



Kaimahi Rangatahi Whakaropu | Te Taiuhu

FULL REPORT:

STATE OF THE NELSON–TASMAN YOUTH SECTOR

**By Debra Bradley
20 April 2026**

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.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose and scope

This report describes what's happening across the youth development sector in Nelson–Tasman, and points to some practical ways to support youth-focused organisations. This report reflects the voices of people *working in* the sector, rather than the voices of young people themselves. That reflects its purpose – to identify what would make it easier for youth sector organisations to support young people across our region.

Throughout this report 'youth' refers to people aged 12–24 unless stated otherwise.

The Nelson Tasman Youth Workers Collective (NTYWC) led the development of this report. The NTYWC supports the people and organisations working with young people across our region and is guided by the principles of Mana Taiohi¹ and Code of Ethics² for Youth Work in Aotearoa, both developed by Ara Taiohi. These principles ensure that all work with young people recognises and respects the inherent dignity and worth of young people, drawing on Māori values and a holistic view of wellbeing.

1.2 How this report was developed and what comes next

In 2025, the NTYWC Coordinator spent several months engaging with the youth sector – talking to organisations, reviewing local data, and drawing on reports and research from across the region (listed in the Appendix).

A Project Lead was appointed by NTYWC to lead the development of this report, and to engage with the sector on the findings and to reflect that feedback in an action plan. The report and action plan are due to be completed by Spring 2026.

We have aimed to reflect local insights wherever possible within this report, but we have also drawn on relevant national sources where local evidence is limited.

¹ <https://www.arataiohi.org.nz/mana-taiohi-youth-development-principles>

² <https://www.arataiohi.org.nz/code-of-ethics>

1.3 Next steps and timeline

The project will work through a series of engagement and consultation steps before finalising this report and an action plan.

Timing	Action
Late April to the end of May	Informal engagement with the youth sector to discuss the draft report and potential actions for the draft Action Plan — via email survey, follow-up conversations, and a Connections Hui in May.
End of June	A draft Action Plan will be developed, reflecting sector feedback on the direction signaled in this report. The draft report will also be updated to reflect that feedback.
Mid-July to mid-August	Consultation with the sector and the wider public via online and in-person meetings. A consultation document will be developed to make it as easy as possible for people to grasp the key points of the action plan and report and to provide their feedback. We will also encourage people to review the draft action plan and draft report to give more indepth feedback on those documents. We will ask youth sector organisations to encourage people in their networks to provide feedback and share their ideas during the consultation process, to give as many people as possible the opportunity to have their say.
End of September	Further changes to the draft report and draft action plan, reflecting feedback before finalising both documents.
October to December	Preparing for implementation of the action plan.
2027	Action plan implementation.

The timeline reflects a strong commitment to gain sector input before decisions are made. The next section sets the scene – describing who young people in Nelson–Tasman are, and the range of organisations which support them.

2. Young People and Youth Services in Nelson–Tasman

2.1 Young people in our region

Nelson–Tasman is home to between 22,000 and 24,000 young people aged 12–24, according to 2023 Census estimates. Around 80% identify as European, 12% as Māori or Pasifika, 5% as Asian, and 3% as other ethnicities.³

³ [StatsNZ](#) information accessed by Paul McConachie in March 2026

The proportion of young people aged 15–24 years old who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) sits at 8–10%.⁴

2.2 Youth services in our region

Nelson–Tasman is well served by organisations working to support young people. In 2024, the NTYWC [carried out an audit of the Nelson Tasman](#) youth sector and created a directory spanning four broad areas:

- **Health** – mental health and counselling, alcohol and drug support, sexual health, and services focused on specific groups including rainbow youth and rangatahi Māori.
- **Education** – alternative learning providers, literacy and numeracy support, school-based programmes, and services for young people who have disengaged from mainstream schooling.
- **Training and employment** – vocational training, work-readiness programmes, mentoring, and employment pathway initiatives.
- **Youth development** – youth workers, community connectors, drop-in services, and programmes focused on identity, belonging, and resilience.

A few things are worth noting about the directory. It is a snapshot of services as they existed in 2024, not a complete list. It includes national organisations whose services are available here even without a local office. It does not include recreation, hobby, or faith-based services – so the full picture of support in Nelson–Tasman is even broader than the directory suggests.

