

MAI
WORLD

Child
AND
Youth
VOICES

Tama-te-rā Ariki

Voices of tamariki and rangatahi Māori

March 2018

Mai World Child and Youth Voices

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MANAAKITIA A TĀTOU TAMARIKI

Children's
Commissioner



About the Office of the Children's Commissioner

The 1.1 million children and young people under 18 make up 23% of New Zealand.

The Children's Commissioner Judge Andrew Becroft and his office advocate for their interests, ensure their rights are upheld, and help them have a say on matters that affect them.

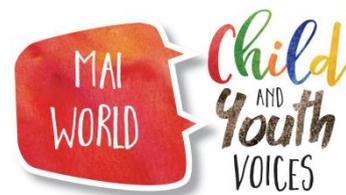
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We wanted to learn about the lived experience of rangatahi and tamariki Māori, so we asked them



If children and young people are given appropriate opportunities to communicate in ways they are comfortable with, they will clearly show their capacity to identify insights gained from their life experiences.

At the Office of the Children's Commissioner we promote the participation of children and young people in decisions that affect them. New Zealanders made a promise to ensure tamariki and rangatahi o Aotearoa (children and young people of New Zealand) have a say and have their voices heard about matters that affect them when the government signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993.

Hearing and incorporating the views of children and young people deliver better and more robust decisions. Children and young people's capacity to act independently is developed and confirmed and their participation as New Zealand citizens increased.

We recognise that as tangata whenua, it is vital that the voices of tamariki and rangatahi Māori are heard at all levels of decision making and planning. Our office wished to more fully reflect their voices in our advocacy. This was a targeted engagement with a group of tamariki and rangatahi whose voices are least likely to be heard without focused efforts to consult them.

The Children's Commissioner seeks the voices of children and young people through **Mai World: Child and Youth Voices**

This series of engagements was given the name Tama-te-rā Ariki to ground it in a strengths-based approach and recognise tamariki and rangatahi Māori as the experts in their lives:

"Tama is derived from Tama-te-rā: the central sun, the divine spark. Ariki refers to the senior most status. Our children, our tamariki, are the greatest legacy our world has."

Dame Tariana Turia, referring to Rose Pere's explanation of the concept of 'tamariki'.



Who did we talk with and what did we ask tamariki and rangatahi Māori?

The kaupapa or purpose of this work was to facilitate sessions to enable this group of tamariki and rangatahi to share their lived experiences. We talked with 155 children and young people aged between four and 18 years old. All 155 of the participants identified as Māori and had known whakapapa to 15 iwi. We engaged with tamariki and rangatahi with a diverse range of experiences and perspectives. For example, we involved rangatahi not engaged in education, employment or training, and vulnerable to systematic risk factors outside of their control, such as economic, social, mental, cultural and physical factors.

We engaged through focus group meetings and 12 individuals were identified through those groups to participate further in in-depth one-on-one interviews. We used a skilled, experienced youth engagement specialist to undertake the engagement. Special activity-based engagement methods were designed and used in this work.

The broad area of enquiry for the work was centred on learning about their lived experiences: of what made them happy; how they felt about themselves; their culture and traditions; and what their dreams for the future were. The information gained from the groups was then used to shape the enquiry in the interviews. The interviews produced the deeper and richer content, which allowed us to build our understanding of the experiences that shape these tamariki and rangatahi's lives.

The tamariki and rangatahi we spoke to for the detailed interviews met with us three or four times in order to share their stories at their own pace and in the way they wanted. They were generous with their time and open in sharing their stories because they wanted others to understand them better.



What did tamariki and rangatahi Māori tell us?

We heard unique and powerful stories from rangatahi and tamariki, offering a perspective not often heard. They voiced strong - and at times overwhelming - feelings for the adults in their lives. They were proud to be Māori and discovered that they blossomed when they found stable adults who were able to connect with them in an authentic way. They spoke of violence and financial struggles as well, and of wanting the best for themselves and their families in the future.

There was considerable variation in the life experiences and perspectives of the 155 tamariki and rangatahi with whom we engaged. They told us that they want people to get to know them for who they are. They appreciated it when we did not make assumptions about them as young people and as Māori, nor about their neighbourhoods. They spoke of enjoying the opportunity to share their stories and explore their lives with others. When we asked why they participated in the different programmes that they were part of, they explained that it was because those spaces respected and valued their identity.

One way we helped the 12 in-depth interviewees warm up to telling their stories was by suggesting they choose a movie character and think of how they relate to that character. This became the 'motif' that supported their story. Some of the quotes shared in this report may refer to their chosen character.

