



Enhancing Learning and Confidence for Māori through Community Participation

Author

Sharlane Pene and Marvynne Ashley, Gracelands Insight Learning

Introduction

Gracelands Insight Learning (Gracelands Insight) is a private training establishment with sites in Hamilton, Paeroa and New Plymouth owned by the not-for-profit provider of disability support and training services, Gracelands Group of Services.

Gracelands Insight has been delivering various Training Opportunities Programmes in its regions for over seventeen years and the subject of this report is one of our Paeroa tutor's innovative delivery of our employment programme OPTIONZ+. Paeroa, located within the Hauraki district, has a significant Māori population and is considered to be a disadvantaged town due to its location, lack of major retail organisations or variety of industry to offer employment. Paeroa is therefore challenged through high unemployment and an associated youth problem (alcohol and drug abuse). A natural consequence of the towns demographic is that the majority of students are Māori youth; many are 'at risk' WINZ clients with unsuccessful track records. This is seen by local citizens as a 'Māori problem'.

Our Paeroa centre has two full-time tutors who deliver two programmes – Intensive Literacy and OPTIONZ+. OPTIONZ+ is an employment and life skills programme that successfully achieves work outcomes for students. The basic criterion for enrolment is being registered as unemployed. Our tutor works closely with the local Work and Income (WINZ) case managers to ensure our client referrals to OPTIONZ+ will have the opportunity to become successful students and gain employment or move to further study.

Enhanced learning for our Māori students has been achieved through embedding community activities in the OPTIONZ+ curriculum. This innovative teaching practice successfully allows students to achieve positive changes in their behaviour and attitude while learning and gaining skills in work environments, often in the public eye.

The employability of our students has risen, with many more, who were previously ignored or not considered because of their 'history' in the community, now being considered for employment. Organisations acknowledge our students are employable, have good working and personal attitudes, and can apply themselves and their newly learned skills. Acceptance of our programme and its outcomes is demonstrated by the number of new projects we attract and the regular requests for our students to participate in activities in their community. Students have learned the value of money and how effort and working together can produce major benefits.

Becoming Involved in Community Projects

Through association with the local Community Art House Manager and Coordinator for the *Out of School Care & Recreation Programme (OSCAR)*, our tutor saw an opportunity for students to make use of the community centre resources and use art to express themselves. The work undertaken at the Paeroa Skate and Leisure Centre included reconstructing a portion of the children's play area to reflect a small town atmosphere. The framed 'buildings' were constructed from previously painted art house members' work, and panels were creatively placed on the inside of these buildings. Bold quirky artwork done by our students adorned the outside of the construction.



Students at work on the Youth Art in a Public Place project.

Students were able to 'play' with paint and experiment with colours to create the eye-catching end result, which was to coincide with the official opening by the Mayor, who commended the students on their contribution to the community. The value of using a wider range of art resources in the programme within the community centre environment became evident relatively quickly, producing a remarkable selection of individual expression through this medium.

The quality of work produced and the engagement of her students in the programme encouraged our tutor to respond affirmatively when asked to take up a project called Youth Art in a Public Place, inspired by the recent launch of 15 large murals by 150 Opotiki students. Caltex, who had a graffiti problem, was approached to allow the students to design and produce a mural on one side of a block wall in a very prominent position at the entrance to Paeroa's main street.

To enable Gracelands Insight to take up this opportunity, the local Resene Centre was also approached for support with paint and materials. Having viewed samples of student work, Resene management happily offered materials at a 50% discount. The result was a wonderfully colourful bi-cultural design in three panels depicting the past, present and future. It attracted interest – people stopped to look and praised the students at work. The students also gained local media attention and featured in very positive articles in the local newspaper and other community editorials.

Through our connection with the Leisure Centre, the Community Health Coach from Te Korowai, representing Waikato Primary Health, approached our tutor with an opportunity to become involved in a variety of courses in cooking, gardening, and exercise. The CHC programmes are designed to develop community volunteers and healthy initiatives to stimulate participants to better their way of living.

Our tutor attended a 2-day training course and took the students for 2 hours per week for 6 weeks of Let's Get Cooking classes held at the leisure centre with all resources provided by Waikato Primary Health. Students took part in 6 cooking classes over a period of 6 weeks, one of which was facilitated by two students to a high standard; this led to the development of an amazing community garden that cut costs by supplying produce to the classes.

