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TE WHARE AWHERO

*Hope House*

# WHĀNAU INSIGHTS

LONGITUDINAL WHĀNAU  
SUPPORT PROJECT

AN 8 MONTH PROGRESS REPORT

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# INTRODUCTION

## WHAT IS THE LONGITUDINAL WHĀNAU SUPPORT PROJECT?

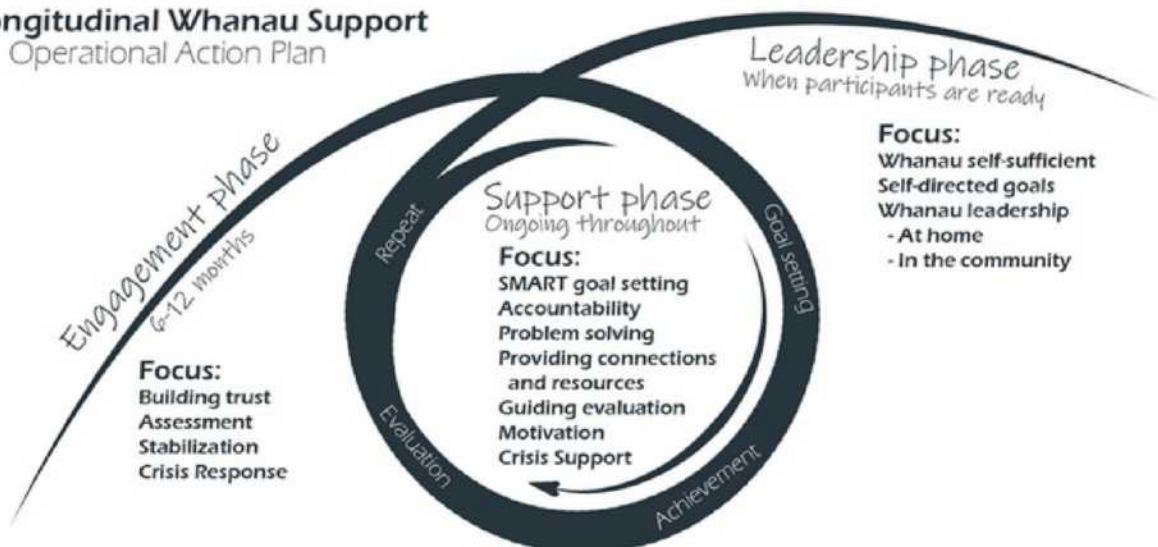
In 2021, we asked our community what they needed to thrive. Overwhelmingly, they told us that support for isolated whānau and their children to have opportunities to connect and participate were key (Holden & Hollis-Locke, 2021).

From this feedback, we created the Longitudinal Whānau Support (LWS) project. The LWS aims to address the long-term, intergenerational challenges facing our community with long-term intergenerational support. This support will allow us to empower the most isolated whānau in our community to realise their aspirations and access opportunities.

Making this long-term commitment to whānau means walking alongside them from the time their child turns 5, all the way up until they turn 20. This will give our Whānau Support Workers the opportunity to build relationships and facilitate significant, lasting change.

During this time, Whānau Support Workers will work with whānau through three key phases: 1) the Engagement Phase, 2) the Support Phase, and 3) the Leadership Phase.

