



Hononga

Identify & Strengthen Connections

Fati Tagoai

He mihi tuatahi i te Matua Nui i te Rangi, ki tāna Tama a Īhu Karaiti me te Wairua Tapu. Tēnā koutou.

He mihi tuarua ki ngā awa, ngā maunga, ngā iwi o tēnei motu. Tēnā koutou.

He mihi tuatoru ki ngā mate, haere... haere atu rā. E ngā rau rangatira mā, ngā kuia, koroua, tuakana, tuahine me ngā tēina hoki. Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou tēnā tātou katoa.

Kei te mihi mahana ki a koutou.

In addition to my mihi, I acknowledge the predecessors who have gone before me; the Toa Rangatira of our sector and the Kaiparahuarahi of the first issue. Malo lava le tauivi, malo lava le faamalosi.

It has been a 'refreshing' experience thinking about an article for Kaiparahuarahi's second issue. It has forced me to truly reflect on our sector, my journey as a practitioner and my perspective of how I view our world. I think about a time in 2003. I was 18 years-old and I was employed as a young person for a Youth One Stop Shop (YOSS). As one of five Peer Support Workers (PSW), I was told that we were 'the hub and the core of the service', and that everything the YOSS did was 'with & for' young people – which was inclusive of PSW.

A part of my induction was to be trained in the Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa (YDSA 2002). Being the young Pasefika male that I was, full of passion and charisma, yet quiet and passive, I was overwhelmed by the jargon and pretended to understand the principles. Eventually, the principles made sense to me. Not because I recited the booklets or attended

numerous workshops, but because the organisation was 'breeding' and 'living' the Youth Development Principles. At that time, I formed a belief that Pasefika and Maori needed to learn these principles, kinaesthetically.

I found myself claiming to be a champion for Youth Development, a 'preacher to the non-converted' promoting the truth that Youth Development works within a Youth One Stop Shop context. Because I was a product of the YDSA, my presentations would vary between literature and my personal testimony. I would always favour presenting principles 1 & 2 of the YDSA, but the more I presented the more I realise that the delivery method was linear. Principles were essential and relevant, but its westernised context was always the blueprint. I acknowledge that the blueprint was a starting platform that enabled a discussion. The development of Mana Taiohi not only enabled the translation of principles to fit Te Ao Māori or New Zealand's context, but the translations can now be reciprocal. Hononga has elements of principles 1 & 2 of the YDSA. It is serendipitous that I am given the honour to provide a perspective on Hononga Taiohi.

To understand Hononga, is to understand and acknowledge that Hononga is a thread that is embedded within the other co-existing principles. Hononga is not just a noun, but a living term which can be described as an action or function 'to connect'; or the belief that we are connected to someone or something. From my perspective, Hononga Taiohi is to make connections with my own childhood and youth. And I compare my childhood and youth

to a river rock, and its journey through the erosion process. Aroha mai to the professionals of the field, I am not a geologist, but my very small experience in year 13 geography has triggered my fascination for our local rivers.



I am from Te Awakairangi (also known as the Hutt Valley). As a people, community and district we are connected by the awa that flows from Upper Hutt to Lower Hutt. In Upper Hutt, the river rocks are sharp and jagged. Fragments of rocks roll down from the hillside and fall into the river. In Lower Hutt, there is consistency in the river rocks being round and smooth. Further downstream at the southern end of Lower Hutt known as Petone, the rocks are either polished or weathered into sand. As you deeply observe these rocks at the river mouth, you identify that the rocks had a journey. A journey where in its original form it was rough but know that it was a fragment of something greater. You recognise that each rock is unique, and has a story through its shape, contours and marking; but you know that its' strength was tested along the way. And finally, you realise that the rocks were freely exposed to all the elements, placed there by chance and evidentially becoming one of two options – 'polished rock' or 'sand'.

Identify: Connecting to whakapapa

There is a rich history in the formation of mountains, shaped by the environment through its erosion process. Fragments of the mountain break into smaller rocks, eventually making its way to the river. This is similar to how we enter into our world. The rocks are a rough, sharp and isolated from its home. But it has a connection to one of the mountains or the hillside, classified by its colour, make up and age. The fragmented rock connects to something greater.



