

# Recruiting via Hui-ā-Rohe: How the Whakapiki Ake Project has increased engagement with Māori students, their whānau (families) and communities

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## Introduction

The Whakapiki Ake Project (Whakapiki Ake) is a tertiary recruitment program that targets Māori secondary school students wishing to pursue a career in the health professions (medicine, nursing, pharmacy, health sciences and optometry) at the University of Auckland. Indigenous-led, Whakapiki Ake is situated within a comprehensive health workforce development program known as Vision 20:20, which involves three integrated core components:

- Whakapiki Ake (recruitment)
- Certificate in Health Sciences (bridging/foundation)
- Māori and Pacific Admission Scheme (admission and academic/pastoral support) (Curtis & Reid 2013).

Vision 20:20 receives funding from the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences at the University of Auckland, the Ministry of Health and Tertiary Education Commission Equity Funding.

In 2012, Whakapiki Ake conducted a formal literature review exploring national and international evidence associated with 'best' practice for the recruitment of Indigenous students into health careers (Curtis et al. 2012). It identified six principles of 'best' practice, including the need to increase engagement with parents, families and Indigenous communities within all recruitment measures, particularly early exposure activities. This principle highlighted an area of concern for Whakapiki Ake, as the historical model of student recruitment targeted Year 13 students via secondary school engagement (Curtis & Reid 2013). Broader contact with students' families and their communities was, therefore, limited.

In response, Whakapiki Ake introduced a new intervention known as Hui-ā-Rohe – referring to multiple gatherings across different regional areas – to increase engagement with secondary school students, their parents and whānau (families). This case study presents the Hui-ā-Rohe approach to share with other student recruitment programs how Whakapiki Ake responded to one principle of recruitment 'best' practice: that of greater engagement with families and Indigenous communities when recruiting Indigenous students into health careers.

## Aims and Objectives

Hui-ā-Rohe aims to provide geographically accessible forums that enable direct contact between Whakapiki Ake staff and Indigenous secondary school students, their parents and whānau.

The objectives of Hui-ā-Rohe are to:

- increase engagement between Whakapiki Ake and the whānau of secondary school students who are considering a career in health;
- increase engagement between school, hapū/iwi (Māori sub-tribes and tribes) and community stakeholders;
- provide appropriate recruitment information targeted at different year groups (Years 9–10, Years 11–12, Year 13) and their whānau;
- advise students, parents and whānau of the secondary and tertiary educational factors and decisions that may impact on a career in health; and
- promote Indigenous student and whānau aspirations towards a career in health.

## Approach

Whakapiki Ake took the following approach in implementing Hui-ā-Rohe:

### 1. Identifying Hui-ā-Rohe regions.

Appropriate regions were identified based on Whakapiki Ake student numbers and Māori population proportions for any given region. Regions with the highest Whakapiki Ake student numbers and Māori population are prioritised.

### 2. Increasing outreach to Māori-medium schools, hapū and iwi.

Whakapiki Ake purposively targeted Māori medium schools known as Kura Kaupapa Māori and Whare Kura for the delivery of Hui-ā-Rohe. These schools provide students with an education immersed in te reo Māori (Māori language) and tikanga Māori (Māori customs) and are often localised within regional iwi and hapū contexts. This focus has allowed Whakapiki Ake to extend Hui-ā-Rohe to a broader outreach of Māori students and whānau (including younger ages from Years 6–8) and to increase liaison with local iwi and hapū.

### 3. Selecting the timing for Hui-ā-Rohe.

Selecting the right timing to provide Hui-ā-Rohe requires knowledge of the secondary school calendar and Indigenous community events in any given year. Influencing factors include the timing of secondary school subject choices (timed to precede the deadlines given to students for subject selection for the following year) and the potential of competing interests for student or whānau attendance (timed to avoid major sporting or cultural events for students and whānau).

#### **4. Identifying potential Hui-ā-Rohe participants.**

The following activities assisted Whakapiki Ake to identify potential participants:

- Maintenance of a Whakapiki Ake registration process.  
The Whakapiki Ake registration process requires any students who are interested in a health career and are engaged in a Whakapiki Ake activity to register formally with the recruitment program via the on-line Pukatono Form. This process captures individual and family contact details so that Whakapiki Ake can promote activities directly to whānau members as well as students.
- Maintenance of a Whakapiki Ake database.  
Whakapiki Ake invested in the development of a comprehensive database populated with student and whānau information. Whakapiki Ake staff are now able to produce region-specific listings of potential participants that can be provided to secondary schools and/or used directly by the program for Hui-ā-Rohe promotion.
- Accepting referrals and non-registered attendance.  
Whakapiki Ake accepts school referrals and non-registered involvement for any students, whānau and/or community stakeholders interested in attending the Hui-ā-Rohe. This open-door policy allows the intervention to be inclusive, rather than restricting involvement.

