Rangatahi perspectives on hauora and wellbeing

A qualitative report from Aotearoa

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Cover and illustrations: Wiremu Kingi
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Cover art title: *Dreaming of Universes*

Note from illustrator: This is a self-portrait. It literally represents my dreams that I have. The whare are my memories of this realm in this lifetime. I often visit other universes (shown as eyes) and traverse time and space – that's what wānanga is all about.

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Executive Summary

There is a great deal of interest, debate and concern about the wellbeing of young people in Aotearoa, and for good reason. A range of indicators suggest that rangatahi are experiencing high levels of stress and distress, while navigating increasing educational and social pressures in a context of widening inequities and climate emergency. So, what can be done to improve the lives of our rangatahi? In this report, we outline key findings from an exploratory, qualitative project designed to elicit in-depth, contextualised understandings of what shapes the wellbeing journeys of our young people, today.

Our findings draw on interviews conducted in 2019 and 2020 with rangatahi aged between 16 and 20, living in Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland). We sought out young people with diverse experiences and identities in relation to culture, gender, sexuality, class, disability and educational stage and trajectory. Interviews were open-ended, with plenty of space for connection and exploration to ensure that the ideas, experiences and issues our analysis foregrounds aligned well with rangatahi priorities. Our analysis builds from these conversations and has also been shaped and refined through wānanga and hui processes with rangatahi during 2021. Our Report findings are presented in two parts. First, in *Hāpai te Hauora*, we explore rangatahi Māori perspectives. Following on from this, we consider insights from a range of tauiwi young people in the section titled *That's my version of wellbeing.*

From *Dreaming of Universes*

KEY FINDINGS

- Rangatahi wellbeing is entwined with, and grows through, affirming connections with others around them.
- Rangatahi are skilled relational actors and provide vital support to friends and whānau.

  I will always tell [my best friend] if I am beginning to shift back into something bad and into something dark and he will come immediately, if he can. Otherwise he will ring me or text me. I can't ever thank him enough really. (Liam, 17: NZ European)

- Discrimination and inequity, particularly racism, ableism and homophobia, are the most profound barriers to living a good life for rangatahi in Aotearoa.

  yeah it's pretty hard to be honest [...] I don't know how to explain it, but I think it's hard being a person who is different, and I think that affects my wellbeing (Aya, 19: Middle Eastern)

- Social pressures are restricting young people's capacity for wellbeing. These include the pressure to have it together, stress-related sleeplessness and weight-based stigma.
- Many rangatahi are managing emotional distress without compassionate and accessible professional support. This needs to change.
- Young people have serious concerns about their future wellbeing in light of unaffordable costs of living and environmental degradation.

Kōrero with rangatahi Māori yielded additional, distinctive findings:

- Wellbeing means hauora, wairua, mauri – an interwoven presence of wayfinding time, space and generations.

  it's like coming into know your tika. You learn that through your family, your past generations it gets fed down to you. (Mike, 17: Māori)

- Rangatahi Māori are living in a society that doesn't reflect their own cultural experiences. This needs to change.
- All rangatahi Māori talked about their experiences of injustice, racism, discrimination and invisibility.
- Rangatahi Māori collectively called to be seen, heard, felt and held in safe spaces, relationships and environments.

  Hāpai te hauora like I feel like help sometimes all you need is for someone to just tell you you're doing ok. (Hinemoana, 19: Ngāti Pūkenga)

- Systems (organisations, services, programmes, schools, kura, mahi) need to be culturally safe, reflecting and supporting Te Ao Māori.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Efforts to support youth wellbeing require a youth-led, intergenerational approach.

  if you wanted to support young people try to like [...] don't, give them all the solutions all at once. Talk to them first about the issues go through it for a long time and get down all the issues first and then start planning from there (Joseph 18: NZ European and Māori)

- Action on structural determinants of wellbeing such as discriminiation and material hardship will produce substantial wellbeing gains for rangatahi and communities.

  To help rangatahi Māori, pacific rangatahi they need to be looking at wellbeing but looking at social determinants cos there are so many students who get help with like the physical wellbeing and stuff but the situation at home isn't good, at the very least wellbeing isn't supported. Like heaps of my mates are going through hard times right now like a lot of them I've had to like ask if they want to come and stay with me in the halls or something cos I know their house is just not good. (Arna, 19: Māori)

  I think especially when you are young, all of those problems aren't from you, it is all of the environment that surrounds you and stuff and I think that if you can start to resolve those things, then instead of kind of looking at it like that is an individual problem, it is really like the larger scale around you that really shapes that. (Rose, 18: NZ European and European)

- Infusing wellbeing discourse and policy with a language of equity and dignity may help shift attention away from psychological and individualised dimensions of wellbeing towards structural concerns.

- Systemic and sustainable investment in rangatahi Māori – kaupapa Māori collectives and systems is needed.

  Instead of just focusing on the physical treatment like white people do we need to focus more on wairua stuff. What's happening beyond what they see. (Kahurangi: 20: Ngā Puhi, Ngāti Wai).

- All youth wellbeing investment, resources, funding models and measurement must be reviewed by kaupapa Māori evalautive processes and practices.

Background and Kaupapa

Aotearoa's record on rangatahi wellbeing is grabbing local (Foon, 2020) and international headlines (McClure, 2021) for the wrong reasons. For some time now, we have been known for our shamefully high youth suicide rate (OECD, 2017) and our failure to address health and wellbeing inequities that disproportionately harm rangatahi Māori, Pasifika young people, disabled young people and rainbow/LGBTQIA+ folk (Cure Kids, 2021; Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2022).

Overall, the picture doesn't seem to be improving. Rangatahi today report that they are struggling with mental and emotional wellbeing to a greater extent than young people ten years ago (Fleming, Tiatia-Seath, et al., 2020). Evidence suggests that wellbeing gaps are widening between the most and least privileged, with those facing intersecting inequities the most impacted (Roy et al., 2021; Sutcliffe et al., 2023).

On a sociocultural level, today's rangatahi are facing uncertain futures in the context of unfolding cost-of-living and socio-environmental crises, while navigating new pleasures and dangers afforded by a globalised, digitised world (Fleming, Ball, et al., 2020; Kickbusch et al., 2021; Maire et al., 2022). The strains and pains of Covid-19 and its aftermath appear to be further compounding the challenges facing young people (Curative New Zealand, 2021; MartinJenkins, 2021). There is widespread consensus on the need for meaningful action to lift the hauora and wellbeing of all rangatahi, now.

So, what action is needed? Research and policy leaders are increasingly recognising what rangatahi already know: the value of taking a culturally-embedded, strengths-based approach that is committed to thinking in partnership with young people about the issues they face and acting on the solutions they imagine (Taitamariki Youth Declaration, 2022).

As we set out on this project, our review of existing literature highlighted some key opportunities, silences and challenges facing youth wellbeing research in Aotearoa. Our kaupapa has taken shape in response, and has been guided by the following statements:

- We need research that is guided by lived experience and moves the conversation beyond managing "risky" youth and mapping prevalence.
- We need to name and challenge the dominant patterning of Anglo-Western logics in mainstream understandings of wellbeing.
- We need to counter an overreliance on Western frames and values (wherein wellbeing may be individualised, psychologised, privatised and atomised)
- We need to move beyond a biomedical frame in order to embrace the potential of hauora and a genuinely holistic understanding of wellbeing.
- We need to meet rangatahi demands for approaches to wellbeing that centre hauora, wairua, whenua and culture.
- We need evidence that showcases the wisdom and integrity of our young people to challenge disempowering stereotypes that continue to flow through media and popular culture.
- We need to listen to a diversity of youth voices and to push back against tendencies to over-aggregate and over-generalise findings.

This Report shares what we have learned from a diverse range of rangatahi about what matters for their hauora and wellbeing. Our collaborative analysis privileges rangatahi lived experience. We identify key thematic patterns, enriched a pūrākau approach which foregrounds rangatahi perspectives in a more holistic and direct way. Artwork and illustrations by Wiremu Kingi (15 years, Te Whānau a Apanui, Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Awa, Ngā Puhi, Te Arawa) are also layered throughout, adding depth and liveliness to prominent themes.

Photograph taken during our wānanga process showing participants discussing a range of pūrākau.

Project Overview

Our purpose has been to work alongside diverse rangatahi to revise and reimagine what matters for hauora and wellbeing for today's young people. This exploratory aim necessitated a flexible and collaborative approach to research inquiry, structured around facilitating safe, respectful and open-ended processes of kōrero, talanoa and conversation. Our research design combined loosely structured interviews with subsequent rangatahi wānanga and interviewee hui. This two-phase design created openings to share our initial findings with young people, to check that our provisional analyses aligned with young people's ideas and priorities, and scaffolds our rich, layered analysis.

Beginning in 2019, our team of interviewers held a total of 56 interviews with rangatahi Māori (20), young Samoan people (11) and other tauiwi youth (25). Kōrero with rangatahi Māori was led by Kaupapa Māori researcher Teah Carlson. Conversations with young Samoan people were led by Samoan researcher Victoria Jensen-Lesatele, and interviews with a tauiwi cohort (inclusive of any young person who did not choose to join the Māori or Samoan cohort) were led by Pākehā researcher Octavia Calder-Dawe.

We recruited participants drawing on our team's broad networks. Rangatahi aged between 16 and 20 and who were currently living in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland were eligible to join our research. Recruitment proceeded slowly and carefully, as we worked to ensure we were connecting with as wide-ranging a group as possible within each of the three cohorts. Reflecting the cultural diversity of the city, participants identified with a range of cultural backgrounds, including: Cambodian (1), Cook Island Māori (3), Chinese (2), English (1), Filipino (2), German (1), Indian/Pākehā (1), Indonesian (1), Irish (1), Lebanese (1), Māori (9), Middle Eastern (1), New Zealand European/Pākehā (14), New Zealand European/Pākehā, Māori (4), Russian (1), Samoan (8), Samoan, Māori (5), Samoan, Scottish (2), Samoan, Tongan (1), Scottish, Māori (1), Thai (1), Tongan (1), Tongan, Māori (3). Those we interviewed were predominantly cisgender (53 cisgender, 3 transgender) and reported a range of sexual identities including straight (34), unsure/don't know (10), bisexual (5), gay (4), lesbian (1), queer (1) and pansexual (1). Of the 56 interviewed, 19 young people identified as disabled and/or as living with an impairment. Interviewees were also drawn from a spectrum of material privilege: some described comfortable or highly affluent backgrounds, while others were experiencing hardship.

Interviews took place wherever rangatahi felt most comfortable: at home with whānau, in a community space, an eatery or on University premises. We prioritised whakawhanaungatanga within our research interviews, sharing food and making connections with participants. A provisional interview schedule guided our talk with rangatahi. We invited participants to speak generally about their lives today and their journey getting there, as well as to reflect on specific people, things, spaces and events that impacted their wellbeing for good or bad. We were also keen to hear what words rangatahi themselves used for wellbeing, and their perspectives on a wellbeing measurement tool, the WHO-5. Throughout, conversation was intentionally open-ended, making space for rangatahi to push our talk, analyses and outputs in the directions they wanted to prioritise. Our conversations lasted for between one and three hours; each was audio-recorded and transcribed, with translation into English where interviews included te reo Māori and Gagana Samoa. Our

research was approved by Massey University's Human Ethics Committee (NOR 1856).

ANALYTIC APPROACH

Our findings are presented as a domain-based analysis of interview data, enriched and complemented by pūrākau (loosely translated to narratives; see below for a fuller account) and further refined through wānanga and hui with rangatahi. The insights we share in this Report are grounded in the interviews conducted with Māori and tauiwi roopū. While insights and perspectives shared by the Samoan roopū were broadly aligned with some important differences (see Carlson, Calder-Dawe, et al., 2022), they do not directly inform our discussions here.

Our analytic process began by getting to know our interview transcripts. We spent time with them, carefully reading and re-reading each one to build a sense of the key ideas and priorities each interviewee was sharing with us. Through this time-intensive process, we developed and refined a number of key domains that patterned rangatahi talk about wellbeing within each of the roopū. Alongside this domain-based analysis, and led by Teah Carlson, our team worked to locate pūrākau within our interview kōrero.

Pūrākau

Pūrākau is more than narrative or storytelling. As we have explained elsewhere, "[pūrākau] can be described as a practice of being, an art of truth-telling; a recollection of moments of time from now through to the beginning of the cosmos. In te ao Māori, we experience the world around us as a projection of our stories, our pūrākau – a trillion stories are connected like synapses in the brain creating electric static; vibrating power to live all at once" (Carlson, Mulholland et al., 2022).

Our use of pūrākau addresses the hierarchical relationship that can be inadvertently created between researcher and participant. Here, the narrative remains as spoken – strong and directly voiced. As Friere (1970) observed, "To deny the importance of subjectivity in the process of transforming the world and history is naive and simplistic" (p. 32). Less interpretative authority is given to a single researcher, while more power lies with research participants and how they chose to share their experiences (as well as, in our case, with a wider collective who helped to refine and make meaning of pūrākau). Aligning with Kaupapa Māori theory, pūrākau is therefore a way for rangatahi to collectively construct a shared understanding of the values and outcomes they see as meaningful. These pūrākau offer a rich, contextualised picture of rangatahi experience, spanning the complex health and social challenges rangatahi face today (for more detail on our approach, see Carlson, Mulholland, et al., 2022).

Pūrākau were selected and refined from interview kōrero with rangatahi. A short extract was chosen from the verbatim transcription that held rich descriptions of value, experience and meaning-making (Crotty, 2020) for rangatahi. Each pūrākau was crafted to provide a story narrative while maintaining the voice of the rangatahi. We hear in the voices of rangatahi a more complete description of their experiences and change, embedded in processes and emotions.

Through a multi-stage process of deliberation and discussion that included the full research roopū, students, and rangatahi participants, we gathered further feedback on what the pūrākau meant to us, and in what ways they were resonant or significant. We held team discussions to hear and consider interpretations of the pūrākau and together arrived at a group ranking of story significance. A crucial element of our process was to facilitate a wānanga with a larger group of Tāmaki-based rangatahi who were new to the project, to connect, share kai and stories, and to further test our analysis-in-process and our selected pūrākau against their experiences and priorities (see also Carlson, Mulholland, et al., 2022 for a fuller account of this wānanga process; a short video is accessible here: https://youtu.be/ASPydlMdsjs).

Structure

In academic literature and government policy, Rangatahi Māori experiences have historically been subjugated and assimilated into western framings of health and wellbeing. The experiences of non-Māori youth (especially Pākehā youth) may be falsely presented as applicable to and representative of all. An acknowledgement that rangatahi Māori have contextually different experiences from non-Māori is an important starting point and corrective. With this in mind, we have divided our analysis into two sections. *Hāpai te Hauora* explores rangatahi Māori perspectives. Following on from this, we consider insights from a range of tauiwi young people in the section titled *That's my version of wellbeing*. In both of these sections, we entwine the main text of our analysis with pūrākau alongside mixed media. The pūrākau are drawn from narratives shared by interviewees. Accompanying images and blocked-out quotations responding to pūrākau were shared with our team during wānanga and interviewee hui.

Hāpai te hauora: Rangatahi Māori perspectives

Breathing your ancestors into life. Note from illustrator: I know that my tīpuna are with me, I find a quiet spot and close my eyes they come forward. When I feel low or need to make an important decision I connect with them, they have been through so much and have wisdom to share. The black and white world is the wairua realm a realm that simultaneously exists in the present, past and future.

HĀPAI TE HAUORA: "IT'S LIKE BREATHING YOUR ANCESTORS INTO LIFE"

Rangatahi described 'hāpai te hauora' as 'breathing your ancestors into life'. This adage captures the breadth and connections of a generation – rangatahi Māori – a generation moving forward together. Drawing from the wisdom of the whakataukī 'Te Amorangi ki mua, te hāpai ō ki muri', explorations of breathing our ancestors into life can be attained through 'amorangi' – the spiritual realm, and 'hāpai o' – the physical realm. The late koroua Wiremu Tawhai explained that those who follow are as vital to the journey as those who lead. This section explores the ways rangatahi Māori make sense of and live hāpai te hauora through navigating journeys of wellbeing.

Rangatahi Māori were given time and safe spaces to explore what hauora meant to them. Through kanohi ki te kanohi interviews and wānanga they gave us an insight into their past, present and future. The analysis presented below is grouped into three main domains:

Te Ao Kikokiko – understanding hauora
Te Ao Hurihuri – sense of belonging & connection
Te Ao Marama – experiences of hauora

Te Tai Ao. Note from illustrator: I went to a place of freedom. Framed in te tai ao – te rakau, maunga and toka all represent our oldest tīpuna.

Te Ao Kikokiko: Understanding hauora

Te Whare Tapa Whā. Note from illustrator: I wanted the whare to be mostly straight and the designs around it to be off balance to make it stand out more. So many times, te whare tapa whā has been interpreted – I wanted this to be a fun, groovy animated style.

A WHARE IN BALANCE

Hauora was mostly described as a holistic concept known as Te Whare Tapa Whā. Rangatahi spoke about the model in relation to its realms 'te taha tinana, te taha hinengaro, te taha wairua and te taha whānau.

> I think a huge influence is te whare tapa whā model. I feel when all of them – all the four pou are balanced I don't have a worry in the world. Or I feel if I am focusing on one of them it attributes to other ones. Like going to the gym for example working on physical health it will help with mental and emotional. (Casey, 18: Ngāti Wai)

As described the realms are pou – cornerstones of health and wellbeing. When they are strong and balanced the structure of the house is sound, in balance and you are content and 'don't have a worry in the world'.

Te taha tinana was the most spoken about realm. Rangatahi were able to give examples of tinana explaining –'Simple just eat properly exercise'.

> Oh gosh, this requires brain power [pause] I would kind of break it down into those four aspects of wellbeing cos I wouldn't do a tick-type thing even if it's faster. (Kiri, 17: Waikato-Tainui, Ngai Tai)

Understanding the physical component of hauora was often easily explained by rangatahi as looking after your tinana (body). When asked about being healthy or what they know about or do to be healthy, references to being 'fit' were made.

> Netball and Soccer that's what I like to do most. It's sports, to keep fit...To be fit, you have to be healthy, to be healthy you got to be healthy as well, and so eating healthy plays a big part in it for me. (Kiko, 19: Cook Island Māori, Kaitahu)

Others were able to identify that exercising was a good way to make themselves feel better and created a space for them to be able to think.

> I like to go exercise I think running is really good, you just think about a lot when you're running. (Rata, 17: Ngāti Ranginui, Ngāi Te Rangi)

As Rata conveyed when asked what wellbeing means, it is a task requiring capacity and space to consider, not something that is understood to satisfy convention. Rangatahi spoke about learning about Te Whare Tapa Whā not only at kura but also at home. Rangatahi talked of learning about the term 'wellbeing' in health class – as a compulsory mainstream school subject.

> I guess it's just taught in health you just pick it up... I adapted to it, it's your physical health, social health, it's interactions, relationships with people. (Mereana, 20: Māori and Pākehā)

Mereana describes hauora as wellbeing encompassing physical health, interactions and whanaungatanga. Including relationships as part of wellbeing means you cannot just have hauora; you have to work at it, connect and be part of something bigger than ourselves.

