



Journal of  
**INDIGENOUS WELLBEING**  
Te Mauri - Pimatisiwin

# Au.E! The Rangatahi Programme

Volume 6 | Issue 2

Article 6, August 2021

Maria Baker

*on behalf of the Rangatahi Ora Team*

*Te Rau Ora*

## Abstract

As the Indigenous nation of Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori have suffered greatly with the number of *rangatahi* (Māori youth) lost to suicide. As Māori, we strive to lead strategies and solutions to address the issue of suicide in our communities and to realise Māori potential. Under Te Rau Ora: National Centre of Māori Suicide Prevention we now have evidence and examples of implementation and operational context, with promising practice of what achievements are being made for Māori suicide prevention and postvention.

There remains the emphasis for explicit Māori suicide prevention and postvention programmes and approaches that are connected to *Te Ao Māori* (the Māori world/culture), that value *te reo* (Māori language), *tikanga* (Māori customs) and *tino rangatiratanga* (autonomy). Imperative to this approach is culturally relevant rangatahi suicide prevention initiatives that specifically focus on building resilience among rangatahi to reduce emotional distress and the impact of suicide.) *Au.E! the rangatahi programme* acknowledges the vast work we must continue to counteract suicide for our future generations. This article will

provide an insight into Au.E! a rangatahi led and focused programme.

**Keywords:** Māori, rangatahi, suicide prevention, resilience

**He Mihi – Acknowledgements:** We would like to acknowledge Te Puni Kōkiri for their support in funding the Au.E! Rangatahi programme. We additionally acknowledge and appreciate the support of *kura* (schools), rangatahi, whānau, teachers, community kaimahi, kuia, and kaumātua. E āku rangatira mai ngā iwi o Aotearoa, koutou i tautoko i te kaupapa nei, e kore e mutu ngā mihi.

## Introduction

Between 2001 to 2015, the loss of *rangatahi* (Māori youth) to suicide has been devastating (Ministry of Health, 2018). Among rangatahi males aged 10–24 years, the suicide mortality rate over the period (2002–16) was 32.6 per 100,000; more than double that of non-Māori. For rangatahi females, the suicide rate was 18.0 per 100,000; more than four times that of non-Māori females. Among rangatahi aged 12–16 years, the number of losses by suicide was higher than non-Māori. Peaking at 16 years of age, whereas the numbers of suicide for non-Māori peaked much later, at 23 years of age (McClintock & Rogers, 2019a).

The impacts of colonisation and wider economic, social, and political structures in society are reportedly major contributors to the disproportionate rates of rangatahi suicide

(Durie, 2001; Lawson Te Aho, 1998). When a tribal people are disconnected from their cultural knowledge, lands, language, and resources, they become disempowered and disconnected from their foundation. Across generations of Māori reside ongoing experiences of trauma and harm caused by colonial systems and approaches (Lawson-Te Aho, 2013), in turn, inhibiting Māori from easily acquiring good health and social wellbeing. Māori-led suicide prevention initiatives are a solution to provide for cultural development approaches; with skills and knowledge of how to deal with colonisation, the factors that impact one's life course, and contemporary responses being used in Māori communities to address suicide (Te Au, 2020).

Initiatives that encourage Māori strengths-based approaches that blend wellbeing messages associated with suicide prevention make a difference. Such initiatives explicitly connect Māori with their traditional language, knowledge, and people, whilst addressing contemporary issues (Balzer et al., 2013; Clark et al., 2011).

The preference for a Māori wellbeing approach that prioritises one's own culture as being central and the basis of wellbeing, is being recognised by national agencies such as Te Puni Kōkiri (Ministry of Māori Development), who provided rangatahi suicide prevention funds for initiatives to

- “Impart knowledge, experiences, and skills to Rangatahi Māori (aged 10-24) to help them build resilience, connectedness, confidence, and leadership ability in a te Ao Māori [Māori world/culture] setting” (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2019, p.2),
- “Focus on building Rangatahi wellbeing by improving their capacity to resist risk factors<sup>1</sup> and enhance the protective factors in their lives” (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2019, p.3),
- “Incorporate a tikanga and kaupapa Māori approach (i.e., elements of cultural pride, te reo Māori [Māori language], identity and mātauranga) delivered in Māori community

development settings” Te Puni Kōkiri, 2019, p.3),

- “Promote strong youth development practice by putting rangatahi at the centre, involving them in key aspects of the initiative's design, implementation, and delivery” (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2019, p.3).

