




2024 Whakatipu Wāhine Toa Report



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Whakatipu Wāhine Toa is a leadership development course designed by Wāhine Māori for Wāhine Māori in mid-level leadership, who are aspiring for higher leadership roles in the sport, recreation and exercise community.

Introduction

In early November 2024, WISPA welcomed 18 Wāhine Māori from across the sport/physical activity sector for our inaugural Whakatipu Wāhine Toa - Māori Women's Leadership Programme.

The programme ran from 1 – 5 November in Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington with the first three days based at Te Rau Karamu Marae, and the final two days at Victoria University as well as the Naumi Hotel. Further online zui are being held to connect and discuss implementation of learnings.



Developed and facilitated by WISPA's Māori Advisory Rōpū He Wāhine Toa kei te Kokiri, the programme aims for mana enhancing growth in leadership and capabilities, that are innately within all Wāhine Māori. The programme aims to tautoko wāhine to step strongly into their rangatira space and pave the way for others to do the same.

The Wānanga was a unique experience for the Wāhine, and has created strong bonds amongst the rōpū. With invaluable support from the Māori Women's Development Inc (MWDI), the wāhine now have access to mentoring sessions to continue their professional journey and assist them with their aspirations & plans.

Purpose & Method

This report aims to provide a summary of the value, feedback, insights, and recommendations for the future based on the pilot of the Whakatipu Wāhine Toa programme. The report was created by gathering feedback from participants, facilitators, and organisers through online surveys, along with discussions.

All 18 participants completed the post wānanga evaluation. Many provided very detailed feedback and we have provided a summary of how participants responded across the board and then selected a range of comments to exemplify this under each respective question we asked.

