Te Whāriki 2025-2026: Impact Report

"Activating the intersections of identity to lead systems change"

leadership lab
Fostering collective responses to complex issues

LINC

Overview of Te Whāriki

Who: Audience
6-10 intersectional leaders in the Ōtautahi region per cohort (2024 and 2025)

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

When: Duration
A 12 month learning experience with coaching, stories of lived experience, networking and facilitating collective activation initiatives

Resources Req: (people, frameworks, pūtea)
$70,000 for 2x Facilitators, 1x Evaluation Lead, Koha for participants etc

Why/Purpose: Impact question
"How do we intentionally grow leaders of system change who identify with groups that have experienced discrimination because of their identities?"

Activating the intersections of identity to lead systems change
https://leadershiplab.co.nz/projects/te-whariki/



What: Detailed description Te Whāriki 2023-2024 Impact Report

- Wānanga x 5
- ALG sessions x 4
- Strengths coaching (individual & teams)
- Te Korekoreka training
- Ideation sessions and activation projects
- Ecosystem engagement opportunities



How: process/methodology
We invite existing intersectional leaders who have experienced discrimination and marginalisation and develop a 12 month learning experience with coaching, stories of lived experience, networking and facilitating collective activation initiatives. Then we can activate the intersections of identity to lead systems change so that we contribute to a more equitable society and system through excluded communities being more connected.

- KO WAI AU? | Through self reflection we achieve self leadership
- KO WAI KOE? | The power of lived experience and shared stories as community leaders
- KO WAI TĀTAU? | Establishing Inclusion as a foundation, we nurture kotahitanga

Kaupapa | Purpose

Te Whāriki is one of three ngā kaikōkiri hubs in JR McKenzie Trust's Intersectionality and Systems Change Project. In 2020, the Trust launched its ten-year strategy, Te Anga Rautaki, with a vision for a:

socially just and inclusive Aotearoa New Zealand

The Project connects strongly to Leadership Lab's vision to see equitable and thriving communities and organisations, by giving effect to the articles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and growing leaders who are fostering collective approaches to complex issues, guided by our values:

mana ōrite, kotahitanga me manaakitanga

Te Whāriki focusses its impact on:

activating the intersections of identity to lead systems change

The kupu 'Whāriki' was chosen to fit with other part of the Leadership Lab 'LinC Ecosystem' (Incubator, Puāwai and Rourou) and expresses the way intersectionality and identity weave together.

leadership lab Pioneering collective responses to complex issues

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Te Ao Hurihuri | Theory of Change

If we....

People
Invite existing intersectional young leaders who have ***experienced discrimination and marginalisation.***

and....

Project
Develop a 12 month internship experience based on ***mentoring, project experience, networking and facilitating activation initiatives***

then we...

Impact
Activate the **intersections of identity** to **lead systems change**

so that...

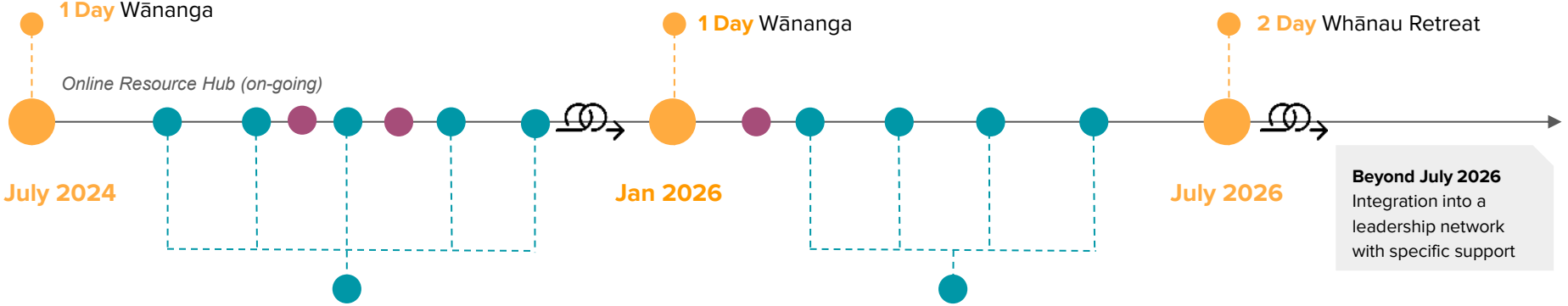
Vision
We contribute to a more **equitable society and system** through excluded communities being more **connected**

The Theory of Change and a developmental evaluation process guided every step in the co-creation of this emergent journey, through ongoing collaboration between Leadership Lab, J R McKenzie Trust and the two other Kaikōkiri hubs.

