

# Media Release

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## Traditional techniques help pregnant mums in Eastern Bay

Eastern Bay mums-to-be can now prepare for childbirth at antenatal classes incorporating traditional Maori techniques and practices.

Kaupapa Maori antenatal classes are being offered in Opotiki by local independent midwife Lisa Kelly, who says the region has a high number of pregnancies among Maori teenagers.

“It’s important to be able to educate the young mums in a familiar, non-threatening environment. They are used to the Kaupapa Maori approach from spending time at their marae and with whanau, so they are comfortable and feel supported,” says Lisa. “The closest antenatal classes were in Whakatane and they have a more mainstream approach. I wanted to offer something that taught traditional Maori techniques and practices.”

For 15 year-old Bobby Jade Wilson who is having her first child, these classes are a chance to learn what it’s all about.

“I came along to learn,” says Bobby Jade. “I want to know about the labour, the pain and what’s going to happen.”

The classes are very hands-on. Friends, whanau, partners and husbands are all encouraged to come along, particularly if they are likely to be at the birth.

“It’s good for them to understand what mum is going through and what they can do to support,” says Lisa.

Healthy eating is a focus and lunch is provided.

“It gives us a chance to chat freely over some healthy kai. The women are learning about healthy options for them and baby and most importantly it means they don’t take off to the local bakery for chips or a pie!” says Lisa.

“The food is great, we are learning all the time,” says Leah Redstone. “Our nutrition expert Linda tells us all about different herbs and flowers that we can eat and why they are good for us.”

Lisa teaches the group natural ways to cleanse their bodies and get themselves ready for childbirth.

“We encourage mums-to-be to use natural ways of getting extra vitamins rather than just taking tablets, which may not be as effective and can be expensive,” says Lisa. “Nettle and raspberry tea is one of the favourites. Nettles are a great source of iron and the raspberries help to tone the uterus in preparation for birth.”

Some of the traditional Maori elements of the class are the most popular.

“This is my third child but I’m still learning new things,” says Susan Lee. “Lisa explains that there are different options for pain relief such as herbal remedies.”

The group make muka strands from inside flax which will be used to tie off the umbilical cord. In Maori tradition this natural technique is thought to be kinder to the baby’s skin and aids in preventing infection. In future classes the group will make clay pots for the placenta to be buried in.

“The word for placenta in Maori is whenua, which is the same word for land. For Maori it is important to take the child back to their roots by giving the placenta back to the land. Often placenta pots from one whanau will be buried in the same place,” says Lisa.

In addition to the Maori traditions and techniques, Lisa gives good practical advice on breastfeeding and caring for babies and guest speakers keep the classes varied.

The Kaupapa Maori antenatal classes are the only one of its kind in the Bay of Plenty and are a result of Lisa’s successful application for funding from the BOPDHB. The Ngati Iwi Authority secured funding on Lisa’s behalf to pilot the programme for a year. Classes are currently running in Opotiki and will take place in Torere in October, Te Kaha in February 2009 and again in Opotiki in April 2009. Anyone wanting more information on the classes should contact Lisa Kelly on 027 229 3086.



*Lisa Kelly (left) demonstrates to Susan Lee (centre) and Leah Redstone how to prepare the muka – a traditional Maori method of tying the umbilical cord.*

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For more information please contact:  
Rebecca Silvester  
Communications Officer  
Bay of Plenty District Health Board  
Tel: 07 579 8033  
[rebecca.silvester@bopdhb.govt.nz](mailto:rebecca.silvester@bopdhb.govt.nz)