

# Arts good for the psyche

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Youth who do arts are psychologically better off than those who do not, a new study from Victoria University shows.

Researcher Stephen Fox has been investigating benefits of traditional [arts](#) participation, finding that participating in arts, particularly traditional arts, brought about markedly higher well being in the youth studied, as well as better positive connections to their families and communities.

The study focused on wellbeing of Maori and Pasifika youth across the North Island and the arts activities they did. It was part of the longitudinal Youth Connectedness Project of the Roy McKenzie Centre for the Study of Families at Victoria University, directed by Dr Paul Jose and Dr Jan Pryor.

Youth who did any art (music, dance, visual arts) were statistically better off psychologically than those who did none. Youth who did kapa haka or were in Pasifika cultural groups had the highest sense of identity, connectedness and wellbeing of all groups.

This was no surprise to kapa haka and Pasifika group leaders interviewed in a previous study: they have seen this for years. But there had been no statistical research into the subject.

The activities, according to the leaders, provide a positive expressive outlet, instil confidence and resilience, and provide high-quality connections to family and community—things which may protect against

future problems. They also provide a rich background in cultural knowledge and history, which helps the youths build a favourable sense of identity.

Fox gradually developed the idea of investigating benefits of traditional arts over years of playing music with artists from many countries and cultures while living in Hawaii.

"You see it in the Hawaiian hula halau (schools), the Japanese taiko drumming students, the Philippine dancers, and it becomes obvious that these kids have a positive edge in life," Fox says.

"It amazes me that something so fundamental and positive is so under-researched," he adds.

By including participation in other arts in this analysis (Western [music](#), dance and visual arts) it emerged that participation in these arts also provides an advantage for all the [youth](#) involved, though not as pronounced as the traditional arts advantage.

"I hope that this will provide something for policy people to consider," Fox says. "It is too easy to say, 'well, it's just arts, we can cut that budget.' The reality is that these are important activities for raising healthy, well-adapted members of society."

His third study looks at arts participation across cultures. Fox anticipates that the trends will be consistent, and the benefits will extend across the New Zealand social spectrum, including the many new immigrant groups.

Provided by Victoria University of Wellington

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