

The background of the entire page is a vibrant, multi-colored rainbow pattern. The stripes are diagonal, running from the top-left towards the bottom-right. The colors include red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, brown, light blue, and pink. The text is overlaid on this background.

**“MAKING  
OURSELVES  
VISIBLE”**

**THE EXPERIENCES OF  
TAKATĀPUI AND RAINBOW  
RANGATAHI IN CARE**

By Point and Associates and the Community Design Team

March 2023

The purpose of the project was to give visibility to the experiences of diverse rangatahi

Our research question was:

What do takatāpui and rainbow rangatahi want Oranga Tamariki to know about them and their experiences of care?



# Nine rangatahi shared their experiences

- Aged 14-23 years old
- 7 in care at the time of interviews
- Māori (5), Samoan (1) and Pākehā (3)
- 8 identified as trans or non-binary & 1 cisgender, & as pansexual, bisexual & queer
- No-one identified as intersex or having a variation of sex characteristics (we didn't explicitly ask)
- Lived in cities, towns and rurally across Aotearoa
- Had a range of care experiences (youth justice, carers, residences, group homes, emergency care & transitions)



A



B



C



D



E



F



G



H



I

The community design team valued kaitiakitanga, manaakitanga, whanaungatanga & rangatiratanga

- Care-experienced rangatahi were involved in all aspects of the research
- We aimed to be strengths based, mana-enhancing & trauma-informed
- Methods & approaches centered rangatahi autonomy, wellbeing and safety





# The community design team co-designed recruitment and engagement methods

- We recruited through rainbow organisations, support services and Oranga Tamariki social workers & care partners
- We provided support for rangatahi through a pastoral care team & VOYCE Whakarongo Mai
- Peer to peer photo elicitation interviews, rangatahi shared 4-10 photos to talk about their experiences
- The community design team & Point analysed & themed the interviews

# Information and consent forms were designed to be accessible.

## TAKATĀPUI AND RAINBOW STATE-CARE PROJECT

The project is about looking at what takatāpui and rainbow young people want Oranga Tamariki to know about their experiences in state care.

We will share what we learn with Oranga Tamariki to improve practice.



## TAKATĀPUI AND RAINBOW STATE-CARE PROJECT: YOUR RIGHTS

The project is about looking at what takatāpui and rainbow young people want Oranga Tamariki to know about their experiences in state care.

We will share what we learn with Oranga Tamariki to improve practice.



If you are aged between **15** and **27** and have experience of state care we'd love you to take part in the project.



The community research team are made up of researchers from Point, takatāpui and rainbow rangatahi who are state-care experienced and members of takatāpui and rainbow communities.

 <https://www.point.co.nz/mahi/rainbow>

If you take part you will be invited to take around 5 photos (or choose some you already have) about your experiences and you will share these with a peer researcher in an online or face to face interview



*We have a consent form we can share with you if you want more info*

If you want more info about the project or would like to join, please call/text Jules at 021 989 745 or email [julie@point.co.nz](mailto:julie@point.co.nz)

It's OK to say "NO" to taking part. If you do take part, you don't have to answer anything you don't want to.



We can pause, or stop, any time you want



You are welcome to bring a friend or support person along to the interview



What you share in the interview will be private

This means no one will know your name



If you tell the interviewer something that makes us worried about your safety, then we need to help you keep safe.



We will work out what to do, together.

*We have a pastoral care team and a list of supports available for people in the project.*

## The research has some limitations

- Not a representative sample
- No participants under 14, or from Pasifika, migrant, refugee and asylum seeking backgrounds
- Difficulty recruiting more takatāpui and rainbow rangatahi
- Not inclusive of intersex identities
- Potential for incomplete and biased representation of experiences



Findings: Being takatāpui in care

Rangatahi takatāpui want Oranga Tamariki to know that being takatāpui is different from being non-Māori and rainbow.

Rangatahi takatāpui were almost exclusively cared for by non-Māori carers and the alienation and disconnection from their culture also impacted their takatāpui identities.

I have never been with a Māori foster family and it caused me to hate that Māori side of me to the point where I tried buying soap online that had bleach in it so I could bleach my skin whiter so I could fit into the families I was living with.



Participant D



## Abuse in care

Absence of trust and connection with social workers, a lack of rainbow training and experience for carers and kaimahi, and a failure to uphold rights in care, were all contributing factors to abuse.

5 of the 9 rangatahi experienced abuse in care. 7 rangatahi shared experiences of suicidal ideation, suicide attempts and self-harm.



Participant D

The [mental abuse] affected me quite deeply with the way I perceive my sexual orientation. I sort of went back into the closet because I was afraid of what other people might think of me.