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Participant Journey Map | Timeline



KO WAI AU?

1-ON-1s

- Strengths Coaching
- 1-on-1 Check-ins
- Impact Stories

Self Directed

- Learning in own time
- Self Reflection

KO WAI KOE?

WĀNANGA x2

- Whakawhanaungatanga
- Whakarongo upskill
- Facilitated Workshops
- Emerging opportunities

KO WAI TĀTOU?

HUI x9

- ISC Community of Practice Hui
- Projects in Action
- Action Learning Groups
- Team Strengths Hui
- Community of Practice Hui

Te Whāriki Whānau 2025-26



Rangimarie Elvin
she/her/ia



Kai J. Lee 李曉敦
he/him/any



River Dantzler
they/them



Sam Woolf
he/they



Trekessa Manu
she/her



Gina Dao-McLay
they/them



Facilitator: Erica Austin
she/her



Facilitator: Tyler Ngatai
he/him

Ngā Kōrero Whakaaweawe | Impact stories

The impact of Te Whāriki 2025-26 has been significant, both in terms of the participant experiences and their collective impact.

The emergent and ongoing nature of systems change means that measuring specific outcomes and impacts can be challenging.

As such, the participants themselves are best placed to articulate the impact to date of their journey together on Te Whāriki 2025-26.





Rangimārie Elvin
(Ngāi Te Rangi, Ngāti Ranginui, Ngāti Pūkenga, Ngāi Tahu)
wahine/ia

No-one ever tells you what you may sacrifice when you enter a room. In my past it had been my Māori self, my takatāpui self or another part of myself because I didn't know how it all fit together to tell my story. Sometimes all it takes are people that are willing to whakarongo and a prompt for unlimited whanaungatanga that lifts you to weave it all together again.

Kōrero Whakaaweawe | Rangimārie's Story

Ko wai au?

He pāpaka nō Te Tahuna o Rangataua, he mōrehu o te kore tūohu ki Te Pirirākau. He mokopuna tēnei nō Tauranga Moana. Nō tōku Koko tōku ingoa tuatahi, nāna tō mātou whakapapa i whakataute. Nō tōku Nanny tōku ingoa tuarua, nāna te pono i whakatau i te mahi kaiāwhina mō Te Haahi Ratana, nāna te tapu i whakairi i te mahi kaikaranga mō te marae o Tamapahore. I was brought up below two of my marae: Tamapahore and Paparoa. My hautūtū-tanga is from my pāpā who can make anything from pure imagination, and my manaakitanga comes from my Koko who dedicated his life to hapori. My lens has been shaped by the tūpuna stories my uncle shared, the whenua my māmā traversed by horse, the kūmara my poppa cultivated, and the mahinga kai that my pāpā fed us from. This has intersected as a kaitiaki, designer, researcher and facilitator passionate about building human resilience and appetite for sustainable change.

Impact of Te Whāriki journey

This has been a reconciliation with my own story where I have been given the tools to approach with curiosity the peeling back of layers and influences that had shaped me into who I perceived myself to be or who I let others see. Our cohort is full of futures nerds, curious creatives and buzzy storytellers that prefer to go deep which has created this wāhi haumaru where we built a common strengths based language so that we could explore those layers to us differently and deepen our understanding of them. This has been impactful for me personally as I'm learning more and more things about myself while also building the courage to confront all my intersections to tell better and more honest stories of me. Te Whāriki and my new mates have shown me the value of bringing our whole selves.



Kai J. Lee 李曉敦
he/him/any

“In April, I guided my tāne group through a somatic experience and sharing circle that loosely mimics the stages and models of Te Korekoreka. The experience + feedback from my brothers were profound. I intend to bring this into International Men’s Day in November 2026.”

Kōrero Whakaaweawe | Kai’s Story

Ko wai au?

