Kaiparahuarahi
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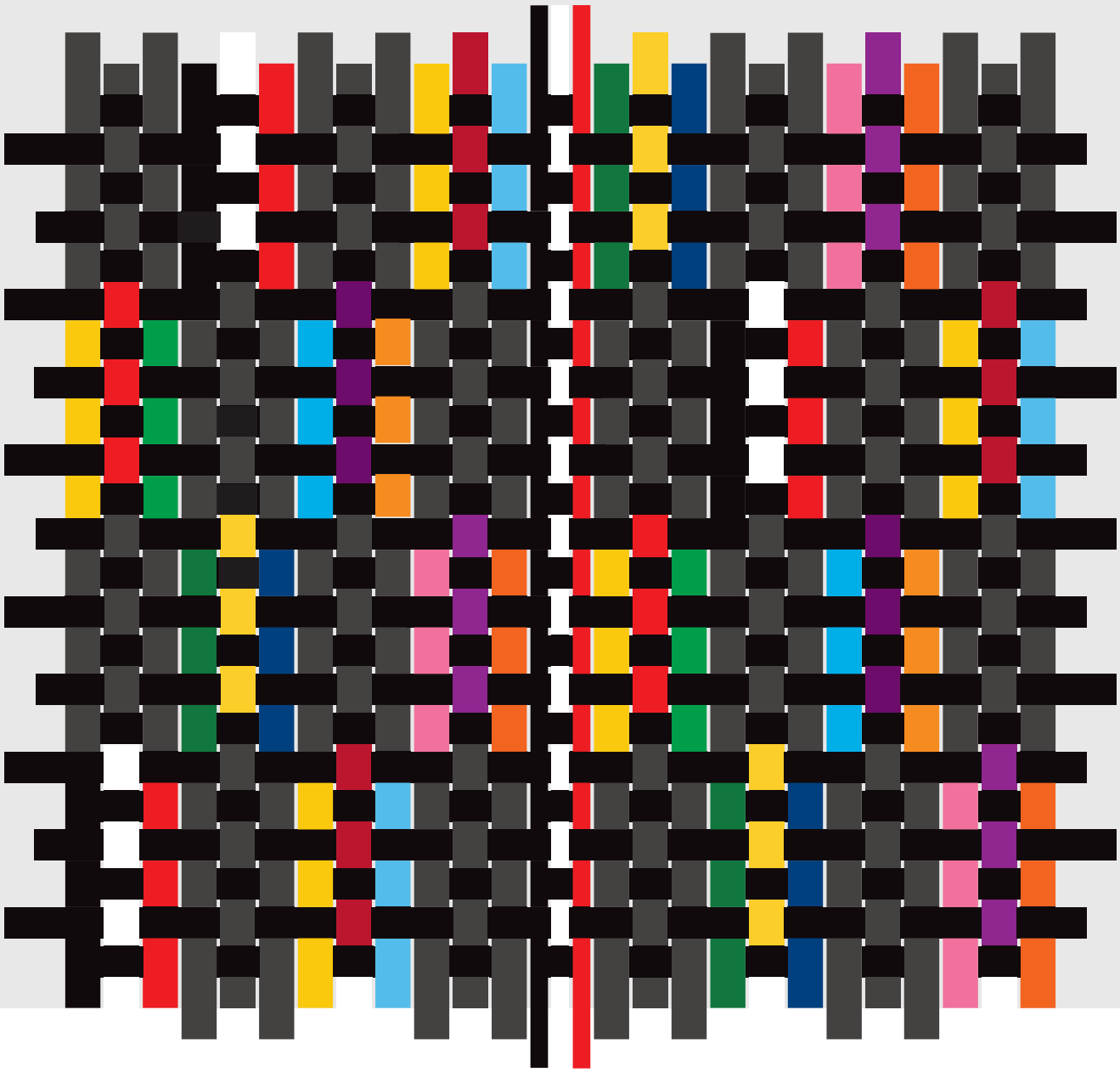
Kotahitanga: Understanding identities through intersectionality



AraTaiohi
Peak Body for Youth Development in Aotearoa

NĀ KAHUKURA RITCHIE, ROD BAXTER
ME NGĀ MANUHIRI HIRAHIRA I WHAKATIKA

Kaiparahuarahi

Kotahitanga: Understanding identities through Intersectionality.

Nā Kahukura Ritchie, Rod Baxter
me ngā manuhiri hirahira i whakatika

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Editorial

E ngā mata ora o ngā tini kaupapa rangatahi o te motu, haramai, e mau tō ringa ki ngā tino taonga kei roto i ēnei tuhinga. E kī nei, ko tēnei pukapuka he kohao o te ngira[1], e kuhuna ai ngā miro o te ao rangatahi.

We live in a time of division, where individualism is promoted over collectivism, and young people are used as political footballs to further separate our divided society, including those of us within the wider youth worker community. This series aims to provide a huarahi toward deeper understanding and empathy across the diverse communities our taiohi move through.

Our early conversations around this edition of *Kaiparahuarahi* centred on intersectionality. When the whakaaro of kotahitanga emerged as a parallel framework, the threads aligned - and inspiration sparked. This kaupapa was strongly influenced by Kiingi Tuheitia's enactment of Te Paki o Matariki and his call for Te Hui ā Motu at Tūrangawaewae - one of Aotearoa's most powerful displays of kotahitanga. Me mihi kā tika ki Te Arikinui Kuini Nga wai hono i te po, arā kite Kiingitanga whānui, pai mārire.

In the context of these journals, we draw on the whakaaro of Pootatau Te Wherewhero, the first Māori king, who spoke of the needle's eye through which all coloured threads must pass. This series of mini editions seeks to be such a needle's eye, where intersectionality and kotahitanga are interwoven within and across the beautiful diversity of our Youth Work communities.

We were conscious of our limitations and knew we couldn't capture every voice. Still, we structured the edition around six core 'sectors' while weaving in these many intersecting voices - urban, rural, taiohi, allyship, Tāngata Whenua, Tāngata Tiriti, gender diversity, wāhine, Korowai Tupu, academic and grassroots. We acknowledge many identities may be absent, but hope that all readers, taiohi or kaimahi, find a piece of themselves reflected.

Two years of mahi has gone into this taonga, with huge generosity by an incredible group of guest editors, representing each of the core sectors within this edition and awe-inspiring contributors who put their passion into every word written. It has been an absolute privilege to connect with these champions of youth development, learn from them and see a glimpse of the transformative work each of them has done for their communities. Nō koutou te mana nui ō tenei kaupapa.

This taonga is a resource, not a complete guide, but a foundation upon which we hope readers build a whare where all taiohi feel safe, heard, and respected—even if their identity differs from those who built it.

The six mini editions discussed are:

Tāngata Whenua Perspectives – A base understanding of kotahitanga and intersectionality through rich whakaaro of tāngata whenua youth workers.

Tagata o le Moana Perspectives – Our Pacific tuakana show how the ocean connects and celebrates difference, rejecting homogeneity.

Ethnic Communities Perspectives – Tauiwi whānau share stories of migration, forced assimilation, and triumph through cultural pride, reminding us of the need for culturally responsive practice.

Rainbow Communities Perspectives – Rainbow taiohi face daily oppression, sometimes from within our own sector. This edition honours the strength and resilience of Rainbow taiohi and those who stand beside them, and we hope that those reading this edition from outside of this community will deeply consider ways in which they are showing up for our Rainbow whānau.

Tāngata Whaikaha Perspectives – Our Whaikaha whānau remind us that society continues to place barriers in their path, yet their resilience drives inclusion and strength for all.

Te Whakapono me te Wairuatanga Perspectives – Faith and identity go hand in hand. This edition explores how nurturing young people's spirituality strengthens their sense of self.

He mihi:

Ki ngā ringa raupā o tō tātou hapori, koutou o Ara Taiohi e mahia te mahi mo te painga o tātou ngā kaimahi, ngāi rangatahi hoki. Nā mātou te honore, te whiwhinga nui o tā koutou mahi. Tēnā koutou, me to mana nui, tō mānawa nui hoki kei te whakamana i a tātou katoa.

With the conclusion of these editions, we know not all voices have been heard, but we hope many feel seen. This isn't the end. Our world, our sector, and our taiohi continue to evolve, and *Kaiparahuarahi*, and Ara Taiohi will move with them. If you feel your kōrero is missing, perhaps you could be one of our next incredible kaituhi. Email Korowaitupu@arataiohi.org.nz and we will be in touch.

Mauri ora,

Te whānau ō Kaiparahuarahi

—

References:

[1]'Kotahi te koohao o te ngira e kuhuna ai te miro maa, te miro pango, te miro whero.' (Pootatau Te Wherewhero)

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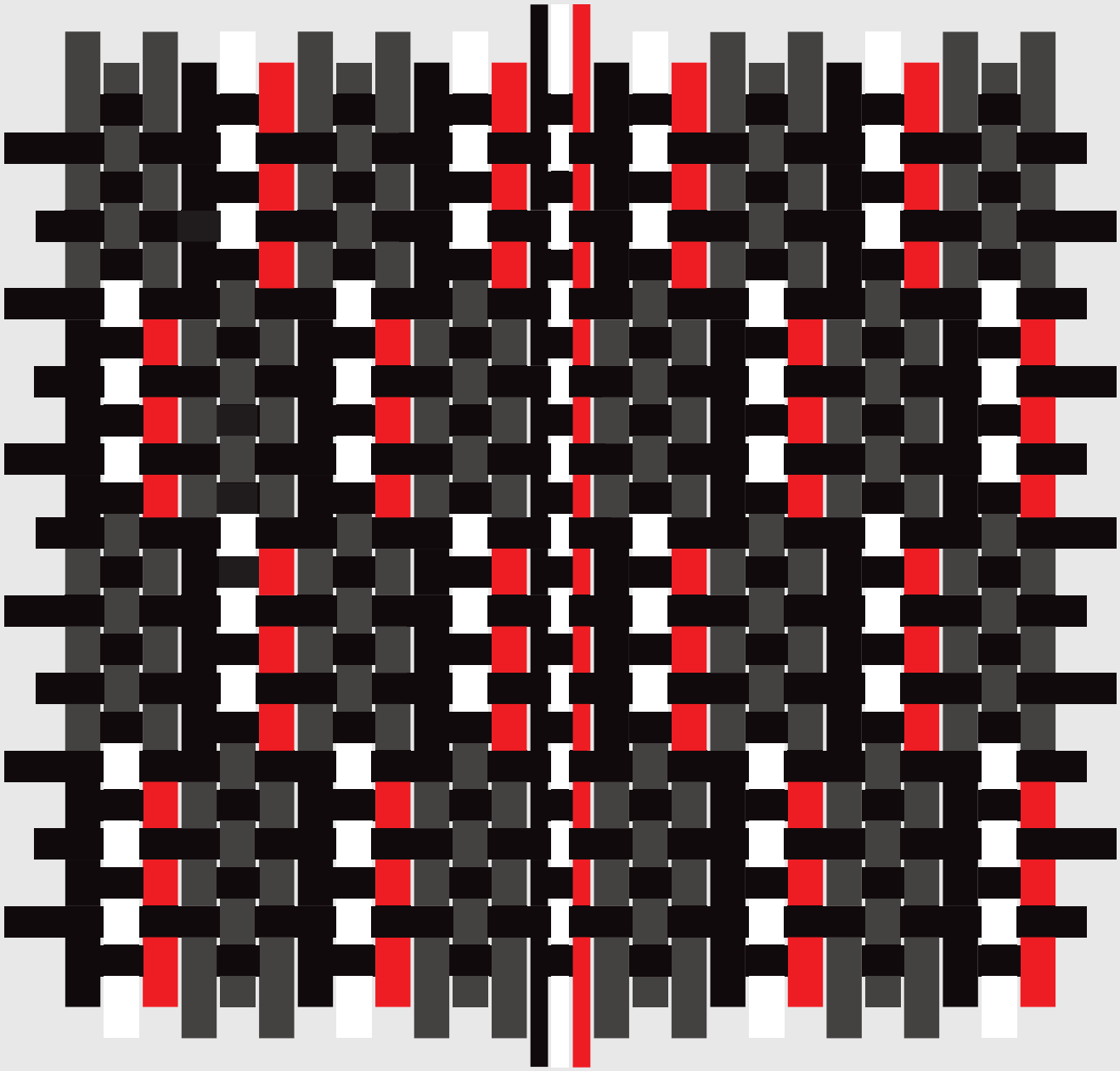
Dedication

Kiingi Tuheitia Pootatau Te Wherowhero VII, naau teenei huarahi i para, maa maatou e whai kia tuutaki i te kotahitanga mo te aao katoa. Moe mai raa me te moohiotanga ka kawe tonu to iwi Maaori i to whakakitenga o te kotahitanga, ka arahi tonu to maatou Arikinui Kuini Nga wai hono i te poo Pootatau Te Wherowhero VIII i a maatou i too ngarohanga. E te Kiingi o te Kotahitanga, Paimaarire.

Tāngata Whenua

PERSPECTIVES



Editorial

‘Kotahi te koohao o te ngira e kuhuna ai te miro maa, te miro pango, te miro whero.’

(Pootatau Te Wherowhero)

E rau rangatira mā, nau mai ki tēnei kohinga mātauranga e pā ana ki tēnei kaupapa o te kotahitanga.

In this very special edition of *Kaiparahuarahi*, we explore this idea of intersectionality, and what that means for Youth Work in Aotearoa, with an intersecting focus on what intersectionaility means from a Tāngata Whenua perspective.

This is the first of six mini editions which will explore six of the many sectors of Youth Work. However, through the work of this collective of contributors you will see a natural intersection of various other youth identities and communities.

Youth Work is such a broad profession woven together by one overarching commonality: young people, all of whom come from diverse backgrounds. Such diversity means that, despite the sector of Youth Work we primarily work within, be it faith-based, Pacific, Māori, Rainbow, immigrant or refugee, or many other communities, many of the young people we work with may belong to several communities.

The hope then, is that as these editions of *Kaiparahuarahi* are released, they will provide the foundational information for anyone working with young people from within these communities, provided first-hand by experienced youth workers within each sector.

Last year Kiingi Tuheitia Pootatau Te Wherowhero te Tuawhitu enacted Te Paki o Matariki, from which followed the Hui aa Motu where Tāngata Whenua and Tāngata Tiriti from across the country came together to wānanga about kotahitanga as a response to the current Government’s divisive attacks against Tāngata Whenua. This collective response inspired us to think about kotahitanga as the framework for understanding what we hope for when working with intersectional consciousness.

We are living in a world where division is used as a tool to marginalise the vulnerable and empower the privileged. Young people have often been used as a tool to create division, gain power and misdirect people from focusing on the underlying issues within our society. We saw this in the most recent election with a huge focus on youth crime, rather than the underlying issues of poverty, failing education systems, disconnection from community through individualisation, systemic racism; and the list goes on...

As youth workers, we have the opportunity to influence young people with minimal obligation to those systems - therefore we have the potential to create kotahitanga for the young people we work with. With that in mind, it is crucial that we understand the vast ecosystem that is our sector. Our hope is that these mini editions focused on intersectionality can provide a grounding understanding of Youth Work in its many layers, so that we as youth workers can work towards kotahitanga.

It is our belief that kotahitanga should be the foundational aspiration for intersectionality, something we should be striving for within Aotearoa. As a sector, it is vital for our mahi.

Ngā mihi nui,

Kahu Ritchie, Tyler Ngatai and Rod Baxter
November 2024

Kotahitanga: Weaving Intersectionality in Youth Work

Tyler Ngatai and Kath Harrison

Whakataukī

He waka kōtuia kāhore a tukutukua ngā mimira.

A canoe that is interlaced will not become separated at the bow – in unity there is strength.

(National Iwi Chairs Forum, n.d.)

He mokopuna ahau ō Ngati Ruanui, Ngati Porou me Ngai Tahu
Nō Kotirana me Airangi ōku tīpuna
Nō te hapu ō Araukuku Tuwhakairiora Arowhenua Awarua hoki
Ko Tyler Ngatai tōku ingoa.

Ko Airihi oku tipuna me ko Tangata Tiriti ahau
Ko Liverpool toku kainga tūturu me no Ōtautahi toku kainga inaianei
Ko kaiako tauwhiro toku mahi
Ko Kath Harrison toku ingoa.

‘Intersectionality’ is one of those buzz words that’s having a moment right now, but it’s a term that’s been around for 35 years and has a whole lot of history and literature behind it. So what does this term mean to us here in Aotearoa and how is it relevant to Youth Work? We’ll explore this, as well as the concept of ‘kotahitanga’ - a potential reframing of ‘power’ as an unconditional force available within communities, rather than a resource that’s selectively accessible from external sources.

The term ‘intersectionality’ was coined in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw, American civil rights academic, who pointed out that “because of their intersectional identity as both women and of colour within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, women of colour are marginalised within both” (Crenshaw, 1991, p.1244). Crenshaw used this example to highlight “the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed” (Crenshaw, 1991, p.1245).

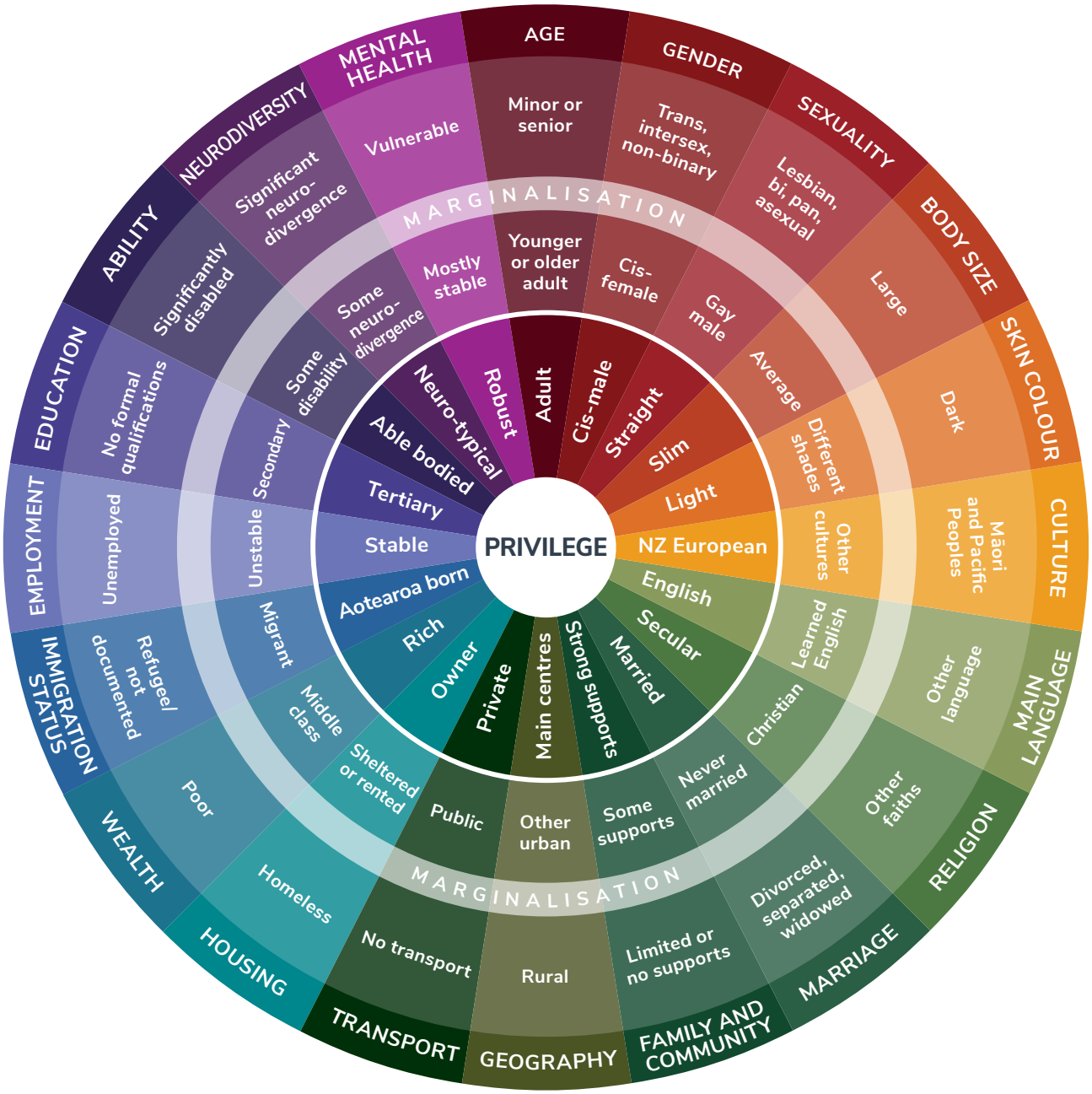
Rather than creating exclusion and marginalisation as many believed, Crenshaw saw the exploration of difference as "the source of social empowerment and reconstruction" and that "ignoring difference *within* groups contributes to tension among groups" (Crenshaw, 1991, p.1242). Similarly, as symbolised in our opening whakataukī, the waka provides a metaphor for 'kotahitanga', acknowledging and weaving together diverse peoples to create "co-operative co-existence" (Chant, 2011), unity and strength (Iwi Chairs Forum, n.d.), and promote the common good (He Puna Mātauranga o Te Tiriti, 2006).

'Diversity' can be understood in terms of any number of identity categories, and 'kotahitanga' in the coming together of different identity groups, such as the collaboration of Tāngata Whenua and Tāngata Tiriti in the writing of this article. Intersectionality, however, recognises identities as cumulative and intersecting with power structures, leading to diverse experiences of privilege and oppression within identity groups. To effectively embody 'kotahitanga' then, we must create space for many diverse views, experiences and identities to influence the way forward.

In the realm of Youth Work, embracing intersectionality is paramount for creating inclusive and effective support systems. Understanding that young people embody a multitude of identities — ranging from race, gender, sexuality, ability, and more — underscores the necessity of a holistic approach. Intersectionality urges us to recognise and address the unique challenges faced by each individual, acknowledging that their experiences are shaped by the intersection of various social factors. By fostering collaboration and cooperation among diverse perspectives, Youth Work can better serve the needs of all young people. This collaborative effort ensures that interventions and initiatives are not only inclusive but also responsive to the complex and intersecting realities of young people today. Through a collective commitment to intersectionality, youth workers can create spaces where every young person feels seen, heard, and supported in their journey towards personal growth and self-determination.

Many attempts have been made to articulate the intersectionality of different identities and their relationship to power and privilege. One of the most widely recognised is Burnham's (2012) Social GGRRAAACCEEESSS - an evolving acronym representing gender, geography, race, religion, age, ability, appearance, class, culture, education, ethnicity, employment, sexuality, sexual orientation and spirituality. Identities of significance to Aotearoa, and their relationship to power and marginalisation in the current context are depicted in the wheel over the page (see *Figure 1*).

Figure 1 AOTEAROA WHEEL OF POWER AND MARGINALISATION



The closer to the centre of the wheel, the more power and privilege each identity marker tends to hold within our dominant systems. Conversely, the closer to the edge of the wheel, our systems tend to create more marginalisation and exclusion. Any given person's cumulative experience will be impacted by multiple identity markers and the significance of those markers to systems of power.

Systems change refers to the comprehensive transformation of interconnected structures, policies, and processes within societies or organisations to address underlying issues and achieve sustainable outcomes. These systems encompass various dimensions, such as economic, social, political, and cultural, and often operate in complex, interdependent ways. Examples of systems include healthcare systems, educational systems, criminal justice systems, and economic systems. Each of these systems involve a network of people, rules, norms, and resources that shape individual experiences and outcomes within society.

When multiple aspects of marginalisation intersect within systems, they can intensify the challenges faced by certain groups, leading to what can be referred to as double discrimination. For instance, within the healthcare system, individuals from already marginalised communities, such as Māori, Pasifika and/or LGBTQIA+, may encounter additional barriers to accessing quality care due to other intersecting factors, such as socioeconomic status or ability. Similarly, in the education system, ākonga who are marginalised due to both their age and neurodiversity, for example, may face systemic barriers over and above those faced by their peers, hindering their academic achievement and limiting their opportunities for advancement.

Addressing systems change requires a holistic approach that acknowledges and confronts the root causes of inequality and injustice. This entails not only reforming specific policies and practices, but also challenging underlying power dynamics and ideological frameworks that perpetuate systemic marginalisation. By fostering inclusive decision-making processes and centering the voices and experiences of marginalised communities, systems change efforts can promote greater equity, justice, and resilience within societies and organisations. Ultimately, by dismantling oppressive systems and fostering more equitable and inclusive structures, societies can create pathways for transformative change that benefit all.

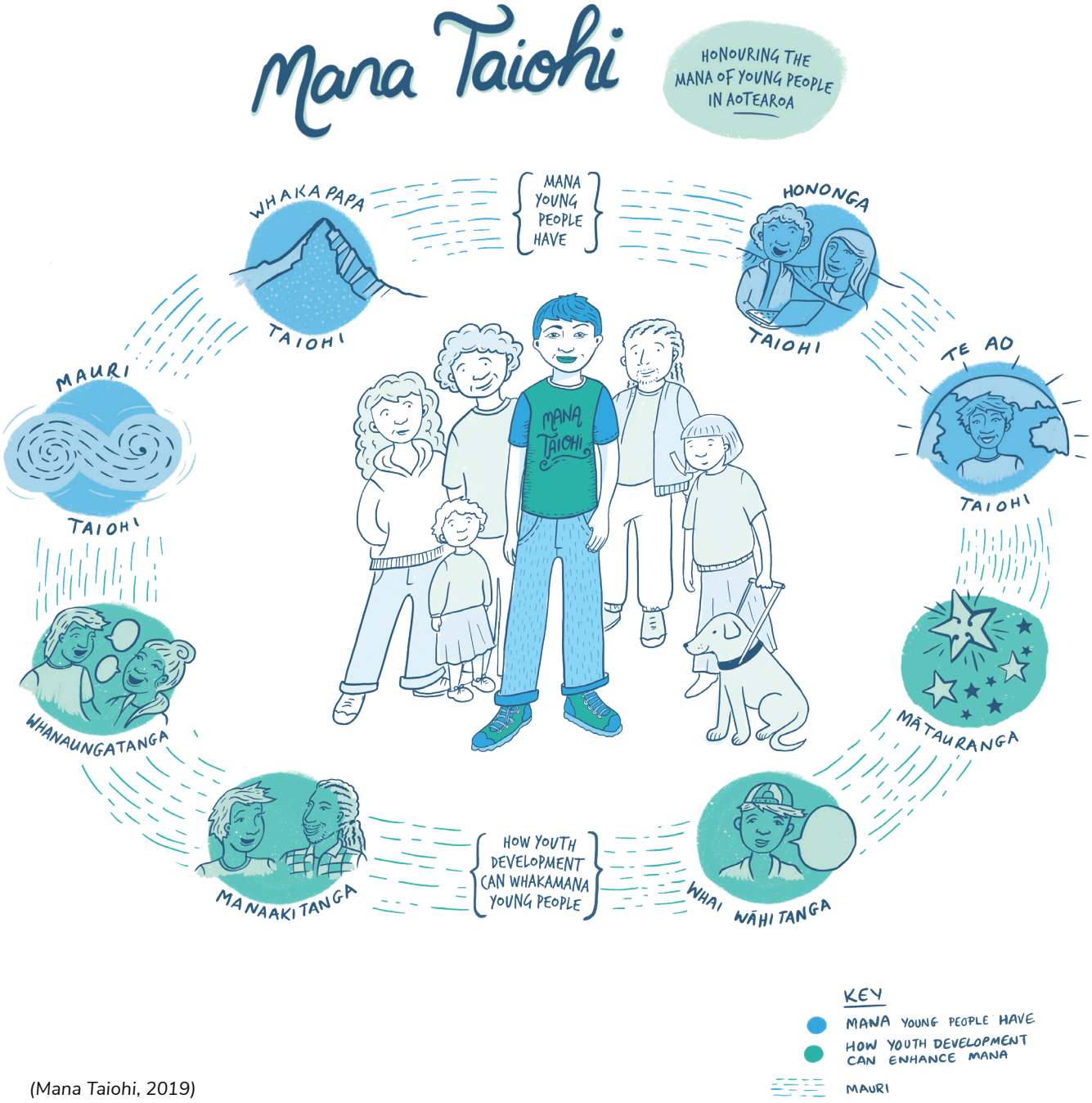
Due to the adult-centric world in which our power structures are located, the impact of 'age' on experiences of marginalisation is often overlooked. This is particularly significant in the context of Youth Work. No matter what other identities you hold, a youth worker's age will often afford you relatively greater power than those with whom you engage, despite young people's rights being enshrined in the United Nations' (1989) Declaration on the Rights of the Child.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, despite making strides in fostering youth participation, amplifying young voices remains a challenge. According to a 2020 report by the Ministry of Youth Development (MYD), only 28% of young people aged 12 to 24 years felt their opinions were valued in decision-making processes (MYD, 2020). This sentiment is echoed in a study conducted by the University of Auckland, which revealed that less than half of young New Zealanders believed they had a say in matters that directly affected them (Roy et. al., 2021).

Structural barriers such as limited representation in political spheres and insufficient platforms for meaningful engagement hinder youth from effectively influencing policy and societal discourse. As a result, there is a pressing need for concerted efforts from policymakers, educators, and community leaders to create inclusive spaces and mechanisms that empower young voices, ensuring their perspectives shape the future of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Proactively dismantling oppressive power structures may well be beyond the remit of most youth workers, however recognising and minimising the impact of these systems on our rangatahi is absolutely within reach.

The role of youth workers in understanding and responding to intersectionality can be seen woven throughout Mana Taiohi (2019):



(Mana Taiohi, 2019)

Mauri

"Mauri is the life spark inherent in all young people... Fuelling that life spark means young people are seen, recognised and valued for who they are... [and supported] to actively construct their own identity... [and] stand in their own truth."

Whakapapa

"Acknowledging the Whakapapa of young people means, in their own way and in their own time, exploring how these histories influence their lives right now. Young people are supported to embrace the journey to find their turangawaewae, their place to stand.

Hononga

"When we understand Hononga we recognise all the connected relationships in a young person's world (whānau, peers, school, the community), and the places and spaces that support these. Young people are supported to identify and strengthen these connections"

Te Ao

"Te Ao Taiohi is the world of the young person... [and] is impacted by big picture influences such as social and economic contexts and dominant cultural values... Awareness of Te Ao Taiohi ensures actions are not judged purely on the surface, but with an understanding of systemic influences that affect young people."

Whanaungatanga

"Whanaungatanga is about relationship... [and] a sense of family connection. It relates to all relationships in a young person's life... When we prioritise Whanaungatanga we invest in high trust relationships... [and] Young people are supported, with a strong foundation of belonging.

Manaakitanga

"Young people are supported, with a strong foundation of belonging... Young people who experience strong manaaki have a safe and empowering space, and feel accepted, included and valued."

Whai Wāhitanga

"Acknowledging Mana, Whai Wāhitanga recognises young people as valued contributors to society, giving them space to participate, assume agency and take responsibility... rather than privileging the voices of a few. Young people are supported to choose their level of engagement in decisions that affect them."

Mātauranga

"Mātauranga refers to knowledge, wisdom, understanding and skill. It includes research, individual experience... held by young people and their whānau. We can strengthen Mātauranga by weaving together these different forms of knowledge and making them relevant to the decisions facing young people and their whānau...".

Exploring intersectionality and kotahitanga in Youth Work in Aotearoa is essential for fostering a bicultural and inclusive environment that reconciles the tensions between divergent cultural concepts of power. Intersectionality, which acknowledges the overlapping and interconnected nature of social identities and their impact on experiences of oppression and privilege, aligns with kotahitanga—a Māori principle emphasising unity and collective action. Integrating these concepts into Youth Work helps bridge the gap between the Māori worldview, which views power as belonging and interconnectedness, and Western perspectives that often emphasise control and individualism.

By embracing Indigenous and bicultural approaches, Youth Work in Aotearoa can promote a more holistic understanding of power dynamics, ensuring that all young people feel valued and supported in their journey towards personal and community development. This alignment fosters an environment where diverse cultural perspectives are respected and integrated, ultimately leading to more effective and inclusive Youth Work practices.

Belonging

In many marginalised or Indigenous cultures, power is often seen as something inherent within the community or nature itself. It's about connection, relationships, and harmony with one's surroundings. Power is intrinsic among one another within the community and is often tied to spiritual or natural forces. Decision-making is typically collective, with emphasis placed on consensus-building and cooperation. This perspective views power as something to be shared and used for the well-being of the community as a whole.

Control

In contrast, Westernised or dominant perspectives often conceptualise power as a form of control or domination. Power is frequently centralised and hierarchical, with authority vested in specific individuals or institutions. Decision-making tends to be top-down, with a focus on individual agency and competition. This perspective often seeks to maximise individual autonomy and achievement, sometimes at the expense of community cohesion or environmental sustainability.

These two perspectives reflect broader cultural differences in how societies organise themselves and understand their place in the world. The belonging approach emphasises interconnectedness and collective responsibility, while the control approach prioritises individual agency and achievement. Understanding and reconciling these differing perspectives is crucial for fostering inclusivity and promoting sustainable development that respects diverse ways of knowing and being.

Fostering a sense of belonging and enabling participation among young people is essential for shaping systems that impact them, particularly when considering the intersecting identities and experiences they bring to the table. Empowering youth from diverse backgrounds, acknowledging their intersecting identities, and ensuring their voices are heard in decision-making processes leads to more comprehensive and representative solutions.

Promoting ownership over the systems that impact our young people not only builds resilience but also acknowledges the complexities of their lived experiences. By investing in the belonging and participation of young people through an intersectional lens, we not only promote social cohesion and long-term engagement but also create more inclusive, responsive, and equitable systems that honour the diverse needs of all individuals within society.

Intersectionality emerges as a potent superpower rather than a suppressive force when we recognise the importance of Youth Work in creating inclusive and accessible systems. By engaging with young people from diverse backgrounds, we sow the seeds of understanding, empathy, and activism early on. Youth Work becomes a crucial avenue for nurturing inclusive mindsets and empowering future generations to challenge systemic inequalities. Through mentoring, education, and community engagement, young people learn to embrace intersectionality as a tool for social change and acceptance. They become advocates for inclusive policies and practices, driving progress towards a more equitable society. By integrating Youth Work into our efforts, we not only amplify the voices of marginalised youth but also cultivate a generation of leaders who champion diversity and inclusivity. In doing so, we harness the full potential of intersectionality as a force for positive transformation, where every individual is empowered to thrive authentically and together.

"Kotahitanga refers to an underlying spiritual unity between all beings… all groups coming together with unique identity, for a purpose, working together while recognising and celebrating our differences. A process of respecting and celebrating others difference and right to self-determination of expression and involvement."
(Joyce & Llewellyn, 2017, p.105)

This is 'Kotahitanga: Weaving Intersectionality in Youth Work'.

Ngā mihi nui

Tyler and Kath

Tyler Ngatai (Ngati Ruanui, Ngati Porou, Ngai Tahu) is the dynamic Practice Lead for Ara Taiohi with a strong commitment to the professionalisation of Youth Work, and Mana Motuhake for youth workers who whakapapa Māori.

His expertise in understanding the complexity and beauty of intersectionality is a koha to the youth sector.

Kath Harrison is a neurotypical, able-bodied, cis-woman, committed to Indigenous rights and upholding her responsibilities as Tangata Tiriti.

She is a mother, social work educator, activist and professional supervisor based in Ōtautahi.

