‘A Game Changer for the Community’:
Raglan Naturally Community Wellbeing Connector

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‘Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, engari he toa takitini’
My strength comes not from one but from the collective effort -Whakatauki

The purpose of this case study is to demonstrate the capacity of communities to self-determine collaborative and equitable responses to significant challenges if they are supported with appropriate resources, tools and structures. This case study was prepared by Dr Michelle Levy, a community psychologist who was a member of the Raglan Covid-19 Community Response Group (RCCRG).

“A game changer for the community” -Teresa Morgan, Raglan Medical Centre: this is how the Raglan Naturally Community Wellbeing Connector (CWC) is described by a key health provider in our community. As with communities across Aotearoa New Zealand, Covid-19 presented significant challenges for Whāingaroa/ Raglan. However, it also provided unique opportunities to strengthen and enact our community-led development aspirations. This case study tells the unique story of our CWC:

- Meeting the challenges of Covid-19: Strong relationships and a shared local vision
- Meeting the challenges of Covid-19: Growing community-led resilience
- Raglan Naturally CWC: Meeting the needs of the community
- Growing collaborative and sustainable local leadership: Success stories
- Raglan Naturally CWC: Key success factors
- Looking to the future: A call to action

Meeting the Challenges of Covid-19: Strong Relationships and a Shared Local Vision

“Our community groups have committed engagers; people who genuinely care and who want to make a real difference for our community.”
-Louisa Barham, Principal, Raglan Area School/Te Kura a Rohe O Whaingaroa

The story of our CWC starts in 2020, well before Covid-19 arrived in Whāingaroa/Raglan. Located on the west coast of the Waikato District, community leaders knew that Whāingaroa/Raglan would be particularly vulnerable to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Not only would the pandemic exacerbate existing inequities across our community, but centralised and even regionalised Covid-19 responses would not be able to meet the basic and complex challenges faced by our communities: pockets of high deprivation and need; wide boundaries including rural and isolated hapū communities; limited local services; major health and social services located over 50 km away; a vulnerable elderly population; and precarious housing.

Those same community leaders also knew that a localised, collective, coordinated response which harnessed and mobilised our unique community resources and strengths would

ensure the safety, well-being and resilience of the entire Whāingaroa/Raglan community in the face of Covid-19. Led by this mindset, key community leaders formed the Raglan Covid-19 Community Response Group (RCCRG) well before Covid-19 arrived in the community. Being as prepared as possible, particularly in the early days of Covid-19 was essential, with the RCCRG understanding how uncertainty and rapid changes, alongside at times inconsistent government messaging, served to both heighten anxiety and tension, as well as reduce community cohesion.

Coordination and communication support for the RCCRG was provided by *Raglan Naturally*, a charitable trust focused on facilitating community-led development in Whāingaroa. Membership of the RCCRG included hapū, school, local government, community health and social service providers, local print/radio media, local businesses/organisations, and voluntary groups. Later, the RCCRG expanded to include newly established regional Covid-19 'hubs', Māori health providers, and community members with specific areas of expertise.

Meeting the Challenges of Covid-19: Growing Community-Led Resilience

"Resources are relatively scarce in rural townships compared to urban areas where specialist services have the population to sustain them. In rural areas/townships we have to be diverse and resourceful to meet the diverse needs of a wide range of people. Barriers can include isolation, lack of transportation and poverty." -Mike Rarere, Raglan Community House

Learning from the national experience and adapting as each new wave of Covid-19 emerged, the RCCRG focused on coordinating a community-led response which would ensure no one in the Whāingaroa/Raglan area[1] would fall through system gaps with unmet needs. Relationships which were established and strengthened by the RCCRG enabled the planning and activation of immediate responses when the impacts of Covid-19 started to emerge in our communities. These impacts, some of which were common to communities across Aotearoa, and others which were specific to the unique characteristics of own community, included employment and income security; whānau moving back from the cities particularly during lockdowns resulting in accommodation pressure, precarious living situations and overcrowding; and isolation particularly for those living alone. Working with whānau impacted on by family harm, homelessness and addiction within our community also became significantly more challenging in a Covid-19 environment characterised by measures such as social distancing, and managed isolation.

Drawing on their extensive community knowledge, the RCCRG estimated 70% of the community would effectively self-manage the impacts of Covid-19; 25% could need help with one or two issues; and 5% would need to access support outside of their own networks (e.g. medication, kai, bills, income support; communication support). Supported by their Raglan Community Covid-19 Response Plan, the RCCRG provided a vital connecting point across resources and responses, with leadership across different communities mobilising support which was most effective for them, including at times outside of our geographical boundaries. For example, schools mobilised necessary support for their communities; hapū mobilised effective support for their communities. Integral to the work of the RCCRG, particularly in the early days of Covid-19 was the mobilisation of a community volunteer workforce, utilising for example, community 'wellness warriors', trusted people who have a

[1] Waingaro, Waitetuna, Makomako, around Karioi maunga, to Aramiro, Aotea and out to the Raglan Deviation ('the divvy')

wide reach into their communities. These known faces were particularly important in working with the stress and anxiety which surrounded issues such as testing and vaccination.

