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# Te Whakaoranga o te Puhinui - Mai i nga maunga ki te moana; Regenerating the Puhinui Stream catchment and its people

Article by the Sustainable Business Network, with input and endorsement from Te Waiohewa iwi representatives and Auckland Council staff from Healthy Waters and Eke Panuku.

Mai i ngā maunga ki te moana - from the mountains to the sea.

The Waiohewa collective brings together the mana whenua of Te Ākitai, Ngāti Tamaoho and Ngāti Te Ata. Together, they have embedded a whakapapa approach to the restoration of Te Awa o Puhinui, the Puhinui Stream. This prioritises the connection between people, place and nature. It takes a holistic approach to revitalising the mauri of this tupuna awa (the lifeforce/ vital essence of these ancestral waters).

The Puhinui awa (river) flows from springs and small tributaries in the lifestyle blocks above Manukau City. It gathers flow through Tōtara Park, nestled below the Auckland Botanic Gardens. The water is clear. It is protected by mature ngahere (forest), the roots, leaves and branches of the plants and trees. Its meandering course provides habitat for tuna and banded kookopu. The mauri is strong.

The stream descends into the lower suburbs. It becomes denuded, channelised and degraded. Shopping trolleys, plastic and all manner of discarded waste find their way into the awa. This diminishes the mauri. Contaminants leach from industrial estates. At times the awa disappears completely, into concrete pipes beneath retail precincts and office towers. The mauri continues to fade. The awa recovers some of its vitality through restored planting in the Puhinui reserve, an important inanga spawning ground. It then flows into Manukau Harbour.

For Māori, the land, the rivers, the oceans and the broader taiao (environment) are our primal ancestors. Māori have a direct ancestral connection, a whakapapa, to the natural world. Over time this has been forgotten. These connections have been severed. This has been reflected directly in the wellbeing of our land, our water and our communities.

Many of the communities around the Puhinui struggle financially. There's high unemployment and low wages. They are especially vulnerable to the job losses and health impacts of Covid-19. These southern suburbs have the least amount of urban ngahere in Tāmaki Makaurau. Canopy cover here is around 8%, compared to 18%-30% across the rest of the city. There's a lack of reserves and green spaces for families and residents to walk, exercise and play.

But transformation is on its way. The Waiohewa iwi have led the creation of Te Whakaoranga o te Puhinui. It's a partnership with Eke Panuku and the Healthy Waters department of Auckland Council, supported by the wider Auckland Council family. This includes The Southern Initiative, Manurewa and Ōtara-Papatoetoe Local Boards and Kāinga Ora. Together they've signed Te Whakaoranga o te Puhinui Collaboration Charter. It has already been a winner at the 2021 International Federation of Landscape Architects Asia-Pacific Awards.

The strategy combines capital investment and strategic action. It will create jobs in restoring nature. It will create safe places for residents and workers to enjoy. It will support local food growing.

*“Māori have a direct ancestral connection, a whakapapa, to the natural world.”*



The work will contribute to ōhanga āniomio - the creation of Aotearoa New Zealand's circular economy. This means keeping resources in safe circulation, eliminating waste and pollution. The project has a strong social procurement focus – purchasing goods and services ethically and locally. This will emphasise working with Māori, Pasifika, women and the young. Businesses will help build this local regenerative economy. The area will be economically, ecologically, socially and spiritually rejuvenated.

The Sustainable Business Network (SBN) is supporting those already working on this. It has fronted an application to secure initial funding of \$1 million through the Department of Conservation's Jobs for Nature fund. This will kick-start work on the ground. It will get restoration mahi underway, building the skills and training programmes.

However to realise the true depth of regeneration outlined in Te Whakaoranga o te Puhinui it will need ongoing funding and support. The project team will rely on business, philanthropy and the Government to seek funding for strategic initiatives not currently funded. With collective and strategic investment the land and people of Te Puhinui will flourish again.

Te Whakaoranga o Te Puhinui

He waka eke noa

Kia Eke Panuku, Kia Eke Tangaroa

Haumi e

Hui e

Taiki e

Intergenerational well-being of Te Puhinui and its people

Unity in a shared purpose

With our collective effort,

We will succeed

*“With collective and strategic investment the land and people of Te Puhinui will flourish again.”*

**Rachel Brown ONZM**

*The founder of SBN, Rachel has played a critical role in advancing sustainable business for almost 20 years. She is a regular presenter, collaborator and driver of action within NZ business. She provides strategic sustainability advice to countless government agencies and businesses, ranging from large corporates to small enterprises. In 2018 she was awarded the New Zealand Order of Merit for years of service to sustainable business.*