



WHAKARONGO KI TE REO MĀTĀTAHI

VOLUME V

Writing and artwork
from the young people
of Glen Innes

YOUTH
VOICES



TE HONONGA
AKORANGA
COMET



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PENI LIU, Year 7



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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

Welcome to the fifth volume of *Whakarongo ki te Reo Mātātahi*, showcasing the powerful writing of Room 12 at Glenbrae School. We were so excited to take on this project as a class. As their teacher, I've had the privilege of witnessing each student's journey. The effort, honesty and heart they poured into their writing has truly been inspiring.

Guided by our inquiry topic, "Choices Change Communities," we explored how the decisions we make can create real change. This led us to look closely at the issues within our own community.

The students dug deep, speaking openly about what they see and how they believe change can happen. We would like to sincerely thank the team at COMET for making this project possible for our tamariki.

Their stories are emotional, raw and courageous. Some even wondered if their truths should be published, but we have learnt that silence never creates change; speaking up is the first step toward it.

And so we chose to use our voices.

Here are our stories.
Here are our voices.
Here are our hearts.

Cardell Tino

Deputy Principal
Glenbrae School

Each year, this Youth Voices kaupapa grows in ways that continue to remind us of the creativity and insight our rangatahi carry. Volume V of *Whakarongo ki te Reo Mātātahi* is no exception.

Every edition brings something new, and this one marks a meaningful shift. For the first time, the book has been created by a single class within one kura. That smaller setting has allowed these ākonga to dive more deeply into their ideas, supported closely by their kaiako as they shaped and refined their stories.

What this class has produced is thoughtful, honest and grounded in who they are, individually and together. Their work adds another layer to the wider journey of Youth Voices, showing once again how powerful it can be when young people are given the space to express themselves.

The stories in this volume don't sugar coat the world our young people are growing up in. In some cases, they respectfully challenge us as adults to be curious as to how young people find themselves navigating some of the societal challenges that have come about through one generation!

This collection stands as a celebration of their voices: stories that offer insight, challenge assumptions and reflect the growing confidence of rangatahi across Aotearoa. Volume V continues that movement with heart, depth and genuine pride in the young people who shaped it.

Noah Meggitt

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

Strength in My Roots

Joelle Hetaraka, Year 8

I was born in a small town in Aotearoa, the land of my ancestors. From a young age, I knew I was different. Not just because of my warm brown skin and the stories my whānau shared with me but because being Māori came with its own unique challenges.

At school, I used to feel invisible. My classmates didn't always understand my culture and would sometimes make up assumptions based on stereotypes. I heard whispers about Māori being 'lazy' or 'troublemakers', and those words stung deeply. I wondered why people couldn't see the strength and wisdom in my *whakapapa* (genealogy).

At home, my family didn't really speak Te Reo Māori, but the stories and values of my *tūpuna* (ancestors) were always part of who I am. Still, outside of that, I often felt the weight of discrimination. Teachers sometimes expected less from me. Some shops watched me with suspicion. I was constantly reminded I didn't quite fit the *Pākehā* (non-Māori) idea of success.

Even though I'm only 13, these challenges have shaped me in unexpected ways. Instead of shrinking, I grew fiercer. I found strength in my culture by learning what I could and joining kapa haka groups at school, where I could express myself through waiata and haka and connect with others who share my heritage.

My journey hasn't been easy. I've lost friends who didn't understand me, felt the sting of racism and battled moments of doubt. But with every setback, I've discovered more about who I am and who I want to be.

My courage inspired others. Slowly, the whispers changed. People began asking questions, listening and learning. I realised that being Māori isn't just part of me. It's my superpower. It gives me roots to stand tall, even when the world tries to knock me down.

My story is one of resilience, pride and hope. A reminder that even though the journey might be tough, embracing who I am can change the world around me.

JOELLE HETARAKA



Housing is a Big Problem in Our Community

Indiana Thomson, Year 8

A big problem in our community is housing. I mean, think about it, people are being forced out of their homes and they are given a small amount of time to pack up their stuff and leave, but the main struggle is finding a new home.

Local housing businesses are removing old houses and making new, cramped, small apartments that are expensive, so think about the people already struggling and then they're being forced out of their home, and they can't afford a new house.

This leads to them having no other choice but to live on the streets, in cars, in crowded dangerous areas or in homeless shelters. Being homeless with no money can lead to stealing and even worse crimes. With little hope, it's no wonder people turn to drug and alcohol use.

We need hope in our community. We need to see people come together, to help each other out. It won't get better if we do nothing.

A Big Problem in Glen Innes

Ali Teohaere, Year 8

One of the biggest issues we need to address in our community is the selling and the use of drugs. This harms our community in many ways and can seriously hurt people for no good reason.

Smoking, drinking and using drugs are all dangerous. Smoking, for example, damages your lungs, and alcohol or drug abuse can lead to reckless behaviour like drunk driving, which puts everyone at risk.

I've lived in Glen Innes for a few years, and while some of those years were tough, I also had some good friends from Point England and Ruapotaka School.

