

## APPENDIX 3: LEARNING STORY: TIAKINA Ō TĀTOU TAMARIKI ('KEEPING OUR KIDS SAFE')

### Building neighbourliness to 'keep kids safe'

#### The 'Why'

Tiakina Ō Tātou Tamariki started because local residents wanted to reduce child abuse and maltreatment by taking a very different approach. There are no 'programmes', 'clients' or 'services' here. Instead, the project aims to build 'trust and care' in the Titirangi neighbourhood – so that residents 'notice and care whenever someone has reason to celebrate, worry or grieve'. The project was inspired by the evidence from Professor Gary Melton's Strong Communities<sup>35</sup> initiative in South Carolina, USA. Tiakina Ō Tātou Tamariki believes that building trust and care within the neighbourhood will increase children's safety and help all whānau and families flourish in the context of a supportive community.



#### History/Background

The neighbourhood of Titirangi – or Kaiti South – in Gisborne has been viewed as a 'rougher part' of town. The neighbourhood was created with the building of state houses in the 1950s; the area becoming home to many Māori workers employed by the Kaiti Freezing Works, Wattie's and other factories in Gisborne. With the departure of Wattie's and closing of the freezing works, the area was left with a high rate of unemployment. Today, the average household income is in the lowest decile, leading to a label of 'high-deprivation' by outsiders. However, that is not the full story. A fuller and much richer story, would include the resourceful, hardworking, innovative and inspiring people who live there.

#### What's been happening, what does Tiakina Ō Tātou Tamariki do?

The Tiakina Ō Tātou Tamariki project was started in 2010 with a ten-year vision from locals, and three years of funding from J R McKenzie Trust and the Todd Foundation. Over the previous ten years a residents association had been active in the wider community. While the new project built on some of the successes of previous work, it was much more focused on an area of nine streets that is home to about two hundred households. The project was established with the ultimate goal of 'Tiakina Ō Tātou Tamariki', or 'Keeping our kids safe'. A related goal is that "every parent and

<sup>35</sup> In Strong Communities, the penultimate goal is to create the conditions necessary for every child and every parent to know that, if they had reason to worry, celebrate, or grieve, someone would notice, and someone would care. The primary goal of prevention of harm to children can also be stated positively as the 'assurance of children's safety'.

every child in our neighbourhood will be confident that someone will notice and someone will care when they have cause for joy, sorrow or worry". The project aims to:

- Help neighbours reflect on ways to ensure that residents (and visitors) in their street are safe and confident to support each other in ways that promote positive change in the neighbourhood.
- Mobilise volunteers to strengthen bonding and build social capital in the neighbourhood.
- Create knowledge within the neighbourhood about the place and the people who live there (i.e. its local history, current situation for residents/environment, and future plans).
- Learn from the project and make recommendations on neighbourhood policy and investment to local and central government and Non-Governmental Organisations.

The project is based on ten principles that have been adapted from Strong Communities to better suit our context in Aotearoa:

1. Activities used to engage the community should be related to strengthening positive relationships in the neighbourhood and the ultimate outcome of keeping children safe and cared for. An activity "fits" if it naturally brings people together so that connections among families are enhanced and isolation is reduced.
2. Plans and approaches should be directed toward the transformation of community norms and structures so that residents "naturally" notice and respond to the needs of children and their caregivers.
3. Activities should continuously promote the core kaupapa. The objective is not to provide programmes or services but instead the continuous creation of settings in which the core messages of the project are heard and applied.
4. Available resources should be directed toward volunteer recruitment, mobilisation, and retention.
5. Activities should be directed toward the establishment or strengthening of relationships among families or between families and community institutions.
6. Activities should include a focus on the development of widely available, easily accessible, and non-stigmatising social and material support for families of young children.
7. Although the ultimate goal is the safety and care of children, project activities will mainly involve parents and extended whānau.
8. Activities should be undertaken in a way that enhances parent leadership and sustainable community engagement.
9. Whenever possible, activities should facilitate manaakitanga and reciprocity of help.
10. Activities should be designed so that they build or rely on the assets (leadership, networks, facilities and cultures) of the community.