Beyond formal services, the Nelson City and Tasman District Councils have improved bus connections between Motueka, Richmond, and Nelson. Social hubs – skate parks, Whanake Youth, the Spot, Youth Council, sports groups, and community events – give young people places to belong and people to connect with. For many young people, these are the first place they meet a trusted adult or find a supportive community.

The breadth of services is a strength, but Section 6 of this report discusses how it also creates challenges for people who are not sure who to contact for help.

The sections that follow explore what is happening for young people in our region, the pressures facing the organisations that support them, and what else could be done to support the sector.

⁴ [StatsNZ](#) information accessed by Paul McConachie in March 2026

3. What's Happening for Young People

This section describes the key issues affecting young people in the Nelson–Tasman region. It draws on local data and research where available, and national evidence where local data is limited. The purpose is to provide enough information to help us identify the most effective actions we can take to strengthen the sector. Each sub-section covers a different topic area and, together, they show why pressure on the youth sector is so significant.

3.1 Mental health and wellbeing

Mental health is the leading concern across the region, and the wellbeing of young people is under real strain due to rising anxiety, lower school attendance, increasing neurodiversity challenges, vaping and gaming addictions, bullying, and unmet housing and transport needs. Young people aged 12 to 24 are at the greatest risk of developing mental health issues because this is a period of rapid change in their lives.⁵

In the 2022 Mohua Youth Survey, stress and anxiety were the most commonly identified concerns. Of the 76 respondents who had multiple concerns, 30% identified four or more issues.⁶ A Golden Bay High School counsellor described anxiety among young people of all ages as being at an all-time high that same year.⁷

This is a nationwide trend, and the Covid pandemic has played a significant role. The Child and Youth Environmental Scan⁸ prepared by the Regional Public Service in 2023 reports that 23.6% of 15–24 year-olds nationally had high or very high levels of psychological stress in 2021 – up from 11.1% in 2020 and 14.6% in 2019. Before 2016, that figure was under 10%.

Demand for neurodiversity support is also high. Matt Stevenson, coordinator of neurodiversity services at The Neurodiversity Clinic, told a Connections Hui in June 2023 that the region cannot meet the need for assessment, treatment, and ongoing support.⁹ Neurodiversity covers a wide range of conditions – including autism spectrum disorder (ASD), ADHD and learning disabilities.¹⁰ The need to provide neurodiversity-related support is reflected in the fact that 50% of the respondents to the 2025 Nelson Tasman Youth Sector Training and Professional Development Survey said they wanted training in this area.¹¹

⁵ Dr Elaine Donovan, Investing in the Future: Exploring Community Engagement and How Best to Support Mohua Youth, November 2022, page 28

⁶ Dr Elaine Donovan, Investing in the Future: Exploring Community Engagement and How Best to Support Mohua Youth, November 2022, page 28

⁷ Dr Elaine Donovan, Investing in the Future: Exploring Community Engagement and How Best to Support Mohua Youth, November 2022, pages 29-30

⁸ Regional Public Service, Child and Youth Environmental Scan, August 2023, page 17

⁹ Nelson Tasman Connections meeting minutes, 28 June 2023, page 1

¹⁰ This definition of neurodiversity was accessed at <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/what-is-neurodiversity-202111232645> on 26 March 2026.

¹¹ Nelson Tasman Youth Sector Training and Professional Development Survey 2025, page 1

Whanake Youth has reported steady unmet needs related to anxiety and depression, more young people aged 11–15 years attempting suicide, and an increase in young people feeling lonely and disconnected.¹²

Rangatahi Māori experience worse mental health than other young people in Aotearoa, and the situation is getting worse. Research from the *Growing Up in New Zealand – Now We Are Twelve | Rangatahi Māori Mental Wellbeing* report¹³ found that clinically significant depressive symptoms amongst Māori secondary school students more than doubled between 2012 and 2019 over time – from 13.8% to 27.9%.

