



**Working together to achieve
a thriving, equitable Aotearoa
for all learners.**

A YEAR IN REFLECTION 2025/26

The background features a light blue gradient with several abstract, white line-art patterns. These patterns consist of concentric circles, spirals, and intersecting straight lines, creating a complex, geometric design that resembles traditional Maori art motifs.

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A YEAR IN REFLECTION 2025/26



TITIRO W
KŌKIRI WHA



WAKAMURI, WAKAMUA.

Look back and reflect
so we can move forward.

Ta Himi Henare

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CO-CHAIR FOREWORD

Tēnā koutou katoa,

It is a privilege to share our reflections this year on behalf of the EPIT Board, and to acknowledge the many people, partners and communities whose mahi is represented in these pages.

This report shows an organisation continuing to mature in its role and purpose. EPIT was established to support more equitable education outcomes for tamariki and rangatahi across Aotearoa. What we see now is a growing ecosystem of relationships, learning and shared commitment that is helping that purpose take deeper root.

As Co-Chairs, we are encouraged by the way EPIT continues to hold its kaupapa with care and clarity. The work remains complex. Inequities in education are persistent, and the conditions faced by learners, whānau, schools and communities are often challenging. Yet throughout this report we see partners responding with creativity, courage and a deep commitment to local aspirations.

A strong theme this year is that relational infrastructure is critical infrastructure. This resonates with us as a Board. Trust, connection, openness and long-term commitment are not separate from the work of equity. They are what allow transformation to become possible. They enable partners to share honestly, to learn together, and to adapt when the path forward is not yet clear.

We are particularly heartened by the openness reflected in this year's report. Partners are sharing not only what has gone well, but also what has been difficult, what has shifted, and what still needs to be learned. That honesty strengthens the integrity of the work. It also reflects the kind of environment EPIT seeks to foster, one where evidence, relationships and community voice can sit together in service of better outcomes.

As a Board, our responsibility is to support EPIT to remain focused, values-led and sustainable as its contribution grows. We remain committed to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, to equity, and to the belief that transformation must be shaped with communities, not for them. We will continue to support the organisation to make thoughtful decisions, strengthen partnerships, and uphold the trust that sits at the heart of this kaupapa.

We extend our sincere thanks to mana whenua, Te Ākitai Waiohū, and to our principal supporters, co-funders, delivery partners, resident partners, communities and all who contribute their time, insight and resources to EPIT's work. Your generosity and commitment make this kaupapa possible.

To Tim and the EPIT kaimahi, thank you for your leadership, care and dedication. To our partners, thank you for your trust, your openness and your willingness to keep working towards more equitable futures for tamariki and rangatahi.

We acknowledge the significant contributions of Dr Hana O'Regan, Dr Lynette Reid and Dr Tim Gander during their time with EPIT. We also warmly welcome Yii Petrus, who joined EPIT as Chief Executive in June 2026, and Dorothy Adams, who joined the Board in December 2025.

The whakataukī that opens this report reminds us to reflect on how far we have come and all that we have learned. As Co-Chairs, we embrace that challenge with humility and confidence, allowing those reflections to guide our journey ahead.



Ngā mihi nui,
Lorraine Mentz MNZM
Co-Chair



Nāhaku noa nā,
Pare Keiha CNZM
Co-Chair

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Tēnā koutou katoa,

Each year, as we pause to reflect on EPIT's mahi, I am reminded that transformational change in education is not created by one organisation, one programme, or one moment in time. It is created through the patient, collective work of many people, in many places, contributing in different ways towards a shared vision of a thriving, equitable Aotearoa for all learners.

This year's report deepens our understanding of impact as contribution. It shows how equity work grows through relationships, trust, shared learning, and the courage to adapt when communities tell us something different from what we expected. Across our partnerships, Communities of Practice, and evidence mahi, we continue to see that impact is rarely linear. It is emergent, relational, and held within the connections between people, kaupapa and place.

Over the past year, EPIT's role as a *hoa haere*, a journey partner, has become even clearer. We are not simply funding initiatives. We are helping create the environment and conditions in which transformation can occur: trusted relationships, time to learn and adapt, access to evidence, opportunities for connection, and spaces where people can come together across sectors and communities. This is relational infrastructure, and it is critical infrastructure. Without it, promising ideas can remain isolated, learning can stay fragmented, and communities can be asked to carry change without the support, trust and connection needed for it to endure.

From careers pathways and inclusive learning environments for neurodivergent learners, to wellbeing, digital equity, financial futures and culturally responsive education, our partners are helping to shift the conditions that shape learner experience across Aotearoa. Their *mahi* reminds us that transformation does not happen in isolation. It happens when people are connected, when knowledge is shared, when community voice is listened to, and when partners have the time and trust needed to test, adapt and grow.

The growth of our Communities of Practice has also been a significant feature of this year. Careers and Transitions, AI in Education, and Rangatahi Financial Futures are becoming more than spaces for conversation. They are becoming places where trust is built, knowledge is shared, and collaboration begins to take shape. The Careers and Transitions work, in particular, shows how research can move into practice when the right people are brought together around a shared challenge. What began as commissioned research has grown into a wider ecosystem of schools, *whānau*, employers, practitioners, researchers and community partners working together to rethink how rangatahi are supported beyond the school gates.

Our evidence mahi has also continued to mature. This year, we have seen the importance of creating spaces where partners can share openly and honestly, not only what has worked, but what has been difficult, what has needed to change, and what they are still learning. This kind of transparency is not always easy in funding or impact environments, where there can be pressure to present certainty or success. At EPIT, we see honest reflection as one of the conditions for transformation. When partners are trusted to surface challenges, test assumptions, and adapt in response to community voice, learning becomes collective and practice becomes stronger. In this way, evidence is helping to build a culture of shared accountability, curiosity and courage across the ecosystem.

The constellations emerging across this report point to several important insights. Relational infrastructure is critical infrastructure. Trust must be built at the pace communities require. Open and honest learning is essential if partners are to share not only what has worked, but also what needs to improve. Identity, culture and belonging are not secondary to learning, they are central to it. Young people thrive when they are positioned not as passive recipients of support, but as active contributors with agency, insight and value. These insights are helping us see more clearly what it means for education to support tamariki and rangatahi to flourish.

As we look ahead, EPIT will continue to invest in the conditions that allow this kind of change to grow. We will keep creating trusted spaces for connection, reflection and open learning. We will support partners to gather and use evidence in ways that honour their kaupapa and communities. We will continue to encourage honest conversations about what is working, what is not yet working, and what needs to change. Most importantly, we will continue to walk alongside those who are doing the hard and hopeful work of equity every day.

To our trustees, kaimahi, mana whenua, funders, co-funders, partners, communities, whānau and every person who has contributed to this kaupapa, thank you. Your mahi, generosity and trust make this work possible.

The voyage towards equity is long, but the direction is clear. Guided by our collective wayfinding, and strengthened by the relationships that hold us together, we continue to move forward.

Ngā manaakitanga,

Dr. Tim Gander

Departure Date: 22 May 2026



OUR VISION

**Working together to achieve
a thriving, equitable Aotearoa
for all learners.**

OUR VALUES

Rangatiratanga ●

Supporting autonomy and the right of Māori to be self-determining

Whanaungatanga ●

Engaging in positive and collaborative relationships with learners, their families and whānau, colleagues and the wider community

Pono ●

Showing integrity by acting in ways that are fair, honest, ethical and just.

Manaakitanga ●

Creating a welcoming, caring and creative learning environment that treats everyone with respect and dignity.

Whakamana ●

Supporting all learners to reach their highest potential by providing high-quality teaching and leadership.

We are committed to upholding the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and working in partnership with Māori to advance shared goals and aspirations.



Hana O'Regan
Board Co-Chair
Departure Date:
December 2025



Lorraine Mentz MNZM
Board Co-Chair



Pare Keiha CNZM
Board Co-Chair



Debbie Burrows
Trustee



Dorothy Adams
Trustee



Liz Gibbs
Trustee



Rob McIntosh
Trustee

OUR PEOPLE



Hannah Mackintosh
Impact Report Writer



Ineka van der Merwe
Office Admin



Dr. Lynette Reid
Evaluation
Departure Date:
February 2026



Dr. Tim Gander
Chief Executive
Departure Date:
22 May 2026



Miura Elikana
Community &
Engagement

OUR PARTNERSHIPS

We acknowledge the unstinting support of our partners and their dedicated teams, and thank them for supporting and working to improve equity in education across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Mana Whenua

Te Ākitai Waiohū iwi

Founding Partners

Hugh Green Foundation

Perpetual Guardian

Te Uru Amokura Springboard Trust

The Southern Initiative

Principal Supporters

Allan and Gill Gray Philanthropies

Hugh Green Foundation

Co-funding Partners

Foundation North

Rātā Foundation

Simplicity Foundation

Tertiary Education Commission (TEC)