> *"Having friendly and trustworthy faces to welcome people made a real difference. They would have conversations with people in their cars and if they were still unsure, the volunteers could refer them to local health professionals who were also helping."* –Lisa Thomson, Raglan Ward Councillor

When the first wave of Covid-19 arrived in the Waikato, a key priority for the RCCRG was to support the testing and vaccination programme being delivered by our Covid-19 Lead Navigator, Nga Miro Health, a Ngāruawahia based Māori health provider. The RCCRG immediately coordinated a volunteer workforce, as well as assisted with issues such as logistical support to secure appropriate testing and vaccination locations. As the Covid-19 testing response shifted from throat swabbing to self-administered Rapid Antigen Testing (RAT), Waikato District Health Board (WDHB) teams began travelling to multiple areas daily, including Whāingaroa/Raglan, to distribute RAT kits to the public. Again, the RCCRG immediately activated a volunteer workforce who were able to manāki WDHB kaimahi in their RAT distribution each day. This included helping whānau presenting for RAT kits to access any additional support they might need (i.e. via 0800/email contact); assisting whānau order RATs online; and distributing free masks and hand sanitiser).

Waikato DHB kaimahi were extremely appreciative of this community-led manāki, commenting it was not a common occurrence in other communities they were visiting. Not only did the volunteer workforce help make the DHB kaimahi jobs much easier, as they were under significant pressure each day, it also made the experience of accessing RAT kits as easy as possible for whānau in Whāingaroa/Raglan. This community-led voluntary support for DHB kaimahi continued until it was no longer needed.

0800/email Support Activation Team

> *"Raglan Naturally knows their local community well and has proved it can provide consistent services in this area. We'd like to enable more community-led initiatives of this kind, and encourage more community groups, including iwi, to consider stepping forward to undertake these services."* -Waikato Herald, 31 May 2022

The importance of ensuring whānau in Whāingaroa/Raglan were able to easily access the support they needed in the ever-changing and complex Covid-19 environment, was identified by the RCCRG as a priority early in the pandemic. Complementing existing services, having a central point of both connection and reassurance which was able to work alongside whānau to either address needs and/or make referrals to appropriate resources was essential. Forming a core element of our community-led Covid-19 response, an 0800/email Support Activation Team was established in March 2022.

Operating under the umbrella of Raglan Naturally, a 0800 number/email was established, and a secure central location provided free of charge by a local community organisation. The Support Activation Team was initially staffed and supervised by skilled volunteers. The subsequent introduction of CWC funding by the Ministry of Social Development enabled members of the Support Activation Team to be paid. Importantly, the discretionary funding

embedded in the CWC role was available where existing services were unable to provide the support needed, or where time was a critical imperative that prevented other options being fully explored. Areas supported by the discretionary funding included essential items, rent arrears, medical needs, utilities, general household items, transportation, communication and education needs.

The 0800 number was monitored 4 hours doing weekdays, with emails monitored daily outside these hours. A secure information system was developed, recording referrals, requests, contact details, and any follow-up required. A team of volunteers were also available on stand-by to assist with tasks such as Covid-19 testing packs and kai delivery, including to rural areas.

Over 150 requests for support were made to the 0800/email support team from March -September 2022. Common initial needs during the pandemic were kai packs/support; testing kits; isolation support; general Covid-19 related information (testing and isolation requirements, employment subsidy); family harm prevention/respite; and support to attend medical appointments. Referrals were made from the Support Activation Team to the Whāingaroa Marae Collective, Raglan Foodbank, Raglan Medical, Raglan Community House, and Waikato District Council. Cases who lived outside the boundaries of the RCCRG or had multiple complex needs, for example, health, accommodation, and basic utilities such as water and gas, were referred to specific case management wellbeing hubs. All whānau who contacted the Support Activation Team were followed up to ensure they had received necessary support.

The presence of the Support Activation Team enabled the RCCRG, with the subsequent support of the Ministry of Social Development and the CWC, to eventually take over responsibility for the local distribution of RATs from the WDHB. This not only relieved pressure on WDHB and ensured the Whāingaroa/ Raglan community was not reliant on overextended health sector resources, but more importantly that the community itself was able to self-determine the most effective way of supporting access to testing resources. The significance of this undertaking was recognised by the Waikato DHB Covid-19 Directorate as the first time a community trust such as RN, had taken up this responsibility.

Community Wellbeing Connector: Meeting the needs of the community

"We have tended to work in silos which has limited our potential reach, exhausted our resources and eventually wellbeing groups wind up through lack of support and resourcing. People don't know where to go to get the support they need resulting in the community's health, wellbeing and effective functioning being eroded."

-Betty Diprose, Guidance Counsellor, Raglan Area School; Whāingaroa Suicide Prevention Group

The first Raglan Naturally Community Wellbeing Connector appointment was made in September 2022. With a desire to allow community-led development to emerge and flourish, our CWC job description was purposefully broad. Alongside supporting individuals and whānau who were experiencing immediate hardship as a result of Covid-19, the CWC also focused on supporting access to wider services and resources able to support wellbeing. As part of Raglan Naturally, the CWC was also guided by a longer term vision of growing well-being across the Whāingaroa community. Importantly the CWC had oversight of the allocation and use of the discretionary CWC fund.

