



create happy

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Welcome to the

GRIT

EDITION

Contents Page

WAIRUA

Running out of Time: Getting Older	1
Mental Health Matters Initiative: An Interview	4
But I'm Here	12
Peace After Violence	16
The Monster: A Poem	19
Art & Soul	20
Who Am I?	23
Like a Rose: A Poem	25

INTEGRITY

Whakaaro NZ: Interview	28
AI Bias	33
Healthy Disagreement	37

MANA

Make It 16: Interview	42
My Journey Through Fear	45
Feminine Thoughts: A Poem	49
The Beauty Of Fear	53

Contents Page

PASSION

Walk the Line: An Interview	56
Another poem about Feminine Rage... ..	61
Lemon Curd Crinkle Cookies	63
Sustainable Fun: Interview	66
Finding Comfort in your mental Health	70
Climbing through the Challenges	74
My Family Yarn Business	76
Becoming a young music artist: An Interview	79
The Rainbow Challenge	82



Editor's Note

Kia ora readers,

Thank you for joining us for the 2023 Grit Edition of the Create Happy Magazine.

Within these pages, we have an array of incredible stories of courage, determination, and persistence that show the strength and mana of rangatahi in Aotearoa. Stories of overcoming lifelong fears, bringing education and advocacy to other young people, and of winning the battle against your own mind. Stories that, we hope, resonate with you long after the final page is turned.

The Grit Edition is a celebration of resilience, of survival, of success. Of enduring struggle that threatens to tear you down, but beating it, and emerging stronger and brighter than ever. It's the dirty work that goes into making our world a better place, the work that we don't always get to see.

Right now, Grit is more important than ever. For so many people, 2023 has brought challenges and struggles that we did not ever believe we would have to endure. Challenges that even for the strongest of us, threaten to drown us. When faced with these, when faced with so many hurdles, it can feel as if we have no hope and that the work of so many, to improve our world, was futile. This is why the stories of this Grit Edition are so crucial. To serve as a reminder that despite the challenge, we will always prevail. That no matter how many times we are torn down, we are always able to rise again.

We hope that these stories help you to see the other side of rangatahi in this country, the side that isn't always properly represented. We hope you are inspired, and that you go out and challenge the narratives aiming to define you.

Cassie Taulelei
Interim Co-Editor

Section 1

Wairua



Running out of time: getting older

Words by Holly Davies

Getting older is scary; it's a list of expletives I'm technically not allowed to say in a youth magazine. When you're a kid, you want to grow up and be whatever adult you've always envisioned you would be, with whatever cool career, too.

You'd be rich, have a cool husband and a couple of kids. University degrees don't exist for kids; you can do whatever you want without one. Adults laugh at you when you talk about your future adult life like it's a romanticised and glamorised fairy tale or a Disney movie. *Lizzie McGuire* or *A Cinderella Story*-Esque.

But as you get older, everything starts to hit you like palm-sized hail. It gets harder and harder until, bang, you're an adult or a couple of months away, and it's almost too late to process and prepare yourself.

At the time of writing this, my eighteenth birthday is in two weeks. By the time this edition and article are out, I will be eighteen. I'm finished high school forever.

Growing up, we are constantly asked a variation of, "What do you want to do when you grow up?" or "Who do you want to be when you grow up?"

You go through phases in life and think of different careers and identities. I wanted to be a princess, a fairy, a mermaid, a hairdresser, a mother and children's book writer, an author, a teacher, an author again, a photographer, a nurse, a poet, a journalist, a director, and a psychologist.

Art/Lindsey Song





Sometimes, I didn't know what I wanted to do, and sometimes, I've been lucky enough to have options. A list of future careers and potential lives.

In periods of my life, I've been so certain, but now I get confused because even though I was thirteen and had no idea what I wanted to do except hopefully live until I was fourteen, there are so many things I want to do. So many things and so much work to do. It's so exhausting, but at least when I was a kid - when I was thirteen, fourteen, even fifteen and potentially sixteen, there was one question people always told me that made me feel a *liiiiitle* better.

It's okay; you still have a lot of time to decide." Or variations of such.

But I haven't been told this for around a year now. I've even been told that I need to make up my mind or that I'm actually running out of time.

Grown adults and educators (who I know have lots of experience, sure) have been telling me I don't have much time to decide. Just when I'm trying to pave my way through whatever this all is.

Apparently, when you hit around seventeen, you have to make up your mind. You're cutting it close. Essentially, you're on your deathbed by the time you've reached Dancing-Queen-by-Abba-age. But it gets better because, like, even if you aren't completely fixed on your specific career but you know you want to go to university after high school, you have to make sure you get your University credits and pay lots of money to either rent a flat, apartment, room or University dorm room.

Alongside that, you get some pretty little student debt.

I know Create Happy is about happiness, and potentially, I should romanticise the idea of growing up and act like this is a little bit less scary than it actually is. But genuinely, it goes against my very being to cookie-cutter it all.

“Essentially, you’re on your deathbed by the time you’ve reached Dancing-Queen-by-Abba-age”

It doesn't mean it's all bad, though. I feel like my time is running out, but honestly, it's not. No matter how long we live, we have our lifetime to live it. We can build and create our lives, identity, and jobs on top of the foundations we developed as children.

We can tell crappy self-deprecating jokes and tease each other about how we a guy once gave you 20 bucks and a block of chocolate in order to marry him, and you took it (of course), but now you're a lesbian, and you'll definitely never marry him.

You can be eighteen and spend more time with your friends and live on your own or with your friends and stay up all night and sleep in all morning, eating a bucket of ice cream to yourself.

I'm told my time is running out, but honestly, it's not. My childhood and adolescence are ceasing, but I still have the memories, the learning.

I don't have to panic even though sometimes panic, when controlled to a certain level, can be sort of motivating.

Just because I'm eighteen soon and it's my last year of high school doesn't mean I have to "hurry up" and pick a specific route or career. Uni can help me with that; experience can.



Photography/Supplied

Just because my dreams and hopes don't align with one specific generic path, that doesn't mean I am running out of time, or I'm confused. When I was a kid, I loved the *Bee Movie*, but I related to the main character because I despised the idea of having the exact same job for the rest of my life. Stability is nice, but I need to learn continuously and be excited every workday.

And even though, like, I'm scared - I'm petrified, and even though I'm still figuring out what I'm doing, it's okay. I'm a little excited. And just because I'm not going to Uni this year, I don't have to worry about running out of time. Neither do you. Just keep working, living and experiencing. You won't fall to pieces because you're eighteen and you're not studying to be a doctor or a lawyer. Because you don't know what you want to do yet.

Take your time.

Mental Health Matters Initiative

Interview by Cassie Taulelei

The Mental Health Matters Initiative is a youth activism organisation advocating for a series of systemic fixes to address the mental health crisis in Aotearoa. I sat down with the founder Amy and team member Kayla to discuss their organisation, their issues with the mental health care system, their plans to fix it, and some of their larger issues with youth activism in society.

How did the Mental Health Matters initiative begin?

Amy: The Mental Health Matters initiative was created nearly a year ago. In 2021, for a social studies project, I created a petition, which was demanding the government put more funding into private and public mental health care services.



I had one session in the public system with a 'health improvement practitioner,' and it didn't really go great. It felt very clinical, very unsafe, I didn't feel like I could really be honest and open. So I left that feeling a little bit dejected, and my mum said, 'Well, that was a bit of a mess.' We tried booking another appointment, but they were too busy, and we couldn't get another appointment soon enough.

I was fortunate enough that my mum was able to take me to the private sector, where I found care, and now I'm in a position where I can really advocate. But that care in the private sector I got really came from privilege. Not everyone has access to that, and I think that that is awful. Mental health care should be an inherent human right, and everyone should have access to the same care.



Everyone should feel that there are places that they can go to truly talk about their feelings. So I created this petition. It got a lot of support, and it was then that I realised this is a massive issue that needs to be advocated for by youth on a much larger scale than my petition. So that's when I created the Mental Health Matters initiative. I called on people in my local community, 'Who wants to jump on board into this kaupapa?' Let's see where we can take this because there is a massive need for advocacy in this space. We need people to actually be speaking up about this issue, specifically for youth, considering the specific contexts and challenges that youth face.

And Kayla, how did you get involved?

Kayla: I got on board late last year. I've known Amy for a few years now, and I've always been really passionate about mental health and mental health care. I want to get into mental health advocacy myself when I am out of school. So in 2022, applications opened up to join the team. I wrote a message about how important mental health advocacy was to me, and my experiences, as well as how I wanted to help people. I joined the team, and I've been a part of it ever since.

How has it been so far for you?

Kayla: Oh, I love it. It's such a wonderful team, it's a great environment. It is just genuinely so wonderful to have so many people from throughout the Wellington region who have all these different experiences coming together with their own unique skills for this kaupapa.



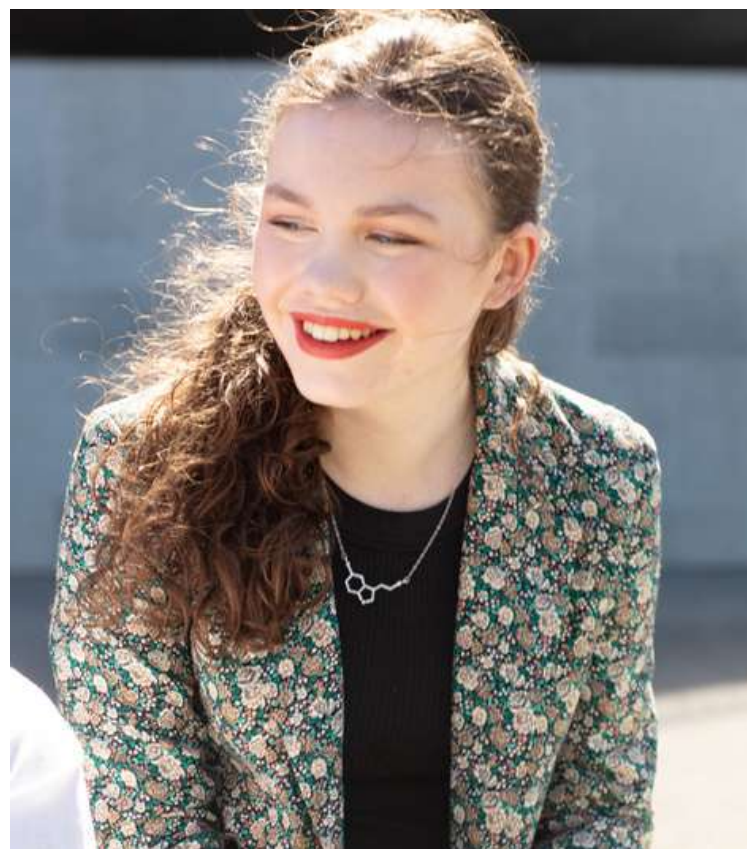
When you started the Mental Health Matters Initiative, what were some struggles that you had to work through to get to where you are now?

Amy: I think the problem with youth activism and working in these spaces is that it's very work intensive. I personally have so many things going on. I'm a full-time university student, I work two days a week, which doesn't sound like a lot, but mentally it can be quite heavy.

Then obviously I'm running MHMI, so it can get quite overwhelming. Another thing is that as a young activist, and the undermining that you get from adults and people in power for being loud and young, you second guess yourself a lot. That's something that I've personally struggled with. As soon as I get questioned by an adult, there's that inherent reaction where I feel like I have to trust them because they are grown up. But you kind of have to take a step back and think, 'Oh wait, there is an issue here. My voice is just as valid.' It can be really intimidating to enter a space of political activism, especially when that space doesn't inherently welcome young people.

Can you elaborate on that point of young people being invalidated by adults in power?

Amy: Firstly, I just want to say there are plenty of adults who have been really supportive of MHMI, like Matt Doocey and Chlöe Swarbrick, as well as my parents.



When I was presenting the petition to the select committee and providing my oral evidence, they said, 'Oh, my goodness, it's so great to hear from young people, this is so important' I got the report back, and they didn't really listen to any of it and kind of just kind of ignored all of the evidence.. Secondly, and this is kind of more on a minor scale, but this is something that we've always been cautious over the Mental Health Matters initiative is that you're quite vulnerable. You're entering spaces where lots of adults feel like they have control.

An article was published last year on the Newstalk ZB Facebook page, and I got called a nutjob, saying that I don't know what I'm talking about. So those are a couple of examples of when you're entering the space and those underlying feelings like an outsider.



Kayla: A lot of the time, you'll be saying something that you're entirely confident speaking about, but then, if you're speaking to an adult, and they say, 'Oh, are you sure about that?' I still have that experience where my confidence crumbles for a moment. So I say to myself, 'Well, what if I am wrong?' Because adults are so confident in themselves, they seem to believe that they have experience. I don't; therefore, they understand this better than I do. That's not necessarily something that people intend to do, but it is definitely something that you see a lot as a youth activist.

What's an accomplishment that you've been really proud of?

Amy: The thing that I'm most proud of, and our biggest accomplishment, is that we have created a community that feels really open and safe about talking about mental health. It's really reaffirming to see what we want to see on a bigger scale start to happen in the groups around us because that's how change happens.

That's how grassroots activism works, it starts on that smaller scale, and it balloons up. So that's something that I'm really proud of. Another big accomplishment is when we get people talking to us about how critical it is for them to see people talking about mental health. Or even just to hear the words, 'your voice matters,' in the context of mental health. That's really important.

