‘Storytime has been such a gift’

Foundation delivers free te reo books to 95,000 families across the country

Joseph Los'e

Mum-of-five Tracey Hudson knows children's behaviour starts at home – and reading to her kids is one of her most important jobs.

That's why the 27-year-old Manurewa mum is grateful for the free te reo children's books she's received since 2022 from the Storytime Foundation, which this week will deliver its 400,000th free book.

"Storytime has been such a gift for our whānau," Hudson said.

The Storytime Foundation provides free books, education and resources to some of New Zealand's most vulnerable families.

After launching a special Pepeha Cloth Book last year, the foundation is about to reach the milestone of 400,000 books delivered to tamariki through the Strong Beginnings for Our Children, Hei Takinga Rangatira mō ngā Tamariki programme (formerly known as First 1000 Days).

It has benefited more than 95,000 families since 1997.

"We first heard about Storytime through Mokopuna Ora, and ever since then the books have become a special part of our home.

"Having beautiful, free books that reflect te reo Māori and our New Zealand culture has made our kids even more excited to read," said Hudson (Te Whakatōhea, Te Whānau-ā-Apanui and Ngāti Māhanga).



Tracey Hudson reads to her children baby Maria and two-year-old Te Atarau.

Hudson was born in Manurewa and educated at the Taonga Teen Parent Unit at James Cook High School.

She and her family have loved receiving the free books over the past four years.

"All of my kids including my 9-month-old have used the books. Storytime has looked after us really well over the last few years."

Hudson said the reading continues when the children start school.

"I do love that the books are in te reo Māori because we actively speak to our children so and they're very aware we love our New Zealand culture. That's specific to who we are,

"We love reading. We usually read most nights. We have a full bookcase of the books and they're really helpful."

The family receives four books per child each year, across eight age groups.

Hudson said all her children are now firmly in the habit of reading.

"It's mostly just getting them excited about reading, getting them excited, getting them involved," she said.

Storytime says exchanges of verbal and non-verbal communication help babies and young tamariki learn to regulate emotions, develop language and social skills, and form secure attachments with their whānau.

These exchanges include a parent responding to an infant's cue and the infant responding to the parent's signals.

Storytime Foundation chief executive Gilli Sinclair said reaching the 400,000-copy delivery mark was something special.

"It feels absolutely fantastic ... to have connected with so many whānau, and to have given so many tamariki the chance to bond with their parents through reading," Sinclair told the Herald.

"The Storytime Foundation started small and since then it's grown to cover the entire country. We work with 140 providers and are currently providing 13,000 whānau the opportunity to read books."

Sinclair said helping pēpi and tamariki to read was rewarding.

"My best memories are reading the comments of whānau who have received the books and the impact they say it makes on the lives of their tamariki."

Sullivan said she would like to see the Storytime Foundation service extended to "reach everyone in need including those who aren't currently connected to our childcare services".

Storytime partners with Well Child Tamariki Ora/Pēpi Ora and Family Start providers, the Ministry of Education, and the Department of Corrections.