

Korowai Aroha | Position Statement

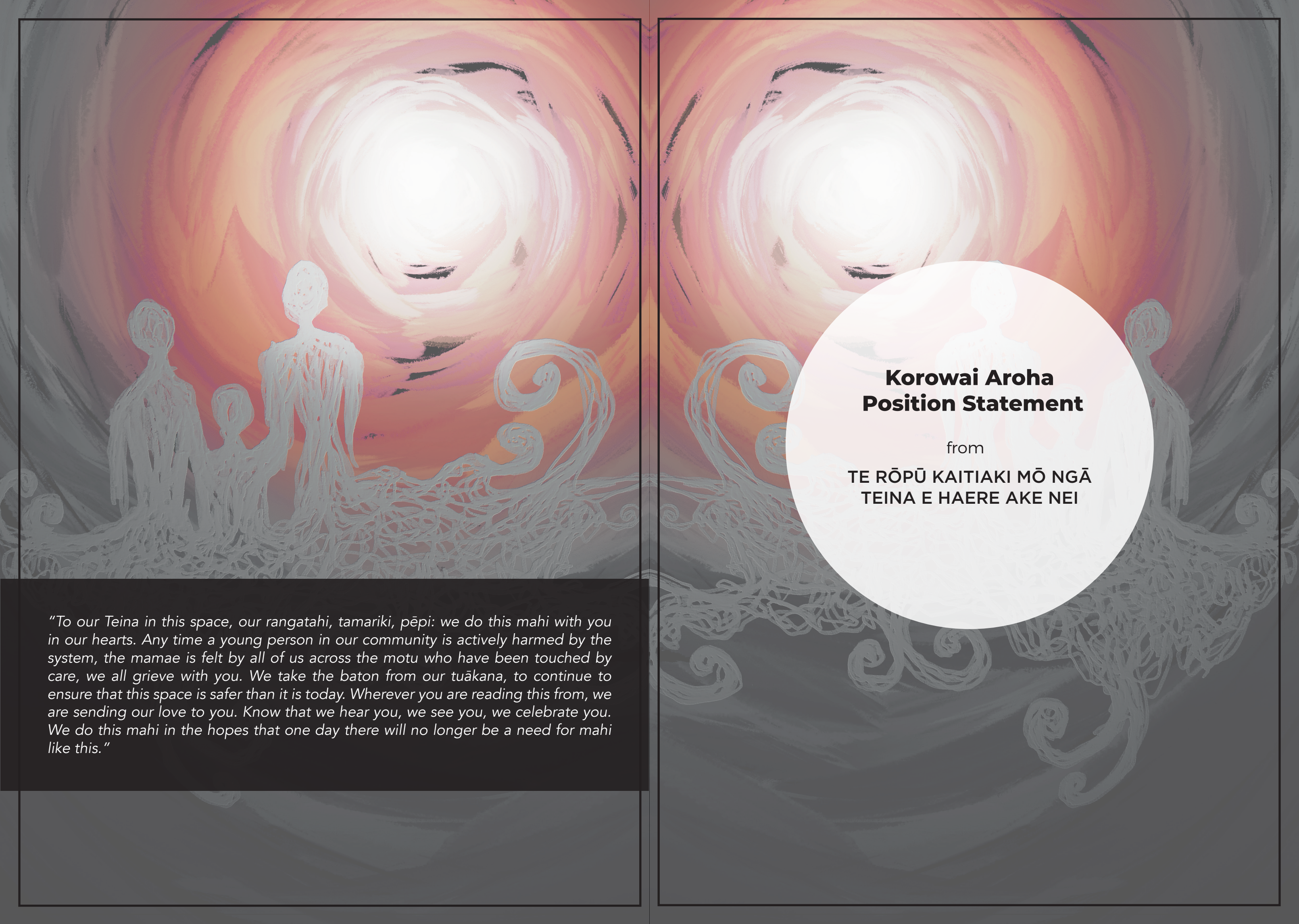
and

Key Asks



from

TE RŌPŪ KAITIAKI MŌ NGĀ TEINA E HAERE AKE NEI



**Korowai Aroha
Position Statement**

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**TE RŌPŪ KAITIAKI MŌ NGĀ
TEINA E HAERE AKE NEI**

"To our Teina in this space, our rangatahi, tamariki, pēpi: we do this mahi with you in our hearts. Any time a young person in our community is actively harmed by the system, the mamae is felt by all of us across the motu who have been touched by care, we all grieve with you. We take the baton from our tuākana, to continue to ensure that this space is safer than it is today. Wherever you are reading this from, we are sending our love to you. Know that we hear you, we see you, we celebrate you. We do this mahi in the hopes that one day there will no longer be a need for mahi like this."

Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua

'I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on my past.'

Rangatira - People of the Light leading to the Light.

More than words

Our rūpū, Kaitiaki mō ngā teina e haere ake nei, are made up of tangata whenua, Tauīwi, tangata whaikaha, migrants, gender diverse, rainbow rangatahi and parents ranging in age from 17 – 30 years old. We have diverse experiences of the care system. Some uplifted young, some left young, some uplifted later, some abandoned by the system too early and left to fend for ourselves. Some in parts of the system where we had no say or support, and some moved from pillar to post several times. We have been unstable, invisible, silenced, and powerless in the decisions made about us, our lives, and the lives of the people we care most about. We came together as a rūpū because, whilst the inquiry process prescribes dates, implying a beginning and an end to abuse in care, many of us exist beyond these dates, and have been called to this kaupapa because abuse in care did not just magically stop in 1999.

