



♡ Whānau Wellbeing

## TŪ KAHIKATEA

### WHANAUNGATANGA AS A CATALYST FOR WHĀNAU WELLBEING

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*Ngāpuhi*

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#### Abstract

This paper is a case study analysis exploring the social, cultural, and health benefits of whānau involved in a whānau-based triathlon hosted by Sport Manawatū in the lower North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand. Using an inductive approach, experiences of whānau were used to develop a framework – Tū Kahikatea, which highlights the concept of whanaungatanga as a catalyst for wellbeing. The framework shows the effectiveness of whānau inspired programmes that are based on Māori cultural principles, in this case manaakitanga, kotahitanga, and whakapapa, and the successes that can be derived from programmes that are aligned to whānau values. Tū Kahitakea adds to the evidence base on whānau-centred approaches and provides a framework, which from a whānau perspective, demonstrates the key areas upon which success can be achieved.

**Key words:** whānau, whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, kotahitanga, whakapapa, intergenerational

## Introduction

Whānau have long been recognised as the crucial change agent for positive Māori development and for realising Māori health and wellbeing (Durie, 2011; Te Puni Kōkiri, 2007; Turia, 2003). Within a changing health and social sector, whānau-centred frameworks have been supported by Government, iwi organisations, and local community groups, who are working more towards the collective needs of whānau, finding ways to work from a cross-sectorial perspective, and strengthening whānau inspired initiatives (Durie et al., 2010; Fanselow & Hughes, 2019; Ministry of Health, 2011). This change is reflected in an increase in whānau-based health initiatives such as Whānau Triathlons, IronMāori, waka ama, marae-based learning, and healthy lifestyle programmes. However, there is still a need to clarify and build upon understandings of what a whānau inspired framework looks like in practice and how it is experienced at a local level (Kara et al., 2011). Gaining an understanding of the success factors behind these types of initiatives can help to inform future health programmes in order to ensure that they are suitably aligned for the benefit of Māori and their whānau.

In te ao Māori, whānau are seen as the basic support structure and are therefore an integral part of Māori health and wellbeing (Cram, Smith, & Johnstone, 2003). While the literal meaning of the word whānau is ‘to give birth’, it is most commonly used to refer to a group of people brought together for a special purpose. This may be from sharing a common ancestor (whakapapa whānau), or a person’s involvement in a common kaupapa such as a church, sport or school group (kaupapa whānau) (Durie, 1999; Metge, 1995; Te Puni Kōkiri, 2005). The whānau is the place where initial teaching and socialisation occurs and provides an environment within which certain responsibilities and obligations are maintained. An important concept linked to whānau is the notion of whanaungatanga. Derived from the root word ‘whānau’, (meaning to lean on, be inclined towards, or to be supported), whanaungatanga is about relationships and having a sense of connectedness to people, place and the environment (Barlow, 1991; Metge, 1990; Rameka, 2018).

This paper is a case study analysis exploring the social, cultural, and health benefits of whānau involved in a whānau-based triathlon hosted by Sport Manawatū in the lower North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand. Using an inductive approach, experiences of whānau were used to develop a framework ‘Tū Kahikatea’, which highlights the concept of whanaungatanga as a catalyst for wellbeing.

## Research Design

Whānau were engaged via an established relationship between the researcher and Sport Manawatū who provided a list of potential whānau who might be interested in participating. From this group, a total of six whānau groups incorporating 30 whānau members from the Manawatū region were engaged in interviews lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. The research was inclusive in design and, while predominantly focused on Māori experiences, it incorporated the voices of both Māori and non-Māori whānau members. To ensure confidentiality and preserve anonymity of whānau, pseudonyms were used when referencing whānau experiences. Pseudonyms were chosen to represent the whānau as a collective rather than singling out individual participants within whānau groups. Māori names were chosen to represent whānau groups that whakapapa Māori, while Pākehā names were chosen for whānau who did not have Māori connections.

While data was initially sorted into codes linked to social, cultural and health benefits for whānau, an overarching theme of whanaungatanga was identified. This led to further research around concepts of whanaungatanga and the development of the Tū Kahikatea framework as an expression of whanaungatanga based on key values and outcomes discussed by whānau. Ethics approval for the project was granted through the Massey University Human Ethics Committee.

