

"You need to get in early, as soon as you see people struggling."



Understanding the life-course journey

Mokopuna voices to inform
the Child and Youth Wellbeing
Strategy Review 2024

NOVEMBER 2024



Mihi nui ki ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa

We thank and acknowledge all the mokopuna who generously welcomed us into their communities and hapori, and who shared their experiences, perspectives and ideas with us for this project. We also acknowledge the villages around these mokopuna who connected and collaborated with us, to enable the voices of these mokopuna to be heard.

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Foreword from the Chief Children's Commissioner



As the independent advocate for all mokopuna in Aotearoa New Zealand, a centrally important aspect of our work is encouraging children and young people's participation and voices, and sharing their insights and lived experiences.

Earlier this year, we had the privilege of hearing from a diverse range of mokopuna around the country, to help inform the review of the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy (the Strategy). I'm deeply grateful to the mokopuna who participated in this project for their time, wisdom, insight and for being real with us in the experiences, perspectives and ideas that they have shared.

Our engagement with mokopuna during 2024 to inform the review of the Strategy followed our earlier involvement (as the former Office of the Children's Commissioner), where we designed and facilitated engagements to inform the development of the Strategy in 2019, as well as engagements to inform its review in 2022.

The Strategy is the Government's promise to Aotearoa New Zealand mokopuna – a commitment to creating an environment where they can all thrive. Its outcomes-focus reinforces the many positive conditions required for children and young people to experience their full potential, and have all of their rights fulfilled, and be fully included in society, growing up loved, safe and well, grounded in their belonging to their families and whānau, within their communities and hapori.

Understanding the priorities, protective factors, and challenges that mokopuna face throughout their lives is essential to achieving the vision of the Strategy – that Aotearoa New Zealand is the best place in the world for children and young people.

Each stage of childhood and adolescence brings unique opportunities and challenges to be navigated, and it is crucial that we pay attention to these dynamics across the life-course of children and young people. By listening deeply and with care to our country's mokopuna, we gain powerful and important insights that can guide policy, laws and practice, ensuring they reflect the realities of the lives of mokopuna, and support positive outcomes in their lives now and intergenerationally.

We are proud to bring forward their voices, in their own words. The insights shared in this report highlight the crucial need to understand mokopuna in the context of their homes, families, whānau, schools and communities, and to consider their rights, best interests and wellbeing within those contexts. Wider data and evidence shows that mokopuna are significantly impacted by the wellbeing of their families and whānau. Helping families and whānau to do well, building on their innate strengths, enables them to support their mokopuna to thrive.

The perspectives and ideas of mokopuna shared in this report provide us with a roadmap to better support their lives, and the lives of mokopuna in all communities and hapori throughout our nation. It's vital that their voices are prioritised and held at the absolute centre to guide and inform all decision-making that impacts their lives, everyday.

Ngā manaakitanga,

DR CLAIRE ACHMAD
TE KAIKŌMIHANA MATUA – CHIEF
CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER
November 2024

He kupu nā te Kaikōmihana Matua o Mana Mokopuna



E noho nei mātou hei māngai tū takitahi mō ngā mokopuna katoa o Aotearoa, ko tētahi o ngā tino mahi he whakahau, he kipakipa i ngā mokopuna me ngā reanga rangatahi ki te whakauru i a rātou ki ngā mahi, ki te whakaputa i ō rātou reo, tae atu ki te tuku i ō rātou whakaaro me ō rātou wheako anō hoki.

I te tīmatanga o tēnei tau tonu, i whai wāhi ai mātou ki te whakarongo ki ngā mokopuna mai i ngā momo hīkoitanga o te ao nei puta noa i te motu, hei tautoko hoki i te arotakenga o te Rautaki Oranga Ngakau mō ngā Mokopuna, arā, te Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy (the Strategy). Nōku te maringanui ki ngā mokopuna i whai wāhi mai ki tēnei kaupapa, mō te wā, mō ngā whakaaro, ngā tirohanga hoki, me te Māori ake nei o ngā wheako, ngā tirohanga hou me ngā whakaaro hoki i tuarhia e rātou.

Nā ko tēnei whakapāpātanga me ngā mokopuna i tēnei tau tonu, hei tautoko i te Rautaki, he mea whai ake i ngā mahi i tū kē (nā te Kaikōmihana Matua o Mana Mokopuna i mua), ki te hoahoa me te whakahaere i ngā whakapāpātanga hei tautoko i te hoahoatanga o te Rautaki i te tau 2019, me ngā whakapāpātanga i whakaritea ki te tautoko i te arotakenga o te Rautaki i te tau 2022.

Ko te Rautaki, ko te ōati a te Kāwana ki ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa – te manawanui ki te waihanga i te taiao e tipu ake ai, e rea hoki ngā mokopuna. Ko ngā whāinga matua he whai ake inga ritenga whai hua mā ngā mokopuna, e rongō ai rātou i te tino pitomata o tēnei mea

o te ora, e tutuki ai o rātou mōtika katoa, me te whakaurunga ki tō tātou pāpori, e tipu ake ai ki roto i te aroha, ki roto i te haumarutanga, e tangata whenua ai rātou, e tūhono hoki ai ki ō rātou whānau me ngā hapori whānui hoki.

Te whai māramatanga ki ngā kawata, ki ngā take haumarū, me ngā wero ka tau ki ngā mokopuna puta noa i tō rātou oranga, he mea nui ki te tirohanga whānui o te Rautaki – e noho ai a Aotearoa hei wāhi, hei whenua papai rawa mō te tipu a ngā mokopuna, rangatahi hoki.

Kei ia wāhanga o te tipu a te mokopuna, a te rangatahi, ko ngā wero me ngā ara whai hua me whakaterehia e rātou, ā, he mea nui hoki mō tātou te aro atu ki ngā momo āhuetanga e pā nei ki te oranga o ngā mokopuna, rangatahi hoki. Mā te āta whakarongo me te atawhai hoki i ngā mokopuna katoa o te motu, e kitea ai ngā tirohanga Whaimana, whai ihi hoki, hei arataki i ngā kaupapahere, i ngā ture me ngā ritenga, me te whakaata hoki i ngā āhuetanga oranga a ngā mokopuna, me te tautoko i ngā whāinga whai hua mō te oranga o ngā mokopuna inamata, me ō rātou oranga anamata.

E whakahīhi ana mātou ki te whakakao mai i ō rātou reo me ō rātou ake kupu hoki. Ko ngā tirohanga i tuarhia i roto i tēnei pūrongo he miramira i te tino hiahia ki te whai māramatanga ki ā tātou mokopuna i roto i te horopaki o ngā kāinga, ngā whānau, ngā kura, ngā hapori, me te aro ake ki ngā mōtika, ō rātou ake aronga me te oranga ngākau ki roto i aua horopaki rā. Ko te whānuitanga ake o ngā raraunga me ngā taunakitanga e whakaatu ana i te pānga nui o

te oranga ngākau o te whānau ki a rātou. He āwhina i ngā whānau kia ora ai, te whakatipu i ngā kaha ā-roto, e taea ai ngā mokopuna kia tipu, kia rea hoki.

Ko ngā tirohanga me ngā whakaaro a ngā mokopuna i tuarihia ki tēnei pūrongo he whakarato i tētahi mahere hei tautoko ake i te oranga whānau, i te oranga mokopuna hoki ki ngā hāpori katoa puta noa i te motu. He mea nui hoki tēnei, kia rangona ō rātou reo, kia noho kawatau hoki, kia mauria ake hei pitomata, hei arataki i ngā whakaritenga kai whai pānga ki ō rātou oranga i ia rā.

Ngā manaakitanga,



DR CLAIRE ACHMAD

TE KAIKŌMIHANA MATUA – CHIEF
CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER

November 2024

About us

Mana Mokopuna - Children and Young People's Commission (Mana Mokopuna) is an Independent Crown Entity, established under the Children and Young People's Commission Act 2022. Mana Mokopuna (formerly the Office of the Children's Commissioner) is governed by a Board, led by the Chief Children's Commissioner. Our role is to promote and advance the rights, interests, full participation, rights, interests, and wellbeing of all children and young people (mokopuna) under 18 years of age, within the context of their families, whānau, hapū, iwi and communities. Our mandate extends to advocacy for and with young people under 25 years old who are, or have been, in state care or custody in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The work of Mana Mokopuna is underpinned by:

- ☆ the Children's Convention and Te Tiriti
- ☆ the child or young person within (without limitation) the context of their family, whānau, hapū, iwi, and communities
- ☆ the diversity of children and young people in all its forms
- ☆ high aspirations for the wellbeing of all children and young people, including responsive systems and structures that support them
- ☆ the need to give priority children and young people who are disadvantaged, and the issues affecting them
- ☆ children and young people's rights to participate in matters affecting them, and the need to hear from, and be informed by, children and young people
- ☆ other international human rights instruments relevant to, and that affect, children and young people.

We are committed to:

- ✓ giving effect to our obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Te Tiriti) and the Treaty of Waitangi (the Treaty), recognising and respecting Māori participation, leadership and te ao Māori approaches in the performance of our functions
- ✓ advancing and monitoring the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Children's Convention) in Aotearoa New Zealand, especially by Government.

Note on the use of the word 'mokopuna'

At Mana Mokopuna, we have adopted the term 'mokopuna' to describe all children and young people we advocate for. 'Mokopuna' brings together 'moko' (imprint or tattoo) and 'puna' (spring of water). Mokopuna describes that we are descendants, and or grandchildren, and how we need to think across generations for a better present and future. We acknowledge the special status held by mokopuna in their families, whānau, hapū and iwi and reflect that in all we do. Referring to children and young people we advocate for as mokopuna draws them closer to us, and reminds us that who they are, and where they come from, matters for their identity, belonging and wellbeing at every stage of their lives.

About this report

An overview of the project

The Children's Act 2014 requires the Government to adopt, publish, and review a strategy for improving the well-being of children. The inaugural Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy (the Strategy), launched in 2019, sets out a shared understanding of what's important for child and youth wellbeing. The Strategy reflects the voices and lived experience of 6,000 children and young people who shared what they want and need to have a good life.