Lara Sweetman was appointed to the position of Raglan Naturally CWC, her whakapapa and upbringing in the Whāingaroa area were invaluable attributes to the success of the role. Combined with an education background and having been on the ground during the community-led response to Covid-19, Lara understood that reciprocal, trusting relationships across the community lay at the heart of developing creative and effective community-led solutions. Supported by already established community aspirations for greater collectively and coordination, Lara prioritised relationship building locally, including marae; Raglan Medical; Takarangi Mental Health Support; Raglan Foodbank; Raglan Community House; Raglan Pharmacy; counsellors; education providers; emergency services; Well-being for Farmers; Here to Help U; Whare Ora; Good Lives Matters; Māori Wardens; Youth Intact; Time Bank; Community Kai Stand; and other businesses. Relationships with organisations and agencies who, although based outside Whāingaroa/Raglan, were also able to offer support were also nurtured, for example, Hamilton Family Centre, Whānau Āwhina -Plunket, Age Concern, Ministry for Social Development, Oranga Tamariki, Te Whatu Ora and Te Rau Ora.

"Connecting Raglan Area School to helpful agencies and supports that we didn't know about before or knew about but are too stretched time wise to find the time and energy to make contact with - and follow up those contacts eg Te Kohao Health services and people operating in the Raglan Medical Centre - connecting parents with kaiaawhina and HIPs (Health Improvement Practitioners)."

-Betty Diprose, Guidance Counsellor, Raglan Area School; Whāingaroa Suicide Prevention Group

With the immediate Covid-19 crises reducing, the CWC was able to focus on ongoing and emerging community needs, many of which had been exacerbated by Covid-19. Working collaboratively with key organisations, the CWC had a focus on reaching those who were isolated and vulnerable within our community, with their needs being most at risk of falling through existing system gaps. Community needs which have emerged and been addressed by the CWC over the past year can be grouped into the following broad categories.

Connections/advocacy/resources for those in need of support

- Connecting whānau with services such as Temporary Marae Health Clinics, mental health support, grief support; rehabilitation services, kai support, support for grandparents raising mokopuna, suicide prevention/postvention support
- Facilitating access to well-being resources for new Mum's
- Connecting groups/organisations, for example schools, with additional resources
- Providing transport to access services, particularly medical/health services
- Accessing accommodation due to a range of circumstances (housefire; emergency accommodation; family harm related needs)
- Phone top-ups to enable access to services/safety
- Providing advocacy for whānau dealing with government agencies

Elderly community needs

- Facilitating health service access by meeting immediate needs such as travel, medical appointment/prescription pickup/drop-offs

- Facilitating longer-term solutions to health service access by working with Raglan Medical and Raglan Pharmacy to design systems to support elderly community members to access their prescriptions
- Facilitating general support, for example, firewood delivery, home maintenance

Supporting Inclusion

- Supporting the newly established Raglan Rainbow Youth group, including removing barriers to service access in the community; connecting them to other Rainbow groups outside of Whàingaroa; and supporting Whàingaroa as Rainbow Inclusive town.
- Meeting needs for the neurodiverse community

Growing community wellbeing and resilience

- Supporting Whāingaroa Matariki Hauora Day
- Supporting Whāingaroa Youth Collective (sports equipment, strategic plan development; funding applications; activities, and promotion)
- Supporting St Johns including, CPR/AED 3 Steps for Life Community Training and committee
- Supporting safety and crime prevention (relationship building; emergency services community day)
- Growing the potential of volunteer organisations, such as Timebank, to maximise its potential to support community well-being
- Supporting the well-being of those delivering health, social and emergency services within the community
- Supporting ways to grow connections across community, including attending/ organising workshops/ trainings, and networking days

Growing Collaborative and Sustainable Local Leadership: Success Stories

"The impact of this paid role that Lara has taken on is VERY significant in pulling together like-minded people and well-being services in the community to work collaboratively."
-Betty Diprose, Guidance Counsellor, Raglan Area School; Whāingaroa Suicide Prevention Group

This section showcases three examples of how the CWC has successfully supported collaborative and sustainable local leadership in three areas of high need in Whāingaroa/ Raglan: temporary Marae-based health clinics; suicide prevention and mental health well-being; and supporting our providers and community 'well-being warriors'.

Temporary Marae Clinics: Providing access to health and social services for whānau

In 2022, a range of services, including the Whāingaroa Marae Wellness Hub, the Raglan Medical Centre, Te Whatu Ora, Mai Uenuku ki te Whenua Marae, Tu Tangata Trust, Raukura Hauora and the CWC collectively identified a need to actively wrap health and social services around rurally located vulnerable whānau who had little or no access to basic amenities, health and social services. The outcome of this collaboration was the establishment of monthly marae-based health clinics. With the first clinic held in October 2022, the services provided by the clinics have slowly grown in response to community need. They now include diabetes, dietician, heart checks/monitoring, Plunket, parenting support, sexual health,

mental health, mirimiri, cervical screening, oral health, vaccinations, minor surgeries, Oranga Tamariki, Mokopuna Ora, alongside hot showers/toiletries/towels, hot kai, washing machines, play and art activities for tamariki, and winter wellness packs.

