



Kaimahi Rangatahi Whakaropu | Te Taihu

## **SUMMARY:**

# **STATE OF THE NELSON–TASMAN YOUTH SECTOR REPORT**

**By Debra Bradley  
20 April 2026**

## Introduction

This summary includes the Executive Summary and Sections 6 and 7 of the State of the Nelson-Tasman Youth Sector Report, for easy reference to key points when responding to the Nelson-Tasman Youth Sector Survey.

## Executive Summary

Nelson–Tasman is home to between 22,000 and 24,000 young people aged 12–24, supported by over 150 organisations working across health, education, training and employment services. That breadth is a real strength – and this report celebrates the skill, commitment and innovation of the people and organisations doing this work every day.

But the sector is under pressure. More young people are struggling with anxiety and other mental health issues, school disengagement, neurodiversity challenges, as well as vaping and online addictions – and the after-effects of Covid have made things harder. Specialist mental health services are stretched, with long waitlists and high thresholds for access. This is pushing youth workers into territory they are not trained or funded to handle, contributing to burnout and turnover at a time when the sector can least afford to lose experienced people.

Funding pressures are growing too. Funding is now the single biggest stressor for youth organisations – nationally, 58% of organisations reported it as a major pressure in 2025, up from 20% in 2006. Organisations are competing for shrinking pools of money while managing rising costs, more complex caseloads, and heavy administrative burdens.

These pressures are made worse by gaps in coordination. With so many organisations working across the region, no one has a clear picture of the whole system. Services are developed and delivered largely in isolation from one another. Bi-monthly Connections Huis do provide an opportunity to network and learn what others are doing, however attendance can vary. The diversity of services can make the system overwhelming to navigate, particularly for whānau with complex needs, where it is not obvious who to approach when asking for help. And the sector lacks consistent, credible ways to show funders the impact of its work – which makes the case for sustained investment harder to make.

The focus of this report is on strengthening the youth sector, and the seven ideas outlined below are proposals for discussion – not final decisions.

### **Feedback on seven ideas to strengthen the sector**

Section 6 of the report outlines seven key ideas on ideas to strengthen the youth sector:

1. Make it easier to match needs with services with a public-facing, interactive directory.
2. Give people a single point of contact, with someone who can connect them to the different services which are relevant to them, and to provide ongoing coordination and communication.
3. Make youth services more visible to the community
4. Build a shared register of youth sector programmes.
5. Support organisations to participate in multi-agency programme.
6. Develop a shared way to measure and report on impact.
7. Provide more specialised mental health training and support for youth workers to recognise they are now helping more young people with high and very high mental health needs.

### **Feedback on key issues affecting young people**

We would also value your input on what actions could be taken to enhance or improve young people's access to:

- youth hubs, drop-in spaces and "one-stop shops" for social connection, safe spaces, easier access to wrap-around support, and somewhere to go that isn't school or home.
- support and programmes for young people who are not in education, employment or training
- job opportunities
- transport (including public transport and driver's licences)
- housing
- food (particularly during the current fuel crisis).

These are discussed in Section 7 of the report.

## 6. Seven Ideas to Strengthen the Sector

This section identifies seven ideas to strengthen the sector's collective ability to support young people, grouped under four themes.

The survey questions are also included here, to make it as easy as possible to capture your responses as you read through this section.

### Theme A: Making it easier to access youth services

Nelson–Tasman has over 150 organisations providing support to young people, so it can be tricky to figure out which is the right one to contact for any particular situation, especially where there are several, overlapping needs.<sup>1</sup> For example, where does a parent turn when their child is vaping, struggling with their mental health, and not attending school? Too many entry points, with no clear pathway between them, can be a barrier to getting help.

This isn't a failure of the organisations themselves – it's just that a fragmented range of services is hard to navigate. That means some young people may delay reaching out or may not find the help they need.

#### **Idea 1 – Make it easier to match needs with services with a public-facing, interactive directory.**

The Nelson Tasman Youth Workers Collective (NTYWC) already maintains a youth services directory. Making it more interactive using AI – so people can search by issue and location to find the most relevant services – would make it easier for young people and their whānau to find help.

For example, a parent in Riwaka could type in their concern about their teenager's vaping and be matched with the nearest relevant service – rather than scrolling through the whole directory to figure out which one to contact.

Practitioners could also use this to refer people to other organisations, if someone was dealing with multiple issues, or if their own organisation does not have capacity to help someone.

