

Experiences of school and learning in Manurewa

STORIES OF RANGATAHI

The
**Southern
Initiative**



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
TE TĀHUHU O TE MĀTAURANGA



Thank you

This book of stories is based on the lived experience of rangatahi, parents and educators in Manurewa. It is the outcome of a collaboration between the MOE, the Southern Initiative, The Auckland Co-design Lab, The Middlemore Foundation and rangatahi, schools and educators in Manurewa. The intent of which is to inform work about attendance, wellbeing and engagement of rangatahi in education and to ensure innovation and strategies developed are done so with an appreciation of the lived realities and aspirations of those young people. It was made possible thanks to the Department of Internal Affairs Digital Government Partnership Innovation Fund.

A big mihi to all the rangatahi, parents, teachers, staff and education providers in Manurewa who shared their stories and the education providers who supported the empathy interviews.

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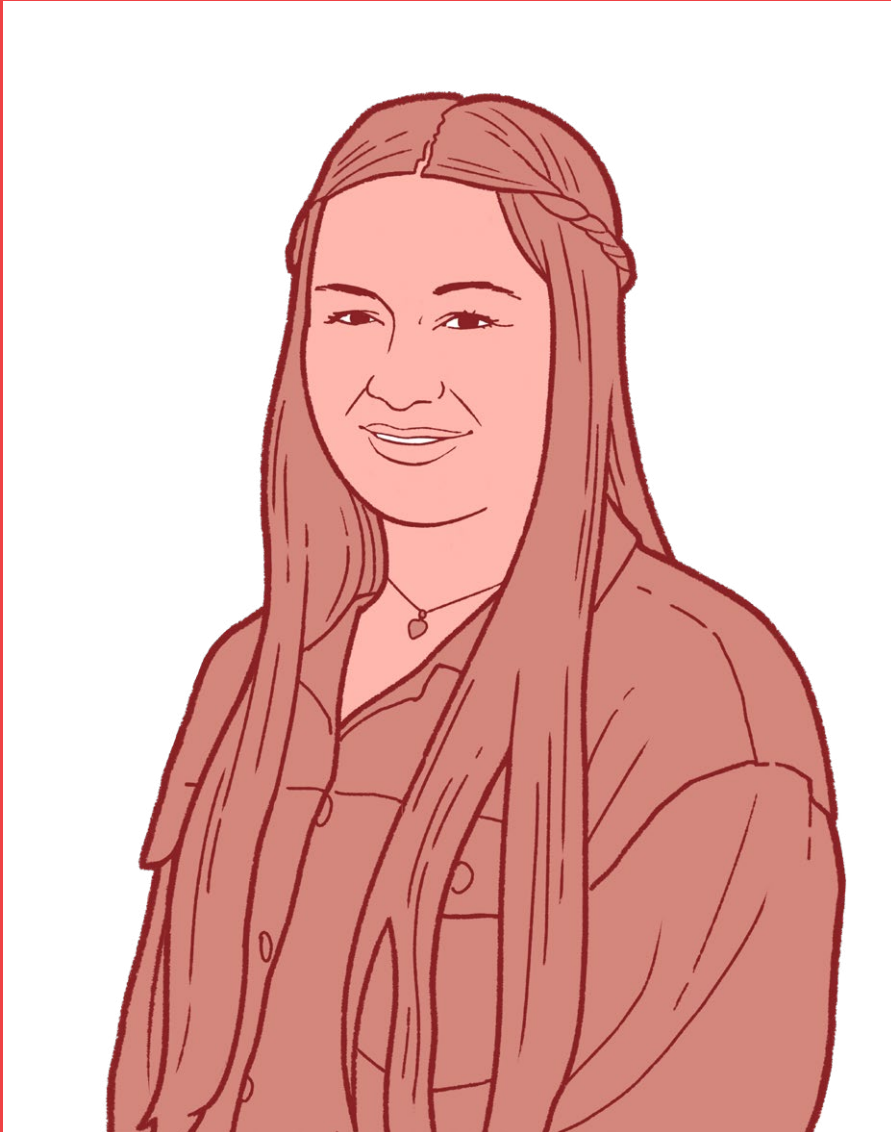


The following 6 stories are based on interviews with 70 rangatahi attending intermediate school, high school and alternative education in Manurewa, and rangatahi not in education, employment or training. A further 16 interviews have been carried out with school staff, youth workers and whānau and 67 ideas were contributed from the UpSouth community digital platform.

