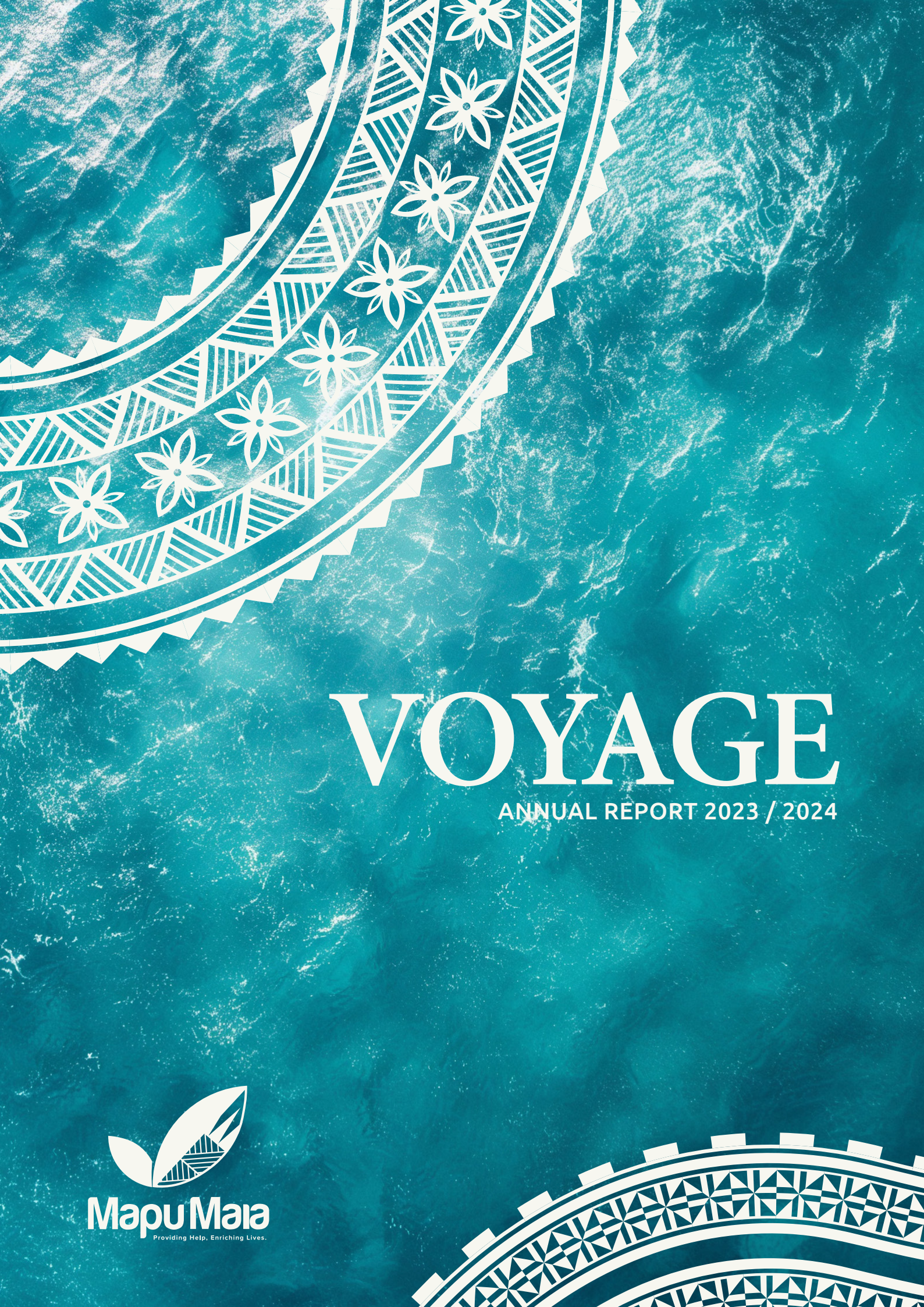




VOYAGE

ANNUAL REPORT 2023 / 2024



Mapu Maia
Providing Help, Enriching Lives.

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OUR MISSION

We are committed to empowering and supporting Pacific peoples in transformational ways toward healthy, resilient and prosperous futures.



A WORD FROM OUR CEO

Talofa lava, Fakalofa lahi atu, Kia orana, Nisa Bula Vinaka, Malo e Lelei and warm Pacific greetings.

