



REGENERATIVE  
Communities

PILOT

*Report 2024*



# Regenerative Communities 2021 - 2024

A project designed and undertaken by Flourish Kia Puāwai, a Charitable Social Enterprise for innovative community and environmental wellbeing initiatives, Aotearoa, New Zealand.

We'd like to acknowledge our collaborators; Te Hapū o Ngāti Wheke, St Martin's Primary School, St Martin's Scouts, Christchurch City Council, Hillsborough, Opawa, St Martins Communities, Ōpāwaho Heathcote River and the Tiny Forest (King George V Reserve).

This report is written to complete the funding accountability to Lotteries NZ and to share our learnings.



[www.flourish.org.nz](http://www.flourish.org.nz)



# Introduction

This report tells the story of a project to explore using a regenerative approach to community-building. The project was carried out between April 2021, when funding was received, and May 2023 by a small team from Flourish Kia Puāwai, a charitable social enterprise based in Otautahi, Christchurch. Of course, lots of reading and thinking and talking and planning happened before the project was able to start in earnest.

We start the report by describing the location of the project and the community it was located in.

Then we explain our understanding of regeneration and why we chose this approach. This is followed by an outline of the principles we developed to reflect the regenerative approach.

The bulk of the report is based on a chronological series of extracts from the journal we kept during the project. The journal included descriptions of what was happening, our thoughts and reactions to events, and the learning we took from them. Throughout the extracts from the journal we have discussion boxes, where we talk about and offer reflections on our learnings from particular events or ongoing challenges.

We finish with a list of resources and references that either provided information for this report or informed our thinking in regeneration.

About some of our language:

- Sometimes we talk about the reserve, and sometimes about the tiny forest. In our journal we sometimes used them interchangeably and this may reflect in the report. To be correct, the tiny forest is located in the reserve but is not the whole of it.

- We were calling the area the tiny forest for some time before the project started. We then discovered that Tiny Forest is a trademark. While we've learnt a lot from the Tiny Forest movement, we have no connection with it.

- We often used Māori words in this project and they appear throughout this report. If you are unfamiliar with any of them then Te Aka <https://www.maoridictionary.co.nz/> is a very helpful resource. The local dialect of te reo uses a 'K' instead of 'ng' and we have used this.

# Contents

- ④ Introduction
- ④ Contents
- ④ Our Approach
- ④ The Community and Location
- ④ Project Development
- ④ Regenerative Communities
- ④ Our Journal with Reflections and Learnings
- ④ What Did we Learn?
- ④ References and Resources
- ④ Appendices
  - Appendix 1 St Martins School Proposal
  - Appendix 2 Results from Student Questionnaire responses
  - Appendix 3 Student feedback on the river and eels learning session
  - Appendix 4 'Give Back' forest volunteers feedback meeting
  - Appendix 5 Foraging Workshop feedback



# Our Approach

You've probably heard of Regenerative Agriculture as a way for a sustainable future. We wanted to explore what a regenerative community would look like.

This pilot aimed to both learn and practice how to undertake regeneration with and by community. We journaled the story as it happened and what we were learning. We hope that other initiatives can pick up this exciting and transformative way of working, and that our experiences can help the mahi.

We believe that this qualitative model most closely reflects a regenerative process, showing our learning, challenges and growing insights. There are no tidy, cut-and-dried 'results' or 'outcomes' to conclude the report. Our goal was to explore and reveal the process, as regeneration is a process rather than an end. We hope that others will be able to pick up from what we've learned and continue to grow a greater and wider understanding and appreciation of regenerative processes.



## The Community and Location

The focus of the project was to engage people from the St Martins / Opawa / Hillsborough communities in caring for King George V Reserve, created in 1927. Located at the junction of three communities, the reserve features a regenerating tiny forest of native vegetation on the bank of the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River. It also includes a scout den and a grassed area.





Our aim is to create local regenerative communities committed to learning, engaging, sharing, support, and transformation. We are beginning with a Regenerative Communities Pilot exploring ecological action, reflecting together, workshops, sharing experience, skills and resources.

Let's take a step forward and imagine and create together a better way of living for all life across the East Canterbury Waitaha Bioregion.  
For our children, our children's children and all life that follows.



## The Community and Location

The forest in the reserve was planted in 1990 to celebrate the sesquicentennial of the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. It is comprised of an ecological sequence from lowland wetland trees, shrubs and grasses to dryland species. It is one of the most established community-planted indigenous riparian reserves along the Opawaho Heathcote river, and once established it was somewhat left to its own devices.



The surrounding community is predominantly middle-class, with the local school being in decile 9. The suburb is in the Cashmere ward, which has a slightly older population than the whole of Christchurch, and is more predominantly more Pakeha than the whole of Christchurch.

We originally planned to carry out a comparable location in a less middle-class community but covid stymied this plan.

# Project Development

This project was developed and initiated by a team of three. Each of us identify as Pakeha. All three of us come from a background of working in community – one in ministry, one in public health and community development, and one in the non-profit sector.

The main kaimahi was Mark Gibson B.A., who carried out the project and maintained the journal, with Sharon Torstonson B.A. MNZM and Michelle Whitaker B.Sc. lending a hand at events and doing some recording in the journal. Michelle did much of the reading and thinking around regenerative practices, and wrote the theoretical section of the report. Sharon was part of the relationship-building with mana whenua alongside Mark, and also pulled together this final report.

We also had the support and involvement of Dr Colin Meurk OMNZ, an ecologist who was instrumental in the original planting and had followed the growth of the forest ever since.

As our relationship with mana whenua developed, Maui Stuart of Te Hapū o Ngāti Wheke of Ngāi Tahu became a loved and valued colleague in the team.

Our goal was to revitalise the reserve by reducing weeds and invasive species, carry out plantings and control pests, all in a way that honoured Te Tiriti. This was to be the vehicle for developing increased community connection as locals engaged with each other while engaging with the forest and with mana whenua. At the end of the project an ongoing kaitiaki (guardian) group would be established and operating. We hoped that long-term there would be a thriving forest, increased community connection and social capital, and a better understanding and value of regenerative principles and practices.

The two main activities of the project were a school programme in which students from the local school would come to the forest as part of their curriculum activities, and the formation of a team of volunteers who would carry out work in the forest. We also worked with other groups such as the local scouts to involve them in the regeneration of the forest.



# Regenerative Communities

## What is Regeneration?

Regeneration means having the ability to regenerate or renew, either naturally or through deliberate actions. It is often heard in the context of sustainability and environmentalism, and in this context regenerative refers to practices and systems that aim to restore and improve the health and resilience of natural ecosystems (including community resources), rather than simply sustaining, conserving or depleting them, and seeks to create positive feedback loops that enhance the health and vitality of the systems they depend on.

It is based on principles such as biodiversity, soil health, water conservation, and renewable energy.

Regenerative practices can be applied in a variety of contexts, including agriculture, forestry, urban planning, economics and now to community development.

## Compared to Conservation?

While conservation is an important approach to protecting and preserving natural resources, a regenerative approach goes beyond conservation and focuses on restoring and improving the health and resilience of ecosystems and equitable co-creation with all partners of the eco-system.

Another of our concerns is that Conservation has not held back our deteriorating biodiversity for many reasons.

"I wondered what is missing that at a community level we could change, what is a better approach we need for the future world?" Michelle

One could think of Regenerative approach as the next level of Conservation.

Here are some benefits of a regenerative approach compared to conservation:

- **Increases biodiversity:** Regenerative practices are designed to promote biodiversity and restore ecosystems, resulting in a healthier and more diverse environment. This can lead to increased resilience to natural disasters, disease, and climate change.
- **Improves soil health:** Regenerative agriculture practices, such as cover cropping and crop rotation, can improve soil health and fertility, leading to higher yields and more nutritious food.
- **Reduces carbon emissions:** Regenerative practices, such as agroforestry and carbon farming, can sequester carbon in the soil and vegetation, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and mitigating the effects of climate change.
- **Supports local communities:** Regenerative approaches often prioritize local production and consumption, creating jobs and supporting local economies. In addition, community-based decision-making processes can lead to more inclusive and equitable outcomes.
- **Enhances ecosystem services:** Regenerative approaches can improve ecosystem services, such as water filtration, erosion control, and pollination, leading to a healthier and more resilient environment.

Overall, a regenerative approach offers a more holistic and proactive approach to environmental stewardship, with the potential to create a healthier, more resilient, and more equitable future for both human societies and the natural world.

## What are Regenerative Communities?

"Regenerative Communities' is a new concept and was not found in our initial research. The closest is 'Regenerative Cultures' by Dr Christian Wahl.

The concept of 'Regeneration' has been applied to many sectors but it is surprising that it hasn't been explored directly to community level or community development as there are many natural synergies; both being a very respectful, equitable and holistic approach.

We came up with our own definition:

"Regeneration is about healing the whole community of life, rather than merely conserving parts of it. It asks how humans can partner with nature to create fullness of health for nature and each other. This requires deep respect and love for, the ecology of our local place, and a willingness to both learn from, and change with it.

A regenerative community acts in ways that restores, renews and revitalizes all of life that makes up their place."



## Why is it important?

This way of seeing the world is far from new. As Josie says, it has a long heritage, woven through cultures, indigenous wisdom traditions, philosophies, religions and communities around the world and across time. Despite this, our predominant human relationship with our planet is broken, prioritising competition and individualism. We owe it to future generations to heal this rupture.

Approaches such as sustainability reduce the damage but do not steer us in a healing, transformative direction. We need to find a pathway that leads us all back to health, reducing climate breakdown and creating a truly fair society.

Throughout human history indigenous societies have lived regeneratively and so we can draw on their wisdom in shaping our way forward.

Here are some reasons why regenerative communities are ideal for our future:

**Sustainability:** Regenerative communities are designed to be sustainable and resilient, meaning they can withstand and recover from environmental, social, and economic challenges. They rely on renewable resources, such as solar and wind energy, and practice regenerative agriculture and land management to ensure the health of the ecosystem.

**Self-sufficiency:** Regenerative communities are self-sufficient, meaning they can provide for their basic needs without relying on external sources. This reduces their carbon footprint, increases their resilience, and fosters a sense of community and interdependence.

**Local economy:** Regenerative communities support local economies by prioritizing the use of local resources and businesses. This promotes economic sustainability and resilience, as well as social cohesion and community development.

**Human well-being:** Regenerative communities prioritize human well-being by designing spaces that foster social interaction, physical activity, and access to nature. This promotes physical and mental health, as well as a sense of community and belonging.

**Climate change:** Regenerative communities can help mitigate and adapt to climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, sequestering carbon, and building resilience to climate-related challenges such as extreme weather events and sea level rise.



## Our Guiding Principles

The activities are not ends in themselves, but tools for learning regeneration, nurturing and growing flourishing regenerative communities.

It is about learning how to be community in THIS place. Digging deeper into the earth rhythms where we are and growing in understanding of and working with indigenous wisdom.

Key questions for all our mahi are:

- How do we connect with the land enough to learn from it, take responsibility for it, and to have a strong sense of being part of it?
- How do we strengthen this connection?
- What do the land/awa provide and how do we give back and be reciprocal?
- How do we do all this in ways that build community?

The whole project is about living these questions. The community are holders of knowledge, it does not rest exclusively with the experts. This is an inter-generational, multi-generational mahi. It is bigger than us and is about creating a life-giving, life-renewing legacy for future generations.

Signage: Our Project Poster for Events

Photo: Introducing Mark Gibson at the entrance to the Tiny Forest





## Regenerative Communities Operational Proposed Timeline

Month	Project Task	Month	Project Task
February 2022	Establishment of paid project coordinator/activator position to initiate, develop and coordinate. 15 hours per week for first year then 10 hrs/wk. Begin Action Research Journal. Monthly Team Meeting		Begin School Programme – Workshop 1 A quick questionnaire to gauge the knowledge base and understanding of the students. Exploring the Ecology of the Forest - how a healthy forest functions; the interrelationships in a "community of life", the importance of biodiversity, insects, bees, birds and trees.
March	Organise and hold a 30th anniversary celebration of King George V Reserve (KGV) at Scout Den (located in the reserve), and in the reserve itself. Introduce the idea of Regeneration and provide sign up/info for the community to begin involvement. Monthly Team Meeting	June	Start discussion with St Martins Scouts with aim to begin in summer. School Workshop 2: Where Do Human Beings Fit - in the forest, and in the bigger community of life? How can we be a 'community within a community'? A beginner's guide to regeneration v sustainability. Planting native trees - seed sourcing, what, where, when. Monthly Team Meeting
April - May	Set up meeting/s with all interested stakeholders to discuss the project and establish those with commitment to it to sign up as partners, particularly Tangata Whenua, St Martins School and Christchurch City Council Rangers/Schools Team. Through Facebook page begin generating the possibility of local engagement in the reserve. Monthly Team Meetings	July - Sept	Community Matariki planting in the reserve. Begin "training" with local volunteers for summer watering School Workshop 3: Understanding Our Place, the importance of knowing and working with this unique place; & Planting Native Trees 2 - adding to earlier learning - the design of this tiny forest, what we can achieve by enrichment planting, what the new plants need to thrive. More winter planting. Continue winter planting program in winter months. Design potential Regeneration Workshops for Summer months at two sites Monthly Team Meetings
May	Host 'Mother of All Cleanups' with community volunteers along river, including through the reserve. Through a range of activities start growing a network of local residents who are keen to engage in hands on environmental activities and community-led environmental/regenerative learning. The intention is that this group will emerge into Kaitiaki group.		

Month	
July - Dec	<p>School Workshop 4: "Wrong" Plants in a Native Forest - the damage they do, why they don't belong, how and when to remove them.</p> <p>School Workshop 5: Technology in Nature. Exploring the forest with the i-naturalist app - how to use, how it works, how it can assist our learning and actions.</p> <p>School Workshop 6: Indigenous Wisdom lead by Tangata Whenua</p> <p>School Workshop 7: Healthier River, Healthier Forest. Tuna/eel monitoring or water quality testing/ Working Waters Trust, or WaterPest Control, Water Quality - divide into two groups - workshop style</p> <p>School Workshop 8: Creative workshop: What I have learnt from the forest? How can I keep giving back? How can I do it with others? Making our responses through poetry, drawing, dance, photography. A short questionnaire to see what the students have learnt during the course.</p> <p>St Martins Scouts hands-on environmental learning begins – potential for multiple workshops.</p> <p>Monthly Team Meetings</p>
Feb - April	<p>Undertaking a review and how we continue the project in line with what we have learnt from the first year. Input/evaluation particularly from the School and Mana Whenua.</p> <p>Establishing a second site as a place of community engagement, environmental education and learning. Begin designing potential open Community Regeneration workshops for both sites.</p> <p>Begin transitioning local volunteers group towards self-leadership/Kaitiaki and continue to support.</p> <p>Monthly Team Meeting</p>

Month	Project Task
May - Dec	<p>Regenerative/Environmental Education Workshops with and for the local community, Mutual Support Group formed from Workshops for ongoing peer support and action.</p> <p>Run the School and Scout environmental education Programmes again informed by first year reflections, evaluation etc and test.</p> <p>Monthly Team Meetings</p>
Jan - April 2023	<p>Sharing learnings with wider community</p> <p>Monthly Team Meetings</p>

Far from simply being a new piece of jargon, we believe that regenerative thinking, when used in its fullest sense, marks a fundamental shift in thought and action. Growing interest in regenerative thinking signifies the emergence of a new paradigm that will prove to be critical for anyone interested in social, economic or environmental change."

Josie Warden



# Our Journal with Reflections and Learnings

Our journal, throughout the two plus year journey, is a tool for reflective learning and we chose this research process because it best matched iterative learning and the regenerative approach. This became the substance of this report.

## 2020 – 2021

As a new organisation, this period saw us giving a lot of energy into establishing systems, policies and procedures, and building our working relationship with each other.

One of the co-directors had carried the concept of some sort of project to regenerate the reserve for some time and the other co-director had been thinking about regenerative approaches. We recognised the synergy, value and alignment with what we were about, and started to map out what it might look like in 2020. Work progressed slowly but steadily, as we fitted it around other Flourish mahi and our own commitments including family, paid work, and other volunteer work.

While we were developing the project, we were also keeping an eye out for funding. This was a challenge.

## Reflections on Funding

It was difficult to find an appropriate funder and we investigated lots of options. The project's blend of environmental and community focus made it hard to fit the criteria of either community funders or environmental funders – we had too much environment for one and too much community for the other. This made writing applications even more complicated than it would otherwise have been.

Thankfully Lotteries Community Research was one good match.

**What could we have done differently?** We know that funding is a constant challenge for many community organisations, taking up a lot of time (often unpaid) and energy.

Ideally, we would have built up relationships with various funders before actually seeking funding, so that funders understood our organisation, our values and our ways of working. This is time-consuming and we were not in a position to be able to give the amount of time and energy that this would have required.



## January 2021

Aue! Aue! Aue! Kua hinga te Totara i te wao nui a Tane. Maurice Grey, Upoko of Te Runaka ki Ōtautahi o Kai Tahu, has died. Sharon our team was a member of the Runaka knew Maurice well, he was greatly loved and valued for his knowledge and wisdom.

We had planned to build an organisational relationship with the Runaka. This would have included working together on this project, and our team member had already had an initial conversation. Any relationship-building must now wait until the Runaka is ready to engage. This would be after the mourning period and the transition to new leadership.

Sadly, the person to succeed Maurice as Upoko became unable to take up this role. After this double blow the Runaka effectively went into recess.

This left us in a quandry. We were committed to working in a Tiriti-based way and we can only do this in relationship with tangata whenua. Where now do we build that relationship?

We are working towards our goal of launching our project with a celebration in the tiny forest to mark the 30th anniversary of its planting – effectively a birthday party for the forest.

This was planned for early May. An essential part of organising the celebration was negotiating mana whenua involvement.