Ko Kai J. Lee 李曉敦 toku ingoa. I carry Cantonese whakapapa and was born in Hong Kong. At age 10, my family immigrated to Los Angeles, California, where I was raised. I am a third-culture kid who has spent decades navigating cross-cultural spaces across Asia and the Americas. I have chosen Aotearoa as home since late 2023 and am happily rooted in Ōtautahi, committed to learning and upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi. I am a visual storyteller, facilitator, community weaver, and the founder of Subtledream Productions. I love human stories, and bring a permaculture-minded, systems thinking geek brain to what I’ve recently been calling the intersection of visual craft, ecological restoration, and collective equity. In my free time, I am often frolicking in the beautiful taiao with a backpack and my cameras.

Impact of Te Whariki journey

A profound expansion in personal leadership, transitioning away from individualistic conditioning toward a deeply collaborative, decolonised mindset. The programme has acted as a safe, trust-filled crucible for group learning, emphasizing that discovering individual uniqueness through tools like CliftonStrengths becomes infinitely more powerful when woven into a shared waka. Key highlights include the balance of structured yet fluid spaceholding and the unexpected depth of individual coaching. Moving forward, the true integration of this journey lies in pulling these frameworks out of white-walled, fluorescent-lit meeting rooms and grounding them directly within the taiao: ensuring leadership change is felt somatically, ecologically, on our own as well as alongside community.



Leadership Lab Pānui February 2026

Stepping Into the Edge and Discovering the Thirst

Reflection by Kai J. Lee - Unconference contributor and Te Whāriki participant

When I first wrote about stepping into the edge before the unconference, I was anticipating the excitement, the unknown, and the discomfort. Now, I've stepped through the threshold.

Through Leadership Lab, I have witnessed myself shifting from documentarian to facilitator. For years I have been comfortable behind the lens, shaping narrative through framing and editing. Holding a room is different. There is no post-production. The energy responds in real time. One feels every hesitation, every silence, and every moment when something deeper wants to surface.

My unconference session was called Weaving the Human Story Back to the Living World. I chose not to begin with theory or policy. We began with breath, then with a question that felt simple, maybe even humorous, and also pensive: If you were a tree, a plant, a fungi, an insect, or an animal, what would you be? What qualities do you carry?

Moss. Harakeke. A loyal dog. A bird. Moko kauae. Pride. Silliness. Patience. Intergenerational healing.

Identity entered through ecology rather than ideology. Instead of debating equity frameworks, we were exploring who we are in relation to the living world. That shift softened defensiveness and made space for story. One participant spoke about her mother being forced to assimilate, to suppress language and culture, and about her own decision to reclaim moko kauae (female moko). She spoke of wanting her daughter to grow up without inherited shame. That moment held grief and reclamation at once. Another participant named the tension between pride and playfulness, between wanting to be seen and remaining small, to not poke out like a tall poppy. Someone else described themselves as moss, slow and steady, overlooked but essential.

Storytelling to others is a way to reinterpret our own story. I watched that reinterpretation unfold in real time. People were not just describing themselves; they were updating their narrative in the presence of witnesses. Participation was a two-way street.

I also felt my own edge. In the past, my internal patterning might have been rooted in a fear of debate or being torn down. Holding this edge required a different kind of diligence: a calm presence and the mindfulness to know that these people had chosen to enter this space to learn and share, not to conflict. I practiced breathing through what my mind deemed to be uncomfortable silence, leaning on my personal history of spaceholding and deep group work to stay anchored. By practicing non-judgment and using non-verbal acknowledgement, I learned to let the dust settle. I realised that even in the quiet, the cogs are turning. There is no need to pile on more words or prompts.

Afterward, a participant shared that our session could easily have been a couple hours long, or even a full wānanga. That comment landed deeply and warmed my heart.



Kai J. Lee contributed to Leadership Lab's newsletter in February 2026.

Click here to read full article



River Dantzler
they/them/ia

“I feel empowered to step into a leadership role in my community with a better understanding of how I work best, and with a network of people I can tap into for support”.

Kōrero Whakaaweawe | River’s Story

Ko wai au?

I was born in the USA and grew up in Colorado, near Tavá (Pikes Peak) and the Colorado River, and always valued connecting with nature as much as I have valued connecting with people. I came to Aotearoa in 2022, and began working as a transgender peer support worker in 2024. More broadly, I am a community advocate for takatāpui and LGBTQIA+ people of all ages in Waitaha Canterbury (plus Te Waipounamu and beyond!). I’m also an artist and love to weave creativity into my mahi. I’m grateful for the vibrant queer community that I’ve found here, as well as my family back home who have supported me through many phases of life.