The same report found that policies and strategies to address mental health inequities have not addressed the specific drivers of poor mental wellbeing for rangatahi Māori and their access to the social, economic and cultural conditions that support mental wellbeing. Participants in the Rangatahi Mental Health Project 2022–2024 also identified Māori counselling as a gap in the region.¹⁴

The Nelson-Tasman region has a lower proportions of Pasifika than the national average¹⁵ and we don't have local data on the mental health of Pasifika young people. However, national data shows that Pasifika people aged 18 years and over are three times more likely to try to commit suicide than the general population, and Pasifika youth have higher rates of suicidal thoughts and attempts. (Te Whatu Ora).¹⁶

3.2 Education and school engagement

School attendance levels and disengagement from education remains a concern. Other issues are very low literacy and numeracy levels, experiences of racism and bullying, a lack of life skills, and inadequate support being available for students with high needs.¹⁷ Neurodiversity challenges are also an increasing factor in all the areas described above.

Average attendance rates on the Nelson Tasman region in 2025 was¹⁸;

0-70%	70-80%	80-90%	90%
11%	14%	30%	52%

Ange Campbell, Skills & Workforce Projects Lead at the Nelson Regional Development Agency, noted that the same themes came up repeatedly in her Education to Employment work – mental health, school attendance, disengagement, work readiness, and a rise in early leaving exemptions.¹⁹

¹² Feedback to Paul McConachie from Whanake Youth, page 1

¹³ Sarah-Jane Paine, Denise Neumann, Esther Yao, *Growing Up in New Zealand – Now We Are Twelve | Rangatahi Māori mental wellbeing*, 2023, page 2

¹⁴ Laughlin J Campion, *Rangatahi Mental Health Project 2022–2024*, page 5

¹⁵ Regional Public Service, *Child and Youth Environmental Scan*, August 2023, page 13

¹⁶ Regional Public Service, *Child and Youth Environmental Scan*, August 2023, page 17

¹⁷ Feedback to Paul McConachie from Tasman District Council, page 1

¹⁸ Leigh Gray, Principal Adviser Secondary Transitions (PAST), in an email to Paul McConachie in August 2025

¹⁹ Ange Campbell, Skills & Workforce Projects Lead, in an email to Paul McConachie in July 2025

The Western Bay of Plenty Vital Signs report states that Māori students are stood down, expelled, and streamed into lower-level classes at higher rates than their peers, reflecting a pattern of systemic bias and low expectations to achieve. This is a significant issue, as fewer than 1% of excluded and disadvantaged young people go on to complete tertiary study in their early twenties. Young people struggling with mental health are less likely to fully engage at school. Affordable housing, a healthy home, a stable income, and connection to whenua and whakapapa are all major drivers of educational achievement.²⁰

However, the Vital Signs report notes that education outcomes for Māori and Pasifika young people have been improving, and there is growing commitment to strengthening culturally responsive support.²¹ (We don't currently have details on whether this is also the case in the Nelson-Tasman region.)

3.3 Employment pathways

As noted in Section 2.1 of this report, between 8–10% of young people aged 15–24 in Nelson–Tasman are not in education, employment, or training (NEET). This figure doesn't capture everyone who is struggling – young people being supported by their parents and not actively seeking work won't show up in this number.²² What we do know is that the longer a young person stays outside education or employment, the more likely they are to become disengaged from the system and unable to take the steps they need to upskill.²³

Unemployment and poor mental health feed each other. Losing a job – or never finding one – can deepen mental health struggles, and poor mental health can make it harder to work.²⁴ Tasman District Council staff noted that a shortage of job opportunities is an additional challenge locally.²⁵

In Golden Bay, the situation is particularly stark. Dr Donovan's 2022 report found that other than hospitality, there are almost no jobs available for young people while they are still at school or after they leave. As one young person put it: "there's just the supermarket and that's a one-way street to depression". There are no local apprenticeships, and once young people leave school they are less likely to hear about potential job opportunities.²⁶

Lack of transport makes this situation worse. Lisa Bradbury of the Golden Bay Work Centre Trust has highlighted transport as an ongoing barrier to work readiness and training access – with no public transport or taxi service, and the community

²⁰ Acorn Foundation, Western Bay of Plenty Vital Signs Youth 2022 report, page 20

²¹ Acorn Foundation, Western Bay of Plenty Vital Signs Youth 2022 report, page 21

²² Lesley McQue, Critical Skills Pipeline Project Lead at the Nelson Regional Development Agency, in feedback to Paul McConachie in July 2025

²³ Acorn Foundation, Western Bay of Plenty Vital Signs Youth 2022 report, page 20

²⁴ Acorn Foundation, Western Bay of Plenty Vital Signs Youth 2022 report, page 22