Trust Tairāwhiti

Hoku Foundation

Delivery Partners

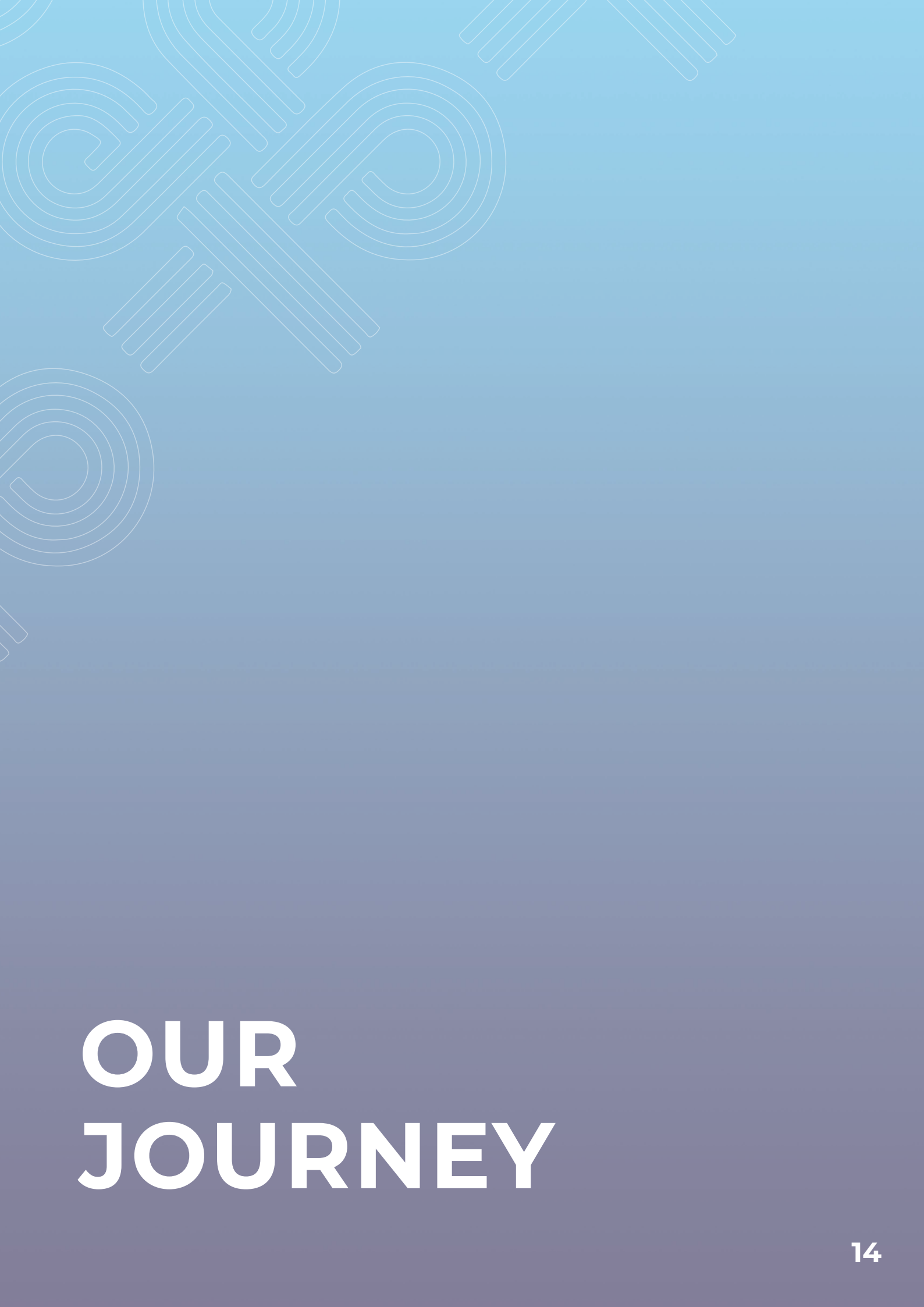
Acorn Charitable Trust
Day of AI
E Tū Tāngata Charitable Trust
Hāpai Tūhono
Hauora Aotearoa
Kilmarnock Enterprises Trust
Nōna Te Ao Charitable Trust
Oke Charity
PMG Charitable Trust
Progressify
Ready 4 Learning Charitable Trust
Sew Your Story Charitable Trust
Stand Tall Community Trust
Taiohi Awhitū
Tāmaki College
Tātai Aho Rau Core Education
Te Uru Amokura Springboard Trust
The Collaborative Trust
The Education Hub
The Kindness Institute
The Moko Foundation
The University of Auckland

Resident Partners

Community Housing Aotearoa
Manaaki Rangatahi
Mission Ready
Te Uru Amokura Springboard Trust
The Story Store Te Manu Mātauranga

Users of Te Whiriwhiringa

CATE
CDANZ
CHA Film Crew
Cobus Mentz
Education Partnership & Innovation
Trust Board
Hauora Aotearoa
He Whakaaraara
Hidden Honey
Hugh Green Foundation
Manaaki Rangatahi
Match Artists
Mission Ready
Philanthropy NZ
Simplicity Foundation
Sir John Kirwan Foundation Board
Tāmaki College
Tātai Ah Rau - CORE Education
Te Uru Amokura Springboard Trust
The Story Store Te Manu Mātauranga
The Workshop
Va'a Collective
Young Oceans Explorers



OUR JOURNEY

Our Journey

EPIT's work has always been grounded in a simple but ambitious belief: that more equitable education outcomes for tamariki | children and rangatahi | youth require people, organisations and communities to work together in different ways.

When EPIT was established, our first task was to create the platform for that work to begin. We were a new organisation, formed through the shared commitment of our founding partners, with a focus on partnership, innovation and educational equity. In those early years, much of the work was about building the foundations: governance, operational systems, kaupapa Māori grounded evaluation, relationships with funders and partners, and the physical and digital spaces where collaboration could take place.

At that stage, EPIT's role was primarily to enable and convene. We brought people together, supported early ideas, and helped resource initiatives that were already responding to inequities in their communities. This was important work, but it also taught us something deeper. Equity could not be advanced by funding isolated activity alone. It required connection, trust, learning, and the ability to see how one initiative might strengthen or inform another.

As EPIT grew, so did our understanding of what contribution could look like. Our role began to broaden from funder to connector, learning partner and evaluator. Initiatives expanded across regions, sectors and areas of focus. The Innovation Seed Fund created space for emerging ideas to be tested. Te Whiriwhiringa | The Nest became an active community asset. Our digital platforms helped people stay connected beyond individual hui and events. Across this period, we saw the value of creating the conditions for people to meet, share, test ideas and build relationships that could endure beyond any single project.

This was also a period of important learning. Through our partners' mahi, we saw that working towards equity required more than scaling activity. It required the courage to challenge inherited assumptions, deficit thinking and narrow definitions of success. It required student, whānau and community voices to be part of the design and direction of change. It required attention to both the small shifts that happen through relationships and everyday practice, and the wider system shifts needed to sustain change over time.

Over time, EPIT's work has moved from supporting individual initiatives to helping strengthen the wider ecosystem around them. We began to see clusters of learning emerging across areas such as literacy, transitions, wellbeing, leadership, digital equity and culturally responsive practice. Partners were not only delivering their own work; they were influencing each other, sharing insights, and beginning to form communities around common challenges and aspirations.

This is where EPIT's role as an ecosystem builder became clearer. Our contribution was not only in what we funded, but in the relational infrastructure we helped create. Relationships, shared knowledge, evaluation capability, co-funding partnerships, community voice and trusted spaces for open learning all became part of the conditions that allowed equity work to take root and grow.

The past five years have also changed how we understand impact. In the early stages, it was easier to describe impact through individual initiatives, outputs and outcomes. As the work matured, it became clear that transformational change is rarely linear, and rarely belongs to one organisation. It is shared, layered and relational. It emerges through the combined contributions of many people working across different parts of the system, often over long periods of time.

This shift has shaped the way we now think, learn and report. Rather than asking only what EPIT has achieved, we are increasingly asking what conditions we have helped strengthen, what knowledge has been shared, what relationships have grown, and what wider shifts are becoming visible across the ecosystem. This is not a retreat from accountability. It is a more honest way of understanding complex change.

The current report sits at this point in EPIT's journey. It reflects an organisation that has moved beyond start-up, beyond project support, and into a more deliberate role as a contributor to systems change. Our work is now focused on strengthening the conditions in which learners can thrive: trusted partnerships, communities of practice, evidence that supports learning and action, and spaces where people can openly share what is working, what is not yet working, and what needs to change.

This five-year arc has taught us that meaningful impact requires many players working in alignment. EPIT is one contributor within a wider ecosystem, both in time and in place. Our role is to help make the connections stronger, the learning more visible, and the conditions for change more sustainable.

The journey ahead will continue to ask more of us. It will require deeper relationships, longer time horizons, stronger kaupapa Māori grounding, and continued willingness to learn alongside those closest to the work.

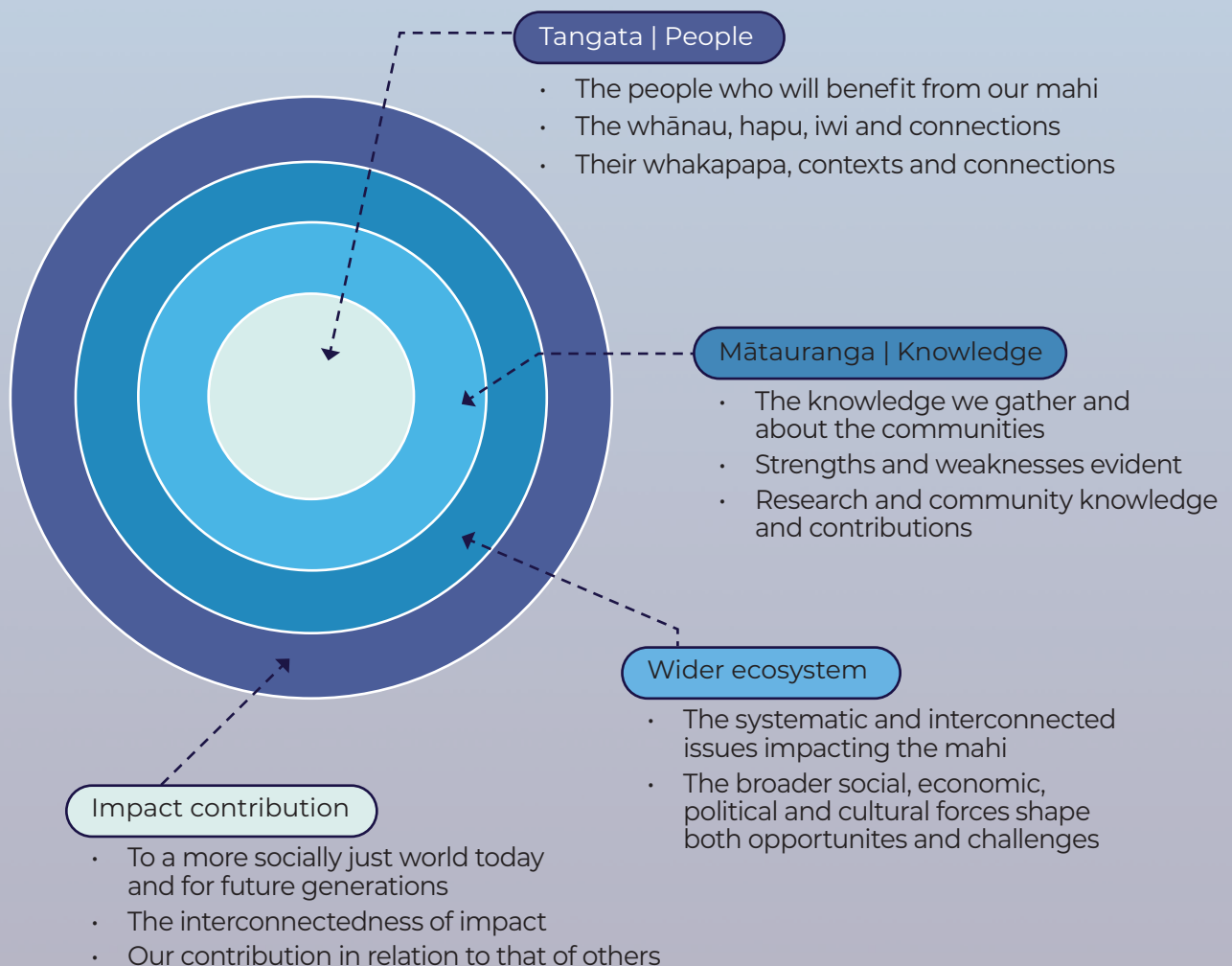
OUR APPROACH

The lens we apply across our work is impact as contribution. Transformational change is rarely linear. It emerges through the combined efforts, relationships, and contributions of many people working across interconnected systems.

