Puāwai 2025: Impact Report

Poipoia te kākano
kia puāwai

puāwai

Nurture the seed and it will blossom

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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

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Leadership in Communities Project

Puāwai Concept Overview

Who: Audience
Cohort of 25-30 rangatahi (15-18 yo)
Tuākana - ex participants

Where: Which part of the Māra is it?
Te Māra Whakatipu

When: Duration
1 cohorts per year

Videos
Celebrating Puāwai 2021
Celebrating Puāwai 2020

Resources Req: (people, frameworks)
Project lead - Tayla,
Facilitation Team: Mahlon, Ata, Wiki, Patariki, Mahmah, Sooze, Lyn

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 Tier 1 is a 3 month leadership experience for 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.

Puāwai Tier 2 is a 6 month leadership experience for returning 17 year plus rāngatahi who are connecting and influencing in their own communities, and progressing into work, facilitation and community leadership pathway, specifically. Outcomes include

- Confidence in practical leadership
- Motivation and taking next steps to put themselves forward in community spaces.

How: Process/Methodology - Tier 1

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

How: Process/Methodology - Tier 2

1) Attend 3 leadership development hui.
2) Receive Strengths Coaching on their Top 10 dominant Strengths
3) Work with the facilitation team to plan and implement the Tier 1 programme.

Kaupapa | Purpose

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

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.

Puāwai Tier 2 is a leadership development programme for returning rāngatahi aged 17 years plus





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

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2026
Key insights

3 day wānanga



25 Coaching sessions







8 Facilitators

17 Rangatahi







9 Tuākana



3 Tuākana leadership hui

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Twin impact groups - rangatahi and tuākana

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.

Each year the cohorts are made up of rāngatahi representing a diverse range of communities. The 2026 cohort had particularly high representation from Pacifika, Māori, and Rainbow communities.

Tuākana
Tuākana have always been a key impact focus for Puāwai. However this year these tuākana have had a specifically designed programme, designed to deepen their understanding of themselves as leaders, and to use the process of delivering the Puāwai programme to rāngatahi, as a space to actively try out their leadership alongside the support of the the facilitation tea.



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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 a five-month programmes per year, with approximately 30 rangatahi. 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. In **2026** it has evolved again to include a Tier 2 Puāwai offering which is an intentional programme to develop emerging leaders from previous Puāwai cohorts.

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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



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Wānanga 2026

Approximately 17 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 facilitators with support from 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 choose 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.









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What did i learn, where did I grow, who did i connect with?

Midway through the Puāwai programme, having attended the ‘Meet and Greet’, received 1:1 Strengths Coaching, and attended the 3 day wānanga, Rāngatahi were asked what they have valued about Puāwai so far, in particular what they have learned, where they grew, and who they connected with, they responded with the following themes:

Know and Understanding my strengths more deeply and how to use them

“I feel like I’m understanding more about myself through Puāwai and how to use my strengths to benefit me.”

“It’s a whole new language that they’re learning.”

“Hearing some conversations from the rangatahi about the strengths, not even needing to initiate that, just hearing it naturally occur, “

Connecting with people who are different from me and outside my circle

“I feel like I’ve met some very new, unique, kind people here. Each special in their own ways.”

“You can connect with people that are really different from you and have different strengths and values.”

“I learned that everyone can be different in their own ways.”

Culture and identity as a source of strength

“They don’t make you leave a part of yourself at the door and then come in like half a person.”

“Everyone’s so non-judgmental and I feel like I could just be myself.”

Belonging, fellowship and community

“Entering a space of new people… the connection was just feeling the sense of belonging.”

“I saw the group come together even more than yesterday… different groups have broken up and gone to talk to other people. Normally we’re pushing that, but this is quite natural.”

Stepping out of my comfort zone and building confidence

“I’m not usually the best at talking to new people, so it’s got me outside of my comfort zone. And I’ve been able to learn how to start conversations.”

“I feel like I’m pretty awkward when it starts conversations… but I feel like that’s moved along and I’ve gotten a bit better at that.”

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What helped rangatahi to feel relaxed, safe, and able to learn?

Puāwai has been designed over the years to create a supportive, safe space for rangatahi to feel belonging, to learn, and to grow. This year, the addition of the Tier 2 programme and the resulting 9 additional team members (tuākana) was an important part of the feedback received and observations made by the team about what was important for helping rāngatahi to settle quickly, open up easily, and engage.

Each tuākana has their own uniqueness and vibe, and that's why some young people gravitate towards certain people. Because we're all so different, there's this overall sense of safety."

"They don't make you leave a part of yourself at the door and then come in like half a person." (Rangatahi)

"Ko te amorangi ki mua, ko te hāpai ō ki muri' "The hāpai is all about making sure everything behind the scenes runs so that everyone is fed, happy... you nailed that."

"Everybody accepts everybody. There's no judgment, and I think that's what made this space really relaxed and safe, because it gives everybody a voice."

"It really helps the way you can all articulate your strengths. It's really cool to model that, because coming into it, it's a whole new language that they're learning."

"They walk in and they're all new, and they just see you and us interacting and go, 'oh, that's how it rolls around here,' and they just join in. We've already got a culture going, a kind, helpful, respectful culture... If there were 4 of us trying to create that, it's real hard."

A key insight underpinning many of the above reflections was the impact of having the 9 tuākana - impacts observed included rangatahi able to connect more easily with the tuākana because of being closer to age and community, the additional hāpai (support) to create manaaki, whanaungatanga, and practical support.

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Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, he toa takitini

Our strength is not as individuals,
but as a collective

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