Through our time in care, we experienced a loss of identity, connection and belonging – cornered to be something we were not – trying to meet others' expectations of us. Judged, stigmatized, and overlooked. We look at each other with the emptiness of strangers walking by as we try to piece together the collective trauma of our stolen childhoods. In this rūpū, we shared, we listened, we heard, we cared. We held space for one another to confront the mamae that exists because of this system, and the mamae that is intergenerationally sustained through these systems. It is through holding each other in this space that we are able to look towards the lives our tamariki deserve to have.

We came together through wānanga following the stages of Te Kore, Te Pō, Te Ao Mārama – rangatira going through these stages to create a position that reflects our hopes, dreams and aspirations for those who have come before, for ourselves and for those who come after us – siblings, tamariki, rangatahi and whānau who are affected by the Care system: To be both, a tika Mokopuna and a tika Tipuna.

Te Kore was a time of torrential rains and floods – Roimata – the strong bond between Ranginui and Papatūānuku. The tears from Rangi marking the deep sadness that sits at the heart of this kaupapa, tears to cleanse the whenua, and tears to feed the seeds they fall upon. These are tears of hope, rangatira unite to be heard, to acknowledge and to influence change.

The seed struggles in darkness - nurture the seed - it will emerge through the light.

The struggle and darkness – this represents at least 70 years of intergenerational silencing. The scope of this inquiry is a choice to silence our generation in the care system. For many of us, it often felt like our voices were taken at birth.

We unintentionally signed a contract when we were born without being told the terms and conditions of our stay, and now we are struggling through early adulthood unsupported because we fall through the cracks of exclusive criteria.

Today, we will not be silenced. **YOU WILL SIT DOWN AND LISTEN.** Angry and disappointed, we are not waiting around until we are old to finally reveal our experiences of State imposed, taxpayer funded harm. We are not standing in line to wait another 30 years for our truths to finally be told and for an apology from leaders who feel devoid of responsibility for things that happened in the past. We stand together as a rōpū, eyes towards the past, in acknowledgement to the whakapapa of mamae this community holds, and the kaha of our tuākana in this space, those that have come before us, pushing for our community to be heard. To be acknowledged.

