

# Puāwai 2025: Impact Report



Poipoia te kākano  
kia puāwai

**puāwai**

Nurture the seed and it  
will blossom

The **Leadership in Communities (LinC) Project** has been supporting community leaders across Canterbury for 9 years ever since the Christchurch earthquakes.

It currently has 7 separate but interconnected programmes:

[Leadership Lab Foundation Report to Funders November 2025](#)



**Incubator**



**Puāwai**



**Rourou**



**Te Whāriki**

# Puāwai Concept Overview

## Who: Audience

Cohort of 25-30 rangatahi (15-18 yo)  
4-5 Tuākana per cohort

## Where: Which part of the Māra is it?

Te Māra Whakatipu

## When: Duration

2 cohorts per year

Videos

[Celebrating Puāwai 2021](#)

[Celebrating Puāwai 2020](#)

## Resources Req: (people, frameworks, pūtea)

\$40,000 per cohort  
Project lead - Tayla,  
Facilitation Team: Mahlon, Ata, Libby, Rochelle  
Tuākana: Wiki, Rose, Patariki, Mel.

## Why/Purpose: Impact question

*"How do we support diverse rangatahi who are potential leaders, disruptors and innovators who have experienced discrimination because of their identity?"*

<https://leadershiplab.co.nz/projects/puawai/>



## What: Detailed description

Puāwai is a leadership experience for 25-30 rangatahi/young people ages 15-18 designed to:

- Connect with others to network, innovate and create change
- Develop real skills, knowledge and confidence with a focus on strengths and knowing who you are
- Provide opportunities for rangatahi from diverse communities, informed by kaupapa Māori principles.

## How: Process/Methodology

- 1) Receive Strengths Coaching on their Top 5 Strengths
- 2) Attend a two-day wānanga of workshops, experiences, networking and leadership
- 3) Design and facilitate Activator events – youth-led practical projects



# Kaupapa | Purpose

[Puāwai](#) is a five-month experience for rangatahi aged 15-18. It is designed to connect and develop a diverse network of potential leaders, innovators, disruptors, and drivers while equipping them with fundamental skills and knowledge.



## Team



**Tayla Taylor**  
she/her



**Atarau Hamilton-Fuller**  
he/him



**Mahlon Saumalu**  
he/him



**Wikitoria Kurene**  
she/her



**Alex King**  
she/her



**Libby Davenport**  
she/her



**MahMah Timoteo**  
she/they



**Pātariki Caffell**  
he/him



**Melissa Lama**  
she/her



**Dereon Maka**  
He/him

## Steering Group



**Chris Jansen**  
he/him



**Jenn Chowaniec**  
she/her



**Te Ao Marama Apiata**  
he/him

# Kaupapa | Purpose

**Puāwai** is a leadership experience for rangatahi aged 15-18, designed to connect and develop a diverse network of leaders, innovators, disruptors, and drivers, while equipping them with fundamental skills and knowledge.

The Project connects strongly to [Leadership Lab](#)'s vision to see equitable and thriving communities and organisations, by growing young leaders from diverse communities and developing their capacity to respond to complex issues. Puāwai is informed by kaupapa Māori principles and guided by Leadership Labs values:

***mana ōrite, kotahitanga me manaakitanga***

Puāwai focuses its impact on:

***rangatahi empowered, connected, contributing and influencing in their own community***

The kupu 'Puāwai' was chosen to reflect the growth that rangatahi and tuakana experience through their journey during and beyond Puāwai, inspired by the whakatauki:

**Poipoia te kākano kia puāwai**  
*Nurture the seed and it will blossom*



# 2025 Key insights

2 day  
wānanga



30  
Coaching  
sessions



10  
FACILITATORS

30 Rangatahi



4  
Activator  
streams



1 showcase with over  
60 whānau in  
attendance

# Twin impact groups - rangatahi and tuakana

## Rangatahi

Puāwai is primarily for rangatahi who are 15- 18 years old who have already demonstrated their involvement within their whānau, friend group, school or community, who want to grow their skills and experience but have not yet received leadership development opportunities, due to discrimination or being marginalised.

The 2025 cohort was one of our most diverse yet, with representation from rainbow, disability, Pasifika, Māori, cross-cultural, Filipino, Nepalese, South African, Malaysian Indian, care-experienced, African, and religious communities.

