

Te Waka Emanaaki rises from the ashes

Juliet Ashton

A year ago the Te Waka Emanaaki Trust — drawn from central Wellington's Black Power gang — lay in tatters.

Key members were either still inside or just out of prison.

The trust had no money, no equipment and, worst of all, no work.

Police were regularly called to the groups headquarters in Kinsington St to break up violent brawls.

Today — 12 months later — the trust has a thriving vegetable garden and a partially built skills workshop, two trucks, a business card — and an almost clean police record for the last few months.

Working alongside trust members during this quiet transformation has been the newly formed but extremely active Whanganui-a-Tara Maori committee to which Black Power members Ray Harris and Whare Moke belong.



Maraea Harper's Maori language students — burly, black-jacketed and tattooed — stare intently at the papers in front of them, smoke spiralling upward from half a dozen lighted cigarettes.

Dark bushy beards, tangled dreadlocks obscure the young impassive faces.

None of their class speaks Maori and their responses are hesitating.

Maraea asks a question of one of the downbeat heads. "Come on," she prompts, gently.

Self-consciously he mumbles a reply.

Maraea, Maori warden and Whanganui-a-Tara committee member takes the language classes each Friday as part of the programme of work and cultural skills which the trust is building up.

In another room assistant city missionary Sam Ferris uses a makeshift blackboard to explain marae etiquette. "First," he says "I want to tell you fellas how to approach a marae." Later he hopes to start carving classes.

Friday afternoons are set aside for education.

The other four and a half week days are for work.

"Eighteen months ago," says Black Power leader Ray Harris, fishing cigarettes from a patch low down on his faded denims, "there were 30 guys here — drinking 70 dozen a week. At this time of day (midday) if they were out of prison they'd be drinking."

He gestures round the big, starkly furnished room, empty except for two youths playing pool quietly.

"Police'd be doing regular checks. A couple of the boys'd go down town, get drunk and rob someone. Now they don't have the time."

The Kensington St house — worn, battered round the edges but tidy — is in the process of being extended into a skills centre.

Demolition of an old shed over the road provided wood for the double garage-cum-workshop. The concrete foundations have already been laid next door to the house.

The workshop is one of two work skills development projects currently providing some regular income for trust members and a base for developing a skills/education programme.

Ray Harris has been involved in the work trust since it was first set up, under another name, in the 70's.

He was responsible for the name change to Te Waka Emanaaki — "the canoe of caring".

At first the trust prospered, bringing in up to \$100,000 a year in private contracts at its peak.

But toward the end of the 70's things started to go wrong. Private contracts dropped off dramatically, some of the gang shifted away and several of the leaders, including Ray, went to prison.

When he came out the trust was barely in existence. It had no funds, no equipment and Kensington St had a bad reputation with the law.

Ray, short, stocky, tough, and articulate, says, "The worst thing was no one would employ us."

Supported by the fledgling Maori committee the trust managed to get a few demolition contracts which gave it a start in money and materials.

Through the Labour Department they got two works skills programmes going — building the workshop and cultivating a big vegetable garden which provides ample for their needs and surplus for marae, kokiri units, and community houses.

Trust members get between \$80 and

N.Z. Maori Council president Sir Graham Lattimer at Te Waka Emanaaki Trust with Ray Harris. (photo Dominion)

