



# PUNA FUND EVALUATION REPORT

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*"It's hard to gain ground when you are scrambling on stones."*

#### Acknowledgements

The research team wish to acknowledge the whānau who contributed to this report. We acknowledge the daily struggle that many whānau are facing, especially in these uncertain times. The resilience, strength and tenacity of whānau represented in the data is inspiring.

The research team would also like to thank the staff and Puna team at Te Pūtahitanga o Te Waipounamu for their support throughout this research. This report was completed in partnership with the data management team from Te Pūtahitanga o Te Waipounamu, Sue Quinn and Sam Selwyn, who have worked tirelessly to provide continuous data over the past year to support decision-making.

#### Te Pūtahitanga o Te Waipounamu

Te Pūtahitanga o Te Waipounamu is a partnership between the nine iwi of Te Waipounamu; Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Apa ki te Rā Tō, Ngāti Tama, Ngāti Kuia, Ngāti Koata, Te Ātiawa, Ngāti Toa Rangatira, Rangitāne and Ngāti Rārua. It was formed in March 2014 as a legal partnership to reflect the aspirations of Te Waipounamu iwi for whānau. Te Taumata was established as a participants' council to act as guardians for the kaupapa of Whānau Ora in Te Waipounamu. In 2015, Te Taumata appointed an independent governance board. The organisation is the realisation of an iwi-led Whānau Ora commissioning model that directly invests in whānau for social impact to bring about positive change.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



## PUNA FUND

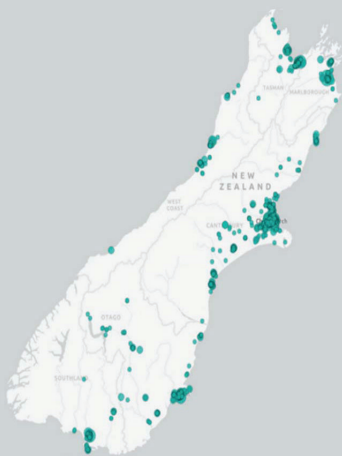
Created in 2020, The Puna fund is targeted at meeting the immediate needs of individuals and whānau who have been affected by the impacts of COVID-19.

## FOOD INSECURITY



exists when people do not have adequate physical, social or economic access to food. (fao.org, 2019)

## LOCATION OF PUNA SUPPORT APPLICANTS



Puna applications have come from across Te Waipounamu

14,690 64,487

There were 14,690 applications representing 64,487 whānau

Whānau asked for:

55%  
KAI

18%  
POWER

(15%)  
DATA

12%  
FIREWOOD

## IMPACTS OF FOOD INSECURITY



### Adverse health outcomes

Including obesity, diabetes, high stress levels and multiple chronic conditions



### Threat to healthy development

Adolescents at risk of obesity, stand-downs, lower grades, poor diets multiple chronic conditions



Increased psychological distress and pressure to meet the needs of whānau

## Food insecurity has disproportionate impacts

on existing vulnerable groups, reinforcing existing inequalities:

Whānau with medical conditions

Whānau with food allergies or dietary requirements

Whānau living with disabilities

Wāhine and tamariki who have left FV situations

Grandparents caring for mokopuna



## COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS HAVE EXACERBATED INEQUITY

- Māori work longer hours for lower wages
- Higher rates of Māori in jobs more susceptible to disruption
- COVID-19 job losses more likely to be women
- Increased food demand and food prices
- Increased psychological stress



## IMPACT OF PUNA FUND

- Whānau were able to provide for needs of tamariki.
- Whānau were able to provide kai, pay bills and keep the whare warm.
- Whānau were able to attend job interviews, fix their car to get to their jobs and continue studying.
- The impact of this flowed on to other members of the extended whānau and community.
- The Puna Fund reduced stress and, in some cases, improved the health of whānau.



# CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>01</b>
Considerations and further background	03
Whānau living on the bread line	03
Whānau and food insecurity	03
The exacerbating impact of COVID-19	04
The impact of food insecurity	06
Summary of literature to take into findings	07
Te Pūtahitanga o Te Waipounamu response to COVID-19	07
The Puna Transition Fund	07
<b>Results</b>	<b>09</b>
Demographic data and key findings	09
Key findings from qualitative data	11
The impact of living on the bread line for diverse groups	11
The impact of COVID-19	12
The impact of food insecurity	13
The impact on children	14
The impact of the process	14
The psychological impact	16
The difference the Puna Fund made to whānau lives	16
<b>August 2021 COVID-19 nationwide lock down</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Case study - Mara and Tahu</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Summary of key findings from across the data</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Implications for policy</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>26</b>
Appendix 1 Methodology	30

# INTRODUCTION

Te Pūtahitanga o Te Waipounamu launched the Manaaki20 campaign on March 21st, 2020, to Inform, Prepare and Uplift/Manaaki the whānau in Te Waipounamu during the initial COVID-19 pandemic response period. An essential part of the response plan was gathering and using evidence to support decision-making.

A Manaaki Whānau Survey was established to gauge whānau need and design an appropriate response. Survey results emphasised that whānau were highly constrained financially, exposing them to significant interrelated stresses. The sudden change in circumstances caused by the pandemic resulted in reduced incomes and job losses that increased whānau vulnerability (Savage et al., 2020). This survey data was then used to steer the strategic direction of Whānau Ora support, by mobilising regional services, including an increase in Navigators, and providing direct relief to whānau through food delivery and funding.

One key strategic response from Te Pūtahitanga o Te Waipounamu was to create an emergency fund (Puna Fund) to provide direct and immediate support for whānau in need of kai, data, power or firewood. The initial provision of this fund was evaluated by Ihi Research as part of the Manaaki20: Evaluation of the Immediate COVID-19 Response Plan (Savage et al., 2020). While the evaluation found high levels of satisfaction with the response, there was evidence that whānau continued to report concerns regarding employment security, future income, and whānau mental health and wellbeing (Savage et al., 2020).

In response to this evidence, Te Pūtahitanga o Te Waipounamu continued to provide emergency support through the Puna Fund for whānau who were in need through the 2020 – 2021 year. The agency has collected data consistently throughout the period of funding. Figure 1 provides an overview of the investment into the fund over this time period as well as distribution of funds.

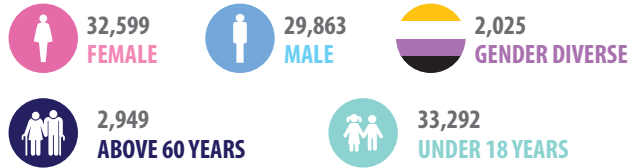
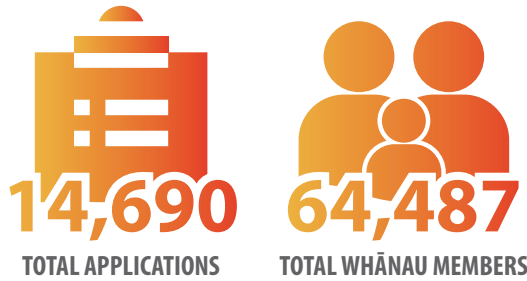
# PUNA TRANSITION FUND

