

For the Kaupapa!

A Te Arawa māmā's perspective on unpaid mahi

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3 December 2019

He mātātoa!

Kei te aha tatau i tēnei wiki mutunga māmā?

Māmā – What are we doing this weekend?

Ka haere ki tētehi mātātoa taku tāriini.

We are going on an adventure my darling

Oooh ki hea māmā?

Ooooooh where to?

Ki te marae mō tētehi hui!

To the marae for a hui!

Kaaaaaooooooooo māmā! He hui anoouou? Kāore i te hiahia tētehi hui anō! Ehara tera I te matātoa! I hui kē tatau inanahi!

Noouou! Another hui? I don't want to go to another hui! That's not an adventure! We have already been to a hui yesterday!

Āe tētehi hui anō....

Yip - another hui

This is an actual conversation I had with my daughter (Maraea, 5) last weekend.

It's AGM (Annual General Meeting) season here in Te Arawa. This means that every weekend from October through to early December my husband and I drag our babies along to hui for our land trusts, post settlement governance entities, marae trusts and social and education trusts for multiple iwi (tribes) around Te Arawa .

These hui (meetings) are an important (and sometimes the only) forum for iwi to attend, receive financial reports and listen to the highlights and low lights of the year. After that, we ask questions, we signal to the governors in the trusts what our needs and focuses are for whatever job that trust is responsible for.

Then there are the trusts we are trustees for -at these hui we present to our iwi, we answer questions and we show our people how we have progressed in the last year. And you know what? It's actually super cool - an honor and a privilege to serve in these roles.

For the kaupapa

For me, the roles I have within my iwi are unpaid. And where some of our trusts are in a position to remunerate their trustees, I can confidently say it doesn't cover the true value of the mahi (work) our governors do, serving our people. But we don't really use the term 'unpaid' work here. We usually say 'for the kaupapa'. Which means we do this mahi because it's important to the iwi and often if we don't, there are serious risks to our way of life.

Especially the work our koeke (elders) hunga pākaiahi (those who are responsible for maintaining our presence on our lands and marae and feeding our guests) and our paepae (orators bench) do for our iwi every day.

For the kaupapa!

That hui life

So while other kids are off riding their bikes or swimming - mine are often in the corner of their whare tipuna (meeting house) with their coloring books, 'helping' set tables in the wharekai (dining hall) or playing 'pepa kutikuti toka hiiiiii!' (paper scissors rock) outside with their cousins. Except my middle boy, Justin. He's 3. More often than that he's perched at a bench in the kitchen, eating fresh fried bread as quickly as his nannies can make it.

Ok. So maybe it isn't all too bad for our kids.

Then after each hui, we take our tired grumpy babies home, we mow lawns, make dinners, fold washing and prepare for our actual day jobs.

My electric marriage

Now, after the kids go to bed, that's when the magic really happens in my marriage.

That's when we pull out our lap tops, plug into the electricity and sparks fly as we respond to the multitude of queries coming through to the trusts we are on, seek funding for projects, complete accountability reports, review invoices, you name it!

While I assume most couples might snuggle on a couch and talk about their days- we wānanga (strategize) and we find ways to fund projects that will create a better Aotearoa, a better world for our tamariki mokopuna (children and grandchildren).

Mokopuna decisions

And that's the kaupapa right there. We are all working to make a better world for our tamariki mokopuna.

It's called mokopuna decisions. A term coined by my whanaunga (relation), Rāwiri Bhana to explain how every decision we make needs to be for the betterment of our grandchildren - Mokopuna decisions has become a movement, a call to action for us here in Te Arawa to strive for the best for our tamariki- a world better than what we have.

And the only way mokopuna decisions can be made, is together.

Together is better

Traditionally in te ao Māori we do everything collectively -with an intergenerational approach to decision-making. Our tūpuna (ancestors) collectively looked after our tamariki mokopuna, we lived together, we shared the workload and we valued each others contributions. And if you didn't contribute- well- I guess you weren't as attractive an option to join your whakapapa line with!

