

LALAGA ŌTARA LEADERS



Knowledge Exchange
December 2025

lalaga

CONTENTS

03	<u>Re-search Purpose</u>	21	<u>Photography</u> Dreamscape & Reflections
04	<u>What Ōtara is Made Of</u>	23	<u>Digital Storytelling</u> Reflections
05	<u>Our Evaluation Approach</u>	25	<u>Daily Word Reflections</u> Critical Discourse Analysis
06	<u>Programme Overview</u>	27	<u>Weaving Connection</u> Community Showcase
08	<u>Inaki of Change</u>	28	<u>Case Study:</u> Ki Aiga
09	<u>Lalaga Snapshot</u>	30	<u>2024 Lalaga Alumni</u>
10	<u>Lalaga Leadership Modules</u>	31	<u>Case Study:</u> Teacher Reflections
11	<u>Our 2025 Cohort</u> (Pre-Survey Findings)	33	<u>Key Recommendations</u>
15	<u>Spoken Word</u> Dreamscape & Reflections	34	<u>Key Learnings</u>
17	<u>Fine Arts</u> Dreamscape & Reflections		
19	<u>Dance</u> Dreamscape & Reflections		

Back cover student work by Zephaniah

TAUHI VĀ

In the spirit of our Moana peoples, we begin by opening the vā (the relational space) that binds and uplifts us. This evaluation holds the stories, courage, and creative growth of our rangatahi, and honours the families, mentors, teachers, schools, and community partners who supported their journey through every tide and turning.

Lalaga is a woven space: a meeting place where identity, belonging, creativity, and leadership come alive. Every insight shared in this report represents a moment gifted to us by our young people. We receive these with humility, gratitude, and deep cultural responsibility. From Hawai'i comes a proverb that resonates strongly with the essence of this kaupapa:

He po'i na kai uli, kai ko'o, 'a'ohe hina pūko'a.

*Though the sea is deep and rough,
the coral rock remains standing.*

Throughout this year, every partner, school, mentor, and supporter has embodied this truth. In times of pressure, change, and complexity, you stood firm like the pūko'a, the coral rock that grounds, protects, and feeds the reef community around it. Your consistency and belief anchored the growth of our rangatahi.

MĀLŌ 'AUPITO

We offer our heartfelt thanks to our funding partners at Auckland Council: Bridget Glasgow and Cate Jessep (Sustainable Schools, Environmental Services) and Emma Helmich (Connected Communities South) for their unwavering support of our rangatahi. We also acknowledge Tangaroa College and Sir Edmund Hillary Collegiate for opening their doors and championing the voices and creative growth of their taura. Your collective commitment has grounded this kaupapa and enabled our young people to flourish.

Student work by Nariah



STORY SOVEREIGNTY & RE-SEARCH PURPOSE

This evaluation is grounded in Pacific Data Sovereignty, affirming that the stories and insights shared belong first to our students and their whānau. Knowledge offered through talanoa is relational, co-owned, and held with cultural integrity, protected and returned with care. Research and evaluation for Lalaga is reciprocity, responsibility, and shared meaning-making in a process that honours the vā and aligns with our Lalaga principles.

Within this frame, this report captures the impact of the Lalaga Ōtara Leaders programme by weaving together the voices of rangatahi, whānau, teachers, and mentors. It reflects not only what changed, but how change was made possible. We invite you to see, hear, and feel the layers of transformation emerging from an abundant landscape of people, connection, and possibility in Ōtara when rangatahi are given space to belong, imagine, and lead.





WHAT ŌTARA IS MADE OF

Ōtara is one of the youngest communities in Aotearoa, with a strong population of Māori and Pacific rangatahi (Stats New Zealand, 2023). This youthfulness holds enormous potential. Yet many young people grow up surrounded by negative stories about their community, fewer youth spaces, and limited opportunities to belong, imagine, and be seen.

Research shows that these deficit narratives shape how rangatahi understand themselves and what futures feel possible. The recent closure of the Ōtara Youth Hub has further reduced safe spaces where young people can connect, grow, and be supported.

LALAGA responds to this reality not to “fix” behaviour rather, a relational, restorative approach that addresses the deeper impacts of long-term underinvestment and structural discrimination that produces what we describe as poverty of mind and poverty of possibility. These are not individual shortcomings, but conditions created when communities are consistently framed through scarcity rather than strength.

This work also matters for climate and environmental outcomes. As the Polynesian Panthers have shared, poverty and climate change are deeply connected. Environmental action does not begin with projects alone, it begins with people. Communities cannot sustain gardens, protect waterways, or lead climate initiatives if they are disconnected, exhausted, or operating in survival mode. LALAGA focuses on human change as the foundation for environmental change. By restoring dignity, strengthening relationships, and creating spaces of belonging and agency, the programme supports rangatahi to care for place, people, and future generations.

In doing so, LALAGA aligns with Auckland Council’s climate and environmental goals by building the social and relational foundations needed for long-term resilience, not just short-term outcomes.

OUR EVALUATION APPROACH

Our evaluation approach follows the flow of Moana methodologies that is relational, strengths-based, and grounded in the aspirations and lived realities of Māori and Pacific rangatahi. Rather than measuring change from a distance, we worked alongside students, teachers, and families to understand what growth looked and felt like for them. This approach ensured that evidence was gathered with cultural integrity and in ways that honoured the vā between evaluator and participant.

Our evaluation was shaped by four key guiding principles (including our Lalaga principles):

1. **Moana-led:** Evidence was gathered through talanoa, observation, and creative practice privileging relationships and lived experience.
2. **Strengths-based:** We centred the brilliance, resilience, and cultural knowledges of our rangatahi, avoiding deficit framing or extractive methods that protect and honour them and their whakapapa matrix.
3. **Knowledge exchange:** Insights were co-interpreted with students, mentors, and teachers. Findings will be returned to students and families through creative and accessible formats.
4. **Integrated with Lalaga principles:** Our data collection followed our Lalaga programme principles:
 - Lead with connection
 - Honour legacy
 - Hold space
 - Grow through reflection
 - Create bravely

LONGITUDINAL FOLLOW-UP (3 MONTHS, 12 MONTHS)

We will continue honouring the growth of our rangatahi beyond the programme through two key touchpoints: the return of each student's private "Letter to Self" in February 2026, supporting reflection and long-term identity development; and a 12-month follow-up in November 2026 to understand sustained impact on confidence, cultural identity, creative pathways, leadership development, and emerging aspirations. These touchpoints reflect our belief that data is relational, cyclical, and grounded in the ongoing growth of our young people (long after the Lalaga programme).

How we collected insights (MERL Tools):

To understand impact in a holistic, culturally grounded way, we used a woven set of MERL tools that honoured different forms of expression and reflection:

• Pre-Programme Survey

Baseline insights on confidence, cultural identity, creativity, and belonging.

• Dreamscape Mapping

Students mapped their incoming dreams and outgoing dreams, showing shifts in self-belief and aspirations.

• Daily Reflection Words

An emotional check-in that captured how students were feeling across the five days.

• Student Visual Diaries

Short written/reflective pieces capturing insights, challenges, and leadership moments.

• Whānau Voices at Showcase

Whānau voice on student growth, confidence, and cultural pride.

• Mentor & Teacher Observations

Professional reflections on engagement, leadership, creativity, and group dynamics.

• Creative Outputs (Artefacts)

Dance pieces, spoken word, photography, art, and digital storytelling (each a form of data in itself).

Together, these woven tools form a rich evidence base that reflects the heart of Lalaga: relational, creative, ethical, and unapologetically Moana.



WHAT IS: **LALAGA** Ōtara Leaders

The Lalaga Ōtara Leaders Programme 2025 was a Moana-centred leadership and wellbeing initiative grounded in the Lalaga framework and card game (a weaving approach) that strengthens identity, confidence, and purpose by connecting culture, relationships, and lived experience. The programme supports emerging young leaders by placing their learning across the vā between whānau, school, and community.

Delivered over one intensive week, the programme brought together a carefully selected group of Year 9–10 students from Tangaroa College and Sir Edmund Hillary Collegiate. Schools nominated students who would benefit from increased confidence, connection, and cultural grounding, creating a cohort that reflected the depth of talent and potential within Ōtara's youth community.

Programme Overview

Hosted by partner school Tangaroa College, the programme opened with a whanaungatanga welcome, establishing a shared space of respect, intention, and collective responsibility. From the outset, leadership was framed as service, grounded in cultural identity and accountability to community.

