

Gathering Taiohi Voices

Report 2026



Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Executive summary	3
Introduction	4
Background.....	4
Youth Approach.....	4
The Youth Action Plan	4
Alignment with Mana Taiohi.....	5
Role in Vision Kāpiti.....	5
Representation.....	5
Methodology	6
Data sources.....	6
Survey participation	8
Summary of findings	10
Strengths and limitations.....	10
Key themes (district-wide)	11
1. Wellbeing, relationships and belonging.....	11
2. Safety and community experience	12
3. Access, transport and affordability	13
4. Education, employment and pathways.....	14
5. Spaces, activities and connection to place	15
6. Culture, identity and inclusion.....	16
7. Voice, participation and trust in decision-making.....	17
What's working well and what this tells us	18
What taiohi want – key priorities (district-wide)	19
Ōtaki taiohi: Place-based insights and priorities	22
Key themes from Ōtaki taiohi.....	22
Solutions	25
Key themes for older taiohi (18–24 years)	26
1. Housing and cost of living.....	26
2. Employment and career pathways.....	27
3. Transport and accessibility.....	27
4. Mental health and wellbeing.....	28
5. Social connection and belonging.....	28
6. Education and alternative pathways	29
7. Identity, culture and representation.....	29
8. Youth spaces and events (18–24 years).....	30
Insights from older Ōtaki taiohi (18–24 years old)	31
Report conclusion	32

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge and honour Te Ātiawa ki Whakarongotai, Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Toa Rangatira, as mana whenua of the Kāpiti Coast district, and recognise their enduring relationships with the whenua, moana and whakapapa of this rohe.

We pay our respects to their tīpuna and acknowledge the ongoing role of tangata whenua as kaitiaki and leaders within their communities.

We also thank the people and organisations who supported this work, including kaimahi working for our mana whenua, schools, kura kaupapa, youth spaces, training providers, and community groups. Your help in sharing the survey and connecting us with young people made this project possible.

Thank you to the taiohi (young people) of the Kāpiti Coast who shared your time, energy, and experiences for this report. Your honesty and openness have helped us better understand what life is like for you. We are grateful for the trust you placed in us by sharing your world.

A special thanks to youth workers across the Kāpiti Coast. You play a vital role in supporting taiohi every day and in creating safe, trusted spaces where their voices can be heard. Your work was key to reaching a wide range of taiohi and building the relationships that made this project successful.

We also acknowledge the Kāpiti Coast Youth Council for reviewing the survey and helping promote it across schools and colleges. Your contribution helped us reach more than 1,000 young people – approximately 13% of the local youth population.

This report reflects a shared commitment to listening to taiohi and supporting them to shape the future of the Kāpiti Coast District.

We affirm the importance of taiohi voices being gathered, heard and uplifted in ways that strengthen mana, identity and collective aspirations for current and future generations.

Executive summary

This report shares what taiohi (young people) across the Kāpiti Coast told us about their lives, experiences, and needs. It draws on survey data, focus groups, interviews, and insights from youth workers and community organisations to provide a broad picture of what it is like to be a young person in Kāpiti today.

Taiohi described strong community connections, supported by whānau, friendships, cultural diversity, and the natural environment. These are important strengths that contribute to wellbeing, belonging, and a positive sense of place.

At the same time, taiohi face a range of challenges that affect their daily lives and future opportunities. Key issues include safety at night, limited affordable transport, cost of living pressures, barriers to affordable activities and services, and difficulties moving from education into employment. For older taiohi, housing affordability is also a significant concern. Wellbeing was a key theme, with some taiohi experiencing loneliness, stress, and challenges accessing support. Many young people also want more meaningful opportunities to have a say in the decisions that affect them and to be involved in shaping services and their communities.

Across responses, there is a clear signal that improving outcomes for taiohi will require not only additional provision, but more coordinated, accessible, and youth-informed approaches to community infrastructure and service design.

The strong call for youth spaces highlights both the value of existing provision and deeper gaps in how community infrastructure is designed, accessed, and experienced by taiohi. Analysis of survey responses highlights dissatisfaction with the availability,

accessibility, and condition of shared community spaces, particularly hubs and facilities intended to support connection.

This suggests a need not only for more youth spaces, but for investment in well-designed, accessible, and youth-informed community infrastructure that can function as meaningful places for connection across different life stages.

Overall, taiohi want:

- safe, inclusive communities
- spaces where they can connect, feel welcome, and belong
- better access to transport, services, and opportunities
- more employment and pathway options
- affordable housing and cost-of-living support, particularly for older taiohi
- stronger and more accessible wellbeing and mental health support
- genuine opportunities to participate in decision-making.

These findings will help shape Council's Youth Approach and support future planning that better reflects young people's strengths, priorities, and aspirations for life on the Kāpiti Coast.

Introduction

Background

In late 2024, the Kāpiti Coast District Council's Connected Communities team started the Gathering Youth Voices project. The aim was to understand what life is like for young people on the Kāpiti Coast today and to help shape Council's Youth Approach.

