

Amokura – Indigenous Innovation

Ko te kaupapa o te amokura, he kaitiaki. E ai ki te korero, ka hoe te hunga whakawhiti i Te Moananui a Kiwa, tera ka tataea e te awaha, e te marangai. Ka pikia e te kaipuke nga ngaru nui, nga ngaru roa. Tae noa mai te hemanawatanga i te kaha o te hiahia kia tau kia uta. A reira ka whakaatu mai te amokura i tona kaitiakitanga, a ra kei tua tata nei i te whenua. Koia ka mohio nga kaihoe he whenua ka kitea.

The kaupapa of the amokura, symbol of guardianship and safety is described above. Amokura are the tail feathers of the tawake, a seagoing bird. Those at sea and far from a distant shore knew the sighting of the amokura meant that they would reach land and safety. The word amokura is made up of two words ‘amo’ meaning ‘to carry’, and ‘kura’ meaning ‘red’ and symbolizing the sacred. The name therefore symbolizes safety and the carrying of that which is sacred, a sacred trust and responsibility. The name Amokura was adopted by iwi of Taitokerau for a project that would work for whanau safety and violence prevention¹. The project has undergone several stages of development, but the iwi commitment to whanau safety and well being has never wavered, and the early vision established by those who began the project remains. This sacred responsibility for the well being of our whanau and tamariki mokopuna is a collective one, and is not limited to organizational structures or specific projects.

History is often told in stories of battles, warfare and scientific innovation or discoveries. Stories of peace and the science or magic of developing peaceful ways of living and working together are less often told. Histories of the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand frequently highlight battles and warriors. In telling and retelling of conflict and warfare other stories are sometimes lost – the stories of heroic journeys, trading exploits, great loves, agricultural developments, astronomy and the power of art, poetry and music are less known². The messages and symbols relating to sacred and life giving knowledge associated with these less known stories are keys to finding pathways to well being.

One popular story of these islands is that Maori are a people who ‘once were warriors’, who battled each other, fought colonial take over, and in the 21st century continue to express this warrior nature through violence to each other. Sometimes this story includes an extra chapter explaining how fortunate it was that colonization occurred or we might have extinguished each other.

The trouble with popular stories such as this is that they are often believed and treated as real – and challenges to their veracity are accused of being revisionist history. Nevertheless, our oral history, our art and music, and the work of those with skills to research and understand the past tell us that that our past is rich, complex and holds lessons for us to hold onto today. We hold onto our gifts from the past and they provide us with the basis to challenge popular myths about who Maori are and were, and teach us how we can relate to each other and our world.

Drawing on the wisdom of our tupuna and traditions is not to return us to a mythic past or golden age – our people have always adapted to new circumstances and experimented with new technology. Rather it is to understand and be guided by the symbols, values and principles that can enhance our capacity to live together peacefully as whanau and communities. Our capacity for resilience as an indigenous people is fed and nourished by our

¹ Acknowledgements to Moe Milne, Uncle Pona Matenga and Herewini Jones for their contribution to explaining the significance and meaning of ‘amokura’

² Irihapeti Ramsden’s response to Alan Duff’s ‘Once were warriors’ was to say ‘Once were gardeners, once were astronomers, once were philosophers, once were lovers..’) See culturalsafety.massey.ac.nz/

language, traditional practices and oral traditions. Dr Bruce Perry argues that 'traditional ways are permeated with empirically derived wisdom'³ and advocates adherence to the practices of indigenous peoples for the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and raising of children. He advocates for community and collective approaches to community building to ensure that family, child rearing and relationships do not become the exclusive domains of experts and specialist programmes.

The World Health Organization 'World report on violence and health'⁴ describes an imbalance in the focus of programmes to address issues of violence, with community and societal strategies being underemphasized compared with programmes addressing individual and relationship factors. There has been limited work done in Aotearoa New Zealand focusing on 'identifying community or societal level risk and protective factors, or interventions.'⁵ The separation between child protection, working with adult victims of intimate partner violence and working with perpetrators, as well as the distinction between social work, counseling, group education, and criminal justice responses to violence does not provide an easy context for community based approaches to flourish.