Going into the future, what do you want to see for the Mental Health Matters Initiative?

Kayla: We don't necessarily have an end goal at the moment. First and foremost, a lot of the action we will take really depends on what happens after this election. Obviously, the ideal would be that the new government comes in and they fix it all.

But realistically, what's more likely to happen is that based on what kind of government gets in, we'll have to respond to that. For example, if National gets in, they want to elect a minister for mental health, which we also support.



At some point, we want to hold a rally outside Parliament to bring the issue of mental health right to parliament's doorstep. To make sure they know it's something they can't just put a symbolic 'solution' over and forget it for the next three years.

“We want to be providing a place for young people to share their experiences, speak up about what they're going through and let them know that it's actually okay not to be okay.”

Amy: When the next government comes in, we have to play it by ear. Lots of things can change within a political scene very quickly or very slowly. But there are going to continue to be issues with people's mental health, you can't fully solve mental illness. So even if we have a system that optimises care, I still think that there's going to be a need for an advocacy platform, to just talk about experiences. That's what my vision is for, that we keep holding our leaders to account because they can't keep getting away with ignoring it or treating it as just an election issue to get votes. We want to be providing a place for young people to share their experiences, speak up about what they're going through and let them know that it's actually okay to not be okay. That mental health is something that we need to be talking about. Because don't talk about it, it can be really dangerous.

What are some specific measures you want to see taken to address the mental health crisis?

Amy: So what we want to see when it comes to an effective mental health system is we want people to access care in ways that fit them. We don't want to see the main way of accessing mental health care as through a GP, in this very clinical way. How can people access mental health care within their communities, in places where people feel safe, like Marae or community centres.



We want a system that takes kaupapa Maori into consideration, which takes different cultures into account. We want to see mental health treated holistically, on a case-by-case basis, because you can't treat it in the same way you would treat a broken arm, for instance. We want to see a system where our mental health workers are taken care of because if they aren't looked after, the entire system falls apart. What we see today is a system where those workers aren't looked after, they're left to deal with an incredible amount of demand in unworkable conditions. We want to see the worker's mental health taken care of properly so that they can, in turn, take care of patients.



We cannot get an effective and caring society without everyone's input, and it's really important to believe in your voice, because it does have power, it does matter, and those stories are priceless to generate change.

Amy: We need to stop living in this world where policies and initiatives that are made to help youth are created by those who aren't living the youth experiences. Everyone was young at some point, but being a young person in the '70s, the '80s, or the '90s is different to being a young person in the 2010s or the 2020s, it's a completely different world. What we want to see is young people with those really unique experiences having a voice around the table.

“We need to stop living in this world where policies and initiatives that are made to help youth are created by those who aren't living the youth experiences.”

I entered the mental health system when I was seven, it would have been amazing to have my voice at the table talking about what was right for me instead of other people asserting what was right for me.

Kayla: The only thing I'll add to that is that we want to see an environment where mental health is something that can be easily talked about, where it's something that you learn about from your school years. We want to see people understand those signs to look for to know if they, their friends, or their family are struggling. We also want to teach people other strategies to deal with struggling mental health that aren't just 'go for a run,' or 'watch your favourite movie.' We want to see an environment where mental health is something that is destigmatised and understood, first and foremost.



What's one piece of advice you would give to people who want to get engaged with this space or with the Mental Health Matters Initiative?

Amy: My one piece of advice I would give to people who want to get into youth activism, whether it's inside or outside of the mental health space, is that your voice has power. No matter how many times people tell you it doesn't, your voice has power, and your experiences matter.

“No matter how many times people tell you it doesn't, your voice has power, and your experiences matter.”

If people want to get engaged with us specifically, there are ways to reach us on our website. Currently, our recruitments are open, so that is open to everyone between the ages of fifteen and twenty.

Anyone from anywhere around Aotearoa can join that. You can also flick us an email or send me or Kayla a message on our Instagram account. We are all very passionate and always willing to talk about mental health.

Kayla: One piece of advice I would give to people wanting to engage in youth activism is that there are a lot of times when you will have to fight your way into that space. It's okay to not always have the energy to do that. I think it's definitely something where you need to pick your battles. For me, because I have post-viral chronic fatigue, sometimes I do have to skip out on events that I want to go to because it would simply be too much. So it's okay if you can't deal with a certain event, you really have to pick your battles. Figure out what point it is that you want to get across, and then fight to get that point across.

You can find Mental Health Matters Initiative on Instagram under **@mentalhealthmattersinitiative** or on their website, www.mentalhealthmattersinitiative.com/



But I'm Here

WORDS BY ELLA MOONEY

Last November, my mind began plotting against me.

Prior to this, I knew I had Sensory Processing Disorder, but it only interfered with my life a little.

I had to wear headphones while doing dishes, I couldn't touch my skin in certain ways, and I would panic if my hands felt dry. OCD similarly manifested in small ways -- I had to reach the door before that car passed, I had to step over cracks, never on them, and I had to look away if someone wiped off the whiteboard in the wrong direction. All unpleasant but manageable parts of regular life.

That changed in November. Exams came, and my fear of failure (which, to me, meant anything less than an excellence in every subject) combined with my exhaustion from a year's worth of early mornings and tiring schooldays to produce burnout.

Sensory triggers took longer to recover from. A nest of starlings appeared in my roof, and suddenly I found I had to wear headphones constantly to mask the horrific screeching of common garden birds.



I had to look away more often from a bench being wiped down, had to hit a sequence of letters on my keyboard to prevent calamity, and had to walk on one side of someone instead of the other.

School finished in December, and I left and haven't gone back since.

Things only worsened over the holidays. Soon I found I panicked at anything being on my right-hand side, couldn't write without a breakdown, couldn't read because the pages were too terribly dry and couldn't even scroll on a device because the page 'went the wrong way'. Quite naturally, I became depressed, spending a good deal of time lying in bed listening to instrumental music because the 's' sound in speech hurt too much, with closed eyes to pretend there wasn't a wall to my right, trying to ignore the way the sheets touched my skin, crying because what else was there to do?



Things did get better from there, thank goodness.

I gradually regained my ability to write and read. Nothing will ever be as good as reading that first book, plastic wrap over the pages to keep their dryness from my hands, and at last being able to escape into another world again.

I received sympathy and workbooks from school, began to study again, and found that doing chemistry homework outside with a glass of lemonade was actually rather pleasant.

Fast forward to now – August as I write this – and clearly, I can type. I can walk my dog, read books, cook and bake, listen to ordinary music, and play chess. It's all still very difficult. Writing this is taking a toll on me, each press of a key on the 'wrong side' causes a burst of panic and 'make it right, fix it, undo it'. But I'm doing it.

I can't walk my dog far, as I can't walk near people in case I can't keep them all on my left side and can't afford to expend all the energy it takes to constantly notice twigs to step over with my left foot and trees to walk around the 'correct' side of. But I do it. I still have to wear headphones all the time, making conversation difficult, but I do that too.

I have learned so much since November, and I think, strangely enough, I appreciate my life more now that it is more restricted and difficult. My experiences have given me greater empathy for others. I try to play badminton with Dad while keeping him on my left side at all times and wearing headphones that could fall off if I lean too far over. I think of someone trying to play badminton who is blind or has only one arm or any number of things, and I wonder at how difficult that must be.

Small problems seem much less all-consuming now. I have an ulcer? At least I'm not having a panic attack because I walked around a tree wrong. Only a merit on an exam? Well, at least I was able to take the exam in the first place.

I think I have become better at problem-solving. Can't swim because I'm wearing headphones? Buy waterproof earbuds! Can't write because I'm too tired today? Invent a new font that means I can form the letters in 'correct' ways and use a pencil that doesn't have 'sides'. Can't sit anywhere in the house because Mum might be on the wrong side? Put a table in the sunroom!

GRIT EDITION

Even though it might seem like a negative, I do have enhanced senses, especially hearing. (A combination of headphone-wearing with already unusually strong hearing). If I need to, I can take off my headphones and endure the overwhelming rush of sound for a second in order to 'turn up the volume' on a quiet thing I want to hear. I also notice pretty much everything available to my senses (a product of constant scanning for something on the wrong side, something to step over, or something to keep from touching my skin), which will probably be useful in treasure hunts, though I haven't had the opportunity to test that out yet.

I don't really get jealous of people who get to do cool things or people in books or movies that I want to live in. I also don't feel a kind of nostalgia for the past- my own past and general history- anymore. The safest place for me is my home.



Even if I did, say, teleport to Hawai'i, or into the 70s, or a work of fiction, or back to a camping trip I always smile at, I wouldn't enjoy it. Hawai'i has people. The 70's did not have medication for OCD. The planet Pandora (from Avatar) has birds and no charging ports for my headphones. That camping trip involved birds and walking and people, and I didn't even have headphones then. The only trips I can currently take are those into works of fiction or other people's lives, so now I am only grateful for the opportunity to live vicariously through them.

A silly one, this, but worth a mention: I have become very good at distinguishing my left from my right, something some people can't easily do, and quite good at walking sideways and backwards. You might say I have become more aware of my body in three-dimensional space rather than one-dimensional because I often have to walk backwards or twist about in order to keep people on my left.

Maybe most importantly, I appreciate what I can do now rather than what I can't. In January, I couldn't really do anything. So now, when I walk or read, or sit and do nothing but not panic, I am overjoyed.

I have learned to have grit and to persist, even if only to persist in getting out of bed each morning. I have learned that things always change- for better or worse. I have discovered that people care about and will support me, which motivates me to try to support others in turn.

“I may not have climbed Mount Everest, survived a war, or slain a fearsome mythical creature. What I have done is simply exist,”

to the best of my ability, inside this brain I happened to find myself in. Others have done far more impressive things in far more restrictive brains, I know.

But I'm here, writing this despite it all, here cooking and drawing and learning and playing chess and reading and laughing, here living my life and - yes- being happy.

I won't go so far as to say I'm glad it happened. I wouldn't wish OCD and SPD on any but the most vile of humans. But I am glad that I have learned from it.

It was a difficult journey, one that's not over yet, and I wouldn't be surprised if, in a month's time, I look back on these words with disgust for my naive optimism about my situation.

But I'm here. Even if it never improves and this is my life now, as restricted as it is, I can look at how far I've come and all the things I can do, and say with real pride, "but I'm here."



Peace after Domestic Violence

Words by Sage Garrett

Content warning for discussions of domestic violence
Poem content warning for metaphorical cannibalism

I've always been quite open about my past as a survivor of domestic violence. Well, at least ever since a month or so after a school guidance counsellor sat me down and asked "Sage, you know what you're describing is abuse, yes?"

Although difficult to fathom at the time, the knowledge that what I went through was unacceptable changed my life and outlook on myself.

My personal experience is in "family" violence, although I don't consider the perpetrators to be family. People often assume that my father was the one inflicting violence, and I understand why, but it was partly this assumption that kept me in an abusive household for thirteen years.

Outsider assumptions and unhelpful norms are often factors that keep people in these situations. In an interview with Maria Phee (17), an inspiring survivor of partnered violence and a friend, she offered a similar sentiment "[during the abusive relationship] I wondered if it was just what mature relationships were supposed to be, because people always say 'Love is hard; it's not always sunshine and rainbows'. There is a difference between a rough patch and abuse."

Another saying I've always hated is "You can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family". That's BULL! I have a loving relationship with my Dad, but I am also lucky to have a Mum that I am not biologically related to. I haven't spoken to my biological mother in over four years; she is not a mother.

Found family is a gift to be treasured. It appears when sought, accepted, and nurtured. This is not always possible for everyone in every moment, but to me personally, it is something that I find important to keep in mind.

What is most important to me is to have an accepting community around me and a sense of self-care. Maria talked about how support from her family is important to her healing process and said "I think the biggest thing is validation; listening and understanding... It is good to have people say that it is okay to feel angry and sad". Even when I can't communicate how I am feeling verbally, I love to have mates who just muck around with me when I need to blow off some steam.

There are as many ways to foster self-care as there are people. For Maria, usually, it's one of her hobbies that she lost touch with like music, art or hanging out with friends and family. I often really like drawing or watching a new film.

What's important is that self-care is not something you only do when you've already reached your melting point, it's a practice to put in day by day, for healing and beyond.

Re-discovering something that you loved as a kid is a great way to figure out what makes you happy, even if it's making "potions" out of leaves or climbing trees.

I have never personally identified with the idea of an "inner child", because I believe that none of our "childlike" wonder should ever be limited to a specific version of ourselves. Rather, I view joy, playfulness, creativity, and recognition of beauty as integral parts of our being. Taking part in "childhood" activities helps me to feel that I never lost any of these traits, I may have simply not been allowing myself to express them.

No matter what anyone has EVER made you feel, whether it was in the long term or the short term, you are worthy of love, support, and care. NO EXCEPTIONS!

If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic violence, here are some resources that could be of help (more sources are available):

In the case of immediate danger: Call 111

Shine: Freephone [0508 744 633](<https://tel:+64508744633/>)

Women's Refuge: Women's Refuge website(external link) Freephone [0800 733 843](<https://tel:+64800733843/>)

Family Violence Info Line (Are you OK) Family Violence Info Line (Are you OK(external link)) Freephone [0800 456 450](<https://tel:+64800456450/>)

Hey Bro: Freephone [0800 439 276](<https://tel:+64800439276/>)

Along with this article, I have also written a poem about how my experience with abuse made me feel:



The Monster

You sliced my cuts and devoured me.