## February – March 2021

Through our networks and personal contacts we received an offer to connect with Te Hapu O Ngāti Wheke, which is based on the other side of the Port Hills at Rāpaki in Lyttelton Harbour / Te Whakaraupō.

Ngāti Wheke have a close relationship with the area of the project, regularly using what is now known as the Rāpaki Track to cross the Port Hills between Rāpaki and the Ōpāwaho (Heathcote) River. The river side of the track ends very near the tiny forest.

We accepted this offer and it was organised for Maui to come and give a blessing at the start of the celebration and speak during the mihi. Serendipitously Mark and Maui met up in the tiny forest, when Mark was passing by and spontaneously stopped for a wander through the forest.

Both had come to connect with the forest and ended up also connecting with each other. They also discovered that they were also connected through involvement with church and people.







## Reflections on Meeting

Mark: "It is hard to put what happened into words but there was a wairua/spiritual connection. My growing experience is that this is also important to a regenerative pathway. Such a pathway includes a connectedness to the seen and unseen. It is holistic. A forest is more than the sum of its parts, there is another dimension that needs acknowledging and nurturing and sharing. It is best expressed in karakia, waiata, art, poetry, craft. The kete we found on the signboard spoke of it, as did the songbook inside it.

It is important that the forest is a place to be silent and listen, as well as to do and act. It is through learning to be with the forest as much as doing things to and for it that our relationship will grow and flourish. We regenerate with the forest. Deepening relationships with mana whenua also necessitates deepening relationship with whenua."

Previous Page Photo: Tiny Forest Harakeke, Flax.

March 2021

We have confirmation of full funding from Lotteries Community Research !!!

Lotteries have asked for an updated draft and plan including timetable (which was done that night!) and confirmation of partnership with Tangata Whenua. We confirmed as a team to investigate a Rāpaki relationship following the birthday event rather than the Runaka.

Part of the project plan is to run a series of workshops in the forest for pupils at the local primary school. Through several meetings and conversations between Mark, Colin and the teacher who would be working with the children, and input from Maui, we eventually developed a programme that we all agreed upon.



Regenerative Communities is formally a go!



March 2021



The 30th Birthday celebration for Tiny Forest - King George V Reserve. It felt like a very long build-up to this community event. In reality the best part of four years.

We have encountered some resistance or lack of understanding to our approach from some quarters, including from more established groups working in the wider area and having their own established ways of working. Part of the difficulty has been the view that regenerative approaches are already being used and so we are offering nothing new.

## Reflections on Language and Understanding

Our experience of this lack of recognition of the regenerative approach we were using, and of the difficulties in finding funding, suggested to us that the understanding of regenerative principles amongst many people practicing conservation is limited. There seems to be a belief that conservation is regeneration.

Indigenous people understand regeneration because it is integral to their cultures, even though they probably don't use the word.

We also looked for better ways to define where we were working. Firstly, we questioned the name of King George V Reserve. Apart from our own discomfort with the name, in conversation with people from the local community in social media and on the ground we found that it was widely disliked.

Given that the reserve was a sesquicentennial Tiriti project in 1990, we felt its name needed decolonising. Getting support for this from the council Community Board became part of our project.

We also favoured the description "tiny forest" over "reserve" for the area. The latter seems to fit well with a conservationist approach where "nature" is set aside, protected alongside a business as usual way of relating to the wider community of life.



Whereas "tiny forest" fits better with urban, local, seeing the community of life as a whole, and a more regenerative approach. It speaks of whole living systems and relationships.

Working on language became a theme of our mahi. This included using where possible Te Reo Māori, especially names. Even using macrons correctly. This commitment was an important part of our commitment to partnership with mana whenua.

The celebration importantly incorporated different dimensions that expressed this fullness of regenerative relationship. Opening karakia, karakia before eating kai, the tapa cloth Maui laid by the track into the reserve, the introduction to flax weaving, the fern fronds laid by Maui on the hall floor during his mihi, the 30th birthday cake (a piece gifted to the forest) and waiata, the waiata sung by Maui and his supporters, our colourful Regenerative Communities display board, and the carving exhibition we hoped to include run by the Whakaraupō Carving Centre.

On reflection it would have been good to include some karakia suitable for planting trees. That part of the programme happened in a more traditional conservationist way.



We made extensive use of volunteers in the running of the celebration, and also enlisted the services of members of the Cashmere High Student Volunteer Army. This was a mixed experience for us. Only one student showed up on time. It put a whole lot more pressure on us. In particular, this detracted from Mark's coordinating role and making connections with people as they arrived.

Once the school volunteers were all there they were excellent. They brought great energy and spirit and made spontaneous contributions that we couldn't have planned for but were very appropriate. Their main contribution was running the barbecue and planting trees. The latter was significant because it carried on a tradition started by students of Cashmere who planted much of the forest in 1990. There was a strong regenerative element in this next generation contribution.





Photos: Community Groups, Coffee, Kai, Seedlings, Planting, Cake, Weaving, Talks, Walks and more.

The Tiny Forest even got a piece of cake and was sung Happy Birthday in Māori led by Cashmere High School Students.



## Reflections on volunteer commitment

Not only were most of the students late, there were also a couple of no-shows from other volunteers. We reflected on how to plan mahi so that the impact of lateness and no-shows could be minimised. Ideally there would be enough volunteers to cover for absences. On the other hand, an oversupply of volunteers would leave some with little to do. We agreed that volunteer unreliability is more likely when there is little pre-existing relationship between the volunteer and the organisation and/or the people involved with it.



The Forest along the Ōpāwaho Heathcote  
River at 30 years old

## Further Reflection

This forest exists because the first peoples locally have a centuries-old relationship with it. It doesn't exist because it has legal status or protection as with national parks or City Council parks and reserves. Its existence and well-being is not decided impersonally by people at a distance, with authority but without close relationship. This is the huge difference between manawhenua and statutory authority. Manawhenua is about authority through relationship. Statutory authority is remote and impersonal. Manawhenua is decision-making 'with'. Statutory authority is decision-making 'about'.

So, King George V Reserve itself was created because of the latter, but in our regenerative communities project we are seeking to make it more relational, and to intentionally connect it both physically and spiritually with the local community, and local people. So, increasingly it exists not so much as a public amenity, but as a living place that locals are invested in, and deeply connected with.

This is not short-term mahi, this is very long-term work! Which is one of the frustrations and challenges of a two-year project!



April – May 2021

While we prepared for and held the birthday party we were reflecting on an ongoing relationship with Wheke. We welcomed the awhi and support from Ngāti Wheke for the celebration and felt good about Maui's involvement, but at the same time we were a little worried.

We were uncertain whether this would be appropriate for the ongoing project because we were of the understanding that another hapū, Ngai Tuahuriri, were mana whenua of this area.

Further comments and discussions with Wheke and others led to us discovering that that the rohe boundary between Tuahuriri and Wheke is contested, with both claiming the area between the river and the top of the Port Hills as part of their rohe!

Apparently this has been rumbling for some time and is expected to keep quietly rumbling for the foreseeable future. We have inadvertently stumbled into Māori politics.

## Reflections on Relationship with Tangata Whenua

This discovery led to a lot of angst and discussion amongst the team, raising questions about our developing relationship with Wheke and more general questions about tauiwi building relationships with tangata whenua.

What impact might our allegiance with Wheke have? How do tauiwi know that such differences exist and how do we walk wisely through these? Just like any organisation or extended family, iwi, hapū and kaupapa Māori organisations have disagreements, disputes, factions and contested mana.

How do we tauiwi negotiate our way through these when we don't even know where they exist? How do we know where to engage most appropriately, and not insult the mana of those who rightfully hold it? What happens if we discover that the group of people that we've built a relationship with aren't the most appropriate for our mahi? Or for our relationship with the wider iwi or grouping?



May – June 2021

In order to help our thinking around the quandary we found ourselves in, Sharon reached out to tauiwi friends and colleagues more experienced in Tiriti practice. She received this wise feedback:

"Knowing there is a conflict is a vital first step – generally it becomes known when you triangulate information and comments from several people – and get the message that the conflict is present in the group.

...In most cases I do have a sense of who I think is more right and who is more wrong – but that is purely my opinion, and irrelevant to dealing with the people. I have found that I can collaborate more easily with one group than another – but both are tangata whenua and deserving of respect and politeness. "

All of this is not really unique to Māori at all ... but to any grouping of humans. The whole "who are the right people to talk to" concern can also apply to a group of young people, or artists, or trade unionists – or anyone!

So – Kaumatua's advice; "Keeping your analytical and thinking cap on – don't deal with tangata whenua people blindly, just as you don't deal with other people blindly. When you become aware there are conflicts, factor that into your judgements about what you are being told. You might need to slow down some actions, while you seek out the views of others."

## Further Reflections on Relationship with Tangata Whenua

Our reflections on our practice to date was uncomfortable. We saw the value in slowing down as advised, but we were already committed. Our new relationship with Wheke, and especially Maui, was already growing and deepening, and turning into personal friendship. Perhaps we should have put the brakes on at the beginning, when it became obvious that we were not going to be working with Ōtautahi Runaka. But we were already some way down the track of the project by then, and emotionally committed.

On top of that there were practical constraints. Having a funding agreement meant we had a deadline for completion of the project. Mark's project leadership was crucial, and had he had to find paid mahi elsewhere he would not have been available and the project would not be able to go ahead.

These practical matters highlighted the conflict between regenerative practice and the mainstream realities of the world we live in.

This is a strong learning we need to take with us into future mahi.



## Early May 2021

As part of our relationship building, profile raising and recruiting for the Regenerative Communities Pilot Mark took on the coordination of a stretch of the Ōpāwaho Heathcote for the Mother of All Cleanups. (This is an annual Christchurch event to remove rubbish and litter from awa in the city.) King George V Reserve is on this stretch of the awa he was responsible for.

We placed invitations to participate in social media and on the temporary boards we have erected at reserve. On the day the good weather was good and good number of volunteers made the task easy. Those who had turned up mostly found out about the clean up on social media.

The briefing to the volunteers included a plug for our project and we gathered several more names and contacts for potential ongoing participants. Although we are building a good pool of potential volunteer participants in the project, we cannot start in earnest until we have reached agreement with Wheke on our relationship in the project.

Meanwhile we need to sign a Reserve Volunteers Agreement with the City Council, and the Reserve is ultimately their responsibility. Ideally this would be signed by one of the volunteer kaitiaki for the Reserve, but the group is yet to be formed. We don't wish to sign it ourselves as the mahi will continue after our involvement ends.





## Reflections and Learning on Capacity

Once again we found that managing an activity was a lot for one person to manage. It would have been helpful to have at least one other person sharing this task, as things can get overlooked when the pressure is on.

### Late May 2021

So far the growth in our relationship with Wheke has been very gradual and no decision had been made by the hapū about being part of the larger project. Kanohi ki te kanohi with Maui over kai seems to have been the game-changer that gave him greater clarity. Finally the word came through their General Manager that they were joining us in the project. Particularly affirming in their confirmation letter was the sentence:

“This is a well thought through approach from this group that provides a good framework for local community groups trying to take a Te Tiriti based approach to a project”.

Patience, respect, and trusting the process has paid off.

Our relationship with St Martins School has also had sticking points. The draft plan that we sent to the school in April included a question asking if the school could make a funding contribution. The school has responded that they were not sure they could manage that. We feared that this would be the end of the relationship but it appears they thought we were expecting a hefty bill rather than the koha we had envisaged. Once this was resolved we were able to move on.

### June 2021

Sharon and Mark travelled to Rāpaki to meet with Maui and Andrew, the manager of Te Hapu o Ngāti Wheke, in order to talk about the Regenerative project and developing our relationship with them. This was the first time we had met Andrew in this role and we got the impression that he was expecting a more transactional relationship where we were looking for tangata whenua input to our project, rather than Wheke and Flourish co-developing the project together.

However we must acknowledge that there is an element of that, as we developed the concept and applied for the funding without tangata whenua input - therefore we were asking them to buy into our vision.



We raised the question of mana whenua and they assured us that we were not to worry about that, they would take care of anything. Their wry smiles and glances to each other reinforced our apprehension that we had landed ourselves in the middle of a turf war between them and Tuahuriri.

It was a good conversation, but very much a beginning one. There was definitely goodwill between us. We left quite a bit for them to discuss and come back to us. This korero will happen in various committees, one of which meets infrequently.

We have contrasting processes, so this is going to take time! Once again, we are experiencing the challenge and complications of trying to work in a regenerative way within the constraints and demands of a world that requires outcomes delivered by deadlines. Wheke are also working with their own priorities and constraints, some of which are very similar to ours.

## July 2021

We held a Matariki planting of ferns in the reserve. Ferns are of course symbols of new life and new beginnings.

The volunteers were mainly local and once again people asked to be added to our growing contact list for the ongoing project. We also had Council staff and a councillor join us.





## Points of Learning: Promoting our Project

The opening, which took about 15 minutes, was essential to the planting. It connected us to our regenerative kaupapa, the place, the time (Matariki) and the mahi of the gathering. It brought us together physically and spiritually.

Mark led the opening with a blessing in English: acknowledging the season, the forest, the river, those who came before us, the vision, the planting, the love and care. Acknowledging mana whenua and their relationship with this place, and the wider community in which we live. Praying that we grow together in understanding and working with the community of life here. May our mahi today bring greater health and life and mana to this place.

Then we had a short reflection on Matariki, starting with a whakatauki:

Matariki hunga. matariki ahunga nui.  
Matariki has many admirers. Matariki brings us together.

It had been suggested that we promote the event in various city-wide online forums but we kept promotion local. Central to the pilot is growing a local regenerative community engaged with the tiny forest. It is about engaging with the people who live in THIS place, and helping create the conditions for greater connection with THIS land.

The focus is not just on restoring and nurturing the forest, but looking at our own connections with nature. By promoting through social media platforms it is inevitable that not everyone will be local.





## July 2021: School Programme

### Learning Activity:

1. A quick questionnaire to gauge the knowledge base and understanding of the students. Exploring The Ecology of the Forest
2. Where do Human Beings fit?
3. Understanding Our Place and the Tiny Forest.
4. 'Wrong' Plants in a Native Forest.
5. Technology in Nature
6. Indigenous Wisdom / kaitiakitanga
7. Healthier River, Healthier Forest
  - a. Testing Water Quality, Eel Health and Predator Trapping
8. Creative Workshop for and reflection on learning.

### Outcomes:

Participants have learnt:

- key regenerative principles - the importance of place, relationship, reciprocity, thinking and acting holistically, collaboration, diversity,
- gained greater knowledge of, and love for this place
- understand the difference between regeneration and sustainability
- greater knowledge and appreciation for mana whenua culture
- Greater knowledge of Aotearoa NZ & Waitaha/Canterbury flora & fauna. Enhanced eco-literacy, able to identify a greater number of species.
- Able to use the i-naturalist app.
- Greater understanding of the main threats to our unique natural heritage, and how to reduce these.
- Better equipped to be change-makers at school and in the wider community.

*Full School Workshops Proposal in Appendix 1*

The school has given the programme the final green light. A very long process has borne fruit. However we needed to re-jig the programme, as we have lost a whole term. We are also still negotiating with our Tiriti partner about their participation, in particular their availability to lead an indigenous wisdom/kaitiakitanga session.

One of our concerns has been the small amount of plants set aside by the Council for these sessions. We've been hoping and praying for more plants to come our way, and through pre-existing relationships with other environmental groups we heard of a group that has a lot of suitable/locally sourced trees to give away.





## July 2021

Mana Whenua Relationship - Mark and Maui met to talk through a number of things. Maui had been unable to attend the Matariki planting so Mark talked through how it had gone. We need to be accountable to our partners. Maui affirmed how we had gone about it and honoured the wairua of the forest.

Much of the discussion covered the forthcoming school programme. As a result of the korero some important changes incorporating tikanga were made.

## August 2021

The school programme is underway! The first session in the programme has happened! Four years of dreaming, growing relationships and planning is finally bearing fruit.

Immediately, adaptation was the name of the game. Running a programme like this will always involve thinking and responding in the moment because things don't unfold as imagined or planned. A team member was unable to attend and another had to leave early. There were fewer students than expected, the time available was less than we had expected, and the teacher was different from the one we had expected.

All of this felt real for a regenerative programme. Mutations in the plan is how we evolve. So we adapted. Worked with what we had. Responded to what was in front of us. The unexpected factors did not undermine the session, they just made it what it was.

The session started with a karakia and an opening connecting us to this place. Maui told the story of Rangi and Papatuanuku and Tane Mahuta to emphasize our relationship with the natural world. He told a story of Tane finding a bird who would agree to live on the ground to care for the forest floor. The kiwi finally coming through and taking on the mahi. Then he used the story to identify our role. That in the absence of kiwi we have to take on the mantle of care and protection, the role of kaitiaki.

At the end we regathered and we thanked the children and everyone else for what their mahi. We reflected on what we had just been doing together; then Maui offered a final blessing.

We had intended to start the programme with a questionnaire for the students. However the team member who was going to lead that was unable to come so we had to come up with an alternative. The teachers undertook to get it to the students so we sent the questionnaire to the school office.



Developing the questionnaire for the students had been a team effort. It was important to us that it didn't feel like a test to the students. Templates that we referred to had some good questions but many sounded like they were about assessing the students' knowledge. We wanted to ask them about what they knew in order to stimulate thinking and imagination, not to assess them.

They also seemed to focus on 'the environment', whereas a regenerative approach looks to grow the appreciation of the interconnectedness between our wellbeing and the planet's wellbeing. So we asked questions about feelings and emotions as well as what they knew and what they would like to know more about.

Responses suggested that we had managed to avoid the 'test' mindset, with many of the responses from the students talking about feeling calm and happy in natural settings, and showing an understanding of our interconnectedness, even though they might not use that language.

*See Appendix 2 for the questionnaire and collated responses.*

Photo Right: School Group learning on the landing.

Photo Over Page: Landing in the Tiny Forest.

