

# Close to Home



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## Turning kai rescue into community spirit

When an apartment complex opened in Auckland 18 months ago, more than 110 people moved in.



Noleen at work in the community room.

Many were living alone, some had previously experienced homelessness, and most didn't know a single neighbour.

While everyone was grateful for a warm, dry, modern home, four walls alone don't create a sense of belonging. That's where kai came in.

The complex includes a community room, and residents were invited to work with the community development team to come up with ideas to bring people together. Early conversations revealed a simple but powerful truth: food could be the key to connection.

The idea of a pātaka kai, a shared food cupboard, was born. One resident, Noleen, brought in a few cans and some packets of noodles, so anyone who might be struggling could top up their weekly shop. A small group of neighbours painted a cupboard together to store the food.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 01

## Kua matihiko a Close to Home

Kua kore kē mātou e tuku i ngā kape o Close to Home reo Māori mā te mēra – engari ka whakairihia tuihonotia. Hei tiro i tētahi kape reo Māori, matawaia te waehere QR.

## Lomiga faainitaneti Close to Home

E lē toe lafoa atu i le pusa meli le lomiga Close to Home i le Gagana Samoa - na o le initaneti e maua ai. Pue le ata o le QR code, e faitau ai.

## Kuo liliu 'a e Close to Home 'o faka'ilekitulōnika

'Oku 'ikai ke mau toe tufa atu 'i he puha meilí ha ngaahi tatau kuo 'osi liliu lea 'o e Close to Home - ka te mau 'oatu ia 'i he 'initaneti. Ke vakai ki ha tatau kuo 'osi liliu lea, hulu'i (scan) 'a e kouti QR.

## Close to Home (《暖心到家》) 数字化啦

我们将不再邮寄中文版 Close to Home (《暖心到家》) 给您, 而是将它发布到网上。扫描二维码, 阅读中文版。



CONTINUED FROM COVER

## Turning kai rescue into community spirit

But what started as a modest gesture quickly grew into something much bigger. That cupboard became the foundation of the Green Space Collective, which has since developed into a full-scale food rescue operation.

Tamihana, one of the volunteers, explains the motivation:

“We wanted to live somewhere where people were connected, where neighbours became friends. We wanted the many cultures here to share their traditions and for everyone to feel like they belonged.”

Another resident, Kevin, began volunteering with KiwiHarvest, an organisation that rescues good food before it goes to waste. “I was looking for something to do, and my knees are shot, so I can’t do heavy lifting, but I enjoy helping,” he says.

It didn’t take long for Kevin and others to realise that the pātaka kai had revealed something important: many residents were

struggling to make ends meet and would benefit from rescued food being distributed on site.

Now, 250–300kg of rescued food arrives at the community room every week. A team of resident volunteers collects it, unpacks it, and divides it into household-sized portions.

“We might get a 20kg sack of carrots,” Kevin explains. “We’ll split that into 20–30 bags – each enough for a household.”

The group’s impact goes beyond weekly food parcels. They’ve hosted a pre-Christmas dinner and a Boxing Day barbecue, supplementing ‘bring a plate’ meals with rescued food and turning shared meals into shared moments.

At this complex, kai isn’t just nourishment – it’s the glue that’s transformed a public housing development into a thriving, connected community.



Shane and Noleen.



# Take the step. They're not alone.

## World Elder Abuse Awareness Day – 15 June

Every day, older people across Aotearoa New Zealand take courageous steps, reaching out, asking for help, and seeking safety. On average, Age Concerns receive 12 elder abuse enquiries every weekday.

If something doesn't feel right, if someone is making an older person uncomfortable, or if they're unsure where to turn, let them know they're not alone – there is a national elder abuse response service.

Contact the Elder Abuse Response Service, freephone 0800 32 668 65, text 5032; call Age Concern on freephone 0800 65 2 105, or visit [ageconcern.org.nz](http://ageconcern.org.nz)

# Thousands of older state homes across Aotearoa are being upgraded through our retrofit programme

We are upgrading older state homes so they are modern, healthy, and easy to live in.



