

What we're Learning About Building Early Years Allyship

April 14, 2026 12:22 pm



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Heading upstream for our Early Years Ally Community

As the Early Years Ally network continued, the second hui offered a different kind of insight. While the first gathering brought a shared group into connection, the second saw a completely new group of people arrive, with no returning attendees.

This highlighted a real challenge in building momentum. People often move within familiar spaces, drawn to networks and formats they already know. Without continuity of people, it became difficult to carry forward the tikanga, shared understanding, and direction that had begun to form. Although we shared the kaupapa, tikanga, and outcomes from the first hui, we saw that this alone was not enough to hold and grow a collective.

It reinforced that being community-led is not something that happens by default. It requires intentional action, shared ownership, and consistency over time. When the community that helped shape the first hui was not present, we were again starting from a different place. This is an important tension to navigate when building something collective.

There were also learnings in how space is held. In the first hui, we prioritised smaller group connection to support safety, but were quickly guided by the group to open this up into a full whanaungatanga round. The community set the tikanga, reminding us that connection needed to be visible and shared across the room.



In the second hui, we responded to that call by creating space for connection. A strong whanaungatanga round allowed people to be seen and to share who they were. At the same time, we explored bringing in an example from practice, inviting The Village to share their work building an online parenting hub. While valuable, this shifted the dynamic. The space moved closer to a familiar pattern, where one person stands at the front and others listen. This limited the time available for collective thinking, innovation, and building together.

This experience highlighted how easy it is to slip back into typical ways of working. Even with clear intention, default patterns such as presentations or networking-style engagement can take over, reducing the space needed for relationship building and shared creation.

We are learning that to build true allyship, the space itself matters.

By holding space for connection and shared learning, we are more able to:

- **Prioritise relationship first**, recognising that connection is the foundation for collective action.
- **Value the knowledge already in the room**, rather than positioning expertise at the front.
- **Create conditions for co-design and innovation**, instead of defaulting to familiar formats.

Looking ahead to the third hui, the focus is on building from what has already been started, not returning to the beginning each time. This will require clearer alignment with a community-led approach, stronger continuity of practice, and protecting the time and space needed for connection and collective thinking.

We continue to learn that building allyship takes time, consistency, and care. It asks us to hold the vā, the space between, and to value it as much as the outcomes we are working toward.

ToC

By bringing together early years professionals to collaborate, reflect, and design solutions, this work strengthens those already leading prevention within Tauranga Moana. Supporting local champions to connect and act collectively ensures community voice and action drive safer environments for tamariki and whānau, aligning with our theory of lasting systems change.