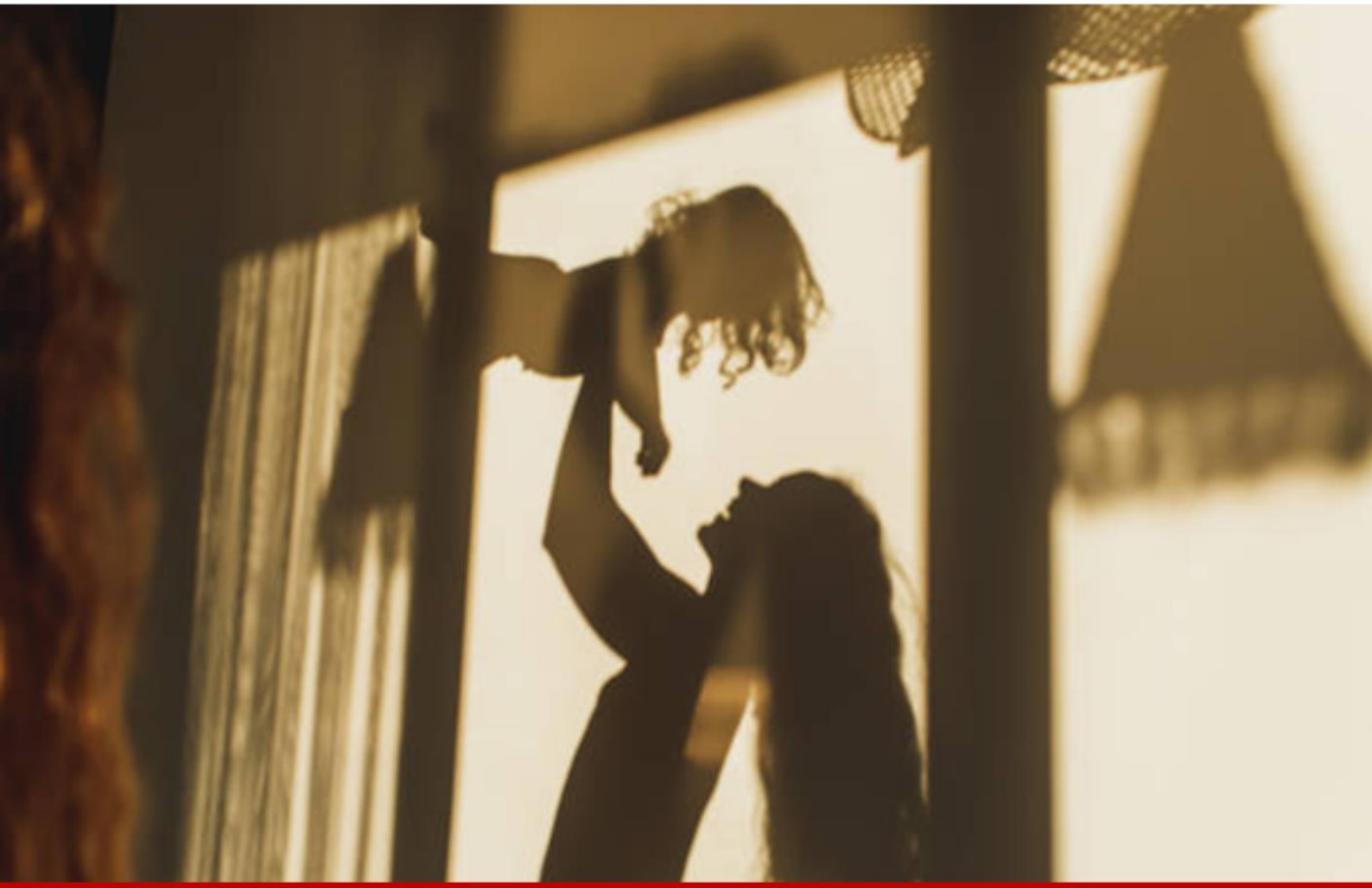
THE EXPRESSION, EXPERIENCE AND TRANSCENDENCE OF LOW SKILLS IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND



WĀHINE MĀORI ENGAGEMENT WITH LITERACIES

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH PROGRAMME

This project is funded by a Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment Endeavour Grant, spanning five years over October 2019-2024.

The overarching goal of this project is to provide policy recommendations to improve life-course trajectories and socio-economic outcomes of adults living with low literacy and/or numeracy (L+N) skills.

This research is aimed at shaping the ways in which we deal with literacy and numeracy issues in NZ with a focus on effective intervention. For further information about our programme and other outputs, see: www.workresearch.aut.ac.nz/low-skills

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RESEARCH PARTNERS

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Acknowledgements

Tūtawa mai i runga	Come forth from above
Tūtawa mai i raro	Come forth from below
Tūtawa mai i roto	Come forth from within
Tūtawa mai i waho	Come forth from the environment
Kia tau ai te mauri tū	Vitality and
Te mauri ora ki te katoa	wellbeing for all
Haumi e, hui e, tāiki e	Let's join, gather and unite

(nā Te Manahau Morrison)

We would firstly like to thank the wāhine who were willing to share their stories and, in doing so, have graciously given us their time, energy and wisdom. Our hope is that we have captured their stories in ways that recognise the mana they hold and that through this report we have honoured their decision to be part of this case study project. We are especially grateful for the help of Parekotuku and Hineitimoana who undertook the interviews and helped the wāhine feel comfortable to share their experiences with us.

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DISCLAIMER

The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the organisations involved.

Executive summary

Wāhine Māori engagement with literacy (2023) is a case study report in collaboration with Te Whakaruruhau. It has been undertaken as part of a larger project, *The expression, experience and transcendence of low skills in Aotearoa New Zealand* (2019–2024), the aim of which is to provide policy recommendations to improve life-course trajectories and socio-economic outcomes for adults with low literacy and numeracy skills in Aotearoa New Zealand. Broadly speaking, *Wāhine Māori engagement with literacy* examines the framing and application of literacy measures in contemporary New Zealand culture. More specifically, it is about the lives and learning of wāhine (women) Māori (the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand) within that culture and their attitudes towards, and complex relationships with, literacy as it is defined in their own lives and in the current setting.

The study adopts an actively decolonial stance, problematising value-loaded terms such as 'illiterate' (negative) and 'literate' (positive). It acknowledges the significant and systemic impacts of the colonial project upon wāhine and all Māori. It makes a strong case for re-examining and, ultimately, redefining literacy. It does so by challenging the conventional Eurocentric definition of literacy—the capacity to read and write in English—that is currently predominant in Aotearoa New Zealand and has, historically, been enacted to disparage, disadvantage, and even discriminate against, Māori. It promotes a culturally inclusive understanding of literacy that is open to the Māori expression of Indigenous storywork, or pūrākau, as a conduit for transmitting narratives and knowledge in order to created shared understanding among persons/peoples. It acknowledges the significance of Māori perspectives and oral traditions, which inform cultural literacy through whakapapa (genealogy) and other tikanga (customary practices) such as waiata (song/s), haka (ceremonial war dance), and mōteatea (lament). It asserts that Māori understandings and lived experiences of literacy are informed by mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge), which underpins Māori social structures, cosmology, and comprehension of Te Ao Māori (the Māori world).

The focus of the study is mana wāhine (the intersection between being Māori and being female). The framework for the study is drawn from Kaupapa Māori (an agenda that furthers Māori development and aspirations). The methodology emphasises pūrākau (pūrākau methodology is a Kaupapa Māori form of narrative inquiry that is relevant and culturally appropriate for Māori-focused research). These approaches and emphases all align with Indigenous epistemologies and advocate, in this study, for a transformative approach to literacy.

Twenty-one participants have graciously offered insight into their lifeworlds for the purposes of the study. The pūrākau methodology integrates face-to-face individual interviews with six of the wāhine with focus group (wānanga) discussions among the remaining 15—a disparity brought about by COVID-19 disruptions. All 21 participants are female, all are mothers, and they are between 21 and 69 years old. 15 are Māori; six are non-Māori (Pacific Island, East Asian, and Pākehā). Interviews were conducted on their terms in agreed-upon venues at suitable times to work around their busy lives. The following questions directed the interviews and focus groups:

1. What has motivated people/whānau to make change in their lives?
2. What was the pathway that people/whānau have taken to make change in their lives?
3. What are people's experiences of their efforts to make change in their lives?
4. What have been supports or facilitators, barriers or challenges in their efforts?

Insights were transcribed and are interpreted according to the pūrākau methodology, which seeks to disrupt a dominant pattern of narrative that can victimise and invisibilise wāhine Māori, instead amplifying their resilience, mana (power), determination, and their dedication to their whānau (families). Their experiences with domestic violence and other turbulent aspects of their lifeworlds, namely grappling with state services and government agencies in securing safety for themselves and their whānau, are necessarily reflected upon at length. Their strength is narratively threaded through the study in parallel with the pūrākau or creation story of Hinetītama/Hine-nui-te-pō. The following thematic categories have been drawn in alignment with the Hinetītama pūrākau and from a critical look at the gathered interview data in response to the four above questions:

A) Connection between identity and wellbeing;
B) Removing oneself from environments that are not safe;
C) Seeking knowledge and information;
D) Learning to navigate the "new";
E) Whakapapa and the protection of children; and
F) Wāhine learning experiences and aspirations.

Each exploration of these themes is bookended by a passage from the Hinetītama pūrākau and a wāhine narrative which foregrounds the one-on-one interview and wānanga participants—a framing device that establishes whakapapa from the first Māori woman to the wāhine living today.

The study determines that literacy, if understood in Eurocentric terms as a product of formal learning, does not contribute meaningfully to wāhine wellbeing (and, crucially, it proposes that securing and enriching wellbeing should be the desired outcome for literacy and numeracy practices). The wāhine interviewed do not prioritise this form of literacy in their lives. The study stresses that emotional literacy, social literacy, and cultural literacy—modes of literacy that are not bound to pen and paper—are of more relevance to, and greater value for, these and other wāhine.

The study notes that reading and writing skills have been proven to be associated with improved health and better socio-economic outcomes. However, it contends that the rigid construct built around this form of literacy at the expense of all others has failed to encompass the identities and fullness of diverse communities in Aotearoa New Zealand. It therefore proposes a paradigm shift, towards policies and practices that centre wellbeing and incorporate Indigenous perspectives in measuring and administering literacy. The study claims that future aspirations for literacy need to be based on a return to the word and spirit of *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* (the *Treaty of Waitangi*). Thus, it argues for shifting from a literacy outlook to *literacies*.

The study aims for a holistic understanding of lived literacies in driving the development of educational policies by public institutions and private groups. Reframing literacy as literacies is posited as a means to empower marginalised groups and to challenge the dominance of the Eurocentric education paradigm. Formal learning in English-language schools cannot be the extent of national literacy standards as it disregards Māori epistemological and ontological realities and can discount wāhine, many of whom may prioritise other modes of literacy. Centring their perspectives will bring about a more culturally inclusive future, one that makes space for the development of emotional and cultural literacies—as well as other forms such as digital, media, visual, financial, and health literacies—alongside the conventional version of literacy that has a monopoly in the present system.

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Glossary

Authors note regarding English descriptions of kupu Māori: The descriptions are principally taken from the context they were provided by participants. Unless otherwise signalled (by the use of an asterisk*), relevant descriptions have been supplemented by Te Aka Māori – Māori dictionary online https://maoridictionary.co.nz

Kupu Māori	English translation/description*
Aotearoa	New Zealand
Aroha	Love; sympathy
Awhi	Guidance; Support
Hā a koro mā a kui mā	Connection to cultural heritage
Haka	Ceremonial war dance
Hineahuone	First woman created by Tānenuiarangi at Kurawaka
Hinemoana	Mother of the oceans; guardian of the seas
Hinengaro	Mind; thought; intellect; consciousness; awareness
Hinenuitepō	Daughter of Hineahuone and Tānenuiarangi
Hinetītama	Daughter of Hineahuone and Tānenuiarangi
Hongi	Act of pressing noses together
Iwi	A social unit; people; nation; tribe
Kaimahi	Staff member(s)
Kaumātua	A respected elder who has been involved, for many years, with their whānau
Kaupapa Māori	An agenda that furthers Māori development/aspirations
Kina	Spiked sea urchin
Kōhanga reo	Preschool language learning nests
Kōrero tawhito	History; stories of the past
Koro	An older man; grandfather
Koroua	An elder (male)
Kuia	An elder (female)
Kupu	Word (singular); words (plural)
Kura Kaupapa Māori	Māori language immersion school(s)
Kurawaka	Name of the place where Hineahuone was fashioned of the earth
Mahi	Work; employment; trade
Mahitahi	Collaboration; working together
Mana ake	Unique identity
Mana wāhine	Intersection of Māori and female identities/experiences
Mātauranga	Knowledge
Mātauranga Māori	Māori knowledge
Matua	Parent (singular); parents (plural)
Mauri	Energetic connection to other beings and places
Moko kauae	Female chin tattoos based on their mana and established through whakapapa
Mokopuna; Moko	Grandchild (singular); grandchildren (plural)

Mōteatea	A form of lament
Oranga Tamariki	Ministry for Children
Papatūānuku	Earth mother
Pepeha	Tribal saying of ancestors explaining connections
Pūrākau	Transmission of knowledge to create shared understanding
Ranginui	Sky father
Raranga	Weave
Rarohenga	Spiritual realm for the deceased
Raruraru	Problem; trouble
Rēwena	A bread made from a 'bug' grown from potato
Rongoā	Medicine; remedy; tonic
Taiao	Environment; nature
Tānenuiarangi (Tāne)	God of the forests, birds and insects; father of mankind
Tangaroa	God of the sea; progenitor of fish
Te Ao Māori	The Māori world
Te Ao Mārama	The world of light; the land of the living
Te reo Māori	Māori language
Te Tiriti o Waitangi	Treaty of Waitangi written in te reo Māori
Te whakaruruhau	Waikato Women's Refuge
Te Whare Tapa Whā*	Mason Durie's model of Māori health; four cornerstones of Māori health represented as a traditional meeting house
Tikanga	Customary practice(s)
Ūkaipō	mother, source of sustenance
Wāhine	Women
Waiata	To sing; a song (singular); songs (plural)
Wairua	Soul; non-physical spirit of a person; spiritual wellbeing
Wairuatanga	Spiritual connection to gods and ancestors
Wānanga	Gathering for open discussion of thoughts, opinions, and experiences
Whāea	Mother; aunty; term of endearment for female of senior status
Whakapapa	Genealogy; lineage; descent; process of layering one thing upon another; basis of Māori identity and for comprehending and interpreting the world
Whānau	Family member; relative; friend with a common interest
Whānau Ora	Flourishing families and their wellbeing; a philosophy and approach that was formed in policy
Whanaungatanga	Social belonging
Whakaaro	Thoughts; thinking
Whakairo	Carving
Whakataukī	Proverbial saying
Whare	House; home; place of residence
Whare Wānanga	University; place of higher learning
Whatumanawa	Seat of emotions; heart; mind
Whenua	Land

* Durie, M. (1994). Te whare tapa whā. *Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand*.

Acronyms	Explanations
ACC	Accident Compensation Corporation
CBD	Central business district
CYFS	Children, Young persons and Family Services. Now renamed OT
COVID-19	Infectious Coronavirus disease caused by SARS-CoV-2 virus
DV	Domestic violence
FotC	Friends of the Court
IPV	Intimate partner violence
KFTS	Kirikiriroa Family Trust Services
Level 4	During COVID, under Public Health Order, movement was severely restricted beyond home and neighbourhoods; citizens were in "lockdown"
MOJ	Ministry of Justice
OCD	Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OT	Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children
Parentline	A government-accredited social service provider
PI	Pacific Island(s); Pacific Islander
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
Refuge	Non-government nationwide organisation providing shelter, protection and support to women and children experiencing violence (for the purposes of this report, reference to Refuge does not include Te Whakaruruhau)
Te Whakaruruhau	Waikato Women's Refuge
TV	Television
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WEAG	Welfare Expert Advisory Group
WINZ	Work and Income New Zealand

Introduction: A wāhine Māori case study

The term 'literacy' invokes particular understandings of capability, skill and knowledge. It infers a status that can result in either the privileging of or discrimination against individuals and communities. The application of the terms 'illiterate' and 'literate' carries a value that must be recognised when conceptualising literacy and numeracy measures, programmes and goals (Keefe & Copeland, 2011). To build a picture of those with so-called 'low' literacy skills, one must interrogate the definition and measures of literacy. An actively decolonial stance must be adopted to shape the ways in which adult literacy (and numeracy) in Aotearoa New Zealand might be addressed in the future. It is entirely insufficient to discuss literacy from a monocultural perspective (Boulton, Levy & Cvitanovic, 2020) as this invisibilises a vast array of understandings and lived experiences of literacy (Yasukawa & Black, 2016).

Māori, as the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand, have an understanding of literacy that is grounded in their own creation narratives and epistemological and ontological realities, which are reflected in cultural practices that have been passed down through the generations (Marsden & Royal, 2003; Matamua, 2018; Royal, 1998, 2012; Sadler, 2007; Tate, 2012). Cultural literacy continues through waiata, haka and mōteatea. Mātauranga is shared through whakairo, raranga and pūrākau and continues through the expression of tikanga during cultural events (Te Awekotuku, 1991; Tibble, 1984). It is these expressions of connection to Te Ao Māori in both the mundane and significant that reflect and demonstrate several forms of literacy of Te Ao Māori.

We have argued (see Furness et al., pre-publication) that Māori understandings of literacy recognise ways of being and knowing that are informed by mātauranga Māori. A significant component of mātauranga Māori is the notion of whakapapa or genealogy, which can be defined as "the process of layering one thing upon another" (Mahuika, 2019, p. 1). In this case study we highlight the narratives of wāhine (women) that demonstrate both their recognition of, and efforts to reflect, the value they place upon whakapapa, which provides what Mahuika (2019, p. 1) calls the "skeletal structure of Māori epistemology." Whakapapa as the basis for Māori social structures directs us to take into account an interconnected and cosmological view, understanding and comprehension of Te Ao Māori (Robertson & Masters-Awatere, 2007; Rua, Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017).

In this same vein, we must recognise that literacy in Te Ao Māori stems from whakapapa and relates to cultural literacy and social literacy and leaves space for emotional literacy. A proudly oral history

inherently challenges the conceptions of literacy and numeracy that restrict definitions of skills, capability and knowledge to the pen and paper – to the written transferal of knowledge. To be abundantly clear, characterising literacy in reading and/or writing (Keefe & Copeland, 2011) as the benchmark for being literate predetermines the exclusion of many literate people from such status.

Future aspirations for literacy in Aotearoa need to be based steadfastly on Te Tiriti o Waitangi, te reo Māori version of Treaty of Waitangi, and recentre various literacies in the design of literacy programmes. This will inevitably challenge capacity for international comparison. However, transnational organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) need to make room for culturally diverse lifeworlds in which literacy can be comprehended very differently. Whilst comparison with other nations may be hindered, success and wellbeing at home can be supported.

Utilising mātauranga Māori, we present the following case study report, which has been conducted as part of a larger project called *The expression, experience and transcendence of low skills in Aotearoa New Zealand*. The project is administered by the New Zealand Work Research Institute at Auckland University of Technology and is funded by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment Endeavour Grant, spanning five years over October 2019–2024. The overarching goal of this project is to provide policy recommendations to improve the life-course trajectories and socio-economic outcomes of adults living with low literacy and/or numeracy (L+N) skills. This research aims to shape the ways in which we deal with literacy and numeracy issues in Aotearoa with a focus on effective intervention. We present here a case study that explicitly uses a cultural lens to explore wāhine Māori life experiences and their reflections of life, literacy and learning.

Wāhine Māori shared their narratives and we present these through a Kaupapa Maori approach, utilising pūrākau and a mana wāhine focus. We aim to platform wāhine Māori in the telling of their aspirations for literacy in the future. We employ a pūrākau structure of Hinetītama to the narratives that we have heard from wāhine Māori. From this pūrākau we explore five themes: (1) connection between identity and wellbeing; (2) removing oneself from environments that are not safe; (3) seeking knowledge and information; (4) learning to navigate the "new" environment/system; and (5) whakapapa and the protection of children.

Most prominently, our findings demonstrate the insignificance of formal learning to wellbeing. That is, literacy, as it is understood from a Eurocentric perspective, did little to support wellbeing or success for the wāhine Māori that we spoke with. Instead, we heard evidence of the profound emotional and

cultural literacy that wāhine Māori needed to navigate the difficult experiences in their lifeworlds. However, the wāhine did not make this explicit connection to various forms of literacy themselves. They spoke about their experiences and how they have navigated these and their hopes for the future.

The centring of wellbeing and journeys to reconnection and extraction presented us with a story told by wāhine Māori that literacy, understood as formal learning, does not contribute to their wellbeing or to their narratives. This reflection issues a powerful statement for public and private agencies invested in the delivery of literacy and numeracy programmes in Aotearoa: namely, that our understanding of literacy needs to recognise the various ways that people can be, and are, literate and enable us to build safeguards to ensure people have the space to develop such literacies and be recognised for those skills, capacities and knowledges.

Our partner organisation

This case study report has been developed in collaboration with Te Whakaruruhau Waikato Women's Refuge (referred to as Te Whakaruruhau). Located in Hamilton's central business district (CBD), Te Whakaruruhau started in 1986 with its first safe house and four staff (Sherson & Irvine, 2018). Since its inception, Te Whakaruruhau has been committed to providing services in ways that are culturally appropriate and that cater to the needs of Māori whānau (Robertson et al., 2013; Sherson & Irvine, 2018).

Te Whakaruruhau has helped thousands of women, children and whānau over its 30+ years of operation. Providing a range of services including crisis care, safe houses, government and agency advice and community-based support, Te Whakaruruhau is a Kaupapa Māori agency managing millions of dollars in contracts (Waikato Women's Refuge, n.d.).

Context

Aotearoa is a settler colonial state, in which settler colonialism should be thought of as "a structure not an event" (Wolfe, 1999, p. 2 as cited in Terruhn, 2019, p. 3). The structures of colonisation remain pervasive, and the colonial project is ongoing (Terruhn, 2019). In the exploration of the narratives of

wāhine Māori, it is necessary to foreground this colonial context in order to consider what literacy programmes might look like in the future of Aotearoa.

Māori lived in a thriving society that consisted of regular trade between iwi and across both the Tasman Sea and the Pacific Ocean (Barclay-Kerr, 2016; Te Kawariki & Network Waitangi Whangarei, 2012; Tuaupiki, 2017). As has been established by Māori researchers, historians and academics through the decades, Māori had established trade relationships that required familiarity and competency with different languages, cultural practices and political agendas (Mahuika, 1977; Nikora, Rua & Te Awekotuku, 2004; Tawhai & Gray-Sharp, 2011).

