

# SOPHIE SHRIMPTON

*THEY/THEM*

APPLYING FOR SECRETARY  
& GENERAL BOARD MEMBER

Kia ora e te whānau! My name is Sophie and my pronouns are they/them. I grew up in Tauranga and moved to Tāmaki makau-rau to study in early 2016. Four and a bit years later I'm still studying – the price of a conjoint law and arts degree. In my time here I've led three student organisations including my current pēpi, Rainbow Law. In my spare time you can find me writing a book through a fellowship (you bet there'll be a bunch of queer characters), learning te reo Māori and español, and on a good long hike (I'm infamous amongst my close friends for lugging along a very heavy book about native birds despite my lack of upper body strength).

## **What made you want to join the RY board?**

I've spent the last two years reviving and leading a queer student organisation, Rainbow Law. It's grown from a meeting at Mojo between my Co-President and I in late 2018 to a 12-person exec working in areas as diverse as making a queer zine (The Agenda, launching at Zinefest in a few months), advocating for asylum seeker and refugee rights and running rowdy pub quizzes. At the end of this year I will be stepping down but want to keep doing the queer mahi.

RainbowYOUTH is the logical place to funnel my enthusiasm. RY has had a huge amount of growth over the past wee while. I've loved reading the annual reports and seeing the increase in rural presence, commitment to decolonising the organisation, the appointment of someone focussed on queer and trans homelessness and endless valuable collaborations and partnerships. I've also loved the small interactions I've had – dropping off clothes to the community wardrobe, running a RY fundraiser in one of my workplaces and attending meetings in the RY space. I appreciate the mahi that Frances and the team have done so far, and would love to be more intimately involved in the future.

The decades of work that has been done is only the beginning and I want to help shape the future of the organisation. We have some huge issues to grapple with. Heterosexism and cissexism are pervasive. As a queer and genderqueer person I want to bring my personal and professional experiences to the table to push RainbowYOUTH in new directions while maintaining what works. Rural presence, decolonisation, homelessness and mental health work needs to be pushed further. There is a need to grapple with relevance and access for Pasifika and Asian-New Zealanders, to advocate for and support trans people in prisons and trans people falling through the gaps of the immigration system. RainbowYOUTH is in the right place to do this – to empower youth to act, to organise and to turn the tide on heterosexism and cissexism.

**RainbowYOUTH is on a journey to proactively and respectfully uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi. How would you contribute to this journey?**

I was raised into a Pākehā with little knowledge of Te Tiriti and its significance until university. At that point I was lucky enough to receive a comprehensive education about Te Tiriti, its historical context and its enduring relevance today. Since that moment I've committed to a constant, iterative process of deconstructing my whiteness and internalised white supremacy, supporting decolonisation and becoming anti-racist.

I've been privileged enough to have the time and resources to dedicate myself to this process both professionally and personally. Professionally, I have written a paper for Te Tai Ōhanga (The Treasury) about how to make policy-making processes anti-oppressive. This included recommending constitutional overhaul in line with Matike Mai and ways to realise tino rangatiratanga for tangata whenua. To fulfil my law honours requirements I am currently working on a research paper focussed on the neo-colonial relationship between New Zealand and the Pacific (which is part of the larger colonial context that Te Tiriti exists within). I am also dedicated to dismantling white hegemony and decolonising the student organisations I am a part of.

Personally, I am on a constant journey to learn more about te reo Māori and tikanga Māori. I do this through official means (courses at university) and unofficial means (constant kōrero). I love to talk to friends about internalised white supremacy and complicity in upholding the New Zealand settler-state (actually a very fun conversation at parties).

To be proactive RainbowYOUTH must be committed to an ongoing process of decolonisation and I would love to bring an attitude of constant questioning, critique and change to RainbowYOUTH.

### **What particular skills do you think you have that would make you suitable for the RY board?**

Board members need to have five key skills to perform their job well. This includes critical analysis, strategic planning, communication, teamwork and humour. I believe I embody these skills.

Critical analysis enables board members to determine the current position of the organisation and gaps in its strategic direction and implementation. It is impossible to effectively guide an organisation if you don't know what the current state of the organisation is. I have worked with many organisations, on the coalface and in leadership teams. I can effectively understand the main internal and external factors that are restraining an organisation and fuelling its growth.

Strategic planning emerges from (a) an ability to understand the values of an organisation, its purpose, its operations and what context it exists in and (b) how to navigate those factors to ensure it's meeting its aims. I have led three different organisations to success. Each organisation was facing very different challenges in very different contexts but I was able to develop and implement plans that developed the organisations in the right direction.

Communication is the glue that ties everything together. You may be able to analyse an organisation and plan its strategic direction but this means nothing if you cannot communicate your ideas to your fellow board members, those working within the organisation and other stakeholders. I am an excellent communicator. I value simple and succinct presentation. I am respectful and calm when navigating conflict.

As the saying goes, teamwork makes the dream work. The board needs to be able to work together to provide guidance to RainbowYOUTH. I understand the importance of collaboration and have experience facilitating people with very different backgrounds to reach common goals. I am aware of my own working style and am able to be malleable to be what is needed for the team.

Finally, and most importantly, humour is vital. RainbowYOUTH has a huge mission. Constant mahi and activism can be exhausting. It's important to stay grounded and healthy by sharing a laugh once in a while.