Back then, there were some fun memories, but the streets were dangerous. Many people were using drugs, and there were even people asking for money, like homeless people, on my street.

When homeless people ask me for money and other stuff, I feel annoyed because I feel like they're gonna spend the money on drugs or smokes or like stupid stuff, but at the same time I feel sad for them because they don't have a job or shelter.

This issue affects everyone. Drugs hurt individuals, families and the whole community. We need to work together to make our streets safer and healthier for everyone.

By the way, this is what I think. It is my perspective, and it is important to me.



Addictions: A Community Problem

Sela Haunga, Year 7

A problem in our community is that we have a lot of vape and alcohol shops, and people going around selling illegal stuff, so shop keepers need to look out for kids who have fake IDs who are trying to buy stuff that kids are not supposed to have.

I'm not talking about kids 13–17. I'm talking about people that are in their 20s–40s, and if you're a parent who allows your kids to do whatever they want, be careful because you might not know what they've been doing to themselves or to other people. This is a message for the parents who let their kids do anything — please look after your kids so they are safe and healthy.

Vape and alcohol shops are becoming increasingly prevalent in many communities, but their presence can have negative consequences for public health. Vape shops often market vaping products as safer to smoke, despite growing evidence linking them to serious health issues, especially among young people. Many of these shops cater to teens and young adults, promoting products with appealing flavors that mask the harmful effects of nicotine and other chemicals.

Similarly, alcohol shops. While legal, they contribute to the normalisation of excessive drinking, which can lead to addiction, impaired judgment and long-term physical damage.

The easy accessibility of both vapes and alcohol creates an environment where unhealthy habits are encouraged, often without sufficient education on the risks involved. This combination can lead to increased rates of substance abuse and a negative impact on overall public well-being.

This is just a message to stop putting so many alcohol and vape shops near our community because it can be dangerous for kids and even for our animals! This is a message for kids who are doing those things and to please say NO! Stay safe and look after your parents.

SELA HAUNGA



The Problem with Alcohol

Awanui Wakeling-Mihaka, Year 8

Hello, I am writing this because alcohol abuse is a big problem in my community. There's too much alcohol, and people spend too much time drinking it. It not only affects their health in a negative way, but it also affects their financial situation, social life and the people around them.

Here are the side effects of drinking alcohol:

- My first major concern is the financial strain. Buying alcohol is an expensive habit and can put a burden on your wallet. In the long run, you'll be spending hundreds or even thousands of dollars on alcohol. Why spend all this money for a few minutes of satisfaction when you could be spending money on rent and food?
- My second reason is that it will affect your social life and the people around you because when you're drunk, you can say or do things that can hurt someone. This can change how others see you and damage relationships with friends and family.
- My third reason is that it affects your mental health. Alcohol can contribute to a bad mental state. It can lead to problems such as depression, anxiety, psychosis and mood swings. It can also affect your brain, leading to memory loss and difficulties in learning. Imagine this happening to your loved ones. You wouldn't want them to suffer like this.
- My fourth reason is your physical wellbeing. The immediate effects of drinking alcohol are vomiting, nausea and dizziness. If you drink alcohol constantly for a long time, it will lead to cardiovascular damage, liver damage, increased cancer chances and digestive issues.

How does this affect our community? In Glen Innes, we see the effects of alcohol nearly everywhere you go. Alcohol also contributes to ruining the environment because people just dump their bottles of alcohol anywhere they feel like. I always see litter around liquor stores, parks and under bridges, and it's caused by people drinking.

I have had real experiences with people who abuse alcohol, like when my cousins were drinking with my uncles, and they started throwing stuff around and smashing things. That could happen to your family members, too.

One of the most serious problems caused by alcohol is family violence. There have been 175,573 calls about family violence this year — that's 480 calls every day, one call every 3 minutes — and 80% of family violence cases go unreported. Family violence mostly happens because of alcohol, this is a major problem in Aotearoa and it has to stop.

This is why I personally believe alcohol in my community should have more regulations because it has more negative effects than positive effects, and it's slowly ruining the community.

How It Feels to Be Around My Cousins

Samsoni Wilco, Year 7

My name is Samsoni, but most people just call me Sam.

I'm one of the youngest cousins in my family, which is cool but also kind of annoying at the same time. I love my cousins, but they can get on my nerves sometimes.

We're always arguing or beefing about random stuff. Most of the time I just want to hang out and have fun, but someone always starts something, and then it turns into drama.

I keep saying I don't want to fight. I just want to chill and spend time together because you never know when it might be the last time you see them.

I guess that's sort of like a community, too. If everyone keeps arguing, nothing really works, but when people get along and help each other, things just feel better.

That's what I want for my family and for my community, too.

SAMSONI WILCO



The Vape Problem

Sebastian Fakahau, Year 8

A significant problem in our community is that a lot of people vape, even kids and teenagers. Some people think vaping is safe or that it helps them fit in, but it can actually hurt your lungs and make you addicted to it.