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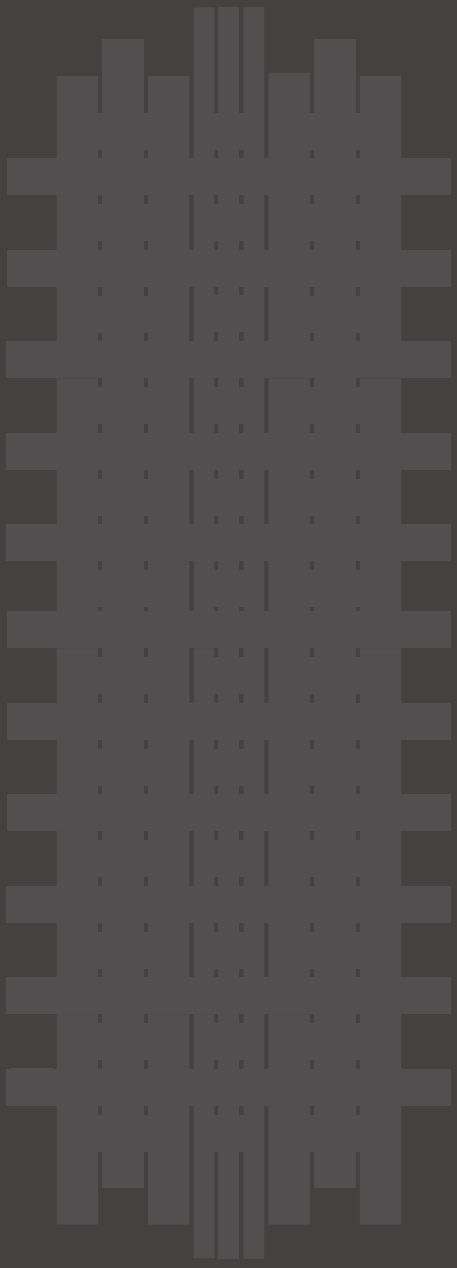


The Impact of Identity on Influencing Young People: Embracing Uniqueness and Navigating Challenges from an Ao Māori perspective

Atarau Hamilton

Ko Titirangi te maunga
Ko Waiau te awa
Ko Takitimu te waka
Ko Ngati Kahungunu, Ngaa Rauru, Ngati Raukawa ngā iwi
Ko Ngai Tamaterangi te hapū
Ko Rangiahua te marae
Ko Merewaipaopao te tipuna
No Heretaunga ahau.

Influencing young people is a challenging and significant responsibility. It involves recognising that your identity places you in a position of influence and adopting a posture that acknowledges this role.

Every identity brings its own uniqueness, and my innate whakapapa (genealogy) allows me to connect deeply with young people, embodying the enduring spirit of my ancestors. However, this position also comes with challenges and discomfort, particularly when my appearance affects the level of influence I can exert.

Acknowledging externally imposed limitations on identity is crucial, especially for those with intersectional identities that lack substantial power. It's essential to combat these limitations and help young people navigate this difficult space. Sharing my experiences openly with young people often elicits shocked reactions, as they are unaccustomed to hearing about these struggles. Turning up honestly and demonstrating strength is vital, especially when working with young Māori navigating a blend of evolving cultures. This honesty showcases the resilience and leadership inherent in our culture, regardless of the challenges they might face.

Embracing Māori Identity

Being Māori means the world to me. It is a privilege that connects me with a rich cultural heritage, something that is often beyond the understanding of those outside our culture. My journey with my Māori identity has been marked by battles and moments of reluctance to fully embrace it in certain spaces. However, recognising my influence and the significance of my background has strengthened my resolve. My struggles with Te Ao Māori (the Māori world) have made me confront internal and external influences that once hindered my full expression as Māori.

The most profound realisation is that being Māori is a superpower. It provides a sense of belonging and connection, no matter where I go. Our foundational values, rooted in whānau (family), hapū (sub-tribe), and iwi (tribe), create a strong sense of home and community.

The Achievements of the Next Generation

The previous generations laid a strong foundation for us by establishing institutions across Aotearoa, fostering deep cultural connections. This groundwork has enabled a stronger understanding of our culture, allowing individuals to embrace their unique identities. Māori culture appreciates diverse leadership styles and theories, recognising different ethnicities and personal leadership mentalities.

Reflecting on my childhood experiences, I remember being encouraged to pursue various interests, from creative and performing arts to kapa haka (traditional Māori performing arts) and language learning. This exposure allowed my generation to grow with a robust understanding of our Māori worldview, distinct from a Western perspective.

Understanding Power and Privilege

At its core, privilege equates to power. It involves having advantages that others do not, enabling succession planning for future generations. Privilege means having systems established in advance, providing a foundation upon which to build.

Systems change involves examining the structures around us and identifying how they confine us, particularly in terms of identity. It requires thinking beyond these confines to leverage our strengths and influence. Systems flexibility comes from recognising immovable constraints and focusing on areas where we can exert influence. For me, appearing Pākehā (non-Māori) but being Māori allows me to navigate and dissolve barriers within the system.

Intersectionality from a Māori Perspective

Intersectionality, for me, places my Māori identity at the forefront. It is a collective identity traversing various contexts, from iwi to whānau. My identity as an Indigenous person intersects with broader contexts, highlighting the complexities of multiple identities. Intersectionality often feels like a shrinking circle, where various aspects of identity intersect and impact experiences.

Introspective thinking is crucial for understanding oneself and aligning with personal strengths. I encourage young people to reflect on their experiences and identify areas for growth. For instance, during a conversation with a young person focused on faith, the Mana Taiohi framework helped me recognise and respect our differing views. This framework promotes empathy and self-reflection, emphasising the importance of understanding and respecting others' perspectives.

In traditional contexts, leadership was tied to experience rather than age. Experience meant a level of development and innovation, not just time spent on a task. However, in modern contexts, age can limit development, imposing arbitrary markers that hinder natural growth. Recognising this distinction is crucial for supporting taiohi development.

Impact of Social, Economic, and Cultural Systems

My understanding of social class and the impact of different capitals—cultural, economic, and social—began in high school. Transitioning from kaupapa (Māori-focused) education to mainstream education revealed the disparities and challenges faced by Māori students in navigating a system that values economic and social capital over cultural capital.

Different systems affect young people at various life stages, influenced by their social environment. Stereotypes and classifications based on age can reinforce societal limitations, restricting young people's ability to express themselves fully.

A strong sense of belonging is crucial for young people, particularly those moving away from home or traditional support systems. My experience in kōhanga reo (Māori early childhood education) highlighted the importance of community and cultural connection, which mainstream education often lacks. This loss of belonging can hinder young people's ability to reflect on their growth and development.

Enabling Participation and Understanding Systems

Encouraging young people to participate in their communities enhances their understanding of systems and their roles within them. Engaging young people in civic activities, like voting, helps them recognise their influence in larger systems. Metrics that focus solely on failure miss the successes within the system, limiting young people's ability to give fully informed consent.

Success should include more opportunities for failure, allowing for quicker adaptation and continuous improvement. Young people's resilience and willingness to try again after setbacks are valuable traits that society should harness. Learning from small failures can lead to significant changes over time.

An Ao Māori perspective encourages exploring diverse approaches to life, drawing from history, whakapapa, taiao (environment), and pūrākau (stories). My journey with intersectionality involves questioning assumptions and beliefs, understanding the privileges within my narrative, and using them to create opportunities for others. Recognising and nurturing these privileges can lead to a more inclusive and equitable future for our taiohi.

Atarau Hamilton (Ngati Kahungunu, Ngaa Rauru Kiitahi, Ngati Raukawa) is a visionary leader in Youth Work, known for bridging cultural understanding and fostering authentic connections with rangatahi across diverse communities.

Embracing Identity in Youth Work: A Journey of Empowerment and Understanding

Amanda Smith

How does your identity influence your work with young people?

My identity as a Pākehā Māori deeply influences my work with young people. Growing up, I often felt caught between two worlds, experiencing a sense of deficit because I didn't fully belong to either. However, this unique blend of cultural experiences has become my superpower in my work with rangatahi (young people). My whakapapa (ancestry), innate gifts, and personal journey resonate deeply with urbanised rangatahi, many of whom are several generations removed from their traditional roots.

Being able to bring my lived experiences into my work helps young people feel normal and understood. I understand their struggles and triumphs from a place of lived experience, which builds trust and rapport. My journey of acknowledging, grieving, and loving my identity allows me to support rangatahi in their own journeys towards self-acceptance and empowerment. This shared understanding creates a bridge that fosters authentic connections and meaningful growth.

How does *who you are* influence *what you do*?

Who I am is integral to everything I do in my work with young people. My identity and personal experiences drive my commitment to social justice and equity, especially for those who, like me, exist in a unique space between cultures. I am passionate about creating a space for rangatahi where they feel they belong and are valued for their unique identities.

This passion manifests in my dedication to nurturing, caring, and loving the young people I work with. My internal compass, shaped by my experiences and values, guides my practice, ensuring that I remain authentic and true to myself. This authenticity is crucial in Youth Work, as it allows rangatahi to navigate their own worlds through their lenses, feeling supported and understood by someone who has walked a similar path.

Tell us about the diversity and intersectionality of the young people you are currently working with?

The rangatahi I work with are incredibly diverse, reflecting a wide range of cultural, socioeconomic, and personal backgrounds. Many are urbanised and several generations removed from their traditional roots, creating a unique blend of identities and experiences. This intersectionality brings both challenges and strengths to our work, as we navigate the complexities of identity, belonging, and self-acceptance together.

What is it like working with your community's young people?

Working with my community's young people is both rewarding and challenging. It is a privilege to support them as they navigate their identities and find their place in the world. The sense of connection and understanding that comes from shared experiences is powerful and creates a strong foundation for growth and empowerment. However, my mahi also requires a deep commitment to addressing the unique challenges they face and advocating for their needs and rights.

Have you noticed changes in terms of intersectionality in Youth Work?

I have noticed significant changes in terms of intersectionality in Youth Work. There is a growing recognition of the importance of understanding and addressing the multiple, intersecting identities that young people bring to the table. This shift has led to more inclusive and holistic approaches to Youth Work, where the focus is on supporting the whole person and their diverse experiences.

What are your suggestions for other people working with young people in this community?

For those working with young people in this community, it is essential to embrace and celebrate diversity and intersectionality. Take the time to understand the unique backgrounds and experiences of the rangatahi you work with and create spaces where they feel valued and supported. Authenticity is key—bring your whole self to your work and encourage young people to do the same.

Additionally, be an advocate for social justice and equity. Fight for the rights and needs of the young people you work with, ensuring that they have the resources and support they need to thrive. Finally, continually educate yourself and stay open to learning and growing alongside the young people you support.

Many of the young people I work with face systemic oppression and marginalisation due to their diverse and intersecting identities. These experiences can create barriers to their success and wellbeing, making it crucial for youth workers to understand and address these challenges. By using culturally resonant frameworks and advocating for social justice, we can help dismantle these oppressive systems and create more equitable environments for all young people.

Are there any resources, theories, frameworks, or model ideas that you use that might be helpful for other people working with these communities?

Several resources and frameworks have been instrumental in my work with rangatahi. The principles of Te Whare Tapa Whā, a Māori health model, have been particularly valuable. This model emphasises the balance of four key aspects of wellbeing: taha tinana (physical health), taha hinengaro (mental health), taha whānau (family health), and taha wairua (spiritual health). By focusing on these interconnected aspects, we can support the holistic wellbeing of young people.

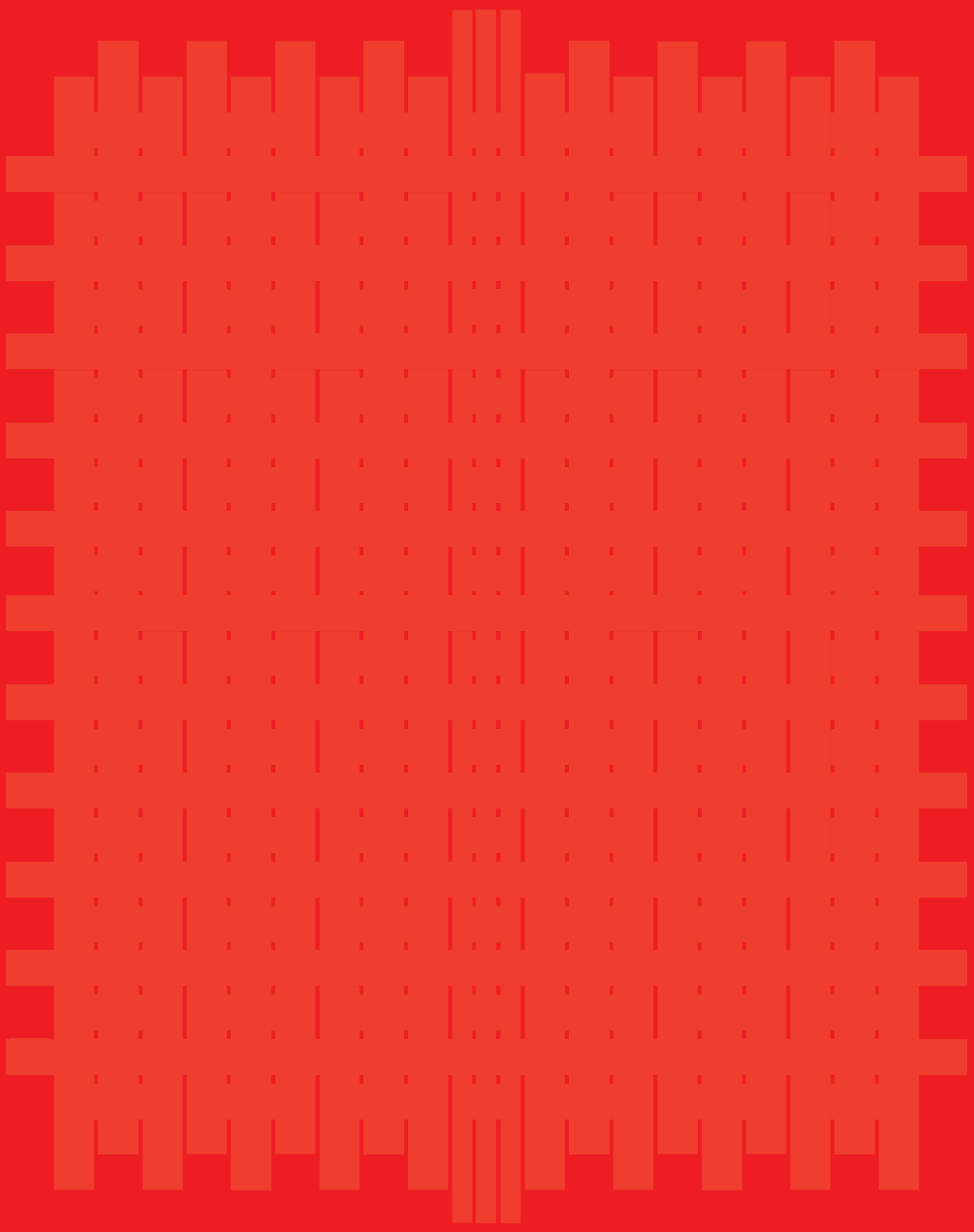
The Mana Taiohi framework has also been vital. This framework highlights the importance of supporting the Mana (authority, influence, and agency) of young people by recognising their unique identities, fostering their wellbeing, and promoting their self-determination. Additionally, the practice of Manaakitanga (hospitality and care) and Whanaungatanga (relationship-building) are central to my approach. These principles guide the creation of supportive and nurturing environments where rangatahi feel a sense of belonging and connection.

The Tohatoha model emphasises the importance of sharing knowledge, resources, and power with young people. It encourages collaborative approaches where youth are actively involved in decision-making processes and have opportunities to contribute meaningfully to their communities.

Finally, the Positive Youth Development in Aotearoa (PYDA) framework provides a strengths-based approach that focuses on enhancing the capabilities and potential of young people and the environments around them. It emphasises the importance of positive relationships, supportive environments, and opportunities for growth and development.

My identity and lived experiences are integral to my work with young people. By embracing who I am and bringing my whole self to my practice, I can support and empower rangatahi as they navigate their own journeys. Through authenticity, commitment to social justice, and the use of culturally resonant frameworks, we can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all young people.

Amanda Smith (Nga Puhi) working with Te Ora Hou Northland, champions rangatahi Māori spaces by fostering leadership, cultural identity, and wāhine-focussed movements, driving systems change to create equitable opportunities for marginalised communities.



Kotahitanga i te Rereketānga – Unity in Diversity

Matt and Rachel Renata

The Big Picture

As of 2024, the World Population Clock estimates there are nearly 8.2 billion people living on planet Earth. In comparison, the global population was only 3.9 billion in 1974. This means that in just 50 years, the world's population has more than doubled!

This rapid growth highlights how our world is expanding and becoming increasingly diverse and vibrant. Earth now hosts individuals with rich and varied tapestries of ancestries from across the globe, each bringing intergenerational strengths, perspectives, and purpose. This diversity could be a thing of beauty. However, this growing diversity also presents challenges for some.

Instead of embracing the range of skills, benefits, and wisdom that diversity can bring, some people react with fear and resistance. What should be a source of wonder can become a source of worry. Unfortunately, fear of the unknown, worry, and anxiety can frame diversity as a threat.

What About the Youth?

Our young people today are often caught in the crossfire of polarising views, whether political, philosophical, religious, or cultural, leading to hatred towards 'the other' rather than seeking to find mutual understanding through conflict. This type of division becomes increasingly disheartening.

Conflict itself is not inherently negative; in fact, when handled constructively, it can lead to a greater sense of unity and significant transformation. A key issue we face is the growing tendency for individuals to lose touch with their own identity and story, which is intricately connected to the broader, universal story. This includes the heritage, history, values, and beliefs that have shaped them over generations.

Tension can be especially intimidating for young people who fear being exposed, rejected, cancelled, or excluded. They are pressured to decide if they are in or out, left or right, pro or anti, for or against. This fear of not wanting to get it wrong can lead to silence or avoidance. As youth workers, we have a unique opportunity to use these moments of tension as formative experiences for growth, provided we are willing to confront them ourselves.

What About Hana?!

An inspiring example of this is 22-year-old Hana-Rawhiti Maipi-Clarke, the youngest MP in Aotearoa. During her 2023 election campaign, she faced harassment and mockery from members of the public. Even after successfully being elected, she continued to experience mistreatment from fellow MPs.

Nevertheless, this young wahine was able to endure such mistreatment from the public and individuals more than twice her age. Without retaliating in kind, she remained composed, secure, and confident, in her whakapapa, in tikanga, in the values handed down to her through the generations, and in her own identity and abilities.

She addressed this harsh criticism with eloquence, education, and understanding. Her resilience exemplifies how we can cultivate strength and resolve conflicts healthily in our own environments.

Food for Thought

Psychoanalyst Stephen Karpman identifies three primary roles in the unhealthy cycle of conflict – the drama triangle: victim, persecutor, and saviour. These roles can trap individuals in a negative cycle, particularly among young people who are still going through adolescent development, which impinges on their impulse control, leading to heightened tension and rapid escalation.

The alternative roles of affirmation, compassion, and self-awareness are far more constructive. Adopting these roles during tense moments can diffuse conflict and empower young people to navigate disputes more effectively.

Understanding a person's values, language, and behaviour as well as your own creates a healthier conflict-resolution process. This understanding encourages the development of new habits that extend beyond direct interactions with young people, influencing their families, friends, workplaces, and other social circles.

As young people grow and learn more about themselves, they come to view various people and spaces as safe environments for expressing what's really happening for them. This posture transforms their approach from one of fear, struggle, and secrecy to one of curiosity, empowerment, and openness.

When individuals feel secure and supported, they are more likely to engage in meaningful interaction with others, creating mutual understanding and respect. This sense of kotahitanga can bridge gaps between diverse groups, leading to greater unity and collective growth.

Too Good to Be True

Addressing global issues like war, the climate crisis, inequality, food insecurity, political oppression, and displacement can seem like a near-impossible task, especially when young people are demonised by people in power or by those in the media.

Politicians campaign against youth as ram raiders and criminals, failing to see and address the unresolved trauma that's within them. Sometimes youth are ridiculed because they cry out about their worries concerning the climate crisis, while others face additional layers of stigma and marginalisation when exploring their sexual orientation or gender expression. In such a complex and emotionally charged context, creating a safe space for young people is crucial.

To achieve this, we must first cultivate the courage to balance confidence, compassion, and self-awareness within ourselves. This internal grounding enables us to guide others in adopting these qualities, providing young people with a supportive environment where they can learn, make mistakes, and practice healthy conflict resolution for themselves.

Ka Whawhai Tonu Mātou – Matt's Experience

'Why do you believe in the colonised God?' This provocative pātai was posed by 'Protect Ihumātao – SOUL' co-leader Pania Newton during a young leadership conference (SWY) in Japan back in 2016. As a young Māori Christian leader grappling with my place in the world, I was initially offended by her confrontational question to me. My first impulse was to retaliate and defend my faith aggressively. However, I felt an overwhelming urge to humble myself and engage in the tense wānanga with her.

I thank God that I listened to that prompting. Our kōrero not only led to a lasting friendship but also provided me with profound wisdom and insight. Through Pania's pūrākau, I learned about the ancient stories connecting Māori to Hawaiki and gained a deeper understanding of the Creator God in Io Matua Kore, as well as the interactions of our tūpuna with Io. This transformative experience reshaped my faith and worldview in ways I will forever be thankful for.

Several years later, when the police began evicting protestors from Ihumātao on July 23, 2019, my wife Rachel and I dropped everything to support Pania, SOUL, and the whānau of Makaurau Marae. To my absolute shock, Pania asked us to help facilitate all-day Whakamoemiti – a full day of karakia every Sunday with the local churches and faith communities in the region.

Despite feeling inadequate, I needed to embody the functions of affirmation, compassion, and self-awareness. We had to walk humbly and listen to the hearts of the people. We hosted a diverse range of ethnic and faith communities, each with their own denomination and expression of faith: Pai Mārire, Rātana, Ringatū, Cook Islanders, Tongans, Hawaiians, West Papuans, Sāmoans, Anglicans, Baptists and Salvation Army members, among others.

Although we didn't really know what to do or what to expect most of the time, the principles of te ao Māori and tikanga guided us, keeping us safe and establishing kotahitanga with everyone involved. Values such as whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, and kaitiakitanga were instrumental in helping us navigate the unknown. We returned almost every night for the next several months, an enduring testament to the strength and unity that we built together. Life lessons that I'll never forget.

Ka Whawhai Tonu Mātou – Rachel's Experience

I remember a time when we were travelling with a passionate faith-based group for Waitangi day celebrations. There was a particular enthusiasm in the group as we had Māori who were in different stages of understanding our identities and how to move in both the faith world and tikanga Māori. We also had various expressions of faith as we had gathered from all over the country.

We were planning to attend a significant pōwhiri. Unfortunately, through a mix-up in time management and confusion in group dynamics, we missed our designated time to be welcomed onto the marae. Our group was disappointed as they were looking forward to prayerfully engaging with the process and conversation within the wharenui.

Suddenly, a few within the group were convinced that we were able to recover the opportunity and skip the pōwhiri process. Entering on their own accord, they felt their faith permitted them to enter without welcome, particularly as they were Māori too. I was uncomfortable and embarrassed as they rushed onto the marae, drawing the rest of us with them.

At that point, I wanted to leave as I felt that we had disrespected tikanga Māori. I had decided that they were the persecutor, and I was the victim. Whether I was right

or wrong became irrelevant because the way I handled the conflict was no longer productive. As I moved away from my group, I allowed my frustration to dictate my behaviour. There isn't an elegant way to say that I began to sulk.

As I proceeded to stew while the chaos continued, I turned to one of our rangatira for guidance. I wanted her to be the saviour to my victim. 'You could leave,' she began, 'and you will leave carrying all of the tension and shame, and nothing will remove that from you.' Then she continued, 'Or, you can stay and see this through. You can watch as the issue is discussed in the wharenui, and through the reflection process, it will be settled. Then you have a chance of seeing it resolved'.

At that moment, our rangatira drew me from my victim mindset, empowering me to stay in the tension to work through it until its completion. She had compassion for my hurt, but also helped me become aware of the consequences of my reaction. She then affirmed my ability to remain and find an alternate outcome. It's a lesson I have held onto and continue to practice.

Tātou, Tātou

If people truly understood their own stories, perhaps diversity wouldn't seem so dangerous. The whakataukī, 'Titiro whakamuri, kōkiri whakamua – Looking backwards to move forwards' reminds us to honour our whakapapa, uniqueness, and history. By doing so, we can better understand each other and move forward together.

Our younger generations should be encouraged to embrace their roots, their stories, and the values that define them. When faced with differences, this grounding will help them approach others with understanding and curiosity, seeing such differences as opportunities for growth rather than threats. Conflicts themselves don't have to lead to division; how we navigate them is crucial.

Imagine a generation of young people who can confidently navigate conflict – whether it's political, religious, cultural, or personal – while simultaneously respecting their own beliefs and exploring others' perspectives. Such skills would empower them in all areas of life: at school, at work, within their families, and within themselves.

Today, our young people face contention from various sources: on their devices, in the news, in their communities, and even within themselves. There is a high demand to know exactly what their stances are on political, social, and cultural issues. Instead of pushing them to align with our personal views, we should support their rangatiratanga, guiding them through these complex situations.

By helping them stand strong in the face of challenges and validating their agency in reaching their own conclusions, we can affirm true diversity of thought and expression in a way that does not create an 'other'. We can achieve true unity by embracing the deep value that comes from diversity, reflecting the power of kotahitanga.

'Mihi ki te rangi, mihi ki te whenua, mihi ki ngā tāngata, e kīa nei he whānau kotahi.'

Matt Renata (Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairoa, Te Āti Haunui-a-Pāpārangi, Ngāti Ruapani) is a trained and experienced youth worker.

His journey in exploring Indigenous theology and Hawaiiki is intertwined with his Māori and Gujarati whakapapa, enabling him to bring unique and rich mātauranga with both generosity and passion.

Rachel Renata (Ngā Puhi, Ngāti Hapani, Ngāti Ingarangi); Rach is a proud Māmā to Mana Tuku Iho, youth worker, kaiako, who is of Māori, Japanese and English descent.

She is passionate about celebrating and supporting young people and whānau in the fullness of who they are.

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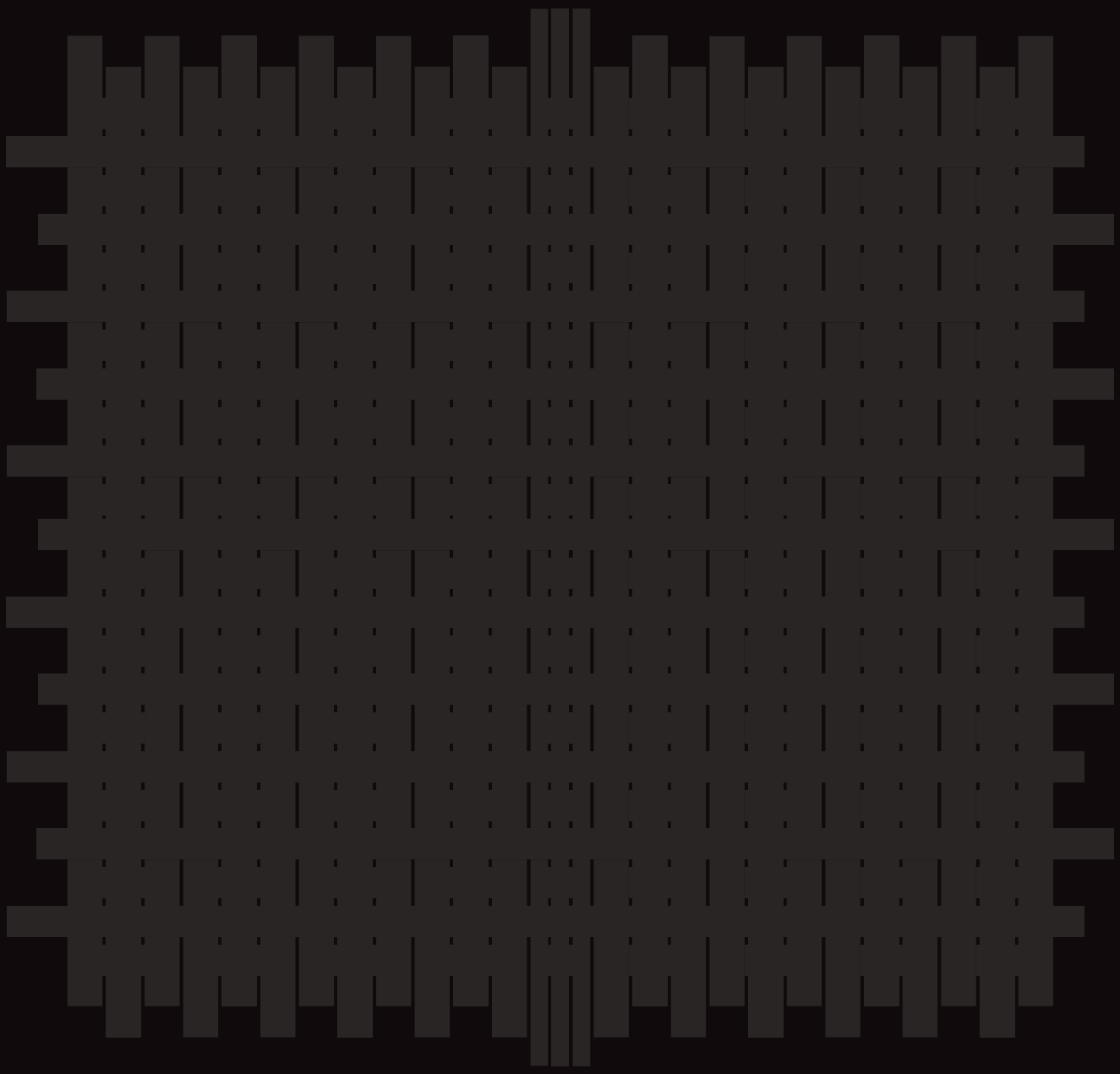


Dedication

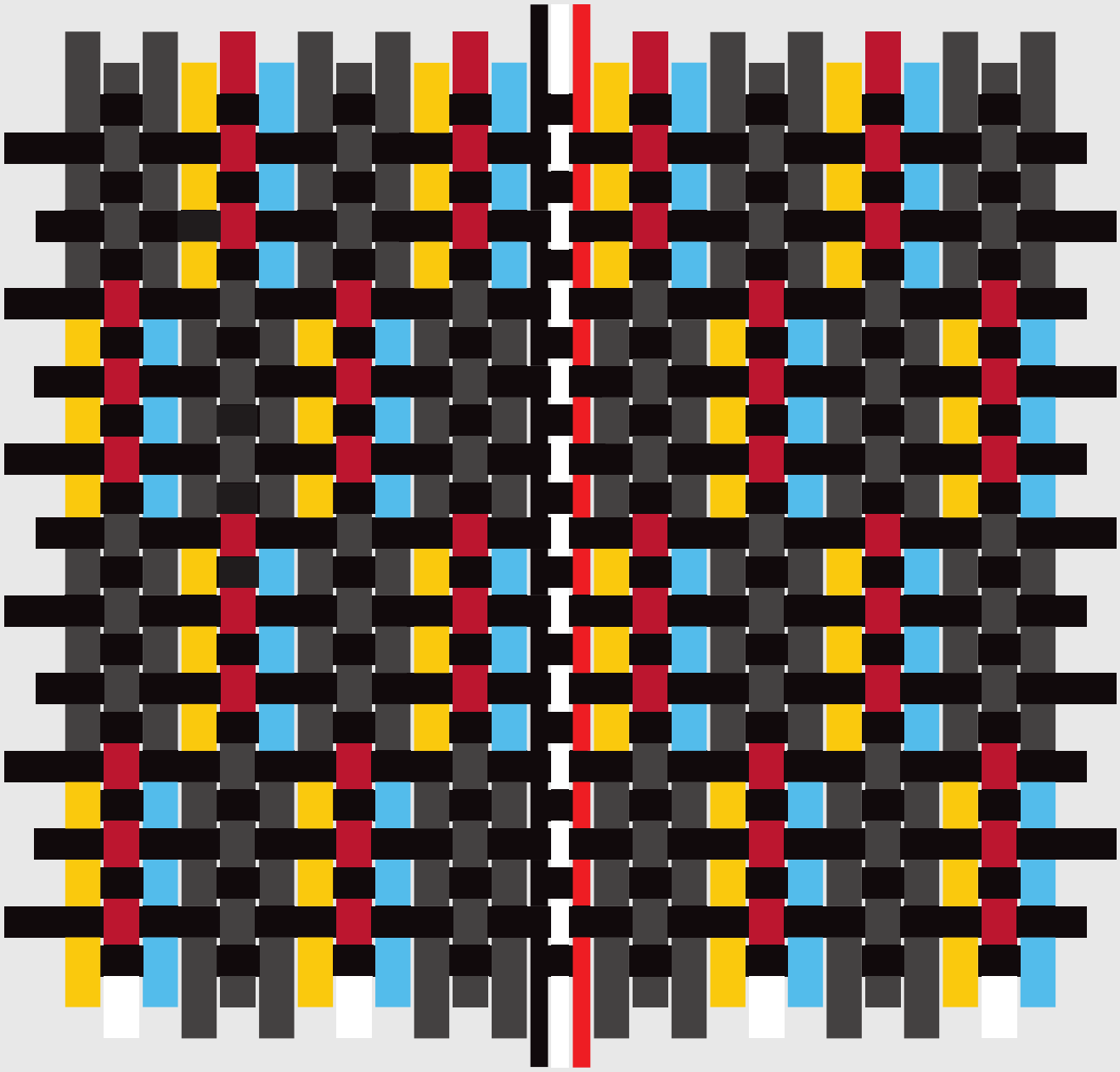
We dedicate the ‘Tagata o le Moana’ edition in honour of the many pioneering wayfinders, voyagers and navigators in our youth development sector. Many of these pioneers are pillars/pou in our communities around the motu - we honour and salute you. Special acknowledgement to those who are no longer with us and have become guiding stars in our continuous voyage.

These champions have carved out the way for over 30+ years weaving te ao Pasifika into the fabric of our sector. Many of them are known respectfully in their local settings and wouldn’t be known nationally, yet we reap what have you sown. “O le ala i le pule o le tautua” The pathway to leadership is through service.

Fa’afetai, Fa’afetai tele lava

Tagata o le Moana

PERSPECTIVES



Editorial

Tagata o Ie Moana

Locating diversity and intersectionality in a Pasifika context

This is the second of six intended 'mini-editions' of *Kaiparahuarahi* that will be eventually collected in two issues, all exploring intersectionality and kotahitanga in a broad and inclusive way. In the first mini-edition, we heard a handful of iwi voices, and our next journey sails in and around the Pacific Ocean.

The moana provides a natural symbol for intersectionality because it is the very thing that surrounds and connects us all. Identities are situated both in the ocean itself, as well as from the numerous islands, many of which have national states, monarchies, chiefly and tribal structures, countries and cultures. 'The Pacific [is] vast, where peoples and cultures move and mingle [...], a strong, resourceful and interdependent Pacific/Oceania' (Mafile'o & Su'a-Hawkins, 2005).

We recognise this vast diversity has suffered centuries of colonisation, as empires sought to claim and possess islands, and assert global dominance. Cartographers have clustered and labelled regions within the Pacific, such as Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia. An excellent example is found in the 'Cook Islands', with whom iwi in Aotearoa have a close ancestral tie. There are 15 islands across the 'Cooks', and whilst there might be efficiences for trade routes and resource sharing, especially for islands that have comparatively fewer inhabitants, it is problematic to ignore or blend the unique historical and cultural stories of Aitutaki, Pukapuka and Mitiaro, for example.

The 2023 Census reported 94,176 responses from people identifying with a Cook Island Māori ethnicity (www.stats.govt.nz). This is more than six times the total population inhabiting the islands which was enumerated at 15,040 in the 2021 Census (CISO, 2021). When communities in Aotearoa, such as Tokoroa, are jokingly referred to as the '16th Cook Island', youth workers need to critically examine the impacts on young people and their cultures.

Therefore, within the kaupapa of intersectionality and kotahitanga, we reject any implied homogeneity of 'Pasifika' as one group. Furthermore, we are uncomfortable with any imperial, political and colonial notions that have inappropriately forced diverse cultures to co-exist as one identity.

Certainly, this has created tensions for generations of young people, who migrated to Aotearoa during post-war labour shortages, who built families here in this new place, who suffered the Dawn Raids, who are the descendants of those original migrants, and who may have never been back to their country of origin due to forces of poverty and disconnection. Mike Tuala builds upon these familiar facets in fresh ways within this issue. Similarly, MahMah Timoteo reminds us that we've all heard of young people labelled as 'coconuts' (brown on the outside, white on the inside), and consequently heard Pasifika artists in Aotearoa reclaiming racist stereotypes. This is but one of countless intersectional challenges for young people: belonging to a place they've never been to, and perhaps their great grandparents are no longer around to answer questions and help them understand their history. They stand upon multiple lands, surrounded by a vast ocean that dichotomously creates great distance and immense connectivity. Like Simulata Pope says, 'potential as vast as the seas'.

