

Ngā Haerenga | Transition Journeys Phase Three

**Voices of rangatahi in their second year following
their move from statutory care to self-determined
living**

September 2023

The Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre works to build the evidence base that helps us better understand wellbeing and what works to improve outcomes for New Zealand's children, young people and their whānau.



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E te tī, E te tā,
Hoki mai te wairua o ā tātou tīpuna o nehe rā
Nā runga i te mea nā rātou te ara i whakatakoto hei hikoi mā tātou ngā uri
Tangihia mai ki ngā tini aitua kua haere ki tua o te tirohanga tangata
Huri noa ki ngā ringa kaha kua horahia o ā rātou ake awahi ki te marea whānui
Tihei Mauriora

Nei rā te mihi maioha ki ngā taonga kōrero kua whārikihia i roto i ngā whārangi o te rīpoata nei. Ka mihi ka tika ki te hunga rangatahi kua tākoha mai ā rātou kōrero me ā rātou wheako mā ngā ara wero me ngā ara hou, rerekē rānei. Kei roto rā anō ko ngā hua maha kia mōhio ai tātou me pēhea te huarahi pai ake kia tautoko ai i te whanaketanga o te hunga rangatahi.

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We appreciate and acknowledge the Ngā Haerenga Advisory Group for their leadership in providing a solid research foundation, various inspirational insights and supporting and guiding the developments that facilitated the success of this research.

Our Ngā Haerenga research team are honoured to have been involved in this project. Without a doubt the passion and drive from the outset has ensured that this project has remained focused. This is an extensive report with very valuable insights which we hope will assist services providing support to rangatahi to enable them more successful transitions from care to independent living.

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, kia ora mai tātou katoa.

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Executive summary

Introduction

The *Ngā Haerenga / Transition Journeys* (Ngā Haerenga)¹ research project is a primarily qualitative, longitudinal study commissioned by Oranga Tamariki in 2019. Its focus is on increasing understanding of the **journeys** and **lived experience** of rangatahi and aims to share their voices as they move from statutory care to self-determined living. Research was undertaken over three years by a research collaboration made up of three external regional teams working in partnership with the Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre.

This report examines key findings from across the three years and in particular, the third and final year which explores the experiences of rangatahi at 18 to 24 months after they left the care or custody of Oranga Tamariki and transitioned into independent living, in some cases supported by the Transition Support Service (TSS)².

The two primary purposes for the Ngā Haerenga research project are:

1. To hear rangatahi voices and to explore and document rangatahi experiences and journeys out of statutory care and/or custody into self-determined adulthood.
2. To build our understanding of:
 - a) rangatahi thinking as they prepare to leave care, including their aspirations, intentions, and perceived needs;
 - b) the trajectories following exit, including experiences, successes and challenges, as well as outcomes across key TSS domains and
 - c) constraining and enabling factors, which contribute to successful outcomes up to 18 to 24 months after leaving care.

Methodology

Two overarching research methodologies have been used in this project – Kaupapa Māori and Longitudinal Qualitative Research. Further, rangatahi case studies (n=9) are used in the different sections of the report to give voice to and illustrate experiences, contributing factors and outcomes for pertinent transition journeys, each of which span the three years of the study. Finally, a Likert scale was used in interviews to ask rangatahi to indicate how well their journey was going overall, since leaving care (see below). Two analytical frameworks are utilised in the study, providing a basis for data collection, validation of key findings, robust analysis and reporting structure. The first framework included six priority focus areas based on Oranga Tamariki identified TSS key outcome areas. These were:

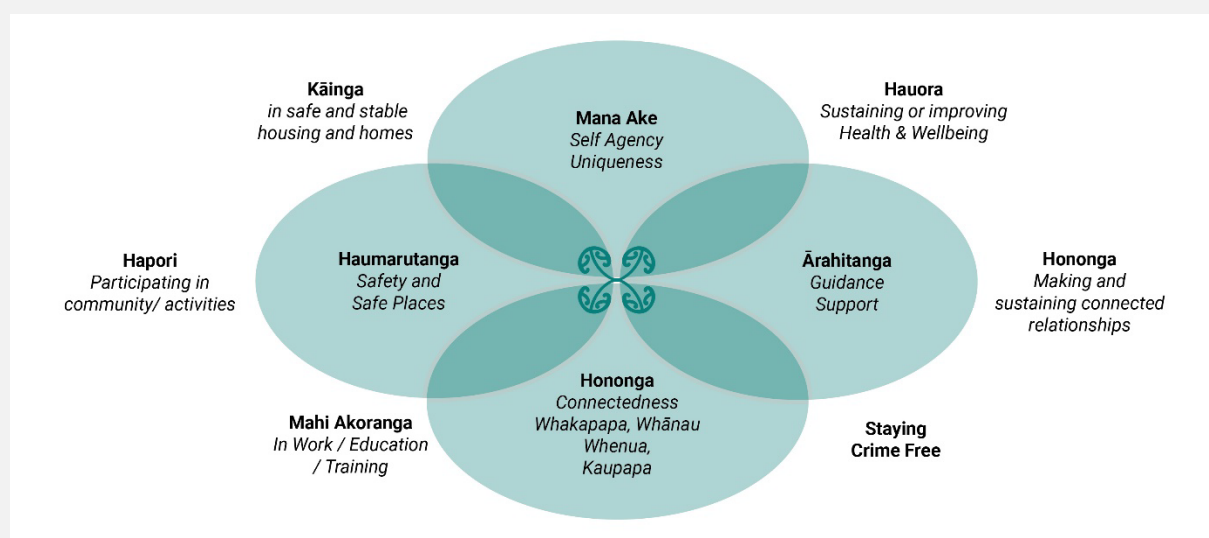
¹ The name for this project was collectively developed as a working title by the research rōpū over a series of planning hui. It was chosen as it encapsulated the project's focus on rangatahi and their experiences of journeying from statutory care to more self-determined living and reflected the bicultural approach to this research. The bilingual working title suggested by the research rōpū was enthusiastically supported and adopted by the Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre and the project advisory group.

² The Oranga Tamariki Transition Support Service was established in 2019 to support rangatahi in the transition cohort (aged 15-17 years) to plan and prepare for leaving care and to provide advice and assistance up to age 25. More information on the TSS can be found here: [Transition Support Service for rangatahi | Oranga Tamariki — Ministry for Children](#)

- kāinga (home or living situation)
- mahi/akoranga (employment, education or training)
- hauora (improving or maintaining health and wellbeing)
- ngā hononga (relationships and connections – with all things including families/whānau/hapū/iwi and with te ao Māori, identity and belonging where appropriate)
- hāpori (involvement in community/cultural activities), and
- where applicable, whether young people had stopped reoffending or were living crime-free.³

The second was the Ngā Āhūatanga framework which emerged while researchers were making sense of the findings of rangatahi journeys. This kaupapa Māori framework was developed and applied as an analytical framework in year 2, then validated and applied to data collection, analysis and reporting on findings in year 3. From the rangatahi validation and researchers' analyses, four āhūatanga conceptual themes stood out as being relevant in assisting rangatahi to express their multi-faceted, often overlapping experiences and journeys across the six focus areas. These were: hononga (connectedness), haumarutanga (safety/safe places), mana ake (self-agency/unique identities) and ārahitanga (guidance). They are shown in the figure below:

Research focus areas and ngā Āhūatanga o Ngā Haerenga



Source: Ngā Haerenga Māori researchers. Diagram developed by Louise Were.

Year three fieldwork and analysis

Forty-four rangatahi participated in year 1 of the study. The three research teams maintained connection and conducted the regionally developed, semi-structured interviews with rangatahi in each of the three years.

Twenty-four of the original year 1 rangatahi cohort took part in the year 3 interview (55% retention rate), the majority of whom were interviewed alone, however some chose to have trusted people support them in the interview. As in Year 1, over half of the rangatahi that

³ The six key outcome areas were identified as priority focus areas for the study by the Ngā Haerenga Advisory Group at the outset of the project in 2020. They reflect outcome areas of interest for the newly established Transition Support Service being delivered by Oranga Tamariki in partnership with community and iwi organisations across Aotearoa since July 2019.

participated in the year 3 interview identified as Māori. Males however (n=15) were more likely to remain in the study at year 3 than females (n= 9).

Summaries were produced after the interviews by each of the regional rōpū and were shared at a third and final sense-making hui supporting collective analysis by the collaborating research team. At this hui key themes, explanatory concepts and potential rangatahi case studies were collectively identified using the analytical frameworks.

Ngā Haerenga | Transition Journeys Year 3 report reflects the 24 participating rangatahi perspectives, experiences and journeys of transitioning out of care into independent living and is written to highlight the rangatahi voice⁴ through stories that were shared with researchers.

Findings

Self-ratings on how things are going since leaving care (Likert scale)

In years 2 and 3 of the study, a Likert scale where rangatahi were asked to rate how well they felt things were going ‘overall’ since leaving care was used to supplement the qualitative findings. In year 3 twenty of the 24 rangatahi interviewed responded to the closed-ended question with the majority feeling that “things are definitely going OK” for them since leaving care. This can be seen in the table below:

Table 1: Year 3 responses to the question “Overall, since leaving care, do you feel things are going OK?”

Scale response	Number of rangatahi (n)	Proportion of responses (%)
1 - No, things are not at all going OK	0	0%
2 - No, things are not really going OK	2	10%
3 - Yes, I think things are going OK	7	35%
4 - Yes, things are definitely going OK	11	55%
5 - I don't know	0	0%
TOTAL	20	100%

Key findings in each of the six focus area sections.

The following summary provides an overview of the key findings of each of the six focus areas of the Ngā Haerenga |Transition Journeys. The findings are also aligned with the Ngā Āhuatanga framework, with enablers and barriers identified for these areas. These can be seen in the tables below.⁵

1. Kāinga/Home or living situation

At 18 to 24 months after leaving care, most rangatahi were comfortable and living in safe and stable kāinga environments. These were typically with previous caregivers, partners, with biological or extended whānau, and/or in secure rentals. Others were flatting, living with

⁴ Note: References to whānau/family are based on rangatahi view and context of their relationships and often do not distinguish between biological and ‘chosen whānau’.

⁵ Rangatahi voices, including quotes and anecdotes, can be found in the corresponding sections in the main body of the report.

their own children or boarding, while rangatahi living with disabilities were often with supportive foster parents or residing in supported living situations.

Some rangatahi were wanting to move on from their current situation (e.g., due to conflict with flatmates or neighbours) and a few were effectively homeless and/or living in potentially unsafe spaces including emergency accommodation and adult correctional facilities. Looking ahead to what they wanted for themselves and others like them, many rangatahi wanted better, more tailored advice and support for understanding entitlements, navigating the housing system, and easier access to potential sources of financial support when needed.

Key enablers and constraints for safe and stable kāinga journeys

	Hononga	Haumarutanga	Mana Ake	Ārahitanga	Other factors
Enablers	Living with trusted people who provide safe/stable kāinga; Assistance to connect and find stable kāinga from trusted people – i.e.: whānau, friends, former carers/foster parents, partners (and their whānau), services ⁶ .	Safe living environments; for rangatahi with disabilities – supported living situations where individual needs were recognised and catered for, Caregiver access to respite care.	Courage, determination and proactiveness to find homes independently; Budgeting skills; self-discipline to stay and willingness to leave if not the right fit; Good relationship management.	Advice and support from whānau, support services and community groups to navigate housing / accommodation system.	Sufficient income and/or people to share costs with; Co-ordinated service support and knowledge of entitlements and how to access these; Dedication from some supported living providers.
Constraints	Lacking healthy, supportive relationships with whānau and friends, and/or a reluctance to ask for support from them to access safe and stable kāinga options.	Lack of availability and accessibility of safe, suitable accommodation; Housing provider discrimination; Unfair entitlement rules / criteria creating inaccessibility (e.g., MSD/W&I).	Unawareness of how to navigate housing and financial support services or advocate for themselves; Interpersonal conflict and limited relationship skills.	Limited/inconsistent/ inaccurate support and advice or negative perceptions/ experiences of services from providers/services (e.g., OT/TSS kaimahi).	Financial constraints – high costs with too low income (e.g., from under-employment); Lack of rental history especially in competitive housing market.

2. Mahi/akoranga (employment, education or training)

At 18 to 24 months after leaving care, most rangatahi were in some form of mahi (work) – be it full time, part time or in a voluntary capacity – or in akoranga (training/education), and in some cases doing both. Often rangatahi were in entry level work in manufacturing, retail and hospitality, although some had recently progressed or moved sideways. Labouring work was especially common for former YJ rangatahi who were working. Some rangatahi were seeking more hours of work or were dissatisfied with their current roles and looking for a career change. A quarter were not in work or education at all, with the main income of several rangatahi coming from the Job Seeker, caregiving or disability related benefit.

Looking ahead, quite a few rangatahi wanted to find work, secure more reliable work, increase hours or improve or change their existing jobs. Others wanted to begin or continue participation in education and training opportunities to expand their work prospects or

⁶ 'Services' or 'support services' in the context of these tables encompasses all agencies and providers working with rangatahi including but not limited to TSS, Oranga Tamariki, Work & Income, community and iwi providers.

wanted to start their own business. Rangatahi wanted more practical, tailored guidance and career support, and more responsive, active job-seeking help (including from WINZ, Oranga Tamariki and TSS) for themselves and others like them. Rangatahi with disability-related needs wanted to continue accessing wraparound bespoke support while those in prison wanted better access to development opportunities. More culturally tailored support was desired by some.

Key enablers and constraints for successful mahi/akoranga journeys

	Hononga	Haumarutanga	Mana Ake	Ārahitanga	Other factors
Enablers	Whānau, friends & peer connections to work; Whānau support for job seeking; Connections through work and support services to upskill; Sense of contribution to whānau.	Wrap around disability support; Safe & supportive working/learning environments (including culturally).	Vision of pathway/goals; Motivation, perseverance, and self-discipline to find and sustain job/education opportunities or change career choice; Sense of pride from working; Strong work ethic; Work builds confidence, happiness.	Career planning and navigation support from mentors and support services (including TSS).	Gaining a driver's licence; Access to transport to obtain & get to work/study; Accessible financial supports for study & work.
Constraints	Lack of supportive whānau & friend networks; Difficulty managing and navigating relationships	Workplace conflicts/ bullies; Limited opportunities in prison; Prohibitive entitlement rules (e.g., student allowance, abatement rates, remand courses).	Low motivation and confidence; Confusion about next steps; Being triggered and managing stressful work relationships; Disability constraints (e.g., ADHD) and impacts of drug use.	Limited career guidance/pathway planning and support for navigating system (e.g., TSS financial assistance, job search support); Prohibitive entitlement rules (e.g., student allowance, abatement rates).	Financial constraints to seeking, applying for and securing work; Limited job opportunities; Conflicting responsibilities, (e.g., needing to look after whānau).

3. Hauora (Health and Wellbeing)

Many rangatahi continued to suffer from a wide range of mental health, disability and substance abuse conditions and issues (e.g., post-traumatic stress, anxiety and depression, autism and ADHD, alcohol and other drug use). While these conditions ranged in severity, several rangatahi specifically referenced experiencing trauma from their time in care, and some, but not all, were accessing therapeutic supports that, to varying degrees, helped them to manage their hauora and participate as best they could. A number of rangatahi were mindful of looking after their health and wellbeing and were engaging in regular physical exercise, and valuing nutritious kai (food).

Looking ahead, rangatahi wanted to sustain or return to sport/physical activities, be drug free, and receive therapeutic services. For themselves and others like them, they wanted better advice and support from support services in accessing hauora activities, navigating the health system; easier, more affordable access to mental health and substance abuse services and more responsive staff in those services.

Key enablers and constraints for positive hauora journeys

	Hononga	Haumarutanga	Mana Ake	Ārahitanga	Other factors
Enablers	Good, trustworthy, supportive relationships with whānau, partners, friends & service kaimahi; Relatable, effective therapeutic & medical services.	Warm, safe, inclusive, professional settings, community spaces and teams; Whānau & other support to exercise & eat well.	Vision, self-drive, and perseverance helped rangatahi find & access services, stick with treatment & persist with healthy choices; Self-awareness, smart-living and taking responsibility for own care.	Whānau role modelling; Medical/therapeutic professionals' understanding, advice and lived experience.	Financial support for therapeutic services from Oranga Tamariki and TSS.
Constraint	Low trust in and being misunderstood from support workers & health professionals; Limited whānau or friends to support participation.	Difficulty navigating the system and accessing useful therapeutic services (\$, waiting lists, not listening, therapists terminating services early). Unwelcoming or unsafe spaces (e.g., housing or hauora environments).	Shyness and ongoing mental health issues (e.g., anxiety) stop rangatahi asking for support, accessing health professionals & activities or maintaining hauora.	Lack of, or inconsistent information, advice & support from TSS & OT kaimahi with no follow through.	Little \$ for therapeutic or medical treatment and healthy kai; Other commitments (e.g., work) so no time for sports / healthy activities.

4. Hononga – Connected relationships

At 18 to 24 months since leaving care most rangatahi described having positive relationships and connections in their lives that enhanced wellbeing and provided rangatahi with practical and other support such as emotional, cultural and social. Over this time, some rangatahi had established new or re-built relationships with previously estranged parents, siblings and wider whānau and also with caregivers, friends, and sports coaches. Some rangatahi continued to be relatively isolated and to have non-existent, strained or unsupportive relationships with their whānau or peers.

Several rangatahi Māori were exploring further and developing their connections in te ao Māori, while some were not interested in exploring their 'Māori side'. Looking ahead, some rangatahi wanted better support to build and sustain connections (e.g., transport or responsive services helping them to connect). Others wanted access to counselling to help improve or better manage challenging interpersonal relationships and whānau dynamics.

Key enablers and constraints for developing hononga

	Hononga	Haumarutanga	Mana Ake	Ārahitanga	Other factors
Enablers	Strong connections or reconnections with whānau (including caregivers, partners & becoming a parent); Social connections; Te ao Māori interests/connections.	Having safe relationships and environments (e.g., where disputes / differences do not undermine relationships).	Developing maturity and confidence in managing conflict & negative relationships; Setting boundaries; Wanting to connect with others & persevering; Wanting to be a good parent/ role model.	Oranga Tamariki cultural assessments; Support service kaimahi & caregivers build meaningful relationships; service providers connect meaningfully & give good advice and support.	Access to relationship counselling; service providers' help to connect with whānau and others; Transportation options (e.g., driver licence).
Constraints	Disconnection (including enforced) – whānau or whakapapa not being known, whānau being unsafe or unwelcoming, current or previous Care & Protection orders; Institutional and practical barriers to seeing whānau, e.g., phones, not able to connect with siblings in care of others.	Unsafe homes inhibit positive relationships; Unstable homes disrupt connections; Prisons limit positive relationships & parents' ability to keep whānau safe.	Interpersonal conflict dispositions, anxiety, low trust, detachment (often trauma related) and disability; Deciding to end negative relationships.	Nil, inconsistent or poor TW ⁷ support; Low trust in TW/SWs & reluctance to ask for help; Lack of healthy role models, mentors & relationship guidance/mental health supports.	Geographical distances, with limited \$ or health & limited options to travel across regions or cities.

5. Hapori – Participating in the community

While not necessarily a priority, many, but not all, rangatahi were engaged in and enjoying hobbies and community and cultural activities at 18 to 24 months. Activities participated in were diverse, ranging from an array of sports, online communities, marae-based learning and dance classes through to volunteering and helping out in community spaces and events. Several rangatahi were not participating in community activities with some rangatahi having to prioritise new adult responsibilities over hapori activities. Overall, rangatahi were keen to continue with, re-join or join new or more hobbies and social activities going forward, but some needed financial support to do so and/or more active encouragement and assistance to identify the right opportunities and to engage.

⁷ TSS transition workers (TW), social workers (SW).

Key enablers and constraints for engaging hapori journeys

	Hononga	Haumarutanga	Mana Ake	Ārahitanga	Other factors
Enablers	Connections with culture, whakapapa, whānau, friends & workmates gives sense of community and helps identify and connect to opportunities for hapori participation.	Feeling safe and welcome in the space (e.g., activities, teams); Supported living & active support important for those with disabilities to engage.	Resilience, confidence, agency; Awareness of opportunities; Self-drive & courage to get out there, make it happen; Sense of contributing and 'giving back' to community / whānau.	Services identifying opportunities, providing encouragement / active support and facilitating connection to hapori; Bespoke planning for disabilities.	Financial support from organisations & whānau.
Constraints	Lack of connections / isolation inhibits awareness, opportunities and encouragement; Some whānau actively discourage participation.	Negative, unsafe experiences or people associations can lead to place/group avoidance; Sports can be more 'aggro' at adult level.	Shyness and wariness to put self out there (often related to past trauma); Low awareness of opportunities.	No people connections to activity/networks of interest; Inadequate encouragement or practical support.	Being an 'adult' with limited time, money and energy; Inadequate resources; Accessibility.

6. Staying crime free

Of the six rangatahi in a YJ residence in year 1, three were in an adult prison at the time of the year 3 interview and three were working and successfully “staying out of trouble” in the community. Of the three now in prison, one had transferred directly to adult prison and two, following their exit from residence, had re-offended. These rangatahi in prison valued visits and phone contact from whānau, wanted someone to advocate for them in the system, wanted to participate in training and rehabilitation while inside, and wanted to be able to prepare for their exit. Those in the community wanted to work, earn their own money and keep out of trouble.

Key enablers and constraints for staying crime free

	Hononga	Haumarutanga	Mana Ake	Ārahitanga	Other factors
Enablers	Practical (e.g., mahi) and motivational support from whānau, especially parents, grandparents & girlfriends; Wanting to prove themselves & be there for whānau; Cultural connections; Positive TW & SW connections & supports.	Living with whānau, & engaging with te ao Māori; Familiarity & routine of prison can provide sense of security.	Maturity, motivation and making deliberate, positive life choices e.g., to access rehabilitation, avoid drugs & risky people, focus on work, parenting & keeping busy; Managing expectations.	TSS/support service planning & support during & after sentence (e.g., kāinga, health, job search support); Probation officer support.	Employment and earning a wage, Facilitation of effective counselling & rehabilitation programmes; Having spiritual 'faith' gives hope & resilience.
Constraints	Cutting ties with risky people/ places can be socially isolating; Prison environment isolates rangatahi from whānau support / motivation.	Emergency housing & prison can feel unsafe. Limited access to rehabilitation & courses in prison / on remand; Prison environment (e.g., fights).	Ongoing addiction, and possible untreated mental health and disability issues; Falling in with 'wrong crowd'; Lacking certainty about release date reduces motivation to access support & make positive choices.	Poor transition planning; Limited support from TSS and other support service kaimahi once in community. Poor representation, advocacy and advice.	Systemic issues; Unfair legal and other processes; No driver's licence & limited mobility.

Conclusions

This Ngā Haerenga | Transition Journeys longitudinal research study has successfully applied and integrated kaupapa Māori data gathering and sense-making methods (including the Ngā Haerenga Āhukatanga framework) to improve understandings of rangatahi journeys from care into independence. At 18 to 24 months after leaving care, 24 rangatahi transition experiences and journeys have been heard and a range of complex, diverse stories and medium-term outcomes were observed and reflected upon

Key high-level observations include:

- In year 3 the Likert scale results to the question “Overall, since leaving care, do you feel things are going OK?” were generally positive and showed an upward trend over time for most rangatahi.
- The prominence of hononga (in all its forms) as a strong enabler of the six focus areas is evident, particularly with whānau and friends as well as kaimahi. Rangatahi often referred to the benefits of meaningful relationships and connections throughout all focus areas and in relation to support service kaimahi. The lack of hononga with supportive people sometimes constrained and limited successful rangatahi transitions. Where this was the case, rangatahi were often relying on their own strength and determination to advocate for themselves, stepping out to their own safe and stable living situations, and/or being self-reliant through maintaining employment/work.
- The variable nature of the support, contact and understanding from Oranga Tamariki and TSS workers was frequently highlighted. While it was present

and useful for some rangatahi, for others it had been non-existent or unreliable from year 1 or had become less so over time. Having service providers or kaimahi that were responsive, timely, consistent in their approach, provided meaningful contacts and enabled rangatahi with knowledge and supports, made a positive difference in rangatahi journeys.

- The importance of having safe, stable environments ā-tinana, ā-hinengaro, ā-wairua (physically, mentally and emotionally) was particularly relevant for rangatahi in regards to kāinga, however was an evident enabler for many of the focus areas, the lack of which could create vulnerabilities in other areas.

The Ngā Haerenga Āhutatanga framework has emerged as a very helpful tool in understanding and explaining the diversity, complexity and multifaceted nature of rangatahi transition journeys. The framework could also be usefully applied in other areas and by other agencies and organisations who support rangatahi, and with whom Oranga Tamariki works.

Ngā Haerenga |Transition Journeys project and its findings strongly affirmed the benefit for all the rangatahi transitioning out of care of the importance of individualised, wraparound, consistent and connected transition services. Rangatahi participants who lived with disability as a significant part of their lives seemed to be benefitting from such tailored services. A key valuable action of the TSS going forward could be to ensure connected, wraparound support continues for all rangatahi transitioning from care. Oranga Tamariki could endeavour to ensure its TSS and other relevant agencies and partners' kaimahi are consistently connected with and present for rangatahi. Further, it could facilitate more consistent collaboration between relevant agencies and services to better provide access and tailored support for rangatahi throughout their transition from care to independence.

Introduction

Background

In July 2019 Oranga Tamariki began delivering the newly developed Transition Support Service (TSS). The aim of the TSS is to better prepare rangatahi / young people aged 15 to 17 years who have been in state care for three months or more for their transition to a more independent adulthood⁸, and to support these rangatahi while transitioning, up to the age of 25 years.⁹

*Ngā Haerenga / Transition Journeys*¹⁰ (Ngā Haerenga) is a three-year longitudinal study commissioned in 2019 by Oranga Tamariki–Ministry for Children and undertaken by three regionally-based teams of researchers working in partnership with the Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre. It sits alongside a TSS evaluation but is not an evaluation study. Its focus is on increasing understanding of the **journeys** and **lived experience** of rangatahi and further aims to share their voices as they move from statutory care to self-determined living.

This report provides key findings from the last stage (year 3) of the study – with a focus on understanding where rangatahi are at and exploring their medium-term outcomes at 18 to 24 months in their journey out of care. Year 1 of the study interviewed these same rangatahi 1-6 months prior to leaving care and focussed on these young people’s goals, plans and anticipated journeys. Year 2 of the study focussed on short term experiences and outcomes at 6-12 months after leaving care. As with previous reports this report seeks to highlight the perspectives of rangatahi (in some cases supplemented by their whānau and caregivers who participated in interviews)¹¹.

Each year around 600 rangatahi aged 15 to 17 years, who have been in Oranga Tamariki statutory care arrangements for at least three months, will leave (or age out of¹²) ‘care’. This figure includes around 150 rangatahi who leave Youth Justice custody.¹³

⁸ Independent from Oranga Tamariki care and custody, but interdependent with communities and other social services, including the Transition Support Service.

⁹ Oranga Tamariki Transition Support Service actively supports rangatahi up to the age of 21, and then provides reactive support (responding to requests for assistance, rather than proactively reaching out) up to their 25th birthday. More information on the TSS can be found here: [Transition Support Service for rangatahi | Oranga Tamariki — Ministry for Children](#)

¹⁰ The name for this project was collectively developed as a working title by the research rōpū over a series of planning hui. It was chosen as it encapsulated the project’s focus on rangatahi and their experiences of journeying from statutory care to more self-determined living and reflected the bicultural approach to this research. The bilingual working title suggested by the research rōpū was enthusiastically supported and adopted by the Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre and the project advisory group.

¹¹ The Year 1 report can be accessed here: [Ngā Haerenga | Transition Journeys: Ngā Haerenga | Phase one: Voices of rangatahi anticipating the move from statutory care to self-determined living \(orangatamariki.govt.nz\)](#).

¹² Oranga Tamariki Care or custody orders are applicable up to a young person’s 18th birthday (or younger).

¹³ Oranga Tamariki. Dimensions of the Transition Population: Demand Modelling (2018). Unpublished research report.

Contexts

Rangatahi transitioning from care often have high support needs

This study was focused on young people who were found to be largely strong, resourceful

and resilient, and at the same time also vulnerable and facing the complex realities of entering adult life after being in care.

Oranga Tamariki and wider community research on the transition population has found that a significant number of young people leaving care or a youth justice residence have multiple and high support needs and, compared to the general population, experience poorer wellbeing outcomes in the years following their exit from care.

A 2018 case review of 16- to 17-year-olds who were in care and met Oranga Tamariki Transition Support Services eligibility criteria found that 40 percent had high or very high support needs.¹⁴ A follow-on survey found that:

- a third of the transition cohort (31 percent) had high needs and mental health needs, with the most common being trauma and stress conditions
- a quarter (26 percent) had high needs and exhibited behaviour that put themselves or others at risk of harm
- one in five (22 percent) had high needs and a substance abuse problem, with young people under youth justice orders significantly more likely to have a substance abuse issue
- one in five (19 percent) had high needs centered around or including a disability.¹⁵

The study further found that comorbidity across the broad health-related categories was common.¹⁶ A quarter of the transitioning cohort were identified as having high or very high needs in more than one category (such as mental health, disability, and substance abuse).

