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People power takes the lead in healthy Northland businesses

If the whakataukī rings true and the greatest thing is people, Northland businesses are truly great after the recent announcement of the annual Westpac Northland Business Excellence Awards 2018 winners.

This is the first year that the award categories had featured the guiding principles of Healthy Families NZ threaded throughout all of its criteria and Northland Chamber of Commerce CEO Tony Collins says virtually all of this year's entrants recognised the value of people, their workers and communities they operate in.

"All of the businesses, to some extent, undertook actions to demonstrate this in their leadership. Wherever possible – within the size of their business, availability of resources or nature of business – they tried to reward or accommodate these principles," he says.

Healthy Families NZ is a nationwide initiative that works with communities to improve the health of people where they live, learn, work and play. Healthy Families Far North kaiwhakahaere Shirleyanne Brown says the seven principles that guide the team's work in the Far North District include implementation at scale, collaboration for collective impact, equity of outcome, line-of-sight, adaptation, experimentation and leadership.

"These are the pou that form the foundation of our work across the Far North with our stakeholders and communities. The inclusion of them in this year's business excellence awards criteria is a direct result of our working relationship with the Northland Chamber of Commerce at a leadership level," she says.

Ohaeawai Community Education Trust, winner of the People Potential Judges Award, is an exemplar of a healthy, thriving business that demonstrates excellence across a number of the principle criteria.

An early education centre that operates on a combination of Reggio Emilia and Emmi Pickler teaching philosophies, it won acclaim over 40-plus other entrants for its sustainable business model that uses natural resources with a deep consideration for its environmental footprint.



Centre manager Liz Owen says the 10 staff are committed to providing high quality education for children in a beautifully aesthetic environment.

“We originally decided to set up because we felt that children, particularly in rural areas, were missing out. And that they were entitled to it. It's a birth right,” she says.

She says the evolution of the delightful interior space has happened as a result of extensive collaboration with the children, whānau and wider community; the next step will involve consultation and review of the outside environment to make it more “exciting and magical for the children”.

Judges said they were inspired by the passion, beliefs and vision of the centre managers in providing an amazing space that clearly demonstrates pride and effort in the development of the play spaces and rituals that support the children's learning.

In addition, the centre has made its mark as a veritable leader within the ECE sector as a result of its impressive progress. Liz says she is often approached by other centres for the sharing of ideas and professional development opportunities.

“It's great. It all comes down to what's best for the children. If we can share something that will make their lives more enriched, that's what it's all about. It really does take a village to raise a child,” she says.

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