When British settlers began arriving to these shores, many were surprised to discover that there were Māori who could read and write in both English and Māori (Jones and Jenkins, 2017). Jones & Jenkins (2011) posit that Māori did not relinquish their pre-contact forms of literacy. Instead, during those early years of discussion with the settlers, Māori added understanding of the English language and its accompanying textual practices to their existing forms of literacy (Jones & Jenkins, 2008; Marsden & Royal, 2003).

However, colonial policies and practices entrenched a system of education that undermined the validity and legitimacy of Māori language, knowledge, culture and values (G. H. Smith, 2000). Furthermore, colonial educators had no intention of learning from Māori (Jones & Jenkins, 2008; C.W. Smith, 2000). The result is a system which, since its establishment, has not sought to embrace or validate Māori knowledges.

It is not the purpose of this report to centre experiences of domestic violence (DV). However, given that the wāhine we spoke to had experienced DV, it is pertinent to note that Aotearoa has one of the highest rates of reported intimate partner violence (IPV) in the OECD with an incident reported every four minutes (Black, Hodgetts & King, 2020; Office of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor, 2018). Previous research has described ways by which the current systems, which are supposed to provide support for victims of IPV, can enact further acts of violence against women and children. As explained by Robertson & Masters-Awatere (2017), court-enforced systems are known to place the burden of care directly upon the women who have fled violent relationships and yet, simultaneously, blame the women for their children's absence from school (despite the risks posed by a violent partner). The burden of family violence is carried heavily by whānau Māori (Allport et al., 2020; Williams & Blyth et al., 2019). This contemporary report by Allport and colleagues on DV demonstrates the extent to which Māori society has been impacted by colonialism.

It has also been well documented that whānau is a key social structure within Māori society. Whether related by blood or by a common purpose or goal, whānau encompasses supports that are inherent within Māori society. Other works have documented that, traditionally, violence upon women and children was not tolerated within Māori society (Jenkins, Philip-Barbara & Harrison, 2002; Mikaere, 2011). As Balzer (1997) asserts, whānau violence within the context of traditional childrearing practices within Māori society was virtually unheard of. Contemporary childrearing in New Zealand is a far cry from traditional processes prior to the arrival of missionaries and the Crown. Along with economic structures, social emphasis on the nuclear family, and the assertion of independence rather than a village that celebrates interdependence, have hugely reshaped Māori society and the transmission of knowledge.

This report acknowledges the importance of our historical context and experiences as sites of tension recognised by the wāhine we spoke with who have experienced IPV or DV in the home. All of the wāhine we heard from have valuable insight and knowledge that reflects their strength and commitment to their children and the learnings they have gained from their life experiences.

Our approach

This case study, in its approach, centres Indigenous knowledge. In particular, it recognises Te Ao Māori approaches in order to contribute towards better understanding Māori flourishing. These approaches are considered with regards to research practice (Pihama et al., 2015; L. T. Smith, 2021; Ware et al., 2017). For the purposes of this case study report, we have engaged with Indigenous storywork as a mechanism to frame and access traditional forms of knowledge (Archibald & Xiiem, 2008; Lee, 2009; Seed-Pihama, 2019). Archibald and Xiiem (2008) refer to Indigenous storywork as an ethical compass to working with Indigenous people, their knowledges and stories.

Pūrākau

Pūrākau aligns with Indigenous storywork in the transmission of historic narratives that contain cultural context and offer deeper understanding when considering strategies for change. Because such knowledge is handed down through the generations, it can create a sense of connection and identity. As a research approach, we drew on the term pū, which refers to the source or beginning, and rākau,

which refers to a tree or plant. Each rākau needs the pū, or roots, to be able to grow and thrive (Lee-Morgan, 2008). Traditional pūrākau interpreted over time were used to retain and transmit knowledge. Hence, pūrākau do not have a set structure or pattern and contain a wealth of information on how to be and live as Māori.

Pūrākau methodology is a Kaupapa Māori form of narrative inquiry that is relevant and culturally appropriate for Māori research. Storytelling is an intrinsic need for human beings and has been a vital part of ensuring Indigenous knowledge is retained and protected (Mika & Southey, 2018). The important role of storytelling has been highlighted by Indigenous Canadian scholar Leanne Simpson (2018), who writes that "Storytelling is an important process for visioning, imagining, critiquing the social space around us, and ultimately challenging the colonial norms fraught in our daily lives." (p. 34). For Māori, pūrākau are vital for identity as they contain a wealth of knowledge that are reclaimed through storytelling, which sustains and maintains mātauranga and a Te Ao Māori worldview that, in current times, is essential to resisting the colonisation of ontological and epistemological constructs (Lee, 2009). Lee (2009) further argues that pūrākau are "a traditional form of Māori narrative, containing philosophical thought, epistemological constructs, cultural codes and world views" (p. 96). Pūrākau, in this context, are understood as narratives – experiences, knowledge and teachings – that form the pū, which people need in order to live healthy, productive and safe lifestyles. The narratives shared as vignettes throughout this report are a return to the pū – the essence of what could be both a flourishing or degenerating rākau (Wirihana, 2012). These pū are used to interpret the life experiences shared by the wāhine Māori participants.

Mana wāhine

The focus of this case study is on women, but it should not be confused for a feminist study. Given our research approach and partnership with Te Whakaruruhau, we purposefully aimed to capture the narratives of wāhine Māori and any other wāhine willing to share with us. As such, this work prioritises the intersection of being Māori and being a woman to provide insight into mātauranga wāhine (Māori women's knowledges) as it relates to mātauranga Māori (Simmonds, 2011; Wilson, Mikarere-Hall & Sherwood, 2021; Wilson et al., 2021). Through the presentation of narratives that highlight wāhine Māori experiences in all their glory, we acknowledge the diversity, resilience, strength and determination that these wāhine have (Irwin, 1992; Johnston & Pihama, 1995). As pointed out by Johnston and Waitere (2009), it is important to centre Māori women to ensure that we take control of

the narrative. Doing so ensures that (as wāhine Māori) we are active in defining and claiming our knowledge. Past studies, written by non-Māori (and men), can inadvertently relegate Māori women to passive recipients rendering them invisible.

Kaupapa Māori

This project is underpinned by a Kaupapa Māori theoretical and methodological approach that centres Māori aspirations, values, beliefs, and experiences throughout the research process (Curtis, 2016; Pihama, Campbell & Greensill, 2019; Pihama et al., 2015; L. T. Smith, 2021). The project was designed and led by Māori researchers who have embedded levels of accountability throughout the project between participants, stakeholders and the research team. The positionality of the team is as follows: Bridgette Masters-Awatere (Te Rarawa, Ngai Te Rangi, Tūwharetoa ki Kawerau); Sharyn Heaton (Kai Tahu, Ngāti Apa ki te rā Tō, Ngati Kuia, Muāupoko, Rangitāne, Te Arawa Waikato/Tainui); Hineitimoana Greensill (Waikato/Tainui); Parekotuku Moore (Ngati Raukawa, Ngai Te Rangi, Waikato); and Mohi Rua (Tūhoe, Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Whakaue). Making our positionality clear explicitly identifies us as both Indigenous and Māori team members. We worked collaboratively with Darelle Howard (Pākehā) and our other case study colleagues Jane Furness and Gemma Piercy-Cameron (also Pākehā) to undertake two case studies that were separate (due to the organisation of focus) yet connected (by the focus on Māori participant stories) to adult literacy (Furness & Piercy-Cameron, 2023).

Taking a Kaupapa Māori approach has enabled the research team to contextualise analysis and interpret data within wider understandings of complex systems and interconnecting environments. Aligning with consideration of structural factors (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Jackson, 2011; L. T. Smith, 2021), the research focused on supporting change and improvement at a systems level rather than directing the attention to 'fixing' the participants and their communities (Palmer et al., 2019). Multiple site visits to the primary agency office and engagement with key staff ensured a strong connection (Tinirau & Gillies, 2010) and clarity on the project's intent to facilitate a collaborative relationship in the build-up to recruitment.

Unfortunately, the arrival of COVID-19 to Aotearoa in 2020 disrupted everyday life for all its citizens, forcing health service agencies to reconfigure both their staff deployment and their service delivery mechanisms. Once community transmission of COVID-19 was detected, the nation's residents were put into lockdown (Derrett, Radka & Wyeth, 2022). For five weeks, the entire population remained in a

Level 4 lockdown – a response considered to be one of the most stringent globally (Petherick et al., 2021). During this time, research activities halted as our team had to take a step back from engaging with Te Whakaruruhau, who were primarily dealing with meeting the immediate needs of Māori women and their whānau.

Given the Kaupapa Māori approach and intentions of the research team, our preferred interview method was to engage in face-to-face interviews. However, the on-going disruption to livelihoods through regional lockdowns significantly impacted our ability to engage relationally with the organisation and their staff. In December 2021, Aotearoa shifted to the COVID-19 Protection Framework, also known as the traffic light system. This transition marked the end of the Alert system and 'lockdowns' which were replaced with mask and vaccination mandates that were intended to reduce further risk of spreading SARS-CoV2 variants.

Methods for collecting narratives

Despite COVID-19 disruptions impacting engagement opportunities with staff, the efforts to develop relational connections beforehand enabled progress towards recruitment once the work context was stable. Te Whakaruruhau initially took responsibility for contracting a community researcher to assist with participant recruitment. Six individual interviews were undertaken over a three-week period in late June/early July 2022. However, with a deadline to complete the necessary number of interviews by the end of August, the data collection process shifted to focus groups/wānanga (Bishop, 1996; Mahuika & Mahuika, 2020). Four focus groups were conducted over a six-week period and followed a wānanga-like process. Fifteen participants took part in these four focus group interviews.

There were 21 participants in total, all of whom were female and mothers. They were all engaged with a professional service that provides support for women who have experienced DV. The women's ages range from early-20s to mid-60s. Fifteen participants were Māori; six were non-Māori (their ethnicities were Pacific Island, East Asian and Pākehā).

Interviews took place in a variety of settings including people's homes, a meeting room in the Te Whakaruruhau office, two community houses, and one in a vehicle parked on the side of a busy road. The range of venues for interviewing participants reflects our desire to capture family-focused narratives, which meant conducting the interviews in venues and at times that suited participants.

General interview questions

The broad questions as they relate to the case study focus were:

1. What has motivated people/whānau to make change in their lives?
2. What was the pathway that people/whānau have taken to make change in their lives?
3. What are people's experiences of their efforts to make change in their lives?
4. What have been supports or facilitators, barriers or challenges in their efforts?

To answer these questions, we explored the following areas: what wellbeing meant to the participants; their learning journeys and experiences of making change in their lives; what helped and what made it harder for them to make positive change in their lives; their literacy learning experiences and its impacts; the helpfulness of other services or supports they have accessed; and their view of the future.

In exploring these areas, we adopted a strengths-based starting point in which we understand people to have many abilities and recognise that they are also often navigating complex lives. The specific questions asked in the interviews, along with the guidelines and prompts available to the interviewers, can be found in Appendix A.

Analysing the narratives

Our overarching aim is to understand how whānau make change in their lives that enable them and/or their whānau to live their lives in ways that are important to them. In undertaking this case study about wāhine and their literacy experiences and aspirations, we draw on notions of flourishing whānau as a useful guide when considering wellbeing. Whānau Ora policies, since being introduced, are recognised as being derived from a philosophy and an approach which have been widely utilised across government agencies and ministerial departments (Boulton & Gifford, 2014; Whānau Ora Taskforce Report, 2010).

We acknowledge the wider health and social service environment within which women's lives exist. There are challenges and complexities for women who are in the process of leaving a violent partner. While the women we interviewed were in stable housing situations (post-emergency housing), they were still in vulnerable places psychologically. Transcripts or interview summaries were sent back to the wāhine to check and comment on (Birt et al, 2016). In analysing the findings, the authors of this study went through several processes. Firstly, they met to re-confirm shared understanding of the aims and focus questions of the research. They then reviewed a transcript, searching for initial insights, observations and potential themes. After an agreed period of time, discussion about each person's findings enabled consideration of potential pathways for analysis. Once an agreed process for presenting the findings was determined, the authors then went about independently reviewing the research corpus. Multiple -in hui were held with senior leaders of Te Whakaruruhau through the process of collection and analysis to enhance the trustworthiness and ensure validity of the processes undertaken. Similarly, the multiple versions of the draft report were sent to Te Whakaruruhau before the publication.

Ethics

The project received ethical approval from the Division of Arts, Law, Psychology and Social Sciences Research Committee (Ref: FS2020-44). In presenting quotes from participants, we have utilised pseudonyms in order to protect their privacy and have modified identifying details to ensure we preserve their anonymity.

Findings: Connecting to pūrākau

In presenting the findings from a strength-based approach, we initially explored what the participants' perspectives of wellbeing are. Thereafter, we explored some of the factors that maximised and hindered the participants' wellbeing. Through interpreting some of the participants' experiences as learning journeys within the research, the factors that had restricted or restrained the pathways for making positive changes in their lives have become explicit. Throughout this section, some of the women's experiences have been briefly annotated alongside what have been interpreted as significant or recurring themes. These findings are presented in a manner that connects the narratives with pūrākau. We have aligned the wāhine narratives to the Hinetītama pūrākau. To assist the reader in distinguishing the Hinetītama kōrero from that of the wāhine Māori we interviewed, Hinetītama pūrākau examples are presented in boxed text, such as can be seen below. With the exception of this first example, the Hinetītama textboxes are placed at the beginning of each new theme.

Throughout Indigenous cultures around the world, there are numerous versions of narratives describing the creation of human life. In Aotearoa, common narratives attribute the creation to Tānenuiarangi (Tāne). When Ranginui and Papatūānuku were separated, Papatūānuku lay exposed to the elements. Feeling remorse for what he had done, Tāne began adorning his father with stars and his mother with forests, birds and insects etc. With room to move and explore, Tāne desired someone to share his life with. He began exploring options for companionship. After a time, Tāne created Hineahuone in the fertile soil at Kurawaka. Through hongi with Hineahuone (sharing breath of life), Tāne created and gave life to the first woman. This description captures the direct descent of Māori to the taiao (environment).

Tāne and Hineahuone had a daughter, Hinetītama. Raised by her mother, Hinetītama knew nothing of her father. As she reached adulthood she fell in love with a young man (who was, in fact, Tāne). Curious about her own identity, she wanted to introduce her lover to her father, so began asking questions such as "who is my father?" Once her father's identity was revealed, she transformed herself, taking on the name Hinenuitepō, and taking herself to the underworld to receive her children when they passed on to the next life. The main themes of the Hinetītama pūrākau are:

- Connection between identity and wellbeing
- Removing oneself from environments that are not safe
- Seeking knowledge and information

- Learning to navigate the "new"
- Whakapapa and the protection of children

These themes identified within the Hinetītama pūrākau provide the base structure for the findings and are explained via connection to the wāhine participant narratives that were shared through our interviews. Given that the focus of the case study is on literacy and learning journeys, an additional theme has been added: "Wāhine learning experiences and aspirations." This theme, though not immediately resonant in the Hinetītama pūrākau, becomes apparent through the process of considering the pūrākau from a mana wāhine perspective – which will become obvious by the end of the findings. At the end of each main theme is an example of a wāhine narrative.

A) Connection between identity and wellbeing

Narrations of the life of Hinetītama refer to her beauty, her youthful innocence and her falling in love. Curious about her parents, she would hear whispers to find out who her father was. Her ideals of how her and Tāne, as a couple, would raise and care for their children, were behind her questions. Embedded within those questions were her sense of wellbeing – of the extent to which her identity was secure (as the daughter of Hineahuone). She believed her partner to be an honest man who would do right by her.

Here we engage with the narratives shared by the wāhine. We start with their recognition of the negative impacts that colonisation has had on the generations before them which have, in turn, continued to impact upon their lives. For all of the women we heard from, there is a clear desire to stop the transmission of intergenerational violence that they have inherited. Below, a brief exchange between Mere and Kākama captures the essence of the comments that were shared by multiple wāhine:

> **Mere:** They [Māori communities] would never see nothing wrong with the way we thought like at all. They [Pākehā] have taken everything and made it backwards. They gave us crap about our language being translated backwards. But their whole lives are backwards and they've made ours just so not [speaker was interrupted]
>
> **Kākama:** We're going through what they [our ancestors] were going through in the early 1900s, with the violence towards children. We're going through that now, because that's what they [Pākehā] forced on us. Because we get judged so heavily

> if our children are running around and causing amuck, and so we get stressed out. We're like 'stop, stop, stop' and we pull them in… we feel we have to pull them in fast. That's where the violence and frustration comes from. Not only that, but the finances. We get lower income jobs, so the stress is just a cycle.

Kara and Hine referred to the negative stereotypes that persist upon them as parents trying to raise their children without risk of losing their children and continue to impact the lives of Māori whānau. Below, we see how Hine referred to her youth when she was embarrassed about being Māori and speaking te reo. However, as an adult, she wishes differently.

> … I moved to Auckland… I didn't want to learn Māori anymore… and I lost it. Not lost it, but didn't use it… Getting into old age now… I want it [ability to speak te reo]… And it's not our fault. But in this day and age we can actually lose that; [inaudible] Maybe not my generation, but the generation before, they got up there and took all that rubbish and all that. Everything got thrown at them. I mean… like can't wear a moko on TV. Those sorts of things. It's because of what they [previous generations] did, we're able to [now]. (Hine)

For wāhine who grew up with, or surrounded by, te reo, they feel a sense of loss for the language they once knew. Now, when their children talk of changing their studies so they no longer have to study te reo, the wāhine feel really concerned for a potential loss of identity and therefore sense of belonging and worthiness.

> … Because I believe that that's where I've gone wrong a lot of the times, because I don't know who I am. And I strongly encourage my children. They're Māori; Māori hard! So like my daughter, she goes… 'Oh mum, I don't want to do Māori anymore now I want to go to bilingual [class].' I'm like 'I'm not trying to tell you what to do, but I think it's best for you to stay in to reo, reasons being because it will just keep you strong in who you are, who we are as our people.' Whereas I grew up in Kōhanga reo and all of that and [Kura Kaupapa], but I lost it when we moved back to [South Island]. I don't remember any or all of those stuff; I lost it all. I encourage my children, 'You stay where you are, I think that's the best thing for you for our people.' Just so that we know who we are. So, we are not getting fed that other rubbish that we don't need. (Taea)

> We're always thinking about everyone else and not us… Colonisation… I hate that word though. We're made to think that we have to be a certain way. (Kara)

Far from the innocence of Hinetītama, these women have observed life's influences. Their insights identified the impacts of strong societal pressures. As they reflected on their youth and thought about the lives of the generations before them, these wāhine recognised positive changes that have taken place recently (such as the visibility of wāhine with moko kauae on television) and reflected upon negative perceptions that make them feel a sense of loss as adults (such as being embarrassed to be Māori as a child and not speaking te reo) as well as social pressures that contribute to a sense of worry for their children (such as the notion that Māori children must be well behaved all the time) and to a fear of having their children taken away.

The influence of cultural perspectives on wellbeing is prominent. Each of the participant's unique worldview – whether drawn from an Indian, Māori or Pacific Islands ethnicity – has influenced their understanding of wellbeing and how it could be both positively and negatively impacted. When asked "what contributes or diminishes your sense of wellbeing?", there were common positive responses that align to self, family and healthy/clean living, as well as common negative responses that were focused on poor communication and interactions with government agencies. These wāhine kōrero reflect a sense of wellbeing that is both individual and whānau focused. For selfcare, wāhine discussed factors such as eating healthily; having a positive and peaceful mindset; having faith; playing with their children; ensuring they have adequate rest; and feeling confident.

> … trying to find ways forwards, wasn't really working for myself. And I've had to shift my focus back to myself, if I can't focus on… the little things like feeling the sun on my face. Not thinking in the negative and not thinking about what I don't have, but what I do have and appreciating that more… [Problems happen when we] don't stop to think about ourselves, and don't take care of ourselves better. Eat better, drink more, laugh more. Those sorts of things and our language, we have this thing where we as women, especially, we really judge each other. And really… Instead of uplifting, we pull each other down for all the wrong reasons. And it's shit, and it happens too often and it's time to change. (Kara)

> Train your way to see the positive, for me [got interrupted]… because ultimately you still want a good life. So you can't sit in your negativeness. Unlearn and untrain your mind. (Waimarino)

> And like I said, changing your mindset and shit. That's hard for me, really hard mentally. But living in the house by yourself and doing that other shit, yes, of course. (Pua)

Pua values "morning and night prayers", whilst Waimarino acknowledged that "knowing who you are and where you come from… your whakapapa" contributes to her overall wellbeing. The wāhine acknowledged the contribution of whānau to their wellbeing. While focus tended to be on their children, siblings and parents also play a role in wellbeing.

> It's like, you feel your army behind you… And they're all different. And I can go to each one of them. And I think that's very important to have those family connections. And they don't have to be immediate. They could be distant. Yeah. Because you could always go to the aunties and uncles. The ones that you can see doing stuff. Like my cousin, I'm so proud of her. She started her own little beauty line… (Mere)

> When it comes to the whole wellbeing and everything, like family functions, you'll see the love… But outside of that, like it's a different story. You don't see as much, they put a whole heap of love and it's all a show… and I like taking my kids to family functions and stuff like that because they see all the love. (Nani)

Wāhine believe that the connections between culture, identity, and positive role-models contribute to positive pathways towards living lives that align with their values and thus contribute to feelings of wellbeing. Reconnecting with one's roots, embracing cultural heritage, and surrounding oneself with supportive people are essential.

> I'm like so amazed… I've got family members often hosting wānanga, teaching you poi, weaving, telling you the old stories of the land, and I find that amazing. Even if you don't speak te reo and stuff, to be able to sit there, amongst your own people. You always feel welcome. Rather than going to a kura kaupapa, you've got different iwi and stuff… When you're with your own people and you know that they're not going to tell 'You don't belong here' kind of thing. (Mere)

> Just knowing who you are… as a Māori… Just knowing who you are, what your whakapapa is, your pepeha. Yeah. (Kohu)

> My family. It was my family. My brother, he's seen a lot. And I actually cried because my partner was doing his usual thing and the first I ever seen [my brother] step in and he just goes, 'I am sick of your shit. My sister doesn't do nothing, goes to work, do the kids and you just sit down and drink, smoke your drugs, all that stuff.' And I said, 'I chose that life brother, you don't need to get involved in it.' He goes 'But there's no one there just to help you to stand up for you. That's what I'm doing.' I'm like 'Oh, I love you for that'… Yeah. They always just tell me, 'F-ing, you can stay by us.' But it was you, you didn't want to. You know they were helping you, but it was just, you didn't feel [interrupted]. (Moana)

The strength of support felt by wāhine as they draw upon their wider network of friends and family helps create space to think about self-care. Having their supports engage in cultural activities, such as Kohu's whānau running wānanga, or Mere's cousin establishing a small business, contributes to a strong sense of wellbeing. Some tensions were noted by Nani, who perceives that her whānau support is "all a show" sometimes, and in the case of Moana, who expressed concern for her brother when he intervened and commented to her partner about his poor behaviour. These dynamic experiences for the wāhine begin to highlight the complexities of whānau and their connection to wellbeing.