### Longitudinal Whanau Support Operational Action Plan

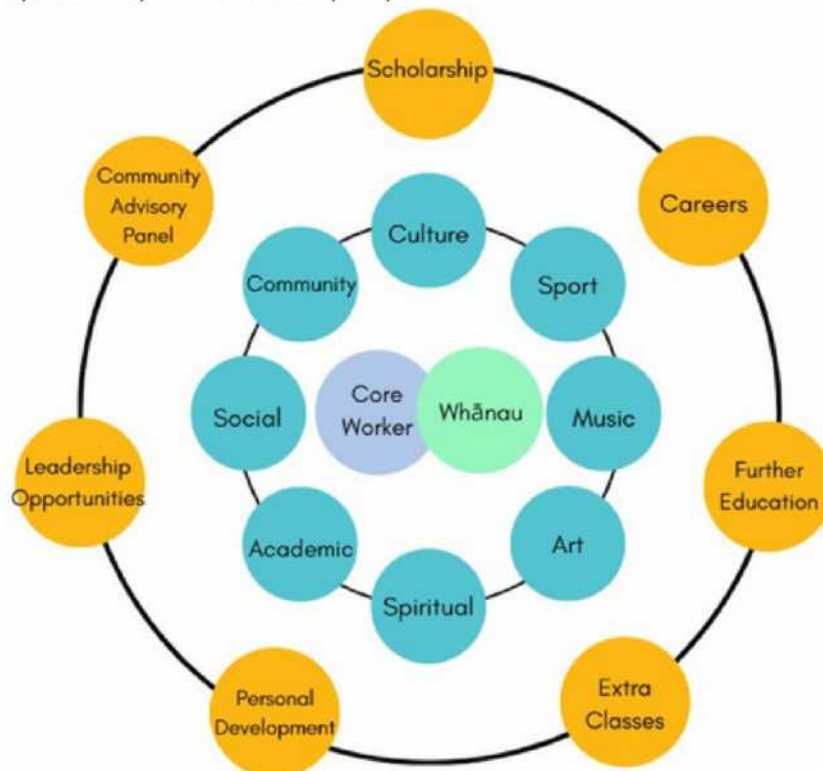


The Engagement Phase is all about building trust with whānau, assessing their needs, and supporting them to stabilise their lives and respond to crises. The goal of this phase is to build a solid foundation on which whānau can begin to look to the future.

Once whānau have moved out of the Engagement Phase and into the Support Phase, more time and resources will be dedicated to setting and achieving increasingly complex SMART goals. The aim of this phase is to foster accountability, build problem solving skills, provide connections, opportunities, and resources, evaluate progress, sustain motivation, and provide ongoing crisis support.

By the final phase, the Leadership Phase, whānau will be self-sufficient, equipped with the resources and skills to set and achieve their own goals, and able to take on leadership roles within their own whānau and community.

These three phases will sit alongside three additional layers of support: 1) the Core Layer, 2) the Connections and Opportunities Layer, and 3) the Scholarship Layer.



These layers refer to the different levels of support the LWS will wrap around whānau starting with the Core Layer which is the relationship between whānau and their Whānau Support Worker. This relationship is the basis on which all other support is built.

The Connections and Opportunities Layer consists of Opportunity Hubs which will be based at three local primary schools and our high school in our community. These Opportunity Hubs will provide a range of developmental pathways to our tamariki and create spaces for them to discover and pursue their strengths and passions. Opportunities will also be given to their parents to participate in workshops ranging from drug and alcohol education to growing a garden at home.

Finally, the Scholarship Layer will build on the opportunities given to tamariki and rangatahi in the Opportunities Layer by supporting them to access the next level of training, education, life experience, or employment beyond high school.



## PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

From the feedback from our community and professionals working in this area, we identified that good early engagement with whānau would be key to the success of this project (McKay, 2022).

For our whānau who have been repeatedly marginalised, understanding the challenges and stressors in their lives is essential to creating positive change that is both realistic and sustainable. We also know from consulting with our community and experts, that trust and hope are the crucial components that will support whānau to take the first steps on their own journeys of change.

The first six months of this project have been about building trusting, hopeful relationships with our whānau. We know that if we don't engage well with whānau during the engagement phase then we will not be successful in creating the long-term, intergenerational change this project seeks to create.

This report is an opportunity to reflect on our early engagement with whānau and understand. If we have been able to achieve this foundation goal by hearing directly from our whānau.

### **All our whānau are dealing with multiple life challenges on a weekly, if not daily, basis.**

Our first three whānau joined the project in 2022 and since then five more whānau have come on board. Within our whānau are 15 adults, 3 rangatahi, and 19 tamariki. 4 of our whānau are Māori, 3 are European, and 1 is South African. 6 of our whānau are single parent households and all 8 are renting, either privately or through Kainga Ora. The majority of our whānau are dealing with serious physical and/or mental health concerns and all our whānau have tamariki experiencing attendance or behavioural issues at school.