Guided by a Moana worldview, the programme affirmed that learning is not limited to talanoa or tok stori alone. Knowledge was activated through doing/practical learning, creativity, and relational practice. Reflection and dialogue were intentionally paired with making and participation, reinforcing leadership as something lived rather than spoken.

Across the week, students engaged in daily morning Lalaga leadership labs, midday creative labs, and afternoon reflection sessions guided by the Lalaga methodology and card game. Leadership was explored through five interconnected themes aligned with key protective factors for Moana youth. The week culminated in the Weaving Connections Community Showcase, where students shared their creative works with whānau, schools, and the wider community.

Lalaga Ōtara Leaders
creates a *weaving space*
that supports young
people to grow



confidence and
leadership through
culture, creativity,
and ***connection*** with
their **whānau, school,**
and **community.**



Inaki of Change

HOW LALAGA CREATES TRANSFORMATION

In Māori and Pacific traditions, an inaki is a woven fish trap designed to gather, guide, and release with care. It works not through force, but through structure, rhythm, and relationship.

LALAGA's Theory of Change draws from this wisdom. Change is not linear, but cyclical and relational. Each strand of the LALAGA Ōtara Leaders programme from connection, leadership workshops, creativity labs, mentorship, storytelling, reflection, and community showcase interweaves to create conditions where rangatahi feel safe to grow, express, and lead. When the weave is strong, what is caught is plentiful and not just participation, but confidence, belonging, and purpose returned to community.

<i>If we...</i> (Input)	<i>Then we will...</i> (Outcomes)	<i>Which will...</i> (Long-term Shift)
Deliver daily LALAGA core sessions grounded in Pasifika wisdom and connection Engage Year 9-11 rangatahi across in creative streams Provide mentorship by Pacific artists who embody cultural pride and leadership Facilitate talanoa and storytelling linking identity, belonging, and climate justice Integrate daily reflection through journaling and feedback Partner with rangatahi, whānau, schools, and partners to co-host a Community Showcase	 Connection and belonging: Feeling safe and part of a group  Confidence, positive identity: Self-efficacy, reduced self-doubt  Emotional resilience: Managing emotions in healthy ways  Voice and expression: Speaking, performing, sharing ideas  Trusted mentorship and relationships: Supportive relationships with mentors and peers  Creative engagement: Learning through arts, play, and creativity  Cultural intelligence: Moana values embedded in learning  Youth leadership: supporting peers, purpose beyond self	• Reignite belonging and purpose among Ōtara rangatahi, shifting narratives from deficit to possibility • Strengthen cultural continuity by embedding Pacific and Māori worldviews in everyday learning • Grow Pacific creative and climate leadership pathways grounded in storytelling, service, and care • Demonstrate the power of arts-based, culturally grounded education to build resilience, identity, and collective hope as a model that inspires others, not one that claims to replicate everywhere • Contribute to Auckland Council and Enviroschools outcomes by weaving social, cultural, and environmental wellbeing together as a living example of climate justice in action

LALAGA SNAPSHOT

45 tauira

Partnering with Tangaroa College & Sir Edmund Hillary Collegiate

- 40 new Lalaga 2025 Leaders (Years 9-10)
- 8 returning Lalaga 2024 Leaders (Years 10-11)

LALAGA Core Team

Design and delivered leadership programme based on Lalaga Card Game & Method/ology

- Torisse Lauulu
- Atelaite Mapa
- Marie Mapa
- Fritz Evile

5 Creative Streams Expert Mentors

-  Spoken Word — Fili Fepulea'i Tapua'i
-  Fine Arts — A'aifou Potemani
-  Dance — Chantelle Huch
-  Photography — Christian Turner
-  Digital Storytelling — Torisse Lauulu

Industry & Community Voices

Speakers shared lived pathways, creative careers, and leadership journeys, expanding students' sense of what is possible.

- Geoff Matautia
- Launder Boys
- Corbyn Taulealea-Huch
- JP Foliaki

Programme Design

5 Daily Lalaga Leadership Labs

1.5 hour Moana cultural intelligence workshops based on the Lalaga levels 1-5 methodology

3 Guest Speaker Lectures

15 Hours of Creative Labs

5 Daily Lalaga Reflection Sessions

Host School & Delivery

 **Hosted at Tangaroa College**
All Lalaga leaders experienced this radical, relational learning model onsite.

 **1 Week**
Students and mentors under the LALAGA Core team collaboratively planned and delivered a full community showcase.

Weaving Connections Community Showcase

 Sir Edmund Hillary Collegiate

 120+ attendees

Including:

- Whānau and aiga
- School leadership and teachers
- Community organisations
- Ōtara-Papatoetoe Local Board representatives
- Coconet media platform

Leadership

MODULES DELIVERED

Level 1: Surface – Connection



Students began the week by strengthening relationships and establishing trust within the cohort. Using Level 1 Lalaga cards, they participated in connection-building activities designed to honour the vā and increase confidence in engaging with new peers. By the end of the session, students had meaningfully connected with everyone in the group and reflected on their personal intentions for the week.

Level 2: Proverbs – Wisdom



This module focused on grounding leadership in cultural values and ancestral knowledge. Students selected proverbs that resonated with them, identified the lessons within each whakataukī or alagā'upu, and used these to build personal and collective "leadership fale." This process encouraged students to reflect on their identity, values, and the wisdom they carry from their families.

Level 3: People of Colour – Solidarity



Students explored what it means to hold space for others and to lead with empathy, vulnerability, and understanding. Through circle-based activities and structured talanoa, they shared experiences, listened to others, and identified strength in shared stories. This module reinforced that effective leadership comes from creating environments where people feel safe, seen, and supported.

Level 4: Reflection – Healing



This level emphasised the importance of self-leadership and emotional resilience. Students were guided through quiet reflective exercises, including writing a private letter to their future selves. The session helped students recognise the role of stillness, self-awareness, and inner clarity in leadership, particularly when navigating challenges.

Level 5: Wildcard – Celebration



The final module celebrated creativity, initiative, and courage. Students applied their learning by developing their own Lalaga card prompts based on issues relevant to their schools and community. They presented these back to the group, demonstrating their ability to imagine solutions, spark meaningful conversations, and contribute positively to their environments.

Our Lalaga

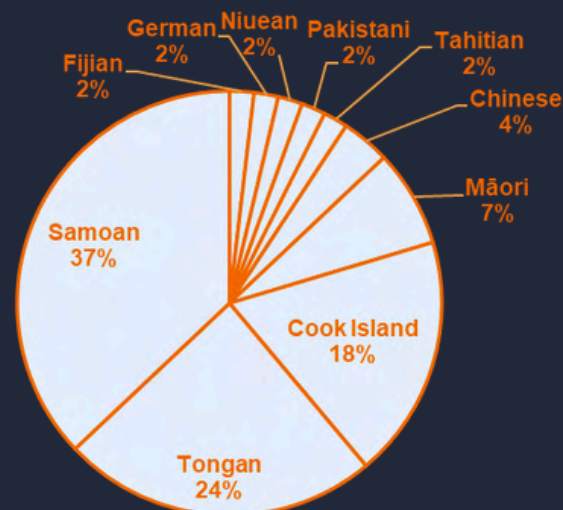
ŌTARA LEADERS 2025 COHORT

From a Pacific Data Sovereignty perspective, these cohort insights are not just participation data. They represent people, relationships, and futures held in trust, affirming that early, culturally grounded investment creates the conditions for sustained leadership, wellbeing, and contribution.

The 2025 Lalaga Leaders cohort includes 38 rangatahi, predominantly aged 13–15, a deliberately chosen intervention point where identity, confidence, and leadership are still forming. In Aotearoa, leadership opportunities are often concentrated at Years 12–13, by which time many young people particularly Māori and Pacific youth have already dropped out or internalised limiting beliefs shaped by structural inequities. By working with rangatahi at Years 9–10, Lalaga invests earlier in the conditions that support self-worth, cultural grounding, and creative voice. This early investment strengthens the education-to-employment pipeline long before key decisions about NCEA, subject choices, or career pathways are made.

We had 10 males and 28 females in our 2025 Lalaga Leaders cohort. The strong presence of young Moana women signals a powerful shift in who is stepping into leadership and creative expression. Supporting wāhine/tama'ita'i at this early stage is critical for building long-term pathways for women's leadership, voice, and representation across community and professional spaces. Equal representation from Tangaroa College and Sir Edmund Hillary Collegiate further reflects Lalaga's commitment to relational equity, shared access, and community-wide benefit.

