



LGFA Taituarā Awards 2025:

Destination Kāwaroa – Stage One

Excellence in Community Engagement



NPDC



Taranaki
Foundation
Inspiring. Giving.



Project Summary

Destination Kāwaroa is a collaborative project led by charitable organisation the Taranaki Foundation, in partnership with mana whenua of Ngāmotu – New Plymouth, Ngāti Te Whiti, New Plymouth District Council (NPDC), and New Plymouth Partners (NP Partners)¹.

The project transforms Kāwaroa Park on New Plymouth’s foreshore into an intergenerational learning and play space celebrating the district’s culture, heritage, and ecology.

Stage One opened on 18 December 2024 and includes:

- Inter-generational play experiences based on the Great 8 principles of best practice playspaces: Sensory Stimulation, Agility and Fitness, Accessible Toilets, Shared Social spaces, Waterplay, Hill Play, and Play Along the Way elements.
- Innovative learning spaces (learning hotspots) linked to NZ Curricula Learning components and key competencies such as rocky shore environment and ecosystems, cultural narrative and traditional navigation, and coastal plants.
- Rich stories of the area, hapū, and communities woven into the layout.

NPDC contributed some renewal funding, project management, and expertise, working in partnership with the New Plymouth community to design and create an extraordinary space for everyone to enjoy for generations to come.

Destination Kāwaroa Together, We Made It Happen



Information board and map

¹ New Plymouth Partners is a unique public-private partnership forum for business and community leaders committed to investing in the region.



Design elements and patterns have been co-designed with Ngāti Te Whiti hapū

Strategic Context

New Plymouth needed a destination playspace

The idea for Destination Kāwaroa was presented by Bryce Barnett, then-Chair of the Taranaki Foundation, to NPDC in 2021. Destination playspaces are premium, city-wide attractions designed for community engagement, extended visits, and inclusivity. At the time, New Plymouth had 49 playgrounds, but none met the criteria for a destination playspace.

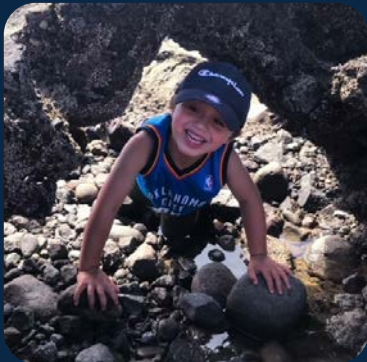
Submissions on the draft NPDC Long-Term Plan 2018-2028 highlighted the need for upgraded or new adventure playspaces. This was confirmed through consultation with Ngāti Te Whiti, Taranaki Foundation, NPDC internal stakeholders, schools, and a wide range of community groups.

A destination playspace would enhance the level of service beyond an ordinary playground and respond to community feedback about needing accessible and varied play spaces. Kāwaroa Park was selected by Council, with the support of hapū, as the most viable option for a destination playspace due to its location on the Coastal Walkway, proximity to the city centre, and space to increase the service level.

Destination Kāwaroa is expected to become an intergenerational asset benefiting the region for decades by catering to Taranaki residents and drawing visitors to the region.



Connecting to the rocky shore



Bryce Barnett with his grandchildren planting the final pōhutukawa at the site.

Destination Kāwaroa aligns with NPDC's vision of a Sustainable Lifestyle Capital by delivering a high-quality community amenity in a financially prudent way, enhancing community well-being with an inclusive and accessible space, prioritising sustainability in design, and supporting regional prosperity by attracting visitors to New Plymouth.

Project risks were identified and mitigated

A risk to Stage One was not having sufficient budget to deliver it. This was mitigated by commencing Stage One once funding was secured. NPDC applied project management best practices, including a project plan and overall budget that were closely monitored and adhered to, and value engineering.

Throughout the design process, a circular economy approach was undertaken, with value engineering and design innovation utilised to ensure the project met allocated budget.

Effective value engineering included applying NPDC resources with relevant expertise, utilising existing infrastructure, replacing some bespoke play equipment, and utilising local suppliers.

To save on contractor management fees, NPDC managed sub-contractors and bought many of the playspace and amenity items directly.

Risks of cost increases and unexpected works were mitigated by analysing equipment for savings, locking in prices early, including budget contingency, and using construction management software for timely updates.



