Kaiwhakahaere comment

Te Ripota o Te Kaiwhakahaere - Tangata Whenua Takawaenga o Aotearoa

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A report given at the Maori Caucus National Hui on the 27th September 2001

Kia ora koutou nga whanau kua huihui mai nei. Ki nga koroua, ki nga kuia me nga rau rangatira e tautoko ana nga kaupapa o tenei hui, tene koutou. Ko enei etahi o oku tautoko tino hohonu ki te whakaora tatou te iwi Maori mo inaianei mo ake tonu atu. No reira huri noa ki te whare, tena koutou katoa.

The current challenges we face in our profession, as Tangata Whenua Social Workers in Aotearoa require inner strength and courage. It requires understanding our roots and maintaining our vision of Maori self-determination as facilitators, re-inforcers and supporters of advancing Maori wellbeing. Often we let the ‘too hard to deal with basket of issues’ douse our flames of enthusiasm in this mahi. Subsequently, we become too reactive and less intuitive, stagnating instead of pursuing proactive strategies, passing time as opposed to valuing the space to role model healthy living.

As Kaiwhakahaere I have had the pleasure of meeting whanau throughout Aotearoa who are involved in all the dimensions of Social work mahi. For example, there are those of you who work face to face individually with people who are suffering. Others have a whanau focused work environment. Yet others engage at the solid rock foundation of community development. Maori social workers also make sure that there is heart pumping into social policy formation, facilitation and advocacy work, research, education and management of Maori/iwi or mainstream social services.

Whatever elements of the social work profession you are engaged in, there have been two key things that have stood out for me in these meetings. The first element focuses on the belief that we profess to be whanau but often our work environments isolate us from those support networks in whanau; our philosophical principles place us in competition with each other; we tend to marginalize those who are less trained or less educated or less experienced than us; we continue to advance ‘pohara’ conditions or circumstances which subsequently establish unhelpful hierarchy within our own profession; there is even a push to place worker loyalty to agencies above commitments to professional practice and so forth.

The second element is based on what I call the ‘waiting game’. And believe me, we appear to be waiting. Waiting for others to represent us, waiting for others to organise us, waiting for someone else to do the work, to be creative to show us the way. Waiting for a Saviour to
rescue us, or seeking a scapegoat to blame if things go wrong.

Well here is my whakaaro regarding those two matters of concern. Who determines our own level of practice in whakawhanaungatanga? If someone was seeking support in their development we should remember well the lessons about whanau looking after whanau, and make ourselves available without being hung up by excuses such as ‘work overload’ to side-step practising what we truly believe in.

In terms of the second issue, the wero and response is simple. Instead of playing the waiting game look for your sources of inspiration, in other words, look inside yourselves – ‘kei roto i a koutou’. That is where the energy, heart and enthusiasm reside, ‘inside of you and yours’. In essence we want your support to deal with all the things that require our attention as Maori in our profession. We want your direction as we set the framework of professional practice for Maori social workers in Aotearoa.

The theme of this conference ‘Kia muru muru tonu te ahi kaa’ reflects the reality of how our flames appear to be burning brightly. Simply this fire is much like the scenario portrayed in the heat of a battle, everything is booming. Identifying our sources of inspiration to growth has been the catalyst underpinning the development of our te ahi kaa celebrations, of our right of occupation as Maori in the social work profession. Its development in Aotearoa has been about challenging us to be a light to everybody.

In order to do this, we need to understand the importance of sharing our stories about our mahi in the social work profession, as Maori. We need to stoke up our fires of wisdom and experience as Maori in all aspects of our mahi – its been hard to light our fires of inspiration and at the beginning people appeared to be waiting for others to do the hard yards. We are starting to burn brightly and the enthusiasm is catching on. Our whanau are beginning to understand the necessity to safe guard our homes and our whanau by articulating appropriate patterns of behaviour and engagement inherent in our own history of whanau, hapu and iwi development in Aotearoa.

Often we are at the cutting edge or even living on the edge, so to speak, of development in our profession. To strengthen ourselves we need to be clear about our identity. This identity is not found in living on the edge. It is about making sure that you spend time working out the dynamics of your own eternal potential. We are just beginning to realise our role in that development as Tangata Whenua. At the ANZASW Ngaruawahia hui in 1986, those of us present at that auspicious occasion felt the warmth of that fire but when we returned to our papakainga that fire diminished and in some areas it went out all together.

My korero to you is that it needs to continue to burn, and that requires guts, determination, thinking smart and being connected to your sources of inspiration. It takes time to comprehend all the various dimensions of our development and it takes commitment. We look forward with anticipation to your efforts to support the role that Maori need to take to strengthen a safe, informed and ‘Best practice’ direction at or done on behalf of whanau.

Note: Since the presentation of this report at the Maori Caucus National hui in Tauranga on the 27th of September 2001 the following information (published in the July Social Work Notice Board) reflects
the accelerating developments happening for Maori social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Here is a breakdown of the 309 Tangata Whenua members. 212 reside in the following Roopu Maori:

- Taitokerau - 26
- Tamaki Makaurau - 70
- Waikato - 30
- Tauranga Moana - 20
- Te Whanau O Rongokako - 22
- Manawhenua - 15
- Tangata Whenua Takawaenga ki Otautahi - 29

97 other Maori ANZASW members are scattered throughout all of Aotearoa as follows:

- Whakatu/Nelson - 8
- Southland - 7
- Otago - 4
- West Coast - 1
- Wellington - 17
- Waizarapa - 5
- Wanganui - 10
- Taranaki - 3
- Taupo - 3
- East Coast - 8
- Bay of Plenty/Whakatohea; Te Arawa - 27
- Coromandel - 4

In addition I have met with many different groups in the country to discuss forming their own tangata whenua branches of the association, to look at the viability of joining the association, and to converse about some of the critical issues that we are currently facing as social workers, with particular reference to how that impacts on us as tangata whenua. Some of the strategies that require further development in the next year are outlined as follows.

- The need to implement ‘hui a roopu’ to assist with the development of roopu in between our National hui is critical to the positive management of our development.
- Strengthening our significant day of celebration – Te Ahi Kaa should be advanced to bring whanau into the ANZASW.
- Continuation of our goal towards developing an ‘autonomous’ Tangata Whenua social work arm to our profession, working in collaboration with our Tauiwi professional colleagues is advocated for.
- Discussions are continuing with Te Korowai Aroha about ‘Te Awhi Pa’ – an indigenous Maori social service type professional body, to look at ‘affiliate status’ for ANZASW Maori members.
- Preparing our whanau for participation in standing committees for the ANZASW. In 2000 we had difficulty getting people to volunteer to be on these committees. In 2001 we had on mass declarations of people seeking to represent us but we had no idea what that entailed. In 2002 we will make sure to brief and screen all of our whanau properly before putting them forward for committee membership.
- Need to look at developing some feedback on the years of development within Te Ahi Kaa. This could occur by way of ‘a pictorial’ edition of Te Komako in 2003.

The next National Tangata Whenua hui for Tangata Whenua is about to be held in Auckland and it promises to be full of interesting kaupapa to be discussed, some of which will be reported on in the next Te Komako.