We stand with the survivors who have finally been able to speak their truth at this Inquiry. Our whānau have been displaced and we in turn have been affected by their pain and trauma. We will not let the next generation be affected. Many of us are parents now.

We hold light for those who came before, who struggled in their childhoods, who struggled as parents, some of our own parents, who struggled against this mamae too – some too much to show us the love and care they held for us. We carry their sustained ahi, knowing their light was almost extinguished by the system. Do not demonize our parents for the tangata they were moulded into by these systems. Do not demonize us. Our people are not the problem – the system is the problem.

In this rōpū we were like a grove of Kahikatea. Despite our differences, we became connected through a shared root system that allowed us to nurture each other as we revisited dark times to find the light. Through this connection with each other, we find kaha, we feel the mauri, the mana, and the power of connection across our whole community.

Through this darkness, we were reminded of the light that pulled us through. The people who stood by and made it possible for us to find strength to move through the raru created by these systems that are supposed to work on our behalf. These are the people who kept us alive. People who made us believe we are important; we belong here, and we have a future.

People who showed unconditional love even when our behaviour was affected by our experiences of care.

People who did not judge us or held our behaviour against us but showed understanding and patience.

People who showed us that we are from greatness and that we hold the space of greatness through whakapapa and connection – we are worthy, we are proud and have responsibilities to fulfil in this world.

People who took time to listen, support us with what we need, who stood by us.

In our lives, we have taken on roles of kaitiaki to our siblings, peacemakers in our fractured families. We find ways to grow and create new life through the cracks. We try to move forward with the tide together, not struggling against it, pulled apart by the waves.

As many of us become parents, our tamariki are now our light – our hope – our purpose and we do know what happy childhoods can look like – simple things, like giggling and splashing through the sprinklers on a scorching hot day.

As we move from Te Pō to Te Ao Mārama, we are like Tane, who has seen the glimpse of light. We believe there is a better world out there for tamariki like us. Like Tane, our glimmer of hope gives us the determination to persevere until we have let the light break through.

We will persevere until history does not repeat itself – until we do not see the same recommendations come out of every report that identifies the same system failures, especially not reports on the death of children that could have been prevented.

More than anything – we need accountability that when failures are glaring and recommendations are made to fix the failures, that these recommendations are acted on, evidenced and maintained.

