



## Catherine Smith, Auckland Museum

### WALK THE TALK WINNER

**A colonial history and 90-year-old building poses potential roadblocks for diversity and accessibility, but Catherine Smith was determined to make Auckland Museum relevant and welcoming to all residents of Tāmaki Makaurau.**

When the museum's Director of People and Organisation took on the job, she set out on a mission to create a culture of diversity, where the workforce reflected the communities it serves, and where employees and visitors feel part of the museum whanau.

Working within the goals of the Strategic Plan 2017-2022, that sets out to reach more people and be relevant and inclusive for all Aucklanders, Catherine has supported staff in their own initiatives, actively encouraged managers to make diversity a success factor in recruitment, and led by example, sharing her own vision for change. Says Chief Executive David Gaimster, "Catherine's leadership and commitment to diversity and inclusion is transforming our museum. It is inspiring our people to undertake ground-breaking work and is seeing us take a leadership position in our sector on a global scale."

Three key initiatives form the foundation of the museum's culture; the Diversity and Inclusion Policy; Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan (detailing actions, roles and responsibilities); and Museum Mindsets and Behaviours.

Through the action plan, Catherine has encouraged the whole organisation to focus on improving diversity and inclusion in each work area, and has provided constant guidance and support. When on their own initiative a group of staff created an Accessibility and Inclusion Working Group, they initially struggled to gain traction. But group member Esther Tobin says that after meeting with Catherine, who gave her full support and helped them develop the accessibility section of the Action Plan, things quickly advanced. With Catherine's support, the group created an internal lecture series delivered by people with lived experience to help educate museum staff about the needs of the community, and their experiences of the museum.



**WATCH  
VIDEO**

“Catherine Smith leads by example, she is a phenomenal leader who has given Auckland Museum a vision and a road map for implementing diversity and inclusion,” says Esther. “She has become our enabler, supporting and encouraging our initiatives, listening to the challenges we face, and responding with a strategic framework that makes it achievable and sustainable. I feel privileged to have the opportunity to learn from her and for the vision we have collectively built.”

Thanks to this support and the ongoing work of the group, volunteer guides have been trained to lead audio-describe tours for vision-impaired visitors, ‘quiet’ hours have been hosted for the neuro-diverse community, and wheelchair access to the museum has been improved.

Internal Communications and Change Manager Chantelle Urquhart says the new Mindsets and Behaviour initiative will become a vital part of workplace culture.

“This follows Catherine’s belief that the way we think determines how we each interpret and respond to situations and ultimately how we behave and treat others. Our mindsets and behaviours have been created from the bottom up through workshops with our people.

“They provide us with a framework for personal development and learning as well as providing a common language and understanding so that we can hold ourselves and others accountable for behaviour. Our ‘Respect Others’ mindset explicitly requires our people to respect diversity of thought, background and experience and recognise the mana of everyone.”

Catherine has actively encouraged managers to make diversity a success factor in the museum’s recruitment process, leading to an increase in Maori, Pacific and Asian representation in the organisation.

Says Head of Visitor Services Fiona Blanchard, “Catherine is vocal in her support of Visitor Services’ focus on recruiting and supporting a diverse workforce. She respectfully challenges others’ thinking around diversity and inclusion through creating formal and informal forums for discussion and debate.”

In October 2018 Auckland Museum became the first cultural institution in New Zealand to hold the Rainbow Tick. Chantelle Urquhart says Catherine was instrumental in not only improving the experience of Rainbow staff, but also in the museum taking a leadership position in this area.

“As a member of our AM Pride staff network, Catherine listened to and actioned feedback that content for our new gallery was not representative of everyone in the community. As a result, the story of marriage equality in New Zealand will now be included in the gallery. Catherine then approached MP Louisa Wall to gift the museum the coat she wore on the day her Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Bill was passed,” says Chantelle.

“This example demonstrates Catherine’s commitment to listening to all voices, taking action and telling all stories, key qualities of a leader who is walking the talk when it comes to diversity and inclusion.”

The judging panel were impressed with Catherine’s unwavering support of any changes that will create a more inclusive culture for individuals working at or visiting Auckland Museum, and her willingness to develop action plans and policies to make those changes happen quickly and visibly.

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AND DO WELL BECAUSE OF IT.**

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