Ethnicity Profile



Multi-Ethnic Composition

Our Lalaga Leaders cohort reflects the rich, layered identities of our South Auckland community. Using total-response ethnicity (where every ethnicity a young person identifies with is counted) we see a picture of identity that is expansive rather than singular. This approach honours the fullness of their whakapapa, which is why percentages add up to more than 100%.

Alongside strong Pacific representation, especially Samoan (37%), Tongan (24%), and Cook Islands Māori (18%), many of our rangatahi identified with multiple ethnic groups. Common combinations included Samoan–Tongan, Cook Islands Māori–Tongan, Samoan–Cook Islands Māori, and Samoan–Chinese with few carrying three or more cultural identities.

These identities reflect the reality of our community of young people moving confidently across cultures, weaving together multiple lineages, languages, and relationships.

Education capital within tauira homes

The question was intentionally broadened to include parents, caregivers, grandparents, older siblings, and aunts or uncles, reflecting the collective nature of support within Māori and Pacific whānau. This invited tauira to think beyond parents alone and to recognise the wider village that contributes to their learning and growth. Despite this, a combined 34% of students were either unsure of their supporter's education level or reported that their supporter had not completed high school. This does not indicate a lack of support but rather highlights the structural distance many families have experienced from formal education systems. It reinforces the importance of programmes like Lalaga that create new points of affirmation, aspiration, and relational support for rangatahi.

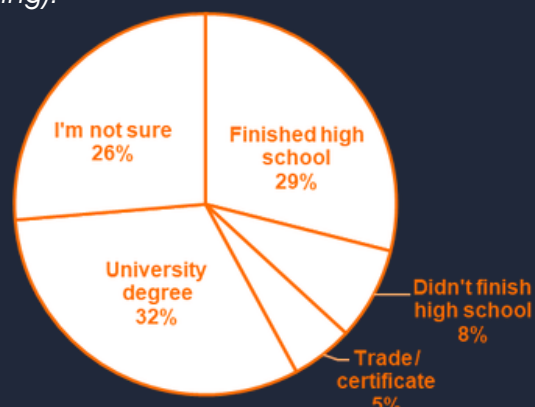
What our youth believe is important to care for

When students were asked what in their environment or in Ōtara feels important to look after or protect, their answers reflected a holistic view of "environment."

Many spoke about people and relationships, emphasising family, children, and community bonds for example: "My family," "our people," and "our little kids." Others focused on community spaces and neighbourhood places, naming schools, homes, streets, the town centre, and waterways such as "Otara Creek" or "our school and community." A strong thread of land, nature, and whenua also appeared through references to native plants, animals, and the land itself: "The land, it's where we live," and concerns about illegal dumping and pollution.

Several students highlighted culture and values as taonga to be protected, noting "Our Pasifika culture" and "our respect for each other / brotherhood." Together, these responses show that for this cohort, caring for the environment is not limited to physical spaces but includes protecting people, place, culture, and whenua as an interconnected whole echoing Indigenous understandings of environment and community as inseparable.

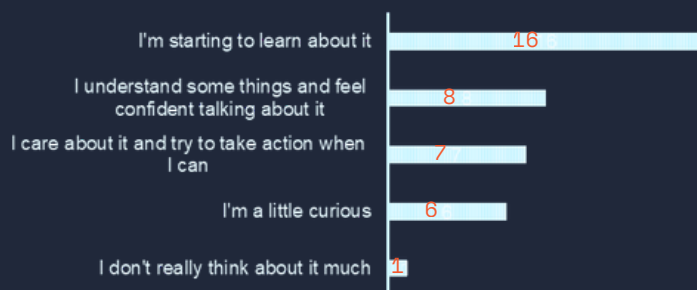
Question asked: "Do you know the highest level of education completed by someone in your home or family who supports your learning? (You can choose anyone: parent, caregiver, grandparent, aunty/uncle, older sibling)."



From a career planning perspective, this matters because many schools serving Māori and Pacific communities have limited resourcing for personalised, culturally grounded careers guidance. Where guidance does exist, it can be narrow, inconsistent, or shaped by constrained assumptions about what pathways are considered "realistic" or available for Moana rangatahi.

When education and career pathways are unfamiliar or feel inaccessible within the home, rangatahi are more likely to rely on schools and community programmes to help translate aspiration into possibility. LALAGA responds to this gap by expanding career imagination for tauira exposing them to creative, civic, cultural, and leadership pathways, strengthening confidence to ask questions, and building relational bridges to mentors, peers, and role models. In this way, LALAGA complements whānau support by expanding rangatahi confidence, connection, and access to culturally grounded guidance.

Youth Readiness for Environmental and Community Stewardship



Student responses show a strong foundation of interest and emerging confidence in caring for the environment and their community. Overall, the responses highlight a cohort that is curious, developing awareness, and increasingly ready to engage in stewardship and community protection which is a powerful base for future environmental and civic leadership.

Lalaga with Lvl. 4 Reflection guest speaker Corbyn Taulealea-Huch



Lvl. 2 Proverbs Guest Speaker - Southsides



Lvl. 2 Proverbs Leadership Lab



Lalaga students with Launder Boys



Geoffery Matautia a.k.a Southsides



Lvl. 1 Surface Whanaungatanga



Launder Boys Guest Talk

I feel inspired about my future when...

Our young people are inspired by culturally grounded sources especially family, supportive relationships, learning, faith, and seeing others succeed. They also highlight the importance of representation and community-connected role models, especially for Moana youth in Ōtara.

A few students said "I don't know," which is a normal part of early identity formation and reinforces the value of programmes like Lalaga that help rangatahi explore their purpose and future pathways in a safe, creative, and culturally affirming space.

ROLE MODELS & REPRESENTATION

When I see young Pasifika people make it out of the hood

People inspire me

I see other people tell their stories about their lives

I see others succeed in their own dreams

I see people my age doing good in school

People speak about their journey on how they got to where they are now

DOING WHAT THEY LOVE

I know I want to be a professional runner and rugby player

I learn more things about the things I love

I get to do the things I enjoy

I watch kpop

ACHIEVEMENT & AMBITION

I attend school & work hard

When I know I got good grades, and a great school

I work hard

SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

I feel supported

I feel people believe in me

I talk to someone about it

I feel confident

I am working with others who support me

I'm receiving that love & support from others

FAMILY MOTIVATION

I do research about my ancestors

My parents

Reminded by my family

I see my family pushing me to my limits

When I see my family

I see my parents work hard and never give up

I think about my family, it encourages me to keep going with school and where it could take me

My siblings

My mom and my dad inspire me

I'm with family and friends

I see my family pushing to my limits

I see my parents working hard hard

LEARNING, GROWTH

I know what to do

I learn more about my future career pathways

I see many other flight attendants loving their jobs also when I read more about flight attendant stories and watch more movies about that

I know I'll be able to talk and make new friends in different places or countries

I learn new things

FAITH, SPIRITUALITY

I'm at church praising the Lord

I am with God

EXPLORATION

I don't know

idk

Spoken Word

**DREAMS ARTICULATED:
VOICE AND CONFIDENCE
BROUGHT FORWARD.**

Spoken Word student reflections shows that programme impact was not limited to confidence gains, but involved a deeper re-authoring of identity, voice, and belonging. The Spoken Word stream generated outcomes by creating relational conditions of voice, belonging, and safety that enabled young people to reframe how they see themselves and to carry confidence, connection, and self-belief beyond the programme.

Dream In **(Before Lalaga)**

Students entered the Spoken Word stream with aspirations that were already present, meaningful, and values-driven. Rather than being absent or underdeveloped, these dreams were often held internally by youth.

In many cases, aspirations were privately held rather than publicly articulated, reflecting confidence, context, and social safety, not a lack of ambition.

Relational and moral aspirations

"Make everyone proud"

"Be proud of who I am"

Professionally ambitious futures

Pilot Nurse

Criminal psychiatrist

neurosurgeon

Broad success narratives that reflected hope rather than indecision

"Be successful"

"Good future"

"Pass school"

Mediators of Change

Communication, Participation, and Youth Voice

"Spoken Word gave me the confidence and love to talk in front of other people without being embarrassed, nervous, or scared."

"I can speak up and my voice is valid."

Positive Identity Development, Self-Belief

"Even if you come from a bad background you can still be good."

Social Connection, Belonging, and Vā (Relational) Skills

"Having a group like family"

"We laughed, shared stories, and soaked up the whole atmosphere together."

Dream Out **(After Lalaga)**

Together, these reflections show that Lalaga supports the development of future-facing capabilities voice, relational intelligence, critical self-belief, and emotional safety that young people need to navigate complex social, cultural, and civic systems.



