

Media Release

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Funding for Marae food forest

The smallest Iwi in the Bay of Plenty has impressed the Bay of Plenty District Health Board with a remarkable proposal to develop a food forest on their land.

“Of the ten we received, Ngaitai Iwi’s application really stood out,” says BOPDHB Maori community action project coordinator Cynthia Turuwhenua.

Ngaitai Iwi of Torere in the Eastern Bay of Plenty will receive significant funding from the BOPDHB as part of the Maori community action projects fund.

“The funding from us will be matched by the Iwi, which includes koha (gifts/donations) from whanau,” says Cynthia.

“The project is called Tiaka Tie which means *the abundant parent promoting the safe guarding of the role of Papatuanuku (our earth mother) as the source of our sustenance*,” says Moana Flowers, the manager of the project for the Ngaitai Iwi Authority.

The aim is to develop a food forest phased around the four seasons of the year. Iwi will work together to prepare the land and grow seeds, vegetables, herbs and fruit for their community.

“We are starting to understand our dietary needs better and using traditional practices to improve our health. Maori were healthy in the past but urban drift took people away from their roots and natural ways of living. I hope the ideas used in the māra-ā-iwi (Iwi garden) will catch on and whanau will establish their own gardens in their backyards,” says Maona who is a certified permaculture designer.

“Permaculture brings everything together, working with nature rather than against it,” says Moana. “It is based on the philosophy of *earth care, people care and abundance share*. We want our families and anyone who visits us to be part of it and eat local, fresh produce.”

A key element to the project is that it is sustainable.

“The project will mobilise families to come together to benefit the health and nutrition of the Iwi well into the future,’ says Moana. “The methodology supports organic food production and the belief that people and animals thrive in harmony with the environment.”

Moana says that the number of families growing fresh produce in their own gardens has increased significantly since the community garden was set up at the Marae.

“We have some great gardeners in this area with lots of knowledge. People have already contributed in lots of different ways and will continue to do so, as well as learning new skills themselves,” she says.

Other Marae in the area are starting to think about similar projects.

“We host lots of events at the Marae such as weddings and birthdays, and reciprocation is part of our tikanga (custom). If we look after people when they come to visit us, they’ll do the same for us,” she says.

Moana has been supplying local kohanga and schools with seeds and plants for a few years. Curriculums include the students and staff attending workshops as well as taking part in seed gathering and learning gardening techniques and skills.

“They will continue to benefit from this project as I believe our children are the carriers of all our seed for future generations and the forethought to generations ahead is a big issue for me,” says Moana.

The local Hauora, Te Iti Hauora o Ngaitai, provides natural Maori health remedies (Rongoa Maori) grown in the food forest to their clients, as well as traditional midwifery resources.

The next 12 months are already mapped out for the Iwi and they have secured plenty of support from within the Iwi as well as throughout New Zealand.

“We’ve just successfully completed our first wananga (workshops) with more than 100 people attending over four days including some of my fellow permaculturists. Members of the community such as Ringawera (marae cooks) and Pakeke (elders) were interviewed to gather their thoughts and ideas on how the food forest could best serve their needs,” says Moana. “We’ve also had a nutrition talk from local dietitian Sarah Tuki and hands-on cooking demonstrations with BOPDHB community educator Stephen Cameron.”

Moana enlisted help from Daniel Nepia, a permaculture designer based in Auckland. “I’m confident that this project will thrive here,” says Daniel.

Daniel conducted the interviews which included an audit of gardening knowledge and skills of the local people.

“There is a lot of local knowledge here already which will make it much easier to get started. I will just be here to guide them through the design stage, but they will own it,” he says.

Funding available now

- Hapu and Marae-based communities can apply for funding from the BOPDHB.
- Funding can be used for projects relating to nutrition, food preparation, community gardens, cooking demonstrations, cuisine courses, targeted exercise with a goal of improving nutrition, increasing physical activity and reducing obesity.
- Training will be available for successful applicants on gardening and horticulture information and advice.
- The next round of funding closes 15th May 2009.
- To apply for funding, contact Cynthia Turuwhenua on 07 579 8555 or email cynthia.turuwhenua@bopdhb.govt.nz.

The BOPDHB Maori community action project fund is part of the Ministry of Health’s Healthy Eating Healthy Action (HEHA) campaign. HEHA is the strategic approach to improving nutrition, increasing physical activity and reducing obesity for all New Zealanders.



Torene school kids join in an after school planting programme run by permaculturist Moana Flowers.

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