Three of our whānau have disclosed witnessing domestic violence within the whānau, and Oranga Tamariki either is, or has recently been, engaged with 4 of our whānau. Three other whānau have ongoing engagement with the justice system, and 4 whānau have members with current or past addiction issues. All 8 of our whānau have reported facing parenting challenges, and 5 have reported financial challenges.



# METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

## **Methodology**

The purpose of this report is to review the early engagement period of the LWS project. To do this, this report addresses three key questions:

Question 1: What factors have facilitated whānau engagement with the project?

Question 2: What changes have whānau noticed in the ways they think, feel, act, and engage with other services/professionals since engaging with the project?

Question 3: How optimistic do whānau feel about the future?

As this report documents the experiences and knowledge of whānau, a qualitative research approach was used. This approach was selected as it allows exploration and understanding of the participant's experiences of engaging with the LWS project (Liamputtong, 2020).

## **Method**

### Recruitment

Recruitment was done using purposive sampling. This means selecting participants who have relevant knowledge and experiences, as well as availability and willingness to participate (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Two groups were recruited for participation in this research: 1) Whānau who are currently engaged with the LWS project, and 2) teachers who are currently teaching the tamariki of whānau engaged with the LWS project.

Criteria for selection of whānau included having been engaged with the project for at least three months, while criteria for the selection of teachers included being current teachers of the tamariki of whānau who participated in this research.

### Data Collection

Data was collected through one-on-one interviews and a focus group.

In total, four one-on-one interviews were conducted with the whānau who are currently engaged with the LWS project. This approach was chosen for its flexibility in allowing the researcher to ask set questions while also allowing the conversation to go in unexpected directions (Liamputtong, 2020). This framework also gave participants space to talk about their early experiences of being engaged with the LWS project and what it has meant for them. Each interview was approximately 20 minutes in length and was conducted in either the participant's home or the Te Whare Awhero office depending on their preference. A consent form was completed by participants before the start of each interview.

In addition, one focus group, comprised of three teachers who are currently teaching the tamariki of the whānau who took part in this research, was conducted. A focus group was used for this group as it offers more opportunity for participants to speak candidly and build on each other's ideas (Acocella & Cataldi, 2021).

Set questions were posed to the participants in a semi-structured format. The focus group was approximately 20 minutes long and held on school grounds. Consent to speak to the teachers was gained from the whānau who also participated in this research.