The realms of hauora have a special relationship to the parts of a wharenui, where a whare is built in recognition and celebration of a tīpuna of the hapū and/or iwi. The whare not only reflects human physiology – front beams as arms, the structural roof beam as a spine and the supporting beams as ribs, but also encompasses the elements attributed to atua – gods bringing te tai ao, the environment, into our being.

> We call it the four walls of your mental wellbeing. It's to do with being spiritually active, mentally aware, socially connected to people and physically and when one falls – everything else is likely to crumble. You gotta be consistent with each of them, be socially active as well as physically active and then mentally and emotionally prepared. (Kiko, 19: Cook Island Māori, Kaitahu)

Important descriptive words are used in this kōrero where spirituality is coupled with activity. To honour mental wellbeing requires awareness and enacting the social aspect means making and maintaining connections.

And just like te tai ao or the walls of the whare, everything has a place and a function – a function to hold us up to be well, sheltered and strong. All the walls must be in balance otherwise the whare will not last against the elements and the environment.

Self-portrait. Note from the illustrator: This is a self-portrait, the way I see myself.

> Growing up I was always told that there were four sides to hauora think of it as the walls of the whare so there's te taha tinana the physical aspect, te taha hinengaro the mental aspect, te taha wairua the spiritual and emotional part of it and then there's te taha whānau. So it's who you're connected to and who you surround yourself with and how that impacts all of those other aspects. It's a very important thing and if you're one of those walls is just as important as the other everything has to be balanced to be ok. (Mero, 17: Ngāti Whātua, Ngā Puhi)

Often hauora was described as balance within the realms of Te Whare Tapa Whā, nurturing each aspect to gain holistic wellbeing – hauora (Durie, 2006).

> Wellbeing is reaching that state of balance where everything in your life is going ok and you've got your mental health and your spiritual health and your physical health in check and everything around you is ok or like they're not giving you bad vibes. (Ange, 19: Māori & Pākehā)

A common response from rangatahi when asked for other kupu (terms) for hauora and wellbeing was to shrug, pause and hesitate. There was silence and acceptance that the term was layered, complex and simple at the same time.

> I just never really thought of defining it. I don't understand how I would define wellbeing – I guess define wellbeing as wellbeing. (Mereana, 20: Māori and Pākehā)

A rangatahi summed up the experience of being asked if they had any other terms they would like to use instead of hauora or wellbeing.

> Doesn't matter what you call it, as long as we understand what you mean, if we don't then it's gonna go over our heads and we're gonna miss the point or not wanna engage. And most times adults and researchers can be the barrier to that happening. (Tūāwhiorangi, 17: Māori, Samoan, and Pākehā)

This is an important consideration expressing being listened to and understood, highlighting the power differential between adults and researchers – and rangatahi, and the responsibility we have to shift that power back to rangatahi. A consideration that is paramount to our understandings of hauora is that knowledge is "constructed within a context of power and privilege with consequences attached to which version of knowledge is given privilege" (Mertens & Wilson, 2012, p. 170).

When responding to patai around hauora and wellbeing, often they would be described by rangatahi in terms of either being healthy, happy, and feeling good, or being ill, unwell, depressed or feeling sad.

> I guess you could define wellbeing as happiness in a way. (Casey, 18: Ngāti Wai)

The binary composite of hauora was explored when first unpacking the terms.

> I feel like wellbeing comes from hauora. Hauora is the thing that can change right, so it's your health, it could be either bad or good right? (Mika, 20: Māori & Scottish)

Explorations of meaning-making during the kōrero drew out deeper complexities beyond binaries of health and illness. Hauora became more about the complexities of the tangible, physical relationships intertwined with hinengaro, wairua (spirit) and mauri (life essence).

> My idea of wellbeing is pretty much like being well and healthy – more physically than anything else. To be fit you have to be healthy you got to be healthy as well and so eating healthy plays a big part in it for me. (Rata, 17: Ngāti Ranginui, Ngāi Te Rangi)

Wairua can be understood as a dense interconnection to the consciousness of the universe. Wairua is the acknowledgement of matter, energy form and force, the universe, and the ever-evolving change that is happening in our world. Wairua means to move away from holding onto the tangible, seen, material, human form, and move into the unseen: the felt vibrational energy that is out there and the end connection of all things.

> Instead of just focusing on the physical treatment like white people do we need to focus more on wairua stuff. What's happening beyond what they see. (Kahurangi: 20: Ngā Puhi, Ngāti Wai).

> It's about social wellbeing as well as mental, emotional and spiritual, they believed in me and they're all there to help me when I needed it. (Marama, 20: Māori)

> I mean genetically and hereditary, there's that physical and mental side of health like a passion and spiritual. They do affect your personal health and the health of your family because it's like coming into know your tika. You learn that through your family, your past generations it gets fed down to you. (Mike, 17: Māori)

Often when te taha hinengaro was talked about it was recognised in relation to times of need, despair and the stigma attached to seeking help.

> I didn't know what mental health was until I was in year nine...now at high school, we do have free counselling available to us through school. There's a lot more opportunities for you to discuss your mental health and feel comfortable cos when I started high school in year nine it was quite a rough process to go through counselling at school because everyone would put shame upon it. (Kiri, 17: Waikato-Tainui, Ngai Tai)

Being able to talk about feelings and emotions is a learnt skill that isn't well supported in schooling systems and support services. Rangatahi spoke about one-off programmes and interventions or a great kaiako/teacher/role model increasing their knowledge base and mental health skills and supports, but that it was not common as a general knowledge base and should be.

> It was shamed in primary because if you had any mental health, if you had depression, if you had anything wrong with you, you were told off for it. You didn't get the help that you needed whereas in primary we never had counsellors available or anyone to talk to. (Hinemoa, 19, Ngāti Pūkenga)

When rangatahi explained the nuances of hauora, often conversations would draw on hard times.

> If you're mentally ill it's like oh you've got something wrong with you, that's how we're taught in school anyway. (Marama, 20: Māori)

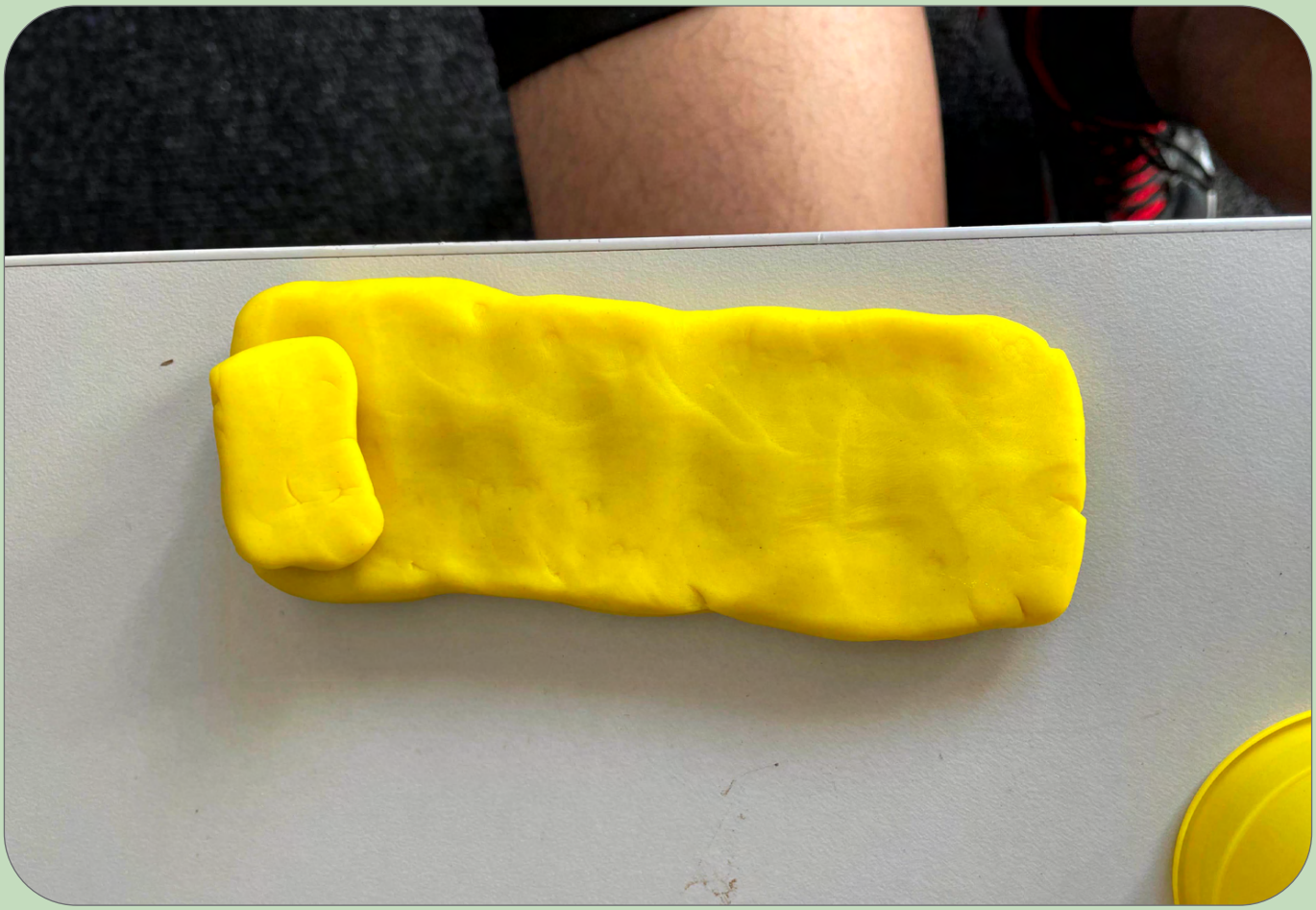
Experiences of being unwell, depressed, and realising what they have lost or do not have any longer featured in these conversations.

Leaving kura
Atarangi, 20: Māori

The following pūrākau describes a pathway towards hauora. This pūrākau was chosen by the research roopū, students, and rangatahi because it highlights the lived experiences of many rangatahi Māori when leaving kura and engaging with health professionals and services.

Atarangi is a 20-year-old wāhine from 'up North'. Atarangi comes from a blended whānau. Growing up, Atarangi had the responsibility of being an older sister to her younger sibling and being the little sister to her half-brothers. Atarangi describes her childhood as "normal" – both her mum and stepdad worked locally and she attended a mainstream school for Years 1–8. Atarangi is aware of her whakapapa and where she is from and acknowledges this often through her kōrero. Atarangi spoke of enjoying her schooling when she was younger, however this changed when she started high school.

> I left halfway through year thirteen because my mental health was in a bad state. I was depressed and had bad anxiety. I would take so much time off schoolwork and it affected my grades. In the end, I thought it was better to drop out and get my shit together. I was paranoid about leaving because school made it seem like you had to finish school or you weren't going to get anywhere in life. I originally thought "oh no I'm just going be working at McDonald's for the rest of my life". Not that there's anything wrong with that.
>
> When I left school, I found out there were more options than what was made out to be. My school made it seem like you only could get into university if you had your level three (NCEA) and then I found out I could attend university when I was twenty as an undergraduate and do foundation courses if I needed. So, I broke down, I left school broke down myself, started seeing a counsellor and psychiatrist, and also had the help of my brother as well cos he studied psychology so I felt like he was a big influence on my development.
>
> A friend knew I was looking for a job, so she told me to come along to help out at her current workplace, and then they offered me the job. I worked there for maybe seven months and then my contract had ended so I was looking for a job and this girl I used to go to school with – I wouldn't say we were friends cos you'd say hi to each other at social gatherings and but it wasn't like I'd go out of my way to hang out with them – I think she'd heard somewhere that I'd left my job and thought I'd been looking for somewhere to work and she thought I'd be good for a position cos my past role trained them so I applied and got hired that was cool.
>
> I feel like my mental health just went uphill when I started removing myself from situations that upset me and just kept channelling my energy into something positive, so I think just an accumulation of things my mental health better and now I'm working, which is cool.



Peta (Māori rangatahi aged 16) moulded the playdoh to illustrate the ways they connected to the pūrākau from Atarangi. Peta crafted a bed, to resonate with his feelings of being overwhelmed with what's going on in his life at times – "just want to stay in bed and hide from the world".

IT'S CONTEXTUAL

Hauora was discussed as being contextual – based on people's living situations and resources available to rangatahi such as housing, money, education, community, kai and health care. Often highlighting their experiential knowing, Rangatahi talked about living in poverty, experiencing abuse, feeling socially isolated and also feeling helpless when it came to supporting friends.

> To help rangatahi Māori, pacific rangatahi they need to be looking at wellbeing but looking at social determinants cos there are so many students who get help with physical wellbeing and stuff but the situation at home isn't good, at the very least wellbeing isn't supported. Heaps of my mates are going through hard times right now a lot of them I've had to ask if they want to come and stay with me in the halls or something cos I know their house is just not good. (Arna, 19: Māori)

Every rangatahi Māori had an experiential knowing beyond their years as they spoke about hard times, deprivation, assimilation and racism. Their insightful views and analysis of social determinants and power differentials were sharp. They analysed the contexts of parents/caregivers, adult relationships, school, health and educational systems concerning their reality, taking into account history, colonisation, racism, prejudice, values and culture.

Being grateful and having a good attitude was identified as being important to hauora.

> For me, it's to do with the friends I choose. So at school yeah there's a lot of kids who drink and smoke and go out partying and I have friends like that but I stick to this one group of friends where they all stay home. And they don't think about stuff like that so I just stick to that group say hi to them around school but don't associate with them outside of school. Especially when they're involved with other people outside of school it could be really bad. I'd rather not get myself into that now while I've got a solid future like planning towards my future doing all that stuff isn't going to help. I'm grateful for what I have what I've been able to experience gratitude for all the people I know. (Kiko, 19: Cook Island Māori, Kaitahu)

Rangatahi spoke about how it was hard to maintain positivity around negative people and situations, but when they set safe boundaries and were selective about who they hung out with it made a huge difference.

GROWING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

Constructing an understanding of hauora was intimately intertwined and understood through whanaungatanga, who were the important people in their lives (living or dead) when they were growing up, how these relationships are present or not today and how this has a strong influence on their hauora.

> All my loved ones that have passed have influenced and shaped me just as much as those that are with me now. (Piki, 18: Māori)

Reassurance is important to rangatahi in times of uncertainty and this doesn't come from a place of agenda and/or fulfilling a paid role.

> Hāpai te hauora – I feel like help sometimes. All you need is for someone to just tell you you're doing ok. You could tell yourself it but it feels a lot better hearing it from someone else other than them meaning it, not just knowing it's their job to tell you. So it's someone you know and trust telling you what you need to hear. (Hinemoana, 19: Ngāti Pūkenga)

Knowing your place in the world and how you fit into was seen by rangatahi Māori as vital to hauora. To belong means they have a strong sense of knowing and being within the context of an ever-changing world.

> Hauora transcends just the physical stuff it's all about that sense of belonging it's a sense of identity. One of the major issues that rangatahi Māori deal with is cultural identity and it's very hard saying oh I come from this place but I don't know much about it and knowing how to speak

> the language sort of brings a bit of clarity to all of that and it's like breathing your ancestors into life. (Piki, 18: Māori)

Hāpai te hauora captures the meaning of wellbeing for rangatahi, as grounded in whanaungatanga, hauora, oranga, ora and mauri. Hāpai te hauora means our power as Māori is innately relational; it depends on the gathering of networks, recognising the entitlements of individuals [mana] that are exercised within the wellbeing of the collective, mana motuhake. The mana of individual rangatahi is dependent on the support and guidance provided by peer support 'te hāpai o'.

Wellbeing is also about whakawhanaungatanga – the enactment of relationships, the new relationships they are forming, maintaining and growing.

> The good life. Having friends and your family, laughing lots, watching movies, being rich and most importantly whakawhanaungatanga getting to know people I like doing that I like getting to know new people. (Rata, 17: Ngāti Ranginui, Ngāi Te Rangi)

When relationships are understood as part of hauora then we begin to unpack hauora as a relational rather than an individualised experience. Individual rangatahi experience the outcomes of such relationships but they are drawn into the shared meaning-making, effects and outcomes.

HEALING

The importance of seeing yourself in your surroundings can impact rangatahi and how they understand and experience te ao Māori. Overt ways of expressing cultural identity include through moko. Moko gives meaning through the skin, creating connections to parts of te ao Māori that are unique to being Māori. Moko can be used to signify emotions that at times rangatahi do not feel comfortable being present in – in process for reflection, connection and ultimately healing.

Hard times were considered times to learn and shape your future, and mau moko a way to celebrate and represent growth permanently.

> Hauora doesn't just consider the good things. We can also be shaped and strengthened by the hard times just as much as the good times and you can carry it with you. Like my moko will get you through in the future. (Marama, 20: Māori)

> To me, moko is part of my healing. I got one on my back…but my brother's and my dad's one they represent loss and grief… it's nice to have one for grief that's pretty. (Kahurangi: 20: Ngā Puhi, Ngāti Wai).

The cultural tradition of taa moko – Māori tattooing – is a positive practice described by some rangatahi as a healing process, a reminder that you can get through hard times. "Moko has been shown to be an effective expression of that identity and one which adds to their wellbeing as Māori women" (Penehira, 2011, p. 214).

I get judged for being a thief all the time
Hinemoana, 19, Rata, 17: Māori

The following pūrākau explores the experiences of two sisters who were interviewed together; they shared their stories of good times and not-so-good times. This pūrākau was chosen by the research roopū, students, and rangatahi as it brings to light the violent impact of racism and discrimination on rangatahi Māori.

Hinemoana and Rata are sisters. Born only a few years apart they have a strong bond of love and friendship. Hinemoana is 19 years old and the eldest of five tamariki. She just started her degree at university. Rata is 17 years old and the second eldest. She is finishing her last year at high school – Kura Kaupapa Māori, a full immersion te reo Māori school. All their siblings have attended Kura Kaupapa and are fluent in te reo Māori and English. Hinemoana describes herself as 'the darker one', with long, dark, thick, curly hair. Rata says, 'I'm the white the lighter skin one' with brown, straight hair. Both have grown up in an urban environment and enjoy what city life has to offer.

The sisters recalled public social experiences together and strangers treating them differently because of how they looked. Rata realised early in life that being lighter skinned, she was not subject to racial profiling like her siblings when she was on her own in public.