Early concept planning



Public communication - using 3D imagery

Project Management

Scope, Timeline and Resources

Destination Kāwaroa was designed to be delivered in phases, with Stage One covering 75% of the 22,000m² site and costing approximately \$6 million. Funding came from donors, sponsors and philanthropic trusts (\$3.05M), central government (\$1.5M), NPDC funding (\$1.1M) and \$300k in interest.

Stage One included civil works for Stages One and Two, and installation of amenities and equipment in various zones:

- **Agility and Fitness/Warrior Course**
 - Hill Play
- **Pathway To The Sea**
 - Pump Track
 - Sensory and Stimulation
- **Social Shared Space**
 - Timber Deck
- **Toilets and Changing Rooms**
 - Waterplay

Following Council’s approval in 2021, design options were explored as a co-design with Ngāti Te Whiti. Civil and structural design began in February 2024, followed by consents and procurement planning. Construction started in April 2024 and was completed on schedule in December 2024.

NPDC managed the project, ensuring a collaborative co-design process involving design, detailed planning, construction, and stakeholder management. Subject matter experts across NPDC contributed to landscape planning, design, procurement, fundraising, legal, parks, property, and consenting.

Governance

The Governance Group, comprising NPDC officers, Ngāti Te Whiti hapū, and the Taranaki Foundation, met bi-monthly to discuss and approve significant project elements. NPDC’s Internal Governance Group included a Project Sponsor, Project Owner, Business Owner, and Subject Matter Expert Lead.

Quality Assurance

Safety was a paramount consideration. All playground items were tested by the suppliers when installed, and a playground auditor (Park Central) was involved in all aspects at key milestones, and then followed up with site visits to ensure the project was compliant with playground specifications.

An Inspection and Test Plan (ITP) was undertaken by contractors BTW and Clelands throughout the project to monitor whether specific requirements and quality standards were being met. The ITP enabled concerns to be addressed as soon as they were identified.



Quality Assurance
Playground Safety Auditor inspecting waterplay and sensory zone climbing features as they were developed



Pumptrack construction



Sensory Play Zone construction



Water Play Zone construction



Wheke sculpting



Hill Play Zone construction



Te Kupenga rock sculpting

Relationship Management

Relationship management has been central to the Destination Kāwaroa project from inception through to fundraising, construction, and opening. Led by project partner Taranaki Foundation and the NP Partners programme, we engaged deeply with the community, including funders, iwi, corporate, philanthropic, special interest groups, and the general public.

Various communication tools were used to maximise community engagement, such as:

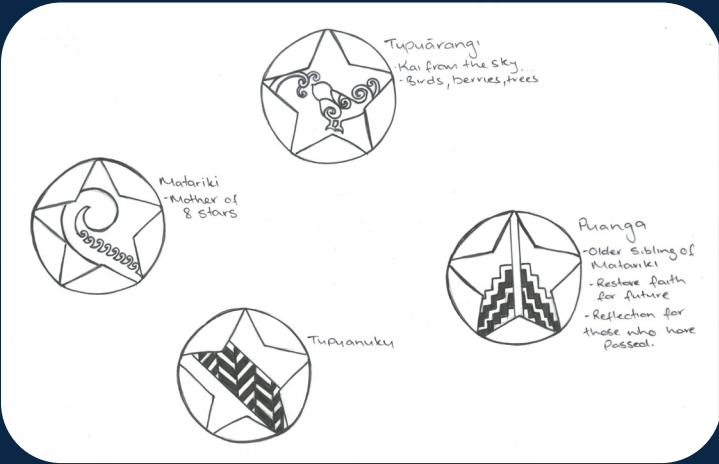
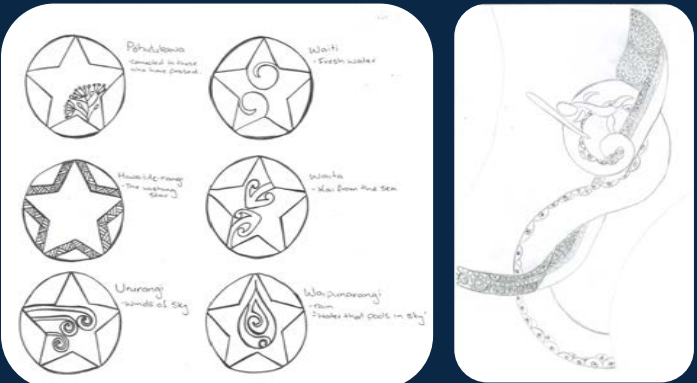
- Regularly updated webpages with information and videos on Taranaki Foundation, NP Partners and NPDC websites.
- Site visits at Kāwaroa.
- Regularly updated social media channels, including Facebook and Instagram.
- Various in-person wānanga (workshops) and presentations with local organisations, schools and groups (e.g. NP Partner dinner, Rotary meetings, Hapū hui).
- Direct emails and in-person engagement with business and community leaders, and entrepreneurs.
- On-site engagement in delivery of the project, e.g. with Moturoa school planting programme.