As the Office of the Children's Commissioner, we designed and facilitated engagements to inform the development of the Strategy in 2019, as well as engagements to inform its review in 2022. The review was required by the legislation that underpins the Strategy (the Children's Act 2014), which states that the Strategy be reviewed within three years of adoption, and then again, within three years of completion of each review.

In May 2024, the Minister for Child Poverty Reduction announced her intention to undertake another review, focusing on specific elements of the Strategy to reflect the Government's priorities and targets; in particular, applying a social investment and life-course approach. The Ministry of Social Development subsequently commissioned Mana Mokopuna to design and facilitate engagements with mokopuna so that their views and voices would be heard as part of the review.

In keeping with a life-course approach, our engagements focussed on identifying the priorities, protective factors, and challenges impacting mokopuna throughout different stages of their lives. We wanted to understand what mokopuna identified as important at different life stages prior to adulthood – as a tamariki, as an adolescent, and as rangatahi, and whether there were priorities that were consistently present throughout these stages of their lives.

We are grateful to the mokopuna who participated in this project for their time, wisdom, and insights, as well as the community connectors and partners who went above and beyond to support us to deliver these engagements.

While the insights were sought primarily to inform the Strategy review, Mana Mokopuna will also continue to draw on them to inform our independent advocacy.

Who we engaged with and how

Between 13 June and 5 July 2024, we held thirteen engagements in six regions across Aotearoa New Zealand in both Te Ika-a-Māui and Te Waipounamu. We met with a diverse range of mokopuna in both rural and urban settings, and in schools and community spaces.

In total, we met with 101 mokopuna aged between 8 and 23 years old. Around 70% of mokopuna identified as Māori, with four of the engagements involving solely mokopuna Māori. Other priority groups reached included mokopuna Pacific, whaikaha, mokopuna living in rural areas, neurodiverse mokopuna, young māmā, and mokopuna who identify as rainbow and gender diverse.

Our engagement methods included workshops, individual interviews, talanoa and group kōrero, and an online survey. Mokopuna drew pictures and wrote on post-its and postcards, and we also captured information and quotes via notetaking.

We followed standard Mana Mokopuna ethics and privacy protocols. This includes a formal ethics process, child safety planning, provision of accessible information, informed consent, koha, and report-backs to ensure accuracy and uphold the integrity of mokopuna voices.

Areas of enquiry

To better understand what is important to mokopuna as they grow up in Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as the barriers and enablers to their thriving, we used a life-course method of enquiry, using the following breakdown of mokopuna life-course stages:

- 0-4 years
- 5-10 years
- 11-14 years
- 15-18 years

We asked all mokopuna, regardless of their current age, to reflect on the following questions in relation to each of the four life-course stages noted above:

1. What kinds of things matter/ed most?
2. What things/challenges get in the way of feeling and doing well?
3. What things/supports/people help, or might have helped?
4. What is the most important thing you want adults to focus on to support all mokopuna to thrive in Aotearoa New Zealand?

In answering our pātai, mokopuna drew on their own experiences and observations, as well as imagining themselves at different ages and describing what they thought their needs and priorities would be. We also encouraged them to reflect on the lives and experiences of other mokopuna in their whānau and peer groups.

Throughout our engagements with mokopuna, from time-to-time mokopuna shared with us experiences of violence, abuse and neglect, as well as mental health and wellbeing struggles. When this occurred, we took appropriate steps to ensure mokopuna were currently safe. Please see Child Protection Policy | Mana Mokopuna www.manamokopuna.org.nz/publications/policies/child-protection-policy/ for more information.

For further information about our methodology, including our ethics process, the engagement and analysis approach, please refer to Appendix two.

The voices in this report

Throughout this report we present the unfiltered views and voices of mokopuna. These appear as direct quotes and are presented in two sections:

the "**Overarching insights and key themes**" section features a thematic overview of key themes and priorities identified across the entirety of the mokopuna whakaaro.

the "**Themes across the life-course**" section groups mokopuna whakaaro by key themes under each of the life course stages specific to each actual, remembered, or imagined life stage.

As mentioned above, we encouraged mokopuna to reflect on their current experiences, as well as their memories, observations of others, and imaginings of their future selves. Because of this, and the interactive way mokopuna shared their whakaaro, we chose not to attribute quotes to specific ages, ethnicities or gender identities. Doing so would have been challenging, and could have misrepresented the perspectives shared throughout the report.

We also had the opportunity to meet with parents, grandparents, and teachers of mokopuna whaikaha who were involved in our engagement. Because these were not direct mokopuna voices, we have not incorporated this whakaaro into the main report, but have outlined their insights in Appendix one

SECTION 1:

Overarching insights and key themes



Loving, safe and supportive whānau and families



Mokopuna overwhelmingly talked about the importance of love, care, and attention from parents and caregivers and a supportive, safe environment to grow up in, especially when reflecting on the needs and priorities of 0–4-year-olds.

"Babies need caring and supporting environments to grow up in."

"and a safe environment, love, care, nurturing, feeling loved."

Feeling a sense of connection and belonging, and spending time with immediate and extended whānau, was identified as very important to all mokopuna at all four life stages. For many mokopuna, pets were included as family members, and identified as a source of love, comfort, and safety.

"No matter how old you are, feeling loved by your family is centrally important."

"My cat, when I'm crying, she'll come and lie on me."

When considering the priorities of older age groups, some mokopuna highlighted the importance of reciprocity and contribution: supporting their whānau and making their parents and caregivers proud. Mokopuna described other sources of love, care and support that emerged as they aged, such as friends, wider whānau members and trusted adults.

"Parents feeling proud."

"Getting less things, to help my mum to save things, helping my mum out with the hard things she can't do."

"Family, spending time [together], because parents are busy."

When considering barriers to thriving, mokopuna identified family violence and abuse, and poverty, as the two biggest barriers to wellbeing across all stages of childhood.

In terms of family violence and related problems (the impacts of poverty are described in the next section of this chapter) mokopuna identified growing up with caregivers who lacked positive parenting skills, neglect, physical violence; exposure to drugs and alcohol; and other safety concerns. Some mokopuna shared the significant impact these experiences had on their lives.

"How my family operates – instead of confronting problems and trying new ways, they bottle things up and rely on drugs and alcohol. I didn't want that in my life."

"The one message I want to get across is for children who do not have their parents in their life because of drugs and alcohol: For me this is a big problem and has caused my life to feel embarrassed and traumatised."

Mokopuna emphasised the need for more accessible support and services for struggling families as early as possible, including help to develop parenting skills, and more support with finances, mental health issues, violence, and addiction.

"I believe that parents that struggle with stress, relationship and money problems should get more support financially and more guidance. Reason being parents struggle with financial emotional and relationship problems eventually generate an unhealthy environment for any child within the environment."

"Help for parents to be better parents and not abusive."

"My mum's friend let me stay at her place with my baby until I was old enough to get accommodation. It was good being in a healthy space, clean and warm. It modelled what life might be like and woke me up as to how things could be better."

Having the basics



Mokopuna told us that one of the most important things for all mokopuna as they grew up was having their essential needs met.

"Getting everything we need – safe dry house, good food, good places to be."

There were dozens of mentions of not having enough money. Mokopuna talked about more financial support needed for new parents and families for essentials such as warm clothes, food, healthcare, hygiene products, and school uniforms and school shoes.

"Financial support for parents that are really struggling with money, more support to lower income families."

"Supporting parents with funds for medical care."

Mokopuna identified food security, affordable health care, and getting enough sleep as particularly important for 0-4 year olds, while housing and addressing the needs of parents and caregivers who are struggling were identified as fundamental needs across all ages.

"You need to get in early, as soon as you see people struggling."

Concerns impacting rangatahi – 15 to 18 year olds – included not being able to find work, and prohibitively high costs of school, sports, and other activities.

"Not having jobs or money, being broke."

Support to learn and grow



Mokopuna also shared their thoughts about the importance of learning and development. They recognised that learning starts with babies in terms of their physical growth and development and identified the kinds of support that were most conducive to thriving during the early years.

"Plunket/Family Start Well child checks and immunisations." – Young māmā

Mokopuna told us that as children age, their school life becomes more central to wellbeing. They described the increasing importance of having responsive teachers who could meet diverse learning needs and enable a sense of choice and autonomy in learning.

"Having teachers who understand more about learning difficulties so they can help kids with disabilities."

"I learn lots of stuff and it makes me feel I'm good at this."

Mokopuna described how, once at school, the importance of belonging extended beyond whānau environments to include belonging at school.

"This kura – they made me feel comfortable straight away – and they said they'd help me if I need anything. They made me feel different – feel loved and get that tingling feeling."

"Teachers who know me."

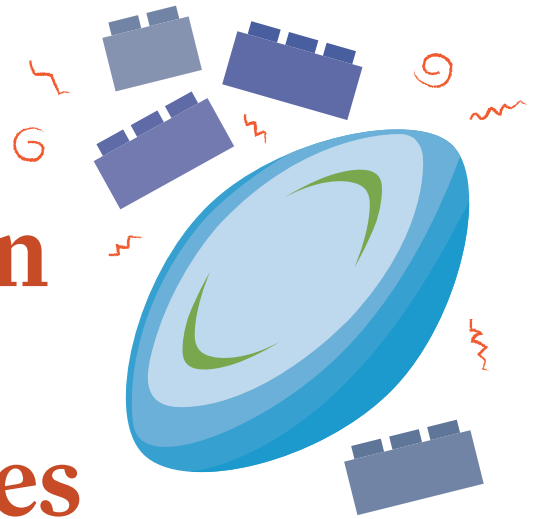
Mokopuna also referred to transitions in schooling. In particular, "opportunities for freedom" was a theme when considering priorities for 15–18-year-olds transitioning to adulthood. For this age group, having opportunities to plan and be ready for adulthood, was seen as critical, as were adults in their lives who were supportive and non-judgemental.

"Money to save for future and create opportunities for freedom."

"Showing pathways other than purely academics."

"How to be confident, work experience, knowledge, how to be a leader, help with struggles in work and other life struggles."

