

# Matala Project Evaluation Report



## Introduction

This report provides feedback from participants, practitioners and audience members who were part of the Matala programme and show from March to December 2022.

The Matala programme took place in Marlborough over 30 weeks. Four professional artists; Vita and Nicole Vaka, Kimi Young and Sheldon Rua worked with young, aspiring artists from Marlborough to offer pre-professional creative and artistic development in dance, singing, music and spoken word. Workshops were held twice a week for three hours each at My Space (Marlborough Youth Trust).

Particularly, the Matala programme focused on building capability of local, young, aspiring performing artists to up skill in their creative and professional practice. Matala in the traditional Tongan sense means the blossoming of a flower, this programme adopted that metaphor as the young aspiring artists are the flower, which were cultivated through the creative and professional development workshops to evolve in their practice as artists.

The programme had four part time roles, which consisted of a programme and artistic director (Vita Vaka), a programme manager (Nicole Pereira) and two additional programme facilitators (Sheldon & Kimi). This project enabled these professional artists within Marlborough to sustain their practice and contributed towards sustainable careers in the arts, particularly in a region where there isn't much industry work for artists.

## Project Rationale

Working in the Marlborough region developing Pacific Performing Arts, community dance programmes and working within the local schools as an arts practitioner and organisation over the last 4 years has had its challenges. Research by CNZ has highlighted that Pacific Arts is the lowest engaged with art form in the region of Marlborough at 5%, further to this 45% of survey participants indicated a greater range of events that appealed to them would make a great difference. So we asked ourselves: ***What opportunities do our aspiring artists have? What if they want to develop community arts programmes to empower other young people, or work in schools doing arts education? Where can they up skill and develop within their local community? How can we retain our current arts resources in Marlborough and also create a pathway for the budding young artists to flourish within our region?*** A key part of the arts economy is to be able to sustain the resources. While bringing in guest artists can be beneficial to the development of artistic practice, this can also be unsustainable for a regional community and further emphasises the importance of developing local creative practitioners to service the regional arts economy. This is relevant to understanding the significance of our programme within the region of Marlborough as the Matala programme aimed to fill a need in the current arts economy but also within the wider demographic of Marlborough to attract young people to stay in the region and develop their creative, artistic and professional capabilities through our pre-professional training programme.

## Intended Outcomes

- Young aspiring artists develop their pre-professional training.
- Professional multi-disciplinary artists develop mentorship and their portfolio of work within the region and beyond.
- Professional artists and aspiring young artists work collaboratively to grow the creative capabilities and opportunities with the region of Marlborough.
- Professional artists and aspiring young artists work collaboratively to create high quality, innovative artwork that grows the visibility of Pacific Arts and Kaupapa Pasifika with the region of Marlborough.
- Develop audiences in Marlborough to raise appreciation and investment in Pacific Arts and other underrepresented art forms such as krump, spoken word and fusion arts.

## Method of evaluation

We used both written survey's and talanoa interviews to gather a range of quantitative and qualitative data from both the participants and facilitators. The evaluation survey's and interview questions we designed with the intended outcomes in mind so that we could evaluate if our project had achieved these outcomes.

The report provides the participant's responses, there were only two participants that did not submit their written responses and as such they have not been included in this report, but we have included their responses in the video report.

### Written Evaluation Questions for Participants:

1. What are some of the key artistic skills (choreography, dance technique, vocal technique, creative writing, performance techniques etc) you have developed by being part of the Matala programme?
2. What are other personal, social and professional skills you have developed by being part of the Matala programme?
3. How has this programme helped you to build professional skills as an artist?
4. Has this programme given you the confidence to pursue your artistic goals/dreams/aspirations? If so, how?
5. How will you use the skills gained through Matala beyond the programme? (Examples could be: continue participating in similar projects in Marlborough, pursue study or further education in the arts, develop a career in the arts etc).
6. Why do you think a programme like Matala is significant/needed/valuable for the Marlborough region?
7. Are you proud of the work you created and why/why not?
8. What were two high points of the programme?
9. What were two low points of the programme?
10. Do you have any further feedback to help us develop a programme like this for the future?

### Written Evaluation Questions for Practitioners

1. How has the Matala project enabled the development of your practice as an artist? (You might want to comment specifically on being an artist working in a small region and the differences from other places in which you've worked)
2. How has the project developed your portfolio as an artist? (You might want to comment specifically on being an artist working in a small region)
3. Comment on your experience working with pre-professional rangatahi in Marlborough to develop their artistic practice i.e. has this been rewarding, challenging and if you could give some specific examples.
4. Why do you think a programme like Matala is significant/needed/valuable for the Marlborough region?

## Key project learnings

- Participants expressed an increased confidence to pursue artistic goals and aspirations.
- The programme built foundational creative and artistic skills to progress into further careers in the arts.
- Key artistic skills that participants developed:
  - Choreography (dance)