## August – December school programme observations

With things continuing to not go to plan in each session adaptation became the theme of the programme. Availability of team members and resource people, numbers of students, even the weather all had a say in how each session ran.

We had not thought about the issue of internet access in the forest for the session in which we focused on an introduction to the app i-naturalist.

In September the covid lockdown took out our whole third session, which required a major rethink of the remaining sessions. There is not a lot of wriggle room as some sessions require external input and we need to work with this.





Biomimicry expert, biologist Janine Benyus has said that we need to take a place in nature's class "not to learn about nature that we might circumvent or control her, but to learn from nature so that we might fit in at last and for good, on the Earth from which we sprang".





We also strived to be responsive to what the students were interested in and adapt the programme to these. For instance, one of the children asked if we were going to include anything about eels so we developed a module for this.

*See Appendix 3 for the students' responses.*

Another time a loud bird call came from somewhere very close to the students. Colin stopped his talk and asked what bird was calling at that moment. The children made various suggestions, I mentioned that it was the favourite bird of one of the students (seen in the questionnaire responses). One boy immediately then said "kingfisher, that was my bird". We could also hear a korimako singing loudly. This represented excellent unprompted, spontaneous learning just by tuning in to where we were and what was happening around us.

The students also learned to adapt. During an activity placing guards around the newly planted seedlings we ran out of stakes to secure them. So we had a few guards left-over. It was a strong indicator of the level of engagement of some of the students involved that they then started to improvise with stakes, using strong small windfall branches found on the forest floor to replace the regular bamboo. A number of guards were therefore secured with these substitute stakes.

The curiosity of students was to the fore in all the sessions:

- Some students found and were fascinated with cicada shells.
- The students who were planting were regularly excited by the amazing large worms they found as they dug holes. Some were huge, and not your regular garden variety.
- One of the students found a bird's nest under the trees. He was interested in how it was made, but also expressed concern about the fact it had fallen out of a tree and wondered how old it was.

So around the specific activity further learning is taking place.

Often disruptive behaviour is seen to be a sign of a disengaged student. But one experience suggested otherwise for us. A handful of boys were winding each other up instead of listening to the resources person. She split the group of three up and asked one of them to stand next to Mark, which he did.

As the session continued he then very quietly started asking Mark questions, all relevant to what was going on. Then near the end he shared that he'd like to see a track made through the middle of the forest, to help people feel more part of it.



One of the other boys in the disruptive group always looked like he was ready to leave. For the whole final session he had his jacket and backpack on and appeared to be quite switched off. But when the small group he was in discussed who would be their spokesperson back to the whole group he said that he wanted to be. The others agreed and he did a really good job of summing up.

It is a reminder of the need to find a way of engaging with each person, and that there will always be a minority for whom the methods being used don't work.







September 2021

**Contested Public Space** - An incident that happened in a school session demanded a whole new level of adaptation and skill. Mark describes what happened:

Arriving early, I discovered a woman whitebaiting from the landing. This is where we usually sat the students during the teaching part of sessions, so there was clearly a conflict of needs/uses. I explained to her that a school group was arriving soon and had planned to use the area. I also noticed that she had thrown a large tarpaulin over an area where a number of tree seedlings had been planted in the last session. So I quietly shared that information with her.

I went back to the car for the last of the gear, and when I arrived back at the landing the tarpaulin had been moved. Almost immediately her husband turned up, she had obviously rung him as he began angrily talking about the groundsheet. I explained once again that there were small trees just recently planted by the school children there and that this afternoon they would be putting guards around them.

This only wound him up further. He clearly didn't want to find a compromise and had a strong sense that he was there first and he could do what he liked. I knew pretty quickly I couldn't reason with him. I needed to make the session safe and pleasant for the students, so I decided to position us on the other side of the clearing away from the landing. The important thing was to not aggravate the whitebaiter anymore. However just as the students and teacher arrived the parent helper got into a very heated argument with him.





I totally disengaged from their argument and focused on the students, giving them a really warm welcome, and inviting them to sit in the new place. This seemed to help the whole vibe of the site and the quarrelling adults quickly backed off and went quiet. Given all of this it felt the right thing to do to begin with a brief karakia/blessing.

Ha ki roto, ha ki waho	Breathe in, breathe out
kia tau te mauri e kokiri nei	settle the mauri that stirs
	inside me
i nga piki me nga heke	through the ups and downs
ko te rangimarie taku e rapu nei	it is peace that I seek
tihei mauri ora!	

I think the blessing changed the tone dramatically. Claimed back the space gently for learning, and growth and healthy relationships. It certainly helped me find my centre again after being thrown by the hostile arrival. The rest of the session continued without problems.

## Reflections on the Conflict

There is a lot to unpack and consider, and follow up on with the school, and Urban Parks and Reserve Ranger (Heidi).

I am aware that I failed to introduce myself properly when encountering the female whitebaiter. It may have made a difference and eased the way a little better.

My starting point of sharing information was probably a good step.

I also realise that over the years I have built up a stereotype of whitebaiters as being often bordering on anti-social and this coloured the way I depersonalised my interaction. In hindsight I would have been better off to notice what was happening, drop off my first load and return to the car. Just to give myself a few minutes to consider the best way of interacting.

What I did get right was to recognise when her husband turned up that I wasn't going to be able to reason with him in the few minutes available, to complete what I was doing, disengage to defuse, and change the site we would work from. I was very clear that the safety and enjoyment of the students came first. I'm sure that my intuition to bend and be flexible came from what the tiny forest itself has been teaching me over the last few years. The trees bend with the wind; they don't stand rigid against it.





Regenerative development does not solve global problems through scaling up universally applicable solutions. It is not aiming to deliver permanent solutions; rather, the focus is on improving our capacity to co-create and keep transforming in response to cHāngīng context. When we talk about co-creating 'regenerative futures' it is best to let go of the notion that we will arrive and live happily ever after. Co-creating regenerative cultures is an ongoing community and place-based process of learning."

Daniel Christian Wahl

Photo: Tiny Forest Track



Ignoring the altercation between the whitebaiters and the parent helper and once again putting the students' needs first was also a good decision.

This incident highlights once again the need to respond to what is in front of you, and to choose a strategy that upholds the kaupapa of the project. The more you are grounded in the kaupapa the easier this becomes. Though the actual execution may not be! Finding clarity is what's easier.

Something else that it highlights is how fraught or fragile or contested public space can be. I think in running the programme we have had a naive belief that we would have the landing area to ourselves. Public space potentially brings a variety of people, activities and expectations together. Anything can happen, so conflict is always possible.

## Follow-up to the Conflict

After this event Mark visited the forest to try to find the whitebaiter and see if they could negotiate an agreement before the next school visit. He eventually did meet up with him and was able to engage in a respectful conversation with him, which became very in-depth. The whitebaiter shared with Mark a tragic event that had happened in his family some years earlier. He believed that the school had fallen short of providing appropriate support and this had led to abiding ill-feeling towards the school.

When Mark arrived for a session a month later the whitebaiter was there again with quite a large set up. The session was going to be focusing on eels and needed access to the river.

After a brief discussion with the whitebaiter Mark and the resource person quickly resolved that they could set the net and hold the workshop further upstream. The whitebaiter shared his knowledge of a certain spot where eels could be found. Once again this was a reminder of the importance of being flexible and adaptive in this space.

Before we headed upstream the whitebaiter told Mark his name, so he clearly wanted to be relational. He also said that in the morning he would stay away and leave the landing for us if we should decide to make use of it.

We didn't, but it indicated a softening of attitude and some movement in his willingness to work with us.

Once again, conversation by conversation the regenerative approach can germinate and grow.



## December 2021

**School Final Session/Evaluation** - As this was a recap of the programme and rather than active learning about the forest, we held the final session in the school classroom.

Mark and Colin explored what was the students' favourite session, what was an important learning, was there anything missing from the course, and do they have a stronger relationship with the tiny forest and river as a result of the course. Then students were asked to choose a creative medium for sharing something of their learning and/or an experience during the course.

The students easily broke into the creative workshop options of artwork, creative writing or mime. After about 20-25 minutes we came back into plenary and students were invited, if they wanted, to share what they had created. The mimers finished early and were impatient to present to us. The artists all came up with work, some finished others didn't. The writers struggled, so more thought needs to be given to resourcing this option in future.

None of the writers wanted to share anything with us which was disappointing. But this creative workshopping highlighted the high level of engagement the students had with the course.

Even the three boys in the writing group contributed their thinking willingly and clearly at other points of this session.

During the wrap-up Colin pointed out that in the coming days or even in 50 years they can visit the reserve and see and enjoy what they have planted. The teacher pointed out that they are now part of the tiny forest because of their involvement with it.

We finished with expressions of appreciation and goodbyes and Mark drew their attention to the opportunity to continue their engagement through the wider community Give Back sessions in the reserve.





## Reflections on the School Programme

This section includes reflections from both Mark and the students.

Mark felt extremely positive ("I still have a glow going on). It has been very rewarding to see the extent to which the students engaged with the programme and the forest.

We asked the students what their favourite session was and got a range of responses. In retrospect we may need to approach this question differently. Only the students who volunteered their thoughts in the classroom are recorded. Not all students took the opportunity to respond, so we are missing the thoughts/experiences of nearly half the class. It is an indicator but nothing more. To be fair the purpose of this part of the process was not to do an exhaustive survey but to invite input and engage the students in active group reflection.

In this first discussion about 'favourite session' one of the students said that he liked the way the sessions were organised, in that they were given a choice of activity. He really appreciated this.

Their response to the question of what was missing from the course was interesting and helpful. A number of possible topics for future programmes were identified.

We asked for a show of hands for the final question: "do you think you have a stronger relationship now with the forest and river (or not)?" A clear majority felt that they did. Later on we came back to this with them and wondered why the minority didn't have this experience. It was an important question but we didn't have time to explore it.

Any of these questions or discussion points could have been explored a lot further. This is something to consider in the future. But we are always limited to around an hour for regular sessions and by the time you build in the activity component there is not a lot of time for discussion and conversation.

The last part of the session where we drew things to a conclusion and there was an opportunity to say thank you to each other was very rich and the students were very engaged with the process. It was very evident how much they had enjoyed the course. There was spontaneous applause for us and the students didn't want to stop clapping!

We encouraged them to think about continuing their involvement with their parents in the local community give back sessions in the tiny forest, indicating that three students at the school are already doing this. One of them was present! We were really elated about this last session and the course as a whole. I had a strong sense that it had worked for these students and given them significant learning and experiences.



## August – September 2021

During the weeks before and after the last session Mark was corresponding with the lead teacher over the question 'where to from here?'

Firstly it is important to now sit down together and evaluate the 7-session programme in 2021. It is vital to our learning that we give the teaching staff the opportunity to offer feedback and their own insights.

Then we need to explore the question of whether or not the school is keen to run the programme again in 2022. Informed by the evaluation this could involve modification and/or extension. It is important to keep evolving the programme. This process even happened within this year. Our original plan changed! Mark also indicated to her that the evaluation of 2021, and potential planning for 2022, for us, needs to be done with our Tiriti partners. This could be an all together hui or we meet separately with each party.

The lead teacher has responded that things are too tight time wise for them between now and the wind up of the school year. So she will be in touch in late January/early February to set up a time to meet together and have a focused conversation around where we have been and where we might travel.

During the time the school programme was happening, Mark was also working to establish a team of locals and help them develop a commitment to the wellbeing of the tiny forest.

By August we had enough people and were ready to begin. The group was mainly retired people, as the Saturday morning time was difficult for families. It is difficult to find times that suit everyone in a diverse community.

Most people came along because they wanted to give back something to their community, and be part of something that will continue. It was also a way to get to know more local people.

Our first activity was to establish a system for ensuring the new plants that the school students had planted would survive the summer. We would do this by setting up a roster for watering the plants.

We realised there would need to be some training around which plants would need watering and how to bring water from the awa to the plants. In order to accommodate people's different commitments we offered two sessions. The first was held in August, then another round of covid restrictions delayed the second until September.



By offering options in this early stage of growing a team of volunteers this flexibility and willingness to accommodate is crucial. Without it the likelihood of people drifting away or disengaging is high.

These first trainings brought together the new team in the forest for the first time. Each time Mark provided an overview of what would be involved and then took the group through the reserve and showed them where the plants that would need watering were located.



After the walk-throughs Mark and the rest of the group talked about how they would organise themselves. Each group immediately began to self-direct. Several people offered creative ideas for problem-solving and some offered to take on roles. It was exciting to see that while Mark had played an important catalyst role the group was naturally transitioning into self-organising.

One of the women found a dead rat in weeds under the forest canopy. This prompted a conversation about the need for some pest control for the birds to thrive. One of the older children shared their knowledge of what other animals were predators - mentioning stoats and ferrets.

Another volunteer shared that they were recently around the forest at dusk, when they heard and saw little owls. It was a great way to end, an uplifting story to encourage our deepening regenerative engagement with the tiny forest.

The September gathering in the reserve was our first operating under the Covid-level 2 protocols. This added an extra layer to our Health and Safety considerations and there is a lot to remember. It has been helpful to be involved with the school as we have learned from them and are pretty well following their protocols for external activities under level-2 requirement.



## Reflections on bringing together the Team

The process of bringing together a volunteer team has been very slow and we are still in the early days. Many seeds had been planted intentionally by Mark over a long period of time - one to one with local people but also through the facebook page he set up for the reserve over four years ago. The strategy has always been small steps.

Early on there was pressure from some directions to organise working bees in the reserve and cast the net widely for volunteers. For example Canterbury Conservation Volunteers were looking for opportunities to bring teams of 20-30 in for big impact sessions. This was not an appropriate strategy for us because to be regenerative this needs to be local. The vision has always been to have local people supporting and developing a relationship with the local wee forest.

That we were on the right track was confirmed to us during this first walk through with the volunteers. Several indicated in our conversation that the kaupapa of being engaged locally is what they are excited about. By narrowing the field we seem to be getting more traction. This highlighted for us how important it is to stay true to your kaupapa.

This can be challenging for those of us who are task-focused. The drive is to complete the task in the quickest and most efficient way, and our task-focused culture reinforces this. Focusing on the doing - completing the task in front of us - can divorce us from the context and process, and the relationships with others and the land. We lose the longer term gains that far outlive the completion of the task.

There is great work going on along the river with people engaging in worthy conservation projects but people are often coming from some distance away. Their involvement with the place is limited to the working bees. By being unapologetically local this project can hopefully move beyond conservation to the regenerative. It needs to be about deepening connection.

The other main comment gleaned from the volunteers is that **they feel it is being engaged locally that they can make the biggest difference. The enormity of the issues we face globally can be disempowering. But locally and collectively we can make a difference.**

Next Page Photo: Dr Colin Meurk and volunteer







August 2021

We've known for some time about several tiny totara seedlings created by the regenerating forest. Where they are located is away from the foot traffic along the track but they are still vulnerable to the feet of explorers and socialisers.

As an urban reserve, this tiny forest is completely open to all-comers day and night. We know that people do leave the track to venture into the forest for various reasons- young people playing, high school students socialising after school, and possibly rough sleepers. This means that young seedlings (especially several tiny totara seedlings that we've been watching) are very vulnerable. How can we protect these?

Part of the dilemma is that the more people know the totara are there the more vulnerable they potentially become. It could empower carers and "guardians" to let people know about them, but it could also empower those who do not share our vision. A lot of plants get stolen from sites where community planting has been done.

It also raises the question of whose trees these are. Or are they anyone's? Do we need to move on from a sense of 'owning' nature? Legally they are the responsibility of the City Council but in reality they do not have the resources to protect or nurture this new life.

Then there are another group of questions around building community. Do we build community if we have an 'in' group and an 'out' group? Those in the know, and those not in the know?

A further set of questions that emerge also are to do with:

- How much of an active role humans take on here?
- Do we just let the forest do its own thing and fare for itself with all the challenges of human and non-human threat (possums)?
- Or do we participate as allies seeking to support the well-being of the second generation trees, or do we just let nature take its course?
- Given that a large part of the threat to the new life is human activity, how can we mitigate destructive activity, and maximise life-giving activity?





## Reflections on Relationships

September 2021

Today we met with Andrew and Maui from Wheke in the Tiny Forest and discussed the project. It was a positive discussion and afterwards we went for a debrief.

We reflected on how difficult it has been to develop the relationship with mana whenua when there are so many external influences. The death of the Upoko of Ōtautahi Runaka was a major disruptor for our project. More widely, our mainstream culture that we're working in has timeframes and expectations that don't make it easy to give the time and priority to growing relationships respectfully. This includes funding application deadlines and timeframes, and accountability frameworks that focus on things that can be measured.

How do you measure progress on relationship-building?

Early November 2021

Located on the reserve is the St Martins Scout den. From the very beginning of the project we have been building a relationship with the scout group, starting with hiring the den for our Tiny Forest 30th Birthday celebration that began the project proper.

Up until now the reserve has mostly been a space where the scouts and cubs let off steam and there is no real relationship with it. In the words of one of the Cub leaders: "... it is considered part of the den ..."

Some of their use of the reserve in the past has impacted on the tiny forest, e.g. plastic drums used for making rafts are stacked to the rear of their buildings but sometimes roll down the bank and across the forest floor where seedlings are trying to establish themselves. The group is keen to engage with the tiny forest and help it to flourish, so there is great potential for the regenerative communities approach to enable them to do this. Because of the relationship we have been building, we are able to work together for our common goals.





This engagement had to be delayed when their preferred starting date was right in the middle of a period which was already busy. There is a limit to how much needs to be done at any one time in the forest and we may have struggled to find activities for all the people involved.

With young people more supervision will be necessary to make sure the activity is forest-friendly. We need to be weeding carefully, and attending to other “care” activities in a thoughtful way. We also need to be mindful of our own wellbeing and give the same consideration to that as all the other elements of this regenerative project.