Increased Confidence and Purpose

"Be proud of who I am → Finish what I have started with my new friends"

Pilot → Pilot, with increased confidence and self-expression

"Pass school to support family"

"Make everyone proud" → Successfully perform my speech in front of an audience"

Expansion of Possibility

"Nurse → Learn from my mistakes and other peoples' stories"

"Criminal psychiatrist → Criminal psychiatrist + poetry writer"

"Neurosurgeon → Same dream, with a desire to do more in community"

Articulation and Naming

"Be successful" → Lawyer

"Good future" → Professional Boxer

"When I started LALAGA, I wasn't very confident and felt quite shy. That began to change when I met the wonderful Spoken Word group."

Through LALAGA, I gained confidence because my group supported me while I was practising, and I was able to support them too.

I also loved our mentor, Fili, who helped all of us grow in confidence. I especially appreciated the support from everyone who helped along the way. I miss you, Fili."

– Year 9, Spoken Word Taurira

OUTCOMES



"When I started LALAGA, I was very quiet. Throughout the day, I became much more confident, and it was an amazing experience."

The games especially Big Buddha, which Atelaite introduced to our group helped me come out of my shell and connect with others."

– Year 10, Spoken Word Taurira

OUTCOMES



OUTCOMES KEY



Belonging



Expression



Confidence



Creativity



Trust



Cultural IQ



Resilience



Leadership



"One skill I learned during the programme was how to release my anger in a safe and controlled way."

Ms Fili gave me nothing but confidence and encouragement, helping me feel comfortable speaking in front of others without feeling embarrassed, nervous, or scared. I truly appreciate her because she was the first teacher who told me that I could do this, even when I doubted myself every second.

I used to tell myself, "I can't do this," and speak very negatively about myself. Ms Fili reminded me to stop talking about myself that way and helped me believe in my own ability."

– Year 10, Spoken Word Taurira

OUTCOMES



Fine Arts

DREAMS EXPLORED: PERMISSION, CONFIDENCE, AND POSSIBILITY EXPANDED.

For rangatahi navigating pressure to “know their future,” opportunities to explore safely are critical. The Dreamscape mapping shows that Fine Arts supported young people to practise confidence, connection, and cultural expression laying foundations for long-term wellbeing, creativity, and leadership, even when dreams remain fluid. These indicate growth in learning disposition, not just aspiration.

Dream In (Before Lalaga)

Students entered the Fine Arts stream with aspirations that were already present, but often framed around outcomes, security, or inherited pathways. These dreams reflected realism and responsibility. In this context, dreams were often held cautiously, shaped by expectations, practicality, or a sense of what was “safe” or achievable, rather than by open-ended exploration.

Professionally ambitious futures

“Be a pharmacist like my mom”

“To get a job with good income”

“To go to Samoa”

“To get good income”

Skills-based goals

“Improve on my drawing skills”

“Study music”

Mediators of Change

Communication Confidence and Idea Sharing

“Don’t be afraid to share my ideas”

Social Connection

“I’ve met new people and have managed to communicate better.”

Purpose-Driven Aspirations and Contribution

“I want to help others in the community to express themselves through designing patterns.”

“Visioning the bigger world and all the opportunities available.”

Cultural Identity Expression through Creative Practice

“I was able to use designing skills to create an artwork based on my culture.”

Dream Out (After Lalaga)

The Fine Arts stream supported communication confidence, social connection, purpose-driven aspiration, and cultural identity expression by positioning creative practice as a relational and community-connected capability.

Increased Confidence and Purpose

“Study music → Study music, with increased confidence to communicate and take risks”

“To go to Samoa → To go to Samoa and keep connecting and learning from people”

Exploratory Shifts

“To get a job with good income → I want to keep learning about my cultures. I want to commit and improve at a sport (volley, netball, rippa).”

“Improve on my drawing skills → I want to try out for the basketball team while practice drawing in my free time”

“Be a pharmacist like my mom → Same dream but commit to art more”

Purpose Expansion

“To get good income → Dedicate myself to working hard and expressing culture through design”

"Some of the things I enjoyed about LALAGA were how relaxed and supportive my art mentor A'aifou was, and how they helped me along the way. Because of uneven numbers, I had to complete my artwork independently, which challenged me, but I was proud that I managed to finish my piece by the deadline for the showcase at Sir Edmund Hillary Collegiate.

After the showcase, I felt a strong sense of accomplishment and relief, but most of all, pride. I was especially proud that I was able to speak in front of a large crowd something I don't usually do, as I'm an introvert who doesn't like stepping outside my comfort zone.

– Year 9, Fine Arts Tauria

OUTCOMES



"Collaborating with Atelaite was a meaningful journey. She brought light into the space, and her ideas and reassurance helped everyone feel safe and connected.

I especially enjoyed the fun games that focused on teamwork. I formed strong bonds with people I initially felt unfamiliar with, and each day more students and staff stepped outside their comfort zones, sharing personal challenges with others who listened with understanding.

On the day of the showcase, some of us felt nervous while others felt excited, but we performed with confidence and joy. The audience could be seen laughing and enjoying the event. This programme was a productive and uplifting experience, and I would encourage others to participate in future years."

– Year 9, Fine Arts Tauria

OUTCOMES



"During my time in the LALAGA programme with Atelaite and the students and staff of Sir Edmund Hillary Collegiate, I witnessed the powerful impact of sharing personal experiences within the community.

What stood out most were the connections we built during the days we collaborated. The staff welcomed everyone with warmth and confidence, and the students brought their unique personalities into the space, turning simple workshops into meaningful, memorable moments.

We celebrated small wins, shared jokes, and built a sense of belonging that carried through each day of the week. Through games, creative collaboration, and storytelling, LALAGA became more than a series of sessions. It became a shared journey where everyone contributed."

– Year 9, Fine Arts Tauria

OUTCOMES



Dance

DREAMS RE-CENTRED: SELF-RESPECT, COURAGE, AND EXPRESSION STRENGTHENED.

Dance outcomes were embodied, relational, and values-based, rather than career-specific. Dance created conditions for rangatahi to practise bravery, trust others, and redefine success on their own terms. These capacities are foundational for wellbeing, leadership, and sustained engagement in learning particularly for young people navigating pressure, expectation, or self-doubt.

Dream In (Before Lalaga)

Students entered the Dance stream with aspirations that were already present, but often anchored in external validation, obligation, or future security rather than self-definition.

Achievement- and security-oriented futures

"To be in real estate"

"To be a photographer"

"Become a flight attendant"

"Go to university"

"To be a nurse"

"Be a flight attendant"

Moral and relationally-based dreams

"Make my family proud of me"

Confidence-seeking narratives

"To become somewhat confident"

Legacy-based dreams

"I have is sports and athletics. By the time I turned 5, I've been working and trained by my father — and uncles cause all of my family been playing sport since birth and it's my legacy to play."

Mediators of Change

Identity Confidence and Authentic Participation

"You should never be afraid to be yourself."

"Just being around people who encouraged me through things that they are comfortable doing as well."

Relational Trust and Social Safety

"I learned to trust others."

"Safe space."

"Safe relationships."

Collective Care and Responsibility for Others

"I learned to have mutual care."

"People have struggles and I should support them."

Shared Vulnerability

"It's okay to make mistakes."

Dream Out (After Lalaga)

The Dance stream supported identity confidence, relational trust, collective care, and resilience by creating safe, embodied spaces where vulnerability and connection were practised as shared social capacities.

Values Reorientation

"To become somewhat confident → To step out my comfort zone more often and get a good paid job for my parents"

"Become a flight attendant → Graduate with good grades, be successful and make my parents proud"

"Go to university → Express my culture through everything I do"

"To be a photographer → I don't want to be a photographer but also I don't want to be a dance. I think, I just want to express myself in whatever way I feel comfortable doing."

Dream Grounding and Immediate Pathways

"To be in real estate → To own a small business now like lawn mowing, since I do it all the time"

"Make my family proud of me → My dream is to do good and respect myself all the way."

"To be a nurse → I still want to be a nurse, but going around Otara and taking photos made me feel like I need to help some people in need."

"Be a flight attendant → Still become a flight attendant but keep weaving connections to be more social"

Openness to Collaboration

"Sports & athletics → Still the same dream, and I love it. This week taught me to trust others. I haven't really trusted anyone cause I can rely on myself until now."

"LALAGA has made a huge impact on my future. It taught me how to believe in myself and push myself to do what's best for me in life. Being part of a group with people who shared similar experiences really boosted my confidence, because I knew I wouldn't be judged."