**My eyes first, so I couldn't see
even in my memory
what followed.**

**Then you got to my throat
so I couldn't scream,
couldn't dampen your regime
with the disastrous help of others.
next, I was skinned,
You even crunched down my bones,
until I was damn all.**

**I can't help but wonder
if it's meant to be this agonizing.
Or is your love language just pale horses and
broken promises of care?**

**Over the last thousand, four hundred, and sixty-four days,
I've had to stitch my own mending -
formed myself a momentous monster
to reclaim my humanity.
Every grizzly mark is bare to all spectators.
But at least I stand here.
At least I am free.**

**Herein lies my strength:
In the stitches that marry my stolen limbs and rotten frame.
I am beautiful because of the seams.
Sometimes I pull apart and the blood lays bare,
but it's all part of my devilish deal.
Rots and spores are the natural response
to the blind torture of your supposed nurture.
Although an accumulation of anguish,
I am threaded together by glorious golds.**

Art & Soul

COMPILED BY AMIRA STEPHENSON

Creativity is something innate in human nature. From poems to dances to paintings and shows, many people find being creative is an amazing outlet for almost anything and everything. Evident in the commonly made budget cuts to arts sectors, the power of creativity is often taken for granted. However, many rangitahi throughout Aotearoa and the world are using their creativity not only to fuel their passion but also as a reflection of their world.

Olivia, 15

I am a creative brain who can feel things deeply, a very rich mix that can create the truest art when found. I tend to lose myself in my journals and then find myself again, forming a connection with my own peace. It helps me understand how I feel and what I like, to know myself better, which betters me further, helping pave my future in the sense of never wanting to lose this part of me. I don't think anyone should live without being creative, for I think you're only half alive without it. I write until the words become less poetic and more of a relief, which I think shows how meaningful being creative is. I also dance. The movements of strength in jazz flow into delicate turns in contemporary.

That's one thing I am so grateful I have a healthy enough body for and have seen myself progress in. After doing so many levels, I have learnt to create my own choreography, even if it's in the kitchen at night following where the momentum takes me. I may not be good enough for the stage, but I have learnt I don't need to be; I do it for myself, which has helped me accept that I am who I am. I have friends who create paintings and write music and are incredibly talented, but you don't have to be legendary to be creative. What I do is different, and that's okay because it's me.

Photo/Mark Hamilton



Lily, 16

On stage is where I truly feel most at home. The unique community, physical demand, discipline and the magic of portraying stories through live performance, whether it be singing, acting, or dancing, have built the foundations of a home where I am comfortable to freely express myself and, over time, have found my identity amongst them. I was always the kid singing loudest in school singing (even if I was slightly off-key) and truly thrived when we were asked to adapt our year four reading books into short plays. I idolised the people who came to Kura to do our Duffy Book Assemblies and fell in love with mastering dance skills in the 'Aspire Arts Academy' studio mirrors, but it wasn't until I moved to Hamilton from Matamata in 2019 and was exposed to the fact that people were making a living off the colourful arts opportunities filling the city, I realised that it was what I wanted to do. As someone who felt feelings in a massive way as a kid, the performing arts created a gateway for me to healthily project those feelings into something that could help others feel included and connect with other creative people like me.

Artistic communities in the wider NZ continue to teach me that the arts aren't just about doing steps, singing a note or saying some lines. It's what you do with those disciplines and how it makes an audience feel that counts. I think the purpose of providing that experience for a viewer and the power of sharing experiences just by saying or doing a few things with purpose has provided me with enough sense of self to pop, and I am eternally grateful for that.



Photo/DJKnight Photography

Vandi, 18

I've found that my identity is a mosaic of different kinds of art I've created and consumed, and I'm always subconsciously consuming art and adding new pieces. As I've progressed through my teenage years, I've found that art is everywhere and in everything, and something doesn't have to be intentional to be considered art. I've found a lot of solace and therapy through art, and I've been able to grow to accept parts of myself that I had previously hidden or been unaccepting of. My gender has always been a significant factor in this. I think that gender is as free-flowing as the stream of art and media available to me is, but initially, this idea led to me feeling as though I should contort my gender to better fit the "free-flowing" revelation I had given myself. I spent a year completely rejecting femininity.

I rejected the idea of my body being a vessel and absolutely resented the fact that my body's biological purpose was to reproduce. All the art I created and consumed at this time was angry and trying to mould my being into something it didn't want to be. All that started to change when I fell in love. He introduced me to the possibility of every texture, colour and feeling (especially the good ones) being art. Art wasn't just angry and aggressive- art could be warm and comforting. Through that discovery, I rebuilt the foundations of my creative endeavours. I was no longer consuming and creating out of spite but out of love. It has been the most healing experience of my life, and I am forever grateful for my newfound ability to see art everywhere and in everything. Finding yourself is underrated and art and is, in my opinion, the best way to do it.



If you want to hear more from these talented artists find them on Instagram at:

@oliviagwenmills for Olivia
and @lily.burgessmunro for Lily.

WHO AM I?

WORDS BY ARIEL SAJAN



Art/Abi Street

"When I let go of what I am, I become what I might be." - Lao-Tzu

Adventurous, calculated, charismatic, loving.

These words may be what comes to mind when trying to think of my identity. "Who am I?" I am a proud Kiwi, born and raised in sunny Hawke's Bay. I'm a top student who works hard until success is in my view. I'm the youngest (and funniest) in a family of four. That's who I am. But why doesn't it feel like me?

I'm an Indian immigrant who struggles to seek my culture.

I am only one of many top students, all working for the same goals and getting lost in the crowd, all while trying to please those around me. I'm the baby of the family, the least called on for big decisions, rubbing my unimportance in my face. So, who am I?

Like I said, I'm a proud Kiwi, but why don't I "look" like one? I'm a good student, but why can't you see me? I'm a part of this great family, but why am I ignored?

I can't seem to grasp either culture. Too Indian to be Kiwi, too Kiwi to be Indian. I can't relate to the things my friends laugh about because that's not how my culture raised me. I can't relate to the things my cousins laugh about because I'm too "whitewashed" and too far stray from my culture.

My academics aren't *my* academics. I don't do what I do because I like it anymore, but simply because I want to be seen and recognised. I want people to be proud of me. But the only acknowledgement I seem to ever get is, "Oh, you're that one smart kid". I'm not like my family; I'm a baby. I don't speak our language the same way they do – not as well as them, as frequent as them, as fluent as them. I'm always overlooked. And all this seems to be contributing to the doubting of my identity. Of *who I am*.

So, how does one find their identity? Is it through songs like in a movie? Is it a grand realisation that comes to them in a dream? Does someone tell them – like a prophecy? I don't think so.

Although I can't give you a step-by-step demonstration on "DIY: how to unlock your inner selfhood" (as much as I'd love to), I can show you how I found my own. This doesn't mean that my identity is set in stone; that this is **who I am**. I'm 16-years-old. I have so much life left to live, so much left to uncover about myself. So, take what I'm about to say with a pinch of salt.

It's easy to just complain about everything going wrong in our lives; how hard it is for us, how everyone around us gets it so easy, how we would be able to do so much more with our lives if we weren't in the place we were. And it is just as easy to connect who we are to what we have achieved. If I win a Nobel prize, I'll be happy. If I'm stuck living at home, I'm a failure. If I don't know what I want to do with my life, I'm just like everybody else.

This is starting to sound like a math equation. $1+1=2$, me + accomplishments = identity, right?

Even being able to acknowledge this is a great achievement. We seem to get so caught up in what's going on around us that it doesn't even click anymore; we no longer see the root of who we are. So, I had to consciously decide to sit myself down and think. Think about what I like, what I don't like, who I do and don't like, and what makes me happy vs. what makes me sad. I had to choose to ignore the societal pressures that are pushed onto me, as an immigrant, as a female, as a teenager, and as a student.

I had to choose to be me.

I wonder to myself, why does my identity need to be connected to what I do? Why can't my identity just be me?

So, ask me that question again. I think I might have an answer now. **Who Am I?**

"When I let go of what I am, I become what I might be." – Lao-Tzu



like a rose

Poem by Santeria Healey-Stevens

Like a rose.

It always makes me happy to know, that it was your choice to go.

That you're happy now, you passed the pearly gates.

I know it was your choice to go, but I want you to know how much I miss you.

I miss you more than words can say.

Like a rose blooming in the garden, you were always there, pretty to look at, sweet to smell,

Then one day you went with the wind, as your petals fell.

And now you are gone, with hardly a trace.

Like a rose in the garden, I knew you couldn't stay.

But oh, how much I miss you.

I miss you more than ever words can say!



Section 2

Integrity



Whakaaro

Advocacy and civics education for rangatahi

an interview with
founder, Petra Graney



Photography/Supplied

Interview by Ella Sage

By youth, for everybody: Whakaaro New Zealand is an education in politics, advocacy, and civics. Founder, podcast host, marine mammal medic, whitewater kayaker, and self-proclaimed 'bird-nerd' Petra Graney (she/they) speaks about the inspiration behind Whakaaro, their own journey with activism and environmentalism, and offers advice to other rangatahi looking to break into similar spaces.

“I wanted to do something that involved anybody around the country”

“I’ve always been interested in environmental stuff. I joined Young Greens – only for a few weeks, during the 2020 election, but the group sort of fell apart after that. At the start of this year, it really kicked off for me. I helped out in the March strike in Nelson, and then I led the May one. I’m a part of Forest and Bird Youth, and I lead my school Enviro group. I even have a podcast, I’m also a marine mammal medic.”

Petra’s passion and excitement to be talking about Whakaaro is palpable, even when she’s 320 kilometres away and grinning through a grainy Zoom call.

Petra: “Whakaaro kind of came from – sorry, do you want me to talk about this later?”

Ella: “If you just want to keep talking, I can ask questions when you want them. You seem like you’re on a roll.”

Petra: “Yeah,” (they laugh) “I’ll just talk and talk.”

“I did a Blake Inspire course in July this year. Part of that course was making an action plan, and I was thinking I wanted to do something that involved anybody around the country. I didn’t want it to be localised, I didn’t want it to be all about me, I wanted to have something that was really broad and could apply to everybody. And part of having it apply to everybody is having relatively little bias.”

“That was the basis of Whakaaro. From being on the Blake course, I realised that even students who are

very environmental, very politically aware, and don't necessarily know how to get into things like activism.

As somebody who has managed to get into that myself – through years of doing other environmental stuff – I wanted to give some insight to anyone who wants it on how to do that and how to put your ideas across."

"You do have the skills, you do have the passion, you do have the drive. and you absolutely belong in this space."

"I never post anything about what I do. My resources are accessible to everybody. Just being in a society, there are people with different opinions. And those people aren't any less deserving of education on things that really should be common knowledge, around civics and how to get into advocacy."

"So, yeah, Whakaaro started, and it's still a work in progress. I only started it in the last couple of months, and I've posted – so far – a couple of guides on what Whakaaro is and some guides on joining groups because that's an awesome start for activism and

advocacy. We're getting to elections, so I made a post about the very basics of MMP and the New Zealand Parliament. Because there's nothing out there. There's all this stuff about the polls and everything, but it's so hard to find the basics... Oh, should I talk a wee bit about how I came up with the name?"

Ella: "Yeah, I was gonna ask about that, but you're onto it."

Petra: "Yeah yeah yeah." *(She's excited.)* "So. Whakaaro, of course, is a Māori word, and I did want to include a Māori word. I grew up in a school that had quite a big basis in te reo Māori, so I appreciate the deeper meaning behind a lot of Māori words.

Photography/Supplied



'Whakaaro' can mean to 'think, plan, consider, or decide,' which is where the whole political ideology comes in. But it can also be 'thought, opinion, plan, understanding, idea, intention, gift, or conscience.' This really encompasses everything I was considering when I was starting to think about Whakaaro, so it was really perfect.

“‘Whakaaro’ can mean to ‘think, plan, consider, or decide,’ which is where the whole political ideology comes in. ”

I didn't actually think of it myself - I was bouncing ideas off my friend on the Blake course, and she suggested something to do with the word 'whakaaro,' and I was like - just 'Whakaaro.' that's perfect."

The inspiration for Petra's activism and advocacy comes a lot from their very unique upbringing.

"I do recognise that I had a pretty amazing upbringing. From when I was 3 to when I was, like, 8, I lived on Great Barrier Island, in the Hauraki Gulf. I went to the local school - which was mostly fed into by the marae.



Even just through that, there was a lot of exposure to Māori culture, and we spent a reasonable amount of time at the marae, doing working bees (not that 6-year-olds are much use, but as much as we could be) and had the odd hangi and things. It was really awesome. Looking back now, that really broadened my appreciation for a whole lot of things, particularly Māori culture."



Photography/Supplied

"I grew up sailing on the Hauraki, tramping (probably before I could walk, let's be honest,) kayaking - sea and whitewater. I think environmentalism and the outdoors really go hand in hand. Growing up in New Zealand's amazing environment, I've always had a deep appreciation for nature. I am a self-proclaimed bird nerd (not in the sense that I know a lot about them, I just love them.) I think the outdoors is really inspirational to my activism and to me personally. Our wildlife, too. We have such special native taonga. That's inspired everything I do now. It all comes from my upbringing in the outdoors."

When asked about the challenges that she's faced in setting up Whakaaro and finding elbow room in activism spaces, Petra thinks for a minute before answering.



