FROM WHĀNAU VOICE TO SYSTEM CHANGE

Final report of the Manaaki Tairāwhiti Navigator Project

What the project learned about whānau needs and the demand for local social support, system barriers, broad-spectrum practice, and community commissioning

Manaaki Tairāwhiti

E tipu matomato ai ngā whānau o Tairāwhiti - all Tairāwhiti whānau are flourishing

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Putting whānau at the centre, hearing their voice and providing accountability for how their needs are met is essential in the work to eliminate family and sexual violence. Manaaki Tairāwhiti's project helps us test, develop and learn how we can more easily and frequently hear the needs of people and how that can feed into decision-making processes. If technology can make that easier, while strengthening information privacy and accountability for action, we could find new and better ways for government, community and providers to work together.

Fiona Ross, Director, Family Violence and Sexual Violence Joint. Venture

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Executive Summary

"Can you bring everyone together who is supporting me and my son? I don't know who is doing what and haven't heard from some of the agencies for a while."

Whānau voice recorded by a Manaaki Tairāwhiti Navigator in Urungi

National social services are designed for scale. They are built to deliver consistent, predictable support to large populations, and for most people, most of the time, they do that well. Standardisation is what makes a national system affordable, auditable and fair in the aggregate.

But a system designed for the average cannot absorb the full variation of need. Some whānau have circumstances that no standard eligibility criteria anticipated. Some whānau have needs that sit across several agencies at once, or situations that change faster than a national process can respond to. In these situations, whānau do not simply go without, they cycle through the system. Whānau are referred from one service to another, asked to re-explain, tested against criteria they do not meet, and returned to the start. The standardisation that supports efficiency at national scale can create additional work locally when whānau circumstances fall outside standard pathways.

The Manaaki Tairāwhiti Navigator Project set out to make that variation visible and to test whether a locally designed response could catch what the national system could not. Over six years it recorded, in whānau words, what people asked for, why they asked for it, what happened next, and what got in the way.

Across the project dataset, 51.3% of recorded system demands encountered at least one barrier that delayed, hindered or prevented access to support. The barriers were spread across systems rather than concentrated in one agency or sector, showing where standardised pathways did not readily accommodate the circumstances navigators recorded. National systems designed for scale can struggle to flex to the full range of circumstances whānau in a region like Tairāwhiti present with.

The Navigator Project strengthened accountability by ensuring whānau voice was heard and used as evidence while protecting whānau privacy. By supporting whānau and recording what happened as they sought help, the project also showed where existing service design did not reach. The purpose was not to criticise individual agencies, but to make visible the gaps and barriers that can be difficult to see from the perspective of any one organisation, and to provide evidence that could be used for improvement.

The project provides a view of what the social system does in practice and how that performance can be understood from the experience of whānau. It also demonstrates an improvement methodology that starts with whānau voice and uses that evidence to understand what is happening, why it is happening and what needs to change. No one should be left worse off after asking for help, yet the project repeatedly documented situations where system design could not accommodate the circumstances in front of it.

Many of the issues identified here have been raised before. Pūao-te-Ata-tū, published in 1988, also identified structural problems in how state social services worked with Māori. The persistence of related concerns nearly four decades later is important context for this report (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2023e).

With project funding now concluded, the lessons learned should inform future place-based work on community commissioning. Those lessons cover how to avoid duplicating unnecessary complexity, how to understand the full variation of community need, how to reduce the cost of current inefficiencies, and where future investment can address service gaps.

What Whānau Voice Means in This Report

Whānau voice means more than consultation, engagement or satisfaction. It is structured evidence about what whānau say matters to them as they seek support: what they need or are concerned about, why they are seeking help, what response they receive, what barriers they encounter and what happens as a result. The project captured this as close as possible to whānau's own words and connected it to measures of system performance through the platform Urungi.

These measures were designed to measure the system, not the navigators. The question was not how many cases a navigator closed or how quickly whānau exited. It was whether whānau got what mattered to them, how long that took, what got in the way and what work was required to make progress.

When repeated experiences are analysed over time, whānau voice becomes evidence about actual demand, service gaps and system performance. This complements rather than replaces administrative data, which generally shows people once they are visible within a particular service or eligibility pathway, whereas whānau voice can make need visible before that point. The housing analysis in this report demonstrates why both views are needed: the Housing Register and Urungi were measuring different parts of the same picture.

How Whānau Voice Becomes System Improvement

The system improvement method starts with purpose: what the system is there to achieve from the point of view of the person using it. Measures are then chosen to show whether that purpose is being achieved. The method, processes and technology follow from that purpose and those measures, rather than being the starting point. Beginning with an existing programme, contract or database and asking how to make it more efficient risks preserving the conditions that are producing the problem.

The work then follows three stages: Understand, Test and Learn, Make Normal. Understand means studying real whānau journeys end to end to see what is happening, the system conditions producing that performance, and the assumptions or thinking underneath them. Test and Learn means trying a different response on a small scale against real demand and measuring whether it works better. Make Normal means changing the relevant practice, process, contract, funding, policy, technology or governance so that an improvement no longer depends on an individual workaround.

Whānau voice is therefore more than information for a dashboard; its value lies in taking that evidence back into the work to understand what needs to change and whether subsequent changes improve the experience of whānau.

The Project at a Glance

1,542 Whānau Supported	**8,299** Total Demands Recorded	**48.1%** of Demand was System-Support Demand	**12,029** Responses Recorded	**6,780** Barriers Documented
51.3% of Demands Hit At Least One Barrier	**79.5%** of Individual Needs Were Met	**51.7%** of Whānau Had All of Their Recorded Needs Met	**444** Pull for Support Responses	**359** Discretionary Funding Responses

(SOURCE: Urungi Platform. These figures describe whānau supported by navigators and should not be interpreted as population estimates of need across Tairāwhiti.)

Four Key Findings That Should Change How The System Is Commissioned

1. **Just over half of whānau got everything they needed.** Of 1,542 whānau journeys analysed between 2019 and 2025, 797 (51.7%) had all of their needs met when working alongside a navigator. A further 413 (26.8%) had between half and almost all needs met. For 332 whānau (21.5%), less than half of what they asked for support with was resolved. Nearly half of all whānau, 48.3%, finished engaging with some or all of their needs unmet (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2025b). This was despite having a skilled navigator alongside them, working with "whatever it takes" flexibility and access to discretionary funding.

   Where needs went unmet, availability was a significant factor. Among whānau with less than half their needs met, availability barriers made up 25% of all recorded barriers, compared with 12% for whānau who had all of their needs met. Where a service existed, navigators could often work through process and communication barriers. Where the required service or product did not exist, navigator skill, coordination, relationships and persistence could not create it. This is the evidence for **Recommendation 1: commission to what whānau actually need, including where supply is missing**.

2. **The data did not show a reduction in system friction over six years.** Just over half of all recorded demands encountered at least one barrier. Across 8,299 recorded demands, 6,780 barriers were recorded, and 51.3% encountered at least one barrier. Recorded barriers rose from 0.56 per demand in 2019 to 1.02 in 2024. Over the same period, recorded responses rose from 1.16 to 1.89 per demand, an increase of 63%. Part of the increase in recorded barriers reflects navigators becoming more skilled at recognising and documenting them, but the data provides no clear evidence that the system became easier to move through over time (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2025b).

   Barrier rates were above 50% in health, money and employment, housing and child wellbeing systems. The pattern was spread across all subsystems rather than concentrated in a single agency or sector. This is the evidence for Recommendation 2: make barrier reduction a formal expectation, with clear ownership and accountability for improvement.

3. **Recorded demand often does not align neatly with existing service boundaries.** Whānau presented with an average of 4.6 whānau needs or concerns each, spanning health, income, housing, education, justice and child wellbeing. Across the full dataset, close to half of all recorded

demand, 3,991 of 8,299 (48.1%), was for help finding, understanding, accessing or progressing through a service rather than for the underlying product, service or practical outcome. Among demand recorded directly from whānau, 3,174 of 7,122 (44.6%) was system-support demand.

That recorded system-support demand is only part of the picture. A direct need, such as housing, may begin as a legitimate request for a service but generate further work when whānau or practitioners must make additional contacts, follow up, repeat information or find alternative pathways. The project recorded this additional effort separately through barriers and navigator responses. Demand recorded as agency demand was also kept separate and is examined, including its interpretation limitations, in Chapter 15.

Navigators themselves delivered 3,485 responses, 29% of all responses recorded, rather than simply referring whānau on. Their work combined practical help, coordination, advocacy, coaching and problem solving across service boundaries. This is the evidence for Recommendation 3: develop a broad-spectrum, generalist workforce able to work across systems while complementing specialist services.

4. **The data did not support a simple dependency explanation.** When whānau worked with navigators and had their needs met, most whānau moved on quickly. Eighty-nine percent stopped engaging with navigators within one year and 72.3% within three months. Among whānau whose recorded needs were all met, 80.7% stopped engaging within three months. Only 39 whānau, 2.5% of the total dataset, had all of their recorded needs met and remained engaged beyond 12 months. Longer engagement was concentrated among whānau who still had unresolved needs. Taken together, the data points more strongly to unresolved need and difficult service pathways as the reason some whānau stayed engaged for longer, rather than to flexible support creating dependency on the system.

The Central Finding

The project built a strong first learning loop in which navigators responded to what mattered to whānau and recorded needs, barriers, responses and outcomes, while coaches and the project team used that evidence to identify patterns, build cases for change and escalate recurring barriers.

The second learning loop was much weaker because system improvement requires the organisations responsible for the design and operation of the system to study the evidence, understand what is producing the pattern, test a different design and then implement the successful changes. The Navigator Project could make problems visible and sometimes secure a different response for an individual whānau, but it did not hold the authority to require agencies to enter that improvement process, redirect funding, change national settings or keep a redesign in place.

A workaround can be extremely valuable for the whānau in front of us, but if the next whānau encounters the same barrier, the underlying system has not improved. Pull for Support and Discretionary Funding demonstrated this clearly: both could resolve immediate problems, but neither could by itself change the underlying criteria, capacity, funding boundaries or service gaps that made the exception necessary.

The project therefore found that evidence without corresponding decision rights was not enough to produce sustained system change, which is the basis for Recommendation 4. For future governance, the learning loop needs to continue from whānau voice, to evidence of a repeated pattern, to an accountable owner, testing and action, and finally to evidence that later whānau experience something different.

The Commission was right that whānau needed help to navigate the system, but without corresponding system change, navigators can become an ongoing workaround for barriers that remain in place. With authority to act on the evidence they collect, the same workforce can also support continuous system improvement.

What the Project Would Do Differently

The project learned that a flexible contract was necessary but not sufficient to create flexible practice. Practice was stronger where provider leaders understood the purpose of the role, practitioners had clear boundaries, supervision and coaching were available, and people had protected opportunities to learn together. Leadership also needs to be connected to the work itself, with leaders studying whānau journeys alongside practitioners rather than relying only on reports about them.

Broad-spectrum roles should complement rather than replace specialist services. Where the underlying problem is that counselling, respite, disability support or another specialist service does not exist or lacks capacity, adding more coordination does not resolve the need. Future commissioning should distinguish between a pathway that needs redesign and a service that needs to be commissioned.

What Needs to Change

For Tairāwhiti to achieve a more effective social sector, the evidence supports four changes:

1. Commission social services to meet actual demand;
2. Improve accountability by including whānau voice as a key measure and by making agencies accountable for recognising and removing the barriers their design creates;
3. Develop a broad-spectrum workforce through flexible contracts and practice support;
4. Adopt community commissioning.

1. Commission to Actual Demand

Design services around what whānau tell us they need.

Community commissioning in Tairāwhiti is an opportunity to put into practice the approach demonstrated by the Navigator Project. Capturing data on need gives commissioners clear evidence about which services are most in demand and the agility to shift investment as needs change over time.

Urungi 2.0 should be developed as community-owned learning infrastructure, not simply as a new reporting database. It should retain what made Urungi useful: whānau voice in the words used by whānau, the reason behind a need, barriers, responses, outcomes, end-to-end time and patterns over time. It should also allow recurring barriers to be followed from evidence through to ownership, action, testing and whether the same condition appears again.

Wherever possible, information should be captured once in the flow of work and then used for whānau-centred learning, commissioning and necessary contract reporting. Duplicate recording across provider systems, spreadsheets and Urungi reduced practitioner time and data quality and risked turning a learning system into another compliance requirement. Technology alone will not create the capability required; practitioner training, coaching, data quality, analysis and governance are also part of the infrastructure, with consent, privacy, Māori data sovereignty and kaitiakitanga built into its design.

Housing should remain a priority. It was the highest-volume direct need recorded in Urungi, and housing instability can affect health, education, safety and employment. Ongoing data collection should help commissioners understand the scale, variation and context of housing need. Other clear priority areas include counselling, respite care, specialist disability and health services, and employment or career support.

Service provision commissioned for direct needs should be simple to access, with reporting and accountability measures able to demonstrate that it is. Where a need is straightforward and the response is a product, a service or a resource, complexity in the access pathway adds cost without adding value.

Primary Commissioning Priorities:

- Housing, housing stability and housing repairs;
- Health services including counselling and mental health;
- Specialist services including disability-related services;
- Respite care;
- Employment/Career support.

Foundational Hardship Supports:

Whānau seeking support to address poverty and hardship most frequently requested help to access:

- Kai/Groceries;
- Clothing;
- Furnishings & household essentials;
- Transport;
- Communication access.

Commissioning to address poverty and material hardship relieves urgent day-to-day needs for essentials such as food, clothing and transport, and stabilises whānau circumstances enough for other support to work. This investment should be coupled with holistic support that identifies whānau strengths and builds longer-term pathways into education, training, employment and independence.

2. Require Agency Accountability for Barriers

Strengthen accountability for reducing friction created by access processes, criteria and delivery arrangements.

Commissioners should make barrier reduction a formal expectation of commissioned services. A significant reason support does not reach whānau is that service processes are hard to understand, hard to work through, and constrained by criteria, policies and communication designed for national consistency rather than local circumstances. Poor outcomes can arise from how the system is designed rather than from any lack of effort by whānau or the practitioners supporting them.

Contracts and accountability arrangements should require agencies and service providers to report on how they are reducing barriers over time, particularly in the following areas:

- Process to access services;
- Communication processes;
- Criteria and eligibility;
- Availability of services.

Whānau voice should also be established as a key measure of performance alongside agency and provider data, so that accountability runs outwards to whānau as well as upwards to funders.

3. Develop a Broad-Spectrum Workforce

Support workforce development for a generalist frontline model that can respond across systems and complement specialised services.

Commissioners of social services should invest in a broad-spectrum frontline workforce able to respond across systems. Whānau needs do not fit neatly within sector silos. The response data shows that practical help, collaboration, coaching, and support to find service options were all required. The evidence supports a generalist, relational practice model that can work across systems, backed by coaching, supervision, shared learning and access to specialist expertise rather than narrow role design.

4. Adopt Community Commissioning

The project indicates that local contracting alone is unlikely to be sufficient to produce sustained system change.

The report recommends that Tairāwhiti be given sufficient local commissioning authority to act on what it learns. The Navigator Project generated sustained evidence on need, barriers and service gaps, but local leaders did not hold all of the decision rights needed to carry improvement work through. Community commissioning would connect the evidence generated through whānau voice with the authority to act on it, allowing investment, service expectations and improvement activity to respond more directly to what is being learned.

This would deliver on the original purpose of the Place-Based Initiative. Cabinet agreed to establish three Place-Based Initiatives in 2016, in part in response to the recommendations of the Productivity Commission's More Effective Social Services inquiry, specifically to shift collective decision-making and discretion to the local level (New Zealand Institute of Economic Research (NZIER), 2022). **Ten years on, that transfer has not occurred at the scale envisaged, so the proposition has not yet been fully tested or realised its potential.**

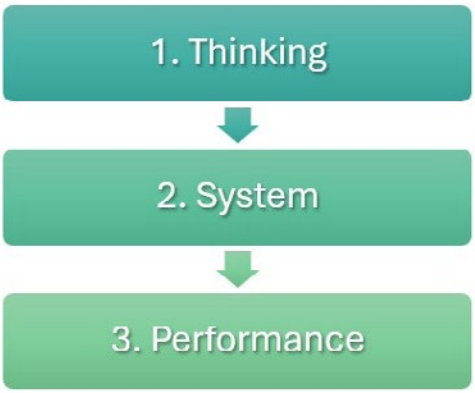
Community commissioning would allow Tairāwhiti to test, in practice, where greater local decision-making improves performance and where national arrangements should remain.

Recommendation Summary

Recommendation	Evidence From the Project	What Needs to Change	Who Needs to Act	Expected Benefit for Whānau
1. Commission to actual demand	Urungi data shows high-volume and unresolved needs across housing, health, hardship, respite, specialist services and employment support. Availability barriers dominate for whānau with the most unmet needs.	Use whānau voice and needs data to shift investment toward actual demand, and commission supply where services are absent.	Government commissioning agencies (MSD, Health NZ, Ministry of Education, Whaikaha/DSS, HUD), the Social Investment Agency, local commissioners, iwi, community providers and agencies.	Support is better matched to what whānau need most, and exists when they need it. Services not in demand can be redirected to match current needs as they change over time.
2. Require agency accountability for barriers	51.3% of recorded demands encountered at least one barrier, spread across every major system. Barriers per demand rose from 0.56 (2019) to 1.02 (2024).	Make barrier reduction a formal expectation of contracts, service design and performance reporting, with whānau voice as a key measure.	Commissioners, agencies and service providers.	Whānau experience fewer delays, refusals, confusing processes and unnecessary repeat contacts.
3. Develop a broad-spectrum workforce	Navigators delivered direct support, coordination, advocacy, coaching and problem solving across systems, and delivered 29% of all recorded responses.	Fund flexible, relational, broad-spectrum frontline roles backed by coaching, supervision, specialist access and shared learning.	Commissioners, providers, workforce leads and agencies.	Whānau receive joined-up support without having to work through every system alone.
4. Adopt community commissioning	Local leaders received evidence but lacked decision rights to redesign services, redirect investment or hold change in place.	Give Tairāwhiti sufficient local commissioning authority to act on whānau-centred evidence and test where local decision-making improves performance alongside the national system.	Central government, local leadership, iwi and community commissioning entities.	Local decisions can respond faster to whānau voice, local demand and persistent system barriers.

How to Read This Report

This report is in three parts, following the sequence the system improvement method itself uses. Thinking shapes a system. The system produces performance.



Part One: Thinking sets out why this work exists, what was believed at the outset, what the project was testing, and the tikanga and methodology underneath it.

Part Two: System describes the local system built to sit alongside the national one: the governance, the workforce, the practice model, the flexible response tools and the measurement platform.

Part Three: Performance presents what the data showed and what it means. The final chapter sets out four recommendations, including how the boundary between national and local responsibility can be learned and tested through the work.

The report distinguishes between three kinds of claim. **Project data findings** are patterns recorded in Urungi for whānau supported by navigators. **Practice and implementation findings** are repeated observations from navigator, coach and provider reflections, and from independent stakeholder research. **Interpretation and recommendations** are conclusions drawn by the Navigator Project team, tested against relevant research and regional proposals.

On the data and its limitations: The data reflects whānau who engaged with navigators and should not be read as a population measure of all whānau need in Tairāwhiti. Counts and percentages describe patterns within navigator-supported journeys. Where a need is recorded as met, Urungi records that it was resolved during the journey but does not always identify whether the accountable service, the navigator, whānau themselves or another party produced the outcome. Recording conditions and navigator capability also changed over the life of the project, including improved recognition and recording of barriers. Part Three explains these limitations and the analytical methods in more detail.

On whānau voice: Most chapters open with a request recorded by a navigator, usually in the whānau form "I need or want… because…". Where a chapter examines demand recorded through an agency, the opening quote may reflect that instead. These are reproduced exactly as recorded, including spelling and phrasing. Recording whānau words rather than agency language was a deliberate measurement decision, set out in Chapter 12.1, and reproducing them unedited is part of honouring it. Quotes have been selected and reviewed to minimise identification risk, and identifying details have not been included.

On related work: 50 Families was the Navigator Project's first phase, beginning in 2018 with two navigators and a coach at Tūranga Health. The Navigator Project is the whole arc from 2018 to 2025 and is the subject of this report. Ka Awatea was a separate system improvement programme studying

the Tairāwhiti family harm system from 2020, resourced by iwi and NZ Police and led by the Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke team under Manaaki Tairāwhiti stewardship. It used the same system improvement methodology and contributed learning to the Tairāwhiti Way of Working. Where other earlier or parallel work in the region is cited, it is named at the point it appears.

On the appendices: Appendices A and B set out the methodology and the measurement architecture. Appendices C and D provide detailed supporting analysis of housing demand and discretionary funding. Appendices E, F and G present three detailed case studies showing the system improvement method applied in practice: respite care and carer support; identification and driver licensing; and the Unsupported Child's Benefit.

What We Mean by "the System"

Throughout this report, the system means the whole set of government agencies, community-based organisations, contracts, policies, criteria, funding settings, information systems and practices that together determine whether a whānau need is met. It includes central government agencies, their regional offices, iwi and community providers, and the pathways between them.

The definition is deliberately broader than any single agency, because whānau needs, and the barriers to meeting them, routinely crossed organisational boundaries. A subsystem is a discrete part of that whole: the Housing Register, the disability needs-assessment pathway, school enrolment, the Unsupported Child's Benefit process.

Where this report refers to the national system, it means those parts designed, funded and specified centrally to operate consistently across the country. Where it refers to a local system, it means capability designed and directed within the region to respond to variation the national design does not reach. The argument of this report is that these two are complementary to each other.

Key Terms

Term	Meaning in This Report
50 Families	The first phase of the Navigator Project, beginning in 2018 with two navigators and a coach at Tūranga Health, and one of three teams testing the emerging Tairāwhiti Way of Working.
Whānau Voice	What whānau identify as important, including the needs, barriers and outcomes they experience when seeking support. Captured as close to their own words as possible.
Urungi	The project IT tool used to record whānau needs, responses, barriers and outcomes.
Kaiurungi	The te reo Māori term for the Manaaki Navigator role, used interchangeably with "navigator" in project documents.
Whānau Need	A demand on the system recorded where whānau asked for help with something directly.
Whānau Concern	A need recorded where whānau raised something that worried them, without a specific request attached.
Agency Demand	A demand recorded as coming to a navigator through an agency or service rather than directly from whānau. Navigators were embedded within provider organisations and some worked across overlapping roles, so this category does not necessarily indicate that an external agency transferred work to the navigator.
Direct Need	The product, service, resource or practical outcome being sought.
System-Support Need	A recorded demand for help to find, understand, access or progress support through service pathways.
Barrier	Anything that delayed, hindered or prevented access to support. Distinguished from waste (see below).
Waste	A system issue that causes wasted effort for those providing services. A whānau barrier is an effectiveness problem whereas waste is an efficiency problem. Removing whānau barriers usually removes waste downstream as well (Manaaki Tairāwhiti Barrier Accountability Framework).
Value Demand	Demand a service exists to meet: type of support whānau came for.
Failure Demand	Demand or additional work generated because the system was unable to do something, or to do it right first time, for whānau. This can include recorded system-support needs and the additional contacts, follow-up, rework and responses generated when a direct need encounters barriers.
Pull for Support	A Tairāwhiti Way of Working tool for bringing the support, pathway or service needed into the collective mahi for a whānau rather than referring them away. In the navigator data analysed in Chapter 11.2, recorded Pull for Support events were generally used where normal pathways had not resolved the need and additional authority, discretion or a different response was required.
Discretionary Funding	Flexible funding available to respond where standard service or funding pathways could not meet an urgent need. This included project discretionary funding and, in some provider settings, locally held discretionary resources.
Tairāwhiti Way of Working (TWOW)	The local practice model that guided how navigators listened, understood, coordinated support and worked collectively with whānau.

Whatever It Takes	A commitment to respond flexibly to what matters to whānau, with the exceptions of breaking the law, putting lives at risk, replacing crisis or specialist services, or promising an outcome that cannot be achieved.
Mana Motuhake	Self-determination and authority; the right of whānau, hapū and iwi to determine their own direction.
Whānau Ora	Whānau wellbeing achieved through whānau exercising authority over their own lives, with support that responds to the whole whānau rather than to individuals in isolation. In Manaaki Tairāwhiti's strategic plan it is expressed as supporting agencies to do whatever it takes to empower and support whānau to meet their needs and aspirations fully and completely.
Value Step (Pou)	One of the four connected steps in the Tairāwhiti Way of Working that add value for whānau as they move through the system.
Community Commissioning	Local commissioning arrangements with decision rights to direct investment, set expectations, monitor performance and require system improvement based on whānau-centred evidence.
Role 1/Role 2	Role 1 refers to the frontline generalist practitioner working directly in the field with whānau. Role 2 refers to experienced navigators who have transitioned into supervisory coaching mentors to support, train, and guide Role 1 practitioners in adopting systems thinking and the Tairāwhiti Way of Working.
Workaround	An immediate, localised tactical response applied by kaimahi to bypass a systemic barrier in order to resolve an individual whānau's urgent need. Workarounds deliver temporary relief but do not resolve the underlying condition, meaning subsequent whānau encounter the same barrier.
Place-Based Initiative (PBI)	One of three regional arrangements established by Cabinet in 2016 to shift social sector decision-making closer to the communities affected by it.
Purpose-Measures-Method (PMM)	A statement, written for each role and each step of the Tairāwhiti Way of Working, setting out what that role exists to achieve, what evidence would show whether it is achieving it, and how the work should be done.
Barrier Dissolution/ Resolution Framework	The system improvement framework used to move a barrier from a repeated problematic event, through evidenced root cause, to a tested redesign and a change made normal at scale (MSD System Improvement Team, 2023).
Broad-Spectrum Practitioner	A relational practitioner who works end to end with whānau, provides practical support, retains continuity and responsibility for progress, and works across organisational boundaries.
Māori Data Sovereignty (Te Mana Raraunga)	The right of Māori to govern the collection, ownership, use and interpretation of data about Māori people, resources and environments.
Understand - Test and Learn - Make Normal	The three stages of a system improvement cycle: study how the system currently works and why, test an alternative design against real demand, then scale what demonstrably works.

PART ONE: THINKING

Why this work exists, what was believed at the outset, and what the project set out to test.

1. Why Tairāwhiti

I need "help to get on the emergency housing waitlist. We live in a van."

Tairāwhiti is experiencing multiple complex issues, the impact of which is stunting regional growth and affecting the quality of life for many of the whānau who live here. The national system is designed for Aotearoa New Zealand as a whole, so these conditions sit outside what it was built to anticipate. These conditions form the context in which the Navigator Project operated.

Climate and infrastructure: Since 2015 the region has experienced a significant upward trend in extreme weather, with dozens of serious weather-related events including flooding, tropical cyclones and major storms resulting in multiple states of emergency. In 2023 the region recorded its wettest year on record, with rainfall exceeding 2,000mm, more than double the normal amount. Compared with regions exposed to the west, Gisborne experiences a greater number of weather and climatic extremes.

Those impacts land on fragile infrastructure. Tairāwhiti is frequently cut off from the rest of New Zealand by damage to the roading network. In 2025, Mayor Rehette Stoltz said the district had spent more on emergency road repairs than ever before, $65 million in a single year, and that many roads were still deteriorating. The Gisborne District Council roading plan looks to shift from reactive patching to proactive investment, though it is not yet clear where that investment will come from. Some roads may never be repaired. The Mayor described the choice ahead as doing what is most important rather than doing less.

Health services: In April 2025, senior doctors and health professionals at Gisborne Hospital wrote to the Government warning that hospital services were close to collapse because of chronic staffing shortages. Senior doctor vacancies reached 44% in April 2025, described at the time as the worst in the country. The New Zealand Nurses Organisation supported the doctors, citing serious safety concerns for both patients and staff. These pressures form part of broader concerns about the sustainability of rural health services in New Zealand.

The local economy: A horticulture supply chain report published by Infometrics in January 2026 notes that Gisborne is a significant horticulture region, producing an estimated $368 million of produce each year. Only 18% of the produce packed in the region is also distributed here, which makes inter-regional transport links critical. The report highlights State Highway 2 as a critical route, noting that disruptions could affect around $112 million of produce flows and increase risks for perishable goods.

Together, these climate, infrastructure, health and economic pressures raise two practical questions for Tairāwhiti. How would whānau cope? And could the social sector keep up with the demand for help that these conditions generate?

A nationally standardised system is not designed to respond easily to all of this local variation. A nationally specified service cannot readily anticipate that a road closure will make a specialist

appointment unreachable, that workforce shortages will shift demand into community services, or that a cyclone will change the composition of local need within a short period. This is primarily a design issue rather than one of intent. Standardisation enables a national system to operate at scale, but can also limit how readily it adapts to local circumstances.

The Manaaki Tairāwhiti Navigator Project looked into how the social sector actually works for people in these conditions, and recorded what it found.

2. The Question We Set Out to Answer

"Can you work with me and my whānau? The doctor still hasn't sent me a social worker yet."

What can a community do to improve the social sector in its local area? The Navigator Project was established to support whānau and capture whānau voice to inform system change. It set out to understand how the social system performed from the perspective of whānau seeking support: what mattered to them, what happened as they tried to get help, what got in the way, and whether the system did what it said it did.

The approach was grounded in action research. Navigators supported whānau regardless of the complexity or type of issues they faced, documented their journeys through the system, and used those experiences to understand what worked, what did not and what conditions would need to change. The project learned through the work itself rather than studying the system from a distance.

2.1 Measuring the System, Not the Navigators

The project's measurement framework was designed to understand **whole-of-system performance rather than navigator performance.** Navigator-supported journeys provided a way to see whether whānau got what mattered to them, how long that took, what got in the way and what additional work was required to make progress. Urungi and the measures captured were therefore designed to make system performance visible, not simply to demonstrate whether navigation worked. Need, outcomes, end-to-end time, barriers and responses were treated as evidence about the wider system rather than measures of practitioner productivity.

The longer-term aim was not to create a permanent navigation layer around pathways that were difficult to work through. Where navigators repeatedly had to follow up, coordinate, advocate, explain, seek an exception or find a workaround, that effort also provided evidence about the pathway itself. Improving those pathways could reduce the amount of compensating work required over time and make support easier for whānau to reach.

Navigators and coaches could make recurring needs and barriers visible, but evidence alone could not change the conditions producing them. As the project progressed, it became clear that system improvement also required the people or organisations responsible for those conditions to study the evidence, understand the cause, test a different response and then implement successful changes. Where the relevant settings sat outside local control, local leaders did not hold all of the decision rights needed to complete that learning loop. This became one of the project's central findings.

The Navigator Project could not deliver that change by itself. What it could do was show where the system was working, where it was not, and what happened when repeated whānau experience was turned into evidence.

Data collected in this way can help answer:

- What needs are repeatedly not being met?
- What barriers or system conditions are contributing?
- What should be improved or commissioned differently?

This report follows that evidence from whānau experience through to system performance and the conditions needed for improvement. It also examines why local contracting alone was not enough where the authority to change funding, service design or other settings remained elsewhere, and what greater community commissioning authority could make possible.

3. Where Manaaki Tairāwhiti Came From

"I want to know what you guys do for whānau. I was told you may be able to help me."

Manaaki Tairāwhiti was a response initiated by iwi, community leaders and local agencies to a set of problems they could all see:

- Overlapping or inter-connected locally led initiatives operating and implemented separately, with many of the same people going to meetings with only slightly different agendas;
- These initiatives being funded and governed by different agencies without alignment;
- The resulting need for repeated and separate collaboration with the same iwi and community leaders and agencies, and often imposed on the same whānau;
- A lack of oversight across the local social sector, and very little locally aligned input into national policy settings.

Iwi, community leaders and local social sector agencies agreed that this way of working was itself part of the problem. One indication of that fragmentation is that in 2023, MSD alone held approximately 150 contracts with around 25 providers in the region, worth about $50 million (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2023e). Local leaders decided to seek a mandate to tailor whānau responses to fit a Tairāwhiti lens, unconstrained by service contract specifications that are nationally focused and do not reflect local circumstances or aspirations.

Manaaki Tairāwhiti began with an initial focus on building local leadership, establishing a clear line of sight on the systemic barriers keeping whānau in need, and ensuring whānau were at the centre of all efforts to improve the effectiveness of the social sector.

Its purpose is stated plainly: ***"Too many whānau in Tairāwhiti are living in crisis and passing that crisis on to their tamariki and mokopuna. Manaaki Tairāwhiti will work together to transform social wellbeing in Tairāwhiti within one generation, so that all whānau are able to meet their own aspirations and are leading fulfilling lives"*** (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2024a).

3.1 The 2016 Mandate

In 2016 the Chief Executives of Te Rūnanga o Tūranganui a Kiwa and Te Rūnanganui o Ngāti Porou brought together social sector regional leaders and sought a mandate from Government to establish a Place-Based Initiative.

The initial 2016 proposal to the Cabinet Social Policy Committee, submitted by the Tairāwhiti Social Impact Collective, later Manaaki Tairāwhiti, sought a mandate to ***"lead improvements in the way the***

sector works with families and whānau in Tairāwhiti. The starting point should be to understand what is being achieved with the current investment in services and supports for at-risk children and young people and their families to identify and introduce improvements that maximise the value of the current level of investment." (Ministry of Social Development, 2016).

The proposal described the iwi-led initiative's ambition as *"an opportunity to work with a community to take a social investment approach in a place, using data and analytics generated nationally and combining that with local knowledge and leadership to focus on the problems and people that matter. It has the potential to get better results in one of our most vulnerable communities. Local measurement of results that supports changes where things are going poorly would also be enhanced with support from the national level."* (Ministry of Social Development, 2016).

In the cover letter to that proposal, Tā Selwyn Parata, then Chair of Te Rūnanganui o Ngāti Porou, set out the intent plainly: *"Our proposal sets out a clear first step: to establish a single social sector governance board, mandated and focused on a common agenda to help our most vulnerable families. From there, we intend to build the experience, evidence and case to take on greater responsibility for social sector investments in our region."* (Ministry of Social Development, 2016).

The vision was to put whānau at the centre of everything done in the social sector, to establish a clearer line of sight into what was working and what was not, to become a commissioning agency for the region, and to build greater accountability across the sector, where no family who needed help was met with the response of "no further action".

The proposal set out six commitments:

1. Create local governance for programmes and initiatives, with decision rights and responsibilities;
2. Develop a single results framework and measurement approach;
3. Understand the cumulative impact of initiatives;
4. Harmonise programmes before reshaping them for better results;
5. Develop the practice model for working with at-risk families;
6. Use lessons from the work to inform wider change.

It also noted the Collective's ambition to expand its mandate and become a social investment commissioning body for Tairāwhiti: *"Our vision is that eventually the single governance group becomes the type of social investment commissioning body envisaged by the Productivity Commission"* (Ministry of Social Development, 2016). That ambition remains unrealised and is the subject of Recommendation 4.

3.2 The National Context for the Mandate

Manaaki Tairāwhiti was never an isolated local experiment. Following a proposal to the then Minister for Social Development, the Government designated Manaaki Tairāwhiti as a Place-Based Initiative in 2016. In that same year, and in part in response to the recommendations of the Productivity Commission's More Effective Social Services inquiry, Cabinet agreed to establish three Place-Based Initiatives. These were designed specifically to improve outcomes for at-risk children and their whānau by shifting collective decision-making and discretion to the local level. By 2022, two of the three remained operating: Manaaki Tairāwhiti and the South Auckland Social Wellbeing Board (NZIER, 2022).

Manaaki Tairāwhiti differed from the other Place-Based Initiatives in one respect: it was iwi-led from the outset rather than agency-led. In practice that meant the governance group was chaired by iwi rather than by a government agency, initially co-chaired by the chief executives of Te Rūnanga o Tūranganui a Kiwa and Te Rūnanganui o Ngāti Porou, with government agencies, the district council and community providers sitting as members alongside iwi rather than convening the table. It also shaped how the Navigator Project reached whānau. Referral was by need rather than by cohort, risk assessment, or agency eligibility criteria, which is a decision an agency-led initiative would have found

harder to make within its own contractual thresholds.

3.3 Manaaki Tairāwhiti Values

The values that guided this work were set out in the Manaaki Tairāwhiti Strategic Plan and shaped decisions and actions both collectively and within member organisations (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2023f, 2024a):

- **Tiriti o Waitangi:** We ground all of our work in iwi partnerships under Te Tiriti o Waitangi.
- **Tino rangatiratanga:** We operate on the basis that every whānau has value and the right to be autonomous and fulfil their potential.
- **Whānau ora:** We support agencies to do whatever it takes to empower and support whānau to meet their needs and aspirations fully and completely.
- **Transformative:** We transform lives through supporting agencies to transform social services delivery, championing problem-solving, and fostering innovation and positive change.
- **Agility and outcomes-focused:** While unwavering in the outcomes we are focused on achieving, we remain flexible in the tactics we use to achieve those ends.
- **Evidence-based:** We test our work and theories rigorously: they are based on robust evidence from multiple sources of the truth, including our own sources of mātauranga, data, and information.
- **Kia māia, kia manawanui:** We are accountable and committed to a shared vision, providing joined-up service, sharing learning and information, and doing whatever it takes to make a real difference.
- **Pono me tika:** We have honest and trust-based relationships underpinning our work with whānau, between ourselves, and with other leaders in our region and nationally.

Manaaki Tairāwhiti aimed to work across four key result areas: improving housing, improving child wellbeing, reducing family violence and reducing addiction, on the basis that these four areas have the greatest impact on whānau wellbeing (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2023e).

4. What the Commission Recommended, and What We Tested

> *"Do we need a lawyer to do a protection of personal and property rights application? We cannot afford a lawyer and don't fit the criteria for legal aide."*

The New Zealand Productivity Commission's 2015 More Effective Social Services inquiry identified a group of New Zealanders with multiple, entrenched and complex needs, and identified system-level constraints in how services supported them:

"The system as a whole is not well set up to deal with clients with multiple, interdependent problems. These clients often need coordinated and intensive services, yet the system tends to deliver fragmented and short-term assistance." (NZ Productivity Commission, 2015)

The Commission described structural conditions, including fragmented funding, rigid contracts and centralised control, that limited coordination, innovation and service responsiveness. To address them it recommended a navigator approach, where skilled local workers would have the authority and flexibility to coordinate services, build trust, and focus on long-term outcomes. It identified the underserved group as those in Quadrant D of its service user framework: people with complex needs who cannot work the system to coordinate the services they need.

