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 Alka Prasad | SUNDAY STAR TIMES

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From restaurant chef to school lunch cook

VIDEO CREDIT: THE HUI

In the heart of Manukau City, Tanya Kaihe has seen dozens of young Māori go from “dead-end” job assignments in factories and security to finding their passion – be it Te Ao Māori, tech, retail or publishing.

Kaihe (Ngāpuhi) leads Hāpai Tūhono, a publicly funded organisation that gets rangatahi (young people) into sustainable, long-term employment. These young people are known to the system as NEETs – not in education, employment or training – and have been on what she calls the “merry-go-round” of Government-led workplace schemes.

But few of these placements fit their skillset, passion or aspirations, Kaihe says.

“We saw a young woman who was sent to a factory, which didn’t work for her, but she was ready to work. So we helped her with interviewing skills, looked at some jobs.

She went for a role at the Spark shop in the mall, and now she’s three years in, she recalls.

“A young man was told to work in security all his life, and he did work as a security guard. Then we find out he has a love for children’s books. Who would have thought?”



A group discussion at Ihumatao organised by Hāpai Tūhono.
SUPPLIED

In the June 2024 quarter, the NEET rate for rangatahi Māori was at 18.9% compared with a national rate of 10.8%. Meanwhile a 2024 report from workforce development group Southern Initiative highlighted that 70% of Māori felt existing career services did not meet their needs, with rangatahi stereotyped into low-value roles.

Kaihe says a lack of robust workforce planning leads young people to be jammed into labour market gaps that don't suit them.

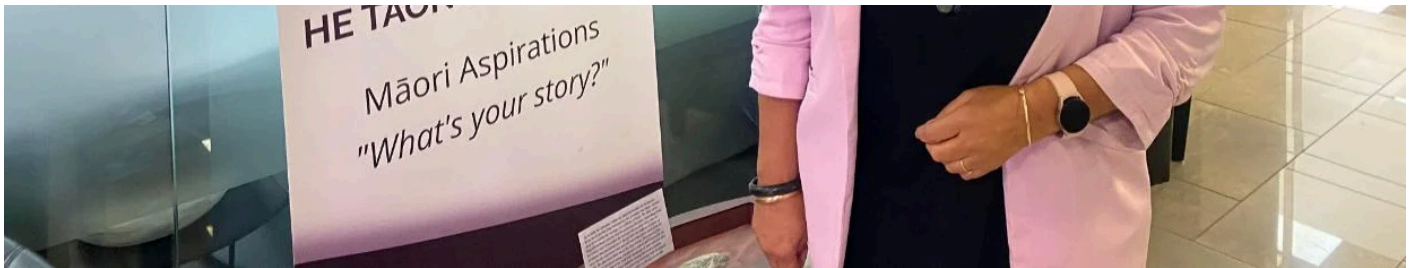
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"There's no real career development strategy in place," Kaihe says. "While the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) has released a career strategy plan, successive Governments haven't figured out how career development works."

Rangatahi Futures

Hāpai Tūhono is continuing with the career development project Rangatahi Futures that was shelved by TEC in 2010. It's a pilot programme to get young people into meaningful work with businesses around Tāmaki Makaurau, with 100% of businesses involved saying the programme had beneficial outcomes for productivity.



Tanya Kaihe is Amorangi (leader) at Māori workforce development organisation Hāpai Tūhono.
SUPPLIED

The organisation also works with Auckland Māori business association Whāriki which holds a directory of 3000 Māori-owned businesses across the region, representing iwi and hapū from around the country. The matching of students to these businesses adds another dimension. Often, building a young person's sense of self can start with telling stories that highlight the innovation, skill and expertise of their tūpuna (ancestors) and contemporary Māori heroes.

"We have to tell the stories about Hawaiki and how their ancestors got all the way here. Who built the boat? Did the person who built the boat also built the sails? Who led the boat? How did they navigate?" says Kaihe.

The latest [Te Ohanga Māori \(Māori economy\) report](#) showed that Māori made up 14% of the total working-age population in 2023 with a 5% uptick in the number of Māori under 15 years old, compared with zero growth for non-Māori.

"The increase in rangatahi Māori is vital in considering the future workforce of Aotearoa New Zealand, and for ensuring the current education and training interventions are fit-for-purpose," the report said, adding that addressing systemic bias in secondary and tertiary education would better support educational outcomes.



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Better advice and the offering of microcredentials – rather than encouraging them to take out student loans for courses that may not work – is the start of a different kind of journey.

“Instead of saying, ‘I’m in a dead-end job’, [rangatahi] can see how they add value and transfer that to other businesses,” Kaihe says.

“At the end, they need to have 15 transferable skills so even if they do have to go to the factory, we can say it’s not their forever job, it’s not all doom and gloom.”