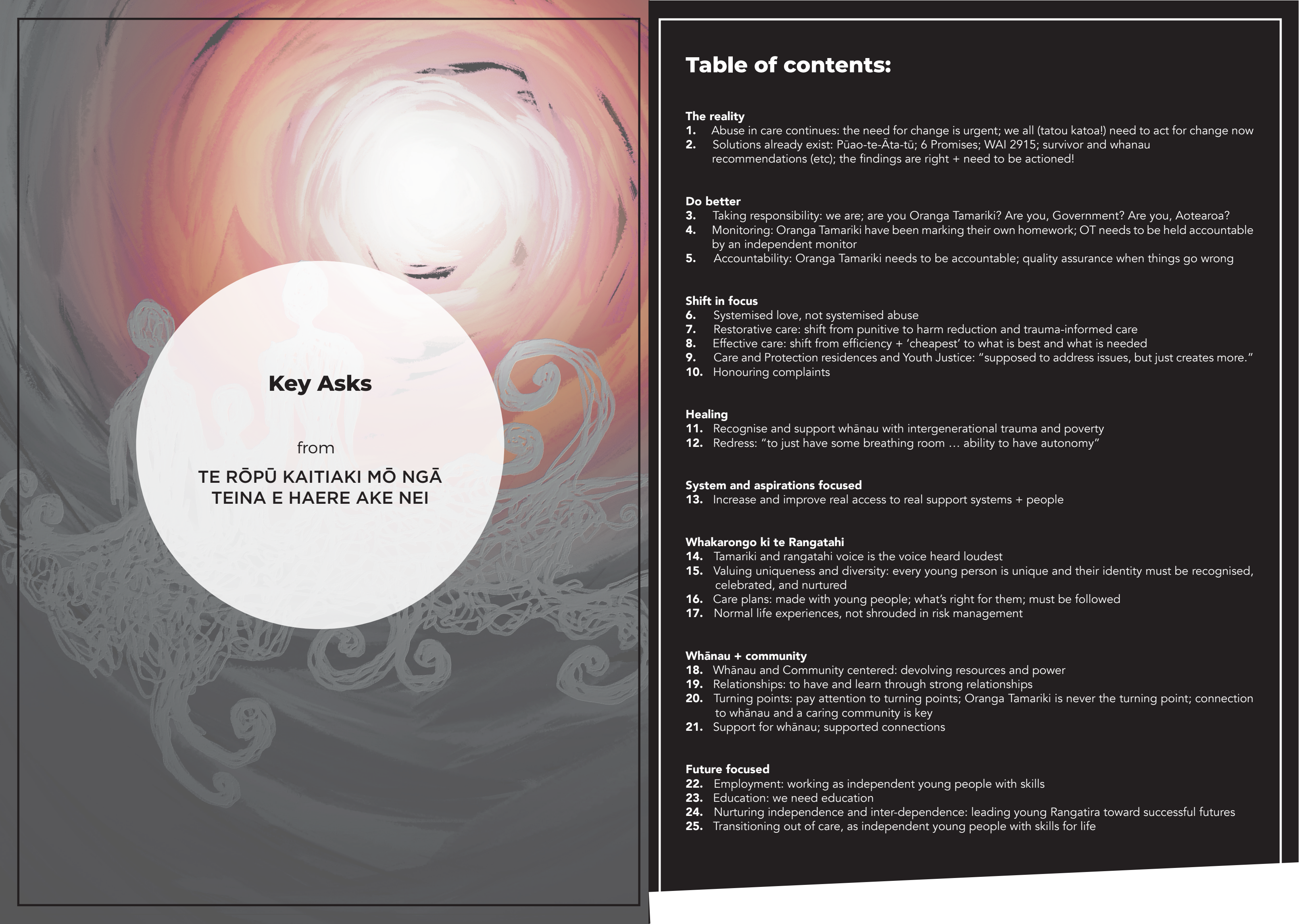
We stand by the 6 Promises proposed by VOYCE – Whakarongo Mai for care experienced tamariki, rangatahi and whānau that call for us to be cared for, protected, loved, and supported in the way we expect for every child and young person in Aotearoa. To have access to our basic rights of stability, education, health care, connection and belonging and to be supported to be ourselves.

Our community is one that has been forgotten and ignored, time and time again. Kia tūpato, turn your ears to our tuākana, hold our truths in your hearts as you move towards the future, hold our truths in your hearts as you provide manaaki for our tamariki. Kia tika, kia pono. Do not let this taonga fall away.

To our Teina in this space, our rangatahi, tamariki, pēpi: we do this mahi with you in our hearts. Any time a young person in our community is actively harmed by the system, the mamae is felt by all of us across the motu who have been touched by care, we all grieve with you. We take the baton from our tuākana, to continue to ensure that this space is safer than it is today. Wherever you are reading this from, we are sending our love to you. Know that we hear you, we see you, we celebrate you. We do this mahi in the hopes that one day there will no longer be a need for mahi like this.

Rōpū Members:

Apollo, Ihorangi Reweti Peters, Karah Mackie, Mary-Lynn Huxford, Reihana Dougherty, Saron Bekele, Starz, Te, Trinity Green, Tupua Urlich and Xixi Xian.



Key Asks

from

TE RŌPŪ KAITIAKI MŌ NGĀ
TEINA E HAERE AKE NEI

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The reality:

The harsh reality of ongoing abuse in care settings, emphasising the urgent need for immediate change.

