

INVERCARGILL INITIATIVE NETWORK

2025 YEAR IN REVIEW



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2025 YEAR IN REVIEW

Across 2025, the Invercargill youth sector demonstrated extraordinary commitment to enabling and supporting rangatahi to thrive. The eight organisations in our network delivered a wide range of activities which created meaningful opportunities for rangatahi in Murihiku.

This year, we saw strong growth in youth leadership, with peer-led wellbeing models, creative leadership programmes, and new opportunities for rangatahi to influence delivery. Young people stepped into visible leadership roles across the community, reinforcing the long-term value of investing in youth capability.

Collaboration remained a defining strength. Partnerships with a wide array of community organisations created inclusive events and extended access to skills and learning opportunities.

Organisations trialled new delivery models which provided flexible, low-barrier entry points for rangatahi and strengthened their confidence and sense of belonging.

Throughout the year, the sector also faced significant pressures. Workforce capacity remained a challenge, with rising demand, long waitlists, increasing complexity, and ongoing strain on staff and volunteers. Many organisations reported concerns around limited operational funding and systemic barriers such as contracting processes, limited mental health access, transport barriers, and gaps in diagnostic pathways for rangatahi.

Despite these challenges, the sector continues to punch above its weight. Among many achievements, the collective mahi has improved wellbeing, strengthened identity and belonging, enhanced digital and life skills, increased participation, and expanded career and education pathways. Our network's shared commitment to rangatahi has contributed greatly to the wider youth sector, helping to create conditions where young people are better supported.

As we look to the year ahead, there is a clear need for sustained investment, removal of structural barriers, and continued collaboration across the sector and the wider community. The progress made this year shows what is possible when community-led organisations are trusted and resourced, and when rangatahi are empowered to lead the way.

Introduction

The Invercargill Initiative Network was established in 2024 in response to feedback from the local youth sector about how best to support rangatahi and the organisations working alongside them.

From early engagement, community partners emphasised the importance of relationship-based approaches. Rather than siloed funding or isolated programmes, the sector highlighted the value of regular connection, shared learning, and proactive support that could respond to change as it emerged. Te Rourou, One Aotearoa Foundation followed this guidance, shaping a network model which prioritises relationships.

The network brings together a small group of organisations delivering frontline support to rangatahi across Waihōpae Invercargill and Motupōhue Bluff. This includes Awarua Whānau Services, Murihiku Young Parents Learning Centre, Number 10 Southland Youth One Stop Shop, South Alive, Southern REAP, Youthline Southland, and Your Corps.

Through regular hui, partners share insights on emerging needs and strengths across the rohe. Together, partners developed a shared Theory of Change which sets out how the network collectively addresses the needs of rangatahi, alongside a shared measurement approach to track progress and understand how individual actions contribute to outcomes for rangatahi.

