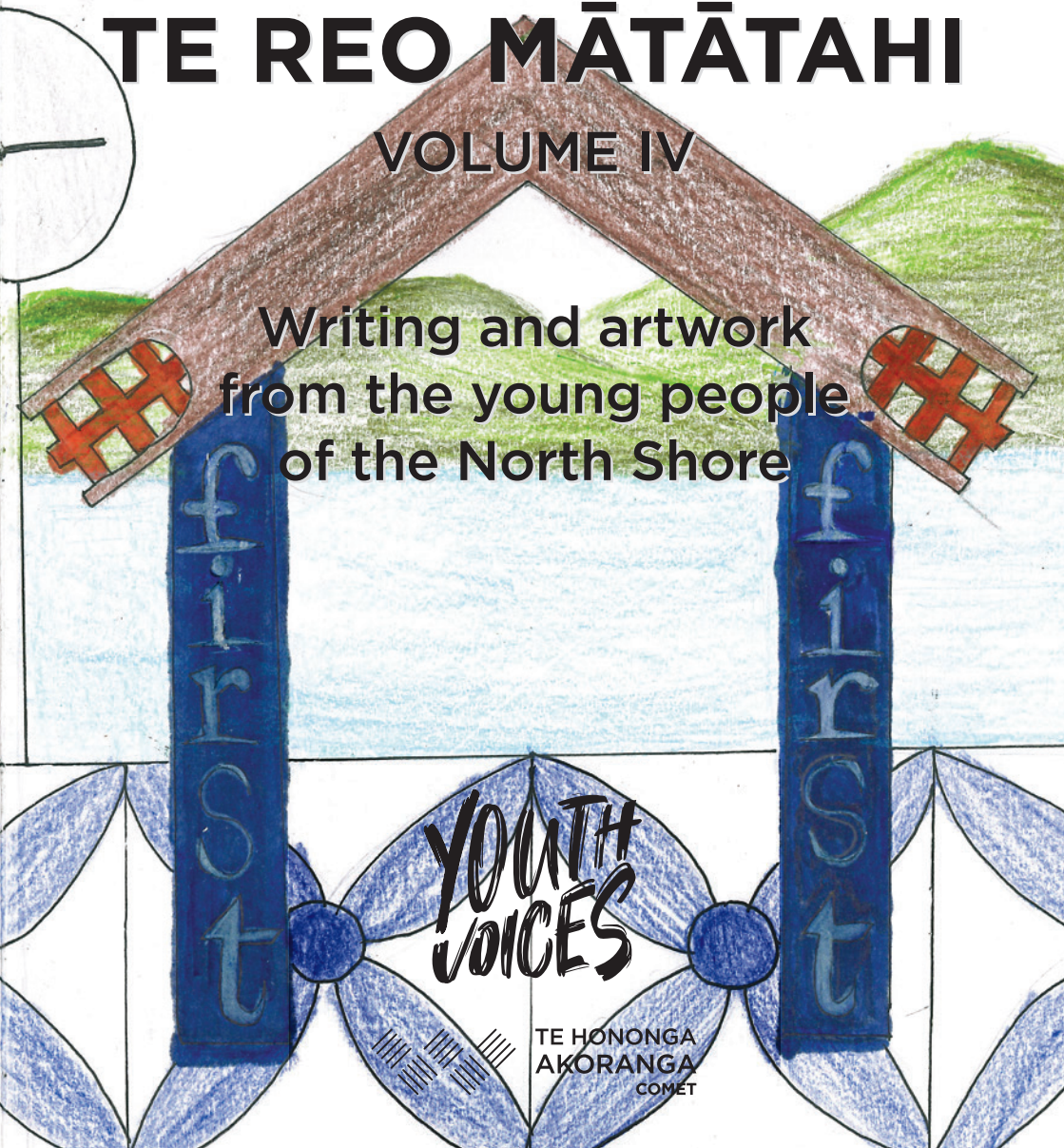




WHAKARONGO KI TE REO MĀTĀTAHI

VOLUME IV



Writing and artwork
from the young people
of the North Shore

YOUTH
VOICES

TE HONONGA
AKORANGA
COMET



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The opinions shared in this book belong to the individual authors. Te Hononga Akoranga COMET respect and acknowledge these diverse perspectives. We are committed to encouraging youth voices through this project.

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INTRODUCTION

This fourth volume of *Whakarongo ki te Reo Mātātahi* brings together the collective creativity of Northcote Intermediate School's authors and artists. Throughout Term Two, the authors met each week, creating stories to showcase their dedication, honesty and talent.

Their willingness to open up and share their perspectives is what makes this collection meaningful.

This project was made possible through the trust and support offered by Northcote Intermediate staff. I am thankful to the Principal and the leadership team for encouraging new initiatives and for allowing me to follow through on an idea that started with a simple inspiration. Every student who participated brought their own experiences and strengths, and their courage in sharing these stories is truly appreciated.

Thanks also go to COMET and Noah Meggitt for their support throughout this process. It is rewarding to see what can be achieved when young people are given the chance to express themselves.

These works stand as a testament to the power of community and the importance of making student voices heard.

I hope readers will find these stories and artworks as inspiring as the journey that brought them together.

Erin Tiplady

Literacy Leader
Northcote Intermediate



It is a privilege to present *Whakarongo ki te reo Mātātahi: Volume IV*. Now in its fourth iteration, this kaupapa continues to grow as a taonga that records and uplifts the voices of rangatahi.

