



Creating equitable education outcomes for every Kiwi learner

IMPACT REPORT 2024/25

KUA TAWHITI KĒ TO
HAERENGAMAI, KIA KORE
E HAERE TONU.

HE NUI RAWA O MAHI
KIA KORE E MAHI TONU

You have come too far not to go further,
you have done too much not to do more.

CO-CHAIR FOREWORD

Tēnā koutou.
This report confirms that Kotahitanga, unity of purpose, remains EPIT’s greatest strength.



Over the past year our five Communities of Practice have matured into powerful learning engines where school leaders, whānau, researchers and philanthropists test ideas and exchange wisdom in real time. Careers practitioners are piloting whole-school pathways, literacy champions are co-creating multilingual resources, and mental-health innovators are sharing tools across the country.

Te Whiriwhiringa | The Nest has never been busier. Seven resident organisations call the space home, while dozens more have flowed through its doors for community hui and countless informal encounters that spark fresh collaborations. Online, our Circle platform now hosts more than four hundred members, a reminder that geography is no barrier when purpose is clear.

Three reflections stand out for me. Co-funding works: pooling resources with like-minded partners allowed initiatives such as Talking Matters and Springboard Trust to stretch further than any single funder could alone. Systems thinking is growing: partners increasingly design multi-year, multi-sector efforts that weave health, social and education threads into a stronger fabric.

Evidence is evolving: by valuing stories, relationships and community-held data alongside traditional metrics, EPIT is modelling a more authentic way to understand whether we are truly making a difference.

The Board remains steadfast in its commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and to brave, equity-centred innovation. On behalf of my fellow trustees, thank you for the trust you place in us and for the mahi you do every day to lift learners across Aotearoa.

Ngā mihi nui,
Lorraine Mentz MNZM
Co-Chair

Kia ora e te whānau whānui o EPIT,
Nāu te rourou, nāku te rourou, ka ora ai te iwi.
With your basket and mine, our people thrive.
Those words resonate through every page of this report.



Over the past twelve months we have moved from running good projects to nurturing an ecosystem where contribution, reciprocity and rangatiratanga guide each decision. The Wayfinding metaphor speaks to a distinctly Polynesian understanding of progress: currents, stars and relationships reveal our course even when the shoreline lies beyond the horizon.

I draw inspiration from partners whose mahi is anchored in place and people. In Whanganui, Taiohi Awhitū weaves iwi, schools and social services into a community of care. He Whakaaraara reframes how data can serve equity conversations. Our expanding Careers Pathways network is forging routes so rangatahi step into futures they can both imagine and access. These endeavours illuminate the mōemoeā we share—that transformation must be designed with, not for, communities.

Board discussions this year therefore centred on three priorities. We are safeguarding the guardianship of data and stories so Māori and community voices retain agency. We are building long-term partnership structures across funding, governance and evaluation, so bold ideas have the time they need to mature. We are strengthening our capabilities through the forthcoming Evaluation-as-a-Service platform and sector-wide workshops that embed rigorous, culturally grounded practices.

To our Executive Director, kaimahi, trustees and every collaborator: thank you for steering the waka with courage and humility. The horizon we chase, an Aotearoa where every learner stands tall is vast, yet the stars are bright and our crew is strong.

Nāhaku noa nā

Hana O'Regan ONZM
Co-Chair

EPIT will continue to advocate for long-term funding cycles, deep partnerships and data sovereignty, because these are the conditions in which equity can take root and flourish.

Tēnā koutou katoa,

Stepping into the role of Executive Director this year has felt like joining a well-crewed waka already charting bold waters. What drew me to EPIT is the way we understand impact as contribution, not attribution, a framing that recognises change as collective, relational and incremental. Our new Wayfinding evaluation approach, together with the Contribution Circles, gives us the language to see and show how many small strokes create wider ripples of equity.

That collective momentum is evident in the numbers. In 2024-25 we supported 11 active initiatives and completed 9 more, and commissioned 2 pieces of sector-shaping research. We now walk alongside four co-funders, five Communities of Practice, seven resident partners at Te Whiriwhiringa | The Nest, and an online community of more than 400 members. Across the year we hosted 12 in-person hui and 14 online events, while our shared space hummed with over 12 700 hours of purposeful use.

Yet numbers are only constellation markers; the real story lies in the growing interconnectedness of our work. Rangatahi-centred projects such as Taiohi Awhitū are modelling what wellbeing-led education looks like in practice, an expanding network spanning Literacy, Careers, Mental Health & Wellbeing, AI-in-Education and Evaluation is nurturing practice-led learning across the motu, and partners are co-designing programmes that honour tikanga Māori and local wisdom while harnessing evidence and technology to accelerate change.

Looking ahead, our priority is to launch Evaluation-as-a-Service (EaaS) so that communities themselves can map, and own, their contribution stories. We will continue to advocate for long-term funding cycles, deep partnerships and data sovereignty, because these are the conditions in which equity can take root and flourish.

Before I close, I acknowledge the steady hands that steered this waka before me, Deb Masters, whose start-up energy moved EPIT from concept to momentum, and Jane Treadwell-Hoye, who embedded a culture of impact and collaboration. Their mahi laid the course we now navigate together.

As the whakataukī that opens this report reminds us, we have come too far not to go further and done too much not to do more.

To everyone who shares a paddle in this waka; trustees, staff, partners, funders, mana whenua and communities, thank you. The voyage may be long, but guided by our collective wayfinding our course is steady and true.

Ngā manaakitanga,



Ngā mihi nui,
Tim Gander
Executive Director

*Kua tawhiti kē to haerenga mai, kia kore e haere tonu.
He nui rawa o mahi kia kore e mahi tonu
We have come too far not to go further
and done too much not to do more.*

Our Vision

Working together to achieve a thriving, equitable Aotearoa for all learners.

Our Values

Rangatiratanga | Self-determination

Supporting autonomy and the right of Māori to be self-determining

Whanaungatanga | Kinship

Engaging in positive and collaborative relationships with learners, their families and whānau, colleagues and the wider community

Pono | Integrity

Showing integrity by acting in ways that are fair, honest, ethical and just.

Manaakitanga | Care

Creating a welcoming, caring and creative learning environment that treats everyone with respect and dignity.

Whakamana | Empowerment

Supporting all learners to reach their highest potential by providing high-quality teaching and leadership.

We are committed to upholding the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and working in partnership with Māori to advance shared goals and aspirations.

OUR PEOPLE



Lorraine Mentz MNZM
Co-Chair, Trustee



Hana O'Regan ONZM
Co-Chair, Trustee



Debbie Burrows
Trustee



Liz Gibbs
Trustee



Luella Linaker
Trustee



Rob Macintosh
Trustee



Tim Gander
Executive Director



Ineka van der Merwe
Admin & Events



Louise Taylor
Evaluation & Impact



Lynette Reid
Research



Nish Chakravarthy
Community & Engagement

Our Partnerships

We acknowledge the unstinting support of our partners and their dedicated teams, and thank them for supporting and working to improve equity in education across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Mana Whenua

Te Ākitai Waiohū iwi

Founding Partners

Hugh Green Foundation
Perpetual Guardian
Springboard Trust
The Southern Initiative

Principal Supporters

Allan and Gill Gray Philanthropies
Hugh Green Foundation

Co-Funding Partners

Foundation North
Rātā Foundation
Simplicity Foundation
Tertiary Education Commission (TEC)

Delivery partners


Acorn Charitable Trust
Ako Ōtautahi Learning City Christchurch
Cure Kids
E Tū Tāngata Charitable Trust
Falelalaga Cultural and Education Centre
FutureMakers
Kilmarnock Enterprises Trust
Netsafe
Nōna Te Ao Charitable Trust
Oke Charity
Paekākāriki School
PMG Charitable Trust
Progressify
Ready 4 Learning Charitable Trust
Sew Your Story Charitable Trust
Stand Tall Community Trust
Talking Matters Charitable Trust
Tāmaki College
Tātai Aho Rau Core Education
Te Uru Amokura Springboard Trust
The Education Hub
The University of Auckland

Resident partners

Community Housing Aotearoa
Manaaki Rangatahi
Mission Ready
Mitey Sir John Kirwan Foundation
Story Store Te Manu Mātauranga
Tātai Aho Rau Core Education
Te Uru Amokura Springboard Trust

Users of Te Whiriwhiringa

Akō Mātātupu
Anogale Trust
Auckland Philanthropic Education Funders Alliance
Belinda Gorman
CATE
CDANZ
Education Partnership & Innovation Trust Board
Extend Education
Father Brian Wilkinson Charitable Trust
FutureMakers
Helmet
Hidden Honey
Hugh Green Foundation
Ignite Innovation
Jade Tang-Taylor | ThinkPlace
Martinus Rail NZ Ltd
Petal Foundation
Philanthropy NZ
Save the Children NZ
Sir John Kirwan Foundation Board
SPELD
Stonefields School
Story Store Te Manu Mātauranga
Tāmaki College
Te Kete Hono Board
Te Uru Amokura Springboard Trust Board
Think Beyond
Trade Business Training
WEAVE Board



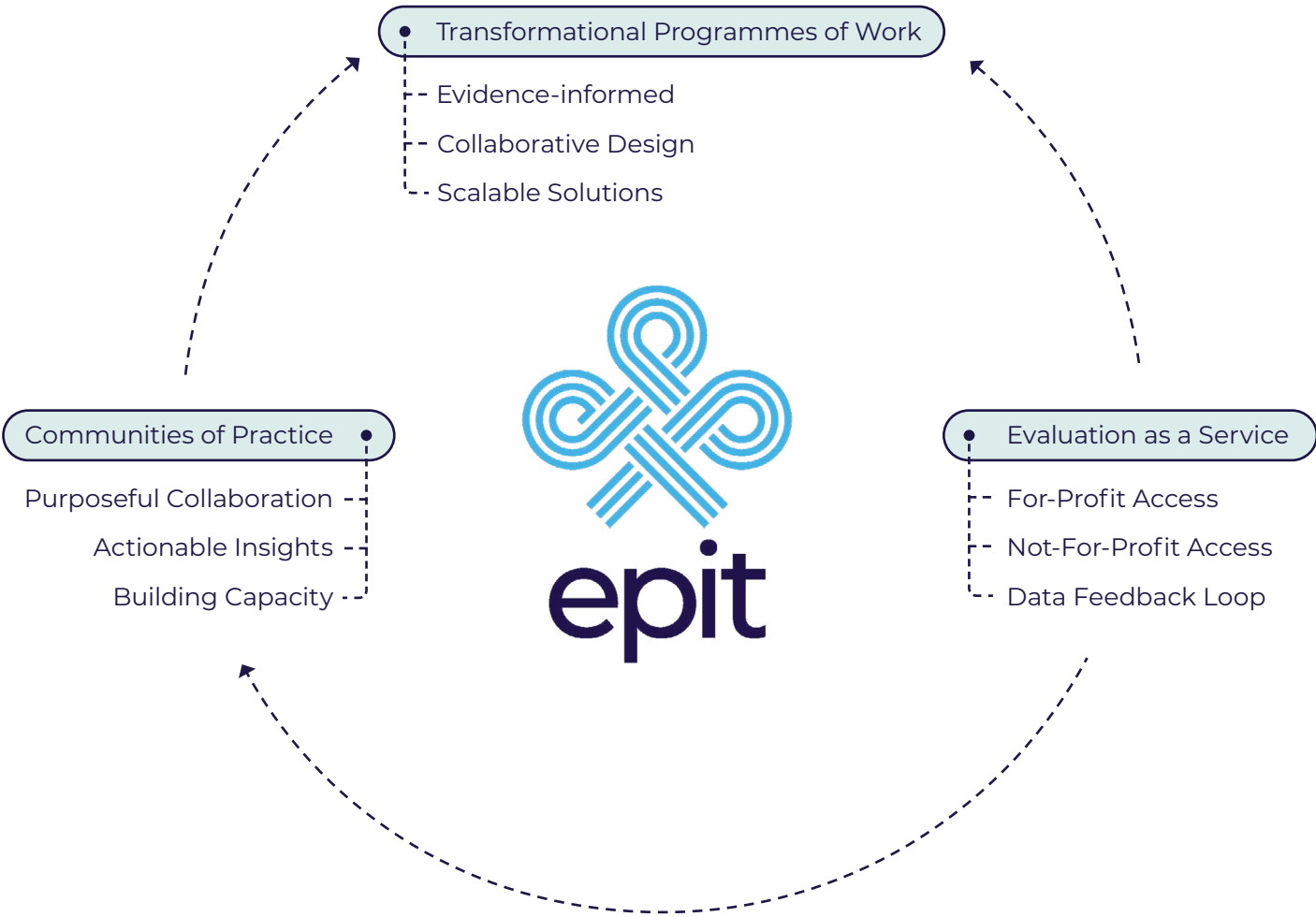
IMPACT AS CONTRIBUTION

Journey towards impact

EPIT was established to help address inequities in education by working alongside others who were already making a difference. In the beginning, our role was largely as a funder; supporting a handful of innovative projects in early learning, literacy, youth wellbeing, and education transitions. We invested time listening and learning. We brought people together and provided resources to strengthen work already underway in communities. Over time, it became clear that our contribution was not just financial but also relational, strategic, and evaluative. Our evaluation framework was established early on. Grounded in kaupapa | philosophy Māori principles, it gave us a way to reflect, with others, on what changes for equity

looked like in different contexts. It helped us see that progress was not always linear, but often required iteration, relationships, and adaptability. We recognised that this would take time and be a long term commitment.

As our understanding deepened, our work and focus grew. What began as supporting good ideas has become something broader and more connected. We now work as part of the system, helping build the infrastructure that supports innovation and equity. This shift has been shaped by our ongoing work with communities, and by the relationships, questions, and insights that have emerged along the way.



Our current mahi | work

We now operate across three core pou | pillars: Transformational Programmes of Work, Communities of Practice (CoPs), Evaluation as a Service (EaaS). These strands are not separate; they are inter-related and reinforce one another as illustrated in the diagram

Transformational Programmes of Work

EPIT continues to support programmes of work that demonstrate a commitment to equity. Our current focus areas are: careers pathways, literacy, neurodiverse learning, and mental health and wellbeing. We also continue to offer an innovation seed fund for organisations who want to test an idea. These focus areas have evolved and grown as we have engaged with, and listened to, our communities. We also offer evaluation alongside funded programmes of work. We do not simply measure outputs but encourage learning about evaluation methodologies to grow knowledge and capacity.

Communities of Practice

Building and supporting our community is an increasingly important part of our mahi. Our CoPs, began with Literacy, and Careers Pathways. These now include Mental Health and Wellbeing, AI in Education, and we have an Evaluation CoP in development.

Circle, our digital platform, is enabling partners to connect, share learning, and amplify each other's efforts, with the aim of becoming a self-sustaining hub for community-led support. Te Whiriwhiringa | The Nest, our shared space, also plays a vital role in our community building. It enables people to come together and engage face to face; it hosts chance encounters and purposeful gatherings, and helps turn connection into collaboration.