1200+



RANGATAHI DIRECTLY SUPPORTED

40+



ORGANISATIONS COLLABORATING WITH THE NETWORK

150+



EVENTS AND ACTIVATIONS FOR RANGATAHI

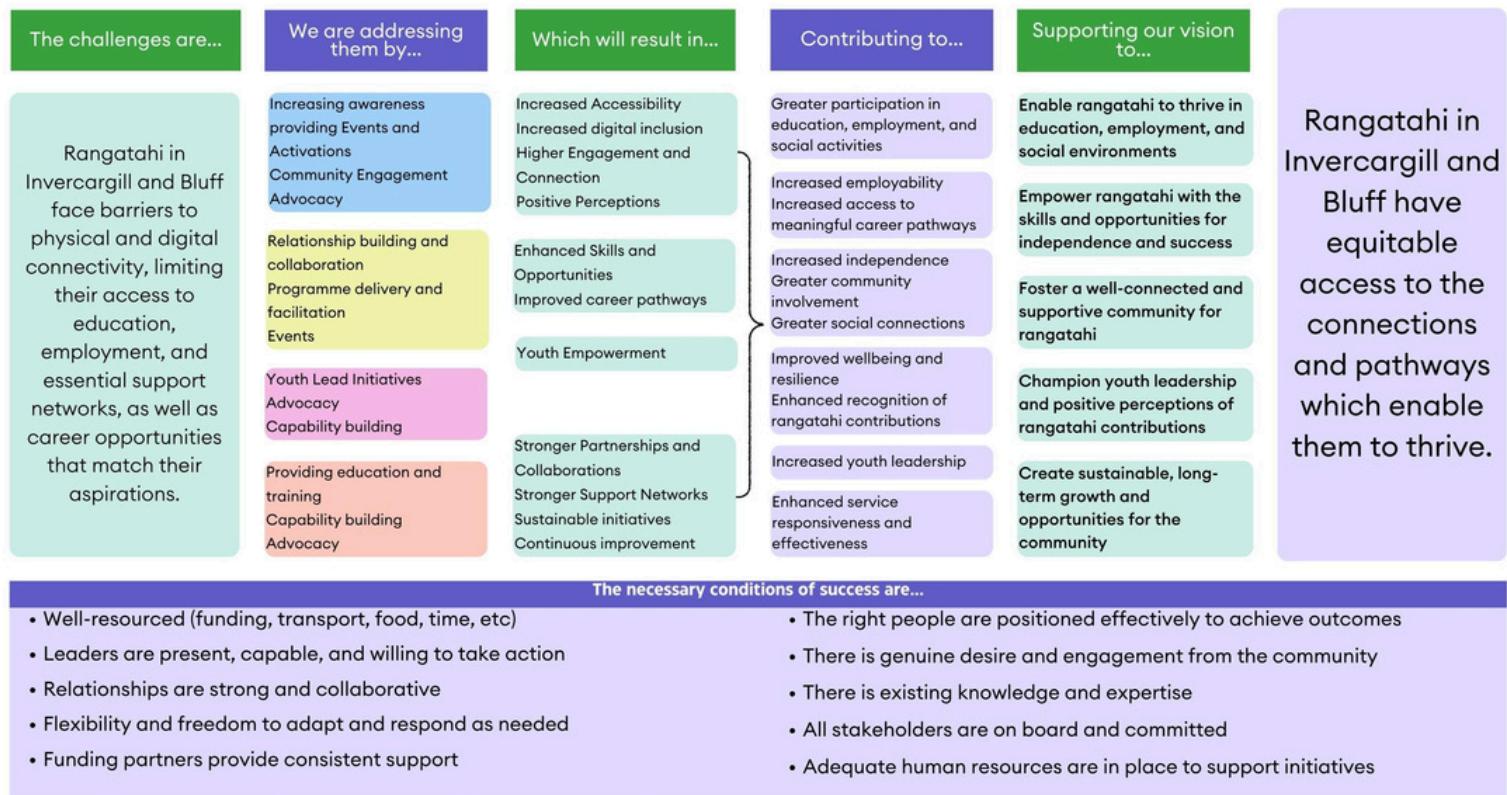
250+



LICENSES ACHIEVED BY RANGATAHI

Invercargill Initiative Network

Theory of Change



Tracking Our Progress

Regular network hui

Partners meet regularly to share what they are seeing on the ground, including emerging needs, strengths, and changes for rangatahi across the rohe.

Anchored to our Theory of Change

Insights from each organisation are mapped back to the shared Theory of Change, helping us understand where activity is occurring and which outcomes are being collectively progressed.

Shared measurement and learning

A shared measurement approach supports consistent tracking and learning across the network. This enables partners to see how individual contributions connect to collective outcomes, and where additional support or focus may be needed.

Progress Against Intended Outcomes

Increased Accessibility

Partners increased access by bringing supports directly to rangatahi, reducing barriers, and creating inclusive entry points.

- Licensing support, wellbeing programmes, and creative activities taken into schools and community spaces
- Events and activations offered free access to support
- Waitlists and high re-engagement rates showed strong demand and improved reach



Increased Digital Inclusion

Programmes focused on lifting digital confidence and skills for young people.



- Rangatahi gained hands-on technical skills through repairing and building computers
- Digital learning spaces and new tech resources expanded access for those facing digital exclusion
- Rangatahi earned NCEA credits through tech based learning and practical digital projects

Improved Career Pathways

Partners created multiple on-ramps into further education, and employment.

- Licensing, work-readiness, financial capability, and mentoring programmes supported smoother transitions
- Collaboration with schools and employers increased access to career development
- Youth re-engaged with learning, gained qualifications, and progressed into further study or training



Stronger Support Networks

Rangatahi experienced increased support through consistent, relational approaches.