This report shares what taiohi told us through a district-wide survey, focus groups, and interviews. It is for Council, schools, youth organisations, and the wider community to help guide decision-making and improve support for taiohi.

The report highlights key themes in young people's lives, and identifies opportunities to create safe, inclusive, and empowering environments. The findings reflect the lived experiences of young people and should be understood as representing their perspectives.

Youth Approach

The Youth Approach will guide how Council works with and supports taiohi across the district. It will set a clear framework to make sure the needs, strengths, and ideas of 12–24-year-olds are built into Council activities.

This report will help shape the Youth Approach by sharing what young people have told us, so their voices are embedded into decisions that impact their lives.

The Youth Action Plan

The Youth Action Plan will sit alongside the Youth Approach. It will set out the practical steps, actions, and measures needed to translate these findings into real opportunities and meaningful change for taiohi.

Together, they form a clear direction: the Youth Approach sets the direction, and the Action Plan outlines how it will be delivered.

Alignment with Mana Taiohi

The project follows the Mana Taiohi framework, ensuring taiohi voices are heard in ways that uphold mana and are culturally responsive.

Role in Vision Kāpiti

The Youth Approach is one of several demographic-focused approaches the Council is developing as part of its strategic framework. These approaches add a new dimension to Vision Kāpiti, a district-wide, community-led vision that reflects shared aspirations and guides Council planning and decision-making to 2060 and beyond.

Representation

The survey had strong participation, with 13 percent of young people in the district taking part. Most respondents were aged 12–17, with a balanced mix of genders and diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Though older youth were less represented in survey participation, this was an anticipated outcome, and their perspectives were actively sought out in targeted engagement, including focus groups and interviews. These engagements provided significant insight into the lived experience of older taiohi in Kāpiti today and are reflected in this report.



Methodology

Data sources

The project focuses on taiohi aged 12–24 across the Kāpiti Coast District. We gathered information through a district-wide survey, focus groups, one-to-one interviews with older taiohi aged 18–24, and ongoing conversations with youth workers and those who support young people. Together, these methods provide a clear picture of young people’s experiences, goals, and challenges.

Ōtaki participation

This report highlights the responses and participation of taiohi from Ōtaki. While the Kāpiti district comprises several distinct communities, Ōtaki is widely recognised (both nationally and locally) for its strong Māori cultural identity and its ethos of doing things “for Ōtaki, by Ōtaki.”

Focusing on Ōtaki-specific findings enables a clearer understanding of the town’s unique characteristics, strengths, and challenges from a taiohi perspective. These include complicated boundaries that impact funding and service areas, along with limited transport links to the wider district and Wellington region.

Kāpiti Coast Youth Survey

The Kāpiti Coast Youth Survey was undertaken in 2025 and is a key source of information for the Youth Approach. It updates earlier engagement with fresh data to support planning and decision-making.

The survey asked 12–24-year-olds about their experiences, aspirations, and challenges. It collected both structured data (such as age, gender, ethnicity, and location) and open-text responses, giving taiohi space to share their views in their own words.

It explored key topics such as belonging, wellbeing, access to activities and spaces, education, employment, and barriers like cost, transport, and safety. A strong response rate (13 percent of taiohi in the district) provides a solid foundation for understanding local priorities.

Focus groups and interviews

We held focus groups and interviews with taiohi whose perspectives are often less heard. This included older taiohi aged 18–24, taiohi living in Ōtaki, taiohi in alternative education, unemployed taiohi actively seeking work, rainbow taiohi, Māori taiohi, and taiohi in Years 9–10 who may be at risk of disengaging from school.

They explored topics such as cultural identity, access to opportunities, and barriers to participation. Common themes included inequities in education, transport and affordability challenges, cultural tokenism, and the need for inclusive spaces and strong support networks.

One-to-one interviews also provided safe, confidential spaces for taiohi to share experiences about employment, housing, transport, belonging, and gaps in services.

Youth workers and community input

Ongoing discussions with youth workers and other people who support young people helped strengthen and test the findings, adding practical insights from those working closely with youth.



Survey participation

The survey had strong engagement, with 13 percent of the district's youth population participating. Respondents were predominantly aged 12–17, with a balanced gender representation and notable diversity in ethnicity, including 25 percent Māori and 14 percent identifying as LGBTQIA+. While younger age groups were well represented, older taiohi aged 18–24 were less engaged, indicating a need for targeted strategies to reach this cohort in future initiatives.

1,000+
voices
taiohi

Who took part

Using 2023 Census data, taiohi aged 12–24 make up 17 percent of Aotearoa New Zealand's population. On the Kāpiti Coast, this group makes up 12 percent of the population, and 14 percent in Ōtaki.

