



TOIORA

IMPACT REPORT

2025

**CREATIVITY
CONNECTION
COMMUNITY**

**Enhancing wellbeing
through art**

WWW.TOIORA.ORG.NZ

Axl works on a screenprinting project.
Cover: Toi ora artist Lauren works on her painting

TOI ORA

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Did you know art is one of the best things for the development of new neural pathways in the brain?

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TOI ORA ARTIST STORY

The moment you walk through the door here, you become a Toi Ora Artist. Check out this artist feature story on Keith.

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FINANCIALS

Small but mighty, Toi Ora utilises a nimble financial model to maximise resources and impact.

HE ORANGA
NGĀKAU, HE
PIKINGA
WAIORAS.
POSITIVE
FEELINGS IN
THE HEART LIFT
WELLBEING.

**1 in 3 people in
Auckland experience
mental distress**



Kia ora

As we reflect on the accomplishments of 2024-2025, we are filled with immense pride and gratitude for the incredible community that surrounds us. Toi Ora is a place of community, creativity, healing and being together to support each other.

As we stand in the space, we are often asked who we are and there is a tendency to fit Toi Ora in a box of Mental Health or community art. Does that fit? Not really. Maybe our success comes from being label-free and that each artist has the chance to develop their unique artwork.

Our programmes are designed to support where needed, and let the artist determine that journey. We are pleased to partner with other organisations and deepen the social impact of Toi Ora.

As we look forward to the future, we remain committed to fostering a space where creativity thrives and where wellbeing flourishes.

Thank you for being an integral part of our journey and for believing in the transformative power of art.

**MAURI TŪ, MAURI ORA. AN ACTIVE SOUL IS A
HEALTHY SOUL.**

Ngā mihi nui

Susanne

Susanne Ritzenhoff - Director

MEET THE TEAM

Founded more than 29 years ago by those with lived experience of mental health challenges, Toi Ora continues to thrive today thanks to the commitment of brilliant, innovative, and dedicated people who drive our mission forward. In 2024-2025, Toi Ora's nimble and dedicated team of paid staff and tutors is comprised of 7.5 full-time equivalents (FTEs). Together with our board of trustees, volunteers, and additional tutors, over 25 key individuals contributed their passion and expertise to advance the Toi Ora community. In 2025, we expanded staff trainings and reflective practice on the Toi Ora Practice Framework and strengthening cultural capability throughout the organisation.

Staff



Susanne Ritzenhoff

DIRECTOR



Peace Chansong

ADMIN



Andre Medland-Parker

ARTIST LIAISON



Joelle Reid

ARTIST LIAISON



Dr. Hedieh Tavazo

RESEARCH



Rose Rees-Owen

COMMS &
FUNDRAISING

Trustees



Nigel Toms

CO-CHAIR



Katy Thomas

CO-CHAIR



Tas Higgins

TRUSTEE



Dr Polu Apollo Taito

TRUSTEE



Brendan Murphy

TRUSTEE



Shea O'Neill

TRUSTEE



Irene Gardiner

TRUSTEE



Wayne Ferguson

TRUSTEE



Farhana Khan

TRUSTEE

52%

increase in happiness after attending Toi Ora.

48%

reduction in anxiety after participating in the Toi Ora programme.

Many people are 1-2 unexpected life events away from a mental health crisis. Toi Ora makes a difference.



OUR WORK

Toi Ora artists Amos and Te with tutor Ricky at the Toi Ora studio.

20+



VISUAL AND
PERFORMING ARTS
CLASSES OFFERED

Toi Ora is a renowned community arts trust that provides tangible opportunities for those facing mental health challenges, addiction, or brain injury to roll up their sleeves and get into something new.

90.1%



PARTICIPANTS
FEEL UPLIFTED

Our focus on participatory arts programmes enables individuals to take charge of their own creative journeys and their lives. Here, people develop valuable skills and create works of personal significance.