## Puna Applications received across the year

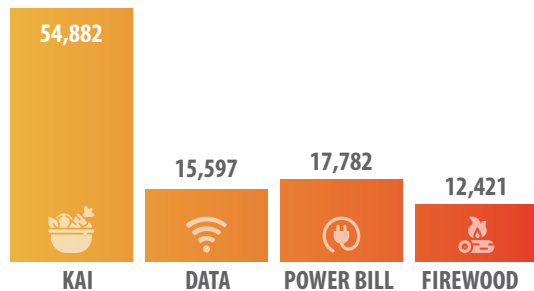
**2,891,542**

TOTAL PUNA SUPPORT

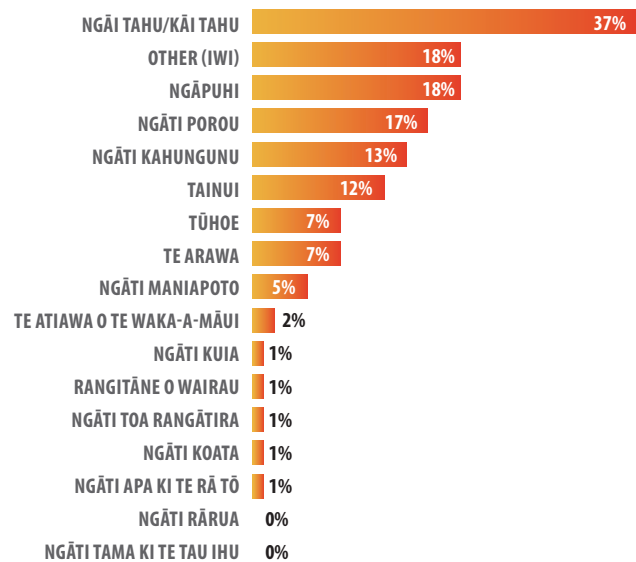
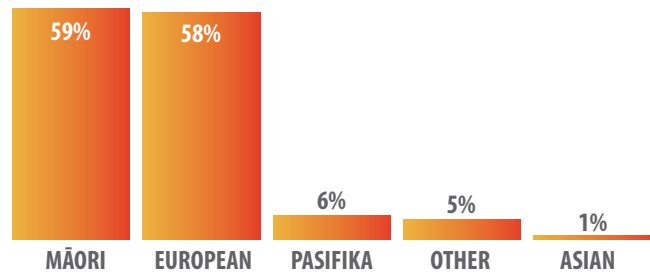
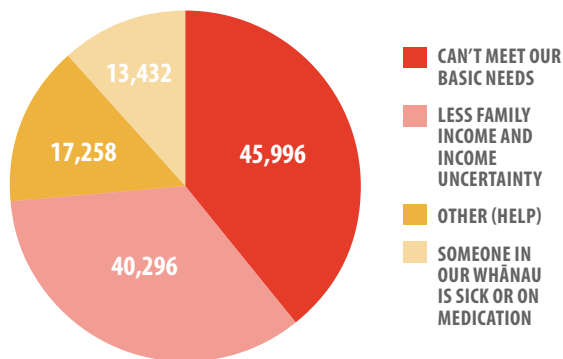
FIGURE 1. PUNA SUPPORT



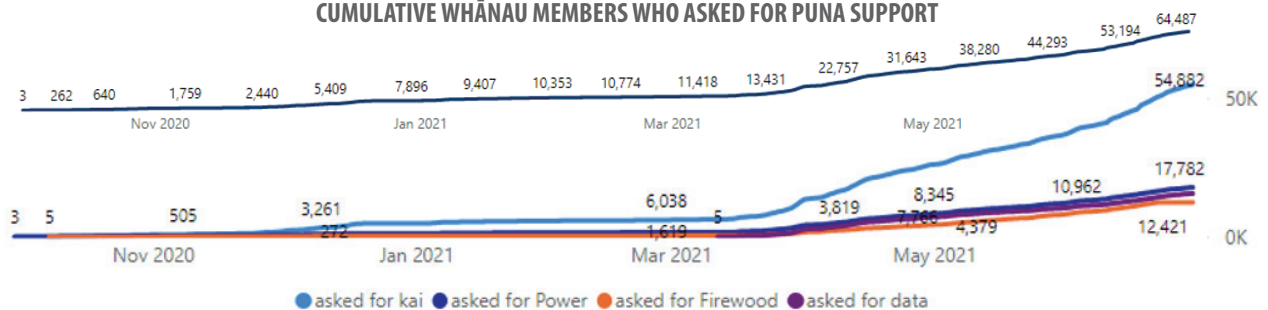
### CURRENT CONCERNS OR NEEDS FROM WHĀNAU MEMBERS



### TOTAL WHĀNAU MEMBERS NEED HELP



### CUMULATIVE WHĀNAU MEMBERS WHO ASKED FOR PUNA SUPPORT



\* These numbers include applicants and whānau members who may have reached us more than once. They combine data from our PUNA support database and our previous Whānau Record Management (WRM).

This report presents findings from an independent<sup>1</sup> evaluation of the Puna Transition Fund (Puna). The evaluation presents evidence related to both the impact and purpose of the fund. Data gathered by Ihi Research provides the basis of this evaluation, supported by internal evidence collected over the past 18-months by the Puna Data Management Team (Te Pūtahitanga o Te Waipounamu).

### **CONSIDERATIONS AND FURTHER BACKGROUND**

The Puna Fund needs to be considered within the socio-economic reality of many whānau to fully understand the impact and implications. Data from the fund indicates that 42% of the applications were from non-Māori, indicating that immediate need is not only a Māori issue. However, for the purpose of demonstrating inequities in the system and how this manifest for Māori whānau, the following review has focussed on evidence that demonstrates how Māori whānau in particular are exposed to food insecurity.

### **WHĀNAU LIVING ON THE BREAD LINE**

Understanding the nature and purpose of the Puna Fund requires an understanding of inequities in New Zealand and how this has manifested in a system whereby Māori communities suffer.

Māori poverty is a direct result of the historical impact of the breaching of the Treaty of Waitangi. There is significant evidence of the impact of colonisation, the alienation of land and resources, and the consequent loss of a cultural, spiritual and economic base for whānau (Reid & Robson, 2007).

Māori are still, on average, paid at measurably lower rates than Pākehā. Māori work longer

hours for lower wages (McKercher, 2020) and are more likely to be in casualised employment. This contributes to the disproportionate poverty experienced by Māori families and their children and severely constrains wealth accumulation (Dale, 2017). Poverty and hardship create and contribute to present and future health, wellbeing and education risks for children (Dale, 2017).

In a recent review of the official child poverty statistics<sup>2</sup>, almost one in five Māori children (19.5 percent) lived in households that reported going without six or more of the 17 basic needs. The rate was higher for Pacific children at 26.1 percent. These rates compared with 11.3 percent for all New Zealand children (StatsNZ, 2021). The burden of poverty falls disproportionately on Māori and Pacific families and those with disabilities (Carroll & Maxwell, 2020).

Despite acknowledgement of the impact of childhood poverty since 2002, the rates of child poverty have not decreased significantly. In 2015, of 915,300 children aged 14-years and under, more than 230,000 were living below the poverty line; and just under half of these children were Māori and Pasifika, yet Māori comprise only 15% of the total population, and Pasifika only 7.4% (Carroll & Maxwell, 2021). Māori are over-represented in the benefit system, making up 15% of the New Zealand population, but 36% of benefit recipients (WEAG, 2018). A 2018 government report revealed beneficiaries and low-income families were missing out on entitlements of approximately \$200 million a year (WEAG, 2018).

### **WHĀNAU AND FOOD INSECURITY**

In New Zealand, household income is a key determinant of food insecurity (Carter et al., 2010). Food insecurity exists when access to

<sup>1</sup> For further detail about the Evaluation Methodology, refer to Appendix 1  
<sup>2</sup> for the year ended June 2020



food is limited, uncertain or compromised. Food insecurity has been associated with poor dietary patterns, such as inadequate fruit and vegetable consumption and frequent fatty processed meat consumption. Inadequate incomes drive people to consume low-cost foods, and low-cost diets tend to be energy dense and nutrient poor (Darmon & Drewnowski, 2015). This in turn increases risks of cardiovascular diseases and obesity.

Over one in four (28.6%) tamariki Māori live in food-insecure households. The Ministry of Health estimate this is 68,000 children (Ministry of Health, 2019). In 2018, The Ministry of Social Development recorded over 320,000 hardship assistance payments in the June 2018 quarter. Food consistently remained the main reason for needing this support (WEAG, 2018).

Household food insecurity can have both short and long-term influences on health and wellbeing. In New Zealand, food insecurity is strongly related to psychological distress (Carter et al., 2011), perhaps due in part to the stress and stigma faced by parents who are unable to afford enough food to feed their children (Jackson & Graham, 2017).

Children living in food insecure households are less likely to consume nutritionally balanced diets which are essential for optimal growth and development (New Zealand Government, 2021). This can have immediate and long-term negative consequences for their health and education (Grant et al., 2010; Wynd, 2011). Household food insecurity has been associated with a wide range of child health and development problems from infancy through to adolescence, including child obesity (WHO, 2017), poor academic performance, and developmental and behavioural problems (Baer, 2015).

The global outbreak of Coronavirus (COVID-19) disrupted food systems around the world

(UNSCN, 2020). Food availability, prices, vendors, as well as personal dimensions such as geographical access, affordability, convenience and desirability were disrupted. Internationally, there was a rapid food environment change over a short period of time which has influenced dietary practices. The concern is that this can lead to a deterioration in both individual, and country level, nutritional and health status (UNSCN, 2020).