- Dance technique in Pacific dance, Pacific contemporary, Contemporary, Hip Hop and Krump
- Creative writing
- Song writing and composition
- Vocal techniques (harmonies, pitch and vocal agility)
- Versatility as a performer in different dance styles but also developed as multi-disciplinary artists
- Photography and Videography skills involving editing videos and music
- Diversified experience of artistic process (learnt about different ways of making, curating and producing multi-disciplinary arts)
- Participants further pursuits after Matala look like:
  - Participating in other multi-disciplinary arts projects in Marlborough and beyond
  - Teaching arts to others in Marlborough
  - Running their own arts projects within the community
  - Pursuing further study and careers in the arts
  - Starting a business as a creative/performing artist
- Development of collaboration, leadership, time-management and problem-solving skills
- Increased self-motivation and self-drive to pursue creative aspirations
- Increased positive self-perception as an artist
- Provided a platform for young creatives in Marlborough to grow as artists and provided a place of significance and purpose
- Challenges of COVID-19 were a low point due to interrupting in person rehearsals and not being able to do a live show. However, this gave the participants a whole different and valuable experience of creating a digital show and this added to their artist toolkit. The participants expressed how this experience showed them how they can pivot as artists amidst a global pandemic.
- Participants expressed a stronger sense of identity and confidence in expressing their authentic selves through the arts.
- Participants developed self-reflexivity in being able to identify mistakes or areas of improvement and make these development focuses for the future
- Participants expressed pride and self-satisfaction in the product (show) they co-created and performed in. This shows that both the process and the product play a significant role in the artistic experience. The participants shared that particularly due to covid creating a show after a 7-month rehearsal process that was interrupted by the various lockdowns-built artist resilience and gave them experiences of how to navigate challenges. Creating an end product contributed to the participants positive well-being as they felt a sense of accomplishment amidst the challenging year with covid.
- Matala raised visibility of Pacific culture, identity and Pacific Arts in Marlborough and contributed to diversifying the arts landscape in the region.
- Increased social inclusion through developing awareness, understanding and connection to a range of Pacific cultural dances and in turn the people of those cultures.
- Given audiences and stakeholders in Marlborough a broader understanding of the transformational power of the arts.
- Provided young people in Marlborough with a creative outlet and platform to positively express themselves and be connected to something meaningful.
- Participants enjoyed the balance of fun and focus in the experience of industry professionalism.
- Participants gained a better realisation and understanding of their own creativity and artistic skills, which helped them to form a more realised creative identity.
- The duration (7 months) contributed to the sustainability of careers/work in the arts for practitioners. This needs further investment in Marlborough to contribute to the long-term sustainability of the arts economy in the region.
- Professional Arts Practitioners developed resilience by navigating through COVID-19 and the impact on the programme and the live show.

**Areas of further development:**

- More one to one lessons (particularly for vocal training)

- Creation of more content in all artforms to make the show longer, however the participants understood that this was a result of in person rehearsals being impacted by covid lockdowns
- More checkpoints for the participants to measure and gauge their progress personally and also get a clearer sense of how we are a group a tracking towards the end product. Upon reflection we think that because the show content was created organically through the workshopping process, this was at times a bit disorientating for the participants. The facilitators also expressed that they really had to trust the creative process and hope that it would bring out organic but also cohesive content for the show. It really taught us as practitioners how to synthesis content in curating a show with the vision of representing authentic artistic voices from Marlborough. When participants saw the final product, they realised the significance of the creative process.

## Participant Feedback

### Filimoe'ulie Fotu – Moala|21| Tongan

While being part of the Matala programme I have developed professional experience to understand and have an insight of what it is like in the industry of performing arts. Not only have I gained the confidence as a performer but I have found confidence in myself as a creative. Matala has helped guide me to understand who I am as an artist and that there is more to the arts than meets the eye. This opportunity has challenged me in many ways but has also helped me step up as a leader. I have become more aware of the artist I want to be and what I see for myself in the future. While being involved in the programme I have learnt to be a disciplined performer and being teachable to upskill and perfect my craft.

While being a part of the Matala programme I have developed a range of artistic skills such as being able to choreograph a dance, upskill in my dance technique by exploring different dance styles to become a versatile dancer. During the music and singing workshops I was able to develop my creative writing and come up with lyrics then make melodies to create our own songs and experiment with a range of vocal techniques to better my vocal pitch and vocal agility. Lastly, I was able to develop photography & videography skills and editing videos & music.



By participating in Matala I was able to develop the following personal, social and professional skills:

- Working with different people and being able to collaborate as a team.
- Opportunities to step up as a leader and also moments of knowing when to lead from behind.
- A strong work drive as a creative and have a willingness to learn.
- The ability to work under time pressure and developing better time management skills.
- Being able to problem solve & adapt to different situations.
- To be more self-driven and have the motivation to achieve and do more for myself .

We faced challenges and obstacles with our rehearsals due to COVID-19, and this meant we weren't able to do a live show, which was a low point for me. However, I think it was great that we were able to adapt and create a digital show that could then reach a worldwide audience.

I am very proud of the work we have collectively created through Matala. Everyone had their part to play and I feel we created something really special. For someone who has lived in Blenheim all their life, this is definitely the beginning of something new and I am looking forward to what the future holds.

Matala has definitely given me the confidence to pursue my artistic goals and aspirations as I feel this has given me a strong foundation. I highly feel confident as a creative that I have developed a strong foundation of skills & knowledge that will help guide me as an artist in the future.

I see myself using the skills I've gained to help me teach others, I want to use and to be able the skills & knowledge I have learnt from the programme to do my own projects in the future and further my career in the arts, maybe even start a business.

I think the programme itself speaks volumes and is very significant to Marlborough as nothing like this has been done in Blenheim. I believe a lot of unique and raw talent comes from Blenheim and I say that with pride, I am also very blessed and grateful to have been part of the process and program as it has given young creatives in Marlborough the opportunity and a platform to grow as artists and it has given young creatives a place of purpose.

### **Iona Sophia Moana Pānoho | 19 | Maori, English, Scottish, Malaysian Chinese**

Through Matala I gained many skills, such as choreography, dance and vocal techniques and song writing. Further to this I also developed my creative collaboration with other artists, patience, working under creatives directors and understanding my own preferences and skills in creative and group settings. This programme helped my build my professional skills as an artists as the facilitators gave us the space to learn and make mistakes, providing constructive criticism and feedback and encouraged us in professional practises.