> *Rata:* Yeah, I'm the white lighter skin one so I can experience both worlds with my whānau. I see what happens. I get lumped in with them but by myself I'm treated normally. So, if I walk through a shop with my younger siblings, like last week I was buying kai and I took all the kids to the shop with me and everyone was just staring at all of us. My younger brothers didn't really notice so they were pulling their bags off and going through their bags and I said, 'like can you put your bag on cos people are watching you, and it looks like you're stealing stuff!'. So, people follow us through the shops and make sure we're not doing anything. But when I'm on my own nobody really turns their head. But even just in uniform they notice the Māori signs and they're like 'oh watch that kid.' It doesn't matter who the person is. White people or Indian people, everyone judges.
>
> *Hinemoana:* Yeah, mostly white, and Asian. It's weird Asians do it cause they are brown too! Mum gets pretty mad cos they do it to her all the time and she looks scary and is dark [Laughter].
>
> *Rata:* Yeah, I get judged for being a thief all the time. Not just strangers but at school too, Pākehā teachers being racist to my friends but I don't really get affected by it because of my skin tone. I haven't been exposed to the Pākehā world properly, I've sort of been shut off, and in just the Māori world which is annoying, so I don't experience too much just in shops.
>
> *Hinemoana:* So, when I first moved to this new mainstream high school last year for a bit it was like hori, like the girls are hori and there's only very few Pākehā people. And because I came from Kura Kaupapa Māori you know I was very academic, top of my class so when I arrived, I was put into all the top streams, all the high classes and there were only white people in these classes. All of them are fully white like my maths class, English, literature, and sciences. My first day I went into class and the teacher was white and the principal had taken me in, and everyone looked at me and cos I had my hair like this [natural thick curl] but in a ponytail and I was wearing a pounamu. I just looked so hori, oh my god I was scruffy, and the teacher goes 'are you sure? Are you supposed to be in this class? I don't think

you're supposed to be in this class' and then the principal goes no she's in this class. Then she goes 'oh wait let me just check your grades' and then she checked my grades. They were like 'they were good' and then she chucked me all the way back of the class by myself.

Arana (Cook Island Māori/Māori rangatahi aged 16) coloured in the waka hourua template to illustrate some of the challenges and protective factors faced by a participant who had an acquired brain injury that challenged their wellbeing.

Te Ao Hurihuri: Sense of belonging and connection

The busy beehive. Note from illustrator: This image is all bee-longing – whanaungatanga – relationships. The bottom level depicts our mahi relationships – learning and skill sharing. The middle level is spending time with our friends, having fun and laughs. The top level is time with whānau, with a nan representing the queen bee – the heartbeat of any hive.

BELONGING AND CONNECTION

Whānau plays an important role in supporting rangatahi to develop a sense of belonging and identity. As rangatahi grow a better understanding of whānau whakapapa, they see they can connect to something that is beyond themselves, knowing their whānau and tīpuna are there guiding them (Reweti, 2022).

> A lot of us feel the responsibility to uphold the practices that our ancestors have passed down to us, and it gives us a bit of a bit more mental stability. It's good for mental stability knowing where you've come from and knowing what to do. (Pita, 19: Māori)

Rangatahi distinguished their understanding and experience of whānau aroha and connection as distinctive to their experiences in wider society. Mainstream society and the bigger world were marked as different, scary, unknown and foreign to many rangatahi Māori.

> I experienced coming from a loving home and whānau that support me in some ways out in the bigger wider world. But then you still get a lot of peer pressure and social pressure out there. (Mereana, 20: Māori and Pākehā)

> Growing up in a Māori world and relationships means love and grief and tangi, and all of that stuff go hand in hand...and don't go into this mainstream model. (Mike, 17: Māori)

Hauora was described as encompassing the breadth of good times through to hard times, life and death, love and loss. Hauora isn't about living a life of happiness continuously – the hard times ground an experience of gratefulness when times are good.

It's like breathing your ancestors into life
Piki, 18: Māori

The following pūrākau explores wellbeing as knowing who you are and where you come from, drawing on cultural identity, te reo Māori, whakapapa, and tīpuna. This pūrākau is about voice and being witnessed as a rangatahi Māori; it is rangatahi being proud of their language and being original and expressing themselves emotionally and spiritually.

Piki is 18 years old, with whakapapa to Ngāpuhi-nui-tonu, and lives in West Auckland with her whānau. Piki attended Kura Kaupapa Māori, a full immersion te reo Māori school until her last two years of high school, when she changed to mainstream as her whānau had moved into the city. Piki describes herself as a creative, competes in spoken word competitions all over the country, and is now heading overseas for her debut. Piki speaks te reo Māori fluently and incorporates te reo Māori in her performances.

I think hauora transcends the physical. It's all about a sense of belonging. It's a sense of identity. One of the major issues that rangatahi Māori deal with is cultural identity and it's very hard saying 'oh I come from this place, but I don't know much about it.' Knowing how to speak the language sort of brings a bit of clarity to all of that and it's like breathing your ancestors into life.

How I do that is three years ago, I started with an organisation. At that time, it was actually me, one of my friends from my class who are all girls and then one person from our school - he was a year thirteen at the time. We got through auditions, semi-finals and then finals but before you go into semi-finals there's like a noho marae so it's like a three-day camp where your team starts working together and you learn more about how to write poems and group poems. And that year we got first in the finals. Before finals we realised, we all really liked to sing but we wouldn't sing alone so we decided to write a little bit of a song and put it into this poem and it just went from there. We started to do it more and created a bit of a trend in the competition. People started singing their poems and we're like we started that!

I started doing spoken word whenever I was feeling something that I didn't really want to feel. Or when I was upset, I wouldn't tell anyone, I just bottled it all up. It was just a way for me to talk about something and not feel like anyone was judging me cos everyone was listening, but they were also very open to what was being said. That was just a really crazy experience. I think that's what got me coming back for more. And to be more involved in the community because everyone's so open-minded about everything that you say. They're very supportive of what you're going through. I've made heaps of friends just from people that were listening to me, or I was listening to them. At first, they'd be strangers and then they'd be like you know what? I really like what you said, and I support you and it just goes on from there. It's a safe space. It's a great way to express yourself.

We use karakia and waiata Māori in our poems. Sometimes I do individual poems but we're a group and we're actually outside of school now. We are travelling overseas soon to perform at the largest international youth forum in the world and it's very crazy, but we've gotten here.

Te Whānau Apanui rangatahi – digital design titled *Tuwhiti te Hopo*. "I think Tuwhiti te hopo means, be bold, be fearless. I think of this whakataukī every day." (Pita, 19)

Connections with friends

Rangatahi spoke openly about their connections with their hoa (friends) and how the support of their peers helped them stay connected to their wellbeing and mental health.

> The people that I surround myself with, my girls, my family they've helped me realise I can. They've given me more confidence to talk about what I do and do not like, and what I feel comfortable with. If I ran with a different crowd, it would be a lot different as well as just feeling like I can depend on people without being too dependent. (Casey, 18: Ngāti Wai)

Social acceptance from peers was important to rangatahi, especially for their mental health, self-esteem, and wellbeing. Knowing they had a choice regarding who they wanted to be friends with and having the option and courage to be different were important life lessons regarding identity, emotional development and security (Ungar, 2005).

Learning who I am. Note from illustrator: A big part of being a rangatahi is learning about what we like, what we don't like, what's our purpose and career pathway. This guy is shown as one half and when they reflect on themselves (in the mirror) that's when they discover their other half which is a happy moment.

Connections at kura

Identity and connections to culture were linked to enrolling at kura that supported te reo Māori and culture. Rangatahi identified that whānau decisions to move to new geographic areas were an intentional way to ensure a connection to their culture and reo. Some rangatahi recognised the importance of tamariki being able to access their taonga tuku iho (ancestorial treasures).

> When we moved over, I barely got the te reo because my parents even though they lacked it because they wanted us to be able to speak languages that connect to our roots. (Tūāwhiorangi, 17: Māori, Samoan, and Pākehā)

Rangatahi wellbeing increases when they recognise themselves in the languages and culture in their kura environment (Baydala et al., 2009). It provides rangatahi an opportunity to experience their culture in spaces where they see themselves.

> That was when I first really started [learning te reo Māori] cos we sort of got into it at intermediate but it was hard because I never had an actual Māori teacher. My two teachers were Samoan and Pākehā so it was hard for them to teach a language that they didn't even know. So getting fluent teachers that came from kura kaupapa that was a lot easier and it made it a lot more natural. (Arana, 16: Cook Island Māori/Māori)

When rangatahi engage with kura, it is more than just being physically present; it was described as feeling connected to the people, peers and the knowledge at the school.

> They really didn't teach you helpful things at high school, I just learned to pass – you didn't learn how to get a job like you don't need calculus and the curriculum is just so white. It's really made for white people to pass...and even critical thinking they are not going to teach you that. There's an answer book and you have to write that one answer and you forget it. (Arna, 19: Māori)

The genuine connection with their kaiako and the curriculum is just as important as peer group

influence to a sense of belonging and achievement in school.

Connections at mahi

Rangatahi gained a sense of belonging and connection through whaunaungatanga with their work colleagues, understanding the power of connection by creating time and space to be present with one another. Connection at mahi was an important part of growing their social wellbeing beyond whānau and peer groups by connecting with others from all backgrounds and cultures.

> One of the things we did is we all sat down in a circle one night and we were just bonding. And that's when I opened up to my colleagues. That was quite a positive thing made me feel a lot more comfortable and it was all of us we were all different ethnicities so it was really cool – a positive connection. (Ange, 19: Māori & Pākehā)

Making this time to connect resulted in self-reflection on mental health and how connecting with others was an important step to maintaining mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

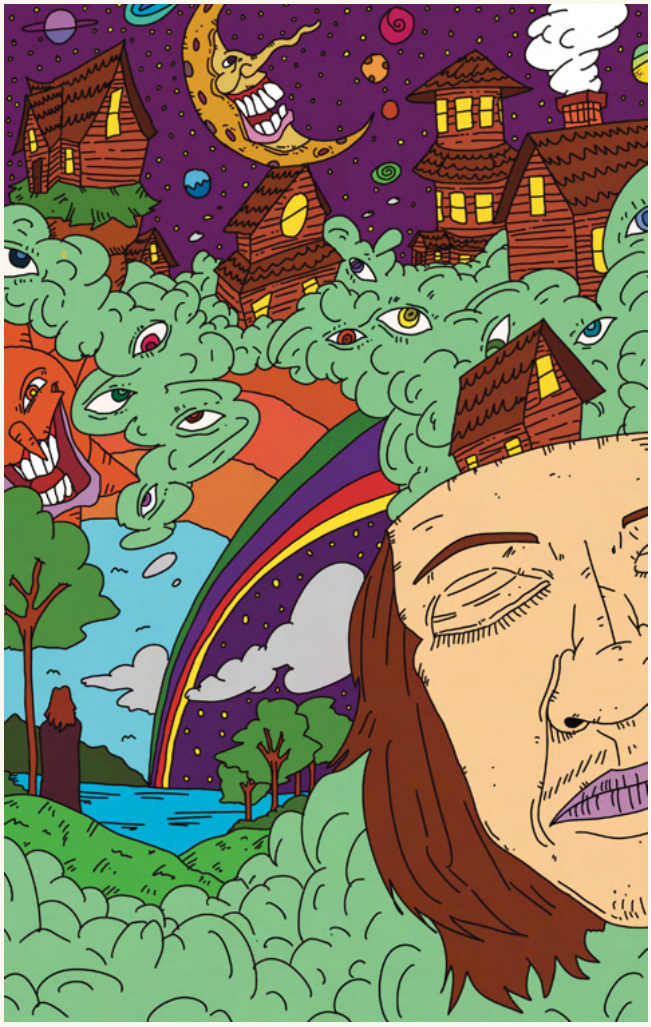
> Connecting socially because I felt for quite a while, I felt isolated. ... I got to build new relationships with those people and they're people I can trust and they weren't like comparing my other situations like school wise... So yes that was a positive on my social wellbeing as well as mental and emotional I guess and spiritually. They believed in me and they were all there to help me when I needed it. (Ange, 19: Māori & Pākehā)

Trust, acceptance and being listened to were key aspects of building a holistic connection with others.

Connections online

Social media was used as a vehicle to connect with others in both healthy and unhealthy ways. On the positive side it was a popular, accessible and low-cost form of building and maintaining relationships and communicating. Unhealthy aspects included overuse, miscommunication, bullying, as well as verbal abuse. Rangatahi spoke of social media where peers were able to share their opinions on political views that were of importance to them, but feeling equally helpless in terms of how to navigate relationships without coming into conflict with either side of the conversation.

> Social media is hard because there's always hate and stuff, not towards me, but I just see it around big things like the abortion thing that's happening. All of my friends, they were really involved with it but a lot of them were on opposite sides of each other. They are arguing and stuff, that took two weeks to handle. So they were all arguing and stuff, and it's out of our control really. We couldn't do anything; all we could do was talk about it. (Kahurangi: 20: Ngā Puhi, Ngāti Wai).



Dreaming of universes

At times social media was a reason for rangatahi pulling away from their peer group when they were experiencing hard times. Their ability to reflect and restore was part of knowing when to 'switch off' from social media.

> I just took some time to heal so I was off social media. I didn't go on cause I knew there was gonna be messages from my friends giving their wishes, and I appreciated it, but it was just a reminder of what had happened. I didn't want to deal with it at the time so I just didn't go on social media. (Mereana, 20: Māori and Pākehā)

Being able to put boundaries in place when (dis) engaging from social media helped control its overwhelming and all-consuming nature. Allowing time to heal meant being present or re-engaging with the physical environment.

TE AO MĀORI

Wānanga

As with many concepts in Te Ao Māori, wānanga is oversimplified in te reo Pākehā, where it is often mistakenly translated as workshop. However, to be in wānanga is to bring people together for a kaupapa, to meet, discuss and deliberate (Te Aka Māori Dictionary, n.d.). Further it is a culturally dynamic process that shares the power among those present. When asked the question, "Can you think of any things in the Māori world that are good for people's health/hauora?" two rangatahi share a brief exchange of common understanding.

> *Marama:* I don't know being able to be or have creative outlets
>
> *Kahurangi:* Like noho
>
> *Marama:* Yeah like wānanga

In kaupapa Māori spaces, noho and wānanga are terms that can often be used interchangeably. Noho means to sit, stay, remain, or can indicate a state that continues over a period (Te Aka Māori Dictionary, n.d.). Though differently defined in the dictionary from wānanga, a common understanding of 'noho' within kura spaces is to come into a space of learning over a period of time. The shared innate knowing between the two rangatahi above suggests that noho or wānanga is a place in Te Ao Māori that is good for people's health, showing that learning, creativity and relationships are prominent aspects of wellbeing.

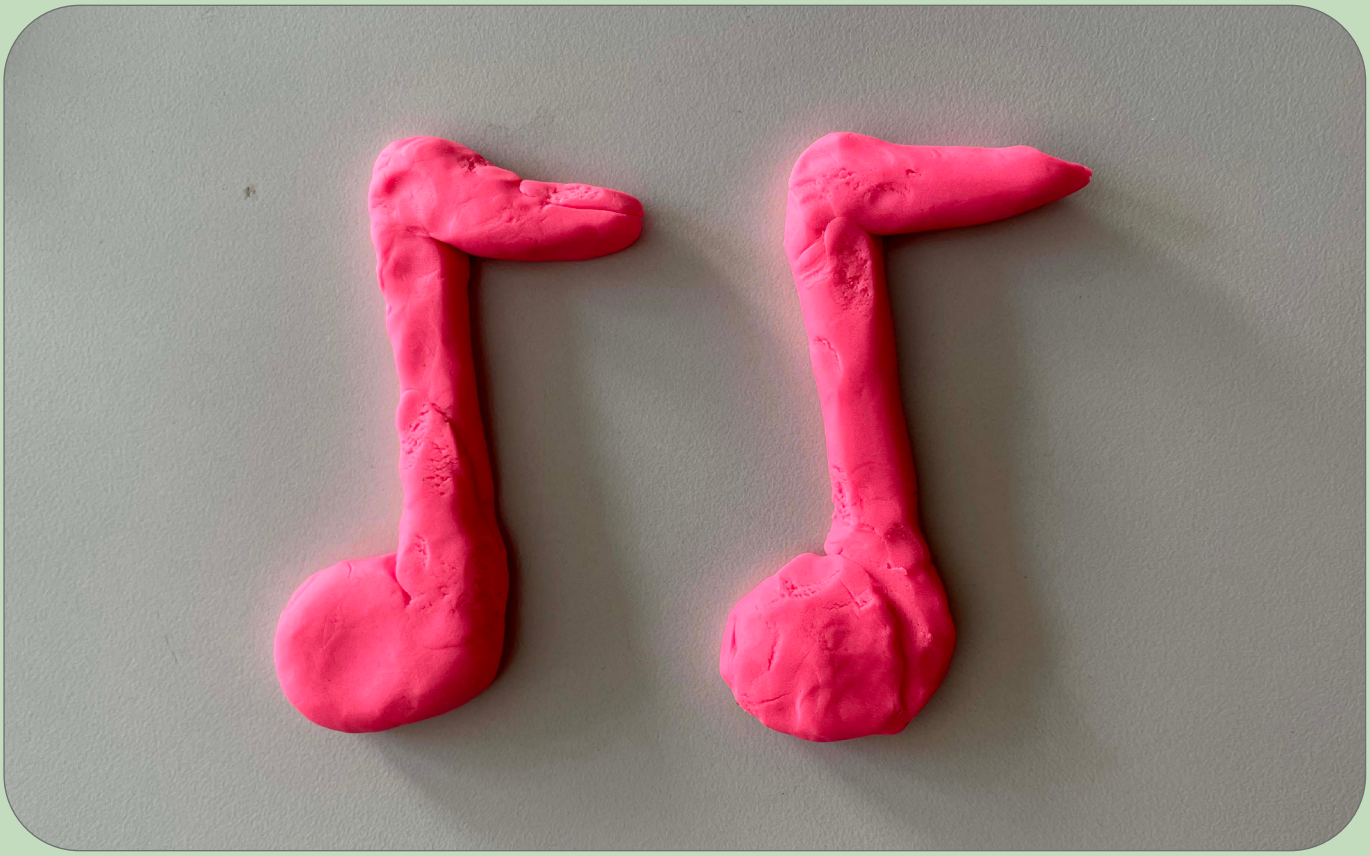
Te reo Māori saved me
Arna, 19: Māori

This pūrākau is about the relationship between rangatahi Māori and te reo Māori. Rangatahi spoke about the positive aspects of speaking and learning te reo Māori. They talked about a range of experiences and fluency but the kōrero always came back to the sense of grounding and ability the reo offered when expressing themselves emotionally and spiritually.

Arna whakapapa to a Northland Iwi and has been through kohanga, kura and whare kura. Te reo Māori is her first language. She grew up with her mum, dad, two little brothers and older brother. She also has a kurī now. Arna is passionate about te reo Māori; it has been a constant companion all her life. At times she has taken it for granted knowing that it was always there. But in more recent years she has come to appreciate it as a taonga to be treasured, nurtured and shared. Arna is aware of the vulnerability of our national language and the hurt and trauma associated with the impacts of colonialism. She talks about tapping into a space for agency – self-determination a tenant of hauora – wellbeing.

