

# Kapa Haka: The Power that sits beyond the stage

*“The power of kapa haka has the ability to heal”. – Dr Kiri Tamahere-Waititi*

## A Thought Piece: An investment into Kapa Haka is an investment in health prevention.

By Ranui Maxwell

Healthy Families East Cape has an explicit focus on evidencing the value of Māori systems of health and wellbeing and the critical value in the prevention of chronic illness. Kapa Haka demonstrates how we can harness the power beyond the stage and performing arts as a cultural strategy.

What this ‘thought piece’ shares is the opportunities and outcomes that Kapa Haka provides us in all facets of achieving physical and mental well-being as a collective and individually.

A commonly used framework, Te Whare Tapa Wha, describes the four cornerstones of Māori health; spiritual, psychological, physical and family. Kapa Haka is an activation of these cornerstones. The physical element of Kapa Haka has developed over many years, particularly in adult and secondary school rōpū, as items are becoming more physically demanding. Good physical stamina is required to execute the performance, particularly at a competitive level. Regional and National performance brackets are given 28 minutes to perform and execute six to seven items.

Each of our Healthy Families East Cape kaimahi (staff) all have a generational connection to Kapa Haka. Most of our kaimahi have represented different rōpū at a national or regional, secondary or Te Matatini level. We can evidence first-hand the well-being benefits that come from participation and supporting whānau and our own tamariki in Kapa Haka. We share some of these insights throughout this thought piece.



“I’m more motivated to exercise during kapa haka season than during the off-season because you’re sharing your fitness journey with others, and everyone wants to be fit enough to perform a full bracket to the best of their ability. This also encourages me to eat healthier kai and drink more wai Māori” – says Jade Kameta (Rautaki Māori).



**There are many contributing factors to fostering and achieving well-being, from a Te Ao Māori perspective, Māori practices of well-being are associated with identity in knowing who you are and where you are from. Te Ao Māori cultural identity has been described as a prerequisite for the good health of indigenous people, while poor mental health can stem from insecure cultural identity.**

**(Ora, Healing Ourselves – Indigenous Knowledge, Healing and Wellbeing).**

Discussing Kapa Haka necessitates addressing identity as a fundamental aspect of our culture. Traditionally, Māori identity was determined by whakapapa (genealogy). This identity was regarded as part of Tikanga, a wider set of protocols and customs. A positive identity requires participation in positive Māori institutions and media, such as kapa haka, Māori sports teams, and involvement with Marae. Te reo Māori and exposure to Māori music and culture, are also effective contributions to positive identity and self-view. (Ora, Healing Ourselves – Indigenous Knowledge, Healing and Wellbeing).

“Links to traditional understanding like pūrakau (storytelling) as a healing tool that connects and reweaves the past with the present-day realities through tūpuna reconnection and that activates as a healing framework that Māori can easily grasp when framing complex cultural, personal, environmental and spiritual experiences”.

Kapa Haka doesn't just involve the individual performer or the competing team, it involves the whole whānau, from supporting the rōpū to tamariki learning by osmosis. Activating the te taha whānau cornerstone of well-being.

In 1970 The Aotearoa Māori Performing Arts Festival became a place where you could be Māori and an opportunity to participate positively in cultural activities. At this point in time Te Reo Māori and Tikanga were in serious decline, the festival was a way that iwi Māori could take collective action to address these issues. Over the past 50 years the festival has scaled and elevated Te Reo Māori, increased participation and pathways into education, economic endeavours, tourism, broadcasting, travel and employment. Māori have harnessed the power of Kapa Haka as a holistic approach to all facets of life in a modern context. The elevation of the performance aspect has also increased.



“Through kapa haka, I have been able to connect to many of my iwi. Firstly, the Delamere cup as a child connecting to Te Whakatōhea and Ngai Tai, Te Hui Ahurei o Tūhoe, secondary competitions in Tainui, and now with my iwi of Te Whānau-ā-Apanui. This has allowed me to connect to where I come from, my hapū, and my marae and provides an opportunity to get to know other like-minded people who enjoy kapa haka as well” says Kaupapa Innovator and Kaihaka for Te Kapa Haka o Te Whānau A Apanui, Hineani Campbell-Collier.

To foster, develop and protect kapa haka in the pursuit of excellence. We own and organise the biennial Te Matatini National Kapa Haka Festival. We fund and support regional kapa haka development. We send the best kapa haka overseas to represent Te Matatini and New Zealand at major international events, Te Matatini Incorporation.

