

Ka mua, ka muri—Walking backwards into the future: Partnering with mainstream child protection services as a community-based Māta Waka organisation

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION: Spurred by critical reviews of Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children, Aotearoa New Zealand’s statutory child protection agency, and growing calls for services delivered “by Māori, for Māori, with Māori”, the New Zealand government is taking significant steps toward devolving responsibility for supporting the wellbeing of tamariki, rangatahi, and whānau Māori from the Crown to Iwi and Māori social service providers. Frequently overlooked in discussions of Crown–Māori partnerships are community-based Māta Waka (pan-tribal) organisations, which provide a range of much-needed services to tamariki, rangatahi and whānau Māori who are not mana whenua. The purpose of this Kaupapa Māori research was to examine the expectations that kaimahi working for a Māta Waka Kaupapa Māori service provider have of other organisations that: 1) partner with tamariki, rangatahi and whānau Māori; and, 2) partner with Māta Waka.

APPROACH: Drawing on findings from wānanga with kaimahi, this article illuminates the principles and values that guide their practice, using these as a foundation for exploring the complexities, challenges, and opportunities inherent in building effective partnerships with statutory child protection services on behalf of tamariki, rangatahi and whānau Māori across differences in mandate, power, world views, and guiding frameworks or tikanga Māori.

IMPLICATIONS: The study findings have implications for current Crown–Māori partnership efforts and, by extension, for the wellbeing of tamariki, rangatahi, and whānau Māori.

Keywords: Partnership, collaboration; Māori; Indigenous; non-governmental organisations; statutory services; community providers; child protection

Spurred by critical reviews of Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children, Aotearoa New Zealand’s statutory child protection agency, and related calls for services delivered “by Māori, for Māori, with Māori” (Waitangi Tribunal, 2021; Whānau

Ora Commissioning Agency, 2020), the Aotearoa New Zealand government is making significant investments in devolving responsibility for supporting the wellbeing of tamariki, rangatahi, and whānau Māori from the Crown to Iwi and Māori health

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and social service providers. In its “2021 Future Direction Action Plan” and related public statements, for example, the Ministry for Children (hereafter “the Ministry”) notes that it will “invest in iwi/Māori and community organisations and build on existing relationships and approaches that enable decision-making by whānau, hapū, iwi and communities” (Oranga Tamariki Ministry for Children, 2022, Partnering with Māori section).

To this end, the Ministry is actively building and formalising strategic partnerships with Iwi and large Māori organisations (Oranga Tamariki Ministry for Children, 2021). Also under way, though less further along, are moves to reconfigure the Ministry’s relationships with the array of smaller, Māori-serving, community-based organisations that likewise are vital providers of front-line services to tamariki, rangatahi, and whānau Māori. These include Māta Waka organisations and providers (hereafter “Māta Waka”), which serve whānau Māori from multiple Hapū, Iwi and whakapapa connections, alongside those from other communities (Eketone, 2002; Maaka, 1994).

As Aotearoa New Zealand once again commits itself to creating meaningful and lasting change in state child-protection policies and practices, specifically as these pertain to Māori (Hyslop, 2021), it is important these efforts are informed by the perspectives of diverse Māori providers on their experiences of partnering with mainstream child protection services. Māta Waka are key entities in the ecology of tamariki, rangatahi and whānau services. However, the space they occupy is complex. Although Māta Waka serve large numbers of tamariki, rangatahi, and whānau Māori, many lack necessary resources, bargaining power and visibility. Consequently, they tend to be overlooked both in allocation of resources and in broader decision-making about services and systems. Yet, alongside Iwi and non-governmental organisations

(NGOs) they are significant providers of front-line services, with valuable knowledge to offer on the challenges and opportunities entailed in building effective Crown–Māori partnerships with statutory child protection services.

To make the perspectives of Māta Waka on Crown–Māori partnerships more visible, this article shares the views and experiences of kaimahi from one Māta Waka around partnering with statutory agencies and other mainstream organisations on behalf of tamariki, rangatahi and whānau Māori. Te Hou Ora Whānau Services is a 21st century, urban, pan-tribal Māta Waka organisation that has its own version of ahi kā (keeping home fires burning) with many whānau who live outside of their own tribal boundaries. To that extent they are Iwi, but they are not an Iwi (Waitangi Tribunal Report, 1998).

To position the findings, we first describe larger contextual factors shaping partnerships between statutory agencies and Māori. We then present our learnings from the kaimahi participants in our study. We conclude by placing these learnings in conversation with relevant New Zealand and international literature on partnerships between Indigenous and mainstream organisations, with the aim of adding Māta Waka perspectives to the current kōrero on Crown–Māori partnerships.

