

Premiere Address – Bros for Change Documentary

The Piano; Christchurch; Friday 26 January 2018

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This week the nation has reflected on the impact of a young man growing up a hundred years ago in the district of Rangitikei. A young man who struggled in his early life with hearing voices which some people thought was a sign of mental illness. He left school in year six; and became a hard-working, hard-living farmer who loved rugby, racing and beer.

The year was 1918. The world-wide influenza attack had struck Maori particularly hard. In a three week period, over two percent of the entire Maori population died – over two and a half thousand people. Whole communities were decimated; decades of sickness, warfare and the rapid loss of land had taken a dramatic toll.

Into that void walked this young man – the man who eventually became the prophet and leader, Tahupotiki Wiremu Ratana. Three days before the end of World War One he had a vision that would make him one of Maoridom's most powerful leaders. His calling was to unite Maori; to become the māngai; a voice for the people.

Fast forward a centuryand it seems the perfect context from which to celebrate the power of belief; the impact of faith; the passion of a collective movement for change.

Through times of challenge and hardship, we look for leadership - whether that be on the political stage, in the tribal settings, or deep in the heart of our communities.

Bros for Change is such a movement - a movement for transformation, ripe for our times. It rose up to meet a need; to address the gap that mainstream services and providers left behind.

As our city recovers from thousands of aftershocks, and the tragic losses of life that are forever etched in our memory, the needs of different communities soared to the surface.

For many of our young people, while the physical environment had turned to rubble, it was the quality of their life that also needed to be rebuilt – to restore to them all an understanding of their power and potential.

They were ready for change: what we might also call Whaka-ahuatanga – a metamorphosis in appearance, in character, in spirit and in shape.

And so it has come to be: young people who have been mentored by the action squad of Bros for Change, have acquired strong social skills; taken on a new respect for learning, all within a foundation of wairua.

They have played in the realms of korikori tinana – whether it be waka ama, hikoi, mau rakau. They are encouraged to be alcohol and drug free; to rely on karakia, on tikanga, on kaupapa as their new way of life. They have paddled a waka,

led a powhiri, recited a karakia, understood the power of nga taonga tuku iho.

It has taken a remarkable man, a leader in his own right, Jaye Pukepuke, to help spark the fire that now runs through the veins of the young people we will watch on screen tonight.

Through the support of the love of his life, his whānau and his great mate Ben Murray - Jaye has recreated and redefined the person he wanted to be. He knew that he could be better than the young man he had left behind; he wanted to be more; and tonight represents just how successful their journey has been.

But the journey has not been his alone. Every step he takes has been for the next generation; the promise of our rangatahi leading him to go way beyond what he thought possible, to take transformation to the streets.

The Bros brigade has sailed right through the cynicism of skeptics who said they couldn't create a programme for youth at risk when they had the shadows of their past behind them.

In Whānau Ora we absolutely know that the greatest solutions lies in the hands of those who have the lived experience to make a difference.

While Jaye, Ben and the Bros Brigade walked this journey through Linwood, through Kaiapoi, through Tuahiwi, through Hillmorton, there is something special about the fact that the documentary focuses on Haeata, the new dawn.

This community campus that has been open for just over a year, epitomises the quest for change in attitudes, in

expectations, in achievements for the population that attends their kura.

And yet, despite the shimmering colours of the new dawn in which their school is painted; it is a school that had barely opened its doors before the bad press arrived.

It provided therefore a perfect place for Bros to Change to work within. The film bears the title, **'Tell me I can't.**

It reminds me of a statement by the late Martin Luther King:

If you can't fly then run, if you can't run then walk, if you can't walk then crawl, but whatever you do - you have to keep moving forward.

Te Putahitanga o Te Waipounamu has been proud to invest in Bros for Change as an approach to life that is moving us all forward.

We have seen the satisfaction on the faces of rangatahi who have beaten the odds; whether that be in fitness; in the art of mau rakau; in the wisdom and technique of the martial arts; or in the fulfilment of mind, body and soul.

We have witnessed the steps to building resilience; engendering in the rangatahi the confidence that when the weight gets heavy they are able to cope.

We have observed too, the love, the commitment, the strength and the endurance of all those who have believed in these young leaders – the personal trainers; the boxing champ; the

kapa haka champion; the whanau who brought them into this world; who stand by them; who back them to the hilt.

Tonight is a fine testimony – not just to Jaye and Ben, and the Bros for Change team.

It is a tribute to the commitment of all the kura who have trusted in this dream; and the entities, the funders, the supporters who have backed it – Te Pūtahitanga o Te Waipounamu, the Rata Foundation, Te Puni Kokiri and He Waka Tapu.

Along the way, there has been amazing support and collaboration with Te Runanga o Ngai Tahu; with local marae – Rapaki, Tuahiwi, Rehua, Nga Hau e Wha; with PHOs, with ACTIS; Canterbury Rugby League with Ministers of the Crown; with government departments; the Council, PHOs, and the wider community.

It is a night to celebrate the initiative and talent of Struan Purdie of Earlybird Media; the design skills and artistic endeavours of Ariki Creative.

But most of all, tonight is the chance for us all to recognise the leadership, the dedication and the excitement that our pathfinders inspire in us all.

Ultimately I hope that the greatest impact of Bros for Change is not so much about the change that our young people have grasped in their lives – but more importantly a transformation in our own societal attitudes and behaviours so that we become a Community for Change to see our rangatahi with new eyes and an enduring respect; to give love a chance.

Because if Bros are gonna change, then the rest of us better move aside or catch-up – or else we might just get left behind.

Tonight, let us all hear the resounding message from our rangatahi, let me be stronger than I was yesterday, let me keep moving forward to be the best form of me that I can be.

Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.