

Bridging the Digital Divide



Faced with long-spells of forced closure brought on by Covid, the Ngāti Tamaoho Trust undertook a large-scale project to digitise its Waitangi Tribunal claim research and Archive resources with help from the Museum Hardship Fund providing a model for iwi-based archives across the country.

Spearheaded by Raewyn Paewai – who has over 26 years’ experience as a librarian - the project took on a new life with the advent of Covid. As the head of this

small-yet-bursting archive in the centre of Karaka, Auckland where the Trust is located, Paewai realised the critical importance of extending its reach to people in their homes.

First established with the Treaty Resource Centre, the archive resources were gifted to Ngāti Tamaoho and has grown significantly to include a range of children’s books, history books, novels, journals, maps, whakapapa resources and CDs. However,

ABOVE: Ngati Tamaoho Trust Librarian, Raewyn Paewai, who spearheaded the Trust’s digitisation programme.



ABOVE: Librarian Raewyn Paewai, and Ngāti Tamaoho Chief Executive Officer, Matekino Marshall with their newly re-housed archives.

despite its significance as a centre for researchers and students, digitisation had never been a priority for the organisation until Covid came along.

“During Covid we were disconnected from people and disconnected from each other, though through lockdown I began to gain a new appreciation of digitisation because it helped to bridge that connection. Over the past year, we’ve received a quarter of the visitation, so it was an opportune moment to really put our digitisation project into fifth gear,” she says.

As well as holding hundreds of books that have been collected or donated by iwi members, the community archive contains all the research from the Ngāti Tamoho Treaty claim making it a goldmine for any descendants, curators, archivists, educators, researchers and students.

“We have cultural values assessments, conference papers, archaeological reports, pānui and photographs. We are the first iwi in the Tāmaki Makaurau area that have our resources housed in a dedicated space at our Iwi office and catalogued using

a library management system so that beneficiaries can access these resources easily. With the change in history curriculum we are having more and more enquiries from students and schools who are researching aspects of the Treaty claim and Ngāti Tamaoho history, so our timing couldn’t have been better.”

A hybrid model

Thanks to the help of the Museum Hardship Fund, Paewai has been able to digitise 3,000 documents, add Dewey classifications including Māori subject headings, so that the database can be more relatable to Māori and accessed using Te Reo Māori.

“We wanted a database system that reflected our values, so we landed on one called Koha which was created by a Wellington based company. Having Māori involved in the construction of the original release and within the organisation enables a Māori lens over how Māori access information. Being situated in New Zealand rather than overseas means if we have any problems or bugs, we can just call them up.”

As a publicly accessible database that can be used at home, Koha enables people in a variety of fields to access documents for assignments, publications or reports.

Throughout the year, the Trust hosts a number of workshops on weaving, whaikōrero, carving and Te Reo Māori so the database enables Paewai to pull up any relevant resources that may complement the activities onsite.

“If we have a workshop on korowai, I’ll make sure to display any relevant books in the workshop area. That way, we can expose people to the many resources that are available to them if they want to learn more about a subject. This really helps to pique their interest. Students are welcome to use our resources for research and I am happy to work closely with them. The Trust runs a rangatahi programme and I teach rangatahi how the library works and the fundamentals of research, so they won’t be behind the eight ball when they get to university. They won’t be whakamā to know what to ask for when requesting a book or an academic essay.”

As well as digitising the Archive and Research Collections, Paewai is working with a team of staff, kuia and kaumātua to look at storing and accessing whakapapa through a database that enables members of Ngāti Tamaoho to learn about their connections to others and give young people a direct connection to their tūpuna.

“We wanted people to learn about their ancestors in a way that respects their tikanga and privacy, some of the bigger sites like ancestry.com don’t do this.”

A new breed of book-lovers

Having worked at Manukau libraries for over 20 years, Paewai was well versed in dealing with seasoned library-goers, though paving the way for non-library goers has been a critical eye-opener.

“I had a set of assumptions that have been blown apart in recent years. I came into this job thinking that I knew quite a bit about how people navigate around libraries, though in this case it’s about helping whānau, hapū and iwi understand the importance

BELOW: In order to better preserve the Trust’s taonga, Raewyn allocated a portion of the money from the Museum Hardship Fund to buy archival boxes and resources such as a map draw to hold a series of the maps of the area that date back to the 1800s.



of the mātauranga they hold, the future benefits in preserving that mātauranga and working through misconceptions and blockers.”

She says creating a space that is “for them and of them” is critical to ensuring new archive users feel it is a place that reflects and welcomes them.

During Covid, the Trust surveyed members on their internet usage and discovered that 11% of households in the area do not have internet access and 28 % have no devices. Accessibility is still a key concern, but something they’re working to change.

“It’s easy to set yourself a project and crack on with it, though at every point, I’ve had to take a step back and test my assumptions. By staying in touch with our community, we’re able to check our path at each step, so we can create something that has real value and ongoing sustainability for Iwi mātauranga.”

Paewai says that by creating a genuine dialogue with the community and bringing them along on the journey, they’re able to create something that captures Māori potential and future proofs iwi aspirations.

“This has been a lovely career change. I am able to understand the issues of people who don’t normally utilise libraries and provide an environment that will develop and enhance participation. The highlight for me is when they begin to see the value in their own taonga. I feel privileged to be a part of Ngāti Tamaoho’s journey.”

Unsurprisingly, the Trust has been contacted by other iwi wanting to replicate its model, so Raewyn often finds herself in a coaching and mentoring role to enable other iwi to share their collections beyond their walls.

“The library really helps to shine a light on new ways of working, one of my proudest moments was earlier this year when a kuia was browsing through the collection and commented to me, with a smile on her face, ‘this is ours.’” I feel by preparing the way like this, we can encourage all iwi to have a culturally appropriate repository, both physical and digital, for the well-being of whānau, hapū and Iwi.



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