Importance of social connections

Wāhine also stressed the importance of social connections, family and community support for wellbeing. They recognised the positive impact of having loved ones who understand, support, and uplift them. Participants identified "faith", "mahitahi" and "awhi", highlighting the significance of interpersonal relationships, collaboration, and encouragement in promoting overall wellbeing. They acknowledged the emotional and practical assistance provided by their family members, emphasising the significance of their relationships and the encouragement they could receive from their families.

> Not having your family around to help you, family who can support you… because it really takes your time away, especially with your kids. (Hine)

> Because I'm not from here. I have no family here. (Aroha)

Aroha, originally from the Pacific Islands, has taken up residency in Aotearoa. The absence of whānau has left her feeling as though she has no support. When support from family members is not present,

there is a feeling of isolation and loss for the wāhine. However, as noted below by Nani, sometimes whānau practices leave no option but to disappear:

> Everything's gone. All my [family]'s there if I need it. Just like my Nana's kitchen table. I think that's what, not just, not just Māori, but we just find it easier. But everybody needs to find that… The last time I can remember that I loved being nurtured, and that I wanted to be nurtured so bad, was by my grandmother, it was my nana, my dad's mum. She died when I was seven and a half… That's the nurturing that I always wanted because she was there to love me. She was there to growl me, but I knew with that growling came this big, huge ribbon of love to help me in any situation. If knew how to help myself or if she knew how to help me, she would help me in a loving way. Now that's something we need, and I think it should be kaumātua… (Kakama)

Wāhine sense of cultural identity and connection to their heritage impacts their daily lives and decision-making processes, reflecting the lasting impact of cultural values, norms and obligations on individuals. It was also noted that the influence of culture is not always a positive one.

> Disappearing from my family. Growing up… we were typical [Pacific Islanders (PI)]. If you're half-caste… it's a different story. Shit after shit 'Oh no, they're [PI] they don't or won't do that.' And I disappear from my family, tried to run away but ended up getting myself married, and four kids later. I love them, but their dad is a typical [PI]. So I disappeared from there. (Nani)

According to the wāhine, the lack of supportive family members and negative attitudes within whānau can hinder progress towards wellbeing. Negative judgement and criticism impact on their confidence and motivation. Negative opinions within families also act as blockages to making positive change. As shown above, the connections the wāhine have to their cultural identity and practices and influences can contribute to, or diminish, their feelings of wellbeing. For example, when the children are happy, fed and in some cases having positive interactions with their fathers, the sense of wellbeing is enhanced for these wāhine.

> The other support is my oldest kids… My oldest daughter is my rock. She hears when I'm talking to her when we have our talks. She just, I don't know, lightens up just makes me happy. Her words hit me too. With my oldest son I know he loves me. He

> tells me, 'Mum, you can do better.' And he's had words with his father because of the stuff he does. So that's my other support are my older kids. (Moana)
>
> Actually, that's my son too. I'm just trying to give him [my ex] the help he needs with his son. (Waimarino)

Emotional wellbeing, whilst being connected to being happy, was described by Pua as also being connected to "not being scared all the time." For the wāhine, happiness is associated with their children. Wellbeing is not limited to personal fulfilment; it extends to encompass the wellbeing of the whole family unit.

The wāhine kōrero shared above highlights supportive factors in their upbringing and cultural identities, which contribute to a sense of wellbeing. In the narrative of Kohu, she shared how she has worked hard to heal from her violent past, get clean from drugs and alcohol and work on gaining knowledge to become a confident woman for her children as they work on their own healing journeys. Marama identified the support services she has interacted with and her experience of/with them.

A wāhine narrative: Marama

Marama's father died young (in his 30s) and was known to beat her mother and sleep with other women. Her mother passed away just over 10 years ago. Marama and her sister were in state care as children. Now, as an adult (between 60 and 69 years of age), all of Marama's children have been/are in state care as well. Neighbours reported "false allegations against her" because of her drinking at the time. They reported that she wasn't feeding her children because the children were unsupervised on the streets late at night, and that she was giving them drugs. When Marama was arrested for drug possession, her youngest was taken away. Her other children were distributed to whānau that they were not supposed to go to – i.e., their father and her stepfather who beat and abused them. As a result, Marama feels her children were damaged and became angry. Marama believes her family were traumatised. When her children were eventually returned to her care, Marama was given no support or resources to help her children heal from the trauma inflicted upon them.

Marama has been homeless and is grateful to her daughter who helped her "get clean." Marama loves arts and crafts such as knitting and doing crochet for her mokopuna. She proudly announces that she

can make rēwena. Pragmatic, Marama has put her hand in a blocked toilet at the marae to get it working again. Strong willed, her "can do" attitude helps her in life.

Services Marama has experience with:

Although Marama is in a more positive space with regards to her wellbeing, her reflections of government services was less positive. In contrast Marama had positive recollections of interactions with Te Whakaruruhau and her local church.

CYFS: Marama has previous experience with CYFS from the time that one of her children committed suicide; she tried to attend the funeral but was denied. At the time Marama was being processed through the Justice System. She believes, "[*t]he system lies… they don't want to come up with a better solution.*" Recently, she attended a camp hosted by CYFs that was intended to help parents of children who were in, or had been in, state care. Marama was surprised to find she enjoyed the camp as a "wonderful" experience and idea from CYFS. The event was a one-off so she felt that it "was just a tease…" She wants more similar camps.

WINZ: Marama had been to the local WINZ office to seek support and funding for herself and her children to help with living costs, the rising price of food and school activities. "*Whanau have ideas. That system is so cold. There's no comfort. It's not just the children who need it [help]. So do the parents… The parent can be a victim too… Put them together. Help them together… They need to learn [how to survive and] buy food. They don't know how to cook*." Because Marama was given a hard time and made to feel like an inconvenience when asking for support and funding, she has decided that she doesn't bother asking anymore.

Te Whakaruruhau: Marama has had great experience with Te Whakaruruhau. Staff have helped Marama and her children access support. As a result of the help she observed, Marama asked about support for men such a her partner, to help them learn skills and strategies to change.

Church: Marama has felt well supported and as such has been actively involved in the Church.

Theme summary

As we have seen through Marama's example, and will see in further wāhine narratives, wellbeing is presented as multidimensional and holistic and encompasses various aspects of their lives. This is consistent with movements in wider literature to conceptualise wellbeing (Dooris, Farrier & Froggett, 2017; Forster, 2007; Grieves, 2007; Johnson, Parsons & Fisher, 2021; Panelli & Tipa, 2007, 2009). There is increased recognition of the multifaceted nature of wellbeing. Indigenous conceptions of wellbeing have been imperative in this space. The wāhine we spoke to exemplify this, reflecting Te Ao Māori perspectives on wellbeing which are whānau orientated and rely on connection to one's whakapapa and cultural identity (Forster, 2007; Mahuika, 2019; Robertson & Masters-Awatere, 2007; Rua, Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017).

Counter to negative influences generated through colonisation, wāhine discussed the positive impacts of having a strong cultural identity and connection to te reo for them and their whānau. Feeling supported makes the women feel stronger, such as Mere who feels like she has an army behind her. Feeling supported by others contributes to feeling less alone and afraid. Unfortunately, the opposite effect was experienced in the case of Nani, who feels her PI whānau were in denial regarding physical violence, which made her feel isolated and, in response, that she had to 'disappear'. It is evident that connection to whakapapa and whānau are central to the wellbeing of these wāhine. In the pursuit of literacy, it is necessary to realise that cultural literacy (to be discussed later) is immediately more relevant for these wāhine than literacy as it is often conceptualised in the current national framework.

Loss of traditional knowledge and access to social structures that contribute to whānau wellbeing are apparent through the narratives shared by the wāhine as they speak of absent parents, and a loss of cultural practices. Recognition of the importance that positive role models and a secure identity have towards alleviating some of the pressures of contemporary society that diminish wellbeing were noted.

B) Removing oneself from environments that are not safe

Upon discovering Tāne's betrayal, Hinetītama's sense of security was gone and her notion of identity threatened. As a result, her wellbeing was compromised. Different depictions of her responses describe betrayal, rage, pain, loss, sadness and isolation – all of which are understandable when one knows the story of Hinetītama. So strong was the sense of betrayal that Hinetītama felt, that she made the decision to remove herself from the relationship she was in with Tāne. She chose to leave Te Ao Mārama where her husband and children were living. She left to go to Rarohenga, where she would wait to receive her children when they would ultimately leave Te Ao Mārama.

For the wāhine we interviewed, they too have stories that describe their similar responses to experiencing IPV. But rather than focus on the details of the violence (that is not the purpose of this report), in this case study we have decided to focus on providing the reflections (as provided by the wāhine) of their decisions to make changes – to leave the familiarity of their homelife because it was not safe for them. Hinetītama, as a strong wāhine Māori, is an appropriate reference for the decisions these wāhine have had to make as well.

Making the decision to leave a spouse/partner was not one these wāhine made lightly. Whether it was the first or seventh time they had sought the support of Te Whakaruruhau, the wāhine wanted support for themselves and their children, as well as for their partners. While wāhine were divided about whether they wanted their former partners/spouses in their lives, they all recognised the connection that remains with the father(s) of their children. However, before the wāhine could feel safe with the fathers of their children, they talked about fear being a big hurdle before turning to Te Whakaruruhau.

> When I am at my home I'm always scared. (Ana)
>
> I got some issues from my experience that led me to the [Te Whakaruruhau] But also, I'm still going through a pretty severe breakup. But it was inevitable. Yeah. So, yeah. Sorry about my moods, as well. (Kakama)

Ana and Kakama referred to the fear that remained with them when they were with their partner. For Kakama, who was still dealing with the change, she acknowledged that her emotions are still difficult to manage. Extensions of fear were expressed by Huria and Taea, both of whom noted how difficult it had been for them to notice, let alone accept, offers of help. Because their trust had been broken, they were scared to talk about their experiences.

> Getting out from that house, it was a big task for me because they [staff] were calling me to come to the safe house, 'it's good for you.' But I kept on rejecting that offer [of help] because I was a little bit scared because coming with two kids and don't know anything… (Huria)

> When I first came into [Te Whakaruruhau], I had trust issues. I guess I'm more open now, but I definitely had trust issues. Even with the police and everyone, I just thought everyone was just out to get me. 'They're just lying to me' or 'they don't really want to help me; they just want to strip me from my partner, from my kids.' And I would just stay purely because I'm scared. That was the bottom line. I'm scared. I'm scared to talk to somebody about what I've been through. I'm scared of what my partner's going to think or how he's going to respond to all of these parent orders and protection orders. So I had all of that running through my head. So this time around, I opened up a bit. Not only to the [staff] but to my partner about what I wanted to do to move forward. (Taea)

At the end of her statement, Taea talked about 'opening up' – her recognition of the need to 'move forward'. The drawback of not opening up was recognised by Moana, whose comments reflect a time of feeling stuck and, as a result, the complex ties that she has with her long-time partner influenced negative feelings.

> I got depressed every time we're in that kind of situation. I think of bad things. If I'm not there, is it going to work out? Might be better. But then I think to myself, no, I'm strong. I don't need you. I think I'm just so used to… I've been with him for 30-odd years and I keep telling myself it's going to get better, but then I still walk on eggshells. I hate having to be wary of what you're going to say, what you're doing, where you're going. I get tired of the questions… all those kinds of stuff. Yeah. It drags me down. It's all around the father. (Moana)

Observations of a new arrival to the facility, and the state of mind a new wāhine brings, was confronting for Kara. It is possible that the new arrival's behaviour served as a reminder for her own state of mind upon arriving at the facility, which made it difficult for her to be near. While each wāhine is in a state of their own transformation and thus will be in a different place on their journey, it is understandable that, while they are still doing their own healing, it is difficult to be near those who are still in a heightened state of trauma.

> Just last night we had a lady come in, about midnight, eh, and honestly, she was different. Quite… confusing, quite full on, so yeah, I just took myself away from the situation. From pretty much her. So yeah, and that's what I mean about this place is beautiful, but then you have different energies coming in, and yeah, right now. And that's something that's different to deal with. (Kara)

Living in fear of the partner, and the isolation a woman goes through in a violent relationship, have been well documented. Sadly, these experiences continue. After leaving their partners and the violent homelife, the wāhine talked about their initial observations.

> Watching the kids be kids. Letting the kids be kids and them not having to listen to mum and dad arguing or fighting. That sucks, and it makes the kids feel unsafe when they're surrounded by that. Providing the kids with a safe, happy home for them to just be themselves and free and just smiling and doing what kids do best. Running amuck. They love that! They don't want to be told, 'Oh, don't do this, don't do that.' They're kids, man, let them be kids. Or they don't want to hear mum and dad fighting and arguing nah, dumb. That's dumb… Let them be kids. (Taea)

> So we have to be their inspiration or we have experience from here. We have changed a lot, but we have nothing to show them. Something is there. But if they want to come out, they have lots of questions in their mind what to do. When I came here, I had lots of questions and how will I survive? So the same thing they face. So if we get a chance to tell them that it's good when you come, everything is good here. But we can't. (Huria)

Thinking about their children and wanting to be an inspiration, pillar of strength for their children is important. Taea's comment about "letting the kids be kids" presents a desire for the opposite of what her partner was thinking. Rather than continue to psychologically beat themselves down – such as Moana referred to earlier and Waimarino notes below – the wāhine talked about trying to make change. Comments by Huria are located below those of Waimarino, that acknowledge the importance of having supports behind them to keep motivated for change:

> Why is it like that or ugly, hey, and then you just feel like, did I do the right thing? You question yourself when really you did the right thing. You shouldn't have to question what you've done when you try to do the right thing. And then everyone makes you feel like you did something so wrong. (Waimarino)

> … I tried to change myself. So I always concentrate on my bigger task. There are lots of tasks for me. So yeah, I changed a lot. I won't take tension for silly things now. And I'm a little bit more confident after I came here. I've started working. In my [workplace] they were also very supportive and motivated. So yeah, I gained lots of confidence. (Huria)

Uplifting your life, and your children from their home, was not a decision the wāhine made lightly. Throughout the kōrero, recognition of how hard it had been learning to cope with the changes is a common theme. Reflecting on the challenges facing them, wāhine admitted they were hopeful their partners could or would change. It was because of these feelings of hope and the connection to their children that they can get caught in a cycle of going back.

> That's why I think we tend to go back. Because we see the good and we see hope. Oh, okay. He's apologised to me and he said that he's not going to do this again! And we go back because we love them, and we believe that he is being genuine this time and he is being true to his word and he is going to change. We run with it and then we just find ourselves back in that situation again. It's a cycle… It's so hard to get to know somebody and what if you get to know them and then it turns out you don't even like them? Whereas you've been with your partner for so long, you already know them inside and out. (Taea)

Taea referred to turning back to the person they know, warts and all, because it feels like hard work to get to know someone new. The familiarity, the comfort, while easy, are also what contributes to the feelings of self-doubt and guilt for returning and putting the children in an unsafe environment again and again.

> I've learned that life is not a fairytale, realising that the people you thought that could truly love you and care about you can really hurt you. My learning journey would be the grieving for my children, my homelessness, my drug life, my gang life. My learning journey, giving up everything that I knew and know, and just leaving it all behind, letting go. So my learning journey is now doing things that I don't know. And I'm doing it right now. And it's scary as heck. (Kohu)

> They're all there. Being a good parent, it's all there. It's just me and the father. I know people can't help with it. It's my choice. It's my decision. Yeah. I don't know. I've learned from my mistakes heaps. (Moana)

> … It's still left me bashing myself, mentally thinking there was something wrong with me; why people couldn't see that I needed help. (Kakama)

Because of the space that wāhine have away from their violent homelife, they are able to begin reflecting on the learnings they now have – that they are in a safe space to share their feelings, fears and hopes for the future. Kohu identified how scary it feels to her, thinking on the past and how it impacted her and her children's lives. For Moana, her concerns revolve around the expectations of good parenting, while also feeling isolated from a 'village' or 'army' as noted in the previous section. For Kakama, her reflections on isolation behaviours that kept her distant from other people have left her wondering if people did not know she needed help. Similar to Kakama, Hine has reflected on her past behaviours: she recognised them as a mechanism of surrender. In the familiar and safe environment she is in now, Hine can reference those behaviours as a call for help.

> Because, yeah, half of me just… because I did tell the Whāeas [sic] what I want to do. 'I just really want to go down to the wholesales, go and get a box of beers and bring it back into this kitchen and just sit here and drink it. And then what? Then what are yous going to do? Kick me out?' You know? And they were like, 'No [name], we're not. But hey, it's good that you told us this.' And I was like, 'Yeah, because I just didn't want to do it'… and yeah. So I thought I'll just tell yous and open up more. (Hine)

Acknowledging the upheaval that comes with leaving a partner, wāhine referred to getting caught up in trying to make the best of the new situation and how, in all the busy-ness of trying to make things better, sometimes they can feel all alone (again).

> Life can get in the way, if you can't balance it, it sort of tips the scale. Then we become so embedded in our ways that we just carry on and you don't stop to… I don't know what's the word. Reset. (Kara)

> So I'm the only one that's trying to keep everything afloat for myself. I've got a lot of people depending on me. But at the end of the day, I've just got to think about myself… Because if we're not okay, then nothing else is going to be all right. (Kohu)

> Yeah. And on continuation of that, I think we need to find our group, if that makes sense. Because we were so used to having a family behind us, but sometimes our

> families are on their own journey. So it's hard to rely on them fully. But I'm fortunate. I've got [lots of] sisters. (Mere)

The interchange between Kohu and Mere reaffirms the potential for feeling isolated and alone after making the decision to leave their partners. As a means to healing, Kara talked about the importance of pausing to reset, while Kohu acknowledged those who depend on her as a motivation for her. Even though Mere has several siblings, her comments suggest that they cannot always be there for her. Despite that, she still feels that having a group of support has made a big difference.

Financial insecurity

Financial insecurity was a common theme and a significant concern among wāhine. They discussed the daily struggle of meeting basic needs, such as food and shelter: "You have to wake up, go to work just to put food on the table… Pay the rent and all that" (Hine). Wāhine expressed frustration and stress caused by the role that money plays in their lives, as well as the broader societal pressure to prioritise material possessions and wealth.

> That's the biggest problem I face is money… because the way we live it's like playing Monopoly, you know? (Hine)

> You have to live a certain way in order to be accepted. But if we weren't stripped of everything that we knew we would know that that kind of whakaaro… that's not right. But this is what we live and eat… And then just exist. And then we get caught in the circle of doing the Joneses. (Kara)

> I just see a whole heap of money… being thrown around… That's pretty much what they just want everyone to see. They want to show people that they have something but I don't see the community. I see them as unit, but it's just… Yeah, I know what they're trying to do, coming from [an Islander's] perspective but as everyone else sees it they're like, 'Oh.' Yeah, that's… They all love each other, kind of thing,' I'm like, no, they're just there to have fun and to drink and once that's gone, it's gone'… So I kind of pull back away from those moments, if that makes sense? … I'm not there to drink… so I've kind of pulled away and I only go when it's a milestone [event] or… a death. (Nani)

> I just don't know how the world's going at the moment. I just find the world's becoming more and more selfish… You realise that people don't care about each other anyway; like it's showing me how ugly this world is. I'm stuck, if it makes sense, because I want a career where I can help people, but at the same time I'm realising how ugly people are. (Mere)

The influence of other people's perceptions of participants' lives was acknowledged, particularly when thinking about their own perceptions of success and happiness. Emphasis placed on material wealth and societal acceptance as markers of achievement as expressed by Ana – "We live in a world where money buys this, money buys that" – is somewhat aligned to the ideals of the wāhine who want to live off the land and be more in tune with the taiao to avoid the problem of depending on money when living in the city.

> That's what I mean, we've become so detached from the natural world our taiao is actually who we are. We are the taiao, the taiao is us. But we've over time, over the years we've become really detached from that. And I know now that there are people there and courses and stuff like that out there that are trying to encompass that and bring that back for… Not just our people but everyone. (Kara)

> Yep, try and build the country life… It's the best life out, being in the country, living off the land, getting your own food and everything, going down the creek washing your clothes, and having a bath, teaching your kids that. That's how I lived, just in a batch. We built our own batch, went to the long drop. Me and my kids went down the creek, give them a wash, washed their clothes… Catching the rainwater… Going down to the creek to go and catch some white baits… or going over to the beach to get kina, oysters. Just living that kind of life really. (Hine)

For wāhine, the financial implications of deciding to leave their partners meant an increase in financial pressure. Paying board in the accommodation, and working while raising children on their own, placed a lot of stress on the wāhine.

> Just for Housing New Zealand. Because it's cheaper, Housing New Zealand. Yes. And I don't want big house because I have no family ever. I have only kids. I'm looking for [one] near the school where my children go for school. I have a part-time job and that's what I was looking for… So I can catch the bus. Housing is just… It's become this thing in our country. Yeah. It's hard for us to get a house. If you want

> to go privately, you better have a top arse job… I'm also looking at private [rental] that's $380–$400. We can't afford that for a small family. (Aroha)

> You have to wake up, you have to go to work just to make money just to put food on table. I'm busy from the time I wake up. I clean the toilet, I don't know how much time I spend washing, because I wash my kids' clothes every day. So yeah, all the time, every day, all the blankets, everything just to keep you[r mind] occupied… And the only time you have a good feed is on pay day. The next day is nothing. Because too much on alcohol and everything else, and bills and all that. And when I just… yeah, I always look back at that in my life, and I got brought up down there, and I always look at my kids, and I'm like, 'Yeah, nah, yous ain't going to be like that. Yous ain't going to have that.' You know? Yous are going to learn, yous aren't going to see any of that. Yeah. And just be happy. (Hine)

For Mere, problems arose with WINZ when she sought to get a declaration of sole parenting signed. After her ex-partner refused to sign, she was directed to seek out family and friends to sign her form.

> … a declaration to change to solo parent… They [WINZ] said 'you have to get it filled out by a friend… and then the other one had to be by a friend [too].' I turned around and said 'I've just come out of a [number] year marriage where I wasn't allowed contact with my friends, and you want me to call them up randomly?' My friends don't even know I got married. (Mere)

> There is no recognition of poverty. The benefit is not enough to survive [on]. Families don't get support to pay their bills. (Mere)

While we engage more with the challenges of engagement with government services in "Learning to navigate the new" (pp. 36–43), here we refer to the ways in which the wāhine are left financially bereft because years of being isolated from friends and family means they have no one to sign legal documents regarding their parenting abilities and needs.

Despite the financial stressors involved with leaving their ex-partners, sometimes there were glimmers of positive changes that made mothers like Hine feel reaffirmed that they had made the right decision for their children.