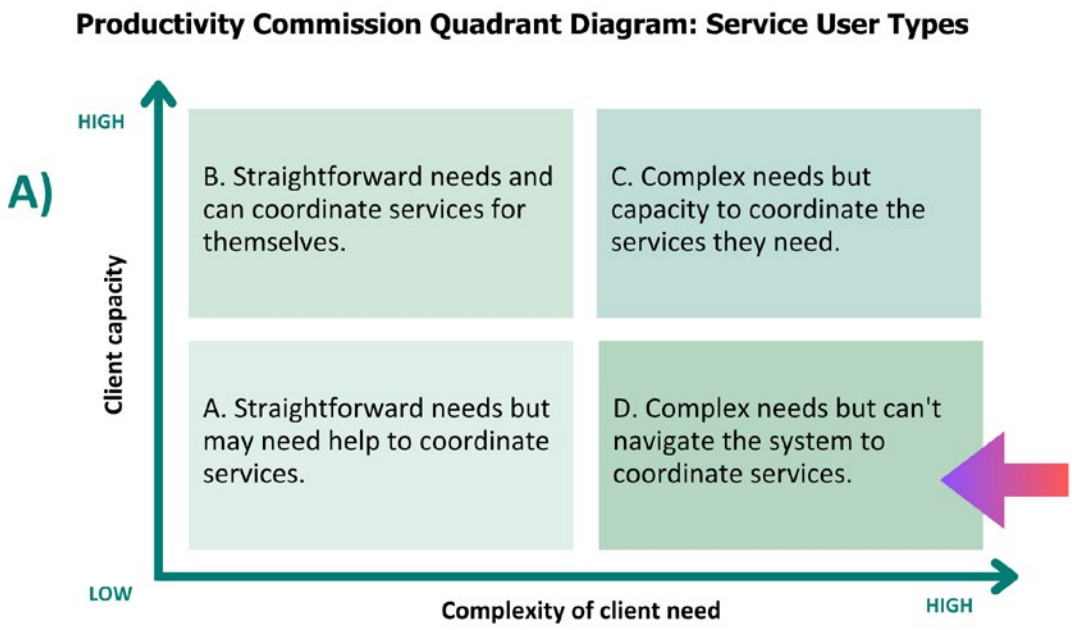


Figure 1: The NZ Productivity Commission's service user quadrant diagram (2015).

The Commission's full recommendation for improving service provision for complex cases was for *"a new approach that puts clients at the centre of service design, assigns responsibility for a defined population, uses navigators to prioritise and sequence services, has information systems to support decision-making, devolves control to avoid over specification, prioritises the use of resources, and is accountable for improving client outcomes."*

Manaaki Tairāwhiti took up this recommendation in 2018 and went a step further. Rather than treating navigation as a limited fix for a few high-need cases, the project developed a full practice approach grounded in whānau voice. It asked whānau what support would make a difference, and designed the navigator role around what it heard.

The alignment between the Commission's recommendation and the Manaaki Navigator role was set out at the outset of the prototype:

- Manaaki Navigators put whānau at the centre, listen to whānau voice, and respond by doing whatever it takes.
- Navigators have no criteria or service specifications, so they can help at the earliest opportunity, with no "that's not my job" thinking.
- Navigators measure effectiveness rather than contract volumes. They measure what matters to whānau, whether support needs have been met, and whether wellbeing has improved from the whānau perspective.

We described Manaaki Navigators as **the water we pour through the system to see where the holes** are. By deploying navigators in the work and analysing the experiences of whānau, the project produced insights showing what was working, what was not working, and what needed to change.

The project showed both the value and the limits of the Commission's recommendation. The project demonstrated that navigators delivered coordinated and intensive support for whānau, and whānau made progress. Navigator effectiveness was tied directly to how well the wider system could respond. The project found that navigation could help whānau work through existing barriers, but navigators could not remove barriers that sat within agency systems. That required action by the organisations with authority over those systems.

4.1 Two More Quadrants

As the evidence accumulated, the project developed two complementary quadrant frameworks, which shift the lens away from whānau and towards the system and workforce conditions that determine whether needs are met. The first covers system performance, including the complexity and coverage of systems. The second covers workforce conditions, including capability and decision-making authority.

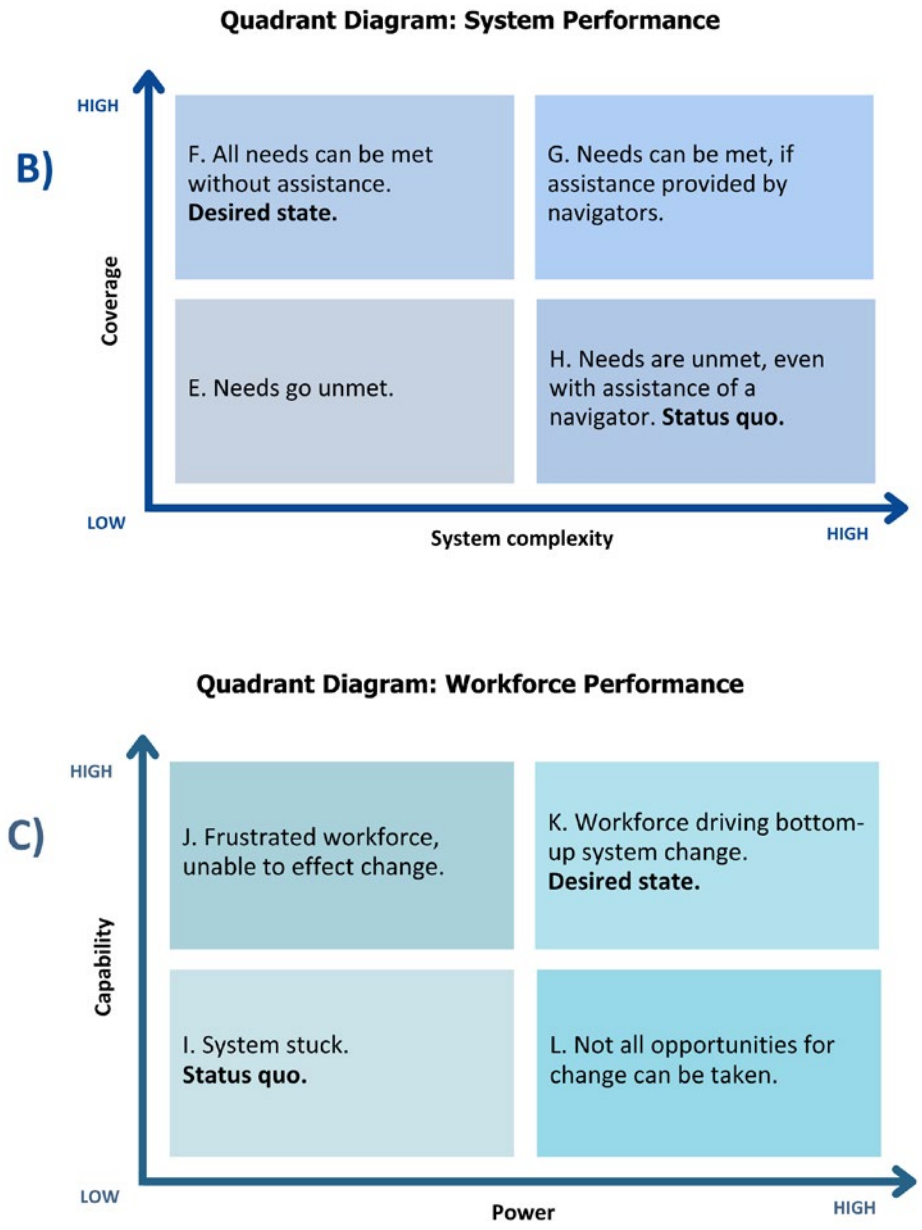


Figure 2: Complementary quadrant diagrams developed by NZIER working with Manaaki Tairāwhiti to examine the system and workforce conditions that determine whether needs are met (NZIER, 2023).

Quadrant Diagram A NZ Productivity Commission	**Service User Types:** Maps client capacity against complexity of client need. Quadrant D: complex needs, but unable to navigate the system to coordinate services, is the underserved group the Commission identified.
Quadrant Diagram B Manaaki Tairāwhiti	**System Performance:** Maps service coverage against system complexity. **The desired state is Quadrant F:** all needs can be met without assistance. The status quo is Quadrant H: needs are unmet even with the assistance of a navigator. A well-functioning system would provide broad, appropriate service coverage while managing complexity effectively. Many whānau instead experience limited availability of services or overly complex access pathways, indicating that coverage is often limited or fragmented, and that system design has not kept pace with real-world needs.
Quadrant Diagram C Manaaki Tairāwhiti	**Workforce Performance:** Maps practitioner capability against the power to make decisions. **The desired state is Quadrant K:** a capable workforce driving bottom-up system change. **Quadrant I** represents the low-capability, low-authority starting condition in which the system remains stuck. **Quadrant J** represents a capable but constrained workforce: capability has increased, but authority to effect system change remains limited. This most closely describes where the navigator workforce ended up.

Navigators and practitioners using the Tairāwhiti Way of Working, operating with strong relationships and local knowledge, can be highly capable while still facing constraints imposed by policy limits, contractual obligations or lack of discretion. Where services are missing or hard to reach, even the best workforce cannot meet whānau needs. System infrastructure must match workforce capability for outcomes to improve.

The project strengthened workforce capability through practice, coaching and shared learning, while decision-making authority remained constrained. The workforce dimension therefore moved further than the authority dimension. Community commissioning would place more decision-making authority alongside the capability already developed locally.



Figure 3: Wellbeing outcomes are determined at the intersection of whānau capability and complexity, workforce capability and power, and system complexity and coverage.

4.2 Simple Systems and Complex Systems

System design can be simple, complex, or anything in between. The difference has little to do with how important the service is. A key difference is how much has to be established, proved or coordinated before help arrives.

An example of a simple system with full coverage is the 111 emergency call: If your house is on fire and you call 111, there are no criteria to meet before a fire truck is sent. There are no forms to complete and no identification to produce. The system is designed to respond to the need immediately. Coverage is universal and the pathway is simple. This example was used in Manaaki Tairāwhiti's earlier system-accountability work to illustrate what a service looks like when the pathway closely matches its purpose.

The Navigator Project found a different pattern across many social services. **Needs that appeared relatively straightforward from the perspective of whānau could become complex because of the pathway required to meet them.**

A caregiver taking responsibility for a child after a family breakdown may simply need financial support to help provide for that child. Yet the Navigator Project work on the Unsupported Child's Benefit documented a pathway involving Work and Income and, where existing evidence did not establish the family breakdown, a family-breakdown assessment through Barnardos, alongside appointments, birth certificates, identity and bank verification, supporting evidence and, in some circumstances, information from other agencies (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2025c). Navigators recorded whānau repeating their circumstances, waiting for appointments and decisions, and supporting children before the additional UCB income began.

The same pattern appeared in **respite care and carer support.** The underlying need could be simple: a caregiver needed a break or practical support to continue caring for a family member. Yet between June 2019 and May 2023, more than 85% of the respite and carer-support needs examined through the project encountered a system barrier (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2023d). Whānau experienced limited provider availability, confusing forms and referral processes, long waits for assessment or funding decisions, and criteria that did not always accommodate their circumstances.

Housing showed another form of complexity. Whānau commonly came to navigators with a clear need for somewhere safe and suitable to live. The project found that lack of housing supply was a major barrier, but the pathway itself also generated work: lengthy waits, complex applications and documentation, Housing Register processes, eligibility criteria, repeated contact with different organisations and gaps in communication or follow-up. Between January 2020 and May 2024, 214 whānau seeking housing support encountered 311 recorded system barriers (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2024c). The housing case study showed that availability, accessibility processes and criteria, policy and legislation were the three largest barrier categories.

These examples separate complexity in whānau circumstances from complexity created by the system. A whānau may have a genuinely complex situation requiring judgement, safeguarding or coordination. But a straightforward need can also become difficult to meet because the pathway requires multiple contacts, assessments, documents, eligibility decisions or hand-offs between organisations.

> Some complexity is necessary to protect scarce resources, establish entitlement, manage risk or fulfil statutory obligations. The question is whether that complexity is proportionate to the risk, entitlement or resource being managed, whether each step adds value for whānau, and whether some decisions could be made more effectively closer to where demand occurs.

Some systems should remain simple and national because they are transactional and universal. Some will necessarily remain more complex. But the Navigator Project work shows that **complexity should not be treated as inevitable.** Where repeated whānau experience shows that process, criteria, communication or organisational boundaries are adding work without improving the outcome, that is an opportunity for system improvement.

4.3 The 50 Families Prototype: What We Thought We Would Do, and What We Actually Did

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"I need a home of my own. I have been in emergency housing a long time"

The Navigator Project began deliberately and at a small scale in 2018, with two navigators and a coach based at Tūranga Health. This first phase was known as 50 Families. The prototype was originally conceived as a service delivery model working with the 50 most at-risk whānau, identified through triage against criteria for complexity and vulnerability, with navigators removing the barriers whānau encountered.

50 Families was one of three teams testing the emerging Tairāwhiti Way of Working in the region at that time, alongside teams inside the Department of Corrections and the Ministry of Social Development (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2024b). Each was applying the same system improvement methodology to a different part of the sector. What distinguished 50 Families was that it worked with whatever whānau brought, rather than within one agency's remit.

> However, several of the prototype's core design assumptions did not hold when tested in practice. Setting out what changed, and why, is the clearest statement of the learning that shaped the project. Each correction arose from what whānau and navigators encountered in practice, rather than being chosen in advance.

What We Thought We Would Do - Traditional Thinking

- Work with 50 of the most at-risk whānau in Tairāwhiti, identified by a triage process;
- Evaluate the impact of our intervention;
- Test a cross-agency process for joining up the response to complex cases;
- Navigators will remove barriers for whānau;
- All whānau involved will give consent;
- We will have criteria for complexity and vulnerability.

What We Actually Did - Systems Thinking

- Relationship-building or preliminary work may be needed before trust is built and informed consent is obtained; consent is then revisited at each new action rather than treated as a one-off signature.
- Navigators cannot remove barriers in agency systems, they 'work around' them. Agencies need to release their own staff to act on their own systems. That single correction turned the recording of barriers into the project's central measurement task.
- Work with whatever comes. Emergent demand surfaces as trust and confidence grow, and initial demand changes over time, so a fixed cohort measures the wrong thing.
- Greater complexity did not consistently trigger greater integration. Navigators observed that agencies often reverted to their defined organisational remits as situations became more complex.
- No fixed entry criteria or eligibility threshold. Whānau were not excluded because they fell outside a predefined cohort; access was based on need.
- Measure what matters to whānau, and record agency barriers. Not volumes, not closures, not units of service.

The real-world learnings from the 50 Families phase shaped the practice model that followed, and they carried forward through people as well as documents. One of the two 50 Families navigators at Tūranga Health became a coach in the wider Navigator Project. One of the participants in the Corrections system improvement work became a coach as well, bringing across what that parallel test team had learned about acting on system conditions from inside an agency.

> The prototype began with the assumption that the main problem was helping whānau reach services. In practice, the project found that the issue also ran in the other direction: service design could make it difficult for services to reach whānau whose circumstances fell outside standard eligibility criteria, sequencing, capacity or communication processes

5. The Thinking That Sits Beneath the Design

"Can you come with me to my appointment with the psychologist? I don't want to go by myself."

Three aspects shaped how the 50 Families Project and the Navigator Project were designed: what whānau themselves said matters, our beliefs and tikanga about how people should be treated, and a system improvement methodology about how work should be studied. The system improvement methodology provided a tool to help us show the value of our local tikanga in action.

5.1 What Matters to Whānau

Whānau were asked what mattered to them, through observation, case studies, and interviews with whānau and with the staff across every agency involved in their journeys. Across teams, different parts of the sector and several years of work, the same themes recurred (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2024b, 2025a). Whānau said:

- We want to feel safe.
- We want control of our lives.
- Someone responds immediately and recognises our situation's importance.
- We want to be connected to services and know the right door to open to get help that responds to our needs. We do not have to fit a criteria to get help.
- The right person to help us is skilled, connected, and available.
- We want an empathetic trusting relationship. We need to trust and know our story is confidential unless we give consent for shared information. We want honesty in our interaction.
- You know our whānau story, we need to be understood and heard.
- We want help and support to meet our aspirations/goals.
- We want choices. We select according to our needs/strengths/preferences.
- Recognise our strengths.
- Understand our cultural background.
- We want respect and don't want to be judged.
- Don't rush us (no time constraints).
- Our awareness of needs/opportunities/risks grows through engagement.
- We're updated regularly/keep us informed.
- We have the opportunity to feedback and input into any change of plan.

Above all, whānau wanted the social sector to **"do what it says it does"**.

These statements are a description of a relationship rather than a service. Almost nothing in it names a programme, a benefit or an entitlement. What whānau asked for was to be believed, to be understood once rather than repeatedly, to be given choices, and to be helped without first having to prove they qualified or were deserving of help. Taken together, these themes point to an expectation that services are fair, responsive and focused on what matters to whānau. The project also sought to identify work that added effort or cost without helping whānau progress.

These findings shaped both the practice model and the measurement framework. They gave the practice model a purpose written from the whānau side of the counter, and gave the measurement framework something specific to measure against: whether the system was doing what it said it would do.

5.2 Tikanga and the Tairāwhiti Way of Working

The Tairāwhiti Way of Working grew out of the system improvement work that began in the region in 2017. MSD Business coaches worked with operational leaders from government agencies and non-government organisations to understand the system barriers preventing staff from responding to whānau needs and aspirations. That work produced a way of working which allowed whānau voice to drive the response. It was tested locally between 2017 and 2019 by three teams: the Department of Corrections, the Ministry of Social Development, and 50 Families (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2024b). It was refined further through the Navigator Project, and later tested again by Ka Awatea in the family harm system, which applied a Purpose-Measures-Method framework to the value steps.

The purpose of the Tairāwhiti Way of Working is:

> ***"Help me to be heard and understood so that I can be responsible for the care and wellbeing of my family/whānau."***

The Manaaki Tairāwhiti Governance Group agreed in principle to apply the Way of Working across the sector in December 2022 (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2023g).

The Tairāwhiti Way of Working is guided by tikanga that shape decisions, relationships and collective action. It gives practical effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi through partnership with iwi and shared stewardship of outcomes for whānau. It recognises mana motuhake and whānau ora, and combines flexibility, accountability and evidence-based practice so agencies can do whatever it takes to empower whānau (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2023g).

Manaakitanga is a design requirement: In practice it means treating the person in front of you as a person rather than as a case: taking care of each other, applying compassion and emotional intelligence, and being able to respond to a situation that requires something different from the standard. A national system can standardise expectations of respectful treatment, but discretion is harder to prescribe centrally because it depends on judgement in context. Someone applying manaakitanga has to be permitted to decide that this whānau, in these circumstances, needs something the process does not provide.

The ability to use informed discretion is one important difference between the local model tested here and nationally standardised pathways. It is also why local administration matters. **The ability to apply informed discretion can help produce more equitable responses where whānau circumstances do not fit a standard pathway. Community commissioning would place more of that decision-making authority closer to where whānau circumstances are understood.**

Pono me tika, honesty and integrity in relationships, carries the same weight for how the work is recorded. The measurement approach asks navigators to document where the system did not work, including where their own organisations did not work. That only produces useful evidence if the culture around it is honest rather than defensive.

The approach was also recognised outside the project. The New Zealand Productivity Commission's A Fair Chance for All used the Tairāwhiti Way of Working as an example of an approach supporting joint accountability to government and to people experiencing persistent disadvantage, and reproduced its whānau and system measures as an example of whānau-centred measurement in practice (NZ Productivity Commission, 2023).

5.3 The System Improvement Methodology

While tikanga describes how whānau should be treated, on its own it cannot show whether that is happening, or what is stopping it. The system improvement methodology gave the project a structured way to examine whether the principles expressed in the Way of Working were being reflected in practice, and what system conditions were helping or preventing that.

The approach is not a local invention, and Manaaki Tairāwhiti did not apply it alone. Business coaches funded through the Ministry of Social Development introduced the methodology to the region in 2017, before the 50 Families prototype began, and continued to support its application throughout the project. It draws largely on the Vanguard method of system improvement developed by Professor John Seddon, shaped for a New Zealand context using international expertise in systems thinking and organisational psychology (Davis, 2016; Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2024a, 2024b). The model was first called Better Every Day and is now known as System Improvement.

The methodology argues that many public services are designed around processing predefined issues and completing transactions. Systems operating this way can assess rather than understand, transact rather than build relationships, and refer on rather than retain responsibility. Where the underlying situation remains unresolved, further demand and additional work can result, creating what Locality and Vanguard Consulting describe as ***"systems that obsess about cost, yet paradoxically drive costs up"*** (2014). Effective services using system improvement focus on purpose rather than outputs, manage value rather than cost, and respond as close as practicable to where demand occurs.

Seven principles govern the work:

- Start by studying your system from the point of view of your customers, where the work happens;
- Create effective performance measures about outcomes, soundly presented over time and embedded in the system, in the hands of those doing the work;
- Use evidence from data rather than opinions to make informed decisions;
- See and work on the whole system, rather than attempting improvement within its component parts;
- Learn by experimentation and reflection;
- Uncover the thinking, the beliefs and assumptions that made the system the way it currently is;
- Those who are accountable for the design and operation of the current system should lead the work to change it.

In practice, system improvement moves through three stages: **Understand, Test and Learn, and Make Normal**. The first stage uses repeated whānau experiences and performance data to establish what is happening, why it is happening, and the system conditions and assumptions contributing to it. The second stage redesigns and tests an alternative response against real demand, using measures to assess whether performance improves. The final stage embeds an effective redesign so that better performance becomes normal across the relevant system.

Urungi gave practical effect to the second principle by placing outcome measures close to the people doing the work. Part Three shows what this produced. The seventh principle is particularly relevant to the project's central finding: evidence can support improvement only when those responsible for

system design have the authority to act on it.

Appendix A sets out the system improvement methodology, including the Understand - Test and Learn - Make Normal model and the Barrier Dissolution/Resolution Framework, which traces the journey of a barrier from a first recorded problematic event through to a change made normal at scale. Appendix B sets out the Purpose-Measures-Method architecture used across the project (MSD System Improvement Team, 2023).

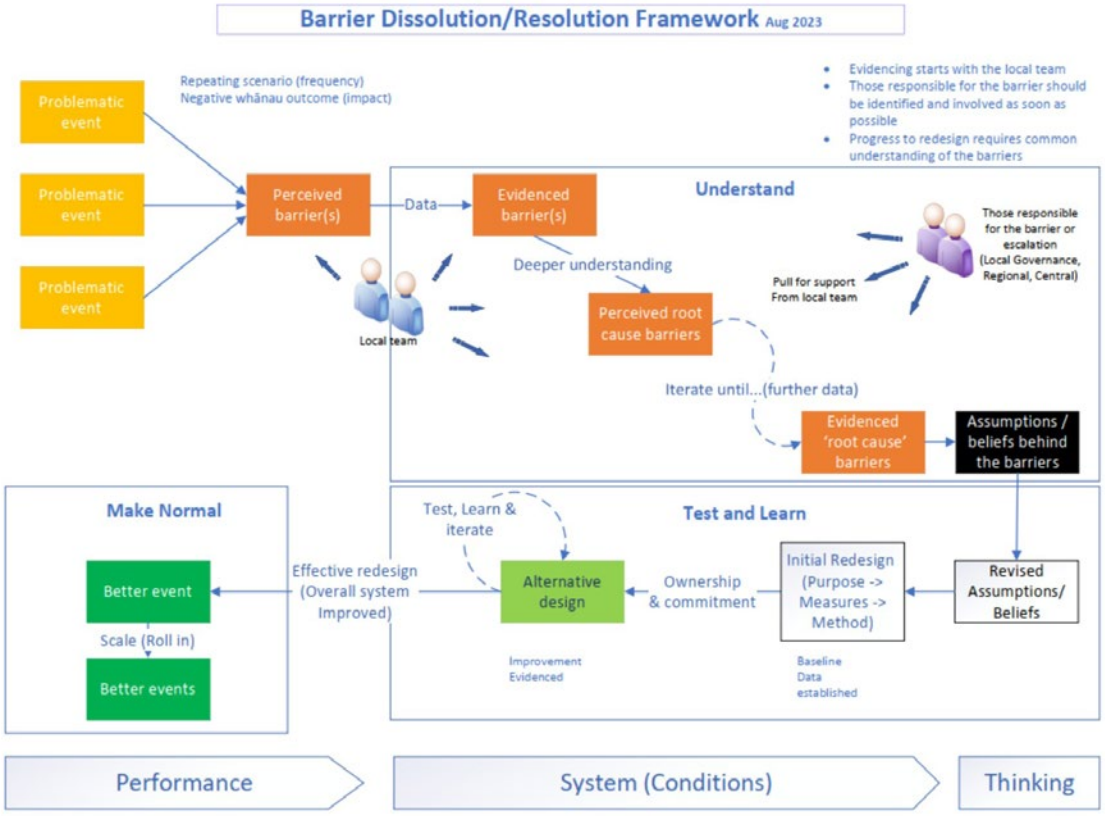


Figure 4: The Barrier Dissolution/Resolution Framework, August 2023. The framework moves from problematic events recorded by the local team, through evidenced root causes and the assumptions behind them, to a tested redesign and a scaled change. The three bands beneath show what is being worked on at each stage: performance, system conditions, and the thinking that produced them (MSD System Improvement Team, 2023).

Manaaki Tairāwhiti also applied the methodology directly to specific parts of the social service system. Between 2022 and 2025, the methodology was applied to specific subsystems identified through whānau voice, including carer support and respite care, identification and driver licensing, and the Unsupported Child's Benefit process. The work progressed to different stages in each case: from mapping and evidencing barriers, through redesign and testing, to attempts to embed change. Case studies described in Appendices E, F and G show what happened when the methodology was applied in practice, including where progress depended on authority outside the region.

5.4 The Purpose-Measures-Method Framework

The practice model and measurement framework were designed to work together. The Tairāwhiti Way of Working set out how the work should be done, while the measurement framework showed whether it was achieving its purpose. Both were built around Purpose-Measures-Method (PMM) statements. Each role in the project, and each step in the Tairāwhiti Way of Working, had a PMM that defined three things: the purpose it existed to achieve; the measures that would show whether that purpose was being achieved; and the method for doing the work.

These individual PMMs were connected by a common overarching purpose: ***"Enable whānau to flourish by doing whatever it takes."*** Each role and each part of the Way of Working contributed to that purpose, creating a consistent line from what mattered to whānau, through frontline practice, to the evidence used to understand how well the system was performing.

Purpose was expressed in whānau terms rather than organisational terms. A purpose written as "deliver contracted services" produces a system that counts services. Here, purpose was written from the perspective of whānau rather than around organisational delivery.

Measures were derived from that purpose rather than imposed on it. No measure was included because an agency required it. The measures were deliberately not targets. Volume and closure-time targets can incentivise practitioners to prioritise throughput and case closure, which can obscure whether the underlying need was resolved. Keeping these measures separate from individual performance targets helped focus attention on whether whānau needs were met and what the system was doing, rather than on practitioner performance.

Measurement sat with the people doing the work and was intended for learning rather than individual judgement. When measures are tied directly to performance assessment, they can incentivise compliant data, but when practitioners use them to understand their own system, they are more likely to support reflection and learning.

Appendix B sets out how Purpose-Measures-Method applies across the project roles, the four value steps, supporting methods and system learning.

5.5 Consent

Consent was captured throughout rather than once: A dedicated Consent statement set out three purposes whānau were asked to agree to: that information could be collected and shared between agencies to improve outcomes for them; that agencies could use their information to identify and escalate barriers in order to improve systems; and that Manaaki Tairāwhiti could use it to increase workforce capability. Consent was revisited at every step where a new event or action occurred.

That consent is the basis on which whānau experiences are used in this report. Whānau shared their lived realities in the hope that the system would change. The evidence presented here exists because they agreed it should be used to change the system, rather than only to resolve their own situation. That agreement carries an obligation.

PART TWO: SYSTEM

The local system built to sit alongside the national one, and how it was designed to work.

6. A Local System Alongside the National System

"Can you please have a look at this form that turned up in the post? I don't know what it's for or how to fill it out."

The Navigator Project tested a local model in which navigators responded to whānau need rather than to a prescribed service specification. While contracted services remain accountable for agreed outputs, the navigator role was designed to retain flexibility where whānau needs crossed service boundaries or did not fit an existing pathway.

The model had to be **flexible** enough to match the needs whānau presented with, rather than prescribe the response in advance, and **agile** enough to act when support was needed rather than after an assessment cycle. It also had to accommodate circumstances that did not resemble the 'standard' case. With **no eligibility criteria,** navigators could support people who fell outside another service's criteria, including those who only narrowly missed a threshold, and could adapt when **local conditions** changed suddenly through events such as cyclones, road closures or workforce shortages.

It also carried **discretionary funding:** a small flexible resource for the situations where transactional national support could not meet a whānau's circumstances in time or in the right form. Chapter 11.1 sets out how often that was needed, and what those uses reveal about where standard pathways could not respond.

Complementary local and national systems are already in play in New Zealand. In land transport, for example, NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi manages the state highway network and has national planning, investment, regulatory and technical-standard roles. Local government develops, maintains and operates the local road network. Funding is shared: NZTA co-invests in approved local transport activities through the National Land Transport Fund, while councils provide the local share. Regional priorities are brought together through Regional Land Transport Plans within the national policy and investment framework.

The comparison is useful because local authorities have genuine responsibility for their own networks within a national framework. Local authorities understand local conditions, set their own programmes and priorities, and decide how local resources are applied, while working within national standards, funding rules and regional plans. NZTA still decides which activities qualify for national co-investment, but within that framework councils hold genuine responsibility for their own networks. They are not contracted to deliver a nationally designed roading programme.

Tairāwhiti has developed much of the local knowledge, relationships and delivery capability that such a model requires, but it does not yet hold equivalent authority over social sector commissioning and investment. Much of the Crown-funded social service system continues to be commissioned

through national agencies and funding streams. The region is actively working towards a more locally commissioned model, with Tairāwhiti Community Commissioning continuing to build the case for greater local decision-making over what support is commissioned and how investment is directed. That transition is still in progress, but much of the local capability needed to support it is already in place.

6.1 What Stays National, What Moves Local

Some services are inherently transactional and are best administered nationally. Superannuation is the clearest example: a defined entitlement, applied consistently, at enormous scale, where local variation would be a defect. Functions such as universal entitlements, national registers, regulation and clinical standards generally benefit from national consistency.

Other functions depend on knowing the person, the place and the circumstance. These are the ones where a standard response either fits or misses entirely, and where the cost of missing is that the whānau cycles in and out of the system. These are the circumstances in which local capability can complement national provision.

The project's proposition is that nationally standardised pathways will not readily accommodate the full variation of local need. Local capability can provide another response where whānau circumstances fall outside standard pathways and help reduce repeated contacts, escalation and crisis responses.

The project could not test the appropriate boundary between national and local decision-making because it did not hold authority to transfer functions or funding. Community commissioning would allow that question to be tested in practice.

7. How the Project Was Set Up and Grew

"I need support at a hui, can you come as my support person please? I don't know what to do."

Place-Based Initiative funding paid for the navigators, or Kaiurungi, who were contracted through local iwi and NGO providers rather than employed centrally. Three coaches and a data analyst formed the backbone office, providing group and one-on-one coaching throughout the life of the project and data support. The project's core whānau voice data came directly from whānau who connected with a navigator.

Urungi also separately recorded demand identified as coming through an agency or service rather than directly from whānau. This preserved the distinction between whānau-expressed demand and work entering the navigator role through organisational channels. Because navigators were embedded in provider organisations and some roles overlapped with wider provider responsibilities, the recorded source does not necessarily indicate an external referral or transfer of responsibility.

The project grew slowly. It began in 2018 with two navigators, and by 2024/25 there were 14, based across 10 community providers and supporting more than 1,500 whānau. Over the full seven years, 31 people held navigator roles and 14 organisations contributed data at some point.

Year	What Happened
2016	Manaaki Tairāwhiti established under iwi leadership to address the clutter and confusion in the social sector, and invited by Government to become a Place-Based Initiative.
2017	System improvement coaching introduced. Business coaches work with operational leaders from agencies and NGOs to understand the barriers stopping staff responding to whānau.
2017–2019	The whānau-centred Tairāwhiti Way of Working is developed and tested by three teams: Corrections, MSD and 50 Families.
2018	50 Families begins: two navigators and a coach at Tūranga Health.
2019	The prototype's assumptions are corrected, and it becomes the Navigator Project. Systematic recording of whānau voice begins in June 2019.
2020–2025	The Navigator Project scales to 14 navigators across 11 providers. Urungi is built. Barrier evidence is produced and escalated.
2025	Project funding concludes. Data cut-off, September 2025.
2026	Manaaki Tairāwhiti agrees to merge into Tairāwhiti Community Commissioning.

7.1 Assessment Against the Original Commitments

Original Commitment	What the Project Achieved	What Remained Out of Reach	Assessment
Local governance with decision rights	An iwi-led governance group was established, endorsed by Cabinet, and oversaw the prototype.	Material authority to redesign central-agency services or redirect significant investment was not transferred.	Partly achieved (Chapter 8)
Single results framework	Urungi and the Purpose-Measures-Method framework captured whānau need, system response, outcomes and barriers.	Wider adoption, data quality infrastructure and ongoing investment remain incomplete.	Achieved as a prototype (Chapters 8, 12)
Cumulative impact	Multiple needs, responses and barriers were connected within whānau journeys; thematic case studies and causal loop analyses were produced.	Linking all regional investment, agency data and longitudinal outcomes was not possible.	Partly achieved (Chapter 19)
Harmonise programmes	Providers shared learning and worked across service contexts.	Externally commissioned programmes remained tied to agency specifications, reporting and national settings.	Limited (Chapter 21)
Practice model	The Tairāwhiti Way of Working was developed, tested and supported through coaching. Governance agreed in principle to sector-wide application in December 2022.	Organisational roll-in was inconsistent, depending on provider leadership and contract alignment.	Achieved as a practice model (Chapters 5, 9)
Use lessons for wider change	Dashboards, reports and case studies made needs and barriers visible to leaders.	The pathway from evidence to accountable action was weak; decision rights remained outside the region.	Partly achieved (Chapter 22)

7.2 What the Project Proved, and What It Could Not

The project showed that its measurement approach could generate usable system insights through dashboards, case studies and detailed reports. The findings were consistent in identifying fragmentation across services, the influence of targets and eligibility criteria, and capacity constraints that affected how readily support could respond to whānau circumstances. In some cases, local data told a different story from agency indicator data and provided a different picture of what whānau were experiencing (Chapter 17 and Appendix C).

Alongside the measurement approach, several things worked well and are worth naming because they are what a future commissioner would build on:

- Flexible contracting and local contract monitoring;
- Local design and delivery of a practice model that works within the current system;
- The Tairāwhiti Way of Working as a collaborative approach when adopted across the system;
- Quality data analysis of what matters most to whānau;
- Fit-for-purpose workforce development.

What did not follow was sustained system change. Regional leaders did not hold the delegated powers needed to alter national policies, procedures, IT systems or other centrally controlled settings. Factors such as the national Accommodation Supplement settings administered by Work and Income, or the wait time for a medical specialist appointment, remained outside local control. Local leaders were therefore unable to complete a full system improvement cycle of testing, learning, redesigning and implementing services better suited to whānau in Tairāwhiti.

Crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic, cyclones and severe weather events showed that rapid change is possible, but those changes were temporary and systems generally returned to standardised settings once the crisis response ended. Chapter 18 looks more closely at what happened during those periods.

8. Governance, Decision Rights and Accountability

> *"I don't want to make a complaint. They can kick us out or we just end up worse off."*

The 2016 proposal described how ***"building on the high level of local collaboration, establishing a single governance entity would enable local leaders to have a clearer line of sight on what is happening in the community and facilitate a shared understanding of what is needed to improve services and outcomes."***

Endorsed by Cabinet as a Place-Based Initiative, the group formally established itself as Manaaki Tairāwhiti. Initially co-chaired by Ronald Nepe, Chief Executive of Te Rūnanga o Tūranganui a Kiwa, and Herewini Te Koha, Chief Executive of Te Rūnanganui o Ngāti Porou, Manaaki Tairāwhiti has been iwi-led from the outset. Herewini Te Koha later left the role, and Ronald Nepe remained chair of the board.

"Manaaki Tairāwhiti is the regional leadership group for social wellbeing in Tairāwhiti. We are an iwi-led and place-based initiative endorsed by Cabinet to explore and evidence alternative social sector service delivery for improved outcomes for whānau. Our ambition is greater than this. We aspire to true social development and empowerment of our whānau and our rohe" (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2021b).

The Navigator Project gave practical effect to this governance role by creating a line from whānau experience to system-level evidence. Navigators recorded what whānau needed, what happened

as they tried to get it, and the barriers they encountered. This evidence was analysed through dashboards, case studies and cases for change and provided to operational and governance leaders. Where barriers could not be resolved locally, the intended pathway was to identify the person or organisation responsible for the system condition and escalate the evidence through governance and, where necessary, to regional or national decision-makers.

The purpose was therefore not simply to make barriers visible. Governance was intended to provide the accountability route through which repeated barriers could be investigated, assigned to those with responsibility for them, and acted on.

Over time, Manaaki Tairāwhiti has established and overseen a range of collaborative initiatives alongside the Navigator Project, including Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke, Te Pā Harakeke, Resilience to Organised Crime, Social Recovery and the Regional Housing Strategy.

The Manaaki Tairāwhiti Governance Group includes leadership from Gisborne District Council, NGOs and central government agencies active in the social sector. At the time of writing, Board members are:

- Ronald Nepe, Chair, CE, Te Rūnanga o Tūranganui a Kiwa
- Doug Jones, CEO, Trust Tairāwhiti
- Naomi Whitewood, Te Rūnanganui o Ngāti Porou
- Daniel Murfitt, Director, Hawke's Bay/Tairāwhiti, Ministry of Education
- Julie Tangaere, Regional Manager, Oranga Tamariki
- Steve Smits-Murray, Regional Commissioner, Ministry of Social Development
- Kemara Keelan, Senior Advisor, Te Puni Kōkiri Gisborne
- Rehette Stoltz, Mayor, Gisborne District Council
- Reweti Ropiha, CE, Tūranga Health
- Danny Kirk, Area Commander, NZ Police
- Nicola Barrington, GDO, Te Whatu Ora Tairāwhiti
- Herewini Te Koha, DCE, Department of Corrections
- Leanne Forward, District Manager, Department of Corrections
- Jamie Forsman, Director, Rotorua, Tairāwhiti, Hawkes Bay, Ministry of Housing and Urban Development
- Michelle Duley, CEO, Gisborne YMCA and Tairāwhiti Community Voice representative
- Chris Semmens, Child and Family Services, Gisborne Barnardos and Violence Free Tairāwhiti Network
- Graeme Broderick, Regional Director, Kāinga Ora

A design feature of the group was that its members held the highest possible delegation powers within their own organisations (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2023e). The limitation identified by the project was not the seniority or commitment of governance members, but the scope of the authority delegated to them.

This governance structure is changing: The Manaaki Tairāwhiti Board has agreed to merge Manaaki Tairāwhiti into Tairāwhiti Community Commissioning (TCC). The current Board will be replaced by the TCC Board, because a governance group on which both providers and public sector agencies sit could not make commissioning decisions without conflict of interest. Broad community involvement will instead be held through a community shareholding structure (Tairāwhiti Community Commissioning, 2026). Chapter 22 returns to the role of community commissioning.

8.1 A Results Framework Built to Measure the System

Chapter 2 set out why the framework measures the system rather than the navigator. In practice that meant avoiding traditional provider metrics such as enrolments, appointments, plans completed, or units of service delivered. These show what navigators did, but provide limited information about

whether the wider system helped whānau meet their needs. Outcomes depended on contributions from whānau, navigators, agencies and service providers across the system, rather than on the navigator alone.

