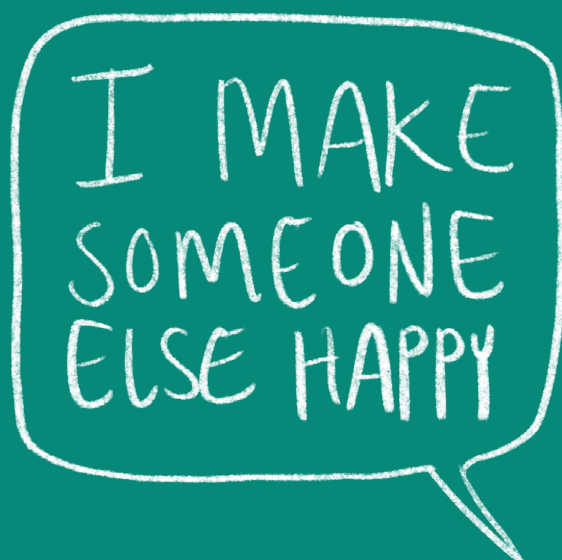


I FEEL REALLY GOOD WHEN...

Strengthening youth mental health and wellbeing in Murihiku Southland

Research Insights from Rangatahi
February 2023



Contents

Acknowledgements	4
The Research	5
The Approach	6
Findings: An overview	9
Issues and Challenges	11
Specific challenges in Murihiku Southland	14
FOUR THEMES	16
A. Trust & Connection: A diversity of people who care	19
B. Spaces & Places: Safe, enlivening environments	23
C. Agency & Empowerment: Enabling rangatahi to take the lead	29
D. Exposure & Education: Ideas, opportunities and ongoing inspiration	33
Concluding Thoughts	36

Acknowledgements

Our thanks go first to all the rangatahi who spent time with us and shared their experiences so frankly. Your honesty and thoughtfulness have made this research vivid and inspiring. Our intention is that this piece of work will amplify your voices and ensure they are heard where it matters — both in your region, and across Aotearoa New Zealand.

We extend our thanks to the schools and individuals that engaged with our process and connected us to such a wonderful array of young people. The care you have for the rangatahi you work alongside was special to witness. The young people of Murihiku Southland have many good allies as they journey forward.

Ngā mihi ki a koutou.

A handwritten note on a piece of paper. The text 'I feel really good when...' is written in red ink. To the right, the words 'im really happy' are written in green ink, with 'really' written in blue ink above 'im'. There is a small blue mark above the 'h' in 'happy'.

— Primary school student

The Research

About

In 2021, Te Rourou, One Aotearoa Foundation (formerly Vodafone Aotearoa Foundation) and Toi Āria: Design for Public Good spoke to rangatahi across Murihiku Southland about their hopes and aspirations for a better future. This work was part of Te Rourou's *Invercargill Initiative*.¹ The focus on one geographic region aims to develop a case study for fast-paced, sustainable and measurable change. The resulting research *Thriving in Murihiku — Rangatahi engagement*² showed that young people in the region want more support with their mental health and wellbeing.

This piece of work entitled '*I feel really good when...*' — *Strengthening youth mental health and wellbeing in Murihiku Southland* is the next stage in understanding and exploring youth needs in this area. It aims to ensure the voices, experiences and opinions of young people of Murihiku Southland inform decision making for the future.

Its ultimate purpose is to contribute to improvements in youth mental health and wellbeing in the region and beyond.

1. The Invercargill Initiative
<https://foundation.vodafone.co.nz/place-based-funding/>
2. Thriving in Murihiku — Rangatahi engagement
<https://www.toiaria.org/our-projects/thriving-in-murihiku-br-rangatahi-engagement/>

Who we are

This project was commissioned by Te Rourou, One Aotearoa Foundation in partnership with the ILT Foundation and Community Trust South and was conducted by Toi Āria: Design for Public Good, a research unit based at Toi Rauwhāangi/College of Creative Arts, Massey University, Wellington.

This multi-organisation partnership is proud to share with you the rangatahi insights that follow.



— Primary school student

The Approach

Phase 1:

Rangahau — Desktop research

In order to locate the research in the wider context of current understanding about mental health and wellbeing, a short piece of desktop research was undertaken in May-October 2022.³ This considered the scope of the project, along with a simple analysis of current provision of mental health support for young people in Murihiku Southland.

Phase 2:

Whakawhanaungatanga — Building relationships

In August 2022, the research team met and built rapport with school leaders and kaihautū to understand the specific situation and needs of each school community.

Some key issues voiced by principals, teachers and counsellors included:

- Higher than average levels of deprivation and difficulty in the region
- Inequity of access to mental health and wellbeing support for all rangatahi
- Schools are currently shouldering a disproportionately large burden when it comes to dealing with the challenges of the youth mental health crisis
- Significant challenges in relation to recruiting/accessing professional support
- The impact of COVID on the fabric of school communities
- The inherent unreliability of external programmes due to funding constraints

These discussions helped frame the rangatahi engagement and offered valuable context ahead of talking directly with students.