### **THE EXACERBATING IMPACT OF COVID-19**

National and global-scale crises like the COVID-19 pandemic have the potential to exacerbate inequities further, leaving many whānau in a very vulnerable position. There is emerging research that Māori were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and lockdown restrictions. This impact includes higher Māori representation in sectors and jobs more susceptible to disruption by large scale events – be they front-line ‘essential’ workers, or jobs that risk disestablishment in the event of an economic downturn – or potential automation (Aiko, 2021).

A social impact report by the Salvation Army found that social and policy issues such as food insecurity, financial hardship, addictions, housing and income support, and employment that pre-dated the COVID-19 crisis were being exacerbated by the pandemic and the government’s response (Social Policy & Parliamentary Unit, 2020). The report notes that Māori and Pasifika workers and communities have been the most vulnerable to COVID-19 associated unemployment because they already had unemployment rates more than twice that of the rest of the workforce.

The expression ‘COVID-19 underclass’ (Scoop, 2020) entered the policy discourse during the Level 4 period to reflect how especially vulnerable Māori and Pasifika peoples are, not

only to public health crises but also to economic downturns more generally (Hendrickson, 2020). Māori women were disproportionately affected by the impact of COVID-19 on employment, with women bearing the brunt of COVID-19 job losses (Carroll, 2020).

The Ministry of Social Development (MSD) saw an increase in Special Needs Grants for food in 2020 during the COVID-19 lockdown (New Zealand Government, 2021). During this time, the total available amount that people could access online for food grants temporarily increased. Although the numbers of food grants decreased through August to October 2020, levels were higher in May 2021, than at the same time the previous year (New Zealand Government, 2021, p.16).

In a recent survey of over 2000 Māori households, Houkamau et al. (2021) found the COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on personal relationships, forcing some whānau to live closer together whilst others were separated from loved ones. One quarter of 2,000 survey respondents reported an adverse negative impact on whānau relationships (Houkamau et al., 2021). In addition, they described the impact of 'pandemic stress' on whānau, the pressures of being restricted, school closures and financial stress brought about by loss of employment (Houkamau et al., 2021). Nearly 20 percent of survey respondents said they suffered adverse psychological outcomes (including stress, sadness and in some cases depression) (Houkamau et al., 2021). A total of 9.70% reported adverse financial outcomes and associated worry, stress and loss. A number of respondents mentioned financial stress and strain from loss of jobs and income. Many references to loss of income were connected to comments about stress and anxiety (Houkamau et al., 2021).

These findings were supported by Cook et al. (2020) who found the COVID crisis had disproportionate impacts on existing vulnerable

groups, which reinforced existing inequalities. During COVID-19 Alert Levels 4 and 3, there was up to a tripling of housing enquiries in some regions due to chronic overcrowding, poor living conditions and problems meeting daily living costs (Cook et al., 2020). Evidence showed a significant increase in whānau seeking the provision of goods and social services. COVID-19 further exposed existing inequities such as in digital connectivity and access to devices for distance learning (Cook et al., 2020).

In Aotearoa, food insecurity was an immediate threat for many whānau during the Alert Level 4 lockdown. Shoppers in lockdown 2020 noted increased pricing at Foodstuffs stores, which operates Pak'n'Save and New World, and Woolworths New Zealand owned Countdown (Cook, 2021). Similarly, Consumer New Zealand observed a reduction in supermarket promotions and reported price increases across all main supermarkets (Cook, 2021).

News reports noted a rapid increase in foodbanks usage across the country during lockdown, with many foodbanks engaging with first-time users. There was increasing concern that new groups of people were entering financial hardship and vulnerability due to the pandemic (Franks, 2020). During the first week of lockdown the Wellington City Mission experienced an increase in demand for food parcels of 400 percent (Kronast, 2020). Likewise, in late April 2020, the Salvation Army delivered 5,895 food parcels, a 346 percent rise from the week before the COVID-19 lockdown. The Salvation Army noted the Ministry of Social Development paid out just under 70,000 Special Needs Grants for food in the week to April 10, 2020 (Boyle, 2020).

At the time of the publication of this report, August 2021, Aotearoa was in a nationwide Level 4 lockdown. Similar patterns regarding food insecurity, increased food prices, and increased demand at foodbanks are being reported (Franks & Mayron, 2021).

## THE IMPACT OF FOOD INSECURITY

CURRENT STATE OF MĀORI FOOD INSECURITY	EXACERBATED BY COVID-19	HAS RESULTED IN	ONGOING IMPACTS
National Nutrition surveys since 1997 have noted Māori food insecurity and the link to income disparity (Russell et al., 1997)	Increased financial stress brought about by loss of hours or employment (Houkamau et al., 2021)	Inadequate incomes drive people to consume low-cost foods, and low-cost diets tend to be energy dense and nutrient poor (Darmon et al., 2015)	Low-cost energy dense food resulting in poor nutrition
The level of food insecurity currently experienced by Māori is unfair and inequitable (McKercher, 2020)	One quarter of the 2,000 respondents reported an adverse negative impact on whānau relationships (Houkamau et al., 2021)	Short and long-term influences on health and well-being – whānau living situations reconstituted (Houkamau et al., 2021)	Impacting growth and development, learning and behaviour of tamariki
Food insecurity is strongly related to psychological distress (McKercher, 2020)	School closures increased financial stress, exposed existing inequities such as in digital connectivity and access to devices for distance learning (Houkamo et al., 2021; Cook, 2020)	Food insecurity negatively impacted on mothers with some reporting skipping meals in order to prioritise the needs of their tamariki (Beavis, 2019)	Inadequate food can have long-term consequences on physical and mental health
Income inequity means that about one quarter of tamariki Māori are growing up with inadequate nutrition, due to the higher costs of healthy food (MoH, 2019)	Disproportionate impacts on existing vulnerable groups, which reinforce existing inequalities (Cook, 2020)	Evidence showed a significant increase in whānau seeking the provision of goods and social services (Cook, 2020)	There is significant stress and stigma faced by parents who are unable to afford enough food to feed their children
Grandparents described the financial struggles they faced as they tried to live on their pensions and support the infants and young children in their care (Tapera, 2017)	Increased adverse psychological impact for whānau (up to 20% in survey data) Houkamau et al., 2021)	Grandparents, being unable to provide sufficient food created feelings of guilt, shame, sadness, anger and distress (Tapera, 2017)	Increased 'pandemic stress', psychological distress and pressure to meet the needs of whānau

## SUMMARY OF LITERATURE TO TAKE INTO FINDINGS

- A third of children live in households where there is food insecurity.
- The level of food insecurity currently experienced by Māori is unfair and inequitable.
- Food insecurity is strongly related to psychological distress.
- Food insecurity can lead to purchasing low-cost foods which tend to be energy dense and nutrient poor.
- COVID-19 has increased food insecurity and exacerbated social issues in New Zealand.

## TE PŪTAHITANGA O TE WAIPOUNAMU RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Mitigating the destructive impact of low income and food insecurity on whānau health and wellbeing requires systemic change. Solutions require a strengths-based, kaupapa Māori approach to building the capability of whānau to design and implement solutions to ensure the wellbeing of their tamariki (McKercher et al., 2021). Te Pūtahitanga o Te Waipounamu is committed to ensuring tino rangatiratanga and whānau capability through Whānau Ora.

As highlighted earlier, an initial 2020 Manaaki Whānau Survey was launched by Te Pūtahitanga o Te Waipounamu to understand whānau need and design an appropriate response. The survey found many whānau were highly financially exposed. The sudden change in circumstances resulted in reduced incomes and job losses, increased whānau vulnerability and significant stress.

The survey indicated many whānau were struggling to find the money to purchase food, rent, power, internet to stay connected. Whānau comments revealed the fragile state of many households with whānau forced to make decisions on whether to eat or stay warm.

*“We are a whānau that live from week to week and simply can’t afford to stock up. So, we*

*struggle with going into supermarkets and getting the basics because shelves are always empty which forces us to buy what’s there and the expensive items which leaves us with very little.”*

*“We run out of wood on cold nights, we run out of hygiene products, tampons, pads etc.”*

The data formed the foundation of the strategy that was used to distribute support, mobilise regional services, including increasing Navigators on the ground, delivery of food and hygiene packs, and the establishment of an emergency whānau fund — the Puna Fund.

## THE PUNA TRANSITION FUND

Puna is a funding stream specifically targeted at meeting the immediate needs of individuals and whānau who have been affected by the impacts of COVID-19.

On 28 September 2020 the Puna Fund was divided into two separate funds to reflect the ongoing needs of whānau.