Navigators were contracted to *"do whatever it takes,"* without restrictive targets, entry criteria or narrow service specifications. Because whānau presented with multiple, related and emerging needs, navigators worked across health, housing, welfare, justice, education and other systems. Recording barriers across these systems made it possible to see which parts of the system helped, delayed, or prevented progress. Whānau entered through a number of doors, which enabled the project to reach some people whose circumstances existing agency processes had not accommodated (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2023e).

This work showed how complex and interdependent whānau needs can be. As one navigator explained, ***"it's like, deal with your sh*t and then we'll give you a house, instead of we'll give you a house, then you can deal with your sh*t,"*** describing a situation where the same issues that created the need for housing also became barriers to accessing it.

Another navigator summed up the challenge: ***"I wish I was a navigator in a place that had services..."*** In many cases, the services navigators were trying to connect whānau to either did not exist locally or were not accessible in time.

Rather than counting clients assisted, a measure that offers little insight into how well the system is working, Manaaki Tairāwhiti evaluated whether whānau needs had been met and what got in the way of meeting them.

8.2 Measuring Collective Accountability

The measurement framework captured three key data points: whānau needs, the navigator's response to those needs, and the wider system's response, making accountability for outcomes a collective responsibility across all three.



Figure 5: Outcomes are produced jointly by whānau needs and strengths, practitioner response and system conditions.

Looking at whānau circumstances, practitioner responses and system conditions together gave the project a fuller picture of why outcomes differed. Attributing results to a single service in isolation fails to recognise or give credit for the contribution of:

- Whānau strengths and their capability to improve their own situation;
- Collective responses, where cooperation or coordination of multiple practitioners across a range of organisations is needed to create a shared outcome (e.g housing, mental health support, income support and broader wellbeing impacts such as feeling heard and understood);
- Changing circumstances of whānau such as relationship breakdowns;
- The combined impact of the interventions that improve whānau wellbeing and the system conditions that reduce whānau wellbeing or keep whānau stuck in cycles of persistent disadvantage.

Looking across needs, responses and barriers in this way also makes it possible to see the cumulative impact of service gaps and fragmented responses over time.

9. The Navigator Role in Practice

"Can you help me fill these forms out? I don't understand them and don't know what to do, they are too confusing."

Navigators began working with whānau by listening, building trust and understanding the whole whānau situation before deciding what response was needed. They acted as a consistent point of contact, coordinated support across organisations and stayed involved until needs were met or it became clear that a system barrier prevented further progress. Their role extended well beyond referral: navigators provided practical support, coordinated and problem-solved across systems, sought specialist knowledge and coached whānau and other practitioners.

9.1 Working Across the Community

The navigator approach contracted a range of providers working with different whānau cohorts, including rangatahi, whānau with disabilities, whānau experiencing family harm, and whānau facing homelessness, poverty and other hardship. Working across community and iwi providers helped navigators share learning, build relationships, and strengthen their understanding of systems and subsystems.

From the outset, Manaaki Tairāwhiti worked with iwi and NGO providers that had strong whānau relationships and practical knowledge of local challenges. The first two Manaaki Navigators were hosted by Tūranga Health in 2018. Over time, with increased investment from government and Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 14 Manaaki Navigators were employed across 11 community organisations:

- Tūranga Social Services - Iwi social service
- Te Rūnanga o Tūranganui a Kiwa - Iwi social services
- Ngāti Porou Oranga - Iwi social services
- Matapuna Training Centre - Youth education and training
- Tauawhi Tairāwhiti Men's Centre - Men's centre
- New Life Fellowship - Community shelter
- CCS Disability Action - Disability service
- Your Way | Kia Roha - Disability service
- Tairāwhiti Beneficiary Advocacy Trust - Advocacy service
- Te Hapara Family Services - Social work, counselling, whānau programmes
- SuperGrans Tairāwhiti Trust - Food bank, budgeting and life skills service

These organisations worked across some of the most common and interrelated needs raised by whānau. Embedding navigators in different providers enabled learning across service contexts while maintaining a way of working practice model.

Urungi data made it possible to compare how navigators from different providers responded to need. Areas where support was harder to deliver were then explored through group reflection, shared learning and coaching.

Provider flexibility varied: Some providers tried to align the navigator role with their organisational purpose, while others allowed navigators to go wherever the work required. How much flexibility navigators had depended partly on the discretion and trust afforded to the role within each provider organisation. The embedded provider model also affected how some activity was recorded, particularly agency demand. Chapter 15 examines this in detail.

Navigator reflections also identified a tension in the collaborative model: Identifying themselves as working with Manaaki Tairāwhiti could itself make it harder to get engagement from some agencies (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2023-2025). Where a collaborative initiative is seen as scrutinising agency performance, the association can complicate the frontline relationships the work depends on. A future model therefore needs to protect the frontline relationships required to support whānau while also retaining the ability to report honestly on system performance.

9.2 The Four Value Steps (Pou)

The practice model is structured around four connected value steps: whānau engagement (whakawhanaungatanga), collective understanding (tētahi tangata pukumahi), collective response and review (mā mātou kōrero), and self-sufficiency and whānau flourishing (ka hoki mai anō). Whānau voice and consent run through every step.

A key part of the collective response step is the Whānau Plan: one plan, owned and led by whānau, recording their needs, strengths, aspirations and goals, concerns and barriers, alongside the actions, who is responsible, timeframes and a review date (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2023g).

Value Steps

Whakawhanaungatanga - Whānau Engagement
Engage with whānau to hear their story (whānau voice), understand their demand and they determine the "next steps".

Tetahi Tangata Pukumahi - Collective Understanding
- Gain a collective understanding, including agency concern, to support a collective response to whānau needs and concerns.

Ma Matou Korero - Collective Response/Review
- A collective response to meet whānau demand.
- Whānau and practitioners create opportunities to monitor, review and reflect on plan to ensure that it meets the purpose.

Ka Hoki Mai Ano - Self Sufficiency, Healthy - Whānau are Flourishing
- The system works for whanau, increasing their likelihood of flourishing.



Whānau/Voice

Method & Tools:

Referral/Intake
- Capture whānau accessing services directly.

Consent
- **Whānau** consent to collecting and sharing information between agencies to improve outcomes.
- Whānau consent to agencies using their information for the purpose of identifying and escalating barriers to improve systems.
- Whānau consent to Manaaki Tairāwhiti using their information for the purpose of increasing workforce capability.

Whānau Plan/Planning
- **Whānau** voice is documented in a plan towards increasing strength and self efficacy. (flourishing)

Practitioner Hui
- Bring practitioners together, to enable agencies/services to work collaboratively, and to help whānau achieve their goal(s).

Pull for Support
- To establish what support, pathway or service is available (within/outside of current system)

Tairāwhiti Way of Working

The Tairāwhiti Way of Working is not linear but more a set of steps to be used at the discretion of the frontline worker. These steps are not mandatory, except for consent which is required for the purpose of our work. If whānau refuse to consent this does not stop us from supporting but there are some restrictions. The Tairāwhiti Way of Working method will evolve and change as we continue to learn and build our evidence of what works best for our whānau.

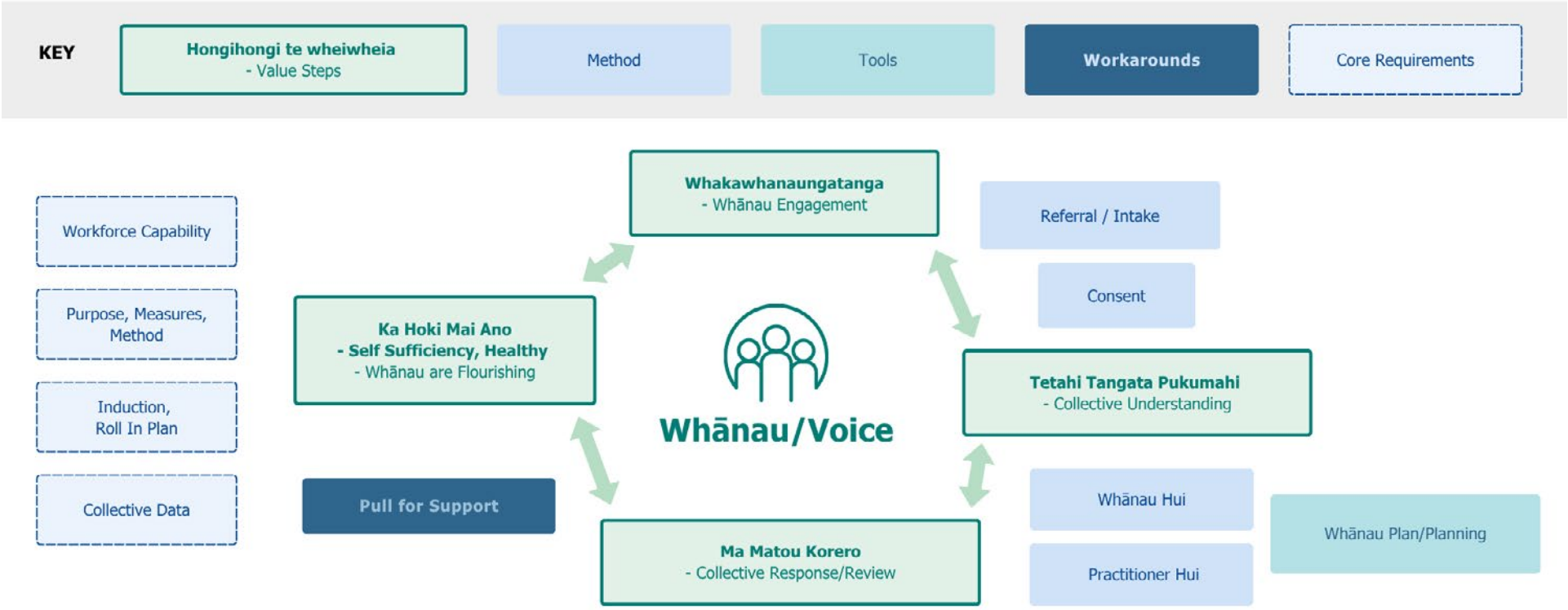


Figure 6: The four pou or value steps that describe the actions that add value for whānau in the Tairāwhiti Way of Working, and methods and tools that support each step.

A fuller explanation of the Tairāwhiti Way of Working, including research findings from the Navigator Project and whānau voice, is provided in the Health Research Council research report (Kerekere, 2025)

> **The Boundary of "Whatever It Takes"**
> The commitment is to understand and respond flexibly, but not by breaking the law or putting lives at risk. It does not require practitioners to accept unmanaged risk, replace crisis teams or specialists, or promise an outcome that cannot be achieved. Courageous conversations are sometimes needed, where there is no realistic prospect of a whānau getting the product or service they have asked for, but where alternatives may exist or questions still need to be put to agencies.

9.3 Applying the Model

Although governance had agreed in principle to sector-wide application of the Tairāwhiti Way of Working, organisational roll-in remained inconsistent, depending on provider leadership and contract alignment. In some cases, provider leaders expressed agreement with the need for change, but this did not translate into changes in organisational practice.

Navigators were also clear that the aim was never to remove or replace the system: we are not trying to have no system, the system is essential; we are trying to improve the current system to make access easier for whānau and practitioners (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2023-2025).

The Tairāwhiti Way of Working is most effective when practitioners work collectively around whānau. Where agencies do not allow the time, flexibility or authority required, the model is harder to apply and its impact is reduced.

10. Building the Workforce

"I need help getting my children school uniforms. Because its too expensive and I cannot afford it."

Workforce development was central to the project: Navigators attended fortnightly coaching and practice support sessions, and could access one-on-one coaching when needed. This support was essential because "doing whatever it takes" often required navigators to work outside familiar service pathways and draw on wider sector expertise.

Coaching was delivered by three funded Manaaki Coach/Practice Leads, whose role was to support navigators to ***"break the often internalised constraints that decades of central government contracting practices have embedded"***, and to coach them in the way of working, systems thinking and the importance of direct whānau voice in the data capture process, including how to identify and record systemic barriers (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2024a).

Two of the coaching team brought direct experience from earlier phases of the work: one had been a navigator in the 50 Families prototype and another had taken part in the Corrections system improvement work. This continuity helped carry learning from those earlier tests into the wider Navigator Project. Regular supervision and group reflection strengthened consistency across organisations and built a cross-sector network able to learn, test and solve problems collaboratively.

Coaching functioned as core project infrastructure, not as optional professional development: Initial training alone was not enough. Practitioners required different levels and frequencies of support, and provider-based Role 1/Role 2 relationships were especially effective, because experienced practitioners could coach colleagues close to the work. Attendance also mattered: navigators who did not attend shared learning hui did not progress as well as those who did, while navigators pulled into other projects lost the benefit of that shared learning.

Kerekere's research arrived at the same conclusion: *"the Programme Lead and Coaches are the unsung heroes of this mahi, because even the most experienced Kaiurungi rely on the Coaches to guide them"*. Kerekere also identified a direct link from provider conditions to data quality. Strong buy-in from providers and high uptake of coaching correlated with confidence in and commitment to the Tairāwhiti Way of Working, which in turn affected the quality of data entry into Urungi. The conclusion, that future contract arrangements should take this into account, is Recommendation 3 of this report (Kerekere, 2025).

Implementation Lessons From Navigator Reflections

Lesson	What the Reflection Showed
Flexible contracts alone did not produce consistent practice	The flexible Service Level Agreement enabled whānau-centred responses, but its intent was interpreted differently across organisations. Business-as-usual duties, provider policies and other prescriptive contracts could override the navigator purpose.
Practice depended on organisational conditions	Provider leadership, supervision, protected time, access to coaching and attendance at shared learning hui affected how consistently the model was applied.
Role boundaries mattered	Navigators could become the "go-to" person for a wide range of work, including activity arising within their host organisation as well as requests from other agencies, crisis teams or specialists. Broad-spectrum practice needs a clear purpose, appropriate role boundaries and reliable access to specialist expertise.
Workarounds helped individuals but did not change pathways	Relationships and persistence often produced a result for one whānau, but the same work had to be repeated when the next whānau encountered the barrier.
Frontline learning was not consistently connected to (and did not guarantee) leadership action	Navigators identified repeated demand and system conditions, but leaders were not routinely involved in studying the work end to end, testing change and reviewing whether performance improved.
Data burden affected learning	Duplicate entry across provider case management systems, spreadsheets and Urungi reduced completeness and could pull practice toward compliance rather than learning. This duplicate recording was not a requirement of the navigator contract. In some organisations, providers chose to maintain additional records for their own reporting or organisational purposes, such as annual reporting, which added to the data-entry burden.

11. The Two Flexible Response Tools

"I need an oven. There is no oven in the house."

Even with skilled navigators and structured practice support, some needs could not be progressed through standard pathways alone. The Tairāwhiti Way of Working used two practical tools to keep momentum when the system could not respond.

Discretionary Funding (3.0% of responses):

Flexible funding used where usual service and funding pathways could not meet a need in time, in the right way, or without creating further hardship. The project held discretionary funding sourced initially from MSD and Health and later through PBI funding. Some providers also held their own discretionary resources. Urungi used the same response category for project and provider-held discretionary funding. Chapter 11.1 reports the overall use of flexible funding across the project, then analyses the Manaaki Tairāwhiti fund separately.

Pull for Support (3.7% of responses):

A tool for bringing the support, service or decision-making authority needed into the collective response. In the navigator data, recorded Pull for Support events were generally used where normal pathways had not resolved the need and additional discretion or a different response was required. These requests ask decision makers to seek an exception, exercise available discretion, or identify a response beyond the usual pathway for urgent whānau circumstances.

11.1 Discretionary Funding: Where Standard Pathways Could Not Respond

Urungi recorded discretionary funding as a response 359 times between June 2019 and August 2025. This includes both funding administered by Manaaki Tairāwhiti and discretionary resources held by some provider organisations. Matapuna Training Centre had its own discretionary funding available for students and accounts for a large share of the overall records.

The analysis here isolates discretionary-fund responses recorded specifically against Manaaki Tairāwhiti. This identified 59 funding responses linked to 58 unique needs for 38 whānau, across 23 different need types and six systems.

59	38	58	23
Times Manaaki Tairāwhiti Discretionary Fund was Used	Whānau Supported	Unique Needs Supported	Different Need Types

The fund was not intended to replace an existing benefit, service or funding entitlement. Navigators were required to test those options first. The Discretionary Fund Guideline required them to set out the whānau need, what had already been tried through the current system, the barriers encountered, the agencies involved, whether there had been a collective response, and how discretionary funding would improve the situation. A request could proceed only when the need had been captured in Urungi and the current system had been tested and did not meet it (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2021a). Kerekere later described the purpose plainly: "before a discretionary fund is accessed, we test every other option first. The purpose is to learn what the system will not pay for" (Kerekere, 2025, p. 28).

A small number of cases were studied in more detail, and the findings show why this process

mattered. In each case, other services and supports were already involved, but the particular circumstances left a gap that none of the existing pathways could meet:

In one case, a house fire left two teenage siblings with no option but to return to their mother's home. The electricity had previously been disconnected because of their mother's credit history, so one of the teenagers agreed to have the account put in her own name after being assured the bill would be paid. Their mother later left the district, leaving the teenagers with no income and the power debt. They were eligible for independent financial support, but using a recoverable Work and Income payment to clear the arrears would simply have transferred the debt to another part of the system. The navigator connected them with Youth Services for their income support application without applying for a recoverable debt. Manaaki Tairāwhiti paid $1,445 in power arrears, allowing the teenagers to begin receiving independent support without carrying a debt created through their parent's circumstances. Other needs, including accommodation, kai, clothing and access to education, were already being addressed through the wider plan.

Another whānau had taken their mokopuna into their care because the child's parent was transient, using drugs and in an abusive relationship. They sought legal advice and began the process of obtaining a Parenting Order without requiring a statutory care and protection response. While this was underway, the family's sole income earner was diagnosed with terminal cancer. He continued paying the lawyer in instalments until his health meant he could no longer work. By then the legal costs had already been incurred and the family could not retrospectively obtain legal aid. The Cancer Society, health professionals, schools, Work and Income, a psychologist and a lawyer were already involved with the whānau, and their health and grief needs were being supported. None of those services could meet the outstanding legal cost created when the family's circumstances changed. Manaaki Tairāwhiti paid $1,530 in legal fees, preventing the debt from being referred for collection.

A third case involved a mother who had entered New Zealand for an arranged marriage that became abusive. She had a child with a life-threatening health condition requiring ongoing treatment and was pregnant with another child. Following the breakdown of the relationship, she needed to progress her residency so she could remain in New Zealand with her children. She completed the required immigration medical examination, but delays meant it expired and had to be repeated. She was already relying on food parcels and repaying legal fees from her benefit, while her immigration status restricted the assistance available to her. Multiple health and social services were supporting the whānau, but the combination of immigration eligibility, legal costs, medical requirements and delay sat outside the support any of them could provide. The navigator also worked through the limitations created by her immigration status and escalated barriers through the health system before discretionary funding was used. Manaaki Tairāwhiti contributed approximately $800 toward legal fees and a new immigration medical, allowing the residency process to continue while the mother focused on her children's health needs.

The fourth case shows a different kind of gap. A child with complex health and behavioural needs lost the support of a key worker who died unexpectedly, while a teacher who was important to her support was also away for six weeks. Her behaviour escalated, she was suspended, and she was at risk of exclusion from school. Horse riding had previously had a positive effect and was recommended as part of the therapeutic response. Her caregiver already received a benefit and Disability Allowance, which was being used for after-school care, and there was a wraparound Ministry of Education plan with several services involved. The navigator tested whether funding was available through Te Pā Harakeke and the Ministry of Education, but neither could fund the recommended therapeutic activity. Manaaki Tairāwhiti paid $350 for a term of horse riding, while the school transported her 40 kilometres each way. She remained engaged in school while agencies explored a more sustainable response.

The circumstances were different in each case, but the same gap appeared. These were not situations where nobody had tried to help. Agencies, practitioners, entitlements and plans were already around the whānau. What remained was a particular need that no existing service specification, eligibility rule or funding responsibility could accommodate.

The data shows that this was not confined to the four case stories. Of the 58 needs, 33 had at least one barrier recorded, with 71 barriers between them. Criteria, policy and legislation accounted for 27 barriers, process to access for 19 and availability for 10. Together these three categories accounted for 78.9% of the recorded barriers. Affordability itself accounted for only four.

Whānau often could not afford the thing they needed, but the barrier was usually wider than affordability alone. The discretionary fund became necessary because the existing system could not fund the need in those circumstances: an entitlement had been exhausted or did not apply, eligibility rules excluded the situation, a process could not respond in time, or the required service or resource was unavailable. Of the 58 needs, 55 were ultimately recorded as met. The fund was useful where money could resolve the remaining gap after other options had been tested; it could not create a missing house, specialist or service. These payments solved the immediate problem for the whānau involved, but they did not remove the underlying system condition. Paying the power bill, legal fees, immigration medical or therapeutic activity made a real difference at the time, yet another whānau facing similar circumstances could still encounter the same gap.

Discretionary funding therefore served two purposes. It provided enough local flexibility to respond to variation that standard pathways could not anticipate, and each use generated evidence about where those pathways stopped working. Appendix D examines what the Manaaki Tairāwhiti fund was used for, the barriers around those needs, and what this means for future commissioning.

11.2 Pull for Support: Escalating When Standard Pathways Failed

Navigators used recorded Pull for Support responses when normal agency pathways had been tried and the need still could not be resolved. This often meant drawing on senior relationships or system improvement channels to bring in the person, service or decision-making authority needed to progress the issue.

444	277	65	588
Times Pull for Support was Used	Whānau Supported	Different Need Types Supported	Barriers Encountered Before Escalating

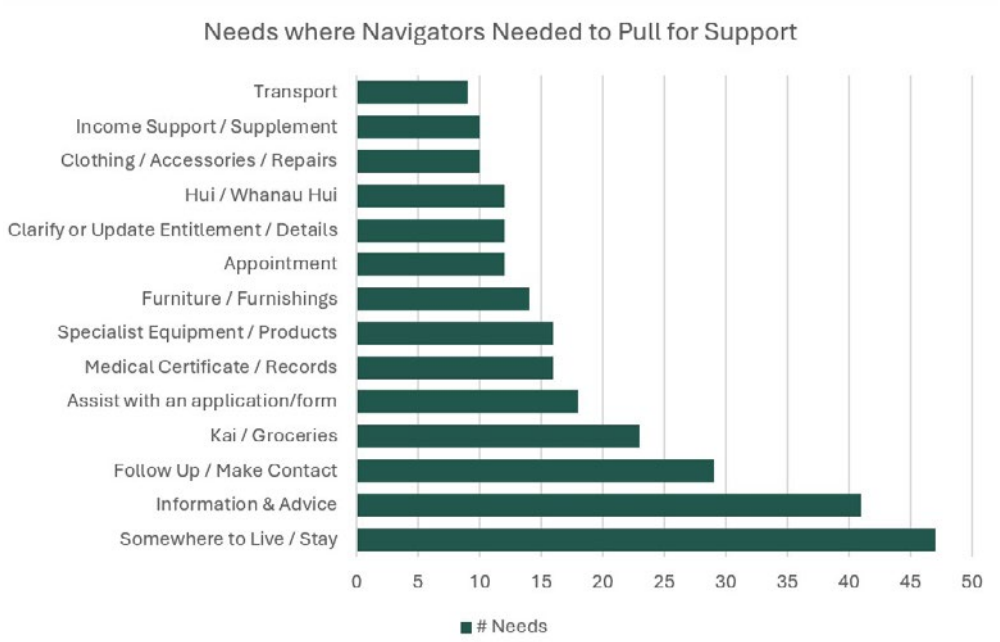


Figure 7: Pull for Support was used most often for housing, information, follow-up, kai and forms, showing the types of need for which exception-handling was required after standard pathways had not resolved the issue.

Pull for Support was used most often for housing, information, follow-up, kai and forms - situations where an exception, additional discretion or a different response was needed to make progress.

Navigator reflections indicate that agencies often responded once the full whānau context was understood and appropriate discretion could be exercised. In many cases this meant discretionary funding was not required. The issue was not always willingness to help; it was that access to a different response often depended on relationships and individual judgement, so the same work had to be repeated when another whānau encountered the same barrier.

> Implications for Commissioning:
> Where appropriate discretion resolves a need, commissioners should consider whether that discretion can be built into the pathway rather than accessed through repeated escalation.
> A local commissioning arrangement can make discretion a designed feature rather than an exception negotiated case by case.

12. Urungi: Designed to Capture Variation

"I need a phone. I need it to get on the emergency housing waitlist."

Urungi is a platform that was built to hold whānau voice, **not to act as a case management system.** Most social service providers already have case management systems, which hold information about a person in order to manage the service being delivered to them. Urungi holds evidence about how the system performed, so that it can be used to call for accountability and quality improvement. Personal information remained with individual providers and was not duplicated.

Urungi was developed from the measurement approach rather than the other way around. Data capture began with sticky notes and spreadsheets and later moved into a purpose-built database as the measures became clearer.

Kerekere's research reached the same conclusion about the importance of this approach: "The heart of the Tairāwhiti Way of Working is listening to and capturing Whānau Voice." Her research found that Urungi had become an important source of information for decision-makers, while also finding that it was not yet being used to its full potential in planning and decision-making across Tairāwhiti (Kerekere, 2025).

12.1 Full Variation of Need

A system that records demand primarily within predefined service categories can make needs for which no existing service exists difficult to see. Urungi was designed to retain those needs in the data whether or not a service was available to meet them. The project's core whānau-voice information came directly from whānau and was recorded as close to verbatim as possible by navigators, including:

- Number and types of needs, capturing the full variation rather than only fundable categories;
- Outcome, whether needs were met or not;
- End-to-end time to outcome, as a measure of accountability and system performance;
- Number and types of barriers linked to each need, with context and the relationship between issues;
- Number and types of responses, recording who did what.

All data collected was moderated and analysed by the coaches and the data analyst.

Each narrative was recorded in free form and then broken down into needs and reasons in the form **"I need or want… because…".** Alongside it, where possible, navigators recorded the organisation the navigator was based at, the relevant system and subsystem, whether a barrier was identified, whether the need was met, and the number of days to outcome.

To establish whether services are reaching the right people across a cohort of those asking for help, personal information was not required.

12.2 Three Things These Measures Do That Conventional Measures Do Not

Measure end-to-end time rather than activity counts: Recording the date the need was presented and the date it was met measures the journey rather than the transaction. An agency can meet every internal service standard while a whānau waits three months.

Treat the navigator response as system evidence rather than productivity: Navigator actions such as driving someone to an appointment, following up a form or finding a workaround were recorded as evidence of the work required to progress a need. This helped show where the existing pathway

had not provided a usable response. The response measure captures what the system was unable to provide, rather than how hard navigators worked. What it did not always capture is who met the need where a need was met, and Chapter 21.3 sets out what follows from that.

Record agency demand separately from whānau demand: Urungi kept requests entering through agencies or services separate from what whānau asked for directly. Chapter 15 examines this category and its interpretation limitations.

System improvement was not left to leaders and coaches alone. The statements for Collective Response and Collective Review each carry a system improvement work measure block: that the system supports a bottom-up approach; that success and failure are used to understand system conditions; that barriers are identified, documented and escalated; and that gaps in services are identified and solutions actioned.

Evidence from whānau informed navigator practice and created a foundation for reporting on whole-of-system performance. A quarterly dashboard showed local leaders where needs and barriers were occurring, supported by more detailed analysis and case studies throughout the project.

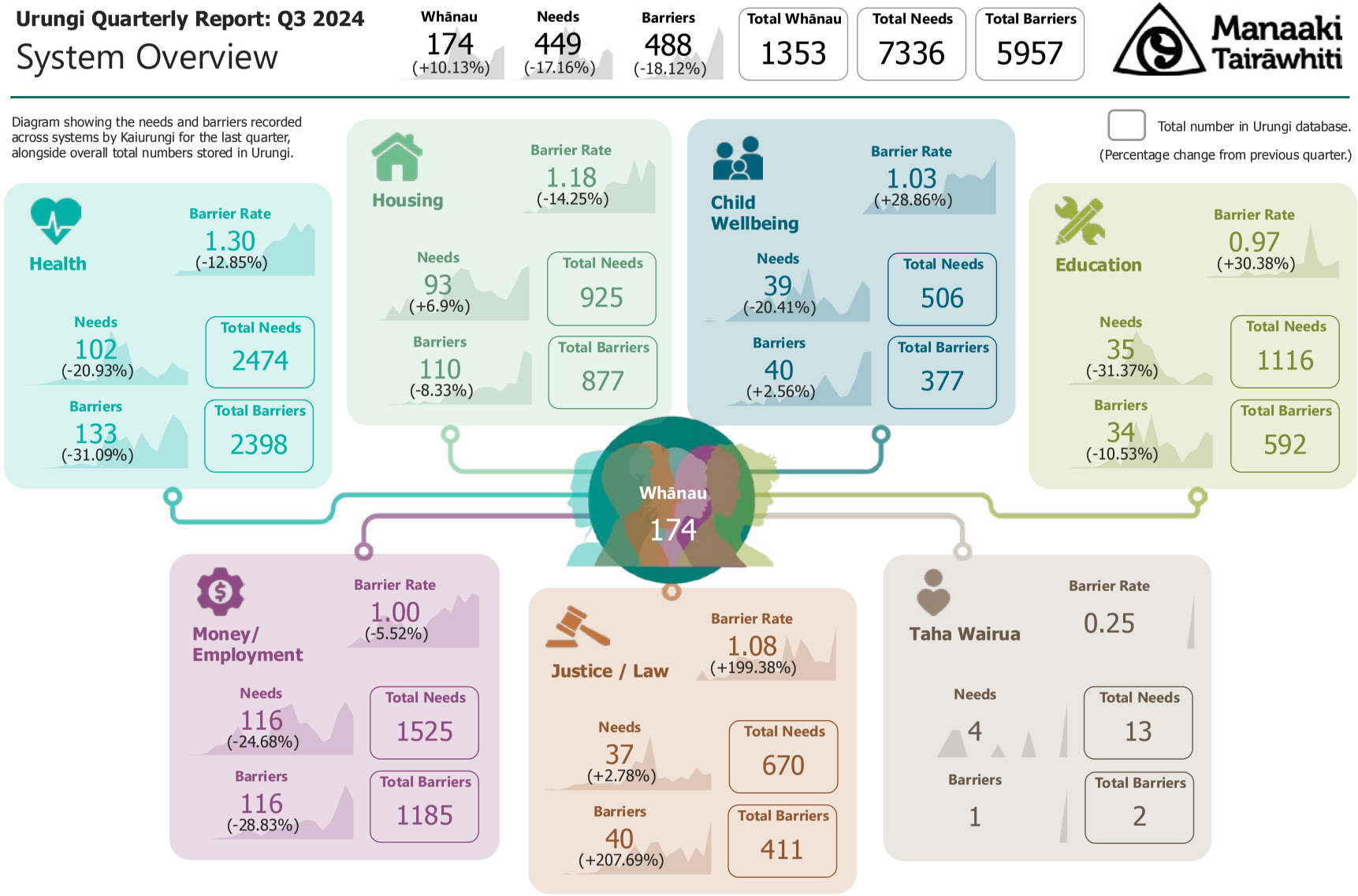


Figure 8: Example of the quarterly report overview used to make patterns of need, response and barrier visible to governance.

12.3 Why This Data is Different from National Data

National datasets describe what the system did: Applications received, entitlements granted, waiting lists held, services delivered. National datasets are accurate and necessary, but their strength is in counting activity within predefined categories, which means demand outside those categories can be harder to see.

Urungi records what whānau asked for and separately records demand entering the navigator role through agencies and services. Its distinguishing feature is that expressed need can remain visible whether or not it fits an existing service category.

When data is entered in the flow of work, Urungi can provide a timely, near-real-time view of changing demand: This can help the region see shifts as they occur and adjust local responses, as happened during the cyclone period described in Chapter 18. The usefulness of this information depends on having the authority to act on it.

PART THREE: PERFORMANCE

What the data showed and what it means

13. What We Measured, and How to Read It

The data in this part comes from Urungi, the measurement tool used by Manaaki Navigators to record whānau needs and concerns, the reasons behind them, responses, outcomes and barriers encountered while seeking support. The main reporting period is June 2019 to September 2025.

The analysis is Manaaki Tairāwhiti's own. Citations to Manaaki Tairāwhiti refer to our project reports, case studies and internal records listed in the report references. Independent evidence is cited to its authors. Chapters 14 to 21 set out what the project recorded and learned. Chapter 22 draws that evidence into recommendations and the proposed balance between national and local decision-making.

13.1 Core Definitions

A recorded **demand** is a need, concern or request entered in Urungi. It may be recorded as a whānau need, whānau concern or agency demand. One demand may have several responses and more than one barrier.

A **response** is an action taken by a navigator, agency, service provider, whānau member or other party to progress that demand.

A **barrier** is anything that delayed, hindered or prevented progress toward the support required.

Demand types describe how the demand entered the dataset. A **whānau need** is something whānau directly asked for help with. A **whānau concern** is something whānau raised as worrying them, without necessarily attaching a specific request. An **agency demand** is a request recorded as coming through an agency or service rather than directly from whānau.

Demand categories describe what was being asked for. A **direct need** is a product, service, resource or practical outcome. A **system-support need** is help to find, understand, access or progress support through a service pathway.

13.2 Barrier Types

The barrier themes used were not set in advance by a research design or an agency reporting template. They emerged from the work itself. Navigators recorded what got in the way as they walked alongside whānau through service pathways. Once enough information had been captured, recurring patterns became visible and were grouped into barrier themes.

Barrier Theme	Description
Process to access	Steps, forms, assessments, documentation or sequencing required before support could begin or progress.
Communication process	Unclear, absent, delayed, contradictory or otherwise ineffective information or communication.
Criteria, policy and legislation	Eligibility rules, policy settings or legislative requirements that excluded or constrained the response for the circumstances recorded.
Availability	The service, resource, product or specialist did not exist locally, had no capacity, or was not available when required.
Delivery mode	The way support was designed or delivered did not fit the whānau circumstances, including channel, location, format or service configuration.
Professional or agency relationship	The way whānau were treated, or the way organisations worked with each other, hindered progress.
Timeliness and delays	A response was available but arrived too late, or delay made it less useful or created additional work.
Affordability	Cost to whānau prevented or materially constrained access to the support required.

Timeliness and affordability were originally captured within broader access barriers and were separated later as the dataset grew. Both appeared frequently enough, and described sufficiently different system conditions, to justify being measured separately.

13.3 Data Limitations

The data reflects whānau who engaged with Manaaki Navigators rather than the whole Tairāwhiti population, so the counts and percentages describe patterns within navigator-supported journeys.

A need recorded as met means it was resolved during the navigator-supported journey. Urungi did not always show whether the accountable service, the navigator, whānau themselves or someone else ultimately resolved it. Outcome figures therefore tell us what happened for whānau; they do not, on their own, measure agency performance.

Recording conditions changed over the life of the project. At different stages navigators used spreadsheets, Urungi and provider case management systems, sometimes requiring duplicate entry by their host provider. Organisational support, participation in coaching and recording consistency also varied. This means some populations and systems are more visible in the dataset than others. Disability-related demand, for example, is particularly visible because some of the most consistent data contributors worked in disability services.

Navigator capability to recognise and record barriers also improved as coaching and practice support developed. Changes in recorded barrier rates over time need to be read alongside that improvement in recording.

Agency demand needs to be interpreted carefully because navigators were embedded within

community and iwi providers and some held overlapping roles. A request recorded as agency demand may have come from an external agency, a colleague or manager within the navigator's host provider, or another part of the navigator's role. The category tells us how the demand entered the work; it does not establish which organisation was accountable for the task or whether work was being transferred from one organisation to another.

The project did not advertise for referrals. Whānau came through recommendation, word of mouth, hui and practitioners who knew the work. This preserved several ways into the project rather than creating one formal referral gate.

Case studies also cover different periods and subsets of the data. Their figures are therefore not always identical to the totals in this report. Where a case study figure is used, its date range is stated.

Project documents use both active and cumulative workforce counts. In 2024/25 there were 14 active navigators across 10 provider organisations. Across the life of the project, 31 people held navigator roles and 14 provider organisations contributed data at some point.

14. What Whānau Needed

"I want essentials. I need a lot for the kids and myself, but I will wait until we get a home first as we have nowhere to store clothes and stuff."

Urungi recorded a total of 8,299 demands. Of these, 7,122 were recorded directly from whānau as whānau needs or whānau concerns. A further 1,140 were recorded as agency demands and 37 were unclassified.

The project deliberately recorded both the underlying thing whānau wanted and the help required to reach it. Within the 7,122 demands recorded directly from whānau, 3,948 (55.4%) were direct needs for a product, service, resource or practical outcome. The remaining 3,174 (44.6%) were system-support needs: help to find, understand, access or progress support.

Across the full dataset, including agency demand and the 37 unclassified records, the split was even closer: 4,308 direct needs (51.9%) and 3,991 system-support needs (48.1%). Whānau were almost as likely to need help getting through a service pathway as they were to need the underlying product or service itself.

This system-support work formed a substantial part of the demand recorded by the project. A housing need is a legitimate need for housing, while the further calls, forms, appointments, follow-up, advocacy and re-explaining required to progress it are additional work generated around that need, and Urungi recorded both.

14.1 Where Whānau Demand Sat

Whānau demand spanned every major system navigators worked with. Health and money/ employment accounted for more than half of the 7,122 whānau demands, with substantial demand also recorded in housing, education, justice and child wellbeing.

System	Total Whānau Demand	Direct Needs	System-Support Needs	System-Support Share
Health	2,286	1,082	1,204	52.7%
Money / Employment	1,754	1,165	589	33.6%
Housing	956	661	295	30.9%
Education	837	363	474	56.6%
Justice / Law	671	396	275	41.0%
Child Wellbeing	573	255	318	55.5%
Taha Wairua	18	9	9	50.0%
Taha Whānau	16	6	10	62.5%
Not Specified	11	11	0	0.0%
Total	7,122	3,948	3,174	44.6%

The balance differed markedly by system: Housing and money or employment were weighted toward direct needs where whānau were more often seeking an actual product, service or practical outcome. Health, education and child wellbeing were more evenly divided or weighted toward system support. In those systems, a large share of recorded demand was the work of accessing, understanding, coordinating or progressing support.

14.2 Whānau Needs and Whānau Concerns

Of the 7,122 whānau demands, 6,808 were recorded as whānau needs: something whānau directly asked for help with. A further 314 were recorded as whānau concerns: something whānau raised as worrying them without necessarily asking for a particular service response.

Demand Type	Direct Needs	System-Support Needs	Total
Whānau Need	3,805	3,003	6,808
Whānau Concern	143	171	314
Total Whānau Demand	3,948	3,174	7,122

Recording concerns separately meant the project did not automatically convert everything whānau raised into a service request. A concern may lead to action, but it may also be uncertainty, a preference, a need for information or something whānau want understood before deciding what happens next.

14.3 What Was Being Asked For

Among the 3,948 direct needs brought by whānau, the most common request was for somewhere to live or stay. Transport, kai, clothing and income support were also prominent.

