



Iwi Research and Development – Nga Tahuhu o te Taiao Te Mauri o Te Ukaipo Summary of Findings: Connections

In 2007 a number of Te Rarawa people contributed to the Te Mauri o Te Ukaipo research project under the banner of Ngā Tāhuhu o Te Taiao. This paper is one of several that summarises the key findings of the Mauri research and may be read in conjunction with other Iwi Research and Development summaries that will be produced throughout 2008.

Te Mauri o Te Ukaipo is researching the intersections between the environment and Te Rarawa views of wellbeing. The focus of this summary is 'connections'. A central theme drawn from the Mauri interviews concerns connections with people, with 'home', and within the community. It highlights the sorts of things that helped to develop, maintain and strengthen relationships and connectedness.

It's about whanaungatanga

Connections in Te Rarawa are deeply rooted in and supported by whanaungatanga. All sorts of occasions and practices were recalled – happy, sad, and routine. They either initiated or strengthened whanaungatanga ties and provided lots of different entry points for connecting. Identity and belonging at a whanau, hapu and marae level were regarded as important - people liked to know who was who, who belonged to whom, and how they connected. People also linked their level of connectedness to their wellness.

Anchors from early whanau practices

Several people talked about the types of things that keep them anchored to 'home' regardless of where they lived at different stages of their lives. For some it was regular visits when they were growing up and the happy memories of significant times:

..every school holidays ... they would cart us off back up to the Hokianga to toughen us up and get us to not forget the life back there.

..when whanau came back at Christmas us kids would all just get together and we'd move in packs all over ... great life, no

responsibilities.

Holidays, tangihanga or if there was a hui called we'd be going back

...

Whanau that had lived away recalled returning home for tangi which maintained connections with both the immediate and wider whanau. Tupuna being buried at home had a strong influence on people's commitment to that place. The death of a parent or grandparent was often the catalyst for the younger ones to strengthen their ties with home and get more involved in home issues:

So when we took [my father] home [to bury], our father to us, that's our link home.

..moving back ... after my Dad died and promising to do what I had to do. ... stepping up to the mark ...

Particular people, usually the ahi kaa, showed leadership in bringing whanau together, and were the sorts of role models that whanau looked up to:

..he's a good anchor for us.

Events

Annual marae, community or whanau events were popular reasons to come home – they were fairly casual and whanau with relatively weak links to home found this a safe way to get to know their whanau and identify with the home people.

There are numerous regular land block meetings, whanau meetings, church functions, cemetery cleaning, marae meetings and working bees that are not only attended by the hau kainga, but large numbers of whanau living away travel home for them also. Pig hunts, fishing competitions, beach horse races and wood chopping events are also popular in the Te Rarawa rohe. A variety of one-off events and social functions – weddings, birthdays, graduations, hui and wananga, whanau reunions, and church celebrations also add to the mix. Taking part in any of these events keeps whanau in touch with the realities of what is going on, builds capacity, shares the work-load and constantly links whanau.

Two long-standing sports days are good examples of popular and sustainable ways for connecting and strengthening identity. The Christopher Harris (Motukaraka) sports weekend has been held annually

since 1980. Its roots date to the 1950s when a Hokianga rugby club was set up in Auckland for the many whanau who moved to Auckland.

The annual rugby and netball tournament is now played at Kohukohu between four Motukaraka clubs (Auckland and north).

The Pawarenga sports day started back in the 1960s as a humble whanau picnic and marae fundraiser. It has grown over the years to become a major attraction on the calendar with whanau returning to rekindle links with close and distant whanau.

The drive [for me] ... is bringing whanau home, bringing your whanau home to something ... Seeing whanau that come back especially for the day that haven't been there for years ...

Interest and involvement with neighboring communities steadily increased each year and helped to build good relationships,

Two years ago there was ... maybe one whanau from Panguru that used to come over. Last year, this year almost a quarter of the population now that show up on that day ... Whangape just as much as Pawarenga and that's big time for me.

There used to be korero on Panguru and Pawarenga being at each others throats on sports, well I don't know where that korero came from but I know it's gone [now].

..it's unbelievable what whanau can do when they get together.

The marae as a connector

For many, the marae was seen as the most important connecting point for whanau. In most communities it was the only facility and most functions were held there. With no regular income stream, overheads and maintenance of the facilities rely on fundraising. Fundraising served two purposes - a means of survival, and a way of involving the wider whanau. Events like basket socials and housie play a dual role – one to raise money, and the other to draw whanau together for some fun, which in turn strengthens whanau connections. Many whanau commit to marae and project fundraising and participate when they can.

Big huge baskets ... That's pretty much how our marae got built, eh.

Keeping connected in the 21st century

Advances in technology play an increasing role in whanau connections. No matter where in the world whanau live, technology can now connect them in a matter of moments. The Rarawa website, email lists, the inaugural Te Rarawa festival in 2006, and Te Kukupa have been instrumental in connecting and providing whanau with up- to-date news and information.

The Whanau Harris whakapapa book is another example of an entry point for whanau wanting to connect. Since its publication nearly 30 years ago, thousands of enquiries have been received and have resulted in new and significant connections for whanau members. This has been a particularly useful way for whanau who are disconnected or who are just starting to learn about their whakapapa.

Although whanau interviewed had strong links in their own local area, many had very little experience or knowledge of other areas within the rohe of Te Rarawa. There were few opportunities to mix with other marae apart from at tangi. There are opportunities for the Runanga to facilitate bringing Te Rarawa people together for social and learning activities. Suggestions include: whakapapa wananga, hikoi to places of significance for each hapu marae, progressing the pou whenua project, erecting story boards with local history, having better iwi connections with Auckland whanau, and holding an annual social function for kaumatua.