Impact of Te Whāriki journey

The biggest takeaway has been the connections that I've formed both with our rōpū, and the wider Te Whāriki network. It's such a diverse community and I've loved getting to know them. Having regular time set aside to be reflective is something I think most of us don't have time for (or don't make time for!) so it was awesome to have a supportive environment that encouraged us to slow down, check in, and reflect on ourselves, our mahi, and our community.

One learning that has stuck with me is understanding where I thrive in projects - realizing that I have the most energy at the beginning of a project has been really helpful in adjusting my approach.



River speaking at National Day of Action in Ōtautahi: Unite for Trans Rights! *Photo: Marie Fox*

Kōrero Whakaaweawe | River's Story

Rainbow Hub Ōtautahi

River Dantzler is leading this project as part of Qtopia:

Ōtautahi Rainbow Spaces Collective is now officially a non-profit! River met Gina Dao-McLay, fellow Te Whāriki participant, through other connections but Te Whāriki helped them recognise the opportunity to work together on the rainbow hub. It's also helped River feel more comfortable stepping into a leadership role with the project.

https://www.orsc.org.nz/



Leadership Lab Pānui August 2026

Kia ora koutou katoa!

Welcome to our August Pānui - this month we share an impact story from River Dantzler who has just completed our Te Whāriki programme and is now part of co-designing our new community of practice for alumni of this programme.

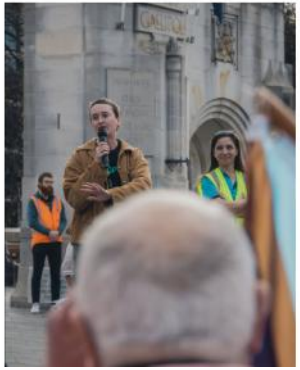
Reluctant Leadership and Creating Rainbow Spaces

A little over a year ago, I was living in a big community house and still feeling fresh at my job as a peer support worker with Qtopia. I spent my weekends going camping, and my evenings taking photos of my friends performing in drag shows. One day, I attended a RAP training with Chris Jansen, and spoke to him afterward about how much I liked the framework. He later emailed me to tell me about Te Whāriki - a year-long leadership incubator programme "activating the intersections of identity to lead systems change."

Leadership? Systems change? Strengths coaching? None of this sounded like me! But I saw a few familiar faces in the photos from the first two cohorts, and I couldn't deny that I was interested. So, I took the leap. I put in my application - not feeling particularly confident, but nervously excited about the possibility.

You might be able to guess this, but I got in! I joined Te Whāriki's third cohort, along with six other amazing humans. Over the past year, we have deepened our understanding of each other, ourselves, and our place in the wider systems change network of Otautahi, Aotearoa, and beyond.

My connection to systems change since living in Otautahi has always been through a rainbow lens. As a queer person new to town, I sought people and places that I could connect to who would respect my identity. It wasn't easy to find out what events were on, what services were available, and what places would be safe to go to. Eventually, I began to make friends in the rainbow community here, and even found a job working as a transgender peer support worker for Qtopia where I get to help people who are facing a lot of the same challenges that I've had to navigate. It was apparent to me early on that the rainbow community here needed more support and connection, and in time as I got to know the community more, those needs would materialise into the dream of a Rainbow Hub.



The idea for the Rainbow Hub first came about from community hui called by Christchurch City Council, and over time and after many meetings, it was eventually decided that it made sense for a new organisation to form to look after the project. Earlier this year, we celebrated a big milestone when Ōtautahi Rainbow Spaces Collective became a registered charity. ŌRSC's first goal is to open the Rainbow Hub - which will offer a permanent, physical location for Ōtautahi's rainbow community.

River Dantzler contributed to Leadership Lab's newsletter in August 2026.

Click here to read full article



Sam Woolf
he/they

A mindful space for noticing, sharing, and learning WITH (huge emphasis needed here) others. Being able to collectively hope and imagine a world better than the current. Learning what enacting systems change looks like has been a process that I am grateful to Erica and Tyler. Seeing how they artfully create space for this learning to happen. I am energised to action change.

Kōrero Whakaaweawe | Sam's Story

Ko wai au?