> Yeah… coming to Hamilton… it was just to just get away from everything. No family here, nobody, just me and my kids. And since we've been down here, seeing my

> daughters, we're always taking them to the park up there, but they always just sat there on the table playing on their damn phone, they never went to go on the swing or slide. But now being down here, they're on the slide now, they're on the tramp, they're trying to ride bikes. (Hine)

Wāhine expressed feelings of being overwhelmed, having self-doubt, and a diminished self-worth. Recognition of the strength it took to leave their violent partners requires constant affirmation. While doubt and challenges still linger, impacting on feelings of self-worth, as was expressed by Taea – "We start to feel like we are not doing enough, we're not worth anything, we're shit at being mum, we're shit at being a partner" – the wāhine continue to work in ways that contribute to making positive changes in their lives and those of their children.

Positive pathways towards personal change often involve various factors that shape individuals' lives. Wāhine identified the significance of trying new experiences; facing the challenges in front of them; the importance of family and relationships; and the impact of parental figures on children's lives. By delving into the life experiences of the participants, it was possible to see how these themes could contribute to transformative journeys. In the narrative from Kohu below, we see how has been supported by Te Whakaruruhau to access support services to assist her and her children.

A wāhine narrative: Kohu

Kohu (between 30 and 39 years of age) came to Hamilton with her four children after leaving a violent partner who was more than 5 years her senior. Although he is not the biological father of her eldest child, he was the biological father of the other three children.

Brought up in gangs, her early years were surrounded by violence. As the eldest child, Kohu had to look after her younger siblings after her mother left. Kohu's former partner beat her in front of the children's school, which was reported. A relative offered to take care of her three youngest children. But Kohu was concerned that the family were on methamphetamine.

Two of her children are living in another country with their grandmother. Another lives in Aotearoa, but in another city with whānau. Her three eldest have PTSD and have been suicidal. Kohu believes that her efforts strengthen them and, she hopes, will enable them to break the cycle of intergenerational violence. For more than two years she has been living life with no drugs, cigarettes or alcohol.

Services Kohu has experience with

CYFS: Children were uplifted by CYFS because she could not protect them. Has done counselling, accessed drug and alcohol support and Living without Violence parenting programme.

Refuge: Ended up in Refuge, who were supportive all the way through.

Police: Feels ignored by the police in her hometown. Lacks confidence in the Police.

Advisor: "It's taken me a really long time to make my home safe."

Social Worker: "I trust her. She's a hard woman… a woman like that gave me strength."

Counselling: Asking for help for her daughter.

Te Whakaruruhau: Kohu has held on to her relationship with Te Whakaruruhau for assurance. She feels more confident now that she doesn't need their support, but she still wants it.

> They [Te Whakaruruhau] were there for me… when the kids were uplifted. They [Te Whakaruruhau] never gave up on me. But I gave up on myself. I reached out to [Kaimahi name] and let her know I was having a baby. She inspires me because of her strength too. And that's why I reached out to those women because I want to be that.

Kohu has been consistently attending parenting programmes – mostly court directed. She still suffers from the trauma and has bouts of depression but is learning to recognise those triggers.

Current feelings on wellbeing

Doubting myself [at times]. I'm the only one trying to keep everything afloat for myself. I've got a lot of people depending on me. But at the end of the day, I've just got to think about myself… Me comes first and then my kids. Because if we're not okay, then nothing else is going to be alright.

Theme summary

Reaching the point of leaving a partner/spouse for your own and your children's safety takes an ability to recognise the immediate and potential future danger of your surroundings. This demonstrates a strong emotional literacy (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). Not only have the wāhine demonstrated existing emotional literacy, the centrality of this literacy to navigating their experiences of DV emphasises its value. These wāhine expressed their challenges with trust, opening up, and managing their fear, demonstrating emotional reflection, self-awareness and a desire for self-regulation, all of which are key aspects of emotional literacy (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2004). Addressing literacy in the future should encompass many literacies, some of which are the only thing standing between a wāhine and her tamariki and sustained violence. The capacity to read and write, while being recognised as socially necessary and beneficial (Cochrane et al., 2020), was not the key literacy used by these wāhine to remove themselves from unsafe environments or to manage their ongoing needs since.

Kohu's struggle to heal from her past trauma was hindered by delays to support for her children. The absence of support for both her and her children was mitigated by the support she was able to find from Kirikiriroa Family Trust Services (KFTS) and Te Whakaruruhau. Commentary by wāhine referring to their struggles with addiction was noted for its impact beyond the wāhine themselves, out to members of their whānau whānui (wider family members). The impact of drugs and addiction is noted by Worrall (2009), who acknowledges the plight of older generations (kuia and koroua) caring for and raising mokopuna because parents (matua) may be suffering from or struggling with addiction.

As identified by the wāhine, due to being isolated from family and friends, the decision to leave meant being prepared to be on their own. This sense of loneliness for DV survivors is well documented (Goodman & Epstein, 2020). Whilst cultural barriers and societal expectations can be interpreted as offering a positive influence in one's life, the participants identified that they could also act as hindrances to positive change. Wāhine discussed the fear of cultural judgments and societal pressure that impeded on their ability to make positive changes in their lives. Some faced challenging situations when trying to align their personal choices with cultural expectations and norms. The trauma of living with a violent partner has left scars, and the slow process of healing is aided by agencies such as KFTS and access to safe housing with Te Whakaruruhau.

C) Seeking knowledge and information

As we have learnt thus far, Hinetītama took control of her own destiny upon discovering Tāne's betrayal. Such was her love for her children, that she made the decision to leave the life she had always known to relocate to Rarohenga. Before changing her name to Hinenuitepō, she had to prepare herself to leave her children behind in Te Ao Mārama. Being a place she had no recollection of, she needed to investigate what life would be like in Rarohenga before permanently taking up residence there. Hinetītama asked those who resided in Rarohenga whether it would be a place she would be happy to wait to offer a loving embrace to her children once they passed over to the spiritual realm.

For the wāhine we interviewed, they described the ways their lives changed when they uplifted themselves and their children to escape violence. While some are still in search of space and time to heal, all the wāhine consistently expressed hopes for an environment and services that will support them. Whether they were new to, or returning to, a state of independence from their partners, the wāhine are searching for new knowledge and information that will enable them to live the lives they aspire to.

> I want there to be a positive in the future, but it's just getting there, you're lost. How do you do that [achieve your goals]? Where's the support for that? What do we do? I don't know. So, you just sit on it and stew. Come back [here to a safe place]. But we do feel blessed that we are safe. (Pua)

> I do [have a goal]. I need a focus. I want to know what I'm supposed to be doing with my life… (Kakama)

> Yeah. I agree. And to just keep learning… Want help… definitely mental health services. (Wehe)

> … I'm focused on getting in here right [points to head]. I want to be living again. I look at people these days who are happy within themselves and I want that. And I can't have that when I've got distractions or people that are doing what I used to do. As a Māori, I look at everybody and I look at our potential… I just don't want to waste time… I just want to hurry up and heal. I want to learn. My focus all year is to gain the knowledge to be the confident woman that I need to be for (youngest child), for myself and for the rest of my kids. (Kohu)

Embedded within each of the wāhine kōrero is a desire to move forward, and a request for help in some form. Whether it is to do with goal planning (like Pua), or figuring out what to do with her life (like Kakama), the desire for help was communicated. Similar to Wehe, with Waimarino and Taea, we will see below their calls for help from others who have survived similar circumstances or, in the example of Taea, spiritual help:

> Yeah. Before I started really losing the plot. So yeah, it's just having… Or even outside of here, it's like, but see, you need to experience that support here before going out so that you know how it's meant to be rolling. Otherwise you just go out of there way worse. (Waimarino)

> I had a situation before I started going to church. I go to a church. Yes, and when they sing, I would start crying… I just cried. [I] teared up. And yeah with my babies, they help. Yeah. (Taea)

Taea revealed finding comfort in going to church with her children. Her comments also reveal that she is finding an emotional release that helps her with her healing journey. Alongside her spiritual support, she referred to self-help practices that help her move forward. She notes that self-help only requires a small amounts of time, but hugely benefits her emotional state.

> Self-care. And it can look like anything. Like go for a walk. I mean, shouting yourself for a new hairstyle, something, like pampering yourself. I mean, like meditating by taking 10 minutes just to lie down on your bed and just meditate or breath work. I love to just lie on my bed and listen to some soothing music and be one with myself; just listening to my breath, the tunes. I could do that for about a good 5–10 minutes. And I'm away again. I'm like, 'Ooh, I'm fresh.' (Taea)

While Taea is able to find help in going to church or by meditating, other wāhine talked about interactions with service staff helping them in their journeys. Firstly we see that Hahana has valued the support from legal documents, which have made her feel secure to the point of stating that her children are well. A Parenting Order has provided her confidence that she has backing to ensure the children's father behaves (for fear of losing contact with his children). Beneath Hahana, Wehe notes the help other wāhine have obtained from a Māori service that has now contacted her to offer their support:

> For eight years he had the power. But now I do. And that's just through healing from everything that went on in my life. I honestly owe it all to [Māori health service].

> They became my family because I had none… They protected me professionally and personally… My children… are doing really, really, well. (Hahana)

> So, one of the other girls back at [the house], she's been with [the Māori service] for about three weeks, and she's just been talking to me about them and what she does and with the kōrero and all of this and how it's benefited her. They sent me a text. (Wehe)

In text format it is impossible to hear the excitement in Wehe's voice. But the audio recording captured the change in tone that reflects a positive response to be contacted by the Māori service she had heard about from another wāhine. In the case of Nani, she felt most supported when interacting with Māori service staff who had survived IPV. For Nani, it was more important to hear from people who had lived experience.

> That's how they learnt and that worked. So that just carried on. And yeah, we learnt so much growing up in the country, too, you kind of learn to use what you have. (Nani)

Wāhine experiences of support services

Unfortunately, not all the services the wāhine interacted with produced positive relationships and desirable outcomes for the wāhine. Here we present reflections on interactions with government agencies as the wāhine were seeking information.

> Then you've got some Oranga Tamariki (OT) workers and some of the ones that have never been broken. You've got some social workers that haven't been through anything and they're trying to tell me that it should be like this, but they never… The ones that actually lived it meant a lot. (Hine)

Hine expressed a preference for receiving advice from someone who has been through similar circumstances, suggesting the service received was not adequate. While Hine talked broadly about her preference for personal knowledge, Kakama and Taea described key traits that they can connect to through interactions that have a positive impact on their emotions.

> Honesty and transparency, if you're there to help, be there to help… (Kakama)

> Because it's actually making me feel more comfortable to be able to go to [the whare] and be like, 'Hey, I'm actually going through this. Is there any way that you can support me through this?' I've heard a little bit from the girls in [the whare] and kind of that you guys have been supportive with them in these sorts of situations. So, yeah. (Taea)

Describing a previous experience, Taea had felt racially profiled and discriminated against when she was trying to access housing support services. Taea claimed, "[s]ometimes it's your colour that you cannot get in…" She went further, to consider that it was her ethnicity: "Is it because I'm Māori or is it because I'm black? Why are you treating me this way? What is it?" While this housing experience was not positive, she did acknowledge that such behaviours and attitudes were not always present: "You get those ones, now and again that give you a chance."

Leaving their violent partner involved a transition that has been hard for the wāhine. They have been working hard to heal themselves and seeking support to heal their children so they can break the cycle of violence. When trying to make a positive change, wāhine acknowledged how hard it is to remain positive.

> I'm trying to be as strong as I can, but this sort of stuff, I'll wear a pad every day, because it's so traumatising. And I'm wearing a pad because I want to be able to go through this knowing it is shit, excuse me. So yeah. My learning journey is making the changes that I never knew that I could. (Kohu)

> Mine's just safety… [it's] a safety issue. How you make the mistake and you just keep repeating it all the time. It's that cycle. Just doing it over and over again. My breaking point was mentally… they've [the kids] been through it and all they want is safety really, and their mum to be happy. They know I make the wrong choices sometimes, but they don't judge me, they don't put me down. They'll give me a little growling and they'll go 'mum, you're going to just keep going through it.' Sometimes [the children] suffer. They've had some bad upbringing and for me… I didn't have a dad growing up, so I don't really know… [My ex] told me a few stories about his upbringing, but I've had talks with him to try and say, 'But now you can just get help yourself. We have kids now. You got to learn to grow up, just take responsibility.' I know it's hard to push that on the side but when it interferes with our kids it drags us all down. And the most that will suffer is our kids. (Moana)

Moana commented on her efforts to change the attitude and behaviour of her ex-partner in her desire to move forward. This strategy reflects a desire to share responsibility and distribute the effort to help their children. Moana's comments highlight a mature outlook that has likely emerged from her attendance at parenting programmes.

> Yeah, parenting. I've done [a parenting programme]. Yeah. I went off to those courses to try and get my kids back and all that stuff. What else? Stayed away from the father. Got counselling, which that didn't help. Lawyer; I had a lawyer. I went by their rules and did what they wanted and I know it was going to take a while but I was doing everything and just to get told, 'No, you're not going to get your kids back.' And yeah, I just started… I ended up crying and all that. Just kept obeying their systems. Did CYFS agreements, just to get told, 'You're still not going to get them back.' (Moana)

Despite her efforts to change hers and her partner's behaviour, being told by the government agency that has taken your children that you will not get them back, must be like a kick in the guts. Further to Moana, we have the following excerpt from Huria, who describes the delay waiting for months to hear back about her housing request, only to receive conflicting information:

> Work and Income, I'm getting benefit for my disability and financially we are very supported. Another thing yesterday, I called them [WINZ]. I waited for two hours. After that I got a call. They took an assessment for housing let four months ago. I just wanted to know [the outcome of the assessment]. They told me, 'You're eligible to get early [help] because your [child has a disability].' I told them he needs his own privacy, and my [other child is] turning 10 very soon. So [they said] ' you are eligible to get the house very soon.' Something like that.
>
> It's been almost five months I didn't get any response from them. So, I called them yesterday and I waited for two hours. Then also after getting them, they were saying 'you're the bottom level. You won't get a house very soon. You have to wait at least for two to three years, whether you go and find private houses.' I have applied for many private houses. But she was saying, 'You have to apply every day from morning.' Like, I don't have any other work?

> She is advising me like that. 'You have to wake up early and you have to apply every day for houses.' It's not possible… It's not possible for a single mother and a working mother, to get up early and find a house and apply every morning.
>
> I just want a house. I think my son, he really needs his privacy. He loves his own world. So I really need a house. So I'm dreaming of a house. (Huria)

Huria experienced inconsistent messages on top of delayed feedback regarding her housing request. Further negative interactions were noted in the advice obtained from the privileged position of a staff member, who felt it was reasonable to tell Huria to apply for housing every day. Lack of understanding, empathy or helpfulness was often attributed to government agency caseworkers. Mere recounted an instance where caseworkers prioritised following manuals and regulations over addressing their needs. She spoke of the caseworker who insisted on following protocol instead of listening to their explanation, stating, "[t]hat's the guy I had a fight with on the phone at WINZ… He goes, 'No, it says you have to do this' and I said, 'No, I've already explained this.'" Bureaucratic approaches such as those noted hindered the provision of adequate support and perpetuated the challenges faced by wāhine when seeking assistance after escaping a violent relationship.

> Long… The referral paperwork was long. And I totally understand why many whānau don't do it because it's just like filling out a novel. You've gotta repeat yourself about your same trauma over and over again. And then you sit down the kid talks about their trauma, and they're like 'I'm not the right person for it' and so the next person has got to tell them. So it's just repeating trauma which was making him more and more aggressive. And it was making me more sad…
>
> I don't have any services I'm with at the moment. But once upon a time I had them all and it was overwhelming. Like, there was just people asking the same questions. I reckon if they had a central database or something then people don't have to be retraumatised, every time. You know, that everyone can just access with a summary of the story. Instead of having to tell your story 100 times. (Hahana)

Receiving poor-quality support from services had a detrimental effect on wāhine wellbeing. Mere's words revealed, "[l]ike mentally when I am dealing with CYFs at the moment… they're calling me up saying, 'You're a bad mum.' But everyone around me is saying I'm awesome." The feelings of inadequacy evoked by the words of the service providers left Mere doubting her self-worth (an expanded explanation is presented in Mere's narrative at p.41). While many of the wāhine interactions

with government services were not positive, there was one positive experience noted below by Taea, whose interaction with the Police produced an outcome that has remained in her mind:

> Police would come over, and I'd be like, 'No, get out. What are yous up to? I don't even want to talk to you. There's nothing going on here. I'm fine. You can see me.' I'm not. But they would just get me to open up to them and I wouldn't. Anyway, so being in [Te Whakaruruhau] this time, I took it upon myself and I decided, with obviously help from [the whare]… 'Have you looked at these?'
>
> 'Yeah, I have had it in my mind for a while.' So I took it upon myself and I decided to action the Protection Order. The day that I went in there, started talking to them about what had happened in the past, during and at the end. And they got a Protection Order for me… a Protection Order without notice. So we didn't go through court or any of that raruraru. But that, for me, was a huge step. And I'm starting to question [why it took me so long]. I love being at [the whare] and I love the support that [the whare] has been giving me too. (Taea)

Wāhine faced many challenges on their journeying towards positive change. Hine, for example, discussed her struggles with medication and the difficulties of caring for her children, particularly her son with special needs. Her decision not to take her medication and the challenges of balancing her responsibilities serve as poignant examples of the hardships she encountered. Additionally, other participants mentioned blockages, negativity and family drama as barriers to positive change. Resilience was required to overcome obstacles and whilst working towards the complexities of personal transformation. As Waimarino expressed, "[n]o one else can help you, but you… it's just about keeping on the straight and narrow, trying to just see the goal at the end." Participants stressed that self-motivation and personal responsibility in achieving positive changes is required.

Feelings of being unsafe and the challenges of seeking support services have contributed to high stress levels. Wāhine expressed their need for safety, highlighting the flaws in the way services like ACC measure abuse based on physical evidence, disregarding psychological trauma. Hahana shared her experiences of repeatedly recounting her trauma, stating, "[y]ou've got to repeat yourself about your same trauma over and over again." This highlights the ways the wāhine are retraumatised during actions to seek support, attempting to act on their desire for trauma-informed care.

A series of comments from Mere and then Marama highlight their thoughts regarding the lack of support they perceived from CYFS. Mere's frustration stemmed from the costs of providing appropriate

support for her children in aiding their healing to ensure they have opportunities for a future that she envisions for them. Her interactions with CYFS made her feel as though support for children is based on a price tag rather than meeting their needs.

> There were no trauma services for my children. Once KFTS stepped in then CYFS wanted to help, but not beforehand…
>
> But I just find they're [CYFS] too structured on how you have to raise kids. Everyone has to raise kids the same. It's so frustrating. (Mere)
>
> If you work for the government then you're owned by the government…
>
> CYFS don't want to hear our ideas for our children or our solutions for our kids. It's terrifying… Changing our system, the things that shouldn't be there. Whanau have ideas. That system is so cold. There's no comfort. It's not just the children who need it [help]. So do the parents… The parent can be a victim too… Put them together. Help them together… They need to learn [how to survive]. They buy food. They don't know how to cook or live off the grid. (Marama)

A desire for more supportive communities, mentorship programs ("coaching for life") and safe housing areas where they could find support, share experiences, and help each other, are some of the wishes wāhine shared with us. Mere mentioned that there was a need for a Big Sister programme: "I'd love it if we had something like that, like a Big Sister programme for us to say, 'Hey, this is what you can do.'" Mere's comments show hope for a safe space where community members can look out for each other and help raise each other's children. Her comments reflect the importance of community support networks in empowering individuals and fostering positive change.

Participants expressed their desire for there to be communities where everyone would be held accountable and where people truly were supportive of each other. As Kākama claimed, "[e]verything in the human stuff needs to go back to… it's not one person, it's a community… everyone is held accountable…" Kākama's position was supported by Mere: "That's what I think needs to happen, is we need to get to this point where we love each other enough as communities." Here we see wāhine highlighting the importance of community accountability and the role it plays in fostering positive change.

Appreciation of the support provided for their children to meet their own aspirations was noted by the wāhine. For the wāhine, the emphasis is on the significance of investing in their children's dreams and

future. Requests include services providing financial assistance to pursue educational and career goals, contributing to their overall wellbeing and the success of a whānau.

The interviewees expressed disillusionment with support systems such as OT (formerly CYFS) due to perceived failures in protecting their children or providing effective assistance. These negative experiences further eroded their trust in the services provided and, as a result, there was a reluctance to engage with them.

Wāhine expressed the overwhelming nature of support services from Te Whakaruruhau. Hahana recounted problems arising from repeatedly having to retell her traumatic experiences to different services, calling this process "emotionally taxing." Hahana suggests the establishment of a network or hub to improve the services' effectiveness, reducing redundancy and minimising the emotional toll on wāhine. There were also mixed experiences by the participants with parenting support services. Moana expressed frustration with the system's inability to support her to regain custody of her children, while Hahana found counselling and parenting support beneficial.

A wāhine narrative: Hahana

Hahana (between 30 and 39 years of age) recently left a violent husband that she has three children to. She referred to initially remaining in the relationship because "I was scared that if he was to leave, he would crush my dreams." One child needed surgery, so she has remained in Hamilton to wait for that. She suffers from PTSD and anxiety attacks. Although she has tried rongoā and alternative medicines to help cope, lack of government subsidy for the costs of non-pharmaceutical medicines meant she could not keep doing that. Her best friend helped her cope and gave support.

Services Hahana has experience with

Refuge: The night she left her husband and went to a friend, she rang Refuge. She didn't hear from them until four months later: "*We never had the one kaimahi. We had multiple kaimahi. So I was retraumatising myself every time I had to do the assessment over and over again. It was absolutely horrible… Offering safe houses was ok, but everyone knows where the safe houses are, including my perpetrator.*"

ACC: Does not see DV as an injury unless there are physical signs present. Does not recognise psychological trauma.

WINZ: We inquired to WINZ if we were able to get any assistance to help with accommodation costs while hiding from ex. Because she had been receiving accommodation supplement, she was not eligible for any more support "*even though I had fled to hide in [another city] because my ex had threatened to bring a gun to find me*."

Court system: She went for protection and custody orders. When she heard he was coming with a gun, she went to lawyer who got a signed Affidavit and filed a Protection Order and interim Parenting Order that day and was successful, but the court gave him supervised access. Protection orders were upheld at Kōhanga but not at schools or after school programmes. She feared her ex would snatch her children from school while they were playing on the field.

Doctors: Was selective about what she told the doctors about her injury (saying she fell or slipped to avoid making ex angrier and because of fear). As a result of previously not revealing details of beatings to doctors, there was no record of his abuse.

OT: "I didn't have any OT involvement because I was dealing directly with Police. OT didn't get involved because my children were safe with me and my wife's family. Also because [Māori health service] was involved and had the wraparound supports that were needed."

Police: "*I became a woman who cried wolf to Police*." Someone (neighbours/friends) would ring the police. But she would not agree to police taking him away. She would lie "out of fear."

Parentline: "*One of my children got support from Parentline to help [them learn to] regulate emotions.*" MOJ helped get child into [a stopping violence programme for children] for children who have been exposed to violence and to access one-on-one counselling.