*Statutory agency–Māori partnerships:
Contextual factors*

Current moves to strengthen partnerships between Māori and statutory child protection services raise important questions about the nature and form such partnerships might potentially take. In Aotearoa New Zealand, as in other settler–colonial nations, relationships between the Crown and Māori are indelibly shaped by New Zealand’s history of colonisation, structural injustices, problematic power relationships, racism, and marginalisation of Māori (Boulton et al., 2018; Fitzmaurice, 2022). In the

child protection context, the significant and intransigent over-representation of tamariki and rangatahi Māori among children and young people in state care, associated histories of separation of tamariki and rangatahi Māori from their whānau, Hapū, Iwi, and culture, and profound systemic failures in protecting children in state care from abuse and harm have understandably resulted in deep wells of mistrust of child-protection services in Māori communities (Boulton et al., 2018). Failures by the Crown to live up to previous commitments to reform add to scepticism that current efforts will be successful (Waitangi Tribunal, 2021; Hyslop, 2021, 2022).

In the years following New Zealand's Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1989 (the Act), the failure of the Crown and statutory agencies to adequately resource Iwi and other Māori providers to support whānau Māori resulted in a significant hollowing out of the promise of the Act and its visionary precursor "Puao-te-ata-tu: The Report of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on a Māori perspective for the Department of Social Welfare" (Māori Perspective Advisory Committee, 1988). The legacies of this and other failures by the state to fully recognise Māori sovereignty in relation to the wellbeing of whānau Māori, to adequately resource meaningful partnerships with Māori, or to elevate Māori approaches to service delivery hang over contemporary partnership efforts (Boulton, Potaka-Osborne et al., 2018; Boulton, Levy et al., 2020), raising cautions for Iwi and other Māori entities.

The neoliberal economic reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, which saw the rise of a "contract culture" in Aotearoa New Zealand's social sector (Mills, 2015), added further complexities. In child protection, as in other domains, NGOs providing contractual services have effectively become less powerful extensions of state services, reliant on competitive, state-funded contracts and subject to contractual conditions that in

many ways dictate the shape of the services they provide, reducing flexibility and self-determination (Grey & Sedgwick, 2013). For Māori organisations, this has typically meant being subject to contractual frameworks that privilege Western models, compromising their ability to provide services in ways consistent with Māori worldviews and lifeways (Masters-Awatere, 2015; Walker, 2004). Furthermore, as Grey and Sedgwick (2013) have noted regarding the positioning of NGOs within New Zealand's "contract state", those speaking up for marginalised groups are frequently themselves marginalised by these arrangements, including having their knowledge and expertise "dismissed, mistrusted or treated as unsubstantiated anecdote" (p. 4).

Nonetheless, as Keddell et al. (2022) pointed out, community-based providers serve as key "instrumental, mediating lever[s]" (p. 4) between statutory services such as child protection and families with multiple needs. As close-to-the-ground providers offering holistic, relationally oriented, culturally responsive services, Māta Waka complement those services also provided by Iwi and other NGOs. In particular they are important facilitators of access to Kaupapa Māori services for whānau Māori who do not whakapapa to mana whenua but may be deeply reluctant to engage with mainstream organisations because of personal and inter-generational histories of traumatic and punitive interactions with colonial systems (Leckey et al., 2022; Lindsay Latimer et al., 2020). Equitable, mutually productive partnerships between statutory agencies and Māta Waka are thus essential to ensuring that the priorities, aspirations and needs of these whānau are met.

Little is known, however, about the experiences of Māta Waka with statutory child protection organisations, or about their perspectives on the elements essential to building effective partnerships between statutory organisations and Māta Waka—relationships that, as Walker (2010) observes,

are vital to “giving substance to Treaty of Waitangi obligations at the local level” (p. 54). As the Crown transitions many of its front-line services in health and child-protection services back to Iwi and Māta Waka, it is the power inherent in those relationships and the kaupapa commitment to tamariki, rangatahi, and whānau wellbeing that unites rather than divides. In seeking to address the knowledge gaps identified, this article is also considered an expression of kotahitanga.

Methods

The purpose of this Kaupapa Māori research was to examine the experiences and expectations that kaimahi working for Māta Waka have of other organisations that: 1) partner with tamariki, rangatahi and whānau Māori; and, 2) partner with Māta Waka. We used a wānanga approach to both the qualitative data collection and analysis utilising Royal’s (2011) description of wānanga as a process of knowledge creation that recognises knowledge as pre-existing. Thus, our “understanding arises in the consciousness of the individual contiguous with the progressive revelation of depth in the world (p. 5)”. Our wānanga approach to the research aimed to facilitate those creative processes of internalised knowing that bring about individual and collective transformation in consciousness and awareness for everyone involved (King, 2021).

Our ethical approach to the research and to meeting our ethical obligations to kaimahi involved was informed by Māori research ethics such as “Te Ara Tika Guidelines” (Pūtaiora Writing Group, 2010), mahi on ethics and marginalisation (Ormond et al., 2006), and the ethics of care and transformational research practices (Brannelly & Boulton, 2017). Ethical approval was received by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (Reference: UAHPEC3398).

