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|  | Speak Up – KōrerotiaActivating the city19 May 2021 |
| Male | This programme was first broadcast on Canterbury’s access radio station Plains FM and was made with the assistance of New Zealand on Air. |
| Female | Coming up next conversations on human rights with “Speak Up” – “Kōrerotia”, here on Plains FM. |
| Sally | E ngā mana, E ngā reo, E ngā hau e whāTēnā koutou katoaNau mai ki tēnei hōtaka: “Speak Up” – “Kōrerotia”. Tune in as our guests “Speak Up”, sharing their unique and powerful experiences and opinions and may you also be inspired to “Speak Up” when the moment is right.Ko: “Speak Up” – “Kōrerotia” tēnei, ko Sally Carlton ahau. Today we’re talking about “Activating the city”. It’s been a real run of events and activations taking place in Ōtautahi Christchurch in the last few weeks, they’ve all been seeking to connect people within Christchurch to city space and people within Christchurch to each other, and so it seemed like a great time to have a bit of a kōrero about this topic. We’ve got three guests today who are all going to introduce themselves and tell us about the work, the mahi, that they’re doing in this particular space. Ryan, perhaps we’ll start with you, you’ve been on this show before but it’s great to have you back talking on a different topic.  |
| Ryan | Thank you. I’m one of the founders of Gap Filler which has been around for ten-and-a-half years now and I’m the day-to-day director. We do a mix of events and installations in the city, some quite short term and some like the Dance-O-Mat or the Super Street Arcade have been there for quite a few years. Our focus has been on the central city in Christchurch and at the moment we’ve got 17 installations live in the central city.  |
| Sally | That’s fantastic and I’m really looking forward to talking about some of the more recent ones - or some of the older ones, as well - as we go through.  |
| Ryan | Cool.  |
| Sally  | Cheryl, perhaps we’ll go with you next.  |
| Cheryl | Kia ora koutou, ko Cheryl Doig tōku ingoa, nō Ōtautahi ahau, nō Ako Ōtautahi Learning City Christchurch tōku mahi. So I’m one of the directors or trustees of Ako Ōtautahi Learning City Christchurch and that’s a charitable trust in the city that’s really focused on creating learning connections across the city and exploring the idea of citizens at the heart of learning. So not just schools and tertiary organisations, but community and business all working together with a focus on equity, access and innovation. So we do some projects. We also run Learning Days that I’m sure we will be talking about later.  |
| Sally | Fantastic, thank you. And our final guest, Erica?  |
| Erica | Kia ora, ngā mihi nui, ko wai au? Ko Guangzhou tōku rohe, ko Baiyun tōku maunga, ko Zhujiang tōku awa, ko Liang tōku hapū, ko Knopp tōku whānau. Nō Haina ahau. Ko Erica tōku ingoa. Ko Ōtautahi tōku kainga ināianei. Kia ora. My name is Erica, I come from Guangzhou, China and grew up in Auckland Tāmaki Makaurau and moved to Christchurch eight years ago. My background is in architecture, my relationship with the city is being the Christchurch Ambassador because I’m very passionate about the city. My professional role that I created for myself is Experience Curator. I use my architecture skills to weave in design and curate meaningful experiences. And who am I? I am a multipotentialite person with multiple passions and also a mum to a one-year-old. And I’ve been lucky enough to be a volunteer at Gap Filler when I first came to Ōtautahi Christchurch and also involved in Learning City with Cheryl and supporting Learning Days, kia ora.  |
| Sally | Many, many hats you wear, Erica! When you say that you are an ‘experience curator’ and you curate people’s experiences, what exactly do you mean by that? |
| Erica | So when we think about a curator, we can’t not about a curator of an exhibition. If you think about an exhibition, you’ve got multiple pieces of artwork that are designed, drawn or executed by artists and the curator is to help put it in a collection for people to experience. So applying that to how we experience a city and how we engage with different spaces and different people – I use the same thinking around curating different things and connecting the dots so people can see it or experience it collectively.  |
| Sally | Very interesting, I’ve always wondered what your title means exactly. Okay, so as we start off our kōrero then: “activating the city”, what exactly do we mean by that? How can a city be activated? Can a city be activated?  |
| Cheryl | From my perspective, absolutely it can be activated and if it’s not activated, it’s in a place of inertia and lack of growth. ‘Activation’ for me and from a Learning City perspective, means a sense of engagement and belonging and it also means a place where… where place, people and purpose are all connected. Activation comes from the people and the sharing of power.  |