**Question 1:** Do you support the development of a more interactive directory?

(Yes/No and any comments.)

---

<sup>1</sup> Regional Public Service, Child and Youth Environmental Scan, August 2023, page 36

**Idea 2 – Give people the option of a single point of contact, with someone who can connect them to the different services which are relevant to them, and to provide ongoing coordination and communication.**

Alongside the interactive directory in Idea 1, there could be value in promoting the availability of a contact person (the NYTWC coordinator) that teachers, youth workers, GPs and whānau can call when they're not sure where to start with finding help for a young person. This is the "human" version of the directory – which would be particularly useful for complex situations where a young person needs help from several services at once.

**Question 2:** Would there be value in having a single point of contact for a young person seeking help, or for someone seeking help on their behalf?

(Yes/No – and any comments.)

**Idea 3: Make youth services more visible to the community**

Lots of amazing services and programmes are available to help young people in Nelson-Tasman region, as discussed at Connections Hui.

We would like to understand how people currently learn about youth services and whether there is value in raising awareness of the full range of support available to young people through additional pathways.

**Question 3:** Is there value in making the opportunities and outcomes from youth services and programmes more visible to the public?

(Yes/No, and any comments.)

**Theme B: Make it easier for youth services to collaborate**

When youth organisations are working hard to deliver services they don't have a lot of time to keep up with what other organisations are doing, let alone think about how to align with regional and national strategies.

The Child and Youth Environmental Scan captured this tension directly: "The lack of a programme of work, and complexity of the need, and the solutions have created additional work ... the time taken to manage connections, keep current with other interventions, read policies and action plans etc., takes resources away from actual work."<sup>2</sup>

People working in the youth sector have consistently named duplication, siloed working, and weak cross-sector connections as real frustrations.<sup>3</sup> Without a shared

---

<sup>2</sup> Regional Public Service, Child and Youth Environmental Scan, August 2023, page 35

<sup>3</sup> Appendix One: Youth Sector Review of the Nelson-Tasman Connections meeting minutes, September 2024.

picture of what's already happening, it's difficult to spot opportunities for collaboration, identify duplication, or align services with regional and national funding priorities.

This leads to organisations developing and delivering programmes without a clear view of what's already out there. Funders are having to assess proposals without a full visibility of how a new initiative fits with what's already in place or what the region's priorities are.<sup>4</sup>

The scale of this problem showed up during the development of the Child and Youth Environmental Scan, where central and local government teams weren't aware of how their work overlapped or aligned with other. The same thing is almost certainly happening across the NGO sector in our region.

#### **Idea 4: Build a shared register of youth sector programmes.**

A region-wide, searchable register of details about youth sector programmes and proposals to help participating organisations spot opportunities for collaboration and avoid duplication. It could start with a Memorandum of Understanding between youth sector organisations about the information they will share, and a commitment to keep this updated.

**Question 4:** Would a shared register make it easier to keep track of what other organisations are doing, and help you identify opportunities for collaboration or avoid duplication?

(Yes/No, and any comments.)

#### **Idea 5: Use the register to identify opportunities for multi-agency programmes**

Section 4.2 of this report describes the competitive funding environment and the heavy administrative load on organisations. One way to shift this would be for agencies to work together on joint funding applications — demonstrating to funders how they propose to deliver on their priorities. This could reduce duplication of effort, support collaboration, and make it easier for funders to see how individual proposals fit into a bigger picture.

**Question 5:** Do multi-agency programmes make sense for your organisation?

(Yes/No, and any comments.)

### **Theme C: Recognise and celebrate the outcomes from youth services**

Youth workers and youth organisations change lives. But the change they create is often invisible in the accountability reports provided to funders because the

---

<sup>4</sup> Regional Public Service, Child and Youth Environmental Scan, August 2023, page 35

outcomes are relational, gradual, and may show up years later in someone's resilience, confidence, or ability to hold down a job. Right now, there is no consistent, credible way for organisations in Nelson–Tasman to show funders what that kind of change looks like.

'Evidence of impact' was identified as a significant challenge at the October 2023 Connections Hui.<sup>5</sup> The Landscape of Youth Work in Aotearoa report puts it plainly: *"There is pressure to demonstrate clear short-term outcomes for funders and policy makers — or 'bang for buck'. Where government funding agencies require statistical reporting that often has little to do with actual change and positive outcomes for young people, and community organisations have to come up with their own stories and measures of success."*<sup>6</sup>

The result is a gap between what organisations can authentically show and what funders need to see. Organisations doing strong, valuable work may struggle to secure funding – not because their mahi isn't effective, but because they lack the tools to demonstrate it.