## Tū Kahikatea Framework

The Tū Kahikatea conceptual framework was developed to illustrate factors relating to the core principles and outcomes that led to whānau experiences of success when participating in a local whānau-based triathlon. Tū Kahikatea illustrates the importance of relationships for whānau and reinforces the role of whanaungatanga as a catalyst for wellbeing. Whanaungatanga is reciprocal in nature in that individuals expect support from their whakapapa or kaupapa whānau and in turn whānau expect individuals to support the collective need.

The analogy of the kahikatea tree was used to illustrate the framework. Like the concept of whanaungatanga, kahikatea grow closely together and are reliant on each other for support in order to grow and develop to their full potential (Marsden, 2003). Standing together allows the roots of the kahikatea to become interwoven providing protection for individual trees so they can withstand any forces that might come against them.

The pakiaka (roots) of the tree represent the mauri (life force) of the kaupapa and is fundamental in enabling the kaupapa to flourish. Binding the trees together is the kaupapa (purpose) that brings whānau together. Ngā rākau (the trees) represent different values underpinning the Whānau Tri as outlined by participants in the research project. These values are manaakitanga (care and reciprocity); kotahitanga (collective unity and solidarity); and whakapapa (connection to people and the environment). Extending from the trees are ngā hua (the fruits) which represent the positive outcomes as experienced by whānau. These are whakamana (empowerment); toiora (enduring wellbeing); and moemoeā (ability to dream). The final part of the framework is represented by ngā manu (birds) which disperse the seeds allowing new growth to occur. This is linked to mana motuhake (self-determination) acknowledging the ability of whānau to realise their dreams and aspirations, thereby determining their own destiny.