| Ryan | Yeah I guess I see the term used a lot in our field these days and I think for a lot of people using the word ‘activate’, they don’t necessarily distinguish it from just ‘activity’, having stuff happening. And I think that’s certainly part of it - we want cities and public spaces where there’s a bit of a buzz and there’s stuff happening - but you know, I guess for a while now we’ve been teasing out what’s the difference maybe between activate and just activity and Gap Filler comes back to the sort of definition of… well, you can run a big event in a city and get a lot of people and a lot of things happening and then everyone goes home and if you want to get that activity again, you have to create another big event. That in my mind, that’s creating activity, that’s not activating the city. So something about activating for me is creating the potential for a more sustainable or ongoing activation, whether that means empowering communities so that you might help them run one event and then that community group can self-run its own events because you’ve built some capability and capacity, or some of our longer-term installations in the city where we build it once and then that becomes kind of an invitation for all sorts of people to use it off their own backs and create that kind of regular activity happening.  |
| Sally | It’s almost like those smaller everyday things as much as those big-scale things.  |
| Ryan | In my mind, certainly. |
| Erica | For me it’s really about filling it with life and the emphasis is really around the verb and just listening to what Ryan is saying, the idea of activities. It could also be filled with plant life and life of all its form and the immediate thought of the work that the Green Lab does, you know, they can fill the space with plant life and that’s also activating but in a slower pace where people can appreciate that slowness of it growing and its response to its environment. And I really want to touch on that emotional and physical response that life has with this space.  |
| Cheryl | I was just thinking about what you were saying, Erica, and the idea of activation being a systems approach and just reflecting on the conversation about one flap of a butterfly’s wings can create a major storm in a different part of the world. That sometimes you actually don’t know whether something has made a difference because people will go away from an activity and nothing might happen or nothing might happen for a while and there’s thinking or follow up conversation and sometimes in the Learning City space, we talk about activating of accepting the nudge. Of someone else that takes on a next stage or a project because it’s got some purpose or meaning for them. So I agree, it’s an ongoing not just a single event, but sometimes it takes a while to emerge and because it’s complex, you don’t necessarily what that might look like, you’ve got to keep poking and prodding the system.  |
| Ryan | In some ways there’s not much more of a passive experience on one level than reading a book or watching a film, on the other hand those are often the most powerful things that linger with you for years and transform your lives and push you in new directions and all sorts. So yeah, it would be a real shame if we lost all of those other layers in the word activate and just focused on movement.  |
| Erica | Yes it’s all about opening people’s eyes, minds and hearts to the city, rather than movement.  |
| Sally | You’ve spoken about the role that people obviously play in this. Is it a two-way thing, then, between the city and the people or are there other parties involved in that as well? I’m thinking here maybe government and/or funders, for example.  |
| Cheryl | If I take Learning City as an example, it’s a grassroots movement and so that’s about the rise of citizen power and the voice of the everyday citizen being heard and that’s got a critical role in making a difference. At the same time, you’ve got your big slow government departments and systems that sometimes can get in the way and sometimes help. So the interaction between the two is a critical part of that work and so where you can get some sort of government or funder that is a partner in the process, not just a funder and a checker off-er, I think that makes a real difference. So partnership is key.  |
| Sally | Erica, given your background with architecture, I’m wondering if architecture makes a difference here as well in terms of the actual construction of physical space and the way things are designed.  |
| Erica | Yes, the thing that comes to mind is Winston Churchill’s quote that always stays with me is, “We shape our buildings, thereafter they shape us” and it is a full cycle in an ever-evolving journey. Reflecting back on the last ten years in Christchurch, you know, we’ve been through so much - the earthquake, the shooting and Covid - and what really stays constant is that change of our environment and the constant readapting and learning and growing. So architecture does actually hold a lot of history and also a sense of belonging that actually helps us to reshape our relationship with the place.  |
| Sally | Fantastic answer, Erica. Anyone else want to add anything to that?  |
| Cheryl | I’ll make a comment as a person who grew up in Christchurch and lives in Ōtautahi because to me they’re different cities. Still a long journey to be had but if you walk through the city and you can see the manifestations and recognition of mana whenua, that to me is the sense of belonging that is critical in terms of the connection with city. I think that’s a really important point for me in this journey.  |
