



Plunket, n.d.

1907

Who we are

Our history

Plunket is proud of our long history of helping tamariki and whānau across New Zealand. Learn more about our origins and the incredible people who help found Plunket.



Need free support or advice?

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Our Story - Ngā Pūrākau

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Our Story – Ngā Pūrākau a Whānau Āwhina



Many people are familiar with the name Sir Frederic Truby King as the founder of Plunket. But when it comes to Plunket's history, Truby King is only half the story. The truth is, if it wasn't for two Māori midwives and the patronage and support of Lady Victoria Plunket, there is no way Plunket would be here today.

The origin of Plunket

Plunket began in the small coastal town of Karitāne with Dr Truby King, Mere Harper and Ria Tikini at the turn of the twentieth century.

Mere Harper ('Big Mary') and Ria Tikini ('Mrs Chicken'), both of Kāi Tahu and Kāti Huirapa descent, were highly respected midwives and healers who often worked closely with their friend and neighbour, Dr King, to care for the ill in their community.

It was Mere and Ria who helped deliver (Tommy) Rangiwhia Mutu Ellison, the first Plunket baby, in 1906 – and later helped Dr King care for him when breastfeeding issues were causing him to lose weight and become unwell.

Mere had seen the same thing happen with Mutu's older brother, who sadly passed away as a baby.

Young 'Tommy Mutu' thrived under the care of Mere, Ria and Dr King, and within a year the Karitāne Home for Babies had opened in Dunedin. Mere and Ria became some of the first in the ever-growing number of nurses and midwives helping to nurture and raise these babies.

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Mere and Ria.

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patronage to the Society.

Lady Plunket was instrumental in rallying support for Dr King's method and vision to 'help the mothers and save the babies'. As a result, Plunket committees, clinics and Karitāne Hospitals spread rapidly across Aotearoa, each representing the hundreds of thousands of other women, mothers, nurses and men, who have all played a part in helping Plunket to become what it is today.

Stronger together

As an organisation that sees over 85% of all newborn babies in Aotearoa, Plunket is perfectly placed to make the difference of a lifetime in those vital first 1000 days of a child's life.

And that's exactly what we intend to do.

Plunket is on a journey to ensure equitable health outcomes for all our whānau – a goal we are passionate and committed to seeing through.

Plunket has existing areas of innovation where services have been co-designed with whānau Māori to be more responsive to the needs of Māori. For example, Whirihiā, our kaupapa Māori pregnancy, childbirth and parenting programme and Whānau Awhina Whānau Ora, that uses the Te Wheke model of care to support whānau Māori.

Another significant shift in the delivery of our services is Engaging Whānau, a project that ensures services available for whānau are designed around and led by needs of whānau and community. We have also hired three Kaiārahi Māori (Māori Capability Advisors) to strengthen our internal capacity and capability to truly 'walk the talk'.

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After all, we're so much stronger together. Just ask Mere, Ria, Dr King and Lady Plunket.



Plunket's founding women

Wāhine toa – Women of strength

These are the stories of the founding women of Plunket.

- [Mere Harper](#) (1842 – 1924)
- [Ria Tikini](#) (1810 – 1919)
- [Lady Victoria Plunket](#) (1873-1968)

Our timeline

A brief history of Plunket and some of our major milestones throughout the years.

1906

Mere and Ria who help deliver the first Plunket baby, Thomas (Tommy) Rangiwahia Mutu Ellison, and later helped Dr King care for him when breastfeeding issues caused Tommy to lose weight and become unwell.

1907

The Karitane Home for Babies opens in Dunedin. The first of its kind, the hospital took in babies and children under two years who were not treated under the general hospital system.

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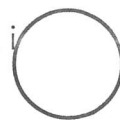
Governor-General and mother of eight. The society took the name 'Plunket' after Lady

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The first national car seat rental scheme, now called Plunket's Car Rental Service, is established and piloted in Dunedin with just four car seats.



1990

Plunket starts to see and support more Māori parents and whānau.

1994

PlunketLine launches in April as an 'out of hours service' operating from 4 p.m. until 1 a.m., 7 days/week.

PlunketLine's service increases to 24 hours per day in October.

2010

The Ministry of Health funds PlunketLine as National Well Child Health Line.

2011

PlunketLine supports Christchurch families following the earthquake.

2012

PlunketLine has the first monthly Facebook chat.

2014

PlunketLine celebrates 20 years.

2018

Plunket launches a new digital service to help mothers who need extra support with breastfeeding, thanks to a significant donation from the Wright Family Foundation.