This survey achieved strong local participation:

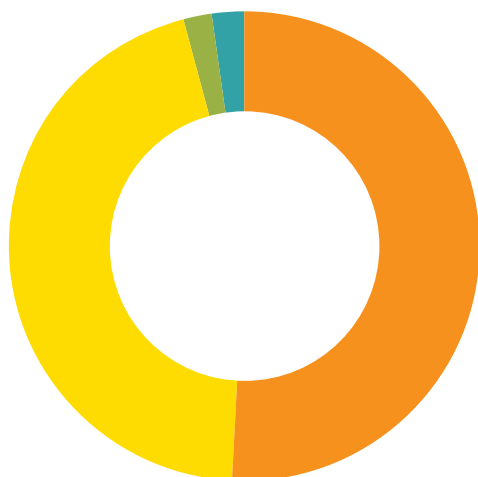
- 13 percent of all 12–24-year-olds on the Kāpiti Coast took part
- 13 percent of 12–24-year-olds in Ōtaki responded.

This provides a strong base for understanding youth perspectives in the district.

Most respondents were aged 12–17 (52 percent aged 12–14, and 39 percent aged 15–17), with fewer responses from those aged 18–24.

13%
of local
taiohi
participated

Gender and identity



- 51 percent female (521)
- 45 percent male (454)
- 2 percent non-binary (21)
- 2 percent other or preferred not to say (16)

A total of 14 percent (138) identified as part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Ethnicity and cultural identity

Survey responses reflected a diverse mix of ethnic identities, with many people selecting more than one.

- Māori: 25 percent (248), well represented and aligned with the local population
- Asian: 10 percent (105)
- MELAA (Middle Eastern, Latin American, African): 2 percent (17)

The remaining 63 percent comprised primarily Pākehā/NZ European and other combined or smaller ethnic group identities across the region.

Disability and diversity

- 4 percent (40) identified as disabled
- 1 percent (14) identified as neurodivergent

Where respondents live

- Paraparaumu/Paraparaumu Beach/Otaihanga: 41 percent (415)
- Waikanae/Waikanae Beach: 21 percent (209)
- Raumati: 15 percent (153)
- Ōtaki/Ōtaki Beach: 16 percent (165)
- Paekākāriki: 3 percent (31)
- Peka Peka and Te Horo: 4 percent (39)

Focus and life stage

- 80 percent (811) said school, kura, or study is their main focus
- 15 percent (152) are in paid work
- 11 percent (111) are job searching or “working things out”

Smaller groups

Some groups are represented in smaller numbers but remain important:

- 1 percent identified as young parents (10), mostly aged 15–17
- 3 percent identified as refugee/immigrant, reflecting a range of backgrounds



Summary of findings

The survey reached a wide range of young people across the district, with strong participation from those aged 12–17 and those in education.

Some groups were less represented in the survey, including older taiohi aged 18–24, rainbow taiohi, and those not in education. This highlighted the need for targeted engagement, which was addressed through focus groups and interviews, and points to the importance of using considered and targeted methods in future youth engagement.

Overall, the findings provide a strong picture of youth experiences in Kāpiti, while also showing where further engagement is needed to ensure all voices are heard.

Strengths and limitations

Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and all data was collected with privacy and confidentiality in mind. The findings reflect the views of those who took part and should not be seen as representing all young people in the district.

Data is self-reported and may include personal interpretations and is intended to support planning and decision-making rather than measure wellbeing.

Key themes (district-wide)

The following themes summarise what taiohi told us about their experiences of living on the Kāpiti Coast. They bring together the main issues, strengths, and opportunities across different areas of life.

1. Wellbeing, relationships and belonging

Findings show that most young people feel supported by whānau and peers, with 79 percent reporting strong family backing for their aspirations and 79 percent stating they have good friends. Confidence in themselves is more mixed, with 45 percent feeling consistently confident. These results highlight the importance of strong relationships as a key support for youth wellbeing.

This finding is further supported by focus groups held with specific youth demographics, particularly taiohi who acknowledged changeable support environments and relationships and the greater impact of these when transitioning. Whether that is coming out as a rainbow person, struggling to navigate life without strong role models, or seeking support for their chosen career path or alternative education/ training options.

The most valued part of the community is its people, with 54 percent of respondents noting positive interactions, strong relationships, and a sense of unity. Comments such as the following reflect deep social cohesion and mutual support.

The second most common theme, mentioned by 44 percent of respondents, was the community's vibe and culture. Taiohi described it as diverse, accepting, and safe.

“

“Everyone knows everyone else, if anyone is sick, people make them meals and take them around to their house... everyone is so welcoming and friendly.”

”

TAIOHI FEEL CONNECTED

79%

feel supported by whānau

79%

have good friendships

54%

highlight strong community relationships

44%

describe their community as diverse and inclusive

These responses show that cultural inclusivity and a welcoming atmosphere are key strengths.

2. Safety and community experience

Safety perceptions differ strongly between day and night. While 71 percent feel safe during the day, this drops to 35 percent at night. Feelings of safety at night are lower for females, younger respondents, and some ethnic groups, with significantly lower levels of night-time safety than males. For example, 55 percent of males feel safe at night, compared to 19 percent of females, and those aged 12–14 report the lowest levels of feeling safe. Rainbow taiohi whose appearance doesn't fit a gender stereotype reported not feeling safe in public by themselves and referenced instances of harassment.