| Ryan | Yes I think that’s been one of the most exciting developments since the quakes was having mana whenua as statutory partners on all the big government blueprint anchor projects. So there’s a much more visible presence there. I got into - whatever the field is that I’m in, the sort of stuff that we do - through performance. So I spent many years in theatre but the kind of underlying discipline is performance studies where we look at all of our everyday behaviours as social roles that we’re playing and so sort of bring that lens to the city about who can you be in what spaces, what sort of roles are you required to play in some instances but invited or allowed to play in other instances. So I absolutely believe architecture, landscape architecture, design in all of its… the environments we’re in make us feel like we can or can’t be, you know certain aspects of ourselves can manifest or not, and I feel like that’s kind of the still the core principle behind a lot of our interventions or installations is how can we tease out some of those behaviours or roles that people might secretly like to play but don’t really get the opportunity.  |
| Sally | Very nice. I think we might have our first song here. Cheryl, you’ve chosen for us Dave Dobbyn’s ‘Welcome Home’ and I think that probably ties in really nicely with what you were saying there before about Ōtautahi and Christchurch. If you want to maybe elaborate a wee bit more? |
| Cheryl | A couple of reasons. One is it has its roots in New Zealand but also that whole notion of tūrangawaewae, is that if you’ve activated a city and you feel that you belong then that means you feel safe, you feel free from racism, you feel that you are valued as a person and so ‘Welcome Home’ to me epitomises that feeling of ahhh, I’ve landed back here in this place and I belong here.  |
| Sally | Ka pai.  |
|  | **MUSIC BY DAVE DOBBYN – WELCOME HOME** |
| Sally | This is “Speak Up – Kōrerotia” and today we’re talking with Ryan Reynolds of Gap Filler, Erica Austin who is a Christchurch Ambassador and Experience Curator and Cheryl Doig of Learning Cities. The idea for this show came about because there’s been a lot happening in Christchurch in the last few weeks and I thought it would be great to talk about what are some of those projects, how did they come about in terms of the concept and how have you seen them being played out. Have they been successful and how do you define success or otherwise?  |
| Cheryl | Ako Ōtautahi Learning City Christchurch has just hosted a week of what we call Ōtautahi Learning Days. So it’s a week of celebrating and uncovering some of the learning opportunities that happen across the city. Part of that is if we’re focusing on equity, access, innovation as key ways of connecting our city. It’s just a good way to bring some ideas together and create a sense of momentum that we can then build on during the year. So that’s not the only thing we do but last week with our Learning Days, we are more or less the container for those events to happen, we don’t run all the events ourselves and they’re varied from Mazhar talking about the “Aroha as a way of dismantling hate in Aotearoa”, through to a reading flash mob out at Hornby Hub with 200 students from the Hornby area, through to a cultural narrative walkway. So it’s really, really varied and so part of that is connecting in the long term with breaking down barriers of equity in particular for rangatahi but not just about that. It’s about the learning opportunities so that everyone has access to learning and equity which we know is an increasing gap, it’s bringing the conversations together so that people are working on those initiatives as a group. So during the year as well as our Learning Days, we have some other initiatives such as a focus on digital equity for example where we’ve just been bringing people together to have the conversation and then seeing what happens in terms of projects or directions that that might take us. The richness of that is the people talk together and they say I wish I’d met you years ago because actually our work is in common so let’s do some mahi together that’s going to make a difference. So that’s a powerful part of our work, it’s that sort of connect lab focus.  |
| Sally | Fantastic. And Erica, how about the many, many projects that you’ve been involved in?  |
| Erica | So I was just looking back and the last ten days I was involved in three different projects and the first one was Pecha Kucha night which is a global movement celebrating visual story telling using 20 slides and each slide playing for 20 seconds to succinctly talk about or showcase projects. And then followed by Learning Days and then Open Christchurch. Cheryl has already touched on Learning Days so I won’t repeat that but I’ll talk about Open Christchurch first. It is a one-weekend-only festival that celebrates exceptional architecture in our city. We opened up 46 different buildings that included different types and different styles of architecture, along with more than 35 different special activities within those spaces. We partnered with all of the different building partners that are either tenants or owners or kaitiaki of the space to run the special activities and we had over 130 volunteer shifts that supported all of the building partners that we were involved. So in one weekend we brought together over 12,000 pairs of feet through doors and it’s been an incredibly journey. It is built on the director Jessica Halliday’s dream for 20 years and it’s so great to be able to realise her dream and make it happen in Ōtautahi.And the other project that I was running was Pecha Kucha and it was one of the ways that I could promote Open Christchurch. So we themed the event focused on architecture matters where we talk about why architecture and design actually matter in our city and we had a range of different speakers speak to that using the Pecha Kucha format.  |
