



Manaakitanga 101

He kura te tangata.
Our humanity is precious.

Sharon Davis, Ngatiwhaātua and Ngāpuhi

A key dynamic to staying 'present', robust and invigorated in our youth work, remaining connected to our core values and ethics and giving the best possible awhi we can, to people with whom we journey, is by participating in and embracing Manaakitanga wholeheartedly.

Manaakitanga is an ancient value that sits at the heart of all Māori practices, philosophies and endeavours and remains totally relevant in our modern world.

You can see the depth of meaning, inextricably embedded in the word, when you look at the components of the word Mana-Aki-Tanga. I always find this process helpful when getting a personal definition of a deep concept.

Mana – Mana in a Māori context is a word that refers to power and authority bestowed, gained or inherited individually and collectively. Mana is dynamic and evolving. Our reciprocal actions 'enhance' or 'munch' mana.

Aki – is a word that means to urge on, encourage, challenge, exhort.

Manaaki as practical actions might include: to take care of, to support, give hospitality to, protect, look out for, to respect, to be kind to, to be generous towards.

Tanga – denotes action. Manaakitanga therefore is an action word. It's something you do with others, alongside others for the purpose of raising up, individual and collective wellbeing.

So **Manaakitanga** literally means **to intentionally care for**

a person's mana (well-being in a holistic sense). Powerful, practical. Highly impactful.

Youth Work in Aotearoa, takes place in a range of diverse environments that are dynamic and evolving from marae to a street curb. The mindful practice of Manaakitanga enables youth workers to be ready to enhance the mana of others in the contexts that present themselves.

I remember at 18 years of age volunteering for a youth programme that worked with 'at risk' young people. I was keen, but not sure that I was bringing 'enough' to the youth work programme I was going to join. My whanau mentor looked at me and said "You have 2 hands, what can you do with those." It so happened that with those hands I could drive a van, play the guitar, prepare kai, play scrag, hug someone, clean up etc. A mentor operating in a Manaakitanga dimension opened up a space for me to realise that if I have 'head, heart and hands', I had personal resources to begin to provide support, kindness, care, awhi to taiohi and the other youth workers.

My youth work journey began there in that humble and tangible 'space of manaaki' and it transformed the whole direction of my life.

What is awesome is that simple actions of manaaki, executed with aroha, enhance the physical, spiritual and/or cultural nourishment and caring of individuals, whanau and communities. I've personally witnessed the transformative power of manaaki in taiohi

(and wider whānau) over and over again. They come into a breakfast club hungry, they leave fed; they come in pregnant with no pathway, they leave enrolled with a midwife. They come in too scared to leap off the big rock into Waro Lake. Boldly they leave leaping multiple times. They come in not knowing their pepeha and they leave knowing who they are and where they come from; they come in shut down in their emotions, they leave expressing themselves creatively through dance.

In each little story, a caring youth worker created an 'atea' (a space) to uplift and enhance the mana of taiohi around them. Manaakitanga sets up the perfect conditions for taiohi to feel safe, accepted, valued, included and empowered through deeper relationships (whanaungatanga). Manaakitanga evolves their story. Manaakitanga uplifts their story. It strengthens taiohi. It is a truly marvellous thing.

Manaakitanga also extends beyond manuhiri, the stranger, or the guest. Manaakitanga calls us to be good to our own, to those who work with us and to recognise and enhance their mana. When we invest manaakitanga into our own people and it is reciprocated, it gives life to our community.

Manaakitanga practices that do this can be demonstrated through:

- Providing appropriate resources for youth workers professional development
- Programme policies and practice of engaging taiohi and their whānau

in programmes that upholds their mana

- Hosting with generosity to enable positive outcomes
- Upholding Maori tikanga and values.

How do we honour the people we work alongside and ensure that the systems we have are honouring of them and the very important mahi they have to do?

Let's take 'Upholding Maori Tikanga and Values' for example. In my work we value manaakitanga. We value the power of being a welcoming community. One way we know this, is because our work place has a clear and known Welcoming Process like Mihiwhakatau. The welcoming process actually happens for manuhiri and all staff are active participators in the various manaaki roles and tasks that need to be beautifully executed.

What's important about this 'way of being' and 'way of doing' is that youth workers who are part of those wider work and community processes, then take it into their contexts and outwork it with young people.

We provide spaces and opportunity for young people to practice manaakitanga in our youth work programmes. There is a manaaki flow-on effect. Thus at our most recent taiohi camp, our taiohi engaged in the whole powhiri process to welcome taiohi from other rohe (areas). It's an experience that is hard to forget because they engage all of their senses in this interactive manaaki process - they can see it, they can smell it, they can taste it, they can feel it and they can hear it. It becomes a transferable skill in their extended whanau. Manaakitanga provides us with immense opportunities

to engage with young people individually and collectively and joyfully act in ways that uplift and enhance the mana of those around us.

I don't want to romanticise the process of Manaakitanga either. The reality is that the journey of Manaakitanga is not always comfortable. It can be demanding of your time, talents and resources, require you at inconvenient moments and connect you to people who seem difficult, ungrateful and 'too hard'. Manaakitanga however values 'going the extra mile'. It's something we become good at as we DO it with others.

Manaakitanga is not just something that is taught, it is 'caught'. I encourage you to have another look at manaakitanga and begin having korero (honest conversations) with others about strengthening your manaakitanga muscles. It is an action word, after all.

My top tip would be to tag along with someone who does manaaki well and learn from them in the contexts where they practice. Manaaki people are my favourite kind of people. You always leave their presence feeling more awesome. Watching their thoughtful actions and perpetual, purposeful and unrelenting acts of kindness towards others provides a wananga into 'how to best impact taiohi.' Manaakitanga is the tried and true methodology that they practice. It is tika. Manaakitanga is a centuries-proven art form of home.

I hang out with someone who loves to manaaki. His name is Lou. We go to a place on the coast in Whangaruru that has 2-bedrooms, blue ocean, white sand and few people. It is near the famous NZ Te Araroa Tramping Trail that traverses

from Cape Reinga in the far North Island to the Bluff in the far South Island.

You can always tell a Te Araroa trumper from everyone else on summer holiday. They're the one with the heavy pack, passing our gate, looking sunburnt, weary, exhausted and starving. If Lou sees a trumper, he can't help noticing. He crosses the street to say Kia Ora and connects. He assesses their need and invites them in for kai, a hot shower, to sleep in a clean bed and to korero around the fire. Everyone accepts his invitation. Usually they are alone, have come from overseas, are young and adventurous, have mothers who are worried sick about them, have cool stories to tell and are very, very grateful. One time he brought home 15 people, on holiday from Wellington.

He told me he offers manaaki in our home because they are someone's tamaiti, roaming a foreign land, on a very long hikoi. That even though he will never see them again he feels he has eased their journey, filled their puku, shared stories, had a laugh and made them feel welcome in a strange land.

And that's the simple, mana enhancing beauty of manaakitanga. People feel affirmed and loved. And when people know they're loved, the narrative of good things start to happen more frequently in young peoples lives. Perhaps why manaakitanga is a proven way to deliver youth services to taiohi. It's the way that enhances their mana.

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