The CWC has played a key role in ensuring a lack of transport, particularly for elderly whānau is not a barrier to attending these clinics, also by funding and facilitating play and art therapy activities for tamariki, being onsight and available to respond to individual whànau needs when requiring additional support and connection to further services, and providing financial support for the running cost of the marae at each clinic.

The success of this approach to enhancing access and outcomes is seen in the growing numbers of whānau who are now regularly presenting to the clinics, including those who travel further to attend the marae-based clinics than they would to attend the local medical centre. Key elements of the marae-based clinics that assist in removing access barriers for whānau include the safe and relaxed nature of the clinics; social connection; no requirement for appointment times; and literacy support to complete necessary forms. Whilst there is a focus on meeting immediate needs, a longer-term aim is to extend the reach of this model across the community, in the process growing and strengthening relationships between whānau, marae and community services.

Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Wellbeing

"There has been a history of such a group coming and going but due to it being run by volunteers, when the passionate volunteers leave or become overworked, the group disintegrates. I am a member of this group and this is exactly what happened in 2022 when the group eventually disbanded, leaving me the only member. Around the time this happened, Raglan Naturally was able to appoint a paid well-being person and as part of their role, they took on the facilitating of the group i.e. managing a database of interested individuals and professionals, taking minutes of meetings and following up/ connecting in with other services and individuals operating in the well-being space. Having a motivated and paid person in this role has meant that the group has revived, is working cohesively within the community, targeting specific needs and creating a well-being synergy that is reaching into all stratas of the Raglan and Whāingaroa wider community."

-Betty Diprose, Guidance Counsellor, Raglan Area School; Whāingaroa Suicide Prevention Group

In 2023, the CWC played a valuable role in assisting the Whāingaroa Suicide Prevention Group to re-establish, grow and plan; facilitate connections across the community; and attend suicide prevention/postvention hui outside of Whāingaroa. Building relationships with agencies such Te Whatu Ora, Te Rau Ora, and Te Aka Whai Ora, has resulted in funding being secured for inspirational kaupapa such as Rob Mokaraka's 'Shot Bro' presentation; and other learning/training opportunities for those working in mental health and well-being spaces. Whāingaroa/Raglan hosted Scotty Harvey's 'UOKBRO' kaupapa for a day, with feedback from Raglan Area School students and parents talking about the strength of networks that resulted from that day. These opportunities and resources are also being shared across communities including Kāwhia, Ngāruāwahia, and Huntly. Other mental health and well-being initiatives where the CWC adds specific value include supporting rangatahi-led well-being and awareness events, team building sports events; and well-being support packages for our local medical team including nurses, kaiaawhina, admin staff, mental health services and doctors.

Well-being Support for Providers and Well-being Warriors

"Would love to have more opportunities to connect back up with all the local services, as we had such a great connecting and relationship building day at the start of the year … to keep those relationships strong by those who are working within the space/care team for our whānau in the community." -*Herani Davey, HIP Takarangi Team ,Raglan Medical*

The CWC recognised the interconnectedness of smaller communities working together, and the pressure which is often placed upon a small number of services and community leaders. Creating opportunities which prioritised the wellbeing of these people was therefore integral to overall community wellbeing. Recognising the importance of this resulted in the following actions and outcomes:

- A wellbeing event specifically focused on the wellbeing of service providers themselves
- Active wellbeing follow-up for community first responders

Raglan Naturally CWC: Key Success Factors

"The CWC is fully transforming and synergising existing local well-being initiatives. Connections, networks, enthusiasm, hope, and people empowerment are stirring in a way not present before this role was created and funded. It's a life-changer for our community."
-Betty Diprose, Guidance Counsellor, Raglan Area School; Whāingaroa Suicide Prevention Group

There is no doubt that the Raglan Naturally CWC has successfully assisted individuals, whānau and communities across the Whāingaroa/Raglan region to make connections and access support which both addresses immediate need, as well as supports longer-term well-being. With aspirations to build on these successes, it is critical to understand the key success factors that have made the CWC so successful. Supported by community feedback, this section describes the key success factors: *Solid Foundations: A Shared Vision*; *Highly Skilled CWC*; and *Autonomy and Access to Resources*.

Solid Foundations: A Shared Vision

"Community groups have been able to further align their goals, working together with negotiated and targeted actions and being authentically connected."
-https://temahau.govt.nz/te-kura-rohe-o-whaingaroa-raglan-area-school

The CWC role emerged from an already established shared community vision for greater connectivity and cohesion which had been facilitated by the RCCRG in preparation for Covid-19. Of importance in Whāingaroa/Raglan was that although ours was a whole-of-community integrated approach, it also enabled various communities, such as hapū, to be self-determining as part of that integrated approach. Existing high-trust relationships developed over a period of time, and both within and outside of our region, were a strong factor. For example, strong relationships underpinned by whakapapa with key COVID-19 lead providers already existed in our community. Within this context, not only was a role dedicated to supporting the community to better collaborate in order to meet needs and build resilience welcomed, but the opportunities such as this role provided in terms of laying solid foundations to support the community to flourish beyond the pandemic were recognised.