Participants in the study involved Te Hou Ora Whānau Services’ kaimahi over 16 years of age who were willing to participate and had given written consent. We obtained appropriate organisational approvals prior to the recruitment of study participants.

Data collection and analysis

In accordance with New Zealand Government Covid-19 regulations at the time of the data collection, we held the wānanga in-person at Te Hou Ora Whānau Services with online participation for those unable to travel. The approach to the wānanga followed the tikanga of Te Hou Ora Whānau Services, for instance, karakia, whakawhanaungatanga, and shared kai. Lasting approximately 2.5 hours, the wānanga was informed by a flexible interview schedule in order to facilitate the pūkōrero. Both the English language and Te Reo Māori were spoken during the pūkōrero. The research team wrote notes during the wānanga, and audio-recordings of the pūkōrero were obtained and transcribed verbatim (both with informed consent).

We used a hybrid method to the data analysis that included both data-driven inductive and deductive (a priori) approaches, ensuring Kaupapa Māori theory was central to data coding and analysis (through the deductive approach), whilst making space for the generation of themes to occur through the inductive approach (King & Cormack 2022; Rolleston et al., 2021). All six research team members reviewed transcripts of the pūkōrero, and the data were then coded systematically by two members. The broader research team then deliberated on and defined the overarching and supporting themes from the pūkōrero. During this time, we reflected on Dr Moana Jackson’s (2015) “ethics of prior thought”. We thus privileged Māori concepts grounded in those ontological and epistemological systems of our tūpuna in our defining and naming of the overarching and supporting themes. We obtained feedback from kaimahi

participants from the wānanga on the initial themes from coded data (illustrated with anonymised quotes) as a quality check.

Results

Eleven kaimahi participated in the study. Five overarching themes and seven sub-themes are described in the sections following. The five themes of *Whakamana*, *Aro ki te hā*, *Whakapapa*, *Whanaungatanga*, and *Pono* are described as the pou—the foundational underpinnings of both good practice and good partnerships. The seven sub-themes of *Manaakitanga*, *Kanohi kitea*, *Wā*, *Māia*, *Ūkaipō*, *Mahi tahi*, and *Pūkengatanga* are the takepū, the “preferred ways, fashioned by Māori thinking and rationale, of engaging with others” (Pohatu, 2013, p. 13). The pou and takepū are described in the text following.

Pou: Whakamana

The pou Whakamana refers to the importance kaimahi place on organisations ensuring that the priorities, aspirations and moemoeā of tamariki, rangatahi and whānau are placed at the forefront of decisions made and actions taken—a principle that in the view of kaimahi is frequently not upheld by partner organisations.

The term “box checking”...rings really true with a lot of other organisations... They’ve got so many different pieces of paper, certain numbers they have to hit in their files to get to that space, that they forget that they’re working with a person in a family and whānau. Which, I guess, that’s frustrating for us as well when we enter that space with that young person’s needs at the forefront, and it’s like, “Oh, but they don’t meet this criteria”.

The social worker for this particular person or this whānau, I hadn’t met them. They’d had them for six months at least, and they’d rung twice...Then the other services that were in there, I think there

was a lawyer for the child and that kind of thing, and I think the lawyer for the children was the only person that I had actually met and spent some time with them. The rest of the people there, apart from say one or two hadn’t even met with them and they’re making these decisions about a whānau, about rangatahi, about where they go, the direction that they get put in. And actually, the whānau have no input and the people haven’t had anything to do them. That’s a real hard thing that I struggle with. And that’s been similar stuff with multiple whānau.

Kaimahi also emphasized that for Whakamana to be realised, statutory organisations that rely on the whānau-centred work of Māta Waka need to ensure that resourcing mechanisms uphold the mana of Māta Waka. They noted that this requires investments in funding services equitably. Also important is avoidance of contracting arrangements that force Māori providers to compete with each other (Grey & Sedgwick, 2013), to extend themselves beyond available resourcing, and—frequently—to underwrite the services they provide out of other funds.

That competitive environment isn’t healthy for whānau, so what happens is organisations will grab or try to take, for a variety of reasons that aren’t helpful. So, because they need certain numbers, because out of fear that if they don’t fill up a service, then they may lose that contract. A lot of that is fed by the contract provider at different times, that they will hold that over an organization. So, I guess what I see from these guys is a shit load of courage to make the right decision, regardless of the consequences...because they generally always have that “whānau first” mentality. That’s very, very difficult in our environment at the moment.

Because of how we have been funded, the funding is not equitable, so what

that means is, is that we've always been short. And so that shortness has been cut around the auxiliary services needed to uphold the mana of the kaimahi.

Fundamentally, kaimahi noted, these issues come down to questions of power. As one said of partner organisations: "There is a lack of willingness to have shared control."

Kaimahi also highlighted the negative impact on partnerships of actions by partner organisations that discount their knowledge and experience, thereby diminishing and undermining the mana of Māta Waka, and thus of tamariki, rangatahi and whānau.

