

Getting more job prospects growing

By CLINTON LLEWELLYN

Jobs are thin on the ground in Flaxmere, but an innovative new horticulture course being delivered from the township's Te Aranga Marae will hopefully result in students finding work on the land.

The first intake of 32 recently completed the first week of the year-long course which, in a break from convention, is being delivered from the marae.

The students are job-seekers from Flaxmere who have been referred by Work and Income to the course, an initiative of the marae, training provider Onsite Education and Flaxmere councillor Henare O'Keefe and his U-Turn Trust.

Participants will transfer to a repayable student allowance for the duration of the horticulture course, which is designed to be as practical and "hands-on" as possible to give the group

the best chance of finding ongoing work.

"As far as I am aware there are no other marae which are offering this training concept," says course facilitator Keith Roberts, from Onsite Education.

"We could have taken them to our training rooms in Hastings, but this is about instilling some mana," he says.

Onsite Education is paying the course costs through its existing government funding, and graduates will gain a recognised qualification – a National Certificate in Horticulture Level III – which many would not normally be able to afford.

For the first part of the course, the students will be responsible for the upkeep of the Te Aranga Marae grounds while getting their hands dirty in the Flaxmere Community Garden, based behind the marae.

The students will go on to learn first aid, agricultural application and safety, how to safely use all-terrain vehicles, tractors

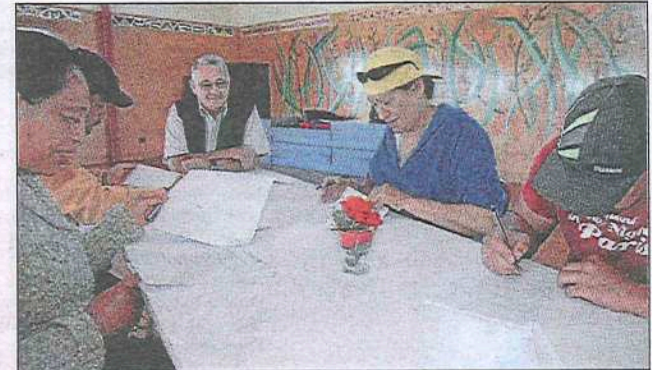
“These are good people who want to work and are willing to do the hard yards. All they need is someone to believe in them enough to give them a break.”

Flaxmere councillor Henare O'Keefe

and tools, such as chain saws, before learning how to plant and prune everything from crops to grapevines.

The skills they learn should position the students to find work in a number of areas, including viticulture, fruit and vegetable production and nursery work, says Henare O'Keefe.

"At the end of the day, our people need jobs," he says. "When we interviewed the successful candidates, I was stunned at their skill-set level. All that's missing is the fancy letters after their names; this will address that. These are good people who want to work and are



Theory: Course facilitator Keith Roberts and horticulture students Denise Toheriri, Jonathan Aiono, Huia Tamepo and Carlos Kirioma go over some theory inside Te Aranga Marae, which is doubling as a classroom for the course.

willing to do the hard yards. All they need is someone to believe in them enough to give them a break."

The course is structured to include a number of breaks so the students can use their skills in paid work during the upcoming apple-picking season in late November-early December, and again when the stone-fruit season begins.

One of the students, 31-year-old Gary Waipouri, has worked in the region's

orchards "for years", and says having a qualification will be a massive boost.

"We need to get Maori people into those supervisor roles. To get these [qualifications] it will show that we can achieve our goals and are capable of doing all those jobs," says Mr Waipouri.

■ Enrolments are being accepted. If you are interested, contact Onsite Education on 878 5561.



Practical: Onsite Education's Keith Roberts, student Gary Waipouri, and Horticulture course supervisor Grant Greenwood and the other participants in the course at Flaxmere's Te Aranga Marae. Onsite

**T-BONE STEAK,
EGGS & CHIPS**