I guess that's where this whakatauki (proverbial saying) comes from...

Aitia te wahine i roto i te pā harakeke (Marry a woman of the flax bush).

This whakatauki essentially recommends that you look for a hardworking industrious woman to join your whakapapa. For the record we have heaps of those types of women here in Te Arawa. The challenge is finding one who can find a good work life balance!

Today - even though most of us live in colonised living structures- we still have collective responsibility to ensure the well-being of our iwi. If we don't then our whenua (land) goes uncared for, we miss commercial opportunities, and we are stuck with policies and laws that don't help us achieve equity with our non Māori counterparts. Working together and as a collective is who we are as Māori – and together is better!

I know its hard work, I know you are tired - and I appreciate you! and you! and you!

I don't know that we are good at telling our people working 'for the kaupapa' how much we appreciate them. Their hard work, their sacrifice, all for our collective good.

So. Just in case I haven't done that lately, here's my mihi (acknowledgement) to all the whānau (families) who do their day to day, then in their 'spare time' work for our collective benefit as Te Arawa - for the kaupapa.

I raise my lukewarm cup of tea (that I made about 40 minutes ago and forgot about as I was putting the kids to bed) and I say this...

- Here's to trustees all over the rohe (region) managing farms, forests and other assets just so our whānau are both sustained and can continue their relationship to their whenua – for the kaupapa.
- Here's to the wāhine (women)I know and admire who are donating their time to ensure that our trusts can continue to deliver amazing outcomes for our whānau – for the kaupapa.
- Here's to our iwi chair who got convinced to stay on one more year to continue the amazing mahi he does and his beautiful wife and whānau who are doing all the hard mahi behind the scenes to help him do it – for the kaupapa.
- Here's to my mother and father in law who created incredible pathways for me and my husband to be able to continue their legacy in governance and to my mum and dad who taught me about the importance of working hard - for the kaupapa; and
- Here's to all the māmās and pāpās like us - staying up late at night after the kids are asleep, sacrificing our adult time so that we can make sure we are contributing to our birthright and making mokopuna decisions – for the kaupapa!

Bottoms up!

How does New Zealand value working 'for the kaupapa'?

I think the first question to ask, is whether people know what unpaid work looks like for Māori – and

I hope this essay has shone a bit of light into what that looks like for some of our whānau. Most non Māori I speak with aren't aware how much we do outside of the 'normal' working day. And it's important we talk to each other. Because together is better.

Often in mainstream media we hear about terrible statistics for Māori, and mainstream NZ calls for iwi authorities to play a better role in the health and well-being of our people. Our marae have always been centers of excellence and well-being for our people. Our indigenous knowledge holds all the tools to making our people well and to making NZ well. What people may not realize is that the system is simply not set up to empower this mahi. Mainstream NZ is not yet able to value iwi intelligence. It's not unusual to be sitting around a table with people who are all paid to be there except the iwi representatives.

But we soldier on. We work for the kaupapa in areas that most mainstream organizations enjoy funding for. We do it for the kaupapa. We do it for our tamariki mokopuna. And when we look at it through this lense, it's easy to value the fruits of working 'for the kaupapa'.

Ngā hua – The fruits of our labours

This is how I value unpaid work in Te Arawa:

- Through the chatters of our tamariki mokopuna in te reo Māori as they play on their new community playground we fundraised for.
- Through the laughter of our koeke reminiscing over a cup of tea in their beautiful new wharekai the iwi worked so hard for.
- Through the karanga (calls) of the birds who are flourishing because of trapping programs in our rohe and the patter of our feet as we walk our whenua.
- Through preservation of our environment and culture fought for by previous generations- for our future generations.

All ensuring that our uri (descendants) can live with tino rangatiratanga (sovereignty).

And just like that, it's all worth it.

Ko tēnei te kaupapa.

This is the Kaupapa.