1. Abuse in care continues: the need for change is urgent; we all (tatou katoa!) need to act for change now - *drawing attention to the persistence of abuse experienced by rangatahi in care and emphasising the critical importance for change.*

“These are more than stories, these are lives and navigating I think it is a miracle many of us in this room are here today.”

“I was 5 when the abuse got really, really bad because OT didn’t bother to check in, OT never came. I was 10 the first time I tried to end my life - my caregiver laughed and said I deserve to die.”

2. Solutions already exist: Pūao-te-Āta-tū; 6 Promises; WAI 2915; survivor and whānau recommendations (etc); the findings are right + need to be actioned! *Highlighting that solutions are already out there. We know what to do, but we don’t do what we know.*

“Your language makes it seem less severe than it is. If the problem is that severe then why aren’t you changing now?”

Do better:

Needing a higher standard of responsibility from relevant stakeholder to improve the care system.

3. Taking responsibility: we are; are you, Oranga Tamariki? Are you, Government? Are you, Aotearoa? - *Holding OT, the Government, and the nation accountable for their actions and calling for them to take responsibility for their roles in change.*

“We are taking responsibility by doing this work, going into dark places that are hard to go to, talking about really hard things in our lives.”

“The Government is responsible for OT, but society is responsible for who is in Government and what it does. We can’t expect the most vulnerable people in society to take responsibility for the harm that has been caused.”

“OT be twisting words like a pretzel. You tell them one thing and they twist shit so much or they change it.”

“There needs to be system accountability of every assault, and not allow assaults to happen in the name of ‘correcting behaviour’ in placements.”

“I was 5 when the abuse got really, really bad because OT didn’t bother to check in, OT never came.”

“The Government had proven itself untrustworthy.”

4. Monitoring: Oranga Tamariki have been marking their own homework; OT needs to be held accountable by an independent monitor - *highlighting the importance of establishing independent and effective monitoring mechanisms to ensure quality assurance when issues or incidents occur within the care system.*

“An actual independent monitor that is not a government department.”

“We can ensure safety by actively monitoring and checking caregivers who put up their hand to care for tamariki.”

“We have a safety in care team in head office that doesn’t actually know what’s happening on the front line.”

5. Accountability: Oranga Tamariki needs to accountable, quality assurance when things go wrong - *stressing the need for OT to be held accountable for their actions and demanding consequences for any mistakes or failures.*

“There is nothing that holds them accountable and consequences if they do get it wrong.”

Shift in focus:

Highlighting the need for a change in perspective and approach within the care system.

6. Systemised love, not systemised abuse - *advocating for a shift towards a care system that prioritises love, compassion, and positive relationships, rather than perpetuating abusive or neglectful practices.*

“We want to promote safety and love.”

“The only life skills OT give us, is the ability to be ultra vigilant and traumatized.”

“These are beautiful children in the community. They need love - not a dark cloud over their head.”

“More supporting caregivers = affectionate; love me for me, genuinely care, and (be) interested in meeting my need.”

7. Restorative care: shifts from punitive to harm reduction and trauma-informed care - emphasising the importance of transitioning from a punitive approach to a more restorative and trauma-informed model of care, focusing on addressing trauma and promoting healing.

"Always having something to address the trauma in the care plan."

"The current system was critized for its punitive nature, and the need for a more restorative approach was emphasized. The participants felt that restoration should be the focus, rather than punishment."

8. Effective care: shift from efficiency and 'cheapest' to what is best + what is needed - calling for a shift in mindset from prioritising efficiency and cost-saving measures to prioritising what is best for the children and providing adequate support for caregivers.

"The government needs to acknowledge that care is not a 9-5 job. Crisis situations don't happen within their work hours."

"Lack of support for caregivers to provide the best care possible puts good people off. Neither parents or caregivers are given the support needed."