There's like a lack of understanding that we work alongside our young people and we've been working with them for quite a while, and that does carry its own weight in terms of what we are saying... There's often times... where it's like, "Why do you need this?", "Why do they want this?", "Why can't they do this?" And it's like, well, actually I've been working alongside them for a year now and I know this is not just, you know, they're not pulling your strings and all that stuff, but that means nothing sometimes, which is frustrating.

Pou: Aro ki te hā

The pou of Aro ki te hā refers to absolute reverence for a person's breath of life (The Pūtaiora Writing Group, 2010). In practice, Aro ki te hā relates to ensuring that partnerships with tamariki, rangatahi and whānau are based upon love, compassion and empathy:

[E]xpressing love is a highly professional skill that is utterly underrated and is not considered to be professional. But I think people who treat it like that are amazing. And they tell you, you know, cos they wouldn't talk to you if they didn't know you thought like that.

Aro ki te hā likewise underscores the importance these kaimahi place on their own and other organisations honouring the voices

and pūrākau or stories/narratives of tamariki, rangatahi and whānau that they aim to partner with, and avoidance of deficit approaches in the interpretation of pūrākau shared.

In terms of processes, like in terms of referrals... it's trying to get the whānau or the young person's voice, not what the social workers want, because their goals are very different to what actually our rangatahi and our whānau want... before even meeting them, is like the referrals, like I've chucked a couple back to [mainstream organisations] to say, "No... This isn't acceptable." So, it's trying to really get the voice of them before we meet them, but when we meet them, we just take them at face value, so we don't judge them by what's been written in those referrals.

Pou: Pono

The pou of Pono relates to the importance kaimahi place on having integrity of process so that organisations follow through with what they say they are going to do, holding themselves accountable to tamariki, rangatahi and whānau, and also to Māta Waka. The kaimahi in this study described lack of follow-through and communication by partner organisations, both with rangatahi and whānau and with them, as an ongoing source of frustration and concern, and damaging to partnership relationships.

A big thing has been accountability and lack thereof with other services. So, a lot of my time is spent actually trying to chase up other services to do the things that they've said they're going to do... one of the big things that builds trust with the whānau that we are working with, is that when things are going to be said they're going to be done, they end up actually being followed through on.

And so it can be really hard, I think, trying to have that accountability and transparency for us working directly

with the whānau, when we're not also getting that ourselves with the different organisations that we are trying to liaise with. But also, those organisations also aren't being transparent or being held to account for the things that they've directly told the whānau as well.

Fundamentally, Pono also refers to the expectation that mainstream organisations demonstrate integrity by doing their own mahi first. This entails ensuring that as an organisation there is investment in learning the priorities, aspirations and needs of, and how to work with, tāngata whenua in Te Tiriti o Waitangi based and culturally safe ways. In general, kaimahi noted, there is a need for ongoing work in this area:

There's a [lack of] cultural capability and competency, but also a [lack of] willingness to be on any sort of journey towards that and understand the value that it could add.

The continual improvement or self-reflection with partners is always lacking.

Pou: Whakapapa

The pou Whakapapa reflects those structured genealogical and relational layers that are interconnected, interdependent and complementary, traversing generations, past, present and future, including connections with tūpuna, with atua, with the natural and spiritual worlds, and with the universe. Kaimahi describe good partnerships as grounded in and responsive to these whakapapa connections, beginning with whānau in the community and extending outwards to include organisations if these are willing to invest time and effort in building relationships.

Because I know like massively in the Māori community, we know everyone. And that's how we get a big in with our whānau as well, it's cos that cousin knows that cousin, and that cousin knows that cousin.

Pou: Whanaungatanga

The pou of Whanaungatanga refers to the importance kaimahi in the study placed on interconnected, interdependent and complementary relationships in partnering with Māta Waka and in responding to the priorities, aspirations and moemoeā of tamariki, rangatahi and whānau. Whanaungatanga also reflects the importance of organisations taking a "whole of whānau" approach. Crucially, Whanaungatanga recognises and acknowledges that tamariki and rangatahi do not exist outside the context of their whānau. For the kaimahi, partnering with tamariki and rangatahi requires being responsive to the self-determined priorities, aspirations and moemoeā of the whānau collective—an obligation that shapes the way they approach their practice.

I think something we do quite well as well is, you know, we get a referral for one tamariki, and then go into that household...we often end up servicing the whole whānau in there. It's that holistic, wraparound support that we provide...That's something I think I'm really proud that we're able to do.

Whanaungatanga also recognises and acknowledges the responsibilities, obligations and commitments that Māta Waka have to the communities and collectives that they are part of, and the relationships that they form within these. The kaimahi in this study emphasised the importance of partner organisations validating and supporting these obligations, and thus ways of working that differ from mainstream, Western practices.

We create, we build genuine connections with our young people.

I think also to be mindful that we are only a part of the community, and people that we are helping are our community. You know, so we are not—there's no this, were actually on par. So, if we want our

community to thrive, that's what we do in order to make it thrive.

