

Maori engagement 101

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WHAKATANE District Council's cultural training couldn't have come any sooner.

During the same week it was reprimanded by the Environment Court for not consulting adequately, council workers were at Taiwhakaea Marae learning about how to engage with Maori in a better way.

The brainchild of Maori policy analyst Violet Hape, Te Ohoake: the Awakening comprised a series of presentations and workshops aimed at providing council staff with the understanding to better engage with Maori.

It was offered to all council staff last week and involved sessions on the make-up of local iwi, Treaty of Waitangi and iwi settlements, and Maori engagement.

Staff could choose to attend the training session on any day over a three-day period and were encouraged to take part in at least two of the three workshops, which included learning about kaitiakitanga (guardianship), tikanga (cultural protocols) and the resource management act in relation to Maori.

And with the decision from the Environment Court regarding the Matata wastewater scheme still ringing in the council's ears, Ms Hape said the training was a timely reminder of the need to provide for positive engagement with Maori.

"That is the goal. To be able to do that effectively, we have to look internally and provide these sorts of opportunities for the staff, build on resources and talk so that we can improve the way we deal with Maori.

"We started off with the systems behind iwi, backgrounding who was who and where they are. It is important to understand who are the marae, hapu and iwi in the Whakatane district and how those structures work, and what kind of structures are in place and under-

stand the differences between iwi, hapu and whanau."

Ms Hape said the training stemmed from a survey conducted internally about a year ago.

Staff were surveyed to identify the training or support they might need.

"In the survey we identified certain areas, especially where there were some obligations under the acts we worked under."

But she said training had to be tapered because it involved people from all aspects of the council's business.

"The meter man and animal control were there. And the training was also offered to those staff in the satellites of Murupara and Galatea.

"Not everyone needs to know the legislative stuff in terms of the [Resource Management Act] or about kaitiakitanga, which is entrenched in the acts. But everyone needs to know where they fit in the puzzle ... that gave people a good overview of where we want to go and where they fit."

Ms Hape said she was keen to create a Maori contacts database that could help staff when it came to engaging with tangata whenua as a result of the training.

"We are required to keep a Maori contacts database. When staff are carrying out projects or resource consents they click in the area where that is happening and they have a suite of things in place.

"We want to try and place the information as we get it then that becomes part of our database.

"Most times we focus on the process and all the documentation and it could be quite simple: just get up off your seat and go knock on the door and that could save you a lot of time down the track."

The training sessions involved presentations from Bay of Plenty Regional Council Maori policy adviser Jane Waldon, Tuhoe board member Patrick McGarvey, Whakatane District Council principle planner Shane McGhie and community regulation manager Graeme Lewer.



KAI TIME: Nadia Bestgen, Bevelyn McBurnie, William Stewart, Geoff Williams, Annette Steele, Chris Rawson, Richard Overy, Hamish Pettengell and Diane Collings have lunch during the break at the Whakatane District Council cultural training at Taiwhakaea Marae last week.

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