Affordable sports, recreation and play in safe community spaces



Mokopuna highlighted the importance of play for both fun and development., particularly for the 0-4 age-group They also talked about access to safe and stimulating playgrounds, toys, and fun activities.

"Having good toys and watching and learning the right stuff."

"Better playgrounds for kids – they're garbage right now."

Mokopuna identified access to sports and hobbies as increasingly important as they age. Sports and recreation were seen as opportunities to have fun, discover interests, as well as fitness and general wellbeing.

"Experiencing new stuff... Opportunities to explore interests."

"Well-rounded life – hobbies/ sports/ not just education."

"Giving kids other outlets, activities like rollerblading that are accessible."

Mokopuna told us they don't want money to be a barrier; they talked about the need for activities to be free and accessible.

"If only education and other fun and cool activities didn't need to be paid for... having to go to places without worrying about money."

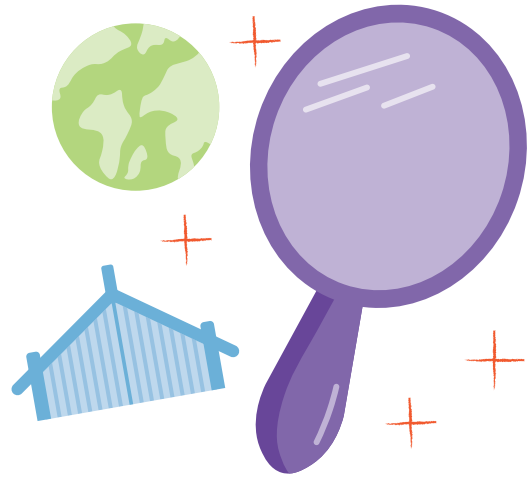
"... Fees for extracurricular activities need to come down."

Mokopuna talked about older age-groups (11-18) needing affordable, safe, and welcoming spaces, as well as the need for more cultural activities.

"Youth centres are a big support – free games and a safe place to go. Need to make them engaging."

"Having more youth spaces for kids to feel safe and get them away from drugs and alcohol by pulling them in with interests they enjoy."

Celebrate culture and identity



Children and young people talked about the importance of being supported to discover who they are. This included being respected and supported to express their faith, their culture, and providing opportunities for mokopuna to be heard. "Knowing who you are".

"Connecting with our identity and culture."

"Having knowledge of our society and wider world."

Mokopuna want leadership opportunities and other pathways to express their growing sense of autonomy. They told us about the importance of being heard, feeling understood, and the importance of experimenting as a part of growing up. This connects to the theme of learning and development that supports transitions to adulthood.

"Listen to the voices of the young people and seriously consider what they are saying. We're becoming adults and we are the future."

"This is our first time at this age, we will make mistakes of which we need to learn from. Allow us to make these mistakes."

Healthy friendships and relationships



Friendships increasingly matter across the life-course. Mokopuna talked about the importance of having friends to play with, as well as opportunities and support to make friends and help them develop social skills when they start school.

"Having fun - being with other kids playing."

"School - good teachers, friendships, having the environment for social skills."

"Older kids and teachers could help introduce you to kids your own age to help you make friends - like a buddy system."

As mokopuna get older, the quality of their friendships becomes more important for their mental health and social/emotional wellbeing. Mokopuna talked about having good friends they can trust, friends they can talk to and who are supportive, as well as healthy romantic relationships.

"Find more friends you can trust."

"Get rid of 'yes friends' - get friends who will challenge you and make you better."

Mokopuna also highlighted the more difficult aspects of building social skills, such as responding to peer pressure, and several mokopuna also talked about being lonely (see Mental health section below for more detail).

"Make-up - feeling like you have to be pretty."

"Peer pressure for drugs and alcohol."

'Being able to stay happy': Mental health



Mokopuna identified feeling happy – and being supported to stay happy and maintain their mental health – as one of the things that mattered most across all ages.

Having a loving, supportive family and home environment and close, trusted friends were identified as key contributors to happiness and mental wellbeing across each of the different life stages (see sections above). Mokopuna also spoke to the importance of being supported to develop self-esteem and learn "...how to be confident... how to be a leader, help with struggles in work and other life struggles."

"What matters most to me is children's mental health, which can stem from family related issues, bullying, finances etc. So, increasing mental health programmes would help decrease mental health issues."

Mokopuna provided examples of "toxic friends" and harmful relationships, including peer pressure, bullying, family violence and other problems at home. They identified the different but related negative impacts these interactions had on mental health, such as poor self-esteem, feelings of shame, isolation, rejection, loneliness, guilt, and worry.

"Once people start talking about you, you try to fit what they say, [to] protect yourself. It sticks with you."

"Bullying – being left out, picked on."

"Feeling judged for not being good enough."

Mokopuna also described how their experiences of material hardship and lack of access to essential items such as hygiene products, contributed to feelings of shame and fears about being unprepared for adulthood. These fears resulted in mokopuna feeling directionless, and worried about how they were going to look after themselves.

"[a feeling of] te whare tapa whā collapsing."

"Being really sweaty... Being stinky."

"Not knowing where to go for opportunities or help with life."

Many mokopuna talked about how hard it was, feeling like they had no one to talk to about their concerns.

"Not having someone who supports you."

"Zero support from the people around them."

Mokopuna spoke of the importance of knowing it is ok to ask for help and, equally, the importance of having safe people in their lives to talk to. They called for increased and easily accessible mental health services, particularly within schools.

"We need more support like counselling for our youth that don't feel safe talking to others."

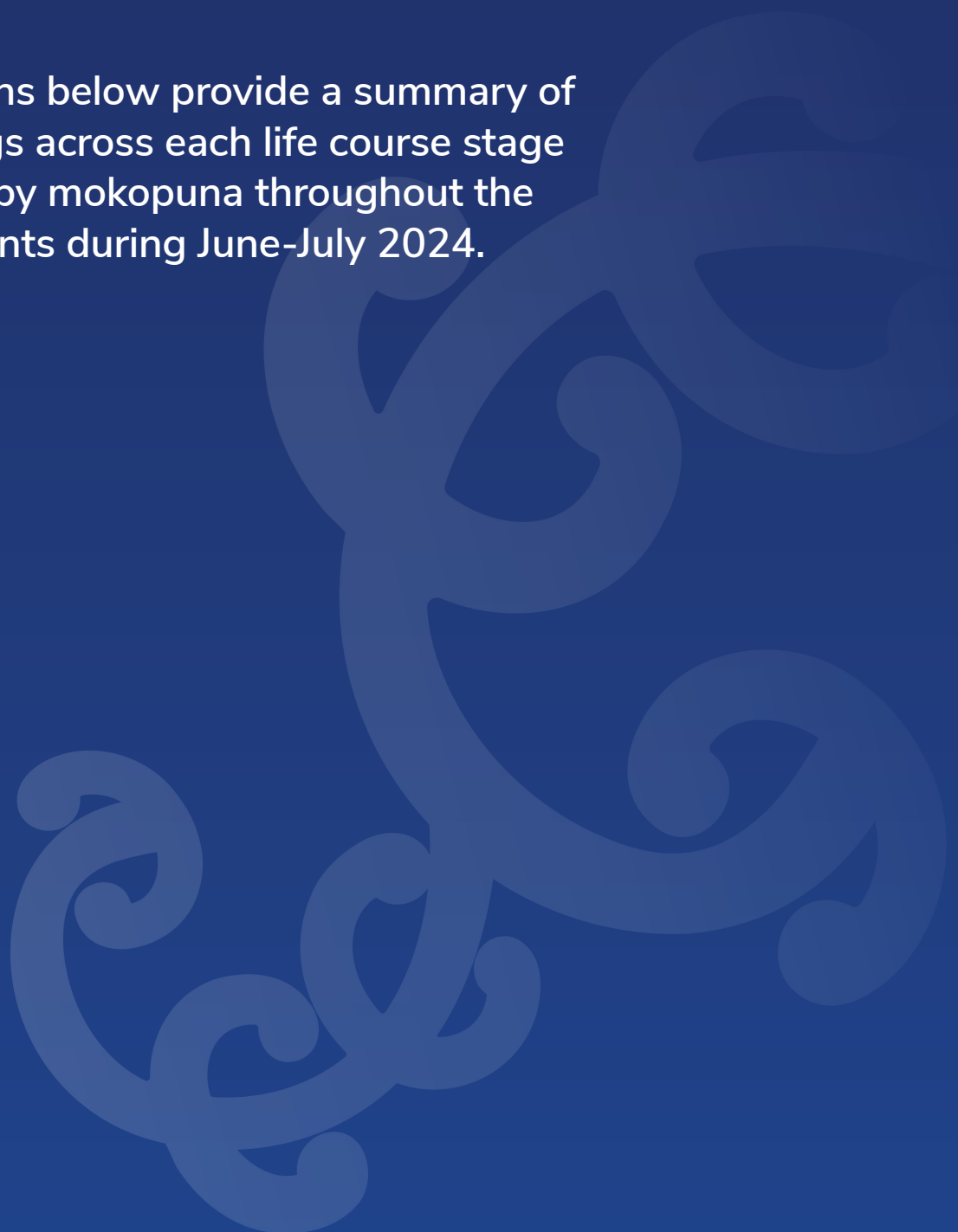
"Posters at school of helplines."

"On-site counsellor at schools, walking around amongst the kids so they have a sense of what's going on for kids – can see kids struggling."

SECTION 2:

Themes across the life-course

The sections below provide a summary of our findings across each life course stage as shared by mokopuna throughout the engagements during June-July 2024.



Key themes about mokopuna aged 0-4 years old



Our kōrero about this life stage involved mokopuna sharing memories and drawing on what they observed with the babies, toddlers, and preschoolers in their lives.

Key priorities for mokopuna wellbeing for the 0-4 years stage of life included feeling safe, loved and cared for, and the importance of being warm, sheltered, fed and clothed. Additional priorities shared with us included support to meet physical, social and emotional developmental milestones, such as learning to crawl, walk and talk, learning positive ways to express emotion, and the importance of having fun and developing friendships.