| Ryan | Open Christchurch in particular to me is just a beautiful, beautiful example of what we were saying before about kind of activating in the less physical movement sense but more in terms of growing connection and the kind of mental activity of giving people a chance to explore, kind of see behind the curtains of the city in a way, see backstage in the places, sometimes people’s homes and civic buildings that you don’t normally get to go into those spaces. And then you carry that with you forever after and as you’re walking through the city, those become little anchor points and memories and touchstones. Yeah, beautiful gesture.  |
| Sally | I notice as well, Erica, that there’s already talk about Open Christchurch 2022. One of my thinkings was, are you going to try and do the same buildings or add to that retinue as well? Will it be sort of ‘we’ve done those ones 2021, we’re going to leave them alone’ or try and open up those ones again?  |
| Erica | It’s actually a really long process. So we have a building council that we’ve worked with for 18 months. So what they do is they come from diverse sort of backgrounds, mostly involved in the construction and architecture industry and they drew up over 200 buildings in Christchurch and we invited 40 and then we also opened up a public nomination of some spaces or places that people are interested in visiting and hence why the 46 buildings was part of the programme. Some of them may opt in next year, others may be new ones that we invite. We don’t know how many would say yes but hopefully we will have a steady growth over the next few years. I think our target that we spoke about was around 80 buildings in five years. Being the programme manager of 46 buildings in one weekend was a huge, huge feat but we piloted this idea of Open Christchurch two years ago in 2019 and we opened one building in one weekend and we had to manage that over three months along with ten guided walks and moving that into 46 buildings in one weekend was, yeah, wasn’t easy but hopefully building partners are excited and positive enough to be involved again. This is an annual event by the way.  |
| Cheryl | And I have to say all credit to you, Erica, for all of that mahi that you’ve been involved in in the last few weeks because that is incredible with Learning City, with Open Christchurch and all the other hats that you wear. If I was you, I wouldn’t even be still standing so I think it’s an amazing thing that you’ve done and full credit to you.  |
| Erica | Thank you, kia ora.  |
| Sally | And Ryan, Gap Filler has been doing quite a lot in the last few weeks as well.  |
| Ryan | We have, yes. What do you want to talk about?  |
| Sally | I want to talk about how very, very impressed I am that you managed to get a play on words with Polite Force instead police force, and not just Ngā Pirihimana o Aotearoa but Ngā Pirihimanaaki. I thought they were two amazing, very clever play on words.  |
| Ryan | Credit to Regan Stokes for the Te Reo pun, kind of carried forward the Polite Force pun into the reo, I think yeah, that was good. OK: Polite Force is our first kind of explicitly performance-based project in quite a while. At its simplest level it’s just kind of our own take or evolution of something like the Central City Ambassadors or greeters or the… oh gosh what was he called… |
| Sally | The Wizard? |
| Ryan | No, not The Wizard, the town crier or something like that although I found him quite intimidating and a bit off-putting. But you know, the idea of some characters around the city who are smiling and available and making people feel welcome. Being a Gap Filler project, we did it in a bit more of a playful way so not only plays on words but we’re doing kind things for people, carrying around umbrellas and holding doors and seeing people unload a van full of luggage at the Novatel and we’ll just step up and give them a hand doing whatever it is that’s nice. Also just trying to facilitate a bit more playfulness and kind of spontaneous social interactions on the street. So some of our Polite Officers carry around bouncy balls and things and if someone is walking along the promenade they might just have a go and end up playing a little game or something. We did actually work quite closely with Regan Stokes in the Te Reo and making Te Reo an important aspect of this because I guess fundamentally we were thinking about active citizenship and what it means to be a good citizen and ‘polite’ has a sense of good manners or something but we kind of extended that definition in our minds of encompassing whatever it might mean to be a good citizen and in this place being a good citizen I think has to mean being a bicultural citizen. So we’re trying to normalise hearing Te Reo on the streets, we’ve got our five mātāpono, our values and principles, that we’re trying to exhibit them further. We challenge ourselves to make our first interaction with people in Te Reo, trying to normalise that and help people understand some of the te ao Māori values and principles and call out good behaviour when we see it and give people a badge or a pat on the back and saying, “Ka pai tōu manaakitanga, thanks for your kindness”, or whatever it might be. So that was a project we were running for about three months and it’s kind of due to wind down about now with an idea that we always had that sort of in the last month we would make a call out for volunteers and see if it could kind of have a life of its own and we had quite a few volunteers step forward and have been out on