

# Learning from Communities

Stories of the initiatives supported through the response to COVID-19 for new māmā, and what we can learn from them for how we work at Te Hiringa Hauora.

June 2021

## Context

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### Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, engari, he toa takitini My strength is not mine alone, but that of many

Recognising that COVID-19 was likely to be especially challenging for new families, the Te Hiringa Hauora psychosocial response included a focus on supporting the wellbeing of new parents. To connect with wāhine hapū, Te Hiringa Hauora needed to rapidly identify leaders in maternal wellbeing from across the motu who had existing relationships with whānau.

This opened up new opportunities for community partnerships to not only support women through the pandemic, but also to explore:

- what it takes to work effectively with change-makers in communities
- the power of mātauranga Māori to support maternal wellbeing
- how these connections might influence the work of Te Hiringa Hauora, especially in relation to the first 1000 days strategy

Innovation Unit was contracted to bring its expertise in social innovation and community-led development to support potential grantees. Community partners were supported through the application process, and could then access regular coaching throughout the contract period. This coaching was designed to give community partners the space, tools and support needed to test their ideas, reflect on what they were learning through their work, and further develop their approaches in ways which would maximise their potential for impact far beyond the six months of the COVID-19 response.

The approach to working with community partners through the COVID-19 response differed to business as usual in some key ways:

- partners were able to draw on personalised coaching and administrative support during the application process;
- coaching and reflection sessions were made available throughout the period of the project to support community partners in stepping back from their day to day work, identifying what they were learning, refining their approach, and communicating their progress;
- flexible reporting allowed for projects to change and evolve, informed by what partners were seeing and learning about what was working for their communities;
- recognising the wealth of knowledge, experience and skills across the group, an online hui was held to enable partners to connect, share, support each other and provide feedback to Te Hiringa Hauora about their experiences as a community partner and the opportunities they see for the first 1000 days strategy.

In this pack we seek to shine a light on the work of the people who received funding through the COVID-19 response project, identify some early indicators of impact enabled through this funding, and explore what has been learned along the way. Finally, we propose some potential implications for the development of 'first 1000 days' work at Te Hiringa Hauora.

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# Kia Kaha Māmā

*'Your values influence your mindset and sometimes you lose your values and get lost, or take on others' values - the good and the bad. Engaging in the Kia Kaha Māmā activities has helped to align me with my values and future goals'*

- Participant

'[Kia Kaha Māmā](#)' was founded in 2019 and is run by Kaniwa Kupenga-Tamarama. The community and its resources support wāhine to share their experiences, and build resilience and strategies to navigate uncertain times. Blending her knowledge of mātauranga, tikanga, midwifery and the Maramataka, Kaniwa brings a holistic understanding of health and wellbeing to all aspects of her work. The community currently comprises over 400 members from across New Zealand and Australia.

Key components include:

- 1) the Kia Kaha māmā forum which offers accessible online support and Te Ao Māori health messages to its members
- 2) physical workshops and wānanga, delivered in collaboration with aligned organisations, which support women at various stages of their lives to connect with their journey (e.g. through motherhood), each other, and primary care support networks
- 3) an inner self-reflective journaling resource to support positive stress relief strategies and build resilience through weaving ancestral practices and the Maramataka.

Te Hiringa Hauora contributed funding to support the further development and growth of Kia Kaha māmā, with the aim of increasing wellbeing during the uncertainty of the global COVID-19 pandemic and into the future.

## Highlights from funding period:

- Journals were designed, printed and trialled with a small number of wāhine
- Rituals were developed to support wellbeing and personal growth throughout the stages of the maramataka
- Small groups were led through these rituals and encouraged to journal their experiences

## What was achieved?

- Participants developed a stronger sense of their own internal strength and ability to cope with difficulties
- Participants developed powerful new strategies to incorporate into their own day-to-day lives to help with stress management and to build resilience
- Participants were connected to sources of support, from both peers and specialists

## How do we know?

- Positive feedback from wāhine who participated, speaking of the power of this approach
- Referrals of friends and family members through the Kia Kaha māmā Facebook page
- Positive feedback from counsellors, mental health workers, and clinicians who encouraged expanding this mahi
- Strong engagement from community both in signing up for and in fully participating in activities