Care- and youth justice-experienced young people often also have fractured support systems. This can be due to strained relationships with their family members, which are sometimes the cause or the reasons for family separation.¹⁷ Furthermore, care-experienced young people are the least likely to receive the appropriate assistance from mainstream services (such as housing, health, education, and social services), because these services are not designed to support the complex needs of this cohort.¹⁸

Research using the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI) managed by Statistics New Zealand also found that wellbeing outcomes for young people aged 18 to 20 who have left care or a

¹⁴ Note that this is assessed by their social worker. Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre 2018. *Transitions Cohort Needs Assessment*. Wellington, New Zealand: Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children. *Transition needs survey* | Oranga Tamariki — Ministry for Children

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Experiences of Youth Transitioning Out of Juvenile Justice or Foster Care Systems: The Correlates of Successful Moves to Independence in *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*. Brisson, D; Hope Wilson, J; Medina E; Hughey C; Chassman, S; and Calhoun, K. 2020.

¹⁸ An evaluation of housing outcomes from a support program for young people transitioning from out-of-home care in Victoria, Australia. Mende, P. and Purtell, J. 2017, in *Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care* 2017, Vol.16, No.2.

youth justice (YJ) residence are significantly poorer than for young people who have had no contact with Oranga Tamariki. The care- or youth justice-experienced young people were:

- between 20 and 80 times more likely to be involved in serious offending and between nine and 20 times more likely to be involved in low-level offending
- five to seven times more likely to be receiving a main benefit
- two to four times more likely to be hospitalized
- half as likely to receive a tertiary qualification.¹⁹

Many of these rangatahi, particularly those with lived experience of trauma and neglect, who have high or complex needs, and/or who are lacking stable and safe family environments, peer and community relationships and resources available to other rangatahi transitioning into adulthood, are at particular risk of 'falling through the cracks' and achieving poorer outcomes.²⁰ These include over-representation in:

- poor quality, insecure housing and homelessness
- poor educational outcomes, including leaving school without qualifications
- unemployment, casual or insecure employment, benefit dependence and poverty
- offending and entry into the adult justice system²¹.

Finally, the Youth19 Rangatahi Smart Survey²² of secondary school aged rangatahi provides further context for understanding the circumstances of rangatahi, some of whom are on the cusp of leaving school and leaving care. The study found that, when compared to young people never involved with Oranga Tamariki, rangatahi who had previously been or were currently involved with Oranga Tamariki were more likely to experience a range of poorer health and well being outcomes, including:

- being less likely to report good wellbeing as measured on the WHO-5 wellbeing index and more than twice as likely to report depressive symptoms
- being more likely to be hit or harmed by others at some point in their lives, including by an adult in the home
- being more likely to report having a disabling condition and less likely to report having very good or excellent health
- reporting more often needing and seeking help from a professional for feeling bad or having a hard time
- being more than twice as likely to have been unable to access a health provider when they needed to in the last year
- reporting (marginally) lower levels of connectedness with friends

¹⁹ Based on information on the 2001 birth cohort sourced from the IDI, managed by Statistics New Zealand, extracted in February 2018. Note these are not official statistics, they have been created for research purposes from the IDI to inform the 2018 Cabinet paper: Transforming our Response to Children and Young People at Risk of Harm: Paper Six: Transition Support. October 2018 SWC-18-MIN-0153 – Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee.

²⁰ Previous research has found 40% of rangatahi have high or very high needs. See: [Transition-Cohort-Needs-Assessment-Stage-2-Survey-Results.pdf](#) (orangatamariki.govt.nz)

²¹ Ibid. See also Sue Harding (2018). Understanding the transitions' population: Multianalysis of the transition cohort of young people and young adults, to inform service design of transition support. Unpublished research. Oranga Tamariki.

²² Publications from the Youth19 Research Group, The University of Auckland and Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand (2021). (i) Young people who have been involved with Oranga Tamariki: Mental and physical health and healthcare access. (ii) Young people who have been involved with Oranga Tamariki: Community and contexts; (iii) Health and Wellbeing of young people who have been involved with Oranga Tamariki: Home and Housing. [Youth19 Rangatahi Smart Survey reports | Oranga Tamariki — Ministry for Children](#).

- being more likely to have been in trouble with the police at some point and unfairly treated by the police because of their ethnicity.

Kaupapa Māori integration in the Ngā Haerenga project

As at July 2020, 24 percent of students in New Zealand primary and secondary schools were identified as tamariki and rangatahi Māori.^{23,24} In comparison, around 70 percent of rangatahi in statutory care, and 80 percent of rangatahi in youth justice custody, are identified as tamariki or rangatahi Māori.^{25,26}

Ngā Haerenga research rōpū and Oranga Tamariki understood that cultural perspectives on and experiences of Māori in care, including youth justice systems were important. Analysis conducted from perspectives located within a Māori world view are often absent, yet findings may be generalisable (to Māori and non-Māori youth). The researchers recognise the diversity of realities of whānau Māori and their rangatahi within larger colonial systems over the generations, often resulting in disconnection from culture and understandings of traditional systems including tikanga and te reo (cultural principles and language)²⁷.

This report therefore integrates a significant change in the analysis and the approach to report writing between years one and three of the study. This change was developed in year 2 in order to incorporate and prioritise whakaaro Māori approaches (a Māori lens, or Māori ways of thinking), and to elevate a Kaupapa Māori-led approach. This helped to weave Māori concepts into the analysis and understanding of rangatahi journeys and led to the development of the 'Āhuatanga' framework for this study²⁸. Analysis incorporates the experiences of all rangatahi through this lens, which seeks to highlight rangatahi experiences within a holistic framing that gives priority to their ways of thinking, knowing, and doing. Given this application to the project in its entirety throughout this study, the term 'rangatahi' describes all youth participants (both Māori and non-Māori) and 'rangatahi Māori' is collectively used to distinguish youth who identify as Māori to contextualise as necessary (i.e., in relation to Māori-specific analysis and reporting).

With the rangatahi in this study, kupu (Māori and non-Māori words) were often utilised to refer to a range of different meanings and principles. These and other concepts used in this report seek to reflect rangatahi understanding and expression of those. One example is where rangatahi used the words whānau or family in the wider context to describe some non-biological relationships, including with caregivers, friends and partner's family in addition to kin-based relationships. Throughout this report we attempt to give context to these relationships where possible to provide clarity. However, the rangatahi view and context of their relationships will ultimately guide how these descriptors are used in this report.

²³ www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/6028

²⁴ The terms 'Tamariki Māori' and 'Rangatahi Māori' refer specifically to young people of Māori ethnicity in this report while use of the term tamariki or rangatahi on its own refers to all young people.

²⁵ Sue Harding (2018). Understanding the transitions' population: Multianalysis of the transition cohort of young people and young adults, to inform service design of transition support. Unpublished research. Oranga Tamariki.

²⁶ www.orangatamariki.govt.nz/about-us/how-we-work/new-ways-of-working/ - Budget 2019.

²⁷ Wirihana, R., & Smith, C. (2014). Historical trauma, healing and well-being in Maori communities. MAI Review, 3(3), 198–210.

Pihama, L., Cameron, N., & Te Nana, R. (2019). Historical trauma and whānau violence. Issues Paper 15. Auckland: New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, University of Auckland.

²⁸ See Methodology section for framework introduction and detail.

While rangatahi may not explicitly recognise and express things in a way in which tikanga and mātauranga Māori may be traditionally perceived, the researchers often observed a connection as Māori, in their āhua, wairua, kōrero and tinana (their appearance, spirit, language and their body e.g., their body language). Whilst Māoritanga and mātauranga Māori may not be prominent for some rangatahi, nevertheless they are evident in rangatahi, through whakapapa, whānau, hāpori, non-verbal communications and are also acknowledged within the connections between them and the Māori researchers, hence the use of the word 'āhuetanga'. It is from these bases that the Āhuetanga framework for this study was developed²⁹ – the interpretation and validation comes from rangatahi (Māori and non-Māori) understandings and perspectives, taking into account the context and realities of their lives. Māori methods and models of analysis were thought to be the best means to enable articulation of all rangatahi narratives in their broadest sense as the concepts can be applied to all their transition journeys in some way.³⁰

The development and application of the Āhuetanga Framework alongside and based on Kaupapa Māori principles and methodologies enabled researchers to connect with rangatahi in a profound way, to understand their experiences, their priorities, their challenges, their hopes and dreams and provided a framework to inform data collection, a holistic analysis and report structure.

Purpose

High level purposes for the Ngā Haerenga research project are as follows:

1. To hear rangatahi voices and to explore and document rangatahi experiences and journeys out of statutory care and/or custody into self-determined adulthood.
2. To build an understanding of:
 - a) what rangatahi are thinking about as they prepare to leave care, including their aspirations, intentions, and perceived needs
 - b) the trajectories following exit, including experiences, successes, and challenges, as well as outcomes across key domains (including rangatahi priorities, Transition Support Service and Youth Justice priority areas)
 - c) constraining and enabling factors, which contribute to successful, unsuccessful, and unexpected outcomes up to 18 to 24 months after leaving care.
3. A further aim for the three-year study is to provide insights which will help Oranga Tamariki to identify opportunities for improving the responsiveness and effectiveness of the Transition Support Service as well as for other agencies and organisations who support rangatahi, and with whom Oranga Tamariki works (e.g., Ministries of Social Development, Education and Health, or non-governmental organisations).

In year 1 of the study, the focus was on purposes 1 and 2a, in the context of rangatahi one-to-six months *prior* to leaving a variety of care arrangements (including rangatahi living in whānau/family homes, non-whānau family homes, high needs residential care settings and youth justice facilities). This resulted in a first report, *Phase one: Voices of rangatahi anticipating the move from statutory care to self-determined living* published in July 2021.

²⁹ See Methodology section for description.

³⁰ Ibid.

In year 2 of the study the focus was on purposes 1, 2b, 2c, and 3, in the context of rangatahi leaving a variety of care arrangements once turning 18 years of age.

This final report will provide a further update and final analysis of the overall experiences of rangatahi in the medium term based on a third interview in year 3. The report also hopes to provide a focus on practice considerations which can guide people who support rangatahi, including the Transition Support Services and other associated agencies and organisations.

Research questions

There are four high level research questions seeking to be answered by the Ngā Haerenga project. These are:

- i. What are the short- and medium-term goals, strengths and resources, challenges and needs, and plans of rangatahi one to six months prior to leaving Oranga Tamariki care arrangements?
- ii. What are the early experiences, achievements and outcomes of rangatahi leaving care?
- iii. What are common success factors/enablers and constraints/barriers which contribute to successful or unsuccessful outcomes?
- iv. How can needed services be improved to better support the transition of rangatahi to achieve successful self-determined, independent and interdependent, outcomes in adulthood?

Across all four research questions, there is ongoing interest in whether identified goals, needs, enablers, challenges, or experiences are of particular significance for rangatahi Māori and other sub-populations (e.g., those in youth justice custody).

Methodology

Methods

Longitudinal Qualitative Research is an overarching method

Longitudinal Qualitative Research (LQR) methodology provides the broad framework which underpins this study. Used in the health sciences since the 1950s, LQR involves in-depth interviews, repeated over time, often at fixed time intervals, with the same people, typically by the same researchers.³¹ It aligns with and supports a Kaupapa Māori methodological approach.³² The Ngā Haerenga project has undertaken annual in-depth interviews with rangatahi, starting at one to six months before leaving care (year 1), followed by a second round of interviews six to 12 months after leaving care (year 2). In late 2022 the final round of interviews was undertaken, 18 to 24 months after leaving care (year 3) and these interviews largely inform this report.

In year 1 all participants were aged between 17 years six months, and 17 years and 11 months at the time of the first interview, were currently in care (or custody) and had been for at least three months (this meant they fit the eligibility criteria for the new Transition Support Service (TSS)³³).

Three regionally-based research rōpū have kept in touch with, followed up and interviewed the rangatahi each year: (i) the Waikato rōpū – covering the Waikato, Bay of Plenty and Lakes District regions, (ii) the Pōneke rōpū – covering Wellington, Kāpiti, Horowhenua, Manawatū and Wairarapa regions and (iii) the Ōtautahi rōpū – covering the Greater Canterbury region and Northern Otago in Te Waipounamu.

Before recruitment and fieldwork began in 2020, the joint Oranga Tamariki Insights MSD ethics review panel approved this project, and the approach being taken. In the co-design of the project, the three research rōpū, supported by the Oranga Tamariki project advisory group, ensured whakaaro Māori informed the project at each step, through incorporation of Māori values, tikanga, mahi ā-rongo and Kaupapa Māori methodologies.³⁴

Kaupapa Māori methodology

Kaupapa Māori methodology is not a new research methodology. It is derived from traditional and contemporary Māori ways of sharing and gathering information, often in the form of 'pūrākau' or stories for example and application of longstanding values, worldviews,

³¹ Hansen, E. (2006). *Successful qualitative health research: A practical introduction*. Crows Nest, Australia: Allen and Unwin; Corden, A., & Millar, J. (2007). Time and change: A review of the qualitative longitudinal research literature for social policy. *Social Policy Society*, 6, 583-592.

³² Linda Smith and Fiona Cram, *A Research Ethic for Studying Māori and Iwi Provider Success*. www.katoa.net.nz/kaupapa-maori; Hirini Moko Mead, *Tikanga Māori Model*. Love, C. (2002). *Māori perspectives on collaboration and colonisation in contemporary Aotearoa/New Zealand child and family welfare policies and practices. Partnerships for Children and Families Project*. Wilfred Laurier University, Ontario, Canada.

³³ The Transition Support Service of Oranga Tamariki actively supports rangatahi up to the age of 21, through transition support workers keeping in contact with them and through entitlements such as being able to remain or return to a caregiver. After the age of 21, support is more reactive (responding to requests for assistance, rather than proactively reaching out) up to their 25th birthday.

³⁴ This methodology is explained in detail in the year one study for this research project. [Ngā Haerenga | Transition Journeys: Longitudinal study phase one](#).

ethics, and processes. Over time much work has been done to develop kaupapa Māori research methods, practices and analyses into current research contexts.³⁵

Central to Ngā Haerenga commissioning was that it be undertaken using a Kaupapa Māori methodology, as stated in the project brief:

Transitions Longitudinal Qualitative Study: 'Applying a Kaupapa Māori methodology in collaboration with Māori researchers, and including a strong focus on the experiences of rangatahi leaving care will help Oranga Tamariki to meet its 7AA obligations and to identify opportunities for improving the TSS for young Māori.'

Pihama noted, "Kaupapa Māori theory provides openings into analysis that can more readily explain and transform current inequities that face Māori people."³⁶ Given the inequitable (over)representation of tamariki and rangatahi Māori in state interventions and the Care and Protection system³⁷, the Ngā Haerenga project researchers agreed with the requirement of Oranga Tamariki that Kaupapa Māori theory and methodology should permeate the research process as a whole, from design to data collection, analysis, and reporting. A Kaupapa Māori lens ensures the frameworks and methodologies are applied in practice to both Māori and non-Māori, with equal relevance.

The research teams were guided by the knowledge gained through the 'acts' of research characterised under Kaupapa Māori, tikanga a-iwi, and the broader Mātauranga Māori methodologies which enhanced the longitudinal components of the study. All teams were led by Kaupapa Māori research experts and a Kaupapa Māori perspective was applied to all data collection and analysis aspects (including for and with non-Māori participants and researchers).

A Kaupapa Māori methodology and analysis was applied in year 1 reasoning that: 'Māori methods and models of analysis may best enable articulation of rangatahi Māori narratives in their broadest sense'.³⁸

Building on that, in year two the Ngā Haerenga research rōpū developed a framework specific to the Ngā Haerenga project to utilise in rangatahi voice data collection and analysis.

This Ngā Haerenga-specific framework named 'Āhukatanga' was founded on the Kaupapa Māori frameworks and principles already in place. The testing and subsequent validation of the Āhukatanga framework in year 3 enabled a robust and culturally centred data collection, analysis and Year 3 report structure to emerge.

The Āhukatanga framework is introduced below in the Analytical Frameworks section.

³⁵ Incl: Smith, L.T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies*. Zed Books.; Cram, F. www.katoa.net.nz/kaupapa-maori/; Love, C. (1999). *Maori voices in the construction of indigenous models of counselling theory and practice*. PhD dissertation, Palmerston North, New Zealand: Massey University.; Pihama, L. (2001). *Thei mauri ora: honouring our voices: mana wahine as a kaupapa Māori: theoretical framework*. PhD dissertation, The University of Auckland, Auckland.; Lee, J. (2009). *Decolonising Māori narratives: Pūrākau as a method*. *MAI review*, 2(3).

³⁶ Pihama, L. (2001). *Thei mauri ora: honouring our voices: mana wahine as a kaupapa Māori: theoretical framework*. Unpublished PhD dissertation. Auckland, NZ: The University of Auckland. p. 9.

³⁷ See Year 1 report Cultural connections.

³⁸ [Ngā Haerenga | Transition Journeys: Longitudinal study phase one | Oranga Tamariki — Ministry for Children](#)

Exemplar, multi-year case illustrations share rangatahi experiences across time

In the spirit of longitudinal research, which affords both cross-cohort thematic analyses and biographic, time bound analyses for individual participants, this final Year 3 report includes themes in rangatahi journeys at 18 to 24 months alongside individual rangatahi case illustrations covering the three years of the study. These case studies (n=9), found at the end of each of the six focus areas in the findings section (see below), have been selected to illustrate some of the key aspirations, experiences, dynamics and outcomes for rangatahi throughout their journeys. They also display how the multifaceted, interweaving āhuatanga are applied to their journeys. All quotes from participants and the illustrative case study summaries have been de-identified and all names used in this report are pseudonyms.

To further inform and to provide context to the research team's interview-based findings, in year 2 and year 3 of the study rangatahi were asked to respond to a closed-ended Likert scale question exploring their perceived progress since leaving care (See Findings Section – Self ratings of how things are going).

Analytical frameworks

A focus on six journey outcome areas

The interviews in all three years explored goals, recent experiences, changing circumstances and outcomes across *six priority focus areas*. These six areas were identified by Oranga Tamariki as of particular interest for focusing Transition Support Services, monitoring outcomes and where risks for poorer outcomes than for the general population were high. The key outcome areas for the TSS were identified from international literature reviews and in consultation with rangatahi, iwi and NGO service providers, and feature in the logic models underlying the new TSS service.

These six priority outcome focus areas for the study were:

- kāinga (home or living situation)
- mahi/akoranga (employment, education or training)
- hauora (improving or maintaining health and wellbeing)
- ngā hononga (relationships and connections – with all things including families/whānau/hapū/iwi and with te ao Māori, identity and belonging, where appropriate)
- haponi (involvement in community/cultural activities), and
- where applicable, whether young people had stopped reoffending or were living crime-free.³⁹

Introducing Āhuatanga – an emergent framework

From their positioning as kaupapa Māori researchers, a thematic analysis through whakaaro Māori (thinking about rangatahi journeys from a Māori perspective) resulted in the development of the Āhuatanga framework in year 2. One reason for highlighting this

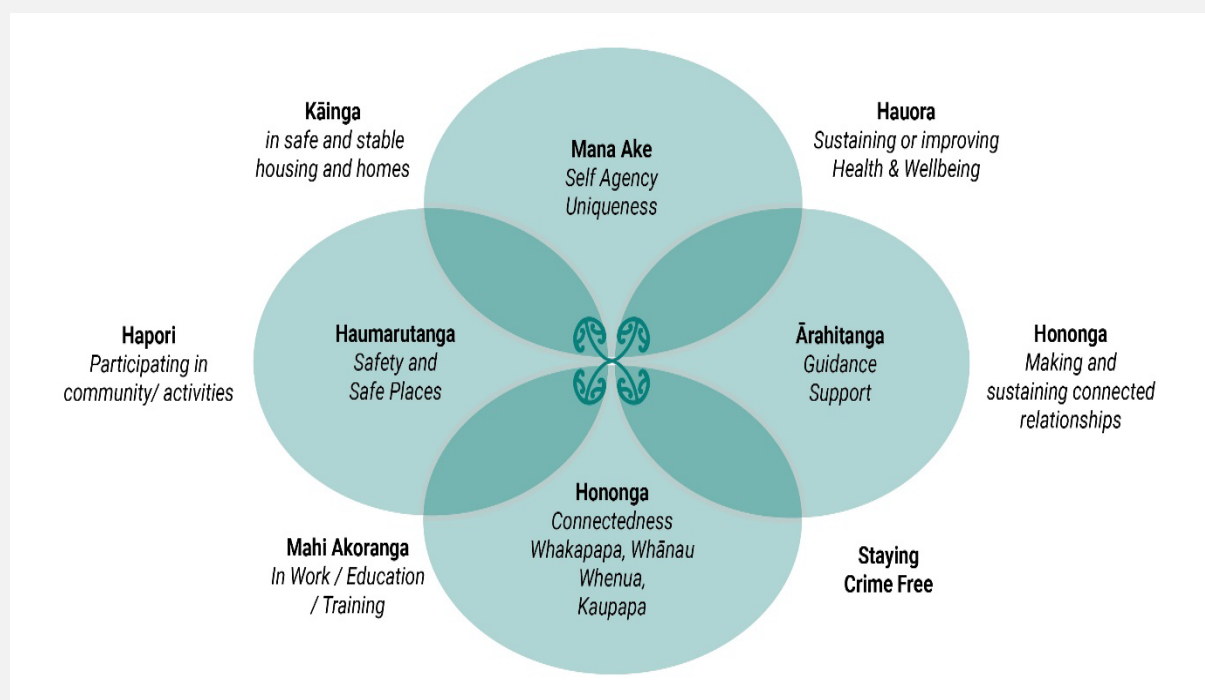
³⁹ The six key outcome areas were identified as priority focus areas for the study by the Ngā Haerenga Advisory Group at the outset of the project in 2020. They reflect outcome areas of interest for the newly established Transition Support Service being delivered by Oranga Tamariki in partnership with community and iwi organisations across Aotearoa since July 2019.

approach in the research is that the proportion of rangatahi Māori in the care or custody of Oranga Tamariki is significant. Additionally, applying Māori concepts to non-Māori in this research project is based on the generalisability and relevance of the concepts for the rangatahi involved. The process included identifying a large number of themes and concepts from a Māori perspective that resonated with rangatahi journeys across each of the six TSS priority outcome areas. The concepts were derived from understandings as researchers, of not only the kōrero shared by rangatahi but of their āhua (appearance, character, or form) as displayed in the interviews. The āhua were a significant mechanism to understand rangatahi through not only words but also their expressions, and sometimes what they were not saying. This often meant getting a sense of the wairua of the rangatahi in front of researchers. Āhutatanga became a way of sensing and understanding their multiple experiences.

Four main concepts or themes were perceived as being especially strong in the rangatahi overall journeys and these formed the Āhutatanga Framework – or key descriptors of rangatahi experience. These four concepts are centred around: hononga (connectedness), haumarutanga (safety/safe places), mana ake (self-agency/unique identities) and ārahitanga (guidance). These themes reflect the interconnecting and interrelating aspects of journeys which sit at the centre of rangatahi transition experiences. Together, they provide a deeper understanding of what was important in rangatahi lives when moving to independence, and what supported rangatahi to achieve their aspirations and outcomes or contributed to their challenges and constraints as discussed in the findings section of this report.

Figure 1 below shows the four āhutatanga conceptual themes as interconnecting and interrelating aspects of journeys which sit at the centre of rangatahi transition experiences. Together, these āhutatanga ripple out to inform transition journeys and contribute to outcomes across each of the six focus areas of the study.

Figure 1: Research focus areas and ngā Āhutatanga o Ngā Haerenga



Source: Ngā Haerenga Māori researchers. Diagram created by Louise Were.

The following provides a brief description of each of the āhuetanga themes identified from rangatahi journeys as playing a significant role. While summarised here, an in-depth description of these aspects is contained in the Ngā Haerenga Year 2 report.⁴⁰ These descriptions below reflect the findings from years 1 and 2.

Hononga (connectedness): Connections and connectedness with whānau, other significant people in their lives, places, culture and whakapapa are valued by rangatahi and are critical to rangatahi wellbeing and success in their move toward independence across the spectrum of outcome areas. Rangatahi also identify connections as having a negative impact on occasion.

Haumarutanga (safety/safe places): Safety, stability and a sense of tau (feeling settled, calm, peaceful) is sought by rangatahi in, and beyond, their kāinga. A sense of safety was critical for rangatahi to flourish and to reach their goals in a variety of contexts. Again, a lack of safety and stability negatively impacts on rangatahi.

Mana ake (self-agency/unique identities): Rangatahi are showing an increasing sense of influence, identity, purpose and reliance on themselves for their wellbeing. Even without key supports a number of rangatahi strived and succeeded in looking after their own wellbeing and aspirations and in being their own champions. Not all rangatahi were able to be in control of their own lives, for example, a number who were in prison or who were engaged in power struggles around decision-making with adults in their lives. A number of barriers affected rangatahi being able to enact control over their own wellbeing and aspirations.

Ārahitanga (guidance): Support by key people especially whānau and whānau whānui (extended whānau/chosen whānau), but also transition workers and other key adults were key to helping guide rangatahi in their journeys. Pou tautoko (significant support people) were important to rangatahi in this stage of their lives and meaningful and ongoing relationships with these people provided a critical role in determining the outcomes achieved by rangatahi.

The Āhuetanga Framework has good alignment with the Oranga Tamariki Practice Framework Te Toka Tūmoana. In particular the principles of mana āhua ake o te mokopuna (the potential and uniqueness of rangatahi), whakamanawa (empowering rangatahi) and whakapapa, ('strong meaningful human connection, significant places of engagement and value relationships within the spiritual dimension')⁴¹ have common themes with hononga, mana ake and ārahitanga. The overall principle of Tiaki mokopuna (make safe, care for, support) is particularly congruent with haumarutanga.

Validation of the Āhuetanga Framework

The āhuetanga themes as described in the context of this report were discussed with rangatahi in the year 3 interviews as a way of checking their resonance and were validated as being relevant to rangatahi.

⁴⁰ Ngā Haerenga Research rōpū: Debbie Goodwin, Louise Were, Cheyenne Scown, Eugene Davis, Dan Love, Catherine Love, Sarah Wylie, Ria Schroder and Damian O'Neill. *Ngā Haerenga / Transition Journeys. Voices of rangatahi in the early stages of their move from statutory care to self-determined living*. Unpublished Year 2 report August 2022: Oranga Tamariki-Ministry for Children.

⁴¹ Oranga Tamariki Practice Framework Te Toka Tūmoana. <https://practice.orangatamariki.govt.nz/practice-approach/working-with-maori-te-toka-tumoana/#what-is-te-toka-tumoana>

Researchers broke down the concepts and sometimes gave examples. Emphasis was placed by researchers on the *meaning* of each āhuatanga theme and its possible relevance to the rangatahi journey rather than the exact kupu (words) used. Many rangatahi understood the essence of each āhuatanga theme and some felt that there was a resonance between them and their own experiences.

“They make a lot of sense.” (Tania). “Yeah, it sounds interesting.” (Luke).

(Interviewer) “Do they feel like they were something that was kind of maybe important within your own journey?” “Yes, definitely.” (Willow).

(Interviewer) “Can you think of which of those things, if any, do you think they’re really important to you?” “Yeah, probably having connections [hononga].” (Karl).

Some researchers chose to use an adapted version of the Waitangi Wheel⁴² to further explore the āhuatanga themes with rangatahi in a way that was directly related to their lives. Each āhuatanga theme was placed on an axis with a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being low and 10 being high) and researchers guided rangatahi to think about what a ‘10’ rating for each aspect would look like, often giving examples first. For example, if ārahitanga was sitting at a ‘10’, that might look like having trusted people to go to for guidance. Once rangatahi had an idea of what a ‘10’ might look like to them for each āhuatanga theme, they were asked to rate that concept in regards to where it sat for them at that time.

Following the ārahitanga example, one rangatahi rated it as being at a ‘2’ in their life at that moment and was asked why she gave that rating.

“I’ve just got my family and a few friends for that but I don’t really reach out to them. I struggle with asking my mum and dad for help and asking friends for help, so probably like quite low.” (Tania).

Another rangatahi spoke about giving his sense of mana ake a rating of ‘5.’

“I would say because I’m only 19 still, so there’s still a lot of stuff I need to learn and as I – there’s also a lot of stuff at home I’m still trying to get used to and trying to figure out who I am but it’s – all of its good.” (Kaleb).

Rangatahi being able to apply the āhuatanga themes to their own lives provided further validation of their importance and relevance to rangatahi journeys towards independence. Although the kupu Māori may have specific meanings, often rangatahi ways of conceptualising or articulating concepts or what they are experiencing were different (ie: self-esteem vs mana ake). Accordingly, in the context of this research the way that the concepts are discussed in this report have been based on the ways that the rangatahi understood, made sense of and related to them – so as to amplify and uphold their voices and narratives in their transition journeys.

While not always explicitly outlined in this report, the āhuatanga themes appear throughout their stories in a holistic manner consistent with Kaupapa Māori methods. Due to the intertwining, overlapping and multifaceted nature of these concepts in many instances, the experiences of rangatahi described in this report may relate to more than one āhuatanga

⁴² The Waitangi Wheel is a self assessment tool based on Mason Durie’s Whare tapa wha model and was developed as such by James Takoko and Kataraina Pipi. Pipi. K., (2010). The PATH Planning Tool and its Potential for Whanau Research in MAI Review Journal. Vol. 3. New Zealand.

theme. The āhukatanga themes are primarily discussed in the enablers and constraints / challenges sections of the Findings.

