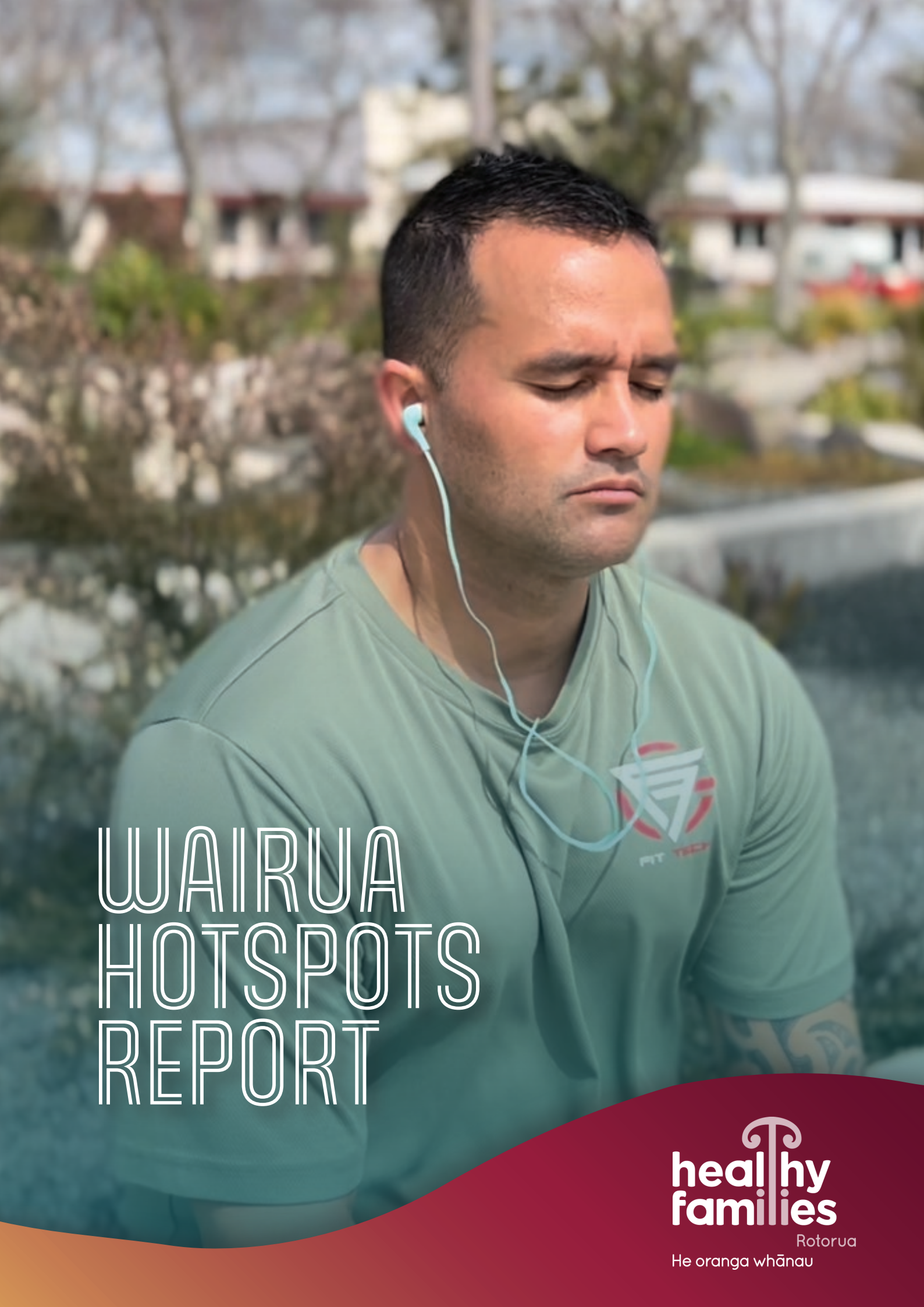

WAIRUA HOTSPOTS REPORT

healthy families
Rotorua
He oranga whānau

KARAKIA

Rukutia rukutia

Rukutia rā i raro i a Rangi e tū iho nei

Rukutia i runga i a Papa e takoto nei

Rukutia i runga i a Tāne e tū nei

Rukutia kia eke i runga i ō ihi,
i ō wehi, i ō mana, i ō tapu

Kia puta hau ki te Whai Ao
ki te Ao Mārama

Ko maia e tawhiwhi Rongo

MIHI

Kai ngā mana, kai ngā reo,

Tēnā rā koutou katoa.

