

FEB 20
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OUR STORY • TAHI

EQUITY

AT THE SCHOOL GATE

CHAMPIONING TAMARIKI, SUPPORTING KURA, CONNECTING COMMUNITIES



PAINGA
PROJECT

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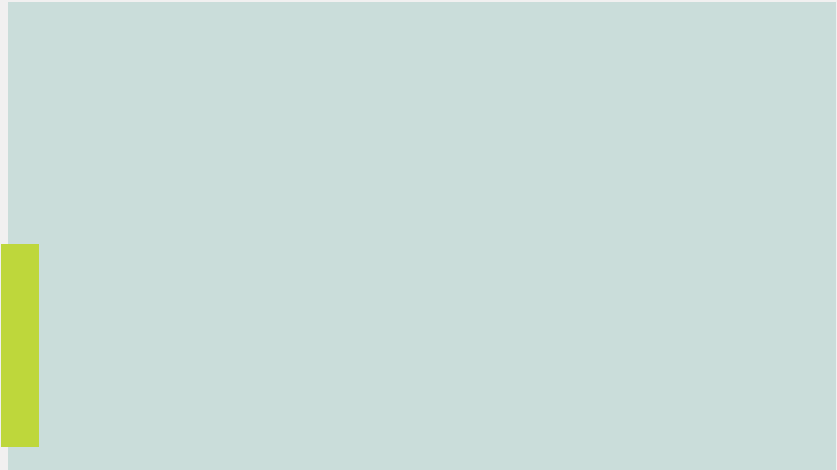
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WHY WE EXIST

Education is one of the greatest gifts we can give our children - it empowers, uplifts, and unlocks potential. But how do we ensure that every child arrives at school ready and supported to learn? And once they walk through the school gate, how do we make sure they feel valued, equipped, and inspired to thrive?

Painga Project exists to champion these children and the schools they attend. We invite everyone in Aotearoa to be part of the solution - to bring their skills, talents, and support so that together, we can create equity at the school gate.





OUR JOURNEY

Our journey started in Papakura, South Auckland, one of the areas with the greatest need. Today, our reach extends across Tāmaki Makaurau. We are guided by the needs of our schools, with a single purpose: to connect, build relationships, and provide resources that support the potential of students, schools, and their communities.

When we began in 2018, schools identified transport

as one of their biggest barriers. After all, it’s hard to imagine opportunities beyond the school gate if you have no way of getting there. So, we funded two 10-seater Painga Project vans for schools to use, helping students access experiences and support beyond their immediate surroundings.

In 2019, two of our schools told us that many of their students were coming to school hungry. With

volunteers and donated funds, we began making 125 lunches a day.

But as a small charity, constantly scrambling for funding makes growth challenging. When the Ka Ora Ka Ako national school lunch programme was introduced,

Painga Project secured the contract to provide lunches for Papakura Intermediate, ensuring continuity for our mahi.

This financial security allowed us to launch other projects in response to the needs of our schools.

PAINGA IN PAPAKURA

OUR HEARTBEAT

Painga Project is committed to supporting high-equity index primary and intermediate schools across Aotearoa. However, our heart will always beat in Papakura, South Auckland, where our journey began.

COMMUNITY

Our APS Painga Project vans have become a trusted and familiar sight, zipping through the streets of Papakura. More than just a mode of transport, our vans and branding reinforce our role as a safe presence in the community - neither educators nor authority figures, simply partners in support.

During COVID-19, our Painga Project vans delivered daily bread, baking, kai boxes, school learning packs, modems, and more - seven days a week - to the gate of any family identified by their school as needing support.

KAI

Throughout COVID, we delivered hundreds of kai boxes, generously donated by our Painga Project community and packed by a local supermarket. Today, kai boxes remain a way for schools to connect with their communities while supporting whānau.

LUNCHES

Beyond providing a nutritious and delicious meal, our school lunch programme fosters connection. Volunteers from the community come together to prepare a meal, creating a space for conversation, idea-sharing, and engagement - many ideas have been hatched, and connections made, as members of the community stop for a chat through the kitchen window!

MAARA

Mahi Maara, a gardening and growing initiative was developed - through this programme, students work in the maara (gardens) as part of their curriculum, growing vegetables for school lunches, gaining hands-on skills, and providing kai for their whānau. As part of this, students also planted 72 citrus trees, ensuring future students benefit from their work for years to come. The maara not only provides kai for school lunches and the community, but also builds relationships and trust. It's a hands-on opportunity for students, volunteers and whānau to learn new skills, share knowledge, and connect with the whenua.

