

Ngā Haerenga | Transition Journeys

**Phase one: Voices of
rangatahi anticipating the
move from statutory care to
self-determined living**

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

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Executive Summary

Key points from this section:

- This paper reports high level findings from phase one of a three year longitudinal qualitative study exploring the experience of forty four rangatahi transitioning from statutory care to more self-determined living arrangements.
- Phase one focusses on goals rangatahi have before leaving care and what they see as key strengths, challenges and support needs for the journey ahead.

Approximately 600 rangatahi aged 15-18 years transition from Oranga Tamariki statutory care (or custody) to self-determined living arrangements each year. To build our understanding of how this transition journey is experienced by rangatahi, including the goals they have, the outcomes they achieve and the things that help or hinder them along the way, we invited a cohort of 126 rangatahi nearing their time to leave care to participate in a three-year qualitative longitudinal research study.

This paper reports high level findings from the first year of the study in which 44 rangatahi were interviewed 1-6 months prior to leaving care by three regionally based research teams (rōpū). The study uses kaupapa Māori methods and includes the voices of whānau and caregivers who also attended some interviews. Rangatahi were recruited between July and October 2020. To be eligible for participation, rangatahi needed to have been in care or custody for at least three months, and lived within one of three broad regions - Waikato/Bay of Plenty, Wellington/lower North Island, and Canterbury/North Otago. Of the 44 participants 23 were male and 21 were female. One participant identified as transgender. Nearly 60% of participants were of Māori descent and a quarter were living in a Youth Justice (YJ) residence.

Rangatahi goals

Many rangatahi struggled to articulate clear goals for the future, and often needed to be prompted and encouraged to talk about their aspirations and plans. This appeared to reflect limited opportunities to date for many rangatahi to think or talk about their next steps. While around one in three had talked about their goals with their social worker or a Transition Support Worker, less than one in five reported having developed a formal transition plan.

Securing a safe, stable place to live was a top priority for most rangatahi. This varied from person to person and ranged from independent living (either alone or in flatting situations) remaining with current caregivers, moving in with whānau, staying in a shared Oranga Tamariki living environment (including YJ residence) and remaining in or accessing supported living facilities. Some rangatahi, however, did not have a clear picture of what this future state would look like and many were not confident that they could achieve their goal. This was most often the case for rangatahi who had limited support networks, had significant disabilities or were in YJ facilities.

Being in work, training or education was similarly very important to most rangatahi. Finding work or a career was seen as essential for financial and housing security as well as to establish a positive future. A primary focus for some was on obtaining a job now to earn enough to support themselves. Some rangatahi had a longer-term plan which included continuing their education to tertiary level or undertaking on-the-job training. Notably some young women were interested in working in the social services, and wanted to improve the lives of other disadvantaged rangatahi.

Connecting with others was also a high priority for most rangatahi. It was not unusual for rangatahi to have experienced a number of broken connections through multiple care placements and changes in social workers. Most commonly, goals centred on connecting or reconnecting with whānau, former caregivers, friends and community or support organisations. Some rangatahi also had goals around breaking connections in order to ensure a better path forward. While this included friends and whānau (see barriers below), it also included intentions to sever ties with Oranga Tamariki social workers as soon as they could.

Hauora or health and wellbeing goals were also important to many, although some had not previously thought too much about this. Physical health (including physical fitness), mental health and gaining access to effective and reliable health care for disabilities, physical/mental health and addiction needs were key priorities. Many rangatahi spoke about not being able to access effective or timely support services in the past.

Getting out and sustaining positive life choices outside of the justice system, was a key goal for most rangatahi in YJ custody. Some were whakamā or ashamed about their past offending behaviour and being in custody, and wanted to show themselves and others that they could do things differently in the future. There was a high level of appreciation for the programmes, structure and educational opportunities experienced in the YJ residences, such as opportunities to learn about Māori culture, to engage in remedial education and/or addiction services. A small number of rangatahi, whose lives outside of YJ residence had often lacked structure, support, connections, security and stability, did not share the goal of staying out of YJ. For them a fear of returning to the instability of the 'outside' world was greater than remaining in YJ or in one case, 'going to the big house'.

Researchers also asked rangatahi about their *broader dreams and aspirations* and goals related to *community participation*. In general, rangatahi found it harder to talk about these topics, and their aspirations were typically 'modest'. This highlights the importance of providing spaces and opportunities for rangatahi to dream 'big', and to plan for and feel secure about more fundamental needs in the first instance.

Strengths and enablers of success

Rangatahi were asked what factors they thought would help them to achieve their goals. Across the interviews, three broad success factors were commonly talked about (with a fourth one common to rangatahi in YJ residences).

Personal strengths: Rangatahi spoke of, or were identified as having, a wide range of qualities that would help them to achieve their goals. These included being determined, resilient and self-reliant, likeable and having good social skills; focused and productive; skilled at caring for and supporting the wellbeing of others and having significant work experience.

Good connections with whānau, current and past caregivers, and various support networks (including with professional and community organisations). While these connections provided security, and in some cases, supported cultural identity, they also afforded opportunities (e.g., work experience). Connections with culture, particularly te ao Māori and connections with whānau, marae and tūrangawaewae were identified as a key enabler for several rangatahi Māori. These connections were seen as important to enable rangatahi to have a strong cultural identity, and, as with tauiwi, to have links to employment and study opportunities, to have access to safe and supportive housing and to support mental and physical health and wellbeing.

Security and certainty. Rangatahi identified sufficient income and food, stable housing and access to reliable transport going forward as fundamental to successfully achieving any of the goals discussed above.

YJ residences providing therapeutic elements: A fourth success factor was frequently talked about by rangatahi in YJ residences. Rangatahi valued having access to regular meals, a safe place to sleep, respectful staff who engaged and listened, learning environments characterised by small class sizes and tailored support, access to health care and opportunities to participate in programmes in te ao Māori. These were things that some rangatahi had not had in their lives previously and saw them as providing a good platform for making positive changes in their lives.

Barriers and constraints

Barriers to success were more often talked about than enablers, and there was a wider range. These included:

- *Financial insecurity* – without work or access to sufficient income, rangatahi were all too aware that their plans and future living situations could unravel quickly.
- *Uncertainty about the future.* Some rangatahi had uncertain futures and could not think about planning their next steps until courtroom decisions had been made or their desire to remain in their current accommodation was confirmed. This was especially an issue for those in supported living and residential care homes with restrictive eligibility rules.
- *Personal barriers identified by rangatahi*, including tendencies to withdraw or switch off when stressed or bored, and lack of motivation, confidence, attention, work experience and skills.
- *Health, disability, mental health and addiction issues*, many of which rangatahi had struggled with over the years, often without appropriate support. Many were concerned about accessing effective services going forward. (For example, for unresolved trauma or addiction issues).

- *Challenging friends and whānau.* These included whānau and peers who placed unfair demands on rangatahi, or were seen to be bad influences regarding criminal behaviour or substance abuse or as negatively impacting on their mental health.
- *Bias and prejudice.* Some rangatahi feared discrimination against them in work and housing opportunities. This was explicitly so for rangatahi within YJ residences or who had a criminal record. Some rangatahi talked about past experiences of being biased against due to their ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation and this was a concern going forward.
- *Cultural alienation and disconnection* from whānau, hapū, iwi and hāpori. Some rangatahi were observed to have a loss of identity and lack of self-confidence associated with experiences of disconnection, which the research team saw as representing a hurdle.
- *Not understanding entitlements and limited access to services.* Rangatahi typically did not know about what transition related entitlements they were eligible for and how to access the right services and supports for them. For many, there was reluctance to engage with Oranga Tamariki and the Transition Support Service going forward. This was because of past experiences of not being listened to, not being given correct information, poor follow through and, when they were referred to services, receiving poor quality services.

Support needs

Rangatahi identified a number of support needs for their transition journey. Rangatahi said they wanted:

1. Easier access to stable housing and more clarity and security regarding income and financial support.
2. More choice and better access to effective mental health services.
3. Improved engagement from Social Workers and Transition Workers, including taking more time to get to know and listen to rangatahi, greater acceptance of where they were at, more deliberate transition planning, better follow through on actions and keeping everyone (including whānau and caregivers where appropriate) informed with accurate, timely information. Further, the opportunity to change a social worker or transition worker if not a good fit.
4. Improved information and understanding of entitlements, and support for accessing services.
5. Ongoing opportunities for engagement, support and services post YJ residential care.
6. Ongoing, early support for connecting and reconnecting to Māori culture.
7. Support for moving into work, education or training (including remedial education).
8. Better, more timely information and more responsive support for rangatahi with an intellectual disability.

Introduction

Key points from this section:

- Each year around 600 15-18 year olds leave Oranga Tamariki statutory care and face significant health, housing, justice and employment related risks and challenges.
- This study aims to improve understanding of how the transition is experienced by rangatahi and the things that help or hinder progress towards their goals.
- Māoritanga, the use of Kaupapa Māori methodologies and the voiced experience of rangatahi Māori is front and centre to this research.

Background

Each year around 600 young people or rangatahi aged 15-17 years, who have been in Oranga Tamariki statutory care arrangements for at least three months, will leave (or age out of¹) 'Care'. This figure includes around 150 rangatahi who leave Youth Justice custody.²

Many of these rangatahi will go on to have successful adulthoods.³ Prior to exit however, a large proportion report high levels of instability and insecurity, and a sense of abandonment, anxiety, and fear.⁴ Many of these rangatahi however, particularly those with lived experience of trauma and neglect, who have high or complex needs, and/or who are lacking the kind of stable and safe family, peer and community relationships and resources available to other rangatahi transitioning into adulthood, are at particular risk of falling through the cracks. achieving poor outcomes.⁵ These include over-representation in:

- poor quality, insecure housing and homelessness.
- physical and mental health conditions.
- poor educational outcomes, including leaving school without qualifications.
- unemployment, casual or insecure employment, benefit dependence and poverty.
- offending and entry into the adult justice system.⁶

In July 2019 Oranga Tamariki began delivering a dedicated new service – the Transition Support Service (TSS). The aim of the TSS is to better prepare rangatahi

¹ Oranga Tamariki Care or custody orders are applicable up to a young person's 18th birthday (or younger).

² Oranga Tamariki. Dimensions of the Transition Population: Demand Modelling (2018). Unpublished research report.

³ <https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/investing-in-children/cabinet-paper-transition-up-to-25.pdf>

⁴ Modernising Child, Youth and Family Expert Panel: Interim Report July 2015 Expert Advisory Panel.

⁵ Previous research has found 40% of rangatahi have high or very high needs. See: [Transition-Cohort-Needs-Assessment-Stage-2-Survey-Results.pdf \(orangatamariki.govt.nz\)](#)

⁶ IBID. See also Sue Harding (2018). Understanding the transitions' population: Multianalysis of the transition cohort of young people and young adults, to inform service design of transition support. Unpublished research. Oranga Tamariki.

aged 15-17 years who have been in state care for three months or more for their transition to a more independent adulthood⁷, and to support these rangatahi once they leave, up to the age of 25 years.⁸ To do so the TSS actively connects and partners with a range of social and health service providers, including iwi organisations, working to support vulnerable rangatahi and whānau.

It is expected that the TSS will, along with community organisations and service delivery partners, improve outcomes for rangatahi during this challenging time. A wide-ranging evaluation programme has been established to support the development of the TSS. This includes the annual *Just Sayin'* survey of eligible rangatahi and rolling, in-depth investigations into the delivery of key components of the service.⁹

*Ngā Haerenga – Transition Journeys*¹⁰ (Ngā Haerenga) is a three year longitudinal study which sits alongside TSS evaluation activities but is not an evaluation study. Its focus is on furthering our understanding of the *journey* and lived experience of rangatahi transitioning from Care. This report provides key findings from the first stage of the study – which explores the in-care, pre-exit context and anticipated journey, from the perspective of rangatahi (and their whānau and caregivers).

Purpose

There are two high level purposes for the Ngā Haerenga research project. These are to:

1. Hear rangatahi voices and to explore and document rangatahi experiences and journey's out of statutory care and/or custody into self-determined adulthood.
2. Build our understanding of:
 - a) what rangatahi are thinking about as they prepare to leave care, including their aspirations, intentions, and perceived needs.
 - b) the trajectories following exit, including actions, experiences (including successes, trials and tribulations) and outcomes across key domains (including rangatahi, Transition Support Service and Youth Justice priority areas).

⁷ Independent from Oranga Tamariki care and custody, but interdependent with communities and other social services, including the Transition Support Service.

⁸ Oranga Tamariki Transition Support Service *actively* supports rangatahi up to the age of 21, and then provides *reactive* support (responding to requests for assistance, rather than proactively reaching out) up to their 25th birthday.

⁹ See *Just Sayin'* 1st annual publication on Oranga Tamariki website: [Just Sayin': Survey of rangatahi eligible for a Transition Worker | Oranga Tamariki — Ministry for Children](#).

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

- c) constraining and enabling factors, which contribute to successful, unsuccessful and unexpected outcomes up to 18-24 months after leaving care.

A further aim for the three year study is to provide insights which will help Oranga Tamariki to identify opportunities for improving the responsiveness and effectiveness of not only the TSS but also services of other agencies and organisations who support rangatahi, and with whom Oranga Tamariki works (e.g., Ministries of Social Development, Education and Health, or NGOs).

