



# Fast response of Talanoa Ako

## to urgent Pacific community needs in the first COVID-19 lockdown 2020



### What is Talanoa Ako?

Talanoa Ako is a Pacific parent education programme that aims to equip and empower parents, families and communities with the skills, knowledge, and confidence they need to champion their children's education.

The Integration and Strategy team of Programme Delivery (Parent Information Community Intelligence - PICI) at the Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga (the Ministry of Education) are responsible for delivering the Talanoa Ako programme (the programme). The PICI team works with churches and community providers called Talanoa Ako partners (the partners) to provide the programme.



### What was the problem?

**In 25 March 2020, Aotearoa New Zealand, went into COVID-19 lockdown.**

At Alert Level 4, people had to stay home, no gathering was allowed, and all public places were closed.

With the lockdown occurring so quickly, the PICI team and Talanoa Ako partners could see that some Pacific families with multiple and complex needs were in urgent need of support.



### What was the solution?

**Existing Talanoa Ako contract funds were repurposed to address the urgent needs of the Pacific community.**

The key principles that informed the PICI team's approach were:

- » put Pacific families at the heart of decision-making
- » trust Talanoa Ako partners to reach and support Pacific families
- » innovate to help meet multiple and complex needs
- » use well-designed accountability systems that allow flexibility.



### Put Pacific families at the heart of decision making

The initial needs of Pacific families were urgent:

*Almost 50 percent [half] of our families in the Ako Centre have either no income or one income.*  
— Partner milestone report

The PICI team provided the partners with a clear focus as well as access to resources to meet a wide range of possible needs.

*Use your discretion as to what support you provide and the amount. Options could be vouchers (Pak n Save, Countdown, New World, etc), fruit and vegetables delivery boxes, support paying for medicine/ prescriptions, assistance paying for a utilities bill etc. You will know from your assessment what is required and what you are able to support within the small fund you have.*  
— PICI team email to Talanoa Ako partners



Because Pacific families knew and highly trusted the partners, they quickly opened up about their difficulties.

*Five families are also struggling to put food on the table and pay their bills due to one of the workers not receiving an income. [Their work had put them on leave without pay.]*  
— Talanoa Ako partner

Pacific families were grateful that the partners understood them and that their staff could talk with them in their language.

PICI team email to Talanoa Ako partners

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# Fast response of Talanoa Ako to urgent Pacific community needs in the first COVID-19 lockdown 2020 *continued...*



Talanoa Ako

## Trust Talanoa Ako partners to reach and support Pacific families

Existing contract payments of between \$10,000 and \$20,000 were repurposed. The PICI team trusted Talanoa Ako partners' judgement and ability to be flexible and responsive in meeting Pacific family needs.

*We became really aware that [the] high-trust model you know is useful... We had enough of a relationship [to be confident] that they were going to do what they said. And more than that, [that they] could do what they said. ... And [putting] the systems around it to keep everyone safe [was also important].*  
— Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga personnel

The PICI team **trusted Talanoa Ako partners' judgement** and ability to be flexible and responsive in meeting Pacific family needs

## Innovate to help with Pacific families' multiple and complex needs

Talanoa Ako partners addressed a wide range of Pacific families' needs:

- » supporting families to manage on reduced incomes:
  - › providing food and care packages
  - › helping with utility bills such as power or broadband and provided petrol vouchers for travel
  - › helping to keep families warm by providing heaters, warm clothes, blankets
  - › supporting families to access entitled services and seek rent reductions
- » helping families to navigate the digital divide, get digital devices and broadband, and learn to use digital devices
- » developing educational resources for Pacific communities
- » developing COVID-19 information and classroom materials.

*A Samoan family ... had a very sick boy in their home who couldn't return to school. We assisted with food vouchers, and phone credit ...[for] the only WIFI device in the house... the parents ... [could meet] online with the school and ... assist their children online.*

— Talanoa Ako partner

*Many were worried about their rental payments. We encouraged these families to reach out to their real estate agents to see if rent could be reduced given the current circumstances... We made a few phone calls on people's behalf, which we found quite personal. Language barriers played huge in this area.*

— Talanoa Ako partner

*So many of these families have had their hours [of work] reduced; [the] internet has been disconnected.*

— Talanoa Ako partner

*[We are] connecting families to organisations running digital inclusion programmes so they can access devices and upskill in order to support their children with online learning.*

— Talanoa Ako partner

*Three families received government wage subsidies. A family received assistance with a utility bill from an agency. A sole parent benefit was approved.*

— Talanoa Ako partner

## Use well-designed accountability systems that allow flexibility

Many Talanoa Ako partners had a history of good service delivery. The revised contracting processes offered them more flexibility to respond to local needs. Partners had:

- » clear instructions on possible uses of the funding
- » simple, easy-to-understand contracting milestone processes – providing enough accountability in a dynamic and fast-moving setting.

The PICI team designed simple forms to collate information on funds spent, keeping both partners and the PICI team safe.

*We had to make sure that we were safe and had the processes that [could show] did what we said when we said.*

— Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga personnel

The contract milestone reports became a vital part of the feedback process. The PICI team used the milestone reports for continuous learning, to respond as the situation evolved.

*[We are] connecting families to organisations running digital inclusion programmes so they can access devices and upskill in order to support their children with online learning.*

— Talanoa Ako partner



## Summary

**Talanoa Ako partners worked with Pacific families who might have otherwise missed support.**

By being flexible and responsive partners could help meet Pacific families' urgent needs.

The PICI teams' focus on well-designed accountability systems allowed for appropriate contracting flexibility.

*The support provided to these families has really helped take a load off. Many of the families we have spoken to have shared with us they were struggling to make ends meet.*

— Talanoa Ako partner



This is a summary of the findings from Oakden, J & Spee, K. (2022) *Talanoa Ako: Response to COVID-19 case studies*. Wellington: Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga – Ministry of Education.