

## ■ Māori & Pasifika Education Initiative

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The ASB Community Trust Māori & Pasifika Education Initiative:  
A story of philanthropic risk-taking and innovation.



ASB Community Trust  
Te Kaitiaki Putea o Tamaki o Tai Tokerau

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Sylvia Park School's project was the first to be funded under MPEI

# Ma tātou ano tātou e kōrero

We speak for ourselves

*In 2006, ASB Community Trust embarked on an ambitious and uncharted philanthropic journey in search of innovative proposals to address the serious problem of educational underachievement among Māori and Pasifika youth. The aim was to lift their educational outcomes by a significant percentage over a five year period of focused intervention. Three years later, the Trust has committed in excess of \$10 million to its Maori & Pasifika Education Initiative (MPEI) and will invest substantial funds through further grant-making. The total financial investment is greater than any amount the Trust has ever committed to a single initiative.*



This paper explores the following questions: What led ASB Community Trust to commit bold funding to a single initiative and take the rocky road of innovation? Why fund an educational initiative focused on Māori and Pasifika youth? How did the Trust develop an initiative marked by visionary intent? What steps did it take and what lessons were learned? And, where to from here?

### **A turn towards proactive, strategic, innovative philanthropy**

Looking back, MPEI was conceived in a time ripe for change. Traditional philanthropic answers had not worked or were having little effect on some problems. The usual philanthropic practice of spreading resources widely would not allow for major innovations to seed and flourish. The latter would require a substantial investment up front and funding over a number of years to enable communities to implement their visions through particular projects.

Internationally, philanthropic organisations were moving towards a creative approach. Some trusts and foundations were seeking to work more closely with communities to define problems, identify solutions and then commit to long-term strategic resourcing and support so as to achieve measureable and sustainable outcomes. In New Zealand, the JR McKenzie Trust and the Tindall Foundation, among others, were flag bearers of philanthropic risk-taking and innovation.

Against this backdrop, ASB Community Trust recognised that various philanthropic benefits would flow from operating with a more strategic outlook. Trustees wanted their decision-making to respond proactively to contemporary challenges and sought to identify issues facing the Auckland and Northland region in which the Trust operates. Trustees set out to harness greater intellectual rigor in the Trust's grant-making through an evidence and outcome-based approach, recognising that surmounting

major social problems would require philanthropic risk-taking. In developing MPEI, the Trust decided to invest substantial financial resources in educational projects aimed at overcoming educational underachievement in Maori and Pasifika communities.

### **A Maori and Pasifika Educational Initiative**

Why fund an educational initiative focused on Māori and Pasifika youth? The Trust had a twenty year history of engagement with the education sector, including an investment of over \$67 million between 2001 and 2006. Arguably, it made practical sense to build on its history and harness existing relationships across the sector.

Many community leaders, politicians, health professionals, educators, researchers, academics, members of iwi, hapu and whanau, and Pacific Island communities had expressed concern about the educational underachievement of Māori and Pasifika youth and the wide-ranging impacts on New Zealand society and economy.

Finally, hard facts and academic research proved beyond doubt that educational achievement was critical for the wellbeing and prosperity of Māori and Pacific Island communities as well as our nation. Put simply, it was in New Zealand's long-term social, cultural and economic interests to address this vexing problem. Failing to do so could condemn future generations of Māori and Pasifika communities to an unskilled underclass; blight economic progress; hinder attempts to strengthen social cohesion, national identity and unity and harm New Zealand's international reputation.

In light of the evidence, MPEI Reference Groups asked this question: 'Why wouldn't ASB Community Trust seek actively to invest in the future workforce and population of our region?'

### **Developing an initiative with visionary intent**

In forging MPEI, the Trust set out to explore a new approach to philanthropy under strong leadership. At the helm was Kevin Prime, a highly respected Chair. Individual trustees also stepped up. Jenny Kirk asked the critical question that promoted Pat Snedden's visionary and courageous proposal; Kristen Kohere-Soutar and Wilmason Jensen embraced the opportunity to lead the Māori and Pasifika reference groups and selection committees. Other Trustees made pivotal contributions: Mary Foy, Soana Pamaka, and Waitai Petera. The Trust had recently appointed a new chief executive, Jennifer Gill, who was passionate about the role and prospects of philanthropy in forging social change and willing to work with others to break new ground. Moi Becroft, MPEI project manager, was an experienced advisor adept at relationship-management.

Trustees agreed to 'ring-fence' substantial funds, demonstrating seriousness of purpose and ensuring the Trust's financial commitment to MPEI would not depreciate in changing economic circumstances. This radical decision was soon tested by the effects of an international recession and upheld. Ring-fencing funds told Māori and Pasifika communities: 'Your interests count in this matter and won't be shaved because of difficulties elsewhere.'

***“The vision of MPEI: Ma tātou ano tātou e kōrero, We speak for ourselves - resonates strongly with words often spoken by Ngati Hine: We want to speak for ourselves.***

***Why is it so important to us that we speak for ourselves? For so many years others have been speaking for us, knowing what was good for us, making decisions for us.***

***But we do not need others to speak for us; we can speak for ourselves. We know what is good for us and we are capable of making our own decisions.”***

– Kevin Prime, Chair of ASB Community Trust, 2003-09



A powerful vision, *Ma tātou ano tātou e kōrero - We speak for ourselves*, signaled the Trust's intent to create meaningful opportunities for those most affected by the problem of educational underachievement to turn things around for themselves. Trustees retained the legal responsibility for all decisions, but there was ample opportunity to create a process that would allow respected members of Māori and Pasifika communities with relevant expertise to shape its decision-making.

A principle-based approach reinforced a shared commitment to making a significant difference. The following principles were to define MPEI projects: strategic relevance; project sustainability; measureable outcomes; partnership and self-help; community ownership and capacity to deliver.

MPEI sought to focus on community innovation. The idea was to create new mechanisms that could add to or challenge existing approaches without disregarding the efforts of the state education system. The Trust agreed to fund a small number of groups who might not otherwise have had an opportunity to implement their visions; community ownership of and support for their initiatives would encourage active participation and project sustainability.

The Trust set a five-year funding limit. Educational under-achievement was a consequence of generations of difficulty, which must be worked through slowly to achieve lasting change. A five year period was needed to begin to see a difference in a child's educational journey. Another important reason was the four year appointment term of trustees. The ASB Community trustees considered that they could not commit to a project much beyond a single term of appointment, because their successors may want to pursue other initiatives and should have the opportunity to do so. Trustees agreed they should see through to completion the grant-making process and take full responsibility for it.

Finally, an organic community development model of engaging with communities enabled the Trust to learn by doing, with one step leading to another.

### **Striving for vision in action: a robust grant-making process**

The Trust established a Māori Reference Group in November 2006 and a Pasifika Reference Group in April 2007. These met on a bi-monthly basis to establish terms of reference for MPEI as well as its vision, mission and principles. Both groups deliberated upon the depth, breadth and characteristics of the problem and how the Trust could make a difference. Reference groups went into abeyance when the selection committees were established in April 2008, which operated until March 2009.

In January 2008, the Trust called for expressions of interests, asking applicants to summarise their proposal in 400 words. In March, the Trust held consultation meetings. Hui were held on Orakei Marae and Papakura Marae in Auckland, Ngararatunua Marae in Whangarei, and Maimaru Marae in Kaitaia, with over 260 participants. A Pasifika fono was held in Otago and another in Waitakere City, with over 150 participants.

By the mid-April deadline, over 300 expressions of interest had been submitted. In August 2008, a short-list of 37 applicants were invited to present an in-depth proposal and business case in January 2009, receiving assistance if required. In March 2009, eight successful applicants delivered presentations to a combined gathering of MPEI selection committees and underwent an external review of governance and management capacity. In late March, MPEI selection committees recommended seven projects to the Trust for funding. They were approved, subject to capacity-building.

### **Some key lessons learned**

Innovative endeavours require vision, leadership and competence. MPEI brought together skilled and committed people, inviting them to make meaningful contributions. The Trust harnessed the professional and cultural competence of its Māori and Pacific Island trustees and staff. The reference group and selection committee mechanisms created space for other Māori and Pacific Island leaders to contribute to Trust decision-making, enabling it to pursue a new approach with confidence.

Advocating for a long view and committing major funding up-front created a sense of possibility. Such ambition invigorated the commitment of Māori and Pasifika contributors, who reached for a gold standard in decision-making.

Reference groups met for over a year, allowing time to consider matters from different perspectives and to evolve a shared approach. Later, tight timeframes put pressure on the grant-making process and may have hindered applicants interested in developing collaborative approaches.

