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Experiences of The Pākehā Project Leadership Journey

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# A REWIRING OF SELF

July 2025

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**weave**

for

 The  
Pākehā  
Project

# ||| CONTENTS

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<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>What drew people</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>What people gained</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Key impacts</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>How is it being applied</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Programme contents</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Programme insights</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Programme challenges</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Programme suggestions</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Content feedback</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Facilitator feedback</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Next steps</b>	<b>25</b>

# == EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**In May 2025, 19 people across the three cohorts were interviewed online about why they did the Pākehā Project Leadership Journey, what they gained, what they found challenging, what they are applying, and their key insights.**

**Their reflections provide a clear sense of the transformative power and contribution of this leadership journey to the pursuit of a Te Tiriti-led Aotearoa New Zealand.**

19 TOTAL	2022 cohort	2023 cohort	2024 cohort
People came for	The kaupapa; connection with other Pākehā; leadership growth.		
They gained	Sense of self; personal healing; stronger relationships; new capacities & tools; deeper community; better communication.		
Application	Shared/co-leadership; restorative tools; community-led approach; tangata Tiriti leadership; wellbeing focus; different conversations.		
Insights	The history of Aotearoa New Zealand & what the Pākehā work is; ways to restore relationships and systems; learning to manage self.		
Challenges	Cost; the name of the programme; reactions from others; initial vulnerability; returning from such an immersive programme.		
Strengths	Facilitation; transformational outcomes; supportive community; self-awareness & agency; relational focus; constitutional confidence; healing/restorative practice.		

# The Pākehā Project



Tiriti honoured.

Whenua flourishing.

People thriving.

Power shared.



# × INTRODUCTION

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**“The Pākehā Project Leadership Journey is designed to support you to explore your role as Pākehā in moving towards an Aotearoa where Te Tiriti o Waitangi is truly honoured. The programme will challenge you, nourish you, and energise you to enact and embody your commitment to healing the harms of colonisation so all can flourish.”** *2025 programme information*

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Co-founded by Louise Marra and Rebecca Sinclair, The Pākehā Project Leadership Journey began its first annual programme in 2022 with a cohort of 24 people. Three years in, 52 people have completed The Pākehā Project Leadership Journey, with most taking part in ongoing alumni gatherings and connection. Participants are predominantly women and most live in Te-Ika-A-Māui, the North Island.

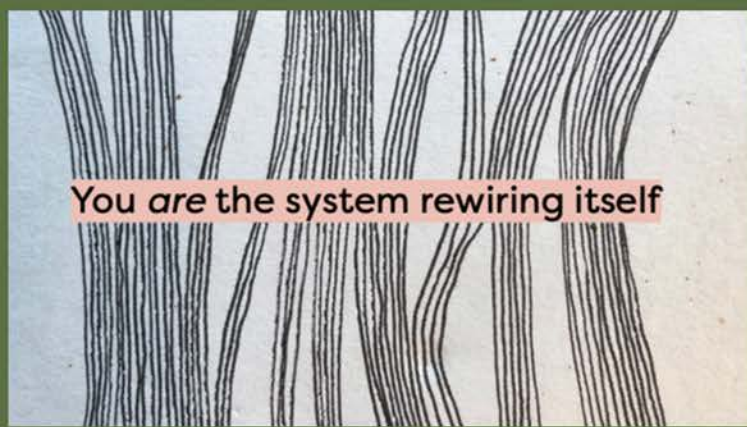
The Pākehā Project explores the work of Pākehā, to realise a Te Tiriti o Waitangi-led Aotearoa and build a flourishing and restorative future for all. It works with the deepest level of the system—embodied understanding—the place of true transformational change. From here the more explicit layers of relational change, and structural change become possible.

The foundation of the leadership journey is that to effect culture change, we need to understand our own culture first, and how it plays out in us. Only then can we come into right relationship with tangata whenua and tauiwi, engage with Te Ao Māori respectfully and authentically, and work more skilfully with the complex entangled systems we inhabit.


