



whakakotahi



Waitomo District proves that change is possible when a community unites for its young people.

Approaching Te Kūiti in the late afternoon, a radio station crackles to life with a stream of hard-case wisecracks in English and Te Reo.

Two young radio hosts rib each other, swap notes on King Country athletics and the upcoming Warriors match, before

Kiwi reggae band Katchafire starts to shake the speakers.

This is Maniapoto FM's afternoon Taiohi show – “the best korero, latest gossip and hottest soundz” – hosted by high school students Te Hua and Ngamira.

Training the young people on the job is Maniapoto FM's way of providing

opportunities for local rangatahi, as well as giving Te Kūiti youth a voice in the community.

It's just one of several youth-focused projects that have emerged since the small rural town two years ago embarked upon a government-backed trial to do better for local young people.



Te Kūiti's new youth council with Hilary Karaitiana (right of centre)

the go-between

Turning into Te Kūiti's main street, the leader of the youth-focused Social Sector Trial adjusts the volume on the car radio.

HILARY KARAITIANA's official title is Social Sector Trial Manager, but she's "aunty" to young people and "Hils" to nearly everyone else.

Seeing a couple of teenagers wandering down the main street, Hilary grins mischievously, hangs out her elbow out the window and slumps down in her seat. As she cruises past, she acknowledges the kids with a perfect deadpan lift of the chin, winning a laugh and a "hey aunty!"

It's a perfect illustration of the way she moves between worlds. Hilary reports directly to Government Ministers and works on high level strategy with both government officials and local leaders. But she also has a grassroots approach that keeps it real for the young people who are the focus of the Social Sector Trial.

From the Mayor and iwi leaders to 14-year-olds in gang colours, building relationships is the heart of a big-picture plan that is widely agreed to be a breath of fresh air for the small community and its young people.

Since 2011, Hilary has co-ordinated and connected the youth-focused resources of

Te Kūiti's community and government agencies into a number of teamed-up projects. The overall goal is to reduce truancy, youth crime, use of alcohol and drugs, and get more kids engaged in education, training or work.

Funding comes from the Ministries of Social Development, Education, Justice, Health and the NZ Police. But government officials do not dictate how the community is to achieve the results they're after.

That is set out in the Te Kūiti Youth Action Plan, created with input from the community and young people, led by Hilary and overseen by a local advisory group. The group includes the Mayor, iwi leaders, the high school principal, police, community social services, training providers, a church pastor and youth representatives.

"We took a more expansive view of how we can work together," says Hilary. "We asked, what are the barriers? It might be that between us all, the solution is here."

behind the statistics

On her way between a catch-up with the Police and a chat with the Mayor, Hilary takes a quick detour into residential streets, stopping at a house where a once-cared-for garden is losing a battle with weeds.

"Just came see how you're going," she says to the young man and his girlfriend who emerge from the back door. "Got stuff to eat? Doing OK?"

The oldest son – still in his teens – supports his siblings by working at the local meatworks. Hilary helped him find the job through Work and Income. With a provider in the house the teenage family is better off than many, but they're young with no parent.

Waitomo district is one of the most socio-economically deprived areas of New Zealand, where hardship is compounded by rural isolation. There is no public transport system and the average wage is \$21,300.

In 2006 there were 4,419 people living in Te Kūiti, including 780 10 to 19-year-olds:

- » Nearly three in 10 young people come from a sole parent family.
- » More than four in 10 leave school with no qualification.
- » Only two in 10 go on to tertiary education.
- » Teen pregnancy rates are double the national average, and young people are twice as likely to be referred to mental health services.
- » Compared to others in New Zealand, Te Kūiti's young people are more likely to live in poor quality housing, have health issues and a low income in the future.



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It might be that between us all, the solution is here.”

Iwi Liaison Officer Steve Rickards, Youth Aid Officer Jacky Fitzgerald, youth mentor Erin Pye and Social Sector Trial manager Hilary Karaitiana.

Generations of joblessness, low education, a strong gang culture, alcohol and drug addiction, domestic violence and cultural dislocation lead people to expect little from life and find less, says Hilary.

“Young people are not the problem. It’s the system and society and adults. When we get it right, our young people will find their potential.”

Iwi liaison officer Constable Steve Rickards agrees: “Some of our organisations have to take the blame for failing some of these kids. You have a naive 17-year-old: you find him a job 50km away, but he has no money and on the third day he stops turning up because he has no transport. So we label him for dropping out, but we have to take some responsibility for that.”

allies and supporters

It’s not that people in Te Kūiti haven’t been trying.

“We’ve tried things time and again,” says Constable Rickards, “putting money into programmes that don’t work or feel-good stuff that doesn’t last.

“Hilary’s position allows her to drive new ways of working without being bridled by a single organisation. She’s seen as a neutral party and she sees the skills that people and organisations can bring together.

“We’ve gained a group of people who are part of this community and know what’s going on, putting their hands up because they have a genuine interest in helping towards local solutions to local problems.”

Mayor Brian Hanna says until the Social Sector Trial, youth-focused funding was fragmented between organisations. “No one was accountable for making sure things actually worked. There was no local ownership and no big picture.”

Youth Aid Officer Senior Constable Jacky Fitzgerald says openness and community input from the beginning means that everyone knows the issues, what is needed, what’s going on and where they fit in.

The Police have committed to several projects in the Youth Action Plan.

Today, Truancy Officer Bill Wana is out on a fishing trip with 12 teenagers on the Alternative Education programme. Most of

the group are known to the Police, but getting police officers and other community members involved with youth activities is about building a different kind of relationship.

kids off the streets

In two years, Te Kūiti’s youth crime and truancy have fallen.