3. The desktop research is available here:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1HSJNBDM-4RiuQQL0goyWyZgTyeOGY27yM8IkVE0_mo/edit?usp=sharing

Phase 3:

Pāporitanga — Building shared knowledge in collaboration with rangatahi

The third phase of the participatory research focused on building shared knowledge through conversation with rangatahi. The aim was to enable them to express their views and thoughts in their own words. For this phase the research team engaged with ten of the twelve schools initially visited, based on school availability and interest in the project.

There were twenty conversations in total — which engaged 141 young people aged between 8–18. Older participants self-identified as male, female, queer and trans — and whilst ethnicity data was not collected there were participants who voluntarily identified as Pākehā, Māori, Tongan, Samoan, Fijian Indian, Filipino and Argentinian. With older rangatahi (Years 9–13) small focus group conversations were conducted. Younger children (Years 4–8) were invited to take part in a simple drawing, writing and conversation exercise — in groups of up to 15 students. (Some of their illustrations appear through the report).

Across the board, conversations were opened with the prompt — ‘I feel really good when...’ and followed up with a focus on conditional situations rather than past experience e.g. ‘What would help you feel better if things weren’t going well?’

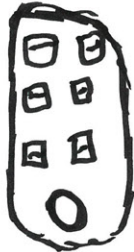
The conversations covered the full breadth of the continuum of promoting good general wellbeing in school populations to dealing with situations of mental health crisis. Students’ opinions on what is helpful and supportive — as well as what could be better — were sought.



— Primary school student

I feel really good when... I like playing soft ball
and playing with my friends
and reading

Playing on my Phone



Swimming at the beach

drawing stick people



drawing Ladybeard's



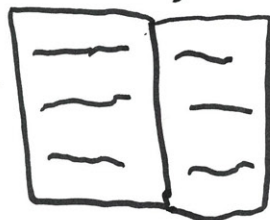
drawing Ladybeard's



going to my unkill's house



reading



eating a apple



helping my sister



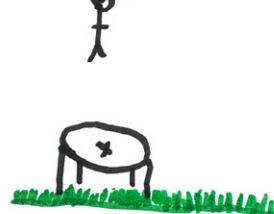
Climing a tree



Play time



Playing on a tramp



drawing food



WRITE • DRAW • COLOUR

Findings — Overview

Each engagement was an incredibly rich and fascinating insight into the lives of young people in Murihiku Southland in 2022. What follows is a summary and synthesis of what was heard.

The first section — Issues & Challenges — describes the situation as young people see it when it comes to their mental health and wellbeing in school environments. The second section synthesises the key opportunities into four themes for potential future focus.

The four themes are:

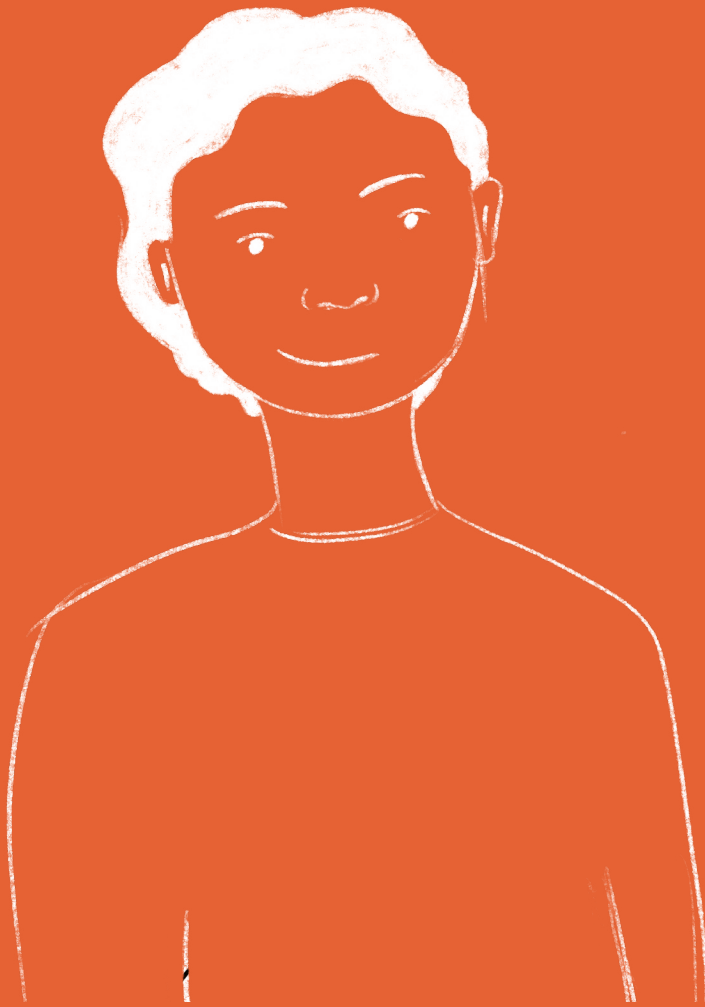
- **Trust & Connection:**
a diversity of people who care
- **Spaces & Places:**
safe, enlivening environments
- **Agency & Empowerment:**
enabling rangatahi to take the lead
- **Exposure & Education:**
ideas, opportunities and ongoing inspiration



— Primary school student

TEACHERS PAY
ATTENTION, THEY
RESPECT YOU, THEY
CARE ABOUT YOU.