We faced some challenges with Covid, and I found the lockdown rehearsals over zoom particularly challenging as it was difficult to engage or feel that I was making progress, especially with the uncertainty of COVID and not knowing when we would be back to in person rehearsals. It was also a good learning experience for me to work with other cast members where there was a difference in working style, this at times caused misunderstanding and tension. Overall, however, I'm grateful for all the experience, as it helped me gain a better understanding of myself and how I relate to the people I work with.

Matala has given me the opportunity to pursue and put into practice my artistic aspirations as this programme was the first time, I've had dedicated time and space to create. I composed music for the first time, created arrangements of songs and choreographed for myself and others. I loved working closely with Vita, developing harmonies/arrangements and recording music. Watching and learning one on one with someone while they're creating is an awesome experience. The moment when everyone came together as a team during the filming and really worked well with each other as a cast.



I was proud of the product we created, but I also saw several things I would like to continue to improve on (I sometimes struggle to be objective about my own performance!). I want to continue participating in similar projects in Marlborough and use what I have learnt to teach others to develop their artistic skills.

This programme is significant for Marlborough as Tertiary education programmes in the arts are non-existent in Marlborough. Matala not only provides education and opportunities beyond anything currently available here, it also fosters an appreciation for professionalism and expertise in the arts.

Keep it up! I absolutely loved this course, thank you all so much for your work, I look forward to many future projects.

### Lava Tikeri | 17 | Samoan

Throughout the whole progress of Matala, I've gained so many new artistic skill and I am grateful. I have learnt and seen different dance styles that you wouldn't normally see being performed in Marlborough. This was such an eye opener for me and gave me exposure to dance styles I would never have experienced if I wasn't part of Matala. I've also learnt new and different vocal techniques and how to improve my vocals, the facilitator Vita really helped me improve as well as my peers – I would learn new things from listening to them.

With so many styles and different things I have never experienced before, Matala has definitely helped me build professional skills. We were also reminded that Matala was a pre-professional program and were taught the real professional world of arts and the strict expectations. This allowed us to work our way up to these expectations helping grow our professional skills.



Learning from experienced teachers allowed me to pick up on the things I needed to work on. Getting better and better over the 7 months grew my confidence in my capabilities in the arts side. Matala practises and the behind-the-scenes process were so important for me as these moments were lessons for everyone as well as myself to work on mistakes and grow confidence.

Through Matala, I've learnt that I am capable of so much more than I thought. I've learnt of the facilitators and my peers and learnt to trust in their different ways of creating art. I'd like to use the skills I gained through this

programme to potentially pursue further education and study in the arts, as I see this as a possible future career pathway. The skills I've gained from the teachers as well as the cast members will allow me to be more confident in my choices in a pathway in the arts.

Matala brought out so many artists hiding in Blenheim and in the Marlborough Region. Through this arts programme, we were able to showcase our own talents through spoken words, dance and singing and some of the artists I met along the 7month journey of Matala never knew their capability until we created the end product (show). Matala shows 'identity' and is most definitely needed and significant in the Marlborough Region. A small region can mean people have choices but follow the rest of the crowd but the Matala project allowed us to bring out themes of identity and show our true identity and what we are capable of. I learnt that we should be proud of our identity and not afraid to show this off.

7 months of sweat and hard work, I think everyone is most proud of the outcome, there are a few mistakes I made which I am certainly not proud of and know I could definitely have done better, but this is a lesson for me in future art projects. There were some struggles and lessons along the way, like COVID, which meant we were

set back with our rehearsals and also had to change some of our dates and this ended up clashing with some other things I was involved with. This meant that I had to make some hard decisions and decided that Matala was the most important to me so I stuck with it. I was also unfortunate that we were unable to do a live show due to covid, as there were many community members that were excited to watch our live show. However, doing a online show meant that we were also able to showcase to people outside of Blenheim. All of these challenges made the process of Matala memorable. Being able to experience new things with people outside our zones and learning off of each other and being able to showcase this on social media to show not only the Blenheim community but people around the world.

### **Sheeba ligaliga | 17, | Samoan**

Through Matala I have developed my confidence in being on stage as well artistic skills like choreography, different dance techniques, vocal training and performance techniques. I also gained professional skills as an artist by learning how to problem-solve in performance techniques and gaining confidence to participate in vocal training through the Matala programme. By being part of Matala I have gained the confidence to pursue my arts dreams and I will use the skills I learned through Matala beyond the programme to pursue further education in the arts and to participate in similar projects in Marlborough. I'm proud of myself for the amount of effort I put into the work I created because it inspires and empowers me to bloom like a flower.

I think programmes like Matala are really important for the Marlborough region because I would love for it to be a normal thing for more young creative people in Marlborough to be in the position of influence and leadership, especially the young Pacific generation to step up and not be ashamed of who we are and where we are from.

I think the Matala programme was done 100% and I loved it. It's only that Covid -19 interrupted and ruined some of our plans that we made. Hopefully, in the future, we get to perform the show in front of people, but it was a great experience.





## Nicole Griffiths | 21 | NZ European

By being part of Matala I definitely learned heaps of vocal skills such as breathing techniques, vocal warmups, and different types of singing and performance styles vocally. I have never done singing seriously until now so I personally feel that I learned and improved significantly. I also feel I improved in my dance technique in the different styles that were developed over the course of the 7 months as we learned several different styles of dance and each required a different technique and discipline.

Confidence is a big thing for me - I find it incredibly difficult to be confident in myself and my craft but with the help of each facilitator, I feel I have started this journey to being 100% confident in everything I do and not second guess myself or compare myself to others. I have developed my professionalism as well and learnt that there is a time and place for everything. When it's time to goof off and be silly and there's a time to be serious and put in the work. Getting to be such good friends with each participant, I did struggle to not goof off at times but I do know how important having a balance is. Everyone is there for a reason and you don't want to waste anyone's time, such as, camera, sound and lighting crew or just everyone in general.