I have strong connections to Samoa; my father is from the illustrious district of Aleipata – a village called Satitoo and my mother is from the beautiful island of Savai'i; a village called Vaega Satupa'itea. The history of Samoa is rich in aganu'u (cultural traditions), faalupega (genealogy) and tala anamua (legends).

My father's family are from a line of high chiefs, but recent generations state that they became ministers of the Christian Faith. As I walk along the beach on the white sands of Satitoo I look at the sea where stories are told of my father being a fisherman. Within view there are many small islands that surround the Aleipata district. Stories are told of the Aleipata Islands being the home for the Leper Colony. I learn from tales that my ancestors served on those islands as ministers. My mother is part of a lineage of warriors and high chiefs, the land they built their house on is called Tanumafili. Tanumafili literally translates to 'bury &

enemies'. My mother's extended family also have their houses built on sacred grounds that have a similar theme of war. As I journey inland to the plantations there is a river called Uli-a-Moa. The legend is told about 'Uli' and 'Moa' being siblings and the gatekeepers of the river. As you walk upstream towards the very beginning of the river; there stands two mountain rocks patrolling the flow of the river. The two rocks are called Uli & Moa.

When I look at my parents I only see fragments of their history. For some people, their parents (or fragments) are the only starting points of their history. Others may not have that same access, but the important factor or question to ask is "where does my whakapapa start"? "Can I have a meaningful connection with it?" When I identify my starting points of whakapapa, I am blessed to realise that I connect beyond my parents. Those connections enlighten what is within me today. I have a deep connection for my faith, I have a love to serve people by being a 'Fisher of Men' and I am a warrior for growth and development. I connect to elements of my whenua, my rivers of Uli-a-Moa and Te Awakairangi and I have a knack to speak in analogies. The young people we interact with today have that Mana, no matter where the starting point of their whakapapa lies.

Connecting to Te Ao

As the river rocks make its journey downstream, the rocks start the abrasion process of being shaped by its surroundings. There is also the understanding that the rocks will continue to be shaped by 'riding' or 'spectating' the flow of the river. An unconscious participant of the abrasion & erosion process. The rocks are free to the elements and will weather all four seasons. The rocks may or may not reach the river mouth; or rocks may be pushed out to a different river channel. The destination of each rock may have been a result of 'chance' or 'fate'.



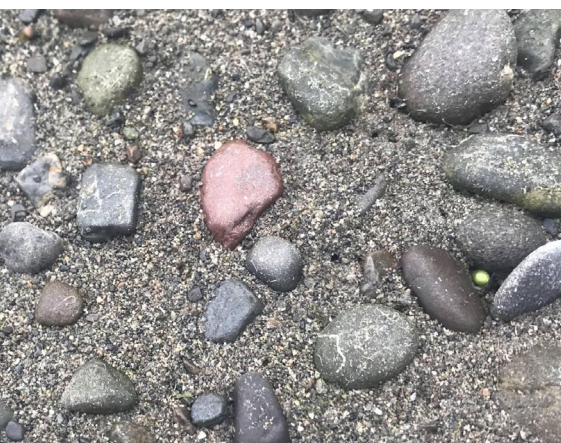
I was born in Upper Hutt, raised in Petone and then lived the rest of my life back in Upper Hutt. My earlier years while living in Upper Hutt I was strongly connected to my mother's side of the family. We were active members of the Methodist church, we lived like a village, and we were raised in fa'asamoa protocols and traditions. My childhood memories in Petone I had strong connections with my father's side. We were active members of multiple churches, we also lived like a village, but with a focus on sports achievement, academia and entrepreneurship. As I grow older I realise that I have two older sisters from my mother's previous relationship, and then blessed again to have a baby brother. A couple of years later, my father passes away to lung cancer, my brother is adopted out and we relocate back to Upper Hutt to be close to my mother's family. I could go on and on and write my life story. But the main point to consider is that throughout my entire journey, I am a witness and an unconscious participant to life's successes and milestones. But I am also a part of life's realities of pain & despair.

When connecting to Te Ao, it is important to reflect on a time where our lives were unconsciously 'riding' the river. We were not in control of what rock mountain we broke from. We were not in control of the weather, we were not in control of our river channels and we were not in control of the co-existing rocks that either shaped, polished or scarred us. Whatever shape or form that our rocks (or our bodies) have become from this unconscious journey, we should take the time to reflect about our connection to these influential factors. What or who are my

'shaping' influences? Am I at peace with my scars? Am I satisfied with my polish? What influences do I maintain a connection with? As we process those connections, we are therefore in a position to make an informed choice on the next part of the river flow.