### The Manaakitia Mai Fund

This fund addresses immediate and pressing needs, e.g., covering the cost of kai, data, and power.

### **The Whānau Roadblock Fund**

This fund addresses a 'roadblock' or barriers that might be holding whānau back from meeting their dreams and aspirations. This includes funding for a driver's licence, photo ID, warrant of fitness or car registration.

The applications for the two Puna Funds are open throughout the year. The agency aimed to process applications for Puna within 10-14 working days. The fund has a clear criterion for support.

### **Criteria For PUNA Support**

- That COVID-19 has significantly affected the financial security of whānau, either by decreasing income or increasing costs.
- That whānau have exhausted or do not have other funds available to them (personal and from government or other sources).
- That the whānau is experiencing significant financial hardship.
- That the funds are proposed to be used in a way that directly and materially enhances one or more of the following whānau Ora Pou: Whānau are self-managing, Whānau are financially secure and engaged in wealth creation.

Whānau are able to access the fund to a maximum of \$1000 per household.

The following section examines the impact of the Puna Fund on whānau during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data highlights the experiences, concerns and needs of whānau as they engaged with the Puna application process.

At the time of writing this report, August 2021, Te Pūtahitanga Te Waipounamu had received a total of 31,727 completed applications from when the initial Manaaki Whānau Survey was

launched in 2020. During the 2020 lockdown there were 4,098 applications. From 15 March to 17 August there were 17,439 applications. Added to this is 434 Manaakitia Mai applications and 2,670 Whānau Roadblock Fund and Emergency Support applications. During the Delta lockdown (18 August to 4 September), 7,086 applications were received bringing the total to 31,727 as previously noted.

# RESULTS

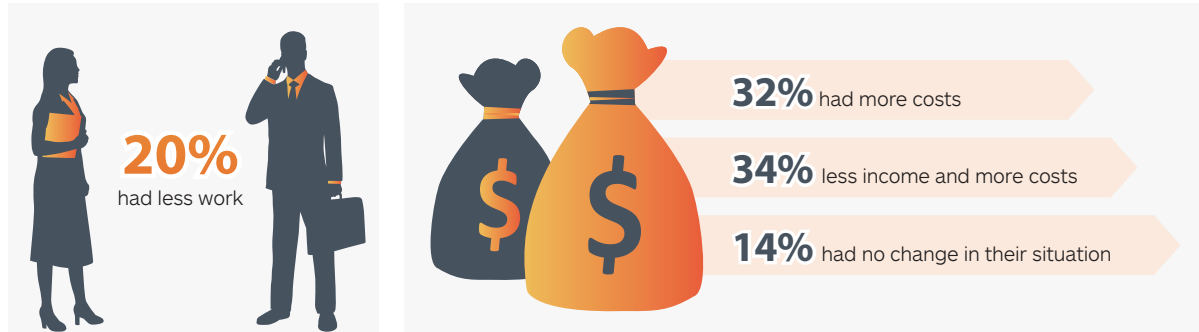
The following section highlights key results from quantitative and qualitative analyses. Results from Ihi Research's Puna Whānau Survey are presented first. This data outlines the demographic characteristics of whānau as they engaged with the fund. The survey also provided opportunities for whānau to comment on their needs, the experiences of the Puna process and the impact it has had on their

lives. Qualitative analysis of this data reveals key themes and sub-themes. A case study of impact is also provided which highlights the unique circumstances of whānau that places them in positions of vulnerability. The case study highlights whānau aspirations and needs at this time, as well as the impact of support received through the Puna Fund.

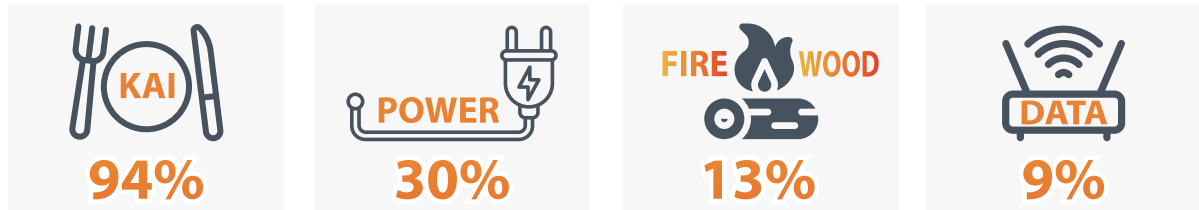
## DEMOGRAPHIC DATA AND KEY FINDINGS



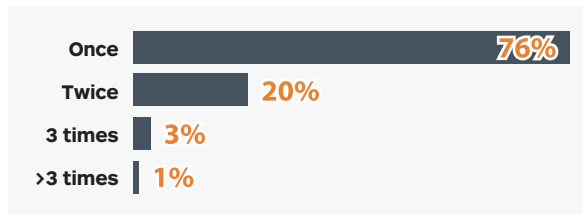
## IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WHĀNAU



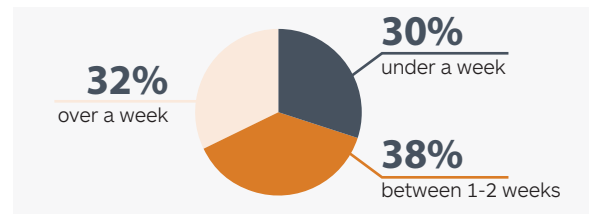
## WHĀNAU RECEIVED HELP FOR



## THEY APPLIED



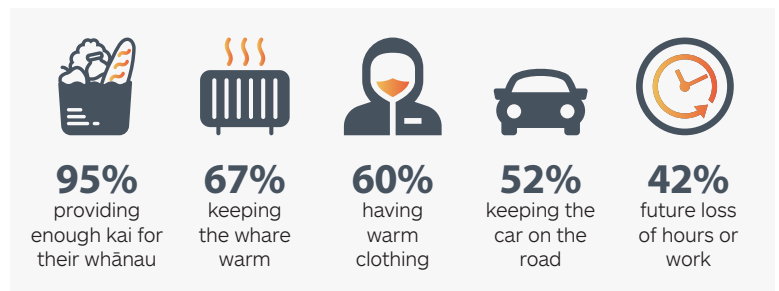
## WHĀNAU WAITED



## WHĀNAU SAID THE PROCESS



## WHĀNAU WERE MOST CONCERNED ABOUT



Nearly half, **45%**, of the whānau had previously approached MSD for support. A total of **73%** of these whānau did not meet the criteria for MSD funding, **14%** needed more information and **13%** had their application approved.

## KEY FINDINGS FROM QUALITATIVE DATA

The survey provided opportunities for whānau to comment on their needs, the experiences of the Puna process and the impact it has had on their lives. The whānau took this opportunity with over 2,980 comments provided.

The quotes selected for this section have been carefully chosen to be representative of key themes and sub-themes. Impact statements in red represent the comments in these themes.

## THE IMPACT OF LIVING ON THE BREAD LINE FOR DIVERSE GROUPS

There were 507 comments that referenced financial hardship, difficulties paying bills and going through difficult times. The data indicates that whānau who applied for the Puna Fund were living under significant financial hardship. Particular groups were evident in the data, such as those living with disabilities or medical conditions, wāhine leaving domestic violence relationships, grandparents caring for mokopuna, and whānau who were not eligible for Work and Income (WINZ) or other support. These whānau had additional needs and responsibilities.

*"I struggle to buy groceries each week because of our basic living costs and expenses being more than we actually receive from WINZ each week."*

*"I was finally able to fill the cupboards with more than just the essentials, hopefully I can build from this and keep at it. It's hard to gain ground when you are scrambling on stones."*

*"We were in such a tight spot financially and I was so stressed and getting the kai voucher felt like winning lotto. We were able to get washing liquid and a big bag of spuds which we had run out of ages ago. It felt like we were never going to get out of the hole until we got that voucher."*

## Whānau with disabilities or medical conditions

*"Basic living costs have increased, petrol has increased, and our power cost has increased, but the WINZ Supported Living payment does not bring these factors into consideration - people who have auto-immune diseases and chronic illness have significant additional basic living costs. The disability allowance is capped and therefore I have to use what should be grocery money to pay for medical costs, prescription charges (part charges not fully subsidised medication - because of significant medical allergies) travel to and from medical appointments etc - it all costs a significant amount each week."*

*"As the main carer and support for my partner it has been hard trying to live week by week to the point where we only eat maybe once or twice a day. My partner being sick and needing to go doctors nearly every week starts to take a toll on us financially."*

Many whānau with responsibilities for caring for others, were grateful for the extra support that kept families together.