Through LALAGA, I learned hip hop dance and other creative skills, and I enjoyed being around people who shared the same interests as me. I'm proud to say that I will be joining LALAGA again next year, as the programme helped me grow in confidence and feel comfortable being myself."

One of my favourite parts of LALAGA was being with my mentor, Chantelle. She encouraged all of us to step outside our comfort zones and helped me believe that I could achieve anything I put my heart into."

Thank you to everyone for being such an inspiration and for supporting not only me, but my whole group and all the students involved. I'm incredibly grateful for the opportunity and excited to be part of LALAGA again."

– Year 10, Dance Taurira

OUTCOMES



"LALAGA meant so much to me, and I'm really grateful to have been part of such an amazing programme. There were ups and downs, but we got through them together as a group."

I made lifelong connections and learned a lot from everyone involved. Many lessons were shared not only by teachers and mentors, but also through learning alongside my peers."

LALAGA helped me understand young Pasifika people's stories more deeply and encouraged me to step outside my comfort zone. I'm thankful to everyone who was part of this journey, and I hope to be involved again next year."

– Year 9, Dance Taurira

OUTCOMES



OUTCOMES KEY



Belonging



Expression



Confidence



Creativity



Trust



Cultural IQ



Resilience



Leadership

Photography

**DREAMS SUSTAINED:
CONFIDENCE AND
CONNECTION THAT GREW.**

By shifting the focus from dream replacement to dream sustainability, the Photography stream demonstrates how relational, skills-based programmes contribute to outcomes that are foundational but often invisible in traditional evaluation models. The Photography stream also enabled inclusive participation for a student with literacy barriers, who was able to co-develop his artist statement through peer support in a non-judgemental, collaborative environment. This demonstrates how visual and relational approaches can expand access and belonging for learners with diverse needs.

Dream In (Before Lalaga)

Students entered the Photography stream with aspirations that were already clearly defined, ambitious, and future-oriented. Many dreams reflected long-held goals shaped by whānau influence, educational pathways, or personal interest.

Professionally ambitious futures

"To travel"

"Be an artist"

"Game creator"

"To be a nurse"

"Be a flight attendant"

"To be a surgeon"

"Become a flight attendant"

"Engineer"

Creative-adjacent identities

"Be an artist"

"Become a photographer or
interior designer"

Stability-focused aspirations

"Become successful in life,
to provide and live a stable
life here in New Zealand"

Mediators of Change

Belonging and Relational Inclusion

*"Connecting
more with my
teachers and
other
students."*

Relational Safety and Authentic Self- Expression

*"It is okay to
show who you
truly are to
others."*

Pathway Exploration and Openness to New Possibilities

*"I've been
inspired and
pushed to try
new things."*

Creative Resourcefulness and Identity Expression

*"I've learned
to be creative
with what I
have."*

Dream Out (After Lalaga)

The Photography stream strengthened belonging, relational safety, pathway exploration, and creative resourcefulness by enabling students to connect, experiment, and express identity through accessible creative practice.

Increased Confidence and Purpose

*Flight attendant → Unchanged, with
increased confidence and social connection*

*"Game creator → Game creator, but
keep my mind to it"*

*"Be a flight attendant → Still become a
flight attendant but keep weaving
connections to be more social"*

*"To be a surgeon → Be a surgeon, but with
new respect for teachers and understanding
not everyone is the same"*

"To travel → To still dream to travel"

*"Engineer → Same dream, but I need to
commit to education which was first hard,
but now it's easy"*

*"Become a flight attendant → My dream
hasn't changed, but I'm more confident to
speak up and communicate with others"*

Expansion into Creative Identity

*"Be an artist → Be a photographer and an
artist. Photography is something I want to
carry on in life."*

*"Become a photographer or interior
designer → Right now, I want to explore
and grow in photography."*

Purpose Expansion

*"To be a nurse → I still want to be a
nurse, but going around Ōtara and taking
photos made me feel like I need to help
some people in need."*

*"Become successful in life, to provide and
live a stable life here in New Zealand → To
be like the Lalaga team. I want Pasifika kids
to have opportunities like this."*

"My thoughts on LALAGA are all positive. I loved being part of the programme and I'm really grateful for the experience. One of my favourite parts was reflecting together on what we had learned, because no one was left behind. LALAGA felt like a little family, and I'm excited to join again next year, hopefully alongside my siblings from Sir Edmund Hillary Collegiate.

Being part of the photography group was an amazing experience. We took photos around the school and went on photo walks through the Ōtara town centre and Dawson Park near the library. These experiences helped me see my community differently and grow my skills.

I also really appreciated how kind and supportive all the teachers were. Atelaite stood out to me because she was easy to talk to and remained calm and positive, even when things were challenging.

Christian, my photography mentor, also had a huge impact on me. He helped me fall in love with photography, and with his guidance I was able to sell a photo for \$250. With his knowledge and my creativity, I created two photos I'm really proud of. Thank you to everyone for creating and supporting the workshop we know as LALAGA."

– Year 9, Photography Taurira



"I really enjoyed the LALAGA programme, especially making connections with other people. Going through the daily reflections helped build my confidence, and I enjoyed learning new things about the projects we were working on. The LALAGA card game was also exciting and helped us connect more easily with others.

Throughout the week, meeting successful people gave me encouragement and helped me focus on what mattered most. I came to understand the main idea of LALAGA, which is about building strong connections with other students and teachers.

During the showcase, I felt confident speaking in front of everyone and showing who I really am. I enjoyed the moment and felt proud of myself.

One thing I think could be improved is how photography is presented at the showcase. This year, I only had the chance to say my name and didn't get to fully explain what my photo was about. I would love more opportunities in the future to speak about my work and show my confidence even more."

– Year 10, Photography Taurira

OUTCOMES



OUTCOMES KEY



Belonging



Confidence



Trust



Resilience



Expression



Creativity



Cultural IQ



Leadership

OUTCOMES





Digital Storytelling

In 2025, Lalaga introduced a Digital Storytelling creative stream grounded in leadership, storytelling, and succession. Seven students from the Lalaga 2024 cohort returned as tuakana, stepping into leadership roles while continuing to grow their own creative practice.

Under the mentorship of filmmaker and storyteller Torisse Laulu, these students worked within the Digital Storytelling stream to shape, capture, and tell stories rooted in identity, place, and lived experience. The stream was intentionally designed as a leadership pathway, enabling past participants to deepen their skills while supporting younger peers and contributing to the kaupapa in new ways.

This approach reflects a core Lalaga principle: leadership is not a title, but a practice grounded in reciprocity, responsibility, and care. By returning as leaders-in-practice, these students demonstrated how creative capability, confidence, and civic awareness continue to grow when rangatahi are trusted with real responsibility and supported by skilled mentors.

The Digital Storytelling stream highlights how Lalaga operates as a living system creating continuity, progression, intergenerational learning, and weaving across Lalaga cohorts.



"In all honesty, I've felt like I've grown so much personally as well as Lalaga was able to create a pathway for me so I've been able to learn lots."

To return to Lalaga, I came to lead and support others by being a positive role model and showing new Lalaga students what it looks like to participate with confidence, respect, and enthusiasm. I wanted to help them learn our routines and traditions so they feel comfortable and included.

I also supported others by offering encouragement, helping explain things when they're unsure, and working alongside them during practices and group tasks.

By being patient, kind, and dependable, I hoped I helped new students feel proud to be part of Lalaga and confident in their own voices."

– Year 11, Digital Storytelling Taurira

OUTCOMES



"What they don't see is the real heart of the place, neighbours checking in, kids riding bikes, and music drifting through the streets."

OUTCOMES KEY



Belonging



Expression



Confidence



Creativity



Trust



Cultural IQ

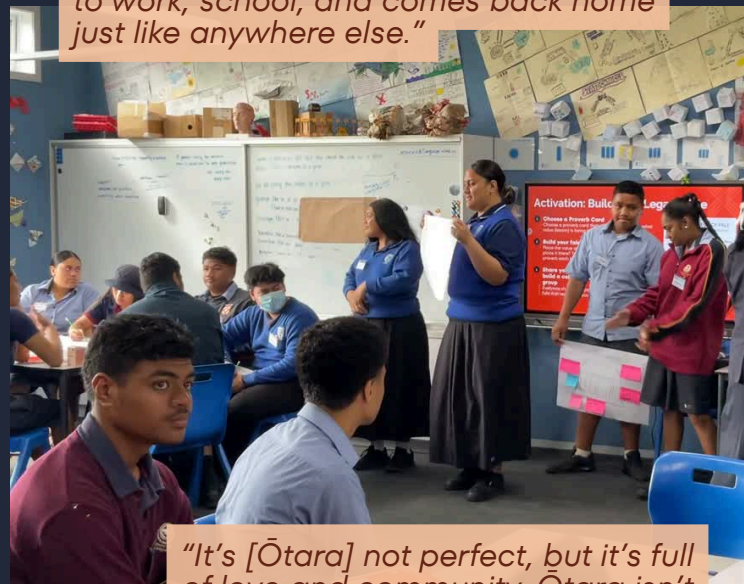


Resilience



Leadership

"Living in Ōtara isn't so bad from what others think. Every family wakes up goes to work, school, and comes back home just like anywhere else."