In Year One of the study, the focus was on purposes 1 and 2a, in the context of rangatahi 1-6 months prior to leaving a variety of Care arrangements (including rangatahi living in whānau family homes, non-whānau family homes, high needs care residential settings and youth justice facilities).

Research questions

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

- I. What are the short and medium term goals, strengths and resources, challenges and needs, and plans of rangatahi 1-6 months prior to leaving Oranga Tamariki care arrangements?
- II. What are the early experiences, achievements and outcomes of rangatahi leaving care?
- III. What are common success factors/enablers and constraints/barriers which contribute to successful or unsuccessful outcomes?
- IV. How can needed services be improved to better support the transition of rangatahi to achieve successful self-determined, independent and interdependent, outcomes in adulthood?

Year One of the study will focus on Question One, which addresses the pre-exit context and thinking of rangatahi prior to leaving Care.

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

Cultural connections: Framing Māori identity

As at July 2020, 24% of students in New Zealand primary and secondary schools were identified as tamariki and rangatahi Māori.^{11,12} In comparison, around 70% of

¹¹ <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/6028>.

¹² The terms 'Tamariki Māori' and 'Rangatahi Māori' refer specifically to young people of Māori ethnicity in this report while use of the term tamariki or rangatahi on its own to refers to all young people.

rangatahi in statutory care, and 80% of rangatahi in youth justice custody, are identified as tamariki or rangatahi Māori.^{13, 14}

Further, it is the view of the Ngā Haerenga Research rōpū that narratives around tamariki and rangatahi in state care have tended to exclude or marginalise Māori culture when considering perspectives on and experiences of Māori in state care, including youth justice systems. Ethnicity (as self-identified) has been considered an important variable, alongside others such as gender, age and geographical location. However, while ethnic representation has been noted in many studies, there has been comparatively little detailed attention to the specific complexities of ethnicity, ethnic identity and/or Māori over-representation in particular. In addition, analysis conducted from perspectives located within a Māori world view are conspicuous by their absence.

In contrast, and as is reasonable given the over-representation of tamariki and rangatahi Māori in state care systems, this research places Māoritanga and experience as Māori as central. In doing so it is recognised that traditional Māori culture in contemporary Aotearoa/NZ is overlaid with experiences of colonisation, loss, inequity and oppression. Researchers in this project are concerned not to impose their own, possibly privileged, understandings and experiences of Māoritanga. Rather, the aim is to reflect the understandings and experiences of rangatahi Māori (as well as tauwiwi or non-Māori rangatahi) participating in this study.

Starting from the voices of rangatahi Māori, their experiences as Māori within the Care and Protection and Youth Justice systems are central to the approach taken in this research. Central also are the positions of whānau Māori and their rangatahi within larger colonial systems that have all played parts over the generations in disconnecting tamariki and rangatahi, whānau, hapū, iwi and hāpori Māori from their culture. The disconnection from traditional social roles, controls and obligations, from traditional systems of health, economics, well-being and cohesion all contribute to the position that rangatahi Māori and their whānau find themselves in today.

In starting from the voices of rangatahi Māori participating in this research, we recognise the diversity of Māori realities, as well as the common elements that frame present realities. In understanding and analysing rangatahi Māori experiences, we cannot ignore context. This includes contexts of ongoing colonisation, of models of racial and/or cultural identity development and Māori aspirations and models of well-being, of imposed as well as internalised racism, and of cultural self-rejection and self-discrimination. We acknowledge that āhua Māori, wairua Māori, whakaaro Māori, ngākau Māori may be powerful influences on rangatahi and whānau realities even in the absence of mātauranga Māori or knowledge of te reo Māori. Principles

¹³ Sue Harding (2018). Understanding the transitions' population: Multianalysis of the transition cohort of young people and young adults, to inform service design of transition support. Unpublished research. Oranga Tamariki.

¹⁴ <https://www.orangatamariki.govt.nz/about-us/how-we-work/new-ways-of-working/> - Budget 2019.

and practises such as those relating to tuakana-teina relationships, manaaki, mahi tahi and whāngai may be pivotal influences outside of traditional systems and structures. We also investigate whether these concepts might resonate with rangatahi and/or be similar but “named” as something else. For example, whanaungatanga and the principles identified above may be just as central and real in kaupapa whānau, such as gang whānau, kura whānau and hood whānau as they certainly are in whakapapa and marae-based whānau.

In the absence of long-term, stable intergenerational relationships rangatahi seek connections. In some instances, connections with other people of colour, whether through ‘mates’, ‘gangs’ or ‘teams’, may be more central in the minds and identities to rangatahi Māori than biological or cultural connections. While whanaungatanga and relationally centred identity is still central, the desire or readiness to accept Māoritanga and mātauranga Māori as a part of that, may not be prominent or even present.

A final point pertinent to the participants in this study, and to peoples subject to the ongoing effects and practises of colonisation; tamariki and rangatahi Māori in state care environments can experience elements of their environments as risky or dangerous to their well-being (in physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and whānau/connectedness terms). In such environments, and in wider social situations that are experienced as oppressive or dangerous, rather than safe or uplifting, people learn to use all their senses to ‘read’ people and situations. Verbal communications – the words that are spoken – tend to carry less weight than the non-verbal signals and communications that are sent. Mahi-a-rongo, using all the senses to assess, relate and communicate is a feature of people who have long experience of relative powerlessness. Mahi-a-rongo is an area that participants in this study demonstrate a high level of expertise in.

It is our understanding that as Māori researchers working in this study, we will be able to connect with rangatahi Māori in this way in order to understand their world, their priorities, their hopes and dreams. Māori methods and models of analysis may best enable articulation of rangatahi Māori narratives in their broadest sense.

Methodology in brief

Key points on methodology:

- *Longitudinal Qualitative Research (LQR)* methodology is the underlying methodology used in this study. This involves annual in-depth interviews with rangatahi, starting at 1-6 months before leaving care.
- *Whakaaro Māori* informs the LQR at each step through incorporation of te ao Māori values, tikanga, mahi-a-rongo sensitivities and Kaupapa Māori methodologies.
- The joint Oranga Tamariki – Insights MSD ethics review panel approved this project in February 2020.

Phase One Fieldwork

- During the period 1 July – 30 September 2020, 44 rangatahi (of 126 eligible participants) agreed to participate in the study. Each young person (one third with caregivers or members of their whanau) was subsequently interviewed face to face, with interviews lasting 30 minutes - 1 hour.
- Three regionally based research teams or rōpū helped to recruit and interviewed the rangatahi; (i) the Waikato rōpū – covering the Waikato, Bay of Plenty and Lakes District Regions, (ii) the Pōneke rōpū – covering Wellington, Kāpiti, Horowhenua, Manawatū and Wairarapa regions and (iii) the Ōtautahi rōpū – covering the Greater Canterbury region and Northern Otago.
- Each region developed their own semi-structured interview guides, using a shared interview framework. Interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed, coded in Nvivo and summarised by the regional rōpū.

Analysis:

- In December 2020 the three regional research teams came together to identify pan regional themes and to develop a shared Nvivo coding framework.
- Interviews were coded regionally, then integrated into a single integrated data file for secondary analysis. This focussed on checking coding accuracy, identifying further emergent themes and reviewing the sensemaking hui analyses.
- The stage two secondary analysis was shared and checked with the wider research team at follow up hui in early 2021, before report writing began.

Details on the project methodology can be found in the Appendix: *Methodology in full*. This addendum provides further details on key steps in the research process including planning, eligibility criteria and recruitment processes, ethical approval and conditions, interviewing practices, retention strategies and analytical procedures.

Research participants

Of the 44 rangatahi recruited and interviewed in Phase One of this study:

- Most were living with whānau (n=13), in a non-whānau family home (n=12) or in a YJ residence (n=11). Six lived independently, one lived semi-independently and one lived in a high needs supported living residence.
- Over half were Māori (n=26) and nearly a third were Pākehā (n=13). Three rangatahi were of Asian descent, one was Pasifika and one was MELAA.¹⁵
- Three quarters were in statutory care (and not in YJ custody) (n=31), of which four had a YJ history.
- 23 were male and 21 were female. One identified as transgender.
- Over three quarters (n=37) were in some form of education or training. Four were in either paid or unpaid work or employment. Three identified as not in education, employment or training (NEET).
- Three were parents and one was expecting to become a parent.
- One quarter (n=11) were identified as having a medium to high level of need or complexity by the research team.¹⁶

By region:

- Five lived in the Waikato, seven were in the Bay of Plenty, two were in the Lakes District and one was residing in Auckland at the time of the first interview.
- Eight lived in the Greater Wellington region and five were living in the lower North Island.
- Thirteen were in the Greater Christchurch region and three were in North Otago.

¹⁵ Of Middle Eastern, Latin American or African descent.

¹⁶ Included rangatahi who had a diagnosed or were suspected to have a physical health condition, a physical or intellectual disability, mental health needs or a substance abuse problem that significantly impedes their ability to perform activities of daily living independently or their ability to engage with others and build relationships (e.g., having emotional regulation issues). These rangatahi were further identified as requiring access to support services in (at least) the short to medium term.

Findings

The format of this report has been designed to highlight and prioritise rangatahi and whānau voices across the range of key topic areas explored in the interviews. Themes are illustrated through the use of summary stories (sometimes composite stories to preserve anonymity) and participant quotes. All names attributed to participant quotes are pseudonyms.

A synthesis of key themes and reflections from the wider research team is included at the end each section of *findings*. Reflections reported are based on group discussions and expertise within the research team (in youth development, te ao Māori worldviews and supporting rangatahi) and include suggestions for organizational response and improvement.

Rangatahi goals

Key points from this section:

Rangatahi told us that when they leave statutory care they wanted to:

- *Have a safe, stable place to live.* There are a wide range of accommodation and living preferences, depending on circumstances.
- *Get a job or keep learning.* Some wanted a paid job straight away, while others planned to continue their education first or undertake on-the-job training.
- *Connect or reconnect with people,* including whānau, former caregivers, friends and community organisations. Some wanted to break current relationships.
- *Look after their wellbeing and access health services.* Rangatahi want good mental health, addiction and disability support services.
- *Get out of the justice system and sustain positive life choices.* For those in YJ residences.
- *Participate in the community.* Rangatahi wanted to start or keep on being involved in a range of community groups and activities.
- *Follow modest dreams.* Rangatahi were reserved and typically modest when talking about their aspirations.

Approach

One of the key aims of the initial round of interviews was to find out what goals and plans rangatahi had for their future, as they turned 18 years of age and journeyed out of statutory care. We were interested in hearing about their own goals and aspirations (short and longer term) as well as any goals they might have that reflected key Oranga Tamariki and Transition Support Service (TSS) priorities. The interview framework therefore was designed to allow space for rangatahi to self-identify goals important to them, while also hearing about goals associated with Oranga Tamariki priorities.

TSS goals can be seen as priority areas for Transition Support Workers to focus on in order to ensure rangatahi are set up well to transition between statutory care and self-determined living. The TSS and its priority focus areas were developed by Oranga Tamariki following international literature reviews and consultation with rangatahi, iwi and NGO service providers. The transition priorities explored in interviews included goals related to:

- Living in safe and stable homes (kāinga).
- participation in education, employment or training (mahi/akoranga).
- improving or maintaining health and wellbeing (hauora).
- being in connected relationships with whānau/hapū/iwi (ngā hononga).
- involvement in community and community activities (hapori) e.g., sports/arts/kapa haka.

A further goal explored in this study relates to Oranga Tamariki's YJ responsibilities and its priority for rangatahi in custody of:

- sustaining positive life choices outside of a YJ residence.

In the development of our shared interview framework, we acknowledged the complexities of asking 17-18 year old rangatahi to talk about their goals for the future. We recognised that most rangatahi are seldom provided with the opportunity to think about or talk about their goals, and few would be brave enough to do this with people they had only just met. We would therefore like to recognise and honour the courage of all rangatahi in this study to take the time and effort to engage with us and to share their dreams, hopes, goals and life stories.

The following section of the report follows the framework of the Oranga Tamariki Transition Support priority areas. While we are using this framework to present the goals discussed in interviews, it is important to note that not all rangatahi self-identified goals in these priority areas. While for some rangatahi there was a clear overlap between their own goals and Oranga Tamariki priorities, others only mentioned goals in the Oranga Tamariki priority areas because they were specifically asked about them.

Contextual constraints to talking about goals

Before presenting the goals that emerged during kōrero with rangatahi it is first important to acknowledge the struggles faced by many rangatahi to find the space to think about or articulate their goals for the future. Throughout the course of the interviews, it became clear that there were several barriers that stood in the way of rangatahi planning and goal setting for their future. These included:

- *Limited opportunities or encouragement* to think or talk about goals for the future (discussed below).

- *Having a lack of certainty about what the future will look like:* As Matt who was awaiting sentence in a Youth Justice residence points out:

“It's hard when I have no timeframe for all that stuff. When I don't know if I'm coming out -- for all I know, it's like a 1% chance, but I could walk out on [date], you know? But I have no timeframe for when I'm coming out, so it's hard to make any kind of plans about what I'll do when I get out.”

- *A history of living in unreliable and changeable contexts* including multiple changes in care placements, social workers, whānau supports.
- *Lack of supports to help realise past goals.* There were also instances where rangatahi were reluctant to engage in goal setting for the future because of previous experiences where the goals they had set were not able to be achieved because the assistance they requested to achieve these had not been provided.