Each volume adds to this whakapapa, showing us the creativity, aspirations and perspectives of young people as they imagine their place in their communities and in the future of Aotearoa.

This edition is unique, belonging solely to Northcote Intermediate School. For the first time, the kaupapa has been carried from within the kura, with a kaiako leading the delivery and guiding students to share their stories.

While rooted in the identity of this school, the volume also strengthens the wider movement of *Whakarongo ki te reo Mātātahi*, ensuring the voices of our rangatahi are heard, honoured and celebrated.

Noah Meggitt

Strategic Lead – Māori Engagement
& STEM Pathways
Te Hononga Akoranga COMET

Kaitiakitanga – My Land, My Home

Razan Zafiri, Year 7

Love the land

That's what I've been taught.
Not just a place we stand on,
but the place that shaped my thoughts.

I'm connected to the land

It's the land of my birth.
It's more than dirt and trees,
it's the heart of our Earth.

I am the guardian of your foundation, a demonstration of the old.
I have been here since the beginning.
Even though my patience is thinning,
I have fed you and helped you.
I gave and gave, now I'm here to ask for your help ...

We should all practice kaitiakitanga and all have rangatiratanga,
we should all be guardians and keep guarding our whenua.
We need to protect this land for our kin.

Start planting trees and watch them grow
through summer and winter.

We should start taking responsibilities as kaitiaki, even a small
splinter of neglect can grow into a wound that harms the land,
the waters and the future generations.

Be a guardian to protect the whenua, the roots and the trees.
We should take care of our seas,
which are home to our turtles,
And we should be kaitiakitanga
driven, protecting our land and our people.

Love our land because land takes care of us.

Gives us food, air and sky.
But if we don't protect it,
everything will die.

Our safe place gone.

Our peace lost.
So we must rise up,
no matter the cost.

Plant more trees, revive the seas,
limit plastic, if you please.
Keep it clean, pest-free,
let our whenua be wild and free.

Let's stand together, hand in hand,
and fight to save this precious land.
Because loving the land
means giving it life,
not just for us,
but for all who come after.

Milford Beach, that's my place of peace.

The waves crash gently,
and all my worries cease.
I go there with my five siblings, all filled with glee.
Three older, two younger than me.
We laugh, we play, we run wild and free.

I'm in the middle, as you can see
and sometimes it's loud,
but in nature,
there's no need to be proud. If we don't take care of this
wonderful place, our safe place will be lost, so we must rise.

Would you wanna lose a place you loved? Hand to hand, we all
must take care of this land no matter the cost. We shouldn't
lose a place that we love.

Because loving the land
is more than grand.

The Good v Bad of Being Tongan

Addison Tanginoa, Year 7

Faka malo atu 'iho'o ha'ele mai. Thank you everyone for coming to read my journal about the good and bad things about being Tongan. I'm going to start off with the pros.

First things first, being Tongan has a 0.0025 chance out of EIGHT BILLION PEOPLE. That's pretty crazy if you ask me.

- 1) Our country is a beautiful place and gets about 200,000 tourists a year, which means it's a "must go" for your next holiday.
- 2) Our genetics are usually big, tough, strong, big muscles and many more.
- 3) We are super kind to each and everyone. We love giving our stuff to people in need, and if someone gets sick, we'll help them until they get better, too.
- 4) Since we've got good genetics, we are usually really good at rugby. For example, Adam Fonua-Blake or Jonah Lomu and lots of other people, such as Jason Taumololo.
- 5) We are carnivores, which means we eat meat, and meat has loads of protein, which gives us the strong and muscly bodies we have now.

Going on to the bad things about being Tongan:

- 1) I have been called a coconut, once even the N-word, and racism is not good, guys. We should all treat each and everyone with kindness.
- 2) Since we are usually bigger than most, some might make fun of us by calling us things like slow or fat or much worse.
- 3) In Tonga, we have to gather supplies for dinner and breakfast every day. If we don't, we may not eat. For example, I didn't get the firewood, which means we can't cook food; or oh no! I didn't bring the meats, which means we've got no food at all.

That's why we should help each other and care for one another.



NICOLE YE, Year 8



Boxing

Joeziah Kauhega-Pilosi, Year 7

Boxing can improve your heart health and make your body stronger, like your core muscles, and you can also learn how to fight properly. Boxing can burn lots of calories, too.

Maybe we could have boxing lessons at schools, or have it as part of PE or even just get some boxing bags. It helps with self-defence and can stop people from fighting, because instead of hitting each other, they can punch the bags.

In Aotearoa, a lot of school fights start from bullying, beef or even gang stuff. School fights usually end with someone getting hurt, but boxing can help with that. It's a good way to keep your body fit and healthy.

At schools in Auckland, fights are getting out of hand. That's why I think having boxing lessons or boxing bags for PE would be a good idea. I really believe it would make schools better and safer.

Sometimes school fights can carry on outside of school, like at the mall, and people can even get jumped or worse. I don't want that to happen to anyone.

If students had boxing as an outlet, some might even love it so much that they would want to do it as a real sport. Who knows, maybe someone could become the next Mike Tyson!

Boxing can help everyone. Why am I talking about this? Because fights are a big problem in New Zealand schools, and I think boxing could be the answer.

Boxing needs to grow.

Stop Vaping

Heaven Fifita, Year 8

You might be thinking, "Oh, not another story about vaping," but I'm just gonna tell you how I see it, for real.

