

Speak to Willie Kaa, one of the guiding lights behind the setting up of the Wellington kokiri units. He'll tell you what's what.

"Kokiri was born out of Maori people not coping with the system, the plight of children not achieving and adults not forthcoming in participation, especially in bureaucratic setups like PPTA's, committees etc. And in the courts parents weren't showing support for their children. Why? Because they didn't understand the system."

So Willie got behind the Maori Affairs Department's Kokiri concept which reversed bureaucracy and made the community responsible for deciding and fulfilling needs.

"We recognised the self-help philosophy and the need to get rid of the reliance on welfare, to move from dependence to independence".

On March 26, last year the Harataunga Kokiri Group moved into action setting its own priorities, some such as assistance and support for Maori and Pacific school students; homework centres at marae and work skill programmes for unemployed.

For Willie it was an exciting time that was not without its opposition from people who saw their position threatened by an enlivened community. However when it was pointed out that "you are the kokiri unit", barriers were lowered. "It's taken a long time for people to get used to the idea that they have this tremendous energy and power to fix their own problems".



In practical terms kokiri operates this way. A small team of Maori Affairs Department community workers base

themselves in the community and concentrate on whatever the community sees as its priority.

"It's a learning programme that never ends. The Maori people at grassroots level know what's needed in their community."

For Willie this learning meant the old social worker approach had to be abandoned in favour of the community diagnosing its own ills. He says the people met to sort out their needs and then with the financial and administrative backup of the Maori Affairs Department, allocated time and resources accordingly.

The kokiri management group in the Hutt Valley meets monthly with all those attending having equal say in what the priorities should be. Attendance varies with upwards of 80 people depending how the community sees the needs.

Does this pose a problem for kokiri?

Willie Kaa — "It's a bureaucratic animal we're handling, the logistics, the backup. A lot of people, me included, haven't come to terms with the full extent of people power".

In nuts and bolts terms, the life of the Harataunga kokiri has been lived in such things as parent support groups set up to help shy parents talk to school principals and staff about their children's progress.

These groups have been very successful judging by pupils attitudes to schooling and even, Willie points out, some parents offering themselves for PPTA's.

In one school pupils wanted to use the library for study after school but no school staff were available. The parents stepped in and now staff it during homework hours with their own parent roster.

In the court, support groups have also succeeded in helping Maori and Pacific Island youth and their parents to handle the trauma of offending.

But it's on the home front that Willie Kaa believes the real success story of Kokiri is. People have laid aside petty rivalries in the interests of the whole community.

Through this community decisiveness, Maori people are restoring their faith in themselves not only in the European world but also in such projects as Te Kohanga Reo, a pre-school centre using the Maori language as its sole communicator of social values.

Now Willie feels Kokiri needs to be shared with the rest of New Zealand and welcomes the establishment of kokiri units in Auckland.

He says the judicial system should be told about Kokiri, the Law Society, the PPTA's and boards' of governors, the schools, and the work force.

"Kokiri should go into the streets and move onto the gang pads. That's the future of Kokiri — to advance on all fronts."

Kokiri — "at grassroots level people know what's needed. They can sort out priorities without bureaucrats".

Interested on-lookers at the Kokiri Wananga.