Identification of these barriers affirmed for the research team the:

- strength and courage of rangatahi in this study to have achieved what they have to date.
- importance of rangatahi receiving consistent support that meets and values where they are at and responds in a timely way.
- need for certainty and stability and opportunities for connections.

While it was the intention of the new TSS, to provide such supports it was noted that around half of the rangatahi in this study reported not having had planning conversations with their Social Workers (SWs), and few had formalised transition plans.

Kāinga – Safe and stable homes

A clear goal for all rangatahi was the desire to have stable homes going forward. A range of housing arrangements were desired by rangatahi, and most typically these included:

- *Moving on from current arrangements and living independently.* This included:
 - *Renting and living alone.* While some rangatahi wanted to live alone, others felt they needed to move on, due to mental health issues and bad experiences of living with people in the past.
 - *Flatting with others/independent living options* – Some rangatahi were looking forward to finding their own place and expected to be living with others in an adult flatting situation. Some hoped to live with their friends and or associates.

- *Moving into education related accommodation* (for example a training institute's on-site hostel).
- Staying in their current caregiving arrangement. This included rangatahi who:
 - were currently living with whānau, living with non-whānau caregivers and foster parents, or were in an Oranga Tamariki family home.
 - Rangatahi who had high needs and were in a supported living environment that met all their needs also wanted to maintain their current living arrangements. One disabled rangatahi, speaking through a loyal caregiver, wanted to stay in the current residential setting and was working with Oranga Tamariki and the provider to ensure this continuity (or failing that, to move to somewhere similar).
 - Some rangatahi in a YJ residence said they would prefer to stay in the residence (or return to it).

Many rangatahi who were seeking to continue their current arrangement wanted to progress to independent living, in the medium term. Some rangatahi however did not have a clear picture of what their future stable housing arrangements would be, or if they did, they were not confident it was realistically attainable. These rangatahi:

- were in youth justice residence (where no clear sentence or release plan was in place),
- had significant disabilities, were unable to live independently and were concerned that their current placement was not guaranteed to continue, and/or
- had very limited support networks. These were more often young women, who described having only one person in their life to support them (i.e., a cousin, partner's mother, current caregiver) and/or were currently living in very fragile living situations (e.g., with friends/partners or care placements that were at risk of ending) and/or had little means of accessing further support (through lack of networks/information, negative past experiences, continually receiving contradictory information/mixed messages).

Summary and research team reflections

While all rangatahi wanted safe and stable housing going forward, there was a range of preferences sought. Some wanted independence, whether that meant living alone or with others, while others wanted to continue to live with whānau or other caregivers – at least in the short term. Some rangatahi indicated some anxiousness about moving into new arrangements due to the unknown nature of these.

Lack of clarity on what was a realistic goal for several rangatahi was a concern. System related processes and procedures seemed to be the basis for much of this uncertainty. One young woman, whose personal circumstances proved a challenge for her social worker to understand, was at risk of having her goal of stable housing compromised. A similar situation was described for another young woman with a disability. Both desired to stay living with their current caregivers, but were left

uncertain about their future living situation. In part this was attributed to a lack of clarity about whether support for these living situations was permissible under Oranga Tamariki regulations.

Mahi/Akoranga – Work, education and training

Nearly all rangatahi wanted to be in some form of education, training or employment. Most rangatahi wanted to be in some form of paid work, immediately or after a further period of study. Paid work was valued because it would:

- *Enable independence and self reliance* – providing an income and the means to pay their way and make ends meet. For some this would enable them to not undertake illegal activities such as stealing or selling drugs. For some there was a sense of urgency around needing a job immediately – so they could support their whānau, pay their rent, or save to study or to buy things to support their studies or hobbies. This often resulted in an urgent focus on just getting ‘any kind of job’.
- *Provide purposeful activity* – keeping rangatahi busy, happier, healthier and less bored than if they were unemployed or sitting at home. They wanted “To be active and keep my mind busy so I stay out of trouble” or would “fill in time so not staying at home and doing nothing” or get tempted to use drugs. Some saw paid employment as a start to a career pathway.
- *Provide the opportunity for rangatahi to give something back to the community* – in particular to others who were or had been in similar situations to themselves. For several rangatahi there was a motivation to ensure care experienced rangatahi received better services than they had. For example, one young woman talked about becoming a Kaiwhakamana with VOYCE Whakarongo Mai (an independent advocacy organisation established in 2017 for tamariki and rangatahi in care) so that she could make a difference in Aotearoa for tamariki in statutory care. She expressed how although she felt the system failed for her and her siblings, she does not want it to fail for others and wanted to be part of the solution. Some rangatahi indicated interest and intention to participate in unpaid or voluntary work to this end.

Rangatahi voiced interest in a wide range of career and job aspirations, including:

- highly skilled professions which would require training first (e.g., lawyer, navy engineering officer, army medic, social worker, pilot, teacher, veterinarian).
- community, social and personal service work (e.g., youth worker, massage therapist, sports coach, personal trainer, beautician, police, joining the army etc.).
- trade related work, where people could earn and learn on the job (e.g., chef, baker, scaffolder, welder, steel fixer, farmer, laborer, auto mechanic, retail worker, labourer).

Continuing education and undergoing further training was also valued. For some, this was part of a longer-term plan focused on gaining relevant qualifications which would lead to further study or professional qualifications. Others identified on the job learning opportunities (e.g., joining the army, apprenticeships, internships, work experience) while others were engaging in interest-based courses to help them learn what they were good at or what they liked doing (e.g., drama, beauty etc.). Skills based courses (e.g., farming, hospitality, mechanics, bee keeping etc.) and work readiness courses that enabled rangatahi to develop the collateral they needed to get a job (CV, driver's licence, NCEA etc.) were also mentioned as practical steps rangatahi were taking to improve their employability.

Young men were more likely to want to be a labourer and to work in construction and auto mechanical fields. Young women were more likely to aspire to work in the personal and social services (e.g., hair dressing, beauty therapy, youth work and social work).

Variable levels of planning

While most rangatahi had clear, if not fixed, ideas on what they wanted to do and a plan on how to get there, some hadn't 'really figured it out yet' – whether this was to study first or work, and what kinds of work or study to do. At one extreme one young woman was able to describe the pathway she would take to achieve her first career (health related), and was also able to discuss the second career she aspired to (to be a farm manager) and the pathway and timeline projected for achieving that. Others knew what they wanted to do (e.g., be a social worker) but who had no clear plan about how to get there. One young woman wanted to be a therapist but was not keen on academic study so was considering undertaking a beauty course instead.

Rangatahi who were less clear about their goals included rangatahi in YJ residences (who were uncertain about their futures), rangatahi with disabilities (some of whom were more focused on obtaining essential life skills and securing appropriate accommodation). Others had dreams but they, or others, did not think their goals were realistic and so they were not planning on working towards this goal (for example being musicians or to be a pilot).

Summary and research team reflections

Securing paid work was seen as essential to rangatahi, as a means to economic independence, being able to do the things they liked, positive mental health and contributing to society. Some rangatahi had very clear intentions relating to types of work desired and for some who wanted to work in more skilled professions, this included further study first.

For some rangatahi, finding work in the short term, which could be just about any form of paid work, was the goal as economic independence was the pressing priority

for them. This reflected a sense of insecurity as they approached their 18th birthdays as well as, for some, a drive to be self-reliant and away from the statutory care system.

We were very concerned that several rangatahi did not have goals and plans in respect to mahi and education. As discussed in 'Barriers' below, some appeared not to have had opportunity or support to discuss or plan in any meaningful way their future employment prospects – making their exit from statutory care precarious and putting their economic independence, and mental wellbeing, at risk during this crucial time.

Hauora - Health and wellbeing

The goals expressed by rangatahi around hauora were varied. There was acknowledgment from some rangatahi that they had not previously thought about what goals they have around hauora, however many rangatahi viewed it as an important area to think about. Key priorities for rangatahi were:

- *Maintaining wellbeing through exercise and fitness.* Physical fitness was recognised by many as a key to supporting both mental and physical health and wellbeing. Several wanted to continue to participate in sports teams like (rugby, league, waka ama, etc.) and to work out because this was seen as developing skills, strengthening the body, reducing weight, and improving physical coordination (e.g., for recovering from injury or managing a disability). For some, working out and exercise (similar to participation in hobbies and working) was also seen as a means to keep them busy and out of trouble.
- *Maintaining or improving mental health.* Many rangatahi prioritised continued or improved management of mental health concerns like anxiety, depression, addiction, grief and anger. Several referred to diagnosed conditions like PTSD and ADHD. Other less common goals included wanting to get “to know who I am”, keeping drug free or being free of certain drugs, improving mental health to the point of no longer needing medications; and being healthy for pēpi (baby).
- *Accessing good quality healthcare services/supports.* Many rangatahi or their whānau/caregivers wanted access to appropriate, good quality support services for their rangatahi to address ongoing mental health issues (e.g., addiction, anxiety, depression, PTSD or anger), and to a lesser extent physical health concerns (e.g., physical injuries, asthma, eye sight etc.) and disability related needs (e.g., ensuring continued access to good quality care arrangements as rangatahi with high disability related needs moved into adulthood). For some this was about continuing their existing health and wellbeing care regimes, however for others improved, more effective, fit for purpose services were required as they felt they had not received adequate services or support in the past. One rangatahi for example expressed the desire to go to a therapist who

could actually help them address their issues. While they had engaged with several counsellors in the past, none had truly understood them or where they were coming from.

Summary and research team reflections

While some rangatahi had not given a great deal of thought about their health and disability related needs, others were very clear that they had pressing needs and goals. Some wanted to stay or to get fit, while others focused on improving their mental health and access to a range of support services. There was concern that services would not be available to rangatahi leaving care or custody once they left.

We noticed a significant amount of rangatahi had goals related to improving and addressing ongoing mental health issues that stemmed from childhood experiences of trauma and grief.

Ngā Hononga – Connected relationships

Goals associated with connections to others were important to rangatahi. These included connections and reconnections with whānau, friends, caregivers, support services/organisations, sports teams and a range of cultural, spiritual and social groups.

This may have been particularly significant for rangatahi in this study as most described movement and variability in their care placements. It was not unusual to hear of rangatahi having multiple placements that required them to break connections on a relatively regular basis with whānau, caregivers, support workers, schools and friends as this quote from Tania highlights:

Well, currently I'm living with my foster parents or caregivers and that's [Caregiver 1] and [Caregiver 2] and I kind of perceive them as my mum and dad at the moment because like they're my longest placement I've ever had and that's like just under a year."

Connections and relationships were often discussed in terms of those they considered would support and would not support them.

Key connected relationship goals included:

- *Establishing and maintaining connections with whānau.* The way rangatahi talked about whānau was broad and related to both biological whānau (both known and unknown) and others who had become whānau because of the close relationship they currently had or because of the love and care they had given over the years. A range of connections being sought were described, including:

- *spending more time with whānau*, particularly if there had been barriers to this happening previously (e.g., geographical distances or care placement rules). One rangatahi expressed the desire to be able to rely on her whānau for the emotional support she needed rather than external services who had not supported her adequately in the past. Some YJ rangatahi in particular, who had experienced enforced disconnection, could not wait to see their friends and whānau again.
- *maintaining contact with current caregivers*. For some, caregivers too were considered whānau. Some rangatahi voiced concern as to how the transition process might impact on this in a negative way.
- *providing support* to partners, children, siblings, parents and cousins, including being a good role model (tuakana) to younger siblings.
- *Re-establishing, maintaining and developing connections with peers and friends*. Friendships were often mentioned as important sources of fun, sharing and support for rangatahi, and friends were sometimes (especially those developed in shared accommodation like family homes, or YJ residence) referred to as whānau. Sometimes friends were seen as potential flat mates.
- *Connections with services and organisations*. Many rangatahi wanted to connect or to maintain connections with social service organisations such as Work and Income and health providers in the future. Some rangatahi saw the Transition Support workers as offering a key support role for them and for connecting them with other services, as they became more independent, and so were keen to develop this relationship (even if they had not yet their transition worker yet, or had met them only once).
- *Breaking or managing existing relationships*. Complexities of relationships with some whānau were common. Some rangatahi recognised the need to make decisions to break or more tightly manage relationships and contact with certain whānau members or peer groups. This was either through their own choice (e.g., relationships were too difficult, demanding, traumatising or detrimental to rangatahi) or due to legal requirements (e.g., sentencing, release plans).

One rangatahi found it challenging to attend courses when younger siblings wanted to stay with her and needed to assertively say 'No'. Some peers and associates were identified as impediments to remaining crime, trouble or drug free. Breaking or more tightly managing existing relationships was noted as a tricky area for rangatahi to navigate, however some had successfully managed this already. For example, a couple of rangatahi had managed to change friendship groups, in order to free themselves of bullying.

Some rangatahi deliberately expressed intentions to not to connect or to actively disconnect with Oranga Tamariki services, including the TSS, and other service providers (e.g., counsellors). Some felt they had been 'let down' by Oranga Tamariki in the past and that social workers and some Transition Workers had been unreliable in that they had not consistently followed through on commitments made.

Summary and research team reflections

Establishing and maintaining relationships with whānau and friends is clearly very important to all rangatahi in this study. Relationships with whānau, friends and caregivers provide a sense of belonging, connection, fun and support. Not all relationships are healthy and rangatahi often spoke of the challenges to maintaining healthy or positive relationships and stopping or better managing unhelpful ones.

