

# A Living Plan that stays on point

**Raurimu Avenue School, Whangarei**

December 2015



Sally Wilson is a cyclist, a kayaker, a green-fingered food grower, and during 2015, the principal at Raurimu Avenue School – a school in one of Whangarei's most challenged areas. When Sally joined the Strategic Leadership for Principals Programme (SLPP) she knew what she wanted to do, how she wanted to develop herself and where she wanted to take the school. But Sally was looking for a clearer understanding of what it meant to be strategic in her leadership.

### A PARTNERSHIP THAT FLOWS

Kim Ashby, a member of Ngāpuhi, the Work and Income Service Centre Manager for Kawakawa and Kaikohe Community Link and second time capacity partner was paired with Sally to help provide that wider perspective.

Kim's insight when she met with Sally was that because Sally generates such a wealth of ideas, she tends to work in a free-flowing way. To formally structure the partnership would significantly reduce its impact and possibly even squash much of the richness that Sally brings to her leadership and to the school community.

"I didn't want to impose a formal way of checking in with her, even though I come from a structured way of working," explains Kim. "In her school Sally has much bigger issues to deal with; more important and pressing priorities, so I just let our relationship flow."

It was a good approach. If Sally's innovation was a free-flowing river, Kim's questions became the river banks. Kim's focus as her CP became helping her to unpack her ideas, bringing clarity to the best of them, and maintaining focus with her plan. Sally explains:

"I wanted Kim to keep me focussed and honest to what I initially said. And I was also feeling isolated as a principal, because

**Kim describes Sally with adjectives such as innovative; excited; no barriers; passionate; continual improvement; an open book; entrepreneurial; big-hearted; energiser; and straight up.**

I hadn't been sharing my thinking with people on a continual basis... My real, heavy thinking goes around in my head only. But I could share that with Kim."

Kim's thought leadership and questioning helped Sally navigate her way towards a more strategic and focussed plan for Raurimu Avenue School. Kim kept reinforcing what Sally was trying to achieve and kept her on track, particularly with regard to the needs of whanau within the school.

**Kim would ask questions such as "With that idea you have, how does it look, and what is the reality of it unfolding and taking place?"**

## RICH COHORT INTERACTIONS

If Sally's innovation was the river, and Kim's questioning the banks, then undoubtedly the SLPP strategy training workshops became the waka enabling Sally to move her leadership to where she wanted it to be, providing new foundations for her to build her skills from the bottom up.

Sally can't say enough about how impactful the workshops were for her, but probably two things stand out: The masterful facilitation by Michelle Kong (GM Special Projects at Spark) who led the cohort of six principals through the carefully created training programme, and the rich collegial learning within the cohort.

"We were connected, contacting, sharing, talking, debating, challenging, discussing and it became so incredibly rich for us, that very soon after the workshops started, we started meeting with each other between our workshops."

## A LIVING DOCUMENT

The Raurimu Avenue School strategic plan changed throughout the year, but Kim says by the end it encompassed everything Sally wanted to achieve right at the beginning of the process. In her estimation, it works.

Sally says after the SLPP had finished, she initially felt flat, but then had an experience which she describes as her best moment in the whole year:

"I got back to school feeling a bit flat. And it hit me when I heard the staff all talking when we were meeting about the plans for next year, and how they're ready to go for it. And I did no talking. That is the most unusual thing, everybody else spoke. That's when I knew I had been really successful with it because of the ownership shift. Everyone present owned the vision so well and knew exactly what it meant.

*It just felt like a lotto win, it was unreal, because everybody knew where we were going. We had done it all year, but they now owned it and they believed it, and could understand it, so it became living, and will carry on and have a life beyond me."*



Kim began volunteering in 2014 as a Capacity Partner (CP) with the programme largely because of her own experiences growing up, and because she has huge admiration for the teaching profession.

"I want to help stretch capability and capacity; to stretch the principal's thinking so that they can see the bigger picture of why they do the work they do and why they love it. For me it is about having the principal experience the same admiration for themselves that I do for their role within the education sector. Their re-motivated passion leads on to the teachers, and these are the kinds of teachers young people remember when they're no longer a student of a school, but of life."



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