Te Rau Ora is the parent body of the National Centre of Māori Suicide Prevention which focuses on promoting *hauora* (health) within Māori *whānau* (families), *hapū* (subtribes) and *īwi* (tribes), and strengthening the Māori centred approach to suicide prevention. Included in this composition is a rangatahi Māori team who lead the delivery of Au.E! An innovative series of one-day events focused on improving the wellbeing of rangatahi by building their resilience against suicide. With the support of Te Puni Kōkiri, Te Rau Ora delivered nine Au.E! between 2017 and 2019 to 994 rangatahi across Aotearoa New Zealand

This article provides a snapshot of the experiences of rangatahi and adult observers from four Au.E! *hui* (events), the evaluative methods used during the 2017-2019 Au.E! programme, and insights into the rangatahi led programme.

### **Au.E!**

Au.E! are one-day events that consist of strengths-based activities and informative workshops to build resilience and knowledge among rangatahi. Te Rau Ora Rangatahi team (the team) leverages their rangatahi knowledge and networks to shape the programme for each Au.E! event. They commence from a position of recognising that communities have different needs and interests. The team actively engage with rangatahi, *kura* (schools) and *rōpū* (groups) in communities to best understand rangatahi preferences and need, their communities, and to determine a selection of workshops for Au.E!.

Workshop facilitators are identified within communities through the community engagement process. Expert facilitators add specialist skills and knowledge that benefit

<sup>1</sup> “Risk factors for suicide include experiencing stressful life events, not having a sense of one's own culture or identity (including sexuality and gender identity), exposure to violence, trauma or abuse, mental health issues, poor physical health, a lack of social support, being shamed, hopelessness, and alcohol and drug misuse” (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2019, p. 3).

rangatahi wellbeing. These expert facilitators bring a broad skill pool to prompt motivational life lessons, narrative, creative, and action-oriented workshops; all focused on rangatahi wellbeing.

Au.E! is an interactive day of positivity and hauora-enhancing workshops focused on building resilience through key messages, narratives, and activities that contribute to wellbeing. The programme is designed to run fluidly, where rangatahi can attend any workshop that interests them, across four 50-minute rounds of workshops, giving rangatahi the flexibility to move to a different workshop in each round. In these workshops, rangatahi can explore, learn, and experience activities such as music sessions with Musicians (Sons of Zion), Basketball with Coach and Mentor Kenny McFadden, Grooming, Artwork, Narrative Expression and Understanding Relationships.



Figure 1. Infographic summarising nine Au.E! delivered between 2017-2019

## Evaluation

Te Rau Ora delivered nine Au.E! between 2017 and 2019 to 994 rangatahi across Aotearoa New Zealand. Evaluations completed of early Au.E! provided for improvements on survey questions, the move to an online survey, and the development of the independent observation schedule. This article will provide a snapshot of four of the Au.E! events that occurred in Waikato, Ōtaki, Tāmaki-Makaurau, and Porirua, where the new evaluative methods were used.

### Evaluation Processes

Te Rau Ora’s research and evaluation team were commissioned to undertake the evaluation of the Au.E! Rangatahi events. Evaluation processes honour the *kaupapa* (programme/events) based on Māori values of *tika*, *pono*, and *aroha* (doing what is right with integrity and compassion) through the principles and practices of:

- *kotahitanga* - unity aimed at improving the health needs of Māori whānau at the community level
- *rangatiratanga* - authority
- *whanaungatanga* - Māori knowing and understanding
- *mātauranga* Māori - collaborative participatory evaluation processes)
- *awhi mai awhi atu* - a reciprocity process that allows information and knowledge to be transferred in an ethical and safe way
- *tino rangatiratanga* - self-determination and autonomy, clarifying roles within the monitoring and evaluation process [and]
- *whakakao* - a purposeful system of thinking through the issues, monitoring, analysis, recommendations and dissemination of information” (Moeke-Maxwell, 2008, as cited in McClintock et al. 2016, p. 4).

At the beginning of the four Au.E! events for Waikato, Ōtaki, Tāmaki-Makaurau, and Porirua, rangatahi were advised they could choose to complete the online Au.E! survey using tablets that were available at the end of the event. Rangatahi received a care bag on completion of the Au.E! survey as part of reciprocity of *koha* (gift) for her/his contribution.

### Objectives

The purpose of this evaluation was to:

- highlight the relevance of the content of Au.E! to the rangatahi participants as identified by rangatahi,
- identify if Au.E! increased confidence in rangatahi to seek help and to give help to others,
- identify the successes and the challenges of the Au.E! programme.