28



YEARS OF TOI ORA

Our gallery space also provides a platform for showcasing these achievements to the public, demonstrating the immediate benefits of personal initiative and community support.

TOI ORA SHOP

Discover affordable, original art from emerging artists. Each piece represents a moment on an artist's journey of creativity for wellbeing. Consider making a purchase to show your support for Toi Ora artists.

toiora.org.nz/shop

Brewing Heart

Artist: Sharon Shih
609mm x 760mm
Acrylic on Canvas
\$350



WHAT WE DO

Toi Ora employs evidence-based methods to enhance wellbeing through creative activities. Our approach is grounded in the Five Ways of Wellbeing and Te Whare Tapa Whā, providing a solid framework for our work. Founded by individuals with firsthand experience of mental health challenges, we understand the value and insight of experience—whether personal or through supportive roles.

Artists choose to come to Toi Ora because they want to be here, and their enthusiasm is evident when they arrive. Our tutors support a self-driven creative process, helping artists set their own goals for both artistic and personal growth so that this can transfer to their lives outside the class setting.

Each artist is empowered to control the pace and direction of their journey, reflected in the diverse range of artwork produced at Toi Ora.

Our classes and workshops are accessible at no cost to participants. Our staff and tutors, trained in emotional first aid, foster a supportive environment, offering practical guidance and encouragement while imparting professional skills to help people get their lives back on track.

Programme participants:

- 45% NZ European
- 27% Māori
- 8% Pacific
- 7% Asian
- 13% other ethnicities

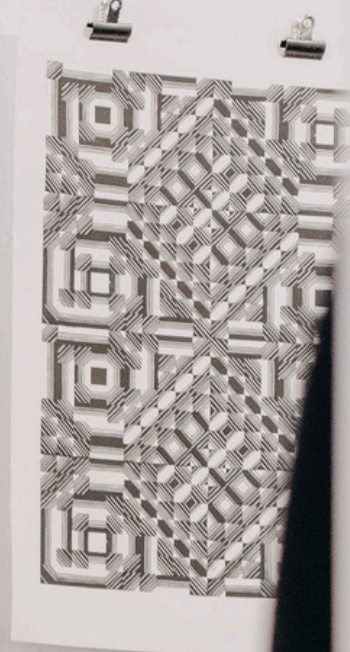
79% of Toi Ora artists have a non-mental health disability



Behind the scenes on Toi Ora artist Lance Setepahano's clay piece, "Ta Moko."

Over a decade ago, Lance Setepthano joined Toi Ora to work on sculptures during open studio. After some years away, to our delight, Lance rejoined the programme.

Shortly after, he completed this incredible work entitled "Ta Moko" (material: Clay).





Faces and figure drawing course art from our long-time artist in residence Andrew Blythe.

NEUROSCIENCE AND ART

Research increasingly highlights the significant role art plays in enhancing wellbeing, with neuroscientific evidence that underscores its profound impact on the brain. Art has been identified as one of the most effective ways to develop new neural pathways (new connections in the brain), a phenomenon known as neuroplasticity. This capability is crucial for cognitive flexibility, problem-solving, and overall brain health. In short, artistic endeavors improve our brains' ability to adapt and learn.

In 2023, the book "Your Brain on Art" highlighted the latest comprehensive research studies conducted at Yale and John's Hopkin's University showing that engaging in artistic activities stimulates the brain's reward pathways, leading to increased dopamine levels and a subsequent boost in mood and emotional health.

This research shows that the act of creating art, whether through painting, drawing, or sculpting, activates multiple areas of the brain simultaneously, fostering a sense of fulfillment and reducing stress. Visual and performing arts are not only therapeutic but also contributes to mental resilience, aiding in the prevention of anxiety and depression. We now have evidence that there are, in fact, different art forms to activate different parts of the brain, providing healing and recovery for specific mental health diagnoses as well as addiction and brain injuries.

By centering these practices in our programme, Toi Ora harnesses the transformative power of art to improve the mental and emotional health, fostering a space where creativity and wellness thrive together.



