

CAMD Case Study – CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND BELONGING:

Pacific Youth Cultural Connection

Australian Museum, Sydney



What it means to be a warrior

Pacific communities make up approximately 0.86% of the Australian population, with 32% (about 19,000) in Sydney. Their youth is disproportionately represented amongst those identified as being 'at risk' or in gaol. The Cultural Collections and Community Engagement Unit at the Australian Museum has been working with the Department of Juvenile Justice since 2009 to reconnect young members of Pacific diaspora communities with their tangible and intangible heritage; to allow them to interact with their culture via access to the Museum's collections.

The Museum holds one of the largest and most significant collections of Pacific material in the world, comprising around sixty thousand objects. The collection is of immense historical and cultural value to Pacific diaspora and creator communities, as well as to Australian and international audiences more broadly.

The aim of the program is to challenge beliefs and perceptions that being a 'warrior' is synonymous with being violent by building cultural awareness and pride. By using creativity, imagination and access to culturally significant artefacts we are building the self-esteem of Pacific teenagers and motivating them to develop their social skills and their sense of community, as well as encouraging new avenues of creative expression based around access to our collections. Dion Pieta, the Museum's Cultural Collections Coordinator noted that the program 'provides these young men with a sense of pride and dignity when the history of the objects is explained to them and their relationship to these powerful objects is revealed. Providing positive role models working in museum activities is also beneficial'.

The program explores and documents how this can help divert juveniles from anti-social and criminal behaviour. Informal feedback from participants to date indicates that this is the case. The Australian Museum is now moving to evaluate its current program working with sociologists and criminologists; to develop benchmarks based on international models; and to carry out economic modelling of the costs and benefits of this cultural connection approach.

The Australian Museum's partnership with Juvenile Justice is an innovative way of supporting young 'at risk' people to retain their traditional culture and help them flourish.

Photograph above: Shigeyuki Kihara