Our contribution framework uses concentric circles to help map this interconnectedness. The circles invite reflection across three areas: Tangata | People, Mātauranga | Knowledge, and Wider Ecosystems. Together, they help us understand who is being supported, what knowledge is being strengthened or shared, and how wider systems are shifting over time.

Rather than asking “Can we prove impact?”, we ask: **Who have we supported, and how are they contributing to equity? What knowledge and capability have we helped strengthen? What wider shifts are emerging across the ecosystem?**

This contribution lens reflects the relational nature of our mahi. It recognises that lasting change happens collectively, through ongoing learning, adaptation, and shared commitment to more equitable futures for tamariki and rangatahi across Aotearoa.



OUR MAHI | WORK

• Transformational Partnerships

At EPIT, partnership sits at the centre of our approach to change. We work as a *hoa haere* | journey partner, walking alongside organisations and communities as they navigate complex challenges and opportunities across education.

Our partnerships range from seed-funded innovations to long-term transformational programmes of work. Across all of them, we prioritise trust-based relationships, co-design, and responsiveness to community voices. We support initiatives that are culturally grounded, locally led, and capable of creating wider systems change over time.

Our current areas of focus are:

- Wellbeing
- Leadership
- Careers Transition
- Literacy
- Digital Equity
- Early Years

• Communities of Practice (CoPs)

Our Communities of Practice (CoPs) bring together educators, practitioners, researchers, *iwi*, community organisations, and system leaders to connect, learn, and act together around shared areas of focus. These communities have grown across areas including Careers and Transitions, AI in Education, Mental Health and Wellbeing, and Rangatahi Financial Futures.

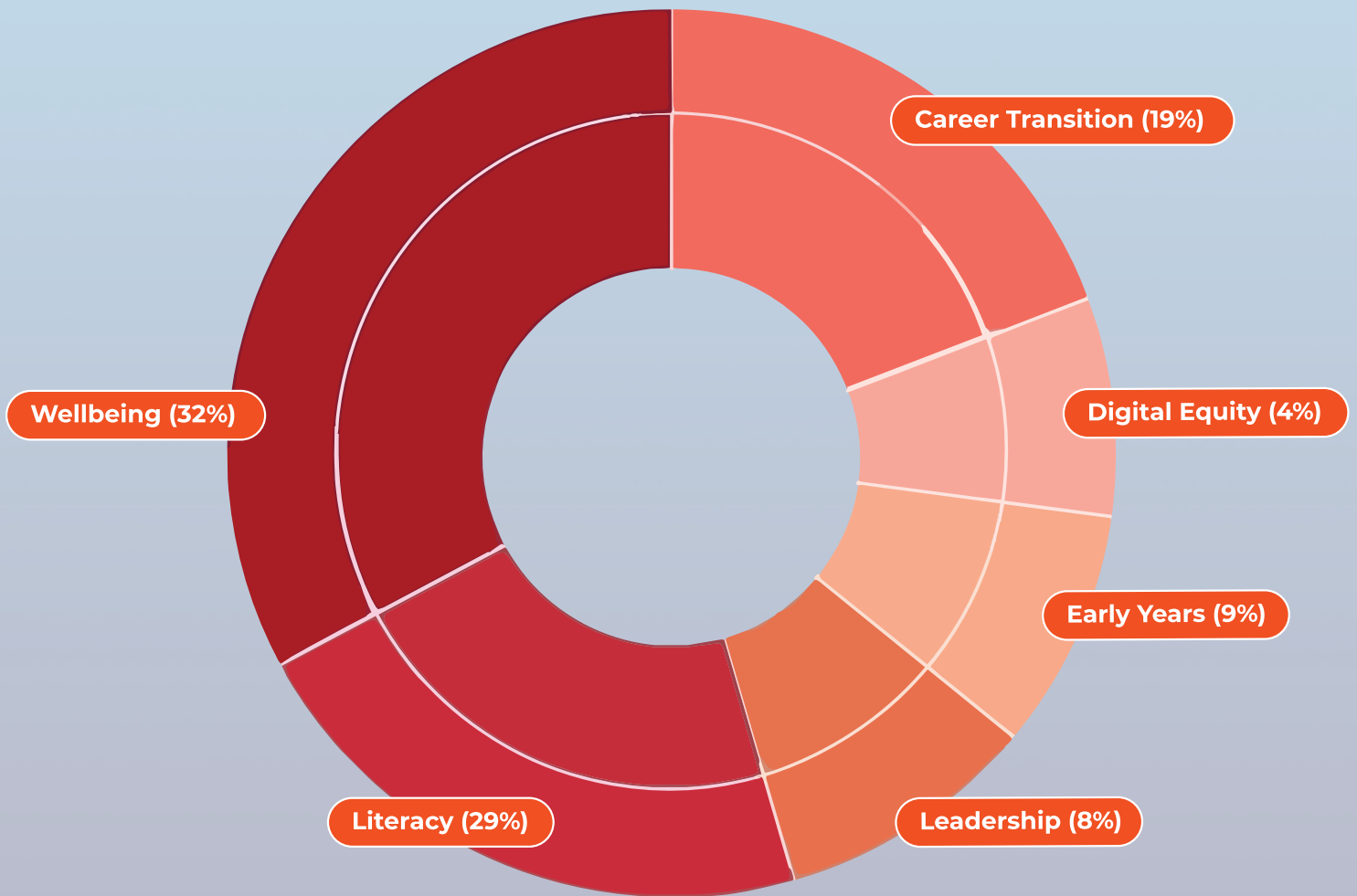
Circle, our digital platform, extends these relationships beyond individual events and gatherings, creating an ongoing space for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and peer support across the EPIT ecosystem. *Te Whiriwhiringa* | The Nest also plays an important role as a physical space where people can come together, build relationships, exchange ideas, and strengthen collective action. Together, these platforms help reduce silos and enable more connected approaches to equity across education. Across each community, connection deepens into collaboration when trust is built intentionally over time.

• Evidence

We understand evaluation to be a relational and reflective process that supports partners to better understand their contribution to change, strengthen practice, and respond to emerging insights within their communities.

Grounded in a wayfinding approach, our evaluation practice supports partners to tell their own stories in ways that align with their *kaupapa*, language, and context. Through shared reflection and ongoing learning, partners are building confidence and capability in using evaluation not as compliance, but as a tool for adaptation, leadership, and systems thinking. This approach enables impact to be understood as collective, evolving, and deeply connected to community voice and lived experience.

\$1,048,216 INVESTED IN OUR
LOCAL COMMUNITIES



COLLECTIVE REACH OF OUR COMMUNITIES

Learners **290,000+**
Schools **500+**

Principals **400+**
Partners **22**



TE WHIRIWHIRINGA THE NEST

9 permanent resident organisations

11,348 hours of meeting room usage for
different tenants, events, principals, schools
& other organisations