Te Kōhao: Majority of support received from here. Took all support she could access from them (as employers). "*We stayed in a whare that he didn't know where that was*." The General Manager started pulling in all the services to assist.

Church: Hahana has found a lot of support from the Church that she joined. With their support she was about to access psychologists and counsellors. She just finished accessing these recently.

What Hahana believes helped her the most

> The General Manager at my work listened to me the first time. I told her my story and she says to me 'what do you need?' At the time you don't know. And she's like 'okay then' and she just put all the support for kai… mental health support… liaison with Work and Income when I needed her to… Our oldest boy… was exposed to it [DV]… he was exposed to it because the kid's father was verbally abusing him for nothing. He's now in counselling, started last year… since he was 12 years old.

Hahana would get support weekly.

> If I didn't work at [Māori health service] I wouldn't have been able to access things like the services as fast as I did. Like for example getting straight to [senior staff] at Te Whakaruruhau. Going straight to the top of Work and Income for the domestic violence… Top of the Parentline list… It was through networking and the people at [Te Kohao health service] that got us there. If you don't know those kind of people… it would be harder.

Hahana was engaged with [Te Whakaruruhau] for two months. [Kaimahi] would visit her every week. When she was in the DV relationship, she felt everyone was letting her down. But [Kaimahi name] would turn up at her house every [week] whether she was there or not. [Kaimahi name] would come and they would say "she's not here." But [Kaimahi name] would leave a message so that I knew she had come. According to Hahana, "she would address a lot of my issues about my fears."

Because of Hahana's place of employment, she had strong support from her employer and her co-workers. As a result of her supports, she acknowledged that having opportunities to network and connect with Whānau Ora navigators facilitated links with different support services and their essential resources for her and her children. She acknowledged that her connections made it easier for her to access support and to be prioritised in receiving assistance.

Theme summary

Creating safe and nurturing environments for oneself and one's whānau is a crucial aspect of wellbeing, one highlighted repeatedly by the participants. They emphasised the need for their children to have a safe space where they thrive and can be themselves. The participants identified the importance of

avoiding conflict and providing a happy home environment. Quotes like “providing the kids with a safe, happy home for them to just be themselves” demonstrate the significance of supportive environments in fostering wellbeing. Part of being in a supportive environment is being in a space: “It’s feeling safe. Feeling like I’m heard.” This indicates that psychological safety and a sense of being valued affirm for wāhine that they have done the right thing in leaving their violent partners.

Central to the creation of these environments is the desire of wāhine for new information and knowledge to help realise their aspirations. There is a lack of certainty around what new directions might look like, but the desire to find direction is evidence of a gap where literacies, more broadly conceptualised (Keefe & Copeland, 2011), could fulfil some of these aspirations. New knowledge in spaces of mental health assistance, goal planning and developing faith and spirituality may feature the capacity to read and write; but beyond this entails the development of other literacies. It is in this holistic understanding of wellbeing and the pursuit of new knowledges that a broadened application of literacy in Aotearoa could more fulsomely support people from diverse lifeworlds.

Support services are crucial for people facing personal struggles and seeking positive life changes. However, the effectiveness of these services can be hindered by various factors. This section explored the limitations and challenges the participants encountered when engaging with support services. The following factors have been highlighted by the participants: personal struggles and vulnerability; challenges with support services; difficulties in accessing housing; racial discrimination in support services; trust and engagement issues; the cycle of returning to harmful situations; trust issues and negative past experiences; distrust in institutions; inefficiency and lack of empathy in government agencies; systemic failures and disillusionment with support services; marginalised communities; staff turnover and burnout; lack of reliable support networks; fear and uncertainty; societal expectations and pressures; challenging family dynamics; cultural identity and discrimination; and access to services and support.

Wāhine identified gaps and areas for improvement in the available services provided to them. They expressed the need for services that genuinely sought to help and support them, emphasising the importance of service providers following through on their promises, improving communication and developing a better understanding of the constant struggles faced by the wāhine and their whānau in dealing with trauma and other life challenges. Access to services in the areas of housing, mental health support and holistic services would better support wāhine. Negative experiences with service providers were emphasised, particularly the ways in which such exchanges took away the fledgeling confidence of wāhine through practices that forced them to repeatedly describe the violence they endured.

Replaying traumatic experiences diminished the sense of safety and security they were trying to build for themselves and their children.

Hahana explained how the strong support wrapped around her gave her strength. She mainly attributed her support to the staff at her workplace and the connections she made while in her job. Yet, despite all the support she observed, Hahana also acknowledged the traumatising effect of having to repeat her experiences over and over to each service. Consistently shared by wāhine was the need for services to be more understanding, accessible and responsive to their circumstances. Wāhine identified a need for streamlined and coordinated services that are timely and provide empathetic support, alongside consistent and respectful communication.

D) Learning to navigate the "new"

As already noted, Hinetītama could not recall ever having been to Rarohenga before choosing to retreat there after Tāne's betrayal. Her only knowledge of Rarohenga was from the information she had been given by those around her or the whispers she heard from the wind. While some voices said it was a wonderful place, others suggested that it was scary. Hinetītama knew that there was no turning back to Te Ao Mārama once she took up residency there. Upon arrival to Rarohenga, Hinetītama had to gain her bearings by learning about her new environment. While she knew that she could not return to the world of light, she still longed for it. Drawing strength from those around her, Hinetītama embraced her new home and took on her new form and the name of Hinenuitepō.

Adjusting to new living circumstances such as being away from a violent partner, and learning to be independent and a solo parent, require big life adjustments. The wāhine in this study all aspire to make positive changes in their lives and they acknowledged factors that hindered positive transformations. Matters the wāhine have been trying to adjust to are a sense of independence; allowing themselves to hope for a positive change; growing in self-confidence; and learning the systems and structures of Te Whakaruruhau.

Wāhine reflected on their violent past experiences with some being isolated from their families and others talking about assistance from family to break away from their partners/spouses. Recognition of whānau in legislation influences the way service agencies understand and interact with Māori providers and whānau (Moyle & Tauri, 2016). Previous research has discussed power and control tactics such those described by the women (Semple, 2001). The wāhine we spoke with were in temporary transitional accommodation and, because of this, had sufficient distance from their relationships to feel comfortable talking about their past experiences and how/what they had learned from them.

> I was completely dependent on my husband. So when I came here I had completely zero, and the people who are here always motivated me and told me, 'you can do this, you are much stronger and you can do whatever you want in your life.' This is the best chance to change myself… My husband used to say 'you can't do anything without me' so it was always in my mind and it made me feel worthless. So I'm thinking, no, I'm not worthless… He may think I'll go back to him, but I won't. I thought, no, I'll stay here. This is the best chance to change myself. (Huria)

> Whānau, their opinion and negativity. Drama. When I tried to disappear, I started taking care of myself, looking after myself and whatnot. All I got from my mum was

> ‘oh that’s why your ex-husband left you, because you’re just like that’ … so I disappeared. (Nani)

> My sisters and my parents helped me leave my violent husband and come here [to Te Whakaruruhau]. They would also tell me ‘you leave your husband.’ But I [wouldn’t listen]. But then I came here [to Te Whakaruruhau] and then I decided to leave my husband. (Ana)

These narratives demonstrate a growing sense of independence and self-confidence among the wāhine who had escaped a violent relationship. While Huria’s example highlights a vulnerability that is particularly salient for the women from another country, wāhine from Aotearoa also reflected on financial dependence. For Nan, the negative opinion of family impacted her thoughts of seeking support from them. Her decision to “disappear” was the opposite of Ana, who enlisted the help of her siblings and parents to leave her spouse.

Breaking the cycle of returning to harmful situations

Sadly though, leaving a violent partner is not a simple matter. Wāhine referred to returning to their partner multiple times. Some highlighted their tendency to return to harmful or negative environments or relationships despite making progress and healing previously. The wāhine who acknowledged this pattern of returning to their spouses also acknowledged that the behaviour impeded their ability to maintain positive life changes and it often reinforced returning to harmful cycles. Taea expresses this sentiment below:

> Going back, constantly going back. I mean, we get away and we’re doing so fricken well and then we think ‘Oh sweet, we’re healed. So we can go back.’ I don’t know what it is, but something in us, or something can mean ‘I’m fine now, I can defeat this, I can get further than this’ and then I’ll go back and then I’m back in that cycle again… I know I just keep going back. I mean that’s a big one… I find myself worse for going back and then being trapped in that same way. The same cycle you just crawled out of and got for, and then you’re going straight back to it. (Taea)

> Whereas before the first or second and the third was like I was mourning, and I couldn’t help but run back [to him]. But each time [I stayed away] got longer and

> longer. I can say that now because I look back and I'm like, 'Wow. The first time I was in [Te Whakaruruhau] I only stayed for a day or two, and then I was gone. Second time, I was there for just under a week. The third time, I stayed for a week and a bit.' This time, I'm like 'I've been here almost a month.' Going on a month and I'm actually really enjoying this time apart [from my ex]. We still connect with each other. We talk with each other. I still go over to the whare and see him and the kids. (Taea)

Taea referred to the negative impacts of the pattern of returning to the violent partner. She acknowledged mistakenly thinking everything was good, that her and her husband 'were healed' only to find herself experiencing the same again. The emotional rollercoaster from repeated attempts to leave the violent relationship have caused emotional fatigue for the wāhine. While Taea has not signalled being ready to break the cycle, others, like Pua, recognised the pattern as a period of transition that they were experiencing.

> I've tried, but I keep running back [to him]. And being here [at safe housing] is hard too. I come from big [PI] family. They can't just call up and 'Hey.' (Pua)

> I'm sick of starting over again. This is the sixth time [leaving him] for me. The same partner, but six times starting over and leaving. It's [the pattern of bad behaviour] is getting too old. I'm getting old… My positive was leaving him… Every week I go back, and I don't know how to keep away. But I know there is something better. I just don't know how to get there. (Pua)

Pua's comments demonstrate recognition of her attempts to achieve a goal to be independent of her violent partner while, at the same time, recognising cultural challenges that make it hard for her. Being from a close-knit family, she misses them, but also realises the likelihood of seeing her ex. While she acknowledges her own strength for leaving, she also recognises that she lacks the knowledge as to how to attain that goal permanently. Pua further described feeling worn out and lacking motivation after going through multiple cycles of leaving and starting over: "I don't think I've got any motivation anymore… I can't give a fuck really if I'm being real." Her comments illustrate the toll that repeated setbacks have had on her emotional wellbeing and her willingness to pursue positive changes. But, rather than letting setbacks such as returning to their partner destroy their hopes, other wāhine were able to keep their minds focused on their lives ahead. Aspirations include being independent and having steady income and access to safe housing.

> I want a job and independence… my son and I alone in any house [will do]. Yeah, I want to learn more English. Learn to drive… Yeah, I want to find [a] job… be more confident. (Ana)

> My independence because I'm running a small business… I'm getting orders but I need some privacy to make something, so I really want to go [leave] only so I can make some orders and increase my wage. My main concern is for the kids, my son. (Huria)

> I haven't been able to find me a focus… I need to find me a focus. I need to find me somewhere that I'm supposed to be. You don't live to 51 to do nothing. And I've done nothing. You know… as far as I'm concerned with the brain I have, and the physical abilities I have, I've done nothing. I should have done something. (Kakama)

> Because I'm going to make the same mistake over again. But I know going through all of that all my life, it made me stronger. It made me stand on my feet and say 'No, that's enough.' And, my kids are older, and… I just didn't want to put them through it… I work now. I'm independent. I make my own choices [not] just going back into that cycle…But I'm happy in the way where I'm working for my kids, providing for them, getting them into school, telling them the right ways and the wrong ways. Hopefully they don't get into my situation, but I don't think they'll get into that situation. (Moana)

The sense of accomplishment felt by Moana is that of being able to take care of her children and help them settle into routines such as regular schooling. Her hopes for the future include hoping that her children will not find themselves in a similar situation to hers when they become adults. Access to support services such as counselling were identified as crucial.

> The counselling is really good. It just helps me think and gives me input on myself. Make myself better. To get myself better and then I can work on my family, which helped a lot… Make myself better. Being in [safe housing] and being with other women getting their input and help is awesome… Just get my life back into stability and just handle it… It's going to be a bit of a long road. Well for me, I think I still got to help myself. (Moana)

The sense of accomplishment by taking care of themselves and their children was acknowledged as progression towards goals of independence. The notion of independence held different feelings for wāhine. As we see below with Huria, she is grateful for the support of her parents, yet she is also critical of how much they protected her from risky situations, leaving her vulnerable to depending on others (such as a violent partner) in her adult life:

> My whole life my parents are the biggest motivation. They always treated me like a baby. Because I'm the youngest at home. They didn't let me try to take risks. So I never took any risk in my life, up from childhood to marriage I got lots of help… like I was helpless. Now also they are treating me the same way. They are very tense about my situation. But I told them, 'No, this is the time to change.' So they are very happy that I handled myself everything because there is no friends, relatives, nobody is there to help me. (Huria)

Huria has taken control of her life, deciding that it was "time to change." This decision signals a growing sense of control of her life and willingness to navigate the new. Similar to the sense of pride Huria expresses when talking about the support she has received from her parents, Ana also acknowledges the support of her siblings and parents.

> My [siblings] and my parents helping me leave my violent husband and come here. They also tell me you leave from your husband. But I am not coming. But then I came here. I [decided when it was time to] leave my husband. (Ana)

Making the decision to leave their partners/spouses means being responsible for all the daily necessities of life. After being in violent relationships that restricted their resources and independence, the wāhine have found it hard adjusting to being on their own.

Wāhine expressed distrust and resistance when engaging with support services. The manner in which staff interacted with them hindered their ability to progress and optimise wellbeing. Stemming from demeaning treatment, a lack of empathy and inefficiency in agencies such as Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ) and CYFS is evident.

> I think Work and Income has to be one of the most, other than CYFS, one of the most demeaning places you could walk into. (Mere)

The criticism by Mere highlights the need for more compassionate and understanding approaches within these institutions.

> I absolutely hate them. I can't stand them from a bar of soap. I've had this lady ring me; this is the third day now that she's been trying to ring me and asking to meet and I have no backup that I can actually trust and call on. I know I have [Te Whakaruruhau] and all of that. I feel like I need more. (Taea)

> They'll just talk to you like you ain't worth shit. And I've had those conversations on the phone and we've done the whole taken up higher and then gone to make a… But then nothing's really improved or changed. Or not even a sorry either. So that's one thing I dread about dealing with WINZ is that it's like a trauma thing in my brain that sits in there like anxiety too. Like, oh no, I don't want to ask them for shit because then I might get one that's going to ask me why and who and just question and interrogation. (Waimarino)

As outlined by the wāhine below, there are frustrations such as trying to understand support system processes and requirements (Waimarino) and the negative reception of those services when wāhine advocate for what they want (Moana):

> Yeah. It's just ticking the boxes. But I understand that sometimes, most of the time you can only help yourself and things. That's what I try when I get in a space like that when you just not relying on other people to help you but when they come to you with these big solutions and then you do your part and then people don't help with their end, I get frustrated and annoyed and angry and stuff. But then at the end of it, I always tell myself, no one else can help you, but you… It's just changing your thought pattern… You just want your independence. (Waimarino)

> I had that same problem too. And I honestly go back to my colour and my skin. Honestly, I do. Is it because I'm Māori or is it because I'm black? Why are you treating me the way you're treating me? What is it?… and you're doing it on your own. You'll go there and try preaching to them and tell them, they just think, 'Pushy psycho.' I don't need that! (Moana)

Looking to the future, wāhine highlighted their desire for stability. As already noted, housing is a key contributor to feeling independent. Expanding upon housing is the importance of mental health. Wehe

referred to the importance of mental health in keeping herself on a path to wellness. Kakama, while feeling optimistic most days, noted that she is still plagued by negative thoughts.

> Just get my life back into stability and just handle it. I guess definitely focusing on my move [to another city]. Yeah. I think so. Just knowing that they're going to be there as well. But also focusing on my mental health and doing what I need to do to keep myself on that path. (Wehe)

> I'm drug and alcohol clean, off meth… and smokefree for myself… For myself to create my life, my foundations for myself and my family is stay drug and alcohol and smoke free… [I] stay focused on wellness, [a] massive healing journey… and that's what's helped me. And now I'm ready to connect with other people. (Kohu)

> Most days, I wake up optimistic, thank goodness I still have that. I can get a little down and very negative about it [my life] because I don't have the tools that I feel I need to surpass where I am. I could run rings around a lot of departments, and they would think I'm sweet as, just fine, because I don't trust anyone enough to be honest, to say, 'No I'm not [fine], I'm full of crap.' (Kakama)

Wāhine revealed the impacts of negative past experiences, such as breaches of confidentiality or betrayal of trust, significantly impacting their willingness to seek support and open up to others. Building trust in themselves and others was recognised as an important contributor to overcoming barriers. A growing sense of confidence from wāhine highlights their transition to navigating the new situation of independence in which they find themselves. In the next we see how Mere has been supported by Te Whakaruruhau to access support services to assist her and her children

A wāhine narrative: Mere

Mere (between 30 and 39 years of age) has three children to her husband and is the primary caregiver of her sister's children. Raised by her Māori mother, Mere has arranged for her children to attend a local Kura Kaupapa Māori. One child is neurodiverse and so Mere requires help and support. She was studying at the same time as working.

Services Mere has experience with

Te Whakauruhau: Mere acknowledged Te Whakaruruhau and KFTS have been great to her: "*I thought I would need therapy support.*" Her sister had worked with a Refuge [Office at a different location to that of Te Whakarururhau] a lot; her negative experiences initially made Mere scared to access support from Te Whakaruruhau.

> In terms of services, the only service that I could say is a positive thing that I've worked with other than Te Whakaruruhau is the Kirikiriroa Family Trust services… They're lovely in there. And they get my sense of humour. Because, yes, I'll make a joke about 'oh, I'm going to kick his ass' kind of thing, like the kids. And they know I'm joking.

CYFS: Has had a long relationship with CYFS in terms of raising her sister's children. In the past, CYFS have threatened to remove the children after one nephew complained about having to do chores (wash his own clothes in the machine). CYFS have recently threatened to uplift her sister's children.

> I'm over CYFS. I want them out because they are impeding my right as an aunty to raise them. The whole point of in-family-placement is so that when the kids go back home, they know the expectations. I'm only raising them the way I know my sister would raise them… I'm dealing with CYFS at the moment. When they're calling me up saying, 'You're a bad mum,' but everyone around me is saying I'm awesome. I'm confused.

For her own family, Mere has experienced the other side of the organisation. After her husband had 'backhanded' their son, CYFS opened a case. Mere claims it was swept under the rug because both men were involved with [a named] Church: "You can lose everything because of their assumptions."

Social workers: Mere's experiences led her to believe the social workers were naïve because they had no lived experience of DV. She rang a social worker after her husband hit their son but was never called back. Because of her circumstances, Mere's family have a social worker for the children and another for herself.

Police: Mere recalled how the Police made an assumption that she (as the mother) was on drugs because they watch as she vomited outside the house after a domestic violence incident [Mere has the tendency to vomit when nervous or anxious]. Mere was angry that the Police left her husband at the

house to sleep off his drunk state but took her away [even though she was covered in bruises] and left her young child asleep in the bedroom in an unsafe house. Mere felt the police made excuses for her husband's bad behaviour, "I."

Barriers and hinderance factors

> I'm paying for and organising my own driving lessons because [CYFS] said I had to, but they aren't very organised about getting lessons sorted [for her]. Benefits jam you into a violent relationship. I couldn't afford to leave.
>
> I had a phobia of cars and driving. I used to think that cars that were driving would purposefully swerve; they'd kill you. So I'd stay right away from roads… now I am finally able to drive, which has been awesome… I'm more independent. I have more job opportunities. And that's why half the jobs I studied for, I couldn't get, because I had no licence because I was too scared of cars.

Benefits and facilitators

Mere finally feels as though she has been able to access the types of help that she really wanted and needed after cutting ties to her husband. She was particularly pleased with the support her sons were receiving and noted, "*I got a Māori male social worker to work with the boys. They [services] need more Māori male social workers*." Through the support of the social worker, Mere has come to understand that "males can be nurturers" as she has watched the children adore and respect the social worker.

Mere had some advice for other women who had experienced IPV. She had historical trauma (intergenerational experience) but has learnt to focus on the individual person as an isolated experience rather than assuming everyone else will be the same.

Theme summary

The desires of the participants encompass the need for: personal growth; the strengthening of cultural identity; improved access to supportive services; hope; self-empowerment; strengthening of resilience; mentorship or coaching for life services; healing; accountability; and individual responsibility. Wāhine sharing their aspirations shed a light on their hopes and dreams for a better life for themselves and

their whānau, while also revealing the challenges they continue to face. In navigating a range of new systems, relationships and experiences, there is room to consider how not only the capacity to read and write but, as well, a variety of literacies beyond this, will be central to fulfilling these wāhine aspirations.

Despite the positive experiences, there were instances where support services fell short. Waimarino shared mixed experiences with services like WINZ, expressing that it can make one feel like "nothing" and cause anxiety. Another participant, Pua, expressed frustration with delays and lack of support, which led to a loss of motivation. These quotes highlight the importance of ensuring that support services are responsive, timely and empathetic, as delays and inadequate support can significantly impact an individual's wellbeing and motivation to make positive changes. The negative impact of engagement with some government agencies has been recognised more widely, as has the compounding stress and trauma it can cause (Fu, 2015; Shrestha-Ranjit, Patterson, Manias, Payne & Koziol-McLain, 2017; WEAG, 2019). If we are centring wellbeing for all those living in Aotearoa, some fundamental changes to colonial structures are necessary. Beyond this, in considering what the future of literacy looks like in Aotearoa, there will need to be a clear shift in power dynamics given the distrust built by repeated negative engagements with the Crown.

Setting boundaries as it contributed to self-care is also crucial when considering wellbeing. Mere expressed the need to set boundaries by saying "[n]o, I can't do that for you." The recognition of personal limits for Mere was crucial in ensuring self-care and in preserving her own mental and emotional wellbeing. Mere's acknowledgement that learning to say no has strengthened her overall wellbeing reflects the significance of establishing boundaries in order to maintain a healthy and balanced life. Beyond this, it is evidence of a strengthening emotional literacy. Emotional literacy includes an accurate perception of emotions to promote emotional growth (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2004, p. 197). This is evident in Mere's example and in the other narratives we heard. The significance of emotional literacy to managing and surviving DV in the pursuit of wellbeing and future aspirations cannot be understated.

E) Whakapapa and the protection of children

Hinenuitepō is, more often than not, depicted as a woman to be feared. She brought about the demise of the demigod Māui, who sought immortality for [hu]mankind. But perhaps that narrative was not written from a mana wāhine perspective. Hinenuitepō reclaimed her mana and, though no longer wanting to remain in an unhealthy relationship, she maintained her love for her children, choosing to wait for them in Rarohenga. Looking through these wāhine narratives, we find women who have been hurt, their children threatened, who have therefore had every right to be depicted as angry women. But the narratives they have shared show them as loving mothers who are thinking about their own and their children's futures. They have dreams and visions. What they want most of all is support that will allow them to be the women they imagined they would become.