Open-text responses also highlight this concern, with repeated calls for “safe places and activities at night.” In total, there were 41 mentions of “safe”, and 44 requests for safer night-time options. Concerns about safety, particularly at night, are closely connected to the availability of safe, accessible places to go. The limited availability of welcoming spaces during evening hours contributes to feelings of vulnerability and reduces opportunities for positive social connection.

“

“Making sure that we should be feeling safe to walk around at night...”

”

Across responses, young people also raised concerns about racism, bullying, discrimination, and mental health challenges. They are seeking safer environments, stronger inclusion, and better wellbeing support across the district.

SAFETY DROPS SHARPLY AT NIGHT

71% feel safe during the day

35% feel safe at night



3. Access, transport and affordability

Access, transport and affordability are key barriers for young people.

Transport is generally manageable for some, with 58 percent saying they can get to places easily. However, 35 percent say this is only sometimes true, and 7 percent cannot get to places easily at all.

Cost is a bigger issue. Only 35 percent say cost is not a problem, while 51 percent say it is sometimes a concern, and 14 percent see it as a clear barrier.

Access to affordable activities is limited. Just 28 percent agree there are plenty of cheap or free things to do, 39 percent say this is sometimes the case, and 33 percent disagree.

Access to services and programmes is mixed, with 54 percent able to access what they need, while others face barriers including transport, cost, and lack of information.

“

“...with a magic wand I would lower the train and bus prices for young people. Because we are less able to make money so getting around cheaply and easily by bike and public transport would be of huge help.”

”

While access is influenced by transport and availability, affordability emerges as a cross-cutting constraint that affects participation across all areas of life. Costs associated with transport, activities, and services can limit young people’s ability to engage, meaning access is often shaped not just by proximity, but by financial capacity.

This highlights the importance of embedding affordability into service and infrastructure design, rather than treating it as a standalone issue.

ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES DEPENDS ON MONEY AND MOBILITY

35% say cost is not a problem

28% say there are enough
low-cost activities

42% experience transport barriers

4. Education, employment and pathways

Education is the main focus for most taiohi who responded, with 80 percent prioritising school or college. Access to education and training is relatively strong, with 57 percent saying they get what they need. However, 35 percent say this is only sometimes the case, and 8 percent say they do not get the opportunities they need.

Employment is a key gap. Only 24 percent feel they have access to the jobs they want, while 36 percent say they have no access at all.

This shows a clear gap between education and employment, with many young people finding it hard to move from learning into meaningful work.

Open-text responses also highlight a need for more internships, career pathways, and youth-friendly job opportunities.

PATHWAYS INTO WORK ARE LIMITED

Only **24%** can access the jobs they want

36% have no access at all

A clear gap between education and employment opportunities

“

“The ability to find employment and significantly better the treatment of youth by employers after employment.”

”

These challenges are compounded by broader access barriers, including transport limitations, cost pressures, and the availability of local opportunities. Together, these factors suggest a need for more connected systems that link education, training, and employment pathways in practical and accessible ways.



5. Spaces, activities and connection to place

Taiohi highly value natural spaces such as beaches, rivers, and parks, with beaches mentioned by 667 respondents, rivers by 521, and parks by 495. Coastlands Mall is also a key social hub (559 mentions), along with sports fields, pools and walking tracks.



"I love being able to escape from the busy world for a moment and swim or talk with friends as we throw rocks into the river. It's very healing to be near my awa."



There is strong demand for more supports and spaces, including:

- free Wi-Fi (66 percent)
- free gym access (57 percent)
- more events (52 percent)
- youth hangout spaces (37 percent)
- music and performance spaces (36 percent).



SERVICES AND SPACES ARE HARD TO NAVIGATE

54% can access the services they need



Spaces and activities are often disconnected and hard to find



"If you want to keep the youth here we need things to do... more indoor spaces where youth can connect."



A recurring theme is the need for more covered or indoor spaces that are inclusive, accessible, and support connection and creativity. The strong call for youth spaces appears to reflect both the value of existing provision and the need to strengthen the wider youth space ecosystem so that it better meets demand across different times, life stages, and forms of participation.

Feedback suggests that the challenge is not only the number of spaces available, but how they are structured and accessed. Young people described services and activities as dispersed and difficult to navigate, particularly without transport, creating barriers even where provision exists. This points to the value of more coordinated and visible youth infrastructure.

Extending the availability of existing spaces, as well as designing new spaces with flexible and youth-friendly hours, is an important consideration for improving accessibility and safety, particularly at night.

6. Culture, identity and inclusion

Cultural connection is a key strength. Many taiohi described their environment as diverse, accepting, and safe, with 44 percent highlighting the community's vibe and culture.

Responses reinforce that cultural inclusivity, and a welcoming community are key strengths of the district. This was particularly highlighted in Ōtaki responses.

Some young people also highlighted the need for youth spaces that are culturally appropriate, and shaped by taiohi, noting that:

“

“You got to give different youth cultures opportunities in different ways and they got to be involved in making this happen.”