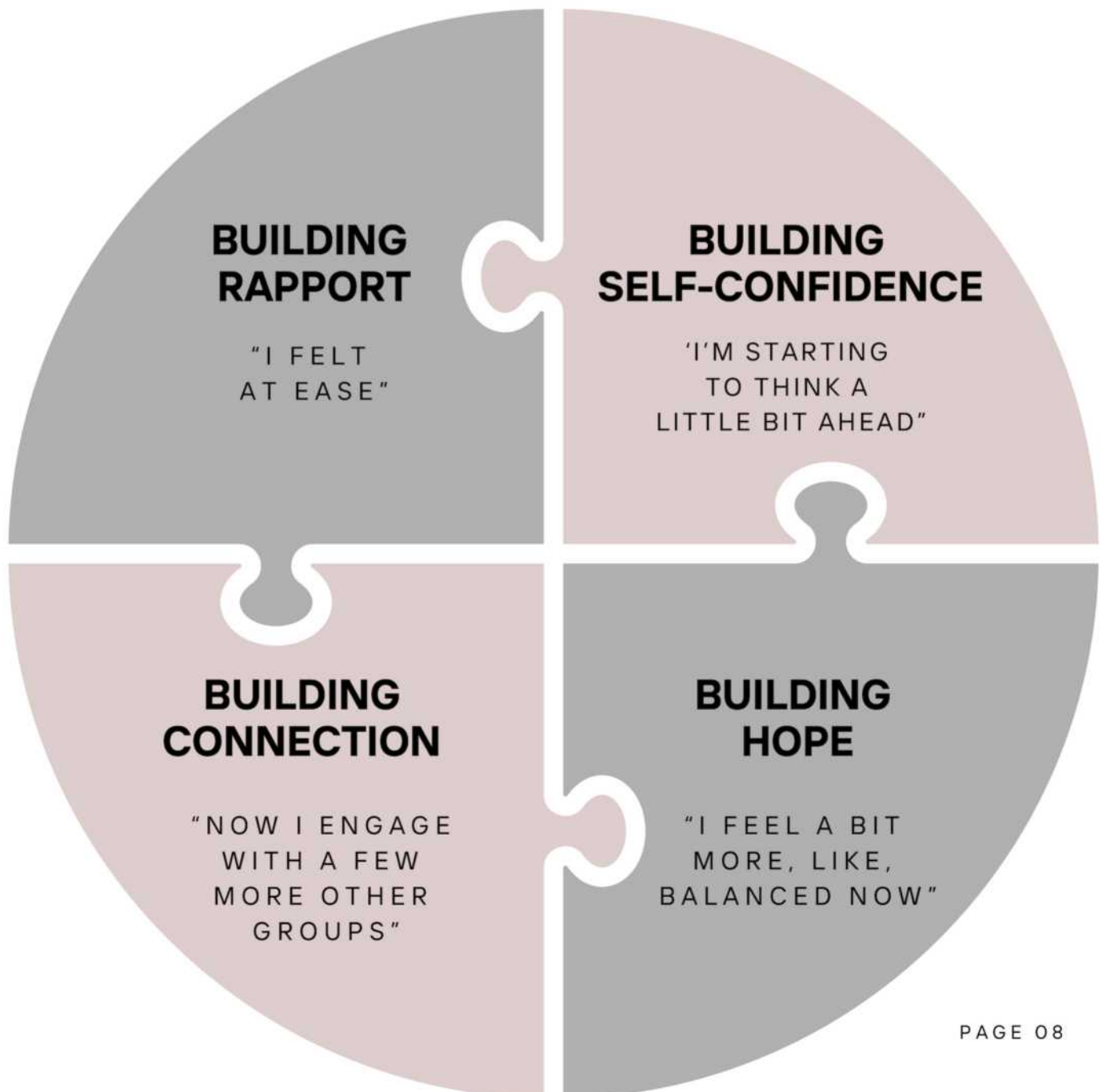
### Data Analysis

Following data collection, thematic analysis was conducted to organise the data. Thematic analysis identifies patterns within the raw data and allows it to be ordered in a more meaningful way (Liamputtong, 2020). To do this, the data was read before initial ideas were noted down and systematically coded (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These codes were then collated into broader themes.



## FINDINGS

Four key themes were identified when talking with the whānau who participated in this report. These themes centred around how whānau engaged with the project and the impacts they saw in their own lives.



# BUILDING RAPPORT

Our whānau talked about the importance of trust, mutual respect, and understanding when it came to engaging with the project. Our Whānau Support Worker's ability to build rapport and instil a sense of confidence in whānau was described as key to establishing open, trusting relationships.

Being consistent, showing up, and following through with plans and promises was one of the ways our Whānau Support Worker was able to build this trust and confidence. This consistency gave our whānau confidence that they could rely on their Whānau Support Worker to do what they said they would.

**"Everything that she said she would do, she has done."**

**"They always went through [with] what they started."**

Whānau also described the sense of trust and confidence that came with knowing that their Whānau Support Worker was knowledgeable enough to respond to the challenges and crises in their lives. Whānau described feeling increasingly confident to invite their Whānau Support Worker into their lives and seek advice and guidance when facing challenges they weren't sure how to approach.

**"She suggested a few things that even the staff at the school wouldn't have thought about as a wraparound support for my boys, so I like that."**

**"I wouldn't be able to know where to look if I needed, like, [my children] both need to be checked for learning abilities and to be able to have that provided has taken such a weight off me."**

Knowing that their Whānau Support Worker was there to support their entire whānau also allowed parents to feel like they had someone on their side.