> Kia ora ko Arna toku ingoa I am from multiple iwis. I'm quite white but I don't really identify with that part of me like I'm not quite sure where I come from European-wise. I was born in the city, my river's uphill, I was born here this is my maunga, like my awa I was like swirling around there for five years and then I went up to this place and started school over there at the Kura Kaupapa Māori.
>
> Te reo Māori was my first language, I pre-learnt my first English words off the tv and that was when I started like understanding my connection to te ao Māori. I'm really beginning to love it cos you know when you're growing up you're just like 'oh yeah' this thing 'this whatever' but the more I learnt about um stories about my iwi or my tīpuna the more I began to love it. However, I did take my ability to speak te reo Māori for granted. I didn't really think of it as anything other than oh it's just a language. Coming out of a full immersion te reo Māori school it was very weird coming into a bi-lingual school they didn't speak Māori as much and that made me uncomfortable to a certain extent. It made me realise how much I should be appreciating my reo and it was probably last year I had an epiphany and I was like I need to speak te reo Māori as much as I can and I need to help other people with their reo as well. So like I've just been lifting up my own reo as well as others.
>
> I arrived here as a very shy little kid it was only really three years ago where I decided to really become myself my true self (giggle) so that's when I started coming out of my shell. I think a lot of that is because I joined this organisation. It's basically a creative competition and I joined that with a couple of other girls in my class that I didn't really know. Like I had about three or four friends that I actually was close with until then and we started getting really close and now they are my closest friends now so that's really cool.
>
> That was when I started just becoming more confident in the way that I hold myself and speak and connect with others. I mean if I can stand up in front of a bunch of people and like yell about my feelings then surely I can just like talk deeply with one person, so that's what ended up happening. That's when our group wrote our very first group poem. It's about te reo Māori and how it was very oppressed language and how it almost vanished and that was very easy to write because we all felt very strongly about our culture and how te reo

> Māori and its people has been oppressed over the years. It's all very easy to tap into a space of you need to listen to us because we've been told to shut up all these years.



Mike (Māori rangatahi aged 17) shaped the playdoh to illustrate the ways he connected to Arna's pūrākau. Mike connected his love of music to the passion and love that Arna had for her reo. "I don't know my language but I have my beats, they take me all sorts of places."

Te Reo Māori

The revitalisation of te reo Māori and positive impacts of this movement are evident in rangatahi today. Rangatahi identified their native language as an important part of who they are and reflected on their appreciation of their culture.

> I started school at kura kaupapa Māori. Te Reo Māori has always, was always my first language... that was when I started like understanding my connection to te ao Māori and really beginning to love it. (Arna, 19: Māori)

Te reo Māori was recognised as an asset for those who spoke and understood it. For the other rangatahi it was a yearning or goal to attain.

> When you're growing up, you're just like 'oh yeah, this thing, this whatever' but the more I learnt about stories about my iwi or my tīpuna, the more I began to love it. However, I did take my ability to speak te reo Māori for granted. I didn't really think of it as anything other than 'oh it's just you know just language'. (Arna, 19: Māori)

The power, freedom and opportunity the reo offers seemed to be appreciated in their later years, when they started extending their social circles and mahi experiences.

Kapa Haka. Note from illustrator: This pretty much speaks for itself. It's about icons of traditional performance. I wanted it to be loud and fun to engage with people.

Kapa Haka

Kapa haka is a cultural performing art, a traditional practice to grow and maintain mātauranga Māori for whānau, hapū and iwi, and more recently kura, institutions and community. The popularity of kapa haka can create both negative and positive dynamics for rangatahi Māori. Participating in kapa haka can inform cultural understanding, te reo Māori, whakapapa, pūrākau, and build community. However, it can isolate rangatahi if they do not fit the norm or meet others' expectations that they should participate.

> I remember I heard some people say they felt shamed if they weren't in the kapa haka group. (Kiri, 17: Waikato-Tainui, Ngai Tai)

For some, it can be an opportunity to share positive experiences with siblings and help build connectedness within te ao Māori, with kapa haka as the vehicle. It then becomes an important tool to share culture in broader spaces. Rangatahi experience the excitement and joy in sharing their knowledge, not just with their whānau but also showcasing te ao Māori globally.

> What would have been helpful for me to navigate through life would be knowing more about where I come from. I went over to The States with [the organisation], I felt so proud to be Māori and to be from Aotearoa. That moment was amazing coz I could showcase the best of our culture to Native Americans. (Tūāwhiorangi, 17: Māori, Samoan, and Pākehā)

The lasting impression from this experience resonated after the performance.

> I felt full and whole and connected to everyone that I was performing with and that was the first moment I was able to do that. I want more of those moments and more connection. (Tūāwhiorangi, 17: Māori, Samoan, and Pākehā)

However, even kapa haka was identified as a stressor for not feeling 'Māori' enough, resulting in the opposite effect for some rangatahi.

Kahurangi: I was in the mainstream [school]. I didn't want to go to the [Māori class] I felt real stressed, was just more about kapa haka.

Marama: Like punishing. Didn't feel like singing.

Kahurangi: Yeah. Real intense you know. More intense than that.

Marama: I also feel like an outsider coz I don't know. I didn't do kapa haka, so they just put me in a support group. I just didn't want to be there, but I don't know any other option.

Kahurangi: You feel like you're not Māori enough, feel like white people.

As with the shame and mamae that is often experienced by Māori for not being able to speak te reo Māori, there can be perceived expectations on rangatahi Māori to be 'natural' performers. Rangatahi identified that pressure to do well can then lead to anxiety and other mental health implications.

Rangatahi reflected on the importance of strong relationships in sports. Mike talked about the bond he created over time within a team environment, which led to a sense of belonging.

I'm thinking of moving up to the under-nineteen team this year and I was like 'oh that's a bit hard' cause I'm only fifteen but I'm going to move with the team that I already play with so I don't have to make new bonds with people. I've already got that strong bond with my original team. (Mike, 17: Māori)

Kai

Kai was closely paired with health, with rangatahi viewing kai as playing a role in being healthy. Rangatahi readily identified that to be healthy you had to eat healthy food and returned to what had been learned in school or through observations of people and around them.

I'm an athlete so being fit and eating well like eating salads and fruits making sure you get your protein in. (Mike, 17: Māori)

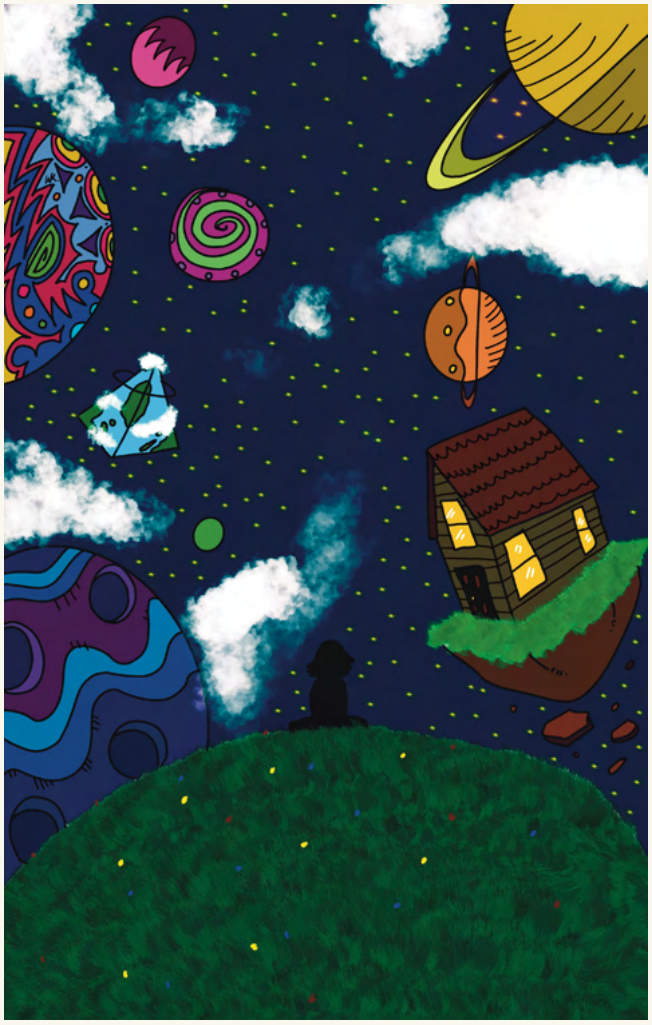
In sports science at school, yeah... your normal fruit and salads and just limit the carbs you eat. (Pita, 19: Māori)

It was recognised that kai can also create a sense of comfort or be an escape strategy.

This year I've started my new thing, but before this year I would go into my room have a fat as kai. (Arana, 16: Cook Island Māori/Māori)

Lollipop man. Note from illustrator: When I think about kai I think about sugar – the good sweetness and the happiness it brings. The theme is Willy Wonka, and the character is a safe, cheerful fellow.

Te Ao Marama: Experiences of hauora



Te Ao Marama. Note from illustrator: Observing time and space from home. I see our world, this reality as fluid, bright and wonderous.

HINENGARO

Rangatahi spoke about hinengaro as mental health – a core aspect of hauora. The realm of hinengaro can be affected by your environment, relationships, kai, experiences, whakapapa and sense of belonging. As influences and effects can come from vast spaces, it's hard to know what advice and actions should be followed. The following excerpt is an example of how rangatahi navigate through all the noise and unknown nature of life.

> When I'm feeling like I need to get some inspiration or guidance, I will ask my tīpuna, which you might know as kupuna, or I just turn to my mum. So if I was struggling with something, I go to her and ask her, and she'll just give me little talks about it. (Kahurangi: 20: Ngā Puhi, Ngāti Wai).

Seeking guidance spiritually by connecting with their kūpuna / tīpuna, or knowing there is a trusted adult in their life, was a shared practice or known option among the rangatahi.

Rangatahi spoke about personal struggles around recognising when they need support. And when they do try and get support, health professionals, services and organisations often fall short. One rangatahi reflected on their own experience as a lesson for others.

> I guess for some people that could be dangerous because some people may be feeling sad, but not understand why they're sad internally. Might be getting prescribed something that isn't, in the long run, gonna help them. (Mereana, 20: Māori and Pākehā)

Rangatahi spoke about recognising what does or doesn't work for their own needs. Many rangatahi made distinctions between western

medicine as being risk averse, short term and limited while alternative approaches were holistic, complementary, and safe. Trying alternative strategies to support mental health was important. Rangatahi articulated other methods they tried without feeling whakamā.

> I think everyone just relies on doctors rather than other alternatives, like yoga or Pilates or meditation. Yeah, stuff like that. (Kiri, 17: Waikato-Tainui, Ngai Tai)

For rangatahi, supporting your hinengaro was a common-sense practice that often adults, decision makers, professionals and services complicate.

NGĀ KARE Ā ROTO

Learning how to manage emotions through adolescence is an important developmental stage. Everyday interactions can be managed well one day, but experienced quite differently on another day. Tension from different aspects of their lives such as peer group, whānau, kura, and for some – leaving home for other responsibilities, means understanding their emotions and identifying what strategies work for them.

> I used to cry myself to sleep, every night. But after a month, two months of family support I started to get better. So it was around, having people around you and life and family. (Arana, 16: Cook Island Māori/Māori)

Experiencing loss within the community, whānau or other, is where rangatahi identified that sometimes dealing with heavy emotions takes time to process – it doesn't reduce the impact but time enables a process to navigate them.

> My uncle passed away last year, beginning of last year, so yeah. I was, that one hit pretty hard as well. I wasn't open to talking about it I would, if it got brought up, I would always shut down and not talk to anyone about it, but now that it's just, it's been a year, I feel like I've grown a little bit so it's easier to talk about. (Kahurangi: 20: Ngā Puhi, Ngāti Wai).

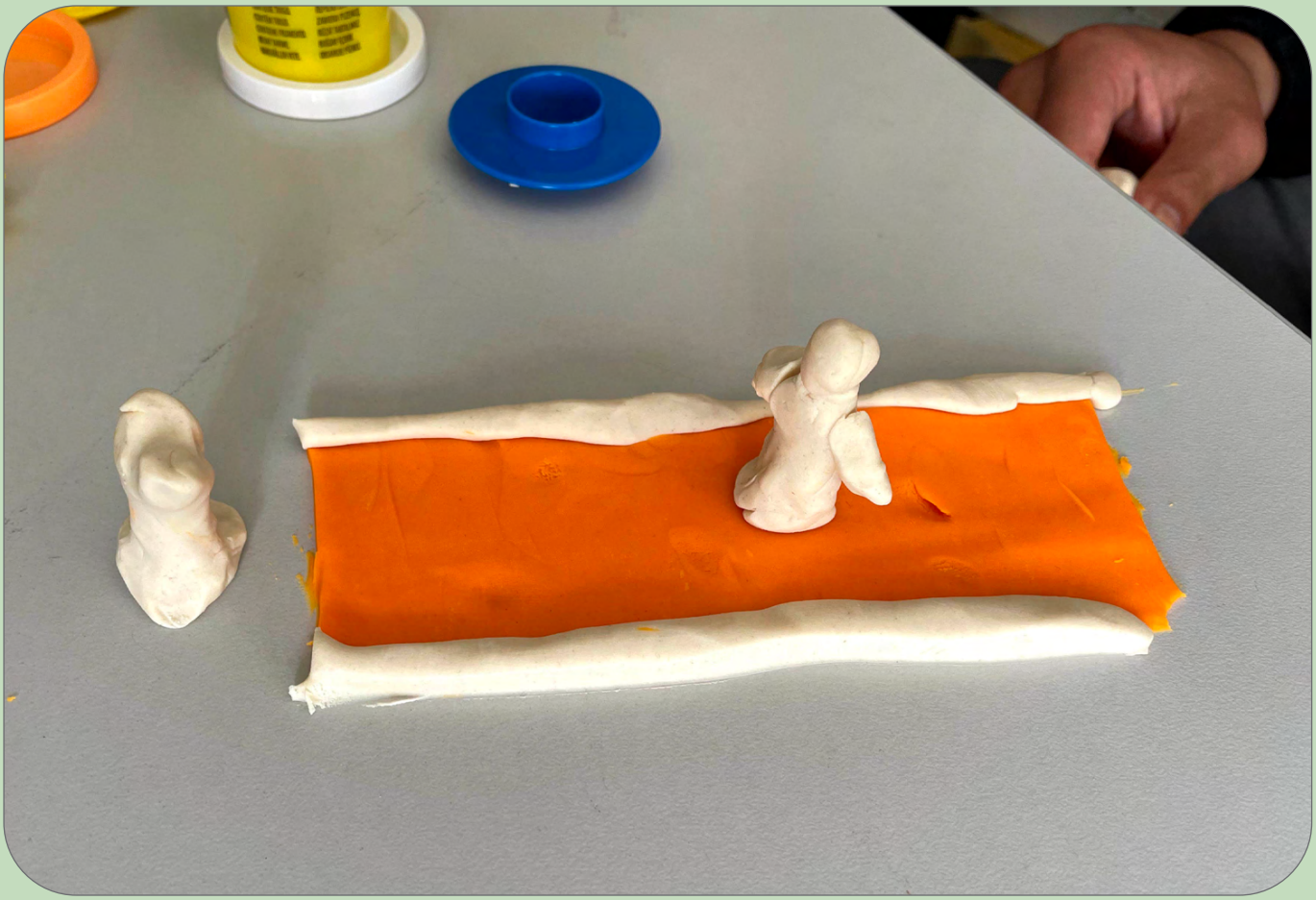
Hinengaro. Note from illustrator: feeling safe is important, when I feel safe I'm free to be me and my thoughts mirror my environment.

Don't buy into the drama
Marama, 20, Kahurangi, 20: Māori

The following pūrākau describes the tensions within social media. This pūrākau was chosen by the research roopū, students, and rangatahi as many rangatahi Māori experience the pull of being connected to social media and how it can be positive, but it can also get out of hand and people really get hurt.

Marama and Kahurangi are cousins who share a close sisterly bond. Marama and Kahurangi have lived together most of their lives and are the same age. As young girls, they attended the same school together, however they did not share the same friend groups and had different interests. Marama and Kahurangi talk about their experiences as rangatahi growing up with social media.

> *Marama:* I don't I go on social media, but I don't post anything like literally two posts on my Instagram from about three years ago and that's it so I kinda just I wouldn't say I go on there. More just to see what other people do but hey, you (Kahurangi) post.
>
> *Kahurangi:* I just keep in contact with my friends but I feel like I'm addicted like I try not to admit it. [I] don't find the need to post about my own I don't know. Maybe two years ago I used to post a lot but obviously I deleted them all, but I just look at them for too long and go "ooh that's ugly I'll take it down now" so yeah I guess social media isn't the best for peoples' images of themselves.
>
> *Marama:* You have to be a certain way to look pretty or whatever. If you don't look this way, then you're not considered beautiful…I don't know I feel like social media portrays who you truly are.
>
> *Kahurangi:* Be careful what you post with social media. Screen Save. Screen shots.
>
> *Marama:* Also, texts! Sometimes a text message can be taken the wrong way. It has happened to me before. There was someone at school that I didn't really want to be mates with her anymore because she was just annoying, she was just always there and like constant like wouldn't leave me alone for like ten minutes she just wanted always to message, and I was just like can you just leave me alone for like an hour or so? And she just kept messaging me and I just got really angry, so I just said I don't want to be mates anymore yeah it kind of just blew up from there.
>
> Her mum got involved and everything and she just made it worse. Her mum was sending my mum nasty messages and threats. It was real bad. And then at school, she came up to me and was with two Pasifika girls angry because I looked at her tik tok account. She was mad and intimidating, it didn't make sense to me but she was blaming me for our friendship ending. I didn't want to go to school anymore because I was scared. I went to see a counsellor and she (a friend) was just standing there laughing at me and I was crying cos I didn't feel safe. Then she just laughed about it. I don't see how it's so funny about someone crying you know my mum just had enough and that's when she went to the cops again and then I didn't have to go to school the next day. I didn't want to because I was scared.
>
> I guess if I could give some advice to other rangatahi going through a similar situation, it would be don't buy into the drama. Just walk away, and keep away from toxic environments.



Tomi (Māori rangatahi aged 16) moulded the playdoh to illustrate the ways they viewed the pūrākau of Marama and Kahurangi. Tomi created an orange pathway with a person walking away from the TV (representing all media) – “Sometimes it’s better to leave your phone behind.”

GENDER AND SEXUALITY

Rangatahi did not explicitly talk about gender and sexuality. Rather, it was expressed in stories about relationships, hard times and growth. For rangatahi who identified as heterosexual, talk about gender and sexuality did not arise. Understanding feelings and emotions regarding sexuality was talked about as being tied up with secrecy and whakamā.

> I'm close to my Aunty, she knows. She doesn't seem to react to what I'm saying she just asks more questions and listens, she cares a lot about how I feel and doesn't judge. I can't do that with my parents they will straight away judge – it's loaded. (Casey, 18: Ngāti Wai)

As rangatahi learn to understand their sexuality, they build relationships with those around them, finding out who they can discuss and dissect their thoughts with, and who they feel acceptance with.

With regard to whānau where cultural community has been an important element woven through whānau identity, this can be an area where rangatahi can feel pulled in separate directions for not being able to see themselves reflected or represented in their culture.

> I told my Samoan Grandmother, she wasn't too happy about it. She spoke about Fa'afafine back in Samoa and how they had a special place in the community but it's different now more complicated. But I'm like I'm not Fa'afafine…I want to do the feminine dances, I'm not interested in the male ones, I don't want to show my chest. So I feel like where do I fit, there isn't a place for me to celebrate my Samoan culture because I don't see people like me in those spaces. (Tūāwhiorangi, 17: Māori, Samoan, and Pākehā)

Gender policing occurred in schools and kura, where tāne in particular were singled out for being too feminine and not projecting stereotypical male behaviour.

> I didn't find my click at kura till later on, I got bullied lots cos I wasn't aggressive or something. (Tūāwhiorangi, 17: Māori, Samoan, and Pākehā)

At times rangatahi described being able to celebrate their sexuality with others but not usually with parent(s) and/or caregiver(s).

