

Takatāpui voices on what is needed for bright futures: a Youth19 Brief

Rangatahi takatāpui refers to Māori young people who are takatāpui, LGBTQIA+, queer, rainbow, nonbinary or questioning their gender identity (see page 2).

Youth19 is the latest in the Youth2000 survey series. These are large scale, high quality, youth health and wellbeing surveys which have involved over 36,000 Aotearoa New Zealand secondary school students and other teenagers since 2001.¹⁻³ Youth19 included open text questions; inviting young people to express their views on key issues. These questions were clearly marked as optional, and over 2,700 Year 9-13 students responded.

There were 150 rangatahi takatāpui in the Youth19 survey (12.6% of all Māori students). In this brief, we report their responses to open ended questions:

- *If you could change one thing to make your home or family life better, what would it be?*
- *If you could change one thing about your school/course to make it better, what would it be?*
- *What is one thing that would make things better for young people you know who have a hard time or who feel bad?*
- *What do you think should be changed to support young people in New Zealand better?*

Summary

Rangatahi takatāpui have powerful and important insights about what would support them better:

At home, they want more quality time with families as well as connection with whānau, whenua and whakapapa. They want safe and loving homes and for their families to have sufficient money especially for housing.

At school, they want learning to be relevant and engaging and teachers to care and teach well. They are asking for safe and inclusive environments where they have opportunities for expression and advancement in their takatāpui and Māori identities. They want uniforms removed or updated and poverty addressed.

In terms of what would make things better for young people who have a hard time or feel bad; they tell us that all young people need friends, family and other adults who listen, understand and encourage them.

Poverty, discrimination, school uniform rules and lack of safety or inclusion were barriers to them developing and thriving as rangatahi takatāpui.

Rangatahi takatāpui want change. They want us to listen and to support them. They need safe, fair opportunities and removal of financial barriers. Their words emphasise the importance of inclusion for rangatahi takatāpui and provide specific pathways for change.



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YOUTH19
A Youth2000 survey

Ka mua, ka muri. Introduction



Ko Taranaki tōku maunga
Ko Waingongoro tōku awa
Ko Ngāti Ruanui, Ngāruahine, me Whakatōhea tōku iwi
Nō Manaia ahau
Ko eku lele mai mei Fatai, Lakepa, Tongatapu mo Hihifo, Niuatoputapu
Oku ou nofo, ako, mo ngoue i Welingatoni
He takatāpui ahau
Ko hoku hingoa ko Tatyana King-Finau

Introduction from co-author Tatyana King-Finau

Ka mua, ka muri. Walking backwards into the future.

In the context of Aotearoa, Indigenous queer identities have always existed. Prior to colonisation, tangata whenua not only accepted but embraced diverse genders and sexualities as is evidenced in whakairo, waiata, karakia, and pūrākau that have been passed down. Te kupu (the word), 'takatāpui' was reclaimed by takatāpui academics, Ngahua Te Awekotoku and Lee Smith, who gifted the kupu back to Māori. It was reclaimed as including all diverse gender identities and sexualities. Over time, the definitions of takatāpui have evolved as have the ways people choose to use the term for themselves, however, in essence:

"Takatāpui is an umbrella term that embraces all Māori with diverse gender identities, sexualities and sex characteristics including whakawāhine, tangata ira tāne, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer. Takatāpui identity is related to whakapapa, mana and inclusion. It emphasises Māori cultural and spiritual identity as equal to - or more important than - gender identity, sexuality or having diverse sex characteristics. Being takatāpui offers membership of a culturally-based national movement that honours our ancestors, respects our elders, works closely with our peers and looks after our young people"
(Kerekere 2015)⁴

In this brief, we use the term **takatāpui** for Māori participants who reported that they are trans, non-binary or are unsure about their gender, and/or that they are attracted to the 'same sex' or 'both sexes' in Youth19. Like any research, there are limitations to this work. Responses to the questions were generally brief. Sex characteristics and intersex identities were not asked about within the survey and some of those included may use other or additional terms to describe themselves. However, at the same time, this is a large sample of young takatāpui Māori in a representative survey.