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**The Pākehā Project Leadership Journey runs between July and November each year and consists of an online orientation, four in-person retreats, regular online sessions and three individual online coaching sessions.**






You are the system rewiring itself




Doing the Pākehā work




Restoring collective trauma


# THE 7 POU




Building momentum with others



Engaging with Te Ao Māori  
as Pākehā



Developing other intelligences



Constitutional imaginaries

# = WHAT DREW PEOPLE

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## 01 The kaupapa

A personal and professional interest in the kaupapa of the programme and values alignment with its aims are the primary drawcard. People came who were interested in social justice, New Zealand's colonial history and the role of their ancestors in that, and in Te Tiriti.

Some referred to wanting to go further on their Te Tiriti journey. Several noted wanting to grow their sense of self as Pākehā; to be more grounded in who they are and to do that in a collective way with others.

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## 02 Desire to connect with other Pākehā wanting to do this work – and to do the Pākehā work

There was interest in connecting with other tauīwi interested in Te Tiriti and anti-racism work and a realisation that Pākehā need to equip themselves to be good Te Tiriti partners. Some had a supportive organisation that aspires to be Te Tiriti-led, which paid for them to take part.

# = WHAT DREW PEOPLE

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## 03 Leadership growth

An interest in alternative leadership models, indigenous models and in Te Tiriti based leadership was a key attractor to the programme. Several people stated that they had been challenged by Māori to do some work on themselves.

People wanted tools to act in bicultural ways and a significant number saw this programme as a natural next step on their journey having done other programmes (those noted were Take Take, Leadership New Zealand, Te Atakura, Gathering at the Gate, The Wall Walk, Waking Up to Whiteness, Ki te Hoe and Tauwi Tautoko).

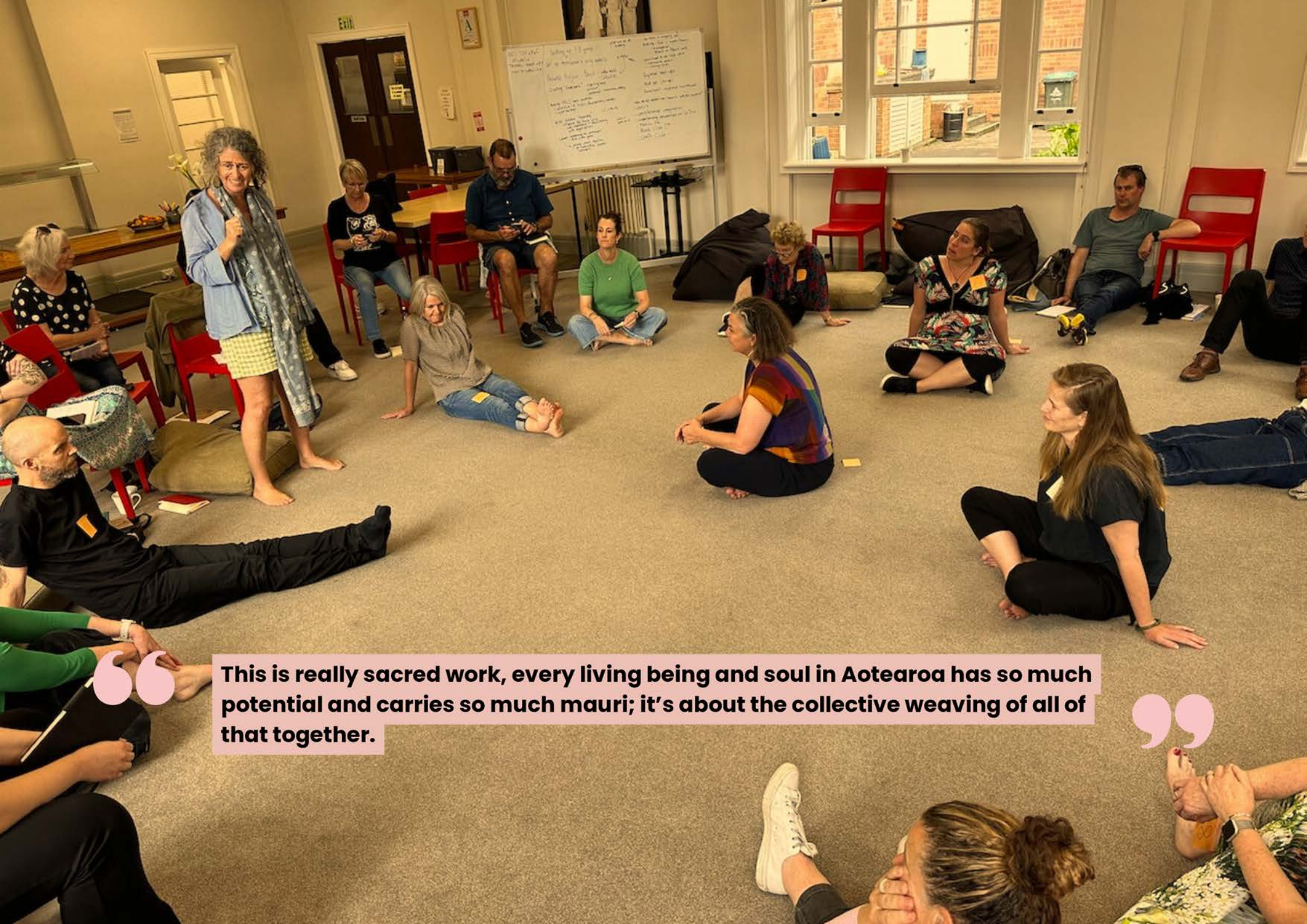
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## 04 Trust in the facilitators and/or was recommended