I've seen people vape near schools and parks, and it makes me sad because it's not healthy and can make others want to try it, too. Vaping might look cool at first, but it's really not worth the risks.

When I first saw my brother vape, I didn't really know what he was doing. He was standing outside, and when I went closer, he blew out a big cloud of smoke that smelled kind of sweet. I thought it looked cool for a second, but then I realized it wasn't just smoke; it was something bad for him.

I felt a little worried because I didn't want him to get sick. I asked him why he did it, and he just said it helped him relax. I didn't really understand that, but I wished he would stop because I don't like seeing him do something that could hurt him.

To help stop vaping, we can start by learning the truth about how dangerous it really is. Teachers and parents can talk to kids about why vaping is bad, and friends can remind each other not to do it. Schools can also have clubs or fun activities that help kids stay busy and make good choices.

If we all support each other and speak up when we see someone vaping, we can make our community a healthier and happier place for everyone.

Overpriced Groceries

Patriot Cummings, Year 8

A problem I've encountered in the community is overpriced groceries or necessities.

Have you ever noticed how expensive groceries are in Auckland? It feels like every time you go to the supermarket, the prices have gone up again! Even simple things like bread, milk, and apples cost way more than they used to. Sometimes it feels like you need a whole lot of money just to buy the basics.

Lots of people talk about how hard it is to afford healthy food. Some families have to choose between buying enough fruit and veggies or getting cheaper snacks. It's not fair because everyone should be able to eat good food. Some kids even swap things in their lunchboxes at school to try new things or just get enough to eat.

It's impossible to ignore the change, especially when walking through the aisles of any supermarket. The shelves are lined with everyday items now priced like luxuries. Eggs were always in our kitchen; now they are over \$10.00 a carton. Tomatoes and bananas are crazy prices!

The price tags seemed to have a life of their own, creeping higher with each passing week. The cost of living has quietly crept up, like a rising tide, and before anyone realised it, Auckland has become one of the most expensive cities in the world to buy groceries.



PATRIOT CUMMINGS, Year 8

My Poem about Vaping

Tini Masua, Year 8

By 2025, Auckland had become a city of clouds. What started as a trendy alternative to smoking quickly took over. Workers in the CBD to teenagers on Queen Street, people couldn't go an hour without puffing away. The air, once Crisp and clean, was now taken with thick puffy air.

Local health reports began raising alarms. Vaping wasn't just annoying, it was dangerous. People were vaping in places like libraries, and some couldn't go an hour without a puff. The air quality was suffering, and the city once clear was smothered by a never-ending cycle of bad air.

Students as young as 12 are being caught often in school rooms or behind buildings. Some Auckland schools report many per week with staff finding vape pens in pencil cases or hoodie sleeves.

Teachers and principals find it harder to monitor than smoking because the devices are small and don't leave a smell. It was so bad, it got banned in Australia, because the population of the kids who vape, it got out of hand.

Will New Zealand follow suit? Or will they turn a blind eye?

RONAN THOMPSON, Year 6





Communities: The Good, The Bad, The Ugly

Tupou Sheppard, Year 8

A community comes with many things, problems included. One of the biggest problems in the community is rubbish. Rubbish that comes from humans who don't recycle or put their rubbish in the bin. Their laziness makes the earth not clean. To keep the earth clean, help pick up rubbish; not just from the land, but also the sea.

One big problem that's still in the community is vaping. Vapes are made for adults, but kids use them because of how some vapes look. And because they see adults using them! Vapes look yum because of the flavours like bubble gum and cotton candy. It makes kids want to try it because who wouldn't want to try bubble gum or cotton candy? I almost tried vaping because of the flavour.

Another reason why kids try vaping is because they want to fit in with the people around them, and they want to be cool. I know people who have begged their parents for vapes even though they are underaged. I even remember someone lying to their parents for money to buy food, but one minute later they are in the alley way using a brand new vape.

Vaping has gotten so bad that kids are ending up in hospital with lung problems, which means they vaped too much and their health has got affected by it. We can stop kids from vaping by spreading the news of what vaping does to your lungs. Or maybe you could become really good at something else, like gaming. Sometimes the best way to stop a bad habit is to replace it with something else you love doing.

If you didn't know, video games and vapes are kinda the same, because they both have addictive stuff. Vapes contain nicotine, which gives you a short buzz. Video games do something similar. They cause something called dopamine. Dopamine makes you feel rewarded and positive, but video games don't kill your lungs, so the better thing to use would be video games.

TUPOU SHEPPARD

Where Hard Work Got Me

Kahurangi Emery, Year 8

I used to think that only smart people made it into good schools, but now I know it's not just being smart. It's also about how much effort and heart you put into everything you do. Not only smart people make it into good school but hardworking and determined people do, too. Ever since I was young, people always said *"hard work always pays off"*, but I didn't really understand it until it started happening to me.

As the eldest daughter in a big family, I've learnt what real responsibility feels like. I help out at home, look after others and still stay up late trying to finish my school work.