Rangatahi were thinking about the services they may need going forward. Positive past experiences where rangatahi felt they were reliably and appropriately supported by the people in the services/organisations they had connected with, appeared to pave the way for a desire to maintain and/or build on these connections going forward. Even in situations where past experiences of services/organisations had not been favourable, some rangatahi held quite high expectations and hopes of what transition workers, in particular, could help them with going forward and were willing to invest energy into these relationships in the hope they would assist them in navigating the path forward.

Hapori – Community participation and activities

Rangatahi were asked about what kinds of community groups or activities they would want to be part of, looking ahead. Often these were connected with goals related to developing or maintaining connected relationships, participating in voluntary work or to improving or maintaining personal health and well-being (discussed above).

Similarly, some rangatahi spoke of what they would like to do but were not able to prioritise these goals currently – as they would need to see how other options panned out. For example, where they were living (e.g., if on a bus route) and what kinds of work they would be doing (e.g., shift work) as this would determine their availability.

Hapori related goals included a desire to commence or continue involvement with:

- sports teams and clubs (e.g., football, netball teams, or joining a gym and maintaining exercise regimes).
- cultural activities such as waka ama and kapa haka.
- exploring nature.
- creative pursuits such as making and performing music, painting and dance.
- voluntary work. One rangatahi described their intention to continue involvement with one NGO and advocate and support other rangatahi. Another example was mentoring support for younger people at risk.
- leading and organising community events. E.g., music performances and fundraising events.

Summary and research team reflections:

A range of community related activities were identified as aspirations for rangatahi, however only a minority had clear goals and were actively planning to follow up on their plans. This likely reflects the delicate age and point in time for many, as they

- move away from school aged events, teams and groups they may have been part of and need to think about joining new clubs and teams, sometimes in locations which they do not know they will be able to get to and which may need to be balanced around commitments of work or study beyond school.
- face an uncertain future regarding where they would live and when and if they might be available to attend.

Given the apprehension of some rangatahi to prioritise goals related to their hapori as highly as their kāinga, ngā Hononga or mahi, this may be an area for subsequent Transition Worker support and encouragement once these other priorities have settled.

Sustaining positive life choices outside of ‘residence’

Eleven rangatahi were interviewed while they were in YJ custody and living in a YJ residence, with several indicating that they had had multiple stays in YJ residences.

With sentences and court appearances pending, many rangatahi had difficulties thinking about the future or making plans because they were uncertain about what this might look like. Regardless of this uncertainty about their immediate future, most rangatahi had taken advantage of the opportunities provided by the structure, routine and facilities in YJ residences to develop skills and qualifications to assist them to manage on the ‘outside’.

The primary goal for most rangatahi in custody was to get out of the residence and stay out of the justice system – or in their words to “*get out of YJ and to stay out of trouble*”. To this end rangatahi anticipating leaving custody wanted to:

- *be a better person*. Several felt whakamā and ashamed for being in YJ. They wanted to show the world they could change, and be a good parent or partner going forward. One young man wanted to prove to his girlfriend’s parents that he was not a bad egg and was prepared to work hard, literally, to achieve their respect.
- *get a regular job*. As discussed above under ‘mahī’, having a job would provide an income and independence. For some, having a job meant they would not need to steal to finance necessities or drugs, or a legit job meant they would not need to sell drugs to make money. Keeping busy would help them to stay out of trouble (which for some was more likely if they were bored).

- *avoid certain friends and whānau* who were more likely to engage in criminal behaviour (or if they did see them, to assertively resist participation in criminal activity).
- *avoid, reduce or better manage drug use*. While some rangatahi were valuing the drug free environment and wanted to continue this, other rangatahi were comfortable using drugs, but wanted to stop stealing to support this habit or acting out when using them.
- *connect with people and organisations* who can help and support them to implement their release and transition plans. For example, Transition Workers.
- *find a stable place to live*. Some rangatahi had never experienced the warm, predictable, nutritious and supportive environment that YJ custody provided them. Coupled with the uncertainty of where they would go once they left, some rangatahi expressed the desire to find a stable living situation on the outside.

Not all rangatahi wanted to leave residence or to necessarily stay out of the justice system once they did leave. Some liked the safe, stable residential environment and the friends they had made there, enough to want to stay or return – and one was explicitly ready to reengage with crime in order to make this happen. Another young man talked about being happy to meet up with whānau in ‘the big house over the road’ – meaning the nearby adult prison.

Other goals for rangatahi leaving YJ residences included:

- *continuing to learn and get qualifications*. Some did not know they were capable of succeeding in a formal learning environment, until they had experienced the smaller class and tailored support given to them in the residences. Many of rangatahi in custody reported valuing and taking advantage of the meaningful courses that were available to enable them to develop core life and job skills and to achieve formal qualifications such as NCEA that they had not previously been able to achieve. Some felt sad about feeling stupid in the mainstream education settings, when they were in fact very capable. As one rangatahi said “I always thought I was stupid”.
- *continuing to learn about te ao Māori*. For some this was the first time they had positively engaged with their Māori culture and heritage.

Summary and research team reflections:

While rangatahi in custody were generally looking forward to leaving the YJ residence, some valued the structure, stability and care it brought to their lives. For many, the YJ residence was seen as a safer, more stable, and caring environment, with learning environments and sports facilities and equipment that they were not able to access on the ‘outside’.

Besides training and educational opportunities, rangatahi also valued the relationships they had with staff and other rangatahi in the residence and the

opportunities they had to show and develop leadership, support others, become drug free, and generally more fit and healthy. Rangatahi commented on the security that being in YJ provided in terms of kai, housing and companionship, noting that this was not always something that was easy for them to come by on the ‘outside’.

This speaks to the challenging circumstances of many rangatahi coming into contact with youth justice system. Approaching the age of 18 years, they faced a decision whether to continue offending and move from YJ to prison institutionalisation (possibly with fewer opportunities), or to find alternatives that did not involve offending. For many, planning was challenging as they were yet to receive their court sentence and did not know the date of their forthcoming release.

It’s vital that the valued support provided inside residences is extended to these rangatahi once they leave – to build on their experiences of a stable, healthy environment and to support their ambitions as they navigate the myriad of challenges they will face outside.

Dreams and longer term aspirations

As well as focusing on their more immediate transition goals rangatahi were asked to think about their longer term aims and aspirations. These were often framed in terms of 2-5 year dreams.

Most rangatahi had fairly modest goals. Identifying longer term aspirations was an area where rangatahi seemed to struggle. Many rangatahi appeared to have little space to ‘dream big’.

“Yeah. I just don’t really have any long-term goals. I don’t know. I just don’t really have any big dreams or hopes”. Matt.

Those who dream big, dreamed of:

- *cultural connections* – getting to know or reconnecting with te ao Māori.
- *traveling the world* - for work; to connect with whānau or to see the world.
- *being a performer* – such as being a rapper, musician, dancer, a famous sports star competing in international events or a successful online gamer.
- *housing* – owning own house, for rangatahi with disabilities being in a safe, appropriate and permanent supportive living environment.
- *lifestyle* - Having fun, wanting the good life, being rich and being happy.
- *freedom* – being free of Oranga Tamariki social workers and being free of YJ custody and constraints (including charges and any sentencing/reparation requirements).

Summary and research team reflections

Many rangatahi struggled to talk about their transition goals in detail, and those that did often had modest practical goals. Safe and supportive opportunities for rangatahi to think about and share their dreams and aspirations appeared to be absent for many rangatahi. Further, there appeared to be a number of constraints on 'daring to dream' most of which were related to important needs not always being met. For example, by necessity of their current (and/or past) circumstances, many rangatahi appeared to be so focused on the basics of living and surviving today they were not at liberty to think more broadly about tomorrow.

Strengths and enablers

Rangatahi were asked about the things they saw as likely to help them to reach their stated goals. At this stage of the research these are *anticipated* strengths and enablers, reflecting both the legacy of what has come before as well as the possibilities of what is to come.

Key points from this section:

Rangatahi (and whanau and caregivers) told us the things that will help them to succeed are:

- *Their personal strengths.* Rangatahi have a range of positive, likeable social traits and have learnt to be resilient and self-reliant.
- *Work experience.* Some have a good part time work track record.
- *Being connected to support people.* Many have good, trusting relationships in the community with people and professionals who will support them.
- *Connection to culture.* Some rangatahi get strength from knowledge of and connection to te ao Māori.
- *Security and certainty.* Rangatahi know that having stability and sufficient income is essential to success in the future.
- *Youth Justice residences.* Those in YJ residences appreciate the respectful staff, structure and opportunities provided. Some had not experienced this level of support and stability before.

Personal skills and qualities

It is important to note that while a range of personal strengths and qualities emerged during the interviews, many rangatahi struggled to talk about their own strengths and positive qualities. Often these only appeared if they were identified by others present in the interview (e.g., a whānau member or caregiver) or were drawn out through interviewer reflections based on observations throughout the interview (for example interpreting a story the young person told as demonstrating qualities such as persistence, determination or resilience and checking this with the young person).

Personal qualities anticipated as likely to assist rangatahi in their future endeavors included:

- *Good social skills.* Some rangatahi were praised by their caregivers or support people for being genuine, kind, empathetic, responsible and likeable. Many were identified as confident and skilled at getting on well with people, working well in teams or interacting with, leading and caring for others effectively. Some talked about their ability to have clear boundaries and resist peer pressure.
- *Focused, determined and productive.* Many rangatahi were described as or agreed that they were reliable, focused, quick learners, hardworking and motivated to achieve results. Several were seen as possessing dogged determination, persistence in the face of adversity and as holding firm to belief in themselves and their abilities, even when others let them down. For example, Ricky, a young man who self-identified as having a disability commented:

“People letting me down and telling me, “No, you can’t do it, just give up”. I’ve had a lot of that before. Even they will like tell me not to do it and I will just say, “No, I can do it, you’re not in my life, it’s my life” so that’s what I say to them, but they just take it the opposite way and say, “No, you can’t do it, you can’t achieve it because you’ve got a disability and you can’t get there”. I say, “Even though I’ve got a disability everyone has got disabilities and they still achieve their goals, even now”.

- *Skilled at caring for and contributing to well-being of self and others.* Some rangatahi who were caregivers for siblings or helped in large whānau/non-whānau placements to care for other tamariki had gained valuable skills that had enabled them to support themselves and others both currently and in the future. As Ethan said:

“I’m pretty good at looking after people, I guess, or being a leader because I’ve been looking after my little siblings and stuff.”

- *Work experienced.* Several of rangatahi had successful part time employment histories which they were proud of and saw as putting them in good stead for the future.
- *Resilience and self-reliance.* Some rangatahi had life skills beyond their years because the circumstances they had been placed in required them to do a lot of looking after themselves. Many indicated they had learnt to rely on themselves to ensure goals and plans were achieved. For many this was a necessity based on their lived experiences of being let down in the past. Some rangatahi reflected on their ability to recognise how they had been able to grow and develop in positive ways despite their often-harrowing life experiences.

“And I just look at it as if those things never happened and I wouldn't be the person who I am ... Yeah, kind of like -- yeah, because like after everything I've been through from sexual harassment and all that from (inaudible), drug and alcohol abuse....And it's like I actually -- like sprouted out of that and become such an empathetic person and like cared so much about everyone”. (Tania)

- *Motivation to be a better person.* A key enabler for some rangatahi who had experienced a range of difficult life experiences and circumstances was their focus on ‘breaking the cycle’ by not repeating what had happened to them. An important aspect was not allowing their negative life experiences to define them or the way that they lived. Some wanted to be the best mother or father for their child they could be. One young person in YJ custody was ashamed of his past behaviour and wanted to prove himself to his partners family and show that he was not just a criminal. For others this was about valuing the person they are not the person they could have become.

So it's like ... with the stuff I've been through I could be like -- I could be a real serial killer like, I could be like an evil person. ... Some people are surprised when they hear the stuff that I was put around that I'm actually a decent person. Like I'm not like a crackhead or anything. Not to be mean or offensive, but it is true, a lot of people fall down that hole and follow their parents, which I haven't done. So I'm not stupid...(Bella)

Summary and research team reflections

A wide range of personal skills, character qualities and lived personal experiences were identified by rangatahi, caregivers and interviewers alike as factors which would put rangatahi in good stead to enable their success going forward. Resilience, determination and manaakitanga shown towards others shone through. The interviewers in our team were always humbled by these emergent qualities, especially when identified in or despite challenging contexts.

Connections with culture

For many rangatahi to thrive, cultural identity and a sense of belonging is important.¹⁷ Cultural identities can relate to a range of factors including ethnicity, gender, sexualities and ability. For the most part in this study references to culture

¹⁷ Williams, A.D, Clark, T.C. & Lewycka, S. (2018). The associations between cultural identity and mental health outcomes for indigenous Māori youth in New Zealand. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 6, 1-9.
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6243073/pdf/fpubh-06-00319.pdf>

are related to rangatahi Māori and, in this section, the strengths that we observed coming from knowledge of and connection with te ao Māori.

For some rangatahi, connections with te ao Māori and a secure understanding of Māori culture and identity were an established part of their life. For others these connections had been disrupted.

“Well as a kid Mum just brought us up around it...When I came here, I just carried on knowing what I knew and just took my own way about it, I guess.” (Willow)

However, the drive to develop a greater understanding of their own Māori culture was shown through their desire to establish or re-establish their cultural connections. Where this occurred, this provided a strong source of pride and mana.