‘Survival entrepreneurship’ to business excellence

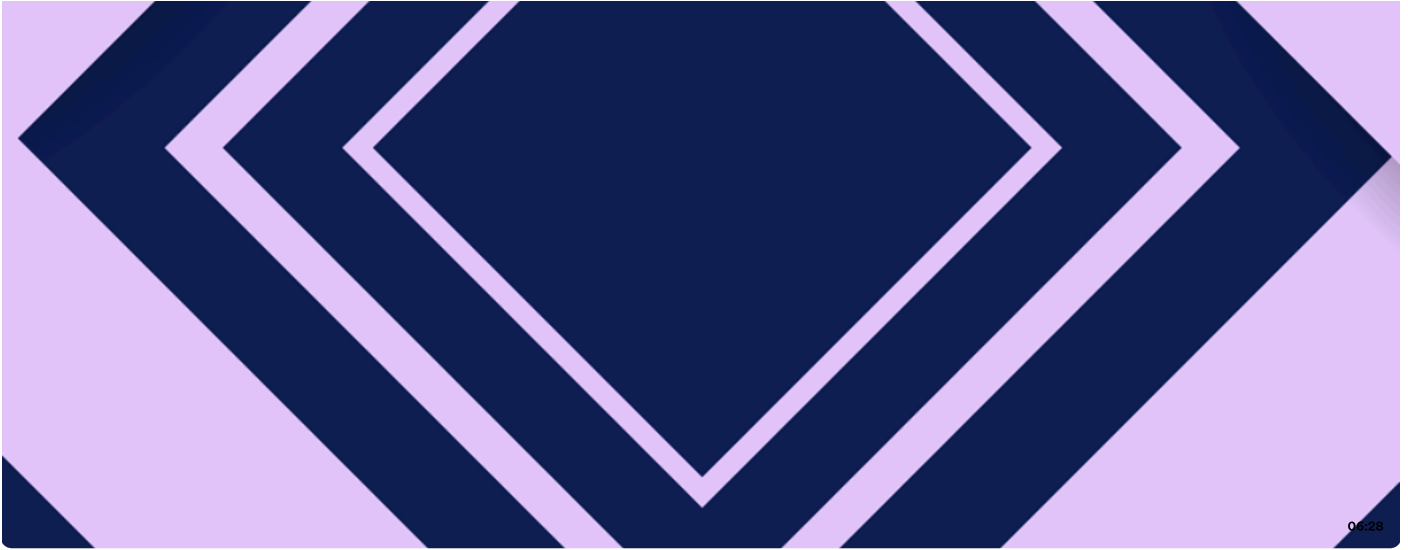
Māori business leader Mavis Mullins (Rangitāne, Te Atihaunui-a-Paparangi, Ngāti Ranginui) says a growing young Māori workforce puts the onus on the community to better prepare future workers.



Business Hall of Fame inductee and wool sector leader Mavis Mullins says spreading the word about Māori business excellence can bring hope at a time when “it’s hard to be Māori”.
PIERS FULLER / WAIRARAPA TIMES-AGE

While agriculture, forestry, and fishing were the primary contributors by Māori to economic growth in 2018, Te Ōhanga Māori report showed administrative, support and professional services now lead the way, contributing more than \$9 billion to the GDP in 2023.

“It’s an indicator that entrepreneurship and innovation sits in our space,” Mullins says.



Mavis Mullins discusses Māori governance
VIDEO CREDIT: INSTITUTE OF DIRECTORS NZ

“What came out of that was a significant business that’s still rolling around, which is huge considering all these shifts in the primary sector.”

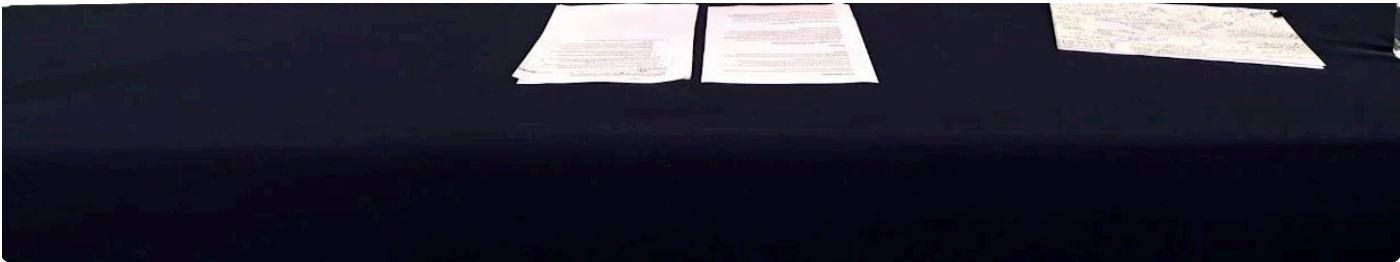
That multi-generational agricultural business success and land stewardship should be informing Government export strategy, she says, as Prime Minister Christopher Luxon has sought to double exports over the next decade.

“Why aren’t Māori more included?” Mullins asks.

The celebrated business leader says it’s a bit difficult to be Maori at the moment, with some negativity towards the community politically and in the media.

But “there is so much for us to be proud of at a time when we’re being challenged on what we do and who we are”, she says.

“One thing we do really well is support each other as people, as whānau, as iwi and hapū, and as business leaders,” Mullins says. “The big thing is remembering we are intergenerational so we have time to achieve our goals. We’re not in a rush or bound by an annual plan.”



How workforce diversity can be your superpower
VIDEO CREDIT: EMA

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