*"All I can say is thank you so much for helping us in our time of need as we only receive a child disability benefit and nothing else. It's pride that keeps me going to hold this family together."*

## Wāhine leaving domestic abuse

Wāhine who were leaving abusive homes, were particularly vulnerable. Whilst being grateful for the financial support, these māmā also felt shame and guilt.

*"It made a huge difference, and we are so grateful. I never planned to be a solo mum. I had to decide if I wanted to keep getting hidings or struggle by myself. I chose to struggle. I'm trying so hard to get off the benny and I feel super useless when that extra bill comes in and I can't afford the basics. I don't smoke or drink. I feel like that's important to mention lol, but we are so thankful."*



*“Thanks to your guys funding I was able to put on a birthday for my babies after leaving a domestic (violence) relationship with their father, feeling useless enough having to be in a motel, the funding lifted a lot of shame and guilt of not providing a better life for my babies. He mihi aroha tenei ki a koutou mo to mahi arohaina me to manaakitanga ki ngā tangata katoa.”*

#### **Grandparents looking after mokopuna**

Older whānau members with extra responsibilities emphasised their commitment to keeping their pēpi and tamariki well, regardless of their age. These extra responsibilities were an immense source of joy, pride and strength, yet came with additional financial demands that whānau struggled with.

*“We look after our grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and we would rather go without than see them and their parents struggle all the time. It is harder as we are not considered as being the main beneficiaries and do not get the increases that beneficiaries get.”*

*“Since his birth I have had my grandson in my custody, he is now 18 with Asperger’s autism, and I have my daughter, his mother, who has mental health issues. Caring for them is a joy and at times a struggle. So, the grocery top up was so much appreciated ... thank you so much.”*

*“Keep doing what you do, as for myself and my moko, from the bottom of our hearts we appreciated everything you did for us. It certainly allowed me to breathe. I’m 61 and have moko three years and four years, so it allowed me to do what I do best and that’s being a living Nan Nan.”*

#### **Whānau not eligible for other funding**

The Puna Fund also provided financial relief for whānau who were not eligible to apply for other sources of support. There was a palpable feeling of relief in whānau comments.

*“The fact that we always get rejected because of my husband’s earnings, but my husband works 40 hours at a factory, we never thought we would get it. I cried ... from the bottom of my heart THANK YOU so much.”*

*“It allowed me drama free and discreet support and put much needed kai on the table. As for WINZ, we’re not eligible for additional support.”*

#### **THE IMPACT OF COVID-19**

There were 86 direct references to the financial impact of COVID-19 on whānau. Forty-four of these referred to the impact of losing a job or reduced hours during COVID-19. The data indicates that for many low income whānau, COVID-19 increased their financial pressure and stress.

#### **Financial impact of COVID-19**

*“For me struggling as a solo dad to raise my babies, ... since COVID hit it put a massive stress on our whānau and we became homeless, but we have a whare now and are struggling away.”*

*“Because of COVID-19 ... our power bill was quite high, it continued right up to this year, constantly behind in the power.”*

*“Incredibly grateful to the Puna Fund for the assistance. We have struggled since the COVID pandemic started as we have had additional costs of face masks and hand sanitiser on an ongoing basis which has been a massive financial burden and greatly affected us both.”*

*“It was a great help and very much appreciated. I was able to put extra money on bills I got behind on during COVID. I thank you guys for the support you have been able to help me with.”*

*“This funding really helps with my family, my co-worker sent me the link to this funding, I’m struggling with food and bills, when I received the message, me and my family felt so blessed, now we are back on track, especially our COVID rent arrears.”*

## Loss of income or employment due to COVID-19

*"We have had a few rough patches during this year with COVID, floods and losing our job due to damages on the property."*

*"This has been life changing. My GP nurse helped us access the funding, I had gone to my GP, I was so broken. My husband lost his job with COVID, and I was trying to carry everything and slipping further behind. The support was practical, made a huge difference and meant I could pay school fees with my pay. The firewood has been such a blessing and every time we have the fire on, I think of the gift from this group and how grateful we are."*

*"This made a great difference for my family weeks later and the power is still ticking over and in winter, it was definitely needed. Unfortunately, we have one worker and his pay has not increased in at least five-years. I lost my job after COVID and haven't found more work. With other costs rising I'm finding myself struggling to supply the basics."*

*"I lost my job of 12-years due to COVID and have struggled to find employment."*

*"I have struggled since losing my job due to COVID."*

## THE IMPACT OF FOOD INSECURITY

There were 557 comments that pertained to having a shortage of food. Of these comments, 168 would meet the definition for a severe shortage of food<sup>4</sup>. The data indicates many whānau are living with severe food insecurity, the quality of food that many whānau eat is poor and it is a struggle to cater for whānau with food allergies or special diets, such as diabetes.

*"Some days we would go without eating so getting a bit of funding helped us out heaps."*

*"It meant we got to eat during a rough patch, we were going through something I never wanted my children to experience - hunger."*

*"It enabled all in the house to eat for the week, some of us normally skip meals so the kids are fed."*

*"I was able to eat properly. I usually have half a bowl of cereal, then wait until dinner to keep my grocery costs down."*

*"I am a single mum and find it hard to afford everything I need. Often, as mum, I only eat one meal a day so my kids can eat and get what they need."*

## Challenges providing food for whānau on limited budget

*"I have never in my life as a single parent ever been able to do a full grocery shop. I can't even explain how much this helped my whānau. I thank you so much. Forever grateful!"*

*"I have never spent \$200 on kai in my life. I have gone without meals for the past six-months just to feed my hungry teenager. When I opened the envelopes, I had tears in my eyes. Thank you with all my heart. I have had three-meals a day for three-weeks now."*

## Low quality of food

*"It made a lot of difference as we live on sausages, it's all we can afford."*

*"We were able to finally do a decent grocery shop including meat, vegetables and fruits to feed all five family members. It has been four-years since we could afford to buy meat, vegetables and fruit all at once."*

## Special diets - diabetic and allergy prone whānau

*"Provided the whānau with dietary essentials like meat, diabetic nourishing foods that are so expensive. Cereals, bread, sugar supplements, milk products. We were so grateful for the extra food that we could not always buy. Thank you."*

*"It made a huge difference with getting my food for my children, specifically my eight-year-old"*

<sup>4</sup> Severe food insecurity is defined as 'they have run out of food and gone a day or more without eating, most likely experiencing hunger' by the United Nations see <http://www.fao.org/hunger/en/>

*who has some disabilities around eating and food, he only eats specific foods, and I can't always afford them."*

*"I was able to buy some special foods for my daughter who is celiac."*

### **THE IMPACT ON CHILDREN**

There were 106 comments that directly related to the impact of the funding on children. Twenty-seven related to purchasing items for children like clothes and shoes, 11 to school needs and 15 to medication. The data indicates the additional funding had a positive impact on tamariki and enabled many whānau to provide clothing, school equipment and medication for their children.

*"The food voucher was life changing for us, the kids got so excited. I don't tell them how hard things are and they never complain, but this help has more of an affect than you would know, and I appreciate it fully."*

*"The assistance with kai helped us out tremendously. Although it was only once, it took so much stress off my shoulders of how we were going to be able to provide the essentials for our children."*

*"In winter I find the bills creep up and not enough money to have all things provided for my tamariki. Sometimes we go without or wait till I save enough; we don't go out to fancy restaurants or buy fancy labelled gears like Nike. We just live day by day but are very grateful for the system to help my whānau."*

*"Receiving this I was able to take some stress off my head and put extra food in the cupboards, fridge, and freezer. My main achievement though was being able to afford to buy my children some socks, new underwear and warm long sleeve t-shirts which they were so happy about as it's been a long time since they've seen something new. So, with having help with food, I was able to do so, from my children and me, thank you."*

*"With the Pak'nSave voucher I was able purchase treats for my children and be able to sit down and enjoy meals with them rather than eating cheap food away in the kitchen while they had better meals. It was the family time we shared that stands out from the kai gift I was given from the Puna funding."*

### **Providing clothes, sports and medication**

*"My son was able to play sport this year and discovered he loved rugby. I'm extremely grateful for the funding for him to be able to do that."*

*"The particular week that I applied for awahi with kai, our twins had started kura so we paid \$200 for their school uniforms."*

*"It made it so much easier for me to be able to get my children and myself some decent warm clothes as that's what I used the money for that I would usually spend on food."*

*"We were able to afford our daughter's medication."*

*"It helped me be able to purchase items the kids needed during winter, like clothes and school items, and helped ease my stress as the kai was taken care off."*

### **THE IMPACT OF THE PROCESS**

There were 730 comments that referred to the process of applying for the Puna Fund with 235 whānau stating the process was quick and/or easy, 401 said it was respectful. However, 94 comments related to not hearing back from the Puna Fund or not receiving the voucher, 37 related to a delay in payment. Some whānau commented on negative experiences with supermarkets/firewood providers. The data indicates the majority of the applicants to the Puna Fund found it quick, easy and respectful, however for some whānau the process was not completed, took too long, or was unsatisfactory.

