



\$100,000 boost to extend Whānau Āwhina Plunket services in South Island rural communities

Funding from the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) will enable Whānau Āwhina Plunket to extend its volunteer-driven community services to additional rural communities throughout the South Island.

The grant of \$100,000 will be used on a range of initiatives over the next year, such as running playgroups, hosting coffee mornings, delivering injury prevention training and continuing its Give People Support Service, which matches families with new-born babies to volunteers who provide extra support. The latest grant brings total MPI funding to \$207,000.

“Whānau Āwhina Plunket is going that extra mile to ensure people living in remote rural areas can access their whānau support services,” says Nick Story, MPI’s director for rural communities and farming support.

“The regular opportunities for face-to-face contact make a big difference to the health and wellbeing of both parents and their children, and a mix of activities and support is available tailored for each region.

“We’re helping to extend the reach of their services to improve the mental wellbeing of rural people. A pillar of the Government and sector’s Fit for a Better World roadmap is ensuring we have strong, thriving and sustainable rural communities, something this Whānau Āwhina Plunket initiative contributes to.”

Support from MPI and other funders will ensure a variety of sessions are hosted across the South Island every week, along with delivery of training workshops and an injury prevention programme.

Whānau Āwhina Plunket community service manager Jane Denley says the regular meetups include playgroups, parent support groups, coffee connection groups, a swim programme for young children, music and movement groups, a baby massage group and a mums’ exercise group. In addition to face-to-face groups, people living rurally are able to access virtual educational sessions called Parenting Bites.

“These virtual sessions grew out of COVID-19 when whānau and communities were unable to meet face-to face,” says Jane Denley.

“We plan to continue these going forward, as they have been particularly popular with people in rural communities who may otherwise have to travel to get to sessions.”

More than 10,000 parents, babies, and children participate in Whānau Āwhina Plunket’s Southern Rural Family Support Services each year.

“The uniqueness is that we bring the services to people - removing the barrier of access,” says Jane Denley.

“The groups are important because they offer parents the chance to meet others with similar circumstances, and to have honest discussions about what they are experiencing in a supportive and non-judgmental environment.”

The community services are open to anyone, not just people who have previously used Whānau Āwhina Plunket.

Local communities shape the direction of their local programme. For example, in Winton, a whānau rōpū has formed for those who want a Te Reo Māori immersion opportunity for themselves and their tamariki.

Participants in the Kawakawa group in Kaikoura wanted to learn about baby CPR, choking and resuscitation, and so St John was invited to lead these sessions with parents and whānau.

Whānau Āwhina Plunket is also planning new groups in Twizel, Tekapo and North Otago.

MPI is contributing funding as part of a \$1.1 million programme announced in May 2020 to boost wellbeing and other support services available in rural communities.