



Volunteer News

Quarterly pānui – March 2026

Kia ora koutou

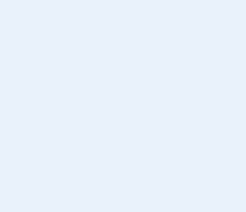
It's been an exciting year for Whānau Āwhina Plunket. Welcome to our March issue of Volunteer News. It has been a busy start of the year, and we are pleased to share some highlights of our mahi in this edition.

We were honoured to attend the events at this year's Waitangi Day Festival, as guests of Ngāti Hine Health Trust. We were proud to show our commitment to being a Tangata Tiriti organisation and walking alongside whānau Māori in meaningful ways.

Also in February, we celebrated the start of Lunar New Year and the Year of the Horse. It was great to see our kaimahi representing Plunket and meeting whānau at the Chinese New Year Festival and Market Day in Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland.

We also experienced a challenging few weeks across Aotearoa with many communities bearing the brunt of extreme weather events. We send our love to all of those who were affected. If you or your young ones feel anxious or overwhelmed and want someone to talk to, now or during a future weather event, please reach out as we are here for you.

Ngā mihi nui,
Fiona Kingsford, Chief Executive.



Plunket at Waitangi Day celebration

Our Northland team and members of our leadership team joined the events at this year's Waitangi Day Festival, as guests of Ngāti Hine Health Trust. Our fantastic Northland team worked alongside the Trust and hosted a chill-out zone, creating a dedicated space for parents and tamariki needing a break. "It was a privilege to attend Waitangi Day with the team this year. This was my first time coming to Waitangi on Waitangi Day, so it was a special experience for me, especially seeing the waka row in," said Amber Hallamore-Russell, Community Services Coordinator and Injury Prevention Coordinator.



Pictured: Clinical Leader Emma Chittenden, Plunket Nurse Jasmine Correa, Te Pou Whakarae - Chief Advisor Dr Hera Black, Board Chair Fiona Wiremu, Clinical Leader Amber Morton, Chief Nurse Dr Zoe Tipa, Board member Tarati Blair-Hunt, Kaiāwhina Cherrie Christy-Hita, and at front: Plunket Nurse Pranita Devi, Kaiāwhina Kyla Moore, Community Karitane Kelsey Hill, Kaiāwhina Jenn Ruka.

Playgroups respond to changing needs of whānau



Justyna Szarek, Annalee Hayward, and Daria Barbashina are behind the success of Plunket's Russian Playgroup. Photo: Ke-Xin Li of Radio New Zealand

Our community services team offer amazing playgroups across Aotearoa in response to the ever-changing needs of tamariki and their whānau. Community services coordinator Justyna Szarek supports cultural playgroups in Auckland.

Tell us all about the Russian Playgroup.

Justyna: It started nearly two years ago in response to the growing community of young Russian-speaking families in the areas I look after. I was already running a Japanese group and a few baby and toddler groups in the area, and it was during one of those baby groups on a Monday that two Russian mums came in. So, it started from there and has really evolved. People travel from all over Auckland to Meadowbank for it.

Is being able to offer a cultural playgroup like this unique to Plunket?

Justyna: Yes, definitely—and the fact that Plunket is so supportive of it. And I can see the difference it is making, especially for new mums who want to connect with other new mums in their language and with a similar background.

Your volunteers are on the ground running the playgroups each day – are they easy to find?

Justyna: My ad for volunteers is always up, if that answers your question! I always prefer to have two volunteers per group so that if one is sick, the other can cover and the playgroup can still go ahead that day for the parents who really come to rely on them for connection and support. But it's also good for the volunteers, so they can build a friendship with one another, especially if they are new to New Zealand.



Clinic welcomes local MP for immunisation visit



Our team in Whanganui were pleased to welcome their local MP Carl Bates and his gorgeous daughter Bonnie-Ann into their clinic for a vaccination from a Plunket nurse. The team spoke to Carl about the impact that the immunisation pilot is having on whānau, as well as a general kōrero about the other wonderful services our team deliver in the area. Run in partnership with Health New Zealand, the pilot aims to provide more opportunities for whānau to access childhood immunisations in their community.

How Plunket helped new mum Jess



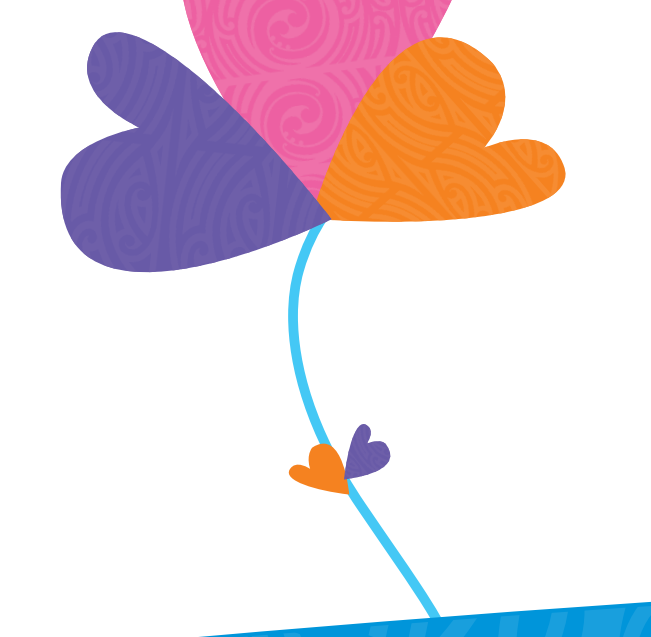
This year's Tax Appeal shares the story of māmā Jess and her mental health struggles after welcoming pēpi, Lachlan. Lachlan arrived suddenly—nine weeks early—and spent time in a neonatal unit. When he came home after several weeks, Jess says, "I felt my mental health slipping quite drastically... more than just the baby blues. Almost like everything we had been through had just caught up with me."