### Methodology

A kaupapa Māori approach provided a culturally appropriate methodology to evaluate in the local context. The greatest strength of using this approach is that Māori define the processes, doing the evaluation for and about Māori, with the eventual outcome targeting and benefitting Māori whānau and their communities (Smith, 1999). The evaluation methodology was based on kaupapa Māori principles of:

- *whakapapa* (connectedness)
- te reo Māori (Māori language)
- tikanga Māori (Māori processes of respect)
- rangatiratanga (determination)
- koha (reciprocity; McClintock et al. 2016).

### Methods

The online survey at the Au.E! events were available through a station of seven tablets that were set up toward the end of the Au.E! event. The survey asked for feedback from rangatahi about activities attended, messages received, demographics (gender, age, iwi region, kura), and Likert type scale for confidence in the Au.E! programme. The post-activity section of the e-survey asked rangatahi to:

- tick all the activities attended,
- write the number of times attended each activity,
- tick all the activities liked,
- write three key messages they took away, and
- write how can [Te Rau Ora] improve the activities?

### Likert Type Scale statements included

- I feel more confident to ask for help.
- I feel more confident to help my friend.
- The Au.E! was culturally appropriate.
- I feel more confident about my culture.
- I enjoyed the Au.E! activities.

- The venue and space for the Au.E! was suitable.
- The Au.E! was age appropriate.
- The Au.E! was well managed.

### Unstructured Au.E! Rangatahi Observation Schedule.

An Unstructured Au.E! Rangatahi Observation Schedule was also offered and returned to the evaluator by *kaitautoko* (teacher, whānau, caregiver) and *Kaumātua* (Elders) attending Au.E!. The observers were teachers, whānau, support workers, Kaumātua, and kuia (female Elder) of rangatahi attending the Au.E! event. The observers were asked to answer the following questions whilst observing the Au.E! events:

- Are rangatahi engaged with the speaker?
- What are the key messages you hear for rangatahi?
- How will you support the key messages back at kura?
- Have rangatahi transitioned from the last activity?

The observation data provided the evaluator with insider perspectives from the Au.E! workshop activities, about the *kaikōrero* (keynote speakers), various performances, and transitions between activities.

### Data Analysis

After each Au.E! event the evaluation and rangatahi team would come together to reflect on how well or not so well the workshops and activities within Au.E! were working. A descriptive analysis of the quantitative data that was captured was completed. The qualitative data analysis was analysed using a general inductive approach (Thomas, 2005), intended to be independent of theory, where explanations from the raw data helped to develop ideas and themes. Collectively, these provided descriptive detail and depth to the captured data (Thomas, 2005).

## Findings

Surveys of four Au.E! in Waikato, Ōtaki, Tāmaki-Makaurau, and Porirua were completed by 456 out of 480 rangatahi. The rangatahi ranged in age from 10 to 20 years, with the largest representation (78%) in the 10 to 16 years of age

group. Followed by equal representation of 17 to 19 years, and 19 years and over, who each represented 11% of the overall number of rangatahi. Sixty eight percent of rangatahi<sup>2</sup> strongly agreed, and 36% agreed Au.E! events were appropriate for their ages (McClintock & Rogers, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d). Eighty six percent of Rangatahi identified with one or more of their own *iwi rohe* (region) affiliations, 14% could identify with two of their *iwi rohe*, and six per cent could identify three of their *iwi rohe*. Seven per cent had little knowledge of their *iwi rohe* affiliation (McClintock & Rogers, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d). Seventy-four per cent of rangatahi strongly agreed, and 24% agreed with the statement of *I enjoyed the Au.E! activities*. They also made comments such as

- “I loved it”
- “It was fun”
- “This opportunity was awesome”
- “It's fun as”
- “It was cool”
- “I liked everything about it”
- “It was a fun activity I really enjoyed it”

Rangatahi were positive regarding the various activities in the Au.E! events. The top eight activities they rated from highest to lowest included

1. Music
2. Basketball
3. Beauty/Makeup
4. Visual Art
5. Barber

6. *Rongoā* (traditional medicine)
7. Do It Yourself (DIY) Dreamcatcher
8. *Raranga* (weaving)

Rangatahi supported their ratings with the following comments

- “Sons of Zion music was amazing”
- “Basketball with Kenny McFadden: ‘Aim for the moon cause if you miss at least, you will be among the stars’”
- “Makeup is always good to feel beautiful, if you look good, you feel good”
- “Raranga a taonga; Mahi raranga connects you to your tupuna”
- “The barber was great”
- “The painting was cool I really enjoyed myself”
- “Rongoa - Knowing the ingredients to take care of my skin and body”

Rangatahi were asked if they thought Au.E! was culturally relevant to them: 64% strongly agreed and 33% agreed, whilst three percent were unsure and one percent disagreed. The rangatahi were also asked if they had felt more confident culturally following their Au.E! event; 67% strongly agreed and 27% agreed, whilst five per cent were unsure, and one per cent disagreed.

