

# Raetihi Community Charitable Trust



Located under the shadow of Ruapehu, in the rohe of Ngāti Rangī and Uenuku, the Raetihi Community Charitable Trust (RCCT) is a small organisation with a community development focus. RCCT serves a local community which is 64% Māori. The trust is active in supporting the Ruapehu Whānau Transformation Project, a whole of community initiative, led by Ngāti Rangī.

The trust, by virtue of its members' values, enjoys an instinctive and practical Treaty engagement. Governance membership and decision-making can be analysed as operating under a two-house model, but this has come about without direct conversation using such terms. In this interview, Māori and Pākehā trustees reflect on relationships within the trust and in the wider community, and the potential value in documenting their approach for others to learn from and for durability. The case study emphasises that respect for values, and for Te Ao Māori, underpins effective Treaty relationships.



## **Relationships within the organisation – respect for values**

For me as Māori, coming into this organisation it was about the people in here. I've known these people for years, so I felt confident I was coming into something that was fair and equitable in terms of acknowledging and supporting Tangata Whenua, mana whenua.

We have got strong women on this Board, we are a wahine toa group, we are culturally mindful. Personal and collective values are respected; if not, we will say. We know how to communicate. We live in a small town, we've known each other for years and are part of other community stuff. Our personal values are similar within the group. Because we know each other I felt comfortable that my values would be cared for.

It is a reciprocal relationship – a true partnership that we have in terms of running this organisation. It is balanced and we all have our strengths. Tasks within the committee are assigned on the basis of strengths. We have confidence in each other, and if there is any form of breach of that, we can work together to problem solve. We are capable of correcting things if they need to be corrected and we try to do that in a mana-enhancing way. If there is a take on the table no one is uncomfortable to address it, and it is done respectfully.

Like draws like, that is why we have got to where we have as a committee. As Māori there is always that thing in the back of your mind about being dominated. The Pākehā in this group are aware of where the lines are in terms of cultural values and beliefs and they carry the relationship in balance rather than one culture dominating the other. I hope we model the Two House model. The current committee demonstrates that balance in terms of its membership. It is not formalised, it just happens.

## **An aware, instinctive approach**

As a trust our focus is on linking and bridging, and so we identified the people to do that and sought them as members. You can have all the written stuff but it might not work, you have to have the qualities to work together – an empathy for difference. We haven't thought directly and consciously about Treaty, we have been thinking about community rather than Treaty. The community needs to be represented on the Trust and we need to have connections with hapū. It is about listening carefully to Uenuku and to Ngāti Rangī.

We haven't used the language of Treaty relationships, but to be effective in the community requires living the Treaty. As a Pākehā working as an ally it is important that we remember the importance of the Treaty ourselves, it is not for Māori to remind us. And it's not about us saying, "Here is the structure, we will be nice and share it with you."

Our grandfather said to learn the way of the Pākehā to survive but hold on to your Māoritanga – to have that ability to walk in two worlds. I think that is why we have got to where we are. As Māori we are really comfortable walking in two worlds – we can hold our own. I think there are others who would be lost on this committee. Not because of how they would be treated, but they would be out of their depth. The trust operates in a taha Pākehā worldview perspective about governance – due diligence, contractual obligations, accountability to funders. It is a Pākehā structure but the way in which we operate is not – it is true partnership, based on our values and the respect that we have.

### **Relationships in the broader community**

There is diversity in our community and there are "them and us" dynamics. It is a community that is still learning how to live with each other. As a trust, if we can move those factions, we do. We try to role model within and outside of this committee.

The maunga is something that everyone can refer to, whether you are Māori or not there is that connection, that shadow which provides that belonging. This is our ūkaipō, our place to stand together, not just Māori – everyone can claim that. With the sense of that ownership and belonging we are more responsive and responsible in relation to each other.

I hope the change will be in our kids – the ability to be in both worlds. For that to be intrinsic. You see new migrants, they know more about Treaty partnership than most Pākehā. I hope it becomes part of the curriculum in school to be proud of the histories. We've got so many amazing stories from here that need to be told – so we are not just seen as war-mongering and eating each other...To stand proud. With it comes other things – not just the stories, it's about the respect and understanding our kinship. People are wanting that, we are starting to have those conversations.

There are people who talk well of specific Māori and then diss Māori in general. What does it take to shift that? It is important to learn and understand the impacts of colonisation and to move it from the individual to understanding impacts on society. Some people have no idea about the impacts of colonisation. It poses the question of how, as a group, we support the community to develop that understanding without it being imposed. We have wānanga that says "with knowledge comes responsibility". There is the responsibility to act on the knowledge you have and to share it. This trust is all about community development, about walking that road together, understanding our cultures and hopefully working to that Treaty relationship model. Do we have the strength of our convictions to take that out further – sharing this with other organisations within our community?

### **Transformation**

Colonisation has done a lot of harm and disconnected some of our whānau from who they are – we are trying to correct that. Connections and whakapapa, are important. Whānau transformation<sup>1</sup> is the big picture for us as a trust.

The Whānau Transformation Project has come out of iwi aspirations and is now supported by the community; within this group we aspire to that unity of vision and hope. The Transformation Project has

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://ruapehuwhanautransformation.com>

given shape to the vision that we had as a Trust and is the catalyst that will help us achieve our vision. It is a vehicle for change in our community. It could be that the next step is that we all sit within the Transformation Project in the future. We already are there representing our organisation but we might move closer.

### **Documenting the approach**

As a Trust we seem to have a Two-House/Treaty model of working without realising we have it. We just need to take time to sit down and document it.

Initially we didn't need to have the commitment to how we work on paper; it was organic. You can have all the paper under the sun but is it practised? Now it has come to a stage where things need to be written for succession planning, so there is clarity about the way that we operate. People are key, and things shift when they move on. For the future we have to leave a blueprint, you have to have a foundation to work from. We do have a process but it is about writing it down.

Once it is written down the blueprint is not necessarily there so that people keep on doing what we do, but rather as a starting point for them to work out what is best for them to do at that time. It is easier to change something than to start from scratch. What we are doing now might not be the best thing to do in five years' time.

As well as the wording in the constitution there would need to be person specifications, as it is about the people in these relationships – there needs to be alignment of values.