The voices in this report are grouped into five insights:

- 1) Insight 1: My cultural identity is my journey
- 2) Insight 2: I need to feel safe and belong so I can reach my potential
- 3) Insight 3: I need adults who care about me
- 4) Insight 4: I want to take away mum's stress
- 5) Insight 5: I travel the digital world

Each of these insights is detailed below, followed by concluding comments on the implications of what we heard in the Tama-te-rā Ariki engagement.



INSIGHT 1: MY CULTURAL IDENTITY IS MY JOURNEY

Cultural identity and connection are fundamental to well-being. We heard from tamariki and rangatahi that when they have a clear understanding of their culture as part of who they are, this enhances their connectedness to family and community. We also heard that when they are not culturally connected, mana is diminished and something is missing for them.

One of our in-depth interviewees chose “Moana” from the film of the same name, as her movie character. She related to the young woman who navigates the ocean and finds who she truly is. She also liked the character’s discovery that the demon became the good spirit when its heart was restored. Our interviewee explained that she started to learn about the Māori world and that this helped her to feel more connected to her family. She discovered that her story has many different stories within it, and hopes that as she learns more, her family will also.

She went on to talk about how she would get really angry or have a lot of attitude; but the truth, she said, was that she didn’t know how to share her real feelings and was scared of getting hurt, and letting people see that she was **“scared and soft”**.
(Māori young person in community centre for 12 to 17 year olds - Housing New Zealand site)

The children and young people expressed pride in being Māori. Many tamariki who were in a primary school were benefitting from in-depth learning of waiata, kapa haka and karakia. The children explained they enjoyed this because it made them feel **“more Māori”** *(Māori children in school-based resilience-building programme for five to ten year olds)*.

There were rangatahi who valued their cultural journeys and showed a strong understanding of the significance of te reo Māori. When asked if te reo should be compulsory at school, they had this to say:

“If you know your culture then it makes you stronger.” *(Māori young person in youth programme for 11 to 14 year olds)*

“I hate when people don’t want to know their culture cause they think they are too cool or something.” *(Māori young person in youth programme for 11 to 14 year olds)*

“If everyone knew Te Reo then there would be more unity.” *(Māori young person in youth programme for 11 to 14 year olds)*



“On the Marae I can't use English, I think it would be cool if everyone spoke Māori everywhere.” (Māori young person in youth programme for 11 to 14 year olds)

“If more people speak it then we won't be shame to use it.” (Māori young person in youth programme for 11 to 14 year olds)

Some of the rangatahi and tamariki also told us how their names are regularly mispronounced and one young person explained that was a good reason for Māori to be compulsory in school.

Their language was unique to them – some rangatahi feared that if everyone learned it, it would lose some of its specialness.

“Cause then we can't talk in our own language without people knowing what we are saying” [laughing] (Māori young person in youth programme for 11 to 14 year olds)

One young person noted that culture is important to everyone, but felt strongly that the individual needs to choose when to begin their cultural journey.

Some rangatahi said they felt whakama (shame) when non-Māori had a deeper connection to their culture than they did themselves. One young person said:

“I hate it when people say I should know my language and stuff”. (Māori young person in Housing New Zealand community centre for 12 to 17 year olds)

The rangatahi were aware of cultural stereotypes about being Māori, but were able to identify these as 'just' stereotypes and generally felt proud of their culture:

“People like the government say bad things about us, but I don't care cause I know my whānau.” (Māori young person in community centre for 12 to 17 year olds - Housing New Zealand site)

“Only when you do good, but if you do bad it's because you are Māori.” (Māori young person in community centre for 12 to 17 year olds - Housing New Zealand site)

“When people say bad things I feel shame or angry, but most of the time I am proud.” (Māori young person in community centre for 12 to 17 year olds - Housing New Zealand site)

“Hardout! Never shame to be Māori.” (Māori young person in youth programme for 11 to 14 year olds)



Some of the young people we spoke with belong to families affiliated to gangs. One young person talked about swearing at a teacher who put their gang down:

“[The teacher] didn’t even ask me why I was angry, she didn’t want to understand my story, that even if they [the gang] do stupid things that’s my family, my history.” (Māori young person in community centre for 12 to 17 year olds - Housing New Zealand site)

One of the in-depth interviewees talked about his dad who joined a gang and became violent. He loves his dad, and would never judge him, because his dad doesn’t judge him. The rangatahi felt the pressure of others’ judgment. But he wants to get a good education to show that young people who seem ‘bad’ can achieve positive things.

