

Speech notes for Tā Mark for the Te Pūtahitanga Symposium
When: Day 2 of the Symposium from 9.00am on Friday 8 July.

Mihi

The Bid

For 19 years there's been a post-settlement transformation taking place in Te Waipounamu.

It began with the Ngāi Tahu Settlement and then a couple of years ago gathered enormous pace with the conclusion of settlements for Te Tau Ihu – the eight iwi of the top of the South.

With the completion of all Settlements, the nine iwi of Te Waipounamu came together to form Te Waka A Māui Iwi Chairs Forum. Our purpose was to use our collective wisdom to advance issues we shared in common... and believe me there are a lot of issues we had common interest in, the most important of which was and still is our responsibility to enhance the wellbeing of our people.

Without iwi, there would be no whānau; conversely whānau are the foundation, the future and the legacy of iwi leadership. Together we are stronger – we rely upon each other for our collective wealth in every aspect of the word.

So when the opportunity came up to bid to be the Whānau Ora commissioning agency for the South Island – it was a no brainer.

We would do it.

We knew it was going to be a lot of hard work but we were up for it.

In a matter of weeks, a small team of people – and I'm talking less than five people – were working at pace on the top floor of the Wigram airforce control tower to get our bid together.

They drew together our demographic statistics, labour force and health statistics.

They investigated all the legal frameworks that would serve our people best and landed on the structure of a limited partnership with two boards. At the top, the iwi partners providing strategic direction through a shareholders council – Te Taumata, and beneath that an independent professional board responsible **for developing the commissioning framework and investment plan.**

This allowed for the necessary separation between independent and objective bid agency and the shareholder council. The team prepared an incredible report and fantastic bid – a bid that I might say was absolutely comprehensive but not conventional. We saw Whānau Ora as our opportunity to do things differently. We were not bidding to be the government's alternative welfare net, we were bidding to be an IMPACT investor, to foster a pipeline of investment in whānau capability and innovation.

We envisaged that change could and would come from the flaxroots, that the pathway of change to greater self-determination and choice would be created by whānau entrepreneurs and leaders operating on the ground and prepared to take their wider communities with them.

Thankfully, the government understood us. We won our bid.

And what made me really proud that day was that our Te Waka A Māui Iwi Chairs Forum created that bid when we ourselves were hardly a year old.

But we were determined and we had our governance and finances and commitment to each other fixed on an end goal that we were determined to achieve.

We trusted our people and our people went for it.

The first year

So we moved in to our first year and what a year it was. It was intense, exciting and hugely challenging. Te Pūtahitanga was launched at six simultaneous events across Te Waipounamu. A Hot House event was held to incubate the talent of the first cohort of funding applicants – when the floodgates opened, 201 applications were received. There was so much activity, I'm not sure that anyone got much sleep!

I want to mihi to Te Puni Kōkiri for its support of us particularly in that first year. The challenge to establish an organisational infrastructure from scratch was massive, we had to do the commissioning while at the same time recruit a workforce, establish our office and develop all those networks.

I also think we were battling from the start the desire of some in the health and welfare sectors to abdicate their responsibilities to us – to let us be the welfare and advocacy funder – something that we resisted from the beginning – and continue to resist.

Fortunately Te Puni Kōkiri and the Minister were with us on that one.

Whānau Ora is a completely different approach to conventional social sector programmes. It is driven by the desire to build whānau capability which is self-sustaining rather than looking outside to others to answer needs. The key to Whānau Ora is in local solutions; whānau knowing best what works for them.

So the trick for us was to develop a funding model that was robust and rigorous in being able to stick to the principles we espoused from the beginning.

It wasn't smooth sailing in the first year. It took a while to get the right people into the right jobs but there was never any doubt that we wouldn't keep solving the issues and expending the energy needed to create certainty and successful delivery.

Today

We firmly believe that our way of working, of empowering whānau to find the solutions themselves is the right approach. It is a holistic approach that takes into account the full spectrum of issues that can impact on a family from health and housing to employment and education; let alone the issues that are often left unvoiced – loneliness, division, isolation, disconnection.

The scrutiny and assessment of our agency has been intense.

Whānau Ora is still not firmly embedded in the wider public's collective mind as a concept for the future and there will always be those politicians who actively lobby to prevent this.

But over time I believe we are getting there and it is thanks to the work of Te Taumata, chaired by Molly Luke; to Norm Dewes and the Pūtahitanga board, and to Helen Leahy our Chief Executive and her team that among community leaders, business leaders, rūnanga, iwi, hapu and other influencers in the South Island, the concept of Whānau Ora is becoming appreciated and endorsed.

This is a very exciting time for the Iwi of the South and for Māori in Te Waipounamu. With Te Putahitanga growing in strength and confidence, we see an increasing number of like-minded people showing interest and there is great potential for leverage. I expect partnerships with others in our communities. It means innovative levels of engagement between us all– new projects, new developments and greater understanding of each other and what Whānau Ora can mean.

Conference sub theme – Tū Pono Hutia te rito o te harakeke

I also want to touch on one of the conference sub themes; the concept of vulnerability.

It's a terrible thing to witness someone's self-esteem knocked flat by circumstances. Job loss, sickness or injury, family bereavement, loss of a partner... these are things that can arise suddenly, and do take an enormous toll. The Whānau Ora Navigators see the full spectrum of experiences facing whānau – including the days of darkest despair when tomorrow seems a lifetime away.

And the world is a very judgemental place. Too much emphasis seems to be placed on those big milestones of success, like promotions, money, car, fame...

I am not sure why we don't spend more time applauding each other for those small moments of success – moments of connection with others, moments when we react to a difficult situation with dignity and wisdom, moments when we help others in small ways.

Family leaders are just as important as community and national leaders. Many of you know my stand on violence and health issues like smoking and excess drink. I advocate vehemently against them. When we can find other ways of dealing with our emotion and dealing with adversity, then I think we should feel proud of ourselves.

What we should be doing is celebrating those everyday things that we do well, like mentor our children with good behaviours, like develop friendships with positive and loving people. The theme on one of the conference tshirts reflects that – ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

Our children learn about enduring love from the adults around them.

And to my mind, Whānau Ora is the pathway to encouraging those little steps that give us a sense of self-worth. Whānau Ora is not just about 'fixing up families' – in terms of traditional indicators of the state (unemployment, immunisation, incarceration rates) but it is also about consolidating and building on the strengths of whānau – and that includes the strength of those around them.

We need to take pride in our culture. It does hold the answers out to us, our values of manaakitanga and whanaungatanga – it is all there in front of us to reach out to and take hold of.

I think this conference is a fantastic opportunity to come together and to celebrate our successes so far.

Let's keep our eye on the seven Whānau ora outcomes that we are here to achieve... and it is worth repeating them here.

Pou Tahī – we want whānau self-managing

Pou Rua - living healthy lifestyles

Pou Toru – We want whānau participating fully in society

Pou Whā - confidently participating in Te Ao Māori

Pou Rimu - economically secure and successfully involved in wealth creation

Pou Ono – we want whānau cohesive, resilient and nurturing

Pou Whetu - responsible stewards of their living and natural environment

Not one of these outcomes describes those societal markers of success like a new car or new set of clothes... they are all about whānau wellbeing and autonomy and recognising that an ability to make healthy decisions for oneself and one's family is a recipe for happiness.

Māu te ara, kia ora ai te whānau.

Let's empower whānau to thrive.

ENDS