

**From Evidence to Action : The Future of Whānau Ora**  
**Hon Dame Tariana Turia**  
**10 April 2018; 2.30pm**

On this day, at this hour, fifty years ago the Wahine sunk as the ship succumbed to one of the worst storms in our nation's history. Peak wind gusts tore through the lower North Island; victims were driven against sharp rocks by the waves, fifty one lives were lost that day. We remember them.

At home in Whangaehu, our sacred marae and church house were swept away, consigned to a pile of memories. Our sanctuary was decimated; taken from us by the cruellest force of nature.

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On this 10 April, as we prepare to dismantle the infrastructure known as SUPERU, it is apt to spend a moment in time recognising the notion of loss and its impact on whānau.

Our whānau endure the most savage consequences of adverse events – earthquakes, cyclones, flooding, droughts. They live through the worst impacts of global financial crisis, of wars against humanity, of policy and legislative change, decisions which rob them of land, of identity, of a sense of belonging.

In the scale of damage done, the dis-establishment of SUPERU, pales into comparison. It is after all just one item in a chronology of political changes that happen to whānau.

But there are similarities in understanding resilience – that ability to turn adversity to advantage.

The key is in understanding how to retain the stories. For us that is the learnings that came from the Social Policy Evaluation and Research Unit and before that the Families Commission over the last decade. And so today, in looking forward at the future of whānau Ora, I am always mindful that the past informs our present.

Fifty years ago, we picked ourselves up, rebuilt our marae, using an ancient technique of rammed-earth construction. Rangitāhuahua was opened by the late Matiu Rata in August 1985.

It would be wonderful to say our tribal whare was never again to suffer the perils of earth, wind, fire and water. But in 2004 and 2006 we were struck by massive floods; swallowing within its wake whole houses; the community battered by massive land and economic loss. This time when we recovered, we built a flood wall to surround our marae. Ten thousand concrete blocks plastered into place.

But it was not the bricks and mortar that were our greatest source of strength through this time. It was the renewed vigour we had to look to each other; to rely on whānau for strength. We started to rebuild ourselves – to relearn old waiata, to hold wananga; to cherish the tupuna portraits we had saved, to build a stronger base for survival.

We reminded ourselves that our whakapapa tells us what our tupuna were; and that memory guides us towards resilience and restoration.

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In a paper by our wonderful Families Commissioner and Chair, Len Cook, he points out that without the protection of whakapapa, the enduring cross-generational connections to others and to the land are lost.

The paper, **an evidence spectrum for social services policy, practice and trust**, tells us:

*“The depth of whanaungatanga is generally ignored in policy.*

*Whānau and whakapapa are about people and place, and embrace matters of either, including urban planning and housing. Communal style living still has a place for some whānau, which can complicate aspects of contemporary life.*

*Whānau members are inherently mobile, which is more difficult for later generations. These characteristics of whānau are generally not detectable from long standing sources including the census”.*

Len concludes that too much of what we currently know as policy, minimises the value of whānau as a multi-faceted source of wellbeing.

Our institutions fail to appreciate the strong bonds of connection between whakapapa and social, cultural, economic and environmental concern, as well as in matters of justice.

So when SUPERU winds up, how do we retain the role we have played as an independent advocate for the interests of whānau; how do we keep the scrutiny about the value of whānau current in every agenda?

We know that the new government targets **children** as its policy focus – it seeks to address child poverty, to have a strategy on child wellbeing, to concentrate on Oranga Tamariki. Nobody would deny that our tamariki should not be an important focus in our lives. But I have three particular questions with this:

- What children are the focus?
- What solutions are being proposed?
- Where do whānau fit within a child-centred model.

In the first question, **what children are the focus**, Len Cook always reminds us of the care needed to examine the data that we can rely on to build our case. In short, we cannot devise credible options for children without having all the insights and tools that you need to make evidence-based decisions.

Len has shared research from Emily Keddell, which cautions against using administrative records of **past** children to identify screening characteristics that predict individual **future** need.

The three most significant predictors for child protection were described as:

- length of time spent on a benefit;
- contact with Child, Youth and Family as a child;
- and the substantiation of other children in the family.

Given that Māori and Pasifika families generally have larger family sizes, such a prediction model automatically has a bias towards assigning higher risk identities to Māori and Pasifika children. A mono-cultural policy lens will miss the obvious.

What works for some families with an individualistic, independent view of the world isn't the same as for collectivist, inter-dependent families. This represents challenges to policymakers and for the delivery of services.

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In the second question, **what solutions are being proposed**, I look for a case in point, at the breakdown of funding that Oranga Tamariki is investing to support its focus on children.

While we are frequently told that up to 65% of children in care are Māori, it is interesting that over one third of the funding in Oranga Tamariki is spent with just nine providers – not one who are defined as a kaupapa Māori entity.

These organisations – Youth Horizons Trust, Stand for Children, Open Home, Barnardos and the like – receive close to ninety million a year. The Family Start programme itself has an annual budget of over forty million dollars.

Meanwhile, one would be hard pressed to find much evidence over the last three years of investment being made into Whānau Ora from Child, Youth and Family; or more recently Oranga Tamariki.

Perhaps that would be a good project for someone to explore: what is the dollar amount and percentage of total funding that is being currently invested in our three Whānau Ora Commissioning Agencies from Health, Education, the Justice Sector, Social Development, Social Housing, Social Investment, Youth Development, Oranga Tamariki.

To paraphrase hip-hop artist Scribe, not many, if any.

Whānau Ora was designed to receive support through mainstream government agencies, but sadly this has not yet materialised.

No incentives were put in place for mainstream agencies to change their approach to align with Whānau Ora, and they appear to have made little attempt to do so.