### **Ease of applying**

*“Applying for funding online was very simple and easy to understand and I was contacted by a member of Te Pūtahitanga o Te Waipounamu within a couple of days stating I had a voucher at the supermarket. So, very prompt with providing great service and really friendly.”*

*“The process was easy, and unlike asking WINZ for help, there was no judgement at all, which was very refreshing. It’s hard to ask for help, but to be questioned and made to feel like a criminal, and having your budgeting skills etc examined, and then being made to feel like you have failed, and that you should be doing better, sucks, it’s hard enough without that treatment! There was none of that in the Puna application.”*

### **Respectful process**

*“I have very much appreciated the help I was given, although I found it hard to ask. I was treated with such respect.”*

*“The process was easy, and unlike asking WINZ for help, there was no judgement at all.”*

*“No shame of asking for help, especially when you have been doing the best you possibly can with what you have and the tight budget you are on, being the best parent and role model, you can be.”*

*“There are many times I am too scared to call Work and Income for assistance because I know I’ll end up crying ... for someone who’s gone through domestic violence recently, it means the world to me to have someone to contact who isn’t going to belittle or bring me down.”*

*“I don’t feel like I have to photograph my empty fridge to prove I need help. Thanks for treating me like a human being.”*

*“I didn’t feel like a loser. I was treated like I mattered. No third degree questions and questioned why I had no money. I now realise*

*there are people who see past a benefit. I’m on an invalid benefit but still get treated with disrespect. Puna made me feel human.”*

### **Dissatisfaction with the process and/or outcome**

*“I didn’t get what I did apply for, 😞 Now my power is cut off.”*

*“I was called about firewood, but I was attending my mum’s funeral and missed the deadline to return the call. When I called back there was no answer and I left messages but never received a follow up or anything.”*

*“I totally understand many applications are received, and it takes time to process, but I thought two- months of waiting was very extreme for our whānau.”*

*“I understand there are a lot of applications, but I would have thought that if someone was in dire need of assistance, like myself, my application would have been looked at sooner. My whānau was living in a house that leaked when it rained, had mould on the ceiling and walls and was freezing because of the lack of heating and insulation. This was all stipulated in the application for firewood. However, because of the time it took to look at the application, regardless of phone calls explaining my situation, we had moved out of the house, therefore the application for firewood was cancelled.”*

*“I think just maybe a faster response on whether I’m accepted would be good. Last time was almost two-weeks waiting and by the time we were accepted we were on the verge of sending our kids away to their other parents because we could no longer feed them ... which messes up legal agreements for parenting and such.”*

### **Challenges with providers**

*“I had a text regarding firewood approval, but no one ever texted me back and I had to call three times, no further response, two times I left*

*a message and one time I spoke to a lady who said I needed to wait longer.”*

*“I received a kai voucher to shop at a supermarket. I enjoyed using the voucher but was shocked that they wouldn’t let me hold the card myself and their explanation was people abuse these cards. ... I hated being made to feel like ‘Oh it’s one of those benefit people’ or ‘Oh broke Māori alert.”*

*“Although I appreciate it with all my ❤️. I was called over a month ago to sort the pellets for my fire, I was told a click and collect order to pick up was on its way and I’ll hear soon ... I have not ... every time I need pellets, I’m hoping that an email would come through. Worst thing you can do to a poor person is to tell them to expect something that doesn’t happen but thank you so much for the power and kai.”*

#### **THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT**

There were 245 comments that related to the stress of not having enough money to pay bills, or the reduction of stress or improved mental health as a result of receiving the funding. The data indicates that financial pressure results in significant stress for many whānau and that receiving Puna funding reduced stress for many whānau.

*“Puna made it very easy to access and provided a much needed one off to make sure another family did not fall into the endless cycle of debt/malnutrition/illness. Sometimes there is so little resilience left that advocating for yourself and your family can be overwhelming, and you fail to get the help you need anyway. Puna just provided the help. Ngā mihinui ki a koutou.”*

#### **Reduction of stress**

*“The power and kai grant came when we were at rock bottom. I did not know how I was going to afford food that week. But this support has given me more than food and power. It’s*

*given me psychological and emotional relief as the stress of not knowing how I was going to buy food to feed my daughter was genuinely affecting my health. I wasn’t sleeping due to the significant stress and worry about whether I could get any food or heat another room in the house.”*

*“It relieved soooo much stress for us you wouldn’t believe.”*

*“It made the stress of that week disappear it was amazing!”*

*“The funding helped me not be so stressed for that week.”*

*“Not stressing ‘do we have enough’ for kai, transport and power.”*

*“The kai vouchers and assistance with the power bill made a huge difference and removed a massive amount of stress.”*

#### **THE DIFFERENCE THE PUNA FUND MADE TO WHĀNAU LIVES**

There were 622 comments that related to the positive impact the Puna Fund had on the lives of whānau. Two hundred and twelve comments related to improved nutrition or more food. One hundred and forty-nine, referred to improved warmth due to firewood or power, 22 comments related directly to improved health and 10 comments related to whānau being able to get to work, get a new job, or continue studying due to the Puna Fund. The data indicates the funding had a varied and positive impact on the lives of the whānau that applied and received funding.

#### **More kai, better nutrition**

*“I would just like to thank you for the amazing koha and support with the \$300 Pak’nSave voucher, it really made a considerable difference for three-four weeks. The kids and I even had our first roast meal (pork) together in the whare.”*

*“This is so helpful; the kids are overjoyed by good food, and you can see it on their faces. I am overwhelmed with tears of gratitude.”*

*“This helped a lot! Helping us through COVID and after COVID was great. We had a massive income change and sick babies, the Puna Fund helped with kai and wood, my whānau was able to be healthy, happy and warm until we got on our feet. I have just applied again for some help because we are in a similar situation. I know they will help if they can, simply amazing support for our whanau.”*

#### **Warmer homes**

*“Enabled us to keep warmer as we have no fire, only heat pumps, so being able to have these on more regularly to help keep my babies warm and not sick, has been a blessing, especially in Southland.”*

*“We were able to purchase some much needed new thermal drapes for our living room ... so a month of power and a week’s supply of kai was so much appreciated.”*

*“It has meant I haven’t had to worry about power and wood which has meant I haven’t got into more debt with Work and Income as wood is \$450 a load here and I need three loads a year.”*

#### **Improved health**

*“I am so grateful in this time of struggle just to receive this care and boost for my whole whānau, it has helped my mental health the most, and also physical because of the kai.”*

*“A massive help. When WINZ and IRD were making us suffer raising four kids on a one child income we simply couldn’t feed our kids ... Puna made kai available to us right as we had really run out of options for how to get by. We are still trying to recover from all those months, but the Puna Fund certainly made a few of those weeks more bearable and less stressful, which is hugely important as stress is a key factor in my partner’s epilepsy and having seizures.”*

#### **Employment or study**

*“I was able to attend more job interviews and I can keep my phone on, so I am contactable.”*

*“Being a student and not being able to receive a student allowance meant I was struggling to make ends meet and the Puna Fund helped me get on my feet and take control of my finances. Especially this winter where my power bill has been \$80 dollars a week.”*

#### **The ripple effect of the Puna impact**

The impact of the fund appears to reach into other areas of whānau life, into families who were not Māori but appreciated support from Māori organisations, from whānau who were in difficult life situations, and has rippled out into other areas of whānau life.