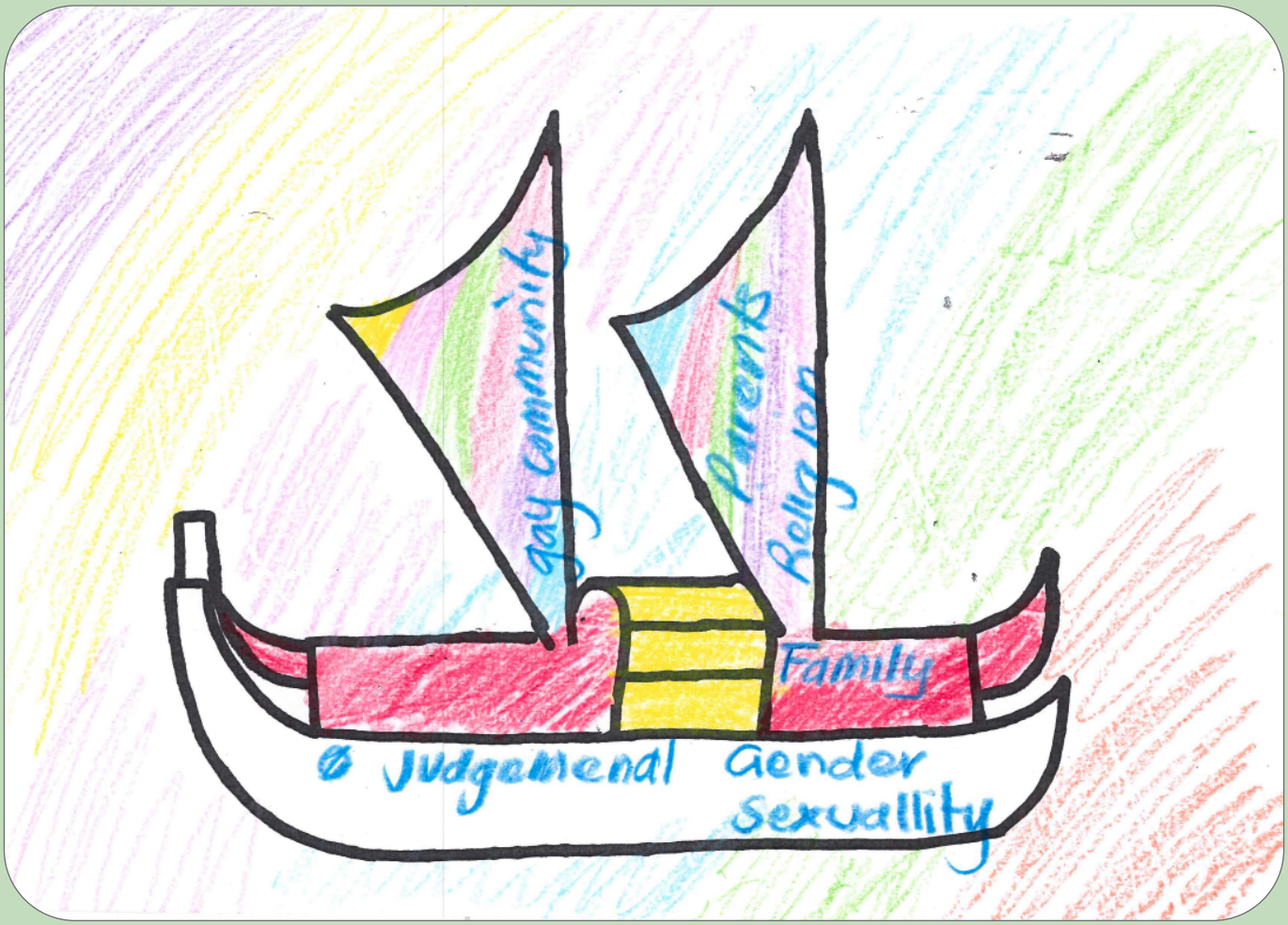
> I can talk to you about it [interviewer] but I haven't like officially come out to my parents. My mum has hinted a lot that she knows, you know, we know who you are kind of thing. (Tūāwhiorangi, 17: Māori, Samoan, and Pākehā)

Love is love
Tūāwhiorangi, 17: Māori, Samoan, and Pākehā

The following pūrākau explores wellbeing in more depth, beyond definitions and terms. This pūrākau was chosen by the research roopū, students, and rangatahi as it brings to light some of the complexities many takatāpui rangatahi Māori feel and face.

Tūāwhiorangi is a 17-year-old emotionally intelligent takatāpui rangatahi living in South Auckland. They are of Māori, Samoan, and Pākehā whakapapa, and come from an affluent whānau. They attended private school until recently moving to a public school. Growing up they have faced the challenge of coming to understand gender and sexuality, and how religious values – which hold significant importance in their family – mesh with their sexuality.

> For me wellbeing is being myself, as in feelings and thoughts and stuff. So physically how do I feel? I've grown up in a religious family, but I know I am spiritual. People ask – do you belong to a religion? I say 'yes', but even though it's my faith and I do practice it sometimes – I'm not so much stuck in the values and rules. For me, since I am obviously gay, if I was ever to have intercourse with someone you can't have sex with rubbers. I think that's because back in the day it was a sin to not have a kid. But you know now that AIDS is such a big thing in the gay community I have to think about my health, like I shouldn't risk my health because of that tradition.
>
> Now I know that I'm gay, but back when I was younger, I wasn't sure that I was gay. l had attractions with girls, but they weren't so sexual like whereas with boys, you know, they always talk about girls parts and stuff and I just didn't have an interest in that. That's how I started to think, am I? Maybe I could be bi. Then I had a girlfriend and thought yeah nah that's not for me. I just never have the sexual attraction that I do with men. Back then that used to play on my mind. I would always wonder, and it was really hard sometimes.
>
> I never came out to my parents, my mum always knew. I always played with her make-up, and her heels, and her dresses. I also always played with my sister's doll. It would always bug me that my mum and dad would always say "oh he should play league", "oh do you have a girlfriend?", "Oh do you have a girlfriend for your formal?" And I would look at them like are you for real? That would always annoy me, and it meant that sometimes I wouldn't go to them first when I had problems.
>
> In my school there were not many boys who really came out. I only knew two. They were seniors and they were really proud to be gay. It's very positive in schools. It's good that people are more like saying love is love.



Te Aranui (Māori rangatahi aged 17) coloured in the waka hourua template to illustrate the ways they viewed the pūrākau of Tūāwhiorangi.

HARD TIMES

Rangatahi experienced hard times in different ways relating to pressure, stress, anxiety, depression, loneliness and drugs. Pressure came in different forms for rangatahi – from peers, whānau and other influential people around them. Pressure also often took the form of making important decisions such as leaving school, going to university, beginning a new job/career and intimate relationships. One rangatahi described the pressure to stay in school for fear of not being able to find a well-paying job after leaving.

> I was paranoid about leaving, cause school kind of made it seem like you had to finish school or you weren't going to get anywhere. (Mike, 17: Māori)

Pressure from whānau members around succeeding in school was an experience woven into responsibilities and roles within the whānau unit. Hinemoana talked about being a tuakana in their whānau and how that created pressure in respect to doing well in school.

> So for me it's different from the rest of my siblings. Being the oldest I guess. It's very intense, like a lot of pressure from mum. A lot of pressure just to do well in school. (Hinemoana, 19: Ngāti Pūkenga)

Intimate relationships was an important milestone for many rangatahi during this time, with the challenges of recognising their vulnerabilities with another person and learning communication skills for asserting what is important to them when navigating how to share intimate time and space with another.

> It was one and a half years before I dropped out. I wasn't doing well just because I was in a toxic relationship. It was my first relationship. I was like 'this is the love of my life' kind of thing... he would make me feel insecure in the relationship and that I was the problem, but I wouldn't say that he was the toxic one in the relationship, I contributed to it as well, just I don't know. Just not helping communication. (Mika, 20: Māori & Scottish)

It can be a confusing time as rangatahi are learning about the nuances of partner relationships and understanding when pressure in the relationship can lead to dangerous situations. As Mika identifies, communication is important as well as knowing your boundaries – what is healthy and unhealthy.

Hard times. Note from illustrator: Hard times is represented by shadows. The things that take away your light, and follow you like a shadow.

STRESS

Stress was often tied in with pressure and expectations, and again often discussed when recalling experiences in school. Trying to alleviate stress while in school was a contributor to their mental health experience, and how they can help one another during times of stress. Some rangatahi recognised they needed to be able to support themselves first before being able to help others.

> I realised I couldn't have been there for them if I couldn't be there for myself, but I think, where we are at the moment, well where I'm at, I can be there for them. But I think they're just stressed at the moment about school cos they're studying and it's just like a lot of pressure for them but I just like to be there for them when I can. (Kiri, 17: Waikato-Tainui, Ngai Tai)

Stress. Note from illustrator: I wanted to depict stress as a character, one that we might form but isn't who we are, it's something we act out but doesnt have to be who we are.

ANXIETY

Rangatahi talked about feeling anxiety in different situations. They described their experiences and highlighted the effects on their physical wellbeing. Anxiety was often in response to situations. Rangatahi explained their physical responses and how they tried to deal with it.

> My heart would just beat really hard and fast and I'll start sweating and I get a huge adrenaline rush. But it's not a good feeling. And everything will kind of speed up. I'm not like a lot of people, crying and screaming, I try and hold it in and my body just shakes. (Mika, 20: Māori & Scottish)

Like pressure and stress, anxiety was described in relation to experiences where they were interacting in certain environments.

> I think it started in high school, it was just like general stuff. I would walk in during karakia and people would just stare at you. Just stuff like that. It's a bit different to everyday experiences. (Arana, 16: Cook Island Māori/Māori)

Rangatahi described the causes of their anxiety and how they developed strategies to manage it. Many rangatahi felt that as anxiety has become more socialised and the taboo of mental health is lessened, they can discuss it more openly. "Anxiety is pretty common. I think people are more open now talking about it" Mika, 20: Māori & Scottish. By creating safer spaces to discuss and acknowledge their mental health and anxiety, rangatahi felt safer reaching out for the support they need.

> Even though there's a lot more talk about mental health and that sort of stuff, I still think we've got a long way to go. Especially at our age level, like in high school. I think no one really understands what is or what other options you can access. Mika, 20: Māori & Scottish

Anxiety. Note from illustrator: Anxiety is a character, one that we can change.

DEPRESSION

Rangatahi often talked about feeling depressed and having depression – using the terms interchangeably. They spoke of the emotions they experienced and how they were able to identify feelings of being depressed and how feeling 'low' impacts their mental health. Ange talked about how she used social media as an outlet for expression.

> I just noticed I was very bad, a toxic thing to do [social media]. But I had a private account and I would just post how I was feeling. I was going through it and they were really bad and I realised it wouldn't have been nice for my friends to be hearing that. (Ange, 19: Māori & Pākehā)

Being able to identify their emotional needs created space for rangatahi to be able to seek the support they need. Depression, low feelings, and a sense of helplessness were managed by seeking out trusted people in their lives for support and knowing they have people around them who can be there for them.

> Like only this year, I've started my new thing. But before this year, I would go into my room have a fat as kai and then study and be depressed. But eventually it would go away. But now I just run away. And that's hard and worse. I usually run to my best friend's house, otherwise I go to my granny's, my dad's mum. I go to her, she's always there for me. (Arana, 16: Cook Island Māori/Māori)

Rangatahi spoke of helplessness and not seeing any other way out. Self-harm and suicidal ideation could lead them to seek support from others, with suicide attempts the reason they received support in some cases.

> I was suicidal. And I knew I shouldn't have been thinking about it, doing that and self-harming. So yeah. I think I just felt really desperate, and I never obviously liked feeling that way. So, because I did try and reach out to my school counsellor, but that didn't really work out for me. I don't think she really understood it. But the school counsellor didn't have a good reputation anyway, so I wasn't too surprised about it. I was just like 'oh ok', but my cry for help wasn't me going to get a counsellor. I actually had to get assigned one because I attempted to end my life. (Ange, 19: Māori & Pākehā)

Depression. Note from illustrator: Depression is a character, one that we can change.

When rangatahi feel connected and have a sense of belonging within their social network, they can pull on wider areas of support when loneliness and helplessness becomes too big a weight to carry alone.

DRUGS/SUBSTANCE ABUSE

With the rise of more drugs in Aotearoa, rangatahi often found themselves in situations where drugs were readily available. Peer pressure was identified as a reason why rangatahi found themselves in situations where they were trying drugs.

> When I was in high school weed would be a really big influence on people. I tried it so many times because I was trying to see what the hype was and I was like, I don't get why people think this is so good because it's so horrible! This makes my chest so heavy and I'm just thinking the same things over and over, but it starts to get distorted. This makes me feel like I'm crazy or something. (Tomi, 16: Māori)

Drugs were identified as being available in school. Two rangatahi recounted how they were able to find drugs within their education programme from other rangatahi who were attending.

> *Kahurangi:* The only time I've been around hard drugs is at the course.
>
> *Marama:* Yeah, me too always. Oh yeah, MD.
>
> *Kahurangi:* Yeah, my friend was addicted to it. It's awful. I think it was outside of this stuff, was talking about a drink it's like P.

Rangatahi navigated spaces around what enhanced or reduced wellbeing as they experienced it within their social environments. They talked about learning how to recognise relationships that may lead them into pathways that do not support healthy wellbeing.

> For me, it's to do with the friends I choose. At school, there's a lot of kids who drink and smoke and go out partying, and I have friends like that but I stick to this one group of friends where they all stay home. And they don't think about stuff like that, so I just stick to that group. Say "hi" to them around school but don't associate with them outside of school. Especially when they're involved with other people outside of school it could be really bad. (Kiko, 19: Cook Island Māori, Kaitahu)

Though rangatahi are still forming key relationships, they identify the peer groups around them that will negatively impact their hauora. Rangatahi may not necessarily see themselves as part of a group, but understand that to maintain some relationships, it's easier to be available in some capacity in one space and not in another.

Two idiots – pill & bottle. Note from illustrator: I was trying to show how stupid taking drugs and alcohol can be. You think you look so cool but really you're a mess.

RACISM

Rangatahi spoke about experiences they have had with racism. Some accounts were explicitly about racism and others talked about how they felt without being as direct about their experience, but were able to speak to how interactions of racism made them feel.

> Last year someone asked me 'oh what percentage Māori are you?' And that stung a little bit even though I don't know. It doesn't look like I'm a very high percentage of Māori so that person was not indigenous, so I was very, very touchy. (Casey, 18: Ngāti Wai)

Racism was often talked about when discussing hard times or low times of hauora or wellbeing. Often there were times when rangatahi just wanted to feel safe and secure in their schools and communities.

> Racism for rangatahi is really an important part of wellbeing making sure that people are aware and accountable to change you get so much judgment so much standardisation profiling you should be this particular way because you're Māori. (Hinemoa, 19, Ngāti Pūkenga)

Rangatahi were clear and explicit about their experiences with racism and discrimination. They were acutely aware of insight into concepts such as racial profiling and 'everyday' forms of casual racism and racial bias.

> It's a completely different fragmented way of the world like it's in parts, there's different standards for white people and Māori people you're just kind of getting into these different worlds.

The centrality of talk about racism in rangatahi's discussion of hard times illustrates how pervasive racism is in Aotearoa and clearly highlights its significant negative effects (see also Carlson, Mulholland et al., 2022). Living in a wider sociocultural system structured around western epistemologies (which inherently favours Pākehā) brings with it considerable challenges and harms for rangatahi Māori. It was clear in our interviews that rangatahi felt they were living in a wider society that was hostile towards them: that simply being as they are, with whatever degree of cultural engagement, their indigeneity was unacceptable within the wider society they inhabit.

Mr Racism. Note from illustrator: From the shadows appears the joker called Mr Racism, large and powerful that takes over space.

“That’s my version of wellbeing”: Tauiwi perspectives

My music dreams. Note from illustrator: Music is colour, healing, freedom, fun and a friend. It’s an important part of hauora for me.

Rangatahi tauiwi had a great deal to share about what matters for hauora and wellbeing, drawing on their own observations and experiences. The analysis presented below draws is structured thematically around six core domains: i) connections and close ties; ii) identities; iii) physical health and embodiment; iv) mood and emotions; v) material resources; and vi) settings and spaces.

CONNECTIONS AND CLOSE TIES

Connection and close ties were cornerstones of rangatahi accounts of wellbeing. Meaningful, close relationships with people around them were deeply valued by those we interviewed. These relationships could take a variety of forms, but many rangatahi emphasised that wellbeing 'starts with the family', describing parents and caregivers as their cheerleaders and closest confidants. Mothers often played a leading role. Annabelle (20: NZ European) explained '[if] I'm having a bad day I will just talk to my mum and yeah she will make it all better'. Along similar lines, Zoe described her mum as a 'best friend' who has 'always been there':

> we're pretty close, my mum and I. We have done lots together over the years [....] she has always kind of been there for me, um like even when I haven't had like I haven't had friends really at points in time, but she has always been there. (Zoe, 17: English and NZ European)

Close relationships with fathers were also valued. Oscar (16: European and Pacific) described a powerful connection with his Dad, who was hands-on and 'always big about hugs' and made him feel 'important'. Along similar lines, Ana talked about feeling sustained by her father's love and pride in her. Her father 'showed up' to celebrate her achievements, even when his employers made this difficult:

> when I was in primary, when I got many awards including scholarships for high school, yeah and I think it was a happy time because I didn't know my parents would[] be there, because my dad wasn't approved of leave to come, but he did, he just left his work, he didn't care, so he just showed up, he just put his job on risk [...] so yeah that was the happiest day of my life. (Ana, 19: Tongan)

While most described close ties with whānau who showed up in their lives when it counted, some did not experience this degree of connection and intimacy. A smaller number of rangatahi described the negative impacts of living with parents who could be frightening, abusive, intrusive, homophobic and controlling.

Especially when family could not be relied on, rangatahi drew a sense of wellbeing from their intimate connections with friends. Having a 'good circle of friends' (Julie, 17: South East Asian) to discuss 'absolutely everything' with offered a sense of security and support.

