



Te Arawa Whānau Ora Wāhine Programme

Eighteen women have graduated from a passion project borne out of a health coach's empathy for disconnected wāhine.



Tears were shed and lightbulb moments aplenty during Te Arawa Whānau Ora's 10-week pilot programme for wāhine with mental health and addiction issues.

Manu Tāpiki health coach, Kayla Kiore, says when she first started working with whaiora there were not a lot of resources in the community for women.

“I eventually learned that no-one was going to come along and save me, so it was up to me to live this life as best I could. Through my own soul searching and healing, I thought perhaps I could be a teeny bit inspirational to others.” says Kayla.

With her former colleague, Rowie Bartlett, the pair started planning a programme alongside the whaiora they worked with. The result was the creation of an empowerment and wellbeing programme to provide a safe space of support and healing for wāhine suffering from the effects from trauma, grief, and mental health addictions. The 10-week module is based on Māori health model, Te Whare Tapa Whā, and took place every Thursday.

The programme included a noho marae, excursions to the forest, lakes, and beach. Presenters spoke about art, cervical screening, grounding, hauora, empowerment, exercise, rāanga, smoking cessation, employment and community law, advocacy, and the Covid response. Kayla guided the women through mātauranga Māori, pēpēhā,

atua, reconnecting with the taiao, emotional intelligence, different perspectives, and vision boarding.

Five women were living in the emergency housing space, and due to mothers' reluctance to leave their babies in this environment, it was designed so their pēpē could come along.

“The initial vision was to gain an insight and understanding on who the wāhine were; embrace what has happened in their past; and focus on their future. A lot of our whaiora get stuck on what has happened to them, so we sought to change that mindset into aspirational thinking and moving past their suffering and their triggers,” she says.

Kayla says Te Arawa Whānau Ora offers an array of holistic services to whakawātea the

wāhine, such as mirimiri, grounding, and access to its healing practitioners. She also brought in facilitators the wāhine could relate to – people like themselves.

“They were people who started with nothing and are now managers; a former meth addict who now has a law degree. They were people who’ve created amazing things or been part of amazing things. It was important our wāhine could see they could grow from where they are now. These people have proven it.”

The constant motivation has had a profound effect on the women. Five have quit smoking, one is now living in her own home, one is now in a healthy relationship with her tāne who was living away, while another has secured fulltime employment.

“We encouraged them to set two goals a week, and one thing they wanted to achieve each day – even if they’re feeling like they’re in dire straits. It might be brushing their teeth, getting groceries, or even just getting out of bed.

“One of my wāhine struggled to come every week but she was the only one who didn’t miss a day. I’d turn up and she’d get in the car and away we’d go. At the end of the day, she’d thank me and say, ‘I knew I should’ve come.’”

Kayla says for some of the older wāhine it was just about having somewhere to be every week.

“One of our whaiora uses a walker but she was there nine out of ten times. The only time she couldn’t attend was when the activity was down a cliff. We ended up carpooling



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to her house to drop off her lunch. She has no whānau, siblings, children, or husband – just a lady alone in this world. I just couldn’t comprehend what that would be like. So, we all made an effort to make her feel welcome.”

“She just wanted to connect with other wāhine, and now she has a friend from the rōpū who she goes aqua jogging with every week. One of the biggest things is that someone cares, and you’re not just being pushed through like a number.”

The wāhine started weaving a pākē (cape) at the beginning of the 10-week programme, and added momentos from their excursions along the way. The pākē symbolised their growth and connection from the beginning to end of the programme, and how it folded into a cloak of protection.

Kayla’s rightfully proud of the programme. At an emotional graduation, every single woman expressed deep gratitude to Kayla. However, she says she is not doing anything extraordinary.

“I’ve always said to them our relationship doesn’t stop here. I will support you no matter where you are, no matter what you’re doing. A lot of them are just going to come to the gym or go for a walk, and that’ll be their excursion for the week. It’s about keeping physical to get those endorphins and serotonin going. It’s getting them well enough, so they don’t become dependent on us as a service” says Kayla.



Whaiora Pūrākau - *Nicole's story

Nicole was involved in planning Te Arawa Whānau Ora's 10-week Wāhine programme and helped it come into fruition.

At the time, she had her own barriers to overcome. She was a stay-at-home carer for her partner, who had suffered a brutal assault which almost took his life. It was while playing the dutiful role of nurse and doctor that she lost the essence of being herself.

Being the fulltime caregiver of her partner could have easily become an obstacle for Nicole attending the sessions. However, when she felt she could not attend due to her home obligations, she was offered a genuine lifeline from the wāhine. They allowed Nicole's partner to join the rōpū when they went on outings to the beach and lake. He enjoyed lunches with the women and attended their graduation.