#### **5. Clarifying the contribution of secondary schools and identifying a Whakapiki Ake advocate.**

Secondary schools are asked to provide a suitable venue and audio-visual equipment for Hui-ā-Rohe, and identify a Whakapiki Ake advocate or school champion who can be contacted by the recruitment program for liaison support. The advocate's activities include sending pānui (meeting notifications) to students and whānau and promoting the Hui-ā-Rohe throughout their school.

#### **6. Maintaining responsibility for Hui-ā-Rohe delivery with Whakapiki Ake.**

Whakapiki Ake maintains responsibility for the delivery of the Hui-ā-Rohe, including: identification of potential participants; coordination of attendance confirmation; responding to any direct communication requests from students and their whānau; arranging catering; sourcing inspirational speakers; and developing/providing targeted workshops. The intention is to limit the demands on Whakapiki Ake advocates and secondary schools.

#### **7. Providing Hui-ā-Rohe in a whānau-friendly approach.**

Hui-ā-Rohe are held outside of normal work hours to assist with parental and whānau attendance (usually with a 6–6.30pm start time). Venues are intended to be easily accessible and familiar for whānau, e.g. meeting spaces within the secondary school, local marae (traditional Māori meeting houses) and community halls. Dinner is provided for all Hui-ā-Rohe participants.

#### **8. Conducting Hui-ā-Rohe within tikanga Māori context.**

All Hui-ā-Rohe utilise tikanga Māori to ensure appropriate cultural practices are observed. This includes beginning hui with a mihi whakatau (Māori welcome), utilising appropriate karakia (Māori prayers) and ensuring whakawhanaungatanga (Māori process of establishing relationships) are undertaken. In addition, the sharing of kai (food) further supports a culturally appropriate approach.

## **9. Utilising Māori health professional role models for inspiration.**

Local Māori health professionals are invited as guest speakers to provide an inspirational talk in which they share their own journey into a health career. Whakapiki Ake acknowledges the contribution of these voluntary speakers with a koha (gift).

## **10. Providing targeted workshops.**

Whakapiki Ake staff provide an overview of Whakapiki Ake as the recruitment arm of Vision 20:20. Staff then split the hui into three groups to facilitate the following interactive workshops.

### **Years 9–10**

Topics include: raising aspirations/expectations for health careers; introducing the importance of school subject choices; understanding University Entrance and the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (New Zealand's national qualifications for senior secondary school students); highlighting the importance of creating good learning behaviours early in secondary school; promoting positive Māori cultural messages; exposure to Māori role models in health; and emphasising the need for future Māori health professionals. An introduction to the Whakapiki Ake pipeline approach to health workforce development (see Figure 1) and an invitation to be part of it is provided by Whakapiki Ake staff.

### **Years 11–12**

This workshop builds on the Years 9–10 workshop, but with a greater emphasis on the importance of subject choices given that senior students are required to confirm these (necessary for access to health professional careers). Students and their whānau are taken through National Certificate of Educational Achievement credit mapping and shown how to calculate a Rank Score (used by universities to determine health professional program entry). Messages regarding the importance of positive study habits are aimed both at students and their whānau (who potentially control family, community and work commitments that may impact on academic performance). Future Year 12–13 Whakapiki Ake interventions are presented to encourage application and attendance. These include MASH or Māori Achieving Success in Health; COACH or Creating Options for a Career in Health; Whakapiki Ake Study Wanānga; and Online Academic Support.

### **Year 13**

This workshop focuses on advice that will assist Year 13 students and their whānau with tertiary applications and transitioning into university study. Topics include: specific details on application dates; an overview of the Māori and Pacific Admission Scheme process; accommodation options; greater detail on available scholarships; and the importance of budgeting. Students and whānau are provided with an overview of the tertiary environment including: reviewing the university Rank Score; understanding the tertiary enrolment process; calculating the university Grade Point Average; and reviewing first year course content at the University of Auckland. Information on future recruitment activities for Year 13 students and their whānau is also provided, including the NEXT STEPS to UNI program and Whakapiki Ake financial support.

## 11. Providing resources – leaving students and their whānau with practical tools.

Resources used to support workshop delivery include: trained Whakapiki Ake staff facilitators; audience-focused Powerpoint presentations; multi-media vignettes showcasing current Whakapiki Ake students and/or activities; and resource packs targeting each year group. The resource packs include:

- Years 9–10: Vision 20:20 prospectus; pad; pen; highlighters; and 'How to Study' pamphlet.
- Years 11–12: Vision 20:20 and Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences prospectus; pad; pen; study planner; and National Certificate of Educational Achievement credit map (Level 1 or 2).
- Year 13: Vision 20:20 and Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences prospectus; Māori and Pacific Admission Scheme application form; National Certificate of Educational Achievement credit map (Level 3); budgeting advice; study planner; application resource; accommodation comparisons; pad; and pen.