the beat with us in the Polite Force. The Office of Ethnic Communities got quite excited and spread the call out and so we’ve a run of non-Pākehā and non-Māori volunteers which is nice, a kind of another side of diversity in that sense, and kind of further making people a bit more comfortable. But the amazing thing that happened today, well we had someone from Council bumped into a couple of our Officers a week ago and he’s the Council’s crime prevention head and he said, “Oh my god, what are you doing, I love this, this is so good, give me your contact details” and so on and had a chat with our Polite Officers and then rang up and said, “Could I fund you to continue this?” And so we’re just having a conversation today. It seems like we’re getting another six months’ worth of funding to keep the Polite Force going and specifically the value that he saw in it, which is part of what was in our minds but not necessarily the central focus, is just a kind presence on the street establishing some relationships with the streeties and the homeless who often have no relationships and negative relationships with the local retailers who want them gone or whatever it might. So establishing some positive relationships there. So that was nice to have someone effectively walk up to you on the street and offer you funding.  |
| Sally | Fantastic! So if we’re thinking about the kind of array, the vast array of projects you’ve mentioned - Erica, you touched on things like the numbers of pairs of feet in the various buildings and Ryan, you brought up that cool story about funding - how else would you say they’ve been successful and how are you kind of assessing them?  |
| Erica | I think for me it’s really about looking at different levels of engagement because you know, if we think about diversity and how we actually authentically include everyone that lives or visits the city, we really have to think about all aspects of engagement and through participation… although our primary intention is through architecture and discovering a city through architecture, but we’re actually exposing them to new areas, ideas, topics, conversations and a basis to collide with different people. And so I think that for us was a measure of success, we and all of the volunteers, saw different people actually visiting and coming out of their homes to experience these behind the scenes or even just going on a tour. Even just popping their head around the corner and realising a small detail of a window, you know that level of detail and the length that we went as a team to go through different scenarios, that was very successful. |
| Cheryl | From a Learning City point of view, often it’s harder to see the presence of change, especially if we’re having Learning Days and people are running their own events. So for example, there were eleven schools that just in their normal kapa haka time during the week, invited parents and whānau and community in and used that time to teach them the Te Reo version of the national anthem and just some natural processes. So we don’t have the data on how many people came to those although we are in the process of collecting feedback, but it’s also the stories that emerge from those conversations and the photos and the videos and so on that are shared back with us or through social media and especially if they have got a focus on equity and moving across boundaries because for us that’s one of our aims, is to have conversations that don’t mean that it’s just a certain type of people that come to events and have the privilege. That’s a much harder thing to achieve but that’s what we will be looking for.  |
| Ryan | I think evaluation and monitoring and measuring impact is just one of the trickiest things, especially when you’re broadly at a humanities space. Yes, you can track numbers and footfall in Open Christchurch - that’s a really good indicator that you hit on something that interested people - but kind of trying to map or capture or calculate that longer-term impact we’ve been talking about or what do you carry away with you, oh come on, that’s tough. We often just rely on the sort of most significant change model, we find a handful of people who have a good story about a project and you know, what it did to them, for them, with them, whatever and a few stories like that are worth an awful lot. And partly it’s just because of the resource to do broad surveys or whatever other mechanisms you might do, it’s just a bit too difficult.Erica said something about the multiple layers and I see it in Open Christchurch, you know the different experience of a volunteer who has run one of the venues and kept it open to the public and learned about the building so that they can pass information on or whatever that might be, will have a qualitatively different experience to a visitor who only attended the event, whatever, and that’s true of kind of anything. There’s those layers of change or impact.  |
| Cheryl | I think what it highlights for me is the thirst in the city for taking part in these events and the fact that in Open Christchurch as an example and some of the things like our cultural walks etc. from a Learning Days perspective - they were full and the demand was stronger than the possibility of attending an event. That’s a good indication that the city is really curious and wanting to take part and learn things. I think that’s a great problem to have. |
