



Dr Vanessa Byrnes

Kia ora, I'm Vanessa Byrnes, an Associate Professor at Unitec in Auckland. I have a background as a director, actor, producer, and performance lecturer, with extensive experience in performing and screen arts in New Zealand and overseas. Over the past 30 years, I've been involved in more than 200 theatre, screen, and radio productions, ranging from independent projects to major international works.

Creativity is a powerful force that I'm passionate about, and I believe it goes hand in hand with mental health. Both creativity and mental health connect to our inner selves, foster connected communities, and enable us to be seen, embraced, and supported genuinely. I strongly support the Creative and Rainbow Communities in New Zealand and advocate for Mental Health First Aid in all aspects of life, as I've witnessed the positive impact it can make.

Currently, I serve as the Head of School for Creative Industries/Manukura at Unitec/Te Whare Wānanga O Wairaka in the fields of Design & Contemporary Arts and Performing & Screen Arts. Throughout my career, I've had the privilege of educating diverse industry professionals at various institutions both in New Zealand and abroad.

Being of Irish/NZ Pakeha descent, I value indigenous methodologies and knowledge-making practices that uphold intergenerational mana. MHFA is a step toward a better journey for all of us, and I'm excited and grateful to be part of it.

[*Find me on LinkedIn*](#)



Annaliese Hohaia

Ko Rangitoto taku whakamarumarū
Ko Hauraki Gulf ngā wai o tērā takiwā
Ko Ngāti Whātua ngā iwi o tērā takiwā
Ko Ngāti Tamaoho te hapū o tērā takiwā
Ko Annaliese Hohaia tōku ingoa

Kia ora koutou, my name is Annaliese, and I was born in Tāmaki Makaurau where I have lived most of my life, with a stint in the UK. I whakapapa more widely to the Netherlands, Italy, and Scotland, so I have enjoyed travelling to these countries many times, as well as all over the world. I am a wife and mum to two small tamariki, who keep me on my toes and have helped me slow down and be more mindful of the world around me.

I am currently a Learning & Development Consultant based at the Ōtara, reporting into the Organisation Development and Equity team. I have an educational background in Physical Education and Health and have spent my career working within the People and Culture realm. It has always been important to me that whatever mahi I do connects with my life's purpose of helping others to be the best versions of themselves. I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to become a Mental Health First Aid Practitioner, ensuring I can connect with this purpose more widely and help others to be equipped to support those they come across struggling with mental health challenges.

As we spend so much of our life at mahi so it is incredibly important that we are equipped with the tools to be aware of and look after our mental health, as well as that of those we work closely with every day. I am looking forward to sharing this knowledge with many of you to create a happier, safer, open, trusting, and respectful workplace.

Kia pai tō rā



Rob Gambolati

I am Rob Gambolati, Senior Lecturer and Programme Leader of the Sport programme with the Community Studies School at Mt Albert. I am an educator through and through.

I thoroughly enjoy helping others learn, grow and develop the skills they want or need to positively contribute to their life. As a massive advocate for holistic health and maintaining a strong "whare" (in relation to Te Whare Tapa Whā model of health / wellbeing). I constantly try to remind people that health is much more than physical, that we are much more than physical beings.

I love working alongside my MHFA colleagues, where we broaden perspectives of what mental health is, to help recognise challenges early and how we can address the challenges we face throughout our lives.



Lisa Bloxam

My name is Lisa Bloxam, I am a Project Manager for the Wellbeing and Services Tima at Te Pūkenga/NZIST. I have worked in many different industries and roles throughout my career including Technical Sales, Business Analysis, Accounting, Implementation Management and Retail Sales. I have also dedicated my time volunteering for Lifeline, NZ Guide Dogs, English Language Partners.

I live in Auckland with my husband, grown-up son and 3 amazing poodles. Together we enjoy the great outdoors in caravan adventures around the mōtu.

I have a passion for Mental Health, and this led me to become a Mental Health First Aid Instructor. Join me in discovering what Mental Health First Aid is all about.

Tamzin Walker

Instructor Development Advisor, Te Pou