The stories reflect what we heard about attendance, engagement, and wellbeing but also people's whole lives. They are intended to be tools that help people engage with the issues and opportunities through the eyes of rangatahi and the people around them.

Initial feedback from young people is that they effectively represent (rather than exaggerate) their lived experiences and feel authentic.

86 interviews: 62 rangatahi in mainstream & alternative education, 8 rangatahi not in employment, training or education, 9 staff and educators, 3 youth workers, 4 parents, 4 schools, 2 alternative education providers; 67 ideas from the UpSouth community digital platform; many cultural backgrounds.



E iai la'u miti I have this dream

Expectations and pathways for Māori and Pasifika represented by Jacqui, a Year 12 Samoan Tongan student. Jacqui is the eldest of six and lives with Mum and Dad.

Talofa. I am Jacqui.

I'm 17 yrs old and the eldest in my family.

My dad's Tongan and my mum is Samoan. There are 5 kids below me. Both my parents work and believe education is really important to get a good job to support the family and bring honour to the family.

From when I was really young I wanted to do something in health. My Nan lives with us and has been sick for a long time. It made me think how good it would be to help my people in our community to keep us healthy.

When I started in college I already knew people because of a camp I went on with some youth mentors. They have really helped me with communication and I have like a family at school who I can talk to when things get stressful.

I worked really hard at school but the work got a lot harder especially when I started NCEA. At Year 10 I chose my subjects for Level 1. Some of my friends found it hard to choose because they didn't know what they wanted to be, but I did. I tried to make sure I got teachers that I knew would help me.

Sometimes it's hard to ask for help especially if some teachers don't think you're good enough. I don't know—maybe it's because they think brown kids aren't as good at science and maths. It seems like that anyway.

Level 1 Science was hard. I didn't do as well as I wanted, so I wasn't able to go in to Level 2 Science. I wanted to do Level 3 Biology and Chemistry next year, which I need for a health pathway. I went to the careers lady to find out exactly what I needed but she didn't think I should focus on health. She said university is really hard.

One of my teachers is going to arrange a trip to AUT so we can have a look around the university and get a feel for it.

She knows how passionate I am about a career in health. This teacher arranged for some teachers from AUT and MIT to come and talk to us at school and it made me excited again. It makes a difference when I know what I am working for and I can connect what I learn in class to what I want to be.

"Yeah cause a lot of kids they are Pacific Islanders too and like they struggle, they are sometimes behind and teacher will be all like ...I'll just give you up to 'achieve'"
(Year 9 student)

- ▲ **Protective factors**
 - Resilient
 - Proactive about education pathways
 - Youth mentor
 - Supportive teacher going the extra mile