## 12. Data tracking attendance.

Whakapiki Ake records basic demographic information on all intervention attendees via its database. This assists reporting and informs the development of Whakapiki Ake activities.

## Results

In 2014, Whakapiki Ake provided 11 Hui-ā-Rohe across the North Island to 625 participants (Table 1). Of these, 310 (50%) were students ranging from Years 6–13, 264 (42%) were whānau members and 51 (8%) were school staff or external organisations representatives. Just over half of all student attendees were not registered with Whakapiki Ake (161, 52%) suggesting that they had not been reached by Whakapiki Ake Hui-ā-Kura (secondary school visits) held earlier in the year. Given this, it appears that Hui-ā-Rohe have enabled a geographically accessible forum for increased direct contact between Whakapiki Ake staff and Indigenous secondary school students. Importantly, Hui-ā-Rohe have also facilitated Whakapiki Ake to engage for the first time with whānau, Indigenous organisations and communities, who made up half of all attendees.

Whānau have responded positively to Hui-ā-Rohe, with one participant writing:

*Firstly, thank you for the information [at the] hui last night. We all found it very useful, helpful and [it] clarified a whole lot of stuff. My younger two [children] also really enjoyed being involved, I think that's a good initiative to touch base with the students at a younger age too. Both [my children] and I have been very impressed with the work you and the team do, the support now and potentially later at University is a real treasure. Such a great resource.*

Whakapiki Ake advocates have also acknowledged the positive whānau feedback and responded by offering to re-host future Hui-ā-Rohe, alongside commitments to increase engagement. For example, one Careers advisor wrote:

*Thank you both for everything... I didn't get to sleep until 12.30am... just reflecting on possibilities regarding [the] future of Whakapiki Ake here in our region ;-). All our crew that I spoke to... found it very worthwhile and your motivational kōrero [talk] – every junior student should hear this... I have heard similar but yours was more interactive and engaging.*

**Table 1: Hui-ā-Rohe attendees, 2014**

Total	Students	Whānau	Staff/External Organisations	Registered Attendees	Non-registered Attendees
625	310 (50%)	264 (42%)	51 (8%)	337	288*

\* 161 of the non-registered attendees were secondary school students

## Discussion

### Successes

Prior to the introduction of this intervention, Whakapiki Ake was focused on student contact within primarily mainstream secondary school settings. In 2014, more than 600 students, whānau and external stakeholders participated in Hui-ā-Rohe, and were exposed to important recruitment messages contextualised to pursuing a career in health.

It is clear from anecdotal whānau feedback, that more concise explanations are required of the secondary education environment and the National Certificate of Educational Achievement, particularly as they relate to university entrance and tertiary success within health contexts. Hui-ā-Rohe have allowed Whakapiki Ake to provide this specialised and often complex tertiary entry and admission advice to students and their whānau, information that they need to navigate both secondary and tertiary educational settings (Madjar et al. 2009). Formal research and/or evaluation to explore these issues further within the Whakapiki Ake context are recommended.

The introduction of Hui-ā-Rohe (alongside other early exposure interventions) has enhanced Whakapiki Ake's ability to influence or reaffirm the cultural development of Māori students considering a career in health. Whakapiki Ake promotes positive cultural messages where Māori excellence is normalised, Māori culture is seen as legitimate and valuable, and the need to maintain Māori cultural connection is supported and encouraged (Smith 2012). Given this context, there may be wider benefits associated with the delivery of Hui-ā-Rohe that extend beyond health recruitment, to Māori development in general.

Overall, the introduction of Hui-ā-Rohe has highlighted the importance of working collaboratively in order to support a comprehensive pipeline approach to Māori health workforce development (Ratima et al. 2008).

### Challenges

A key challenge that may impact upon future delivery is program funding. The development and delivery of community-based interventions are resource-intensive, requiring substantial staff input and time alongside significant operational costs. Although Whakapiki Ake has purposively expanded the number and type of interventions to increase its focus on early exposure, the overall funding pool for program recruitment has remained relatively static. Unfortunately, further expansion of Hui-ā-Rohe (and other upstream recruitment interventions) may be limited if program funding fails to keep pace with the increasing demand generated by the success of early exposure interventions.

Another challenge, also sensitive to funding, is the need to ensure that Whakapiki Ake can deliver age- and year-appropriate interventions that avoid duplication of recruitment messages or activities. Understanding how to scaffold recruitment interventions to ensure that activities are engaging, appropriate for the different contexts and, therefore, meet the intended recruitment outcomes will require additional staff time, energy and resources.