In preparation for the activities with the scouts we met with the leaders to talk through the sessions and Health and Safety. We learned that the group puts two scouts in leadership roles alongside the adult leaders for any of their activities, and these young leaders were part of our discussion. We welcomed this youth leadership development component as an aspect of community regeneration.

We developed a plan for the orientation session. The focus will be awareness raising as to the living tiny forest, its history, the role of young people, and the story so far. Then we will move to identifying their crucial kaitiaki role especially behind the den. That this is an ongoing role, in which they can develop a regenerative relationship with the forest.



There was a lot of preparation required for the activities. As well as designing what would be done, we needed to brief the CCC Park Ranger, get more guards, mats and stakes for the new plants, and liaise with the scout group.

The initial scout orientation and engagements sessions were an interesting experience. There was high attendance and the activities got completed, although it was somewhat shambolic. On reflection we felt that the groups were too big, 12 – 15 seems to be an optimal number to work with.

A good half of the young people appeared well engaged, while others hung back. Regenerative work is about relationships and you can't force people into a relationship. So there needs to be some active choosing involved. We will need to discuss this with the scout leadership if we repeat these sessions, as those scouts not engaged will need some other activities. In terms of those who were keen over the two nights there is real potential for growing something.

This was the first night the Scouts had tried out their youth leadership structure and it was not a great success.

We later identified a number of possible contributing factors:

- The young leaders were new to the role and none had the confidence to offer strong leadership.

- They didn't know Mark and weren't used to working with him.
- It was outside and a large group. Inside it may have worked, but outside it can be harder to hold a group together.

The adult leaders are keen to build on this orientation and first giving back session and we agreed to meet to evaluate and explore next steps.

## December 2021

The scouts also undertook their own activities, in liaison with us. They wanted to begin clearing up a section of the forest behind the den, where trees had fallen. Our role was to run this past the CCC Ranger, in accordance with the agreement we have signed. We also needed to confirm Health & Safety management with the group.

The larger material was removed and smaller debris was left to decay on the forest floor. This raised the question of whether it was good regenerative practice. We will discuss this with the scouts as we continue to encourage regenerative thinking.

Since our orientation sessions the scouts are beginning to take their role as guardians seriously. They are proactively looking at how they can care for the area around the den.



## Volunteers Update

The team of volunteers is now active and taking part in regular "Give Back" sessions in the forest. As is to be expected with any group of volunteers, there is waxing and waning of availability and interest. We are constantly reworking things with the group. Working regeneratively it is important to be aware of this and to work with what resources we have without overburdening people. The quality of what we do and how we look after each other is more important than the quantity of output.

It's important that our activities are informed and eventually led by the volunteers. We've asked the volunteers to complete a questionnaire designed to engage with them about what they are getting from the mahi, what impact it is having on their lives, and what else they'd like to be doing.

### December 2021 – January 2022

The December sessions saw good attendance with a mixture of new and regular volunteers, including children and households.

Sessions always started with karakia and then a brief health and safety outline. As a new wave of covid was affecting the country, the outline included covid measures and scanning our QR code.



Photo: Signing in for COVID



This support included coming along to an unscheduled session, to clean up after a flood deposited swathes of grass and weedy vegetation through the lower parts of the forest. This was removed from pathways and high-use areas and used as mulch around recent plantings.

Our January session also saw good levels of participation, in spite of it being holiday time. There were several new participants who had seen our signs advertising the session at the entry to the forest. Most of our recruitment has happened through local signage and word of mouth.

Much conversation takes place during the mahi, and relationships between the locals are developing. Our mahi is regenerative for communities as well as the forest. Conversations have ranged over climate change, use of self-sown native trees from their homes, forest predators, and how to dispose of weeds properly. People walking the track also stop and talk, and we regularly get expressions of gratitude from the locals.

We have introduced a regular "Tree of the Month" talk so that the volunteers can learn more about the forest. To be regenerative it is important that as well as 'giving back' the volunteers continue to receive. That we accentuate the flow of giving and receiving, the reciprocity aspect of what we are doing.

During our working together we get to learn about the skills and gifts that each person in the group has, and it would be good to find ways of using different people's skills. We will ask the regulars if they are willing to share their skills and gifts for the benefit of the group and our mahi. This could begin to happen alongside resourcing workshops that deepen our understanding of how regenerative communities work.

We also need to think about morning tea refreshments for the volunteers. Providing hospitality/manaakitanga is an important part of a regenerative approach. However, a pandemic may not be the best time. We need to keep thinking and talking about this important element of our mahi. Late January saw the first confirmed cases of the Omicron variant in the community.

We have moved to the Red level.

**LEVEL 4 COVID-NZ**

ALL EVENTS CANCELLED UNTIL  
FURTHER NOTICE



## February 2022 – a time of quiet

Mark's mother has died, and this has been a time of grieving and reflection for Mark. There has also been a lot of rain which has reduced opportunities for sessions in the forest.

Lurking in the background has been the pandemic and our move to the red setting. CCC vaccination pass mandates for volunteers working in parks and reserves, and the emergence of the highly contagious Omicron variant has increasingly impacted on people's thinking about their activities and availability. Two of our volunteers are choosing to be unvaccinated so cannot participate in our activities for the foreseeable future. We continued to include them in our emails as they are still part of the team and it is vital that they are treated with respect.

With the extra work required around fulfilling CCC Covid health and safety requirements, the weather, and Mark's unavailability, we decided to cancel the February session.

This has become a time of stillness in our programme.

## Reflection

Weather, pandemics, and death can all interrupt our plans. This calls for flexibility, patience and adaptation. The wee forest continues to flourish, even though the weeds are rampant around the smaller, recently planted shrubs and trees.

It seems also that grief is part of the regenerative process. A regenerative approach doesn't push on regardless but pauses and respects what is happening. Such interruptions can be an opportunity for change and growth.

At times such as these the most important thing becomes keeping our connections warm. This has happened through regular emails amongst the group.

## March 2022

The resurgence of covid and the restrictions that have been introduced mean some changes to the way we work in the Give Back sessions. Aside from extra administration on-site (checking vaccination status and providing QR scanning), we are more spread out in our mahi. We are not getting new volunteers at present and suspect that this may have a lot to do with covid. Mark has family commitments to carry out related to the death of his mother so we have also been adapting to accommodate that.



As we were winding up one of our sessions our botanist advisor Colin commented that "the forest is winning". This statement of faith was an affirmation of the regenerative powers of the forest. It still needs human allies because the threats are very real. That is what makes our ongoing work so essential.

There has been little movement on the school front in terms of a possible programme in 2022. The Covid wave is slowing everything down and the school is heavily impacted. The school programme is also pretty full this year, so we are talking with them about how to keep the school involved. We will be as flexible and open as we can be to go with whatever works at their end.

The Cubs have been in touch again and we agreed to do two more sessions with them.

Unfortunately, covid meant we had to cancel these sessions. Sad, but part of our reality at the moment.

With not so many activities happening and people pulling back from social contact we've put more time into providing informative and inspiring posts on the reserve facebook page. In the last month these have included posts on totara, kahikatea, ngaio and houhere. These posts have gained a lot of views and likes, more than other posts.

Mark has attended a First Aid course and now has a Comprehensive First Aid certificate. From a regenerative point of view this training equips him to better care for the well-being of participants in all of our activities.

He can also pass on new knowledge to volunteers when the opportunity arises. It is vital that we share resources and practice mutual care of one another in the full ecological sense.

### April 2022 – Winding Down and Looking Ahead

Over a summer of the watering programme and Saturday Give Back sessions there has been a slow and steady growth in support. We now have an active team of around 20 people, including eight children. The majority of people who have engaged have shown some commitment. Hopefully this will give us a platform for further growth next spring and summer.

Our summer watering programme has ended, and we have asked for a volunteer to keep an eye on the plants should late autumn and winter be dry. The Give Back sessions will continue with some adjustments as a result of consultation with the volunteers. Reflecting the principle of reciprocity, we're giving thought to an end of season celebration with the volunteers and key partners in our various initiatives.



With the cHāngīng of the seasons and moving into a quieter time in nature, it's an ideal time to look at the next steps in the project. An earlier initiative that invited the volunteers to share their thoughts on the future of the project did not get any responses, and the celebration could also provide a better environment to stimulate this conversation.

We are very aware that one of the aims in this first year was to grow local leadership for the regenerative programme. We have done well establishing an ongoing network of volunteers. Some of these people have offered to do specific tasks. But the next stage of developing a team to take on oversight has not been reached quite yet. . It is still early days and this process possibly takes longer than we have been allowing for. This is slow work. It is not something we can push, fast forward or engineer. That leads to something that is NOT authentic community. We just need to continue to look for a variety of ways to grow conversation, participation and leadership from within the group.

Covid has definitely had an impact and limited our ability to meet and organise. It has possibly also created a hesitancy to make new commitments and to engage. So we need to be patient for the new shoots of leadership to emerge. Setting up and launching a trapping programme over the winter may assist this process.

With three arms to the regenerative work - watering, weed and predator control; and the involvement of scouts and cubs, there is the growing need to create some kind of coordinating group. This is the next development stage beyond having one person coordinating and initiating, which is what Mark has been doing.

But before any new developments are initiated conversation with our Te Tiriti partners is essential.

After hearing little from them for a while, we have organised a catch-up. We have found that face-to-face catch-ups work for them better than emails. They have had lots of things to attend to and of course covid has made everything more difficult for us all. We welcome the opportunity to review the year with Maui and look to the coming months.

Photo: Regular  
Volunteers planning  
mahi.





## Impact in One Year



April 2021



April 2022



## Reflecting on Celebration and Reciprocity

Organising the end of season celebration and thank you to all involved proved to be a real headache. It was extremely difficult to find a date that suited everyone and when the scout hall was available.

It is a typical scenario for many groups who don't have their own facilities, and are trying to organise a one-off event that is outside their usual framework.

An absolute bottom-line here is the relationship with the tiny forest. This is where we are seeking to create a regenerative community. The project celebration needs to be in location. It also needs to involve primarily the people who have been engaged with the tiny forest in an ongoing, relational way. They won't all be able to come, or necessarily want to come, but it is important that they are invited and we make the timing as accessible as possible to the majority of people. Beyond the volunteers we also recognise our wider partners who have been an integral part of the project. So, from a regenerative point of view, place and people are integral to this celebration.

What is a regenerative approach to this situation?

Is there one?

We need to think creatively and flexibly, and not push too quickly for one time. Thinking in terms of the tiny forest there are seasons and times. A time for resting, a time for budding and flowering, a time for fruiting, a time for spreading the fruit and so on. These seasons are a process and they are gradual, rather than abrupt and exact.

In talking it through with our Tiriti partner, we found exactly the right time to look back with thankfulness and look forward with new hopes and dreams. We will celebrate our mahi at Matariki. The ongoing planning reinforced how important this collaborative work is. Maui's way of seeing things brings new possibilities into view. This is the indigenous approach, and also regenerative.





## Reflection – A Tale of Two Riverbanks

The tiny forest is located on one bank of the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River. On the opposite bank there is a large park. It has a mostly open, grassed bank that leads to a busy walk/cycleway asphalt path and beyond that extensive playing fields. Before the playing fields were created it was a huge landfill pit, and before that a gravel extraction quarry. Pre-colonisation, it was a wetland, mahinga kai habitat. The last few years has seen growing erosion of the river banks in an increasing number of storm events. The council has sought to stabilise them with extensive indigenous planting. The mahi was done by staff and contractors.

Since then the planted river bank has become progressively denuded. Multiple plants have gradually disappeared, mostly from theft rather than dying. These plantings have been incredibly accessible to people wanting to remove them for whatever reason. From previous experiences of talking with people about indigenisation programmes our tentative thoughts are that the motivation for removal could be a combination of anti-anything indigenous and pro-colonial landscaped riverbanks; and, theft with view to on-sell or for personal use.

But the emerging story of this bank is one of a project with good intentions and vision that is failing. There is no community buy-in, or involvement in the mahi.

On the other bank is King George V Reserve mostly cloaked by a flourishing tiny forest. It also has a pathway with multiple people moving through it. Right from the beginning people from the community were involved in creating the forest. In recent times through our Regenerative Communities project there has been regular community engagement/'giving back' in the form of enrichment planting, guarding, releasing, weeding, learning, blessing, celebrating. All of this has been about building a regenerative relationship between the community and the tiny forest. So far, very few, if any of the plants have been removed. It is an indigenous, natural heritage habitat and the community have valued and respected it. Its fate is proving very different to the other bank.



May 2022

Our final Give Back session was combined with the annual Mother of All Cleanups which is a city-wide initiative to pick up rubbish from our waterways.

Despite promotion in social media by us and the river network no one else from the wider community turned up for the river cleanup. In the reserve it was a different story. Five new people turned up to help – a family who have just moved into the area of the reserve, and someone who made a connection with us through the King George V Reserve facebook posts.

With Mark needing to lead the cleanup, we were pleased to see that volunteers picked up key roles. It worked extremely well. Then when we discussed the upcoming Matariki celebration a couple who have their own small business offered to sponsor the kai for the celebration. These are encouraging sign of growth in the group and an emerging regenerative culture.

Photo: Volunteers cleaning up the river and riverbank.

## Reflecting on Engagement

There is a strong pattern emerging of people learning about and becoming involved in this project through personal contact. This is either with somebody who is already part of the group, or through seeing us in action on a Saturday. Some also connect through our Facebook page.

This is perhaps a reflection of how important an ongoing relationship with the area is and a sense of personal investment in it, rather than an isolated, one-off activity.





## King George V Reserve Facebook Page

<https://www.facebook.com/KGVReserve>

This page was started a few years prior to the launch of our current project. We post regularly and it has become an integral part of the project. Almost daily posting seeks to educate and share information to interested locals. While it keeps people updated with opportunities to join the working bees, it is so much more than that.

Its main purpose is to foster a relationship with the tiny forest. Relationships need regular communication and updating. More than just a relationship we aim to grow a love relationship. This takes time, regularity, persistence, truth telling, encouragement, celebration and so much more. So we celebrate the life flourishing and struggling in the tiny forest. We celebrate the day to day, week to week seasonal changes. We share the story of the forest and its history. We celebrate the charismatic, hero/ine trees right down to the smallest flora and fauna. We celebrate the relationships within the tiny forest community.

We post so as to keep the story of the tiny forest alive, so that the local human community may want to become part of it and to grow with it. We post to draw more and more people into a love relationship with the tiny forest, to promote awareness and to encourage regenerative engagement.





## May – June 2022

**Our mana whenua relationship grows** - Our main engagement with mana whenua happens between Mark and Maui. They usually meet face-to-face and the conversation is wide-ranging, including a lot of personal content. This is the gradual, conversation by conversation, kanohi ki te kanohi, process of growing relationship, that is so essential for Tiriti-based partnership.

The two met in May, and after covering a number of aspects of the project, Maui invited us to join him in his special place near Rāpaki in the indigenous forest, and then for ongoing conversation back at the kaik, including the opportunity to meet up with a key person in their team who leads the planting programme. We felt honoured to receive the invitation and were keen to accept. When seeking to work bi-culturally and in ways that honour and practice Tiriti-based partnership the relationship extends beyond the immediate context. This requires a willingness to be very flexible and open and receptive to other opportunities to come together.

A few days later Maui took us to the unmarked entrance to Taukahara. This is a 100 hectare block of old and regenerating bush near the Rāpaki settlement, on Māori land. At first our walk was though was quite scrappy and open vegetation, but the further we climbed the more dense it became.

Hgh up there was significant natural regeneration taking place on the forest floor. Several traps had possums in them and there are plans for significant plantings by the hapū.

Not long after walking under forest cover two piwakawaka/fantails turned up. At this point we paused. Maui took off his hat and said a karakia. Amongst other things he was greeting the piwakawaka. He then just casually commented that they would stay with us for the rest of our hīkoi now. It spoke of close relationships and deep knowing.

During the day he also made reference several times to Taukahara being his 'university', as the place where he learns continually. The word 'university' comes from the Latin 'universus', meaning 'whole, entire. This is where he learns more about the interconnectedness of things, the wholeness we belong to. Here nothing is separate. He also spoke of Taukahara as his gym, or fitness centre. Walking up and downhill through this forest is physically making him fitter and improving his health.

The piwakawaka did stick with us nearly all the way, their numbers even swelled for a while to five! When we took the wrong fork in the track they left us, but as Maui had predicted a pair of kereru took their place. When we got back to the fork the piwakawaka were immediately with us again. There was a lot going on for overly rational Pakeha to get to grips with!







In a clearing where Maui often camps he pointed out a tree and said this was his tree. He said that when he arrived in this clearing for the first time the tree spoke to him. Then he recounted the conversation he had with the tree when he saw the need to remove a large broken branch. This whole two-way relationship with the tree is so different to the bestower/recipient power relationship implicit in the western 'environmental care' discourse that we were more familiar with. Maui cut up the branch for firewood, which he used this to start a fire. He now has a fire pit in his campsite and whenever he is in residence cooks on the fire and it keeps him warm. He gathers fallen branches for his fires. It is part of traditional Ngai Tahu mahinga kai culture to light fires regularly on the whenua over which you have manawhenua. The fires keep the relationship warm and alive.

During our day in the forest there was always time for korero and particularly story-telling. The stories were often symbolic of cultural values and wisdom. It was this sharing that laid another rich layer onto the experience of being in the living forest, as a community of life.

We also covered aspects of our tiny forest regeneration project. Sometimes this came naturally from the context, but there were other times that we asked specific questions. This was because of the demands of the dominant framework we're working in and the need to resolve dilemmas so we could keep 'cracking on'. We were ambivalent about introducing everyday business in this special journey but Maui dealt with them very gracefully.



After the walk Maui took us to a couple of other significant sites and told us their stories. We finished back at the marae where Maui took us to the plant nursery. The hapū is collecting seeds from their forest and raising them into seedlings for replanting. They have hundreds of seedlings in varying stages of growth. One of our team was delighted to discover that the team leader was somebody she knew but had not seen for some years. This reconnection further strengthens our relationship with Wheke.