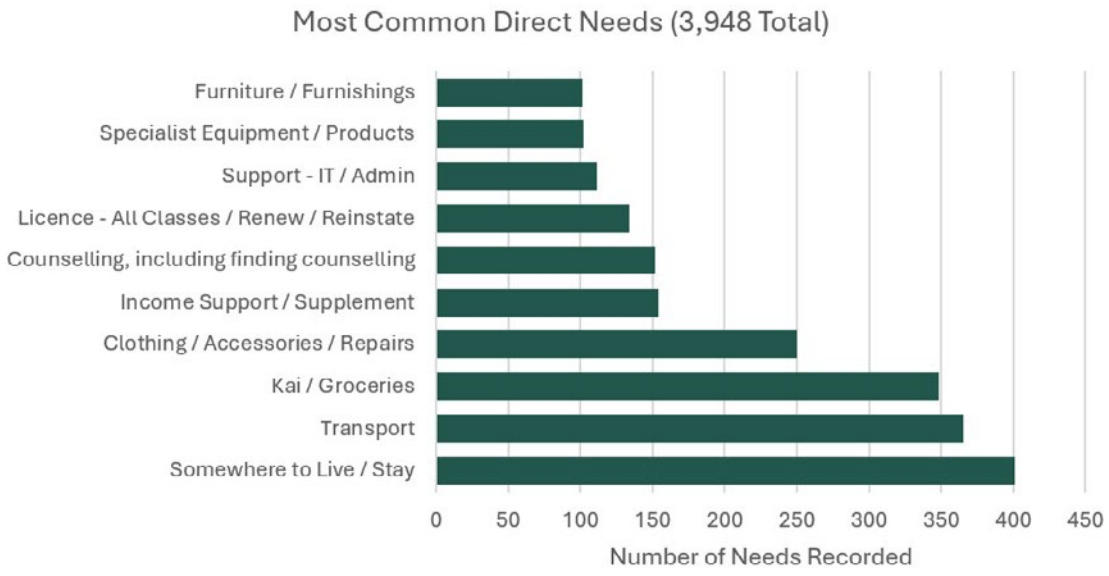


Figure 9: The most frequently recorded direct needs - the products, services or practical outcomes whānau were seeking.

These ten themes accounted for 53.6% of whānau direct needs. Direct demand was broad: 63 different direct need themes were recorded. The pattern includes housing, transport, food security, income, health and counselling, disability-related equipment, licensing and practical administrative support.

Five practical hardship supports (transport, kai and groceries, clothing, furniture and household essentials, and communication access) accounted for 1,136 records, or 28.8% of whānau direct demand. These categories do not prove material hardship in every case, but their volume shows how often practical everyday needs sat alongside other work.

System-support demand was more concentrated. The most common requests were for information and advice, someone to attend with whānau, follow-up, help with applications and forms, and someone to speak on their behalf.

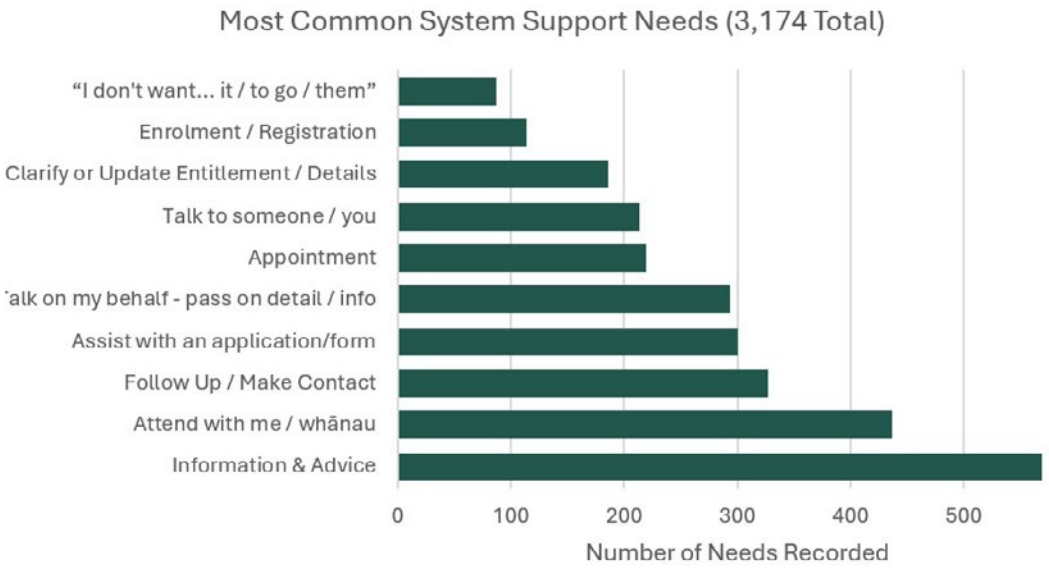


Figure 10: The most frequently recorded system-support needs - 'help to find, understand, access or progress support.

These ten themes accounted for 86.5% of whānau system-support demand. Unlike direct demand, which spread across many different things people needed, system-support demand clustered around a small number of recurring tasks required to reach or progress services.

Repeated system-support demand points to the pathway itself as a target for improvement, rather than only to a need for more navigation capacity. Navigation is valuable where whānau need it. But if the same additional work appears repeatedly around the same service, the pathway itself also needs attention.

Some of this system-support demand can be understood as failure demand: additional work generated because an earlier response did not resolve the issue, or because the pathway was difficult to find, understand or progress through. But system-support demand should not automatically be classified as failure demand. Some accompaniment, advocacy or coordination may be appropriate because of the nature of the situation. Recording it separately allows repeated patterns to be studied to determine which work is necessary and which might be reduced through better system design.

14.4 Why Whānau Asked for Help

The "Because" field in Urungi adds context that a service category alone cannot provide. The reasons whānau gave for seeking help reflected both material hardship and difficulties within service pathways.

For direct needs, the most common reasons included affordability, not having enough of an essential item, health concerns and homelessness. Relationship breakdown, safety concerns and uncertainty about where to go also featured strongly.

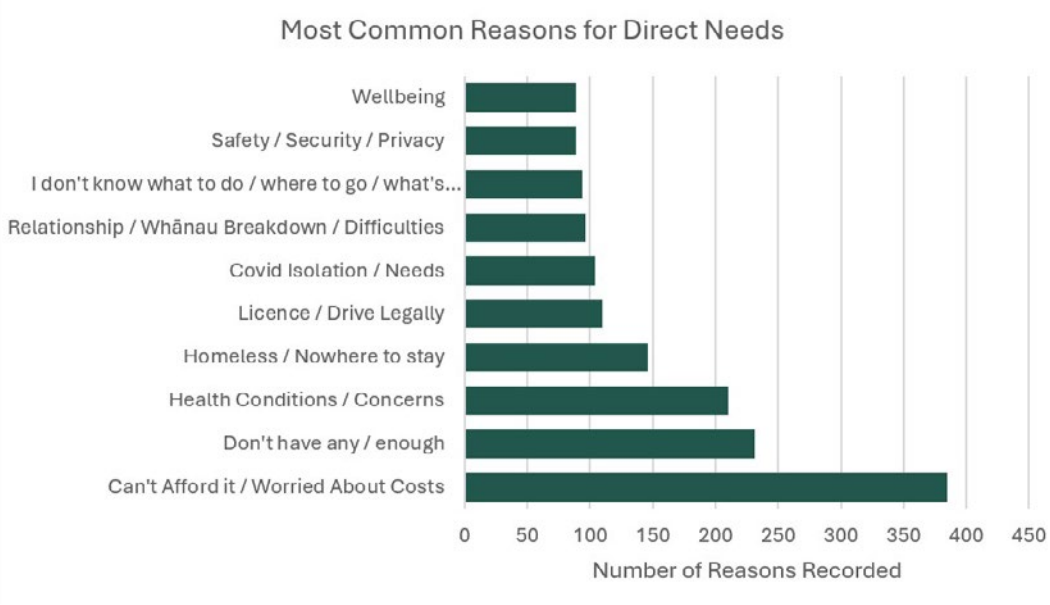


Figure 11: The most common reasons given for needing a product, service or practical outcome.

The reasons behind system-support demand were different. The most common was simply not knowing what to do, where to go or what was happening. Other recurring reasons included needing a support person, benefit applications or reviews, health treatment, lack of follow-through, stress, safety and trust.

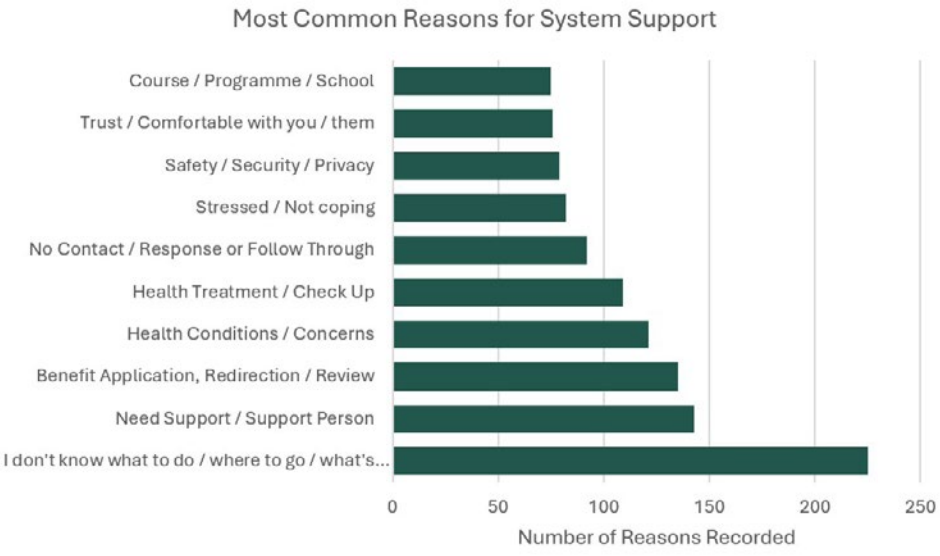


Figure 12: The most common reasons given for needing help to find, understand or progress support.

The reasons help explain why apparently similar requests can require different responses. A request for somewhere to live because a tenancy is ending is different from a request for somewhere to live because the current home is unsafe. A request to attend an appointment may arise because the person needs practical transport, because they do not understand what will happen, because they do not trust the service, or because they want someone present to help communicate.

This is why the Navigator Project recorded the need and the reason together. A service category on its own cannot show the circumstances around the request.

> Commissioners therefore need to address both the supply of the products and services whānau are asking for, and the additional work required to reach services that already exist. The same demand data can therefore show both where provision is missing and where recurring access work might be reduced through simpler processes, clearer information, better coordination or appropriate local discretion.

15. Demand Recorded as Agency Demand

"Can you come to an appointment on Monday with a complex whanau. Dad is on ACC but other than that they have nobody else involved. I have done everything I can in my role."

Agency demand recorded by a Manaaki Tairāwhiti Navigator in Urungi

Urungi recorded 1,140 demands as agency demand, representing 13.7% of all recorded demand. This category identifies requests recorded as coming through an agency or service rather than directly from whānau.

Agency demand needs careful consideration. Navigators were embedded within community and iwi providers, and some held overlapping roles. A request recorded as agency demand could therefore have come from an external agency, a manager or colleague within the navigator's host provider, or another part of the navigator's role. The category tells us what kind of work entered through organisational channels; it does not tell us who would otherwise have been responsible for it.

Demand Type	Direct Needs	System-Support Needs	Total
Agency Demand	334	806	1,140
Share	29.3%	70.7%	100%

Agency demand was much more heavily weighted toward system-support work than demand recorded directly from whānau. Seven in every ten agency demands involved finding, progressing, coordinating or supporting access to a service rather than providing the underlying product or service.

15.1 What Was Recorded as Agency Demand

Follow Up / Make Contact was the most common system-support need recorded as agency demand, appearing 306 times and accounting for 38.0% of the 806 agency system-support demands. By comparison, Follow Up / Make Contact accounted for 327 of 3,174 whānau system-support demands, or 10.3%.

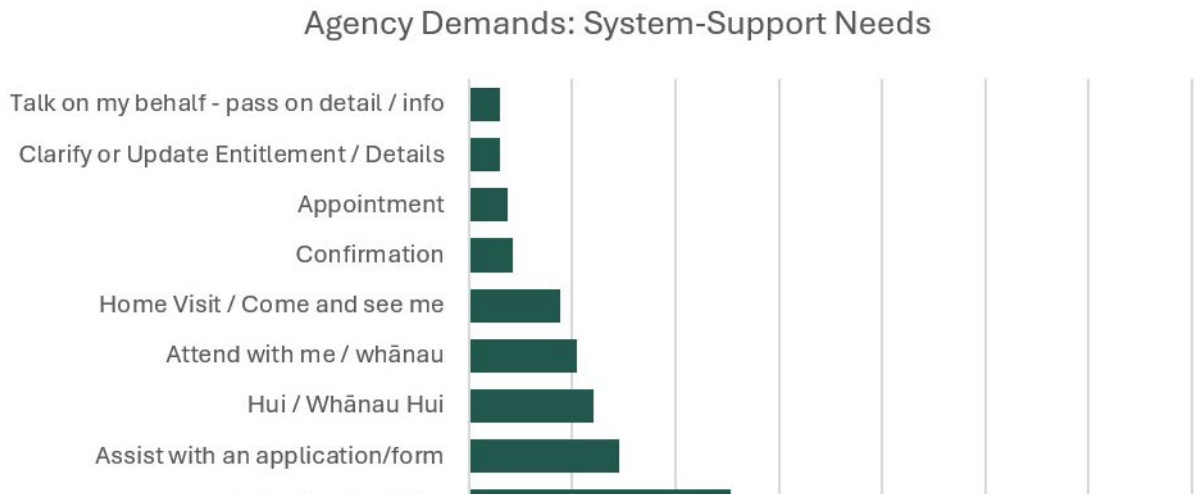


Figure 13: The most frequently recorded system-support needs classified as agency demand.

The first six system-support themes accounted for 82.1% of agency system-support demand. Much of the work was about maintaining contact, progressing processes, helping with forms, attending alongside whānau and connecting people with other parts of the system.

Agency demand also included direct needs, and housing stood out among them. Somewhere to Live / Stay was recorded 101 times, accounting for 30.2% of all direct agency demand. Kai, medical certificates or records, transport, coordinated plans and tutoring or resources also appeared.

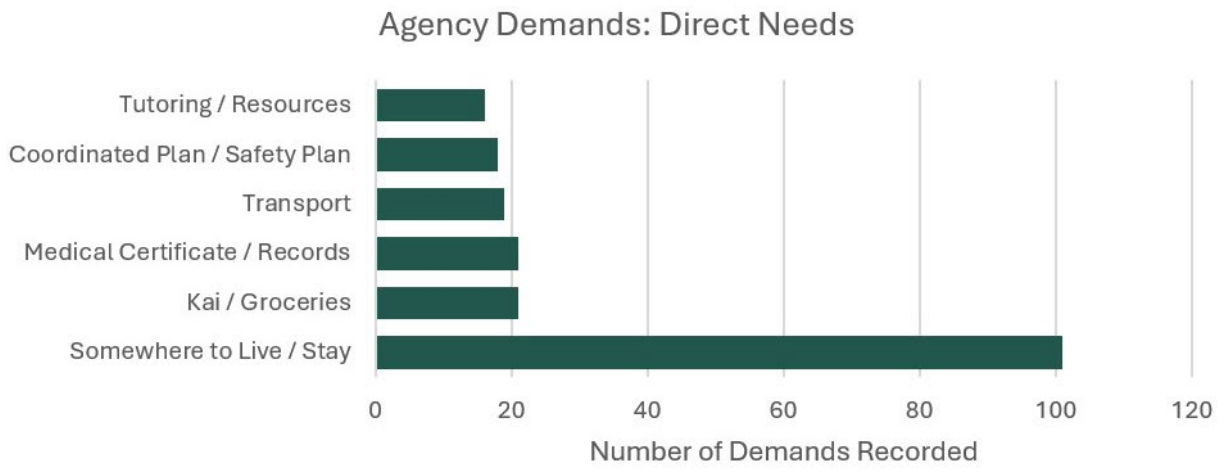


Figure 14: The most frequently recorded direct needs classified as agency demand.

A future model should keep the role flexible without making it the place every difficult task is sent. Future data collection should also distinguish requests from the navigator's host provider from requests from external agencies, and record why the navigator or frontline practitioner was asked to act. That would make it easier to separate intentional collaboration from unclear responsibility, service gaps or avoidable additional work.

16. Where the System Could Not Flex

"Can you call the dentist about the waitlist for teeth getting pulled out? My son has stopped talking for over a month as his mouth is sore."

Across the Urungi dataset, 6,780 barriers were recorded against 8,299 demands. Just over half of all recorded demands, 51.3%, encountered at least one barrier.

6,780	51.3%	1.59	4.40
Total Barriers Documented	of Demands hit a Barrier	Average Barriers per Demand Affected	Average Barriers per Whānau

A barrier was recorded against a specific demand when something delayed, hindered or prevented progress. So when this report says 51.3% of demands hit a barrier, it means that in more than half of the cases where support was being sought, at least one thing got in the way of resolving it.

Number of Barriers Across Systems:

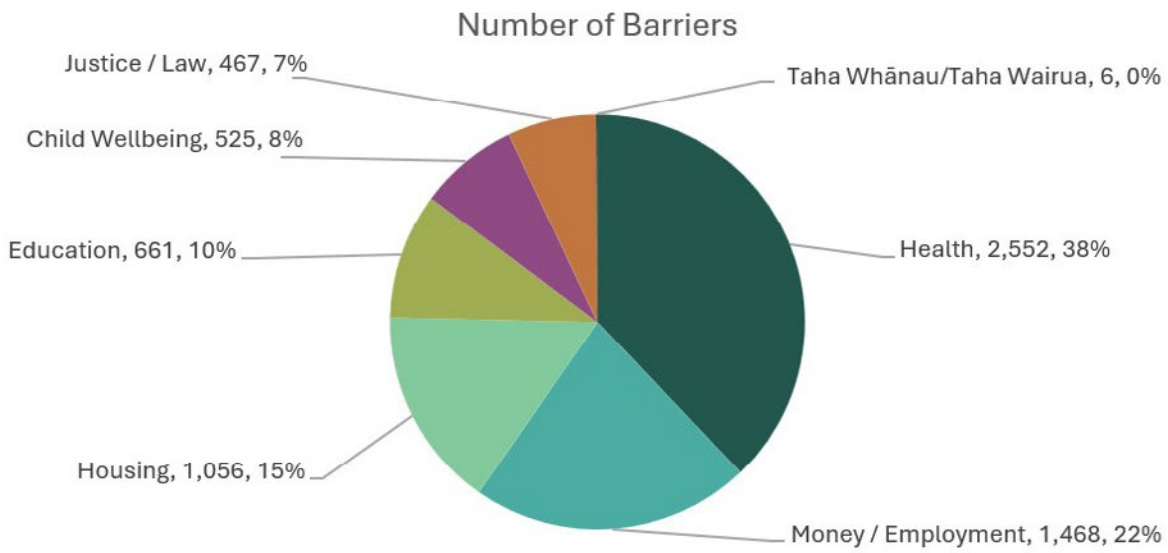


Figure 15: Number of recorded barriers across systems.

Percentage of Needs With 1 or More Barriers:

Health **57%**	Money/ Employment **54%**	Housing **53%**
Education **39%**	Justice/Law **44%**	Child Wellbeing **52%**

Affected needs faced an average of 1.59 barriers each. Barrier rates are high across every major system, with health, money/employment, housing and child wellbeing all above 50%. This is not a pattern that can be assigned to one agency or sector, and the same whānau often needed help across several systems at once.

Some needs carried especially heavy barrier loads. Tenancy issues, property access, respite care and parenting support commonly required several organisations to line up, or depended on services with limited local capacity. The need itself was not always complicated but the pathway around it could be.

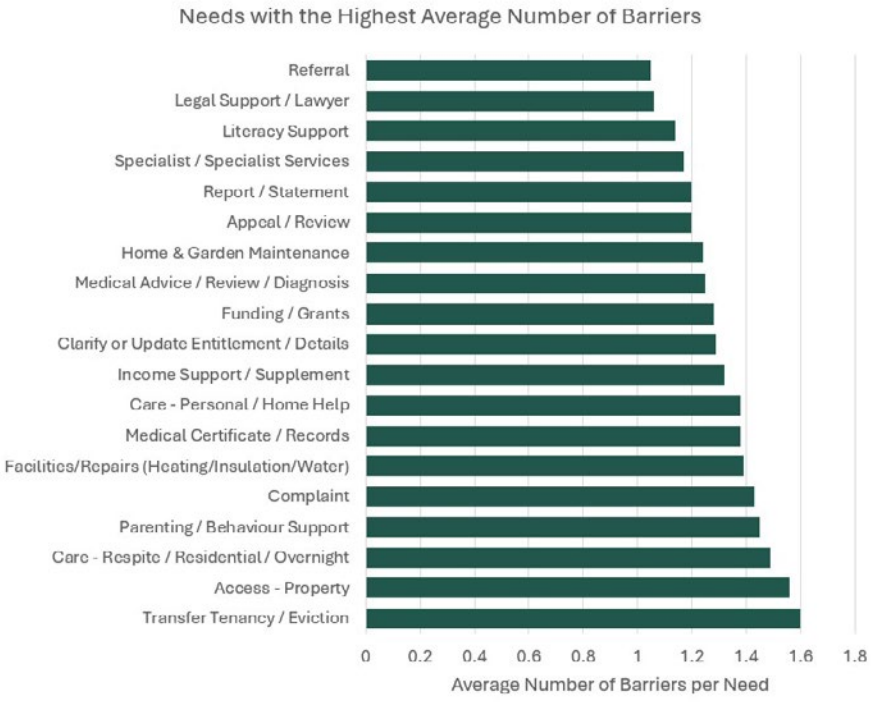


Figure 16: Needs requiring action across more than one organisation, or depending on limited service capacity, carried the heaviest barrier loads.

The care and respite case study gives a closer view. It analysed 344 narratives from 107 whānau, identifying 365 care-related needs between June 2019 and May 2023 and 439 recorded system barriers. Barrier rates for carer support and respite care were above 85% in that case-study dataset (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2023d).

The system improvement programme that followed then studied the same pathway from inside the system. Led by a dedicated project manager, Michelle Duley, it identified five funders and no single owner of the pathway as a whole. Appendix E follows that work from whānau voice through mapping, redesign and test-and-learn activity.

16.1 Barriers Did Not Reduce Over the Life of the Project

Over six years, the project did not record a reduction in system friction. Recorded barriers rose from 0.56 per demand in 2019 to 1.02 in 2024 (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2025b).

Some of the increase reflects better recognition and recording of barriers as navigator capability grew, and the mix of demand also changed over time. The data cannot separate those effects from changes in system conditions.

The same broad themes continued to appear in later years, and navigator reflections describe many of the issues identified early in the project still recurring years later.

The amount of work required to respond moved in the same direction. Recorded responses rose from 1.16 per demand in 2019 to 1.89 in 2024, an increase of 63%. That is not a productivity measure, it is a measure of how much recorded effort sat around each demand.

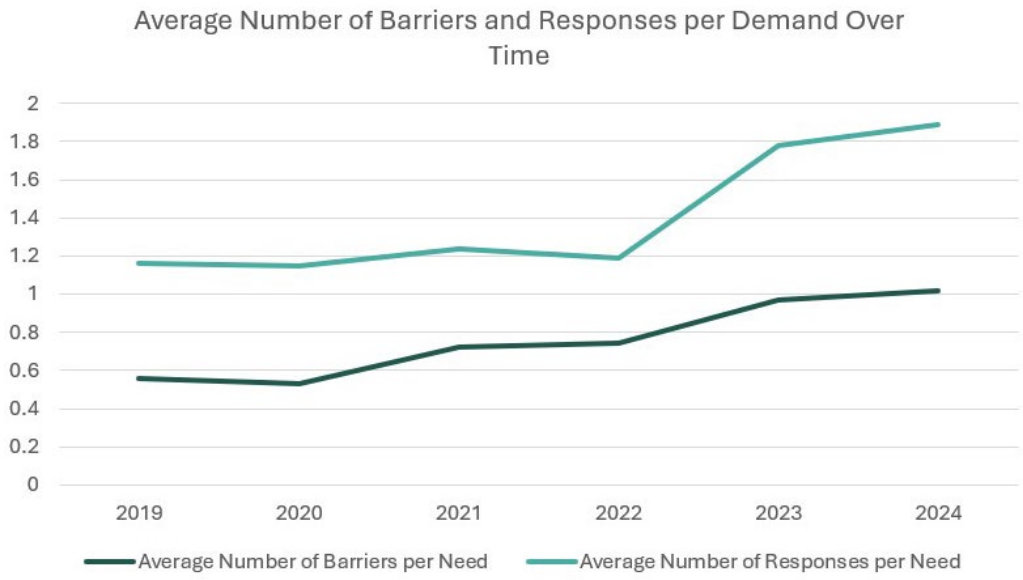


Figure 17: Both the friction whānau encountered and the effort navigators expended rose across the life of the project.

The original expectation was that evidence about repeated barriers would feed a learning loop: understand the barrier, bring in those who control the system condition, test a different design, and make the better design normal. The project became increasingly good at identifying and understanding repeated barriers, but was much less able to secure and sustain a redesign where the relevant settings sat outside local control.

16.2 Barriers Have Wide-Ranging Impacts

Barriers were associated with around 170 identified agencies, providers and cross-agency pathways. The largest counts were linked to high-contact parts of the system, including Work and Income/MSD, health, disability support, housing and multi-agency interactions.

Those counts are not a ranking of agency quality. Organisations differ greatly in size, role and frequency of contact, so a high-volume agency will naturally appear more often in the records. Barriers were widely distributed, and whānau journeys frequently crossed more than one organisation.

Some barriers sat inside one service. Others were created between services, where two reasonable processes did not line up around the same whānau. Poor alignment is itself a barrier, and it is difficult to resolve where no one owns the whole pathway.

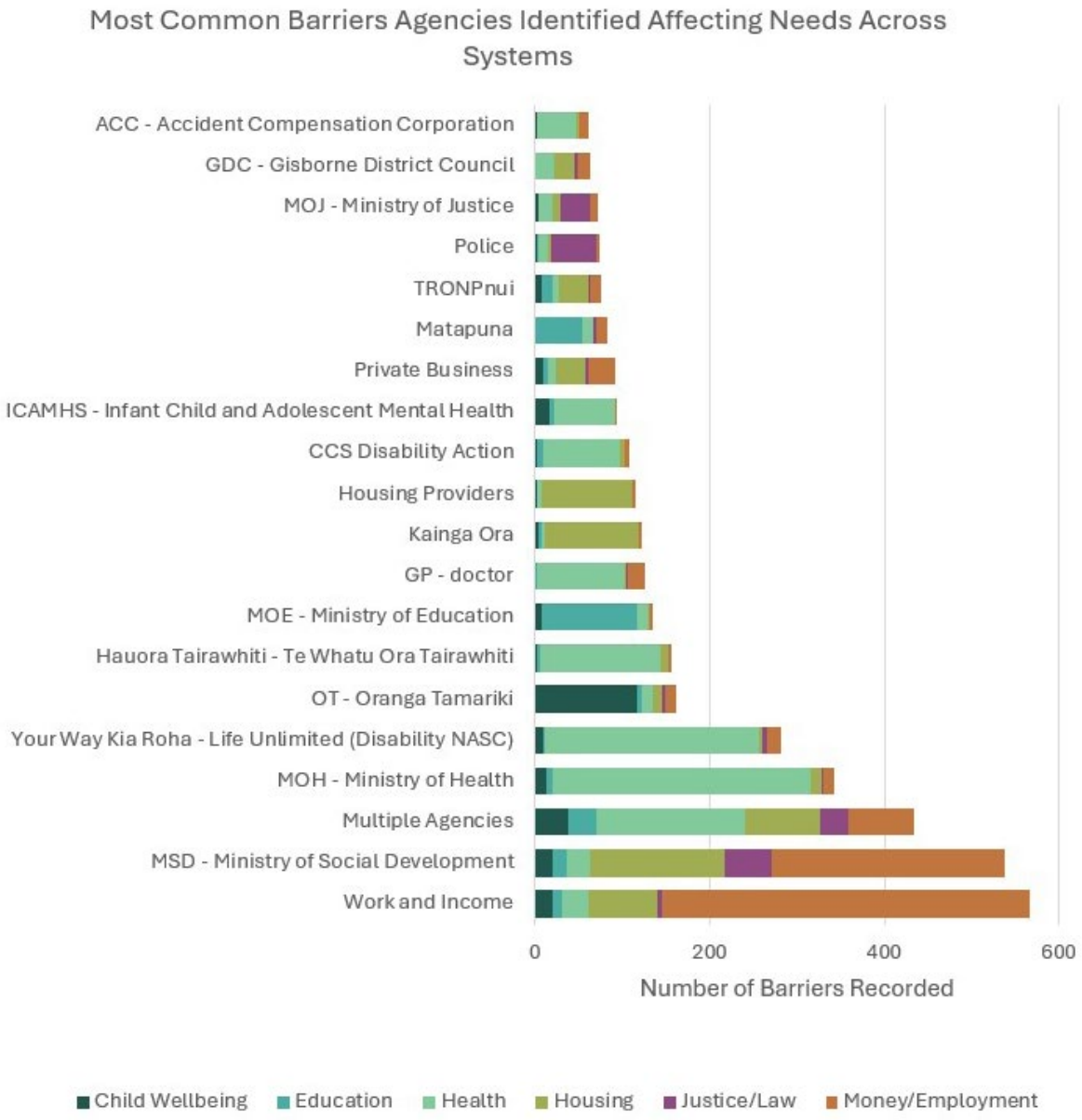


Figure 18: Recorded barrier counts by agency and cross-agency pathway. These counts show where barriers were recorded most often; they are not a ranking of agency quality.

The education attendance case study shows the breadth of those connections. The analysis followed 74 whānau needing support with school attendance and identified 56 agencies involved across their wider journeys. Twenty-three of those agencies or pathways were associated with recorded barriers (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2023b). The same whānau were dealing with health, income, housing, transport, justice and child wellbeing issues alongside school attendance.

16.3 Understanding Different Barrier Types

The barrier themes are defined in Chapter 13. In practice, they began with what navigators recorded in the flow of work and were grouped as recurring patterns became visible. The categories describe the difficulty experienced in the whānau journey; they do not, on their own, identify the root cause or the organisation accountable for changing it. The project's Purpose-Measures-Method framework used the term "perceived barriers" for that reason.

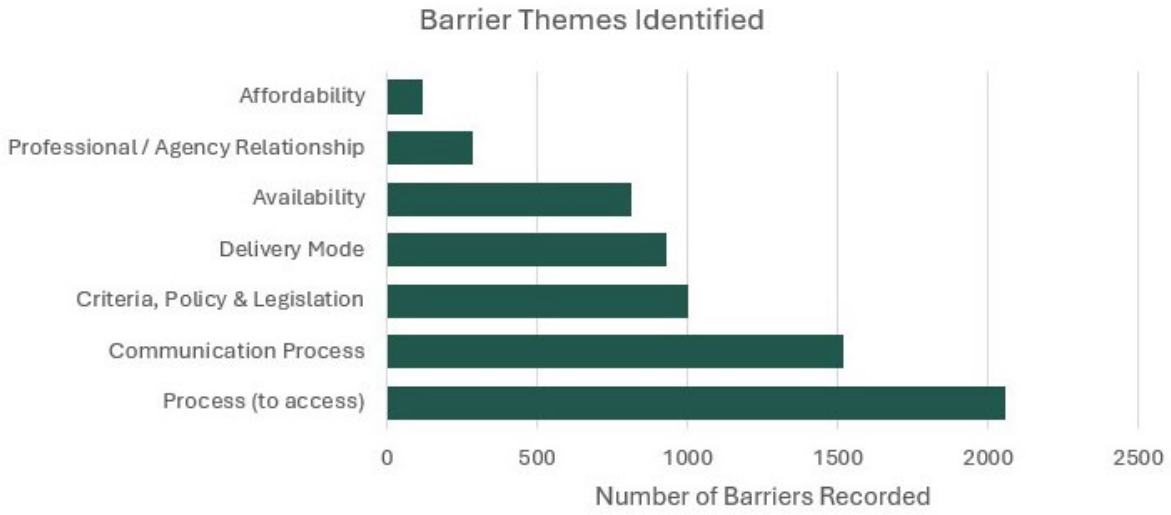


Figure 19: Process to access and communication process together account for 53% of all recorded barriers.

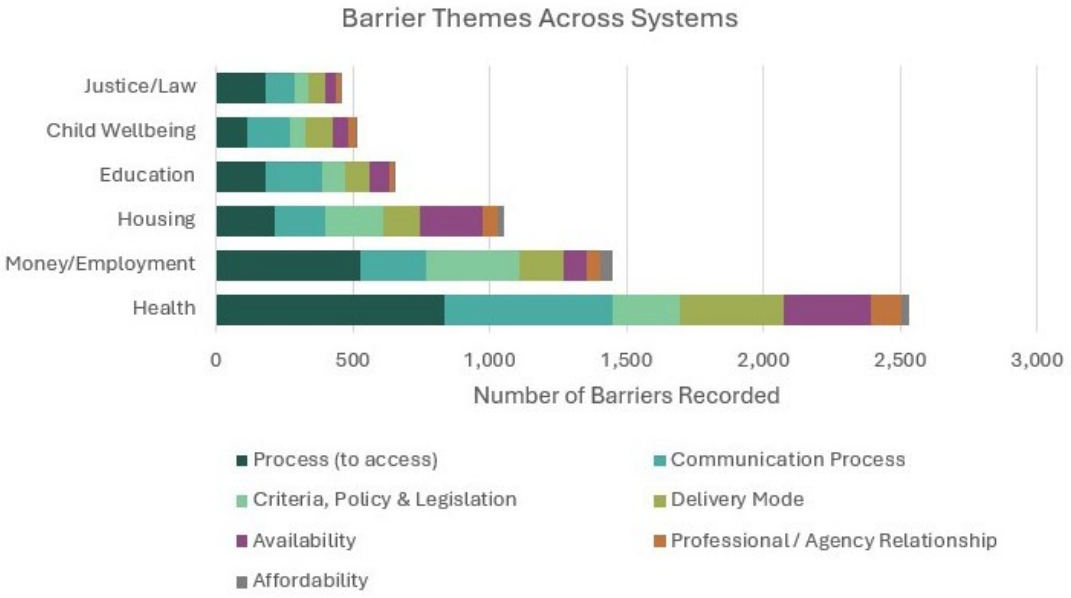


Figure 20: Every barrier type appears in every system, but not in the same proportions. Housing is the only system where availability is the largest barrier. Criteria, policy and legislation weigh heaviest in money and employment. Health generates more process and communication barriers than any other system.

The largest barrier types were Process (to Access) and Communication Process. Together they made up 53% of all recorded barriers. Much of the difficulty therefore occurred before any service was delivered: working out what to do, obtaining the right information, completing steps in the right order, supplying documentation, making contact, waiting for a response or receiving conflicting advice.

The pattern also differed by system, as Figure 20 shows. The mix of barriers matters as much as the total, because different barriers require different responses.

Availability is different from a process problem. Where a service exists but the pathway is confusing, that pathway can be simplified; where the service has no capacity or does not exist, a navigator cannot solve the problem through greater persistence. Availability barriers were most prominent among whānau whose needs were least likely to be met (Chapter 19.4).

> For accountability, barrier reduction can be tracked by recording the barrier, who owns the condition causing it, what was tested, and whether the same condition recurs for later whānau.

16.4 Barriers and Waste Are Not the Same Thing

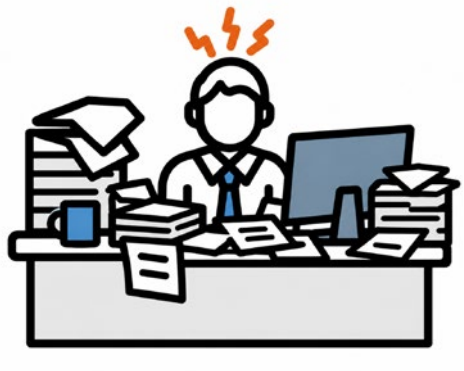
Manaaki Tairāwhiti's Barrier Accountability Framework distinguishes a whānau barrier from waste because they describe different effects of the same system conditions:

The same system condition can create both. A form that asks for information already held elsewhere within the organisation may delay whānau and also create rework for staff. A referral that sends whānau to the wrong service may leave the need unresolved and generate more calls, appointments and assessments.

Removing the whānau barrier is the higher priority because doing so often removes waste downstream as well. This is also why barrier reduction should not be framed as criticism of frontline staff. Navigator reflections describe practitioners frequently working around the same obstacles as whānau, with the duplication and rework contributing to delay and burnout (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2023-2025).



A **whānau barrier** is a system performance issue for whānau trying to get services. It is an effectiveness problem.



Waste is a system issue that causes wasted effort for those trying to provide services. It is an efficiency problem.

17. Housing: Local Voice and National Data

"I need a forever home. I'm in a motel (emergency housing)."

17.1 What the Data Showed

Housing shows clearly why local whānau voice needs to sit alongside national administrative data. 'Somewhere to Live / Stay' was the highest volume direct need recorded in Urungi, with 502 records across the full dataset.

In 2024, the Gisborne Housing Register fell from 639 households in March to 504 in September, a reduction of 21.1% (Ministry of Social Development, 2026). Over the same period, Public/Social Housing need recorded by navigators remained at 8.3, 8.1 and 9.5 needs per 100 whānau across the March, June and September quarters. The Register was falling sharply while the social housing need presenting to navigators was not. Recorded housing demand did fall later in 2024 and rose again through 2025, so the two measures do not simply move in opposite directions. What they show is that they move independently.