E TŪ TĀNGATA
AOTEAROA



E TŪ TĀNGATA
AOTEAROA

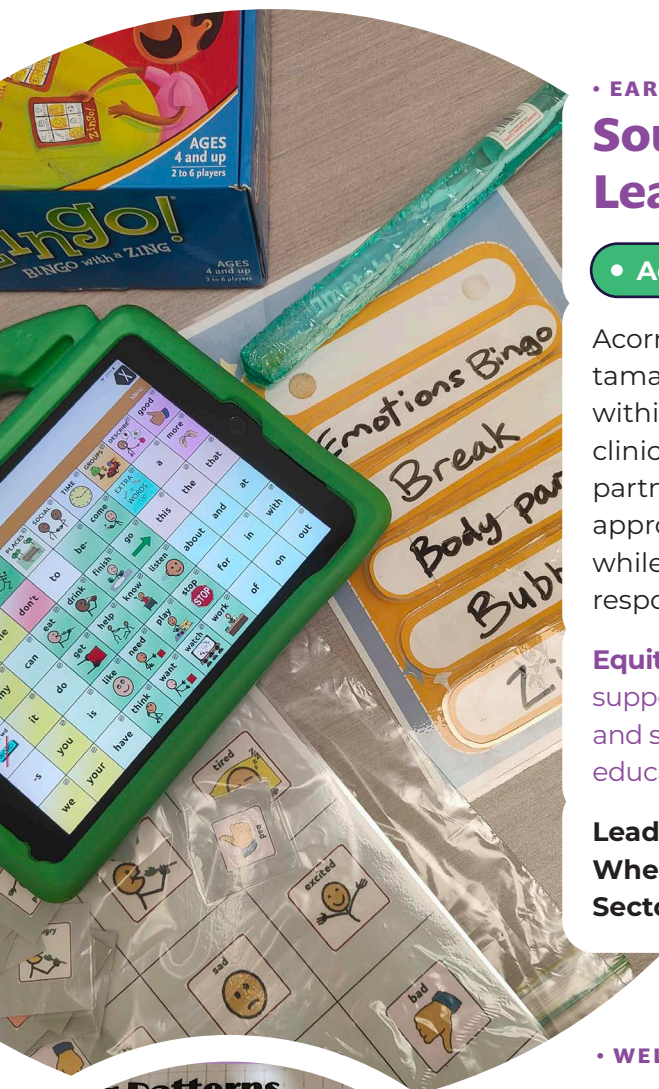


E TŪ TĀNGATA
AOTEAROA





FUNDED PROGRAMMES OF WORK



• EARLY YEARS

South Auckland Community Learning Hub

• Active

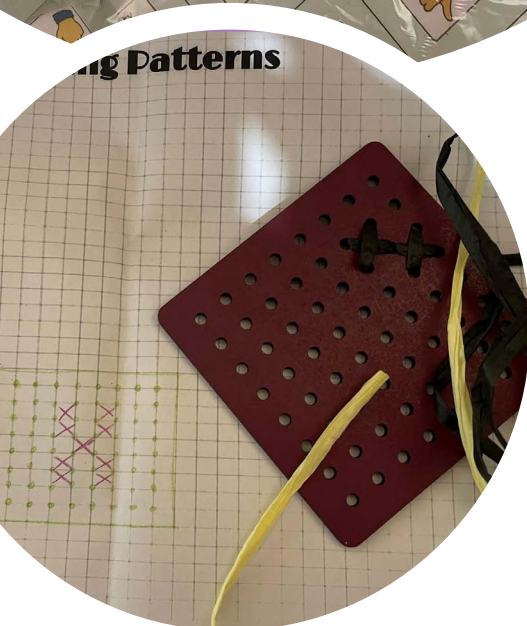
Acorn is growing a community-based hub for neurodivergent tamariki in South Auckland, now moving into early delivery within a local early childhood setting. The hub brings clinicians, whānau, and educators together in one place, in partnership with schools and community organisations. This approach is building local understanding of neurodiversity while supporting whānau and kaiako to better recognise and respond to learning needs.

Equity impact: Reduces inequities in access to neurodivergent support by embedding services in trusted community settings and strengthening the confidence and capability of whānau and educators, particularly for Māori and Pasifika tamariki.

Lead organisation: Acorn Charitable Trust

Where: Tāmaki Makaurau | Auckland

Sector: Early Years, Primary, Whānau



• WELLBEING

Akomanga Kaihanga: Well-being and achievement in learning for social innovation

• Active

The Akomanga Kaihanga (AK) programme reimagines NCEA assessment by embedding social innovation into the curriculum and centring student voice and agency. As a formal option class, learners engage in real-world projects, working with community partners and using design thinking to address local issues, alongside new approaches to recognising competencies and contribution.

Equity impact: Culturally sustaining assessment increases learner engagement and confidence, while challenging traditional definitions of success to recognise diverse strengths and contributions.

Lead organisation: Tāmaki College & The University of Auckland

Where: Tāmaki Makaurau | Auckland

Sector: Secondary

• WELLBEING

Creating a cultural change in schools by developing a digitally decentralised platform

• Active

E Tū Tāngata is challenging Tall Poppy Syndrome by growing a decentralised, culturally grounded platform that supports schools to embed values of self-worth, belonging, and collective success. Through a co-designed kete of resources, its decentralised model empowers schools to embed positive identity and belonging into everyday life and curriculum.

Equity impact: Shifts in school culture towards inclusion and collective wellbeing strengthen identity, belonging, and the conditions for learners and educators to thrive.

Lead organisation: E Tū Tāngata Charitable Trust

Where: Ōtautahi | Christchurch, Aotearoa | New Zealand wide online

Sector: Primary, Secondary



• EARLY YEARS

Supporting neurodivergent children in early childhood education

• Completed

The Education Hub has developed and launched a comprehensive online course to support early years educators working with neurodivergent tamariki. Grounded in Te Whāriki and cultural diversity, the course centres whānau voices and real-life stories, supporting kaiako to reflect on their beliefs, deepen their understanding of neurodiversity, and adopt relational, strengths-based approaches in practice.

Equity impact: Builds more inclusive practices across ECE settings, strengthening participation, advocacy, and outcomes for neurodivergent tamariki.

Lead organisation: The Education Hub

Where: Tāmaki Makaurau | Auckland, Aotearoa | New Zealand wide online

Sector: Early Years





• WELLBEING

Breaking through Barriers to Learning, Step by Step, Stitch by Stitch

• Completed

Sew Your Story empowers tamariki through hands-on textile storytelling. In its development phase, it has created a structured classroom programme and teaching guide, supporting schools with resources and mentoring to embed creative, identity-focused learning. Learners explore identity, culture, and history using sewing, building confidence, perseverance, and strong engagement in non-traditional learning environments

Equity impact: Students build identity, confidence, and belonging through culturally connected, hands-on storytelling that values diverse ways of knowing and learning.

Lead organisation: Sew Your Story Charitable Trust

Where: Te Tai Tokerau | Northland

Sector: Primary



• EARLY YEARS

Whanau support - tamariki foundation skills

• Active

Ready 4 Learning supports whānau as first teachers by co-designing culturally responsive resources that strengthen early foundation skills. Guided by hapū and iwi, the initiative acts as a connector across schools, ECEs and agencies. Through strong local relationships and collaborative delivery, whānau confidence grows and tamariki experience more positive, homebased learning experiences.

Equity impact: Whānau build strong early learning foundations for their tamariki, supported by increased access to culturally aligned resources.

Lead organisation: Ready 4 Learning Charitable Trust

Where: Kawerau, Te Tairāwhiti | Gisborne

Sector: Early Years, Whānau

• CAREERS TRANSITIONS

Investing in our youth's future through entrepreneurial and digital skill capability pathways

• Active

Stand Tall is a community-led, cross-sector initiative delivering entrepreneurial and digital learning experiences that build confidence and real-world skills for rangatahi. This initiative is expanding its programmes to reach more diverse young people, while influencing how education, community and employment systems support youth to navigate their futures.

Equity impact: Rangatahi develop the confidence and capability to shape their own pathways, supported by education partners who enable equitable access to future-focused opportunities.

Lead organisation: Stand Tall Community Trust

Where: Te Moana a Toi-te-Huatahi | Bay of Plenty

Sector: Secondary



• EARLY YEARS

Growing mighty kids

• Active

Oke supports schools to build outdoor classrooms that embed sustainability, teamwork, and hands-on learning into everyday teaching. The initiative now has national reach, extending learning beyond building edible gardens to include curriculum development and community partnerships, helping students and whānau thrive through connected, real-world learning.

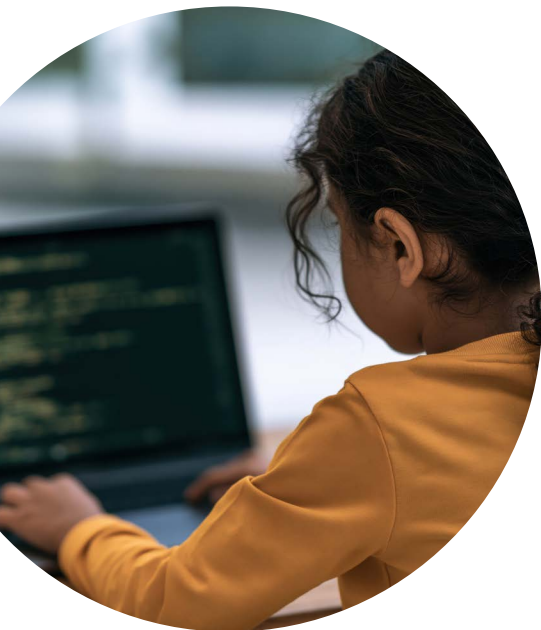
Equity impact: Outdoor learning creates inclusive, culturally relevant opportunities that strengthen student engagement, community wellbeing, and resilience.

Lead organisation: Oke Charity

Where: Tāmaki Makaurau | Auckland, Te Tai Tokerau | Northland, Ōtago | Christchurch

Sector: Primary





• DIGITAL EQUITY

Providing digital access and support for the implementation of SchoolTalk in underserved communities

• Active

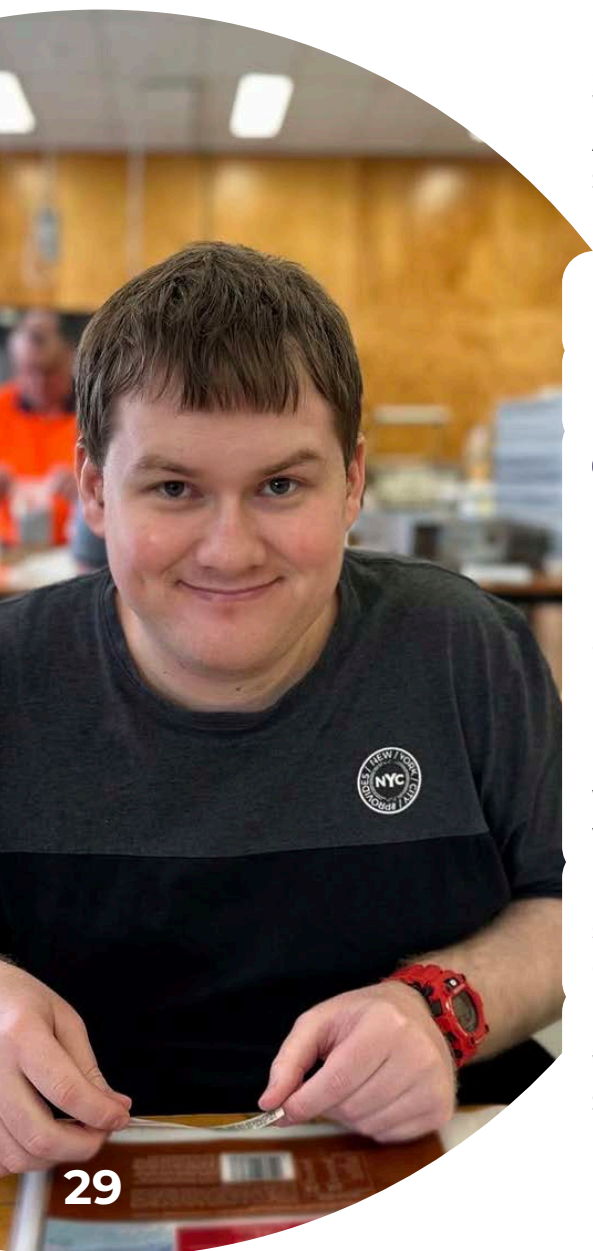
This initiative focuses on communities affected by the digital divide, enabling a cohort of high equity index and remote schools to participate in a fully funded programme supporting digital access and teaching practice. SchoolTalk is a teacher-first learning platform that strengthens formative assessment, learner agency, and real-time visibility of progress, alongside support for digital skills for teachers, learners, and whānau.