²⁵ Feedback to Paul McConachie from Tasman District Council staff (Ana Lovell and Yulia Panfylova), page 1

²⁶ Dr Elaine Donovan, Investing in the Future: Exploring Community Engagement and How Best to Support Mohua Youth, November 2022.

connector support for driving lessons coming to an end. Parents are often unable to help with transport because they are working.²⁷

Both employers and young people agree that more needs to be done to make sure youth people are work-ready.²⁸ Local providers highlight the need for clear career pathways, employment-focused programmes, mentoring, supported transitions, and practical skills – including access to driver licensing.²⁹ . Lesley McQue, Critical Skills Pipeline Project Lead at the Nelson Regional Development Agency, has noted that local young people who attend Polytech tend to stay in the region or return (which is not the case for young people who leave Nelson to go to university).³⁰

3.4 Housing, transport and access to services

We don't currently have local housing data, but the Nelson-Tasman Connections Report 2023–2024 lists housing as an emerging need, alongside food insecurity and poverty.³¹ Here's what we do know, from the Western Bay of Plenty Vital Signs Youth 2022 report – young people who grow up in insecure or unsafe homes are more likely to face the same situation as adults. And rainbow secondary school students are more likely to report housing deprivation than their non-rainbow peers, at 38% compared to 28%.³²

Over half of the homeless population in Aotearoa are under 25, according to the Vital Signs report.³³

In Motueka, emergency housing is essentially non-existent. When Libby Clifford-Harvey worked for the Golden Bay Workcentre Trust she noted that the backpacker's accommodation that previously provided emergency housing is now occupied by RSE workers. Emergency housing is available in Nelson, but accessing it means young people are separated from their support networks.³⁴

Lack of transport is a barrier to accessing services, training, employment, and recreational activities – especially for young people in rural parts of the region.³⁵ And it can be particularly challenging for some Golden Bay teenagers to get a driver's licence – with the need to have access to a car for practising and to get to Nelson for licensing.

The sector has consistently recognised the value of youth centres, drop-in spaces, and one-stop shop services that provide wrap-around support across health, education, and employment – removing the need for young people to seek help from

²⁷ Lisa Bradbury, Golden Bay Work Centre Trust, Connections meeting minutes, March 2024, page 5

²⁸ Acorn Foundation, Western Bay of Plenty Vital Signs Youth 2022 report, page 22

²⁹ Acorn Foundation, Western Bay of Plenty Vital Signs Youth 2022 report, page 21

³⁰ Lesley McQue, Critical Skills Pipeline Project Lead at the Nelson Regional Development Agency, in feedback to Paul McConachie in July 2025

³¹ Nelson-Tasman Connections Report 2023-2024, page 3

³² Acorn Foundation, Western Bay of Plenty Vital Signs Youth 2022 report, page 12

³³ Acorn Foundation, Western Bay of Plenty Vital Signs Youth 2022 report, pages 12-13

³⁴ Libby Clifford-Harvey, Golden Bay Workcentre Trust, Connections meeting minutes, 31 March 2025, page 6

³⁵ Acorn Foundation, Western Bay of Plenty Vital Signs Youth 2022 report, page 14

multiple sources.³⁶ In particular, Dr Donovan’s report discusses the value of a social drop in space, where more help is available if needed.³⁷

3.5 Safety and belonging

We don’t have local police data or safety statistics to include here. But the Nelson–Tasman Connections Report 2023–2024 flags “hate crimes against sexuality” and “suicide” as emerging concerns raised by the sector.³⁸ The Youth Sector Emerging Needs Summary 2020–23 includes multiple references to bullying.³⁹

The Western Bay of Plenty Vital Signs report states that young people are more likely to experience violence than any other age group. Boys and girls are equally likely to experience teen dating violence, though males are more likely to experience physical violence and females more likely to experience sexual violence. Young people are particularly concerned about bullying, hate crime, and antisocial behaviour – and the fact that these issues often go unreported, with significant impacts on physical and mental wellbeing.⁴⁰

Cyberbullying has grown alongside increased technology use. Disabled young people face higher rates of cyberbullying, and young Māori females are more likely to experience bullying through text messages. Rainbow young people are more likely to feel unsafe at school and at home.⁴¹ There is also a well-documented link between lower-income neighbourhoods and safety concerns.⁴²

