



DATE: Oenuku, March 21 2018

Publicity release: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Rangatira of tomorrow uphold wai rangatira of today

Young people from Te Rangi Āniwaniwa are leading a positive language movement to strengthen Māori concepts of wai.

Healthy Families Far North has been working with the Far North-based kura and whānau over several months to co-design a sugar sweetened beverage (SSB) free policy. This comes after the collaborative success of the SSB-free Indigenous Youth Basketball Tournament in July, which planted the seed for the kura to embrace an ongoing stance in going water only.

At an initial exploratory workshop, rangatahi were quick to grasp onto the intention of the policy and opted to approach it with strength-based language that reflected more appropriately their world view.

Healthy Families Far North manager Shirleyanne Brown says the term 'SSB-free' did not capture the imagination as much as 'wai rangatira', which students offered as a more meaningful articulation of the water only schools movement.

"The water only schools movement is very much couched in health-based rationale. The students at Te Rangi Āniwaniwa have identified the notion of wai as a carrier of mauri. Wai has a whakapapa that, when tampered with by adding sugar and other additives, contaminates its purity. Therefore, an SSB-free policy resonates stronger as a policy that upholds the consumption of wai rangatira," she says.

Numerous insights have been gathered from the workshop, which will form the basis of ongoing ideation as the draft policy takes shape.

"While there appears to be some existing practices around mātauranga Māori that will form a foundation for change, some whānau tell us that strong leadership and commitment is necessary to achieve success. Similarly, while some whānau tell us they are ready and open for change, there is still existing concern about the affordability of drinking alternatives, proving that there appear to be strong connections between the consumption and marketing of SSBs," Shirleyanne says.



Healthy Families Far North and partners met again last week to further review the insights gathered and start the next step of the design process – to seek solutions that will address the themes voiced by the whānau.

“The vision of a healthy kura will keep the journey in good stead as we move forward together. We hold the vision and we trust the process,” Shirleyanne says.

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