



Manaaki Tairāwhiti

A regional illustration of a connected and whānau-centred social sector

The Manaaki Tairāwhiti journey

Manaaki Tairāwhiti is an Iwi-led partnership changing the way that social services work together across Tairāwhiti. It was developed in response to issues which are familiar across the social sector in Aotearoa – disconnection, duplication, siloed working, and services being developed and delivered for a region without first understanding the needs of whānau and communities. Rather than continue to miss the opportunities of improved connection, Iwi, central and local government and non-governmental organisations have come together in Tairāwhiti to develop local solutions to the region's problems.

Manaaki Tairāwhiti received Cabinet mandate as a place-based initiative in 2016 but remains locally driven in practice. Having a mandate from central government enables the organisation to tailor responses to social issues in Tairāwhiti, changing those aspects of national service specifications, systems and processes that they feel do not reflect the realities of the region. Since then, they have moved through phases of developing a collective vision and understanding the social services sector in Tairāwhiti through observation, mapping and hui. They are now in a period of working collectively on social issues in order to test and learn about effective contributions to whānau wellbeing.

Manaaki Tairāwhiti is a governance board where the region's decision-makers can sit around the same table

The Manaaki Tairāwhiti Board is co-chaired by Te Rūnanganui o Ngāti Porou and Te Rūnanga o Tūranga-nui-a-Kiwa, centring Iwi leadership as the driver for collective action. The membership of the board includes leadership from central government social agencies, including Oranga Tamariki, non-governmental organisations and Gisborne District Council.

The board provides a place for the leadership of the social sector in Tairāwhiti to come together, bringing their organisations' perspectives and knowledge and developing a collective vision of flourishing whānau. This collective vision is emphasised as crucial. Prior to its development, social agencies pursued their own aims with their own approaches, collaborating in small groups on particular issues, but often working at cross-purposes or duplicating work. A collective approach to governance not only rationalises meetings and connections across the wider sector, but ensures that everyone is working to a shared vision of whānau wellbeing.



Iwi leadership ensures that the group is independent from central and local government, while still being able to draw on institutional knowledge and national practice. Iwi also have a unique mandate to speak on behalf of their rohe at all levels of government. Te Rūnanganui o Ngāti Porou and Te Rūnanga o Tūranga-nui-a-Kiwa have the authority to advocate for Tairāwhiti, including in Wellington, which has been essential in managing a shift from government-imposed and directed social services to local vision and delivery.

The Manaaki Tairāwhiti methodology is to use the unmodified voice of whānau to understand the wider system

Manaaki Tairāwhiti emphasises that an important point of difference in their work is the centrality and respect that whānau voice carries. The perspectives of whānau, including what they say about their goals and needs, is treated as crucial to the work that social services do. This includes emphasising the words themselves, (that is, not making assumptions about what whānau may need or want) and taking the time to kōrero with whānau and truly hear their perspectives. Whānau voice is honoured, even where this commitment may run counter to established practice or policy.

The priority placed on whānau voice is profoundly important for the whānau seeking or in need of social services, but also provides a richer and deeper understanding of what is occurring on the ground in

Tairāwhiti. Manaaki Tairāwhiti emphasise that for them data and evidence must go beyond the simple counting of service delivery or assistance provided and must centre the actual needs of whānau in the community. This evidence can then be used to reflect on and modify practice in a process of ongoing testing, learning and adaptation.

“A lot of groups came to Tairāwhiti with a plan, instead of listening to the community.”

The Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre works to build the evidence base that helps us better understand wellbeing and what works to improve outcomes for New Zealand's children, young people and their whānau.

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This voice can also be communicated and shared among those in the community, feeding into the collective vision of flourishing whānau. It can also be expressed in Wellington to those designing and delivering services, and the governance of Manaaki Tairāwhiti can ensure that that voice is heard. In this way, services can be refined and regional realities can be acknowledged and acted upon in the wider system as well.

For Manaaki Tairāwhiti the barriers that whānau face in the system are most crucial. This is not about individual practice or services, but how the wider systems are expressed in the lives of whānau. Emphasising the voices of those

“The journey begins with what matters to whānau.”

whānau is a way of understanding where the barriers are and how they can be addressed, with the ultimate goal of influencing social sector system change.