A one-size-fits-all approach to measurement won't work for everyone. Feedback from the Rangatahi Mental Health Project 2022–2024 was clear: *"We need frameworks to measure success, outside of social media and mainstream services optimised for Māori."*<sup>7</sup> Any shared framework will need to be flexible enough to reflect different cultural contexts and ways of working.

The good news is that practical tools are being developed. Hands for Impact, in partnership with Ara Taiohi, is working specifically on this challenge and has recently completed a case study with Tararua Community Youth Services which is relevant to youth work in our region. That study found that every \$1 invested generated \$11.65 of social value.

Youth work creates real, lasting change for young people, whānau, and communities. But it is relational, gradual, and long-term – and that makes it genuinely difficult to capture in the short-term statistical reporting that funders typically require.

### **Idea 6: Develop a shared way to measure and report on impact.**

We could develop a shared framework for measuring and reporting on outcomes – making it easier for individual organisations to demonstrate their value and giving the region meaningful data on the sector's collective impact.

---

<sup>5</sup> Nelson Tasman Connections Hui, Report 2023–24, page 3

<sup>6</sup> Ara Taiohi, Mahi Tūturu – The Landscape of Youth Work in Aotearoa, August 2025, page 74

<sup>7</sup> Laughlin J Champion, Rangatahi Mental Health Project 2022–2024, page 6

**Question 6:** Could your organisation benefit from consistent measuring and reporting on the outcomes of your work?

(Yes/No, and any comments.)

## **Theme D: Provide specialised training and wellbeing support for youth workers**

This report discusses the flow-on effects of specialist mental health services being at capacity – with other youth workers picking up more responsibility for supporting young people who are struggling with mental health issues.

**Idea 7:** More specialised mental health training and support for youth workers to recognise they are now helping more young people with high and very high mental health needs.

We will seek guidance from the sector on whether more training and support would be of value, and if so, what this could look like.

**Question 7:** Could people in your organisation benefit from more specialised mental health training?

(Yes/No, and comments.)

## 7. Issues Identified by the Sector

A wider set of issues are affecting young people, and the youth sector is well-placed to provide insights on these issues and potential responses to them.

### **Welcoming places for young people**

Youth hubs, drop-in spaces and "one-stop shops" have been raised consistently by the sector as a response to multiple challenges — social connection, safe spaces, easier access to wrap-around support, and somewhere to go that isn't school or home. Motueka and Golden Bay already have youth hubs that are meeting a real need. Options for something similar in Nelson and Richmond has had momentum at various points but has not yet led to a sustained outcome. Other informal spaces — The Wire Club, Magenta, skate parks, Whanake Youth – also play an important role.

### **Support for young people who are not in education, employment or training**

We have an 8-10% NEET rate in our region, combined with the specific challenges described in Section 3.3.

### **Job opportunities**

As noted in Section 3.3, a shortage of job opportunities creates a challenging environment for young people – and poor mental health and unemployment can feed each other.

### **Transport**

Transport is an important issue for young people. Bus improvements have helped, but young people in rural areas and those trying to get to training, employment or appointments still face real difficulties. Driver licensing support — previously provided through community connector roles that have ended — is a specific gap.

### **Housing**

Housing sits behind many of the other issues in this report – mental health, school attendance, employment, safety. The report notes that over half of Aotearoa's homeless population are under 25, that emergency housing in Motueka is effectively unavailable, and that young people accessing emergency housing in Nelson are separated from their support networks.

### **Food and the cost of living.**

The cost-of-living and fuel crisis is having significant flow-on effects for young people and for the sector supporting them. Food insecurity is rising sharply, with food parcel demand up around 21% in the last year. Children are going to school hungry. Support workers on fixed contracts are struggling with the fuel costs of home visits, and volunteers are finding it harder to afford to volunteer.

**Question 8:** What actions could be taken to enhance or improve young people's access to:

- youth hubs, drop-in spaces and "one-stop shops" for social connection, safe spaces, easier access to wrap-around support, and somewhere to go that isn't school or home.
- support and programmes for young people who are not in education, employment or training
- job opportunities
- transport (including public transport and driver's licences)
- housing
- food (particularly during the current fuel crisis).

Issue:

Comments:

Issue:

Comments:

Issue:

Comments: