

Dannevirke family promotes self-sufficiency

By Harry Gibbons

"If you give a man a fish he will feed himself for a day but if you teach him to fish he can feed himself for a lifetime," is a proverb seen by Punga Paewai as holding a simple answer to today's high level of unemployed Maori youth.

By taking a sample of raw, unemployed Maori youth, merging it with a deep social concern, and mixing it with a well grounded farm training scheme Punga Paewai and his four brothers — partners in a major farming and rural contracting operation based near the southern Hawkes Bay community of Dannevirke — have come up with a recipe which goes a long way to restoring pride and confidence among Maori youth.

The scheme, launched on March 2, provides five-week courses for young Maoris from the East Cape to Porirua, who come to learn valuable skills which can give them employment and the opportunity to make their way in a tough society.

The teachers are the Paewai brothers, Punga, Manahi, Ringa, Nicky and Hepa and the classroom is their extensive sheep farming property which they have built up through organisation and hard work.

Much of the property in recent years has been, and still is being, cleared of scrub and through the partnership's active contracting element provides a source of work for the district's seasonal labour pool.

BEST MAORI FARMERS

As 1978 Best Maori Farmer of the Year award winners, the Paewais have made a justified claim to being well suited in operating their training scheme.

Spokesman for the partnership, Punga Paewai, maintains the proverb which advocates self-sufficiency holds the secret in providing a skilled work force of young Maoris able to take the vast number of rural job opportunities he feels still exist.

The idea stemmed from the inability of the brothers to find sufficient skilled workers to make up their contract gangs and a farm staff — while the media constantly blasted them with increasing unemployment figures.

The two situations did not seem to equate and possessing a proven track record of strong community responsibility it was decided that two birds could be killed with one stone.

As the brothers already had plans for a hostel complex to house seasonal gangs they decided to prepare a training scheme to use the facilities all year round. They poured \$61,000 of their own money to build a complex of bedrooms, kitchen, dining and recreation rooms.

The concept soon got rave treatment from other community sectors and it quickly became obvious that not only was the scheme a positive application of common sense and initiative but had the potential of creating thousands of jobs, many hundreds of them in southern Hawkes Bay.

The Dannevirke County Council put up no barriers when planning permission was sought and when the complex was opened its deputy chairman, Adrian Waterworth, referring to the unemployment situation, told those present that everyone could see things wrong with society, but few like the Paewais had the gumption to do something about it.

From the beginning Punga Paewai was certain his approach would work and, with the second group of 14 already in the middle of their course, he is just as certain now.

DELAYS, CHANGES CRITICISED

He did have doubts between courses however. There was a frustrating delay of about 10 months while the Paewais waited for financial support from the Department of Maori Affairs.

"That wait tended to kill enthusiasm and initiative" he told an employment seminar in Dannevirke on April 24.



Hepa (left) and Punga Paewai check over their plans for the complex which will house their farm trainees. The complex, almost completed, is behind them. — Evening News Photo.

He was also critical of changes in the programme which saw his training periods narrowed down from three months to 13 weeks and then five.

Present at the seminar were representatives of several Government departments who drew more of the same fire from others as that lit by Mr Paewai.

The critics all supported the Paewai claim that the problem was job organisation not job creation. They too had schemes in the pipeline which could have gone a long way to assisting the unemployed but which were being subject to delays and changes.

Mr Paewai thought his proposals might have seemed too simple for a bureaucracy more at home handling complicated schemes.

However assistance in the form of wages for the trainees and a proportion of the wages for the Paewai supervisors came through, and the scheme went ahead.