Equity impact: Improved access to digitally enabled learning, alongside stronger teacher capability and whānau engagement, creates more equitable learning opportunities.

Lead organisation: Progressify (Formerly Te Kete Hono - Stonefields Collaborative Trust)

Where: Te Tai Tokerau | Northland, Tamāki Makaurau | Auckland, Waikato, Te Moana a Toi-te-Huatahi | Bay of Plenty

Sector: Primary, Whānau



• CAREERS TRANSITIONS

Employment pathway programme

• Active

Kilmarnock supports school leavers with intellectual disabilities into employment, building skills and confidence through a holistic, work-based training programme in a safe and supportive environment. They've developed a Health and Safety training programme integrated into daily operations, introduced individual learning plans, and are progressing towards NZQA accreditation. Kilmarnock is strengthening pathways into employment through work experience, peer-led learning, and ongoing collaboration with employers.

Equity impact: A holistic, learner-centred approach to training strengthens confidence, capability, and independence, leading to employment success.

Lead organisation: Kilmarnock Enterprises Trust

Where: Ōtautahi | Christchurch

Sector: Secondary, Community

• LITERACY

PMG Stacks

• Active

The PMG Charitable Trust is continuing to develop and scale its online platform, Stacks, an innovative tool designed to build financial literacy for rangatahi. The platform is expanding its reach through schools and community partners, evolving with feedback from users into a more interactive and personalised learning experience. Early engagement is showing strong uptake from rangatahi and growing interest from iwi and Pasifika communities.

Equity impact: Increased access to trusted, engaging financial education is supporting rangatahi and their whānau to build confidence and capability in managing money

Lead organisation: PMG Charitable Trust

Where: Aotearoa | New Zealand wide online

Sector: Secondary



• CAREERS TRANSITIONS

Careers leadership development

• Completed

• Co-funded

Co-funded: EPIT, Rāta Foundation, Simplicity Foundation, and Tertiary Education Commission (TEC)

This initiative brings principals and careers staff together to co-design and embed strategic, equity-focused careers education plans embedded within the school's long term strategic plans. It builds leadership capability, strengthens shared ownership of careers education, and supports more coherent and culturally responsive pathways for rangatahi.

Equity impact: Rangatahi are supported through more intentional, equitable approaches to transitions into future learning and careers.

Lead organisation: Te Uru Amokura Springboard Trust

Where: Tāmaki Makaurau | Auckland and Ōtautahi | Christchurch

Sector: Secondary, Community





• WELLBEING

Taiohi Awhitū Wellbeing for youth

• Completed

• EPIT Commissioned

This initiative is a community-driven, iwi-led model focused on strengthening the wellbeing of tamariki and rangatahi through a coordinated system of care. Building on its pilot phase in Whanganui, the project brings together schools, whānau, and a network of local providers, with dedicated navigators acting as relational connectors to ensure ākonga can access the right support at the right time.

Equity impact: Improved access to culturally grounded, coordinated support is strengthening trust, belonging, and engagement for learners and whānau.

Lead organisation: Tātai Aho Rau | Core Education (with Nga Tai O Te Awa, Te Puna Mātauranga, and Takitini Hauora Kāhui Ako)

Where: Whanganui

Sector: Early Years, Primary, Secondary, Community



• WELLBEING

Transforming mental health education in schools

• Active

Hauora Aotearoa is expanding a culturally grounded approach to mental health education in schools, embedding the Te Whare o Oro framework to support rangatahi wellbeing. Working in partnership with iwi, schools, and health organisations, the initiative integrates trauma-informed, strengths-based practices into learning environments, alongside growing teacher capability and leadership for a wellbeing-first approach.

Equity impact: Culturally responsive mental health support strengthens wellbeing for rangatahi Māori, supporting more equitable learning conditions and outcomes.

Lead organisation: Hauora Aotearoa

Where: Aotearoa | New Zealand wide

Sector: Secondary, Community

Ngā Karanga Anamata / Rangatahi Futures

• Active

Ngā Karanga Anamata / Rangatahi Futures is a kaupapa Māori approach to career development that expands career development beyond schools into communities. This initiative strengthens community-led delivery, introduces culturally grounded qualifications, and is establishing a Māori Career Development Association to support a more connected and responsive national system.

Equity impact: Māori-led, community-based career development pathways that empower rangatahi to navigate futures with greater agency and cultural connection.

Lead organisation: Hāpai Tūhono

Where: Tāmaki Makaurau | Auckland

Sector: Community





• WELLBEING

Web Wise Wanderers

• Active

The Collaborative Trust is delivering Web Wise Wanderers, a youth-led approach to digital wellbeing that equips tamariki with practical skills to navigate online risks. Through interactive videos built around the STOP, BLOCK & TALK® framework, and co-designed with young people, the initiative supports learners, whānau, and educators with accessible, real-world tools for digital safety and resilience.

Equity impact: Expands access to proactive digital wellbeing skills, enabling tamariki to recognise risks early and navigate online environments with greater confidence and resilience.

Lead organisation: The Collaborative for Research and Training in Youth Health and Development Trust

Where: Aotearoa | New Zealand wide

Sector: Cross sector



• WELLBEING

He Takere Waka Nui

• Completed

He Takere Waka Nui is a kaupapa Māori initiative supporting rangatahi in rural Māori communities through education, vocational pathways, and leadership development. Co-led by The Moko Foundation and Nōna Te Ao, it delivers co-designed, culturally grounded programmes that foster self-determination, strengthen community connections, and create meaningful futures for Māori youth.

Equity impact: Strengthens access to meaningful pathways for rangatahi Māori in rural communities, supporting transition into education, training, and employment.

Lead organisation: The Moko Foundation, Nōna Te Ao

Where: Te Tai Tokerau | Northland

Sector: Secondary, Community

• WELLBEING

Whāia te Oranga

• Active

Whāia te Oranga is a community-led initiative designed to enhance the wellbeing, cultural identity, and educational success of tamariki Māori in bilingual units across West Auckland. Developed in collaboration with whānau, kaiako, and tamariki, this initiative fosters self-regulation, belonging, and resilience for tamariki, while also delivering training for teachers and whānau to ensure sustainable delivery.

Equity impact: Provides access to high-quality, culturally relevant wellbeing experiences, enhancing the educational and cultural success of tamariki Māori.

Lead organisation: The Kindness Institute

Where: Tāmaki Makaurau | Auckland

Sector: Cross Sector, Secondary



• DIGITAL EQUITY

Day of AI Aotearoa

• Completed

Day of AI Aotearoa is a free, culturally grounded initiative supporting schools to build AI literacy for ākonga and educators across Aotearoa. Through curriculum-aligned resources, teacher training, and community engagement, the programme strengthens confidence, critical thinking, and responsible use of AI, with a focus on reaching high equity and under-resourced schools.

Equity impact: Provides equitable access to culturally relevant AI education, focussing on ākonga and kaiako in communities most affected by the digital divide.

Lead organisation: Day of AI Aotearoa

Where: Tāmaki Makaurau | Auckland

Sector: Secondary





An artistic illustration of a tree with a thick, textured brown trunk. A vibrant red ribbon is tied in a bow around the lower part of the trunk. To the left of the trunk, there is a lush green bush with yellow and green foliage. The background is a soft, warm brown color.

SIGNPOSTS:

MAPPING WHAT MATTERS

Transformational Partnerships

What shifts have we contributed to in the wider systems we're navigating?

Signposts:

- Partners are embedding, sustaining, adapting, and scaling practices in response to community needs.
- Formerly siloed work is now part of broader learning and equity ecosystems.
- Youth and whānau are positioned as active co-designers and contributors, not just recipients.
- Mental models and dominant narratives are being challenged.
- Māori-led and community-designed initiatives are influencing system shifts.

These signposts point to the conditions that lay the foundation for systemic change.

Transformational Partnerships

At EPIT, partnership is at the centre of our approach to transformative change. We recognise that collaboration and trust must be built at every level. We endeavour to build strong, lasting relationships, grounded in the principle of being a *hoa haere*, walking alongside our partners as we navigate the sustained, system-wide reduction in inequities in education across Aotearoa.

Convening an ecosystem for change

Our transformational partnerships are intentionally diverse. Some are multi-year, integrated programmes designed to support sustained change over time, while others begin as smaller pilot initiatives or seed-funded innovations that are tested and, where effective, invited into new towns and regions. A consistent priority across this work is co-design, with communities, *rangatahi*, and *whānau*, ensuring that solutions are grounded in lived experience and responsive to local needs. This approach recognises that transformational change requires both time and trust.

Our role extends beyond funding to fostering sustained, ongoing relationships. Our Communities of Practice (CoPs) are built on the understanding that connection is where learning happens, and collaboration is where learning converts into action. CoPs are intentionally designed to be spaces for social learning that build ongoing connections within sectors, reducing silos and creating a productive environment for system-level change. These connections enable learning to be sustained, deepened, and shared across the ecosystem.

Transformation in Practice

Across the Careers & Transitions ecosystem, our funded transformational programmes of work are demonstrating what system change looks like in practice, shifting careers from fragmented, compliance-driven activity to culturally grounded, connected, and strategically embedded approaches. Their work is bringing the research to life in communities across Aotearoa.

Bringing a whole school approach to careers leadership: Te Uru Amokura's Careers Leadership Development Programme

Careers education and guidance needs to shift from peripheral and siloed to be fully integrated and centralised within the school curriculum. This involves not only a repositioning of careers as a whole-school responsibility, but a redefinition of how careers education has been experienced to date. **Te Uru Amokura's Careers Leadership Development Programme** is working with schools, using a unique triadic partnership model that brings together a careers practitioner, a school principal, and a business leader to co-develop a strategic careers plan tailored to their school community.

Piloted across Christchurch and Auckland, the programme has since expanded into Te Tairāwhiti, with conversations underway to grow further into the North. Each school leaves with a strategic roadmap that embeds careers into curriculum, teaching, and whānau engagement, with equity named and intentional throughout.

