

# Well minds

## The impact of recreation on rangatahi

More young New Zealanders are affected by poor mental wellbeing than ever before, and those on lower incomes are often the most affected. Recreation opportunities can make a difference, by meeting rangatahi's needs for [connection and empowerment](#). The benefits of participation include:

- reducing [the impact of stress](#);
- developing a sense of connection and belonging,
- lowering [levels of depression](#) and anxiety in rangatahi.

### Snapshot – Youth mental health

Increasingly 15-24 year olds In NZ are struggling with their mental health,<sup>1</sup> as reported in the [Youth19 survey](#).

- 29% of females and 17% of males report having symptoms of depression, which is double the 2012 rate<sup>2</sup>
- Youth from high deprivation areas report higher levels of depression and have higher levels of attempted suicide.
- NZ has one of the highest youth suicide rates of all OECD countries.<sup>3</sup>
- During the teenage years there is a significant drop off in recreation and sport participation in NZ.

Recent UK research has [similar findings](#).

[Mike King](#), youth mental health advocate says that: “*one big issue for young people who seek help with mental health issues is the waiting list for counsellors.*”

**Can recreation participation make a difference for young people?  
If so, what works?**



Wellington Secondary Schools Junior regionals, Ki-o-Rahi, <https://www.kiorahi.com/blog/2020resultswellyjunior>

### The Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework (2019)<sup>4</sup>

Based on discussions with young New Zealanders, this focuses on reducing the impact of child poverty. It includes the following outcomes:

- Happy and Healthy
- Respected and Connected
- Involved and Empowered

Participation in recreation can positively contribute to all three areas.

### Benefits of participation

There are many benefits of recreation participation, and some are of particular relevance to rangatahi. [A range of approaches](#) to community infrastructure can be used to boost social relations and wellbeing in a community.

### Being in nature

Recreating and exercising outdoors, actively or in reflective mode, is [beneficial in myriad ways](#) for mental wellbeing, including:

- Being in nature can positively impact the [immune system](#)
- Reducing rumination<sup>5</sup>
- Increase feelings of wellbeing<sup>6</sup>
- Reduction of stress<sup>7</sup>.

### Social connectedness

*Social relationships have the capacity to “get under our skin” in ways that shape the biological processes detrimental to health... and can relieve the harmful aspects of stress.<sup>8</sup>*

There are [three aspects to connection](#) - all of which can be met through arts/recreational activities:

- Social support
- Socialising
- A sense of belonging.

Long term health benefits of social connectedness are well documented.

## Connection to culture

A secure cultural identity gained from cultural and social connections is key for improved mental wellbeing, in particular for Māori.<sup>9</sup> This is developed through:

- Connectedness to whanau, society and culture - key for Māori health and wellbeing
- Activity including [play creative and artistic activities](#) as expression of culture<sup>10</sup> and its positive impact on mental wellbeing, in particular for Māori, Pasifika and other migrant communities.

Applying the [Te Whetu Rehua](#) model ensures that Māori are supported to identify needs, develop approaches and facilitate opportunities by Māori for Māori.

## Being active

*By the end, we're all like a big group and connected in some way. Even if we hadn't talked at all during the session. Because we're all doing the same thing and participating...*

*[Emily, Just Shift It research participant]<sup>11</sup>*

The [Five Ways to Wellbeing](#) emphasised the value of being active. Preferred activities will depend on the group participating, and may include a wide range such as [sport, dance and yoga](#) for young women.

## Case Study 1: Ki-O-Rahi

Ki-o-Rahi is a traditional Maori ball game, with eight a side on the field. The game has elements of a variety of sports, including touch, rugby and handball.

*"The players have to employ a range of skills and it uses skills that appeal to New Zealand kids, including catching, running, kicking, throwing and passing,"* says Simon Hirini. [Find out more info.](#)

## Case Study 2: Te Arawa Journey

This longstanding outdoor pursuits and life-skills programme offered by Te Waiariki Pūrea Trust, is for rangatahi aged 10-15 yrs. It develops leaders and encourages understanding of self, and one's whakapapa. Journey participants demonstrated:

- Resilience and improved leadership capabilities, and understanding of what leadership means
- Everyday lifeskills
- A desire to support others wanting to participate in the Te Arawa Journey.<sup>12</sup>

For more information on the Recreation Aotearoa Outdoor Recreation fund, click [here](#).

## Principles in action

<a href="#">Whakawhanaungatanga – Connection and belonging</a>	Create opportunities to build relationships
<a href="#">Tangata - Connect to culture and identity</a>	Offer and value traditional games, sports and arts  Ensure that that the stories surrounding these activities are shared and understood
<a href="#">Te Whenua - the significance of place</a>	Go wild, be in nature, connect to the place – land, water, flora and fauna  Enable people to enjoy both <a href="#">green and blue spaces</a> and link these with opportunities for interaction and settings to suit the group
<a href="#">Target those most likely to be affected</a>	Design and deliver programmes with higher deprivation communities
<a href="#">Co-design</a>	Find out what participants want, and how to meet these needs. Combine creative, competitive, challenging, cooperative and confidence building.
<a href="#">Include physical activity</a>	Whether the primary focus or incidental, having ways of being physically active is a key contributor to improved mental wellbeing. Think about intensity, duration and frequency.

## References and resources

- <sup>1</sup> <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/health/99014681/rising-depression-and-anxiety-among-kiwi-youths>
- <sup>2</sup> <https://informedfutures.org/wp-content/uploads/Youth-Mental-Health-in-Aotearoa-NZ.pdf>
- <sup>3</sup> <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/health/95796049/youth-mental-health-resource-launched-in-hope-of-empowering-parents-teachers>
- <sup>4</sup> <https://childyouthwellbeing.govt.nz/our-aspirations/strategy-framework/outcomes>
- <sup>5</sup> Bratman, Gregory N. et al. (2015). Nature experience reduces rumination and subgenual prefrontal cortex activation. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*. doi: 10.1073/pnas.1510459112
- <sup>6</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/299545902\\_Mental\\_health\\_benefits\\_of\\_outdoor\\_adventures\\_Results\\_from\\_two\\_pilot\\_studies](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/299545902_Mental_health_benefits_of_outdoor_adventures_Results_from_two_pilot_studies)
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid
- <sup>8</sup> <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/literature-reviews/social-connectedness-and-wellbeing.html>
- <sup>9</sup> Maori Mental Wellbeing report (2018) Health Promotion Agency
- <sup>10</sup> Sport NZ (2020) Maori Play Framework.
- <sup>11</sup> Shift Foundation (2020) [Just Shift It: Empowering young women to positively impact their wellbeing.](#)
- <sup>12</sup> McLean, L & Ford, S. (2020) Outdoor Activity Fund; *Parks and Leisure Journal* Vol 23.4 Summer 2020, pgs 16-17