Given the depth of this sociological and anthropological complexity, what can youth workers do to help? Firstly, we can locate Aotearoa within a diverse Pacific context: this reinforces an equitable focus on Māori 'and/or' Pasifika, whilst appreciating and celebrating the inherent diversity of many iwi and many nations within one macro-context. Secondly, we must stop 'othering' each other, and be comfortable knowing we are simultaneously different from each other and connected to similar places and stories.

Undeniably, there are unique issues facing people living on and descended from this corner of our planet. The looming threats of the climate crisis have created eco-anxiety for young people, as we've witnessed through years of global protests, and are most acutely felt by those in many island nations in the Pacific, including young people living here in Aotearoa New Zealand.

A quarter century ago, Mary Autagavaia offered a multidimensional framework for supervision with Tagata Pasifika, and an adaptation of her model might be helpful when embracing an intersectional view of young people in and from the Pacific. Autagavaia (2000) encourages us to think about ripples in the ocean, starting with a central drop and expanding outwards. Imagine the intersectionality of one young person as concentric circles, starting in the centre, perhaps with their God and faith, rippling out to their immediate āiga/family, including their extended family, friends, church community, school, work, sports, and all the various identities that overlap from that single drop.

This mini-edition is a mere drop. And even though, by design, this issue is short, we invite you to consider this a whistlestop tour, and the beginning of a more comprehensive journey we all might take to chart the inherent intersectionality found within Tagata o le Moana.

Special thanks must go to the inimitable Chillion Sanerivi who's stepped up as a guest co-editor. We are very proud for the first ever Pasifika edition of *Kaiparahuarahi*. Aupito William Sio describes this generation as the 6Bs - Brown, Beautiful, Brainy, Bilingual, Bi-cultural and Bold. What an opportunity to share through this edition who we are and who we've always been. Pacific Scholar, Epeli Hau'ofa says

> *"We should not be defined by the smallness of our islands, but by the greatness of our oceans. We are the sea, we are the ocean. Oceania is us. It is time to create things for ourselves, to create established standards of excellence that match those of our ancestors"*

These three individuals share the depth, the mass experience and the richness of who we are, and are an example of the greatness we have as Pasifika.

Dr MahMah Tohoa Lita Tetini Timoteo was auspiciously and enthusiastically recommended by Green MP Kahurangi Carter outside the Beehive after a recent hui with Jane Zintl and Rod Baxter, and honouring this suggestion has paid dividends! MahMah shares stories that will make you laugh, then cry, then deeply reflect (you didn't expect this issue to feature a gay cat café, did you?). Mike Tuala presents a familiar story in a fresh way, and recognises that our professional journeys often take us to unexpected places for good reasons. Finally, Simulata Pope is simultaneously philosophical and practical, offering a map for relationships at multiple levels, including the often-overlooked managerial and supervisory spaces.

We acknowledge the editors for this mini-edition include the perspectives of Pasifika peoples, Tāngata Whenua and Tāngata Tiriti. Whether our whakapapa be indigenous or migrant, our ancestors all navigated the Pacific Ocean to arrive at this place and support subsequent generations. At the entrance of Te Kōngahu Museum of Waitangi, you'll see the words NAVIGATORS | NGĀ KAIWHAKATERE followed by this text:

All who come to this country have to cross a vast stretch of water to get here.

Boldness and great navigational skill brought Māori to these shores, then Europeans, hundreds of years later. Now two peoples had to navigate the unknown waters of a relationship.

Each had to come to terms with the other to get what they wanted. They tested boundaries, they negotiated, sometimes they clashed. The conversation began.

As the conversation continues and expands, we hope the contributions within help you navigate your journey with young people from, in and around the Pacific.

With warm Pacific greetings,

Chillion Sanerivi, Rod Baxter and Kahu Ritchie
December 2024

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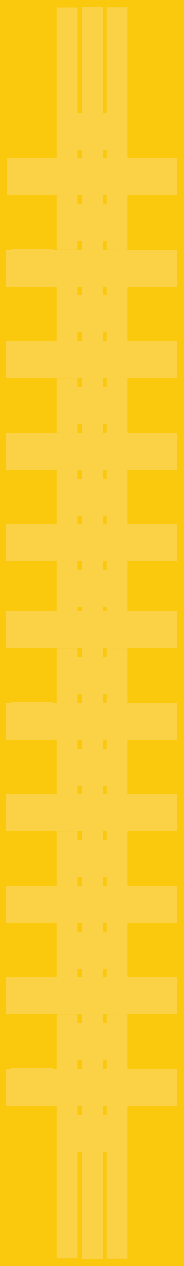


Three Simple Ways You Can Show Up for Pasifika Practitioners

Simulata Pope

Working with and alongside Pasifika is vibrant and joyful, but it is also a privilege—one that many underestimate, undervalue, and tokenise. Throughout my career, both professionally and in love work (volunteer work), many practitioners have loved to showcase their experience working with Tāngata Moana (people of the Pacific). But here is the giggle moment—do they actually know what it's really like? Do managers truly understand what it takes?

I have completed countless leadership, management, supervision, and professional development trainings. However, throughout all this learning, especially when it intersects with Pasifika, I have learned that the best way to lead Tāngata Moana is by seeing their potential to be as vast as the seas. Your role as their counterpart is to journey alongside them through the waves, while helping to chart the course. This is how you can most effectively support the work you both aim to achieve and ultimately provide the best ways for young people to thrive under your watch.

As confronting as this may be, we Pasifika—along with many other groups—are tired of constantly waving our flag to prove why we are the champions of our own seas. So instead of calling people out, here are three simple and effective ways you can strengthen your youth development practice when working with Pasifika practitioners.

Note: I am a storyteller, and I get philosophical at times, so please read with an open mind.

1. Cheerlead—Do not Just Cheer Achievements, Cheer Mistakes Too

In a world focused on 'managing' people, behaviours, and dynamics, we often overlook cheerleading as one of the most effective ways to transform individuals. I cannot count the times I have cheered others through meals, care packages, hugs and jokes. Learn about the values of the Pacific, apply them, and understand the importance of cultural humility. Cheer, but do not overstep. Make noise when it comes to the wins - praise the learnings when it doesn't work out.

As Pasifika practitioners, we navigate spaces where very few at the top look like us, yet all our clients do. We are often the ones assigned to do the icebreakers, say the shared lunch prayer or MC the events. So, how can you continue to cheer us on in these spaces? How can you show support for our strengths?

'My name is Simulata Pope. I am proud to be Simulata Pope. It is cool to be Simulata Pope.' These three lines, which my father Rev. Iki used to close his lectures to me, still serve as a reminder of how my biggest cheerleaders see me in this world.

Cheerleading is embedded in many Pacific ideologies that we, as Tāngata Moana, often use in our Youth Work practice. The coolest part? **Anyone can cheer someone on**, and the Pacific does this extraordinarily well. Just look at the fans of MMT (Mate Ma'a Tonga) Rugby League.

When we cheer people on, we experience mafanā (Tongan: feeling of warmth). We get creative, empathetic, connected and most importantly, we journey with the person. From a Pasifika perspective, cheerleading celebrates how far someone has come, the shoulders they stand on, and the obstacles they have overcome.

In a world filled with opinions, political marginalisation, and so much blah blah blah, how can you—yes, YOU—stay mindful of the cheerleaders around you? How can you hear their encouragement, even when they are not physically present? Once you master this, do it for every Pasifika practitioner who crosses your path.

2. Expect High Standards and Speak to Their Worth

Be brave enough to set the bar high for Pasifika. Our standards are immaculate, but the environments we are placed in often limit our potential. By showing that you expect the best from us, you commit to helping us become the best versions of ourselves.

For too long, especially in a sector with limited resources and a desperation for processes, we have been quick to critique practitioners based on what they need to develop, rather than positioning them in spaces that align with their strengths.

How can you speak life into practitioners? How can you find ways to complement their work instead of focusing on what did not go right? I learned this through practising empathetic leadership. Sometimes, we must demonstrate our own worth so that our Pasifika people can recognise theirs. If you can, study the chiefly systems of the Pacific. That is how you set high standards for the greater good of harmony and community.

I once managed a Pacific youth worker who was excellent at talking but less so in action. Leading someone so charismatic was challenging. However, when I noticed that his outputs did not align with what he said in our team meetings, I raised my concerns during our next supervision session. I pushed him to understand my concerns, and years later, he introduced me to his new team, saying, 'if it wasn't for her getting my act together, I wouldn't have realised how great my practice could be.'

Sometimes, challenging a practitioner to be better, do better carries incredible weight in their professional development.

3. 'And if you back them when they're 15? They will have your back for life.'

As my high school English teacher turned lifelong mentor, Dr Michelle Johansson once told me: 'if you have their back at 15, they will have yours for life.' ('Ten pieces of advice for the teachers of young brown scholars', by Dr Michelle Johansson, youthmentoring.org.nz/news). I challenge you readers, if you bat for your Pasifika practitioners, the connections made are **then life-long**.

Throughout my managerial experience, I have heard strong opinions from other managers, senior leadership teams, and CEOs about how Pasifika youth workers are 'masters of winging it, super funny, and bring joy to the office.' In management terms, this often means being underprepared, goofing around and not taking the work seriously.

I remember being challenged by a CEO in a former job, who noticed my team playing cards in the office kitchen. She questioned why I allowed this on the company's time and whether my team saw me as an authority figure. What she did not know was that my team had spent the entire night working overtime, transporting two young people who had been assaulted by their partners to the hospital. They bought them food, organised care packages on their own dime and returned to the office the next morning, emotionally drained. If playing cards for an hour in the kitchen helped bring them back to a safe space, of course I would endorse it! And what happens when we endorse practitioners to be valued in a job? **We retain them in jobs longer and work gets better.**

Backing your people in tough situations is challenging in a professional context. The balance between professional and personal relationships is constantly tested.

However, I hope the work of Pasifika youth-led initiatives demonstrates that

it is not always about what you do, but how you make people feel.

That is why I still have monthly catchups with all of my colleagues from my very first job til this day.

So what now?

The intersectionality of Pasifika is vast in itself. In the Youth Work sector, and particularly in Pasifika-led youth development, this is not new. Many Pasifika people do Youth Work daily without realising it. We are family managers, supervisors, event coordinators, fundraisers and more. Older cousins are safe spaces for our young ones, elders are our mentors, and community leaders are our managers. The difference? One is a job, and the other is life. One requires a contract and organisational processes, while the other is often a voluntary 'volun-told' task. Understanding this dynamic is a step closer to realising why Pasifika youth workers are some of the best practitioners in the world. **Pasifika don't need to tell you the complexities of their world, but find ways to not assume that it is easy to navigate.**

Pasifika practitioners are as extraordinary as anyone else. Make sure to highlight this at your next team meeting. The best way you can show up for Pasifika practitioners is simply to do just that—show up. It is a privilege to know them, even when you want to flick their ears for being late to work.

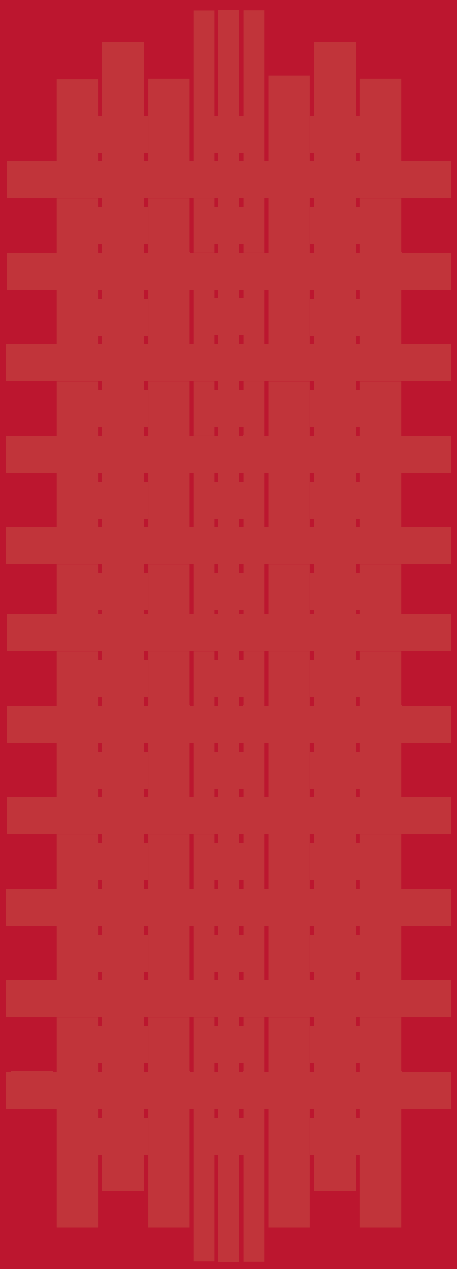
Tu'a fakau'a ofa atu.

Simulata Pope is a young Tongan/Niuean woman raised in South Auckland, now residing in Wellington. A dedicated child-rights advocate, she began her journey as a youth worker and remains deeply passionate about engaging with youth in various spaces. Her commitment to this work is inspired by her parents—her father, a youth worker and pastor, and her mother, a social worker.

Simulata's professional expertise is now focused on management, where she has developed a strong knowledge base in leadership and governance within the social sector. She holds several governance roles across various boards and reference groups.

Beyond her professional responsibilities, Simulata is deeply involved in serving the Pacific community. She frequently leads grassroots initiatives and mobilises national and international Pacific projects, benefitting Pacific communities both in Aotearoa and in the homelands.

In addition to her advocacy and community service, Simulata is a creative force in the performing arts scene, with a passion for stage management and filmmaking as part of her love work (volunteer work) projects.



Kotahitanga: Weaving Intersectionality in Youth Work

Dr MahMah Tohoa Lita Tetini Timoteo

Ko MahMah tōku ingoa.
Ko Timoteo tōku ingoa kōpū tangata.
Ko Mariie tōku māmā.
Ko Tetini tōku pāpā.
Nō ‘Autirēria mai tōku māmā.
Nō Rakahanga mai tōku pāpā.
Kua ‘ānau ‘ia au ki Autirēria.
Ē no’o ana au ki Ōtautahi, Christchurch.

My name is Dr MahMah Tohoa Lita Tetini Timoteo, and I am a proud, fat, queer, Cook Island va’ine. These elements of my identity have informed who I am, where I am and what I do.

I was born in a small town called Tweed Heads, Australia. My father was not a very nice guy, and in an attempt to save our family from a future of abuse, my mother moved my siblings and me to the beautiful Aotearoa. Years of witness protection landed us in the small town of Hari Hari on the West Coast of the South Island—population 300 with more cows than people. The town was Pākehā-dominated and many people called my siblings and I ‘the coconut children’. Racism ran deep in this town. Running just as deep was the homophobia. I never had a coming out story: people either had the privilege of knowing or not. But it was difficult to be open about one’s queerness in a place that was well known for children being forced out of home when they did end up ‘coming out’.

Acknowledging externally imposed limitations on identity is crucial, especially for those with intersectional identities that lack substantial power. It’s essential to combat these limitations and help young people navigate this difficult space. Sharing my experiences openly with young people often elicits shocked reactions, as they are unaccustomed to hearing about these struggles. Turning up honestly and demonstrating strength is vital, especially when working with young Māori navigating a blend of evolving cultures. This honesty showcases the resilience and leadership inherent in our culture, regardless of the challenges they might face.

The bullying was pretty rough. Students used to spit on me as I walked down the corridor. My homework would be stolen from my bag and flushed down the toilet, resulting in the teacher not believing I had done the assigned work and giving me a detention. I was forced to get changed in different bathrooms from my other classmates for PE because the senior girls would spurt words of abuse and disgust when they came in. On the bus, I used to wear headphones and turn up the music to full volume to drown out the death threats and words of encouragement to kill myself. Kids can be mean.

“You have grown into someone who would have protected you as a child. And that is the most powerful move you made”. I saw this quote from an unknown source on Instagram the other day, and I thought it spoke beautifully to the person I have become.

Unlike many of the teachers and other adult figures in my life growing up, I have become somebody who, to the best of their ability, fights for the liberation, protection and care of others. I share my past, as it is in every way a core reason for the aroha and commitment that I put into my mahi and community today.

I am currently a Pacific Student Advisor and Teacher at the University of Canterbury in Ōtautahi, Christchurch. Intersectionality is a core theory that we use in the course I co-coordinate and teach, an important approach that we encourage our students to weave through their university mahi but also beyond the confines of the institution. On a personal level, intersectionality has provided me with tools to understand my own identity, and more so, how multiple aspects of who I am can never truly remain separate from one another. Rather, they intersect and respond to each other in ways that make my whole self. As a very simple and silly way of trying to explain intersectionality to my students, I sometimes use the example of a friend wanting to take me somewhere to hang out. This friend knows I am queer so they ask me if I would be interested in going to a

gay cat café. Gay? Cats? Coffee? Say less. We head along to the café but I notice there is nobody that looks like me. A room full of what appears to be papa'ā people. We go to sit down, and the chairs have arm rests and unfortunately, I am unable to fit into them. In this instance, my friend has considered one aspect of my identity, but has failed to consider how other aspects of my identity impact the complex and multifaceted ways I navigate the world, or in this case, a gay cat café.

The approach of intersectionality serves many students who have never considered the notion of multiple and overlapping aspects of their identity that could, and usually do, influence their life. I find that this significantly impacts our students who belong to marginalised communities with many of them considering and making sense of their own lived experiences. An example of this was a lecture I taught on white supremacy and connecting such ideologies and actions to the 2019 Christchurch Terrorist Attacks. One of our Muslim students spoke to me afterwards and shared their story of being horrifically bullied at school. They explained that what they had learnt in class helped them to understand that they have not only experienced racism but, more specifically, Islamophobia. Furthermore, this student had an even deeper understanding of how such violent and unjust ways of thinking have been fostered and carried out as attacks. This student, along with others, learnt that their identities can play a significant role in how they experience the world.

I work with a diverse range of young people, with varying ages, genders, ethnicities and lived experiences. This is both in my teaching and other project and community mahi that I do. I remember working with young people for the first time. It was terrifying. Perhaps these feelings were a reflection of how mean young people had been to me at school. I thought that maybe my experience of being bullied would follow me into adulthood and even into my career. I think my biggest fear lay in the fact that I knew how cool young people were, and how confident and real many of them could be. They would let me know if I bored them, or angered them. They would let me know if they thought I dressed well that day or if my 'fit' needed work. They would never pretend to laugh at my jokes, and I think that one hurt the most. But I did feel accomplished when I could get a chuckle out of them every once in a while. Young people are unbelievably powerful...

Something beautiful I am seeing with more of the young people I am working with is a stronger sense of exploration and curiosity of identity, which I did not see as much growing up. Maybe it was just the conservative West Coast environment. Perhaps for some, they have safer spaces and people in their lives that make this easier now. They also may have greater access to resources and materials that aid their identity journey. As a previous co-chair of a Rainbow organisation in Ōtautahi, I had the honour of witnessing some of these journeys with our queer young people. All journeys were unique. We had some young people that were openly queer and could express who they were to those around them, both at home and in public. Others would have to lie to their parents and say they were attending a faith-based youth group, then when they would arrive, they would often head to the bathroom that best aligned with their gender and change into an outfit that they felt better expressed who they were. For many of our young people of colour, there were other layers and complexities that they were forced to face.

Some people are under the assumption that queer spaces are safe spaces for all queer people. Unfortunately, that is not always the case. Dominantly queer spaces often times are not as intersectional as they could or should be, particularly when it comes to internalised racism and explicit racism.

This is why organisations such as Moana Vā were created and are so important for our Pacific rainbow / MVPFAFF+ communities.

Moana Vā – Navigators of Pacific Pride – was established to identify and address the needs of Pacific Rainbow+ LGBTQIA+ MVPFAFF+ (mahu, vakasalewa, palopa, fa'afafine, akava'ine, fakaleiti (leiti), fakafifine) communities in the Canterbury region. They aim to provide support, advocacy and mentorship for our Pacific Rainbow+ communities and acknowledge the challenges of living in a region that is systemically conservative, enabling unconscious racial bias and stereotypes of our members and their families. Through their social platforms, Moana Vā also offers a safe space for those connecting online from around the globe. Existing as we are in the city of white supremacy is extremely challenging, and finding spaces and people that accept and support the multifaceted individuals that we are has not been easy. But groups like Moana Vā work tirelessly to provide alofa and care to our marginalised Pacific communities in Christchurch. An intersectional approach is imperative when considering and creating spaces that cater to the needs and experiences of peoples and communities with intersecting, layered identities.

These challenges can be seen beyond queer spaces. My thesis explored the lived experiences of Pacific peoples as they navigated climate change spaces. The findings indicated that climate spaces, although some would find them progressive, were also dominated by white people who upheld problematic ways of thinking that actively caused harm to people of colour, and in this case, Pacific peoples within Aotearoa. This bled into government spaces, community spaces, and for a lot of our young people, activism spaces (Timoteo, 2023). Helena Fuluifaga Chan Foung, a Pacific climate change activist, explains that Pacific people are not on people's radar when it comes to climate discussions (Kaho, 2021). In Aotearoa New Zealand, September 2019 saw one of the largest marches in New Zealand history, with over 80,000 marching as part of the School Strike 4 Climate (SS4C) youth movement. However, less than two years later, SS4C Auckland disbanded after criticisms of racism (Miller, 2021). On Facebook, they released a statement that read 'School Strike 4 Climate Auckland has avoided, ignored, and tokenised black, Indigenous and people of colour voices and demands, especially those of Pasifika and Māori individuals in the climate activism space' (Cardwell, 2021, para.4). The group further explained that people of colour were the demographic of people who were worst impacted by climate change and therefore, they should be leading the climate justice movements (Cardwell, 2021).

Many were not impressed by the decision. Helena Fuluifaga Chan Foung expressed her frustration for the group's decision, identifying that SS4C Auckland claimed that this disbandment was a request by the BBIPOC community (Tagata Pasifika, 2021). By placing the onus on BBIPOC communities, the responsibility no longer belongs to SS4C Auckland. As Helena explains, by pulling themselves out, this also removed the potential and political leverage that they had, which many other communities do not possess (Tagata Pasifika, 2021). This leaves more work for young Pacific activists who are often campaigning across multiple issues for Pacific people and shouldering work, study, family and community responsibilities. Drawing upon the thesis, my participants expressed their frustration with the overlapping scheduling of Polyfest and the School Climate Strike in 2018.

> *Aolele emphasises that climate change is the 'biggest intersectional' issue, highlighting the multitude of layers, including racism, that are involved in the climate crisis. She expresses that the lack of intersectional thinking can be seen in the conflicting scheduling of Polyfest and the School Climate Strike in 2018. Aolele said that it 'pissed her off' and 'this is how you know it was white' because they were not aware of the largest Pacific Island event in Aotearoa New Zealand. She stated that the organisers should have been aware of this event and considered the presence of Pacific people, as they are one of the most impacted people within the climate crisis. Aolele further expressed her frustrations as Pacific individuals and communities were forced to make a choice. As people practise their routines for months to perform at Polyfest, many of them chose to attend Polyfest. 'That felt like a big disrespect or act of racism to purposefully exclude us from the space. Even if it isn't their intention, that was the impact, that's what happened'. (Timoteo, 2023, p.163).*

Our young people are going through a lot. My fear sometimes is that we are placing a great deal of pressure on them to become leaders, future problem solvers and inspirations. When in reality, they should be able to just be. Live in their youth. Not feel the weight of the world crushing down on their shoulders. But I know for many of our young people, particularly those within our most marginalised communities, some are not granted the grace to just exist, feel joy, have fun and belong. The young people I work alongside are forever faced with 'impending waves'. This notion of impending waves is explained in my thesis by one of my participants Nanai:

> *...life priorities, and this imagery of impending waves that everyone has, like one impending wave just like the ocean, like there's one wave that hits you first and then another wave behind that. For people in the islands, our impending wave is climate change. For people in the diaspora, like in Portland and in Auckland, their impending wave is paying their rent for that week. Climate change is not the wave that's going to shift them first, it's trying to get food on the table, it's trying to afford your kids' school fees, trying to pay off your student loan. So that is your impending wave; that's your main priority.*

Intersectionality allows us to consider these 'impending waves' and the multitude of ways that they impact the young people we engage with. My position as a Pacific Student Advisors has exposed me to varying examples of this through my years in this role. Many of our Pacific students' greatest obstacles are not so much in the classroom but outside of it.

Commitments to family, friends, community, church, sports, etc influence students significantly. Often-times our students are the main form of transport in the household, the babysitting, the tangi organiser, the top sports-person, whilst also balancing close to full-time work to support themselves and their whānau.

I understand that. Growing up I used to milk cows in the morning between 4am and 7am. I would then get ready for school, finish school, be one of the school cleaners, finish up and head to the local shop where I worked part-time, and then head to the pub where I was a kitchen-hand and sous chef. All between the ages of 14 and 18. I get it. We did what we had to do to get by and support the people we loved. But it is tough and systemic oppression and unjust socio-economic positioning contributes a great deal to the disparity in how some young people and their loved ones continue to navigate and survive the system.

I have the privilege of working with Pacific rangatahi in the climate education space. When I entered one of the projects, I wanted to emphasis the mahi that I had already done within the community and many of the discussions that were already being had with folks in this similar area of mahi. It was important to communicate that the climate issue was an intersectional issue as Aolele, Nanai and Helena had already spoken to, and that in order to address the climate issue, one must consider the varied and compounding other challenges that exacerbate the environmental emergency which disproportionately impact indigenous peoples. We also know that Pacific and Māori people are highly policed. A very simple example of this was a talanoa workshop we curated for our Pacific students, ranging from ages 10 to 14. This session took place in the library, which was located in the local mall. Little did some of our team know that many students from this school, which had higher numbers of Pacific and Māori students, were banned from the mall. Having no access to their local mall meant that they were not only unable to access the library, which was a wonderful space to engage in educational materials and resources, but they also did not have access to the pharmacy located in the mall.

In one of our sessions, when students were asked to talk about the things they thought needed to be addressed in their communities, many of them spoke about racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination. Even in the context of climate change, the students wanted Pacific

cultural hubs and improvements to their sports fields. Some may not think that this is linked to climate change, but it is. An intersectional lens allows us to consider the repercussions of 'intent vs impact'. The intent is to teach our young people about climate change and equip them with the tools necessary to address such issues, potentially building them into community leaders. However, this approach is narrow and does not take into consideration how the very system that is causing a global climate emergency is the same system that is causing significant harm to marginalised people of colour around the world.

> *They literally took the land that Indigenous people had been in interdependent relationships with for generations, and over time, they industrialized that land, and they made that land suitable for the fossil fuel industry. They committed double harm in relation to climate change. They first violently moved Indigenous people out of their land and onto lands that were either smaller or that those Indigenous people were less accustomed to. Then, at the same time, that land became the basis for the fossil fuel industries and the industrial economy we now know is responsible for the rise in global average temperature. Colonialism and imperialism are not the only or the most fundamental forms of oppression that played a huge role in today's climate change problems. For example, anti-Black racism has a long history and, over centuries, was also used in ways that created violence and harm that can be associated with laying the groundwork for today's climate crisis. When thinking across different groups, whether Indigenous people, Black people, but also diverse Latinx groups and others as well, we can focus on the different forms of colonial disempowerment, of racism, of other forms of discrimination that played a huge role in bringing about what we understand today as climate change (Whyte, as cited in Funes, 2020, para. 8-9).*

The intersectional identities and experiences of our young people highlight the intersectional national and global issues at play for them and their communities. One of my biggest pieces of advice that I have when it comes to working with young people in our communities is to truly listen to what they have to say without an agenda dictating the outcomes. Although it is important to help guide our young people, often times it is project and organisation objectives that command the direction of young people. We want to hear what they have to say, but only when it serves the scripted narrative that we have written. This can come down to assuming that we know better and is highly prevalent when working with young Pacific and Māori people, particularly after acknowledging the historical and generational harm and bias that has followed many of our young people, even before they were born. Many young people have never had their voices heard or taken seriously, and when they have been acknowledged, it can be in a tokenistic way. My experience with government consultation work within these communities has shown that the perspectives and experiences shared within the consultation process are often not included or spoken to in the final outcome, and even more disappointingly, the communities are not re-visted to touch base and report back these final outcomes. This has resulted in some members of the community no longer wanting to be part of these processes as they do not believe they are being adequately considered as a key stakeholder. Furthermore, their time and energy is not being compensated for with fair koha.

With this in mind, it is imperative that our communities see the value in their experiences and voices. In all honesty, I try my very best to be my young people's biggest hype person. My biggest hype person growing up was my mum. But other than that, I did not have a great deal of people around me who made me feel confident in who I was and who I could become. I hope that in some way, I can do that for some of the young people I work with.

No matter who they are or who they want to become, I want them to believe in their manifestations and dreams and know that they are enough, always.

Alongside this, there will be times where you and the young people you work with are not vibing. I found this incredibly difficult in the beginning. Interestingly, a friend who is in a similar field, explained that some young people react in negative ways to you because they do not understand you, and in some cases, are resistant to you because you represent something that either challenges them or confuses them. I see this a lot as somebody who does not neatly fit into categorised boxes. This comes from people understanding identity in very fixed, traditional ways.

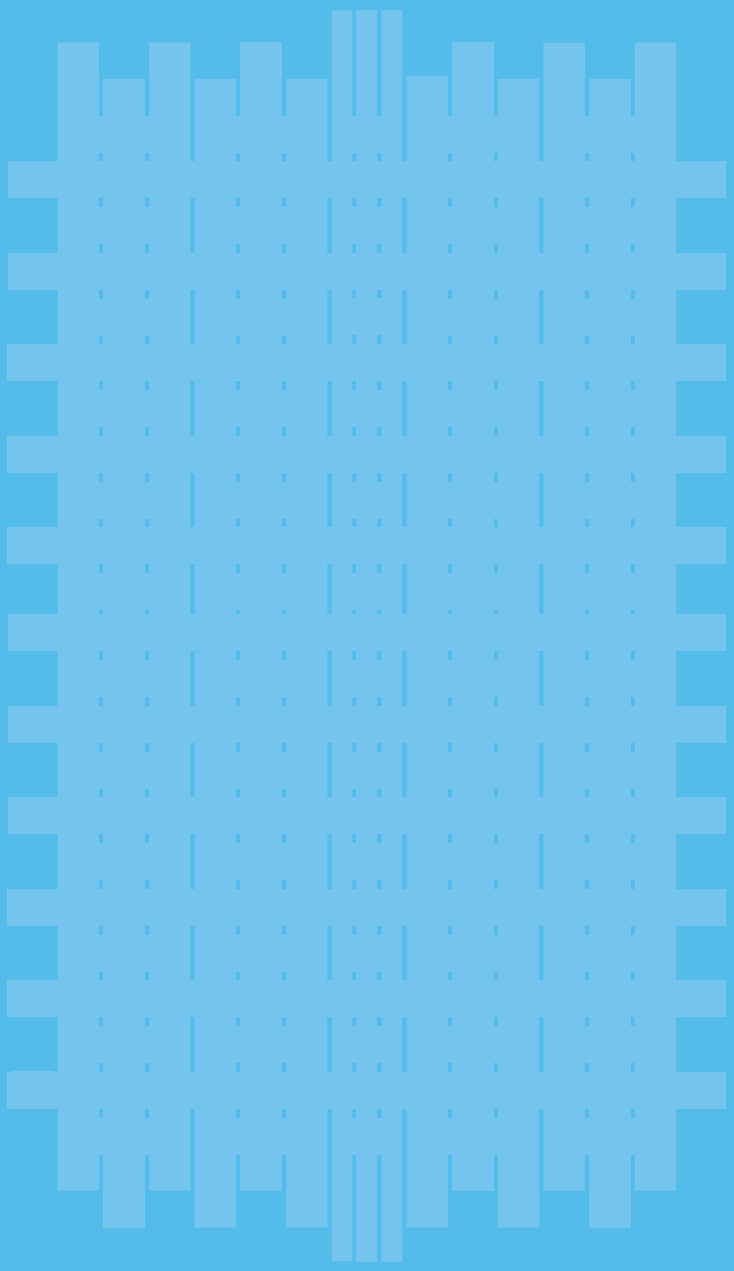
My queerness, the way I speak, and even the way I dress often does not align with how people assume 'Pacific' peoples to be – even more so, how 'Academics' or a 'Dr' would be. With that in mind, I hope in the work that I do, I challenge these static stereotypes and rather, celebrate the fluidity of identity and the beauty in dismantling constrictive boxes that work to limit our minds, bodies and souls. As a result, the young people we have the honour of working with may feel empowered to also celebrate this freedom.

Meitaki ma'ata

Kia orana! My name is Dr MahMah Timoteo (Tohoa Tetini). I am a Cook Island multidisciplinary teacher and researcher who recently completed a PhD in Anthropology through the University of Canterbury. My thesis explored the lived experiences of Pacific peoples and their navigation of climate change spaces within Aotearoa.

Much of my research and mahi interests lie in climate change, Pacific peoples and communities, intersectionality, Indigenous liberation, queer liberation, body liberation, and wellbeing. Alongside this, I take great pride in advocating in online spaces that work to challenge oppressive systems that continue to harm our most marginalised communities. More so, these spaces emphasise the importance of joy and rest. I am a proud member of Moana Vā, a Pacific Rainbow organisation based in Otautahi. As part of Moana Vā, I have the privilege to co-host the podcast 'Two Fat 'Fine', celebrating queer, fat, joy.

The interweaving of my research background, alongside my social media presence, has granted me the honour to speak in inspiring spaces, with inspiring people, and even more inspiring kaupapa. From lectures, to workshops, to conferences, to panel discussions, to MCing, and events and festivals. I continue to be thankful for the incredible mahi I get to do with so many very special communities. Meitaki ma'ata.



Navigating Two Worlds: Mike Tuala on Identity, and Supporting Young People in Aotearoa

Mike Tuala

I follow the trail of the Pacific migration of the 1960s and 1970s when my grandparents made the courageous decision to leave Samoa for better opportunities in Aotearoa. My five siblings and I were raised in West Auckland. Our home in West Auckland is shaped by the journey they made.

Samoa is a huge part of my identity. It is rooted in a calling to go back to our homeland and to serve our community here. It is beautiful to navigate both worlds, Samoa and Aotearoa.

I'm the oldest male in my family. The responsibility and leadership that I have in my family led me to take on a similar role in the wider 'village'. I've been in the Youth Work space pretty much since I left high school.

A career as a youth worker felt like a calling from God. I am a real believer in following your gut and your heart. In high school, I was surrounded by organisations and people inspired by a vision of serving young people. I jumped on the waka, and I haven't got off since then.

How does your identity influence your work with young people?

When I think of identity, I have so many interacting identities: I am Samoan, I'm male, I'm the eldest male, I live in West Auckland, and I am New Zealand-born. Each of these identities carries a story and influences how I view the world.

I am of the Pacific and live here in Aotearoa. I am a New Zealand-born Samoan: this is a very different experience to someone born in the islands. My worldview is slightly different than that of someone who was born in the motherland.

My upbringing and spirituality are very important to me – they ground me and my work as a youth worker. Being a man of faith is a really important part of the different jobs and different types of Youth Work I do. Even when I'm not talking about my faith explicitly, it influences my approach, the conversations I have with young people, and how I treat people. I always try to respect the dignity of the person I'm talking to, not to bring any judgement into our space.

Youth Work is about giving yourself to serve the community and to serve young people. In Pacific culture, service is a value. This idea of service really influences my work and how I turn up for people.

It wasn't until I started Youth Work that I realised that our people are a minority and are seen as vulnerable. This shook me, because I've always seen our people as strong and resilient – and we are! It caught me by surprise to see how people struggle with mental health and addictions. So, the concept of service that I grew up with has enabled me to do what I do today.

I didn't really see myself getting into drug and alcohol mahi. I was more interested in leadership development and mentoring for young people. But God shows us signs, and He puts people in our lives that we didn't feel drawn to or called to, and somehow, I ended up working in the drug and alcohol space. I've been in the space for eight years and love it.