| Erica | And I also want to mention that as people who love and are passionate about Christchurch, I think we have the best people that are initiating and yes, we’re taking movements but we’re also reinventing them to make it our own and with Learning City and with a lot of placemaking and Gap Filler interventions and Pecha Kucha and TedXChristchurch, even Open Christchurch, they’re somewhat based on other concepts but we actually took the time and reflected on what is actually valuable for our own city and readapted it to make sure that people here are engaging with it authentically and meaningfully. So I think, you know, amazing city to be in at the moment and I always have this conversation with my family about me being an activator, I love immersing myself in Christchurch. Whereas other people may choose a city that has already been activated and that sort of relationship is quite different and everyone’s motivation is quite different. When you are in a city that you’ve chosen, you choose to be activators rather than being activated.  |
| Ryan | A bit of a statement, a bit of a question really, something that’s been on my mind about this hazy area of impact. Because often we’re sort of reading the signs: How are people responding, what’s the general sense we’re getting of people’s relationship or reaction to this event or this project, this thing we’ve put into the world? And say with the Polite Force, it had really positive responses from Christchurch NZ, from the Central City Business Association, Office of Ethnic Communities, a few that obviously saw a lot of value in it. We also had a fair bit of abuse on social media, on the Council social media page about the Te Reo, about waste of time and money and things like that and I don’t know, we’ve been reflecting on that and I think when you are a bit in the business of social change as well, if you had 100% support and plaudits then you clearly wouldn’t be pushing any boundaries. If everyone loved everything you were doing. It’s a hard one to throw out there but in some instances getting a little bit of pushback or criticism I think is a good sign about impact as well and obviously can also be a bad sign. I’m not too sure what to make of it but just something we’ve been reflecting on.  |
| Cheryl | I always think if nobody is criticising you, then you’re not pushing hard enough. If everyone is criticising you, it’s not so good but the thing that we’ve talked about that’s in common is the having some clear values and things that we stand for. So I don’t think any of us would say oh, some of them didn’t like their speaking in Te Reo, that’s not going to mean that we don’t do that because fundamentally we’ve all talked about how important that is. So it’s just trying to get that mix but I think that push back is just a normal part of the change process. |
| Erica | We can’t please everyone, that’s the fact. We try our best to customise and individualise experiences but if we are able to please everyone like you said, Cheryl, we aren’t pushing the boundaries and also if people are always familiar with something, they aren’t learning and growing and so it’s about exposing them to new ideas. Yes, they might be criticising this one thing and then they spend time reflecting on that experience and they might grow without noticing it. So we need to acknowledge what we see as negative impact, may grow into something that will shape them in the future. |
| Ryan | Isn’t it interesting that so often the impact assessment, frequently because it’s tied to some funding and a report that you have to do for funding, we’re really pushed to like only include the positive, the people who said I love it, I love it and the higher the favourability rating and whatever, the better. But it’s certainly more complicated than that. |
| Sally | We might have our second song then, which was Erica’s choice. You wanted a local Christchurch band, Erica.  |
| Erica | Yes, their work is quite close to my heart. They were the first band that played at Gap Filler’s Pallet Pavilion that I was volunteering for and I met the man of my dreams at the Pallet Pavilion so I actually have to thank the band for that. But they are also very talented couple with a band called The Response and so the song that I recommend is ‘40,000 Day and Night’.  |
|  | **THE RESPONSE – 40,000 DAY & NIGHT** |
| Sally  | Ko “Speak Up – Kōrerotia” tenei. We’re talking about activating the city. For our final segment we’re going to be thinking about what are some of the benefits? Why do we want to activate city space? We’ve spoken a lot about how it might kind of engender some kind of social change, perhaps not immediately but maybe down the line, but how do we see this kind of social change taking place? |
| Cheryl | For me it’s about uncovering what already exists and continuing the conversations. Individually the people close to us with our organisations and society that really promote deep equity and so that whole idea of, especially in a post-Covid world but even beforehand, the equity gap is something that needs to be addressed if we are going to survive and thrive as a whole society. Hence we are about learning, not just about education, because one of the things that I’d love to see is the continued conversation about Christchurch as a place of learning, not what school you went to. It’s about breaking down the barriers and the silos that make it much more cross-pollinating and accepting of difference and coming back to that safe place to be.  |
| Sally | How about in terms of economy? Ryan you mentioned Christchurch NZ for example, were behind the Polite Force. I imagine, bottom line, these sorts of things make the city look good.  |