Straight after school, I'll be walking around Northcote with my friends. Some of them will be vaping, thinking they're all that.

I tell them it's not cool, that it low key kills your lungs, you know? They always ask if I want a puff, but I always say no.

Why would I vape if I want my lungs to last?

It can impact other kids, too. For starters, I have asthma. If my friend had a puff and blew it right in my face, my asthma could get so bad, like, worse than ever!

Honestly, if I had the power, I would low key shut all the vape shops down and get vapes banned in the whole of New Zealand. I'd even write letters to the Prime Minister about it.

It's just not worth it.



YIYI YIN, Year 8

Women Aren't Treated Fairly

Meleane Taukolo, Year 7

It feels like women aren't treated as fairly as men.

Women are getting paid less, while men are getting paid more.

The fees for women's sport are more expensive, while the fees for men's sport are cheaper.

Men are just seen more in the world, and women aren't.

Back in the day, women had very few rights. They couldn't go to school or do the same jobs as boys did. They were often just expected to stay at home cooking and looking after the family and the house. They wouldn't really be seen out in public. Sometimes they were treated very badly, or even worse, beaten by men.

Some women out there need money to survive, but they still don't get paid what they deserve.

Not that long ago, women even had to get their husband's approval just to get a bank account.

It feels like women are just being used. This world seems to be run by men for men.

Community Help

Faimafili Mataafa, Year 7

On Wednesday and Monday nights, my community comes together to help feed people who are struggling and need support.

Why is this important?

It's important because many people today are in need. Food is becoming more expensive. For example, 1 kg of long white rice now costs around \$2.49 to \$3.50.

Why is it good for the community to help?

It's good because some families might only have enough food for one person, and others may not even have enough money to buy milk. Helping each other makes a big difference.

How can people support their community?

People can support the community by going to the supermarket and buying things like bread, rice or other food to share.

What other initiatives could help the community?

I think we could do free community dinners every week and also on public holidays. Everyone could come together and give out food. The food could be paid for with fundraisers. We could also do fundraisers to help people in the hospital who are sick.

Why are people struggling nowadays?

Because the government keeps raising food prices. I did some research, and back in January 2015, a loaf of bread cost \$1.13. Now it costs about \$1.40. That might not seem like a lot, but it makes a big difference.

The government should think carefully before raising food prices. If they keep doing this, it will make New Zealand look bad. The government needs to do more than just hand out money or food once in a while. They need to actually help. There are children on the streets looking for food, just trying to survive.

Who is helping and how?

The people who help are the ones buying food for the dinners. This could be your friends, family members or anyone who wants to support.

Why is this important?

It means fewer homeless people sleeping on the streets. It makes the community look better and feel safer for everyone, including those who have no home.

Homeless people are still part of our community here in New Zealand. We need to be kind and respect them the same way we treat our friends and family. If we don't, our community won't feel safe or welcoming. At the end of the day, we are all humans, just waiting for something better to happen.



ZOEY BRUNT, Year 8

Unexpected Friendship

Stacey-Lee Kirk, Year 8

If you had told me at the start of Year 7 that Shriya would end up being one of my closest friends, I probably would've laughed.

We were in the same friend group, but honestly, we didn't get along at all. There was always some kind of tension or awkwardness between us, and we mostly kept our distance. It felt like we just didn't click.

Then, around Term 2, something changed. Our other friends started drifting away and eventually left both of us out. To make things worse, they began talking behind our backs, saying not-so-nice things about Shriya and me.

At first, I was lonely and confused. I didn't understand why they were being so mean, or why they suddenly didn't want to hang out with us anymore.

But in that difficult moment, Shriya and I ended up spending more time together, mostly because we had no one else to turn to.

We started talking more and realised that we actually understood each other better than we thought. We both felt betrayed by the same people and shared similar feelings about being left out. It was like we were on the same team, even if we hadn't noticed it before.

Slowly, the walls between us came down. We found ourselves laughing about silly things, sharing secrets and supporting each other. Our friendship grew stronger because it was built on real trust and shared experiences. Looking back, it's crazy to think how things could have been so different if those tough moments hadn't happened.

Now Shriya is one of the people I trust most. It just goes to show that sometimes, friendship comes from the most unexpected places, especially when life throws challenges your way.

Gender Equality in Sport

Syria Fa'avae, Year 8

Girls and boys deserve to be treated equally. For too long, boys have had it easier than girls in almost everything, from sport to career opportunities.

Historically, women were often limited to only a few jobs, like being a teacher, a nurse or a stay-at-home mum. Today, even though we have more choices, we still face inequality.

Boys sometimes mock girls for trying new things, and some teachers favour boys in class. Many people still think girls aren't as strong as boys. They don't believe we can play the same sports, like rugby, boxing, wrestling, karate or jiu-jitsu.

This has been my experience at school. Growing up, I noticed that schools didn't recommend the same range of sports for girls as they did for boys. Even when there were zone days, it felt like they were promoted mostly to boys.

How can we give girls more school sporting opportunities?

Here are my solutions:

- **Create more chances for girls to try new sports**, especially the ones seen as "boys' sports."
- **Invite professional female athletes to speak to us.** Their advice could give girls the confidence to try something they might be scared of.
- **Bring in more female coaches and helpers**, especially athletes from our local community who can act as role models.