“He didn't come to be part of the rōpū. He just came so I knew where he was. He had his own things to do rather than participate in something that's not intended for him.”



“But he loved watching me be 'me' because it'd been a while since he'd seen 'me'. And it kept my mind-space safe knowing he was safe, rather than sitting at home with somebody and having to ring him every five minutes. It was easier to take him on some of those outings because I don't have a whole lot of faith in people – but I'm getting there,” says Nicole.

While she is now eager for Manu Tāpiki health coach, Kayla Kiore, to creating the next Wāhine programme, Nicole confesses to trying to skip her first session. She had told her paeārahi she would make her own way to class, without any real intention to attend. A short time later, her paeārahi pulled up outside Nicole's house to see if she had left the driveway.

“During that first cup of tea, I just sat there very quiet and watched. It was to see what sort of āhua these ladies had and whether I was comfortable to sit myself in that space. Because if you feel wrong to me, I won't sit. I'll leave. But it felt good for me because everyone had a similar story, or something had happened in their lives where we were kind of the same.”

Before joining the programme, Nicole's entire existence was about being brave, being strong, and dealing with whatever life threw at her. Therefore, it's not natural for her to admit she felt like a “lost little sheep” when she started.

“I hadn't dealt with the grief of my dad passing. I then had to deal with my partner being assaulted and just about dying, to coming home and starting fresh with nothing. I had

to live in a hotel for two weeks and I couldn't handle that, so I moved out and found a flat. But even after doing all that, I felt vulnerable.”

“So, I've got all my emotions back that I'd pushed out on purpose. Admittedly, I don't like emotions, but I'm learning how to deal with them. I have to physically go and get them myself from the people I gave them to.”

Nicole is currently weaving a pākē (rain cape) for her son's 21st birthday from the skills she learnt on the Wāhine programme. It brings her an inner contentment when she is feeling low, and she can retreat to the safe space she has created in her bedroom to sit with her thoughts and feelings.

“I don't worry about the small things as much as I used to, simply because I now know I don't have to. I don't need to sit and wallow because I've learnt how to deal with it, and I'm still learning,” says Nicole.

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**Names have been changed to protect identities.*



Whaiora Pūrākau - *Blue's story



Blue had stopped working and was drinking frequently. She had her reservations when she was encouraged to join the Wāhine programme, particularly the first day when she realised it involved a marae stay.

"I was hungover, and it was hard to get my head around it. It can be quite intimidating going into a circle of new people, being part of a pōwhiri, and then getting through the day," she says.

However, meeting the other women and guest speakers provided her with motivation and a renewed confidence in the programme.

Even though I wasn't in the right space mentally, I was able to focus, and I wanted to keep coming. It was really good to listen to the other speakers. That's what really did it for me. says Blue.

She has certainly made strides since overcoming her initial doubt. Throughout the course, she drunk less alcohol and is now back at work. While she admits to still enjoying a drink once a week, she does so without self-judgement and is aware of how far she has come.

"I know it sounds bad, but in the beginning I questioned whether I'd even continue showing up. My head wasn't in it at all even though I was physically present. But you soon realise all the wellness you can achieve through the programme – even the little things."

"I've discovered an internal strength even when I'm outside the group. I feel stronger managing people and I can deal with problems the right way. It's like a cord's still connected to the rōpū, providing that little bit of courage.

"Whare Tapa Whā is ingrained throughout the programme, and I've noticed the holistic change in myself since I started this journey. It's the best health approach to me because you can't fix one without the other," says Blue.

Manu Tāpiki health coach, Kayla Kiore, describes the programme as a place for wāhine to come together and be present no matter what is happening in their lives.

"It's like a renovation of the mind. At the beginning, the way the wāhine managed their issues became overwhelming. Ten weeks later, obstacles thrown at them weren't a big deal. They could manage it without heading into that dark space and withdrawing back into themselves or turning to negative influences" says Kayla.

Kayla said coping with basic issues without the extra struggle became easier for the women, especially knowing there was a group of 20 with different scenarios, different stories, different ways of life, and different journeys, yet all feeling very similar in how they managed life.

"They became conscious of what they were doing, how they reacted and behaved, yet it was a place where everyone could be themselves. Sometimes life can be falling apart around you, so put on a face, go to mahi, do what you have to do to get through the day, and when you get home the mask comes off."

"They didn't have to do that in this rōpū or pretend they're better and their mental health issues are gone. It was actually, 'I've had a real crap day and I don't want to be here but here I am.' And at the end of it, 'cool, thank you for allowing us to be together.' It was like that most weeks but with a little bit of learning and a little more confidence as the weeks went on. That played a major part in the success of the programme," says Kayla.

**Names have been changed to protect identities.*