9. Care and Protection residences + Youth Justice: "supposed to address issues, but just creates more" - criticising the current state of care and protection residences and youth justice systems, highlighting how they often fail to address underlying issues and may even exacerbate problems.

"Remember experiences of being in care and moving around a lot, residences would be used as a threat to behaviour. This was seen as the worst outcome - speaks volumes about how residences are viewed by those responsible."

"Institutions are a way to push problems away - a way to make care easier for bureaucrats not focused on the needs of tamariki and rangatahi."

10. Honouring complaints - taking complaints seriously and ensuring they are properly addressed within the care system.

"I told someone about it [abuse in community] and they didn't actually do nothing."

"If we are in care, we should be able to report what is happening straight away and get a quick response."

"There was that understanding that if we were to say something we would be worse off. Often a complaint won't change care and we would get a crack or be sent somewhere much worse and get even more of a crack."

"The police don't like it when CYF kids call the police. If it's in your care plan that you have called police on caregivers and then caregivers don't want you, after that and you end up in a group home."

Healing:

Supporting tamariki, rangatahi and whānau to move out of te pō and into te ao mārama through healing so that they can thrive.

Shifting towards prevention: a further shift toward keeping whānau together and supporting whānau more when their child is taken away or at risk, to build their mana, resources and resilience.

11. Recognise + support whānau with intergenerational trauma + poverty - highlighting the call for better prevention and earlier support; support for whānau and keeping whānau together.

"What kind of a community that we want to build and work backwards from there."

"Me and my sister also a big part of my life, she was the only one close to my age. I knew from a young age that I understood intergenerational trauma. My brothers were raised horribly and I get that taken out on me."

"My mum was put in to care when she was really young and wasn't good. When she was 15 she started taking off. She was abused so badly. That is why me and 8 other siblings were put into care... I am always mamae about the support she didn't get."

"What could have been done to prevent myself (from entering) the care system? Having a proper chat with the parents. Finance is a big thing. If they (CYFS) picked up on that language was a barrier to getting employment early they could have put them (parents) in language programmes instead of putting me and my sister through the system."

"A space where you're not just talking about problems - you are talking about life skills and flourishing like how to grow a garden, how to be useful ... if we had programmes like this people would feel more support."

12. Redress: "to just have some breathing room...ability to have autonomy" - expressing the need for redress measures that go beyond financial compensation, allowing individuals to have some space for healing, autonomy, and the ability to address their specific needs.

"Redress is more than money" - highlighting the importance of acknowledging and providing support for families who have been affected by intergenerational trauma and poverty, understanding how these factors impact their experiences within the care system.

"Nice to have a pot of money for healing that I could just access...I would travel, physical therapy or just be able to heal. It would be good to not need to work every day and just have some breathing room or brain space. The ability to have autonomy."

Support Accessibility and Improvement:

Advocating for the enhanced accessibility and effectiveness of supports for the tamariki and rangatahi in care.

13. Increase and improve real access to real support systems + people - *advocating for enhanced accessibility and effectiveness of support systems and services for individuals in the care system, with a particular focus on addressing the specific needs of migrants and ensuring equitable access for all.*

"Looking back they didn't get the support they needed as migrants. The system didn't serve migrants adjusting to a new community."

"A lot about my journey was about Mum and trying to get back to Mum."

"Lucky to have grandparents but they need a lot more support than they are getting."

"I look forward to the day that it doesn't matter how long you were in the system there should be a way that you can access support. To prescribe a structure on support based on a normal upbringing based on time spent in care, it's so silly."

"I got put in a new placement - it was the best care arrangement; I found out that we were supposed to get pocket money. WHAT? Pocket money?"

Whakarongo ki te rangatahi:

This section emphasises the importance of actively listening to and prioritising the voices and experiences of tamariki and rangatahi in care.

14. Tamariki and rangatahi voice is heard the loudest.

"Listen to the young person and their emotions - sometimes they won't tell the whole story."