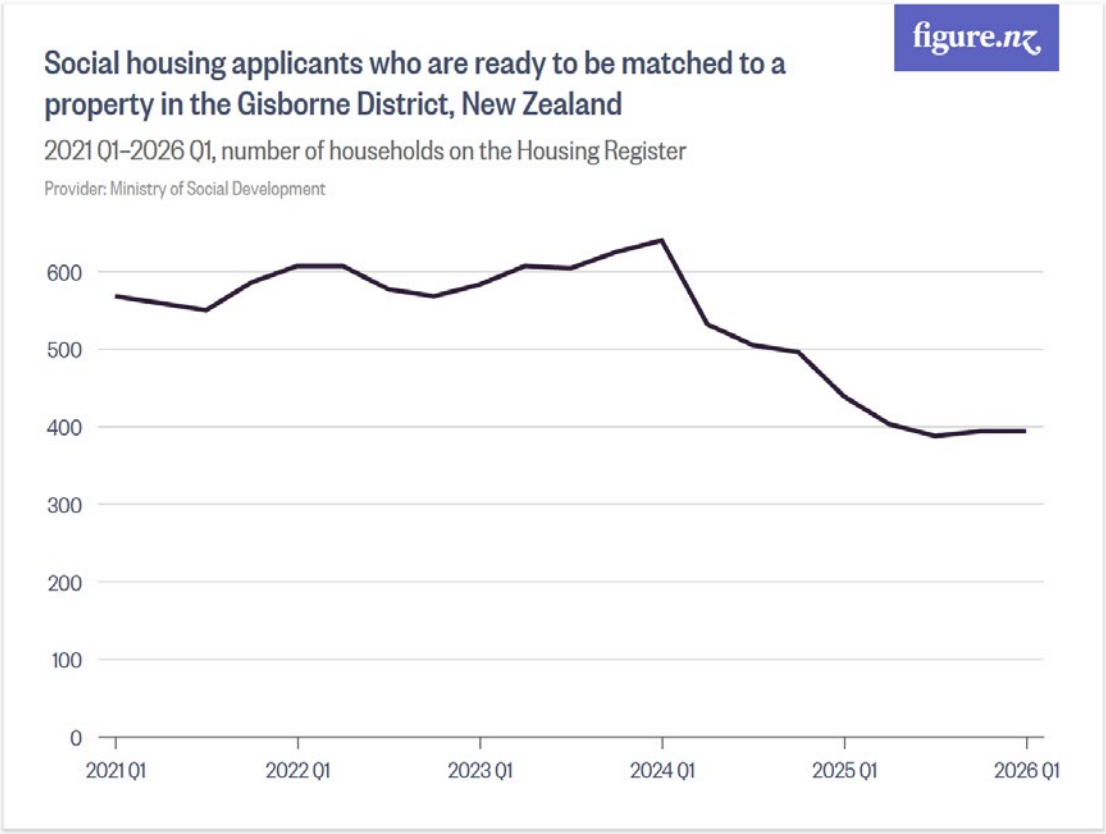


Figure 21: Applicants on the Gisborne District Housing Register at the end of each quarter, 2021 Q1-2026 Q1. The Housing Register includes applicants assessed as eligible for social housing and ready to be matched to a suitable property. Source: Ministry of Social Development, via Figure.NZ (https://figure.nz/chart/hT3dNCNcpse6ehxV-qSiqFC9lzjOZQaal).

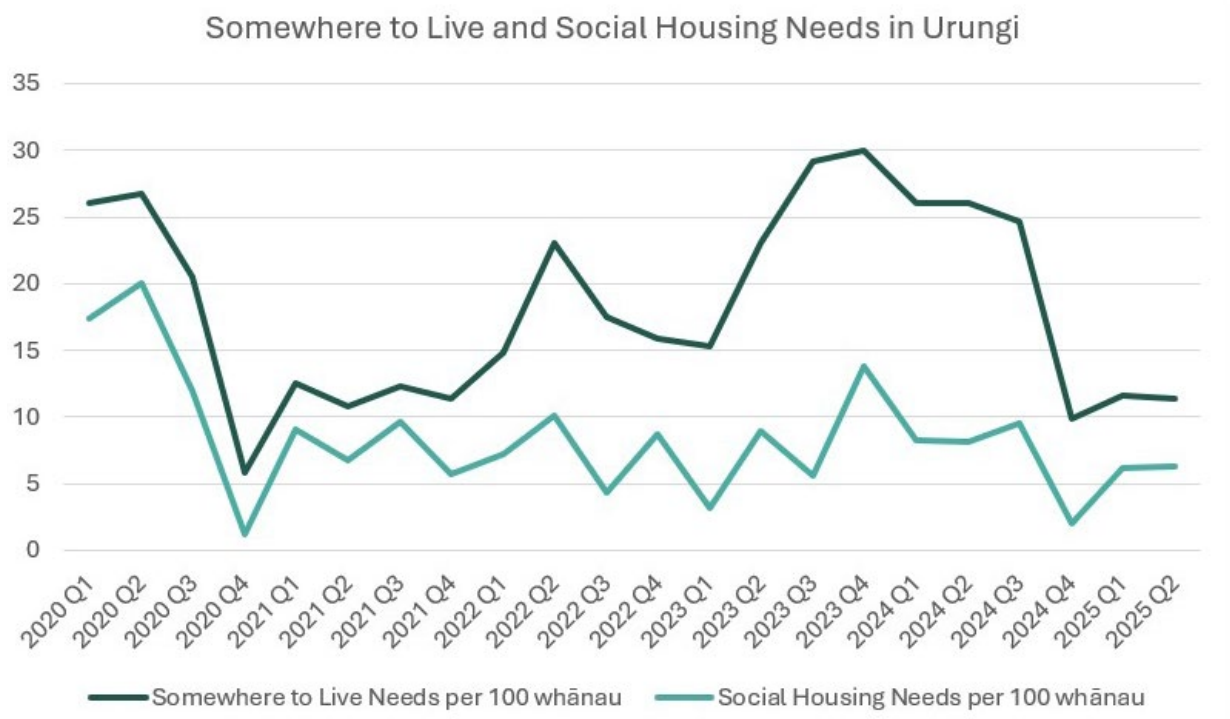


Figure 22: Somewhere to Live / Stay needs recorded per 100 distinct whānau supported in each quarter. Public/Social Housing shows the subset of those needs coded to that subsystem. A whānau may record more than one housing need in a quarter, so the measure shows the frequency of recorded housing demand rather than the percentage of whānau needing housing.

17.2 Why the Measures Tell Different Stories

The two measures count different things: The Housing Register includes applicants who have been assessed as eligible for social housing and are ready to be matched to a suitable property. Urungi starts with what whānau say they need. Housing need can exist before someone enters the Register, while they are trying to get onto it, or after they are no longer recorded on it.

The pathway itself also created barriers. Of the 206 Somewhere to Live / Stay needs themed under the Public/Social Housing subsystem, 109, or 52.9%, encountered at least one barrier. Availability was the largest barrier, but almost half of the barriers related to criteria and policy, the process for accessing housing, or communication.

Leaving the Housing Register does not necessarily mean being housed. In the June 2024 quarter, 120 primary applicants left the Gisborne Housing Register and 54 were housed in social housing (Ministry of Social Development, 2024a). Applicants can also leave because they are no longer eligible, their housing need or requirements cannot be confirmed, or they ask to be removed.

The Housing Register is an important measure of eligible demand within the public-housing system, but it is not a measure of total housing demand. Whānau voice starts with the need itself, before eligibility and administrative processes narrow who becomes visible. For local commissioning, the two should be read together: national data shows who is inside the formal pathway, while local whānau voice shows the need around it and the barriers people face getting through it. Appendix C provides the detailed comparison and analysis.

18. When Conditions Change

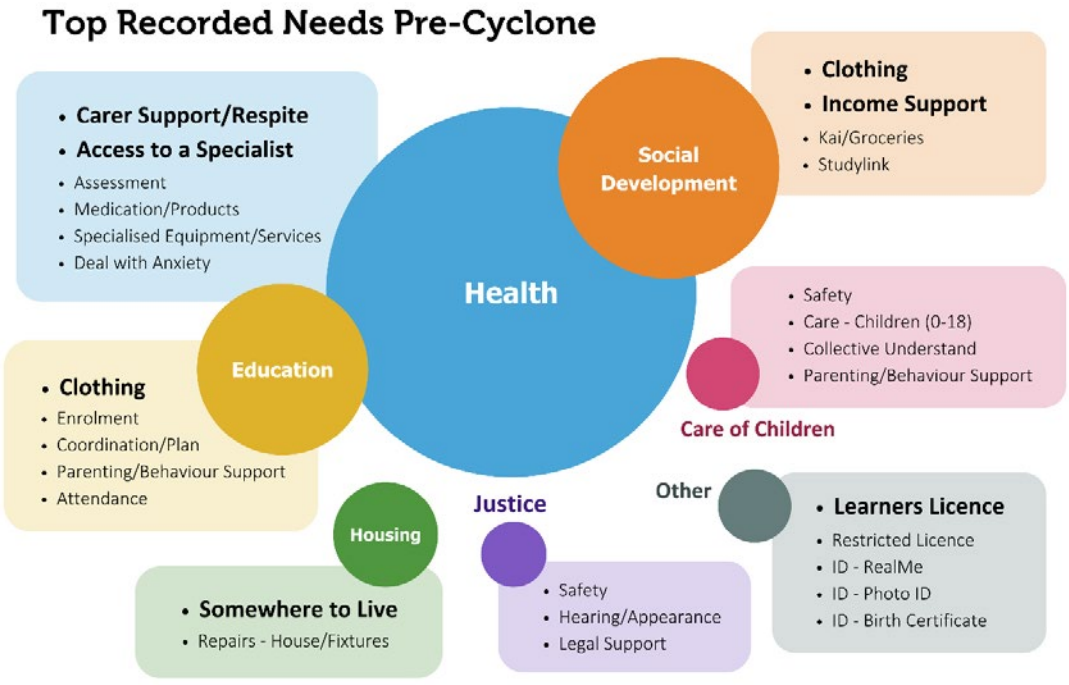
"We are trying to replace our boys pokemon cards. They were lost in the cyclone, along with everything else."

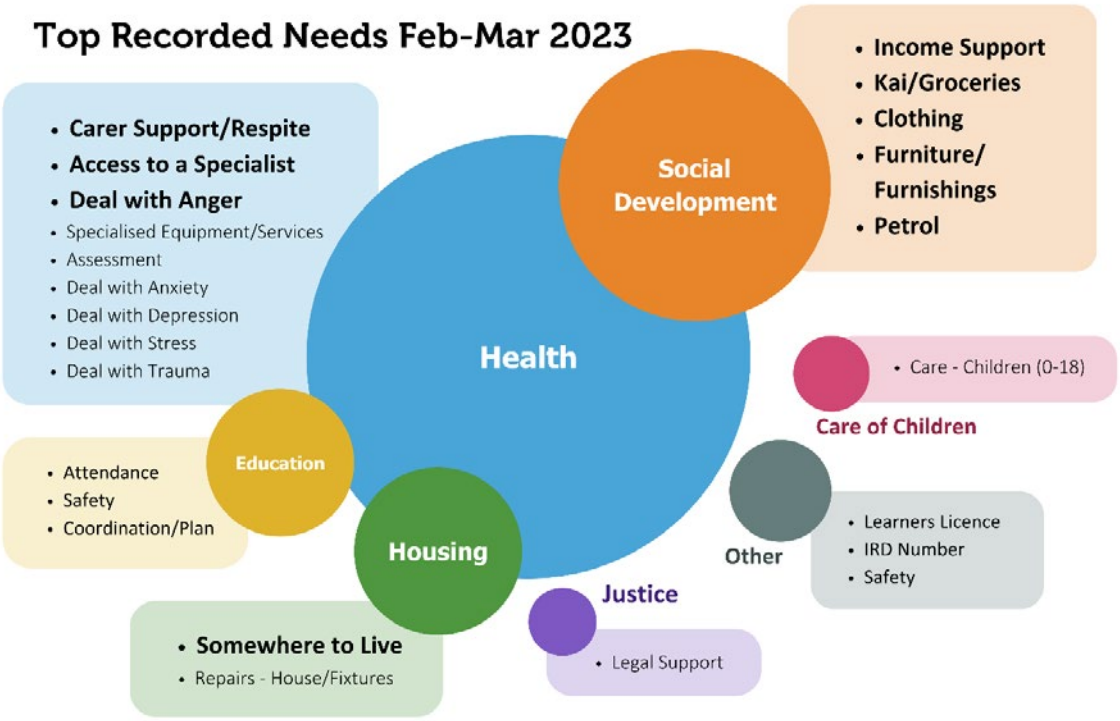
During the project period Tairāwhiti experienced the Covid-19 pandemic and major severe weather events, including Cyclones Hale and Gabrielle in 2023. These events changed local circumstances quickly and placed additional pressure on housing, transport, income, communications and basic household needs. Cyclone Gabrielle provides the clearest example in the Urungi data of what happened when local demand changed suddenly, and a real-world test of a central question behind the Navigator Project: if demand changes, can the system change with it?

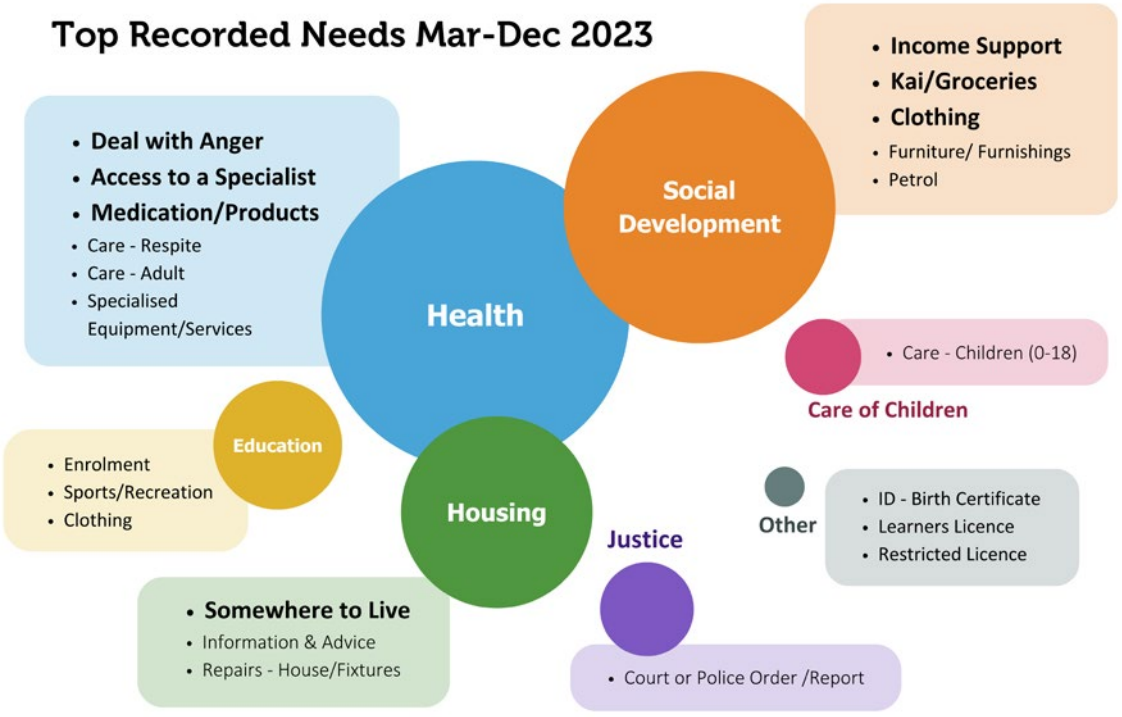
18.1 What the Data Showed

Cyclone Gabrielle changed both the volume and the composition of the needs and concerns captured by navigators. In the full 2023 Urungi dataset, 139 needs were recorded between 3 January and 12 February, and 227 between 13 February and the end of March. That equates to around 103 needs per month before Gabrielle and 147 in the immediate aftermath.

The types of need changed as well. In the immediate aftermath of Cyclone Gabrielle, Urungi recorded needs for kai, clothing, furniture, petrol, transport, somewhere to live, income support and specialist equipment alongside the health, disability, education and family needs already present. Flood or fire damage was explicitly recorded as the reason for 13 needs between 13 February and the end of March.







A separate analysis of needs that explicitly mentioned cyclone or flooding identified 45 demands from 19 whānau, with 68 responses and 33 barriers. Just over half of those needs, 53.2%, encountered at least one barrier (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2023j).

Cyclone-related needs did not replace everyday social need; they were layered onto circumstances whānau were already managing. One whānau journey presented at the Tairāwhiti Resilience Research Symposium distinguished immediate cyclone needs for evacuation, accommodation, trauma support and replacement transport from the recovery needs that followed, medication, stress, grief, navigation

and financial support, while existing health, income, legal and communication needs continued underneath them.

The same pattern appears across other whānau narratives. Road damage disrupted travel for cancer treatment, while flood-related employment loss led to rent arrears, food and clothing needs. Lost belongings created clothing and furniture needs alongside disability support, and damage to a home became a housing issue when a whānau member was due to leave hospital.

18.2 What the Crisis Response Demonstrated

The crisis also showed that system barriers do not disappear when need becomes urgent. Among the 33 barriers in the cyclone-specific analysis, communication was the largest category, followed by accessibility process, availability and delivery mode. Whānau encountered services that were too busy to respond, uncertainty about which organisation was responsible, different processes between the coast communities and town, limited communication access and existing eligibility or referral requirements.

At the same time, the response became more flexible. Navigators provided products and practical support, coached whānau, worked collectively across organisations, sought expertise and used Pull for Support. The barrier rate was 57.6% immediately before Gabrielle and 51.1% between 13 February and the end of March, so the proportion of demands hitting a barrier did not rise with the increase in recorded need. Organisations adapted quickly, using greater flexibility and working differently when circumstances required it.

Period	Needs	Whānau	% with Recorded Barrier	Responses per Need
3 Jan - 12 Feb, Before Gabrielle	139	67	57.6%	1.55
13 Feb - 31 Mar, Immediate aftermath	227	73	51.1%	1.42
Apr - Dec, Recovery	637	202	60.0%	2.16

During the cyclone response, organisations used more discretion, adapted processes and worked across usual boundaries more quickly than in business-as-usual conditions. Local relationships, judgement and discretion became more important, and organisations found ways to work around everyday system boundaries.

The wider question is why that capacity to adapt should exist only during a declared crisis. Whānau circumstances can change just as quickly through family violence, homelessness, illness, disability, loss of income or family breakdown. The same flexibility would be valuable in those circumstances, without a declared emergency needed to trigger it.

19. What Happened for Whānau

"We just want some practical strategies. We don't know what to do, nothing seems to work."

19.1 Responding to Needs

The project recorded 12,029 responses across systems. Manaaki Navigators delivered 3,485 of those responses directly, around 29% of the total.

12,029	~210	3,485	1.45
Total Responses	Response Agencies	Navigator Responses	Average Responses per Demand

Recorded responses included practical help, collaboration, coordination, coaching, advocacy, follow-up, seeking expertise, escalation and referral. Referral was one part of the model, not the model itself.

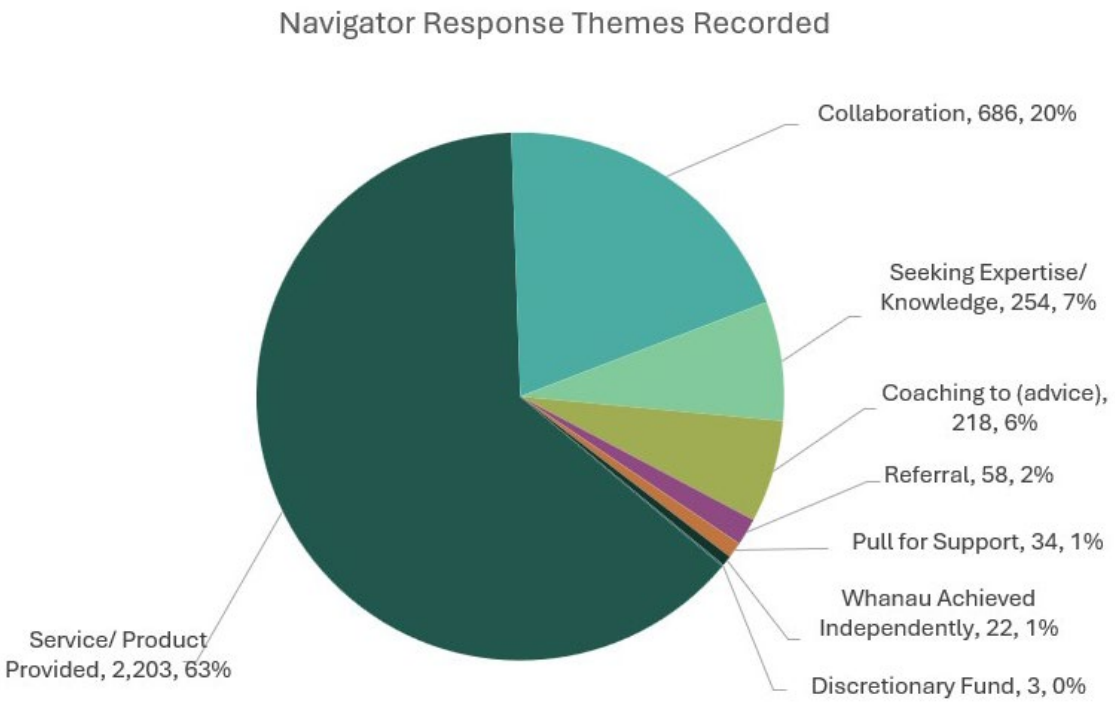


Figure 23: Navigator responses included practical help, collaboration, coaching, advocacy, seeking expertise, escalation and referral. Referral was only one part of the response model.

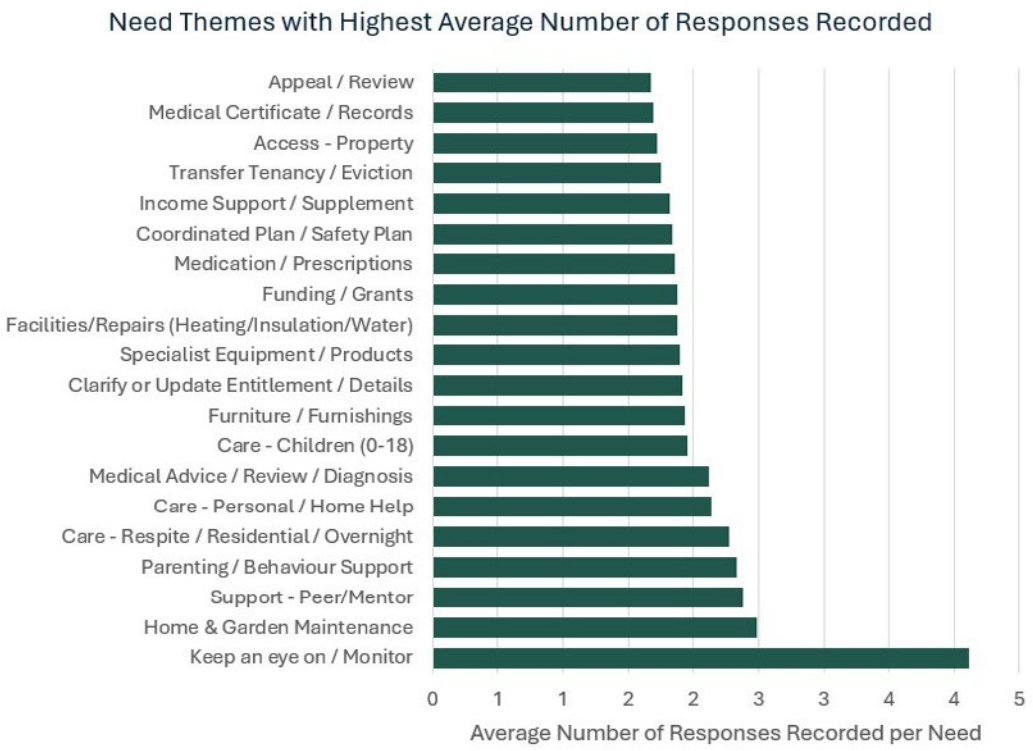


Figure 24: Some needs required repeated action, follow-up and coordination before progress could be made.

Some needs required repeated action before progress could be made. Housing, respite and carer support, parenting support, entitlements, specialist equipment and health-related needs commonly involved several contacts, follow-up and coordination across organisations.

Repeated effort came from two places: genuine complexity, where several specialists were needed, and complexity created by fragmented responsibilities, criteria or processes. Recording the work across systems helped show which was happening in individual whānau journeys.

> A future workforce should not become another layer of coordination for services that do not exist. Generalist practitioners need continuity, clear boundaries and access to specialists, while commissioners need to invest directly where specialist capacity is missing.

19.2 Outcomes at the Level of the Demand

79.5% Needs Met	11.6% In Progress	3.5% Not Met	5.4% Unresolved
6,595 needs resolved when supported by navigators.	965 needs were still in progress when the project ended.	294 needs could not be met, even with navigator support.	445 needs remain unresolved or have changed over time.

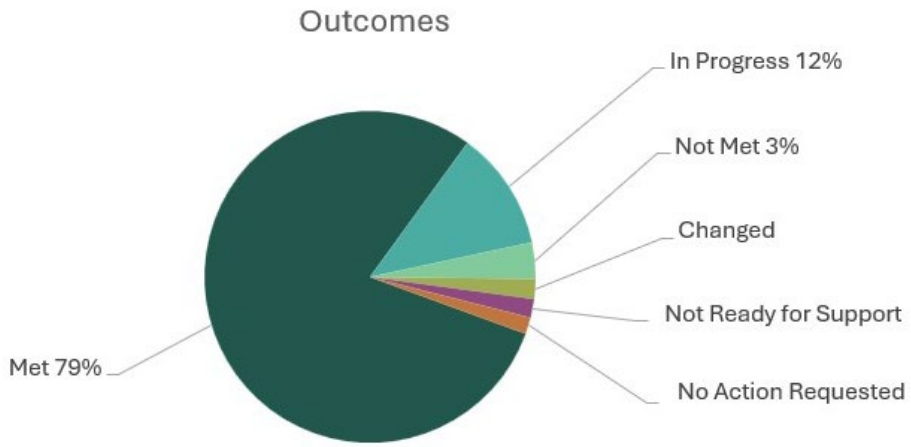


Figure 25: Outcomes recorded against all 8,299 demands.

19.3 Outcomes at the Level of Whānau

Demand-level reporting is necessary for system analysis, but it is not how whānau experience the system. The engagement analysis therefore also looks at the proportion of each whānau's recorded needs that were met.

Analysis of 1,542 whānau journeys between 2019 and 2025 shows (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2025b):

Outcome	Whānau	Share
All needs met	797	51.7%
Most needs met (50-99%)	413	26.8%
Less than half of needs met	332	21.5%
Total	1,542	100%

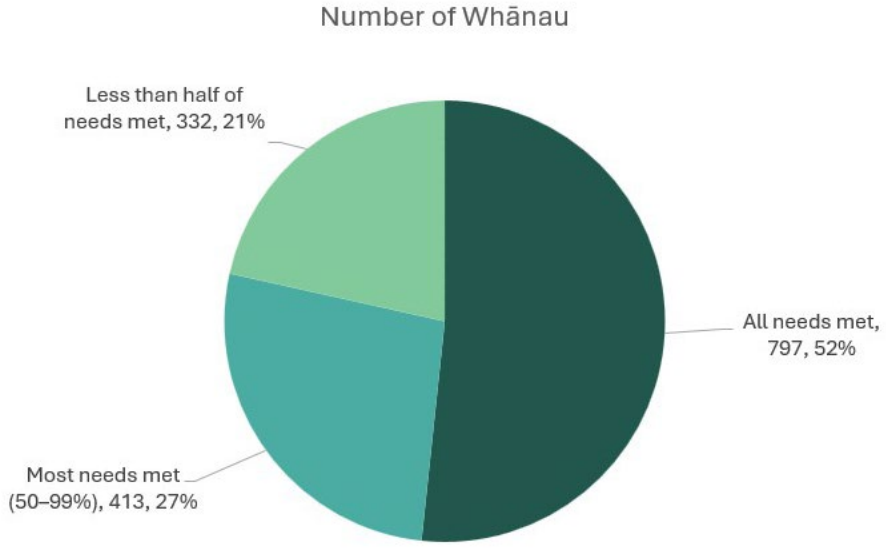


Figure 26: Outcomes measured at whānau level rather than need level.

Of the 1,542 whānau in the engagement analysis, 51.7% had all recorded needs met, 26.8% had between half and almost all needs met, and 21.5% had less than half met. For 48.3% of whānau, some or all of their recorded needs remained unmet. These results were achieved with a skilled navigator alongside whānau, working with "whatever it takes" flexibility and access to Pull for Support and Discretionary Funding responses (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2025b).

19.4 What Distinguishes Whānau Whose Needs Were Not Met

The outcome groups differed most in the types of barriers they encountered. For whānau with less than half of their needs met, one quarter of all recorded barriers were about availability. Either the service was not present, did not have capacity, or was not available in a form or timeframe that could meet the need (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2025b).

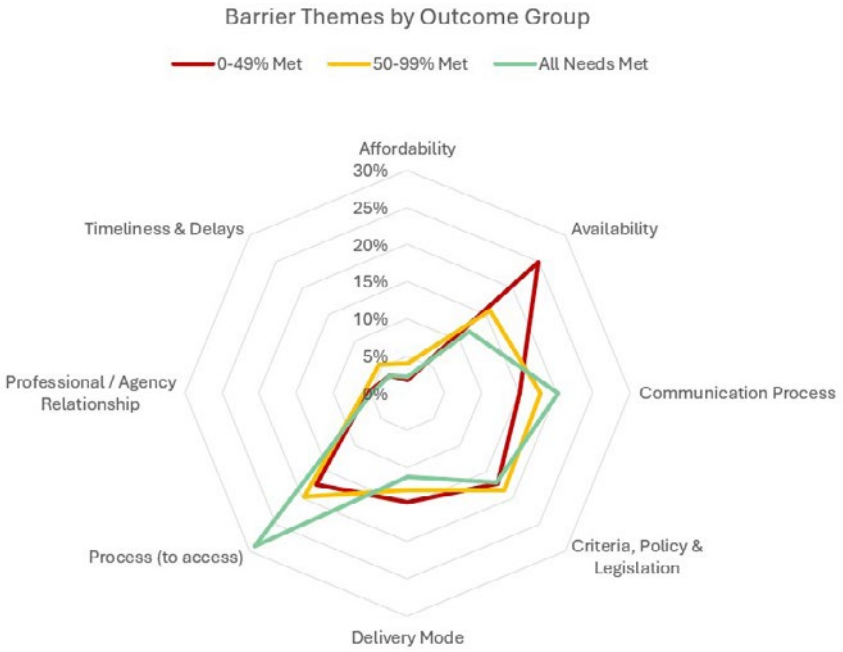


Figure 27: Comparing barrier themes by outcome group shows that availability barriers dominate for whānau with the most unmet needs.

For whānau whose needs were all met, process and communication barriers were more prominent. Those barriers can still consume time and cause stress, but where the underlying service exists, a skilled practitioner can often work through them using persistence, local relationships, clearer information and advocacy. Where the service does not exist or has no capacity, greater persistence cannot resolve the need.

The group with 50-99% of needs met sat between the two patterns. Availability remained significant and timeliness or delay also featured strongly. Some support was eventually reached, but only after sustained effort and waiting.

Respite and carer support showed that formal availability can also be misleading. A service can exist, be funded and be formally allocated, but still not work in the form offered. Between 18 January and 1 December 2023, 285 people in the region were allocated carer support; 100 used none of the allocation and only 35 used all of it (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2024d). Formal availability therefore needs to be analysed alongside utilisation and whānau voice.

> Commissioning decisions therefore need to test three things: whether the service exists, whether whānau can reach it, and whether the service in the form offered actually meets the need.

19.5 What Responses Revealed

Where less than half of needs were met, collaboration and coaching or advice were prominent, alongside direct provision and seeking expertise. Navigators were often trying several routes at once: supporting whānau directly, coordinating organisations and looking for specialist help.

Where all needs were met, "service or product provided" was the most common response theme. But this does not mean the accountable service always delivered the result. Some of those responses were provided by navigators themselves, including transport or essential items.

Discretionary funding was one response that worked well for bounded practical gaps: 55 of the 58 unique needs supported through the Manaaki Tairāwhiti discretionary fund were ultimately recorded as met. It could resolve a remaining practical gap, but it could not substitute for missing service capacity (Chapter 11.1; Appendix D).

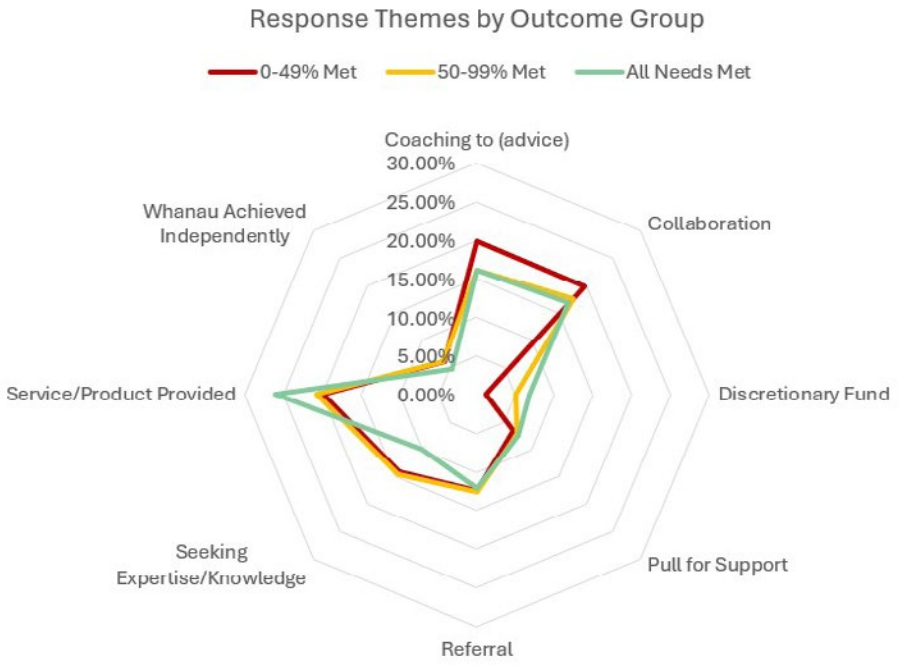


Figure 28: Where needs were not met, it was not for lack of effort. Navigators used a wider range of responses for whānau with the most unmet needs, not a narrower one.

The variety of response themes also increased with engagement duration: from an average of 2.14 response themes for whānau engaged for less than three months to 4.71 for those engaged for more than a year. Barrier themes increased with duration as well (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2025b). Longer journeys therefore involved more varied attempts to resolve need.

19.6 Seeing the Whole Picture

The broad-spectrum approach made it possible to record needs across the whole whānau situation rather than only those that fitted a host provider's service category. The data showed how quickly one need could cross into another system. As Kerekere's research put it, needs are "person-shaped, not service-shaped" (Kerekere, 2025). The case studies show what that looked like in practice:

- Transport into health: Just over a third (37%) of the transport and delivery needs identified

by navigators were within the health system, with half of those relating to disability needs. Transport barriers limited access to essential health services (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2023h).

- Health into education: 41 of the 74 whānau (55%) who needed support with education attendance also had a high number of needs, concerns and demands recorded within the health system (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2023b).
- Housing across youth: Young people faced significant housing barriers, with limited availability of suitable emergency and supported housing, particularly for young people and those with disabilities, leading to unstable living situations (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2023i).

> Taken together, these examples show how unmet need in one part of the system creates consequences, and further demand, in another. Commissioning needs to account for that.

19.7 Priority Service Gaps

The data shows both what whānau asked for most often and where needs were most likely to remain unresolved. High-volume direct needs included housing, transport, food security, clothing, income support, counselling, licensing, specialist equipment and household essentials. High unresolved need was concentrated where service capacity was missing, delayed or unusable in the form offered. Respite, counselling, specialist disability and behavioural support, suitable housing and other scarce local capacity repeatedly appeared in navigator reflections and barrier work.

Need Theme	# Needs	% Not Met	% In Progress	% Met	Average Days to Outcome
Care - Respite/Residential/Overnight	74	23.0%	16.2%	58.1%	38.9
Funding/Grants	57	15.8%	15.8%	61.4%	10.3
Facilities/Repairs (Heating/Insulation/ Water)	66	15.2%	28.8%	45.5%	58.1
Specialist/Specialist Services	87	11.5%	20.7%	57.5%	25.4
Employment/Career	50	10.0%	32.0%	36.0%	36.9
Car/Accessories/Repairs	51	9.8%	21.6%	64.7%	21.3
Course/Programme	88	8.0%	30.7%	52.3%	41.9
Legal Support/Lawyer	52	7.7%	7.7%	71.2%	30.0
Somewhere to Live/Stay	502	7.4%	25.5%	52.2%	25.1
Enrolment/Registration	126	7.1%	13.5%	68.3%	17.6
Care - Children (0-18)	64	6.3%	18.8%	62.5%	51.2
Home & Garden Maintenance	55	5.5%	16.4%	67.3%	30.8
Medical Advice/Review/Diagnosis	77	3.9%	15.6%	71.4%	26.1
Income Support/Supplement	157	3.8%	14.0%	77.1%	16.7
Licence - All Classes/Renew/Reinstate	136	3.7%	22.8%	69.1%	27.8
Parenting/Behaviour Support	55	3.6%	16.4%	69.1%	31.8
Counselling	153	2.0%	30.1%	60.1%	21.2

Housing, health and disability, and education, training and employment should be priority areas for future commissioning. Foundational hardship support also cuts across these areas because unmet needs for food, clothing, transport and household essentials can prevent other support from working.

20. The Dependency Question

"I want to do a parenting course, to be a better parent especially if the boys are coming back to me."

20.1 Where the Concern Comes From

Dependency has long been a concern in social service design. It appears in debates about eligibility, time limits, frontline discretion and how much support should be available.

The Productivity Commission specifically noted the concern that coordinated, client-led services could "encourage dependency" or make costs harder to manage (NZ Productivity Commission, 2015). Fry and Wilson (2023) and Fry (2022) also describe the tension between controlling access and enabling flexible, relationship-based support.

The Navigator Project provided an opportunity to test that concern in practice. The question was whether whānau stayed engaged because of the navigator relationship itself, or because their needs remained unresolved.

20.2 The Navigator Model as a Real-World Test

Navigators worked without a fixed engagement time limit, fixed entry criteria or a prescribed menu of responses. The analysis used 1,542 whānau supported between 1 June 2019 and 1 June 2025 and compared engagement duration with the proportion of recorded needs met (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2025b).

20.3 What the Engagement Data Shows

72.3% **finished engaging within 3 months** (1,115 whānau)	7.0% **engaged for 3-6 months** (108)	9.6% **engaged for 6-12 months** (148)	11.1% **required support beyond 12 months** (171)

Most whānau did not remain engaged for long periods: 89% stopped engaging within one year and 72.3% within three months. That pattern is not consistent with widespread long-term reliance on navigator support.

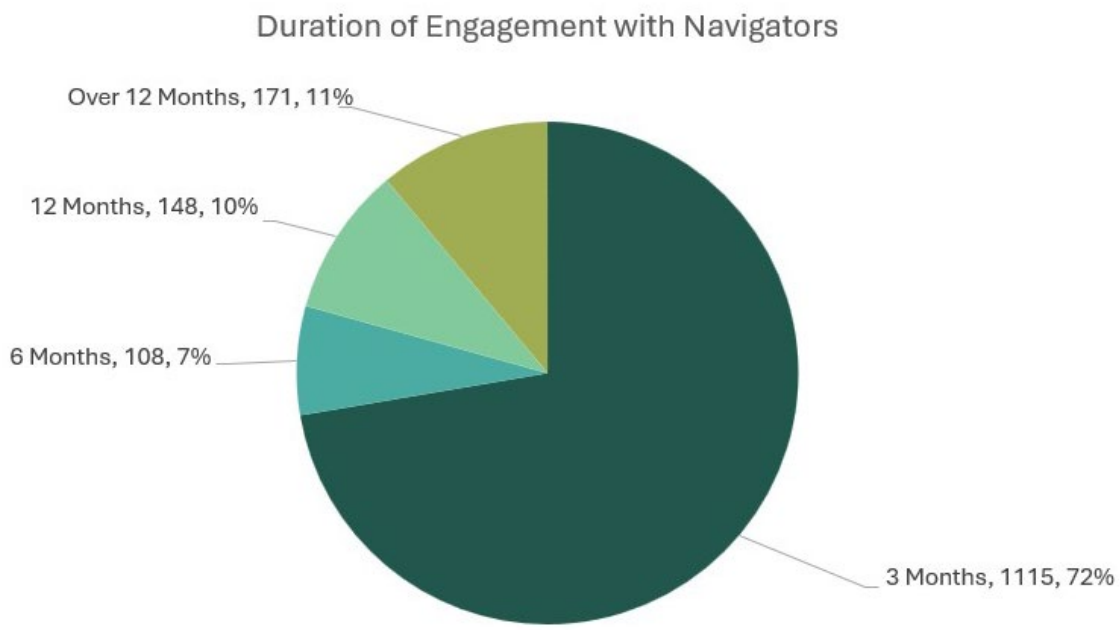


Figure 29: Duration of engagement with navigators, 1,542 whānau, 2019-2025.