INSIGHT 2: I NEED TO FEEL SAFE AND BELONG SO I CAN REACH MY POTENTIAL

A sense of safety and belonging is vital for all children and young people. We heard from tamariki and rangatahi that safety, belonging and positive encouragement can fuel their dreams. But sadly we also heard how lack of safety and belonging leads to neglect, instability, and trauma, and triggers anti-social attitude.

One of the in-depth interviewees described her journey to succeed on her own terms. She talked about having to leave home when things became too chaotic or her mum was too unwell to parent her. She talked about having to stay “up the line” and not fitting in there, then not fitting in when she came home. She explained that she remained committed to the family for the sake of her little brother and her mum. She used to calm herself by watching *Dora the Explorer* (about an independent child character solving problems without adult oversight). Sometimes the chaos in this rangatahi’s life was so extreme that she couldn’t create an image of safety in her mind. She spoke about finding refuge in high school, where she explored different subjects and learned new things, and how her mum stayed unwell but gave her lots of encouragement to do well at school. Now she pictures herself taking care of her family.

We asked the youngest tamariki we spoke to, four-year-olds, what made them happy:

“Smiling, friends, playing tag, [girl’s name] my friend, eating toast.” (Four-year-old Māori child in early childhood education centre)

Their responses to the question about what made them sad included:



“People breaking my mahi...” *(Four-year-old Māori child in early childhood education centre)*

“Not listening.” *(Four-year-old Māori child in early childhood education centre)*

Asking where they felt safe, one of the groups of young people expressed how their view of the neighbourhood had changed. A young person explained that there used to be:

“...lots of fights and people drinking at night.... But its way better now, I think [my neighbourhood] is cool. I don't care if people hate on the [neighbourhood]”. *(Māori young person in youth programme for 11 to 14 year olds)*

Others in that group stated:

“There's way more things for youth now which is cool, and everyone knows where to go if they need help. I wish more of my friends would come here.” *(Māori young person in youth programme for 11 to 14 year olds)*

“We go out and do stuff and learn about our community and be proud of living here.” *(Māori young person in youth programme for 11 to 14 year olds)*

A sense of belonging to their neighbourhood is celebrated in these young people's comments.

INSIGHT 3: I NEED ADULTS WHO CARE ABOUT ME

Tamariki and rangatahi need secure relationships with adults with whom they can talk about challenging issues. Tamariki and rangatahi told us they wanted more kōrero space with adults, and said how this shows them they are valued. Rangatahi also told us that they need more than their friends to talk to, and if adults don't listen then they won't talk.

The young people wanted non-judgmental adults to talk to, as they recognized that sometimes their peers lacked the wisdom that they sought. Rangatahi made it clear that it was about finding the right adult. If an adult will listen and not judge them or their families – especially not their families - these young people say they do talk to them.

The main adults who were identified as supportive were parents, youth workers and teachers (so long as they were “cool”).

Young people talked about needing adults to parent them:



“To focus more on us than on what they do.” (Māori young person in community centre for 12 to 17 year olds - Housing New Zealand site)

One of the in-depth interviewees chose ‘Mogli’, from the film of the same name, as his movie character. He related to Mogli’s bare feet and that there were no adults in Mogli’s story (until the end, when he goes to the ‘man village’). The young person told us:

“I had all the gears...mum would give me money and dad would buy me stuff. Every day after school I would hang out with my friends...then I would bus home. No one would be at home, usually dad would be with his friends and he would leave me money to buy dinner...” (Maori young person not enrolled in school, a training programme or work)

He talked further about his parents not being authoritative and acting like his friends rather than his parents. His attendance at school deteriorated over time and he was eventually ‘asked to leave’ at the beginning of Year 12. He says that **“even though I had fun I feel left out when I hear that my mates are all doing something with their lives...”**. He left school without NCEA Level 1.

For many of the rangatahi and tamariki we engaged with, very challenging experiences are a regular part of their lives. They talked about violence, alcohol and drugs as normal (admitting that they also do some of these things). But they all agreed that they would not want that to be part of their future. When asked what they would change if they could, young people said:

“Get rid of all the alcohol and drugs, ask my family to sacrifice it for me and my siblings.” (Māori young person in community centre for 12 to 17 year olds - Housing New Zealand site)

“Tell my family to stop drinking and doing drugs.” (Māori young person in community centre for 12 to 17 year olds - Housing New Zealand site)

Another of the in-depth interviewees talked about how his grandmother raised him, while his younger siblings received the love of his parents. He became angry and then violent; eventually he was excluded from school for fighting. He chose ‘Kevin’ from the *Home Alone* series as his movie character. He spoke about meeting a youth worker who talked with him, not at him, and gave him a space to vent his anger and sadness and be himself. Now he has returned to school and is working towards NCEA level 1. (Māori young person formerly not enrolled in school, a training programme or work).



