



Celebrating Community Collaboration in Eastside Rotorua

Keeping tamariki engaged during lockdown

“That was the coolest!”

That’s probably not a commonly heard phrase during this isolation period, but it’s the feedback that the Tatau Pounamu Collective and its Piripoho Service have been receiving daily in response to the Activity Packs being delivered to whānau who need to keep their tamariki positively engaged during lockdown.

Our Eastside Rotorua community has been hit hard by Covid-19, with increased financial pressure on whānau, growing mental health issues, feelings of loneliness and anxiety, limited access to basic needs and resources and of course, boredom.

Tatau Pounamu is on the ground, seeing those community needs first-hand through Piripoho services and innovating responses to meet them. During Level 3 and 4 to date, community needs have been evolving rapidly, and we’re focused on giving support that is agile and coordinated.

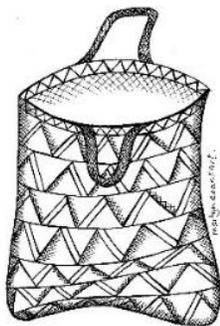
Providing Resource Packs has been one key initiative that we’ve been able to adapt to meet changing needs. In the early weeks of COVID-19 response, koeke, kai and hygiene packs met an urgent need for older adults and the most vulnerable community members. As Level 4 lockdown progressed, this diminished as an immediate local need and could be met through access to Rotorua-wide resources.

By week 2 of lockdown, a new need was rising sharply for home-based activities for children. Whānau were telling us they needed help engaging their tamariki in positive play and learning activities at home. This was an especially urgent need for whānau for whom no internet access, or limited phone data, or a lack of devices prevented them accessing online educational and play resources.

Creating the Activity Packs has been a real team effort. Our broad-based Tatau Pounamu Collective includes people who expertise in child development and play, such as Eastern Kāhui Ako, Plunket, and Our Mokopuna (Kaitiakitanga ngā Mokopuna), who developed a wish list of good quality play and learning resources that could be used in multiple ways and for different ages. Sourcing pack resources during Alert Level 4 has been a challenge, with limited access to shops and stock.



The Piripoho Team put the packs together, keeping strict to the necessary Covid-19 health and safety protocols.



Above: One of Martyn Evans' designs

Making the Activity Packs available is really important, as Sheree McKenzie from Our Mokopuna tells us, because “Play is children's work - and parents can de-stress too by being playful! Activities in the packs gave children a range of things to do, from balls and bubbles for fun movement to vivid pens and colouring sheets donated by local artist Martyn Evans, who designs tikanga Māori colouring activities for art therapy programmes, that encourage mindfulness and relaxation for all ages.”

The Piripoho team has developed databases that track the needs of individual whānau, however getting packs out to whānau during lockdown has been another challenge! The assistance of Police has made this possible, working closely with the Piripoho team to deliver Activity Packs right to families’ doors.



Above: Activity Packs arrive! One parent told us that “the highlight for the kids was having the Police drop the packs off.”

The officers who have been delivering packs in the neighbourhoods say it’s been “absolutely awesome” having the opportunity to do this. Family Harm Intervention Coordinator Cherie Lang says “It is so nice for Police to arrive at a home for something other than responding to an emergency or arrest someone... and for them to be in a proactive, non-threatening environment themselves. They truly loved it!”

“Initially most parents were surprised to see Police”, Constable Amanda Martin reflects, “but once they realised why we were there, big smiles came across their faces, kids lit up and you could see how much they appreciated the packs. As I was walking away from an address, I could hear excited kids jumping and clapping.

Of course, with every response, comes a cost: another part of the team effort has been the support of Tatau Pounamu Collective members who have been extremely active in applying for and sourcing funds to cover the initial expenses for the packs, and providing in-kind support. Thanks to Rotorua East Lions Club, donations to Tatau Pounamu, and Ngāti Uenukukopako Iwi Trust, we have been able to create and deliver 412 Activity Packs to date!

Tatau Pounamu’s champions are the key to helping us develop a co-ordinated approach to our Covid-19 response. For example, our links with Rotorua Lakes Council, Lakes District Health Board and Te Arawa have ensured we are well connected to Rotorua-wide initiatives.

Tatau Pounamu’s Community-Led Development Partnership with the Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) is also an important underlying support of our responsiveness. Through that strong relationship the DIA Community Advisor supports Tatau Pounamu behind the scenes and makes connections that help us work effectively and collaboratively, and the partnership also makes an on-the -ground investment in people resourcing that makes a huge difference to achieving the Tatau Pounamu kaupapa.

Feedback about the Activity Packs from tamariki and parents alike has been uplifting:

“I like the Easter baskets that we could make and the Māori colouring in sheets and the pens because we didn’t have cool pens like that.”

“The chalk was awesome. We drew on the ground, so we knew where to shoot the ball from for tag.”

“I love them - the kids left all their colouring pencils and stationery at school, so they have only been using pens we had around the house.”

“That was the coolest, [my child] was so excited about the Police being at our house. Thank you so much.”

“Loving the pictures and the bubbles and stationery.”

Responding to the needs that arise from COVID-19 is going to be a long journey. Tatau Pounamu will keep listening to what whānau need and adapting how we can support the physical and mental well-being of our Eastside community.