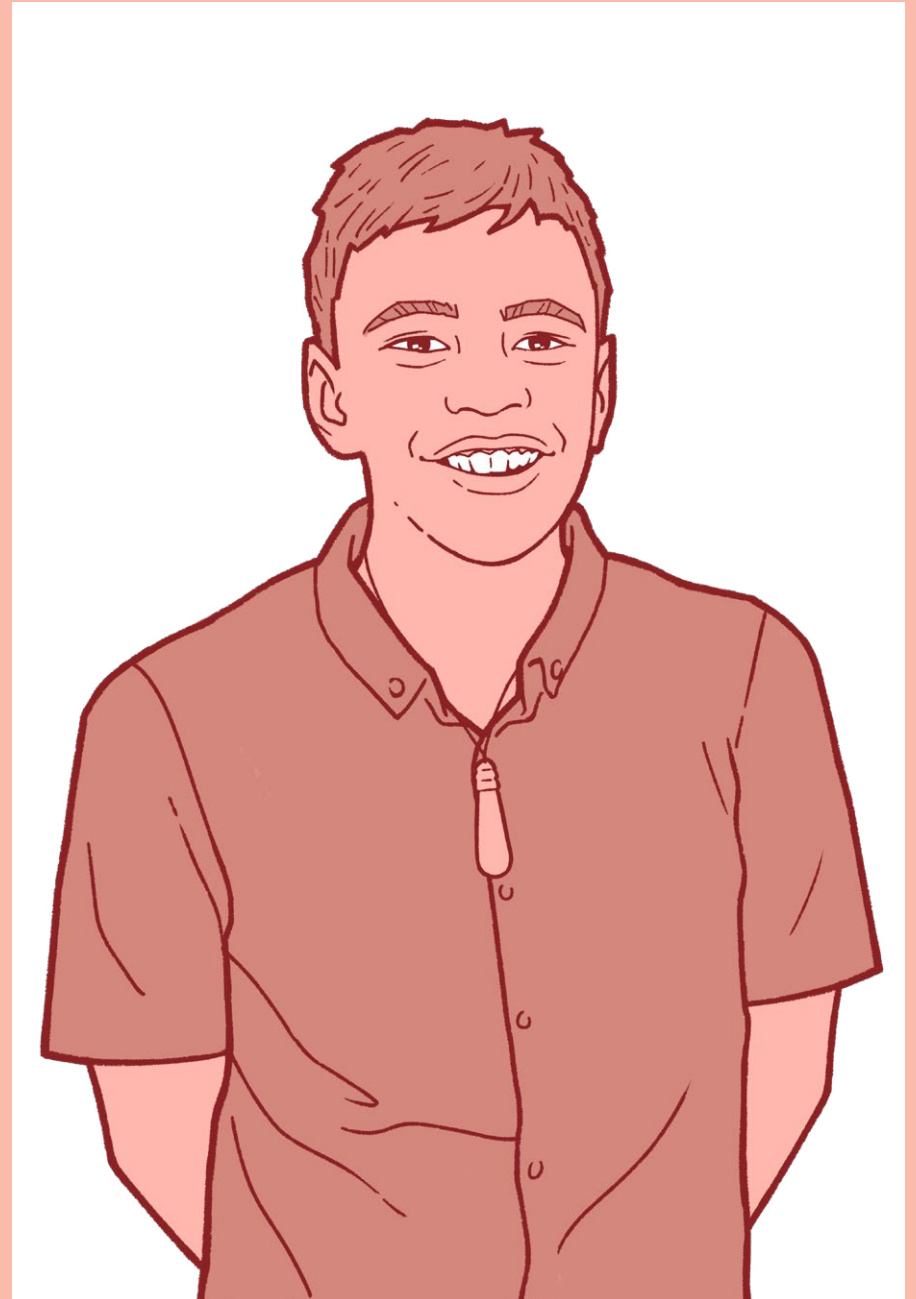
- ▼ **Risk factors**
 - Active discouragement because of low expectations or bias
 - Lack of support to get the right NCEA mix



**Kei a rātou
tōku tuara.
Aheira!**

**They have
my back,
it's solid!**

The importance of relationships—especially at high school. From the perspective of Adam, a Year 10 Māori Samoan student. Adam lives with his Mum and four siblings. He turned around low attendance.



Kia ora. I am Adam

I'm Maori Samoan. I didn't like it when I started Year 9. I didn't know many people. It wasn't cool, I kept getting in trouble. Some of my teachers didn't understand me. Some teachers, they just write on the board and tell us to do our work, but I needed more help. I find it hard to sit still. Some teachers were okay with it but some get angry. It's just hard for me to focus sometimes. My new teacher gets me.

I used to be really good at maths but then I didn't understand anything so I felt like shit. So I didn't always go to class and neither did my new friends. I mean there was no point. I started to wag and go off the rails and my mum was worried.

That's when they started this new programme at my school with this really cool teacher. He came in and gave me a place to feel like I belong. I like the

programme and the brothers on there. They have my back. It's solid!

I love playing rugby and my goal is to be an 'All Black'. All my mates play rugby. My other goal is to help my mum and my family—that's why I need to get a job. When I see my mum proud of my work it makes me happy. My mum looks after me and my four siblings, solo. I want to help her around the house to pay the bills so she can have a break.

Healthy for me means staying fit and having a positive mind-set. Healthy whānau means no more fighting or struggling and life is easier.

I love sports. I also like hanging out with my mates. The new programme I am on is gangster because all the boys are on the same page and the tutors understand us. I even like doing maths again.

The school uses my culture through Polyfest and the cultural week at school. It makes me feel proud to see my culture, during language week it's cool to see our traditional clothes worn at the school. Learning traditional ways is mean. I don't know what qualifications I need but I want to get a job that helps my family.