Moturoa school propagated native threatened coastal plants and planted them onsite.

Throughout the design phase, the project team conducted extensive community consultations, including:

- In-school sessions, including inviting kids to draw pictures of what they would like to see at the park.
- Hapū presentations and wānanga, including site visits.



Hand sketches by Kristie McCulloch, hapū designer. Kristie was a key member of the design team and involved from inception through all stages of the project and undertook specific work with hapū to develop the design concepts along with the broader design team.

Design Process

concept ideas generation

Co-design team
Hapū
NPDC designers
NP Partners

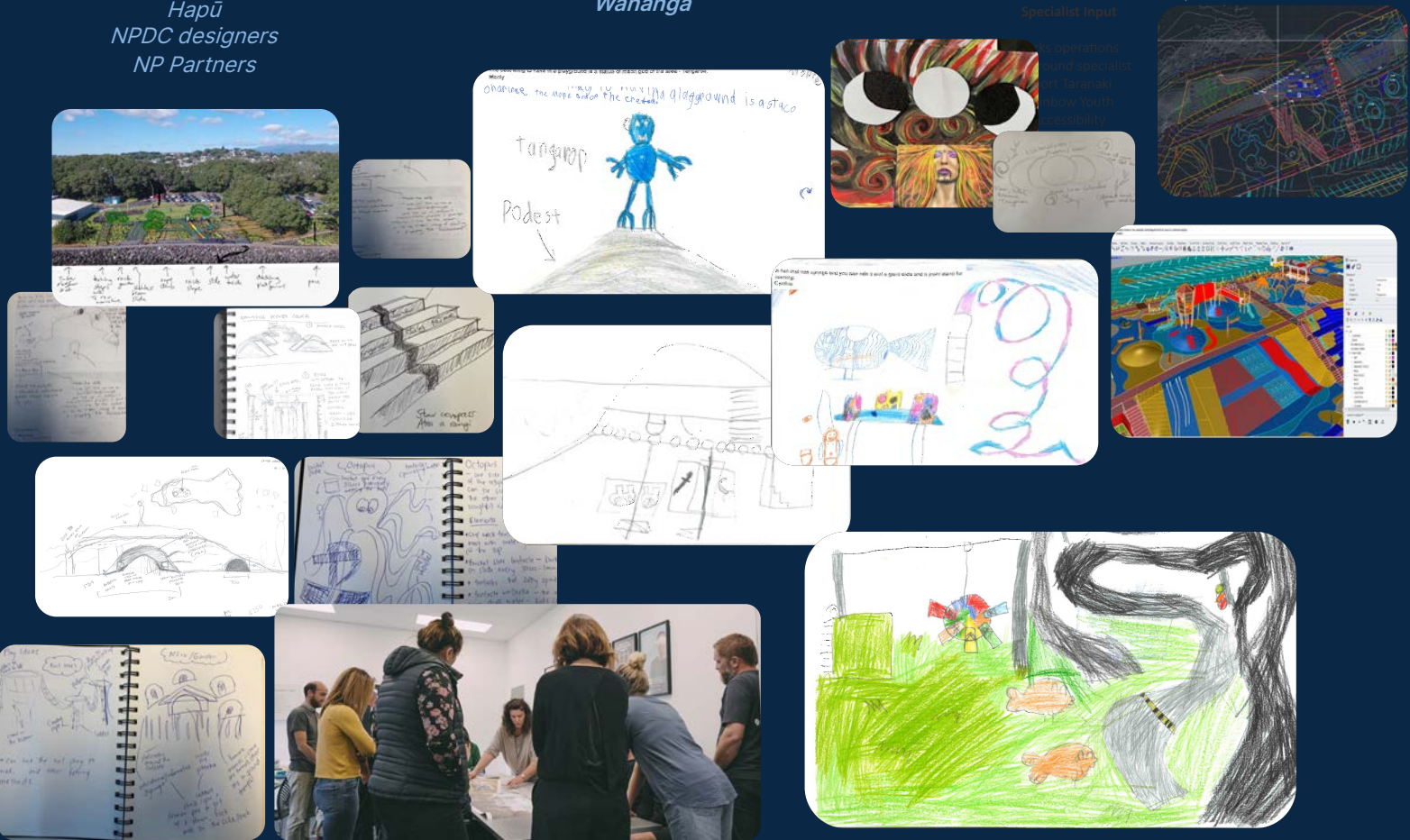
concept testing

Central School
Wānanga

Hapū
Wānanga

developed & detailed design

Specialist input



- Wānanga sessions with community groups, including NP Partners, Conductive Education, Rainbow Youth, CCS Disability Action, Sport Taranaki, Age Concern, NPDC Age and Accessibility Working Party, Blind Foundation, Deaf Aotearoa, Cancer Society, Rotary, Ngāmotu Marine Reserve Society, and Taranaki Regional Council.
