



The right person
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Peter Wolf

Peter hasn't ever counted the number of young people he has assisted over the past 40 years, but there are many photos on his office wall that give some indication of the impact he has made on the lives of young people and their families. A living legacy has accumulated, and some of those young people, who are now adults, still often seek him out to convey their appreciation.

It is hard to get Peter to take credit for how many hundreds of young people have successfully reached adulthood and are able to live better lives than they otherwise might have without his friendship and support. Working with youth seems to have been a calling for Peter, amplified by his own vulnerabilities and difficulties as a young man, and by the Christian faith he found and fostered in his early twenties. *The key thing is for young people to know that they are significant and special.*

Peter grew up in Dunedin with two siblings and five stepbrothers and stepsisters. He found his own way into trouble, then had to create his own pathway out. What remains a kind of mantra for his work and his approach even now, is that 'each person needs to take responsibility for their own feelings, to find their own way to the life they want'.

His father, Albert, an English seaman, jumped ship in New Zealand in the late 1940s. He was arrested and placed in detention for three months and then allowed to stay in New Zealand. He

met Peter's mother, June, in Dunedin; this was where she had been born and raised. By the time Peter was five years old, his father had left the family, and there was little or no contact after that. His mother married again; her new husband was a refugee from Poland who had lived and suffered through the Second World War, and the rise of Communism and Russian 'labour camps'.

The shift in family make-up was not easy for Peter; he resented his new stepfather's authority and they struggled to find their relationship with each other. Slowly, as Peter matured, he came to understand what his stepfather had been through during the War and realised that the issues he was having with his stepfather were mostly his own. An attitude of love and respect quietly emerged.

Peter went to Kings High School in Dunedin. He was small and skinny as a boy and tended to be bullied. He tried quite hard to fit in with different groups and loved to play rugby. However, he did not have a strong picture of what he might do after he left school; he just knew that he wanted out. Peter left school

early, when he was about 14. He thought of becoming a builder, but this didn't eventuate. Instead he walked another path. Of course there might be those who would say that he went on to be a builder all his life—a *builder of young lives and community*.

At the time, however, without any qualifications, his mother advised him to get a job with the government, saying that it would be 'a job for life'. Peter joined the railways as an apprentice moulder at Hillside workshops in Dunedin. He was in the foundry; his first introduction to paid employment and also to shop-floor politics.

Peter became a steward for the Railways Labourers Union and acknowledges that this influenced his thinking around workers' rights and social justice from an early age. The older men in the foundry shared their understanding of industrial relations and challenged Peter to develop his own position. *I always remember that some of their thinking in those days was that it was the boss's job to screw the worker and it was the workers' job to try and get the best deals possible that they could for themselves. So there was always that side of contesting what you were fighting for.* Then, with the impact of Rogernomics in 1984, the railways and unions were eroded away to a mere shadow of their former selves. Peter became only too aware of the human cost. The job for life came up short. Peter was one of the first to be made redundant from the foundry at the Hillside workshops.

Another thing that influenced his politics early on was the anti-Springbok tour protests in 1981. In his early twenties at the time, Peter supported the tour, as many did: *It was a sport, just a rugby game.* The bigger picture and the consequences behind the tour were not on his radar until one of his colleagues, a well-read Māori guy who was reading about Nelson Mandela, began to challenge Peter on his lack of knowledge of apartheid and racism within Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Other key people have influenced Peter, including Gary Coster, Peter's boxing coach when he was young. Gary made an impact, training and guiding Peter in the sport and in life choices. Peter also acknowledges his wife, Teina, whom he met when he was 17 years old, and who has been a constant support to everything he has done in his work and life. Teina is from Rarotonga and, at six years old, arrived in Dunedin with her parents in the 1960s. They had immigrated on a sponsored labour scheme. The cultural influence and knowledge intrinsic to his relationship with Teina and her family proved invaluable in Peter's later work with Pasifika youth.

Peter was in his early twenties when he began to emerge from *the havoc* that he knowingly caused through his teenage years. He recognises now that the timely influence of supportive people in a young person's life was evident in his own experience, and this

knowledge is firmly implanted in Peter's mind and approach to youth work.

At the time he was made redundant from the railways, his own brother was on a youth programme. Peter was interested to know more about the programme and the support it gave young people, so he

put his hand up to volunteer. He then also decided to learn te reo Māori, and today he would class himself as at an intermediate level. His affinity with Māoritanga has also contributed hugely to his effectiveness in supporting Māori youth and whānau.

Peter's work with youth coincided with him becoming a Christian. Teina's brothers were also involved in youth work at the time. The family had not been overly religious; nevertheless, Peter had sometimes attended Sunday school and his mother had been keen to instil good moral values in him and his siblings. There was always a sense of 'something bigger out there'. Peter and Teina had their first child when he was 20 years old and, with a young family, he underwent a shift in his outlook and way of

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behaving. He was first attracted to Elim in Dunedin; this Pentecostal, charismatic-type church promoted good lifestyle and character building, and had stern views on alcohol, drugs and morality. Peter thinks that the church enhanced his awareness of the importance of fairness and equality and how to bring about change. *I always believed that what we were doing was making a difference and I suppose that reflects in your own growing up. The right person at the right time, whether it's a teacher or parent or someone, who can have an impact on you. We are shaped and we are who we are today because of the people who've influenced us.*

It wasn't until 1987 that Peter was employed and paid as a full-time youth worker. Training was initially on the job, but when Peter was offered a training placement in Otahuhu, the family relocated to Otara. They then moved to Papakura for a year, before returning to Dunedin.