Okeroa knows what it's like to live in an old home. He and his two children were living in one of the oldest state houses in Gisborne.

When we started work to upgrade the house, Okeroa moved into a newly renovated home nearby. He noticed the difference straight away.

“On the very first night, it was warm and cosy,” Okeroa says. “When the weather is warmer, the house stays cool.”

For Okeroa, the changes have made everyday life easier. “I really like the open shower,” he says. “I have arthritis in my hips, so it is safer for the kids and much easier for me.”

The new kitchen has also made a big difference. “It feels clean, solid, and the drawers open easily,” Okeroa says.

For Okeroa and his whānau, the move has meant more comfort and less worry.



“It's made a real difference to how we live,” he says.

The Gisborne home Okeroa lived in is the 3,500th home to be upgraded. It was built in the early 1940s during World War Two.

It was bought by Housing New Zealand in the 1970s. Since then, it has been home to many people in need. One whānau even lived there for more than 20 years.



## My home is old and cold. When will it be fixed?

We are fixing or rebuilding many older homes each year to make them warmer and more comfortable.

Because there are so many homes, we need to plan the work carefully and do it over time.

If your home is planned for this work, we will get in touch to talk with you about what will happen and how we will support you.

If you are worried about your home or need help sooner, please contact your housing support manager – they are there to help.

# From emergency housing to flourishing gardens

**When Damien moved into his Kāinga Ora home in Dunedin in May 2025, life became more stable for his whānau.**

After living with family and spending time in emergency housing, having a permanent home gave him the chance to settle, and to reconnect with a lifelong passion for gardening.

Damien has been growing vegetables since he was about 10 years old. In emergency housing there was no space to grow kai, but moving into his own home meant he could finally work the soil again. Today, his backyard is flourishing with vegetables, herbs and fruit –

enough to feed his whānau and share with others. Growing his own food saves money and brings a strong sense of pride.

Gardening has become both a passion and a source of wellbeing. Damien spends hours tending plants, composting, and recycling materials to build garden beds and greenhouses. His 18-month-old son Josiah enjoys joining him outdoors, exploring the garden alongside him.

With horticulture qualifications and experience in market gardening, Damien knows how to make the most of his space, even creating

natural fertilisers from food scraps. His housing support manager says the whānau is thriving and well connected in the neighbourhood. For Damien, having a stable home has opened the door to better health, confidence, and the hope of turning his passion into future work.



Damien

## Smart tips to cut waste and save on your food bill

### 1 Look for 'fresh' bargains

Check out local veggie shops, produce markets and ethnic food stores. Seasonal fruit and veg are usually cheaper, and specialty stores often have good prices on spices and staples.

### 2 Keep your pantry stocked with long-lasting staples

Items like canned beans, tomatoes, coconut milk and tinned fruit are handy for quick meals. Pasta, rice and noodles have a long life too. Check bulk aisles or places like Bin Inn for lower prices.

### 3 Swap out meat now and then

Meat is one of the biggest grocery costs. Try planning a couple of meat-free meals using beans, tofu, legumes or cheeses like halloumi or paneer.

### 4 Grow your own kai

Even a tiny space can be used to grow herbs, greens or small veggies. Use windowsills, benchtops, or upcycled buckets and tubs. See page 8 for great gardening tips for winter from our friends at Common Unity Project.

### 5 Cook in batches and use your leftovers

Make big pots of meals like curries, stews or bolognese. Freeze some, then stretch the rest by adding extra veggies, lentils or beans. You can create plenty of new meals from one base sauce. Check out 'Love food hate waste' for leftovers inspiration.



Scan me



## Keeping a pet in your Kāinga Ora home

**Kāinga Ora supports tenants having pets – but it's important to be a responsible pet owner. Some pets require our written consent before you bring them into your home.**

You'll need written consent from Kāinga Ora if you'd like to keep a dog, cat or livestock (such as cows, sheep, horses, pigs and goats). You automatically have our consent to keep all other types of pets.