It's been a tremendous year for Mapu Maia – a year of many firsts and great new achievements for the organisation and the team. We've done a huge amount of work and there is so much that I am proud of.

As our ancestors used the stars to navigate across the vast Pacific Ocean to reach their destination, we too have used our cultural values and lived experience to guide our approach and achieve better outcomes for our people.

I'd first like to say thank you to our wonderful community – to the funders and community groups who have supported us and made our work possible. Above all, a heartfelt thank you to our clients who have trusted us to walk alongside them.

A significant internal undertaking for us this past year has been the setting up of our own infrastructure. Formerly under the collective wing of PGF Group's shared services, we've now been able to transition into establishing our own infrastructure – including setting up our Financial, HR and Payroll system. This has taken a significant amount of time and effort and it's a real tribute to the team that we have now successfully completed the transition.

One of the biggest highlights of the year was the establishment of our Hawke's Bay office in November 2023. The catalyst for this was Cyclone Gabrielle. This devastating event brought everything to crisis point, including mental distress to the thousands of families affected in the region. We identified a desperate need for Pacific mental health and addiction support. The office was officially launched last year and now we have established clinical, Rainbow peer support, public health and Ta'iala services.

At the same time, we launched our Pacific rainbow service, providing help to our Pacific rainbow community in Hawke's Bay by providing peer support and clinical assistance. The year kicked off with the "Ia Fai Ma Sulu" Camp, an opportunity to bring together the Pacific Rainbow community to share and learn about mental health.

Another standout achievement was securing the national Pacific contract for Preventing and Minimising Gambling Harm, covering both prevention and

efficiencies, and provide us with better data.

We have weathered many challenges amid an uncertain

A heartfelt thank you to our clients who have trusted us to walk alongside them

- Tuala Pesio Ah-Honi

intervention. This saw us rapidly expand our services across the country, with gambling harm support now in Auckland, Christchurch, Hawke's Bay and Wellington.

We have several significant developments in the pipeline over the next 12 months. An important milestone will be the opening of a Mapu Maia Christchurch office, our first in the South Island. With the increase in Pacific populations in the motu over recent years, we've seen a corresponding increase in the need for services.

Training and upskilling our team are a priority for us, and we look forward to continuing our workforce development training. We're also upgrading our client management system to improve reporting and client management, to increase

climate, but we are confident we have the right systems and people to navigate safely through it all.

Once again, a big fa'afetai tele lava to our community partners, our stakeholders and especially to the community we serve.

We look forward to what the future has to bring as we continue to serve our Pasifika communities.

Malo 'aupito, Meitaki Maata, Fakaauae Lahi, Fa'afetai Fa'afetai tele lava

Tuala Pesio Ah-Honi
Mapu Maia Limited CEO



A WORD FROM OUR CHAIR

Nisa Bula Vinaka, Talofa lava, Malo e lelei and Kia Orana and Pacific greetings to you.

Our journey this past year has shown us how difficult life is for an increasing number of Pacific families who are trying to cope with mental distress, addictions, rising cost of living and social issues.

The evidence is all around us that our Pacific families and communities are struggling. At Mapu Maia, we take the experiences and stories of the families we support to heart as we navigate the best ways to meet their needs. That's why we made it a particular priority in 2024 to increase access to services by opening a new office in Hastings, providing programmes in mental health and addictions, Pacific rainbow services and Ta'iala community services.

This year we have also prioritised investing in our business infrastructure and systems as we continue to increase efficiencies and identify better ways of working. Our board are committed to implementing sound governance structure by upskilling ourselves to ensure we have the appropriate expertise and experience to govern and lead the organisation.

We continued to partner and collaborate with communities, supporting stakeholders at the forefront of addressing gambling harm and other addictions and the systemic challenges many families face.

We rolled out our strategic plan – to ensure Mapu Maia provides a culturally effective service and resources to the community we serve. Leading that strategy and realising that vision is our CEO, Tuala Pesio Ah-Honi. Her

leadership of the organisation has been outstanding amid external pressures and uncertainty.

External pressures are real, as are the interrelated crises of natural disasters, funding, high cost of living, and growing inequality. But we are confident we have the right strategy and vision to withstand them.

