

Job schemes covering the Coast

There's a new pride on the Coast. It's in every township, it's on the maraes and in remote corners of the backblocks — a pride in employment.

In a short time the employment schemes operated by the Labour and Maori Affairs Departments between Tolaga Bay and Lottin Point have established themselves as an integral and valuable part of the East Coast work scene.

For jobs have a special meaning and significance on the Coast. They mean cash in the pocket and one less in the dole queue. Their significance is that unemployed of all ages can stay home, earn a living and take a pride in their community.

More obvious

And nowhere is that pride more obvious than on the many maraes up and down the predominantly Maori region where, because of the population ratios, the great majority of both unemployed and people on the work schemes are Maoris whose tribal lands are on the Coast.

The maraes are taking on a smartness and sparkle long overdue in many cases. Bands of special scheme workers are setting about the task with a will. And while pay packets are going into their pockets, the community is benefiting from the scheme structure — not just the maraes, but incorporations, schools, clubs, departments and councils.

"It's one of the best things this Government has ever come up with for this area."

Feeling better

That comment during a visit to see the effects of the employment programme sums up the feeling of those who are seeing the benefits and are feeling the enthusiasm among workers who a few months ago had no job and little prospect of one.

But none is more enthusiastic than the scheme's co-ordinating supervisor, Mr Parekura Horomia, who heads a team of five area supervisors in charge of the job bosses and work gangs.

He's a local who has come back to the Coast and his patch of land at Tolaga Bay. He knows the problems and he voices the excitement that is felt by those who are guiding this scheme along.

"It is not just a matter of eight hours' work a day, but being taught a sense of

belonging — these schemes are bringing the young people back to their maraes.

"The supervisors are at the helm but the people are running it all themselves — that's the secret."

Mothers help

And that's where pride once again flows from the newly-created work opportunity. Mr Horomia has seen mothers turn up to help their children on a work scheme project to get the job finished.

A criticism the supervisors hear about their 300-400 charges, is "where are they?" But the majority of them are out of sight, cutting scrub on a farm slope, refurbishing an isolated marae, fencing up a country road, helping out on farms, tidying up churches, cutting trees, hedges, long grass ...

"Our workers know if they slack around and lose a PEP job, there goes their last chance," Mr Horomia points out.

"Youngsters are finding a fulfilling job at home after finding no work for them in the cities and no jobs to be had on the Coast. The employment schemes give them a chance."

No openings

To those who say there are plenty of jobs on the Coast and no need for subsidised work schemes Mr Horomia replies that there would not be more than a dozen openings at any time. Trying to place workers in the private sector by the hundred is not encouraged by job figures like that.

The majority of the workers are in the 17-23 age group and 90 per cent of them are unskilled. They are forced to become reliant on subsidised work. An estimated 96 per cent are Maori and every effort is made to keep off the scheme any person on another type of benefit, who has a working wife or husband, or might not be in dire need of work.

Long run

In the long run the main aim of the scheme is to place as many people as possible in permanent or part-time employment in the private sector.

Naturally, this is not possible for all and a large percentage of the scheme workers must enroll for another six-month stint.

But there is no longer the stigma attached to being unemployed that might have kept the same workers away from the dole queue, money out of East Coast family pockets and an air of depression among the unemployed young.

In simple terms, the unemployed have benefited, their families have benefited and the Coast community is feeling those benefits.

Revived

The marae is traditionally the base of Maori culture and life, so it is both appropriate and fortunate that the maraes are able to play their role as a base for these work schemes. Many of them are themselves desperately in need of renovation and cleaning, so work groups up and down the Coast are pouring their energies into work the maraes might never have been able to afford to do.

The grounds are smarter, carvings, tukutuku and kowhaiwhai are being brought back to life and amenities painted and improved.

Similar work is being done for other non-profit organisations, while farm work is being done on corporations and other Government development blocks.

But it does not stop there. The effects of the work scheme are felt in many quarters, be they the office with the new clerical worker, or amenities like Camp Williams benefiting from student helpers and, later, refurbishing work planned for a work gang during the winter.

Employment habits

Mr Horomia is proud of the scheme's achievement of good employment habits, of the absorption of gang members who have become good workers, of the placements made in the training or private sector on the basis of good work done under the scheme, of favourable comments from various quarters, of voluntary help in the teaching field from within the community, and of offering a guiding hand to workers in their budgeting and banking.

Will the work run out? Mr Horomia believes some will, but there is always a cultural spin-off from these schemes and basic skill courses will set the workers up with something to offer the private sector.

Courses

A basic skills centre will be established this year on land donated by farmers. The former MWD single men's quarters will be moved to the new site from Te Puia and will become a live-in establishment where young trainees will be taught basic skills under the tutorship of local farmers and farm workers.

In taking a look at the work being