The wāhine we heard from ranged from being young, first-time mums to mums of adult children who were starting to produce grandchildren. No matter the age of the wāhine, they still had the welfare of their children at the front of their minds. For some wāhine, they have needed additional support for the neurodiverse needs of their children and for others whose children were suffering from trauma. One example we share below is from Huria, whose school has twice been declined support from the ongoing resourcing scheme (ORS) for her son:

> … The school applied two times for his ORS funding, but they got rejected two times… one of the people from [another city] took his assessment and he told me that [my son's] eligible to get ORS funding… But again, the same thing happened. They rejected him. So these kind of things makes me more harder because I'm struggling. Managing a disabled kid is really a difficult task and being a mother of a disabled, and in between that I'm working. I have a shortage of time. I tried to get him his funding, but they keep on rejecting… So it's a very hard thing for me to think [about] my life. I was always thinking about him, how we will survive because I need some support because I'm not getting any support from my husband financially. He [my son] really needs that…, which is haunting me every time; he really, really needs the support. That's the main concern I have now. That's the main thing holding me back… Once he gets the funding, he'll be okay. Then, I can focus on other things. That's the biggest thing in front of me. (Huria)

Huria's declaration that "they rejected him" captures her feelings about how the support service does not see her son as being as important as she does. Her comments, such as "they keep on rejecting,"

highlight the frustration that is bubbling up. Acknowledgement of the lack of financial support from her husband was preceded by her question, "how will he survive?", which indicates she is thinking about her son's future and the difficulties he will have without adequate support with his learning. Huria was not the only wāhine who had a child with a disability. Others spoke of their search for support for children with disabilities, recovering from mental illness such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or with learning difficulties.

> Well, they helped me realise why my son is the way he is because of the trauma. I thought, I didn't realise he was that affected by what he's seen. And so they have helped me get him some help. Just medication, really. He's still waiting for him to get to the school still for referrals, for everything. But it's I suppose time. (Pua)

> It was actually through my daughter's fear of speaking out about her own mental illness that when she tried the first time going to [a Māori service] straight away. (Kara)

> And then my son, well, he's blind. And just him being on the tramp, he loves it. And then him just going to the swimming pools, he loves water and just seeing that, he looks like mean, because he's never been on a tramp before. And he's never been to a swimming pool anyway. Yeah, we had a little pool at home but not a big one with heaps of… other kids in there. (Hine)

Concerns for their children are not restricted only to the wāhine of children with disabilities: it is present for all the wāhine, whether their children or mokopuna are too young to be in school or are adults trying to pursue a career. All the wāhine want to protect their children from violence and see them happy.

> … trying to stop things from like us happening and protecting my children from the same things happening to them. (Wehe)

> I feel like I'm hitting a brick wall every time I ask for help. (Kakama)

> I was in [Te Whakaruruhau] since I was thinking about my children's education. I want [to see] them happy. (Aroha)

> I shouldn't have been, but I'm still here. Still get a next year to change things. Those are positive things… Just looking forward one step at a time. My family gets to visit. Forgiving people is hard but still… (Nani)

> Taking it one day at a time, you know?… I used to think I'm going to die lonely, but I am responsible for my future. I matter, so yeah nah, that's not going to get to me. I do feel like I have faith and I trust that my girl is going to live her best life and I am too. (Kara)

> For me it's just to see smiles on my kids' face. See them not walking on eggshells. Just being a kid, really. They can just run around and just do what they want, don't have to be hearing us argue or the father just don't do nothing for himself. I think it's just that. (Moana)

In this next exchange, Hine and Kara highlight the connection between their children's happiness and their own. Hine expresses a desire for "being a kid" like she describes seeing in her children's happiness; Kara joins in, acknowledging Hine's words and adding her own thoughts that wāhine Māori do not get enough opportunity to have fun:

> Hine: Trying to be happy and by being a kid, well, see let your babies just be kids and then let them enjoy being kids because when they get to that age, it's over [got interrupted]…

> Kara: Not just for our babies but for ourselves. As Māori, especially, Māori women, I feel we don't do enough of that.

Happy and settled children have an impact on their mothers' wellbeing. Taea, below, notes that she feels more settled because she can observe her children being happy:

> I'm just happy with my children… I have no problems now. Before I have problems, before was coming to [Te Whakaruruhau]; then I settle down. Now I have no problems. So I just want my children to be happy. Yes. (Taea)

> If the kids happy, they're healthy, fed, clothed, let someone raise a kid how they want to. Unless they're [the children] in imminent danger and you have to step in… (Mere)

As touched on in "Learning to navigate the new," when the children are settled, so too are their mothers. When wāhine commented about their futures, they often talked about their children's futures – the two being intertwined. Building on earlier comments presented in this section, Mere and Aroha (below) talk about their visions of supporting their children's futures:

> I want them to grow up being resilient. Ever since we've left, they've gained a new outlook on life. My two year-old was the reason we left… The thing that I want for my kids is that I want them to have a violent-free life. And I just want them to be happy. Every so often the image of my six year-old under the bed and the policeman comes to mind and that's what keeps me going. Those are the reasons that I keep going because I don't want that for my children. I just want them to be normal functioning adults that are violent-free. (Mere)

> Like my daughter, she was in [another city]. She wants to start for the dancing so I will support her… She stayed with my friend, I send money and now she said, "Mummy, I want to start nursing." So I say "Okay, no problem. I send you some money." Because she's my daughter and so I send her money because before you start for nursing [studies], you have to go for the x-ray and medical, all this stuff. I send her money [so] she start nursing… I was happy enough for her future. Yes. (Aroha)

As we read here, despite working to escape IPV, the wāhine continue to work on their mental health and trauma recovery while also supporting their children. Recognition of the momentous effort wāhine are making for their whānau was noted by Kara and Taea.

> You've got your whānau to think about. And when you say whānau it's the whole community. It's just not your immediate family. It's your cousins, your aunties, your uncles, your nannies, your koros [sic], their nannies and koros [sic] and your nannies' koros [sic] and that's… (Kara)

> I believe the woman in the whānau, the mother in the whānau; we are the rock of the whānau. We are the backbone. We're the ones that hold the family together and we definitely know what's best for us as a whānau. And when we feel like that our other person is trying to bring us down or be negative or… Total rubbish!… We are strong. Women are strong and we can put up with it. But there is only so much that we can take and then we start to feel like we are not doing enough; we're not worth anything. We're shit at being a mum, we're shit at being a partner. It's just all that stuff they're putting us through, putting us in, even though there's a part of us that's like 'No, we can do this'… It's not easy. And we want the best for ourselves and our partners… we want nothing but the best for them and our children. (Taea)

As Taea highlighted, while she wants to be the 'rock' for her and her whānau, recognition of the fatigue that wears them down was noted. Negative interactions inform and grow negative thinking that makes them have thoughts of being 'shit' as a mum and a partner. For the wāhine, it is important that they remain strong for themselves and their children if their desire to break the intergenerational transmission of violence is to eventuate.

> I think back in those days too, it was hard. It was really hard. Especially for our people. I know for my nanny and my mum growing up was hard. When the Pākehās [sic] came and they just stripped us from our wairua, from our language, our beliefs. It had a major impact on our whānau. Even to this day, we suffer a lot mentally, spiritually, physically. I think it's really important that for our own wellbeing, like [name] said, is to look after ourselves, to focus on ourselves. Be one with yourself, get to know yourself, your own wairua. Work on yourself and then you will be able to put that off to your children so that they don't have to suffer like how our parents or our grandparents did. Make the change within yourself to cut all those generational curses. Our people suffered, but it doesn't mean that you have to suffer, we have to suffer… I think connecting back to who you are and where you're from. Not only that but surrounding yourself with positive people. Because if you are constantly around people that are toxic of course it's going to have an impact on you. But if you surround yourself around people that are positive or that are like you, that have the same thoughts, same wairua, everything, like the things that you want, then it's going to have an impact on you, isn't it? And staying true to yourself, connecting back to your roots. Say where you belong, where you are from, where your whānau are from. I think that's really important. I was from that so I'm very disconnected from that, but I'm working on it, finding out who I am. (Taea)

The emotional impacts of having your children uplifted are an acute experience that many Māori wāhine fear. The number of Māori children taken away from their parents, and the number of Māori in prisons, has long-lasting effects on Māori children. Some of the wāhine we heard from spoke of growing up in households without a parent. The ongoing legacy of pain serves as a potent reminder to the wāhine of why they want to survive for their children.

> So that, I feel, is a big problem in this country. Huge problem along with a lot of other things. But that, that creates generational trauma… You know, the ripping kids out of their homes and for no apparent reason. Lots of things. I can go on. I don't

> want to go on because it's too depressing… Because it's huge. It's a big one. And nine times out of ten, it's our Māori kids that suffer. It's bad enough we had our culture ripped away from us. Our reo and now this. (Kara)

Sadly, not all the wāhine are with or near their children. Those below speak of the sadness and pain they feel because their children have been taken away. In order to maintain their privacy, quotes used in this section have been anonymised in a different format to protect them and their experience.

> I'm like, not doing well, pretty much live with it, if that makes sense? To kind of help other people with that, then I want to do something with early childhood, so it's still… I do have a lot of skills, but it's not on paper… And that was actually what I wanted to do. So last year, I was actually going to call social services… Yeah, so the skills that you can't actually get from, you know, I got, it's just biding my time to actually get them, but I prefer my skills better than them… (Wāhine A)

> And yeah, I got my kids back in a month. And I told them I was doing everything. I was obeying their rules. Everything went to CYFS because it had to go back to them to be judged and if it was doing okay… your obligation [was] to look at houses. That was on one of your obligations to be in a housing place… And when you work hard and do it it's like… And you get nowhere with agencies or people that just judge you. (Wāhine B)

> Mine is counselling and parenting. Yes. They helped me and my lawyer. When I had to apply for my birth certificate my lawyer said, 'No, because you are looking for your kids, not for the father.' When I apply for my children's birth certificates, my lawyer helped me… look for my father… parenting and counselling programmes helped me… (Wāhine C)

> They [Te Whakaruruhau] were there for me… when the kids were uplifted. The [kaimahi] never gave up on me. But I gave up on myself. I reached out to [Kaimahi name] and let her know I was having a little baby. She inspires me because of her strength too. And that's why I reached out to those women because I want to be that. (Wāhine D)

Family and relationships play a crucial role in journeys towards personal change. The influence of parental figures on children's lives, as alluded to above, has been both a positive and negative influence when searching for positive influences in their lives.

Multiple wāhine narratives

The series of quotes presented from wāhine here have purposefully been selected as examples of their learning aspirations for their children. Mere has a pathway planned for herself and her children:

> My oldest one, he's a real academic that one. He loves robotics and computer science. If I could access him more programmes in that terms, I would get him involved with that. [Name of second boy] he's got a short attention span. But he's awesome in terms of he's a daredevil. He gets stuck into anything. We've been discussing other options for him because he said that he struggles with school. And I said to him 'you don't have to be an academic to be successful.' So, I was telling him about building and plumbing and being an electrician. That you can learn with your hands. That's actually why I liked having my dad around because he's of that mindset too. He could never concentrate on one thing unless something interests him. He's right into tinkering in the shed. I saw [son's] eyes light up when it came to being around there. He wants to be a builder. [Name of youngest boy], I still don't know with him. He's smarter than what he looks. I just worry for him. I don't know what the future looks like for children with disabilities. So, it's day by day where I'm discovering what he's good at. For him. I just want him to be settled. To be happy and to be confident. Because he does struggle with making friends. I don't want to see him get bullied… I can see these kids have a lot of potential, but they have a long way to go. Their emotional stability… needs to be under control. Despite all their dreams I can see them becoming disheartened so easily.

Marama has dreams and aspirations for her mokopuna – for her eldest to be a politician and for her tomboy moko to do karate/play rugby.

> I want better things for my mokos[sic] than what I got. I just want to see them [mokopuna] succeed in something good. Because I come from a long line of violence. I don't want my moko[s] to see all that… Violence is all we knew. My son

> blames us ('our generation'). He does a great job [of parenting]… Better than what I done… Changes are happening. And I'm so wrapped. Cycle is broken… breaking. We're both intent to do that [break the cycle]. For our mokos[sic] for their future. Why should they go down a violent road? They deserve better.

Kakama has more pragmatic hopes for her children.

> I hope my son stops getting into trouble and leaves the girl he's with at the moment. My eldest son anyway… My daughter lives in [rural town] is doing a course in town… She seems to be doing better. I just hope she works it all out. Just because I wasn't 100% consistent that I'm not the arsehole. (Kakama)

Theme summary

A central concern for the wāhine we heard from is the protection of their children. Such protection ranged from keeping their children close, to caring from them from afar. As noted earlier, frustration was experienced when support services failed their children and did not prioritise their needs as these mothers wanted. There was repeated expression of the link between the children's happiness and that of the wāhine. In order to secure wellbeing for these wāhine, it is therefore insufficient to focus on the individual while neglecting the wider whānau.

The identification of colonial ideologies that reinforce negative stereotypes upon Māori (Cunneen & Tauri, 2016; Lewis, Norris, Heta-Cooper & Tauri, 2020; Hetaraka, 2022), and upon wāhine Māori in particular, place burdens upon them as mothers to ensure their tamariki behave in ways that are perceived to demonstrate good parenting (Hetaraka, 2022). That is, we are hearing the impact of the "[s]tereotypical views of uneducated, uninterested and irresponsible Māori […] parents" (p. 323) that are woven through the colonial project. These stereotypes have evidently impacted on the wāhine we spoke to, diminishing their wellbeing. Beyond, this Hetaraka (2022) has identified that these stereotypes underpin negative teacher perceptions and expectations for Māori achievement. The pursuit of literacy for these wāhine and their tamariki is inherently constrained by an education system that reinforces ideological barriers (Durie, 2004).

Aspirations for children's learning are hindered by struggles to access funding support for learning needs. The examples shared by wāhine identified disability and neurodiversity needs as well as recovery from trauma. The efforts wāhine were going through to support their children has impacted on their ability to engage in self-care or to even think about their own aspirations for the future. Wāhine consistently feel that they would be able to think about their own needs only once their children have received adequate support. Medical conditions present obstacles to making positive changes and securing wellbeing for themselves and their tamariki. Huria struggled to obtain support and funding for her autistic child, demonstrating some of the challenges faced by parents of children with special needs. Despite her child being assessed as eligible for funding, their applications were repeatedly rejected, causing additional stress and financial strain. Huria stated, "*I'm struggling managing a disabled kid… I'm not getting any support from my husband financially.*" This experience highlights the difficulties encountered in accessing necessary resources and support. Whilst there are discussions about trauma, OCD, mental health issues and substance abuse – all of which could require medical support – there has been no in-depth exploration or discussion of how these situations impeded directly on the participants' wellbeing. Pihama et al. (2014) highlight the impact of historical trauma on lives. This position is supported in the Royal Commission of Inquiry Report (2020). From these works, we acknowledge the relevance of considering trauma and its importance to holistic approaches to wellbeing.

F) Wāhine learning experiences and aspirations

Once settled into her new home in Rarohenga, Hinenuitepō had time before the first of her children arrived to reflect on her life in Te Ao Mārama. She thought about her happy childhood and the loving embrace of her mother, of her youth and her curious exploration and discovery of the environment around her. She thought about her love for Tāne, and how they had produced beautiful children. She still loved him and would be forever connected to him through their children. She realised that her ideas of love had emerged from the stories she had heard of her wider family (stories such as Ranginui and Papatūānuku, Tangaroa and Hinemoana). It was through thinking about others and their partnerships that she realised that she was still her own person whether she was with a lover or not.

Throughout the case study, wāhine references to their learning experiences, whether formal (such as in school or through professional development) or informal (such as observations of those around them), have been intermittently made. Most often when asked about their learning experiences, wāhine tended to skip past their formal learning by making general statements such as "I hated it" or "I went to multiple schools" before delving in more depth into informal learning experiences. One wāhine, Kakama, despite going to numerous schools by the time she ultimately left school, remembers fondly her early formal learning experiences because of her love for learning.

> Cos I was a straight A student at school. Teacher's pet. I went to 36 different schools. But yeah I was always teacher's pet. A good student. The lowest mark I got was a B- I think… I loved it, not so much school. I loved to learn. I still love to learn. (Kakama)

Although Kakama was the only wāhine who spoke fondly of her formal learning experiences, she was one of many who was engaged with and enjoyed informal learning from, for example, grandparents or other family members. A common experience is learning that took place across the generations or amongst extended family members. Gathering food from the taiao (environment) is a form of learning that wāhine remembered fondly. Kara and Hine mentioned earlier the wellbeing effects of gathering food from the oceans, rivers, forests and land. Multiple wāhine hoped that their children and other young people of today would reconnect with traditional food gathering and growing practices to ease the stress caused by raising food costs.

Mere similarly enjoys environmental studies and recalled being involved in restoring eels on a nearby farm. She had started training to be a nurse when she got pregnant. Although she can appreciate rongoā, she felt she needed to gain medical knowledge for safety reasons in her planned career. She

got a certificate then moved to nursing. After having her children, she tried botany. She went to a Māori Whare Wānanga for herbal medicine. She was previously working at the Hamilton gardens but resigned to look after her father's ailing health.

> I'm bored at the moment… but not mentally ready… Feel like I have a concussion. I'm still trying to set up a good routine… I am thinking should I go back to my passion before husband and children. Or find out whether I have new ones… My focus at the moment is on life skills – driving is the major one. I've had a learner's licence for 10+ years… As much as I want to go back to study. I just can't yet. (Mere)

Unlike Mere, who has done a range of formal training, Kohu spoke with regret about a lack of opportunity to gain formal qualifications as an adult.

> I've never had that opportunity (learning/to get certificates, do courses) ever in my whole entire life other than when I was at school. But yeah I do. I want to do what I can offer with my potential. Whatever that is. I'm good at talking. I'm caring. I thought I wanted to be a doctor/nurse… I thought I wanted to work at rest homes. I don't actually know what I want to do at the moment. I don't see this as me. This little step where I am. I see myself doing something bigger with my life. But I haven't worked that out yet… I'm putting that in mind. (Kohu)

Common between Mere and Kohu is an inability to know exactly what they want to do with their lives, at the moment. Such inability is not surprising given that they were both living in one of the safe houses at Te Whakaruruhau after an earlier stay at emergency housing.

The invitation to participate in interviews about learning experiences and goals offered wāhine the opportunity to make observations and reflections on their life journey so far and any learning they had gleaned from their experiences. While many talked about their informal learning, a comment from Kohu below captures the essence of what other wāhine had been trying to articulate:

> I learnt more when I was broken…[a] shattered woman… I'm trying to unlearn what I have learnt which was toxic. And not from only the men, but what I was brought up into. I'm just trying to get rid of all the bad crap and learning new stuff. I've been welcoming new people into my home so I can learn new stuff. Sometimes I have my walls up, but sometimes I have to let them down. (Kohu)

The self-reflection about protective behaviours shared by Kohu resonates with earlier comments by Kakama, who acknowledged she would say what she thought people wanted to hear in order to make them believe she was doing okay when, in reality, she was not. Both wāhine are calling for support to learn new strategies to deal with the new circumstances of their lives.

Kakama described herself as having "a really big persona." She feels as though her star-sign is a way to explain her strong sense of confidence as well as her constant changing of her mind when it comes to making decisions. She is education and career driven; she is willing to work/get a job, but feels she does not know what she could be best suited to.

> I'm [5o+] years old and I still haven't got a career path. I've got a brain, but I don't know what it's good for. I don't know where to go with it. It's like I need a life coach. Because I've got this far in my life and I don't know how to take the next step to do the next, whatever I need to do. I'm so willing to work. I'm so willing to get a job. But I don't know what I'm good at because I'm good at lots of things, but I'm a professor of none. I haven't got tickets for anything… I want to know what I'm supposed to be doing with my life. Being a beneficiary and being – oh I don't know – not needing elocution lessons and having good vocab, the dictionary and stuff like that, and understanding too, the English vocab is great, but it's not great if you're not doing anything with it… I want to help, but I don't want to have to give too much empathy…
>
> I know I'm OCD hard. I don't need everything in line so much, but if it's got a quirk, I need to be able to sit with that quirk or I have to change it… I used to go into people's places and see things crooked, I'd straighten it up… People get offended by it… I want control. (Kakama)

The lack of impulse control Kakama ascribes to OCD is reflective of the lack of control she had with her violent partner and her current desire to have control of her life-decisions and future. Responses described by Kakama reflect someone who wants to take charge of her life but, having never had the freedom while in a violent relationship to make decisions for herself and to follow those through, is now expressing feelings of frustration. While Kakama expressed a deep desire for personal growth and to find a sense of direction in life – "I need to focus. I want to know what I'm supposed to be doing with my life" – Mere mentioned the absence of a career path and the struggle to identify their strengths and

talents. Whilst both wāhine had a quest for personal fulfilment and self-actualisation (which are essential aspects of wellbeing), they felt like they had yet to realise their potential.

Unlike the women described above, who aspire to obtain careers and 'tickets' that will enable them to acquire employment, Hahana is in a different situation. She was in stable employment and had received strong support from her line manager and other staff within the organisation. Personal learning aspirations for the future for Hahana are, thus, very different from others.

> My biggest goal in life is just to be. And so I'm just be-ing now. I'm doing things that I want to do. Ever since I've left. Everything has gone well for us. My children are happy. I'm happy. My mahi is going well. My anxiety plays up every now and again. Certain senses… like when I smell [alcohol] I'm still overcoming some of the things I learnt (such as dinner on the table when he comes home and a clean house)… Now I use my experience to help other women to overcome the barriers like I did. I'm the [coordinator for a Māori health service] to help them deal with the healing from the trauma of DV. I'm the biggest advocate because I know what it's like to be in their shoes and come out the other end… In my next role I will be dealing with all the men that are coming out of being incarcerated and helping them deal with their pasts. And how to do it in a more violent-free way… Everything that I do is from a Māori worldview. Because that is one of the things that we lack is Māori working for Māori from a Māori worldview. (Hahana)

Furthermore, Hahana offered advice for others.

> Do it [leave your abusive partner] when you're ready. You have to be mentally prepared for the aftermath. Being in [a violent relationship] is not as hard as after [the relationship]. The mental, psychological side of everything. The psychological side is harder. Attend those wānanga. Attend those psychological appointments. It is lonely. But keep pushing through… Once you've left, access everything [all the support services] you can. (Hahana)

A wāhine narrative: Kakama

Kakama (between 50 and 59 years of age) lived on the streets for three and half years when she was young. She recently lived in a rural township but is currently in Hamilton. She talked about getting kicked out of a sibling's house at 4 a.m. in the morning and spending the rest of that night on the street. Until recently, she lived in fear that her ex would hurt her children, family and loved ones.

Services Kakama has experience with

CYFS/OT: Had negative experience of blended family, with stepdaughter who manipulated relationship between her biological father and stepmother to drive Kakama out. Eventually with the help of the stepdaughter's biological mother, Kakama was able to reach out to CYFS. CYFS then threatened to take away her biological son.

Police: Charged man who held her hostage for three days and nights. Police were clinical in examining her physical health but did nothing to advise about psychological help. Police told her to contact Friend of the Court (FotC), who helped put her in contact with Te Whakaruruhau. Slept on streets night before court hearing against violent ex because that was where police told her to meet them but did not check she had accommodation.

Refuge: Was currently utilising safe housing to escape abusive relationship.

> [Kaimahi name] was very on point with her work. She knew that I'm a very open and honest person. But it also takes one word for me to close up and become an introvert because… just mental fears where people have told me too many times that I'm dumb or I'm not worth much or nobody's gonna want me now. Just things like that that you build this big wall up and you want to hide behind it sometimes. Especially when someone says something that triggers.

WINZ: Kakama did not have positive experiences with WINZ.

> So many organisations, even the police; they treat you like a number. I get that brassed off sometimes when I go into the beneficiaries, when I have to go into WINZ. I turn around as say look, 'What are you asking my name for? All you need is

> my number' Cos they never say my name right. Culturally insensitive. Or they'll call out my last name… cos they're too scared to try using my first name.

Social workers: "I made them most of them bawl their eyes out (sighs) males included. Because they were just textbook. I would work my way around them aye. I knew exactly what to do."

People's Project: This group were recognised for their assistance in helping to find a good GP. Kakama wants access to the women's respite care she has heard about. She saw a pamphlet about it and wants to go there for her own self-care. She is frustrated with the lack of progress in helping her access support.

What Kakama believes has helped her the most

Self-therapy: Kakama revealed that she holds a mirror up to herself in the morning, takes a deep breath and talks positively to herself to learn to become her own friend.

Te Whakaruruhau: Kakama spoke highly of staff she had engaged with from Te Whakaruruhau.

> [Kaimahi at Te Whakaruruhau] They actually looked at me like I was a person, not a number. That is really hard to find when you're in situations like that. Absolutely, I feel like I'm judged. Some people [three names] didn't judge me. Those kinds of people I can relate to because they're open minded. They're not bureaucratic. They're not stuck to a book. They understand that you can't always stick to the state line.

What Kakama believes has not helped her

Kakama experiences panic attacks. She has struggled with wearing a mask during COVID because doing so takes her mind back to trauma of being silenced by her ex: "I'm still stuck in fight or flight mode."

WINZ said before COVID-19 lockdowns that they would help her move away from Hamilton to another city to escape her violent ex-partner but has since reneged on their offer to help.

Kakama believes there is too much empathy and not enough action to make change: “they [government organisations] need you to be needy.” She also believes that the government support system is a self-feeding entity that is not actually trying to help people to be independent. Instead, it is creating a culture of need. This tension she feels goes against her desire to become independent and self-sufficient.

Theme summary

Wāhine have varied memories of their formal learning experiences, with most preferring to describe informal learning such as that which is transmitted through the generations. Often, it is the grandparents who were remembered fondly for teaching skills that are important to gathering food from nature. Having escaped violent relationships, most of the wāhine are not in continuing or stable employment. As such, many are still figuring out the skills, knowledge and experiences that might lead them to careers that will sustain their interest. Opportunities to gainful employment are severely limited for those who do not have a driving licence. Many of the wāhine we spoke with do not have a licence. A small number revealed previously-held fears of driving, which places them in a position of requiring support. Neha et al. (2020) highlight the importance of whānau in the early learning of Māori children. As far as literacy is defined as the capacity to read and write, its uses are only bounded to particular parts of life’s journey. Hahana, the only wāhine who described herself as being situated in gainful employment, had aspirations for healing. Healing from trauma for themselves and their children is a major focus of all the wāhine.

Tensions expressed by wāhine highlight the perceived negative effects of professional intervention from government services within an institutionalised system that was built to support Pākehā (White) ideals and norms – and, as expressed by many wāhine throughout the case study, it is a system that maintains its control over Māori whānau. Having created its place as the central agency of importance (Burns & Früchtel, 2014), government agencies are then unwilling to withdraw themselves from the situation and leave decision-making in the hands of the family (including extended family and kinship networks). Kakama expressed this in her acknowledgement of government support systems “creating a culture of need.”

Discussion: Literacy implications of the wāhine narratives

Structuring the thematic analysis of the wāhine narratives through the pūrākau of Hinetītama presents us with a clear picture of resilient wāhine and mothers who have had to navigate challenging experiences of DV and subsequent trauma. As we explored their pathways, the changes they have made, what supports or barriers have emerged along their journeys and their aspirations for the future, literacy (understood as the capacity to read and write) was not prominent. This group of wāhine Māori endure particularly precarious lives and yet our most vulnerable are not seeking recourse to the formalised Eurocentric form of literacy, nor has it been identified as a part of their journeys. This speaks to the irrelevance of the capacity to read and write in their lifeworlds. Such skills are socially useful and have been attributed to better health and enhanced participation and access (Falzon, 2019). For example, a lack of formal literacy skills has been "associated with a number of poor social outcomes and economic harm […] such as shame and frustration, social isolation, poverty and unemployment, and poor health, [which] only worsen with age" (Cochrane et al., 2020, p. 20). However, based on our findings, we argue that there is a clear need to open conceptualisations of literacy to encompass people and communities who might otherwise find formal learning irrelevant, or ultimately useless, in their contexts.

Here we explore why literacy in Aotearoa has been framed so narrowly, drawing in the history of the present moment, reflecting on Eurocentrism in education as an ongoing part of the colonial project. We then extrapolate from the wāhine kōrero their use of other skills and knowledges to explore the redefinition of literacy in Aotearoa as the need for literacies in Aotearoa. Finally, we emphasise that the pursuit of literacies should be in the name of wellbeing, reflecting on wāhine Māori narratives of their wellbeing. In this space, we will offer a brief reflection on our findings about the barriers to, or supports for, achieving wellbeing for these wāhine Māori and we consider how literacies, broadly conceptualised, could be woven into these various inhibiting or facilitating structures.

Eurocentrism and learning

As is being increasingly recognised, the colonisation of Aotearoa has had a significant impact on Māori, heralded by an erosion of traditional sanctions and cultural practices (Boulton, Levy & Cvitanovic, 2020;

Cooper & Wharewera-Mika, 2011). That is, "within education, racism has been embedded in policy and practice from the outset" (Hetaraka, 2022, p. 330). When British settlers came to colonise this whenua, they brought with them Eurocentric systems of education which were forcefully implemented (Ka'ai-Mahuta, 2011). This fundamentally changed the landscape of literacy and learning in this country: "The English language, and by extension Western norms and values (Walker, 1990, p. 146), became the primary language of instruction. Suppression of Māori institutions, knowledge systems and language severely restricted oral tradition practices" (Forster, 2007, p. 99). The most obvious impact of a Eurocentric version of literacy being imposed on Māori is that Māori are recurrently viewed through a deficit lens as failing to meet the national standards of literacy and numeracy. However, this history is not simply a case of a new standard and definition being introduced as the measure of 'literate' or 'illiterate'. Beyond this explicit impact is a most insidious reality in which Māori pursuits, definitions and experiences of literacy have been obliterated through policy and by force (Hetaraka, 2022; Ka'ai-Mahuta, 2011). That is:

> It is easy to think of the tools that the master created being generic and unbiased tools such as education, government, democracy and so forth. Not only are these terms not innocent but it is important to recognize that imperialism and colonialism enabled the design of specific tools tailored especially to deal with Indigenous Peoples […] The colonizer did not simply design an education system. They designed an education especially to destroy Indigenous cultures, value systems and appearance. (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021, p. 22)

It is both the explicit and implicit impacts of the colonial assertion of Eurocentrism that we will discuss here as the context in which to understand the lack of relevance of formal learning for the wāhine we spoke to.

Traditionally, education in Māori society was collective: "[g]roup learning and cooperative teaching was the norm, with uncles, aunts and grandparents all playing important roles … In an oral culture, waiata (songs), whakataukī (proverbs), kōrero tawhito (history), pūrākau (stories) and whakapapa (genealogy) were important educative tools for transmitting an iwi's history, values and models of behaviour" (Calman, 2012, para. 4). The ongoing colonial project ensured that not only was the whānau removed from the learning space, but the valuing of oral forms of knowledge and knowledge transmission was quickly reduced as reading and writing capacities were centred (Forster, 2007; Ka'ai-Mahuta, 2011). The first Europeanised school for Māori in Aotearoa was established by a missionary in 1816 who taught basic reading, writing and religious studies (Calman, 2012). Initially, secure in their own knowledges and

culture, “Māori became increasingly interested in learning to read and write” (Calman, 2012, para. 11). As established trading partners with Britain in the initial contact period, Māori decided there was benefit in being able to engage in such skills (Calman, 2012; Hoskins, Tocker & Jones, 2020). In this early period, all teaching was in te reo Māori and Māori saw the opportunity to “assimilate aspects of the Pākehā world into their own” (Hoskins, Tocker & Jones, 2020, p. 144). However, this was not to be the direction of assimilation.

Problematically, from 1845 onwards, there was a pronounced period of policy intervention in which the assimilation of Māori occurred and that defined Māori education policy until the 1930s (Calman, 2012). In this period of the colonial project, the discourse of Eurocentrism was embedded, insofar as British civilisation was deemed superior to Māori civilisation, allied to perceptions that “the greatest favour that could be bestowed on Māori would be to turn them into ‘brown Britons” (Calman, 2012, para. 12; Ka’ai-Mahuta, 2011).

The New Zealand government introduced various policies and legislation to regulate and standardise the education system to reflect European norms (Stephenson, 2006). Ka’ai-Mahuta (2011) argues;

> The New Zealand Government has continually passed legislation that has been detrimental to the Māori language and furthered the Government’s agenda of cultural assimilation and language domination. The mechanism of the Government’s agenda […] was the State education system. (p. 196])

The Native Schools Act (1867) “established a national system of village primary schools” (Calman, 2012, para. 15). Beyond this, the Native Schools Act imported European ideals, social norms, morals and ways of being that sought to civilise Māori through confining their education to labour. The curriculum in colonial schools emphasised subjects such as English, mathematics, science and religious studies (distinctly western in emphasis), codified through the 1880 Native School Code (Calman, 2012). This emphasis reflected the priorities of the British education system insofar as education was geared towards producing a ‘literate’ workforce for the colony (Calman, 2012). At the same time, Māori social norms, morals and ways of being were actively suppressed. The national system of schools established under the 1867 Native Schools Act prioritised teaching the English language (Calman, 2012). Initially, te reo Māori was permitted to facilitate the teaching of English, “but as time went on official attitudes hardened against any use of Māori language” (Calman, 2012, para. 17). While the English language was introduced as the primary medium of instruction in schools, corporal punishment was meted for speaking te reo (Calman, 2012; Hoskins, Toker & Jones, 2020). The 1907 Tohunga Suppression Act

further “prevented the application and development of specific types of knowledge (Durie, 1998, p. 76). Without access to oral tradition practices and the Māori language, intergenerational transmission of knowledge and history was hindered” (Forster, 2007, p. 99). Schools, education and literacy have played a fundamental role “in assimilating colonized peoples, and in the systematic, frequently brutal, forms of denial of Indigenous languages, knowledges and cultures” (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021, p. 73).

Bringing us closer to the contemporary moment, there has been a growth in Māori-driven education since the late 90s, including kōhanga reo (preschool language ‘nests’) and Kura Kaupapa Māori (Māori-language immersion schools) (Calman, 2012). However, such initiatives are still marginalised while Eurocentric education dominates the learning space. This marginalisation permeates at the institutional level and, evidently, within individuals’ perceptions as well. The wāhine we spoke to were asked to explain their education pathways and their understandings of literacy. The response was an immediate dismissal of formal learning. On the surface this may recommend the necessity of extending the reach of literacy programmes to ensure access to literacy for our most vulnerable groups. However, we consider this more pertinently as a reflection of (a) the irrelevance of narrow conceptualisations of literacy for the wāhine Māori we spoke to; and (b) that for these wāhine Māori, ‘formal learning’ indicates Western-led reading and writing. This represents an internalisation of the centrality of Eurocentric literacy as formal and, hence, more valid. There was no question as to whether other learnings could count as formal learning. It also demonstrates the extent to which those education spaces that these wāhine Māori have been involved with still practice the teaching of one literacy and one modality in such a way that formal learning is bounded to a narrow conceptualisation which, in turn, is experienced as irrelevant for the wāhine. As they continued with their narratives, it became apparent that other forms of literacy (see below) are far more imperative in navigating their lifeworlds. For policy-makers, educators and researchers, such realities suggest a clear direction in shaping the future of literacy in Aotearoa.

Ka Hikitia – Ka Hāpaitia (The Māori Education Strategy) has five outcome domains:

- Te Whānau: Education provision responds to learners within the context of their whānau
- Te Tangata: Māori are free from racism, discrimination and stigma in education
- Te Kanorautanga: Māori are diverse and need to be understood in the context of their diverse aspirations and lived experiences
- Te Tuakiritanga: Identity, language and culture matter for Māori learners

- **Te Rangatiratanga:** Māori exercise their authority and agency in education (Ministry of Education, 2023, para. 4).

In order to see positive outcomes for Māori emerge from this strategy, these domains need to be operationalised in the literacy space. It is not simply about access but, instead, about making accessible literacy *relevant* to different lifeworlds. Simultaneously, literacy is about understanding "Māori positively, as acting in Māori interests, using Māori ways of interacting, with Māori knowledge" (Hoskins, Tocker & Jones, 2020, p. 143). It is about unbounding literacy from Eurocentrism and re-embedding it in different worlds, in particular Te Ao Māori. Pākehā institutions continue to resource, legislate and assert their right to define social norms and standards (Balzer, Haimona, Henare & Matchitt, 1997; Boulton, Levy & Cvitanovic, 2020; Stephenson, 2006). The history that informs the present is one where the curriculum/formal teaching/literacy have, and continue to be, "a colonial tool used to aid in the reproduction of the dominant worldview" (Ka'ai-Mahuta, 2011, p. 203). There is a long and violent association between cultural violence and formal literacy/learning that must be recognised in considerations of the future of literacy in Aotearoa: "Literacy is one of those mischievous concepts, like virtuousness and craftsmanship, that appear to denote capacities but that actually convey value judgments" (Knoblauch, 1990, p. 74 as cited in Keefe & Copeland, 2011, p. 94). Literacy moves beyond a description of capacity or skill and, instead, reveals "assumptions, ideological dispositions, and political influences" (Keefe & Copeland, 2011, p. 94).

Redefining literacy as literacies

As Keefe and Copeland (2011) suggest, "'What is literacy?' is a three-word question that deceptively suggests simplicity, but instead opens up a world of complexity" (p. 92). They go on to say that "the way in which we define literacy is powerful and will lead to opening the final frontier of literacy opportunities to include people with extensive needs for support" (p. 92). While Keefe and Copeland (2011) are centring disabled peoples with extensive needs for support, we consider that this same sentiment applies for other lived experiences, such as those of the wāhine Māori we spoke to navigating DV with their children.

Formally literacy has been narrowly defined in accordance with Western understandings of knowledge as the ability to read and write. That is, "[t]he literacy skills of interest in western nations are text-based and very often in the English language" (Cochrane et al., 2020, p. 6). Such definitions are typically

accompanied by discursive framing such as "illiteracy as deficiency" (Hamilton, 2016, p. 6). Nevertheless, there have been many efforts to reconceptualise literacy (Hindle & Matthewman, 2017; Kalantzis, Cope & Harvey, 2003; Rutten et al., 2013; Yasukawa & Black, 2016). Formal understandings of literacy continue to be challenged by ongoing societal changes and wider critiques (Rutten et al., 2013; Yasukawa & Black, 2016). As such, there has been movement from "the notion of a singular literacy to multiliteracies" (Rutten et al., 2013, p. 444; see also Yasukawa & Black, 2016). This shift is apparent in the UNESCO understanding of literacy. According to UNESCO 2008, in the 1950s and 60s, UNESCO (2008) prioritised an "eradication of illiteracy (UNESCO, 1953; UNESCO, 1957), seen as a problem of providing sufficient opportunities for illiterates to learn how to read and write" (p. 11). However, in their 2008 report UNESCO recognises the argument that;

> literacy only has meaning within its particular context of social practice and does not transfer easily across contexts. There are different literacy practices in different domains of social life, such as education, religion, workplaces, public services, families and community activities. They change over time, and these different literacies are supported and shaped by different institutions and social relationships. (p. 11])

However, UNESCO (2008) recognises that alternative measures of literacy that conceive of multidimensional literacies is "largely symbolic" (p. 17) because "literacy statistics are still based on the dichotomous variables" (p. 18) of whether someone can read and write. Basing literacy statistics on the dichotomy of can/cannot read and write is attributed to easy administration, clarity of definition and connection to other population measures (UNESCO, 2008). Thus, despite the potential shift in discursive framing, the practical application of a literacies approach recurrently fails to emerge in practice. This remains the challenge for the future of literacy practice in Aotearoa.

There are a multitude of skills and knowledge forms conducive to living a successful and flourishing life (Hindle & Matthewman, 2017; Kalantzis, Cope & Harvey, 2003). Digital literacy (Reddy, Sharma & Chaudhary, 2020), media literacy (Jones-Jang, Mortensen & Liu, 2021), visual literacy (Kędra & Žakevičiūtė, 2019), financial literacy (Goyal & Kumar, 2021) and health literacy (Paakkari & Okan, 2020) have all been discussed as important. Emerging from the narratives we heard from wāhine Māori, cultural and emotional literacy are imperative for navigating lifeworlds. Given that the wāhine we spoke to have been and still are navigating turbulent waters, it becomes abundantly clear that some literacies are more central to these narratives and lifeworlds.

Emotional literacy speaks to emotional intelligence and the ability to recognise and understand one's own emotions. It has been defined as;

> the capacity to reason about emotions, and of emotions to enhance thinking. It includes the abilities to accurately perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth. (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2004, p. 197)

Skills such as self-awareness, self-regulation and reflection are central to this literacy. In navigating domestic violence as mothers, the narratives shared demonstrate immense emotional literacy which have contributed to their capacity to navigate such experiences. As just one example, Mere recognises that learning to say no has strengthened her overall wellbeing, reflecting the significance of establishing boundaries in order to maintain a healthy and balanced life. According to Orbach (2000), the significance of emotional literacy has been noted more recently: "[e]motional intelligence is beginning to be recognised as being even more important than cognitive and intellectual intelligence to our mental and physical health, our career success and our personal happiness" (p. 269).

Amongst other skills it is this emotional literacy which has enabled these wāhine to be in the position to engage with us and consider their aspirations for the future and their versions of wellbeing. As Alemdar and Anılan (2022) suggest;

> Since emotions can contribute to relationships in a positive way, it is crucial to be able to realize, make sense of them, and make the most use of their power. In the context of emotional literacy in order to lead a quality life, it is necessary for individuals to get life skills such as understanding, managing, and expressing their own emotions (Antidote, 2003; Killick, 2006; Park, 1999; Steiner, 2003; Weare, 2004). (pp. 29–30)

The emotional literacy learnt and displayed by the wāhine we spoke to demonstrates the central relevance of this literacy to their narratives and needs.

In aspiring to conceptualise the shape of literacy in the future of Aotearoa, we can learn from the importance of emotional literacy and build space into learning programmes and institutions for literacies beyond the written word. Roffey (2008) recognises that;

> [t]he focus on emotional literacy and relational values […] may challenge many givens and assumed subjective 'realities'. It may, however, also be seen as 'common sense'. An emotional literacy discourse does appear to tune into what people want in their own lives – acknowledgement and feeling valued, empowerment, agency and a sense of positive connection with others. (p. 37)

Emotional literacy underpins relational literacy. As suggested by Roffey (2008), "[t]he definition of emotional literacy […] is a values-based concept that promotes the knowledge, understanding and skills that underpin relational wellbeing for both individuals and whole school communities" (p. 30). The centrality of the development of emotional literacy, particularly in aid of building relational literacy, was pertinent for the wāhine Māori we spoke to. In the narratives we repeatedly heard, the significance of interpersonal relationships, collaboration and encouragement in promoting overall wellbeing is clear. Such a perspective is consistent within Te Ao Māori where a relational sense of self is dominant (Robertson & Masters-Awatere, 2007). The wāhine spoke about the emotional and practical assistance provided by their family members, emphasising the significance of their relationships within their journeys. Relational literacy can mean "the ability to reflect upon, describe, and negotiate relationships in personally meaningful ways" (Salmon & Freedman, 2001, p. 7) . In Te Ao Māori, such literacy is intimately connected to whakapapa, which is deeply relational (Robertson & Masters-Awatere, 2007). We heard either the sense of loss felt in the absence of whānau support, or the encouragement experienced when that support was present. These wāhine are either seeking their whānau or deeply appreciative of them, demonstrating intense relational aspirations. Such relational literacies are clearly central for these wāhine, who would benefit from a wider understanding and experience of literacy in society.

It becomes apparent that the predominant, narrow conceptualisation of literacy could be so much more relevant to different lifeworlds if it was just one literacy amongst a suite of culturally appropriate literacies. The eagerness with which Māori took to British teachings of reading and writing in early contact periods was based in a context of supreme assurance in the validity of their own literacies. With the Eurocentric genocide of Māori literacies came a structural valuing of the capacity to read and write as the most valuable form of literacy. However, individual and community wellbeing is predicated on the strengthening of emotional literacy which, in turn, develops relational quality and social capital, each contributing to wellbeing (Roffey, 2008).

Cultural literacy also appeared to be fundamental for the wāhine we spoke to. The usage of 'cultural literacy' "goes beyond viewing literacy as basic skills and includes 'an awareness of cultural heritage, a

capacity of higher order thinking, even some aesthetic discernment'" (Keefe & Copeland, 2011, p. 94). In the context of our case study, cultural literacy thus speaks to literacy of Te Ao Māori. Cultural literacy in Te Ao Māori is both transmitted by and expressed through waiata, haka, mōteatea. Mātauranga is shared through whakairo, raranga and pūrākau and continues through the expression of tikanga during cultural events (Te Awekotuku, 1991; Tibble, 1984). It is these expressions of connection to Te Ao Māori in both the mundane and significant that reflect and demonstrate several forms of literacy of Te Ao Māori. The wāhine we spoke to expressed their desire to remain connected to Te Ao Māori and how this has helped with feelings of connection, identity and wellbeing. Similar sentiments have been articulated in wider literature: "Constructing a robust, internal, contemporary tribal identity (iwi, hapū, whānau and individual) is essential if our communities and knowledge are to flourish" (Forster, 2007, p. 103). In considering the shape of literacy in Aotearoa in the future, we can consider how reframing literacy to include cultural literacy could lead to more successful outcomes. In a similar vein, Ritchie (2017) speaks to the ways that fostering eco-cultural literacies can "provide a counter-narrative to national and international discourses that narrowly define and confine educational goals to be focussed on narrow standards of literacy and numeracy" (p. 289).