Conversely, barriers to thriving within this age group included harmful family environments, lack of resources and access to essential services, and lack of safe spaces to play and connect with others.

What matters most

"To be safe, loved and cared for":

Mokopuna overwhelmingly talked about this age group needing a loving, caring and supportive environment to grow up in. They talked about the importance of "being surrounded by family", which included not only parents and caregivers but also wider whānau connections.

Many mokopuna highlighted the importance of feeling safe, describing loving parents as those who "don't get angry and yell for unnecessary reasons".

"The voice and the presence of the loved ones."

"Spending quality time with their parents, family and whānau."

"Parents and a safe environment, love, care, nurturing, feeling loved."

"Having everything we need":

Mokopuna highlighted the importance of having "...a safe dry house, good food". They described the kind of environment that was important for 0-4-year-olds as one that provided healthy food, access to nappies and formula, and proper health care. Mokopuna also talked about the need for a quiet space and having enough sleep.

"Babies need medical attention, 0-4 get sick a lot, I watched my brother grow up and he needed attention."

"Rest, food, support to live, warmth."

"Learning the right stuff":

Mokopuna talked about the types of things that babies and toddlers need to learn, including physical, social, emotional, and developmental milestones.

"Teaching him how to be open with how he's feeling, and that he knows he can ask for help."

"Having a positive mindset." ... "having a creative mindset." ... "having a good schedule."

Mokopuna also highlighted the importance of good environments that support learning.

"Going to day care to learn."

"Having fun and people to play with":

Play, being happy and making friends were also expressed by mokopuna as vital for 0-4 year olds.

"Having a run around outside with parents or siblings."

"Friends - they need people to play with or they will be lonely."

What gets in the way

Lack of communication:

Mokopuna highlighted the vulnerability of babies and toddlers, especially if they were being raised by parents and others who may not have the skills to understand them and help them develop.

"Communication is limited, not understood."

"Not talking to express emotions."

Harmful family dynamics and behaviours:

Mokopuna talked about neglect; "parents that ignore... not paying attention." They also talked about the impacts of growing up in unsafe environments exposed to violence, abuse, drugs, alcohol and addiction, and strangers in the house.

"Alcohol, parties and violence – don't want our kid in that sort of environment."

– Young māmā

"How my family operates – instead of confronting problems and trying new ways, they bottle things up and rely on drugs and alcohol. I didn't want that in my life." – Young māmā

"Scary strangers in the house."

Lack of community support for struggling families:

Mokopuna identified lack of support for parents and caregivers as a key barrier to mokopuna wellbeing in the early years. They highlighted the need to support parents and caregivers struggling with mental health and addiction, and to develop positive parenting skills.

"...services not great: overloaded, not the right workers, and focussed on extreme end of hardship and need, e.g. violence, alcohol."

"Lack of support was the biggest struggle." – Young māmā

"Not many family supports."

"Not having enough money":

For many of the mokopuna across all our engagements, material hardship was one of the most troubling barriers to wellbeing. Mokopuna gave many examples, including "not having enough money to get food" and other things babies need, like nappies, baby formula, and clothes. Mokopuna also highlighted problems like unaffordable housing and poor housing conditions.

"Finances for caregivers/guardians of the kids – if they don't have the money to support the kids, how are they going to support the kids?"

"Always moving, not being able to settle."

"Parents that are having a hard time at work ... not having enough money to get food."

"No activities and spaces for kids":

Mokopuna provided other examples of material deprivation as factors that got in the way of supporting babies and toddlers to thrive, with a particular focus on overcrowding and obstacles to going outside to play.

"Having a noisy and interrupted space."

"No room to grow and develop."

"Staying inside all day without getting fresh air."

What helps

"More support for lower income families":

Mokopuna observations consistently highlighted enabling access to the things they had identified earlier as 'mattering most'. This included: having enough to eat; "support for housing"; affordable healthcare, increased employment opportunities; and financial support.

"Financial support for parents that are really struggling with money, more support to lower income families."

"\$100 donation to new parents."

Mokopuna also shared their beliefs about needing to lower the cost of living and making baby food, formula and milk freely available.

"Outings being affordable, cost of living going down, baby formulas/nappies/wipes being cheaper!"

"Having a supportive and loving family":

Almost universally, mokopuna told us that having loving and supportive parents and family, including extended whānau (specifically grandparents, uncles, aunts) were critical to their wellbeing. Many shared positive experiences with their own whānau or specific whānau members.

"Having nice loving and supportive parents /relatives /family."

"Having your birth parents in your life that love and care for you."

In addition to the importance of feeling loved and supportive, some mokopuna also highlighted the importance of good role models and positive influences within the whānau.

"He's 'monkey-see, monkey do' so [it's] important to have a positive space and influence around him."

Support from community and for families:

Mokopuna talked about the importance of having loving people around who were outside of the family. They emphasised the need for community support for families who are struggling.

"[The principal] was a huge support when my mum couldn't step up to support me. She has great advice, words of wisdom, when we feel lost." – Young māmā

Mokopuna want to see more opportunities for parents and caregivers to learn "how to parent and what to do with your child", and see that there are alternatives to family violence.

"[A] parenting course to show parents not to take everything out on their kid."

"Māmā knowing how to keep pēpē safe, and take a break from the stress, for example, put moko in a room."

Mokopuna also proposed having more people to check in with families who were struggling or accessing support, to make sure things were going ok, including providing drug and alcohol tests.

"I believe that parents that struggle with stress, relationship and money problems should get more support financially and more guidance. Reason being parents struggle with financial emotional and relationship problems eventually generate an unhealthy environment for any child within the environment."

Key themes about mokopuna aged 5-10 years old



As with the previous age group priorities, when thinking about what is important for the life-course stage of 5-10 year olds, mokopuna described the importance of "affordable clothes and food" and "a roof over your head". The emphasis on feeling loved by whānau also continued, with the additional focus on not only feeling loved, but also on the value of having people to love and care for.

Having a sense of belonging, connection, and cultural identity emerged as additional findings in this age group, as did having opportunities to learn, play, be with friends, and play sport.

Barriers to thriving within this age group identified by mokopuna again included harmful family environments, lack of resources and access to essential services.

Mokopuna identified additional barriers to wellbeing in the areas of struggles with mental health and experiencing and expressing their identity and culture, being expected by their families to take on too many responsibilities, and the negative impacts of "having teachers that don't care."

What matters most?

Having what you need:

Mokopuna again stressed the need for "affordable clothes and food", and healthy houses. They talked about the prohibitive cost of living, especially in relation to school requirements like uniforms and stationery and reminded us of the importance of free school lunches.

"Stationery and lunches need more resourcing and costs too much."

"Not having them worry about school uniforms as they're really expensive."

"A roof over my head, because we'd be on the streets if we didn't have that."

Being healthy:

Mokopuna talked about the importance of being healthy and having access to health care, mental health supports and health information. They also emphasised the importance of access to sport to keep fit and healthy.

"Knowing where they can access resources such as healthcare and counselling."

"I like basketball and league and rugby. Sport gets you stronger."

People I care about most, particularly parents and whānau:

Being in a loving family and feeling a sense of connection and belonging was especially important to almost all of the mokopuna who engaged with us.

"Having understanding parents."

"Time with friends and family."

"When I was nine, my baby brother was born. He's adorable. When I was ten, my baby sister was born. That was probably the coolest thing that has happened to me. She is a very beautiful baby."

"Having a whānau environment outside of school and home":

Mokopuna talked about the importance of growing up in communities where they felt a sense of connection, participation, and contribution. Some also talked about having people they could trust, including role models who can help them grow.

"Equity > equality. We all matter, help everyone as much as you can."

"My family is good and helps some poor people."

Friendships and fun:

Many mokopuna talked about the importance of their friendships at this time of their life, particularly making new school friends, highlighting things like inclusion, acceptance, belonging, and relationships.

"Need to be able to be kids."

"Make new friends, having sleepovers for the first time."

"Friends at school were the safest people in my life."

Mokopuna also highlighted the availability of fun activities, as something that matters to them when thinking about the 5-10 years old stage of life. These activities largely included opportunities for sports, and fun places to go to outside of school, as well as having access to technology (phone, TV, screens, PlayStation).

"The gym is really fun."

"The brand-new park – the hamster wheel, the flying fox."

Knowing who you are; culture and identity:

The importance of culture and identity emerged as a theme when considering what mattered most for this age group. Culture and identity included Māoritanga and faith, and more generally, mokopuna within this age bracket having the opportunity to discover who they are.

"Kapa haka."

"The most important thing to her is her identity. Her culture, her Māoritanga."¹

"Room to find out who you are."... "Help [to] develop their own mind."

¹ This whakaaro was captured by a teacher aide who was taking notes on behalf of one of the mokopuna with whom we met.

School, learning and becoming independent:

Many mokopuna highlighted this stage of life as being about learning more and getting to do more things.

*"Experiencing new stuff."...
"Opportunities to explore interests."*

"General stable environment, especially when they're learning things about the world."

Mokopuna talked about the importance of having supportive, and understanding teachers, and learning including social and emotional aspects as well as reading and writing.

"I learn lots of stuff and it makes me feel I'm good at this."

"Learn how to communicate."

"Taught rights and wrongs."

What gets in the way:

Poverty:

When reflecting on the difficulties of growing up poor for this age bracket, resources, mokopuna observations echoed their whakaaro regarding 0–4-year-olds. Mokopuna told us that growing up without money for the basics was hard for the whole family.

"Not having a house makes people crazy."

"Not having kai."

"Broken bike."... "No PC, no phone."

Mokopuna were acutely aware of the prohibitively high cost of living. They described the flow-on effects of "being poor", including "not [being] able to buy school equipment or uniform", being "unable to pay sports fees" and exclusion from other opportunities.

"Not being able to do out of school activities."

Lack of parent/whānau support:

Mokopuna emphasised the enduring impacts of growing up with support. Once again, their whakaaro echoed their previous comments when thinking about the needs of 0–4 year olds.

"If you don't have people that can pick you up and let you know it's ok to keep trying – this is valid for all ages."

"No support through life."