## Tuākana

Rangatahi who join the programme are supported by a Tuākana (mentor) from the community they identify with, who may share some similar lived experiences. Tuākana are also a key impact focus as Puāwai aims to support Tuākana to be equipped, connecting and influencing in their own communities.



# Whakapapa of Puāwai

**Puāwai originated** in late 2019 where some of our Leadership Lab team who were facilitating our post-earthquake incubator for community leaders suggested we offer something similar for rangatahi. Through a process of co-design with a wide range of rangatahi we agreed that we wanted to focus on those who had “*done the mahi but not got the treats*”, rather than the typical “*badges and blazers*” profile of student leaders. We discovered that discrimination and marginalisation was the key issue to be addressed. Consequently Puāwai has focussed specifically on rangatahi who identify with groups that include Māori, Pasifika, Rainbow, Ethnic, Disability, and Care Experienced communities.

**Puāwai evolved in 2024** from a 9 month programme to two five-month programmes per year, with approximately 30 rangatahi and 5-6 Tuākana in each cohort. The programme consists of strengths coaching, whanaungatanga hui, a two-day wānanga and Activator events. This shorter-form programme has proven successful, with higher engagement in each component and stronger rates of retention across the span of the programme.



# Te Haerenga | The Journey

## Strengths coaching

### Learn

Receive Strengths Coaching on Top 5 Strengths

## Whanaungatanga hui

### Connect

Meet and build relationships with other young leaders, identity-based rōpū and Tuākana

## Two day wānanga

### Explore

Attend a two-day wānanga of workshops, experiences, networking and leadership

## Activators

### Activate

Use the skills and knowledge gained to design and facilitate youth-led practical projects



# Wānanga 2025

Approximately 28 rangatahi came together to explore their strengths, leadership, and intersecting identities at the Puāwai wānanga.

We dove deep into workshops exploring intersectionality, the vā and tūrangawaewae, leadership and identity, communication styles, and how to be “a villager in the village.” These workshops were facilitated by our Tuākana, providing an opportunity for them to develop their facilitation skills, share their lived experiences, and further connect with the Puāwai rangatahi.

Wānanga also provide an opportunity to begin planning the Puāwai Showcase – the Activator component of the programme. Rangatahi chose from two of the four activator mediums (podcast, art, photography or spoken word) to learn more about these through taster sessions. At the conclusion of the wānanga they then committed to which medium(s) they wanted to explore to express a window to their world.



# Activator#1 2025 – Podcast

Rangatahi who chose the podcast Activator stream worked with facilitators MahMah Timoteo and Wikitoria Kurene to share a 'window to their world' through developing a podcast episode and got hands-on experience through getting to record their episode at PlainsFM.

Across 5 episodes rangatahi explored a diverse range of topics led by their own interests and identities including reflections on being young Māori wāhine in today's world, a creative and humorous reenactment of a family dinner through the lens of African identity, conversations about music and film and the introduction of special guests important to the young people. You can check out the episodes here:

- [Episode 1: Ngā Wāhine Toa](#)
- [Episode 2: Crazy Middle-Class Africans](#)
- [Episode 3: Unplugged Podcast](#)
- [Episode 4: Max's sick as podcast ft. Egg Academy](#)
- [Episode 5: Fixated on formalities](#)



# Activator#2 2025 – Photography

Rangatahi worked alongside photographer Hōhua Kurene to explore photography as a tool for storytelling and self-expression and through workshops they developed technical skills, designed their own creative concepts and captured images that reflected what matters most to them - friendships, identity, passions and activism. These were then displayed in a photo exhibition at the December showcase.