Getting consent helps us check that your home is suitable for the type of pet you'd like to keep and that everything complies with council bylaws and other rules.

If you're thinking about getting a dog, cat or livestock, please talk to your housing support manager or call 0800 801 601. They'll guide you through the process and help you understand what's needed.

For more information visit [kaingaora.govt.nz/havingapet](http://kaingaora.govt.nz/havingapet)

## FREE dog desexing for Auckland and Northland

The government is funding SPCA to support free or low-cost dog desexing in Auckland and Northland. The programme aims to help owners manage their pets responsibly by reducing unplanned litters, roaming dogs, and related safety issues in local communities. Cost and access to veterinary services can be a barrier for many households, and this initiative will remove those obstacles by making desexing more affordable and accessible.

The programme will run for 12 months and prioritises areas where roaming dogs are more common.

Support is available through local services: if you are in Northland, contact your housing support manager for a dog desexing voucher. If you are in Auckland, contact the SPCA Centre for assistance.

For more information, click or scan the QR code.

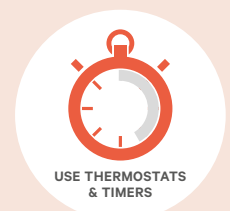


*Scan me*

## Save power, save money

Winter months are tough for keeping power costs down. But there are some easy ways to reduce your power bill.

- Wash clothes in cold water and wait for a full load before you start the washing machine.
- Limit showers to 4–5 minutes.
- Turn off the TV and the lights when you leave the room, and phone chargers when you have finished using them.
- Make sure the seals on your fridges and freezers are in good condition and aren't leaking, or mouldy.
- Heat your home using thermostats and timers so your heaters only come on when you need them and automatically turn off when the right temperature is reached.



# Cosy winter days with your pēpi and tamariki



Winter can be a time to slow down, stay cosy, and look after one another. Here are a few practical tips from Whānau Āwhina Plunket to help you and your whānau to stay warm, well and connected through the colder months.



## ACTIVITY IDEA: reading with your tamariki

Rainy winter days are time to slow down at home with your whānau. It's never too early to read with your pēpi! Reading to your tamariki builds their language skills, sparks curiosity, and strengthens your bond. Look at the pictures and kōrero about them together. You can visit your local library together. Many run special story times for tamariki in the winter months.



## Warm layers, happy pēpi

Babies can't regulate their temperature like we can, so it's important to keep them warm but not too hot. A good rule is to dress your baby in one more layer than you are wearing. Start with a soft layer close to the skin, add something warm, then a jacket or blanket on top if needed. Natural, breathable fibres such as cotton or wool are best, as fabrics like polar fleece, rayon, nylon and polyester don't breathe as well. The back of your pēpi's neck is the best way to check their temperature. It should feel warm but not sweaty. If their neck and back are warm, it's okay if their hands and feet are a bit cooler.

## Taking time to get better

When it's cold, germs spread more easily and it can be harder for our bodies to fight them off. If your tamariki are unwell, keeping them home, and offering plenty of liquids and extra rest will help them recover faster. Making sure tamariki are well before returning to daycare or kura helps them return with the energy to play and learn.

## A warm, healthy home

In the colder months, we spend more time inside. A warm, dry, well-ventilated and smoke-free home protects your tamariki from getting sick. Simple actions such as washing hands regularly and routinely cleaning high-touch areas like door handles, light switches and toys reduce the spread of winter bugs.



## Everyone in the whānau helps keep pēpi safe while they sleep

Everyone in the whānau plays a part in keeping pēpi safe at sleep time. A safe sleep space for every sleep makes all the difference. A firm, flat baby bed with firm sides, like a wahakura, pēpi pod, cot or bassinet, is the best place for every sleep. Lay pēpi on their back, face up and clear of blankets, toys and other items, and keep baby and their space free from smoke, vaping, alcohol and drugs.

## Keeping immunisations up to date

One of the best protections we can give our tamariki is to keep their vaccinations up to date. It's never too late to catch up! This includes the flu vaccine, which is recommended every year from age 6 months.