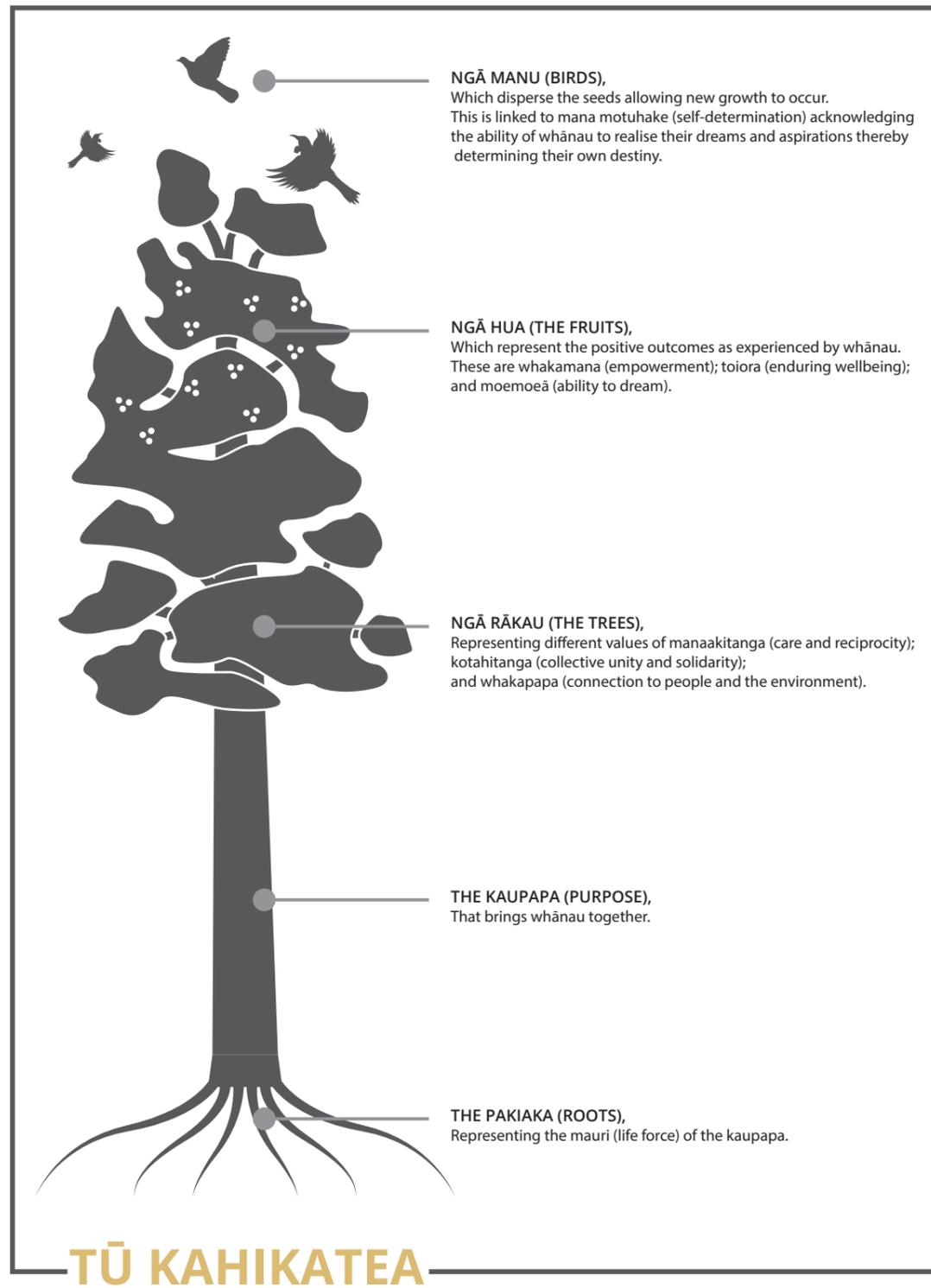


Figure 1. Tū Kahikatea framework

### Application Of Tū Kahikatea Framework

This section demonstrates how Tū Kahikatea can lead discussion around the positive impact a localised Whānau Triathlon (Whānau Tri) had for participants.

#### Pakiaka (roots)

Grounding the kahikatea are the pakiaka (roots) which represent the mauri of the kaupapa. Mauri is referred to as being the spark of life with every living thing having a mauri (Mead, 2003). It is present in all things and binds people to the environment (taiao) and primal energy sources (atua) (Henare, 2001). Mauri is crucial to any kaupapa and the wellbeing of relationships hence the necessity of its place in the Tū Kahikatea framework. The mauri can be viewed as instilling the mana into the kaupapa, which is then embodied by the participating whānau. Mauri can be used to inform how and why activities should be undertaken and monitors how well these activities are tracking towards their intended goals (Pohatu, 2011).

#### Kaupapa (purpose)

This case study focuses on the annual Whānau Tri hosted by Sport Manawatū in the lower North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand. Attracting between 400 – 500 participants each year, the Whānau Tri has become an annual event for many whānau in the Manawatū region. The Whānau Tri kaupapa (purpose) is about participation across all generations which includes intergenerational teams of kaumātua (grandparents), mātua (parents), whaea kēkē and matua kēkē (aunts and uncles), tamariki (children) and mokopuna (grandchildren). It also provides whānau the opportunity to engage with members of the community creating a sense of kotahitanga (collective unity and solidarity) with other participants involved in the programme. Prior to the triathlon, participants have the option of taking part in a 10-week programme designed to give whānau the skills and confidence needed to complete the triathlon as well as focusing on making sustainable lifestyle changes (Sport Manawatū, 2013). The day of the event involves a festival-type atmosphere celebrating health and culture featuring health-related stalls, entertainment, spot prizes, and lots of extra activities and competitions for people to enjoy.

#### Ngā Rākau (values)

Ngā rākau represents the overarching values practiced by whānau through their participation in the Whānau Tri programme. These values are manaakitanga, kotahitanga, and whakapapa. While each value is distinct, it's important to note that they are all interconnected and closely linked to each other.

#### Manaakitanga

Manaakitanga is about caring for a person's mana through acts of caring, supporting, and uplifting one another. Mana can be described as a spiritual power gifted from atua and can be seen as the influence, authority, integrity and power attributed to a person (Barlow, 1991; Marsden, 2003). There are different manifestations of mana and our experiences of it. Mana tangata refers to the individual deeds and activities of a person and is harnessed through generosity and empathy, otherwise known as manaakitanga. Manaakitanga is grounded in working with the collective in a spirit of reciprocity and demands a high standard of behaviour towards each other. Through upholding and elevating the mana of others, we are in turn uplifting our own (Mead, 2003).