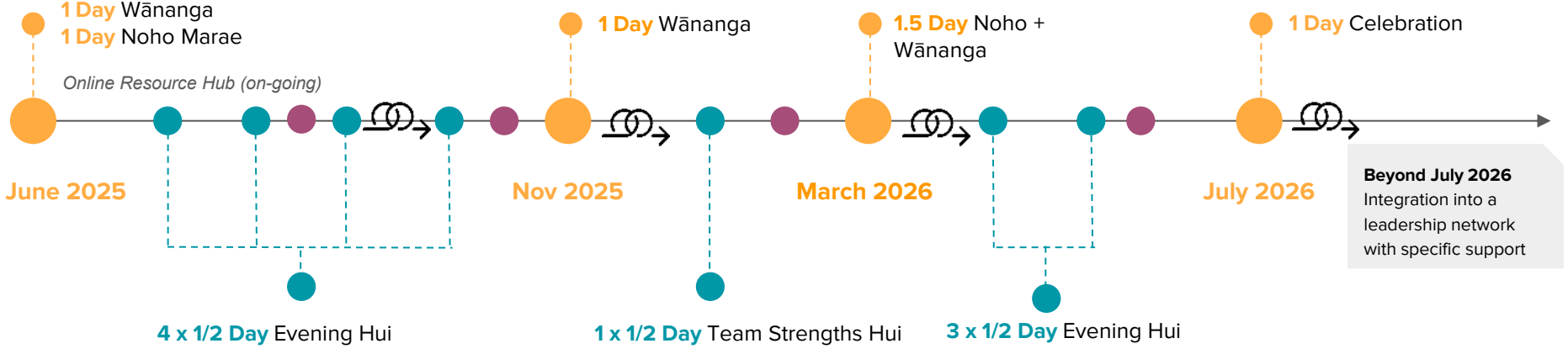
My parents were born in the Matamata and Wairoa but call the South Island home. I've spent much of my life between these places. I was raised on farms and small towns, hiking through mountains, and anchoring myself on riverbeds. Clothing I wear has been handed down through generations along with the skills to keep them alive. We practice hyper-localisation, participating in wellbeing economies, and pursue intergenerational thinking and behaviour.

Impact of Te Whariki journey

Reflective, challenging, opportunities to grow and strengthen character, spiritual in some ways, introspective, identity recognition and development, contextualisation of oneself in place and time, and connection with others that are seeking change or want to be involved in changemaking.

The identity piece has been crucial for my understanding of my own power and autonomy, how privilege is a boon and a hinderance depending on the context and my awareness and expertise navigating with it. Overall I have loved the identity piece and have found it deeply challenging for many reasons. One of them being the increasing sense and desire for action.

Participant Journey Map | Timeline



KO WAI AU?

1-ON-1s

- Strengths Coaching
- 1-on-1 Check-ins
- Self Reflection

KO WAI KOE?

WĀNANGA x4

- Whakawhanaungatanga
- Whakarongo upskill
- Facilitation Workshops
- Emerging opportunities

NOHO EXPERIENCE x4

- Wānanga with the wider Leadership Lab whānau & ecosystem
- Marae noho experience (Rāpaki Marae)

KO WAI TĀTOU?

HUI x7

- Themed Kōrero with Guests (from LL network)
- Projects in Action
- Action Learning Groups
- Team Strengths Hui
- ISC COP Sessions

Leaders for Equity Unconference Participation

November 2025

We saw active participation from all the Te Whariki 2025/2026 whānau at the Leaders for Equity Unconference. Another great way for this cohort to share and learn with others working in the systems change space.

Attendees ‘voted in’ Kai and Sam’s topics. They were well attended on the day:

- Weaving the human story back into the living world (led by Kai J.Lee)
- We are the future of Aotearoa – what if? (led by Sam Woolf)







Leaders for Equity Unconference Participation

November 2025

Sessions submitted by Te Whāriki alumni Cooper Sides (2023/2024 cohort) and Amy Knudsen (2024/2025 cohort) were also voted in:

- How marginalised can respond to fragility (led by Cooper Sides)
- Equity in Action Case Study: Mō Āpōpō Future Makers (led by Amy Knudsen)





Te Whāriki End-of-Programme Retreat

July 2026





As part of our Action Station session (designed for emergence), we started reflecting on our journey so far, and instead of working on a new systems change kaupapa or simply amplifying on existing kaupapa, the whānau recognised the need to create space that aligns with our current capacity needs:

