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Raising gardens to raise healthy communities at Parkdale Reserve

The Kaitāia East community is stepping into a healthier future as it gets stuck in laying down Parkdale Reserve's first ever community gardens this week.

Members of the community action group – Ngā Maramara o Parata – and Te Rūnanga-a-Iwi o Ngāti Kahu took to their chainsaws, hammers and gumboots as they seized the opportunity of a fine afternoon to construct the raised beds on the Parkdale Crescent site.

In true community spirit, the timber has been donated by Juken NZ Ltd, the topsoil from the Te Hiku Sports Hub site and the seeds from a neighbouring resident, with additional transportation being provided by community whānau.

“We see this as an opportunity for our neighbourhood to grow. Our kaupapa is about whanaungatanga, manaakitanga and kōtahitanga by planting the seed. That seed is the wellbeing of our next generation and ensuring the nurturing of our future is supported by us of today,” says Te Rūnanga-a-iwi o Ngāti Kahu iwi liaison Hohepa Rameka.

The Parkdale community has been working closely with Healthy Families Far North in its redevelopment journey. Healthy Families Far North kaiwhakahaere Shirleyanne Brown says the team has played a crucial role in the scoping stage of the park's revitalisation by undergoing preliminary research on Kaitāia's green spaces, as part of its wider strategic approach, Ka Tipu Te Ora: Growing Health.

Focus group sessions, one-on-one interviews and literature review findings have resulted in an insightful collection of authentic data that is helping guide the response to the state of public green spaces in the township, she says.

“One of our research insights has shown us that more community gardens means more fresh kai for the Kaitāia community. The name Kaitāia suggests the area is overflowing with an abundance of food, and Far North District Council policy states community gardens exist for those who have insufficient private open space to engage in gardening. The creation of community gardens is a wonderful first step to bring people together as one to directly respond to what the community have told us,” she says.



Each raised bed will be adopted by four households in a system that will encourage ownership and sustainability as the season warms and they begin to bear produce.

Long-term resident Elaine Lloyd says the gardens are the beginning of a long-held dream and just the beginning of breathing life back into the reserve.

"This has been coming for a long time. I've been here for 40 years and I have a great granddaughter that will hopefully be able to play here. We don't want our kids playing on the roads, but that's the only place the kids have got to play in the winter time because it has been so wet and swampy," she says.

Also on the wish list for the park's upgrade are improved drainage, lighting, toilet facilities and a raft of beautification additions that the committee will be working with the Far North District Council and the Northland Regional Council to progress to implementation.

For now, residents and their children will be finishing off the raised beds and strategising on what's next in store for the space. All members of the community are welcome to an open meeting being held next Thursday November 2 at Te Rūnanga-a-Iwi o Ngāti Kahu, 21 Parkdale Crescent at 6.00pm.

CAPTION

Helping hands: Resident Elaine Lloyd and Ngā Maramara o Parata chairperson Sharlene Harris muck in laying out the foundations for Parkdale Reserve's first community gardens.

Ends

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