Connecting to Mauri

At the river mouth, polished rocks are everywhere. Each rock has a nice 'finish' but you can identify the abrasion that the rock had to endure. Amongst those rocks is a blanket of diminished rocks and sand. You raise questions about its journey, 'Was it strong enough?' 'What was the main cause of its destruction?' 'Would the rock have been safe in another river channel?' 'What if the rock had a conscious to make an informed decision about its destination'?



As a child and teenager, I was always taller and bigger than my peers. I would socialise with people a few years older than me to fit in, and I tried to be involved and have a go at everything. I feel uncomfortable in saying it, but I was naturally talented in most things. Throughout my teenage life I was uplifted, praised and told that I was going to be amazing. I have heard comments of being "the next Jonah Lomu", "the school's Head Boy" and at one point "the next Mayor of Upper Hutt". They were all really nice comments made by my peers and significant adults, but none of them excited me. I also remember

the disappointment that people had with my non-excitement, comments of "a waste of talent", "laziness" and even "arrogance". However, I do recall that people observed me as a role model. Initially it wasn't exciting, but the epiphany of knowing I was a role model, was the result of a sad story.

In year 10, there were periods where I conformed to being a school bully. I would use my size and stature to show dominance, especially to the senior students. One day, a boy with red hair kept staring at me. I took the stare as a challenge, walked up, towered over him and swore like an American gangster from Tupac's "Hit'em up" track. I provoked him for a fight, but he stared at me in silence not saying one word. A teacher intervenes and yells at me saying that the boy has Special Needs, and that he usually stares. I recall feeling like a "(Ahem)". Upon further reflection I realise that my year 9 friends were also doing the same thing. I realised that I was a role model regardless of whether I wanted the title. Humbled and convicted by this experience, I wanted to pioneer, and role model a positive way of being.

With young people, we can have some great successes in exploring their belief systems, identifying their strengths or shower them with praise and positive affirmation. But there are times where we as practitioners may have to wait for a significant event to spark a young person's awareness and ownership of their strength. That spark is the awakening of what a young person has to offer to the world.

Strengthen

I try to visualise the type of rock that would reflect my journey; and I picture that my rock is a black jade that represents my foundation in Aotearoa. My rock will have blue and green speckles that shows my fusion of Pasefika traditions or even creativity. The rock will have deep markings to represent times of challenges and struggle.

It will also have old chip marks to portray the loss of loved ones. The rock will have smooth edges to represent people that raised me. Some areas will be polished to display achievements or closure, while other areas will be rough to represent room for growth. The rock will be solid to signify years of endurance, and it will have a square frame to symbolize strength, mana and mauri.



In my final year of high school, I didn't know what career path to take. I knew that I wanted to be a pioneer, and I wanted to be a role model that had a positive effect of others. It dawns on me that I have strong qualities of engaging with people. Working with people becomes my profession at a YOSS. It also leads me to higher education in tertiary and university. I was successful in gaining further part-time employment or contracts through sports agencies, fitness industries and other social services. It becomes evident that my entire employment history has been connected to one theme – my passion for growth and development of people.

In the river analogy, rocks do not have the awareness to make an informed choice about their destination. But when you work with a young person, and bring awareness to what they are connected to, they have the power and control to decide on what they would do next. And when the connections are strengthened, young people become independent and self-sustainable.

As I have mentioned earlier, to understand Hononga Taiohi is to connect to my youth. My story is a reminder that not so long ago, we were young people once. Once upon a time we were like the river rocks that journeyed through the erosion and abrasion process. Maintaining that process keep us accountable. My rock continues to flow down the river in its new form, ready to shape and connect our future generation.



I am a Toki (Adze)

An adze to create new opportunities

A tool to enable, equip and enhance

A weapon for youth and social development

An instrument to shape others

A pounamu to the world

Fati Tagoai

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Ministry of Social Development

Fati Tagoai is currently a part of a team that is full of passion, heart and purpose. Charismatic public servants for the Ministry of Social Development, delivering Youth Services in the Wellington and Whanganui regions. A husband (and sometimes a case study lol) to Adolescent Mental Health Nurse – Alicia Tagoai, and busy parents to Mya, Danii and Tia.