Tell us about the diversity and the intersectionality of the young people you currently work with?

I'm currently working in the public health addiction space, specifically in addiction prevention, and a lot of the young people we serve have alcohol and other drug addictions. We work with community groups where young people may have some form of addiction.

We see a lot of young people facing mental health challenges as well as addiction. We see quite a lot of young people experiencing depression, anxiety and more serious challenges like psychosis.

There are other layers, such as supporting our takatāpui young people. We know that our Rainbow communities are disproportionality harmed by alcohol and drugs. We've also seen an increase in people with a Māori or Pasifika background seeking support for addiction. But, you know, you don't have to be a certain race or from a certain culture to be impacted by alcohol and drugs.

What is it like working with your community's young people?

I love it. It is a blessing and a privilege to work with my community and the young people that I serve. What I love most about my current role is the ability to work at a local grassroots level but also to have opportunities to develop policy and advocacy at a national level. It's a real privilege and a blessing to be in both spaces.

It is really important to have young Pasifika community voices advocating for policies. Our young people are so resilient, so switched on. Sometimes, our role is to work alongside them, elevating their voices into those spaces where their voices aren't really acknowledged or heard, or to translate some of the jargon. It's about how we can translate information so that it's easy and accessible for young people to understand, contributing to their understanding.

Have you noticed any changes to the intersectionality you see in Youth Work?

Absolutely, I think our world has become more complex. The systems that young people have to navigate are very broad: the education system, the justice system and the health care system. All of these can be quite intimidating to young people.

I've also noticed the advancement of technology and how fast the pace of life has become. I often hear similar concerns from other youth workers. How do we keep up with the pace of living when things are being digitalised? Are young people savvy online? How do we keep Youth Work practitioners up to speed?

We have to think about future technology systems, as well as current systems. As the world gets more complex, Youth Work has to speed up. Otherwise, we will be left behind!

What advice do you have for other professions that work with young people?

If we bring it back to basics, working with young people is about empathy and active listening.

I'm more than confident that other people are able to work with our communities. Our nation is becoming more diverse. There's a lot more mixing, a lot more diversity.

I often think of a quote from Peter Drucker:

'The only skill that will be important in the 21st century is the skill of learning new skills'.

I feel like we're at the stage where we constantly have to learn new skills and learn new ways of engaging to keep up with young people, and to keep up with society and the expectations.

Our society has become more diverse and more complex. It's important that youth workers consider how we can adapt, to be flexible, to learn new skills and new ideas.

Are there any resources, theories, frameworks, models or ideas that you use that might be helpful for other people working in the community?

I've been really fortunate to be part of a couple of Pacific leadership programmes here in Aotearoa where there's been a lot of self-reflection on what it means to be Pacific and working in a mainstream working environment.

We can bring ourselves to these spaces. We should be open to engagement and conversation. I've seen quite a lot of Pacific practices adopted into mainstream spaces.

I like to use the Fono Fale model as a way to explore, understand and share a Pasifika view of the world. I think the idea of a house, the pou that holds the roof and the foundations is a beautiful metaphor for keeping us grounded. We use a Kakala framework at Auckland Council as a way to engage with our Pasifika communities. How you communicate a message is very important to Pasifika communities – it is not just about engaging and taking information from them; it is important to present the information back to the community.

The other framework I always come back to is the positive youth development framework when I'm working in a youth-specific context, particularly when I need to have a hard conversation. We should seek to have more positive strengths-based youth engagement.

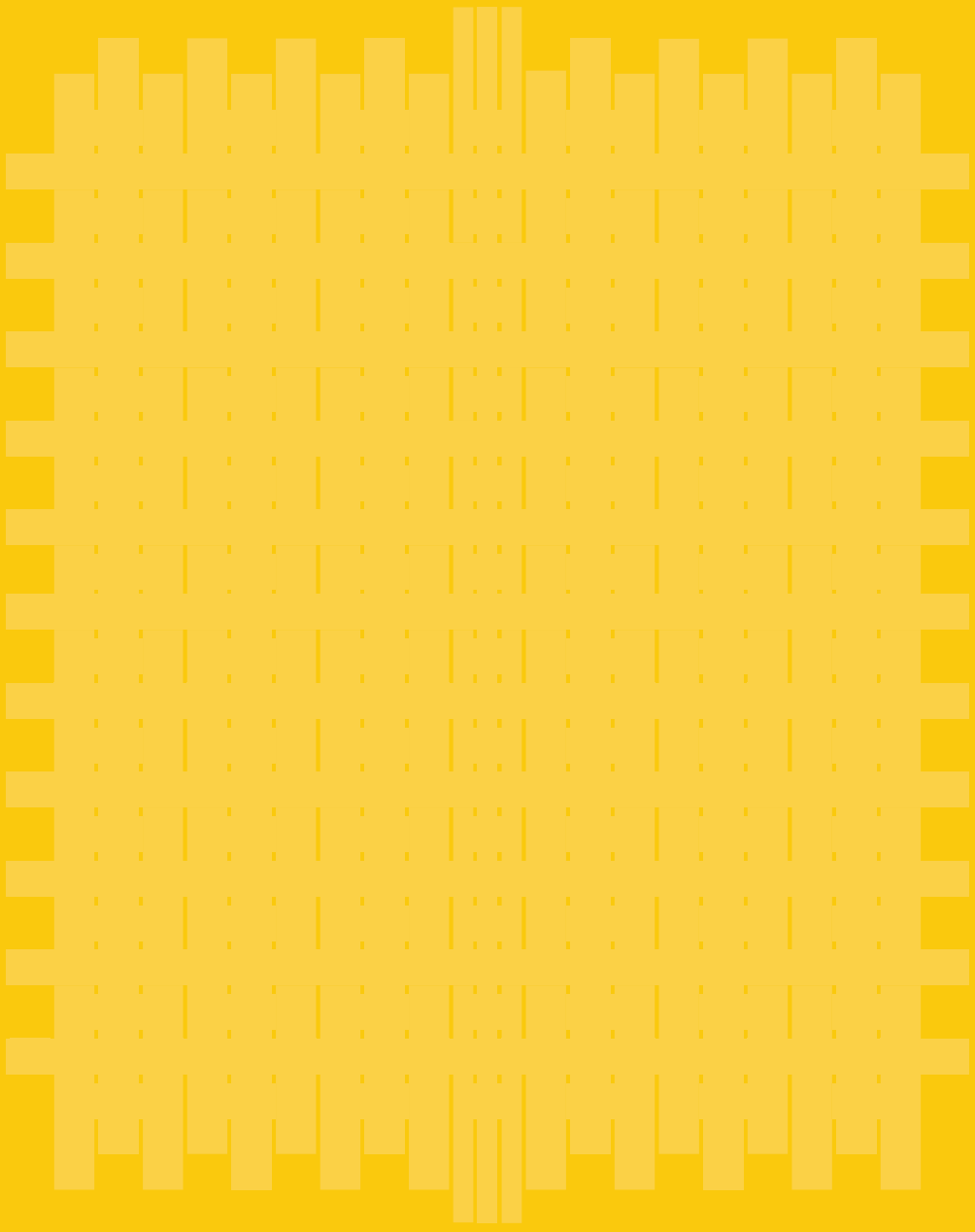
Pasifika people have a place here in Aotearoa. It is important that there is space for Pacific youth workers to support each other. I love the idea of continuous support, networking and relationship building, where we focus on the key values that hold us as a collective, so that we can better support our young people.

Mike Tuala (Samoan) is currently working as a CAYAD (Community Action on Youth and Drugs) Advisor within Auckland Council's Community Impact Unit. His primary focus is to help transform the systems and environments that perpetuate alcohol and drug harm, and to support rangatahi using a strengths-based and harm reduction approach.

Mike's previous mahi consisted of working with rangatahi through Odyssey House's residential programme and a secondary schools' programme called Stand Up!

He is passionate about educational outcomes for Māori and Pasifika, and how we can take more of a holistic approach to wellbeing and mental health.

He has also been a board member for a not-for-profit youth development organisation called The Logos Project, and for a secondary girl's college situated in West Auckland. He hopes to bring his experience in public health and education together to further improve the lives of rangatahi and communities. Mike is a proud New Zealand-born Samoan and enjoys getting out into the Waitākere ranges for a hike or a bush walk.



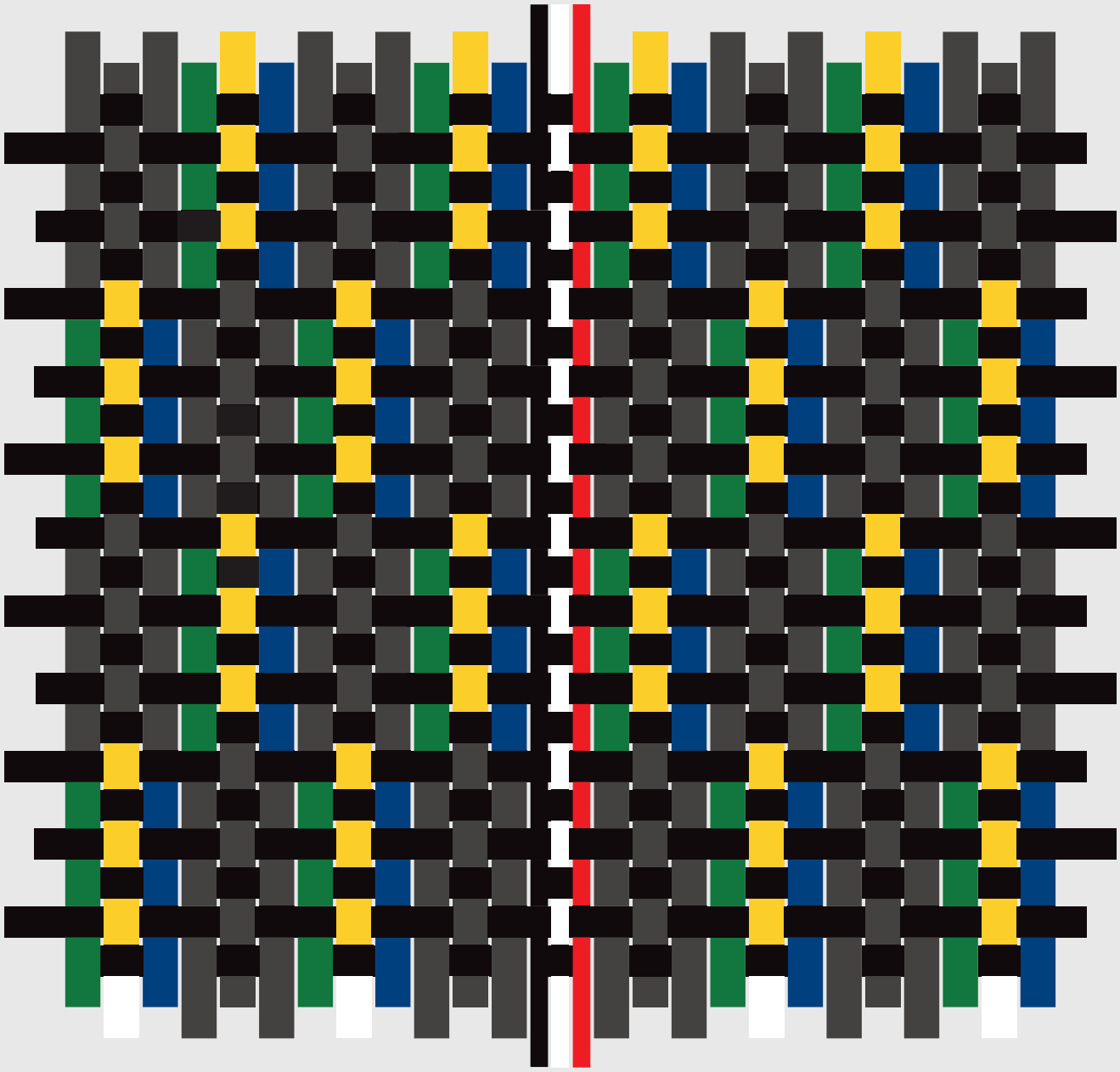
Dedication

We dedicate *Ethnic Communities perspectives* to all the young people in Lebanon, Palestine, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, Congo and around the world—those who fight to survive every day amidst global greed and the ongoing disregard for the human rights of brown and Indigenous lives.

This work is especially dedicated to the more than 13,000 Palestinian children and young people who have been massacred since October 2023. They will never have the chance to experience Youth Work in all its beauty or benefit from its support, but their lives and stories remain a call to action for justice, care, and change. Finally, this is dedicated to all the parents, grandparents, and ancestors who were forced to leave their homes in search of a better future for their children. To those who had to figure it out as they went—we see you, honour you, and thank you.

Ethnic Communities

PERSPECTIVES



Editorial

In this collection of articles, we explore the profound impact of cultural identity on Youth Work through the experiences of three dedicated practitioners.

Each story highlights the unique yet strikingly similar journeys of individuals who have harnessed their own heritage and personal experiences to empower young people from diverse backgrounds.

All three authors share backgrounds characterised by a rich history, a story of migration and a youth environment marked by a somewhat forced assimilation. They each broke free by connecting with their communities and reigniting their love for their identities first.

Navigating such a journey is challenging, especially in a global society dominated by contemporary forms of colonisation, which often translate to white cultural dominance. Through these stories and the remarkable achievements of these writers, we see that diversity and community building are the solutions.

Colonisation, in its historical and current forms, often demands that we adhere to a single way of living and doing, one that prioritises the 'easier and better' approach for all. Although these forms of colonisation are easier to navigate for Pākehā and people in the Global North, they are proving harmful to all, including those benefiting from them, as they strip us of our cultural heritage, ancestral learnings and communal ways of living. Our exceptional writers demonstrate through their work that recognising each person for who they are, with all their intersecting identities, is the way forward for everyone, not just for ethnic communities that are made to feel different and pressured to assimilate.

Our hope is that all youth workers in Aotearoa read these articles with an open invitation to explore their own identities, embrace them and embark on a journey of self-discovery as they learn about every young person they meet. We invite you to be curious about all the identities our young people carry, both those they are familiar with and those they are still exploring. Each one of us is unique and should be celebrated for our individuality.

Eman Ahmad Abdallah Ghandour Qur'an shares her journey from Jordan to Aotearoa, emphasising the significance of her name and cultural heritage. Eman's story highlights the importance of understanding and embracing one's cultural roots to build confidence and resilience in young people.

In another article, **Wasa Ali** reflects on how their identity shapes their mahi with young people. Grounded in their Christian faith and Somali heritage, Wasa emphasises the value of grace, patience and cultural acceptance. Wasa's narrative highlights the power of authenticity and cultural acceptance in building meaningful relationships and fostering a sense of community.

Lovely Dizon, in a Filipino researcher's perspective, captures the essence of being an Asian young person in Aotearoa through the words of a Filipino youth: "it's like you belong, but you're also different, you know?" Lovely's personal journey of negotiating her Filipino identity in Aotearoa informs her work, aiming to amplify the voices of Asian youth and destigmatise mental health within their communities.

These articles collectively highlight the transformative power of culturally responsive Youth Work. Their stories remind us that understanding and valuing cultural identity is essential in fostering a sense of belonging and success for all.

Sakhr Munassar, Rod Baxter and Kahu Ritchie
December 2024

Empowering Diverse Voices: A Career Practitioner's Experience with Multicultural Communities

Eman Ahmad Abdallah Ghandour Qur'an

Ko wai au? Who am I?

My full name, Eman Ahmad Abdallah Ghandour Qur'an, holds deep significance within my cultural heritage.

In Jordanian and wider Arab traditions, names are more than mere identifiers: they signify family, tribe and ancestry. My first name, Eman, meaning 'faith', was chosen by my parents, while Ahmad and Abdallah represent my grandfather and father. Ghandour is my family name, and Qur'an marks my tribal lineage, rooting me in the village of Al-Taibeh in northern Jordan. Each part of my name reflects layers of identity that connect me to my ancestors and inform how I engage with those I support.

For the past ten years, I have dedicated my career to helping migrant and refugee youth transition to and thrive in Aotearoa. Over the last two years, I have focused on career counselling in my role as a Future Student Advisor at Auckland University of Technology (AUT). My work primarily centres around South Auckland, one of the most diverse areas in Aotearoa. Here, I guide students from Pacific, Māori, and migrant or refugee backgrounds. My passion for career development has led me to establish Khawat, meaning 'sisterhood' in Arabic—a network that supports women across New Zealand in understanding their careers holistically. Khawat provides a platform for discussing critical issues such as bridging the pay gap, applying for advancement or leadership programmes, recognising our unique skill sets and lived experiences, and fostering meaningful connections while celebrating our cultural heritage.

Beauty in the complexity of our identities

My identity as an Arab woman, navigating life as both a migrant and a New Zealander, deeply shapes my work with young people. After arriving in Aotearoa from Jordan at the age of 11, I understand first-hand the challenges of balancing cultural expectations and adapting to a new society. This has allowed me to connect with young people from multicultural backgrounds. My own journey of finding a sense of belonging in Aotearoa, rooted in learning about Te Tiriti and embracing te reo Māori, has taught me that cultural identity is central to self-confidence and empowerment. This realisation guides my approach, as I aim to create spaces where young people feel both their cultural roots and unique perspectives are respected and valued.

As a proud Arab woman with roots in Jordanian culture and a career focused on supporting ethnic communities, my identity influences my personal and professional practices. My Islamic Jordanian heritage is a constant reminder of my ancestors and cultural values. Love, respect, relationship building, integrity, collectivism, giving and volunteering are guiding principles I draw on from my identity. These principles influence the way I work with young people, fostering a sense of community and identity among the young people I support. For instance, my roles as a Future Student Advisor at AUT and as the founder of Khawat reflect my desire to provide young people, especially women, with a platform and the tools they need to advocate for themselves, access opportunities and feel empowered by their heritage, rather than isolated by it.

Ethnic young people – an intersection of history, cultures and a new home

The young people I work with are incredibly diverse, representing a range of ethnicities, religions and cultural backgrounds, including Māori, Pacific, and migrant and refugee communities. Each young person brings a unique blend of identities and experiences, influenced by their heritage, generational status and social dynamics within their communities. Intersectionality plays a significant role, as many students must navigate multiple layers of identity and balance expectations from both their cultural communities and wider society. When working with young people in my community, there is a need to understand the diverse realities of each individual, rather than painting people or groups of people with one brush stroke.

Both as a career advisor and through my platform Khawat, I'm always inspired and humbled by the young people I come across. Supporting these young people isn't just about providing academic or career guidance, as conventional approaches to career development might promote. The young people I work with bring a multitude of intersecting identities and lived experiences that need to be respected and valued when discussing their future aspirations. Often, young people from my community are the primary

caregivers for their families, working several jobs to provide for their household, sometimes all while navigating the pressures of being the first in their family to study.

This means carrying enormous pressure to succeed and do well academically, often at the expense of their wellbeing. I recall a time working in a space where the young people I was supporting were asked what hobbies they had. Seemingly an innocent question, but many young people I work with do not have the time or the resources to enjoy hobbies, particularly if they are the primary caregivers for their families. Part of my work to date has also been about bridging these inequities by facilitating and creating spaces where young people can play sports or enjoy a new hobby they normally wouldn't have the resources to do.

I see this as such an integral part of my careers and course counselling practice, as working with young people in my community means going beyond seeing their career aspirations or study options as an isolated part of their lives. Rather, it's about finding ways to integrate and embrace our identities and diverse backgrounds to continue breaking down inequities within careers, tertiary education and life. Our young people thrive when they can bring their whole selves to all the spaces they are a part of!

What works for Māori works for my community too!

There has been a growing recognition of the need to address intersectionality in Youth Work. When I began my career, many support structures tended to overlook the layered experiences that come with being young, being a migrant and navigating multiple cultural worlds. Working within predominantly Western or Pākehā youth support spaces, I noticed that embracing one's cultural background or diverse lived experiences was not as valued. Today, there's a stronger emphasis on understanding how intersecting identities impact everything from mental health to career aspirations. In the context of Aotearoa, the work of Indigenous scholars and practitioners to push for cultural competency and promote kaupapa Māori or ethnic-specific frameworks within Youth Work has helped open the door for a broader, holistic understanding of youth wellbeing and career development. I've found that what works for Māori works for my community. This shift has allowed for a more holistic approach to careers development and has also paved the way for a multitude of ethnic and culturally specific support frameworks, something I embrace wholeheartedly in my practice.

For those working with young people from diverse backgrounds, I suggest adopting a culturally responsive framework that recognises the unique experiences and challenges of each individual.

- Investing time in learning about each community's cultural heritage, values, and language can create a more authentic connection.
- Approaches like a kaupapa Māori philosophy and Te Whare Tapa Whā model, which I use extensively, offer practical ways to understand and support a young person holistically—considering their physical, mental, spiritual and family wellbeing.
- Above all, approaching every interaction with empathy and an openness to learn is essential.

My journey has been deeply influenced by my cultural heritage and personal experiences. By embracing and celebrating the diverse identities of the young people I work with, I strive to create inclusive and supportive environments that empower them to thrive. Through culturally responsive frameworks and a commitment to understanding each individual's unique background, we can continue to break down barriers and foster a sense of belonging and success for all.

Are there any resources, theory, frameworks, or model ideas that you use that might be helpful for other people working with these communities?

In my work, I find that combining kaupapa Māori principles (Mana Taiohi) and Te Whare Tapa Whā model is incredibly valuable. Te Whare Tapa Whā, with its emphasis on the interconnectedness of taha tinana (physical health), taha hinengaro (mental health), taha whānau (family) and taha wairua (spiritual health), aligns well with the holistic needs of young people navigating complex identities.

Additionally, recognising the unique attributes of the '1.5 generation'—who are bridging the expectations of their heritage and their new homeland—offers insights into the types of support that are most effective. For instance, creating mentorship opportunities where youth can see themselves reflected in leadership roles can help them feel understood and encouraged to pursue their own paths.

Eman Ghandour is a career practitioner and community leader passionate about integrating Jordanian heritage with Te Ao Māori.

Through a holistic framework, Eman empowers individuals to navigate their career journeys, blending cultural identity, community values, and personal growth.

How Faith, Heritage, and Authenticity Shape My Work with Young People

Wasa Ali

Grounded in my identity

My identity profoundly influences my mahi (work) with young people, keeping me grounded and introspective.

This self-awareness is crucial in my role as a youth worker. By constantly reflecting on my own experiences and values, I can better understand and connect with the young people I work with.

Being a Christian has enhanced my Youth Work by sharpening my grace, patience and resilience, especially during challenging times. My faith provides a strong foundation that helps me navigate work, especially in difficult situations. Additionally, my Somali heritage has made me culturally accepting and relatable, particularly to young people exploring their native language or identity. Growing up in Lower Hutt, specifically Naenae, I was shaped by my community, which has been instrumental in my development as a competent youth worker. The support and values instilled in me by my community have given me the tools to be a positive influence on the young people I serve.

Authenticity and relationships

At Zeal, my organisation, being celebrated for my authentic self allows me to build deep relationships with young people. This authenticity sets me apart from other adults in their lives, such as teachers, parents and caregivers, making it easier for them to be themselves around me.

When young people see that I am genuine and true to myself, while being outside their usual circles, they feel more comfortable opening up and sharing their own experiences and challenges. This mutual trust and respect are the foundations of meaningful and impactful Youth Work.

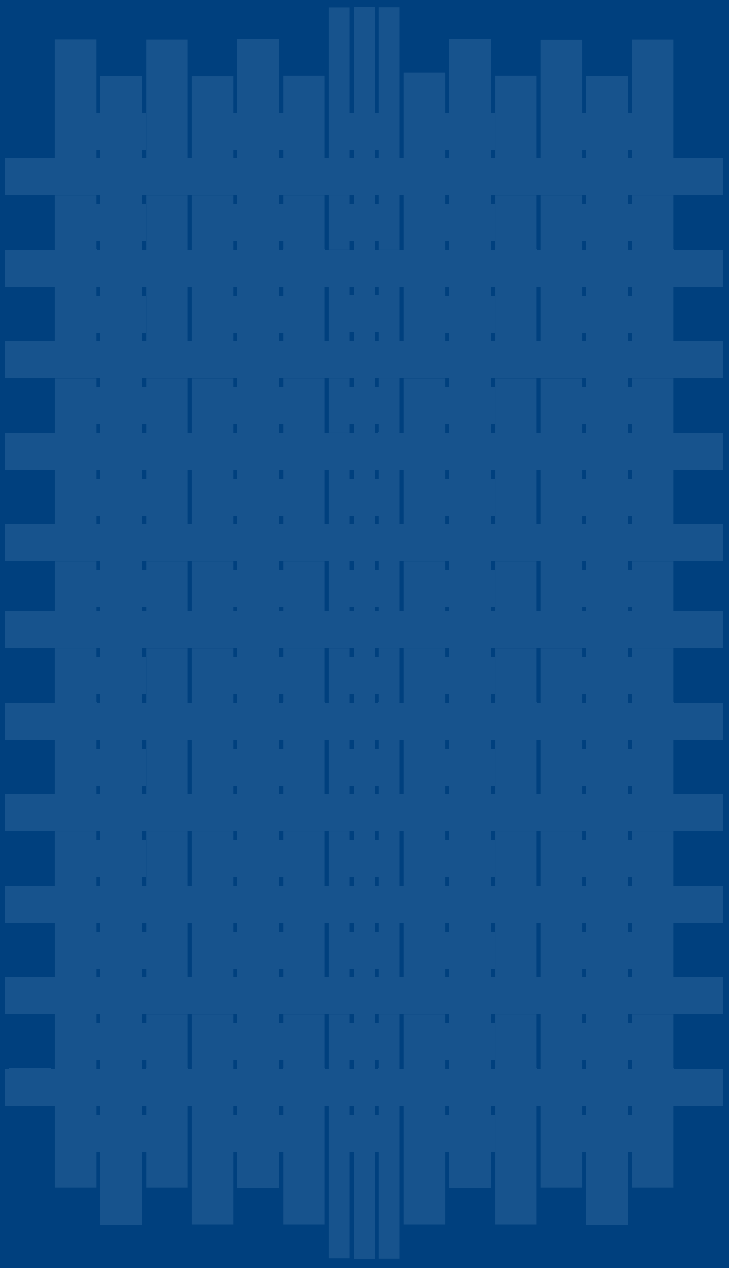
I work with young people from diverse backgrounds and social classes, diversity that enriches the interactions and learning experiences for everyone involved. I am always amazed by how they form friendships regardless of their backgrounds, thanks to the culture of togetherness we foster. This inclusive environment encourages young people to look beyond superficial differences and find common ground, fostering a sense of unity and mutual support.

Working in my community reminds me of my own needs as a young person with my own identity and intersectional factors. My advice for other youth workers working with diverse communities is to:

- meet young people where they are;
- take your time building relationships,
- always keep their best interests at heart;
- see them for who they truly are;
- set realistic expectations for your agenda—we are there for them, not the other way around;
- be transparent about what you can support them with, showing them your limits; and
- connect with your community and stakeholders to link young people to other organisations that can help them.

By staying true to our identities and fostering genuine connections, we can make a significant impact on the lives of young people.

Wasa Ali: (Somali) Grounded in his love for his community, faith and service. A qualified youth worker and an incredibly humble human whose work is a constant reminder that a different world is always possible.



Exploring Pathways To Being Fully Known

Dr. Lovely Dizon

"It's like you belong, but you're also different, you know?"

In a few words, a Filipino young person had encapsulated the experience of being an Asian young person in Aotearoa.

As a researcher, I'm particularly interested in understanding the experiences of young people and, more specifically, 1.5 and second-generation Asian young people. These are young people who were either born in Asia and moved to Aotearoa between 0 and 12 or were born in Aotearoa with first-generation parents. For my doctoral thesis, I focused specifically on 1.5 and second-generation Southeast Asian (SEA) migrant youth (12–18 years of age), with both parents from the same SEA country.

While these descriptions seem arbitrary, I believe these distinctions are necessary. Asians are often lumped together as one homogenous group that is viewed to have the same experiences, and therefore the same needs.

This could not be further from the truth. Asian young people living in Aotearoa come from endlessly diverse experiences.

Some migrate with their parents (who then either stay here permanently or go back and forth); some come as refugees. Some settle into big cities where ethnic diversity is more prevalent, and some end up in tiny rural towns where nobody looks like them. Some come as international students; some were born here. Some hold multiple ethnic identities; some feel strongly attached to one.

These examples only highlight one aspect of diversity, which is migration experience. The complexities continue. Asian cultures have their own distinct cultures, histories and complexities. Then, add to that gender and sexual identities, socioeconomic backgrounds, disabilities, experiences of ill health, and so on – the intersecting identities are endless. Yet, all these nuances matter, because they have implications for what that young person might need in terms of support. If we want to improve outcomes for our Asian young people in Aotearoa, a simple first step is acknowledging and validating these nuances.

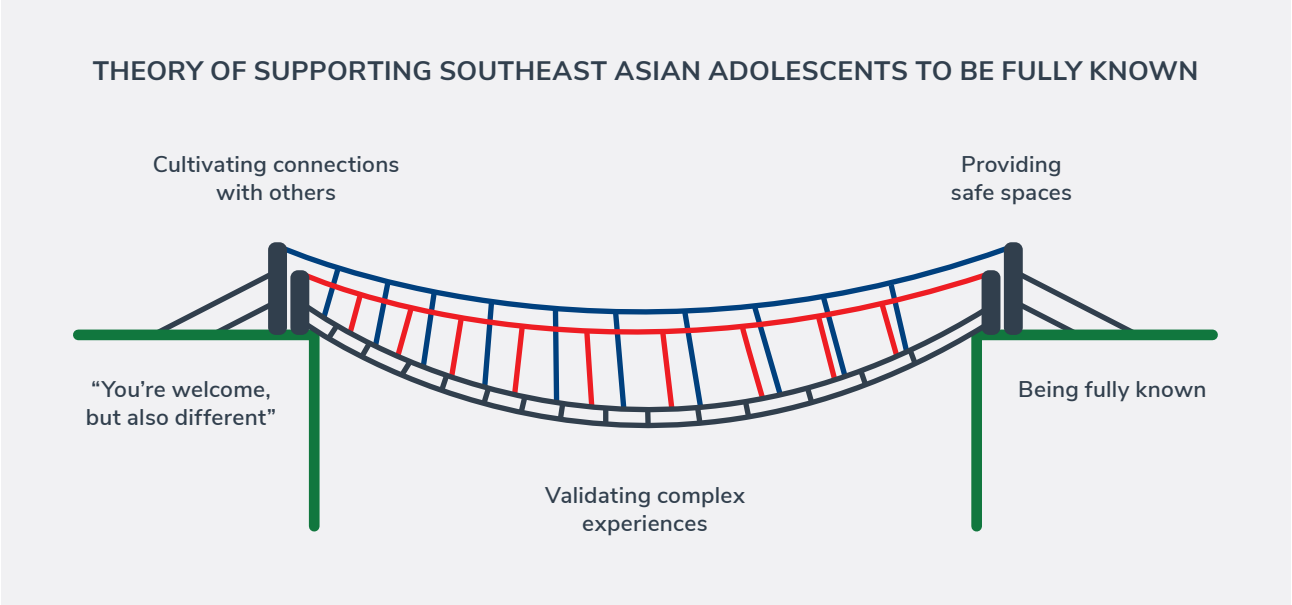
So why a focus on Asian young people? To put it simply, it's because who I am has massive implications on what I do. In fact, I became so hyper-fixated on figuring out whether I was normal regarding all the shame I felt about not feeling 'Filipino' enough nor being 'Kiwi' enough (whatever either of those things meant), it ended up being a central focus of my doctoral thesis. I wanted to understand this experience of 'feeling like you belong, but you're also different', and I wanted to see if I was alone in what I was experiencing. And it turns out, many 1.5 and second-generation Asian young people have felt the same way at one point in their lives.

I am a 1.5 generation Filipino migrant, a woman, an oldest child. I have had diagnosed mental illness, I have struggled to negotiate my ethnic identity and I have had various experiences of being Filipino in Aotearoa, both in big cities like Tāmaki Makaurau and small rural towns in King Country, Waikato. And all these parts of me are entwined in my work, which ultimately seeks to amplify the voices of Asian young people in Aotearoa and hopefully play a role in helping to destigmatise mental health within our communities. It sounds clichéd, but I try to be the big sister or Ate (a Tagalog word for older sister, pronounced at-teh) that I needed when I was younger.

My doctoral thesis specifically focused on understanding what kind of support 1.5 and second-generation SEA migrant young people wanted as they negotiated their ethnic identities (Dizon, 2023). Through listening to these young people, I felt the relief they had also been searching for. The relief of knowing they were not alone in all the big ways they felt about themselves, their ethnic identity, their personhood. Some Asian young people rarely get a chance to share how they are really feeling. And it might take some time to get to this point. They may not necessarily have the language to accurately express what's going on for them. When they share their stories, try to soak up every word. For some, it might be the first time they've said those words aloud.

Working with Asian young people means working through experiences of racism and discrimination, often occurring through microaggressions, so they are made to feel like it's not 'true' racism.

It means working through parts of their Asian culture that may be harmful and damaging. It means working alongside family, or managing family, or mitigating negative experiences with family – depending on the young person. At the core of it, working with these young people means we must first validate their lived experiences. They want to know that what they are going through is normal, that there is nothing wrong with them as individuals. They desire to know they are not alone in what they are experiencing.



As part of my thesis, I developed a theory entitled "supporting Southeast Asian (SEA) adolescents to be fully known", which I believe summarises some useful ways to work alongside SEA young people, and other Asian young people. The symbol of a bridge highlights the ongoing and everyday experiences of ethnic identity negotiation, where an individual can go from feeling 'you're welcome but also different' to 'being fully known'. The bridge also highlights the need to provide a common understanding between SEA adolescents and whoever is supporting them, regarding SEA adolescents' lived experiences.

Without this shared understanding, this validation of experiences, there are going to be significant limits to the kind of support that is provided. Then the power of having meaningful connections with others, as well as having safe spaces to express oneself and to share openly about their experiences, allows Asian young people to feel less isolated - to feel they have a community that understands, accepts and loves them.

Because at the end of the day, isn't that what we are looking for? A place to belong, people who accept and love us, and to experience what it means to be fully known, to ourselves and with others.

Dr. Lovely Dizon (1.5 generation Filipino): a researcher committed to amplifying the diverse voices of Asian youth in Aotearoa, with a PhD in population health.

Passionate about creating safe and intentional spaces, community building and communal care, always advocating for greater representation of the often-invisible experiences, needs and strengths of Asian youth in Aotearoa.