The reward system associated with CHC programmes also allowed students, in their new roles as community health volunteers, to accumulate their hours and cash them in for healthy rewards such as free doctor and dentist appointments, t-shirts, caps, etc.

As our students continued to engage positively in their community activities their course attendance improved greatly and their attitudes towards their community became much more positive. Where they had been very self-absorbed, they became more engaged and aware of the needs of others.

At the beginning of the programme most students, having been referred by Work & Income, were reluctant participants. When engaged in community activities student attendance rose (barring illness) from an average of 70% to 100%. In the classroom they developed greater social skills and awareness of their responsibilities. Major improvement was noted over the course in the following areas: respect to peers and staff; reduction of swearing to zero; adherence to course rules; and respect for their environment – ensuring the Centre was attractive (producing various artworks, signage etc), cleaning up kitchen and cafeteria area unasked, etc. Students voluntarily assisted each other in course work, gave positive feedback to their peers, and developed a pride in this programme. Student improvement in these areas, if put on a scale of 1–10, could have been 3 overall at enrolment time; six months later it had progressed to 8+. In terms of becoming less self-absorbed and more engaged in the Paeroa community we have observed a number of students interacting within the community through their own initiative.

For instance, one student approached the Māori Wardens in town with the idea of removing graffiti from local buildings. The Hauraki District Council were approached and supplied paint for the project. Walter says "I see now it is out of place – it makes the town look messed up. Doing an Insight course, doing common-sense things, has resulted in me advising young people to talk to someone about their anger and frustration and to join in some activities to get rid of some of their energy." Another student, who has already left the course, continues to work at the Community Garden, and all food is contributed to the local community. Two students continue to work at the Paeroa Skate & Leisure Centre – one helping supervise after school activities and one assisting with the children's art house (NZ Children's Art House Foundation Trust) activities. They have both also contributed further work to the town's murals. All this work is voluntary and unpaid.

The tangible evidence of student progress and media attention of the work undertaken encouraged other organisations to approach Gracelands Insight with new opportunities and projects. Students took up the opportunity of becoming volunteer leaders at the annual school holiday 4-day camp, becoming positive role models for the children of Paeroa. The varieties of projects in which the students are involved, along with their advances in skills, have highlighted the need to align workplace activity with the unit standards in the curriculum.

Embedding Community Activity into our Curriculum

The opportunity to build our profile while giving our students variety in their learning experience by participating in community activity produced tangible evidence of positive change, new skills and personal growth. Our tutor realised that many of the community projects could be incorporated into the curriculum and used as naturally occurring evidence to assess unit standards. The OPTIONZ+ curriculum was revised so that behaviour and skills demonstrated throughout these projects were able to be assessed to appropriate standards.

Below are some comments from our students who have progressed into work from this programme:

"Before I joined the Insight course I didn't really think about anyone else. I only had to look after myself. When I started doing the Let's Get Cooking and Gardening projects, I learnt that it's good to get involved and to give back. It's a good feeling."

"I always went to the pub to meet people – that was my community. I know now through my involvement with my tutor Shar at Insight and the Paeroa Skate and Leisure Centre that there are a number of groups and people that you can be a part of and feel good about yourself and what you do. My self-esteem is at an all time high. I'm proud to say I am a better person because of this path."

"I hated gardening. I thought it was for old people. I really get into it now, and enjoy the nice food that I and my whanau can have. Healthy eating was a no-no in our house. Now we have veges with every meal and my whanau get involved in the gardening side of things, which is awesome. We do things together, which is another bonus, because we never did that either. I want to thank Shar and the staff at Insight for encouraging me and reminding me that I can do anything I put my mind to. It took a while to sink in, but I have to say I got there."

"I now have a job that is a responsible job and unemployed people can see how I have made something of myself. My self-confidence was low when I started the course but now I am proud of what I have achieved. I am proud to be a part of my community."

A student who said she "didn't like children or group interaction" now volunteers as a day camp teenage leader. Her employer says that she "works all day interacting with customers and is a great part of the team". Another student now does volunteer work running a Scouts programme in Paeroa. One student, who found it extremely difficult to be punctual for the first part of his time with Insight, learned how to be on time to ensure he didn't let others down. Now employed, his employer says that "his attendance and timeliness is 100%."