*“When the food voucher arrived at Pak’nSave I was able to pay an outstanding bill that week. The load of wood was an absolute surprise because I didn’t realise at first where it came from. That load of wood gave us an extra \$40 per week for the last two months to buy necessities for my tamariki, electric blankets for our beds, more winter clothing, full tank of gas for the car or put that \$40 on the power bill to stay ahead. The wood is gone now but we are so grateful. The Puna Fund paid a power bill and from that I was able to fix the car and get a warrant. The funding has helped us in so many ways that I didn’t have to dissect our weekly budget to survive. We didn’t have to struggle in the last two months. We were able to get ahead with a few things.”*

*“This funding helped out so much during our tough time of losing our baby. It helped put kai on the table and power for us to live and top up to keep in touch with whānau - I was able to pay off debt that was urgently needed.”*

*“In my life I have received help twice from Māori organisations, this time and when my twins were born. Both times I have been blown away by the practical support, kindness and delivery of help with no judgement. I wish more pākehā experienced this and they would understand that Māori services and governance create huge benefits for everyone, of all races. Thank you for caring for me and my family, you made a huge difference and I thank you from the bottom of my heart.”*

*“I’ve been working full time as a solo mum. I was earning training apprentice wages, earning under \$15 an hour, and was receiving next to no support from Work and Income. Before COVID my ex-partner was financially contributing toward our son, but he lost his job a few months after the lockdown and has yet to find consistent employment. Knowing that my power was paid, and that we had extra money for kai made all the difference. Last time my son and I used the food voucher to buy a small fruit and sandwich shout for the other children at pre-school, as I know we aren’t the only family who has been struggling.”*

*“I hope to be in a position to pay your generosity forward one day.”*

*“Once again, many thanks for caring ... It was hard for me to ask for help ... I have always been independent and used to being there for others .... And to have you help ... No question of being there to support, just helped lift my spirit amongst the worries ... Thank you ... Thank you ... Thank you ...”*

*“I think what you are doing is extremely awesome and knowing that you have helped not only myself, and whānau, but I have heard about a lot in our community who have also had awahi from you, is really awesome and I am grateful.”*

# AUGUST 2021 COVID-19 NATIONWIDE LOCK DOWN

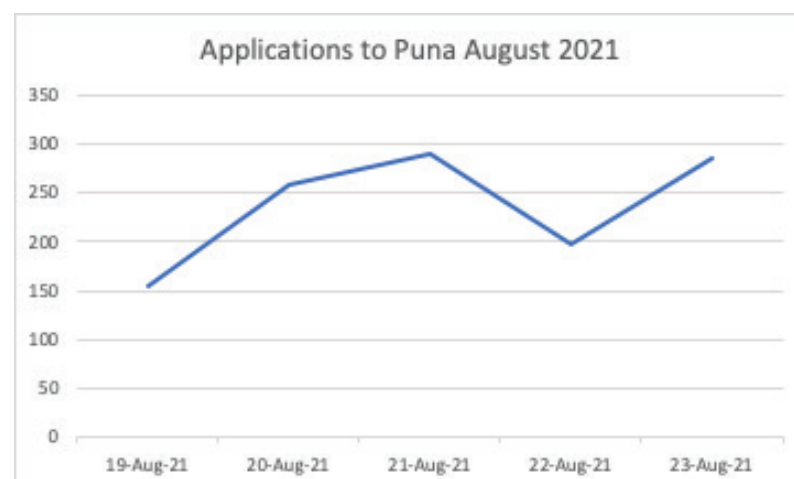
At the time of writing this report, the second nationwide lockdown was announced at 11.59pm on Tuesday August 17, in response to a case of COVID-19 Delta variant in the community.

Data collected by the Puna team between 19th and 23rd August 2021 indicated a surge in applications due to low income, job insecurity, inability to meet basic needs and other issues (see figure 2). Directly, or indirectly, many whānau expressed their concerns of mental ill-health experiences of themselves and other whānau members. Qualitative data was analysed from the Puna Fund applications to understand whānau reactions, feelings, and sentiments around the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on their mental health.

Of a total of 1,089 applications received<sup>5</sup>, 712 whānau applicants referred to and/or discussed different forms of mental health challenges and worries as their primary concern during lockdown. Seventy-six percent of whānau classified their needs as being urgent. Sixty-five percent of the applicants discussed additional stress that the lockdown created including medical illnesses, bereavement, insecurity, loss of income, social isolation and uncertainty.

It appears that for many whānau the lockdown restrictions cause significant stress and anxiety, particularly those who already have existing stressors in their lives, such as medical illness or limited income. These challenges are significant and support and stimulus responses like the Puna Fund is only one element of what

should be a long-term plan for whānau wellbeing and hauora. The evidence strongly suggested that COVID-19 lockdown restrictions lead to increased stress and require additional support from government agencies for relief and reassurance.



<sup>5</sup> Applications between 18 August and 32 August



# CASE STUDY - MARA AND TAHU

Mara is 26-years-old and lives in a small semi-detached flat with her son Tahu aged four. Soon after her son was born, she had to leave her partner as he was violent. She was lucky to find a small flat with a manageable rent and has been living there for the past four-years. Being a solo mother motivated Mara to enrol in university three-years ago. She wants to create a financially secure future for herself and her son. She is in her third year of study for a Bachelor of Social Services degree.

While studying, Mara is supported by the solo mother's benefit through Work and Income. After paying rent, petrol, a weekly amount to her power and insurance, and paying the shortfall in childcare so she can attend uni, Mara is left with about \$60 a week for food and all other expenses. Food is the last thing she buys every week, and it is always very tight. She plans her shopping before she goes, she adds up how much she can spend as she walks through the supermarket and tries to buy the cheapest options.

Often, Mara doesn't have enough food for the week. She describes how she can 'fast' for a day or two if she does not have enough, choosing to make sure she can feed her son first. She tries to save \$10-15 a week for emergencies, but often has to spend this money to keep up with essential living and studying costs.

*"I've got pretty good at fasting, I just don't eat for a day or two, or have a bit of bread. As long as I can feed Tahu I'm ok, but to be honest sometimes being really hungry can make you feel like shit."*

Mara describes the ongoing issues she has had with Work and Income over the past four years. There have been times when her benefit has been stopped for no apparent reason leaving her with no money for days. It takes time and money to call or visit Work and Income (WINZ) to solve the problems. She feels she often has to argue with WINZ staff who make her feel ashamed that she needs support.

Three times this year the WINZ payment to the childcare stopped without any reason. Mara has to go through the process of reinstating the support every time without explanation from the WINZ staff as to why it was stopped. She describes the stress of realising she suddenly had a \$400 childcare bill and no way of paying it off.

*"It was such a shock, I cried and cried, there is no way I've ever got that much money, the childcare was saying Tahu couldn't go anymore, and I was trying to get to lectures, and no one at WINZ knew what was going on."*

The interactions with WINZ and the daily struggle of trying to manage on such a tight budget has

impacted Mara's mental health. Some days she finds it overwhelming to get through daily tasks and get to her lectures. However, she wants to get through university and into a job when Tahu goes to school, so she pushes herself to keep going, even when it is very difficult.

*"The struggle to make ends meet affects my whole life really – I try to stay on top, but sometimes I just don't want to get out of bed ... it all feels too hard, I just want to give up."*

Last year, Mara found the COVID lockdown period especially hard. She didn't have enough money to stockpile food which made her very anxious at the start of lockdown. When she could get to the supermarket the cheap food that she relied on had sold out, so she was forced to borrow money from friends to buy more expensive food. She needed more food as Tahu was home all day and hungry. She found herself getting into debt just to get through the six-weeks.

*"The COVID lockdown stressed me out so much, I was at home with my son watching everyone panic buy knowing there is no way I can do that, I was stressing out that I won't be able to feed him, I still only had my \$50 to spend on food. When I got to the shops all the usual food I buy was gone – I had to borrow some money, spend more and I got less, and Tahu wanted more food cause he's home all day – it was really hard."*

In March, Mara had a small car crash on the way to uni. While it wasn't severe and she had third party insurance, she had to arrange with a mechanic to fix her own car so she could continue to get to uni. She couldn't get the car repairs funded by WINZ, so she had to use all the money she had to pay off the repair. This left Mara with enough money to pay rent for two weeks, but no way to pay for food or power for herself or her son. She couldn't get a food grant and felt too ashamed to ask friends and family to borrow money again, especially when she couldn't see how she could pay it back.

*"Little things – become huge things – like when I had a small ding with my car, I've got no way to fix that, and when you've already borrowed money from whānau, and you know WINZ isn't going to help you out – you don't know what to do. I ended up duct taping my car and getting the basics fixed to get to uni, but I know I'm not going to get a warrant next time."*

Mara was able to access the Puna fund this year after hearing about it from a friend. Within a week Mara had a food voucher to pick up at the supermarket and was able to buy two weeks worth of groceries and data. Mara describes the huge relief she felt at a time when she felt hopeless. It had a significant impact on her living situation, her son's wellbeing and her mental health. Mara said the process to apply for the Puna fund was easy, she felt respected throughout the process and was so grateful for the relief at such a stressful time.