Takepū: Manaakitanga

The takepū Manaakitanga relates to the centrality that kaimahi place upon exercising respect, care and kindness during each and every interaction with tamariki, rangatahi and whānau. Kaimahi found it troubling when these values weren't as evident in the practice of partner organisations.

It's really quite sad really cos sometimes when you meet someone for the first time and after the initial meeting they're like, "that's the first time I've heard praise in I don't know how long".

But also, when you were saying that you were smiling cos you were thinking of some of those young people and you could see them. And so you didn't see this problem as such, you saw everything else that was there. I think it's really sad when especially statutory work robs people of that, you know? When they're talking about all the whānau they have a privilege of working with, they should light up...Do you know what I mean? Otherwise, they shouldn't be there.

Takepū: Kanohi kitea

The takepū Kanohi kitea refers to the centrality of the "seen face"—the importance kaimahi place on partner organisations engaging in a meaningful way with Māta Waka through ongoing, open and mutually respectful dialogue, communication, and mutual learning.

Communication is key...face to face communication too...Acknowledgement.

Come talk to us and see what we do... They don't know where our buildings are, they don't know what our services are.

So, it's also language and knowing from both sides how to use that language, so

it's communicative across the board. It's about putting our frameworks into their language and hopefully vice versa as well.

For the kaimahi, being the "seen face" equates with being the "trusted face": being present and turning up for the tamariki, rangatahi and whānau they work with, and for. This commitment to being a seen and trusted face extends to their relationships with one other, and with the organisations (both statutory and NGO) they partner with, informing kaimahi expectations of what good partnerships should look like.

I'm so sick of the excuse, "Oh, I'm just too busy". Having the same person not show up...That happens a lot.

There's also that expectation too, that we are the ones communicating with the young person for the other so-called professional, just cos we're the ones on the ground all the time with them. That's not good partnership.

Takepū: Wā

The takepū Wā relates to the centrality of time to Māori ways of being, knowing, relating, and doing in responding, and being accountable to, the priorities, aspirations and moemoeā of tamariki, rangatahi and whānau. Achieving this requires an honouring of the time that is required. This flexible responsiveness, grounded in whanaungatanga, typically surpasses—and thus can be in conflict with—the time constraints generated by formal government commissioning and contracting processes, which typically are inflexible and do not honour Wā.

We don't want to do that, we don't want to move someone on that should be moved on yet, even if the contract's coming to an end.

I think that's what the sort of state services seem to be is "Get them off

our books as quickly as possible.” And actually that’s not the right approach to take with our rangatahi and whānau. You need to be involved until you don’t need to be involved anymore.

Actually what we also allow is that those whānau, if they need extra support in the future, that they can always come back. So, it’s not just a “You’re out.” That’s what gives them a bit of relief and support to continue their good mahi.

Takepū: Māia

The takepū Māia refers to the importance kaimahi place on being courageous in all interactions, with one another and with partners. Acts of courage are supported through respectful, straightforward engagement around challenging issues.

There’s a difference between being direct and being disrespectful.

Part of this is being able to speak your mind freely to whether it is good or bad...Where you can respectfully call the shit on someone else and know that we will hold that respect when we shake hands at the end and leave.

Having the courage to defend or stand up for the voice of whānau, even with [mainstream organisations] or someone who appears to have greater power or whatever. But also the courage to say when they [the kaimahi] might not be the right person for that rangatahi or whānau, and that’s quite hard in a competitive provider environment.

Kaimahi highlighted the adverse impacts on whānau when courage on the part of other organisations and their workers was lacking.

I think most of them want to do a really good job. They’re just hamstrung so much...They’re just scared...They’re operating under fear...They’re operating under a process rather than as an

individual...It’s sad...And fear that makes you stop being creative...Fear. You can’t feel your wairua if you’re scared...But we know all this, but why is it at the expense of our whānau? It’s always at their expense.

Takepū: Ūkaipō

The takepū Ūkaipō refers to the importance of supporting the reconnection of tamariki, rangatahi, and whānau with sacred sources of sustenance and nurturing, as a vital part of the healing process for minds, bodies and spirits. Yet kaimahi also noted that such cultural practices are often not considered to be *valid* social work or mental health interventions by the mainstream services they partner with.

Just connecting them with nature and simple things like gathering kaimoana and stuff, and then taking it back and sharing it with people.

We really connect them back to the taiao, so our environment and actually being able to look after and nurture other things also.

We can cut down harakeke together [then] she weaves, and that’s great. But yeah, the other professionals didn’t realize that that was part of her wellbeing, which I argued for.

Takepū: Mahi tahi

The takepū Mahi tahi highlights the importance of inclusion, participation and collaboration between partners in support of shared goals whenever working with, and for, tamariki, rangatahi and whānau.