High points were definitely filming, getting to spend that time doing something I love with people I love will always be a highlight. Learning harmonies was also a high point no matter how frustrating when I couldn't get my harmony right.

Harmonies was something I wanted to learn right from the start so I loved it. It was unfortunate that we were unable to perform the show live and take an excerpt to perform at the Nelson Arts Festival due

to COVID. I think the energy of a live performance is awesome and performing is something I love doing. I am aware that this was totally out of anyone's control though and the filming was still so much fun. I am definitely proud of what we created, it took a lot of hours and a lot of hard work to complete the final product. I can clearly see how much I developed and grew from the beginning to the end. You are always your harshest critic so I know of things I would improve about my performance if I could go back but I am still beyond proud of myself and everyone else.

I think I would like to put these skills to use by potentially starting a dance class for younger children around Marlborough who just want to have fun and learn dance without putting the stress on parents to pay an arm and a leg for classes. I have begun developing choreographic skills to create dances to teach and I have a few friends that would be keen to help me with this. I now have the confidence to pursue this. I definitely require more skills and growth to successfully accomplish this though.

Matala was about growth and there is always going to be room for growth and development, therefore I always have something to learn. Pursuing artistic aspirations is all about growth. In who you are and in your craft. I also now truly believe that I have a whole support network behind me ready to help me achieve these aspirations. I feel more prepared to face any professional setting that is required to undertake these goals.

Marlborough has nothing on offer to develop artists professionally other than the dance schools. We have such a large amount of creative people and there is very little for them to do to express themselves. They need to have things like Matala to develop these skills to chase their creative aspirations.

## Atina'e Mase | 18 | Samoan

I developed artistic skills from Matala, such as choreography and vocal techniques – I didn't know I had the voice to sing and Matala helped me realise that and bring out my voice. I think the key thing I developed by being part of this programme was my confidence. It gave me more confidence with my own artistic skills and performing this to others. The process of Matala was a high point because I got to meet new people and be surrounded by people who let me be who I am.

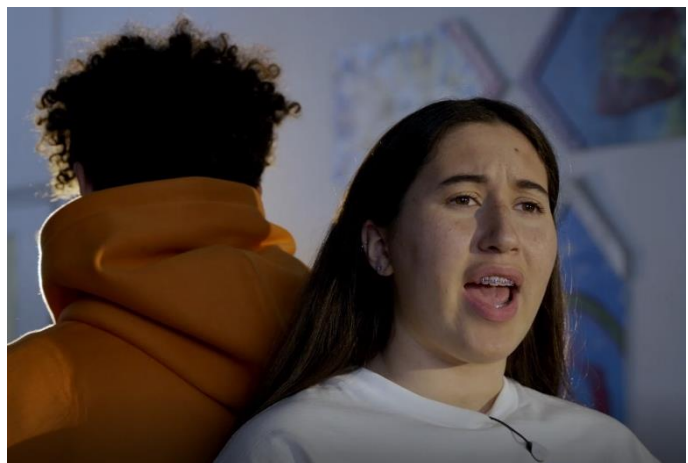
I was really proud of the performance we created and we had fun in the process. I'd like to participate in future projects like Matala and I think that this programme was significant for Marlborough because it brought out the best in us as Pasifika people. The show ended up being digital so we were able to show the world who we are as Pasifika in Marlborough, and I think this set an example for our younger generation that being Pasifika isn't just about brown skin, but it's okay to be who you are and represent our culture and our ancestors. Matala allowed me to stand tall and be proud of who I am as a young Pasifika. The facilitators did an amazing job and I hope they do this more often for Blenheim.



## Anika Moetaua | 18 | Cook Island Maori | NZ European

Through the Matala process I have developed my creative writing and performance techniques and have gained a lot of confidence in terms of believing in the craft I create and sharing it with others. Matala has exposed me to many professional aspects that I haven't been exposed to before, like the dedication and time spent on the process itself, including learning new techniques and having last-minute changes or tasks and being able to execute those. This programme has definitely given me the confidence to pursue more of my artistic aspirations. It has also made me more excited to get out there and experience more awesome avenues like Matala.

I am going to use the skills developed through the programme to continue developing my craft in my own time. I am definitely proud of the work I created, my writing has grown immensely throughout the process and that is shown through the end products. Now I am excited to further grow and write better pieces of poetry. Matala has given me the skills to be more confident in producing more works. Matala is one of a kind and has truly opened up a new avenue for creatives in Marlborough. The facilitators and participants were like-minded and diverse people and this was great because we were brought into a space together to learn and create through the rehearsal process. Matala to me is a celebration of



all types of art forms and expressions which is what makes it so special and valuable. Marlborough doesn't have anything similar so it definitely adds a lot of depth to the arts community in Marlborough. Keep doing these programmes as it gives creatives in our region the means and inspiration to create. Also Matala was able to bring so many different people together - Everyone gets a chance to share their voice, which is what makes the programme special and one of a kind.

### Frister Ligaliga | 18, | Samoan

Through Matala I developed my dance technique in a number of different styles and choreography skills as well as vocal and performance techniques. I also developed my social and personal skills such as more confidence to communicate, socialise and build relationships with others, listening and sharing opinions, commitment, not being afraid to share a different talent like Pacific dance and confidence in myself to sing and dance in front of others.



Being in Matala was never a regret! It has helped me develop different skills that I had never been able to reach before. I saw my self-confidence grow, especially in my dancing and singing. In the past being part of my church band, I had always been shy to open my mouth to sing, but in one of our rehearsals when we were singing the "Matala Chant" our director Vita said that good sound comes out when you open your mouth. I tried it and I had never been so proud of myself, I gained confidence through learning to singing like that. With dance, I was able to experience different styles that I had never done before as I am used to doing

Pacific dance. I gained more knowledge of dance in general too like spacing, facial expressions and how to perform better.