Kapa haka contributes unique Māori hauora practices with beneficial outcomes that extend far beyond the individual, the team and the stage.

Last year, Te Matatini's budget was boosted to \$34 million over two years, up from \$2.9m per year. This investment will support the national function of Te Matatini and the regional development of Kapa Haka. Enabling Kapa Haka to continue providing mental, social, health and well-being for the iwi, hapu, whānau and hāpori (community).

**Kapa Haka allows us to exercise other parts of our mental health and wellness. "Kapa Haka is the expression of our range of emotions, providing healthy pathways of expression. Each haka item allows us to express our range of emotions, says Kiri.**

Emotional well-being is fundamental to learning how to process emotions and respond with appropriate behaviour. Becoming essential to a person's overall well-being. Lacking emotional self-regulation can perpetuate negative emotions. Kapa Haka is an outlet to express a person's emotional range. Each Kapa Haka item provides opportunities to test and feel those emotions in a safe environment. If you have ever watched a Haka being performed you can see and feel the emotions without understanding the language, emotions are universal.

**"Kapa haka essentially benefits all areas of Te Whare Tapa Whā, especially if you live away from home. Kapa haka provides healing mentally. Each song holds its kōrero and enriches you in your culture. It also gets you in touch with your spiritual side. Wiri is an awesome example of a release of energy. Whatever may be building up has a chance to be released when you do the wiri". Te Kapa Haka o Te Whānau A Apanui, Kai Haka – Titoki Shelford says.**

The Mataaua Kapa Haka Regional Competition was held in Te One, Tōrere hosted by Ngai Tai Iwi over the weekend, supported by our lead provider Te Ao Hou Trust. There were 22 rōpū representing their iwi and hapu across the Mataatua region. Each rōpū is allowed a maximum of 40 performers, meaning approximately 880 people participating in this year's regionals. At least two new rōpū were formed to meet the needs of other rōpū being oversubscribed. This evidences the power of cultural strategies like Kapa Haka to shift conditions of health deficits into positive health outcomes for Māori and their whānau.

A total of 13 regionals will be held across 80 days from February 23 to May 12, 2024, 120 teams vying for the opportunity to represent the mana and hopes of their iwi, hapu, whānau and communities at Te Matatini 2025. Two of our Healthy Families East Cape kaimahi performed for Te Kapa Haka o Te Whānau a Apanui. Jade Kameta (Rautaki Māori) and Hineani Campbell-Collier (Kaupapa Innovator).

Nikora et al. underscore the significance and value of having a sense of place, community connection, access to cultural learning opportunities, avenues for Māori self-expression, and distinctive Māori well-being practices.

Congratulations to all of the rōpū who participated and a special congratulations to Hineani, Jade and Te Kapa Haka o Te Whānau A Apanui for winning this year's Mataatua Kapa Haka regionals. Hineani and Jade share some of their insights from their recent Kapa Haka campaign below;

“It's been a way for me to express my thoughts and feelings, my Ihi, wehi wana, about various kaupapa over the years. And a method of releasing negative energy while balancing my hinengaro and wairua. That's what I do when I haka and I always feel better after a performance.



“Kapa haka has also allowed me to make new social connections and strengthen existing relationships with others, including the taiao, my whakapapa. I've been fortunate to connect with many leaders throughout the motu, whom I consider to be my role models not only in kapa haka but in life. People who have exemplified a way of being. People I've been inspired to be.

As a result, it has provided me with numerous opportunities in life, such as traveling the world to showcase our culture. Kapa Haka has been the primary vehicle in my life to live and breathe my culture, my tuakiritanga, my mana motuhake, and my oranga”

55 teams have qualified for Te Matatini, this marks the largest contingent of teams qualifying for the bi-annual event. Te Matatini Incorporated announced this week that the competition will be held across five days to accommodate all of the qualifying teams, the first time in the history of Te Matatini.

From a health and wellbeing perspective, Kapa Haka thrives as a prime example of how it achieves collective impact in promoting health and wellbeing throughout our community.

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References: Nikora, L.W., Meade, R., Hall, M., Bowden, L., Selby-Rickit, T.H.R., Mikaere, T.M., Te Huia, A., & Fox, R. (2022). The Value of Kapa Haka – An Overview Report. Auckland, NZ : Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga

Pihama, L, Tuhiwai Smith, L 2023, Ora: Healing Ourselves, Indigenous Knowledge, Healing and Wellbeing



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families

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He oranga whānau

