

Wardens keep students on track

by Vicky Crawford

They call it the “animal train” — it’s the 3.08pm from Britomart station and it has a mean reputation.

Kids running on the tracks, bullying, tagging, vandalism, stand over tactics, this train has seen it all.

The ‘A’ train travels along the western line picking up hundreds of teenagers from more than seven different schools and returning them to their homes in West Auckland.

It’s a potent mix. Put together teenage hormones, interschool rivalry and an absence of parents and teachers — the potential for trouble is high.

Enter the Maori Wardens of Waitemata, tough young men and women whose job it is to ensure everyone gets a safe ride home.

Distinctive by their size and black uniforms they can be heard telling people to move down the aisles, clear off the doors and get their tickets out.

The 12 wardens who work the school run and the weekend late nighters are trained to mediate conflict and prevent trouble before it begins.

Troublesome teens might be split up from their mates or in more serious cases a call will be made to their school or whanau.

It’s an approach that appears to be working — the wardens say the crime rate has dropped by 85 per cent since they joined the network in 2002.

Joseph, a year eight student at St Peters College, knows he’s safe when the wardens are on board.

“If someone’s annoying you, you can tell them and they’re big and stuff and they’ll tell them not to,” he says.



PHOTO: VICKY CRAWFORD

TOUGH JOB: Maori Warden Bumper Taumaunu helps ensure teenage train riders are kept in line.

Team leader Bumper Taumaunu, 27, remembers what it’s like to be a cheeky kid and he knows the importance of building a relationship with them.

“I’ll crack a joke with the bullies or try to identify what’s wrong.

It might be that they’ve got a problem at school and I can talk to someone for them,” he says.

Train passenger Chrissy

Duggan says putting wardens on the trains was a “stroke of genius”.

“The kids were berserk before, smashing bottles on the tracks and pushing each other at the stations,” she says.

“They are pretty well behaved now considering there are so many of them.”

Maori warden Andrew Randell says there have been a

couple of times when the conductors have had trouble with young kids trying to take their wallets and pull their hair.

The wardens cruise the carriages and offer back-up and support so the conductors can focus on their job to collect the tickets.

A positive spin-off has been the intercultural exchange that goes on between the Maori wardens and the conductors who are

often new immigrants to New Zealand.

Chairman of the Waitemata Maori Wardens Jack Taumaunu negotiated the original contract with Tranz Metro and he is clear about his team’s mission.

“We’re not the police. We don’t have batons, we don’t have guns, it’s not our role to pepper spray people, our philosophy is to help these kids,” he says.

Maori urged to donate organs

by Leisha Jones



PHOTO: LEISHA JONES

TIME FOR CHANGE: Phil Heremaia

Maori are being urged to reconsider their cultural views on organ donation following the first reading of a bill in Parliament.

The Human Tissue Amendment Bill will allow for a donor register, where individuals can sign on and legally state which organs they wish to donate.

The donor’s wishes will not be able to be over-ruled by family members.

New Zealand’s rate of donation is staggeringly low, last year only 29 people became donors.

The number of Maori donors is significantly lower due to cultural reasons that do not allow the tupa-paku (dead body) to be interfered with in any way.

Janice Langlands, donor co-ordinator at Organ Donation New Zealand, believes it could be possible to change these cultural views.

“It’s not to say that Maori don’t donate, because they do.

Three of the 13 donors we have had this year have been Maori. They just don’t donate as frequently.”

National MP Dr Jackie Blue says other countries have had successful donor registers and attribute their success to education sur-

rounding the issue.

Phil Heremaia, organ donation consultant, says educating people is a key factor in getting the message across.

Heremaia was the mortuary manager at Middlemore Hospital for eight years when he decided he needed to raise awareness about organ donation.

“I kept seeing my people coming through the mortuary.

And I saw the reasons they were dying, things like renal failure, which could have been stopped.

“I thought to myself, it’s time somebody got off their butt and did something. We need to start trying to help ourselves.”

Heremaia has filmed three documentaries on the issue but says it is time to “hit the road”.

He will travel from the tip of the North Island to Invecargill by camper van spreading the word.

He says he will visit schools, hospitals, marae and homes with a particular focus on getting the message to Maori.

“The subject is so tapu, it’s very hard to talk about.

“But I’ve turned it around and said to them, ‘If you are not willing to give your organs, then would you

receive one if you needed it to live?’”

The Maori Party did not support the bill, saying that their constituency rejected it outright.

Andrew Tookey, of GiveLife New Zealand, says it seems the Maori Party is taking advice from elders.

“Times are changing and more urban Maori are in favour of it.

“I notice on the urban Maori station last week they asked, ‘Should Maori be donors?’

“The poll from Maori listeners said 79 per cent were in favour.”

Heremaia says a large percentage of Maori are now young to middle-aged.

While they are still a part of the old culture they are more willing to move on with society than the older generation.

Langlands says there needs to be access to accurate information for Maori working in health.

“I think we need to provide Maori health workers with the information. It is more appropriate for Maori to educate Maori about the issue.”

Heremaia says he is aware that his work may attract criticism, but he is confident he will succeed.

“It’s my passion. You’ve got to believe in your cause, have a passion for it and really drive it home.”