But disengagement does not always mean success. Among whānau who stopped engaging within three months, 26.6% had less than half of their recorded needs met. Some may have stopped engaging with needs still unresolved because barriers remained or repeated attempts had become exhausting (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2025b).

Looking at duration and outcome together provides a clearer picture:

- Of whānau disengaging within three months, 57.7% had all needs met (643 of 1,115).
- Of whānau engaged beyond 12 months, only 22.8% had all needs met (39 of 171).
- 77.2% of long-term engaged whānau still had unmet needs (132 of 171).

Among whānau whose recorded needs were all met, 80.7% stopped engaging within three months. Only 39 whānau - 2.5% of the total engagement dataset - had all recorded needs met and remained engaged beyond 12 months (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2025b).

Duration of Engagement	3 Months	6 Months	12 Months	Over 12 Months	Total
Outcome: Needs Partially Met (0-49% needs met)	297	11	9	15	332
Outcome: Needs Mostly Met (50-99% needs met)	175	50	71	117	413
Outcome: All Needs Met (100% needs met)	643	47	68	39	797
Total	1,115	108	148	171	1,542

20.4 Understanding the 2.5%

The circumstances of those 39 whānau help explain why a small group continued to engage after their recorded needs had been met (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2025b).

Fifty-nine percent were engaging with navigators based at Matapuna Training Centre. For rangatahi in alternative education, an ongoing relationship with a navigator was part of the setting, and common needs included follow-up, clothing, appointments and counselling.

Of the remaining 16 whānau, 56% were engaging with disability services. Their recorded needs were mainly coordination, information, applications, forms, advocacy, respite, specialist equipment and entitlement clarification rather than a pattern of new crises.

The remaining cases involved safety, housing, work and basic entitlements. Together, these cases point more to ongoing context and coordination needs than to a common pattern of dependence.

20.5 A Better Analogy

The navigator relationship is closer to the relationship between a patient and a trusted general practitioner. Once enrolled with a GP, a person can return when they have an existing or new health issue. People do not usually make another appointment when they no longer need medical advice or treatment, but neither are they "exited" from the relationship and required to re-enrol each time.

The project did not find evidence of widespread navigator-created dependency. Most whānau moved on quickly, particularly when their needs were fully met, while those who stayed engaged longest were overwhelmingly those still carrying unmet need. Staying connected to a navigator and remaining dependent on, or having difficulty within, the wider service system are not the same thing.

21. What We Learned

The Navigator Project tested the navigator role, but it also tested whether whānau voice could be used to understand how the social system performs, whether a broad-spectrum workforce could respond more flexibly, and whether repeated barriers could be turned into system improvement.

Much of that worked as intended. Navigators were able to listen across service boundaries, respond to what mattered to whānau, use local relationships and flexible tools, and capture evidence about what happened. Coaching and shared learning strengthened workforce capability, while Urungi made patterns of demand and barriers visible in a way conventional service reporting could not. Turning that learning into lasting change in the systems producing the barriers proved much more difficult.

21.1 The Missing Double Learning Loop

The project built a strong first learning loop. As whānau raised needs, navigators worked to meet them and recorded what happened, what got in the way and what response was required. Coaches and the project team then used those records to identify patterns, produce cases for change and escalate recurring barriers.

The second loop was supposed to change the system condition causing the pattern. The system improvement method requires the people accountable for the design and operation of the current system to study the work, understand the causes, test a different design and make the improvement normal. But that second loop was inconsistent.

The project could identify and evidence barriers, bring the right people together on some issues, and sometimes secure a different response for an individual whānau. What it did not hold was the authority to require every responsible organisation to enter a structured improvement process, redirect funding, change national policy or keep a redesign in place through organisational change.

At the level of individual whānau, Pull for Support often produced a workable response once the full circumstances were understood and the right person was involved. The problem was that the same work had to be rebuilt for the next whānau. A workaround is valuable for the whānau in front of you, but it is not yet system change.

Discretionary funding shows the same distinction in practical form. It could resolve an immediate need after ordinary options had been tested, but the payment did not change the criteria, funding boundaries or service gaps that made the exception necessary. Where another whānau encountered the same gap, the underlying system condition remained (Appendix D).

The respite system improvement programme progressed further because the organisations responsible for different parts of the system participated in the work. It moved from whānau evidence into an end-to-end study, an agreed purpose and principles, an implementation plan with evaluation indicators, and testing. It still depended on authority outside the local project to implement the final redesign changes.

21.2 Harmonising Programmes

Manaaki Tairāwhiti had limited influence over how most social service funding was contracted in the region. Programmes generally arrive with national or regional strategies, outputs, eligibility settings and procurement requirements already determined. That leaves little room to tailor funded work to local conditions or to include system improvement expectations.

The navigator contract worked differently, creating room for a flexible role to respond to whānau need rather than a narrow service specification. However, it still sat alongside each provider's other contracts and operating systems.

Where navigators held dual roles, where business-as-usual duties took priority, or where provider managers did not share the project purpose and method, flexibility could be eroded. A prescriptive contract elsewhere in the organisation could pull practice back toward narrower organisational priorities. Navigators also described a subtler risk: a "whatever it takes" role could become a person who did whatever it took for the organisation rather than whatever it took for whānau.

Local contracting can create a flexible role, but it does not by itself harmonise the other services, agency settings and specialist capacity that the role depends on. Decision rights matter, but they need to be used through a clear purpose, whānau-centred measures, capable practice, system improvement discipline and accountability for what happens next.

21.3 What We Would Do Differently

The implementation lessons set out in Chapter 10 point to several changes that should be built into any future model from the start:

1. Embed the practice model in the main contract: The flexible Service Level Agreement created room to work differently, but its intent was interpreted differently across organisations. Purpose, measures, reporting, role boundaries, coaching expectations and the system improvement responsibilities should sit in the primary provider arrangement, not alongside it as an optional way of working.

2. Agree supervision, reporting and role boundaries before placement: Provider induction should make the Tairāwhiti Way of Working, the Purpose-Measures-Method framework, host-provider responsibilities, coaching expectations and escalation routes clear before a practitioner begins. Dual roles and business-as-usual work should not quietly displace the shared purpose.

3. Capture data once, in the flow of work: Duplicate entry across provider case management systems, spreadsheets and/or Urungi reduced data quality and consumed practice time. The navigator contract did not require duplicate recording; some providers maintained additional records for their own organisational or contract reporting. Future design should use one underlying record wherever possible and make the learning record part of the work rather than an additional compliance task.

4. Involve leaders in studying the work, not only receiving reports: The project produced evidence and sent it upward. A future model should create opportunities for leaders to study whānau journeys end to end with practitioners, agree what will be tested and review whether performance improves. Leadership involvement needs to be part of the method, not an escalation at the end of it.

5. Protect the broad-spectrum role from becoming a catch-all: Flexibility across systems is essential, but crisis, statutory and specialist work should remain with the services accountable for it. The role needs a clear purpose and reliable escalation routes when the required response sits elsewhere.

6. Distinguish specialist scarcity from coordination failure, and fund accordingly: Some needs could not be met because the service or specialist capacity was missing. Navigator reflections identified examples such as trauma-informed care, counselling, behaviour support and FASD assessment. Adding coordination capacity to a system with no specialist capacity generates activity without outcomes. Where the gap is a missing service, the response should be to commission that service.

7. Record how a need was met, not only whether it was met: Future measurement should distinguish whether the accountable service, a broad-spectrum practitioner, whānau themselves or another party resolved the need. It should also distinguish agency demand arising within a host provider from demand coming from an external organisation. That would make collective accountability much clearer.

21.4 What Others Have Found

The Navigator Project is not the first attempt in Aotearoa New Zealand to run a joined-up, relationship-based model inside national systems. Other evaluations describe many of the same implementation problems.

Children's Teams used Lead Professionals and cross-agency arrangements to support tamariki and whānau below the statutory threshold. The 2019 evaluation found strong conceptual support for the model and positive whānau experiences of the Lead Professional relationship, while also identifying structural barriers to implementation (Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre, 2019).

Those barriers included service gaps and waiting lists, reliance on workforce contributions from partner organisations, inconsistent role clarity and contract alignment, and problems with the ViKI case management system. The evaluation's conclusion that enabling functions should support rather than challenge work with whānau is directly relevant to the design of Urungi 2.0.

Evaluation of the Tairāwhiti Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke model described strengths in its high-trust iwi/Police partnership and kaupapa Māori approach while also identifying challenges in shared data, workload and outcome measurement (Leonard et al., 2025).

Later Tairāwhiti system improvement work described changing levels of participation across the wider family harm response and the difficulty of sustaining a genuinely multi-agency model where participation, responsibilities and information systems are not equally embedded across organisations.

Te Puna Aonui's 2024 stocktake of multi-agency family harm responses found substantial variation between sites in scale, participating organisations, available services, meeting frequency and operating arrangements.

The national pattern was not one of identical local models. Communities had adapted named approaches to local circumstances. Practitioners wanted greater national consistency on good practice, including purpose, information sharing, risk and safety approaches, record keeping and outcome reporting, while cautioning against imposing one uniform process or governance structure

everywhere (Te Puna Aonui Business Unit, 2024).

This supports the balance proposed in this report: common rights, safeguards and standards alongside local discretion about how people and services are organised around need.

Julie Fry's review of joined-up social services identified trusted relationships, clear objectives, robust shared data, effective governance, adequate staffing and meaningful decision rights as recurring conditions for successful collaborative initiatives. It also identified system barriers in funding, accountability, data, service capacity and organisational culture (Fry, 2022).

NZIER's work on devolution makes a similar distinction between services that benefit from national scale and standardisation and services that require local knowledge, trusted relationships and bespoke responses to complex need (NZIER, 2022; Fry & Wilson, 2023).

The Tairāwhiti evidence reflects the same recurring conditions found in these evaluations: trusted relationships, clear purpose, aligned contracts, usable data, sufficient service capacity and meaningful decision rights.

Kerekere's research reached a similar final conclusion. The Tairāwhiti Way of Working could improve the experience of whānau, but extending that practice alone would not be enough. Her findings called for stronger accountability, continued investment in Urungi and coaching, formal pathways from evidence to action, and greater local authority over commissioning. In her words, "This requires courageous leadership at all levels" (Kerekere, 2025).

22. What Needs to Change

"I need a break. I can't handle these kids for much longer."

22.1 The Evidence Provided to Governance

Across the project, dashboards, case studies, barrier analyses and cases for change made recurring needs, barriers and service gaps visible to governance and to agencies.

The register below records the evidence provided, and what is known about what followed. Blank cells in the final two columns indicate that no action or system change was documented in, or returned through, the project material reviewed for this report.

Evidence Register:

Evidence & Insights	Date Provided	Sector	Action Taken	System Changes
Respite Care	Jan 2022	Disability, Child Wellbeing		
Education Overview	Apr 2022	Education		
Identification Needs & Barriers	Jun 2022	DIA, MSD	Identification dependency analysis provided to DIA and MSD, including a question about a universal free form of identification accepted across agencies.	No returned response is documented in the project material reviewed for this report. National digital-identity work progressed subsequently, but the project could not trace a connection between that work and the Tairāwhiti analysis.
Driver Licensing System Map	Oct 2022	MSD, Waka Kotahi, DIA, Education, Police	End-to-end driver-licensing system map produced, using regional MSD employment data and identifying barriers across the pathway.	No returned response is documented in the project material reviewed for this report. The driver-licensing system was subsequently reviewed nationally and reforms were announced, but the project could not trace a connection between those changes and the Tairāwhiti work.
Counselling	Dec 2022	Mental Health		
Education Attendance	Apr 2023	Education	Case study submitted Jul 2023; 29 systemic barriers identified across 23 agencies as the starting point for operational leaders.	No system improvement programme recorded against the analysis.
Respite Care	Jun 2023	Disability, Child Wellbeing	Twelve-month multi-agency system-improvement programme progressed through Understand, Redesign and Test and Learn. The system was mapped, findings validated, a shared purpose and principles agreed, and tests begun. Findings and recommendations were also escalated nationally.	Whaikaha began related system-improvement work, which was later paused during its restructure. Make Normal was not completed. Subsequent national disability-support reforms occurred, but current local respite capacity and ownership of the wider pathway have not been rechecked for this report.
Cyclone Related Needs	Apr 2023	Cyclone Recovery		
Youth Voice: Justice and Transport Barriers	Sep 2023	Justice, Child Wellbeing, Transport		
Total Mobility Scheme Review	Oct 2023	Disability, Council		
Somewhere to Live Case Study	Jun 2024	Housing		
Kai/Groceries Needs & Barriers	Aug 2024	MSD		
Power/Gas Needs & Barriers	Oct 2024	MSD		

Education: Enrolment, Transport and Diagnosis Needs & Barriers for 3TW	Nov 2024	Education - 3TW		
MSD/WINZ Barriers & Responses Report	Nov 2024	MSD		
Homelessness Urungi Data	Nov 2024	Housing, Council		
Urungi Quarterly Report	Q3 2024 Q4 2024 Q1 2025 Q2 2025	MT Governance	Quarterly dashboards provided to governance throughout.	
Unsupported Child Benefit	Feb 2025	MSD	Barrier analysis, causal-loop diagram and navigator-tested Unsupported Child's Benefit Guideline produced; organisations needed for fuller redesign identified.	No redesign programme is documented in the project material reviewed for this report.
Carer Support Needs & Barriers	Mar 2025	Disability		
Whānau Engagement and Outcomes	Aug 2025			

Twenty pieces of evidence were provided to governance and agencies between January 2022 and August 2025. Across most of them, issues were made visible but there was no consistent pathway requiring the relevant system owner to take that evidence through testing and change.

The respite and carer-support programme progressed further through the improvement cycle than the other pieces of work in the register. Whānau voice was analysed, the pathway was mapped from inside the system, findings were validated, a new purpose and principles were agreed, and tests began. The work reached the point at which making the redesigned approach normal required the organisations controlling the relevant funding and settings to carry it through. Whaikaha then engaged the MSD System Improvement Coaches to begin studying its own systems, and that work was later paused during the agency's restructure.

Other pieces of work stopped earlier in the improvement cycle. Identification and driver licensing produced a dependency analysis and an end-to-end system map showing where barriers sat across the pathway. Unsupported Child's Benefit work produced a barrier analysis, causal hypotheses and a practical guideline. Education attendance, housing, kai, power, youth and other analyses documented recurring conditions. Together, they made the issues visible, but the project could not require every system owner to respond through the same improvement method.

This is the missing second learning loop described in Chapter 21.1. Kerekere reached a similar conclusion, recommending stronger formal pathways from Urungi evidence of system failure through to Board and agency action at local, regional or national level (Kerekere, 2025).

The line from evidence to recommendation:

Finding	What it Means	Recommendation
51.7% of whānau had all recorded needs met. Availability barriers were most prominent among whānau with the poorest outcomes.	Coordination and navigation can help where a service exists, but they cannot create supply that is missing.	Commission to actual demand, including building capacity where unmet need is repeatedly visible.
51.3% of recorded demand encountered at least one barrier, and the data did not show a sustained reduction in recorded system friction over six years.	Making barriers visible is not enough. The systems creating them need to own the learning and improvement.	Require agency accountability for barriers, measured through whānau experience as well as agency data.
44.6% of whānau demand was for help to find, understand, access or progress services, and navigators delivered 29% of all recorded responses themselves.	Whānau often need active, generalist support across system boundaries, not referral alone.	Develop a broad-spectrum workforce, supported by coaching and access to specialist services.
Evidence was repeatedly generated and escalated, but local leaders did not hold all of the authority needed to redirect investment or change recurring system conditions.	Local evidence needs to be connected to decision rights and the ability to test different ways of organising the system.	Adopt community commissioning, using the system improvement method to learn the appropriate balance between local and national responsibility.

22.2 Recommendation 1: Commission to Actual Demand

Design services around what whānau tell us they need.

The starting point for commissioning should be current evidence about what whānau are asking for, what remains unresolved, what is difficult to access and what is changing over time. Urungi recorded 7,122 demands directly from whānau as whānau needs or concerns, with a further 1,140 recorded as agency demands. Of the whānau demands, 55.4% were for an underlying product, service, resource or practical outcome, while 44.6% were for help finding, understanding, accessing or progressing support. Commissioning therefore needs to address both service supply and the pathways used to reach it.

Where a service exists, process and communication barriers can often be worked through or redesigned. Where it does not exist, has no capacity, or is not available in a form that works for whānau, better coordination cannot solve the underlying problem. Among whānau with less than half of their needs met, availability accounted for one quarter of all recorded barriers, compared with 12% among whānau whose needs were all met.

Housing provides the clearest example. Somewhere to Live or Stay was the highest-volume direct need recorded in Urungi, with 502 records. Within the Public/Social Housing pathway, 52.9% of recorded needs encountered at least one barrier. Chapter 17 also showed why local evidence matters: the Housing Register fell substantially during part of 2024 while public and social housing need recorded by navigators remained relatively stable. The two measures capture different things: national administrative data showed demand visible inside the formal eligibility pathway, while Urungi showed need before that pathway had narrowed who was counted.

Chapter 19.7 also identified unresolved need in respite care, counselling, specialist disability and behavioural support, and employment or career support. These are not simply navigation problems; they raise questions about whether enough support exists locally and whether it is available in the form whānau need.

The data also shows the importance of relatively small practical supports. Transport, kai and groceries, clothing, furniture and household essentials, and communication access accounted for 28.8% of whānau direct demand. The Manaaki Tairāwhiti discretionary fund provides one example of why some of these needs require local flexibility. Of the 58 unique needs supported through the fund, 55 were ultimately recorded as met. The fund was useful where a relatively small payment could resolve the remaining gap after existing options had been tested, but it could not substitute for missing housing, respite, counselling or specialist capacity. Where the same gap recurs, that evidence should inform whether a pathway needs to change or whether the missing support should be commissioned directly.

Commissioning to actual demand therefore means more than purchasing whatever appears most often in the data. It means understanding the reason behind the demand, responding to immediate need where necessary, and studying recurring patterns to determine what should be provided differently. Immediate hardship support should sit alongside longer-term pathways into stable housing, health, education, training, employment and independence.

Commissioning to actual demand also depends on being able to keep seeing demand as it changes, which is where Urungi 2.0 becomes important. It should be developed as community-owned learning infrastructure, rather than simply a new reporting database. The next platform should retain the features that made Urungi useful: whānau voice in the words used by whānau, the reason behind a need, barriers encountered, responses, outcomes, end-to-end time and patterns over time.

It should also strengthen the areas the prototype could not show clearly enough. In particular, future measurement should make it possible to see who ultimately met a need (the service responsible for it, a broad-spectrum practitioner, whānau themselves or someone else) and distinguish intentional collaboration from work being shifted elsewhere because a pathway has failed. Urungi 2.0 should also

make it possible to follow recurring barriers from evidence through to ownership, action, testing and whether the same barrier appears again.

Where possible, data should be captured once in the flow of the work and then used for whānau-centred learning, commissioning and necessary contract reporting, rather than requiring practitioners to repeat the same information across multiple systems. Any case management functionality should support the Tairāwhiti Way of Working rather than reshape practice around the requirements of the technology.

The platform will also need the conditions that made Urungi 1.0 useful: practitioner capability, coaching, data quality support and analysis. Consent should continue to be treated as an ongoing way of working, with privacy, role-based access, Māori data sovereignty and kaitiakitanga built into its governance. The technology is important, but the purpose is the same as it has always been: to make what matters to whānau visible enough to inform better decisions.

22.3 Recommendation 2: Require Agency Accountability for Barriers

Make the organisations responsible for service design accountable for reducing the barriers that design creates.

Across the project dataset, 51.3% of recorded demands encountered at least one barrier. Health, money and employment, housing and child wellbeing all recorded barrier rates above 50%. Process to Access and Communication Process together accounted for 53% of all recorded barriers. Much of the difficulty experienced by whānau therefore occurred before a service was ever delivered: finding the right pathway, understanding what was required, obtaining documents, making contact, completing steps in the right order, waiting for a response or receiving different advice from different parts of the system.

The project did not record a sustained reduction in this friction. Recorded barriers increased from 0.56 per demand in 2019 to 1.02 in 2024, while responses required per demand increased from 1.16 to 1.89. Improved navigator capability contributed to better recognition and recording of barriers, so these figures should not be read as proof that the system deteriorated by the same amount. They do show that the project found no clear evidence that the system became easier for whānau to move through over time.

Barrier data should not be used to rank agencies or criticise frontline staff. Many of the barriers recorded by navigators were also producing rework, delay and frustration for the people working inside those services. Others occurred between organisations, where individual processes that made sense on their own did not fit together around the same whānau.

Barrier reporting should become part of ordinary accountability, with recurring barriers leading back into the work rather than ending as a count in a report. The responsible organisations need to study what is happening for whānau, understand the conditions producing the barrier, test a different response and check whether later whānau have a better experience. The purpose of recording barriers is to reduce their recurrence and improve the experience of later whānau, rather than simply build a larger record of barrier evidence.

Whānau voice needs to sit alongside agency and provider information in measuring that performance. Organisations already account upwards to funders, regulators and governance bodies, but the Navigator Project shows why the social system also needs to face outwards towards the people it exists to serve.

22.4 Recommendation 3: Develop a Broad-Spectrum Workforce

Support a generalist frontline workforce able to work across systems while complementing specialist services.

Whānau demand did not fit neatly within organisational or sector boundaries. Among the 7,122 demands recorded directly from whānau, 44.6% involved help to find, understand, access or progress support. Across the full dataset that proportion was 48.1%. Navigators also delivered 3,485 responses themselves, around 29% of all responses recorded.

Their role extended well beyond referral and included practical help, information, follow-up, coaching, advocacy, problem solving, collaboration across agencies and pulling in specialist expertise when it was needed. The Navigator Project showed the value of having someone who could retain sight of the whole whānau journey rather than only the part belonging to one service.

A broad-spectrum role should complement, rather than replace, specialist, statutory and crisis services. The agency-demand analysis shows why clear boundaries matter: seven in ten demands recorded as coming through agencies involved system-support work, including follow-up, progressing processes, forms and attendance. Because some navigators held overlapping roles, the data cannot show how much of this was work transferred from elsewhere, but it does show how easily a flexible role can absorb work that properly belongs elsewhere. Missing specialist capacity and coordination problems require different responses, because more navigation cannot fix a service that does not exist or has no capacity.

The workforce also cannot be separated from the infrastructure around it. Coaching, supervision, provider leadership, shared learning and access to specialist advice were central to both the quality of practice and the quality of the evidence captured. They should therefore be treated as part of the model rather than as optional overheads.

The aim should be to build broad-spectrum capability across the community rather than recreate a permanent specialist navigator service sitting beside an unchanged system. Over time, more frontline practitioners should be able to hear what matters to whānau, work across boundaries where appropriate, recognise system barriers and contribute evidence to improvement.

22.5 Recommendation 4: Adopt Community Commissioning

Give Tairāwhiti sufficient local commissioning authority to act on what it learns.

The scale of the investment involved is substantial. NZIER estimated government social service operating expenditure in Te Tairāwhiti at about $1.2 billion in the 2021 fiscal year. In 2023, MSD alone held around 150 contracts with about 25 providers in the region, worth about $50 million. The Navigator Project created a whānau-centred view of how parts of that system perform, but the authority to redirect investment remained largely elsewhere.

The Navigator Project generated sustained evidence about need, service gaps and barriers. Local leaders could see where standard pathways did not fit and could sometimes negotiate a different response for individual whānau. What they did not consistently hold were the decision rights needed to redirect investment, change service expectations, commission missing capacity or require system owners to follow improvement work through to completion.

This was one of the questions Manaaki Tairāwhiti was established to test. The 2016 Cabinet mandate envisaged a phased movement from local governance and shared measurement toward greater local decision-making and, if the model proved its value, a social investment commissioning role for Tairāwhiti. The Navigator Project has now generated much of the evidence that was intended to inform that next step.

Community commissioning provides a way to connect that evidence to authority without simply

reproducing the existing system through contracts issued from a different office. Its value is in allowing investment, service expectations, workforce capability and system improvement to respond to what is being learned from whānau.

Community commissioning therefore needs to retain practical system improvement capability alongside its commissioning and data functions. Better contracts, data sharing and provider feedback are useful, but they are not the improvement method. The work starts by studying how a system actually performs for whānau, understanding the conditions and assumptions producing recurring barriers, testing a different design against real demand, and implementing the changes only when the evidence shows it works better. Without that discipline, there is a risk of changing who commissions services while reproducing the same system that leads to the same outcomes with the same barriers.

The report does not propose drawing a fixed line in advance between everything that should remain national and everything that should move local. Chapter 6 set out why the two systems are complementary: national systems have strengths where consistency, common entitlements, regulation, standards and scale are part of the purpose, while local capability matters where circumstances vary, several systems have to work together, local capacity needs to be built or standard pathways repeatedly fail to fit.

Rather than setting that boundary theoretically, the system improvement method provides a way to learn it through the work by understanding how the current arrangement performs for whānau, testing greater local discretion where the evidence supports it, and retaining the arrangements that perform better. Some functions may prove better retained nationally, while others may benefit from greater local authority.

Chapter 18 gives an example of why that flexibility matters. Demand changed rapidly during the cyclone period, organisations adapted, and the proportion of demands encountering a barrier did not increase. The cyclone response showed that systems can work differently when people have enough discretion to respond to changing conditions, without suggesting that crisis arrangements themselves should become permanent.

Community commissioning would create the conditions to test that kind of adaptation deliberately rather than waiting for a crisis. It would also allow the other three recommendations in this chapter to operate together: commissioning against actual demand, requiring improvement where barriers recur, and supporting a workforce able to work across the whole experience of whānau.

Any greater local authority would still sit alongside strong public accountability, fiscal assurance, transparent governance, Māori data sovereignty and independent evaluation, and should be judged by whether it improves performance for whānau. Tairāwhiti needs enough scope to test different arrangements, learn from the work and make changes where the evidence supports them.

22.6 Conclusion

More than a decade after the New Zealand Productivity Commission published More Effective Social Services, and ten years after Cabinet established Place-Based Initiatives to shift more collective decision-making and discretion to the local level, many of the same system conditions remain visible in Tairāwhiti.

The Navigator Project shows what whānau voice, flexible practice and strong local relationships can achieve, while also showing where their limits sit when the wider system does not change. Whānau voice can generate meaningful evidence about what people need, what gets in the way and what happens when they seek help. Urungi made that evidence visible across systems. The Tairāwhiti Way of Working gave practitioners a way to respond flexibly to what mattered to whānau. Coaching, discretionary funding, Pull for Support and cross-sector relationships helped people progress needs that would otherwise have stalled.

But navigation alone cannot fix a system that continues to produce barriers. Of the 1,542 whānau included in the engagement analysis, 48.3% finished with some or all of their recorded needs unmet. Availability barriers were most prominent among those with the poorest outcomes. Across the wider dataset, 51.3% of recorded demand encountered at least one barrier, and there was no clear evidence that the system became easier to move through over six years.

The Evidence Register shows the same limitation at governance level: recurring needs, barriers and service gaps were made visible, but the people holding that evidence did not always hold the authority needed to carry improvement through to completion.

The findings show that improving the social sector requires more than helping whānau navigate a difficult system. There also needs to be a way to change the system conditions that keep creating the same barriers and improve the productivity and outcomes required of the sector.

Community commissioning would bring that evidence closer to the decisions about investment and system design that the Navigator Project itself could not make. The Tairāwhiti Way of Working, a broad-spectrum workforce, Urungi 2.0 and coaching would support it by keeping whānau voice connected to commissioning and system improvement.

The project does not leave Tairāwhiti with a finished model to roll out unchanged, because doing so would run against the methodology on which the work was built. Instead, it leaves the region with a way of listening, measuring, learning and testing what works, together with six years of evidence about where the next work should begin.

There is already substantial evidence that whānau face barriers and that skilled practitioners can help them work through those barriers. The next phase needs to connect that learning to the authority and investment required to address the barriers that keep returning, so that we achieve better value for money spent in the region.

Whānau shared their experiences in the hope that services would improve for those who came after them. The measure of the next phase should be whether the next whānau encounters the same barriers and, where barriers remain, whether the system can show what it learned and what it changed because it listened.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: The System Improvement Methodology

Part One describes the thinking that sits underneath the Navigator Project. This appendix sets out the method in enough detail for future commissioning, practice and system improvement work to continue to use it.

The methodology was introduced to Tairāwhiti through business coaches funded by the Ministry of Social Development from 2017. It draws largely on the Vanguard method of system improvement and was adapted through practice in the New Zealand public-service context. The work was initially known as Better Every Day and is now referred to as System Improvement (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2024a; 2024b; Davis, 2016).

The method starts from a simple proposition: a service should be understood from the point of view of the person trying to use it. Measures should show whether the system achieves its purpose for that person, not only whether the organisation completed its own activity.

A.1 Seven Principles

Seven principles govern the work:

1. Start by studying the system from the point of view of customers, where the work happens.
2. Create effective performance measures about outcomes, soundly presented over time and embedded in the system, in the hands of those doing the work.
3. Use evidence from data rather than opinion to make informed decisions.
4. See and work on the whole system rather than attempting improvement only within its component parts.
5. Learn by experimentation and reflection.
6. Uncover the thinking, beliefs and assumptions that made the system the way it currently is.
7. Those who are accountable for the design and operation of the current system should lead the work to change it.

The second principle is what Urungi put into practice. The seventh is central to the final finding of this report. Evidence can make a problem visible, but sustained change requires the people with authority over the system condition to participate and act.

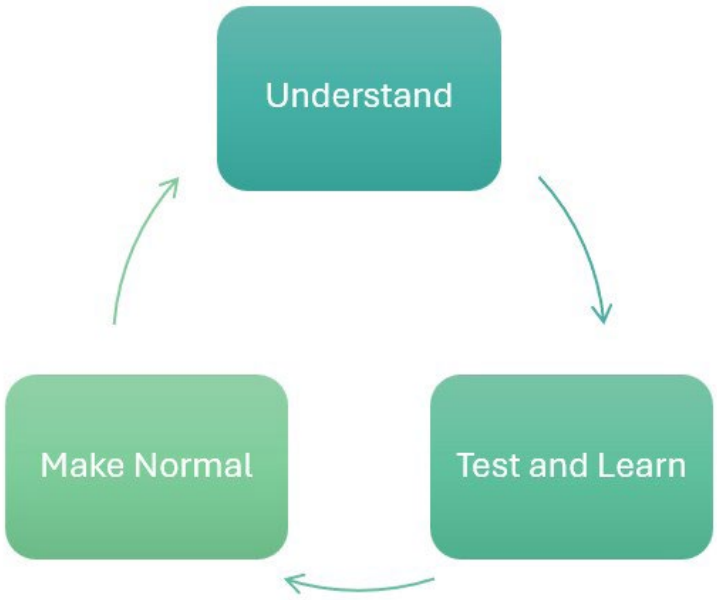
A.2 Purpose-Measures-Method

Before changing a service, the method asks three questions:

- Purpose: What are we here to achieve, from the point of view of the person using the service?
- Measures: What information would tell us whether the system is achieving that purpose?
- Method: How should the work be designed so that the purpose can be achieved and the measures improve?

The sequence is deliberate: measures are derived from purpose, and technology and process are then designed to support the work required. The method is not designed by starting with an existing contract, database or organisational structure and asking how to make it more efficient.

A.3 Understand, Test and Learn, Make Normal



The first stage is Understand: The team studies real demand and real journeys end to end. It asks what matters to whānau, what they needed, what happened, how long it took, how many organisations were involved, what barriers appeared and what practitioners had to do to make progress.

The aim is to identify three things:

- Performance: what is happening for whānau now;
- System conditions: the processes, policies, roles, measures, funding, technology, capacity and organisational arrangements that produce that performance;
- Thinking: the assumptions and beliefs that created and sustain those conditions.

A barrier should not move into redesign simply because one difficult event occurred. Repeated cases are used to establish whether there is a pattern and to understand the causes well enough to test an alternative design.

The second stage is Test and Learn: A different response is designed and tested against real demand on a small scale. The test is measured against the purpose. The team watches whether outcomes improve, time reduces, barriers fall and the work becomes easier for whānau and practitioners.

The test is adjusted as evidence develops. The purpose is learning, not proving that the first proposed solution was right.

The final stage is Make Normal: Where the alternative design improves performance, the change is embedded into everyday practice at the appropriate scale. Roles, contracts, policy, technology, measures and governance are adjusted so the better response no longer depends on a particular individual or workaround.

Performance continues to be monitored. If the same barrier reappears, the learning loop begins again.

Make Normal depends directly on decision rights. A local team can often understand and test a problem within its reach. It cannot make a national funding rule, policy setting or service specification normal without the organisation that owns that setting.

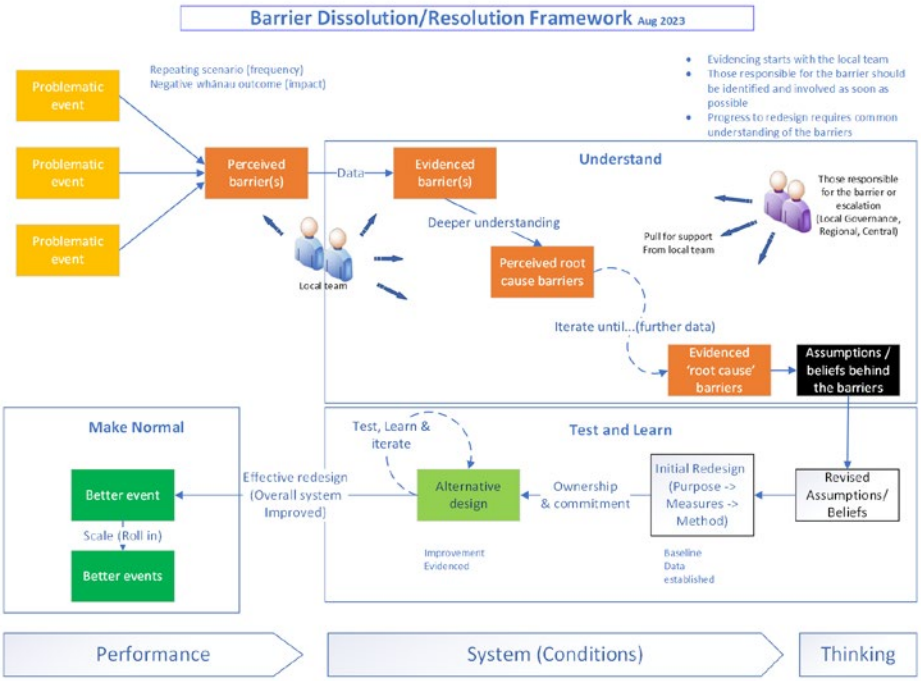
A.4 The Barrier Resolution Framework

The Barrier Dissolution/Resolution Framework used by the project traces a barrier from the first problematic event through to a sustained redesign.

A simplified sequence is:

- Record the event as experienced by whānau.
- Look for repetition across other whānau journeys.
- Establish the performance pattern with data.
- Identify the system conditions producing it.
- Identify the thinking or assumptions underneath those conditions.
- Bring in the people who own the relevant conditions.
- Test an alternative design against real demand.
- Measure whether performance improves.
- Make the successful design normal at the appropriate scale.
- Continue monitoring to ensure the barrier does not return.

Where the barrier sits outside the local team's authority, the framework requires escalation to the people who do hold that authority. Escalation is part of the method, not the end of it.



A.5 How Far the Method Travelled

Between 2022 and 2025 Manaaki Tairāwhiti applied the methodology to several subsystems identified through whānau voice. The three detailed cases in Appendices E, F and G show different points on the same pathway.

Work	What the Evidence Showed	How far the Method Progressed
Respite care and carer support (Appendix E)	Between June 2019 and May 2023, whānau seeking carer support and respite care encountered a barrier over 85% of the time, against an overall Urungi barrier rate of 44% in the same period. The project validated this from inside the system and found it not fit for purpose: five funders, no clear owner, no dedicated facility-based respite identified in the region at that time, and low utilisation of allocated Carer Support.	This was the furthest the method travelled: three of four phases were completed. The system was mapped, findings were validated, a new system purpose and principles were agreed, an implementation plan with evaluation indicators was developed, and tests began. Whaikaha engaged the MSD System Improvement Coaches to study its own systems. Making the redesign normal required national authorisation the region did not hold. Whaikaha's work was then paused by its restructure.
Identification and driver licensing (Appendix F)	The 2022 analysis mapped circular dependencies between forms of identification. Of 109 recorded identification barriers, 27 (25%) concerned driver licensing; 15 of those 27 (55.6%) were recorded at the learner-licence stage. The driver licensing system map also recorded no testing officer available in Gisborne in October 2022 and noted the same issue in 2021. Later Urungi records show some of the same document-access and course-access conditions still occurring in 2024 and 2025, although the later counts are too small and unevenly recorded to establish a trend.	A complete end-to-end system map was produced, identifying where barriers sat across the pathway. The project documents reviewed for this report do not contain a returned account of what was tested or changed in response. National developments later occurred in both digital identity and driver licensing, although the project could not trace a direct line from its evidence to those changes.
Unsupported Child's Benefit (Appendix G)	The causal analysis identified eight reinforcing barrier loops. One Urungi record also raised a case-level concern about how changes to a parent's benefit when a child moves into another caregiver's care could influence care arrangements.	A barrier analysis, causal hypotheses and a navigator-tested practical guideline were produced, and the organisations needed for fuller redesign were identified. The project did not hold authority to require those organisations to enter a redesign programme.

Across all three cases, local teams could diagnose the problem and develop ways around it. Changing the underlying system depended on the organisations that controlled the relevant settings.

Appendix B: The Purpose-Measures-Method Architecture

Purpose-Measures-Method (PMM) is used across the Tairāwhiti Way of Working to connect what the work is trying to achieve, how people know whether it is working, and how the work should be done.

PMM applies at more than one level. Frontline and coaching roles have their own purpose, measures and method. The four value steps in the Tairāwhiti Way of Working are also defined in this way, as are supporting practices such as consent, information sharing, planning with whānau, practitioner hui, Pull for Support and reflective learning.

Together, these form a connected way of working. The purpose comes from what matters to whānau. Measures show what happens as whānau move through the system. The method describes how practitioners and organisations respond. Learning from the measures then feeds back into practice and system improvement.

B.1 Purpose

At each level, the overarching Manaaki Tairāwhiti purpose is: "Enable whānau to flourish by doing whatever it takes."

The Tairāwhiti Way of Working expresses its purpose from the whānau perspective: "Help me to be heard and understood so that I can be responsible for the care and wellbeing of my family/whānau."