Whānau expressed a number of different ways that manaakitanga was exercised throughout their involvement in the Whānau Tri. Being shown respect as a person no matter their ability, age, experience, or lifestyle choices contributed to the positive aspect of the kaupapa and whānau experience of manaakitanga. Whānau thought this was crucial as they felt that deficit-based health messages they received were often negative and not aligned with values important to them. This had previously put many participants off from engaging with health services:

*It wasn't just facts and figures, or you know, 'You're bad, you're bad, you're bad,' you know, which a lot of the health thing is that 'You're bad, you're bad, you're bad,' you know. You see in the media, 'You smoke, you're bad. You're obese, you're bad. You drink, you're bad', you know. But this was trying to put a positive spin on getting you up and off the couch and doing something, encouraging you to do it, and that it's ok to be you, so it was just that uplifting. (Willow whānau)*

Reciprocity was also an important factor demonstrated by whānau who developed a strong sense of social responsibility towards the kaupapa and each other recognising the important role they had in supporting and uplifting each other:

*It's encouraging each other and supporting each other and it's like you're sharing your journey with someone so you're sharing the highs and the lows. (Kauri whānau)*

*Everybody's the same, so one person isn't higher than the other. So if you're struggling, they're right there to encourage you, they're right there to pick you up. (Kereru whānau)*

These experiences demonstrate how the Whānau Tri facilitated whānau to feel valued and in turn whānau developed a sense of responsibility back to the rōpū (group) thus engaging in manaakitanga.

### **Kotahitanga**

Closely linked to manaakitanga is the principle of kotahitanga (collective unity and solidarity) which embodies a sense of social cohesion and unity. Recognising diversity amongst whānau and individual members; kotahitanga is not about everyone being the same, rather it is an environment which fosters a spirit of inclusion and cooperation, creating a shared sense of belonging and solidarity with each other and the environment.

For many participants, the Whānau Tri was the first time they had had a positive experience in a sporting and/or health environment. Whānau linked this back to the sense of kotahitanga in that they felt united in purpose in an environment where everyone felt included. Whānau also commented on how the Whānau Tri provided opportunities to develop wider networks of support by connecting them with people and places that they might not normally have associated with:

*It becomes whānau, it's not just blood, we're all on the same kaupapa. No one cares what anyone looks like, we're here to achieve a goal. (Kauri whānau)*

*It's kotahitanga, whanaungatanga and it's all of that encompassing into one. (Kereru whānau)*

Working towards a common goal helped whānau to connect with each other allowing for relationships to be strengthened. These relationships helped to create a sense of belonging and unity which resulted in a solid commitment to each other and the kaupapa which in turn ensured successful completion of the programme by whānau.

### **Whakapapa**

Whakapapa operates at many different levels and is an essential component of whanaungatanga. There are several definitions and explanations of the word whakapapa. Some of these include the ability to ground oneself in something that is known; to make flat or to layer together; and to make as to lie with our earth mother Papatūānuku, referring to our relationship to the earth from which Māori life evolved (Edwards, 2009). Whakapapa informs the relationships that we have through genealogical connections: past, present and future, encompassing everything that is passed from one generation to the next (Marsden & Henare, 1992; Penetito, 2008; Rameka, 2018).

Central to the success of the programme is the way that it encourages intergenerational participation with a wide range of age groups being involved in the initiative. Whānau also highlighted their desire to press forward so that they might be an inspiration for others in their whānau to come and join the kaupapa. Whānau spoke about their tamariki and mokopuna as being prime motivators behind their desire to continue with the kaupapa. Involvement for them meant that they might increase their chances of living longer whilst also role modelling to other whānau members the positive effects of being active. This demonstrates how the Whānau Tri can be an effective support mechanism and a way to encourage intergenerational lifestyle change:

*Hopefully what I'm doing will inspire some of my family to embark on the same journey. (Kereru whānau)*

*So for me, I continue to do it because I have more generations underneath me to still uplift and still bring. (Kauri whānau)*

Whakapapa also acknowledges our ancestral links to the environment connecting whānau to the land and reminding whānau of the importance for the maintenance, enhancement, and advancement of these enduring relationships for well-being (Edwards, 2009; Jackson, Baxter, & Hakopa, 2018). Providing whānau with opportunities to engage in outdoor activities proved beneficial for whānau with many discussing the positive benefits they felt by being in te taiao (environment):

*I feel a stronger connection to the environment. (Kauri whānau)*

*Spiritually, I love doing the gorge, and I go talk to him [Tāne mahuta – Guardian of the forest] ... so it's like a renewal for me spiritually and it's a reset for me. (Kereru whānau)*

Whakapapa is reflected throughout the Whānau Tri programme both in the context of bringing generations together and also the spiritual element of connecting whānau to the environment.