- Puke Ariki museum's education staff collaborated on educational hotspots, and Taranaki Regional Council's marine biologists were consulted on educational design features.

The project focused on creating a space that catered to diverse needs and preferences. Key groups such as Rainbow Youth were engaged to understand the specific considerations for design.

For example – many of their members struggle with body image, so having an ability to be a part of the space without actively engaging in physical activity (quiet seating areas for observation and quiet enjoyment) were considered particularly important.

Project Success

Before: an ageing playground disconnected from the site's culture, history and ecology

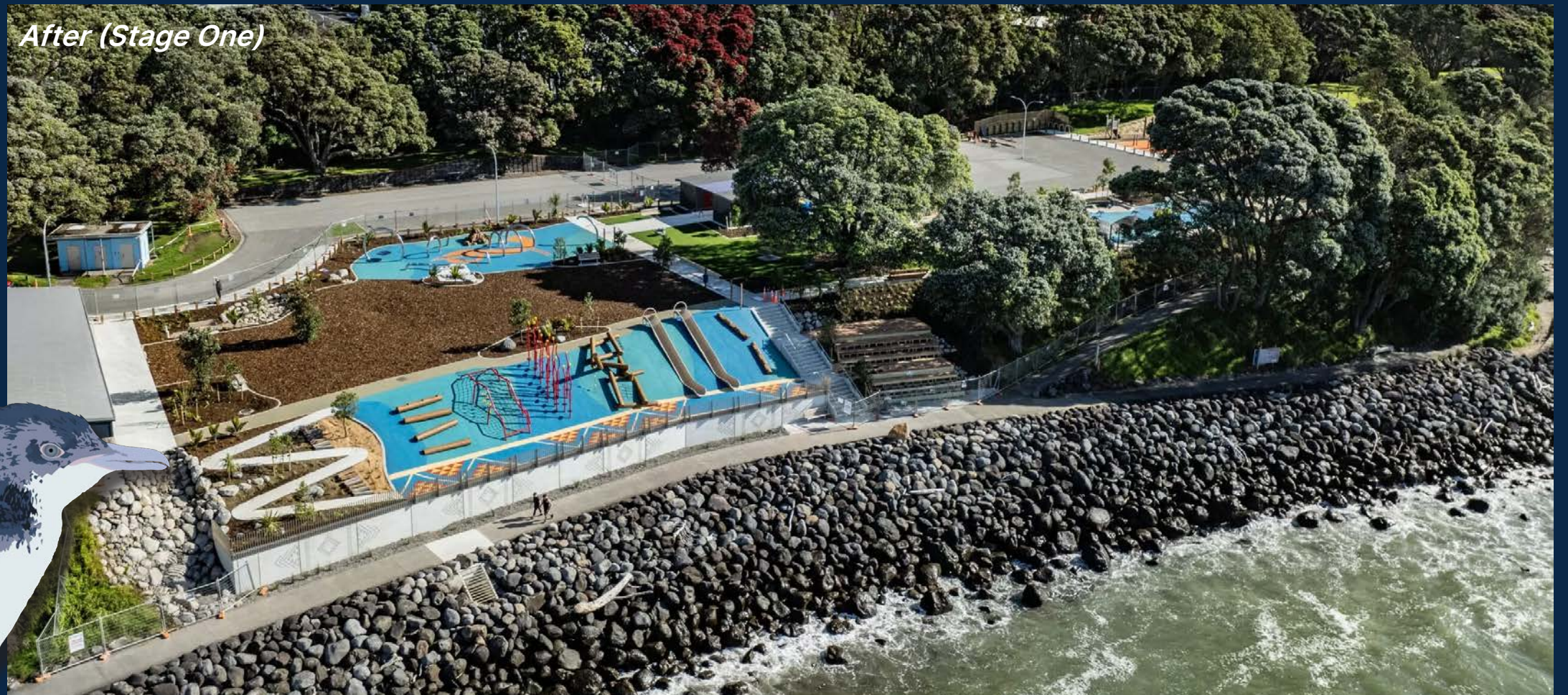
Kāwaroa Park, located on New Plymouth's Coastal Walkway beside Kāwaroa reef, previously featured an ageing playground disconnected from the site's cultural, historical, and ecological significance. The area, known for its plentiful kaimoana, had a playground dominated by a hard surface carpark, disconnecting it from the coastal environment.