Sometimes it's not about how naturally good you are at something, it's about how much you're willing to try, even when things get hard. Being the eldest means I have to be strong for everyone, even when I feel like breaking down.

There were times when my mind felt tired, and my heart felt heavy when I wanted to give up. But I didn't. I kept pushing because you never know what's waiting for you at the end. Whether it was on a field playing sport or studying late into the night, I gave everything I had. I've faced moments where people doubted me or tried putting me down, but even when I felt invisible, I kept going.

The day I got that letter saying I was accepted into Auckland Girls' Grammar School, I couldn't stop smiling. It wasn't just about getting into a good school; it was proof that all my effort, in everything I do, really meant something. My family was proud of me, my coaches were proud of me and, most importantly, I was proud of myself.

I didn't just get into Auckland Girls' Grammar because I worked hard at school. I got in because I never gave up. Whether it was balancing my family duties, my schoolwork or pushing myself in sport. It all showed me that when you give your best in everything, you'll always find success somewhere.

I don't just want good things happening to me. I want good things to happen to our community, too. I've seen a lot of things that shouldn't be happening, and it hurts to see people give up on their goals or lose their way.

I didn't really like the local high school because of the things I saw and heard there. I saw with my own eyes how some students were treated and how a lot of things were just ignored or let slide. I wanted to be in a college where I could learn, grow and gain knowledge, a place that pushes me to be better, not just to fit in. That's why I chose a different path for myself.

Because I didn't just get into Auckland Girls' Grammar; I earned it. Through every challenge, every training and every moment I refused to give up. And now, I want to use everything I've learnt to help change things around me to show my community that, when you work hard, believe in yourself and never give up, anything is possible.



KAHURANGI EMERY, Year 8

Prices Keep Going Up!

Pearl Haare-Tawhai, Year 8

Have you gone to the shops and wanted to buy a chocolate bar, but you only had \$10 when it costs \$15? Well, that has happened to me, and I was very disappointed. So let's talk about these prices going up.

Shopping is so expensive nowadays, and what I hate about it the most is that my family and I can't get what we need for the house, and we can't get what we need for ourselves and for our body to be healthy.

We not only have ourselves to look after, but we also have animals that need their food to nourish and keep them energetic throughout the day.

That's why I'm so glad we have a GI community service. It provides the food and toiletries we need for our household.

Our community is so special because we have a restaurant named Tatou, which means 'everybody eats'. The restaurant allows anyone to be invited for free, which means no making reservations, but it's optional if you want. The best part is that the food is absolutely FREE!

I have visited Tatou before and have had a good experience. The waiters and servers are so nice, and their menu is a full course meal. Their food is delicious, and I would recommend going there if you are struggling because of the high prices for everything.

Tatou and our GI community is a blessing when prices are very high at shops, because they provide us with the stuff we need at home. Prices are going up. So let's make a difference and create more communities that help us with our needs.



PEARL HAARE-TAWAHI

We Have Problems

Jordan Taloa, Year 7

A big problem I can see in our community is people vaping and smoking. When I go for walks, I see kids my age or a little bit older vaping, and it is harming their lungs. It's strange that their parents give them the vapes, and they do it so they look cool and then it becomes an expensive addiction.

To help with this problem, they should close down vape shops if they don't ask for ID. But I think they should mostly close them down because the parents buy it for the kids to get around this, which they shouldn't.

It's a waste of money spending it on the vapes. Instead they should spend it on the more important stuff like food, water and all the stuff you need to survive. Some of the kids' parents force them to sell the drugs so they don't go to jail and so they can make money.

Another problem I have seen is people keep throwing their rubbish everywhere, and it is not good for the animals and the pollution. We have to think about how we are hurting the animals and the Earth because it already hurts enough.

This is why we took away plastic straws and cups. And now we have paper straws to reduce the amount of plastic thrown away. Paper is definitely better, but I don't like how they get soggy and ripped.

Rubbish everywhere makes it look like we don't have any pride in our community. It makes it look messy and not loved. And that makes me sad, because we should love where we live.

JORDAN TALOA



How Can We Change Our Community for the Better?