- SECONDARY STUDENT



Issues & Challenges

In the focus groups, rangatahi shared openly about their experiences of mental health, the issues that occupy this research and setting the scene.

These included:

- Depression, anxiety and panic attacks
- Expectations and pressures
- Anxiety about the future
- Acceptance and bullying
- Social media and device use
- Vaping and addiction
- Grief and loss

There were also specific challenges relating to Murihiku Southland including:

- Transportation challenges
- Conservative values
- A small, highly connected population

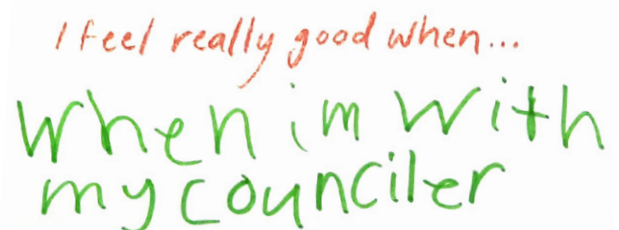
The primary focus was to hear students' suggestions for improvement. However, there were also many references to positive efforts to take care of mental health and wellbeing in schools. In particular, many students spoke with appreciation of the teachers and staff who support and care for them.

"I think we are quite fortunate. There's a lot of teachers who want to have a connection with you. I think it makes everybody else feel that they can share what they're going through. They know [teachers] are not gonna turn around and judge them."

— Secondary school student

"I like [our counselling space]. It's a safe place. There's a counsellor here and a health nurse. You just make a booking or sit outside in a quiet area".

— Secondary school student



I feel really good when...
when im with my counsiler

— Primary school student

Depression, anxiety and panic attacks

Many students talked about being affected by mental health issues, whether that was through their own personal experience or that of their friends and family. They spoke of the struggle to reach out for help and a lack of continued support once they did.

“Your emotions are so invalidated when you’re a teenager. People just think it’s like mood swings and stuff, which to be fair it might be sometimes. But most of the time, it’s something bigger — it’s lots of little things, and then they build up, and it’s one more little thing, and it all just comes tumbling down.”

— Secondary school student

“I would say [depression] is a base issue — it’s pretty normal. I think that might be something that adults maybe don’t get as much. Whereas for us it just feels normal.”

— Secondary school student

Expectations and pressures

Rangatahi often spoke of the pressure and expectations they experienced from many different directions including friends, family, school and community. Feeling pressure to achieve academically and within sporting environments was a common experience.

“I think the pressure of school, trying to do well in sports, and with the added pressure of work and homework, it all piles up.”

— Secondary school student

“It’s just that having to have a job and school and homework and then all your extra stuff and sports, it’s a little overwhelming.”

— Secondary school student

Anxiety about the future

Amongst older students particularly, there is significant anxiety about the coming transition into the post-school world — and the challenges that lie ahead.

“We need something that can, like, prepare us for things out of school-life. I know people who have left school and been uncomfortable, because at school we are sort of in situations that we’re comfortable with and there’s no actual situation that we’ve been pushed out of our comfort level. So some sort of transition?”

— Secondary school student

Acceptance and bullying

Many rangatahi brought up the issues of not feeling accepted and at ease in their schools. This ranged from feeling judged by other students through to bullying — and serious harassment, including the use of slurs. This was particularly apparent for gender diverse students and those from minority cultures.

“Bullying’s such a thing. They’re scared people are gonna judge them and they feel unwelcome almost and they feel as if they are not accepted for who they are, which isn’t fair.”

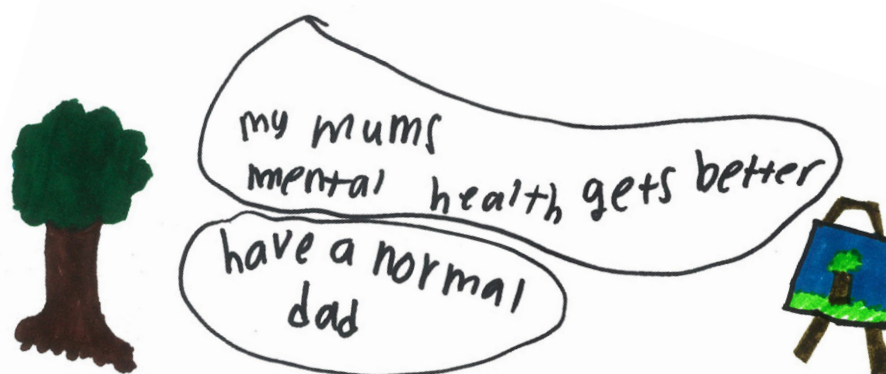
— Secondary school student

“I think that queer kids get bullied a lot. Especially when you’re trans, people are not nice about it at all. I will get shouted at, like, people say you can’t be wearing those pants you’re not a boy.”