Our team also signed up for a Matariki Experience two-day live-in wananga with Maui and Ngāti Wheke on Matariki weekend. Part of the experience was to attend two on-line zui that gave an outline of some of the tikanga that would be followed and its context. Due to illness only one of the team was able to attend the actual wananga. For her it was an enriching and insightful weekend.

Previous Photo: Maui and Sharon in Rāpaki

Photo Above - View from Rāpaki Forest to Whakaraupō Lyttelton Harbour



## Reflection on Kōrero in the Forest

One of the topics we touched on was the mainstream focus on constant positivity and praise, and this doesn't prepare us for failure or disappointment. From a regenerative perspective this highlighted the importance of good process and practices and working with failure rather than trying to avoid it. Taking risks and learning from the experience. Going with what is possible and what is actually the reality rather than trying to force some other kind of outcome.

In reflection later, one of the team spoke about how difficult it can be to accept failure in our dominant funding/project management/ outcomes framework that we are so often working in. Funding is a scarce commodity and it feels uncomfortable to not deliver the 'success' other groups might have delivered had they been granted the funds. Fortunately some funders are becoming more open and accepting of the concept of failure and the resultant learning as also being a valuable outcome.

Another topic we asked for guidance on was attendance at a workshop we had been invited to attend. The workshop was for all the groups who are working along different parts of the river and are part of the River Network.

In the spirit of Tiriti partnership we would like to invite Maui to attend, but as Tuahuriri are attending as the Tiriti partner for the River Network and they are also the council's partner this could be a problem. Maui immediately came up with the perfect solution - he would like to attend as part of our organisation rather than as a representative of Wheke. . Not only is this so appropriate for the workshop, but it is also a wonderful and very significant expression of how the relationship between Wheke and Flourish is developing. Maui now feels comfortable enough with the relationship to feel ok to take responsibility and initiative, rather than just responding to our requests.

Photo: Rāpaki Whare





May 2022

The River Group Workshop we'd been invited to attend was part of some research being done to learn how groups work together and what would enhance the relationships and ways of working. Our morning started before the actual workshop, with Maui having an in-depth discussion with the Tuahuriri representative Arapata. This resulted in them agreeing to share the role of mana whenua and both gave mihi at the beginning of the workshop.

The workshop itself was scheduled for two hours (including lunch and networking) and was quite intense and rapid-fire.

We were seated at tables in small groups and given activities to draw out ideas about what the work needed. We all found it difficult to brainstorm with people we hadn't had a chance to get to know, and the dynamics at the table hindered participation. We needed to be very task-oriented and there was no time for sharing or connecting on another level like we do in our own hui.

Photo: Mark in the middle of mahi

## Reflections on Process

Our experience reinforced for us the crucial importance of group process, including giving sufficient time for good processes to happen. More time would have given the opportunity for all of us around the table to get to know each other and how we work a little more. The perfunctory introductions that are standard at many events like this are not a good platform for meaningful contributions.





June 2022

**Predator Trapping** - We've regularly come across signs of predators/pests in the forest, and have been working towards getting some trapping going. This involved liaising with the council and with a volunteer organisation whose goal is to eliminate predators from the Port Hills.

We were now at the stage where we are ready to start the initiative. We held a hui for anyone interested and this was attended by the scout leaders and volunteers from the Give Back team. The Scouts are very keen to be involved, it is harder at this stage to get volunteers from our Give Back team. So it may end up being a Scout project, or a partnership between scouts and give back volunteers.

One of the first steps that we've been advised to take is to consult with the community and immediate neighbourhood. This has raised lots of questions as to the extent and form of the consultation. There are a range of options and it would be helpful to know what has worked well in other locations. Whichever way we decide to do this the Scouts are keen to be involved. These are their neighbours.

From the beginning we have had an awareness of the need to engage neighbouring residents because they have an important role to play in the wellbeing of the forest.

There are signs of damage along the boundary at the back of the forest and it would be good to establish positive relationships so that we can explore what is going on there and find solutions together. The strength and longevity of this project will ultimately stand or fall on good relationships and understanding and knowledge shared and informing practice as a community.

We've all agreed that the process needs to be right and we need to be thorough in our preparation before starting any programme. So it'll take as long as it needs to, this is also vital to regenerative work. It is not just about 'getting on with it'. It is also about setting something up that is for the long-term not just a quick fix.

### Working with the Local Body.

In recent months this relationship hasn't been easy. Not because of individuals but because of the lack of resourcing for natural restoration. Our primary working relationship is with a Parks and Reserves ranger and we get on really well with her. But she is chronically overworked and overstretched. This has meant that some of our next steps are held up because she needs to be involved and is not available.



It is currently the planting season which is a crazy time of the year for rangers with so many community planting projects needing ranger oversight.

Nothing else can happen with pest control until we have done a walk through with her and determined if the Tiny Forest is big enough to set up a trapline.

So a challenge to all regenerative work with communities is managing the relationship with overstretched local body resources. These bodies have oversight and control the direction and pace of development and this can erode community energy and trust. At this time we can't see how we could manage this relationship any differently, we must just be patient.

July 2022



**Matariki Celebration** - As we are becoming accustomed to, this event turned out very different to how we'd imagined it might be. Our work is not about forcing a particular template or strongly held plan on to proceedings. While planning is essential, we constantly adapt as events evolve organically with who participates and contributes and with what the set of circumstances at the time makes possible.

We had a good number attend the celebration, and it felt there was a growing sense of community. None of our broader partner organisations (e.g. the school and the council) attended, which was disappointing.

Photo Left: Matariki Hui, Below Left: Portable Hangi Below Right: Kai Time





But it was the middle of winter and covid and other winter illnesses were prevalent. Illness also impacted on our preparation as two of our team were unavailable on the day due to being sick. This required some last-minute organisation to fill the gap.

We provided a Hāngī for the Matariki feast. A delightful part of the meal was the sweets and desserts provided by the group themselves. All of this was a sign of the 'give back' culture growing amongst the volunteers, along with the 'silent' sponsorship provided by one of the families. None of what was shared was requested.

After the feast we held an in-depth conversation that noted and celebrated our achievements over the past year, and expressed hopes of how we can continue to grow our mahi with the tiny forest. It was a constructive and helpful session for us all to look ahead together.

*Summary of the volunteer feedback is in Appendix 4.*

There was plenty of good energy in the group to share openly and honestly, and to contribute experiences and ideas. There is a growing sense of us sharing in the shaping of the direction of our mahi and kaupapa. People have invested quite a lot of themselves in the tiny forest, and feel connected with it and increasingly with each other.

Maui then led us in a lovely talk on Matariki. As usual he brought his special brand of magic to it all. A big part of what he talked about was the importance of relationships.

As we reflected later he offered a rich and non-threatening indigenous world-view that would have offered something new and helpful for some of the volunteers. He did so through his great skill in story-telling.

He ended with an invitation to help plant the indigenous forest that they are bringing back to Wheke's ancestral mountain behind Rāpaki. Here is what it means being Tiriti partners in action. So often we ask manawhenua to support our mahi, with little thought as to how we reciprocate. Now we are being invited, trusted to support theirs mahi. There is a beautiful reciprocity evolving in this.

We finished the evening with photos and affirmations of what we had shared together and our ongoing relationship with the tiny forest. Some volunteers needed to leave quickly, while others lingered for the final clear-up and further informal conversation. It had been a grand evening.

Follow-up over the following days involved koha to acknowledge various contributions. It is important to reciprocate the goodwill of others in settling such financial matters promptly and generously. We also emailed the volunteers a few days later thanking them for their participation and contribution to the spirit of the evening. Feedback from participants showed how much they had enjoyed the evening and appreciated the opportunity to reflect and plan.



## Reflection on the Matariki Celebration

There was a lot to do to prepare for this event. Illness in the team in the days before led us to consider postponing, but there were so many threads involved that would require pulling together again that it felt best to continue.

Our main concern was the health of our project leader Mark. He was able to manage his energy levels and organise last-minute support. The incredible goodwill and spirit of the volunteers and Maui's contribution also carried the event and so in many ways Mark felt regenerated by the kai, sharing, story-telling and sense of community.

Our group discussion didn't cover all the topics we'd considered, but if it had included them it would have been too long or else we wouldn't have had the time for reflection and exploration. What came through from the sharing was growing engagement with the tiny forest and a desire to be more hands on and involved in decision-making.

July 2022

**Working towards an oversight/kaitiaki group** - We have been encouraging the volunteers to consider being part of an oversight group. So far two people have put their hand up.

Establishing this group in coming weeks will Mark a significant step in our development. Early on we were anxious to get such a group up and running and were on the verge of forcing this along. But we realised that this needed to happen organically.

The leadership of the project has fallen almost entirely on Mark and this has been a big workload. At first his drive was needed to recruit volunteers and get everything started. But now we believe that the volunteers are engaged enough that they are keen to help shape our priorities and direction.



Photo Right: Tiny Forest Regular Volunteers / Kaitiaki Group



## July 2022

There were several highlights to this session.

Near the end of the planting some supporters arrived to encourage us along. One of these people brought a recorder and played tunes to those of us still around. It brought a whole new dimension to the planting and is something we could look at planning into the next similar gathering. This bringing together of art/creativity/culture and the natural world is regenerative for our soul and well-being, and in its own way can build a sense of place.

We had a visit by the woman on the Ōpāwaho Heathcote River Network who coordinates the community groups along the river. She herself is the key organiser of one of the groups upstream from the tiny forest. Another organiser of the group next upstream from us participated in the whole planting and we networked afterwards. We began exploring the possibility of getting our two volunteer teams together. We would be able to hear each other's stories and learn from each other.

We were able to recruit one more person for the oversight team and we now have four people to get things started. We can now convene a meeting. Our sense is that quarterly meetings should be sufficient.

## August 2022

**The oversight group meets** -This meetup represents a significant evolutionary step in our journey as a regenerative community. Up until now Mark has been a paid coordinator relating to the growing team of volunteers via email. Now there is a small team sharing oversight of what we do as the Tiny Forest community. The next step will involve downsizing Mark's role in this group.

Mark put together an agenda and facilitated the meeting. Everyone contributed well to the discussion and offered ideas, as well as willingness to follow-up and action things. We worked together well and it was easy reaching consensus on things. It was a very promising start.

Mark agreed to continue doing the communication side of things with emailing and Facebook posts.

It is really good to be sharing the decision-making and responsibility for how we continue to develop and grow together.



September 2022

**A new season** - The first session of the new season saw good attendance.

We met one of the neighbours of the tiny forest for the first time. She shared that she is really grateful for our mahi. The group is now taking on much more self-leadership, with problem-solving and task allocation happening amongst the group.

We were saddened to find that a couple of our plants had been dug up and stolen. We discussed how we might lessen the chances of this happening again, with no obvious solution.



## Reflection on Regenerative Leadership

As the project has evolved we have been learning a lot about what leadership looks like in a regenerative community. Mark has taken a strong role in initiating, creating and developing the community of volunteers in the Tiny Forest. With the establishment of the Oversight team his contribution is beginning to change and he now works as much as possible through them.

Stepping back after holding leadership roles for a long time can be hard but for regeneration to grow it is extremely important for both the group and the person who has held this role. As Mark was stepping back he had some major family issues demand his time and energy. He was able to give them the time he needed in the confidence that the group was beginning to be self-sustaining.

By encouraging and enabling others to share leadership it is easier to regenerate yourself. Your role becomes not only one of giving out but receiving. The reciprocity of the regenerative approach strengthens and heals everyone.

Photo: Ōpāwaho Heathcote Riverbanks left to rewild





Tiny Forest  
King George V  
Reservoir Fountain

The Kūmara  
Awards



## The Kūmara Awards

A celebration of the best of the best in the Kūmara region

2023

Winners of the 2023 Kūmara Awards

Best of the Best in the Kūmara region

For more information, visit [www.kumaraawards.co.nz](https://www.kumaraawards.co.nz)



## November 2022

**Workshop Planning** - To extend our knowledge of regenerative practices we are planning two workshops with the volunteers. The first will be to Ōtamahua / Quail Island, an island in Whakaraupō/Lyttelton harbour that is part of the Wheke rohe. This will be led by Maui.

The second will be about foraging, with a focus on the local area around the tiny forest. A local wildfoods and foraging expert has agreed to lead this second workshop. We would also like to do a workshop on seed gathering.

**Recognition and Encouragement** - Without Mark's knowledge, the team submitted our project for a Kūmara Award. These are awarded by Placemakers Aotearoa, which has a strong regenerative emphasis.

We were delighted when the project won the 'Tiakina te whenua, ka manaakitia te tangata. Caring For the Land, Caring For the People' category – it was incredibly affirming and encouraging. We celebrated the award with the Give Back team.

Photo Top: Mark, Maui and Volunteer

Photo Bottom: Award cake for the Tiny Forest Team cut by  
Local Councillor

Photo Next Page: Kūmara Award and Certificate on the Tiny Forest  
Riverbank





## December 2022

**Forest User Survey** - In order to learn a little more about the relationship that people have with the tiny forest, we carried out a wee survey of people we met in the forest. Most of the people we spoke to were local and visited it often. One teenager proudly pointed to the trees he had planted when he was part of the school programme the previous year. About half of those we spoke with were aware of our group who care for the forest.

## February 2023

**Seed Gathering Snag** - We have hit a potential snag for this proposed workshop. The Council has emailed us to advise that they would be required to get a permit for seed-collecting under the Reserves Act. We had already mentioned our plans on our Facebook page, and were reprimanded for going public before we had sought permission to hold such an event. While the email was warm and friendly, we were reminded about where the power lay.

We responded apologetically, and as requested we set about trying to organise a meeting with the park ranger to discuss this.

## Reflections on working with Statutory Bodies

This request/reprimand from the council raises again the difficulties of community initiatives working within legislation and with statutory bodies. At times we are not on the same page, and so there are tensions and even conflicts that need to be negotiated. There is a very clear power differential. In this situation it highlights that ultimately the power lies with those who are the legal guardians rather than the spiritual ones. Thinking regeneratively it is hard to see how this facilitates a regenerative approach.

Council work from a legal mandate and set of policies rather than a relationship, while those with the deepest connection with the place have the least power. So, it doesn't encourage and nurture a culture of community investment in their place. When the community is working with whenua that is under the jurisdiction of a statutory body they have to find a way of doing this and staying true to the land. No easy task!

The other key thing that this snag highlights again, as it has been ongoing for the project, is the difficulty in working closely with the park rangers. This seems to be a systemic problem. The Council is under-resourced in this key area and it has been perpetually difficult to arrange meetings or even have discussion with the overstretched ranger on important issues.



The majority of our attempted communications receive no response.

So, while the council has oversight of the Tiny Forest it seems they don't have the resources to carry out this function adequately. This raises the question of how community groups can work collaboratively with statutory bodies when they are often not available? At this stage we have no answer to this dilemma.

## February 2023

**Reactivating School Engagement-** This year the school is looking at initiating a new programme that has been developed by our regional council. Because of our programme that we ran in 2021 we were invited to be part of the planning. We're excited to be included in this, as we were disappointed not to be able to run the programme last year.

One issue that arose in our conversation was who to ask to represent manawhenua. As with our local council, the regional council's manawhenua relationship is not with Wheke.

**Meeting about Seed Gathering** - It was great to gather in the Tiny Forest with council staff to discuss various issues, including our proposed Seed Gathering Workshop. The meeting went well and we found consensus on all of the issues. This will help our ongoing mahi as the Community of the Tiny Forest.

We were delighted to learn that, given that the seed-gathering workshop has an educational focus, the council's biodiversity chief has given us a green light to proceed. The Reserves legislation provides that if the primary purpose is educational then seed-gathering can happen in a reserve.

We also discussed the willows and their removal and ongoing weed disposal, and also predator-trapping. The ranger is happy for trapping to go ahead once we have two trained and accredited trappers.

A good meeting of minds came about with a discussion about planting in further areas of the reserve and about the potential for expanding the reserve itself. This would align with council commitments to lower carbon emissions.

All in all, the meeting showed what can be achieved when partners are able to connect and talk.



## Ōtamahua / Quail Island hīkoi

On a beautiful summer morning a large group of us met with our hosts and resource people Maui & Hama at the ferry terminal for the trip to Otamatua/Quail Island.

Once we had disembarked on the island Maui welcomed us and gave a karakia. Then after a group photo we walked the track uphill. After having various uses such as farming and a quarantine, the island is now gradually being replanted in native species. Along the way we saw large areas of regenerating vegetation.

At our first stop Maui shared stories that painted a picture of the relationship that Ngāti Wheke have had with the island. Many of the plants here have healing powers and so it was a pharmacy for them. We talked about Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Kemp's Purchase, and the subsequent devastating loss of much land, forests and rivers. In more recent times he says the hapū have tried to use the island as a university for Mātauranga Māori in partnership with DOC who have jurisdiction over it because of its conservation reserve status. Hama emphasized that this is a tapu/sacred place. We can come here to connect with rākau - joining our mauri with their mauri. Here and now we are having a relationship with each other, and the rākau.

This works to restore the balance, both here and within ourselves. In this way the trees are medicine, and we ourselves become medicine. We need to find this medicine within us.

Every plant has its own wairua and purpose. It is important to get to know their names and fully acknowledge them. He shared stories and healing wisdom of a number of the trees and plants around us. Many of these trees and plants are also growing in our tiny forest.

While we sat or lay in the shade Hama suggested that this was a good place to whakawhanaungatanga, just as the rākau have a relationship with one another. We all introduced ourselves and shared a little about where we are from and how we got involved etc.

Maui emphasised that everything is connected and so we have a responsibility to care for the others - for the trees, for all of life, if we are to grow a stronger future. He shared his gratitude that all of the life around us in the trees was thriving, that the growth has been incredible, and that this regeneration of the island is "beautiful to see".







Photos from Top Left: Leaving Lyttelton, Walks & Talks: to the top and down again.