| Ryan | Yes it’s an interesting one. In recent years we’ve heard from the Council that kind of the central city of Christchurch is ‘done’, the retail precinct is ‘done’ and so let’s turn our attention elsewhere. And that’s true on one level but I think the retail precinct - I can’t believe they even used that phrase - is the closest thing we have to a monoculture in the city in terms of the activities that you can do and the people that it caters for. And so we’ve been motivated for a while about well let’s bring diversity and a really broad sense of diversity of activity, things to do that don’t cost money that opens out a kind of range of people who might feel some connection to the central city. So Polite Force, that kind of came out of some of those conversations around what’s a sort of a free experience we can put on the streets and so we were surprised when Christchurch NZ reached out excitedly and said great, this is just what we want happening in our city. But I guess that’s a good sign, that even though economic development is kind of at least a third of and a strong part of their remit, that they’re thinking a bit more broadly than that as well. |
| Sally | How about events like Open Christchurch? You probably don’t have a sense of how many people, if any, came from elsewhere in New Zealand, but I imagine it’s probably one of those types of events that could bring people into the city and that’s obviously got to be advantageous in terms of economics.  |
| Erica | We have some data of outside visitors. I also managed a lot of the ticketing side of things so I can see who have registered for bookable events and venues and it was very fascinating when you have conversations with… An architecture practice brought ten of their staff down on a trip to Open Christchurch and they made a weekend of celebrating architecture and design, and we had the head of architecture school in Auckland come down to experience. So there is a need and also a platform for people to really acknowledge and think about what good design is and also just to celebrate creativity. Open Christchurch is one of the first type of architecture events in New Zealand and no other city in New Zealand has it. So it does have its benefits in terms of attracting the crowd who already appreciates architecture but actually really focus on the local engagement, of people who may not think oh architecture is for them or good design is for them. It’s actually normalising that conversation of actually good design does improve our lives and if we change something small, it can actually make our lives better in our own homes and workplaces and communities. For me it’s really about that and making it, again accessible and understandable for people.  |
| Sally | How about in terms of other… so we’ve touched on the social and the economic but there are many, many, many more I’m sure you could talk about. Health and wellbeing is one that occurred to me. People just getting out and about, first of all, but engaging with people, experiencing new things. Erica you mentioned at some point, you know, people noticing that little bit on the window and ‘Take notice’ is one of the five ways to wellbeing. So there’s lots of wellbeing benefits that I’m sure these kinds of activities, these kinds of activations, are engendering as well.  |
| Ryan | Yes I was talking before about how hard it is to get meaningful data about a lot of this impact stuff - you know, surveys are really resource intensive and so on - but one of the great resources we do have in that respect is the Canterbury Wellbeing Index, the survey that’s been happening every year. And we were fortunate enough - I’m still not quite sure how - but a handful of Gap Filler projects were included over quite a few years in the Wellbeing Survey that went out to 15,000 maybe residents of Selwyn, Waimakariri and Christchurch. That’s one of the only real good data bits that we have and that awareness - you said ‘Take notice’ of something - but that awareness or connection is just such an important thing to have. A space, a thing, something in and about the city that you feel is reflective of you and some things that are important to you in some way. I’m spoiled because our organisation has put out a lot of things into the central city and I get this amazing feeling of riding around the city and seeing little bits of me or things that reflect me and my values here, there, everywhere. That’s an experience that often only kind of business owners, shop owners, developers get going around the city - I built that building or that’s my shop or whatever it might be. So to be able to give that experience at least in miniature to lots of other people, that’s an important thing to strive for.  |
| Cheryl | So I think the challenge is to take that feeling that you have because you’ve been involved and ensure that there’s a diverse group of people that feel that connection. Because I love the work that you do and because I’m often in and around about town, when I see something new it’s like oh this is really cool and so I don’t want to lose that sense of transition, that suddenly we’ve become this thing and the city doesn’t change. So I like the new things, the Polite Force, I haven’t seen that at all so I’m thinking I’ve missed out on something and what I love about that is the sense of play and I think that’s one of the key things in terms of a benefit for wellbeing, that sense of just lightning mood, the opportunity to play and even the things that have remained like the Dance-O-Mat. When I go into town on Sundays, usually there’s someone there and I go look this is kinda cool, we might just watch someone or wonder who they are and where they’ve come from and I just think we need to keep promoting those sorts of benefits because we have to create a place that our people, especially our young people, want to stay in or thrive in and as well attract people from other parts of New Zealand or other parts of the world as we open up. |