"I'm gonna be honest. Setting up Whakaaro was shockingly easy. It was really just - chuck in a username, chuck some posts up... I don't think I've gained the following yet to get any pushback. It's definitely a growing page. Like, currently I'm at a goal of 100 followers, so... But in other aspects of advocacy, I definitely have. You're always going to find resistance in anything you do that's not the norm. Climate activism? It's not the norm. But it's really important to not take that to heart."

"Another challenge in activism and advocacy is feeling like you're not qualified to be there or you should be leaving it to people with more experience, but it's important to remember that everybody feels like that in some way. Everyone feels like they're not doing enough or that they shouldn't be giving themselves this label - of being an 'environmentalist' or being an 'activist.' And it's a bit of an imposter situation - I'm not gonna use the word 'imposter syndrome' because that is a bit of a buzzword.

That can be a really big barrier if you're just getting into the scene."

"My advice for that is to not worry about it. Be confident in your ability. The fact that you're trying to get into the scene in the first place shows that you do have the skills, you do have the passion, you do have the drive. And you absolutely belong in this space."

So if setting up a space like Whakaaro is 'shockingly easy,' why aren't more people doing it? Petra shares some final advice for rangatahi looking to break into their own spaces.

"Any step is a good step, no matter how small it is. You can just get a couple of your friends together and just have a conversation. That's the start. Just having these conversations. Go talk to your mum! Having these ideas going around... you never know what's going to come out of that."

AI BIAS

WORDS BY ELLA MOONEY, CASSIE TAULELEI, NINA M ZINK, MILLY PETRIE, ISLA GALBRAITH

It's common knowledge that humans are biased. Some people are overtly racist, sexist, or queerphobic. Some people show unintentional bias in their language, while others cross the street to avoid people they perceive as 'different'. Humanity as a whole is becoming less biased as time goes on, thank goodness, but now we have another entity to contend with — one who is picking up our built-in biases and learning from them. I am talking, of course, about AI.

When it comes to AI, it's not the system itself that is biased but rather the data that the AI is based on, which was created and chosen by humans. In simpler words, the AI itself is not biased; the human input is.

AI learns through data that is inputted from the world around us, and this data contains the biases of humans. For example, AI developed in central Europe will create images of white humans, as the data set it is trained on contains limited variation in these characteristics. This may not be intentional, but it can cause problems around bias against a population. Not only this, but it can begin to affect people's livelihoods.



An example of this was Amazon's AI recruiting tool. This system was trained on resumes submitted to the company, which were mostly from men, so it was led to believe that men were preferable candidates, thus developing a bias against female applicants.

Algorithms, too, can be biased and are sometimes coded to favour certain outcomes, or they misinterpret data when their code has been oversimplified. Biased deployment is when the AI is utilised in a scenario that it was not designed for, leading to misunderstanding of the situation and potentially causing discriminating decisions to be made.

Have you ever used AI and noticed gender stereotyping? For instance, if you asked ChatGPT to write a story about a doctor, the most common response would be a story featuring males. Does this advanced system really not understand the fundamentals of men and women having the same career options?

The profession of nurse yields the same outcome; mainly women are written about, though men can be nurses too.

This doesn't just apply to the healthcare industry; gender stereotypes are also present in AI's conception of other occupations, such as various trades, farming, and teaching.



I wanted to see for myself and give ChatGPT a fair chance, so I conducted a brief experiment, asking the exact same question each time:

"Can you write me a story about a teacher?"

When asked ten times, each one representing 10% of the population of teachers, the result was six stories with leading roles of females and four stories with males leading. However, 84.66 per cent of teachers in New Zealand are, in fact, female, according to a study from 2020. This means that according to my calculations, the problem is bias in our society, and ChatGPT is merely mirroring us.



What about racial bias in AI?

Racial bias exists everywhere, and AI is no different. Image generators, like Midjourney, tend to be particularly egregious with this. So I created an experiment to try and qualify it, which bore some fascinating results.

But first, my expectations:

I chose six prompts: 'wealthy man,' 'wealthy woman,' 'poor man,' 'poor woman,' 'police officer,' and 'prisoner.' Knowing the extent of racial bias in society, I expected that the 'wealthy' prompts would display exclusively white people, whilst the 'poor' prompts would display people of colour.

That isn't quite what happened.

'Wealthy man' bore no surprises. All four images displayed a conventionally attractive white man.

'Wealthy Woman' displayed three white women and one black woman, which came as a pleasant surprise.

'Poor man' displayed four white people, as did 'poor woman.'

All four police officers were white, as were the prisoners.



These prompts generating almost exclusively white people can be put down to a theory called 'whiteness as default.' This theory dictates that the standard configuration for a human is white, and evidence of this theory is everywhere. The 'skin colour' pencil in primary school, which was always a light beige, the colours of band-aids, which were only expanded to include brown and black versions recently and the lack of diversity in makeup shades. This is evidently also prevalent in AI image generation. Despite the presence of the one wealthy black woman, the rest of the people generated are white.

Whilst it's infinitely better than being racially profiled by the AI, a bit of melanin every now and then wouldn't hurt.

Who gets to decide what is being fed to AI and what is restricted? This is a complicated decision that involves governments, AI developers, companies, data scientists, and stakeholders.

But not everyone's idea of accuracy and bias is the same, and most people are biased, even if they don't realise it. That's what makes the decision of what is being fed to AI so complicated.

The impacts of artificial intelligence are currently being debated, but it is widely known that AI has the power to reshape the world as we know it. This means that there are certain restrictions in place to make sure AI doesn't cause issues. Some concerns about privacy arise when providing specific personal information to a generative AI tool, so there are certain restrictions in place that limit where the information may be sent, stored and used.



AI has been a concern for some people, and the issue of content restriction is no different. The European Union has put forward a legal framework for artificial intelligence that emphasises the importance of trust in AI tools. The framework aims to regulate AI algorithms to make sure that they are safe and reliable for all users.

In order to curate specific content for individuals and increase engagement on the platform, social media companies use AI algorithms. The usage of algorithms can be positive; the content being fed to you is catered towards your interests, whether Lana Del Rey, baseball, or photography. However, a large concern with catered content is promoting 'echo chambers' and accentuating the bias within AI.

An echo chamber is an environment in which a person encounters only beliefs or opinions that coincide with their own so that their existing views are reinforced and alternative ideas are not considered.

This bias is dangerous due to misinformation being easily spread, which enforces false ideas in the user.

A recent study shows that 83.7% of mental health advice on TikTok is likely to be misleading and contain false information. There are also concerns around influencers and celebrities generating AI images or videos of other people and posting them on social media for personal gain, be it political or monetary.

In this modern age, due to AI and social media, it is now incredibly difficult to differentiate fact from fiction. Like with all new creations, we are unable to fully understand the extent this technology can grow.

On that rather grim note, our article ends. Next up is AI ethics, the third in the series. Until then, remember that even though AI is biased, you don't have to be!



HEALTHY DISAGREEMENT

WORDS BY NINA M ZINK

In our society, we tend to think that we work best when everyone agrees and there is no conflict. But is that a good thing? Isn't evolution, in and of itself, simply the conflict of species, where the most vital traits prevail?

Without friction, there is no change in motion; without conflict, there are no new ideas that develop, no new doors that open. This is not to say we need another war; that is not a healthy disagreement. Instead, we must cope when people challenge our ideas and keep an open mind about the situation.

Healthy disagreement is a big part of being compassionate, but it also needs the grit, courage and bravery to stand up for what you believe is right. This article will cover what healthy disagreement is, and we will conclude with some tips on what to do if you find yourself in a challenging situation.

Healthy disagreement is the ability to disagree with someone but in a respectful, calm way, with an openness to the points and evidence the other brings up.

Healthy disagreement is a way of constructively discussing a problem, and bringing up a range of solutions and opinions before working together to come to an evidence-based conclusion that everyone can agree on. In this way, you learn how to compromise to keep your debate grounded in the correct context without creating a blame game or trying to guilt trip the other. The solutions you come up with in this way will likely be more relevant and have a tangible impact on fixing the problem.





There are some essential things to remember when initiating and participating in a healthy disagreement:

1. Listen to what the others are saying. Give them the time and space to make their point without interrupting. You want them to feel relaxed and calm and that they are being heard. You can also paraphrase back to them to show you have understood what they are saying.
2. When making your point, don't use 'you' statements, as these can feel like direct criticism or attack. Instead, use 'I' or 'we' statements, show inclusivity, and be open and honest in your emotions.
3. Invite many different ideas and opinions. Especially when working with a larger group, ensure everyone's voice is heard, not just a select few. Please do not jump to conclusions about people's opinions; only they know what they are thinking, and they have the right to share it.
4. Base your points on relevant evidence. Refrain from overcomplicating your problem; escalations are often caused by a misunderstanding, where the causes for actions have been mistaken. Establish your situation clearly, and work together to form a solution directly relevant to the problem. Going off on a tangent of trying to blame someone is only going to distract from the real issue and lead you nowhere.



Take note of the behaviour of those you are working with. If things get too drastic, bring them up. For example, if working on a large team, clearly state, "In the past hour, half of the people here have not spoken."

This will bring these things to attention and tone down the louder noises in the room, giving other people the chance to voice their opinions. If someone is trying to blame someone else, you can resolve such situations with phrases such as 'It is no singular person's fault, we are all on this team, and all have something to do with it.'

Lastly, be open to new ideas. Your idea isn't necessarily the best one. There is nothing terrible in admitting you were wrong or if your idea isn't the most suitable. Own up for things. If done calmly and respectfully, people will respect you and your honesty, and your views and opinions will still be listened to instead of shunned.



In the end, healthy disagreement is about working together with other people to form a solution to a problem. Be open, be honest and be yourself. A discussion isn't a competition, and it's not only your responsibility; it's up to everyone taking part to show compassion and respect. Healthy disagreement is something you can learn with time and patience. Just keep on going!





Section 3

Mana





BY DENIKA MEAD

Make It 16 is a youth-led movement with a mission. These passionate teens believe that not allowing 16 and 17-year-olds the right to vote is age discrimination. When you reach 16, you can drive, work full-time, and be legally independent. In the face of this, not being able to vote seems ridiculous.

Co-director Sage Garrett and communications co-lead Caitlin Taylor strongly believe that 16-year-olds should be given the right to vote. "Make It 16 is a youth-led, non-partisan campaign to lower the voting age to 16, and currently, a lot of our work is based around how there's been a bill introduced to parliament to lower the voting age for local elections, which has passed its first reading," Sage says. Caitlin speaks about how the campaign started. "It began with the 2019 youth parliament.

The members were 16 to 18 years old. They were fully capable of understanding political and social issues that affected them and were able to debate them like an MP, yet they couldn't vote. It seemed really unfair. So they got youth MPs, across all parties, to sign in support of lowering the voting age, and then Make It 16 slowly established itself."

"I've been part of Make It 16 for almost three and a half years now. I joined when I found out that my birthday fell two days short of the election. I stumbled upon Make It 16 and offered to help with their social media, and the rest is history."

Make It 16 has had incredible success. They recently had their petition to lower the voting age brought in front of the Supreme Court, a win that Caitlin described as "massive."

"After losing twice already at the High Court and the Court of Appeal, then it had already been over two years that we'd had this legal case," she said. "Our hope was almost crushed. To win at the Supreme Court with all the media following us was really cool and exciting. There were definitely happy tears in that moment. It was really cool to see a coming together of all these young people who were really passionate about the change, and that helped us get another step closer."

For Sage, a highlight of his time at Make It 16 has been being able to see, in person, the first reading of the bill to lower the voting age for local elections in Wellington.

"It was exciting to sit in the gallery and hear all of the parliamentarians talk about their support for our campaign or to hear the arguments against it. To watch that and have them all say yes to it was really exciting."

Most of the Make It 16 team's interactions happen online. "Most of the action happens in Wellington," Sage, who is based in Hamilton, says, "Everyone's everywhere, so we've got people based in Christchurch and in Auckland and Wellington, so it's Zoom for most of our meetings, and then if something really big happens, we fly to Wellington. It was really nice to be able to see everyone in person for the first time when we went to the Gallery to watch the first reading of the bill to lower the voting age for local elections."



Caitlin says the best way that people can help with the movement is to get involved directly.

"We've got a 'Get Involved' section on our website. Flick us an email at the hello@makeit16.org.nz email, or hit us up on social media."

Make It 16's submissions drive opened at the beginning of October. "If people are just hoping to get involved more short-term when our submissions drive opens, then that will be the best way to do that, so you can have your voice heard by the government on why the voting age should be lowered."





MY JOURNEY THROUGH FEAR

BY ABI STREET

Sharks. Stingrays.

Either of those two words is enough to evoke a deep fear within me. Enough to make me want to get as far away from the ocean as possible.

My fear of sharks and stingrays stems from experiences and thoughts that plagued my childhood and teen years. The first experience with stingrays I can remember was when we travelled to the Porangi River near our bach at Cooks Beach. At dead low tide, you can walk across to an island, a long stretch of sand and trees. On that particular tide, I was walking across with my parents when what looked like a trapped plastic bag appeared before us beneath the rolling waves. My Dad, sure it was just a plastic bag, trudged on. However, the fear had begun to kick in for me, and I clung to Dad until we came to stand before it. And I was right; it was a stingray — a decomposing one. Its tail missing, flesh flapping in the underwater winds of currents, and snails eating away at its skin.

I scrambled up my Dad's back, even though the animal was dead.