Family violence, growing up in unsafe homes:

Again, risk factors identified by mokopuna in relation to family violence, neglect, abuse and addiction highlighted their relevance and harmful impacts across all ages.

"Having parents that drink, do drugs etc."

"It was hard trying to handle my parents when they were hitting me and giving me hidings."

"Parent separating – moving from one house to another."

Peer pressure and bullying - mental health risk factors:

As mokopuna reflected on issues specific to this life stage, they began to identify the types of experiences that compromised their mental health. Much of their whakaaro centred around the harmful impacts of peer pressure, bullying and feeling lonely or 'different'.

"Starting to do stupid things – vaping and other stuff."

"Having no friends."

"Being different races or disabilities."

From the perspective of the mokopuna who shared their views with us, this theme continues throughout subsequent mokopuna life course stages, as outlined later in this report.

"Needing to be the adult":

We heard a lot from mokopuna about the simultaneous pressure of being given too much responsibility for their age, at the expense of having time and space to play, while also feeling unheard and without agency.

"Mum would always be out and I'd be left alone to look after my siblings."

"No-one listening due to [my] age."

"My family are not good with kids, they use my younger sibling like a slave...[they] just sleep, eat and tell her what to do."

These observations illustrate the complex and compounding ways in which mokopuna experience barriers to both participation and play.

"No room to grow and develop."

"No time for yourself."

Again, this theme emerged as a barrier to wellbeing that mokopuna first highlighted when considering our pātai in relation to 5–10-year-olds, and increased in relevance as mokopuna talked about subsequent life course stages.

Negative experiences of education:

Another recurring theme that first emerged during our kōrero about issues of importance to 5-10-year-olds was the impact of negative experiences of school.

Just as they identified the numerous ways in which having a sense of belonging at school was a significant protective barrier, mokopuna described the multiple ways "sucking at school" could be experienced. This included "bad teachers", poorly resourced schools, a lack of teachers or teacher aides with specialist training, feeling culturally invisible, and as mentioned earlier, missing out on opportunities due to prohibitive sport and activity fees.

"School zones limits the school potential for kids."

"Teachers that don't care."

"My nephew changed schools four times, because he doesn't talk, so many different things."

What helps:

"Getting things you need, not want":

As highlighted earlier and later on in this report, mokopuna universally described the mutually reinforcing importance of having enough money to live and enabling access to housing and other essential resources and services.

"Being fed properly, money"

"Good parents who are financially stable."

"Give us a house."

"Daily food donation."

Mokopuna identified other supporting factors, including increased school funding to relieve whānau of the financial pressures caused by school fees and the cost of school lunches.

"Free food in schools."

"Funding for school uniforms."

Welcoming, supportive and well-resourced schools:

Mokopuna want to feel a sense of belonging at school, and to be known for who they are and well understood. They also talked about the need for good teachers who can support learning in ways that work for different needs and at different paces.

"Somewhere welcoming and entertaining to keep kids engaged and come to stay and learn."

"Better teachers that can teach not just one style of teaching but a style of teaching that works, that everyone can understand."

"Work with kids' passions and find their talents."

Many mokopuna called for more funding for schools, so they can better meet the needs of students, particularly mokopuna whaikaha, and to help reduce school costs.

"More funding into schools – proper and better education."

"Fees for extracurricular activities need to come down."

A loving family, safety, and more support:

Mokopuna continued to share their observations of what has helped them to experience wellbeing within their whānau, overwhelmingly attributing their sense of being cared for and valued as the key protective factor.

"My mum helps me when I get home."

"My dad protects me and my mum"

"My grandmother passed away – she told me if I got sad, it's alright – she'll be there for me. She helps me feel strong"

"My first day at school – my mum had to stay the whole entire day cos I was scared."

Mokopuna also supplied numerous suggestions about ways to strengthen the capacity of parents to provide love, care, belonging and safety.

"Help for parents to be better parents and not abusive."

"Social workers helping kids stay with parents."

"Giving [parents] the necessary tools to survive financial mentally emotionally physically."

"Daycare for afterschool for those parents who work – sometimes they can't get babysitters, so kids don't have to be alone, so they don't have to be neglected."

Some mokopuna talked about the need for "better communities" and the provision of safe spaces.

"Somewhere safe to go when children's parents are abusive."

Making good friends and having fun:

As mentioned earlier, friendships are important in this stage of childhood. Mokopuna shared examples of ways they felt supported to make friends, while others told us that having more support to make friends would be helpful.

"My brother is at the same school as me and he helped me make friends."

"Older kids and teachers could help introduce you to kids your own age to help you make friends – like a buddy system."

Other mokopuna recommended establishing more mokopuna-friendly community spaces and opportunities to have fun.

"After school care and holiday programmes."

"Investing in playgrounds to get kids outside instead of being glued to screens."

"Being more welcoming to culture":

A few mokopuna talked about the value they placed on being Māori. They called for greater acceptance and encouragement of their culture.

"More cultural activities."

"More reo."

This call for more support for cultural identity increased from mokopuna when they shared their views with us, in relation to subsequent life-course stages (see more later in this report).

"Rights":

Supporting mokopuna to feel heard was mentioned as important for this stage, and this becomes a stronger priority in relation to 11-14-year-olds and 15-18-year-olds, as outlined in the following sections of this report.

"Listening to kids."

Key themes about mokopuna aged 11-14 years old



In relation to this stage of childhood and adolescence, mokopuna continued to describe the importance of having access to what they described as "basic necessities", with an increasing emphasis on the less tangible essentials for wellbeing, such as emotional and physical health and hygiene.

The importance of feeling loved remained a priority, with increasing value placed on being able to reciprocate love and support. Mokopuna also continued to highly rate the importance of access to sport and recreation, supportive teachers, good friends, and having "spaces to connect with each other – both in school and communities".

Barriers to thriving within this age group identified by mokopuna again included harmful family environments and poverty. "Toxic friends", "body shaming", and isolation were identified as major barriers to wellbeing, and exposure to drugs and alcohol within the family emerged as new experiences and concerns that mokopuna shared in relation to this stage of life. The impact of lack of care and responsiveness from teachers and subsequently feeling disengaged from learning were key experiences and views relating to education that came through strongly from mokopuna.

Reflecting on what helps the most for mokopuna at this stage in their lives, mokopuna provided examples and suggestions that augmented their recommendations in relation to the 5–10-year-old stage of childhood. Added to this was an increased focus on supports that enabled a sense of leadership, recognised the importance of mental health, access to culture and community connection, with mokopuna calling for increased "consideration [of] kids'

needs and ideas", "a better mental health system", and "funding for free drop in/school support/cultural support hubs".

What matters most:

A loving connected and mutually supportive family:

Feeling loved and supported, an appreciation of time and connection with immediate and extended family – including reconnecting after separation – continued to be extremely important.

"Having my mum in my life, having my dogs, my siblings, helping my mum."

"Whānau me tō wairua."

"Going to [park] with my family, meeting my brothers after being separated."

Mokopuna recognised the value and rewards of reciprocity, providing examples like supporting loved ones – including their pets – and making their parents proud.

"Giving mum things and love."

"Parents feeling proud."

Having what you need:

Mokopuna demonstrated a nuanced understanding of what the core essentials for this stage in life might be. While their whakaaro still highlighted the importance of "money for things you need", e.g., "a house", "money to buy food", and "school shoes – yayyy!", they also recognised support to manage and maintain their physical and mental wellbeing as essential.

"Basic necessities.... basic feminine hygiene products."

"Access to healthcare, mental healthcare"

"Feelings and emotional health"

Culture and identity:

Mokopuna described the importance of feeling supported and "having room to grow... room to find out who you are". Being able to explore, develop, and celebrate their culture and identity was seen a big priority at this stage in life, whether that meant expressing their faith, championing what it means to be Māori, and/or establishing a sense of ethics and integrity.

"Māori, Māori, Māori, Māori."

"Culture - our roots, our people."

"Knowing what's right and wrong, knowing who your friends are."

"God."... "The Bible."

Sports and recreation, opportunities to explore interests:

Priorities around sports, exercise, and hobbies increased for mokopuna when considering this stage of their lives. Similar to their deepening understanding "the basics" described above, mokopuna observations illustrated their recognition that "keeping themselves busy" by engaging in sports, hobbies, and other types of recreation had positive impacts on their wellbeing at multiple levels.

"Sport is really important for kids."

"Netball clears my head."

"My baby, hobbies, rugby." – Young māmā

Supportive, understanding and skilled teachers:

Mokopuna talked about the importance of school, with reference to specific subjects such as art, science, writing, reading, as well as highlighting the importance of teaching life skills, including physical development and preparation for high school and beyond.

"Education around growing up and puberty."

"Jobs and work out of school."

Kōrero shared with us by mokopuna had a strong focus on the importance of having teachers and other support kaimahi with the skills and understanding to meet mokopuna where they were at in terms of their abilities, interests, and learning needs.

"Having teachers who understand more about learning difficulties so they can help kids with disabilities."

"Teachers to sit and talk to about work."

"Actual support worker at the school full time."

Healthy friendships and relationships:

Having good friends and an active social life remained consistently important for mokopuna during their consideration of this stage of life, with an added focus on the role of romantic relationships. Mokopuna also talked about needing opportunities to connect with each other.

"Social life is important at that age."

"Maybe a girlfriend."

"Having spaces to connect with each other – both in school and communities."

Mokopuna also shared their awareness of the foundational aspects to maintaining friendships. As mentioned earlier, mokopuna observations of friendship in relation to early childhood and at primary school strongly focused on making friends and having fun. In contrast, mokopuna considerations about friendships during the intermediate / early secondary school years deepened to include an emphasis on trust and empathy.

"Trust, friends, confidence."

"Becoming more aware of other's circumstances."

What gets in the way

"Not having enough":

Mokopuna continued to identify poverty as a huge barrier to mokopuna and whānau wellbeing at this stage of life. Once again, markers of deprivation and their impact on wellbeing included barriers to housing, hygiene and poverty of opportunity.

"Missing out on opportunities, funding, taxi rides."

"Can't wash clothes."