In some instances, they’ve just completely washed their hands of the situation. So I mean, yeah, I’ve been aware of situations where [mainstream organisations], for example, have been involved and there’s been a kid might be uplifted kind of situation. And they’re like, “Oh, but

you guys are involved. Like, you've got someone there," and we are expected to either do nothing or be the one that holds and sorts out everything. And there's sort of no in between. It's really hard to get good collaboration and people fitting into their roles.

As the kaimahi emphasised, Mahi tahi requires recognition, acknowledgement, and mutual awareness of and respect for the roles and responsibilities that each partner brings—key building blocks of effective partnerships that kaimahi view as critical but which too often are absent.

People don't know who we are and what we do. They assume "[I] can do this. [I] can do that." Actually do you even know what I do? Do you even know what my program[me]s are?

Good partnership is roles and responsibilities. Everybody knowing what their role and responsibility is within that cohort. Actually know who is in that cohort with that whānau, and then having regular hui.

Takepū: Pūkengatanga

The takepū Pūkengatanga relates to recognition, acknowledgement and being respectful of the knowledge, expertise and skills that kaimahi within Māta Waka hold in their ways of being, knowing, relating, and doing. For the kaimahi, this is evidenced by partner organisations respecting both the practices they use, many of which are grounded in Te Ao Māori, and community-based kaimahi as professionals and colleagues. Too often, this recognition isn't evident in their relationships with partner organisations.

So, someone else looking into that wouldn't have seen weaving, but if you put it into their language, so actually this was our form of counselling, then [mainstream organisations] would've got it.

Their ability doesn't get acknowledged. Their insight and relationships they have to whānau aren't recognized. Their roles and responsibilities aren't clear or respected. And at time of decision making, they are often left out of decision-making.

Discussion

The findings we report here are from a small-scale, qualitative study set in a particular context, time and place, and so must be interpreted and understood from this perspective. There is no one voice of Māta Waka. Nor is there one voice for tāngata whenua who work within the broader context of child-protective services in Māta Waka, Iwi, statutory or other mainstream organisations. Rather, all will have distinct experiences, perspectives, and lived realities.

Nonetheless, our findings align closely with those in the broader literature. Research conducted in New Zealand has shown that NGOs in general face a number of challenges in collaborating successfully with statutory organisations, including differences in norms, misalignment in practices and paradigms, and differing perspectives on optimal timeframes for service provision (Grey & Sedgwick, 2013). As demonstrated by a scoping review of the research literature on partnerships between Indigenous and mainstream health providers in Australia, these tensions are magnified for Indigenous organisations, which face additional challenges related to cultural differences and systemic racism (Taylor & Thompson, 2011). Factors identified as contributing to "tenuous and unproductive" relationships (p. 297) included legacies of colonialism and related mistrust on the part of Indigenous organisations; differences in values and ways of working; ambiguity—and lack of shared knowledge—around roles and services; insufficient resourcing; and challenges in sharing power related to institutional racism and "inherited paternalism" (p. 303).

The wider literature also suggests that, like the communities they serve, Indigenous organisations and their workers regularly have experiences of not having their knowledge and expertise valued, of being excluded from decision-making, and of being rendered invisible (Keddell et al., 2022; Taylor & Thompson, 2011; Taylor et al., 2013; Walker, 2004, 2010). Mirroring these findings, the kaimahi in this study described challenges around respect for their roles and recognition of their cultural and professional expertise from statutory agency partners and other mainstream organisations.

Embedded in these experiences is a positioning of kaimahi and, by extension, Māta Waka as less than professional. Other studies report similar findings, noting that rather than valuing the relational, flexible, and open-ended practice of Indigenous workers and providers, mainstream organisations and workers raise concerns about boundaries, ethics, confidentiality, and accountability (Cuestra-Briand et al., 2015; Eketone, 2021). Attesting to the persistence of such appraisals, a study of transcultural relationships between Māori providers and mainstream organisations conducted more than a decade ago conducted more than a decade ago (Walker 2010) identified similar critiques of Kaupapa Māori practices. It also noted the negative impact on these relationships when “non-Māori organisations questioned the competence of staff and accountability mechanisms in Māori organisations” (Walker, 2010, p. 52).

Tensions over mismatches between Indigenous and Western frameworks (Sookraj et al., 2010) undergird and fuel these concerns, together with a lack of respect for, and understanding of, Indigenous knowledges, practices and service models. The kaimahi in our study painfully described mainstream organisations’ lack of understanding or validation of their Kaupapa Māori theoretical models and practices, a finding

consistent with the broader literature on epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007) and with studies highlighting the persistent silencing and marginalisation of Māori knowledges and knowledge holders in Aotearoa New Zealand’s social and health sectors (Boulton, Levy et al., 2020; Cormack & King, 2022). In his 2004 case study of a Māta Waka provider, for example, Walker (2004) detailed the challenges faced in gaining either validation or funding for the Māori frameworks and practices at the heart of the provider’s kaupapa. In consequence, Walker (2004) concluded, “the desired partnership that was envisaged by ‘Puao-te-ata-tu’, the articles and the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi and the focus on Māori caring for Māori as envisioned by the Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1989 was not manifested” (p. 162). Seventeen years later, Lindsay Latimer et al. (2021) reported similar constraints on Māori workers, including a lack of recognition of practices grounded in mātauranga Māori.

