



JOEY JOLEEN MATAELE

Born: Tonga

Organisation: Tonga Leitis Association

One of the South Pacific's foremost advocates for LGBTIQ+ equality, three decades of achievements in activism, Joey Joleen Mataele is the executive director of the Tonga Leitis Association (TLA).

She took on that role in 1992 when co-founding the organisation, a year before she helped to start up the Miss Galaxy Queen Pageant, which has since become a major occasion in the calendar attracting thousands of spectators.

The pageant celebrates the diversity and creativity of fakaleitis (often abbreviated to leitis), who are Tongans assigned male at birth but who have a feminine gender expression.

"We started the Miss Galaxy pageant to raise funds for our education and HIV projects. It was a platform to educate our people and reach the wider community too. The pageant has become a huge annual event and happens during our Pride week. Since it started, the funds raised have enabled us to supply 72 scholarships to re-educate our dropouts!"
(GiveOut.org, February 2020)

For much of the 1990s and 2000s, she worked on Tonga's response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, working with government departments and



setting up less formal learning opportunities which were more successful in reaching the target demographics.

A 2018 documentary titled *Leitis in Waiting* helps to tell Mataele's story and those of other leitis taking part in the Miss Galaxy pageant. Produced and directed by Dean Hamer, Joe Wilson and Hinaleimoana Wong-Kalu, the film screened at over 50 festivals and was nominated for a GLAAD Media Award.

Mataele is also a co-founder of the Pacific Sexual and Gender Diversity Network (PSGDN), a Fiji-based organisation that was established at the Pacific Games in Samoa in 2007.

"Homosexuality is still illegal in Tonga, and so we need help, resources and funding from both the local and international community to challenge these colonial laws. Being able to sit down together and have a conversation is important, even when you have differences. We need to make sure that we have a seat at the table." *(GiveOut.org, February 2020)*

Image credit (Creative Commons)

Credit: TongaTui

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joey_Joleen_Mataele#/media/File:Joey_Joleen_Mataele_traditional.jpg