

WILLIAM FITZGERALD

HE/HIM

APPLYING FOR GENERAL BOARD MEMBER

Born and raised in Australia, William grew up dancing and designing side by side. After training with the Kim Harvey School of Dance in Canberra, and the New Zealand School of Dance in Wellington, William joined the Royal New Zealand Ballet in 2014, where he performed across New Zealand and internationally to critical acclaim.

Throughout his years in Wellington, William has pursued his passion for the LGBT+ community by being a weekly volunteer at the New Zealand Aids foundation, and across multiple LGBT+ events throughout the years.

William became a New Zealand Citizen in 2018, and at the same time, embarked as a freelance dancer, designer and teacher. He is currently working with the "Ballet Collective Aotearoa," and "LoCo Arts," on upcoming projects across New Zealand in 2021, as well as being guest teacher for various dance schools.

What made you want to join the RY board?

There are a few reasons I wish to join the board. I have been considering for a while now ways I can further engage within the LGBT+ community. How I can help (with my views/voice/resources) shape a better future and community that allows there to be a fair and loving space for all to exist as equals. I believe that the Rainbow Youth's mission in creating these spaces, and in giving voices and support to those who need them most is one that aligns to my own views. I think the education packages and programs in place are essential, now more than ever, and I would love to be a part of this forward movement to creating a better, more inclusive, Aotearoa.

Another reason for wanting to join the Board, is that I would love to be surrounded by like minded peers who are at the core of these changes. Peers that are turning a critical eye towards the current socio-political dynamics of New Zealand, having the discussions about how best to move Rainbow Youth forward through these times, and the ones imagining this brighter future and how to get Rainbow Youth there.

I wish to be able to share the knowledge and experiences I have. LGBT+ history and understanding of the battles fought and won in our shared history is important to carry forward with us and the younger generation.

I want to be able to give back to the community that has always been there and supported me through some of the toughest times in my life. I believe that I am now in a place in my life to be able to give back, be with knowledge, support, innovative ideas, a strong voice or simple acknowledgement of others. By being on the Board, I would be able to have the furthest reach possible and aid those that were in similar situations to myself, through this amazing organisation.

RainbowYOUTH is on a journey to proactively and respectfully uphold Te Tiriti o

Waitangi. How would you contribute to this journey?

I would uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi by creating equal opportunities and a space for Maori and other indigenous people to be heard on the board. Active consultation of Maori elders in matters of the community and an engagement across New Zealand as to how to best include everyone. The continued expansion and exposure of Tikanga within the Rainbow Youth community, and for myself a continued learning of Te Reo. In line with Rainbow Youth's mission, it is a constant and ongoing expansion of the community to make everybody feel included and providing a place for them in this world and I would hope to do aid in this.

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

I bring a variety of skills and experiences to the Board. My years working as a professional Dancer has led me to engage in various aspects of a not-for-profit organisation. I have been engaged in many philanthropic events, and understand the importance of fundraising and marketing to an organisation.

As a dancer, I took it upon myself to expose myself to as many different aspects of the organisation I worked for. Learning and listening to the many amazing and passionate individuals that made up all the various facets of the company I worked for. I have an understanding that without the internal community working together, there can be no end product. There are many different types of professionals working within the dance world, I have learnt how to navigate these relationships, and their importance to the whole. Having this experience gives me a key perspective which I believe a board member should have.

One of my favourite roles as a professional dancer has been my engagement in education and outreach. Whilst dancing at the Royal New Zealand Ballet, I was involved with and was an assistant in the education programmes the company ran. The focus was, not only to bring dance and the arts to New Zealand's National Curriculum, but in also bringing dance to lower decile schools across New Zealand. In this way I was able to provide the opportunity and experience to kids that would never have been able to access the dance world otherwise. I think everyone should be able to access everything, and have, at the bare minimum, the opportunity to try. I think this aligns with the Rainbow Youth's initiative in creating a fair and equal community.

As a teacher I have now had the experience of teaching a whole variety of individuals around the world, both able-bodied and those with impairment, from ages 3 to 85! Through this, I have learnt patience, the ability to approach and teach an idea through various different approaches, being able to listen to others for their needs and desires and an enjoyment of a shared passion. I have learnt to engage with people across all different walks of life, in a united way. It has taught me that I am able to encourage, inspire and bring out the best in others around me, which would be a valuable asset to the board.

Throughout my time at the Royal New Zealand Ballet, the company faced some of its most tumultuous times. With 4 artistic directors in 4 years, 2 general managers, countless staff turnovers and dancers moving on, there were a lot of changes. During this time I became a voice for the dancers, and a union representative for the dancers. The dancers in a company are often seen internally as the lowest on the pecking order; They are expendable, replaceable, and thus are often treated as such. I used my voice to speak up on behalf of those less heard. My proudest achievement throughout my time as a Union representative, was externalising our dancers union into the "E Tu Union." This came at a time during which the artistic directors were undergoing a mediation, internal and external

investigations with various cases of misconduct. The importance of giving power to the undervalued members of the company was at a high, and being able to facilitate that was key. I also negotiated the artists collective agreement (contracts, protections and obligations surrounding employment), with the general manager and chairman of the board for the dancers, facilitated a pay rise for the company members to match national inflation rates, and aided dancers in personal matters.

Being a union representative brought me into board meetings of a large organisation, taught me how to stand up and to argue my point concisely, negotiate, gain an objective perspective on issues and how they would affect the organisation as a whole. It helped me refine my voice and how I wish to use it to help represent and stand up for others that do not have the capacity to do so for themselves.

My skills as a freelance artist have taught me self management and promotion, the ability to seek out and pursue any and every opportunity available, good networking skills, perseverance in the face of rejection, resilience, applied problem solving and self worth. All skills which I believe will benefit the board as it works towards it's goal of creating a better community.

As I am based in Wellington, I would really love to see Rainbow Youth's reach and physical footprint expand across New Zealand. I believe I could be a good anchor point here in Wellington, and be able to help provide the Rainbow Youth with a perspective outside of its home bases.

Growing up as a queer bi-racial individual in a white heteronormative society has given me a unique perspective, one that is apart from most of its connections. My family was shunned by it's white heritage, and was not fully embraced by its Chinese Malaysian side either. As a Queer person, I didn't fit within the conventional and conservative standards of my Roman Catholic community. My intersectionalities give me pride, a pride that was won through a lot of self acceptance and love. My experience is one that I know is shared with others within the community, but often a perspective that isn't represented. I feel like I would be able to represent this perspective with pride and would be able to share that with the board.

I am always and forever learning, I embrace a challenge head on with everything I have. I am engaged and passionate about the matters of my heart, and the Rainbow Youth's mission is one I hold close to my heart.