

Te Pou o te Whakaaro Nui *Cultural Celebration*

Before Keri Opai was appointed to the Paeārahi role (Māori leadership) at Te Pou o te Whakaaro Nui in 2014, many employees had little idea of how to act appropriately at Māori events or engage with kaupapa Māori organisations, and weren't confident using te reo Māori in resources.

In 2018, the organisation's staff of 40 in Auckland, Hamilton and Wellington have confidence to do all these things.

Te Pou o te Whakaaro Nui (Te Pou) is a national centre funded by the Ministry of Health to support workforce development in mental health, addiction and disability services. The organisation works with district health boards, non-government organisations and training and education providers.



Keri's Paeārahi role has had a huge impact in helping Te Pou staff gain a basic understanding of tikanga and te reo Māori and has strengthened the organisation's connections to Māori people.

The role was developed organically with a broad scope, so Keri could tailor it to the organisation's needs. He was supported with appropriate resources, including time, funds, and influence with the leadership team. Each manager and team met with Keri to explore how he could support them.

Keri began by focusing on the basics, helping teams with specific requests, while also identifying and targeting small changes in organisational processes to improve responsiveness to Māori.

"We now regularly consult Keri on all things Māori," says CEO Robyn Shearer.

"This may be extensive, such as his continuous input into the refresh of a mental health framework, or brief, such as finding an appropriate Māori image for a resource," she says.

Other changes to organisational processes are implemented through Keri's weekly Edublog (educational blog on Māori topics and present issues) and by teaching pronunciation, pepeha (introductions), karakia and waiata at his monthly te reo Māori classes.

All staff, including managers, are expected to attend and learn new te reo Māori words, their origin, meaning and work on pronunciation. All staff have attended a two-day Te Pūmaomao training at a marae, to deepen their understanding about the Land Wars, the Treaty of Waitangi and Māori history.

The overall shift in visibility is a direct result of incremental benefits created by changes to Te Pou's organisational culture.

"For example, previously our policy was to avoid using Māori words and macrons if possible. Now we confidently and consistently use basic te reo Māori terms in our publications, including appropriate macron use," says Robyn.

“Critically, we now understand why correct te reo Māori pronunciation and word use demonstrates our respect. We accept and embrace tikanga Māori ceremony for both significant events and every-day practices, regularly saying karakia before meetings and shared meals, and singing waiata at pōwhiri.”

“Recently, after a colleague’s sudden death, Keri and our kaumātua conducted a cleansing ceremony, which many found comforting, appreciating the opportunity to formally acknowledge her loss,” says Robyn.

“The regular use of karakia and ceremonies are ways our organisation shows we value tikanga Māori and how, with leadership, Māori knowledge can be shared and applied in mainstream settings. The karakia and waiata have helped form our organisation identity, bringing us together across different offices.”



Several employees have extended their own individual journey with tikanga Māori, in the workplace and beyond. Two employees, including one non-Māori, are being trained to present Te Reo Hāpai, the mental health glossary Keri created. Presenting Te Reo Hāpai will increase their knowledge of te reo Māori and their visibility within the sector as individuals knowledgeable of tikanga Māori.

Another non-Māori employee initiated and runs weekly waiata practices in the Auckland office. Last year she completed a course focusing on tikanga and Māori history, giving her more insight into a Māori worldview. This year she is embarking on a Level 5: NZQA course with Te Wānanga O Raukawa.

Many employees have made changes in their home lives. One employee found new confidence to support her Māori child to attend his iwi reunion at a marae without her Māori partner. Another now feels more confident talking to her grandchildren whose first language is te reo Māori.

Many more employees are also making a point of introducing their children to basic te reo Māori and tikanga to help ensure the next generation has a more accurate understanding of colonisation’s role in the history of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Having Keri in the Paeārahi role has also benefited Te Pou externally in several ways. It’s more visible throughout the mental health, addiction and disability sectors as an organisation that supports te reo Māori and the status of Māori people as the tangata whenua of Aotearoa New Zealand. This visibility allows the organisation to better engage with, and sometimes partner with, kaupapa Māori organisations.

A final example of this initiative’s benefit is the creation of a new role, Kanorau Pasifika, manager for diversity and Pacific leadership. The Kanorau Pasifika role directly resulted from the Paeārahi role modelling.

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