Across government agencies, other than Te Puni Kōkiri, it would not yet appear that the transformational potential of Whānau Ora is being supported in cross-sectoral investment.

And this is where I get to my third question, **Where do whānau fit within a child-centred model?**

In 2012, I launched a report for the Families Commission, *Te Pumautanga o te whānau*. One of the stories from the Kamau whānau encapsulates the vital context of whānau in keeping every child safe. The whānau said in that report:

*“Resilience, I suppose, is what we are all about. We survive because it’s how we are brought up. We take for granted all that the whānau does for us, believing that it’s a natural thing. As a whānau, we all put our resources together, when times are tough, and that’s the main thing; knowing and understanding one another helps.”*

The evidence that whānau have both obligations and responsibilities towards nurturing our children as the centre of their universe is well documented – through Puaote-ata-tu; through He Korowai Oranga and of course through Whānau Ora.

More recently, there has been review after review, of this evidence from Whānau Ora.

I remind us that Whānau Ora came into life on 8 April 2010, just over eight years ago. Since that time we have endured a constant stream of parliamentary questions; independent reviews to Cabinet; evaluations; research; and the persistent appetite of the media for a juicy storyline. I would suggest that more than any other Government policy, Whānau Ora has been the subject of an intense scrutiny that is hard to justify.

In its election campaign last year, Labour also joined the conga line, announcing yet another review.

So what is the future for Whānau Ora?

Let’s look at what we already know:

In 2015, Lyn Provost the Controller and Auditor General concluded:

*“Whānau Ora has been a success for many families who now have a plan to improve their lives. For example, some whānau are working towards getting their young people living and working on their ancestral land. The government spending to achieve this has been small, but the importance for the whānau is significant”.*

Also in 2015, the Productivity Commission was very supportive of Whānau Ora as an evolving approach.

During the first four years of Whānau Ora, we moved from a focus on building whānau-centred social services to a focus on building whānau capability to be self-managing. Whānau Ora in essence, is about taking back control and responsibility. That means, it starts with whānau.

The Commission found that Whānau Ora embodies concepts important to Māori and holds much promise to tackle long-standing issues for improving Māori wellbeing and mana whakahaere.

It described the characteristics of Whānau Ora as able to promote support to whānau with multiple, complex needs and aspirations. Its kaupapa Māori orientation is especially important because of its development approach, its focus on empowering whānau and because it acknowledges the cultural significance of wellbeing for Māori.

So we come back full circle, to the legacy of SUPERU; the definitions of wellbeing, and how we can ensure that whānau are at the centre of all policy and decision making.

How do we draw on the richness of Te Kupenga to understand data that recognises whānau? What can we learn from Whānau Ora to appreciate whānau as a multi-faceted source of wellbeing?

We all know that government too frequently introduces approaches which reinforce deficits for Māori and ignore the strengths and opportunities that exist within whānau to create change for themselves.

The proper recognition of whānau in policy terms requires not only having whānau recognised as a distinct analytical entity in information sources, but acknowledging their characteristics in the design. That is, rather than being **done to** (as a result of knowing the data) the preference is for whānau to **do for themselves**, on their own terms, driven by their motivations, inspired by their whakapapa, and able to succeed because we place trust in whānau at the point of delivery.

Our former Chief Executive Clare Ward summarised that what works for whānau is being able to have their situation considered as a whole, with the whānau - not a government agency - at the centre. In this process, we shouldn't just focus on risk. Resilience is critical - it is a process and can be built and supported.

Finally, I want to say that best practice means allowing whānau to drive changes, engage in their own solutions and become empowered.

I know only too well that this has been difficult for government to do.

Trusting people to find solutions for their own lives requires an absolute belief in Māori. It is also about dismantling the reliance we have on others; for whānau to restore confidence in ourselves.

But we must be clear, that while the state has a duty to create an optimal environment in which people can do for themselves, **the most enduring answers lie within whānau** not the Social Investment Unit or Treasury or any other organ of the State.

We do expect Government agencies to pull their weight in a coordinated and sustainable way; to enable whānau, hapu and iwi partnership in design, delivery and evaluation of social services. Whānau Ora has challenged the way agencies work, forcing them to rethink their approach; and to provide much better services for our whānau to access.

There are risks associated with emphasising agency performance measures and efficiency rather than the experiences and perspective of citizens; the lives of whānau.

In his letter to the new Minister for Social Development, our Chair warned Minister Sepuloni that there are :

*“cases where an agency-focus has given agencies and their Ministers a false sense of confidence in the quality and relevance of the services being provided.*

*One serious consequence is that the means by which ordinary citizens can hold government to account have reduced, resulting in a potential loss of trust in government itself”.*

I am proud of the challenges SUPERU has championed; I am grateful to have sat alongside of some great thinkers and activists in this work; and when it comes time to turn off the lights and shut up shop, we can be thankful that we have a significant archive of research and reports which can help strengthen the evidence that appears to be required for the power of whānau to be recognised.

My thoughts this afternoon has emphasised that evidence is not just a matter of infographs and analysis; powerpoints highlighting trends in data points.

Evidence is also built from whakapapa; from trust and faith; from listening to the stories of whānau.

And most importantly of all, actions built from evidence, must be created by those who have most to benefit from the change process – the whānau themselves.

Whānau Ora shows us all that you can be collective and achieve individual gain; that you can be intergenerational and build a strong future; that you can be outcomes focused while still addressing need.

It shows us we can rebuild and restore; that our histories help us to heal; that our legacy creates a platform from which to learn.

Resilience is an asset; results are strongest when they are locally owned; and the greatest risk to our ongoing future prosperity is if government fails to grasp the opportunity that Whānau Ora offers to place all our whānau at the centre of our world.