Facilitation team



Erin Roxburgh
Ngāti Porou



Vanessa Mill
Ngāti Porou, Ngā Puhi



Chantal Bakersmith
Ngā Puhi, Ati Haunui A
Paparangi



Prof. Sarah Leberman
MNZM

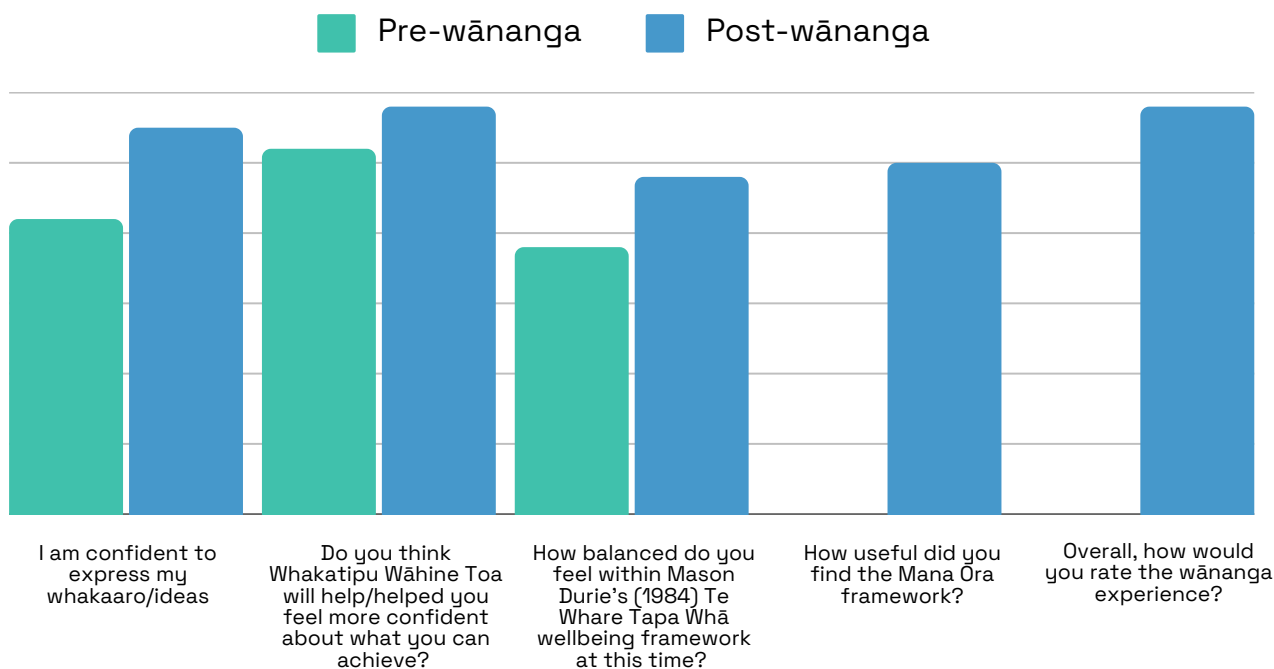
Participants

Bailey Te Maipi	Upper Hutt City Council - Recreation Advisor - Community and Founder of Waa Hine Skate
Brooke Pryor	Volleyball New Zealand
Caroline Te Paa	Aotearoa Māori Women's Netball
Cheri-Lee Atkinson	Waikato-Tainui Lawyer
Desiree Heke-Ready	Aktive Auckland Sport and Recreation - Māori Participation Co-ordinator
Dionte Kang	Auckland Rugby League - Clubs and Partnership Coordinator
Erin Steel	Sport Northland - Healthy Active Learning Facilitator Lead
Georgia Bewley	Rugby Southland - Female Lead
Janay Tauri	Sport NZ - Senior Māori Comms Advisor
Katie Smith	Blues Rugby - Partnerships Manager
Maraea Howe	Kaitohutohu Hōhenga/Activation Advisor - Māori Outcomes Auckland Council
Maylene Meroiti	Selwyn Primary School - Sports Coordinator / Head Coach Netball / President
Metiria Light	Sport Waitākere - Rautaki Maaori - Sport Waitakere, Healthy Families
Natalie Broadhead	Waikato & Bay of Plenty Football Federation - Women's Development Officer
Rawinia Everitt	Native Sports Performance
Renei Ngawati	Programme Lead/Contract Manager (Contractor)
Stephanie Te Ohaere-Fox	Canterbury Rugby - Women and Girls Lead
Vesna Radonich	International Paddling coach

Participant feedback

Post-wānanga evaluation

n = 18 participants



Rangatiratanga/Leadership

Q In what ways if any, has your understanding of rangatiratanga/ leadership changed as a result the wānanga?

Participants in the wānanga experienced meaningful growth in their understanding of leadership and rangatiratanga. Many expressed a shift from seeing leadership as an individual role to embracing a collective, holistic approach rooted in humility, responsibility, and empowerment. They emphasised that true leadership involves listening, learning, and uplifting the mana of others rather than leading in isolation. This collective strength, deeply connected to whakapapa and atua wāhine, reinforced the importance of whanaungatanga and unity in amplifying Māori wāhine voices and challenging existing structures.

A key theme was the recognition that leadership is not one-size-fits-all; rather, it is shaped by individual strengths and ancestral knowledge. Participants found inspiration in connecting with other wāhine and exploring the attributes of atua wāhine within themselves. The wānanga provided a space for reclaiming mana, deepening spiritual awareness, and broadening perspectives on leadership.

Overall, the experience reinforced that leadership is both inherent and evolving, grounded in cultural identity, collective empowerment, and the aspirations of future generations.

Participant quotes

“Through our wānanga, my understanding of rangatiratanga has deepened beyond perceived traditional leadership concepts. I now see rangatiratanga as a personification of humility, collective responsibility and the importance of empowering others. I believe true leadership isn’t just about guiding others, it also involves listening, learning from those around me and nurturing a shared vision where everyone’s mana is uplifted. This experience has shifted my focus from leading in silo to leading with others, embracing the collective voice of the community.”

“The Whakatipu Wāhine Toa wānanga gave a whole new meaning and purpose to leadership for me. Leadership is in our whakapapa, in ourselves, we all possess the attributes of our Atua Wāhine and we just need to know them better and when to call on them. The connection with other amazing wāhine was inspirational.”

