# Transcript – Reflections on Seventh report, A duty to care, Thoughts from tangata whenua

[Pauline] Kia ora, Leslynne. What are your key takeouts from the Seventh Report?

[Leslynne] Kia ora, Pauline. Thanks for the chance to have a chat with you about the report. I think the report is an incredible piece of work. It's really brave. It's really bold, and it talks to some of the important work that's been done before, but I think it does also point us in the direction of some exciting opportunities that we've got to think differently about responding to what's called family violence.

I think it also really highlights some incredible work that's happening all around the motu and the people who are pushing the boundaries and testing new ways of — or in many cases old ways of doing things and doing them better.

[Pauline] Such as your own organisation, really. And I think, you know, having the opportunity to highlight what's happening in Manaaki Tairāwhiti has been a real opportunity within that report. What about some of the challenges that you see that have been highlighted? Can you speak to any of them? And I guess it would be really interesting to know in some ways if you seen those challenges reflected in your own work that you're doing as well.

[Leslynne] Yeah, sure. I think a lot of the work that we're doing, because it's with whānau in the whānau led, community supported area, it's great that we're able to test some new ideas there, because there are lots of barriers and challenges that have been put in place, that slice and dice, who gets help and who doesn't from the social sector.

And we've really got to change the way that that happens. We can't separate or target groups of people who can or should get help and ignore others because our systems have not been set up to respond to the real-life stresses and strains that whānau face every day.

So, I think one of the great opportunities we have is to really closely examine all of the thinking that's gone into targeting approaches, limiting types of support and types of organisations who can be helping, and I think it places a great responsibility to consider the duty of care and the duty to care, which have got different implications for different people.

But it changes the way we need to think about what challenges exist and how we overcome them and who we need to work with in order to shift forward and not just do the same things better, but do entirely better things.

[Pauline] Yeah, and I think some of that, certainly from what I've read in your experience, comes down to just forming a relationship to start with, right, with whānau, with people who are experiencing a whole variety of adverse circumstances and being able to establish that trust before you move any further.

[Leslynne] Yes, like other people around the country, we know that the investment has been in responding to crisis, and that's appropriate and we need to continue to do that. But we also need to find more innovative ways of preventing violence from ever happening.

And that means having strong, trusting relationships between whānau and the places where they want to get the support they need at whatever point in their journey, and then also having trusting relationships between funders and providers where there's not so much a transactional focus on what type of help and to whom, so that we're enabling greater capacity for help to be — help and care to be delivered to the people who need it and not just in a post-crisis situation. So, I think those are good areas where we can be doing a lot more work in changing the relationships between government and communities, between funders and providers, and most importantly, the relationships between frontline workers and whānau asking for help or support.

If we get it right in the first interaction between whānau and whoever that they might ask for support or help, and everybody else stands behind that relationship and mirrors the trust and the care that needs to be taken, we could transform what we see now, which is transactional relationships based on small packages of care broken down by the amount of time and the amount of care, and we can actually broaden all of that out.

[Pauline] So that, I mean, because a lot of, or some of what we've been talking about is some of the stuff that Manaaki Tairāwhiti's already investing in, is it — do you have a, like a vision for the future? Are there things where you're thinking, in terms of what your organisation's doing, it would be good to move towards something — or different ways of working or ways that you could improve or things like that? Are you —?

[Leslynne] Yes, Manaaki Tairāwhiti has a big vision. The vision of our organisation is that all whānau are flourishing. And we do believe that if we're successful, there would be no need for a social sector at all. But while we still have demands to respond to, we need to change the way that we do what we're doing, all the way from our relationship with central government, who've got such an important role. But it's a role that needs to be shared in many cases with local communities, because all of our communities have different strengths and different people who have a passion and a drive to be part of the future and part of reducing the harm that families face.

So, devolving those opportunities where central government works with communities on a case by case basis without a search for a template that's a blueprint for all is a key place to start, is to give communities, give regions and their local leaders, the iwi and the other leaders that can step into this work, who have got a vision and a focus that extends past funder contracts and provider contracts, and it looks into how do we hold each other to account for what we're seeing happening in our families and whānau, and how do we share that duty of care so that we can all take responsibility for it and understand that being effective in supporting whānau doesn't belong to just certain groups of people that are funded to do work.