*"Honestly it was the best thing – I can't really describe what it's like to have \$200 to spend on food – I could stock up on the basics, get some cleaning products, buy fruit for my son, I cooked us a big meal. I can't tell you what a massive difference it made to us."*

Mara is on track to finish her degree at the end of the year. She has found the past three-years incredibly challenging and believes that most of New Zealand doesn't realise how difficult it is to live week to week with no money to cope with anything unexpected. The stress of caring for her son on her own and making sure his basic needs are met can be overwhelming. Mara values her independence and has committed to stay at uni no matter what happens. She will graduate with her degree in November 2021.

# SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS FROM ACROSS THE DATA

## **Whānau are struggling on insufficient or low income**

- There were 33,292 children (under 18-years) who were in the households of those whānau who applied.
- Some whānau; those with medical issues, disabilities, grandparents caring for mokopuna and those leaving domestic violence situations appear to be particularly impacted by low income.
- Whānau reported experiencing stress and shame managing on low income.

## **COVID-19 has exacerbated the impact of low income for many whānau**

- Whānau reported losing jobs or hours due to COVID-19.
- Whānau report having additional expenses associated with COVID-19 or lockdown.
- The uncertainty of the COVID-19 situation contributes to whānau stress.

## **Food insecurity is a significant concern and priority for whānau**

- The top concern for whānau is having enough food to feed their family.
- Whānau on low income are likely to eat cheaper poorer quality food.

- Whānau requiring specialist diets, such as diabetes, struggle to have their nutritional needs met.
- Some whānau are suffering from severe food insecurity, missing meals, and experiencing hunger.

## **Puna Fund has a positive impact on whānau and their tamariki**

- Whānau were able to provide for needs of tamariki.
- Whānau were able to provide kai, pay bills and keep the whare warm.
- Whānau were able to attend job interviews, fix their car to get to their jobs and continue studying.
- The impact of this flowed on to other members of the extended whānau and community.
- The Puna Fund reduced stress and, in some cases, improved the health of whānau.

Further, the data indicates there is an ongoing need for support so whānau can meet their basic needs in a time of crisis. Many whānau in the survey appear to be barely coping, many with a negative cash flow and a complex set of problems, including health and disabilities.

## Continuous improvement

The data from this evaluation indicates that a proportion of whānau who applied for the fund, did not hear back or were dissatisfied with their application outcome. The data suggests that Te Pūtahitanga o Te Waipounamu may not have had the infrastructure to deal with the volume of requests, particularly when referrals escalated quickly in 2021.

Some whānau experienced issues accessing the fund. For example, those without identification could not access their supermarket vouchers, or whānau living in households where the power was under other whānau names could not receive support for power. Developing strategies to overcome these challenges for some whānau is needed.

*“I think having someone available on a phone line to help with errors would be beneficial as I had trouble accessing my kai voucher and was unable to contact anyone about this.”*

There is an opportunity to invest in the systems to ensure the fund can be administered to meet the need. There appears to be some issues with the providers, supermarkets and firewood providers, which could also be investigated in more depth.

It is apparent the need continues for many whānau in crisis, particularly during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The fund will require ongoing support from Government. While long-term government policy needs to ensure that tamariki are not living in poverty and whānau are not living with severe food insecurity - the immediate needs of whānau in crisis are very present and concerning.

# IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

The 'right to adequate food' is included in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which New Zealand ratified in 1978 (AHRLA, 2013). The level of food insecurity currently experienced by Māori is unfair and contradicts the promise of equity inherent in the Treaty of Waitangi (Reid, 1999). The New Zealand government, therefore, has a moral obligation to uphold this right for all citizens and promote policies that enable all households to have sufficient income for the basic necessities of life, including food (AHRLA, 2013).

The long-term implications of increased food insecurity experienced by whānau, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, cannot be understated. While short-term crisis responses like the Puna Fund address the immediate pressing needs of whānau, a range of government policies are needed to lift whānau out of poverty. Until there is a marked increase in the living conditions of low income whānau, funds like the Puna Fund are desperately needed to ensure the devastating impacts of food insecurity are mitigated.

While aspects of the Child Poverty Action Group's evidence-based policy recommendations (CPAG, 2017) have been implemented by the Government, this research indicates these measures are insufficient to make a significant difference in the lives of low-income whānau. The Government needs to set priorities for family income support, include

higher (and waged-linked) adult benefits, a higher minimum wage, and lower tax rates and well-designed child-related tax credits in lower income ranges (CPAG, 2017). Healthy food costs in New Zealand should also continue to be monitored and welfare benefits routinely adjusted to meet household basic healthy food costs (Mainvil, 2017).

This report indicates particular groups of whānau, those with disabilities, medical conditions, grandparents caring for mokopuna and wāhine leaving violent relationships, are particularly prone to ongoing food insecurity. All households need sufficient income to afford basic needs, including food. When basic needs are met, households and individuals can thrive and make meaningful contributions to society (Dale, 2017). To enable all Māori to flourish, Māori economic development goals need to be realised.

For indigenous people, the right to food, is linked closely to rights to land, sovereignty and culture (AHRLA, 2013). Health and other professionals should use their collective impact to advocate for social justice and structural (policy) solutions that change systems perpetuating social and health inequity. Mckerchar et al., (2015) found that Māori society highly values knowledge to maintain a stable food supply; this knowledge needs to be transferred to future generations (Pihama, 2001).

A pilot study in Whakatane, (population ~19 000) found increasing accessibility to traditional foods, such as kūmara (sweet potato), yams, and kaimoana (seafood) improved food security and food sovereignty (Moeke-Pickering et al., 2015). If Māori have access to free or low-cost traditional foods, such as mara kai (food from the ground) at marae, community gardens and cooperatives, then they can practice manaakitanga within their whānau by gifting healthy food. This approach to food access also relates to the broader value of kaitiakitanga (Moeke-Pickering et al., 2015).

Based on evidence that food producing community programmes could support low-income whānau. Te Pūtahitanga o Te Waipounamu, introduced the Kōanga Kai initiative to support whānau rangatiratanga by building healthy and sustainable kai production practices, alongside the Puna Fund. The fund provides support so whānau can create gardens in their homes and communities, and engage in planting, hunting, gathering, foraging, producing, preserving and preparing kai.

Kōanga Kai is about self-determination and sustainable kai production that puts whānau in charge of creating healthy lifestyles, and that is environmentally and economically sustainable. While the fund is well subscribed and early indications are that it has an impact on food security, it should be noted that while these strategies may reduce the severity of food insecurity, evidence indicates they will not resolve it (Moeke-Pickering et al., 2015).

Mitigating the destructive impact of low income and food insecurity on whānau health and wellbeing requires systemic change. Solutions require a strengths-based, kaupapa Māori approach to building the capability of whānau to design and implement solutions to ensure the wellbeing of their tamariki (McKercher, 2021).

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# APPENDIX 1 METHODOLOGY

## EVALUATION OF THE PUNA FUND

The evaluation findings for this report draw upon a year of monitoring data gathered by Te Pūtahitanga o Te Waipounamu data management team. In addition an independent survey administered by Ihi Research to over 8000 emails that had requested support. We received over 200 emails to report that they had not received funding, or had not heard back, so could therefore not complete the survey.

Whānau were invited to participate in the survey by email. The survey was hosted by Qualtrics and accessed online. This may have limited the whānau who were able to respond, to those who had data and connectivity at the time of the survey.

An incentive of offered by Ihi Research to those who completed the survey to enter a draw to win eight \$100 dollar grocery vouchers – they entered their details into another platform to ensure anonymity. The survey was open for a fortnight. The recipients of the draw were contacted by the Research company and sent or had vouchers delivered.

There were two phone interviews with whānau who had received funding and who had volunteered to be interviewed. The case study is a result of these phone interviews.

The three primary research questions were.

1. What are the concerns of whānau and what help did they need?
2. How many whānau accessed PUNA and what difference has it made ?
3. What was the impact of the process and the funding on the lives of whānau?

### Qualitative data analysis

The qualitative data was analysed using a cloud-based data analysis programme Dedoose, several researchers coded data into the themes that make up this section of the report. There were five open ended opportunities to comment in the survey. There were 3411 comments, which were coded into 33 different theme/sub themes.



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