

## Times are tough for families, but there is help they can access

*By Fiona Kingsford, Whānau Āwhina Plunket CEO*

It's set to be a challenging year for many across Aotearoa. Inflation figures released this week, the cost-of-living crisis, and the threat of recession all suggest that one of the biggest challenges facing whānau will be household finances.

Our nurses, kaiāwhina and health workers who see 290,000 under-fives, including 80 per cent of babies born in New Zealand each year, are well-placed to see first-hand what the need is across the country.

Heading into February, food prices are still high, the housing shortage remains and those with older tamariki are facing expensive back-to-school costs. It's a prolonged financial struggle. Food poverty is real. Rising costs are impacting the health and wellbeing of tamariki.

What's more, some whānau are reducing the time they take on parental leave to make ends meet. Research shows raising a child in New Zealand starts at \$9,100 a year, which for many is a huge financial commitment. Worryingly, some are going without necessities to ensure they have enough money to pay for food.

Welcoming a baby is a joyful and exciting time. The first three months are such an important time for parents and pēpi to build a strong bond. But it's also challenging dealing with changed circumstances, and many whānau expecting new arrivals this year will find this particularly challenging.

At Whānau Āwhina Plunket our nurses provide clinical assessments, and along with Kaiāwhina and Community Karitāne, support whānau and families, through home and clinic visits, as well as PlunketLine 0800 933 922, a free 24/7 helpline where caregivers can talk to a registered nurse. .

As an integral part of our communities, we offer a wraparound support service, and can connect whānau with the many organisations and services out there designed to support when it is needed most.

Other organisations are getting behind families welcoming the newest New Zealanders this year too. Contact Energy has launched 'Fourth Trimester', an initiative that gives Kiwi families expecting a baby from 1st February 2023 three months of free power. The offer will see two million hours of power gifted to families of the newest New Zealanders, aiming to alleviate some of the financial pressure placed on new parents so they can focus on bonding with their new addition.

We supported Contact to gift the offer to a group of new mums at our Poutokomanawa Plunket Clinic in Manurewa this week. The feedback on the impact the offer will have for the whānau that received it was incredible.



Eseta Cook, who welcomed baby Mavae this month said, “When I heard we were getting three months of free power I was so excited. Now I get to enjoy electricity for three months all for free, and it also means we get to save a lot within that three months – so I’m really grateful – it’s going to be amazing.”

We welcome any initiative that’s going to support whānau in raising healthy thriving tamariki – so it’s amazing to see companies get on board and help families.

For those that have a loved one or know someone expecting a baby this year, remember that a little support can go a long way. Whether making a meal or offering to clean some of their home while parents rest, small acts can make a big impact on new whānau trying to get by. As a charity, we are always grateful to receive donations to support the work we do.

This year might be a challenging one for the families of the newest New Zealanders but it’s important to keep in mind there is support around – don’t be afraid to reach out.

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### **About Whānau Āwhina Plunket**

Pēpi, tamariki and whānau are at the heart of Whānau Āwhina Plunket. The charity is Aotearoa New Zealand’s largest health and wellbeing support service for tamariki – seeing 290,000 under-fives. About 80% of newborns are enrolled with Whānau Āwhina Plunket each year.

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Our website [plunket.org.nz](http://plunket.org.nz) is one of the country’s most widely read digital child health resources, with 1.8 million visits each year. It is data free which means you don’t need mobile data to access, and you can choose to view in English or te reo Māori.