Participant F

If the social worker had time to build a relationship, I would have had the safety to tell her about the experiences I was going through at the time which would have helped me to leave...instead of admitting to the foster family that I didn't want to live with them.

## Poor and inconsistent access to gender-affirming healthcare

Access to gender-affirming and rainbow-responsive healthcare was largely dependent on the skills and knowledge of their social worker.

Lack of access to gender-affirming healthcare had significant impact on mental health and wellbeing. Many rangatahi had to self-advocate to get their basic health needs met.



Participant C

They [OT] didn't really do anything about my mental health after coming out as trans. So it was kind of shitty but at the same time they probably didn't know what they were supposed to do. There are a lot of things they need to do.

I am eligible for hormone blocker for this [hair on the lip] and everything else. I have done the consultation but [my social worker is] not releasing the pills for me. I have been to every session there is. Some days I don't go out because of my face.



Participant H

## Not feeling safe and supported in their identities

Rangatahi told us about the failure of their support systems - social workers, kaimahi, caregivers, whānau and schools - to keep them safe and supported. They experienced ongoing and normalised microaggressions. Cis-heteronormative assumptions and practices were pervasive within Oranga Tamariki.



Participant C

Anytime I tried to tell them [residence staff] hey you are using the wrong pronouns, or you are using the wrong name they would get really angry and say you weren't born with those pronouns, or you weren't born with that name.

I think I started dressing gender neutral from a young age and I got bullied for it. It happened at every school I went to, so it made it difficult to make friends especially because I moved so much.



Participant I

Findings: What worked well

## Supportive, affirming connections

Rangatahi also shared their experiences of being understood, respected, and loved for who they are. Many were either getting or starting to get the support they needed to affirm their sexuality and gender identities.

They said these positive relationships can be life-changing.



Participant D

I know that whatever I say about my gender identity or sexual identity I am not going to be judged in any way [by social worker]. So, it just makes me feel like I have had that parent for the first time.



Participant C

[My social worker] is an ally and she goes out of her way to make sure the kids are being taken care of and supported. To have that kind of support from Oranga Tamariki really changed my mindset. I felt like they were there to make my life better not just there to take over the parental role.

Findings: What worked well

Feeling secure, loved, and celebrated in their identities

Rangatahi told us that connections and support from others contributed to them feeling accepted for who they are. They talked about what it felt like to be not just accepted but also celebrated.

Love. That was a big thing. I have never felt as much love as I did in that moment [photo with all the foster family]...it's nice to have a family and it has been so long since I have felt like that.



Participant A



Participant F

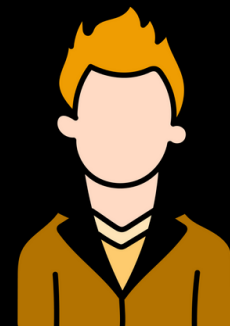
If it wasn't for being in the home [foster home] I am in now I may not have taken the step to fully admit to myself I am trans and medically transitioned. If I was medically transitioning and still with OT and how they moved us around quite a bit I would have really struggled with that.

Takatāpui and rainbow rangatahi want real changes.

They said they took part in the project because they want things to be better for other takatāpui and rainbow rangatahi.

They want them to be safe and supported in care, and for their rangatiratanga to be upheld; and to be accepted and recognised in their entirety.

There is a part of me that doesn't want to be part of advocacy [this project] because it is triggering and traumatising. Why should we have to put in the hard work, but the reason is that nobody else will. Or they will, but will it be misplaced because they don't know what is going on where we know what is, specifically what is going on.



Participant E

## **We recommend that Oranga Tamariki:**

- **Develop culture and systems** to ensure Oranga Tamariki is a safe organisation for takatāpui and rainbow rangatahi
- Put **policies, practices and training** in place so kaimahi can work safely and confidently with takatāpui and rainbow rangatahi to create trusting and supportive connections.
- Create care standards that **uphold the rights and dignity** of takatāpui and rainbow rangatahi.
- Improve **mental health supports** that are rainbow-affirming.
- Improve access to **gender-affirming healthcare** and other forms of **rainbow-responsive healthcare**, including for intersex tamariki and rangatahi.

## **We recommend that Oranga Tamariki:**

- **Support caregivers and whānau** to create safe and affirming environments for takatāpui and rainbow tamariki and rangatahi.
- **Ensure safe caregivers** for takatāpui and rainbow rangatahi
- Support takatāpui and rainbow tamariki and rangatahi to connect with **wider support systems** - hapū, iwi, schools and communities
- Commit to further **research and data collection**