"The people who abused me are going to get away with it and continue doing more of this and getting paid because OT don't want to deal with it."

"... to make a difference for those who are silenced now."

15. Valuing uniqueness and diversity: every young person is unique and their identity must be recognised, celebrated, and nurtured - *recognising and addressing the need for cultural consideration, support, and inclusivity in caring for young people from diverse backgrounds and with diverse identities, highlighting the impact of cultural identity and experiences on their well-being.*

"Understanding of cultural differences and the need for the child to learn of them."

"All children should know where they come from."

"Not much cultural consideration and support with reconnecting with family. Lost cultural roots in care."

"I was terrified of Māori people, hated them, I didn't like brown people because all you wanted to do was hurt me..."

"I thought being Māori was the worst growing up; this hate was taught in care, education, society and at home, pākehā whānau were wrongly trusted more and being the only Māori sibling and seeing my other sibling choose to associate with white power groups as their own way of hiding from trauma. I now know that intergenerational trauma begins to look like culture."

16. Care plans: made with young people; what's right for them; and must be followed - *advocating for the active involvement of young people in the development of their care plans, ensuring that their individual needs, preferences, and identities are considered and that the plans are adhered to throughout their care journey.*

"If it's about me why can't I read it? I wasn't allowed to access it until I was at a certain age. I didn't request it until I was 19 and by then it was too late to change anything when it was put on paper it was set you know. I wondered why carers would treat me differently at times."

"I don't understand how a one or two pager can tell you all you need about a young person."

"Having young person's needs included: what should be beneficial for carers to know like certain triggers, and about who they think they are and who they want to be."

17. Normal life experiences, not shrouded in risk management- *highlighting the importance of providing tamariki and rangatahi in care with opportunities for normal life experiences and relationships, free from excessive risk management practices, allowing them to develop trust, stability, and healthy relationships.*

"De-systemising the care experience of children in care. Stuff like can't stay at a mate's house without their families being police checked."

"To not feel like an object in the process, important to understand why decisions are made and what is happening and to find safe ways to explain these things."

"You don't know how to value friendships, because you haven't learned how to build trust of stability in relationships. There can be lots of people you love and respect but trained not to get comfortable in any setting."

Whānau and community:

This section highlights the importance of centering whānau and community in the care of rangatahi by resourcing and empowering them. It emphasises the need to recognise and value strong relationships, both within and outside of the care system, and the impact they have on the long-term, intergenerational well-being and development of tamariki and rangatahi.

It introduces a key shift from the ideal of nurturing independence which perceives and frames the young person as individual, to nurturing inter-dependence which sees the young person within an existing network of people, connections, and support, and with their own unique contribution to make.

18. Whānau and Community centered: devolving resources and power - *devolving resources and power, with a focus on centering the role of whānau and community in the ecosystem of care.*

"Care and institutions don't mix together as a concept. Good Lives Model which is guiding the Disability Strategy reflects on the move from institutions to community alternatives. Disability sector is more advanced in their thinking than the care sector."

"...antenatal courses I took it was very Pākeha - the things you get taught and the way you are told things. Hapū wānanga - we were all brown, it was great! Why can we not normalise what makes a good life for a baby."

"More about allowing iwi and community to do the healing. Governments have given us all the evidence they are not worthy of our trust and they have too much power."

"Stop demonising our whānau, and whakapapa."

19. Relationships: to have and learn through strong relationships - *recognising the importance of strong relationships in the care journey and the need to have and learn through meaningful connections. Young people leaving care should not be pressed toward an ideal of only standing on their own (independence), but into understanding the value of the relationships and connections they hold (inter-dependence).*

"That's why I said travel (as something that should be supported more). You could reconnect and see whānau. You might want to see your whānau but might not feel comfortable going all in and staying with them and so instead you have your own accommodation."

20. Turning points: pay attention to turning points; Oranga Tamariki is never the turning point; connection to whānau and a caring community is key.