The structural support provided by Raglan Naturally for the CWC was also critical. Not only was there clear alignment with the values, aspirations and focus of RN in terms of community-led development which uplifts the well-being of the community, the established robust infrastructural support, such as governance, policies, financial, reporting and accountability measures, has allowed the CWC to focus specifically on with their mahi within the community.

Highly Skilled CWC

"Lara has done a very good job making 'connections' in this community. She has done this with consideration and empathy, utilising existing networks and connections to make a positive impact. This was especially present in her work with the rural community and manawhenua."
-Mike Rarere, Raglan Community House

Getting the 'right' person for the CWC role was fundamental to its success. Lara was a known-face with in-depth knowledge of the community, including rural communities, and a high degree of expertise working at the flax-roots level. She was also a highly skilled relationship builder able to grow and maintain trusting relationships with diverse communities across our region, as well as with organisations outside of Whāingaroa/Raglan.

"Being a rural community and the fact that the Well-being Connector has lived locally all her life meant she already had great connections in our area." -Teresa Morgan, Raglan Medical Centre

"[Lara is] particularly well qualified for this role - she is local; has developed previous professional and personal networks with local schools and whānau; and brings all these prior experiences and connections to this role."
-Betty Diprose, Guidance Counsellor, Raglan Area School; Whāingaroa Suicide Prevention Group

"If I come up against a roadblock I am able to confer with Lara and her local knowledge which has been so incredibly helpful in quite a few situations." -Teresa Morgan, Raglan Medical Centre

Being a skilled relationship builder, the CWC knew that understanding how communities in our region could collaborate to share resources and effectively meet needs, required firstly listening to what was going on for people, groups and organisations. Experiences with Covid-19 had shown that purposefully getting to know the community was important in being able to mobilise and effectively utilise a wide range of resources, including the voluntary and retired professional workforces. Relationships with marae and hapū are particularly important in this role, and as evidenced by the success of the temporary marae clinics continue to grow and strengthen.

"She took time to meet with us, seeking our input, finding out what we provided and passing this information on to others" -Mike Rarere, Raglan Community House

"Rural community organisations can struggle to connect with the wider community due to limited capacity" -Mike Rarere, Raglan Community House

However, building trusting relationships encompasses more than solely an initial connection. As identified by key stakeholders, successful thriving relationships require that attention is paid to elements such as commitment, follow-through, and being positive and enthusiastic.

"Has been extremely proactive in making contact, following through with what she says she is going to do, and always going that little step further." -*Teresa Morgan, Raglan Medical Centre*

"Importantly she maintained and nurtured our relationship which continues to this day." -*Mike Rarere, Raglan Community House*

Relationships with groups, organisations and services is a significant element of the CWC role. However, the CWC also built trusting relationships with individuals and whānau at the flax-roots. The capacity of the CWC to form non-judgmental relationships allowed her to understand whānau realities, identify needs, and therefore solutions. With an education background, the CWC also understood how ethical obligations, such as confidentiality, privacy, and safety, needed to be considered within these relationships.

"Reaching out to whānau with school-aged young people and their particular needs that weren't being met due to not having those key relationships of trust in place."
-Betty Diprose, Guidance Counsellor, Raglan Area School; Whāingaroa Suicide Prevention Group

Autonomy and Access to Resources

"She also has the ability and resources to guide, connect, problem-solve, and support pretty much anyone who needs it. She has closed a big gap for many in accessing equitable, sustainable & appropriate support, whether it is medical or personal." -*Teresa Morgan, Raglan Medical Centre*

The CWC responded to emerging community needs quickly and effectively. Two key elements enabled this to occur. The first was the expertise and broad skill base of the CWC, coupled with a genuine desire to respond to what is 'on top' for the community. An intuitive understanding of community needs stems from the embeddedness of the CWC in the community, alongside her holistic understanding of needs and well-being. Combined these allowed the CWC to not only identify unmet needs, but to fill these critical gaps, often in creative and unique ways. Not only was the CWC able to identify and provide timely solutions for emerging and often urgent needs, but she also worked strategically and collectively to problem-solve longer-term, self-determined, and sustainable community solutions. Intentionally growing the capacity of the Suicide Awareness Group in order to support its ongoing viability, and working with the medical centre and pharmacy to address the issue of prescription access for those without transport are examples of this.

"Lara has used her time effectively and strategically to make key connections across the community to either support existing hauora initiatives (e.g. local suicide awareness network group) or play an integral role in setting up key hauora initiatives (e.g. temporary medical clinics to rural marae)"
-Betty Diprose, Guidance Counsellor, Raglan Area School; Whāingaroa Suicide Prevention Group

Structural features of the role were the second element that supported the capacity of the CWC to address community needs. Being able to successfully meet emerging and often urgent needs requires responsive high-trust contracting models. Such models are characterised by high levels of the role and funding autonomy, flexibility, and creativity. Supported by capacity and expertise in community-led development, the CWC had the authority to make autonomous decisions regarding how to best meet community needs.