Another major drawcard was already knowing and trusting the facilitators Louise and/or Rebecca or wanting an opportunity to work with them. Some trusted the recommendation of someone else they admired or knew other

people who had done it. Several people stated that they knew this programme would go deeper and further; that 'it would not just be another Treaty training or decol programme'.





“This is really sacred work, every living being and soul in Aotearoa has so much potential and carries so much mauri; it's about the collective weaving of all of that together.”



# ≡ WHAT PEOPLE GAINED

The overriding sense from participants is that this programme is deeply transformative on multiple levels:

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**It was like waking up from the matrix.** I had spent my entire life to that point rocking along accepting the dominant culture at face value. I realised that almost everything about how we run things is just choices, not 'how it is'.

**I got to feel seen** and valued at a very deep level, in a way that's more unconditional than my experience of family to date.

People come out of the Pākehā Project not just with a desire to do things differently, but with the **tools and confidence.**

You have points in your life that **change how you live your life**, this is one of those. There is no going back, I was sitting in my ignorant bubble, I have gone through this and my eyes have been opened, I have new knowledge about myself, systems, New Zealand as a whole.

It's really nice having a network outside of work; having that web behind you helps with your ability to be in a leadership role – that can't be underestimated. Our cohort got pretty tight pretty quick – **I know I can ring any one of them and they would be there for me.**

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# ≡ KEY IMPACTS

“It’s given me hope and brought me closer to humanity and myself.”



## 01. REVISED SENSE OF SELF, WAYS OF SEEING/BEING

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- Shifted sense of identity & belonging
- I can be myself
- I can honour my Pākehāness and ancestry
- Thinking differently, more deeply
- Seeing why we have the system we have
- More confident in my position in the world



## 02. PERSONAL HEALING

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- Catalyst to undertake personal therapy
- Tracing ancestors, going deeper into intergenerational lineage healing
- Making lifestyle changes
- Closed some trauma loops
- Taking better care of self
- Given me permission to be who I am, renounce perfection, rewire old habits



## 03. BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

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- More comfortable approaching and working with iwi/Māori
- Shifted from a superior to relational mindset
- Moving from guilt, fear, indecision to navigating deep issues & forming relationships
- Stronger relationships at home, work, friends