He takirua te haere o ngā mea katoa i tēnei Ao,

Kia whakatairanga ake ko te Ao
Wairua me te Ao Mārama.

Rātau ki a rātau te hunga kua takahi i te ara
ki te Ao Wairua ki a rātau,

Tātau te hunga ora e takatū nei
i te Ao Mārama ki a tātau.

Tihē i mauri ora!

E kore wā mātau mihi ki te hunga nā rātau ngā kaupapa
i roto i te rīpoata nei i hāpai e maroke i ngā hihi o Te Rātūoikura.

E kore hoki ngā mihi ki a koutou ngā kaipānui me ngā mātanga
mātai rīpoata e waimeha i te ua a Tōuarangi.

Tēnā koutou, tēnā tātau!

healthy families
Rotorua
He oranga whānau

RĀRANGI UPOKO
Contents

What is Healthy Families?	**4**
Healthy Families NZ Principles	**5**
Purpose | Executive Summary	**7**
Bringing the built environment alive for Wellbeing | Enhancing Mental Health through Immersive Practice	**8**
Synergy of Built Environment & Mental Health Approaches	**9**
Mission | Our Challenge | Overall Goal	**10**
Theory of Change - Built Environment | Prototype Description	**11**
Impact | Lessons Learnt | Continued Collective Impact	**12**
The Role of Healthy Families Rotorua | Future Opportunities | Call to action	

WHAT IS HEALTHY FAMILIES?

Healthy Families NZ is a large scale prevention initiative that brings community leadership together in a united effort for better health in the places we live, learn, work and play.

Our goal is for all New Zealanders to enjoy health promoting social and physical environments that enable healthy food and physical activity choices, being smokefree, drinking alcohol only in moderation and increasing mental health, resilience and wellbeing.

The Healthy Families NZ approach focuses on addressing the underlying conditions that impact our health and wellbeing, in order to reduce the risk of preventable chronic disease. All of the Healthy Families NZ localities are connected through this common approach and principles, which creates our prevention movement.

We seek to uncover the journey that leads to chronic disease, understanding the lived experience of whānau and communities so that we can determine together how best to address the conditions that lead to experiencing preventable chronic disease.

HEALTHY FAMILIES NZ PRINCIPLES

Implementation at Scale
Strategies are delivered at a scale that impacts the health and wellbeing of a large number of the population, in the places where they spend their time - in schools, workplaces and communities.

Adaption
Strengthening the prevention system requires constant reflection, learning, and adaptation to ensure strategies are timely, relevant and sustainable.

Collaboration for Collective Impact
Long term commitment is required by multiple partners, from different sectors, at multiple levels, to generate greater collective impact on the health of New Zealanders. Knowledge is co-created and interventions co-produced, supported by a shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, ongoing communication and a 'backbone' support organisation.

Experimentation
Small scale experiments provide insight into the most effective interventions to address chronic disease. These experiments are underpinned by evidence and experience, and are monitored and designed to then be amplified across the system - if they prove effective.

Leadership
Leadership is supported at all levels of the prevention effort, including senior management, elected officials, and health champions in our schools, businesses, workplaces, marae, sporting clubs, and other settings in the community

Workforce
A dedicated prevention workforce who are embedded within their local community, driving and supporting systems change. Healthy Families NZ kaimahi are skilled in systems thinking, creating adaptive responses to complex issues in local and cultural settings, and are able to identify prevention activity with potential for sustainable outcomes.

Equity
Health equity is the attainment of the highest level of health for all people. Equity recognises that different people with different levels of advantage require different approaches and resources to achieve equitable health outcomes. Healthy Families NZ will have an explicit focus on reducing inequities for groups at increased risk of chronic diseases

Line of Sight
The line of sight provides a transparent view on how investment in policy is translated into measured impacts in communities, ensuring best value from every dollar spent on prevention.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi
Healthy Families NZ is committed to fulfilling the special relationship between Māori and the Crown under Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Te Tiriti).

Healthy Families NZ prioritises the inclusion and protection of mātauranga Māori as an important enabler of Māori health and wellbeing. We collaborate with partners across our communities to improve Māori health outcomes and active pae ora. Māori participation and decision-making at all levels of planning and implementation is critical.