Matala has given me the confidence to dance and sing, it has always been a dream to showcase a different version of myself and I have never been so proud of myself and the what the other young people that participated in Matala achieved. Matala had helped us showcase our different identities, it helped me build confidence in myself to step out of my comfort zone and try something new - I had so much fun throughout Matala.

I was so happy to experience and gain the different skills and techniques in dance in singing, I would proudly use what I have gained through Matala in other arts projects I participate in and potentially pursue the arts in further education at University.

We as Pasifika people are very honoured and proud to have this program of Matala in our small town. It's a program that signifies our identities. I know that people in our region are proud and happy about Matala as it expresses and embrace their identities as Pacific. It also showcases who we are to this small town we're living in and it will let our Pasifika aspects and values grow and be alive within the Marlborough region!

I had never been this proud of myself and what I have achieved through Matala. There was a time where I had nearly given up on Matala due to a busy schedule, but I kept pushing myself to be part of it until the end because it's what made me happy and I learnt so much from being part of this programme. Through this experience I learnt that I should keep chasing my dreams even though the path is hard, keep on trying because success is waiting.

My family was also really proud of me and the show that we did, I think for future development it would be awesome to include even more dances and songs to make the show longer as my family wanted to see more – although this was really encouraging that people liked it and wanted more.

### Terian Tenoa | 18 | Kiribati

Matala has helped me to build my professional skills as an artist by giving me the opportunity to try new styles in the arts and perform them with confidence. I particularly benefited from learning new dance styles and learning how to harmonise. The programme has also taught me the importance of having the right mindset for rehearsals and performance. Through this programme I have gained key artistic skills such as:

- Mindset (Setting into character)
- Expressing myself through dance choreography
- Move in different ways through learning different dance techniques and choreographies
- How to switch on and focus in performance mode
- Choreography and performance techniques like making my movements bigger, sharper etc.

The programme also helped me develop social and personal skills such as:



- Learning to have fun in the process but also when I need to not muck around and focus on the task during rehearsals.
- How to socialise with my peers in a social and professional way.
- To step outside of my comfort zone and perform a variety of different performing arts that I wouldn't normally do with confidence.

Matala has created a shift in my perspective in how I viewed the performing arts. I have gained self-confidence to realise that I can be creative and come up with choreography or ideas that can be added to the group performance pieces. I am proud of the final work we created, particularly because I was given the opportunity to add dance moves from my Kiribati culture. I was also proud to perform other cultural dances, which is significant to me as it connects me to people who I care about (like my friends cultures). I have enjoyed this so much that I would love to pursue the performing arts as a further study and career pathway. I know that I will also use the skills I have learnt through Matala for my family and Kiribati community performances as this is a big part of my family and culture.

Matala is important for our town because it is different, in a place like Marlborough things like Pacific Arts, Krump, Spoken Word and even

the songs we were singing are not seen here. The common styles here in Marlborough are opera, jazz etc so it is important for people to know that there is culture here and a variety of styles within the arts. I think it's really important in Marlborough to continue to do programmes like Matala that bring in new performing arts to our town. I think this will be really helpful in building towards a new normal for the arts scene in our region.

## Mele Lopeti | 23 | Tongan

I gained key artistic skills such as dance, vocal and performance techniques. I also developed some social skills, like meeting new people and working in collaboration with them – I don't think I would've met or socialised with these people if it wasn't for Matala. I also learned through the process of Matala that you can be professional and still have fun in the process. This programme definitely pushed me to do new things and really go outside of my comfort zone to try different forms of art. I am proud of the work we created through the Matala process and I definitely surprised myself. The process allowed me to explore moving outside my comfort zone and develop other skills in different artforms that I wasn't really comfortable with before. After watching the final product I do not regret trying it. The programme actually gave me a sense of purpose in a time where I felt lost and provided an escape from reality for me at times. Being part of Matala gave me something to focus my energy on.



It was disappointing that due to covid we were not able to do a live show, however getting the opportunity to be able to experience the videography aspect of the arts was definitely an unreal experience and very interesting to learn about the behind the scenes work to produce a digital show.

Matala definitely gave me a new found confidence in my skills and gave me a better understanding of my creative identity. If given the opportunity I would definitely like to pursue my artistic goals and hopefully further develop my skills by participating in similar projects in or even outside of Marlborough.

As much as I loved being part of the programme and the creative process, there were some points where I wasn't able to visualise the end product and didn't know what we were working towards. At times, this made it feel like there was no intention in some of the things we were doing, but when I saw the end product the creative process then made sense and I think it turned out great in the end.

I think a programme like this is significant for Marlborough because there aren't many opportunities to develop artistic skills especially here in Marlborough and it gives young aspiring artists a pathway into the arts industry.

## Sonitani Kula | 23 | Tongan | Samoan | Fijian

Through Matala I gained some key artistic skills, particularly in my poetry writing and performance techniques – I definitely gained more tools in how to deliver my spoken word and developed my confidence in performing. Being able to watch and learn from my mentors (facilitators) has been key in building my confidence as an artist as I was able to watch them navigate the creative process and produce an end product amidst covid. There were times where I didn't understand what we were creating for the show as there was no set story and we were creating from scratch, but in the end, I was really proud of the work we created and this was such a process both within the Matala rehearsals and also outside of this – it feels good to have a win on the board after a hectic year. By being part of Matala I have a stronger confidence in who I am as an artist.



The skills, experiences and connections that I have gained through Matala have given me the confidence to continue to progress as an artist. I'm moving to Auckland in 2022 and I want to continue to develop my profession there and I hope to compete in competitions in the near future.