Check your Well Child Tamariki Ora book or ask your nurse if you are unsure what is due.

**PlunketLine is available 24/7** and you don't even need to leave home to talk to them. Call **0800 933 922**.



# Protect against flu, Covid and whooping cough

## Prepare for winter: protect yourself, your whānau and your community

As winter approaches, illnesses like influenza (flu), Covid, and whooping cough (pertussis) spread more easily. Colder weather means spending more time indoors and close to others – at home and in our communities – making it easier for viruses to pass from person to person.

Keeping up to date with immunisations is the best way to protect yourself and those around you from these viruses. Vaccination helps slow the spread of illness and reduces the risk of serious disease and hospitalisation. It also protects people who are more vulnerable, including babies, older people, and those with underlying health conditions. Vaccines used in Aotearoa New Zealand are safe, well tested, and closely monitored.

## Flu and Covid vaccines

Flu vaccines are available from **1 April 2026**. They are recommended for everyone aged 6 months and over and are **free** for people at higher risk of getting very sick – this includes those aged 65 and over, pregnant women, young children with a history of respiratory illness, and those with long-term health conditions (including mental health and addiction). Getting your flu vaccination every year can also reduce the risk of heart attacks and strokes and helps older people to stay independent for longer.

Covid vaccines are available all year round. Talk with your GP, pharmacy, or healthcare provider about whether you might need another dose – this is often recommended for older people and those at higher risk.

## Whooping cough (pertussis)

Whooping cough is highly contagious and can be very serious for newborn babies. It spreads through coughing and sneezing, and the severe cough may cause rib fractures or lead to pneumonia in older adults.

After the childhood vaccines, boosters are given at 11 years, 45 years (if required) and 65 years.

If you're pregnant, the vaccine is free and recommended from 16 weeks (but is available from 13 weeks). This helps protect your baby in their first weeks of life, before they can have their own immunisations.

## Where to get vaccinated

You can get vaccinated at a range of places in your local community:

- Your GP or medical centre
- Local pharmacies
- Hauora Māori and Pacific health providers
- Community vaccination clinics
- Some midwives

You can book your immunisation online through **Book My Vaccine** or call the **Vaccination Helpline** on **0800 28 29 26** (8.30am to 9pm, Monday to Friday). Interpreters and additional support can be arranged if needed.

## Other ways to stay protected

If you're feeling unwell, stay home and rest. Try to keep your distance from others and remember simple things like washing your hands regularly – they all help stop illness spreading.



# FLU 2026

Protect yourself and  
your whānau

# Keeping your home warm, dry and healthy

We spend a lot of time inside during the colder months. It's important to have a warm, dry home to stop the spread of germs and prevent other health conditions, such as rheumatic fever and skin infections.

Simple activities like cooking, showering and hanging your washing inside can cause an unhealthy buildup of moisture. Follow these three easy steps for a dry and healthy home.



## Wipe any moisture

or drips off your windows and walls.



## Open windows

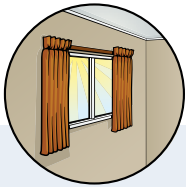
in the mornings and while you shower or take a bath.



## Hang washing outside

to dry, if you can; or in a room with a door closed and windows open.

Drier air is easier and cheaper to heat and stopping moisture building up helps prevent mould. Here are some things you can do to help.



## Open your curtains

during the day and close them just before dark.



## Open your windows

for 15 minutes every day, ideally first thing in the morning when the air is cold and dry.



## Heat your home

using thermostats and timers so your heaters only come on when you need them and automatically turn off when the right temperature is reached.

The Healthy Homes Initiative can provide practical support to make your home warmer and drier. The team will visit your home and talk about the needs of your whānau, and then work with you on what improvements could be made.

To find a Healthy Homes Initiative provider near you, click or scan the QR code.



Scan me



## Check the heat before you sleep

Check your electric blanket for hot spots before first use

**Every winter, heating related fires in New Zealand increase by 29%**

Check for hot spots in your electric blanket by turning it on high for 15 minutes, then switching it off and running your hand over the blanket.