If you've been following Toi Ora for a while now, you will know that artist Andrew Blythe is a bit of a celebrity around here.

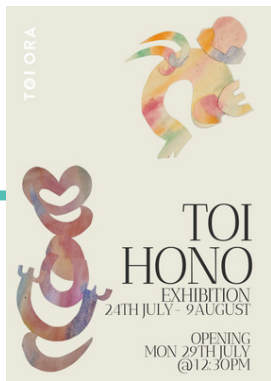
Known for his signature painting of 'xs', 'ns' and 'os', he's been trying out something different and experimenting with oil painting.

We love to see what happens when Toi Ora artists try out new things.

2025 HIGHLIGHTS




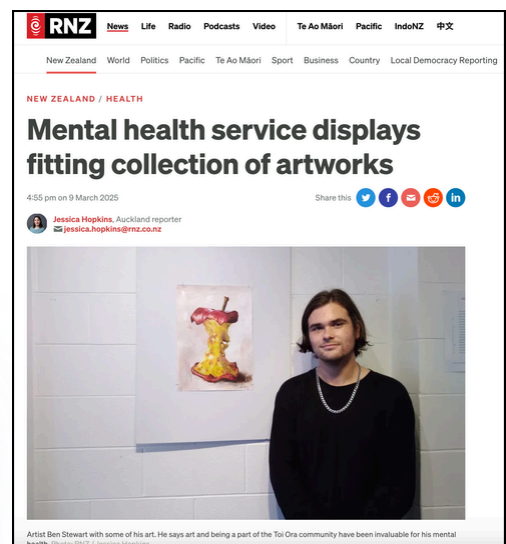
2024 Toi Ora T-shirt Contest Winning design by Andrew Blythe.



Viewing art has proven benefits for wellbeing. The Toi Ora Gallery hosts more than ten exhibitions each year. Exhibitions celebrate the work of our very own Toi Ora artists and tutors – including this year’s t-shirt contest. Each art work representing a moment in a journey for wellbeing.

Exhibitions rotate every few weeks with beautifully curated installations in painting, drawing, mosaics, figure drawing, printmaking, poetry, and other mediums. Art sales at the Gallery and online increased this year, directly benefiting our artists. One of the largest sales was to Auckland Hospital.

In 2025, Toi Ora participated in off-site exhibitions and was even featured in RNZ for our exhibition collaboration with the Kāinga Tiaki Centre. 



Read the full story featuring our director Susanne Ritzenhoff, and Toi Ora artist Ben Stewart: <https://toiora.org.nz/toi-ora-on-rnz-a-collaboration-with-the-kainga-tiaki-centre-for-win-win-situation/>



At Toi Ora's Matariki Screen Printing workshop & exhibition at Lifewise Cafe.



“Kaye Shibuya

2025 HIGHLIGHTS CONT.

GETTING OUT AND ABOUT

This year we offered additional curriculum for public exhibitions. Our artists offered works for Printopia, Community Markets, and larger public exhibitions at Toi Ora.

We developed new partnerships with Auckland City Mission, MahiTahi Trust, and Emerge – for the delivery of classes at Paremoremo, and Wiri Women’s Prison.



INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS

On June 19 a Delegation of 33 from Korea came to visit Toi Ora to learn about the practice and tour the space with the intend of setting up a creative space for mental health in Korea



TOI ORA CELEBRATES MATARIKI AT LIFEWISE

To celebrate Matariki , Toi Ora invited our artists to join us at Lifewise Cafe on K Road to screen print a Matariki inspired t-shirt. We also had an exhibition on in the Lifewise Cafe so people could check out and purchase original artwork from Toi Ora artists.



