

Koe Mata Ae Liaki Ako
The Face of Truancy

by

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Abstract

Truancy is a growing phenomenon in New Zealand. Māori and Pasifika whānau are overrepresented in the truancy data. This research listens to the voices of non-attending students to hear and understand their school journeys. Exploring the backgrounds and experiences of Māori and Pasifika students through talanoa may help us better understand the barriers that prevent them from attending school and reaching educational success. Increased understanding of school attendance, or lack of it, will assist in improving the paths to success for Māori and Pasifika students in the future.

Addressing our alarming truancy rates requires addressing the unique challenges and needs of our most disadvantaged Māori and Pasifika young people. The voices of these six truants might be understood to represent the impact of systemic failures and social neglect. Hearing first-hand accounts of their educational journey has provided a more holistic and empathetic understanding of these young people's challenges; hearing their voices has allowed a more profound understanding and justified interpretivism as a research methodology.

Many Māori and Pasifika young people fail to successfully navigate the New Zealand education system. The barriers to educational attendance and success are diverse. Through talanoa with the students, this research established the themes of absent parents; violence in the home; relationships with teachers; mental health issues; and drugs. The six absentee Māori and/or Pasifika young people revealed parents who were absent in their lives; they felt that their parents had abandoned them, they felt responsible for their siblings, and they were opting to distance themselves from their parents to protect themselves from constant disappointment regarding their parents.

The talanoa revealed violence in their homes and lives from a very young age. The talanoa highlighted that the young people's attitudes at school mirrored the attitudes at home, and the violence from home started to bleed into violence at school. Of interest, the talanoa exposed a dislike for mothers, but fathers were exonerated and held in high regard, even though they were the aggressors. The young people spoke in depth about their dislike and disrespect of their teachers, reciprocating the attitudes they felt they were receiving from their teachers. Mental health issues were prominent across four of the journeys recounted by the participants.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the Acknowledgements), nor material which, to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

Date: 17 February 2025

Laiha Holliday

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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

This research addresses the gap between current educational ideals and practice, and the lived experiences of six truanting students from Franklin, South Auckland. The location focus for this research is the Pukekohe / Tuakau region, where I reside and work as a teacher. At the time, while conducting this research, I taught full-time to a year 1 and year 2 class. I had 26 beautiful students. This district, Franklin, is renowned for its deep roots in racism. It is crucial that we all, as educators, policymakers, and researchers, better understand their barriers and assist in removing them. Many broader societal issues connected to truancy cannot be addressed solely by the education system (Clark et al., 2005). New Zealand education discourse echoes with terms like ‘education inequality’, ‘high truancy rates’, and ‘low performance’. We must address and encapsulate the commitment to equitable and inclusive education access for Māori and Pasifika families. Māori and Pacific words used in this thesis appear in two glossaries following the end of the final chapter (see the Glossaries on page 74).

As an ex-Police Officer in the Franklin area, I am deeply familiar with the encompassing impairment that truancy brings upon our Māori and Pasifika families, I understand the challenges it amplifies in navigating the New Zealand education system. Crossing the bridge from poverty to full integration into education is daunting for many of our Māori and Pasifika students.

In the terminology of national education policy, Pasifika has become a well-known word meaning students in New Zealand schools with ancestry from any of the Pacific Island nations. Throughout this thesis, both Pacific and Pasifika will be used, as deemed appropriate. Similarly, it has become commonplace to use the Māori name for the country of Aotearoa instead or in combination with New Zealand, and in this thesis, I will use either Aotearoa New Zealand or New Zealand.

The cause of truancy is complex and diverse (Lubeck, 2022). Initiatives like *Tapasa*, a Pacific-focused approach to behaviour management, and the *Action Plan for Pacific Education*, a comprehensive strategy to improve educational outcomes for Pacific learners, are designed to bring about a commitment to cultivating an inclusive, thorough and responsive education system that respects and integrates the diverse needs and experiences of our Māori and Pasifika learners (Ministry of Education, 2018; Ministry of Education, 2023).

School absenteeism has far-reaching consequences that impact various social factors, ranging from absent children to their families, schools and communities, the criminal justice system, social work agencies, social service organisations, and the economy. Non-attendance has been acknowledged as a complex problem or phenomenon associated with individual characteristics, family, school, peers,

and the broader context of society. Regular attendance is an essential factor in school success. Students who are chronic non-attenders receive fewer hours of instruction; they often leave education early and are more likely to become long-term unemployed, homeless, caught in the poverty trap, dependent on welfare, and involved in the justice system. High rates of student absenteeism are believed to affect regular attendees as well because teachers must accommodate non-attenders within the same class (Clark et al., 2005; Education Evaluation Centre, 2022; Education Review Office, 2023; Lubeck et al., 2022).

The rate of regular attendance in New Zealand continues to fall. Between 2015 and 2019, the regular attendance rate dropped by 12%. By 2022, the regular attendance rate reached 40%, a further 18% fall from 2019. In 2022, attendance was impacted by high Covid-19 case numbers, but the longer-term trend is clear. Declining attendance is seen across all school types and for all ethnicities. The drop has been steepest in low decile schools and for Māori and Pacific learners (Education Evaluation Centre, 2022; Education Review Office, 2023). Chronically absent students usually have unexplained or unjustified absences. Frequent absences can emerge early in a student's life and begin with occasional absences. These students are more likely to become educationally disengaged, not achieve qualifications, and experience poor long-term social and economic outcomes (Biddulph et al., 2003; Lubeck et al., 2022).

If the New Zealand government seriously wishes to address the growing incidence of poverty, it may be wise to monitor attendance closely because regular attendance is a child poverty indicator according to the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy. Lubeck et al. suggest that where attendance levels are concerned, there must be greater accountability and follow-up action to support improved attendance levels. Lubeck et al. recommend that the New Zealand government develop and implement a school attendance strategy that reflects this complexity, and the varied responses required for intervention to be effective (2022).

There is a genuine need to alleviate child poverty levels and improve housing affordability to improve school attendance (Lubeck et al., 2022). Poor attendance, or truancy, clearly indicates disengagement from education. It is often a precursor to students leaving school early without the education and qualifications they need to succeed in today's world. Truancy can frequently lead to other more severe misbehaviours that may set young people on an unsatisfactory life pathway with poor social and economic outcomes (Biddulph et al., 2003; Lubeck et al., 2022; Ministry of Education, 2010).

This research intended to provide a platform for truants to talanoa (see Glossary on page 74) and share their experiences. Their voices are of utmost importance as they offer a unique understanding of the barriers they encounter that hinder their educational success. It was an attempt to hear their stories.

The question I set out to answer was, 'how do these young people see the difficulties in their lives concerning schooling?'

The voices of these six truants give some insight into the impact of systemic failures and social neglect. Hearing first-hand their accounts of their journey will provide a more holistic and empathetic understanding of these families' challenges, allowing for a more profound understanding (Interpretivism). By capturing first-hand the nuanced, personal trauma that Pasifika and Māori students are experiencing, as an educator and researcher, I hope to provide a valuable bridge between academic research and the tangible experiences of those within our Pasifika community. To choose to ignore these voices potentially risks perpetuating the same top-down approach that has historically contributed to the marginalisation of minority groups in educational discourse.

CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

The range of ages of compulsory education, when children are legally required to attend school, vary widely across OECD (Organisation for Educational Co-operation and Development) countries. In some countries, early childhood education and care (ECEC) is mandatory from as early as three years old. In other countries, education becomes compulsory only from primary education onwards, sometimes as late as seven years of age. Likewise, compulsory education ends as early as age 14 in some OECD countries, and lasts until 18 in others. The age at which compulsory education ends in some countries depends on obtaining a particular qualification. For example, in the Netherlands, students can leave education at 16 if they get an essential qualification, but otherwise, they must continue until they are 18. In countries with dual systems, such as Germany, the final years of compulsory education may be partly spent in workplace-based training (OECD, 2021). The following sections consider compulsory schooling in a range of jurisdictions.

GLOBAL

When universal and compulsory schooling was first introduced during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it was often limited to comparatively short periods of primary education. Since then, the duration of compulsory education has increased gradually, a trend that has continued up to today. Austria made pre-primary education mandatory for 5-year-olds in 2010, and France introduced compulsory pre-primary education starting at 3 in September 2019. The upper age limit of compulsory education is also increasing. In 2015, the United Kingdom raised its school leaving age to 18, while in 2017, Austria made formal or non-formal education compulsory until 18 unless students obtain an upper secondary qualification earlier (OECD, 2021).

As a policy, mandatory school attendance creates the truant category. Truancy has become a significant issue globally. Chronically absent students are more likely to perform poorly in school and more likely to drop out, which negatively impacts earning potential over their lifetime. The implications for schools with significant absenteeism problems include loss of funds and failure to meet performance requirements. Tremendous costs to communities associated with truancy and absenteeism include higher criminal activity rates, citizens not productively contributing to the community, and higher government spending for social services (Maynard, 2013). In societies that expect student attendance and consequent learning and certification, non-attendance becomes a sign of poor education, and behavioural issues often follow.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The majority of truancy research is conducted in the United States of America (USA). While the circumstances of the USA are different from those of New Zealand, nonetheless, the literature has some insights to offer us. In what follows, the USA terms elementary school and high school will be used interchangeably with the more common New Zealand terms, primary school and secondary school. Crime among the youth has become a significant social concern in the USA, as in New Zealand. Attempts have been made to address 'juvenile delinquency' at the early stages of development. As part of a constellation of school problems, poor school attendance has been linked with diminished academic performance, school dropout, substance use and violence. It is considered a risk factor for severe juvenile delinquency (Davis et al., 2018; McCluskey, 2004).

Truancy is part of a more extensive taxonomy of problems. Along with shoplifting, drinking and drug-taking, and other nonaggressive antisocial behaviours, truancy has been classified as a form of *delinquency*, as opposed to *aggression*. There are alternative ways of phrasing the same distinction: between covert and overt antisocial behaviour, or between socialised delinquency and conduct disorder. Recent epidemiological research points to different etiologies and developmental trajectories (Bimler & Kirkland, 2001).

Chronic absenteeism has been indicated to put over six million American students at risk of numerous adverse short- and long-term outcomes, such as academic failure, dropping out of school, long-term health issues, unemployment, and involvement in the juvenile justice system. Davis et al. (2018) find that zero-tolerance policies, such as suspension and expulsion, contribute significantly to chronic absenteeism rates among students. When students are absent from school, regardless of the reason, it presents significant barriers to equitable and practical instruction, undermines stable learning environments, and inhibits students' success. Chronic absence can be reduced when schools work with families and communities to track attendance data, create welcoming school environments, and implement strategies to address barriers to attendance (Davis et al., 2018; McCluskey et al., 2004).

In the USA it is estimated that between 5 - 7.5 million students attend school only occasionally every year. Of the 49 million students enrolled in schools in the United States during the 2011–2012 academic year, 3.5 million students were assigned in-school detention, 1.9 million students were suspended for at least one day, 1.6 million students were suspended more than once, and at least 130,000 students were expelled (Davis et al., 2018).

Numerous risk factors, such as school, personal (individual), family/parental, developmental, neighbourhood/community, and economic issues, have been identified as contributing to problematic

absenteeism. Parental/family risk factors include parents' education level (or lack of) and parental supervision (Davis et al., 2018; Maynard, 2013). Individual or personal risk factors contributing to chronic absence are low self-esteem, inadequate social skills, antisocial peers and peer pressure, negative cognitive and behavioural manifestations, decreased motivation, losing academic interest, and falling behind and avoiding class. Other individual or personal risk factors also include physical and mental health problems, substance abuse, drug use, perception of self, and detachment from school (Davis et al., 2018).

Among the more prominent community characteristics, the presence of delinquent peers, street gangs, and interracial tensions are also thought to influence school attendance. Whereas all the preceding factors have been linked with school attendance problems generally, there may be risk factors that are more predominant among younger students. For example, parental influences may significantly impact elementary school attendance more than school or community factors, which are more likely to influence middle and high school students (McCluskey et al., 2004).

As children get older, the importance of their peers at school and in the community increases. Individual and family factors are responsible for generating high rates of elementary school absenteeism. In particular diminished family resources and child characteristics such as illness are major causes of chronic absenteeism (McCluskey et al., 2004). Given the importance of a high school education in the USA, truancy and school failure seriously affect employment opportunities. Truancy is associated with negative occupational consequences, including relegation to lower-status occupations, less stable career patterns, and higher unemployment rates (McCluskey et al., 2004).

The notion of the 'life-course' is one theoretical perspective on the relationship between school attendance and delinquency that has been widely used. From a life-course perspective of crime and delinquency, educational disinvestment, and, more specifically, poor school attendance influence the educational trajectory, reducing students' ability to perform and complete school successfully. In a high school completion and truancy study, 75% of chronic truants failed to graduate from high school compared with 3% of non-truants (McCluskey et al., 2004). In adulthood, truants are described as having more children at a younger age, experiencing marital breakdown by age 23, being more likely to be heavy smokers, and showing more signs of depression than their non-truant counterparts (McCluskey et al., 2004).

Although criminologists have examined high school attendance, the link between primary school attendance and delinquency has not been fully explored. Typically, primary school attendance problems are explained as illness-related or parent-dictated; therefore, early attendance is not directly

examined as a risk factor for youth. However, some studies in this area suggest that poor attendance habits, even at the elementary level, can predict problems over the entire life-course. Specifically, chronic absenteeism in elementary school has been found to escalate in middle and high school and inhibit academic achievement (McCluskey et al., 2004). It remains unclear whether the relationships between truancy, class and poverty are causal or correlational.

AUSTRALIA

The schooling system of Australia is very similar to that of Aotearoa New Zealand, and we can learn from their experiences. The overall school attendance picture in Australia is good. Year 1-10 students attend, on average, 92% of ‘available school days’ in Australia. The overall proportion of Australian students who attend school regularly is also good, with 75% of Years 1-10 students attending at least 90% of available school days. Australia’s school attendance rate is comparable to that of other countries with high-performing education systems. For example, in 2016/2017, the overall attendance rate in state-funded schools in England was 95.3% (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2019).

There are areas of concern: 25% of Australian school students attend less than 90% of school days—approximately 20 or more days absent in a school year. Attendance rates tend to decline in secondary school from Year 8 onwards. Similar to Aotearoa New Zealand, there is a notable attendance gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and between students from metropolitan and remote locations (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2019; Education Review Office, 2022; Ministry of Education, 2010).

This is particularly pronounced in certain groups of students. Again, similar to Aotearoa New Zealand, students in the early years of compulsory schooling, students transitioning through secondary school, students in remote locations or socioeconomically disadvantaged areas and Indigenous students are most at risk for this kind of absence (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2019; Education Review Office, 2022).

AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand Education (School Attendance) Regulations 1951 require schools to record all students' attendance daily, “every morning and every afternoon.” This is why school attendance is officially counted in half-days (Lubeck et al., 2022). A school attendance record contains a period (in minutes) for which attendance is recorded. Primary schools have two periods (morning and afternoon), while secondary schools have up to ten periods daily. For each of these periods, a student receives an attendance code. There are four categories of attendance codes: present (p), justified absence (j), unjustified absence (u), and exam leave (x) (Lubeck et al., 2022).

The Education and Training Act 2020 is the primary legislation that establishes and regulates New Zealand's education system. Under this Act, school enrolment and attendance are both a right and a legal requirement. Section 33 of the Act states that every domestic student is entitled to free enrolment and attendance at any state school "beginning on the student's fifth birthday and ending on 1 January after the student's 19th birthday" (Lubeck et al., 2022).

Section 35 of the Act requires all domestic students between 6 and 16 to be enrolled at a registered school (state, state-integrated, or private). Children aged five are not required to enrol but must attend school once enrolled. Section 36 of the Act requires all students to attend school whenever it is open. Section 36 also obligates school boards to take all reasonable steps to ensure all students attend school when it is open (Lubeck et al., 2022).

There are various exemptions to these obligations. They include when a student is homeschooled, has been placed in residence or a programme under the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989, participates in a secondary-tertiary programme, or has a well-being or transitional plan (Lubeck et al., 2022). Section 243 of the Act allows parents to be prosecuted and fined up to \$3,000 if they do not enrol their child at school. Similarly, Section 244 of the Act will enable parents to be charged if their child does not attend school regularly. The parent of a student who does not attend school is liable for a fine not exceeding \$30 for every missed school day. The fine may not exceed \$300 for the first offence or \$3,000 for the second offence (Lubeck et al., 2022).

Aotearoa New Zealand's attendance levels are below those in comparable countries. In a comparison by the Ministry of Education, attendance in Aotearoa New Zealand was lower than in Australia, Canada, Ireland, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Education Review Office, 2022; Education Review Office, 2023; Ministry of Education, 2022).

Aotearoa New Zealand has consistently had lower attendance than other countries. The Covid-19 pandemic has further reduced attendance. Attendance in Aotearoa New Zealand schools has declined across all demographic groups for several years (Education Review Office, 2022; Education Review Office, 2023). Attendance and achievement are directly related. The current levels of regular school attendance across all demographics are concerning. They have been trending in the wrong direction for many years. Lubeck and colleagues (2022) recommended that the government achieve a sustained average of at least 70% of students attending school regularly by 2024.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the expectation is that learners will attend every day that a school is open and that schools will take all reasonable steps to ensure they do. There are different types of absences from school. Absences are classified as justified when a learner has an acceptable reason to be away, such as a short-term illness. Unjustified absences are those that are either unexplained or are an unacceptable reason. An example of an unjustified absence could be a holiday during term time. Regular attendance in Aotearoa New Zealand is defined as missing less than a week (less than ten half days or five full days) in a term. Learners who miss a week each term will have missed out on a year of schooling by the time they are 16 (Education Review Office, 2022).