Marcus Vitano Sefilino, Year 7

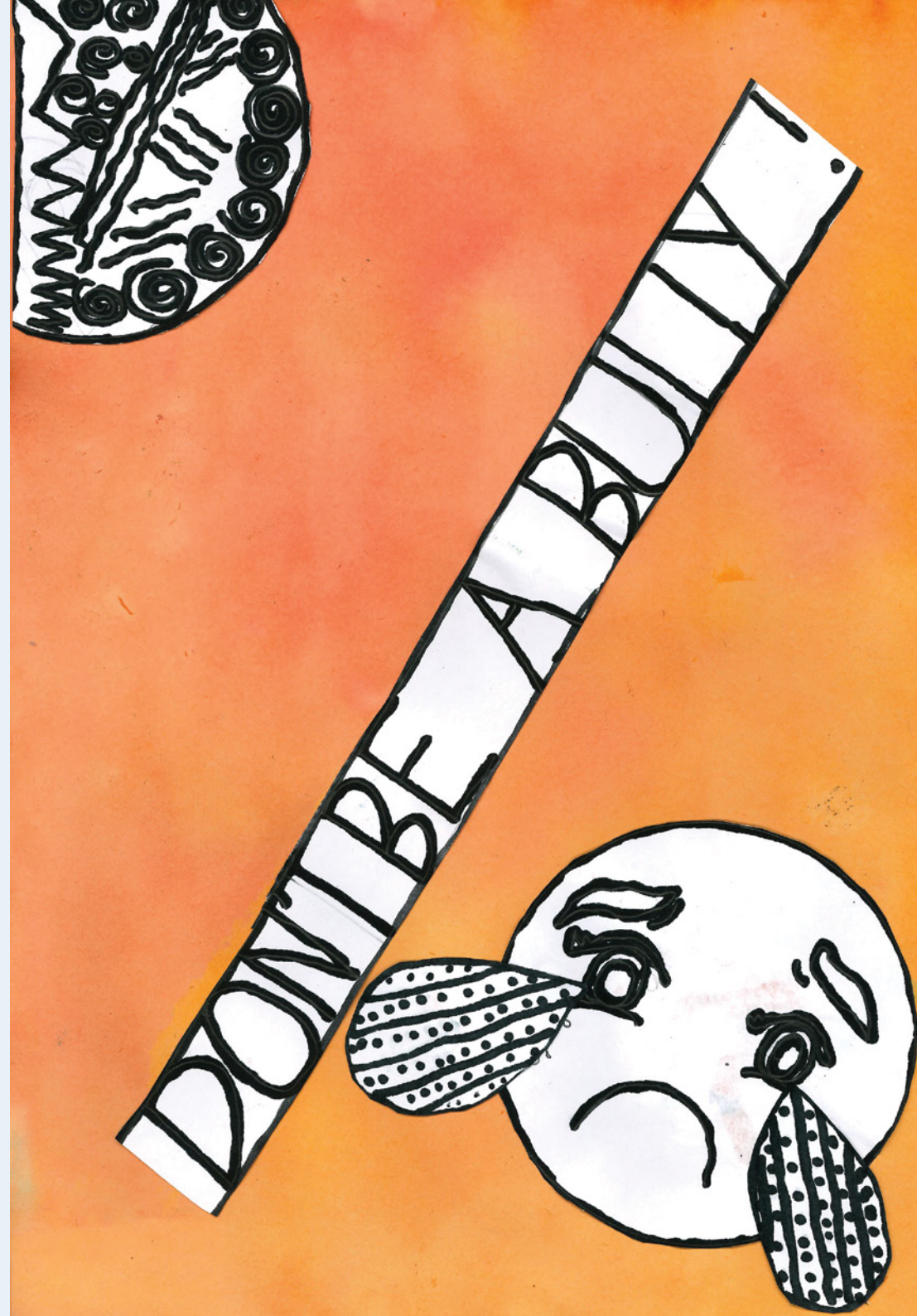
One thing that needs to be changed in the community is bullying and cyber bullying. Children around my age find it difficult to connect with other children. This leads to depression and anxiety because it creates sadness and fear.

Bullying and cyber bullying needs to change because it affects our courage to face the day. Watch out cause this might lead into suicidal thoughts or worse.

So be careful of what you say! Because I have been through this before and it's not good. Bullying is emotional and unhealthy. Some people mock other people by saying mean stuff like swearing. We can change this by being kind and supportive to one another.

But one thing about me is that I have been through both cyber bullying and bullying. It made me emotional and weak, but as days flew by, and I knew that I was not going to let that bully destroy me, I stood strong with a smile and let it go. So don't let the bully let you down AND DON'T BE A BULLY.

MARCUS VITANO SEFILINO





JOEL GOODDAY

Problems in Our Community

Joel Goodday, Year 8

In the busy city of Tāmaki, not everything is as simple as it seems. While some people have homes, food and jobs, others face struggles that often go unnoticed.

One of the biggest community problems we have is homelessness. Every day homeless people sit on street corners or outside shops. Some are older, some are younger and some are even families with children. They carry everything they own in small bags and trolleys.

I remember seeing a man in the cold. I wondered where he had slept the night before or if he had eaten.

Later, I learned that some people become homeless because they lose jobs, can't afford rent or face family or health problems. It's not a choice. It's a struggle just to survive.

Homelessness isn't the only problem in our community, but it affects many others. People without homes can't get proper healthcare, education or even a safe place to rest. This creates bigger problems, like hunger, illness and sometimes crime.

Seeing these problems made me realise how important it is to notice and care about others. Homelessness shows that our community can be unfair, but it also shows that kindness, awareness and action can make a difference.

Stop Using Drugs

Gara Wijohn, Year 8

Every day, people's lives are being affected by the use of drugs and other more inappropriate stuff. My job here is to talk about the side effects and causes of why people are doing drugs. I'll try to help convince people to do the right thing!