Matala is really significant for our region because a lot of people within Marlborough don't see creative arts as something that has value. Being able to change mindsets and help people see the transformative impact and power the arts has is so essential for this region.

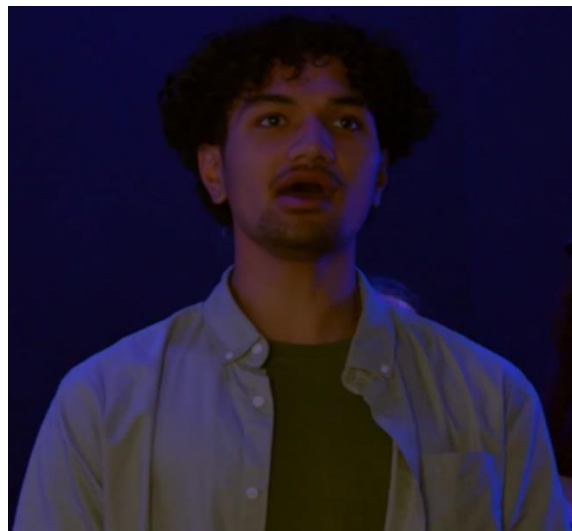
### **Aaron Kitekeiaho | 18 | Maori | Tongan | Cook Island | German**

Matala helped me develop artistic skills in dancing – Pacific dance and also other styles like Pacific contemporary that I hadn't done before. It also helped me develop my vocal technique and participating in the singing was a high point of the programme. Vita created a great environment for us that really made me feel at peace like I was singing with my family at home. Through this programme I built my personal leadership that I applied at school and I started to take on more responsibility.

I was part of a gateway programme through school, where I would go with Vita to primary and intermediate schools across Marlborough to help teach Pacific Performing Arts to students. Being part of Matala actually helped me teach the kids in the schools and also helped with my dance class at school and teaching my peers.

Matala has given me the confidence to pursue my goal of singing and be confident in this, through Matala I was able to be myself and show my artistic and creative skills. From participating in this programme it has encouraged me to pursue a career in singing.

There are other arts programmes in Marlborough but they don't let us show our Pacific background. So I think a programme like Matala is needed in Marlborough to show who we are as Pacific because this programme and show lets us share our cultures.



### **Te Oho Mauri | 26 | Maori**

I love doing arts, it's a passion of mine, especially acting and I want to take on more major roles so Matala has really helped me develop my skills to pursue a further career in the arts. This programme helped me with my communication, connecting with people and on my artistic and life journey – I really believe I was meant to do Matala. Through this programme I developed my self confidence and was better able to connect with other people and cultures.



I really enjoyed the environment of Matala; it was high energy and positive and I think this is a valuable programme for young people in our region to help grow them as an artist and connect with other young artist.

## Practitioner Feedback

### Tevita Vaka

Compared to living in the city, I felt as a practitioner that my artistry was more developed in a smaller region because there was a scarcity in Pacific Arts content and performance opportunities. As a multi-disciplinary artist, I felt a strong sense to build the Pacific Performing Arts content and opportunities for access and participation in Marlborough through the multi-disciplinary arts. With minimal opportunities here in a smaller region it was a challenge to start something like Matala and believe in it yourself and lead a team to achieve this vision. I think this really challenged me to grow my practice as an artist to bring this vision to fruition from start to finish in a region where this type of art isn't common.

With the covid-19 pandemic we had to change from a live show to a digital performance. This change helped me to explore and experience curating, directing and producing a digital show, which has different elements to a live show. I know I have added to my artist portfolio with achieving the digital version of Matala and it has sparked my interest to do more digital shows in the future.

The creative process was definitely rewarding and challenging at the same time. The challenge was finding ways to keep the participants engaged and learning new things over the 30-week programme. There were a mix of experience and ability levels with dance and singing so I had to be really mindful of this when planning and delivering the workshops. At times it was challenging to balance this because we were doing group workshops so you could see some students were at their absolute limit of learning and others needed further progression. This helped me develop different ways of facilitating and working with a mixed ability group. I think for future projects I would incorporate more one-to-one training to tailor the development specifically towards the individual.

I wanted the Matala show to be something that wasn't conventional for Marlborough. In this region the theatre shows I have seen, while professional use an existing script of well-known theatre productions. There is nothing wrong with that, but I wanted to bring Marlborough audiences something different with Matala. I wanted the art work to be organic and an authentic representation of the participants narrative, weaved with our ideas as arts practitioners. The creative process definitely developed me as an artist as I was working with artforms like spoken word and even some dance styles I had never incorporated into my works before. So working in collaboration with the other three arts practitioners and using fusion arts to produce a cohesive show was a great way to challenge me as an artist and add diversity to my portfolio of work. This was really important to me because I wanted to bring diversity to the arts scene in Marlborough. I wanted the audiences to know that there are different types of artforms in the region and artists here who take pride in performing and teaching these artforms (Pacific Arts, Spoken Word, Krump and Fusion Arts).

At times, it was challenging to not be working off a pre-existing script as I really had to trust the process as an artist. Sometimes it was really confronting because as the programme manager/director people were looking to me for all the answers, but they were being created through the process. In the end the process really taught me how to curate and direct high quality art work that was made in collaboration with the participants and how to synthesis the different artforms together. Having been through this process with Matala I think I am now much more equipped to curate and produce collaborative fusion arts pieces in the future.