Year three fieldwork and analysis

Between 1 July 2022 and 31 January 2023, 24 rangatahi from the original year 1 cohort of 44 took part in a final interview. A description of year 3 participants can be found below.

As with the year 1 and year 2 interviews, each region developed its own semi-structured interview guides, using a shared interview framework; there were variations in the extent to which different elements of the framework were covered, often as a result of the fact that rangatahi differed in the depth to which they wanted to engage in discussions on different aspects of their lives. Interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed.

Summaries of each rangatahi experience were written soon after each interview, so these could be shared with the wider project team. These summaries outlined interviewees' experiences and medium-term outcomes since leaving care, including their achievements, what had gone well, what the main challenges were, and how things were going in relation to the six key outcome areas outlined above.

The year 3 interviews also applied Kaupapa Māori research principles and methodology in the te ao Māori framing developed by Māori researchers (n=6) in year 2 of the study. The four āhukatanga aspects of rangatahi transition journeys identified as particularly significant from a whakaaro Māori perspective (see Figure 1) were presented and discussed with participants in the year 3 fieldwork to check that they resonated with their experience. A high level of rangatahi validation gave the team confidence to use these in the year 3 analysis and final year reporting.

The third annual two-day sense-making analysis and planning hui with the wider research team took place kanohi ki te kanohi (face-to-face) in Wellington in late November 2022. Each case was discussed at this hui and key themes, explanatory concepts and potential rangatahi case studies for year 3 reporting were identified, which form the basis of this report.

Year 3 research participants

Twenty-four rangatahi were interviewed during year 3 of the Ngā Haerenga study. This was a 55 percent retention rate of the original cohort who participated in year 1 (n=44), and only slightly down on the year 2 retention rate of 60 percent (n=26).

Of the 24 year 3 participants:

- 21 had participated in year 2 of the study. Three had reconnected with the study following a hiatus between years 1 and 3.
- Nine were female and fifteen were male. Males were more likely to stay in the study than females. While 52 percent of year 1 participants were male, this proportion had increased to 65 percent by year 3 (vs 43% for females).
- Just over half (n=13) identified as Māori (including four Māori/ NZ European). Nine participants were NZ European, one identified as a Pacific Islander/NZ European and one was of Asian descent.
- For five rangatahi, disability was a significant part of their journey.

- Eleven were in Te Waipounamu (South Island), seven were in Waikato / Bay of Plenty (Te Moana a Toi / mid-central North Island) and six were in Te Whanganui-a-Tara / Wairarapa / Manawatū / Kāpiti (lower North Island).
- One in four (n=6) had had involvement in Oranga Tamariki youth justice service prior to turning 18 and leaving care/custody. This population was less likely to be contactable or able to participate in years 2 and 3 of the study (down from over a third in year 1).
- Four were parents (3 tāne, 1 wahine) and one rangatahi was hapū at the time of the year 3 interview.

The majority of rangatahi were interviewed alone (n=17), with four interviewed with a biological parent or grandparent, one with their partner and partner's mother, one with a caregiver and one with a kaimahi support person. As a number of rangatahi chose to have a trusted person/people join them in the interview, quotes throughout the findings of this report may reflect a third person context. This was often due to researchers seeking validation from rangatahi or their trusted person assisting with communication where the rangatahi struggled and so providing a richness of data that may have otherwise been lacking.

Fifteen of the interviews were conducted face-to-face or kanohi ki te kanohi, with the remainder taking place by phone and texting (n=8) or online via Facebook Messenger video call (n=1). Participants were given a voucher of their choice as koha, a tangible demonstration of gratitude from the researchers to the rangatahi for sharing their kōrero and time.

Findings

Self-ratings of how things are going

Although this research is primarily qualitative, a Likert scale was included to provide quantitative data to contextualise some of the qualitative findings. This is particularly helpful in assessing the longitudinal data from rangatahi stories and experiences.

In years 2 and 3 of the study, interviewers asked participants to rate how well they felt things were going 'overall' since leaving the care (or custody) of Oranga Tamariki.

Rangatahi self-rated their experience on a four-point Likert scale designed to indicate the degree of certainty with which they agreed with the question construct (Yes definitely/Yes I think so/No not really/No not at all). This scale is drawn from Te Tohu o te Ora – an annual survey conducted by the Oranga Tamariki Voices of Children team, who designed the response options to be as accessible as possible to a wide range of tamariki.⁴³ In practice, this approach enables researchers to identify those participants who agree “Yes, definitely” as the most certain group that things are going ok.

Most rangatahi feel that things are going OK since leaving care 18 to 24 months ago

In year 3, 20 of the 24 interviewees responded to the closed ended question, which was put to participants in writing or read out aloud or over the phone. Responses were generally positive, and are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 2: Year 3 responses to the question “Overall, since leaving care, do you feel things are going OK?”

Scale response	Number of rangatahi (n)	Proportion of responses (%)
1 - No, things are not at all going OK	0	0%
2 - No, things are not really going OK	2	10%
3 - Yes, I think things are going OK	7	35%
4 - Yes, things are definitely going OK	11	55%
5 - I don't know	0	0%
TOTAL	20	100%

As can be seen in Table 1 above, of the 20 responses received, over half (11 or 55%) of the rangatahi interviewed who gave a self-rating were certain that, since leaving care, things were ‘definitely going OK’. Additionally, just over a third (7 or 35%), were less definitive, but also ‘think things are going OK’. In year 3, two rangatahi (10%) reported that things overall were ‘not really going OK’ for them.

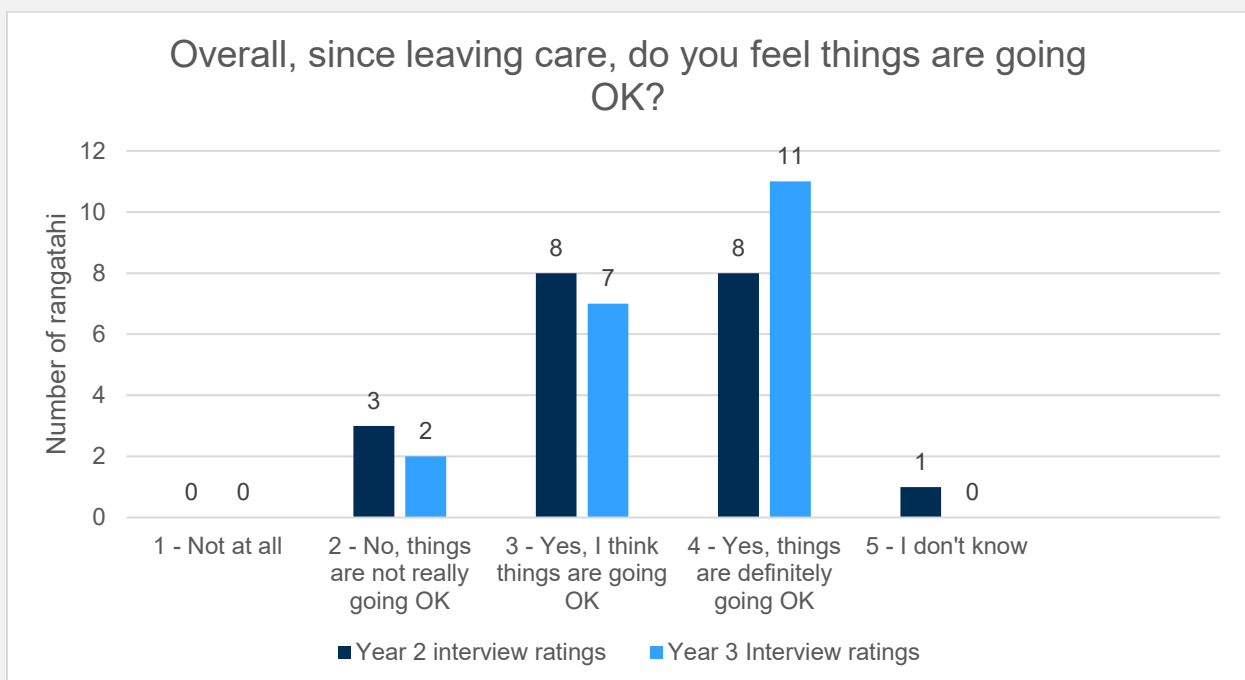
⁴³ [Te Tohu o te Ora 2019/2020 Methodology Report \(orangatamariki.govt.nz\)](https://www.orangatamariki.govt.nz/te-tohu-o-te-ora-2019-2020-methodology-report)

A higher proportion of Rangatahi feel that things are ‘definitely going OK’, compared to a year earlier

Compared to year 2 self-ratings, the cohort overall is reporting a slightly more positive experience by year 3. In the year 2 wave of the study, 12 out of 25 interviewees who gave a rating said things were ‘definitely going OK’ for them (48%). As can be seen in Table 1 above, there was a slight increase in this proportion to 55% in year 3. A range of factors were identified in the shift towards more definitive positive ratings, and these are identified and discussed later in the findings sections (under each of the six key focus areas).

When we compare results for the specific cohort who gave ratings in both years 2 and 3 (n=20 participants), a more definitive move towards positive self-ratings over time can be seen. Figure 2 below demonstrates that, overall for those giving ratings in both years, three more rangatahi rated their progress experience at ‘4 – things are definitely going OK’ in year 3, than did in year 2. Through this targeted analysis it can be asserted that this moderate increase in positive self-ratings overall is not due to the change in participants in year 3, where six participants from year 2 dropped out of the study and three who had been absent since year 1 were reconnected. Rather this suggests these participants are, overall, feeling more settled and confident than they were a year ago.

Figure 2: Year 2 and year 3 responses from the same rangatahi (n=20): “Overall, since leaving care, do you feel things are going OK?”



While there was some two-way movement between ratings it was particularly notable that two (of the three) rangatahi who had in year 2 rated themselves at ‘2 – not really going ok’ were now much more positively rating themselves at ‘4 – definitely going ok’ in year 3. More on one of these rangatahi journeys can be found in Kaleb’s case illustration in the Hauora | Health and Wellbeing findings section.

The third rangatahi who in year 2 gave themselves a self-rating of ‘2 – not really going ok’ was sadly not able to rate their experience any higher in year 3. This was primarily due to high levels of stress related to challenges with mahi/akoranga along with ongoing struggles

with mental wellbeing. A case illustration for this rangatahi can be seen in Tania's case illustration in the Mahi/akoranga | Work, training and education findings section.

Also, sadly for one rangatahi, their year 2 self-rating of '4 – *definitely going OK*' notably fell to '2 – *not really going OK*' in year 3. This downward journey was primarily due to recent challenges in maintaining safe and stable housing. More on this rangatahi journey can be found in Victoria's case illustration in the Kāinga | Living situations findings section.

Journeys across the six key focus areas

The purpose of these findings is to understand rangatahi journeys as they transition out of care. The findings are based on analysis guided by what rangatahi have shared of their experiences, goals, priorities and challenges. The following sections are formulated on these bases, are aligned with the Āhukatanga framework and attempt to highlight rangatahi voices throughout the findings.

The following sections follow the structure of the six focus areas for this research that came from the TSS priority outcome areas:

- kāinga (home or living situation)
- mahi/akoranga (employment, education or training)
- hauora (improving or maintaining health and wellbeing)
- ngā hononga (relationships and connections – with whānau/hapū/iwi and with te ao Māori, identity and belonging, where appropriate)
- hāpori (involvement in community/cultural activities), and
- where applicable, whether young people had stopped reoffending or were living crime-free.⁴⁴

Each of the six sections has a common structure (medium-term outcomes, enablers of success, constraints and challenges, future needs and aspirations and one or two demonstrative case studies spanning the three years). Hononga also contains rangatahi Māori stories that emphasise rangatahi te ao Māori connections in the medium term. Within each of the focus areas, āhukatanga themes are prioritised and presented as key aspects of rangatahi journeys – particularly where they relate to underlying enablers and challenges to success (where relevant). As is the nature with rangatahi journeys and kaupapa Māori models/frameworks, you will see that the sections, āhukatanga themes and focus areas interweave, overlap and impact in different areas of rangatahi lives and consequently the report, therefore this should be taken into account when reading.

Not all rangatahi prioritised all focus areas for discussion in the interview, but for those that were able to or wanted to talk about certain areas the following patterns and observation of rangatahi experience emerged and are included as key themes in each of the focus area sections. Some researchers found that it was difficult for several rangatahi to identify future goals and aspirations when a lot of their time and energy was focused on the present and on fulfilling basic needs such as attaining or maintaining kāinga and mahi/akoranga. This was noted as a contextual element for this cohort who were less likely to have 'safety nets' such as intergenerational wealth/familial resources or other supports and networks compared to a

⁴⁴ The six key outcome areas were identified as priority focus areas for the study by the Ngā Haerenga Advisory Group at the outset of the project in 2020. They reflect outcome areas of interest for the newly established Transition Support Service being delivered by Oranga Tamariki in partnership with community and iwi organisations across Aotearoa since July 2019.

cohort of rangatahi who had not been in Care and Protection and/or Youth Justice. In outcome areas such as hapori this also became evident with many rangatahi no longer having the time they once did and not having monetary resources to engage in hobbies or community participation as they took care of their adult responsibilities – sometimes with very little support.

1. Kāinga – Living situations

Rangatahi kāinga and living situations at 18 to 24 months

Rangatahi were in a range of living situations in the medium term following their transition out of care.

Most were in safe, stable and welcoming kāinga environments, such as:

- Living with previous caregivers e.g., foster parents
- Living with biological whānau (e.g., flatting with whānau; living with aunties; living with biological parents and siblings; grandparents).
- Private rentals (e.g., with whānau; flatting) with brother and parents
- Living with partners and/or their partner's whānau
- Supported Living (people with disabilities living in care facilities or with foster families)
- Boarding
- Living with their own children, in rental accommodation.

Some rangatahi were in living environments that were less ideal than they would have liked:

Navigating through flatting and communal relationship dynamics could impact on the suitability and sustainability of some living situations for example Brittany who said:

“I’m currently flatting with five other girls... It’s (a) rollercoaster, like it’s fine for me but – because I have been away so much I haven’t been here when there’s been a few tiffs now and then.”

Bella had had a number of changes in accommodation since her 17th birthday, often due to friendship related flatting dynamics:

“And then we couldn’t find anything and then me and (friend) had another squabble, then me, (friend) and (friend) all stopped being friends with her. So I just ended up – because it got to the point where it was like I literally had nowhere to go, so I had to go into a random flat. So I posted and found a flat within like a week of doing that. It took a lot for me to do it because I’m not one to move in with anyone I don’t know. But I’m still in that flat.”

For various reasons a number of rangatahi were looking to move from current living situations as they were not ideal but were okay for now so there was no urgency.

“It was cheap but the house...old as, it was quite full of people and just very low standard of living, yeah. I personally don’t mind... I just – I’m just trying to look after myself out there, yeah.” (Ethan)

Other rangatahi were safe and secure in their living situation although ideally wanted to move into more independent living. Some felt ambivalent or that they could take the time to get things in order before moving:

“Yeah, love them (whānau). It’s just I’m older and want to move out.... Like it’s not my biggest stress coming home....so it’s just like I don’t really care. If I move out I move out, if I don’t I don’t.” (Tania)

Some felt safe and stable in environments that didn’t appear conventionally secure but worked for the rangatahi:

A number of rangatahi who had come from the YJ space and were either in prison or released expressed how it ‘worked’ for them. One rangatahi is in a high-risk unit in prison but voiced that he feels safe even though he acknowledged he was living in a changing and risky environment:

“I feel safe..I just – I don’t know, it’s jail, you can never really feel safe, something can change in a day...But to me I feel safe...” (Sam)

Sam was open about liking the institutional environment, having progressed through several stints in youth justice facilities before entering prison. He liked the youth justice facilities and appreciated the educational and sporting opportunities, supportive staff and routines that he felt provided a sense of safety and security that was lacking in other living situations he had experienced. Similarly, he liked prison as it provided him with friendships, kai and security. Another rangatahi, Luke, was released to a ‘*halfway house*’ which he said was ‘OK’.

Eruera was living in a tent on whānau land. He had access to an old house on the land for bathroom facilities, but preferred living outdoors. He was happy with his living situation for now, as he preferred it to the emergency accommodation he previously was in, but was looking to flat somewhere. It also provided him with the solitude that he favoured.

A few were in unstable and potentially unsafe spaces

A few rangatahi were in, or had been in, emergency housing or MSD motels and ‘not loving it’. Eruera, previously discussed, was one of them. Victoria is another and described:

“I feel like the emergency housing is kind of like foster care for adults, but it’s a very vulnerable place for an 18 year-old to be in because there’s a lot of odd people”

While some found prison a safe and secure environment at times, there were other instances where this was not the case. Troy, who was in prison, had been subject to violent assaults and been sent to isolation units. “*Fights just come to you*” – his whānau reported and stated that “*you can hear the difference in his voice afterwards*”.

A few rangatahi were effectively homeless, ‘couch surfing’ with nowhere stable available. For example, Bella had had several stints living on a couch with a whānau member, and Luke was between friends, partner, Mum:

“I don’t even know at this point (where is home). For a while, I was staying in my mate’s house in a spare room and then going back and forth from there to Mum’s. Now I’m back and forth from my girlfriend’s house to Mum’s. I don’t actually have a proper place yet.”

Dangerous neighbours were a huge concern for Penny and her whānau, as her mum describes:

“...we’ve got no support to have the neighbours that’s caused trouble to be moved. We’ve had- (Names) been assaulted by one of their friends or relations. We’ve had them flour-bombing the car, my car. I’ve had friends intimidated by them that we don’t – you know friends can’t come here.”

Enablers of success / positive kāinga outcomes

A range of factors were identified as contributing to positive safe and stable housing and kāinga for rangatahi at 18 to 24 months after leaving care. These are discussed below, using the Āhuatanga framework.

Hononga – Connectedness

Ngā hononga was prominent – most rangatahi that had access to stable housing in year 3 found that this was enabled through hononga or connections with others including foster parents, biological whānau and in a few instances support workers or support organisations.

Awesome whānau connections supported many rangatahi to have good kāinga outcomes. These included: biological (e.g., parents, aunties, uncles, cousins, siblings, grandparents), caregiver whānau (caregivers becoming whānau), and partner’s whānau becoming whānau to rangatahi.

There were instances described where rangatahi reconnection with biological whānau had enabled them to secure accommodation that they were happy with and provided them with feelings of security and a sense of belonging. Brian experienced this when he came out of a YJ facility and was supported by whānau.

In some cases, whānau connection / re-connection hadn’t been able to occur previously due to restrictions based on Care and Protection orders. At the year 2 interview, Karl had moved in with his mum and siblings which he was very happy about. He hadn’t been in the care of his mother for a while before that due to Care and Protection rules. Sam, also due to Care and Protection rules, was not allowed contact with his mother or siblings (who were also in care), but once out was able to live with his mum. Sam’s story is described further in a case illustration under the Ngā Hononga section.

Nick who has high needs/disability had an unsuccessful time in supported living and returned to live with his foster family in year 3. The strength of their connection is evident in how the wider family worked together to ensure his needs are met as described by his carer:

“His foster family make the situation work. His foster mum and dad ensure that someone is always home when he gets dropped home from school, and his oldest sister still lives in a sleepout on the property to make room for him in the house.”

Kaleb’s strong and positive connections with his chosen whānau (caregiver parents who moved in with him and his brother) have created a living situation that he enjoys being in and have provided a sense of family:

“Really nice. It’s like actually having a family... or you’re actually having a family situation so that’s nice... It’s really good because I can usually just

connect with my friends at any time and I can have – I've got my mum and dad at home I can hang with and do sports and shit – stuff.”

In some instances, rangatahi and their foster family view each other as whānau and plan for intergenerational living into the future:

“(Foster brother)’s still living with Dad...At some point that’s going to change and (brother), he will transition to (Supported Living service) and at that point I think (rangatahi) will as well. They’re good friends – and then they can both come for dinners throughout the family and keep that connection together. Maybe even be in the same housing or something like that. That would be an option I would like.” (Nick’s caregiver).

We saw a number of instances of whānau supporting their rangatahi and their partners and babies, as in the case of Brian and Tāne. One lives with his grandmother, partner and baby while the other lives primarily with his in-laws along with his partner and their baby.

Establishing relationships and having a partner with a renting history or whānau support enabled several rangatahi to access suitable housing where they may not have been able to on their own. For example, Luke, who had been in prison and didn’t have a rental history, was looking to leverage his partner’s previous rental history to help them find a house to rent.

Amy had found accommodation through connections with her partner’s whānau:

“My partner and I moved to his family’s house in [Area]. And because I already found out I was pregnant, they let us back in. They let us stay there. We’re sleeping in a cabin; rented a cabin on the lawn so it’s kind of working for us.”

Willow’s story below likewise touches on the reconnection with her partner as being an enabler to their accessing and creating a safe and stable home environment for themselves and their pēpi.

While living with whānau is positive for numerous rangatahi, as young adults being able to have their own space is important too. Kaleb talks about making it work anyway:

“(I) Is there enough space in the house for everyone?...No, but we make it work...(I) So do you feel like you get enough of your own kind of – personal space?...No, definitely.”

Karl says he is ‘happy’ in his kāinga situation but having his own space is ‘lovely’:

“Oh, yeah, because we had to move out because that house was just too small... because (current house) it’s got four bedrooms upstairs, and then I’m out the back in the sleep out...(I: also need your own space)...Yeah, just leave and be quiet.”

Haumarutanga – Safety/safe places

Supportive living providers have offered good opportunities and trusted services and enable rangatahi to remain in safe and stable living situations:

“...sometimes the family need to have a break in order to make it all work...have funded respite through provider” (Nick’s foster mum)

In one case it was a relationship with a previous landlord and a good tenancy track record that helped a rangatahi into an ideal kāinga situation.

Wider whānau support (kin and non-kin) enabled Nick to maintain good kāinga outcomes that supported his high needs:

*“My sister acts as respite carer when they need a break... (rangatahi) goes to her house for art every Saturday for a few hours to give Mum a break.”
(Nick’s foster mum)*

Lee has experienced a safe and supportive living environment for the last year now after having to leave a stable care placement of many years, and being moved between motels for a number of months. The supportive living provider staff have gone out of their way to overcome challenges with Lee’s behaviour and he is flourishing in this environment because of their persistence.

Tāne is living between his own parents and his partner’s grandparents and said they “*are very helpful, kind and welcoming and I feel safe there*”.

Mana ake –Self-agency

Despite facing many challenges as was outlined in the context of this report, mana ake is strongly evident in the rangatahi in this study in the form of courage, determination and proactiveness. Most rangatahi took initiative to improve their living situations or set future goals for improvement in big or small ways. This is seen as mana ake – rangatahi asserting their own strength and determination to make their own path, despite a lack of support from others in some cases.

Rangatahi described increased pride and responsibility when moving into more independent living situations. Ethan who had previously been in a long-term foster placement was now claiming his independence and making a home:

“Funny, I think this is the first time I can call the place my own home, so I think that’s something to celebrate first. Especially my – I look after the house and stuff like that, I pay the bill(s) for it and stuff like that. Where it’s always been me living with someone else and I don’t now, so I think this is my first step into proper independency. Apart from that, it kind of sucks because I’ve to pay all my own shit.”

Rangatahi often take the initiative to find and access suitable housing options. In one case when conflict arose in a flat, they (rangatahi and partner) sought alternative suitable accommodation themselves online “*Really at the moment it’s just looking on our own.*”. In this case they were seeking a stable, affordable boarding environment with a mature person or people. Bella was becoming more confident to do things on her own when it came to finding accommodation.

“I think just becoming more confident in being able to do things for myself, and really pushing myself to be able to have more confidence and courage that I am capable and I can do it by myself, because I’ve been doing it by myself since I was pretty much 16. So just removing – like, you know, putting myself out there and actually applying those skills to everyday life and just teaching myself.”

Creating safe environments for tamariki/whānau as well as themselves was a driver for some rangatahi which can be appreciated by the example of the self-agency, determination

and drive by one young wahine to provide a better living situation for her and her whānau. (See Willow's case illustration at the end of this section).

Life experience, learning new or adding to skills, e.g., budgeting, conflict management and relationship skills, meant that rangatahi were better placed to know what they needed and to manage living situations. One rangatahi had left her initial flat at the first sign of conflict, but developed strategies to manage potential areas of conflict (e.g., agreeing expectations or rules at the outset) the second time around. In some cases, problem solving skills that rangatahi developed over the two to three years since leaving care assisted them to adapt their living situations if they did not suit them:

"I didn't sign (up to) a flat with my flatmates because I was going to move. Yes, so I'm currently sorting that out with my other friends, moving in with them." (Brittany)

Ārahitanga – Guidance

Often whānau provided guidance and opportunities to enable rangatahi to access suitable accommodation. Amy who was couch surfing with her boyfriend after losing their accommodation said her dad *"lined us up his flat ...so cheap rent"*. This had also occurred with Bella whose whānau member had supported her several times to access accommodation, or stay with her in between times.

Other times services provided guidance and facilitated rangatahi securing housing, in Willow's case through a transition service at a local marae:

"They ended up enrolling me into [programme] at the marae. And through there was transition services....they put me through to [Social Service] who ran a residential health thing, but they would help with cheap housing for care-experience kids."

Age and lack of rental history could mean rangatahi required a reference which Penny's transition worker was obliging with:

"She – she is quite happy to be...a reference for (Penny) and that, because when we go to apply for houses, she's got to apply as well, because of her age." (Penny's mum)

A church provider sourced an emergency housing placement which, while not ideal, provided a relatively safe space for a rangatahi to apply for and then move into a new flatting situation which was better than it had been.

After being released from prison, Luke was placed in transitional housing to begin his integration back into the community:

"...yes exactly, transition into the community... I guess that was just what they saw as the safest place for me to go."

With Sam currently in a prison setting he feels unable to plan for his kāinga goals due to not yet being sentenced and having no certainty of release date. However, his transition worker is actively supporting him in a consistent manner with a focus on aroha and manaakitanga to assist him to feel comfortable and supported in his current living situation. The transition worker's support contributes to maintaining Sam's morale, with finding a kāinga not a current priority in the face of uncertainty around the length of his sentence.

John found that boarding with people who are more mature (older than previous flatmates) and who already have established their own respective pathways has been helpful in guiding him forward.

Other contributors to positive kāinga outcomes

Having adequate financial resources was fundamental. Regular and adequate income was a significant enabler for rangatahi to secure and maintain suitable and safe kāinga environments. For example John, “*looked on Trade Me for other (housing) options. Having access to Student Allowance has been helpful*”.

A stable partner or friends with income to share expenses with also made access to suitable housing easier for rangatahi.

Constraints and challenges to securing safe and stable kāinga / living situations

It appears that not having strong whānau connections was likely a constraint impacting on rangatahi finding and securing safe and stable accommodation, even if it wasn't explicitly mentioned by rangatahi.

Hononga – Connectedness

A lack of connection/poor relationships with whānau/friends and unwillingness or inability to ask for support or accommodation from them hindered access to safe and stable kāinga for rangatahi in some cases. Eruera, who had found support through whānau couldn't stay for long, and had to move on. His next stay was in a tent on land that belonged to a whānau connection. Bella had to look for a flatting situation where she didn't know anyone which was a big step for her. It appears that some rangatahi connections did not always translate into more permanent accommodation with whānau or friends, and therefore rangatahi needed to step out into the unknown – and in some cases this repeatedly did not work out.

Haumarutanga – Safety/safe places

A general lack of access to suitable and safe accommodation holds rangatahi back from their kāinga goals, especially as they are a vulnerable group often with related underlying trauma, and need haumarutanga – safe and stable living environments. Stability was something that many rangatahi wanted as Bella reflects on her experience getting to a stable kāinga.

(I) “What about feeling safe, like having a home where you feel safe?”...“Oh, yeah. Yeah, that was really hard for me to get to but I'm there. But I think when you haven't lived in a safe home ever, a lot of people really have an unstable lifestyle. But learning to stabilise that and learning to put your foot down and break that cycle, because it is a cycle for people like me that come from houses that aren't safe, we tend to create unstable lifestyles for ourselves getting older. And I think doing that is a really bad cycle and I want to break it, so I am breaking it, but it's just continuing to stay stable and have a place for yourself to go to when you need it – like my house.”

A number of rangatahi had experienced placement in emergency housing. Almost all said that they did not feel safe or stable in that environment, as previously mentioned by Victoria:

“...but they tend to put a bad mix of people in the houses and I’ve actually been attacked in that house, and others have been threatened. So it’s a bit of a – and there’s like some dodgy stuff that goes on, that we all just want to avoid.”

Being placed in potentially ‘unsafe’ neighbourhoods caused instability for some rangatahi in their kāinga situation, as Victoria experienced in Kāinga Ora / HNZ housing and Penny had with her dangerous neighbours where she also had to deal with things like: *“the drug fumes seep into our house sometimes and makes us crook.”* (Penny’s mum)

Mana ake – Self-agency

Having limited knowledge and guidance around what supports/services are available restricted the ability of rangatahi to advocate for themselves to find and access suitable kāinga situations. Bella discussed how difficult it was finding a flat in the previous year due to not being seen as ‘suitable tenants’ by Tenancy Services, and also having to find enough willing flatmates to be able to afford the rent. While rangatahi seek stable living situations, some have experienced difficult relationships which make renting with flatmates short term only. More support and guidance in these situations would be helpful.