Evaluation as a Service

We are in the planning stages of developing and offering Evaluation as a Service; it's a natural evolution of what we've achieved and learned so far. Building on our original framework, EaaS will soon enable organisations to map their own contribution to impact in alignment with their kaupapa and that of the communities where they are contributing. It is designed to support rangatiratanga | self-determination in evaluation, respecting the strengths and challenges of diverse communities. Qualitative data gathering and storytelling remain central to this.

Understanding impact as contribution

As EPIT has grown, so too has our understanding of impact. In the early days, we reported impact as a collective effort with our partners doing the mahi, enabled by EPIT, and together we celebrated what was achieved. Outcomes were visible, measurable, and often attributed. The more we have explored impact, especially through our evaluation training, the more we've realised the limits of this framing.

Impact cannot always be neatly measured or claimed. It's rarely linear, and it is almost never the result of a single action or actor. As a result we are reframing impact as contribution. We believe it is about the small and large ways we all engage in the important work of equity. There are numerous challenges faced in this mahi, and individual contributions can seem insignificant but together they shift systems, nurture change, and lay foundations for transformation.

This evolving understanding is closely aligned with a Wayfinding approach (Spiller, Barclay-Kerr, & Panoho, 2015), which we have adopted across our evaluation processes. Wayfinding is a navigational practice grounded in Polynesian knowledge systems, where progress is guided by continuous attention to context, relationships, and emerging conditions. In this approach, signposts are used as indicators of movement, and waypoints as markers of key moments. Together these begin to form constellations, which over time, show the overall impact of the combined effort of those working towards more equitable outcomes for learners.

This approach shifts us from measuring predetermined outcomes to making meaning together, and it underpins our move from 'impact as attribution' to impact as contribution. To help us do this, we have developed contribution circles.

Why contribution circles?

Contribution can take many forms, for example: helping a partner explore a new evaluation approach, co-creating a process to improve rangatahi | young people into careers; or brokering a relationship that unlocks a new collaboration. These moments do not transfer easily to a spreadsheet, but they matter. None can be 'owned', yet all are part of the change we are collectively working towards.

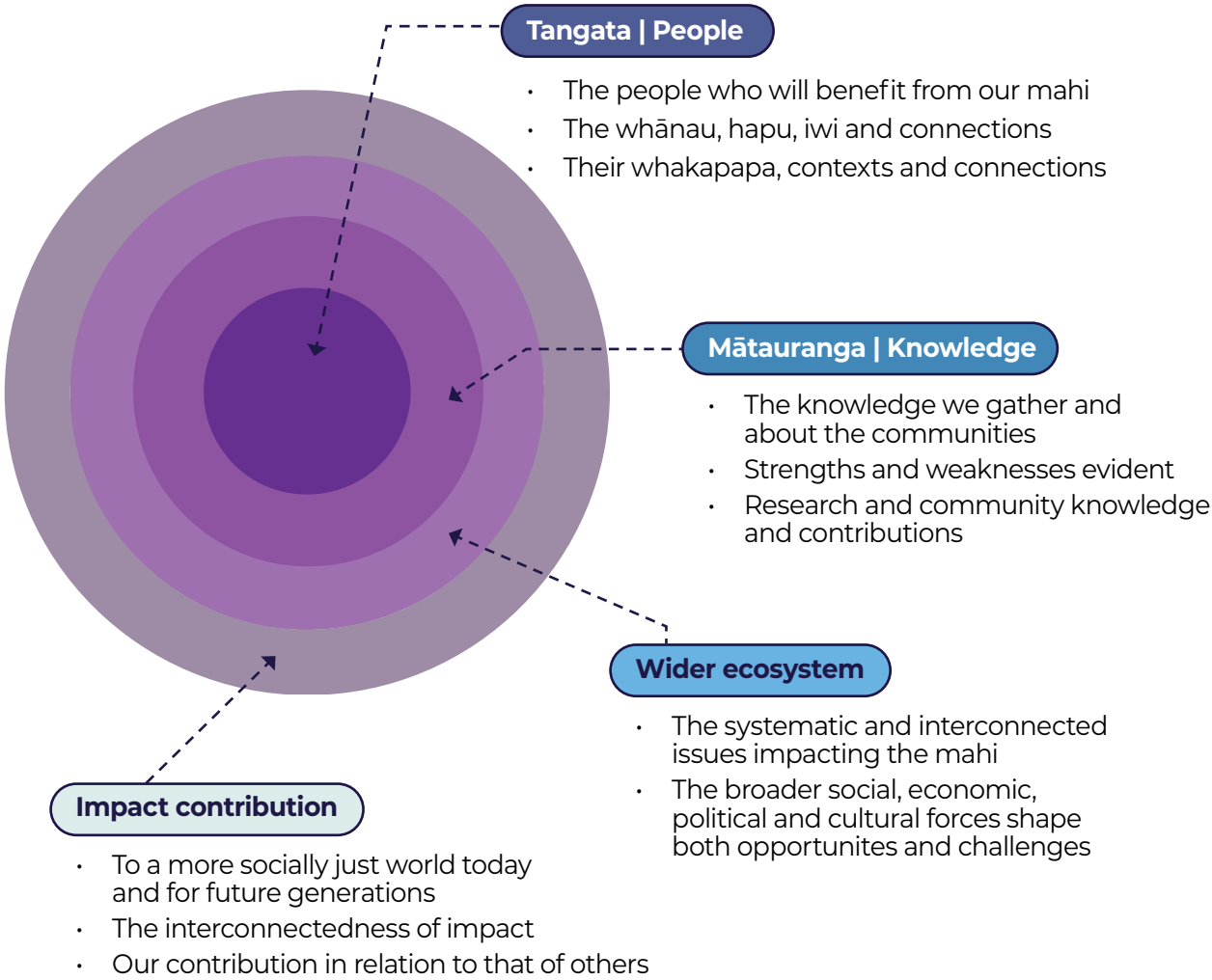
Our contribution circles are a way of seeing and showing this. They reflect the complexity and interconnectedness of our mahi, and that of those we support. We have found this approach not only deepens our learning and understanding, but keeps us accountable to our values. It asks us to show up with integrity and curiosity, to walk alongside, and to recognise that meaningful change happens incrementally, over time, and together.

Applying a contribution lens to our evaluation

The concentric circles in the diagram on the next page show the relational nature of change. Each layer, whether individual, organisational, community, or systemic, is interconnected, with each influencing outcomes in different ways. When assessing impact as contribution, each of the circles invites reflection.

For example:

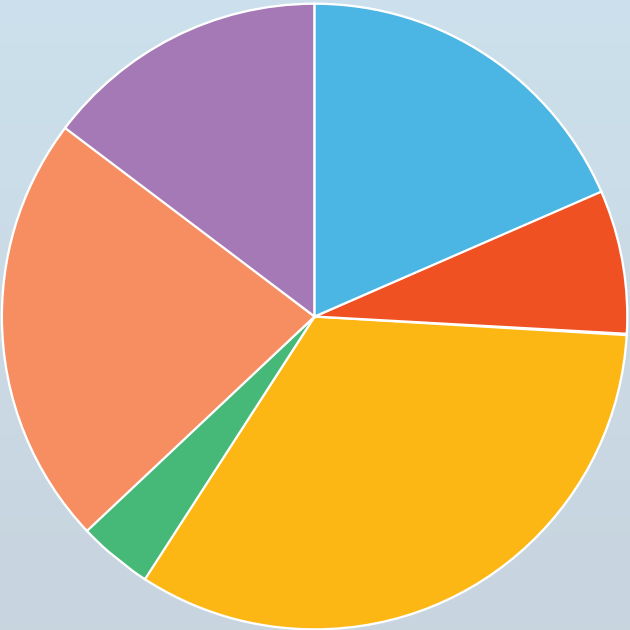
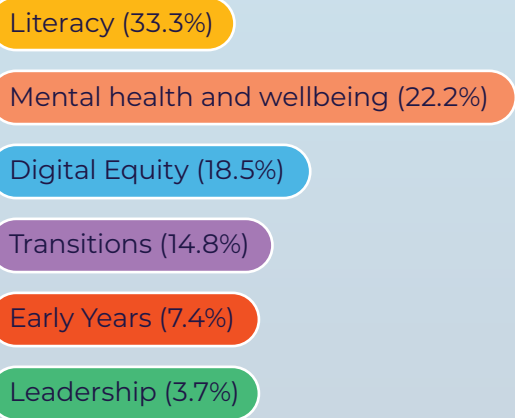
- Who have we supported, and how is this impacting the work of equity?
- What knowledge have we helped grow or share, and how is this being used to build equitable outcomes for learners?
- What shifts have we contributed to in the wider systems we're all navigating?



In asking these questions, we move from trying to prove our impact, to understanding our contribution. This is not a linear story, but a co-created, adaptive journey. Like ripples in water or stars in a constellation, each contribution interacts with others, forming patterns that evolve over time.

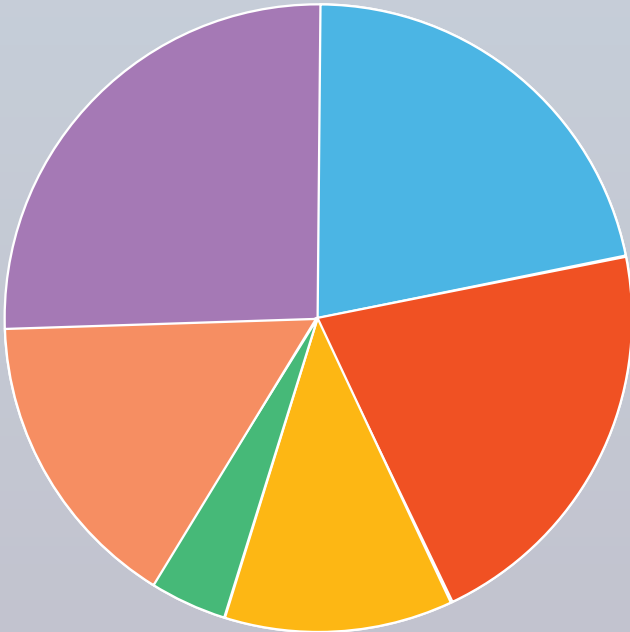
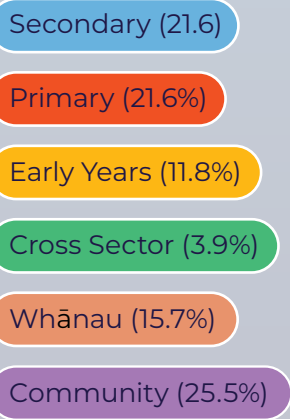
We are now using these circles to assess our own contributions, and are sharing this methodology with our partners. The circles offer a shared language, a way to reflect, and a chance to honour the work that often happens behind the scenes that can make all the difference.

Areas of Focus

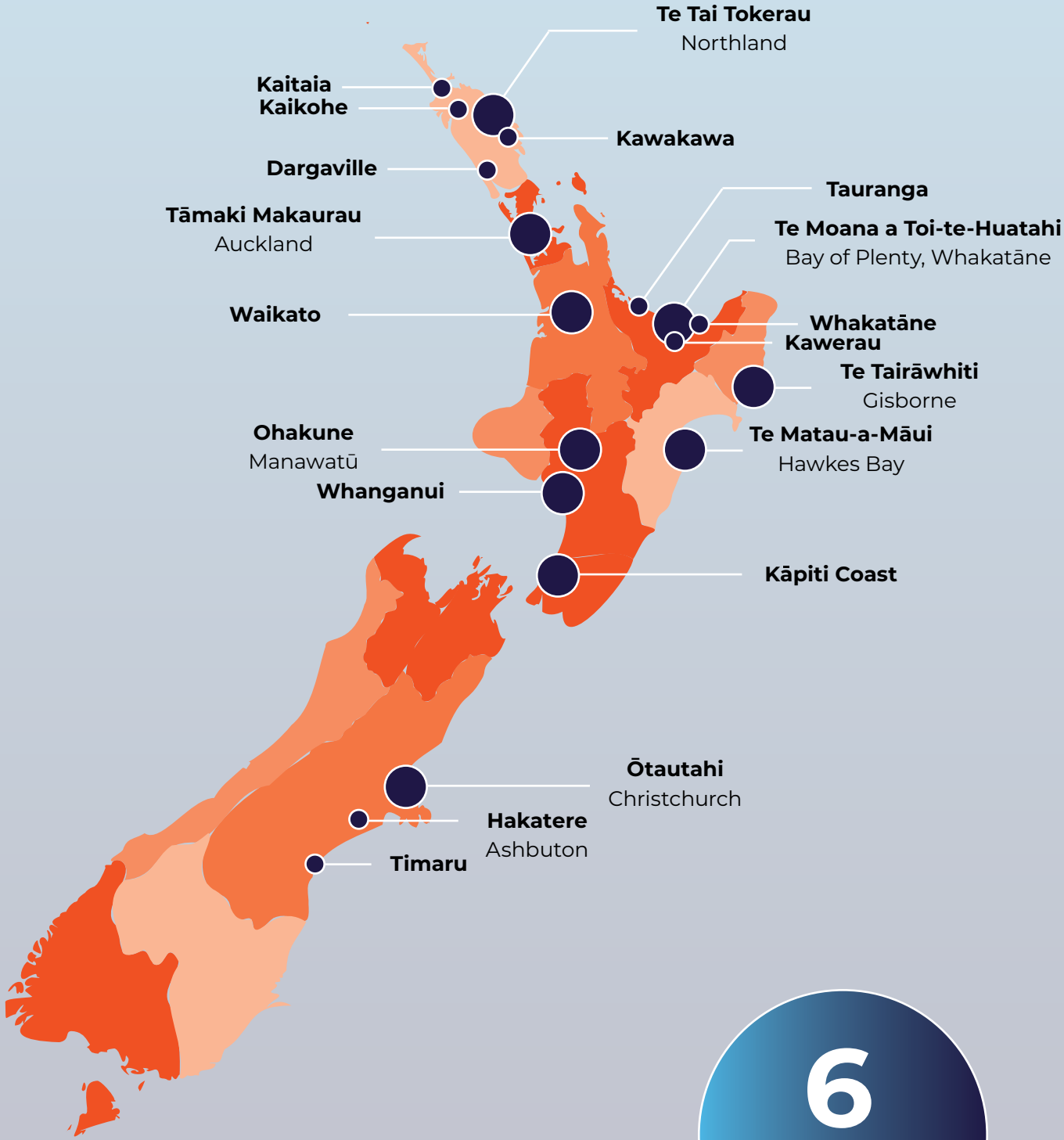


Sectors

Some span more than one sector



Our Active Areas





11

Active initiatives
(includes 1 seed fund)

2 EPIT
commissioned works

13 Pipeline initiatives



408 Members of EPIT
digital community

14 EPIT hosted digital
events (includes webinars
and panel discussions)

9

Completed initiatives
(includes 5 seed funds)