# ≡ KEY IMPACTS

“ I notice what’s happening in peoples’ nervous systems. ”



## 04. NEW CAPACITIES & TOOLS

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- Can engage with racism with curiosity and empathy
- Can live with uncertainty
- Can settle myself, be more self-regulated
- Slowing down, working with mauri (life force)
- Am now more creative
- Practical tools – the intelligences, nervous system, noticing triggers



## 05. DEEP CONNECTION & COMMUNITY

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- More connected with nature
- Deep bond and ongoing connection to cohort (this was universal)
- Discovered a different way of being in community
- Closed some trauma loops
- Motivation and courage to stand up and act, within a web of others



## 06. BETTER COMMUNICATION

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- More willing to say what I think; caring less what others think
- Can engage in hard conversations with empathy, without reacting
- Resourced to have meaningful conversations about what it means to be living here, who we are in NZ, what has happened & what it could look like

# + HOW IT IS BEING APPLIED

**Most people on the programme are committed to bringing their experience and learning from this leadership journey into the spaces in which they live and work, including at home, with rangatahi leaders, in their church space, in the legal profession, in government spaces and in the community sector.**

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My kids are already there – **I’m working on my role as an ancestor**, I’ve got a whole new world now, it’s like I’ve gone from black and white to colour, totally mind blowing.

My team is mixed pakeha/Māori, can sense tension in the room, would have wanted to have answers or fix it, gave me **confidence to acknowledge the entanglements** and decades worth of stuff, and say ok I can sense stuff going on here, that was really powerful.

**I now know I am a spark** that can be part of rewiring the system. With this consciousness I will weave a new way forward, one step, thought, action at a time; I am a thread weaving a new rug.

I was able to speak on behalf of pākehā at a tangi of a kuia; **that was a moment of connection.**

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# Participants are applying what they learned in four main ways.



## 01. Applying learning at work

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Of the many examples of how people were applying what they learned at work, key ones were:

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### || SHARED/CO-LEADERSHIP

“This has brought a kaupapa Māori way of working throughout our services; it’s so much better for our whānau.”

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### ✕ USING PROGRAMME TOOLS

Working with the nervous system, working with triggers, self-regulating, slowing down and acknowledging when trauma and tensions arise, without needing to fix or solve.

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### ≡ STARTING WITH COMMUNITY

“I now start with true consultation from the beginning, with iwi, hapu, other communities, working genuinely – a power shift, being ok with the unknown, it’s flipped my approach.”

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### + LEADING A TANGATA TIRITI GROUP

Working more confidently, differently and far more constructively with iwi/Māori and with Tangata Whenua and tauiwi at work.

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### -- WELLBEING FOCUS

“For the first time in planning days last year, I talked to my team around our wellbeing – the way I manage staff is slightly different, we have more conversations about how we are. I told staff the only PD we will contribute to is Te Tiriti related.”





## 02. Being clear on purpose & leadership

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## 03. Having different conversations

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## 04. Taking steps in personal development

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"I'm learning what to pick up and put down in holding space for Māori in New Zealand, and what my role is in that."

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"I have shifted from being a public sector middle manager after many years, to developing an anti-capitalist business based on 'enoughness' and rehumanising the workplace."

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"I had a transformational talk with my father-in-law – pre Pākehā Project I would have got my back up, instead we learned from each other."

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"Before I would be strident, that's terrible why are you saying that stuff, trying to convince others, now I take more time to think about where this might be coming from, more forgiving, and how do you influence change with people who are polarising."

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Participants shared how the programme has been a catalyst for accelerating personal development, for example in terms of reconnecting with ancestry, learning Te Reo, or seeking therapy.