Toi Ora artist Zet working on a screen printing piece.



from
ANEURYSM
to a
**PASSION FOR
WRITING**

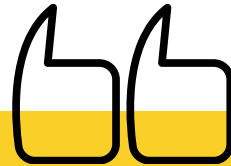
BY KEITH HOPKINS

I'm now 73, at the age of 60 I suffered a major brain aneurysm, that nearly killed me. After four major brain surgeries, a month in a coma, and four months in rehab relearning basic care skills, e.g dressing one's self, I finally returned home. At this time my wife went into hospital with her first cancer, and during the day I was home alone, due to my children being at work.

A new neighbour moved in next door, and we got talking about life, and I told her about my experience in the last few months. She said, "I work at Toi Ora, you should come along, it's the right place for you, you'll enjoy it!"

A few weeks later I was enrolled and rearing to go! Before the aneurysm I was a Special Needs teacher, so I thought I knew the lay of the land, wasn't I in for a surprise!

I've been at Toi Ora since 2014, and I'm so grateful for the facilities, the wonderful staff, and the fantastic artists! I've always been interested in the arts. My mum, and my oldest sister are artists, and I was an artist until the aneurysm.



"After my brain injury, Toi Ora helped me change my attitude and my outlook on life. From my first visit, my attitude literally changed overnight. The programmes at Toi Ora have helped me to look at my new life from a whole new perspective."

-Keith

Now instead of drawing I write stories and poems. What inspires me now is life itself, and being a person watcher, because humans are such a funny bunch of creatures whose life stories are filled with humour, quirkiness, love, hate, and creativity.

My other artistic endeavour I'm learning is the guitar, which is a real challenge for me, as I have no rhythm, and because of my brain injuries I struggle to remember the chord structures, but I haven't given up and I'm determined to learn, and hopefully master the guitar.

My tip for anyone learning something new is go for it. Don't worry about making mistakes. The neural surgeon said I would never walk again, I proved them wrong. My cancer specialist said I

had a certain amount of time before I passed, I proved them wrong!

I'm learning to enjoy myself, and I'm learning new skills, writing and the guitar!

I'm finding there's no right or wrong way in my life, and I'm enjoying every bit of time and life I still have, and take every opportunity that's handed to you!

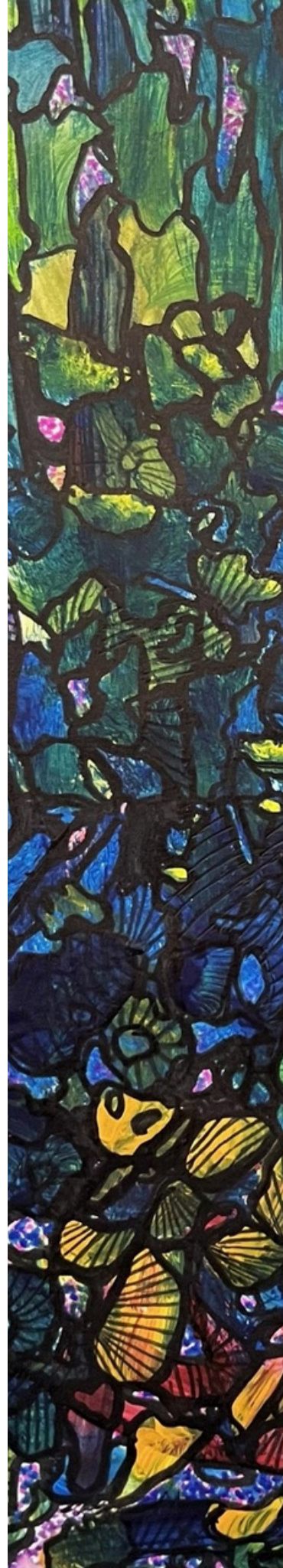
Before my aneurysm I glided through life, and now my mantra is, "Memento Mori," which means, "Remember Death," and by remembering Death I remember to Live! I now try to learn something new, within reason, and I enjoy my new life.

My advice to anyone, "go for it, try everything, and try something new, you never know, the new thing you are learning might be the thing that you're great at!

I enjoy my new life, I stumble at times, I just pick myself up, dust myself off, I don't worry about what others think, I have nothing to lose, and everything to gain!