As a girl who plays sport, this is personal for me. I play three sports: netball, rugby league and basketball. Of my three coaches, only my netball coach is a woman. My other two coaches are dads.

Male and female coaches lead very differently. A man can't fully understand the dynamics of an all-girls team in the same way a woman can. A female coach understands what we go through, especially as we become teenagers, and can connect with us on a different level.

This inequality extends to professional sport. Female athletes should be treated the same as male athletes, but they get paid less. The excuse is often that men's sport is more "entertaining" or "rough", but that doesn't make it fair.

I believe more women athletes should be helping and encouraging young girls. We need to show every girl that she is strong enough to try new things and that she belongs in any sport she chooses to play.

Why Are Groceries More Expensive?

Melania Hannam-Tahi, Year 7

I think the North Shore is starting to get more expensive when buying groceries. Like butter, cheese, milk and bread; things like these should be way cheaper. If you didn't know, a couple years ago some fast food restaurants like KFC were much cheaper for a family of five or more.

In New Zealand, there are many farms that produce dairy products, and they are still overly expensive even though they are produced here! For example, a 2-litre bottle of milk is \$5.44, and a 700 g bag of bread is \$4.09.

Did you know that when you shop local, the money stays local? When you buy at shops like Pak'nSave, New World and Four Square, the money stays in New Zealand. If you shop at Woolworths, some of the money goes to the workers, but the rest goes to Australia, since it's an Australian-owned business.

Do you ever look at the price of a block of cheese that looks cheap and think, *"Yep, that's in my budget, in the basket it goes?"* Have you ever looked at how much it would cost per gram?

At the back of my school, there was a garden owned by the school, but maintained by the community, that grew a lot of kūmura.

The last batch of kūmura was about 800 kg. It got shared between the community and the school. The garden hasn't been growing new crops, apart from some taro and bananas.

Why buy expensive groceries when you can grow some?

"Run It Straight" Challenge

Vikena Folau, Year 8

I was just scrolling TikTok the other day when I saw this 'Run It Straight' challenge. At first, I was like, *"Oh, that's pretty choice."* It kinda looked like a hard-out league tackle. But then, bro, it went viral. The video I saw blew up with over a million likes, and suddenly everyone wanted to do it.

It turned into a real competition. Two guys would challenge each other: one runs straight, the other has to smash him. Full on.

For months, people were signing up. But then I was watching the highlights, and it got heavy. There was this guy in the hospital, in a coma, because some massive dude ran him over. It wasn't even a fair go.

A month later, I heard a man actually died from doing the same thing. It's crazy how a TikTok trend that everyone thought was cool can turn into something so dangerous. It's not just a game when people are getting killed, eh. It's just dumb.

My Story

Lewis Hosking, Year 8

My experience in Australia was not as good as I hoped. I thought it was gonna be a mean time because my first day at school was all right, but a few days after it got stink. After going there for a while, everyone started not to like me. Only the black kids liked me. All the white kids were racist and annoying as anything, like I mean, really annoying.

After Year 6, I went to college in Year 7. It felt weird because in New Zealand you don't go to college til Year 9. That two-year difference made me a bit nervous. Still, it was all good because my brother and sister were there. Some of my brother's friends were as well.

After a year, I think I was getting into trouble a lot. Hence, my mum said that I needed to go back to New Zealand because the teachers and students were making me the "naughty guy".

When I got back to New Zealand, I felt so much better because I was back where I was born and bred. I couldn't wait to get back to a New Zealand school with my own culture so I could get along with people and not be the "naughty guy".

I had to come back to New Zealand because I was wagging, and I was swearing at the teachers and the principal, which I think now was NOT a good thing.

When I first arrived at Northcote Intermediate, I didn't know what was going to happen. I thought I was going to be unhappy, but my dad got me to give it a go. It was decently hard, but I persevered. That is a new word I learnt a while ago.

Then I trialled for one of the school basketball teams, and I got into the top Year 8 team and won the championship title and got the MVP title.

I am looking forward to going to Northcote College next year because all my boys will be there.

In the future, I hope it's gonna be good, like really good, and that will be the end of the story of Lewis.

New School v Old School

Serenity Ahkil-Malau, Year 8

First of all, why should we kids have to change the way we think just because it's not how the teacher wanted us to solve the problem? Or because I didn't use as many adjectives as they wanted?

Sometimes teachers compare us to how they used to be taught, and honestly, it gets tiring coming to school and being interrupted just because you can't explain things the way you wanted to.

I know all kids are different. Some get the question straight away, some don't. For me, I'm one of the kids who doesn't always get it straight away and that's OK. Even if you try your best and still get it wrong, at least you know you tried.

I've had all kinds of teachers, from really old-school to more modern ones. To be honest, it's way easier having new-school teachers than old-school ones. It's not about their age; it's because the new-school teachers actually seem to understand us kids better these days.

In today's world, technology is everywhere, and new-school teachers bring classrooms to life with smartboards, apps and online tools. Old-school teachers sometimes prefer their usual way of teaching, but the younger ones are changing how students learn: one tap, click and swipe at a time.

For the next generation, I feel like all teachers need to change the way they teach a little bit. It's not like the old ways are bad, but new-school teachers just have a better understanding of kids today.

Honestly, I think our generation is kind of mysterious in some ways, and it takes a teacher who gets that to connect with us properly.