The individual PMMs sit beneath these purposes. They create a line from what matters to whānau, through frontline practice and collective work, to the evidence used to understand how well the system is responding.

The Tairāwhiti Way of Working is also guided by a set of principles. Whānau determine what matters and choose who they trust to support them. Practitioners work with the whole whānau situation rather than only the issue that fits their service. Whānau strengths, aspirations and self-determination are recognised alongside need. Organisations work to a shared purpose, share information lawfully and transparently, and respond flexibly when standard arrangements do not fit the circumstances in front of them. Funding should also be flexible enough to respond to whānau need.

The method is not intended to become another fixed process. The Tairāwhiti Way of Working is a learning approach that changes as practitioners and leaders build evidence about what works. The value steps can be used according to the circumstances of the whānau rather than followed as a rigid sequence, while consent remains part of the work throughout.

B.2 PMM For the Navigator Project Roles

The Navigator Project developed role-based PMMs to make clear what each role exists to achieve, how performance is understood and how the work is carried out.

Role or Function	Purpose	Measures	Method
Manaaki Navigator / Kaiurungi	Capture whānau voice to inform system change while enabling whānau to flourish by doing whatever it takes.	Whānau voice recorded as "I need or want… because…"; outcomes; end-to-end time; perceived barriers; navigator response.	Apply and model the Tairāwhiti Way of Working; respond flexibly to whānau; participate in coaching and shared learning; use Urungi or another agreed platform to record whānau experience; share learning across the workforce.
Recording Whānau Experience	Hold and organise whānau experience so that it provides evidence about system performance.	Whānau voice recorded as close to verbatim as possible; needs and concerns; outcomes; time to outcome; barriers; responses; service gaps; frequent or high-concern patterns.	Record the whānau narrative and supporting measures; theme needs, responses and barriers; identify recurring gaps and barriers; prepare cases for change; escalate evidence through the agreed pathway.
Navigator Supervisor / Practice Lead	Use whānau voice and system-performance evidence to identify where the system is not meeting whānau need, while building practitioner capability.	Whānau needs, concerns and outcomes; cases for change; barrier evidence; escalation to practitioners, operational leaders, barrier owners and governance; progress of system improvement work; adoption of the Way of Working.	Coach practitioners in the Tairāwhiti Way of Working and whānau voice capture; reflect on successes, barriers and differences in practice; collate and analyse evidence; develop and escalate cases for change; support Pull for Support and discretionary responses where required.

These roles are connected rather than separate. Frontline practitioners work alongside whānau and generate evidence through the work. Recording whānau experience makes patterns across individual journeys visible. Coaches and practice leads help practitioners use that evidence, strengthen practice and move recurring issues into wider system learning and escalation.

PMM does not make the frontline practitioner responsible for fixing every system problem. It makes clear what each role is there to do and how evidence moves from individual whānau experience into collective learning and, where necessary, system change.

B.3 PMM Across the Four Value Steps (Pou)

The Tairāwhiti Way of Working is organised around four connected value steps. These describe the work that adds value for whānau rather than the internal processes of any one organisation. Whānau voice and consent run through all four.

Value step	Purpose	Measures	Method
Whakawhānaungatanga – Whānau Engagement	Engage with whānau to hear their story and whakapapa and build trust and rapport.	Whānau and tamariki voice; consent; level of engagement; relevant whakapapa and connections.	Begin where whānau are; recognise strengths and aspirations; listen to whānau voice; build trust over time; agree how contact will occur; seek consent; understand the wider person and whānau rather than only the presenting issue.
Tētahi Tangata Pukumahi – Collective Understanding	Gain a collective understanding that supports a collective response to whānau.	Evidence of practitioners working collectively; barriers; successes; appropriate information sharing.	Bring together the people and information needed to understand the whole situation; facilitate hui where required; share information with consent; use tools such as genograms or ecograms where useful; synthesise and analyse information together.
Mā Mātou Kōrero – Collective Response and Review	Respond collectively to whānau needs and aspirations and review whether the response is working.	Results, including end-to-end time; one plan owned by whānau; needs, strengths, aspirations, concerns and barriers; whānau and practitioner participation; reflection and learning.	Plan with whānau; facilitate hui; Pull for Support where needed; act on the agreed plan; review progress collectively; reflect on what is working and what needs to change.
Ka Hoki Mai Anō – Whānau Flourishing	Whānau and practitioners reflect on outcomes, impacts and self-sufficiency and plan any future support.	Whānau assessment of what self-sufficiency means to them; whether whānau can manage their own plan where one is still needed; outcomes; reflection and learning.	Gather feedback throughout the engagement; support whānau to manage their own plan; agree how re-entry or Pull for Support will work if circumstances change; reflect on what worked and what should be carried forward.

The value steps join together relationship, understanding, collective action, outcomes and learning. Measures show whether each step is achieving its purpose, while the method gives practitioners guidance about how to work without prescribing the same response for every whānau.

B.4 Supporting Methods

A number of supporting methods sit around the four value steps. They are practical parts of the Tairāwhiti Way of Working that help practitioners and organisations work collectively around whānau.

Supporting Method	How It Is Used
Referral / Intake	Supports an "any door" approach. Whānau demand is captured in whānau language, the people or services able to help are identified as early as possible, and consent enables collective understanding rather than repeated referral between organisations.
Consent	Ensures whānau understand who is involved, how information will be shared and why. Consent covers support for the whānau, identification and escalation of barriers and use of information for workforce learning. It is revisited when new actions or uses of information arise.
Information Sharing	Allows information approved by whānau to be shared lawfully and ethically so practitioners can work from a shared understanding without requiring whānau to repeatedly tell their story.
Planning with Whānau	Records whānau voice, strengths, needs, aspirations, barriers, actions, responsibilities and timeframes in a plan led and owned by whānau.
Practitioner Hui	Brings practitioners together with whānau to build shared understanding, clarify roles and agree the response. Whānau should leave knowing who is involved, what each person is responsible for and what will happen next.
Pull for Support	Brings the support, expertise, service or pathway needed into the collective response rather than referring whānau away. It also builds frontline capability and shows where ordinary pathways are unable to respond.
Reflective Learning	Creates time for practitioners to look closely at what happened, challenge assumptions, identify learning and decide what should change in future practice.
System Stewardship - Learning and Improvement	Takes the learning beyond an individual whānau journey. Practitioners and leaders reflect on system performance, build capability, act on barriers within their authority, escalate those outside it and continue improving the Tairāwhiti Way of Working.

Consent is more than a form or signature. It is part of the relationship with whānau and is revisited as the work develops. Information sharing follows from that consent. Planning belongs to whānau rather than to an agency. Pull for Support brings help into the work rather than sending whānau to another door. Reflective learning and system stewardship ensure that experience is used to improve what happens next.

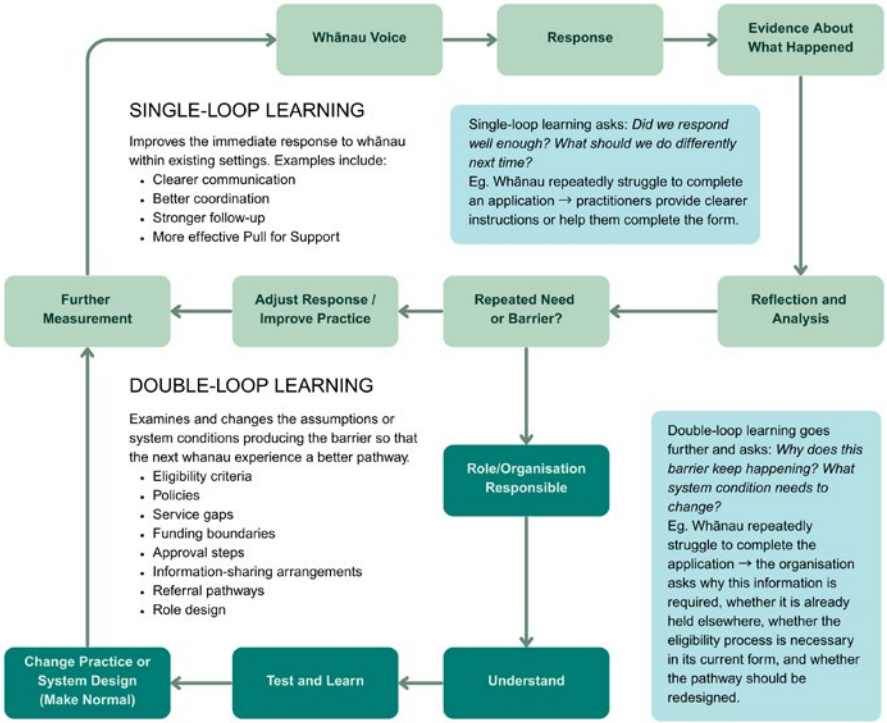
B.5 PMM and System Improvement

PMM creates a connection between frontline work and system improvement. At the frontline, practitioners record what whānau need, why they need it, what happens, how long it takes, what barriers arise and what response is required. Looking across many journeys allows practitioners, coaches, analysts and leaders to see repeated patterns that may not be visible from within a single service or organisation.

The PMMs for Collective Response and Collective Review make system improvement part of the work. Successes and failures are used to understand system conditions. Barriers are identified, documented and escalated. Gaps in services and community programmes are identified and acted on. Reflection is expected to lead to improvement rather than remain as discussion.

The System Stewardship PMM extends this responsibility further. Leaders and practitioners are expected to understand, reflect, learn and act on the system at all levels; build the capability of kaimahi and leaders; act on high-priority barriers within their remit; escalate those owned elsewhere; and continue to improve both the Tairāwhiti Way of Working and the region's capability to apply it.

The intended flow is:



This is the link between PMM and the double learning loop described in Chapter 21.1. The first loop asks whether the immediate response works for the whānau in front of us. The second asks why the barrier exists, who has responsibility for the condition producing it, what needs to be tested differently and whether later whānau experience a better pathway.

The Navigator Project became increasingly capable of producing evidence for that second loop, but could not always complete it where the authority to change the relevant setting sat elsewhere. That finding is specific to the project period, while the learning cycle itself remains part of the system improvement method.

B.6 How the Measures Are Intended to be Used

The measures are designed for learning rather than as individual practitioner targets. A measure such as end-to-end time shows how long whānau wait from presenting a need until it is resolved. Barrier measures show what delays or prevents progress. Response measures show what additional work is required around the need. Whānau voice provides the reason and context that a service category alone cannot show.

Looking at these measures together allows practitioners and leaders to ask not only whether activity occurred, but whether the work achieved its purpose and what the wider system contributed to the result.

This is different from measuring practitioner performance through case numbers, appointments or closure times. Those measures can show activity, but they provide limited information about whether whānau got what they needed or why they did not. PMM keeps attention on the effectiveness of the whole system rather than the throughput of one role.

Five design features are central to the approach:

1. Purpose is expressed from the perspective of whānau: The work is measured against whether whānau are heard, understood and able to progress what matters to them, rather than only whether an organisation delivers a contracted service.
2. Measures follow purpose: Need, reason, outcome, time, barriers and responses are captured because they help practitioners and leaders understand how well the journey is working.
3. Measures are used for learning rather than individual throughput targets: The aim is to understand performance, not encourage practitioners to close work quickly or maximise volumes.
4. Measurement sits close to the work: Practitioners, coaches and leaders use evidence in reflection, coaching and improvement, making data quality part of practice rather than something left only to analysts.
5. Method changes as learning develops: PMM does not lock the Tairāwhiti Way of Working into a fixed procedure. Practice is expected to change as evidence shows what works better for whānau.

Appendix C: Housing - Local Need and National Administrative Data

C.1 What the Two Measures Count

The Housing Register is a point-in-time administrative measure. It contains applicants who are not already in public housing, have been assessed as eligible for social housing and are ready to be matched to a suitable property. Eligibility is determined through the Social Allocation System against national criteria, including housing need and the household's ability to access, afford and sustain suitable alternative housing (Ministry of Social Development, 2026).

Urungi begins with the need rather than eligibility for a particular service. Across the full project dataset, Somewhere to Live / Stay was recorded 502 times, including 206 needs coded to Public/Social Housing. Other Somewhere to Live / Stay needs sat across emergency, private and other housing pathways. These included whānau who were homeless, facing eviction, living somewhere unsuitable, seeking emergency accommodation, trying to access social housing, or looking for somewhere else to live.

This means the Housing Register shows the people visible within one formal housing pathway, while Urungi provides a wider view of the housing need presenting to navigators.

C.2 What Both Datasets Show Over Time

Quarter	Gisborne Housing Register	Somewhere to Live / Stay needs per 100 whānau	Public/Social Housing needs per 100 whānau
2023 Q4	624	30.0	13.8
2024 Q1	639	26.0	8.3
2024 Q2	531	26.1	8.1
2024 Q3	504	24.7	9.5
2024 Q4	495	9.9	2.0
2025 Q1	438	11.6	6.2
2025 Q2	402	11.4	6.3

(Source: Ministry of Social Development Gisborne Housing Register 2026).

The clearest difference between the two measures occurred during the first three quarters of 2024. Between March and September, the Gisborne Housing Register fell from 639 to 504 households, a reduction of 135 households or 21.1%.

Over the same period, Somewhere to Live / Stay demand recorded in Urungi remained broadly steady at 26.0, 26.1 and 24.7 needs per 100 whānau. The same pattern was visible when the analysis was narrowed to Public/Social Housing, at 8.3, 8.1 and 9.5 needs per 100 whānau.

From March to September 2024, the Housing Register was falling sharply while social housing demand presenting to navigators remained steady. Urungi housing demand fell later in 2024 and rose again in 2025. The two measures are not interchangeable: one counts eligible applicants within a formal pathway, while the other records housing need presenting locally.

C.3 What Got in the Way

The barrier data helps explain why the two measures can diverge. Across the 206 Somewhere to Live / Stay needs coded to Public/Social Housing, 109 (52.9%) encountered at least one barrier. Those needs were associated with 198 recorded barriers.

Barrier Theme	Number of Barriers	Share
Availability	70	35.4%
Communication Process	33	16.7%
Criteria, Policy & Legislation	33	16.7%
Process to Access	30	15.2%
Delivery Mode	14	7.1%
Professional / Agency Relationship	11	5.6%
Affordability	5	2.5%
Unclassified	2	1.0%
Total	198	100%

Availability was the largest single barrier, accounting for 35.4% of the 198 barriers recorded against Public/Social Housing needs. Supply was a major part of the problem, but it was not the only problem. Criteria legislation and policy, process to access and communication barriers together accounted for 96 barriers, or 48.5% of the total.

The wider Public/Social Housing data shows the additional work this created. Alongside requests for somewhere to live were repeated requests for information and advice, advocacy, follow-up, tenancy transfers, help with applications and forms, accompaniment and supporting documentation.

Whānau and navigators recorded delays completing or updating assessments, uncertainty about priority ratings, difficulties having changed circumstances reflected, repeat applications and documentation, long waits for contact or decisions, and poor communication between different parts of the housing pathway.

These barriers matter when interpreting the Housing Register because they occur on the pathway between needing housing and becoming, or remaining, visible as an eligible applicant.

C.4 A Falling Register Is Not the Same as Falling Housing Need

People leave the Housing Register for several reasons. In the quarter ending June 2024, MSD recorded 120 primary applicants leaving the Gisborne Housing Register. Of those, 54 were housed in social housing (Ministry of Social Development, 2024a). MSD did not centrally hold information showing how many of the remaining applicants moved into private rentals. It advised that applicants can also

be removed because they are no longer eligible, because their housing need or housing requirements cannot be confirmed, or because they ask to be removed.

A lower Housing Register shows that fewer applicants remained recorded as eligible and ready to be matched. It does not show that housing need fell by the same amount.

Administrative data is essential for understanding demand within the services government currently provides, while whānau voice starts with what people actually need, including need that sits before or outside the formal public-housing pathway. Used together, the Housing Register shows eligible demand within the public-housing system and Urungi shows the wider housing need presenting locally, including the barriers whānau encounter trying to resolve it.

For commissioners deciding how much housing and housing support Tairāwhiti requires, that wider view of demand matters.

Appendix D: Discretionary Funding Analysis

D.1 What Discretionary Funding Was and How It Was Used

Manaaki Tairāwhiti held a small discretionary fund that navigators could access when a whānau need could not be met through the usual service or funding pathways. The fund was initially supported through MSD and Health funding and later through Place-Based Initiative funding.

Urungi recorded 359 discretionary funding responses between June 2019 and August 2025. These records include both the Manaaki Tairāwhiti fund and discretionary resources held by individual providers. Matapuna Training Centre had its own discretionary fund available for students and accounted for a large share of the overall records. Kerekere's research also notes that Matapuna, and later SuperGrans, held their own discretionary funds (Kerekere, 2025).

This analysis includes only needs with a discretionary fund response from Manaaki Tairāwhiti. There were 59 MT discretionary-fund responses attached to 58 unique needs. One need had two funding responses, so the analysis uses 58 unique needs to avoid double counting.

Measure	Discretionary Fund Data
Discretionary fund responses	59
Unique needs supported	58
Whānau supported	38
Different need themes	23
Systems represented	6
Needs with at least one recorded barrier	33 (56.9%)
Barriers associated with those needs	71
Needs ultimately recorded as met	55 (94.8%)

Fifty-seven of the 58 needs were recorded as Whānau Need and one as Agency Demand. The data does not include a complete record of the amount spent against each need. This analysis can therefore show what the fund responded to, the barriers associated with those needs and what ultimately happened, but it cannot calculate total expenditure, average payment size, value for money or financial savings.

D.2 The Fund Was Used After Other Options Had Been Tested

The discretionary fund was intended as a last-resort source of flexibility, used after existing entitlements, services and other funding options had been tested and could not meet the need. The May 2021 Discretionary Fund Guideline required the navigator to pull for support from a supervisor or coach and provide:

Navigator

Accessing Manaaki Tairawhiti Discretionary Funding:

- Pull for support from Manaaki Navigator Supervisor/Coach
- Provide the following details for consideration:
    - Please provide a brief overview of the case details in an e-mail to Supervisor/Coach
        1. Case code / Name
        2. Demand/need or want
        3. What have you tested in the current system - ie requested/clarified current entitlements/ support from MSD, Pulled for support from other agencies. Give details of what you have tried.
        4. Barriers
        5. Agencies involved - Has there been a collective understand/response
        6. How will discretionary funding improve the situation
    - Attach quote (with amount requested) to e-mail.

Supervisor

Consideration of discretionary fund request:

- Do you have sufficient information to progress this request?
    1. Whanau demand captured in Urungi
    2. Current system tested and does not meet the need of whanau
    3. Request more information / Advice about additional avenues for support / access
- Record in Discretionary Fund spreadsheet
    1. Date
    2. Case Code
    3. Demand
    4. Amount
    5. Outcome - approved/declined/more information requested
    6. Rationale
- Consider request - consistency
- Advise Navigator of outcome and rationale or
- Provide Programme Lead with detail/quote and request for payment to be made.

Programme Lead

- Discussion with Supervisor/Coach, check all practical steps have been completed
- Code required
- Check quote and documentation
- Make payment using Manaaki Tairawhiti Credit Card and file receipt
- Reimbursement made to agency if already paid (on receipt of an invoice) if required
- Ensure audit trail of expenditures is completed

Expectation - All discretionary fund requests will be treated with urgency as all other avenues for support have been tested and exhausted.

"The purpose of the discretionary fund is to test the system. If funding is a barrier, before a discretionary fund is accessed, we test every other option first. The purpose is to learn what the system will not pay for." Leslynne Jackson, Programme Lead, Urungi Team (Kerekere, 2025, p. 28).

The method can be summarised as:

Whānau need →Test existing entitlements and services → Pull in other agencies or options → Identify what is preventing the need being met→ Request discretionary funding if the gap remains → Record the response and outcome

The figures that follow therefore describe needs that should already have been tested against existing entitlements, services and other available support before Manaaki Tairāwhiti funding was approved. Not every one of the 58 needs has a barrier record attached in the exported Urungi data. The absence of a recorded barrier should not be interpreted as evidence that the funding guideline was not followed. Recording practices varied across the life of the project, while the guideline itself required existing options to be tested before approval.

D.3 What the Discretionary Fund Paid For

Need Theme	Unique Needs
Car / Accessories / Repairs	6
Clothing / Accessories / Repairs	6
Communication Device / Connection	5
Kai / Groceries	5
Facilities / Fixtures / Repairs - heating, insulation, water or hot water	4
Furniture / Furnishings	4
Income Support / Supplement	3
Get things / drop things off	3
Home & Garden Maintenance	3
Medication / Prescriptions	3
Specialist Equipment / Products	2
Debt / Budgeting Support	2
Medical Advice / Review / Diagnosis	2
Other one-off need themes	10
Total	58

The one-off needs included accommodation associated with health treatment, a bond, baby equipment, driver licensing, specialist services, transport, tutoring or educational resources, help with an application and recreation or sports equipment.

The fund was used across a wide range of needs. A vehicle repair could allow a disabled young person to keep using their modified vehicle; a phone could keep someone contactable by services; accommodation and petrol could make an out-of-region specialist appointment possible; and a household repair could restore hot water or help secure a home. What these needs had in common was that a specific practical requirement sat within a wider whānau situation and no standard response available at the time could meet it.

D.4 The Barriers Around Discretionary Funded Needs

Thirty-three of the 58 needs had one or more barriers recorded. Across those needs there were 71 barriers.

Barrier theme	Number of Barriers	Share
Criteria, Policy & Legislation	27	38.0%
Process to access	19	26.8%
Availability	10	14.1%
Delivery Mode	6	8.5%
Communication Process	4	5.6%
Affordability	4	5.6%
Unclassified	1	1.4%
Total	71	100%

Criteria, policy and legislation and access processes accounted for 64.8% of the barriers. Including availability increases this to 78.9%.

Although the response was a payment, affordability was not usually the only barrier recorded. It accounted for four of the 71 barriers, while criteria, policy and legislation, access processes and availability accounted for most of the remainder. Far more often, navigators recorded that criteria or policy did not accommodate the circumstances, that the process for reaching support created a barrier, or that the required service or resource was unavailable.

One recent vehicle repair journey illustrates how several otherwise reasonable funding settings can leave a gap between them. The whānau needed repairs to obtain a warrant of fitness. Victim Support could not fund the repairs because they were not directly related to a recent family harm incident; a children's flexible fund was temporarily closed; and Work and Income advised that the person had exhausted the relevant entitlement. None of those decisions necessarily indicates that the individual service was operating incorrectly. Taken together, however, they left the whānau with a practical need that none of the available pathways would meet.

The value of the discretionary-fund data is that it shows where separate services, entitlements and funding responsibilities did not join up around the circumstances of a whānau. This does not mean every item funded should become a universal entitlement; it identifies where the existing arrangements left a gap.

A barrier recorded in Urungi is also not the same thing as an evidenced root cause. The barrier tells us what got in the way during the whānau journey. The system improvement method then requires further work to establish why it occurred, who owns the condition and whether a redesign would improve performance.

Discretionary funds

These are examples of discretionary fund case stories. In each of these cases we checked the clients' needs, and there was a coordinated and wraparound support plan in place however, none of the services could meet the financial need.

Key messages:

- Workarounds? Barriers haven't been solved.
- There are plenty of other agencies involved however, none of them can fund the need of the whanau

"Whatever it takes"

Manaaki Tairāwhiti

better every day System Improvement

Names have been changed

Whanau	Voice & situation	How did it help?	Agencies involved Agency = lead agency	What did we test?	Manaaki Tairawhiti response	Recommendations
RAYCHEL & NINA Teenaged siblings  Complexity Ability meeting own needs	**Minors with debt and no parental support** **"I want to finish my education so I can get a job, so I can pay the bills and look after myself."** A house fire left two teenagers with no option but to move back into their mother's care. Mother's house had no electricity connected due to mother's bad credit. Mother convinced daughter to have power reconnected in the teenager's name promising to pay the bill. Mother subsequently moved out the district leaving the girls with no income and a significant debt to the power company. The girls applied for a benefit but had no ability to repay a recoverable debt to Work and Income.	The siblings started with a independent benefit and a clean slate as we removed parent's debt from teens.	4 Accommodation, kai, clothing, personal care items, household essentials, access to education, Youth Payment for financial support are all in plan. Te Pa Harekeke | Matapuna | Work and Income | Turanga Ararau – Youth Services	• Do not apply for recoverable debt with Work and Income • Connect to Youth Service for benefit application	**$1445** for the power arrears.	• Flexible system that can respond to variation in client needs
MERCEDES & JOHN 2 parents, 3 teenage children and 1 moko  Complexity Ability meeting own needs	**Care of grandchild, terminal diagnosis & debt** **"We can't cope with the financial legal cost of taking our moko into our care due to terminal cancer that changed our circumstances."** M & J took their mokopuna into their care as their daughter was using drugs, was transient and involved in an abusive relationship. Whanau demonstrated resilience taking care of mokopuna to remove care and protection concerns and did not involve Oranga Tamariki. M & J got legal advice and applied to the Family Court for a Parenting Order. Months later J, the sole income earner of the family was diagnosed with terminal cancer. He continued to work for as long as possible to make regular part payments to the lawyer. As his health deteriorated he had to leave his job. The family struggled to pay their bills on a benefit and could not retrospectively apply for legal aid.	Building whanau resilience and reduced stress & prevented referral to debt collection agency.	11 The families other needs (health, grief) were being met by other services. Cancer Society | Hauora Tairawhiti Oncology Specialist | Nurse | Social Worker | Palliative Care | Campion College | Gisborne Girls High School | Work and Income | Psychologist | Lawyer	• Working outside the system • Prevent going to debt collection agency • Added value to services meeting health an psychosocial needs	**$1530** for the legal fees.	• Flexible system that can respond to variation in client needs • Retrospective legal aid
SHILPA A woman, her child with a medical condition and her unborn child  Complexity Ability meeting own needs	**Legal fees and immigration medical** **"I need help to stay in NZ so my child can get the medical treatment she needs, my marriage has ended and I have no support."** Shilpa Entered NZ for the purpose of a culturally arranged marriage which became abusive. She gave birth to a child with a life threatening medical condition requiring ongoing treatment. Due to violence in the relationship, the couple separated and then reconciled several times. At risk of deportation, Shilpa sought legal advice and made application for NZ Residency completing the required medical examination. While pregnant for the second time, she was concerned her unborn child may have inherited the same genetically related medical condition as her first.. Lengthy delays in the Court process meant her immigration medical 'out of date' and she had to repeat same the expensive process while relying on food parcels and repaying legal fees by instalment from her benefit.	Immigration application could be completed & mother could focus on ensuring children's health needs were met.	10 Shilpa's other needs were met by other services. Barnardos | Te Hapara Family Services | Plunket | Turanga Health | Hauora Tairawhiti Pediatrician | GP | Gisborne Radiology | T-Lab | Tuhono Whanau | Lawyer	• Work around mother's lack of entitlement due to immigration status • Support for legal fees • Support for medical costs • Advocacy • Escalated barriers with Hauora Tairawhiti	**~$800** for some legal fees and an Immigration Medical.	• Flexible system that can respond to variation in client needs
VICKY A child with a health condition  Complexity Ability meeting own needs	**Disability support for child with complex needs** **"I want to go horse riding as it calms me down."** Due to health and behaviour issues, Vicky needs support. Her key support worker passed away suddenly and her teacher was away for 6 weeks. Without their support Vicky's behaviour escalated and she was suspended and risked being excluded from school. As part of her therapeutic plan, horse riding was recommended as it had really positive results in the past. Vicky's caregiver receives a benefit and Disability Allowance which covers the cost of her after school care. There is no funding in the current system to pay for Vicky to do horse riding for therapy , although equine therapy is a proven strategy for managing her behaviour.	Vicky is still engaged at school and enjoying horse riding. Sustainable funding is being explored by agencies.	7 Wraparound support plan by Ministry of Education. Oranga Tamariki are involved due to Care and Protection concerns. Ministry of Education | Psychologist | Waikirikiri School | SENCO | TRONP-Social Worker in School | Oranga tamariki | Te Pa Harakeke | Work and Income	• No fund via Te Pa Harekeke (OT Children's team) • MOE	**$350** for a term of horse riding. The school transported her to and from the horse riding venue (40km each way).	• Flexible system that can respond to variation in client needs

DRAFT

Chapter 11.1 sets out four consented case examples in detail (as shown above). Across them, other agencies, services and entitlements were already involved, but a particular need remained that none of the available funding or service pathways could meet. The circumstances differed — power debt inherited through a parent's circumstances, legal costs after a sudden loss of household income, immigration and medical costs alongside family violence and serious childhood illness, and a therapeutic response with no available funding pathway — but the same issue appeared in each case.

Discretionary funding provided a practical response to the immediate situation without necessarily changing the underlying barrier. The cases therefore illustrate both the value and the limitation of local discretion: it can respond to unusual combinations of circumstances that standard pathways cannot anticipate, while repeated gaps still need to feed into system improvement.

D.6 What the Fund Tells Us About System Design

Of the 58 unique needs in the dataset, 55 were ultimately recorded as met, two changed and one remained in progress. The high proportion recorded as met should not be treated as proof of the fund's effectiveness in isolation. It was used selectively where a specific payment or purchase could make a difference, and Urungi cannot show what would have happened without it. The value of this analysis lies in understanding the circumstances in which the fund was needed.

The four case studies show how rules that may work reasonably for most people can leave a gap when several different circumstances come together for one whānau. The power company could legitimately seek payment of an account. Work and Income could offer recoverable assistance. Legal aid had eligibility and timing rules. Immigration required a current medical. Disability and education funding had defined purposes. The problem appeared when those separate arrangements met one real whānau situation and none of them could take responsibility for the remaining gap.

National systems need rules, criteria and service boundaries so entitlements can be administered consistently and public money accounted for. What they cannot do is anticipate every combination of family circumstances, timing, eligibility, health, disability, debt and local service availability. The Navigator Project does not suggest removing those arrangements, but maintaining enough informed local discretion alongside them to respond when genuine variation falls outside the standard pathway.

The existing fund guideline shows how that discretion can be used without bypassing ordinary services: establish what whānau need, test existing entitlements and services, involve those already responsible, document the barriers, and use discretionary funding only when the gap remains. Each use should also prompt the question of whether this was a genuine exception or a gap another whānau is likely to encounter again.

Where the circumstances are genuinely unusual, discretionary funding may remain the most proportionate response. Where the same gap recurs, the evidence should move into the system improvement process. That may mean simplifying a pathway, widening discretion within an existing service, changing eligibility or funding settings, or commissioning a service that is missing.

Future commissioning should therefore retain discretionary funding for genuine variation, while ensuring it does not become a permanent workaround for a repeated gap the system already knows about. In this way, discretionary funding is a practical example of the complementary local and national model described in Chapter 6: national systems provide consistent services and entitlements at scale, while local discretion can respond when a particular combination of circumstances falls outside them. Recording those exceptions also keeps the gaps visible so they can inform future system improvement and commissioning.

Appendix E: Respite Care and Carer Support - How Far the Method Can Travel

E.1 The Evidence

In June 2023, Manaaki Tairāwhiti published a case study analysing whānau voice captured in Urungi in relation to respite care and carer support (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2023d). The case study was undertaken at the request of the Navigator Project team and approval by the Manaaki Tairāwhiti Governance Group. Its stated purpose was to shed light on the systemic barriers preventing whānau from effectively accessing carer support and respite care in Tairāwhiti; its measures were whānau voice captured in Urungi (demand, response, barriers, outcome and end-to-end time); its method was the Tairāwhiti Way of Working.

The analysis covered four years of data, from June 2019 to May 2023, and drew on:

- 344 narratives from 107 whānau
- 365 needs, demands or concerns relating to care
- 504 recorded responses by navigators
- 439 system barriers recorded

The barrier rate for care-related needs was 78%, against an overall Urungi barrier rate of 44% for the same time period. For carer support and respite care specifically, the rate was over 85%: 87.5% for respite care and 86.03% for carer support. Most of the demand came directly from whānau, with 76% whānau need and 15% whānau concern.

The higher barrier rate had two possible explanations. Part of it may reflect who was most visible in the data: two navigators were based in disability-focused providers, CCS Disability Action and Life Unlimited, and were often called on to work with whānau with ongoing and complex needs. But the later system-improvement work also confirmed problems in the system itself, including complicated processes and poor communication (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2023d).

The four largest barrier categories were accessibility process (43.5%), communication process (22%), availability (13.2%) and delivery mode (11.4%), with the remaining recorded barriers falling into the smaller criteria, policy and legislation and professional/agency relationship categories (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2023d).

Specific barriers it identified were:

- A lack of available providers, with no one suitably trained to meet whānau needs, and services already at capacity;
- Confusing application forms and referral processes;
- Long waiting times for assessment and funding approvals;
- And, to a lesser extent, a lack of information about entitlements and options, inflexible funding criteria, and roles focused on supporting individuals rather than the whole whānau.

Respite care and carer support produced markedly different barrier profiles:

	Respite care	Carer support
Whānau	40	40
Narratives	76	129
Needs recorded	80	136
Barriers recorded	120	184
Barrier rate	87.5%	86.03%
Accessibility process	32.5%	58.2%
Availability	24.2%	~1%
Communication process	18.3%	25.0%
Delivery mode	14.2%	12.0%
Criteria, policy and legislation	10.8%	4%
Needs marked met	76.6%	95.6%

Where the service does not exist, whānau encounter availability barriers. Where the service exists but the process is hard, they encounter accessibility barriers. Both appear in both subsystems, but the weighting differs: availability accounts for 24.2% of respite care barriers against around 1% for carer support, while accessibility accounts for 58.2% of carer support barriers against 32.5% for respite care. This is the distinction Chapter 19.4 draws from the full dataset, visible here within a single domain.

The 365 care-related needs involved a wide range of organisations: navigators recorded 18 referring agencies, 47 response agencies and barriers across 25 agencies. Most needs fell under the health system, but the spread of agencies involved shows how many organisations sit in the lives of whānau seeking care support.

The outcome figures need to be read carefully. Of the 365 care needs recorded, 310 were marked met, 22 not met and 12 had no recorded outcome, with the remainder in progress, changed or requiring no action. The analysis suggested that some needs may have been marked met once the immediate assistance requested had been provided, even where the underlying need remained. This case-study finding should also be kept in mind when reading the headline outcome figures in Chapter 19.2.

End-to-end time was determined by how many organisations had to be aligned. Needs resolved in 0 days were clarifications of entitlement, information and advice, or help with a document. Needs taking 1-30 days involved following up with agencies, such as chasing claims, requesting reviews, advocating over declined or partially paid claims. Needs taking over 30 days required a coordinated plan across whānau and multiple agencies, or escalation to managers and coordinators.

E.2 The Response: A Twelve-Month Programme

In July 2023, Manaaki Tairāwhiti appointed Michelle Duley as Project Manager on a twelve-month fixed-term contract, to lead the next phase of work on the respite care and carer support system. In August 2023 the case study was presented to funders and service providers. In September 2023 a project plan went to the Manaaki Tairāwhiti Governance Board (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2023c).

The programme's aim was stated plainly: to connect with system leaders, apply a systems approach, validate or debunk the barriers identified through whānau experience, and seek action on the system by the system (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2024d). The project plan set the purpose as "to investigate, validate and address the barriers identified through the analysis of whānau voice gathered by Manaaki Tairāwhiti... The project aims to address local barriers and escalate other barriers" (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2023c).

The plan named eleven stakeholder groups, describing the list as not exhaustive, and identified an agency lead for each, several that were still to be confirmed:

Stakeholder	Role/Responsibility
Manaaki Tairāwhiti Governance Group	Governance and leadership
Whaikaha	Funder - Disability Support Services
Te Whatu Ora	Funder - Disability Support Services
Oranga Tamariki	Funder - Respite Care and Carer Support Services
Disability service providers	Service provision
Needs Assessment and Service Coordination (under 65)	Assessment and coordination
Needs Assessment and Service Coordination (over 65)	Assessment and coordination
Aged residential care providers	Service provision
Men's respite centre	Respite provision
Second respite provider	Respite provision
Manaaki Navigators and coaches	Supporting whānau and recording their voice

Because funding and provision differed across cohorts, the project plan proposed dedicated working groups for the different sub-systems. The professionals who took part came from ten organisations: CCS Disability Action, Te Whatu Ora (infant, child and adolescent mental health services, and child development services), SuperGrans, Tauawhi Men's Centre, the Ministry of Education, NZ Health Group, Tūranga Social Services, Your Way | Kia Roha, the Ministry of Social Development (business coach) and Manaaki Tairāwhiti (programme lead and project lead) (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2024d).

The project took a deep dive into the carer support system as it applied to people under 65 accessing disability support services, mental health services or Oranga Tamariki services, with particular focus on children and young people.

Professionals working in over-65 services were approached but asked to delay engaging until new leaders had been appointed following changes in the health sector (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2024d). A new Group Director of Operations for Gisborne Hospital was appointed in May 2024, during the final months of the programme.

The September 2023 project plan set out the intended timetable below. The July 2024 final report later described progress using four system-improvement phases (Understand, Redesign, Test and Learn, and Make Normal) and recorded the first three as completed (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2024d):

Period	Phase
Jul 2023	Project manager appointed; twelve-month programme begins.
Aug 2023	Case study presented to funders and providers.
Sept - Oct 2023	Phase One: Understand. Working groups observe, document and talk with people working in the system; evidence the performance of each subsystem; validate the barriers whānau identified. Progress report to the Board.
Oct 2023 - Feb 2024	Phase Two: Test and Learn. Each group tests changes in real time, observes the effect, adjusts and tries again. Progress report to the Board.
Feb - Apr 2024	Phase Three: Analyse. Evidence analysed, learnings themed, recommendations developed for scaling, making permanent, or escalating.
Apr - Jul 2024	Phase Four: Make Normal (planned). Develop a plan to scale and roll in agreed changes across the system, support implementation, and monitor the efficacy of the changes. Final report to the Board.

Escalation was built in from the outset: the plan states that ***"depending on what barriers are identified, there will be the need to pull for support from the MTGG should the barrier require escalation for resolution."***

The programme was designed to follow the full improvement sequence. Whānau evidence identified the issue; the relevant parts of the system were brought together; a lead and timetable were established; test-and-learn activity was planned; and governance provided an escalation route. The later stages show where implementation depended on authority beyond the local project.

E.3 What the Understand Phase Established

The working group mapped the whole system and documented how the work happens within it. It validated the barriers whānau had reported, and identified the system conditions producing them (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2024d).

The system map below shows the resulting end-to-end pathway, from referral and diagnosis through assessment, funding and provision. It sets out the whole pathway a whānau travels when they need a break: referral routes, diagnosis, assessment gates, the five funders, the providers, the care options at the far end, and the way the map connected unmet support with later demand in services such as family harm.