Mapu Maia has grown exponentially over the past 12 months, and we are proud of what we've achieved. We strive to support the organisation's growth by ensuring stability and sustainability. We applaud our frontline workforce and the hard work they do each day to support their clients and their families, ensuring they stay relevant and effective.

The board extends deep gratitude as we acknowledge the former Mapu Maia Chair, Rev Uesifili Unasa. We wish to thank him for his eight years of hard work and dedication to the Mapu Maia service.

We also acknowledge the PGF Group Board and Asian Family Services Board for supporting Mapu Maia's transition to full autonomy and independence.

Mapu Maia's mission is 'to empower and support Pacific peoples in transformational ways toward healthy, resilient and prosperous futures'. The board is confident that Mapu Maia – thanks to strategies that place families at the forefront – is well placed to realise its vision. We remain committed to supporting families into 2025 and beyond.

Vinaka

Maikali Kiloni
Chair Mapu Maia Limited

We applaud our frontline workforce and the hard work they do each day to support their clients and their families.

- Maikali Kiloni



OUR PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH

The Mapu Maia public health approach has 6 key elements, each driven by Va Tagata, our Pacific engagement model. Everything we do is through a cultural lens, that is through an understanding of Pacific cultural nuances, values, principles and best practices. We focus on preventing gambling harm and work to minimise its risk/impact on the individual, family and community. The following are the key elements of our public health approach.

- » Harm Reduction and Strengths-based – we work alongside the community to facilitate their needs and empower action.
- » Evidence and best practice.
- » Lived Experience and Peer Support perspective is embedded in planning, design and delivery.
- » Locally Driven – our programmes are nationally co-ordinated and locally implemented because every community is different.
- » Partnership – We collaborate with community groups, health and social services for a stronger, more cohesive and connected public health response so that all Pacific and priority populations can live free from gambling harm.
- » Evaluation – A key facet of our approach is constant monitoring and evaluation of outcomes.
- » Equitable Outcomes - Working to achieve equitable outcomes for Pacific people is a cornerstone of our public health programmes.

VA
TAGATA



EQUITABLE
OUTCOMES

MEET OUR BOARD



Moefiainu Daisy Lavea-Timo

Daisy Lavea-Timo has two decades of experience teaching, mentoring and people-weaving across multiple spheres. A former English and drama teacher, Southern Regional Manager of the Ministry of Youth Development and Engagement Advisor for Regenerate Christchurch, Daisy is passionate about connecting talanoa across sectors, especially anything youth-related. In 2020 Daisy founded Cross-Polynate, with the aim of combining a team of Avengers to improve outcomes for people and communities across the motu and Moana-Nui-A-Kiwa. A proud wife and mum, Daisy has 'a few degrees' from the University of Canterbury, dabbles in Rugby League and is the 2017 New Zealand Slam Poetry Champion.



Meleane Burgess

Meleane Burgess was born and raised in Samoa. She moved to New Zealand to complete her final year of high school, later furthering her education at the University of Waikato. She is a Chartered Member of the Institute of Directors and an Associate of the Chartered Governance Institute New Zealand. Meleane has extensive experience in governance and advisory roles. She is Managing Director of Dynamic Advisory Ltd, an Independent Director on the Public Trust Board, Council member of the University of Waikato and a Trustee of Mahi Mihinare – Anglican Action. In 2022, Meleane won the Pacific Governance Leader and Rising Governance Star awards at the Women in Governance Awards and was recognised as a Pacific Woman in Business at the 2023 Waikato Pacific Business Excellence Awards. She was part of the 2024 cohort of the Global Women Breakthrough Leadership Programme. A former member of the Ministry of Social Development Pacific Reference Group where she continues her advocacy for better outcomes for all Pacific peoples living in Aotearoa New Zealand. Away from work, she enjoys spending time with her husband and three children, as well as working in her garden.