2020

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Related topics

Plunket and services

Our vision and mission

Tamariki and whānau are at the heart of everything we do at Plunket.

Plunket and services

Lady Victoria Plunket

(1873-1968)

Plunket and services

Ria Tikini

(1810 – 1919), Kāi Tahu, Kāti Mamoe, Kāti Huirapa

Plunket and services

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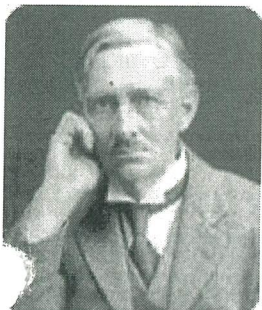
(Plunket, 2011)
2020

As at date of publication
Nov 2012 (Archive)

Our history

The Plunket Society was founded over 100 years ago...

Frederic Truby King. His vision was to help the mothers and save the babies that were dying from malnutrition and disease.



Truby King believed scientifically formulated doctrines on nutrition and infant care were the key to reducing the escalating death rate among babies and children and to the future health of the nation.

His care and devotion to improving the life expectancy of infants was evident even before Plunket's foundation. In fact the first baby taken into Truby King's care was a young Maori baby boy, Tomas Mutu Ellison from Puketeraki Hill in 1906 when upon visiting the family on his way home Truby King suggested he take the young sick infant with him to 'build him up a bit'.

An idealistic man of fierce determination, he Truby King called a public meeting and succeeded in winning the support of influential Dunedin women. They pledged to form a society to carry forward the vision for a new health regime based on the support and education of mothers.

Eight months later, the Karitane Home for Babies opened in Dunedin. It took babies and children under two years who were not treated under the general hospital system. Plunket Karitane Hospitals were the first of their kind and soon spread rapidly around the country. They were known as a safe and caring environment for new and expectant mothers and their babies who were failing to thrive. Dunedin's Karitane Hospital also operated as the sole training centre for Plunket nurses.

By May 1908, a branch of the new society had been formed in each of the four main centres. The work succeeded in attracting the patronage of the influential Victoria Plunket - wife of then Governor-General and mother of eight. The society took the name 'Plunket', after Lady Plunket.

Truby King would have accomplished little without the enthusiastic committed support of volunteers throughout the country. They set up the branches and sub-branches and fundraised for everything, from Plunket nurse salaries and expenses to building clinics and Karitane hospitals.

Plunket's philosophy became parenting lore. Dr King's first mothercraft manual, Feeding and Care of Baby written in 1913, was in popular demand and was translated into Polish, Russian and Spanish. In 1916 he wrote The Expectant Mother and Baby's First Months and these were given to every applicant for a marriage licence.

Sir Truby King received a knighthood for his outstanding contribution to society in 1925. He passed away in 1938, aged 79, and was the first private citizen to be given a state funeral.

Sir Truby King's legacy lives on in the Plunket society, although many of his original teachings do not. The strict regime of care and directive advice from the Plunket nurse has been replaced by a flexible partnership model of care and support for parents and their children.

Funding difficulties prompted the closure of Karitane hospitals in the late 1970's, which were replaced by Plunket Karitane family centres. As the century progressed Plunket continued to forge new innovative programmes in response to the needs of young families. These included the establishment of the national car seat rental scheme programme, piloted in 1981 in Dunedin with just four car seats. Over 27,000 restraints are available throughout the country. In 1994 Plunket broke new ground

3rd

in New Zealand by launching PlunketLine, a telephone advice service staffed with Plunket nurses.

The changing face of NZ in the 1990s meant Plunket was starting to see more Maori parents and families.". A training programme for Kaiāwhina (Māori Health Workers) was set up, and positions established for Māori at management and board levels within Plunket's structure.

The Society's volunteer networks and Well Child care and support services continue to play a vital role in the lives of young families. Today, parents of more than 90 percent of new babies access some aspect of Plunket's Well Child health service.

More recently an increasing number of Pacific Island families started enrolling with Plunket . Pacific people consist of a diverse range of identities, languages, cultures, and perspectives that are constantly changing. Samoan, Cook Islands Maori, Tongan, Niuean, Fijian, Tokelau and Tuvalu people make up the majority of the Pacific community within New Zealand.

For the past 100 years Plunket has been a very innovative leader in the provision of Well Child care for children, families and communities, and will continue to be so in the future. Plunket also plays a key role in advocating for children's rights.

We reach our families in a variety of ways, such as face to face through home visits, clinics, our mobile clinic, Parenting Education courses and Car Seat Rental Schemes. We are also available via phone through PlunketLine 24 hours a day, seven days a week on 0800 933 922.

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