The Amokura project is an integrated community change initiative⁶ to address family violence in Taitokerau (the Northern area of New Zealand.) The project is led by the Family Violence Prevention Consortium which is made up of the Chief Executives of seven iwi (tribal) authorities. The Amokura purpose is to provide strategic leadership and co-ordination of violence prevention and early intervention activities across Taitokerau. Leadership by iwi constitutes a long-term commitment to violence prevention. Our first responsibility is to provide this leadership in our own whanau, hapu and iwi. However, expression of manaakitanga and kaitiakitanga in our lands means this commitment extends to the whole community. We want all children and young people regardless of background to be able to enjoy safety in their own homes and communities across our region. This in turn means more positive engagement in education, community activities and employment.

Maori academics, health, welfare, education and justice professionals argue that models of analysis and intervention methodologies based on Western or mainstream thinking have been consistently ineffective for Maori.⁷ This includes in the field of family violence, where Western profeminist analysis of violence is seen as having only limited application to Maori families and communities. Analysis of family violence and models of practice are grounded in cultural values, beliefs and practices. The Amokura project is grounded in the Mauri Ora Framework.⁸ This framework was developed by a group of Maori practitioners from across Aotearoa New Zealand and describes three stages or tasks for addressing violence:

- dispelling the illusion that violence is normal, acceptable or culturally valid
- removing the opportunity for violence to take place
- teaching transformative practices for the liberation of whanau

³ *Effects of Neglect on the Developing Child: Relational Poverty and Vulnerability to Abuse and Neglect.*

Notes taken from this paper presented by Dr Perry of the Child Trauma Institute at the World Conference on Prevention of Family Violence, Banff, Canada, October 2005.

⁴ *World report on violence and health.* Geneva: World Health Organization. Online at http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/en/full_en.pdf

⁵ *Beyond Zero Tolerance: Key Issues and future directions for family violence work in New Zealand.* Report prepared for the Families Commission by Janet Fanslow, August 2005.

⁶ *Principles for evaluating comprehensive community initiatives.* Prepared by The Association for the Study and Development of Community on behalf of the National Funding Collaborative on Violence Prevention 2001

⁷ For a full discussion see *Literature Review: Family Violence Prevention for Maori*, report prepared by Pihama, Jenkins & Middleton, Te Rito Action Area 13, 2003

⁸ *Transforming Family Violence: a conceptual framework 2nd ed.* Tamati Kruger, 2004. Te Puni Kokiri. Online at: http://www.tpk.govt.nz/publications/docs/whanau_violence.pdf

The framework draws on traditional concepts, values and practices. It spans the range of violence prevention possibilities from primary prevention to crisis and post incident intervention. Amokura has a particular focus on activities and initiatives that will help to dispel the illusion that violence is culturally valid or acceptable, and that emphasize collective responsibility for the welfare of whanau, hapu and iwi. We work alongside providers through training and development to support them in specific innovative projects or meeting training needs. At a community level we are able to support events that promote whanau well being, respectful relationships and gender equality. We also link with other initiatives that are consistent with our approach, such as Everyday Communities.

In Te Ao Maori our elders (kaumatua and kuia) are seen as valued repositories of tradition knowledge and everyday wisdom. Amokura also convenes kaumatua kuia forums to discuss ways of supporting wellbeing and preventing violence. Kaumatua kuia with a well developed analysis of the impact of violence and abuse in their communities and on their mokopuna are powerful advocates. Their stand against violence in all its forms both contributes to dispelling the illusion that violence is acceptable or culturally valid, and to removing opportunities for violence to flourish.

Taitokerau has a high Maori population, up to 50% in some parts of the region. The region includes several small urban centres and many remote rural communities with limited access to communications and services. As for the rest of Aotearoa New Zealand the Maori population in Taitokerau is a youthful one. Most recent Census⁹ data shows:

- 53% of the total Maori population in Taitokerau is under the age of 24
- 19% of this group are parents
- 44% of households with Maori residents under the age of 24 receive household income from benefits
- more than 20% of Maori children and young people live below the poverty line

Poverty and income disparities are among the community and societal factors that stand out as increasing the risk of interpersonal violence.¹⁰ Negative statistical patterns that describe some dimensions of our experience as Maori intersect and are visible in our own whanau and communities. This intersection of issues or difficulties has a disproportionately negative effect on our young people. The impact of dispossession and dismantling of Maori social structures, economic and cultural base through colonization is an important part of our current context. Clear and direct links can be traced from this early legacy of violence and domination to current levels of violence. The statistical patterns also reflect that Maori and particularly Maori youth are more likely to come under surveillance and the attention of welfare, justice and policing agencies.