That was my first experience with a stingray. Multiple others unfolded at that same river and always ended the same way: me in tears and terrified out of my mind. 'Sea flap-flaps,' my family now calls them, in an effort for my over-creative mind to see them as less dangerous.



Because of this controlling fear, just getting into the water was a challenge. The fear was like a noose around my neck. And even though I had seen wild sharks, that fear still held me back. I remember only being able to stand in water up to my knees, even at a surf beach, watching my cousins play in the waves further out, too scared to move. Or being on the boat, curled up on the couch, despite the sweltering heat, refusing to go in the water because I was too scared. Using the cover-up of 'I'm not that hot, actually,' despite it being a record-high day.

My first interaction with sharks was at Great Barrier Island on the boat. I was swimming in the refreshingly clear, cold waters on a hot summer's day. As you now know, this was already a considerable step up, considering I would usually stay on the boat in the sweltering heat rather than dip a toe in what my mind believed were stingray and shark-infested waters.

Treading water, I looked over at Dad, who was on the paddle board and was squinting down at the water below us.

'Is it just me, or do you see that dark shape that keeps swimming below us? I'm not sure whether it's a very big kingfish or a shark', he said.

As soon as the rest of us heard the word shark, we were out of there. Jumping onto the paddle boards, people on the monohull next to us started shouting and pointing at the water a few metres before us.

A 3-metre bronze whaler shark swam not a few metres away from us.

It's safe to say I never swam in that bay again.

While that experience was one where my thoughts were right, countless other times nothing would happen, but I would still be too scared. It was a never-ending battle that I seemingly always lost.

I watched everyone experience the relief and enjoyment of the ocean without getting hurt by a stingray or shark, time and time again. At the same time, I sat on the beach or boat, fighting the wall that my fear had created.





It started to make me feel so much regret. Every night after a water day, I felt regret that I hadn't pushed against that wall just a little bit harder, that I should have just got in. I should have gone faster on the ski biscuit; sharks weren't chasing us like my brain imagined. I should have cannonballed off the boat like everyone else rather than sitting on the paddle board in my togs, convincing myself I would get in.

And as time went on, that regret piled up. Until, one step at a time, I started to get into the water.

The first step was confessing to my parents about my fears, finding out they had already guessed. Swimming off the boat on my Dad's back was the second step. The next one was swimming using the paddle boards. The next one was swimming with one hand on Dad. The next one was a swimming sandwich between my parents. The next one was floating with Mum, and cannonballing with my brother. And slowly but surely, the little steps became big ones. I went to bed with a smile on my face and no regret. I had pushed back against the wall, and it had cracked.

Now, a couple of years on from those first steps, I've earned my Open Water PADI diving certification, and I've dived with sharks and stingrays. Kneeling on the ocean floor, a few metres away from my greatest fear, and loving it. Learning to do water sports that before, I was too scared to try, lest I fall off. I can swim by myself, free dive down among fish, and be okay.

However, there are still some days where the fear is too much, and I will lose the mental battle. Only getting in halfway before freaking out, or the voices in my head while swimming are too loud to ignore. But that's just part of the battle; not every day is a good day. On some days, I swim all around the boat or across the island by the river, unafraid of the stingrays below me. On others, that wall is too thick to break.

Yet, looking back on that little girl, terrified of what lay beneath the waters, too afraid to go in the ocean despite yearning to experience the joy everyone else did. I've come a long way. Even so, I'm still on my journey through fear. There is still a while to go, and maybe this journey never fully ends. As Glennon D. Melton said, 'If you can't defeat the fear, just do it scared'. We get hung up on being able to overcome fear and experience things without being scared. But the truth is, you'll always have it with you; it is a part of you. But you just learn to push back, to break the wall.





Feminine ThFoughts

Poem by Amira Stephenson

My parents chose not to find out I was a girl until I was born
They wanted it to be a surprise.
My mum always had a feeling that I was a girl though
and so have I.

I am a girl
A cisgender female
A girl who loves pink and purple
And dreamed of becoming a princess when she was younger.
Who wears skirts whenever she can
because...
because...

Because pants
are great,
but they're not the same.
Pants aren't graceful
like a rose in a flower garden.



Feminine ThFoughts

Poem by Amira Stephenson

You can't twirl in pants
You *can't* be a princess
or a ballerina -
with a tutu flared out
spinning in circles,
stuck in a box.
Pants don't work like that

Because at school
I got told I had a "moustache"
Heaven forbid a woman have any hair on her face
or arms
or legs
or her vagina.
A woman's skin *must* be akin to smooth porcelain
'Else she couldn't be a sculpted statue
A work of art-
for what is a woman if not an object for men to look at?
Because I've had shorter haircuts over the years-
all of them made me question my reflection



Feminine ThFoughts

Poem by Amira Stephenson

And every time I walked out of that salon
feeling confident about my 'new do'
I stare
into that glass
all I can see are the faces of other more beautiful women
With soft features, opal eyed gazes, long 'feminine' hair
But when I look at my choppy bob
all I see is Frodo Baggins
and I wonder
if I'm 'feminine enough'.

Because for the last seventeen years
Society has tried to show me
what it means to be female.
Tried to tell me how I should
look
act
feel
Sometimes not every part of me is traditionally feminine
But there's always one—
Female Rage.





Overcoming Your Labels

Words by Mackenzie Ha

Growing up, it always feels as though everyone has a label for you. That someone can put you into a box labelled a single thing. As if that's who exactly you have to be.

The truth is, it's impossible to label someone one thing. Humans are creatures that are capable of such an abundance that couldn't all fit into one box. But sometimes, it's hard to break free of the box if that's all you've known.

For myself, I've always been the 'smart kid' because, well, I did reasonably well in school and I tried rather hard. But I've always felt pressured into it, as if that was who I had to be. That I would have to always be 'smart.' As though I couldn't fail because I was too 'good' for that. I did enjoy school and was intrigued by new things. You could say I was try-hard, but that is part of my personality. When I was in primary school, I was called a 'human calculator'. The truth was, I simply knew my times tables. But it did make me feel like I needed to live up to that name which was a struggle for a young kid.

I've now moved on from primary school and am in Intermediate school. Your grades and scores matter now, which seems to make it all that harder. Instead of focusing on that, I used these years to give other opportunities a try. Not just activities that involved having to be 'smart.'

Art/Abi Street





I didn't succeed with everything I attempted, but it made me realise I have other skills. I trialled for many different sports teams and got into zero of them. It did make me realise that I wasn't as bad at sports as I thought. I did find out I was quite decent at art. One thing I did try was wearable arts. It was an opportunity that opened up to the world of art which wasn't just paint and drawing.

We can end up labelling others without thinking. It can feel as suffocating for others as it feels for you.

To avoid labelling others, try to imagine that you were the one receiving what you were going to say. Would you feel like you were being labelled? It can be hard to understand if your words would label someone or not because everyone is different. But a helpful way to compare your words to labelling words is to ask yourself a question. Would that feel like it? Would it feel like labelling if the roles were reversed? Though it does sound cheesy; it can work! Simply thinking twice can help prevent labelling other people.

The thing is, everybody is given different labels because we're all, well, different. Especially in school and as we grow older, labels are often dished out like lollies. No matter how we try to overcome them, someone will always try to label you again. It's a never-ending journey to truly be yourself without your actions being swayed by others' opinions.

“We can end up labelling others without thinking.”

Remember, your life is your decision, not one made by those around you. So let yourself try new things even if it completely breaks what your label has been your whole life. And don't forget to be mindful of others as we all have labels we all want to overcome. You don't have to do it alone. Many people who care about you would gladly help you overcome your labels and discover who you truly are.



The Beauty of Fear

Fear, I thought you controlled me. Your temper tantrums and unstoppable urges felt like the beginning of the end. Your gaslighting and lies made it seem like I was the one who was crazy. Only, I was the one who controlled you all along.

Fear stems from uncertainty. When you don't know what is happening next, you're left to your own treacherous mind to come up with the happily ever after, convincing yourself that everything you ever do will go wrong when, in reality, there's very little chance of that happening. However, often our own mind betrays us and gives us scope to convince ourselves that everything will go wrong, despite there only being a small chance of that happening.

It's funny because as I write this, I sit with worry subsiding in my chest. I worry about how I will be perceived, about making one mistake and having my life blow up in my face because of it. About not being enough. As a teenage girl, it is daunting. But fear is inevitable; it protects us from unrevealed danger. And sometimes, that is okay.

When you get stuck in the pattern of worry and distress, the consistency and familiarity of it can provide you with a toxic sense of comfort. Of being and living with your own terror in its truest, most flawed form. As humans, we are not perfect, and feeling fear reminds us of that. It grounds us in a world of expectations and trends and constructed perfection. Yet once this becomes a common occurrence, it can be hard to recognise fear.

So, how do we know when we are afraid? As humans, it is certain that we are all afraid of something. Regardless of whether or not we have discovered what frightens us yet, we will figure it out eventually as we get new experiences under our belt and new places to call home. You may have felt your heartbeat getting faster as you get closer to presenting a speech, your chest constricting, and all of a sudden, your breath is nowhere to be found. Your inner alarm system is blaring at full volume. Do not ignore me, do not mute my voice. When your alarms are going off, forgetting about it or ignoring the feeling can seem like the easiest solution.

But eventually, your tolerance will get lower and lower and all of a sudden the noise is unavoidable. You will no longer be able to suppress the alarms, and they will only serve to overwhelm you.



What should we do?

Listen to them. Listen to the alarms sounding, and respond not with suppression but with compassion. This is your chance to get to know yourself better, to feel the emotions your body is telling you to feel and to embrace it with open arms. Instead of shoving the feeling of fear away, respond with compassion and empathy.

Recognising fear is brave. You. Are. Brave. We only have one homebody to reside in, and it isn't going anywhere, so show it some love.

There are only four hundred people to have ever been recorded experiencing true fearlessness. And of the few people who felt no fear, it was a curse.

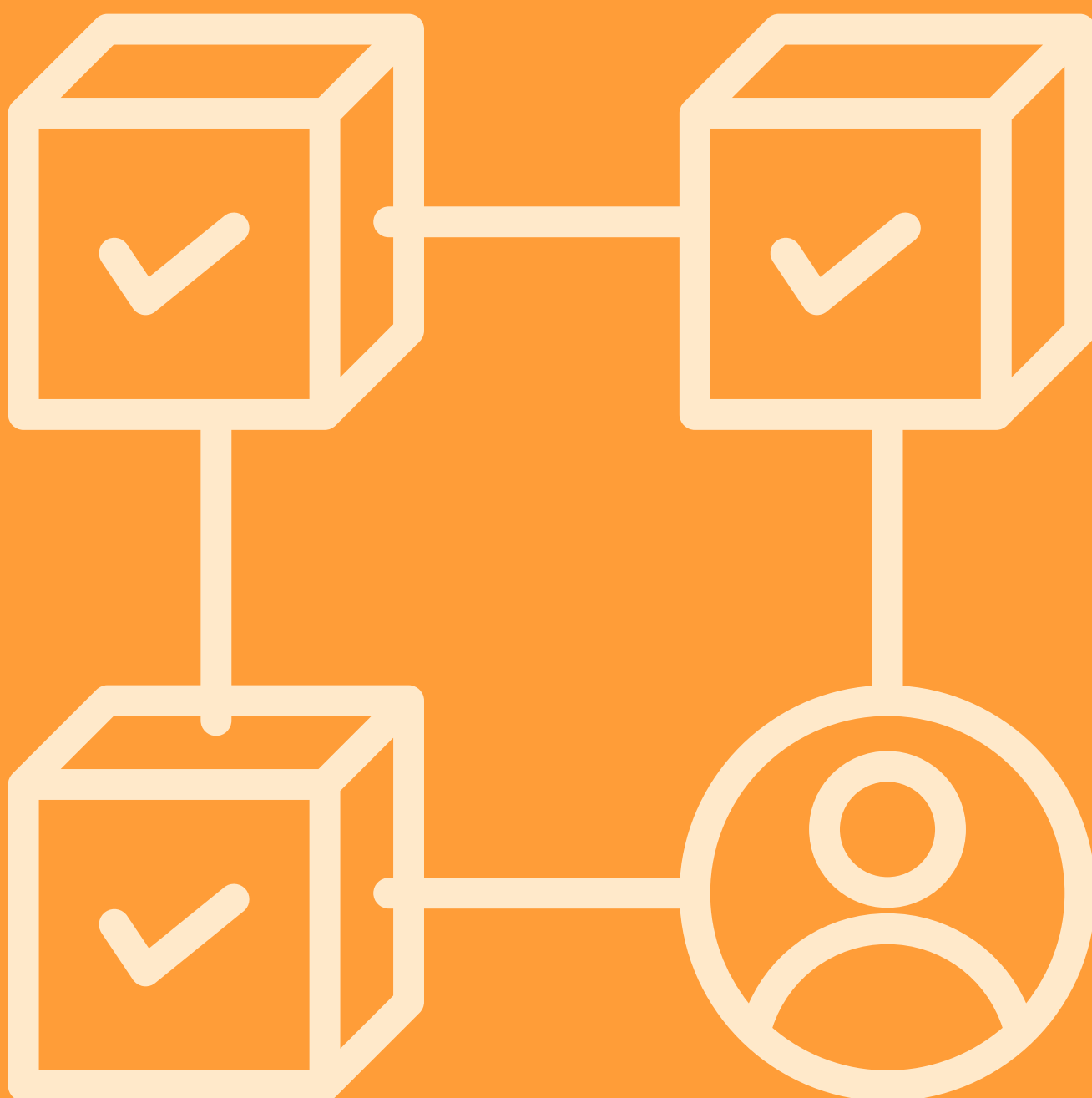
Their inability to recognise the risk in their surroundings led to further anxiety and uncertainty. Fear is our friend if we choose to embrace it and give it the potential to protect us. There are 8 billion of us in this world, and almost every single one of us has the opportunity to experience the beauty of fear. So embrace it with all your might.