## Conclusion

Whakapiki Ake is a successful, Indigenous-led, tertiary recruitment program focused on supporting the growth and development of the Māori health workforce. A willingness to review the evidence base and respond to principles of 'best' practice in the recruitment of Indigenous students into health has assisted Whakapiki Ake to develop new Indigenous and community-focused interventions. We hope that by sharing our experience, Whakapiki Ake can contribute to the broader evidence base, celebrate our successes, and be mindful of the ongoing challenges to maintaining and enhancing Indigenous potential.

## References

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## Early Exposure

## Transitioning

## Retention

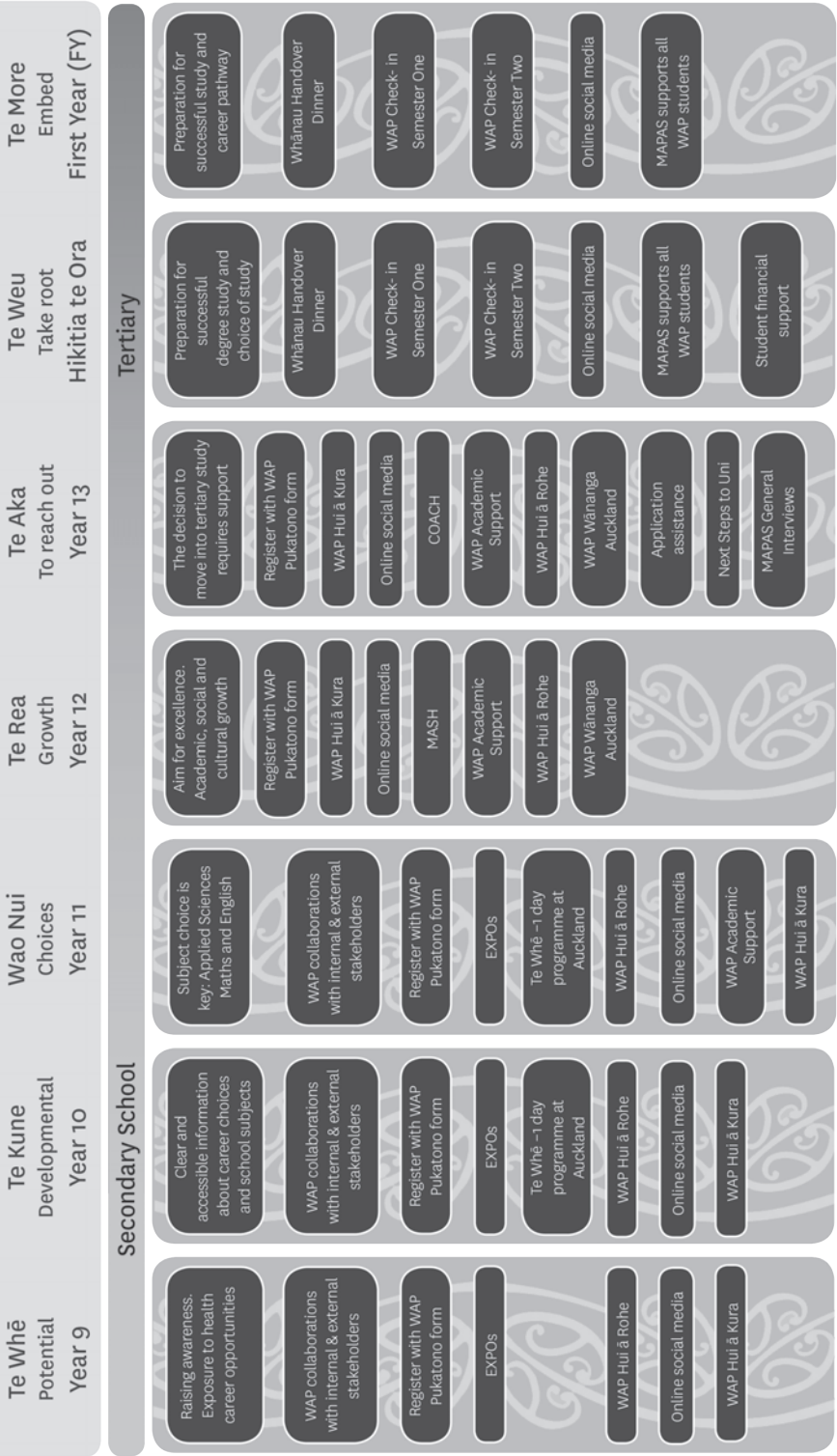


Figure 1: Whakapiki Ake Pipeline