Consultation meetings raised expectations the Trust couldn't meet and created an unexpected avalanche of expressions of interest. This led to disappointments at a time when the Trust was seeking to build relationships with Māori and Pasifika communities. Also, the decision to invest significantly in a small number of projects did not allow for more modest but worthwhile community aspirations to be supported. The Trust did however encourage unsuccessful

***“What, if any, gems may have rolled on to the floor during this process? Did we miss the very thing we were searching for? These questions underline the burden of decision-making in a major philanthropic initiative like MPEI. I'm certain the projects on the table will address the issue of educational underachievement, but whether they are sufficient to lead a vanguard of change, only time will tell.”***

– Jennifer Gill, CEO, ASB Community Trust



applicants to consider its programme-based funding, leading to some successful applications.

Lively presentations by shortlisted applicants communicated that, if given the opportunity and resources, Māori and Pasifika communities will generate and lead their own solutions. Their resounding message: 'We think we can take charge of this problem and turn things around for our people, but we need to do it our way.'

Some applicants required a capacity-building bridge. Engaging advisors to work alongside MPEI applicants during different stages of the process helped to build organisational capacity in different ways, positioning them to implement their visions and to respond proactively to future challenges.

Openness and willingness to doing things differently led to cultural changes in the life of the Trust. Staff recognised their need for more cultural knowledge and support. Opportunities to learn the protocols of respectful engagement increased awareness of Māori and Pasifika cultural values. Trustees and staff managed the mechanics of cross-cultural relationship by practicing an ethic of manākitanga (hospitality). Exercising due regard for one another and appreciating everyone's contribution ensured that relationships remained intact.

Finally, all agreed that some things could have been done better and, perhaps, educational underachievement will not be overcome by a single silver bullet but rather by a number of magic bullets.

#### **Where to from here?**

From its earliest days, MPEI sought to look to the distant horizon of the sea – Titiro atu ki nga taumata o te moana. A number of projects are now in the final stages of capacity-building. The Trust will announce successful projects in coming months and post their profiles on the [www.Initiative.org.nz](http://www.Initiative.org.nz) website soon after.

The Trust is working with the New Zealand Council for Educational Research to establish and implement a framework that will evaluate the process and outcomes of MPEI projects. The Trust is also reflecting on the MPEI journey to date through in-depth narrative interviews. It hopes to eventually publish a fuller account of the MPEI story and its lessons, contributing to discussions on what to look for, and how to go about innovative and strategic philanthropic endeavours.

For now, the journey continues.

#### **■ Māori Selection Committee ■**

Kelvin Davis; Mary Foy rsm; Dr Manuka Henare; Rangimarie Hunia; Frank Leadley; Dr Elizabeth McKinley; Waitai Petera; Kevin Prime; Kristen Kohere-Soutar (Chair)

#### **■ Pasifika Selection Committee ■**

Linda Aumua; Mary Foy rsm; Jenny Kirk; Mokauina Fuemana Ngaro; Soana Pamaka; Ezra Schuster; Faafua Leavasa-Tautolo; Lili Tuioti; Wilmason Jensen (Chair)

***“Māori and Pasifika Reference Groups provided a simple rationale for the special treatment of Maori and Pasifika youth. ‘We want what others have: university enrollments; high paying jobs; people who are successful in their life careers whatever their field and confident about themselves and their culture. How come the state education system works for most people in the population but not for our peoples?’***

***“These prominent community leaders and educators, and others submitting applications, also revealed that, ‘At school, no matter what the prevailing philosophy, a Maori and Pacific Island child often feels like a poor cousin to his or her Pakeha mates. The starting deficiencies magnify the further on you go in the school process.’***

– Pat Snedden, Former ASB Community Trust Trustee

#### **■ The Hard Facts ■**

Government statisticians project that over the next 10 years, the Auckland region's Maori population will rise from 144,000 to 183,000 and its Pasifika population from 176,000 to 256,000.

Statistics published in 2005 by New Zealand's Ministry of Education showed that 48.9% of Maori and 36.6% of Pacific Island students left high school with less than NZCEA Level One qualifications, compared to 21.7% of Pakeha students.

Between 2000 and 2005, Maori and Pacific Island children achieved lower rates of year one students attending early childhood education than their Pakeha, Asian or other peers.

In addition, health research concluded that education played a pivotal role in improving the health outcomes of Pacific Island communities. Lifting the levels of educational achievement would help to raise the level of family income and in turn support better health outcomes. A higher family income would also help to diminish the incidence of overcrowded housing and reduce the incidence of illnesses attributed to such living conditions.

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