**"The support worker at school's just for the kids, but you guys are here for me as well."**

Another thing that allowed our Whānau Support Worker to build rapport was their ability to provide wrap around support and go the "extra mile." Whānau expressed a sense of security and gratitude in knowing that their Whānau Support Worker would be able to work with them to tackle challenges across all areas of their lives.

**"...there's a lot more that your organisation has done that, you know, I can always be thankful or grateful for. So, I mean, whānau appreciate that. And if there was any more, I think that, you know, your organisation will somehow provide it, even though you may not have it..."**

**"You're putting out such a fantastic amount of people, and time, and service. Just everything, just to make sure, you know, little ol' me is okay."**



Finally, whānau talked about how knowing their Whānau Support Worker would be able to work with them long-term supported them to build strong, trusting relationships. Whānau recalled past experiences of support being withdrawn or having to juggle and repeat their story to multiple different support workers. Knowing that they had support for the long-term allowed whānau to feel more secure in their relationship with their Whānau Support Worker.

**“I kind of felt, first question in my head was, how long is this going to be for? And with a bit of worry, because most [other services] dropped out... but yeah, I felt that coming to this kaupapa was eh- I felt at ease.”**

**“Having to juggle people and chase tails and, you know, it's so hard having five different people who essentially are trying to do the same goal, having to try and make sure they're all on the same page... A long-term thing is great because I have one person, I have to blab about my life too and not 10 people that have to be on the same page. And it's just, it's so much less stressful and less confronting.”**

**“A lot of the time when you have support it eventually disappears, but it's nice to know that it's not going to disappear.”**



## BUILDING SELF-CONFIDENCE

Rediscovery and building of self-confidence through reminders of strengths, achievable goal setting, and having the safety net of a Whānau Support Worker was discussed by our whānau in their interviews. Most of our whānau talked about their confidence having been “knocked” by significant events in their lives and how having a Whānau Support Worker has helped them rediscover their strengths and give them the confidence to try new things.

For many of our whānau, building confidence was more about remembering past confidence and learning how to rebuild that for themselves than learning it for the first time.

**“I think I’m just a bit more confident again.”**

**“I think that I’ve always been confident, right? I think thanks to the staff, they just, you know, reiterated what I already knew.”**

Our whānau also talked about how having guidance helped them look at challenges from a different angle and feel more secure and informed in their decision making.

**“I think it was just like, also guidance. I knew what I wanted to do. But there was a few challenges.”**

**“She’s helping me a little bit with, you know, looking at things from a different perspective sometimes, or just, you know, suggesting ways to handle situations and stuff.”**

Similarly, knowing they had a support worker to back them up and act as a safety net supported our whānau to pursue opportunities and engage with supports or teachers at school they previously hadn’t.

**“She’s there behind me, supporting me... and, it’s just, it’s nice to know that somebody cares.”**

**“...having Tania come along to the meeting [whānau hui at school]... It’s just knowing that there’s extra support people there that just have my back, and my children’s mainly, but mine and my children’s best interests first.”**

Finally, whānau talked about the impact of setting achievable goals on their self-confidence. Being able to write down what they were working towards and what steps they needed to take to achieve them was described as motivating. Some whānau also described the process as allowing them to “reset” and identify what was important to them.

**“The goals, it wasn’t just writing them, it was actually putting them down so I can see that they’re achievable, but in stages.”**

**“I think that was part of me setting or re-setting. You know where to from here. I know they’re achievable.”**

**“I am starting to think a little bit ahead.”**

# BUILDING CONNECTION

Throughout the interviews, our whānau talked about becoming more connected. These connections took a variety of different forms including whānau having greater access to opportunities and feeling closer to, and more included within, their schools, local communities, and whānau.

When it came to accessing opportunities, whānau talked about how their whānau support worker had connecting them to events and groups, and provided opportunities for their tamariki to explore their talents and passions.