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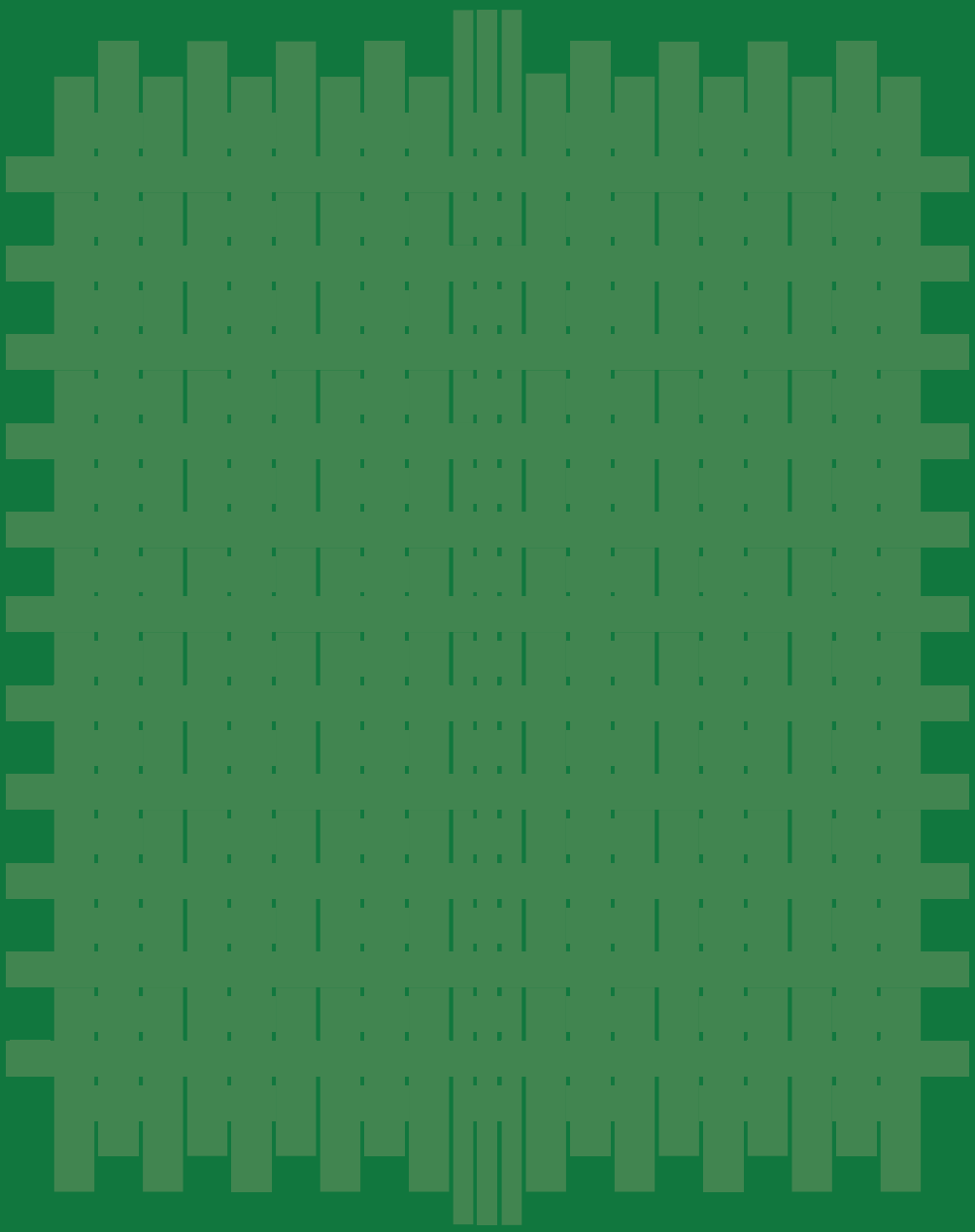
Reference:

Dizon, L. (2023). *An invitation to be fully known: A mixed methods grounded theory on supporting 1.5-and second-generation Southeast Asian adolescents as they negotiate their ethnic identity* [Doctoral thesis, The University of Auckland].



Dedication

This edition of Kaiparahuarahi is dedicated to our trans, intersex, takatāpui, and MVPFAFF+ rangatahi, those who are dreaming, resisting, thriving, and becoming in a world that too often tries to define them by limitation.

We honour your beauty, your complexity, and your courage. You are not a debate. You are not a burden. You are a taonga. You carry whakapapa, mana, and generations of fierce, radiant truth. You are part of a long line of people who have refused to be erased, and you are exactly who you are meant to be.

To our trans, intersex, takatāpui and MVPFAFF+ youth workers, thank you. Your presence is powerful. Your leadership creates ripples of safety and transformation. You are forging new paths not just for yourself, but for the young people watching, hoping, waiting to see someone like them leading with authenticity and heart. You are rewriting what leadership looks like.

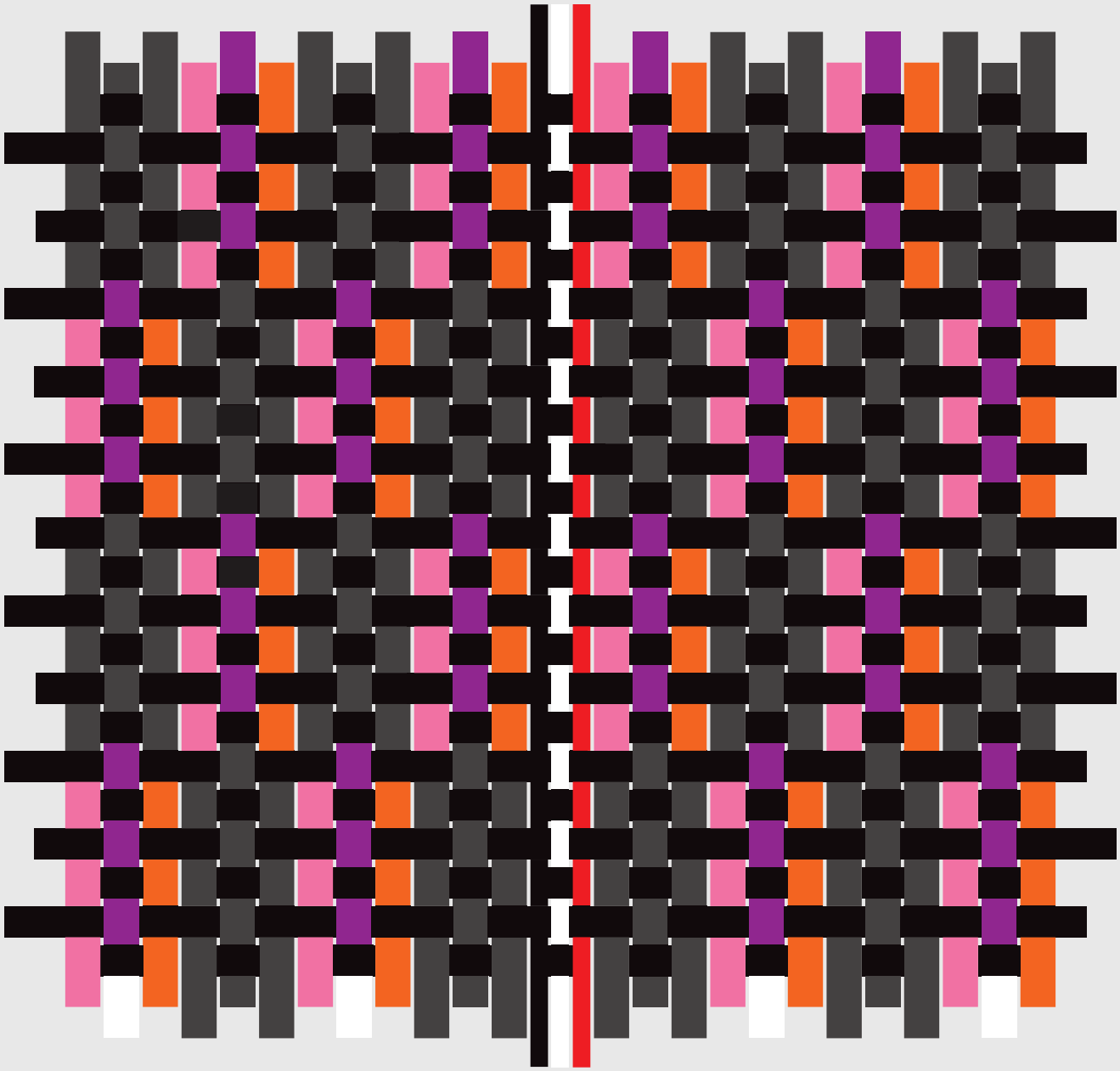
And to our allies in the sector, those who do the quiet, consistent mahi. Those who speak up even when it's uncomfortable. Those who centre manaakitanga, who listen more than they speak, who stay in the room when it gets hard, we see you. You are helping to build the conditions where all young people can belong.

In a time where global rhetoric seeks to erase, shame, and regulate identity, this edition stands as a trans, intersex, takatāpui, MVPFAFF+ affirming declaration of solidarity and aroha.

May these pages remind you that you are not alone. That you are already enough. That the world is better with you in it.

Rainbow Communities

PERSPECTIVES



Editorial

In this edition of *Kaiparahuarahi*, we uplift the voices and lived experiences of takatāpui, MVPFAFF+ and Rainbow youth workers—those who stand at the intersection of identity, resilience, and resistance.

The stories shared on these pages are not simply personal reflections, they are maps of survival, joy, grief, growth, and aroha. They show us how identity is not a checkbox but a lived, evolving terrain shaped by whakapapa, community, and the relentless courage to be seen.

We cannot speak about the experiences of Rainbow rangatahi without recognising the strength they continue to show as they navigate a climate of increasing scrutiny.

Across Aotearoa, political debates are questioning who qualifies as a woman or a man under law, and whether trans young people should have access to life-affirming care like puberty blockers. These are not abstract policy debates—they are deeply personal realities for many of our rangatahi. And yet, despite the noise, Rainbow young people are not backing down. They are rising. They are organising, educating, speaking truth to power, and dreaming up futures grounded in authenticity, liberation and care. They are building communities where everyone belongs. As youth workers, allies, and whānau, our role is not just to stand beside them, but to amplify their mana, protect their right to thrive, and ensure the spaces we hold are worthy of their brilliance. Now, more than ever, they deserve our courage.

Jordan Walker's piece reminds us that simply existing authentically, powerfully, and unapologetically is a radical act in a world still reluctant to let us live whole. They challenge us to confront how Rainbow inclusion has too often centred whiteness, leaving our Indigenous, disabled, and trans siblings to survive under umbrellas that were never built with them in mind. Their critique is fierce, and necessary. Colonisation exists within Rainbow spaces too, and dismantling it means rebuilding from an Indigenous lens, not simply adding colours to a flag.

Micah's reflections come from a place of quiet strength. They show us the tender work of holding space for rangatahi in all their complexity. Their story is not one of perfection, but of presence. Of being a safe person when they once needed one. In Micah's words, "being visible doesn't mean having all the answers—it just means holding space for others to find theirs." This kind of mana affirming practice is the heart of Youth Work at its best.

Tayla's powerful reflection, 'Loud, Proud & Tired', invites us into the lived experience of a Rainbow youth worker navigating the intersections of identity, advocacy, and care. Grounded in both personal truth and professional insight, their piece shines a light on the quiet resilience and fierce commitment it takes to work in a sector that still too often asks Rainbow practitioners and rangatahi to shrink. Tayla shares the beauty and pain of living authentically, the weight of witnessing harm, and the hope found in creating spaces where identity is seen as a source of mana, not risk.

While this edition of *Kaiparahuarahi* centres the voices of Rainbow youth workers and rangatahi, the kōrero doesn't sit in isolation. Two deeply moving and essential contributions by our MVPFAFF+ whānau are woven into companion editions of this series, offering intersectional insight that resonates across every page of our Rainbow edition.

In the *Faith-Based Edition*, Tali Aitofi shares his story of holding safe space for young people while navigating kidney failure, loss of spiritual home, and the journey to reclaim belonging as a brown, queer youth worker within Christian settings.

Dr MahMah Tohoa Lita Tetini Timoteo brings honesty and insight in the *Tagata o le Moana* edition. She unpacks what it means to live at the intersections of queerness, race, body liberation, and climate justice—reminding us that not all queer spaces are safe for all queer people, especially our MVPFAFF+ communities.

These pieces may appear in other volumes, but their truth belongs here too. We honour and uplift their whakaaro as vital threads in our collective Rainbow communities.

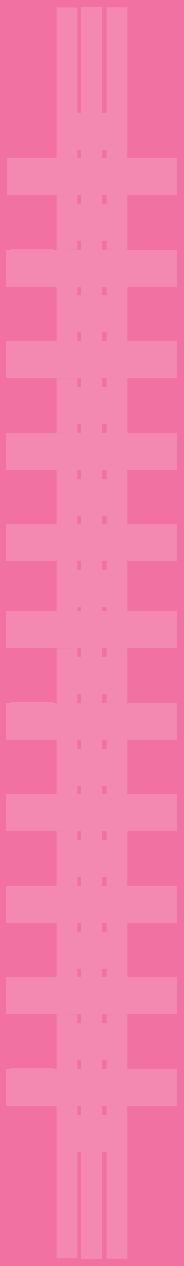
All these pieces speak to the profound power of intersectionality where gender, sexuality, race, faith, neurodivergence, and other aspects of identity don't compete for space, but instead weave together into something richly human. These stories show us that the personal is always political, and that identity is not a limitation— it's a location of deep insight and transformational potential.

This edition of *Kaiparahuarahi* is not a celebration of Rainbow inclusion as a finished product. It is an invitation: to sit with discomfort, to ask harder questions, and to reflect on what it truly means to centre justice in our spaces, not just for some, but for all.

Our hope is that you read these words with your whole heart. That you see the rangatahi in your life not as problems to be solved, but as taonga to be held. That you challenge the systems around you, and that you find your own place in this collective work.

Ngā mihi nui,

Zoe Findlay
July 2025



Loud, Proud & Tired: A Personal and Professional Reflection on my Experiences as a Rainbow Youth Worker

Tayla Taylor

I come to write this article as a Rainbow youth worker, an advocate, a foster sister, a leader and a practitioner with experience working with rangatahi who seldom see themselves reflected in the spaces and professionals that are supposed to hold them.

This is not a blueprint for how to work with Rainbow rangatahi, but a piece woven with personal reflections, sector insights and a deep aroha for the Rainbow rangatahi I have journeyed with and the Rainbow kaimahi and allies I get to work alongside.

Working at the intersection of my identity as a Rainbow wahine and youth worker has meant learning to navigate both tension and transformation. Through my mahi with VOYCE – Whakarongo Mai—delivering advocacy and connection services for care-experienced tamariki and rangatahi, and with Leadership Lab, delivering an intersectional youth leadership programme—I've deepened my understanding of what it means to show up as my full self.

In this piece, I want to explore what it means to live and lead from the intersections and what this identity means to me. I want to name the silences and microaggressions that still exist in our sector. I want to honour the beauty of showing up anyway and express my gratitude to the quiet allies and colleagues whose actions have said more than words. And most of all, I want to amplify the voices and needs of the Rainbow rangatahi in care who have shared what safe and affirming care spaces look like to them.

This is a love letter to the Rainbow rangatahi who are still learning that who they are is more than enough.

What does this identity mean to me?

I've always known I wasn't straight, even if I didn't yet have the language to describe it. For a long time, I carried a quiet anxiety about claiming the Rainbow identity, worrying that I wasn't 'queer enough', not embedded enough in the community, or lacking the right language to speak confidently. But I knew how I felt.

It wasn't until I began contracting with Leadership Lab in 2019, working on the Puāwai Youth Leadership Programme, that I found the language to articulate myself. The space created within that kaupapa invited openness, vulnerability and reflection, offering me an opportunity to begin to explore and share a 'window to my world'. It was a space where intersectionality was a lived practice embedded in how we worked, related and showed up. This kaupapa became the first place I felt safe enough to weave my identity into my mahi.

Being a youth worker and a member of the Rainbow community is a layered experience. There have been moments of affirmation where I've felt completely supported to be my loud, proud, authentic self within the sector. And there have been times where I've been confronted by deep ignorance and discomfort. Then there are the moments in between, where there is silence, neutrality, the 'don't ask, don't tell' energy that still lingers in parts of our sector.

To me, being Rainbow means embracing every part of who I am—who I love, how I live, how I move through the world and who I stand with. This part of my identity means community and connection with people I don't have to explain myself to. It means standing proud and taking up space loudly, lovingly and unapologetically alongside others who have been told to shrink.

Reconciling my Rainbow identity with my professional identity as a youth worker has been a journey marked by discovery, courage, disappointment, support, aroha and advocacy. It continues to be all of those things. And it continues to remind me that the most powerful Youth Work comes from a place of alignment where identity, purpose and practice are not separate but deeply interconnected.

Living and working in the intersections

Living and working at the intersection of being Rainbow and being a youth worker means my queerness is not separate from my mahi. It actively shapes it and teaches me how to hold space with empathy, how to challenge systems with integrity, and how to uplift those who sit outside society's norms. I've been able to reflect on what it means to live my truth with aroha and lead with authenticity with the belief that visibility is powerful.

I don't clock in and leave my Rainbow identity at the door. It's one of the lenses through which I see and understand the world, and connect with others who are navigating their own journeys of identity and belonging. Showing up as my full self in all spaces hasn't always been easy and has meant navigating bias, assumptions, tokenism and homophobia that is both overt and subtle. But it has also meant walking alongside others on their learning journeys, holding space for others to grow, and showing young people what it looks like to honour yourself and take pride in who you are, even when it's hard.

At VOYCE – Whakarongo Mai, we deliver advocacy and connection services for care-experienced tamariki and rangatahi, many of whom are not only navigating the care system, but also their Rainbow identities. As a Rainbow youth worker, the intersections I carry are central to my practice and shape how I engage, how I advocate, and how I push for systems to do better by our kids.

So, how does my identity influence my work with young people? The answer is—in every way.

There is tension often rooted in heartbreak from bearing witness to the deep harm experienced by some Rainbow rangatahi in care and the way their identities are misunderstood, questioned, erased, or framed as problems by those meant to protect them. I've seen a lack of Rainbow competency across our sector, including misgendering, silence, fear-based decisions, and microaggressions that go unchallenged. But there is also beauty in getting to support rangatahi as they explore their identities, and to help create environments where they can simply exist as themselves without apology.

Some of that advocacy for me happens behind the scenes: supporting my own whānau to become foster caregivers, taking in transgender and gender-diverse rangatahi, and wrapping them in aroha, safety, and possibility within our home. This is the interweaving of the personal and professional of my intersectional identity. It's systemic and it's intimate and it's some of the most important work I will ever do.

Homophobia, silence, and the ethics of Youth Work

At times, it can feel as though there is a reluctance or discomfort within parts of our sector to fully acknowledge the ongoing harm experienced by Rainbow rangatahi, and to treat Rainbow inclusion as a core competency rather than an optional 'add-on'. It's like a kind of strategic avoidance disguised as neutrality. There is a perception among some that the sector is already doing 'enough' when it comes to Rainbow education, or that these conversations receive disproportionate attention. These responses often reflect a lack of understanding, a discomfort with change, or a choice to disengage from the deeper work required to shift culture.

Over the past twelve years of practice, I've had the privilege of working in a wide range of local and national Youth Work spaces across community, care, youth participation and leadership, programme development, training and contracting. During this time, I've witnessed the quiet (and sometimes not-so-quiet) ways that homophobia, transphobia and Rainbow exclusion show up in our sector through microaggressions, silence, resistance, and at times, overt discrimination.

While many of these moments were not intended to cause harm, harm was caused nonetheless, not just to me, but to the young people we are meant to walk alongside. It's important to say that these examples are anonymised and drawn from a broad span of practice, including stories shared by sector colleagues and rangatahi themselves.

I've heard Rainbow identities reduced to slurs in professional settings—like in online hui where a glitch is casually referred to as 'gay', or in shared spaces where youth workers freely use terms like 'faggot' or weaponise queerness as a joke. I've sat in trainings where youth workers have rolled their eyes at the mention of pronouns like 'they' and replaced them with 'it' or have openly stated they wouldn't support a young person's gender identity if it didn't align with their own personal beliefs.

I've co-facilitated trainings where practitioners have admitted they wouldn't work with transgender young people or advocate for their needs, and devastatingly, have justified this with 'moral' reasoning. I've heard youth workers tell young people that if they were under their roof, they wouldn't be allowed to be transgender. And I've seen people in influential roles share discriminatory views about gender-diverse and non-binary young people on public platforms.

Not all harm is loud. Sometimes it's in the subtle assumptions like a colleague asking a young lesbian why she's not dating boys. Or the well-meaning practitioner who says, "I don't care what you are or who you sleep with, it doesn't affect me," not realising that *not caring* is part of the problem. When you're in a position of power, not caring doesn't make you neutral. Silence can be just as harmful as discrimination.

This has become even more pronounced in recent years, particularly as I've been in a heterosexual relationship. When people don't recognise me as part of the Rainbow community, their assumptions often surface unchecked. I've found myself in spaces where people around me speak freely and offensively under the belief that I'm not personally affected. It's in those moments that I'm reminded how invisibility can become its own form of erasure, and how quickly people will reveal their biases when they think they're speaking outside of the communities they're commenting on.

These attitudes, whether spoken or implied, are not just personally painful but professionally unethical. They are inconsistent with Mana Taiohi, particularly the principles of acknowledging a young person's Mauri, supporting the development of their identity and centring Te Ao Taiohi, the lived worlds of young people. To uplift a young person's Mana is to recognise what is right with them. The examples above show a lack of that recognition. A lack of Manaakitanga. A lack of Mātauranga. A lack of the kind of integrity our profession is built upon.

As a sector, we have Code of Ethics for a reason. And Rainbow exclusion, whether through bias, neglect or direct offence, violates several key clauses, including:

- **Clause 2:** Be a positive role model, online and offline, especially where it affects your practice.
- **Clause 3:** Avoid labelling young people negatively or treating them as problems to be solved.
- **Clause 4:** Act with honesty, integrity, and impartiality.
- **Clause 6:** Understand how dominant systems oppress people with marginalised identities and consider how this impacts young people.
- **Clause 12:** Ensure practice is equitable, inclusive, and challenges discriminatory beliefs and systems.
- **Clause 13:** Recognise how young people's lives are influenced by culture including gender, sexuality, and variation of sex characteristics.
- **Clause 18:** Reflect on your own values and how they impact your work.
- **Clause 19:** Treat all people with respect and dignity, even when their values differ from your own.
- **Clause 20:** Ensure the safety of young people above all else.

These are not abstract ideals. They are the foundation of ethical and youth-centred practice, and they matter immensely when working with Rainbow rangatahi.

A letter of gratitude to the ally in my office

This is a letter of thanks. A quiet acknowledgement to the cis, straight colleague who has shown me and our rangatahi what true allyship looks like in practice.

I've watched you grow in confidence and competence when working alongside Rainbow young people. I've seen the way our gender-diverse rangatahi gravitate towards you, the way they trust you, the way they feel safe in your presence. That safety comes from the work you've done and the work you continue to do to unlearn, to listen, to show up better than the day before.

I hear it in the questions you ask: "What are your pronouns?" "Is it okay if I call you 'bro'?" You ask with care and don't make assumptions. You ask so young people have the chance to tell you what's comfortable and what is right for them.

I saw you step up to have hard conversations when we were too tired to explain, once again, why that joke, that slur, that silence, is harmful. I watched you take that weight off our shoulders and carry it for us and use your voice when others haven't. And it has mattered.

I see how you share what allyship looks like with other youth workers, sportspeople, friends and whānau in your own communities where your voice holds influence. I said earlier in this piece that sometimes when something doesn't affect you personally, that's exactly when your voice can make the biggest difference, and I see that in the way you make noise when it counts.

It's not about knowing everything or getting everything perfect. It's about the values behind your kōrero, the intention in your actions, and the consistency in how those things show up in your practice.

I also want to acknowledge my wider workplace. While the Rainbow Tick isn't a perfect solution, the intent it reflects means something. It's in the small but important steps, like the training sessions made available, the resources shared, the Pride celebrations uplifted across the motu. It shows we're moving together in the right direction.

So thank you. For your allyship and presence, and for doing the work even when no one is watching.

What I've observed, across time and spaces, is a profound lack of:

- training that reaches beyond the 'already converted'.
- accountability for practitioners who hold discriminatory beliefs.
- research into the unique experiences of Rainbow rangatahi.
- promotion of the excellent research and resources that do exist.
- understanding of intersectionality.

There is often this misinformed view that minoritised identities are somehow in competition with each other. Intersectionality is not about competing identities—it is about complexity. It is about understanding that the young people we work with and the colleagues we stand beside often carry overlapping experiences of marginalisation. Failing to see that is a missed opportunity and a failure in our practice.

This piece isn't just about Rainbow young people but also about Rainbow practitioners and what it feels like to live and work in these intersections. For me, being a Rainbow youth worker means that these aren't theoretical issues. They are issues and experiences lived, felt, and navigated daily. And that is why I am calling for not just Rainbow awareness, but Rainbow competence. For more than just tolerance, but real inclusion. Because when we uplift Rainbow kaimahi, we are also building a safer, stronger and more ethical youth sector for our rangatahi.

What our Rainbow rangatahi need

Being care-experienced already places young people at the intersection of state intervention and systemic disadvantage. Adding Rainbow identity to that mix compounds the risks of harm and invisibility.

The Making Ourselves Visible report (Clunie, Fenaughty, & Haunui et. al., 2023) captured this intersection powerfully through exploring the experiences of takatāpui and Rainbow young people in care. Rangatahi described feeling unsafe in their placements, encountering transphobia or homophobia from caregivers, professionals and peers. Some had to hide their identities to stay safe. Others found themselves constantly educating the adults meant to support them. A key theme was a lack of understanding and competence among social workers and caregivers around Rainbow identities, particularly for trans and non-binary youth (Clunie, Fenaughty & Haunui et. al., 2023).

These findings were reinforced in the Oranga Tamariki-commissioned literature review *Rainbow Children in Care* (Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre, 2023), which highlighted that Rainbow children and young people make up about 20% or one-in-five of the children and young people in Oranga Tamariki care—and that Rainbow tamariki are not being proactively identified or supported. It noted significant practice gaps, including a lack of inclusive assessment processes, Rainbow-specific placement guidance, and training for caregivers and staff (Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre, 2023).

The *Identify Survey: Community and Advocacy Report* (Fenaughty, Ker & Alansari et. al., 2022) shows just how urgent this work is. One in ten Rainbow participants had been involved with Oranga Tamariki, with higher rates among trans men (16%) and non-binary participants (12%). Māori Rainbow rangatahi were overrepresented compared to Pākehā participants (18% vs. 9%) (Fenaughty, Ker & Alansari et. al., 2022). These figures are not highlighting an exception, but a systemic pattern that calls for changes to the system, as well as the importance of our competence in practice.

So what do our rangatahi need? At VOYCE – Whakarongo Mai, we see the everyday consequences of inaction: rangatahi navigating placements and whānau where their pronouns are ignored; the fear of coming out in environments where identity is misunderstood or pathologised. Affirming who our rangatahi are has the power to be healing. They need need safe placements, inclusive practice, and youth workers who understand that identity and layers of intersectionality are not 'risk factors' but sources of mana. They need youth workers and advocates who are trained, not just well-meaning, and access to Rainbow mentors, connection, community and healing spaces that see all of who they are and hold them with aroha and dignitiy.

Conclusion

My identity is foundational to how I practise, how I lead, how I connect and how I advocate, shaping the way that I show up for my sector colleagues, for our young people and for myself. Seeing how the sector responds to this identity in particular has meant sitting in moments of deep pride as well as deep discomfort, confronting homophobia, microaggressions and silence from the very people tasked with journeying alongside our rangatahi. But I also hold deep gratitude for those who have chosen to use their voice and model what it means to stand alongside Rainbow young people and colleagues, committed to ongoing learning and advocacy and to wrapping them with aroha, understanding and competence.

To live and work in these intersections is not always easy, but if there's anything this journey has taught me, it's that showing up as your full self is an act of resistance. For our Rainbow young people, for our sector and for all those still figuring out where they belong, may we keep showing up, carving out space and doing the mahi to build a sector where everyone is seen and celebrated.

Tayla Taylor (she/her) works at the intersection of advocacy, youth leadership, and systems change.

Based in Ōtautahi, she is a Kaiārahi with VOYCE – Whakarongo Mai, amplifying the voices of rangatahi with care experience, and a Senior Consultant with Leadership Lab, where she leads Puāwai, a youth leadership programme nurturing diverse community leaders. Tayla is a Mana Taiohi and Code of Ethics trainer, and a member of the Korowai Tupu Rōpū, advocating for safe, ethical, and competent Youth Work in Aotearoa. Passionate about youth development, Tayla creates spaces for rangatahi to lead, connect, and thrive.

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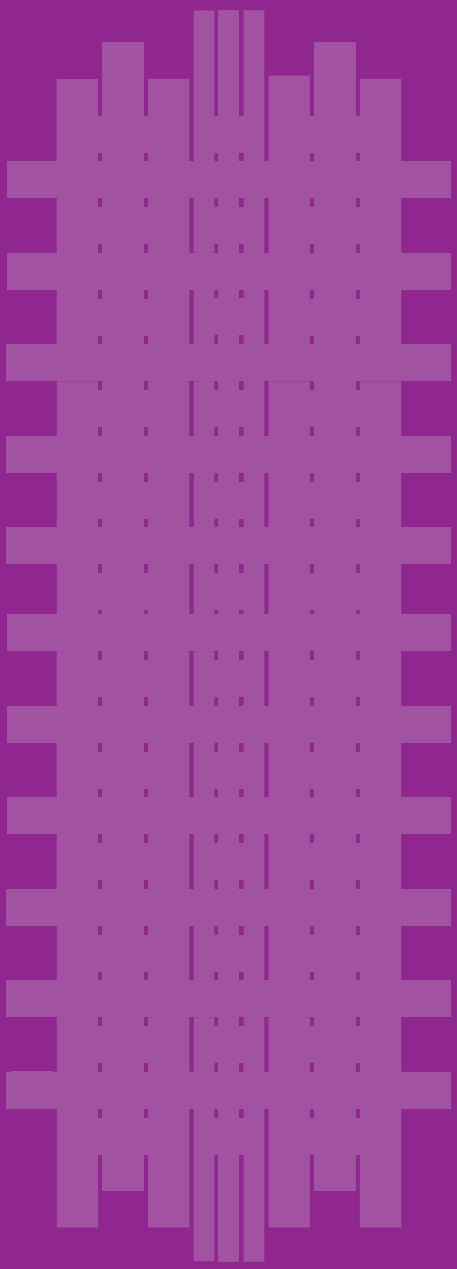


It’s Not about Having All the Answers

Micah Heath

Mauri ora

Nō Waitaha, me Kāti Mamoe me Ngāi Tahu ahau

He Kaimahi ahau mō The King’s Trust Aotearoa New Zealand

Ko Micah tōku ingoa

How does your identity influence your work with young people?

Like many of our Rainbow whānau, I wish that coming out was a positive story. I would love to recount a memory of being surrounded by love and support. Growing up deeply intertwined with a Christian upbringing was both beautiful and challenging—it added layers of complexity and prolonged me being able to love and accept this part of myself.

This journey has given me a deeper understanding of ‘otherness’, of navigating spaces where you might not be ‘the norm’.

Being an openly gay male and having an experience growing up within a conservative faith-based community has grown my empathy for the young people I work with, especially those who are questioning, marginalised or navigating complex identities. It’s helped me create safe spaces for young people, not necessarily by talking about sexuality explicitly, but by being authentic and showing that there’s room for everyone.

Tell us about the diversity and intersectionality of the young people you are currently working with.

My context has changed in recent years. I am no longer working with the same young people week to week. This means that I have the opportunity to connect with rangatahi from multiple backgrounds (Māori, Pasifika, migrant, neurodiverse, LGBTQIA+, etc). These overlapping identities shape the young people’s needs, challenges, and strengths.

Through being open to learning, trying and getting things wrong, I’ve realised that I don’t need to have all the answers… my job is to hold space for young people to find theirs.

How does who-you-are influence what-you-do?

I remember feeling so misunderstood growing up, often feeling worthless, unlovable and isolated. Navigating these feelings was tricky, and I always wish that I felt safe enough to open up to a trusted adult. Instead I found solitude in anything that suppressed these feelings. My heart for journeying with young people has come out of my lived experience, wanting to create safe spaces and acknowledge the identities of all young people. I have learned that it is so important to know when to speak and when to listen, to give room for other voices and to be intentional with inclusive language.

What is it like working with your community's young people?

As I mentioned, we work with such a broad range of rangatahi across our workshops: some are connected for a short term and others journey with our trust over time. It is the biggest joy to hold these spaces and welcome all rangatahi from different walks of life. I have learned that our content, language and practice needs to constantly be reviewed to reflect the young people we work with, ensuring that everyone feels seen, heard and acknowledged. This is something we are committed to continually working on and upskilling in.

Have you noticed changes in terms of intersectionality in Youth Work?

Yes, there's definitely more awareness of intersectionality. Youth-based services are becoming more trauma-informed, more inclusive of gender diversity, and more attuned to the ways colonisation, racism, and homophobia overlap and how this impacts the way young people experience the world.

There's still lots of work to do. Sometimes inclusion focusses on one part of identity without considering others, for example, Rainbow inclusion that doesn't address takatāpui rangatahi, or faith-based spaces that aren't yet safe for queer youth. But the willingness to learn, unlearn, and sit with that tension is growing, and that is the important thing. Young people are leading the way; they're asking better questions, expecting more from us, and pushing for spaces that reflect the full complexity of who they are. That, to me, is the most powerful shift.

What are your suggestions for other people working with young people in this community?

- Learn to sit with discomfort—yours and others'. You'll be surprised what happens when you lean into this.
- Don't make assumptions about someone's identity from appearance or background.
- Create space for voices that aren't always heard—especially trans, takatāpui, or neurodiverse youth.

Are there any resources, theory, frameworks, or model ideas that you use that might be helpful for other people working with these communities?

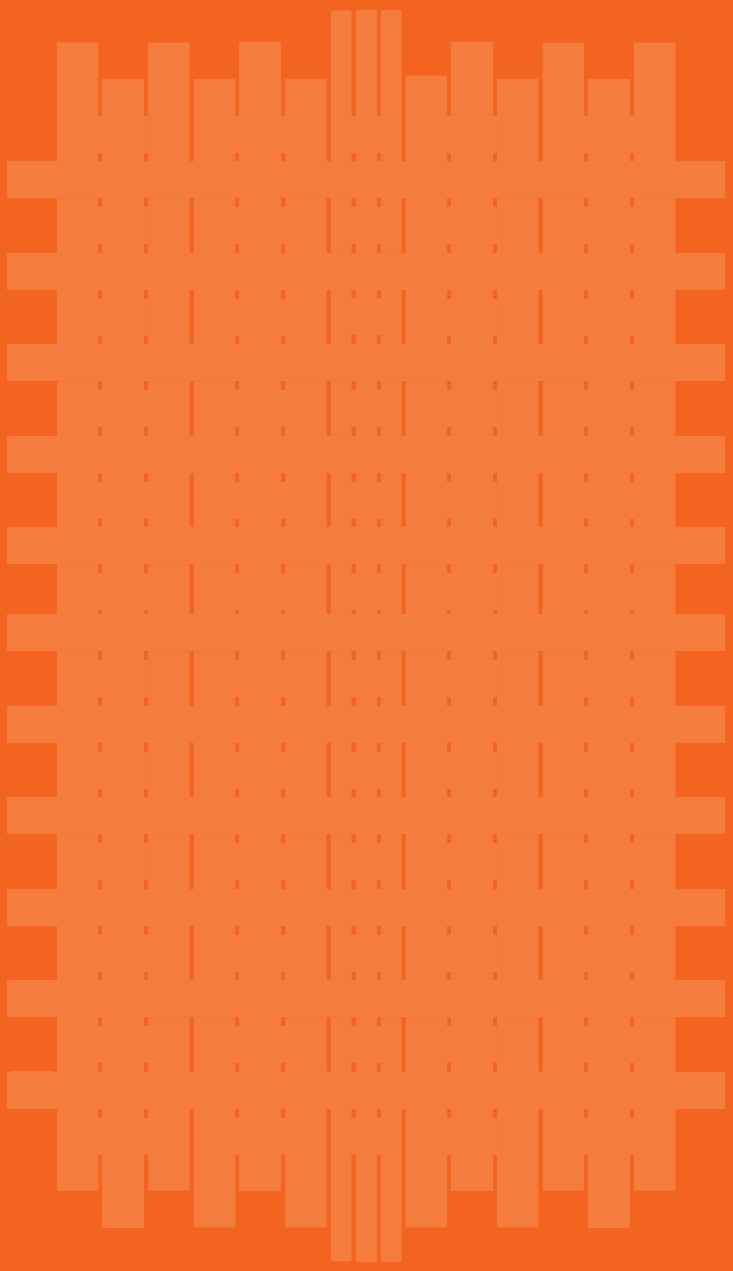
- The Mana Taiohi framework
- Te Whare Tapa Whā
- Rainbow YOUTH's resources.

Closing

I'm learning that being visible doesn't mean having all the answers—it just means holding space for others to find theirs. That's the kind of Youth Work I want to be part of.

Micah Heath (Kāi Tahu, Kāti Hateatea) is the Programmes and Impact Lead at The King's Trust Aotearoa New Zealand, combining a passion for entrepreneurship with a deep commitment to rangatahi.

With a diploma in youth development and ongoing reo Māori learning, Micah brings both heart and hustle to his mahi.