There has been a decline in attendance since 2015, which appears to be continuing and getting worse. Learners of different ethnicities, ages, and from various school deciles (the ranking system in New Zealand based on the socioeconomic for the families of the students in the school) have all seen a decline in attendance (Education Review Office, 2022). Regular school attendance is critical to achievement and the future of Aotearoa New Zealand. This drop was evident before the Covid-19 pandemic, and it has continued since (Education Review Office, 2022). The attendance drop in the lower decile schools is steeper and involves mostly Māori and Pasifika students (Education Review Office, 2022).

These increases in non-attendance are very concerning because every day missed impacts learning. While many factors impact attendance, research shows that some are more important than others. The Education Review Office (ERO) reports on factors that significantly affect whether or not learners attend school regularly. These include parents' attitudes, learners' attitudes, and how learners experience the school (Education Review Office, 2022).

In Aotearoa New Zealand, learners who attend between 80%-90% are said to have irregular absences. Those who attend 70%-80% are classified as having moderate absences. Students who attend 70% or less of the time have chronic absence (Ministry of Education, 2022). In Term 2, 2019, 43.8% of Māori students attended school regularly, compared with 61.3% of European students and 68.9% of Asian students. The factors identified as contributing to non-attendance disproportionately affect Māori students and whānau (see Glossary on page 74). These include societal causes such as poverty and housing and in-school causes like bullying and racism. Māori students disproportionately suffer bullying and racism (Lubeck et al., 2022).

The sections below focus in on Aotearoa New Zealand and consider several aspects of the truancy problem, zeroing in on the Franklin community, an area on the eastern coast of the Hauraki Gulf and the western coast of the Manukau Harbour, where this research was carried out.

FAMILY FACTORS

Currently, ethnicity and culture are statistically linked to children's achievement. Overall, Pākehā and Asian children consistently achieve higher than Māori and Pasifika children. This finding is linked with socioeconomic status (SES) since the families of most Māori and Pasifika children occupy the lower levels of the SES scale (including the poverty level), and these children also make up a disproportionate number of those in low-decile schools (Biddulph et al., 2003; Lubeck et al., 2022).

Family factors also impact attendance, including the family's relationship with the school, attitude toward education, sense of connection with the school, and feeling that the school respects the family's culture. The understanding that school and education are helpful for the present and the future impacts a student's choice to attend school. The support for participation and learning includes supporting homework and academic progress, supervising, and monitoring attendance - the stability and harmony at home. The economic factors include employment stability, housing, and affordable transport (Biddulph et al., 2003; Ministry of Education, 2022).

Falling attendance may also reflect families struggling to manage the costs of living, which are increasing in the wake of the global Covid-19 pandemic, as the rising costs of accommodation – especially for low-income households, and the increasing work intensity for parents – with an expanding proportion of two-parent families where both parents are in full or part-time work (Ministry of Education, 2022).

About 11% of Aotearoa New Zealand families experience material hardship. While the proportion of families with children experiencing material hardship in Aotearoa, New Zealand, has been steadily trending down since 2013, single-parent families, families with three or more children, Māori, and Pacific families still disproportionately experience material hardship (Ministry of Education, 2022).

Some authors understand attendance and non-attendance differently. A Ministry of Education report (Weber, 2020) states that the overall relationship between attendance and attainment can best be described by a straight line, especially at over 70% attendance. Other findings of this report:

- » The first 1.5 days of justified absence across Term 2 is the only 'safe' level of non-attendance (where there is a minimal impact on a student's attainment).
- » This implies that any other absence from school is associated with substantially lower attainment – that is, every day matters.
- » The first few unjustified absences in a term are associated with the most significant drops in attainment.

- » Attendance is more strongly related to attainment at higher year levels, particularly NCEA (National Certificate of Educational Achievement) and for mathematics, as opposed to reading.
- » Attendance is critical for some student groups (including students in low decile schools).

Lubeck and colleagues recognise that reasons for chronic non-attendance can be highly individualised. However, many submissions identified common societal causes. These included lack of transport, family violence, material deprivation, poor housing or homelessness, and mental health issues in the home. We heard that some students are often absent to care for siblings or to work part-time jobs to provide for their families. The Ministry also identified parents' experiences of school and parentally sanctioned absences as contributing factors (Education Review Office, 2022; Lubeck et al., 2022; McCluskey, 2016; Ministry of Education, 2022).

PRIMARY SCHOOL CORRELATION

National and international evidence shows that attendance directly affects how well learners achieve in primary and secondary schools. Poor attendance increases the risk of poor achievement, which has lifelong negative impacts, including lower earnings and employment sustainability. International research has also linked lower school attendance to an increased likelihood of dropping out earlier and social isolation from the school community and peers. Poorer mental health and social functioning, increased likelihood of criminal activity, and increased likelihood of requiring social assistance in the future (Clark et al., 2005; Davis et al., 2018; Education Review Office, 2022). There is no "safe" level of non-attendance. International and domestic evidence thoroughly documents the direct links between achievement and attendance. The steady national decline of attendance in Aotearoa New Zealand over recent years should have alarm bells ringing (Lubeck et al., 2022; Weber, 2020).

Establishing regular attendance routines early in children's schooling is essential. How often learners attend early primary school predicts how much they will participate in secondary school. Non-attendance in early education usually continues in later years. Primary school also lays the foundations for future learning and develops the skills essential for success in secondary school. Missing school in primary school can create gaps in learning that set learners back in secondary school and contribute to increasing disengagement from school and learning. Factors associated with truancy usually include a variety of domains, such as the individual, the family, the school, and the community in which they live (McCluskey et al., 2004).

There is a need to rectify poor attendance early before it becomes entrenched. Some students who are chronically absent in high school never attended primary school regularly. The Attendance Service was

seen as coming into the picture too late when the focus should be on early prevention and establishing the foundations for regular attendance (Lubeck et al., 2022; McCluskey et al., 2004).

MĀORI AND PASIFIKA

For some students, there are well-being barriers to attending school regularly. For example, New Zealand has one of the highest rates of bullying in the world, and students report that too many young people do not feel safe and/or included at school. All students must feel they can express their individuality without fear of judgment, rejection or harassment (Milne, 2013; Ministry of Education, 2022).

One of the barriers that research has revealed is that Māori and Pasifika parents are more likely to keep their child out of school if the child is being bullied, has an illness, or has mental health issues. It was found older learners, Year 11-13, are not attending school because they are uninterested in what is being taught. Parents of tamariki (see Glossary on page 74) in lower decile schools face issues such as difficulties with transport and their children not having the right equipment and resources they need for school (Education Review Office, 2022; Lubeck et al., 2022; McCluskey et al., 2004; Ministry of Education, 2022). Although their attendance rates are higher, students of higher-decile schools are less motivated to go to school because they have more enjoyable activities at home (Ministry of Education, 2022).

Three factors that motivate learners to go to school are: getting to see and spend time with their friends; seeing how the school will help them in the future; and liking at least one of their teachers (Ministry of Education, 2022). The significant widening of the gap between attendance at decile 1 and 10 schools over the past decade is concerning. In 2011, this difference was 21%. By 2021, this gap had widened to 31%, with decile 10 schools averaging 71.7% regular attendance, and decile 1 schools averaging 40.9%. Poor attendance is profoundly troubling and exacerbates existing educational inequalities. Education is one powerful tool. We must provide all children with equal opportunities. Our national attendance crisis is robbing children of the influential academic and social benefits an education provides (Lubeck et al., 2022; Milne, 2016).

Māori and Pasifika learners from low-decile schools are more motivated to attend school when they participate in sports and clubs. Primary learners and learners from low-decile schools attend if they have an adult they trust; Pasifika learners are more motivated to go to school to make their families proud of them (Ministry of Education, 2022). Lubeck and colleagues believe that as a Treaty partner, the Crown must actively promote and protect Treaty rights and develop education settings that reflect Māori

- Crown relations. According to Milne (2013), a child needs to be secure in his or her own cultural identity for growth and success to develop at school.

The Ministry of Education suggests that learning is increasingly happening online or in settings outside of the classroom. We also know that being physically present in a school doesn't necessarily mean young people are participating and progressing in their learning. Engagement, therefore, includes developing a sense of belonging, participating, and achieving that is underpinned by educationally powerful relationships. In most cases, this will still mean some physical presence in a place of learning (Ministry of Education, 2022).

The achievement of Māori students, Pacific students, and students with learning support needs continues to be a significant issue for many schools, with little change in this picture since 2015. A school's most effective strategy for improving outcomes has been shown to be a deliberate focus on tracking and supporting Māori and Pasifika student learning and well-being (Bonne & MacDonald, 2019).

TEACHER RESPONSES

In the 2018 survey responses, there was a general theme of growing demands being made on schools to respond to the increasingly complex needs of students. Teachers feel hard-pressed to do the job of teaching a student population that has a growing number of needs, including mental health issues. Teachers and principals reported increased stress levels, lower morale, and long work hours. Significant issues on principals' minds included recruiting quality teachers and having enough funding to meet their school's needs. Decile 1–2 schools continue to face the most profound challenges in meeting their students' needs. This is especially evident regarding student wellbeing (Bonne & MacDonald, 2019).

Ensuring appropriate staffing topped the list of practical actions schools had taken to improve the integration of students with learning support needs. Some principals say they need more support for implementing strategies to strengthen Māori and Pacific students' learning and differentiating teaching for students with learning support needs. These areas continue to present problems for substantial minorities in secondary schools, indicating needs that cannot be met by asking schools to source their advice (Bonne & MacDonald, 2019).

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

Young people are often referred to Alternative Education due to their behaviour. Over a quarter have been suspended or excluded. They are also referred due to attendance issues and alienation from school. Sometimes, they are referred by Youth Justice or Oranga Tamariki, this is a Government department in New Zealand that is responsible for the Ministry of Children. Many young people in

Alternative Education have been suspended or excluded. More than one in four (28%) have been suspended at least once, which is 22 times more likely than other young people. Before starting Alternative Education, two out of five (38%) young people in Alternative Education were referred to Attendance Services. This is over five times more likely than the rest of the population (Ministry of Education, 2022).

These young people's needs have not been identified and met early enough. They also have significant gaps in their learning, which have not been addressed. Waiting for a place in Alternative Education deepens disengagement. This indicates that our education system is not currently set up with sufficient or the proper range of provisions to meet the needs of these young people. In the year before they start attending Alternative Education, young people in Alternative Education miss an average of 58 days of school. Many young people work at a level several years below their age – for example, at Year 4 or 5 level (age 8 to 10), even though they are 13 to 16 years old (Ministry of Education, 2022).

Only around one in four return to school when they move out of Alternative Education. More than half do not go on to further training or employment. By age 20, almost 70% are receiving benefits. Only three in 10 (28%) young people attending Alternative Education attend tertiary education at age 18; by age 24, this drops to one in 10 (11%). At age 24, almost two-thirds (63%) of people who had attended Alternative Education were receiving a benefit, compared to half of the adults (51%) with similar backgrounds but who never went to Alternative Education (matched comparison group) (Ministry of Education, 2022).

Alternative Education needs to be rethought to provide better outcomes. These young people have significantly worse outcomes than other young people, worse even than very similarly disengaged young people with high needs. They are still determining whether to achieve an education qualification. As adults, they are much more likely to be receiving benefits and be involved in the criminal justice system. At age 18, four in 10 (39%) of young people from Alternative Education have Police proceedings against them compared to 6% of other young people. Less than one in 10 young people from Alternative Education achieve NCEA Level 2 or higher (Ministry of Education, 2022).

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

The *Action Plan for Pasifika Education* (APPE) (Ministry of Education, 2023) strongly advocates for authentic community engagement and empowers whānau to share their educational stories and trauma. The APPE has a core objective to address the deep *mamae* and issue a *wero* (challenge) to *kura* (schools) to combat racism and discrimination as learning barriers.

The *Tapasa* (Ministry of Education, 2018) document is designed to increase a kaiako's understanding of Pasifika learners' diverse and ethnic-specific needs, identities, language and cultures. *Tapasa* promotes collaboration and respectful relationships to enhance the learning and well-being of our Pasifika students. *Tapasa* recommends effective pedagogical practices tailored to suit Pasifika students. It highlights the importance of kaimahi being culturally competent in our endeavours to meet the needs of our ever-diverse multicultural classrooms.

Tapasa and APPE advocate for inclusive pedagogical practices encompassing our Pasifika student's cultural needs. The *Tapasa* (Ministry of Education, 2019) and the *Action Plan for Pasifika Education* (Ministry of Education, 2023) robustly advocate confronting systemic racism and discrimination and addressing the need to feel welcome in the classroom, emphasising the need for pedagogical practices tailored to suit the needs of our Pasifika learners.

Their voices underscore the crucial role of kura, kaimahi, and tumuaki in creating a safe environment free from bias. This also emphasises the importance of genuine community engagement in tackling deeply entrenched challenges. A beacon to enrich understanding of the distinct identities, language, and cultures of Māori and Pasifika learners. Addressing systemic inconsistencies is paramount. Genuine and authentic community engagement lies at the heart of effective change. We must hear the voice and trauma of the truant. Milne (2016) argues that cultural identity is severely impugned when a young person is not part of the dominant culture. This is essential because identity is firmly formed and developed in these tender years.

The *Tapasa* framework encourages cultural competencies in our New Zealand classrooms. Our kaiako must cater to the needs of the many cultures in the school. Cultural incompetency impacts attendance and, therefore, the educational outcomes of our Māori and Pasifika students. Collaborative decision-making becomes essential in turning the tide on New Zealand education's horrendous attendance statistics. The *Tapasa* underscores the importance of engaging Pasifika students, their families, and advocacy groups in reshaping our attendance rates.

Equally crucial is developing resources to support kaiako in becoming culturally competent. Effective communication is pivotal among Māori and Pasifika students and their families in deciphering and seamlessly meeting their needs. A comprehensive approach, including our Māori and Pasifika aiga (family) routine evaluations, is imperative, ensuring continual refinement of infrastructure, curriculum, and teaching strategies to guarantee a genuinely inclusive and accessible learning journey. The New Zealand government have made concentrated efforts to reshape our attendance rates for our Māori and Pasifika students, but has it worked? Are we trending in the right direction?

FRANKLIN

I am a teaching staff member at Pukekohe Intermediate School (having started in January 2024), and I am the staff representative on the School Board of Trustees. This section draws on a report by Franklin Attendance Services (FAS) prepared in mid-2024 and delivered to the Board of Trustees of Pukekohe Intermediate School. Because this report is an unpublished document, it is not in the reference list of this thesis. One of the points the report makes concerns the importance of intercepting potential truants before the start of the school year. This period of time before the school year starts is pivotal in ensuring whānau understand the importance of attending school. FAS states that there has been an increase in whānau dealing with mental health issues, social issues and community challenges like lack of emergency housing and whānau displacement (Ministry of Education, 2022).

The Ministry of Education policy is that schools refer students to FAS after they are absent for 21 consecutive days. However, it is proving very difficult to re-engage students after 21 days, so FAS proposes that referrals be made after 3 – 5 days of absence. The current 21-day referral is proving unsuccessful, with the Franklin Attendance Service returning the truant tamariki to kura. The Attendance Officers found the tamariki disengaged from kura when the 21-day referral was made. Franklin Attendance Service believes it is pivotal in improving attendance rates by catching the whānau much earlier than the current 21-day referral process. They suggest a 3 – 5 day referral could impact the ever-growing attendance issue throughout New Zealand.

FAS claims that they no longer consider the number of whānau on their waiting list as an overload but more like an impossible task. These issues are compounding their ability to re-engage their tamariki in school. Whānau have been forthcoming and honest in saying that their tamariki going to school is not their priority.

FAS staff have seen an increase in Mental Health issues in the whānau of the truants. Parents express significant concern about the inability to make their kids listen or care about school. Parents argue with children that they can't catch up at school and that the teachers don't see or hear them. The students perceive that the teachers don't answer or care about their questions (Clark et al., 2005; Davis et al., 2019; Education Review Office, 2022).

Staff in FAS have needed to develop conflict resolution skills. The issues they are exposed to at the doorways of truants' homes have been most undesirable. This has underscored the need for professional development in this area. A significant area of need is the attendance dropout from Year 8 – Year 9. Students go to the school grounds but not to class. They are forming gangs on school premises

but not attending class. These gangs are referred to as Peer Pressure Bonded Gangs, located on school grounds. FAS recommends that the school spend more time preparing the tamariki for the transition between primary and secondary schooling.

Families are struggling with social issues, like unavailable emergency housing and unemployment, making school a lesser priority. FAS is finding a very high percentage of re-referrals, possibly due to schools not making changes that encourage truants to stay in class. A significant obstacle to improving attendance rates has been the delayed referral system, which refers students only after five weeks of absence. Returning to school via the FAS is incredibly difficult, making a successful return highly improbable.

FAS has seen an increase in intermediate and primary school students being absent due to older siblings not attending. There is a significant increase in the Year 1 – Year 3 age group. The reasons for the whānau have been mental health issues that the whānau are navigating through. Whānau report that mental health issues arise from the following scenarios:

- Tamariki loss of identity
- Tamariki loss of sense of belonging
- Transient parents
- Dysfunctional whānau unit breaking down
- Mum and Dad splitting the kids up to sustain MSD benefit
- Subject to violence in the home
- Emergency housing
- Rehousing due to incarceration (to nanny and granddad)
- Out-of-zone applications and non-travel capability

FAS has seen an increase in the grandparents taking on care for their grandchildren due to parents being incarcerated. This has proven problematic as they can't care for young children and get them to school, especially when the school is not near their home and they are out of the zone.

It has been noticed that whānau can be very non-responsive when school applications are online, often due to not having online capabilities. This can be a hurdle that they choose to refrain from engaging with. FAS have had to spend considerable time with deans, and timetabling for the students can be difficult when they miss a lot of lessons. Returning to school can be very difficult for teachers and students involved.