7

Permanent resident
organisations

12

EPIT events held at Te Whiriwhiringa, The Nest

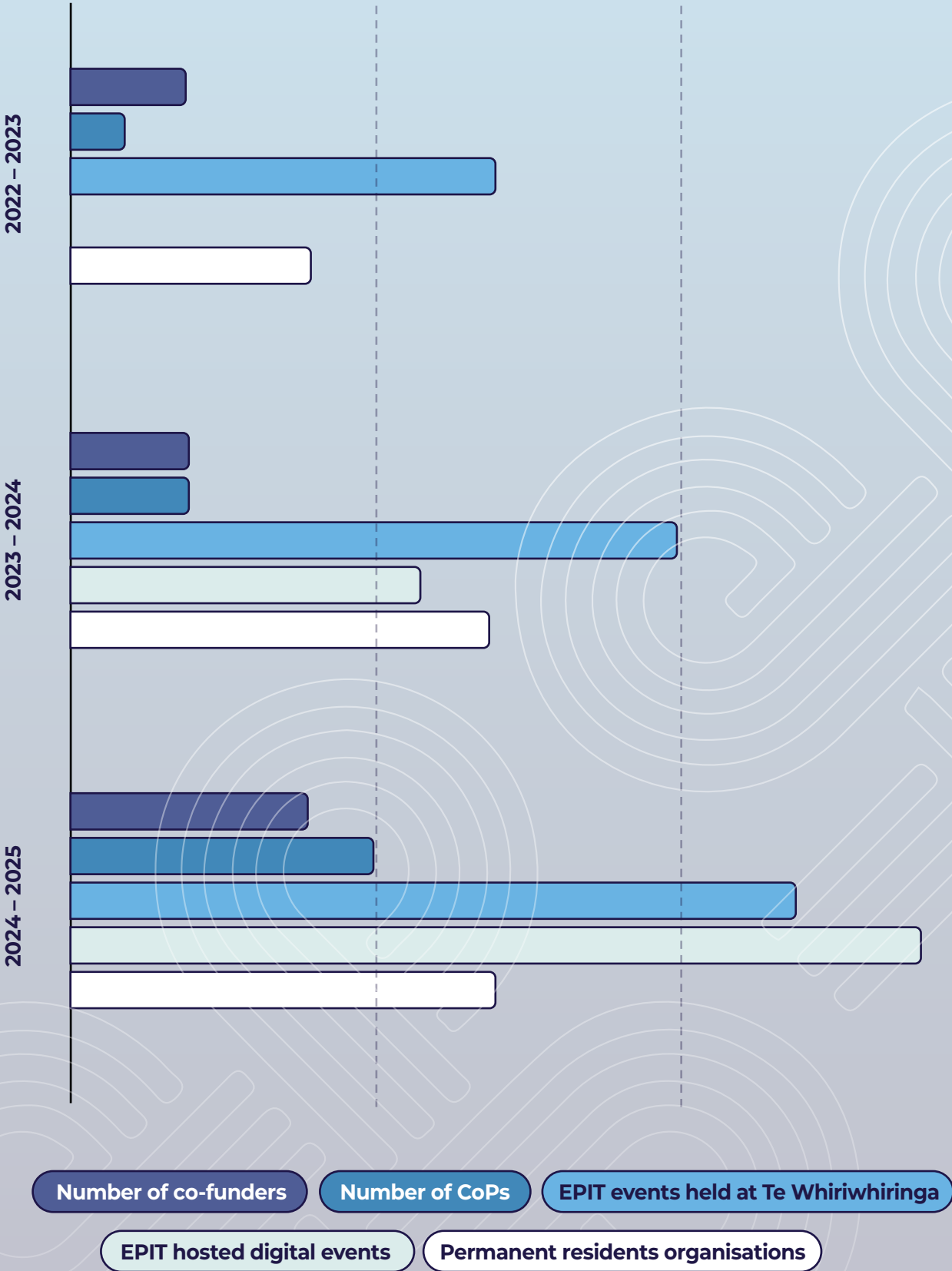
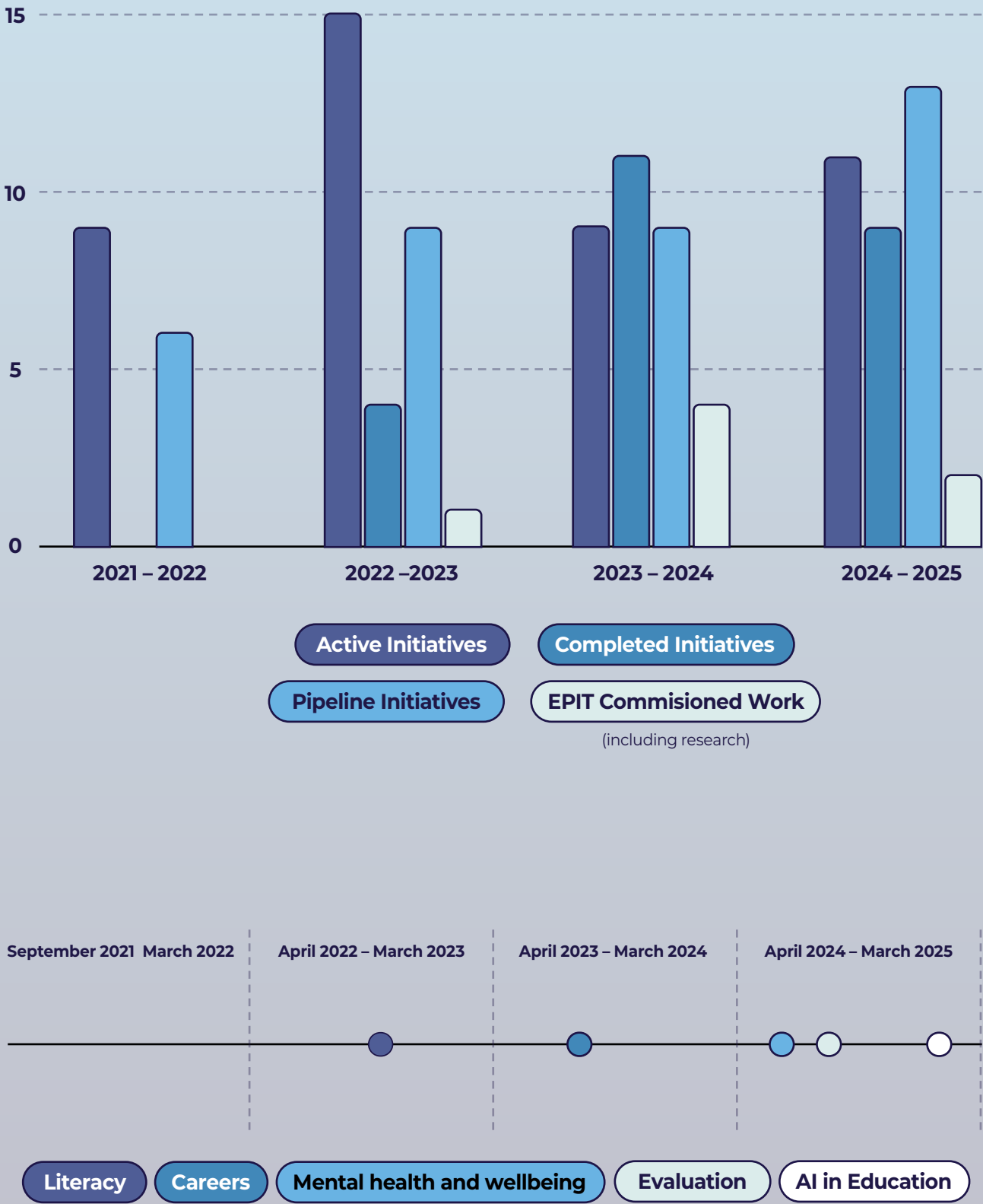
4

Co-funders

12792 Hours of
floor and meeting
room usage

5 Communities
of Practice

Our Growth



FUNDED TRANSFORMATIONAL PROGRAMMES OF WORK

Principal Supporters

Allan and Gill Gray Philanthropies
Hugh Green Foundation

Co-funders

Foundation North
Rātā Foundation
Simplicity Foundation
Tertiary Education Commission (TEC)

Regions

Te Ika-a-Māui | North Island
Te Tai Tokerau | Northland
Tāmaki Makaurau | Auckland
Te Moana a Toi-te-Huatahi | Bay of Plenty
Te Tairāwhiti | Gisborne
Te Matau-a-Māui | Hawke's Bay
Waitaha | Canterbury
Aotearoa | New Zealand wide online



South Auckland Community Learning Hub

• Completed

• Seed Fund

Acorn is establishing a community-based hub model for neurodivergent tamariki, embedding early specialist support within schools. It reduces barriers by making diagnosis and care locally accessible while building confidence in whānau and kaiako | teachers to better support learning needs.

Equity impact: Reduces inequities in access to neurodivergent support, especially for Māori and Pasifika tamariki.

Lead organisation: Acorn Charitable Trust

Where: Tāmaki Makaurau | Auckland

Sector: Early Years, Primary, Whānau



Play with Learning

• Completed

• Seed Fund

Paekākāriki School is piloting a play-based learning model co-designed with 8–12-year-olds, using Go-Pros. Children document their experiences to inform curriculum-aligned changes. The initiative supports emotional wellbeing, agency, and peer connection through joyful, self-directed learning.

Equity impact: Children have agency, and gain confidence, and deeper learning engagement through play.

Lead organisation: Paekākāriki School

Where: Kāpiti Coast

Sector: Primary

Akomanga Kaihanga: Well-being and achievement in learning for social innovation

• Active

The Akomanga Kaihanga (AK) programme reimagines NCEA assessment with a focus on equity and student agency. Learners co-design social justice projects and assessment tasks reflecting their lived experiences, reshaping what success looks like in schools.

Equity impact: Culturally sustaining assessment enhances learner engagement and systemic equity.

Lead organisation: Tāmaki College
& The University of Auckland

Where: Tāmaki Makaurau | Auckland

Sector: Secondary



Creating a cultural change in schools by developing a digitally decentralised platform

• Active

E Tū Tāngata is challenging Tall Poppy Syndrome by providing schools with accessible, culturally grounded values resources. Its decentralised model empowers schools to embed positive identity and belonging into everyday life and curriculum.

Equity impact: School culture shifts towards inclusion, supporting mental wellbeing and identity development.

Lead organisation: E Tū Tāngata Charitable Trust

Where: Ōtautahi | Christchurch, Aotearoa |
New Zealand wide online

Sector: Primary, Secondary





Supporting neurodivergent children in early childhood education

• Active

The Education Hub has created an inclusive online course to support early years educators working with neurodivergent tamariki | children. Grounded in Te Whāriki and cultural diversity, it equips teachers to use strengths-based strategies and collaborate with whānau.

Equity impact: More inclusive practices across ECE settings improve learning outcomes for neurodivergent learners.

Lead organisation: The Education Hub

Where: Tāmaki Makaurau | Auckland, Aotearoa | New Zealand wide online

Sector: Early Years



Breaking through Barriers to Learning, Step by Step, Stitch by Stitch

• Active

Sew Your Story empowers tamariki through hands-on storytelling. In its deepening phase, it partners with schools and community mentors to embed inclusive, kaupapa Māori-aligned practices. Learners explore identity and literacy using sewing, fostering confidence and belonging in creative, non-traditional ways.

Equity impact: Students build identity and literacy through inclusive, creative storytelling rooted in cultural traditions.

Lead organisation: Sew Your Story Charitable Trust

Where: Te Tai Tokerau | Northland

Sector: Primary

Whānau support – tamariki foundation skills

• Active

Ready 4 Learning supports whānau as first teachers, co-designing culturally responsive resources that strengthen early foundation skills. Guided by hapū and iwi, the initiative empowers families and connects them with kura | schools, improving confidence and educational outcomes for tamariki.

Equity impact: Whānau are empowered to build strong early learning foundations for their tamariki.

Lead organisation: Ready 4 Learning Charitable Trust

Where: Kawerau, Te Tairāwhiti | Gisborne

Sector: Early Year, Whānau



Investing in our youth's future through entrepreneurial and digital skill capability pathways

• Active

This community-led, cross-sector initiative, is being scaled to increase access to its entrepreneurial and digital pathways programmes so that more rangatahi | youth can be involved. The initiative aims to unlock talent and nurture an entrepreneurial spirit, enabling rangatahi to address challenges and connect with their purpose.

Equity impact: Rangatahi from diverse backgrounds gain tools, confidence, and visibility in future-focused innovation pathways.

Lead organisation: Stand Tall Community Trust

Where: Te Moana a Toi-te-Huatahi | Bay of Plenty

Sector: Secondary





Growing mighty kids

• Active

Oke supports schools to build edible gardens that embed sustainability, teamwork, and hands-on learning into the curriculum. The initiative includes garden builds, community events, and ongoing support, helping students thrive through outdoor, real-world learning.

Equity impact: Alternative, hands-on learning strengthens student engagement and community wellbeing.

Lead organisation: Oke Charity

Where: Tāmaki Makaurau | Auckland, Te Tai Tokerau | Northland, Ōtautahi | Christchurch

Sector: Primary



A Vision for Ōtautahi Christchurch as a Learning City

• Completed

• Seed Fund

Ako Ōtautahi co-designs lifelong learning opportunities that reflect Ōtautahi's diverse aspirations, particularly youth. Through cross-sector collaboration, this initiative created local pathways to reduce barriers, and supports inclusive, community-led learning design across the city.

Equity impact: Inclusive, lifelong learning pathways are developed with and for local communities.

Lead organisation: Ako Ōtautahi Learning City Christchurch

Where: Ōtautahi | Christchurch

Sector: Cross-sector

Improving speech language therapy for Māori children

• Completed

Cure Kids co-developed a te ao Māori-aligned speech-language therapy model with whānau and educators. It provides culturally grounded tools for teachers and parents, improving support for Māori tamariki with speech and language needs.

Equity impact: Speech-language therapy is more effective and culturally responsive for Māori learners.

Lead organisation: Cure Kids

Where: Te Tairāwhiti | Gisborne

Sector: Early Years, Primary, Whānau



Reimagining Distance Learning in Aotearoa

• Completed

• Seed Fund

In a joint initiative with Touro University, California FutureMakers conducted a national study into the nature, regulation, and activity of distance learning providers in Aotearoa's school sector. The study supports more equitable, flexible learning opportunities and informs better policy and practice across the sector.

Equity impact: Research insights are informing strategies to improve equitable access to digital and flexible learning pathways.

Lead organisation: FutureMakers

Where: Aotearoa | New Zealand wide online

Sector: Secondary, Cross-sector





Providing digital access and support for the implementation of SchoolTalk in underserved communities

• Active

This initiative continues to focus on communities affected by the digital divide enabling 25 high equity index and remote schools to be part of a fully funded two year programme. SchoolTalk uses a learning platform to codify effective teaching practices and promote learner agency. Digital devices and connectivity are included, along with support to learn digital skills.

Equity impact: Equitable access to digitally enhanced learning

Lead organisation: Progressive (Formerly Te Kete Hono - Stonefields Collaborative Trust)

Where: Te Tai Tokerau | Northland, Tamāki Makaurau | Auckland, Waikato, Te Moana a Toi-te-Huatahi | Bay of Plenty

Sector: Primary, Whānau

Employment pathway programme

• Active

Kilmarnock supports school leavers with intellectual disabilities into employment and teaches skill development in a safe, supportive environment. They have developed an in-house Health and Safety training programme aligned with the NZ Curriculum and are working towards NZQA accreditation. They also work with potential employers to successfully welcome Kilmarnock graduates into their workplaces..