"I like it when the teacher interacts with you, it makes you like, gets to know you and stuff, so like they don't just give you work and tell you to do it, they'll talk to you in class, interact with everyone ...yeah I like it when teachers do that, it actually inspires kids to learn." (Year 11 student)



"When I was in intermediate I loved maths, I knew everything and then got to high school looked at it all couldn't do it, the fact that I couldn't do it just made me hate it." (Year 12 student)

- ▲ **Protective factors**
 - Bonding with friends in the programme
 - Positive relationship with new teacher
 - Connection to culture

- ▼ **Risk factors**
 - Income stress at home
 - Historic domestic violence
 - Mainstream teachers not understanding and loss of self esteem—possible neurodiversity that previously has gone unnoticed
 - No clear pathway even though really keen to get employment and help whānau



**He mataku
au o te
kura tuarua
High school
is scary**

Moving to high school can be scary for many.
From the perspective of Tiare, a Cook Island Māori
intermediate student. Tiare is the eldest of three and
lives with Mum and Dad. She has mixed attendance.

Kia ora. I am Tiare.

I am Cook Island Māori. I live in Manurewa with my parents and my brother and sister.

We have moved a few times. We have lived in our house for a couple of years. I like my street because it feels safe and I know the kids now.

I want to work in a job that helps people and my community.

I think you have to have a good mindset to be able to achieve goals and be the person that you want to be.

I like it when my teachers actually ask if I'm OK and stuff, and how my day was—I think that's really cool. Sometimes you feel like they are so close that you can actually share your personal stuff and it's really nice to have teachers like that. I had a bad year at primary because I felt upset when my teacher would only

focus on the smart Palagi kids at the front. It made me and the other students feel dumb.

I feel really proud of my culture when we celebrate events at school like Polyfest and Māori language week. It makes me feel included. I wish that I could feel like that in all my classes.

I'm really nervous about high school. I saw a fight on youtube at the school I am in zone for. There's heaps of smoking, if you snitch—you get the bash. It worries my parents too, so they are trying to get me into other schools that are further away from where I live, but we're not sure on how that will work out.

We did get to go up to one of the schools. It was awesome. We got to try some of their tech equipment and we got to do some dancing which was cool. I am still not sure about all the different classes. My cousins said to me that they found it hard to know where

to go and that they had to go to lots of different classes and you get lots of new teachers and that you don't really get to know most of them. They can maybe help me with that if I get into that school.

"I don't know if it was my mindset or the teacher but I felt like if you weren't one of the smart kids you didn't get noticed. It made me feel upset." (Year 9 student)

"Honestly like back in Year 8 and transitioning to a year 9 as a high school student I reckon it was just nerve racking. Nerve racking because I'm new to this space, you're not very familiar with peers that are older than you by like five years, five to four years so yeah it was just, it was just scary at that time. But once you found your space at the school you feel oh okay I think I've got this." (Year 10 student)

- ▲ **Protective factors**
 - Feels safe at home
 - Connected to community
 - Positive mindset
 - Positive teacher relationships that enable you to share
 - Positive cultural identity
 - Possibly older cousins at school

- ▼ **Risk factors**
 - Experienced racism and low expectations
 - Anxious about high school
 - Housing instability with several house moves



KO TE HAUKAINGA A PLACE TO BELONG

Belonging makes a difference. Told by Hoani, a Year 11 student in alternative education. Hoani lives with 11 whānau. He has low attendance in mainstream schooling.



Kia ora. I am Hoani

I am 15 yrs old and I'm Māori.

I was born in Rewa and lived here all my life although have moved around quite a bit when I was in CYFS care. I got expelled from school last year and ever since been here.

I like it at alternative education because everyone here is the same, I'm around people I can communicate with yeah like family. The tutors know who we are and they give one-on-one learning which makes me understand the work more.

I live at home. There's about 11 of us with my dad. My mum lives up north so I don't see her much.

We have had to struggle a lot. When it comes to money all my family go to war. It's pretty full on you know. Like if someone gets in a bad place it goes right through the whole house.

My dad and brother have been inside and that's where I was heading but my brother told me, If I keep staying home I'm gonna end up just like them.

At intermediate they made you feel like you were different and they were better than you. I had heard about high school from my brothers. On the first day a teacher said I looked bad so I decided I would live up to that.

I got expelled... I think the teachers just thought I couldn't do stuff or didn't want to so they didn't really ask me anything. They just put me in a group with other Māori's and kind of left us.