Anne Fitisemanu

Anne Fitisemanu is of Niuean and Samoan descent. A leader with an extensive career across the education, health, corporate and Not-For Profit sectors. She is driven by a deep-rooted commitment to create opportunities and promote equality in the workplace and beyond for people of diverse ethnicity, gender and ability. Her passion for helping others stems from her Pacific cultural background and personal experience with economic hardship. Anne's former role as the CEO for TupuToa focused on achieving equity through building pathways for Māori and Pacific people to access roles in corporate Aotearoa. As the newly appointed CEO for Make A Wish (MAW) Foundation NZ, Anne is furthering her commitment to equity by ensuring the MAW Foundation serves all Aotearoa's communities. Anne has built a reputation for breaking down barriers and inspiring others to break through limiting beliefs to recognise anything is possible through focus, commitment and self-belief. Anne serves on a number of NFP boards, the largest being Awhina Plunket where she was the first Pacific Peoples appointment. Anne is also a member of the Institute of Directors.



Maikali Kilioni

Maikali Kilioni was born and raised in Fiji. He has worked in the addiction sector for over two decades and is serving his second and final term as a board member of the Drug and Alcohol Practitioners' Association Aotearoa-New Zealand (DAPAAANZ). He is also a founding member of DRUA, the Pacific Addiction Network, where he sits on the executive committee. He also currently holds the role of Industry Engagement Lead Pacific for Toitū Te Waiora in the Workforce Development Council.

A registered and accredited clinical supervisor, Maik also works privately as an addiction and mental health practitioner, contracting with the courts through the Ministry of Justice and serving as an auditor with Te Whatu Ora. His extensive work experience and sector knowledge led to his appointment as a Wellbeing Adviser for the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care in Aotearoa New Zealand from 2020 to 2022. A dedicated volunteer, Maik has been actively involved with the Fijian community in Wellington for decades.



OUR PROGRAMMES

"Our Mapu Maia values are not just written on paper – we live and breathe them. We bring the alofa from our homes into work, then take that love out into the community."

– Lisa ah Honi-Uini, Mapu Maia Ta'iala team lead

Engagement with high schools

With Pasifika youth a priority group for Mapu Maia, we collaborated with three Auckland schools to raise awareness about gambling harm: De La Salle College and McAuley Girls High – both South Auckland; and Kelston Girls High in West Auckland.

CASE STUDY: DE LA SALLE COLLEGE

This pilot programme was a collaborative effort involving the school's social workers and our internal teams. After one-on-one talanoa with the students to build trust, we held workshops that were a safe space for those affected by gambling addiction to discuss their experiences. They could also talk about the broader impact of gambling harm, including the mental health challenges faced by their families. The aim was to equip students with coping strategies and foster resilience, helping them navigate the interplay between gambling, online gaming, and mental health. By integrating these workshops into the school's support system, we sought to create a holistic approach to minimising gambling-related harms and enhancing overall student wellbeing.

Since our sessions risked triggering some deep emotions, the gambling harm clinical team played an important role in the programme. They were involved in the therapeutic assessments and talanoa with the school and the students.

Programme lead Raymond Une says, "I started to see change in the students. They began to open up as the sessions were delivered. It became a space where they could talanoa about their emotions and feelings where they normally couldn't in a classroom or at home. It was a space of trust and acceptance. The change rippled onto other students, and the entire group began to strengthen their brotherhood. It was a space of lightness and trust where vulnerable conversations were held".

Outcomes

- » After the first session we found that the students were very expressive about their challenges, not only with gambling within their families, but also academically and life in general.
- » The students shared that they felt they had to take on the burden of their families and this stress was impacting their performance.
- » Students exhibited positive changes in attitudes towards gambling, recognising it is a serious issue and understanding the importance of responsible gambling behaviours. However, while some were willing to stop, others acknowledged they were struggling to change their behaviour.
- » Overall, students were well engaged and were looking forward to ongoing sessions.

Church programme in Wellington

Mapu Maia is bringing its message of hope and empowerment to Pasifika communities through a series of public health workshops delivered entirely in Samoan across 12 parishes. The purpose of the programme is to bridge the gap between the youth and their elders. Older Pasifika tend to shy away from talking about mental health and this negatively impacts the younger generation when they face their own challenges. The programme is delivered through skits, performances, workshops, talanoa, and presentations that bring everyone together. In the Wellington region, Mapu Maia has taken the engagement even further.

We have partnered with the local Porirua parish to amplify Pasifika voices in the city's governance. With the support of health promoter Leaupepe Anthony Leaupepe, over 100 community members contributed to the Porirua City Council Class 4 Gambling Policy Review. Through guided talanoa sessions and submission forms, Mapu Maia empowered individuals to share

their perspectives on critical policies impacting their lives. This initiative not only strengthened community awareness but also showcased the power of collective action, as Pasifika voices came together to advocate for meaningful change. It is a testament to the importance of culturally tailored approaches in public health and policy engagement.