— Secondary school student

“Sometimes when I tell people about my culture here they like, single me out.”

— Secondary school student



— Primary school student

Social media and device use

Students spoke of information overload and pressures experienced from interacting in online spaces. For this generation of youth, who only know the world with phones and the internet, there were worries for themselves and for others of being forced to grow up too quickly.

"Kids nowadays are exposed to a lot on the internet, they kind of grow up quicker."

— Secondary school student

"Social media is a big complex thing. Sometimes it goes to cyberbullying. Yeah it's bad. Like the ones that do it on the phone but would be way too scared to do it to your face."

— Secondary school student

Vaping and addiction

The rise of vaping is having a significant impact on school communities. It is creating challenges for many students around feelings of comfort and safety — particularly in bathroom environments. Many students want to see more support for those experiencing addiction.

"We need support for quitting. I've heard a bunch of people say that they don't actually want to vape anymore but they are addicted."

— Secondary school student

"I know a lot of kids that love sports and stuff, but they vape to escape from all the stress and pressure."

— Secondary school student

Grief and loss

Many rangatahi in Murihiku Southland have experienced grief and loss. Often these experiences — losing peers to car accidents, illness or suicide — are perceived by the rangatahi to be badly handled in school environments. Some rangatahi spoke about feeling let down by their schools and expressed disappointment in schools' responses.

"All of us really needed to talk [after the car accident]. We weren't talking to each other because we were 15. We couldn't really."

— Secondary school student

"I just got really angry, like profusely angry. I couldn't focus on anything. I needed to talk to people. I still feel like I haven't really. It needs professionals who know what they are doing. It's shit though cause even if you did want to go talk to someone the waitlists are so long — three, four, six months."

— Secondary school student



— Primary school student

Specific challenges in Murihiku Southland

Transportation

Rangatahi highlighted issues around the lack of public transport and the resulting dependence on cars. In a large rural region social connection can be compromised and access to activities that support wellbeing and/or professional support can be restricted.

“Because we’re so few and far between like everyone’s spread out, it’s hard sometimes to see your mates. Like you might just be stuck at home for two weeks in a row and so you don’t have that avenue to let things go. And some people can’t really deal with that well and lots of people will bottle up their emotions. They don’t really know how to communicate that to the people around them.”

— Secondary school student

Conservative values

A number of the students spoke about their experience of discrimination in Murihiku Southland. For LGBTQIA+ youth or those otherwise outside the mainstream, it can be a difficult place to be.

“There’s a very big man energy. Top dog.”

— Secondary school student

“If you don’t play rugby you’re a pussy.”

— Secondary school student

A small, highly connected population

For some students accessing support services, the highly connected population poses additional problems as anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

“We had someone come in in the last couple of weeks. I mean, I couldn’t talk to her because, well, I knew her and I didn’t really want to talk to her. So that’s the thing about small places, it can be connected to your family.”

— Secondary school student

“Well I wouldn’t be comfortable talking about anything of any substance with [the counsellor]. You wouldn’t want to overshare. It’s a small community. If you go talk to them everybody ends up knowing. I feel like we need an outside source like someone that we don’t see everyday and talks to everybody we know.”

— Secondary school student

PEOPLE BEGIN TO
FEEL ISOLATED
BECAUSE OF WHERE
WE ARE, LIKE, IT
CAN BE HARD AT
TIMES, ESPECIALLY
DURING SCHOOL HOLIDAYS.

- SECONDARY STUDENT



Four Themes

Conversations with rangatahi elicited a huge range of suggestions and ideas for ways to improve support for their mental health and wellbeing.

These fall into four themes:

- **Trust & Connection:**
A diversity of people who care
- **Spaces & Places:**
Safe, enlivening environments
- **Agency & Empowerment:**
Enabling rangatahi to take the lead
- **Exposure & Education:**
Ideas, opportunities and ongoing inspiration

These are outlined below in more detail — along with a selection of ideas and suggestions from the rangatahi themselves.

Many schools already use wellbeing frameworks such as *Te Whare Tapa Whā* and the *5 Ways to Wellbeing* with their students — so there was frequently a good level of understanding about the topic.



A.
Trust & Connection:
A diversity of people who care



B.
Spaces & Places:
Safe, enlivening environments



C.
Agency & Empowerment:
Enabling rangatahi to
take the lead



D.
Exposure & Education:
Ideas, opportunities and
ongoing inspiration



HAVING MORE THAN ONE
COUNSELLOR. ONE
PERSON IS NOT GOING
TO FIT EVERYBODY'S
PERSONALITY.