> I don't talk to my brother and mum as much about certain things, whereas I have a friend [Jay] who I talk to about absolutely everything, like anything and she does the same with me and that is really nice to have that sort of relationship (Reuben, 16, Pākehā)

Having a friend who really cared could be a vital lifeline at times when rangatahi felt most alone with 'something bad' (Liam, 17: NZ European). Joseph explained that having a friend who 'actually does give a shit' helped him manage difficult feelings and suicidality:

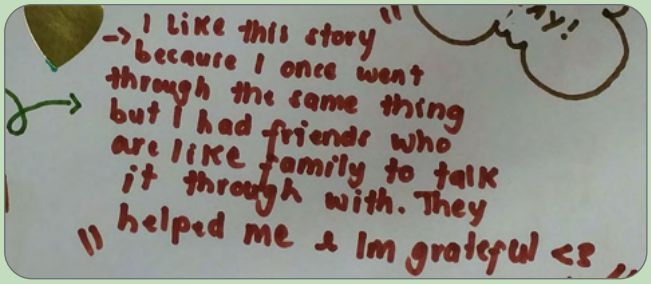
> he was [...] the voice of reason on my shoulder and it was more like we can talk about this and we can get through it and that really just sort of helped me mentally because I realised hey, someone actually does give a shit about me (Joseph 18: NZ European and Māori)

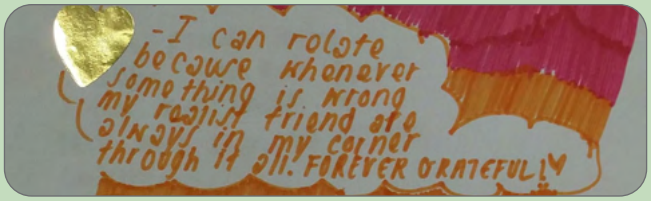
Everyone needs at least one of those friends
Liam, 17: Pākehā

The following pūrākau describes the support Liam receives from close friends. This pūrākau was chosen by the research roopū, students, and rangatahi as many rangatahi emphasised the importance of close friendships for sustaining hauora. Those we spoke with described the importance of both providing and receiving this kind of care. This pūrākau also evidences the emotional depth of connections between young men – speaking back to stereotyped representations of male friendship as shallow, competitive or unemotional.

Liam is a 17-year-old heterosexual young man with Pākehā heritage, and the youngest of three siblings. At the time we met, Liam was living at home with his parents and attending a local secondary school. Liam describes himself as an 'emotional guy' in a context where staunch masculinities are valued. In the passage below, he discusses hitting 'rock bottom', and outlines the role his close friends play in lifting him up.

> I only have a couple of friends that I could ever talk to about anything with and I think everyone needs at least one of those friends really because if you don't have anyone then it gets... you can't fight the battles on your own really.
>
> I had a few bad moments where it was just me and bad thoughts and it goes as bad as you can get, if you get that. As bad as you can get. And then you just have the little voice in your head telling you just to try again, I guess. And then after three repeats I realised that I can't keep trying to do this myself, trying to fix this myself so my closest friends at the time ... I didn't tell them everything at first, I just told them little bits, kind of just like letting water out of a water balloon that's just about to pop; just little squirts here and there instead of the pin prick which will explode the balloon kind of thing. And then over time I just let more and more of that water out and that's helped as well. I realised how much better that felt than me going to a really bad place and then just almost giving up on everything really.
>
> I would be in a very, very, very dark place if I didn't have those couple of friends that I can just pick up the phone and call them or text them, at school give them a hug or something or on the worst days, cry on their shoulder.
>
> [now] I will always tell [my best friend] if I am beginning to shift back into something bad and into something dark and he will come immediately, if he can. Otherwise he will ring me or text me. I can't ever thank him enough really. I always tell him that ... I always joke that he is a bit of a dick, but I love him to bits.





Wānanga participants' mixed-media reflections on Liam's story. Here, both participants used gold heart stickers to signify the resonance the pūrākau had for them, and the gratitude they feel for friends who are 'like family' and 'always in my corner through it all'.

Another central pillar of connection for rangatahi we interviewed was the relationships some formed with animals, particularly family pets. Carlie described a powerful connection with her family dog:

> animals, I think they sense everything so if they sense your emotions so that's what I loved about my dog and he was a big dog he was a boxer so, he would always you know come to me if I don't know I just like that he could sense when I needed someone and he would not leave my side and I got in quite a bad, I guess accident with a skateboard and I concussed myself lost 6 hours of memory and scraped skin off my entire face and arms and he did not leave my side for all of 3 days [...] he was just very protective and like loving I guess [....] he was just like a friend (Carlie, 19, NZ European)

For some, connections and close ties extended to spirituality and religious traditions. Relatively few from the tauiwi cohort self-identified as religious, although a number came from religious family backgrounds. For rangatahi with religious faith, connection with God could be a powerful support in times of stress. Ana (19, Tongan) described how her relationship with God imbues her with a sense of care and confidence and relieves stress: God has 'taken me throughout this whole, my whole life' and 'he'll continue to have my back'.

Others described a looser sense of spiritual order structuring their worlds, including a belief in karma, energy and reciprocity ('if you treat people with kindness, kindness comes to you if you treat people with negativity, negativity comes back'; Carlie, 19, NZ European). For Reuben (16, Pākehā, a self-described atheist, spirituality could be 'a connection' and a 'sort of spiritual energy' that was profoundly felt and yet 'hard to explain': 'I sort of can just sense energy with certain things'. For Ash, spirituality was place-based and offered a sense of connection to the natural environment:

> I am kind of spiritual, like I don't believe in God – like a biblical God, I don't really believe in a higher power – but I believe that the Earth is just like, a source of energy a source of divinity and should be appreciated. (Ash, 18, NZ European)

Whether in the form of close family, friends or animal companions, or a broader sense of spiritual connectedness, rangatahi sought out and drew sustenance from strong relational bonds (see Carlson, Calder-Dawe, et al., 2022 for a more detailed discussion).

Relational pressures and expectations

While young many young people explained that wellbeing arose through their relationships with others, these connections could also be a source of stress. This was a strong feature of talk about family relationships in particular. Some rangatahi met parental expectations with relative ease; others struggled, particularly in cases where expectations of performance were calibrated by high-performing older siblings:

> They got Excellence Endorsed. My sister got it through all school, all of Level 1, 2 and 3 and my brother got it in Level 2 and Level 3. And I am sitting on Merit Endorsed for Level 2 and Level 1. So yeah, I do well but it's hard not to think that you are not doing as well as your siblings so you are not as good as them kind of thing. (Liam, 17: NZ European)

The desire to live up to expectations and make whānau proud were at the forefront of rangatahi's talk. The pleasure of succeeding for family, and the pain of failing to meet expectations, figured as key influences on rangatahi wellbeing, especially for those whose parents had migrated to Aotearoa (Peiris-John et al., 2021). The drive to 'get it together' was linked to a sense of accountability to parents and a desire not to add to their burdens:

> [Mum and I] don't really talk much to each other and when we do, it is purely cold intellect [...] I like not having to I guess output my emotions onto her. Because I feel like she already goes through enough. [...] She doesn't need my baggage on her as well because she already has enough, I guess. (Bea, 17, South East Asian)

> I don't want to disappoint my parents – mostly my mum. So, I was like yeah, I will get it together so she doesn't have to worry about me and she can worry about other stuff. (Somsak, 16, South East Asian)

Several of those we interviewed experienced considerable pressure surrounding their role in managing – and deescalating – family tensions. This relational work took a range of different forms, including 'holding down the fort' (Carlie, 19, NZ European) for younger siblings during parental separation or times of loss. Rangatahi living in stressed households with caregiver conflict and anger talked in detail about the strategies they had cultivated for side-stepping familial conflict. For example, home was 'not the best envionment to be in' for Somsak due to tension between his mother and step-father. He went on to explain his approach to navigating his step-father's moods:

> sometimes he can be happy and be super nice and sometimes he will be mad or mad about something, so he would be more annoyed. So, when he is usually at that stage I usually just kind of ignore it and I just keep to myself so I don't bother him, to like set him off.

These accounts evidence young people's roles as skilled emotional actors in their families, responsible for sustaining harmony and safeguarding household relationships. At times, this comes at considerable cost to young people, who find themselves having to grow up quickly, 'far before you are an adult in order to kind of cope' (Rose, 18, NZ European and European).

The masks we wear. Note from illustrator: I feel like I wear a mask sometimes, sometimes I get to choose my mask but other times it's out of my control. It can depend on who's around, what energy is flowing and what cards are being played.

I don't want to be like that when I'm older
Kara, 17: Tauiwi

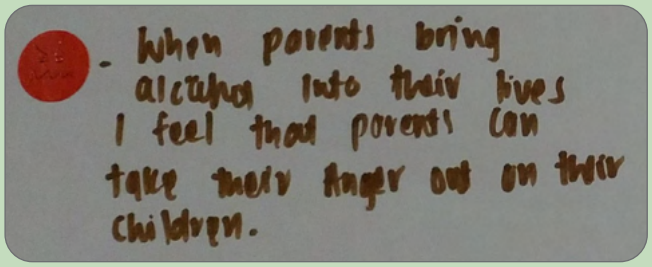
The following pūrākau illustrates how rangatahi navigate sometimes challenging home situations. This pūrākau was chosen by the research roopū, students, and rangatahi as it captures the role many rangatahi play as active conflict and relationship managers in their households.

At the time we met, Kara was living at home with her parents. In the passage below, Kara describes how she negotiates her Dad, who drinks heavily at times. While popular media typically constructs teenagers as hostile, difficult and unmanageable, here we see a very different story, as Kara describes the sophisticated de-escalation and conflict management strategies she has developed. Kara's narrative also speaks to how young people are working to do things differently from parents – in this case, of her desire to have a very different relationship to alcohol than her Dad's.

> [Dad]'s good, it's just when he drinks a lot, he's not so good. So really, you know some days he's great and some days he's not great but I don't avoid him I don't like AVOID him, but I just avoid any confrontation. I'm like, I'm going to make sure I try my best not to, because I have a short fuse but I'm good at kind of reeling myself back really fast. Like, he can snap really quickly but you know I don't keep going,
>
> I know that if I do [keep going], that will go even worse so I am just going to walk off I usually go and sit in my room or go sit with the cat so I'm like well then I'm removing myself from the situation and if he wants to keep going, well I've said I've removed myself so it's his problem now, so.
>
> He can be completely in the wrong and sometimes he'll be like oh yeah, I understand. But if he has been drinking, he will not listen. It will be like it will be like if he smashed a plate and I was standing there and he blamed me for the plate even thought it was obviously him, he wouldn't listen. It would be like – no, no, you did it. So.
>
> Yeah I'm like I don't, like, I love my dad, to bits because he is my dad and he has always been there for me, but I don't want to be like that when I'm older. Because I've seen, I mean, it has made me really upset – some of the things he has said – and it has made mum really upset. And I'm like I don't want to be like that and do that type of stuff.

> I've never read something that was so similar to my experience [...]. You kind of have to learn how to manage [parents] and their emotions and learn how they think and work around certain topics
>
> [young people] have to try and manage quite volatile situations as the adult when they shouldn't have to. It was just interesting that this is clearly quite a broad thing that happens for quite a lot of young people.

This comment was shared by a queer, South Asian young person who was part of a small hui focussed on sharing and refining pūrākau.



Wānanga participant's mixed-media response to Kara's story. Here, this young person has selected a red sticker with a frowning face to show their frustration and anger about situations like Kara's where parents 'take their anger out on their children'.

IDENTITIES

Culture: connection, wellbeing and exclusion

Rangatahi in Aotearoa inhabit complex cultural worlds, and these worlds offer both belonging and exclusion. Culture was central to identity and wellbeing for many rangatahi from this cohort. Those from recent migrant backgrounds often described a powerful sense of connection to their cultural heritage. Having moved to Aotearoa for study, Elias missed the 'vibes' of Arab culture, particularly the emphasis on family and collective responsibility:

> Like here [in Aotearoa] when you are 18 or 16 you just leave the house, you just go figure out your life, your parents stop paying for you, if you decide to get a job you just count on yourself, back home it is just more, family always has your back no matter what, that's like the tiny vibes, the family gatherings it is like, we all have a lot of family gatherings (Elias, 19: Middle Eastern)

Crossing back and forwards between different cultural spaces in the course of a day was a common experience for many rangatahi we spoke to. Aya reflected that moving between between the differently inflected cultural spaces of home, the Mosque and University felt like living 'three lives all in one day':

> sometimes it's confusing, because like the days that I go to the Mosque, and I go to Uni and I hang out with my family at the same time, like sometimes I go to Uni and it's from like 9am to 3pm, then I come back hang out with my family for a couple of hours, and all go to the Mosque together, and I live those three lives all in one day (Aya, 19: Middle Eastern)

For young people who identified only as Pākehā or New Zealand European, talk about culture tended to devolve into national identity arguments centring "kiwiness" and kiwiana or else focus on absence of culture. The potential exclusions of a "kiwi" identity became evident in an exchange with Amy (16: Chinese). The passage below picks up from her observation that she sits in-between Chinese and Kiwi cultures, occupying neither fully:

> *Interviewer:* [...]So, how would you be, in what ways would you be not Kiwi or not Chinese in a full sense? How do you know this?
>
> *Amy:* It's like, how I think is [I'm] probably a bit more like a Kiwi but then, my lifestyle is not that much. Also, if I go to China, I find it hard to just communicate straight in Chinese because sometimes I want to say something but I realise I don't know how to say it. And if I, yeah, but then also I look Chinese so I am not fully like Kiwi. Yeah.
>
> *Interviewer:* So, your sense of, this is quite a tricky question, but what would a Kiwi look like?
>
> *Amy:* Like just colour. Yeah.

Looking Chinese, in Amy's words, leaves her 'not fully' Kiwi: while other factors ('lifestye') may have a bearing, this young woman explains that 'colour' is a barrier to taking on a kiwi identity. Entangled with this account are a raft of exclusionary, racialised ideas about what a "real" New Zealander looks like: who belongs, and who does not. Significantly, the position of Māori as tangata whenua, along with British colonisation and its calamitous impacts on Māori, recedes almost entirely from view in "kiwi" discourse.

Racism

Despite the suggestion that 'this generation' is more 'engaged' (Amy, 16: Chinese) with issues of racism that previous generations, non-white rangatahi oriented to racism patterning everyday life as mundane, and part of the routine texture of everyday interactions. International students from Asian countries were told to "go home". Violet noted how racism combined with colourism. While she experienced racism directly herself, she also observed a different form of discrimination directed at those with darker skin:

> when you're darker, like not my type of dark because I'm still kind of tanned-ish [...] the darker you are generally it's like a bit more difficult,

> so it's kind of you're being dirty, like unclean yeah that type of racism, not wanting to hold that persons hand, kind of like that (Violet, 19, Chinese and South East Asian)

Of all participants in the tauiwi cohort, culture-based hatred was described in the most acute and vicious terms by Aya, a visibly Muslim young woman. Central to Aya's talk about her identity is the difficulty of being someone who looks and is culturally 'different':

> I think it's very, yeah it's pretty hard to be honest [...] it's probably just like, the way that I actually look different, like as a clear Muslim woman, and yeah like it's just, I think it's, I don't know how to explain it, but I think it's hard being a person who is different, and I think that affects my wellbeing (Aya, 19: Middle Eastern)

We spoke with Aya in the months after the Christchurch mosque attacks, which had precipitated fresh waves of ferocious racism from strangers, including abuse from a man at a train station:

> he was saying how do you have the nerve to come out in public, he said that to me, and a lot of people on the train station were kind of confused, he was like "how do you have the nerve after all that happened, to show your face and think it's ok to be around all of us?", [...] [some] people were like, they were like "oh my God I'm so sorry you had to go through that" [...] "that is disgusting", and that was really nice, but a lot of people also just stood around and looked at me, like I was like you know, like they just looked at me like, "yeah that's what you get" kind of thing, so it was like a really, yeah it was very, probably one of the most hardest moments in my life up to this day

Our data aligns with other recent evidence showing that entrenched racism is a blight on wellbeing for non-white rangatahi in Aotearoa (Peiris-John et al., 2021; Roy et al., 2021). Action in this area has potential to radically transform young people's everyday lives and futures.

From *Mr Racism*

Gendered policing, transphobia and homophobia

Rangatahi interviewed for this project reported a range of sexualities and genders, reflecting the growing possibilities for this generation of young people in Aotearoa. Even so, the continuing force of entrenched cis-hetero norms was palpable in participants' talk. Those who aligned comfortably with hegemonic gender norms tended to have little to say about gender. Those whose identities and/or appearances placed them outside normative understandings of cisgender described powerful gendered policing. For young men in particular, elements of behaviour that could be read as feminine were picked up on and challenged by others (Gavey et al., 2021). Reuben was the target of bullying at school from an early age. For this young person, the shift to an affirming high school environment left him feeling free to experiment

with masculinity and femininity in a way that has 'come really naturally' without needing to give it a lot of thought:

> [now] I have so many people make comments and be like it's so cool and brave what you are doing and dah, dah, dah. I have never really thought about it, it's like I am male with long hair and I wear crazy makeup to school and like post it on Instagram. I have never, it has just come really naturally and that has been really cool. (Reuben, 16, Pākehā)

While Reuben doesn't orient to his non-normativity as 'brave' in his current context, the fact that he is remarkable – and remarked on by others – aligns with what we heard from other rangatahi: that gender norms continue to structure social expectations in ways that can be stifling, restrictive and punitive. Nic, who identified as gay, described his experiences of pervasive bullying at an all-boys religious school:

> Well I was bullied the entire time I was in school like forever but, like I think I was always kind of I wouldn't say ok with it but I managed it quite well I think and then I think after 12 years of it this eventually builds up to a point where you're like oh shit I don't know if I'm actually still ok with this (Nic, 18: NZ European)

Bullying and ostracism experienced at school could be compounded by intolerance at home. Nic's Dad 'doesn't like it at all', and his Mum 'pretends to be OK with it but she's not'.

Despite first-hand experience of considerable discrimination, many rainbow rangatahi felt that overall, society was moving in a positive direction:

> nowadays, no one is going to accept that shit because we are more aware, but I don't know, just back then it was normal I guess to hate people who were different to you. (Ash, 18, NZ European)

While this observation gives ground for cautious optimism, our conversations with rangatahi point in another direction: towards the continuing intolerance of sexual and gender identities outside the cis-hetero norm, and the strong need for social change in this area (Veale et al., 2019).

Disability and ableism

Many from the tauiwi cohort reported some kind of formal encounter with diagnosing professionals and disclosed a range of disabilities and impairments that were affecting them in their daily lives. These including depression, anxiety, autism spectrum disorder, dyspraxia, ADHD/ADD and head injury. For these rangatahi, experiences with disablement, difference, diagnosis and accommodations had a powerful impact on their sense of self and wellbeing.

Rangatahi with undiagnosed learning disabilities described growing self-blame and exhaustion arising from assessment pressure and a lack of support from teachers. For Zoe (17, English and NZ European), it was 'Not Achieved after Not Achieved after Not Achieved' despite 'putting so much effort into my papers'. Liam described a similar experience of struggle, and reflected that the new accommodations and new identity position opened up through his diagnosis had 'changed my life':

> I was working through primary and intermediate with this learning disability which I had no idea I had, I just always struggled with a few things in school. And I do still now, but because we had the means to get me this learning thing. We got it tested and then I have been able to get help which has also really changed my life. (Liam, 17: NZ European)

With this in mind, Liam worried for others who might not have access to the explanation and support he received:

> I think there are more people that are like me who are just never going to go through [the system] which really sucks because they will be thinking oh well I am doing badly and there is something not quite right but there is nothing I can do about it.

