



A JOURNEY: Mena Antonio — with a poster for her workshops at the Wairarapa community centre — plans to help women overcome their fears and find their passion through her programme The Diaspora Way.

Finding your passion

By ERIN KAVANAGH-HALL
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Her love of art and “adventurous” Pacific ancestors have inspired Mena Antonio to start her own women’s mentoring programme.

The former Toi Wairarapa coordinator and Masterton Licensing Trust committee member has founded The Diaspora Way, designed to set women on “a journey of self-discovery” — helping them conquer fears, foster self-belief and find their passion.

Mrs Antonio created the programme in July, and has been providing coaching to women in Wellington, in person and via Skype.

She will launch it in Wairarapa this week with a series of workshops through the Wairarapa Women’s Centre.

While considering a name, she looked to her Samoan family and New Zealand art history studies and came up with “diaspora” — referring to people who journeyed from their homeland to a new home.

“The paintings of the first ocean voyagers to New Zealand captured my imagination,” she said.

“I thought about my Samoan relatives coming here, and wondered what the women were thinking.

“They would have been adventurous, joyous and absolutely terrified — they were finding themselves.

“Whether we’re sailing on the high seas or living in Masterton, everyone’s

on a journey towards something.”

Mrs Antonio said she felt a need to create The Diaspora Way after meeting women who felt “stuck” in their current circumstances, doubting their abilities.

“I would ask them what their passion was, and they didn’t know.

“We found out they did know — but their fear was protecting them from exploring it.

“They had been told their ideas wouldn’t work, or that they wouldn’t make them any money, so they suppressed it.”

She also hopes to help women improve their confidence by embracing their identity independent of societal duties.

“We define ourselves by our roles — mother, wife, manager, community person. But we are more than our jobs and kids.”

Mrs Antonio said she has seen several women grow in confidence through her programme — such as board chairs overcoming conflicts with committees, and government executives exploring their love for fashion.

She hopes to see more women “stepping out” in Masterton.

■ Mrs Antonio will be holding workshops at the Wairarapa Community Centre every Wednesday in May, starting tomorrow from 7pm to 9pm. For more information, or to book individual sessions, contact Mrs Antonio on 027 327 9109 or at mena@thediasporaway.co.nz.