AND A YOUNGER
PERSON, THEY
CAN RELATE TO
OUR PROBLEMS.

- SECONDARY STUDENT



FOCUS AREA A

Trust & Connection: A diversity of people who care

What we heard

Young people are looking for more — more people to support them and more diversity in that support. They want to feel a sense of trust and understanding from the adults that surround them. They are looking for connection.

Support is required at both ends of the wellbeing spectrum. It can take a variety of forms — whānau groups, supportive teachers, other adults in the school, visiting mentors and role models — the main thing is people who take an interest. Shared life experience and genuine passion is important to young people. The work of counsellors is greatly appreciated, but a greater diversity of backgrounds and life experiences would be valued.

“I think we need more, I wouldn’t say counsellors, but people who genuinely care about students’ issues and it’s not just their job to kind of listen to students. Setting up this environment where every student feels like they can talk. So you don’t feel like you’re the odd one out in your school.”

— Secondary school student

“I guess that’s the whole thing, it’s getting over that ‘maybe I do have a problem, maybe I should go talk to someone’... That check up thing is a great way of normalising that conversation... Yeah I think that’s all some people need, just a little chat.”

— Secondary school student

“Increasing conversation on all sorts of levels. Talking to counsellors but also just being able to talk to each other. Having it sort of be everywhere a little bit.”

— Secondary school student

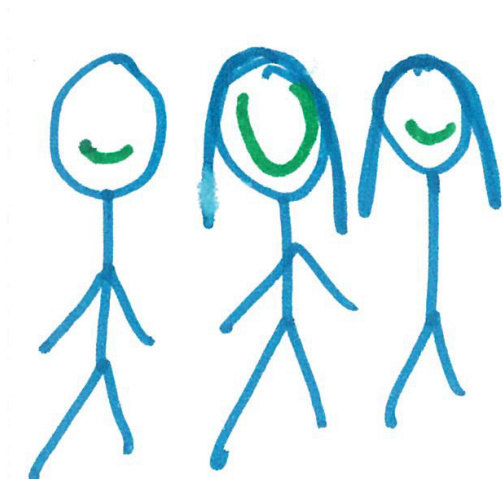
“Just someone who’s been through what you’re going through. Not just like some old lady that’s talking to you.”

— Secondary school student

What can be done

From the canteen to the classroom, foster cultures of connection and conversation in schools.

- Resourcing and enabling an even greater diversity of role models, mentors and other supportive adults in schools
- Enabling more choice in how and where young people access counselling provision, for example through subsidising transport provision
- Empowering kaimahi and students alike to cultivate skills and make time for genuine conversation
- Sharing best practice regionally on processes for vertical connection across schools
- Ensuring all young people have access to appropriate cultural and/or other identity support



— Primary school student

“So like a choice of people to talk to or different people that you can approach within different things.”

— Secondary school student

“I think you know, talking to someone even when you don’t have a problem, just having those conversations. And it should be for everyone.”

— Secondary school student

“There’s a few guidance places around but I think a lot of them are more expensive or are not for students. So if you had like a sort of a free pass to go, see a guidance counsellor of your choice and there were maybe three or four places in Invercargill like different centres that were comfortable with sofas.”

— Secondary school student

“I think there should be more people to talk to. ‘Cause there’s only a couple of people to talk to when you’re feeling down. Have them roaming around school or something, just to see them at lunch time and stuff. Maybe like older people, like adults.”

— Secondary school student

“More role models — I think having both genders is important. It’s less drama with a guy — and it’s good for guys, lots of the [difficult] Year 10s are guys.”

— Secondary school student

"I think there should be more groups where people can just go and talk. Just about anything. And then there will be people there to support them if there aren't other people to do that."

— Primary school student

"It's like a mate to mate interaction, not just someone doing their job."

— Secondary school student

"Yeah, like a queer guidance counsellor would be amazing."

— Secondary school student

"Someone like a Filipino that's already been in New Zealand... Someone who's walked a similar path and maybe has the same experience."

— Secondary school student



— Primary school student

IF YOU ASKED US WHAT
COULD BE DONE TO
GIVE PEOPLE OUR AGE
SOMEWHERE TO HANGOUT,
I DOUBT WE COULD EVEN TELL
YOU. WE DON'T KNOW WHAT
WE WANT. WE JUST KNOW
WE WANT SOME PLACE
FOR US.

- SECONDARY STUDENT



FOCUS AREA B

Spaces & Places:

Safe, enlivening environments

What we heard

Spaces and places are critical to wellbeing. Young people want more places they can call their own — places to nourish themselves, pursue their interests and support each other.

Many young people expressed difficulty in finding places where they felt safe, welcome and able to be themselves. This included spaces to be still and quiet, and places where it's OK to let anger and energy out. School environments can add to stress and discomfort to a young person's life — well-imagined, well-resourced and well-cared for facilities have the potential to make a huge difference to collective wellbeing.