Issues of power and control, at multiple levels, pervade the accounts of the kaimahi in this study and are echoed in the broader literature. As Moore et al. (2022) noted, Indigenous organisations are frequently small, community-based, relatively resource poor, and reliant on state contracts for their survival—all factors, in addition to their Indigeneity, that place them at a disadvantage relative to powerful statutory agencies and their staff. In his studies, Walker (2004, 2010) described relationships between Māori organisations and state agencies in which state agencies used their statutory power to assert control, with adverse impacts on respect and trust. A recent study of Māori health contracts (Eggleton et al., 2022) supported and amplified these earlier findings, pointing to language embedded in contracts that reinforces top-down power arrangements, paternalism, and a deficit lens. Eggleton’s study also highlights “subtle forms of control” (p. 6),

including the powerful but relatively invisible dynamics entailed in discounting the capacity and expertise of Māori workers and providers. These findings align closely with the experiences of the kaimahi in this study, who speak of the unwillingness of mainstream organisations to cede control or share power as an ongoing source of stress and frustration. Profound disparities in resourcing, particularly in relation to large differentials in pay between statutory and community-based social workers (Social Service Providers Aotearoa, 2022), exacerbate these tensions.

Taken as a whole, our findings suggest that efforts to create equitable partnerships between statutory child protection organisations and community-based Māta Waka will necessarily require action at multiple levels, from the restructuring of top-down, performance-focused, Western-centric contracting models to investments in forthrightly engaging the multi-layered systemic, organisational, and professional dynamics that sustain the dominance of Western frameworks and practices—and which in ways both subtle and forthright, disrespect and devalue Māori ways of being, knowing, relating, and doing (Cormack & King, 2022).

The interlocking challenges to effective partnerships between Indigenous and mainstream child-protection organisations highlighted in our study data are both real and persistent. Yet as the kaimahi suggested, and findings from other studies confirm, important benefits are also realised when these relationships work well, with shared goals and understandings, a climate of trust, a strong relational foundation, ongoing dialogue and information sharing, and respect for Indigenous knowledges, practices, and self-determination (Moore et al., 2022; SNAICC, 2020; Taylor et al., 2013). These include improvements in the cultural relevance and safety of services, greater attention to the social determinants of client issues, a broadening of service provision, frameworks and practice models, and

enhanced responsiveness to family, whānau and community needs (SNAICC, 2020; Taylor & Thompson, 2011).

Durie (2004) has contended that the interface between Western and Indigenous perspectives and practices is potentially a “source of inventiveness” (p. 1140). The findings of this study are consistent with his insight. Embedded in the words of the kaimahi in our study—and in the pou and takepū distilled from these words (summarised below in Table 1)—is the outline of a framework for envisioning and building more robust, innovative, and mana-upholding partnerships between Māta Waka and statutory and other mainstream organisations.

As the Aotearoa New Zealand government seeks to strengthen its Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnerships with Māori and deepen its investments in Māori-led, community-based and preventive services (Boulton, Levy et al., 2020), it is essential that Māta Waka, which operate from a Te Ao Māori lens but provide services applicable and open to all tamariki, rangatahi and whānau, are not invisibilised. The pou and takepū developed from the experience and perspectives of the kaimahi in this study hold promise as guiding principles for effective partnership practice. However, more work is needed to bring this framework fully into view, including forthright attention to the issues identified in this study and related research as posing challenges to effective partnerships between Indigenous providers and mainstream child-protection organisations.

Conclusion

The pou and takepū highlighted by the kaimahi in this study manifest in their tiaki for those they serve, and for one another—highly professional and volitional acts of love that evoke power in its most beautiful form. They are also at the heart of what kaimahi expect in their partnerships with other organisations. Imbued with a fierce grace, Te Hou Ora

