

A Bridge of Hope: Stephanie Asava's Journey from Papua New Guinea to New Zealand

Every successful journey begins with a single courageous step. For Ms. Stephanie Asava, that step meant leaving behind the comfort of home, her family, and most painfully, her three young sons, to pursue an opportunity that would change her life and inspire many others.

Born and raised in Papua New Guinea, Stephanie had already achieved significant academic success. She earned a Bachelor of Health Management from Divine Word University and later completed a Postgraduate Diploma in Health Sciences through the University of Canterbury. Yet she believed that learning never stops and that new opportunities often require sacrifice.

In 2025, seven years after she had last lived in New Zealand, Stephanie returned to Christchurch to begin an Aged Care Programme. The decision was not an easy one. As a mother of three boys under the age of ten, she faced the emotional challenge of leaving her children and family behind while pursuing her studies. The future was uncertain, filled with both hope and fear.

Before she could even board the plane, Stephanie had to overcome several obstacles. She needed to complete the IELTS examination, secure enough funding for tuition fees, and find sufficient money to support her living expenses for an entire year. These challenges would have discouraged many people, but Stephanie remained focused on her goal, and the Center for Arts and Innovation prepared her for New Zealand.

Behind her stood a strong support network. Her husband, children, and extended family encouraged her from the very beginning. Their faith in her abilities became a source of strength during difficult moments.

Stephanie was also part of something historic. She became the first student mentored and supported by the Centre for Arts and Innovation (CAI) to undertake the Aged Care programme in New Zealand. As a pioneer participant, she carried not only her own dreams but also the hopes of future Papua New Guinean students who may follow the same path.

The programme itself was demanding. It required commitment, discipline, resilience, and hard work. Like many international students, Stephanie balanced her studies with part-time employment while adapting to life in a new environment. There were long days, challenging assessments, and moments of homesickness. However, she remained determined to succeed.

Her efforts paid off. Stephanie successfully completed all her papers and graduated on 20 May 2026. Even before graduation, her dedication and professionalism opened new doors.

She secured full-time employment and was granted a work visa, providing her with a strong foundation for her future career in New Zealand's growing aged care sector.

Reflecting on her achievement, Stephanie is quick to acknowledge that her success was not achieved alone. First and foremost, she gives thanks to God for His guidance, protection, and provision throughout the journey. She is deeply grateful to her husband, children, and family, whose sacrifices made her studies possible.

She also extends sincere appreciation to the Centre for Arts and Innovation for their preparation, mentorship, and support before she departed from Port Moresby. Their commitment to creating educational pathways for Papua New Guineans played a crucial role in turning her dream into reality. Equally important was the support of Wantok Solution Limited, which provided encouragement and assistance throughout her year of study.

Stephanie's story is more than a personal success story. It is a powerful example of what can happen when determination meets opportunity. It demonstrates that Papua New Guineans can compete, succeed, and thrive internationally when given the right support and guidance.

Her journey also highlights the importance of organisations such as the Centre for Arts and Innovation. As Papua New Guinea continues to develop its human resources and create opportunities for its people, programmes that connect Papua New Guineans with world-class education and training are becoming increasingly valuable. CAI is helping to build bridges between Papua New Guinea and New Zealand—bridges that allow students to gain internationally recognised qualifications, valuable work experience, and brighter futures for themselves and their families.

Stephanie hopes that her story will encourage other Papua New Guineans, especially mothers, young professionals, and aspiring students, not to give up on their dreams. The road may be difficult, and sacrifices may be required, but opportunities often lie beyond our comfort zones.

To future students considering a similar path, her message is simple: believe in yourself, work hard, trust in God, and never be afraid to pursue opportunities that can transform your life.

As one door closes with graduation, another opens with new possibilities. Stephanie Asava's journey is proof that dreams can become reality, and that when organisations like CAI continue to create pathways between Papua New Guinea and New Zealand, many more success stories will follow.

Her journey is not just her own achievement—it is a beacon of hope for countless Papua New Guineans who dare to dream of a better future.