
MARIA BURGESS



Team Manager- Te Kāhano,
Family Start, Wesleyan
Community Action
—
Te Āti Awa

IDENTITY OF PORIRUA IN KEY WORDS

Turangawaewae- “it’s where we
belong- it is always a part of
you”.

WHO AM I AND MY CONNECTION TO PORIRUA

Maria was born and raised in Porirua after her parents moved from their ancestral land during the Māori migration to Porirua in the late 1950s and 1960s. She ‘whakapapas’ to Te Āti Awa and Samoa, however considers Porirua to be her turangawaewae (standing place) stating “I am a big part of Porirua and Porirua is a big part of me”. As a result of harsh life experiences in her 20s, Maria chose to train in social work to support families that are in the same situation that she had previously been in. She has been doing this in a variety of roles over the last 14 years and is currently the team manager for Family Start “a government funded initiative for families with young babies” to try and ensure the best possible start for these children.

WHAT I LIKE OR VALUE IN PORIRUA CITY

Maria mentions the “close knit” community that exists in Porirua as well as the physical closeness of everything within the city. She also felt that lower levels of inequality in Porirua allows her clients to believe that they can make a fresh start and contribute to the community, where as in areas of higher inequality, often this can seem like too big a jump to make.

HOW PORIRUA INFORMS MY IDENTITY

For Maria and her whānau, Porirua will always be home. She mentioned that some of her children are away travelling, while some have moved elsewhere but that they always know where to come back to. Porirua is always this place.

MY FAVOURITE PLACE

Maria named Titahi Bay Beach and its coastline as her favourite place in Porirua because of her connection to the area. It is where she grew up and she has a spiritual connection with the area and the urupā on the cliffs. “I always walk up along there (the cliffs) and you just feel the mana and the wairua of our tipuna there, because you are looking out to sea, you can see the south island.” This whole area was historically the main trading route for Ngāti Toa and other iwi/ hapu.

CHALLENGES FOR PORIRUA

In Maria's line of work she has had a lot of exposure to addictions and named an ongoing meth epidemic as a core struggle for Porirua presently. She links some of these addictions to the history of the area and colonisation, and the fact that many Māori are struggling to deal with this history. She also mentioned the growing population in Porirua and the welcoming of a variety of people from all over the world. However she was concerned that these people coming into the city should have a fundamental knowledge of the history and culture of Porirua as part of their introduction to the city. She felt that this was essential in order to ensure a thriving Māori identity within the city.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PORIRUA

Maria sees the history of Porirua and its culture to be an incredibly important element of the city and believes widespread language and cultural education in schools is a crucial part of Porirua City's future. Maria believes that the current mayor Mike Tana provides an opportunity for more culturally sensitive elements in the city and she also emphasised the role that Ngāti Toa play as the mana whenua and looks to their leadership within Porirua.

Maria also mentioned Porirua's lack of a significant local sporting colour. Despite seeming like a small detail, Maria felt that Porirua needed its own colours in order to acknowledge and symbolise that Porirua is itself a city and not simply a suburb of Wellington City.

Maria recognises that to realise these opportunities, it may be a slow process from generation to generation.

WHY I AM EXCITED TO BE INVOLVED IN THIS PROJECT

Maria was very excited about the idea of a Decolonised City and what this may look like in the future. To her this meant that people knew and understood the history of the area and this in turn would lead to more respect and awareness for Māori culture.