Alongside the benefits and affirming potential of disability-related diagnoses, rangatahi also spoke

about their stigmatising potential in a social context that is structured around ableist assumptions regarding capacity, value and visibility (Calder-Dawe et al., 2019). While Zoe affirmed a disability identity ('it's who I am and it's who I have been my entire life') her whānau felt differently:

> I think it's been hard for me not getting a diagnosis but it's been hard for me with my parents' acceptance of the diagnosis because it is such a big deal to them, [Mum] has bought book upon book she's watching YouTube videos and that's her coping mechanism but it's not mine. So it's just that constant bombardment and my dad's just feeling really guilty all the time

It could also be exhausting trying to access support when symptoms were not taken seriously, and most especially when impairments were not immediately visible to others. Rose's ongoing difficulties with concentration and energy after a head injury were compounded by the burden of having to explain it all the time – and the possibility of being doubted:

> I don't want people to think that I am using it as an excuse and a lot of that is probably how you can't see a head injury and you can't see the effect it is having on someone's life. (Rose, 18: NZ European and European)

Overt, hostile ableism was less commonly described by rangatahi we interviewed, perhaps reflecting the fact that most in this cohort, like Rose above, had impairments that were not readily perceptible to others.

From *My music dreams*

They just thought I was lazy
Zoe, 17: English and Pākehā

In the following pūrākau, Zoe describes the disability prejudice and ignorance she encounters. This pūrākau was chosen by the research roopū, students, and rangatahi because it captures the pervasiveness of ableism and disability prejuduce in young people's lives. This can be intensified in high schooling, where a high premium is placed on being – or at least looking – "normal" and variations in learning styles are treated as laziness or a lack of capability.

Zoe is a 17-year-old young woman of colour with English and Pākehā heritage. At the time we met, Zoe was about to begin her final year at her West Auckland school. Schooling has not been easy for Zoe. In the passage below, Zoe describes the challenges she has faced. She also emphasises the value of teachers and mentors who has her back. While the actions of many of those around her suggest that there is "something wrong" with her, Zoe holds fast to her learning disability as a part of her, challenging those around her to examine their own assumptions about disability, "normality" and value.

> last year it was just horrible, like absolutely horrible – it was Not Achieved after Not Achieved after Not Achieved I'm like, I'm putting so much effort into my papers, why is it not working? I ended up having inattentive ADHD. it was just really difficult that no one had picked up on it, especially with teachers because instead of thinking you know perhaps she is struggling, they just thought I was lazy
>
> I think it's been hard for me not getting a diagnosis but it's been hard for me with my parents' acceptance of the diagnosis because it is such a big deal to them. For me it was fine, because I'm like well you know no matter what it's who I am and it's who I have been my entire life so I don't see how a piece of paper saying that I've got something is going to change that,
>
> Yeah and even with my Nan, she's like oh well you would never know you had it because you look normal. I'm like what's that meant to mean? I'm like thanks, I guess. And she is like, well I wouldn't think there is anything wrong with you because you are normal. I'm like, well there's nothing wrong with me first of all, um just because something says I have a um disorder doesn't mean there is anything actually wrong um and B I don't know how I am meant to process am I meant to be thankful that you think there is nothing wrong with me?
>
> my Health teacher when I tried to explain it to her, she just um, she was like oh you know I never thought you were one of those "hrrrr hrrr" kids. And she was like if you want to listen to music [to help you concentrate] then you have to bring in a medical like note, which is basically impossible. I can't just walk up to the [specialist] and ask for one, I wait months for an appointment.
>
> I'm going to email the ah psychologist I see and be like can you just write me an official note that says I can listen to music to help me concentrate in class purely because I really just want to give her that note, be like "actually, here's a note, get wrecked"

> I like [Zoe's story] coz a lot of the time students were marked as lazy, but that's almost never the case. [...] There's hardly ever a reason as to why a student won't complete work just because they don't want to. There's usually something behind it that people just overlook because it's too much effort.

This comment was shared by a queer, South Asian young person who was part of a small hui focussed on sharing and refining pūrākau.

> It's mainly the interactions with her family that stood out to me [...] it's almost like we're kind of finally seeing it from a younger person's point of view rather than an adult trying to be a younger person. It's kind of like, coz I have ADHD and I internalise a lot of the stuff that she's talking about [...] I just completely understand what's going on.

This comment was shared by a young Pākehā trans man who was part of a small hui focussed on sharing and refining pūrākau.

PHYSICAL HEALTH AND EMBODIMENT

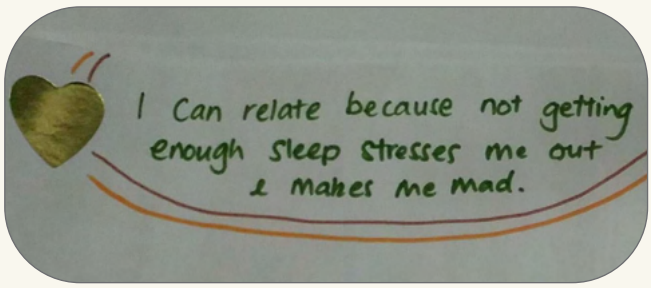
Physical health and a sense of bodily wellbeing were also described as significant influences on rangatahi hauora. On the whole, the rangatahi we spoke to reported good physical health. Some reported disruptions to physical health in the form of discrete periods of illness or injury, such as serious influenza or broken bones; a small number talked about the impact of chronic illnesses, such as asthma, traumatic brain injury, chronic fatigue or a thyroid condition, on their lives.

Beyond these experiences with physical health and illness, rangatahi described how pressures shaped their experiences of embodiment and bodily wellbeing. Almost everyone we spoke to described troubles with sleep as a major constraint on day-to-day wellbeing. Many rangatahi made a connection between their difficulties sleeping and tension, anxiety and racing thoughts. A small number were using sleeping medications at the time of interview to help them avoid a 'vicious cycle' of stress-related and stress-inducing insomnia, as Lizzy explained:

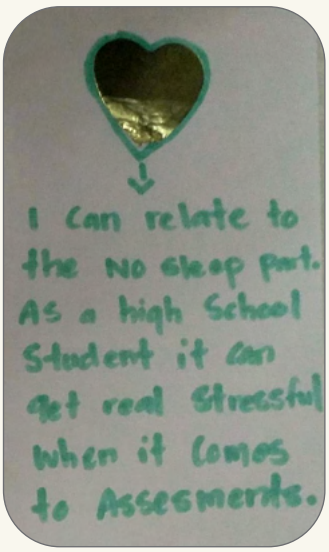
> I have seen a doctor and I did get sleeping pills which then help me to sleep, because I get knocked out so I don't have time to think or have dreams which does help, because even though it isn't a long term solution, it means that right now, when I am really busy, I have more energy to do most of the things that I need to do. And then if I don't get sleep, the anxiety gets worse and because the anxiety gets worse, I can't sleep. It is a vicious cycle that you can get trapped in (Lizzy, 16, NZ European)

Another dimension of social pressure shaping rangatahi's talk about physical wellbeing was a construction of healthy embodiment as grounded in thinness. While thinness was described as a desirable marker of health and attractiveness which could be achieved through eating healthy foods, fatness and body fat were often talked about as fundamentally unhealthy:

> I know that being fat is not good because it would be bad for your health and mum always says that



Wānanga participant's mixed-media reflections on everyday academic pressure and the impacts on sleep. This participant used a gold heart to signal they related to the lack of sleep especially 'when it comes to assessments'.



This participant used a gold heart to signal they related to this pūrākau, noting the negative impacts of not getting enough sleep.

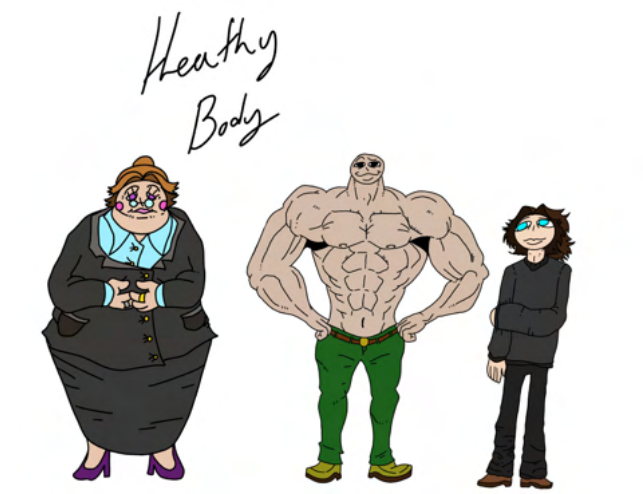
> it is bad to get like diabetes and things like that. If you are fat, you might get high blood pressure and all that. (Amy, 16: Chinese)

Rangatahi, particularly young women, spoke about weight monitoring and calorie restriction as commonplace, fuelled by peer-to-peer comparison and the desire to outshine others, or to at least fit in with them:

> yeah I think you constantly are comparing yourself [physically] to everything and everyone um. So yeah like the whole not eating thing and everything, I probably limit what I eat and I do eat a lot because of how much exercise I am doing. But a lot of the time I limit what I am eating, just because you know you have to kind of fit in, I guess. (Lizzy, 16, NZ European)

Zoe (17: English and NZ European) described following a strikingly similar practice of calorie restriction and exercise, arising from her sense that 'the people around me were all like little and I wasn't'. Reuben (16, Pākehā) described a feeling of positive embodiment arising from weight loss, gym-based exercise and a stepping away from feeling 'fat' and 'constant grossness'.

This thin ideal invites a disruptive relationship with embodiment, where in feeling 'fat' is shorthand for feeling bad. This is significant for rangatahi wellbeing as it contributes to the intersectional harms of weight-based prejudice and stigma. Our findings suggest that the urgent change called for in mainstream understandings of embodiment, thinness and fatness in Aotearoa (see Gillon & Pausé, 2022) would enhance wellbeing for young people.



Sizes, shapes & ages. Note from illustrator: What is a healthy body? I don't know, something that looks like me but not. This was a hard drawing to depict.

MOOD AND EMOTIONS

Elements of mood, thoughts and feelings played a central role in rangatahi talk about hauora. Thoughts and feelings could be a kind of barometer for wellbeing: a good mood could be an overarching indicator of hauora in other domains.

Learning how to manage mood, thoughts and feelings was described as something requiring time and effort, which people 'gradually learn how to do' (Sera, 18, NZ European and South Asian). Some of those we spoke with were engaged in improving mood through formal support and medication. Access to this support depended, of course, on young people's capacity to recognise when they were in a 'bad spot' (Somsak, 16, South East Asian). A deterioration in state of mind could be gradual and hard to perceive. With experience and professional support, Sera described learning to disentangle 'normal sad' (wherein 'you are sad and bawling your eyes out and crying, but you are not being crushed') from 'bad sad', which is 'a lot heavier, and it kind of weighs you down'. The seriousness of a situation or a period of low mood or anxiety was often clearer in retrospect, as evident in Somsak and Ana's accounts below:

> if I looked back now, it is probably a lot more clear that it was a bad spot to be in. But at that time, I probably just ignored it and didn't know what to do so I felt more stress. (Somsak, 16, South East Asian)

> I just thought that I was dumb, until now like I actually reflect, it's like oh that was a reason why I didn't care about life, there was a reason why I didn't want to go to school, or I just didn't listen to the teachers, yeah (Ana, 19: Tongan)

A climate of doubt surrounding what is normal made seeking help challenging, particularly when others were sceptical and unsupportive (see also Gibson, 2022). Nic (18: NZ European) recalled how his distress was dismissed by his father who told him to 'man up'. For Rose, her experience of low mood was hard to voice without what she considered to be an 'identifiable reason' to feel down:

> a lot of people are like that is just silly and why do you feel like that? Like, when nothing kind of, there was no kind of identifiable reason why things were like that (Rose, 18: NZ European and European)

Another barrier to getting help was the idea that rangatahi should be able to manage things independently, without bothering or burdening others. Joseph explained:

> it's like if you're not, if you're not like your friends like if you're not happy and all your friends are happy, you you need to shut that down and you need to act positive and you need to act great or else you will ruin everyone else's day. (Joseph, 18: NZ European and Māori)

As a result, many we interviewed described hiding, ignoring or bottling up negative emotions, to avoid burdening others. Liam agreed that 'heaps of people [...]just shut off and they put on a fake smile'. Liam also noted the downsides of this approach: it took a considerable toll, and was difficult to sustain in the longer term as emotions would eventually 'leak out' or else 'just [...] pop'

> It is like you are holding something corrosive inside of you and you are just melting and if you don't get it out quickly or in a controlled manner, you are going to suffer. I have learnt that the hard way (Liam, 17: NZ European)

From *The masks we wear*

I would usually just suppress those things
Daniel, 16: Filipino

In the following pūrākau, Daniel talks about the things that stop him from talking to counsellors and family members about how he's feeling. This pūrākau was chosen by the research roopū, students, and rangatahi as it captures the complexities and dilemmas many young people face when it comes to seeking help and support through formal channels. It also captures the vulnerability rangatahi feel when confiding in unknown adults – especially in a context where distress may be dismissed as "made up" or downplayed.

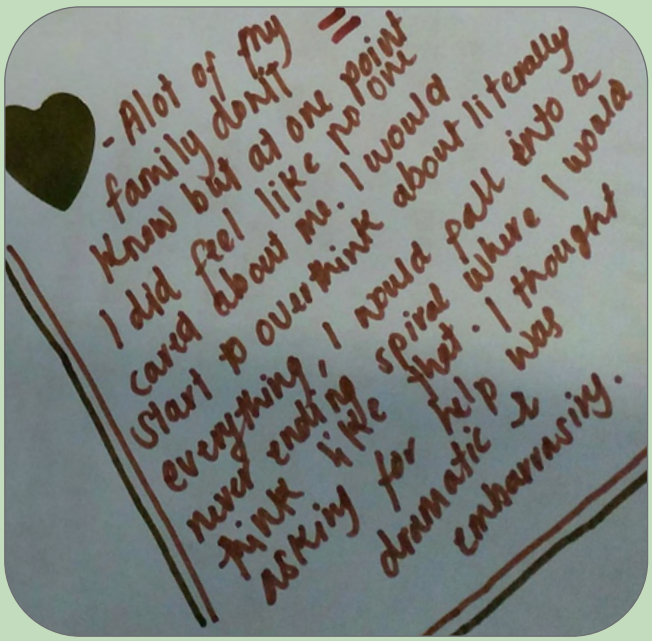
Daniel migrated to Aotearoa as a teenager with his parents and sibling; while there are things he likes about life here, he is lonely. Leaving his friends behind was very painful. In the passage below, Daniel describes the tensions he experiences around seeking mental health support: on one hand, a desire for information (and diagnosis), and on the other, a fear he will be dismissed as 'overreacting' by counsellors and parents:

> I would be terrified of like sharing my own ideas, my own emotions with someone else, so that is really scary. So I would like just back out last minute if I did ever plan to go to see or talk to counsellor.
>
> Sometimes I think maybe I have depression maybe anxiety, maybe insomnia, maybe bipolar, but sometimes I would just think no I don't have any mental illness I am just overacting and stuff like that. Sometimes I would try to do the online mental illness test and when I did a depression test they would tell me I am depressed and then I have ADHD and stuff like that. But I still won't believe them unless I actually get a diagnosis from an actual doctor.
>
> Sometimes I just feel empty so like wrap myself in a blanket, become like very bored and become very non-verbal. So that happens once or twice at school. So I became like non-verbal, I just left school after like the bell rang without talking to my friends, I just walked back directly to my house.
>
> Then I would just be like really silent but sometimes I would have to stop myself if like my dad or my mum would make me do something so they wouldn't see that something is wrong with me. Because I really don't want them first to worry. But the other side sometimes I would think that my dad would usually think I'm not having those kinds of problems. Like usually just like say you already have more experience I didn't feel like those stuff ... I didn't feel those kind of stuff when they were at my age. So sometimes I would think that my dad would say I was over dramatic and stuff like this. So I would usually just suppress those things.

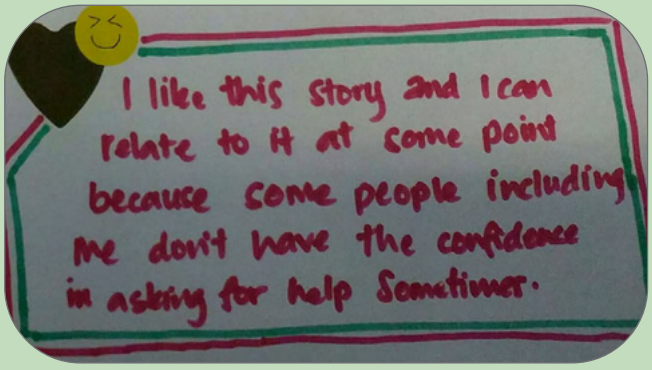
I think this is a very common experience [...] if you're not making it up and it is left untreated and whatever is triggering it continues to trigger it, you will continue to decline till you get to a certain point, like a breaking point, and then it might be finally recognised if you're lucky. So, I think that really speaks to that whole thing. And then also the stigma around it as well because obviously he doesn't want to have to worry anyone or that worry that if he does speak out that he won't be taken seriously.

The first time I ever saw a counsellor [...] it did not go well at all. So, the first time after that I went to counselling was three days ago because I just didn't want to do it again [...] it's kind of off putting when the first time goes badly, and it feels like it sets a precedent for how it's always going to go.

This comment was shared by a gay Pākehā young person who was part of a small hui focussed on sharing and refining pūrākau.



Wānanga participant's mixed-media response to Daniel's story. Here, this young person has selected a gold heart to show their connection with this pūrākau. At a time of great difficult, this rangatahi also 'though asking for help was 'dramatic & embarrassing'.



Here, this young person has selected a gold heart and a yellow sticker with a smiling face to show that they like this pūrākau and resonate with it. They reflect that young people 'including me, don't have the confidence to ask for help sometimes'.

MATERIAL RESOURCES

Money, cashflow and financial security were all features of rangatahi talk about present and future wellbeing. The majority of young people in the tauiwi cohort were living with parents and whānau who were able to reliably provide the necessities of life. When money worries flared, this had serious implications for family wellbeing and for young people themselves. Morgan described the stress and guilt their household experienced as a result of financial hardship:

> [at church] like we could never give tithe, my mum always felt so ashamed, she would every Sunday she would just cry and cry and cry, if she could only give like $2 or nothing, or she had to like, she was so out of money, she would have to ask other people for money, not for tithing but just so that we can get food, you know. (Morgan, 18: NZ European).

