

Keynote Speech: Hon Dame Tariana Turia
‘The importance of growing
whānau capacity capability and independence’

One of the universal soul-searching questions of our generations is asked by almost every child, ever.

It is a question asked as you drive into the sunrise of your whānau holiday. A question asked at every new signpost; every big town.

Are we there yet?

Tonight, I want to focus a little time on that question, as we ponder the journey of growing our whānau capacity, capability and independence.

But I want to first start, where you started, in acknowledging the nine iwi who bravely stepped forward in 2013 and told government with absolute conviction, if whānau are to advance in Te Waipounamu through the Whānau Ora approach, iwi must step up, speak up and front up:

Ngāi Tahu

Ngāti Rarua

Ngāti Tama

Ngāti Koata

Te Atiawa

Ngāti Apa ki te Ra To

Ngāti Kua

Ngāti Toa Rangatira

Rangitane ki Wairau

I can tell you with good authority that the politics of the debating chamber are only a shade of the passion and the intensity of the debates I know we have between and within and across our iwi confederations.

That you are here today, united as one, distinctive in your own iwi integrity, and solid in your collective investment for future generations has to be commended.

I know it will not have been without its challenges, but as your banners proudly demonstrate to us all – Whānau Ora in Te Waipounamu is owned by, accountable to, and delivering for the aspirations of the iwi who first breathed life into the mauri that became Te Putahitanga o Te Waipounamu – and for that you deserve our ongoing respect.

I love the fact that your symposium takes its inspiration from the ground-breaking report, Puaō te ata tū, and the momentum that was mobilised through Matua Whāngai.

This time in our evolution, in the late 1980s, told us that a dependence on the welfare state and its bureaucracy had diverted us from our tribal network and our reliance on our own whanaunga.

Matua Whāngai told us that the tribal whairiki which weaves and connects families together had worn thin and in some cases disintegrated.

The first recommendation from Puaō te ata tū was, and I quote, *“to attack all forms of cultural racism in New Zealand that result in the values and lifestyle of the dominant group being regarded as superior in those of other groups, especially Māori”*.

The late John Rangihau in his forward made it very clear: *“Our problems of cultural imperialism, deprivation, and alienation mean we cannot afford to wait longer. There is ample evidence of interest, concern and energy in the community to herald a new dawn : Puaō te ata tū!”*.

Fast forward twenty years.

Over those two decades we kept firm to a hope that the new dawn would rise. We committed to whakapakari whānau; to Te Urupare Rangapu; to ngā kōhanga reo, the establishment of kura kaupapa Māori; to iwi social services; to local level solutions and direct resourcing which would '*close the gaps*'.

We perceived with great promise the growth of our hauora provider network; we became immersed in the machinery associated with our treaty settlement process; we returned to our tribal lands to make clear our commitment to ourselves.

We occupied Pakaitore for 79 days in 1995; we argued for the H to be returned to Whanganui; we celebrated the vision of Dr Irihapeti Ramsden in promoting the ideal of cultural safety; a concept we legislated for in the health sector in 2002 with the introduction of cultural competency guidelines.

Are we there yet?

In that same year, 2002, we introduced He Korowai Oranga, with a vision of Whānau Ora, to shift our focus on disease and illness to a desire for health and wellness.

He Korowai Oranga was upfront and explicit: To achieve Whānau Ora, the health system will work in a way that acknowledges the aspirations and the central role that whānau play for many Māori, as a principal source of strength, support, security and identity.

It would take, however, until 2009 – with the relentless drive of the Māori Party and its membership – that we would finally get the whole of nation, system change that was required through the recommendations of the 2009 Taskforce on Whānau centred initiatives, chaired magnificently by the unique leadership of Professor Sir Mason Durie.

The 2009 report reiterated the optimism of Puao te ata tū, reminding us that the capacity, capability and independence of our whānau was a vital foundation for our future.

The Taskforce told us that agency efforts could accelerate whānau wellbeing and complement the approach if they committed to a new way of working with whānau. While the report mentioned health, social development, justice and housing as germane to whānau wellbeing, the Taskforce noted in particular the significance of education.

