

Whānau Āwhina Plunket celebrates women in leadership this International Women's Day

With more than 96 per cent of its workforce made up of women, and a long history of supporting Aotearoa's wāhine, the team at Whānau Āwhina Plunket is celebrating female leadership this International Women's Day.

Chief Executive Amanda Malu said International Women's Day was a time to recognise the contribution of women.

"Whānau Āwhina Plunket has long recognised that women belong in all places where decisions are being made – and we've been a proudly women-led organisation throughout our nearly 114-year history," Ms Malu said.

"From our beginning, Whānau Āwhina Plunket has had influential women at our forefront, working hard to help all women in Aotearoa, and today we boast one of the largest nursing workforces in the country."

Ms Malu said that while the charity grew from the efforts of many women who were passionate about improving the health and wellbeing of pēpi, babies and their mothers, the story begins with two Māori midwives, whose stories until recently were invisible in the history books.

Mere Harper and Ria Tikini, of Kāi Tahu and Kāti Huirapa descent, were highly respected midwives and healers in the Karitāne community.

In 1906, Mere and Ria were concerned about the infant mortality rates in their community, and when they became worried about the health of new born baby, Thomas Mutu Ellison, they decided to do something about it, enlisting the help of local doctor, Truby King. Mutu Ellison went on to thrive and is recognised as the first Plunket baby, and Mere and Ria went on to become two of the first nurses and midwives to work at the Karitāne Home for Babies in Dunedin.

"Mere and Ria, along with our founding patron Lady Victoria Plunket, were the first in a long line of wāhine toa, paid and unpaid who have paved the way for Whānau Āwhina Plunket, a service that is unlike anything else in the world," Ms Malu said.

"This proud tradition continues today with an all-female leadership team, half of whom are Wāhine Māori and a board that has a majority of women and is led by Chair Dame Fran Wilde."

International Women's Day (8 March) is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women. The day also marks a call to action for accelerating women's equality.

For more information on International Women's Day, visit www.internationalwomensday.com

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