- Peer-support models, mentoring, and youth-led support roles strengthened local networks
- Digital platforms and helplines provided safe spaces for ongoing connection
- Whānau-focused and community-based initiatives enhanced belonging and wellbeing

Enhanced Skills and Opportunities

Programmes strengthened practical skills, supporting young people to develop the capabilities they need to thrive.

- Life-skills, digital, creative, and wellbeing programmes equipped rangatahi with tools for independence
- Employment workshops, training pathways, and hands-on learning increased readiness for future work
- Youth gained technical, financial, and creative skills that opened new opportunities



Higher Engagement + Connection

Youth engagement grew across the region through activities that fostered belonging and confidence.

- Large-scale community events brought rangatahi, whānau, and sector partners together
- Regular programmes, workshops, and 1:1 supports strengthened trusted relationships
- Youth-led designs, murals, and activations created meaningful ways for young people to shape their environments

Stronger Partnerships and Collaborations

Cross-sector collaboration strengthened service reach and responsiveness.

- Organisations shared referrals, resources, and spaces to meet rising demand
- Partnerships with schools and industry enabled new initiatives
- Regular hui supported shared problem-solving and aligned practice across the network



Positive Perceptions

Activities helped rangatahi build confidence and a positive sense of identity and contribution.

- Young people took on leadership roles, co-delivering programmes and influenced decision-making
- Creative exhibitions, cultural activities, and celebration events showcased youth strengths
- Feedback from participants highlighted increased confidence, motivation, and a sense of achievement

What We're Hearing

Our network of community partners meet regularly to share what is happening for rangatahi. These conversations give us a clear picture of emerging needs, strengths, and shifts across the rohe.

The themes below reflect the strongest insights from this year's network hui.

Positive Impact

Rangatahi are stepping into leadership, building confidence, learning new skills, and reconnecting with education and opportunities.

Programmes that are practical and hands-on continue to have powerful effects.

“You investing in us as rangatahi has helped us to believe in ourselves.” - Rangatahi participant

Rising Complexity in Young Lives

Partners are seeing increasingly complex needs. Many young people are balancing mental distress, financial pressure, caregiving roles, disrupted engagement with school, and uncertainty about the future. Some are taking on adult responsibilities very early.

“There’s an Increasing number of neurodiverse youth struggling in school; many undiagnosed young people are labelled as ‘naughty’ while not receiving the support they need.” - Community Partner

Community Strengths

The network continues to work in strong partnership. Organisations share resources, referrals, spaces and ideas, which allows them to respond quickly and reach more rangatahi.

Schools, whānau and community groups remain essential to this collective impact.

“Having everyone come together, all of those organisations and rangatahi in one room co-designing solutions, it really shows how the community can rally together.” - Community partner

Pressure on Staff, Volunteers and Organisations

The sector is carrying significant strain. Teams are small and workloads remain high. Demand continues to increase and volunteer numbers are difficult to maintain. Sustainability and staff wellbeing are recurring concerns.

“[Our services] are consistently full and staff are carrying heavy, often high-risk cases.” - Community Partner

“The people making decisions don’t seem to understand the reality of what we’re working with.” - Community Partner

Systemic Barriers Limiting Access

Transport gaps, contracting processes, the cost of assessments, and slow specialist pathways continue to limit access for many rangatahi. These barriers place extra pressure on both young people and providers.

“The system isn’t working. Our rangatahi can’t even access the necessary assessments. Once they have a diagnosis, parents have a leg to stand on, and young people realise they’re not the problem.”

Acknowledging the Sector

We would like to acknowledge our rōpū for their commitment and care throughout the year. Every organisation in this network has shown what is possible when people work together with passion and a shared belief in the potential of rangatahi.

We also acknowledge the wider youth sector in Murihiku. Volunteers, mentors, kaiako, youth workers, whānau, community leaders and local partners have all contributed their time and energy to create opportunities for young people. Their dedication has helped build environments where rangatahi feel valued and supported.

The progress reflected in this report belongs to everyone who has shown up for young people and stood alongside them. We are grateful for the collaboration and the collective determination to improve outcomes for rangatahi in this region. Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou for all that you do.

- the Te Rourou team