If you use an electric blanket, make sure:

- it is less than 5 years old
- it is rolled during storage, not folded
- cords and controls are not twisted, and the blanket lies flat on the bed
- heavy objects are never placed on the bed while the electric blanket is in use
- it is always turned off before going to sleep.





## WINTER FIRE SAFETY

### Every year, colder weather means more house fires happen

#### See a fire before it starts



**A metre from the heater** – keep everything at a safe distance

It's tempting to hang winter laundry near a heater. But unless it's a metre away, your clothes are a fire waiting to happen.



**A clean dryer avoids a fire** – remove lint before every use

If your dryer's filter fills with lint, it can easily catch fire. Remove the risk by getting rid of lint buildup before every use.



**Working smoke alarms save lives** – keep yourself safe from fire.

Test your smoke alarms often to make sure they're working.

For more information visit [fireandemergency.nz/getstarted/](http://fireandemergency.nz/getstarted/)

CALL

111

# Gardening tips

The star constellations of Te Waka o Rangi and Matariki have set in the west, and Tamariki is taking his shorter winter path toward Hinetakurua, a clear sign the colder months are here.

As soil temperatures drop, gardens slow down. If you haven't planted winter veggies like broccoli, cabbage or cauliflower, you still can, but growth will be slow until spring. Protect young plants from frost by covering them with shade cloth or similar materials.

#### Look after tender plants

Bring delicate plants like herbs and greens indoors for winter. Keep them in pots with good drainage until spring, when they can go back outside.

#### Grow broad beans now

Broad beans germinate well in winter and can be planted straight into the soil. Pick them while young and green for the best flavour. They're great soil improvers too, so plant them where you plan to grow tomatoes in spring. Once they've finished, cut them down and use the stalks as mulch for your tomato seedlings.

#### Think ahead

Good gardening means preparing the soil for the next season and staying tuned to seasonal changes. Planting in stages helps with this, especially for things like broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage. Plant a new batch every week or two so your harvest is staggered.

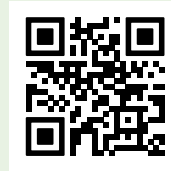
#### What to plant now

Broad beans (seed), broccoli, cabbage, garlic, kale, lettuce, mesclun, pak choi, radishes, snow peas and strawberries.

#### Compost tip

Keep a separate container of dry organic material (cardboard, paper, dead leaves, small sticks, mulch) beside your compost. Each time you add food scraps, cover them with a scoop of the dry mix. It adds carbon, reduces fruit flies and helps your compost break down faster.

Gardening tips thanks to Common Unity Project Aotearoa.



Scan me



COMMON UNITY  
together we grow

## FOR KIDS, ABOUT KIDS



## Ideas for celebrating Matariki – Friday 10 July | Rāmere 10 Takurua

- ★ Explore your whakapapa (genealogy or family tree) by talking to a family member about your tūpuna (ancestors) and your whānau (family).
- ★ Write a pepeha to introduce yourself by talking about your whānau (family) and whenua (the land you live on); your maunga (mountain); your moana (sea), roto (lake) or awa (river); your marae; hapū (subtribe) and iwi (tribe).
- ★ Share kai (a meal) with friends and whānau. If you're a keen baker, ask a family member to help you make rēwena (cultured potato bread).
- ★ Observe the night sky with whānau – set an alarm and view Matariki at a dark, elevated position on a clear day. The best time is between 5.30am and 6.30am, so go to bed early the night before! Or see if your local space observatory is holding any Matariki events.
- ★ Learn a Matariki waiata. If you're good on an instrument, learn to play as well as sing it.
- ★ Get stuck into the garden. Help your whānau harvest any veggies that were sown ready for winter. Check out page 8 for gardening tips.



**Colour me in!**

# Preventing rheumatic fever

## During the winter months, try to keep your home warm and dry.

Create as much space as possible to spread out around your home – rather than having to crowd in the same room if possible. Having more warm rooms and sleeping spaces available means germs like strep throat are less likely to spread.