[Pauline] Yeah, I think you raise a really important point there around, you know, relationships and the need for a collective approach. I mean, really what we're looking at is multiple experiences. And at no point in time, I think, can one organisation be responsible for addressing all of those, so there needs to be some sort of trusting relationship across.

It's interesting that you talk about developing a new relationship between government and community as well, and that almost has to mirror the relationship that's between frontline staff and whānau really, I guess, is what you're suggesting.

Do you think that there’s other challenges within, you know, for changing the way government works? What do you think the report suggests for government in terms of changing their focus and their approach?

[Leslynne] Yeah, I think, I think in the past, managing risk and managing budgets has really been what sat behind how support services are in place, whether it's in government or in communities and more and more, we're coming to understand that actually we just have to have trusting relationships with the people we’re here to serve, to listen to whānau, to allow them to prioritise what they need, and then to respond accordingly, and to be able to do that in a way where we are examining the systems that are in place and where we can test and build learning systems within what it is that we are doing to share learning across systems so that we can stop doing the things that are adding to the harm and we can spend more of our time doing more of the things that whānau tell us are of value to them, that we can do more of what whānau say matters to them, that's going to help them to be more in control of their own situation, and leading their own path to well-being, and in some cases, that includes recovery.

[Pauline] Yeah, I think that's the outcome that we'd like to see for everybody is, you know, that healing pathway and one that leads to recovery. You just, you mentioned doing less of the things that contributes to harm. I just wanted to pick up — do you — does Manaaki Tairāwhiti have a process of understanding what those things are that are contributing to harm, those things that we put in front of whānau that doesn't actually promote safety or well-being for them?

[Leslynne] Yes, we've been working to better understand what the barriers are for whānau when they ask for help, and many of those barriers are assumptions that we've all made about who's responsible for doing what and when and how. And we need to let go of all of those assumptions and truly follow the journey that whānau go through when they are asking for help and look at what those barriers are for them and then work with the people that are in those systems. They are the only ones that can change those systems.

We can't be commentators, externally commanding people to change the way they work. We have to embed learning systems so that people can reflect on the way that they work and make changes where they've come to learn new information.

We have many, many examples of barriers where common sense would tell us that's not the right way to do this, but the way that our infrastructure is set up, we preclude people from getting the type of help they need when they ask for it. So, we need to unpick those things, and we need to do that in a safe, organised way, based on good theoretical knowledge, with the right type of coaching and support and the right leadership support so that people feel safe to say, you know, if I do the right thing and it doesn't feel like it's exactly by the rulebook, is my boss going to come down on me like a ton of bricks, or is my boss there to support me to do the right thing for this person that's in front of me, and will they support me to do what I need to do?

[Pauline] Kia ora, Dennis. Thank you very much for taking the time to speak to us today about the Seventh Report. So just to kick off with my question, what were your key takeouts from the report?

[Dennis] First of all, Kia ora, Pauline. Thanks for the opportunity to share my thoughts on the Seventh Report.

My takeaways were the breakdown in communication with agencies, the lack of cultural understanding, the lack of understanding of the pressures on the disabled community and that these tragic events were preventable.

[Pauline] Yeah, I think that's a big thing. I mean, you know yourself that quite often our reviews show that the large majority of the cases that we come across are entirely preventable, which really suggests that there are challenges out there for agencies and also for NGOs as well.

What do you think are the key challenges that the report raised for you?

[Dennis] I’d just like to, before going there, just to also say in terms of the statistics for Māori, for Pasifika, in this particular report, for disabled, other minority groups, it just again highlights institutional racism, unconscious bias. Huge challenges for the agencies and public sector and NGOs in terms of deconstructing these systems to be far more humanistic in their approach to the most vulnerable in our communities, and such a need for those agencies to have the groups I mentioned, Māori, Pasifika, new migrant groups, disabled, in their workforce.

Because what the report shows is just a huge lack of understanding of those communities and the pressures on those communities, who to talk to in those communities, how to approach people in those communities. It's just such a huge gap.

And I think decades, particularly in the Māori area, decades of throwing millions if not billions at the public sector and agencies to share really Māori information with the mātauranga Māori on the hope that they will be able to better engage, better understand Māori has shown this is not working and that — I mean, the simple solution is to just pass it all into Māori hands, so there may be some hope in the future with the Māori Health Authority and what's happening there and/or start employing the right people for the job, which is not necessarily those that are qualified and just coming out of university with no experience in the communities or the cultures that they're supposed to engage with when they get employed, but employ people from those cultures and from those communities.

