



Otago Bulletin Board

Ones to Watch: Taikawa Tamati-Elliffe

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Tamati is not only completing Māori Studies and Entrepreneurship, he's a dad, a business owner and has two jobs. With all of these commitments, he is having a positive impact on the future of Māori in the tech world.

“Sleep doesn’t happen often” laughs third-year student Taikawa Tamati-Elliffe as he reflects on what has been a busy year so far with many achievements.

The student is not only completing Māori Studies and Entrepreneurship, he's a dad, a business owner and has two jobs. With all of these commitments, he is having a positive impact on the future of Māori in the tech world.

“It's been a busy time. Just before our first lockdown my son was born. I went on parental leave, was back at work for one day and then we went into Alert Level 4. A lot of our family were with us at the time so I had nearly three months at home with my new son – about 11 of us in the house. It was a pretty great time actually.”

“One of my jobs is as a Kaiāwhina or Māori student support. Every Māori student in the business school who comes in, I look after. It's busy, especially during our lockdown. We were making welfare phone calls and checking in on students.

"My other job is Māori Partnerships and Pathways Manager for Centre of Digital Excellence (CODE). My role is ensuring games funded by CODE that have Māori content – I look through their content to ensure its authentic and correct. There is also a pay-it-forward element, where the groups funded are challenged to give back to the iwi who have supported them. There is very little Māori influence in the game development industry, so we are creating a fund to help address helping whānau who are interested to access the right technology to then pursue those pathways.”

As well as his two busy roles, Taikawa is the proud co-founder of Ngāti Gaming which supports other gamers on their journey with Te Reo Māori and Māori culture in general.

“My mum does important work with the revitalisation of Māori language alongside Ngāi Tahu and I had the privilege of learning our language and culture as I grew up. I see this as a chance to give back and encourage others on their journey. If I'm helping impact others in a positive way, I couldn't ask for more.”

“At the end of last year my cousin and I started Ngāti Gaming. The idea came about when he wanted to learn more Māori. I decided we could be creative with this. We game a lot and I decided to flip the whole vocab of a game we play often. I was rough, I didn't speak English to him unless he really needed me to explain something to him.

“From that idea came meeting other players who wanted something similar and saw an interest in what we were doing. We started a community on Discord aimed at gamers. We now have more than 550 members in our community. An interesting challenge was translating English words into Māori when there wasn't a particular Māori translation already.”

When Taikawa returned to University earlier this year he took up a development opportunity through Audacious at Start Up Dunedin, which has been another important stepping stone in

getting set up.

“I saw it as an opportunity to learn more about business. I won the Best Social Impact Award in semester 1 which gave me some funding to kickstart my journey. The business continues to grow and we have some big goals for the future.

“My cousin and I are heavy in the competitive scene for gaming. One of our goals is to have a fluent Māori team on an international competitive gaming level. Having that impact internationally would be incredible for empowering our community.

“Currently our community meet regularly on Discord we have voice channels which people drop into daily and play games while sharing discussions. We’ve really made it a safe space to ask questions and I’ve noticed it helps those with anxiety to feel they can ask questions without judgement.”

As part of the work Ngāti Gaming is doing, Taikawa says they’ve also been offering te reo classes online every fortnight which is run by a qualified Te Reo teacher and now the business, which started as two people, has grown to a larger team of 12.

“We now have a team of content creators, social media managers, our Māori teachers and even mental health and wellbeing support. We really aim to look after our community. Community is really at the forefront of what we do.



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“Long term we would like to create games. Essentially, we want to create networks to explore digital careers, helping our community of game developers, artists, videographers and inspire other Māori to move into those industries.

“It’s also important work as some Māori join us feeling embarrassment that they can’t speak te reo or don’t know much about their culture but through gaming it brings down those barriers. You get to know each other and it creates a safe space.”

Taikawa says another of their big goals for the future is pencilled in next Matariki.

“On the horizon we have a goal to host the world’s first Māori vs Aboriginal gaming event. It is the result of changing times. I do feel in the last few years we have begun to address our need to learn Māori language and history and this is part of the work to be done.”

Taikawa says this work is important to him as he grew up knowing his language but this isn’t the case for all Māori.

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Kōrero by Internal Communications Adviser, Chelsea McRae