## Sheldon Rua

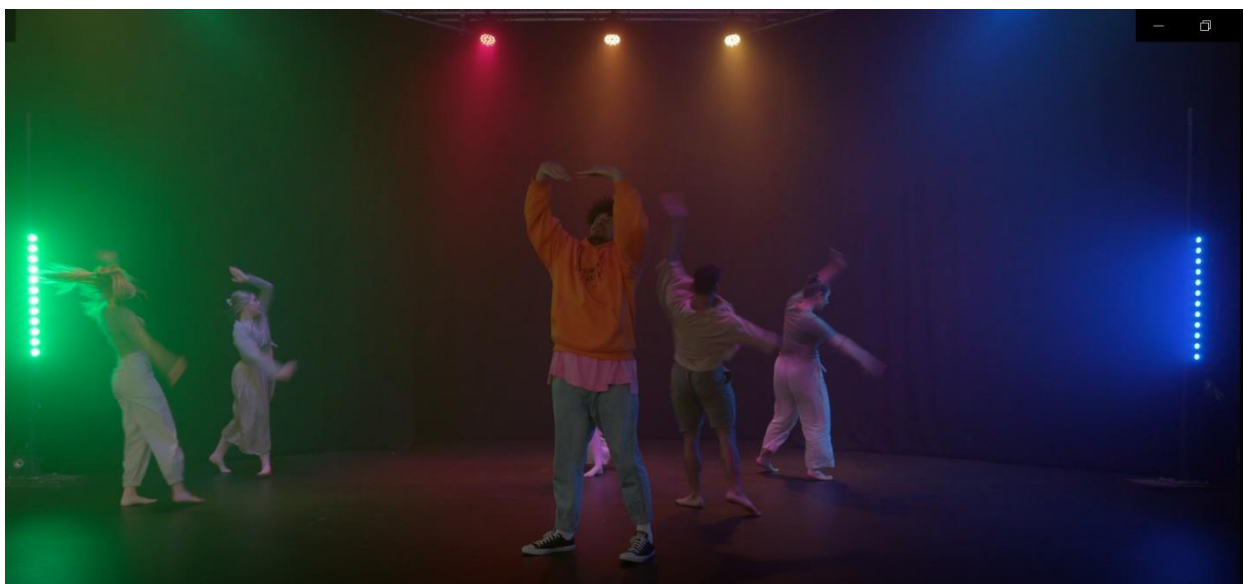
Matala has given me the opportunity to expand my practice in small communities, investing my arts experience into local young artists who do not have a more immediate access to the arts sector as say, a main city such as Wellington, or Auckland.

As an artist myself, I was given space to create my own original works and works in collaboration with local artists of Blenheim. This meant that my works were able to reach different parts of the country and be noticed by communities who have yet to experience my creative process and product.

It has been rewarding in the sense that I feel proud watching other young pre-professional artists step into their personal creative identity, whilst expressing their true self as artists. I felt my experience was valued and taken on board by the artists, which helped maximise their potential in this project to create high quality works.



Programmes like this are important in the Marlborough region because it delivers years of professional experience of the arts sector directly to the next generation of artists who need the platform to be seen. Investing in programmes like these strengthen the overall arts economy of Aotearoa as a whole, and provides rangatahi of communities in smaller regions a broader perspective of having career experience in the arts.





## Kimi Young

Matala has given me a rare opportunity to have ongoing work in a small town like Blenheim in a career field of dance where it is tricky to have a sustainable workflow no matter where you are based. I have never had an opportunity like this where I have had the freedom to create so organically, collaborate with like-minded artists and be so involved in the project from start to finish. In the past, I have been able to secure dance teaching or dance performance jobs in Auckland and Wellington, but this is the first job/paid project that has allowed me to be a working artist for seven ongoing months, rather than for one month or three months. As an effect, I was able to develop my practice as an artist every week. For example, I was able to see what skills and support the dance group needed week to week. Then I was able to prepare and alter my lesson plans accordingly. It was so valuable to be able to have a weekly reflection and application.

Also, being able to create group dance pieces and work with a varied skilled group of dancers was a good challenge. I feel I have grown in being able to confidently give set choreography for a group, teach online zoom classes clearly (during lockdown), and be more decisive and confident about choreographic changes when managing a group choreography. I feel I have also grown in being able to develop my dancers to take ownership for their own practice time as they are clear about their movement and counts for their movement. I had times where I was stuck, but again, the ongoing weekly practice of reflection as to what worked and what didn't, and being able to alter this weekly to find a solution that did work for seven months helped to strengthen my skills as an artist.



This process also helped to develop my skills in being co-producer and co-director. To be able to switch between these different roles, gave me the opportunity to trust in the process, trust in myself and trust in the fellow co-producers and co-directors. Sometimes we would have to switch roles fairly quickly, or make fast decisions and I think this helped me not only be more decisive and trust more, but also be confident and clear in these decisions.

From Matala, I have been able to create multiple dance pieces I am proud of, I have been able to experience not only facilitating and performing within dance, but also as a co producer and co-director. Being based as an artist in a small region like Marlborough can bring the false perception that there aren't opportunities within the performing arts field. But I can confidently say that when I moved here 3.5 years ago, I have had ongoing artist opportunities teaching, performing and developing from projects and work like Matala. I am so proud to be working in a region where projects like Matala are being created, pioneered, grounded and piloted for the benefit of the community as well as the young people and working professional artists within the region.

I think Matala was valuable as there is no tertiary institute or existing pre-professional/bridging programme that displays the opportunities of what a creative path after high school would look like in Marlborough. It was important for young people to have access to this, so they could get first-hand experience of what further study in the performing arts realm may be like. It was also needed, as many young people in Marlborough may not have a safe space where they feel like they can be themselves - Matala provided a safe place where the participants could develop as budding artists, as well as grow as people without judgement from themselves or peers.