Table 1. Overview of Five Pou and Seven Takepū

Pou	
Aro ki te hā	Utmost reverence for one's breath of life. Love, compassion and empathy underlay the very essence of the approaches and practices taken when working with and for tamariki, rangatahi and whānau.
Whakapapa	Structured genealogical and relational layers are interconnected, interdependent and complementary, traversing generations, past, present and future, including connections with tūpuna, with atua, with the natural and spiritual worlds, and with the universe.
Whanaungatanga	Those interconnected, interdependent and complementary relationships generated through whakapapa, through working on shared kaupapa with one another alongside tamariki, rangatahi and whānau, and through the sharing of lived experiences as a collective, are continually strengthened and sustained.
Whakamana	Ensuring that the priorities, aspirations and moemoeā of tamariki, rangatahi and whānau are always forefront, where tamariki, rangatahi and whānau are recognised and acknowledged as being experts of their own lives.
Pono	The importance of being absolutely true, unfeigned and genuine with regard to the kaupapa and core values and having integrity of process when working with, and for tamariki, rangatahi and whānau.
Takepū	
Manaakitanga	Respect, care and kindness is exercised during each and every interaction with tamariki, rangatahi and whānau.
Kanohi kitea	Being present, not only in the physical sense but also in terms of being real, human and relatable is crucial to developing and strengthening whanaungatanga, and to being accountable to tamariki, rangatahi and whānau.
Wā	Time is central to Māori ways of being, knowing, relating, and doing. Responding, and being accountable to the priorities, aspirations and moemoeā of tamariki, rangatahi and whānau requires an honouring of the time that must be taken to achieve this.
Māia	Acts of courage in all interactions with one another, strengthen and support the relationships developed and sustained through whanaungatanga.
Ūkaipō	Tamariki and rangatahi are returned back to Papatūānuku as the sacred source of sustenance and of nurturing. Connecting back to Papatūānuku and Ranginui is not only an integral part of the healing process for minds, bodies and spirits, but also a way in which the knowledge held by Papatūānuku and Ranginui can be shared with tamariki and rangatahi, contributing to their growth and development of life skills.
Mahi tahi	Collaborative approaches in support of shared goals are crucial whenever working with, and for, tamariki, rangatahi and whānau. Strong relationships based on trust are critical to such collectivist approaches.
Pūkengatanga	Fluidity in ways of being, and creativity in ways of doing are required in responding and being accountable to the priorities, aspirations and moemoeā of tamariki, rangatahi and whānau. Ways of being, knowing, relating, and doing are grounded in mātauranga Māori; the body of knowledge derived from, and built upon, the knowledge of our tūpuna.

Whānau Services are deeply committed to authentic and meaningful partnerships. They will not turn anyone away, including statutory and other mainstream organisations.

The challenge for these organisations is to similarly commit to, and invest in, the difficult but essential work entailed in being good partners with Māta Waka and with tamariki, rangatahi and their whānau, beginning with reaching out to learn from and with them about how to work with tāngata whenua in Te Tiriti o Waitangi based, culturally safe ways that whakamana. Building and sustaining such partnerships

will require, as Whiting et al. (2018) have noted, “two-eyed seeing”: the capacity to “capture and catalyze the tremendous value and strengths of both worlds....” (p. 330).

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Glossary

ahi kā	burning fires of occupation	pou	post, upright, support,
aroha	love, compassion, empathy		pole, pillar, goalpost,
Hapū	kinship group, sub-tribe,		sustenance
	sub-nation, to be pregnant	pūkengatanga	expertise
Iwi	extended kinship group,	pūkōrero	well-informed, speaking
	tribe, nation, people, bone		with authority, articulate
kai	food, meal	puku	stomach, belly
kaimahi	worker(s)	pūrākau	ancient/historical
kaimoana	seafood		narrative, story
kanohi kitea	to have a physical presence,	rangatahi	young people
	to be seen, to represent	ranginui	Sky Father
karakia	to recite ritual chants	raranga	to weave
Kaupapa		taiao	natural world
Māori	Māori agenda, Māori	takepū	preferred ways of
	principles, Māori		engagement with others
	ideology—a philosophical	tamariki	children
	doctrine, incorporating	Te Ao Māori	the Māori world
	the knowledge, skills,	Te Tiriti o	
	attitudes, and values of	Waitangi	the Māori version of the
	Māori society		Treaty of Waitangi; forms
kotahitanga	unity, togetherness,		the foundation of the
	solidarity, collective action		contractual relationship
koha	gift, offering, contribution		between two internationally
kōrero	speak, speech, address		recognised sovereign
mahi tahi	to work together,		nations – Māori, as tāngata
	collaborate, cooperate.		whenua (people of the land),
māia	bravery, courage		and the British Crown
mana	spiritually sanctioned or	kotahitanga	unity, togetherness,
	endorsed influence, power,		solidarity, collective action
	and authority	tūpuna	ancestors
manaakitanga	showing and receiving	tūrangawaewae	standing, place where one
	care, respect, kindness, and		has the right to stand
	hospitality	ūkaipō	the suckling of a child on
mana whenua	power associated with		their mother's breast at
	possession and occupation		night, one's ancestral land,
	of tribal land		a place of nurturing and
Māori	Indigenous Peoples of		of spiritual and emotional
	New Zealand		strength
mara	garden	wā	period of time, interval
māramatanga	enlightenment	wānanga	to meet, discuss, deliberate,
Māta Waka	many canoes, a pan-tribal		consider
	Māori organisation	whakamana	to give authority, to
moemoeā	to have a dream, have a		validate
	vision	whakapapa	ancestry, familial
Ōtepoti	Dunedin		relationships
Papatūānuku	Earth Mother	whānau	to be born, extended
pēpi	baby, infant		family, family group
pono	to be absolutely true,	whanaungatanga	relationships
	unfeigned, genuine	whenua	placenta, ground, land

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