Risk-taking behaviour has been declining since 2001, thanks to better education, more parental involvement, and more open conversations about risk. This is a positive trend. But it doesn’t reduce the need for safe, welcoming spaces where all young people feel they belong. The Western Bay of Plenty Vital Signs report states that creating spaces that are genuinely youth-friendly remains a priority.⁴³

3.6 Cultural identity and environmental connection

Māori language and culture are protective factors that strengthen rangatahi Māori wellbeing and success. Culturally responsive services – those that draw on te ao Māori, traditional knowledge, and the inherent mana of young people – are not just preferred; they are more effective.⁴⁴ The Western Bay of Plenty Vital Signs report states that building on culturally responsive, youth-led approaches that strengthen diverse identities is a clear priority for the sector.⁴⁵

Young people across the region are increasingly engaged with the issues of climate change and environmental destruction. This is generating a strong sense of purpose

³⁶ Acorn Foundation, Western Bay of Plenty Vital Signs Youth 2022 report, page 15

³⁷ Dr Elaine Donovan, Investing in the Future: Exploring Community Engagement and How Best to Support Mohua Youth, November 2022

³⁸ Nelson-Tasman Connections Report 2023-2024, page 3

³⁹ Youth Sector Emerging Needs Summary 2020-2023, pages 1, 2 and 3.

⁴⁰ Acorn Foundation, Western Bay of Plenty Vital Signs Youth 2022 report, page 16

⁴¹ Acorn Foundation, Western Bay of Plenty Vital Signs Youth 2022 report, page 16

⁴² Acorn Foundation, Western Bay of Plenty Vital Signs Youth 2022 report, pages 16-17

⁴³ Acorn Foundation, Western Bay of Plenty Vital Signs Youth 2022 report, page 19

⁴⁴ Acorn Foundation, Western Bay of Plenty Vital Signs Youth 2022 report, page 24

⁴⁵ Acorn Foundation, Western Bay of Plenty Vital Signs Youth 2022 report, page 25

and a commitment to leading change – kaitiakitanga in action.⁴⁶ The Vital Signs report notes that environmental connection supports wellbeing, identity, and belonging, and there is real energy in this space.⁴⁷

3.7 Substance use and online activity

The picture here is mixed. Over the past 15–20 years cigarette smoking and binge drinking have both declined substantially among young people in New Zealand. Among 15–17 year-olds, around 51% reported drinking in the past year in 2022/23, down significantly from the mid-2000s. Hazardous drinking in this age group has almost halved, and monthly binge drinking among secondary school students fell from around 34–40% in the early 2000s to around 22% by 2019.⁴⁸

The decline in more traditional forms of substance use is encouraging. However, vaping has emerged as a significant new concern, with use increasing among young people across the region.⁴⁹

Screentime and gaming addiction have also been flagged as growing issues.⁵⁰

3.8 Summing up

The issues described in this section do not sit in isolation. For example, mental health affects school attendance; housing instability affects educational achievement; lack of transport limits access to employment; and lack of safety and belonging affects everything else. Addressing these issues holistically is essential for the sector to respond effectively.

Section 4 looks at the pressures being experienced by the organisations and workers who are helping young people.

⁴⁶ Acorn Foundation, Western Bay of Plenty Vital Signs Youth 2022 report, page 14

⁴⁷ Acorn Foundation, Western Bay of Plenty Vital Signs Youth 2022 report, page 14

⁴⁸ Blair Carpenter, information provided to the Advisory Group, March 2026

⁴⁹ Acorn Foundation, Western Bay of Plenty Vital Signs Youth 2022 report, page 10

⁵⁰ Youth Sector Emerging Needs Summary 2020–2023, page 1

4. Pressures Facing the Youth Sector

4.1 Stretched mental health services

Specialist mental health services in the region are at capacity. Wait times are long, thresholds for getting help have tightened, and young people with mild to moderate needs are increasingly falling through the gaps.

The consequences reach beyond the young people who can't get help. Youth workers across the region are now supporting young people with mental health issues that go well beyond the scope of their roles. The flow-on effects of this issue are explored further in section 4.3.

