

Of the 12,000 tribal members counted in the 2006 census only 10% (2,000) still live here in the Ōpōtiki Township. Strengthening the binds that tie these tribal members to the community of Ōpōtiki is as vital to our recovery as the creation of education and employment opportunities to stem the outflow of our best and most productive iwi members.

A time for reclaiming our iwi identity is upon us as we look forward and at the same time link again to the ways we once were. To begin to do this, Whakatōhea Maori Trust Board developed and implemented a Wellbeing Survey to provide a clear and concise picture of our current position and status. 750 people who whakapapa to Whakatōhea and live in the Ōpōtiki community were interviewed.

The purpose of the survey was to provide information to assist the Board to develop strategic plans to support iwi/community development in a range of areas including cultural, education, health, social and economic wellbeing. The Survey Questionnaire was developed to gather information that is relevant to our community, our place and our way of life. Not only was the survey used to learn about the issues of the community but also the strengths. In addition, people were also asked to provide their solutions. For the majority of them this was a first. Some of the responses were repeated in many of the surveys creating a predominant theme *"We love living here, but I need work, I need to support my whānau and I can't do that on the wages from kiwi fruit"*; some of the responses were unique to a people who thrive living closely connected, *"We should have one large marae for all the hapū to use – a show piece to promote our iwi"*, people had strong opinions about the way we live and 'owned' the problems, *"somehow we need to develop an awareness and pride among our Iwi to combat the continuing trend to smoke, gamble, drink, drugs and abuse. We must continue to confront why we are failing, (cigarettes go up in price so they grow more marijuana)"*.

Key to the success of the Survey was the selection of interviewers. This process of selection also provided valuable learnings. For instance, we selected people who were well known and trusted and well connected to sections of the community that we wanted to focus on. For example, to ensure we interacted with youth we selected a woman who is involved with rangatahi in the area of sports coaching, whereas to engage with older people and kaumātua we knew we had to send someone who speaks te reo Maori, and had a broad knowledge of whakapapa connections.

This process proved very successful for the results of the survey as the insights we gained into our community have been immensely valuable in providing a unique and specific picture of the way our people think and feel about the way they live. As well, this information has provided a mandate for the Board to commence strategizing for iwi transformation on culture, health, education, economic, social and environmental aspects of iwi life over the next 50 years.

The Survey has also been valuable to local people. It was the first initiative taken by the Board in a leadership role for many years and by the end of the survey people were aware that the Board had broadened their focus from one of being interested in just economic development to having an interest in the health, and social wellbeing of whānau as well. Confidence in the WMTB as an organisation with the best interest of whānau as their core purpose has increased over time since the survey was completed. More than that, those interviewed felt they were given an opportunity to not just have their say, but to be heard and to have their ideas included as part of the strategic planning for their communities and this has led to many other conversations since.

This process and these learnings reflect the call by Henare and colleagues (2011) for ways of working that derive from a Māori world view and which focus on Māori capabilities and Māori participation in their own worlds as well as within New Zealand society more broadly. All Māori people want to have good health, be well educated, live in a healthy environment, have adequate housing, have access to meaningful employment, feel secure, and have the knowledge and capacity to participate

fully in society. Typically, the approach to reporting on Māori quality of life has focused on the position of Māori compared to wider New Zealand¹.

In designing the Survey questionnaire, WMTB believed that the usual indicators of socio economic status are not only based on a deficit model but also fail to provide outcomes for wellbeing. The utilisation of inadequate measures often report false and misleading statistics which do not accurately reflect the needs of Whakatōhea whānau.

For example whānaungatanga is an integral part of the well-being of Māori, as relationships with whānau members provides support, happiness, contentment and a sense of belonging. At the presentation of findings of the Wellbeing Survey to Whakatōhea people in their hapū groups at their marae the information we provided was varied and of great interest to those who attended.