“I like to take credit of the Māori side.” (Tania)

Some rangatahi, mainly in youth justice residences, expressed joy at finding the opportunity to connect with te ao Māori while in care/custody. They saw this as a positive force, and something they wanted to develop further, which would help them to achieve their goals going forward.

Yeah, it's pretty good cultural stuff, yeah, want to get to know more in my background and all that. Yeah. (Jonah)

Summary and research team reflections

While some rangatahi Māori felt connected to te ao Māori and had a secure understanding of Māori culture and identity, others indicated they were in the process of making this connection/re-connection. We were pleased to hear this emerge from the kōrero and interviews (although often this was prompted), because to our minds, connection to one's culture is a key source of pride and mana, and a powerful enabler of success.

We were concerned that not all rangatahi Māori felt a connection with te ao Māori or saw it as important. While some rangatahi in YJ residences valued learning about te ao Māori, some for the first time, others had not had the opportunity. We feel this should be a priority for all Tamariki and Rangatahi Māori in statutory care – from the earliest age.

Social connections and support networks

Social connections and networks were identified by rangatahi as a key enabler for successful transition through providing support and guidance and through affording opportunities that they would not normally have access to.

These connections were particularly valued when they showed rangatahi that they were unconditionally supported and that the person or people could be relied on. This was clear as Ezra described a support person who:

*“like, didn't like just give up on me, eh; didn't like -- just when I mucked up didn't just like throw away the key like, "All good, we don't want him anymore." They're just like, "Oh, no, all good, we'll still have him. I see a big change even though he's doing -- still doing bad stuff or like still doing s***, I see that ..." Oh, they've said, yeah, they think I'm like changing or have changed; and I reckon I've changed too.*

Key networks included:

- *Whānau.* Several rangatahi talked about achieving key goals such as getting work or finding accommodation through family members. One young man was confident he would get a job with his uncle's building firm when he was out of care. Another young woman was planning to stay with her mother while she attended a training course.
- *Current and past caregivers.* Several rangatahi spoke about their current and previous caregivers as ongoing supports for them. This provided these rangatahi with a sense of security and belonging. In interviews caregivers were often identified as key advocates for the young person and rangatahi told stories of how current caregivers wanted them to stay on with them post turning 18. Previous caregivers too were identified as offering places of refuge, support and advice, and ongoing friendship and/or advocacy. For example, a key enabler of success for Nick, who has an intellectual disability, is the ongoing support of his ex-caregiver who is prepared to act and advocate for him despite him no longer being in her care.

“What I've found with transition for Nick and people like Nick who really do need someone like myself -- they need an actual person. Someone who really is truly looking out for them because even when you're in the house with all the staff and the different changes, when you're a young person and you can't really always vocalise what it is you need or want or isn't happening for you, you just need that person to be able to...”

- *Professional support.* For some rangatahi, previous positive experiences with social workers and YJ residence staff had given them confidence that Oranga Tamariki staff, including social workers, TWs and caregivers, would continue to be an asset for them going forward. Several rangatahi talked of at least one Oranga Tamariki staff member worker who had assisted them in getting them ready for their transition by connecting them with work or courses, finding suitable accommodation, getting clothing and living allowances or making sure

they had the right supports in place to move forward. Besides practical support this gave them confidence that they were not making this journey alone. For example, Tania, whose placement had broken down, described how her social worker had used her connections to get her a new placement. This stable placement not only provided her with stability in her pre-transition years but set her up well as a place to transition from.

So I got kicked out again and I had no place to go and was scared and everything. And I couldn't go to my friends like I usually would. But my social worker, she found -- well she was working with a transition worker, which is really funny and my mum [Caregiver 1] was the transition worker involved. And she – [Social Worker] was telling her about my case, how I needed a place to stay and [Caregiver 1] said, "Can I meet her?" And now I've been living with them.

- **Community networks.** Rangatahi also talked about how valuable teachers and mentors they knew in the community were who provided support, timely responses to requests for help, guidance and access to reliable and accurate information. They valued the time these people gave them and the connections to people that can make things happen in the community.

Summary and research team reflections

As expected, current supportive relationships were seen as key enablers for rangatahi going forward. We acknowledge that we ourselves would not be in our privileged positions today without the support, kindness and advice of others when we were becoming young adults and even now, as adults.

While not all rangatahi were able to identify current relationships as strengths or enablers going forward, most did and we were impressed with the stories of support and dedication, and the range of people identified in the interviews as being on the side of rangatahi going forward. This highlighted the wide potential sphere of positive influence on rangatahi.

Youth Justice residential settings

A clear enabler for many rangatahi who had youth justice involvement to achieve their goals going forward was the structure, learning opportunities and security that had been provided to them during their stay in YJ residences. For some, their experiences were identified as giving them enduring skills and knowledge that they could carry with them and would be of benefit to them once they left. Identified success factors noted to have an enduring effect included:

- Caring staff who connected with and were willing to listen and support rangatahi, and believed in them.

- Good routines and regular access to healthy kai, and toiletries and cooking facilities. Some had not experienced this before and was an eye opener to what might be possible.
- Equipment and discipline to support physical health and fitness. For some, being in a YJ residence gave them a break from drug use and the opportunity to eat healthy food and establish regular exercise and fitness regimes.
- Making of new friends and potential supports with other rangatahi in residence.
- Good teaching and learning environments. As previously discussed, these were small in size and identified as highly responsive to individual circumstances and need. These learning opportunities gave rangatahi remedial and foundation skills (e.g., drivers licence) and the inspiration and confidence to continue learning beyond the residence. One young man Matt, who previously had not enjoyed school and did not experience success in that environment, spoke at length about how he had thrived in the learning environment offered in YJ residence where he was now studying history and calculus. First, he describes his learning experience in mainstream school:

“I left halfway through Year 12 ... I'm not stupid but I didn't like school. ... It just didn't sit with me. I was always disruptive, distracting. I distracted others. Just couldn't focus on my work most of the time. Fell asleep in class, didn't go to class. ...”

Then he goes on to talk about the learning environment in YJ:

“It's a bit like -- yeah, you do work, but it's not like rotate between subjects as much, and it's a much smaller class, of course. ... I'm doing Level 2 stuff right now.”

Summary and research team reflections

As previously noted, many rangatahi come to the YJ residence without a history of stable, living environments, and some lacked role models teaching them good health and hygiene habits. The opportunity to break bad habits (e.g., drug use) and to learn new skills and habits (e.g., studying or regular exercise regimes) is a precious upside to being in custody and provides a key lesson into what an alternative lifestyle to crime might encompass. We were pleased to see Māori cultural experiences and education, along with a wide range of other activities and opportunities discussed above, was valued by rangatahi Māori. Lessons can be learned about the need to replicate these elements for some rangatahi outside of the YJ system.

Sufficient income and security

Time and again, rangatahi identified that in order to reach their goals they needed to secure access to key fundamentals or necessary conditions, including:

- sufficient income to pay the bills, and access to work and opportunities for earning independent income. WINZ, study link and scholarships were also seen as important services that would help rangatahi feel more secure and provide food to eat.
- a safe, stable place to live. Rangatahi acknowledged they needed sufficient income to service independent living expenses without the help of whānau and caregivers to help them with stable living environments.
- access to affordable and reliable transport. This would enable them to get to places of learning, jobs (of which some were part-time and in different locations), hobbies and sports team (e.g., practices).

Summary and research team reflections

Access to food, stable shelter and work or other income is a given necessity and thus, an enabler, from which we can achieve more high-level goals. It is significant that rangatahi were acutely aware of the realities so as to explicitly include assumptions around the necessities of life. Nothing should be taken for granted, as many well know. The honesty and realism of these rangatahi is vital as they recognise the challenges ahead and the risks that if income, housing or transport falls through, the fragile system could collapse and they could fall through the cracks.

Anticipated barriers and challenges

Rangatahi were asked to identify what might stand in the way of meeting their stated goals. A wide range of responses were given.

Key points from this section:

Rangatahi (and whānau and caregivers) told us the things that they were worried about are:

- *Not having a transition plan.* Many have not had conversations with their social workers about next steps and feel unprepared.
- *Accessing entitlements and services.* Many do not know what transition services and supports they are entitled to or how to access them.
- *Financial stress and insecurity.* Rangatahi know that their plans and living situations can unravel quickly if they don't have sufficient income.
- *Their personal limitations getting in the way.* Some have bad habits and lack independent living skills.
- *Health and wellbeing challenges.* Many rangatahi struggle with ongoing health and disability issues and were concerned about accessing quality services.
- *Pressure from whānau and peers.* Some are concerned about excessive demands and pressure being put on them which puts them at risk.
- *Bias and prejudice.* Some rangatahi, especially those with a criminal record, are worried about being discriminated against.
- *Being disconnected.* Some are concerned they will not develop good relationships with whānau, hapū, iwi and people in the community

Personal barriers/challenges

Some of the key barriers to achieving goals as identified by rangatahi related to personal barriers/challenges including;

- *Avoidance reactions.* Rangatahi frequently described having avoidant and disengaging habits which would come to the fore when faced with a range of challenging situations. These included switching off and avoiding situations that were boring, not of value or interest or stressful. This meant they missed out on opportunities and exercising perseverance with challenging tasks, such as engaging in class activities or completing school work. In their own words different rangatahi said:

“I just get frustrated and leave”

“I get bored quite quickly”

“I lose hope”

“I’m a procrastinator and avoider”.

“If it’s not something I like or value I’ll shut down completely”

“If things aren’t interesting to me I just don’t learn them”.

- *Limitations.* Rangatahi also described a range of personal limitations they felt they had in relation to others, and which held them back. These included:
 - Lack of motivation – indicated by statements about not caring greatly about succeeding in school for example or ‘could not be bothered’.
 - Low confidence – Some caregivers and rangatahi talked about low confidence being an ongoing issue and resulted in rangatahi being reluctant to put themselves forward, take risks, ask for help or ask questions.
 - Lack of ability to focus for long periods.
 - Lack of ability to problem solve and make good decisions. e.g., thinking through problems clearly and identify realistic solutions.

Summary and research team reflections

These honest reflections from rangatahi relating to their reactions and personal barriers/challenges reflect their own self-perception while omitting the many potential underlying causes of these reactions, which are outside of their control. It is important to recognise that many of these reactions are, or reflect, coping strategies, often in relation to historical trauma, neglect, poor role models and lack of support as well as associated mental health issues.

We also recognise that while these personal limitations may present as barriers to date, the ability of rangatahi to recognise and articulate their own personal limitations and challenges can also be seen as a strength going forward.

The positive discussions we had with rangatahi about the YJ residences speak to the power of new, smaller and tailored learning and therapeutic environments for them

outside of the YJ residences, and the hope for rangatahi to learn new ways of managing challenges and engaging with education, peers, goals and caregivers alike.

Health, disability mental health and addiction issues

A wide range of health, disability, mental health and addiction issues were identified as potential barriers to rangatahi success. These included:

- *Physical health and disability.* Some rangatahi talked about physical health and disability related issues such as sports injuries, poor eyesight, epilepsy and difficulties breathing due to asthma as potential barriers to achieving goals if these were left untreated. Some rangatahi had high complex needs that would require stable ongoing support over the long term. There was a concern that this might not be sustained.
- *Ongoing mental health issues.* Many rangatahi spoke about a range of mental health issues holding them back, including anger outbursts, panic attacks, PTSD, anxiety and depression.
- *Alcohol and substance abuse.* Several rangatahi spoke with concern about their use of drugs (e.g., marijuana, speed) and alcohol, some recognised they had addiction issues which, if left unchecked, would impede or had already harmed, them and their future success. Not all rangatahi using alcohol and drugs saw this as an issue.
- *Access to effective mental health and addiction services.* For many rangatahi, an equal challenge going forward was what they saw as a lack of appropriate support to help them address these ongoing and sometimes long-term mental health and addiction issues. For rangatahi who had been able to access support for these issues in the past, it was not unusual for them to express their disappointment in these services. They expressed a desire to receive treatments that worked for them or to engage with professionals that understood them and their needs. As one young woman explained, she did not have *“a good relationship with my counsellor – she just wasn’t getting it and like she didn’t understand.”*

Summary and research team reflections

Rangatahi expressed a range of health and disability related concerns going forward, including concerns related to the availability of effective services. To our minds, the prevalence of mental health and addiction related needs speaks to a history of trauma, neglect and abandonment in the Care population. The views of some rangatahi in this study that services used to date have been ineffective for them, as well as difficulties in accessing appropriate services, raises ongoing concerns about the appropriateness and accessibility of these services for rangatahi.

While some rangatahi spoke favourably of the services they have received, too many have not received timely, effective services to date. This speaks to deficits in the availability, promotion and targeting, and delivery of services for these rangatahi. It also says a lot about the responsiveness of service professionals, including Oranga Tamariki Social Workers, often during key, formative years in facilitating access to these supports.

Challenging connections with peers and whānau

A number of rangatahi did not have the connections with the whānau and peers they wanted, or needed going forward. These included:

- *Negative associations and influence from peers.* For many rangatahi, connections with friends were an important source of validation, fun and support for them to achieve their goals. But sometimes peers, whether a group or individuals, were seen as an obstacle. While this latter scenario was common for rangatahi with youth justice involvement, others also spoke of this problem - both in terms of peers encouraging or being associated with problematic behaviours and activities or because their desire to hang out with mates stopped them attending to the mahi they needed to do to achieve their goals.