"It's [Ōtara] not perfect, but it's full of love and community. Ōtara isn't just a suburb, it's home."



"Last year's Lalaga has helped me with my confidence and taking new risks. I really enjoyed coming back to LALAGA. I helped the younger students feel comfortable and helping them step out of their comfort zone, by stepping up and not to be a leader but as their friend."

– Year 10, Digital Storytelling Taurira

OUTCOMES



"I believe since Lalaga last year, I have gained a lot of confidence to showcase my talents. I have returned because I want to help guide the new students with the many things I learned last year but also encourage them to give things a try. Last year in Lalaga, I took dance. From Lalaga, I want to pursue my love for dance and sports but also help provide for my family."

– Year 11, Digital Storytelling Taurira

OUTCOMES



DAY 1

Happy Joy **Amazing**, Believe, Love, Impressive, Bored, Okay, **Comfortable**, Alright, **Positive**, Tired, Thankful, Good, Amazing, Nice, **Energetic**, Excitement, **Confident**, Achievement, Fun, Friendship, Connected, **Happy**, Joy

BELONGING COMES FIRST

Day 1 words show that students felt safe, comfortable, and emotionally held from the outset. Joy, friendship, and connection appeared immediately, alongside honest expressions of tiredness, indicating a space where students did not need to perform. Early confidence emerged not through pressure, but through belonging establishing the conditions for growth, voice, and leadership in the days that followed.

DAY 2

Fantastic, Amazing, **Funny**, Fun, Nice, **Happy**, Joyful, Great, Good, Tired, Good, Relieved, **Grateful**, Fun, **Ecstatic**, Happy, Fun, Tiring, Alright, Tired, Cool, Happy, **Hungry**, Sleepy, Tired, Awesome, **Cool**, Amazing, **Interesting**, **Hungry**, Satisfied, Tired, **Excited**, Happy, Fun, **Demure**

SETTLING INTO TRUST

Day 2 language reflects emotional regulation and growing relational safety. High-frequency words such as happy, fun, amazing, good, and joyful signal sustained positivity, while tired, hungry, and sleepy reveal honesty about physical and emotional load. This mix of energy and fatigue indicates that deeper engagement had begun where students were investing themselves. By Day 2, Lalaga had shifted from a new experience into a trusted space where youth could participate fully, be honest about their needs, and remain connected.

Daily Word Reflections

**Using Critical Discourse Analysis*

DAY 3

Exciting, Great, **Fun**, Amazing, Wonderful, Good, **Inspired**, Normal, **Nervous**, Great, **Connected**, Productive, Inspiring, **Tiring**, Relieved, Enjoyment, **Fire**, Good, **Good**, Good, **Passion**, Enjoyable, Inspired, **Motivated**, Good, **Interesting**, Stressful, Important, Gratitude, **Great**, Awesome, **Warmth**, Tired, Encouraged, Good, Connected, **Enthusiasm**, Connected, **Safe**, Uplifting, Strong, **Relieved**

CONNECTION HOLDS THE WORK

Day 3 words reveal deep connection alongside emotional effort. Students named feeling inspired, strong, and uplifted, while also acknowledging tiredness and stress showing that identity work is both demanding and restorative. Belonging and cultural affirmation created a space where young people could process layered emotions safely, transforming effort into pride, joy, and renewed engagement.

DAY 4

Fun, Good, Inspired, **Amazing**, Cool, Dead, **Good**, **Creative**, Weave, Good, Enlightened, **Tika**, Uplifting, **Good**, Fun, Nervous, **Nervous**, Hype, Proud, **Inspired**, **Seki**, Happy, Exciting, **Ifo**, Good, Stressful, **Fantastic**, Sore, **Amazing**, Excited, Annoying, **Mana**, Confident, **Sheltered**, Great, **Fiefia**

IDENTITY COMES ALIVE

Day 4 language reflects joy, cultural ease, and emerging leadership. Students freely moved between English and Pacific languages, signalling a space where identity felt safe and expressive. Words like proud, confident, and mana point to internal shifts in self-belief, while honest expressions of tiredness and stress show that youth were trusted to be real, not perform. Creativity and weaving metaphors reveal growing self-awareness. Learning was no longer separate from who they are becoming.

DAY 5

*Nervous, **Connected**, Amazing, **Motivated**, Nervous, Amazing, **Excited**, Nervous, Great, **Grateful**, Safe, Positive, **Scared**, Excited, Hyped, Nervous, **Alive**, Sleepy, **Confident**, Happy, **Joyful**, Good, Good, Good, **Memories**, Grateful, **Proud**, **Excited**, Nervous, **Woven**, Excited, **Connections**, Nervous, Exciting, **Relationship**, Motivated, **Nervous**, Enjoy*

BECOMING WOVEN

Day 5 language captures intensity, vulnerability, and collective pride. Students openly named nervousness alongside excitement and motivation, signalling a space where emotions could coexist safely. Words like connected, relationship, and woven show that the Lalaga metaphor had been internalised. Tauria were no longer just participating, but understanding themselves as part of a collective whole. Gratitude and pride mark a reflective close, while the mix of nervousness and energy reflects the emotional and physical intensity of creating, performing, and belonging together.



Lalaga student work by Sione



Weaving Connection COMMUNITY Showcase!

The Community Showcase marked a transition from programme participation to public, place-based affirmation, with approximately 150 people in attendance, including the Otara-Papatoetoe Local Board, community organisations, Coconet media, school leadership, whānau, and the wider community. The event strengthened community connection, participation, and belonging, providing a safe and inclusive space for rangatahi to share their creative work and be recognised by their local community. In doing so, the showcase supported wellbeing, confidence, and ongoing engagement, demonstrating how locally grounded creative initiatives contribute to connected, resilient communities in Otara.

"My dad was very proud of how I presented my speech. It made me feel loved because I don't usually get this type of praise."



"Seeing people support us made me feel confident."

"It made me feel happy and confident."



"Seeing everyone perform made me feel proud."

"I want to do it again."



"I felt proud of what I achieved."



"I felt upset because the day was over and I wanted to do it again."



"My parents were surprised because they wouldn't think I'd ever dance in front of an audience. It made me feel motivated to dance on stage next year for Polyfest."

"My parents were not there, but the audience and my friends made me feel proud."



"I felt more confident being on stage."

"I felt so proud of myself and my team."

"Just good people, good energy."



Aiga Ki Case Study: *When LALAGA enters the home*

Whānau voice, sibling pathways, and creative leadership across years

Lalaga understands that the deepest indicators of impact are not found only in individual outcomes, but in what whānau see, practise, and carry forward together. This family case study centres the Ki whānau whose children participated in Lalaga across two consecutive years: Iosefatu (Fatu) as a Lalaga Leader in 2024, and his sister Fiagatasi as a Lalaga Leader in 2025. Their journeys are held alongside the voices of their parents, whose reflections offer critical insight into how Lalaga's impact lived beyond the programme and into the home.

Iosefatu *Lalaga Leader 2024*

At 14 years old, Fatu entered Lalaga with strong academic ability and curiosity about creativity. He hoped the programme would help him explore new ways of expressing himself particularly through photography. Through Lalaga, Fatu developed a new way of seeing his community. He gained an appreciation for the beauty of Ōtara and learned how to capture it through photography, later identifying himself proudly as the "family photographer." This creative growth was accompanied by increased confidence and ease in forming friendships across schools.

At home, these changes were visible to his parents and siblings. This growth translated into tangible leadership where Fatu this year took on the role of lead photographer for his school's Prizegiving Night, applying the skills and confidence developed through the Lalaga Photography stream in a real-world, high-responsibility context.

"Lalaga inspired me to see the brighter side of different communities. I can show people the beauty of Ōtara through photographs."

