

Taku Hīkoi: Connecting physical activity and kōrero tuku iho into our built environment.

“Ka whakātu ngā pou, ngā pou whakairo, ngā pou tuku iho a Te Whakatōhea” - Danny Paruru (Te Whakatōhea)

By Ranui Maxwell



From Left to Right “ Anna Kurei, Danny Paruru, Jade Kameta and Troy Hart-Webb”.



Pou - Muriwai

Ten Pou have been carved to represent hapū of Te Whakatōhea.

Designing and strengthening built environments that reflect iwi, hapū, community identity and whakapapa is the aspiration for the Taku Hīkoi project.

The relationship between cultural identity and the built environment is an essential element in shaping societies and championing cultural heritage. This form of placemaking reflects the cultural values, beliefs and practices of a community.

Professor Michelle Thompson-Fawcett (Ngāti Whātua), the Poutoko Taiea, University of Otago, has led significant mahi (work) in extending conversations around decolonisation in the process of urban planning.

“The built environment is not just about physical spaces, it’s also about cultural spaces, and we need to create places that allow for the expression of Māori culture,”

“Such achievements signpost the many ways that the wellbeing of Indigenous peoples in colonised locations might be envisaged as part of urban design, planning, decision-making and governance processes,” Thompson-Fawcett says.

Taku Hīkoi is a project that is realising all of these values through a shared cultural and value-led partnership between Te Pou Oranga o Whakatōhea , Ōpōtiki District Council and Healthy Families East Cape.

A series of Pou Whakairo (carved pillars) honour hapū of Te Whakatōhea. Below are the hapū of Te Whakatōhea along with the names of the Pou and their characteristics.

Ngāi Tamatamahaua

Muriwai – Illustrious tīpuna and māreikura that all whom all of Te Whakatōhea descend from, who lived in Mauke travelled to Aotearoa on the Mataatua Waka.

Pou Kaitiaki – Wheke (Octopus), and representation of the resources of the sea.

Ngāti Rua

Tūtāmure – Tīpuna, Rangatira and fierce warrior of Te Whakatōhea & Ngai Tai. And whare tīpuna of Ōmarumutu marae.

Nukutere Waka – Ancient waka of Te Whakatōhea.

Ngāti Patumoana

Ruamoko – Tīpuna, Rangatira and fierce warrior of Ngāti Patumoana, Te Whakatōhea.

Hineiahua – Tīpuna, Rangatira from whom the name Ngāti Patumoana derives.

Ngāti Ngahere

Te Hau o Te Rangi – Rangatira and renowned provider for his people.

Te Tahi o Te Rangi – Once a tohunga who later transformed into a taniwha and kaitiaki.

Ngāti Ira

Pou Kaitiaki – Depicting the resources of the land.

Tamatea Matangi – Tīpuna, rangatira of Te Whakatōhea, and husband of

Traditionally, Māori whakairo was used a mechanism to record whakapapa and honour the stories of our tīpuna, to share whakapapa and life lessons. Taku Hiko seeks to enrich the built environment of Ōpōtiki district with ancestral stories and whakapapa. Connecting physical activity and kōrero tuku iho, mātauranga Māori with modern urban design is intended to bring the pou to life.

Kai whakairo (carver) and project lead, Troy Hart-Webb, recently unveiled a series of Pou Whakairo, to be erected at various sites throughout Te Whakatōhea. These Pou Whakairo are not just beautiful works of art, but they hold deep meaning and significance to the Ōpōtiki community.

The unveiling of ten Pou Whakairo during this year's Matariki celebrations marked the first phase of this ongoing project. Each Pou depicted a different story, representing the rich cultural heritage and history of Te Whakatōhea iwi and hapū. The local community were able to gather around the impressive pou at the opening, filling the space with pride and connection. An additional two pou are being carved and will be installed later in 2024.

“The connection between the natural environment and our health is well documented in indigenous narratives. The maramataka— our Māori system of observing the relationships between signs, rhythms, and cycles in the environment—is underpinned by generations of Indigenous knowledge, observation, and experimentation.

Healthy Families East Cape have been working to align and deepen connections between kaupapa in and around our communities with Maramataka and te ao Māori.”

Jade Kameta, Rautaki Māori Healthy Families East Cape, has worked alongside Troy to align each of the pou with the nine stars of Te Kāhui o Matariki cluster or the Pleiades), Tautoro (Orions belt), and Te Kōkota (Hyades).

“In te ao Māori (Māori worldview), each star has an intrinsic connection to kai, wai and people. A recent revival of the maramataka across Aotearoa is providing uniquely indigenous ways to ‘reconnect’ people, and their health, with the natural environment. Through Taku Hikoi, the collaborative partners can tell the story of the connection between whakapapa, the stars and other environmental signs.”

Each star represents our connection to Kai, wai, and people. The stars also connect us to whakapapa, including tupuna who had passed on. This is echoed in the way that we approach our health and wellbeing.



Pictured - (Pou) Hineiahua and (HFEC, Rautaki Māori) Jade Kameta

The illustrious and prominent ancestress, Muriwai connects all hapū of Te Whakatōhea.

One of the pou are dedicated to Muriwai which is aligned with Matariki, who is the illustrious mother to the Matariki cluster.

project which involves the launch of the “Taku Hikoi APP,” a mobile application designed to further enhance the experience of visitors and locals alike.

This innovative app will allow people to embark on a virtual journey where they can walk in the footsteps of their “Tīpuna” and delve deeper into the stories represented by each Pou Whakairo.

“The app will provide an interactive and immersive experience, blending technology and cultural storytelling to life” explains Jade.

The app is developed in partnership with Te Pou Oranga o Te Whakatōhea and Waikato University, due to launch in early 2024.

“The Ōpōtiki Plays Steering Rōpu, formed in 2022 and supported by Healthy Families East Cape, was born from a desire of local organisations, community groups and champions wanting to enhance playful environments and increase physical activity opportunities in Ōpōtiki. The rōpu is led by Te Ao Hou Trust, Ōpōtiki Primary School, Ōpōtiki District Council, Whakaatu Whanaunga Trust, Sports Bay of Plenty and Te Pou Oranga o Te Whakatōhea.

The Ōpōtiki Plays Steering Rōpu will be playing a lead role in increasing community participation in Taku Hikoi.

The Ōpōtiki Plays Steering Rōpu want to better understand how they can better support the increase of physical activity with a particular focus on the Motu Trail.

We have created a short survey that will help shape activities for the future. Scan QR code to complete the survey today!