Transport to and from school has been a considerable barrier that FAS has assisted with. Many whānau are displaced due to societal issues, and many are out of zone and even transient, thus increasing the number of non-enrolled tamariki in Aotearoa. Worse than truanting, these tamariki are non-enrolled in any kura. The Attendance Service is finding that the number of non-enrolled tamariki is growing exponentially. This is problematic for a region like Franklin, where more support is needed for these whānau.

A significant difference and trend occurring in truancy has been the impact of social media. Bullying used to lead the cause of truancy, but now, in Franklin, the lead is social media. The influence of social media on the very impressionable, bored, idle, and restless years 8, 9, and 10 who are looking for entertainment needs to be revised for the attendance officers. Working parents are having difficulty with their teenage children who refuse to attend school, and parents are sometimes shocked at the personality changes of their children.

Attendance advisors are finding that they have to visit home in the early morning to physically get children out of bed and “parent the parents,” demonstrating to the children that compliance is expected. The issue of not getting out of bed is compounded when younger siblings copy-cat their older sibling's behaviour - refusing to attend school when the older sibling is truant. This widening refusal to comply with parents has in turn led to a massive increase in children's anxiety and self-harm. Suicide attempts have also been on the rise. Consequently, there has been an increase in referrals to school counsellors and external counselling services.

In Franklin, there has been an overload on the waitlists of the following networks:

- Whirinaki Clinic
- Northern Health Service
- Waiuku Family Services
- Franklin Family Services

These long waiting lists have proven problematic as students only attend school once they have been to their appointments, but these networks are currently overloaded. The problem of non-enrolled tamariki has changed from only high school to now including the tamariki of primary and intermediate schools. FAS believes this is due to the copycat mentality whereby the younger siblings are copying the non-attending actions of their older siblings; they call this the sibling ripple effect. FAS suggests schools should be more proactive with enrolments. Assisting parents with forward enrolments would help in guiding and proactively engaging tamariki on their educational journey. Collaborative decision-making that involves schools and families is paramount to unpacking the barriers to attending kura.

CONCLUSION

Addressing our alarming truancy rates requires addressing the unique challenges and needs of our Māori and Pasifika young people. Addressing their needs demands actionable steps. Engaging with the Māori and Pasifika communities, developing tailored resources, consistent communication and regular assessments for inclusivity is paramount. We need concerted efforts to bridge the gaps, which will determine these frameworks' true efficacy. The wero (challenge) lying ahead is to ensure that these well-intentioned plans do not remain in print but become actions and positive habits. Returning to school via the current services appears incredibly difficult, making a triumphant return highly improbable. The social issues are engulfing all areas for whānau, and the sharp increase in living has created a tsunami of problems that whānau cannot withstand, making school attendance a minor matter, certainly not their priority.

CHAPTER THREE: Methodology

This chapter identifies the approach taken to carrying out this research. It answers the questions about how I carried out my research, and explains the underlying concepts, principles and procedures associated with this research. It outlines in detail how I carried out the data collection, analysis and reporting, and ethical considerations.

Through the tools of social science, I am seeking to understand students' perspectives and the whānau of recidivist truants. This research studies recidivist truants and human behaviour in a social context. I aim to activate the voices and stories of families of students who are frequently truant from school, and to identify the circumstances impeding engagement in education. The chosen methodology needs to encapsulate the voices of the truants in order to assist in understanding their reality, and to be culturally sensitive to their needs.

As the daughter of a Tongan migrant living and researching in New Zealand, it became evident that the most applicable method for collecting information from the truants would be the principles of Talanoa, as the target participants were Māori and/or Pasifika, and I am Tongan Māori. My specific background, both my ancestry and family and my professional experiences, add to the information in this research. Hence autoethnography and narrative methods support the collection of information through Talanoa.

The people whose lives are reflected in this thesis, including myself as the researcher, are of Māori and Pacific ancestry, so words and phrases from Māori and Pacific languages are at home in the pages of this thesis. To use these languages symbolically represents the cultures of the people in this research. Te reo Māori is an official national language of Aotearoa New Zealand, and Pacific languages are celebrated each with their own language week of the year. The Ministry of Education places strong emphasis on the need for schools and teachers to include Māori and Pacific languages and cultures in their classrooms. I wrote the thesis title in the Tongan language with the help of my father (see more detail on page 30).

By using the interpretivist paradigm, my research will be able to explore different factors, such as behavioural aspects, based on the truants' experiences inside and outside the classroom. Understanding their interpretation enables the researcher to treat their lived experience as unique as the participants themselves (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020).

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The intent of this research was to explore the backgrounds and experiences of six truanting students of Māori and or Pasifika ethnicity, to better understand the barriers as they perceive them preventing them attending school and reaching educational success. For this research on Truancy, the Ontological position is Constructivism (participants construct their own reality), Phenomenology (the participants understand themselves and insightfully discuss their realities), and constructivism naturally leads to Interpretivism (the researcher and the readers will construct reality from the Talanoa-attained data). The principles of Talanoa, which are care and patience, are used to collate authentic and genuine stories among Pasifika. This process allows a safe space for cultural authenticity to blossom and allows rich contextual and interrelated information to surface as co-constructed stories. The synergy of talanoa leads to an energising and uplifting of the spirits, a positive state of connectedness (mafana), and enlightenment. These are the principles of Talanoa that will be applied throughout this research. A phenomenological standpoint against a background of an Interpretivist paradigm will assist me in understanding that my interpretation of their stories remains only that. Readers likewise will bring their own experiences and understanding to an interpretation of both the participants' stories and my understanding of those stories.

Interpretivism will allow the participant to articulate their voice and journey regarding truancy; they will first construct their reality, and then I will interpret their reality from their experiences and draw on my knowledge and understanding. The interpretivist paradigm will assist in gaining a deeper understanding of their perspectives, reality, and decision-making. Using the interpretivist approach allows for a greater depth of knowledge by seeking the experiences and perceptions of the truanting participants (Allarahsheh & Pius, 2020). Human subjects interpret their world all the time to make sense of it. This is done with the people around them: their whānau, their history, social media, what they see on television, and other influential people in their lives (Bogdan & Knopp Biklen, 2006).

Using Interpretivism allows us to comprehend better that their experience's meaning constitutes their reality. The participants constructed the meaning of their experiences by socialising with others on their journey, which helped to form their reality (Brooks et al., 2014). This interpreted reality is what this research seeks. Aligning with the phenomenological perspective and essential to the approach is the assumption that the interpretation mediates human experience (Brooks et al., 2014). My research showed that the participant's understanding of what was happening to them differed from my knowledge. However, it still constructed the reality of their experience.

This research hopes to attain an in-depth understanding of each truant's behaviour and reality. This qualitative research aimed to attain culturally specific insights about values, beliefs, emotions, opinions, behaviours, relationships, and social context around attendance and education.

METHOD - TALANOA

The principles of Talanoa are the qualitative methods used in this research. Talanoa belongs to the Phenomenological research family (Vaiotei, 2006). Talanoa means to relate experiences or tell stories: multi-layered critical discussions and free conversations. My father comes from Ha'afeva and Ha'apai. He is strong in the Tongan culture and language, and my experience with him and his cultural processes meant that Talanoa was the most appropriate method for this research. The principles of Talanoa are the definitive method of my data collection.

The Principles of Talanoa come from the research of Timote Vaiotei. Talanoa is a personal encounter where people share their stories, issues, and realities; Talanoa allows more mo'oni (pure, honest, authentic truth) information to be available for Pacific research. I recognise the power dynamic in my participants' relationships: mutual respect, and I have a genuine desire to know, feel, and understand their journey.

Vaiotei asks, "Why hound me with a question when you don't care for an answer?" (Vaiotei, 2006). Talanoa is a data collection method in which care and patience are taken to collate authentic and genuine stories among Pasifika. I conduct individual interviews, which are respectful (faka'apa'apa) engagements in an informal context. The students recognise my place in the hierarchy, and I acknowledge and respect them with rights and opinions that I treasure and value. In Talanoa, the respect is mutual and reciprocated.

Epistemology deals with the origins of knowledge (ilo), the nature of knowing, and the construction of knowledge. Integral to Talanoa is the realisation that it requires making meaning of the participants' interpretations of their cultural context. In a good talanoa encounter (fetaulaki), the researcher creates the space and conditions that holistically intermingle researchers' and participants' emotions, knowledge, and experiences.

Talanoa allows people to engage in social conversation, which may lead to rich discussions or knowledge (ilo) creation. This allows rich contextual and interrelated information to surface as co-constructed stories. This synergy leads to an energising and uplifting of the spirits, a positive state of connectedness (mafana), and enlightenment. Talanoa requires the researcher to partake deeply in the research experience rather than stand back and analyse it (Vaiotei, 2006).

Talanoa is friendly, and the process allows a safe space for cultural authenticity to blossom. Power sharing of the principles of talanoa becomes an integral derivative of this method. The effect of reciprocity is that when people give koloa (in this case, time and knowledge) respect (faka'apa'apa) plus honour, developments will be followed with interest. A relationship has been developed between the researcher and the participants.

As evidence that a positive relationship was developed during the talanoa, the relationship did not end at the end of the interviews. Later in the year, some participants continued visiting me, popping into Tuakau Primary School to say hello and often giving me cuddles. On one occasion, one participant purchased me several of the \$1 lolly bags and a coke. He left them on my desk and a verbal message from another teacher: "These are for Miss. I know she has a long day." This was prize-giving day; he was correct. I am well aware that although it costs about \$3.50 financially, that is money he certainly doesn't have, so I was honoured to get my little but colossal gift. I saw the adult that was with him, at Prizegiving that night. She told me that he spent all of his money on me. He didn't get himself anything. It dawned on me that this research and listening to their story had significantly impacted them. Although I was a stranger, I was one of the few people on their journey who had shown them love and attention without hurting or deserting them. That \$3.50 spoke volumes to me. This showed me that the principles of Talanoa were being reciprocated. The respect between myself and the interviewee personified a mutual bond. This was the outcome of applying the Talanoa principles in this research.

METHOD - AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

As noted above, I am using autoethnography as a supplementary method for gathering information and presenting results (Adams et al., 2015). Autoethnography is growing in popularity in education research as an alternative to standard qualitative methodology, usually based on interviews or surveys (Stewart, 2023; Stewart et al., 2021). Autoethnography basically means accepting that the life and experiences of the researcher can be a valid source of information (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Williams, 2021). To write about one's own life and experiences is inevitably done in the form of narratives, which is why narrative methods are so often paired with autoethnography. My mother's life story, and my own life and work in the community in which this research is conducted, is the first influence of autoethnography in this thesis. Second are the narratives of events that happened during the research including the sections below on recruiting the participants and holding talanoa with them. A narrative style is also used in the next chapter to present the results of my talanoa with the participants. Finally, also included in the next chapter is an account of my personal experiences from my former occupation as a Police Officer in the same community, focusing on what I saw happening with children in the homes.

RESEARCH LOCATION

My location focus for this research is the Pukekohe / Tuakau region, where I reside and work as a teacher. This district, Franklin, is renowned for its deep roots in racism. It has recently come to light that Pukekohe is one of the most racist towns in the history of New Zealand (Bartholomew, 2021). Racism is the belief that some races are superior or inferior to others. Pukekohe is 52 km south of the centre of Auckland. Puke means hill, and Kohe (Kohekohe) is a native tree prominent in that area, so Pukekohe means the hill covered in Kohekohe trees. Pukekohe is famous for its onions and potatoes. Māori migrated to the area in the 1910s and 1920s to work in the market gardens of Pukekohe. From 1925 to 1962, segregation occurred in Pukekohe—segregation according to race. Houses were not rented to Māori, resulting in Māori workers and their families living on the market gardens in cow sheds and shacks and sheds. These were built to store potatoes and manure, only to become unlawful housing for the Māori people working in the market gardens. This resulted in a massive spike in preventable diseases among the Māori: measles, diphtheria, tuberculosis, malnutrition and whooping cough. 73% of deaths among Māori were related to their poor living conditions, and over 200 Māori infants and children died from preventable diseases. The floor of many of the Māori housing was mud, and yet they were still paying rent—unacceptable and disgusting behaviour towards the Māori of the time (Bartholomew, 2021).

Māori could not access the services of hairdressers, cinemas, swimming pools, buses, schools and grocery stores without being segregated and made inferior. My mother, Laiha Mann, born October 1950, was a Māori student at Pukekohe North School and lived in the sheds in the market garden. She recalls helping her mother deliver her sister on the mud floor of their shed (she was six years old), even though the Pukekohe Hospital was within walking distance. Their living conditions were horrendous; she cannot recall how many people lived in their shed, but she says there were a lot of families in their home (shed). She recalls swimming in the Pukekohe swimming pool on Fridays only, the day before it was cleaned out for the Pākehā to swim in. She recalls the abuse and getting the strap for speaking Te Reo Māori at school. My mother is now 73 years old and still lives in the area where she and my father brought up their seven children. She has vivid memories of the everyday racial abuse she encountered throughout her life and can recall in detail being six years old and picking the peas in the market gardens for her family to make money. She speaks of intense inferiority to the Pākehā with *mamae* (pain) in her heart. She recalls teachers being surprised that her class grades were as high, sometimes higher, than the Pākehā kids. Although it is in the past, this history and the associated *mamae* still affects people today who suffered it; this *mamae* colours the sound composition of the district today.

RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS

My method of collecting qualitative research data involved investigating real-life experiences through face-to-face talanoa with six participants. My research sought six Māori and / or Pasifika participants between the ages of 13 and 15 who had been referred to a truancy agency for lack of school attendance. Recruiting participants presented extreme difficulty in this research due to the fact that the young people whose experiences I wanted to find out about were not in school and therefore unable to be contacted through the usual channels.

Recruitment posters (see page 121) were designed to invite six Māori and/or Pasifika students between 13 and 15. The poster said that Mrs Holliday should be found at Tuakau Primary School. Posters were put up around the local townships of Tuakau and Pukekohe on dairy notice boards and given to Tuakau College and Pukekohe High School attendance officers. I met with Franklin Attendance Services and Tuakau Attendance Officers, but these meetings did not result in any traction in reaching possible participants. One was worried about privacy constraints, and the other could not acquire any participants.

Participants approached me after seeing the recruitment posters in the local shops and schools. Strangers were at my classroom door around 3 pm at Tuakau Primary School. Initially, I was hesitant and unsure. I didn't realise that they were waiting to meet with me, as they were strangers who came from a low socioeconomic background and were likely gang-affiliated (as I concluded from their appearance and clothing). It took me quite a while to get comfortable with the strangers coming. I often did not realise they were waiting for me (as it is a school, and many people come to pick up their children). I usually would see them waiting outside, but my immediate reaction was that they were a lot older than 15, therefore not waiting to see me. The participants always appeared to be much older upon first appearance, and once meeting them, it was clear that they were living their lives much ahead of their biological age. They looked a lot older than their chronological peers. Life and trauma had made them grow up very quickly.

Once I had one participant confirm and consent, the other five participants came almost daily, as a result of word of mouth. The six participants all consented, and dates were arranged for them to conduct their interviews. The location of the interviews proved problematic. When discussing going to their homes, they would quickly retract their permission and desire to be interviewed. Their resistance revealed issues around not having permanent homes and not having adults in their world whom they trusted. It became evident that they didn't have a safe space where they felt comfortable to talanoa openly with me about their journey.

It quickly became apparent that I had become their 'safe' adult, even though I was a stranger. I had developed a sense of trust with these young people, and we solved the lack of safe space in their 'homes' by doing all of the talanoa interviews in my classroom after school. Two of them attended with an 'adult', but most came alone or with other young mates and explained that they hadn't lived with their parents for a long time. Some of their parents were incarcerated, and some of the participants were living with their 'in-laws' at the tender age of 13 and 14 years old.

I had encountered six young people who had come forward to share their story. They appeared excited that someone, anyone, would listen to them. They couldn't provide a safe space (home) to interview as many were not living with their family. Some of them were not on talking terms with their parents and hadn't seen their parents for a long time. The way they spoke about their parents showed mistrust and almost hatred. One participant explained that he had forgiven his dad but had told his mum to walk past if she ever saw him. He was 14 years old.

I approached the few truancy agencies in the area: Tuakau Attendance Services, Franklin Attendance Services, and Pukekohe Attendance Officers. Two agencies offered to assist my research; one was not engaging at all. However, although they were eager about the research and willing to help, their labour was fruitless. All of the participants came from the posters and word of mouth. Once I had one participant, the others came quickly. All six interviewees met the research criteria of being 13-15 years old, Māori and/or Pasifika, and had been referred to an attendance agency due to poor attendance at school.

COLLECTING DATA

The data for this research was collected using the principles of the talanoa method. Talanoa derives from the Tongan language and means a face-to-face conversation, chatting about anything and everything in a free and informal manner. 'Tala' means to talk, tell, explain, expose, inform, command, or talk about, and 'Noa' means ordinary, nothing in particular (Vaiotele, 2006). Talanoa often leads to a deeper and richer understanding of a Pasifika Phenomenon.

A fundamental characteristic of Talanoa as a research method is that it is trustworthy and meaningfully engages with the research process. As a method for data collection, its ontological roots are linked to Constructivist Paradigms (Prescott, 2009). Talanoa belongs to the Phenomenological family (Vaiotele, 2006). Phenomenology attempts to understand the meaning of events to ordinary people in particular situations. The Talanoa approach also relates to the Ethnography approach and the ethno-methodology approach. Ethnography describes the culture, and the ethno-methodology approach refers to the

method people use to create and understand their lives and how they go about seeing, explaining and illustrating the order in which they live.

The understanding reached as a result of talanoa is a constructed reality. In Talanoa, the researcher and the participant are considered equal and inseparable. Both parties will benefit from the understanding gained from the experiences (Prescott, 2009).