MAHINGA KAI

Painga Project proudly supports the Edmund Hillary School Mahinga Kai programme, which teaches tamariki, whānau and the community to grow thier own kai. Guided by the maramataka, to deepen the connection to Papatūānuku.

KOHUKOHUNUI

Named after the highest peak in the Hunua Ranges, Kohukohunui was born from the idea that the Wairoa River and surrounding Hunua Ranges offer a vast outdoor classroom right on the doorstep of our Papakura schools.

Developed in collaboration with Papakura Intermediate, Kohukohunui focuses on STEAMM learning - Science, Technology, Environment, Arts, Maths, and Mātauranga Māori. With the support of our Painga Project vans, a teacher from Papakura Intermediate and a Painga Project team member took 32 students per day into the Hunuas, two days a week, for hands-on learning experiences. Activities included:

- Water testing through the Healthy Waters programme
- Riverbank planting at YMCA Camp Adair
- Working with Southern Parks and local groups on kauri dieback, pest control, tree identification, and seed sourcing

The impact of COVID-19 and ongoing teacher shortages meant Kohukohunui had to evolve. In response, we have relaunched it as an in-school Outdoor Education Project.

At Kohukohunui @ Papakura Intermediate, an outdoor covered learning space has been created for hands-on, practical learning - fire lighting, outdoor cooking, survival skills, and more. This space gives students and their schools access to outdoor education without the cost, teaching resource and added complexity of leaving the school grounds.

As we build the capability of Kohukohunui, we aim to reintroduce adventures into the Hunua Ranges, helping students see that the activities they love at school can translate into real career pathways.

SPREADING JOY!

Christmas is one of our busiest, and happiest, times of the year. This is often not the easiest or happiest time for whānau under pressure, but thanks to the generosity of our supporters (businesses like APS, community organisations such as Clevedon Presbyterian Church, and the wonderful Clevedon School), we distribute vouchers and gifts to hundreds of these whānau each Christmas, easing some of that stress and pressure.

Our schools identify the whānau in need, and Painga Project ensures they receive their gifts. Right up until Christmas, our Painga Project vans can be seen zipping around, making special deliveries and spreading joy.

HEARING & VISION

In 2019, schools began sharing their struggles in accessing hearing and vision support. The barriers were universal:

- Limited resources from school health providers
- Screening with no follow-up
- No funding to cover glasses
- Lack of people power to take students to appointments
- No ongoing support for children who needed it

We spoke with audiology and optometry professionals, but their perspectives on how services were delivered varied widely. What was clear,

however, was that funding for screening sat across multiple providers, who would simply send a letter home - leaving it entirely up to whānau to navigate the system.

For many families, a letter telling them to take their child for a follow-up raised more questions than answers:

- Where do we go?
- How do we get there?
- What will it cost?
- Will we even be able to access the support our child needs?

More often than not, the result was nothing happening at all.

WHAT WE FOUND: A SYSTEM FULL OF GAPS

Suspecting something was seriously amiss with hearing and vision screening in New Zealand schools, we assembled a team of experts from:

- Auckland University Medical School
- The Hearing House
- Ko Taku Reo (formerly Deaf Education NZ)
- Manukau Super Clinic
- Painga Project volunteers