We created this brief to share the words, the taonga, that have been provided by takatāpui rangatahi in the survey. We have endeavoured to represent their voices fairly, using quality research processes, with an emphasis on being strengths-based. This information can support whānau, schools, and communities to develop strategies for supporting rangatahi takatāpui. We aim to acknowledge the unique challenges faced by takatāpui and to empower rangatahi takatāpui and those around them. By emphasising the strengths and needs of rangatahi takatāpui, families, schools and communities can create environments that are welcoming and supportive, allowing young people to thrive and be themselves.

LAF

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Methods and Participants

More about Youth19

The Youth19 Rangatahi Smart Survey ('Youth19') was led by Terryann Clark and Terry Fleming with researchers from the University of Auckland, University of Otago, AUT, and Victoria University of Wellington. Ethics approval was obtained from the University of Auckland Human Subjects Ethics Committee. The survey was carried out in the Auckland, Northland, and Waikato education regions in 2019. This area includes 46% of New Zealand secondary school students.^{3,5} Schools were randomly selected and students were randomly selected from the rolls.^{3,5} A total of 7,721 year 9-13 students at Kura Kaupapa Māori and other schools took part. In addition, 92 alternative education students, and 78 young people not in education, training, or employment took part.^{6,7} Young people completed the survey on handheld internet tablets in English or Te Reo Māori with optional voiceover. The survey was anonymous and covered many areas of wellbeing. All participants were offered help options and could have these emailed or texted to them as part of the survey. You can see more about the survey as well as other reports and papers for Māori, Rainbow and other groups on our website www.youth19.ac.nz (e.g., see references 1 and 8-12).

Methods for this analysis

For this brief, we analysed responses from rangatahi takatāpui school and kura students to the following questions in Youth19:

If you could change one thing to make your home or family life better, what would it be?

If you could change one thing about your school/course to make it better, what would it be?

What is one thing that would make things better for young people you know who have a hard time or who feel bad?

What do you think should be changed to support young people in New Zealand better?

These were open text questions where participants could type in responses in their own words or skip to the next question. We used a general inductive approach¹³ to analyse responses. Initial themes were identified and then reviewed with rangatahi takatāpui recruited via personal networks. The concepts were also reviewed with takatāpui researchers and Youth19 researchers. Example quotes for each theme were identified and, as the brief was developed, it was further reviewed to ensure it captured key issues and solutions.

Findings are reported with brief commentary from the authors and then quotes from rangatahi takatāpui participants. All quotes come from rangatahi takatāpui school and kura students in the survey, with their age shown in brackets.

Participants

There were a total of 150 rangatahi takatāpui in this analysis (12.6% of all Māori students), they included 136 rangatahi who were 'same' or 'both' sex attracted and 28 who were trans or unsure about their gender identity (students could be trans or gender-unsure and same/both sex attracted). Of these participants, 105 were girl/woman/wahine, 42 boy/man/tane and 3 identified in another way; 29 were 13 years old or under, 27 were aged 14; 34 were aged 15, 26 were aged 16, and 34 were aged 17 or older.

There is no single indicator of how many rainbow (takatāpui, LGBTQIA+, queer or rainbow) students there are in Aotearoa. However, local and international data indicate that at least 10% of secondary school students are in this group.^{10, 14, 15}

Home and Family

In this section we summarise rangatahi takatāpui responses to the survey question:

'If you could change one thing to make your home or family life better, what would it be?'

89 rangatahi takatāpui responded to this question. Their responses were diverse, with many young people reporting that **nothing needed to change**, that they were happy with how things were, or that they were grateful for the support and positive relationships at home.

Others highlighted that they wanted **more quality time** with their family/whānau. This was the most common type of response across all ages. While it can be easy to assume teenagers want less time with families, the finding that teenagers want *more* time and connection with families is common in Youth19 work and other studies with young people. Youth19 co-leader Professor Terryann Clark, has carried out in-depth analyses of what supports wellbeing among rangatahi Māori. That work also highlights the importance of connection to whānau and includes insights about how families and communities can support connection and whanaungatanga (see <https://www.youth19.ac.nz/rangatahi-maori> and references 11 and 12).

In a linked theme, some rangatahi takatāpui highlighted the importance of **connection with whānau, whakapapa and whenua**.

There were also rangatahi takatāpui who expressed needs for changes that young people shouldn't have to ask for: **safe and loving homes** and or **addressing poverty and housing**.

Example quotes for each of these areas are given below, with the young person's age shown after each quote.

I wouldn't change anything

A substantial proportion of rangatahi takatāpui said they would change nothing at all. Some highlighted gratefulness for their family.