”

At the same time, concerns were raised about discrimination and community attitudes, with 108 mentions relating to improving inclusion and creating more supportive environments. This finding was further highlighted in focus groups with specific demographics of taiohi such as Māori taiohi, rainbow taiohi and taiohi in alternative forms of education who felt discriminated against, viewed negatively, or judged as part of their journey.

There is a strong desire for inclusive, culturally safe spaces that reflect different identities and experiences. Māori youth in particular highlighted the importance of cultural connection, grassroots initiatives, and meaningful involvement in decision-making to avoid tokenistic engagement.

Students also shared aspirations for spaces and opportunities that affirm their culture, and provide support, including:

“

“More places to learn about your own culture.”

”

This reinforces the importance of designing spaces and services that are not only physically accessible, but culturally grounded and reflective of the communities they serve. Co-designed approaches can help ensure that spaces feel relevant, inclusive, and genuinely welcoming for diverse groups of taiohi.

NOT ALL EXPERIENCES ARE EQUAL

Many taiohi in our district face discrimination and exclusion



7. Voice, participation and trust in decision-making

Nearly half of taiohi who took part in the survey (48 percent) say they have not made their voice heard, while only 15 percent say they have.

There is also a gap between knowing how to have a say and actually doing so, with 30 percent saying they know how to make their voice heard.

Understanding of Council is low, with 32 percent saying they know what Council does. Trust is also limited, with only 20 percent believing youth voices are listened to. Young people expressed feeling under-represented and unheard and want more involvement in decision-making and the design of services.

Feedback also suggests that young people are seeking more than opportunities to provide input – they want meaningful involvement in shaping decisions from the outset. This includes being part of the design, development, and delivery of services and spaces, rather than being consulted after decisions have been made. Strengthening youth participation in this way can support more relevant, effective, and trusted outcomes.

TAIOHI FEEL UNHEARD

48% have not made their voice heard

20% believe youth voices are listened to



“

“Make it more youth connected with not just asking what young people want but actually doing what young people want here.”

”

Climate Change Responses

The team asked taiohi for their thoughts on climate change. While 84 percent of taiohi who took part in the survey say they understand what climate change is, this does not fully translate into concern or personal relevance. Only one open-text response mentioned climate change.

Sixty-one percent say they are concerned about climate change, and 66 percent feel they understand how it will affect them. This suggests a gap between knowledge and personal relevance, and an opportunity to better connect climate issues to local impacts.

What's working well and what this tells us

Taiohi value the strong connections within their communities, along with the district's natural environment. Culture, diversity, and inclusivity are also seen as key strengths, contributing to a sense of belonging.

Alongside identified challenges, some existing spaces and services are seen as working well. Youth-oriented environments that are welcoming, accessible, and designed with taiohi in mind are particularly valued, along with programmes that are well-resourced and aligned with taiohi interests. Dedicated youth programmes are also recognised as effective where they are well-resourced and aligned with

taiohi's interests. These examples highlight the importance of intentional design, accessibility, and youth-focused programming in creating spaces that taiohi actively use and value.

At the same time, taiohi have identified clear areas for improvement. They want more activities, spaces, and services that meet their needs, along with better affordability to make these accessible. Transport and infrastructure need to be improved to support easier access.

Safety is another concern, particularly at night, and there is a call for more inclusive environments and more positive community attitudes to support all young people.



What taiohi want – key priorities (district-wide)

Across the findings, taiohi consistently identified a set of priorities that would improve their experiences and support their wellbeing. These reflect both survey findings and insights from focus groups and interviews.

These priorities are presented thematically and are not ranked in order of importance. Together, they reflect the range of changes taiohi identified as important to their wellbeing, belonging, and ability to thrive.

Taiohi want:

Safer and more accessible spaces

Safety at night is a significant concern. Taiohi want improved safety and more safe, welcoming spaces and activities after dark, along with more indoor and weather-appropriate spaces. This includes considering spaces specifically for older taiohi aged 18–24 that are separate from school-aged spaces. This includes ensuring spaces are available outside standard hours and are designed to support safe, structured activity during evenings and weekends.

More social spaces, activities, and connection opportunities

Taiohi want more social, creative, and interest-based activities, especially older taiohi aged 18–24. Taiohi want more spaces and events that reflect their interests and fit around work and study, including more youth-led events such as music, arts, and other creative activities. There is also a strong

preference for spaces that are clearly designed for young people, rather than general community facilities that may not feel relevant or welcoming.

There is an opportunity to build on existing youth development provision by strengthening the range and accessibility of youth spaces across the district. This includes considering increasing informal, safe, welcoming, and weather-appropriate spaces; improving visibility and awareness of available options; and ensuring spaces are responsive to different ages, identities, and life stages, including considering the needs of older taiohi aged 18–24.

Stronger wellbeing and mental health support

Mental health pressures, including loneliness and stress, highlight the need for earlier support to prevent issues escalating. Taiohi want more accessible, everyday support, including spaces where they can connect, feel supported, and build a sense of belonging. While access to services such as counselling remains important, there is also a strong need for preventative supports, reduced wait times, and more free or low-cost options that are easy to access before challenges become more serious.