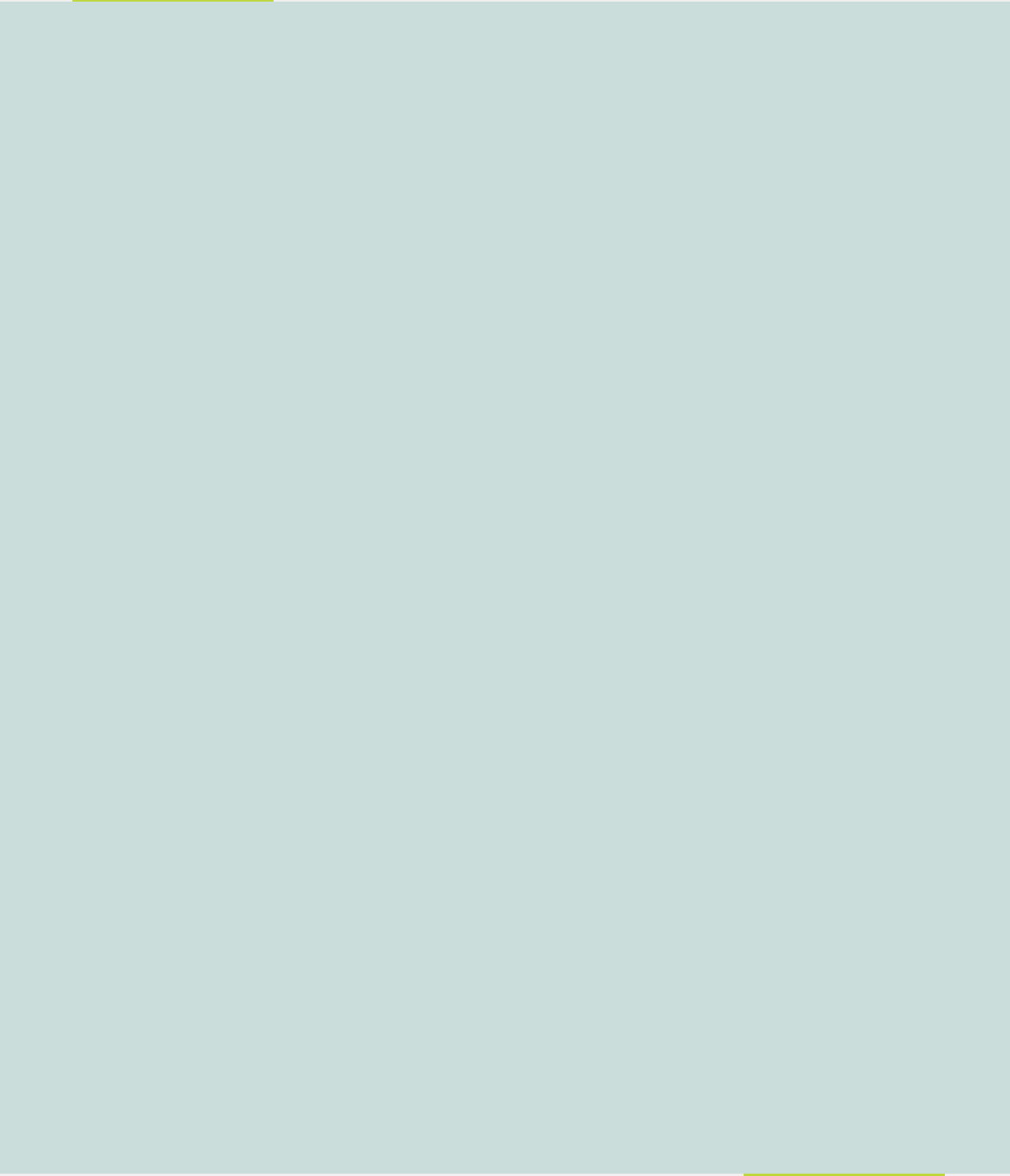
We set out to investigate how screening and support actually worked - and what we found was alarming.

HEARING

There is no nationwide hearing screening for primary or intermediate students. A very basic test happens in high school—but often, this is far too late.

VISION

Vision screening is supposed to happen in Year 7 via the Kids Health Programme. Many schools haven’t received this testing since 2019. The current flip chart test is outdated and misses many vision problems.



If a student does receive a letter for glasses, a subsidy is available, but:

- Whanau often aren’t aware of the subsidy.
- There is confusion over whether they have to pay it back.
- Glasses can cost over \$500, while the subsidy is only \$278.

A child’s vision can change within a year, requiring new lenses that families can’t always afford.

A BROKEN SYSTEM

The more we uncovered, the clearer it became:

- The system that should support our children was actually a collection of poorly targeted programmes with no accountability from either health or education.
- Even if a school wanted to help, they lacked the resources to support their students through the process.

Teachers shared heartbreaking stories of watching children struggle - some in a fuzzy, blurred world, others in a world so silent or so loud that they simply withdrew, disengaged, or were labelled disruptive.

And then, we all wonder why school attendance drops.

Despite all our research, Painga Project still couldn’t find a clear way to navigate the system—but what we did know was that existing funding was ineffective, resulting in what Manaaki Tairāwhiti calls “waste work.” The children who needed support the most were the least likely to receive it.

TAKING ACTION: OUR PILOT PROGRAMME

Determined to create real change, we partnered with The Hearing House and Auckland University to pilot a hearing and vision screening programme at Edmund Hillary School.

With loaned equipment and the help of Painga Project volunteers, we tested all consented students.

WHAT WE FOUND

Vision:

- 30% of students needed to see an optometrist on the University Vision Bus.
- 80% of those students needed glasses.
- Six months later, a follow-up showed:
 - 20% of students had moved schools.
 - 20% were wearing their glasses correctly.
 - 60% needed new lenses due to inconsistent use.