“Fear, I don’t just control you. I welcome you.”



Section 4

Passion





Walk the Line

Interview with Vanessa Stirling

By Audrey Goh

At just 15, Vanessa Stirling received an email inviting her to participate in New Zealand's biggest youth fashion show, Walk the Line. Vanessa continuously tests and trials her ideas before concluding the final piece. I chatted to Vanessa about her motivation, inspiration, and what it took to get her to where she is today.

Before we start with the behind-the-scenes of you creating your wonderful masterpiece, what motivated you to do fashion?

Vanessa: Probably my family. I think only two girls out of my whole extended family don't sew; we have quite a lot of people in my family, and the majority of them sew. I think that motivated me because I grew up in an environment where there was always room for sewing. I was always interested in it.

Where did you get the inspiration for your garment from?

Vanessa: Probably Google. I've always liked steampunk, so that was my original idea. I also find denim really fascinating, so I tried to combine denim and steampunk, then it just evolved from steampunk to denim, to my final garment.

What part of the creative process did you struggle with, and why do you think you struggled with it?

Vanessa: As I said, I like denim, but I hadn't used it as much as I should have before I started, so it was very difficult trying to piece everything together. The top part of my dress was based on a corset, which added another layer of difficulty. I've done a lot of simple dresses, whereas this design was very complicated. Then I think I just tried to work too hard and tried to push myself a little bit further than necessary. I probably designed something a little too difficult for the time we had, and I was always pushing like, 'We need to get this done.' That didn't make me stop and think, if I take my time, things are going to work out better. I tried a whole lot of techniques that weren't what I was used to, so it was difficult there too. I'm happy with what I created, though.

“I tried a whole lot of techniques that weren't what I was used to, so it was difficult there too. I'm happy with what I created though.”

Triple stitch: A type of sewing stitch with three stitching lines instead of one. Common when working with denim.



Photo/Supplied

If you could, would you go back and tell yourself to go slower?

Vanessa: Definitely. Me and my mum worked out that for every one seam on the dress, I'd done it three times because I kept screwing it up.

What were some more technical aspects of the garment creation that you struggled with?

Vanessa: I was doing triple stitch with a gold colour so that it stood out on the denim, if you look at a pair of jeans, you'll see that they have the golden stitching, which I really liked. Trying to do that was difficult because sewing things together and then putting so many layers together, the machine really didn't like that. Especially when I was topstitching. So that was difficult, but we got there.

Topstitch: A type of sewing stitch that is meant to be seen from the outside of the garment. Present on pants and jeans, especially around pockets on jeans.

How did you overcome those difficulties?

Vanessa: A lot of help from my mother, she was lovely. Mainly it was a lot of support from my friends and family. If I ever got too overwhelmed by it, just stopping, taking a break and rethinking things really helped me through it all.

What was your reaction when you found out that your garment was going to be featured in the biggest youth fashion show in New Zealand?

Vanessa: I was shocked. Genuinely shocked. When I got the email through, I was like, 'How in the world?' 'Have they made a mistake?' If you ask my mum, she'll tell you that I sent her about a trillion emails saying, 'Look what I just did!' It was quite stressful trying to get it done for that because if I wanted to get it in, I had to finish it a week earlier than it was originally due.

There was a bit more time pressure, but I was still very pleased.

What did you enjoy most about the show?

Vanessa: I think just the environment it was in. I had only done smaller fashion shows and created things in my own home. But getting something to that high of a level and having people I'd never met judging it, and people I'd never met doing the show with me was quite fun. Making new friends and seeing what others my age are making was cool.

Was there anything about the show you didn't like?

Vanessa: Getting up early because we had to get up early to get there on time. But there was also a lot of stress, I think a little bit more than there should have been. Makeup and hairdressing, they didn't do it quite how I would've expected, but then they had to get through eighty people, so they were stressed too.

Pre-Design Drawings/Supplied

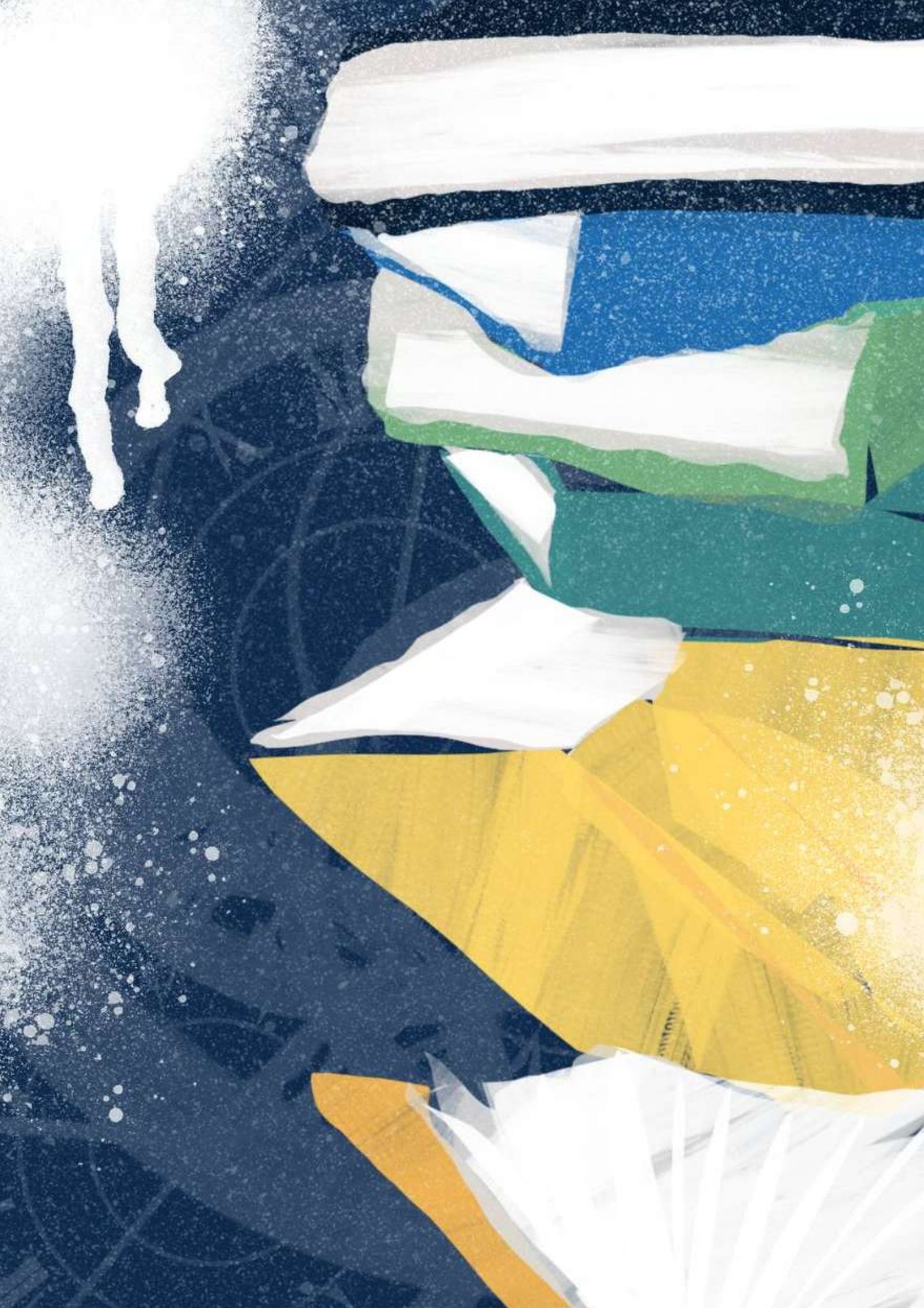


Final Design /Supplied

Final question, what are your plans for the future within this realm?

Vanessa: I'm not entirely sure. I don't think I'd do fashion design as a main career, but I've always dreamed that when I get married, I'd make a wedding dress. I think that would be a challenge but a really fun one. Also, making a ball dress for next year would be quite nice. Just doing projects that stretch me when I have the time to do them. A side hobby or side job would be quite nice, but not a main career. After school hours, making some money on the side.

Seam: A stitch that connects two pieces of fabric together.



another poem about feminine rage and not quite being enough

Holly Davies

the biggest myth i was told when i was a child wasn't santa claus,
it wasn't the easter bunny,
it wasn't unicorns and it wasn't tinkerbelle.
as much as i say it was, it wasn't the tooth fairy.
the biggest myth was laced in goldilocks
with her golden hair and pretty lace
she was good and kind, a little bad
but we all know she found something just right
something just enough.
but the lie, no, the myth, in this story and in this purpose, was that truly
nothing is ever just right.
nothing is really just good enough, not my being, not my grace.

my love is either too little or too much, and the clips in my hair, the
pain in my head and the poetry i write. the love i receive is either
overwhelming and exhausting or i'm left starved and left with nothing.

as a girl, i don't get to have just right. i don't get to feel safe, if i do it's
too safe and it's a trick, on the other hand i'm afraid for my life. i don't
get to dress up and look merely good because i either try too hard or
not enough.

another poem about feminine rage and not quite being enough

Holly Davies

my hair is too loose or too tight in black elastic and when i'm having a shower i constantly struggle with the level of heat because it's never just warm enough. my skin is covered in goosebumps and i'm laying in ice or my body burns and i feel i might melt.

if my lipstick is too bright, im trying too hard and if it's not there i'm not trying enough, if my hoops are too big i'm a sl*t and if my hoops are too small i'm too basic...if my dress is too long i'm too conservative but if my dress is above my knees and hanging at my chest i'm showing too much.

i don't get to "speak up" in a world that tells me i'm too loud, im too aggressive but if i give more empathy and i lower my voice i'm shy and i'm passive and you are now criticising me for being kind. i should speak up for myself, for others, but when i do you look at me and moan with the eyes of someone who wants to give me a lobotomy.

but how do we watch these movies and read these books and get read these books and comprehend the idea that something, somewhere, someone, somehow will be just right for us when for our whole lives we are taught to feel by systems bigger than us that our hearts are only good enough for too little or too much?

Lemon Curd Crinkle Cookies

WORDS BY AUDREY GOH

These crinkly cookies that have a lemon curd centre makes the cookie bright and balanced. Filled with a tangy and zesty curd, the cookie becomes the perfect summer time cookie.

Lemon Curd Recipe:

- 4 large egg yolks
- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup (134g) granulated sugar
- 1 tbsp lemon zest (if you like it to be more concentrated, you can add another teaspoon)
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup (80ml) fresh lemon juice
- $\frac{1}{8}$ tsp salt
- 6 tbsp butter, room temperature (cut into cubes)

Lemon Curd Instructions:

1. Fill the bottom pot of your double boiler with 1–2 inches of water. (Or use the DIY double boiler method listed in the notes.) Place on high heat. Once the water begins to boil, reduce to low heat to keep the water at a simmer.

2. Place egg yolks, granulated sugar, lemon zest, lemon juice, and salt into the top pot of your double boiler. Whisk until completely blended, then whisk as the curd cooks. Constant whisking prevents the egg yolks from curdling. Whisk and cook until the mixture becomes thick, resembling the texture of hollandaise sauce. This takes about 10 minutes. If curd isn't thickening, turn up the heat and constantly whisk.





Lemon Curd Instructions (continuation):

3. Remove pan from heat. Whisk the sliced butter into the curd. The butter will melt from the heat of the curd as you whisk. Pour curd into a jar or bowl and place a piece of plastic wrap directly on top so it is touching the top of the curd.

Note: This prevents skin from forming on top. The curd will continue to thicken as it cools. Once cool, you can remove the plastic wrap. You are able to refrigerate the curd for up to about 10 days.

VANILLA CREAM CHEESE COOKIE RECIPE :

- 2 & 1/2 cups all-purpose flour 300g
- 1 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup unsalted butter, softened 113g
- 227g cream cheese at room temperature
- 1 & 1/2 cups granulated sugar 300g
- 2 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1/3 to 1/2 cup lemon curd
- 1 cup confectioners' sugar

Cookie Instructions:

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F and line one or two large cookie sheets with parchment paper.
2. In a medium-sized bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, and salt. Set aside.
3. In a large bowl or the bowl of your stand mixer, add the cream cheese and butter and beat together with the paddle attachment until smooth. Scrape down the bowl's sides and mix until thoroughly combined.

Note: You do not need a stand mixer. Alternatively, you can do it by hand: Add the softened cream cheese and butter and, using a spatula, beat and mix it until it is smooth.

1. Gradually add in the sugar while the mixer is running at low-medium speed. Once incorporated, beat on medium-high for 1 minute until light and fluffy.
2. Add the eggs one at a time, scraping the sides in between additions. Incorporate the vanilla extracts.