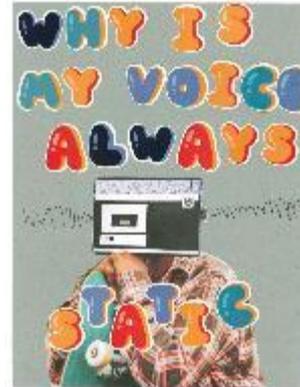
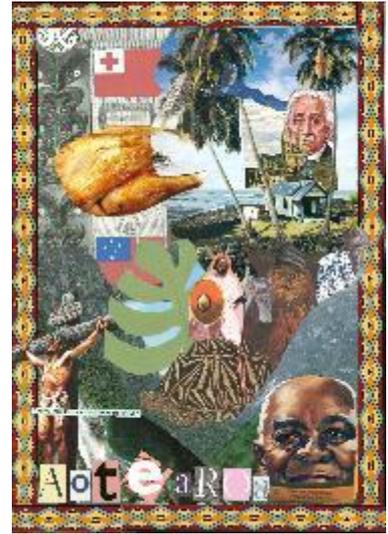
# Activator#3 2025 – Spoken word

Through a series of spoken word workshops with Puāwai facilitator Pātariki Caffell, rangatahi explored storytelling through poetry and performance. They developed skills in writing and performing and crafted original pieces that reflected their lived experiences, thoughts and aspirations. These poems were performed at a final showcase.



# Activator#4 2025 – Art

We collaborated with Paper Jam to explore collage as a creative form of storytelling and self-expression. Rangatahi were first introduced to the medium through a hands-on workshop at the wānanga and could then choose to participate in a half-day workshop at the Paper Jam studio, where they created their own collage artworks reflecting a “*window into their world.*” Through this process they expressed their identities, interests, and lived experiences producing meaningful, personal pieces of art that were displayed at the showcase.

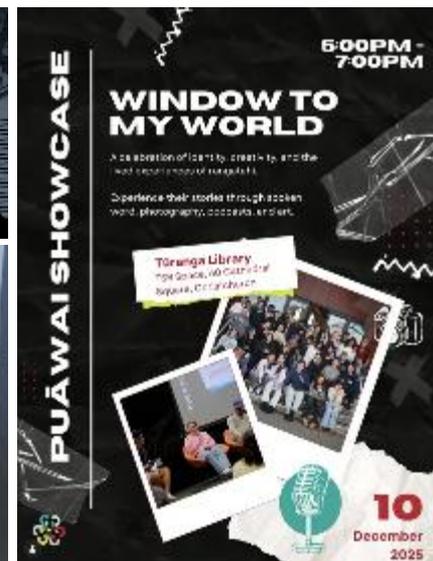


# Whanau Showcase 2025

The Puāwai Showcase was an inspiring evening that celebrated the voices, creativity, and leadership of our rangatahi. With over 60 whānau members in attendance, rangatahi shared a window to their world using their chosen activator medium, MC'd the evening and guided attendees through the kaupapa.

The showcase featured spoken word performances, photography and art displays, and rangatahi-led panels providing a sneak peek into the episodes that launched that evening, all sharing real stories and lived experiences. These displays and performances reflected the deep learning and shared experience of Puāwai for the 2025 cohort and marked an important milestone in their journey together.

Whānau and rangatahi expressed pride in the confidence, authenticity, and growth demonstrated throughout the night.



# Whakaaweawe | Impact - Rangatahi highlights

At the conclusion of Puāwai, rangatahi reflected and provided feedback on their experiences and identified what were the highlights for them:

trying out podcasting  
leadership skills jamming waiata  
lots of laughs doing cool photography welcoming atmosphere  
having a bond with dereon chatting over breakfast the showcase  
how to use my strengths art was so fun friends outside of school  
top 5 strengths communication skills super friendly kaimahi  
connecting with tuākana strengths coaching  
making new friends meeting new people

# Whakaaweawe | Impact: How Pūāwai Has Impacted Rangatahi

Rangatahi describe Pūāwai as having a positive impact on their confidence, leadership development, and sense of self. Through building relationships, understanding their strengths, and practicing their leadership, rangatahi report feeling more capable, connected, and empowered to lead and advocate for themselves and others.