The shifts speak for themselves. Schools that once had fragmented, activity-based approaches are building coherent, school-wide strategies:

**Our careers department
— one person, one hour a week
— did not have a strategy.
Now we have a strategy that
aligns with our school vision.**

A clear, shared vision across a school, supported by distributed ownership is what anchors careers as a core part of teaching, curriculum and whānau engagement. These reflections from schools that took part demonstrate how when senior leaders share responsibility for careers alongside dedicated practitioners, the culture starts to shift:

We are continuing to develop a 'careers culture' where every staff member can have effective careers conversations with students.

All staff will recognise their roles in opening eyes of students and whānau.

By integrating cross-school collaboration into the programme design, Te Uru Amokura is building confidence, capability and momentum for change across the school system.

**Embedding kaupapa Māori
into career pathways: Ngā Karanga
Anamata / Rangatahi Futures**

Career development has been built around a one-size-fits-all model that does not reflect the aspirations, values, or worldviews of Māori rangatahi and their whānau. Hāpai Tūhono is reshaping how schools approach careers education by designing a system grounded in te ao Māori.

Ngā Karanga Anamata / Rangatahi Futures is a Māori-led, community-driven initiative that embeds kaupapa Māori into career pathways, shifts away from individualistic, linear models of career navigation, and builds collective, relational approaches that honour a lifetime of learning. At its heart is a belief that career kōrero | dialogue should be holistic, reflecting all elements of life, not just employment outcomes:

Community appetite exists for careers support that is about life, dignity, and contribution, not just employment outcomes.

Rangatahi and whānau respond most strongly when career kōrero is relational, values-based, and future-focused rather than transactional.

The initiative is building lasting infrastructure: Level 4 and 5 qualifications for culturally responsive career practitioners, a Māori Career Development Association to advocate for system change and uphold best practice, and a Train-the-Trainer model that equips rangatahi, whānau, kura, marae, and community groups to lead career kōrero themselves.

This is more than just a programme — it is a movement to create a future where Māori leadership and values drive a thriving, inclusive career development system.

The Ngā Karanga Anamata / Rangatahi Futures transformational programme of work demonstrates that sometimes equity is not achieved by improving access to the existing system, but by redesigning the system itself.

Reaching beyond the school gates:
Kilmarnock Enterprises Trust's Employment
Pathway Programme

The journey into meaningful work does not end at the school gate. For many young disabled people, it is only just beginning. Kilmarnock Enterprises Trust's Employment Pathway Programme is transforming what workplace inclusion looks like, by shifting the focus from what participants need to change, to what workplaces need to understand.

At the centre of this transformation is a move from a supervisor-led training model to a peer-led learning model. Flipping the model of delivery has fundamentally changed how participants see themselves, where previously they were recipients of training, they now see themselves as leaders and teachers.

The results are profound. A previously reserved employee, once working quietly in the storeroom, has become a natural leader, now running forklift training for his peers, known for his kindness and clarity.

Marionette from Kilmarnock says:

He told me his favourite part of the job is teaching others. That's his highlight.

Another participant who once doubted himself and stayed on familiar, repetitive tasks has grown in confidence and capability to the point where he now mentors others, and is preparing to move into supported living.

He used to doubt himself and stay on the same tasks. Now he's helping others as a buddy. He's even preparing to move into supported living — that's huge for him.

These are not just skill shifts. They are identity shifts which have been cultivated through changing the ways we relate to one another, and the way we approach learning:

The course didn't do it alone — it was another prong in a holistic approach that solidified everything else.

This transformation came through the combined effect of the course, workplace mentoring, and supportive supervision. Change is not just about learning new skills, it's about building a stronger sense of identity, combined with having the confidence and agency to navigate the future.

These combined initiatives reflect a broader transformation in how careers and transitions are understood across Aotearoa with aligned shifts emerging across practice, leadership, and culture. Together, they point toward a future where careers education is coherent, culturally responsive, and collectively owned, with responsibility shared across schools, workplaces, and communities to ensure every young person can navigate their own pathway

Communities of Practice

Who have we supported and how is this impacting the work of equity?

Signposts:

- EPIT is trusted for its authenticity, openness, and collaborative approach.
- Collaborations are leading to innovative approaches to community engagement, participation, and outcomes for equity.
- Facilitated conversations and events are leading to actionable change.
- Communities of Practice are becoming more connected, less siloed, and increasingly self-led.

These are the signposts that guide the development of strong, trusted relationships across the ecosystem.

Communities of Practice (CoPs)

Our CoPs are intentionally designed to bring together members across sectors to connect, learn, lead and act together around specific areas of practice. These are social learning ecosystems, spaces where the interactions between people are the mechanism for learning, where knowledge is co-created in real-world contexts through collective sharing, testing and reflection.

As a neutral, trusted partner, committed to relationship building across the sector, we are able to convene the CoPs in a way that enables transparent, cross-sector conversations that would otherwise be difficult to achieve. We bring together voices from across the system - educators, iwi, community organisations, government, and industry - ensuring that each CoP reflects the diversity of the ecosystem it serves.

As CoPs grow and evolve, they increasingly become spaces where members are able to share challenges, test ideas, and learn from one another in ways that are both practical and deeply relational. The result is a level of trust and openness that accelerates learning and strengthens collective action.

Earlier in the report, we spoke to how this is showing up in the Careers and Transitions CoP. This next section will demonstrate how CoPs have formed around AI and its implications for education, and how the financial capability sector is coming together in new ways to improve the financial futures for rangatahi.

AIED COP

When generative AI hit education, the sector didn't lack information, it lacked meaning. Teachers were overwhelmed by noise, tools, and opinion, with very little grounded in what this actually meant for teaching and learning. The AiEd CoP emerged to fill that gap.

Founded by Tim Gander through FutureLearning in early 2023, the community began as a small group asking simple but urgent questions—What is the opportunity here? Who else is exploring this?—it has now grown into a network of over 500 practitioners. It is deliberately practitioner-led, values-driven, and independent of commercial influence. The focus is clear in exploring how AI can support effective pedagogy, inclusive learning, and equitable outcomes for ākonga across Aotearoa.

The community is intentionally practical, offering a place where AI tools can be tested in the open. On the Circle platform, a teacher recently shared an AI reflection tool they had built to develop student capability and invited critique. Within days, peers across the country had tested it, suggested improvements, identified a critical issue, and even planned to use it in their own contexts. The original creator refined the tool in real time.

This is what self-led learning looks like in practice. Another thread saw educators, researchers, and practitioners collectively navigate the ethics of AI note-taking in parent-teacher interviews, surfacing privacy concerns, sharing alternative tools, and even forming direct connections to continue the work offline.

In a space that is evolving rapidly, the AiEd CoP is a space for collective sense-making. Teachers are trialling tools, shaping policy, and leading others. Connection is turning into collaboration, and collaboration into practice change.

RANGATAHI FINANCIAL FUTURES COP

The financial capability sector in Aotearoa has long been active, but largely disconnected. Many organisations are working toward the same goal of improving financial outcomes for rangatahi but often in isolation, with limited coordination or shared understanding of impact. This CoP has been intentionally established to bring that work together

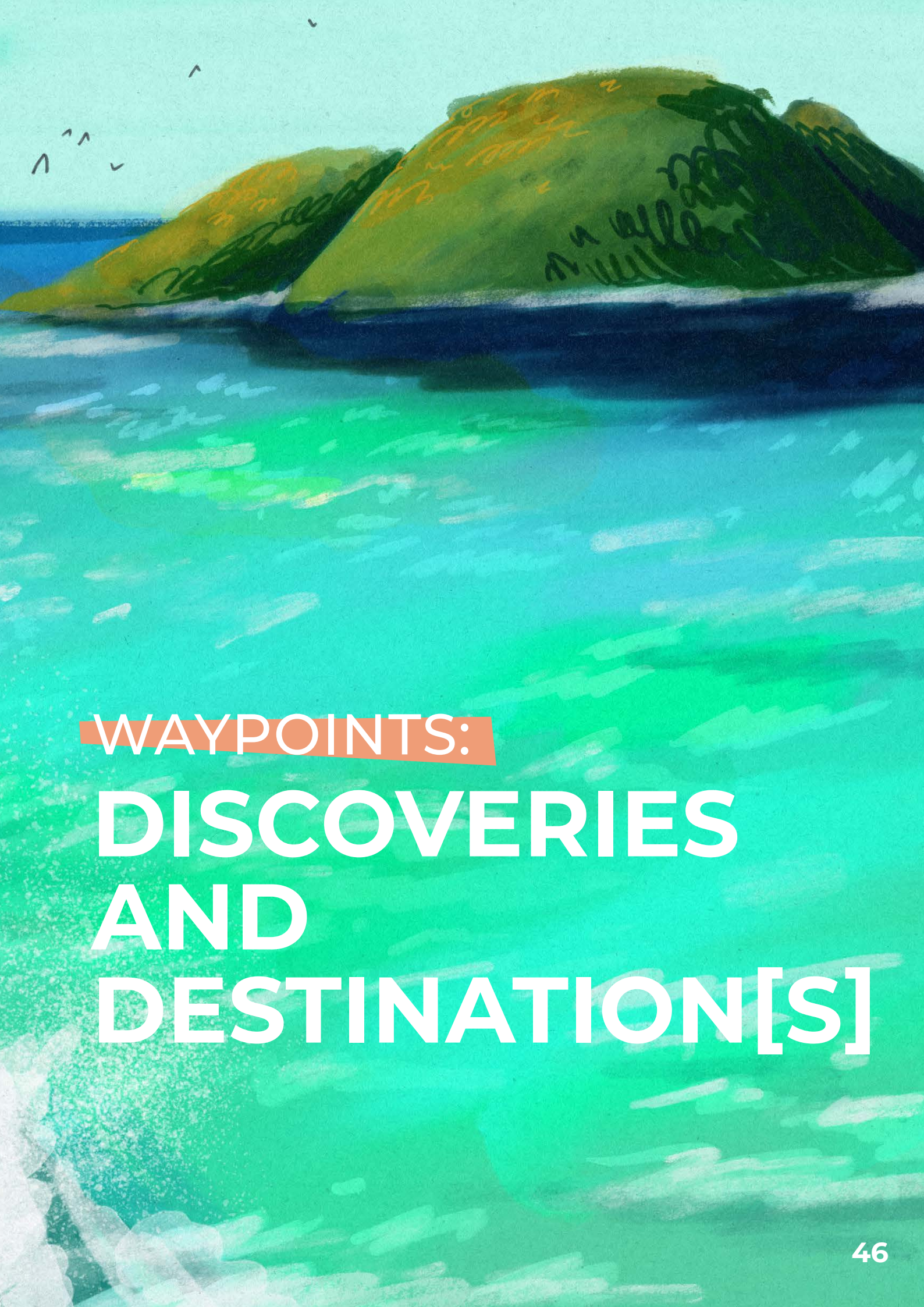
As an EPIT funded partner, PMG is leading the establishment of this CoP, convening organisations from across the system. An initial hui brought together 24 organisations, including banks, iwi, government agencies, and community providers. Despite many of these organisations traditionally operating as competitors, every participant signalled their commitment to continue. The response in the room was unanimous with participants asking 'why have we not done this before?'