Our ecology adviser Colin was also part of the hīkoi. Over the day he shared his knowledge about the distribution and preferred habitats of the plants we studied.

We continued on to the tall carved pouwhenua on the summit. A pouwhenua marks a place of cultural significance. Maui introduced us to the pou and explained its significance and the story it tells.

Before we wandered down to the beach for our picnic lunch Maui stressed something that was a recurring theme through the day. The importance of this oral history being told by the hapū and iwi, not pakeha. They really want to avoid cultural appropriation of their stories and maintain control of them, so they haven't favoured DOC signage going up around the island telling these stories. It is important that this is done in person by those whose stories they are. Knowledge must come from a direct relationship. That they shared their stories of the pouwhenua with us is a mark of our growing relationship.

The swimming beach was a busy and noisy site as many people with motorcraft and particularly jet skis had gathered. It detracted a little from our shared experience but not as much as we feared. People just seemed to enjoy eating together, conversation and resting up after having been on our feet a lot in the heat of the day.

After lunch Maui led another short session of sharing stories and wisdom in the old quarantine barracks, now an educational space. One of the things he talked about was the kaimoana collected and caught by Ngāti Wheke around the island and harbour. He emphasized the need for others to respect this customary relationship. He also talked about how Ngāti Wheke have a topuni over the motu. It refers to placing a cloak over a place, individual or taonga so as to confer rangatiratanga. It's a way of claiming mana.

Then we had some free time for wellbeing before a short wander back to the jetty and eventually the ferry. We didn't have an official ending which was an unfortunate oversight. Endings and beginnings are both really important for community time like this. It acknowledges that we are now 'in community' and we are now 'out of community' – at least in terms of being gathered or scattered community.

It seemed to end our time beautifully though that we saw two hector's dolphins in the harbour as we approached Lyttelton. The Māori name for these sea mammals is Tutumairekurai, meaning ocean dweller. They are revered as taonga and are sometimes seen as a sign or tohu of wellbeing or absence of wellbeing in an ecosystem. If there are plentiful hector's dolphins then it is a sign of health in an inshore eco-system. Feedback from participants afterwards was universally very positive. As one participant said, **"gave us pakeha plenty to think about and curiosity to know more"**.



## Reflection on our Hikoi

This day was one of rich learning.

Firstly, much of the vegetation was similar to our tiny forest. We were able to learn much more about the trees and plants we worked amongst, not just in the botanical sense but in terms of wellbeing and wairua.

The insights that Maui and Hama offered us into the relationship that Wheke have with the whenua and the forest gave us a thought-provoking perspective from which to deepen our relationship with our tiny forest. We also gained a deeper insight into Te Tiriti and events since, and the alienation of the whenua from Māori .

Spending the whole day in each others' company gave us the chance to learn more about each other, and grow our connections.

We gave a koha in acknowledgement of Maui and Hama's huge input to the day, but received so much more in return. We can continue to repay them by applying what we have learned to our project and in many other settings.

Photos Following: Foraging Workshop including Lunch

March 2023



**Foraging the Ōpāwaho workshop** - Thorough planning for this workshop paid off.

Our leaders were Peter and Jackie, who have been making a living out of foraging. Peter sees foraging not only as a good way of supplementing one's diet from local wild food to reduce food bills, but also to have a closer relationship to the land. The work has a mindfulness dimension. It is about moving slowly through the land and in a way that becomes therapeutic for body, mind and soul. It is about knowing what to take and what to leave, how to be replenished without exhausting the bounty available.

We advertised in the community and asked people to register and pay beforehand rather than on the day. This gave us an idea of how many people we had attending and could prepare resources for them.



We met in the reserve immediately behind the scout den on an autumnal morning. It had been raining the night before and we had organised several groundsheets for this eventuality. Almost twenty people attended, and it was a very diverse group. After introductions, a blessing, and outlining health and safety procedures, we began our foraging walk.

The walk began with the trees and plant life all around us behind the scout den. From there we walked down into the Tiny Forest and along to other areas adjacent to the river, eventually returning to our base behind the scout den.

There were frequent stops to look at what Peter or Jackie had discovered, and then a brief commentary on that species. Peter and Jackie's informal chatty style and sharing was engaging and incredibly informative. Peter encouraged the use of Google lens as a tool for accurate identification of plants.

It was eye-opening to learn about the diversity of plant life on this river edge, we had no idea how much of it is edible. We think we know our locality, but foraging opens up a whole new world to us and deepens our relationship with it. It also highlights just how dependent we have become on manufactured, processed and marketed kai. Many of the plants that are labelled "weeds", undesirable, noxious and are therefore marginalised, are actually nutritious foods.





We also became aware of how much locally available food is actually not edible because of the toxicity of our natural environments. Peter described foraging as “an edge activity” that happens on the edge of a river, the edge of a coastline, the edge of city or farmland etc. These are often places that are sprayed or damaged in some way, so we need to know the history of the whenua where we are foraging.

So, foraging heightens our awareness of what we are doing to nature and ourselves, not just afar but in our neighbourhoods. It reminds us that we need to keep our natural world nearby healthy in order to keep ourselves healthy.

Globalisation of food means we mostly source our food from beyond where we live, and this disconnects us from the realities of our own neighbourhood wellbeing. It means we don't have to be responsible for the health of our local ecosystems.

Back at the scout den Peter & Jackie quickly organised lunch, an offering of a great variety of foraged food. It really was a feast of tastes and kinds of food. Peter and Jackie had put a lot of preparation into providing the amazing fare on offer, highlighting just how reasonable their fee was.

As we neared the end of the feast we tried to get some reflecting going by way of a debrief but it was quite limited what was offered.

We had already prepared an evaluation form so we handed that out instead. The responses to that were hugely positive, everybody got a lot out of it. Several identified practical things that could be done differently another time, and we will take that on board.

*See collated Foraging Workshop evaluation in Appendix 5.*





## March 2023 – Awa Kura day

Our school River Day was a large event, with one hundred and twenty Years 3 and 4 students, plus teachers, parent helpers, and those of us who were part of the planning and delivery. The two lead organisations who had put the whole programme together were our regional council ECan & Te Tāone Tuna, but the City Council, manawhenua (Ngāi Tūāhuriri) and ourselves were also involved.

We were leading one of the six learning stations. Each group of 20 students would rotate around the stations. One of the volunteers has offered to help with our station. Eleanor will be an excellent assistant with her huge botanical knowledge and experience as a primary school teacher. It is good to make use of the talents and experience of those within our growing community. This is a key dimension of regenerative communities. Increasingly this is happening.

We had a plan for how we would work together and who had what responsibilities, but as usual we had to adapt to the realities of how the day unfolded. The timing of each group wasn't always in synch with others, so the movement from station to station was clunky. More often than not we were still finishing with one group at the far end of the forest when the next one arrived. In this chaos a few parts of our sharing didn't happen.

It was revealing how many of the students hadn't been to the tiny forest before, even though it is in their area. The history of the whenua around the forest on both sides of the awa was largely unknown also. Some of the adults with the students commented on how much they had appreciated hearing this history and how it helped them know their place better.

We strongly emphasised how the school is very much part of the unfolding story of the tiny forest. We showed them what students from their school had planted in 2019, and told them that they could now also become involved in supporting these trees and the whole forest through the kaitiaki programme the school is hoping to start up this year.

The following month we were delighted to receive from the students a card they had made thanking Mark for all the things they learned from him. They had also done a card for Eleanor.

The artwork on the card reflected what featured as part of the learning station, and was full of richness and symbolism. It spoke of relationship and connection, joy and life and colour. Inside were smaller pictures and messages from each of the children. They had obviously really enjoyed their time with Mark and had engaged more deeply with this place.







## Reflection on Awa Kura day

Once the students started rotating around the learning stations there was a lot happening in a short time and so it was all pretty intense. In reflection afterwards we agreed six was too many groups and the time slots at each station were not long enough. We needed either more time or reduce our material and leave a lot of the richness and connections out.

This was the youngest age group we have engaged with in the forest and it is challenging to do hands-on learning with them in such a short time frame.

This is a challenge of fitting in to a pre-existing programme designed by others. Were we to be part of a similar initiative in future we would need to be much clearer about how the logistics might impact on our plans and adapt accordingly. There were more children than we were used to and the day's activities were more intense. As the children were also younger than we were used to, we may not have appreciated what was feasible in the timeframes allowed.

Hopefully what we did fostered some curiosity and maybe a sliver of a possible ongoing connection and relationship.

Photo Previous Page: Students in the Tiny Forest for World River Day

Photo Right: Station set up for Students



March 2023

**A special occasion** - Mark was thrilled to be invited to attend the ordination of Maui at Rāpaki. He was ordained as a deacon into the Te Pīhopatanga o Aotearoa, the Māori diocese of the Anglican church.

Attending and supporting Maui in particular but also Te Hapu o Ngāti Wheke is all part of honouring and strengthening our growing partnership. In Mark's next contact with Maui he said he felt "honoured" by his/our presence. This kind of relationship building with manawhenua is an essential part of growing a regenerative community in our Aotearoa context.



## April 2023 – Deep Time Walk on Earth Day

This was the last of the summer/autumn “workshops” we ran for the Tiny Forest volunteers, and for some, the wider community as well. It was prepared and led by Mark.

A deep time walk is a walk in two time frames, the history of the planet, and the here and now. It is walking an evolutionary process, as well as the passing of time. It's a sacred walk as we reflect on the process that brought us to life. That in a very real way we are walking our whakapapa. We are walking on the earth, we are walking the earth story, but we ourselves are earth.

The walk regularly stops along the way to hear what is unfolding at that point in time. It helps us to go deeply into our place and helps us to understand more fully the super long process that has unfolded to bring us to where we are.

We began with a welcome and a karakia in both te reo Māori and English. This was partly in response to the disappointment expressed by some participants in the Foraging Workshop that the blessing was only in English. Mark looked at well known Māori blessings but none fitted the event. To acknowledge our kaupapa and the day itself, Mark wrote a blessing for a Deep Time Walk, and Earth Day.

## March 2023

I tenei ra o te Ao  
kia hīkoi tatou i runga  
i te aroha me te miharo  
mo tenei waahi  
me nga mahi auaha  
kei roto tatou.  
Kia haere tatou me te mihi  
mo nga oranga katoa

On this Earth Day  
may we walk  
with love and wonder  
for this place  
and for the ongoing creative  
processes  
we are part of.  
May we walk  
with gratitude for all life

i whai oranga ai tatou.  
Kia haere mahorahora tatou  
ki te ako me te tipu  
me te whakahohonu  
i to tatou mohiotanga  
ko wai tatou me te  
huarahi e tika ana  
kia hīkoi.

that has made our lives  
possible.  
May we walk  
with openness to learn and grow  
and deepen in our  
understanding  
of who we are  
and the pathway  
we need to walk.

Along the route it was good to acknowledge and affirm the mahi of other community initiatives. As we walked through these places we could enjoy seeing all the green life they have nurtured.



April 2023

Part of our discussion at the end focused around the question, did we walk in the right direction? We had started in an industrial area and ended in the tiny forest. Perhaps walking from the forest to the industrial area would be more symbolic of what has happened to the earth. The group agreed that the way we did it felt right. It brought us to the present in a place of hope – a place that the community is regenerating, and that nature is now regenerating. It would have been tough to hear the brutal truth about the destruction that western industrial culture has wrought in Earth, and end in a largely depressing place.

Two words that were offered several times during our reflection at the end were “sobering” and “wondrous”. One of the tiny forest volunteers commented that walking the big narrative we are part of helped to contextualize our ongoing regenerative mahi in the here and now - in the Tiny Forest.



**Oversight Group meeting** - Our pilot project is shortly coming to a close and Mark will be relinquishing many of the responsibilities he has had as the project leader. It is time to look at how to transition to an ongoing initiative.

The group reviewed and affirmed the progress to date, and discussed a celebration to mark the end of the formal project. It also planned for the coming winter season.

A lot of the discussion focused on how to organise ourselves post-project. How shall we share the leadership responsibilities and tasks that Mark has undertaken? By the end of the discussion some of these tasks were taken on by Oversight team members, but Mark will still carry a number voluntarily. We agreed that we are on the look out for other people to take on further roles - particularly in the social media space.

So the process of devolving power and leadership has moved to another stage, with further shifting still to do.

Photo: Time Walk stop in the Tiny Forest



## May 2023

**Kōrero with Maui** - This catch up had a different feel to our previous meetings. As the project was coming to an end soon we were focusing on how to wrap things up.

Complicating the conclusion was the difficult situation our young organisation found itself in. As our Te Tiriti partner it was important to be open and honest about this with Maui. We have been unable to secure either baseline funding or funding for any of our ongoing projects and this was making our structure unsustainable. We talked about how hard it is to find funding these days, something he is familiar with. We talked about our size and structure. He reflected on how challenging all the groups around Whakaraupō are finding it at the moment and their approach is to try and work more collaboratively.

Reflecting on the wind up of the Regenerative Communities project he noted that these projects always have to end, so there is never an ideal time. It is great that the community of the tiny forest can continue even though the project ends. It is important to note too, that our project was always about building the forest community until it was self-sustaining, and we feel good to see that our aim has been met.

It is appropriate that we have a good ending just as we had a celebratory beginning with the 30th birthday party for the tiny forest. We agreed that Matariki would be an appropriate time for a wind-up celebration. As Maui put it, "Matariki is all about death and endings" We then reflected together on how Matariki also marks new beginnings that aren't necessarily clear, but that there is an awareness and hopefulness that something new will emerge.

We also talked about the thorny issue of financial support for the mahi that he does in the future. We agreed that the relationship between the community of the tiny forest and Ngāti Wheke needs to continue. That projects come and go, people even come and go but relationships between communities and the tiny forest go on. But how does this happen without exploiting Maui or the hapū? This is an open question we need to keep exploring. What does relationship/partnership look like beyond money? How does the reciprocity continue? Does the tiny forest team need to cross the hills to assist with the mahi over there?

Mark was deeply appreciative of the honesty both shared about their own personal situations at the moment in relation to work. Despite what Maui is dealing with at the moment he was able to engage in this conversation about the project with real integrity and care.



## May 2023

**Our final session with the project** - This regular Give Back morning was to be our last as part of the project. Mark will continue on in his personal capacity as a volunteer.

At the end of the mahi and before our manaakitanga time Mark planted a whekī /tree fern that had been given to him as a Christmas present by the Council ranger. Before planting he shared a little of the back story including that it looked like it had died but we managed to revive it. He also noted the significance of the day as it was the coronation of King Charles III. The reserve where the tiny forest grows is named after his great-grandfather. The new king is a renowned conservationist and champion for the natural world so this was worthy of affirmation with a whekī that hopefully will reign in the realm of the flood-plain section for a long time.

There is now a strong regular group who carry this mahi and guardianship role in the tiny forest. The project has helped to birth and nurture this wee community.

## June 2023 - April 2024

**Concluding the project** - Although Mark's time as our project worker has come to an end, there is still project mahi to be done. We will draw together feedback from the various participants in the project, concluding our ongoing efforts to encourage their contributions. Of course there has been continuous dialogue during the activities, but we needed a more formal, dedicated time to reflect with the participants.

Mark and Colin had incorporated this into the school initiative, and we had rich feedback from the students. The teachers had told us that they were under a heavy workload and would get back to us to review the initiative and plan further ones. Covid intervened and stymied our hopes of holding a second series.

Several attempts to hold a focused conversation with the Give Back volunteers in the tiny forest did not eventuate for various reasons. Lack of numbers led us to cancel a couple of planned gatherings.

Sharon was leading this part of the mahi and writing the draft of this report, and her partner had a family illness and bereavement. The main responsibility for caring for the family member and attending to funeral arrangements and estate management fell to her and her partner.







January 2024

This meant her availability and energy was limited for much of this time.

We agreed a process with Maui that we would complete a draft report about the project and then supply it to him for Wheke input. Sharon's limited availability meant that this process took longer than we'd hoped.

### Reflection on Balance

Once again, we acknowledged that life events must be properly recognised and worked with. A regenerative process allows time and space for us to deal with both practical and emotional mahi. So often in our mainstream culture the pressures of outside responsibilities such as paid work do not fully acknowledge and provide for this.

This will always be a tension when working in a regenerative way. The tension exists not only between the process and the wider mainstream culture, but often within ourselves. We are products of our culture, and our default setting is often that we prioritise 'getting the work done' ahead of our self care and wellbeing.

**More Contested Space** - Returning to the forest after the Christmast break, the volunteers were upset to find that over the school holidays a group of children had created a bike track in the tiny forest. This had involved digging up the ground and putting in barrels and tyres to create jumps and dips. It had destroyed a lot of plants planted by the volunteers and other groups, and also wiped out much self-regenerating life.

Their concern was shared on the forest Facebook page. Responses supported the children creating their own fun and minimised any impact on the forest.

Discussion amongst and with the volunteers has been ongoing while they grieved for the lost plants. There are bmx tracks provided elsewhere in the city but we recognised that half the adventure for the children would have been the making of it. There is nowhere in today's urban areas where kids can dig stuff up or hammer something to a tree or build a fort etc.



## February 2024

**Feedback from the Give Back volunteers** - After several unsuccessful attempts to hold a dedicated feedback session with the volunteers, we decided on a two-pronged approach. We emailed the volunteers with the general topics we would like to cover, and invited them to respond via email. We also offered them the option of phoning Sharon and having a conversation about these questions, or any other feedback they would like to offer. Finally, we also indicated that Sharon would attend a regular session in the forest and talk with them as they worked. It was important to offer a range of options so that people could choose which process worked for them.

Around ten people were at the volunteer session that Sharon attended. These included the person who had rung Sharon and the couple who had responded to the email.

The feedback told us that people felt good about the future of the tiny forest. They could see that (apart from where the BMX track had been built) the plants they had planted were healthy and growing, and there were lots of self-sown seedlings throughout the forest. They valued the expertise that was available to the project, although some people questioned the prioritising of different activities, especially weeding.