Hearing:

- 33% of students required earwax or foreign object removal at school.
- 8% needed specialist referrals to Manukau Super Clinic.
- 50% of those referred needed multiple follow-ups, including grommets, surgery, or hearing aids.
- Painga Project managed the referrals, provided transport and people power to ensure students attended every appointment.

We quickly realised that screening was the easy part - the real challenge was building a long-term support system to ensure students actually received the on-going help they needed.

SCALING UP: A SOUTH AUCKLAND-WIDE APPROACH

To expand our impact, we:

- Purchased our own hearing and vision screening equipment.
- Gained the necessary training to use it.
- Extended our reach across multiple Papakura schools.

By 2024, we had scaled even further:

- Expanding to 18 schools across South Auckland.
- Introducing screening in kōhanga reo for ages 3-5 years.
- Attending school-based whānau events (Whānau Hui, Open Days etc.) to screen entire families.

Our data continues to align with our pilot:

- Between 22-36% of students require optometry referrals, with 80% needing glasses.
- A small percentage require further specialist follow-ups at Manukau Super Clinic.
- Hearing referrals remain at around 8%, but with higher student numbers, we're uncovering more urgent cases requiring immediate intervention.

BUILDING A SUPPORT NETWORK

Often schools, the community and whānau don't have the resources to navigate the health system on their own, so we've called on our special relationship with The Hearing House to build relationships, and essentially, connect students with specialists, doctors and ear nurses.

Through these trusted partnerships, we've built a network of medical professionals who generously wrap their arms around our students, ensuring they receive free, urgent support and ongoing care.

WHĀNAU & COMMUNITY: A WIDER REACH

Recognising that these issues don't stop at students, in 2024 we expanded screening to whānau and the wider community.

By offering hearing and vision checks at school events like Whānau Hui and Open Days, we're creating an inclusive, whānau-centred approach - where health support is accessible, normalised, and part of the school community.

THE FUTURE OF HEARING & VISION AT PAINGA PROJECT

We started with a hunch that something wasn't right. Now, we know there's a system-wide issue, and we're actively filling the gaps.

This isn't just about screening - it's about breaking barriers, closing systemic gaps, ensuring access to healthcare, and giving every child the chance to see, hear, and engage fully in their learning.



OUR SUPERPOWERS

Our superpowers come in all ages and stages of life. When they're not working their magic for Painga Project, you may know them as 'volunteers' - but to us, they are our most treasured taonga.

They are the engine room behind everything we do. From individuals to specialists, schools to churches, small businesses to corporate titans, the support we receive is both humbling and inspiring.



THE EXPERTS WHO POWER OUR MAHI

- **Optometrists** – Providing the expertise, guidance, and generosity that allow us to grow. Many donate full days to consult in schools and clinics.
- **Audiologists** – Supporting us through the two-stage hearing screening process and ensuring timely referrals to the Super Clinic.
- **Ear Nurse** – More than just wax removal! From the, somewhat expected, cotton bud baddies, to the less expected; batteries, rubber bands, beads, stones, and seeds - if it can fit in an ear, our amazing ear nurse has probably removed it.
- **Doctors** – Offering free consultations to provide

urgent medical support during school hours.

- **Auckland University Students** – Optometry and Audiology students gain hands-on experience working with children, under the supervision of their university and The Hearing House.

THE TEAM ON THE GROUND

- **Vision Screeners** – Trained by Auckland University, our vision screeners are dedicated and efficient, often screening up to 100 students in a single day. Their work is fast-paced and high-impact, ensuring that as many children as possible receive the vision support they need.

- **Hearing Screeners** – Trained by The Hearing House and our generous audiology supporters, our hearing screeners bring dedication and focus. Their work requires precision and patience, ensuring that every student receives a thorough and accurate hearing assessment.
- **Screening Navigator** – The master coordinator, ensuring our hearing and vision screening teams are where they need to be. This role requires patience and flexibility, especially when there is regularly a need to change schools at a moment’s notice (see Treading Lightly).

THE BACKBONE OF OUR COMMUNITY WORK

- **APS Property Services** – For navigating our special projects for us and always having our back.
- **School Students** – Volunteers from St Cuthbert’s College and Clevedon School who generously give their time to support our schools.
- **Kai Team** – Volunteers from throughout the community and with us from the very beginning, making lunches five days a week.
- **Maara Team** – Tending our maara, fruit trees, and gardens - mulching, weeding, planting, seed collecting, and propagating. If it’s outdoors, they’re on it.

