



HRC Te Otu Mātua

Halswell Residential College

A Cultural Narrative

We are “Te Whānau o Otu Mātua”, a name gifted to us by Dr Terry Ryan. Our name connects us with a spur on the western section of Ngā Kohatu Whakarakaraka o Tamatea Pōkai Whenua/the Port Hills, overlooking the Christchurch suburb of Halswell.

Reflection on our story begins with the land we live on. At the entrance to the HRC te Otu Mātua grounds, a bridge crosses a small stream. This small stream is just one of several minor waterways, originating from scattered spring-fed sources, that eventually drain into the Huritini/Halswell River, which wends its way into lake Te Waihora.

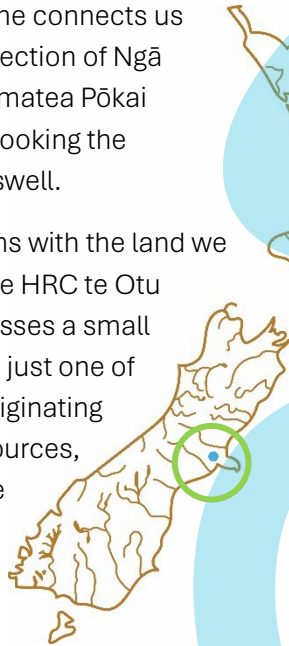
Before European settlement, this was an important kāinga mahinga kai (food-gathering place). Māori travelled this network of ara tawhito (traditional travel routes) from Kaiapoi to Waihora, to harvest native fish such as tuna (eels), inaka (whitebait), mata (juvenile whitebait), kōkopu (native trout), koukoupāra (giant kōkopu), and kanakana (lampreys). Along the riverbanks, they found abundant birdlife, including, pārerā (grey duck), pūtakitaki (paradise duck), raipo (New Zealand scaup), tataa (brown duck), and pāteke (brown teal), as well as nourishing plants such as pora (‘Māori turnip’), tutu, and aruhe (bracken fernroot). The river system we find ourselves a part of becomes an apt metaphor for our story.

An early stream arising from European settlement in Ōtautahi was the work of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. They established a self-sufficient community in 1886 to provide a home for vulnerable girls and women. In addition to a

working farm complete with an orchard, the Sisters set up a laundry where residents put in long hours of strenuous work washing sheets for local hotels as well as for the military who lived in the township. They also planted several trees across the site, which have made the land we live on today a place of tranquil beauty.

The St John of God Brothers took over the premises developed by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd and became the next stream in the river system. These waters were not healthy, and several vulnerable young people left this land with painful memories of abuse endured during their time here. Pain leaves a stain on the land. And over the years, other painful eddies have entered our story. The whānau of te Otu Mātua acknowledges the support of several cultural and spiritual leaders from our community who have blessed our land and buildings with cleansing and healing waters at various times throughout our history.

The waters did not flow smoothly for the Brothers in other ways as well. The Department of Education stream joined the Brothers to provide necessary financial support. These new waters marked a time of rebuilding, starting with the residential villas, which have since been rebuilt to reflect our current emphasis on creating a homely environment different from the institutionalised contexts that preceded it. The day school, garage, kitchen, and laundry blocks built by the then Department of Education are still in use today. Eventually, the financial waters grew so turbulent that the



Department of Education bought out the brothers completely in 1983.

Running alongside the Department of Education/Ministry of Education stream is the stream of governance. The currents in this stream have twisted and wound back on themselves, making their way around obstacles, some of which included restructures, threats of closure, merging of schools, roll reductions, merging of boards, and funding concerns. Through this and more, the HRC te Otu Mātua story has been a story of resilience.

Changing currents in our river system reflect changes we have seen as essential to providing a home where rangatahi can experience support, aroha, guidance, and care. We have moved 'from children should be seen and not heard' to 'putting children at the centre and hearing their voice'. We have moved from highly structured behavioural management programmes where one size fits all, to relational support meeting individual needs in daily life experiences. We have moved from long term tenures to short-term interventions. We have moved from siloed decision making to collaborative planning designed to best meet the needs of the child at the centre of our work.

Cultural awareness, with a recognition of the importance of giving Māori rangatahi opportunities to learn as Māori, is a stream that reconnected us with tangata whenua. In 1996, Whare Tawawa was set apart as a whare steeped in Tikanga Māori and continues to be a whare where Māori rangatahi are supported to understand their relationships according to their own stories. A Māori immersion classroom ran for a few years, adding depth to cultural awareness. However, roll reductions compromised its continued operation. River systems change course over time, and streams can reform. Sometimes, under the right conditions, a dried-up waterway can flow again.

The names of ngā whare and ngā akomanga remind us of our relationship with the land we live on as well as the waterways around Ōtautahi:

- **Tauawa** is a reference to Te Tauawa a Maka, a spring-fed tributary of the Huritini/Halswell River system.
- **Te Puna Wai o te Reo** is the name of our first bi-lingual classroom and is translated as "the spring of languages."
- **Owaka** means the place of canoes and is a reference to the mōkihi (rafts) made from buoyant material such as raupō (bulrush, *Typha orientalis*) that traversed the waterways around us.
- **Huritini** means "many turns" and is descriptive of the Huritini/Halswell river itself.
- **Makonui** refers to an inland waterbody also known as Clay Bar Lagoon and renowned for being kāinga mahinga kai.
- **Kawatea** means the arrival of the dawn and is the Māori name for Little Okains Bay on Te Pātaka o Rākaihautū/Banks Peninsula.
- **Raumata** (mesh for whitebait), **Kaharoa** (drag net), and **Tihao** (a net for freshwater crays) refer to some of the tools that were used for food gathering in this kāinga mahinga kai.

The story of HRC te Otu Mātua, like the waterway that borders it, continues to meander through space and time. We continue to support rangatahi who travel with us to feel safe, to make connections, and to learn coping skills. They are a part of our story and will remain members of our whānau forever.