Importantly, this included how to utilise the discretionary funding resource which was attached to the CWC role.

"The process of referring and connecting patients with this service/support/initiative has been very easy to follow, is timely, and very efficient. The timeframes to get support via Raglan Naturally for patients who are engaged with Takarangi is incredibly fast … Feedback from our patients with this process has been positive experiences and is deeply appreciated by them."
-Herani Davey, HIP Takarangi Team ,Raglan Medical

The benefits of this flexibility and autonomy were particularly noticeable in outcomes related to whānau being supported to: access services, (e.g. transport to health services; prescription pick-ups); address family harm related needs (e.g. respite accommodation; phone care top-ups; petrol vouchers); purchase necessary resources to support well-being (pedometer, physical wellness classes); and deal with for unanticipated events (e.g. house fire for newly arrived rest home nurses from India). In addition, the flexibility and autonomy of the role enabled the CWC to prioritise areas crucially important to the long-term well-being of the community, but for which no other services are mandated or funded to focus on. Well-being support for first responders and community 'well-being warriors', a critical area of focus in communities reliant on a small number of people across services and leadership roles, is a perfect illustration of this. These examples, whilst addressing immediate need, sometimes in the smallest of ways, all directly contributed to long-term well-being across the community. The impact of role flexibility and discretionary funding to the success of the CWC in addressing service gaps and supporting long-term community well-being cannot be underestimated.

Looking to the Future: A call to action

"Great thing about Lara's paid connector role is that she has the time and mandate to not only be present on the actual day but to continue fostering those connections and supporting the synergy that was fostered over the day. Invaluable!!"
-Betty Diprose, Guidance Counsellor, Raglan Area School; Whāingaroa Suicide Prevention Group

Covid-19 demonstrated exactly what can occur when communities are provided with the resources to activate their own self-determination and enact responses which meet self-identified priorities. From the outset, community leaders knew Whāingaroa/Raglan could deliver a localised Covid-19 response founded upon the significant strengths which existed within our community. They also knew the reach of our strengths and resources would be amplified by the community working together.

The fundamental importance of facilitating resilience and self-determination is heightened in isolated communities largely reliant on external services and resources. The vulnerability of our community has been particularly visible over the past three years, not only because of Covid-19, but also extreme weather events which saw the main route connecting Whāingaroa/Raglan to Hamilton severed for over two months in early 2023. Impacting heavily on community cohesion and wellbeing, unpredictable events, whether pandemics or climate-related, can no longer be thought of as isolated, 'once in a lifetime' happenings.

The success of the CWC in a relatively short period of time demonstrates the ongoing need which exists within our community. Of importance however is that it has also clearly

established the centrality of a paid position with an explicit mandate on facilitating coordination, collaboration, and connection if authentic and sustainable community-led development is to be activated. Supported by a high-trust working environment, the CWC clearly understood where they were able to add value, both complementing and growing our existing resources and collective strengths. The successes with temporary marae-based health clinics and suicide awareness clearly shows what is possible when community-led approaches are genuinely empowered.

The role of the CWC was never intended to be short-term, limited only to the Covid-19 crisis. Marking an important milestone for Whāingaroa/Raglan, the CWC position was from the outset viewed strategically by community leaders as a platform from which we could confidently launch into our own future as a resilient and sustainable self-determining community, growing long-term sustainable solutions. The first CWC was always considered the beginning of realising our vision for multiple connectors embedded across the community. Excited by the success of the CWC, our intention is to continue to build on what has been achieved, exploring and activating growth across a range of areas that are becoming increasingly critical to holistic well-being and growing resilience in our community, for example kai sovereignty and power sovereignty. Supporting this longer-term vision, Raglan Naturally is currently in the process of achieving MSD Level Three Social Sector Accreditation Standards.

This case study tells the unique story of the Raglan Naturally Whāingaroa/ Raglan CWC. However, it is also a call to action. Centralised or regionalised systems are not designed to be responsive to emerging community needs. Successful communities are those who see the future as something they can build for themselves, and who are willing to go beyond dominant models. The final word is perhaps best left to one of our key stakeholders:

“She’s done a great job, but has only got started!”
-Noelene Manufui, Raglan Budget Service

Appendix: Community Tautoko

1) Teresa Morgan/Raglan Medical

How have you/your organisation benefited from working with the Community Wellbeing Connector

We have found the relationship with Lara to be invaluable to myself & the Medical Centre. She has been extremely proactive in making contact, following through with what she says she is going to do, and always going that little step further. Our relationship with the Community Wellbeing Connector has exceeded our expectations in that she is a great communicator, has worked with us when we have identified gaps in our community for their wellbeing and helped access services that we have been unable to access, whether due to time or staffing restraints. Being a rural community and the fact that the Wellbeing connector has lived locally all her life meant she already had great connections in our area.