Flattening the White Umbrella of Refracting Hues

Jordan Walker

Lately I've been thinking about how I exist as a trans person in my 30s—as someone who took nearly half of their life to release the inside, out. I spent my youth disappointed that I couldn't shape shift my reality, disconnecting my innate belief that I had magical powers from how everyone else was perceiving me.

You're a girl, you don't know how to play this game. Stay here, be quiet.

I've been living in this skin my whole life, but the last three years have helped me to escape that, to shed anew and truly feel alien, existing in a world where everyone is so content with mimicking the suits that their parents traced out for them. I could wallow, and trust me, at times I do, but I feel equally distraught for their realities. Do they want to exist within that suit?

My trans identity has selfishly only been for me. But in existing, I've managed to do something I never intended: to influence others, to influence and be influenced by rangatahi. Maybe it was tikanga following me around, buried within me too, this duty to share and learn through the simple act of existing.

Motivated by the suicide of our brother, in my early to mid 20's I was advocating that the youth suicide statistics be exposed and taken seriously. These stats were intentionally buried by the knuckle-dragging government of the time (the right, go figure). Knowing I needed to lift my game to meet these bureaucrats, I moved into research education, facilitating access for literacy tools for low-decile primary and intermediate schools across South Auckland. Once I finished this research, I moved into studying social anthropology. These values have always been fundamentally part of my core, but transitioning was only for me. Before I transitioned, I was told that everyone needed to come with me, and that it wasn't a solo journey, even though the pain felt isolating, even though it felt like no one else suffered through trying to fit their existence into a structure – one that seemed to serve them more than it did the person transitioning.

My worlds collided when my core values met my trans self. How could I promote loving yourself, access in this decrepit system, knowing that you deserve better, knowing who you are, if I wasn't fully formed?

Inclusivity suggests that someone is excluded. Existence is a gift, and by way of existing, we are fundamentally included. It's true that life challenges some more than it does others, and if we want Utopia then we need to acknowledge that inequity, and act.

Yet there's irony in that acknowledgement when we are grouped up, and when intersectionality is excluded from the 'collective' rights. We are dubbed the 'Rainbow' population, and I use that kupu with discomfort, because historically it's been co-opted by the white majority, and marketed as collectivism and pride. I like to refer to them as my dysfunctional cousins. Those who like to exclude the rest of the alphabet and claim that trans women aren't 'real' women. Or those who forget that Indigenous justice is part of our fight too.

Our dysfunctional Family is all under the rather exclusive umbrella of several hues, systematically upholding white supremacy and the patriarchal oligarchy. I've seen it on a small scale in community groups, set up and maintained predominantly by the white upper class. Pākehā gays and lesbians, organisations now stagnant as our collective conscience of Indigenous rights expands and bubbles outwards, now awkwardly silent on issues that involve Indigenous members of their community. These aunties and uncles who fail to understand our differences. I've seen it on a national scale of Rainbow organisations funnelling funding from the decaying bones of the child Te Aka Whai Ora, claiming to be 'serving' Māori and Pasifika populations. The same white-dominated organisations who block smaller Indigenous-led Rainbow orgs, misuse funds, perpetuate racist behaviour and create abusive environments for their Māori kaimahi.

Micro-aggressions of racism are racism fractured, but racism all the same. It is perhaps more abusive to be aware yet unwilling to be inclusive.

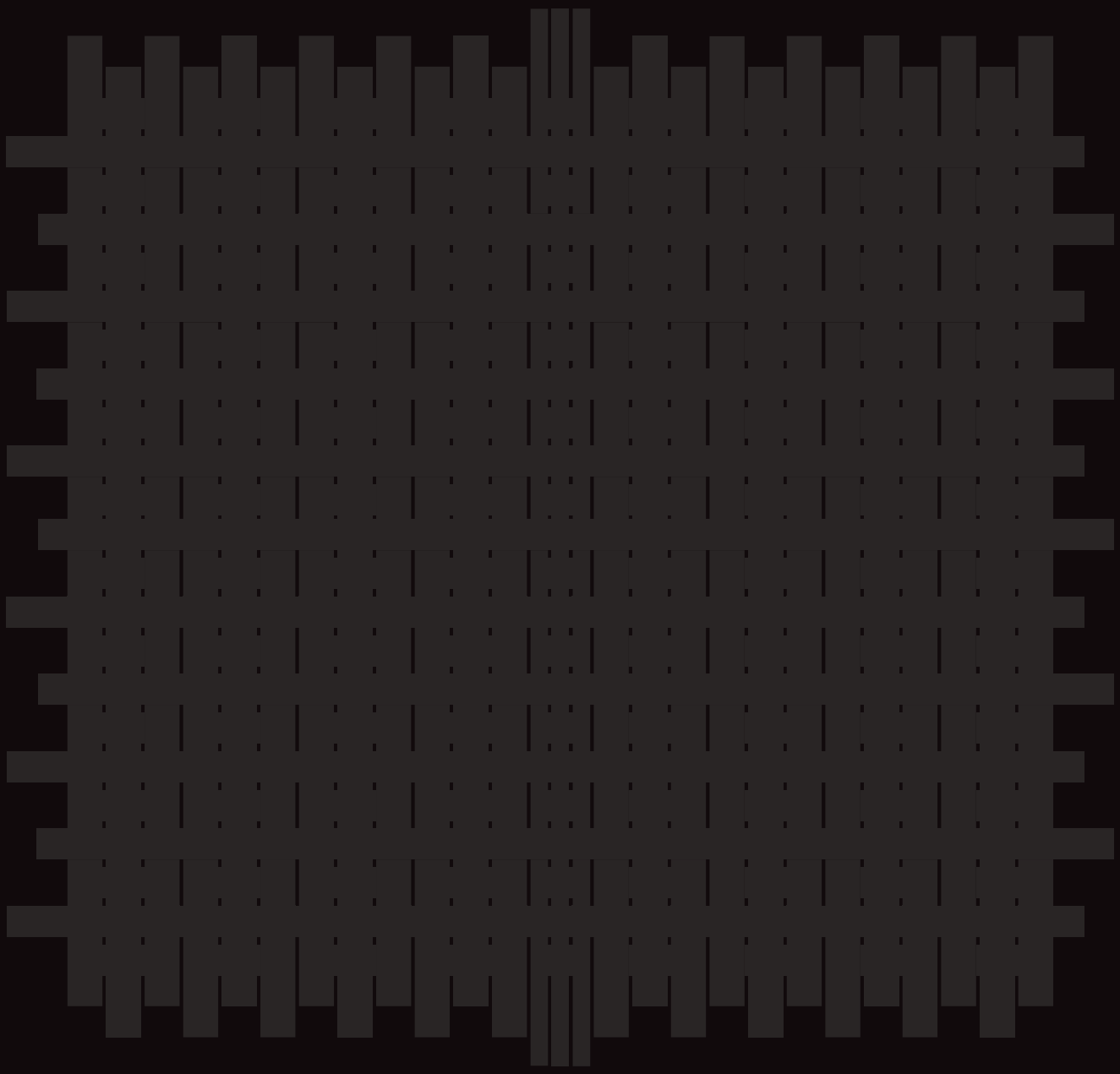
Rainbow organisations built on the bones of racist white people cannot decolonise.

They need to be disassembled, criticized, analysed and built anew from an Indigenous lens. Arguably, existing within the current system, Indigenous-led organisations also need to be careful when considering their structures. We are all colonised, and therefore need to think purposefully about our intentions, and the positions we are offering ourselves and others. Gifting ourselves 'Director' titles reads hierarchy. If we do not have the foresight of succession, of tuakana and teina, nor kaitiakitanga in having something sustained, current and evolving, we are not working from an Indigenous lens, we are merely reproducing the social landscape of our own conditioning (Organth, 2022, p. 27).

I empathise, this is big mahi, which risks implosion of our collectivity. We need to and can do better — if you've become comfortable sitting in a seat that has afforded you immense privileges, then the perfect starting point is planning your departure. It is ensuring the succession of a younger generation, and if they are Indigenous, ensuring that what you are leaving behind is better and fundamentally safer than when you first took that seat.

Jordan Walker (Ngāti Kahungunu ki te Wairoa, Ngāi Tūhoe, Ngāti Porou, Ngāi Te Rangi) is a takatāpui uri of Te Tairāwhiti, working as an arts producer, with various governance positions including with OutLine Aotearoa.

They're a social anthropology postgraduate with interests in the work economy and organisational anthropology.



He Mihi Whakamoemiti – A Dedication

This edition is dedicated to all young Tāngata Whaikaha: the dreamers, the disruptors, the truth-tellers and the creatives, who are not waiting for inclusion but building spaces where they already belong.

To those navigating a world that often does not see or hear you: your voice, your leadership and your lived experience are sacred. You are not only the future of Aotearoa, you are shaping it right now.

To those holding multiple identities: Māori, Pacific, neurodivergent, queer, chronically ill, Deaf, autistic, visible and non-visible. We honour the strength it takes to survive and the courage it takes to thrive.

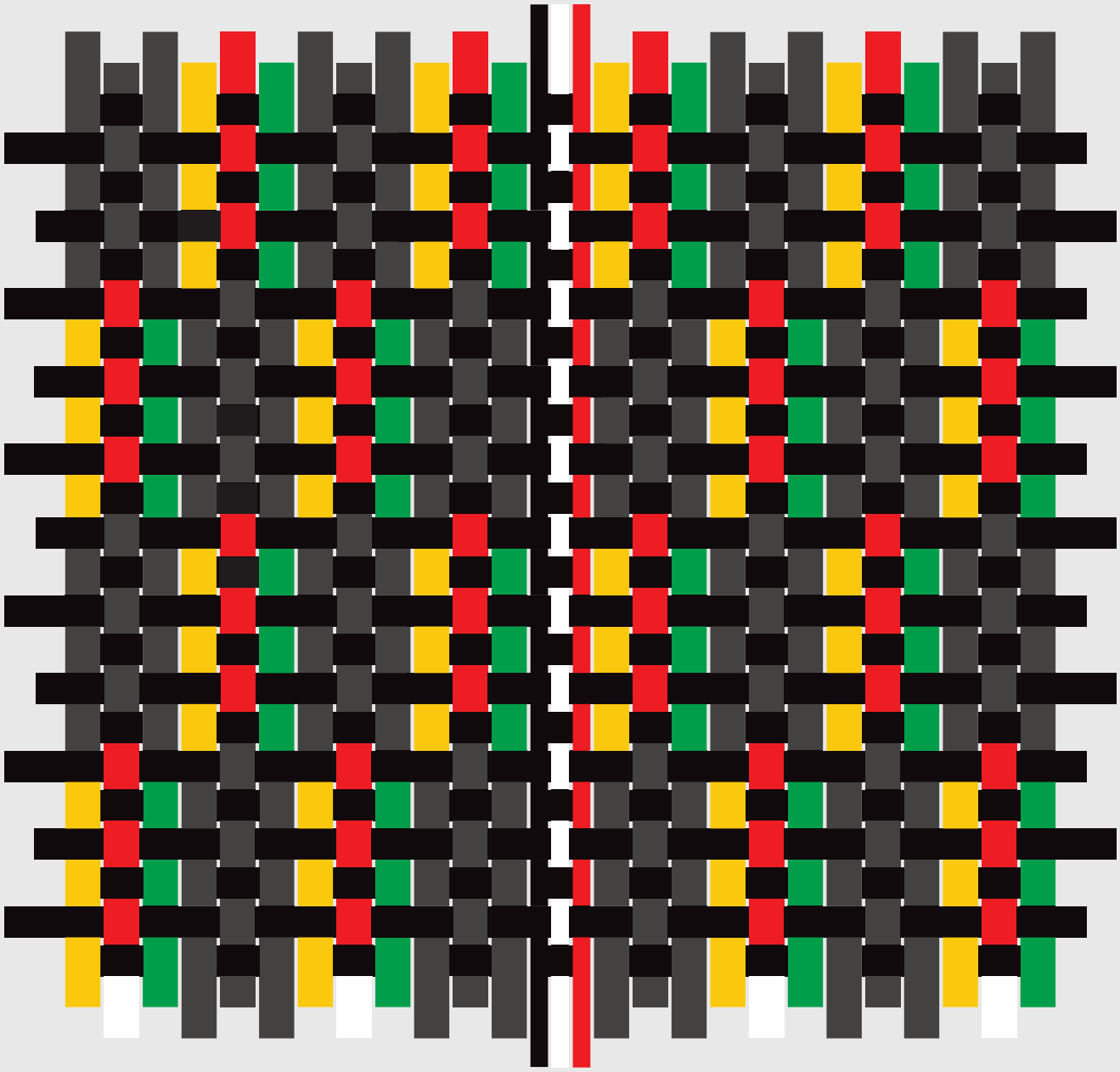
To the youth workers, advocates and support services walking alongside, not ahead. Thank you for making space, for backing rangatahi to lead, for choosing equity over ego and for staying in the mahi even when the systems fall short.

To the whānau who fight daily battles behind closed doors and still turn up with aroha. And to every adult who refuses to speak over young people and instead lifts their voice higher.

To all those working in the shadows: your work matters. Your care matters. Your belief in disabled rangatahi lights the path forward.

Tāngata Whaikaha

PERSPECTIVES



Editorial

In this mini-edition of *Kaiparahuarahi*, we reflect on the perspectives of youth workers and practitioners who are Tāngata Whaikaha themselves, and who support youth development in various ways. They truly live up to the description from Maaka Tibble (Ngāti Porou) who said in 2016 that 'Tāngata Whaikaha means people who are determined to do well, or is certainly a goal that they reach for'.

Ableism is an ever-present face of white supremacy that is experienced every day by Tāngata Whaikaha and is easily dismissed or ignored by able-bodied people. The perspectives of the authors in this edition challenge youth workers of all abilities to know better and do better when journeying alongside young Tāngata Whaikaha.

At a time when community-based youth development is under intense pressure with government investment having been decimated, youth workers and organisations working in this sector have felt this most acutely.

There is a tendency for 'mainstream' youth workers to rely on the organisations who focus on young disabled people – this is a cop out. Partnership and collaboration is vital, but these contributors challenge us all to consider our responsibility to create safe and inclusive spaces that support the Whai Wāhitanga of young Tāngata Whaikaha – as is their right.

John Nu'uausala's article highlights how his Pasifika values flow into his work with young people and how being a youth worker 'isn't just a job but a reminder of the responsibility of service, not only to our communities but to our people and the next generation'. His personal experience of disability from an accident later in life informs his perspective of the uniqueness of every young person's journey. He challenges us all to support young people to 'not only cope but find their voices'.

The article from Abdulla Shiblaq reminds us of the power of working with young Tāngata Whaikaha and ensuring they have both high challenges/expectations and high support. Well-meaning supporters can unconsciously inhibit the growth of young people with disabilities. He challenges us to engage with the young disabled people we support and 'aim to instill in them a self-belief that they can do anything,' saying 'I had that self-belief because of my upbringing'.

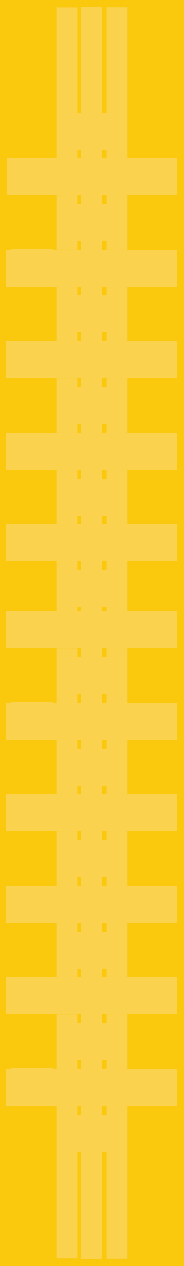
Amber Paterson's heart for social justice shines as she explores how her own intersecting identities, including neurodiversity, have built her perspective and influenced her practice. She reminds us that we 'don't need to have lived the same adversity as someone else to believe their experience. Instead, I hold space, ask curious questions and reflect on the taonga they share with me'. She also challenges us as readers to identify systemic barriers that we have a responsibility to dismantle.

Meleseini Luhama Tau'alupe explores their multiple intersecting identities that 'used to feel like a weight. Now I know it's more like a quilt – layered, warm and woven with love'. They challenge us to intentionally consider accessibility in design, always asking 'who are we forgetting?' Their call is to not limit Mana Taiohi to being a framework, but an 'invitation to walk with young people'.

All these pieces speak to the deep potential of intersectionality where complexity is both hard and beautiful, often unseen or misunderstood, and where the heart of youth development resides.

Ngā mihi nui,

Lavinia Lovo and Jane Zintl
July 2025



Self-Belief First: Supporting Young Disabled People with Confidence

Abdulla Shiblaq

My name is Abdulla. I'm a Muslim, Palestinian male born with a disability called Noonan Syndrome. During my upbringing, I wasn't involved with the disability sector too much. The only experiences I had with the sector were during my hospital stays after a surgery.

Currently, I'm a regional coordinator at YES Disability. We support young disabled people. Some of the people we support aren't always too sure what they want to do or what is available for them after they leave school, and we support them to find those things.

I believe my experiences influence the way I support other disabled people. I feel like I try to convey my experiences in situations that can help them in their circumstances. Because I was away from the disability sector during my upbringing and only got involved during my employment, I used a lot of mainstream services instead. This gave me the confidence to not always ask for additional help.

I try to implement this with the people I support: encourage them to try to build self-confidence and try things on their own first if they can, and then if they need support, reach out. I believe you don't develop your skills as a person without trials, and that's how I try to support people. I ask them if they can do something on their own first before someone helps them or supports them, to measure their skills and how much support they require.

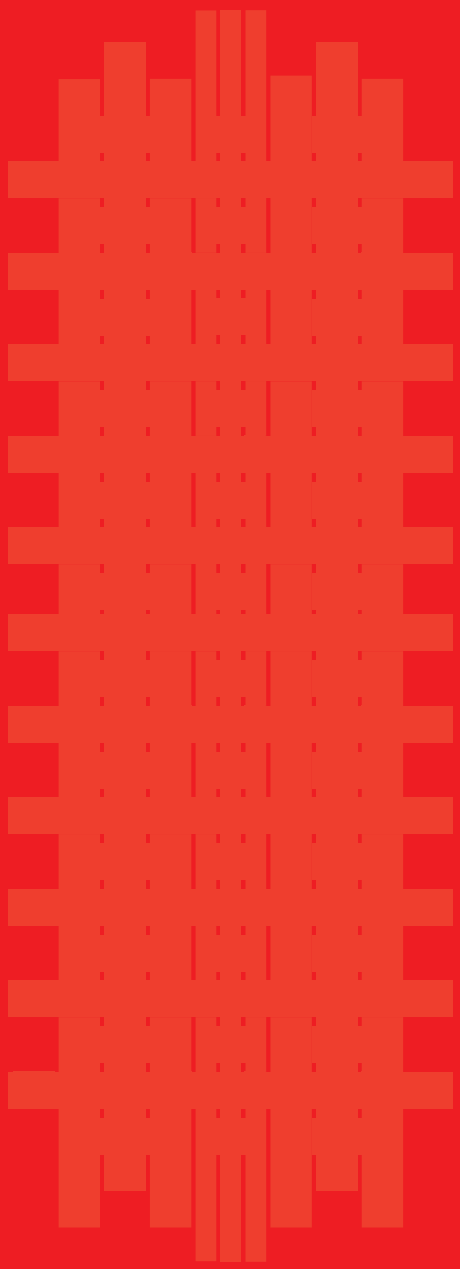
Through my experiences, I also have high expectations of the young disabled people we support, and I try to challenge them in ways they are not familiar with. I believe that we shouldn't cap someone's potential, but it's difficult sometimes to push someone who isn't used to being pushed in certain ways. I have to be cautious and analyse the young person to determine what they require of me. I recognise not everyone is in the same situation or had the same upbringing as me, so it sometimes does become difficult to understand certain situations. But just like I wanted people to have an open mind about my situation, I try to be open-minded as well.

I feel having an open mind to people's perspectives makes it easier to understand their situations, removes assumptions and creates the space to ask further questions. My experiences provide a different perspective that I can demonstrate to the young people, in the sense that they don't need to always rely on services and that they have the capability to achieve their goals on their own.

Abdulla Shiblaq is a Regional I.Lead Coordinator at YES Disability Resource Centre. He is a Muslim, Palestinian youth worker born with Noonan Syndrome, who draws on his lived experience to support young disabled people to build confidence, challenge themselves and pursue their goals.

Abdulla brings a unique perspective to Youth Work, encouraging self-belief and independence in those he supports.

Engaging with the young disabled people we support, I aim to instill in them a self-belief that they can do anything. I had that self-belief because of my upbringing. I still have high expectations of myself and try to challenge myself in situations I haven't previously experienced.



Not Just Surviving, But Thriving

John Nu'uausala

Being a straight Samoan man who is paraplegic plays a big role in how I engage with our young people. I don't see myself as a professional when I work, but as someone whose culture, values and lived experiences influence how I relate, guide and support others.

Being Samoan, I grew up being taught the importance of fa'aalo'alo (respect), 'aiga (family), alofa (love) and tautua (service), so being a youth worker working with young people with disabilities isn't just a job but a reminder of the responsibility of service, not only to our communities but to our people and the next generation. So I see my cultural and personal identity as both a gift and a responsibility, ensuring the young people I work with know that they belong, are valued, and have the power and potential to shape their own futures, just as I have been supported to shape mine.

I'd say our workspace is quite diverse in the sense that we work with those with disabilities but they also come from different cultural backgrounds and sexualities. I've learnt that no two experiences of disability are the same and that our young people carry multiple identities – such as culture and gender – that shape how they perceive the world.

It's made me more conscious of the need to create a safe, inclusive space for our young people, where they feel a sense of belonging and safety.

Thanks to growing up in a big Samoan family, the aforementioned cultural foundations of fa'aaloalo, 'aiga, alofa and tautua shape the way I relate to our young people. These cultural foundations help and shape the way I relate to our young people. I guess being a paraplegic makes it a little easier to relate as well. It's not something I lead with, but it is unapologetically me, and over time it actually breaks down walls. I guess it's a good icebreaker as well, as young people tend to be curious about my situation. And as someone with a disability, I bring lived experience and a deeper understanding of living in and navigating a world that isn't fully accessible.

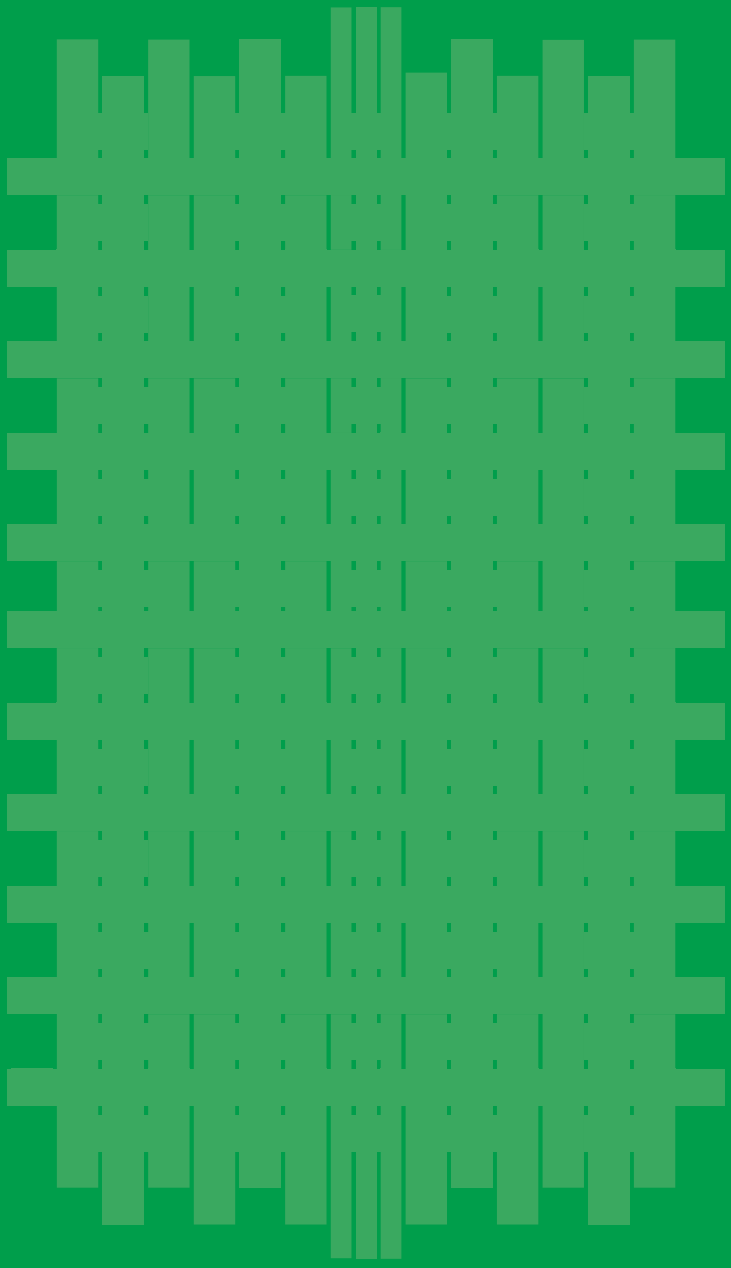
I find as someone of authority as a senior youth worker, I represent someone who knows and understands what it's like to live in a world that isn't built for you, but who makes it work. This is especially important for those who feel that their disability or identity makes them different, left out or judged. Working with young people with disabilities in South Auckland is both a privilege and a responsibility – they're not just clients or service users, they're my people. They're from the same wider community I'm from, and I feel the connections to the challenges they face, the potential they have, and the cultural values they carry.

It's about helping our young people to not only cope but to find their voices. Personally, it's about seeing our young people go from being quiet and withdrawn to being keen to step into leadership and say 'this is me'! That growth and confidence validates what I do as a youth worker from South Auckland.

Alongside all the challenges, like certain systems not working for our youth or supports not fitting their culture, services often miss the bigger picture. I believe my role is not only as a youth worker but as a community connector, a voice that brings the realities of young people to the forefront of conversations.

With that being said, working with young people in South Auckland gives me hope because I see their strengths, their creativity, their resilience and their pride. Give them the right support, safe spaces and a little belief, and they won't just survive, they'll thrive!

John Nu'uausala is a proud Samoan paraplegic man and Senior Youth Worker for PHAB Pasifika. Grounded in the values of fa'aalo'alo, 'aiga, alofa and tautua, he brings cultural depth and lived experience to his mahi with disabled young people in South Auckland.



Justice, Whakarongo and the Joy of Difference: A Personal Reflection

Amber Paterson

He ūri ahau nō tawhiti
Ko Kōtirana
Ko Aerihi
Ko Wēra
Ko Ingarangi te whakapaparanga mai
Ko Aoraki te maunga te rū nei taku ngākau
Ko Mataura te awa e mahea nei aku māharahara
Nō Waihopai ahau
E mihi ana ki ngā tohu o nehe, o Ōtautahi e noho nei au
Ko Amber Paterson taku ingoa.

In the world of Youth Work, intersectionality isn't just a concept I've studied, it's the lens through which I see everything. My identities are woven through every part of my practice when working with rangatahi and their whānau.

They've always been there, even before I fully understood them. These threads of identity that show up for me being neurodivergent, a woman, fat, in my 30s and white offer lived experiences and are the foundations I use to navigate this work and relate to the diverse lives of the young people I support.

One of the things I value most about myself is the ability to truly listen to people's stories and find connections where others might not see them. I don't need to have lived the same adversity as someone else to believe their experience. Instead, I hold space, ask curious questions and reflect on the taonga they share with me. I sit with that learning, compare it to what I know, and if it fits, great. If it doesn't, I keep digging. That's the beauty of growth in this mahi. It's layered, slow and deeply human.

Growing up, I often felt like I didn't belong, like I didn't quite fit. But that experience has become one of my greatest assets in youth development. My practice has always been about making sure rangatahi feel seen, not because they've earned it or have something to offer, but because they are human. Because they exist and that is enough.

My father had a profound impact on how I see the world and the values I hold today. His worldview was extremely rigid, black and white, binary and deeply critical of minorities. Some people were seen as better than others, and there wasn't any room for questioning or exploring anything outside of that.

For a long time, I internalised that way of thinking without even realising it. But as I got older and started to do the inner work, I began to understand just how much that environment had shaped me and how much I didn't want to carry those beliefs forward. That upbringing helped shape my strong sense of justice, not because I was taught it, but because I had to seek it out for myself. It taught me what exclusion feels like, what impact silence has and what happens when people are boxed in.

That experience has helped me navigate marginalisation with a clearer lens. It allows me to sit with rangatahi who are feeling unseen or unheard and to genuinely understand what that can feel like. It's why I care so deeply about creating spaces where rangatahi don't have to prove their worth to be accepted. I'm now the person I needed growing up, and I carry that with me into every part of my practice.

Throughout my journey in youth development, I've worked with a diverse range of rangatahi. My early experiences were shaped by major social disruptions, which taught me that youth development is about responding to real, messy evolving needs. I've worked in kura, run mentoring programmes, facilitated holiday initiatives and co-designed safe spaces for takatāpui, queer and gender-diverse rangatahi. One of my proudest moments was developing a wānanga-based drivers licensing

programme with nearly 100% success in its first year. This was achieved because we built it with, not for, rangatahi. We centred their learning styles, energy and ways of being, as opposed to outdated systems and structures that were not relevant to them.

These experiences have taught me that rangatahi are incredibly capable, creative and insightful. When we trust them, when we co-design with them, when we let go of control and invite them to shape the process, the outcomes are profound, not just for them, but for us as adults, too. I've been challenged and transformed by the rangatahi I've worked alongside. They have held up a mirror to my assumptions and reminded me to stay humble, stay curious and stay open.

In my current mahi, I support kaimahi through supervision. I still work kanohi ki te kanohi with some rangatahi, but what hasn't changed is my belief that all young people hold complex, layered identities, whether we as adults are invited to see them or not. If a practitioner believes they work with just one demographic, I'd be questioning how well they really know their young people. It's our job to earn trust, to build relationships where rangatahi feel safe to be all of who they are and not just the parts that are easy to understand.

Everything I do is shaped by who I am, especially my neurological differences. My neurodivergence allows me to pick up on patterns others might miss, to connect dots between stories, behaviours and systems. It also means I sometimes process the world differently, more intensely, more sensitively. I used to think that was a weakness. But over time, I've come to see it as a superpower in this mahi. It enables me to deeply attune to the energy in a room, to sense what's not being said, and to respond with empathy and presence.

I'm proud of who I've become. I've worked hard to unlearn the need to be 'palatable' or 'nice' just to make others comfortable. Young people deserve adults who will sit with them in complexity and not flinch. I'm learning every day how to do that better.

One of the greatest privileges of this mahi is sitting with rangatahi who are asking big questions of themselves and the world. Especially those who are neurodivergent, who see and feel the world deeply. I've seen how powerful it is when rangatahi feel safe enough to challenge dominant narratives, when they realise that what they've been told doesn't align with who they are or want to be. They don't want to be told how to live; they want to be equipped to make informed decisions for themselves, but they need adults around them who are willing to be challenged too.

Youth development isn't about fixing people. It's about walking alongside them, building reciprocal relationships and being open to learning from them just as much as they learn from us. It's the whole haerenga. Rangatahi are living in a time of deep social change, and they're more informed, connected and vocal than ever. That's something to celebrate, not fear.

Too often, I see systems that underestimate young people. Systems that assume they need discipline instead of dialogue, control instead of care. But when we step back and actually listen, we hear brilliance. We hear innovation. We hear the future.

I feel there's a tension in the youth sector. In some spaces, particularly those shaped by traditional values or narrow belief systems, change is slow. But I've also witnessed incredible moments of transformation through initiatives that centre identity, culture, neurodivergence and belonging. These moments give me hope.

I think resistance to change often comes from fear, especially when people are being asked to re-examine long-held belief systems and finding contradictions to their traditions. But the truth is, change is constant. It's happening whether we like it or not.

To me, being part of change means listening. It means engaging in hard kōrero, and it means knowing that relationships are strong enough to hold tension, disagreement and difference. That's the kind of resilience we need in our youth sector.

If you're in this mahi, I invite you to practice with patience and curiosity. When something a rangatahi says or does challenges you, take a moment. Ask yourself why that is. This mahi is like holding a mirror up to ourselves. Sometimes what we see surprises us, but that's where the growth happens.

We are all differently wired, and our mahi should reflect the diverse minds, cultures and identities of the rangatahi we serve. Difference isn't a deficit. It's where the magic is. One of the frameworks I hold close is the idea that society disables people, not their bodies, not their minds. When a space isn't accessible, we must ask: who was at the table? When it was designed? Who was left out, and why?

I think about the rangatahi who use mobility aids and are told they can't attend a programme because it's in a space with stairs. Or the Deaf rangatahi who don't have access to an interpreter, so they're excluded from their social connections. Or the neurodivergent rangatahi who are labelled 'difficult' because they don't sit still or speak in the expected way, particularly in their learning environments. These are systemic barriers, not personal failings, and as practitioners, we have a responsibility to dismantle them.

The glass ceiling that limited previous generations must be young people's ground floor. Their expectations are higher, their voices are louder and their courage is extraordinary. As adults, we don't need to have all the answers, but we do need to show up, hold space and stay open.

We need to understand that the world our rangatahi are growing up in is radically different from the one we knew. They are navigating climate anxiety, online communities, current-day genocides, evolving language and shifting social norms. They are processing multiple identities and facing new kinds of challenges. And yet, they continue to rise, to adapt, to dream.

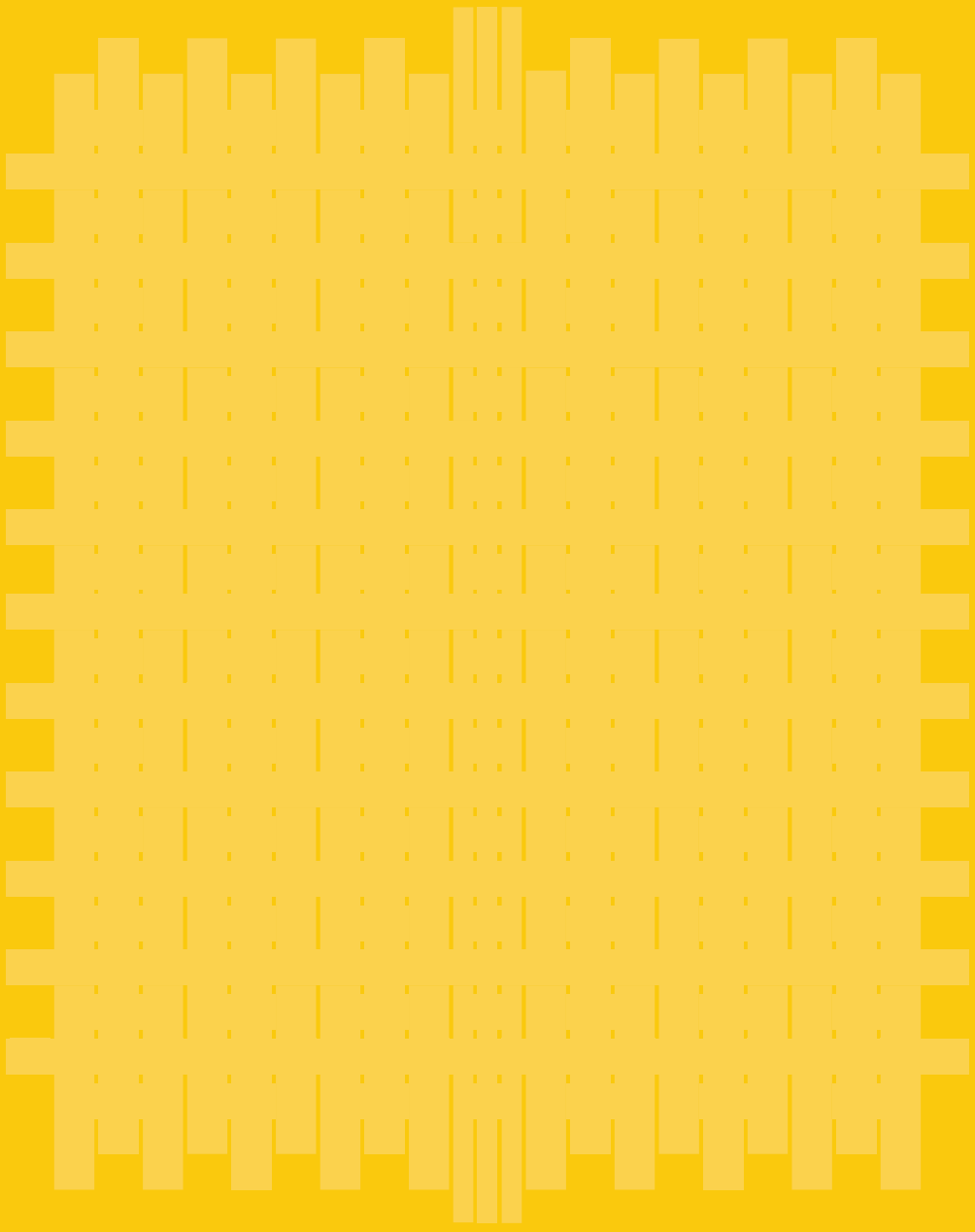
Let's be the people who stand beside them, not in front of them.