Three key themes emerged from rangatahi comments drawn from the survey results in response to asking for their opinions about activities. These were categorised into *ko ahau* (me), proud to be Māori, and positivity; demonstrating the impact of the workshops and the overall Au.E! events (Table 1).

Table 1 Key themes from survey results about the activities

Ko Ahau	Proud to be Māori	Positivity
“Self-love”	“Good to be Māori”	“Never be afraid”
“Me is the most important”	“Be proud to be Māori”	“Be positive”
“Love myself”	“Proud to be Māori”	“There are good things ahead”
“Learn to love yourself more”		“Stay positive”
“Be yourself and express you”		“Be optimistic”
“Being self-aware”		“Resilience”

<sup>2</sup> The survey asked rangatahi to provide their rating using the following scale– strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree

Ko Ahau	Proud to be Māori	Positivity
“I'm important”		“Be creative”
“Self-love is to be embraced by all”		“Kia Kaha, Kia Maia, Kia Manawanui”
“Express yourself”		
“Be productive”		
“Believe”		
“Be the best you can be”		
“Believe that you can do it”		
“Be passionate about what you do”		
“Have fun and get amongst it”		
“Be proud of your work”		
“Be confident in what you do”		

### Asking for Help and Helping a Friend.

Rangatahi were asked if they felt confident to ask for help if they needed following their Au.E! event. Forty-three per cent strongly agreed and 45% agreed, whilst 10% were unsure, and two per cent disagreed. Some of the examples expressed by the rangatahi included

“I learnt that I could ask for help if I need it”

“Don't be afraid to ask for help”

“[I] Know I can ask for help”

“Talk to people when you need too”

Rangatahi were asked if they felt confident in helping a friend; 60% strongly agreed and 35% agreed, whilst four per cent were unsure, and one per cent disagreed.

They made comments such as:

“Being a better helper to others”

“Be manaaki to others”

“Help your friends”

“You're not alone!”

“Always be there for someone in need”

“Know that some people go through hard times”

### Take Away Messages from Au.E! Hui.

Rangatahi were asked to consider what key messages they would take with them post Au.E! Their messages were categorised into three themes: motivation and participation, perseverance, and having dreams and setting goals (dreams and goals) as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Key themes of take away messages from Au.E!

Motivation and Participation	Perseverance	Dreams and Goals
“Give everything a go”	“Aim to be the best”	“To keep going at your goals and dreams in life”
“Do what you like”	“Aim high”	“To dream”
“Try everything”	“Learning how to love yourself more”	“Reach your dreams”
“I can join in games”	“You can always get better”	“Shoot for the moon, and if you miss, you'll be one of the stars”
“Do good in school”	“Never give up”	“Follow your dreams”
“You can do it”	“Try your best”	“Aim for the stars”
“Give everything a go”	“Keep trying if you fail the first time”	“Set high goals”
“Accept people for who they are”	“Keep learning my Māori side”	“Chase your goals”
“Always have a positive attitude”		
“I learnt that I could be more sociable”		

Motivation and Participation	Perseverance	Dreams and Goals
“Improve yourself”	“Know your strengths and weaknesses”	“To make higher goals and don't doubt yourself”
	“Push negativity away, keep going forward!”	“Chase your dreams”

### Observers

Fourteen adults across the four Au.E! Hui contributed to the unstructured observation schedules. Four from Waikato, three from Ōtaki, three from Tāmaki-Makaurau, and four from Porirua. They were asked if they observed rangatahi engagement with the speaker and the activity. The adult observers confirmed 95% engagement of speakers with rangatahi, with the remaining five percent of rangatahi needing support to connect to the speaker or facilitator. The majority of observations witnessed rangatahi being easily engaged with the workshop.

“Very engaged, having a lot of fun”

“Kara (Master of Ceremonies) "Ka rata ngā taurira ki āna kōrero"

“Kenny McFadden (Keynote speaker) "Focused 100%. The delivery was interesting, honest and held the students' interest."

For shy rangatahi—the observers felt some rangatahi may have needed support to orientate them to the method of the workshops. However, once they were socialised to the mode of the workshops, they engaged in the activities they liked.