“What has been reaffirmed through the wānanga is that we are far more powerful as a collective. When we come together, we see the strength of our shared mana and the deep cultural knowledge we carry. The wānanga has reminded me of the importance of whanaungatanga—the power in our connections. In isolation, our voices can be marginalized, but together, we amplify each other’s mana and create a unified force that can advocate for change and challenge the structures that diminish our leadership. Together, we are a formidable force, carrying the power of our whakapapa and the aspirations of future generations. By embracing our collective strength, we are not just navigating the existing structures but reshaping them in a way that honors our values, our mana, and our rangatiratanga as Māori wāhine.”

“I think I have better understanding of where attributes of wāhine Māori stem from. The history and learning about atua wāhine was very helpful and I could see similarities or traits which are innately within all wāhine Māori. I have a better holistic view of leadership. It’s not one glove fits all approach. There are many different ways to lead and finding the strengths you have within you and then crafting your leadership style from that is the best approach.”

“My understanding of rangatiratanga has changed more than I can put into words. I went into it wanting to learn more around wairua and leadership but learnt so much further.”

“It was also powerful to hear from each person at the wānanga what their idea of rangatiratanga/leadership looks like and be able to incorporate and add that into my understanding.”

“The wānanga has not only enabled me to embrace my understanding of rangatiratanga, it has allowed me to reclaim my Mana, ignite my Ātua Wāhine and now re-establish another platform of rangatiratanga from multiple perspectives and levels of consciousness.”



Wānanga sessions

Q What were the most useful aspects of the wānanga for your learning and development?

There were a wide variety of responses to this question with each participant finding value to varying degrees across the different wānanga sessions. Areas frequently mentioned included the atua wāhine session, creating relationships, being based at the marae and the mana ora framework.

Participants valued the wānanga's immersive and reflective environment, particularly the relaxed and holistic approach to learning at the marae, which encouraged deeper self-awareness and new perspectives on leadership. The opportunity to connect with other wāhine, share experiences, and engage with Te Ao Māori concepts such as atua wāhine and whakapapa were particularly impactful, fostering both personal growth and lasting professional relationships.

Participant quotes

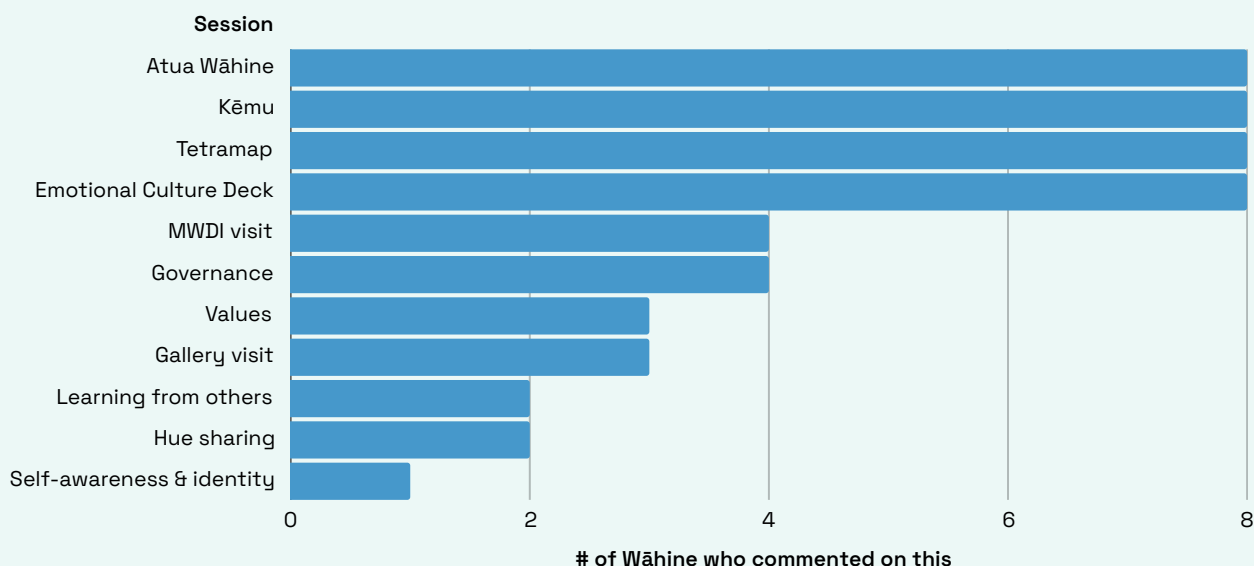
“The whanaungatanga. Talking with and hearing from other wāhine who are dealing with similar issues. I also think that because of this wānanga, I have made some really critical relationships for my mahi in Tāmaki. The facilitators and all of the workshops really lifted my thinking and knowledge base up to another standard. Nga mihi wāhine maa... You were all fantastic!!”