In this research, the participants were offered options of the time and location of their talanoa interview. The beauty of this research was that the participants could determine a time and place that worked for them. They were given a hard copy of the intended interview prompts a week before. All participants were allowed to control where and when they wanted to do the interview. All of them could determine a time that worked for them, but interestingly, all participants asked to do the talanoa interview in my classroom after school hours, to which I willingly obliged.

One of the interviewees attended with her mother. Her mother was gentle and very friendly. The participant had been away from school since Covid-19 and had not returned to school. She didn't enjoy school before Covid, and chose not to return. Mum was not surprised as none of her children had been successful in school. At the interview, the daughter pulled out a piece of paper, to her mother's surprise. The participant had written down all of her answers to the interview in essay form. The Mother told me, she had never seen her write so much. The Mother was shocked. She asked me what I had said to the daughter to make her do this. I explained to the mum that I hadn't said or done anything. The mother asked, why did you do this? (mother in shock). The participant replied, "Mum, this lady cares about me and my story." The Mother whispered to me, I wish you were my daughter's teacher; you have made an immediate connection with my child. This showed that the respect principle of Talanoa had worked. The reciprocity embedded in talanoa will raise the expectations that researchers and participants have of each other, promoting mutual accountability, which will add to the trustworthiness and quality of the research - another outcome of the application of the Talanoa principles.

DATA ANALYSIS

All talanoa conversations were recorded on a voice recorder and emailed to the transcriber to be transcribed from electronic form into written form. The transcribed interview was then analysed into thematic categories. The researcher conducted a thematic analysis and placed the interview topics into themes. There were an array of themes, but five themes repeatedly arose. These will be discussed in greater detail in the discussion section.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) granted ethics approval on June 7, 2023, for three years until June 7, 2026. The ethics code given to this research is 23/122. When applying for ethical consent with this research, a concern was the moral approach to obtaining suitable applicants. I was unaware of how to attain students in a way that did not breach ethical limitations. I proposed making posters (see page 121) and pamphlets and approaching attendance officers, and AUTEC approved this. None of the participants I attained were approached by me initially. They all came by seeing the posters and word of mouth among the other absentee students. They were all attained ethically.

Another concern for this research was ethically conducting talanoa interviews in the participants' homes. The absentee participants would attend with their parents, and it would be best to conduct the talanoa interview in their family homes, where they would be most comfortable. Although AUTEC granted permission to do this, it was not to be. In hindsight, this was an area that I was mistaken about. Not only did the participants not have a family home, but they did not have any responsible adult. None of them opted for a talanoa interview at home. They did not attend with their adult whānau, preferring to talk with me alone.

CHAPTER FOUR: Data Collection and Analysis

This section incorporates the results of my data collection and analysis processes, and explains how the death of my student was the start of my relationship with the participants. My journey through grief and pain led me to my participants, and beautiful relationships were built. The 'Face of Truancy' is part of society that is unseen. My assumptions were proved wrong. I analysed my talanoa and four themes emerged. Limitations and strengths of my research are both discussed in this chapter.

ESTABLISHING RELATIONSHIPS IN A REALWORLD SETTING

Six participants were recruited through the posters placed strategically around Tuakau and Pukekohe township - local dairies, community boards, high school community boards, and shops. Tuakau is a small township on the border between Waikato and South Auckland. It has a population of just under 6000 people.

Next to Tuakau is the township of Pukekohe. Pukekohe is much larger at 27000 people but has a staunch history of racism. The roots of Pukekohe are touched by the tentacles of superiority and racism, providing a complex background to this research. Researching "the truancy journey of Māori and Pasifika students" in these areas is highly relevant and inextricably linked to this district's truancy story. The posters (see page 121) were a plea to Māori and/or Pasifika students aged 13 - 15 who had been referred to Attendance Services for non-attendance at school.

The posters encouraged any interested students who fit the criteria to find Mrs Holliday at Tuakau Primary School (the local school with around 300 students). Tuakau Primary School does a lot of mahi with the community, and its reputation is very positive. Although Tuakau is a low socioeconomic area with high crime rates, the school is at the heart of the community. The principal supported my research by allowing me to advertise on the posters and invite people to come to Tuakau Primary School to find me.

The first student that arrived was a Māori girl or young woman. She had a little sister at Tuakau Primary and knew of me but knew nothing about my research. She came and questioned me about the research. In my class, at the same time as this research, one of my students passed away suddenly as she was run over in her driveway. This was a challenging time for the community, for the school, and very much so for my class of 5 and 6-year-olds. I made displays of photos of my class and this special little girl. I had members of the community coming in and leaving flowers. Some were taking their time and looking at the many photos. In these emotional and embracing moments, 'criteria fitting' students approached

me and asked about the research. They would be in my classroom, looking and talking, yet respecting the solemn, sad, heartbreaking situation that shattered the community. Older students inside my class would wander through and comment that they knew the sister of the deceased. The students would reveal from these discussions that they had seen my posters, and our relationships began.

In my time of grieving, these 'criteria-fitting' students saw that I was human and very caring. They seemed to come forward and offer their condolences, and it was here that connections were made. It was a very dark and difficult time in my teaching career when these potential participant students saw a human they could help, and in turn, our relationships started. For several months I struggled with my grief and trying to lead 26 five and six-year-olds through a challenging valley. My students would constantly ask where their friend was; they would ask me to explain why she wasn't coming to school. This was incredibly painful and went on for several months that felt interminable. I had to be strong for my students, yet I hardly had the strength to carry myself. Maybe it was in observing this struggle that these young absentee students decided they liked me.

In my time of weakness, these students came to be the strength I certainly did not possess. I had strangers arriving at my classroom door and offering to help where they could. I was trying to be the strong teacher and guide my kids through the most unthinkable distress, only to realise that I was encountering the most beautiful moments in a society that is rife with crime, absenteeism, and violence. What was the connecting factor? I believe it was a shared pain. I was in pain, and they recognised it better than I did. They navigated through the pain better than I did. They were much more familiar and comfortable with pain than I was.

I can only wonder if this challenging period was the connecting factor for my research participants and me. I wanted to unload my pressure as I was not bearing it very well, and I did not want to teach or research anymore. I didn't feel that I could carry on anymore. The death of my six-year-old student was too heavy for me to carry, let alone carry 26 little ones through the same dark valley. In hindsight, just when I wanted to quit researching and quit teaching, I realised that it was the collective strength of my 26 kids that carried me through with teaching, and it was connecting with the participants and their pain that carried me through to completion with this research.

KOE MATA AE LIAKI AKO - THE FACE OF TRUANCY

A startling revelation during this journey was the disruption of my initial assumption that absentee students would be at home, behind closed doors and curtains, possibly sleeping or playing computer games (or similar) all day. Once I met the six participants, I realised I was completely wrong about this assumption.

These six participants were young people I had seen but had not noticed. Society at large sees them but doesn't notice. For example, many of them walked past my class daily (heading to the local high school in uniform but not going to school). It became evident that these absentee students are not behind closed doors; they are in our faces every day, crossing our busy paths every day, but we don't notice them. We think they are going to school because they pass us in their uniform and walk to school. But it is now apparent that these very kids are falling through the cracks right before our eyes. These kids are what I would call the 'Face of truancy, Koe Mata Ae Liaki Ako' (Tongan). I initially thought the face of truancy was 'blurred and unrecognisable', but in hindsight of this research, the 'Face of Truancy' is the kids we see daily in the dairy, walking to school and hanging with friends. They are not behind closed doors; they are right in front of us, but we haven't stopped and connected with them. The "Face of Truancy, Koe Mata Ae Liaki Ako" we see daily but are too busy to recognise, to reach out to, or to connect with. Koe Mata (the face) Ae Liaki Ako (the student who left school). The face of truancy seems an appropriate title because we live in a world that is very busy and never turns off (constant social media) and the sounds and pressures of life are intense and relentless. With all of the constant demands, it can be hard to know what to tune in to. I feel that with the 'Face of Truancy, Koe Mata Ae Liaki Ako', we see them daily, but we don't attune to them, we don't notice them, we are busy trying to fend for ourselves, navigate life for ourselves, that we see these faces, koe mata ae, daily but we don't have the time or capacity to notice them and their unmet needs.

As the participants continued to come to my classroom door, I was able to arrange talanoa interview times with them all. They were obliging and forthcoming with their stories. I always intended to talanoa with them in their own homes with their parents and their grandparents. I always intended to hear the stories from the varied generations. This approach was methodically stipulated in ethics approval, as I intended to talanoa with them in their familiar and safe space. I intended to connect with intergenerational family members and to see if there is a pattern or familiar journey among the generations in their families.

Contrary to my expectations, of all six participants, only one had a parent she was living with (the father was in jail). I had to interview all the other participants in my classroom after school hours because none lived with parents or adults with whom they felt safe. All talanoa interviews, except one, were conducted in my classroom at Tuakau Primary School. All interviews were conducted with the participants while their teenage friends/mates waited outside for them. Only one adult came with the interviewees during the research; no adults appeared to be guiding them, and no adults were in their lives except the 'tutors' at their alternative education classes. They all spoke highly of the tutors but didn't speak highly or kindly

of the adults in their homes, which, according to their description, were often/usually inadequate as homes.

Many of the participants explained their living conditions; I was shocked to hear that they were living with their in-laws (13-year-olds claiming this), others saying that they had been homeless for years and living with different mates, crashing on the couches of mates. Others said that they had a parent in jail and that the other parent (usually mum) had other kids with another family and they had chosen not to stay with their biological mothers; one participant explained that he had told his mum to keep walking if she ever saw him in town. Most of the participants had very hate-fuelled relationships with their parents.

The students that I encountered all spoke in a manner that made me realise that they had experienced so much trauma in their lives that they thought these experiences were normal. Their experiences made them seem or behave much older than they were biologically. For example, having in-laws at 13 years old shocked me, but the young man in question thought it was normal. I asked him to clarify; he said, “Yeah, it's my missus’s home, I live with my missus.” I said, “How old are you? He said, “13,” I said, “How long have you been together, he said, “Ages, 2 months.” He saw no issue with being 13 and living with his in-laws after having a girlfriend for 2 months.

Another 13-year-old Pasifika student had a marijuana addiction and was suffering from severe depression. He was gripped by fear and anxiety, and in talking to me, it became apparent that I was the first person to whom he had revealed this information. He spoke very openly and warmly to me, and it became evident that he did not have any adults in his world to help him navigate through his pain. I asked him to explain his depression to me. He was unable to articulate why he was depressed or where it started. He could not link his marijuana use to his depression and struggled to pinpoint what his plans moving ahead were. I was surprised to find out that his father had died of lifestyle-related diseases only a few months before the talanoa interview with me. I thought that the depression might be linked to the sudden loss of his father; the participant didn’t think so and could not link the two together.

I began to wonder if these young participants had endured so much trauma that had made them “grow up” quickly. They lacked the life skills, guidance, and intellectual resources to make sense of their journey, and thus, their reality was a little different from the conclusions I was making as we spoke respectfully to one another.

TALANOA UNFOLDS

All talanoa interviews, except one, were conducted in my classroom in Tuakau. They were after hours (not teaching hours) and were at a time convenient for the participants. The participants were in control

of where and when the talanoa was. They controlled all circumstances, attending the dates and times they requested. All talanoa interviews were conducted when they were asked for. However, one student had encountered some difficult personal issues and was on the run from the Police. She was later located and arrested by Police in Manurewa, and I never saw her again. When I enquired through her friends, they saw the funny side and didn't seem phased or worried that she had had a run-in with law enforcement. It appeared to me that this may have been a regular occurrence with these absentees and "not a big deal", as they laughed, telling me. Their hate for the Police was explicit; disrespecting law enforcement came quickly into our conversations. They were not shy about their dislike of authority and law enforcement.

All participants were given a paper copy of the details for the criteria for becoming a participant in this research. They all took the A4 poster with the requirements, an information sheet, and a permission sheet to discuss with their parents (at this stage, I was unaware that they did not have parents in their lives). The participants all returned their signed permission slips and requested a date and time for the talanoa. As requested by the participants, the talanoa was held in my classroom. Conducting the talanoa in their homes was not viable as they didn't have a "home" and lived in multiple places with different friends. They didn't have adults in their lives that they trusted, and they didn't have a safe space to speak honestly and openly with me, so my classroom became the safe place to have the talanoa together. In a short period, I became their safe adult.

Once the talanoa was scheduled, all participants returned at their scheduled times. The talanoa took place in my classroom after school hours, and although they were usually with a small group of friends when they came to talanoa with me, they always asked to speak to me one-on-one, telling their friends to wait outside. I always welcomed their friends to join us if it made them more comfortable, but they all chose to speak to me one-on-one.

I explained that their identities would be kept confidential. No one would be able to determine their identity through my research. I informed them that I would not tell anyone they were involved in my research if they chose to say it to others; that was their prerogative. Once these formalities were completed, the talanoa was open, revealing their stories and realities. I always organised small finger foods (biscuits) and bottled water. They never touched the food; they all seemed to want to talanoa and share their experiences with me. I had a massive table in my classroom that seats 12, and all the research talanoa were done at this huge table. My classroom is warm and welcoming. There are many plants, very tidy, open spaces, and lots of children's art hanging on the walls. I often get compliments for my immaculate classroom environment and atmosphere. This is something I spend many hours working to create and perfect. This purposeful love and care in making my class pleasant positively

impacted the participants. Most of the participants made comments regarding the classroom space. Some commented that they hated school and had terrible memories but enjoyed being in my classroom.

Barbour (2014) explains that sociology studies societal structures, blending the moral virtues of our participants' perspectives on their educational journey and not suppressing their empowerment, taking considerate care to be transparent about power relationships with the participating truants in this research. I explained explicitly to the participants that their life journey was vastly different to mine and I knew very little about their experiences. Their input into this research was highly regarded and of great worth to the learning.

The introductions were done when I made the participants feel comfortable. I would ask the participant for permission to voice record the interview (this information was also in the information sheet they were given). I showed them my phone and the app that I would use to record the interview (voice recorder app). All participants approved the recording process and the reason for doing so. They were informed that the app would record the talanoa, and then I would email the recording to a transcriber who would turn the interview into a transcribed Word document. This document will be emailed back to me so that I can analyse the transcripts for my research. All transcripts were completed by Tracy Mendey from Digital Fingers. Upon electronically returning the transcripts using Word Document, they were checked thoroughly for accuracy.

Once the transcripts were accurate, I re-read them repeatedly to become thoroughly familiar with the contents. I segmented the transcripts from the qualitative data analysis (Boeije, 2010). The qualitative data was analysed for general and abstract principles, and four themes emerged. I compared the interview transcripts. I segmented the data into similar themes and reassembled the qualitative data thematically. As the qualitative data was segmented, it was regathered and reassembled into themes. The themes that repeatedly arose to the surface are relationships with teachers, violence in the home, mental health and bullying, and absent parents. I recombined the data and integrated the interview transcripts (Boeije, 2010).

Barbour encourages qualitative research enquiries to focus on the truants' understanding and beliefs rather than the outcomes of their journey (Barbour, 2014). I intended to understand their perspective of their reality, an attempt to understand the construction of reality. The truant's approach and perspective to knowledge and reality is the focus of this constructivism/interpretivism research. Precautionary research by Barbour (2014) reminds us that memory is provisional, subjective and concerned with the present rather than fact. There is also a warning about qualitative research interviews being a dumping ground or a smash-and-grab of information on an innocent bystander or whatever researcher can relieve

them of their information. I was aware that I was the researcher and possibly the victim of smash and grab talanoa, but it was my job to determine the 'signal from the noise' (Patton, 2015).

Barbour (2014) claims that we perceive reality through stories and how we construct, interpret, digest and recount these stories to others. These interpretations become the beholder's reality, thus making me aware that the version of events that I receive from the participants is how they have reconstructed it for themselves, not necessarily fact.

As this qualitative data was translated and synthesised into themes, what emerged is like art. This mural has pieces that make sense as they are seen in new ways that make the truancy phenomenon better understood. My experience in the New Zealand Police is another part of the mural, bringing light to different angles and aspects of the truancy journey. All adjoining to assist in making sense of the qualitative data and creating this artistic mural (Patton, 2015).

Patton (2015) speaks wisely about differentiating the signal from the noise, sorting the significant from the trivial and finding the patterns and themes in the data to generate explanations and communicate the essence of the participants' voices, actively distinguishing the signal from the noise amongst the transcript of qualitative data.

The thematic analysis quickly revealed that four strong themes were emerging. These will be discussed in detail in the data analysis section. I read the transcripts multiple times for accuracy and then numerous times for theme analysis. Although the interviews were conducted with six separate absentees, themes emerged that were all very similar across the interviews.

The themes that emerged strongly from the data were:

- Relationships with teachers - how the students perceived the teacher and how their actions and words had negatively impacted the student.
- Jail and Violence in their homes - a common occurrence in their homes. Violence is normalised.
- Bullying and Mental Health - Isolation, depression, victims of bullying, generational trauma, feeling alone.
- A prevalent theme that was overarching was absent parents. Either physically absent (incarceration) or physically at home but preoccupied with varying lifestyles (gangs, violence, drugs).

LIMITING FACTORS

Time felt restricted, and thus, talanoa conversations were restricted by time. Although the participants arrived at their proposed time, I felt obliged to limit the time I needed with them as the interviewer. They were volunteering their time to help me with my research, and I was incredibly grateful that they were willing to share their educational story with me. When they arrived at my class after school hours, most came with several 'friends' who waited outside. Although they had a great attitude in the talanoa interview and they wanted to tell me about their education journey, I felt obliged to hurry and not make them and their friends wait.