Outcomes

- » The initiative delivered awareness presentations to Kiribati, Tuvaluan, and Samoan communities.
- » Partnerships with Pacific churches enabled over 100 submissions on Porirua's gambling policy review.
- » We did two nationally-broadcast radio interviews on PMN 531.
- » We established new relationships with Ara Institute and NZMA Institute for further outreach opportunities.

This initiative not only strengthened community awareness but also showcased the power of collective action.



I only have gratitude, to have a space where I could talk to my brothers, to strengthen my relationship, to feel more confident. It's a space I look forward to every week.

– Programme participant

Together we Thrive

This series of community events hosted in partnership with Te Whatu Ora aimed to improve access to screening and healthcare for our Pasifika communities through a family-centred approach. This included giving people the opportunity to screen for problem gambling and to take part in brief interventions.

We focused on four Auckland neighbourhoods with some of the largest Pasifika populations: Māngere, Ōtara, Glen Innes, West Auckland.

Our project team lead worked collectively with our

clinical, health promotion and administration teams to deliver the best possible outcomes. We also collaborated and partnered with community groups, government agencies, health providers and celebrities to make the events a success. To remove any barriers to connecting with families, we arranged to have speakers fluent in Samoan, Tongan or Cook Island languages at each event.

On the days themselves, kids' activities, music and other live entertainment helped to create a warm, relaxed atmosphere and make a fun day out for the whole family,

Outcomes

- » New referrals to the clinical team: 19 Community engagements: 771
- » Post-event survey of 268 people delivered the following response:

Was the event helpful and informative? 98% agreed or strongly agreed.

Do you want more events like this? 99% agreed

- » Do you want more events like this? 99% agreed

Kids' activities, music, and other live entertainment helped to create a warm, relaxed atmosphere.

Post Cyclone Gabrielle support

On February 14, 2023, Cyclone Gabrielle lashed the Hawke's Bay, leaving more than 70,000 people isolated and vulnerable. All lifelines were wiped out – including health services, power, roads, wastewater, drinking water, internet, and cellphone networks. As is so often the case, this crisis laid bare existing gaps and inequalities. It was against this backdrop that Mapu Maia identified a desperate need for Pacific mental health and addiction support. This culminated in the official opening of our Hawke's Bay Office in November 2023, marking a significant milestone in expanding our services to the region. Having a base in the area has allowed us to act as a vital hub for delivering mental health, addiction support, and community-based services – with a strong focus on Pasifika communities.

Through the establishment of a dedicated, culturally responsive team, the Hawke's Bay branch of Mapu Maia is committed to providing accessible, high-quality care tailored to the unique needs of Pasifika individuals and families.

I'm so proud of our team, the way they all got in there and were willing to help out wherever they could.

- Tapusoa Herman Ah Kiong, Mid Central Manager

Access and Choice:

The Access and Choice contract for the Hawke's Bay office has significantly improved access to mental health and addiction support, especially for the Pasifika community. The increase in referrals is an indication of the positive impact of a culturally responsive and accessible service.

Thanks to a collaborative Hawke's Bay team made up of two clinicians, two Ta'iala/Community Navigators, a Rainbow Peer Support, and an office administrator we have been able to also address broader socio-economic challenges. On the following pages we look at some of the highlights.



Rainbow support

Mapu Maia's Rainbow Peer Support provides a culturally respectful and supportive space for our Pasifika rainbow community in Hawke's Bay. We promote mental health and wellbeing through sharing experiences, community connections, and advocacy for the rights and inclusion of the Pasifika LGBTQIA+ community.

La Fai Ma Sulu ('To Be the Light')
To overcome cultural barriers to discussing mental wellbeing among rainbow Pasifika, we held a two-day camp, La Fai Ma Sulu, with education sessions and workshops. As we were discussing sensitive topics such as personal sexual development and sexual health, our clinical lead was present to support people through the activities.

Outcome:

- » Participants were grateful to have a safe environment that allowed them to express themselves, and which reduced the stigma around seeking support and accessing services. The ladies have requested the camp be held yearly and that we extend the opportunity to others in the Rainbow community.