After: an accessible intergenerational learning and play space celebrating the site's culture, heritage, and ecology

Stage One of Destination Kāwaroa opened to the public on 18 December 2024. It is now an intergenerational educational and play destination, with eight themed zones interconnected by walkways.

The zones provide safe, inclusive, and tactile facilities for socialising, playing, exercising, learning, building confidence and agility, or simply enjoying the location and fresh air



Kororā nest near Kāwaroa. A learning hotspot board highlights important Kororā conservation messages.



Project Success

Stage One features include:

- Water, challenge, and natural play features.
- Shared social spaces, seating, shelter, and an outdoor classroom area.
- Reef-themed sensory stimulation zone for younger children.
- Pump track and swings.
- Educational elements and learning hotspots.
- Improved public facilities, including a Changing Places bathroom, parking, and space for food trucks.

The co-design process with Ngāti te Whiti and the breadth and depth of community involvement in design and delivery has resulted in people feeling empowered by their ability to contribute to this enduring community asset.

NPDC’s Parks and Open Spaces team reports high visitor numbers, with each zone being utilised by people of all ages and abilities. The splash pad saw heavy use during the hot summer months. Other councils have praised the project and inquired about how they can emulate its design.

Criteria Success Factors Met

To meet the criteria for a ‘destination playspace’, Stage One aimed to meet critical success factors.



Sensory sculptures



Sensory Play Zone climbing



Water jets and mist shooting from the Wheke waterplay arms



Stage 1 grand opening December 2024



Hill Play Zone



Sensory Play Zone tunnel and slide



Project Success

Critical Success Factors for Destination Kāwaroa	Evidence of success factor being met
Increased level of service	Compared to the previous playground at Kāwaroa Park, Stage One delivers more expansive and accessible amenities, and more diverse and numerous play spaces catering to all ages and abilities.
Something for all ages and abilities	- Community feedback was incorporated to ensure the space is inclusive for all ages and abilities. - The area serves as a convenient gathering point with immersive entertainment for everyone.
Accessible	- Community feedback was incorporated to ensure the space meets the needs of disadvantaged or disabled individuals. - Features include: - Changing Places bathroom for those who are profoundly disabled and their caregivers - Accessible toilets and changing facilities - Mobility carparks and ramp access from the Coastal Walkway - Hard and non-slip surfaces - Accessible water play - Improved access to the natural reef
Reflective of Ngāti Te Whiti aspirations	- Stage One tells a rich story of the local area and hapū, including: - Maramataka physical features (Māori lunar calendar) - Sculptures of Te Wheke-a-Muturangi highlighting Kupe - Star of Puanga and Matariki constellation - Sensory features of local motu, flora, and fauna - Learning boards with te reo translations.
Educational	- The space includes 10 ‘learning hotspots’ that align with NZ Curricula, reflecting narratives from Ngāti te Whiti, and linking to Puke Ariki exhibitions and TRC’s Rocky Shore Programme. - Outdoor classroom areas and easier access to Kāwaroa Reef encourage natural exploration and sea life observation.



A design by hapū designer, Kristie McCulloch

Kāwaroa Tikanga Reef Etiquette

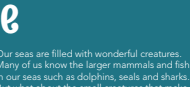
Our seas are filled with wonderful creatures. Many of us know the larger mammals and fish in our seas such as dolphins, seals and sharks. But what about the small creatures that make their homes on our rocky shores? They may be tiny, but these creatures are just as precious and play an important role in the marine ecosystem.