Equity impact: Holistic approaches to employment level the playing field for those with intellectual disabilities leading to success in the workplace.

Lead organisation: Kilmarnock Enterprises Trust

Where: Ōtautahi | Christchurch

Sector: Secondary, Community

He Whakaaraara

• Active

• EPIT Commissioned

He Whakaaraara brings together community data, stories, and indicators to better understand and disrupt systemic inequity. Led in partnership with iwi and education leaders, it maps local definitions of equity, building a platform for collective learning and policy change.

Equity impact: Community-defined data drives systemic learning and collaborative action on equity.

Lead organisation: EPIT commissioned

Where: Aotearoa | New Zealand wide

Sector: Cross-sector





Financial Literacy Online Programme

• Active

The PMG Charitable Trust has developed an online platform called Stacks, a tool designed to teach financial literacy to rangatahi. It was created in collaboration with rangatahi, iwi, schools, and community groups. Feedback indicated that rangatahi were using the tool and sharing it with their whānau.

Equity impact: A reduction in barriers resulted in increased financial literacy.

Lead organisation: PMG Charitable Trust

Where: Aotearoa | New Zealand wide online

Sector: Secondary



Scaling of E Tipu E Rea programme

• Completed

The E Tipu E Rea programme supports rangatahi to stay in school and pursue meaningful futures through support, training and residential wānanga | forum. By increasing school retention and facilitating engagement in tertiary education, trades and digital career options, the programme is changing lives. Alumni are a key part of this initiative, which is currently being scaled..

Equity impact: Rangatahi Māori are pursuing educational pathways and training, experiencing positive futures, and giving back to their communities.

Lead organisation: Nōna Te Ao Trust

Where: Mataatua, Te Moana a Toi-te-Huatahi | Bay of Plenty, Te Matau-a-Māui | Hawkes Bay, Te Tairāwhiti | Gisborne

Sector: Secondary, Whānau

Navigating a saturated and instantaneous informational social media environment: Guidance in te reo Māori

• Completed

This initiative aimed to create digital literacy resources in te reo Māori, to foster safe online interactions. Māori ākonga | students, rangatahi and whānau formed a small co-design team which reviewed existing tools and created new content specific to Aotearoa Māori contexts.

Equity impact: Online spaces are being safely used for positive engagement.

Lead organisation: Netsafe

Where: Aotearoa | New Zealand wide online

Sector: Primary, Secondary, Whānau



Folauga Programme in Schools

• Completed

• Seed Fund

A pilot which trained facilitators to deliver programmes in schools teaching traditional Pacific Island cultural traditions and practices.. This intergenerational learning, uses elders from the community, and is part of a wider initiative aimed at bridging generational and cultural divides and encouraging knowledge sharing.

Equity impact: Knowledge sharing and intergenerational learning bridges many gaps in generations, traditions and practices.

Lead organisation: Falelalaga Cultural and Education Centre

Where: South Tamāki Makaurau | South Auckland

Sector: Primary, Secondary



Taiohi Awhitū Wellbeing for youth

- Active
- EPIT Commissioned

This initiative is a community-driven, iwi-led pilot project aimed at improving the wellbeing of tamariki and rangatahi across Whanganui. Developed in partnership with communities and school Kāhui Ako, the project embeds dedicated “navigators” in schools to connect ākonga and whānau with local wellbeing providers. Using a co-designed, culturally responsive model grounded in Te Whare Tapa Whā, the pilot is structured around collective accountability and a shared vision for hauora.

Equity impact: Improved wellbeing support is strengthening belonging, attendance, and engagement for learners and whānau.

Lead organisation: Tātai Aho Rau | Core Education (with Nga Tai O Te Awa, Te Puna Mātauranga, and Takitini Hauora Kāhui Ako)

Where: Whanganui

Sector: Early Years, Primary, Secondary, Community

Careers leadership development

- Active
- Co-Funded

This initiative brings principals and careers staff together to co-design strategic, equity-focused careers education plans that are then embedded in the school’s long term strategic plans. It builds capability, lifts visibility of careers education, and supports culturally relevant transitions for rangatahi across diverse secondary school settings.

Equity impact: Rangatahi receive equitable, strategic support for transitions into future learning and careers.

Lead organisation: Te Uru Amokura Springboard Trust

Co-Funded: EPIT, Rāta Foundation, Simplicity Foundation, and Tertiary Education Commission (TEC)

Where: Tāmaki Makaurau | Auckland and Ōtautahi | Christchurch

Sector: Secondary, Community



Talking Matters Te Tai Tokerau expansion

- Completed
- Co-Funded

Talking Matters has partnered with community groups and whānau to provide culturally responsive training and support for oral language development. Tamariki are experiencing language-rich environments in their first 1000 days in a way that works for their community and culture.

Equity impact: Pathways to effective literacy are developed through strong foundation skills in oral language.

Lead organisation: Talking Matters Charitable Trust

Co-Funded: EPIT, Foundation North

Where: Te Tai Tokerau | Northland

Sector: Early Years, Whānau





SIGNPOSTS

MAPPING WHAT MATTERS

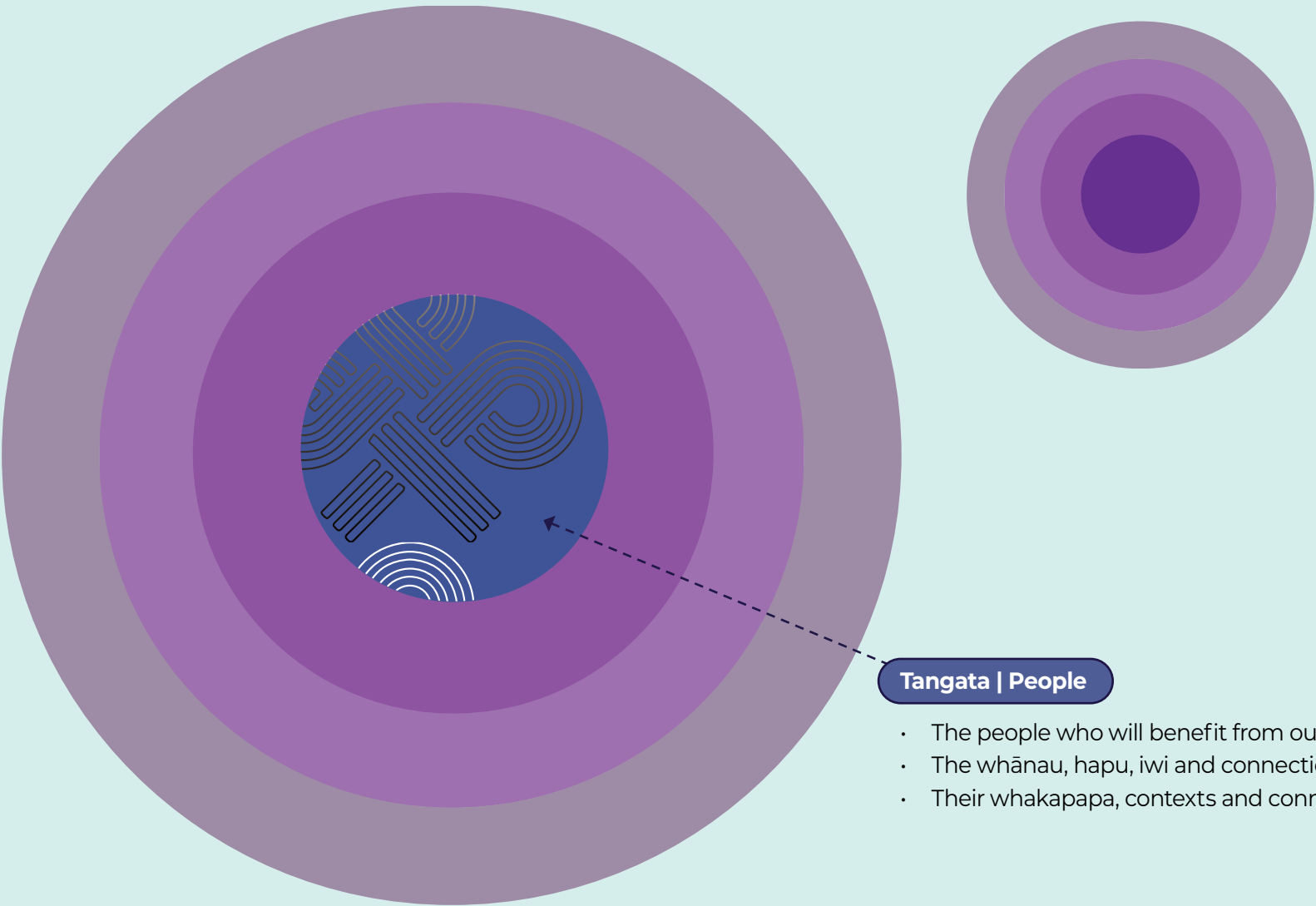
Signposts are the markers that help us understand our contribution to impact. These are used to highlight effective practices, shifts that have been made, and emerging challenges. In this section, we explore signposts across our three pou:

Communities of Practice, Evaluation as a Service, and Transformational Programmes of Work.

These signposts help us know we are heading in the right direction.

Pou 1: Communities of Practice

Who have we supported and how is this impacting the work of equity?



Tangata | People

- The people who will benefit from our mahi
- The whānau, hapu, iwi and connections
- Their whakapapa, contexts and connections

Signposts

- EPIT is trusted for its authenticity, openness and collaborative approach.
- Partners are supported to keep going, solve problems within local communities and share learnings with others.
- Collaborations are leading to innovative approaches to community engagement, participation and outcomes for equity.
- Facilitated conversations and events are leading to actionable change.

These signposts point to the conditions that signal change in how people are connecting and collaborating across our Communities of Practice.

People, purpose and partnerships

At the centre of our contribution circles is Tangata | People - learners, and the individuals and organisations working to support them to thrive. These are the people we walk alongside in the pursuit of equity; this is a core part of EPIT's mahi.

Rather than leading from the front, EPIT works alongside communities, organisations, and changemakers supporting, connecting, and learning with them. As intended, our approach is grounded in partnership. We have been described as “a taonga | treasure” for communities who want to make a difference.

Building connection by design

What began with informal conversations, early funding, and evaluation support, has grown into a more intentional focus on building long-term partnerships and growing new collaborations. Once somewhat siloed, these are now becoming more connected and deliberately centred around our evolving and increasingly integrated Communities of Practice.

Communities of Practice, people, and a [digital] platform create the conditions for relationships to grow and deepen.

EPIT is now recognised for the way we hold space for partners to explore challenges, stay curious, and develop their their mahi.

EPIT makes space for us to explore, question, and grow. We don't have to arrive with all the answers. Instead, we're supported to take an enquiry approach - to understand the challenges before rushing to solve them. It's a thoughtful, empowering stance that values curiosity over certainty.

Spaces of sharing and learning

Our physical and digital spaces underpin the growth of our Communities of Practice, providing both the infrastructure and the culture needed to sustain collaborative learning. Te Whiriwhiringa | The Nest has become more than just a shared office; it is an intentional space where ideas are sparked, relationships strengthened, and spontaneous collaborations can emerge.

An informal conversation in our shared office space between Te Uru Amokura | Springboard Trust and Joanna from Story Store | Te Manu Māutauranga, led to a new list of schools that Joanna could approach about the Trust’s work. The result: new books for an increasing number of school libraries.

Circle, our digital platform, extends this kaupapa online, enabling partners to stay connected, share insights, and deepen inquiry together. These spaces enable the conditions for communities to learn from each other, challenge thinking, and collectively strengthen the impact we’re making across Aotearoa.

Through deliberate and well-resourced engagement approaches, Circle has the potential to become a key driver of community building and engagement within the education sector. It can be a platform that helps increase the visibility and understanding of equity-focused work that is contributing towards impact across Aotearoa.

Hui and events for action

EPIT-hosted hui are repeatedly described as energising and impactful. Feedback from a recent Mental Health and Wellbeing Hui showed it not only sparked inspiration, but also led to immediate follow-up conversations and emerging partnerships. Participants particularly valued the opportunity to connect with kaupapa Māori leaders and expressed a strong desire to stay engaged with the wider EPIT community.

Thanks very much for organising that first Hui, it was a truly inspiring session and I feel very thankful to have been able to join. I have few follow-up chats already in the diary - both me out, and inbound to me.

The Annual Partner Showcase is another example of a facilitated event that resulted in networking, collective learning and new connections. Some of these have led to further collaborations.

The workshops they host have deepened our practice, sparked new thinking, and opened doors for more meaningful collaboration.

As a result of meeting EPIT partners, we now have beautiful connections and partnerships.



One outcome of these connections has been the introduction of organisations to communities they might not have otherwise met.

Example: R4Learning made critical connections in Kawerau before beginning their mahi | work there. These connections came as a direct result of conversations with Talking Matters, whom they met through EPIT. These introductions have helped build trust and engagement in the community which enabled the project to progress more quickly.

This is just one example and suggests that hui are functioning as more than events; they are signposts for shared momentum, surfacing the energy and direction needed to navigate complex challenges together.

Growing our communities of practice (CoPs)

Our Communities of Practice bring together the mahi we are doing to contribute impact in relation to the core of contribution circle, that is, Tangata | People. They represent the clustering of groups, intentions and ideas. The goal is for these to be community-led, and driven by activators who mentor, share, and support collaboration.

We are already seeing this in the Ai in Education CoP, where four or five activators are encouraging others and sparking ongoing conversations. Each CoP is unique, their evolution different, but the ultimate aim is the same - for these to be self-managing and self-sustaining.

In this following interview Dr Lynette Reid shares how the Careers CoP evolved and where it is now.

Interview

When Dr Lynette Reid first connected with EPIT, she wasn't sure what to expect. What unfolded was a research journey that challenged assumptions and built something enduring; not just findings, but a community of shared purpose. From the outset, the kaupapa was built around positive practice.

It became about unpacking success — not diagnosing failure

A qualitative approach was adopted, one focused on careers advisors known for best practice. The goal was to understand what was working, how it had been built, and why it mattered. The work produced some rich data but perhaps one of the most transformative aspects was what happened next.

In academia, research often stops once the article's published or the conference is over. It gets shelved. But this work didn't sit still. Straight after publishing the findings, they were shared widely through EPIT networks and discussions started on the next phase.

One turning point was broadening the geographic reach through the next piece of commissioned work. This further deepened the understanding of the realities of careers leadership in secondary schools across the motu | country. These insights, and the resulting dialogue, led to a growing and diverse Community of Practice.

EPIT created platforms, such as webinars and events, that were accessible and welcoming. You didn't have to wait a year for a conference. Suddenly, school advisors, tertiary people, community organisations, funders, even whānau — all were coming together around this work.

People saw themselves reflected in the research because it was inclusive, and grounded in real stories. Instead of telling people what wasn't working we were saying, 'Look what's possible.' And that, Lynette believes, is what made the difference.

People felt seen. And the openness of the invitation mattered. EPIT said, 'This is for all of you,' That matters, especially for Māori communities. I think people responded to the integrity of it.

EPIT then saw an opportunity to explore what might happen if careers advisors and senior leadership came together to co-develop a careers strategy plan. This evolved into a pilot study carried out in partnership with Te Uru Amokura Springboard Trust. Lynette said this is an absolute first for career development.