Together, participants are building a shared understanding. Starting with defining who rangatahi are in this context, identifying gaps in the current system, and ensuring efforts complement rather than duplicate what already exists.

The CoP is deliberately collaborative. Funding, leadership, and delivery are shared across members, with corporates contributing financially and community organisations bringing research, insights, and access to rangatahi.

This is still early-stage work, but it reflects a shift toward greater alignment across a fragmented sector. By creating a space for coordination and shared ownership, the CoP is beginning to lay the groundwork for a more connected and effective approach to supporting rangatahi financial futures.





WAYPOINTS:

DISCOVERIES AND DESTINATION[S]

Waypoint One: More than a village

DISCOVERIES:

It takes more than a village to nurture a thriving adult. It takes whānau, educators, health providers, and social services working together. It takes an approach grounded in whakawhānaungatanga | relationships; a community of care and shared responsibility.

DESTINATION[S]:

EPIT is playing a vital role in supporting whole communities to build a system of care and opportunities for learners across Aotearoa.

Last year, this waypoint reflected a growing understanding that schools and early learning centres cannot create systems change alone. Creating the conditions for tamariki and rangatahi to thrive takes more than isolated efforts or individual actions, it is something that must be fostered through relationships, shared responsibility, and communities moving together with care and intention.

This year, the wayfinding journey has taken us deeper into noticing what these ecosystems of support can look and feel like in practice. The conditions that support learners to thrive are deeply relational and deeply cultural. Tamariki and rangatahi flourish when they are surrounded by relationships that help them feel known, valued, and connected. The cultures that surround young people every day both inside and outside the school gates shape how they experience themselves, their learning, and their place in the world.

Cultures of trust and belonging are often shaped quietly through whanaungatanga, developing shared languages, cultural recognition and building a sense of collective responsibility over time. Within these environments young people are more likely to participate fully in learning and begin to imagine futures for themselves.

Our partners are working closely with schools, whānau and communities to reveal the cultural and relational foundations that foster the conditions for ākonga to thrive in our education system.



E Tū Tāngata: **Creating cultures** **where young people** **know their value**

The kaupapa behind E Tū Tāngata emerged in response to Tall Poppy Syndrome and the ways it shapes the lives of young people across Aotearoa. Beneath everyday experiences of teasing, comparison and fear of failure, E Tū Tāngata recognised a deeper cultural pattern where many young people learn to hide parts of themselves in order to feel safe.

E Tū Tāngata has set out to shift this wider social culture that shapes how young people see themselves and how safe they feel to participate and contribute.

The movement works alongside kura and communities over time, helping them embed a shared kaupapa grounded in three core ideas. You Have Value. We Succeed Together. Others Matter. These values are woven through everyday life in schools through storytelling, whakataukī, classroom practice, assemblies, waiata, restorative conversations, visual language, rituals and shared experiences. Over time, these ideas begin to shape the way young people see themselves, relate to one another and understand their place within the collective.

This slow cultural shift can be seen in the ways kura are beginning to live the kaupapa collectively. Students are creating dances and songs around E Tū Tāngata values.

“Every child is inherently valuable just because they are a unique gift to their community.”

Shared language is appearing in playground conversations and classrooms. Kaiako | Teachers are hearing students encourage one another rather than diminish each other.

“You know you are changing culture when people are singing and dancing about it.”

At the heart of the work is a belief that every young person carries inherent value. In environments where many rangatahi experience criticism or internalised shame, E Tū Tāngata intentionally centres mana, dignity and unconditional worth.

What is emerging through E Tū Tāngata is a deeper understanding that the cultures young people grow inside have wide-reaching impacts. When schools become places where learners feel valued and emotionally safe, something begins to shift. Rangatahi begin to see themselves differently, and communities begin relating differently too.



Taiohi Awhitū: **Weaving ecosystems of care around ākonga**

In Whanganui, Taiohi Awhitū is demonstrating what becomes possible when wellbeing is understood not as an individual responsibility, but as something collectively held by communities. Developed as a Māori-led, community-centric wellbeing innovation, Taiohi Awhitū emerged in response to fragmentation across mental health and wellbeing support systems that left many ākonga whānau struggling to navigate disconnected services and support structures.

Taiohi Awhitū literally means “to embrace young people,” and the project’s purpose is to strengthen this embrace by activating a more connected network for educators, tamariki, rangatahi, and their whānau to access wellbeing supports at the right time, right place and with the right people.

The relational architecture that underpins Taiohi Awhitū is deeply grounded in te ao Māori. The work is shaped by whakapapa, tikanga, local relationships and long-established trust networks that already exist within the community.

In practice, this has meant embedding navigators within kura who work directly with rangatahi, whānau and educators to coordinate support in culturally responsive ways.

Kaumātua bring cultural guidance, identity and connection to te ao Māori into learning environments, helping many ākonga strengthen their sense of belonging and pride in who they are.

Wellbeing providers have come together in collaboration to overcome isolated and siloed services to ensure support feels coherent and navigable for ākonga and their whānau.

Taiohi Awhitū supported kura to identify trusted whānau connectors - described as “whānau weavers” - who could help build stronger engagement between schools and communities. Across participating kura, whānau spoke about growing trust in schools and a stronger sense that their tamariki were understood and cared for.

“A person’s health is inseparable from their connection to people, place and purpose.”

Collectively, these relationships support young people to see themselves reflected in their learning environments and connected to the people and places around them. Embedding this relational infrastructure requires care and patience, respectfully moving “at the speed of trust.” Relationships within the communities have often been built over decades and are sustained through reciprocity, shared responsibility and deep local knowledge.

Across the initiative, schools are observing stronger cultural identity, increased wellbeing, deeper whānau participation and stronger peer relationships. At a local intermediate school, ākonga connected with whakapapa and whenua through poi making, awa-based learning and cultural wānanga. These experiences strengthened confidence, emotional literacy and leadership among rangatahi.

Further, Taiohi Awhitū supports kura to reflect on the stories and assumptions shaping school culture itself. Through co-design processes with ākonga, kura are shifting the way conflict resolution and

behaviour are understood. Teachers describe becoming more relational in their responses to challenges, creating environments where young people feel more heard, understood and supported. This shift is changing the everyday experience of kura for many ākonga.

Older ākonga are encouraged to recognise the influence they carry over younger students within the school community, which in turn has developed a stronger sense of responsibility for the culture they are helping shape on the school grounds.

Taiohi Awhitū demonstrates that wellbeing grows when kura, whānau, iwi and communities move together around ākonga through trust, shared responsibility and cultural connection. Through these interwoven ecosystems of care, young people are supported to feel connected to each other, to place, and to a shared sense of purpose.

Waypoint Two: More than an idea

DISCOVERIES:

The work towards equity is not momentary. It is a long and deliberate journey sustained by those with deeply held convictions.

DESTINATION[S]:

Equity is built over time through care, and in context, with community. Our challenge is to hold that long view: supporting ideas to grow roots and ripple outward as sustainable programmes.

Last year, this waypoint reflected a growing understanding that the most meaningful equity work rarely begins as something new. What becomes visible through an initiative represents years of persistence, relationship-building and belief in what education could become.

This year, a different layer of insight has begun to emerge. Across the ecosystem, there is growing attention on the ways education defines intelligence, achievement and success. Many young people already hold rich capabilities and ways of understanding the world long before formal education systems learn how to recognise them.

Creativity, cultural knowledge and collaboration are often treated as secondary within conventional learning environments. When these strengths remain unseen, many learners experience education as something that only partially recognises who they are.

What is becoming clearer is that ākonga are more likely to thrive when education creates room for different forms of expression, contribution and intelligence to coexist. Confidence grows when learners can recognise strengths within themselves that may previously have gone unnamed or unnoticed.

This work is also revealing the patience required to hold open space for different ways of knowing inside systems that do not always know how to value them yet. Change is unfolding slowly through the steady work of making invisible forms of capability more visible over time.

Some of our partners are challenging our education system to deeply consider its definitions of intelligence by making visible what our system chooses to value and surfacing what it is failing to count.

Tāmaki College: **Seeing young people** **as contributors**

“Assessment as a tool to shape and reinforce students’ understanding of ‘who I am in relation to society, and what I can do with and for others within it’.”

Akomanga Kaihanga is a learning for social innovation programme at Tāmaki College developed through a research-practice partnership with the University of Auckland. The project is exploring how assessment in secondary schools might better recognise the broader capabilities young people develop through community-connected learning, including contribution, collaboration and social action.

One project involved students working alongside Auckland Council on the redesign of a local public space. Rather than participating in a token consultation process, students became active contributors to shaping the future of their community. They visited the site, identified barriers affecting safety and accessibility, gathered evidence from local people, developed proposals and presented their thinking directly to council representatives.

The experience helped students shift the way they saw themselves in their communities from passive recipients to active contributors.

Teachers observed students learning how to name strengths that had previously gone unseen or unnamed. Students were recognising in themselves qualities such as empathy, resilience, advocacy and

systems thinking. Through naming these qualities, students were able to see their own contribution and understand the value they could bring to the world around them.

The programme also revealed how transformative it can be when learning is rooted in real relationships and real contexts. Students approached issues with care and curiosity because the work mattered to their communities and to their own lives. They began asking deeper questions about fairness, access and belonging. Their ideas often provided a unique reflection on people's experiences and a strong desire to create more equitable outcomes for others.

Akomanga Kaihanga is exploring new ways to make these forms of learning visible within formal assessment frameworks. The team is developing visual transcripts and competency frameworks that better capture collaboration, contribution and social innovation alongside academic achievement.