Me tika i ngā kororā o te taharai
Show respect for sea creatures



- Tread carefully.
- Leave creatures exactly where you found them.
- Leave attached seaweed in place.
- Look with your eyes to avoid damaging rocky shore creatures.
- Gently put rocks back to the same position you found them.
- Limit your collection of empty shells as other creatures use them as homes.

Kia tūpatahi ngā hoi hoi i ngā pū
Be careful and keep safe



- Check tide times to avoid being cut off by the rising tide.
- Do not explore the seashore alone.
- Look out for waves - never turn your back to the ocean.
- Beware of slippery and uneven rock surfaces.
- Pick up any rubbish found on the shore and dispose of it appropriately.

Kororā Little Blue Penguin

Eudyptula minor

Did you know that kororā nest near Kāwaroa and many other places along the Taranaki coastline?

We **ALL** have a responsibility to keep kororā safe.

Kororā are the world's smallest penguin, measuring around 25 - 40cm in height - slightly taller than a rugby ball!

They have a slate-blue back and a white belly providing perfect camouflage in the water. Their pink legs and webbed feet help with swimming and walking on land.

Their scientific name *Eudyptula minor* means 'good' 'tide' 'diver'. Like all penguins, they cannot fly, but they are awesome swimmers and their paddle-like flippers help them zoom through the water at speeds of up to 6 km an hour! 10,000 feathers (3 - 4 times more than birds that fly) are kept waterproof with oil producing glands.

Kororā hunt using their good eyesight out at sea, keeping mostly on squid and small fish.

When they return to the land at dusk they are often quite noisy with loud screams, wails, trumpeting and deep growls.

Kororā are found in many places around New Zealand, including the Taranaki coast, and also in southern Australia where they are known as fairy penguins.

Karohia te paunga i ngā kororā
Avoid disturbing wildlife



- Keep your distances from seabirds and penguins as well as their nests and burrows.
- Keep your distance from seals.
- Use the zoom on your camera or binoculars to get a closer look.
- Keep dogs under control at all times on Taranaki beaches.

Protect our kororā!

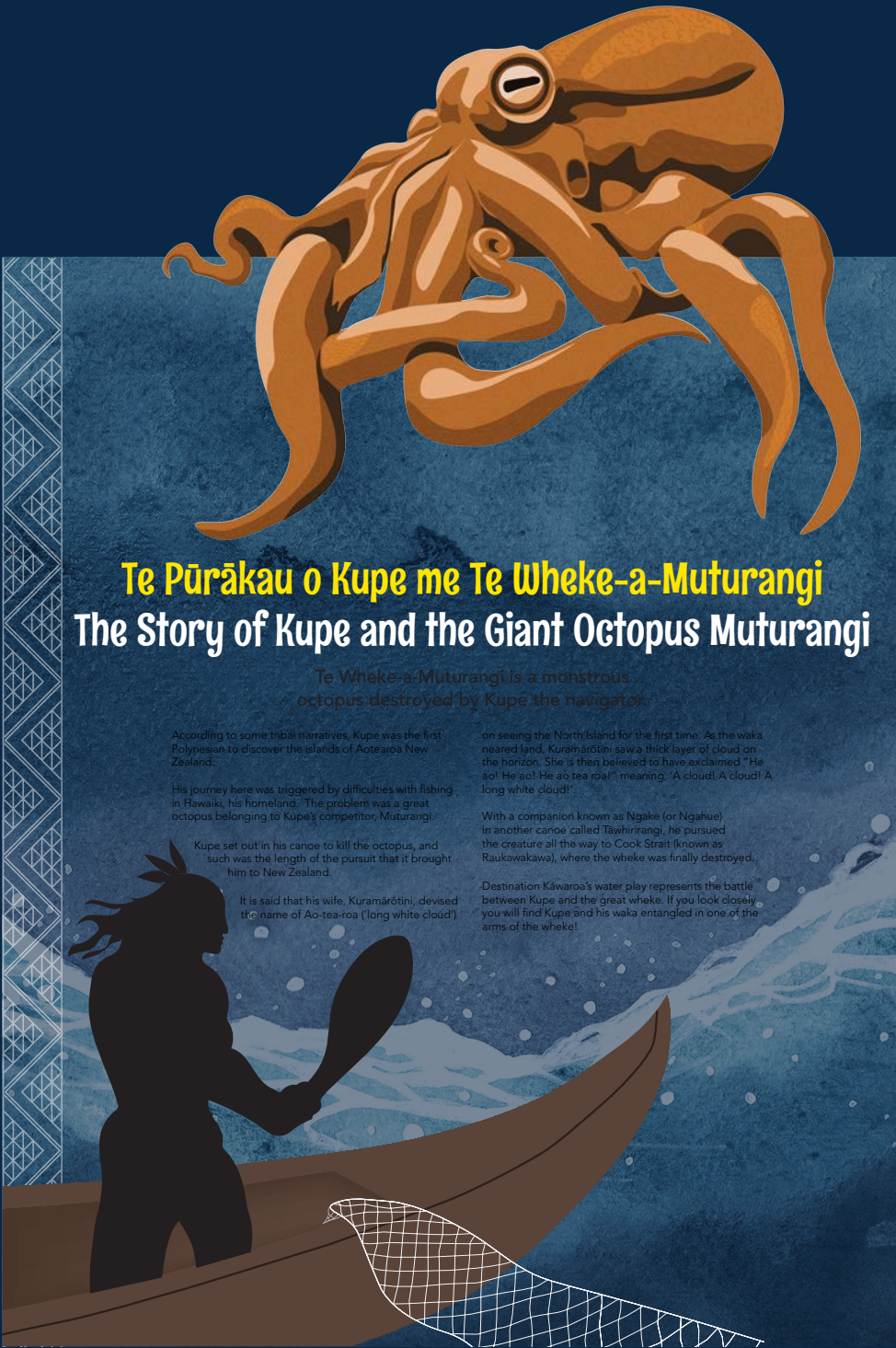
Kororā return to the same location each night. Please do not disturb penguins or their burrows. If adults are disturbed bringing food back to their chicks, nests can be abandoned and their hungry chicks may not survive.

