

## **Celebrating 25 years of Lisa Reams – Maori Story**

“In 2005, at the recommendation of our CEO at the time (Sue Krahe), I applied and was selected to be part of a Rotary professional vocational exchange program to northern New Zealand. As part of an amazing team of southern AZ professionals, I spent five weeks in New Zealand learning about social services there and making presentations about my work here.

One day I had the honor of presenting at a rural women’s health fair held at a Maori meeting house (or “marae”). I spoke about one program of Our Family, our CommonUnity Program for young mothers and children. In describing the types of situations that brought young mothers to need our support, I spoke of domestic abuse. A young Maori woman, maybe 19 years old, raised her hand tentatively and softly told all of us that her boyfriend beat her, she hadn’t told anyone before, and she didn’t know what to do.

I listened and thanked her for her courage in speaking up. I recognized that I know how to respond to her from my culture but not from hers, and that I would be gone in an hour and would not be the one to support her longer term. I asked the group, full of Maori elder women, what they would do to support this young woman now that she had told them of her situation. Both of the elders sitting on each side of her reached out and took her hands. The eldest one spoke up and said that now that she had told them, they would keep her safe.

I stayed for another hour making sure everyone had the information and resources they needed. Out of five weeks of amazing experiences on that international exchange, that vulnerable multicultural intervention left the most lasting impact on me. I was so honored to be a part of that young woman’s journey and to experience first-hand the love and support of the Maori elders.”