Although it was a new relationship that I was building with the participants, they confided in me willingly about their journeys. They appeared eager to share their experience with someone willing to learn about them. So, although time was 'restricted' and 'limited", it didn't appear to deter them from sharing their most intimate and personal stories. The 'vā', the relational connection with the participants, was such that they were willing to open up and divulge their most private and hurtful stories. I believe the vā was strongly present with these young people. They felt comfortable to open up and speak with me. They said they trusted me and could see that I was genuinely interested. They say that they have wholehearted trust.

Everyone is genuinely worthy and valued. I have a genuine love for people, and I genuinely want to know their stories. I have a love for people from all walks of life. I love their story, and I try not to judge them. I am intrigued by people and hope to learn more about them. I am but one person, and my knowledge of life is minimal. Talking to people who vary significantly from me helps me learn more as they have walked paths I have not; therefore, their knowledge is rich. I look at people who walk different paths and can teach me something. I enjoyed listening to my participants' exciting and varied stories. Their stories vary vastly from the sheltered and protected life that my stable home and parents gave me. Although time felt restricted, and I felt that I had to hurry and let them and their friends carry on with their day, I believe that the vā between myself and the participants was strongly present because I was genuinely interested in their path, their story, and their journey.

Losing contact with the participants was another area that limited my research. After the interviews, I had a few occasions when the participants visited me in my classroom. They often brought me gifts (chocolates and small lolly packets). These gifts were sometimes just left on my desk, and I knew it was them. They never left notes because I don't think they were competent writers. Some of them told me that they couldn't read and write. Although the gifts were very cheap (i.e. a few dollars), I always felt very loved that I got these gifts because I knew that these young people did not have any money to spare.

There were a few occasions when I would be in the local township of Tuakau and see a large gathering of young people. Most members of the public would avoid these gatherings due to the evident gang affiliation. I saw a few of the participants at the gathering, and I was pleasantly surprised when they gestured hello to me among their friends. I knew then that I had a special vā between myself and them. Even among hardened gang members, they could comfortably acknowledge me respectfully.

I was comfortable, enjoyed being around the absentee students, and learned much from them. They had taken paths that my sheltered life had not walked. There was an occasion after the talanoa interviews when I tried to contact the participants but could not. I was informed a few days later of their whereabouts. Some truanting students had been arrested in Manurewa (regarding a disorder) and had not yet returned. This is a limitation to the research as I cannot clarify any matters further with them. This restricted my research as those young people are now unlocatable. They were living on the couches of friends, or, in some cases, acquaintances.

Vocabulary skills of the participants - Sometimes, the participants struggled to find the words to express their feelings or experiences. Their 'worlds' were very narrow, and consequently, their interpretation of their experiences was limited to the personal and immediate: they did not have the more prominent points of reference that more education might have brought them. As a local primary school teacher, I was aware of the literacy state of the area. The vocabulary and relationships were similar to those I teach in low socioeconomic classes. Their literacy and numeracy comprehension are limited.

The limited language ability of the participants resulted in a limited ability to transfer the depth and authenticity of their journey, pain, and reality. An example would be the way they would leave gifts on my desk without a note.

RESEARCHER'S EXPERIENCES

I have a unique vantage point from which to undertake this research based on my experience as a Police Officer in the same community (Counties Manukau District) for seven years. I am familiar with the nature of homes affected by crime, drugs and poverty, and the gravity of the situation for the children living in those homes.

My service in the Police included attending homes and families that were dysfunctional and impacted by crime, drugs, poverty, and ill health. All these problems were intermingled and incredibly hard to separate. I saw how trauma in one generation transferred in different forms to the following generations, the trauma multiplying as it was passed on to the next generation. My experience with the Police

exposed me to homes and families in their darkest hours. Endless and relentless bouts of violence, death, abuse, aggression, chaos, confusion, insanity, utter sadness and heartache. Heartache is already at the property, or police are about to deliver a message of heartache. Therefore, during this research, I was not shocked or dumbfounded by what my participants had to say. I have entered poverty-ravaged homes where children's needs appear secondary to the crime lifestyle; for instance, I have located Class A drugs hidden in tins of baby formula (milk powder) on search warrants.

I have entered homes and executed search warrants where I witnessed abuse of children that was inexcusable. Sometimes, physical abuse, like the grandmother kicking a crying, crawling infant (her granddaughter) in the stomach and yelling at her, "Shut up, you little wench!" to quieten the child. The grandmother then continued to flick the ash from her cigarette onto the bare back of the crawling child - the ash from her cigarette singeing on her delicate skin. I picked up that child (protective), and her nappy fell right off her because it was drenched in urine and faeces and had not been changed for days. That same infant, I thought she had drawn on her arms with pen or felt, as they were red - but on closer inspection, it was a rash protruding from her delicate skin. The physical and mental state of that infant was staunchly substandard. And yet, with that warrant, we arrested her 19-year-old father for his crimes, and her 16-year-old mother was heavily pregnant with child number two. In this particular home, in the sitting room, next to the children's toys, were multiple firearms leaning against the sliding door, with ammunition loaded. Is there a possibility that our young people in New Zealand are growing up in houses that are not the best environment for thriving and prosperous futures? What is worse - the intergenerational abuse (the people who are supposed to protect our taonga are the abusers) or parents who are not mature enough to protect and care for their babies but rather choose a life of crime and violence. What are we teaching our young people?

On another occasion, we helped a young mother escape into emergency housing for fear of her and her baby's safety. We placed that 16-year-old Māori mother into refuge in an undisclosed location in Papakura. She was terrified and distraught, and my attention was turned to her infant child, who was hysterically crying in his very cramped and broken pram. His skin was severely infected with eczema to the point where he had crevices in his skin that were bleeding and encrusted. That wasn't the worst part; he was in so much agony that I asked the distraught young mum if I could pick the child up. She cried, hands in her head, sobbing as if she could not take any more. Her infant sobbed, riddled in pain. I picked him up; his skin was flaking off. I tried to cuddle him and settle him. His abdomen area was incredibly tight and stiff to the touch. I asked the mum if we needed to change his nappy. She didn't answer. I asked to see his bottle feed; she pointed to a tray of chocolate milk cartons. It turns out that the young mum had been feeding her boy chocolate milk since birth. It appeared that his severe skin impairments and constipation issues were possibly originating from his diet of chocolate milk. This young mum was doing

the best she knew with her infant, but perhaps not the best for the infant. Is it possible that the next generation may not be overly concerned with education, and more pressing matters will take precedence, like optimal health and homes safe from violence?

On several occasions, I have witnessed young Māori mothers proudly showing their newborn babies off to their mates and then feeding the newborn Fanta, a 1.5L fizzy drink, straight from the large bottle (without a teat) into the baby's mouth. I watched heartbroken as that newborn was gagging choking on the fizzy drink they were pouring into his mouth. The two young mums are incredibly proud of their newborn babies, like any new mother. Standing outside the mall, their clothing and sexual behaviour are likely to gain attention, which will highly likely result in a second pregnancy shortly. School may not be the foremost concern for these young mums in five years. They looked young enough to be students who should have been in class themselves. What messages are we teaching our young people? What will become of these newborn babies? Perhaps not a future that prioritises education and, more likely, a future riddled and steeped in crime and a life of survival on the streets. In five short years, these newborn babies will likely be exposed to drugs, crime, and violence and no doubt will have tasted neglect beyond comprehension.

My exposure to such lifestyles is an asset to this research because I begin to understand the impact of the trauma and reality that such participants grow up in. I am not shocked or upset by their stories because, for 7 years, I was going into homes similar to what they are describing. I have entered many homes where children's basic needs like hygiene, food, or warmth are not met, but drugs and gangs created different priorities from these basic survival needs.

When the participants speak of violence, and they say it so flippantly, I am well aware that the violence is extensive, but for them, it is their 'normal'. They normalise the violence, they normalise the drugs, they normalise being absent from school. My time with the New Zealand Police is an advantage to this research because I slightly understand such participants and their lifestyles. I am not naive to the lifestyles within these homes. One participant talked about when she got (physical) hidings from her father, and it showed strength if she could "handle it and not cry." So she learnt to take the hidings and not cry.

Another boy talked about the domestic violence in their family home and blamed his mother for the father's violent outbursts, saying that if mum learnt to shut her mouth, she wouldn't get hidings as she did. He proceeded to say that he'd forgiven his father for the violence but had no more forgiveness for his mum for her part in the violence. He said he no longer has anything to do with either parent, but if

Dad walked past, he was all good with Dad, and he is forgiven, but not Mum; she can keep walking right by.

I have pulled cars over and located newborn babies (our most precious taonga) placed in a banana box for a car seat. The proud parents none the wiser that the cardboard box provides zero protection for their most beloved, precious taonga. I have seen children sleeping under houses with their families. I have seen a Pacific Island family of six crawl out from under the house, and when I looked through, all of their minimal belongings were in their 'home'. Incredibly, they were paying rent to live there.

I have executed search warrants and had 4-year-olds show me where mummy's drugs are. The Police presence in her home did not concern this young infant, clearly a regular attendance. The grandmother hurled obscene abuse at the Police but remained in her bed (mattress in the sitting room) and raised her hand for the Police to put the physical warrant in her hand. Grandma did not look at the Police, raise her head, or open her eyes. Of all eight family members that were in the sitting room sleeping, no one got up or looked up, and all remained sleeping in their beds. In this warrant, six family members, over three generations, were arrested - charges ranging from Class A drugs, burglary, theft, and violence. What monstrosity are our infants living in that 4-year-olds can identify and locate drugs? Perhaps our young people have more significant battles ahead of them before having the chance to become present at school regularly. What chance do such children have of becoming well-educated?

One night shift, I had dealings with a 14-year-old Māori offender who had severely assaulted a Police Officer. Given the boy's tender age, I was instructed to interview this juvenile in the presence of his Nominated Person. That night, I rang 14 family members consecutively, asking them to come to the Manukau Police Station to sit in an interview with him (the primary purpose of the Nominated Person is to make sure he is treated fairly by the Police given his young age). All family members (including his mother and father) used obscenity to rudely inform me that the boy was my problem, not theirs. I was told very abruptly in a coarse manner to go away. At 14 years old, this boy was high on Methamphetamine and had also consumed alcohol. The concoction of alcohol (suppressant) and methamphetamine (stimulant) had severely disturbing effects on this young boy's behaviour. He aggressively threatened on multiple occasions to rape me until I was bleeding. His long-distance grandma came in at 0400hrs to be his Nominated Person, and she was kind enough to explain his family dynamics. Both of his parents are steeped in gang life (his father is the president of a well-established gang); of the 14 people that I rang, all are illiterate. She (long-distance grandma) can read and write because she was whangai'd out very young. She gently and kindly apologised for the catastrophic abuse I encountered from her moko. His aggressive behaviour was heartbreaking and upsetting. The most mind-blowing aspect was that he seriously assaulted a Police Officer in the head, he threatened to rape me repeatedly, and yet, he walked

free with his grandma after the interview (due to being a juvenile), in which he arrogantly denied all allegations. As I ushered them out of Police security, he turned and suggested that he couldn't wait to see me out in the street and that when he raped me, he would make sure that I bled heavily. A 14-year-old boy.

So, as a researcher, I have an experience that underpins my understanding of the participants and their lifestyles. This 14-year-old was crying out for love and attention, which he was not receiving at home. His way of getting attention, good or bad, was to commit heinous, unwarranted crimes. He was inflicting physical, verbal, and emotional pain on anyone who he interacted with. Perhaps he was lashing out as a means to release the pain he felt inside; maybe he is destined to be illiterate like the rest of his family, steeped in crime and unable to connect with his children as the generation before. Perhaps education is not the priority of this gang-affiliated family, especially given that we know they are all illiterate themselves.

CHAPTER FIVE: Discussion

This research aimed to explore the background and experiences of some Māori and or Pasifika truanting students to better understand the barriers that prevent them from attending school and reaching educational success. Through talanoa with six absentee Māori and Pasifika students between the ages of 13 - 15, I could analyse the data to determine the themes that arose. The four clear themes that emerged were Absent parents, Violence, Mental Health and Drugs, and Teachers.

The talanoa with students absent from mainstream education was central in this research; their collective voice was paramount to understand the phenomenon of truancy in the Tuakau-Pukekohe region of South Auckland. The purpose was to gain an insider perspective, to the extent possible (Baskerville, 2020). It proved exceedingly difficult to recruit participants for this research, since young people are usually recruited through their schools or community groups, which obviously did not apply in this case. These participants represent a group of young people who are lost to the system, and therefore to research, and a major strength of this research was the fact that I was able to recruit them at all. For this reason, this research is almost unprecedented in bringing to the surface the details of the lives of truants like these.

It is commonly accepted that for students to be successful in school, regular attendance is essential (Ministry of Education, 2022). Non-attenders' immediate and prominent result of such behaviour is an academic failure (Devine et al., 2023). Students who have minimal attendance in Primary School, continue with minimal high school attendance, they often drop out and leave education early. When students experience chronic absenteeism, they are highly likely to experience poorer long-term health conditions and social issues (Ministry of Education, 2022). These students join the many who are unemployed, homeless, dependent on government welfare, commit crimes and are stuck in the poverty trap (Ministry of Education, 2022). It is in the interest of our future to understand this phenomenon and act to nullify or at least reduce these crippling outcomes.

According to van der Berg (2008), a student's home life influences their educational achievement most. She even goes as far as to say that the home background is crucial. A strong contender for prime reason for lack of academic success is poverty. Poverty, among other home factors such as parental educational attainment, also affects a student's educational outcome.

THEME 1 - ABSENT PARENTS

A theme that stood out was Absent Parents, who were revealed in the talanoa to be absent from the participant's lives. Parents are dealing with the consequences of their poor decisions, often embarking on journeys that did not include their children. Parent absenteeism affected the participants immensely. Parents appeared to be a large portion of the root cause of much trauma to the participants, Parents leave the burden of responsibility for younger siblings to fall on the shoulders of the participants, making navigating school all the more complex and fearful.

SUB THEME 1.1 - Abandoned by Parents

The participants discuss memories of being abandoned by their parents, often repeatedly. Although the young people need guidance and direction, the parent/s leave, and the participants are left to navigate life for themselves.

This participant elaborated on how Dad was violent, and although he was a “good man”, he abandoned the family often.

Just everything with dad kicking us out with nothing at all and coming back to our house with nothing cos he's taken it all. My mum's just done me to be honest, she had everything of everything and never came back with anything - Angela.

Another participant spoke of his absent parents, one in jail and one away drinking alcohol, “I come from a bad home. There wasn't really much there. Dad was in jail; mum was out there drinking” - Levi.

This participant spoke of the high levels of violence in her home and her Dad kicking them out frequently,

We (my family) were struggling. Dad kept kicking us out. Fights, heaps of fights with anybody when we were little. We would watch it, but we wouldn't cry - Angela.

When a student (students) come from a home with family and personal difficulties, this affects school attendance negatively. Among reasons for the dysfunction that can lead to a lack of school attendance are low socioeconomic status, substance abuse, inappropriate anger responses, inadequate emotional responses, inadequate parent interest, abuse of family members, illiteracy, mental health issues, and depression (Ministry of Education, 2022). The participants' talanoa revealed that all these factors were present in their homes. These findings align with the study of McCluskey et al. (2004), who also states that school absenteeism is linked with parent and family factors such as socioeconomic status, family social support and child abuse/neglect. Van der Berg explains that true poverty is beyond a lack of

finances; true poverty entails not being able to function effectively in society (2008). This poverty finding aligns with the School Attendance Report (2005), claiming that students who don't achieve well at school due to non-attendance will be associated with lower-paying occupations, less stable career paths, and a likelihood of unemployment. This further involves criminal activities and drug and alcohol abuse. Kerslake et al., (1997) states that truancy and poverty have always been closely related and have a long history together. Of concern, findings by Biddulph et al. (2003) explain the cycle of violence beginning with child abuse and leading through to adult offending. He claims that victims of childhood abuse and neglect (which the talanoa revealed about our participants) leads to a substantial likelihood of further offending, and in particular, violent offending.

SUB THEME 1.2 - Responsible for Siblings

The participants expressed immense feelings of responsibility because they were bringing up their younger siblings in their parents' absence. Often using words like 'protect', 'watch out for', and 'care for', actions that appear too demanding for their own abilities or resources. They were longing for these very actions from their absent parents.

This male participant spoke with pride about his siblings. He explained his violence was not naughty but just his way of protecting his sister as he was raising her.

I was actually – well, not naughty, but just protecting my little sister because I was the one who raised her. I come from a bad home. There wasn't really much there - Levi.

This male participant elaborated on his pure hate of school. Although he was miserable and suicidal about school and life, he continued going to school to avoid separation from his siblings.

When you did go to school, what did you enjoy?

Nothing. It was hell. I was sad every single day. I knew I had to go otherwise I was gonna get taken and I didn't want to leave my siblings alone - Tom.

This male participant appeared to be suffering from severe depression. He explained his fear and hate for Oranga Tamariki, due to prior involvement with them for four years. He had a genuine hate and fear of being separated from his siblings.

CYFS. Oranga Tamariki. I didn't wanna get taken. We've been in CYFS for like three, four years last time I used to go to school, so I used to just keep going to school. They told me if I didn't go to school, I would get taken so I just kept going. That's how my attendance was 100%. So like on

my sick days, I went. Cold days, I didn't want to go, I was like giving up on myself, but I still went, I still had to push through - Tom.

This participant explained his desire to please his Koro (see Glossary page 74), his parents were absent, and koro was bringing up the children. Koro allowed him to stay home from school at 14 years old. He speaks of his fear of separation by the authorities

He just told me, you don't have to go no more, boy, stop trying. Because I used to – my siblings could stay home for months on end and my koro just saw me keep going, and he just told me, you can stop now, boy, so I just said, I'm done, and I just dropped out. I just told them it's the last day I'm coming. Done - Levi

Some students are absent from education due to taking care of family members at home, be it younger siblings, disabled siblings or older people (Ministry of Education, 2022). Some schools express frustration as parents permit their children to stay home and avoid school. The disappointment is heightened by schools that are trying to help their students attend school regularly, but find an obstacle when parents condone, or more so encourage, absent behaviour from their children (Kerlake et al., 1997).