Dogs are a big threat to kororā - keep control of your dog on Taranaki beaches at all times, especially near dusk and dawn. Even small, mild-mannered dogs can harass, kill or harm penguins.

During moult time (2-3 weeks in the summer) they cannot swim, making them particularly vulnerable to dogs and other predators such as cats and stoats. When moulting they can look scruffy - just like an exploding pillow. If a penguin is clearly injured or in immediate danger, contact the emergency hotline 0800 DOC HOT.

Project Success

Learning hotspots



Transferability to other local authorities

Listening to and empowering the community to go beyond an average playground

NPDC could not afford to undertake such an ambitious project on its own. By supporting Taranaki Foundation’s vision, NPDC unlocked the opportunity to create a true destination playspace; achievable only with community backing.

For other councils looking to emulate this success, it is important to engage your region’s philanthropic community early on to gauge interest. This is what Taranaki Foundation and NPDC did, and it informed subsequent decision-making and planning.

Through NP Partners and the Taranaki Foundation, many Taranaki people and organisations stepped up to fund the project to ensure its delivery; from small contributions to very large (\$1M+) donations and generous in-kind commitments. Over 80% of the project’s funding was from sources external to local government. The project’s unique funding structure empowered the Taranaki community to deliver the destination playspace that it wanted – for enjoying today and long into the future.

Community empowerment in design

Community empowerment not only played a vital role in the vision and funding, but also the design of Destination Kāwaroa. By actively involving the community, the space reflects local values and cultural heritage, especially through partnership with Ngāti Te Whiti.

In a recent letter to NPDC about Stage One, Ngāti Te Whiti Hapū wrote:

“The collaboration in this project has not only strengthened our connection to the Kāwaroa site but has also been a mana-enhancing experience for Ngāti Te Whiti. This work showcases the powerful outcomes that arise when all parties come together with mutual respect and a shared vision.”

Public feedback during the design phase led to significant changes. Notable features include: Taranaki’s first splash pad and Changing Places facility, and stormwater upgrades to prevent flooding. Community concerns about the ecological impact of more formal access to the reef also led to the decision to retain informal access.

Local firms, suppliers, and community groups played a vital role in design delivery, including the design and installation of bespoke elements, enhancing cost effectiveness for the project and ongoing maintenance.

Destination Kāwaroa is testament to what can be achieved collectively when local government works in genuine partnership with mana whenua and the community to create something truly extraordinary.