"Tbh [To be honest], I wouldn't change anything"
(13 years or under)

"Nothing I love my family & what they do for me"
(13 years or under)

"Nothing, I praise my grandparents and their every move they have done for me and my family"
(15-year-old)

"Kao, Engari kaore i te wa nei"
(16-year-old)

"Nothing. My family is amazing"
(17 or over)

Quality time with whānau

Many wanted more quality time with family, to connect, communicate and have fun with whānau. Sometimes this was explicitly because of parents' work.

"Maybe spending more time with them"
(13 years or under)

"To be able to go and have fun with all my family"
(14-year-old)

"To have dinner with all of my family every Friday"
(14-year-old)

"Actually have quality time with parents"
(16-year-old)

"I would lower my father's work hours so my family could spend more time together"
(17 or over)

Home and Family continued

Connection with whānau, whakapapa & whenua

Some rangatahi also expressed a desire for more connection with whānau, whakapapa, whenua.

"To move back up North to our home"
(15-year-old)

"Maybe have my dad in my family and get to know him" (13 years or under)

"To live with my siblings"
(14-year-old)

Safe, loving homes

Rangatahi takatāpui wanted safe, harmonious and loving homes. A substantial minority commented on wanting to live with or without specific people. For example:

"Give dad full custody" (17 years or over)

"Live with my brother" (14-year-old)

Some commented on needs to deal with parental or family conflict, parental stress, mental health or substance use issues.

"Less conflict between each other"
(16-year-old)

"For my mum to seek professional help... so I'm not the punching bag anymore"
(17 or over)

Others emphasised hopes or needs for loving support, communication or acceptance.

"To be there for me and others more. To not always be on our phones..." (14-year-old)

"Actually feel like my family loves me"
(14-year-old)

"Communication with my family and being comfortable around them"
(16-year old)

Address poverty and housing

Financial hardship and material deprivation was a significant issue for many rangatahi takatāpui. This sometimes contributed towards increased complexity in the home or whānau environment.

Having enough space at home, so that all the family could be together was also important.

"I would make the bills and rent cheaper"
(14-year-old)

"More money to help pay my parents debts"
(15-year-old)

"More money so my parents would stop fighting"
(16-year-old)

"Probably to live in a bigger house and have the family all together"
(14-year-old)

"For my family to all be in the same place, bigger house"
(15-year-old)

School

School

We asked:

'If you could change one thing about your school/course to make it better, what would it be?'

84 rangatahi takatāpui responded to this question. Many highlighted wishes to **'update school'**, with a wider range of options, more interesting or more 'real world' type learning or sometimes other factors such as adjusting school timings. Some specifically highlighted the critical importance of **inclusion and support of rangatahi takatāpui** at school and of opportunities for **cultural advancement**.

There were also many comments regarding the need for **safety**, not feeling scared or addressing bullying in school, as well as the importance of quality relationships including needing **teachers who care, listen and respect you**.

Finally, rangatahi takatāpui commented on the needs to remove or update **uniforms**, including removing requirements to wear skirts, and to **address poverty** so that all rangatahi takatāpui could participate fully, safely and comfortably in schools.

Their responses are outlined under each of these areas.

Update school

Many rangatahi takatāpui highlighted the need for updates to school subjects, a better fit by teaching contemporary 'real world' options, and improved pedagogy. Some commented on the need for less homework or less pressure.

"Teach us stuff actually about the real world and let students do hands on work instead of sitting in a classroom all day and just reading and writing. I believe our community would have a better benefit from this "
(16-year-old)

"Provide a Drivers Ed or First Aid Course"
(16-year-old)

"Teach things that we need further on in life."
(16-year-old)

"Kia harikoa ake nga hotaka. Maha ake nga hotaka hakinakina parekareka."
(13 years or under)

"Make it less boring and more intriguing"
(14-year-old)

"Making classes room more exciting for people like me who want to go to school every day and enjoy what I'm working on"
(16-year-old)

"Less stress. More teaching and less focus on achieving high grades. Giving me more opportunities in interactive education."
(16-year-old)

School continued

Inclusion and support of takatāpui students at school

Takatāpui students highlighted the needs for schools and teachers to accept and support takatāpui and other rainbow students and actively build supportive school environments.