Cookie Instructions:

1. Fill the indentations with lemon curd until it reaches the top; the amount depends on the size of your cookie. Refrain from over filling, or it will overflow when baking.
2. Bake for 12 minutes or more for larger cookies. These cookies don't take long to finish baking, so 2-5 minutes more will do. Cookies will have a set and light golden look (they will flatten a bit), and the lemon curd will look bubbly.
3. Remove the tray from the oven and let the cookies cool on the baking sheet for 5-10 minutes before moving them to a wire rack to cool completely. Bake the rest of the cookies with the remaining dough.
4. Let cookies cool in the refrigerator for about 20 minutes until the lemon curd has set.
5. Dust the cookies with powdered sugar, careful not to cover the centre of the lemon curd.



Cookie Instructions (continuation):

1. Fill the indentations with lemon curd until it reaches the top; the amount depends on the size of your cookie. Refrain from over filling, or it will overflow when baking.
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Sustainable Fun

Environmental sustainability for the future of events



**Interview with Nonstop
Solutions Co-founders Karina
McCallum and Sophie Brooker**



Interview by Milly Petrie

Photography/Supplied

It is more important than ever to care for and heal our environment for future generations. We are now part of the generation that needs to deal with this large issue.

“The mission is to assist society towards a circular economy”

An organisation that has taken passion and grit to help save our planet one step at a time is Nonstop Solutions. The typical event attendee produces 1.89 KG of waste per day, 85% of which can be landfill, depending on where and what type of event it is. Nonstop Solutions is putting an end to this unnecessary waste and informing Aotearoa on implementing zero-waste systems within the event industry. Co-founders Karina McCallum and Sophie Brooker explain why they began Nonstop Solutions, their goals for the future, and why it is an important initiative for the future of Aotearoa.

Can you provide an overview of your organisation and its mission related to zero-waste events?

The mission is to assist society towards a circular economy, which looks like supporting events, businesses and individuals to transition habits and systems which then support and build up to this circular economy. We saw the events industry as a bubble to introduce things that society could implement later on. So it just started from there.

What are the environmental and social benefits of hosting zero-waste events, and how do they contribute to a more sustainable future?

I think there's kind of the obvious, like less waste is better for our planet, less landfill and building towards that circular economy where we're not destroying and taking from the planet to create everything we use. Events are a massive waste producer for a really short period of time. It's one of those areas that seem a little silly to be producing such an excessive quantity of waste.

A little bit of change makes a really big difference, which is really cool because that can be quite hard to do when you're in this space. It's helping change the mindset of society. The impact it's had on our team around being able to get paid and do work that is not only beneficial for them, like in terms of having a job and having a community, but it's also doing good work.

“It's awesome to see the change that has even been made over the past five years in terms of the limitations of single use plastic.”

They're able to kind of leave the job being like actually made a difference. Like I turned that pile of waste and that pile that was going to landfill, but I saved it.

What challenges or obstacles have you encountered while promoting sustainability in the event industry, and how have you addressed them?

How do we try to get that change of people recognising that there's value in paying for our services and like instead of just sending everything to landfill.

Photography/Supplied



There's just like a mindset change for event organisers and people to start budgeting it in and be like, this is actually a service that we need. I think that addressing that aspect of having to convince someone to do something for the environment is severely easier, especially in the last years with the climate marches and just the general understanding in mainstream media. That climate change is real, and something has to be done.

How do you see Aotearoa evolving with regard to sustainability and zero-waste initiatives?

Being fully reusable is the goal. Having an event pretty much operate like a cafe is our goal. Having a variety of food on reusable plates that are washed on site, and then you can sit down and eat it as well. That is the best way to be sustainable, and we're seeing slow changes towards it. There's positivity on the horizon. It's awesome to see the change that has even been done over the past five years in terms of the limitations of single use plastic, which is incredible. It's really shown again how important it is when you've got government backing. Especially with single-use plastic bags because that was a huge issue. So that's great that that's finally gone and it's the right way to show people that we were able to do it for that, so why can't we do it for these?

Can you provide advice or recommendations for individuals looking to make their lives more environmentally friendly and sustainable?

Making a little 1% change in your life. A 1% difference. Because that adds up when we take collective action. Let's focus on changing one thing right now.

And then once that becomes really normalised, and you don't even think about the fact that it's something you have to change or it's being changed, then you go, okay, what's next? Like maybe it's starting with bringing a reusable coffee cup for when I get my coffee. And it's better than overwhelming yourself trying to do all these things. If you just start one at a time and make that your routine and pattern.

I think something I've learned in the last six years is that you can't demand change from others, especially your peers. You really have to inspire that, and you have to lead by example and show a lot of grace and that people are changing and transitioning and doing what they can with what they have at the time. I think that's been really key to not only changing what I do day to day, but then seeing that ripple effect in my outer life as well.

**To get in touch with Nonstop Solutions
contact: hello@nonstopsolutions.co.nz**



Finding Comfort in your Mental Health

Interview with Comfort Apparel founder Emma Dodd

Emma Dodd is an Otago-based young entrepreneur and founder of the clothing brand Comfort Apparel. By its own statement, the brands' and Emma's mission is to help you 'find comfort in your own mental health,' with products based around increasing awareness of the mental health situation for young people and encouraging wellbeing.

“It's always been to do with supporting mental health, especially in young people.”

How did you get started?

“The main way that I got started with my business was just through watching my parents with their businesses. They've had food trucks, it's been nearly ten years since we opened the very first one. I always knew that I wanted to do something within,

Entrepreneurship and business. In May of last year when I was still in high school, I was a year twelve, and I just wasn't getting the creative encouragement that the school should have been giving me. I really wanted to have something that I could put my mindset and my focus into, something that I got a lot of happiness and support from. That became Comfort Apparel. At the start, it was called 'My Comfort Matters,' you can see how the motif has always been comfort. It's always had to do with supporting mental health, especially supporting mental health in young people because I am a young person myself.”



Photo/Supplied



Photo/Supplied

What motivated you to make Comfort Apparel a mental health advocacy group?

"I knew that there were other people out there like me who were either the same age, younger or older, who suffered from social anxiety or poor mental health in general. Being someone who has social anxiety and general anxiety, I know that sometimes you don't want to talk to a store holder or talk to a businessperson, I felt that myself.

So I wanted to make it so that people were as comfortable as possible interacting with Comfort Apparel, that's why when it comes to markets, I have QR codes so if someone isn't comfortable talking, they can scan that QR code instead. They don't even have to look at me. I'm just happy that they're comfortable.

Then it just developed from there."

What's an accomplishment that you've been really proud of?

"I recently went into *Passion, Pitch, Enrich*, which is a leadership and youth empowerment program. I pitched Comfort Apparel there, both to the general public and to the program's judges.

"It took a lot of confidence and a lot of inner strength"

It took a lot of confidence and a lot of inner strength, it was a very vulnerable speech of mine. I did end up with a bit of waterworks, but that's what it's all about. In the end, though, I won one of three prizes, including the one for talent, which is probably the biggest achievement I've made during my work with the business. To know that people do appreciate what I'm bringing to the table was definitely the biggest achievement for me."

Who did you have to support you along the way?

"Obviously, my parents have been there since the start, and also, my boyfriend has been there the whole entire way. Unfortunately, I had lost a couple of friends just due to leaving school and such, but along that entire way, being the owner of a company that supports mental wellbeing and breathing and mourning really did help to cope with that loss of friendship."

Where do you want Comfort Apparel to take you?

"In all honesty, I just want it to take me places where I can show young people that it's okay not to be okay. To know that it's okay to be unsure what they're doing with their lives or to not know what they're going to do tomorrow. A lot of people have a massive expectation on them from people in their

Photo/Supplied



lives or themselves. They feel they must know what they're going to do for a career, which subjects they're going to take, and which university courses they're going to take. The biggest part of one of the collections at Comfort Apparel was to 'be yourself' and to be real with it. Don't try and run with this perfect, made-up version that everyone is expecting you to be. I'm just where I want to be, supporting young people. To give them a hand to hold, and to tell them it's okay to not be okay."

Photo/Supplied



Did you feel those kind of pressures from the people around you when you were first starting?

"I think I'm very fortunate that I didn't feel that pressure at all. My family is definitely the type that says, 'Mistakes happen, you just move on or try again.' We've never really been people who say that 'you have to get it right on the first go, and if you don't do it right the first time, then you'll never be able to do it.' I'm very grateful to have been raised around the family I have, where I don't feel a single bit of pressure. Maybe a little bit, but that comes more from myself than from them. I've never had the expectation on me that I must meet this amount of orders or this goal or anything like that. It's genuinely just my own goals that hold those expectations."

Do you find that your own goals crush you?

"Sometimes, yes. If I put down a goal at the start of November, and I say, 'I want to reach twenty-five orders,' by the end of the month and don't reach twenty-five orders, I would be really down on myself

and think, 'What was I doing wrong? Is this a me problem, or is it a website problem? What was the issue?' So now, I only try to set goals that I know are fully achievable until further notice."

What helped you pick you back up after those times when you didn't achieve your goals?

"I feel like the biggest thing was the support that I had from the people around me. Not just from my family and friends, but my business support from my followers and customers. Everyone who follows the brand itself has always been so supportive. When I took a six-month break from Comfort Apparel to refresh my brain, the amount of support that came back was phenomenal. I think the account on Instagram lost maybe two or three followers, but everyone else just stuck there because they knew that something good was going to come out of my work. So, it's the support that I get from the followers which is just amazing, really. It's what keeps me sane."

What would be one piece of advice you would give to people who want to start their own business?

"My biggest piece of advice would be to surround yourself with people who you know will support you, no matter what. If you're surrounded by people who are only there for the discount, you're not going to get their full support, they may just critique you and tell you what you're doing wrong instead of

properly supporting you. Of course, there's no harm in criticism, but you really want to surround yourself with people who will care and support you. No matter the circumstances."



Finally, what's something you do to relax?

"I really enjoy going on walks with our family dog. We have lambs here too, at the moment, so feeding and playing around with them is really fun because it gets me my breath of fresh air and allows me to hang out with the animals."

Climbing through the Challenges.

Rock Climbing requires grit. You have to persevere through setbacks, the judgment of others, and the fear of failure. It's a problem-solving game; you have to think about so many things simultaneously. Or it has the potential to become deadly.

My dad has been rock climbing since he was 17, and I've been rock climbing since I was 7. The heights of the climbs I was doing scared me. My brain would let me know all the things that could go wrong. Thankfully, my parents kept reminding me that I was strapped safely into a harness and that Dad was controlling the rope.

Every time I climbed, I would get more and more confident in my ability. Once, we were climbing at a place in Kinloch (near Taupō), and I was on a climb that I had done many times before. I looked down and saw how high I was. Before the fear entered my mind, I thought, 'This is the highest I've been!' I remember being so proud of myself for crushing a goal I didn't even know I had!

There have been many struggles that I've had to overcome while climbing, both mental and physical.

Mentally, my perfectionism is a major issue, and I'm still struggling with it. I'm a perfectionist at heart. I need to do things perfectly, or I feel I'm not good enough. Climbing is no different. Rock climbing is a strategy game; you must be very strategic and calculating to be good at it. When my arms tire and my brain gets foggy, I know I should get off the wall, but there's a little voice at the back of my head telling me I need to get to the top or I'm a failure.



Sometimes, I listen to that voice until I fall off the wall, my harness keeping me safe. Sometimes, I ignore it and listen to my body telling me it's time to stop. I still struggle with that little voice when climbing, but I'm trying to block it out and listen to my body. Although I believe it is good to push yourself when challenges come up, I also believe it's not good for your body and mind to over-exert yourself.

I also often struggle physically. I'm not really a physical person; I don't do any competitive sports, and I do correspondence school, so I don't do P.E. My family loves to go bush walking as well as mountain biking, but finding the time to do those activities is challenging, especially in the colder, wetter months.



Art/Abi Street

So I'm not the fittest, which I also know I need to work on.

This does affect my climbing ability. Climbing requires physical strength, and since I'm not as physical as I should be, I notice that my arms start shaking and my legs start to tire faster than if I were fitter. This discourages me, making me highly frustrated with myself, knowing that I need to get fitter but not having the time. I'll be working on this in the coming years because I want to be the best climber I can be.

If you've read this and thought you might like climbing, I'd recommend an indoor climbing gym. Although it's not the same as outdoor climbing, it's perfect for getting you started when you don't have anyone around you who's interested in climbing, indoor or outdoor.

My Family Yarn Business

Words by Santeria Healey Stevens

When I asked Mum how she started her hand-dyed yarn business, Dye Happy Yarn, she said, "It all began when I showed a friend some yarn that I had bought from an op shop, but she didn't love the colour. She suggested that I dye it, and I was mind blown that it had never occurred to me yarn could be dyed just as fabric can be."

After consulting Google, she discovered yarn could be dyed with food colouring and our kitchen pots, so she gave it a go! We recommend Chemknits tutorials if you want to try it for yourself. Not only did she love the results, but the process as well. Instantly, she began researching professional dyes and bought acid dyes which are more reliable but require more precautions. These days, we have a dedicated dye kitchen on our front deck with massive pots and hotplates. Her business name came from a dream. "I woke up one morning, and the words were there in the front of my mind, it just felt right." She built the branding around the name 'Dye Happy,' with a sugar skull logo and sarape background as an acknowledgement of our Mexican heritage.