**"...my oldest daughter did mosaicking with Tania at school and just had a talk to her while she was doing it and stuff. But she produced this awesome thing that she's never done before. She was so proud of it. And she still is and she has got this interest in wanting to do more."**

**"And then for the kids being able to have those opportunities to get... their abilities looked at, their support at the school, the Lego clubs, just a friendly face at school, the push to get some counselling sorted out, which was much needed and very helpful. I think it's made a big difference in their positivity."**

Feeling more connected to their tamariki's schools was also a significant connection that was noted by both whānau and teachers. Whānau described feeling more confident speaking with teachers and the teachers noted a new openness from whānau to engage with them and seek support.

**"That was huge getting to know the staff at the school."**

**"The before times when they came [to the school], it was just because they were angry about something at school. That's the only time you saw them. Now, they'll say, hey, I'm just driving up the drive, [child's name] is not going to get out of the car. He's having a meltdown. Can you please help us because we know that you can support us with this? They wouldn't have done that before."**

Similarly, whānau talked about having the confidence to engage or re-engage with their local communities and become more involved with their neighbours and community activities.

**"...now I engaged with a few more other groups. So that was part of my goal was to go back into, you know, my other groups that I had started with prior before coming to your kaupapa."**

**"I think [the programme] gives me a bit more sense of like, you know, I'm in touch with the community. I suppose I'm in touch with people outside of my house."**

One participant also talked about wanting to start giving back to their community thanks to the support they had received.

**"I'm hoping that, from the help that I've been given, any surplus I can donate back into the community."**

**"Now I just want to be able to help people the way that I've been helped because I know how much it makes a difference."**

Connecting back into their whānau was another significant thing mentioned by some of our participants. The parents in these whānau talked about having more time and energy to give to their tamariki and feeling more motivated to make changes for them since engaging with their support worker.

**“With me not having that weight on my chest and that stress, it’s just freed me up to be able to be there for [my children] a bit more emotionally as well.”**

**“[I’m] more motivated to do better for me and [my child].”**



# BUILDING HOPE

All of our whānau talked about feeling hopeful in different ways. For some whānau, their hope was less future-focussed and more focussed on having opportunities to recover and regroup.

**“At the moment, I think I’m still going through the recovery stage of all the changes. Um, so I’m a bit meh about it [the future].”**

For other whānau, their hope came from their lives feeling more stable and from personal feelings of resilience and contentment.

**“I think sort of in a spiritual way, I feel a bit more, like, balanced now than I was before.”**

**“I just found some new strength, and I’ve changed. I think I’m happier now.”**

And for others, their hope felt inspiring and full of opportunity to move away from trauma and into more positive, supportive environments.

**“It just shows me that there’s that light in the world when I was in a pretty dark spot.”**

**“I think that just having that one on one with staff from this kaupapa has been really, really inspirational.”**





## **DISCUSSION**

This report asked our whānau about their experience of the LWS, what factors facilitated their engagement, what changes they've noticed in the ways they think, feel, act, and engage, and how optimistic they feel about the future.

Ultimately, we want to understand if this project is creating a context in which social change can occur.

# WHAT CREATES GOOD ENGAGEMENT?

We know from reviewing the academic literature and talking with experts and our community, that good initial engagement is key to building the strong, trusting relationships that will eventually lead to social change (for example, see Bowden & Sowden, 2022; McKay, 2022).

The findings from this report tell us that there are several key factors to building good engagement. Most notably, whānau told us that effective rapport building is the most important factor in creating effective engagement. For our whānau, effective rapport building centred around trust and knowing that their Whānau Support Worker was someone they could rely on.

Strategies our Whānau Support Workers used to build this trust included being consistent and “showing up” for whānau, demonstrating that they had the appropriate skills and knowledge to respond to challenges and concerns facing whānau, and demonstrating that they were there to support the entire whānau and that they genuinely cared for the well-being of our whānau by going the “extra mile”.

Our whānau also discussed how the long-term nature of the LWS project further facilitated their engagement. Whānau described the emotional fatigue and re-traumatisation that often came with having to retell their stories to professionals over and over again, as well as the difficulty of co-ordinating multiple support workers while in emotionally or physically vulnerable positions.