You can train or educate people or get them qualified far more easily than trying to teach someone who has no experience in a particular community, world or culture how people from that community, that culture, think and operate, what their norms are.

So, the whole HR system in terms of who public sector and agencies are employing, is a key one, apart from talking about their own internal systems of, you know, like 15 minutes for that client and out the door you go.

So huge structural barriers and issues and challenges there, but also in terms of institutional racism and unconscious bias, huge challenges to the belief system and the value system and the paternalism that permeates across the whole of the public sector. That whole really philosophical approach by many disciplines, but I think of Paulo Freire and his whole politicisation of the proletariat in South America, starting from their world view.

So, if an individual, I believe, or a group has an issue or a problem, they also have the solutions, the solutions don't come from outside.

So, I heard on a call the other day, a little quote from a CEO group who was working in a particular area, looking at how to empower community. Then we had a number of community participants comment about actually how powerful community is. So maybe the language, well, the language must change actually, across the public sector, from empowering community to how can we leverage off the power of community to achieve what we want and to support community to look after themselves.

So, a whole paradigm and mental shift needs to happen in the, in the halls of power.

[Pauline] Yeah, I think, I mean, you raise an incredible point there because the report's actually centred on three kaupapa Māori services who were actually doing phenomenal jobs and providing for their own communities, and it's speaking to exactly what you've just raised.

So, in terms of, I mean, you sort of went there in what you were just saying before around future focussed and looking at who are we employing for these positions and you know, just thinking about whether or not the right people are there, do you think that there's anything else that's raised within the report that would suggest changing the way we're travelling, what sort of future focus we should be considering?

[Dennis] I suppose I — my examples come out of Te Ao Māori, really, and kaupapa Māori services, and there's this catch phrase across the health sector and across the social sector: whānau centred.

But what you actually see is still the individual approach, unless you go to a kaupapa Māori service where the whānau, all the whānau come, not the individual. And the whānau are involved from the beginning to the end.

And for Māori this has got to be the approach, where whānau is centre, where whānau make the decisions, where professionals sit to the side unless requested for their support from whānau, as opposed to the way it is now, which is where the professionals are centre and the professionals decide what the solutions are for the whānau or the individual.

So, in my future, looking forward, needs to be a huge growth in kaupapa Māori services and a commitment from the Government and the health sector, the Ministry of Health and various other bodies to support that growth, because the few that we have are showing phenomenal results.

Surprisingly enough, we hardly hear about those. So, all ups to this report and focussing on kaupapa Māori services. That's the future forward for Māori.

And if the catch phrase is right, get it right for Māori, you get it right for everybody else, then that's the future forward for Aotearoa New Zealand.

[Pauline] Yeah, you talk about some big shifts, you know, professionals moving to the side and letting whānau lead. I mean, that's a real challenge, and I'd imagine there'd be a lot of people that would have to sit back and consider how that would look and how that would work.

So that sort of brings me back down to my final question, and that's around what change is required for government to support this. And I guess, you know, in my work I reflect on how tightly defined programmes are and that's completely contrary to what you're talking about, which is really focussed on what whānau identify as their key problems.

What's your view around the changes that government is required?

[Dennis] I just reflect on your last comment first, because it's got to do with power and control, and we need to recognise that there's an imbalance of power in this country between government and Māori.

And that permeates all of the institutions in this country. I would put Māori institutions that have been set up on mandated Western structures in that category as well, actually.

And so, when professionals have to sit to the side, this is a direct challenge to their certificated and qualified power. And that's part of what keeps that power system in place. So that when we talk about a huge paradigm shift, it is about professionals and doctors and psychiatrists and clinical psychs acknowledging, one, the imbalance of power and how they perpetuate that within their positions.

And so, to answer the question in terms of what the government needs to do, very idealistically, it needs to honour the Treaty. It needs to honour Te Tiriti. And that, to quote Whatarangi Winiata, if the Treaty was honoured, equity would not be an issue.

So that's a big high-level aspiration, I suppose, in terms of what the government needs to do. But if that was done, all the other stuff would eventually fall into place.

Until Māori have Te Tiriti honoured and a rightful place with the other power brokers in this country at the table, not much is going to change. We keep on tinkering with the nuts and bolts, but not actually getting down to having a look at the engine and what runs everything.