Using regional advantages to challenge national barriers

Manaaki Tairāwhiti has been able to capitalise on existing high levels of collaboration and alignment of practice in the region. A small community where the geographic range of social services providers, local government areas and lwi rohe lined up, Tairāwhiti was in an advantageous position to develop a collective social sector, and this was reflected in the community drive that set up Manaaki Tairāwhiti.

This allows those in Tairāwhiti to not only be joined-up on the ground, but to begin to do things differently systemically. This is an ongoing journey of understanding, refinement, and developing responses to those system settings that do not fit the local context.

“There’s a lot of re-work at the frontline due to systems. We need systems-level change to address barriers.”

Regionally-led services must leverage existing relationships, trust, knowledge and networks to enable decision-making to occur in the community. This helps to ensure that system barriers can be addressed within a region without needing to involve Wellington. For its part, central organisations must trust the collaboration that occurs regionally rather than assuming that decisions must be made in national offices.

Connections across the social sector are changing the way services are delivered for tamariki and whānau in Tairāwhiti

An example of this work in practice is with Oranga Tamariki reports of concern. Where these reports do not require further intervention, they can still be referred elsewhere among the social services in Tairāwhiti depending on the needs of the whānau involved. In this way, whānau with needs outside the purview of Oranga Tamariki can still receive the support they require from a connected social service. In this respect, there is “no wrong door” to social services in Tairāwhiti.

Similarly, in the prevention of family violence, Tairāwhiti is operating on a connected and mutually supporting model. Tairāwhiti is one of the regions operating a Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke model, in which Iwi and the Police

“We want to respond to the demand at the door – any door.”

come together to support whānau experiencing family violence. In Tairāwhiti, because of the governance of Manaaki Tairāwhiti, other social service agencies, including Oranga Tamariki, are able to be included in the service and provide support and knowledge as it is required. Manaaki Tairāwhiti share an example of this working in practice, where a young man with long-undiagnosed autism has been supported to receive a diagnosis and support for his whānau, when the likely alternative was a conviction and prison sentence.

Iwi leadership aspires to pursue systemic change

Vital to the success of Manaaki Tairāwhiti has been the leadership of Te Rūnanganui o Ngāti Porou and Te Rūnanga o Tūranga-nui-a-Kiwa. This leadership has an aspiration of working toward decentralising the commissioning of social services to the community. This corresponds to a growing awareness among central government social agencies that few social issues can be addressed without local knowledge and thorough understanding of local contexts and that therefore these issues are best addressed by the communities themselves.

Central to the growing success of Manaaki Tairāwhiti is devolved, local decision-making. The iwi leadership of Manaaki Tairāwhiti provide the drive to translate opportunities on the ground into systemic change for the region. This is a journey in which local evidence and insights are reflected back to central government agencies in order to identify the barriers that exist in the system and then to change them.

An important system issue that Manaaki Tairāwhiti has already identified is a lack of flexibility and agility in the existing system of contracting and provision of services. This can lead to perverse outcomes, such as when providers cannot include tamariki who are not currently in the care of Oranga Tamariki in their services, even when they have been identified as being in need of support. Decentralising commissioning of these services to local communities and to iwi would help to ensure that pragmatic flexibility is maintained so that decisions can be based on the needs of the community. Manaaki Tairāwhiti continues to demonstrate the impact that this can have in practice.

Lessons from the Manaaki Tairāwhiti experience

Tairāwhiti possesses a unique set of regional characteristics which has supported the development of a connected and whānau-centered social sector governance group, including the personal dedication and drive of those involved. Nevertheless, the experience of Manaaki Tairāwhiti provides important lessons of what support such initiatives require from central government in order to be successful.

Some of Manaaki Tairāwhiti's success factors include:

- A Cabinet mandate for change with broad trust about how that change is enacted, in order to challenge those aspects of national service specifications, systems and processes that do not reflect the realities of the region.
- A strong evidentiary base for action, including rich whānau-voice information.
- Central government being willing to come to the region with a blank page, without predetermined ideas for what whānau need.
- Support for agencies taking the time to connect and truly hear the voices of whānau, acknowledging that this is likely to take longer and be more complicated than business as usual.
- An acceptance that very few social issues can be addressed with one-size-fits-all approaches, and that therefore solutions to the complex problems facing Aotearoa's whānau must be regionally-led and nourished with local and community knowledge.

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