Redeveloping assessment material for unit standards such as, Be assertive in a range of situations, Apply listening techniques, and Describe community service, has enabled our tutor to combine the learning with community activities for one day a week with students spending three days in the classroom. Incorporating work experience into unit standards that are assessed throughout a variety of community activities has accelerated engagement and student progress, and this has resulted in additional benefits such as learning about and developing community pride and team spirit.

These units are among the ones assessed whilst engaging in community activities:

- 3503 – Participation in a Team
- 62 – Maintain Personal presentation
- 526 – Describe Community Services
- 6634 – Demonstrate Knowledge of Basic Nutrition
- 1291 – Participation in Conversation
- 3501 – Apply listening techniques
- 1304 – Communicate with People from Other Cultures

Unit	Projects Used to Deliver/Assess Unit Standards	Benefits Derived from embedding Community involvement into the Curriculum
3503	Community Garden Let's Get Cooking Mural Project Reconstructing Children's Play area (Paeroa Skate & Leisure Centre)	Developing community pride students continue to do volunteer work in the community when they have left Insight Learning encouraging young people to take pride in their community by speaking with them and leading by example
3501	Paeroa Skate & Leisure Centre Projects/school activities Lets Get Cooking	
1304	Meeting various cultures in the community through their involvement in the mural project, etc. – interacting with other cultures (Chinese, Indian communities) through interacting with the community at large	Good feedback from employers who have employed our students: "I trust her with everything now – two years ago I would not have employed her" " A fabulous worker – he takes the initiative to do what is needed" "I would encourage other employers to get workers from Insight" "Made a positive difference – great having Insight Learning in this town"
62	School Holiday Camp (Leadership Volunteers) Award ceremonies at Leisure Centre Visiting Community groups and attending community courses (such as seminars on 'P', etc.)	
526	Visits to local services Canvassing ways our students are able to offer their services	Positive image for Insight "Students used to misbehave in public – now behaving appropriately" "Students come to Insight with their heads held high – they used to mope" (Work & Income staff comment)
6634	Let's Get Cooking Preparing hangi for Community Open Day	
1291	Community Garden – Let's Get Gardening Let's Get Cooking Working on a variety of community projects	

The Community Health Coach *Let's Get Gardening* programme developed from a 6-week introduction to gardening to a permanent element of the OPTIONZ+ curriculum. In 2 months our students turned a piece of waste ground into a flourishing community vegetable garden with organisations donating fertiliser and planter boxes, and members of the community and student families also helping out.

Students completed a number of unit standards while working in the garden. One unit standard, Participate in conversations with known people, was assessed while students worked with each other. Our tutor reported greater success in the assessment of this unit because, unlike the classroom situation where conversation was stilted, once the students were in the garden working together the conversation just flowed.



Let's Get Gardening course.



Work well underway in the *Let's Get Gardening* course.

Naturally occurring evidence is gathered regularly in natural situations during these community projects as students work through their unit standards. Another example of this are the unit standards, *Participate in a team or group to complete routine tasks* and *Demonstrate knowledge of basic human nutrition*. During the CHC cooking programme assessments have been revised to include activities that occur in this programme so that students are observed in practice outside the traditional four walls of a classroom. Through observation of students participating in the various programmes (cooking, gardening, community projects) the results are evident that the students have adopted new behaviours, such as respect for others' culture, space and opinions. Students also learn about sharing, listening and participating willingly. By working in public places students are challenged to apply their learning in a variety of situations and thereby learn the behaviours that are expected in their community.



The unit standard *Demonstrate knowledge of workplace health & safety requirements* was undertaken during the internal reconstruction of the Paeroa Skate and Leisure Centre along with *Communicate with people from other cultures*. This project had a high profile in the community as the Centre had an official opening day where our student efforts attracted extremely positive feedback.



The Skate and Leisure Centre internal reconstruction project in progress.



The Skate and Leisure Centre internal reconstruction project completed.

