

24th February 2025

During term 4 of 2024 Whenua Iti Outdoors ran an intensive pro-social intervention with tamariki at Parklands School in Motueka. We were initially approached by the Principal of the school with a request to create a programme that worked specifically with tamariki who entered early childhood education during the Covid years to address issues including self-esteem, confidence and resilience.

By weaving together strands of funding from a number of sources we were able to offer a programme that saw every student in the school coming to Whenua Iti for at least two days of programming, with younger tamariki coming through for two full days a week for seven weeks of term 4 2024.

Programme activities were selected that emphasised teamwork and personal development through collaborative activities and group challenges. Understanding self, successfully working with others, and contributing to team success all help to boost self-esteem and confidence.

The programme was designed to align with the core values of the school, which helped to bridge the gap between the learning that took place in the outdoors to the learning in the classroom.

The key learning indicators of the programme were to:

- Have an increased understanding of the natural world
- Have developed a greater connection to self, to local places, to plants and animals, the community and each other through active recreation
- Have a growing understanding of respectful ways to engage and care for nature
- Have enhanced hauora (holistic wellbeing), improving focus, confidence and self-motivation
- Have explored the natural world (te taiao) from an indigenous cultural perspective.

The programme was structured to take place in the outdoors and incorporated kēmu and activities that grew an understanding of the natural world. For example, tamariki were given an opportunity to pot up a seedling tōtara to represent their pathway to leadership. This involved getting their hands into the soil, connecting them with Papatūānuku, working with the fragile roots of the seedling and then taking it home with them to nurture. See the reel on Instagram [here](#).

Other outcomes of the programme were attained and exemplified through feedback from teachers who were surveyed at the end of the programme and included:

“Pushing students out of their comfort zones is a great way to help them grow [and] to manage themselves, which was happening all the time. It was awesome to see them grow as individuals.”

Experiential learning inspiring positive change

“Being in group environments challenged all students in how they fit with others around them – ie being inclusive.”

“The use of te Reo Māori and all the connections to all activities has been exceptional and really talking to the students at their level has really engaged them.”

“Instructors have been inclusive in every way possible for our students, especially students who struggle to concentrate (we have a lot of them!).”

When the team was asked about unintended or unforeseen observations and learnings that could inform practice or further investigation it was noted how important it had been to work alongside the school in programme development. Additional (and consequent) to this was the value of having two staff (one teacher and one teacher aide) accompanying the students each day. This was a huge help with behaviour management and meant that our tutors could focus on the delivery of the programme, to the benefit of all. Having school staff attending programmes has the added benefit of transference of learning, activities and deeper connections with students back into school, extending skills and knowledge gained into daily life in the classroom and in all social interactions.

A copy of the [blogpost](#) our team put together about the programme (and that was linked to the school’s Facebook page) is attached to this report.