Daniel could see Jess's mental health take a turn for the worse, and encouraged her to open up to her Plunket nurse. Jess's nurse referred her to the Plunket Perinatal Adjustment Programme (PPNAP) which is available in Canterbury and Dunedin. It offers free, one-on-one mental health support for mothers with babies under one year.

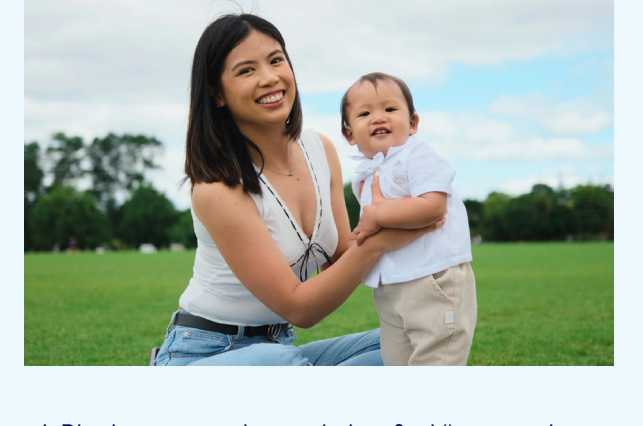
[Read more from Jess](#)

Bell Gully summer interns

We are grateful to the many businesses around the country who give their time to support Plunket. Bell Gully summer interns pitched in at Plunket for a volunteer day, spring cleaning at Karori Plunket in Pōneke, Wellington, and at Meadowbank Plunket in Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland. "It is a privilege to help this valuable community-based organisation," said Bell Gully.



Client story



A Plunket nurse who made her feel "seen and heard" meant the world to Jan as new mum.

"When I became a mum, I didn't realise how many questions, worries, and what-ifs would fill my mind every day. My son is now one year old, and looking back, one of the biggest blessings in my motherhood journey has been our Plunket nurse.

"Plunket isn't just about check-ups, it's about people like her who truly care, who make new mums feel supported and never alone," she says.

[Read Jan's story](#)



New Year Honours recognition for Plunket volunteer



Congratulations to Queenstown volunteer Ella Wilson for her recognition in the 2026 New Year Honours. Ella, a life member of Plunket, was recognised for her services to Plunket. Ella has been a volunteer since 1966 on committees in Lower Hutt, Dunedin, Greymouth, Oamaru and Tawa. She was also a national councillor in Wellington before joining the Queenstown committee in 1995. What a well-deserved honour!

BestStart Butterfly Appeal Week is Coming!

BestStart centres across Aotearoa will be hosting fundraising events and activities to support Whānau Āwhina Plunket. You don't need to have a child at BestStart to get involved—everyone is welcome!

How you can support:

Join local events and Plunket checks

Keep an eye out for activities happening at BestStart centres during Appeal Week (23–27 March). Plunket clinical and community kaimahi will be visiting selected centres to offer services too! Just contact your local centre to let them know you'd like to pop in.

Cute tees for cuties

You can purchase adorable BestStart Butterfly Appeal t-shirts for your little ones, with all proceeds going to Plunket. The t-shirts go on sale from 9am, 20 March until 5pm, 30 March (freight charges apply).



[Buy a t-shirt](#)



Online Perinatal Wellbeing Service launches

Jess's story shows the importance of support that Plunket can provide to whānau and new mums. That's why Plunket is proud to launch the new Online Perinatal Wellbeing Service, which is initially focused on supporting whānau in the Waikato. This free, online perinatal mental health service supports parents and caregivers who are experiencing mild to moderate distress, anxiety or depressive symptoms and who have children aged up to 5 years. Plunket will pilot this service to test and refine a model that could support wider national delivery in the future.

Ringing in the Year of the Horse



Image: Plunket Nurses Dandan Wang, Yolanda Yu and Maggie Zeng, with Principal Advisor, Priority Populations Vivian Cheung, and Community Services Manager Andrew Lin.

Whānau Āwhina Plunket staff were proud to attend the Chinese New Year Festival and Market Day at the Auckland Showgrounds for the very first time. The heart of our presence at the festival was the opportunity to engage with the village that raises a child. We met many dedicated grandparents who play a crucial role in childcare highlighting the importance of extended family.

Whānau feedback

Check out some of the latest feedback we've received about the work we do.

"As an older mum, I was looking to meet other mums in the same bracket as my friends all had children when they were younger. The PIN group helped with that. We still talk most days, share our amazing baby stories and have supported one another in hard times."

– on Plunket in the Neighbourhood (PIN) groups, one of the community groups we offer

"As a first-time mama, we navigated so many uncertainties in those first months with our pēpi. Our Plunket nurse was approachable and non-judgemental yet so knowledgeable. The advice and support we received changed our experience as first time parents for the better. We were so grateful to open our home to Plunket."

– on one of our Plunket nurses

If you no longer wish to receive this newsletter, please let us know by emailing annalee.hayward@plunket.org.nz