I used to really like sport but when I was 13 I got into drugs and stuff so stopped going to school. One of the things I'm proud of is stopping that stuff and trying to make a better life. I'm trying for Level 1 this year so I can get a job and get some money. Just got to be patient

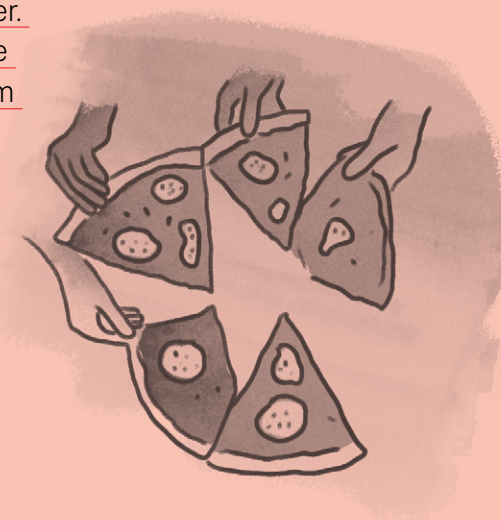
and do the work. The guys here are helpful and encourage us. When we achieve something they bring some pizzas in and it feels real good. Everyone comes and it makes me feel like I can make a good life.

"You can't just be telling people the same thing over and over. Especially if they're not going to get it. We're not designed to be robots, straight up, we're not designed for that."
(Year 11 student)

"Yeah, when I see my family struggle, it makes me want to learn and makes me want to become better. They don't want to be like that and I don't want them to struggle any more."
(Year 12 student)

- ▲ **Protective factors**
 - Strong bonds with tutors
 - Strong bonds with friends
 - Positive reinforcement
 - Resilient

- ▼ **Risk factors**
 - Crowded housing
 - Financial pressures at home
 - Negative experience at intermediate
 - Low expectations at high school







Tina mata'utia Super mum

Building resilience from the perspective of Mele, a Tongan Samoan solo mum. Mele works full time with two children.

Talofa. I am Mele

I am Tongan and Samoan. I am a solo mum of two children. I have a girl in Year 10 and a boy in Year 12 at the local high school. I work in the local branch of IRD.

My girl has had an easier road than her brother at high school. When she moved from the intermediate a big group of her friends also came too. We'd only moved recently into the area when my son started.

I make sure my kids are busy with activities after school so they can't get into trouble. My son plays rugby and made some friends through that. My daughter loves netball and dance. She is okay. She is a bit nervous about choosing subjects for next year but I am helping her with that.

My son's coach recognised his leadership potential and pulled him up when he started to mess around in Year 10.

Now he is playing up less in class and is more focused.

He has had some problems with maths. The jump from intermediate to high school was massive.

I am big on getting an education so I had to encourage him to hang in there—even with a teacher he didn't like very much. It's important they learn that you are going to have to communicate and get on with people, even with the ones you don't like. He just didn't ask for help when he didn't understand.

I kind of wish the teachers would notice and be more proactive. Not sure what would have happened with him if I hadn't got involved. It helped that my son realised it for himself when someone came to the school and talked about maths being important for construction and engineering. Now my kids know that I will

even get extra tutoring if they need it. When my son managed to get merit in maths, I got really excited for him.

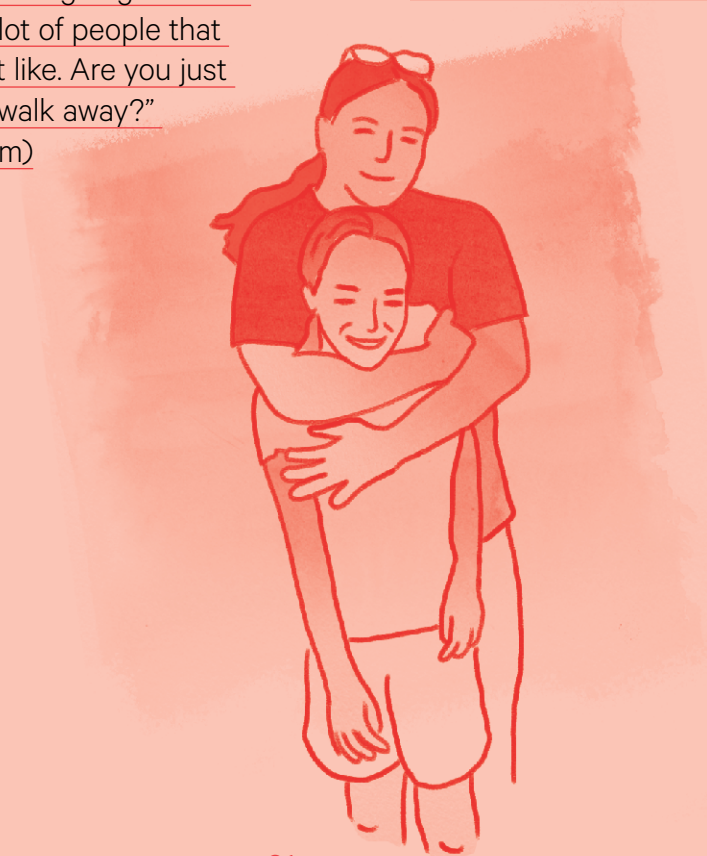
"[My son] was having issues with quite a lot of teachers and I said, well I went, I had to go hardball on that one where I said if you don't like the teachers that's not the teacher's problem that's yours, when you leave school you're going to come across a lot of people that you won't like. Are you just going to walk away?"
(Solo mum)

