

Manaakitia Trust...

Mrs Piki Takiari could see young Maori were having difficulty coping with the modern world — even in a small city like Wanganui.

To help them she became involved with Mahi Tahi in Wanganui. It was a drop-in centre started by the YMCA in February 1979.

It was a place where people — mainly young — could go and feel at home. Until April 14 last year it continued as a kind-of club for people who were having difficulty surviving.

But in April Messrs John Ward and Graeme Stephens decided to extend the bounds of Mahi Tahi. With the assistance of Mrs Takiari they started a work skills programme.

There was a little conflict as Mahi Tahi moved from a protective nest to what was hoped would be a self-supporting co-operative business.

Mrs Takiari resigned as director of Mahi Tahi so she could concentrate on the social aspects of the group. Graeme Stephens became the director and John Ward the supervisor.

The name Mahi Tahi was replaced with Manaakitia Trust, which, according to Mr Ward, would allow the group to cast off the old and start anew in a different direction.

Mr Ward said at the time the trust intended handling the effects of unemployment in a Maori way. He hoped they would eventually be able to cater for 20

people.

He said the trust faced a difficult job. The people it was dealing with had left school with no hope of finding a job. The expectations were low as was their faith in their own ability.

He said people not used to working were not aware of the responsibilities that went with a job or could not be bothered with them — basic things like turning up everyday on time.

From the start he took a firm hand.

"Mind you, I have to be reasonable and lenient too. I allow them so much freedom and then I clobber them," he said.

Now, after almost a year, his methods seem to be paying dividends. The trust has 25 people being paid to learn work skills and employs five supervisors. (Wages are supplied by the Government as part of its unemployment relief).

It now has five plots of land around Wanganui which are used for gardens — about 12 hectares are involved.

In July the trust leased one hectare of land from the Railways at Aramoho. The disused section was over-run with scrub, small trees and long grass. Mrs Takiari and a group of young people — mainly girls — cleared the land and it is now in gardens.

The supervisor of the clearing gang was Miss Pat Thomasen. Before taking on the job she had been a dressmaker in Wellington.

"It's hard work but we get stuck into it," she said. "The girls are good. They really amaze me — they stick to a job. The boys tend to give in but the girls stick with it." Though the work was harder than she was used to she enjoyed it. "I like it, You are not confined within four walls. You also learn a lot about yourself — we have to push ourselves. You learn how to cope with it."

She said the trust did a lot of free gardening for old people.

"A lot of them are lonely and they want to have a talk. When you are sewing for people they come for a fitting and all you learn is their body measurements. Here you get to know people," she said.

Since then, Mrs Takiari has left Manaakitia to start a PEP renovation of the Kaiwhaiki Marae. Mr Stephens has left to work as an accountant with the Imlay Freezing Works though he is still the director of the trust and is on hand when his expertise is required.

The day-to-day business of the trust is now run by Mr Ward. His trump cards are his senior supervisors: An A grade mechanic and a "pommy ex-army man" Mr Charles Mitford.

"I had to go and find him, the Labour Department did not have anyone suitable. The kids take to him because they talk to him on a one-to-one basis."

By late February the trust had found 11 of its members permanent work, five had gone on to the PEP and three were self-employed: One as a paper-hanger, one in horticulture and one in forestry.

When Mr Ward started with the trust it owned one old van that ran "mostly on the gift of God". Now it has a reliable ute, a TK Bedford seven tonne truck with a full canopy and the van.

And while the trust has prospered materially, Mr Ward says its main aim is still to help people cope.

"With no names mentioned I will tell you about a 14½-year-old. Last Christmas she ran away from her parents — away from everybody. For three weeks she existed on the streets, I don't know how.

"Her parents brought her down to me and said could I do anything with her. I said I couldn't employ her because of her age. They said they wanted somewhere she could go during the day. Somewhere she could do something without causing the trouble and strife she had been."

Mr Ward agreed to let her work at the trust as long as her parents dropped her off and picked her up.

"Within three days her parents were back and said the change was astounding. She stopped here till she went back

Mr John Ward (left) supervisor of the Manaakitia Trust in Wanganui, and the trust's new director, Mr Graeme Stephens.
Photo. Wanganui Chronicle

