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Whānau Voices

# EXPERIENCES WITH #TĀTOU—A PERSONAL JOURNEY

Denise Smith

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## Abstract

Denise Smith shares her experiences engaging with “#Tātou”, a West Auckland programme that is part of the “Whānau House Collective Impact” initiative, and which promotes a whānau-centered approach to promote physical activity and good nutrition. Each participant is assisted by a *kaiārahi* (health navigator) who supports them to reach their goals. Denise shares the barriers to her participation, her personal journey with whānau, her resilience in the face of ongoing challenges, and the connections made with others and within herself as a result of whanaungatanga experienced as part of #Tātou.

*This article has been adapted from an interview.*

**Key words:** whānau, kaiārahi, whanaungatanga

## My Personal Journey

A friend of mine used to come here... she recommended me to come [to Waipareira]. I was a bit standoffish for a while, but then I thought, nah, I'll go and see what it's all about. So I came last year and I met up with my *kaiārahi* (support worker). Still I was a bit nervous at the start. When I first came in I was in a bit of a pickle because I lived up on a farm with my sister-in-law and my niece and nephew... I felt like I wasn't going anywhere. I was stuck in this rut. Unless it was with the kids or with my sister-in-law, I did nothing for myself. So, when I came here it opened my eyes a little bit more than what I was seeing up on the farm. There was nothing against the farm, it was nice... fresh air and everything. But social life and life was dead for me.

Since I've been coming here I started going to wai-fit training and that every week right 'til Christmas. I loved it. Every Tuesday and Wednesday I was there. Rain or shine. I was there on the coldest day freezing my butt off. I rely on public transport [to go] everywhere and I still came. I didn't do the evening ones because it was just a little bit harder getting home at night. But yeah, I was pretty much doing training every week. But then I got a job as well so it sort of took a day out of the training.

I didn't have the help of Work and Income getting me the job, I did it myself. But sadly, that came to an end earlier this month. They wouldn't renew my contract, so I'm back looking for work but that's even better for me. I'm looking for my job in Hastings. I'm wanting to move to Hastings to live.

Everyone is going, "why Hastings?" Because I don't want to be here in Auckland. So that's just given me a bigger pressure to look for a job and my house down in Hastings. Not having much luck, but there is time. The right job will come and the right house will come. I'm in a hurry, but I'm not—sort of thing. While I'm looking, I'm helping my niece out. She's got five kids and three of them are at school, but she's got two younger ones that need the help and one of them is not at kindy. I've got them... so I'm keeping busy on top of looking for work.

When I first came to see my *kaiārahi* I needed help in getting out a bit and getting to know myself again—and having the confidence. Like I said, I was in a rut on the farm going nowhere. Just get up and do the same thing day after day. I suffer from depression as it is and I was lucky I had a lot of good days rather than bad days. So, when I came and saw my *kaiārahi* I needed to get something to get me back into reality, something to get me connected with others and myself.

I think the biggest thing that got me back into reality was the physical training. Not only am I doing something for myself in terms of fitness, but I was meeting people. Can't tell you all their names, but I know their faces and I can say hi to them and that. I think a lot of it was the training that helped, because I was happy to go and do the training but at the same time I was socialising with other people.

Just recently I got kicked out of where I was living on the farm. My family helped and put me up and all that, but I was in such a mess because I felt betrayed by my sister-in-law because of the amount of effort and time I did for her. But now, about a week later, I looked at it and I said to myself: I'm definitely angry but at the same time I'm thankful because this has given me that chance to get out, which I'd been wanting to do for ages but I just wasn't strong enough. It's like with my ex-partner, when I was living with him he was a violent person and it was hard to get out of that relationship—it's sort of like that.

They did me a favour by kicking me out and now I'm free, I'm doing stuff I wouldn't have done when I was up there. I think to myself, where I am now is in a better space. Yeah, I've had these little hurdles like losing my job, getting kicked out. But this was a good hurdle—even though it was a bit of a mess at the start.

Everything is coming right for me. Now, my next mission is to look for a job and house in Hastings—get settled down there. Another goal is that I want to get driving lessons. I feel confident in the carparks but not on the roads. I think I just need to bring my confidence back up, but I think I'll be alright down in Hastings because it's quiet and there's not as many people around.

I mean my family is there for me no matter what, but I wouldn't run to them. They won't be the first ones I'd run [to] for support as such. That'd probably be my kaiārahi. Because I can talk to her better than what I can talk to my family—my family, they don't say it, but I can see it—they judge me or they try to judge me. At this moment, my younger sister is still trying to talk me out of going to Hastings, but it's my choice and I'm planning to do it. She goes "but you'll be alone". And what's that got to do with me going to Hastings? I can make friends. I say, I may get down there and a year later I may not like it—I'll find another challenge to move somewhere else. There is nothing for me here in Auckland apart from family. Honestly, I can't even say there is a job [t]here for me as such, but I just need to start a new chapter in a new area. So that's what I'm doing.

I've always been someone to have plans in place. I'm always one to take new challenges. I like my challenges. Whether I follow the challenges is depend[ent] on me, myself. It may take awhile, but I've noticed that this time around my challenges are achieved quite quickly, rather than take forever to do. My next challenge is [that] I'm 46 this year. I've only got two to three years and then I'm going to take on the king of the ocean swim to Takapuna. I want to do it before I'm 50. So that's going to be my next challenge.

A lot has changed within myself due to being part of #Tātou, but I think a lot has changed due to me changing it for myself rather than #Tātou or my kaiārahi. My kaiārahi has been the guideline—and I think with #Tātou it's that support that's helped me. If I didn't have that support with me I wouldn't have done it myself. I think it's also someone I can talk to and it's not connected to family or anything.

Like you can talk to your family, but you can't talk honestly about how you feel because they'll take it wrong or something. If I'm having a crap day, I can come and talk to my kaiārahi and let it come off my shoulders and then I'm feeling good. I can always ring or text my kaiārahi and say I need to talk. So I think that's where I am now. But yeah—I think it's a bit of both—having connections with others, and support from others.

#Tātou has put me where I am— if it wasn't for #Tātou I wouldn't have done it for myself.