Difficulties with navigating relationships contributed to a lack of suitable or only short-term kāinga situations when conflict resolution was lacking. Sometimes this was due to what would be considered ‘normal’ in communal living situations, and other times past trauma contributed to a breakdown of living situation relationships. Tāne had yet to solidify staying with his partner full time as difficulties regarding communication and parental roles sometimes caused conflict. John moved out of a flatting situation due to ongoing conflict with flatmates. There appeared to be too much conflict (‘petty matters’ according to John) at a previous residence which made it challenging for him to stay. Different types of relationships with friends and flatmates could be a challenge to rangatahi and prevent them moving into more suitable living situations. Tania describes a different lifestyle as being a deterrent to flatting with her friends:

“I was planning to move with a group of friends and we were going to flat in [town] but I started to just not like them... they just like – all they want to do is drink and like I’m constantly working nightshift and I really cannot be bothered so I’d rather just go for a surf or go for a walk and chill out. But they were just like, ‘We could start a party at (place)’ and I’m like, ‘Yeah, no, not keen’.”

Ārahitanga – Guidance

Perceptions of dishonesty and obstructiveness on the part of Oranga Tamariki social workers sometimes set up conflict-ridden situations. Penny who had returned to live with her mum and sister said Oranga Tamariki won’t let her siblings (who are in care) visit due to the house being too small, but correspondingly won’t support them to find more suitable accommodation:

“Oranga Tamariki’s using the excuse of this being a too small a unit to have the other children to visit...and for two hours alone.” (Penny’s mum)

Often rangatahi were confused about the distinction between transition workers and social workers. Both roles had the potential to provide knowledge about entitlements and support to access suitable housing. Sometimes this guidance was provided well, but in other

instances rangatahi found services unhelpful. Even if entitlement criteria was sound, in some cases rangatahi found they were not provided a helpful service, no alternative support was offered, and:

“...promises were not kept. Oranga Tamariki...social worker said, “Oh, we’ll write a support letter. We’ll help you”, but we’ve never had any support letter. We’ve never had any support at all to move into better housing.” (Penny’s mum)

Inaccurate or mixed messaging from services/funders impacted rangatahi. Willow struggled when she was informed that ongoing funding for her placement was available, and then found out that funding criteria meant she was no longer eligible for a placement top-up. Ultimately this meant she had to leave a supportive living environment for a less-than-ideal kāinga. Lack of access to suitable supports/inability of others to enable support was also an issue in this case where a rangatahi had to leave a transitional housing placement due to the organisation feeling that he no longer needed it:

“They just said that I didn’t really need them anymore and that I was too independent.” (Luke)

Eruera was also ‘kicked out’ without explanation with his belongings just gone and had to go to a backpackers which was being used as emergency housing:

“... I just came back and – yeah, I took most of my shit that was there, I took my shit that was at the house and then yeah, I didn’t even know where my TV and shit was. They just took it I guess.”

He felt the agency that was supposed to be helping him didn’t do anything to help him.

Other constraints or challenges to positive kāinga outcomes

Financial constraints and a shortage of housing options often restricted rangatahi in their ability to obtain suitable housing:

“...the lack of housing, because I don’t get supported, so anyone like – everyone they say, ‘Oh no, you can’t afford this, can’t afford that’.” (Penny’s mum)

General affordability of suitable housing was also a constraint. In this instance, after being in several unsuitable provider-accessed housing situations, a rangatahi found her own private rental that was more suitable, but the price was excessive and above-average for her area:

“It’s really expensive, but in the end it’s OK.” (Willow)

Having restricted hours of work also contributed to rangatahi inability to move into suitable housing situations. In this case a rangatahi who was working shift work felt that she would prefer to wait until she had regular hours before moving into a flatting situation with her peers:

“I’d rather not like move into a flat with a group of people that work normal hours and then there’s me that works dumb-as hours.” (Tania)

Mental health and ongoing trauma effects can affect sustainability of employment, hours of work and income can also impact some co-habiting living situations, which can mean finding safe and suitable kāinga options is a challenge.

Looking ahead: Rangatahi future aspirations for kāinga and living situations

Not all rangatahi spoke about kāinga goals and aspirations in their interview, with the majority in safe and stable housing by year 3. Of those who did refer specifically to goals, these were generally more focused on mahi/akoranga as a way to enable better kāinga situations in the future. The following are examples of specific kāinga rangatahi goals:

Goals

- Housing support to find suitable places away from drugs where he can build a rental history and that will also rent to people with convictions.
- To move to another area of the country to be closer to her sibling who has a child of a similar age so their children can grow up together.
- Had plans to move overseas however this has changed. Now she is hoping to flat with different people, since her current flatmates already organised to continue living together without her.
- To move with her mum and sister to a new, bigger place with better neighbours.
- To move out from living with caregiver whānau now that she's older and more independent, perhaps to go flatting with friends.
- To move out from living with his grandmother and go flatting with friends.
- To find a flat through Facebook or online.
- Having a more stable place to stay.

Service needs and aspirations

- More support with knowledge of support services available – Rangatahi spoke of not having any knowledge of suitable housing options or supports, including finances or flatmates or how to access them. Proactive ārahitanga from services and help navigating services and markets such as StudyLink, the housing market and tenancy and lease obligations would be beneficial in this regard.
- More consistency and dedication of TSS and other services in support provided – Rangatahi experienced inconsistency with services in their transition journeys. A regular contact and needs assessment may help to address this gap identified by rangatahi as well as maintaining ongoing and regular follow up with rangatahi. Persistence is required to help rangatahi find suitable kāinga that supports their need for safety and stability. Emergency housing for example appears not suitable or helpful for rangatahi development.
- Tailored services and advice (e.g., for young parents, those accessing independent living for the first time) – Personalised wraparound services encompassing aspects such as financial supports and entitlements or suitable housing options would be beneficial to rangatahi in accessing suitable kāinga.
- Support for navigating accessing of suitable housing specifically (such as entitlements, where to look, housing service providers, how to address lack of rental history and references).

Exemplar case illustration: Kāinga | Housing #1

Willow's story has been shared to illustrate positive kāinga outcomes. It highlights the uncertainty rangatahi in care can face when their circumstances change and the way that the presence of, or lack of support by key people such as caregivers and transition workers can have a large impact on their lives. All four of the āhukatanga concepts are present and easily discernible in Willow's story, however mana ake emerges as the main thread that has enabled Willow to turn a challenging journey into a positive outcome for her whānau.



A safe place for pēpi: Willow's story

Kāinga Case Illustration #1

Where did my transition journey begin?



Where am I now?



How did I get here?



What's next?

Where did my transition journey begin?

Willow was happy and settled, living in a large city with a non-kin caregiver and their whānau when we met during year one of this study. During this placement, Willow had become hapū (pregnant) and a key challenge for her at that point was feeling uncertain as to whether Oranga Tamariki would continue to fund this living arrangement. Willow felt unsupported by her social worker who was inexperienced with working alongside young pregnant people in her role. This caused much distress for Willow who was attending a Teen Parenting Unit (TPU) at the time and was adamant that she wanted her baby to remain in her care. She felt frustrated.

Although Willow previously had a transition worker, she had been allocated a new one just before the first interview. She was worried about her living situation.

Willow was enjoying the TPU, learning about parenting, literacy and numeracy. Growing up, her mum had kept Willow and her siblings connected to their Māori culture and she continued this at the TPU by participating in the Cultural Group with other parents and speaking te reo Māori.

Willow's caregiver was a huge support to her during this time, helping her arrange a midwife, teaching her how to budget and supporting her general health and wellbeing. Her goals at year 1 were related to caring for her baby and wanting to get her restricted driving licence.

Where am I now?

Willow is back in a relationship with the father of her child and they are living as a family in a three-bedroom, private rental. The challenge now however is that rent is quite expensive – above average for similar-sized houses in her area. Willow and her partner both work full-time and share caregiving responsibilities. She now has her restricted licence which has also helped her visit and stay connected to her younger siblings in nearby towns.

Although she couldn't complete the Likert scale rating at year 2, when asked if she thinks things are going ok at year 3 she rated it as a '4 – yes definitely.' When asked why, she replied, "I just feel very stable."

"they've always told me growing up that I can stay in care until 21 and then I got hapū and they were like, 'no.'"

"Well if I can't stay here with baby, I know that it's going to make me very unstable to start with because I don't know where I'm going to end up or anything..."



"I just feel very stable."



Willow's story continued



How did I
get here?



What's next?

How did I get here?

Oranga Tamariki did not continue to fund Willow's caregiving arrangement, so she decided to move out as there was too much financial strain being placed on her caregivers. She rented privately for a short time but decided to move due to unpleasant flatmates. She continued to follow up with the organisation that her previous transition worker came from and eventually they were able to enrol her into a programme at a local marae. Through transition support services there she was linked into a social service which supports care-experienced youth with subsidised housing. Willow stayed there for over half a year before deciding to look for something else due to it being too small.

While searching, Willow had seen some rental listings from her previous landlord.

What's next?

Willow and her partner's current goals are to move elsewhere in Aotearoa to be closer to one of Willow's older siblings, who has a young child of a similar age.

Willow doesn't feel that she will need much assistance going forward and feels well supported. Although she acknowledges the support she has received from key people, much of what Willow has achieved has been the result of her own strength and desire to give her child a safe and stable upbringing.

If she had her time again, Willow would tell her younger self, "To just realise that everything takes time and not just to expect it to happen overnight. And that probably that if you want to go places once you end care, not just rely on the system. You've got to put yourself in this mind frame to get yourself there as well."

"...when I moved out of there it wasn't the fact that I was a bad tenant or she was a bad landlord, it was just the fact that I didn't like the other people in the flat... so when she saw my name pop up, she was more than happy to give us another house, which was good. We pretty much got a house as soon as I applied."



"So [the child] can be around [their] real family and not just [their] foster family."

"I've always had the strength to go out and find resources if I don't feel supported. I've always had that strength to get up and go find those resources even when I was younger, like even just simply finding my own transition worker and things like that. I know that when I get put in situations like that, that because I don't want to repeat my family's history with my [child], I know that I'm able to make those quick decisions."

Exemplar case illustration: Kāinga | Housing #2

Victoria's story speaks to her experiences with housing during her transition journey. Unfortunately, her story is a stark contrast to Willow's and demonstrates negative kāinga outcomes in the form of unsafe living situations. Victoria talks about the many challenges she has faced which have made securing a safe and stable kāinga difficult, such as mental health struggles and the impacts of past trauma. However, unlike Willow she felt invalidated and unsupported by the people around her who were meant to help. Victoria too, has shown strengths related to her sense of mana ake which have supported her to stay resilient and retain her independence throughout her journey.



Somewhere safe to call home: Victoria's Story

Kāinga Case Illustration #2

Where did my transition journey begin?



Where am I now?



How did I get here?



What's next?

Where did my transition journey begin?

Victoria is a young Pākehā female living in the North Island. At the beginning of this study she was 17 years old, living with her boyfriend whom she had only known for a week and under Oranga Tamariki care and protection. She had already had numerous contacts with Youth Justice and spoke of past trauma that she would like to deal with.

Victoria is autistic and was suffering from depression, she had made a suicide attempt by overdosing on medication a week prior to the first interview. Victoria is a strong, sociable and confident young woman who has clear goals around further vocational training in beauty therapy. She also wanted to find stable housing and strengthen relationships with her family, however she believed she needed to deal with her emotional issues first. Victoria didn't feel that her emotional issues were taken seriously, or that Oranga Tamariki and other organisations were helping.

Where am I now?

Victoria has grown a lot over 3 years but has also hardened to disappointments. She is living in an unsafe environment in emergency housing and has been in and out of homelessness over the past 12 months. She feels unsupported in her transition and that there is nowhere to go to find somewhere safe to live.

Victoria was unable to complete her qualifications, has worked off and on but cites battles with mental health and employment affecting her benefit as the main contributors to her inability to earn her living or access housing.

*Child, Adolescent and Family Services provided by a Te Whatu Ora District Health Board

"They're just there. Some of them -- I think CAFS aren't doing anything but the rest are kind of. OT isn't doing anything either, they're the ones that gave me the meds to look after, thinking I was stable enough to carry them, but I obviously wasn't."*



"My transition worker is meant to be helping me but she's kind of said, 'You do it on your own,' my transition worker is like, 'You've used your money, I don't know what else I can do for you.' Like, I don't know who to ask."

"So, I'm back in emergency housing, in [an emergency boarding house] at the moment due to the lack of help from Transitions. They kind of just tossed me away, my transition worker has been very unhelpful. And the house I'm living in is unsafe."

"I've had job interviews but they don't like the hours I'm able to offer, since I'm on a certain benefit I can only work to \$110 a week, which ends up like four or five hours because the minimum wage has gone up. But if I work longer I'll lose my benefit which is my main source of income."



Victoria's Story continued



How did I
get here?



What's next?

How did I get here?

Victoria's Likert Scale rating went from a '4 -Definitely going OK' at the year 2 interview, due to the feeling of independence, to a '2 -Not really going OK' at the year 3 interview. While she has grown as a person, she feels she has gone backwards regarding her mental health and housing situation. After the first interview, Victoria split with her boyfriend and was placed in foster care which did not work out, resulting in her spending the last 18 months in and out of emergency housing and couch surfing. Unfortunately, throughout the three years of interviews neither of her core issues around housing or mental health have been resolved. While Victoria has matured, her challenges have remained consistent throughout. Perceived lack of support from Oranga Tamariki, her transition worker, other agencies, and a feeling of being discarded come through as her main barriers.

What's next?

Victoria has consistently expressed her needs to deal with past trauma, mental health and the need to find safe, stable independent accommodation throughout the three years of interviews. These are still her core goals and aspirations. Victoria has grown personally and continues to be more independent – "I feel like I'm pretty independent. I get myself where I need to be if I have to be somewhere, and I often do a lot of my -- standing up for myself and make appointments for myself because that's been slack by my support. So, I feel like I'm a little bit more independent from when we last met. I feel I've grown up a lot as well, yeah." Victoria's advice to her younger self was around more financial support for those unable to find housing and mental health disability support as she finds it difficult finding programmes to assist with this.

"She [transition worker] actually said some really unprofessional hurtful things, and so I kind of do feel like I have no help with the housing stuff."

"She often says I'm unmanageable, like because of my diagnosis and mental health, but every other support worker is like... she shouldn't be kind of discarding me like that, like it's not even too hard to handle, she's just kind of given up, which is kind of sad because she's been there since I was 17."



"I think having quite -- having a lot of knowledge on mental health end, abuse and trauma. Because a lot of people coming out of foster care or went into foster care have dealt with a lot of trauma and stuff"

"I would say, stick to your gut and be open to new experiences...just because you have a mindset like this, don't let your mindset be closed, because a closed mindset won't help you get further in life -- because you have to have an open mindset to accept the good and the bad to grow from situations."

2. Mahi/akoranga – Work, training and education

Rangatahi engagement in mahi and akoranga at 18 to 24 months

By the third year of this study, participating rangatahi had mostly settled into some type of mahi (work) or akoranga (training/education). Many were working to establish career paths. Experience and learnings had led some to make changes in their direction. An example is John who removed himself from an Engineering Course (March 2022) and is now doing an IT certificate (online) which is also part of an IT Bachelor's degree course:

“...didn't like engineering after a while, really wanted to do IT from the start and felt that engineering was a bit too soon for me.” (John)

Sixteen rangatahi spoke specifically about their mahi/akoranga circumstances in their interviews. Of those four were in full-time work, two in part-time work, four were in formal study, at least two were volunteering and six said they were not engaged in mahi or study or were on a Job Seeker benefit. Of those working, most were in labouring positions with one rangatahi each talking about being in manufacturing, retail and hospitality.

Sarah, who was still at school (through special education provisions of the Education Act) was also working part-time in her school café. Other rangatahi were in post-school study, John for example was *“doing maths and physics online and doing level 5 IT BSc and working part-time in retail”*. Some rangatahi had casual work but all of those that did were keen to get more stable hours.

Several rangatahi from the YJ space were employed in full-time labouring and driving work, Brian was working 12-hour days six days a week, and had no time for anything else, sleeping on his day off. Eruera who was concreting simply stated: *“I am keen for more work”* and was hoping to make his job permanent. The job has helped him gain routines, make new mates, and occupy his time. His boss says he's a good worker and is happy to keep him on.

Others had been in employment or study but were not currently doing either, for example Belinda who *“was doing beauty training...got some certs... can't get work”*.

Some rangatahi felt they were under-employed or in low pay/minimum pay roles and feeling stuck. A few of these were trying to gain more hours or other full-time mahi.

Working hard to meet aspirations, gain industry qualifications or promotions was a theme for rangatahi, often motivated by wanting to provide good home lives for themselves and their whānau, interweaving mahi/akoranga and kāinga goals.

Enablers of positive mahi/akoranga outcomes

Key enablers for positive outcomes in the areas of mahi/akoranga-work/education and training included various aspects of hononga-connectedness, haumarutanga-safe places, mana ake-self agency and ārahitanga-guidance. In addition, the possession of a driver's licence and access to transport were very practical enablers for rangatahi to engage in and achieve positive outcomes in education, training and the workplace.

Hononga – Connectedness

Having the support of whānau (biological or metaphorical) was frequently identified as vital for positive mahi/akoranga experiences. Support was manifested in a number of, often very practical and tangible ways. From getting a job directly through a family member, *“I got the job through Dad”*, or a contact of a girlfriend’s whānau, to accessing security work through whānau friends and their informal networks; the value of connections was significant.

In education and training, whānau could provide both the motivation to pursue a particular area of education or training and support to do so (e.g., through giving ‘tips’, explanations or demonstrations). An example of this is John who changed his area of study to pursue a career in IT after speaking with his uncle who owned an IT business overseas and had indicated that he would provide support to his nephew in his learning. Tāne also secured work labouring with his uncle and Brian gained employment through his father.

For some rangatahi, providing contribution to whānau and kāinga could offer both motivation and a sense of satisfaction or accomplishment. When asked about what enabled Tāne to maintain work he said that: *“to provide for family and stay on good terms with (partner)”* is the main motivation...*“knowing that I’m contributing to whānau wellbeing helps too”*. A rangatahi worked five to six days per week stating that he *“liked the job and the sense of contribution to whānau”*.

For some rangatahi, culturally appropriate or marae-based study provided a sense of connection to whānau and culture that they enjoyed and felt they benefitted from.

Paid work/workplaces often incorporated elements of formal or informal training and experiential learning. Some workplaces provided access to job-related qualifications (eg. WorkSafe certificates, forklift driving) or motivation to gain additional skills and qualifications (from loading goods onto a truck to obtaining an appropriate ‘ticket’ to drive the truck).

Interestingly, to a lesser extent rangatahi acknowledged connections with friends or peer networks as enablers to positive mahi/akoranga outcomes. Tāne said he got some work as security for dance parties directly through friends, whom he gets to work with as well.

Haumarutanga – Safety/safe places

Learning and working environments where rangatahi felt safe physically, culturally and emotionally contributed to successful outcomes for rangatahi in mahi/akoranga. These included cultural service or marae education settings. Sometimes environments with tailored pedagogies and positive people enabled rangatahi to feel safe learning. Rangatahi describe these as *“great learning environments”* where they *“enjoy practical roles”*.

After not feeling safe in her current town and experiencing conflict in her workplace, Amy is looking forward to job opportunities when she relocates and is hoping to re-establish in a position which she has completed industry training for:

“Moving to (hometown) will offer other employment opportunities and perhaps away from personalities I have struggled with in (current town).”

For young people with recognised impairment or disability, there was often an extra layer of support, with specific organisations focused on their care providing some excellent wraparound services, sometimes homes and teacher aides and programmes designed to meet their learning and achievement needs.

A strong programme as part of wraparound supported living was testing behaviours and increasing independence for Lee, who is living with significant disability and spent a lot of time constructing things and working in an arts and crafts room. He had been helping with planter boxes, making things out of wood, helping with establishing a garden for the centre he was at and had kept himself very busy. A mentor was brought in as part of his learning development programme.

“We found that with support around all of those things he can be trusted to do these things and do them – even independently.”

“I mean I’m really happy with his progress. I would love to see what the future has in store for him and if he does, you know, is there a possibility of him being independent and going and living semi-independent where he doesn’t have – because at the moment he has 24-hour support.” (Lee’s support worker)

Significantly, another rangatahi who has Down’s Syndrome and limited verbal capacity happily attends a special school where they were learning how to do things that enhance learning and independence (e.g., learnt to use and got a library card) resulting in more engagement in the programme and noticeable language development.

Mana ake – Self-agency

Rangatahi in this study have consistently shown mana ake in their pathway aspirations, resilience, self-agency and self-motivation to varying degrees. This is still evident in their mahi/akoranga aspirations and actions in year 3.

An example of mana ake is demonstrated in the way that some rangatahi maintain big dreams for their careers and follow through on these. After Dad helped secure Brian a job he’s starting to expand his work aspirations from driving trucks to boats:

“This job might take me somewhere in life, something else better where I want to be...Yeah. I want to drive...like cargo ships and stuff...I’ve been looking into it.”

There were examples of rangatahi re-evaluating their study pathway to reflect the type of career or mahi they are wanting or “*finding what they love*”, like John who removed himself from a course to study his “*passion*”. Rangatahi expressed that having consistency and a strong work ethic enables a sense that other greater aspirations/success are within reach. For example, Brian works hard six days a week, sleeping on days off. In response to the question “What has helped you the most over these last couple of years?”, he replied:

“I think this job... Yeah, keeps me out of trouble.”

Clear self-assurance and confidence was identified by a few rangatahi as being an enabler for positive mahi/akoranga outcomes. Oliver described how his confidence enabled him to start MC-ing at local events and he attributed confidence to being able to make money being in a band as a ‘*side hustle*’:

“Many, many times I’ll get offered to, like, MC for big events in (town), or MC in different cities and towns. And gigging, that’s really my side hustle and money.”

There are examples of mana ake where rangatahi such as Willow are undertaking activities like updating CVs and handing them into a few stores for part-time work prospects, or like

Penny, doing volunteer work to build up their CV. Bella applied for her job and started at the beginning of Covid. She had to work from home, undertaking training, until she was able to start in person. She has maintained her job for over a year, seeking more hours to start with, and has now been promoted to a higher position.

Ārahitanga – Guidance

Career support and pathway planning were both prominently identified by rangatahi as important to mahi/akoranga success as described in the hononga section above. Transition workers were also sometimes identified as providing assistance with job seeking by linking rangatahi with 'trade-assist' or trade fairs:

"I went to a course with the transition worker...just to help me get like job seeking..." (Brian)

Assistance to learn things like budgeting skills were likewise significant and acted as enablers in the other focus areas. In relation to mahi/akoranga, budgeting skills was not a strong point for Bella, but in the last year she had worked out what she needed to do.

"I'm getting paid, I'm getting money... it forces me to budget... work is important to me because otherwise I won't be able to pay my rent."

Tim, who is currently in prison has taken advantage of the study available to him: *"I'm doing a numeracy and literacy, and in March I've got this AOD course going up; eight-week AOD course".* He also spoke about doing all the courses on offer: *"Like everything that they can offer me; scaffolding course, barista, hospitality, customer service. Yeah, like that type of stuff."*

Other contributors to positive mahi/akoranga outcomes

Financial assistance allowed rangatahi to access learning opportunities. Despite their young age, because of their circumstances, some rangatahi were eligible for the student allowance. This enabled rangatahi who did not have whānau (financial) support to gain qualifications and skills that would likely have a positive impact on their future career trajectory.

Gaining or upgrading driver's licences was a huge enabler for many rangatahi, either by learning how to drive or becoming legal drivers to assist with securing a car, or transport to and from mahi/study. In some instances, licensing assisted with meeting job requirements or helped with obtaining employment or promotions. Having access to driving lessons (e.g., through a school programme, parents) was significant for rangatahi in relation to positive mahi/akoranga outcomes and added to their mana ake. One rangatahi noted *"...getting my learners licence gives me confidence in myself"*. For another rangatahi, obtaining a licence also impacted on hononga and ārahitanga themes. When Karl got his licence through REAP (Rural Education Activities Programme) in year 2, his mum sat her licence first and then he followed her lead.

Aside from licencing, other transport options to and from mahi/akoranga were also key. Along with transport assistance from whānau and friends, rangatahi described catching public transport and staying mobile, in one case, using an electric scooter (which could be expensive). A number referred to services offering financial assistance and timely support for travel as important. For example, Belinda when describing significant help said:

“Mainly financial support, being able to get there on the train, from OT” (regarding training). “If I didn’t have that, I think I wouldn’t have been able to get out there. I know people that stopped their courses because they couldn’t afford to get out there. So that was good, with them.”

Work-related qualifications and experience were evident in providing forward movement for rangatahi in mahi/akoranga, impacting on things like mana ake (confidence, sense of agency, access to finance and contribution to whanau), haumarutanga (job security, feeling happier), hononga (new/strengthened networks), arahitanga (direction, options/pathways). Some evidence of work qualifications and experience with these positive impacts for rangatahi are:

- Manufacturing – “changed job to better role... happier”
- Job at retail store – “got promotions”
- Duty manager licence – “working on good pay”
- Bakery qualification – “can relocate and have options”
- Doing correspondence school – “helps”.

Constraints and challenges to positive mahi/akoranga outcomes

Hononga – Connectedness

While hononga was a huge enabler for some rangatahi in their medium-term mahi/akoranga journeys, lack of hononga was a serious challenge for others. Not having strong and connected relationships could be a challenge for rangatahi in meeting their mahi/akoranga goals, limiting access to things like transport, pathways/planning and motivation. As well as these limitations, managing and navigating relationships in the workplace posed particular challenges for some rangatahi. Several described relational difficulties at work as causing them to leave without alternative employment to go to, and struggling to manage the impact of these negative relational experiences.

Haumarutanga – Safety/safe places

Workplace bullying was mentioned by several rangatahi and was damaging in terms of mana ake (particularly by undermining confidence and sense of efficacy), and hononga (undermining relationships and lost connections). After gaining qualifications in her industry and being promoted to a managerial position, Amy felt bullied at her job causing her to leave that position but remaining in the same workplace. However, she felt that the next role also exposed her to the same behaviours, so she lost confidence and left the industry:

“I tried to deal with that (bullying) but couldn’t find another job. I did find another job but I got bullied there too so I decided not to work in that department anymore.”

In contrast to Tim who was able to do lots of courses while in prison, Troy, who is also in prison, was unable to take part in any course as they weren’t offered to him. Doing courses was important for potentially reducing his parole date but his nan thinks “*the system sucks*”. She attended a parole meeting and they said he could possibly get out early if he completed courses – but no courses have been offered. She said, “*maybe they are short staffed so are not offering courses*”. The related issue of criteria for programmes for rangatahi to access in prison is described in more detail in the Staying Crime Free section of this report.

Mana ake – Self-agency

Several rangatahi spoke about feeling confused or unsure around their next steps. Oliver was at a “crossroads” and unsure what to do next.

“... I’m still in education. I’m in my – this is my final year of diploma as well, and this is the great part, but the worst part is the next year plan, the vision, like, what’s plans for next year. That’s probably my only issue that right now. I’m a bit lost of decisions and what to do for next year...”

Associated with feelings of confusion sometimes, a lack of motivation or entrepreneurial spirit seemed evident with some rangatahi. Past trauma responses were sometimes identified as hindering the ability of rangatahi to progress in their mahi. Tania was dealing with challenges at an internship placement and described it as “*triggering*” and this contributed to the organisation’s choice to end her internship early. Another rangatahi struggled to deal with conflict in the workplace and also resigned. While wanting to gain increased hours Tāne acknowledged that he was still not getting full-time work – not just due to unavailability of work but by “*not being organised and prepared*” himself.

In some cases, rangatahi who had previously struggled with negative behaviours found this impacted their ability to undertake or sustain work or study. Drug use impacted motivation and access to jobs (drug testing requirements), “*some days I just can’t do what I need to do... smoke too much (marijuana)*”. Ethan “*lost licence so lost job*” as a result. Both are on Job Seeker benefits.

Ārahitanga – Guidance

A general absence of career ārahitanga was specifically noted by at least four rangatahi. Oliver’s quote under mana ake above also demonstrates he could do with some guidance around his career planning as he completes his music course. Absence of planning supports leading to lack of direction again emerged as a substantial hindrance to accessing training and employment. A lack of clear goals and associated lack of confidence had a flow-on effect on “*job search struggles*”. Rangatahi did not know how to access appropriate financial resources or other entitlements and felt unable to get advice, guidance or support. In year 1 only ‘1 in 5’⁴⁵ rangatahi described having formal transition plans and this could continue to impact rangatahi in their medium-term mahi/akoranga journeys.

Other challenges and constraints to positive mahi/akoranga outcomes

Learning and literacy difficulties and/or having a disability or unresolved trauma can hinder rangatahi in their mahi/akoranga aspirations. Tania was doing an internship at an organisation working with youth but trauma triggered by the mahi and literacy issues led to it being terminated.

Having difficulties like these without adequate support was a constraint in cases such as Victoria who was diagnosed with Autism in year 2 and “*can’t work more than 10 hours a*

⁴⁵ Oranga Tamariki. (2021). Ngā Haerenga | Transition Journeys: Longitudinal study phase one. www.orangatamariki.govt.nz/about-us/research/our-research/nga-haerenga-transition-journeys-longitudinal-study-phase-one/

week”, or others with ADHD and learning differences struggling to access or maintain adequate mahi/akoranga opportunities.