I don't know if people fully realise this, but it was the first time ever that careers advisors and school leaders have come together to do anything like this. In our field, that's huge. I keep saying it's absolutely original.

The pilot is still underway but feedback so far is positive from both principals and careers advisors.

Principals acknowledged that they hadn't previously included careers voices at the leadership table. There was real recognition that careers work belongs to the whole school; that it can't sit solely with the advisor or transitions team.

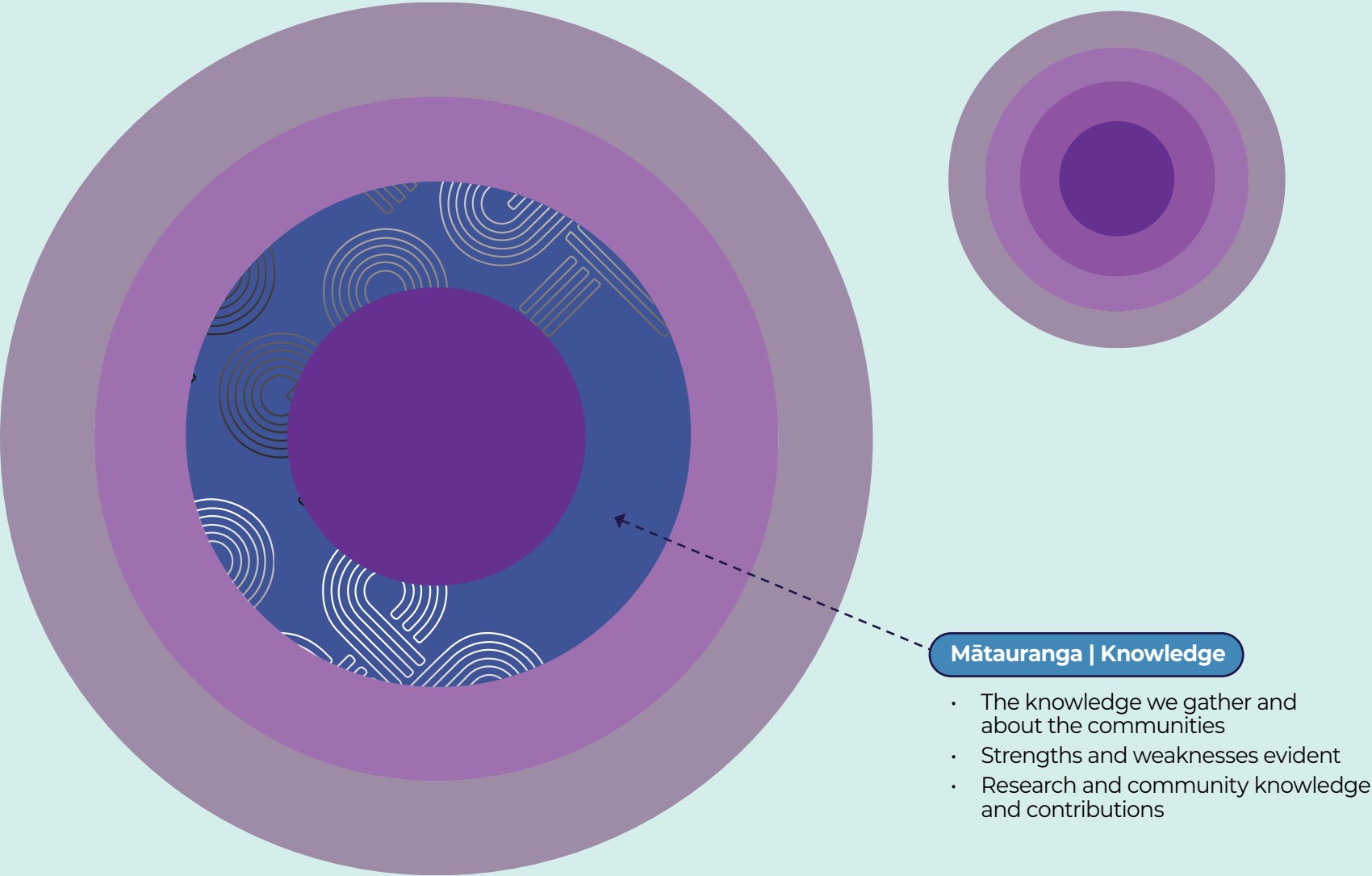
Careers advisors - many were emotional - were finally getting the chance to share their mahi with their senior leaders, to be heard - they felt that their work was recognised and valued and that they were making a difference.

There is now recognition that "careers is everyone's role". As a CoP this is a success story. For Careers in Aotearoa this is a new beginning.

EPIT is a dynamic force that brings people's visions and missions to life. More than just a platform, it's a catalyst for collaboration and connection, walking alongside those it supports to realise shared aspirations.

Pou 2: Evaluation as a Service

What knowledge have we helped grow or share, and how is this being used to build equitable outcomes for learners?



Signposts

- Evaluation recognises and builds on community knowledge and expertise.
 - Confidence and capability in evaluation are increasing across the EPIT community.
 - Our community feels supported to explore their own evaluation approaches and develop solutions that reflect their unique contexts.
 - Adaptive approaches are resulting in reflection, problem-solving and better outcomes for communities and learners.
 - The sharing of collective knowledge is contributing to more equitable outcomes for learners.
 - Constellations of insight are emerging, connecting diverse experiences across the ecosystem.
- These signposts point to the conditions that signal a shift in how evaluation is being understood, owned, and used across our community to further the work of equity.**

A relational approach to evaluation

One of the original purposes of evaluation at EPIT was to demonstrate the impact of our work and that of our partners. As EPIT has evolved, our approach to evaluation has also developed, expanding in both focus and reach. What began as a service for funded partners is growing into a wider service outside of the organisation. This strategic shift has placed greater emphasis on learning and on the critical role it plays in the evaluation process.

Learning is helping us build understandings of the communities we serve - their histories, aspirations, and expertise, and with this the value of collective contribution. Learning is also helping us to better understand how inequities can better be addressed. Our commitment to mātauranga, within our contribution framework, is also guiding this evolution. Through our evaluation services, we are helping to generate and share knowledge about the conditions, practices, and contexts that are making a difference, and why.

Feedback shows that EPIT is valued for our approach to evaluation particularly the ease of reporting, the flexibility, and the capability building that is embedded in our evaluation work.

I particularly like the EPIT approach to evaluation, their thoughtful, interactive approach to evaluation makes the paperwork feel purposeful and doable.

Our evaluation advisor is in the waka with us: supporting ethics, developmental evaluation, and reflection at every milestone.

From the beginning, our approach to evaluation has been about more than compliance. It has prioritised responsiveness to communities and the complex challenges faced within the wider ecosystem. As a community service, EPIT continues to reshape our evaluation as we listen to our community and their insights and questions. In response we have recently updated our approach to align with wayfinding methodologies (Spiller et al., 2015).

A wayfinding approach to evaluation allows for complexity and change. It values the voices of communities and invites adaptation to diverse settings and conditions. Our values of Whanaungatanga | Kinship, Manaakitanga | Care, Rangatiratanga | Self-determination, Pono | Integrity, and Whakamana | Empowerment are embedded throughout, ensuring that evaluation remains relational, ethical, and empowering.

Holding space for learning

Guided by our wayfinding approach, organisations are encouraged to navigate their own evaluation journeys with confidence and clarity; in practice, helping teams to map their contribution plans, co-design culturally responsive tools for data collection, and develop meaningful ways to tell stories of their contribution to impact. EPIT is frequently recognised for the way we hold space for partners and communities to explore challenges, stay curious, and develop their own solutions.

EPIT is like an older sibling who gently guides me through the challenges of this industry. It doesn't hand me the answers on a silver platter but instead encourages me to work through the obstacles I encounter in my professional life on my own.

Yet, it's always there, ready to offer advice and support whenever I need it, making sure I learn and grow from each experience.

We encourage our partners to understand the nuances of their context, to work collaboratively in their communities, and to ensure reflection guides shifts in direction when required.

Example: Pivoting when it became clear that the values of a potential collaborator were misaligned with the core values of our partner organisation.

Example: Resisting the urge to quickly find a community champion to meet deadlines and instead waiting for the right person.

Example: Re-working the programme delivery to train teacher aides when teachers were too busy to attend training resulting in a better option for neurodiverse learners.

This flexible, developmental approach has helped ensure their mahi aligns with what communities genuinely want and need.

EPIT makes space for us to explore, question, and grow. We don't have to arrive with all the answers. Instead, we're supported to take an enquiry approach - to understand the challenges before rushing to solve them. It's a thoughtful, empowering stance that values curiosity over certainty.

EPIT values community knowledge and adapts to this, learning alongside our partners about the varied and complex ways people are working to address inequities. Solutions which are then created by our partners with their communities work better. As a result of this dialogic, values-based style of evaluation, EPIT is now being sought for their evaluation expertise and services.

The evolution of EaaS

Towards the middle of 2024 we began to receive requests for training in evaluation. In response to this we ran a series of introductory sessions. Four face-to-face, and two online sessions were held between August and October 2024. The purpose was twofold:

- 1. Respond to community requests for training in impact evaluation
- 2. Learn more about what the wider community were asking and needing

We collected data after each of the workshop sessions and then followed up with a survey at the end of 2024. This gave us an overview of how the sessions had been received, what was most beneficial and helped identify if anything had changed as a result of the training.

A valued approach

One of the most appreciated aspects of the workshops was the unpacking of key evaluation concepts, particularly the distinctions between outputs, outcomes, impact, and evidence. Participants consistently highlighted this as a valuable learning area, noting it helped demystify the language of evaluation and gave them greater clarity and confidence in their own approaches to measuring and communicating impact.

- I have a much broader understanding of the meaning of impact and ways in which this can be measured.
- My thinking has expanded greatly. I see the process as foundational... I found the distinction between outputs and outcomes very helpful - recognising that numbers are only a small part of the story.
- I gained a better understanding of how to compile a more insightful impact report while supplying the data that needs to accompany the report.
- ...sometimes outputs get more of the attention.

Post-workshop feedback showed that the knowledge gained from these sessions is being applied to internal evaluation, being shared with boards, and it is helping with funding applications.

- I have given a lot of thought about how we might measure impact... I intend to begin a discussion with Board members as soon as possible to share the information from this workshop and to discuss its relevance to our project.
- As organisations have reached out to us to apply for funding, I have emphasised that we really do want to understand their goals and how they plan to measure those goals, and also offered to work with them on it... we are also working to collect stories and create a digital dropbox for them to better understand our impact.
- Now, I take impact evaluation more like the moral of a story, not just data compilation.

Shifting thinking about impact

It was at our evaluation workshops that we first tested the idea of **impact as contribution**. This was received enthusiastically across all six sessions. Participants described this as “brilliant,” “clarifying,” and “empowering,” with many noting that it helped them move beyond the pressure to prove direct, linear outcomes within short funding cycles. In addition, they began to recognise their work as part of a wider ecosystem of change. The idea that impact could be understood through shared learning, contextual insight, and long-term contribution reframed their understanding.

- Rather than taking a short-term view of our impact, we’re beginning to think more long-term about the overall impact on our kids, schools, and communities.
- The workshop widened my understanding of impact, especially that our work is often just a part of something much bigger.
- It crystalised my thinking & ignited my brain to think about different reasons for measuring impact and different stakeholder expectations of impact.

Mapping journeys of change

The next step for us was to develop our wayfinding process; **impact as contribution** was a central part of this. We tested this in March 2025 with a small selection of our partners. Feedback from this session indicated that a wayfinding approach fitted with the complexity of their mahi. It gave a number of very practical ways to map journeys of impact and left participants feeling like they understood more and could progress with increased confidence.

I have a better and more practical understanding of concepts of impact measurement and evaluation.

I found it really valuable for demystifying and making sense of the impact evaluation landscape. I also came away with many tools and ideas for approaching our storytelling with creativity and from a place of empowerment.

The most useful was understanding the concept of wayfinding, learning about signposts, the metaphors of the currents, birds, the sun; this was revelatory.

Incorporating signposts as markers helps to build responsiveness, which is particularly important when innovating. Signposts acknowledge that there are unknowns and that there is knowledge held by others that is not always evident at the outset. Signposts help with observation, listening and they therefore guide evidence gathering. Learning about the many and varied ways evidence can be gathered was valued by those who attended the wayfinding workshop.

The most valuable to me, the evidence gathering, collecting stories and different ideas and creative ways to engage different groups, charting waypoints and analysis.

The most useful for me was the creative data gathering example games, timelines, videos. And a new understanding and interest in research and methodologies.

I have a much broader understanding of the meaning of Impact and ways in which this can be measured.

The gold standard is the story of person impacted.

Building constellations

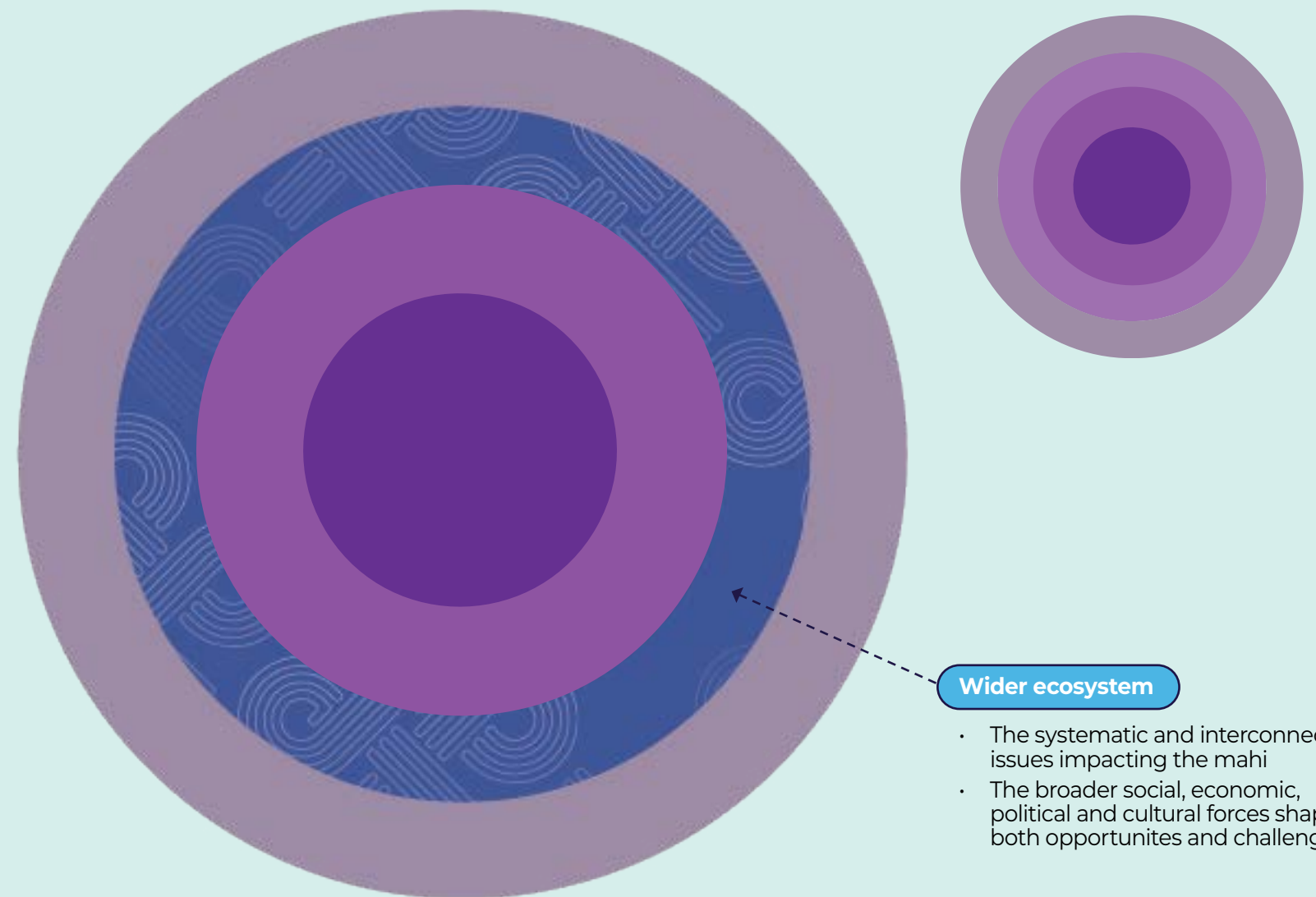
The next phase for EPIT is to offer our evaluation services more widely and digitising this process so that we can more easily strengthen evaluation capability across the sector. By doing this we are contributing to a broader constellation of practice, one where knowledge is collectively built and shared. Our approach to evaluation is helping to shape the learning about equity across the ecosystem; our EaaS will enable this learning to be shared.

Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, engari he toa takitini.

My strength is not that of an individual, but that of the collective.

Pou 3: Transformational Programmes of Work

What shifts have we contributed to in the wider systems we're all navigating?



Signposts

- Increasing clarity on what transformational change looks like in practice.
- Partnerships with Māori are informing worldviews and approaches to systems change.
- Stories, strategies, and themes of transformation from diverse communities are being named, shared, and used to guide others.
- Approaches are being embedded, sustained, adapted, and scaled, contributing to wider change across the ecosystem.

These signposts point to the conditions leading to long-term, transformational change.

Transformational programmes of work

Our transformational programmes of work are learning -based initiatives responding to the ongoing challenges of inequity within the education landscape. Some are funded directly by EPIT, while others are co-funded in partnership with philanthropic allies. We also commission work when we wish to explore emerging opportunities or gaps within the wider ecosystem's knowledge base. The key element linking all of these pieces of work is their potential to contribute to systems-level change across the wider education ecosystem in Aotearoa.

Contribution to wider ecosystem change

Individually and collectively our partners are working to make a positive difference within the broader social, economic, political, and cultural landscape. Each contribution is part of a wider whole; the whole of the community it serves, the organisation leading it, and the wider systems it sits within. Together, we are contributing to this third circle of our contribution model: Wider Ecosystems.

Our work includes multi-year programmes, pilot studies that often get scaled, and small innovation projects. We prioritise co-designed initiatives, especially those developed with communities, rangatahi, and whānau. Many are multi-year, recognising that transformational change takes time and deep trust.

Critically, our connection to this work does not end when funding concludes. Many of our formerly-funded partners remain closely linked through our Communities of Practice (CoPs), our shared learning spaces, and our continued evaluation support. Later in this report, we feature stories from organisations whose work continues to shape the wider ecosystem, beyond their funding contracts with EPIT.

Increasingly, we are entering formal co-funding arrangements with aligned funders; EPIT is providing evaluation and learning support as part of these partnerships. This layered approach reflects our role as connector, funder, ally and thought partner; walking alongside a wider ecosystem of support that enables transformation.

What does transformation look like?

This is an essential but complex question. At EPIT, we understand transformation as more than the successful delivery of programmes. It involves shifts in the conditions that shape learning, equity, and participation; conditions that, if left unexamined, continue to enable discrimination, exclusion, and unequal access to opportunity.

Transformational practice involves intentionally acting to understand, challenge and change processes and practices that result in disadvantage, and to re-imagine and re-create these for more equitable and socially just outcomes (EPIT Evaluation Framework, 2021).

Across the EPIT community, there is growing clarity about what transformational change looks like in practice across different contexts. Many of our delivery partners are contributing to transformation for equity through systems change (Kania, Kramer, & Senge, 2018), often working in one or more of the following areas:

- **Structural change** – shifts in policies, practices, and the way resources are allocated
- **Relational change** – shifts in relationships, power dynamics, and the flow of influence
- **Transformative change** – shifts in mental models, narratives, and assumptions about equity

Here is how they are doing this.

Transformation in practice

Creating meaningful pathways for all

A number of partners are working alongside schools, supporting programmes and pathways that create a wider range of opportunities for learners whose needs, identities, or circumstances are not fully met within the current system. For example: The Education Hub, Oke Charity, Sew Your Story, Kilmarnock Enterprises, and Acorn are all working to provide better opportunities for learners who are neurodivergent, have intellectual disabilities, or thrive in non-traditional learning environments. They are doing this through training, expanded curriculum and increasing the community support around these learners.

Kilmarnock is working across systems change by providing greater work opportunities for young people with intellectual disabilities. Alongside this they are now providing training to better equip their young employees for life and further pathways.

Andrew’s story:

“When Andrew finished school, his path forward was anything but clear. Like many young people with an intellectual disability, he faced significant obstacles to success in an open employment environment. After starting at Kilmarnock, Andrew flourished, growing in confidence, building a broad skill set and creating many enduring friendships.

Fifteen years after he started with us, Andrew was equipped and ready to take on the next stage of his journey: an exciting new job in open employment!”

Marionette from Kilmarnock says:

This is a dream come true for this young man.

The training extends to the workplace where Kilmarnock are supporting employers to be employment ready for those transitioning into their work spaces. One employer shared this:

These guys with a disability can bring an advantage to a business - it brings the team closer together.

Kilmarnock is reframing transition as a capability journey and in doing so they are changing the futures of these employees; from exclusion to meaningful employment

By creating better futures for those who are not fully catered for within existing systems, our partners are contributing to systems-change across all three areas; structural change, relational change and transformational change. This involves developing more inclusive strategies and practices, providing training, and resourcing and working to change the way learners are perceived, accepted and supported into meaningful pathways and futures.

Placing rangatahi at the centre of decision-making

Some of our partners are supporting transformation by working with young people, including them in designing and trialling resources that are being created in support of their learning. The approach recognises rangatahi as active contributors to change, whose insights shape more relevant, effective, and sustainable solutions for themselves and their peers.

Netsafe's te reo Māori digital safety modules were transformed by directly involving rangatahi and their whānau. What began as a translation project evolved into a kaupapa Māori-led initiative thanks to early engagement with Māori leaders.

Rangatahi helped design content, shaped the tone, and featured in videos, while whānau emphasised the need for resources that felt like everyday kōrero | conversations rather than schoolwork. This led to video-first, self-paced modules accessible beyond the classroom.

By embedding Māori-led design in digital safety education, Netsafe's initiative is changing the position of Māori in the creation of resources and changing the narrative from deficit to a whānau centered, culturally grounded expression of digital wellbeing.

The majority of the audience that came to us when we were at Matatini were my children's generation, parents, and a lot of them said 'I'm already monitoring, I just want to know what else I need to be mindful of.'

As whānau said: "this is long overdue."

PMG Charitable Trust has created a financial literacy digital platform, Stacks, which has been developed with direct input from the rangatahi users.

Through focus groups the rangatahi challenged assumptions about youth disengagement with money and showed a strong interest in building financial sustainability for themselves and their whānau. Additionally, they directly influenced the design of the platform, and helped shape its content, brand, and key features like a confidential, advisor-verified search tool. They also featured in the video content being produced.

The result is strengths-based, culturally grounded and centred on what matters to rangatahi reframing as co-designers of their futures. Their involvement:

smashed assumptions and stereotypes that some have - that young people don't care... I was amazed at the level of astuteness.

Both of these initiatives are shifting how decisions are made, by strengthening relationships between learners, teachers, and whānau. This is not only resulting in more equitable learning resources but it is also challenging the mental models that define success and who might be part of the shaping of this.

Learners shaping their own futures

More equitable learning environments emerge when learners are seen as contributors, not just recipients. Several of our partners are working directly with schools to redesign assessment systems in ways that honour identity, deepen engagement, and build learner agency. This includes strengthening teacher capability and making assessment more visible, inclusive, and culturally grounded.

The Akomanga Kaihanga initiative at Tāmaki College, is redefining educational success by embedding culturally responsive, real-world assessment into the NCEA framework. Students engage with social issues and co-create solutions, positioning local knowledge, lived experiences and identity as central to learning. By doing so they are challenging traditional assessment systems and shifting mindsets around what counts as knowledge and achievement. An 'all of school' teacher professional development approach is woven into this to enable a school-wide systems shift that can be scaled.

Through a digital equity programme, **Progressify** formerly Te Kete Hono (TKH) | Stonefields Collaborative, is assisting schools with limited resources and access to technology, to successfully integrate their digital assessment platform. The schools are scaffolded into the programme over three years. The engagement model and embedding approach is already positively impacting learning and student agency.

The principal of Kawerau Pūtauaki School spoke of her experience of the programme:

Being part of the digital equity funding initiative and using SchoolTalk has been transformational for our school. One key impact has been the increased visibility of student progress, allowing teachers to provide more targeted and timely support. This has led to improved learner agency, with students taking greater ownership of their learning journey.

These examples highlight transformational shifts in how assessment is designed, delivered, and understood. They show what's possible when learners are supported to shape, not just navigate, their own learning journeys, and when the systems around them evolve to match that vision.

The transformational programmes of work within the EPIT community are a significant part of the work towards transformation. Each one, in its own way, is contributing to deeper, system-level change by shifting how equity is understood, who is involved in shaping learning, and how relationships and resources are being redirected to support thriving. The examples above are just some of these. We explore more stories, and the insights they generate, in the following Waypoints section.

Signpost challenges

Signposts indicate the conditions that signal change; some mark positive shifts, while others reveal challenges ahead. How we respond is part of our mahi. Sometimes it means circling in the waka until conditions shift. This takes responsiveness and agility.

**Signpost challenges:
Communities of Practice (CoPs)**

While the vision for partnerships, and our commitment to our Communities of Practice, remains strong, financial hardship is forcing some organisations to close their doors. Partnership arrangements are being cancelled despite long-term planning and commitments. Our partners are having to circle in their waka as they regroup and refocus. EPIT continues to walk alongside them with care and understanding.

Tracking actionable change remains a challenge, particularly when EPIT is several steps removed from the Tangata | People at the centre of our vision. Attribution is also problematic. A contribution model is helping to address this.

As EPIT’s networks grow, so too does the challenge of sustaining deep, interconnected relationships. This is where our digital community Circle can support us. The aim is for it to become a self-driven centre for shared insight and community connection.

**Signpost challenges:
Evaluation as a Service (EaaS)**

There are diverse and sometimes conflicting understandings of terms like equity, transformation, evaluation, and impact, with colonial frameworks continuing to shape how these are interpreted and applied. Holding space for dialogue here is a critical part of EPIT’s evolving role.

The capacity and capability of organisations to carry out their own evaluation is being stretched with limited finances being redirected into programme delivery. Our EaaS offering is aimed at addressing some of these challenges, providing robust tools and support to guide partners.

The need for evidence, related to learner achievement, remains strong among funders keen to see immediate impact. However, in attempting to obtain such information providers often face significant barriers in accessing this data with privacy constraints, the specific focus of internal assessments, (often excluding the focus on initiatives), and the difficulty of assigning attribution - all limit what can be reported. EPIT continues to work on moving the narrative about what counts as evidence.

**Signpost challenges:
Transformational programmes of work**

Schools and early childhood services are stretched, and plans to involve educators are being paused or scaled back. EPIT recognises this and is working closely with partners as they adapt and pivot. Community support at a coordinated level is becoming more necessary.

More organisations than ever are reaching out for support, and many are seeking deeper, longer-term investment as short-term funding cycles negatively impact longer term transformation. The need for surety of funding is growing, and the conditions many are working under are increasingly fragile. Co-funding is one positive step toward meeting these pressures.



WAYPOINTS

DISCOVERIES AND DESTINATION[S]

Waypoints mark moments of deeper insight, where there is new clarity or a new direction has emerged. They do not simply tell us what happened; they help shape our direction. We call these our Discoveries and Destination[S]:

Discoveries: Insights about equity and transformation drawn from our collective mahi and community engagement.

Destination[S]: Places where we have temporarily ‘landed’. These are the moments to pause, reflect, and decide how our contribution might evolve from here.

In the rhythm of wayfinding, waypoints offer orientation, meaning, and momentum.



Waypoint one: More than a village

Discoveries: It takes more than a village to nurture a thriving adult. It takes whānau, educators, health providers, and social services working together. It takes an approach grounded in whakawhānaungatanga | relationships; a community of care and shared responsibility.

Destination[S]: EPIT is playing a vital role in supporting whole communities to build a system of care and opportunity for learners across Aotearoa.

In last year’s impact report, we explored the OECD’s scenarios for the future of schooling (OECD, 2020). One of these, imagined schools as learning hubs - central places for community learning and care. This year, we’ve started to see evidence of this idea taking shape in different ways across our mahi.

What we know is this: schools and early childhood services can not bring about systems change alone. Creating the conditions where all learners have the opportunity to thrive requires more than committed whānau, more than a good school, or early childhood service, and more than a village. It takes whole communities wrapping around tamariki and rangatahi. It takes shared care, knowledge, and responsibility.

Social services and entrepreneurs continue to bring their ideas and support, but this in isolation is also not shifting the equity landscape. The effort requires more (OECD, n.d.). It requires working with and within communities, in ways that are coordinated, relational, and grounded in local knowledge. We need, as Tuhiwai Smith (2012) suggests,

“visions that bind us” and “a reframing” of the narratives around where the problem lies, to how better futures might be reimagined and built together.

Some of the work EPIT supports is doing this: our partners are listening closely to communities, responding to their visions, and building with them. Together they are shaping strong and hopeful narratives about what’s possible for tamariki and rangatahi.

Talking Matters

When Talking Matters set out to explore new partnerships in Te Tai Tokerau, they started with a firm commitment to authentic relationships and an understanding that change moves at the speed of trust. Their initiative began with an invitation from a whānau member, a rainy season that wouldn’t let up, and a decision to pause, listen, and wait.

For six months, that’s exactly what they did. Communities in the north were dealing with more pressing needs: damaged roads, kura and houses, disrupted lives, and recovery efforts. So, rather than pushing ahead, the team circled the waka. When the time was right, they resumed, not to deliver a programme, but to walk alongside the community. What emerged from that quiet start was something durable: a set of relationships underpinned by shared values and built over cups of tea, long drives, and kōrero that meandered through stories, hopes, and lived knowledge.