Say no to drugs

In order to stop drug use, we need to start saying no to drugs. The reason why saying no to drugs is good is because it helps stop suicide rates going up, it will prevent having bad side effects to your health and it can help you have more control of your emotions and actions towards others including yourself.

Choose to be healthy

Choosing to be healthy is an excellent decision to make. Being healthy can change your life. It can lead to a happier and longer life time, and it could also prevent you from diseases. Not only does it prevent you from diseases, it also helps you have a better mindset, which can make your body stronger. This could also improve your moods and how you react in the day.

Start a new happy life

In terms of creating a new life, you must stop doing drugs, making bad choices, creating bad habits and start eating healthy. Set good goals and boundaries; and be positive about yourself. Once you've gotten out of drugs, you will see how good your health is. After a week, you notice lots of changes with your body. Also you could get a job, have a good family and more.

In conclusion, stopping drug use not only helps you have a better life but also helps you create a better habit. It makes you make good decisions!

GARA WIJOHN



The Problems in Our Community

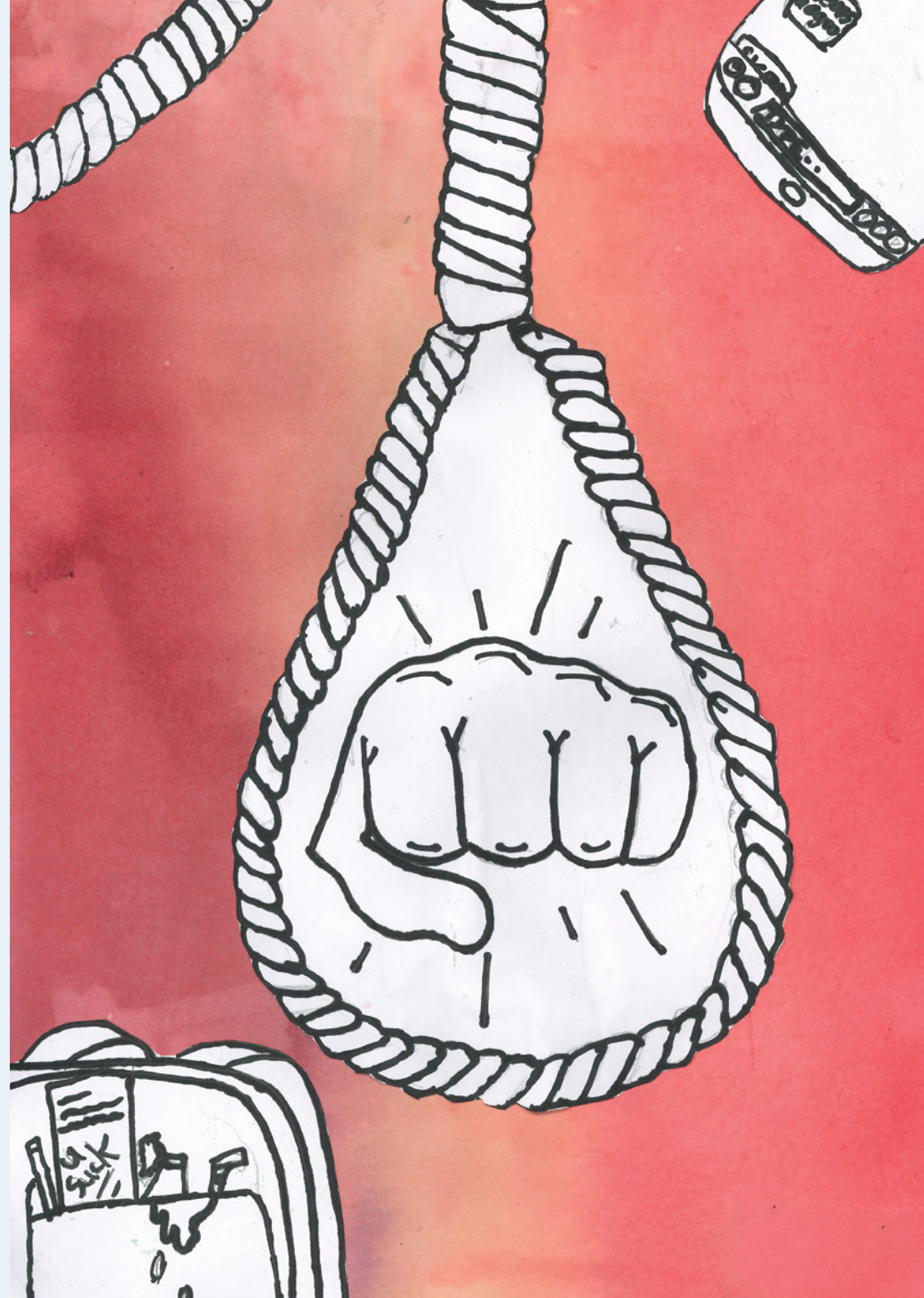
Diamond Lui, Year 8

In my opinion, bullying is a serious problem in New Zealand. Bullying can be physical, verbal, social or online. It can lead to suicidal thoughts or worse, hurting yourself badly. The people that bully other people must have family issues at home or do it because they think it's fun and have nothing to do in their lives. Even your own parents can be the person bullying you, which is not right.