"I want our school to accept more openly that sexuality is a big part of maturing into adulthood! I wish our school could openly establish in class times that being gender diverse in a community filled with different people and opinions is okay because so many students are discriminated from other students and or teachers"
(17 years or over)

"Having Rainbow Youth come in and have discussions with students"
(17 years or over)

"LGBT groups or more support around that area. Because I know there are a lot of gay people at my school who will probably marry a girl and have babies because they never got given the confidence to come out"
(16-year-old)

Safety at school

Many participants spoke about stopping bullying or ensuring school was safe for all. Some discussed the need for teacher support or mental health help, while others highlighted opportunities for supporting all to develop friendships and positive relationships.

"Stop the bullying"
(13 years or under)

"Teachers doing more about students who are obviously uncomfortable and scared in their classroom"
(17 years or over)

"Better support for students struggling with bullying or mental health"
(15-year-old)

"For everyone to have a friend"
(15-year-old)

Opportunities for cultural expression and advancement

Likewise, rangatahi takatāpui highlighted needs for cultural inclusion, expression and opportunities.

"Support Māori and ensure there are enough opportunities."
(17 years or over)

"That we are able to represent our culture through cultural tattoos or taonga"
(14-year-old)

"All schools in NZ should learn Te Reo Māori and the history of our tupuna and the colonists"
(15-year-old)

"Making Kapa Haka not optional."
(16-year-old)

"To make te reo Māori compulsory."
(16-year-old)

School continued

Teachers who care, listen, and respect you

Rangatahi takatāpui highlighted the need to ensure teachers care, listen and respect them.

Some commented on the needs for fairness and quality teaching.

Several commented that teachers should stop discriminating, having favourites or behaving inappropriately.

"Teachers that respect and understand what we say, think and do"
(13 years or under)

"Teachers who don't swear at the students or talk badly about a religion or race"
(14-year-old)

"Teachers not having favourites"
(15-year-old)

"The teachers ...to care for us and what we are doing and actually teach us".
(15-year-old)

"Having teachers who are respectful and actually know how to teach."
(17 or over)

"Encourage and allow more teacher and student involvement. This is for each party to be able to build a bond with each other and connect with each other more."
(17 or over)

Uniforms

Several discussed the need to update or remove uniform requirements, including not having gender based uniform rules.

"I would like to change girls uniform because its cold and also when girls have to wear skirts and boys don't, I don't find that fair at all"
(13 years or under)

"No uniform."
(13 years or under)

*"Warmer winder uniform.
Not skirts"*
(15-year-old)

Address poverty

Some students highlighted the need for basics, including food and clothing.

"Free food for the kids that don't have food."
(15-year-old)

"Some shoes I guess"
(17 or over)

Making things better for those who have a hard time

We asked:

'What is one thing that would make things better for young people you know who have a hard time or who feel bad?'

50 rangatahi takatāpui responded to this question. They emphasised the importance for **support and connection**, with many commenting on the importance of people to talk to and not feeling alone. Some emphasised the kinds of support that are helpful, particularly **non-judgemental understanding**, and people who can **offer encouragement**. Fewer commented on the need for professional services or counsellors, rather most highlighted the importance of family, close friends, and understanding adults.

This pattern was similar to our analyses of responses to open text questions from other students who took part in Youth19.¹⁶⁻¹⁸ In these analysis too, young people focused on family, peers and adults in their communities as key.

Support and Connection

"Someone to talk to, ...family to back them up and support them"
(13 years or under)

"I just want them to know that they are not alone"
(15-year-old)

"Feeling love and support"
(16-year-old)

"Just give them time and be there when they need"
(17 years or over)

"Having support networks such as close friends who care and are genuine."
(17 years or over)

Non-judgmental understanding

"A person who truly understands what they're going through"
(14-year-old)

"Getting someone who will listen to them, though they may worry or feel embarrassed that the person they find or trust may judge them..."
(14-year-old)

"To make them feel wanted..., instead of judging them on what they have done."
(16-year-old)

"Not get yelled at. Not get blamed. Not get ashamed"
(15-year-old)

Offer positive encouragement

"Encouraging them. Talking about relatable experiences." (16-year-old)

"Reassuring them and pointing out their talents and qualities." (17 years or over)

"Just ask them if they're ok and stay by their side for as long as you feel you need to"
(13 years or under)

What should be changed to support young people in Aotearoa NZ?

At the end of the survey, we asked,

'What do you think should be changed to support young people in New Zealand better?'