## Confidence

*“Puāwai taught me to be more confident in my identity, which eventually led me to be more confident in leading.”*

*“Puāwai impacted me in an extremely positive way. It taught me to be more confident standing up for myself and talk in front of my peers no matter how scary it is.”*

## Leadership

*“I learnt to be a better and more sensitive leader amongst my peers.”*

*“I gained a better understand of how I can lead as I grow up.”*

*“The impact of engaging in Puāwai has been more leadership opportunities for me.”*

## Strengthened connections

*“I made lots of new connections with lots of different people.”*

*“Puāwai gave me more social skills to use to talk to new people.”*

*“I’ve found I’m more open and sociable now, especially in leadership spaces.”*

## Understanding of strengths

*“I use my strengths a lot now that I’m aware of them.”*

*“I have found my strengths which has helped me beyond Pūāwai.”*

*“Knowing that your strengths are not only good for you but also for others.”*

# Whakaaweawe | Impact beyond Puāwai

Rangatahi describe how the learning from Pūāwai has carried into their everyday lives. They are actively applying their strengths, confidence, and leadership skills across school, work, and community settings, supporting a positive sense of identity and meaningful contribution.

## Strengths-led leadership

*"I often use my strengths in my leadership space, specifically my council and working alongside my co-head."*

*"My knowledge of my strengths and my newfound confidence helped me know what roles I'd work best in a team."*

## Community contribution

*"I learnt how to give more to my community."*

## Strengthened identity

*"I've become more confident in my heritage and who I am."*

*"I learnt more about where I feel I belong and what I need."*

## School and future pathways

*"Learning how to podcast and attempt more creative things with new people in a new environment helps a lot with school and hopefully work sometime."*

*"I learnt fun ice breakers I can use at work."*

## Confidence

*"I became a lot more confident in everything I do."*

*"Building good communication skills and confidence in public speaking."*

# Whakaaweawe | Impact - Tuākana

Over the last six years of implementing Puāwai we have been able to engage and employ a group of 15 incredible young adults who identify with similar communities as the rangatahi. Puāwai is completely designed and implemented by this group in their roles of facilitators and tuakana to the rangatahi in the programmes.

When asked about the most rewarding aspects of being a Tuākana, they most commonly reference:

- Connecting with rangatahi, especially over shared experiences.
- Supporting rangatahi to explore their intersectional identities.
- Observing rangatahi growth through improved confidence, greater awareness of their strengths and leadership development.

*“For me, the most rewarding part of being a Tuākana is seeing taiohi reaching a place where they see their strengths shine in their spaces like school, homes and community spaces and expressing themselves in the way they do that in their unique way!”*



*“Being Pacific, fat, and queer, it was really special to share some of those intersectional educational pieces and to have the rangatahi respond so well, particularly with their own lived experiences.”*

# Whakaaweawe | Impact - Tuākana

Puāwai supports tuākana to strengthen their leadership and practice in ways that extend beyond the programme. Through reflection, connection, and shared learning, Tuākana describe how the experience deepens their ability to contribute meaningfully within their wider communities, networks, and professional spaces.

*"Puāwai always keeps me grounded and at the front of my youth work practice."*

*"I'm inspired by what I can learn and what I get challenged on by them."*

*"The skills I have learnt and developed by being a part of the Puāwai programme has been invaluable to my practice in my day-to-day mahi, and my other communities (Pacific networks, Church youth groups etc)."*

*"This mahi has allowed me to reach so many other aspects, people, groups within communities and influence the other mahi that I do, especially in the educational space."*





## Kōrero Whakaaweawe | Emily's Story

2025 saw me take part in Puāwai for a second year. My impact story last year described how Puāwai has helped me in many ways, especially developing my confidence in putting myself out there as a leader and participating more in social settings.

Taking part in Puāwai for a second year has allowed me to explore the different focal point of my tasks, for example focusing on my passion of music instead of my relationships.

What I have learnt through Puāwai this year has helped me to truly understand how I function as a human being, allowing me to assess my needs and focus on the things that really matter to me.

Being able to connect with new friends, as well as reconnecting with old friends at Puāwai has helped me to feel less “outcast” for want of a better word. I feel like I can be myself around more and more people the more I come to Puāwai.

**“I feel like I can be myself around more and more people because I come to Puāwai.”**

**Emily**

**Pronouns:** She/fae

**Age / Tau:** 18

**Rōpū:** *Rainbow*





## Kōrero Whakaaweawe | Galaxie's Story

I think that Puāwai is all round an awesome opportunity to learn and grow positively both within yourself and with others.

2025 was the second time I have been involved in Puāwai. My experience has been different each year due to the personal growth I've experienced and my understanding of positive and negative leadership.