For whānau coming into the LWS, knowing they had one support worker who would be able to walk with them long-term allowed them to feel more “at ease” when sharing their stories. This ease was attributed to knowing that their support worker wasn’t going to “drop out” or “disappear” on them and that they had time to reveal important information to their support worker at their own pace.

# THE IMPACTS SO FAR

Throughout the interviews, our whānau noted changes they'd observed in the ways they think, feel, and act, and how they've engaged with professionals since joining the project.

Prior to joining the project, whānau described having adverse life experiences that had "knocked their confidence" in their ability to parent their tamariki, engage with professionals, and make decisions. For our whānau, this often meant feeling judged or intimidated by services or professionals and like they didn't have the tools necessary to be an effective parent.

During the interviews, whānau described feeling increasingly confident in their own ability to parent their tamariki, manage challenges, and engage with professionals such as teachers. They identified that the guidance, support, and goal setting they had received from their Whānau Support Workers were the key facilitators of this change.

Support and guidance were identified as significant as they allowed whānau to feel like they had someone "in their corner", someone who could give them other perspectives to consider, and someone who could guide them to pathways they didn't know they could access. Having a Whānau Support Worker was described by one of our whānau as "an armour of support" that gave them the confidence to believe they could make changes in their own lives.

Similarly, goal setting was identified as significant to rebuilding self-confidence as it allowed whānau to identify the small, achievable steps they could take towards broader, more significant change. Being able to make changes, no matter how small, was incredibly significant to our whānau, as all of them have spent significant periods of time feeling marginalised and disempowered. Knowing they can make change empowered whānau and gave them renewed confidence in their decision making.

This renewal in self-confidence also contributed to whānau having a greater sense of connection to their community and whānau. Whānau described feeling more confident to walk into their tamariki's classrooms at school and talk to their teachers, and to connect with other parents and school and community groups.

Our Whānau Support Workers' focus on facilitating access to community resources helped reduce the isolation experienced by our whānau and gave them additional professional and peer support to draw from. For our whānau, having these additional resources means being able to explore and pursue interests, passions, and opportunities, and has given them additional social and emotional resources to spend with one another. For the parents of our whānau, this has looked like a reduction in the stress they've been experiencing and having more energy to parent their tamariki.



# LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Hope has been the sustaining factor in our whānau's continued positive change throughout their engagement with this project.

For our whānau who are facing serious mental and/or physical health, financial, justice, behavioural, addiction, and parenting challenges every day, surviving has been about putting one foot in front of the other and focusing on the present.

During the interviews, our whānau told us that since joining the LWS project, they have started to look to the future. This hope our whānau have for the future describes a broad range of things from looking forward to opportunities to recover, to feeling more resilient and content, to feeling inspired and having a renewed sense of faith in themselves and their community. We have seen our whānau start to dream and to start focusing on setting and achieving developmental goals.

Maintaining and sustaining this hope will be key to continuing to create the long-term, intergenerational change this project seeks to create.



# CONCLUSION

The purpose of this report was to reflect on our early engagement with whānau and understand if this project is creating the context in which social change can occur.

From talking with our whānau, we learnt that effective rapport building is key to creating good engagement. This rapport building centres around creating and building trust, something our Whānau Support Workers did by being consistent, having the skills and knowledge needed to appropriately support whānau, taking a whole of whānau approach, and demonstrating that they genuinely care for the well-being of whānau by going the "extra mile".

Our Whānau Support Workers also nurtured whānau-led change by guiding and supporting, building self-confidence, and setting and achieving goals.

These elements of effective engagement have led to our whānau telling us that they feel more confident, that they feel more connected, and that they feel more hopeful for the future. We believe that continuing to nurture the confidence, connectedness, and hopefulness of our whānau will lead to environments in which real, long-lasting, intergenerational social change can occur.

The next step in the LWS project is to keep working with the University of Canterbury to develop an evaluation framework that will allow us to continue capturing and recording the outcomes achieved by our whānau in a meaningful way. We plan to have this framework in place by the end of the pilot period in June 2024 and to secure the funding to allow us to turn this pilot into a long-term sustainable project.

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