- slow down, recalibrate and reset
- practice healing and inner systems change processes
- be with self and others we trust in the rōpū
- create

On July 3-5, the cohort headed for a retreat that is intended to:

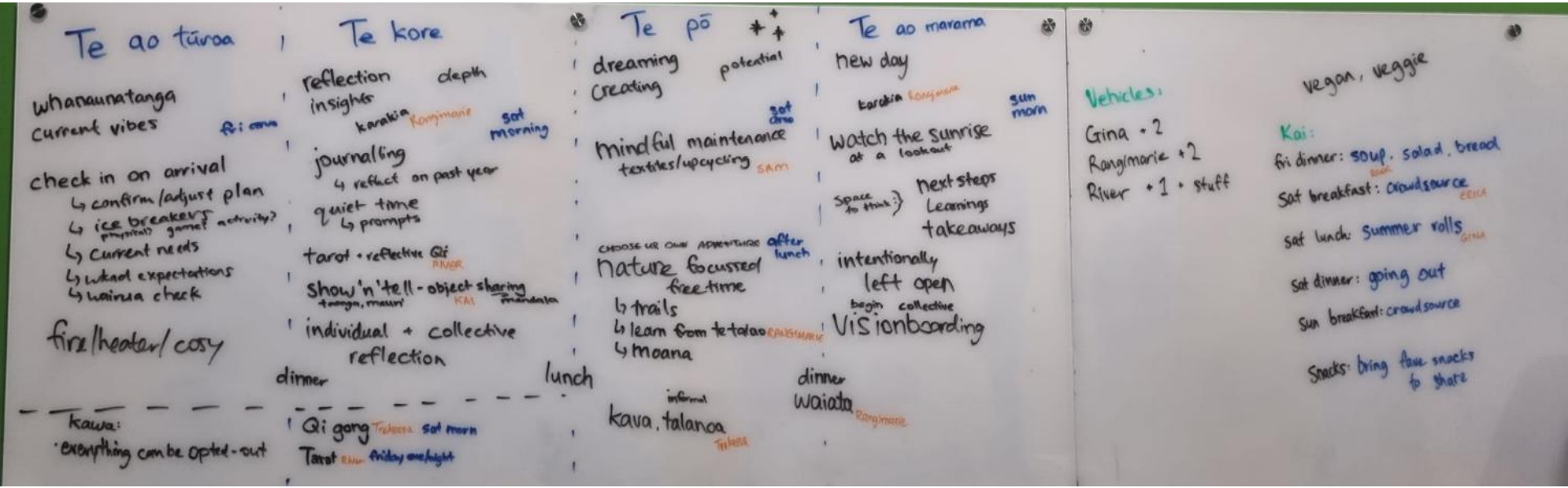
- Test and develop a retreat format/practices through direct experience (Phase 1)
- Offer to our communities of impact/ COP whānau (Phase 2)

This is very fitting as the theme for Matariki celebrations 2026: Matariki herenga waka – For Everyone (a powerful expression of unity, inclusion, and shared heritage).

Te Whāriki End-of-Programme Retreat

July 2026

The programme was fully co-created:



Te Whāriki End-of-Programme Retreat

July 2026





Each session was led by a member of the rōpū:

- Reflection Questions and Journaling
- Breathwork + Guided Qi Gong
- Making Kai and Sharing Stories Together
- Nature Mandala Building (object of significance)
- Learning from the Taiao (Hīkoi)
- Nature Focused Free Time
- Crafternoon: Mindful Maintenance
- Waiata & Karakia Practice - We learned Tokorima Taotao (Charisma Rangipunga, Paulette Tamati-Elliffe)

  This waiata-ā-ringa (action song) acknowledges the five primary hapū of Kāi Tahu. This could be nice to sing as a mihi to Mana Whenua of the area we are staying, Kāti Irakehu, mentioned in the waiata.
- Kava + Talanoa
- Sunrise Session + Intention Setting for the Future