## At the sign of a sore throat, get it checked

Rheumatic fever can often start with a ‘strep throat’ infection. If strep throat is not treated with antibiotics, it can trigger rheumatic fever to develop in some people.

In young children, signs of a sore throat can include:

- finding it hard to swallow
- having trouble eating or drinking.

## Where to get checked

There are lots of places you can have a sore throat checked.

- You can go to your doctor or nurse. Let them know you or your family/whānau member has a sore throat so they can be prioritised for appropriate care. You may have to pay a fee, so phone ahead to check.
- Pharmacies in some communities can do sore throat checks, swabs and treatment for children and young adults at higher risk of rheumatic fever. Contact your pharmacy to find out or visit Healthpoint for pharmacies providing a sore throat service.
- Your child’s school may have a free sore throat checking programme – contact them to find out.

If a strep throat infection is diagnosed, antibiotics will be prescribed to prevent rheumatic fever and the full 10-day course of antibiotics needs to be taken, even if you feel better.

## Symptoms of rheumatic fever

The following symptoms of rheumatic fever can develop 1–5 weeks after a person has had a strep throat infection.

- Sore joints – these are the most common symptom of rheumatic fever. Joints may be red and swollen and feel hot, including the hip, knees, elbows, ankles and wrists. Different joints may be sore on different days. Sore joints may cause a limp or difficulty walking because of the pain.
- Shortness of breath – your child may feel short of breath more easily than usual when they are active or exercising.



- Unusual jerky movements of your hands, feet, tongue and face – this can look like fidgeting or being unable to sit still and can affect your handwriting. The movements stop during sleep.

If you or anyone in your family/whānau have any of these symptoms, take them to your healthcare provider as soon as possible. You can also call **Healthline** on **0800 611 116**, free and available 24/7.

For more information about rheumatic fever, click or scan the QR code.



*Scan me*

If your child has signs or symptoms of rheumatic fever, take them to a doctor or nurse straight away to be checked.

Rheumatic fever usually starts

# 1-5 weeks

after your child has had strep throat.



## No data? No problem.

Zero.govt.nz has you covered.



## Driveway safety reminder



Safekids Aotearoa suggests three things you can do to make driveways and other places safer for children:

- **Check** for children before driving off
- **Supervise** children around vehicles – always
- **Separate** play areas from driveways.

## MoneyTalks is a free service to help you manage your money

You can get free, non-judgemental budgeting and debt management support by visiting [moneytalks.co.nz](https://moneytalks.co.nz) for information, resources and a chat.

You can email [help@moneytalks.co.nz](mailto:help@moneytalks.co.nz), call 0800 345 123, text 4029 or find a free financial mentor near you at [moneytalks.co.nz](https://moneytalks.co.nz)



## John's happy to be back in the neighbourhood he grew up in

Longtime Hawke's Bay Rugby Union volunteer John is happy to be back living in Maraenui, Napier. "I grew up here in Maraenui with my 10 brothers and sisters after mum and dad bought a four-bedroom home. So, moving back now feels like coming home. I still see a few people I went to school with."

John was living in a flat in another part of town when he got a notice that they were going to be demolished.

"I ended up in emergency housing, living in a motel. Even though I am 70 now, I was worried about not having somewhere permanent to live."

He has recently moved into one of the new homes opposite the local shopping centre.

"I love living here. These apartments are beautiful and there is always something going on across the road or someone



John loves living back in Maraenui.

I know dropping in. The house is nice and warm and if it gets too warm, I can open both doors and get a breeze blowing through.

I go for an early morning walk around the community. Sometimes I help the lady at the Four Square open the door; it's a heavy one.

I help with the Pakeke group across the road twice a week. On Mondays I am there early to put the cup of tea things out before everyone comes in for housie. You can win either a bag of potato chips or a lollipop!"

**Contact** Publication enquiries should be made to: [editor@close2home.co.nz](mailto:editor@close2home.co.nz)

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