Lots of islanders go through cyber bullying every single day on social media. They can post mugshots of innocent people online, writing a hate paragraph about them or spreading rumours that aren't true or in real life.

I don't think this behaviour shows humans as kind and caring. It is mean, hurtful and can be fatal.

DIAMOND LUI





There's a Drinking Problem in My Community

Sivihiva Muli, Year 8

A serious problem in my community is that heaps of Polynesian people drink a lot. In my community, a lot of people have a problem with drinking too much alcohol. It's sad because it sometimes makes them act in a bad way or get sick.

Some parents don't take care of their kids properly because they drink too much, and that hurts families. I see people drinking even during the day, and it makes the streets feel unsafe sometimes.

I think there should be more fun and safe things to do so people don't feel like they need to drink all the time. Our community would be a better place if people got help and support to stop drinking too much.

SIVIHIVA MULI

The Ultimate Reason Why We Should Stop Bullying

Deondre Kereama, Year 8

The ultimate reason why we should stop bullying is because it causes deep, lasting harm to individuals and society as a whole. Bullying is not just teasing; it can destroy anybody's confidence, create mental health issues like anxiety and depression and, in some cases, lead to self harm or suicide.

From my past experience, I have seen people I know in my class get bullied because of the way they look or because of their weight. No one deserves to feel unsafe or unwanted simply for being different.

When bullying is tolerated, it creates a lot of fear and cruelty, rather than one of empathy and respect. By choosing to stand against bullying, we protect human dignity; build stronger, more inclusive communities; and show that kindness and respect are more powerful than hate.

People may start bullying others for a variety of reasons, past experiences or wanting control. Sometimes, individuals bully to feel powerful or just because they want to fit in with other people, especially in environments where authority is rewarded. Others may have experienced bullying themselves, using their frustration as a way to deal with their own pain or to prevent becoming a target again.

In some cases, bullying behavior is learned from home or other environments where disrespect or aggression is normal. A lack of empathy or understanding the harm can lead people to bully without fully realising the impact of their actions.

Bullying needs to stop because it is causing deep, lasting harm to individuals and society.

Hood Rats!

Paaka Rarere, Year 7

I think we need more places for kids, like arcades or parks. Right now, too many kids are out on the streets with nothing to do. If they have nothing fun to do, they might start getting involved in things like fighting and vaping. Vaping is a big problem with kids in New Zealand.

What I really want to say is that kids should be allowed to just be kids, and we need more places for kids to have fun.

Most kids I know vape, and there is a huge chance they can get into drugs and end up on the streets or worse. And those kids could have the potential to do amazing things like being a doctor or a police officer, etc. I see kids who are smart but don't use what they have, like their brains.

I have seen kids my age who have to look after their grandparents, younger siblings or parents. That's a lot of pressure to carry. It's no surprise that some of these kids turn to drugs, cigarettes or vaping to cope. I feel bad for them, but sometimes, the choices they make contribute to their problems. Of course, not every kid on the street is there because of their own decisions, but many are.

That's why I believe we need more safe, fun places for kids to hang out. If kids have better options, like parks or arcades, they might stay off the streets and away from bad influences.

Let's give kids the chance to enjoy their childhood and grow up with hope for a better future.



The Price of Being a Poly Girl

Kira Mata, Year 8

Being a Polynesian girl is more difficult than you think. Some may say it's a flex or something you use against someone, but as a Poly girl I reckon those are just cover-ups for us Polynesians. In this story, I will share the reality of what really happens in the mindset of us Poly girls.

I am a Polynesian girl born with a heart that carries oceans, but sometimes it feels like I'm drowning in them. People see my smile, but they don't see the weight I hold, the expectations of my family, the silence I keep so they don't worry. At home, I hear laughter, but I also hear the tired sighs of my parents working too hard. I try my best to help my parents even if it's something little.

I give my best in everything I do, just to make my parents and family members proud. Sometimes giving your all in everything can be tiring and exhausting. But there's a hope that there might be something big waiting for you at the end. You should never stop something because you're not as good at it, because you can become better by learning from it. You can start not as good, then finish off amazing.

I am a Polynesian girl who just wants to be seen and respected by others. I am a girl who cares for others and has a big heart. People might not notice how hard it is to be a Polynesian girl because they just take it as a flex or something you can use against us.

I'm the type of Polynesian girl who will try my best in everything even if it means doing things I've never done before just to make it in life. It's not easy being a Polynesian because you don't know what us Polynesians have to go through. It's not as easy as you think.

There are also times where I can't say certain things to anyone, especially my parents. You might think, "*Why don't you tell your parents?*" It's not always easy. We all have different parents and they all act differently. But there's a feeling where I don't know how to tell my parents just by the way they will react. There's a time where I have to keep to myself and don't let anyone know because of how they would think of me or how they will react.