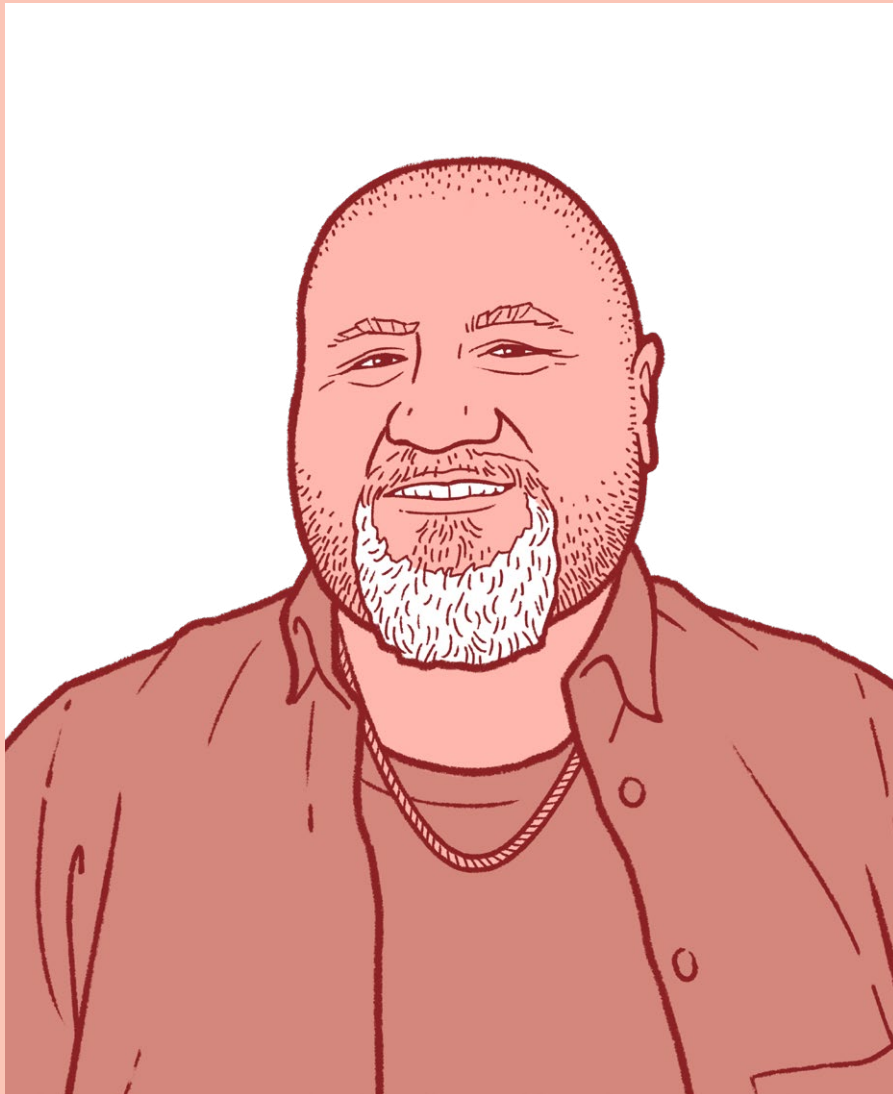
▲ Protective factors

- Very engaged parent
- Positive and resilient mindset modelled by mother
- Coach positive role model
- Exposure to future career pathway

▼ Risk factors

- House move
- Passive teacher





F'a'atuatua ma so'otaga Trust and relationship

Relationships are important—even for science! Told from the perspective of Sione, a science teacher. Sione has two children and comes from Māngere. He is involved in Kāhui Ako and passionate about whānau engagement.