Whether brief or long-standing, periods of financial strain could cast a long shadow for rangatahi. Elias's experiences of material hardship before immigrating to Aotearoa have 'definitely had an impact' on him:

> it just taught me that if you don't work you don't have money, if you don't have money you can't have a happy life you are always stressing about money. (Elias, 19: Middle Eastern)

Rising costs of living

Worry around money and their ability to 'stay afloat' (Reuben, 16, Pākehā) in the future was a feature of almost all interviewees' talk. This research took place in Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland), a city renowned for housing unaffordability and a high cost of living more generally. Living here was considered 'very expensive' (Annabelle, 20: NZ European) 'really difficult, especially with the whole house price situation' (Lizzy, 16, NZ European):

> Just a bit worrying yeah, because the most, the one thing I'm most worried about is kind of like financial future, like your stability in terms of money, yeah. (Violet, 19, Chinese and South East Asian)

Responses to the prospect of a precarious financial future were varied. Some simply tried not to think much about the future 'to avoid getting really worried' (Reuben, 16, Pākehā). Others shared plans for weathering financial uncertainties. Bea described her idea to build up a personal 'emergency fund' to meet large, unexpected costs she might face in the future:

> I have read a few of the stories where people have an emergency fund and they manage to get through hardships like a close relative dies and they have to cover those funeral costs. So, from that I have decided that I am going to have my own emergency fund as well. I think it is a very long term goal but of at least $50,000 which is a bit far from where I am now But yeah, I would really like to have one because it would mean that I don't have to worry about anything if something happens because there is money for it to be fixed I guess. (Bea, 17, South East Asian)

From *The masks we wear*

SETTINGS AND SPACES

Home environments

For some participants, family and childhood homes were remembered fondly as significant sites of memories, connection and wellbeing. Reuben (16, Pākehā) described a 'deep spiritual connection' to his family house, which 'means a lot' to him. Aya described her old home as a 'happy place'. She sometimes finds herself driving past to soak up the memories or to take solace:

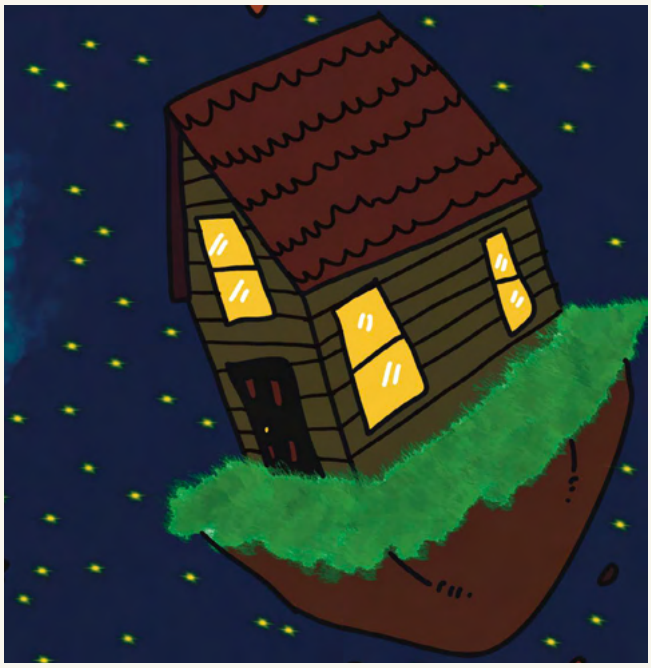
> I go there because I know it's a happy place, I mean I see like, we had this steep hill that we'd like you know, we'd do waterslides on, it was like a really, it's a really, really happy place in my life I'd say definitely, even driving past like unintentionally sometimes with my friends, I'm always like that's my old house, that was my place, that's my like you know, it definitely speaks to me that place, it was probably like yeah, it was a good like 5 years of my life, definitely. (Aya, 19: Middle Eastern)

Connections to home could extend beyond a particular house to a suburb, beach or town, particularly for those who spent some of their childhood outside the city. Thinking of the town where he was born made Milo 'get quite sad...out of happiness':

> [my town] that made me so happy, just like from memories I have from back there, even small things like, yeah but, I don't know how it would have affected me, I think the environment in [my town] made, definitely affected my personality, who I am, I don't know, I guess maybe the city environment, maybe gave me more of the anxiety, sort of side of me. (Milo, 16, European)

Strong and sustaining home-attachments of the kind described above were contingent on both relational and material dimensions of home. For those with difficult or oppressive whānau relationships, home was somewhere to avoid. Others living in precarious and poor-quality rental housing described the impact on their wellbeing and health. Morgan had moved between various rentals with family. After one house was sold, they moved into a rental that was 'super shit, really bad':

> Mould, and the landlords who were, unfortunately playing into the stereotype foreign and didn't care, but they would happily blame us for anything failing with the infrastructure, or mould or anything, even though you know, their building was not necessarily up to standard, it wasn't insulated, there was an HRV but it didn't work, so in the winter you would always have to like wipe mould off with vinegar, and everything and you had to shuffle things around so nothing got too damp (Morgan, 18: NZ European).



From *Te Ao Marama*

Educational spaces

Rangatahi had a range of experiences with educational spaces. Overall, primary school was remembered by many as a place that was 'almost always good' (Oscar, 16: European and Pacific). Many had fond memories of school, particularly primary school, and described warm and supportive relationships with particular teachers. Just as some rangatahi visited old houses, Liam liked to visit his old primary school:

> Primary was a good time and I miss it a lot; I still think about it a lot. Primary is only down the street so when I go for a walk I walk through primary and I'm like – I did this, I did that, I did all this kind of cool stuff there. (Liam, 17: NZ European)

The transition to high school was identified as a time of 'drastic change' (Julie, 17: South East Asian) for many, as academic pressures ramped up considerably. Several identified schools as playing a key role in amplifying academic pressure on young people to define a future pathway and to achieve. Sera described the private, single-sex high school she attended as a 'pressure cooker':

> I left school because school was awful and it wasn't even to do with bullying or anything, it was literally just the schooling system and all the pressure that is placed on you. (Sera, 18, NZ European and South Asian)

For many, performing well at school, and moving into University study was perceived as necessary for future success and happiness:

> you know there's that pressure then as well if they want to go to University, there's especially such a high pressure now to do well [...] you can't just do ok and get in, not anymore at least if you want to be on an international playing field. (Morgan, 18: NZ European).

Older participants were more circumspect, wishing that they had known earlier that exam results didn't determine their futures in the way they had been led to expect:

> One of the deans was like you need to get you know do the best you can you have to do this and I think just kind of the mindset that he gave us was like you need to get the very very highest you can get. And I was like well I don't need the very highest so I just wish I hadn't, you know tried stressed and tried so hard because I didn't need the excellences so, what's the point in over-trying if you don't need it. (Annabelle, 20: NZ European)

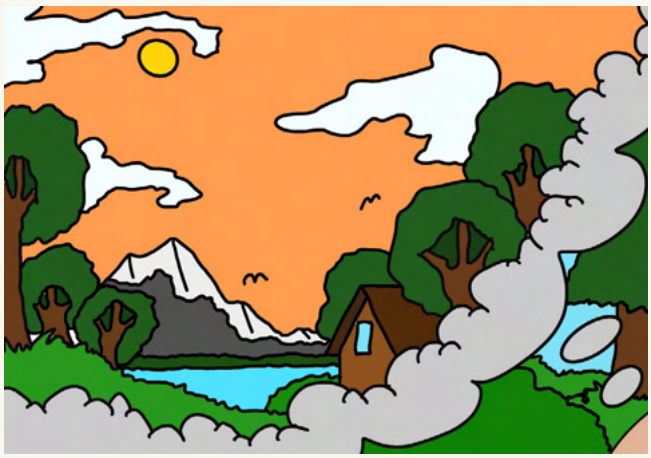
Nature spaces

Being in nature was a profound source of wellbeing for many of the young people we spoke to. Several rangatahi talked about the embodied pleasures of being outside and connecting with the natural world. This could be close to home, as Lizzy explained:

> I sometimes go and lie on the tramp outside, we bought it years and years ago and it has no bounce anymore, but it is nice to lie there and just listen to the sounds around. It is nice to take a break from all of the media and all of the stuff that is happening in life. I really don't get to do it often, but it is nice when I do because it is a real break from everything. (Lizzy, 16, NZ European)

Many detailed the exhilaration and release they experienced from more structured nature-oriented activities such as swimming and sailing. Rose, who had the opportunity to learn to sail as part of a charitable trust, described the 'incredible' feeling of being on the water in high winds:

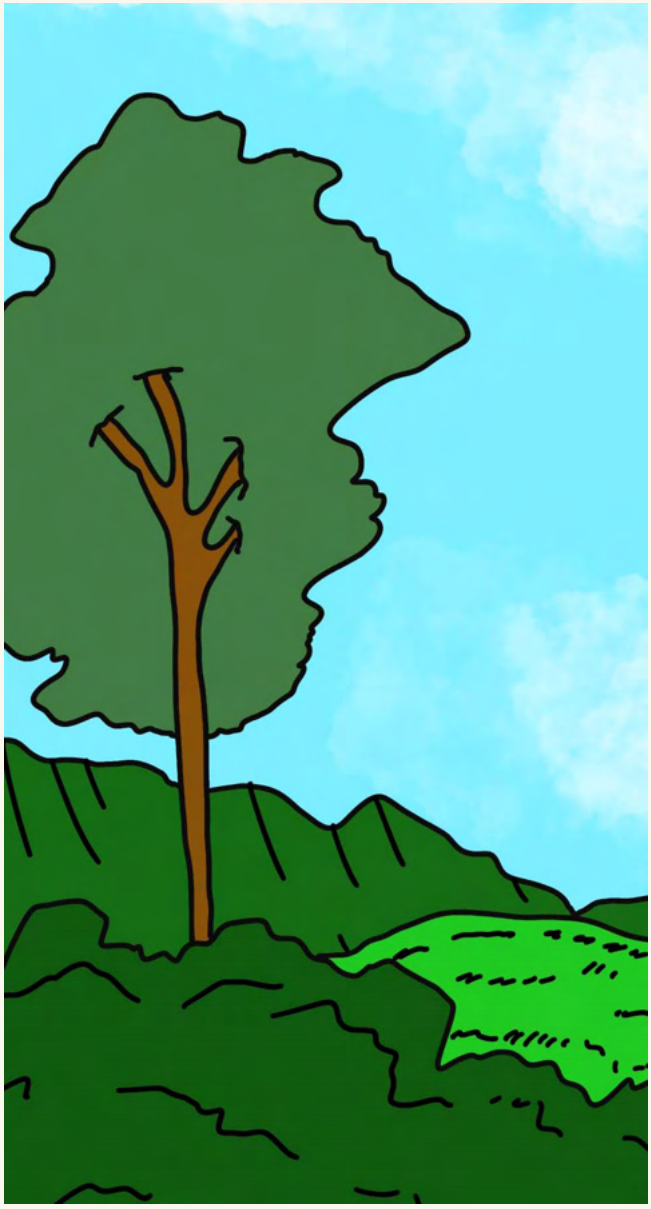
> You get like a real adrenalin rush out of high winds and in order to balance the boat you end up having to lean out of the boat and you have just got your feet in by straps along the boat and you are kind of... I don't know, that is the closest thing I feel like I will ever come to feeling like I am flying' it's incredible. (Rose, 18: NZ European and European)



From *Hinengaro*

Young people's expressions of delight and wonder in the natural world was tempered with an awareness of environmental degradation. Climate change, natural resource depletion and biodiversity loss are key issues that weigh heavily on young people's minds as they look to the future (see also Fleming, Ball, et al., 2020). As our conversation with Connor drew to a close, we asked him if he had any last thoughts he'd like people who read our work to know about:

> let them know that my outlook on the future is not the most positive because yeah there's not enough change happening fast enough for any of the conflicts going on at the moment. [...] put like a stress on the environmental issues because that's kind of what we can effect (Connor, 18: Pākehā)



From *Te Tai Ao*

Concluding thoughts: A call to be seen, heard and sovereign

In this Report, we have presented a multimodal, multifaceted analysis of what matters for rangatahi hauora – young people's wellbeing – in Aotearoa. Above all, rangatahi call to be seen, heard and sovereign. They call to be heard on matters of importance to them; to be respected by the communities that surround them; to be listened to by their loved ones and supporters.

While the concepts of hauora and wellbeing invite a wider perspective, mainstream conversations about what matters for rangatahi too often fall short, slipping back into a dominant register of physical and mental health. In contrast, our analysis thinks big, spanning the complex health and social challenges, milestones, pressures and expectations that contour the lives of those we worked with. In *Hāpai te hauora*, our analysis has spanned diverse experiences to highlight three core dimensions of hauora for rangatahi Māori – the journey to be seen, heard and held in safe spaces through whanaungatanga. In *That's my version of wellbeing*, we presented six core domains of talk that patterns tauiwi young people's reflections on what matters for wellbeing. Based on these analyses, we have formulated a series of key findings:

- Rangatahi wellbeing arises through affirming connections with others around them.
- Rangatahi are skilled relational actors and provide vital support to friends and whānau
- Discrimination and inequity, particularly racism, ableism and homophobia, are the most profound barriers to living a good life for rangatahi in Aotearoa.
- Social pressures and stress are restricting young people's capacity for wellbeing.
- Many rangatahi are managing emotional distress without compassionate and accessible professional support. This needs to change.
- Young people have serious concerns about their future wellbeing in light of unaffordable costs of living and environmental degradation.

Findings from kōrero with rangatahi Māori:

- Wellbeing means hauora, wairua, mauri – an interwoven presence of wayfinding time, space and generations.
- Rangatahi Māori are living in a society that doesn't reflect their own cultural experiences. This needs to change.
- All rangatahi Māori talked about their experiences of injustice, racism, discrimination and invisibility.
- Rangatahi Māori collectively called to be seen, heard, felt and held in safe spaces, relationships and environments.
- Systems (organisations, services, programmes, schools, kura, mahi) need to be culturally safe, reflecting and supporting Te Ao Māori.

Some findings were consistent across the two roopū. Many rangatahi are forming sustaining, joyful connections and supporting their own and others' hauora. This flourishing was often described as arising *in spite of*, rather than through, interactions with formal support people and services. We heard that young people are at the sharp end of everyday racism and discrimination based on culture, gender, sexuality and embodiment. They are feeling huge pressure to succeed and live up to social, cultural and familial expectations while also facing some big messes from previous generations, regarding environment, inequality and the cost of living. Finally, rangatahi also spoke about the many barriers to formal help and support. This includes a felt sense of shame at accessing support as well as scepticism and inaction from those with the power to help.

Rangatahi Māori consider hauora as a relational dynamic ecosystem, considering people in relationship to environments. This means hauora is more than health and wellbeing. This holistic approach to wellbeing is important as logic, measures, resources and evaluative practices and processes must account for this understanding. Wider society is, however, entrenched in western discourses where genuinely holistic approaches struggle to take root. We heard that rangatahi Māori are being pushed into unsafe racist spaces, where risks are taken and good, safe relationships are scarce. If we want to have healthy well, grounded and contributing young people we need to get better at providing safe, supportive, and adaptive environments.

In response to these findings, we have formulated a series of broad recommendations for transformative action:

- Efforts to support youth wellbeing requires a youth-led, intergenerational approach.
- Action on structural determinants of wellbeing – such as discrimination and material hardship – will produce substantial wellbeing gains for rangatahi and communities.
- Infusing wellbeing discourse and policy with a language of equity and dignity may help shift attention away from psychological and individualised dimensions of wellbeing towards structural concerns.
- Systemic and sustainable investment in rangatahi Māori – kaupapa Māori collectives and systems is needed.
- All youth wellbeing investment, resources, funding models and measurement must be reviewed by kaupapa Māori evalautive processes and practices.

To conclude our Report, we flesh out these recommendations with some more fine-grained action points to help communities, service providers, researchers and policymakers bring these recommendations to life. We also provide some final reflections on transformative process and transformative language. These reflections, like our broader analysis, arise from our conversation with rangatahi.

1. PATHWAYS TO SOVEREIGNTY

We want rangatahi hauora to thrive and this means *systems transformation* and *powershifting*. First, mātauranga Māori must be valued as a knowledge system and must demonstrably influence decision-making. In practice, this means organisations, service providers and researchers need to:

- Access, grow and build Māori scholarship and expertise to support, understand and enhance rangatahi Māori initiatives, services and systems.
- Recognise that systemic racism is a key determinant of health outcomes for rangatahi Māori

Second, we need a greater focus on making our insitutions, services and organisations directly accountable to young people. In practice, this means organisations, service providers and researchers need to:

- Ensure rangatahi are involved in key decision-making points that impact them.
- Ensure this involvement begins early: rangatahi should be involved in co-design, co-management and/or leadership roles.
- Prioritise research and analysis that generate insights to improve hauora for rangatahi and rangatahi Māori.

Third, finding pathways to sovereignty for rangatahi Māori requires mana motuhake o ngā raraunga Māori – Māori data sovereignty. All work addressing hauora and wellbeing must understand and enact principles of Māori data sovereignty in relation to the collection, use and dissemination of data and information. In practice, this means organisations, service providers and researchers need to:

- Collect ethnicity data accurately and consistently.
- Ensure that, where held, ethnicity data is used to assess and improve progress towards rangatahi Māori health equity.
- Seek out and use empirical tools explicitly designed for, with, and by Māori to inform and improve existing practice. This includes using Māori models in monitoring and evaluating progress.
- Employ by, with, and for Māori approaches to understanding and communicating Māori perspectives.
- Consider the wider context of underlying health determinants and the continuing impact of colonisation on rangatahi Māori health outcomes.

2. PRIORITISING WHANAUNGATANGA AND DEEP LISTENING

As we work towards making meaningful change for rangatahi, whānau and communities, whanaungatanga and deep listening are paramount. Many of those we spoke to were critical of superficial efforts to engage them. Rather than "giv[ing] them an apple" (Rose, 18, NZ European and European) and sending them on their way, young people asked for adults to take the time to connect and listen deeply. Unsurprisingly, the rangatahi we spoke to were often repelled by quick fixes, one-off counselling sessions and people who offered them solutions before hearing the problem out.

> Talk to them first about the issues go through it for a long time and get down all the issues first and then start planning from there cause it can like for especially for counsellors at schools they like to give you solutions straight away instead of listening to the issues at hand (Joseph, 18: NZ European and Māori)

With a strong focus on connection and listening beyond the surface, formal support provision has potential to make a real difference for rangatahi. Without this focus, increased investment in this area may not yield the transformation that is needed.

On a broader level, attention to whakawhanaungatanga means supporting the relationality of all things. We uphold whanaungatanga by recognising the sanctity and interconnectedness of hauora to mātauranga Māori, whenua, wairuatanga and mauri. In practice, this means organisations, service providers and researchers need to:

- Support the development and maintenance of respectful and mutually beneficial relationships with rangatahi and rangatahi Māori, whānau, hapori, hapū, iwi and community.
- Honour and support the development of mātauranga Māori within systems and operations.
- Work with and for rangatahi Māori in culturally accountable ways that value and support the expression of mātauranga Māori.

3. WIDENING THE LENS TO EQUITY AND DIGNITY

Across our conversations with rangatahi, it was clear that discrimination is the fundamental constraint on young people's hauora and their ability to live well in Aotearoa. All rangatahi Māori described experiencing injustice, racism and discrimination. The majority of non-white tauiwi young people also reported racism and hostile stereotyping. A substantial number of young people across both roopū reported homophobic and cisnormative policing. Many narratives of hardship and distress can be traced back to structural violence.

> people who are suffering with this kind of stuff, it's so hard to see that none of it's taken seriously, it's so hard to say that I was a person who suffered with [racist harassment and bullying] not even long ago like what 2 years ago, it's so hard to sit here and be like, I went to a teacher and they didn't help me, they didn't give a crap (Aya, 19: Middle Eastern)

It is clear that taking strong action to reduce young people's exposure to structural violence will enhance hauora and wellbeing for all. To support these efforts, we suggest a shift in English language terminology, from youth wellbeing to youth wellbeing, equity and dignity. An insistence on naming and recognising the importance of equity and dignity to young people's flourishing will help to keep these issues at the forefront of the wellbeing agenda. In addition, to combat entrenched racism and work towards equity and dignity for all, organisations, service providers and researchers need to:

- Identify and address systemic racism across scales. This will involving personal reflection, critical consciousness-raising and whole-system audits of practice
- Reject framings of ethnicity as a "risk factor".

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