The project currently employs a number of part-time "Community Animators" who originally acted as catalysts for activities and now support residents to drive their own development instead. They live in, and are from, the local area of Titirangi/Kaiti South. Some of them grew up in the neighbourhood; so have a depth of understanding and strong local connections. Community Animators support residents to do a wide range of things – ranging from running a Kids' Christmas Party in the park, to calling and facilitating a community meeting about an issue, to helping a neighbouring whānau in a time of crisis. Community Animators are an intentional 'presence' in the community – involved in everything that's going on. Community Animators are focused on increasing:

- neighbourhood knowledge;
- neighbour interactions;
- neighbourly trust;

- volunteering; and
- care, concern and celebration.

This has seen the Community Animators and local residents involved in a wide range of community activities, such as:

- Forming of 'Street Legends' – a group of representatives from each street in the neighbourhood. This group meets monthly to plan and organise neighbourhood activities.
- Community events for the neighbourhood – in five years dozens of community events have been held, for example:
  - 'Give-It-Away Day' (residents sharing pre-loved household items and clothing with neighbours).
  - Street Clean Up Day (large skip bins provided for residents to dump tonnes of household rubbish).
  - Neighbourhood planning and consultation events in partnership with the local authorities.
  - Christmas, Easter, ANZAC, Childrens' Day, Mothers Day and many more.
- Renaming local streets to reflect traditional tupuna names. When Kaiti South was developed as a housing area, authorities ignored the Māori history of the area and chose to name the streets after British cities, and European scientists.
- A neighbourhood Facebook group – members are local residents. Residents share information and news. Local resources – local people and local knowledge is grown.
- Drafting the Titirangi Neighbourhood Plan – the plan has been put together by residents for residents and other stakeholders in the neighbourhood. It is designed to be a starting point to build agreement amongst residents and stakeholder organisations about how to work towards the vision of "Tititangi people love living here, care for the place and each other".
- A local history project – local history nights have been hosted by the local hapū, Ngāti Oneone, on significant days (e.g. Waitangi Day, Titirangi Accord Anniversary).

The project has tried not to just focus on activities for children because one of the principles is that efforts should engage and inspire the adults who are responsible for caring for children. Tiakina ō Tātou Tamariki is working to increase trust and care among residents and improve the overall neighbourhood environment. Priority is given to activities that encourage conversations in the community about what 'safe' means to residents, how 'safe' children are and what more can be done to keep kids safe. Over time, this has impacted positively on a growing local desire to "keep kids safe".

### **Engaging parents and other local adults**

Annette Toupili's role as a Community Animator is part-funded by Plunket and the Tindall Foundation to promote parenting skills to parents who are not comfortable with the usual agencies – these families are often labelled the 'hard to reach'. Annette explained that many people do not want to go to agency-led parenting courses, even if run by a community organisation. People have had negative experiences of attending courses where they are "talked to", by someone standing up the front and trying to teach them something. The approach Annette uses instead is to host a *conversation*. She hosts coffee groups for parents at the local school, in the neighbourhood park or sometimes at her home.

Through taking a more informal approach, "people are learning without realising they are learning" says Annette. It is "non-stigmatised peer-support". People come to the coffee groups to connect, to share, to ask questions. Parents know a lot already, and Annette is also able to bring that knowledge out. Annette also shares her learnings and thoughts.

"We're doing the same thing as a parenting course would, but in a really relaxed setting – so it's not a course at all" says Annette.

"There's no judgement. If you're having a hard week that is OK". There is no stigma attached to attending the parents coffee group and this is seen as a very important factor for its success in engaging people and drawing people in. Annette says that when the coffee group started up only two people would come along. These days, a lot of people come along – sometimes up to 15 people at a time, and residents are now running the group themselves. More than 100 parents have been involved over the last two years, making friends with one another, and being supported to take on board new ideas to try with their kids at home.

### **Who's involved in Tiakina ō Tātou?**

Most importantly it is local people, local residents of the Titirangi neighbourhood. Formally, Tiakina ō Tātou Tamariki is held by Te Ora Hou Aotearoa, with another partner project in Whanganui. The initiative has received support from JR McKenzie Trust, The Todd Foundation, Plunket, Gisborne District Council, Safe Tairāwhiti Community Trust, Department of Internal Affairs and Ministry of Social Development. They are also working closely with groups like Inspiring Communities, Wesley Community Action and Great Start Taita to share learnings about a very different approach to social change and community-led development.