THE THINKERS & DOERS WHO INSPIRE US

- **Kim and the team at WELLfed** – Your dedication to empowering communities through food education, and so much more, continues to inspire us.
- **Leslynn and the team at Manaaki Tairāwhiti** – Your work pushes us to do better and reminds us of the impact that strong community-led initiatives can have.
- **Victoria University 2024 Stout Fellow Rebecca Macfie** – A powerhouse of ideas and connections, you champion child poverty awareness and challenging us to think deeper. The Poverty By Design conference was a game-changer for Painga Project’s approach and action.

TREADING LIGHTLY

From school shoes and togs to toothbrushes, Christmas presents, kai boxes, hearing and vision screening and follow-up support - Painga Project responds to the needs that schools identify. We don't assume we know best - our focus is always on listening and responding to what schools and their communities tell us.

Each school is a unique 'planet of talent,' navigating its own journey, operating in its own time zone, and moving within its own orbit. Being welcomed into that orbit is a privilege, and so our fundamental philosophy is to tread lightly. We engage in ways that align with each school's culture, community, and the tamariki we serve.

Success for us isn't about visibility or recognition - it's about seamlessly becoming part of the woven fabric of a school, adapting and flexing to support its needs in a way that truly works for them.

A key part of our resilience as an organisation has been our commitment to training and equipping those who work alongside us. Every Painga Project volunteer, team member, and trustee completes our learning modules, ensuring that everyone who represents us engages positively, respectfully, and effectively with our schools, their tamariki, and their communities.

SUSTAINING CULTURE

Respecting the cultures we work within is essential to the way Painga Project operates. No child should have to set aside their culture to access support. Our approach is guided by the understanding that tamariki should be able to bring their full selves - their language, customs, and ways of being - into any space we work in, without compromise.

To ensure our volunteers and team members engage in a way that is both respectful and informed, we have developed a cultural competency framework that provides essential knowledge and guidance for working within the schools and communities we serve.

This framework strengthens understanding of te reo me ōna tikanga (Māori language and protocols) and te ao Māori (Māori ways of life), ensuring that every interaction - whether in a school, on a testing van, or elsewhere in the community - is grounded in care, respect, and cultural safety.

Cultural competency is a universal skill that enhances our ability to engage meaningfully with people from all backgrounds. By embedding these values into our mahi, we uphold equity at the school gate and strengthen the connections that support tamariki, kura, and their communities to thrive.

SCALING UP

2025 & BEYOND

EXPANDING OUR REACH IN TĀMAKI MAKAURAU

We are focused on strengthening our hearing and vision work in the Auckland region, ensuring we can continue supporting the 18 schools we currently work with while expanding into an additional 20 schools and adding to our current resources to enable this.

PAPAKURA HUB

Designed as a dedicated screening space and outreach clinic, the Papakura Hub now provides a home base for Painga Project and our Superpowers to connect with the community. It also serves as a satellite clinic for Manukau Super Clinic Audiology, our volunteer doctors, The Hearing House, and other essential services.

CELIA, THE HEARING BUS

Schools are often short on space and full of noise, which can slow down our work. To overcome this, 2025 marks the launch of Celia, our mobile hearing bus. Named in honour of the incredible Celia Lashlie, she is fully equipped for both screenings and referral appointments. Celia will significantly

reduce the need to take students off-site for follow-ups, ensuring they receive the support required whilst reducing the amount of schoolwork missed.

WHINA, THE VISION BUS

Named after the legendary Dame Whina Cooper, Whina is our mobile optometry clinic, capable of seeing up to 30 students per school day with two optometrists onboard. She allows us to move quickly from screening to glasses, with ongoing follow-ups - all within the school day. Thanks to her flexibility, Whina will also be available for after-school and weekend community events.

ONE PAIR, OR TWO?

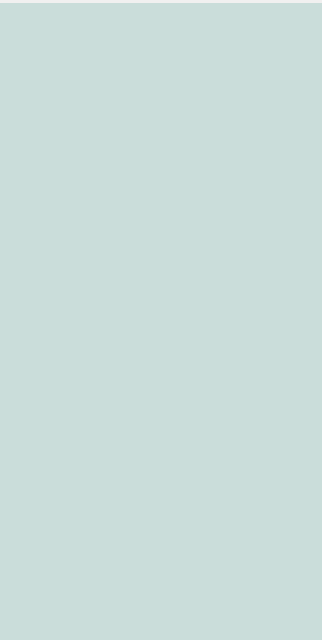
One of our biggest learnings has been the necessity of providing two pairs of glasses - one for school and one for home. Even adults struggle to keep track of their glasses, so it's no surprise that children do too! Whether it's an excited toddler snapping the arms off, or a family pet chewing them up, having a backup pair is essential. In 2025, we are hoping to provide two sets of glasses to every student in our schools who needs them.

