

NZ YOUTH WEEK

Pacific Stars

An MSD Pacific Team special

EXCLUSIVE NEWS TODAY

An ipu kī with Agnes Milford



Agnes Milford after her keynote where Pacific students from across the city came and watched the film 'Vai' which she starred in.



Pacific young star shares some thoughts on Covid19

It's Youth Week 2020 and the theme this year is "*E korero ana mātou. E whakarongo ana koutou? We're speaking. Are you listening?*". We sat down for a virtual ipu kī with young Pacific star, Agnes Milford to hear her thoughts around lockdown.

Agnes (Siufaga, Falelatai) is a proud product of Tangaroa College, Otago where she found her love for drama. She is part of The Black Friars, a South Auckland based theatre troupe formed in 2006, with the desire to challenge the dominant discourses of stereotypes surrounding Pasifika people and to keep 'talented young brown people off the street and on the stage'. You may recognise her from her debut screen performance in the award-winning Pacific film, "Vai".

What have you been up to during the Lockdown?

Nothing much, not that we could do anything. I just started working full time as a Recruitment coordinator at a non-profit - social change organisation called Ako Matatupu, a month before they announced the level 4 lockdown, so I spent my lockdown figuring out how to do my job remotely really.

My colleagues (Komiti Pasifika and Kaihautū) have been holding 'The Ako Fonos' every Wednesday evenings @7pm via Zoom for the past 5 weeks. This is a space or fala (mat) we hold for the community to come together to educate and raise awareness that Māori and Pasifika peoples have been in crisis long before Covid19!

I have also been learning how to cook and home-school my young siblings (I'm one of 5), so I can't wait for school to open and take them away.

What are some of the challenges you have seen for our Pacific communities during Covid19?

1. Panic Buying- this was quite a disheartening thing to witness, some families were able to panic buy and stock up their supplies for the lockdown period. Then I saw other families who could barely even afford to get basic essentials.
2. Students working remotely without devices or resources- disappointing and heartbreaking don't even explain this feeling. I witnessed schools having no knowledge of our Māori and Pacific families. Here they were, forced into lockdown and learning remotely and yet many did not have a device and were still expected to learn? How ridiculous! Some may have had 1 and at most maybe 2 devices. Most families might have a phone but do not have Wi-Fi. Resources were not always accessible because some staff were too picky about students damaging these resources. So, our students were expected to be learning remotely on a device they didn't have, in a space they didn't have, because most of us live in a 3-bedroom house with 13 people living in it too.
3. What about those students who have fallen through the gaps at school and how has this lockdown widened that gap for them? And what about those students for whom school was the only safe space they could escape to away from home, away from family violence? I think about those young people a lot.

What are some of the opportunities you are seeing?

-An opportunity for government to recognise the value of our essential workers who have kept this country afloat: healthcare, supermarkets and factories.

Everyone is equal and all jobs are significant!

-I see an extensive opportunity for new ways of working in partnerships between school, home and across government.

-An opportunity for our Māori and Pasifika communities to reconnect within our homes and with our aiga.

-Our Māori and Pasifika students might be able to tell their stories about the challenges they face, e.g. access to doctors, Identity, poverty and overcrowding. Some families have been in crisis long before COVID and I believe this has magnified these challenges. We need to tend to this cycle and break it collectively. *"If nothing ever changes, then nothing ever changes"*- Dr Michelle Johansson

-Developing a curriculum, strengthening effective teaching practice and assessment that reflects Māori and Pasifika knowledges, worldviews, understandings and ways of being.

What are you looking forward to after lockdown?

- I look forward to a change towards a better Education system. Hopefully, teachers will have fun ideas and come up with innovative ways to create engaging learning environments for their students.
- Our country taking hygiene more seriously
- I hope people's creativity and artistic projects that have flourished during the lockdown, continues. I have seen so many dances, songs and writing being done, and I sure hope this enquiry into creative expression carries on.
- Our Black Friars team continuing to forge performance places and practices that foster the principles of Teu le Vā.

What does wellbeing look like for you and your aiga?

My well-being hasn't been at its best since lockdown. I put a lot of stress on myself to learn my job within a couple of weeks, and being so unkind to myself, led to a mental breakdown.

I'm grateful I have such a supportive workspace and because of them, slowly, I am realising the value of kindness to self.

I have so appreciated being around my immediate aiga more, this has supported and stimulated everyone's well-being, by cooking together, exercising together, being strong in our faith and just being connected. #FamGoals