✓ **Better access and affordability**

Transport, cost, and access to services are major barriers. Taiohi want improved public transport, including more reliable and flexible options, and lower prices. Increasing access to free or low-cost activities and services would also support young people. Older taiohi aged 18–24 want better transport options including more reliable and affordable services, to support access to work, study, and social life.

✓ **More employment opportunities and clear pathways**

Taiohi face significant barriers when attempting to transition from education to employment. Taiohi want more entry-level jobs, internships, and clearer pathways into work. There is also a need to strengthen connections between taiohi and employers, including opportunities to support networking and matching between job seekers and employers.

✓ **Stronger youth voice and participation**

Many taiohi feel unheard. Taiohi want more meaningful engagement and opportunities to be genuinely involved in decision-making and the design of services. This includes opportunities for co-design and shared decision-making, where taiohi play a meaningful role in shaping the services and environments they use.

✓ **Opportunities to express identity and culture**

Taiohi want culturally appropriate, inclusive spaces and initiatives. This includes Māori-led approaches, supporting te ao Māori ways of living, and ensuring taiohi can access spaces that reflect their identity and culture.

✓ **Flexible education and pathway options**

Taiohi want more flexible and supported pathways that recognise different ways of learning and provide clearer links into meaningful employment. This includes recognising alternative pathways such as trades and other non-traditional routes.

✓ **More affordable housing and cost of living support (older taiohi aged 18–24)**

For older taiohi, housing affordability and the cost of living are significant concerns. Taiohi want affordable rental options, support to find flatmates or shared housing, and alternative housing models that support independence while enabling them to stay in the district. These pressures can also limit access to employment and opportunities, making it harder for taiohi to remain connected to their communities.

These priorities highlight the importance of a coordinated approach that supports taiohi across wellbeing, access, participation, and connection.



Ōtaki taiohi: Place-based insights and priorities

In addition to the district-wide findings, deeper insights were gathered from Ōtaki taiohi to better understand place-based experiences and priorities. These align with the wider themes, while also reflecting the specific needs and strengths of the Ōtaki community.

Key themes from Ōtaki taiohi

Six key themes came through strongly in the Youth Survey results and in our conversations with Ōtaki taiohi. While they value their community's cultural strengths, they also see gaps in the infrastructure, mental health support, and inclusive spaces that need attention.

1. Cultural identity and community pride

Ōtaki taiohi have a strong sense of cultural pride and connection. Māori identity, te reo Māori, creativity, and the close-knit feel of a small town help build belonging and respect.

Many value seeing and hearing te reo Māori in public, local art, and the strong Māori presence in the community. Access to learning about whakapapa and feeling connected to culture were especially positive for Māori taiohi who took part in the survey and focus groups.

Taiohi also spoke about valuing relationships, community services, and local events that bring people together in family-friendly and accessible ways.

“

“Don't know about the rest of Kāpiti but Ōtaki's got a mean as community there's art all through main street and the town the people are real nice people speaking Te Reo in public on the street.”

”

2. Spaces, activities and youth infrastructure

Taiohi value the natural spaces of Ōtaki. The most popular places to spend free time were beaches, rivers, and parks. Waterways were especially important, reflecting strong environmental and cultural connections. Coastlands Mall is also a popular social space, alongside sports fields, swimming pools, libraries and cafes.

Young people want a broader range of youth-friendly spaces that feel safe, affordable, inclusive, and relevant to their needs. Many asked for more youth events and hangout spaces, music and performance spaces, youth-friendly cafes and free/affordable gym access.

Forty-two percent said they would create more youth spaces, services, and activities if they could.



“A youth space which is free for taiohi, where youth workers who are trained and relational can work with taiohi to create a safe environment after school to take youth away from hanging out at places like the train station.”



3. Transport and connectivity

Limited and unreliable transport makes it harder for taiohi to access education, jobs, recreation, and connecting outside Ōtaki.

Free Wi-Fi was identified as a priority by 72 percent of taiohi who took part in the survey, showing digital access is also a key issue.

Taiohi want better public transport, shorter travel times, and improved infrastructure. Improving transport and digital access is important for equity and opportunity.



“Increase the time that public transport runs for in Ōtaki, and Ōtaki Beach. Aiming to lower the travel time to get from Ōtaki Beach to Waikanae (40 minutes), as that is far far too long.”



4. Safety and inclusion

Many taiohi feel safe during the day but less safe at night. This was also highlighted in the wider district survey.

Young people expressed a desire for safer, more inclusive environments and stronger wellbeing support, aligning with themes identified across the wider dataset.

5. Financial hardship and community care

Cost of living pressures and food insecurity are real concerns. Taiohi spoke about the importance of manaakitanga and looking after each other.

Some suggested practical solutions such as free food initiatives and stronger community support networks. There is a clear desire for community-led approaches that reduce hardship and support wellbeing.

6. Education, employment and future aspirations

Most Ōtaki respondents (87 percent) are enrolled in school or tertiary education.

- 46 percent feel they get the education or training they need
- 41 percent say they sometimes do.

