

Community Partnership 2013-14

Nga Mahi a Hua Whenua, Hua Moana

Four whānau groups from Hokitika experienced the thrill of finding, gathering and cooking kai from the land and sea. They did this as part of an HPA funded project. The participants were young mums and their small children — many without the knowledge, money or transport to do this on their own. Along the way they gained new skills and new friends. They also got to visit parts of the West Coast that some hadn't seen before.

Fergus Bryant from local health and social services provider, Poutini Waiora, helped organise and implement Nga Mahi a Hua Whenua, Hua Moana. Fergus has lived in the area all of his life and local kai gathering is just a part of how he lives his life.

Local skills and knowledge

Fergus says they were lucky as they had all the local knowledge and skills needed within their team at Poutini Waiora. "Like me, my colleague Joe has lived here much of his life and knows about the local spots for kai and the traditions involved. And Miriama knows other really useful things like how to make natural insect repellent, for example." They made use of the local Anglican Church kitchen for kai preparation.

Offering practical life skills and social benefits

The project was aimed at sharing practical skills with low income whānau that they could keep using. It also got them out and about — connecting with the land, with traditional Māori tikanga, with each other and with Poutini Waiora. And it encouraged families to eat fresh food and be active together.

"Many of these mums are struggling at home. They are often isolated without transport and like many young people today they don't know how to get food, except stuff that is wrapped up and sold at a supermarket.



"Their kids don't know these things either. They don't know how to fish or light a fire — they aren't connected to the land in that way."

Getting things started

To get the ball rolling, Fergus and his team had an initial hui with interested whānau. Although Fergus knew some of the families through his work, it was largely 'word of mouth' that got people along. "In a small community it isn't hard to spread the word the old fashioned way."

At that first hui they talked about their plans and asked whānau what they thought. “We had a timetable in place with five different activities scheduled over five weeks. We explained that we might have to change things as we went, depending on the weather and local tides. Everyone was okay about that.

“Making it about kai was a big drawcard for these whānau too – it made it attractive from the outset.”

Flexibility and good transport are vital

“We kept it simple and we were flexible. If things did change we just let people know by phone, they all have a cell phone these days. We had to swap our mussel trip with a cress gathering one because of the tides, but that was fine.”

Fergus says that transport was a key success factor for this project. “We had our own van to use and lots of different-sized kiddy car seats. Transport was essential — these mums didn’t have any of their own. We could pick them up and because it was a small group we could change the times a bit as we went. If we just said ‘be here at 9.30am Monday morning’ it wouldn’t have worked.”

Having one van meant that numbers of participants were restricted but Fergus says that this was actually a good thing. “The small numbers meant that it was very personal and hands-on. It also kept things safe. Doing activities that involve fire, water and knives adds some risk so you have to keep a close eye on things, but this was easily managed with a small group.”

Different sessions to keep it fresh

The five sessions varied with each involving different foods and skills. One was about traditional breadmaking while another involved fishing. “Some of them had never had fresh fish before, except maybe fish and chips. We taught them to catch the fish, prepare it and then we talked about healthy ways of cooking the fish. We even had pink rods for the girls!”



The hua whenua session (vegetable gathering) had some unexpected benefits when the group came across wild blackberries, so they learnt about collecting berries too. The whānau involved were also taught how to build a fire as part of their experience – a basic skill that most didn’t know how to do.

Benefits for all

Fergus says that Nga Mahi a Hua Whenua, Hua Moana was a huge success and there were many great outcomes at the end of the project. Those involved rated it highly and results exceeded expectations for each of the goals set.

“As well as the practical food skills, the group got to know each other, to look after each other’s kids and help one another. Friendships blossomed, they got new confidence and some of the mums are already engaged with other social activities around town.”

And by the end of the project Poutini Waiora had good relationships with some new whānau, so they were better placed to support those families in future.

Top tips

- Tap into the local knowledge and skills in your community.
- Make it fun and new for people – go to places they haven’t been before and do something different each session.
- Be flexible and adjust things as you go.