In the late 1980s, Teina and Peter began to foster children. Peter ran an after-school programme for children and provided outings and activities for boys from the Lookout Point Boys Home in Dunedin, which housed children in the care of Child, Youth and Family Services (CYFS). Peter tried to be a positive adult role model. Much of his youth work and social work practice has been influenced by Shane Walker from Dunedin, who has played a large part in Peter's personal and professional development.



Above: At the Whangarei Te Pahi Ora Hou Camp, 2004

Below: Peter at the Capital Teen Convention, Wellington, 2001





Early Intervention Programme [EIP], an outing at the Devonport Tunnels, with Birkdale Intermediate, 1999

It was one of Teina's brothers who prompted the family's return to Auckland and move to Beach Haven in 1991, which became home for the next 26 years. It was a financially difficult period for the couple. The family joined a number of local churches and their faith played a huge role in how they managed.

Beach Haven had a large Māori and Pasifika population, and a significant range of social issues. *Broken and dysfunctional families, violence, poor education and poor environmental factors, are all things that impact on a young person's behaviour.* Peter provided quite personalised support to young people and their families, sometimes helping to rebuild relationships, or simply providing

safe activities and a positive influence. *Basically what I do, is make ladders for people who are stuck, and it's a way to help them get out of where they are at, to go on a different path.*

In 1991, Peter took over the management of the North Shore branch of Te Hou Ora (The New Life), formally part of Youth for Christ, which was established by Robert Poupouare in Grey Lynn in 1987 and worked with at-risk youth in the community. On the Shore, the Trust first provided a youth camp, and the first club programme was established in 1987. By 1991, Peter was working in the Birkdale and Beach Haven communities, and then extended his work to include Glenfield. He and Teina introduced foster care

services, alternative education, intervention programmes in schools and mentoring services.

In 1996, the Trust was re-named Te Roopu O Wai Ora North Shore and then, in 2012, it was again re-branded, as the Kaipatiki Youth Development Trust (KYDT). As the work on the Shore had continued to grow and the Trust's services developed, it came to a point where the organisation needed to stand as its own entity. The aim of the trustees was to grow and develop their own style of community development social work, specific for this community and with a community development model way of working. They have developed strong partnerships with the Kaipatiki Communities Facilities Trust. Members of KYDT include Mathew Shepherd, Malcolm Green, Cathryn Shepherd and Robert Wilson, with William Tangariki of Ngati Hau as the Trust's kaumatua.

KYDT is committed to providing culturally appropriate strengths-based programmes and services, recognising the concepts of community development to ensure people feel empowered in their own decision making. There are four key principles to the Trust's mahi (work): he oranga Hinengaro (emotional and intellectual well-being), whakawhānaungatanga (a healthy whānau), he oranga tangata (a healthy person), and he oranga wairua (a healthy spirit). These four principles are based on the whare tapa whā model of health that was developed by Māori health expert Mason Durie in 1982. In Durie's model, the four cornerstones of health and well-being are represented by the four walls of a whareniui (meeting house).¹

Today KYDT also works in other suburbs covered by the Kaipatiki Local Board. One of Peter's key relationships in the community is Jill Nerheny, Kaipatiki community coordinator, with whom he has worked for many years and has always found

very supportive. Both have been able to provide very longstanding relationships with the community and have formed a very strong professional connection. Peter's office today is based at the Kaipatiki Community Facilities Trust. A joint strategy has been to reduce crime and offending in the area, and to increase positive youth involvement in community-based activities and events. Peter and his team work alongside many community people including the police, social workers and schools, as well as with families. He has gained the respect of many in the community. 'The team have their finger on the pulse in terms of their connections with the wider community. They have good relationships with their partners, and they are good at connecting young people to their community' (referral agent, Youth Justice, CYFS).

The Trust also runs an anti-bullying programme, which primarily educates young people to manage their own responses to incidents of bullying, and to maintain their power and control. The programme is called 'Don't take the bait'.

Peter has gained a great deal of knowledge about the many terrible situations families and individuals find themselves in and, although he can get angry about it, he tries to refrain from making judgement. *Very often problems are caused by people who themselves have been deprived, abused or abandoned or who have known violence and dysfunctional family life.*

In 1995, Peter decided to study towards a Bachelor of Social Work part-time, shifting to full-time study in the final two years. He graduated in 2000, then returned for another two years to do a postgraduate Diploma in Social Work and Supervision. He says that these qualifications have opened other opportunities for him.

In 2006, Peter was offered a contract by the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) to work with youth in the Northcote area as a focus of research for a proposed investment from MSD in

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child and youth projects. Peter was still working in an alternative education programme and a residential programme and a boys residential home in Auckland Central at the time. Although initially reluctant, he accepted the contract. It was a good match for Peter, who could access many young people who might otherwise have not been included in the research.

The work lasted for two years and provided a regular pay cheque. There was an additional benefit when the Ministry agreed in 2008 to extend the life of the project after the research phase.

Peter's commitment to the welfare and advancement of youth has been rock solid and enduring. *I suppose my view, and still today, is that for a young person growing up in a time of crisis, from what I've learnt and all the research shows, is that whenever the time of crisis is, the more support for that person at that time, the more positive the outcome is down the track. The less support at that time, the more negative the outcome is.*

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¹ *Mason Durie, Whaiora: Maori health development* (pp. 68–74), Auckland, Oxford University Press, 1998

He whakatauki Teni
Naku te rourou nau te
rourou
ka ora ai te iwi.

With your basket and my
basket the people will live.