Another participant stopped attending school because her family struggled after Dad kicked them out. She went to Countdown supermarket pick-packing to support the family financially. She left school because she didn't see school taking her any further. She was 15 years old.

Q: *What were you doing for a job?*

A: *I was a pick-packer at Countdown.*

Q: *Can I assume that money was more important than getting an education?*

A: *Yeah to me, I mean we were struggling then.*

Q: *Struggling with what?*

A: *Just everything with dad kicking us out with nothing at all - Angela.*

SUB THEME 1.3 - Distancing Themselves from Parents

The participants speak of physically and mentally distancing themselves from their parents and having no more forgiveness for them. An attempt to avoid constant overwhelming discouragement from their parents, and possibly a means of self-protection from constant disappointment.

This male participant spoke openly and maturely about the circumstances of his life. He showed recognition that his life could have turned out better and placed the blame on his parents. He blamed both parents but showed forgiveness for his father but not his mother.

I do blame myself, but I mostly blame my parents of like not pushing me to go to school or like not giving me ground rules. I usually just blame it on my dad until I forgave him and then my mum, I've forgiven her too many times, so I just gave up. I told her straight up, you know, I'm not gonna forgive you, that was the last forgiveness you'll ever get out of me. Don't contact me, don't contact me. If you see me, please walk the other way. Now that's how it is between me and my mother - Levi.

This participant claimed that he had been disappointed by his parents repeatedly and at the age of 14 years old he was happy to forgive his father but had no desire to have any relationship with his mother.

A couple of weeks ago, I was in touch with my dad. Mum, I never get in touch with her. Me and her have issues. I'm never getting in touch with her again - Levi.

Biddulph et al. (2003) explain that when a child is exposed to domestic violence, there is inevitable damage to the child. These children can become aggressive and violent towards their parents, and siblings. He further claims that the children exposed to violence, then become turned out of home (separated from their parents) and as a means of survival they turn to a life of crime. These claims from Biddulph et al. (2003) align with the talanoa of the participants. They also align with the findings of the Ministry of Education (2022) which claims that children exposed to such violence are likely to become unemployed, homeless, stuck in poverty and therefore likely to become involved in a lifestyle of crime.

SUMMARY - ABSENT PARENTS

The 'absent parents' theme arose strongly amidst the talanoa with the young absentees. The participants struggled with a sense of parent absenteeism, which had placed the participants under a considerable burden of responsibility.

The tentacles of intergenerational trauma reach from the generation before. The participants are under unwelcome pressure, inheriting extra obligations by default, making their lives more difficult. Not prioritising school and education, but rather a journey that prioritises 'protecting my sister' and 'not getting separated'. These participants describe in detail their fear - their grapple with the fear of being separated by the authorities.

The participants come from families that are already crippled by erupting episodes of violence, drugs, and crime. Tenderly and ferociously protecting what they have left: their siblings - abandoned and disowned by their parents they refuse to abandon their siblings. Attending school because the authorities threaten to dismantle the world of their siblings. Attending school – yes. Engaging in learning - no. Why attend school? Because they do not want to be separated from the small remnant of whānau they have left. The participants are staunchly loyal to their siblings and friends, even if it means putting themselves in harm's way or getting in trouble with the law because they feel they are better protectors for their siblings/friends.

For the participants, school/education is not a priority. Our young people are more focused on 'survival'. They see no way out of their situation other than masking their pain and unhappiness. This is their environment. This is their reality. The participants are on the wrong side of this volatile crevice. The foundations of their world are very sensitive and fragile. Constant disappointment and abandonment have left the participants in protective mode, protecting themselves from a hostile world including their parents as in the story of the boy refusing to 'forgive her' and instructing her to 'walk on by' when she sees him. The very people (parents) who should be protecting and caring for them appear to be the perpetrators who are destroying the foundation on which they stand. Their foundations were fractured by eruptions of violence. It is a blind journey for the participants, further burdened by the siblings they carry on their shoulders. It makes sense that our young people then make poor decisions only to suffer the consequences throughout their lives, and disorder and fear become their everyday reality.

THEME 2 - VIOLENCE

The participant's attitudes to violence reflected those in their family. The environment encapsulated an atmosphere of fear and fragility. On the verge of violence at any moment, triggered quickly, erupting into carnage at the drop of a hat. The participants were exposed to violence from very tender years, making violence very much normalised for these young people. In the presence of heightened aggression and the inability to process emotions calmly, the participants shared similar stories of their tumultuous worlds.

SUB THEME 2.1 - Attitudes at School Mirror the Attitudes at Home

The participant's attitudes mirror those at their homes. With regards to violence, the families' default for most emotions is expressed through means of physical and verbal violence. Perpetrating aggression onto the mothers, children, and members of the public whose lives intertwine.

The young people's attitudes to violence mirrored those in their families and society at large. Experiencing the violence daily at home had normalised their response in times of frustration. They

appeared to lack the ability to communicate calmly and verbally during times of frustration, instead defaulting to using verbal and physical violence. Their emotions had in one case been subdued through the father teaching them as very young children to watch the violence and not cry in the rearing of physical aggression, as crying was deemed a sign of weakness.

This female participant explained how the violence was every day in their lives. “*We’ve watched it (violence) every day.*” Another participant elaborated that her father had taught them to refrain from crying during fighting/violence.

My dad. My dad would fight with anybody when we were little. We would watch it but we wouldn’t cry because we knew not to, like if we cry we are a bitch, we’re a little shit - Angela.

That same participant explained with conviction that her father was correct in his thinking (regarding the crying). She was clearly convinced that her dad had taught her with wisdom.

Like if we cry, we are a bitch. Yeah and we would actually listen because to be honest crying, when you see someone fighting, is not very helpful, is it? So you just sit there quietly and watch it all” - Angela.

Another participant talked about how violence and fighting were frequent, even to the point of her having fights at school on days that she didn't intend to have fights. This particular fight could not be avoided as the participant was going to be stabbed.

Even like on my birthday, I was trying not to have domestics, so I had a fight on my birthday because a girl wanted to stab me, straight up. I have had so many fights - Angela.

A male participant explained how he had anger issues that he was not able to control. His inability to control his anger had seen him ‘called to the office’ with the management of the school several times, resulting in suspension and expulsion. His father was incarcerated for murder.

Is there anything stopping you? Anger issues. - I can’t control it (child of father who did jail time for killing a person) - Adam.

This participant had dreams of turning her anger into money by becoming a professional fighter. I did wonder if her aggression saw her successful in her fighting, possibly more successful using her violence than she is with education.

Q: *Talk to me about your dreams.*

A: *First I, just to get my anger out somewhere, somehow and like once I get, you know like pro fighting, you like get paid, I want to invest in that money, yeah. I just want to be rich, not for myself but for my family, so they don't have to like ask for anything, they can just get it - Angela.*

Biddulph et al. (2003) explain that when parents are aggressive in their home, they are modelling aggression to their children. They are modelling how to deal with matters, and how to respond to situations, which leads to criminal and inappropriate behaviour. The behaviour children are exposed to is how children will behave. This is what the talanoa is revealing about their homes and their behaviour. The attitude to violence at home is mirrored when the children attend school. Of interest, Biddulph finds that for children who had been involved in maltreatment at home, the predictors for future offending, neglect were just as strong a predictor as victims of physical abuse, verbal aggression, and inadequate supervision.

SUB THEME 2.2 - Blame Mum for Dad's Violent Outbursts

The fathers were the aggressors in the homes of the participants. Some participants blamed their mothers for their father's violent outbursts. They spoke of not having any more forgiveness for the mother. They spoke of emotions of pure hate and disowning of their mother. Yet, the father they were still in a loving relationship with.

Despite the normalised violent home environments, in which the fathers appeared to be the main perpetrators, yet it was the mothers that the participants despised and rejected. The participants speak about hatred and rejection of their mothers, blaming her for the father's violent outbursts.

This participant speaks of Mum in an inferior way, demonstrating that Dad rules the home.

Q: *Why was he kicking you out?*

A: *Kicking mum out. You know they just, you know, domestics. Not vicious, no abuse, just yelling - Angela.*

This male participant explained how he has no desire to be in a relationship with his mother. The participant was 14 years old.

I've forgiven her too many times, so I just gave up. I told her straight, you know, I'm not going to forgive you; that was the last forgiveness you'll ever get out of me. Don't contact me, don't

contact me. If you see me, please walk the other way. Now, that's how it is between me and my mother - Levi.

This quote shows the anger the dad possesses and even the children know not to mess with dad. I suspect the mother is well aware of the rank order in this family.

My dad's a good person, it's just the anger. He's a really good person. Just anybody that messes with him, he won't take shit, he'll do whatever he can to kill them or dong them - Angela.

This male participant blamed both parents for his upbringing but explained that he does not wish to be in touch with his mother ever again.

I come from a bad home. There wasn't really much there. Dad was in jail, and Mum was out there drinking. I do blame myself, but I mostly blame my parents for not pushing me to go to school or like not giving me ground rules. I usually just blame it on my dad until I forgave him and then my mum. I have forgiven her too many times. So, I have just given up. A couple of weeks ago, I was in touch with my dad, but my mum I never got in touch with her. Me and her have issues. I am never getting in touch with her again - Angela.

This male participant portrays his feelings regarding his mother. It is clear that he is still in contact with his father, but does not want anything to do with his mother.

My dad's working now, looking for a job. Mum's still... she's just doing – I don't really stay in contact with her.

Q: When were you last in touch with your parents?

A: A couple of weeks ago I was in touch with my dad. Mum, I never get in touch with her. Me and her have issues. I'm never getting in touch with her again - Levi.

There was one exception to this finding, one of the participants, his father died young of lifestyle related diseases. This young male spoke highly of his mum and the significant role she played in his life.

SUB THEME 2.3 - Violence at Home Becomes Violence at School

Participants describe violence at home as occurring daily and from a young age. The participants used violence at school. Verbal fights with teachers, physical violence in the classroom and violence against other students. When asked about how many suspensions they had, some participants could not answer.

- Violence towards teachers
- Violence towards peers
- Anger towards (absent) parents

None of the participants saw themselves as bullies, but rather victims of maltreatment by society, teachers and their parents, thus justifying their violent actions as a means of protecting their younger siblings. They see themselves as the protector of their younger siblings due to absent parents. They expressed solemn and genuine care for their siblings, constantly fearful of authorities separating them.

This participant commented that his father went to jail for killing someone. His reaction was one of curiosity, not a reaction of having a parent at fault. He never blamed his father for the murder.

A: *Him and his friend beat up this guy, like ages ago, and they both went to jail.*

Q: *What happened to that guy?*

A: *He died.*

Q: *How does that make you feel?*

A: *I don't know. Like curious at why he did it - Adam.*

This female participant spoke openly about not wanting to fight but was in a fight most days.

I was in a fight almost every day in school because of like, you know, girls that think that something is funny and they think you're a little girl, so you take your anger out on them - Angela.

This same female participant shared about her experiences of violence since she was young.

Q: *So help me understand. Your dad is physically hurting someone?*

A: *Yeah well...*

Q: *Who's he hurting?*

A: *You know like when we were little, like other people, not my mum, he never touched my mum. Not in front of us anyways.*

Q: *You've watched what every day?*

A: *You know like angriness, anger, domestics.*

Q: *Physical anger?*

A: *Yeah. Fights, heaps of fights- Angela.*

This female participant was able to identify that the anger was intergenerational from her nana to her father, she could identify that the anger had then gone from her father to his children.

Q: *You've mentioned the word 'anger' a few times. Can you talk to me about where that comes from?*

A: *Yeah, well it starts off with my nan. She's a very aggressive person. She's kind to people that are kind to her, but I think the anger comes from my nan onto my dad, you know, back in the days how they used to, you know, 'come here, come here, get a hiding.' Then my dad carried it on to us because we've watched it every day (Angela).*

This male participant showed a lack of awareness for how often he was in trouble with school management for his anger outbursts.

Q: *Can I ask why did you stop going to college regularly?*

A: *I got kicked out for fighting.*

Q: *Did you get consequences or did the school management get involved with your hitting?*

A: *I just kept having interviews and then I'd get like suspended or stood down.*

Q: *So you've been suspended?*

A: *Yeah.*

Q: *How many times?*

A: *I don't know - Adam.*

The participants discuss the violence in a justified manner. Not referring to themselves as bullies but rather from the perspective that they are protecting and caring for others. Bullying is a serious issue in New Zealand, one of the highest rates in the OECD (Ministry of Education, 2022). In Aotearoa, the Māori and the low socioeconomic status children have particular issues with abuse and poor health. Poverty and truancy have a long history. Poverty and social and economic dilemmas are closely related to neglect, more than it is related to abuse. Parenting with neglect and poor supervision allows children to become deviant and a criminal lifestyle usually entails (Biddulph et al., 2003). Fergusson (2014) claims that there is a correlation between educational underachievement and social, economic factors and family factors. He goes further to say that the family factors include single parents, large family numbers, poverty, parents with limited education, low socioeconomic status, child abuse and family violence. The participants paint a very clear picture including all of these factors.

SUMMARY - VIOLENCE

Family violence was a prevalent occurrence in the life talanoa of all participants, openly discussing the aggressive brutality that they had been exposed to. This is further reflected in the participant's learned absence of emotion. Violent attitudes and behaviour resulted in suspension and expulsion from mainstream schooling. The participant's homes appeared to have heightened dysfunction - family issues in the form of violence, conflict, abuse, and disturbed parent-child relationships. By the participant's descriptions, families of dysfunction had impaired the child's educational outcomes and attendance. Children who were subjected to aggression and violence, like the participants, are more aggressive toward parents and peers. And yet, the main predictor of later offending is race and gender, not abuse and neglect.

However, these participants would appear to fit most of the researched predictors for future offences. Fathers were the violent aggressors in the homes of the participants, and the participants appeared to hold their fathers in high regard. The participants elaborated on lessons their fathers had taught them, like not crying in a fight, or showing any emotion. The mothers were at the end of a very staunch arm of rejection, the participants choosing to distance themselves from their mothers. Was this an attempt to prevent further pain and suffering for the participants? Why was Mum to blame when Dad was the parent dishing out the violence daily? Dad had done jail time for murder, and yet Mum was held accountable by the participants. Why such hate towards the mothers? Why was Dad held in such esteem? It would appear not only was the behaviour normalised for dad to be violent, but his behaviour had warranted the children to mimic his behaviour at school. I struggled to understand or comprehend why Mum was shunned and rejected by the children. Given the amount of violence that the participants were describing in their talanoa, not once did they portray themselves as bullies. Instead, they often describe their circumstances or reference themselves as victims, and not bullies or perpetrators of violence. Taken from the perspective that they were 'protecting' and 'caring for' themselves and their siblings which justified the behaviour and violence. A skewed correlation between an aggressive behavioural trait/response of the participants and their father's violence. Perhaps he was not considered a 'bully' because this was the participant's understanding of 'protecting' and 'caring for' his family. The high volumes of violence had presented to them a father figure who was physically displaying his 'caring' and 'protecting' nature through the reoccurring and regular bouts of violence. Was this the justification to hold Mum accountable and reject Mum staunchly?

Many of the participants talked about how they are close to their fathers. A relationship difficult to comprehend, given that the participants displayed no knowledge of the father and/or minimal knowledge about what they did, where they lived, or whether they were in employment. This lack of comprehension created contention for me. Struggling to understand how the participants were

disclosing that they were close to their father, yet the relationship and involvement of the father through the talanoa suggested otherwise. My perspective of a close relationship with a loved one is daily conversations, knowing how and where they are, being aware of significant events in their life, and intimate characteristics. Grappling with the thought that the participants held their fathers in high regard as they were seen as 'protecting' and 'caring' for their families through regular use of aggression and violence. Pondering, did the participants consider themselves 'close to dad' because of their commonalities with violence? Their fathers were violent beings, and the participants admitted to using violence frequently, just like their dads. Was this their interpretation of being close to their father? By sharing the same philosophy, mirroring and mimicking their father's decisions and actions was replicating the dad's actions, their way of being 'close' to dad. Their pride in their fathers made me consider that they did idolise their fathers and their actions (be they violent or aggressive). Was it possible that the participants chose to be like dad and shun mum as this was their way of being close? When the question was posed to the participants about being close to their fathers, they replied - yes. Did they mean, yes, I am close to Dad because I am like him? Are the lines blurred between relationship and behaviour? I ask myself if the participants considered themselves close to their fathers because their behaviour was close to his behaviour.

It began to dawn on me that maybe their relationships were also based on violence. Their very existence in their family was a foundation of violence. Violence is what they were born into, what was normalised for them, what they talked about, what was present from a young age, what they think about, and how they express themselves. Violence was their default, and how they showed their protective and caring abilities. What society identifies as a major area of concern affecting families (violence) was the one definitive thing in their lives - violently protecting and caring for their family, siblings, status, and self.

THEME 3 - MENTAL HEALTH AND DRUGS

The participants displayed low levels of self-worth, struggling with thoughts of self-harm and suicide, possibly heightened by the choice to self-medicate with drugs as a means to gain some form of control over their anxiety and depression.

SUB THEME 3.1 - Suicidal Thoughts

The participants openly discuss Suicidal thoughts that are loud and overwhelming - making it difficult to navigate day to day. Often turning to friends and drugs to help fill the void and numb the trauma and pain.

This male participant who was large in stature and clearly strong, spoke like he was tormented by memories of being bullied.

Q: *Tell me about the guy sitting in the class that was the old you. What was he thinking?*

A: *Killing himself. Life was terrible for him. He used to get bullied by his older brother. He used to get bullied by his brother's friends, like while he was in front of his older brother - Tom.*

This male participant had unfortunately lost his father to diabetes. He explained how the death of his father incurred bullying and torment from other students.