## Ngā Hua (fruits of success)

While ngā rākau (values) laid the foundation for whānau experiences, ngā hua (fruits of success) discusses the key successes as experienced by whānau. These are represented as whakamana, toiora, and moemoeā.

### Whakamana

Whakamana is a concept about enabling and empowering potential (Durie & Hermansson, 1990; Durie, 2011). It's about enhancing the mana of whānau through the establishment of caring relationships where whānau feel supported and valued, enabling them to develop self-confidence and belief in their own abilities.

Prior to engaging in the Whānau Tri, many participants struggled with low self-esteem which impacted negatively on their hauora (holistic health). Some of this stemmed from experiences of being bullied or feeling that they didn't fit in with the 'sporting' crowd:

*I think it's just cause all these mass participation things say they're for everybody, but they're not really, when you go along to them, it's pretty much the same set up with lycra clad people. (Linden whānau)*

Being involved in the Whānau Tri program gave participants confidence in their abilities, increasing their self-esteem and sense of self-worth. This was apparent in one of the participant's kōrero who spoke of how her involvement in the Whānau Tri had given her the confidence to spend time with her friends at the beach over the summer break, something that she would not have contemplated prior to the event:

*Last summer I went to the beach a few times. We just all met up. I just used to not sort of do things like that. So yeah, that really stems from the Whānau Tri. It's just that confidence for me has been the most amazing thing. (Willow whānau)*

Others spoke of previously having a desire to get active and take advantage of community resources but lacking the courage to do so:

*I lacked the confidence to go and plenty of times I would have togs in a bag and I'd get to the pool and I'd be like, 'Oh, it's quite busy,' and I'd be like, 'Oh, I'll give it a miss today,' so yeah. (Linden whānau)*

By the end of the Whānau Tri programme, whānau had shifted to a place where they felt confident in their abilities to engage in resources and other hauora activities provided by the local community:

*After the Whānau Tri, the momentum was there. It just gave me the confidence from the Whānau Tri, so just that snippet of doing that medium, I knew if I focus and train, I can do that 200km. (Tui whānau)*

*I've joined Crossfit, which is awesome. It's hard and I'm still not very good, but I love it... and that was really through getting my confidence through the Whānau Triathlon experience. I just felt that I was ok to step out, and I could, I could do something else. (Willow whānau)*

These comments demonstrate the successes that come from whānau feeling valued and respected and the impact the programme had on developing their self-confidence and belief in themselves.

### Toiora

Toiora suggests the idea of enduring wellbeing. Toi relates to a summit, pinnacle, and can also mean indigenous, source and knowledge. Ora is about health, life, vitality and can also mean to be cured, recovered and healed. Therefore, toiora can mean the pinnacle of health according to an indigenous understanding. As a success factor in the Tū Kahikatea framework, it's about finding opportunities to increase spiritual, mental, physical and collective health which in turn lays the foundation for personal wellbeing and achieving whānau ora.

One of the success factors of the Whānau Tri programme was the example of whānau choosing to make healthy lifestyle changes, such as an increase in physical exercise and changes to their diet, and enjoying some of the benefits that these lifestyle changes bring:

*It's probably the first time in my life that I've enjoyed my exercise. (Willow whānau)*

*I'm the fittest and healthiest I've ever been. (Kauri whānau)*

*Physically, I'm probably a shirt size smaller than I was and I'm just a hell of a lot fitter. (Linden whānau)*

Whānau also spoke of a shift in attitude towards healthy eating. These lifestyle changes have been incorporated and normalised into their daily routines which in turn has helped to influence change for their extended whānau:

*Just making little changes in your life, lifestyle. For example, eating, making little changes, that's success, that's healthy. (Ngaio whānau)*

While physical benefits were apparent, whānau also spoke of how participation in the event had helped their mental wellbeing:

*I've had mental health issues, so I recognise those, so I like to do tris because it helps me without going on meds. (Keruru whānau)*

*I feel a bit clearer in my mind and just a bit more alive. (Willow whānau)*

These experiences demonstrate how the Whānau Tri programme provides an effective medium to engage whānau in healthy lifestyle activities. This in turn encouraged whānau to make simple lifestyle changes in their daily routines leading to a greater sense of wellbeing.