# Kia Kaha Māmā

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## Lessons learned / reflections:

- Kaniwa learned that people wanted the opportunity to share the journals as gifts to other family members. The journal design was adapted to enable them to be effectively used outside of the context of a wānanga or supervised experiences.
- Through this project Kaniwa has realised that the perfect time to lay some of these foundations for positive self-care would be around 14-16 years old. This would require different channels, networks and mechanisms. She is now exploring how that would best be achieved in collaboration with groups such as Hui Te Rangi and Te Whare Whai Hua.



*'..We don't all have support so just knowing there are people there can be the difference between life and suicide. So much of what you said has relevance to me in the present and I'm glad I got to see this. I needed this.'*  
- Participant

## What's next?

- Kaniwa intends to continue vlogging Kia Kaha māmā daily activities according to the Maramataka to continue raising awareness, as well as to publish the Kia Kaha māmā story
- Kaniwa sees strong potential for these resources and approaches to be taught to midwives, as a way of strengthening the spiritual and mental aspects of the holistic practices they provide to wāhine Māori
- Kia Kaha māmā focuses on the development of positive stress-relief strategies to replace detrimental strategies. There is potential for this project to inform other wellbeing projects, including those focused on FASD, smoking cessation, weight management etc. from a kaupapa Māori perspective.

## Kia Ora Māmā

*'It's awesome to hear the same struggles and triumphs as a single māmā myself. We just do what we have to do. And our babies grow to be such strong and resilient kids.'*  
- Participant

Kia Ora Māmā was created by Arataua Ltd / Kahurangi Milne to empower Māori mothers both online and offline, providing a space for them to share, connect and feel 'normal' in their mum journey. The Kia Ora Māmā digital series was created to provide specific content for māmā covering a range of topics. As the movement grew, it became apparent that there was a huge need and demand for dedicated spaces for Māori māmā.

Te Hiringa Hauora contributed funding to support Kia Ora Māmā to expand its offerings to provide more opportunities for māmā to connect and feel part of a tribe that supports and understands.

Elements of the project included:

- development of expert-led video content on relevant wellbeing topics
- hosting of a live event to bring māmā together

At its heart the aim can be explained as *kia whakatairanga i te tūranga a te māmā i tēnei ao* - to empower the role of māmā in this world.



### Highlights from funding period:

- Engaging online content was created for māmā who may be feeling alone, giving them a safe place to share challenges relating to COVID-19 and motherhood more generally.
- Four Facebook live panels were hosted covering topics:
  - Single māmā
  - New māmā / birth during COVID-19
  - māmā whangai
  - māmā in business
- Māmā from all walks of life were hosted at the first ever Kia Ora Māmā live event. It was also videoed for those who were unable to attend in person.

### What was achieved?

- 100 tickets for the event sold out within 24 hours. 60 additional tickets were released and sold out within 25 mins.
- 160 māmā from around the motu came together for the event. Many māmā were particularly grateful for the opportunity to connect physically during this time.
- Kia Ora Māmā continues to expand its offerings, creating more opportunities for māmā to share their experiences, often for the first time in a safe community which continues to support and empower one another.

### How do we know?

- Facebook panels resulted in high engagement from the Kia Ora Māmā community and attracted many positive reactions.
- Social media comments thanked panel guests for bravely sharing and showed that many women related to the kōrero and felt supported by the forum.
- Many have requested more live video discussions.
- Feedback on the event has provided significant insight into the influence and power of Kia Ora Māmā in helping to support and empower māmā Māori.

# Rongoā Māori Coping Strategies for Resilient Māmā

*'I'm so happy to be able to support other mums..I went into such a place of darkness when I had postnatal depression, it was horrible and lonely. I am finally able to do what I love and support others going through a hard time...'*

- Participant

Tasha Wharerau brings wāhine in communities across Northland together to build their resilience and confidence. Using a community-owned, peer-led model, and rongoā Māori, her mahi supports māmā and whānau to develop their own skills, confidence and strategies to cope with the challenges of parenting through:

- online and in-person groups providing a space for connection for māmā who have gone through or continue to struggle with depression and anxiety
- support groups, driven and maintained by their local communities, which provide invaluable support for māmā at all stages of their motherhood journeys.