“Re-indigenising myself through tikanga, mātauranga atua wāhine – whakapapa and being surrounded by mana wāhine who stepped into a space of vulnerability. I am in awe of our roopuu and the space that was created for us!”

“Learning key aspects of leadership with a Te Ao Māori perspective. I felt I was able to connect with the concepts much easier especially about personal development aspects e.g. ways that I thrive and struggle and how these can be related back to transitional journey of Atua Wāhine and the process of Te Kore, Te Po, Te Ao Marama.”

“I loved the environment and the way that (especially in the marae space) the facilitators allowed us to move and relax when taking in information. Through my professional and personal life I am really fast with how I approach things and being taught in a more casual environment as well as been given lots of time for reflection has made me reevaluate how I lead and teach my current programs.”

Poll: Wānanga sessions



Q Which sessions did you enjoy the most from the wānanga?

Participants gained valuable insights by exploring atua wāhine, connecting their strengths and stories to their own identities. Visiting the Robyn Kahukiwa exhibition reinforced a sense of legacy and resilience, while small and large group discussions provided meaningful spaces for reflection and sharing.

Practical tools like tetra mapping and the Riders and Elephants card deck provided useful frameworks into improving teamwork and collaboration, especially in sports and leadership contexts. Engaging in taonga tākaro added an interactive and energizing element to the wānanga, fostering connection through movement and competition. The sessions on atua wāhine, mana wāhine, and mana ora helped participants reconnect with their purpose and reaffirm their cultural identity.

Participant quotes

“Loved the tetra mapping and further understanding of how to work alongside people, as well as the card deck from Riders and Elephants. In sport a huge part of our job is getting people to work together that may not ever do so otherwise and that was a huge reflective moment for me on how to help bridge that. As well as the incorporation of Māori Kupu into it which really helped being a bit of novelty to me from other personality tests I’ve done.”

“I loved all of the tākaro we played with Ness and the way it was integrated into each day to keep us active as well as connecting with each other through a bit of competition.”

“Atua wāhine and the connections we could make to their strengths and characteristics. Then to visit the exhibition, Robyn Kahukiwa’s art, brought the spirit of our atua wāhine alive before us, their stories in colour, their strength in form, reminding us that we are part of something eternal, a legacy of resilience, a moment through time. Reflecting on mana wāhine in small groups was also really effective. I’m all about the smaller roopu as well as the wider roopu too – there was a good balance between the two, allowing for everyone to speak and share.”

“Ātua wāhine Mana wāhine Mana ora sessions as these reconnected me back to my WHY! Allowing me to work through and understand that restarting and revitalising my AHI Kā and AHI Wā at my age is absolutely positively divine!”



Facilitators

Q Please provide any feedback on the facilitators

Participants overwhelmingly praised the facilitators for their knowledge, passion, and ability to create a safe, inclusive, and engaging learning environment. They appreciated the diverse strengths and styles each facilitator brought, ensuring that leadership and tikanga Māori were explored in a well-rounded and meaningful way. The facilitators' balance of interactive, fun, and reflective practices helped maintain focus and deepened the learning experience. Their ability to communicate complex ideas in an accessible and engaging manner was really valuable, making the sessions impactful and inspiring.

A key highlight was the facilitators' intuitive responsiveness to the energy and needs of the group, allowing the wānanga to flow naturally and align with the kaupapa. Their commitment to fostering a supportive space enabled participants to be vulnerable and share openly, something many had not experienced in a long time. The facilitators' dedication, manaakitanga, and aroha were deeply felt, contributing to a positive overall experience. They showed strong leadership, which elevated the entire programme and left participants feeling inspired, empowered, and well-supported.