KIRA MATA

Healthcare Workers on Strike

Kalolaine Tamale, Year 8

I am writing about the problems of health workers, such as doctors and nurses, going on strike.

Overworking shifts

Doctors and nurses have been working very hard to provide the health and care that patients need. But did you know that doctors have been working double shifts?!

In my opinion, I think that doctors who are working double shifts need some rest because it could affect their own health and mood, which could cause a risk to patients' lives! But doctors are not just working double shifts for patients ... they're also working to get a pay rise!

Money talks

Talking about double shifts, did you know that doctors don't get enough money? Well, that's one of the reasons. People may think that's unfair because they've been helping patients or our family members with their medications. That's why doctors and nurses are going on strike!

Work stoppage/strike

As I was saying about doctors not getting enough money, because of low payments, doctors and nurses have been going on strike. Doctors go on strike to protest about how they're not getting paid enough or their shifts don't equal the same amount they're checked for. But doctors going on strike causes a bad effect on hospitals and patients who are in need.

In conclusion, we need more doctors and nurses in life. I feel very disappointed in doctors going on strike because there are people out there who need help. In my opinion, I think that doctors should be doctors for helping people, not protesting about not getting paid enough.

KALOLAINE TAMALE



Problems in My Community

Elena Tahí, Year 8

A problem in our community is drug addicts who just stay around Glen Innes. Drug addiction is a serious issue that not only affects the individuals struggling, but it is also harming the kids because when kids walk past them, they blow the smoke in the kids' faces, and it goes down to their lungs and it smells really bad. The drugs affect their lungs and their brain; scenarios come into their brain, and they think it's real, but nothing is actually happening or it's not there, which makes people think they are hallucinating.

Another problem is crime. People are shoplifting (stealing). Some people think it is OK to just walk in a shop and hide the stuff in jumpers or bags. Some people shoplift because of peer pressure, for fun or wanting something you're not allowed to have. Others do it because they don't have any money.

Ram raids are kind of similar, just more unsafe. It's when you drive your car into the store and then it smashes through the glass or the wall, then you take as much belongings from the store as you can. There have been 55 ram raids this year, and that is not good, but in 2022, there were 329 ram raids, which is a big difference. Nobody wins. The shop owners face big bills; some close their shops or put their prices up to cover the cost.

The other problem I have noticed in our community is the road. There are a lot of road works, so it takes longer to get somewhere if you live far away, and also the buses, when they stop to let the people off, have to stop in the middle of the road to let them off, which is taking longer for the people at the back to get where they need to go. For example, I live like eight minutes away from school, and with the road works on, it takes me 13 minutes to get to school.

All these problems affect everyone. They make our community less pleasant to be in and can cause happy people to get angry and feel unsafe when they see the bad things that happen in their homes.

ELENA TAHÍ

Homeless

Connie Anania-Talanoa, Year 8

Beneath the stars,
they wander slow,
with nothing but the night to know.

No roof, no bed, no warmth to feel,
Just empty streets, a world that's real.

They carry hope in broken hands,
a fleeting dream, like shifting sands.

Yet still they walk, with silent grace,
in search of peace, a resting place.

Being homeless is hard but with every day a fight,
a battle for survival in the cold, endless night.

The world moves fast, while you're stuck in place,
chasing a hope you can barely embrace.

Being homeless is hard so be kind not cruel.
Don't make fun of people living rough.



CONNIE ANANIA-TALANOA

The Struggles in My Community

Peni Liu, Year 7

In my community, there are a lot of problems happening, and sadly, many of them are caused by people themselves. Some people don't seem to care about the impact they're having on the world or how things look around them.

For example, I've never thrown rubbish on the ground, but I see it everywhere. It's clear it's from people who don't think twice about the mess they leave behind. It's frustrating because they don't realise that by littering, they're not just ruining the environment but also making the area feel less safe and welcoming for everyone. Sometimes I wonder why people act this way. It's so rude and inconsiderate.

There are also times when I see homeless people selling drugs, which is heartbreaking because it shows how hard their lives must be. But what's even more concerning is the amount of vapes that get left on the ground. These vapes can be dangerous, and kids who don't know better might pick them up, not understanding the risks. It's scary to think that something as small as a discarded vape could cause serious harm to a child.

In some communities, homelessness can lead to serious struggles like addiction and involvement in illegal activities, including selling drugs. People without stable housing often feel desperate to survive, and for some, selling drugs becomes a way to earn money or fund their own habits.

However, these actions are often the result of deeper issues, such as lack of access to mental health care, job opportunities or affordable housing.

While some individuals may resort to these out of necessity, it's important to understand that the root causes of homelessness are complex. Addressing these challenges requires both immediate support and long-term solutions focused on rebuilding lives and providing opportunities for recovery.

People often don't realise the consequences of their actions, like how leaving rubbish on the ground or selling drugs can hurt others, especially the younger generation, who are more vulnerable to these dangers. It's a reminder that we all need to think more carefully about how we treat each other and the world around us.



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