

Te Roopu Wahine Toko I Te Ora continues to provide basics

Thirty four years on, the driving force for the establishment of the Maori Woman's Welfare League has increased.

President, Georgina Kirby says the appalling lack of adequate Maori housing on one hand and the low esteem some Maori parents have of themselves are areas the league has got stuck into.

The league was born prior to 1951 out of the need to look after the Maori families who flooded the cities. Housing was big on the agenda in the days of league founder, Whina Cooper.

In fact one of the first jobs of the league was a housing survey that revealed most Maori families didn't have proper homes in the city. Government departments then took over in providing adequate housing.

While Georgina Kirby acknowledges some things have changed, she says the big push is still on for Maori housing.

She says 3,600 new houses are needed in the next five years, and that's one hundred a month. She says it can't be done on the present nineteen million a year that's allotted to Maori housing.

The league's annual conference this year recommended that a bigger budget be asked for.

And the state of Maori families is also a big concern for the league says Georgie.

"Parents need to let children know they're wanted. They have to take re-

sponsibility and see the need to be parents."

Georgie admits that a lot of parents have had the responsibility taken away from them by state agencies like police and social welfare. And a lot of parents have abdicated the responsibility as a result of urban living breaking down caring whanau structures.

That's where she sees the most important role of the league, in providing the basics; the wairuatanga or sanctioning of people; the shelter which encompasses the warmth of the whanau; and food which is more than just kai but also the feeding of the total person.

She says without the basics, "it's no good talking about te taha this and that".

"Good housing needs proper health care."

Health care was really emphasised by this year's league conference in Hastings. It followed up the first really professional health survey of Maori woman carried out by Maori women.

'Rapuora' employed Maori women to

sample how Maori women saw themselves, and the results were written up by Elizabeth Murchie a past president of the league. (A detailed look at Rapuora is included elsewhere in this feature, as is some of the recommendations from this years Conference.)

The league has declared the Decade of Maori Health 1985-1995, so that Maori goals, as outlined in Rapuora and at the conference, can be monitored and worked at.

In addressing the needs of the Maori people today, Georgina sees the urban migration of the Maori and subsequent breakdown of the whanau supportive system as the main culprit. Subsequent generations of whanau have been split up by the non-Maori make-up of city life and have been separated from support that would normally have been there, she says.

She cites her own family example where her parents moved away from their Wairoa base, and along with a few other Ngati Kahungunu, lived and worked in the Rotorua area.

She says her family kept their links with Kahungunu but also forged new ones with their Te Arawa neighbours. As a result, she grew up in a supportive environment which her parents had built up.

League members gather outside their national headquarters in Wellington with Koro Wetere and Dame Te Atairangikaahu.



Photos courtesy of league