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Far North workplaces looking to the skies to stay grounded

Healthy Families Far North, in partnership with Te Ahikaaroa Trust, is linking Far North organisations into the return of Māori and indigenous wellness systems for the people of Te Taitokerau.

Te Ahikaaroa Trust founder Rueben Taipari has joined up with Healthy Families Far North to introduce mātauranga Māori – particularly the maramataka lunar calendar – to organisational environments, with the goal of supporting the optimisation of workplace wellbeing.

Healthy Families Far North is a large-scale initiative that seeks to create health promoting environments in the Far North in the places where its people live, learn, work and play.

Rueben says that the maramataka is a traditional system of understanding the natural cycles of the environment and energy patterns that allowed tūpuna Māori to live comfortably and sustainably with the elements, to develop, and to prosper.

“The potential to assist modern society is still very relevant; perhaps more so in these unnatural times when society is no longer in touch with the natural environment,” he says.

The journey to reclaim maramataka for the Healthy Families Far North team began collectively last year alongside many of the nine other Healthy Families NZ sites. Over the past 12 months, most of the sites have been engaged in a return to Māori systems over a range of approaches and initiatives in a national movement to curb the prevalence of chronic diseases and improve health equity for Māori.

For Far North workplaces, the first foray into adopting maramataka as an organisational approach began with workshops held in December at Te Roopu Kimiora – the Kaitiāia-based Child and Adolescent Service facility.

Rueben led sessions with Kaitiāia Hospital, Sport Northland, Department of Conservation, Te Hiku Hauora and Te Rarawa Anga Mua kaimahi that were designed to introduce the



maramataka, before moving onto interactive exercises, such as synchronising organisational objectives with its practical application to economise on staff outputs.

Preliminary feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Participants said on an esoteric level, the workshops have highlighted the impossibility of performing at a constantly high pace because the natural environment forces us to consider the ups and downs of daily life.

On a practical level, kaimahi related to the maramataka system for its ability to help co-ordinate a number of tasks, from event planning to scheduling meetings.

Healthy Families Far North kaiwhakahaere Shirleyanne Brown says engaging with organisations who are involved in health, social services and environmental mahi with Māori-led approaches is deliberate.

“These organisations are typically reactionary in nature and have a consequentially high toll and burnout rate on staff health. Engaging in maramataka as an organisational resource allows for workplaces to plan and manage appropriately while investing in preventative health and wellness using ancestral funds of knowledge,” she says.

Rueben will continue to work one-on-one with workplaces, particularly as the Trust's new maramataka is being designed for printing to coincide with Mātārīki. He will also be facilitating an evening workshop with people working in public health, nutrition and physical activity at the upcoming annual Activity and Nutrition Aotearoa (ANA) Forum set for Tamatea Kai Ariki, May 23 in Whangārei.

Ends

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