At the end of the day, old-school teachers bring valuable experience, but new-school ones are better equipped for this digital generation. The best classrooms, though, are the ones that have balance, mixing the wisdom of the past with the technology of the future.



mutu

Tekau mā wha

My Whenua

Felicity Watts, Year 8

*Ko Whakapunake te maunga
Ko Te Wairoa Hōpūpū Hōnengenenge Mātangi Rau te awa
Ko Tākitimu te waka
Ko Ngāti Kahungunu te iwi
Ko Tamaterangi me ko Hineterā ngā hapū
Ko Pūtahi te marae
Ko Felicity Aroha Watts ahau*

These names, these places; why am I talking about them to you from a classroom in Northcote? Why does it even matter? What importance do these places in Hawke's Bay hold here?

I'm a 12-year-old girl who has lived on the Shore; I've never lived there. A mountain, a river, a people, a marae hundreds of kilometres away. An ancient form of introduction linked to a different time and a different place.

We return to our roots, to remember our name.
Without this return, like rivers run dry,
our bond with the whenua would wither and die.

A few weeks passed. We got in the car and travelled mile after mile through gorges and valleys back to Hawke's Bay.

Back to where my grandad grew up.
The small lime green house whose rooms seemed too small to squeeze in the ten children who grew up there.

We went back to visit their pā, their urupā. The fields they played in, the rivers they swam in and the roads they raced on. Listening to stories about how, even in her old age, my great grandma would climb to the highest point in the tree and jump into the river below.

We return to our roots, to remember our name.
Without this return, like rivers run dry,
our bond with the whenua would wither and die.

*"Month after month, in motion and memory; year after year,
visiting gravestones we partake."*

In living traditions, walking paths they'd take.
We listened to the stories our parents spake.

Speaking of grandparents, we never met this
created connection.

First the maunga, awa, waka, iwi, hapū, then you.
Because all these forms connect you through
and through
They shape who you are, your path they accrue.

We return to our roots, to remember our name.
Without this return, like rivers run dry,
Our bond with the whenua would wither and die.

Our connection to whenua is precious. Because of whenua,
our connection to our tūpuna is born anew. Our ancestors
are a part of the whenua again.

Whenua holds memories of what we did then
and someday we'll see them again.

Whenua holds memory of smiles and of cries,
from maunga to awa, from earth to blue skies.
Our pepeha begins with land, so our story lies:

We return to our roots, to remember our name.
Without this return, like rivers run dry,
our bond with the whenua would wither and die.

So I go back again and again and form the connections.
Learn new stories, find the gems.

Do what they did then,
visiting the little house that was lime.
We protect the whenua for all time.

Pathways for My Future

Zoe Cameron, Year 7

My story might not be a common one, but it's really important to me. I'm super passionate about sport, especially basketball. I've been playing basketball for over five years now, and I've just made it into the school AIMS team.

As an intermediate student, this is the time to start thinking about the future, like what high school or college we should go to. For me, it's not just about school. I want my education and my sport to connect, so I can make clear pathways for my future.

The hard part for me is choosing between schools. I think Northcote Intermediate has really good sports teams. The two colleges I've been looking at are Northcote College and Westlake Girls High School. My head is leaning towards Westlake because they seem to have more opportunities in sport and some big wins in education, too.

But then there's the friendship part. Most of my close friends are going to Northcote, while only two or three are heading to Westlake. I know people say, *"Oh, you can just make new friends."* That's true, but it's still something I think about.

Also, some of my old and current basketball teammates will be going to Northcote, and they have a strong reputation in the Premier League. With Westlake, I don't really know much about their basketball teams yet.

So right now, I'm trying to figure out this big decision: whether to follow the bigger sporting opportunities or stay close to the friends and teammates I already have.

KATE HERRING, Year 7





AXEL BARNETT, Year 7

Trying to Be An All Black

Christian Havealeta, Year 8

I used to play for Northcote Rugby Club and want to try and be an All Black. What I need is to do lots of training and be consistent. I also need to have some rest days. You have to believe in yourself so you don't give up on your goal.

It takes a lot of sacrifice to try and be an All Black. You have to sacrifice some things you have in order to get what you want. You have to sacrifice your time to go to trainings and to games on Saturdays.

At Northcote Rugby Club, I would go to rugby practice on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and we would play against clubs like Takapuna and East Coast on Saturdays.

I want to be an All Black because you get paid well and have lots of fun. I need to play for a club and get better, so my coaches can recognise me and so the leagues can see how I play. It's not going to be an easy thing, but if I try, there might be a chance.

I started playing in 2019 as a J6 at Northcote Rugby Club. We learned the basics like passing, tackling and catching. We would run with the ball and see our passing techniques. From 2020 to 2021, I was a J4, so we played against harder and bigger opponents.

Every grade I went up would get harder and more challenging. It was hard because everyone knew how to play and everyone was already grown up. I remember playing my first game as a J3. I would see my opponents getting hit so hard that I could hear the water splash as they got hit.

And that's my story.

Drug Use in Our Community

Shriya Mani, Year 8

I want people to understand that drugs are bad for both individuals and the community. Drugs cause a lot of problems because people who use them often do things without thinking, like violence, harassment, public damage and many other things.

Drugs are also harmful for children my age and for teenagers, because we can be easily influenced. Sometimes young people think people who use drugs are "cool" or that doing drugs will make them more popular. But the truth is drugs damage your brain, your mental health and even your appearance.

I see people using drugs in malls, on the streets, in the city, basically everywhere. A third of car crashes and robberies involve people on drugs, which shows how dangerous they really are.