My biggest challenge is my dad passing away last year—45 years old, dying of diabetes. Since then, people have been putting me down, bullying me. They tell me I will not make it and I am not good enough. This is when I stopped going to school. I did not feel safe at school, I did not feel comfortable. The bullying would start and I would truant for 5 days easily. I would get anxiety due to the bullying. I have kept my anxiety hidden from my parents, hidden from society. I keep myself away from people and lock myself in a corner. When people put me down, I am back in the corner with anxiety - Tom.

Aotearoa has exceptionally high suicide rates. In the OECD, male Māori Youth have the third highest, and female Māori youth the highest rates among young people. This is correlated to the rising mental health issues in New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2022). Suicide and mental health are closely related. In New Zealand the highest age bracket for suicide is 15 - 24 years old, and Māori suicide is 2.8 times more likely than non-Māori. Of interest, of the Māori who do commit suicide, half of the suicide victims had been in touch with Mental Health services for help. Of the Māori suicides, half of them are from the most deprived areas of New Zealand. There is a strong correlation between mental health issues and poverty (Gibson et al., 2017).

Young people in New Zealand of Pasifika heritage, suffer from depression and anxiety and are twice as likely to attempt suicide when compared to the rest of the Aotearoa population (Gibson et al., 2017). The participants in this research spoke openly about how they wanted to die and didn't enjoy being at school or being alive. They had suicidal thoughts and were struggling with mental health issues.

SUB THEME 3.2 - Trauma, Living Beyond their Age

The participants are young in biological age, but given the lives they lead, they have grown quickly and are having to make decisions beyond their ages.

Having experienced trauma beyond their biological age has them navigating issues that 13 - 15-year-olds are not supposed to be dealing with. At a tender age, exposure to constant violence has possibly

detrimentally impacted their mental health. Carrying weights of responsibility never intended for their ages has also had a detrimental impact on their mental health and self-efficacy.

This participant is 14 years old and speaks of quitting school, he can not handle numeracy or literacy. He gives up on school and on himself.

I'm Done, and I just dropped out and I told them that's the last day I am coming and I did. I was in Year 10 I think. I did not do well at school. I do not know how to read or write or do maths. I just didn't talk so much to the teachers. I tried to, but I just gave up - Levi.

This 14-year-old participant had no father. His father died from lifestyle-related health concerns, and he was only in his 40s..

Q: *What are the biggest challenges that you face?*

A: *My dad passing away.*

A: *He had diabetes - Tom.*

This participant was suicidal and felt compelled to stay at school in order to prevent his siblings from getting separated by the authorities. He was 14 at the time of the interview and clearly under a vast amount of pressure.

Q: *When you did go to school, what did you enjoy?*

A: *Nothing. It was hell. I was sad every single day. I knew I had to go otherwise I was gonna get taken and I didn't want to leave my siblings alone - Levi.*

This participant was 13 years old and was living with his in-laws, when questioned, his girlfriend was also 13 years old, and they had been together for two months. He spoke like this was 'normal' behaviour for a person his age.

I live with my brother-in-law and his family. I tried to look for a job, but the new rules say they're only hiring 17-year-olds now because I wanted to go to course and also do work. I have to be 17 to be able to work at night times, night shifts - Adam.

SUB THEME 3.3 - Loud Voices of Self-Harm, Mental and Physical Isolation

The participants spoke of the loud voices of self-harm and self-hatred from others. Self-hate encompasses the participants in anxiety, disabling them from functioning amongst members of society.

This creates mental and physical isolation, and people prefer to do life alone and retreat to the corner of society unnoticed.

Mental health issues are rife throughout Aotearoa, especially among our Māori and Pasifika youth. In the OECD top three for our Māori youth, with dysfunctional family factors including absent parents and high domestic violence. The participants speak openly about feeling suicidal, being unhappy and the voices that are louder than any other voices.

This male participant spoke of the words others were speaking over him. *“People say that I’m not gonna make it and that I’m not good enough” - Tom.*

This female participant spoke about her mental health issues.

I've got bad anxiety, I get shy. Meeting new people. Course, I really didn't wanna go because I was shy but then I needed change in my life, but then I got used to it. I'll get that used to that person more and then yeah.

Q: *Are you still getting bullied?*

A: *Oh, no.*

Q: *Still got anxiety?*

A: *Yeah. That still sticks with me. Say if I go out, I'll sit in the car. I don't like big groups of people. I don't like giving people hugs, there's only certain people. That's because I like my bubble to myself and there's only like a very few people I talk to and let out what I want to let out. Like my Auntie's daughters, them - Isabelle.*

This participant spoke about his coping mechanism being to shut down when his anxiety is out of control.

Q: *You said I feel safe. Do you not feel safe?*

A: *No.*

Q: *Why not?*

A: *I'm just not... I just don't feel comfortable around heaps of people.*

Q: *Do you get anxiety or something?*

A: *Yeah.*

Q: *Do you? What happens when you're feeling anxious?*

A: *I just put my head down or I won't talk to anybody.*

Q: *Okay, so you shut down.*

- A: *Yeah.*
- Q: *When the children were bullying you back in June, did you get anxiety then?*
- A: *Yeah.*
- Q: *Bad?*
- A: *Yeah - Isabelle.*

This participant spoke of having four days off from school due to his anxiety issues.

- Q: *When you were truanting, how often – like how many days off would you have?*
- A: *Four.*
- Q: *Four days off?*
- A: *Yeah.*
- Q: *A week?*
- A: *Yeah.*
- Q: *The anxiety, is that in your family?*
- A: *No.*
- Q: *Just yourself?*
- A: *Yeah, just me - Tom.*

Absentee students leave school, and when they become adults, they can be described as having more children at a younger age, experiencing marital breakdown by 23 years old, are usually heavy smokers and experiencing depression more than the students who attended class (McCluskey et al., 2004). When students leave school without qualifications, they usually engage in activities that make the individual susceptible to mental health issues (Fergusson, 2014).

The exposure to economic and social disparity has been relentless for the Māori of Aotearoa. This has been the ongoing effect of colonisation. The Māori experience societal discrimination and, as a result, are more likely to experience mental health problems. These factors create an array of mental health problems for the Māori that result in increased chances of mental health issues, of a feeling of disconnection and isolation from cultural identity (Gibson et al., 2017).

The Māori population is relatively young, and yet they are likely to live in severe and persistent poverty with low socioeconomic status. The likelihood of developing mental health problems for our participants is high, given the socioeconomic status of the area (Tuakau / Pukekohe area) and given their ethnicity and age group.

SUMMARY – MENTAL HEALTH AND DRUGS

Despite the calm, stoic appearance of our young participants, I had the privilege of sitting eye to eye, *kanohi ki te kanohi*, allowing me for a moment to see, feel and hear their truth. They present with their friends, laughing, joking, and appearing to enjoy themselves, but the truth is far from this equanimous appearance. They were brave enough to expose a fraction of their world to me, and underneath the imperturbable exterior, I could see what the apparently nonchalant young people were battling.

They live in a world where boundaries and structure are non-existent. They have no parents to guide them, so possibilities are endless, but are they? Instead, they are transient to the point where they move from mate's house to mate's house, living with their in-laws (at 13 years old!) or sleeping on the couches of anyone who will have them - often overstaying their welcome. Their foundation in life, namely the family, has been destroyed by violence, alcohol and drugs, leaving them and their siblings to navigate through life. Navigating through the rough territory of death, failure and disappointment, damaging large portions of their already brittle mental health.

The participants are too young to obtain employment, even though they mention they have goals to obtain driver licenses and work at McDonalds, or KFC, or farm work. Their only hope is to get educated, but their battles in education are challenging; given that attendance is poor, the likelihood of success is poor. They speak ill of their teachers and acknowledge that they come from 'bad homes'; given that we know this, it comes as no surprise that their mental health is vulnerable and delicate. The fragility of their mental health hangs in the balance. Thus, the option of drugs to numb the pain is an easy and viable preference.

They grapple with anxiety and depression, explaining that they retreat from people and isolate as a means to protect themselves. Some participants explained that they had not told anyone about these mental health issues, and the *talanoa* with me was the first time they had told anyone - isolation at its finest. Our young people are confined in the trap of mental health issues, isolated and plummeting into further deterioration of self-harm and self-hatred. They are looking for someone to pull them up, but instead, they pull up their siblings above themselves. Falling deeper into drugs and depression, desperately looking for the way up and out of this endless pit. The pit of suicide. The very pit that too many of our Māori and Pasifika youth fall into. Many of them spoke of suicidal thoughts and hatred for parents, teachers and life. The *talanoa* revealed data about the mental health state of the participants that, unfortunately, strongly aligns with the research findings of many. The state of the young people's mental health in New Zealand is in dire need of radical attention.

Pacific people are experiencing the highest rates of mental health issues in New Zealand. The suicide rate among the OECD countries places New Zealand at the top for female Māori suicide and third for male Māori suicide. Māori youth suicide rate is 2.8 times more likely than non-Māori. The participant's life stories align perfectly with the horrid suicide history of Aotearoa. The low socioeconomic status of their families, their race (Māori and Pasifika), exposure to social and economic disparities, living in poverty, and unfortunately, living with systemic discrimination. The chances of our Māori and Pasifika student encountering mental health issues are highly probable. The difficulties the participants were balancing in their journey were handled by their ability to detach themselves from society, their parents, and their school, either by psychological withdrawal or by opting to numb their pain with recreational drug use to progress forward in their world of disconnection and trauma.

Given this is the state of their mental health, are our Māori and Pasifika young people aware of this? Do they know what mental health is? Do they know how to deal with anxiety and depression healthily? Living on the couches of friends, lives not balanced, without stability in their lives to have a parent figure who can help them identify their mental health condition and how to help them? Our young people are ill-equipped to deal with the monstrosity that is their mental health issues. Fear that those horrendous and embarrassing suicide statistics that hang over our beautiful nation of young people are only likely to grow substantially.

THEME 4 - RELATIONSHIP WITH TEACHERS

The participants speak of a strong dislike and mistrust of their teachers, blaming their teachers for their desire to stop attending school and feeling unworthy, unwelcome, and unmotivated to try as success is improbable.

SUB THEME 4.1 - Fearful and No Connection to the Teacher

Fearful and no genuine connection made between the student and teacher resulted in offences taken and walls built that did not come down. Students become sensitive to maltreatment.

This male participant had a clear hatred for his teachers at school.

I often feared and hated my teachers. The teachers that I have now (on course) are actually respectful. I hated my teachers, if I could say one word it would be, "Fuck you." I could hear them talking about me. Like, they'll be in the break room, and I would walk by, and I would hear my name being thrown around. They never said nice things about me. They would say, "yeah he is going to end up homeless and shit like that" - Levi.

This female participant spoke highly of her maths teacher, wanting to be a maths teacher herself

My maths teacher, nah the class was cool as, like everybody there is friendly and like being the only Māori in that class actually I was all good as. My teacher, she understands me, you know, and she personally talks to me if I don't understand anything. Cos when I don't, like you know, ask what's this stuff I don't know cos I didn't learn algebra and she just tells me everything like step-by-step. Not like you know those YouTube videos, she doesn't show me videos, she just shows me her technique and then ended up whacking out algebra yeah, I liked it all. Yeah she left, she had to go to a different class. That's why I didn't go back to maths and then I changed my classes heaps.

Well to be honest school for me wasn't good, only maths. I wanted to become a maths teacher because of my maths teacher, but then when I realised everybody else was shitty in the school like the people, it's not the school, it's the people, right? So the people just fucked up my whole entire school, my school life. I liked it, it's just the fighting - Angela.

Baskerville (2020) explains that when youth choose to leave school, they can do so to protect themselves. Biddulph et al. (2003) explains that when children come from homes of dysfunction, they can have modified performance and behaviour. These children are at a higher risk of hyperactivity, truancy, low levels of literacy, low levels of self-esteem, mental health issues and suicidal ideation.

There is an important saying in Allen et al. (2009) that is a Samoan proverb, O tu, aganu'u, ma agaifanua a le tamaititi o le a le mafai ona ulufale atu I le potuaoga sei vagana ua fa'atauaina ma faaulufaleina muamua I le loto ma le agaga o le faiaoga. It means that the child's culture cannot enter the classroom until it has first entered the teacher's consciousness. Miss V (mentioned in one person's talanoa) must be a teacher who follows the thinking in this proverb. We need more Miss V's in our classrooms, working with the most vulnerable students.

Her name was Miss V and I forgot the school's name, but she was an awesome teacher. She was Samoan, she was an Islander. When the kids used to bully me, she used to tell me – she will speak in her language and just tell them to be quiet and they'll just be quiet straightaway. So her, I appreciate her very much. Thanks to her that I just kept going - Levi.

Allen et al. (2009) continues to say that teachers make a huge difference for our student. To a large extent their educational success or failure lies in the mind and actions of the teacher. Baskerville (2020) explains the prejudice that vulnerable and low socioeconomic youth experience in the classroom. She

explains that the youth feel unsettled, neglected, labelled, invisible and minoritised. Regarding teacher connection, Carpenter et al. (2001) found what kind of teacher could be effective for Māori and Pasifika students. It was interesting to learn that it has nothing to do with ethnicity, age, gender, experience, teacher training type, subject area, or years of teaching. This leads me to believe that anyone can be an effective teacher for our Māori and Pasifika student, given the right attitudes.

Carpenter et al. (2001) encourages the reciprocity approach to teaching, simply meaning that students will reciprocate back to the teacher how they perceive to be received. This is important for a teacher's relationship with a Māori or Pasifika student. The students want to feel welcome in the class, that they are seen, that the teacher respects them, and that the teacher talks to them (Baskerville, 2020). None of these things happened with the teachers the participants described they hated.

SUB THEME 4.2 - Disrespectful and Toxic Relationship with the Teacher

Disrespect and lack of 'love and attention' resulted in toxic teacher-student relationships, resulting in the participants opting to truant their classes. The participants felt annoyed and unwanted.

Devine et al. (2023) explain that New Zealand has deep fissures in society and education that aren't being addressed. Baskerville (2020) elaborates that students must feel valued, respected, and included for their potential. She further explains that students who don't feel respected and valued will have diminished self-worth, and their actions of being truant show this. This aligns with the talanoa of the students who feel significantly undervalued and frustrated.

Baskerville claims that the students want to be treated fairly and have their learning needs met. They feel excluded and disrespected. This aligns with the participants' talanoa and Baskerville's claims that students need inclusion.

They (teachers) just didn't get to know me, so I stopped and gave up on myself. If a teacher gives me respect, I will give it back to them 100% - Levi.

Allen et al. (2008) explain that it is not about the teacher's ethnicity but rather that the teacher understands and empathises with the student. This empathy and understanding is crucial for effective learning with Māori and Pasifika students. This aligns with the talanoa. This participant speaks highly of her maths teacher, wanting to be a maths teacher herself, but because she was in fights every day, she hated school.

Well to be honest school for me wasn't good, only maths. I wanted to become a maths teacher because of my maths teacher, but then when I realised everybody else was shitty in the school like the people, it's not the school, it's the people, right? So the people just fucked up my whole entire school, my school life. I liked it, it's just the fighting. I was in a fight almost every day - Angela.

There is the theory of reciprocity in teaching, where students mirror the respect that they perceive a teacher is giving them. They will adapt their behaviour and expectations to what they perceive the teacher gives to them (Ministry of Education, 2022).

A: If I could say this word right now, oh. F U C K Y O U. I could hear them talking about me, like they'll be in the break room and I'll go past, you can hear my name just getting thrown around left and right.

Q: What are they saying?

A: Bad stuff. Some of them will say, oh, yeah, XXX's definitely gonna end up homeless, and shit like that. Yeah, I had bad teachers, man - Levi.

Research by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership found that the most critical factor (in school) that influences education achievement is the quality of the teacher (n.d.). Carpenter et al. (2002) explain that for Māori and Pasifika students, the relationship between teacher and student must be based on mutual respect, which is not the same as liking one another. The students must know that the teacher will help them learn, more than the teacher just being a nice person.

"The teachers just gave up on me, so I just gave up on myself" - Levi. A teacher who puts a student down, ignores, compares, has favourites, is boring, growls over trivial matters and displays unfair treatment are all behaviours that have a negative impact on the student's behaviour and, therefore, on their learning (Carpenter et al., 2002).

Milne (2016) argues the crucial necessity for educators to consider the language and culture of their Māori and Pasifika students and explicitly establish respectful and reciprocal relationships with the students and their family, learning is enhanced and their cultural identity positively affirmed.

SUB THEME 4.3 - Lack of Success at School = Lack of Motivation

Lack of success and personal achievement lead to a lack of motivation to attend school. Positive teachers made for positive experiences at school.

Māori and Pasifika students generally have lower educational grades than Pākehā and Asian students. However, this may be correlated to the lower socioeconomic status, as Māori and Pasifika families occupy the lower levels of this status (poverty) and are the children in the lower decile schools (Biddulph et al., 2003). The participants in this research all attended school in a low socio economic area (Tuakau).

Since primary up to high school, I didn't know how to read or write or my maths, but I knew how to communicate. I just didn't talk so much to the teachers. Tried to, but I just gave up - Levi.

Nearly a quarter of learners do not see school as essential or valuable (Ministry of Education, 2022). This aligns with the talanoa responses.

I don't see school taking me further. Yeah cos right now my work took me further than I did in school. My school was like, it never took me anywhere, like it just... I got my NCEA Level 1 though. I was nearly about to get my NCEA Level 2 but because of my attendance I couldn't, I got dropped down, put down, yeah.

Yeah, I regret leaving school to be honest. Not because of my friends but because I looked dumb in my NCEA, you know like, yeah, certificates, house certificates and stuff, that's all I got in NCEA Level 1 - Angela.