Let's be brave enough to whakarongo. Let's be the people we needed growing up.

Ngā mihi nui

Amber Paterson is a white, cis, queer, fat, mama, dyslexic, autistic, ADHD woman who has always lived and grown up in Te Wāipounamu.

She supports youth workers with professional supervision and believes in the importance of ethical Youth Work in Aotearoa New Zealand.



More Than a Quilt: Holding Space at the Intersections

Meleseini Luhama Tau'alupe

My name is Meleseini Luhama Tau'alupe. My first name was gifted from my great-grandmother. My middle name, Luhama, came from my auntie in Portland, Oregon. It means the outer rigging of the double-hulled canoes that travelled the Pacific. In broad terms it means support.

Tau'alupe is the name our whānau was gifted, meaning the seabird/frigate bird, a reminder of our whakapapa as navigators and wayfinders. I carry all these meanings with me, and they are a part of my identity.

My whakapapa stretches across Oceania: Tongan, Fijian, Cook Islands, Hawaiian and Māori. I recently heard someone say, "Whakapapa isn't earned, it's honoured." I think about that often.

Holding multiple identities used to feel like a weight. Now I know it's more like a quilt: layered, warm and woven with love. I carry being queer, non-binary, neurodivergent, disabled and Indigenous not as a burden, but as fabric.

The most important role I have is as a mother, or, as my wee one would say, a snack provider. Their name, Vai Amanaki, carries the meaning of water and hope. They live up to it in every way: fluid, powerful and essential.

I am proudly queer, proudly fluid. My preferred pronouns are they/them, but any pronouns said with love are welcome. I've been reclaiming what it means to be indigenously queer. The acronym MVPFAFF+ captures the Indigenous names across Oceania for those of us who live beyond the binary. I'm a child of the earth and the ocean. They are mine, and I am theirs.

Access, Identity and Honouring Whakapapa

Lived experience shapes everything I do. I think about accessibility in design: colour contrast for people with vision loss, armless chairs for bigger bodies and pronouns done with care. We don't claim to know everything, but we keep striving to do better. True accessibility means asking 'Who are we forgetting?' and widening the table, maybe even reconstructing or reimagining what the table could be. Maybe a woven floor mat?

I was diagnosed with epilepsy at five and spent nearly twenty years medicated with drugs designed for something I didn't have. After a high-risk pregnancy with Vai, where I developed postpartum psychosis, I was diagnosed with autism. Turns out, my seizures were absent episodes: my brain's fire alarm to overstimulation. I likely have ADHD too.

There's grief in learning this late, but also relief. If the research hadn't centred on white men, maybe I would have been seen earlier. Still, I parent with this new lens. I honour what I didn't have, the magic of experiencing the world in a different light.

I also live with endometriosis, PCOS, IBS and chronic pain. And yet, I have my Vai. I am so grateful. Shame around being disabled still lingers in society, but to me, pushing past our boundaries is a colonised mindset. Therefore, rest is resistance.

Empathy, Young People and Motherhood

Young people feel shame too. They don't want perfection, just empathy. I see their lives, the worlds they carry, like fragments of glass: sharp, almost seen as disposable. But when given space to repair and repurpose, we can lay those pieces out in a mosaic; they reflect light and colour. We are gifted the opportunity to support them through their unlimited potential.

Becoming Vai's mum didn't change my values, but it amplified them. I always saw the big picture: the kaupapa, the whenua, the people. But Vai made me zoom in. They taught me to notice the micro, the daily details, the being-called-in moments. Had I not had Vai, I'd still be a parent to many. But with Vai, everything came into focus.

Intersectionality as Lifeline

Intersectionality isn't an abstract framework to me. It is our collective space of accountability. It is the reason I exist and resist. It means living beyond the structural violence of colonisation, capitalism and imperialism. My identity is not separate from my mahi. It's the source of it.

My role at Ara Taiohi may seem invisible to some, but it's vital. I get to resource the sector. I send out MOSAIC cards, *Kaiparahuarahi* journals, *Code of Ethics* booklets, and I know where they all land. It's like a mind map in my head: a card lands in Blockhouse Bay, and suddenly that place is on my map. Though I'm not front-facing, I ensure youth workers are equipped to support young people. My role connects the kaupapa across Aotearoa, and I love it.

Youth Work and Systemic Vision

I think the youth development sector is ahead of its time. The way we continuously work towards honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the way we honour young people through practicing Mana Taiohi, it's where many of our other sectors will be in 10 to 20 years. We're clearing the weeds for others to follow. Mana Taiohi isn't just a framework. It's an invitation to walk with young people. It helps us to better understand how to reach those struggling with housing, mental health and identity. And it shows us, too.

If we aren't serving the most vulnerable, what are we doing? Nelson Mandela once said, "The true character of society is revealed in how it treats its children." So when we look at statistics, we need to go beyond the numbers. We need to ask what we're missing in the story.

Capitalism is structural violence: physically, mentally and emotionally. I learned that especially during COVID. I worked in a shop without PPE, saved only by a manager who studied biomedicine. I didn't realise the risk I carried to myself, my mother (who works in a dementia ward) and the tamariki I cared for. What would it mean to work outside of productivity and deadlines? To work in a way that centres people, not just outcomes?

"Don't bleed on those who didn't cut you" – Community, Supervision and Support

Poetry and writing guide me. I often say art is a whitewashed word for culture. What inspires me is culture. It reminds me not to tokenise, not to dilute someone's mana.

My advice to youth workers navigating complex identities? Go to therapy. Build community. Create support systems so that your mamae doesn't bleed onto those who didn't cut you. That quote sits with me deeply. It reminds me that healing is also a form of accountability and care.

Supervision gave me language to reflect on my practice. Therapy helped me unpack old wounds. Both are essential. We deserve spaces to process and heal.

Young Resistance and Dreams for the Sector

Young people are what give me hope. Always.

Recently, in response to ICE raids in the US, young people across cities like LA, New York, Seattle and Chicago began throwing glitter on the faces of ICE officers. When officers removed their masks later, the glitter stayed, identifying them. This act wasn't random, it was resistance: bold, strategic, joyful. Glitter became protest. It was funny, but it was also deadly serious. That's the brilliance of young people: they take the unbearable and respond with something deeply human and deeply political. They do what adults often can't – make hope visible.

My dream? That youth workers never have to fight over funding crumbs again.

Imagine what we could do if we were properly resourced and valued as an essential service. The youth sector feeds into every other sector. It deserves to be recognised, respected and fully funded.

Meleseini Luhama Tau'alupe – Survivor, fighter, carer, and excellent snack dealer to their wee one. Here for the kaupapa!

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Refaat Alareer (2024). *If I Must Die: Poetry and Prose*. OR Books.

Layla F. Saad (2020). *Me and White Supremacy*. Sourcebooks.

Bianca Elkington, Moana Jackson, et al. (2020). *Imagining Decolonisation*. Bridget Williams Books.

Teresia Teaiwa. Various Works.

Karlo Mila (2005). *Dream Fish Floating*. Huia Publishers.

A few pieces that have shaped me:

- *If I Must Die* by Refaat Alareer: a poem from Gaza about becoming something more than a martyr. "If I must die, let it bring hope. Let it be a tale."
- *Me and White Supremacy* by Layla F. Saad: "unpacking how everything is rooted in whiteness."
- *Imagining Decolonisation*: a collection of work, featuring Moana Jackson, that made me weep.
- The work of Teresia Teaiwa: "We sweat and cry salt water, so we know that the ocean is really in our blood."
- *Dream Fish Floating* by Karlo Mila: a Tongan poet who submitted a poem to Parliament on the Treaty Principles Bill. Badass.

Dedication-Te Whakapono me te Wairuatanga

This edition is dedicated to the thread that connects and runs through all religions, faith, and spirituality, the call to compassion and to love and care for others.

As we reflect on the role of faith and spirituality in the lives of young people, we hold in our hearts those whose daily realities are shaped by conflict, loss, and uncertainty. We honour the survivors of harm in State and Faith-based care. The weight you carry is immense, and the strength it takes to seek restoration in places where trust was broken is sacred.

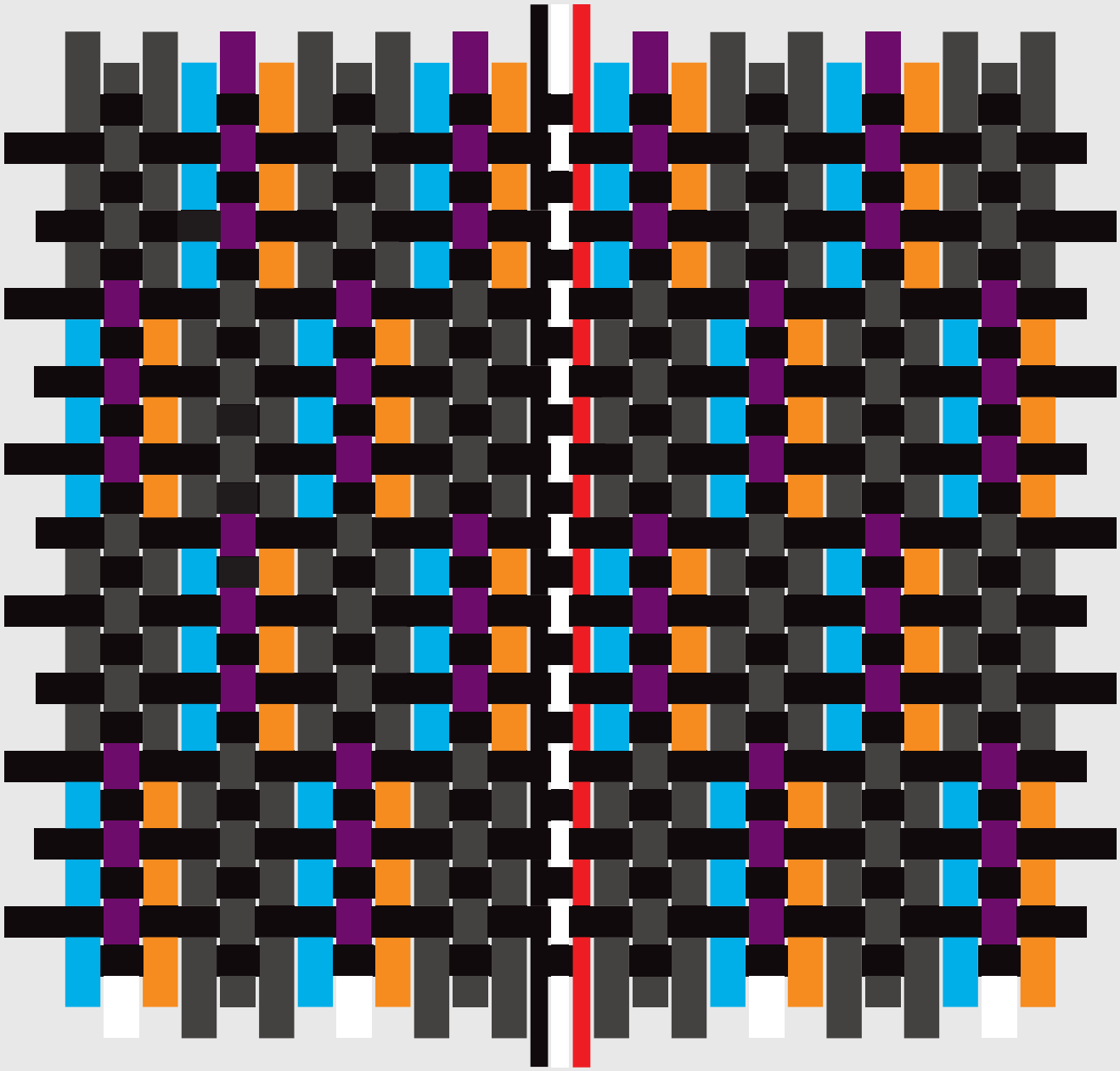
To our fellow youth workers and young people further afield, in the midst of devastation the people of Palestine and Gaza continue to show deep resilience, dignity, and faith — holding fast to their identity, whakapapa, and hope.

May this be an offering of solidarity.

May we continue to be youth workers who listen deeply, walk gently, and commit ourselves to peace and justice — both here and across the world.

Te Whakapono me te Wairuatanga

PERSPECTIVES



Editorial

In every facet of Youth Work—schools, faith-based programmes, community centres—we are constantly reminded that young people enter our spaces as complex individuals. They carry layered identities shaped by race, gender, sexuality, ability, and culture. And for many, faith is a vital and formative part of that intersectional mix.

Intersectionality—a concept developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, reminds us that identities are not just separate parts added together but parts interwoven in ways that are shaped by lived experience. In a Youth Work context, it's important to consider the intersectionality our young people experience, how different aspects of a young person's identity might intersect with each other, and also, the ways in which intersectionality is experienced by youth workers themselves.

In this edition, we hear from Kate Dunstan-Brown who reflects on Youth Work through the lens of faith, belonging, and bicultural commitment. Drawing from her own experience as a third culture kid and Christian pastor, Kate explores how her identity, theology, and values shape her work with high school-aged youth in urban Wellington. She highlights the importance of *imago dei*—the belief that every young person is made in the image of God—as a foundation for inclusive, respectful, and empowering practice. Kate addresses the challenges of navigating mental health needs, fostering belonging in insular peer groups, and maintaining wellbeing as a youth worker. She advocates for intersectional awareness, cultural humility, and the use of frameworks like *The Code of Ethics for Youth Work in Aotearoa* and *Growing Young* to support meaningful and sustainable youth engagement.

Tyla Harrison-Hunt reflects on his journey as an intersectional leader shaped by his Māori and Muslim identities. Raised with strong values of servant leadership, he found alignment between tikanga Māori and Islam, both emphasising care, humility, and collective wellbeing.

After the Christchurch mosque attacks, he helped bridge communities, supporting grief and healing. His lived experience led him to run for local government, where he now champions youth and multicultural voices. Tyla believes intersectionality is a strength, not a barrier, and calls for leadership that makes space for diverse, relational, and transformational voices.

Aaliyah Turner, a youth worker in both secondary schools and church settings, explores how identity and faith are deeply interwoven in her practice as a Māori Christian kaimahi. She emphasises the importance of knowing who we are and why (Ko wai au? He aha ai?) and creating space for taiohi to do the same.

Aaliyah's strengths-based relational approach highlights the intersection of whakapapa, wairua, and youth development. Whether working with Māori rangatahi or Pākehā youth, she centres belonging, identity, and spiritual grounding.

At its heart, her mahi is a call to decolonise, reclaim reo and culture, and journey with taiohi in ways that affirm their mana and model a holistic expression of Youth Work that honours both Māori identity and Christian faith.

Tali Aitofi shares a deeply personal story of faith, identity, illness, and transformation. Grounded in church-based Youth Work, his kaupapa was always about creating spaces of belonging and unconditional love. But a diagnosis of kidney failure and the brave step of coming out altered his life. Tali speaks powerfully to the pain of losing his place of belonging within a faith community that once embraced him, and the systemic barriers that marginalised his body and identity.

Yet from this loss emerged renewed purpose. Now working with Praxis NZ, Tali calls for youth workers to be safe people, listeners, allies, advocates. His message is clear: for some taiohi, inclusion isn't just affirming, it's life-saving. Tali's story reminds us that loving God and loving people should never come with conditions, and that youth work grounded in aroha, authenticity, and courage can change lives.

Nada speaks about what she has learned, difference is not something to overcome, but something to honour. As a former refugee, an Arab, and a Muslim woman, she has often found herself being 'the other'. These very experiences have shaped her youth work, encouraging people to embrace their identity and walk proudly as their whole selves.

Red Cross synopsis

Highlighted within the stories shared by our contributors is the reality that oftentimes we find ourselves in a unique and sacred position of journeying alongside a young person whose faith traditions may be different to our own. It is in these moments we can draw on our own growing cultural competence and relational wisdom to uphold the mana of that young person's expression of faith.

It also means embracing faith and spirituality as a resource, not just a site of tension. Faith can offer young people a framework for meaning, justice, resilience, and a place of belonging. When approached through an intersectional lens, Youth Work can help young people explore their spirituality in ways that affirm all of who they are, not in spite of their identities, but because of them.

As you read the stories and experiences shared on these pages, it is my hope you come away encouraged, challenged, and open to deeper reflection.

These voices remind us that Youth Work is not just about programmes or outcomes, it's about people. At its best, it's a sacred partnership, where identity, culture, and faith are honoured as vital parts of the whole person.

While this mini edition of Kaiparahuarahi centres stories of faith and spirituality in Youth Work, also featured in companion editions are rich contributions from fellow youth workers across five other groups: Tāngata Whenua, Tagata o le Moana, Ethnic Communities, Rainbow, and Tāngata Whaikaha. We honour and celebrate each of these editions and the voices we are privileged to share space with in their pages.

Intersectionality invites us to see taiohi not through a single lens, but as unique individuals, shaped by whakapapa, experience, belief, and belonging. It challenges us to hold space where all those layers are recognised and uplifted.

May we continue to grow as youth workers who encourage taiohi to bring their full selves. May we be courageous enough to listen well, honour difference, and commit to practices that uphold mana, embody aroha, and point toward a more just and hopeful future.

Miriam Bucknell
July 2025

A Faith-Based Reflection on Intersectional Leadership

Tyla Harrison-Hunt

Introduction

Let me start by saying that acknowledging many parts to your identity isn't easy; being blended by a range of lived experience is hard to navigate, especially when you're placed in a position of power or leadership. You must find the balance, strike the right notes in the right environment, and use those pieces of you for the ultimate purpose of serving others.

I was raised in a classic Māori whānau—full of loud singers, tight-knit siblings, and a strong sense of identity. Later in life, I married into an incredible Pakistani whānau who reflected many of those same qualities—deeply rooted in their culture, proud of who they are, and connected to a wide, vibrant community.

Leadership was modelled daily by my parents: caring for others, standing up for what mattered, and following the adage 'leaders eat last', which is reflective of servant leadership. Servant leadership, in short, is a style that puts others before your own needs for the betterment of a collective. It demands the shedding of ego, being comfortable knowing that you may not always be at the forefront, and giving of yourself—sometimes, if not careful, to the detriment of your own wellbeing.

The Start of Intersectional Service

Those early lessons in service, strength, and identity were later reinforced through faith.

My first experience in using these intersections as a superpower came after embracing Islam. Islam brought a deeper sense of discipline and spiritual clarity—one that aligned naturally with the tikanga I had grown up with.

Together, these values shaped how I understood responsibility, how I showed up in the world, and how I supported others through hardship. That understanding was tested in the wake of the March 15 attacks. Our whānau and community suffered immense loss, and I found myself in a space where I was expected to help bring together alternate worlds—to speak between Muslim and non-Muslim communities, to mediate, and to connect people who, if not for tragedy, may never have crossed paths.

Grief ran deep, and institutions weren't built to hold what communities needed. But still, our city found ways to move forward—through acknowledgment, mutual respect, and shared humanity.

Intersections are Strengths, Not Burdens

Navigating those days—between mourning and action—wasn't simple. But it showed how essential cultural and spiritual frameworks are when systems inevitably fail. In fairness to the Crown, the response was swift, and they made use of the tools available to act decisively. The political leadership at the time was marked by compassion and urgency, with Dame Jacinda Ardern playing a pivotal role in guiding the country's immediate response. However, it must be acknowledged that the current Westminster parliamentary model has underserved Indigenous and minority communities since its inception. For more than 150 years we have had to evolve as a people that bent, contorted, and adapted to a colonial power. If it wasn't for our staunch heroes like Tā Tipene O'Regan, Dame Whina Cooper, or the unwavering peaceful activists like Te Whiti, we would be seeing a completely different Aotearoa New Zealand today.

Being Māori and Muslim has never felt like a contradiction. It's a bridge; in fact, the Māori worldview and Islamic worldview have profound connections. The ideas that people come first, intergenerational equity is prioritised, and our environment deserves care were all tikanga (lore). This is what connected me to my faith and actually bolstered my connection with te ao Māori. The mosque became another marae, a place of a diverse people conversing, sharing ideas, and finding ways to grow their spirituality.

In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, everything ran on adrenaline—planning next steps, mitigating social and cultural risks, and trying to create calm in the chaos. I had to mediate and communicate both the bureaucratic nature of western systems and the cultural and societal norms of an ethnic or faith-based viewpoint. I never in my life thought I would be thrust into the business of disaster management overnight, but things became easier when I saw small moments of hope: the smiles from grieving whānau, the prayers whispered with the words "Alhamdulillah"—praise be to God—thanking Allah (SWT) for taking care of their lost loved ones.

To many New Zealanders, this response was hard to comprehend. "How can someone give thanks in a moment like this?" they asked. But this is the power of faith—not as escapism, but as an anchoring. Islam is grounded in five principles known as the Five Pillars—a guide to life rooted in responsibility, generosity, and trust in something greater than ourselves.

Mana to Mana—Bridging the Gaps

One of the most affected groups after the attacks were our young people—many still discovering who they are, some born here as 'NZ-born immigrants', others navigating grief for the first time. Many lost family members, brothers, sisters, and parents. It was an unfathomable experience working in those spaces.

Youth Work became a priority almost immediately. A group of young Muslim men formed a group called 'Bani Adam', a grassroots initiative grounded in kotahitanga (oneness/togetherness) and manaaki (uplifting/support).

As a group we didn't operate through hierarchy. Instead, we embraced a mana-to-mana approach—one based on trust, mutual respect, and shared responsibility. In my previous experience working in the youth space, the challenge has always been finding a balance: how do we set healthy boundaries without losing the relational depth that makes effective change? How do we navigate becoming a bigger brother, while also teaching our youth to be self-managing? These questions often came up in our conversations.

The answer came through in our actions. We ran camps, continually connected and were always there when they needed us the most. We also knew there was no time limit to our engagement. We knew that this would be long-term, underpinned by the understanding that one day we will see them walk by on the street as adults, knowing that they will be fulfilled again, holding a sense of accountability, and most importantly, be happy. That was the vision of the group.

Politics is Hard—But It's Worth It

I knew that these programmes would be temporary. Crown funding will inevitably finish and there's no guarantee of future funding. So, I told myself "If this change is temporary, I need to change policy". In 2022, I decided to have a shot at local government, to represent those who need essential services, particularly our young people. Little did I know, six months later, I would be elected as a city councillor, holding both youth and multicultural portfolios for the city.

Leadership in the public space comes with immense internal and external pressure. It requires you to think with agility and navigate a bureaucracy that has an innate tendency to 'hold the line' on the status quo.

But after learning from all of the people I surrounded myself with in life, my intersectional nature became my greatest asset. I feel empowered in this role, knowing the deep interests people have, and delivering on them. I inherited an ability to put myself in their shoes—and whether I agreed with them or not became unimportant. People just want you to listen and acknowledge their voice. As complicated as politics is, it's as simple as acknowledging the mana they have. Politics, by nature, is a sharing of ideas to get to an outcome.

The Next Generation

I'm constantly reminded of the importance of our young people's voices—always remembering the tough times in 2019 and the ten years prior working in the youth sector. Intersectionality isn't just a buzzword, it's our lived reality. It's reshaping how we serve, how we lead, and how we relate to one another. Our next generation is more intersectional than ever before, navigating multiple layers of identity with depth and clarity.

Their voices matter because they shift the dial on intergenerational thinking. In 2019, Local Government New Zealand found that the average age of elected members ranged between 56 and 60 (Rankin, 2022). That statistic speaks to the absence of a truly 'present' voice—one that reflects the realities of today's fast-changing world. Young people deserve more than just a seat at the table; they deserve power. Power to influence, to lead, and to shape a future that benefits not just their own generation, but all of us. I dream of a time where young people help the older generation reimagine what the new world could look like.

We need a transformative shift in how we engage with the unknown—because it challenges us to design spaces grounded in authenticity rather than assumption. We must recognise that race, gender, faith, disability, class, and trauma don't exist in isolation—they intersect in complex, beautiful, and deeply human ways.

Quotes from Prophet Muhammad PBUH

"Smiling in the face of your brother is charity."

— Jamiʿ al-Tirmidhi 1956

"Make things easy, not difficult. Bring joy, and do not drive people away."

— Sahih al-Bukhari 69

"The best people are those who are most beneficial to others."

— Al-Mu'jam al-Awsat 5787

Summarised reflections

Nothing is fixed—everything can change with the right mix of effort and patience.

The hardest challenges often need nothing more than consistent elbow grease and belief.

Never be afraid to be a student of life.

The unknown isn't something to fear—it's where growth begins. Seek knowledge relentlessly.

You won't always have the answers—and that's okay.

It's a reminder that life is a journey, not a test.

Tyla Harrison-Hunt (Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Porou, Te Ātiawa) is a Christchurch City Councillor, leading the city's multicultural and youth portfolios. With over 10 years of experience running youth initiatives and social enterprises, he has worked at the intersection of community development and social wellbeing.

In the years following the March 15 terror attack, Tyla has spoken internationally — from Germany to Japan — sharing insights on indigenous leadership, community resilience, and intersectional identity.

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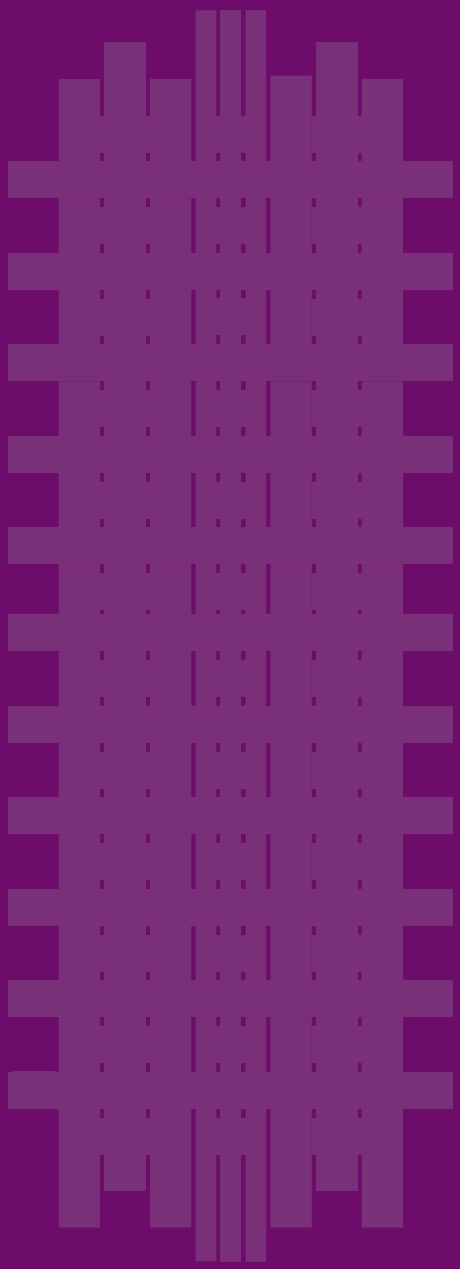


Ko Wai Au, He Aha Ai: Identity in Practice

Aaliyah Turner

Recently, Miriam got to sit down with Aaliyah Turner, a youth worker on the Kāpiti Coast, and have a chat with her about all things Youth Work—how she sees herself in this space, the intersectionality of her faith and her identity, and how she brings all that together in her mahi.

So, how does your identity influence your work with young people?

Ko wai au? Nuinga tēnei pātai—that's a big question! Although I think it's one that's universal. I would like to offer a potentially new perspective alongside this, he aha ai—why?

I think, like lots of us, the journey of these pātai is one that I will follow throughout my life as it grows and changes with me. I tēnei wā—at this time—I think about some key aspects of how I would describe myself. He Māori ahau, he Karaitiana au—I am Māori, I am Christian. I am a culmination of lots of big and small traits, and sometimes I wonder how, as people, we are supposed to hold so many facets. For me, my faith gives me the perspective that there is purpose for why we are who we are.

Recently, I've been reflecting on the fact I have been made Māori for a reason:

Ko Panekire tōku maunga
Ko Waikaremoana tōku moana
Ko Mataatua tōku waka
Ko Tūhoe tōku iwi
Ko Ngāti Ruapani tōku hapū
For a reason and with purpose.

One of my favourite aspects of Youth Work is that no one type of Youth Work is the same as another, because no single youth worker is the same as another. Youth Work has to be flexible; it has to be a mahi that is responsive both to the youth worker's strengths and identity, and especially, to the strengths and identity of our taiohi.

My identity as Māori and Christian influences not just how I see myself, but how I relate to the young people I work with. I really value whanaungatanga, and I think one of the things I aim for is to build real, meaningful relationships where taiohi feel seen and heard. I try to hold the values of manaakitanga, aroha and wairuatanga in our interactions. In my mentoring, one of the things I'm always trying to do is support their own journey of these pātai: ko wai rātau, he aha ai—who are they and why, what is their purpose?

How do you bring that into your practice as a youth worker, that concept of identity?

I think a big part of Youth Work is being a cheerleader. We're all unique, we all carry mana, and we are all worthy of having someone in our lives who is wholeheartedly in our corner. Part of being that cheerleader means reflecting back to them the specific talents, values and skills you see in them, and then helping them to explore what that means.

My faith reminds me that it's not just about belief, it's about practice. Faith without action can grow stale. But action doesn't always mean changing the world. Sometimes it looks like using our understanding gained from questions like ko wai au, he aha ai? Who am I and why?

I think it's important to recognise our power and responsibility to uplift those around us. We are created for connection and community. I see part of my role as that cheerleader, creating spaces that invite young people to explore ko wai au, he aha ai?—to feel proud of what they find and put it into practice.

Who are the young people that you are currently working with?

At the moment, my Youth Work mahi exists in two key areas: one of the local colleges and a church-based youth group. I'm in a unique space where I'm working with two very different groups of young people from very different walks of life.

At school, the majority of the young people I work with are Māori, perhaps because I am a familiar face in a system that hasn't been built for them. A lot of my mahi is about being loudly strengths-based: finding the wins, affirming identity and helping to portray that to the wider school community. One way I've tried to create this kind of space is by starting a tukutuku panel group, where Year 9 Māori rangatahi learn how to design and create tukutuku panels, then return the following year as tuakana to support the new group. My faith is always at the foundation, and in this mahi, it is more about being the foundation. I find myself praying, "God, who is this person in front of me? What makes them who they are?" It's not overt, but it shapes how I see and respond to the young people I'm with.

In youth group, faith is able to be a bit more obvious. The young people there are mostly from stable, church-going families—predominantly Pākehā—doing well in school and connected to strong support networks. It's been a new challenge for me, thinking about how I connect with young people whose experiences differ from mine, and what it means to affirm strengths when those strengths are already seen and celebrated. It's a different kind of Youth Work, but one that's growing on me.

So how does who you are influence what you do? What parts of your personality are you bringing into your practice?

Before anything else, I want to create a space of no judgement. In my own life, I've swung in a lot of different directions, made a lot of mistakes, and now, as I'm getting older, I'm starting to find this space in the middle. Because of that, when a young person shares something with me—whether it's something they are proud of or not—I'm not here to judge. I am honestly just here to love them and to be a supportive presence in their life.

Creativity is another part of who I am. Not necessarily in a traditional arts-and-crafts way, but in how I take the little bits of insight I gain about a young person—like a spark of interest, or a shift in behaviour/mindset I notice—and build on it in a way that's tangible for them.

At the moment you're doing some study. What is it?

I'm doing a diploma in te reo Māori (Aaliyah is currently studying te reo Māori at Te Wānanga o Raukawa).

Is that for your own development—for you? Is that for you to bring into your mahi? How did that come about and what's your reason?

I think it's a bit of all of the above. It's a God thing that I'm there, and I know I've wanted to do this since I left school. There's a part of it that is my own journey and about reclaiming te reo for my whānau, healing some of the generational trauma and gaining confidence in who I am—owning that I am Māori and belong in and out of Māori spaces.

Praxis was the start of that for me, and it gave me the space to begin that journey gently and alongside Youth Work, which already felt like part of who I am.

I think where God comes into that is the timing. I don't see Youth Work necessarily as a job (this is going to sound really cheesy), because I know for a fact I would do it if I wasn't paid—and I have. Youth Work is a big part of my ko wai au, he aha ai?

I'm pursuing this mātauranga Māori also for my young people, because in the spaces that I am in, I tend to be a safe place for our Māori young people. I want to be able to whakamana them. I'm not there yet, but I would like to have the knowledge and grow my kete so I have the resources, the patience and the grace in those areas to be able to say, "Yeah, I know that," or "I'm learning that," or at least to have some scope of "We can go there together." It's about being able to better understand the young people I tend to gravitate towards, and those who tend to gravitate towards me.

I've also learned how vital it is to be consistent, especially with young people who've experienced trauma or chaos. Some are constantly testing: "How far can I push this before you give up on me?" My response is to keep showing up, even when I'm tired or not at my best, and to say, "I'm still here, and I still care." I think a big part of this is about how I show up. I try to be authentic and own the fact that I'm not here to have all the answers—all I'm here to do is be someone in their journey that says, "Hey, I think you're really cool and have a lot to offer," and continues to remind them of that.

It's about being countercultural, in a way. It's the idea that just because things have been one way forever doesn't mean that's the way it has to be—or the way it should be. Especially in this conversation of intersectionality. I feel like within intersectionality, when we talk about people, it does become a conversation of identity. There are invitations here to go deeper, but there also needs to be caution to not just categorise people into different identity files. The more we are open to the conversation of intersectionality being about empowering people to live their lives as their whole selves, the more we are going to have to change how we do things, because the systems that we operate in don't work for the people in them. They don't work. And again, it's that question of, "How can we change from success looking like having a bunch of stuff done and ticking a bunch of boxes, to, let's have success look like people being confident and kind, and loving to one another?"

Have you noticed any changes in terms of intersectionality in Youth Work?

I feel a little unqualified to speak to any big changes in intersectionality because, even though it feels like I've been doing this mahi my whole life, it's only really been four or five years. In reality, I'm only a baby in this space—especially when you look around and you see the legends who have basically defined Youth Work.

You hear stories of fire soccer, and I wasn't around for that—but even then, I'm like, that's crazy! What do you mean you lit something on fire and kicked it around?! I guess in that way, maybe the idea of what risk looks like has changed. So now it's more about, how do we take risks and still push people, form those relationships through experience, but still hold this idea of safety?

How do we hold that tension of intersectionality and faith and Youth Work?

I think it comes down to the fact that we are open to asking questions. Maybe that is a bit of a cultural shift as well. The older generations often hold the view that you don't question your elders, and you don't speak unless spoken to—be seen and not heard. Today, that's definitely shifted. I think in a lot of spaces there's more of an acknowledgment now that young people have a voice, they have opinions, they are educated, and they are passionate about things and want to pursue them. I think now there's more of an acknowledgment of that, and people are learning to make space for that. There are wins and losses in the learning, but we're getting there.

At the same time, the climate has shifted again. While there's been a strong move toward acceptance and authenticity, we're now seeing a rise in more rigid, polarising views. Young people are caught in the middle—they're being exposed to both empathy and extremism, often without the developmental tools to process it all. I've noticed in my mahi an interesting viewpoint, where it's easier for people to have empathy for those who aren't in front of them. For example, people on social media, where the view seems to be, "To the people outside of us—let them do what they want to do, let them be who they want to be," but the closer you are to me, the less I know how to have empathy for you. And those dynamics create this fear of not being able to have imperfections, not being able to question, not being able to change answers.