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## **Participant stories:**

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**One participant shared a story of how the programme had transformed the relationship between her organisation and a local iwi, by seeking to work together, owning and apologising for past mistakes made and developing a real relationship with a key iwi leader, which unlocked the wider relationship between the organisation and the iwi.**

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**Another participant spoke about the journey her organisation had been on to explore and implement a shared leadership model. Over a two year period, she worked with her board, sought advice, built relationships, and had wānanga to move towards a model of tikanga-based shared leadership. Now they are sharing the leadership and walking in two worlds.**

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# !! PROGRAMME CONTENT

**Drivers for these changes were: the skilled facilitation which created a safe, non-judgemental, honest space; programme content which includes bringing in guest speakers to act as 'wise guides'; building a sense of community, support and belonging in the group; and provision of diverse practices, tools and knowledge.**

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The non-judgemental approach to the kaupapa was transformative. Being able to extend that out has been powerful for me – not being judgemental of others, being more accepting, approaching things with love.

They showed us dominant operating systems, the white western world view, made it safe, no blame, shame, less than, it was an enabling investigating of pākehātanga.

The guest speakers, Doctrine of Discovery, nervous system, Te Tiriti learning, constellation.

The facilitators create safety and a healing field. They hold space with generosity and love, it was like we collectively created a woven basket that held us all – I wish everyone could feel that.

A brave thing is they allow a space for discontent in the group, it is a superpower to process that – when someone doesn't agree it unsettles the whole and it feels nasty – as Louise is totally unfazed by that, it allows everyone to mature around conflict and process that.

Connecting with nature, learning to let things go, contemplate.

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**It was noted that there is ongoing connection and support from The Pākehā Project once the formal programme ends: with the facilitators, self-organised through their own cohort, and through alumni gatherings.**



**There are not many courses where you get to stay in—this is a network where this is important, we go off into our own lives and come back to re-source, re-root, and get new knowledge and insight; it keeps feeding you over time.**



# !! PROGRAMME INSIGHTS



## **The history of Aotearoa New Zealand & what the Pākehā work is**

"It opened my eyes to the history of our country and the system we are operating under. There has been a strange collective amnesia about our history, we weren't taught it in schools, don't want to know about it, I had my eyes opened to that."

"In New Zealand a big thing that plays out is 'It wasn't me, I don't have to do anything about it', that's about guilt and fear; you may not have personally done that but get a lot of privilege from it and continue to, that is freeing. You can then be humble and step back from spaces you might have gone stridently ahead but it's not your story to tell or your work to do."

"Learning about colonialism, the wise guides were really good to provide insight into the lived experience of this, smart but humble and generous people. Huge generosity in Māori, constantly amazed at how generous they are to Tangata Tiriti and continue to be."

"To be a strong ally you need to be centred in who you are, where you come from, the world views you have absorbed, so you end up not doing further harm."

"It deepened my understanding of the superiority of the white western world."

"The importance and urgency of the constitutional work."

# !! PROGRAMME INSIGHTS



## **Ways to restore relationships and systems**

"I learned relationships need to come first."

"My organisation has been built on trauma and it's following them everywhere, I am thinking what would a walking healer do? What does healing look like for here? It's me being safe, steadfast, kind."

"I do things differently, avoid cultural appropriation, am respectful."

"I learned I can't control others. A lot of it made me centre on what matters and where I can have an influence versus where I can't and when to let go and stop worrying about things."

"Collective work is critical – if you are doing this individually its perpetuating a western approach; this has been a big eye opener in terms of growth work."



## **Learning how to manage myself**

"An a-ha thing was giving me more ability to be in spaces that are uncomfortable and to be ok with that."

"Confronting my own biases and challenging others; situational challenging to see if its racism or ignorance."

"Not getting triggered, I can feel that arriving and now have skills and ability to go this is a me thing, why am I feeling threatened."

"Biggest growth comes out of the things that are most challenging."







# + PROGRAMME CHALLENGES

**Cost of the programme is a barrier for many, despite being comparable or lower cost than other programmes for the time involved and depth of content and support offered alongside. Some struggled with the language used in the information provided on the programme.**

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There was some wondering about the name 'The Pākehā Project' but most changed their mind about this as the programme went on.