Te Whāriki Retreat - Impact

September 2026



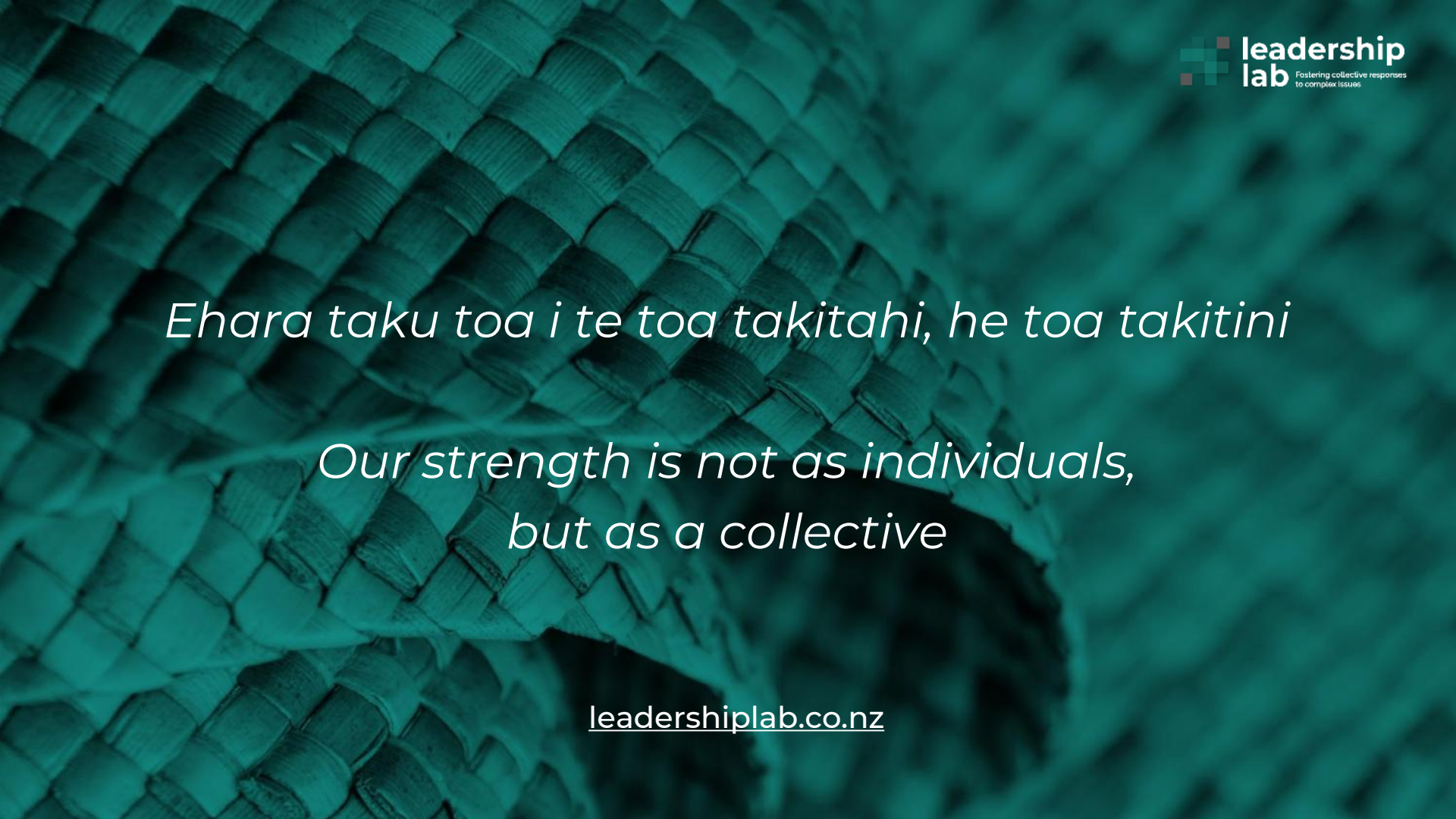


Inspired by the retreat, Kai J. Lee submitted a session for Leaders for Equity Unconference 2026: Slow Productivity and Love as Systems Change. This was voted into the programme and also part of Do-Lab topics:

Key themes of conversation:
What does a full cup, knowing and ease feel like?

- Balance
- Actively finding time to rest
- The process of having a break/giving space before returning
- It's okay to have days where not much gets done - Experiencing joy, being present, having the ability to lean towards what is there and might be challenging (easier with a full cup)
- Movement
- Spending time with friends & whānau
- Not skipping ahead because you're too busy

Click to read Unconference 2026 Session Notes Summary


leadership lab
Fostering collective responses to complex issues
Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, he toa takitini
Our strength is not as individuals,
but as a collective
leadershiplab.co.nz