Peer-led approaches have been proven to be more effective and accessible than specialist support for the women involved, and drawing on traditional Māori healing methods shows great promise but is not yet available to many. With COVID-19 increasing anxiety, and many turning to unhealthy coping mechanisms e.g. alcohol, these services are even more important and are being delivered online. Te Hiringa Hauora contributed funding to enable Tasha to build the capability of a small group of māmā to provide peer support to others. Through supporting people from these communities to develop the skills to deliver rongoā Māori, she aims to enable more hāpu māmā and whānau to access culturally appropriate and powerful support and healing now and into the future. This will support the resilience and wellbeing which is so vital when dealing with challenging times.

## Highlights from funding period:

- Hapū wānanga which utilised rongoā Māori were run in Whangārei and Kawakawa. A wellness wānanga was held in Moerewa with Hiwa i te Rangi teen parent unit.
- 22 participants were invited to become facilitators in their own areas.
- Rongoā Māori presentations were developed including creating and using porotiti for calming the breath and focus.
- Tasha and others she supports have taken up training with the aim of building skills to support whānau. This has included training in facilitation, depression and anxiety, mental health and addiction, and other areas of interest.
- Peer support groups ran successfully in Whangārei, Kerikeri and Kawakawa throughout 2020. A new group met for the first time in Whāngarei and another was set up in Kaikohe.

## What was achieved?

- Whānau accessing support were able to identify and develop their own positive coping strategies.
- Whānau accessing support were able to build their understanding of and comfort with what COVID-19 restrictions meant for birthing, and other areas of concern.
- Agencies and organisations who don't usually work together are collaborating around common goals e.g. Oranga Tamariki, Plunket, early childhood centres and community groups.
- Anxieties which could otherwise have led to depression and distress were managed and alleviated.
- Māmā built new skills and confidence to support others.

## How do we know?

- Whānau attendance at groups, wānanga and online platforms were strong, and feedback was positive.
- Participants at support groups felt safe to share: 'I've never told anyone this before.'
- Participants responded positively and several signed up to support others.
- Training was requested and completed.

# Rongoā Māori Coping Strategies for Resilient Māmā

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## Lessons learned / Reflections:

- Facilitating wānanga is a very specific skill which requires the confidence to be highly responsive and agile, putting whānau needs first. This can be very challenging, especially for those who are just learning. Training to support new kaimahi needs to focus on listening to and caring for others - true manaaki.
- Community-driven approaches are essential as each group has different needs, however it can mean moving more slowly to avoid putting pressure on people, especially those who might be dealing with anxiety or depression.

## What's next?

- Kaikohe is trialling the development and distribution of Rongoā Māori boxes consisting of a wooden box, dirt and seeds chosen by the recipient from a seed bank. 100 boxes are being assembled to be gifted to hapū whānau, mums and babies during the time of Puanga in June.
- Alyssa, a mother from the teen parent unit, is creating a 'māmā pack' to be given to mums as they leave hospital. This idea is being developed through the Young Enterprise Scheme and will be piloted as part of the enterprise fair. Tasha is supporting Alyssa to engage with māmā involved in anxiety group meetings to explore what might have helped them at that stage.
- The networks involved in and developed through Tasha's work are developing a COVID-19 response template which will support them and others to keep services and support available through various levels of restrictions. This scenario planning will be of value into the future in building the sustainability of offerings.
- Tasha is exploring opportunities to provide culturally appropriate (kaupapa Māori) breastfeeding support for Kaikohe. Currently breastfeeding support is not available in the area and that available elsewhere through mainstream providers is not seen as culturally safe.
- Further training opportunities in practices such as flinchlock release, mirimiri, infant massage and neuro-linguistic programming are being explored.