"Kalliedescope", Anonymous Artist, Mixed media on cardstock, 210x297mm.



“Through Toi Ora I was able to connect with people who were kind and respectful. I could also reconnect with my creativity and feel the joy and satisfaction this can bring. Gradually, through friends, family and Toi Ora I have been able to feel safer in the world. I have found trust and have been able to enjoy my daily activities again.”

- Juliet, Mt. Roskill



LEAVING A LEGACY

Did you know that leaving as little as 1% to Toi Ora in your Will can leave a lasting legacy and make a difference?

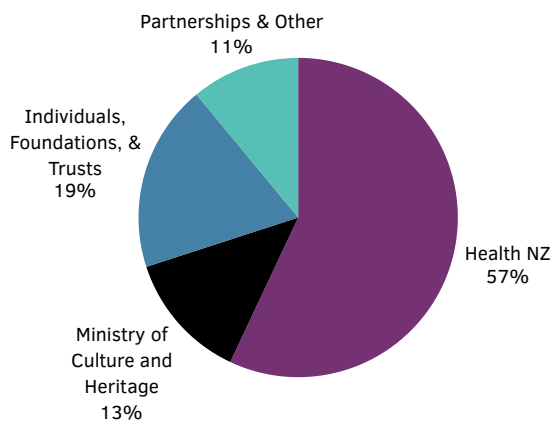
For more information: info@toiora.org.nz

FINANCIALS

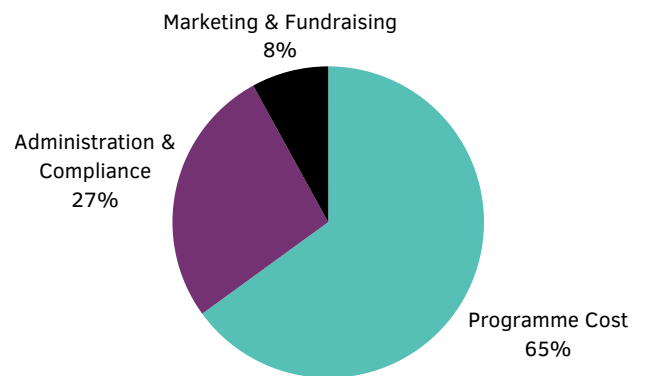


Printmaking artist at work in the Toi Ora studio.