Employment opportunities are more limited:

- 38 percent say they do not get the job opportunities they want
- 45 percent say they sometimes do.



“We need more business that offer interning for college kids that want to look into the career they want.”



Older taiohi spoke about barriers to employment and career pathways. They are interested in internships, financial literacy, accessible study spaces, and being involved in designing solutions that support their future.

Despite challenges, taiohi show resilience, ambition, and a strong desire to thrive in their community.

Solutions

Ōtaki taiohi suggested practical solutions across several areas. Overall, they want accessible resources, affordable activities, inclusive spaces, and community led solutions that support cultural identity and help taiohi thrive.

- Invest in spaces where taiohi Māori can connect with their identity and express creativity.
- Run more youth events, career expos, and collaborative activities that actively seek youth input.
- Provide free Wi-Fi.
- Extend public transport hours.
- Improve links between Ōtaki, the wider Kāpiti Coast district, and Wellington.
- Improve safety in the evenings.
- Deliver initiatives to reduce racism and bullying.
- Provide internships and work experience opportunities.
- Offer financial literacy education.
- Develop a central hub for study spaces, and co designed initiatives to help taiohi plan for the future.
- Strengthen community support systems, for example, free food initiatives, networks of gardeners and farmers to assist families in need.



Key themes for older taiohi (18–24 years)

Older taiohi aged 18–24 highlighted stronger pressures around cost of living, transport, housing, and finding stable employment. In turn, this has made taiohi less hopeful of their future prospects, despite wanting to stay in the district. They also emphasised the need for more relevant social spaces and events, better access to support services, and clearer pathways into work and independent living.

1. Housing and cost of living

Housing and affordability are major concerns for young people. Many rely on family homes, struggle to find flatmates, and feel at risk of being priced out of the district. There is strong interest in more affordable rentals and alternative housing options, such as communal living, to support independence without high costs.

Cost of living pressures are significant. Financial stress is common, especially for those without stable employment, with many relying on family or Work and Income support. Rising living costs make it harder to cover basic needs and limit independence.

The cost of tertiary study, along with limited local job opportunities, adds further pressure and makes it difficult for taiohi to move from education into stable work and housing.

Overall, many want to stay on the Kāpiti Coast, but feel that housing costs and the wider cost of living may force them to leave. Proposed solutions include affordable rental options, support to find flatmates, and new housing models to better meet young people's needs.

“

“Open a polytechnic/university and build affordable housing to go with it, maybe also put a few cool clubs and bars in too.”

”



2. Employment and career pathways



Taiohi face ongoing barriers to employment, including a lack of entry-level roles, unrealistic experience requirements, and limited opportunities. Focus group participants described sending many applications without response, leaving some feeling that job searching is “a waste of time and energy,” despite being motivated to work.

Limited local opportunities mean many feel stuck between education and employment. While some pursue tertiary study, the cost is high, and there are few clear pathways into stable careers. Local options are often seen as limited to retail or trades, and internships or work experience opportunities are hard to find.

Unstable or unavailable work adds financial pressure, with some relying on family or Work and Income support.

There is a clear call for more practical pathways into work, including local internships, stronger connections with employers, and networking opportunities to help match young people with jobs.



“Make it easier for them to get a job. Have maybe a place they can go and chat to someone about what jobs are available and what times work for both parties.”



3. Transport and accessibility

Transport is a significant barrier for many taiohi. Public transport is often seen as unreliable and costly, particularly for those travelling to Wellington for study or work. Frequent bus replacements and a lack of late-night services make it harder to get around.



“Make spaces less car-centric, and reclaim them as walkable and community areas.”



These challenges limit access to jobs, education, and social activities, reduce independence, and add to financial pressure. They also make it harder for young people to stay connected to opportunities in the district.

There is a clear need for more reliable, affordable, and flexible transport options, including improved late-night services. Many responses highlighted the need for “better public transport”.



4. Mental health and wellbeing

Mental health and wellbeing are ongoing concerns for many older taiohi. Feelings of anxiety, stress, and loneliness are common, often linked to unemployment, financial pressure, and limited opportunities.

A lack of social connection also plays a role, with some young people feeling isolated and lacking spaces where they belong.

Older taiohi also highlighted barriers to accessing support, including long wait times. There is a clear call for better support, including free or subsidised counselling and spaces where they can reflect, connect, and explore their sense of self.

“

“Improve mental health services so that there’s the staff and resources to properly help everyone without the insane waitlists.”

”



5. Social connection and belonging

Social isolation is a recurring theme for many young people. While some youth spaces exist, older taiohi often experience them as more relevant for those under 18 or not aligned with their age and life stage. Older taiohi want spaces and events that are tailored to their age and life stage and separate to younger taiohi.

“

“Establish spaces that allow for inter-generational interaction and conversation... Would help people learn from each other, prepare young people better for interacting with other age groups (which school often does not), foster stronger community relations, and help prevent possible loneliness.”

”

Many taiohi want more opportunities to connect outside of school or work, especially through interest-based, youth-led activities that feel natural and social, rather than formal programmes.