"Moving houses every single goddam year."

Family harm:

Mokopuna observations about the impact of family violence on wellbeing at this life-stage mirrored their whakaaro across earlier life stages (and, as outlined in the next section, continues during kōrero about barriers to wellbeing of 15-18-year-olds).

Mokopuna identified examples of family harm as significant barriers to wellbeing, including neglect, physical and sexual violence, and being exposed to family violence and drug and alcohol abuse.

"When I get a growling from my dad for no reason."

"...hitting, screaming."

"When my mum and my uncle used to fight and fight. They fought every day and night."

"The one message I want to get across is for children who do not have their parents in their life because of drugs and alcohol. For me this is a big problem and has caused my life to feel embarrassed and traumatised."

Further kōrero from mokopuna continued the theme of "not having enough time to be a child."

Reflections about this stage of the mokopuna life-course prompted whakaaro from mokopuna about the State's involvement in, and impact on, family wellbeing (i.e. actions carried out on Oranga Tamariki directives).

"[Being] in care, being told bad things about parents."

"No biological parents, just caregivers"

"Not being able to be alone with parents [i.e., needing to be supervised]."

Barriers to mental health and wellbeing, including "Having no one to talk to":

Mokopuna kōrero about barriers to mental health at this stage in life increased exponentially in contrast to the earlier age stages.

Mokopuna listed numerous contributing factors to poor mental health, including harm and pressure from peers, including body shaming, bullying, pressure to vape, drink alcohol and use other drugs. Mokopuna shared some of the impacts of these pressures, such as low self-esteem, and the risk of self-harm, and told us how these problems were exacerbated by social media.

"Fake friends."

"Gaining weight and being bullied for it."

"Starting to do stupid things, vaping and other stuff."

"Getting bullied and being told to commit [suicide]."

Mokopuna described the prevalence of anxiety and depression, and being worried about things beyond their control, such as the environment or health of a family member.

"My whare tapa wha collapsing"

"Feeling like I'm annoying people."

Many mokopuna described feelings of loneliness – compounded by both a sense of not being able to open up and share what was going on for them, alongside an absence of safe, supportive, and available people to talk to.

"Mental support and emotional support is lacking for youth. I can't name five places where I get the mental and emotional support I needed. For me, what lacked the most is the counselling, so I buttoned things up and didn't share it. If I'd had someone to talk with it would have been heaps easier."

Mokopuna observations about this stage in their lives also highlighted their awareness of problems arising from a lack of school and social services support for autism and ADHD.

"Not liking school", negative experiences with education:

Mokopuna identified a range of contributing factors that got in the way of positive learning experiences and/or having a sense of belonging at school.

Factors contributing to mokopuna disengagement from school included not feeling liked, understood or respected by teachers and other staff, and feeling there was a "lack of opportunities for different interests".

"[School felt like] a prison camp."

"At school, my attitude got in the way. [I] was always treated with disrespect, so treated others like that."

"Listening to teachers growling."

"No room to grow and develop."

Some mokopuna also explained how a lack of support and understanding could result in feeling like they'd failed.

"Not enough support to learn - you have to do it on your own."

"Not being good at things."

What helps

Feeling loved and "welcomed" by whānau:

Mokopuna continued to highlight the importance of feeling "welcome [and] wanted" by their whānau at this stage in their lives.

"My nan supports me heaps, no matter what I say, she'll give me a good answer, she'll always be supportive."

"Me and my cousins have got things sorted - reckon it's us communicating with each other and saying what we want to do and 'boom', we done it!"

Mokopuna also continued to recognise the rewards of reciprocating love and support to people in their family.

"Getting less things, to help my mum to save things, helping my mum out with the hard things she can't do."

Mokopuna also talked about having people outside of the whānau who will protect them and stand up for them. They also talked about supporting and helping others in need.

"My teacher aide really helped me when I was at school because she protected me and parented me and helped me focus and learn."

"Someone to stand up for me, hear my story and my point of view."

Better financial support, and support for families:

Mokopuna want to see more financial support and help for material needs, as well as making things less expensive.

"Lower tax by \$100."

"Financial support for parents that are really struggling with money, stress and relationship problems."

"Stop driving kids into debt before they get into anything."

Mokopuna also want more support for struggling parents, to help them be better parents:

Support included advice and courses, drug and alcohol support and rehab, better foster care and checking in.

"Parent learning courses and learning facilities."

Access to the right kind of mental health support:

Several mokopuna talked about the need for a better mental health system, with more safe and accessible support programmes, including school-based counselling services. They also talked about raising awareness amongst young people about what support is available.

"What matters most to me is children's mental health which can stem from family related issues, bullying, finances etc, so increasing mental health programmes would help decrease mental health issues."

"Posters at school of helplines."

"Counselling for free."

"On-site counsellor at schools, walking around amongst the kids so they have a sense of what's going on for kids – can see kids struggling."

Independence, social and emotional development:

Mokopuna talked about the importance of having their voice heard and learning how to self-regulate. Some mokopuna talked about the need for greater equity and a sense of social responsibility.

"Swearing, listening to calm music."

"Listen to the voices of the young people and seriously consider what they are saying. We're becoming adults and we are the future."

"Treating everyone equally."

Well-resourced schools - a place of safety, belonging and learning:

Mokopuna talked about the difference adaptable and flexible teachers can make to them being motivated to learn.

"Pushing children to the limit. But not too much to where they lose passion for what they're doing."

"Teachers being more involved in your learning, giving you help in something you're struggling with."

Mokopuna highlighted the value of schools providing support for some of the things that can be hard to ask of family, e.g., issues around consent and the development of life skill.

"This kura – they made me feel comfortable straight away – and they said they'd help me if I need anything. They made me feel different – feel loved and get that tingling feeling."

"Supporting with life skills."

Mokopuna also highlighted the importance of having a positive and safe school environment that supports and encourages healthy relationships and takes a strong stance on bullying.

"Safer school environment; Watching out for bullies."

"Have stuff on at lunchtime (e.g. dance classes and alternatives that are enjoyable and will keep them busy)."

Spaces for fun and recreation, community connection:

Mokopuna talked about the need for affordable, safe, and welcoming mokopuna spaces for community connection, celebrations of culture, and support with schoolwork.

"I wish there were spaces outside of school to learn and hang out without lots of people seeing or being around you."

"Youth centres are a big support – free games and a safe place to go. Need to make them engaging."

Mokopuna also want to see more opportunities for community-driven activities:

"Having regular activities, like Friday night stuff, ice-cream afternoon sessions."

Key themes about mokopuna aged 15-18 years old



The things that matter most for this age-group of mokopuna – as expressed by the mokopuna who shared their views with us – continued to centre around the need for financial stability, bringing the cost of living down, and making sure that hygiene resources are available and affordable, if not free. Mokopuna described the importance of having access to counsellors and safe people to talk to about their problems, with many calling for an increased presence of mental health professionals in schools.

Mokopuna described the importance of having practical support and access to programmes in and outside of school that supported their transition to adulthood and independence. Family continued to be a priority, but less so, with other priorities such as "having a voice to speak out", "a chance to succeed", having a strong sense of identity, and the need for safe and engaging community spaces taking precedence.

Barriers to thriving within this stage of life identified by mokopuna again included harmful family environments and poverty. Mental health problems such as feeling isolated and lonely continued to be identified by mokopuna as a problem, and the availability of drugs and alcohol within communities emerged as a new finding. Lack of availability of programmes and support to learn life skills and transition to adulthood were highlighted as sources of concern, with many mokopuna describing their worries about finding jobs, being financially independent and the pressure of being able to support their families.

What matters most

Access to the essentials:

As mentioned earlier, mokopuna concerns about the cost of living, and the way they see families struggling to provide the basics, persist across all stages of the mokopuna life-course.

"How people are trying to give their kids a better future, yet living expenses are getting in the way."

Seeing their families happy and thriving, or conversely, struggling – and having to deal with the negative impacts on their lives – remains one of the things that mokopuna told us matters most.

"What's most important to me is the happiness and financial stability of my family."

"Making basic necessities/ resources easy to access."

"[If] education and other fun and cool activities didn't need to be paid for... [going] to places without worrying about money."

The support and love of family and friends:

Mokopuna reflections about what mattered most continued to centre around the importance of family and the "feeling of being safe and loved by someone". Observations highlighted the importance of connection and belonging, being around positive role models, and having healthy relationships with both family and friends.

"Family is #1."

"A stable relationship – friends, family, dating."

Support for health and mental health:

Mokopuna talked about the importance of being supported to maintain their mental health, especially in relation to having access to mental health practitioners.

"What matters most to me is children's mental health, which can stem from family-related issues, bullying, finances etc. So increasing mental health programmes would help decrease mental health issues."

"Mental Health: More access and outlets; more people to come out from behind a desk and be involved to see things first hand."

"Good people that we can talk to about anything."

Reflections included an awareness of the risks and impacts of having readily available vapes and other addictive products in their homes and communities, along with the need for addiction support for not only themselves but also whānau members.

"Drugs are too easy to access." ... "Decreasing vape stores."

"Helping parents with their addiction."

A good education:

School continues to be important to mokopuna at this life-stage, particularly recognition of the value of having involved and supportive teachers.

"Being able to make mistakes without being judged. If I were to fail a class or task, it would be understood why, and believed [that] I can learn from it, or improve from it, and not be a disappointment."

"A teacher that understands learning disabilities."

For many mokopuna, the importance of school at this age extended to include preparation for adulthood, including learning skills that would increase employment opportunities.

"Showing pathways other than purely academics."

Becoming independent adults:

Mokopuna talked about the importance of thinking and planning for the future. They told us that this stage of life involved a focus on finding opportunities to obtain work experience, getting a driver's licence and thinking about career options.

"I want to get every qualification that I can that will better our future, and get us in a better space."

Mokopuna highlighted the importance of having programmes and people who could help them prepare for life as an adult.

"What is important is making sure our youth have workshops and programmes that help us learn more about life after high school. A place where we learn more about the problems in society, whether it's past or present, and how it will affect our future."