The shortage of specialist mental health services comes through clearly in feedback gathered from across the sector. Yellow Brick Road, which provides mental health support for families across Nelson, Tasman and Golden Bay, has just 2.8 staff, and has developed its own waitlist due to an increase in referrals.⁵¹

At a Connections Hui, Luke Walton from Motueka High School observed that the region has the largest waitlist in New Zealand for mental health services.⁵² The Youth Sector Professional Development Survey (2025) included this comment: “a lot of our young people are not severe enough to qualify for mental health support but still desperately need it.”⁵³

Connections Hui as far back as 2022 were raising the same concern – not enough mental health support in schools, including a shortage of counsellors, youth workers, and safe spaces for young people to talk about what's happening at home.⁵⁴

4.2 Funding pressures

Funding is the single biggest source of stress for youth sector organisations across Aotearoa. Ara Taiohi's 2025 report *Mahi Tūturu – The Landscape of Youth Work in Aotearoa* found that funding was a major stressor for 58% of respondents – nearly three times the 20% who raised this concern in 2006.⁵⁵ The same report reflects the development of a competitive environment: “there are a lot more youth organisations and there are constantly more charities – there is always a new kid on the block and there is more competition in the funding space.”⁵⁶

The Nelson Tasman Youth Sector Professional Development Survey identified that rising costs mean that even where the level of funding stays the same, it buys fewer hours and less support for young people.⁵⁷ Organisations are competing with each other for shrinking pools of money⁵⁸ while demand for their services is increasing.

⁵¹Feedback to Paul McConachie from Yellow Brick Road, page 1

⁵²Connections Hui meeting minutes, 31 March 2025, page 2

⁵³Nelson Tasman Youth Sector Training and Professional Development Survey, July 2025, page 3

⁵⁴Youth Sector Emerging Needs Summary 2020–2023, page 2

⁵⁵Ara Taiohi, *Mahi Tūturu – The Landscape of Youth Work in Aotearoa*, August 2025, page 60

⁵⁶Ara Taiohi, *Mahi Tūturu – The Landscape of Youth Work in Aotearoa*, August 2025, page 85

⁵⁷Youth Sector PD Survey (Document E2, June 2024), page 2

⁵⁸Connections Meeting April 2025 (Document D3), page 19

One local organisation reported having to prepare 100 funding applications and 60 accountability reports in a single year.⁵⁹

Short-term contracts also put pressure on organisations. They don't support long-term planning and, if contracts are not renewed, continuity of care is disrupted – which is particularly damaging in a sector where sustained relationships are the foundation of good practice.

A Hands for Impact report on social return on investment research notes that youth development sector is undervalued and underfunded despite strong evidence of its impact.⁶⁰

4.3 Demands on youth workers

As discussed in Section 4.1 of this report, youth workers are increasingly supporting young people with high and very high needs that go well beyond the scope of most youth work roles. As the number of young people presenting with serious issues has grown, youth workers need more specialised mental health training to respond effectively.⁶¹

Non-government organisations (NGOs) across the region are doing their best to fill the gaps left by overstretched specialist services. But this new demand, plus the funding and capacity constraints discussed in Section 4.2, creates a huge amount of pressure. As one Nelson–Tasman organisation described it, frontline staff who aren't clinically equipped for this level of need are carrying too much, “directly contributing to staff burnout and turnover, and loss of key team members.”⁶²

The wellbeing of youth workers needs to be taken seriously, both for their own wellbeing, and due to the flow-on effects for young people. Outcomes like identity, confidence, and safer decision-making grow from consistent, relationship-based support – before a crisis hits. When youth workers burn out and leave, that continuity breaks, and the young people who rely on those relationships are left without reliable support.

As noted in the Tararua Community Youth Services (TCYS) report, investing in early engagement prevents escalation and reduces pressure on education, health, and justice systems over the longer term.⁶³

4.4 Barriers to coordination

Nelson–Tasman has a large number of youth sector organisations, which are each doing important work. But this variety of services and programmes makes coordination challenging. When time-poor youth workers need to focus on supporting more young people with more complex needs, it becomes more difficult to also keep

⁵⁹Feedback to Paul McConachie from Whenua Iti, page 2

⁶⁰ Dr. Marie Nissanka, Telling the Story of Youth Work through Social Return on Investment, Hands for Impact in partnership with Ara Taiohi, December 2025, page 10

⁶¹Ara Taiohi, Mahi Tūturu – The Landscape of Youth Work in Aotearoa, August 2025, page 60

⁶²Feedback to Paul McConachie from Golden Bay Workcentre Trust, page 1

⁶³Dr. Marie Nissanka, Tararua Community Youth Services – The impact of youth work in a rural community, Hands for Impact, page 22

up with what others are doing, let alone plan how to work together in a joined-up way.