INSIGHT 4: I WANT TO TAKE AWAY MUM'S STRESS

Family experiences and parental stresses have a profound impact on children and young people. We heard from the tamariki that see and understand their parents' situation, and want to help. In some cases, the stress of the parents is impacting on the emotional and mental wellbeing of the children.

Our engagement with tamariki between eight and ten years old demonstrates this insight. These young children were acutely aware of their parents' financial stress. When asked, "[W]hat would you do?" tamariki said:

"Give my parents money because they are always sad and angry about money." (Māori child in school-based resilience-building programme for five to ten year olds).

"Pay the bills and the rent. Have more time with family." (Māori child in school-based resilience-building programme for five to ten year olds).

"Give my family money." (Māori child in school-based resilience-building programme for five to ten year olds).

"Have a bigger house for my whole family." (Māori child in school-based resilience-building programme for five to ten year olds).

They knew that paying the bills and the rent was a significant stress for the adults in their lives and they wanted to release this burden by giving their parents money. When asked why they would want to do this, one responded:

"... because they are sad when there isn't enough money." (Māori child in school-based resilience-building programme for five to ten year olds)

Many identified their mums as carrying the primary burden in this area. Two brothers explained they **"...need[ed] to get a good education so [they] could get good jobs to get rid of [their] mum's stress."** (Māori children in kura kaupapa).

One of the in-depth interviewees (a young person) also talked about family financial stress. He chose 'Aladdin,' from the film of the same name, as his movie character. The rangatahi is clear that he doesn't need three wishes - only one. He would **"change everything for [his] family."** (Māori young person not enrolled in school, a training programme or work)

Time and space were closely related to these financial concerns: lack of time with family and lack of space at home. One of the tamariki talked about how they would like to be able to **"...buy many houses so that the family can stay together, in**



their own rooms.” (Māori child in school-based resilience-building programme for five to ten year olds).

INSIGHT 5: I TRAVEL THE DIGITAL WORLD

Without conversations with adults about online news content, children and young people will reach their own conclusions. Across the focus groups, the tamariki and rangatahi we talked with said that they had unsupervised access to the internet (which is common in families' busy lives). We observed they were highly connected to the digital world but not necessarily to their local communities.

Some communities are using access to digital technology to bring young people into their centres:

“I go hang out at the library because I can get free Wifi” (Māori young person not enrolled in school, a training programme or work)

However, some online information that is not 'filtered' through a trusted adult has the potential to stress and confuse younger children. It was apparent that for several groups, their digital experience is their reality. When asked “[W]hat challenges get in the way of your goals being reached?”, we heard they wanted to get rid of the United States president, Donald Trump. One young person explained this was **“because he’s building the wall and hates Muslims.”** (Maori young person not enrolled in school, a training programme or work).

Enquiring further, we found that they were getting their news information primarily from online sites such as Facebook and YouTube. Without adults informing and equipping children and young people to walk in these digital spaces, there’s a risk that they will not be able to critique what they hear.

A number of the younger children (between seven and ten years old) told us of their worries about high-profile international issues, and particularly about Donald Trump. Many of the children and young people believed that if Trump were removed from power it would fix most of the world’s problems, especially since his racism targeted poor people who were brown. They are experiencing the issues on social media as a very real threat. When probed further, it was clear many of the young people believed that Trump was in charge of New Zealand and that the wall was being built here. When asked if they knew who the leader of New Zealand was, a few said John Key (no one mentioned the then Prime Minister, Bill English).