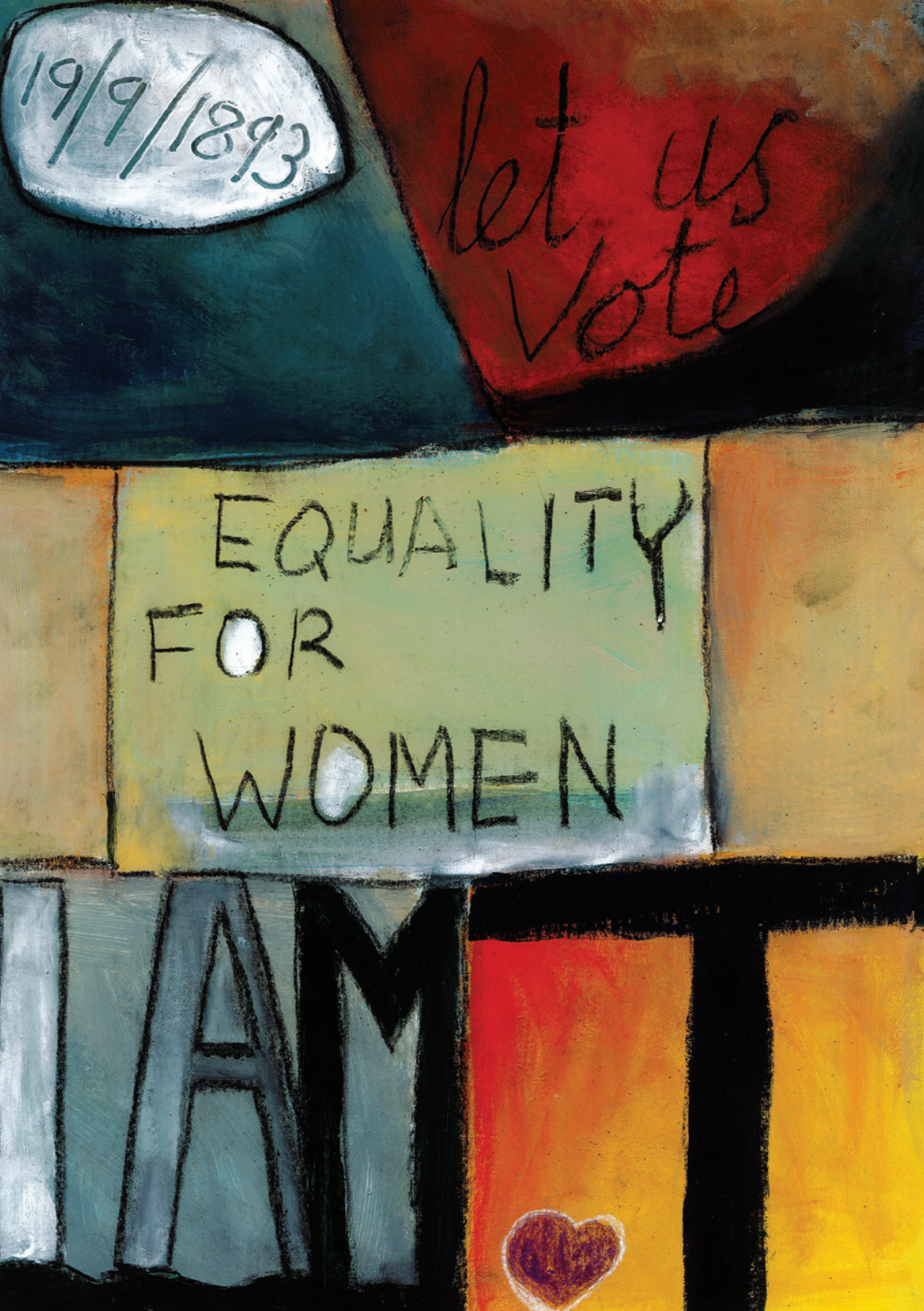
For me, walking home from school can be very scary. It's intimidating when you see people who are high sitting on the side of the street because you don't know what they might do.

They can catcall, make inappropriate comments or even turn to violence and harassment. What makes it worse is knowing you can't really do anything to stop them, especially since they might be stronger or more experienced than you.

I don't think walking home should feel this scary. We should be able to walk home feeling safe and protected, not worried or uncomfortable every single day. No one deserves to live with that fear.



AMELIA KAPITAN, Year 8



ARIA POWELL, Year 8

The Fight for Women's Suffrage

Lihley-Anne Mana-Hohaia, Year 7

Once upon a time, women were unable to vote. Sometimes women don't get the same treatment that men do. Women are not getting paid as much as men. Women are getting treated differently.

The fight for women's suffrage was one of the most important social justice movements in modern history. It represented not only the struggle for the right to vote but also a broader demand for gender equality and recognition of women as full citizens.

A long time ago, women were not allowed to vote. Only men could choose leaders and make big decisions. This was not fair.

Brave women stood up and said, "We should have the same rights as men!" They worked hard, marched in parades, gave speeches and even went to jail to fight for the right to vote. This fight was called the women's suffrage movement.

Thanks to strong women like Kate Sheppard, laws began to change. In New Zealand, women were allowed to vote on 19 September 1893.

But the fight didn't stop there. Although women were allowed to vote, Māori women still weren't allowed seats in Parliament. Māori women were at the front of the suffrage movement, fighting for their right to vote and to stand as members of the Māori parliament.