Sometimes, others’ perceptions of a rangatahi living with disability was thought of as limiting what they could achieve.

“They used your intellectual disability and that as if you couldn’t do things or achieve things and that. And I mean that’s – that’s what they’ve focused with [Name], not her abilities...Yeah, not nurturing her strengths. And the social workers definitely have not nurtured the strengths.”

“CAFS were saying, ‘Oh, she shouldn’t be able to do this. She can’t do this.’ Half of what they said that she shouldn’t be able to do she already had surpassed.” (Parent)

Competing responsibilities were a restriction for several rangatahi in being able to work or study, for example Karl who enjoys providing care for his siblings to support his mum including taking them to and from school and sees this as a job in itself. Another rangatahi was very keen to keep up his sport, and he tried out for it but the long hours he worked (12-hour days) meant he did not have the energy to participate therefore his work/life/hauora balance was challenged. Luke spoke about needing to find a safe and stable living environment before he could look at getting mahi:

“Well, once I’ve got something solid and I’m in a house, I want to be getting at least a part-time job and then do some studying online... That’s probably the first one, yeah, just as soon as we’ve got somewhere to properly stay, then job.”

Having financial constraints to address issues such as the cost of travel, start-up costs (i.e., course costs/equipment, uniforms, tools for mahi etc), having no access to phone or internet to job seek or meet benefit requirements, or the exorbitant cost of education as expressed by Victoria “*want to study but can’t afford it*” was problematic for rangatahi.

Five rangatahi specifically mentioned varying negative impacts of Justice and MSD system failures as being a constraint on their mahi/akoranga outcomes, i.e., either not having knowledge and understanding of entitlements or the entitlement criteria being perceived as unfair itself. For instance, Belinda who is hapū does not qualify for maternity leave as she had not been in her position long enough and also could not access the sole parent benefit as she was still seeing her partner: “*partner is working so not collecting benefits...so financially strapped*”, or one rangatahi who stated: “*...can’t find a proper job...worked more hours and go over \$110...WINZ penalised payments*”.

At the year 2 interview, Asher explained that he was unable to access StudyLink to pay for his course due to the entitlement criteria:

“StudyLink wasn’t giving me the Student Allowance because the EFTS⁴⁶ were 0.75 instead of 0.8. Whoever made the classes in [polytech] didn’t give them enough credits or days or something, so I wasn’t able to get the allowance.”

⁴⁶ Equivalent Full-Time Student – a way of measuring a student’s workload used by tertiary providers and StudyLink.

Looking ahead: Rangatahi future aspirations for mahi/akoranga

Goals

At this stage numerous rangatahi expressed a variety of future goals and aspirations in regard to mahi/akoranga.

- There were several rangatahi who expressed a desire to start their own businesses and were working towards goals to achieve this like saving to buy equipment, such as one who is saving \$5k to buy IT gear or others gaining relevant qualifications to assist them in their business aspirations.
- Obtaining a better job or a 'forward focus' was part of aspirations illustrated by "wanting full-time", "more hours" or "looking for better part-time work". Willow expressed she will seek a new job when relocating "(looking for) a hospitality role when I move by my sister."
- Gaining qualifications was another goal of rangatahi – even just completing school. Brittany is already aware of further skills and endorsements she wants to get that will support her in the future such as a Duty Manager's Licence and Penny wants "to go to polytech or get a job like practised on the job training (e.g., woodwork, building, travelling, nurse) ...prefer a part-time job at the moment".
- Getting a driver's licence was another goal. And for a rangatahi in prison he "wants job when leaves prison...not sure what...want to earn money".
- One rangatahi had goals for mahi/akoranga centered on whanaungatanga and contribution back to whānau – gaining a strong sense of respect.

Service needs and aspirations

- Career ārahitanga: (would benefit from next steps guidance / training, independence)
- Opportunities, advocacy and prioritising the development of rangatahi in/out of prison acknowledging this is a critical time in their life and will impact on life course outcomes
- Marae-based or culturally-based supports (e.g., marae-based courses)
- Driver licensing help
- Benefit advice (advice on benefit claw-backs, knowing about entitlements)
- Quicker response times from Oranga Tamariki for needs (help with transport from Oranga Tamariki; support when transferring benefits smoothly; slow response times and hassle process)
- Wraparound support for rangatahi with high needs: (need intensive support and specialised training courses that provide extra supervisory capacity to follow interests, e.g., woodwork – specialist support would be needed to train in a particular job)
- Financial support for young parents (unfair not to be able to access maternity leave, benefits or to lose placements)
- Support for stability of hours and sufficient hours of work.

Exemplar case illustration: Mahi/akoranga | Work, training and education #1

Tania's story shows that although some young people in care are eventually able to find a strong sense of haumarutanga with positive and supportive whānau, their work and/or study prospects can still be negatively impacted by not having the right ārahitanga. Her journey illustrates how hauora can be challenged by work situations and how mental health struggles can be exacerbated by experiences such as racism and an inability to get the right support to deal with past trauma. It's clear that Tania has a desire to become more independent, but that certain conditions need to be in place to empower her sense of mana ake further.



Looking for a change: Tania's story

Mahi/Akoranga Case Illustration #1

Where did my transition journey begin?



Where am I now?



How did I get here?



What's next?

Where did my transition journey begin?

Tania had been living with non-kin foster parents in a small town for just under a year – the longest Oranga Tamariki care placement she had experienced. Tania is Māori and Pākehā but identifies more strongly with her Māori heritage. She had a strong bond with her foster parents, calling them 'mum' and 'dad' and felt like part of their family. Without her foster whānau, Tania felt that she would have missed out on a lot.

Tania wanted to remain living with her foster whānau once she turned 18 and had begun making plans.

Tania's mahi/akoranga goals at year 1 were to study Youth Work the following year through a national provider and she was hoping to get an internship in a local organisation as well. Her long-term dream was to use her future qualification to support and advocate for other tamariki and rangatahi in care.

Where am I now?

At the time of the year 3 interview, Tania was no longer engaged in her youth work internship and instead had a job in the food service industry.

Tania does not enjoy her food service job. She finds it stressful and has had run-ins with managers while advocating for herself and other staff. She wants to make a change but feels stuck

Although she is still living with her foster whānau and is comfortable there, Tania recognises a desire to move out and be independent. She had plans to go flatting with friends but decided against it as they like to party too much. Financially it also makes sense for her to stay where she is for the time being. A great positive of Tania's foster whānau are that they are also Māori. They are engaged with their hapū, iwi and marae and use te reo Māori regularly in the home. This has sustained and nurtured Tania's connection to te ao Māori and has encouraged her to explore her own whakapapa further.

Tania gave a Likert rating of 2 in the final interview, the same rating she gave the previous year.

"Yeah, we've a really cool bond and like they teach me so many things and support me quite a bit."

"I wouldn't have known and I probably wouldn't have gotten extra support, like my counselling, driving lessons, my licence and a whole bunch of stuff like necessities that I need in life."

"Yes, we have with my transition worker and we made like an agreement and everything that I have to pay rent, which is big kid stuff and fair enough and I'm welcome to live there whenever I want or however long."



"I'm thinking more like an apprenticeship in building or painting because I really love painting. I've done two trials and I've just really enjoyed it. But, yeah, no one wants to hire me for an apprenticeship because I don't have the qualifications... and I can't afford to go and study for them. And my car keeps breaking..."

"because like everything's falling apart."



Tania's story continued



How did I
get here?



What's next?

How did I get here?

Tania explained that she had been unable to keep up with her studies and her internship had been ended by the provider agency.

Tania felt unsupported to navigate the challenges she was experiencing and unsure how to advocate for herself.

Tania had talked openly about her mental health struggles at years 1 and 2 and these were only exacerbated by her job and other hardships she had been experiencing when we spoke at the year 3 interview. Tania also talked about witnessing racism in her workplace, "Because I've heard a lot of racist stuff. Just being like, "Kia ora, what kai can I get you tonight?", stuff like that, and they're just like, you know, a racist."

She had been receiving counselling, however she had been busy and missed some appointments causing her counsellor to close her file which she was feeling upset about.

What's next?

Tania's main focus at the moment is to change to a job she enjoys and that is less stressful.

She also feels that she still needs counselling, "I really need counselling but, you know, it's just too much admin to find a new counsellor and my case file got closed. I can't really afford counselling anyway." So she has decided not to re-engage.

"Well, because of COVID, you know, my internship -- but also like it was too much for me because I was struggling a lot with my mental health..."

"they were always like, 'Oh, yeah, we'll support you and help you' but they didn't really..." "I struggle a lot with reading and writing and I didn't know how to advocate for that because I didn't want to get the piss taken out of me."

"I don't really talk to anyone anymore. My counsellor closed my file, even though I've been asking her for a counselling session for a little bit and she just randomly decided to message me, 'Hey, we haven't had a session since August. I think it's time to close your file.' I'm like, 'Okay. I really need counselling but okay.'"



"No, I think I'm just going to leave it, like not getting counselling and mother nature. I'll just go camping once my car's fixed and then figure it out from there."

Exemplar case illustration: Mahi/akoranga | Work, training and education #2

Oliver's story is similar to Tania's in that he has a good sense of haumarutanga in his kāinga and with key whānau members. Although he is a passionate young man who has been able to engage with his interests and accomplish a lot already, like Tania he is lacking strong and consistent ārahitanga in relation to his next steps. The uncertainty of his future has impacted on Oliver's hauora too, causing anxiety around how he will be able to achieve his career goals.



Seeking Guidance: Oliver's Story

Mahi/Akoranga - Case Illustration #2

Where did my transition journey begin?



Where am I now?



How did I get here?



What's next?

Where did my transition journey begin?

Oliver is a Māori male who was 17 at the first interview. He was at boarding school while under care and protection and staying with his Nan and sister when not attending school. Oliver talked of suffering childhood trauma and being thankful that he was in care and protection with his Nan. He is a confident, driven, and hardworking young man who has clear goals around creating and performing music – Oliver had a settled home life with his Nan and although he had to move schools due to issues with bullying, he was thriving at his new school.

Oliver has a strong connection to his whānau through his Nan and sister, he also speaks of various aunts who pop in from time to time and offer support. He has not connected with his Māori heritage and is unsure of his whakapapa.

At the time of the first interview Oliver spoke of having had a lot of social workers. However, he was not sure if he had a transition worker or what a transition worker was. He did not have a clear plan once out of Oranga Tamariki care.

Where am I now?

At year 3, Oliver was still living with his Nan and enjoyed the security and stable nature of his home life.

He has continued to work on his passion for performing and is in the final year of a diploma course in music. Oliver is also performing gigs and emceeing events which allows him to earn money while studying. He is proud of his accomplishments to date but is concerned about his next steps and lack of direction. The one area of uncertainty is around his future.

Oliver continues to be in close contact with his sisters and they support him. His relationship with his wider whānau isn't as strong and he has still not connected with his mother's side of the whānau.

Regarding contact from Oranga Tamariki, Oliver has not had much interaction at all.

"My plan is to do music...that was to go work, get my money and get the equipment."

"I've had heaps, they're always changing. I remember having a social worker for like about ten minutes and then he'll leave or she'll leave."



"Home will always be home to me. No, nothing has changed. Everything's still the same. I mean, it's all lovely and that."

"This is my final year of diploma as well, and this is the great part, but the worst part is the next year plan, the vision".

"Yeah, like a pathway...I think that's only because right now I'm pretty anxious for what next year brings to us."

"Yeah, so I get along with all of them with ease. Like, they check up on me every day."

"You know what, I haven't heard from them in -- I haven't heard of them since last year. I haven't heard one word from them. But no, they still give me, like, \$100 a fortnight. That's about it."



Oliver's Story

continued



How did I
get here?



What's next?

How did I get here?

Oliver's journey thus far has been assisted by a stable and secure living environment, with his Nan being a constant support, and by his connections with his sisters and wider whānau members.

His transition out of Oranga Tamariki care has been quite seamless. Although Oliver struggled with consistency with social workers, he did have a period of stability during year 2 with a social worker who he really connected with. Unfortunately, this connection only lasted a few months and then Oliver's transition worker changed again.

Music has been a constant in the 3 years of contact with Oliver and he has been in multiple bands throughout this time. He has done very well to complete his diploma and has a sense of confidence around his abilities.

What's next?

Oliver is unsure of what is next and is seeking guidance on options for his future. He is aware that music is not a traditional career option and is anxious about what path to take upon completion of his diploma.

He would like to continue to live with his Nan. Although he is aware that her health is deteriorating and he may need to move at some point, he is not focused on that at this time.

While Oliver has struggled with consistency of service from Oranga Tamariki in his transition, he is very thankful of their role in placing him into a safe and secure living arrangement as a child.

"But it was really hard because there were so many different people coming in saying, 'Yeah, I'll be your worker for today.' I had a worker for one day and she was gone.... But, no, this transition (worker) has been good. He's helped me out. He even comes through the studio and stuff, has a jam."

"Oh, yeah. Yeah, I'm on my way to finishing it with ease."



"You know, because I just -- all I know is that there's a place to go back to once everything is over and that's what I love about home."

"I really appreciate, I'm so grateful for everything that they (Oranga Tamariki) did for me when I was younger, man. Because I wouldn't be here today without them and I feel like, you know, I'm one of those stories that OT has. Like, I'm one of those stories. Like, through the media with them always getting negative comments and always getting put on blast that someone done this and done this and it's always on the controversial side. But I believe personally that I've -- that I was -- that I'm a story to tell from that -- from that environment that -- it's a good place."

3. Hauora – Health and wellbeing

Not every rangatahi was focused on, or open to talking about, health and wellbeing aspects of their transition journey. For those that did, the key focus areas are discussed below.

Health and wellbeing circumstances at 18 to 24 months

As was the case in previous years of this study mental health emerged as a prominent issue for many rangatahi. Mental health issues rangatahi were facing included: anxiety, paranoia (conspiracies), alcohol and other drugs, depression, trauma (including from care). ADHD, learning disabilities, Autism and Down's syndrome were also cited as impacting factors, with some categorising their mental health situation as 'bad' or fluctuating, and another descriptor as 'average'. One noted *"I'm getting help but I am relapsing again now, so trying to not relapse and not have to fall back into that depression can be really hard"*. There were others that were ambivalent or OK about their mental health at this stage: *"(I'm) not too worried...have hope for the future..."*.

Addressing mental health was described as both an enabler and a constraint to positive outcomes, depending on services, access and where the rangatahi themselves were at. Bella says it's her biggest barrier. *"I think for me it's just like my mental health is probably my biggest barrier."* Some were accessing therapy and others were not able to address or get help resolving their mental health issues for multiple reasons.

Most rangatahi were conscious of looking after their physical health and wellbeing and were actively engaged in a range of regular physical exercise activities. These included: riding push-bikes, exercise, table tennis, riding motorbikes with mates, gym, sports, playing Airsoft, surfing, walking pets, cardio workouts.

Victoria is suffering from long Covid which impacts on all facets of her wellbeing, and while *"hard"*, she is starting to reinstate some physical activity like swimming and soccer.

Enablers of success/ positive hauora outcomes

Hononga – Connectedness

"Good, strong relationships help with wellbeing." For the participants in this study this can include connections with whānau (as they see them), therapists/counsellors, friends, workmates, support services (including transition and social workers), and partners (and their whānau). Rangatahi said the basis of good, strong relationships that enabled hauora outcomes were things like: *"Trust and understanding, lived experience and supportive people including whānau"*. Rangatahi often referred to the fact that lived experience enabled empathy and therefore strengthened the connections they felt with these workers. When communicating on *"quality kaimahi care"* one rangatahi equates success to being trusted *"because trust leads to understanding"*. Another spoke about consistency from a support worker being helpful for their wellbeing *"my transition worker comes every Tuesday and that helps"*.

Whānau are often enablers to rangatahi in their hauora. Bella says her *"cousin is supportive and positive"* and for Amy, the practical support of her foster mum driving her 1½ hours each way to her counselling appointment every week is invaluable. For other rangatahi, foster whānau also continue to look after their wellbeing. Partners were also mentioned as

connecting rangatahi to support services and counselling, *“my girlfriend told me about (service) and makes sure I go to my appointments”*. (Tāne)

Some rangatahi who were or were about to be parents said that their tamariki motivated their ‘healthy living’:

“I’m hapū and baby’s health is my focus...feeling happy, excited, motivated to be well...access (supports) despite care.” (Belinda)

Good social services, predominantly therapist relationships, enable rangatahi to adequately address hauora needs. When asked about what led to good hauora outcomes, some of the replies from rangatahi included: *“Good connection with my therapist”, “Counsellor”, “Seeing my counsellor fortnightly...it’s helpful”*.

Having good connections with and support from Oranga Tamariki meant that Kaleb could access a counsellor to help address some mental health issues that impacted on his hauora. Karl was able to access drug and alcohol counselling with help from his transition worker:

(I) “OK, so you talked to him (transition worker) and said, “Oh, I want to – whatever – get on top of this?””

“Yeah. And then obviously he threw out some options and then I just picked one.”

Friends and supported living kaimahi were integral to rangatahi being involved in team sports and activities, and in some instances individual activities like going to the gym, bike riding or daily walks.

Pets were attributed to hauora in a few cases. Tania walks her dog daily along with going to the gym and surfing occasionally, all of which she said *“also helps with my mental health”*. Another rangatahi talked about her cat being *“really good for my mental health and routines”*.

Haumarutanga – Safety/safe places

Safe, stable environments lead to good hauora outcomes according to rangatahi, including having regular access to good kai and healthy housing options even as respite. Eruera spoke about how *“Kai was better prepared at Aunty’s but not at other place”*. Volunteering at ‘Kai in school’s’ distribution hub was cited an enabler and a place where rangatahi felt secure and had access to kai.

Being able to access safe services enabled positive hauora. One rangatahi was moved from a wait list and therapy started which *“has resolved a lot of trauma from care...I’m happy now”*.

Kaleb was also able to access counselling after a long wait and felt it had a positive impact:

“There was a lot of stuff I had to deal with...But I got through most of it. Some of it will be with us forever, I think...Yeah, no, I’ve dealt with most of all that stuff and it’s really nice.”

Predominantly in relation to disabled rangatahi, quality wraparound care situations and trust of support workers enabled good hauora progress. Lee had significant interests that could be dangerous to himself or others, however through safe intervention/trials, building trust, ensuring wellbeing, safe testing, tailored, careful solutions and courageous effort by his

supported living service and kaimahi he is now “doing well” and has other interests that are helpful to others and not risky.

Mana ake – Self-agency

Resilience, strength, self-agency, determination and perseverance emerged as mana ake factors for rangatahi hauora in this study. An example is by “keeping going – get it done”. One rangatahi persevered in connecting with different therapists to “overcome my trauma” and Bella showed insights into her own health by doing research: “And I kept researching and I’ve learnt so so much about it. But now I know how much it impacts me, and it does a lot.”

Looking after or taking responsibility for their own care and wellbeing was demonstrated by rangatahi in ways such as in medication compliance. Bella was particularly proactive in following up with the GP and mental health service to get an appointment for an assessment.

“For me because it has been so hard to deal with and I’m not medicated and I didn’t have any coping mechanisms, I didn’t know how to deal with it properly. So I went to the doctor and I was just like, “Hey, I think this is what’s going on. I need a referral and this needs to happen as soon as possible.” And so the doctor – luckily she was a nice doctor and she did actually listen to me.”

“Self-awareness”, “smart living” and “being street smart” including things like shrewd budget skills and planning enabled rangatahi to keep safe and achieve good hauora outcomes, as Ethan illustrated:

“...gotta commit to healthy lifecycle, structure to my day and daily goals...find my own way to feel good by reassurance and research”.

Bella was able to find a way to cope with her anxiety at going to supermarkets:

“But just due to like my mental health kind of, like my anxiety has gotten progressively worse so for me going to the supermarket is a really, really big challenge and I can’t do it. So now I figured out a way – so I just click and collect it so I don’t have to do that. It works out way better and way easier for me than having to like go through the stress of having to actually go to the supermarket.”

Tāne was thinking about having a ‘hauora plan’ which doesn’t need to be ‘full on’, however to provide balance amongst his competing commitments it seems necessary to him.

Rangatahi who had come from the YJ space talked about positive choices as being central to their hauora: “stay on track, stay out of trouble” and “stay busy...have own hobbies on own” (referring to past bad associations) and “getting a job” would make a difference to their hauora.

Having good supports available and being willing to call on them if needed, “don’t be pig headed” was an interesting determination by several rangatahi who could see that asking for help could assist in their hauora journeys.

Ārahitanga – Guidance

Relational aspects of ārahitanga such as mentors, guides and service providers having trustworthiness and understanding, lived experience and being supportive facilitated rangatahi accessing good hauora. Getting guidance on all facets of health and wellbeing, such as regular doctor or health service visits for nutritional advice, mental health and general wellbeing guidance, aided rangatahi in their hauora journeys. One rangatahi described feeling “*empowered*” after a health service provided guidance to take control of their own health and wellbeing.

Having role models and examples of maintaining good hauora was useful for rangatahi. Oliver is engaging in daily cardio “*...trying to look after myself like nan*” and plays table tennis which his nan used to play at a national level.

Other contributors to positive hauora outcomes

Rangatahi identified consistent access to good, nutritional and affordable kai as a marker to good health with Eruera noting above the difference in his hauora when there was inconsistent access. They recognised this marker and how it was enabled in various ways including:

- “*...am putting on weight in prison*”
- “*I eat OK so am healthy*”
- “*...into good affordable kai*”
- “*in good health – gaining weight and getting nutritional advice*”.

Accessibility to fun recreational activities like team sports makes it easier for rangatahi to engage in positive hauora activities.

Constraints and challenges to improving hauora

Mental health distress is a prominent constraint for the hauora of rangatahi but it was recognised that hauora can impact on all other areas of life (particularly focus areas), like this rangatahi who admitted “*...motivation to hauora (or to get well) impacts everything*”.

Hononga – Connectedness

Rangatahi indicated a lack of trust and support was a substantial hindrance to them achieving hauora goals. This was especially the case in relation to their variable counselling experiences. Many spoke about not having counselling they had requested as a result of support workers “*not understanding them*” or breaking promises. Victoria said things were “*not positive with transition worker*” and as a result she had “*no support to get counselling*”. Others spoke about having “*no follow up on counselling as promised*” or in some cases as with a rangatahi who had received a diagnosis in year 2 but was unable to access supports through Oranga Tamariki who she felt were “*not taking her Autism and mental health issues seriously*”. Ethan, who is experiencing some mental health issues manifesting in the form of paranoia, also commented how he is “*distrustful of support workers*” and is not accessing help.

Rangatahi not feeling understood or not connecting with support workers or therapists could leave them feeling frustrated and impact negatively on their hauora journeys. As Tania described in her case illustration (see mahi/akoranga section) her counsellor ended their

sessions due to her struggling to get to them even though she felt she really needed them. Amy also had a similar situation, with her counsellor ending her sessions due to missed appointments but feeling she really needed them. Bella felt “ghosted” by her counsellor when she really needed her.

An additional hauora constraint related to hononga identified by rangatahi was around whānau and peer expectations (real or perceived) and perceptions of themselves or others. This was evident in various ways in rangatahi experiences. For example, one rangatahi did not want to “burden (partner) or Dad with my issues” in accessing therapy, and Penny not wanting to take up a recommendation of a gym pass from her doctor was attributable to her shyness and concern around image perceptions.

Simply, an absence of whānau or friends “to go with” often contributed to rangatahi disengaging with hauora actions.

Haumarutanga – Safety/safe places

Inappropriate housing that is unsafe or unhealthy impacts negatively on the hauora of rangatahi. Some examples of this are Ethan who after being “kicked out of Aunty’s place for no reason” moved into a flatting situation in which the “flat (was) not great...unhealthy”. Penny had aggressive neighbours whose drug fumes made her whānau sick when “seeping into our house”. Previously mentioned were experiences of emergency housing which several rangatahi did not feel were good environments for them, and some of them left.

“Bullies”, “negative vibes”, “aggressive” and “stressful” environments hindered rangatahi engaging in beneficial hauora activities in some cases. E.g. attending a gym or participating in sports/recreation activities.

In prison, rangatahi described being unable to access hauora supports such as gym, rehab (addiction), counselling and sports.

Mana ake – Self-agency

Mental health again impacted on rangatahi in terms of their mana ake. Anxiety stopped several from participating in healthy activities like the gym or sports, or going to the supermarket to get healthy food rather than take-aways.

“I struggle in public settings to communicate when I’m anxious, or to go out even to the shops or gym.”

Penny’s doctor recommend she cut down on her kai intake and obtain a gym pass, but she “feels too shy”. Others were “scared to open the can of worms”, fearing what that “will open up”, and are therefore not willing to address trauma issues that impact negatively on their hauora journeys. One admitted they didn’t seek mental health support when needed due to their “moderate depression”. Addiction issues challenged some rangatahi in reaching hauora outcomes, like Karl engaging in chronic drug use and having “no self-control”. Dealing with anxiety by using alcohol was a way of coping for one rangatahi, impacting her hauora:

“There’s just certain things that do actually make me really anxious – and I guess when you’re drunk, you know, liquor courage. I probably couldn’t go into a club sober. I have done it and I didn’t like it.”

Some rangatahi just did not feel they had the time or energy to undertake good health practices.

Ārahitanga – Guidance

Several experiences of TSS or Oranga Tamariki social workers not providing information on supports available were highlighted by rangatahi. Moving from care and the supports and access required to meet high and complex needs were not provided for rangatahi on their transition journey in most cases. Being aware of and navigating services and activities was an issue and, along with lack of guidance to access counselling and therapy in particular, meant some rangatahi felt they were “*not able to get counselling*” or even “*get diagnosed*”.

Furthermore, issues such as long waitlists meant rangatahi found it hard to connect with services themselves.

Other challenges or constraints to positive hauora outcomes

Rangatahi indicated that the “culture and sports are different” and some experienced “*aggro*”, for example Oliver who previously used sports as an outlet found he “*didn’t like basketball...macho environment and negative energy...judgy*”.

Affordability affected rangatahi journeys to good hauora in examples such as:

“*can’t afford the nutrition’s kai*”, “*no money for therapy*”, “*no money to get to appointments*”.

In Kaleb’s case he paid for his counselling, but cost was a significant factor he had to work around:

“*Yeah, I paid – I paid all of it... it’s not cheap.*”

In some occurrences, the cost of their chosen hobby or sport was just too expensive to maintain for rangatahi.

Other commitments such as work and study meant that rangatahi found hauora activities difficult to access. Amy was having counselling but “*work made this tricky to get to. I missed too many appointments so my counsellor closed my file and I can’t go back*”.

Other rangatahi expressed hauora pursuits as being: “*hard to fit in*”, “*tired from work*” or “*too busy to play sport*”.

Looking ahead: Rangatahi future aspirations for hauora

Goals

Some rangatahi goals for hauora included:

- “*Want to play league again*”
- “*Goal is to get drug free...but need less stress first*”
- “*Get together a hauora plan ... nothing hard-out*”
- “*Want to be stable and healthy for baby and play sport again*”

Service needs and aspirations

Rangatahi described various aspirations they would like to see from service providers in relation to their hauora journeys such as:

- TSS advice on health and other systems to meet needs (e.g., criteria to access services and related funding)
- Drug/rehab counselling and mental health service, faster and affordable access
- Rangatahi feeling they are listened to by services
- Transition worker facilitating access to all services as well as hauora activities.

Exemplar case illustration: Hauora | Health and wellbeing #1

Bella's journey shows how hauora and mental wellbeing is a significant element of a young person's life. Her story demonstrates that hauora has a far-reaching and often bi-directional influence on other areas like securing a safe and stable kāinga and being able to participate in mahi/akoranga and hapori. Although there have been many difficulties for Bella as she has navigated the transitional space towards independence, along with a lack of ārahitanga, her strong sense of mana ake in the form of self-awareness and self-determination comes through as a protective factor that has supported her to keep persevering towards her goals.



Looking after my mental health: Bella's story

Hauora Case Illustration #1

Where did my transition journey begin?



Where am I now?



How did I get here?



What's next?

Where did my transition journey begin?

Bella is Māori and European and was 17 years old when we met in the first interview. She had a very unsettling period in her college years, moving a lot between different family members, foster families and secondary schools in a number of towns. She left school early when her last living situation broke down and moved to the city to start a training course.

She had plans to finish her training course and get a job, but her main focus was to work on herself and get some help with her mental health issues. Bella said she felt like a "bit of a lost soul" trying to figure out what she wanted to do, but her past traumas were holding her back.

Although the situation wasn't the best, she was enjoying a bit of independence and felt that her confidence had grown a lot, "just meeting new people and just having the same interests as them as well." However, she admitted it had been a bit of a rocky start. She had trouble with her rent when changing from Oranga Tamariki payments to WINZ and Studylink. "There were a lot of things that were supposed to happen that were said but never done. So that was why I was so behind in my rent." She struggled to get hold of her social worker and had been told that she would be getting a transition worker who could help her, but this had not happened.

Where am I now?

Bella feels she is in a safe place now, living in a new flat and feels much more stable.