"I was admitted into mental health ward and it was the doctor who asked me about my goals and ambitions. That conversation is what led me to be more involved with VOYCE."

"Turning points was I went to a leadership programme called RYLA from Rotary. Lots of people shared what they were passionate about and I didn't have anything I was passionate about. That's when I reconnected with this community."

21. Support for Whānau; supported connections - *providing support for whānau and promoting supported connections within the care system. which develop supported connections beyond the care system (inter-dependence).*

"Removing children adds to the mamae of the whānau."

"I would focus on what's working and how to amplify those existing coping strategies. Is it food, is it clothing, transportation that's the problem?"

"What are whānau carers not getting paid the same as OT caregivers?"

"The system of approach of uplift does not address the underlying issues within whānau and communities, even after being uplifted the safety of our taonga is not a sure thing."

Future focused:

This section focuses on the aspirations and needs of rangatahi as they navigate their journey towards a successful future through independence and inter-dependence. It highlights key areas such as employment, education, nurturing independence and transitioning out of care.

22. Employment: working as independent young people with skills - *this message addresses the challenges faced by rangatahi in care when it comes to finding and maintaining employment. It acknowledges the unique stumbling blocks they encounter, including issues of trust, authority, and developing healthy workplace relationships.*

"Working is very difficult. There are some unique stumbling blocks for those in care holding employment. Accidentally being a bad employee because of distrust you have to authority and power. Haven't heard anyone talk about it. It's the relational difficulties in the workplace that can come."

23. Education: we need education - *this message emphasises the significance of education for rangatahi with care experience. It recognises that many of them choose educational pathways as a means of healing and personal growth. It also advocates for scholarships and early investments in education to provide equal opportunities for success.*

"Many care-experienced young people choose education pathways to help them heal - like art therapy. Spend a lot of time doing things to heal when could be investing time in other things - therapy takes time out of your life."

"If there could be scholarships if you were in care and you don't need to apply... Early investments that don't need to be paid back because if you are investing 100,000 a year on a person in prison this would be so much cheaper."

24. Nurturing independence and inter-dependence: leading young Rangatira toward successful futures - *foster independence in tamariki with care experience. It calls for creating opportunities for reconnection and transitioning out of care services (inter-dependence). It emphasises the need to focus on developing caring and nurturing families instead of planning for a lifetime within the system.*

"It's kind of funny how much OT push independence but as soon as you say you want to do something suddenly they say 'no, we are your guardians'."

"Don't like the terminology of transitioning from care to independence. The transition has got to be back into something - back into whānau and community."

"Sometimes I don't think independence is the right idea; when you have all those connections we talk about with culture, whānau, communities, that's more like an inter-dependence where the supports are built into the relationships. True strength would be interdependence, not independence."

"Don't create dependency on system - create opportunities for reconnection, transition out of services."

"Care plans need to focus on making families caring and nurturing - not planning for a lifetime in the system."

25. Transitioning out of care, as independent young people with skills for life - *the challenges for young people when they leave the care system. Highlighting the need for robust support systems and resources to help young people successfully navigate the transition, develop essential life skills, and establish their autonomy and inter-dependence. Criteria to services operate as barriers.*

"So many hurdles to access. It's already a stressful time to do the transitioning - we need to make this easier."

"Life's pretty bleak after care - you don't have trusting relationships you can lean on when you need to. Like when sick and need help - don't have the type of relationships where you know who to ask for help - don't tell anyone, don't reach out for help."

"You leave care on the backfoot feeling like you have to start again. Takes a lot to just try to build your life and move on. You have to suddenly learn to do things you haven't been equipped to do - make decisions, trust, have autonomy."

"After care would look similar to any other rangatahi at that age. There is a lack of support systems around them to fuck up. General population of young people, their parents can help them, and it gives them space to fuck up. You don't have that space when you are a care kid because there isn't a lot of people there for you."