INCOME



EXPENSES



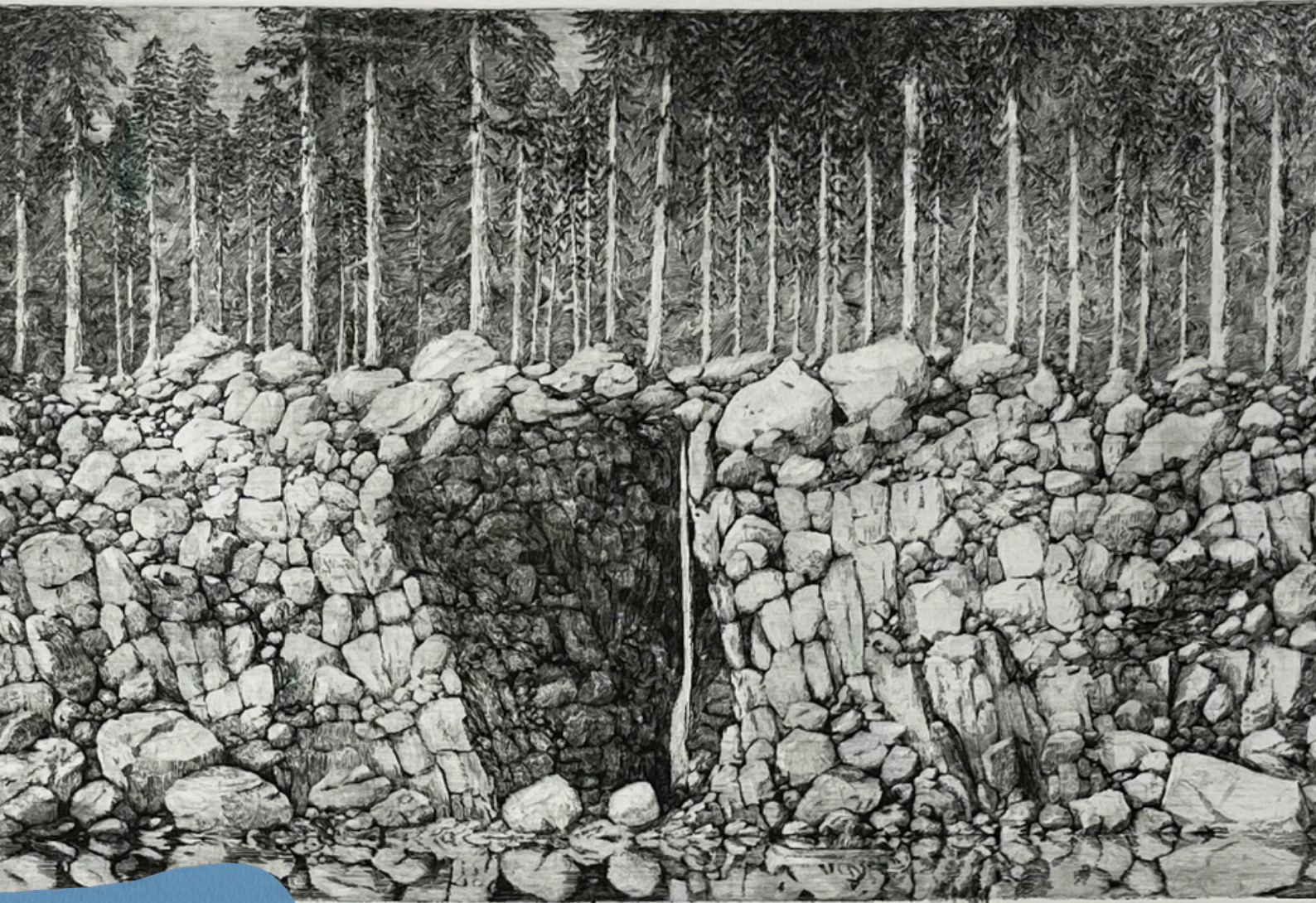
Toi Ora's annual budget sits at just under \$750,000 with our 25 staff and tutors combining to 7.5 full time equivalents (FTEs). Attending a two-hour class at Toi Ora costs just \$60 per person, making it a highly affordable model of support within the mental health ecosystem. In comparison, other important interventions such as counselling typically costs \$100-\$200 per hour, and an overnight stay in a psychiatric hospital can exceed \$2,000.

In terms of what Toi Ora delivers, Artists report strong outcomes: 52% increase in happiness; 90% learned new or improved skills; 80% feel more socially adept. Artist participation has grown significantly, 125% overall, following a 144% increase the previous year. This growth includes an increase in Māori participation, a rise in female participation, and a strong presence of under-30s, who now represent 35% of all participants.

This work would not be possible without the generous support of our funders and donors, including:

- Alexander Harold Watson Charitable Trust
- Arts Access Aotearoa
- Auckland Council
- Chisholm Whitney Family Charitable Trust
- Christine Taylor Foundation
- DIA Lottery Grants Board
- Foundation North
- Four Winds Foundation
- Jenny & Andrew Smith
- Health NZ/Te Whatu Ora
- North & South Trust
- One Foundation
- Pub Charity Ltd
- Public Trust
- The Dragon Community Foundation
- The Lion Foundation
- Waitematā Local Board

And anyone who has purchased art or made a donation this year or in the past. Thank you! And a thank you to Samara Azam for creating this Impact Report.



Volunteer with us

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09 360 4171

6 Putiki Street,
Grey Lynn,
Auckland 1021

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