"I think when you haven't lived in a safe home ever, a lot of people really have an unstable lifestyle. But learning to stabilise that and learning to put your foot down and break that cycle, because it is a cycle for people like me that come from houses that aren't safe, we tend to create unstable lifestyles for ourselves getting older. And I think doing that is a really bad cycle and I want to break it, so I am breaking it, but it's just continuing to stay stable and have a place for yourself to go to when you need it – like my house."

Bella likes her job and sees it as really important for her wellbeing. "It keeps me busy, it keeps me on my toes. It has a routine for me. I'm getting paid, I'm getting money... it forces me to budget...and also, I'm really really really close with all my girls at work."

In the third interview Bella spoke about how her anxiety had gotten "progressively worse," and it was sometimes difficult for her to even go to the supermarket. "I think for me it's just like my mental health is probably my biggest barrier. Yes, I'm getting help but I am relapsing again now... but, yeah, I think just learning to cope with that and create coping mechanisms has helped heaps."

"There were a lot of things that were supposed to happen that were said but never done. So that was why I was so behind in my rent."

Bella had been feeling like a "bit of a lost soul" when we first met but more recently had been enjoying "meeting new people (with) the same interests."



"I think when you haven't lived in a safe home ever, a lot of people really have an unstable lifestyle. But learning to stabilise that and learning to put your foot down and break that cycle, because it is a cycle for people like me that come from houses that aren't safe, we tend to create unstable lifestyles for ourselves getting older. And I think doing that is a really bad cycle and I want to break it, so I am breaking it, but it's just continuing to stay stable and have a place for yourself to go to when you need it – like my house."

"It (my job) keeps me busy, it keeps me on my toes. It has a routine for me. I'm getting paid, I'm getting money... it forces me to budget... and also, I'm really really really close with all my girls at work."

"I think for me it's just like my mental health is probably my biggest barrier. Yes, I'm getting help but I am relapsing again now... but, yeah, I think just learning to cope with that and create coping mechanisms has helped heaps."



Bella's story continued



How did I get here?



What's next?

How did I get here?

Bella tried several flatting situations with friends, which had fallen through, and ended up couch surfing. She was courageous to look for a flat with people she didn't know and ended up finding a place through a posting on Facebook – "It took a lot for me to do it because I'm not one to move in with anyone I don't know."

Over all three interviews, Bella had consistently talked about her fluctuating mental health. At one point she felt she was coping well, "I think I've just grown in character and more on how to deal with it." She had started to see a therapist which was accessed through her transition worker, although initially declined by ACC.

Bella gave a Likert scale rating of '3 – Yes I think so' in the year 3 interview, a slight change to year 2 where she chose "I don't know," although her explanation both times was similar, expressing that it was "up and down" and changed a lot depending on the day which made it hard to quantify back in year 2.

Bella feels that her own determination and independence has gotten her to where she is now, especially with being very proactive and articulate about her mental health issues. She spoke about using alcohol to give her confidence, and eventually asked her doctor for a referral to mental health services. "So, I went to the doctor, and I was just like, 'Hey, I think this is what's going on. I need a referral and this needs to happen as soon as possible.' And so, the doctor – luckily, she was a nice doctor, and she did actually listen to me. She sent me through to the team over in – I can't remember the name, it is a mental health service."

What's next?

What Bella would like to tell other young people leaving Oranga Tamariki care:

"I think it depends on the situation. Like if you were in my situation where you don't have family and you don't have much outside support, create that family and create that support and really really keep those good people and good friends around for a while. Because it is going to be really hard, especially if you are living independently."

Her message to Oranga Tamariki and transition and other support services is:

"Don't let it happen again. Your social workers are overworked. They have too much of a caseload. There's too much. You, as the organisers, as the providers and the people that are supposed to be helping these kids, you're not doing enough."

"There's more that could have been done for myself and probably thousands of other kids that also landed in the same situation as me. We should not be left to take care of ourselves at the end of the day. Like there are so many years and years of stuff that could have been prevented for myself, that didn't need to happen... so I'm just, if anything, angry and I just think this could have ended differently."

"It took a lot for me to do it because I'm not one to move in with anyone I don't know."

"I think I've just grown in character and more on how to deal with it."

So, I went to the doctor, and I was just like, 'Hey, I think this is what's going on. I need a referral and this needs to happen as soon as possible.' And so, the doctor – luckily, she was a nice doctor, and she did actually listen to me. She sent me through to the team over in – I can't remember the name, it is a mental health service."



Bella would tell young people like her "If you were in my situation where you don't have family and you don't have much outside support, create that family and create that support and really really keep those good people and good friends around for a while. Because it is going to be really hard, especially if you are living independently."

Bella says support services "are overworked, they have too much of a case load. There's too much. You, as the organisers, as the providers and the people that are supposed to be helping these kids, you're not doing enough."

"There's more that could have been done for myself and probably thousands of other kids that also landed in the same situation as me. We should not be left to take care of ourselves at the end of the day. Like there are so many years and years of stuff that could have been prevented for myself, that didn't need to happen... so I'm just, if anything, angry and I just think this could have ended differently."

Exemplar case illustration: Hauora | Health and wellbeing #2

Kaleb's experience also highlights the importance of hauora and mental wellbeing for rangatahi who are transitioning towards independence. He too has a strong sense of mana ake, and this has enabled him to be very aware of the negative impacts of trauma on his life and to be motivated to take steps towards healing. Unlike Bella, Kaleb had the right ārahitanga behind him while he explored his options and was able to put in boundaries that distanced him from connections that he felt weren't good for him while choosing to strengthen positive relationships. Although many things were in his favour, it still wasn't easy to get the right support in a way that was timely and affordable.



Resolving trauma: Kaleb's story

Hauora Case Illustration #2

Where did my transition journey begin?



Where am I now?



How did I get here?



What's next?

Where did my transition journey begin?

Kaleb was living in an Oranga Tamariki family home for the past four years when we spoke at the year 1 interview. He got on really well with the caregivers there and explained that although he was in a (non-related) family caregiving home, they had "taken him in" and had become his family. It was clear from our first interview that Kaleb had a deep mistrust of Oranga Tamariki, and that his experiences in care had negatively impacted his hauora and mental health.

Kaleb has had a good relationship with his transition worker over this time, who was based at a local youth centre. Kaleb enjoyed spending time there and they had been helping him study for his learner's driving licence.

He has been studying a pre-trade mechanical course at the local Polytechnic and was excited to be completing it in the next four weeks. He wasn't too sure if he would go straight into work the following year or complete more study.

Although he described himself as shy and a "lone wolf," Kaleb enjoyed engaging in a special hobby, however it was quite expensive, and he had been struggling to convince Oranga Tamariki to provide some funding toward it.

Where am I now?

Kaleb is living in a house with his family – his previous caregivers from the Oranga Tamariki family home, their son and his partner. This is an ideal situation for Kaleb and he describes it as, "Really nice. It's like actually having a family... yeah, a family unit. Everyone's together."

Kaleb works at a general fabrication company. He enjoys his employment there but would prefer a welding job. Overall, he likes the work and gets on well with his co-workers. "I found out one of my co-workers does [my hobby]. And so, I've gotten back into it and I'm really loving it now."

Although he still hasn't sat his learner licence, he isn't too worried about it because he gets around easily on his electric skateboard.

Kaleb had given a Likert scale rating of 2 at the year 2 interview, signalling that things were not going ok overall. He attributed this to, "Mostly trauma and dealing with that stuff...because the stuff that I'm trying to deal with, it's their fault [Oranga Tamariki] and it was their problem they should've fixed."

He rated his current situation as a 4 on the Likert scale, stating that things were "going great at the moment." When asked why he replied, "because OT is out of my life... Oranga Tamariki is not a part of my life anymore."

"Yeah, I do not trust CYFS one bit because at one point, around two years they kept me in the dark when I've kept telling my social worker, "Tell me what's going on" and they didn't. Because I was meant to be in the family home for around two weeks. How long has it been? Yeah, three or four years...And that was before the new caregivers came... and when the new caregivers came, I was depressed before that, I was really depressed because they kept me in the dark and I didn't know what was happening and I didn't know what was like going on and I didn't know what my plan was."



"Really nice. It's like actually having a family... yeah, a family unit. Everyone's together."

"I found out one of my co-workers does [my hobby]. And so, I've gotten back into it and I'm really loving it now."

"Mostly trauma and dealing with that stuff...because the stuff that I'm trying to deal with, it's their fault [Oranga Tamariki] and it was their problem they should've fixed."

"Kaleb reported that things were "going great at the moment because OT is out of my life... Oranga Tamariki is not a part of my life anymore."



Kaleb's story continued



How did I
get here?



What's next?

How did I get here?

At our year 2 interview, many things had changed for Kaleb. He had decided to stop contact with his biological family, due to an incident, and spoke about how this had been a positive choice for him. He had fully transitioned into being part of his caregiver family, and was flatting with his brother in a property owned by his parents and was happy there.

Kaleb was no longer in contact with his transition worker because he didn't see himself as the type of young person that could benefit from their support and had distanced himself from the youth centre too – "they just deal with certain kids, and I don't really fit in that category."

He was working in the fabrication industry, although he wasn't too keen on the type of work he was doing. Eventually, he got in touch with TradeAssist who set up an interview for his current job the next day.

Accessing counselling to deal with the trauma of his past was something that helped Kaleb greatly, however, it was not an easy process. He booked an appointment in year 2 but would have to wait three months to attend it. It was also expensive, with Kaleb explaining in year 3 that it had cost him approximately \$150 per session, which he paid for himself. For him though, it was worth it – "I did go to that (counselling) and it helped a lot. I went like maybe five times but that's really all I needed...I recommend almost everybody to go there. Obviously, not many people want to, but it is definitely worth it...Especially if you've been in obviously Oranga Tamariki or in a similar situation."

What's next?

Kaleb's main goals for the future are to find a welding job, and to eventually sit his learner licence.

Kaleb would tell other young people: "I'd say be as stubborn as possible...I've gotten through my life because mostly I've been stubborn".

"they just deal with certain kids, and I don't really fit in that category."

"I did go to that (counselling) and it helped a lot. I went like maybe five times but that's really all I needed...I recommend almost everybody to go there. Obviously, not many people want to, but it is definitely worth it...Especially if you've been in obviously Oranga Tamariki or in a similar situation."



"I've gotten through my life because mostly I've been stubborn and because...I've always known what I've wanted and a lot of people have tried to change my mind...When Oranga Tamariki or CYFS back then told me how to do certain stuff and I just said, 'No' because it wasn't in my best interest."

"Yeah, and there's been a lot of -- there's been a lot of scenarios when I could have very easily given in or have given up, but I didn't because of my stubbornness."

4. Ngā Hononga – Connected relationships

Ngā hononga/connected relationships is a prominent focus throughout this report across the six outcome areas as a component of the Āhukatanga framework (Figure 1). As an āhukatanga, we have seen under kāinga, hauora and mahi/akoranga, that hononga refers to the ways in which connected relationships can support and constrain desired outcomes.

Ngā hononga is also a priority outcome focus of interest for the TSS. For the TSS connected relationships is a goal – supported by the view that all rangatahi are better off and more resilient when they have supportive relationships with people in their communities, including former caregivers, transition support workers, sports coaches, counsellors, whānau, and, for rangatahi Māori, iwi and hapū. It also refers to cultural connections.

The following section concentrates on hononga as an outcome area, but also considers its role as a component of the Āhukatanga Framework. All references to hononga are taken from rangatahi understandings, for example, hononga equates strongly to identity and cultural connection, however navigating and maintaining healthy relationships were described as vital hononga by rangatahi. This section addresses (i) the extent to which rangatahi are wanting to be, and are, connected with people and organisations in their communities, whānau and, where applicable, their iwi and hapū, their identity and cultural connections; as well as (ii) the role that hononga, as one of the four āhukatanga, plays in enabling or constraining connected relationships.

Due to the high priority interest of Oranga Tamariki in hononga journeys for rangatahi Māori specifically, these are summarised for each rangatahi Māori participant at the end of this section – see *Rangatahi Māori Hononga Stories* which follows the Hononga case illustration.

Rangatahi perceptions and experiences of hononga and connected relationships at 18 to 24 months

There were a multitude of different experiences talked about by rangatahi in relation to connections and relationships. Some described positive relationships that enabled their wellbeing and practical supports. Others felt that strained or toxic relationships with whānau or peers hindered their progress in some areas, and several indicated an indifference to cultural identity. Some rangatahi had happily referred to building or re-building relationships with estranged parents, siblings and wider whānau (also other connections with the likes of caregivers, friends, sports coaches).

Stability and genuineness in connections and relationships emerged as a high priority factor for rangatahi across the board, and their experiences varied in that regard. Unsurprisingly whānau (rangatahi-defined) relationships in general came though as pertinent to good outcomes for rangatahi in this study. While this may be an enabler for all people, it appears particularly significant for these rangatahi who have largely experienced some type of disconnection and possible trauma through care involvement.

Enablers of success / building or maintaining positive relationships

Hononga – Connectedness

Many rangatahi talked positively about whānau relationships, having stable or close relationships with both kin and foster/chosen parents, siblings – one describing how her siblings caregivers facilitated regular contact which “*makes it easy*”. Oliver’s sisters are able

to visit regularly and he “*checks in every day*”. A close relationship for a disabled youth with a foster brother who is close in developmental age is designated a “*good match*”. Two rangatahi specifically described their relationship with their grandmother as being their key positive relationship, with one who had lived with her since the age of four referring to her providing wider whānau connections: “*Home is my connection to Nan and the wider whānau*”.

Reconnection or improved connection with whānau was a prominent descriptor to facilitating good hononga outcomes. The impact of strong and safe relationships carried over into all areas of this study with whānau being a regular enabler. Some of the rangatahi described current enablers as:

- re-established connection with dad and sister
- reconnected with brother, mum and dad
- relationship with foster mum has improved. Good relationship with Dad.
- sporadic connections with Mum but more proactive now. (More contact).
- strong connections with aunt
- Mum and siblings now close connections and maintain support
- being hapū – brings Mum closer
- intergenerational connection
- place to go when home life gets too full on now (parents’ place)
- 12 mins talk with Mum each week from prison helps.

Amy’s relationship with her foster mother had greatly improved this year: “*Yeah, her and I got back as a mother and daughter again. It’s been nice.*”.

At this stage of the study several rangatahi are becoming parents themselves and value their roles, responsibilities and connections as parents. Although back in a relationship, Willow maintained full custody of their pēpi until her partner developed better parenting capabilities. Tāne said he is “*trying to be a good father and role model caring role*” for his 2-year-old pēpi. Troy who had a child that was born while he was in prison, ensured that whakawhanaungatanga and a connection to his key person (Nan) was maintained, “*she has [the child] one day a week*”. He was also wanting to keep his baby and partner away from gang environments.

Another rangatahi sums up his feelings of positive impacts and connections as a parent:

“(I’m) whānau orientated...love being a pāpā...spend lots of quality time with tamariki...take them out in the community.”

Partners and their whānau are important to rangatahi where they are establishing new connections and different types of relationships, and in doing so can find or recognise a new type of support: “*Working hard at relating and getting to know in-laws*”. Several said their new partners were providing support and others also found their partners’ whānau was a strong, enabling connector. For example, Belinda, who’s hapū, was able to live with her partners’ whānau and valued the support they provided in preparing for parenthood.

‘Māoritanga’ or cultural-based relationships and connections were described in various ways as being positive contributions to hononga: whānau connections “*kids growing up with their cousins*”, kapa haka through school, “*feel strong connections to the marae – I go monthly*”. A Māori caregiver whānau provided cultural connections by upholding te reo and affirming the

rangatahi in their culture. Further information on hononga journeys for rangatahi Māori can be found in a compilation of their stories at the end of this section.

In Amy's case, she attributed finding her biological mother, who she was planning to meet and reconnect with as well as wider whānau, hapū and iwi, to Oranga Tamariki's provision of a cultural assessment and support around this. Some rangatahi, such as Penny, recognise the importance of these cultural connections but are still searching for those. Brian's transition worker also helped him in this regard by helping him do a course that was *"trying to find my background because I didn't know where I was from and that"*.

Increased social networks were identified as allowing hononga growth for rangatahi in areas like workplace or school: *"work is very important (for hononga)"*, online communities, in new locations (or having friends already there like Sarah does), Teen Parenting Units, sports or other events:

"Came together for tamariki birthdays...got to connect to other whānau with children."

Sometimes these networks can appear unconventional or perceived in a negative light, but they provided positive connections for rangatahi, an example of this was a connection to a gang that the rangatahi felt provided a sense of belonging and connection and segued them into community, cultural and sports activities.

A few rangatahi also gained hononga concepts through connections with te taiao (environment/natural world) and even through pets in some cases. Penny for example appreciated and valued her connection with her cat.

Haumarutanga – Safety/safe places

Generally, haumarutanga or feeling safe with whānau and friends was evident as important for rangatahi, as is apparent in all sections of this report, but *"the relationships with whānau at home"* is something identified by rangatahi in this section of the findings. Oliver's nan, who he lives with, is his safety person who he said he can fight with but then make up. *"She's been there – she been there most of the times. And me and her, we have – though we have a rocky relationship and I love it...I love that relationship where – where she feels like a friend to you as well."*

Some rangatahi talked about setting boundaries to keep themselves and their whānau safe and for parents putting boundaries around own children particularly. (See Kaleb's case illustration under Hauora and Willow's case illustration under Kāinga.)

Mana ake – Self-agency

Rangatahi displayed mana ake in relation to hononga in ways such as being more proactive in connecting with others or growing their social confidence. Also, demonstrating maturity in relationships – setting boundaries (relationships and environments), growth in conflict resolution and managing relationships. Victoria when referring to not wanting to have contact with her whānau explained:

"(I'm) learning not to react negatively when I see them – better because I ignore....they are still abusive and manipulative."

Bella talked about putting boundaries around her relationships with friends and whānau:

“But I know now how to remove myself from a situation I know isn’t good for me...like setting a boundary with Dad too – it’s hard, it’s really hard but I just don’t want to like repeat the cycle and the bad habits.”

For those that were parents or were moving into parenthood, their growth and responsibility had developed through that new type of connection. One rangatahi recognised they needed “*timeout*” from parenting sometimes, Belinda said she was:

“Motivated for better outcomes for my own children than what I experienced.”

Proving oneself was indicated as a motivator and self-directed mental health awareness another enabler where one rangatahi Bella talked about overcoming trauma and mental health issues, to better manage relationships.

Ārahitanga – Guidance

Good relationships with service providers, particularly transition workers and social workers, were seen as big enablers for rangatahi achieving good outcomes.

“I have a good relationship with my transition worker ... if I needed to get somewhere he would probably try and make some time and take me there.”
(Karl)

Karl also rated his sense of ārahitanga an 8 – close to the high end. When asked why he said:

“Yeah, that’s more [transition worker], I guess, that’s probably because he gives me the most guidance.”

Penny also had a high rating of 10 for her sense of ārahitanga:

“Because if mum’s not there, I’ve got [transition worker].”

Rangatahi talked a lot about meaningful connections with these key providers, kaimahi, community services, and long-term caregivers in some cases, as being crucial to facilitating effective guidance, services and good outcomes, and their words are used throughout this report. It seemed that if rangatahi had good, trusting relationships with these providers they achieved positive wraparound outcomes holistically in many areas.

Services helping or problem-solving to assist rangatahi to maintain connections was mentioned as an enabler such as: “...they help me with transport to see my whānau”. Also, in the case of a rangatahi with a disability, they had developed strong connections with kaimahi at supported living.

Other contributors to positive hononga outcomes

As with Luke and his parole office location changing to a closer office (described below in the Staying crime free section), flexibility in location and accessibility of services was identified as being helpful for rangatahi to access and maintain connections. Ease of accessing supports or services to enable connections or address barriers that may be getting in the way of enabling connections (eg. finance, transport or counselling to help with relationship issues) was helpful for rangatahi.

Transport options were often an enabler to maintaining hononga connections. This rangatahi simply stated: *“I got my licence so I can visit my siblings”*.

Constraints and challenges to building or maintaining positive connected relationships

Hononga – Connectedness

Disconnection was found to be a large constraint on ability to achieve satisfactory hononga outcomes for rangatahi. As previously mentioned, most rangatahi in this study had experienced disconnection to varying degrees which has undoubtedly impacted on all aspects of their lives examined through this research. At this medium-term stage of transitioning out of care, rangatahi discussed disconnection to several areas as shown below (including whānau being unwilling or unable to reconnect):

- not connected to whānau – no support to
- when do connect – whānau are manipulative and abusive
- whānau says connection is not wanted
- grandad not welcoming – not connected with dad and step mum due to conflict
- lost connection to biological whānau
- no contact with dad and his mum’s side.

Enforced disconnection attributed to Care and Protection restrictions was also outlined in the Kāinga section of this report. A rangatahi who only has supervised access with whānau feels sad and frustrated about those inadequate connections. Penny feels sad about strained connections and relationships as her siblings are inaccessible due to problems with their carers and Oranga Tamariki. Bella referred to *“being cut off from whānau by CYFS...still not happy...want to know about my case”*.

Respectively, examples were given such as geographical distances with unaffordable costs *“to visit my mother and other side of her whānau”*. A young woman stated she doesn’t know her *“younger siblings as they don’t live with me”*, she also described having disconnected relationships with older siblings:

“I feel like I don’t know my brothers and sisters.”

Foster siblings were also referred to by rangatahi as enforced disconnection in some cases:

“Access to foster sister is hard – (coz) can’t connect with Dad.”

Rangatahi in prison have detailed numerous ways in which hononga is constrained by being in prison with limited or no access to whānau or friends. One has no contact with siblings he was previously close to due to incarceration rules and lack of access.

Lack of cultural/whakapapa connections created challenges in differing ways for rangatahi trying to connect. Some were unable to find links to connect or had unclear connections with whakapapa Māori. Belinda talked about wanting to connect with her biological father and whānau but could not connect through Dad:

“I know Dad’s whānau exists but have no connection.”

Conversely, being associated with a particular culture could make rangatahi feel negative outcomes resulted, for instance one rangatahi felt they were socially assigned as Māori which created negative or racist implications, and John a non- Māori rangatahi had cultural

clashes with his step-mum who “has strong (cultural) views” creating conflicts and disconnection between himself and his dad. He “holds hope” that he can re-engage with his dad but said he “needs to prove himself”.

One or two rangatahi attributed a pattern of universal conflicts with friends, whānau and networks as being a constraint to effective hononga outcomes. Bella said she “falls out with people quite regularly” which affected her kāinga and mahi situations as well as her general relationships.

Haumarutanga – Safety/safe places

Lack of safe places and relationships for rangatahi was discussed and effects resulting from circumstances like not having suitable or safe housing to enable connections, changing friend groups or relocating could be disruptive for rangatahi connections.

Imprisoned rangatahi referred to the difficulty of maintaining contact with friends outside prison. These relationships are important to them in order to maintain supports or safe relationships not associated with “the big house”. A circumstance shared from a rangatahi in prison was around the safety of his child and his inability to “keep baby safe”, and away from the gang pad.

Mana ake – Self-agency

Mental health was sometimes described as having detrimental effects on connections and relationships where rangatahi struggled to make, manage or maintain healthy connections. This could be seen through trauma responses, ADHD, anxiety and paranoia causing conflict “friends staying over got a bit messy (conflictual) so not many friends”. Other manifestations of poor mental health or trauma responses included rangatahi having a “lack of trust so I hold back” or “reluctant to rely on others” and being “detached” from others was another descriptor used by Oliver who had issues with his friends in his band as a result.

Some rangatahi, such as Bella and Kaleb, were exercising their sense of mana ake by making choices to no longer connect with their biological whānau:

‘I’ve blocked my proper mum and dad out of my life... Yeah, I kind of just snapped – and I was just like, ‘Yeah, no, you’re not going to be in my life anymore’.”

Ārahitanga – Guidance

While most rangatahi were unclear what the distinction was between a social worker and a transition worker, and several rangatahi did not want or have transition worker support, it appeared that TSS services, such as the provision of 1:1 contact, guidance, practical assistance and support was often variable and inconsistent. Rangatahi expressed low trust in social workers, and it appeared that this carried over, for many, into their expectations and experience of TSS transition workers. Years of experiences of social workers “not doing what they said they were going to do”, not keeping in contact, not being accessible and sometimes multiple changes of social workers contributing to a lack of continuity of service, had led to rangatahi having low expectations and sometimes a lack of respect for, or actual avoidance of social workers. These attitudes and expectations were not infrequently carried over to transition workers. “I haven’t heard from her at all” (Sarah referring to transition worker). The outcome is rangatahi feeling let down, disrespected and distrusting.



This can be seen to the point where Tania lost her car in an accident and although transport would help her in many areas of her life (particularly mahi/akoranga) she is “reluctant to re-engage in the OT process to help to get a car”.

Guidance and modelling of good relationships and connections was at times evidentially lacking for rangatahi in this study, leading to inability to understand or manage boundaries and healthy interactions in order to foster good connections. An example of this was a young man with a lack of good relationship boundary modelling who repeatedly had issues, drama and conflicts around friendships principally with the opposite sex. He stated he “wants a girlfriend...not just friend zoned” but continuously made inappropriate advances towards female friends and got angry when they declined, displaying a lack of understanding around relational boundaries. Unfortunately, this young man’s desire for connection with the opposite sex led him to connect online with someone who took advantage of him, and this had negative impacts on his sense of haumarutanga.

A deficiency of guidance and access around mental health supports exacerbated these issues described above.

Other constraints and challenges to positive hononga outcomes

Geographical isolation and/or limited or no access to transport options to enable connections to whānau, friends, service supports, groups and the like hindered some rangatahi in their capacity to nurture strong relationships. Transport options could be compromised due to financial restrictions or lack of a driver’s licence and in some cases due to illness or disability, meaning rangatahi had to rely on others to facilitate and enable connections.

Looking ahead: Rangatahi future aspirations for hononga

Goals

Akin to rangatahi hononga experiences, there were a variable range of personal hononga goals that can be surmised throughout the expression of their experiences throughout this report, some of which were:

- Several rangatahi spoke about being committed to continuing to try to connect or maintain connections with whānau (including chosen) and culture (e.g., whakapapa and te ao Māori), friends and social networks as well as sometimes trying to address issues that were hindering their ability to do so: “Still looking for Māori connections”.
- Others were looking to reconnect with whānau in some instances where there was an enforced disconnection.
- Connection with support services (including counselling) to enable better relationships was something some rangatahi spoke about doing.

Service needs and aspirations

Rangatahi voiced the following service needs and aspirations in relation to supporting hononga outcomes:

- cultural connections underpinned by support services
- support in building and maintaining healthy relationships
- financial support to enable connections

- transport to enable connections
- consistency and follow up in support services and support people.

Exemplar case illustration: Hononga | Connected relationships

Sam's story makes it clear that ngā hononga are extremely important for young people and that their absence can make difficult life situations feel much worse. Within his story we see that the systems he encountered during his transition – youth justice and care and protection – were extremely detrimental to his sense of connection and belonging and caused him much distress. Within these systems, Sam was prevented from engaging with and maintaining his positive relationships – at times not being able to connect with anyone at all – and in their absence, he had to make other, possibly less positive, connections instead.



Life behind bars: Sam's story

Hononga Case Illustration

Where did my transition journey begin?



Where am I now?



How did I get here?



What's next?

Where did my transition journey begin?

When Sam was first interviewed at 17, he had been in a youth justice facility for six months. Before then, he had lived with his Mum and some younger siblings; they are a tight family. Sam's always been pretty keen on club sport. Before YJ he had some good friends in his neighbourhood and in his club. At the time of the first interview, he had a social worker and a transition worker, but Sam didn't rate either of them because they hadn't followed through on things they said they would do, and they hadn't been in contact with him as much as he wanted. Sam was looking forward to being released and going back to live with his Mum. He was also keen to re-join his old sports club when the new season started.



Sam was looking forward to being released and going back to live with his Mum



Where am I now?

Sam's been in prison for quite a while now. 2021-2022 were tough times to be a prisoner, with staff shortages, Covid restrictions and court delays impacting on remand times and on access to programmes within prison. Sam spent many months on remand, and his sentencing was not scheduled for more than a year after his latest offending. Remand meant no access to work, rehabilitation or education programmes, and Covid restrictions meant he could not have any visitors, and he was on lock-up (alone in his cell) for 22 hours each day. He used his time in the yard to keep fit. His \$5 weekly phone card from Corrections gives him about 12 minutes of talk time each week with his Mum.

Covid restrictions meant he could not have any visitors, and he was on lock-up (alone in his cell) for 22 hours each day. He used his time in the yard to keep fit.



How did I get here?

When Sam was first released, he did go back and live with Mum, and was supported into a fulltime job by a new transition worker, which he enjoyed. He really liked the transition worker who has consistently supported him since. However, the job was short-lived: he reoffended around a month after his release, and was sent back to prison. At first, his Mum couldn't visit because she was on home detention, but she talked to him daily by phone, and he often talked to his siblings. He really valued this contact during his time inside, but his only visits were from professionals. After a few months in prison, Sam's Mum also went into prison custody, which meant they could only communicate via letters. Sam's siblings went into care and were separated. Sam wasn't allowed to phone his siblings and was told by the prison social worker that while he could write to them, they were not allowed to write back to him.

He reoffended around a month after his release, and was sent back to prison. At first, his Mum couldn't visit because she was on home detention, but she talked to him daily by phone, and he often talked to his siblings.