As with friends, while connections with whānau were for the most part spoken of as key strengths, some rangatahi spoke about their current connections as being potential barriers or constraints to success going forward. These included:

- *Challenging whānau dynamics.* Some rangatahi had whānau (whom they did not live with, but saw at least occasionally) with complex dynamics and support needs. This meant rangatahi sometimes had to focus on supporting whānau members rather than their own lives. This worried them, looking ahead. For example, Amy described how her large whānau relied on her a lot and the difficulties that creates for her:

“they ask me for money and ask me if they can move in with me and [then trying to] do my course but it's just too much, I can't handle.”

- *Disconnection from whānau:* Rangatahi frequently mentioned being disconnected from whānau as a source of frustration and a limitation. Sometimes this was due to a lack of available information about the whānau, but other times contact was not permitted by Oranga Tamariki or the social worker because this contact was seen as too risky or too challenging (e.g., reconnecting with deaf whānau member).

Summary and research team reflections

In the Goals and Strengths sections to this report, good relationships with friends, whānau and caregivers were found to be of high importance to rangatahi. An absence of, or complications within those relationships, can also be an issue, especially if the relationships are closely connected, in terms of time or expectation. These can bring with them demands the young person is not comfortable with or able to manage effectively. Rangatahi are able to identify what might be hindering them, but may need support with handling such complex dynamics.

Of particular concern are the relationships that rangatahi feel are not being fostered. Whakapapa and whanaungatanga are crucial to wellbeing and it is understood that rangatahi estranged from whānau will feel this loss keenly. Where there is an absence of such important relationships, Oranga Tamariki should be doing everything it can to enable and support connections, where these are sought. Meeting or reconnecting with whānau is a key step for rangatahi to know where they come from and to knowing who they are, and where they want to go. Without this many feel at a loss during a time of change. This may involve coaching and support when meeting with some whānau members, rather than a simple yes or no connection in the years leading to independence.

Limited access to services and support

Many rangatahi saw themselves as unlikely to be able to access the support and services they needed to smooth their transition to a more independent adulthood. There were several reasons for this:

- *Low awareness of entitlements and uncertainty on how they would access them.* A number of rangatahi were noted to have little or no awareness of the entitlements they could access either through Oranga Tamariki, Transition Service Providers or other regional or mainstream services – or where and how to access them. Many had not had transition conversations with their social workers and had not discussed post statutory care services. Examples of services rangatahi said they needed but did not know if they could, or how they would access, included:
 - health services – including physical health, disability support and mental health services (e.g., trauma related services).
 - housing and transport services.
 - training and employment support.
- *Accessibility thresholds* were also identified as a barrier to receiving needed support. Some rangatahi were aware of currently missing out on needed services, sometimes because, they were not old enough to get ‘adult’ services or because as one rangatahi put it, they were not “*assessed as severe enough to get the financial benefit required*”.

- *Low confidence in Oranga Tamariki and social services and a reluctance to ask for help and support.* Many rangatahi reported a history of poor, inadequate or inconsistent professional support and advocacy from Oranga Tamariki social workers, transition workers and other social services during their time in statutory care. This undermined their confidence going forward. Feedback included:

- Not being heard, listened to or taken seriously;

“Yeah, yeah, like I'm never going to be heard. I've never like - like throughout like the five years of being with like CYFS, I feel like I've never been like heard, like my voice doesn't matter (Sandra).

“it's been about experience and no support at all and awful social workers who have just not cared, never - if I've ever needed anything, just - it was never’ (Tina).

- *Not being a priority*, with some social workers being too busy to meet them.

“Oh, my social worker is useless. Well, he's all right but he's just busy”. (Luke)

““We need to talk.” But she always says she's busy with her own clients and it's not fair...” (Ricky, on trying to access his Oranga Tamariki social worker to sort out his living situation)

“I know my independence worker is helping me but he's got other people that need more help and take priority. And so with me I'm one of the good kids that are usually in the background and those type of kids really get left alone (Kaleb).

- *Slow response times and being given the ‘run around’.* Delays following requests for assistance were common and resulted in unnecessary stress and missing key opportunities, including reconnecting with whānau, taking up training or work experience opportunities, accessing health care and maintaining living situations and financial security. Examples were given of support being delayed where rangatahi and social worker goals did not align, or where financial support they were eligible for e.g., purchase orders, rent, allowances etc. did not come through on time, resulting in unnecessary financial hardship and stress for rangatahi. One young person spoken to did not have blankets in her home.

Timeliness of support was also discussed in relation to rangatahi being informed about the entitlements they were eligible for in a timely manner.

*'I ask, but then I get run around in circles and come back, and I guess I give up, because someone will speak for ten minutes and then I realise I still don't have the answer to my question of what the f****s happening. I'll ask it again and again, and I'll ask my lawyer. I'll ask social workers. I'll ask the youth transition worker. And I don't get a straight answer from anyone' (Matt).*

Caregivers voiced their concerns too. For example the caregiver of Elijah described a situation where she had required support from Oranga Tamariki to access medical assistance for Elijah, but was not able to contact anyone at Oranga Tamariki to discuss this. This had left her feeling unsupported and Elijah at risk of not receiving the medical attention he needed had she not been prepared to advocate strongly for him.

Summary and research team reflections:

The team were concerned at the low level of awareness, and confidence in accessing, services and supports shown by rangatahi. There appears to be clear failure in the system when rangatahi are not informed about services they are eligible to access and would likely need and benefit from during the transition period.

A reluctance to engage with Oranga Tamariki and other services persisted despite an acknowledgement by some rangatahi that because they had grown up in state care, they did not have the 'normal' whānau and community supports available to them that other rangatahi outside of the care system might have.

The examples given where rangatahi felt let down by social workers not only served to break down trust in people and services (for example transition support workers) they also were a direct barrier to future planning and progress as housing, training work and education placements were jeopardised.

The team were also concerned about the lack of planning and preparation rangatahi talked about so close to turning 18. We see this as a core Oranga Tamariki social worker responsibility, which appears not to be consistently implemented and needs greater prioritisation by all Oranga Tamariki social workers. Resourcing issues may need to be addressed to enable this prioritisation and to ensure no rangatahi are missed. Consideration of peer to peer support through the likes of an existing trusted organisation like VOYCE - Whakarongo Mai could help to support this mahi.

While each research rōpū shared transition entitlement and service information with rangatahi, much more preparation support is needed for rangatahi prior to leaving statutory care.

Discrimination

Experiences of prejudice and discrimination in the past, including the recent past, were shared by several rangatahi. Although not directly named as prejudice or discrimination by them, these experiences were observed to be harmful for rangatahi and contributed to a fear of being discriminated against going forward.

Rangatahi with a history of youth justice involvement expressed this most acutely. These rangatahi were concerned about being perceived as inherently bad people and worried that their criminal record/conviction would affect their employment and housing prospects in the future. Others had experienced, and likely remained concerned about, discrimination based on:

- racism towards them as Māori.
- having a disability.
- their diverse sexual identity.

Summary and research team reflections

Understandably a criminal conviction is perceived to be a barrier to success going forward as landlords and employers may be reluctant to take a risk on someone with a criminal conviction. Given this prejudice in the community it is particularly important that rangatahi in YJ settings are given tailored, intensive support prior to and following their time in custody.

It is also incumbent on social workers and transition workers to acknowledge the role that prejudice can play in the community, including in their own attitudes and practice.

Cultural alienation

As well as disconnection from whānau, mentioned previously, some rangatahi Māori discussed feeling disconnected from te ao Māori (whakapapa, whenua, whānau, marae, tūrangawaewae, hapū, iwi, hāpori).

Some rangatahi Māori were whakamā or embarrassed about not knowing their whakapapa.

*“I know from Ngāti Porou but that’s about it. I don’t really know any of that....Don’t really know any of my people, or anything.”
...“When I moved over here, I was already like set back I was like,
“Oh, I’ve got a lot to catch up and I’m new. I’m in my second year, I don’t know anybody, I’m not going to jump into that [for kapa haka] because I don’t know anything about it” so I’ve just not done it since which I kind of regret.” (Wini)*

“I would say I don't really see myself as Māori, but I still have Māori blood in me --...Yeah, I don't really do much stuff with that type of stuff. I don't really see myself in any of those areas at all.” (Kaleb)

Interviewer: *Do you feel like you are much connected to your Māori side?* **Respondent:** *Nah. (Wiremu)*

Summary and research team reflections

While some rangatahi Māori felt connected to te ao Māori, and some in YJ residences valued learning about it (as discussed in the goals section), several rangatahi Māori were disconnected or not as connected as they wanted to be to their whakapapa and Māori culture. While some intuitively identified with people of colour, they did not identify with being Māori. For any rangatahi Māori, disconnection from te ao Māori, and the absence of a secure Māori identity, is a concern for us.

While not explicitly identified as a barrier to success going forward, we see an important opportunity to improve this situation going forward – whether for rangatahi in care or custody. For rangatahi Māori to reach their full potential, connection with, and valuing Māori culture, Māori culture must be seen as a source of pride, mana and a real asset in their lives. We hope that further questioning of rangatahi connections to culture in subsequent interviews will provide a greater understanding of rangatahi perspectives on how these connections might support them to develop a positive identity.

Insecurity

Just as having housing, income and food was seen as a pre-requisite or key enabler to achieving a range of goals rangatahi had set for themselves, fears of not having these fundamentals in place, or of them falling apart unexpectedly, were expressed by many as a possible barrier to their wellbeing and success. Two forms of insecurity stood out:

- **Financial insecurity:** The lack of stable and/or sufficient income, was identified as a serious risk for rangatahi. Some rangatahi had experienced this scenario firsthand already, so felt this risk acutely before their 18th birthday. One young woman described being helped to pay bond and rent in advance for a flat, but did not receive the promised assistance to obtain a heater, bedding, cooking utensils, and a food grant for over a month. In the meantime, she went without key essentials.

Another young woman described her experience of moving into an independent living situation with insufficient funding.

“And then also with like Oranga Tamariki, they have moved me into my own house but they're making me pay the power bill and

food myself, which I only earn like \$150 a week, electricity is really expensive. And then I also have to buy cleaning products, sanitary products and everything and that's just not enough for me. You know like because how much I earn is not enough and I just wish that they could help me with that.” (Francis)

- *Uncertain arrangements going forward:* More generally, uncertainty about the future, whether it be where and who to live with, what work or training could be accessed, what sentence will be received or what transport one could use to get to work or training, generated anxiety and feelings of insecurity and was an anticipated barrier for many rangatahi to achieve their goals.

While this uncertainty is generated by a range of factors there are a number of examples in this study where this uncertainty is directly attributable to slow systemic responses and decision making or lack of systemic agility to address these situations. Examples given previously in this report include rangatahi in YJ residence feeling unable to plan or even look forward to their future because they are awaiting sentence or release plans. Similarly, we have heard from rangatahi with disabilities or females who are hapū about being uncertain about where they will live or how they will survive because they are waiting for others to provide them with clarity about what is available to them.

Summary and research team reflections

Income sufficiency and certainty going forward are key concerns for many rangatahi. They know from experience how circumstances can unravel and downward spiral, - like a house of cards - when fundamentals are unstable.

Feelings of insecurity can be reduced by responsive services and careful planning – but this is missing far too often. We noted previously that many rangatahi approaching 18 years of age had not had basic transition planning discussions with their social workers or had met with their Transition Workers. Many were unsure who their Transition Workers were or what their role was.

Support needs and service opportunities

When discussing goals and barriers, we asked rangatahi what services and supports they needed going forward to ensure success in their transition. The stories rangatahi have told us, along with their stated needs, have provided fruitful ground for identifying a range of opportunities to improve services provided to rangatahi. These are summarised below, grouped together by commonly expressed, serious concerns:

Key points from this section:

Rangatahi (and sometimes caregivers and whanau) told us they wanted:

- Better engagement from social workers and transition workers, and choice to change them if they are not working for them.
- Clearer information about their entitlements and how to access services
- More support for connecting them to work, education or training opportunities, suitable housing, and health and disability services.
- Greater income security.
- Effective mental health services, and more choice and flexibility to change providers.
- Continued support and connection to opportunities outside of YJ residence.
- Support and encouragement for connecting and reconnecting to their communities, culture and te ao Māori.

Issue #1: Housing insecurity

Rangatahi said they needed:

- Easier access to independent living / housing options and supported accommodation (for rangatahi with disabilities who are not able to live independently).
- Financial security, with greater certainty they will be able to earn or access support or top-ups to pay the rent and meet essential living costs.
- Stability, with more certainty they could remain in a housing situation that is working for them, if they wanted.

The research team suggest that; because inadequate, unsafe or unhealthy housing and financial insecurity can lead to a downward spiral all too quickly, the risks and fears for rangatahi thinking about moving to independence could be further improved by:

- Oranga Tamariki:
 - stocktaking sources of income and housing support, including emergency support options, available to transitioning rangatahi. This would include the Oranga Tamariki and the TSS, other government agencies (e.g., Work and Income, Study Link, Kāinga Ora/Housing NZ, Housing and Urban Development), NGOs and iwi trusts in each region.
 - reviewing the sufficiency of TSS support available to rangatahi trying to access or stay in independent housing (including when things go wrong).
 - ensuring that TS workers and social workers are aware of the support options and are able to support rangatahi to access them.
 - working with other agencies to develop and prioritise housing and accommodation support options for rangatahi leaving Care.
- Social workers and TS workers ensuring planning documents are shared, regularly updated and include contingency planning for financial security.

