Leadership and Learning: Ōpōtiki's first Computers in Homes Project

Initiative: Whakatōhea Maori Trust Board
Theme: Leading in and with Whakatōhea and communities

It's well known that at conferences it is often the chance meetings that broker new connections and opportunities. So it proved at Victory Village Forum in 2011 for Whakatōhea Maori Trust Board and Computers in Homes. Now new leaders are emerging alongside new skills and more widely available technology.

The importance of a skilled and work-ready community is vital for Ōpōtiki and the Eastern Bay of Plenty as aquaculture, tourism and other regional economic strategies progress. Connectivity is a key part of this and computer skills are a "must have" for so much of the training and employment that is emerging.

While children get some access to computers at school, for many Ōpōtiki families there are not computers in the home and families cannot easily support their children's on-line learning or advance their own skills. Thanks to a chance meeting over dinner at Victory Village in mid 2011, Whakatōhea leaders Danny Paruru and Louisa Erickson of Whakatōhea Maori Trust Board got talking with Di Das, the Chief Executive of Computers in Homes . They shared a passion about whānau and family-centred learning and development, and explored how they could work together to bring Computers in Homes to Whakatōhea and Ōpōtiki.

Computers in Homes works through low decile schools and aims to bring technology coupled with the relevant training, skills and support to families. With the skills and confidence to use technology, parents are able to connect with their children's learning. As a result, Computers in Homes helps to strengthen relationships between families and schools, improve education outcomes for children and provide greater opportunities for their parents.

Once the logistics were arranged, the question of leadership of the inaugural programme came to the fore. Louisa reflects "We needed someone who had the technical knowledge and skills, and who could most importantly relate well to the families and encourage them to join in, and stay. They needed to be really sensitive to where each whānau was at with their learning, and how best to awhi them. And they also needed to be clear and firm about whānau completing the work in order to qualify, and support them to remain focussed."

"I thought of someone I know well, "Louisa says," He'd recently finished his own training in computers at our Whakatōhea Training Unit, and was looking for 'what next'. I really doubted that he'd say yes, because he has always been a shy person himself and hadn't taken leadership positions in the past. However, to my delight, he said yes! He really stepped up! I'm so glad that I asked."

Tona Titoko led the course and kept everyone engaged. Nineteen whānau graduated after 20 hours of tuition. This is really significant, not only because whānau now have recognised new skills but also because with successful course completion comes the opportunity of a free computer in the home, with free internet access and technical support for twelve months. For many families this is their first ever computer in the home and as such it offers an opportunity for upskilling everyone. School age children can access help with their homework, research for school projects and enhance their emerging computer skills. Adults can also improve their own skills, gain access to information, and connect with whānau living away from Ōpōtiki.

Says Louisa again, "It was so moving being at the graduation. Graduates are leaders in their own whānau – putting their hand up and learning something new that can bring so many benefits. For many, this was their first ever certificate and graduation. They will go on to do such great things. And for Tona, he now knows he is a leader, and a great teacher. He can go on and use his new skills and abilities in other situations."

Key Intent:
To enhance connectivity and computer skills of whānau.

Key Learnings:
- Conferences offer all sorts of opportunities to connect with those outside our regular spaces and this can bring new perspectives and partnerships into existence too.
- Creating opportunities within our networks for less likely leaders to emerge in a supported way builds personal capacity and capability that strengthens our communities as well as those individuals.
- Taking a holistic approach by including wider whānau plus the donation of computer hardware and support for a year helps to embed having a computer and the world wide web in homes as a 'new normal'
- Encouraging reflection about what is being learned as things are implemented, helps to ensure learnings from the process are used in future initiatives

Key Outcomes:
- Nineteen more whānau in Ōpōtiki have computers in their homes, along with new computer skills and are connected to the world wide web.
- Whānau have experienced success in learning and received recognition through their certificate. In many cases this was for the first time.
- Whānau can be more connected to what their children are learning and children can share and be supported in both their learning and their computer skills at home.
- Adults in these whānau now have more of the skills that are needed to participate in the growing local economy and may also pass on these skills to others they know.
- Leadership skills and abilities are clearly valued and nurtured.

Key Contact:
Louisa Erickson, Iwi Social Services Manager, Whakatōhea Maori Trust Board
Louisa.Erickson@Whakatōhea.co.nz

Story by Louisa Erickson and Barbara MacLennan. **May 2012**