Talofa. I am Sione

I love teaching and the opportunity it gives me to support rangatahi to learn. I loved science at school and I see young people arrive from intermediate school loving it too only to lose interest when they get to Year 9 and 10. I want to help change that.

I find getting to know pupils and getting a better understanding of what's going on for them really helps to build trust and relationships.

I am proud that the school is so inclusive and that it celebrates all cultures through language weeks and cultural celebrations. The pupils seem to love it too, so I try to bring it into the classroom. I think more teachers should do the same because I think it's a big part of why my kids stay engaged but they may need help.

When I was at school both my parents worked shifts and

found it hard to get involved with school—but I know they loved it when they could. It's why I am so passionate about opportunities for whānau engagement in school. It's hard work though as there's so much going on for some whānau, especially housing and money being tight.

It means really getting to know pupils and their whole lives. My top tip is to be consistent and going directly to all the whānau right at the beginning of the year to build trust. I know now that if there is a problem they will text or email and everyone knows what's going on.

I am proud that my school goes the extra mile but there's only so much schools can do on their own.

Sione was recently invited to get involved with the Kāhui Ako and hopes that there will be the opportunity to collaborate with local schools around whānau engagement and transition between intermediate and

secondary school. It's one place where he can help join things up and connect the dots.

“So what I tend to do as soon as I get my class roll before school starts, is to contact my newbies, introduce myself, say look I'm really looking forward [to the year]. We actually come in on the first day. We have a whole of whānau day, we get lots of parents in who are with us the entire day. Or even for them it's great just getting that invite. I think I have really good relationships with my parents, I can be brutally honest sometimes, and I think most of the time they appreciate that, but you get a feel for it.” (Intermediate teacher)

- ▲ **Protective factors**
 - Shares the same lived experience of students
 - Purposefully invests time in building relationships with students and whānau
 - Weaves culture into the learning in the classroom
- ▼ **Risk factors**
 - Hardship faced by whānau
 - Not all teachers are investing the time in building relationships



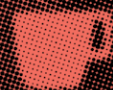
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TO GO



How can these stories be used?

These stories reflect the voices of rangatahi, educators and whānau. They help us to:

- build empathy for the lived experiences and points of view of rangatahi, parents and teachers
- show people's experiences in the education system now, why some things work and why some don't, and why some can make things worse
- think about what future responses need to consider, and to test emerging ideas and our assumptions about those ideas

You can use these stories for discussion in your own community about attendance, wellbeing and engagement.

You could invite students, whānau, teachers, school staff, community members, agencies, community providers and iwi. Divide up the larger group into smaller groups mixing young people and adults if possible and appropriate.

Possible activities to build empathy, gain understanding, support discussion and identify opportunities for change

01. What is happening for us now? Use the personas to generate discussion and reflection with staff and/or young people

In small groups each person is given one story to read and take on as their own. They introduce themselves to the rest of the group from that person's perspective, and share something of their story. This helps the group to immerse into different perspectives and become familiar with each of the stories. Then use the discussion guide to reflect on how these stories connect to your world, and how well current systems and school environments are set up to support wellbeing and attendance outcomes.

YOU'LL NEED: Stories of Rangatahi booklet (copy each), discussion guide (p40), ballpoint pens

TIME: Allow 1-2 hours for reflection and sharing

02. Generating & testing new ideas and ways of working

Use the stories to generate ideas for how your school, community or education area could be more responsive to the wellbeing and attendance needs of rangatahi. What might we try?

The stories can also be used to test proposed ideas against. Do ideas proposed take into account what these stories tell us about the lived experiences of young people, whānau and educators? Are they helping to address underlying issues that impact on wellbeing and attendance for young people?

YOU'LL NEED: Sharpies, ideation concept cards (see <https://www.aucklandco-lab.nz/resources>)

TIME: 1-2 hours

03. Supporting safer discussions

Using stories like these can be a safe way to explore ideas and issues with young people, without asking them to disclose details about their own lives.