### **What changes have been noticed?**

Five years into the project, Manu Caddie, Project Manager, says that he has noticed:

- Residents taking a lot more initiative in organising things themselves. Community Animators are now rarely the initiators of ideas, events and projects in the neighbourhood – residents are stepping up and initiating most things. This change has been noticeable in the last 12 months.
- People are more positive and seem more hopeful.
- There is pride in the neighbourhood.
- That physical changes in the environment – for example, getting the local neighbourhood playground revamped, replanting natives, painting a mural – provide new inspiration and optimism.
- People such as school principals and police officers have noted positive changes in local families, including an increase in participation at school and a decrease in crime and Police callouts.

Tiakina ō Tātou Tamariki has also been collecting data to capture changes in social capital. Local statistics that highlight changes between 2010 and 2013 survey periods include:

- In 2010, 67% of people surveyed said they "enjoyed living in this neighbourhood". In 2013, this increased to 100%.
- In 2010, only 41% of people had shared phone numbers with their neighbours. By 2013, this increased to 72% of people reporting they had shared phone numbers with neighbours.

- In 2010, 84% of people knew their neighbours names. In 2013, this had increased to 97%.

The change in key social capital indicators is very encouraging. It shows more positive interactions between neighbours and residents trusting their neighbours more. Residents also feel more optimistic about their community, with fewer wanting to leave any time soon. Importantly, these positive changes in community correspond with falling crime statistics, with assaults in Titirangi decreasing by 67% in the period, compared to a regional average decline of only 11%.

### **What's enabled the changes?**

1. Having dedicated local Community Animators who take an asset and strengths-based approach to their work and a commitment to supporting community-led changes in their local neighbourhood.
2. Continued funding for the Community Animator roles from a range of sources.
3. The skills, attitudes and āhua (disposition) of Community Animators themselves. Being local residents, or from the area adds a certain legitimacy. Annette says "I'm here for the long-term...I really love my neighbourhood and this community".

### **What does this story tell us?**

Annette says that there are a lot of people in New Zealand concerned with the question of "how are we going to fix these people". The approach in Tiakina ō Tātou is certainly *not* about "fixing people". Rather, it sees local people, local residents as the greatest asset and a key resource to mobilise positive change. The most important resource is the *people*. Tiakina ō Tātou is also all about action being locally-generated, rather than plans and expectations being externally imposed. There is a big difference.

Tiakina ō Tātou is also working to counter a culture of exclusion and dispossession that has been built up in Titirangi. It is about changing a culture of non-engagement and over-reliance on external agencies. Tiakina ō Tātou is about shifting mindsets. The project works to get local residents to understand that they have all the skills and resources necessary to care for themselves within the community. Professional helpers can be useful, but the most vital resource already exists in every street and neighbourhood – it is the *people*. The project therefore builds on and relies on the assets that exist within that community (for example, leadership, networks, knowledge and culture).

"It is about getting people to be more neighbourly and care about one another again...It is going back to what it means to be a neighbourhood" says Annette.

"People can speak out, take care of one another, and create a better future than what we have now. We are rich in so many ways, we just need to realise it" says Annette.

Some key learnings from this project include:

- Being there for the long-haul. Tiakina ō Tātou is based on a ten year commitment. It is important to understand that sustainable change takes time. It is slow work undoing decades-old culture that is steeped in non-engagement, unhealthy self-belief and distrust.

- The importance of local residents being employed as Community Animators. This lends a legitimacy and mana to the project. Ideally these roles are best as part-time, so the workers are not set up as more professional 'experts' to help the community. The Community Animators are simply residents who have the opportunity to dedicate some significant time to organising and encouraging other residents.
- Funders need to be flexible – open to taking risks and being more experimental. Tiakina ō Tātou has benefitted from supportive and understanding funders who were also keen to learn and be open to new approaches.
- There are limits to traditional service approaches that pour money into fixing problems faced by 'hard to reach families'. The approach used in the Tiakina ō Tātou project is about seeing the neighbourhood as the client (or locus of change), rather than a family or individual. The project is focused on building up positive relationships within the community. It is about the community's ownership of change. It is transforming the community's norms and structures so that the environment in which individuals and families live also change.
- To achieve the ultimate goal of the safety and care of children, the child cannot be the centre or target for "interventions". Rather Tiakina ō Tātou Tamaraki involves and works with parents and extended whanau – employing the philosophy of "it takes a village to raise a child".

See: <http://www.teorahou.org.nz/index.php/resources/community-development/>