Marlborough is still new to non-traditional art forms such as pacific arts, krump, spoken word and fusion arts so to give the participants exposure to learn these was rewarding, as we got to see them grow and appreciate

them. Furthermore, to see them proud and then perform confidently in these art forms was evident in how this came across to the watching audience. Because these art forms aren't popularly shown, it's understandable there would be a varied response from the watching audience. However, it was important for us to bring to light these powerful channels of expressions to develop exposure and appreciation of diverse arts (Pacific Arts, Spoken Word, Krump and Fusion Arts) for Marlborough audiences. What people don't know; they don't know, and we, in a way hoped to develop a palette or taste for different and unique arts forms, in a means to educate the Marlborough audience that this does not only exists strongly in larger cities like Auckland and Wellington, but it can also be vibrant within our smaller regional arts community. We did this as we didn't want Marlborough to miss out on how these art forms can be powerful tools of self-expression and storytelling.



## Nicole Vaka

Studying and working as a creative practitioner and educator in Auckland was a very different experience compared with the arts scene and opportunities in the smaller region of Marlborough. When I moved here 6 years ago, I was worried that my arts practice would diminish because there was such a scarcity of opportunities in the artforms and platforms which I was used to performing in and teaching. Being a graduate from the University of Auckland I had a passion for Contemporary and Pacific Contemporary dance, community arts and arts education. I realised there weren't many if any opportunities like this here in Marlborough. While at first it was discouraging, it provided an opportunity to innovate and bring my knowledge and skills as a professional arts practitioner to Marlborough. The Matala programme has certainly given me the platform to impart my skills and experience into young aspiring artists in Marlborough.

Within this project I have enhanced my facilitation skills by working with participants of different abilities and varying degrees of experience in dance and professional practices. This challenged me as a practitioner to constantly reflect on my practice to see what was working for the participants and what needed to be adjusted to make the content and process relevant to them.

Throughout the project Vita, Kimi, Sheldon and I worked strongly in collaboration with each other to develop the show content. This process was rewarding but also



challenging in the sense that we didn't know exactly what the end product was going to look like. We wanted to create organically through the workshopping process with participants, so this creative process challenged my comfort zones, which ultimately developed my practice with putting the show together in the end.

Due to covid and the various lockdowns, changes in alert levels and government guidelines, this impacted both our rehearsal process and our live show. While it was a really confronting, challenging and disheartening time, this was the catalyst to develop my creativity further as I had to find ways to change my teaching to online and then make sure we were adhering to all the government guidelines when our in-person rehearsals could resume. Further to this, I had to work out a plan to produce a digital show. I was in charge of doing research into how we would produce a digital show from the filming and budget right through to the ticket sales and distribution. This added to my portfolio as an artist as I had never curated and produced a digital show before. Working on Matala through the global pandemic actually made me more resilient as an artist and I felt much more confident to continue my arts practice in a covid environment going forward. I think our response as practitioners was a key learning experience for the participants and they also commented on how this taught them to be more resilient as artists. This reminded me that when you are in a role of facilitation and mentoring, your response is so key because other people are watching and modelling their behaviour from you.

Working on the Matala project has developed my portfolio as an artist working in Marlborough, while this is a small region, I have been able to develop my repertoire of dance choreography and teaching in contemporary and pacific contemporary dance as well as professional practices in the arts. Further to this, I have progressed my arts management and production skills by managing this programme over 7 months from start to finish – this required bringing and synthesising many different parts together. I think being able to work as a arts practitioner on a part time basis in Marlborough for almost the entire year is pretty rare, so the Matala project contributed to the sustainability of my practice as an artist and I hope there are more opportunities for ongoing work in the arts for me and other practitioners working in multi-disciplinary arts in the region.

I think a programme like Matala is really key for a region like Marlborough, as I expressed earlier, I studied dance in Auckland and had endless opportunities to be able to perform, participate and teach dance, community arts and arts education. However, in Marlborough tertiary training in the arts doesn't exist – so what do our young aspiring artist that stay in the region do after they leave school? Matala provided a solution for the next generation of creatives in the Marlborough region – they experienced diverse multi-disciplinary arts and built their artist toolkit. For me as a practitioner, creating this point of access and participation in underrepresented artforms like Pacific Arts, Krump and Spoken Word in Marlborough was the reason why I do what I do. I think seeing the growth and development of the participants and end results of the Matala programme, it provides a clear rationale for why programmes like this should continue to be invested in, as they provide diverse arts experiences for our young artists in the region to pursue their creative dreams.

## MATALA Audience Feedback

*"The show was beautiful! Everything was so well done; I can't believe how professional it was. I loved seeing the choreography in it and the performance everyone worked so hard for. I wish it was performed for a live audience – surely when restrictions lift? All in all I loved it so much, such a performance is revolutionary especially in a little old town like Blenheim. What a blessing to watch, I couldn't stop smiling. Great to see all the creative gifts put to use, my heart is so full!"*

*"Amazing show, I loved it, now when I heard that "How Great Thou Art" – come on now, that was awesome! It's great to see and hear something different, sometimes being different is not everyone's cup of tea and that's okay – you did that! Keep breaking grounds and pushing boundaries for this generation and the next, we love to see it!"*

*"I loved it so much and I can't wait for more."*



*"I watched Matala last night and I loved it! Such amazing opportunities you're bringing to Blenheim."*

*"Matala. Wonderfully creative, through provoking and visually sensational – loved it!"*

*"I felt a sense of belonging, before words, I could identify with the moves (Haka fakatonga)."*

*"One of my favourite shows and I want to see more."*

*"Powerful!"*

*"It was a bit hard to make sense of the story, but we loved the dancing, singing and spoken word and watching our local young people perform, especially the ones we know were really shy before – you can see how much their confidence has grown, they shine when they are performing."*

*"Amazing, your craft is so creatively insane, our household loved it."*