It has been a profound disappointment that agency and government indifference, apathy and neglect has characterized the way in which the state has responded to the initiative and inspiration of our whānau.

That's not just my observations of course – that is what you said and whānau across Aotearoa told the Panel who last year reviewed Whānau Ora.

It is my greatest hope that the 2019 Wellbeing Budget will recognize the pivotal impact of Whānau Ora in changing the landscape of hope for our whānau across Aotearoa.

But back to the policy beginning of Whānau Ora.

On 8th April 2010 Whānau Ora was launched, and a year later Sir Mason encouraged us to translate the high hopes we had for Whānau Ora into fresh gains for strong whānau to lead communities throughout our nation.

The first phase of Whānau Ora saw the establishment of 33 provider collectives; 125 Whānau Ora providers; ten regional leadership groups; a national Governance Group and overseeing it all the Whānau Ora Partnership Group with six iwi leaders and six Ministers.

Here in Christchurch He Oranga Pounamu comprised 19 providers developing support at a local level such as housing relocation and access to services for those affected by the 2010 and 2011 earthquakes.

Are we there yet?

In March 2013 Professor Durie, on behalf of the Governance Group, recommended that a new approach was required to move to a greater level of autonomy and responsiveness to whānau; to extend the reach; promote the vision and inspire whānau to truly understand their potential.

Enter the Commissioning Agencies.

My concern was always about how we could make sure Whānau Ora was driven by whānau first and foremost – not by governments, ministers, political parties, departments, providers, commissioning agencies – but whānau. This was not Provider Ora: we wanted whānau to be in the driving seat, charting their own road map to a prosperous tomorrow.

If Whānau Ora is about disrupting intergenerational dependency on others, and instead investing in solutions written by whānau, then we need to operate from the premise that whānau know best about making decisions for the benefit.

We do not need any more theories or practices which have a whakapapa outside of Aotearoa.

We have had enough of systems of data which perpetuate a pathology created from deficit thinking which we internalize.

We must believe that the vast majority of whānau function successfully without any intervention from the state. We must always uphold a focus on ngā tikanga mau painga – a strengths focus.

We have more than enough example of the incredible creativity and overflowing promise of potential from within Te Waipounamu – 201 applications when you first opened the doors shows us that.

Our job now is to support, advance, or get out of the way.

By that I mean, knowing where we are from, where we are going, and making our own decisions is all around building the capacity and capability we need to keep our future firmly fixed in our gaze.

So to the question, are we there yet, I would say – ask yourself that question first.

Ask your iwi leaders, your Taumata, your iwi chairs: is the vision you boldly stood up for in 2013 being realized?

How is the dual governance model working – the limited liability partnership approach of the Taumata; the general partnership limited model upheld by your board.

Are you confident that your language, knowledge, spirituality, histories as defined by you, your teaching and research methods, your child-rearing patterns, your ways of communicating, your waiata, your kawa, being seen as instrumental to the way whānau lead themselves forward?

How do you manage conflict in a tikanga driven way?

Are you truly investing in the wellbeing of the whānau – the collective – as well as individual successes?

Are your Navigators being valued appropriately for the vital role they play in life-saving, in life-changing?

And most of all, is your capacity harnessed, your capability secure, your independence strong enough to create the future your mokopuna deserve?

Are we there yet?

That's up to you to answer –

- to keep asking yourself searching questions;
- to stand strong and proud in the grand plans you want future generations to inherit;
- to do whatever it takes to strip away the layers of bureaucracy; a second skin of self-doubt; any processes or conversations which distract you from your greatest purpose – to carve out possibilities of greatness.

Finally I want to end with the challenge I left you at the social laboratory you initiated five years ago, in the Hothouse of 2014.

“Yours is no small task. You are here to help whānau to pursue the opportunities they are looking for, to reach those opportunities on their own terms and in their own ways.

Within each whānau lies the key to creating positive change. No-one may dictate the ideal part for a whānau beside that whānau themselves”.

Keep focused on that task. Keep believing in our whānau, in all their wildness, their colour and their diversity.

Never resile from that awesome responsibility and privilege you have – to enable all our families to flourish through the seeds of transformation they plant today. There is no greater time to do that than now.