In Kaikohe, the work began with a teen parenting unit at a local high school and soon extended to Kaitaia, where a whānau workshop led to a peer-led playgroup for hapū māmā | expectant mums and young parents. Other partnerships followed, shaped not by pre-set plans but through local insight. Each initiative blended mātauranga Māori, early language development, and community voice, with tools adapted to real lives and, where possible, aligned to learning pathways.

What Talking Matters has shown is that building a sustainable, community-led programme means stepping back as often as stepping in. It means resisting the urge to ‘roll out’ and instead, allowing something to rise from local knowledge, local leadership, and a shared sense of purpose. Now, a year in, they’re beginning to see that familiar shift: from being welcomed in to being asked back. That’s when you know a community is not just engaging with the kaupapa, but beginning to carry it forward in their own way.

Nōna Te Ao

Nōna Te Ao is showing what it looks like when an entire community builds around its rangatahi, not as a service, but as a shared commitment. Grounded in rural kura and kaupapa Māori education, the initiative began with just a handful of students in Tolaga Bay and has steadily grown across four regions, reaching 500 rangatahi through school-based and whānau-led support.

Their approach is layered and relational. It starts with schools, but quickly expands to include whānau, iwi, alumni, employers, and coaches. Students are not just supported to stay in school, they are accompanied on a journey that includes planning, mentoring, and real-world experiences. Wānanga bring rangatahi into contact with people and places beyond their usual horizons, from tertiary institutions to workplaces to leaders with lived experience. This is broadening their sense of what’s possible.

Every part of the programme is shaped with the community. Local raukura | graduates lead delivery, alumni return as mentors, and whānau are not just consulted but are actively involved. This sometimes means travelling to wānanga with their moko | grandchildren, seeing potential, considering new futures for them, and for themselves. Schools that once saw students drop out of the education system are now seeing them stay through to Year 13, with some whānau choosing to keep rangatahi in their local schools because they trust what’s being built in their local community.

This is not a model being dropped into place but rather a network of support being grown from the inside out. Nōna Te Ao is helping create the conditions for rangatahi to thrive by strengthening the people and places already in their lives. It’s a reminder that when we talk about equity, we’re not just talking about systems, we’re talking about people choosing to work together.

Taiohi Awhitū

Taiohi Awhitū began as a question: could a youth wellbeing model designed overseas be reshaped for Aotearoa? A year later, a navigator style hub in Whanganui is underway. Instead of replicating an overseas programme, this pilot, commissioned by EPIT, is developing an Aotearoa place-based, co-designed, community driven wellbeing initiative. An example of authentic co-governance, this kaupapa is led jointly by iwi and EPIT delivery partner, Tātai Aho Rau, with navigators appointed from within the community itself.

At the centre of this work is a deep history of relationships. Many of the leaders involved have worked together over the past 13 years, and it shows. There is trust, clarity, and shared commitment. For the first time, wellbeing providers from across the rohe | region are working in collaboration as part of a coordinated community effort. The name of the initiative was gifted by community partners. It literally means: “embracing youth at the moment the tide turns,” signalling a commitment to catching rangatahi at that critical inflection point and steering them toward flourishing.

The approach is deliberately local. One early childhood centre, four primary schools, two intermediates, and a college are involved, alongside whānau, hapu, providers, and community leaders. This also includes nanas, whāea | aunties, and others who bring lived wisdom to the table. All are working together for the wellbeing of the future generations in their community.

Three community-based navigators anchor the mahi, moving between homes, kura, and community spaces to build trust, connect support, and strengthen identity and resilience among rangatahi. They work relationally by listening, responding, and helping others navigate what can often be a fragmented support landscape. At the heart of their role is a shared understanding: that wellbeing and learning are deeply interwoven, and meaningful

While still in its early stages, Taiohi Awhitū is already offering a way for communities to lead their own solutions, with coordination that doesn’t override local knowledge, but holds space for it, and everyone is paddling in the same direction.

The path forward must be one of genuine partnership, respect, and co-governance. Only then can Aotearoa truly live up to its name, the land of the long white cloud, where all peoples stand tall, together. (Davis & Joyce, 2025)

Waypoint two: More than an idea

Discoveries: The work towards equity is not momentary. It is a long and deliberate journey sustained by those with deeply held convictions.

Destination[S]: These stories show us that equity is built over time through care, and in context, with community. Our challenge now is to hold that long view: supporting ideas and visions to grow roots and ripple outward as sustainable programmes.

At EPIT, our observing and listening has shown us that the most impactful equity work often begins with long-held lived commitments grounded in identity, purpose, and responsibility. This work is rarely just a spark of inspiration but rather an idea carried, shaped, and nurtured over time. Our partners come to this work for diverse reasons, but a shared thread runs through many of their stories: a deep concern for learners and a desire to shape systems that amplify their voices and meet their needs.

EPIT's innovation seed-funded initiatives are often the first visible step toward realising a partner's values, voice, and vision for learners in Aotearoa. These beginnings are not abstract or accidental but grounded in personal, lived experience, professional insight, and longstanding connections to community. What may appear at first glance as a 'new idea' is, in reality, a carefully held intention, often years in the making. As we walk alongside our partners, we come to understand the deep meaning, impact, and lived reality of this mahi.

The te ao Māori concept of whakaaro | thought speaks to this kind of depth. It refers to a reflective process rooted in whakapapa | genealogy, connected to wairua | spirit, and shaped by collective responsibility (Royal, 2003). An idea, in this context, is not merely intellectual but also relational, spiritual, ethical, and lived. Something to be felt, practised, and honoured.

In the following interviews with Joanna Baynes, Mary Kelleher, and Saoatulagi-ole-Tagaloa Penina Ifopo, three EPIT partners reflect on where their ideas came from, and where they are heading. Each story is a purposeful expression of insight, responsibility, and enduring commitment to learners, whānau, and the legacies they uphold.

Interview

Books for all tamariki
Story Store | Te Manu Mātauranga
Joanna Baynes

Story Store is a voluntary start-up organisation set up by Joanna, a retired school librarian of 35 years. Story Store aims to collect excellent condition, new and 2nd-hand children's books and then make them available for free to school libraries that are under-resourced. All contributors to the initiative are volunteers.

The spark was lit over a morning tea at work, and from that moment Joanna knew this is what she'd do once she retired.

I'd been working in a well-resourced school library and often got donated books I already had. I would send those books on, anonymously, to schools that needed them more.

It was simple, free access to books for tamariki everywhere in Aotearoa. Books they want to read, not just books others think they should read. That's important, not sending tatty, second-hand books. It's not charity, it's equity.

It's like saying my junk ought to be good enough for you. And I object to that. Children deserve quality; if it's not good enough for your child, it's not good enough for anyone's.

At its heart, Story Store was created to offer dignified access to excellent-condition children's books for schools without the means to build robust libraries. Every book is selected for quality, relevance, and appeal. They come from everywhere, families, and book clubs. One mother, a potter for 55 years, donates all her pottery proceeds to help buy books. One story particularly captures the spirit of this grassroots generosity:

A 10 year-old boy donated every cent he had received for Christmas, it was his New Year's resolution.

Originally Story Store focused on primary schools, and then quickly responded to unexpected needs. Joanna says that she had tunnel vision at first and that all went by the by when she started receiving books for 17 and 18 year-olds, and board books for toddlers. A visit to the Little Pearls early childhood centre was a turning point for her:

They were scanning pages left to right. They knew how a book worked. That experience changed things for me.

This was when Joanna realised that she needed to be flexible and understand what was really happening in schools and for learners in Aotearoa, and how deeply appreciated the work is.

In one school, the principal cried because there was a beautiful new Gavin Bishop book, and she hugged it to her chest and cried... It makes you realise, this stuff is very real.

Another school gave this feedback:

Our library collection was very depleted as we had just reopened after a few years of being closed and had culled most of our old and dated collection. Story Store gave us an injection of engaging and interesting books that our ākonga actually WANT to read, which was our dream for opening our library – that ākonga would walk into our new space and immediately find something they want to read.

With a smaller collection but refreshed and engaging books, the attitude from ākonga towards the library all together is drastically different, they want to be in there and there is plenty they want to read.

The plan is to pass on this mahi in a few years.

I know someone who has indicated she may take it on. She is younger than me and has more contacts. She is very outgoing, eloquent and knows way more people than I do...

As Story Store looks ahead, what began as a personal spark has become a collective mission. A testament to how, in the hands of a community, even the simplest idea can become a legacy of learning. Every page turned and book selected with care reinforces that equity isn't abstract, it's local, tangible, and lived. It is found in the dignity of choice, in a child recognising themselves in a story, and in a teacher offering a book that truly speaks to their learners.

Over time, Story Store has become more than a book-gifting initiative, it is a quiet act of resistance against inequity, and a growing, sustained movement for educational justice. Its strength lies not just in generosity, but in its insistence that all tamariki deserve quality, joy, and the chance to see the world, and themselves, through books. This is equity as practice. This is community in action.

Interview

One stitch at a time

Sew Your Story
Mary Kelleher

Sew Your Story evolved in response to a need in Te Tai Tokerau. To founder Mary Kelleher, contact with textiles, old treasures and found objects is an essential part of her life. Seeing that tactile sensory experience was unavailable to early school age children, she saw the need to create a pathway for traditional crafts to connect a younger generation to our collective memory of fabrics and fabrication.

The idea of Sew Your Story emerged from a turning point in Mary's life at age 50 when she attended a course in Creative Technology but the desire to create and tell stories through stitch and objects was already part of her life - quietly embedded in cupboards full of fabric, jars of buttons, and shelves lined with collectables.

I have always had a passion for fabric, collectables, and storytelling, and discovered the power of textiles as a medium for self-expression. My fabric murals resonated deeply with students and teachers, sparking interest in reconnecting with the handmade traditions and histories they represented.

From this grew the idea of Sew Your Story, a concept of telling your story as a tool for personal discovery, encouraging children to explore their feelings and make meaning through creative choices.

From the beginning, the work has been relational and reflective. Children are encouraged to choose materials based on feeling and meaning.

I chose this button because the pattern looks like star sparkles

a child said when stitching a collage about the Maori Creation Pūrākau.

The learning is in the choice, the self-discovery, the story. This hands-on, emotionally attuned approach offers an alternative literacy that is grounded in visual language, sensory exploration, and cultural knowledge. For many, it creates a new pathway into learning as a life-long journey.

Additional schools across the region are now asking to be part of this and there is interest from the Ministry of Social Development, IWS (Intensive Wraparound Service) and the Far North Resilient Communities Charitable Trust. Opportunities are opening up for deeper community engagement and collaborative storytelling projects within families and local groups.

Interview

My focus is to share craft as a tool for storytelling and cultural continuity. This can be anchored either in educational or community settings, wherever the story needs to be told.

Stitching and handcrafting creates a living archive of whakapapa and belonging. The important thing is to place tamariki at the centre of their own local narratives.

As Sew Your Story continues to evolve, what began as a creative practice has grown into a deeply relational and restorative way of working. It is a living archive of whakapapa and belonging, crafted through fabric, guided by memory, and shaped by learners and whānau. Emerging not from trend but from tradition and need, Sew Your Story offers tamariki and their communities a space to express, heal, and reimagine. It is a quiet, powerful shift towards equity, stitched one story at a time.

Intergenerational Learning

Folauga Programme in Schools

Saoatulagi-ole-Tagaloa Penina Ifopo

Falelalaga Cultural and Education Centre is a dynamic and forward-thinking organisation dedicated to preserving and promoting the rich cultural heritage of our community while fostering educational growth and innovation. Established in 2021, it has evolved into a beacon of cultural preservation, education, and community development, serving as a bridge between the past and the future. With a particular focus on elders and seniors, they honour and cherish the wisdom and experiences of their older generation.

When Penina migrated from Samoa over two decades ago, she carried with her more than her experience as a teacher. She also carried a deep commitment to tautua, the Samoan principle of service.

The idea was already in me 23 years ago when I migrated. I was born into service.

But it would take years of observing and learning New Zealand's education system before her dream came to fruition. It was painful and familiar, Samoan children full of potential, but disconnected and often misunderstood.

Their knowledge, their culture was not captured, not acknowledged.

The calling to do something about this wasn't just a thought, it was a lived reality she saw every day. The catalyst came in an unlikely form, the COVID-19 lockdown. It was then that Penina felt people becoming restless and she returned to a practice from Samoa, lalaga weaving.

When the first batch of lau'iga arrived, my sister and I began weaving. Then we invited elders from the community to join. Their reaction was powerful, they just cried. Some hadn't seen lau'iga in over 30 years.

These elders had been weavers in Samoa, but the skill had lain dormant in Aotearoa. I made a call to Radio Samoa to whoever is out there to come and weave. People showed up, and what began as an informal session became a movement. This was the birth of Falelalaga—the house of weavers.

Falelalaga was then taken into schools, starting with a class in a Manurewa school. Penina said to the school:

Give me one class. I want to work with the students who are disengaged, the ones who don't come to class or feel like they belong.

The result was immediate engagement. One teacher said: "This is the first time I've seen them engage and participate". Students helped unload the elders' supplies from the van before class even began. Elders sat with students not as guests but as part of their aiga | family talking and teaching. It was not just weaving but the cultural value behind it.

As one student reflected:

Now I know my language and culture they are my superpowers.

Changing education systems takes more than an idea. It takes relationship, trust, and visibility. Falelalaga didn't just teach cultural content, it changed the way learning felt and worked for both students and teachers.

The work expanded into a formal programme called Folauga, reaching across age groups and school levels. It included structured lesson plans, resource development in the Samoan language, and facilitator training. Shifts were not theoretical but showed up in students' attendance, enthusiasm, and sense of pride. One student wrote after their involvement:

The best six weeks of my term was the Folauga programme. I had joy in attending and working with the elders and hearing stories.

As demand grew, an infrastructure around this grew; training elders, opening the Hall Mix Centre, and expanding to include health and homework programmes. The vision of setting up a aoga Samoa in Manurewa is in progress. The plan is a full Samoan language and culture school and expanding into communities beyond Auckland and later to other parts of Aotearoa.

I want my granddaughter to walk into a library and find a book written by Falelalaga in the mother tongue of her grandmother and ancestors – Gagana Samoa

As the programme Folauga continues to grow, what began with a weaving circle has become a movement of cultural restoration and educational transformation. Anchored in tautua | service and sustained by intergenerational knowledge, the programme is reshaping what learning can look and feel like when identity, belonging, and language are placed at the centre. Equity here is not a destination, but a journey that is woven slowly through relationships, responsiveness, and deep commitment over time. The Folauga approach reminds us that meaningful change is not built overnight. It emerges through long-held purpose, cultural grounding, and the quiet leadership of those who carry vision across generations.

We know the journey is long but for our mokopuna, it's worth it...

We would like to thank these partners for allowing EPIT to be part of their long held dreams and the commitment to their mahi over a lifetime.

Waypoint three: From connection to interconnection

Discoveries: The work towards equity is achieved together across systems, places and people, through dialogue, reciprocal learning, and open sharing.

Destination[S]: The next step for EPIT is moving from relationships as tools of utility towards an interconnectedness that nurtures ecological balance, and equitable outcomes.

EPIT's relationships with partners are held together by shared values, emotional connection, and ongoing dialogue. Over time, our understanding of connection has deepened, reflecting a growing recognition that this is not merely personal or logical, but also shaped by and within wider social, emotional, and environmental factors. We try to reflect this in how we work: prioritising conversation, shared purpose, and reciprocal learning.

