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### **Laying seeds for the rejuvenation of hospital-based community gardens in the Far North**

Healthy Families Far North, in partnership with the Northland District Health Board and Te Hiku communities, is on the verge of bringing back a heritage tradition of hospital-based community gardens in the Far North.

Kaitiāia Hospital has offered up surplus land to develop kai and rongoā gardens at its child and youth services facility, Te Roopu Kimiora. The hospital site previously housed large gardens at the site many years ago, but they have since declined.

The idea to bring the gardens back was first seeded at a meeting of the Healthy Families Far North Regional Leadership Forum leaders earlier in the year, with Northland District Health Board general manager Jeanette Wedding pitching it as an ideal marriage between primary and preventative healthcare.

“A hospital-based community garden has untold potential. As a means of providing pathways for training, feeding and treating patients and their whānau, economic capacity, food rescue and so forth. The possibilities are truly exciting,” Jeanette says.

She adds that if the Kaitiāia-based project flies, there is also the potential to transplant the concept to other Northland District Health Board-based sites across the region.

Healthy Families Far North kaiwhakahaere Shirleyanne Brown says her team has been involved in an intensive social innovation process in recent months, gathering insights from its prevention partnership group members, key informants and community focus groups.

This, with a view towards understanding where the opportunities and barriers lie and what solutions could be collectively designed to ensure sustainability.

“Our insights have validated what we already knew, but have more importantly provided a rich foundation of data from which to build from. For instance, we now know for certain that community gardens are more than a means of providing fresh produce to keep our bodies healthy. Our communities have told us that connection with Papatūānuku feeds our wairua and soothes our minds,” she says.



She adds the possibility of being able to consult with vulnerable clients in the calm surrounds of a thriving garden is a unique position for the service to be in.

The hospital community gardens project is part of a wider Healthy Families Far North approach – Ka Tipu Te Ora: Growing Health – which is looking at rejuvenating public green spaces right across the Te Hiku region.

“We have also been working with Te Rūnanga a Iwi o Ngāti Kahu, the Far North District Council and the Maramara a Parata community action group to look at how we can scale up the reinvention of Kaitiāia West’s Parkdale Reserve through local government policy. We are working closely with the Department of Conservation and kaumātua to promote the many outstanding tracks and reserves in our region through the art of indigenous storytelling. And we are also on the verge of launching Te Puna Ora Papakāinga – an initiative working with cluster marae to map our natural wild food sources,” she says.

The next step in the hospital community gardens initiative will be to reconvene the Kāhui Taupā (prevention partnership group) to present the insights and begin the concept design, incorporating the principles of māramataka.

Shirleyanne anticipates that the first sod will be turned before Christmas with a blessing ceremony.

“We’re going to have a BYO shovel party. Bring your own shovel. But we want to make sure that this isn’t going to be something that’s done ‘to’ the community, rather done ‘with’ the community and that we have a clear concept in place before the soil is even touched. Watch this space!” she says.

**CAPTION:**

Picture this: Te Roopu Kimiora presents a blank canvas of possibilities for the rejuvenation of hospital-based community gardens.

**Ends**

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