

It takes a village to see tamariki thrive in tough economic times

By Fiona Kingsford, Whānau Āwhina Plunket Chief Executive

Times are tough at the moment and many whānau are struggling to make ends meet. This Children's Day (3 March 2024) – a day that should be one of celebration – it's our little ones who are bearing the brunt and now, more than ever, they need a village behind them.

The cost-of-living crisis is hitting hard. Latest child poverty statistics show one-in-eight children, or 143,700 are going without the basics – fruit and vegetables, heating, and doctor visits. For Māori, it's one-in-five; Pacific peoples, one-in-four.

It's grim, and our Plunket nurses, kaiāwhina, and community Karitāne who are trusted and hold the privileged position of being welcomed into homes and emergency accommodation in communities up and down the country, are all so very aware of this and the important role they play.

Whānau Āwhina Plunket is part of the village of community and iwi providers across the motu, striving to keep our little ones and their whānau well. Every day the team is checking baby is growing and developing as expected, offering extra support when it is needed with feeding, sleeping and the like, and picking up any concerns early – so whānau are less likely to end up in the ED waiting room in our overrun hospitals.

Our people are also the link whānau rely on to access the wider health and social support network; sometimes it is their only link and lately they're doing more referrals for food parcels.

Plunket's village includes our many volunteers who give up their precious time and the organisations and individuals who generously donate to our charity to prop up our underfunded government services so we can keep being there for whānau.

It's that ongoing support and commitment to tamariki that paved the way for us to open a new family friendly one-stop shop community hub in Rotorua recently. We are truly grateful for the support from Generation Homes and the many organisations who supported the project – as a charity we couldn't have done it without them.

The hub brings all wraparound support services, such as education and play groups that give people confidence, connection, and a sense of belonging, under one roof. Plus, there is space for like-minded community providers who share our vision.

We are constantly looking at ways to make it easier for whānau to reach the support they need. We're in homes, we have more than 400 clinics across the country, we've opened in some shopping centres and we're online providing 24/7 help through PlunketLine and one-on-one video call support for those who need us most.



Plunket has walked alongside whānau for more than a century. We're in it for the long haul. But we can't do it alone. It takes a village to raise a child. A village, plus government investment to address the widening pay gap that exists for our nurses and healthcare workers compared to their colleagues' working in hospitals.

Investing in the early years is money well spent – our tamariki deserve it, for their future, for our country's future.

ENDS

About Whānau Āwhina Plunket

Pēpi, tamariki and whānau are at the heart of Whānau Āwhina Plunket. The charity is Aotearoa New Zealand's largest health and wellbeing support service for tamariki – seeing 290,000 under-fives. About 80% of newborns are enrolled with Whānau Āwhina Plunket each year.

Our nurses provide clinical assessments, and along with Kaiāwhina and Community Karitāne, support whānau and families, through home and clinic visits. PlunketLine 0800 933 922 is a free 24/7 telephone advice service for parents and whānau, where callers can speak to a registered nurse for advice, or call the Admin Line on 0800 184 803 to make an appointment in your area. Our website plunket.org.nz is one of the country's most widely read digital child health resources, with 1.8 million visits each year. It is available data-free through the Zero Data portal at zero.govt.nz, and you can choose to view it in English or te reo Māori.