Le Lumana'i Siva Academy

This exciting initiative brought together 45 students from nine HB schools to celebrate their unique identity through cultural arts and performance. There has always been a strong rivalry between schools in the region, and the Academy's goal was to create activities that would reconnect the students in a positive, empowering setting.

Challenges:

Leading the project required courage and faith from our Rainbow Peer Support Annie Kaio. For many students this was their first encounter with rainbow leadership. Initially, they felt uncomfortable approaching Annie.

Winning over parents to the vision of the project. Annie presented at a parents' night, explaining how cultural dance and music can be effective tools for addressing mental health. Our rainbow youth were unsure other students would be open-minded about their sexuality.

The programme:

Over 12 weeks students learned cultural songs and dance, which they performed in an end-of-programme showcase. The schedule comprised weekly practices, group sessions, feedback and evaluation, parent sessions to keep families in the loop and to gain their buy-in, group activities, pick-ups and drop-off.

Outcomes

- » A strong sense of community developed and solid friendships were formed. Students who had arrived with low self-esteem found that connecting with their cultural heritage gave them a feeling of pride and identity.
- » Parents noticed positive change in their children after they joined the Academy.
- » The experience instilled Pasifika pride, raised awareness of mental health and provided a platform for displaying talents and creativity.
- » The videos of our students' performing went viral on social media. The high number of shares and likes caught the media's attention, leading to interviews with Radio Samoa and Radio NZ about Mapu and Le Lumana'i.

Tapusoa Herman Ah Kiong is Mapu Maia's mid-central manager and mental health and addictions clinician. He shares his experience of the team's rainbow initiatives:

"One of the best outcomes from our work in the Hawke's Bay over the past year has been the shift in acceptance and awareness of our rainbow community. Especially for our youth. The Siva Academy was the shifting point. Initially we were concerned that the youth wouldn't be drawn to it, but we used the cultural performing arts to open our youth up and to connect them. Just seeing them come together, working together, laughing was awesome.

On a personal level, it was so wonderful to see the growth in my son, who attended the Siva programme. He has always

wanted to connect with his culture and this allowed him to not only do that but also extend his group of Pasifika friends. He came in very uncoordinated, but he worked hard. He was practising moves around the house, singing, practising lyrics! He got real, real close to Annie and the tutors and the students, and a lot of the senior students. So for me that was a breakthrough moment. Not just for him, but I could see it in the eyes of a lot of students, especially the ones that haven't been raised in their culture. Two brothers arrived who were very shy, and over that 12-week period I just saw the growth

in their confidence, the ability to communicate and engage with everyone involved in the programme.

This was all down to our rainbow peer support Annie. She led us and we followed. It was down to her ability to share her culture gift, in the performing arts. She wasn't always nice! She was harsh when she needed to be and was more than happy to say even to the tutors "I am expecting more from you guys!". But she was also loving and empathetic when it was required. Only Annie could have made this such a success."

Christchurch Eastern Eagles

Uprising Hauora

Experience: Strengthening Whānau and Wairua through Sport

UHE is a whānau-centric programme delivered to the Eastern Eagles Rugby League Club (Aranui) with the focus to have talanoa and discussions to raise awareness of mental health, gambling harm and wellness and wellbeing without judgement or prejudice for the sports community.

Hoping to overcome the barriers and images of misconceptions we have of our athletes as strong without weakness, the UHE is a space to allow our athletes to share their most inner thoughts and feeling, helping shape vulnerability as a form of strength and connectedness to relationships they have with people and their community.

The initiative integrates counselling and social support, addressing gambling harm,



wellness and wellbeing by rediscovering and re-empowering the values of physical, mental, spiritual emotional wellbeing in a social and cultural context.

The programme promotes greater awareness of gambling harm and builds resilience within the community. Key highlights have included replacing traditional bonus number fundraisers with “I Got Your Back” T-shirts, monthly

wāhine group sessions, and creating alcohol-free bonding activities for the men’s team. By prioritising cultural connectedness and positive engagement, UHE strengthens whānau and empowers the Eastern Eagles to develop as one united, thriving community.