PURPOSE

This report showcases Wairua Hotspots, a built-environment prototype in Rotorua that activates movement, learning, and whanaungatanga by weaving Ngāti Whakaue pūrākau directly into public walking routes.

It charts the kaupapa's intent, journey, early impacts, lessons, and opportunities to scale. Like the bike and e-bike kaupapa, Wairua Hotspots reframes everyday environments as culturally resonant places that invite regular, low-barrier participation—supporting prevention, equity, and intergenerational wellbeing.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wairua Hotspots is a built-environment prototype in Rotorua that weaves Ngāti Whakaue pūrākau (ancestral narratives) into an accessible walking track experience.

Through wayfinding, interpretive design, and facilitated engagement, it reconnects whānau with atua, whenua and te taiao. The kaupapa seeks to increase Māori participation in the built environment by transforming everyday public spaces into culturally resonant places of learning, movement, and whanaungatanga. In doing so, it reduces sedentary behaviours, strengthens cultural identity, and contributes to chronic disease prevention.

The prototype turns familiar public spaces into pūrākau-rich hīkoi experiences. With interpretive markers such as pou, tohu, ground inlays, digital and audio prompts, and kaiārahi-led activation, walking and learning together becomes normalised as a daily practice. This strengthens taha tinana and taha hinengaro, deepens cultural identity and kaitiakitanga, and increases Māori participation in Rotorua's built environment.

Early implementation indicates that aligning with mātauranga Māori, maramataka, and prevention priorities complements existing transport-led initiatives such as the bike/e-bike pilot. Together, these prototypes extend the system shift away from car-first and sedentary defaults towards culturally led movement and collective hauora.

BRINGING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT ALIVE FOR WELLBEING

The built environment is more than the physical structures and pathways around us – it shapes how we connect with each other, with nature, and with our inner selves.

When revitalised through indigenous knowledge and community-led storytelling, our environment becomes a living space that nurtures hauora across all dimensions.

A guided walk, anchored in iwi narration and pūrakau, can transform ordinary spaces into sites of significance, where history, identity, and belonging are reawakened. This deepens participants' sense of place and whakapapa, which is foundational to mental wellbeing. When people see their environment as alive with meaning, it strengthens cultural pride, community cohesion, and emotional resilience.

ENHANCING MENTAL HEALTH THROUGH IMMERSIVE PRACTICE

The integration of guided meditation at the conclusion of the hikoi creates a bridge between external exploration and internal reflection.

Participants / whānau are not only learning about the whenua, they are also learning to slow down, breathe, and ground themselves in the presence of the land.

This practice is particularly powerful in hotspots of mauri: places where the natural environment holds a palpable energy. Such places provide respite for wairua, soothing for hinengaro, and restoration for the body. Research shows that time in nature reduces stress, lowers anxiety, and improves mood; combined with culturally anchored mindfulness, these benefits are amplified.

SYNERGY OF BUILT ENVIRONMENT & MENTAL HEALTH APPROACHES

By combining a built environment initiative with a mental health approach, the kaupapa achieves multiple outcomes:

- **Cultural Enrichment** – restoring narratives of place through iwi voices and pūrakau.
- **Social Connection** – collective walking and listening strengthens whanaungatanga.
- **Hinengaro Support** – guided meditation reduces stress and nurtures mental clarity.
- **Wairua Nourishment** – recognising sacred sites and feeling their mauri uplifts the spirit.
- **Physical Hauora** – walking itself promotes fitness, circulation, and overall vitality.

This holistic model reflects a Te Ao Māori worldview where whenua, people, and wellbeing are inseparable. It reimagines the built environment not just as infrastructure, but as a living health-promoting space.

MISSION

To reconnect people, place, and movement by embedding Ngāti Whakaue narratives and wairua-centred design in Rotorua's public realm—so that everyday hīkoi become acts of learning, belonging, prevention, and care for te taiao.

OUR CHALLENGE

Participation in Rotorua's built environment is disproportionately low, contributing to increased sedentary behaviours.

Māori continue to be over-represented in the highest percentiles of chronic disease. The current urban realm underutilises mātauranga Māori and place-based narratives that would otherwise invite everyday engagement, movement, and cultural connection.

OVERALL GOAL

Increase participation of Māori in the built environment in Rotorua by embedding Ngāti Whakaue pūrākau, whakapapa connections, and wairua-centred design into public spaces—thereby improving holistic wellbeing outcomes and contributing to chronic disease prevention.