Fortunately we are also aware of the strength and resilience of our people, our young people in particular. This is evidenced in our arts, music, sport, marae and the commitment of those working in social services, health justice and iwi development. Our 2005 Amokura Conference provided us with a range of workshops showcasing innovative indigenous providers and practitioners, as well as a two day kaumatua kuia workshop to discuss issues of whanau well being. Our 2005 Amokura awards celebrated people from across Taitokerau who have made outstanding contributions to violence prevention and whanau well-being in their own communities. Our resilience, creativity and innovation are evident in projects such as Up North Peacekeepers in Kaitaia, and a range of other iwi and provider projects.

Dispelling the illusion – Step Back!

⁹ *Rangatahi – Northland Region*, Statistics NZ, 2001

¹⁰ *World Report on Violence and Health*, abstract p4

A key component of dispelling the illusion that violence is acceptable is our 'Step Back' campaign. 'Step Back' can be best understood in the context of social marketing - a process that can be used to bring about change at a group or community level. and one frequently used in health promotion campaigns. Social marketing is most effective when:

- the target market is clearly identified
- the message is credible and relevant to the target market
- programmes are supported, reinforced and integrated with other strategies such as media advocacy, education and community based interventions¹¹



'Step Back' is a violence prevention message from Amokura that is communicated primarily through the medium of music via radio jingles and community concerts. Te Runanga o Ngati Whatua (one of the tribal authorities involved in the Amokura Project) owns MAI FM, a leading youth radio station in Aotearoa/New Zealand. MAI promotions staff have worked with Amokura to develop a brand that is consistent with violence prevention and youth culture to 'dispel the illusion' that violence is normal and acceptable. Aotearoa/New Zealand has its own distinctive brand of music with indigenous flavours, influenced by hip hop music, reggae and rhythm and blues. Hip hop is the primary music genre used in concerts and jingles as having the highest youth appeal. Step Back jingles are played on iwi and mainstream radio stations across the region.

As the footage that will follow shortly shows the brand has been successfully introduced and adopted in Taitokerau, with more than 20,000 people in the region attending Step Back events in 2005.

(9 minutes DVD footage)

The Step Back message is positive and clear. Opportunities are provided for young people and community or iwi social service providers to be involved in aspects of event planning and organization, and review of artist material to ensure consistency with violence prevention messages. The brand has been picked up by young people in remote rural communities as well as urban centres in Taitokerau. Young local artists and dancers are built into concert programmes as supporting acts and via competitions – and this has resulted in composition of original raps around the Step Back theme. As shown on the DVD, young composers have also become involved in recording their work for radio, with hard-hitting lyrics directed at adults.

Step Back 2006 will involve major events in Kaikohe, Whangarei and Kaitia. Amokura is partnering with Te Runanga a Iwi o Ngapuhi with a three hour Step Back concert as part of Ngapuhi Festival.

¹¹ See *Small-scale Social Marketing*, Danika Hall, DRUGINFO Vol. 4, Sept 2005

Conclusion

Amokura is uniquely positioned, combining iwi leadership and in-depth knowledge of the people and communities of Taitokerau with extensive networks with iwi and Maori social service providers. This ensures clear identification of the target market and message relevance. The message is championed and supported by iwi and Maori social service provider networks at local levels. Amokura engages in research, education and advocacy activities at a range of levels to ensure the violence prevention message is consistently presented. Both a formative evaluation and outcomes evaluation are in process. The Amokura project is scheduled to end in June 2007. Learning from the project will inform other indigenous and community based violence prevention initiatives. We are seeking the time when individuals, whanau, hapu and iwi understand the impact of violence and abuse, and declare violence to be unacceptable. We want our dynamic and committed service providers in Taitokerau to be joined by whanau, hapu and iwi who can apply our tikanga and values to leading advocacy for non violence and whanau well being in our rohe.

So, to leave you with the words of our young people

*Step Back!
You claim that you're not violent
Smack only if it's required
Raising your hand don't make you a man
You ain't a man if you smack your love
You ain't a man if you crack your sons
You ain't a mom if you smack your girls
Make up then wake up if that's your world
Step Back – by EZ (extract)*

Di Grennell, Amokura Project Manager