Concerns raised at Connections Hui over recent years tell a consistent story. In 2020, participants identified gaps, overlaps, and disconnects between youth services and schools.⁶⁴ By 2025, those concerns included not enough information sharing between agencies working with the same young people,⁶⁵ and uncertainty about what can be shared across agencies, given the grey areas around confidentiality.⁶⁶

Schools are a natural hub for reaching young people, and it makes sense for youth organisations to work alongside them.⁶⁷ But schools are under serious strain of their own. As Yellow Brick Road staff noted, teachers and school staff are managing large numbers of distressed and unwell young people – and they are not mental health workers either.⁶⁸ This limits their capacity to partner with external youth organisations, even when the relationship would benefit the young people they work with.

The Regional Public Service Child and Youth Environmental Scan describes a systemic problem in public agencies, which is highly likely to also be occurring in the community sector: “many agencies prioritise and invest in child and youth wellbeing, but strategies are designed and delivered in isolation from one another and with no clear understanding of the broader picture or the longer-term outcomes.” The result is fragmented support, duplicated programmes, wasted resources, and tension between national and regional outcomes.⁶⁹

4.5 Summing up

These four pressures – overstretched mental health services, funding constraints, demands on youth workers, and barriers to coordination – compound each other. Together, they limit the sector’s ability to support young people effectively, particularly where they are facing multiple challenges.

Section 5 looks at the strengths and the collaborative energy that already exists in the region – and that forms the foundation for the seven ideas in Section 7.

⁶⁴Youth Sector Emerging Needs Summary 2020–2023, page 3

⁶⁵Connections Hui meeting minutes, 23 April 2025, page 2

⁶⁶Connections Hui meeting minutes, 22 July 2025, page 3

⁶⁷ Feedback to Paul McConachie from Hilary Genet and Helen Davis, 10 September 2024, page 2

⁶⁸ Feedback to Paul McConachie from Yellow Brick Road, page 1

⁶⁹Regional Public Service, Child and Youth Environmental Scan, August 2023, pages 4–5

5. Strengths to Build On

The Nelson–Tasman youth sector has a great deal to be proud of. A wide range of organisations are working hard to support young people, professional networks are strong, and there are good examples of collaboration across the region. In addition, a growing number of culturally grounded and environmentally-focused initiatives have established.

5.1 Diverse services making a difference

The breadth of the Nelson–Tasman youth sector is one of its greatest assets, and includes a mix of national organisations with a local presence alongside community-based providers of programmes developed to meet local needs. The large majority are not-for-profit organisations.

5.2 Strong networks and professional development

The Youth Workers Collective plays an important role in connecting organisations and building the capability of the people who work within them. Through the regular Connections Hui, youth sector workers share information, build relationships, and learn about the issues others are grappling with. The regular pānui circulated by the NTYWC Coordinator keeps the sector informed about a huge range of professional development opportunities, upcoming events, and sector news.

A collective that actively nurtures professional connections is a real strength in a sector where workers are often stretched and working in isolation.

5.3 Collaborative initiatives

Schools and youth organisations have been working together to provide joined-up support for young people – and these collaborations show what is possible when agencies invest in building cross-sector relationships.

A regional initiative placed kaimahi youth support workers in secondary schools as community connectors – including Motueka, Golden Bay and Nelson Girls College. This was a collaboration between the Ministry of Education, Tasman District Council, Nelson City Council, and local high schools, focused on supporting young people at risk of not being in education, employment or training (NEET).⁷⁰

Nayland College is a good example of an integrated model. Students can access a school counselling cottage, Whanake youth nurses, youth workers, and a foundation course for numeracy and literacy support – all within the school. The college also has established relationships with agencies including Presbyterian Support Upper South Island (PSUSI) and REAL.⁷¹

In Golden Bay, a 2022 report found that youth workers had built close collaborative relationships with the Golden Bay Work Centre Trust, schools, the Infant, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (ICAHMS), Te Whare Mahana, Mohua Social

