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Hokianga marae supports smokers stopping before they start

Morehu Marae has taken a stand to further ensure the survival of its descendants by becoming the first marae in Pawarenga to go auahi kore.

The committee celebrated its adoption of its auahi kore marae policy on Monday (EDITORS: Monday August 7 2017) in a bid to celebrate the health of its people and send a clear message to smokers to stop before they start.

The policy comes on the back of the successful Wero stop smoking programme implemented by Te Hiku Hauora in the community last year. Of the ten smokers who took part, seven stopped for good.

They have gone on to further support whanau in the area to stop and build an auahi kore movement within the community that is gaining steady traction, with the support of Hauora Hokianga and other Te Taitokerau smoking cessation services.

Marae secretary Rongo Bentson says the policy is a natural progression from the marae leading the charge with para kore and waipiro kore kaupapa in the past to better support the health of its people and environment.

And it's clear that the kaupapa is close to the community's heart with many marae members sharing stories of loved ones who have succumbed to smoking-related illnesses.

“For the future generation and the health of our young people – this is what the kaupapa is all about. If you don't have some measures or some level of commitment to our people that we're trying to help them, then we're failing. I'd rather fail trying than not try at all,” says marae committee member Frank Herbert.

Marae committee member Hepa Stephens says the policy has been launched as an expression of aroha with the ultimate goal of retaining the marae as a central place where good health is normal.



“We want to make our marae a place where everyone can learn our tikanga and our reo, and enjoy good health. The marae is the place for that,” he says.

The committee says there has been some preliminary resistance from some sections of the community and it is looking at ways to be sensitive and empathetic to smokers' needs while retaining the integrity of the marae policy.

But for now, it's a cause for celebration says Hauora Hokianga smoking cessation practitioner Pat Dargaville.

“This is a big thing. To have Morehu Marae be the first in Pawarenga to take up the policy is excellent. It sends a great message to whanau and the kaupapa is, do you want to stay around a bit longer for your mokos? Once again, congratulations and we're here to help if anyone wants to stop,” she says.

As a champion Te Rarawa marae, the policy is reflected in the organisational goal voiced by Te Rūnanga o Te Rarawa CEO Kevin Robinson to ensure that the organisation is totally auahi kore by the end of 2018.

Te Rūnanga o Te Rarawa, the lead provider for Healthy Families Far North, is on a continuing journey of health and wellness and an auahi kore organisation has been identified as a key goal for the organisation's 70 staff moving forward in the prevention of chronic diseases.

Healthy Families Far North kaiwhakahaere Shirleyanne Brown says Healthy Families Far North is about preventing poor health outcomes on a large scale in the places where people live, learn, work and play.

She says her previous work in the auahi kore marae movement across Te Taitokerau with the Northland District Health Board has not only seen many marae embrace the kaupapa but use the experience to further transform for better health outcomes in other areas.

“It is wonderful to see Te Rūnanga o Te Rarawa and Morehu Marae taking up the challenge of safeguarding the health of its' people in a strength-based, positive way. This shift is more than creating auahi kore Māori spaces. It's about the reclamation of authentic tikanga where introduced practices – such as smoking, drinking alcohol and sugar sweetened beverages – were never the norm. It's a win for Te Rarawa and it's a win for all iwi Māori,” she says.

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