

OPINION

Manaaki Mats help grieving whānau

■ Eastern Bay Villages member Ruth Gerzon shares how a resilient generation welcomed the renewed sense of community spirit



Serendipity is the positive outcome from something random. It was just such a stroke of fortune that led my friend, Annie Meredith of Gisborne, to find a new way to support whānau facing the unimaginable grief of the loss of a baby or toddler.

Annie is an end-of-life doula, supporting people who are dying. She wanted to be a funeral director since the idea was suggested when she was just 21 and her beloved grandmother had died.

After two decades of teaching, she decided to take the plunge, approaching the funeral directors in Gisborne. There weren't any vacancies so, undeterred, she trained in supporting whānau who want to be fully involved in after-death care. Through this, we came to know one another four years ago.

The next part of the journey to serendipity came when in 2021 Trust Horizon granted our Funeral Guides collective funding for cooling pads and freezers to keep bodies cool, alleviating the need for embalming. We lent one of the two small freezers, that keep icepacks frozen, to Annie so she could trial its use. We had hoped they would be useful in the transport of bodies/tūpāpaku from one part of the country

to another.

When a baby dies, one of the few healing things that can be offered to the grieving families is the gift of time with their infant in their own home surrounded by their whānau and friends. For this, we need equipment that cools the baby, preserving their appearance, condition and dignity without having to cool the whole room.

The equipment used in much of the world is a Cuddle Cot, a bassinet that keeps the baby cool, costing about \$4000. Gisborne hospital had one but it is not very reliable. In November 2021, after the stillbirth of Kyrei Keepa, maternity staff could not make the Cuddle Cot work. They phoned Annie for help. Annie got it working but also offered the whānau the alternative of our small portable freezer and the specialised dry ice packs.

Hailey and Cody Keepa chose the icepacks. With the Cuddle Cot, the baby needs to be kept in it most of the time. With the ice packs in covers placed next to the skin, the baby can be wrapped in a shawl and kept in the arms of whānau as much as they wish.

The ice packs need to be changed every six hours. The whānau said that they liked to be involved in this act of love for their baby. They found the whole experience important to their grieving and to supporting their children to come to terms with the death of their sibling.

The whānau chose to keep their



WHĀNAU SUPPORT: Annie Meredith, of Gisborne, has helped develop Manaaki Mats for use by grieving whānau.

Photo supplied pēpi at home for three days, taking countless photos with baby's siblings, making precious memories to last a lifetime.

It was the coincidence of the breakdown of the Cuddle Cot, the loan of the freezer and ice packs that led to our

understanding of what a better and cheaper solution this is for whānau.

That's the serendipity part. What happened next was not chance but action taken on understanding the value of this relatively inexpensive equipment.

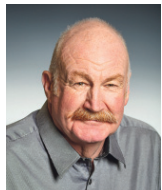
Annie, and her friend and death-care specialist Claire Turnham, set up Manaaki Mats, the loving name they gave to the ice packs. They approached hospitals and hospices throughout the country, offering online training, guidance and support and a supply of the Manaaki Mats. Already many hospitals and hospices have bought them and they are now fielding interest from overseas in this beautiful, cost-effective resource.

Here, our Funeral Guides Collective has ice packs and the two freezers funded by Trust Horizon available when not being used for adults. However, in a shout out to skilled seamstresses, we do need someone with better sewing skills than I have, to make covers attractive for use with babies. Ideally, though, a service club could sponsor a freezer and Manaaki Mats to be kept at the hospital for babies, so this option is always available for whānau facing loss.

Annie Meredith will be the guest speaker at the next Dying2Know/Ka Mate Korero hui 3-4.30pm on Sunday, November 5, at the side entrance of the Disabilities Resource Centre, 191 King Street. All welcome.

Bridge replacement

Rangitaiki Ward councillor and farmer Wilson James



THERE has been much publicity of late regarding the so-called "urgent need" for a second bridge into Whakatāne township and that council needs to put scarce resources towards moving the project forward at pace. Our mayor says he will push hard for it to happen.

A second town bridge would require a huge amount of money, paid for by rates, to upgrade the roading both within the town boundary and the roads leading to the bridge rurally, to handle the increased traffic flow on the affected roads and streets as they become thoroughfares carrying all traffic large and small.

Our council is the Whakatāne District Council – the emphasis being district. If we are going to look pragmatically at the district's (and Eastern Bay region) desperate need for better access then all our efforts should be going towards replacing the Pekatahi Bridge – a wooden, one-lane, 100-year-old structure only a few minutes south of Whakatāne that not too many years ago shared the roadway with a rail line. This bridge serves not only many of our local communities but also the Ōpōtiki, East Coast and Gisborne areas. It is an integral part of our State Highway 2 network.

Without the Pekatahi Bridge, all that traffic must flow through the Whakatāne urban area, and if, for some reason, the Landing Road Bridge was damaged in a weather event (as it was in 1983) all of Whakatāne's traffic would need to use the one-laned wooden structure at Pekatahi ... a very daunting thought.

A new two (or more) lane bridge crossing the Whakatāne River at Pekatahi

where an existing roading network on either side of it already is in place at the existing site is, in my mind, an urgent priority way ahead of a second access to a town that is relatively small in the big scale of things.

A minimum two-lane bridge at Pekatahi would not only handle the multi-hundreds of trucks that use the bridge daily but could possibly take some of the Whakatāne traffic from Rotorua, Kawerau and Edgecumbe area as people would come to realise it is probably as quick to go that way as having a possible slight holdup at the Landing Road Bridge, especially if they worked or went to school on that side of town. It is only a few minutes longer from Awakeri to town going via White Pine Bush Road to Pekatahi.

Imagine the difference at the Landing Road Bridge if just 30 percent of the traffic coming from the south-west diverted along SH2 from Awakeri to town.

I believe this project has been on the council's radar previously during Mayor Tony Bonne's term and needs to be re-orientated urgently, because if we lose the current crossing at Pekatahi to a weather event (which could well be a very high possibility) our region collectively will suffer for a very long time. Our dairy, horticulture and forestry industries, to name just a few, rely on that single-lane wooden crossing every day and every night of the year.

The consequences of not replacing the bridge at Pekatahi are astronomical when you think about it, and it would be making excellent use of both ratepayers and government's much-sort-after finances.

Then, after that project is under way, we could turn our attention to a second crossing for Whakatāne township.

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