

Western Leader

Wardens not singing with angels

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By STEPHEN FORBES

Show some respect.

That's the message from Waitemata Maori Wardens Trust chairman Jack Taumaunu to the newly formed Waitakere Guardian Angels.

The Angels group, first established in New York in 1979, has set up a division in west Auckland to act as a community crime watchdog group.

But Mr Taumaunu isn't impressed.

He says the organisation's failure to consult with Maori, as well as the wider community at large is a sign of disrespect.

"We should have been notified, the police should have been notified, the Citizens Advice Bureau and the Salvation Army should have been notified - we're all part of the community," he says.

"It's disrespectful"

His thoughts are shared by Maori Party co-leader and Tamaki Makaurau MP Pita Sharples.

Dr Sharples opposes the organisation's presence in west Auckland.

"I don't think we should support such a group," he says. "It's an American model being dumped in our backyard.

"Instead more support should be given to the Waitemata Maori Wardens."

Dr Sharples says Maori wardens have worked tirelessly for more than a century with little financial support.

"The money they've received over the past 100 years has been peanuts. Yet their emphasis has been on rehabilitation through the family.

"We have seen them breaking up fights, picking up truants and taking them back to school, even keeping the peace by patrolling the western and southern line trains.

"The wardens play a very positive role in policing our communities.

"Their role is as mediators and facilitators - helping whanau to help themselves."

But Guardian Angels chapter leader Andy Cawston says there is room for other groups in west Auckland.

"I would say that the problem of crime in New Zealand is sufficiently large enough for all sorts of organisations to work together to address the issue," he says.

"The Maori wardens certainly play an important role and I think the Guardian Angels can play a role as well and I would be more than happy to work with them."

Mr Cawston says the group has not yet had time to meet with other community stakeholders.

"We will in due course welcome a meeting with the Maori wardens and the Maori Party," he says.

Mr Cawston says the Guardian Angels have proven their worth globally over the past 26 years.

He says feedback since its arrival in west Auckland has been encouraging.

"We've had a very good reception from the people we've spoken to in the community."