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Two Māori cousins appointed to shape the future of global Indigenous education movement

Two Māori cousins from Tairāwhiti and eastern Bay of Plenty who helped bring the World Indigenous Peoples' Conference on Education (WIPCE) back to Aotearoa are now helping shape the future of one of the world's largest Indigenous education movements.

Tamariki Tu Tamariki Ora Chief Executive Jaye Wainui and kaupapa Māori researcher, filmmaker and educator Dr Toiroa Williams have been appointed as Aotearoa representatives on the WIPCE International Council.

The appointments place the two young leaders at the centre of a global network of Indigenous educators, researchers, leaders and communities working to strengthen Indigenous knowledge systems, languages and approaches to education.

For Jaye and Toiroa, the appointment represents a full-circle moment from helping four years ago secure the successful bid to bring WIPCE home in 2025, to now helping guide the movement's future international direction.

"WIPCE was never intended to simply be a conference. It is a movement," says Jaye Wainui.

"It is about relationships, knowledge sharing and creating connections between Indigenous communities around the world. Our role is to help strengthen those relationships and look at what impact WIPCE can have over the next 25 years."

Dr Toiroa Williams says the opportunity is about ensuring the knowledge and relationships built through WIPCE continue to grow for generations to come.

"WIPCE has always been about Indigenous peoples coming together, sharing knowledge and strengthening each other," says Dr Williams.

"The opportunity now is to ensure that knowledge continues to grow, is preserved and is accessible for future generations."

Established in 1987, WIPCE has grown into a significant international Indigenous education movement, bringing together thousands of Indigenous educators, researchers, leaders and community members from around the world.

The movement was founded on the principle that Indigenous communities should have spaces to share their own knowledge systems, languages and approaches to education. Through WIPCE, Indigenous peoples have created an international platform to celebrate success, exchange ideas and strengthen relationships across communities.

The 2025 WIPCE gathering in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland marked the return of the conference to Aotearoa for the first time in 20 years, bringing Indigenous voices from across the globe together on ancestral lands.

"To now have the responsibility of helping shape the future of WIPCE is a privilege. It is about honouring the generations who built this movement while creating pathways for those who come after us."

The appointment brings together two different leadership pathways connected by whakapapa and a shared commitment to kaupapa Māori.

Jaye has built a career spanning social services, health, justice, corrections and local government, and is now Chief Executive of one of Kiriakiroa's largest social service providers, supporting whānau and communities through kaupapa Māori approaches.

Dr Toiroa Williams has recently completed his doctorate and continues his work across kaupapa Māori research, mātauranga Māori, te reo Māori, storytelling and education.

“Although our journeys have been different, our whakapapa is the same,” says Toiroa.

One of the opportunities ahead for the Council is capturing and preserving the wealth of Indigenous knowledge shared through WIPCE over nearly four decades which excites them both.

“Across almost 40 years there have been thousands of stories, presentations and examples of Indigenous innovation shared through WIPCE.”

“Imagine the value of bringing that knowledge together so future generations can access it, learn from it and continue building on it.”

The appointments also reflect a new generation of Indigenous leadership joining a movement built over decades by Elders, knowledge holders and community leaders.

“We are not replacing the generations who came before us,” says Jaye.

“We are standing on their shoulders. The future is about bringing together the wisdom and experience of our kaumātua with the energy, ideas and aspirations of the next generation.”

The next WIPCE will be held in Hawai‘i in 2028, continuing the international journey of a movement that began more than four decades ago.

For Jaye and Toiroa, the opportunity is about carrying the voices of their communities onto a global stage. Their joint appointment was acknowledged recently at an official reception attended by global WIPCE leaders including Dr Rongo Wetere, Aroha Te Kanawa, Dr Bentham Ohia and Professor Tania Ka'ai.

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