MOBILE MEDICAL SUPPORT

Our screenings frequently uncover acute conditions requiring urgent treatment. However, cost, accessibility, and lack of in-school medical resources remain major barriers. In response, we have increasingly stepped in to support students with urgent medical needs. In 2025, we aim to secure a mobile medical van, allowing schools to access immediate care with the support of our incredible volunteer doctors.

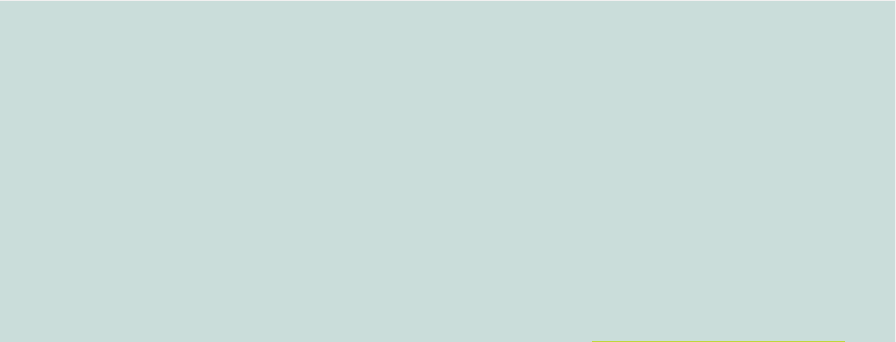
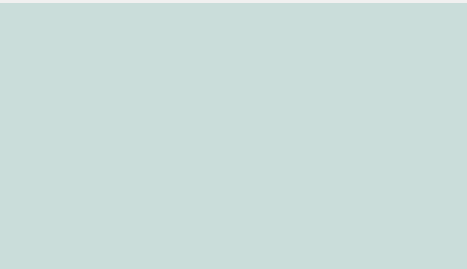
TE TAI RĀWHITI EXPANSION

We are mapping out our journey into Te Tai Rāwhiti, learning from the amazing Manaaki Tairāwhiti along the way. Many schools in this region are isolated, so we plan to adapt our model to support high-equity index primary and intermediate schools from Ruatoria down to Wairoa. Our goal is to provide dedicated vision and hearing support through two mobile clinics, ensuring full wraparound care for tamariki in the region.



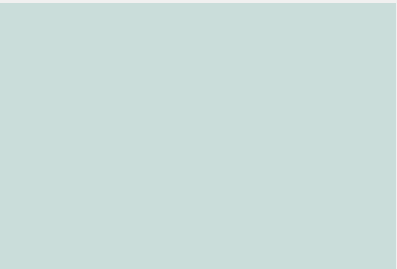
TE WHANGANUI-A- TARA EXPANSION

Wellington is a natural next step for Painga Project, with many high-equity index schools and a strong base of volunteers to help us drive change. We are working towards replicating our mobile optometry and audiology model, with a long-term goal of expanding these services beyond the Wellington region.



LOOKING AHEAD, STAYING COMMITTED

Our journey continues to grow, evolve, and take us to new places. As we expand our reach, introduce new resources, and deepen our connections, we remain guided by the same principles that started it all - listening, responding, and showing up where we are needed most. 2025 will be another year of learning, action and following the need.



JOIN US ON THIS JOURNEY

As this Painga Project story outlines, hearing and vision screening is a major part of our mahi - but it's so much more than that. At its heart, Painga Project is about championing tamariki to ensuring they walk through the school gate with everything they need to fully engage in their learning. It's about supporting kura, walking alongside schools to provide practical solutions that remove barriers and create opportunities. And it's about connecting communities, building strong relationships between tamariki, whānau, educators, and health professionals to ensure no child is left behind.



Our commitment to Equity at the School Gate drives everything we do. But we can't do it alone. There are so many ways you can help. Whether it's lending time,

expertise, or resources, your support makes a real impact. If you'd like to join us, we'd love to hear from you.

Together, we can make Equity at the School Gate a reality for every child in Aotearoa.



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