45 rangatahi takatāpui responded to this question. The most common responses were:

- **Listen to us**, with many rangatahi takatāpui commenting on the need to let young people speak, to listen to what young people say, or to allow young people to vote and to take into consideration what they want.
- **Support us**, including ensuring there is mental health support, support in school and support with hard times
- **Fairer, cheaper education** and systems.

Listen to us

"Listening and taking into consideration what we want"
(17 years or over)

"Not looking down on them just cause they are kids" (14-year-old)

"By letting young people speak"
(16-year-old)

"Allow voting for 16 year olds"
(14-year-old)

"Ask them what they want to do and how you can help them and support them"
(15-year-old)

"To understand where we are coming from"
(15-year-old)

"Giving more opportunities and not putting as much stigma onto our generation than what older people are doing."
(17 years or over)

Support us

"More helplines, more doctors, more things to do"
(13 years or under)

"Support young people through their hard times"
(14-year-old)

"Get more help for young people like myself"
(14-year-old)

"More support for them in schools, work, etc"
(15-year-old)

"More support around family abuse"
(17 years or over)

Fairer, cheaper education

"Money to go to school"
(16-year-old)

"A fairer educational system and cheaper uni tuition"
(15-year-old)

"Cheaper education and healthcare"
(13 years or under)

Implications and support

What do these findings mean?

Rangatahi takatāpui have identified changes that could be made to support young people better at home, in schools and in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Some of their comments highlight strengths and positives. It is heartening to see how many rangatahi takatāpui would change nothing at all at home and love it as it is.

However, at the same time, poverty, discrimination and school uniforms are barriers to developing and thriving for rangatahi takatāpui. Many are asking for basic human rights that no young people should have to ask for: safety, inclusion, fairness.

We urge policy makers, educators and communities to read these young people's voices and to ensure that:

- Rangatahi takatāpui are supported to connect with whānau, whenua and whakapapa.
- All young people are safe, supported and loved at home.
- Poverty and housing insecurity are urgently addressed.
- Rangatahi takatāpui have safe, inclusive, quality school environments where they are free from discrimination and can develop and thrive as takatāpui and as Māori.
- Poverty and school uniforms are not barriers to participation in education.
- All young people have access to friends, family and others who can offer connection, support and understanding in hard times.
- That education and other systems are inclusive and fair.

These changes require families, educators, healthcare providers, policymakers, and all of us to work towards better futures for rangatahi takatāpui and for all young people.

Support agencies and resources

There are many community agencies offering information, resources or support. For example:

- Takatāpui NZ: online resources for takatāpui and whānau: <https://takatapui.nz>
- InsideOUT: Information, resources, training and support to schools, workplaces, government agencies, community groups, whānau and individuals: <http://insideout.org.nz/>
- RainbowYOUTH: Supporting rainbow young people and their whānau: <https://ry.org.nz/>
- OUTLineNZ 0800 OUTLINE (6885463): Free phone counselling and support for LGBTIQ+ people <http://www.outline.org.nz>
- Gender Minorities Aotearoa: Information, advocacy, and wrap around support for transgender people of all ages, ethnicities, and backgrounds: <https://genderminorities.com/>
- Be There Aotearoa: Resources and support information for whānau of trans and gender-questioning tamariki and rangatahi: <https://www.be-there.nz/>
- Te Ngākau Kahukura: Professional development for working with young rainbow people: <https://www.tengakaukahukura.nz/>
- *Takatāpui: Part of the Whānau*. Kerekere E. Auckland: Tiwhanawhana Trust and Mental Health Foundation, 2015: <https://takatapui.nz/takatapui-part-of-the-whanau#part-of-the-whanau>
- *Making Schools Safer for Trans, Gender Diverse and Intersex Youth: A practical resource for schools and whānau on supporting trans, gender diverse, and intersex students*. InsideOUT, endorsed by the Ministry of Education, 2021: <http://insideout.org.nz/resources/>
- Supporting LGBTIQ+ Students: Te Kete Ipurangi, Ministry of Education. <https://www.inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/supporting-lgbtqa-students/>
- *Relationships and Sexuality Education – A guide for teachers, leaders and boards of trustees*: Ministry of Education, 2020: <https://health.tki.org.nz/Teaching-in-HPE/Policy-Guidelines/Relationships-and-Sexuality-Education>

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