– Fatu



Fatu (second from left) in Lalaga 2024
Photography stream

Fiagatasi *Lalaga Leader 2025*

At the outset, Fiagatasi did not identify as someone actively engaged in environmental issues, nor as confident speaking about them. This makes her later choice to write and perform a spoken word piece on climate change and Pacific Islands identity especially significant.

Through Lalaga, Fiagatasi was supported to connect her personal interests, cultural values, and emerging awareness of place into creative expression. What began as quiet curiosity and in some areas, uncertainty evolved into confidence, voice, and public storytelling. This shift was recognised not only by mentors, but deeply felt by her whānau, who witnessed her growth at home and on stage.



Fiagatasi in a Spoken Word
Creative Lab session (background
third from left)

Aiga Reflections

From the Ki parents perspective, the Lalaga Showcase was a shared journey of preparation, courage, and pride that unfolded at home as much as it did on stage.

The spoken word segment resonated most deeply with the family because their daughter, Fiagatasi, was chosen as the speaker. While she wrote the piece herself, drawing on her own thoughts and feelings about climate change and the Pacific Islands, the process became collective.

Each evening, the family practised together working carefully on articulation and pronunciation so that every word could land with meaning.

"Although she wrote from her own heart using simple, genuine words, it was a shared journey, we practised every night... It was a moment of pride and growth for our whole aiga."

– Talimai Ki (Mother)

As parents, they described their daughter as naturally shy and introverted. Being entrusted with such a visible role helped her step out of her shell in a way they had never seen before. Standing in front of a large audience, she spoke with confidence, using her own knowledge and presenting herself "like an experienced speaker."

"She stood in front of a large audience, something she has never done before. We could clearly see her growth in courage, self-expression, and pride. I wanted her to see that her thoughts, experiences, and words matter and that she can achieve anything when she is supported and encouraged."

– Talimai Ki (Mother)

Beyond their own child, the parents also reflected on how the showcase embodied values of connection, culture, and community. The name Lalaga itself signalled Pasifika identity. Pasifika mentors proudly representing their cultures reinforced the importance of knowing who you are and where you come from. Students leading their own sections, bringing their cultural perspectives into artwork, design, and speech created a strong sense of ownership. The presence of school leaders, community boards, and shared food for families completed the picture.

"It reflected true Island culture, a celebration of connection and togetherness."

– Talimai Ki (Mother)

As parents, they also offered thoughtful reflections for the future, suggesting deeper parent involvement in mentoring and broader exposure to fields such as science and technology. These reflections were shared not as critique, but as evidence of their investment in the programme's growth.

In closing, the mother shared gratitude not only as a parent, but as a former Sir Edmund Hillary Collegiate student herself. She and her husband spoke of seeing Lalaga's impact across two of their children giving them confidence and skills in areas they had

Fono Ki (Father) at the Community Showcase



never felt strong in before. For the Ki aiga, Lalaga was not experienced as a one-off programme, but as a meaningful, empowering space that strengthened confidence, identity, and connection at school, on stage, and at home.

"We have seen how it has positively changed two of our children... For that, we are truly grateful."

– Talimai Ki (Mother)

This case study shows that the outcomes associated with Lalaga emerge through sustained relational conditions rather than isolated programme activities. The changes observed including increased confidence, strengthened cultural identity, leadership development, and enduring aspiration were reinforced within the whānau context and carried across siblings and years. These outcomes were shaped and sustained through family practices, parental support, and shared responsibility for growth, rather than through individual participation alone.

At a community level, these whānau outcomes carry particular significance for Ōtara, where many families navigate structural barriers related to income, access, and opportunity. When confidence, leadership, and cultural pride are strengthened within families, they act as a multiplier effect, reinforcing protective factors that support young people to navigate and resist the impacts of wider social and economic inequities. This case illustrates how investment in relational, culturally grounded initiatives contributes to community uplift by strengthening whānau as sites of aspiration, stability, and continuity, rather than positioning young people to succeed in isolation from their social context.



Shout-Out Wall

LALAGA 2024 ALUMNI (STILL WEAVING IMPACT)

The following students are part of the Lalaga 2024 cohort. Their journeys show that the impact of Lalaga continues well beyond the programme week across leadership, learning, creativity, and civic participation.

Some have stepped into formal leadership roles. Some have excelled academically. Some have taken their voices into civic spaces. Others continue to grow quietly, steadily, and with pride. Together, they reflect what happens when young people are given space to belong, create, and lead.

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Benrish Hafoka

Top academic performer (excellence) in Chemistry and Lea Faka Tonga at accelerated senior levels.

Chrismata Sue

Top in Year 11 Dance, demonstrating strong academic-creative crossover.

Amiria Kiria

One of only two Year 10 students to pass all corequisite exams; Top in Diversity.

Jeremiah Peteru

One of only two Year 10 students to pass all corequisite exams.

Cecile Schwenke

2nd in Dance and Top in Critical Thinking.

Stephanaiya Parekura-Tekapo

Top in Self-Regulation, reflecting strong learning habits and personal growth.

CREATIVE LEADERSHIP

Iosefatu Ki

Lead Photographer for Prizegiving.

Chrismata Sue

Creative excellence recognised through senior Dance achievement.

Cecile Schwenke

Creative performance paired with critical thinking excellence.

Irasa Manu

Demonstrated leadership growth in film pathway.

CIVIC & COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

McTaavao Kirisome Mahe

Appointed Student Prefect for 2026.

Nu'ulofia Mafua, Raymond Smith, Jeremiah Peteru, Anthony Ioane, Eunice Uasila'a, McTaavao Kirisome Mahe

Civic participation through Dog Bylaw student delegation to Auckland Council.

Timote Mafi

Volunteer leader at Ōtara Block Christmas Lights.

Victoria Mapa

Church youth leader for Clover Park youth leading activities and service projects.

EMERGING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Megan Fiti

Recognised for commitment to leadership pathways and student representation.

Kansas Heta

Consistent contributor across academic, cultural, and peer spaces.

Suega Poutoa

Early leadership potential recognised through advanced contribution.

Timothy Vaivao Tupai

Progressed to final stage of a competitive school leadership application process.

Jahmani, Jayvez, MJ, Ellice Leilua

Participated in Ngāti Ōtara Mural Project.

Teacher Reflections: How Lalaga Shifted Student Confidence, Belonging & Leadership

Context

Kaiako reflections indicate that students selected for Lalaga were not chosen because they were already thriving, but because teachers could see untapped potential constrained by barriers. Many were students who struggled with attendance, disengagement, or classroom behaviour, and whose capabilities were obscured by survival strategies such as disruption, withdrawal, or performing “coolness” to mask need.

Observed Change in Students

Across the week, teachers observed a marked shift in confidence, relational comfort, and school engagement. Upon returning to school, students appeared more at ease with peers, teachers, and learning environments. Crucially, this was not a temporary uplift limited to the programme space; teachers noted sustained changes in how students showed up in class, interacted with adults, and supported others.

“Since Lalaga... I now see they have become leaders in their groups at school and are much more supportive of the people around them.”

– SEHC Teacher

What Enabled the Change

Teachers identified the relational design of Lalaga as the primary mechanism of impact. By engaging with students as equals rather than through traditional hierarchical roles, kaiako were able to build trust and connection that had not previously been possible. This shift in relational positioning allowed students to lower defensive behaviours and engage authentically.

“They now trust me to help them, instead of shying away from help or trying to ‘be the cool guy’.”

– SEHC Teacher

“I understand and see the value of teaching Lalaga. The framework, the card game, and then to have us (teachers) and students talanoa together to connect is powerful.”

– Tangaroa Teacher

Illustrative student trajectories:

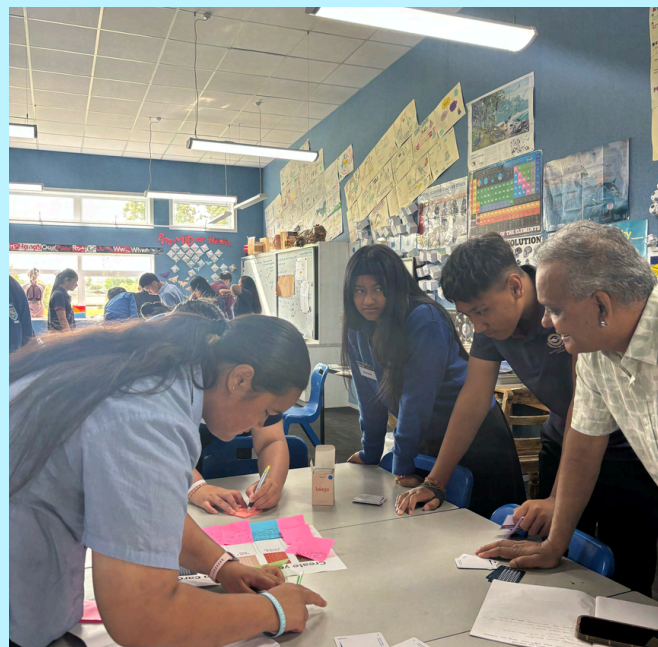
- A student previously known for disengagement and disruptive behaviour experienced a shift in self-perception, moving from seeking attention through disruption to developing pride in personal growth. Teachers observed increased self-belief, receptiveness to support, and a visible sense that “he knows we care about him.”
- A typically quiet and reserved student demonstrated increased confidence and pride through dance, stepping into visibility in ways not previously observed.
- A small group of senior male students demonstrated strengthened leadership presence, improved work ethic, and increased respect and support for kaiako following the programme.



