

## **PERSONAL STATEMENT** - Geri Sheppard

Kia ora, my name is Geri. I am a single Mother of two, self-employed photographer, volunteer, graphic designer and so much more. Let me share a little of myself.

Nelson is my home it's a great place to indulge my great love of nature, camping and the outdoors. If I'm not in my garden I'm creating and building something with my kids or doing a bit of DIY on the house.

At twenty I set off on a four year OE. I made a point of experiencing as many sights - historical, cultural and natural as possible before coming home to study at the School of Design in Wellington.

I had always considered teaching, in the year I graduated I was asked to come back to Massey to teach portrait photography, I was hooked! When I finished I had re-written and taught four papers including one I had created from scratch for the Fashion Design Department. I continued to teach that paper in block courses for several years after I moved back home to care for my terminally ill Mother.

Since then I have been a self-employed Photographer specialising in family portraits and weddings. I've had many opportunities to share my knowledge including eleven years at Waimea College Community Education, NMIT, Plunket, YMCA and The Hub - a community drop in centre for youth. Sharing my joy, inspiring people, giving them the tools to make a real difference to their practice and seeing the light-bulb moments has been a truly rewarding experience.

One of the proudest and most humbling roles photography has offered me is the opportunity to become a volunteer photographer for Heartfelt. Heartfelt provides photos to families that have experienced stillbirths, premature births or have children with serious and terminal illnesses. It certainly isn't an easy role but I know how much comfort these photos will bring to those going through one of life's most unthinkable events.

The most important role I have is that of Mum to my boys. We live in a socially and culturally diverse community and I'm proud of the strong connections we share in our neighbourhood. My boys go to a culturally and community focused school, Victory. I chose the school because I wanted my children to be well rounded and inclusive. I am proud to be one of the parents instrumental in re-establishing the school PTA.

One of my sons has been diagnosed with dyslexia. This journey has been a fraught process most especially for him. My Mother was a SPELD teacher, I met the mother of one of her students recently and she told me what my Mum had meant to her daughter. This confirmed for me that providing individualised learning programmes is crucial.

I have a strong sense of responsibility to our bicultural partnership, to empower youth to be the best they can be. I have gained knowledge and understanding of cultural practice through study and work but I still have a lot to learn. I'll make a start by building relationships, by finding connections, by involving whanau and by cultivating a relatable and interesting learning environment. My intention is to learn Te Reo Maori, I want to reach out to local Iwi, I want to know more than just the components of my mihi and to start to build relationships for the future.

I feel very privileged to have enjoyed a career that has given me so many opportunities and experiences. It's time to spread my wings and share some of that joy with young people and hopefully inspire them to live their lives well and with purpose too.

Ngā mihi.  
Geri

*'Ko te ahurei o te tamaiti arahia o tātou mahi'*

What bicultural knowledge and understanding do you bring to the role of classroom teaching?

As part of my design degree we did a six month paper on Cultural History and Social Paradigms in Design which I loved. This gave me a among other knowledge a beginning understanding of tikanga Maori and our bicultural history as New Zealanders.

I have gained knowledge and understanding through enquiry, learning and implementation of cultural practice in my own work; through my photography business; my previous role as Newborn Hearing Screener; as a volunteer photographer for Heartfelt providing photographic memories to families who have lost babies or who have terminally ill children.

We live in Victory Square where we have a very diverse local community including the largest population of chin (former) refugees in NZ, I'm proud of the strong connections we have in our neighbourhood and the many wonderful opportunities my two boys and I have to learn about non-European New Zealanders.

I have a strong sense of responsibility to empower youth to embrace our bicultural identity, to use Te Reo Maori and Tikanga Maori where I can, and to develop my own cultural understanding and share that with others.