*"I didn't like the name but then I realised I am the project; I do like it now."*

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One person shared the Pākehā Project on their Facebook page and faced a racist reaction from a family member, who no longer talks to them.

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People were at different places on their Te Tiriti and self-discovery journeys, which could cause tensions. Some were challenged initially by the nature of some of the practices they were asked to do, like meditation, connecting with nature, and with being vulnerable in a group.

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Some found it hard to return to their lives after such an immersive experience and keeping the community and connection going is strongly desired but takes effort in busy lives.

# + PROGRAMME SUGGESTIONS



## **Reframe what the programme is and what it isn't**

That it's about being a good Te Tiriti partner and about becoming Tangata Tiriti, and about thinking about leadership more relationally; that it involves personal development work and will be challenging at times.



## **Consider renaming the programme**

Especially in this current political environment.



## **Be clear on who is being targeted and who the programme is for**

Focus promotion on who is being targeted – for example those who are willing to do self-development work, explore being a good Te Tiriti partner and wanting to lead more relationally.



## **Consider having different levels of offering**

For those new to this work and those more familiar, potentially offer shorter courses and specific options such as coaching, support mechanisms once people leave the programme and cultural advisor support for Tangata Tiriti working in edgy spaces.



## **Resourcing**

Multiple suggestions were made to resource the programme so that scholarships can be offered and costs brought down for wider reach, including sourcing patrons, philanthropic support, targeting corporate leaders and alumni subscriptions.



# × CONTENT FEEDBACK

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**Feedback on the content and processes of the programme was universally positive.**

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Content was fantastic, the wise guides [external speakers], coaching, online sessions in between [in-person] retreats, the facilitation was great, it was learning in action.

It has been so intentionally thought through, and adapting as they go, it has flexibility and wovenness.

Half is unpacking yourself and half is the tools.

The restorative leadership in a changing world doc, that outlines what makes this programme different and have transformational outcomes – this pulls it [the conceptual framework] together for me.

Enables you to think critically in a different way about all sorts of things – helps you move from guilt, fear, indecision to being able to navigate these deep issues, form new relationships.

**Suggestions to strengthen content were:**

- **Do more small group work.**
- **Include more on how people are applying the Pākehā Project in their workplace, and on how to put learning into practice at work and in life; focus more on how to take it out into the world.**
- **Be coached or in peer groups to commit to prototyping.**

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# × FACILITATOR FEEDBACK



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**There was only praise for the facilitators Louise and Rebecca, and for the guest speakers.**

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Both women are extraordinary teachers, in the presenting of sessions they model a very holistic way of being, and that's catchy. Everybody feels that.

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Facilitation was awesome – guests, the way Louise can hold space when trauma comes up and help them deal with that in a group setting is remarkable.

Louise and Rebecca are extraordinary facilitators – they can build trust quickly between diverse people, phenomenal. Whatever your level of knowledge, no-one was made to feel they didn't have enough knowledge, it's a really safe space, I'm blown away by how they do that.

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**No-one going in understood how deeply this affects your central essence and core, it was going to the heart and you have to function from the heart. It makes people vulnerable; you go to that depth.**

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# THE PĀKEHĀ PROJECT LEADERSHIP JOURNEY: NEXT STEPS

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**The Pākehā Project is an oasis in a desert of desperate social justice activism.**

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**Cohort four of The Pākehā Project Leadership Journey begins in July 2025.** The feedback from this evaluative process has been folded into the 2025 programme and the work constantly evolves with each cohort. The suggestions for strengthening made above are being proactively explored.

The global and national contexts for this work are extremely challenging. Offering this programme and media around it has drawn hate mail, abuse and personal threats against the facilitators. Their direct experience of the issues raised in the programme have been used to strengthen the learning further.

Increasing polarisation, inequity, and divisive agendas highlight the vital importance of work that seeks to collectively restore, heal, share power and build a flourishing future for all.

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