Today, because of the women's suffrage movement, girls can dream of voting, leading and making the world a better place!

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Women wanted to have the same rights as men. They wanted to vote and have a say in how their country was run. So they stood up, spoke out, marched and worked hard for many years.

These brave women were called suffragettes. They didn't give up, even when people told them "no." They believed everyone should be treated equally.

Finally, after a long fight, women won the right to vote. This was a big step toward fairness and freedom.

In my opinion, I think it's not fair for boys and girls to get treated differently, with women not getting paid as much, not being able to have more than three jobs and not being able to vote for what they think and know is right.

What are your solutions?

Rugby

Vikena Folau, Year 8

It all started at my uncle's 21st birthday party. There were heaps of people I didn't even know. Suddenly, this random guy comes up to me, says he's known me since I was a little boy and then asks if I play rugby. I just said, "Nah."

A month later, at my little brother's first birthday party, it happened again. My family from Wellington were there and they asked me, "You playing rugby yet?" Again, I said no.

On the drive home, I was getting real curious. Why did everyone keep asking me that?

When we got home, I went straight to my mum and asked her. She told me it was because my dad used to play rugby for North Harbour when he was young. That's when it all clicked.

That night, I lay in bed thinking about rugby but in a different way. I was thinking about actually playing. All I could picture was pulling on a jersey for our local club, the Glenfield Greyhounds. I'd seen them play, and they were hard out.

The next morning, I asked my mum if she could sign me up.

Two weeks later, I had my first training with the Greyhounds. We did tackling drills, passing, game plays and heaps of fitness. It was tough but mean.

After I got home, my mum told me I had my first practice game next week. A whole week went by, and then it was finally game day. I was officially a Greyhound.

My Cultural Differences

Na'a Anitoni, Year 8

Tongan schools

When I attended school in Tonga, everyone knew each other, and they would always walk to school. They never drove to school, and the students would always talk like they were family. When school started, the teacher knew me and my family. I was family with most of the teachers in the school.

Two hours into school, a student was found wagging outside. When the teacher saw him, they told him to go and snap a branch off a nearby tree.

When the student came back with the stick, the teacher said, *"Stick out your hand right now."* Then the teacher hit him with the stick five times. After that, the kid went back to class and started to do his work.

In Tonga, things are harder and more disciplined. Everyone is smart and well-disciplined.

New Zealand schools

The Poly students are always slacking in class and think they're all that because they are Tongan or Samoan.

To be honest, the Poly boys need to humble themselves because they think they can do anything they want to when they want to, but really, they are not all that. Poly people will do things at school that they wouldn't do at home.

New Zealand is so much different to Tonga; it is way less disciplined. People can just walk out or sit on the stairs and talk. Here, you can get away from doing work by sitting with your friends and talking.

Some of the teachers here look down on our culture and think we don't do any work, but in Tonga, if you don't do any work or roam around, you will get slapped.

All the Tongans and Samoans, they are just putting shame on their culture, because if they do the things they do at school at home, they will get a hiding.

What do you think is better?

If we're talking about what's better for learning, I would say Tonga because students there are well-disciplined and most of them will get smart earlier in life because they learn things earlier than in New Zealand.

Here, they expect kids to learn their times tables when they are in Year 6. In Tonga, the kids are expected to know their times tables when they are in Year 1.

In Tonga, most people will not muck around because the teacher knows their family, so they can just tell the parents.

Some kids are there for school, but you can tell which kids don't wanna be there. In New Zealand, if kids don't want to be there, they just start wagging and won't even get disciplined.

What could New Zealand do to be more like the islands?

If New Zealand wanted to be more like Tonga, the teacher should not go lightly on the Poly students because they will just think they are all that, and I think they should be disciplined more.



ROMANE CASSANY, Year 7

80 Minutes on the Field, the Rest of Your Life Off

Zaccaria Muna, Year 8

The beginning

It all started with the Ponsonby Ponies, under-6 restricted team. That's where I first got my go at rugby league back in 2016.

Last year, 2024, was a big one. I was playing for the Tigers, and our team went undefeated for ages, right up until we played against the Ōtāhuhu Blues and lost 26-12. Later that year, I got to play for the Samoa under-12s. We played nine games and won them all.

That was my 2024; heaps of good moments that made me who I am today.

The next chapter

Now it's 2025. So far, for my club, I've played seven games, winning five and losing two. My eighth game is this week against the Marist Saints. I'm also playing for Raukawa in a big Māori tournament down in Rotorua. It's a massive opportunity, with scouts from five NRL clubs there: the Warriors, Bulldogs, Roosters and two others.

Everybody is somebody off the field

Off the field, I wasn't always the player you see now. It all changed when I got motivated and self-disciplined. My parents have supported me the whole way and helped me get to where I am now. It took a while to get stronger, not just with my body but in my head, too.

All the hard work, the constant training and hitting the gym is what put me here. It only takes a second to find that right mindset, to want to improve and to focus on yourself.

Moving into the future

I keep going because of my Mum and Dad. They sacrifice so much — their money and time off work — just so I can train. They're the ones who push me, especially when I don't wanna go or when I'm sore. They make sure I keep going and take every opportunity I get.

I aim to improve my skills every year, and I know 2026 is gonna be my year!

MOORE ZHANG, Year 8



The Separating Line of Race

Ana Puliueva, Year 8

What is racism?