## January 2024

A lot of the feedback talked about how people felt more connected to the forest. They were still grieving about the damage done, but discussing strategies that might help more of the community to value and protect the forest and its unique gifts.

People also enjoyed getting to know each other and, as one person put it, "recover a sense of 'village'". They also valued connecting up with other groups working on different areas of the river.

While the morning teas were an essential part of the sessions, some people found it hard to stop work and join them. They were focused on the mahi and would prefer to carry on with that.

**Many of the comments implicitly reflected a regenerative perspective. They referred to a changed relationship with the land and river, and how it benefits mental health. One person was planting more natives around their home, trying to restore what must have once been there.**



There was sympathy for what it must feel like for tangata whenua. Maui's input was greatly appreciated; as one volunteer described it "he addressed some things that changed how you feel about the whenua" and "gave a sense of building of bridges and belonging to the same place together".

Photo Below: Sign at one entrance to the Tiny Forest for ongoing community mahi



## Reflection on Feedback

While we were hoping to hear from the volunteers about the process this project was using, there was a focus at times on the practicalities rather than the process. This suggested to us that living in our task-focussed society makes it hard to see beyond the 'what' to look at the 'how'.

For instance, the purpose of the kai and korero is regenerative – it is a giving back to the volunteers, and a chance to connect on another level. But some appeared not to recognise that and wanted to continue their mahi in the forest.

Many of us have learned to be task-oriented and don't always recognise the value and purpose of process. Task orientation can lead us to overlook context and relationships. This is a challenge for regenerative projects and we need to think some more about how to work with an over-orientation to tasks.

The input of the 'experts' such as Colin was greatly appreciated and his knowledge and commitment has been a huge benefit to the project. A regenerative process needs to balance the valuing of expert input with fostering the ability of everyone to recognise and value their own knowledge/expertise and that of all others in the group.



April 2024

Feedback from Ngāti Wheke:

Throughout the project, we had an agreement that Wheke were welcome to contribute to this report in any way and at any time they wished. They chose for us to draft the report and send it to them for their comment, which was ....

*On behalf of Te Hapu O Ngāti Wheke, it was indeed a pleasure to work with the team from the tiny forest.*

*Over the past few years the relationship between us has grown close, not only sharing knowledge of the awa and whenua but extending out to form relationships with other river network groups.*

*This relationship grew through the Whanaungatanga in evening hui events like Matariki, and other celebrations throughout the seasons. One of the more memorable times was a visit to Ōtamahua (Quail Island) with Colin Muerk, and how we found the natural beauty of the island through the knowledge which we shared together. This emphasises the kotahitanga of the project.*

*We also note that te Hapu O Ngāti Wheke was on the boundary of our Takiwa in this project. Our Hapu will always support communities which will improve the environment, and share and acknowledge knowledge with local schools and community led projects. It was an honour and a privilege to work with the whanau at The Tiny Forest.*

Maui Stuart

Te Hapu O Ngāti Wheke



April 2024

**Where are we now.** - As the research component of this regenerative project ends, the mahi itself is continuing.

There is an established group of local volunteers meeting regularly and self-managing to work in the forest. Mark continues to play an active role in this group, although not the explicit leadership role he held during the development and research phase. All activities have been and continue to be a rich source of learning about local biodiversity, how whenua and awa can be healed and nurtured, as well as the stories of this place.

There is ongoing discussion and strategising around how to raise awareness of how precious the forest is amongst the wider community, with the aim of creating a social environment where activities such as building a bmx track would not be contemplated.

The school is interested in holding more learning sessions in the forest. They also have exciting ideas for the forest becoming an 'oasis of biodiversity'. Working with the school along these lines would require a level of time, effort and expertise that the group is unlikely to be able to give without funding. This is something that the group will need to consider carefully.

The scouts have become increasingly appreciative of the value and complexity of the forest on their doorstep, and they are talking with Mark and the other volunteers about what role they can play.

There is greater awareness of the tiny forest in the community, and interest in the mahi that the group has been doing.

With the end of the research project, Flourish's formal relationship with the tiny forest regeneration project also comes to an end. However we will still continue to keep in touch, following its progress with interest and helping out when we can.

Photo Below and Next Page: Life in the Tiny Forest









# What Did We Learn?

To review the project, we drew on the Guiding Principles for Regenerative Thinking, laid out by Josie Warden of the RSA in a 2021 article: [What Does Regenerative Thinking Mean?](#)

*Start with place and context. Recognise that people, places and communities have different and unique qualities. Question assumptions that context-agnostic or top-down solutions will work in any and every place. Instead, ask what it would look like to begin working from the potential that is offered by a place, community or specific context.*

From the beginning, we were clear that we wished to work with the community that was local to the tiny forest. It was suggested to us that we look more widely for volunteers, but we realised that a person coming from another area would not build an ongoing relationship with the forest.

Feedback from participants confirmed for us that this was the right choice. Many spoke of a closer relationship with the area and/or people in their community, and the benefits it brought to them. These included a feeling of belonging and being connected to the locality, and mental and emotional benefits from time spent in the forest. They gained a deeper understanding and appreciation of the history and ecology of the place where they lived.

*Seek different perspectives. Regenerative thinking recognises that complex problems look different from different perspectives and that a diversity of views are needed to address them. No one person can see the full picture and by missing certain perspectives we may end up addressing perceived rather than real challenges.*

We aimed to bring together as many people and groups as possible who had some form of relationship with the area that the tiny forest was located in. This started with tangata whenua. We also worked with the school, the scout den and the city council. The local community was invited to become part of it via notices and local social media.

The perspective of tangata whenua enriched the project hugely. People spoke of a greater feeling of connection to the land and an appreciation of how tangata whenua relate to it. They had been offered a different framework from which to relate to the land.

There were challenges to engaging with some other groups. Established groups had their own perspective of how to carry out the work in the forest, and it seemed that the difference between ecological restoration and regenerative thinking was not widely understood. The perspectives they offered were not always appropriate for this project.



Working in a public space, we needed to work with the bureaucracy that held administrative responsibility for the reserve. The council staff appreciated what we were trying to do and were supportive and encouraging. However the demands and restraints on them meant they couldn't always be available in a timeframe that fitted with the rhythms of the forest that we were working with.

**Build capability and reciprocity.** *Work with people and places to create shared ownership of challenges and find shared solutions. Work to create the conditions where others can continue to shape the work into the future. Support others to build capabilities and nurture relationships, mutuality and reciprocity.*

This took time to build up. There was a sense of people deferring to the 'expert' knowledge that Colin and Mark brought to the group. As relationships amongst the group grew, people grew more confident in developing shared solutions. The continuous learning that was happening also helped their confidence.

**Take a nested systems view of success and consequence.** *Look beyond financial value and narrow measures of success. Recognise that you are working with nested wholes and be aware of the relationships between different layers. Always think about the impacts, consequences and contribution of your work on the wider wholes, both intended and unintended: across knowledge and skills; infrastructure and relationships (both physical and social); ecosystem health; biodiversity; resilience, etc.*

The key measure of success for many in the project seemed to be the health of the forest ecosystem. While they acknowledged the growth of their knowledge, skills and relationships these weren't mentioned as measures of success. In our task- and goal-oriented society, how can we encourage people to see intangibles as measures of success?



**Design for circularity and circulation.** *Ensure that information, value and power, as well as physical resources and elements, can flow and circulate across and between layers of the system in a way that helps the system regenerate. Enable participation and ensure that everyone can have their voices heard. Actively engage and create spaces for the exchange of ideas; encourage plurality and diversity.*

The Give Back volunteer process included scheduled breaks from mahi for discussion and knowledge exchange took place. The leaders made a conscious effort to acknowledge and encourage contributions from the participants. Discussion also happened during their mahi. Success at organising dedicated feedback sessions was patchy.

The questionnaire that began the school programme was designed to encourage the children to recognise and value their own knowledge and ideas. We were also open to learning from them what they wanted to know more about and responding to this. Activities were designed in different formats (e.g. in the feedback session at the end students could write, mime or create artwork to express themselves).

The project leaders took up any opportunity to give talks, share information and an exchange of ideas.

**Create space for emergence.** *Test and iterate ideas and activities, rather than planning then acting at scale. Recognise that this is the best way to learn about potential impacts and spot new opportunities or potential pitfalls. Share your insights widely. Recognise that scaling can happen in different ways: up, to influence rules or policies; out, through replication; or down, to change mindsets.*

This project was designed as an exploratory study about how to work regeneratively. Our goal was to test our ideas about building regenerative communities in order to discover the opportunities and potential pitfalls. The purpose of this report is to share our insights.

We deliberately did not have a detailed plan of activities, but allowed for the emergence of ideas and needs of the participants. On top of that, government-imposed restrictions due to a resurgence of covid meant that we had to adapt and be flexible, coming up with new ideas about how activities could continue.



*Design from a hopeful vision of the future. The future is not pre-determined. Beginning by envisioning a hopeful vision of where you want to get to can help you move beyond short-term barriers. Working from a place of hope, the 'what if?', can build energy, momentum and commitment for the work that needs to happen now to realise it.*

The project was about discovering barriers and working on ways to address them.

Several of the volunteers had ideas about how to progress and grow the current project, and they would like to see other similar projects start.

As a result of their participation in this project, the school is interested in the potential of the tiny forest as an ongoing learning environment. They have some great ideas about further activities that they could carry out.

One of the volunteers suggested that a session to do a "100 year plan" would be valuable. This point of transition that the project is now at would be an ideal time to do this.

*Work on the inside as well as the outside. Remember that your interior conditions – how you think, reflect, communicate – affect everything you do. Designing regeneratively involves a developmental outlook and requires us all to work on ourselves and our mindsets and behaviours as much as on the infrastructure, institutions, services and products in our external world. How are my own perspectives cHāngīng and how am I reflecting on these changes?*

Flourish team members were all looking at our own mindsets and behaviours and trying to work regeneratively. Mark modelled these when working in the field. We didn't explore this in depth with the volunteers, it would require a lot of time and not all were interested in this aspect of the mahi. However discussion often covered aspects of our external world. Feedback also indicated that the incorporation of Māori knowledge and tikanga in the programme deepened their appreciation of the relationship with the whenua.

The questionnaire that started the school programme invited the children to reflect on their relationship with the forest and nature. They responded well to this. They also valued the tikanga aspects of the programme.



# Our Key Takeaways



**Relationships** are the foundation and it is vital to invest time and energy in these. It is best to have relationships in place before starting the mahi, but this isn't always possible. As a project develops, opportunities emerge for new relationships.

Our most important relationship was with tangata whenua. Any similar project ideally needs to have people who have some level of cultural sensitivity and understanding of Te Tiriti.



**Time:** It takes time! We needed to work with the rhythms of the forest, and the availability of people. We needed to adapt to chāngīng circumstances. Sometimes it feels like you're not getting anywhere. It's important to take note of growth and progress as well as accomplishment.



**Contested space** was a challenge for us. The site of our project was public land. We hadn't given any thought to this and what it might mean, so we hadn't anticipated the activities by other people that impacted on the project.



**Negotiating clashes** between regenerative processes and wider society values and processes was an ongoing theme.

- Our society teaches us to value **outcomes over process**. Many of us get a feeling of accomplishment by starting and finishing a worthwhile task. Yet this project is about relationships and learning as much as it is the tasks of weeding, planting, watering, having project meetings, ticking the admin boxes, and so on. We began to learn about the need to go with the flow, and allow things to evolve naturally. To take time away from the immediate task to connect with others. For many this did not come easily. There is further learning for us to do in this area.

- The rhythms of nature, e.g. seasons, weather, growing cycles, etc, set a timing framework for us that did not always sit well with the demands of the **timeframes and deadlines** that funder requirements, availability of people, compliance obligations, etc created.



• **Nature vs humans:** Our experiences of how other users of the forest treated it showed us that not everyone appreciated its vulnerability and need for nurturing. The responses to our concern about the building of the BMX track suggested an expectation that the forest would be fine and the loss of a few plants was neither here nor there. There are no obvious or easy solutions to this worldview, something that any regenerative project will need to face.



**Resourcing can be a challenge:** Do we need a different funding model for regenerative projects? Funders tend to look for specific outcomes by a set date. Regenerative processes can't guarantee what the outcomes will look like or the rate of progress towards them.

Are there alternative means of resourcing regenerative projects? Gifting, timebanks and exchanges sit well with regenerative processes. Because of the deadlines we were working with we didn't have much opportunity to explore these avenues. Other projects may be able to incorporate some of these.

The level of input required from key individuals is also an influence on what type of funding is required. The priority of earning a living means that many people are limited in how much volunteer time they can give to a project. It is difficult to fund wages or contract fees from anything other than grants.







# References and Resources

- [www.flourish.org.nz](http://www.flourish.org.nz)
- <https://www.maoridictionary.co.nz/>
- [Christchurch City Council Libraries Insite report: King George V Reserve- history and naming Prepared for: Sarah Blows, Parks Unit, March 2021](#)
- <https://www.flourish.org.nz/about.html>
- <https://conservationvolunteers.co.nz/portfolio/mother-of-all-cleanups-christchurch/>,..
- <https://ccc.govt.nz/culture-and-community/statistics-and-facts/community-profiles/spreydon-cashmere-heathcote/cashmere-ward/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/KGVReserve>
- Online Wananga in Diana Kopu's Personal Meeting Room (Mahi a Atua/Flood Relief). Immediately following Cyclone Gabrielle and while many rural/Māori communities were still reeling from the impact.
- Josie Warden of the RSA (<https://www.thersa.org/>) in a 2021 article (<https://www.thersa.org/rsa-journal/2021/issue-4/feature/what-does-regenerative-thinking-mean>)
- <https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/pdfs/journals/rsa-issue-4-2021.pdf>
- <https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/pdfs/reports/from-sustaining-to-thriving-together-final.pdf>

These resources offer valuable insights and tools for anyone interested in learning more about regenerative communities and how to apply regenerative principles to community development and design:

- "Regenerative Communities: Creating Resilience in Uncertain Times" by Daniel Christian Wahl - This book offers a comprehensive guide to regenerative design principles, tools, and practices for creating resilient and thriving communities.
- 'The Design Pathway for Regenerating Earth' Joe Brewer, 2021. A must read for anyone interested in this space.
- The two other leaders in this area globally are Annaloes Smitsman <https://www.earthwise.global/> and Jenny Andersson <https://reallyregenerative.org/>



- The Regenesi Group - This organization offers training, consulting, and resources for regenerative design and development, with a focus on creating healthy and thriving communities. <https://regenesigroup.com/>
- The Living Future Institute - This organization provides resources and certifications for regenerative design and development, with a focus on creating regenerative buildings and communities. <https://living-future.org/>
- The Evolution Institute is a global non-profit research and policy organization that seeks to understand and solve humanity's most critical problems. <https://evolution-institute.org/>
- The Global Regeneration CoLab - This initiative brings together diverse stakeholders to explore and develop regenerative solutions to social and environmental challenges, with a focus on building regenerative communities. <https://www.grc.earth/>
- The Center for Regenerative Design and Collaboration - This organization provides resources and training for regenerative design and collaboration, with a focus on creating regenerative communities and ecosystems. <https://crdc.global/>
- Regenerative Thinking, A Regenerative Life - Carol Sanford <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cpbYiZcfcJw> from 8mins good intro to living systems. Also <https://makingpermaculturestronger.net/the-seven-first-principles-of-regeneration-with-carol-sanford/>
- Oneness – Tom Chi's Ted Talk <https://youtu.be/zyr4qORDu2A>
- Charles Eisenstein <https://charleseisenstein.org/books/the-more-beautiful-world-our-hearts-know-is-possible/>
- Project Olceri - Brian Dean Lakota tribe <https://www.olceri.org/>
- <https://projecttwinstreams.com/> New Zealand
- Starhawk – The 5th sacred thing <https://starhawk.org/writing/books/the-fifth-sacred-thing/>







Flourish Kia Puāwai 2024





## Appendix 2

### Result from STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

#### Regenerative Communities Pilot

August 2021

**How do you feel when you come into this tiny forest? Or are near this river? How about when you are in other natural places, like forests, parks, rivers, mountains, and lakes? Or around anything that is alive and growing, animal or plant. What do you think about? What do you notice and enjoy? What feelings stay with you after you leave these places?**

Cool, calm and collected.

I love being by the beautiful river and being surrounded by native NZ trees. When I am at the reserve, I feel very connected to nature, especially on a nice sunny day.

When I come into the tiny forest, I feel safe and happy because the nature there is amazing. When I come near the river, I feel a little sad because there is so much rubbish floating down stream. I also feel the same when I'm at the beach or in other forests. Another thing I do out there is think about nature and everything else around me.

It makes me feel calm and it lets me enjoy what's around me and what stays with me is a feeling of something like slow motion.

I feel calm and relaxed when I go into forests or around lakes and rivers. When I go into King George Reserve or other tiny forests, I think of helping the community.

I really like going anywhere that is nature, it makes me feel refreshed and calm and I feel like I'm lucky to live in NZ.

It is a nice calming feeling that stays with me for the rest of the day.

When I am around plants and things that are alive and growing, I feel connected to mother nature, and I feel amazed at what nature can produce.

When I enter nature, I feel calm, sometimes a bit cold if there's a breeze. I remember the fresh smell of the trees or the plants. My mind going blank and peaceful. When I leave, I remember the noise of birds and trees.

I feel relaxed and peaceful. The sounds of cars are distant or completely gone and the sounds of nature take over. Waves, waterfalls, birds, trees, wind, and insects, are the only living things you hear which is far nicer than the droning of cars, trucks, motorbikes and buses. Everytime I see trees or birds I feel peaceful and happy. In natural places the quiet and peacefulness is amazing. The peaceful and relaxed feelings stay with me after I leave wild, natural places. It is great what a small bit of forest can protect, in forms of birds and insects.