Participant quotes

“Amazing Wonderful Knowledgeable Easy to approach Inspiring. All had different styles of delivery and to be able to have those conversations that kept us all safe when we needed to express the negative experiences was enlightening. We all were able to be vulnerable without judgement! something i have not felt in a loooooong time when being in a room with all women!”

“All the facilitators were so knowledgeable, inspirational and supportive. I really enjoyed that each individual was involved and able to have a turn at guiding us in their knowledge about leadership and Tikanga Māori.”

“All facilitators had a great balance of inclusive, fun, interactive practices which helps me to keep focus. Appreciate you all, each facilitator shared their passions, their strengths and it was thoughtfully and carefully woven together to create the successful shared experience we all had together.”



“I was thoroughly impressed with the facilitators throughout the wānanga. Here’s my feedback:

Outstanding Delivery: Every facilitator demonstrated a high level of expertise and passion in their sessions. Their ability to communicate complex concepts in an accessible and engaging way made the learning experience enjoyable and impactful.

Manaakitanga and Aroha: It was clear that each facilitator had put a lot of thought and preparation into their sessions. The aroha they brought to the wānanga was evident, not only in their delivery but also in how they created a safe and inclusive space for us to share, learn, and connect.

Intuitive Flow: What stood out the most was their ability to lean into the natural flow of the wānanga. They were responsive to the needs and energy of the group, adjusting their approach intuitively as required. This flexibility allowed the sessions to feel organic and aligned with the kaupapa, making the overall experience more meaningful.

Creating a Supportive Environment: The facilitators were excellent at fostering a supportive and collaborative environment. They encouraged open dialogue, actively listened to our contributions, and validated our experiences as Māori wāhine. This approach made it easy for us to engage deeply with the content and with each other.

Overall Impression: The facilitators were exceptional in every aspect. Their combination of preparation, cultural insight, and adaptability created a powerful and enriching learning environment. I felt well-supported and inspired by their leadership, and I appreciate the aroha they brought to each session.”

“Having the right facilitators makes or breaks a programme, these wāhine toa made this programme extra ordinary and extraordinary.”

“Ngā mihi nui to all the facilitators for their dedication and the manaaki they extended to us throughout the wānanga.”



Logistics

Q Please provide any feedback on the logistic of the wānanga (accomodation, kai etc.)

The different spaces the wānanga took place in worked really well for the participants. The marae provided a powerful cultural grounding and a sense of balance and connection while the hotel allowed for comfort and reflection, with thoughtful organization ensuring a smooth and well-paced flow. The kai, manaakitanga, and well-being focus made offered a rare opportunity to be looked after and fully engage in learning without the usual responsibilities.

Participant quotes

“Starting at the Marae: I loved how we began the wānanga at the marae. It was a meaningful way to ground us in Te Ao Māori, connect with our whakapapa, and set a culturally rich tone for the rest of the experience. Transition to the Hotel: Moving to the hotel afterward provided a nice balance, offering a comfortable space to rest and reflect after our sessions at the marae. It was well-organized, and the transition between locations was smooth. The kai was well-balanced, nutritious, and thoughtfully prepared. I appreciated that the meals catered to our taha tinana (physical well-being), providing healthy options that kept us energized throughout the wānanga. It was clear that there was a focus on well-being, which added to the overall positive experience.

Well-being and Flow: I appreciated the consideration given to our overall well-being during the wānanga. The schedule was well-paced, allowing for breaks and time to reflect on what we had learned. The flow of activities felt natural, and everything was well placed, enhancing the learning experience. The logistics were well thought out, and I felt cared for throughout the entire wānanga.”

“The combination of venues, the focus on well-being, and the seamless flow of activities contributed to a positive and enriching experience.”

“Marae was amazing the most beautiful marae I have ever been on, and it was what I needed to get my wairua back to balanced at the moment. The Naumi was also amazing so very blessed to be looked after. Also, the kai was amazing so happy all around.”

“The food was amazing and made this feel like a retreat. I'm sure I speak for myself and many other mamas where I don't know the last time I didn't have to cook a meal, clean the dishes and just look after someone else. I am really grateful for what maybe the only opportunity I'll have in my adult life to be looked after by someone else and fully be able to just learn and build up myself instead of worrying about everyone else.”



