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Healthy Families Far North embraces return of indigenous Maori systems

Healthy Families Far North is heading into the holiday season with a new cause for celebration – the return of indigenous Māori systems in its movement to support the good health and wellbeing of people across Te Taitokerau.

Healthy Families Far North is a Ministry of Health-funded initiative that aims to improve population health where people live, learn, work and play. And, as the Far North District Council comprises 40.6% of people of Māori descent, the movement's strategic direction is deliberately steeped in Māori concepts to resonate with those that call the Far North home.

The māramataka, or lunar calendar, is being used as a foundation right across the team's work says Healthy Families Far North kaiwhakahaere Shirleyanne Brown.

“Māramataka is a stem of mātauranga Māori that has been handed down through generations as a taonga for reading the environment and crafting future potential. At a glance, it is a measurement of marking time by the movements of the moon. On an existential level, the māramataka provides an ancient blueprint that informs the health and wellbeing of entire eco-systems via an intricate, rhythmical cycle of ebb and flow,” she says.

Healthy Families Far North has been partnering with Ahipara-based Te Ahikaaroa Trust in the integration of its work, from forward strategic planning to the co-design of the Kaitiāia Hospital community gardens to delivery of wānanga that will be working with marae clusters to map natural, local food sources with the Te Puna Ora Papakāinga initiative.

In early December, Te Ahikaaroa Trust founder Reuben Taipari will also be workshopping with kaimahi from Te Rūnanga o Te Rarawa, Te Rūnanga a Iwi o Ngāti Kahu, Northland District Health Board, Sport Northland, Department of Conservation in a bid to strengthen local prevention services across the whole community.



“Māori believe that the environment, including humans, are interconnected and influencing. The rise and fall of the moon is a transparent indicator of space and time that our ancestors observed and applied certain protocols to for each moon phase,” he says.

On a practical level, this could mean any number of things. Mental health services may be able to plan appropriate responses around times of high community need, DOC may be able to plant and prune at the optimal time and Sport Northland would be attune to the appropriate time to plan low or high energy physical activities within schools and communities.

“These are just potential examples. This mātauranga Māori is a taonga; we whakapapa to it and we can use it to interpret our use of time and sustainable activities within a modern-day context,” Reuben says.

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