

Whānau Ora Review - Tipu Matoro ki te Ao

Final report to the Minister for Whānau Ora, released 20 February 2019

A summary of the review prepared by Tui Ora, New Plymouth, Taranaki

What is Whānau Ora (WO)?

It is a cultural approach to the way services are provided that is shaped by Māori culture, traditions and heritage. At heart it empowers whānau to decide for themselves the way they receive services that often start with health and social services but extend into a range of other services such as education, justice, physical activity/recreation.

It is aspirational and strengths based, which means considering what is 'right' about a family/whānau – what their strengths are, what they aspire to – rather than what is wrong and needs to be fixed by health professionals or 'experts.' This model is called the deficit model and in the past, has tended to dominate the way health, social services and many other agencies view people – the clients, patients etc.

Whānau Ora is not one programme or service but a way of providing a range of services or an approach – a way of doing things. It puts whānau at the centre of services and addresses individual needs within the context of the whānau. It also recognises that some whānau deal with multiple challenges that can compound, creating complex, intertwined situations.

There is a difference between a client-centred approach and a whānau approach. The latter has a stronger cultural relevance. Also, it considers the broader needs or aspirations of a client or whānau. For example, a man with diabetes may be referred to a fitness trainer to help manage his weight. But in his house, whānau may also be dealing with a young person not at school, lack of a vehicle, a cold home, income deficit (low or no income), learning/literacy issues and an elderly relative who can't eat well because of poor teeth. The man's physical activity may be the least of his worries.

When was WO established?

It began in 2010 and has had two phases. Phase one was about designing and building the whānau-centred approach and putting in place organisations (the providers) to provide services.

The second phase, begun in 2014, led to the development of three Commissioning Agencies. There is one for the North Island (Te Pou Matakana), one for the South Island (Te Pūtahitanga o Te Waipounamu) and one supporting Pasifika families.

These agencies commission organisations to provide a range of services. They have flexibility and are designed to bring decision making closer to communities.

Other bodies are involved in Whānau Ora including the Minister for WO, the WO Partnership Group (Iwi-Crown membership) and Te Puni Kokiri (administering agency for WO).

Despite some misconceptions that it is a Māori and Pasifika-specific intervention, WO is available to all New Zealanders.

How does it work?

There are seven agreed outcomes or targets for everyone (providers, commissioning agencies) to work towards.

How it is implemented varies across the country, but broadly speaking in the North Island (the area covered by Te Pou Matakana) it works by:

- Funding staff called navigators (Kaiārahi or Kaiāwhina) who help whānau navigate through health, social service and other agencies or services. These staff work alongside whānau as they make whānau plans that cover aspects such as goal-setting, actions to take and milestones.
- Providing specific funds such as Whānau Direct which support whānau to meet a range of expenses that will help them make long-term sustainable changes – anything from dental treatment and tools for education, to vehicle repairs and home insulation.
- Focused projects such as Collective Impact projects which bring in a range of partners to work in an intensive manner with specific communities.

Has Whānau Ora worked?

The review report completed in November 2018 and released last week, said the commissioning approach is changing things positively for whānau. It says: “In all areas we visited, and across all monitoring reports we reviewed, we have seen whānau progress towards achieving their self-identified priorities.”

However, the phase two approach is only four years old and the report noted it is too early to say whether or not that positive change will be enduring.

What makes it successful? The report said the following features of the model make it successful:

- It is culturally anchored, whānau-centred and strengths based.
- It is flexible with Commissioning Agencies, partners, providers and whānau entities working on issues important to them.
- It is supported by a range of parties.
- It is supported by a passionate and committed workforce.

What makes it less successful – what are the Whānau Ora challenges?

- The Commissioning Agencies cover large geographical areas and more local options could be considered. This includes reaching into rural and deprived populations.
- There is a certain extent of reinventing the wheel as each agency invests in “bespoke administrative arrangements”.
- Demand outstrips funding and resources – in some areas providers spend time on short term, crisis based issues which diverts them from the core of WO – building strong and resilient whānau with long-term aims.
- Building understanding among government agencies about the WO story – what it is, how it works and how agencies can work with WO (partly because the Commissioning Agencies measure the outcomes differently meaning each ‘story’ is different).
- Increasing the uptake of government agencies because of the above.
- Central government agencies that are opting out of their responsibilities.

What were the review's other findings?

It was asked to consider the accountability and transparency of the commissioning model. It found a significant and formal accountability regime and made the point that “there is a disproportionate level of external scrutiny applied to Whānau Ora.” Over the years there have been at least four reviews including one by the office of the Auditor-General, one from the Productivity Commission and this ministerial review.

While many checks and balances are in place, the review recommended more “downward transparency” – making the criteria, rationale and processes for decision-making more visible to partners, providers and whānau.

The review was also asked: Is a whānau-centred approach more widely applicable across Government? It reviewed other reports on social investment (including those from overseas) and said there were features of WO that aligned closely with the success identified in these other reports.

“We therefore are of the view that there is potential for whānau-centred approaches to be applied more widely across government”.

There were two ways this could be done:

1. Embed reference to, and requirements about, whānau-centred approaches through existing channels or government “levers”. These include: the 2019 Wellbeing Budget, strategies and legislation being developed to support NZers wellbeing, completing a whānau-centred policy framework for use across government, embedding whānau-centred approaches within the NGO sector, improving quality and availability of data about whānau.
2. By a “culture shift” within government. The review recommended Te Puni Kōkiri work with agencies and address perceived barriers.

Other relevant points about WO delivery in Taranaki?

- Tui Ora is one of the Whānau Ora providers in Taranaki. The other is Tu Tama Wahine.
- In our organisation WO has evolved over the years. We have a Whānau Ora team and a range of navigator staff (called Kaiārahi and Kaiāwhina) who work intensely with whānau as well as those of specific age brackets e.g. Mothers and babies in the Whānau Hāpai service.
- We also receive funding from Te Pou Matakana for other initiatives such as Whānau Direct and Collective Impact projects.
- However, most of our funding comes from other sources (such as the Ministry of Health) which stifles some of the flexibility that whānau-centred approaches offer. We also note that funding constraints in other areas eg in government agencies, mean people tend to concentrate on specific issues rather than overall-system wide issues. Access is therefore channelled or directed in a certain way.
- Last month we appointed Tamara Ruakere to a new role General Manager Whānau Ora to ensure it can be embedded across the whole organisation. Strengthening whānau wellness and quality of living is at the centre of our Strategy and Business Plan.

You can find more information and a copy of the report on Te Puni Kōkiri website

<https://www.tpk.govt.nz/en/whakamahia/whanau-ora-review>

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