Outcomes for the School Community

Teachers identified multiple benefits extending beyond individual students:

- Increased confidence and leadership
- Improved sense of belonging
- Reduced behavioural issues
- Stronger respect for others
- Enhanced pride in the Ōtara community
- Greater student citizenship and motivation to contribute positively
- Teachers also linked LALAGA participation to longer-term academic and leadership outcome, observing that LALAGA 2024 participants are now receiving academic awards or stepping into leadership roles



Future Potential and Scalability

Teachers strongly endorsed the need for Lalaga in their community and identified opportunities for scale that maintain its relational integrity including smaller in-class adaptations, transition programmes for intermediate-to-secondary students, and professional learning for kaiako grounded in Pasifika concepts and connected pedagogy.

"Since Lalaga... I now see they have become leaders in their groups at school and are much more supportive of the people around them."

– SEHC Teacher



This case study shows that student outcomes are enabled not only through curriculum delivery, but through reconfigured relationships that allow trust, belonging, and agency to emerge. Lalaga created relational conditions that enabled students – particularly those previously disengaged or labelled through behaviour – to be seen differently and to see themselves differently. By shifting interactions from hierarchical roles to relational connection, the programme unlocked student potential that traditional school structures can struggle to reach on their own, especially within time-pressured and compliance-focused environments.

Teachers observed that when students felt respected, known, and supported, improvements followed across confidence, behaviour, leadership, and help-seeking. Importantly, the impact extended beyond individual students. Changes were observed across classrooms, whānau relationships, and the wider school community, contributing to improved peer dynamics, strengthened trust between students and kaiako, and a more positive learning climate overall.

This aligns strongly with current Government and education-sector priorities focused on attendance, engagement, wellbeing, leadership development, and inclusive school cultures. Lalaga demonstrates that investment in relational, culturally grounded programmes functions as enabling infrastructure supporting schools to meet their core objectives through preventative, strengths-based, and sustainable approaches.

Guiding pathways for embedding, sustaining, and scaling LALAGA

The following six recommendations reflect the layered way LALAGA creates change beginning with rangatahi, extending into schools and whānau, strengthening community leadership, and contributing to wider system outcomes. Rather than prescribing a single model, these recommendations are offered as guiding pathways and questions for schools, funders, councils, and partners to consider how LALAGA-informed practice could be embedded in ways that are realistic, staged, and locally owned. Together, they balance aspirational direction with implementable actions grounded in evidence from the 2025 evaluation.

LALAGA RECOMMENDATIONS

1 RANGATAHI

Continue investing in early, identity-affirming leadership development

Sustain LALAGA as an early-intervention leadership and wellbeing programme that prioritises identity and belonging, creative expression as leadership practice, relational safety and trusted mentorship, and the development of voice, confidence, and self-belief.

What does it look like to create spaces where rangatahi can belong, be themselves, and step into leadership with confidence and cultural grounding?

2 SCHOOLS

Embed LALAGA as a school-within-a-school leadership pathway

Partner schools should adopt LALAGA as a school-within-a-school programme, co-funded and delivered annually, aligned to wellbeing, engagement, and leadership priorities. This includes hosting the programme onsite, recognising LALAGA as a legitimate leadership pathway, and supporting teacher participation in relational, culturally grounded practice.

What would it look like for schools to embed LALAGA as a school-within-a-school pathway, alongside existing options such as LACs, that supports wellbeing, engagement, and leadership?

3 WHĀNAU

Strengthen family connection as a core site of impact

Continue to design LALAGA as a whānau-inclusive programme by maintaining community showcases as collective moments of affirmation, strengthening intergenerational communication and visibility for families, and recognising whānau as partners in sustaining leadership and confidence over time.

How might whānau be recognised not only as supporters, but as partners in nurturing confidence, leadership, and belonging over time?

4 COMMUNITY

Position LALAGA as a youth leadership pipeline for Ōtara

LALAGA has demonstrably contributed to youth civic participation, environmental awareness, creative leadership, and local pride. Auckland Council and the Ōtara–Papatoetoe Local Board should recognise and support LALAGA as a local youth leadership pipeline, investing in cohorts focused on future community advocates and champions, environmental and climate leadership, and creative and entrepreneurial navigation grounded in place.

What does it look like to grow local leadership pipelines rooted in place, culture, creativity, and collective responsibility?

5 SYSTEM

Protect the relational and cultural integrity of the LALAGA model

Evidence consistently shows that LALAGA's outcomes are generated through relationships, not content alone. Scaling without protecting this integrity risks undermining impact. Any growth or replication of LALAGA must maintain small cohorts and high mentor-to-student ratios, retain Pacific creative mentors and cultural facilitators, protect time for connection, reflection, and talanoa, and resist dilution into compliance-driven or extractive models.

6 INVESTMENT

Shift from short-term funding to multi-year partnership investment

Alumni outcomes and longitudinal indicators show that LALAGA's impact compounds over time. Funders should commit to multi-year (3–5 year) investment, recognising LALAGA as enabling infrastructure that supports education, wellbeing, environmental stewardship, and leadership outcomes simultaneously.

How might systems and funders shift from short-term projects to sustained investment in relational, culturally grounded infrastructure that enables long-term outcomes?

LALAGA

KEY LEARNINGS

The learning from the LALAGA Ōtara Leaders evaluation can be understood as a weaving space rather than a linear set of outcomes. Vertical strands represent the core elements that run through the entire programme, across all creative streams, stakeholder groups, and moments in time. Horizontal layers show where and how those strands show up and compound. Impact is generated not by any single strand or layer, but by their interaction. Where strands intersect with layers, meaningful and sustained change becomes possible.

	Identity & Belonging <i>Dignity</i>	Moana Leadership <i>Relationality</i>	Creative Expression <i>Voice</i>	Creative Practice as Infrastructure <i>Possibility</i>	Place-based & Environmental Care <i>Stewardship</i>
1 Individual	Confidence grows once vā (safety and belonging) are established.	Leadership begins with self-awareness and care for others.	Students gain voice, courage, and authentic self-expression.	Creative pathways enable participation regardless of confidence or literacy.	Care for place emerges as personal responsibility and pride.
2 Collective (Peers)	Group safety enables vulnerability and risk-taking.	Vā is strengthened in cohorts through trust, reciprocity, and mutual support.	Creativity deepens connection and shared group identity.	Creative spaces include diverse learners without exclusion.	Collective pride strengthens care for people and place.
3 Whānau	Identity and confidence are reinforced and affirmed at home.	Leadership is recognised, practised, and supported within the vā of whānau.	Creative outputs create shared pride and intergenerational affirmation.	Creative processes invite whānau into the learning journey.	Environmental values are carried and shared intergenerationally.
4 School	Students re-enter learning with confidence and belonging.	Teachers and students related through respect, care, and shared vā.	Creative engagement improves participation and classroom behaviour.	Creative practice supports inclusive, culturally-responsive, preventative pedagogy.	Place is affirmed with mana, not deficit narratives.
5 Community	Rangatahi reclaim Ōtara as home and source of pride.	Leadership extends into service and care in civic and community spaces.	Creative storytelling reshapes narratives about place and people.	Creative outputs enable accessible community engagement.	Environmental protection begins with dignity, identity, and belonging.
6 System	Early identity investment prevents disengagement later.	Moana leadership strengthens long-term pipelines over time.	Creativity sustains engagement beyond formal programmes.	Creative infrastructure outperforms extractive, short-term models.	Environmental justice is people-centred, not project-based.

Moana Leadership in this evaluation refers to leadership grounded in vā or the relational space that binds people, place, and responsibility. Vā is expressed through care, reciprocity, humility, service, and collective wellbeing rather than individual status or authority.



lalaga