General

Q Any other feedback on the wānanga - things you enjoyed, things we could improve on for next time?

Participants appreciated the well-balanced schedule, the safe and inclusive space, and the ability to reflect without feeling overwhelmed. Suggestions for future development included a follow-up wānanga for continued learning, expanding support for Māori wāhine in sports, offering a version for younger wāhine, and integrating more active sessions and governance discussions.

Participant quotes

“You got the balance of wāhine right on, there was no person overpowering the wananga. This is hard to get right considering you’d never meet some of these women in real life you could only work off the bio’s that we supplied. I loved how you were able to adapt the programme to suit the flow and energy at the time. After every session who asked if there were any specifics or other areas or conversation that we would like to talk about or cover and you accommodated that well. The down time was a chance for everyone to process and reflect on the sessions that we just had and I didn’t walk away with a heavy mind at all. Busy mind yes but not a heavy mind. You got this balance right. Well Done WISPA for delivering an amazing, exceptional well planned, wairua led, purposeful wananga and that hopefully other wāhine get the opportunity to experience it.”

“I think it was great how there was enough down time and space to process and ‘just to be’ during the 5-day Wananga and how the programme wasn’t ‘over programmed’. I came out of the Wananga feeling at peace, tau and refreshed (rather than exhausted) with empowerment.”

“The way in which the space allowed us all to immediately let down any guards we may have had up when entering into it and share what our worries or doubts were about why we shouldn’t be there because we didn’t feel worthy to be there, which so many of us felt, was remarkable. I felt so safe and able to be my true self as soon as we began.”

“Being able to be in a wānanga space on a marae really can’t be beaten and was such an important part of the success of the wānanga. Having Ella and Britt there to capture the experience was so special and such an integral part of the wānanga so that we can all remember our time with each other and the images/videos can be shared to promote the kaupapa moving forward. Thank you all so much for creating such a beautiful, life changing kaupapa.”



“Thoroughly enjoyed meeting our new rōpu of tuahine and the connections that have come out of the wānanga. Loved the tākaro and the emotion cards which I have booked out 2 seperate times to share with our team.

I’m wondering if there is room to have more active sessions as options, i.e. walk/run group early each morning - after the days session OR walks up significant maunga/trails to further learn the hitori of the whenua - be good to physically link the tohu in the whaikōrero, ie maunga, moana/awa. I think also we would have also benefitted from a longer Governance session especially due to the importance of understanding liability.”

“Merran and Sarah, thank you for your time with us in a Māori space. To our wāhine Māori, ka wani kee!! Amazing work wāhine maa.”



“The wānanga was a truly empowering, enriching experience, and it was honestly a real privilege to have been chosen. I appreciated everything about it our space. Here are a few suggestions and thoughts I’d like to share:” [continued on next page]

“1. A 2.0 Wānanga for This Group of Wahine

I would highly recommend a 2.0 wānanga for this group of wāhine. The connections we built and the insights we gained are profound, continuing this journey would allow us to deepen our learning, reflect further, and build stronger, more resilient networks personal and professional. A follow-up wānanga would provide the opportunity to continue strengthening our collective voice and empowering us as Māori wāhine leaders.

2. Supporting Wahine in the Sports Sector

As a pilot program, it's extremely important to continue supporting Māori wāhine, particularly in the sports sector, so they feel heard and represented. This wānanga focused on empowering wāhine in sports, addressing specific challenges they face, and enhancing their leadership skills could have a significant impact on both individual development and broader organizational change. This could also include more case studies or practical applications around leadership in sports contexts, providing real-world relevance from Māori lenses and perspective.

3. Pilot Program Extending to 13-17-Year-Old Wahine

I also think that offering a version of this wānanga for younger wāhine (ages 13-17) could be incredibly valuable. Introducing them to the concepts of wāhine atua, self-awareness, and leadership early on could have a profound impact on their confidence, cultural identity, and leadership potential. This could also foster a sense of connection with the Māori world, providing them with tools to navigate both their personal and professional lives in the future.