Te Kūiti Sub Area saw a 12 per cent drop in recorded crime for the 2011/12 financial year – the greatest reduction in Waikato District. Out of all apprehensions, the proportion committed by young people dropped from 30.8 per cent in 2011 to 17.3 per cent in 2012.

Only one young person has been to Youth Court since 1 January 2012 and no young people have appeared since July 2012.

The Warehouse has seen a 90 per cent reduction in youth shoplifters following a combined project with the Police. The \$45,000 this has saved has been distributed back to community groups.

Overall attendance at Te Kūiti High School has increased up to 10 per cent in some year levels.

“We’ve seen a real drop in the number of kids on the streets, as well as less crime and virtually no graffiti,” says Constable Fitzgerald.

Support from local business owners has been key. Local retailers have not only stopped selling synthetic cannabinoids, but also support a truant-free central shopping district during school hours. Retailers call if they spot young people out of school, and Police or a truancy officer takes them right back to school.

Truancy officers, schools and police work with consistent truants and their families. They’ll do home visits and seek help for families with underlying issues.

“We’re constantly talking back and forth, swapping information about the kids we’re worried about,” says Hilary.

“We’ve got this group of invisible kids. They’re not committing crime but they’re not going to school either. Their parents don’t know what to do, and many appreciate the support with their kids. A Police visit carries the authority of the law, so the kids feel compelled to take notice and often the parents lift their game too.”

personal attention

Early on in the trial, it became clear that a number of extremely high-risk kids urgently needed intensive, one-on-one help.

“Some of those kids had been disengaged for years,” says Constable Rickard. “We saw no hope for them.”

A youth mentor, Erin Pye now supports about 40 young people referred by Police, school staff, social workers and probation officers. A former gym trainer, teacher aide, adult educator, fitness tutor and mother-of-five, Erin also supports Te Kūiti’s Alternative Education programme for 12 young people.

Erin works with kids who aren’t at school or are often truant, those with a history of offending, gang affiliation or family violence, teen parents, pregnant girls, and kids with little family or whānau support.

Each young person gets personal attention – from a listening ear, advocate and coach to arranging professional alcohol and drug counselling.

“All we’ve done is put support there and find ways to build those young people, so that they start to find confidence, and realise that they can make mistakes, but they can also learn and do better.”

Seeing young people repeatedly caught and fined for unqualified driving, the Police, Erin and Hilary now help them get their driver licence. Fines are waived if they rectify the situation within a month. Otherwise, they can work their fines off through community service, instead of accumulating debts which their families will struggle to pay off.

It is hands-on, intensive work.

“Often, it means arranging everything: finding where they are, waking them up for community service, taking them to court, sitting with them at Work and Income, helping to fill out forms, practicing the tests, driving to mum’s place 12 kilometres away to get a signature.

“Some of these kids are the first members of their families to ever hold a licence. For many, it is truly the first ‘official’ achievement of their lives,” says Hilary.

opportunity

Over the back fence of Te Kūiti’s public pool the Manga-o-Kewa stream flows through



Tai Huapa: connecting the young with their cultural roots.

Te Kūiti. It's not always clean, but the stream is culturally significant and a popular swimming spot for young people who can't afford the pool fee.

Spurred to action by the rubbish in their river, young people on Te Kūiti's new youth council are working with Maniapoto Māori Trust Board to clean up the river.

The youth council was set up as part of the Youth Action Plan. Mayor Brian Hanna is actively involved. He mentors young leaders, including the youth council and rangatahi on the Tuia Māori young leaders programme.

Other projects also create opportunities to lead, grow and engage with the community.

Young people have led alcohol and drug-free campaigns and three community education events, attended by more than 200 people.

Te Kūiti High School teacher Tai Huapa and his sister Te Ingo Ngaia run kapa haka and waka ama training. It gives positive purpose, a sense of belonging, pride and reconnection with cultural roots – important given that young Māori account for the district's most worrying youth statistics.

"There are huge needs here among Māori, and we've seen some of our most dramatic and sustained changes in young people through the kapa haka and waka ama programmes," says Hilary.

In another initiative, Maniapoto FM has set up a rangatahi radio show airing every weekday to provide youth voice, training and employment.

A national pilot sports programme is underway at Te Kūiti High School, and a secondary school trade training programme has been set up.

Regular holiday programmes and activities have involved more than 780 young people.

looking ahead

It is obvious to Hilary and many of those she works with that giving local people the ability to acknowledge and respond to local needs is the answer.

"You figure out what's needed, put in resources and adapt what you're doing – of course it's going to work."

Hilary says the key is community teamwork.

Social Sector Trials

Social Sector Trials have been running in Levin, Kawerau, Te Kūiti, Taumarunui, Gore and Tokoroa since March 2011.

The goal is to trial collaborative, community-driven social services for youth. The trials aim to get better results for 12 to 18-years-olds, especially more participation in school, training and work, with less truancy, youth crime, and alcohol or drug use.

Encouraging results have seen the six existing trials extended to June 2014, and expanded to 10 more communities.

learn more

www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/initiatives/social-sector-trials/index.html

Read about Levin's Social Sector Trial

<http://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/journals-and-magazines/rise/issue-22/spotlight-on-central.html>

"We're running on the smell of an oily rag, but no matter what happens we have to continue to work together because that's the right thing to do."

She's realistic about how long it will take to see meaningful long-term change for disadvantaged young people in Te Kūiti.

"Three generations of alcohol and drug abuse, dislocation from culture, family violence, gangs and unemployment is not going to be turned around by a short trial. But we're doing what we can to turn it around for the next generation and the one after that.

"We have a lot of issues here. But we know what they are now and I am optimistic that we are building change for the next generation." 📷