"A place where you can just hang."

— Primary school student

"I feel really good when... I can have my time alone either painting or doing art and reading in a quiet place."

— Primary school student

"I have one friend that was going through a rough time. Yeah. I always took him to the music room and we just played instruments, because he loves the drums. The music teacher understood that something wasn't right."

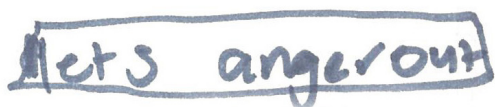
— Secondary school student

"Make it easier to access and more enjoyable and comfortable for us. Instead of going to talk to an old person in a room. Just being able to connect with them better."

— Secondary school student

What can be done

- Re-imagine schools as wellbeing resource hubs — and prioritise accordingly. What changes or upgrades would most support improvements in student wellbeing?
- Resource variety — young people are diverse, and so are their needs. For some, more quiet spaces are important. For others, places they can let their anger out. Specific areas for certain age groups or minority groups in the school community should also be a priority. Even the youngest children appreciate a choice of places to go.
- Support initiatives and places for young people across the city and region — and keep developing new ones, in concert with those who will use them.
- The traditional counselling environment doesn't work for everyone. A greater diversity of places and spaces that counselling can happen in would support greater access.



Let's anger out

— Primary school student

Quiet spaces

"I would love to have another space, like a little cushion room or something. Like the room at the new mall, there's like a family sitting room inside the bathroom."

— Secondary school student

"A calm down class. Somewhere you can just do your own thing in your own time so you can just do what makes you happy."

— Secondary school student

"A room or something like a place to be comfy and just talk to someone about it."

— Primary school student

"We usually walk to the back of the field to talk and climb trees to make us feel better."

— Primary school student

"A room that is dedicated to self care. If someone is having a panic attack they don't have to go to the bathroom or guidance. They could go to this comfy room with pillows and blankets."

— Secondary school student

Spaces to let go

"I go up to the wool shed and kick and punch the wool."

— Primary school student

"Places where you can cool off. Somewhere with a punching bag."

— Primary school student

"Places to let your anger out."

— Primary school student

a sensory room / quiet room

— Primary school student

Improved facilities

"I want some nets on the basketball hoops. To be fair I think that would make a lot of people pretty happy. Fix all the doors on the toilets. Or maybe some better ones. And toilet paper."

— Secondary school student

"I reckon if you're not in the rugby team you kind of get seen as a pussy. I feel like 90% of the funding for the school is rugby. They are always getting new jerseys, new gear, everything. But nothing else for any other sport."

— Secondary school student

"I'd like to have more access to the gym and stuff like that. And more free time, so we have time to just chill."

— Secondary school student

"Make swings. We need swings, there's no swings."

— Primary school student

"Improving things in the playground — like adding swings and a slide etc."

— Primary school student

Designated areas

"I think it would be good if we had a few central common rooms for year 7 and 8s. So we don't have to, like, just stay in our classrooms when it's raining or something. When we just want to socialise but we don't want to have to deal with the seniors."

— Secondary school student

Diverse counselling environments

"Yeah, probably outside of school. It just seems like a bit much for me having to do all that and then go straight back to class."

— Secondary school student

"I've actually done that with someone before. When I was getting frustrated she, like, took me up to the court and we played some basketball. She took me there in the car. You can communicate way better when you're doing something that's not just talking."

— Secondary school student

"I think for the kids who do feel stressed, they should have a place to go when they feel like that. It could be a room or something... a place where they could all talk and they had people who could comfort them because they have people who have gone through the same things and they understand."

— Primary school student

"Even like a mentor where you go for a drive. You could do different stuff. Like one you might do a classroom session, one you might go for a drive and you just cruise round and talk or like you go for lunch and you just eat and talk. You're not just going to this room every time and sitting there talking. When you go to a counsellor you should wanna go there, you shouldn't feel like 'oh I gotta go to the counsellor', you should want to go and want to talk to them cause they actually wanna help you as much as they can. Yeah I reckon going for a drive or lunch or even just going to a little park and having some crackers and cheese."

— Secondary school student



— Primary school student

Safe, welcoming, local places

“There’s just not a lot of safe places for any of us to hang out [in Invercargill].”

— Secondary school student

“I guess I agree it’s more of a community issue rather than a school specific issue. I would say community spaces where people can go to learn about issues faced by rainbow rangatahi.”

— Secondary school student

“Maybe opening up youth spaces, there’s not a lot. I feel like, if there was a space where young people could go, even just like a distraction or just a place where you can go and have fun. For the older kids, yes you can hang out with your mates, but I feel like even just interacting with other kids, like people that you don’t normally hang out with. It might not even be a place. It might be something like a sports competition. Like a touch rugby competition. We don’t really have many social activities here. And with COVID obviously it’s mucked up some things.”