Sam's story continued



How did I
get here?



What's next?

Sam was released from prison in late 2021, and with Mum also out by then, he moved back to live with her. His siblings remained in care. Whereas last time his transition worker had sorted employment for him, this was not the case this time around, but he did help arrange a benefit. As before, Sam only lasted a few weeks in the community before he reoffended and returned to prison. While he was in the community, Sam got to see some of his siblings – his first face-to-face contact with them for over a year. Once back inside, he had phone contact with his Mum but this was his only source of hononga apart from with his transition worker and fellow prisoners. Custody of both Sam and his Mum has significantly impacted connections within their family unit.

When Sam first went into Youth Justice care, he had a mix of friends – some who got into trouble like Sam, and others who were quite focused on their sport, education or work. Sam didn't want his mates visiting him, but he got to see some as they came in and out of YJ and later prison custody. He's made other mates in prison, but he's lost contact with all his old friends who haven't been in trouble. For him, positive connections are limited to his Mum and his transition worker, and the times in his journey where it has been hard to maintain connections to his Mum and siblings have been the biggest challenges for him.

What's next?

At the start Sam wanted a job that made him lots of money. In the short time he was out and working, he enjoyed being employed. Two years on, work is no longer part of his goals in life, and Sam seems quite settled in prison. While he says he wants to stay out of trouble, he doesn't see this as likely. Uncertainties around the timing of his release have made it impossible to plan for the future, and it seems that the transition worker's main influence is on helping him keep out of trouble while inside. Sam likes him because he understands what Sam has been through, and he focuses his energies on doing things that actually help – he follows through on promises.

Sam didn't think he could give the best advice to his younger self or to other young people going into Oranga Tamariki care, but he did say to "just be good. Check you're behaving politely, nicely."

Sam only lasted a few weeks in the community before he reoffended and returned to prison. While he was in the community, Sam got to see some of his siblings

"I get locked up and they just forget about me. I get out, I've forgotten about them."



"I want to try stay out, eh, but reality, probably no. I'll end up coming back. ... Institutionalised. It's just all we know now. Life behind bars."

"just be good. Check you're behaving politely, nicely."

Rangatahi Māori Hononga Stories

The following collation of stories shows a snapshot of where rangatahi Māori felt they were in relation to their hononga journeys and particularly their Māori connections. Their experiences and interest varied across the 13 Rangatahi Māori who were interviewed in year 3 of the Ngā Haerenga study.



Rangatahi Māori Hononga Stories

Bella

Learning more about her whakapapa, marae and whānau was an area Bella was starting to think about. Bella was only starting to reconnect with her whakapapa Māori through the help of her cousin. They knew their marae but had not been there a lot and felt a bit whakamā when going there to visit whānau – Bella didn't feel like she belonged. Bella was disconnected from her Māori parent who was not really connected to their Māori side.

"...even some of (parent's) side aren't really connected to it because like a lot of people in our culture aren't because it's so shadowed in New Zealand, it's not talked about enough and even for me it's really hard for me to come to terms with my culture when people don't see me as my culture—which sucks. Because it's like that is my culture, that is what I identify as but people don't even see that. And so, because I am white and because I don't look like a typical Māori does not mean I am not Māori. That is my culture."

Even though Bella has always known she is Māori, and she feels good about it, it is not a "big deal" to her. She has noticed that:

"there is a lot of racism towards our culture that I've picked up on. I don't experience it, obviously because I don't look like I'm Māori, I don't really fit into that but then a few people have picked up on – just kind of the things they just say about it...I don't act. There is no white girl, there is no acting. My culture is my culture. We don't all act a certain way. It's just different, I don't know."

Bella spoke about negative feelings towards looking white and trying to connect with the culture.

"I've had so many friends who deal with the same thing, like (Name) is Māori. You can tell, but not really, and she's had the same thing. People like make fun of her. Who was it – one of my friends joined kapa haka because she is Māori and she got bullied for being in that kapa haka group, because she didn't look Māori and they all thought, "Oh, she's too white", and so she left. She quit kapa haka because of that reason... because people told her she didn't belong in the group. And I've dealt with that too for ages, like people saying, "I'm a white girl. People saying that I'm whitewash, that I don't even have any Māori in me. I've got like 1%". Like not true at all, you should see my Mum's side. So, trying to get in touch with it is really hard when people don't see you."

Brian

Brian was involved in crime and ended up in a youth justice facility but had strong connections to his whānau. His goal was to live either with or near his family when he was released. Not only did he achieve this, but his whānau contributed significantly to his achievements by supporting him. His father helped him get a job in the same company, and his grandmother was providing a home for him, his partner and their baby.

Brian feels really connected to his Māoritanga. He goes back to their marae often (in another town) and has good connection with whānau back there.

Eruera

Eruera had very few whānau living near him but had one aunty who he had a good connection with. His mum lived in another city and was in emergency housing and visited him now and then or talked to him on the phone. He did not know his dad. Much of his whānau lived in other cities at least two hours away or in the South Island or Australia. He didn't know much about his whakapapa, but he knew he was from "down south" and that he was from Ngāi Tahu iwi. Eruera is currently living in a tent on land that is part of a whānau connection.

Brittany

Brittany knows she has whakapapa Māori, however, is disconnected from the Māori side of her whānau. She was brought up in Care and Protection with her non-Māori side. She views her whānau as being quite separated and fragmented. She knows she can connect if she wants to, but each year she has been asked, she expressed that she isn't interested in pursuing these connections.



Amy

Amy had just finished living with her foster family when we first met, and mentioned her wishes to find out more about her whānau and where she was from:

"I sort of want to know who I am and where I'm from. That's the first thing I want to do, is to know who I am."

Amy's support worker undertook a cultural assessment for her, and as a result had made a connection with her father's whānau and her mother's whānau. This was a positive for Amy and she was excited about it:

"I actually got good news for that. Next year in February I'm going to see my family. My actual family... Yeah, we're going, mum and I and my foster mum and I are going to go up there next year."

It was a 2-year process, but she is excited and nervous about reconnecting with her whānau. This could have a big impact on her sense of self and confidence. The links with her biological father's whānau seemed to have dried up though, and she is yet to make a connection there.

"Yeah. My Dad was in Northland. They couldn't find any of my dad's family, but we found some of my mum's family. But we had [Name] who was doing our cultural assessment, she's found family so"

Amy had a goal to connect with her whānau and iwi, so this is a positive step. The support from the person doing the cultural assessment enabled them to make this connection.

"I had [Name], I forgot her last name, but she was doing my cultural assessment. She got asked by OT to look for my family. It took about two years, that we didn't hear from her. But she's told us she heard from family."

Luke

Luke knows he is Māori through his dad and knows where their marae is but hasn't visited it. He's interested in learning more if the opportunity arises but is not focused on it.

Willow

Willow had a lot of exposure to te ao Māori when still in the care of her biological mum. Although she was later out of her mum's care, she continued her connection when she was at a Teen Parenting Unit. At the unit she was actively engaged in a cultural group and was learning te reo Māori.

Penny

At year 1, Penny's mum strongly believed there is whakapapa Māori on Penny's father's side, however they no longer have contact, so she didn't know much more about those connections. At year 2, Penny was offered to connect with Māori culture/Māori as a subject through correspondence school but was not keen – she felt like it would be too much. Her shyness has been a barrier to engaging in the culture:

"Like on my Tuesday one they sing Māori songs, and I cannot sing, because I find it weird because I still don't really know them, and I don't really like singing in front of people."

At year 3, Penny's mum was trying to find her own whakapapa links and described it as a difficult process:

"Yeah, and also, I find that Oranga Tamariki do not allow or want the ones who are struggling to identify their heritage. For me, I know there's Māori in me, but because I don't know my biological father, they're trying to say, "No, there isn't, there isn't", but there is. There is Māori in (me) --They'll just turn round and say, "No, you're not."

I find it hard that -- to connect, because I tried to go to (iwi) for assistance in trying to find out and they weren't interested."

Penny was connecting a bit more with te ao Māori through Te Kura (correspondence school) in year 3 though:

"I like my Māori songs and that. But I know some Māori words, but I don't really know much, but I can sometimes understand them, but sometimes I cant. But I don't know, because my group thing I go to on Tuesday, I like --and I'm -- because I do speak a bit of Māori, so I knew most of it. And they'll sing in Māori and it kind of reminds me of like doing kapa haka and that."



Rangatahi Māori Hononga Stories – continued

Tania

Tania is proud of her Māori heritage, her caregiver parents are also Māori and are active within their marae, hapū and iwi. They use te reo Māori in the home and Tania is strongly linked to te ao Māori through them. This positive relationship has encouraged Tania to find out more about her own whakapapa, iwi and hapū and she is also interested in getting moko (Māori tattoo) on her body to represent her whakapapa.

Oliver

Oliver had just finished at a Māori boarding school when we met him. While he was immersed in te ao Māori at this school, his links with his wider iwi and whānau were limited. He had connections with his grandmother and sisters, but they don't seem to have the connection to wider whānau either. Oliver enjoyed kapa haka but had no intention of carrying on when he left the school he was attending. Once he was out of the Māori environment at school, Oliver did not pursue any more studies around te reo Māori or engage in kapa haka. His close whānau connections were still strong and he does connect with some of his wider whānau on occasion, but he spoke about not connecting with people: "I'm so -- I've been detached from so many people lately."

Troy

Troy is a rangatahi Māori currently serving a sentence in prison. He and his whānau did not talk about his cultural connections specifically this year however it was clear that Troy has strong whānau connections. He was brought up by his grandparents and has a young baby. He misses his whānau and tries to maintain as much contact as he can with them through phone calls as the ability to visit has been limited. Troy tries to influence a positive upbringing for his tamaiti and ensure whānau connections are maintained – whakawhanaungatanga shows through strongly in Troy. Undertaking a cultural assessment in prison did lead to his sentence being reduced by 10 months.

Tāne

At this stage, te ao Māori connections aren't a big focus for Tāne. He does not have a lot of intended or initiated connections with iwi aside from attending marae activities on his partners' side. There's "not an interest to engage more". Tāne's partner and their baby, however, are an important whānau connection that he aims to sustain. He has some connection with own parents for "checking in" purposes, however he is not in regular contact with them. Having whānau outings to parks, playgrounds and local pools and visits to friends who have kids has been helpful to build his own relationship with his partner and pēpi.

Nick

Nick only just discovered his whakapapa Māori over the last year. He had previously been registered with Oranga Tamariki as having an ethnicity of 'other'. Nick's foster Mum and family are central to his world and provide him with lots of aroha and wrap-around supports. His disability support worker (he has never had an Oranga Tamariki Transition Worker) is working with Nick and his (foster) Mum to learn more about his whakapapa. The disability funding agency initiated this journey. He knows his iwi but is not yet registered with the iwi. The worker is finding out about his whakapapa from his biological grandmother, who has helped him identify his marae.

Belinda

Belinda has just found out that she may have whakapapa Māori through her dad but is not sure due to lack of a connection with him, but this has opened new possibilities of wider connections to her Māoritanga. Her transition worker is currently researching and supporting her to find out more and connect to her heritage which she is excited about.

5. Hapori – Participating in community and community activities

Rangatahi participation in hobbies and community at 18 to 24 months

Many rangatahi in the medium-term stage of their transition journeys were engaged in various activities that supported their participation in hapori/communities. These included:

- hobbies: roller derby, volleyball, dance, Airsoft, gaming, sports, table tennis, motorbikes, fishing, biking, social activities with others in the support services
- community events: hauora days, security jobs
- volunteering: community gardens, op shop
- opportunity for re-engaging/ engaging with te ao Māori
- in prison: “community of care” support (referred to being missed in staying crime free section).

For some rangatahi however, it became evident that community participation was not able to be considered with the same energy as tending to their adult responsibilities such as working or finding somewhere to live, and therefore became less of a priority over the longitudinal study. Others were simply not in an environment where they could engage with a hobby that they used to. Present in rangatahi conversations was a lack of opportunity to engage with their community, or a change from engaging in the past to no longer taking part and this may explain why there was a lack of kōrero in this section of the report compared to the others.

Enablers of success / positive hapori – participating in community outcomes

Hononga – Connectedness

Te ao Māori connections are opening up new communities for rangatahi to connect with and often enable a sense of identity and belonging (hononga). Belinda has newfound connections to her whakapapa Māori which is talked about in her rangatahi Māori hononga stories. Another rangatahi with a disability discovered that he has links to one iwi from his birth grandmother. His foster mum, who is working with his grandmother, is currently attempting to get him on the iwi register to connect him with his iwi community and strengthen his sense of belonging.

Ethan who is noted as Māori by Oranga Tamariki but doesn't identify as such, is experiencing a new culture and community through his Filipino girlfriend's family.

Willow designates being in a community marae setting as enabling a connection to culture. The marae is also her preferred studying method, as well as providing access to a driving course:

“...felt more connected to culture studying in a marae setting.”

She also became involved in volunteering for a kai distribution organisation that is founded on kaupapa Māori values.

Another rangatahi expressed how much they enjoy doing haka and waiata at in-person days for Correspondence School. Growing networks did include a rangatahi who felt he had created a circle of friends at school: “...*good friend group at school*”.

Whānau (e.g., parents, cousins, aunties, uncles) connect rangatahi with hapori activities such as sports, music, cultural events and in this case Tāne said “*a group of mates provide security support for gigs and stuff and got me paid mahi too*”.

Less typically recognised hapori connections sometimes also provided rangatahi with opportunities and support for broader community engagement. Through his association with a gang Eruera described his involvement in lots of community events often held at marae and sports days. This strengthens his participation in not only hapori but te ao Māori as well.

A number of rangatahi spoke of networks and hapori through connections in the workplace. For example, Kaleb is engaging in his hobby with someone at work and another rangatahi joined their work’s social table tennis team. Eruera keeps up social contact with workmates and has fun with friends “*going fishing, riding bikes and hanging out*”.

Engaging in new activities or joining new groups is connecting rangatahi to different hapori and extending networks. Amy reached her year 2 goal of playing volleyball and tried out roller derby and, although she found the sport “*too aggressive*”, she’s engaged and trying new activities with new contacts.

Broadly, friendships aid rangatahi with hapori outcomes in multiple ways. In this situation, already having established relationships means Sarah feels: “*excited to return to my old community and networks when I return to (town)*”.

Haumarutanga – Safety/safe places

As with other outcome areas of this study, feeling safe ā-hinengaro and ā-wairua (mentally and spiritually even at a risk to their tinana with some sports), emerged prominently for rangatahi when engaging in hapori-related activities. Feelings of security in this regard empowered a sense of belonging and in some cases a sense of contribution to hapori. Two rangatahi specifically identified this sense of contribution in their volunteer work especially in things like food distribution.

Feeling “OK” to re-enter the gaming community after an unsafe experience was deemed as significant for Asher as “*I had heaps of gaming friendships online*”.

Lee, who is non-verbal, has made great progress in his safe supported living environment including with others: “*way more talking to caregivers and participating in activities*” such as swimming, fishing, arts and crafts and recently gardening boxes. He is classified by his caregivers as a: “*success story with supports helping him and is thriving in this supported community*”.

Through Nick’s special school (disabilities) he attends a “*tech course*” at a local polytechnic at which he is also participating in inclusive (dance) classes.

Mana ake – Self-agency

Previous examples of rangatahi showing resilience, confidence, agency and the will to connect are prominent indicators of mana ake, particularly around accessing opportunities to “*get out there*” – trying new activities and engaging with new people in communities. Some of these activities, often outside of rangatahi ‘comfort zones’, include: inclusive dance,

community classes, art classes, swimming, roller derby, reaching her “*dream of playing volleyball*”, and for one rangatahi fostering his gardening interest. Most of these rangatahi said they “*made it happen*” (often in combination with connectors as an enabler), and grew their confidence as a result. Nick catches the bus to polytechnic now where he attends tech and dance classes – this is a huge step for him.

Willow volunteering in a community garden programme, including gathering and distributing food boxes, gives her a sense of contributing to the community in addition to participation supporting her mana ake development. Similarly, Penny volunteers at an op-shop for SPCA which she feels contributes, but also gives her work experience and social contact by “*getting out of house*” regularly. At times when he’s been available, Tāne also highlighted contributing to local youth-orientated initiatives to “*give back*” to the community and the spaces that helped him when he was getting into trouble. An example being a “*Youth Ball*” where he, alongside friends, provided security to support safety for event attendees.

Ārahitanga – Guidance

Wraparound, tailored support enables participation in hapori for disabled rangatahi, for example connection with activity centres in assisted living hapori. An individual plan and support for participation for Lee ensured he was guided into community participation in his mahi/akoranga and social activities.

Services identifying options and funding supports for rangatahi also make a significant difference in aiding rangatahi involvement in hapori, such as Nick who received disability support funding to enable his activities, however all these ārahitanga provisions would assist most rangatahi to have greater opportunities to engage in hapori connections (particularly holistic services like kaupapa Māori) as well.

Other contributors to positive hapori outcomes

General awareness of and connection to community events like sports and hauora days improved hapori participation for rangatahi. Oliver having emceeding exposure at a community event is an example of this, with awareness coming through mahi connections. Connections with hapori are often made through connections with whānau, friends and support services/people and shows the importance of a range of people in the lives of rangatahi.

Constraints and challenges to achieving positive hapori outcomes

Hononga – Connectedness

Just as connections are an enabler, fewer connections can hinder rangatahi in their hapori participation and outcomes. Lack of awareness of community events or introductions to new communities obviously constrain rangatahi in this regard.

Some rangatahi were already isolated due to losing whānau connections and only having a small number of trusted people in their lives, and therefore found it difficult to make new connections in communities.

Some rangatahi indicated that their challenge to hapori connections was that their whānau were contrary to their involvement – sometimes due to disapproval of the activity itself, the

people associated or in other instances attributable to them having conflicting priorities for the rangatahi. For Sarah her plans are heavily dictated by her father, so she does not have much self-agency to engage in anything herself.

Several rangatahi like Penny, who were unsure of their Māori heritage, were wanting to connect to their iwi and hapū hapori but were unable to do so as a result of their whānau disconnection and a lack of perceived support from local iwi to find their whakapapa.

While the prison environment can provide a sense of community and is missed by some after release such as Luke who said, “*I miss the community of prison*”, the opposite can also be true. Sam for example spends long periods of time in isolation with little to no opportunity to engage in the prison activities with others and where sports or other engagements aren’t accessible.

Haumarutanga – Safety/safe places

Settings, environments or relationships not providing safety equate to reduced participation by rangatahi in hapori. Oliver removed himself from a basketball team as there was “*too much negative energy in basketball*”. One rangatahi shared how he was exposed to scamming and extortion through an online connection and eventually chose to isolate himself as a means of self-protection. Another rangatahi felt unsafe when, after cutting ties with gang associates, his only apparent option of bail was to his sister’s home in that gang’s “*area of town*”.

Mana ake – Self-agency

Pertaining to past harmful experiences and often unresolved trauma factors, rangatahi became guarded, distrustful, or displayed social anxiety causing them to withdraw from hobbies and social engagements. There are examples outlined above that demonstrate this, such as not wanting to go to the gym alone. One rangatahi was passionate about acting but did not pursue it even though it was a goal, and another rangatahi chose to withdraw from his car community. Arangatahi who was into partying and nightclubbing as her main hapori focus “*...for me I really like going out because it’s one thing I do – I’m working week days so I like to go – I’m a party girl at heart*” and while this was her expression of who she was as a person, her drinking to cover her anxiety may mean she puts herself in unsafe situations.

Ārahitanga – Guidance

In relation to hapori outcomes a lack of ārahitanga or support to engage safely was a major factor in deficient outcomes. Being unaware of activities/options or not having an introducing connection combined with a lack of encouragement made accessing hapori participation difficult or out of reach for some rangatahi – especially where they were lacking mana ake (confidence, resilience etc).

Some rangatahi were already isolated due to their time in care, and some had introverted personalities which made it difficult to engage with hapori without support. For example, Karl, Penny and Asher all spoke about not having many friends over the three years of interviews. This was still the case for Karl at year 3 and as such he had no connection to a hapori. Asher had difficulties with real-life friendships and had turned to an online hapori instead, but Penny was beginning to engage in the community by volunteering.

The absence of Ārahitanga in the form of practical support and accessibility was also a hindrance.

Other constraints or challenges to positive hapori outcomes

Lack of adequate resources – time, money and connections/support – are identified as barriers that affect many of the rangatahi in this cohort in particular. Financial constraints reduced rangatahi capability to participate effectively in some community activities or hobbies “*it’s an expensive hobby*” or simply: “*no sport – no money*”.

Having other commitments/constraints also meant little to no ability to engage in hapori activities. It appears that as rangatahi focused more on adult responsibilities linked to independence in the medium term, (e.g., working, finding a place to live, providing for their pēpi), their priorities shifted and things like sport and other community activities took a back seat to meeting basic needs and responsibilities. Brian gave up playing sport because he was too tired after a 12-hour work day (six days per week).

The following quotes list some reasons rangatahi identified they are unable to participate:

- “...*too busy studying so not doing any common activities*”
- “*No time!*”
- “*Nah no sport – no time due to work*”
- “*There’s no opportunity for sport in prison*”.

Accessibility was also an issue for some rangatahi, e.g., “*catching the bus became too difficult*”.

Although not referred to explicitly by rangatahi the implications of the global Covid pandemic affected rangatahi participation in hapori activities, not just due to the illness itself but as a consequence of the situational impacts on communities. Penny talked about how Covid disrupted her mahi/akoranga at the Correspondence School and although the in-person group had resumed at the time of her interview most of their mahi was still done at home. Bella started her new job just before the pandemic and had to do induction training and work from home. She also was stuck in a flat with extra people due to the lockdown situation which caused some rifts after a while. At the time of interviewing rangatahi for the year 3 interviews in late 2022, reduced group activities and widespread closures were still being felt all over Aotearoa.

Looking ahead: Rangatahi future aspirations for hapori

As mentioned, hapori did not emerge as a strong focus for many rangatahi in their medium-term transition journeys who were more attentive to addressing other needs like trying to maintain a basic living environment. However, some other focus area goals would link to increased social and community participation. A few specific hapori goals mentioned by rangatahi were: “*want to join (a) rugby league team*” and “*still want to do acting*”.

From rangatahi kōrero it could be surmised that part of their goal for some rangatahi was to address other issues that hindered their ability to participate in hapori activities.

Service needs and aspirations identified by rangatahi to help obtain more positive outcomes in hapori participation included:

- support (financial and planning)

- assistance to engage
- assistance through services to connect with specific hapori activities.

Exemplar case illustration: Hapori | Community engagement

Lee's story could have had a very different outcome if not for the concentrated efforts of a key organisation and their kaimahi who created tailored, wraparound supports that were the right fit for his needs and the needs of his whānau. For a short time before these supports were in place, the negative impacts on Lee's wellbeing were evident. Although Lee has found a safe and secure kāinga in his supported living situation, more importantly he has become part of a community. Being with people who really care about Lee and have the understanding and resources to meet his needs has provided a huge sense of haumarutanga to both Lee and his whānau. His sense of mana ake and self-determination is being nurtured, he has strong connections to others within his community, his potential is being explored by having the right ārahitanga in place and as a result, he has made great progress towards his goals.



Outstanding success for a rangatahi with different abilities: Lee's story

Supported Living Case Illustration

Where did my transition journey begin?



Where am I now?



How did I get here?



What's next?

Where did my transition journey begin?

When I first met Lee, he was 17 years old and had been living with a very supportive caregiver for about five years in a family home where he was treated like whānau. He attended a special education class at high school. Lee is largely non-verbal, only speaking a few words now and then. He seemed really settled, but there were some behaviours of concern that were coming to light. His foster mother shared that her goal for Lee was for him to continue at school for another year, and then move to a supported living arrangement.

"He'll take everything he's learnt from here, go home and do it again. Really loves to make things we've built.... The planter boxes. He's helped build all of those. He's planted. He's dug up the ground for all the kai, all the vegetables. So he's been a huge part of that progress out there for all the kai in the yard, all the vegetables."
(Supported Living kaimahi)

Where am I now?

Lee was a changed person when I saw him again in year 3, from where he had been in year 2, having moved out of his foster care and into unstable and unfamiliar living environments for a few months. There was a lot of concern for his wellbeing back then. Lee has moved to a supported living situation, managed by a Social Support Service organisation. He smiles and feels positive about where he lives and gets on well with the kaimahi (support workers). He has a good friend who also lives in the whare. He has become more verbal and communicative. Lee is able to have more independence by living there now.

The kaimahi agree Lee is comfortable where he is now living and is starting to come out of his shell. He shows dedication to all the activities and likes making garden boxes and planting gardens. He especially enjoys food, he looks healthy and well and has a great new hairstyle. Lee spends a lot of time in his own arts and crafts room and loves riding bicycles. He now wants to learn to ride a motorcycle.

"When I arrived (at the organisation) I couldn't get two words out of Lee. So now you can have a full conversation with him. He's able to articulate how he's feeling, what he wants and what he needs...whereas he wasn't able to do that when I first started working with him. So, he's really found his voice... it's amazing to watch him."
(Supported Living kaimahi)





Lee's story continued



How did I
get here?



What's next?

How did I get here?

Lee's behaviours had become increasingly concerning prior to, and early on in, his new living situation - particularly around risky behaviours. The perseverance and commitment of the organisation's management, and the team of kaimahi ensure Lee feels comfortable in his living situation and is active during the day. Through careful implementation of specific strategies, alongside 24-hour supervision and good connections made with kaimahi, he is enabled to pursue his interests and live well. He has been provided with an environment that works for him, like creating things in his own arts and crafts room, daily activities he is interested in, and persevering with communication skills. Guidance has been provided by kaimahi and a mentor who sees Lee fortnightly. This has resulted in very few risky behaviours as had been the case a year ago. He appears to be well psychologically, mentally and physically.

"We found that with support around all of those things he can be trusted to do these things and do them -- even independently." (Kaimahi)

Although the organisation was unable to acquire funding for 1-1 support, they have continued to provide specialised care to Lee, *"No specialist support at all. It's all been in-house by kaiāwhina support really to tell what can we do to help him and support him and those things."*

What's next?

The support of the organisation has ensured that Lee's overall wellbeing has substantially improved, his āhua (appearance) is more open and positive and he looks healthy and well. But one thing missing is re-connecting him with a whānau member he wants to see. The Trust has not been able to make that contact yet.

"So that's a big connection... that we're missing for him, is a whānau connection... we're huge on whānau being involved with them and their pathway through life. But for him there hasn't been one since he's been with the Trust." (Kaimahi)

Thinking about mahi in the future, the kaimahi noted he likes woodwork and this might be an area he could pursue workwise but he would need a specialised type of training course if he were to pursue a career or trade.

Kaimahi also identified that they would like to see Lee develop a little more independence and have some unsupervised time. They have started testing this out and it is going well. They would love to see whether Lee can live semi-independently which shows how far he has come.

"That's it. I mean I'm really happy with his progress. I would love to see what the future has in store for him and if he does, you know, is there a possibility of him being independent and going and living semi-independent where he doesn't have -- because at the moment he has 24-hour support. He's always with one of us, we're always supporting him to do things. I'd love to see what he could do on his own, given the chance." (Kaimahi)

The outstanding support of the organisation and the care and support of kaimahi shows that much can be done for and with rangatahi with different abilities to help them achieve wellbeing and open the doors to reaching their full potential.



"We found that with support around all of those things he can be trusted to do these things and do them -- even independently." (Supported Living kaimahi)

"No specialist support at all. It's all been in-house by kaiāwhina support really to tell what can we do to help him and support him and those things." (Supported Living kaimahi)



"So that's a big connection... that we're missing for him, is a whānau connection... we're huge on whānau being involved with them and their pathway through life. But for him there hasn't been one since he's been with the Trust." (Supported Living kaimahi)

"That's it. I mean I'm really happy with his progress. I would love to see what the future has in store for him and if he does, you know, is there a possibility of him being independent and going and living semi-independent where he doesn't have -- because at the moment he has 24-hour support. He's always with one of us, we're always supporting him to do things. I'd love to see what he could do on his own, given the chance." (Supported Living kaimahi)

6. Staying crime free

Current circumstances of rangatahi formerly in Youth Justice custody

Of the six rangatahi interviewed in year 3 who were in Oranga Tamariki Youth Justice (YJ) custody at the time of the year 1 interviews⁴⁷:

- Three remain in custody – in adult prison. Of these, one was transferred directly from the YJ residence soon after turning 18, and two entered adult prison after re-offending following their exit from YJ custody.
- Three are living in the community, and state they have been living a crime-free lifestyle since leaving their YJ custody arrangement.

Recidivism (re-offending, or being convicted of a crime, after being released from custody) was evident for three YJ rangatahi who are currently serving time in adult prisons. Sam came out of YJ and was supposed to go into supported accommodation but reoffended after three weeks, returning to an adult prison. Troy is serving a four-year sentence after he and his brother got into trouble after release from YJ. Tim is midway through a four-year prison sentence after spending the last four years in and out of the YJ system and referred to the comfort of prison, “*Nah, it’s actually all good in here, it’s not that bad.*” Of the three rangatahi now living crime-free: Brian is working hard six days a week and providing financial support to his partner and six-month old pēpi “*all my money goes to supporting my partner and baby these days*”. Eruera has casual work concreting. Luke is currently looking for part-time work while he studies maths and physics online and is looking for a place with his fiancée. He is hopeful for the future: “*as long as I stay out of trouble life is a lot better*”.