| Ryan | I think this made me think of another point about that fuzzy impact space. Actually I’m working with some people from the District Health Board and Community and Public Health as a creativity and wellbeing or art and wellbeing international conference being held online next month. But was talking to the woman from Community Public Health who is helping organise that and she said in relation to the Dance-O-Mat, she’s like you know, I’ve never been on it but it’s made me happy so many times over. Like how do you capture that unless you happen to meet this person and have a conversation with them? - that’s not going to come up in any clicker that you’ve got or any survey you do around there - but somehow she sees that as a thing that reflects something of value that’s inside her. And so that’s a point of connection for her to the city. And I think a lot of what we’ve been talking about - Open Christchurch and Learning City - is creating so many little moments like that where people feel connection or feel that there’s some reflection of them and their values in this place. |
| Erica | I just wanted to that as part of Learning Days I was wearing my other hat as a photographer capturing some of the visual stories and it’s still very hard when you have video and photography devices. It’s the conversations that you have with people. You know, I was at the 4C Centre capturing these beautiful Māori rangatahi designing and 3D printing these amazing designs on musical instruments and the stories they tell and the vulnerability and the passion they have for their culture and you know, walking through the design you can’t really capture that with a digital device. But it’s about that human interaction and that conversation starter to revealing these stories is such another layer of experience which I had the privilege of being a part of. I don’t know where this is taking us in terms of our conversation but I’m just reflecting on that specific moment where you resonate with someone who you may or may not have connection with or will have connection with in the future. |
| Sally | I’m not sure where it’s taking us either but it was a very beautiful input. Just a final question from me then, which is who needs to be doing this activation?  |
| Ryan | I’d say in a way everyone. I mean that’s the ultimate kind of democratising thing is that everyone is finding some way of sharing the connections that they have and it can happen at the scale of an event that attracts 12,000 people but it can happen at a conversation over a meal about something you did in your day that you want to excite someone else about.  |
| Erica | For me it’s reminding me of what you said at the start of this conversation Ryan, about that performance aspect and where you’re standing on stage and your relationship with the audience and everyone has a role to play as part of an experience or a performance and so when you’re thinking about activating a space or activating the city, everyone needs to be involved.  |
| Cheryl | Yes I agree, I think ideally everyone feels that they have a place where they have some sort of influence to activate and so the challenge for us all is to help people to find their own voices to activate their spaces and not presume that its our place to activate for them.  |
| Sally | Fantastic way to finish up. I think that’s given us a good pathway forward, a challenging pathway forward but a good one. Have you got anything else you’d like to add though before we wind this kōrero up?  |
| Erica | I came up with a really… I think, a really good quote is that I would invite people to immerse themselves in unfamiliar experiences and use their strengths to participate and learn with others.  |
| Sally | Well I’d like to say thank you so much to all three of you, I think this is a nice easy topic in some ways because you’re all so passionate about it and you’re all so involved and are yourselves activating. But I find this stuff fascinating and I’d really like to thank you for taking the time to talk about it.  |
| Erica | Kia ora thank you. |
| Cheryl | Kia ora.  |
| Sally | Tēnā koutou. And to finish off, Ryan, we’ve got your song which actually is very opportune given we were talking quite a bit about the Dance-O-Mat in this final segment.  |
| Ryan | Ha, you pressured me to come up with something that related to the topic. A band called Ahori Buzz, musician who at least lived quite a lot of this life in Christchurch, Aaron Tokona who actually died of a heart attack last year. But Ahori Buzz song, ‘Turn Around’ is a really upbeat amazing song with sort of Jimmy Hendrix-style guitar and incredible singing and it’s become the song that I usually put on at the Dance-O-Mat when I’m taking people on a tour which happens a fair bit because it seems to get everyone moving.  |
| Sally | And a really nice metaphor, I suppose, for the whole topic we’ve been talking about in terms of activation.  |
|  | **SONG BY AHORI BUZZ -TURN AROUND**  |