— Secondary school student

“[There] is a place for years 7 to 13 students, who can go hang out, meet new people and just have fun. There’s a trampoline, a pool table, a basketball hoop, racing games, chalkboard and a little workout place. It’s like a sort of community centre, but just for young people... On your first visit there is, like, free food. I don’t really like a lot of things about it, but I like how it’s a place you can go where it’s really quiet and you can just think.”

— Secondary school student

“Activities to do. There’s not really a lot to do. A bit more to do in town would keep people out of trouble. An arcade. A local skidpad would go pretty hard. Just somewhere where you can just take your car and, like, mess around. Where it’s not a problem to the public. If people had somewhere like that they could go I reckon there would actually be way less stress going on in town.”

— Secondary school student

“There’s nothing for teenagers. There’s just nothing there. There’s just nothing there for us to do and then it ends up we get bored and we do stupid things. And then we look bad and we get in trouble.”

— Secondary school student

“There was a group of really silly year 12 boys and they used to do a bunch of stupid stuff, like skids and stuff. And I feel like they need somewhere where they can go, where they won’t get themselves in trouble. Because they have nowhere else to go, they’ve got nothing else to do. And they’ve got no warm space or anything like that. Especially in winter it’s fucking cold down here. We are a cold town.”

— Secondary school student

*ilike to hang in
the trees*

— Primary school student

I feel really good when...

- I can have an enjoyable time like spending time with family & friends.
- Being able to have my time alone either paint or doing art and reading in a quite place.
- Playing guitar ~~and~~ learning how to strum & play chords.
- Improving things in the playground like adding swings, slide, etc...
- Improving the library / school structure.
- When I or one of my friends are feeling down we usually walk to the back of the field to talk and climb trees to make us feel better.
- The ~~Juniours~~ ^{Juniours} should have a little pool to play with toys & stuff.
- A room or something like a place to be comfy and just talk to someone about it.
- If I could I would do more educational field trips and place they could go.

WRITE • DRAW • COLOUR.

LET THE SCHOOLS BE MORE TOGETHER. LET'S WORK ON GETTING RID OF THE JUDGEMENT AND STEREOTYPES. THATS STUFF FROM THE PAST. WE ARE READY TO CHANGE.

— SECONDARY STUDENT



FOCUS AREA C

Agency & Empowerment: Enabling rangatahi to take the lead

What we heard

Being heard, seen and understood is a vital component of wellbeing. Young people have ideas on how to make things better, and want to be involved.

Social connections and a sense of belonging are vital components of good mental health. Across the board, peer support is highly valued by young people. They want more time and support to do this well, and they want to learn from each other too. More opportunities for cultural connection are also important, especially for Māori/Pasific and queer rangatahi, as well as newer Southland communities such as those of Colombian, Indian and Filipino heritage.

"Most of my boys and all that kind of stuff, they will always keep an eye out for each other. And we always meet up in the weekends and, you know, we aren't really scared to tell each other anything, we always share. It sort of stays in between the boys' group."

— Secondary school student

"Cultural appreciation. Some cultures here have their group, but a lot of the other kids feel like they don't have one."

— Secondary school student

"I think teachers forget about cultures outside of European New Zealanders and Māori."

— Secondary school student

"They are trying to create more of a bond between the students. But they can't just tell us what to do, we need to do it. They should mix the classes up and age groups."

— Secondary school student

"[Whānau groups] become more of a friendship and more of like a younger sibling, like, 'oh actually, I want to check up on that person'. It's not like, 'I've got three kids to check up on today'."

— Secondary school student

"I feel really good when... I make someone else happy."

— Primary school student

"I feel really good when... I talk to my friends about some of my problems."

— Primary school student



— Primary school student

What can be done

Enable environments that foster young people's need for belonging and self-expression and foster greater inter-school and regional connection to strengthen the fabric of youth wellbeing and enable ongoing learning. Develop in-school infrastructure that empowers students to respond to emerging needs in their own ways.

- Awhi existing youth-led initiatives with seed funding to pilot or develop ideas
- Prioritise learning opportunities for both students and teachers to learn more about mental health together, and foster a culture of better connection
- Create opportunities for young people from across the region to connect with each other more and learn about what works in other schools

"More connections with other schools. We only mix with other schools around sports."

— Secondary school student

"I feel like one thing we've talked about this year a lot, is the fact that we don't have a lot of interchange with other schools. Being rural we feel quite isolated being out here."

— Secondary school student

"The councillor got me a box of things to squish to relieve stress, like a bag of rocks and a balloon full of shaving cream... Maybe they need to get young people to design those packs...? I guess we'd need funding. And we'd need a space, we could do it with the student council."

— Secondary school student

"Yeah, I think supporting your friends is one of the best ways to help. You just have someone to talk to and someone to share things with. Eventually it just gets better when you know you've got a friend to talk to. Sometimes with strangers it's like you might not know how they are gonna react to it. They don't know how you think and all that."

