



Matariki 2011.

Initiative: Matura

Theme: Building Community

Finding common ground through celebration recognises the unique aspects of Matura, and has also grown trust and respect across formally polarised local groups, including gang members and school teachers.

Gathering community conversations together can be a key part of community development and an opportunity arose early in 2011 to help foster and strengthen a relationship between the local school and marae. This marae is unusual in that it was created to provide a traditional space for all North Island iwi within the Ngai Tahu rohe (territory).

In recognition of this, Matariki (which is traditionally a North Island celebration) was chosen as the focus for bringing together the marae and local primary school. This occurred after a discussion about why Matariki is only celebrated in the North and how it would be awesome to celebrate the occasion. It seemed a natural progression to invite the Matura Kohanga Reo (not affiliated to the marae and is part of the national organisation, www.kohanga.ac.nz) to join the organising of such a celebration and a conversation of excitement sprung from there.

Working together, all three organisations became one dynamic organising group of people! Each group contributed what they would like to achieve with such a day to the discussion and the common goal was to bring the children together to celebrate New Zealand culture through Matariki. Conversation quickly became action as powhiri, storytelling, songs, art and sharing kai all become key activities and, because the school had never visited the marae before, it was unanimous that the celebration would be hosted on the marae.

Roles were divided, local businesses engaged and all three organisations utilised their networks to create a large workforce of helpers. Many hands made much lighter work and all three organisations seamlessly worked together with the marae taking the lead in coordinating everyone. The children spent the weeks leading up to the event creating artwork to decorate the whareniui and a week before the celebration they came to the Marae to practise their songs and show.

On the actual day our local gang – the Mongrel Mob - was the labour force to both lay and serve the hangi (meal). Our nannies told stories and the elders beamed at both the young energy entering the

Marae to sing and dance and the wider community supporters who had the opportunity to be welcomed to the Marae often for the first time. New relationships were formed, old relationships rekindled and a strong network was formed between the Marae, Primary School and Kohanga Reo.

While these outcomes were somewhat expected, especially once the organisation took off, other unexpected outcomes were the new relationships formed between the teaching staff and our local fathers, particularly among the gang members. These men were in fact all fathers of students but had not been to the school for any meetings or events and generally had a poor view of general education, based on their own personal experiences. The preparation before the Matariki event was completed at the marae the day before and all the helpers shared a meal together after their work. This provided an opportunity for these fathers and teachers to meet each other and build new relationships in a social context where they were all working together to provide great experiences for the children and no one group had overarching power and control.

Whilst in 2012 Matariki has been celebrated at a lower key than last year, the relationships continue to grow and new alliances have formed. The school had tried to encourage a whanau advisory group to assist the school and the Board of Trustees in prior years with little success. This year an invitation resulted in a great response and a strong group of parents attended a whanau workshop to help the school improve this aspect of its curriculum. As school professionals and whanau had already laid the foundation of trust through Matariki in 2011, the workshop produced great feedback, compliments and suggestions as to what will be beneficial for the future.

Also, creating a strong alliance between the two educational providers in our community, and now having both underpinned by local marae support, has resulted in stronger collaboration, a greater pool of shared resources and most importantly strengthened trust. This trust comes from a common desire across the entire community for only the best opportunities and happiness for our children and, now, to always work together to achieve this.

Intent: to develop a mutually beneficial relationship between the local kohunga, school and marae.

Key Learnings:

- Always ask questions: you never know where it will lead
- Never assume – just because it is expected that the education system is aligned with our cultural heritage does not mean it has occurred. In this case, the primary school had never been invited to the Marae before.
- Many hands make light work and even across what may seem to be quite different groups, there is often common ground.

Key Outcomes:

- Strengthened relationships across several groups in our community: Children bring everyone together. Maori culture decrees that the menfolk of those most affected need to put down and serve the hangi. In this case that brought parents who were formerly alienated from both marae and education settings into a mutually beneficial group that continues to work together one year on.

- An entire community learnt more about the uniqueness of its own marae and its collaborative iwi (multi tribal) executive).
- Stereotypes and presumptions were able to be reconsidered and diversity was embraced by working beside each other

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Story by Jo Brand.

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