A lack of connection is linked to feelings of loneliness and impacts overall wellbeing, highlighting the need for spaces and opportunities that help young people feel they belong. Focus group participants reported periods of isolation and loneliness while trying to find a sense of belonging. Prolonged periods of feeling misunderstood or unsupported can lead to withdrawal or disengagement, particularly for those without stable role models.



6. Education and alternative pathways

Taiohi feel pressure to follow traditional education pathways. While education is important to many, pathways are not always clear or accessible, and some feel pressure to pursue tertiary study despite the high cost and uncertain outcomes. Those in alternative education described internalised failure, lack of recognition, and difficult transitions out of school. Alternative pathways, such as trades and apprenticeships, are valued but can feel isolating and are not always well supported. There is a need for more flexible, supported pathways that recognise different ways of learning and provide clearer routes into meaningful work.

“

“I would make it so stuff that will improve your life in different aspects (such as work courses, life courses, social help) wouldn’t be so expensive or hard to find/get into”

”

7. Identity, culture and representation

Identity and belonging are important for many taiohi. Māori youth, in particular, emphasised cultural reconnection, holistic wellbeing, and the need for culturally grounded spaces that reflect their identity.

There is a strong call for Māori-led initiatives and grassroots approaches that support culture in meaningful ways, along with genuine, mana-enhancing involvement in decision-making rather than tokenistic engagement.

“

“I think that it would be great to have more opportunities for not only whānau Māori but families to have a space where you can bring photos of loved ones and share about their lives and history! This would be a great way to connect and possibly learn more history about the area and mana whenua.”

”

More broadly, there is a need for inclusive spaces and opportunities that reflect different identities and experiences, and help young people feel seen, valued, and represented in their communities.

8. Youth spaces and events (18–24 years)

There is demand for:

- dedicated youth spaces for older taiohi aged 18–24
- events outside weekends
- creative and social opportunities.

There is a clear gap in spaces and activities for older taiohi aged 18–24. Existing youth spaces are often seen as focused on younger age groups and are not always relevant to older youth. For older taiohi, the findings suggest a gap in age-appropriate and life-stage-relevant spaces, rather than indicating that existing youth provision lacks value. Current youth spaces may be experienced as more oriented toward younger age groups, pointing to the need for differentiated offers across the 12–24 age range.

“

“More spaces and opportunities for over 18s which are free, or spaces for when you are year 12 and 13 and older so you know about it before you leave college and then you are linked in already and they [can] help you there and [you] have somewhere to go which is gonna be good after you leave school.”

”

Many young people prefer interest-based, youth-led events that feel social and engaging, with strong interest in music, arts, and creative events they would want to attend and be part of.

Timing is important, as many taiohi work weekends. They prefer events held in the late afternoon or evening during the week.



Insights from older Ōtaki taiohi (18–24 years old)

For older taiohi aged 18–24, Ōtaki offers a strong sense of belonging through whānau and community. However, some feel isolated and have less access to opportunities and services than taiohi in larger towns and cities.

1. Employment and transport

Finding work and building a career can be challenging. Older taiohi are interested in internships, work experience, and support to build financial literacy.

Transport is a major barrier. Limited and unreliable services, and the lack of regular commuter rail restrict access to jobs, study and training.

2. Mental health and isolation

Many spoke about anxiety, depression, loneliness and uncertainty about the future.

Despite this, older taiohi aged 18–24 show resilience and ambition. They are involved in creative projects, leadership programmes, and have goals such as starting businesses or teaching overseas.

They want more youth spaces, recreational options, and co-designed initiatives that help them plan confidently for the future. Some see government as distant and overly formal, highlighting the importance of grassroots networks and social media for staying connected.

Report conclusion

This report shows that taiohi on the Kāpiti Coast feel a strong connection to their communities, supported by positive relationships, cultural diversity, and access to natural environments. These are important strengths that support wellbeing, belonging, and a sense of place.

At the same time, the findings point to a range of challenges that shape young people's daily lives and future opportunities. Taiohi face barriers related to transport, cost, access to services and activities, employment opportunities, safety, and housing, particularly for older taiohi. Many also want more spaces where they can connect, feel safe, and express themselves, and more meaningful opportunities to be heard and involved in decisions that affect them.

The findings highlight the importance of:

- building on existing community strengths
- improving access to opportunities, services, and affordable activities
- supporting safe, inclusive, and culturally responsive environments
- strengthening spaces and opportunities for connection, participation, and belonging
- ensuring taiohi have a genuine voice in shaping their future.

Overall, young people want to feel safe, connected, supported, and able to access opportunities that enable them to thrive and remain connected to their communities. The findings highlight the need to build on existing youth development strengths while strengthening the wider youth support ecosystem to better respond to diverse needs, access barriers, and ways of participating.

Access to safe, welcoming, and affordable spaces also plays a preventative role, supporting wellbeing by enabling connection, reducing isolation, and creating everyday opportunities for participation.

This requires a focus not only on individual services, but on the system as a whole – ensuring that spaces, supports, and opportunities are coordinated, accessible, and shaped in genuine partnership with taiohi.

