

## **Closing Address: Te Aho Mutunga Kore – The Eternal Seats**

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In the midst of the smooth moves on the dance floor last a classic New Zealand idol entertained us all. And I'm not referring to the dancing king of Te Taumata – who boogied so hard he split his pants.

The unique sound of Dean Waretini seduced our kuia to dance with delight – making a memory that brought many of us to tears.

One of those songs that captured our groove was Te Piriti. It is a song rich with meaning. This was written when the new bridge was being built in Auckland over the Manakau Harbour between the middle class white suburb of Onehunga and the brown working class one of Mangere, and it alludes to the social bridge that needed to be made to join the two cultures.

Taku aroha -  
Ki nga pou o te piriti  
Äki, pakia mai rau  
E nga tai kaha ra e  
Pukepuke, i aue

My concern -truly, truly -  
is for the pillars of the bridge.  
pounded, beaten, a hundred times

by the strong tides there  
rising and falling,

The bridge is a metaphorical one, connecting different cultures. The message is that the social structures which keep different cultures in any country joined together must have strong foundations; they are like the pou of our whare; a basis for keeping the people strong, united, protected from harm, to cling close together for warmth, to look upwards for inspiration.

It resonated with the kōrero of Dame Tariana: Let us return to our origins. It is time that we returned to the rootstock of our ancestors.

It is in the intergenerational vision that Miriana Stephens talked about – te pae tawhiti.

It came through the stories of the Hutchen / Stirling whānau : over successive generations and never-ending challenges, the one thing that stood the test of time was their strength as a whānau to overcome adversity; to have karakia, waiata, to look to the messages of their tupuna : aroha mutunga kore.

It was echoed in the presentation by Lorraine, Ella and Donna – who fought against a chorus of disbelievers – those who could only see the disability as defining them. Lorraine challenged them: you know nothing of her spirit; her ancestors; their

strength and tenacity, to survive and thrive; to be ourselves and for that to be enough.

The one word raukura placed on our korowai of love described enough in beautiful complexity:

Healing ...passion ....mistakes....connection....he  
kākano....diversity....whakawhanautanga.....heart.....inspire...  
..tautoko.....Amiria.....tika and pono.....manaakitanga....  
mahi.....strength.....

Whānau Ora in one word.

From one word, we can build tomorrow; living beyond what we think we are capable of, striving to become better than we are.

One of my favourite poems by Emily Dickinson tells us:

Hope is the thing with feathers  
That perches in the soul  
And sings the tune without the words  
And never stops at all.”

That is what these two days have given us in rich abundance. Hope. Except now we have a new meaning according to Amiria. “Hope” – expect the best.

Expecting the best came from the expressions of wonder in the kōrero of Jade Temepara : did you know that from one kamokamo can come 200 seeds. And before you know it you have a million seeds, to keep replenishing ourselves so that there is no other option but to grow.

During the course of this hui, one of our budding wahine from Bluff, Aimee Strongman, was taken ill, the ambulance called, and she was immediately taken to hospital.

They say that life is under no obligation to give us what we expect. That you can be swept up in the flow of our time together, and suddenly the rapids come out of nowhere.

Between us all, a team of angels sat with Aimee through the long night last night, waiting for her Mum to get her at first light this morning. They knew where they must be – right by Aimee's side.

That is what I so love about Whānau Ora – the expression of love, compassion, sacrifice, commitment – that without hesitation knows what's right; acts in ways to always place the people first.

It is said, that only in the darkness can you see the stars. And in this time of Puanga and Matariki, how bright those stars are shining for us, how wondrous it is to see the hope beyond the horizons that is replicated in 76 different entities, in showcase workshops that were amazing in their talents, their determination, their demonstration of kotahitanga, their belief.

We need those stars to glow, to rekindle the faith that we can fight the most formidable battle, laid out so powerfully by Tā Mark, the Minister and Jireh this morning - and reinforced so significantly by Te Tai o Marokura and Bros for change.

We have to rise above the viciousness of abuse, the horror of violence. We have had a festival of words to take away with us.

In Bros for Change Jaye gave us two great quotes: *“the best way to predict the future is create it”* and *“Before you quit – think about who’s watching”*.

I have a greatly extended vocab after these last two days:

- “It has been an incredible haven of opportunity – an intersection – where we transition from a time when others want to define us to walking in our own light”
- “Innovation is bravery in action”
- “Level up”
- “Don’t try to be the Unicorn”
- “It’s your attitude not aptitude that determines your attitude”
- An aspiration cycle
- Own you so others can’t
- Even if you win the rat-race, you’re still a rat”

Transformation happens through the power of one:

- like the one person that would be hyped from the narrative of Robett;
- to the one amazing team of navigators across our communities;

- to the one young woman who in working with Māui Lab, in writing up all the stories of the Whānau Ora entities, has undertaken a transformational journey;
- to the one crew of caterers, called *Kākano Café*, helping to make us look anew at kai;
- one roopu called *Te Kākano o Te Totara*, growing our future;
- one Board called *General Partner* and one called *Te Taumata* who set the vision alight;
- one workforce of champions – our team of ten – Maania, Haydon, Trisha, Vania, Te Rā, Maire, Juli, Gina-Lee, Rongo, Alice, who would do everything and anything to listen, to learn, to lead, to laugh and to love the whānau with whom we work;
- one extraordinary wahine toa, Amiria Reriti who has been our incredible MC.

Miriana talked about the benefit of branding – the stories that are woven through our korowai, what is it that we are known by?

I want to finish by returning to the river. Our hui has been the beautiful game-changer; the breath of life for all of us here because of your incredible commitment, the sacrifices that have not gone unnoticed of time and of support. From the nine rivers of Te Waipounamu you came together in an outpouring of creativity; a wellspring of inspiration; a 100% attitude.

The reasons our rivers have flowed so smoothly has been possible because of the magic of Mokowhiti. And so my final act today in celebrating whakapapa, whānau and the sacred

rivers of life is to call the whānau of Mokowhiti to the stage. There is a special momentum that the expression of manaaki that warms the heart and connects us together.

You have hosted us, managed us, been our security, organised our hui in a way which has truly exceeded our vision. To mark this moment, this profound celebration of the journey of Te Pūtahitanga we want to share with you a special kōhatu that will always be a reminder of the wonder of these last two days.