"[Learn] how to be confident, [get] work experience, knowledge, how to be a leader, help with struggles in work and other life struggles."

Some mokopuna talked about the importance of finding work and being able to support their families. Their comments highlighted an increasing appreciation of being able to support family, in addition to being supported by family.

"[Getting a] job - providing for family."

For many mokopuna, the priorities specific to this age group included gaining a sense of freedom and agency, having opportunities to experiment, to learn about the world around them, and to be active participants in society.

"This is our first time at this age. We will make mistakes of which we need to learn from. Allow us to make these mistakes."

"We, too, are concerned about what goes on in our world, especially our country. What happens now WILL affect our future. Most of us aren't stereotypical or ignorant."

"I feel that the voting age should be lowered. New Zealand youth are the future and deserve to have a say in what the future will look like."

Identity and connection to culture:

Mokopuna told us that environments where their culture – particularly as mokopuna Māori and Pacific – and faith were supported and celebrated was crucial to their wellbeing. Many spoke about the importance of having the safety and space to discover who they are for themselves.

"Finding yourself, and who you are as an individual."

Sports and recreation in the community:

Mokopuna across all life course stages talked about the importance of playing sport, participating in activities, and generally having fun. Most of their whakaaro centred around the absence of affordable opportunities, and the lack of safe, accessible spaces to hang out with their friends and have fun.

"Somewhere safe mutually accepting and welcoming."

"Holidays programmes and youth programmes for free."

"Areas to go cool down and chill in community."

See "What gets in the way" and "What helps" in the following sections for more detail.

Equity, having a voice:

Themes around equitable access to services, equal entitlement to support, resources and essential needs, and equity of participation – as well as noticing some of the ways in which mokopuna are prevented from accessing equally resourced support – emerged strongly during kōrero about mokopuna priorities at this stage in their lives.

"Making sure hygiene resources are available for everyone."

"Counsellors in every school."

"School zones limit potential for kids."

Whakaaro shared by mokopuna about equity also brought to light mokopuna awareness of racism, and age and ability-based discrimination.

"To be a Pacific Islander but still be treated the same as any other."

"Most people over the age of 16 pay taxes to the government, and I think they deserve a say in where that money goes."

What gets in the way

"No money":

Mokopuna expressed that financial and material hardship continued to act as a barrier to wellbeing for 15–18-year-olds. Kōrero relating to this age group however also highlighted the pressures of having to support themselves as they enter adulthood and independence.

"No access to gears for [the] job."

"No government youth services are available until you turn 16."

Family violence, unsafe homes:

As mentioned earlier, mokopuna kōrero highlighted the ongoing stressors and harm accompanying growing up experiencing violence and harm within their homes.

"[Feeling] unsupported, abuse, unsafe homes, family arguments, neglect."

"Drugs are too easy to access, and parents don't really care. They're doing it as well, so it just keeps going."

Barriers to mental wellbeing:

Most of the kōrero about barriers to mental wellbeing at this stage in their lives reflected mokopuna observations about issues affecting 11–14-year-olds – e.g. relationships, peer pressure and bullying, and a lack of safe people and support services.

"Breaking up with someone."

"Coming out as gay."

"Being judged, worried about others' opinions."

Some mokopuna described the flip side of independence - less time with their whānau – as something they struggled with

"Saying good-bye to family, more time away from them."

Mokopuna shared additional barriers to mental wellbeing at this stage of life, including an increasing concern about global problems like war and pandemics, experiences of discrimination, and extreme weather events.

"Events in the world."

"How I'm being treated.... unfairly especially Māori and 'Poly' [sic]."

Their kōrero included specific reflections about the COVID-19 lockdowns during 2020, and the effects of Severe Tropical Cyclone Gabrielle in February 2023.

"COVID and Cyclone made me feel isolated from whānau and friends."

"Feeling isolated from COVID and the cyclone, not being able to be active or play sports, and having no contact with my loved ones during the cyclone."

Transitions to adulthood:

As much as mokopuna talked about the freedoms that came with becoming an adult, they also described worries about being unprepared for independence, i.e., knowing how to look after themselves, knowing how to get a job, or even identify what they want to do with their lives.

"I believe the education system is outdated and needs to be updated. Schools only produce workers. I feel most kids leave school without the necessary tools needed to survive or sustain themselves healthily."

"Not knowing how to be an adult."

Discrimination and inequality:

Some mokopuna described a 'double burden' of experiencing discrimination and feeling unheard as mokopuna, while also being pressured to plan, achieve and succeed as future adults, both by family and by others in society.

"Pressured by family."

"Not having a voice."

"A challenge for me is when I have to battle with my sister because she don't like taking her medicine and my family make me do all the jobs."

"Being treated unfairly by adults, that makes me feel bad, it makes us feel like, why bother."

Awareness of discrimination also extended to include structural racism and inequality.

"Biased society."

"Racist government."

What helps

Affordable living and financial support for struggling families:

Similar to mokopuna recommendations in relation to other life-course stages, mokopuna want more support for families who are struggling financially, when it comes to thinking about this age group.

"You need to get in early, as soon as you see people struggling."

"Stop cutting benefits to people who need them."

"Access to free hygiene products." ... "free stationery for kids."

Some mokopuna talked about increasing wages and making things cheaper, as well as reducing taxes. They also mentioned the need to support families as early as possible.

"Transport prices, cut back down to 50%."

"Taxes and prices for things to decrease because it is hard to provide for a family and yourself. If only education and other fun and cool activities didn't need to be paid for or having to go to places without worrying about money."

Mental health and addiction support:

Many mokopuna called for increased mental health support, including counselling, school counsellors, non-judgmental people who will listen, getting the right support. They also want more accessible drug and alcohol and rehabilitation support services, for both parents and young people.

"People going into schools to let kids know that they can go for help."

"More programmes that help our youth and young adults, that support our wellbeing."

"Support for families /parents who are struggling with mental health and drugs."

"Stop increasing vape stores."

Love and support from family, whānau and friends:

Mokopuna want to feel loved and supported and have people they can go to for help and not feel judged.

"Parents giving their kids love."

"[Being able to] ask parents for help when you need it."

"Family members that don't constantly put you down but uplift you."

They also talked about relationships and friendships they can trust, and people who will bring out the best in them.

"Get rid of 'yes friends' - get friends who will challenge you and make you better."

"My mum's friend let me stay at her place with my baby until I was old enough to get accommodation. It was good being in a healthy space, clean and warm. It modelled what life might be like and woke me up as to how things could be better."

Safe and inclusive communities, supporting culture and identity:

More acceptance of their culture was important to a number of mokopuna in their whakaaro relating to this age group, including support for te reo and cultural activities.

"Te ao Māori needs more cultural support within Aotearoa. A safe place for all youth to hang out in, cultural festivities."

"I feel Te ao Māori culture needs to be more appreciated and more recognised through my kura and my environment."

"The rights of rainbow youth must be protected."

"Let my culture stay alive. Incorporate more Māori culture in everything."

Education that motivates and prepares for independence:

Mokopuna want school to be interesting, motivating, and relevant, with supportive and responsive teachers.

"Even just a pat on the back can help."

Mokopuna want to know about the range of opportunities that are available, and to be shown the life-skills they need to be prepared for becoming an adult.

"Showing pathways other than purely academics."

"More jobs and upskilling opportunities for our youth is a major one."

More sports and recreation opportunities and safe community spaces:

Mokopuna want more places that are safe and welcoming.

"Areas to go cool down and chill in community."

"Something to focus on to stay away from drugs."

They also want more sporting opportunities and more free programmes, especially during the holidays.

"More sports."... "Gym and physical health."

"Holiday programmes and youth programmes for free."

SECTION 3:

Appendices



Appendix 1: Insights from parents, teachers, and carers of mokopuna whaikaha

For some communities of mokopuna, like mokopuna whaikaha who are non-verbal, engagement with whānau helps us understand their experiences.

We had the opportunity to meet with ten parents, grandparents, and teachers of mokopuna whaikaha who were involved in our engagement, along with three kaimahi who work with the mokopuna.

Because these were not direct mokopuna voices, we have not incorporated this whakaaro into the main report. However, as many mokopuna themselves articulated during our engagements, it is critical that parents, grandparents, and other caregivers have the support they need in order for the whole whānau to flourish and thrive.

The insights of parents, grandparents and teachers corroborate this view, and provide valuable observations, which we have shared with MSD as part of this project. Below is a summary of the insights.

They told us about their hopes for their mokopuna...

Parents and caregivers talked about what they wanted for the mokopuna in their lives, including wanting them to lead the best life possible. They talked about the commitment and sacrifices required for day-to-day care and supporting their mokopuna to realise their potential, as well as the importance of wraparound support.

"I have two girls, both deaf, both with learning difficulties. I push them, I push my girls to their limits – I believe they can reach their potential. I have these two and it's nonstop."

"I have 5 brothers and sisters. When my son [was born], I made a conscious decision to raise him with my siblings. I said, you're going to help me raise my kids, and we are all doing it."

We asked what gets in the way...

They talked about the impact of poverty on whānau, and how this limits opportunities for mokopuna to thrive. They also talked about the lack of funding and support, particularly for things like respite care.

"Anything he wanted to do, he couldn't do. He loved rugby he loved haka, he just wanted to be a part of it. But we had no money."

"They're stuck at home, kids got nothing to do, we can't take them anywhere."

"What I see is the lack of support after school, for activities I can't afford to blow my budget on things like transportation. There are a lot of kids who miss out on activities." – Teacher

They highlighted the inequity of funding and services, and difficulties with navigating the system. They talked about needing to have money or the support of a good advocate to be able to access services.

"My mokopuna is different because he has two parents, and they are both lawyers. They know how to negotiate the system. They know how to get what they're entitled to."

"It should be handed to us, we shouldn't have to fight for it, the information, we don't know what we're supposed to ask for, they should say, here's the information, it seems like common sense to me."

A lack of specialist services and delays in assessments were raised as significant issues. Parents, caregivers and teachers all said the community needs more specialists, including speech and language therapists, child psychologists, and neurotherapists.

"A huge issue for us is wait times, autism. We need try to catch things early."