⁷⁰ Connections Hui meeting minutes, 23 April 2025, pages 2–3

⁷¹ Connections Hui meeting minutes, 23 April 2025, pages 2–3

Services, Golden Bay Community Health, Police, mana whenua, and the Youth Collective.⁷²

5.4 Cultural and environmental initiatives

Solutions grounded in te ao Māori and connected to the environment are responding to the needs and strengths of young people. The Rangatahi Mental Health Project 2022–2024 offered hauora wānanga for young people, providing a safe space to explore the Māori holistic health model; te whare tapa whā.⁷³

Participants said Te Reo Taiohi gave them confidence, new connections and friendships, experiences within te ao Māori that they had never had before, and a space where they felt seen and heard.⁷⁴

Hawaiki Ora offers wānanga grounded in traditional frameworks, creating space to challenge the intergenerational effects of colonisation and begin healing for whānau and communities. The programme is open to both Māori and non-Māori young people aged 15–17 years.

He Kai Kei Aku Ringa is a not-for-profit organisation based in Te Taihū (Top of the South Island) that runs seasonal wānanga in hunting, diving, fishing, gathering, and preparing kai. Young people build confidence, resilience, and wellbeing while connecting to the environment, their food, and their communities.

Environmental organisations which enable young people to develop a sense of purpose and connection, include Enviroschools, Forest & Bird Youth, the Brook Waimārama Sanctuary, Natureland Zoo, and the Nelson Pilot – 16 Weeks of Real Climate Action.

5.5 Other positive trends

More positive trends to celebrate are reductions in alcohol use and improved educational outcomes for Māori and Pasifika youth.

As noted in Section 3.7 of this report, youth alcohol use in New Zealand has dropped substantially over the past 15–20 years.

Education outcomes for young Māori and Pasifika people have been improving over recent years, as noted in Section 3.2. And local tertiary education opportunities through NMIT, and initiatives like Next Gen Futures – a major annual career expo designed to connect students with local industries – are helping more young people see a future for themselves in the region.

⁷² Dr Elaine Donovan, *Investing in the Future: Exploring Community Engagement and How Best to Support Mohua Youth*, November 2022, page 34

⁷³ Laughlin J Campion, *Rangatahi Mental Health Project 2022–2024*, page 8

⁷⁴ Laughlin J Campion, *Rangatahi Mental Health Project 2022–2024*, page 10

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.⁷⁵ 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.)

⁷⁵ 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."⁷⁶

People working in the youth sector have consistently named duplication, siloed working, and weak cross-sector connections as real frustrations.⁷⁷ Without a shared

⁷⁶ Regional Public Service, Child and Youth Environmental Scan, August 2023, page 35

⁷⁷ 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.⁷⁸

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

⁷⁸ 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.⁷⁹ 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."*⁸⁰

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."*⁸¹ 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.

⁷⁹ Nelson Tasman Connections Hui, Report 2023–24, page 3

⁸⁰ Ara Taiohi, Mahi Tūturu – The Landscape of Youth Work in Aotearoa, August 2025, page 74

⁸¹ Laughlin J Campion, 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:

Appendix 1 – References

This report is based on information provided in the following documents.

- Regional Public Service, Child and Youth Environmental Scan, August 2023
- Women's Support Motueka, Community Readiness Study Research Report, Published November 2023 and Updated June 2025
- Dr Elaine Donovan, Investing in the Future: Exploring Community Engagement and How Best to Support Mohua Youth, November 2022
- Truwind Research First, A Youth Hub for Whakatū Nelson, May 2025
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- Individual feedback provided to Paul McConachie from 15 Nelson–Tasman youth sector organisations (2024–2025)
- Youth Sector Emerging Needs Summary (2020–2023)
- Nelson Tasman Connections agendas and meeting notes (2023–25)
- Top of the South Impact Forum agendas and meeting notes (2018–2020)
- Golden Bay Combined Youth Survey Results (2022)
- Nelson Tasman Youth Sector Training and Professional Development Surveys (2024 and 2025)
- Laughlin J Campion, Rangatahi Mental Health Project 2022–2024.
- Sarah-Jane Paine, Denise Neumann, Esther Yao, Growing Up in New Zealand – Now We Are Twelve | Rangatahi Māori mental wellbeing, 2023
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- National Youth Agency, National Youth Sector Census, Snapshot, Summer 2024, United Kingdom
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