“Our rangatahi are shy, so I took a couple around to the various displays to ask questions, so they are aware of what help is available for them. What I have seen is the rangatahi saw and participated in fun, interactive workshops. Ka rawe!”

The transition between workshops was mainly smooth. However, there were a small number of comments mentioned about the slow transition between workshops; once rangatahi understood how the routine of the rotational workshops worked, they were easily engaged in the day's activities.

There were also a range of messages heard by the observers which further endorsed the messages provided by rangatahi, such as:

“Set goals”

“Ask for help”

“Have a reason to do things – aim”

“Train: Education opens opportunities for a better future”

“If you are in it, you will win it”

“Anything is possible, no matter the background”

“Dream big”

“Don't be afraid to take risks”

The adult observers were also asked how they would support the key messages taken by the rangatahi from Au.E! events. The following are a selection of their statements:

“Be available to find avenues for youth to achieve their goals”

“More encouragement to recognise talent and push work hard to make the talent a career”

“Caring more about our immediate environment and the people within it”

“Focus on the positive”

“Employ the words used by the hosts with the rangatahi throughout the day”

“Create a support network”

“Encourage and influence good outcomes”

“Empowering our rangatahi with a sense of belonging, pepeha, whakapapa, identity will help them to be assertive and positive leaders for the future”.

“I can be a role model. I can be a non-judgemental ear and a shoulder to lean on”

“Check-in’ with the boys, although they are non-verbal, they communicate in lots of other ways”.

## Discussion

Au.E! events were informed by rangatahi based within the community and were strengths-based, with a specific focus on building rangatahi

resilience and wellbeing. A high percentage (93.5%) of rangatahi who attended Au.E! knew their iwi rohe affiliation and 98% of rangatahi enjoyed the event. Given the consequences of colonisation upon Māori of being disconnected to culture, this finding was positive. The themes of *ko ahau*, *proud to be Māori*, and *positivity* further highlighted the rangatahi participants' preferences and the potential impact of the workshops and the overall Au.E! events. In addition to the aspirations among rangatahi of being connected to their culture and to Te Ao Māori.

Given the confidence in knowledge about one's cultural identity, Au.E! and its activities aligned well with rangatahi. The eight activities that were rated from high to low were Music, Basketball, Beauty - Makeup, Visual Art, Barber, Rongoa, Do It Yourself (DIY) Dreamcatcher, and Raranga. The 14 adult observers also affirmed the positive rangatahi engagement with the facilitators and activities of each of these workshops.

Ninety-eight per cent of rangatahi reported they would ask for help if they needed to and 95% of rangatahi said they would be confident in helping a friend. These are key as it is commonly known among rangatahi of their preference to go to their friends to talk about issues rather than talk to an adult (E. Rau, personal communication, February 25, 2019). If rangatahi acquire knowledge, skills, and confidence about what can help them or others if distressed, then this result is beneficial for all parties. The messages rangatahi said they would take with them were identified in three themes of *motivation and participation*, *perseverance*, *having dreams and setting goals* demonstrating the importance of rangatahi strengths-based approaches that promote aspirations and ongoing development of rangatahi.

## Conclusion

Au.E! as a one-day event promotes the importance of a Māori sense of belonging and other indicators of cultural identity for Māori, whilst blending important messages about emotional wellbeing and resilience against suicide. By ensuring rangatahi lead, design, and deliver such a programme has been crucial to its success. By ensuring connectedness with

rangatahi, ensuring speakers and topics are most relevant, and using familiar forms of expression. Rangatahi in these cohorts were generally satisfied with Au.E! as were the adult supporters indicating this rangatahi centred programme and responding to what was relevant to rangatahi, had relevance to all. Implications others can take from these findings include rangatahi driven and community led models to strengthen resiliency through rangatahi leadership and preferred activities. Engagement and participation in strengths based and wellbeing focused activities have the potential to build resilience, form relationships and empower rangatahi.

The limitation and corresponding recommendation are the need to provide a follow up evaluative activity with these and other cohorts to ascertain what information, knowledge, and helpful messages rangatahi have retained since Au.E!

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#### **About the authors:**

There were a number of Rangatahi Ora Team Members who were integral to the development and delivery of Au.E! events. This article has been written on their behalf. We would like to recognise Tarah Nikora for her leadership, and acknowledge Rangatahi Ora members: Eunique Kitiseni, Kuratapirangi Higgins, Fay Rhind, Natalia Jones, Georgia Butler.

**Dr Maria Baker** (PhD) (Ngāpuhi, Te Rarawa) Over 20 years of professional history in Māori health and mental health. CEO - Te Rau Ora.