"We need to have more specialists to support communities – waiting for two years for a speech and language therapist, two years is the going rate for any organisations."

Pressures of family life and concerns about the future can lead to feelings of anxiety and depression, not just affecting parents and caregivers but the mokopuna themselves.

"You're full of depression, you're isolated, you're full of anxiety. Coming here (to the school) is the highlight of my day - they're warm, they're supportive."

"I quite often wonder.. can I keep doing this? I can't keep doing this."

"School is a safe place for him, but he's 19, he'll have to move on. For the future, it scares me, but he's more scared."

We asked what helps or would have helped...

They want simplified and more supportive systems. This includes a simple pathway to funding, less jargon, and to feel that they're not wasting time when they fill out applications.

"When she was diagnosed in Wellington the child development team gave them a list of all the support available, the organisations all the phone numbers."

"You hand me a piece of paper and tell me to apply for funding, just tell me, am I going to get the funding or not. I'm not going to fill the forms out when they're just going to tell me I can't get it... It's a waste of time."

They also want timely and equitable access to assessments and diagnosis, stressing that the earlier you have assessments and diagnosis the better outcomes. In particular, they said that dental care should be more regular, and that mokopuna whaikaha should be on a schedule and called up like other kids.

"Having the access to the agencies, getting the assessment and diagnosis times shortened, from 19 months to 1 or 2 months. Because if you don't get it before intermediate, you're out of luck. There's only a short window and then you're too late."

"They can't tell us when they have a problem with their teeth. And they're way behind their peers. Referrals should be automatic."

They stressed the need for more funding and support, particularly respite care. They also talked about the impact on other mokopuna in the family, and how they miss out on their time and attention.

"Respite care, especially afterschool and weekends) You've got to have that trust, with who is going to be in your home with that child, especially when it's a child who can't communicate."

"I've got a 19-year-old autistic son with us. My daughters are missing out... I don't have wider whānau support... For family time, I have to be 100% for my son, so we go to the park, I have to give him all my time, not play with her, she's on her own... They love their brother but feel guilt cos they want the right to their mum's time too."

They highlighted that more support and training is needed for teachers and teacher aides, to help them recognise the mokopuna with different needs, with disabilities, especially mokopuna with neurodiversities. They also want the profile of teacher aides to be better recognised as specialist teachers, and to be given more hours to make the job viable.

"(Teachers) need to be taught about what they need to look for, to go outside the school, to get assessments, to get the help for that child. It seems obvious."

"Teacher aides are super passionate people because you they should get mean training to do it."

They want support for when mokopuna finish school, including being able to develop life skills so they can have something they can belong and contribute to.

"Places like Hōhepa in Hawke's Bay that has a functional system. It's live in... it provides access to things that will help develop life skills (like farms and cheese factory), so they can be work prepared. But Gisborne is isolated so not sure it can happen here."

Appendix 2: Methodology

The engagement approach

Mana Mokopuna engages with mokopuna using a rights-based lens and a mokopuna centred perspective, upholding the right of all mokopuna to have their views heard on things that impact them, their whānau and communities. We are evidence-informed and advocate that mokopuna are the experts of their lives and should be considered as decision-makers along with their whānau and community, and should be heard from within their own communities.

We utilise a village/community connector approach to engagements with mokopuna. These engagements nurture and sustain meaningful relationships with trusted community organisations, adults and whānau who hold authentic and existing relationships with mokopuna. This ensures that the mokopuna who we engage with remain connected to their existing support networks and that Mana Mokopuna is guided and supervised by these trusted adults.

Due to the short timeframe for this project, we had a navigator who worked with community connectors who have an existing relationship with Mana Mokopuna and have been involved in previous projects/engagements.

Engagement methods with mokopuna included in-person focus groups, 1-1 interviews, and an online survey.

Find out more about our some of methods for engaging with mokopuna on our website: [Resources | Mana Mokopuna](#)

The ethics process

We established an ethics panel, including external representatives from diverse cultural, professional, and geographic backgrounds, who each have experience working with mokopuna.

The panel met once to provide advice and feedback on our proposed approach, including our information, analysis and consent processes, our engagement and wellbeing plans, to ensure that the project:

- is ethical, socially, and culturally acceptable
- gives effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and makes explicit our commitment to upholding Te Tiriti provisions for Māori
- is informed by best practice approaches to mokopuna participation
- has appropriate consent processes and a wellbeing plan
- is consistent with our code of ethics.

Areas of enquiry

The overarching aim for this project was to get a better understanding of the 'life-course' of mokopuna in Aotearoa New Zealand, including transitions and times of change at various points in their lives. We encouraged mokopuna to think holistically about what helped and hindered them to thrive by drawing on the four components of wellbeing as articulated in Tā Mason Durie's Te Whare Tapa Whā.

Our mokopuna life-course method of enquiry involved the following breakdown of mokopuna life-course stages:

- 0-4 years
- 5-10 years
- 11-14 years
- 15-18 years

We asked all mokopuna, regardless of their current age, to reflect on the following questions in relation to each of the above four life-course stages:

1. What kinds of things matter/ed most?
2. What things/challenges get in the way of feeling and doing well?
3. What things/supports/people help, or might have helped?
4. What is the most important thing you want adults to focus on to support all mokopuna to thrive?

To answer these questions, we invited mokopuna to reflect on their lives from birth to current day, and to think ahead to imagine what might become important as they become an adult. Mokopuna drew on their own experiences and shared observations of other mokopuna in their lives, such as babies, younger and older siblings, cousins, nephews, and nieces, as well as their peers.

At the end of each engagement, we asked mokopuna to look back at these different life-course stages, and tell us what is the most important thing they want adults to focus on to support all mokopuna to thrive.

Demographic data

We met with 101 mokopuna across six regions during our mokopuna engagement for this project. As part of our commitment to uphold the Te Tiriti o Waitangi, we prioritised engagement with mokopuna Māori within the context of their whānau, hapu, and iwi, and as such, around 70% of those we engaged with identified as Māori. We also took an equity-based approach, taking care to reach a diversity of mokopuna experience (e.g.: age, ethnicity, gender, disability, care-experienced, and socioeconomic status) across priority cohorts, including:

- Māori
- Pacific
- Whaikaha and neurodiverse
- Rainbow and gender diverse
- Young māmā
- Urban and rural

Demographic breakdown

We met with 101 mokopuna from six regions, including:

15 mokopuna	11-13 years	Majority Māori, with a small number of Pacific and pakeha	Tairāwhiti
9 mokopuna whaikaha			Tairāwhiti
9 mokopuna	12-17 years	Pacific young people	Tāmaki Mākaurau
3 young māmā	15-23 years	Māori / Pakeha / Hispanic	Te Tai Tokerau
7 mokopuna	15-20 years	Māori	Te Tai Tokerau
10 mokopuna	11-13 years	Majority Māori, with a small number of Asian	West Coast
12 mokopuna	8-11 years	Māori	West Coast
14 mokopuna	10-13 years	Majority Māori, with a small number of Pacific and pakeha	West Coast
12 mokopuna	15-17 years	Māori / Pakeha	West Coast
8 mokopuna	14-16 years	Majority Pacific with a small number of Māori	Te Whanganui a Tara
2 mokopuna whaikaha	15-18 years	Māori and Pakeha	Te Whanganui a Tara

Analysis process

For this project, we used thematic analysis to identify unique and shared whakaaro, and to code and cluster our findings. We took an inductive approach to allow themes to emerge from the data rather than using predetermined thematic categories.

The stages of analysis were as follows:

1. For each engagement, kaimahi transferred mokopuna responses (written by mokopuna themselves on post-it notes or on whiteboards or poster paper) and notes taken by kaimahi into a digital template. Notes were grouped according to the three key areas of enquiry and the different age brackets.
2. Once we uploaded all insights, we held a group analysis workshop. Six kaimahi worked in pairs to highlight commonly raised whakaaro and unique experiences. We coded and collated the insights into clusters, identifying themes and grouping clusters under the different age brackets and areas of enquiry.
3. Kaimahi who attended engagements reviewed and sense checked our codes and themes to ensure the analysis held true to what they heard on the ground, and to identify themes that may have been missed in the analysis workshop.
4. We held a second analysis wānanga to develop our findings. This involved looking at our main themes in relation to the four mokopuna age brackets, to see how mokopuna perspectives changed according to different life-course stages, and to identify insights that spanned multiple stages.
5. Once we had determined our themes and established our insights, we prepared a set of resources, including:
 - Individual community 'report backs', summarising our engagement with each rūpu. These 'report backs' enable us to demonstrate transparency and provide mokopuna with an opportunity to let us know if we are accurately representing their views and voices. This act of closing the loop is an essential part of good child participation practice.
 - A full report (this report: Understanding the life-course journey. A report of mokopuna engagements to inform the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy Review 2024.
 - An 'At a glance' version, summarising our key findings and insights from the mokopuna who shared their valuable perspectives.

Glossary

Aotearoa	New Zealand
Hapū	Kinship group, clan, sub-tribe (the primary political group in traditional Māori society) (Te Aka Māori dictionary)
Iwi	Related hapū forming a tribal federation usually sharing adjacent territories (Te Aka Māori dictionary)
Kaimahi	Staff, worker
Kapa haka	Concert party, Māori performing group, (Te Aka Māori dictionary)
Kōrero	Speech, narrative, story, account, to tell, record (Te Aka Māori dictionary)
Kura	School
Māmā	Mother/mothers
Māoritanga	Māori culture, practices and beliefs, Māoriness, Māori way of life (Te Aka Māori dictionary)
Mokopuna	The term we use for children and young people, descendants - see explanation at the start of this report.
Pātai	Question/questions
Pēpē	Baby/babies
Rangatahi	Adolescents / young people (usually over 14)
Rōpu	Group
Tā	Sir
Te ao Māori	Māori world view
Te Ika-a-Māui	North Island
Te Waipounamu	South Island
Whaikaha	Disabled
Whakaaro	Idea/ideas
Whānau	Family/extended family
Whare tapa whā	A holistic health and wellbeing model described by Sir Mason Durie - four walls of a house analogy



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