— Secondary school student

asking people if they want
to play with me when they
are lonely

— Primary school student

I feel really good when...

when I do athletics

Playing Rugby

when I'm eating KFC

Playing with my friends

Making new friends

A massage

Playing instruments

Swimming

Camping

I'm with my family

Maths

Polyfest

Running

travelling

Praying to God

going to parks

Playing sports

going to school

Sleeping

Playing games

Singing

Playing with our buddies

~~watching~~

lunch time

Parades

learning

Reading the bible

Watching TV or phone

WRITE • DRAW • COLOUR



MORE THINGS TO
DO, A DAY OUT,
OPPORTUNITIES!

- SECONDARY STUDENT

SOME OPPORTUNITIES
TO GO OUT AND SEE
WHAT WE WANT TO
DO WHEN WE ARE
OLDER.

- SECONDARY STUDENT



ITS AN OLD
PEOPLE'S TOWN.
WE NEED MORE
OPTIONS!

- SECONDARY STUDENT

FOCUS AREA D

Exposure & Education:

Ideas, opportunities and ongoing inspiration

What we heard

Continual exposure to different people, perspectives, experiences and resources is valuable to young people. They want to see more, experience more, and be able to do more. It helps them feel hopeful.

In a relatively isolated region, the value of access to a wide range of people, activities and opportunities cannot be under-estimated. Whilst external speakers and programmes in schools are commonplace and largely appreciated, there is huge potential to develop such offerings. Rangatahi are hungry for experiences that educate, energise and inspire them.



— Primary school student

"Ways to deal with situations — like resources. Having a day on a Friday with people just that come in and present to us. They might have ten different situations on the TV screen and they go through them and say how to deal with them."

— Secondary school student

"Just camping or just doing stuff. Yeah. You are away from school with all your mates. You're away from your phones and technology, so you can just do activities."

— Secondary school student

"We had a rainbow day which was like outside of school, but with other schools. We went to the YMCA. We all did a bunch of activities. Like, archery, a silent disco."

— Secondary school student

"I'd like more after school groups. I'd like to see more groups. And a gym and computers and holiday programmes."

— Secondary school student

"Some of our students have got this thing... It's like a workout programme for students who are not doing so great outside of school, in school and are just having a bit of a hard time and it just kind of helps them to relieve some of that stress. Mainly working out, lifting weights. Sometimes we'll go into the staffroom to get a coffee or something after the workout... and just have a talk about how our week's been."

— Secondary school student



— Primary school student

What can be done

Prioritise a diverse range of activities and opportunities for rangatahi — both in and out of school — and ensure equitable access.

- Review external programmes alongside young people, particularly with regard to the appropriate age for delivery
- Support equitable access for all rangatahi to existing activities and events in the city and across the region
- Enable multiple opportunities for students of all ages to encounter ideas for their future working lives
- Pilot a programme of trialling different school based activities with young people — engage them as co-producers and co-organisers

"I'd like a variety of things — gaming, abseiling. Anything that people want to have access to as long as it's legal."

— Secondary school student

"Things to do that are optional e.g. boxing classes... they [the difficult boys] would do that, they love the gym but it's always locked."

— Secondary school student

"I feel really good when...we go to camp!"

— Primary school student

It would be really good if there was ~~foot~~ futsal at school.

— Primary school student

We also need better books in the library, I'll bring my own books to school now.

— Primary school student

When I help people



— Primary school student

Concluding Thoughts

Mental health and wellbeing is an incredibly important issue for the rangatahi of Murihiku Southland. Like many young people across the motu they are growing into a world full of challenge and anxiety and they are seeking ways to feel better and to face these challenges head on. Murihiku Southland is a unique area with some unique challenges, but it is also a region full of promise and possibility.

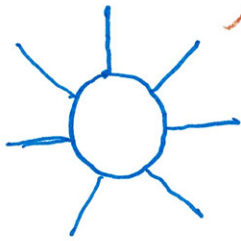
We heard from young people who care for the region they live in, and care for each other. They are seeking more connected systems of support, more encouragement and inspiration — and places where they can feel safe, and be themselves. Most of all, they want to be involved.

Mental health and wellbeing is not a simple problem that can be ‘solved’ by one action or a single programme. But there is much that can be done to nourish and enrich what’s working — and many opportunities to nurture and support emerging ideas voiced by rangatahi.

The young people of Murihiku Southland are thoughtful and wise.

Let them lead the way.

I feel really good when... ^{when I go to beach.}



sleeping

When I'm with my friends

When the weather's nice.

Spelling The tyre swings back.

laughing

When we go on family trips.

When people share with me.

Friends to talk to.

cool playground things

Talking to my mum, Dad and Teacher.

Good Food

When I'm with my pets-

My Teacher's fun talks.

Comforting my friends



~~Fidgeting~~ Fidgeting.



WRITE • DRAW • COLOUR.