Enablers of staying crime free

Hononga – Connectedness

All six rangatahi recognised the importance of whānau connections in varying primacies. In some cases, this was expressed by recognising the consequence of not having those connections, like Troy who “*finds it hard not being with family*”. Brian, who has a strong motivation to stay crime free especially now he’s a father to a six-month old pēpi, sees his parents as his main support, providing an example of how his “*Dad got him mahi*”. Others were connecting or reconnecting with whānau to differing degrees.

Tim’s relationship with his uncle and aunty has facilitated a job for him when he is released:

(Interviewer) “And your uncle said, ‘Once you’re out, we’ve got a job?’.” (Tim) “Yeah”.

Luke reconnected with an old girlfriend after ‘cleaning up his act’, they are now engaged and looking for a place together. He was also enjoying an improved relationship with his older brother, compared to before he went to prison.

Several of the YJ rangatahi stated that they appreciated the connection with culture in both YJ and prison although Luke was slightly less concerned about seeking it saying:

“(Māoritanga) not a priority but if something comes up I’d be interested.”

⁴⁷ Rangatahi were only counted as YJ in this study if they were in a YJ facility at the time of the year 1 interview.

Brian feels connected to his Māoritanga and regularly goes to his marae.

Cultural connections were practically beneficial for some however, for instance, undergoing a cultural report enabled Troy to get a 10-month reduction in his sentence.

Transition workers and social workers being positive and supportive influences can be significant for rangatahi, especially where other connections are restricted. In this case Sam appreciates that his transition worker is his only regular visitor “...have awesome visits from my social (transition) worker every week”.

Troy’s previous youth justice facility worker checks in with him and his whānau as well, which they appreciate and demonstrates the meaningful connection that was established between them.

Haumarutanga – Safety/safe places

As was the case when in YJ residences, there were rangatahi who valued the familiarity, routine and security of prison, and the guaranteed accommodation without the hassle of having to obtain and maintain it, regular meals, routines and social networks. Sam sees himself as “institutionalised” said he “likes prison – food, warm...I feel safe”. Luke who was released on parole about five months prior to the interview said he “misses the community of prison”. Tim spoke of being comfortable in prison and the normality of it for him: “it’s not that bad...I don’t know, just – yeah, it just feels normal”.

Being on his whānau whenua in a tent where Eruera has stayed since year 2, provides him with a sense of safety and connection in a wider sense. He also has a new group of friends and social contacts mainly through work which provides him with constructive connections socially and sometimes an alternative place to stay.

Mana ake – Self-agency

Mana ake is displayed by YJ rangatahi when making good choices and managing expectations, especially around things like release or working through parole conditions.

While Luke was in prison, he attended multiple parole hearings and was told what he needed to do in order to get parole, however it was not organised by the facility leading him to use his own sense of mana ake to make it happen:

“They just said that I needed to complete counselling and courses and stuff. They said that, but then none of it was really happening so had to see them again just to get it all started.”

He also expressed how he managed his expectations around release following many parole hearings and a sense of uncertainty about if he would get out of prison:

“I had already learned early on just to always tell myself that I’m not going to get out. I know my end date and I’ll look forward to that, but if there’s something that’s like parole or something that’s just a chance, then I’ll just tell myself that I’m not getting it so I don’t get my hopes up and then get sad.”

Luke’s offending was fuelled by P, and he has made a concerted effort to reduce his drug use to “only smoking a bit of weed”. Rangatahi are choosing to ‘cut out’ negative connections that may lead to criminal behaviour, like one who now avoids the “toxic car community” or another who said he “stopped hanging out with dangerous, risky, drug taking

people”. Tim referred to not hanging with the “*crowd I hang out with*” when released to reduce chances of reoffending. He also mentioned his plan to stay crime free was “*I’m just going to focus on work, to be honest*”.

Another aspect of ‘making good choices’ rangatahi identified was accessing support services to assist them on their new, positive pathway. Brian tries to stay busy and fills up his time with constructive activities – in this case being a hard worker six days a week means he’s “*too busy with work to get into trouble*”. In fact, Brian attributes working hard to being the most significant enabler to changing his lifestyle for the better: “*Working has helped me the most over the last two years*”. The three rangatahi in the community were in some sort of work situation.

Fending for themselves was an example of YJ rangatahi expressing mana ake and self-agency. Eruera for example had been through several different accommodation situations and had to make decisions for himself as he said he did not get any real support from youth transition agencies.

One rangatahi simply stated he’s “*moved on...not interested*” in criminal behaviours now.

Luke said he had a near-death experience that “*woke me up*” so he is now striving for a better life. Although he started counselling in prison, he made sure he completed it when he got out.

Ārahitanga – Guidance

Transition planning, particularly practical assistance and planning around kāinga, mahi/akoranga, hononga, seemed to be imperative in assisting rangatahi to make and maintain changes to stay crime free. Brian was referred by his transition worker to a transition course after he left the YJ facility that was about job seeking. He told us that they had “*helpful kaimahi*” in the YJ facility. Sam said that the guidance of his mum and transition worker “*scores a 10 out of 10 on Ārahitanga*”.

Although what one rangatahi described as his “*faith journey*” had its “*ups and downs*” over the last few years, he values the spiritual and motivational guidance his faith provides.

Receiving counselling programmes in prison assisted Luke in multiple ways. The counselling course he undertook was an offence-related course expediting him getting probation sooner, but he also said he “*got useful things out of it*”. Luke benefitted from the counselling that was facilitated while he was in prison and continued when he was released:

“I had quite a few of them but, yeah, eventually getting seen by a counsellor. Towards the end of our sessions, I think we had done like 13 out of 15 and they were like, “Yeah, that’s all right. You can continue it on the outside”. I’ve finished with that already and then she said, “Yes, you don’t need to see me anymore. Everything’s all good”... it was actually really good to be honest. There was a lot of stuff that I’d never thought about that got brought up and it was pretty hard-out.”

Constraints and challenges of staying crime free

Hononga – Connectedness

For those rangatahi in prison maintaining connections with the outside world seems problematic, often resulting in them being unable to access connections to things like supports and planning, motivation and hope (hāpaingia te wairua). Visitor restrictions impacting hononga with family are especially hard for rangatahi. Covid restrictions are still impacting Sam who has no visits from whānau but does enjoy short phone calls with his mum. One rangatahi said he has *“no friends outside of prison...my only contacts beyond Mum is other prisoners”*.

Even once they got out, some rangatahi maintained a sense of connection to the prison system, such as Luke who explained that he was *“still kind of in (the prison system)”* even though he was out on parole and that he missed *“just everyone there, the community aspect of it...I love all of them, all brothers. It was mean in there”*.

In some cases, geographical isolation and lack of finances (e.g., for phone calls) also contributed to whānau and support people not being able to connect with or visit rangatahi in prison. All these factors can impact on rangatahi capacity to form healthy and strong connections and relationships or in some instances influence their motivation to stay crime free.

Sometimes changing lifestyles and cutting previous connections to remain on a good path meant that rangatahi had limited robust connections at this stage and in some cases just kept to their new relationships with one or two people. Although Eruera lives on shared whenua with his aunty he said that he doesn't have a strong connection or communications with his aunty *“tent's still there so am using the space but stay with a mate sometimes too”*. He described how *“he's missing Mum”* so is making an effort to connect with her although communications are still sporadic.

Haumarutanga – Safety/safe places

Sam felt that fights were *“coming to me”* in prison which resulted in him spending long periods in isolation *“22 hours in lockdown in a single cell and only two hours in the yards with others”*. Troy was also experiencing fights in prison, and being put in isolation for one to two weeks. His whānau were very concerned about his wellbeing.

Another rangatahi expressed that he *“doesn't feel safe inside”* and was rejecting support being sent in, like food, money or phone cards, as he feels pressure to use them from other prisoners and this makes him a target. Tim had found that keeping to himself was safest for him: *“I don't really get along – well, I do, I get along with everyone, but I don't trust anyone.”*

Unsafe and unsuitable emergency housing had been making things feel unsafe for Eruera in year 2 after leaving care when he transitioned from a YJ facility to a youth transition organisation who brokered some accommodation with a backpackers that was being used as emergency housing. Eruera *“didn't like it...stayed there for a month before I left...it was a druggie space”*. After leaving the backpackers he began staying in a tent on whānau land where he remained in year 3.

Mana ake – Self-agency

Using drugs or addiction issues continued to be a challenge for a few rangatahi. Although Karl was referred to a drug counsellor by his transition worker which helped, he said, *“I just have no self-control”*. Likewise, a lack of incentive or drive, often following multiple let downs or situations of hopelessness (e.g., no chance of parole, not having access to supports), meant mana ake and resilience of rangatahi was compromised.

Ārahitanga – Guidance

Transport was an issue for some rangatahi. One rangatahi lost his driver’s licence so had no transport to go see his parole officer, causing him to risk breaking his parole conditions. Luke’s parole office where he had to attend weekly was on the other side of town. After attending regularly but with difficulty, he raised this problem with his parole officer who appears to have used this as a learning opportunity (i.e., keep to parole conditions and get support) and advised Luke if he *“stayed out of trouble (he) would get my case transferred to a closer parole officer”*. As a result, Luke was transferred to a closer office enabling him to continue to fulfil his parole requirements with more ease, but that initial transport issue would have not been resolved if he hadn’t addressed it.

There were expressions from rangatahi that if their transition worker or social worker was only short-term (e.g., just for sentence or because of staff turnovers), it was inadequate support and there was *“no point”*.

Once out of prison, Luke had inadequate contact with his transition worker:

“I was meant to (have a transition worker). I had one when I got out and I saw him once and we set up a meeting and shit and I never heard from him after that. So I don’t know.”

Limited or inadequate planning supports was referred to by several YJ rangatahi with one voicing that he had, *“no goals for when I’m out of prison – no plan”*.

Other constraints or challenges to achieving staying crime free

Systemic issues such as lack of staff (services both in and out of prison), unfair legislation and legal systems, and lack of career or transition planning were all issues that were identified by rangatahi that came from the YJ space. Racism within the systems was implied in interviews but not explicitly labelled. Disproportionate consequences like court sentencing or remand times seemed excessive to rangatahi, leading to feelings of hopelessness. Troy and his whānau *“didn’t feel like his lawyer represented him well and the legal system was a bit harsh”*.

Delays in sentencing (remand) impact rangatahi in their ability to rehabilitate with no access to services or support opportunities. Being on remand in an adult prison meant that there was no opportunity to do courses or work programmes that may reduce sentences and provide rangatahi with hope and opportunities – concerningly, a rangatahi conveyed that meant *“no chance to improve”*. Sam *“wants to learn”* but with long periods of remand *“no one in my unit is doing courses”*. One rangatahi, similar to the situation Troy described in the mahi/akoranga section, talked about having no access to *“courses which would improve chance of parole”*.

Being moved around units within prison (eg. yard units) or in one case to different prisons is disruptive for rangatahi trying to make their way in these systems. Moving further away from whānau was also not helpful for maintaining connection as this meant some whānau were no longer able to visit. There was also a real possibility that some of the YJ rangatahi had mental health and learning disabilities that had not been identified or addressed. This was indicated in some of the kōrero shared by these rangatahi and seen in the behaviours that had led to some of their subsequent offending. These systemic issues can reduce the ability of rangatahi to learn and grow in life in the real world.

Looking ahead: Rangatahi future aspirations for staying crime free

Goals

Over the three years of this study Sam has fewer and fewer identified goals, with kōrero becoming 'wishy washy' as a result of having no certainties around release or hope for the near future. He confirmed his transition worker does try to work with him on goal setting and plans but he can't because he has "*no idea what's happening*". He does however want advocacy for Justice and other services to help him.

Brian has aspirations to move on to a better career and is looking at pathways forward.

Troy has a 10-month old and is hoping to "*be a good dad*" when he's out.

Other goals identified by rangatahi included wanting:

- visits from whānau
- to not reoffend
- to stay crime free!

Service needs and aspirations

Rangatahi from the YJ space identified the following that they thought would be beneficial from the services working with them:

- courses and training
- transition, goal and career planning supports – with whānau
- help to seek parole reduction
- enable rangatahi voices (listen) and have lived experience of those working with us (empathy/understanding)
- need access to rehabilitation and courses
- reduced remand time – not fair
- advocacy
- enable visits and contacts from whānau.

Exemplar case illustration: Staying crime free

Troy and Brian's stories provide two contrasting experiences of the youth justice system.

Both young men had great potential and many innate strengths that were easily identified by others while in the youth justice facility. They both wanted to stay crime free once they left the youth justice unit, and when prompted were able to think ahead about what they might find difficult and what could help them along the way.

Brian was able to engage with the right ārahitanga/guidance once he got out and leveraged positive relationships to help him achieve his goal to stay crime free.

Troy's path wasn't as straightforward once he left the unit. Some of the connections he continued with once out of YJ took him further away from his goal while the ārahitanga/guidance he then received was seen as unhelpful. He unfortunately ended up returning to the justice system.



Leaving Youth Justice: Brian and Troy's stories

Staying Crime Free Case Illustrations

Where did our transition journey begin?



Where are we now?



How did we get here?



What's next?

Where did our transition journey begin?

Brian and Troy were both 17 year old tāne staying in a Youth Justice unit when we talked to them separately in year 1.

Brian was showing his hardworking abilities on the farm and just wanted to get out of there as soon as possible. He was keen on getting a job and moving back somewhere close to his whānau and hoped to get back into sport too. He hadn't thought too much about what might stop him getting back into crime, only that "staying active and getting a job" would help, especially since he perceived being physical and active as one of his strengths.

His kaimahi (YJ worker) saw Brian as a humble person, hard working and quick to learn.

Troy was showing great leadership skills when he was in the Youth Justice unit. Thinking about when he got out, he wanted to continue to work out and stay fit and healthy. Although he was keen on getting a job for the money, he said he wanted to get on a course first. He'd had jobs before and they hadn't gone very well, so he was a bit worried about getting a job straight away.

Troy had also been on training courses but hadn't been motivated to go to them even when he was offered transport - "Just no motivation, just didn't want to do anything." He was, however, starting to see its importance in his life.

He'd also been struggling to get some of the practice tests right for his driver's licence, but he wanted to change it. "When I get out, I want to just do the -- I'll just do the test."

Similar to other rangatahi his age, Troy wanted basic things, like to "move out of there (his whānau home), get a car, get my licence, and have an income, money."

He wanted to stay out of trouble and he felt he would be able to make his own decisions about that.

We talked about what would help him when he got out and he felt it would come from his own determination, to "just push yourself" and "have a friend there to push you as well." When talking about what he would do if he got together with the wrong people that would get him back into trouble he felt that he would be strong enough to make his own decision. When asked how he would respond to peer pressure he said, "if there's something I don't want to do I won't do it." But he was also realistic that having money was important "just to get by" and that he would need an income. He saw having money as being linked to your wairua (spirit) "because you feel good." At this point in time, it was not about serving an addiction but about feeling independent and feeling good about that.

Troy had talked to case workers and a transition worker in the town he would move back to and was hoping that they would support him to get into a course and get his licence. Although he had to think about it, Troy saw his strengths as being "good at motivating myself to do things, even if I'm not good at it, just do it." And the kaimahi saw his leadership also - "I think you're a really good leader in the unit... you're very outspoken, if you want to say something you will say it...Yeah, really good discipline, I feel you have, yeah, and you're really good at encouraging yourself and others."

"Brian is a humble man. He's very quiet spoken, so he just gets on with things and excels in everything that he does." As another kaimahi explained, "(He's) got a mean work ethic. Not just physically... he'll get his head down and then he'll do stuff and then he'll excel at it. He also picks up and learns very quickly. Quick to actually put that hard work down like the mental strategies and that." (Brian's YJ kaimahi)

"Before I came in, I was mental up on that course, but they were coming around picking up and I was like, "No, I don't want to go" but now that I'm in here I want to get out and do something legit and that's like a start. So, I can start there." (Troy)



*"I've done jobs a few times and when I was doing it, I just get so frustrated because I don't know what to do and like people are like, "Bro --" the other workers that know what to do give you shit because you don't know how to do anything. You're like, "F****", you know, you just -- I can't manage doing a job that I don't know how to do, so I was telling them that I will be keen to jump on a course and learn about a job before jumping straight into it." (Troy)*

"Just doing my time. Get out and stay out. Don't come back and stay out of trouble when I get out. Avoid trouble." (Troy)



Brian and Troy's stories

Continued

Where are we now?



How did we get here?



What's next?

Where are we now?

Brian is now a dad. He was living with his new partner, their baby and a whānau member at the time of the Year 3 interview. After leaving the Youth Justice unit, he connected with a transition worker and did a job-seeking course. He ended up getting a job through his father and works fulltime doing very long hours – six days a week. He had tried to get back into sport but was too tired after work so he gave that up. In fact, he was often too tired to do anything else on his day off but sleep. Brian has stayed out of crime. Brian wasn't interviewed in year 2 of the study but gave a Likert scale rating of 3 in the current interview – 'Yes I think so' when asked if things are going ok. He wasn't quite sure why but mentioned that, "This job might take me somewhere in life, something else better where I want to be."

Troy got into trouble with the law within a year of leaving the Youth Justice unit. When I talked to his whānau last, he had been sentenced and was in an adult prison. His whānau felt that his sentence was particularly lengthy for the situation and stated that the lawyer didn't speak up enough. A whānau member said that "a social worker that spoke at the court hearing said to us that if she'd seen the paperwork, he shouldn't have got that sentence." She was able to request a cultural report which helped reduce it. One whānau member who attended a parole meeting reported that they said he could possibly get out earlier, but he needed to do courses, however no courses had been offered to him. She thought maybe they were short staffed or there were none available. She thinks the "system sucks."

Troy is a dad also. He still connects with his partner and less so with his whānau, although when he calls, he says he is "clocking in to let you know I'm alright." He has been mixing with a gang now, but he doesn't want them around his kids. His brother said he was sounding mature by saying that. A whānau member says his situation in prison hasn't been good, he has been in a few fights and has been in the isolated secure unit. "He won't talk about it to us. He says you got to be in there to know what it's like." Another whānau member had said "It's hard not to fight if people come at you – fights come to you."

When I spoke to a whānau member, Troy had just come out of being in the secure unit for two weeks. "One time he was there for a whole month. You can hear the difference in his voice afterwards" she said and was very worried about it. "Prison is hard when you're with people with hardened criminals. Troy is not getting any better – he's a people person. Finds it hard not to be with family." Troy was not able to give a Likert Scale rating at either the year 2 or 3 interviews.

*"This job might take me somewhere in life, something else better where I want to be."
(Brian)*

*"A social worker that spoke at the court hearing said to us that if she'd seen the paperwork, he shouldn't have got that sentence."
(Troy's whanau member)*



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Brian and Troy's stories

Continued



How did we get here?



What's next?

How did we get here?

Brian says what helped him the most to stay crime free has been having his job and his parents. His job "keeps me out of trouble," and his parents, "they help keep me on the right track."

Troy was unable to navigate life well after leaving the youth justice unit. He went down a path with friends that got him into trouble with the law again and this took him into the adult prison system. He already had links to gangs but had so far stayed away from them, however, now he is more involved. He became a dad, but now has a lengthy sentence. He has gone down a path he really didn't want to go down.

What's next?

Brian aspires to start training in another career and has been looking into it. He has dreams that he wants to fulfil. Brian is living well, with his new family and whānau support, and a job that keeps him busy.

Troy's whānau member believes in change, that people can change even after prison. "I'm a Christian. So, I have hope for him." She is hopeful he will get bailed to them when he gets out. She is aware that if he goes to another town he may get caught between gangs. One of the workers from the Youth Justice unit still follows up with him and says to the whānau "I will always be there for Troy."

Troy's story is particularly heart-breaking – people saw a lot of potential in Troy, he was noted as a leader, and was bright and charismatic. He alluded to some difficulties with learning things and these challenges may be symptoms of deeper issues. Unfortunately, Troy was unable to keep out of trouble and this has led to a difficult path for him and his whānau.

Brian says what helped him the most to stay crime free has been having his job and his parents. His job "keeps me out of trouble," and his parents, "they help keep me on the right track."



Brian aspires to start training in another career and has been looking into it. He has dreams that he wants to fulfil. Brian is living well, with his new family and whānau support, and a job that keeps him busy.

***"I'm a Christian. So, I have hope for him."
(Troy's whānau member)***

***"I will always be there for Troy."
(Troy's YJ kaimahi)***

Unfortunately, Troy was unable to keep out of trouble and this has led to a difficult path for him and his whānau.

Conclusions

This three-year longitudinal, primarily qualitative, research study of rangatahi leaving state care and custody has successfully integrated kaupapa Māori data gathering and sense-making methods and improved our understanding of rangatahi journeys from care. Rangatahi were generous in sharing their experiences in the medium term of moving out of care to formulate this report. Their kōrero informs Oranga Tamariki, the TSS and other relevant agencies and service providers of some of their needs, enablers and challenges in their transition journeys.

Year 1 of the study⁴⁸ found a broad range of aspirations and a range of supports and challenges were anticipated by rangatahi prior to leaving care. Notably, we found that, in its first year of the TSS, few rangatahi (1 in 5) reported having been supported in developing formal transition plans before they left care.

In year 2 of the study there still appeared to be negligible formal transition planning, progress monitoring or consistent support for rangatahi. A wide range of experiences, early outcomes and supportive and inhibitive factors were shared by rangatahi as they reflected on and made sense of their journeys 6-12 months after leaving care. Also, in year 2 a kaupapa Māori framework of data analysis was developed and applied to make sense of the complexity and diversity of journeys across the six focus areas (Ngā Āhukatanga framework). This kaupapa Māori Āhukatanga framework was applied to both data collection and analysis methods in year 3 and proved helpful in understanding and representing the complexity and diversity of rangatahi journeys from care. The framework has also formed a basis for the structure of this report.

This report is focused on year 3 findings for the 24 rangatahi still participating in the Ngā Haerenga |Transition Journeys study. Again, we found a range of complex stories and diverse outcomes for rangatahi participants 18 to 24 months after leaving care. Recurring themes in enablers and constraints show the generalisability of the āhukatanga across the outcome areas and how the impacts of these interweave across rangatahi lives.

The 24 rangatahi that participated in the study in the third year were at variable places across the six focus areas: kāinga – living situations, mahi/akoranga – work, training and education, hauora – health and wellbeing, ngā hononga – connected relationships, hāpori – participating in community and community activities, and staying crime free. At this stage of their journeys many rangatahi seem to be, to different degrees, entering into new responsibilities and more adult situations, finding their feet and showing new types of resilience and mana ake.

Key high-level observations include:

- 21 of the 24 year 3 rangatahi participants answered a Likert scale question “Overall, since leaving care, do you feel things are going OK?” Results were generally positive and showed an upward trend over time for most rangatahi.
- The prominence of hononga (in all its forms but often from whānau and partners) as an enabler of the six focus areas and arguably across rangatahi lives is highly

⁴⁸ [Ngā Haerenga | Transition Journeys: Longitudinal study phase one.](#)

evident as being critical in their journeys. In particular, positive hononga frequently benefitted and supported rangatahi to access opportunities within mahi/akoranga, kāinga and hauora. Although hononga, or lack thereof, was sometimes described as a constraint to successful outcomes, this was usually in relation to things like service providers not understanding/connecting with rangatahi, inconsistency of meeting and following up with rangatahi, or conflictual/uncomfortable relationships with a range of people.

- Having safe, stable environments is critical to enable successful rangatahi transition journeys. This can mean different things for different rangatahi, encompassing physical, mental and spiritual aspects and can be applied across all focus areas, however it is particularly relevant for kāinga.
- Mahi was particularly evident as a protective factor for staying away from crime, for supporting mental health, and giving rangatahi a purpose and sense of achievement. It was also critical for rangatahi who were supporting whānau including partners and pēpi.
- Mental Health/trauma impacts were conspicuous in this group of rangatahi and the varied degrees to which support to address these challenges was requested, provided, and engaged in had an obvious impact on their ability to achieve successful outcomes across all focus areas.
- Support from Oranga Tamariki and TSS varied across the rangatahi experiences. For some this was crucial to their success, while for others this type of support was not wanted or was not forthcoming, timely or reliable when it was sought. It was evident however that where appropriate, meaningful support was provided to rangatahi from transition or social workers this did have a positive result on rangatahi transition journeys. Many rangatahi recognised and appreciated this support when it was present and those who did not receive the same levels of support often noticed its absence as well.
- A lack of consistency from transition or social workers in their contact with rangatahi, their level of understanding and supports was noted. This could perhaps be partially addressed through improved holistic assessments, improved training for key kaimahi, and greater collaboration between agencies facilitated by TSS. This would assist with ensuring rangatahi have access to relevant information, entitlements and services as they transition out of care. It could also enable rangatahi to maintain a primary connected and trusting relationship with their transition worker and a holistic service, minimising the need for rangatahi to have to navigate multiple service providers alone.
- It was evident that this group of rangatahi with complex needs would all significantly benefit from individualised, wraparound, consistent transition services. It was noted that those with more obvious disabilities were provided with tailored, wraparound, consistent supports and access to funding streams with positive results. However, from the rangatahi perspective such an approach would be beneficial to all of those leaving care, transitioning into young adulthood and navigating 'independent living' for the first time.

The Ngā Haerenga Āhuatanga framework has proven to be a helpful tool in understanding and explaining the diversity, complexity and overlapping nature of rangatahi transition journeys. The framework could also be usefully applied in other areas and by other agencies and organisations who support rangatahi, and with whom Oranga Tamariki works.

While 'growing pains' of rangatahi finding their feet could be seen throughout the findings of this study, the same could be said of the TSS service itself where the learnings of a new initiative are expected to occur. The willingness of Oranga Tamariki and TSS to commission this study and to take these learnings communicated via rangatahi experience to enhance the service being provided will help to ensure a positive impact on rangatahi outcomes moving forward.

Again, the researchers mihi to the rangatahi and their whānau who committed to sharing their experiences of their journeys with the team over a long three years, through a global pandemic and often while they were navigating some huge changes in their own lives.

Glossary

Ā-Hinengaro	Mentally
Ā-Tinana	Physically
Ā-Wairua	Spiritually
Āhua / Āhuatanga	Shape, Appearance / Aspects, Characteristics, Appearance, Nature
Ake	Original, Indigenous, Own – emphasises who something belongs to
Akoranga	Guidance
Aotearoa	New Zealand
Ārahitanga	Guidance, Leadership
Aroha	Love, Affection
Hāpaingia	Lift Up
Hapori	Community
Hapū	Sub-tribal groupings / Pregnant
Haumarutanga	Safety, Safe Places
Hauora	Health and Wellbeing – Holistic Wellbeing
Hononga	Connections and Connected Relationships
Hui	Meeting, Gathering
Iwi	Tribe, People
Kai	Food, Eat
Kaimahi	Worker, Employee
Kāinga	Home, Living Situation
Kanohi	Face
Kanohi ki te Kanohi	Face-to-face
Kapa Haka	Māori Performing Arts
Kaupapa	Purpose, Topic, Interest
Koha	A Tangible Demonstration Of Gratitude, Gift, Donation, Contribution
Kōrero	Talk, Discussion
Kupu	Word, Term
Mahi	Work
Mahiā-rongo	Using All The Senses To Assess, Relate And Communicate
Mahi/Akoranga	Work/Education, Training
Mana	Prestige, Authority, Power, Control, Influence, Pride
Mana Ake	Self-Agency, Unique Identities, Inner Strength
Manaakitanga	Kindness, Nurturing and Caring for Others
Māoritanga	Māori Culture/Practices/Beliefs/Way of Life
Marae	Communal Meeting Place of Māori
Mātauranga	Knowledge, Wisdom
Mauri	Life Force, Vitality
Mihi	Acknowledgement
Moana	Ocean, Sea
Mokopuna	Grandchild
Ngā Haerenga	Journeys
Ora	Life, Vitality
Oranga	Wellbeing
Pāpā	Father, Dad
Pepeha	Tribal Motto, Tribal Saying/Background
Pēpi	Baby
Pou Tautoko	Supporter
Pōuri	Sad, Sorrowful

Pūrākau	Legend, Myth
Rangatahi	Youth
Rōpū	Group, Team
Taiao	Natural Environment
Tamaiti / Tamariki	Child, Children
Tane / Tāne	Man, Male
Tau	Settled
Tautoko	Support, Uphold
Te	The, Singular
Te ao Māori	The Māori World
Te reo Māori	The Māori Language
Te taiao	Natural Environment
Te Toka Tūmoana	Oranga Tamariki Māori Practice Framework
Tiaki	Care, Protect
Tikanga	Customs, System Of Values And Practices
Tinana	Body, Physically
Toi	Art, Creativity
Wahine / Wāhine	Woman / Women
Waiata	Song, Sing
Wairua	Spirit, Spiritually, Soul
Whakaaro	Thoughts / Thinking
Whakaaro Māori	Māori Ways of Thinking and Understanding, Consciousness of Things Māori
Whakamā	Embarrassed, Ashamed
Whakamanawa	Empower, Inspire
Whakapapa	Geneology
Whakawhanaungatanga	The Process of Building Connections and Relationships
Whānau	Family
Whānau Whānui	Extended, Wider Family Connections, Chosen Family
Whanaunga	Relative/s
Whanaungatanga	Kinship, Family Ties
Whenua	Land