Referring to the young people from the stories, rangatahi can talk about what they think might be going on for those young people, how they might respond to different things, what motivates them or what is important to them. This can help shape new ideas and identify what isn't working with current approaches.

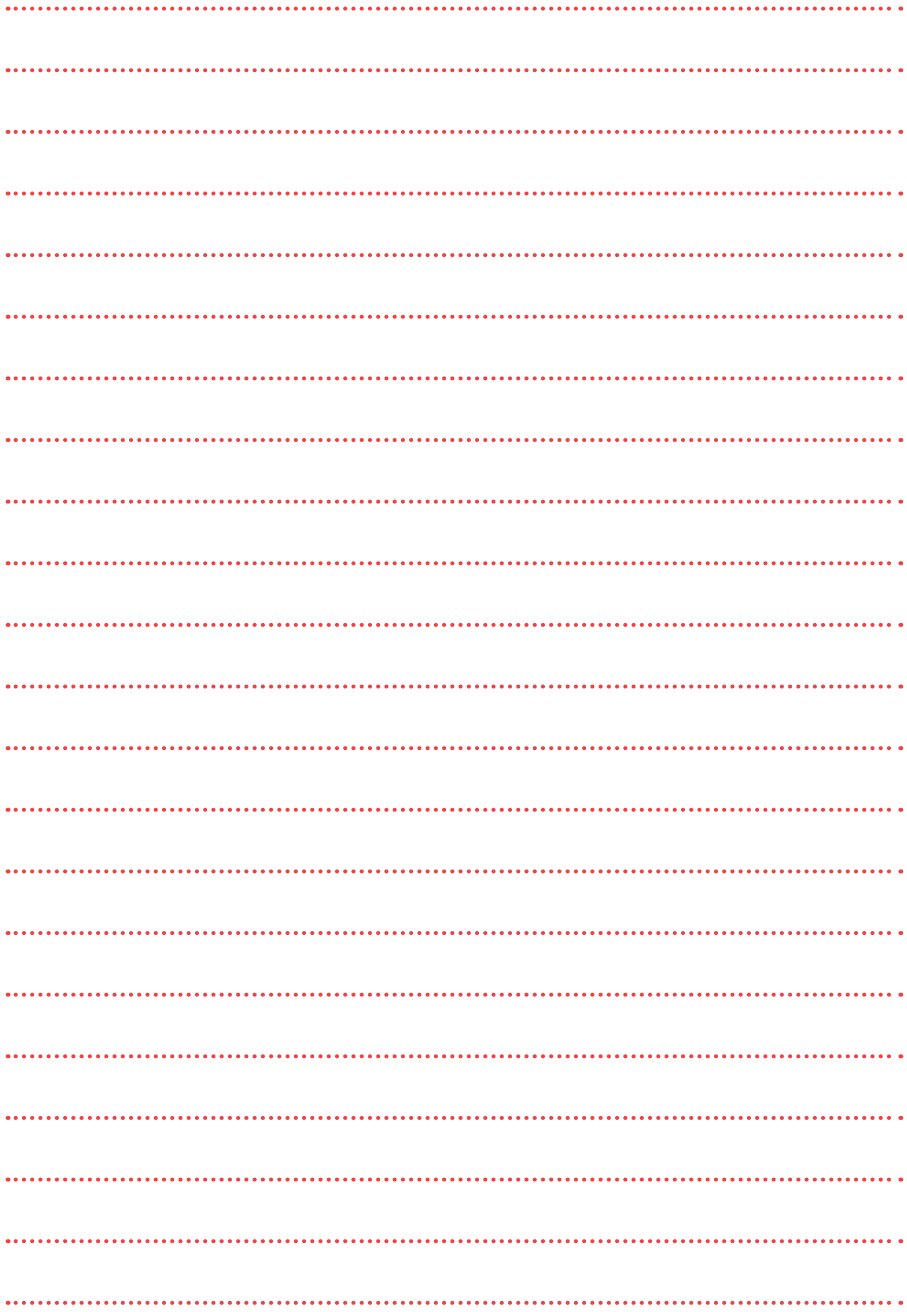


Discussion and reflection guide

Do you recognise these stories?

Do they remind you of people or stories that are close to you?

How well are your programmes or systems designed to respond to the experiences of rangatahi in these stories?



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