

# people scene way to go bro!

**CHRIS PHILPOTT talks to Martin Kaipo, creator of a community organisation that is helping Otangarei.**

Martin Kaipo's infectious laugh reverberates around the room as he reminisces about his experiences with the Otangarei Youth Sports and Recreation Trust – in particular about the time Prime Minister Helen Clark visited.

"It was hard case," Kaipo chuckles. "It was like Bill Clinton, all these black cars driving round, and I was thinking 'what the hell's happening there!'"

Martin Kaipo is obviously one of the good guys, and I can tell there is just something special about him as his charismatic personality overcomes the dreary scene outside the window of his living room.

Based on that charisma alone, it's plain to see that he could be responsible for what could be described as a dramatic turn for the better in the often overlooked community of Otangarei.

But Martin's tone becomes noticeably more sombre as he discusses Otangarei itself.

"These type of communities are not considered valuable, or that they can contribute, or can't contribute," he murmurs quietly, before expanding on the family viewpoint which is central to what he believes, as well as why he does what he does.

"I've got children. I've got grandchildren. I've got family in this community. Not only that, but all the community are family in one way or another. We meet each other at the shops, we play sports together, we go to school functions.

"If you look at the community as a whole and you don't look at it as some kind of family, then there's something wrong with society in general."

It is that same family focus which saw Martin, along with wife Janine, founding the Otangarei Youth Sports and Recreation Trust in 1991.

"It's about looking at the whole family," Kaipo continues, explaining the core beliefs of the trust. "How do we nurture, how do we educate, how do we provide resources so they can cope?"

Starting in their garage, where the couple put together a gym for young people in their immediate vicinity to use, the Kaipos started to reach out to a community in need.

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Fifteen years later, the trust has become much more than Martin Kaipo, now the managing director, could ever have dreamed. In the last three years alone the trust has grown from three staff to twenty, and is now becoming increasingly involved in much more than just youth work.

"I suppose we're instigators – instigating safety, instigating wellbeing – and we've done that by some things that we've delivered, like fire alarms." He beams proudly when mentioning the initiative he helped introduce that put mandatory fire alarms in much of the state housing in Otangarei. "We've got our own medical centre now. We run education programmes during school, after school."

In addition to helping provide infrastructure, the trust also tries to help clean up the community – literally – which helps to make Otangarei a more attractive place for home buyers, as well as instilling a sense of pride for current residents.

"One of the things about this type of community is they're really visual, so we try and deliver to them something they can understand and they can see," he explains.

"Once the message is out there and they can see it, then they will make choices whether they want to be part of it, to contribute to it, or just ignore that things are happening around them."

The hands-on and inclusive approach taken by the trust saw them announced as the Supreme Winner of the 2001 Trustpower National Community Awards, an honour not lost on the man himself. "We were nominated and we were honoured, eh, because there were a lot of great organisations there," says Kaipo humbly. "We don't think of what we do as life changing."

"We were down the back, talking to Pamela Peters at the time," Kaipo continues, before stopping and laughing loudly. "Then they called out our name and we were like, 'eh?!'"

Despite achieving what might be considered a pinnacle for any voluntary organisation, the Otangarei Youth Sports and Recreation Trust further expanded its operations in 2004, establishing TearRawRize Studios.

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TearRawRize put together a little music jingle that you may be familiar with, known as "Slow Da Flow". Kaipo picks up the story.

"The road staff that were co-ordinating the next campaign were trying to gauge ideas from the community about what was the best way to send messages out to young people, 'cause at that time our road statistics for youth deaths were astronomical," he says. "The only thing I could think of at that time was music."

"So I brought it back to the staff, to my son and his team. They took it back to the recording studio and within two weeks we had our demo.

Took that demo back to the next meeting and they bought it, straight off the cuff." Kaipo smiles widely. "They loved it."

The story behind the Slow Da Flow campaign, one of the most successful road safety campaigns in recent times, is a tribute to the amazing work that the trust is doing. Perhaps the biggest benefit, however, has been an increase in open doors since that time.

"It's something that when we go somewhere and we meet people that don't know us, we talk about the Slow Da Flow campaign, and straight away they click – 'woah, you did that!'"

This year the trust has approached the World Champion New Zealand "Bombing" team (a particularly artistic and world-renowned form of graffiti) to come to their community.

"The crew that won it are gonna come up and do some stuff up in Otangarei," he says, visibly excited at the prospect. "One of them lives in Otangarei and another one lives up here too, and I thought, 'What! Two of them are from Whangarei?!'"

Kaipo chuckles once more and it becomes obvious that his willingness to embrace popular and street culture may have inadvertently kept him thinking younger. "We're providing the canvas for them to do their stuff."

Despite such success, Martin Kaipo knows that he belongs in Otangarei, to rise to the challenge of helping an entire community find its feet.

"Every day's a challenge – not only by those who are unable to access the resources, but those who flaunt the resources, to those who are just totally against what we're there for."

One gets the sense that Martin Kaipo and the Otangarei Youth Sports and Recreation Trust will somehow find a way to overcome those obstacles. After all, the good guys win in the end. ■

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