What is emerging through the project is a hopeful reimagining of assessment. One where education helps young people recognise not only what they can achieve, but the ways they can participate, contribute and shape the communities around them.

Waypoint Three:

From connection to interconnection

DISCOVERIES:

The work towards equity is achieved together across systems, places and people, through dialogue, reciprocal learning, and open sharing.

DESTINATION[S]:

The next step for EPIT is moving from relationships as tools of utility towards an interconnectedness that nurtures ecological balance, and equitable outcomes.

Last year, this waypoint explored what it means to move beyond transactional relationships and towards deeper forms of connection. Across the ecosystem, there was a growing understanding that flourishing happens when trust, reciprocity and shared responsibility are woven through the way young people experience education.

This year's wayfinding has deepened that understanding further, drawing our attention to the types of relationships that need to be interwoven around ākonga to sustain wellbeing and growth through the school years and into the future. Across the work of equity, it is consistently observed that young people are more likely to thrive when they are held within connected ecosystems of support that help them navigate complexity with confidence.

Fragmented support, isolated opportunities and disconnected experiences can leave young people feeling uncertain about where they belong or where to turn next. When relationships between schools, whānau, iwi, communities, employers, wellbeing providers and peers are strong and connected, young people are more able to see pathways for themselves and move through them with greater agency.

Our partners are working with schools to understand what it takes in practice to build interwoven ecosystems of trusted support around ākonga. Establishing the relational base that centres identity, belonging, culture and community as foundational supports for young people to feel grounded, and confident in their ability to navigate their futures.

Stand Tall: Preparing young people not just for jobs, but for life

**“Young people thrive when
learning is grounded in
community, culture, belonging.”**

Stand Tall builds entrepreneurial and digital capability with rangatahi. Through programmes like ThriveX, Stand Tall supports rangatahi to “shape and walk their own pathways with confidence.”

Stand Tall applies a dual lens to their approach. Alongside supporting rangatahi to grow in confidence, capability and agency, they are also strengthening the systems and relationships around them. Kura, employers, whānau and community become part of a shared learning journey that creates pathways that feel more connected, relevant and reachable for rangatahi. Insights gained alongside rangatahi are then carried back into the wider ecosystem, shaping how adults and organisations support young people over time.

The kaupapa underlying this work is grounded in the belief that capability growth begins with belonging. Many rangatahi arrive carrying uncertainty about where they fit, what they are capable of, or whether education pathways genuinely reflect who they are. Programmes like ThriveX intentionally begin with whanaungatanga, creating spaces where rangatahi can share their strengths, ideas and aspirations in an environment where they feel seen, listened to and supported.

This identity-led approach is threaded throughout the learning experience. Culture, belonging and lived experience are reflected back to young people through environments

that help them recognise themselves and their value within the learning journey. Stand Tall has observed that when rangatahi feel connected to the people and environments around them, participation deepens and confidence begins to grow.

One young person reflected that during an early ThriveX session they found themselves “speaking openly, feeling listened to in a way they hadn’t felt before.” As the programme unfolded, opportunities to collaborate, pitch ideas, and engage with others helped them build confidence in both their thinking and their own potential. “For the first time, they felt like they had a vision that could lead to real change.”

Stand Tall is demonstrating the power of equipping rangatahi with entrepreneurial and digital capabilities that are increasingly important in the modern world of work, while grounding that learning in real world experience, relationships, and connected pathways. As rangatahi apply their skills in authentic contexts, they build confidence, develop meaningful community connections, and deepen their ability to navigate future opportunities. Alongside this, Stand Tall works across the wider ecosystem to improve the pathways and transitions surrounding young people, creating a more connected and supportive environment for their futures.



Sew Your Story: **Bringing story** **and identity into** **the classroom**

Sew Your Story brings to life a different understanding of what learning can look and feel like. Developed by textile artist and educator Mary Kelleher, the programme supports primary-aged learners to explore identity, family history, and cultural memory through textile storytelling and creative practice. Rather than treating creativity or culture as an “add-on” to learning, Sew Your Story positions them as foundational to how young people make meaning of themselves and the world around them.

Sew Your Story brings different forms of intelligence and cultural knowledge into the learning environment. Inside classrooms, learners gather fragments of personal story and experiment through making. Fabric, stitching, colour, imagery, and symbols become tools for reflection and expression.

A distinctive aspect of the programme is its commitment to slow learning. The programme creates extended periods of uninterrupted creative time where tamariki can become fully absorbed in making and meaning-making. Teachers observed that tamariki often continued working through break times because they were so deeply engaged.

“This programme has had such a positive impact on our school community, demonstrating to students that their voices and creative efforts matter beyond the classroom.”

The programme also highlights the importance of embodied learning. Repetitive craft practices such as sewing, arranging fabrics, and stitching supported concentration, focus, and nervous system regulation. Learning happens not only cognitively, but physically and emotionally through the body itself.

As tamariki engaged in the programme, understanding often unfolded gradually. Through recurring visual motifs and repeated creative practice, learners began recognising meaning intuitively over time.



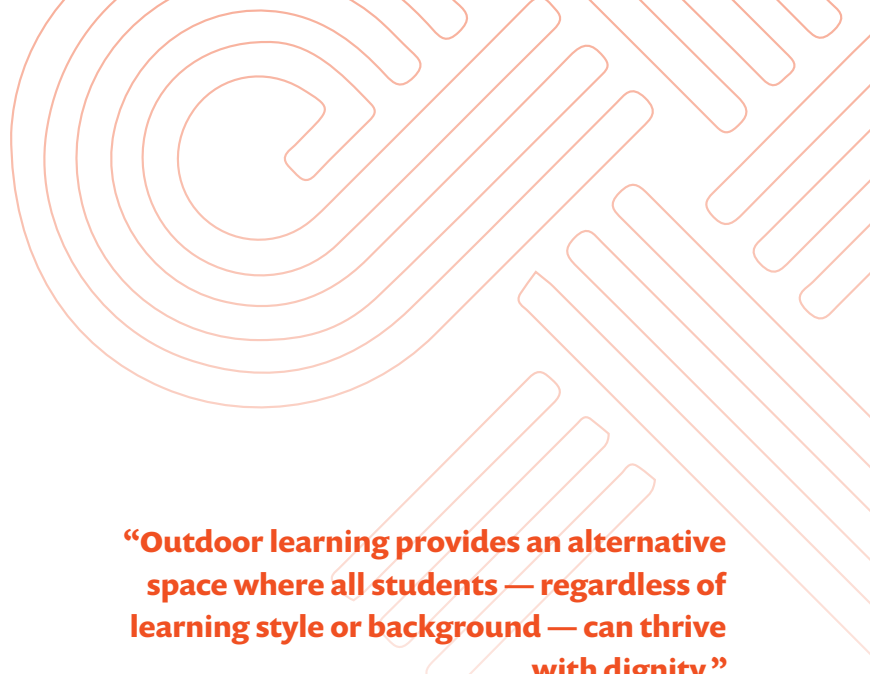
“Repeated exposure allows learners to recognise meaning intuitively, often before it is explained in words.”



Sew Your Story allows tamariki to bring fragments of their own stories into the classroom, shaping the learning environment into one that reflects their own lived experiences. By centering creative practice as a tool for meaning making, the initiative invites tamariki to see their own stories, identities, and ways of knowing as meaningful parts of their learning journey.

This approach recognises that understanding does not always emerge through linear verbal explanation. Sometimes meaning is absorbed gradually through image, repetition and creative exploration.

For many tamariki, these shifts in their learning environment were transformative. Teachers reported strong growth in confidence, perseverance and pride. Learners who did not always thrive in traditional classroom settings became deeply engaged when learning became visual, personal and creative.



Oke Charity: Thriving through outdoor learning

“Outdoor learning provides an alternative space where all students — regardless of learning style or background — can thrive with dignity.”

Oke Charity creates outdoor classrooms where whole communities are learning together about the benefits of gardening and healthy living. For some tamariki, traditional classroom settings do not reflect their strengths, their ways of learning, or the realities of their lives. Oke’s outdoor classrooms offer an alternative environment where learning becomes relational, embodied, and connected to people, culture and place.

Across South Auckland and increasingly across Aotearoa, Oke’s outdoor classrooms are places where mātauranga Māori, Pacifica horticultural traditions and environmental stewardship coexist alongside formal education. By participating in the outdoor gardens, students learn about growing kai and caring for living environments, collectively, and in relationship with one another.

These spaces are also reconnecting kura with whānau and wider communities. Oke describes its work as “whole communities learning together” - an approach where kura become hubs for intergenerational learning and shared responsibility. Across many kura, koro and kuia are sharing mātauranga about planting and harvesting traditions, whānau are participating in working bees, and communities are gathering around māra kai that extend learning far beyond the school gates.

At one kura, when Oke hosted its first after-school working bee, more than forty whānau and community volunteers turned up to help build and strengthen the outdoor learning space. The event became an expression of collective ownership and care. Tamariki worked alongside parents, teachers, and community members, seeing themselves not simply as recipients of education, but as contributors to something shared.

These outdoor learning environments are creating opportunities for students to learn differently. Oke’s research and school observations show that children who struggle inside traditional classrooms often thrive outdoors. Teachers are reporting calmer behaviour, stronger emotional regulation, increased confidence, improved collaboration, and greater engagement with learning. Outdoor environments are creating conditions where creativity, autonomy, leadership, and joy can emerge naturally.

Oke is broadening the opportunities for learning to be experienced by tamariki in physical, emotional, cultural and social ways all at once. Through participating in the care of the gardens, students are experiencing shared learning and shared responsibility, building resilience and connection to their place and the people that collectively contribute to its stewardship.

GLOSSARY

These may be used interchangeably throughout the document.

Ākonga	Student, learner
Hoa haere	Journey partner
Hui	Gathering, meeting
Kaiako	Teacher
Kaumātua	Respected elder
Kaupapa	Philosophy, ethos
Kaupapa Māori	An approach grounded in Māori worldview and ways of knowing.
Kōrero	Conversation, dialogue
Kura	School
Manaakitanga	Hospitality, kindness, caring
Mahi	Work
Mātauranga	Knowledge, wisdom
Pou	Pillar
Rangatahi	Youth, young person
Tamariki	Children
Tikanga	Customs, values
Whānau	Extended family
Whakapapa	Genealogy, ancestry
Whakawhānaungatanga	Relationships, shared experiences of belonging