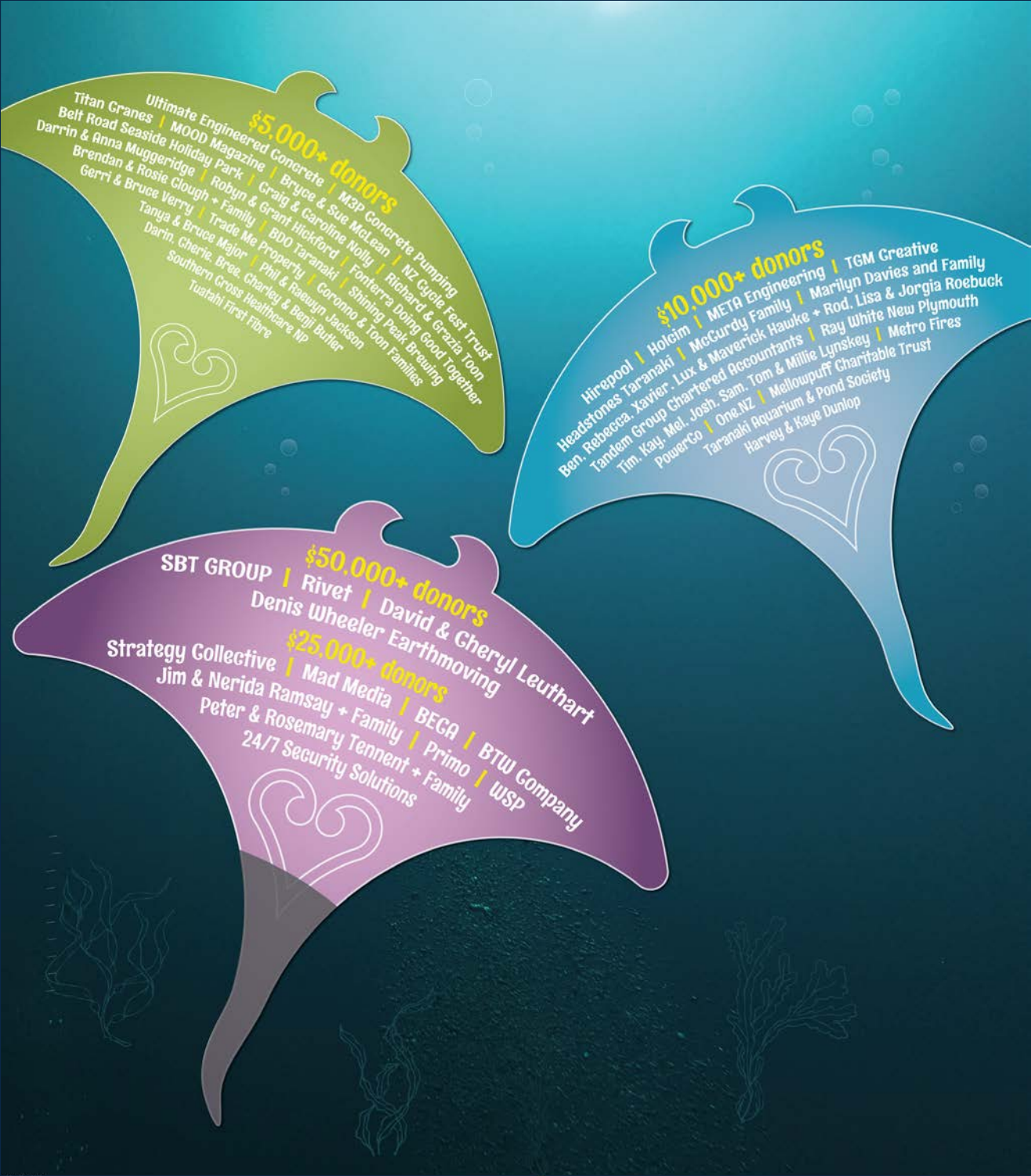
Destination Kāwaroa Supporters and Donors

Together, We Made It Happen!

The vision for Destination Kāwaroa has been realised through the passion of our community. We acknowledge and celebrate the generosity of all those that have contributed to making this world-class intergenerational play and learning space a reality.

Ngā mihi nui.

Foundation Partners



Destination Kāwaroa Partners \$100,000+



Bryce & Delwyn
Barnett + Family



Radcliffe Family



David & Fay
Garrett + Family



Phil & Robyn
Hinton + Family

Lottery Community
Facilities

Thank you to all of our supporters and donors who helped make Destination Kāwaroa a reality!

Ngā mihi nui

Signage on-site displaying all donors and sponsors, highlighting community ownership and engagement in the project, with over 120 contributors.