As a youth worker and a person of faith, I try to model what it looks like to hold space for difference without fear. That includes showing taiohi that faith isn't about having all the answers, but about asking deeper questions with love and humility.

I think there's a really hard tension between the fact that our young people are passionate and loving and wanting to explore topics that are important to them—but in this world of extremes, they don't yet have the tools or developmental capacity to understand the nuances.

How do you find that as a youth worker? How do you support young people through that?

I hold them to a higher standard. Once you've got a relationship with young people—if you're consistent enough in yourself and your behaviour—it's okay to call things out and have hard conversations. Maybe you hear a hateful comment and take the opportunity to say, "Hey, that's not okay, we don't talk like that here," in order to hold the kaupapa. Other times, depending on the young person or the situation, there's an initial, "That's not okay," and in a separate space, where there's time and not so many people around, asking, "Where did that come from? Let's talk about that. Do you know people from the community you just made a comment about, or have you heard that somewhere else?"

I think one of the biggest disservices we can do for our young people is not holding them to a high standard—assuming that they can't handle it. They are highly capable and emotionally aware. When we have a good relationship with a young person and we've had that strengths-based relationship going on, we can say, "Yeah, I know you're an amazing person, and that was not an amazing person comment. Amazing people don't do that".

Have you found any resources or frameworks or models that you use that you find helpful when you are thinking about the young people you are working with and those intersections that you hold and that you work with?

Circle of Mana. As youth workers, when it is your life, there is this parallel of yourself and your own journey, and what you're doing in your mahi with your young people. So for me, that was launched through Praxis, and it's definitely foundational in how I operate in the world. The understanding that belonging is important—like a foundation. There's not a lot you can go past until someone feels like, "I'm seen, and people know that I'm here." I think that model holds the standard that eventually you're going to get to a place where you are generous and you're giving back to your community, and it's not being stuck in this one place of, "It's all about me".

It's part of intersectionality. As individuals, we have so many different facets, but we are made to be in relationship and in community.

So we have to understand that we might be one person who has maybe ten different things that we would describe ourselves as, but we're in a community of people who have the same thing—and so many other intricacies. The Circle of Mana is a framework that holds that, because it's something that is applicable to an individual or to a group.

I use Te Whare Tapa Whā, but I feel like it's one of those things that I don't think about because it's quite intrinsic. In a general catch-up, you go through those areas—you say, "How is your whānau? How are your friends? How are you doing in yourself? How's your hinengaro and your tinana? Are you sleeping and eating?" And then, "How's your wairua?" And for some of your young people who aren't in a faith-based context, that's the hardest one to grasp, because it's quite a broad concept. But I like to say, "How do you feel grounded? How do you get that?" In our faith-based settings, it's being able to have those direct conversations and trust that our young people have the capacity to have their own journey in their own faith—and be open that that goes up and down for them as well.

I feel like our Māori young people tend to grasp this idea of wairuatanga a lot quicker. Talking to young people who don't have a lot of connections to their Māoritanga, there's still something in them—in their whakapapa and who they are—that's just known: that we are not alone in this physical world. There are different elements and dimensions. I think that's why, for our Māori young people, it's important to be able to hear stories like Tārore or Rātana, learn about these big Māori movers and shakers who had their own God experiences, and know that there's a Māori way of faith and a Māori journey with Jesus. And then, for Māori young people who don't have a faith, there is still this kind of intrinsic knowledge of "we're connected," and that idea of hononga and mauri—there's energy in the world.

The way I often have my young people describe it to me is: they're spiritual. There's this understanding that there's a greater purpose and a greater energy, and I think that again is something that we tend to see more in community-centred cultures: The idea that we're all connected and we have this responsibility to Papatūānuku, the earth—where we are—because it's a gift. And that responsibility is also to each other—because again, it's a gift, and we need each other to survive. There's a deeper connection than just knowing your name and having a few things in common—this commonality of ora and wellness and life.

Do you have any final reflections?

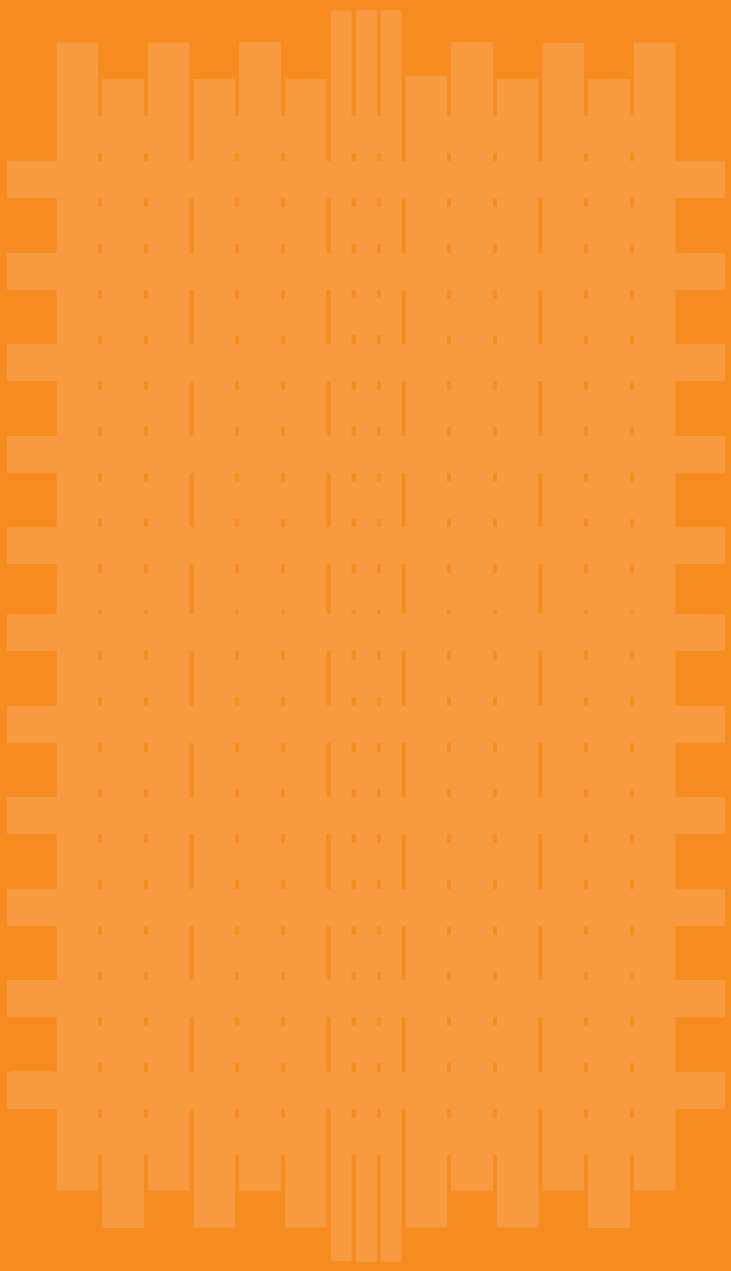
It's challenging, and as a society, we're not there yet. In general—despite the political world that we're in, where lots of news is very doom and gloom—we are moving towards a society and a people that are more accepting and open-minded and willing to learn and change. I think just to acknowledge that sometimes we go out on a limb to change something because we see it could be better, and the reaction isn't always great—the reaction is still opposing.

The idea of kia kaha, kia māia, kia manawanui—be strong, be steadfast, be willing. Keep doing the little bits that we can with the people that we have influence on, and keep going despite the challenge. It's important to still acknowledge there are some really incredible things happening, and sometimes it's hard.

My belief is that intersectionality, in its essence, in its truest form, is about connection. It's a meeting point. I think that space is the greatest invitation we have, and in the same way we are learning to be more open-minded as individuals and as communities, we're learning to be okay with seeing that intersectionality looks different in different places—as long as there's that connection, that acknowledgement of mauri and life, that we're in this together.

Aaliyah Turner is a descendant of Tūhoe and Ngāti Kahungunu iwi. She began Youth Work straight out of high school, completing her diploma through Praxis. Now, five years later, Aaliyah still loves her mahi and the many shapes it has taken.

She currently works within the guidance team at Paraparaumu College, serves on the Praxis board representing past students' perspectives, volunteers at a local youth group, and is studying full immersion te reo Māori through Te Wānanga o Raukawa. Her faith continues to shape the way she approaches Youth Work, weaving into her commitment to young people, whakapapa and community.



Quick Fire with Kate

Kate Dunstan-Brown

I am a third culture kid who emigrated to Aotearoa in 2012 at the age of 22. Being caught between cultures, I struggled to find a sense of belonging, and this influences what I do. I want every young person to feel a sense of belonging in healthy ways, to connect with their communities and whakapapa.

When I moved to New Zealand, I basically began working with young people right away, and now I've been working in this sector for over a decade. I have always held the belief that the world is big and worth exploring, and this shapes my sense of adventure and fun within Youth Work.

When I moved to New Zealand, I basically began working with young people right away, and now I've been working in this sector for over a decade. I have always held the belief that the world is big and worth exploring, and this shapes my sense of adventure and fun within Youth Work. I think quality of care and quality of relationship are two important principles that I value in my personal life, and therefore value in Youth Work.

It's important to me that youth know I have a high work ethic, because I want them to see that modelled but also want them to know that they are worth working hard and advocating for, that they are seen, heard, and known, to the best of my ability.

My identity is shaped by what I believe is important to God—that shapes much of my thinking about young people and the world they live in. I think from the Bible it's clear that people have a shared responsibility to care for the earth, to respect and care for other human beings, and to help one another navigate the turbulent road called life. I also believe that the Christian worldview (or at least mine) says to all young people that their voice is important, not just for the future, but also for everything happening in real time.

Young people have so much to say about hope, joy, heartache, and regret, and they often lead with curious and open minds.

Within the Christian worldview there is a concept called 'imago dei', which means 'made in the image of God'. As a Christian pastor working with young people, I believe that every young person—from any walk of life, race, gender, culture, ability, religion or lack thereof, and family structure—is made in the image of God. That is my starting point, I care about the young person in front of me because I believe they were made wonderful, creative and worth knowing.

The young people I work with lack diversity in race and culture, however, are diverse in their interests, their school activities, their family spaces, their beliefs, and their ages. They go to a lot of different schools within the Wellington region, and this alone creates a space of intersectionality. I have witnessed and overheard several conversations about the merits of "this-school-over-that-school", "this-reputation-versus-that-reputation", and what school values are actually important when it comes to the education system in Aotearoa. The group of young people I work with can be quite insular, and this becomes a barrier to making new people feel welcomed. It is an ongoing area of work for myself and my team to encourage young people to help us create a space of welcome and belonging for others.

I believe it is paramount that, within the Youth Work sector, we consider the importance of diversity and intersectionality. I find that we are living in a climate of western global culture that is becoming increasingly polarised, and I am concerned for the welfare of young people if youth workers do not properly understand the importance of these issues.

Aotearoa is unique in that Te Tiriti o Waitangi is foundational and honouring Tāngata Whenua is important. I hope these underpinning values in Youth Work can continue to provide a backdrop for young people to thrive in this country.

What is it like working with your community's young people?

The high school age group continues to be complex, but also wonderful. The youth particular to my setting are cheeky, kind, interested in faith, but still working things out. Lots of them have had a variety of opportunities in their lives and have really supportive parents.

What I can find difficult working with this group is that some of them are struggling with ongoing mental distress. Even with referrals to healthcare professionals, they often seek me or my team out when they are in distress. We potentially have greater rapport, an ongoing relationship, and don't work in a clinical setting, which can help young people open up and share what they are truly experiencing. As with many things in life, this is a double-edged sword because we want to be available to care well for young people, however we must consider the load of distressing information and potential for things like compassion fatigue within Youth Work. My hope in this area is that through multiple pathways we can both help young people increase their resilience and manage our own needs to stay well.

What are your suggestions for other people working with young people in this community?

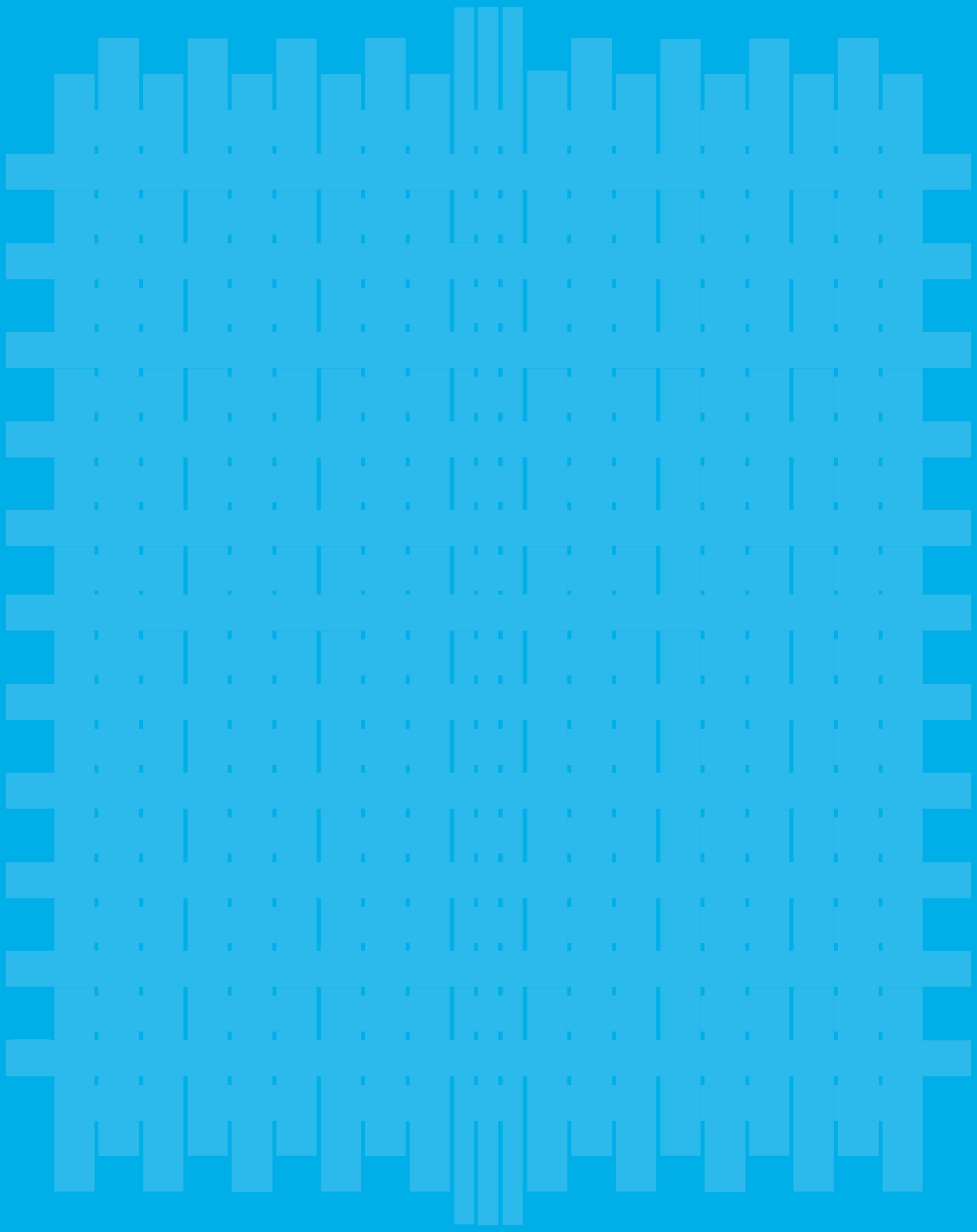
The young people in this community are a smaller group, mostly youth who come in from the suburbs to our urban setting for youth group and catch-ups. To work well with this youth population, you need a level of confidence and self-awareness. They can be ruthless with their jokes, and as a youth worker you need to be able to laugh at yourself. Also, these kids have a high BS radar—they can see through fakeness quickly, so being honest is often the way to go. I would say knowing your role, scope, and responsibilities, and having access to a wider network of people who care about young people, is crucial to success for working with these young people.

Are there any resources, theories, frameworks, models, or ideas that you use that might be helpful for other people working with these communities?

As a team, we've been working through *The Code of Ethics for Youth Work in Aotearoa New Zealand* as a framework to continue to develop our youth practice and standards. The Code of Ethics provides a robust foundation for anyone working with young people, is easily accessed in multiple formats, and has helped my volunteer youth team with questions and professionalisation in the field. Whakawhanaungatanga (relationship building) is a core component to our youth ministry. Within the Christian Youth Work context, *Growing Young* by Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin is a helpful tool, particularly around empowerment and allowing young people to be key stakeholders in the church. *Growing Young* gives Christian youth workers not just a path for working with young people but the research and evidence to back up its claims. It emphasises that when organisations such as churches invest money, people, time and effort into youth, the entire organisation grows as a whole.

Kate Dunstan-Brown is Pākehā of Yorkshire and Irish whakapapa. Raised in the United States she moved to Aotearoa in her early 20s. She currently lives in Te Whanganui-a-Tara with her young whānau surrounded by university students.

Kate has worked in youth ministry spaces for over a decade and is passionate about young people feeling seen, heard and encourages asking big questions about life, faith and wellbeing.



Creating Safe Spaces: A Journey of Youth Work, Faith, and Inclusion

Tali Aitofi

I have worked in a variety of Youth Work contexts—alternative education, youth health, community Youth Work, and kids' and youth camps—but I would say that church youth group was my niche.

There, I found the opportunity to build a sense of community and belonging that included not only the young people themselves but, when appropriate, their families as well.

The 'buy-in' was easier because most of the youth group's families were already involved in the life of the church. I had two opportunities each week to connect with the youth: Sundays, when we would be dismissed from the main service to have our own teaching and devotional time, and Friday nights—our 'Fun Nights'—where the programme was shaped to be interactive, sometimes crazy, and sometimes laid-back. Whatever my team and I planned, we always aimed to make it the highlight of the young people's week.

Because this was a Christian youth group, my message each week was simple yet profound: "Whatever you do in life, wherever you end up, remember: love God and love people". If you asked any of those young people today, I'm sure they would tell you how often I drilled that into them. We cultivated a safe space where young people could experience a deeper sense of belonging, where everyone was welcome, and where for at least two hours each week, they could be their authentic selves. Authentic. Self.

A Life-Altering Moment

Mother's Day 2018 changed the trajectory of my life in ways I could never have imagined. I was 26 years old and had just moved back to Porirua after a year in Tūrangi. I was serving as the Children and Youth Pastor at my church—the same faith community I had belonged to since I was eight years old. Surrounded by an amazing group of people who had nurtured, encouraged, and loved me most of my life, I can't fully express how involved I was in church life. My relationship with God was sacred to me, and nothing connected me more to God than worship and service.

The day before Mother's Day, I spent the afternoon with the youth setting up morning tea and treats to celebrate the mums in our church. But on Mother's Day morning, I woke up with severe leg pain and drove myself to the emergency room. By the time my name was called, I could no longer walk and needed a wheelchair. An x-ray showed nothing abnormal, but a nurse suggested a blood test. I wasn't worried; I just wanted to get back to church.

Eventually, the nurse returned and said, "Tali, your kidneys are functioning at 28%". I had no idea what that meant. I was admitted to hospital, scheduled for a biopsy, and a few weeks later, diagnosed with kidney failure. Within months, my kidneys had completely failed. I would need to start dialysis.

The Reality of Dialysis and Systemic Barriers

There are three treatments for end-stage kidney failure. I have experienced two: haemodialysis and a kidney transplant. Haemodialysis involves two needles—one to draw your blood and filter it through a machine, and another to return the clean blood to your body. This process takes five hours, three times a week. In Aotearoa, one in ten people suffers from kidney disease and requires dialysis to survive, with Māori, Pacific Islanders or South Asian descent being the most represented groups in dialysis use (Kidney Health NZ, 2025).

The second option is a kidney transplant, which I was blessed to receive in January 2024. However, even qualifying for the transplant list requires meeting strict health criteria, including having a certain Body Mass Index (BMI).

This requirement, while well-intentioned, raises serious questions. The BMI system, created by Belgian mathematician Adolphe Quetelet—who, importantly, was not a doctor—was originally intended to define the 'average man' by dividing weight by height squared. Over time, this index evolved into what we now know as the BMI scale. That a 19th century European mathematician nearly 20,000 kilometres away from Aotearoa could influence eligibility for life-saving surgery in 2025 is, frankly, absurd.

Let's be honest, Māori and Pasifika bodies are built differently from European ones. The system is slowly recognising this, but for many, the damage has already been done.

According to 2020/21 statistics: "...there were 46 transplants for people of Māori ethnicity, 30 for people of Pacific ethnicity, 22 for people of Asian ethnicity, and 102 for people of Other (including European) ethnicity. Despite a similar level of use—and a far greater rate of use—of dialysis, Māori people only benefited from less than half the number of transplants that people of Other ethnicity had" (NZIER, 2021, 28).

Coming Out and Losing My Place of Belonging

That 2018 Mother's Day, I missed helping my youth group celebrate their mums. Instead, I lay in a hospital bed, trying not to cry, confronted by my own mortality.

Let me tell you—life feels even shorter when you're holding on to a secret.

From a very young age, perhaps four years old, I knew I was attracted to other boys. As I grew and became more deeply involved in my faith and faith community, I learned that liking guys wasn't 'normal'. So, like any 'good' Christian in my situation, I suppressed it. That attraction became a secret, the secret turned into shame, and the shame forced me to create a version of myself that wasn't real. I wore a mask to protect myself, never letting anyone close enough to see the truth.

More than a year after that Mother's Day, I could no longer keep the secret. The emotional stress, combined with the physical demands of staying alive, became overwhelming. In September 2019, I came out to my family and to my church's senior leader. After publicly coming out, I realised that while I was still loved, I could no longer fully belong or contribute to church life as my authentic self.

For the community I had served faithfully most of my life, "Love God, love people" apparently no longer applied to me—or anyone like me.

Finding New Purpose in Youth Work

That loss led me to where I am now. Today, I work for Praxis NZ, a faith-based organisation with a Christian kaupapa. We train youth workers across Aotearoa—people who are not only great leaders but also great human beings. I proudly wave the brown-boy-Rainbow-kidney-disease flag and encourage the next generation of youth workers to reflect on what it truly means to be inclusive.

This is a matter of life and death—and I say that without a hint of exaggeration.

There could be a young person in your organisation right now holding on to a secret that has turned into shame, praying for someone to signal that they are a safe person to confide in. Be that person. It costs you nothing to listen—but for that young person, saying it out loud could cost everything.

I lost my place of belonging, my safe space filled with people who loved me. I lost a huge part of my Christian identity. Strangely enough, that last part isn't as tragic as I once thought. When people now ask me where I stand with my faith, I say this:

If Jesus is the example of what it means to be kind, compassionate, loving, forgiving, and inclusive—I can do Jesus. But I struggle with the idea that an unconditionally loving God would condemn me for loving unconditionally.

Youth Work that Changes Lives

As youth workers, we have the opportunity to create safe, inclusive spaces where everyone is welcome. Your organisation, your community, our sector, Aotearoa, the world—all need more inclusive youth workers. People who will love, support, advocate for, and teach young people that they are enough.

Let us continue creating communities where everyone is welcome at the table.

Tali Aitofi (He/Him). From the villages of Moata'a, Savaia Lefaga, and Sapapali'i, is a New Zealand born Samoan/European who hails from the Promised Land of Porirua!

"I feel like I bring a unique perspective to the conversation around Pasifika Youth Development. Being New Zealand born, bi-cultural and gay, I have walked on the edge of not fully belonging in any one space, so I have no greater joy in my practice than helping a young person find their place of belonging."

From Alternative Education to Youth Pastor, to being a huge part of the Praxis Team, Tali's practice has been shaped by the experiences he had over his 10+ years working with young people from across Te Whanganui-a-Tara.

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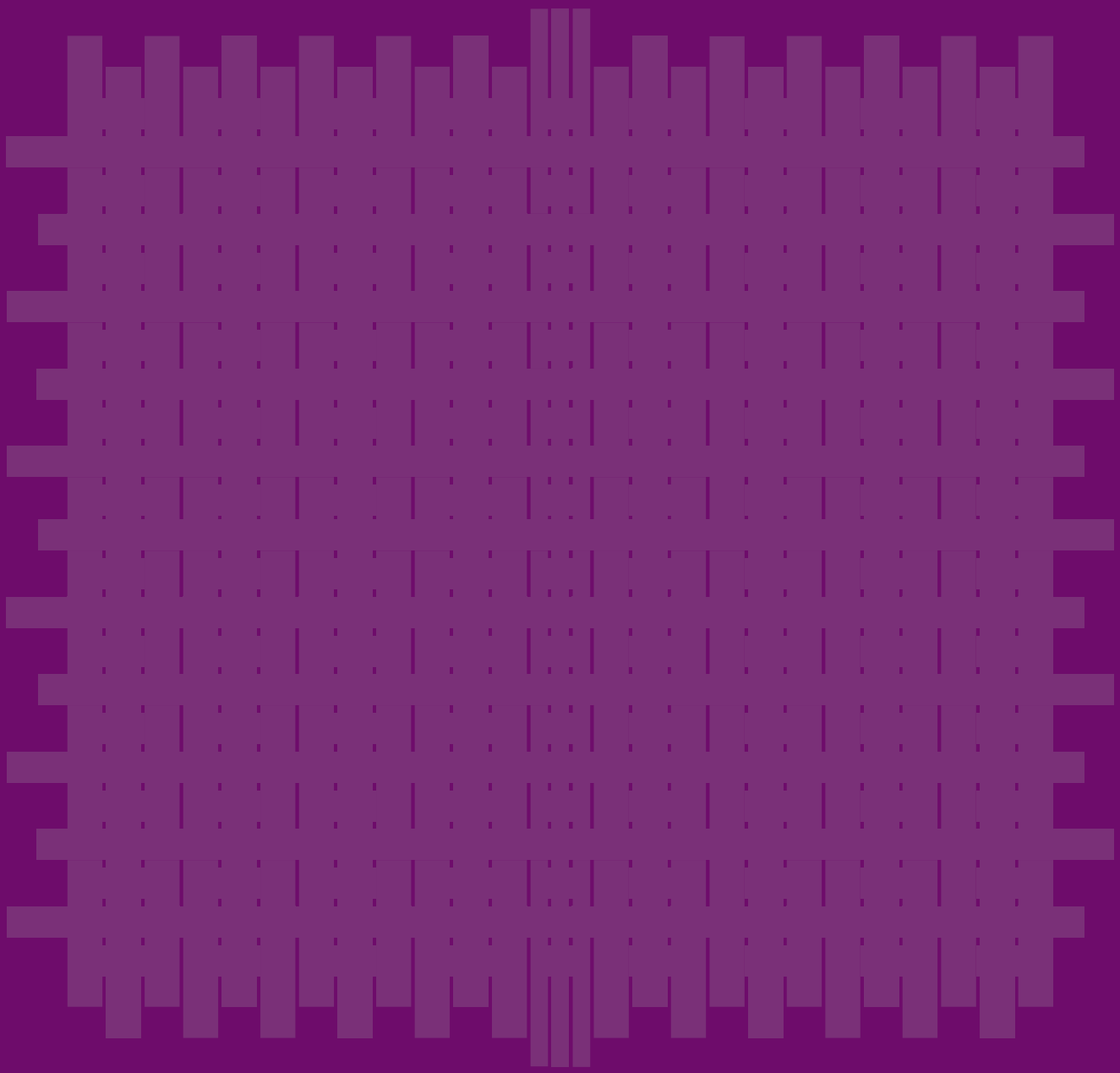

Wearing Difference with Confidence

Profile of youth worker Nada Haroura

My name is Nada. I came to Aotearoa New Zealand as a young former refugee from Syria. I'm Arab, I'm Muslim, I'm a hijabi woman and I'm proud of all of it.

Now, as a youth worker, I often find myself supporting young people from all walks of life different backgrounds, different cultures, different beliefs. And through that work, I've come to realise something very personal and very important: difference is not something to hide. It's not something to overcome. It is something to honour.

Coming here as a teenager, I quickly noticed how different I was. I wasn't just new,I stood out. My language, my religion, my dress, my skin, my name. I was visibly, audibly, undeniably different. But instead of trying to blend in or shrink myself to be less noticed, I held onto who I was.

I knew from the beginning: I wasn't meant to fit in. I wasn't meant to blend in. I wasn't meant to be unnoticeable. My difference wasn't a flaw, it was my strength. And so I wore my hijab with pride. I held tight to my culture, my faith, and my values, not because it was easy, but because it was me.

But it wasn't always simple. There were moments of misunderstanding, moments of judgment, moments of isolation. Sometimes, people didn't know how to approach me. Sometimes, they made assumptions. And sometimes, I felt the pressure, the pressure to be more like "them" and less like me.

Instead, we should help young people adapt, not by changing who they are, but by showing them that they don't have to choose between their roots and their future. They can carry both. I want young people to walk proudly with their culture, their faith, their accent, their clothing, their whole selves, without apology.

And to those who encounter differences: don't assume. Don't stay silent. Ask. Be curious. Learn about what brings people joy, what they value, what they believe in. Assumption is the enemy of understanding, and understanding only comes when we're willing to listen.

I've learned that faith is not just belief, it's identity. And identity isn't something you grow out of to survive. It's something you grow into, to truly live.

Nada Haroura is a former refugee from Syria, now based in Ōtepoti Dunedin, where she works as a Settlement Youth Worker and Arabic interpreter with Te Whatu Ora. She is currently studying Psychology and has completed a Postgraduate Certificate in Intercultural Communication and Applied Translation.

Nada is a proud Arab, Muslim, hijabi woman who brings lived experience, cultural depth, and a strong sense of advocacy to her mahi. She is passionate about empowering young people from diverse backgrounds to embrace their culture, faith, and identity with confidence. Nada also serves on the New Zealand Refugee Advisory Panel and is dedicated to building spaces where difference is not just accepted.

That's why I believe so deeply that in any space, especially when working with young people, we must stop expecting people to fit in. Because when you ask someone to fit in without acknowledging who they are, you're asking them to strip away parts of their identity. You're asking them to become someone even they might not recognise.

Our Editors

Kahukura Ritchie

Kahukura Ritchie - Ngāti Kahungunu, Rangitāne ki Wairarapa. Youth Work Manager and Kaiārahi at BGI Wellington.

Passionate about being a stepping stone for taiohi to reach their potential, Aotearoa youth development and equipping our youth workers with the knowledge to best support taiohi in our whenua.

Zoe Findlay

Zoe Findlay (They/Them) is a youth development professional and strategic leader based in Ōtautahi. With a background spanning outdoor education, mental health, and systems change, they currently work in the rainbow mental health space, supporting inclusive, identity-affirming practice.

Of Māori and queer identity, Zoe brings both lived experience and sector expertise to their mahi, championing approaches that centre mana, belonging, and connection. They are passionate about creating sustainable, values-led change across the youth sector, with a focus on equity, Te Tiriti commitments, and the wellbeing of queer and trans rangatahi.

Lavinia Lovo

Lavinia Lovo is a 30 year old Samoan-Tongan with Spina Bifida. Lavinia is a youth worker for PHAB Pasifika sees herself as a kaiāwhina or community navigator who wants young people to know that she understands what they're going through as a living example.

Sakhr Munassar

Sakhr Munassar is originally from Yemen and has been calling Aotearoa home for the last 9 years. Based in Te Whanganui-a-Tara, Sakhr is a passionate community member and advocate with expertise in equity, policy, advocacy, social impact and systems change.

Sakhr is a founder of two non-profits: hala Aotearoa, a social impact art events organisation, and Nas, Aotearoa a BIPOC collective working on issues relating to social cohesion, racism, discrimination, and white supremacy.

Rod Baxter

Rod Baxter is Pākehā, Tangata Tiriti, and a non-practising Catholic. Rod lives with his husband Dylan, a local intermediate teacher, in Ngaio, Pōneke, and they spend their time with whānau, renovating an old villa and studying Te Reo Māori.

Rod's been a youth worker since the turn of the millennium, and is currently the CEO of The King's Trust Aotearoa New Zealand.

Tyler Ngatai

As the Practice Lead at Ara Taiohi, Tyler Ngatai is a passionate advocate for youth development, with a strong focus on intersectionality and systems change.

He brings a wealth of experience and a deep commitment to advancing equity and social justice for young people from all backgrounds.

Chillion Sanerivi

Chillion is the Managing Director of RIVI Consultancy, based in Pukekohe, South Auckland, with nearly 20 years of experience in youth development. He specialises in social impact, leadership development, community engagement, and systems change, underpinned by Pacific and Māori Indigenous knowledge.

A certified Design Thinking facilitator with a Master's in Change and Organisational Resilience, Chillion advocates for the professionalisation of Youth Work in Aotearoa and works across sectors including climate change, education, mental health, and creative arts. He holds multiple governance roles, including Co-Chair of Ara Taiohi, and has a strong presence in youth development and advocacy nationally.

Miriam Bucknell

Miriam Bucknell is Pākehā, of English, Cornish, French Breton, and Irish whakapapa. She lives on the beautiful Kāpiti Coast with her whānau. With a background in teaching, guidance counselling, and research, Miriam currently works for Praxis as an Educator and Programme Leader for the Year 2 Diploma in Youth Work.

Miriam counts herself as fortunate to have been a volunteer youth leader for too many years to mention! But loves the creativity and adventure she has brought to that space, and the journey she has gone on with young people. One of the things she loves the most about Youth Work is hearing stories, and seeing youth workers passionate about the young people they work with.

Tautoko Team

Jane Zintl

Jane Zintl is the CEO of Ara Taiohi, Aotearoa's peak body for youth development. Youth worker, lawyer, Strengths Coach, ethics lady/champion/guru, relational, bookworm, faith-based and passionate about youth development.

The kaupapa that drives my mahi with young people is a belief that when we are confident in our own identity, we are able to truly celebrate the success of others. The voice of young people brings integrity, passion and justice to our nation.

Renee Ngatai

Renee Ngatai (Ngāti Ruanui, Ngāruahine, Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Porou) is the Korowai Tupu Administrator and a passionate advocate for rangatahi in Aotearoa.

With a background in anatomy and structural biology, and a deep grounding in Mana Taiohi and Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Renee brings lived experience, integrity, and aroha to every space she holds.

Korowai Tupu

We've named this journal

Kaiparahuarahi

to honour the trailblazers who humbly create paths where there was not a way before.

This kupu was gifted by the late Matua Bruce Stewart in the build up to the first Ara Taiohi wānanga.

We will continue to invite specific people to share unique perspectives from the multifaceted youth development sector. We also really like publishing ideas that were previously unpublished, like something someone's talked about often in workshops, or emerging trends in our practice.

The existing issues have presented a wide range of experiences from the field. This journal is a chance to capture the evolution of our mahi in real time.

VOLUME 1:

- Number 1 celebrated 20 years of Youth Work ethics in 2017. Originally conceived as a one-off publication, an irregular journal emerged naturally.
- Number 2 explored Mana Taiohi principles in practice, shortly after the launch in 2019.
- Number 3 recorded a series of blogs written during the global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.
- Number 4 captured definitions of the Youth Work profession after emerging kōrero in 2021.

VOLUME 2:

- Number 1 unpacked the ins and outs of Whai Wāhitanga three years on from the principle's graduation from Youth Participation.
- Number 2 highlighted the INVOLVE conference that took place in Tāmaki Makaurau in 2023.

Got something to say?

It could be published in a future issue of Kaiparahuarahi.

What would you like to read about in future issues?

Send us an email: korowaitupu@arataiohi.org.nz
Subject: Kaiparahuarahi.

This journal is a little bit different. We aim to reflect the diverse and developing practice of Youth Work in Aotearoa New Zealand. That means we welcome contributions in various shapes, sizes and forms. That's right: there's no word limit, no style guide and no money. All contributions are voluntary. The editors might offer you some feedback and do a tiny amount of grammatical polishing, but generally we avoid censorship and promote free and honest voices.

Kaiparahuarahi: The journal for Youth Work in Aotearoa

Volume 2 Number 3 August 2025

Kotahitanga: Understanding identities through intersectionality

AraTaiohi
Peak Body for Youth Development in Aotearoa

Korowai Tupu