From left to right:
Georgie Griffiths *(RLC Bikes in School and Active Modes - Facilitator),*
Rachael Doelman *(RLC Transport Facilities Lead - Safe and Sustainable Journeys),*
Pirihira Whata *(Healthy Families - Rotorua) &* ***Josie Scott*** *(Ngāti Whakaue Koeke).*

THEORY OF CHANGE – BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Wairua Hotspots is built on a simple logic, when Ngāti Whakaue pūrākau are revived and embedded into site selection, interpretive design, and guided hīkoi experiences, tamariki and whānau encounter a visible, culturally grounded track that makes mātauranga Māori easy to access in everyday life.

This visibility builds recognition of Māori systems as valuable in public design, sparks curiosity and local pride, and leads to repeat use of sites by kura, kōhanga reo and community groups. The long-term result is improved wellbeing outcomes for Māori, achieved through increased daily movement and strengthened social connection, all driven by mātauranga Māori. This theory rests on several assumptions, that whānau have safe access to parks and paths, that cultural resonance motivates ongoing use, that collective practice strengthens resilience, and that regular contact with nature supports mental health.

PROTOTYPE DESCRIPTION

The prototype tested a place-based interpretive track with pūrākau stops along a safe walking loop.

Each stop contained kupu, ingoa, and narratives that tie whakapapa to the surrounding landscape, such as puna, mauri sites, and viewsheds. The experience was supported by kaiārahi hīkoi, and digital/audio guides.

The prototype also trialled ways to measure system shifts. These included embedding interpretive design into local place-making standards, establishing seasonal hīkoi, securing resource flows for champions and upkeep, sharing governance responsibilities with local leaders, and shifting public perceptions of parks from neutral spaces to wairua-centred commons.

IMPACT

Whānau reporting pride in seeing Ngāti Whakaue pūrākau represented in the built environment.

The kaupapa supported taha tinana through regular, light-to-moderate movement; taha hinengaro through stress relief and mood improvements associated with green/blue space; and taha whānau by creating opportunities for intergenerational connection through shared hīkoi.

Whānau improved recall of pūrākau and kupu, strengthened their ability to articulate pepeha, and demonstrated kaitiakitanga by caring for sites during visits.

The track was intentionally designed to be free, local, pram- and kaumātua-friendly, with bilingual signage. This ensured accessibility for all whānau regardless of reo ability, age, or mobility.

LESSONS LEARNT

Wairua Hotspots demonstrated that cultural resonance is a powerful driver of participation. Families returned to the track because it told their stories, not because it was convenient. Champions proved essential for sustaining engagement, safety, and authenticity.

CONTINUED COLLECTIVE IMPACT

The kaupapa strengthened relationships between iwi, kaumātua, whānau, and agencies. It shifted the mental model of public space from being neutral and recreational to becoming a living classroom and wairua-centred commons.

THE ROLE OF HEALTHY FAMILIES ROTORUA

Healthy Families Rotorua provided backbone support by framing the kaupapa in prevention terms, embedding it within systems change efforts, and holding the evaluation lens. The team convened knowledge holders and agencies to co-design the loop, trained champions, developed seasonal activation calendars, and connected the prototype into broader policy and investment conversations.

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

The prototype has laid the groundwork for a network of Wairua Hotspots loops across Rotorua. These could connect mahinga kai sites, puna, and ancestral stories, embedding cultural design in a wider set of neighbourhoods. Opportunities exist to integrate the kaupapa with active transport and parks planning, develop micro-modules for early years, rangatahi, and kaumātua, and establish dedicated funds for maintenance and renewal. Scaling will require sustained co-design and careful kaitiakitanga of cultural integrity.

CALL TO ACTION

Wairua Hotspots is more than a prototype. It is a step towards reclaiming place and identity in Rotorua's built environment. By embedding pūrākau and whakapapa into everyday spaces, the kaupapa transforms walking into an act of prevention, connection, and care. We invite partners, kura, and funders to walk alongside us in expanding Wairua Hotspots, ensuring that every hīkoi in Rotorua is guided by the wairua of this whenua.

OUR KAUPAPA PARTNERS

ROTORUA LAKES COUNCIL

NGĀTI WHAKAUE KOEKE

healthy families
Rotorua
He oranga whānau

Contact: healthyfamilies@tawo.org.nz