Issue #2: Accessible, effective mental health services

Rangatahi said they needed:

- Better access to *effective* therapeutic interventions (e.g., trauma recovery, anger management, treatment for addiction).
- Better understanding from professionals of where they are at, taking the time to value their strengths and successes and to get to know their needs and challenges.
- Choice of the professionals they work with. e.g., “someone who gets me”.

The research team suggest that; because so many of rangatahi in care and custody have ongoing unresolved trauma, addiction and mental health issues, the health and wellbeing of rangatahi moving on from statutory care could be further improved by:

- Social workers;
 - ensuring that rangatahi are receiving the mental health services they need, discuss needs, options and link them to services.
 - following up with rangatahi re: the effectiveness and fitness of purpose of the services they receive.
 - supporting rangatahi to change service providers, where needed.

Issue #3: Social Worker and Transition Worker engagement

While we heard many positive stories about social workers and TWs, we also heard frustrating stories and calls for improvement in support workers. This was summed up nicely by Kaleb when he said his social worker:

“listens to me and she gets what needed to be done. ...I've only had two, some kids have like five because they can't handle the kid and it's like if you can't handle the kid you shouldn't even be in CYFS and that what slightly pisses me off, just that, whereas they just give up on the kid. It's like you're not meant to give up, you're meant to like -- the whole point of your job is actually get them where they need to be”.

Rangatahi said they needed:

- More choice about who their transition and social workers are.
- To be free of fear of reprisals (e.g., withholding of or delaying support and entitlements, negative comments or attitudes) if they expressed dis-satisfaction with a SW, TW, or services received.
- Social workers and transition workers who:
 - connect, listen and get to know them (and their limitations and struggles).

- value and prioritise them - engage when times are bad (don't judge and don't give up on them) and good (don't assume they don't need attention and support).
- give straight answers to their questions.
- can talk about safe sex and contraception.
- help them to plan for their transition.
- get back to them, and follow through in timely way; They "should do what they say they will do".
- support and advocate for their aspirations and requests, even if the social worker disagrees (e.g., when want to connect or reconnect with whānau; or need contraception advice and support).
- are stable in their role and if they change to a new role or caseload – do a good handover.
- inform and update caregivers and whānau, where appropriate (e.g., when high needs rangatahi and or those with disabilities are in a particularly vulnerable space).

The research team suggest outcomes could be further improved by:

- Ensuring staff to rangatahi workloads levels are sufficient to ensure that all rangatahi are able to be given the time to build a relationship, the prioritisation they need and the respect their mana deserves.
- Regular communications of priority and refresher skills training (including diversity and inclusiveness, relationship building) for Social Workers and TWs working with transition cohort.
- Ensuring planning conversations happen, that are respectful of rangatahi wishes, and develop in the context of a supportive relationship(s). All rangatahi should have a transition plan they have participated in developing.
- Providing multiple opportunities for a young person to engage with a TW (even if rangatahi say they are not interested).
- Where the young person and social worker or transition worker disagree on the value or risks to their stated goals, we recommend a process takes place to discuss the issues and identify options (in recognition that supporting the return of rangatahi to their whānau may be challenging for social workers who identify members of a whānau as potentially being an impediment to rangatahi progress).
- When TWs or social workers change/leave, ensuring the handover process is adhered to before this happens where able and that rangatahi have time to build a relationship with this new person.

Issue #4: Understanding entitlements and accessing services

Rangatahi said they needed:

- To better understand the range of transition related entitlements and services available to them and/or their caregivers/whānau.
- Greater clarity around what services they are currently using and how these and other possible services fit into the bigger picture. In particular rangatahi were confused about TWs (if they had one & who it was), but also how other youth workers and mentors came into the picture.
- Social workers to ensure they are registered with a GP, to connect them to health services and follow up on referrals.
- More hands-on support in developing independent living skills; “They basically just chuck you in the deep end and hope to God you can swim”.

The research team suggest outcomes could be further improved by:

- Better communication, sharing of information and updating of plans between and Social Workers and TWs, to ensure a clear, joined up approach.
- Better, consistent and reiterative communication with rangatahi, explaining who is delivering which services and why.
- Clear communications about aging out of care, and when statutory care arrangements cease and transition services and entitlements become available.
- Right to Remain or Return (RTRR) with a current or former caregiver entitlements need to be more carefully and deliberately explained to rangatahi and more strongly supported, or an alternative found, by Social Workers.
- Providing SWs and TSS providers regular updates/training around services and entitlements available to rangatahi, and how this can be shared with rangatahi in a timely and youth friendly manner.

Issue #5: Ongoing support for YJ residents leaving care

We often heard encouraging stories about how rangatahi value the support, training, advice and assistance provided by staff, external providers and visiting TS workers in YJ residences. Many of the transitioning rangatahi have moderate to high or complex needs and, when we interviewed them, were soon to be moving from this safe, stable, therapeutic and learning environment to one where there may be less support or structure.

The research team suggest outcomes for rangatahi leaving a residence into the community could be improved by:

- Social workers and TWs engaging early in a custody sentence, learning about the needs and the services meaningfully engaged by rangatahi, and look for opportunities to continue this support and access to services, or something like

them, outside of residence (e.g., addiction and anger management programmes, connection to te ao Māori culture). For some this may be in a different region.

- Assistance to access alternative accommodation or changed locations where existing options (e.g., family and friends) are likely to encourage addictive, anti-social and offending behaviours.

Issue #6: Connecting to Māori culture

Rangatahi Māori said they needed:

- More, ongoing support for participating in cultural programmes and activities.
- Help connecting with whānau (even when the social worker disagrees this is a good thing).

The research team suggest outcomes could be further improved by:

- Social workers and TWs for rangatahi in the Transition Service actively seek out and facilitate opportunities for rangatahi to connect or re-connect with te ao Māori and whānau, hapu, iwi connections and identification.
- Cultural activities are encouraged, valued, explored and provided by Social Workers from a young age and by TWs for rangatahi in the Transition Service.

Issue #7: Moving into work and further education or training

Rangatahi said they needed:

- Work experience and employment opportunities in the community.
- To have had opportunities from an earlier age, to engage in education in smaller, more responsive formats (YJ residence rangatahi, looking back).
- Support and linking to 'catch up' classes for improving basic literacy and numeracy skills that they had missed out on previously.
- Support with learning how to handle the pressure of juggling work and education.
- People around me to support and motivate me (staff, tutor, family)
- Mentors for work and study.
- Good housing and transport options that make getting to work/study easy.

The research team suggest outcomes could be further improved by:

- Planning and follow through from social workers and TWs which focuses on connecting to local work/training opportunities, building community networks and identifying and securing work and training mentors.
- From an early age, social workers ensuring that the educational context for in-Care tamariki is appropriate, strengths based and supportive. As rangatahi, this is something Transition Workers could support also. This may require speaking to schools or working with the young person, whānau and caregivers to identify more engaging alternative or complimentary settings for tamariki and rangatahi.

- Supporting and maintaining momentum and motivation for re-engagement with education through hands on support, or connecting rangatahi to personal tutors and mentors or remedial or small group literacy and numeracy classes. Such targeted assistance with obtaining minimum educational qualifications (e.g., NCEA Level 2 English and Maths) would enable rangatahi to pursue higher level education and vocational goals.

Issue #8: Tailored support for rangatahi with intellectual disability

Caregivers and whānau of rangatahi with intellectual disabilities said they needed:

- Early clarity and certainty around caregiving arrangements going forward.
- To be kept informed about changing circumstances/ needs and service entitlements.
- Social workers and residences to understand rangatahi as individuals with unique stories, needs, support systems and service histories.
- To be heard and recognised as a voice for rangatahi and informed about opportunities and support to advocate for them in the wider health and disability system.

Conclusions

Key points from this section:

- Phase One of the multi-team and cross-regional longitudinal study has now been successfully completed – validating the underlying approach to be extended to stages two and three.
- The study is heavily indebted and grateful to the 44 brave and generous rangatahi who agreed to participate and who shared their stories and thinking with us.
- We have learnt a lot already. The study found wide variability in the experiences, aspirations and expectations of rangatahi preparing to leave care.
- In response to some rangatahi expressing dissatisfaction with the level of planning and support being provided, Oranga Tamariki is now looking at ways it can increase awareness of the TSS among rangatahi in care or custody.
- The research rōpū will now move into Phase Two of the study.

Following completion of the preparation, recruitment, interviewing and analysis stages of Phase One of the three year Ngā Haerenga |Transition Journeys study, some key lessons and high level observations are able to be drawn.

- The methodological challenges to implementing a multi-site, multiple rōpū, longitudinal qualitative study with whakaaro Māori values at the centre and a diverse range of rangatahi participating are significant. Challenges at each stage have been successfully managed collectively, validating the method chosen to explore rangatahi journeys from statutory care. As a result, we are confident that the approach and mahi can be continued successfully into Phase Two (and Phase Three), although we acknowledge there will be more challenges to come.
- YP told us a lot about their impending journeys and their progress to date. The research team is deeply indebted to the 44 rangatahi who agreed to participate in this study and shared their stories and thinking with us at this time of transition. This should be a time of hope and opportunity for rangatahi, but in circumstances that precarious and challenging can be anxiety producing. The kōrero and conversations the rōpū had with rangatahi reminded us how brave and inspiring these rangatahi are.
- There was great variability in the experiences of rangatahi to date relating to their transition journey and in their expectations and anticipations of where rangatahi would go from here. While some look forward to the day they are finally independent of Oranga Tamariki, and a few felt relatively well placed to move onto the next stage in their lives, most do not. Transitioning from statutory care to self-determined living arrangements that will work for rangatahi is a deep concern for all participants.

- What mattered most to rangatahi going forward was:
 - enjoying life and being connected to their friends, whānau and caregivers they could rely on.
 - understanding their entitlements and getting sufficient support from Oranga Tamariki and TWs when they needed it (e.g., planning, help setting things up, help when things go wrong).
 - ensuring stable living conditions, whether this was staying where they were for now or moving on to something more independent.
 - having adequate income.
 - looking after their health and wellbeing and connecting to needed services, such as mental health services that work for them.
 - securing work and participating in education and training.
 - sustaining positive life choices outside of a YJ residence.

Rangatahi identified a range of needs and services that would help to smooth their transition or enable them to move on successfully. The research rōpū too, after meeting and interviewing these rangatahi, hearing their voices, seeing their āhua, body language and gaining wider understanding of their circumstances, were also able to identify opportunities for improving services that would help rangatahi and improve their chances of successfully transitioning.

Next steps

The research team has now begun to prepare for Phase Two of the Ngā Haerenga | Transition Journeys study. Phase Two will explore rangatahi experiences to date and progress towards their goals in the months following their move from statutory care. Phase two will also focus on exploring cultural connections, in particular for rangatahi Māori, in greater depth.

By August 2021:

- a summary of the key findings from Phase One of Ngā Haerenga/Transition Journeys study will be shared with participating rangatahi.
- interview guides to support Phase Two interviews will be tested and ready for interviewing.
- the research team will have re-connected with and invited all 44 rangatahi to participate in the Phase Two follow-up interviews.
- the research team will have reviewed Phase One and applied lessons to Phase Two.

Phase Two interviews are scheduled to take place from July 2021-October 2021, on a rolling basis (depending on time of exiting Care, and rangatahi availability). The research team expects that while some rangatahi will not be available to participate in Phase Two of the study, attempts will be made to follow up with all and we anticipate that the majority will continue to participate. Excitingly, because the same rangatahi will be involved, Phase Two will afford the beginning of temporal analyses as well as continued cross sectional analyses.

Glossary

Āhua Māori	Things that give the sense of being Māori
Āhua	Appearance, nature
Hāpori	Community
Hapū	Sub tribal groupings, pregnant
Hauora	Health and wellbeing
Iwi	Tribal groups
Kāinga	Home
Kairangahau	Researcher
Kaitiakitanga	Guardianship/ stewardship, trusteeship
Kanohi ki te kanohi	Face to face
Kura	School
Kaiwhakamana	Advocacy worker at VOYCE – Whakarongo mai
Kaupapa whānau	Whānau type relationships built around a common sense of interest/purpose
Mana	Power, authority, prestige, influence, pride
Māoritanga	Māori culture/practices/beliefs/way of life
Mahi-ā-rongo	Using all the senses to assess, relate and communicate
Mahi/Akoranga	Work/Education, training
Mahi tahi	Work together, collaborate, cooperate
Manaaki	To support, take care of
Manaakitanga	Kindness, nurturing and caring for others
Mātauranga Māori	Māori knowledge and understanding

IN-CONFIDENCE

Ngā Haerenga	Journeys
Ngā hononga	Connections and connected relationships
Ngākau Māori	Māori heart, mind, soul
Pēpī	Baby
Rangatahi	Youth, older children, younger generation
Rangatahi Māori	Māori youth
Rōpū	Group, team
Tamariki	Children
Te ao Māori	Māori world
Te reo Māori	Māori language
Te Whare Tapa Wha	A Māori model of health and wellbeing developed by Mason Durie
Teina	Younger sibling, more junior, of a junior line, mentee
Tino rangatiratanga	Self determination, autonomy
Tuakana	Older sibling or relation, of a senior line, mentor
Tuakana-teina	Mentoring relationship between older and younger/more experienced, less experienced
Tūrangawaewae	Place to stand, place where one has rights of belonging through kinship, whakapapa, hapū and iwi connection.
Wairua Māori	Māori spirit/spirituality
Whakaaro Māori	Māori ways of thinking and understanding, consciousness of being Māori
Whakamā	Embarrassed and ashamed
Whānau	Family, extended family groups
Whāngai	Foster, adopt or care for
Whanaungatanga	Relationship, kinship, sense of family connection

Appendix: Methodology in full

Longitudinal qualitative research

The overarching methodology used in this study is *Longitudinal Qualitative Research* (LQR) methodology. LQR involves in-depth interviews, repeated over time, often at fixed time intervals, with the same people, typically by the same researchers.¹⁸ LQR focuses on subjective experience and the context of research participants, enabling researchers to build 'holistic' understandings of key decisions, behaviours and actions, and ultimately how trajectories can be influenced by diverse factors. LQR can explore and analyse data both cross sectionally (thematically across a population) and/or temporally, exploring how change is created, lived and experienced by participants.¹⁹

In this study LQR involves an annual cycle of in-depth semi-structured interviews by three teams in three broad regions of Aotearoa, with a cohort of forty-four rangatahi transitioning out of care. In year one participants were recruited into the study and interviewed 1-6 months prior to leaving care, with the intention being to interview them annually thereafter up to 18-24 months post care. While subsequent years will afford temporal analyses, year one is limited to cross cohort thematic analysis.