*'We really felt supported and cherished during the wānanga being able to talk in an open way without judgement, and understanding stress and anxiety is a normal part of hapūtanga and our fears are valid and real.'*  
- Participant



## Te Pā Harakeke o Papatūānuku

*'I was determined not to let my trauma be passed on through generations after me. I quickly realised it's a lot of internal work. You need to find exactly what's right for you. I tried everything I thought could help me heal these deep wounds to be the best version of me to my new whānau.'*

- Participant

Te Pā Harakeke o Papatūānuku is a collaboration between Whānau Āwhina Plunket and Hāpai Te Hauora. The initiative aimed to increase awareness of maternal mental health and wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic, and counteract the isolation and disconnection suffered by some women during this period. Led and delivered by Whānau Āwhina Plunket's Whirihia team, and supported and informed by Hāpai Te Hauora, the funded initiative delivered maternal mental health support, assistance and messages to vulnerable māmā and whānau via a series of wānanga, alongside a safe sleep initiative.

Key components of the initiative included:

- Pā Harakeke - building awareness of the role of pā harakeke, its care, maintenance and uses, while supporting whānau ora and connectedness and reinvigorating the environment
- Wahakura - promotion of wahakura to deliver maternal health and wellbeing and safe sleep messaging while improving access through increasing wahakura production and distribution.
- Leveraging off of Whānau Āwhina Plunket's hapū wānanga events to provide a safe space to engage with māmā and whānau around key messages and link them to other services.

These were underpinned by the development of messaging, resources and support accessible via different channels, especially social media. Post-wānanga 1:1 support was made available online and succinct visual and video messages were created and shared through Facebook to enable access. The 'Te Pa Harakeke o Papatūānuku - Messages of Maternal well-being' documentary, made available on multiple channels, allows viewers to walk alongside whānau as they share their stories about how they used their intuition to guide their healing for themselves and their pēpi during this uncertain year.

### Highlights from funding period:

- Three marae and one marae home-school in the central North Island worked on the Pā Harakeke kaupapa.
- Attendees of hapū wānanga were gifted wahakura, a sustainable safe-sleep device which weaves together safe sleep and wellbeing support.
- Increased capacity of the kairaranga network available to the team (now 26) and increased production of and access to wahakura.
- Short documentary on maternal wellbeing and connection to Papatūānuku: [youtu.be/er9HjIutToY](https://youtu.be/er9HjIutToY)

### What was achieved?

- Tamariki involved in the pā harakeke kaupapa gained understanding of the work, its connection to their marae, kuia, culture, heritage and future.
- Whānau and sector were involved in discussions around maternal health and wellbeing, sharing experiences in a safe, supportive space both at wānanga and via different media channels.
- Participants were connected to the comprehensive support and information provided by Whānau Āwhina Plunket.
- Plunket built and strengthened relationships with iwi, hapū, marae, kairaranga, nani and kuia, and the Māori Women's Welfare League.

### How do we know?

- Positive feedback from participating whānau.
- Shared stories demonstrated the challenges experienced, the importance of reaching out and the amazing change that can result.

*'Like the weaving of a wahakura, the Whirihia team share their mātauranga, weaving maternal and pēpi health and wellbeing advice and messages through all their mahi, wānanga and engagement with whānau.'*



## Our Partners' Experiences of Working with Te Hiringa Hauora

Throughout and beyond the granting period, the Te Hiringa Hauora team purposefully worked with potential community partners to explore opportunities and, where possible, overcome barriers to working together. The practices utilised in this project represent a more flexible, human-centred way of working for Te Hiringa Hauora, and as such, provides a strong opportunity for learning within the organisation.

We asked the community partners to reflect on their experience of working with Te Hiringa Hauora as part of the psychosocial response to COVID-19 and share what was helpful and what was more challenging. These insights are captured below:

### What helped:

- Support during the application process:
  - taking on some of the administrative burden
  - being flexible and trouble-shooting around some of the application criteria
  - a focus on relationships rather than process
- Reporting that focuses on learning and impact, rather than compliance
  - the freedom to openly change direction during the funding period as more was learned about the best ways to work with whānau
  - changing course is a sign of learning and improvement, not just being 'wrong.'
  - being trusted, and trusting enough to be open and share
- Open, supportive and reciprocal communication
  - creating space for frank, open conversations to enable two-way learning
  - offering support and uplifting conversations during challenging periods
  - always having regular check-ins

### What was challenging?

- Juggling the demands of working full-time, leading this kaupapa, studying, whānau etc.