I've learnt that I'm the type of leader that will strategically think through problems and outcomes and approach them before telling others to do it. Puāwai and understanding my strengths has helped me learn to lead in a less intimidating way, and instead be able to lead in a way that helps everyone feel like their ideas and feelings are valued.

This year for the activators I chose to share a window to my world through

**“I think that Puāwai is all round an awesome opportunity to learn and grow positively both within yourself and with others.”**

**Galaxie**

**Pronouns:** She/her

**Age / Tau:** 16

**Whakapapa:** Māori



## Kōrero Whakaaweawe | Dereon's Story



**Dereon**

**Pronouns:** He/him  
**Age / Tau:** 19  
**Rōpū:** *Pasifika*



My 2024 impact story was written from the perspective of being a rangatahi who had just completed Puāwai for the first time. I shared how Puāwai helped me understand myself better by revealing my potential as a leader, and 2025 provided an opportunity to practice those skills as I was approached to step up into the role of Junior Tuākana.

I wanted to be a Tuākana because I wanted to give back to the Puāwai community and help younger leaders develop their skills and confidence. Being part of Puāwai as a youth and worker/leader was an amazing experience, and allowed me to be a part and contribute to their journeys of the rangatahi. Puāwai helped me develop my leadership skills, which I've been able to apply in my role as Tuākana. The other skills and knowledge gained in Puāwai that have helped me in my role include communication skills, and relationship-building. Learning to communicate effectively with people from different backgrounds has been invaluable, and Puāwai taught me how to build strong relationships with others, which is essential in my role.

Seeing the growth and development of the other younger/Junior Tuākana has been amazing, and building relationships with people from different ethnicities and backgrounds has broadened my perspective. Puāwai has helped me prepare for my mission that I'm currently on in the Philippines by teaching me how to connect with others and share my experiences. Puāwai has helped me on my mission by giving me confidence in my abilities and faith, teaching me how to be a good listener and build relationships with others, and helping me develop a sense of purpose and direction.

**“Puāwai helped me develop my leadership skills, which I've been able to apply in my role as Tuākana”**

## Kōrero Whakaaweawe | Wikitoria's Story



**Wikitoria Kurene**

**Pronouns:** She/her  
**Whakapapa:** Māori and Pasifika

I have been involved in Puāwai since 2021 in the roles of tuākana, kaiāwhina and now facilitator. I was blessed to be able to participate in both Tuākana and in the facilitation space, which have both been very rewarding. The most rewarding part of being a tuākana was being able to interact with the rangatahi and hear about them, their passions and also see their growth throughout the programme. Being able to be in the facilitation space was rewarding because it allowed me to share my passions combined with the goals and aspirations of the Puāwai kaupapa to support the rangatahi on their journey.

Community is a huge part of who I am and what I do. The skills I have learnt and developed by being a part of the Puāwai programme has been invaluable to my practice in my day-to-day mahi, and my other communities, such as Pacific networks and Church youth groups. Being part of a team who are passionate not only in this space but other aspects of their lives is probably the most rewarding because you learn so much from one another, in professional and in personal lives.



**“The skills I have learnt and developed by being a part of the Puāwai programme has been invaluable to my practice in my day-to-day mahi, and my other communities ”**



**Mahlon Saumalu**

**Pronouns:** He/him

**Whakapapa:** Samoan

## Kōrero Whakaaweawe | Mahlon's Story

I have been involved in Puāwai since 2021 in the roles of tuākana, kaiāwhina and now as a facilitator. The most rewarding part of my experience in Puāwai is seeing growth in the rangatahi and their journey from beginning to the end. Seeing the reality of “*Kia puāwai te kākano o te rangatahi*”. I love how rangatahi come away with a sense of identity and recognising their natural strengths and talents throughout the programme.

Puāwai has positively impacted my ability to contribute to the communities I'm part of as it always keeps me grounded and at the front of my youth work practice. Puāwai is always a great reminder of the hope in our next generation and that they can rise in their own tino rangatiratanga. I'm inspired by what I can learn and what I get challenged on by them.

**“Puāwai is always a great reminder of the hope in our next generation and that they can rise in their own tino rangatiratanga.”**



*Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, he toa takitini*

*Our strength is not as individuals,  
but as a collective*

[leadershiplab.co.nz](http://leadershiplab.co.nz)