**What things does nature give to us all to help us survive and to enjoy life? What do you give back to nature to help it to be healthy?**

Nature gives us fresh air, food, water, power, animals to love. To give back to nature we recycle and at home we have meat-free nights.

Nature gives us air, fruit, some veggies, and something to look at. What I give back by looking after my plants, so they are healthy and not being mistreated.

Nature gives a feeling of well-being and oxygen, and in return we help nature to reproduce.

Nature gives us oxygen. I go and water some NZ native plants, and I pick up rubbish.



Nature gives us fruits and vegetables and meat from animals. I do tree plantings and rubbish collections with my family and friends.

Nature gives us food and water and helps us survive. In return we take care of it.

Nature gives us many things like food, shade, water and more. To give back to nature I pick up rubbish and be a tidy kiwi.

The trees give us oxygen – without them humans couldn't survive.

Oxygen and carbon dioxide.

Nature gives us everything. Food, water, and basically everything comes from nature. There is nothing that was not made from nature. Nature gives us happiness in the forms of animals, forests, food, shelter and more. We plant trees, and try to create green spots in cities which allows nature to thrive there. In some places we compost food that we then give back to the earth. Plants, birds and insects then thrive there.

### **What are we as human beings doing to the natural world that needs to change?**

Polluting it.

Chopping down trees. Littering.

We are cutting down trees, littering, polluting the air and oceans, and killing animals.

We throw away our rubbish into the grass and water.

Chucking rubbish into the bushes or forests, and buying things that contribute to landfill.

We're polluting the environment by putting green-house gasses and CO2 into the air.

Emitting carbon and methane.

We are using way too much gas and driving everywhere when we don't need to. Cutting down too many trees so animals have nowhere to live.

We have a massive carbon footprint e.g. using cars, mining and farming.

Well, firstly humans are helping change the climate and it is getting out of control. Humans need to change the amount of greenhouse gases, carbon dioxide that is getting released into the atmosphere. Humans are also dumping vast amounts of rubbish on the earth, of which a lot ends up in oceans. Human beings are cutting down trees and robbing the natural world of its resources. Chopping down trees and not planting enough new ones is resulting in less trees for birds, insects and other animals to live in, some species then die out. Another thing humans need to change is trading or selling endangered animals, or parts, overfishing and the by-catch that gets caught like seabirds and sea mammals and fish. Humans need to respect the natural world more. Some people ignore signs like "no bikes" and still bike in reserves, which is very disrespectful.

### **What do you already know about natural environments? About our trees, plants, birds, insects, fish and animals? How did you learn that?**

Trees give us O2 and plants give homes to insects, animals and birds. Birds spread seeds around. Bees help keep us alive by pollinating plants. Fish are a good source of protein for birds.

I don't know very much or anything that I can remember.

Frogs don't live in Christchurch because it is too cold.

I don't know (IDK)

Not that much. I do know some types of native trees.



I know nothing.

I know that it all is very delicate and precious. I learnt it all through school.

I know a lot of the different Maori names for native plants and birds.

Frogs don't live in Christchurch because they don't like the weather.

I know that Takahe can poo up to 9m long in a day and that they were thought extinct before someone discovered them (lockdown quiz). Without one kind of animal, like insects, nothing can survive. Insects pollinate, and are food for fish and birds (documentary). The world is changing fast and wild animals are decreasing while domestic animals are increasing. The white feathers on birds are to startle predators in the moment of flight (book). Some animals are endangered like kakapo, kiwi, kokako, saddleback and more. Rats, stoats and possums are a problem in NZ which needs to change (website).

**What is your favourite tree/bird/insect? What do you especially like about them?**

Bird. So cherp, cherp.

I love ladybirds because they are very unique and colourful.

Kingfisher bird because they have my favourite colours on them and they are cute.

My favourite bird is an eagle because it represents America.

My favourite bird is the kiwi because they are native and look cool, they also can't fly, which is cool because most birds can fly.

I love the fern because of its unique leaves.

I like the kea because they are cheeky.

My favourite bird is a Takahe.

Favourite tree is a kauri, because of how massive they are, and they are very pretty.

I like the tui because of how they fly and get drunk.

I don't really have a favourite tree because all trees are different, but I quite like oaks or other large leafy trees that are huge. My favourite insect is a cicada because of their chirping. Cicada chirping indicates summer! I quite like tuis and their songs and kakapos and their green owl looks.

**What were your thoughts and feelings during the blessing?**

Relaxed and calm.

I felt like I was doing the right thing and I felt connected to the plants.

Good vibes.

I don't know.

I thought we should plant loads of trees so it would be best for the environment.

I was absent (didn't attend until 2<sup>nd</sup> session)

I was confused but appreciated it.

???

Great mental space?

I can't really remember what the blessing was. But I felt relaxed and peaceful.



**What would you like to learn more about? What are you interested in?**

Learn about trolls.

Why the Heathcote is so polluted.

I would like to learn more about our rivers and insects.

The names of trees and animals and how to protect them.

I would like to do a lot of planting and weeding.

I want to learn about the eels and how to look after them and weigh them.

Helping to plant more trees and make bike trails to connect people with nature.

The history of the reserve. The animals that inhabit the reserve.

I would like to know how animals service nature without dying.

What birds nest in cavities, and what birds don't. What type of nesting places do different birds prefer to rest in.



## **Student feedback on the learning session about river health and tuna / eels.**

### **WHAT DID YOU ENJOY ABOUT THE RIVER?**

- Cool scenery
- Cool place to hang out
- ducklings
- wildlife
- diversity of life - eels, fish, insects, birds
- plants, trees
- clarity was good in parts
- whitebait
- the eels

### **WHAT DIDN'T YOU LIKE ABOUT THE RIVER?**

- Stinky smell (of the water)
- duck poo
- dead rat (floating in the water)
- murkiness of the water
- polluted - rubbish, sediment, dirt
- eels endangered
- not being able to touch the eels

### **WHAT ACTIONS COULD WE TAKE TO MAKE THE RIVER BETTER?**

- Reduce whitebaiting
- reduce commercial eeling
- carefully get rid of extra sediment
- ban eeling for fun, not for kai (\$5000 fine)
- litter traps
- tuna townhouses
- clean river by picking up rubbish on sides and in river
- war on introduced species such as canada geese
- ask CCC to put up positive signs about what to feed ducks



## **‘Give Back’ volunteers feedback meeting, July 2022**

### What do you like about the tiny forest?

- River/plants/birds
- Re-establishment of big plants and trees – reminder of being on the west coast.
- Atmosphere – Aliveness
- Feeling away from the city.
- Being involved in our backyard and knowing the land.
- Sound, light, birds
- Fern growing out of the rock near the plaque, a sign of the tenacity of nature.
- Forest coming of age, culminating in establishment of trees/plants and nature starting to take over – self regenerating, and us being part of this.

### What don't you like about the tiny forest?

- The name! Council policy on process for changing names of Council reserves etc. has been underway for 18 months. The Community Board, Rapaki and us are all keen to change it. We will persevere!
- Weeds
- Council not being able to care about, love this place like we do and their contractors from out of area who lack local knowledge and don't do their work properly or carefully.
  - Questions of how to engage with Council about these issues
  - Particular concern of spraying of plants tagged not to be sprayed. Suggestion of standard colours for tags across all Council reserves to increase likelihood that plants aren't sprayed when they shouldn't be.

### How has being involved changed you?

- Pride in our community
- Taking responsibility in our community
- Kaitiaki for the river and life on the river
- Colonisation has disconnected us from the land and knowledge about it. So this is beginning a new journey. Decolonisation?
- Learning about Matariki
- Reconnecting to a place I have grown up with.
- Recovery of a sense of 'village' through interacting with each other in the forest.

We noted also that a local kindy have been involved in their own time in the tiny forest, and the importance of engaging the young.

### What do we do next?

- Keen for workshop or other input on plant identification
- Putting up signage for particular plants?
  - Possibly detracts from the sense of 'wildness' of the place.
  - Alternatively put up a guide board at the beginning/end of the forest to help people identify plants in it.



- Or pamphlets on plants /weeds in the forest.
- Use silhouettes of leaves to help people identify particular plants.
- Or QR link to this info to reduce paper use and prevent litter.
- Pest Control: Mark has recently done training on this and can pass this on. Has met with reps from scouts and one of the volunteers to run through required process of establishing and running a programme.
  - Would involve use of a particular common trap to catch rodents/stoats etc. There is a process to go through with Council to access these, including plan for how/where these would be placed.
  - Pest control would particularly benefit bird numbers.
  - Pest control is not for everyone – there is a need to be prepared to occasionally kill animals still alive caught in traps.
- New ferns are coming from Council for planting – discussion around where next to put them. Colin will be involved with ranger in mapping this out.
- Don't leave piles of weeds in the forest. Volunteers are frustrated and disheartened by this. Need to negotiate something better with the CCC.



## Appendix 5:

### Foraging Workshop feedback

**1. How would you rate this workshop on a scale 1 to 10? From loved it – 10. To very disappointing – 1.**

One person rated it at 9, all others at 10.

**2. How did you find out about the workshop?**

Most people found out about it via facebook or by word of mouth.

**3. What were the most enjoyable aspects?**

- Finding there are so many plants with nutritional/medicinal potential; having experts point out key features to identify safety from toxic; what uses each plant has was useful
- Fungi
- Knows a lot of edible plants
- Close to CBD, relaxing atmosphere
- Learning about and finding mushrooms
- Knowledgeable hosts
- It was casual, interactive. Beautiful day, great vibe from a forest maintained by volunteers, sampling afterwards!
- Learning what I can eat and medicinal properties of various plants
- The river, the blessing to start, the shared kai!
- The walking and exploring
- Learning about different mushrooms
- Learning about plants I never knew were edible
- Hands on walking and learning, able to ask questions along the way, sampling
- Walking in the forest, learning new things
- Learning about new things around Christchurch
- The amazing foraged feast in the sunshine!

**4 & 5 What parts of the experience did you struggle with? How could we improve this workshop if we did another one?**

Most people struggled with nothing. Two found hearing difficult at times and two found all the walking a little difficult. Two people would have liked something to help them remember all the information, and one person mentioned the lack of toilet access.

**6. We began this workshop with a blessing. How did this make you feel? What were your thoughts?**

Everyone appreciated starting in this way. Several said they would have liked it to have been in Maori. (It was given in English.)

**7. Has this learning experience changed the way you see this place? If so, how?**

- Definitely has opened my eyes more to what can be used
- Yes, many plants/fungi right at our ankles can be used. When to harvest/pick.
- I'm more interested in walking around
- Yes. Some edible/some exotic
- Observe more around me. Use of google lens
- I will be more observant. I will look at what I would normally consider to be weeds differently
- Yes, will be more in tune with the environment
- Hadn't been here before



- Yes, I will be walking with more mindfulness/curiosity, and look out for familiar plants/mushrooms. Eager to know more and look up recipes
- Yes, such abundance
- Yes! It was a good learning experience! I didn't really know there was a reserve here. I will visit again.
- Definitely, I didn't know this place existed
- So many to see in the season right close to residential
- Sure! My house is around the corner. Next time I walk I will show what I learnt to my son
- Very much so, there is so much I didn't know about this area

**8. What are we doing to the natural world as human beings that needs to change?**

- Better care of waterways
- Pushing nature further out
- Care the greens
- Protect earth, not waste and reusable
- Be more sustainable in growing
- Being destructive to nature
- (blank)
- Stop destroying wild areas
- Personal accountability, cleaning up after yourself, leaving the land as you find it
- Our heavy impact and lack of focus on sustainability. Not understanding the natural resources we have around us.
- Destroying/cutting things for silly reasons
- Littering, not aligning with nature. Wanting convenience, plant blindness
- Become aware of the seasons and appreciate
- Be aware of our environment, and what is around us
- Viewing too many things as disposable – resources, land, vegetation, people

**9. Do you think you will do anything different in your life as a result of participating in the workshop? If, yes, what?**

- Look for things to forage during walking
- Unlikely, but maybe a little over time
- Yes, more connected to nature
- So far, no
- Refer more to foraging wild foods
- I will be more observant, and look at what I normally consider weeds differently.
- I will be more informed when attempting to explain mahinga kai to my students
- Yes, much more observant of plants I'm seeing ("weeds"). Will use google lens to ID plants
- Yes, I will be walking more mindfully, looking out for familiar plants/mushrooms. Looking up recipes.
- Access more natural additions to my meals. Look for plants with anti-oxidants
- Hard to tell, but I'll definitely try
- Yes, make more out of foraged foods. Expanded pantry, greater range of foraged foods.
- Opened my eye more, would like to now explore more
- Greater awareness of our environment
- Look around more to understand the plants around us

**10. The workshop was organised by the Regenerative Communities Pilot project and Flourish Kia Puawai. Are you interested in learning more about our mahi?**

Several people were interested in a follow-up.



## KING GEORGE V RESERVE PROPOSED LEARNING PROGRAMME for St Martins School, 2021

### Project Description:

A series of monthly workshops for 25-30 St Martins School senior students in King George V Reserve/"tiny forest". The kaupapa of the programme is to teach key regenerative principles, and why they are important, through tutoring and 'hands-on' practical engagement; in this particular place, but which are then applicable everywhere.

### Activities

DATE	LEARNING ACTIVITY	LEADERS
10 May	A quick questionnaire to gauge the knowledge base and understanding of the students. Exploring the Ecology of the Forest - how a healthy forest functions; the interrelationships in a "community of life", the importance of biodiversity, insects, bees, birds and trees.	Mark Gibson & Dr Colin Meurk
21 June	Where Do Human Beings Fit - in the forest, and in the bigger community of life? How can we be a 'community within a community'? A beginners guide to regeneration v sustainability. Planting native trees - seed sourcing, what, where, when. Let's give it a go!	Mark Gibson & Dr Colin Meurk
05 July	Understanding Our Place, the importance of knowing and working With this unique place; & Planting Native Trees 2 - adding to earlier learning - the design of this tiny forest, what we can achieve by enrichment planting, what the new plants need to thrive. More winter planting.	Mark Gibson & Dr Colin Meurk
09 August	"Wrong" Plants in a Native Forest - the damage they do, why they don't belong, how and when to remove them. Let's give it a go!	Dr Colin Meurk & Mark Gibson
20 September	Technology in Nature. Exploring the forest with the i-naturalist app - how to use, how it works, how it can assist our learning and actions. Have a go!	Dr Colin Meurk & Mark Gibson
18 October	Indigenous Wisdom	Rapaki?
15 November	Healthier River, Healthier Forest. Tuna/eel monitoring or water quality testing/	Working Waters Trust, or Water



	Pest Control - divide into two groups - workshop style	Watch/Wai Kaitiaki & Predator-Free Port Hills with Mark Gibson & Dr Colin Meurk
06 December	Creative workshop: What I have learnt from the forest? How can I keep giving back? How can I do it with others? Making our responses through poetry, drawing, dance, photography...A quick questionnaire to see what the students have learnt during the course.	Mark Gibson & Dr Colin Meurk

### **Outcomes:**

Participants have learnt:

- key regenerative principles - the importance of place, relationship, reciprocity, thinking and acting holistically, collaboration, diversity,
- gained greater knowledge of, and love for this place
- understand the difference between regeneration and sustainability
- greater knowledge and appreciation for mana whenua culture
- Greater knowledge of Aotearoa NZ & Waitaha/Canterbury flora & fauna. Enhanced eco-literacy, able to identify a greater number of species.
- Able to use the i-naturalist app.
- Greater understanding of the main threats to our unique natural heritage, and how to reduce these.
- Better equipped to be change-makers at school and in the wider community

### **Flexibility:**

This plan is open to discussion and modification. The proposed dates have been chosen to fit the availability of Dr Colin Meurk, community leaders of the programme, but if necessary we could bring in backup people to cover for the absence of one of us.

### **Rapaki:**

The proposed session on “Indigenous wisdom” would involve engaging appropriate leadership. We are developing a relationship with the Rapaki community, and so will consult with them in developing this focus. Our hope is that they would come and lead the session.

### **Funding:**

The Regenerative Communities Pilot project has just been launched by Flourish Kia Puawai Social Enterprise. Mark Gibson is a co-director of Flourish and he is leading this project. Colin Meurk is an expert adviser to the project. At the moment we have limited funding for paid time for Mark. Colin is voluntary but we want to change this. We are applying for more funding to



hopefully extend the project for at least two years. Without further funding this will run out in May. This would limit greatly what we can do.

Our hope is that the programme with St Martins School will be part of the Regenerative Communities pilot project. We wonder if the school can make any financial contribution towards our time, to complement other funding we might secure? Should Rapaki be involved in the course as proposed we also envisage a koha would be needed to recognise their contribution.

**Christchurch City Council:**

As King George V is a CCC reserve there are requirements we need to comply with in order to have permission to carry out activities within it such as planting, wedding, trapping etc. There is a special document for schools to fill in before this can happen. We ourselves will need to sign a Park Volunteer Agreement.

**Police Vetting:**

We have been advised also by the CCC that Mark Gibson and Colin Meurk will need to go through the police vetting process if working with children. Mark has already been vetted by his part-time employer but this may not be adequate. It would be good to clarify if the school has an established process for doing this and to negotiate with the CCC if this would be acceptable in this instance. Or if you would prefer that we initiate this.

**Results of Final Creative Session**

The final session where students share their learning in a range of creative ways will require careful planning. But we believe it is a good way to end the course, and fits well with the regenerative principles we will be teaching in the sessions. A regenerative way is to give back and to share with others. We hope that the results of this session might be able to be shared with both the school and Flourish Kia Puawai. This will then enable us to keep growing and developing what we do.

**Contacting us:**

Thank you for considering this proposal. We very much enjoyed the recent orientation day in the reserve with your senior school. We hope that together we may now be able to develop an exciting programme with the students who were inspired by that experience.

We are open to any opportunity to discuss this further with staff, and BOT.

Please contact us through Mark Gibson.