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The Journey of Pūao-te-Ata-tū: what did we learn?

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Florrie Henrietta Brooking

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Abstract

“Pūao-te-Ata-tū The heralding of a New Dawn”, How could a simple policy document sustain so much mana over a thirty year period of time? Being a new, young Māori social work practitioner in the late 1990s was an influential time for the researcher, and there was an on-going relevance and significance of this policy document Pūao-te-Ata-tū that was difficult to explain. It would seem that Māori were still a predominant feature in the clientele for the welfare system, yet this document pledged to address the inconsistencies in policy and practice to address those very unbalanced statistics.

Pūao-te-Ata-tū was published thirty years ago – how much did it change practice in Child, Youth and Family, did it lead to the changes expected? Apart from working through policy, literature and legislation another approach was to go back to those involved with the Ministerial review committee at the time and seek their views on what their expectations were then and what their reflections are now. The findings of this thesis highlighted a clear factor that Pūao-te-Ata-tū was much more than just a policy document, it was an approach that has never been replicated but its authenticity as a voice for the people was immeasurable. There was also significance in the period in which this review took place; the social climate in Aotearoa New Zealand at the time was changing. These changing times were driven by dynamic people who took risks and approach things in an unconventional fashion. As fluid and free as change may have seemed at the time our findings were that overall change will only occur if the political powers in place support that change wholeheartedly. Pūao-te-Ata-tū although not successful in its full entirety, it may not have yet exposed its full potential; there is capacity within its powerful doctrine that its best is still to come.

Preface

This research project is influenced by my whānau, culture, work histories, age, gender and my capabilities. I will introduce and explore myself in my introduction, however my employment history triggered my desire to explore and re-visit the creation of this unique document *Pūao-te-Ata-tū: Day break: The Report of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on a perspective for the Department of Social Welfare*. My approach to this research report was from the perspective of an ex-practitioner for Child, Youth and Family seeking to explore what made Pūao-Te-Ata-tū so different, what can we learn about its approach that will assist in ensuring there are no further injustices against Māori at a systematic level. This research explores the reflective narratives of those close to Pūao-Te-Ata-tū at the time of its inception, unfortunately not all of the committee members were approached for feedback.

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Firstly acknowledgment must go to my participants without your commitment to meeting and speaking with me certainly none of this would have been possible. I am truly indebted to you for your willingness to share your history, knowledge and reflections with me.

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Ehara taku toa, he takitahi, he toa takitini

My success should not be bestowed onto me alone, as it was not individual success but success of a collective.¹

¹ Author unknown: As cited in <http://www.Māori.cl/Proverbs.htm>

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Abbreviations

DSW	Department of Social Welfare
WARAG	Women Against Racism Action Group
MAU	Māori Advisory Unit
NZASW	New Zealand Association of Social Workers
TWSWA	Tangata Whenua Social Workers Association
ANZASW	Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers
CYF	Child, Youth and Family
CYPF Act	Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1989
CYP Act	Children and Young Persons Act 1974