

Te Whare o Rehua

He kaupapa whakahononga
i te rangatahi me te
ngahere

Kāhui: Mātaatua





INTRODUCTION

As part of Te Mātāwai's support in revitalising te reo throughout Aotearoa, we are showcasing some of the kaupapa kaitono have been doing in Mātaatua. Whaea Brenda Tahī sat down with us to kōrero about Tūhoe Tuawhenua Trust's kaupapa, and tell us a little bit about what they've been up to in Ruatāhuna.

HE AHA TE KAUPAPA WHAKARAUORA REO?

Tūhoe Tuawhenua Trust developed and ran Te Whare o Rehua, a kaupapa whakarauora reo aimed at rekindling the connection between rangatahi and the ngahere, through the medium of te reo. As Whaea Brenda explained, "There's a huge body of knowledge about the ngahere within our people, within our kaumātua. Engari kai te ngarongaro ngā kaumātua." Because of the multiple demands on whānau in and around Ruatāhuna and Te Urewera, many are unable to bring their tamariki "back to the bush", as has been typical in the past. This was another motivating factor to develop the kaupapa.



"People brought up in Ruatāhuna, and elsewhere, aren't always connected to the ngahere in the way they used to be. But we are a forest people, and our kaupapa is based on the integration of our forest and our people. This is a key issue for us – our ngahere is losing the people, and our people are losing the ngahere."

Te Whare o Rehua responds to this need, in bringing rangatahi (roughly between the ages of 10-24) back to the bush and teaching them about various aspects of the ngahere. Each



haerenga focuses on a specific theme, and experts with relevant pūkenga are brought in to tutor the rangatahi on that domain. Piloted by the Trust in 2018, with support from the JR McKenzie Trust, there have been six ngahere-based wānanga since then. This has included wānanga and haerenga on kererū, eeling, ‘breaking in’ or starting wild horses, hunting poaka, possuming, and pest control. The reo and tikanga of living in the ngahere are covered throughout these programmes, for example learning about lighting and using fire. Whaea Brenda explained some of the detail rangatahi have learned in relation to maintaining a fire:

“There’re different names for the different ashes – ‘pungarehu’ is one, but there are others too. There’s the soft ash, which is light and grey. Then you’ve got your burning coals, and the ash there. It’s all ash, but they all have different names in Māori. So when you’re trying to hold your fire overnight, and want to keep your fire for morning, you cover the coals with the light grey ash, and that’ll hold your fire till morning (especially if the wood is mānuka). And it’s different if you’re cooking bread in a camp oven. You don’t put the coals directly against the oven, but use the ash as a buffer between the coals – this holds the heat in. We thought it was important for the kids to understand how to keep their fire. There’s a difference in how you work your fire for cooking, and for warmth. A working fire is an important part of being in the bush, and the reo comes with that.”



“Transferring knowledge to the next generation is part of the kaupapa”, she stressed. “We talked to our tutors and asked how they learned. They described the deep relationships they had with their koros or uncles, who would take them to the bush and support this transfer of knowledge.” “We want to engender a ‘hunger’ for this type of learning

amongst rangatahi, through taking them into Te Whare o Rehua.”.



WHAT ARE THE LESSONS YOU'VE LEARNED?

When we asked, “He aha ngā hua e puta mai ana?”, Whaea Brenda highlighted the wellbeing of rangatahi, nurtured through the connection to the mana and mauri of the ngahere:

“We see the wellbeing of our young people once they’re connected to the ngahere. Not just mahi kai, but their wairua, and feeling they can achieve things... The essence of the ngahere brings about healing and change in the rangatahi. When we see that kind of thing in them, it creates a fire in the belly, and they become really keen.”



She also noted the whanaungatanga that comes through the wānanga: “It’s awesome to see the rangatahi connect with each other, and then they come back in the holidays to whānau here to connect again.” Sustainability of this kaupapa, in nurturing the connection between rangatahi and the ngahere, is equally important, which she refers to as the “cascading effect.”

“The cascading effect is a really important one, because young people become the focal points for their whānau, and might encourage their aunties or uncles to ‘Take me hunting!’, or ‘Take me eeling!’. And one of our big outcomes is not just that whānau are doing more of this kind of thing but also that other local organisations are now doing it. We’re trying to replicate the old way of learning, in the relationship between the rangatahi and the tutor, but we’re happy to see others picking up the idea.”

Transferring knowledge about the ngahere is critical, and the pool of knowledge the Trust draws on, through the tutors, is invaluable. The Trust provides support to the tutors to see



how they might communicate and engage with the diverse needs of rangatahi, as while they are experts in their respective domains of the ngahere, they are sometimes unfamiliar with such approaches to engaging with young people. “This helps get the tutors to be really effective, and we’re giving them the support to do this.”



When times were challenging, Whaea Brenda reiterates that the purpose of the kaupapa is what kept her and the team motivated:

“We never set up Te Whare o Rehua thinking it was a simple thing to deliver. Our kaupapa is about the transfer of knowledge, not just about running a programme. Our objective is seriously about transferring this knowledge to the next generation. So when you’re serious about this objective, that keeps you going. It’s part of the future of the ngahere – it can’t be that without the people. No good having just an empty bush... So what keeps us going? This ultimate kaupapa. If we don’t do this really, really well, it’s not going to work. And then what’s the point? We get a real satisfaction from the kids learning. Reo and knowledge are all integrated together.”

When asked what advice she’d give to future or potential kaitono, she said,

“My advice to any applicant is that they’re true to their kaupapa and the issue they’re trying to achieve with their community and people. Don’t think of it as merely accessing a source of funding for an organisation. If the funding source does not suit your kaupapa, pressure the funding source to see your point, to fund your programme, to understand your needs.”



WHAT ARE YOUR FUTURE ASPIRATIONS FOR TE REO MĀORI?

Looking to the future, Whaea Brenda wants to see te reo “flourishing, but properly used” :

“I think in relation to what we’re doing in the Trust, we want to see te reo flourish, and we want to see it used properly. It does concern me that te reo out there is not always being used correctly ... But I’m loving seeing te reo everywhere. From us as a Trust, and specifically here in Ruatāhuna, we want to see te reo maintained in the way it was in yesteryear in that it’s idiomatic, as a native speaker would speak. And is rich with the vocabulary of life in the ngahere. For example, what those different types of ashes are; understanding the gaits of a horse, and being accurate about the terms that you use in the reo related to the ngahere – like the different types of eels – all of this needs to be captured, in not just learning the words, but being able to put it into practice. Te reo, mātauranga, tikanga, all integrated together. That’s why we do what we do.”