Seki Race

In March 2024, we hosted the Hawke’s Bay office’s very first event, a community sports day that brought together 81 Pasifika youth from diverse communities. Our vision was to help our young people be resilient and supportive of each other in reaching their goals. Hosted like an amazing race, the goal was to level up our young people’s potential by equipping, empowering, and enabling them

to navigate challenging life experiences.

Nine stations were set up for different challenges – from relay races to coconut scraping, apple bobbing to an inflatable obstacle course. Prizes included sports shop vouchers, T-shirts and hats. A highlight was having all the helpers and Mapu Maia staff compete in a 100m dash!

Outcomes

- » Increased community engagement.
- » Youth felt a sense of belonging and value within in the community. They were also empowered to be vocal about their needs within the communities/families.
- » Positive connections – through peer support and collaboration.
- » Youth feedback – Those who took part said the event was both enjoyable and insightful, helping them feel more prepared to tackle challenges in their lives.
- » The success of this initiative has laid the groundwork for future programmes that combine fun, cultural relevance, and personal development

A lot of the time our youth will close themselves off when they face challenges. So we gave them challenges along with opportunities to work as a team. It was all about showing them they can call on people around them, their friends and communities, to get through those hard times.

- Tapusoa Herman Ah Kiong, Mid Central Manager



OUR GROWTH

The past 12 months has seen a tremendous growth in our Mapu Maia services, its programmes and workforce. With this exponential growth comes greater accountability to ensure high quality outcomes and impact are met and achieved.

Across the regions our service model focussed on the family at the centre of all service programmes and community projects.

In all program design, planning and delivery the Mapu Maia approach is applied, and delivery of services are both online and in community spaces where Pacific people reside, work, socialise and worship.

One key component is the partnership and collaboration with community groups and stakeholders where a more cohesive and connected Pacific health response is achieved.

We work with local government, government agencies, the gambling industry and other sectors to advocate for harm minimisation, advocate for Pacific voices and raise awareness of inequities.

The Mapu Maia Public health approach is multi-pronged with 6 key elements. The approach is also driven by *Vā Tagata*, our Pacific engagement model and is incorporated into all the key elements. This is done through a cultural lens – that is, through an understanding of Pacific cultural nuances, values, principles and best practices. We focus on the prevention of harm and work to minimise the risk/ impact of gambling, alcohol and other addictions to the individual, aiga/whānau/ family and community.

Effective engagement is crucial to the work we do as we build rapport and trust to break down barriers and increase access to services is key.



Ta'iala team

The Ta'iala Team at Mapu Maia is dedicated to supporting Pasifika youth and families across New Zealand through culturally sensitive, community-focused services. By fostering strong relationships and promoting mental health and wellbeing, the team delivers impactful workshops, events, and organisations such as Leave Your Mark and Mafoa ae Ata. These initiatives inspire resilience, strengthen identity, and encourage open discussions in safe spaces. Through collaborations with schools, organisations, and local communities, Ta'iala continues to expand its reach, empowering Pasifika youth and families to build brighter futures. We strive to create a holistic approach to minimising gambling-related harms and enhancing overall student wellbeing.

We tell people 'We are here to listen. Come and rest.' That is what Mapu Maia means; we are a safe haven. We walk alongside people and ensure they get to where they need to be.

Opening of Hawke's Bay office

The Mapu Maia Hawke's Bay Office officially opened its doors in November 2023, marking a significant milestone in expanding our services to the region. This office serves as a vital hub for delivering mental health, addiction support, and community-based services, with a strong focus on Pasifika communities. Through the establishment of a dedicated, culturally responsive team, the Hawke's Bay office is committed to providing accessible, high-quality care tailored to the unique needs of Pasifika individuals and families.





LIVED EXPERIENCE

As part of our uniquely Pacific approach, we not only deliver programmes to help address harm in our communities, but we walk alongside our tagata ola every step of the way. For us to do this with authenticity, we offer peer support through 'lived experience' workers. Alongside our clinicians, these team members help individuals and families – with empathy and without judgement – to navigate their challenges and guide them on their journey to wellness. Our two peer supports share their stories.



Mele

Mele works to support people affected by gambling harm. Mele's journey with gambling harm began as a young married mother of four. Having never learned to budget, she says she found it difficult to make ends meet. When Mele met her second husband, he recognized she 'had a problem' and asked her not to gamble while they were together. Mele stopped gambling for seven years but resumed after that relationship ended. "I had no one to hold me responsible," she says.

