

YOUNG GIFTED & BROWN

Taking Care of Business

BY SEMIRAMIS HOLLAND



Miriana Ikin of Ngāti Rārua and Ngāti Ranginui is a founder of Aotahi Limited, a business education company specialising in developing educational resources for small business owners in Aotearoa. Aotahi was established in 2004 with a view to providing practical and relevant business information with an Aotearoa indigenous focus.

After returning with her husband to his hometown Te Kuiti in 2002, they were both inundated with requests from locals requesting advice on how to run a business.

“When we asked if there was anyone offering advice, we found there wasn’t,” Miriana says.

Miriana and Keith then approached Te Wānanga o Aotearoa for assistance to provide business programmes to the local community. They started business courses through the Pacific Business Trust in Auckland. Te Wānanga o Aotearoa also issued a management contract for delivery of business programmes.

“We have tutors who are business practitioners based in the community

and we train them mainly on facilitation techniques,” Miriana says.

In the early stages the programmes’ market tended to be predominantly Māori. But they found a large number of foreign students enrolling onto the programme who wanted to know the New Zealand business environment. Aotahi is now building a market presence in Native America where communities like the practical nature of the programmes and how they incorporate indigenous values.

“Internationally, people like the fact that we are holistic in our thinking approach to the business, the fact that we value our responsibility to the environment and our communities,” says Miriana.

Aotahi has released a series of books to support small business and Indigenous business development. Part of the series focuses on covering the essentials of small business start up. Aotahi has also produced a unique business dictionary that is Aotearoa based and bi-lingual, to encourage the use of Te Reo Māori in everyday business.

Their latest book, *Taking Care of Business: Indigenous Business Case Studies*, looks at 13 in-depth case studies of indigenous business from New Zealand, Australia, Canada and the USA. The book is primarily intended for use by tertiary-level students and entrepreneurs to study management concepts from an indigenous perspective. Aotahi is also currently developing a suite of business programmes for small business owners in Aotearoa focusing on a number of issues including business literacy and numeracy, online business, marketing and intellectual property.

Aotahi is based in Te Kuiti and employs six fulltime employees. The directors are Miriana Ikin, who was educated at Canterbury and Waikato Universities, and Naomi Smyth of Waikato, Ngāti Maniapoto who has a Bachelor of Management Studies degree in Finance with First Class Honours and her Masters with First Class Honours in Economics.

“When you live in Te Kuiti, you can only really see the road down to Otorohanga. But when you have a look out, there are a lot of opportunities that exist.”