Soon, she was dyeing more yarn than she could possibly knit herself, so she took it to her knitting circle. "With the blessing of the café where we met, I started taking a basket of yarn, which soon turned into a whole table of yarn, and selling not only to my knitting friends but to the café customers as well." When my mum began to sell her yarn at local markets, I started my own stall. At first, I sold mini skeins of yarn under the business name 'Baby Dye Happy.' Soon, I began selling other items I'd handmade.



My little brother began dyeing fibre for spinning. My stall grew alongside Mum's business. I soon dropped the hand-dyed mini skeins and sold hand-painted postcards instead. I changed my business name to Colourful Creations, which felt a bit more fitting.

We were surprised to discover that most 'NZ yarn,' though grown here, is often spun offshore in China or Turkey. And nearly all other independent dyers like mum, import the yarn that they dye.

"Early on, I decided that my point of difference would be only stocking NZ grown and milled yarn even though this greatly limits my range. There are only about three mills in NZ who sell on a small enough scale for me to buy from, and none of them mill the kinds of fashionable, luxury yarns that other indie dyers import."

Mum's favourite supplier is Anna Gratton in Fielding, who owns both a farm and a mill. She has bred Corriedale sheep specifically for their wool for over 40 years and mills it onsite. Corriedales are cousins to Merino, but being crossed with a long wool variety of sheep, their fibre is stronger and has more character.

I asked Mum what the hardest thing was about running a business from home.

"It's definitely learning to prioritise it over other household tasks. As the only adult in our household, it can be super difficult to take time and energy off home life and onto the business. There are always more immediate things that need doing: schoolwork with you kids, cooking, dishes, laundry.



But real growth only happened in the business when I scheduled dedicated time to it. Even if that meant a messy living space or beans on toast for dinner, again."

Before covid we would road trip to all the yarn shows in the main centres of the North Island. "After all these years, I still find putting my work out on a market stall terrifying. Even though I love the colours that I design, and I believe in the yarn that I dye, the self-doubt is always there and must be overcome every time."

We do fewer markets these days and focus more on the website that Mum built.

When I asked mum how she started her hand dyed yarn business, Dye Happy Yarn, she said:

"It all began when I showed a friend some yarn that I had bought from an op shop, but she didn't love the colour. She suggested that I dye it and I was mind blown that it had never occurred to me, yarn could be dyed just as fabric can be."

After consulting aunty Google, she discovered yarn could be dyed with food colouring and our kitchen pots, so she gave it a go! We recommend Chemknits tutorials if you want to try it for yourself. Not only did she love the results, but the process as well. Instantly, she began researching professional dyes, and bought acid dyes which are more reliable but require more precautions.

These days, we have a dedicated dye kitchen on our front deck with massive pots and hotplates. Her business name came from a dream.

"I woke up one morning and the words were there in the front of my mind, it just felt right."

She built the branding around the name 'Dye Happy,' with a sugar skull logo, and sarape background as an acknowledgement of our Mexican heritage. While there have been ups and downs, we have got a lot of joy out of our business, we have learnt new skills and made new friends because of it "....but mostly because we get to play with yarn!"

For more information or product list, visit
dyehappyarn.co.nz





Becoming a Young Music Artist

An interview with
Lucy Summerfield.

Words by Jay Roxburgh

Are you intrigued by the music industry, the pros and cons of pursuing music or perhaps you're just simply not confident in your understanding of the community and its algorithm? I felt a similar way, that was until I had the opportunity to interview Lucy Summerfield. Lucy is a young, creative, kiwi musician/singer/songwriter pursuing a full-time career in producing music.

When asked how she first got into music? She responded, speaking of how she was "surrounded by a very musical family", and that "music came from all different directions", growing up with both her grandparents playing guitar, her dad playing saxophone, mum playing piano and guitar and her younger brother singing and playing guitar.

What inspires Lucy when writing music? Belonging in a community, locational features and overall, she believes her inspiration is "very based on the natural world" In one of her singles, Constellations, she chose to write about how the sky connects us. "It's hard watching people you care about disappear into the wide world, but for me, the idea that we can all look up at the sky and see the stars keeps us bonded together".

A top opportunity Lucy received was the chance to record at Roundheads Studios. She got to experience this through high school music competitions, Rock Quest and Hook Line and Sing Along. Lucy tells me about the New Zealand Music industry and how it has an intense commitment to youth, and is very "uplifting and supportive, so Lucy feels that these opportunities are accessible.



"Getting over the fear of negative advice" is a necessity if you want to continue in your career of music creation. But because of the constant discouraging criticism, imposter syndrome isn't uncommon. Lucy found this to be particularly harmful in her university, she said "as soon as you meet people who are really talented, you immediately start doubting yourself and doubting your own talent" And, understandably, she's still figuring out how to fully overcome that in her everyday life.

Key pieces of advice Lucy would give to young aspiring musicians/singers/songwriters is "Collaborate, collaborate, collaborate! If somebody else is really skilled and they're making you feel intimidated, that means you need to go and collaborate with them, work together."



"Now days to be a musician you have to be self made. Meaning you need the producer, manager, social media marketer and you need to do it all yourself, it's a good idea to start learning how to do so as young as possible."

Some highlight experiences for Lucy have been the chance to meet:

- Neil Finn is most known for being a principal member of Split Enz, a founding member of Crowded House, and a touring member of Fleetwood Mac.
- Laughton Kora is recognised for his role in the band Kora on vocals, guitar and keys.
- Joel Shadbolt is very well known for having a long-established music career and making himself a household name in New Zealand, L.A.B frontman (vocals and guitar.)

Lucy Summerfield has just come out with a new single, Fruit Tea, on Spotify. You can find her @[lucysummerfieldmusic](#) on Spotify and Instagram.



The Rainbow Challenge

Are you a rainbow youth or an ally? Do you want to use your creativity to make NZ more inclusive? The Rainbow Challenge is a chance to support youth who identify as LGBTQ+ innovatively and creatively while learning photography at the same time. It formed after one of our Click Happy students, who recently realised they're queer, Lillian, came up to Wellington for a Create Happy Media workshop. They became quite emotional, having seen how much more welcoming Wellington was in comparison to Christchurch for those in the LGBTQ+ community. Saying:

"You guys have a rainbow crosswalk, and there is even a drag queen crossing light! I walked into a bookstore with a rainbow flag in the window, and some old dude was at the counter... he could have been gay or an ally, it didn't matter.

He made me feel welcome. I need to figure out how to help Christchurch to be as welcoming as Wellington."

Upon hearing this, we realised we wanted to create something that allowed us to make every space as welcoming as Lillian experienced in Wellington. And also so that we could spread the creative compassion message of our Trust (Every Body is a Treasure) -- That everybody is a gift to the planet.

We need YOU to help make this happen and to help spread this message across the country. How you do it is simple. Look for blocks of colour and photograph them. Or create blocks of colour. This can be done with a phone or a camera, or you can paint something and send it in. But it must be just one colour per image.





We will then gather all of the images taken, give them to VJ Cubeman and have him create an epic installation video exhibition that will be gifted to libraries and schools up and down the country.

Over the summer holidays and in Term 1, we will be running the Rainbow Challenge. We are inviting libraries, groups, schools, and individuals to join in. It is something you can do collectively in your location in Term 1, or you can do it solo during our summer challenge in the new year.

Our TikTok channel is called @NZRainbowChallenge (it used to be Click Happy with Gritty).

Gritty is our K9 Youth worker, an Irishdoodle dog who travels the country helping to teach photography skills and making people happy. Gritty loves everyone. So part of the message here is to be like Gritty. She doesn't care who you love. She just loves you. She wants you to spread love and kindness around you everywhere. We will throw down challenges on TikTok this summer so you can join in there. It's fun, and you get to use your creativity to make the world a more inclusive place.



For more information visit:
<https://linktr.ee/nzrainbowchallenge>



Ask Mandi

Dear Mandi,

I'm constantly procrastinating, and I struggle to do things when they aren't fun. Is this a problem?

Answer: You tell me. How is that working out for you? I know that I have struggled with it because I have late diagnosed neurodiversity. ADHD paralysis is real, I know. But there are three executive function hacks that I have found helpful, which I'm happy to share.

#1 - DO THE HARD THING FIRST.

Get it out of the way. Kick its' butt.

Mark Twain is one of my favourite writers. He once said, 'Eat a live frog for breakfast, and you can go through the day knowing that the worst is behind you.' He was talking metaphorically about doing the most challenging thing on your to-do list first.

Three tools to help you do that:

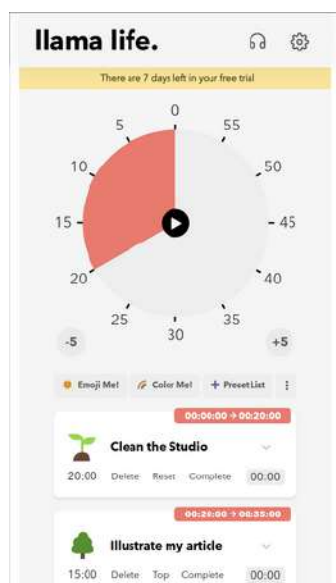
There is a documentary on Netflix called Stutz. It is about a psychologist who works with Hollywood A-listers. He got sick of regular psychotherapy because of its focus on the past instead of giving tools that will work in the present. So he developed a group of tools over many years that he shares in his book called The Tools.



These three visualisations that will help you learn to get comfortable with the uncomfortable stuff.

Why would you want to do that? Because your life will be much more uncomfortable if you can't learn to get comfortable with being uncomfortable. It seems like an oxymoron, but it is anything but. When you run from pain or discomfort, it grows bigger and bigger and makes your world smaller and smaller. Each time you face a challenge, your comfort area expands, and your mental fortitude gets stronger.

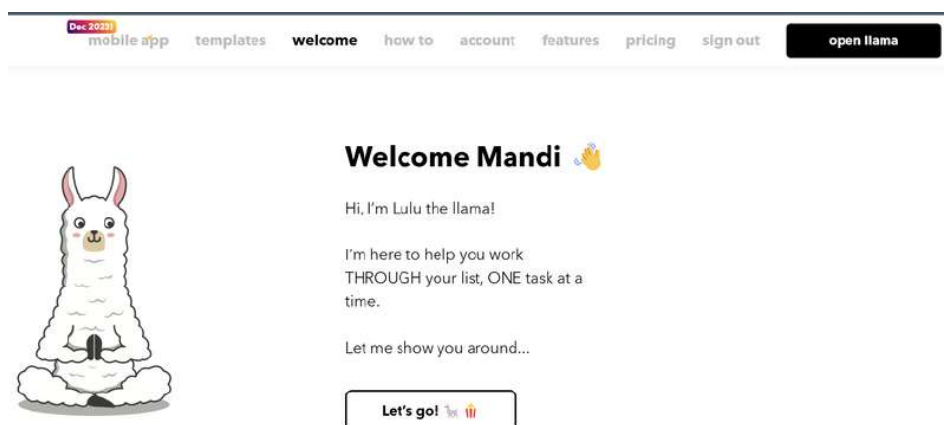
If you stay in your comfort zone, your growth as a person slows or reverses. All of the best stuff happens outside of your comfort zone. Each time you stretch out to the next level, your comfort zone grows. Thus, you end up being comfortable in more spaces. Have you ever heard of the window of tolerance?



This is a window of what you can handle. The longer you stay in your comfort zone, the narrower the window gets. The more you stretch out of your comfort zone, the wider the window is open and the more things you are comfortable handling. Don't get me wrong. The comfort zone is important for recharging. The problem comes when you never leave it. It's all about building your courage reserves. And that only happens with baby steps of getting out of your comfort zone.

#2 USE A TASK TIMER

Start with 30 minutes and pick one task that you need to get done. Set a timer and push yourself to be able to tick off the box by the end of the timer. Research shows that most can handle getting up to 90-minute blocks. I have a room in my house that has become the dumping ground for all things. So I have started to set a 20-minute timer once a day, and my task is simple: clear one box of stuff from that room in 20 minutes. (currently trying the Llama life timer because, well, Llamas.) Not sure how long it will take to get it completely clear but that doesn't matter.



What matters is that I am no longer procrastinating about that room, and once it is clean it will no longer be taking up mental space in my head. So I do mentally challenging tasks and then mix them up with physical ones. All with timers set to help me from "squirrelling" as my neurodiverse brain likes to do. It is one way of keeping me on task if I am setting artificial deadlines.

#3 GAMIFY IT

I have been putting off doing Yoga. Why? I have no idea, it is so good for me, and I love it. But I am not routinely making the time. So as I was cleaning out that messy room, I found a pack of Yoga cards with different poses on each card. I have set the deck outside of my bathroom. So each time I go to the loo, I am triggered by seeing the cards, and so before I go in, I draw a card, and then when I leave, I strike the Bose in the hallway. This is called a tiny habit and will build up over time, and it gamifies my exercise procrastination. Do you have something you could gamify that would get you started taking a tiny step toward your goal?

Do you have a question for Ask Mandi? Send it to Mandi@createhappy.org

Support Lines

Kokiri Te Oranga Pai -

07 895 5807

Whats Up (youth 5-18 years) -

0800 942 8787

Lifeline - 24 hour counseling -

0800 543 354

Youthline - 0800 376 633

The Lowdown - text free - 5626

Need to Talk? - free call or text 1737

Remember:

*If you or someone else is at risk of harm to themselves or others, call **111** and ask for police.*

*For urgent mental health support/advice, contact Crisis Assessment and Home Treatment service, for all ages 24/7 - **0800 50 50 50***

For non-urgent support/advice contact your GP (general practitioner/doctor) first.

