

Programme helps learners to thrive

Conrad Waitoa admits he wasn't the best student and he often struggled at school. But that was before a mentor showed him a different way of learning.

Now, after 20 years in the financial sector, he has decided to give back to the Havelock North school system by founding Inspire in Education (IIE), an educational organisation designed to service the needs of Māori learners at the intermediate school level.

"It's a new spin," he says. "I'm using the information that I know and what I experienced as a young Maori boy growing up and not being the greatest in my learning."

He was inspired to create the programme after observing National Standards data presented during his nine years on the board of trustees for Havelock North Intermediate and Te Mata Primary School.

The organisation's mission is to help foster an educational environment that focuses on the importance of the Treaty of Waitangi in education by using a kaupapa Māori approach to release the potential of Māori learners and their whānau in English-medium schools.

"IIE is passionate about the facilitation of connections between mana whenua and schools," Conrad says. "We recognise the importance of engaging relationships that will help learners and their whānau thrive."

IIE offers a range of educational mentoring programmes designed to suit the needs of each learner, their whānau, and the schooling community. The organisation

also provides a range of professional learning and development services to assist schools with Māori cultural competence standards and Māori curriculum design.

"We're offering solutions to help some of our Maori students who just aren't connecting, not only with numeracy and literacy, but also with themselves," says Conrad. "Just getting them to understand who they are, first and foremost."

Conrad has been drawing on his own finances since establishing IIE last November.

"It's been a hard process to get to the pilot stage," he says. "It's been a tough road but I've just received charitable status for one of my trusts that I've set up. That's going to help me in the long run with funding and funding applications."

In the meantime, Conrad and Jamie Twigg, from 543 Design & Online, have been working with a group of Havelock Intermediate students to come up with a logo and branding for the organisation.

"I've seen two drafts already and they are absolutely fantastic," says Conrad.

A decision on the final design will be made early in term 2 — the organisation will launch its website shortly afterwards.

Conrad is focusing on the intermediate school age group "because those young boys and girls are just finding out who they are and different things are changing for them in their lives, with their bodies and hormones".

"It's a good time to plant a seed with them and help them understand what lies out there



BRAINSTORMING: Inspire in Education founder Conrad Waitoa consults with a group of Havelock North Intermediate students tasked with creating a logo for the organisation. Clockwise from bottom left: Tyler, Sophie, Dayton, Tiaho and Jason.

in education that is not just your mainstream. There are a lot of other things they can go into that might be something they're actually interested in.

"We tend to drive an education into four main areas: reading, maths, English and writing. But you've probably got some phenomenal dancers out

there, some talented musicians, music writers, poets, but we don't give them an opportunity to express that in a formal area. My programme will allow them to be who they want to be in the short time I have them each week."

Looking at the bigger picture, Conrad believes the programme

will have a massive effect on society's attitude towards young people.

"They see them as at-risk and I see them as at-promise, and that's how I'd love the world to see everyone who doesn't dress the same as us or think the way we think they should. They're actually phenomenal people."



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