In the movement in and out of relationships of DV, we heard stories of displacement and feeling lost. This is particularly pertinent for wāhine Māori where place and the environment are intimately connected to wellbeing and flourishing. In other words, "alienation from the natural environment and the experience of displacement through migration or through changes to home environments can be highly destructive of cultural identities and communities which may need rebuilding" (Hindle & Matthewman, 2017, p. 33). This rebuilding is part of the pursuit of cultural literacy and cultural wellbeing. Building literacy for Māori must be about enhancing "connections to culture and whenua [to] foster a secure sense of individual and collective identity that promotes health and well-being within whānau" (Reweti, 2022, p. 380).

Hindle and Matthewman (2017), as part of the project Tuhia ki Te Ao–Write to the Natural World, consider how Māori perspectives can be recognised and developed within literacy practices in secondary schools. They argue that "students should develop a sense of environmental identity as part of their cultural heritage. The project investigates how students' environmental identities can be conceptualised as central to culturally responsive pedagogy within literacy practices in Aotearoa New Zealand" (Hindle & Matthewman, 2017, p. 33). This connection to the environment, as part of the development of literacies for and by Māori of all ages, is fundamental. As Hindle and Matthewman (2017) suggest, "[a] literacy attentive to place raises the importance of learning in, through and about

the local environment, and makes explicit connections between culture and environment" (p. 34). These are the necessary literacies to relate to the lifeworlds of the wāhine we spoke to. It is about not only prioritising the space for these literacies in future conceptualisation of literacy in Aotearoa but, further, recognising that people may already have a great deal of literacy in such areas. Thus, by expanding the conceptualisation of literacy, we can frame literacy success in strengths-based terms.

Reframing literacy as literacies can produce space for Māori to redefine and self-determine literacy for themselves. For example, it could emphasise the idea that "[l]iteracy is more than the functional transmission of information. It embodies values and can express our sense of being" (Hindle & Matthewman, 2017, p. 35). Given the immediate discounting of the relevancy of formal learning for the wāhine we spoke to, it is necessary to pursue a reconceptualisation of literacy such that literacy is extracted from the Eurocentric world and revitalised in the Te Ao Māori. If what constitutes 'formal learning' for the wāhine was not simply a narrow focus on reading and writing, but expanded to support cultural literacy, emotional literacy, and an embodiment of values and a Māori sense of being, the prospect of renewing practice and, in turn, more equitable outcomes appear possible. Whilst the ability to read and write, as it is narrowly conceptualised, is a useful skill, it is one literacy among many; not the totalising benchmark upon which to measure someone's skills, capacities and knowledge. Beyond this, our focus on reconceptualising literacy as literacies speaks to the efforts of others who "emphasise that literacy always happens somewhere — it is located in particular places and environments" (Hindle & Matthewman, 2017, p. 34).

Nevertheless, as with much epistemological violence, the issue remains that we do live in a colonial settler society, rendering the capacity to read and write as the most valuable form of cultural capital within societal institutions. This presents a dilemma: while we advocate for the equitable valuing of various skills, capacity and knowledges and consideration of these as equally valid literacies, society more broadly does not reflect such a position. This is problematic as "[d]efinitions of literacy shape our perceptions of individuals who fall on either side of the standard (what a 'literate' or 'nonliterate' is like) and thus in a deep way affect both the substance and style of educational programs" (Scribner, 1984, p. 6 as cited in Keefe & Copeland, 2011, p. 93). Furthermore, this results in the steadfast centring of a narrow version of literacy in which we see the picture painted that "[i]n 2015, many Māori adults have been identified as not meeting national minimum standards of literacy and numeracy" (Hutchins & Ikin, 2016, p. 5). Despite this enduring practice of utilising a narrow definition of literacy in Aotearoa, our study envisions a decolonist future in which literacy standards are self-determined by Māori, leaving room for multiple literacies to be recognised and for the revaluing of cultural and emotional literacies.

Looking back to look forward, we can imagine future literacy standards that recentre oral literacy. After all, "[h]istorically, Māori culture was oral and multimodal, rooted in complex symbolic meaning making and communication" (Hindle & Matthewman, 2017, p. 35). The idea of literacy entailing the capacity to read and write need not be abandoned in its entirety, because "[w]ritten language has become a central part of Māori literacy but best fits within a rich set of oral and symbolic practices" (Hindle & Matthewman, 2017, p. 35). That is, the monopolising force of the idea that literacy only entails one's capacity to read and write precludes consideration of a multitude of different literacies that speak to individual and community capacity and knowledges. Keefe and Copeland (2011) argue for the following:

> We believe that the definition of literacy used by educators, policy makers, researchers… must be one that will presume ability and therefore lead to higher expectations, increased access, and more inclusive educational opportunities for all people. (p. 98)

In presuming ability, policy makers, educators and so forth would be better able to recognise existing forms of literacy and be more ready to develop these literacies alongside other formalised Eurocentric understandings of literacy. Building on literacies that are already apparently relevant to someone's lifeworld will produce more effective literacy programmes and outcomes. In sum, we recommend that we move from literacy to literacies in both standard, programme and outcome and centre a critical perspective that asks "[w]hose literacies are dominant? Why are some literacies marginalized?" (Rutten et al., 2013, p. 445).

Literacies in the pursuit of wellbeing

The 'wellbeing approach' has been cemented in policy in Aotearoa after the Third International Conference on Wellbeing and Public Policy in 2018 (Weijers & Morrison, 2018). Aotearoa is recognised as "one of a few countries leading the field" (Weijers & Morrison, 2018, p. 10) in the wellbeing approach, which is perceived to be "an important departure from the policymaking status quo" (Weijers & Morrison, 2018, p. 4). The pursuit of wellbeing has clearly been at the forefront of the Labour-led government, demonstrated mostly explicitly in the 2019 Wellbeing Budget and the strengthening and development of Treasury's Living Standards Framework (McMeeking, Kahi & Kururangi, 2019). This Framework outlines a series of wellbeing indicators and is intended to support policy advice across government (Treasury, 2023). In 2018, Te Ao Māori perspectives on the Living Standards Framework

were explored (McMeeking, Kahi & Kururangi, 2019; O'Connell et al., 2018). This exploration produced He Ara Waiora, a framework that provides "an indigenous and uniquely Aotearoa New Zealand response [and takes…] a tikanga-based approach to wellbeing" (Treasury, 2021, para. 2; see also McMeeking, Kahi & Kururangi, 2019). The relatively newly-minted He Ara Waiora is intended to centralise Māori perspectives of wellbeing within policy advice. However, it was recognised that "it is not enough to incorporate kupu and whakaaro Māori: the framework must generate substantive, measurable change" (O'Connell et al., 2018, p. 10).

In pursuit of substantive change in the government approach to literacy in Aotearoa, it is necessary to centre various Māori voices to consider what literacy looks like in Te Ao Māori and, more broadly, within the diverse lifeworlds of whānau Māori. Given the government focus on wellbeing and, furthermore, in light of the wāhine narratives of their own wellbeing, we are arguing that, despite other 'functionalities', literacy should be pursued primarily in the name of enhanced wellbeing. This runs counter to prevailing official discourse wherein, while there is some recognition of social reasons for supporting literacy, the focus is economic and work-related reasons (Cochrane et al., 2020, p. 7). Economic interests are certainly at the forefront of discourses on literacy and numeracy across the OECD (Yasukawa & Black, 2016). What wellbeing will look like is socially located and variable (Robeyns, 2020; Winterton, et al., 2014). Hence, literacy needs to be reframed as literacies in order to provide space for multiliteracies to be equally validated, strengthened and developed in culturally appropriate ways that move towards diverse realisations of wellbeing.

Our wāhine spoke extensively about wellbeing and, while formal learning was quickly minimised as contributing to wellbeing, other literacies threaded through their narratives as imperative to their navigation. Here we can see that the aspiration of increasing literacy and numeracy skills in Aotearoa in the pursuit of wellbeing for its people must realise that literacy must be broadly conceptualised. It reinforces the approach of Hutchins and Ikin (2016) in Haea Te Pū Ata (a national strategy for Māori adult literacy and numeracy), which calls for the need to "raise positive awareness for literacy and numeracy, to alleviate barriers to literacy and numeracy achievement for Māori adults and whānau in communities, and to engage relevant and effective services that meet the needs and expectations of whānau" (p. 6). However, while raising awareness for literacy and numeracy based on the perspective that "literacy and numeracy is a key determinant in whānau health and wellbeing" (p. 6), we emphasise that literacy, narrowly defined, has been perceived as irrelevant to the journeys of the wāhine we spoke to. It is necessary to consider how literacies, broadly conceptualised, are a key determinant in whānau health and wellbeing.

Shaping literacy and numeracy programmes into the future must build on Hutchins and Ikin's (2016) "commitment to and investment in a kaupapa Māori approach to literacy and numeracy, which includes biliteracy in te reo Māori and English and literacy practices that express and value a Māori worldview, and where learning contributes to whānau wellbeing" (p. 9). We want not only to build formal learnings into people's lives, but to create space to realise the importance of, and value in, multiple literacies and how relevant they are to people's wellbeing and success. As has been explored above, this includes emotional and cultural literacy, which centres the connectedness of Māori as people and recognises that identities are fundamental to their health and the actualisation of potential (Reweti, 2022; Williams et al., 2019). For example, "[f]inding accessible pathways to restore fragmented knowledge and reconnect whānau to te ao Māori (Māori world) is an essential part of securing cultural identity to facilitate well-being" (Reweti, 2022, p. 375). For Indigenous peoples, "[h]ealth and/or wellbeing is a state of balance reached when interlinked spiritual, social, emotional, intellectual, cultural, and physical or material dimensions of a person's being are equally nourished" (Johnson, Parsons & Fisher, 2021, p. 478). The literacies entailed in all of those dimensions of wellbeing must be realised in literacy programmes to truly centre wellbeing.

Hutchins and Ikin (2016) outline one of the goals of Haea Te Pū Ata: "By 2020, quality in Māori adult literacy and numeracy provision will be characterised by a focus on whānau wellbeing. Whānau wellbeing will be a central aim of teaching and learning, enabling learners to transfer their learning to whānau contexts and contribute to and strengthen their whānau wellbeing" (p. 9). For the wāhine we heard from, wellbeing is holistic and extends far beyond the capacity to read and write. Understandings of wellbeing as diverse and holistic are increasingly being mobilised both in Aotearoa and around the globe (Dooris, Farrier & Froggett, 2017; Forster, 2007; Grieves, 2007; Johnson, Parsons & Fisher, 2021; Panelli & Tipa, 2007, 2009). There is "consensus that wellbeing is […] a broader-based concept comprising multiple facets of human experience" (Dooris, Farrier & Froggett, 2017, p. 98). However, acceptance of this framing of wellbeing does not always translate to application in practice as reductionist programmes fail to meaningfully realise wellbeing aspirations (Dooris, Farrier & Froggett, 2017). This presents an enduring challenge for future literacy programmes in Aotearoa, which need to realise wellbeing aspirations for diverse people and move beyond merely incorporating kupu and whakaaro Māori. To do so, it is necessary to foreground "Indigenous peoples' holistic, collective and relational perspectives on health and wellbeing" (Johnson, Parsons & Fisher, 2021, p. 477; see also Harmsworth & Awatere, 2013; Grieves, 2007; Reweti, 2022).

While not wanting to minimise the place of reading and writing in a Eurocentric world, we want to empower other literacies as being equally valid and important to wellbeing. That is, "there are many literacies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) and many modes of literacy, including modes of literacy that operate simultaneously – multimodal literacies (Jewitt & Kress, 2003) – that people use in their lives" (Cochrane et al., 2020, p. 6). As Kakama said, "not needing elocution lessons and having good vocab, the dictionary and stuff like that, and understanding too, the English vocab is great, but it's not great if you're not doing anything with it." It is not simply a case of putting that form of literacy to use: it is also about recognising that other literacies are more imperative to navigating turbulent lifeworlds. As Johnson, Parsons and Fisher (2021) suggest;

> Although each iwi (tribe) and hapū (sub-tribe) will have slightly different perspectives, Māori health and wellbeing generally comprises several overlapping dimensions: whanaungatanga (social belonging), wairuatanga (spiritual connection to gods and ancestors), mauri (energetic connection to other beings and places), hā a koro mā a kui mā (connection to cultural heritage) and mana ake (unique identity), as well as physical, mental and emotional wellbeing (taha tinana, hinengaro and whatumanawa) (Durie 1994; Pere 1984). Overall wellbeing of individuals, families and the wider community is attained when these dimensions are equally nourished through relationships between peoples and places. (p. 479)

It is in the recognition and development of literacies that underpin whanaungatanga, wairuatanga, mauri, hā a koro mā a kui mā and mana ake that the full literacy potential of Māori can be realised.

These wāhine kōrero essentially expressed that knowing who they are and where they come from – particularly whakapapa – contributes to their overall wellbeing. It is in the reconnection to one's roots and the embracing of their cultural heritage that wellbeing can be realised. This reflects the broader conceptualisations of wellbeing in Te Ao Māori: "[k]nowing where we come from and learning and retelling our collective narratives are critical to the sense of belonging, and therefore the well-being, of Māori people" (Forster, 2007, p. 99; see also Reweti, 2022). We heard the centrality of relational support and the connection between culture, identity and supportive social connections in the whānau and community to the wellbeing of these wāhine. Wellbeing was said to be enhanced through "faith", "mahitahi" and "awhi" within interpersonal relationships and collaboration. We also heard that wellbeing can be just as readily diminished if whānau relationships are absent or negative. Here wellbeing is related much more intimately to emotional and cultural literacy, couched within Te Ao

Māori, rather than the capacity to read and write. That is, "[l]iteracy learning is about building the capacity to meaningfully engage in and contribute to the worlds we live in" (Hutchins & Ikin, 2016).

When asked "what contributes or diminishes your sense of wellbeing?", we heard responses that were individually focused, centring on selfcare; eating healthily; feeling confident; having a positive and peaceful mindset; ensuring adequate rest; and having faith. However, we also heard readily expressed whānau-focused responses. Wellbeing is not limited to personal fulfilment but extends to the wellbeing of the whole whānau. Beyond, and including, the whānau, the importance of a supportive community was expressed as central to wellbeing. The wāhine desired a community where they can feel safe, supported and validated; they positioned this as key to realising wellbeing. Aspirations for such a community is often based on their desires for their children's security and wellness.

Poor communication and interactions with government agencies diminishes wellbeing. Inadequate or even unsafe interactions were experienced, which generate self-doubt, stress and trauma. Government services such as OT, WINZ, CYFS and ACC were explicitly mentioned as having a detrimental effect on wellbeing. Engagement with government services that should have been supportive often engendered negative ramifications. Experiences have been plagued on the supply side by racism, a lack of empathy, a demeaning approach, and systemic failures; and on the demand side by vulnerability, trust and engagement issues, fear, uncertainty and disillusionment from historic system failures. These negative experiences with government agencies are not unique to the wāhine we spoke to. It has been well document that experiences with some government agencies can be degrading and intensify stress for our most vulnerable (Fu, 2015; Shrestha-Ranjit et al., 2017). The Welfare Expert Advisory Group (WEAG) charged with reviewing the social security system in Aotearoa released their findings and recommendation report Whakamana Tāngata: Restoring dignity to social security in New Zealand in 2019. WEAG (2019) found that the current system "diminishes trust, causes anger and resentment, and contributes to toxic levels of stress" (p. 7). Engagement with similar agencies, such as WINZ, was found to be a stressful and confusing experience (WEAG, 2019).

Investing in Kaupapa Māori approaches to literacy and numeracy (Hutchins & Ikin, 2016) is central to redefining the existing partnership between the Crown and Māori in accordance with the Treaty of Waitangi. However, to be actively adhering to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, it is clear that we must move beyond squarish thinking (Freeland, 2023). That is, by seeing the square of the western conceptualisation of literacy, we can see the circle of Kaupapa Māori within. We are attempting to box the aspirations of wāhine Māori, and Māori more generally, into a square that has four walls (Freeland, 2023). We need to move beyond the square, bounded conceptualisation of literacy to think about how these aspirations

of the wāhine we spoke to can be fulfilled. It is clear that, given the evident distrust with government agencies, the delivery of any literacies must be Māori led. We advocate for literacies to be "led and implemented by whānau, hapū, marae, iwi, and Māori communities" (Hutchins & Ikin, 2016, p. 9) to increase the access, but more pertinently the relevancy, of literacies to diverse Māori and to people more generally.

Closing comments

Wāhine we spoke to acknowledged their past mistakes and challenges, yet still expressed positive attitudes towards the future. They emphasised their aspirations and plans for a better life, highlighting the presence and importance of supportive systems and community services such as Te Whakaruruhau. For example, we heard, "I love to think that our future's going to be a positive future. And I'm hopeful that one day it will be" and "I'm just happy with my children… I just want my children to be happy." This demonstrates an optimistic outlook and determination to create a better future for themselves and their whānau.

In order for literacy to have a positive contribution in the futures of these wāhine, we suggest that, building on Haea Te Pū Ata (Hutchins & Ikin, 2016), Aotearoa adopts a broad conceptualisation of literacy as literacies. We advocate for programmes to envelop and build on literacies that are relevant to diverse lifeworlds. Reading and writing is socially necessary and can work as a buffer against social harms such as unemployment (Cochrane et al., 2020). However, hearing from wāhine Māori who have been navigating turbulent experiences of DV with their tamariki, formal learning was discounted when they were asked about contributions to wellbeing. Other contributions such as connection to cultural identity, having a supportive community and ensuring the safety of their tamariki, were much more readily identified. We have noted that cultural literacy and emotional literacy were far more immediately necessary for these wāhine in their current life situations.

It is emotional literacy that underpins their capacity to understand and navigate their experiences and aspirations for new situations. It is their emotional literacy that enables their self-reflection and awareness. In expressing aspirations for the future, these wāhine spoke of a desire to gain knowledge that will enable them to create the lives they dream of. To give their children opportunities to heal is their main goal. Additionally, they want to access the learning support needed to help their children grow to become thriving adults later in life. But most of all, wāhine want to provide their children with

stable, safe environments (physical, emotional and economic). For the wāhine, the perception is that, once that goal is secured, they can then pursue their own learning aspirations and life goals.

Literacy programmes in Aotearoa could be part of this new future and knowledge journey. However, such programmes should not be based on understandings of literacy that are bound in Eurocentric conceptualisations of valid knowledge forms. Rather, future literacy programmes should recognise the importance of emotional literacy and the desire for greater cultural literacy and provide space to develop such literacies alongside formally understood versions of literacy. Herein lies the potential and the challenge.

In closing we present this whakataukī as an acknowledgement of the strength of the wāhine we heard from for this project. Each of them are inspirational contributions to the legacy of ūkaipō.

Ko Hinetītama koe, matawai ana te whatu i te tirohanga

You are like Hinetītama, the eye glistens when gazing upon you

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview and focus group questions

Interview and focus group guidelines, questions and prompts

Wellbeing For the study, wellbeing is a broad concept. It includes what people/whānau say is important to them in life, what enables them to live the lives they want to live, what helps them be 'well'/live their best lives *holistically* (physically, psychologically/mentally, spiritually, whānau wellbeing/environmental wellbeing/relationships)	
1. What does wellbeing mean for you?	*Explore understanding of wellbeing* *- What does wellbeing mean for you/your whānau/what does it look like for you/your whānau?* *- Where did your understanding come from?* *- What contributes positively to wellbeing for you/your whānau?* *- What diminishes/takes away your sense of wellbeing for you/your whānau?* *What is important specifically for Māori that might be different for others? (if appropriate)*
Making change in your life This area is about their journey towards living the lives they want to live/making positive changes, perhaps from the time they can remember wanting to make change in their lives or pursue an interest or goal. It explores motivations, pathways, experiences, what has helped, challenges/ barriers in their journey towards living the lives they want to live (being in a state of wellbeing). It includes their learning journey in a broad sense.	
2. Tell me about your learning journey/making change in your life?	*Explore experiences of* *- learning (formal (e.g. schooling), informal/outside the mainstream education system) (e.g. tikanga, adult learning, marae-based)* *- and/or making change in their lives to improve their/whānau lives (positive change)* *What has been their pathway/journey towards their aspirations/ living their lives in ways that are important to them?*
3. What (or who) has helped you to make positive change (been a support to you)?	*What (or who) [e.g. people, places (e.g. home marae, maunga), programmes/courses, services (e.g. WINZ, counselling), artefacts, events, tikanga] and how?* *Examples*
4. What has made it harder for you to make positive change? (What (or who) has got in the way, made it difficult?)	*What (or who) and how?* *Examples*

Interaction with Service Agencies (current, and previous)	
5. Tell me about your experience with Te Whakaruruhau (Waikato Women's Refuge) and what this has meant for you? **What led to you come to them for support?**	*Try to get a sense of the situation that led to them coming along/the reason they came/what they thought they might gain/how they thought it might help them or their whānau in their lives (their wellbeing)*
6. How has Te Whakaruruhau helped (or not helped) you/your whānau)? Potential to use mapping exercise of the types of assistance support (physical, social, cultural, financial, emotional, educational) See - Meeting notes 18th May 2022	*Try to get a sense of <u>how</u> TWH is <u>helping</u> them towards what's important to them or their whānau in their lives.* *- look for L+N examples (including skills but more especially sense-making/navigating the world: "reading the world, reading the word, being the world"* *- look for cultural examples (tikanga), social/emotional/relational examples (e.g. being with others, communicating with others), learning examples*
7. What other services/supports have TWH been involved in helping you to access? If doing mapping exercise – use different colours for different agencies (positive and negative)	*Try to get a sense of other services they are accessing at present and whether TWH has referred them/taken them along (or not) and the relationship was established or maintained by TWH - are TWH still involved or not.*
8. How are these other services (eg. police, courts, WINZ, OT, Schools) **or support agencies** (Runanga, Hauora, Iwi groups, Red Cross, Anglican Action) **helping you and your whānau?** **Or they <u>not</u> helping you and your whānau?**	*Try to get a sense of ways other services they are accessing have been really helpful (in what ways) Try to get some specific examples* *Those that are <u>not</u> helpful, get some specific examples of ways they have failed whānau. Try to gauge if they have ideas of what could have been done better/differently.*
Looking forward	
9. How do you feel about the future? (positive/negative) Try encourage them to talk about their literacy aspirations for themselves and/or their children	*Explore* *- How would you describe your skills and knowledge compared to what you would like know and be able to do?* *- What services do you think are needed for people in a similar situation?* *- What could change (in your own health and life, the whānau, the community, the services) to better ensure wellbeing for people in your situation?*
Is there anything else you would like to add?	

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For further information about our programme and other outputs, see
http://workresearch.aut.ac.nz/low-skills