What impact do you think the Community Connector has had on Whāingaroa community overall?

I think the impact has been very positive on the Whāingaroa community. Our connector has connected with so many parts of our community, she is very inclusive and sharing which means it is a win, win, win for us all. She also has the ability & resources to guide, connect, problem solve & support pretty much anyone who is needing it. She has closed a big gap for many in accessing equitable, sustainable & appropriate support whether it is medical or personal.

Are there any other comments you would like to make about the Community Wellbeing Connector?

It has been a game changer having our Community Wellbeing Connector in the community. For me personally I have absolutely loved working with and getting to know Lara. She embodies the Community Wellbeing Connector role 150%. Where I am unable to assist, (I can only support patients at Raglan Medical), Lara is more than happy to step in, these people would have struggled had it not been for Lara. If I come up against a road block I am able to confer with Lara and her local knowledge which has been so incredibly helpful in quite a few situations. I just wish this role had been established earlier. Lara is my silver lining to all the craziness that Covid brought with it.

2) Noelene Manufui (she/her)/Financial Capabilities Mentor/Raglan Budget Service

How have you/your organisation benefited from working with Community Wellbeing Connector?

- Increased connections to other services and workers in the area
- Increased training opportunities in the area
- Increased coordination of service provision by providers in the area

What impact do you think the Community Wellbeing Connector has had on the Whaingaroa community overall?

- Increased community access to services
- Increased community access to and participation in, activities in the area

Are there any other comments you would like to make about the Community Wellbeing Connector?

- A very necessary job
- She's done a great job but has only got started!

3) Mike Rarere/Raglan Community House

How have you/your organisation benefited from working with Community Wellbeing Connector?

Raglan Naturally's Connector has done very positive work for this community 'connecting' services with those in need, sourcing resources, and providing opportunities for groups to network, share information and build stronger relationships for the benefit of the wider community. She took time to meet with us, seeking our input, finding out what we provided and passing this information on to others. Importantly she maintained and nurtured our relationship which continues to this day.

What impact do you think the Community Wellbeing Connector has had on the Whāingaroa community overall?
Very positive impact. Resources are relatively scarce in rural townships compared to urban areas where specialist services have the population to sustain them . In rural areas/townships we have to be diverse and resourceful to meet the diverse needs of a wide range of people. Barriers can include isolation, lack of transportation and poverty. The Connector was able to get out to a wide range of locations and connect those in need with services that service the wider rural community, and some that operated district/region wide. Rural community organisations can struggle to connect with the wider community due to limited capacity. The Connector role helped to do the linking between service providers and those in need.

Other comments?
Lara has done a very good job making 'connections' in this community. She has done this with consideration and empathy, utilising existing networks and connections to make a positive impact. This was especially present in her work with the rural community and Manawhenua. Connecting through existing networks to support the wider community.
Nga mihi.

4) Shelley Riky's/St John

How have you/your organisation benefited from working with Community Wellbeing Connector?

- As a provider of training on CPR & the use of AED's we have found the help of the Community Wellbeing Connector invaluable.
- Enabled us to be a part of Community Health days that have been organised, significantly lifting our profile and in turn improving the Health and wellbeing of the Community.
- They have also facilitated meeting a in which we have made great connections for continuing our training and obtaining assistance for fundraising for more AED's in the community.

What impact do you think the Community Wellbeing Connector has had on the Whaingaroa community overall?
A very positive one with great connections formed in amongst the health community and the wider community. Awareness of health issues has been lifted and health services have been improved for the Community.

Are there any other comments you would like to make about the Community Wellbeing Connector?
Appreciating the positivity and enthusiasm. And tautoko what Mike Rarere said.

5) Herani Davey- Takarangi Team Raglan Medical

How have you/your organisation benefited from working with Community Wellbeing Connector?
The Takarangi team have been able to have opportunities to offer patients within the Raglan community particularly with reducing isolation, engaging in groups and activities that connect them with their community, give patients a starting point to build their own individual priority for their health and well-being (self determination), increases their self-confidence to engage with their goals/plans, while improving their overall quality of life.

What impact do you think the Community Wellbeing Connector has had on the Whāingaroa community overall?
The process of referring and connect patients with this service/support/initiative has been very easy to follow, is timely and very efficient. The timeframes to get support via Raglan Naturally for patients who are engaged with Takarangi is incredibly fast. Once the need is identified during session with Takarangi, it

is picked up the service and the patient has been made contact with in a timely manner. Feedback from our patients with this process has been positive experiences and is deeply appreciated by them.

Are there any other comments you would like to make about the Community Wellbeing Connector?
Would love to have more opportunities to connect back up with all the local services, as we had such a great connecting and relationship building day at the start of the year, once every 3 months, to keep those relationships strong by those who are working within the space/care team for our whanau in the community.

6) Betty Diprose/Guidance Counsellor Raglan Area School

How have you/your organisation benefited from working with Community Wellbeing Connector?