Whakaaro Māori

Whakaaro Māori informs each step of the LQR research process in this study. Te ao Māori values, tikanga, and mahi-a-rongo sensitivities are incorporated by Māori researchers in each region to enhance the mana of participants and get the best possible information from, and outcomes for, rangatahi.

While not a kaupapa Māori research project, there is strong representation of Kairangahau Māori across the three research rōpū. Combined with the high representation of rangatahi Māori who were engaged to participate, it was critical that whakaaro Māori and Kaupapa Māori research methodologies were utilised in this project.

This approach is evident in the centrality of whanaungatanga (connecting authentically with rangatahi and building trusting relationships) and kaitiakitanga (looking out for the young person and assisting and advising where needed) and manaakitanga (requiring kindness, nurturing and caring for others).

¹⁸ Corden, A., & Millar, J. (2007). Time and change: A review of the qualitative longitudinal research literature for social policy. *Social Policy Society*, 6, 583-592.

¹⁹ Hansen, E. (2006). *Successful qualitative health research: A practical introduction*. Crows Nest, Australia: Allen and Unwin.

Kaupapa Māori methodologies apply longstanding Māori values, worldviews, ethics and engagement processes to modern research contexts.²⁰

Māori models used to inform research practice included:

- *Te Whare Tapa Whā*. A widely recognised, holistic model of Māori health and wellbeing developed by Professor Mason Durie.²¹
- *Whānau narrative inquiry*. While this form of narrative enquiry, like other forms, places rangatahi and their experiences and stories at the centre of the research process, it further integrates these narratives within an indigenous cultural framework that links them to their cultural context.^{22,23} This cultural context has been outlined above.

Research steps

Preparation and recruitment

Ethical approval

In February 2020 the joint Oranga Tamariki – Insights MSD ethics review panel reviewed the proposed Transitions Longitudinal Qualitative Research project and gave their approval and support for the study. Key ethical protocols include:

- *Informed consent* – all rangatahi and caregivers were talked through the study purpose and protocols by the research team, and signed informed consent sheets prior to the first interview.
- *Confidentiality* – strict protocols were used to ensure Oranga Tamariki would not know who ultimately participated in the study. These included the provision that Oranga Tamariki would not receive copies of transcripts and reporting would ensure individuals or whānau were not identifiable.
- *Voluntary participation* - all rangatahi and caregivers knew that it was optional to participate and that if they chose to join the study they could withdraw at any point over the following three years without impacting the service they receive from Oranga Tamariki.
- *Protecting participant wellbeing* – researchers developed protocols to ensure that no harm would come as a result of participation. Further, throughout the research process researchers ensured rangatahi identified as being in urgent

²⁰ Smith, L.T. (1999). Decolonising methodologies: Notes from Down Under. London; Zed Books

²¹ www.health.govt.nz/our-work/populations/Māori-health/Māori-health-models/Māori-health-models-te-whare-tapa-wha

²² Clandinin, D. J., & Rosiek, J. (2007). Mapping a Landscape of Narrative Inquiry: Borderland Spaces and Tensions. In D. J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology* (p. 35–75). Sage Publications, Inc

²³ Love, C., Waldegrave, C, King, Makarini, S., Waldegrave, K. & Nguyen, G. (2020). Pae Whakatupuranga: Functional Family Therapy Cross Generations. Formative Evaluation Report Wave 1; A Report by the Family Centre Social Policy Research Unit for Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children.

need were referred to support services and actively supported to receive the assistance needed.

Research planning

Three research teams or rōpū operating in three broad regions came together to plan a robust, integrated approach to year one's fieldwork. The three teams were:

- Waikato rōpū – covering the Waikato, Bay of Plenty and Lakes District Regions (and included interested rangatahi moving from these regions to Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland during the recruitment and interviewing period).
- Pōneke rōpū – covering Wellington, Kapiti, Horowhenua, Manawatu and Wairarapa regions.
- Ōtautahi rōpū – covering the Greater Canterbury region and Northern Otago.

A two-day planning hui with the three rōpū was held in early 2020 for the research teams to get to know each other and plan the stage one fieldwork and analytical process. This was followed by (n=3) 2–3-hour hui where research tools and protocols were scoped, progressed, reported back to the group and confirmed. Key outputs included:

- clear recruitment, data collection, data management, data integration, data analysis and reporting timeframes and protocols.
- agreement on what taking a youth friendly, trauma informed approach means and development of pastoral care, koha, and keeping in touch protocols for participating rangatahi (and their whānau/caregivers or support person(s), where appropriate).
- establishment of a common question framework for year one. Because different rōpū had different skill sets, research orientations and interview styles, it was agreed that a shared framework would be used by all teams to underpin their work, however each team would develop their own interview methods and structure (see below for different approaches).

Participant eligibility

Between July 1 and 30 October 2020, a total of 126 rangatahi who met the eligibility criteria for the study were identified and efforts made to approach directly and, if this was not possible, indirectly via their caregivers or whānau with an invitation to participate. To be eligible to participate in the study rangatahi needed to:

- currently be in Oranga Tamariki care or custody.
- be eligible for the Transition Support Service (i.e., had been in care continuously for three months or more).
- aged between 17 years 6 months and 17 years eleven months in July 2020.

- able to engage and communicate with interviewers OR have whānau or caregivers who could communicate with them and share their views on their behalf, as well as share their own whānau perspectives.
- be based in one of the three broad regions of the study.²⁴

A total of 126 rangatahi were identified as fitting the criteria of being eligible to participate in the study.

Recruitment

There were two stages to the recruitment process:

1. *Sample selection, initial contact, provision of study information and request to pass on contact details to research team:* All prospective rangatahi who were identified from the Oranga Tamariki CYRAS data set as meeting the study criteria were initially approached by telephone (or failing that, email) by a Wellington based Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre researcher. Prospective participants and/or whānau were given an overview of the study, and, where agreeable, provided with study information sheets²⁵ and links to an informational video made with the help of two care experienced young women working for Oranga Tamariki. If the young person indicated interest in participation, permission was sought to pass on their contact details outside of Oranga Tamariki, to the regional research rōpū.

❖ Of 126 eligible rangatahi, a total of 51 rangatahi indicated interest in participation and agreed to have their details passed on to the regional research team. 31 declined and 44 were not able to be contacted.

2. *Regional research team follow up, meeting with rangatahi and informed consent.* Regional rōpū followed up with the 51 prospective participants and, where rangatahi wanted whānau or support person involvement, members of their whānau or wider support network. Prior to any interviewing, individual researchers made contact with rangatahi, introduced themselves and made connections. Where possible this was done over shared kai provided by the researchers. Sharing of kai was not possible for those participants who chose to be interviewed by phone, or those interviewed in person in a YJ facility. Researchers were careful to ensure they took adequate time to talk through the details of the information sheet with rangatahi and ensured all questions surrounding the purpose, parameters and requirements for the research answered before gaining written informed consent from participants to take part in this first interview and to be contacted in the future for further interviews. Researchers also took great care to ensure all contacts and the interviews were

²⁴ It is recognised that rangatahi may have moved or have been placed outside the three broad regions following initial engagement.

²⁵ Available upon request

set up to enable rangatahi to participate well. For example, rangatahi experiencing communication difficulties were supported through the use of visual prompts, the inclusion of caregivers to assist with communication and provided with the time and space needed to share their ideas.

- ❖ Of the 51 rangatahi expressing interest in participation, 44 signed informed consent forms and participated in the first annual interview. 7 were not able to be contacted, had moved regions or subsequently declined to be interviewed.

Maximising retention

Because attrition is a significant risk for any longitudinal study, and of particular concern for a mobile, young, transient population, a number of strategies were employed to maximise retention over the three-year study. This built on the expression of whanaungatanga – taking the time to get to know participants prior to starting the first interview, making connections, and building a trusting relationship as appropriate. Subsequent actions included:

- providing options for rangatahi as to how they were interviewed (e.g., kanohi ki te kanohi, phone, video call etc. alone, with whānau, caregiver, support person etc).
- bringing kai, refreshments and positive goodwill to interviews.
- ensuring all contacts were respectful and mana enhancing.
- keeping in contact with participants in the months following initial interviewing;
 - for most rangatahi this included either a phone call or a kanohi ki te kanohi meeting, with refreshments. For others, contact by text or Facebook messaging was preferred.
 - keeping up-to-date contact information.
 - providing updates on study progress.
- providing advice and support to promote participant wellbeing.
 - Providing information or ensuring rangatahi knew about key entitlements and services available in their region.
 - For rangatahi at acute risk of harm or poor outcomes, an expanded duty of care was performed to ensure the young person received the supports they needed and were entitled to.

Fieldwork

The key data collection method used in this study is *semi-structured interviewing*. A broad structure was developed by the research team in consultation with the Ngā Haerenga Advisory Group – who provided advice in line with the high-level research question on priority areas of interest. A common question framework used across all rōpū was developed to inform interviewing in each region. The common question framework covered the following topics:

- Current circumstances and situation.
- Goals and aspirations after leaving care, including:
 - Personal goals and aspirations.
 - Hauora - Health and Wellbeing.
 - Ngā Hononga – Connected Relationships.
 - Kāinga Whare and Stable Housing.
 - Mahi/Akoranga – Work/Education or training.
 - Hapori – Community participation.
 - Criminal behaviour (for those in Youth Justice Custody).
- Perceived strengths and enablers that will help rangatahi reach their goals.
- Perceived challenges and constraints that could limit rangatahi progress.
- Needs and types of help required to overcome barriers and reach goals.
- Intended actions or plans.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed for subsequent analysis. Interviews ranged from between 30 minutes to one hour in duration. All rangatahi were given the option of being interviewed with their whānau and/or caregivers. A third of the participants elected to have whānau, caregivers or YJ residence staff supporting them at the interview. In each region at the completion of each interview, researchers summarised the circumstances and key findings for each case/young person, prior to transcription.

A further feature of the interviewing process included regional variability. Each regional rōpū approached the common question framework autonomously – using the methods and approaches each rōpū considered to be most effective and relevant for them and the rangatahi and whānau in their regions. Further, while all rangatahi Māori were interviewed by Māori researchers, Tauwi rangatahi were interviewed by a combination of Tauwi and Māori researchers. In one region a Pākeha researcher engaged with and interviewed non-Māori, using a similar trauma informed, youth friendly, mana enhancing and relationship building approach to their Māori colleague. Both researchers in this region used a shared semi-structured interview guide.

Analysis

In each region, rangatahi (and whānau/caregiver) interviews were recorded, transcribed and anonymised before being uploaded into Nvivo²⁶ for coding. Interview summaries were also uploaded into Nvivo.

In December 2020 the three regional research teams came together for a two-day sensemaking hui. At the hui:

- regional rōpū shared individual case summaries and discussed themes and common issues identified in their regions.
- teams worked together, through a series of structured activities, to identify pan regional themes and issues.
- An Nvivo coding framework was developed. This was subsequently refined over the following weeks before being collectively agreed upon.

Following the sense making hui, and the agreement on the coding structure, researchers in each region coded the interviews using the agreed Nvivo coding structure. This allowed for all cases and codings to be subsequently integrated into a single, cross regional Stage One data file.

In February and March 2021, two project co-ordinators undertook a secondary analysis of the integrated Ngā Haerenga Stage One data file: This involved:

- Reviewing each transcript for coding accuracy, occasionally adding Nvivo codings where required.
- Identifying emergent themes from the transcripts.
- Checking emergent themes with the sensemaking hui analyses.

While some of the secondary analysis emergent themes were identified at the 2020 sensemaking hui, others were not identified at that time.

The stage two secondary analysis was shared with the wider research team at follow up hui in March and May 2021. Themes and interpretations of new themes were verified and agreed for subsequent reporting.

A summary of the analysis process can be seen in the figure below.

²⁶ Nvivo is a qualitative data analysis tool used widely in the social sciences.

Year One Analysis Process