### Moemoeā (ability to dream)

The concept of moemoeā in the Tū Kahikatea framework links to the ability of whānau being open to explore their hopes, dreams and aspirations. Building on the success factors of whakamana and toiora; moemoeā sees whānau being able to lift their vision above the treetops – expanding their view of what is possible.

Whānau spoke of the Whānau Tri as a catalyst to pursue other healthy lifestyle ventures and, for many, the newly found confidence gave them the ability to pursue their moemoeā (dreams/visions). All participants have gone on to participate in other healthy lifestyle initiatives with each of the whānau citing their involvement in the Whānau Tri as being the vehicle for helping them to expand their vision of what was possible, giving them the

motivation and self-confidence to realise their dreams. Whānau likened their experiences to being like a seed that had been planted. Their newly found self-confidence and sense of accomplishment lighted a spark which they were excited to explore:

*It gave me that, it gave me the seed to do that, and that's made me realise that just something small can grow into something beautiful like that. (Kereru whānau)*

*Just that sense of being able to do something so out of your comfort zone, that you can achieve it, opens up, expands, it's just so amazing. (Ngaio whānau)*

Being inspired and having the ability to dream is an important factor for whānau in being able to achieve mana motuhake.

### Ngā Manu

The final part of the framework is represented by ngā manu (birds) which disperse the seeds allowing new growth to occur. This is linked to mana motuhake (self-determination) acknowledging the ability of whānau to realise their dreams and aspirations, thereby determining their own destiny.

#### Mana motuhake

Mana motuhake is about self-determination and whānau being in a position where they can realise their moemoeā. It's about lifting whānau to a place where they have the rangatiratanga (self-determination) to be able to continue living healthy lifestyles when support has been removed (Durie, 2011), or in this case once the Whānau Tri has been completed. In the Tū Kahikatea framework, mana motuhake is represented by a manu (bird) who after tasting ngā hua (the fruits of success), flies off with the seeds to populate a new grove of kahikatea.

The ultimate success of the programme was demonstrated by whānau feeling motivated and confident in their abilities to define their own aspirations and having the ability to set goals to press forward and achieve them. These goals all centred on different whānau aspirations and included participating in Iron Māori, fundraising activities to go to the Great Wall of China, completing the New York marathon, and setting up a kapa haka group to take to an indigenous festival in Italy. Whānau all spoke about the Whānau Tri programme as being the catalyst for them to explore and seek out these opportunities.

*And you see, the Whānau Tri was a catalyst for me to do other things. So I went on and did Iron Māori and I did a 10 km Striders marathon thing. (Kauri whānau)*

*It just triggered us to continue, you know the motivation to carry on. So Iron Māori is our next goal and then after that there's a marathon in New York, 2019. (Ngaio whānau)*

This is a demonstration of whānau being able to exercise rangatiratanga by developing their own aspirations and devising strategies to achieve them. This shows the positive effects of whānau-based initiatives, such as the Whānau Tri programme, in helping whānau to recognise their own strengths and realise their potential thus being able to achieve mana motuhake.

### Conclusion

Tū Kahikatea adds to the evidence base on whānau-centred approaches and provides a framework, which from a whānau perspective, demonstrates the key areas upon which success can be achieved. The framework shows the effectiveness of whānau inspired programmes that are based on Māori cultural principles, in this case manaakitanga, kotahitanga, and whakapapa, and the successes that can be derived from programmes that are aligned to whānau values. Central to the success of the Whānau Tri programme is the concept of kotahitanga which was seen by whānau as being a core factor for them to complete the programme and to realise their achievements. Using the base structure of pakiaka (roots), kaupapa (purpose), and ngā rākau (values), Tū Kahikatea has the potential to be adapted across other programmes through integrating the different kaupapa and values that are unique to each programme. While ngā hua (fruits of success) may also be different for each programme, the overall aim of mana motuhake as represented by ngā manu would remain the same.

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