- Lara in her role as Community Wellbeing Connector is like a life-line bridge between the school, where I work as guidance counsellor, and community. Lara is particularly well qualified for this role ie she is local, has developed previous professional and personal networks with local schools and whanau and brings all these prior experiences and connections to this role, connecting Raglan Area School to helpful agencies and supports that we didn't know about before or knew about but are too stretched time wise to find the time and energy to make contact with - and follow up those contacts eg Te Kohao Health services and people operating in the Raglan Medical Centre - connecting parents with kaiawhina and HIPs
- Lara has used her time effectively and strategically to make key connections across the community to either support existing hauora initiatives (eg local suicide intervention network group), or play an integral role in setting up key hauora initiatives eg medical clinics to rural marae - reaching out to whanau with school aged young people and their particular needs that weren't being met due to not having those key relationships of trust in place - something Lara has been able to foster as part of her connector role. Priceless!!
- Lara is skilled in using collaborative approaches within her role of networking. This releases synergy resulting with other people being empowered to use their skill sets and networks to run hauora initiatives that benefit the school and niche community members. A great example of this is the recent Saturday UOKBRO Hauora day that took place in the Raglan town hall. Students and parents of Raglan Area school were present and talked about the sense of empowerment that resulted from the networks built over the day. And the great thing about Lara's paid connector role is that she has the time and mandate to not only be present on the actual day but to continue fostering those connections and supporting the synergy that was fostered over the day. Invaluable!!

What impact do you think the Community Wellbeing Connector has had on the Whaingaroa community overall?
I believe the impact of this paid role that Lara has taken on is VERY significant in pulling together like-minded people and wellbeing services in the community to work collaboratively. This has been a challenge to services and organisations in Raglan in the past - both those in paid and voluntary roles.

We have tended to work in silos which has limited our potential reach, exhausted our resources and eventually wellbeing groups wind up through lack of support and resourcing. People don't know where to go to get the support they need resulting with the community's health, wellbeing and effective functioning being eroded.

The Raglan suicide prevention network group is a typical example of this. There has been a history of such a group coming and going but due to it being run by volunteers, when the passionate volunteers leave or become overworked, the group disintegrates. I am a member of this group and this is exactly what happened in 2022 when the group eventually disbanded leaving me the only member. Around the time this happened, Raglan Naturally was able to appoint a paid wellbeing person and as part of their role, they took on the facilitating of the group i.e. managing a database of interested individuals and professionals, taking minutes of meetings and following up/ connecting in with other services and individuals operating in the wellbeing space. Having a motivated and paid person in this role has meant

that the group has revived, is working cohesively within the community, targeting specific needs (eg organising a Lifekeepers training course) and creating a well-being synergy that is reaching into all stratas of the Raglan and Whaingaroa wider community including local marae, local schools, Time Bank, medical centre, rural support, tamariki initiatives in the community etc. Very inclusive!!

Are there any other comments you would like to make about the Community Wellbeing Connector?

This role is fully transforming and synergising existing local well-being initiatives. Connections, networks, enthusiasm, hope and people empowerment are stirring in a way not present before this role was created and funded. It's a life-changer for our community.

Further feedback from Betty Diprose- 22/11/23 Following Shotbro and Hìkoi for Hauora events.

Can you tell us how the Suicide Awareness meetings are helpful?

The metaphor I think of is- bridges- it is a bridge to the community- something that I was finding hard to create and sustain. The network co-ordinator role that Lara does around hauora is so helpful and important- gives me a group to go to share, connect in, and brainstorm- all of us are working in different areas bringing different expertise and connections to support the community needs that we are working to address. It has become a helpful group as a forum to discuss what is happening in Whàingaroa and assessing where the gaps in hauora are, or where the current need is that we can focus in. We can invite people into the group and by having it under RN there is a form of credibility- connected to a reputable community mainstream organisation. Because of this and the momentum and successful working relationships now operating with our Suicide awareness roopu the focus of the group has grown from suicide to community-wide well-being or hauora. It was very hard previously before Lara joined as the co-ordinator and connector to maintain momentum and keep the group functioning effectively, so, therefore, we have learned that it is important to have people within the group that are in paid roles to co-ordinate and organise- to maintain longevity- otherwise the group dissolves and falls over as it has in the past.

How do you see Raglan Naturally are adding value and supporting the community, through the Wellbeing Connector?

We are now covering well-being/looking after well-being so much more effectively within our own community. The difference is so significant, we have gone from operating at a level 1 to a 10 in terms of addressing well-being issues in a holistic way within our community.

We now have a functioning core group within our community focused on an overview of hauora- well-being. There is constant monitoring and identifying of gaps or issues to address. There is a functioning, highly skilled, and connected group to share and collaborate with, and any new initiatives/ agencies/support can be discussed and considered and then explored and connected with. It is not an add-on to Lara's work, it is core to her paid work- therefore it has momentum that is sustained and just keeps building on itself.

The title 'Community Well-being Connector' certainly encapsulates what the role is providing for our community. The vision that the government had when providing this funding opportunity to empower communities to decide how to address the well-being needs within their own communities has been utilised to its fullest potential within our community. It really has been a game-changer.