Mele spent over a decade trying to fight her gambling urge –

including self-exclusion from the casino – but without success. Pokie machines were cropping up everywhere, so she turned to those instead. "I felt so bad, so much self-loathing."

A turning point came after Mele had reunited with her second husband. She succumbed to her addiction again while he was away in Samoa for three months, using money from his business. "But he forgave me and said, 'Get the help you think you need – I am here by your side'." That was when Mele reached out to Mapu Maia.

"I had never wanted to before – you are scared, thinking the whole community will know your business. But I got this wonderful counsellor who shared a personal story and that relaxed me. It was like she was admitting she's not perfect either. She set up a [gambling support] group for myself and two other ladies."

In her role as lived experience peer support, Mele now runs group sessions and works alongside clinicians to help others turn their lives around. This includes attending court to support clients.

"I went with a clinician to support a young man at his court case. The judge said she was referring him for diversion [avoiding full prosecution] because a) he had done a lot of community service b) he had repaid all the money c) Mapu Maia had provided a letter detailing the help he'd had and 'there was a Mapu Maia employee in the room to support'. I loved that. It gave me a feeling of how useful we are for this sort of role."

This realisation in the value of her contribution was reinforced during Mele's first client visit.

"I didn't realise how much people need the lived experience. A clinician asked me to go with her to visit a lady who didn't want anyone to know her business because she was embarrassed. The lady gave permission for me to visit. When we arrived, you could tell she really had a wall up. But I gave her a bit of my story, and we both ended up crying. I said 'I know what the addiction means, I know right now what is going on in your mind. I want you to know there is hope and I am here for you.'"

Annie

Annie Kaio is the Mapu Maia peer support for rainbow youth in Hawke's Bay. Annie is a Samoan born and raised fa'afafine working to 'change the narrative' around the region's rainbow population, helping to break down barriers to inclusion.

Hawke's Bay's rainbow community is growing, but inclusion and acceptance remain an ongoing challenge. A large part of Annie's role as Rainbow Peer Support involves creating projects that bring the whole community together, opening up a space for rainbow and non-rainbow to connect, engage and share positive experiences.

about the issues they face. With Annie in the role of Programme Director, it was also an ideal platform to challenge negative perceptions around rainbow identity.

"I needed so much courage to even start this because I knew these kids knew nothing about rainbow, only what they see and hear on social media. But I said to myself, 'your race or identity or culture don't matter; if you have the ability to bring about change, you deserve a seat at the table'."

Annie says it was one of the best experiences of her life. The students went from "walking on



works one-on-one with rainbow youth who are facing challenges both within their families and at school. "They can open up to me and express their emotions. Being a lived experience, I've walked this path and know exactly what they are talking about."

Where necessary, Annie will refer individuals to Mapu Maia's clinical team for counselling. However, she will remain present at these sessions if the students wish. Annie relishes being able to give rainbow youth advice and opportunities that were not available to her growing up. "Being born and raised in the islands, we never had these spaces, we were never taught about mental health. It was always swept under the mat. What I love most about my role is bringing awareness to these rainbow peers so they can have a voice and fight for what is right for us. I don't want these kids to have the same experience as me because there are so many services that can help them. I want everyone to respect the rainbow Pacific community."

What I love most about my role is bringing awareness to these rainbow peers so they can have a voice

"Being inclusive all starts with us. What I say to the rainbow community is 'you need to be able to work and deliver to give yourself a good reputation, so we have that respect from the community.' That is where we break the stigma of stereotyping and misjudgment."

One Mapu Maia project Annie is especially proud of is the Le Lumana'i Siva Academy, which brought together over 50 students from different high schools. The 12-week initiative aimed to connect Samoan students to their heritage through traditional song and dance, and to create a safe space for youth to connect and open up

eggshells" around her to forming a close bond.

"They told me 'We used to see you around but didn't think we'd be able to sit down and have a conversation with you.' The kids have so much respect towards the community now."

The experience was also empowering for rainbow youth taking part. One student told Annie, 'I want to be part of the academy but I don't want to dance with the boys'. After first checking with the parents that it was okay for their son to join the female performers, Annie gave the go-ahead. Annie also





VOYAGE

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Mapu Maia
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