Measuring Outcomes

The idea of enhancing our students' learning through community participation was developed and integrated into the programme in mid-2008. In 2009 the concept was embraced by our tutors and resulted in the projects described in this paper. Our statistics for 2006–2009 are charted below:

Year	Positive' Outcome recorded by Tertiary Education Commission	Increased average credits per student	Throughput (Note: up to 17 students can be enrolled at one time)	Into work	Polytechnic	Other fulltime training	Negative outcomes	Returned to Optionz+ (Unable to find work, or not having work ready skills)
2006	72 %	5.5	32	9 (28%)	2	2	5	14
2007	81%	11	37	13 (35%)	6	6	6	6
2008	80%	41	41	15 (36%)	5	4	6	11
2009	90%	32	32	15 (47%)	8	4	3	2

These statistics reflect the increased 'employability' of our students and the community's acceptance of them into the local workforce. 'Negative' outcomes were minimal in 2009, as were the 'returned' outcomes, indicating that the vast majority of students were ready to move into employment or further vocational training. Enrolment on the programme is on-going; when students find employment they leave the programme. They are encouraged to continue their 'learning journey' by undertaking further part-time study and are supported by the tutors on an on-going basis, to ensure their continued success.

Those students in our 2009 intake who have gone into work are now employed in a variety of jobs, including security officer at Work & Income; care giving; factory work; retail work; contracting; information officer; and working in the automotive industry.

The innovative practice of embedding community activities in our OPTIONZ+ curriculum has produced results far quicker than previously experienced by our tutor when the unit standards were delivered only

in the classroom. The employability of our students has risen, with many more, previously ignored or not considered because of their 'history' in their community, now being considered for employment. Students now show an understanding of the positive benefits of volunteer work in the community, namely raising profiles, further learning and showing good work ethic to a prospective employer.

Community Perception

Organisations acknowledge that our students are employable, have good working and personal attitudes, and can apply themselves and their newly learned skills. Acceptance of our programme and its outcomes is demonstrated in the number of new projects we attract and the regular requests for our students to participate in activities in their community. For example, students were invited to be volunteer leaders at the OSCAR day camp and successfully attended and graduated from leader training to be considered suitable for the role. Work experience placement is higher as local businesses find work opportunities and there is greater positive feedback across the community about our student work, which continues to encourage other organisations to do the same.

There is community pride in the mural and communal garden, with residents often stopping at the garden to give feedback. Community citizens proactively turn up to plant or water the garden and as it is located behind the police station, local authorities turn up and talk with students who until now were used to seeing these authority figures in rather different circumstances.

Student Learning and Confidence

Students have learned the value of money and how effort and working together can produce major benefits. Attendance records indicate student attendance is higher on the days of integrated community/curriculum activity, with a drop when there are classroom tutorials. Our tutor endeavours to address this by extending the external activities into the classroom and continuing a holistic approach to their study. For our Māori students in particular, the hands-on and group engagement is encouraging them to attend and study.

Student evaluation forms indicate an increase in their willingness to continue to engage in further learning, and for those who have not gained employment, their re-enrolment in other programmes is increasing.

Our tutor recalls how difficult it was to get students to do anything unless fiscal return was involved. Now graduate students continue to volunteer for community work as their self-confidence blossoms.

Tutor Benefit

Our tutor continually seeks innovative delivery and assessment of unit standards to assess students in natural circumstances. This work will continue to address the needs of our Māori students in terms of successful completion of their course work. The positive outcomes have energised staff to keep seeking opportunities that fit the essence of the programme.

Summary

Students have built their self-confidence and are moving towards employment or have the confidence to continue into further vocational study. These community activities have raised the profile of the learning organisation and the value of the programme. The additional benefit to the students is the change in community perception and attitude toward them. Our Māori students are now seen as future leaders and role models in Paeroa.

By integrating these projects into the curriculum our tutor is able to gather naturally occurring evidence of the learning that takes place, which has provided more effective evidence of learning through the dynamics and diversity of the situations in which the students find themselves.



Student receiving his certificate at the 2009 Graduation from tutor Sharlane Pene.



This work is published under the [Creative Commons 3.0 New Zealand Attribution Non-commercial Share Alike Licence \(BY-NC-SA\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/nz/). Under this licence you are free to copy, distribute, display and perform the work as well as to remix, tweak, and build upon this work noncommercially, as long as you credit the author/s and license your new creations under the identical terms.