*'Usually we do what whānau require us to do for them, then at the end of the contract we have to make our reporting fit the contract outcome requirements.'*  
- grantee

*'Most funders don't ask...perhaps they think that they are doing it right if there is no feedback. I truly feel this is one of the few interactions I have had in the 11 years of working in Māori health promotions space that the funders have had such open and frank discussions, ngā mihi nunui ki a koutou.'*  
- grantee

*'The whole team at Te Hiringa Hauora have helped me immensely, and in some ways made my own dreams come true by supporting the development of (my initiative) which in turn has intentions to help as many wāhine as possible, strengthening them through personal development, learning positive stress-relief strategies, building resilience and learning most importantly to value and love themselves.'*  
- grantee

# Reflections and Recommendations

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The focus on learning throughout this project was not limited to the projects receiving funding. The team at Te Hiringa Hauora was keen to explore what could be learned about how to successfully partner with individuals, groups and organisations creating real change in and for their communities.

The following insights came through coaching conversations with community partners. They should be considered a starting point for opportunities to explore, rather than a list of fully developed or exhaustive recommendations.

## 1. Relationships are foundational

Relationships opened the door for funding conversations. They were further strengthened by the team's willingness to look beyond compliance and process during the application stage. Project reporting focused on shared purpose and trust cemented that good will.

Note: existing relationships were a major enabler of success for this project: the team at Te Hiringa Hauora were already aware of the community partners and their work and vice versa. How the seeds of these relationships were planted and nurtured initially will be important but was not explored in these conversations.

## 2. Safe, flexible spaces enable learning and innovation

Funding relationships create power dynamics which can stifle innovation and learning. In the context of this project, the team's openness to changes in project direction, and a clear prioritisation of learning over compliance, were powerful enablers of conversations that might not have happened otherwise. This enabled new approaches to be tried in communities and meant that the on-the-ground learning from the mahi reached the team at Te Hiringa Hauora.

## 3. Funding into communities goes a very long way

We know that incredible things often happen in communities on very low budgets due to the efforts and sacrifices of individuals. Through this project it has been apparent that a relatively small amount of funding can create a significant change for those individuals and the communities they serve. Notably, several acknowledged the power of the funding to free them up to step back, reflect, learn, take on opportunities to develop themselves, and feel less torn between their commitments to whānau, community and other roles.

*"We wouldn't have done this study without the HPA (Te Hiringa Hauora) funding. It has allowed us to acknowledge and work in a space where our minds can be happy to deal with these things. It enabled us to realise and identify what we were missing and to see how it all can become possible."*

- grantee

## Reflections and Recommendations: continued

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### 4. Peer connection is powerful

Bringing community partners together to share their experiences, discuss their work and support each other was widely acknowledged as one of the most useful and appreciated aspects of the experience for the grantees. While this was a voluntary hui, all grantees chose to attend and were enthusiastic about the potential for other opportunities to connect with each other.

### 5. Innovation requires dedicated support

Grantees saw significant value in having an independent innovation coach who could support them to step back from their day-to-day mahi to reflect, learn and further develop their ideas if they so desired (coaching was offered on an 'opt-in' basis). This role, played by the Innovation Unit team, also acted as a thought-partner to Te Hiringa Hauora: supporting community engagement, organisational learning and contributing to the development of strategies.

### 6. Te Hiringa Hauora has a vital role to play

Te Hiringa Hauora is in a powerful position to support wider sector understanding of the power of mātauranga Māori, what it takes to support the wellbeing of Māori mothers, and what partnership can look like in communities. Grantees spoke particularly about this role as being a supporter of their work (financially but also through sharing stories and successes), a connector (within and across different sectors, systems and spaces), and an advocate for a more holistic approach to wellbeing.

If you are interested in discussing this project,  
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