As part of that presentation we presented statistics on how many hapū members actively participated at their marae. It came as a surprise to many at the Hui that there were a large number of whānau who were no longer connected their marae, and many of them had provided the reasons for disconnection and non-participation. The immediate response was *“we need to reach out to them and make it ok for them to come back – we need them”* and *“no wonder we hardly have anyone turn up for working bees”*. We also fed back to each hapū the findings of the question *“On a scale of 1-5, 1 having no impact, and 5 having a significant impact, does your connection to your marae have an impact on your wellbeing?”* The findings showed a majority of people rated this question ‘high - significant impact’.

By developing and implementing this survey in Iwi-led ways, **community, or in this instance, Iwi led development** has provided opportunities for whānau and hapū as well as the business sector, service industries, local government and central government agencies to sit together at the table to have conversations about what is possible for the community of Ōpōtiki. The planning conversation tables have enabled the Board to begin to build strategic and important relationships across the community and at a regional and national level. There has been wide recognition of our need to work together across the community, that no one group will achieve transformation for our community on their own and that we all have a contribution to make. Building relationships where we can learn to value each other’s contribution will take time and we are only just beginning. Even so, the survey gave us information to begin this journey and it also **created momentum** and the planning process that has been on-going since is **sustaining that momentum**.

Key learning from the Wellbeing Survey:

1. Process is as important as outcomes. How you do what you do is as important as what you do. Go and ask the people – they have stories to tell, their stories are important and you can’t make a plan with them if you don’t know their stories.
2. Talking to people also reveals thoughts and ideas about what might be done differently. The solutions to our most difficult issues can be found in the people who live with the issues every day – encourage policy writers to sit with them and talk to them, and to listen.
3. When you have information that comes directly from the people that information can’t be disputed or denied but it can be manipulated so there must be integrity built into the process. Treat the people’s answers with respect – ensure confidentiality and have processes that show you value their responses – i.e. how information is stored and recorded.
4. Make sure there is support for interviewers - some of the stories interviewers will hear are hard and very sad.

¹ Te Puni Kokiri In Focus

5. Try to balance these difficult stories with questions and discussions that encourage people to dream more.
6. Employ the services of people who are well known, trusted and respected in the community. Many of the questions are personal and challenging so survey interviewers who are natural and comfortable sitting in whānau homes make the process easier and you are more assured of engagement for the whole interview.
7. It's important to have regular communication about the survey in the local paper and on local radio as it is being carried out so that people are familiar with it and know what surveyors are talking about when they contact them for an interview – this is what helped give the survey mana.
8. Share the findings – we went out to the marae and reported many of the findings that were relevant to those whānau groups. Keep going back out to people and keep them updated on what is happening with the information and how it is being used – people appreciate being kept in the loop. Present to all the stakeholders. People then have a sense of the process belonging to them.
9. Have a poroporoaki at the end of the survey project – a time of closure of one process and the beginning of another, it's time to acknowledge everyone's contribution and say thank you.
10. There are a number of organisations who will request the final document – we decided to prepare short reports on parts of the analysis but have not made the whole document freely available. The research belongs to Te Uri o te Whakatōhea. .

The Board recently sat together over three days to develop a new vision, purpose and strategic goals for the development of their people.

BOARD VISION:

"Ko te kai hoki ki Waiaua"

"To be the food bowl that feeds the world"

BOARD PURPOSE:

"Ki te whakarangatira I ngā uri o Whakatōhea".

"To lift our nation, to grow and invest in the wellbeing of our people."

The planning process is on-going, due for completion in 2012. Implementing the high level strategic goals will require changes in systems, a changing of the old guard to ensure leadership is the right fit for the way forward and a lot of open communication.

Key Contact:

Louisa Erickson
Iwi Social Services Manager
Whakatōhea Maori Trust Board
07 3156150 0276675553
Louisa.erickson@Whakatōhea.co.nz

Story by Louisa Erickson, 2012.