In te ao Māori, relationships are placed at the centre of being. Whakapapa connects individuals not only to their whānau but to the land, ancestors, and spiritual forces as part of an interwoven cosmos of connections (Henare, 2001). Relationships are enacted through ritual, story, performance, and practice and not solely through detached outcomes (Smith, Maxwell, Puke, & Temara, 2016). This is a space grounded in respect and whakapapa a place of togetherness.

While some knowledge systems emphasise detachment, replicability, and analytical classification, others value relational ethics, intuition, spiritual balance, and ancestral continuity. These values align with the principles of te ao Māori, where relationships are not only social but deep and committed connections formed over extended periods of time.

Bringing these worldviews into dialogue invites a rethinking of what it means to relate and connect. This is not a process of assimilation, but one of mutual respect and a space where multiple ways of knowing and relating can coexist. In doing so, we move from relationships as tools of utility toward an interconnectedness that nurtures ecological balance, and equitable outcomes.

Increasingly we are seeing evidence of this in practice with our partnerships building interconnections of purpose.

Ready 4 Learning (R4L)

Ready 4 Learning began with a clear commitment: to support whānau as first teachers and strengthen early foundations for tamariki. But it hasn't stayed as a single programme or fixed model. Instead, it's become a living example of what it means to work relationally and responsively — adapting with each new community while holding to shared values.

In Kawerau, the work started with a single connection to a local kura. From there, relationships grew, first through staff who believed in the kaupapa, then through a playgroup where the team spent time simply being present, getting to know whānau in everyday moments. A key community worker was introduced through EPIT-partner Talking Matters, showing how trusted relationships already in place can open doors for deeper engagement.

In Te Tairāwhiti, the entry point was completely different. The team connected first with an early childhood centre, and the relationships developed from there, rippling outward through whānau and kaiako. Rather than replicating the Kawerau model, the team adapted their approach entirely, following the rhythm and values of the local community.

One of the most significant shifts was moving away from a colonial model of governance. Instead of setting up a formal advisory group, the team adopted a wayfinding approach, holding space for guidance and key community champions to emerge through relationships and lived expertise. This shift changed everything: it allowed flexibility, fostered shared ownership, and helped the work stay grounded in place.

As the work evolved, Ready 4 Learning supported communities not just to access resources, but to grow their own capability and confidence. Appointing a local champion and developing a scholarship programme to support them has become a key part of this. It came after a period of waiting, where they circled in the waka until the ‘right’ person emerged. This approach has allowed R4L to recognise leadership already present in the community and to support people to step further into that role.

What emerged is more than a programme. It’s an example of ecological interconnection. Ready 4 Learning has shown that when relationships are formed through genuine engagement with diverse ways of knowing, they can become the basis for interdependent communities where local solutions are shaped and sustained through ongoing dialogue and learning across differences.

Stand Tall

Stand Tall began with a challenge: many young people were missing out on the chance to develop digital and entrepreneurial capabilities. The pathways that existed were often narrow, disconnected from their lived realities, and shaped by systems that didn’t fully see them.

What followed was not the creation of a single programme, but the emergence of an interconnected network. Stand Tall has worked steadily to expand access by adapting content, building new partnerships, and embedding mentoring in ways that feel real and relevant. Their approach has never been to scale by replication, but to grow through alignment, bringing in the strengths of each community and shaping something fit for place and people.

In the Bay of Plenty, that means connecting schools, community leaders, employers, and attendance services - creating new links across the youth ecosystem. These relationships are integral to the work. The initiative doesn’t sit outside existing systems but works within them, shifting mindsets, language, and practices from the inside out.

The team has also mapped the wider system, visualising how youth, iwi, employers, government, and education sectors intersect. That map revealed the real work: not just helping young people find pathways, but helping communities build the conditions in which those pathways can grow. This includes surfacing roadblocks, resourcing collaboration, and staying with the complexity.

Through all of this, Stand Tall has helped reframe what opportunity looks like, who is seen as having potential, and how we support that potential to emerge. It is not just about digital tools or business ideas. It’s about creating a sense of belonging in future-focused spaces and ensuring those spaces reflect the diversity of those who step into them.

He Whakaaraara

He Whakaaraara began as a call to pay attention — to the lived realities of inequity in Aotearoa, and to the gaps in how we understand and respond to them. It was never intended as a one-off report. It is a living, evolving initiative, grounded in the idea that we must bring data, stories, and community insight together if we are serious about systemic change.

Launched through a collaboration between UNICEF, the Mātauranga Iwi Leaders Group, Tātai Aho Rau, and EPIT, He Whakaaraara moves beyond describing inequity. It seeks to illuminate how it is sustained, and how it can be dismantled. That means working across diverse communities and centring their own definitions of equity, rather than defaulting to institutional frameworks that often miss the mark.

The project draws on Tātai Aho Rau’s theory of action, unfolding over three phases: scan and prototype, deepen and reach, then sustain. Each phase invites iteration — space for learning, recalibration, and responsiveness to what emerges.

In its first year, He Whakaaraara focused on five key groups: Māori, Pacific Peoples, Rainbow, Disability, and Migrant whānau. What surfaced was not just disparity, but deep wisdom - insights into what matters and what works when change is led locally and shaped collectively.

Instead of prioritising comparative statistics and deficits, the initiative integrates storytelling with data — providing a fuller picture of experience. It opens space for intersectionality to be named, not flattened. The platform itself is digital and evolving — shaped not by one voice, but by many, and designed to grow over time with input from whānau, schools, advocates, and community leaders.

He Whakaaraara is more than an equity dashboard. It’s an ecosystem of learning — one that challenges how we define progress and who gets to define it. Regional workshops, webinars, and professional learning sessions are supporting this work to land, shift thinking, and invite collective action.

Already, schools, providers, and policymakers are using the insights to inform practice and strategy. But perhaps its most important contribution is relational: creating space where multiple truths can coexist, where connection is not about agreement but about understanding, and where communities are seen as the holders of solutions — not just subjects of inquiry.

...The stories shared through He Whakaaraara are really important. I amplify the calls for change so that all mokopuna can experience their right to education equitably in Aotearoa, and so we remove the barriers in the way. Education equity is essential for mokopuna and will have a profoundly positive intergenerational impact.

- Dr Claire Achmad, Chief Children’s Commissioner.



CONSTELLATIONS PATTERNS OF IMPACT AND INSIGHT

Constellations highlight how our mahi connects across wider systems. They reveal patterns of insight in and across our work, building a deeper understanding of our contribution to impact.

Mapping and tracing these constellations shows how change is taking shape across communities. This informs and strengthens our collective action towards achieving more equitable outcomes for learners in Aotearoa.



Building Constellations

To better understand EPIT's contribution to impact this year, we brought together two interwoven strands of analysis.

First, we looked across our contribution circles, Tangata, Mātauranga, and Wider Ecosystem Change, to reflect on the role we have played in each. These reflections captured in the Signposts have led to our waypoints, the discoveries and destination[S] of our journey. Together, they illustrate the shifts and movements we've made alongside our partners, and how these are contributing to broader equity outcomes in education.

Second, we have continued to use a rhizomatic approach (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), to deepen our understanding of impact across our work. As introduced in last year's Annual Impact Report, rhizomatic analysis is about noticing what grows and where energy and insight are emerging - not in straight lines, but in and across diverse, sometimes unexpected directions. We look for patterns, divergences, connections, and outliers. We pay attention to what is visible and what sits beneath the surface.

The threads of our analysis began to cluster into our waypoints, and as these grew and

combined with others we started to see constellations building; patterns of impact and insight that stretch across initiatives, places, and relationships. Like the work itself, these patterns are always evolving: reminding us to remain adaptive, curious, and accountable on the journey toward all young people in Aotearoa thriving.

This layered, relational mapping has given us a more holistic picture of the system we are part of, and the learning it holds. Rather than tracing a single line of change, our impact story has multiple entry points, all helping to shape, and strengthen the ecosystem's capacity to respond. Here are some of these.

An ongoing discussion: What does it mean to thrive?

What does it mean to thrive in Aotearoa? Is it about stability, a home and a job (for instance) or is it something more intangible, such as having choices and a sense of purpose? These are the kinds of questions EPIT, together with its community, continues to explore. We know that defining "thriving" is both complex and necessary if we are to create the conditions for it to occur.

We are fortunate to have longitudinal studies in Aotearoa that offer insights into what shapes thriving across a lifetime. What is clear is, a person's adult identity is significantly influenced by their childhood. Contributing factors include genetics, health (including maternal), housing, caregiving, safety, nutrition, education, mental wellbeing, and socioeconomic conditions (Poulton, Moffitt, & Silva, 2015; Growing Up in New Zealand, n.d.). Furthermore, our systems are not yet designed to equitably support all learners. Barriers related to race, ability, neurodiversity, language, and income, still shape individual and whānau outcomes. Society works better for some than others, and our education systems reflect that.

The Global Flourishing Study, a longitudinal international study focused specifically on wellbeing, defines flourishing as “the relative attainment of a state in which all aspects of a person's life are good, including the contexts in which that person lives” (Ritter et al., 2025, p. 5). In this sense, flourishing is a whole person, in-context outcome; “a rich interplay of multiple life dimensions” (p. 2). This is reflected in Aotearoa's Te Whare Tapa Whā, (Durie, 2001), which was referred to in EPIT's 2023/2024 Annual Impact report, and in the contribution circles and signposts we use to navigate change.

As well as defining flourishing, the research study is exploring the conditions that result in this - across communities and varied aged groups around the world. One of the key initial findings from the study is the irrefutable need for connection between people and ideas. Being connected through purpose, place and a shared commitment to one another, is a strong precondition for flourishing. This connection is not a superficial one but deep and long lasting.

The Education Partnership and Innovation Trust has 'partnership' in its name. It has always been our vision to see these come to life. We are moving in the right direction and finding that learning and ongoing dialogue across a range of lived experiences is a necessary part of this. Building constellations is a way to support this dialogue and learning, and helps to develop patterns of impact and insight, across our own mahi and then across the wider ecosystem. Together these constellations inform and increase the effectiveness of our work towards more equitable outcomes for learners.

“Increasingly, innovation springs not from individuals thinking and working alone, but through co-operation and collaboration with others to draw on existing knowledge to create new knowledge. The constructs that underpin the competency include adaptability, creativity, curiosity and open-mindedness”

— OECD, n.d., p. 6

True systems change requires the interconnectedness of ideas, people, and purpose.

Patterns of impact

EPIT is contributing to impact across our contribution circles. For example, within the **Tangata** circle, our evidence shows we are helping others navigate differently by embedding learning into their impact journeys so they are more agile and responsive to community needs. Our growing communities of practice are fostering deeper dialogue that informs and sparks action. The Careers Leadership CoP is one example of this.

In the **Mātauranga** circle, our Evaluation as a Service (EaaS) and wayfinding approach, is building evaluation capability with equity at its centre. The narrative is shifting from counting outputs to understanding impact as contribution. Part of this is recognising the value of community knowledge, and the need for open, reciprocal engagement. By embedding storytelling into evaluation, we are making space for more relational and meaningful understandings of impact.

Our contribution to **Wider Ecosystem Change** is visible in the transformational programmes we support. These initiatives are central to EPIT's mahi, and we deeply respect the dedication and perseverance of those leading them. We have growing evidence of co-governance, co-funding, and strengthened partnerships; essential conditions for sustained, systemic impact. Early signals suggest shifts in how transformation and equity are being understood and addressed within the education landscape.

Across all contribution circles, EPIT's role is in creating spaces: spaces for conversation, connection, reflection, and learning; for shaping equity, with, and within communities; and for building the capability to evaluate and articulate contribution. These may be quieter signs of impact, but they reveal a growing readiness across the ecosystem to adapt, collaborate, and hold complexity—together navigating towards enduring change.

Patterns of insight

We have learned that improving future pathways for learners is about more than just achieving higher scores at school. It's about opening up possibilities, centring learner voices, recognising diverse cultural strengths, engaging with whānau, and connecting young people to opportunities that reflect their potential.

No school or whānau can carry this responsibility alone; the challenges facing learners are complex. We need whole communities working together, and a shift from simple connection to deeper interconnectedness.

As the OECD notes in its future vision for education:

“To be prepared for the future, individuals have to learn to think and act in a more integrated way, taking into account the interconnections and inter-relations between contradictory or incompatible ideas, logics and positions, from both short- and long-term perspectives. In other words, they have to learn to be systems thinkers.”

— OECD, n.d., p. 5

Whole Communities Working Together

One of the strongest constellations emerging through our work is the power of a community coming together to support the wellbeing and thriving of its learners. It is becoming increasingly clear that the effectiveness of any single programme is amplified when it is part of a wider, connected ecosystem of support.

We see this in action through the mahi of Nōna Te Ao, and through Taiohi Awhitū in Whanganui. Here communities are building hubs of care, learning, and leadership. These are living spaces of connection where whānau are involved, and rangatahi can get the practical support needed to dream of futures that matter to them.

In these spaces, community is a daily practice. People show up for each other. They share knowledge, support each other, and build tomorrows together. This is what systems change can look like: not always large-scale or top-down, but relational, and sustained by those who know their people best.

We honour and support these kinds of community-led efforts. They remind us that thriving isn't something we deliver to people but something we grow with them - through interconnectedness.

**Deepen connections:
Cultivating interconnectedness**

At EPIT, we are asking more of ourselves and our partners; not just how to connect, but how to cultivate true interconnectedness. This shift isn't about more contact or better communication; it's about nurturing relationships grounded in reciprocity, self-determination, and collective wellbeing.

Interconnectedness means recognising ourselves as part of a larger whole and celebrating our need for one another. It is founded on our humanity and it asks us to centre mutual reliance, collective identity, and shared responsibility across time and place. This becomes our living map.

We believe transformation begins with people. While our work often calls for scale, we also support communities grounded in place, relational depth, and local knowledge. Sometimes this means stepping back so communities can lead through place-based wānanga, co-designed pathways, and grounded practice.

By drawing on mātauranga Māori and the lived realities of our partners and communities, EPIT continues to support the growth of responsive, equitable, and culturally grounded systems. We are committed to weaving together understanding, practice, and place as we journey from connection to interconnectedness.

**Within the spirit of He
Whakaaraara - we have begun.
This is our future.**



Glossary of Terms

These may be used interchangeably throughout the document.

- Ākonga** – Student, learner
- Hapū** – Family, sub tribe
- Kaiako** – Teacher
- Kaupapa** – Philosophy, ethos
- Kōrero** – Discussion, to converse
- Mahi** – Work
- Manaakitanga** – Hospitality, kindness, caring
- Motu** – Country
- Pono** – Integrity
- Rangatahi** – Youth, young person
- Rangatiratanga** – Self-determination
- Rohe** – Region
- Roopū** – Group
- Tamaiti** – Child
- Tamariki** – Children
- Whakaaro** – Thought
- Whakamana** – Empowerment
- Whakawhānaungatanga** – Relationships, shared experiences of belonging
- Whānau** – Extended family
- Whanaungatanga** – Kinship

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