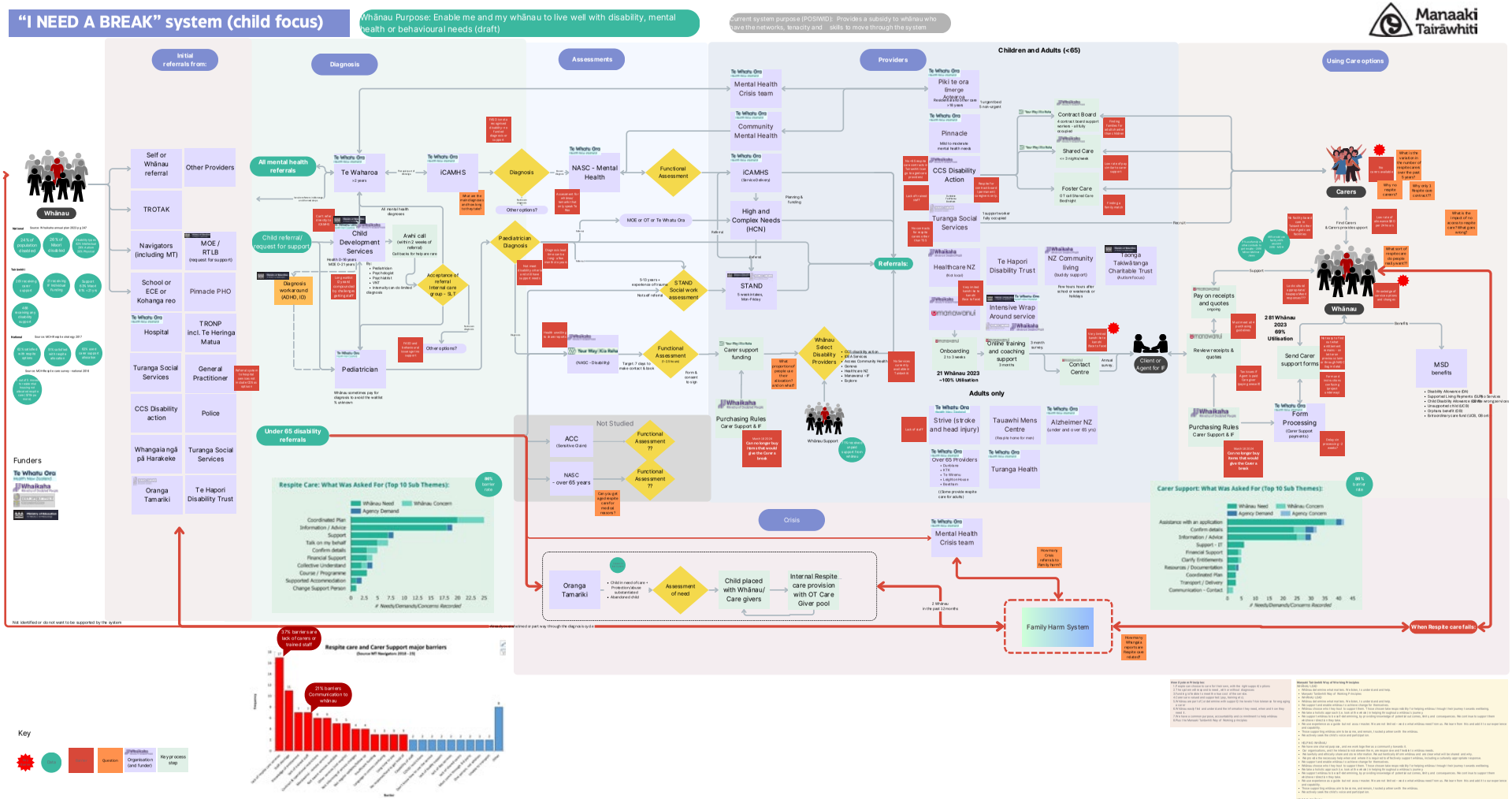


Figure 30: The "I need a break" system in Tairāwhiti, mapped end to end by the respite care and carer support working group in 2024. The map covers referral, diagnosis, assessment, funding and provision across five funders and more than twenty organisations.

Five funders, no owner: The 2024 project identified five funders in the Tairāwhiti carer-support system: Whaikaha, Te Whatu Ora, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Development and the Accident Compensation Corporation. It found that these subsystems operated substantially in isolation from one another, with no funder holding oversight or responsibility for the system as a whole. ACC was not included in the project.

Carer support reimburses costs; it does not purchase a service: It reimburses some of the costs of engaging a support person while the full-time caregiver has a break, which relies heavily on whānau having natural networks to draw on. Caregivers reported not wanting to impose on others, or that their networks were exhausted. Some noted that the person they cared for had complex behavioural or physical needs requiring skilled support that natural networks could not provide.

Between 18 January and 1 December 2023, 285 people were allocated carer support. Of those, 100 (35%) used none of their allocation and only 35 (12%) used all of it. The 2024 project interpreted this low utilisation as evidence that allocation did not necessarily translate into support that whānau could practically use or into the break from caring that the funding was intended to support (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2024d). The figures show a clear difference between being allocated support and actually using it, although they do not explain why individual whānau did not use their full allocation.

The 2024 system improvement work found that there was no dedicated facility-based respite service in Tairāwhiti at that time. The report also recorded that some local aged residential care facilities held arrangements to provide respite for people under 65, but access depended on bed availability and high long-term occupancy. It considered an aged residential setting inappropriate for a young person (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2024d).

At the time of the 2024 system improvement work, the barriers reported by whānau were validated against the following system conditions:

- Accessibility: At the time of the project, Disability Support Services required a medical diagnosis of an eligible disability for access. The project recorded waits of up to two years for diagnosis and noted that some needs, including FASD, did not meet the Disability Support Services eligibility criteria then in use.
- Availability: The project recorded limited services and staffing to provide respite care and carer support. Whānau often relied on their own natural resources, where these were available. No dedicated facility-based respite option was identified in the region at that time. The project recorded the carer-support rate at that time as $80 for 24 hours.
- Communication: Whānau frequently reported not knowing what their entitlement was, not being updated when things changed, and not knowing where to find information about services.

The 2024 project concluded that the contracts and measures it examined could work against the purpose. The project found that the contracts then in place undermined organisations' ability to respond flexibly to what mattered to whānau, and that the measures attached to them are often meaningless - counting bed nights, for example, says nothing about whether the service worked. Attempts to collect more meaningful data had fallen short because they remained framed from the perspective of the system rather than of whānau. Contestable tendering was found to create adversaries of community organisations and to encourage siloed working.

Members of the working group understood the parts of the system they dealt with, but no one had a view of the pathway as a whole. Mapping it collectively gave the group a shared understanding of how the different parts fitted together. The 2024 final report records that one member had believed a service was available somewhere in the community and was shocked to learn that it was not. The exercise exposed the gap between knowing individual parts of the system and understanding how the whole pathway operated.

Some changes were within local reach and were made. The June 2023 case study recommended monthly hui between Life Unlimited and CCS Disability Action, with other providers to follow, and records that this was done (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2023d).

E.4 The Redesign: A New Purpose and Principles

The working group agreed a new purpose and set of principles for the system, derived from the data and from what matters to whānau (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2024d). The purpose was written in whānau terms:

"Enable me and my whānau to live well with disability, mental health or behavioural needs."

The six principles were:

1. Whānau can choose to care for their own or engage a carer, with the right support and options.
2. The system will respond to need, with or without diagnosis.
3. Whānau easily find and understand the information they need, when and how they need it.
4. Funding is flexible to meet the true cost of the service.
5. Carers are valued and supported.
6. Our organisations have a common purpose, accountability and commitment to help whānau.

The redesign was carried into a Local Implementation Plan that linked proposed actions to their expected impact on whānau and to how the project would know whether a difference had been made. The evaluation indicators included whether a pool of carers was available for whānau to access, whether whānau reported having their needs met when they voiced them, and whether the utilisation and availability of respite beds for over-65s increased. The final report also recommended that service efficacy be measured in ways that are meaningful from the whānau perspective and show how support affects whānau (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2024d).

The redesign was not starting from a blank slate. The New Zealand Disability Strategy, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and Mahi Aroha, the Carers' Strategy Action Plan 2019-2023, already recognised the need for carers to be properly supported, including through adequate compensation and opportunities for a break (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2024d, Appendix Four). The Ministry of Health's Transforming Respite strategy had run from 2017 to 2022. The system this project found not fit for purpose was already the subject of stated Crown policy.

E.5 Test and Learn, and Where the Method Stopped

The final report records that the project completed three of four system-improvement phases: Understand, Redesign, and Test and Learn. Tests were developed to help participating organisations collect, analyse and respond to whānau voice within their own systems. Those tests were still running when the final report was written. Local leaders were able to implement aspects of the Tairāwhiti Way of Working and of the new principles within their own subsystems.

The final report records that making the redesign normal required 'leaders at the highest level, authorising the systemic changes required', a step described as 'above the authority of anyone locally' (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2024d). Locally, the pathway had been mapped, findings validated, a shared purpose and principles agreed, and tests begun. Implementing the successful changes across the wider system required decisions from the organisations holding the relevant funding and system settings.

The findings were also taken to Whaikaha at national level. The project connected with Whaikaha nationally, presented its findings to the National Disability Support Services Network Conference, and Whaikaha engaged the MSD System Improvement Business Coaches to begin taking a systems approach to respite care and carer support in its own systems. The escalation route therefore reached the relevant national organisation, but the project documents reviewed for this report do not show the

wider system change being completed.

Whaikaha's own system improvement work was subsequently paused by the major restructure of the agency (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2024a). The final report, dated 1 July 2024, predates that pause.

The local programme could not control the national changes occurring around it. E.7 sets out what happened to its funders while the work was underway.

E.6 What the Project Recommended

The final report made recommendations at national and local level (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2024d).

Nationally, it recommended that sector leaders take responsibility for championing accessible, responsive services that respond to diverse needs including those of disabled whānau; that services be commissioned in a way that enables agencies and providers to implement the Tairāwhiti Way of Working; that a collegial practice environment be created; and that service efficacy be measured in ways that are meaningful, show the impact of the service on whānau, and give agencies intelligence for continued whānau-directed improvement.

Locally, within the current system, it recommended that the funders of all five respite care and carer support contracts agree to enable providers to work differently - responding to need as expressed by whānau rather than to diagnosis, and intervening at the earliest opportunity, when whānau first express a need; that funders develop and trial new ways of contracting that allow providers to implement the Tairāwhiti Way of Working; and that the work continue as part of the wider health and disability sector programmes.

On supply, it recommended further work to understand the feasibility of, and true local demand for, a residential respite service, including how existing services other than aged residential care might be extended to provide one. The implementation plan set out concrete actions: supporting the establishment of a carer network, and facilitating micro-credentialling for carers through the workforce development council.

The final report explicitly recommended that funding from all five funders for respite care and carer support be devolved and the services commissioned by the Place-Based Initiative for the Tairāwhiti community, and that a new service model based on the Tairāwhiti Way of Working be scaled - responding to need as expressed by whānau, at the first opportunity, irrespective of diagnosis - with whānau-centred data collection tracking efficacy over time, identifying emerging need, and creating a learning loop. Against the system failure "the system is not fit for purpose", the report's recommendations table offers two options: devolve funding lines to the Place-Based Initiative as a step towards devolution, or devolve directly to iwi.

The final report concluded: "With five funders and no clear owner, the current siloed approach will continue. Devolving funding for these services will provide the opportunity to provide support to whānau in a holistic, more responsive way." (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2024d)

This recommendation emerged from a multi-agency project involving Te Whatu Ora, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Development, CCS Disability Action, NZ Health Group and local providers, studying the respite care and carer support system. The recommendation is consistent with Recommendation 4 of this report, reached through a separate study of one specific subsystem.

E.7 What Happened Next, Nationally

The respite system improvement project began with the appointment of a project manager in July 2023 and concluded with the final report to the Governance Group on 1 July 2024. What happened to its funders during that window is a matter of public record:

Date	Respite System Improvement Project	National System
Jun 2023	Case study published: barrier rate over 85%	
Sept 2023	Phase One begins: Understand the system	
Oct 2023	Phase Two begins: Test and learn	
Mar 2024	Test and learn underway	Whaikaha changes the Purchasing Rules for flexible funding from 18 March. Whaikaha subsequently acknowledges that the changes caused concern and confusion.
Apr 2024	Analysis and recommendations	Clarifications issued after significant feedback; on 30 April the Minister announces a review into disability support services.
Apr-Jul 2024	Redesign agreed; tests continuing	Review underway
Jul 2024	Final report delivered to the Governance Group	
Aug 2024		Government accepts the independent review's recommendations. Cabinet decides that responsibility for delivering Disability Support Services will transfer from Whaikaha to MSD, and that expansion of the Enabling Good Lives approach will be paused.
Sept-Oct 2024		Disability Support Services functions transition from Whaikaha to a dedicated business unit within MSD.

(Source: Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2024d; Whaikaha, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c; Upston, 2024a, 2024b; Ministry of Social Development, 2024b)

These national changes directly affected the Disability Support Services part of the system the local programme was engaging with while its test-and-learn work was underway. They did not amount to a restructuring of every funder identified by the local project. The timing nevertheless mattered: one significant part of the pathway was changing its funding rules, organisational home and operating settings while the local programme was attempting to study and improve it.

From mid-February 2026, all NASCs and Enabling Good Lives sites began using the same approach to assess needs and allocate supports. The changes apply to people applying for the first time and to existing users when they are reassessed. Families' and carers' needs may also be included where their support is important to the disabled person's needs and wellbeing, including respite and other supports that help carers take a break. From 1 April 2026, the purchasing rules for flexible funding, including the March 2024 changes, were removed for Carer Support, Individualised Funding, Enhanced Individualised Funding and hosted Enabling Good Lives Personal Budgets (Disability Support Services, 2026a, 2026b).

The 2026 reforms address several issues identified across the June 2023 case study and the 2024 system-improvement work, including assessment and allocation, flexible funding and recognition of carers' needs. What cannot yet be said is whether those changes have removed the barriers whānau experienced in practice.

A further Disability Support Services consultation ran from 8 June to 31 July 2026 and included better support for carers and improved respite options. Disability Support Services is now reviewing the feedback and is developing a package of financial, respite and practical support for family carers; the details and timing of those further changes are still being developed (Disability Support Services, 2026c).

The 2026 reforms change how needs are assessed and how flexible funding can be used, but they do not establish that local respite capacity or the availability of suitably trained carers has increased in Tairāwhiti. Nor do they establish whether the wider issues identified in the 2024 final report, including whether carers receive a usable break and whether the pathway has clear overall ownership, have been resolved. Current local capacity and experience would need to be rechecked before drawing those conclusions.

Appendix F: Identification and Driver Licensing - How Far the Evidence Can Travel

F.1 The Evidence

In June 2022 the project team provided an analysis of identification barriers to the Department of Internal Affairs and MSD (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2022b). Identification had appeared repeatedly in Urungi as a precondition in pathways including opening a bank account, applying for a benefit or StudyLink support, and meeting identification requirements associated with employment. The 2022 analysis also recorded cases in which obtaining an accepted form of identification depended on other documents, applications or costs.

The analysis mapped overlapping dependencies across birth certificates, passports, driver licences, Community Services Cards, IRD numbers and other forms of identification. In the pathways recorded by the project, obtaining one form of identification could depend on already holding another, completing another application or paying another fee. For some whānau, this created a circular pathway rather than a single route to an accepted form of identification.

The analysis ended with one question to the agencies involved: why not a universal form of identification that is free, accepted across all agencies, and managed by one provider?

One component of the identification picture stood out. Of the identification barriers recorded by Manaaki Navigators to September 2022, 25% were for obtaining a driver licence (27 of 109). Of the 27 driver licensing barriers, 15 (55.6%) were recorded at the learner-licence stage (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2022a).

F.2 The Understanding

In October 2022 the project produced a full system map of the Tairāwhiti driver licensing pathway, from eligibility at sixteen through to a full licence (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2022a).

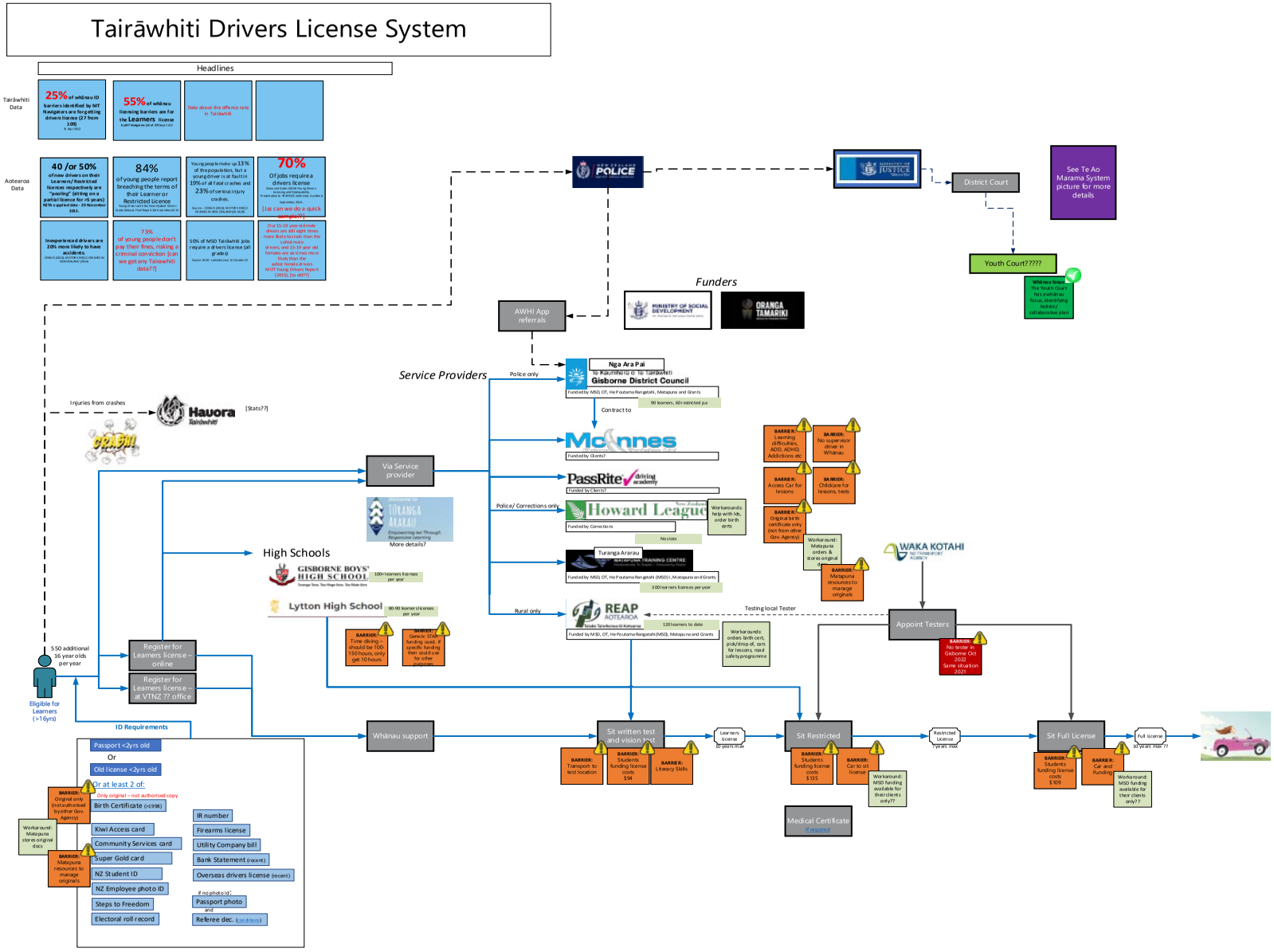


Figure 31: The Tairāwhiti driver licensing pathway as experienced by whānau, showing entry requirements, provider channels, costs, barriers and the workarounds providers had built. Source: Manaaki Tairāwhiti driver licence system picture, 12 October 2022.

All figures and conditions in this section describe the system as it stood in October 2022. What the map showed was a pathway with barriers at multiple steps, involving different organisations:

- At entry - identification: The 2022 system map recorded the acceptable-ID pathway as a passport or recent New Zealand driver licence, or a combination of approved identity documents. Original documents were required rather than photocopied or certified copies. For whānau without acceptable ID, this could mean obtaining and safeguarding original documents, some of which carried a cost (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2022a).
- Through the middle - cost and capability: The system map recorded licence costs at each stage, with the barrier recorded as students funding these themselves: about $94 for a learner licence, $135 for a restricted licence and $109 for a full licence. Alongside cost were barriers money alone could not solve: no supervising driver in the whānau; no car for lessons or the test; no childcare during lessons; no transport to the test location; literacy barriers at the written test; and learning differences that made standard instruction unsuitable. The map also recorded 100-150 hours as the expected supervised-practice range and around ten hours for some supported learners (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2022a).
- At the end - no tester: The system map recorded that in October 2022 there was no driver testing officer available in Gisborne, and that the same situation had applied in 2021.

The absence of a local testing officer shows the limit of what whānau effort and community support could overcome. The system map therefore shows that even after obtaining identification, funding, a vehicle and supervised practice, whānau could still encounter a local practical-testing bottleneck when no tester was available.

The map also recorded the workarounds community providers had built. Matapuna ordered and stored original identity documents on behalf of whānau. REAP, serving rural whānau, ordered birth certificates, transported learners, provided cars for lessons and ran a road-safety programme. Howard League helped with identification and ordered birth certificates. These workarounds shifted additional document-handling and practical support into community providers so whānau could meet the licensing requirements, an example of the additional work the project classified as failure demand.

The education attendance analysis independently corroborated these barriers from a different direction, recording only one location in the region for obtaining driver licences and verifying RealMe identities, restricted appointment times at banks due to staff shortages, limited transport options to reach required locations, and whānau not knowing where to go for assistance (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2023b).

F.3 Why It Matters Beyond Licensing

The system map also connected licensing barriers with consequences beyond transport. MSD data supplied for the map showed that 50% of MSD Tairāwhiti jobs, across all grades, required a driver licence in the calendar year to October 2022. For whānau seeking work, difficulty entering or progressing through the licensing system could therefore limit access to a substantial share of the vacancies being recorded locally.

The system map also linked licensing with Police, Justice and court pathways, showing how difficulty progressing through one part of the system could create consequences and further demand elsewhere. Its illustrative pathway connected difficulty obtaining acceptable identification with delays in licensing, licensing barriers with access to some employment, and unlicensed driving with enforcement consequences (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2022a).

No single organisation owned the pathway as a whole. Different agencies controlled different parts: DIA, including Births, Deaths and Marriages, issued identity documents; Waka Kotahi set licensing and acceptable-ID requirements and testing arrangements; MSD held employment-support and some funding roles; Police and the Ministry of Justice sat at the enforcement end; and community

providers supplied much of the practical support. The system map was intended to make those interdependencies visible.

F.4 What Happened

Project documents indicate that some work was undertaken in response, but do not show what was tested, what changed, or whether later Tairāwhiti whānau experienced a different pathway. No returned response is documented through the project's escalation pathway or against the case for change.

The wider Urungi dataset shows that licensing needs continued through to project close. The category 'Licence - All Classes/Renew/Reinstate' contained 136 recorded needs, of which 22.8% were still in progress (Chapter 19.7). A separate extract of licence-related barriers from Urungi contains 71 barriers recorded against 62 licence needs between October 2019 and February 2025.

The most frequently repeated barrier in that extract concerned access to driving courses. Forty-four of the 71 barriers were recorded against MSD. In 35 of those barriers, the same condition was recorded: whānau could not access the course directly and needed to be referred by MSD. A further nine barriers associated with MSD described delays, slow processing or lack of response around referrals. The 2022 system map had raised as an open question whether MSD-funded support was available only through MSD clients. The later Urungi data shows that, for the driving-course pathway being used in these cases, access depended on an MSD referral.

Several of the practical barriers mapped in 2022 were also still visible in needs and barriers captured in Urungi in 2024 and 2025. In August 2024, one learner-licence application was delayed for two weeks while a birth certificate was obtained. In February 2025, whānau replacing a licence card for a job application first had a certified birth certificate declined because the original was required. After returning to Matapuna to collect the original, whānau went back and was then told the supporting student ID was not acceptable because it did not show an expiry date, requiring another return to Matapuna to have the ID reissued. That one journey shows three of the same conditions identified in the 2022 map: original documents rather than certified copies, a community provider holding those documents on behalf of whānau, and identification standing between a person and an employment opportunity.

The later Urungi data shows other access barriers as well. Barriers captured in 2024 included course waitlists and backlogs, no driving lessons up the Coast unless whānau travelled into town, digital enrolment requiring a phone and Google account, and no out-of-hours course for a whānau member who had started full-time forestry work. One disability-related journey recorded a driving assessment costing $1,100-$1,200, followed by the potential cost of a vehicle and modifications, alongside funding criteria linked to employment.

F.5 What Happened Next, Nationally

National reforms were later announced that address some of the barriers identified in the 2022 map, but not all of the access problems still appearing in Urungi in 2024 and 2025. The Ministry of Transport reviewed the Graduated Driver Licensing System in 2025, consulting from April to June on proposals to reduce cost and access barriers to a full driver licence (Ministry of Transport, 2026). Final changes were announced on 3 February 2026, the first major changes since 2011, and most take effect from 25 January 2027.

2022 System Map	National Change
Overall Class 1 licence cost	Under the current pre-2027 fee structure the three Class 1 application fees total $362.50. From 25 January 2027 they will total $282.50, with the largest reduction at the full-licence stage.
Cost and difficulty of the second practical test	The Class 1 full-licence practical test is removed from 25 January 2027.

(Source: NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi, 2026)

The employment link documented in the map is also explicit in the national rationale for the reforms: the Government stated that driver licences are important for access to jobs, education and healthcare, and the Ministry of Transport will review the changes after three years for their effects on road safety, employment and economic outcomes (Bishop, 2026).

Identification policy is also changing. The Department of Internal Affairs is developing a Verifiable Credentials service that allows verified identity information held by DIA to be issued digitally and shared by the person when needed. DIA's published roadmap records development through 2025 and 2026, with service rollout planned for 2027 (Department of Internal Affairs, 2026).

This development is relevant to the question raised by the 2022 Tairāwhiti analysis about a more universal and portable form of identification. It does not yet amount to the universal, free form of identification accepted across all agencies that the project proposed, and it does not by itself address the practical barriers recorded in the 2022 system map.

The announced driver licensing changes do not directly address several access barriers recorded on the 2022 map:

- The document access and original document barriers recorded on the 2022 system map;
- Access to a supervising driver, a suitable vehicle, childcare during lessons or tests, and transport to the test location;
- Literacy support and learning-support needs recorded in the 2022 pathway.

The learner application fee is unchanged at $96.10 and the restricted application fee reduces slightly, from $167.50 to $160.50. More than half of the driver licensing barriers identified in the 2022 analysis were recorded at the learner stage, while the largest fee reduction occurs at the full-licence stage (New Zealand Transport Agency Waka Kotahi, 2026).

The Four-Year Gap

The barriers were reported in June and October 2022. The reforms were consulted on in 2025, final decisions were announced in February 2026, and most changes take effect from 25 January 2027. By the time most changes take effect, more than four years will have passed since the local evidence was provided. The project records do not show a traceable connection between that evidence and the later national reforms.

For system improvement, the important question is whether evidence supplied by a community can be traced through to action and learning. Where a community identifies a barrier and a change occurs years later through a process it had no visibility of, it cannot know whether its evidence contributed to that change. Gathering whānau voice evidence therefore creates a responsibility to advocate for

action, including carrying locally evidenced barriers into the national system when they cannot be resolved locally.

Appendix G: Unsupported Child's Benefit - Barrier Work Applied End to End

G.1 What Triggered the Work

Eight whānau in a single year asked a navigator for help while applying for the Unsupported Child's Benefit, a weekly payment for carers supporting a child whose parents cannot care for them because of a family breakdown.

G.2 The Understand Work Questions

The team asked six questions:

- What is the current system design?
- What is the usual wait time for processing?
- What causes the evidence thresholds?
- What is the current communication practice between parts of the system?
- What is the definition of family breakdown?
- What is the cost of the UCB?

G.3 What Whānau Asked for While Waiting

While applications were being processed, whānau asked navigators for kai and nappies, clothing and money. They also asked for follow-up with Oranga Tamariki, Work and Income, Barnardos and Youth Services, for letters of support, for someone to attend appointments with them, and for information and advice.

G.4 What the Process Actually Required

The February 2025 UCB analysis, drawing on needs and barriers captured in Urungi, describes a pathway in which whānau first explained the family breakdown to Work and Income. Where existing evidence did not establish the breakdown, the pathway could include a family-breakdown assessment through Barnardos before Work and Income made the benefit decision. The navigator-tested guideline listed a full birth certificate for the child, proof of identity for the caregiver and bank-account verification among the documents to bring. Urungi examples included delays obtaining a birth certificate and one case in which a face-to-face Work and Income appointment was required because a phone appointment was unavailable. The guideline described at least two weeks as the best-case process time, during which caregivers could be supporting the child before UCB payments began (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2025c).

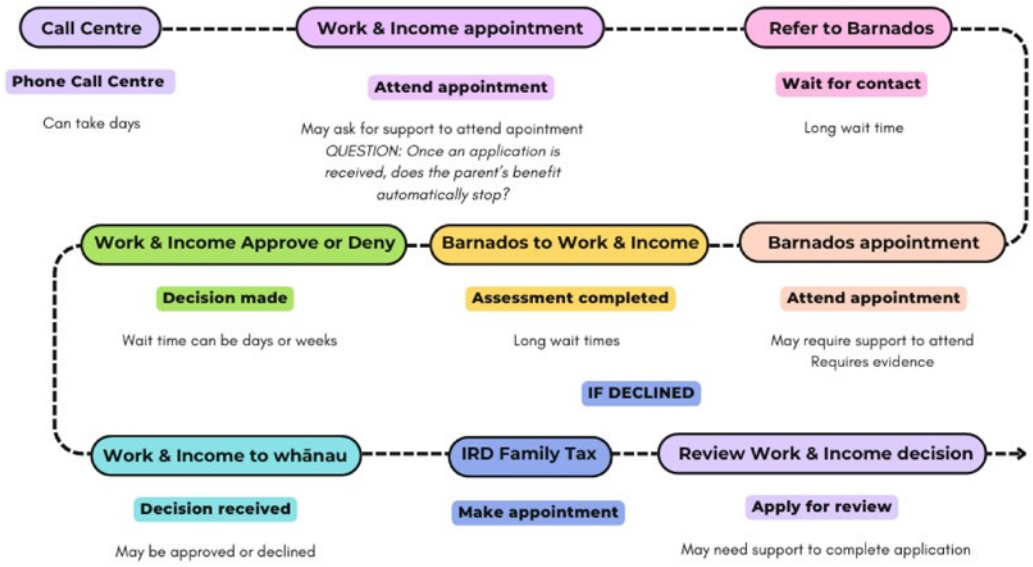


Figure 32: The Unsupported Child's Benefit pathway as documented by the project, showing the appointments, assessment, supporting information and waits that could sit between an application and a decision. The navigator guideline described a best-case process time of at least two weeks, during which the caregiver could be supporting the child before UCB payments began.

G.5 What Went Wrong in Practice

- Three weeks from application to being told a page was missing and the interview could not proceed.
- A food grant exhausted with no consideration given to another child entering the home.
- A letter from Oranga Tamariki declined by Work and Income as insufficient.
- An agreement at a Family Group Conference that Oranga Tamariki would support the application, followed by no contact from the social worker.
- Online bank verification not possible after the Gisborne Kiwibank branch closed, because screenshots were not enabled on the applicant's device.
- One whānau said it had taken three years to get a benefit for a mokopuna in care, and for that reason did not want to apply for a new child now in their care.

G.6 The Eight System Barriers

The causal loop analysis identified five primary barriers and three additional barriers, each expressed as a reinforcing loop (R1-R8).

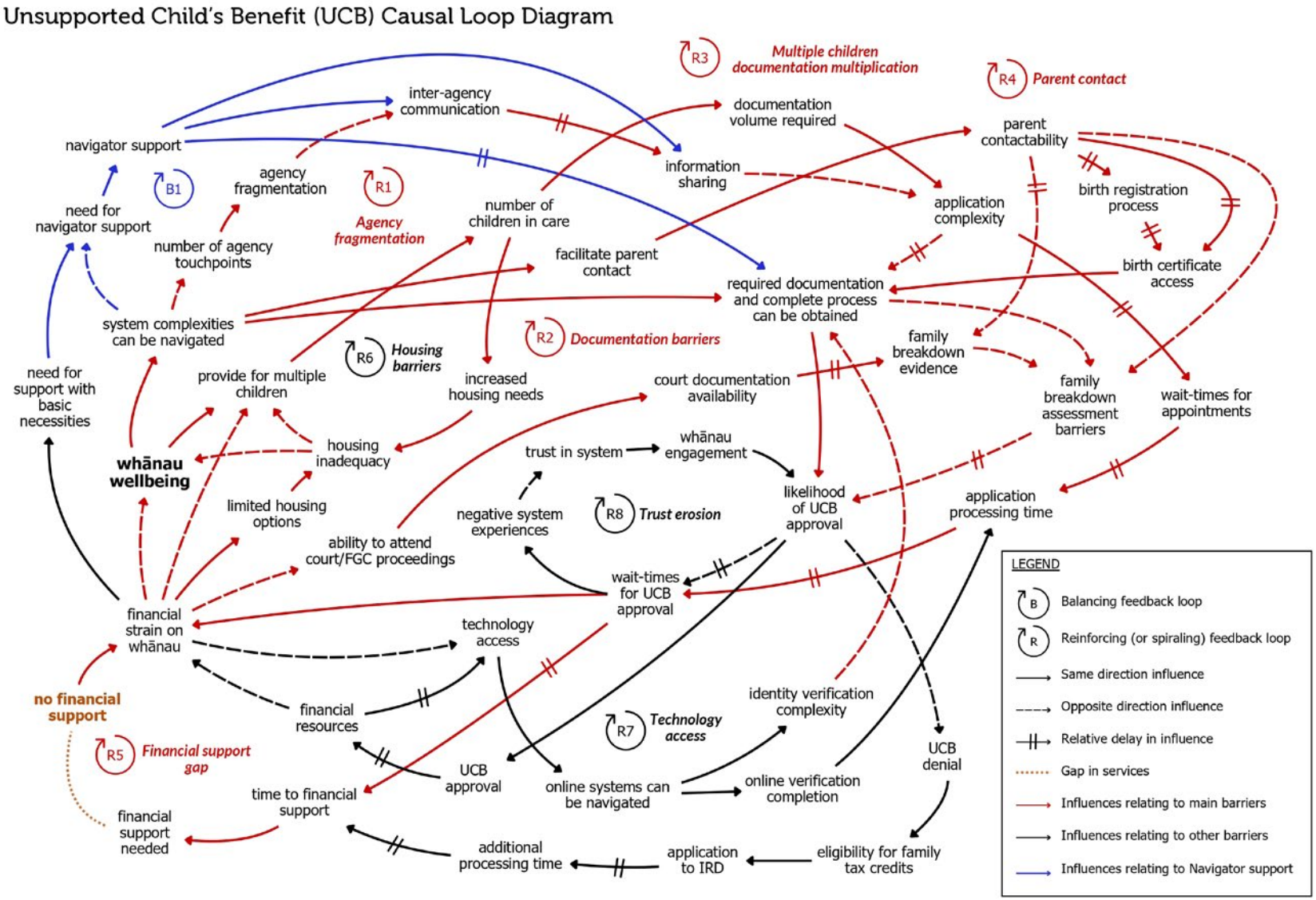


Figure 33: A visual hypothesis derived from whānau voice captured in Urungi. Reinforcing loops R1-R8 represent hypothesised ways in which barriers could interact and compound; they are not causal effects established by the dataset.

The five primary barriers:

- R1. Agency fragmentation: The analysis hypothesised that repeated hand-offs and limited information sharing could increase application complexity, waits and the number of agency contacts required from whānau. Urungi barrier narratives included whānau carrying information between Work and Income and Barnardos.
- R2. Documentation requirements: The Urungi data captured requirements for family-breakdown evidence, caregiver identity, relationship and care information, and birth certificates. The causal analysis treated these documentation steps as capable of extending applications where required information or documents were not readily available.
- R3. Documentation multiplication for multiple children: The analysis identified additional documentation work where caregivers were supporting more than one child, including sibling groups.
- R4. Parent contact: The analysis identified difficulties where information needed to establish family breakdown depended on contacting a parent who was unavailable. The UCB analysis also drew on Urungi examples where supporting information from Oranga Tamariki or other agencies was used or sought. The project did not complete the further Understand work needed to establish how alternative evidence pathways operated in practice across different circumstances.
- R5. Financial support gap: Urungi data showed caregivers requesting kai, clothing, bedding and other essentials while waiting for a UCB decision. In the recorded cases, hardship assistance did not always cover the additional need during the waiting period.

The three additional barriers:

- R6. Housing: The causal analysis linked additional children joining a household with increased housing needs and treated financial pressure during the application period as a factor that could constrain housing options.
- R7. Technology access: Urungi data included difficulty using MyMSD, accessing online forms and completing online bank verification. The analysis treated limited digital access as one condition that could extend the application process for some whānau.
- R8. Trust erosion: Some Urungi narratives described frustration or reluctance to re-engage after previous difficult experiences. The causal model treated repeated delays or unclear communication as factors that could reduce trust and engagement over time.

The analysis also identified one balancing loop:

- B1. Navigator support: In the causal model, navigator help with documentation, inter-agency communication and immediate needs was treated as a balancing response that could help whānau progress through the existing process while the underlying pathway remained unchanged.

The model therefore treats navigator support as a workaround within the existing pathway rather than a redesign of the pathway itself.

The project concluded that a simpler, more connected pathway could reduce several of the barriers identified in the analysis and reduce the need for navigator assistance (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2025c). The causal loop method draws on Connolly (2023), prepared for the New Zealand Productivity Commission.

G.7 A Benefit Interaction Requiring Further Study

From an Urungi record:

"If whānau apply for an Unsupported Child's Benefit it affects the parent's benefit and they will come and take the kids and this can impact on the care and safety of the children."

This Urungi record identified a possible interaction between the Unsupported Child's Benefit and the financial circumstances of the child's parent. The record described concern that applying for UCB could affect the parent's benefit and, in turn, influence whether the child remained in the caregiver's home. The causal analysis treated this as a potential system effect rather than an established causal finding (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2025c).

The project did not complete the further Understand work needed to establish exactly how the relevant benefit, tax-credit, child-support and care settings interact in practice, how often this situation occurs, or under what circumstances it may influence care arrangements. That work would need to be undertaken with the organisations that administer the relevant parts of the system, using actual whānau journeys to test the hypothesis and identify the system conditions involved.

At this stage, the evidence supports a question rather than a conclusion. Whānau experience raised a credible concern about whether the interaction of financial support settings could create unintended consequences for care arrangements. That question needs further system improvement work; it should not be read as evidence that parents generally remove children for financial reasons.

G.8 What the Project Produced in Response

Navigators documented and tested a UCB Guideline setting out the pathway, the documents required, what happens at the relevant appointments, and what Barnardos may ask, including a template letter of support available from navigators.

The work also named the agencies whose collaboration would be required to redesign the pathway: Barnardos, Work and Income, Oranga Tamariki, Youth Services, the Department of Internal Affairs (birth certificates), Inland Revenue (family tax credits) and whānau themselves.

G.9 Where the Work Reached, and Where It Stopped

The work moved from whānau voice to a documented pattern, a causal analysis, a practical guideline and identification of the organisations needed for redesign. What it did not produce was authority to require those organisations to change the pathway. The guideline therefore remained a workaround: it helped the next whānau move through the existing process rather than removing the conditions creating the barrier.