

# Maori Wardens — Frontline Social Workers

Philip Whaanga

It wasn't that long ago when Maori wardens were seen as no more than 'Maori police' — a brown version of the long arm of the law. But it's all changing now according to Maori Warden Association president, Peter Walden. He says government support for the revamped association has put the spring back into the movement with current membership of over eleven thousand wardens who want to help their people.

Peter Walden says the feeling of *aroha* is strong amongst Maoris and it's this respect that allows wardens to work with social problems. He says Maoris respect wardens for what they are and pay attention instead of classing them as an authority figure or outsider. With the strong concern a warden must have for others and a specialised knowledge of what help is available, the way is cleared to air any problems such as budgeting or alcohol abuse. Because wardens are selected by the good standing they have in a community, other Maoris don't see them as outsiders and so are more at ease discussing any problem areas.

## Just Talking

However, the National Wardens' Association would like to see a more positive role for wardens in a legally defined sense. Mr Walden says the current powers of wardens to police unruly or drunken behaviour at Maori gatherings should be substituted for a more outward-looking role such as that of the New Zealand Maori Council — to promote, encourage and assist Maoris in their physical, economic, educational, moral and spiritual well-being.

This more positive legal definition of the warden's role would recognise the expanding field of social work that wardens now deal in, says Mr Walden. He feels it would also better allow them to defuse potential trouble with Maori youth roaming the streets at night. He says it's a sad fact that Maori parents seem more willing to let their children roam the streets at night, with urban living having eroded traditionally strong Maori family ties.

## Drastic Reduction

One warden working in West Auckland, Tom Wairea said they become substitute parents listening to the joys and problems of the street

kids. The four wardens in this particular patrol cover a large area three nights a week taking in hotels, dances and even home visits and have received great co-operation from hotel managers and patrons alike. Tom says just the fact that the wardens are regularly seen is one reason for the good response from the community. He says quite often he's contacted by young people who can't talk to their parents and are running away from home, or by parents who want to talk about problems they're having.

## Positive Role

One striking example of the success this revamped wardens association is having is in Henderson, where the local shopping mall has reported a drastic reduction in petty thieving. In fact the mall businessmen are now contributing to the local warden's association and another shopping mall business group are looking at asking for warden patrols in their area.

These small successes haven't gone to the head of the national warden president and Peter Walden sees the time now as a period of consolidation for the association. He sees a great need for wardens as a buffer group in the community between the European way of life and the Maori way of life — front-line social workers defusing potential problems before they come to a crisis point.



Tu Tangata magazine administration officer James de la Haye (left) discusses the new magazine layout with Government Print customer services manager Roy Bedford. Tu Tangata magazine is just one of the many varied printing jobs the government printer handles. From topographical atlases to new telephone directories, from producing microfiche to specialist book-binding, the government printer does the lot. Roy Bedford says changing technology in the print trade has meant an increasing specialist workload from government departments. However he says the thousand Government Print workers around the country offer a high standard of work in the very competitive printing field.