4. Fostering Lifelong Connections

The wānanga was an excellent opportunity for connection and whakawhanaungatanga, and it would be great to see more ongoing support and networks built beyond the wānanga itself. A community or support system for wāhine to continue sharing experiences, resources, and wisdom with each other could ensure that the learning from the wānanga is sustained and expanded upon long after the program ends. (PS Shorty is organizing 09 area for us)

Areas for Enhancement

Understanding governance was an area which I am wanting to understand. As mentioned before, offering more time for practical application could help deepen my understanding and knowledge in this area as I am needing to update my Incorporated Society.”

“Overall Impression: The wānanga was a deeply meaningful experience, and I believe there is significant potential for growth and expansion. It was a great start, and I would love to see it continue to evolve to reach more wāhine, in the sports sector and younger generation. Thank you for providing such a powerful opportunity for learning, growth, and connection.”



Facilitator feedback

Post-wānanga evaluation

n = 3 Wāhine Māori Facilitators

For the facilitators, facilitating the Whakatipu Wāhine Toa course provided valuable experience in leading professional groups, expanding networks, and deepening knowledge of Te Ao Māori.

It provided a valuable opportunity to gain confidence, improve their facilitation and management skills, and developing their ability to observe and adapt their leadership styles. The experience fostered personal growth, strong connections, and a desire to continue supporting future leadership programmes.

Value & Development

Q What (if anything) have you gained out of facilitating Whakatipu Wāhine Toa?

“I have gained confidence in facilitating groups of working professionals. Experience, knowledge, expanded network, friends, follow-on mahi with a few of the participants.”

“Further personal growth and knowledge in Te Ao Māori. The connection and ability to meet other relatable wāhine which helps grow my network & the opportunity for many of us to work together, mahi kotahitanga.”

“Loved being a part of this kaupapa and I am very keen to co-facilitate future leadership programmes. Mauri Ora.”

Q What skills/competencies do you feel you developed during the programme?

“Confidence in myself, and trust in the program we delivered. Grew my: facilitation skills, management skills, the ability to observe, titiro, whakarongo. I had to adapt my more natural leadership style to fit with the other facilitators.”

“I loved being a part of this kaupapa & I have grown & developed in my leadership abilities particularly in the manner of observation & speaking less (which often offers more).”

Learnings & Recommendations

for future Whakatipu Wāhine Toa courses

- Of benefit post-programme has been the continued connections and opportunities facilitated with and for the wāhine. Including; Outward Bound and involvement in other WISPA programmes as facilitators. Intentional post-residential activities for continued connections should be considered and leveraged upfront in future.
- Partnering with aligned and uplifting organisations is crucial to the programme's success. Our partnership with MWDI has been invaluable, with many of the wāhine accessing their services on top of the MWDI mentorship aspect of the programme. Sport New Zealand's strategic alignment to the programme is crucial for continued and extended benefit to the sector. Further opportunities should be explored for future including Ministry for Women and Te Puni Kōkiri.
- We would seek to evolve the train the trainer programme from our current facilitator group further into alumnae to add ongoing value and development for the wāhine.
- Development of an extension wānanga for specific governance training would add value based on participant feedback and our observations, with incorporating existing materials such as the Sport NZ Governance 101 training and IOD resources.
- Particular mention of how impactful the ātua wāhine content was – this was a stand-out session of the programme. This along with the Mana Ora framework are critical for future programme content.
- Very tangible value from the mentorship support provided by Dr Sarah Leberman to the facilitator team.
- Noticing of the positive impact of structured reflection and down-time – at first there was some discomfort, but with time the practice was well leant into with appreciation for a wāhine Māori space to safely sit with their ideas and have time to process alone or in groups.
- Widely impactful experience for each of the wāhine's taha tinana practicing physical breathing exercises with an external provider.
- A clear strength of the collective was having a diverse group of wāhine Māori from across the breadth of sector and country – the connections and learning that came out of the programme were more than we could have hoped for on selection and preparation.
- The Māori Women's Development Inc visit was incredibly valuable – many of the wāhine were unaware of the history of the organisation, as well as the services and funds available to them through MWDI. This will remain a key activity of the programme going forward.

Thank you to our funders and supporters, facilitators, participants and rōpū He Wāhine Toa kei te Kōkiri for making this pilot programme a success.

For more information, please contact us via info@womeninsport.org.nz