

Ara Taiohi – Developing a Rainbow Competency Framework for Youth Sector Organisations

As the peak body for youth development in Aotearoa New Zealand, [Ara Taiohi](#) supports its members and others who work with young people to be more connected, effective and accountable. The J R McKenzie Trust recognised that the piloting, evaluation and refinement of Ara Taiohi's Rainbow Competency Framework was crucial so that the project could take its next steps. Supporting a peak body such as Ara Taiohi to undertake this important mahi meant that the positive impact would be felt more widely than a single organisation striving to achieve systemic change on its own.

Ara Taiohi's membership consists of 121 organisational members and it reaches over 700 individual members via those organisations. Its goals are to connect the sector, raise the standards, champion youth development, and promote sustainability to support young people to thrive.



Ara Taiohi is at the forefront of advocacy for young people in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Ara Taiohi has a key focus on young Rainbow people since 2012 when the Queer/Trans Caucus was first established as part of its youth sector report, [Te Hautaki](#). This entailed a national consultation across 11 hui which recommended Rainbow issues be included in all facets of youth sector work. It was recognised that Rainbow young people struggle with discrimination, stigma and exclusion and there was a call for the creation of a Rainbow Competency Framework for the wider youth sector.

Competency frameworks are designed to help organisations and individuals to provide services that are appropriate to people outside their usual frame of reference. Competency is about understanding and learning to communicate across

cultures by understanding that no one person's position is neutral. For this important project, Ara Taiohi sought input from people best placed to help.

"We co-designed the Rainbow Competency Framework with young Rainbow people from around the Wellington region, and with input from experts from the Rainbow community sector," says Anya Satyanand, Executive Officer at Ara Taiohi.

The young people were very clear on what they needed mainstream youth development organisations to do:

- Welcome Us
- Count Us
- Respect Us
- Include Us

The aim of the Rainbow Competency Framework is to create safer youth environments where young people with diverse sexes, genders and sexualities are respected, made to feel welcome, and ultimately thrive. Ara Taiohi understood that in order to design a Framework that would be embraced, all parties would need to be on board.

"Part of the kaupapa is about partnership between mainstream and Rainbow organisations, and Ara Taiohi and Rainbow Youth have modelled this through our partnership to prototype, pilot and refine the Framework," says Anya.

She's been really pleased with the interest and engagement from mainstream organisations.

"We've been so heartened by the unexpected champions we've found in the mainstream sector; people who are 'old school' but because they've had young people asking them questions about their Rainbow competency, they're seeking knowledge, and are genuinely committed to making changes!"

The team at Ara Taiohi has big plans around how they'll embed the Rainbow Competency Framework.

"We'll be building 'Rainbow competency' into [Korowai Tupu](#), the professional association of youth workers, beginning with the ongoing professional development process and eventually into base competencies. We'll also build it into our online self-review tool for mainstream organisations. Lastly, we'll continue our work with Rainbow Youth to build the capability of the Rainbow sector to deliver high quality training and support for mainstream organisations," says Anya.

The future is looking rainbow bright.