Some implications of what we heard from rangatahi and tamariki Māori

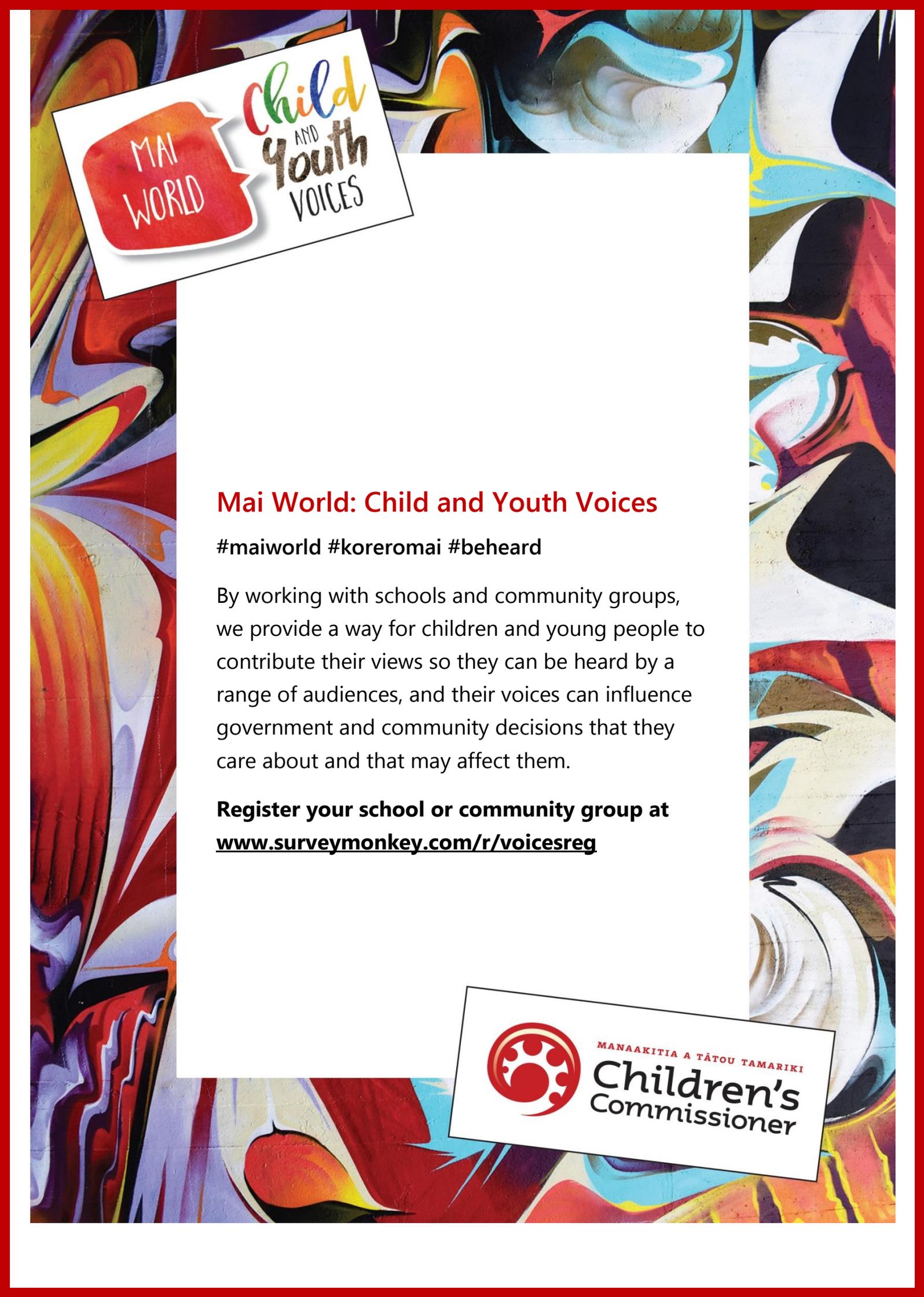
This was a targeted engagement; we sought to connect with and better understand the lived experiences of a group of tamariki and rangatahi Māori who are often not heard - and about whom decisions are therefore made without the benefit of direct engagement.

From the five insights discussed in this report, it is clear that tamariki and rangatahi Māori have a unique sense of belonging and identity as Māori. We recognize, though, that there is no one voice of Māori, but rather, there are diverse views, experiences and perspectives. The life experiences and perspectives of the 155 tamariki and rangatahi we spoke to varied considerably – each had their own story. While being Māori was a common element, how that impacts children’s lives needs to be understood, not assumed.

It took us time to build the relationships that allowed our office to hear from the young people in this report; however, it would not be fair to describe them as difficult to reach. It was more the case that we needed to make the investment. Having the opportunity to share their stories and explore their lived experiences with others is powerful for young people when it is done in a respectful way.

In order to create trusting relationships with young Māori, adults need to be sensitive to the fact that each child or young person is unique, with varying degrees of cultural connection, te reo, and awareness of tikanga. When adults assume this knowledge in all tamariki and rangatahi Māori, young people can feel whakamā (shamed) and disengaged if they do not hold this knowledge. This is particularly so if non-Māori adults demonstrate their knowledge to young Māori. If building relationships always comes first, the risk of these mistakes is reduced. Cultural identity and connection have a profound impact on tamariki and rangatahi. As young people strengthen their cultural identity and connections, their sense of self grows, increasing belonging and security.

All children and young people need secure relationships with adults with whom they can talk about challenging issues. For young people struggling with sadness and violence, the right adult at the right time in their lives can make all the difference to their trajectory. Adults also need to have the skills to help children and young people interpret and navigate their world. Children and young people greatly value relationships with their families and friends. These relationships can have a profound impact on their well-being.



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