Racism is difference, a wall defining you from me,
where our status isn't the same, where our kind aren't supposed to be.
Racism is a terrorist, ruining, traumatising all,
making sure one beats the other triumphantly, and the other one
miserably falls.

What is racism?

Racism is unfair judgment, because we don't align with your standard.
All because we're different, our names deserve to be slandered.
Racism is conflict of interest, where you go up, and I go down.
A land where the slaves are brown, where the fair-skinned have
a crown.

Years before you and I were brutal a lot more.
Where I would've been whipped, scolded, but what for?
I would've had to work longer, no cares about if I'm tired.
We could only do what those cruel ones desired.

My blood, my ancestors and yours included as well,
What were we supposed to do? We had no one to tell!
Not even me either. But it's different with the others.
The pain they faced doesn't only affect; it smothers.

It smothered them from even attempting to fight,
It suffocates me, to a point where I see the light.
Where do we belong if we don't belong here?
When can they all stop obeying you, trapped by fear?

They had families. What exactly made it their fault?
We were unable to provide for our offspring, all because
of your assault.

As much as it hurt us, it also hurt them.
They thought and still think that we are nothing,
but they're worth a gem.

This generation can make it different, change this, stand up now.
So I want you at this moment, make a vow.
A vow to swear that we should all be cared for equally.
A promise you're willing to make, so that the world can see.

Racism doesn't need to separate us, none of us need to be
restrained.
If you don't want to, that's fine, but I'm not staying chained.
I don't mind if I lose any blood on the way to salvation,
because mankind needs to open their eyes and see this revelation.

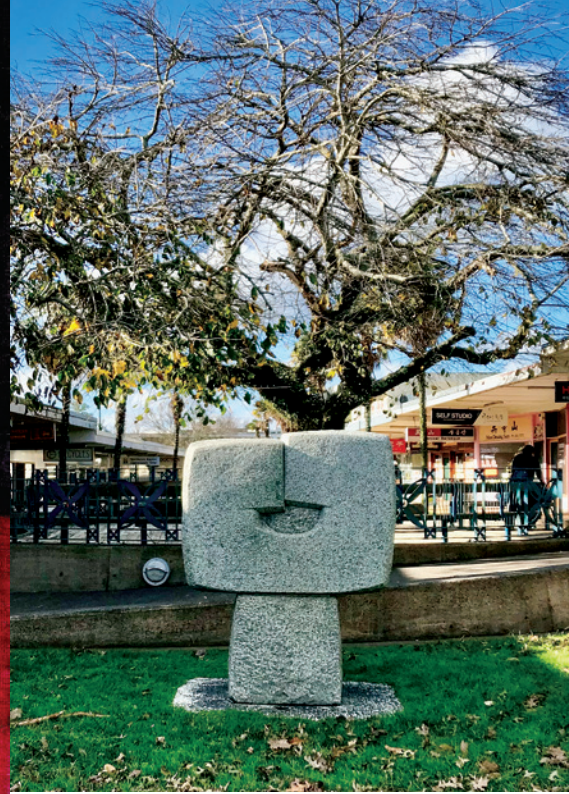
And I'll fight with the strength that I've got until I die,
I'll do what it takes, honouring those who flew high.
Potential is what we have, I definitely won't lie.
We can fight this disease, if we can just get up and try.

I'm gonna stand up, victorious and loud.
Show off my true self, and I'll make them proud.
I hope they smile, those ones who ascended into the clouds.
Just know, I'll be willing to bring freedom to many crowds.

Can't you see it? Can you hear freedom's call?
It's ready to accept everyone and embrace all.
In this life, you have two options, with two consequences to employ.
Be the one to give joy, and not the one that destroys.

Kāore ōku hiahia
ki te Pakango

ISHA NAIR, Year 8



CREDITS

Project Lead: Erin Tiplady

Editing: Erin Tiplady, Noah Meggitt, Jonathan Longstaff

Graphic Design: Jonathan Longstaff

Cover Art: Scarlett Chen (Year 8)

Interior Art: Axel Barnett, Zoey Brunt, Lily Burton, Romane Cassany,
Emily Freed, Amelia Kapitan, Kate Herring, Isha Nair, Aria Powell,
Nicole Ye, Yiyi Yin, Moore Zhang

Photography: Room 1 – Beau Bradley, Mikayla Healey, Codan Junior
Kingi; Room 8 – Theo Allen

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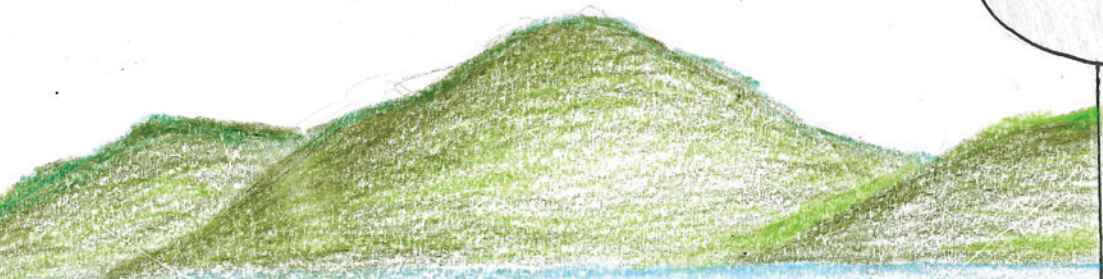
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