Teachers need to have a better understanding of what students need in order to achieve at high levels. This in turn, affects how the students feel about themselves, their self-efficacy, self-worth, and their motivation to achieve well in school (Centre for Education and Statistics, 2022).

(Teachers) not really paying attention or helping me do my work. Teachers just gave me a computer, said I could do anything I want, and that was my school experience. I tried to teach myself how to read and write. I do not have Level 1 (NCEA). I stopped going to school when I was 14 (years old) since they weren't really paying attention to me. They were just giving the funding for me to the school, so I stopped coming. I stopped for a whole year and then I went to course (alternative education course) - Levi.

When a teacher doesn't spend time with a student, that student may feel worthless and not valued. Students interpret time as care. If they don't receive any time, then the teacher doesn't care (Baskerville 2020). They interpret this as being alone and having no support, making truanting a viable option; detaching from education is easier than trying to teach themselves. ‘

Yeah cos right now my work took me further than I did in school. My school was like, it never took me anywhere, like it just... I got my NCEA Level 1 though. I was nearly about to get my NCEA Level 2 but because of my attendance I couldn't, I got dropped down, put down, yeah."

Q: So if you could do it again what would you change?

A: I would change my whole background (laugh). That's what I would do, I'd change like my whole life... but I want to go to a different school, see, because people always see me as how I used to be - Angela.

SUMMARY – RELATIONSHIP WITH TEACHERS

As a teacher (researching), in my classroom, I had beautiful talanoa with six participants about their educational journey. A prominent theme arose that was undeniable - the impact teachers have on these Māori and Pasifika participants' educational journeys. These words are repeatedly echoed when discussing teachers: dislike, mistrust, blame, unworthy, unwelcome, and unvalued, almost like a brick wall of further barriers. The participants spoke of being fearful and feeling no genuine connection with any of their teachers. It became apparent that the participants were feeling a great deal of maltreatment and sensitivity to offences. Justified or not, it was evident that their walls had been built strong and sturdy, which would be difficult for any teacher to get inside.

Brick by brick, maltreatment by maltreatment, the walls were being built. Even if the abuse by the teacher was unintentional, and the teacher was unaware of their failings and shortfalls, the walls constructed continued to rise. The walls take the form of perceptions of being unsettled, neglected, labelled, minoritised, and invisible. I question whether these "walls" were not only being built at school but if they had possibly been cemented at home too. The same 'offences' from the parental figures were happening again in class by the parental figures (teachers). Was it possible that the teachers were offending the students in the same way that the parents had? Maybe the correlation of the offences against the students (parents and teachers) was why the students were sensitive to the maltreatment at school. They also echo the treatment the parents had at school, so there isn't much expectation of anything better.

Teachers may be unaware that the students not only analyse the time not spent with them in class, but more so the time and attention that teachers give to their 'favourite' students. Again, The teacher was unaware that they were busy 'teaching' the already advantaged students, and in doing so, the participants added more insult bricks to their metaphorical wall. Therefore, were students attending class with those built-up walls already in place? Previous poor experiences with teachers lead to a sense

of distrust, disrespect, and insecurity. Is this why some students are incredibly hard to get close to? This is a likely reason why some students are angry and struggle to form relationships with new teachers.

The participants use strong words to describe their negative feelings towards their teachers, offensive words that give insight into their truth. However, they also talk about incredible and loving teachers—shedding light on the approach of reciprocal teaching. Where teachers have shown the participants respect, the students have reciprocated that respect. Participants mirrored the way they perceived the teacher. This gives a nod to the participant's perception, as often the teacher is unaware of the effect that their behaviour is having on them. Reciprocal teaching is evident in the participants talanoa; the students mirrored the teacher's expectations, the teacher's behaviour, and the teacher's respect.

The love for the participants is demonstrated using the gestures of time and attention. If these elements are missing in the classroom, they may be sensitive to them as they do not receive them from home. Does this mirroring of class and home dramatically impact the participants? Is this why some students play up? Getting attention of any sort may be better than getting no attention. Given the home conditions of the participants, the elements of time and attention may be more critical than the lack of them at home, especially if home conditions were not conducive to learning.

Teachers hold an incredible position of influence with the young people of today. Allen et al. (2008) explain that the culture of the student cannot enter the classroom until it has first entered the teachers mind. As a teacher - curriculum and assessments comprise a considerable portion of our day-to-day endeavours. These are a waste of time if we first do not listen to the students sitting behind these large, metaphorical walls. Walls are built with every brick. Bricks of insult, neglect, labels, hate, fear, and discrimination, cemented at home with further neglect and abuse.

The findings of Allen et al. (2008) intriguingly say that the effectiveness of teachers for Māori and Pasifika students does not correlate with their teaching experience, age, type of teacher training, sex, ethnicity, gender, or race. Thus, anyone can effectively teach our Māori and Pasifika student. Having had beautiful talanoa with these wonderful research participants, I ponder the idea of the brick walls they had built around them and how brave they were to offer to be a part of my study. A teacher-researcher, in a classroom, in a school, they bravely shared their educational journeys, having exposed their hard times and good times. I think that, as the generations go on, we will have more difficulties, more mental health issues, and more dysfunctional families; therefore, making the time to make changes is now. Another generation later, we will be inundated with mental health issues, possibly higher suicide rates and taller brick walls for teachers to climb over. Maybe a small step we can take as teachers is to focus a little less on curriculum and assessments and give more time and attention for our students as people.

CHAPTER SIX: Conclusion

This truancy research has been an eye-opening journey. I was a Secondary school teacher for 8 years before joining the New Zealand Police based in Counties Manukau District for 7 years. I returned to teaching at the Primary school level and, most recently, have been teaching at the Intermediate school level. As a Police Officer, I was exposed daily to many homes and families at the height of their trauma, attending in their darkest hours. I always felt the anxiety and distress of the parent's arrests, engagement with the Police, and court proceedings; the children were often overlooked. Their needs and wants are second to the all-consuming demands of their parents.

Frequently attending family harm incidents: Mum, a victim of family harm abuse, Dad has unleashed his uncontrollable aggression again, furniture strewn about the home, new holes in the already debilitated walls. Children hide, trying to escape the chaos and noise. The smell of alcohol and marijuana lingers. The evidence of an unacceptable vulgar attack is undeniable. Children often sit in the corners, huddling together, sometimes rocking back and forth, evident that they have just witnessed brutal violence (again). The older child comforts the younger siblings. These scenes are a regular sight in the role of the Police.

I always felt immense agony when I would see the children in their homes of trauma. Dad is hurting the people he loves, Mum is bruised and battered (physically, mentally and emotionally), and the kids appear withdrawn as the Police flood their home, trying to stop Dad's violent actions. More damage is done to Mum, to the house, to a depleting environment, and to children captured in the grip of violence. This is an experience that profoundly changes a teacher's heart.

I always checked the recycle bins, which gave me an insight into the extent that alcohol had affected the livelihoods of families Police visited. The majority of the homes recycle bins were overflowing with Cody's RTD (ready to drink) Bourbon and Cola cans and other brands of alcohol – an unfortunate indicator of the reliance and priority parents at these homes placed on alcohol. My heart constantly ached for the children, but in the Police position, we were always after the offender (usually the father), preoccupied with collating evidence to meet the ingredients of the offence. My focus was not on the prosecution of the offender; I wanted to be with the children, check their welfare, and meet their needs. I always wanted to understand the world they were inhabiting.

In my working role as a teacher, my heart was always naturally drawn to our young people from homes that were trauma-filled. Their lives are intricately woven with violence. I constantly desired to speak to

the children, hear their stories, and understand their journey. To peel back the layers of their world and see what they see. This research has been an incredible journey and an awakening. To listen to their journey from their perspective has been invaluable. Seeing their pain and understanding their hate and fear has been an eye-opener. Having six young participants be brave enough to share their vulnerabilities with me has inspired and made me want to be a teacher of genuine connection.

The journey with the truants has undermined the preconceived ideas that I naively had before this journey. This study intended to determine what barriers prevented our Māori and Pasifika students from succeeding at school. Through talanoa with six Māori and/or Pasifika absentee students between 13 and 15 years old, I wanted to divulge what barriers prevented them from succeeding in their education journey.

Six wonderful absentee students emerged, and the enriching talanoa revealed the four main reasons for their educational difficulties:

- Having absent parents
- Violent homes
- Mental Health and Drugs
- Relationship with Teachers.

Before starting this research, I naively expected to interview several generations of the absentee's whānau, hoping to determine a generational pathway through school that would help me better understand the family dynamics and, therefore, the family trajectory regarding school. This research taught me otherwise; there were no intergenerational interviews / talanoa. Of the six absentees, only two mums came, and I never met any koro or nannies to interview and determine previous generational pathways. To my surprise, the absentee students were not living with their parents; they were somewhat homeless & transient, living on friends' couches and not in contact with their parents. Herein emerged the theme of absent parents. Absent parents were a significant source of the pain and agony that the children were experiencing.

Another revelation was the absentee students I interviewed, several of whom I saw daily and had no idea they were the young people slipping through the cracks of society. I would have young people walking past my classroom and going to the local high school. I would see them in school uniforms, walking with their friends, and I assumed they would all attend school. That assumption was wrong; they were truant and had been so for a long time. I thought the 'face of truancy' to be blurred and unknown when they were right in front of me, walking past my class every morning and afternoon, hidden in plain sight.

Another main finding of this research was the relationship with the parents from the participant's perspective. It was a revelation to learn that they refused to have relationships with their mother, yet they were friendly with their father. This was difficult to comprehend, given that the fathers were the violent aggressors. The research proposes that the truants found themselves 'close to Dad' and had more to do with 'behaviour' being close, not necessarily 'relationship' being close. This was the assumption because the truants could not give general information about the dads (where they lived, what they did for a job, if they had a job). This showed that the relationship was minimal, yet they perceived it to be close. I believe they deem their behaviour to be close to their dads, meaning both are violent. Close in behaviour, not close in relationship. A revelation to divulge the difference in understanding.

Another finding was an insight into how violence is interpreted in their homes. Violence is a very prominent and profound factor in their homes. The results of the talanoa clearly show that violence was daily. I realised that violence was their way of showing care and protection. This was how their father had shown care and protection for his family, and this was how they showed care and protection for their siblings. This mentality also demonstrated clearly that they believed their use of violence at school was justified. The talanoa showed that they never considered themselves bullies. Their violence was justified. Their father was a 'good man', even if he had done jail time for violent offences, including murder in the case of one participant.

Another finding was around their crippling fear of being separated by the authorities from their siblings. The truants expressed how they had absent parents and were carrying the responsibility of their siblings on their shoulders. Many of them had previous experience with CYFS (Child Youth and Families)/ Oranga Tamariki and were very aware of the implications of being separated from their siblings. This fear crippled them, and for many of the students, they were attending school as a means to prevent separation. They were not engaged in learning; they attended school to avoid separation.

According to the talanoa, teachers were a significant factor that prevented the truants from enjoying school. The talanoa disclosed that the participants were afraid of their teachers. There was a mirroring at school of the home environment. For example, as students they felt that they were being neglected and ignored, that no time was given to them, and that no attention was given to them in class. They thought that their teachers were not valuing them. They were highly sensitive to any maltreatment against them. The classroom experience mirrors the environment in their homes with their (absent) parents.

All of the above factors, with absent parents, violence, and not enjoying school, revealed that the mental health of the participants was dire. They struggled daily with suicidal thoughts that they numbed with drug use.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The research unveiled many findings; however, a few areas limited the complete success of this research. I set my heart on meeting the whānau of the recidivist truant to understand the influential people in their lives. I would like to talanoa with the families who raised their children. I wanted to get to talanoa with them, understand their education journey, and understand the correlation between the adult and the child. I would like to enter their family homes. It is important to feel the living environment and see the living conditions. I would love to have spent more time with the participants and talanoa longer with them all.

Not meeting parents: I met with one Māori mother (of a participant) who supported her truanting child in the talanoa. Apart from this one mother, I did not meet any other parents. No other participants lived with their parents or were on talking terms with them. Apart from that, one participant and the others were not in a healthy relationship with either of their parents. Some parents were incarcerated for significant crimes, some were simply absent, and several had moved on to relationships that did not include these participants. This inability to talk to the parents disadvantaged my research immensely as they withheld vital information from the research. It was a huge detriment to my studies not meeting my participants' parents. Although in this sense it was a disadvantage, it also exposed the serious problem of absent parents among our most vulnerable and traumatised tamariki.

Not going to their homes: As a researcher, I was keen to see inside their homes and witness their living conditions. This information clarified many questions about priorities, lifestyles, and possibly health and well-being. Not having a home for me to talanoa with them was the reality for these young people. They did not have a safe space or safe adults to rely on. This limited my research data collection as witnessing inside their homes might have offered valuable information.

Limited time: Time was limited with the participants. Although they gave me the time to talanoa with them and to interview and collect their stories, I knew that they had much more 'trauma' and experience that was worthy of listening to. I understand that these beautiful young people had 'trauma' beyond their biological age. I don't think they realised how much they carried on their shoulders. One interview was a disadvantage to this research. I would prefer to have had much more time with the participants.

The chosen methodology of Ilo (Pasifika knowledge) is intended to encapsulate the voices of the truants. Choosing the correct paradigm (Constructivism and Interpretivism) allowed for a deeper understanding of their interpretation; their perceived reality. The principles of Talanoa were applied in every opportunity in a means to collate authentic and genuine stories from the participants. The principles of respect and equality showed reciprocity between myself and the participants, allowing mutual understanding to thrive and blossom. The primary aim of this research is to attain an in-depth understanding of the truant's behaviour and reality. This qualitative research aimed to attain culturally specific insights about values, beliefs, emotions, opinions, behaviours, relationships, and social context around attendance and education in New Zealand, specifically in Pukekohe and Tuakau.

SUGGESTIONS

This research has helped me understand that teachers and truancy officers must be aware of their attitudes and words spoken around and to the students. The participants of this research come from homes of absent parents and violence. They were sensitive to maltreatment, having come from abusive homes, so small injustices from the teacher became significant issues for them, even if the injustice was unintentional by the teacher. Wisdom about the student's home life would benefit Māori and Pasifika students. Wisdom about their fears (separation, family dysfunction) and how to help them navigate these fears that prohibit them and rob them of their youth and innocence.

To their teacher or truancy officer, I would recommend connecting with the young person daily. Take the time to learn something new about them. Take the time to learn something they struggle with or something that is their strength. That small moment of genuine connection will help the students break down the brick wall that they have built around themselves. When you can, compliment, do not criticise the student. With the talanoa, it was evident that the parents had spoken mean words over them all of their lives: bitch, little shit etc, followed by violence. These negative criticisms numb the students; they are already prisoners of many putdowns. A teacher who adds more criticism to the student will not make a positive difference. The difference will come when the teacher gives compliments. Criticism will fall on deaf ears; constructive compliments will begin to show them who they can be. Their world is complex and full of injustice and despair. Their days are challenging, and they are wrongly despised and abused. They come from an environment of instability and insecurity - constructive compliments rather than criticism.

Māori and Pasifika students from this research were afraid and fearful, be the teacher or truancy officer that builds them up and does not building their walls of offence and defence. I encourage teachers and truancy officers to visually see the metaphoric brick walls around the students and be wise to speak and act in a way that helps take the bricks down. It may take five compliments before a young person starts

removing bricks metaphorically, and a relationship can be built with that young person. When teachers do well with creating relationships and making genuine connections, it may help the students improve their enjoyment levels at school, their fragile mental health, and their self-worth and self-efficacy.

They already feel undervalued, unloved, neglected, worthless, and very, very fearful of being separated by the authorities. I consider the saying, ‘Sometimes the most unloved children will ask for love in the most unloving way.’ This saying aligns with my research. A teacher who recognises fear and neglect when a young person responds with undesirable behaviour uses wisdom to know what the young person might be trying to say when the young person behaves in unwanted ways. Look beyond the behaviour and see the child, see their whakapapa, see their need, see their pain and abuse. Look beyond the behaviour and see the young person.

Mary Jackson was the first black American female engineer 1958 and stated, “Doubt kills more dreams than failure ever will.” This aligns with my research in that doubt is before failure. Doubt is not even launching the dream; failure is launching the dream but not making it. Our young people need teachers who help break down the brick walls and engage them in learning. Help them recognise their self-worth and value, giving them the chance to become educated and help their dreams not to be prohibited by doubt.

FUTURE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

This truancy research only scratched the surface of information about our six young people and their journey. The talanoa process could be done further, unearthing more insight. Further research into the homes of the truants, further delving into their home life to get clarity on their experiences and considering any angles for enabling positive change. An update five years on would be invaluable to our knowledge of our Māori and Pasifika young people. I think about how fast the times are changing, and I wonder how this will impact our youth and education.

Further research into the mental health state of our young Māori and Pasifika to explore areas that can be improved. It might be worth considering looking at a younger age group of Māori and Pasifika young people to see if there are early indicators we can intervene with and help the tsunami of mental health issues arising.

Further research might be done with the grandparents of children with incarcerated parents, who are now bringing up the mokos. Their story and journey, their struggles with the moko, and their struggles getting them to school. They are pivotal in influencing our young people to attend school regularly. The grandparents of the young person may be dealing with factors we know very little about. Researching

this area and supporting our grandparents may be of great benefit to help us help them with our biggest taonga, our tamariki.

Glossaries

Te Reo Māori

Aotearoa	Māori name for New Zealand
kaiako	teacher
kaimahi	staff
kanohi	face, eye
koro	grandfather
kura	school
mahi	work
mamae	pain
Māori	the Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa
moko(s)	grandchild(ren)
Pākehā	White New Zealander
tamariki	children
taonga	a valuable, something treasured
tumuaki	principal
wero	challenge
whānau	family/families
whāngai	to adopt, adopted

Tongan

faka'apa'apa	respect
fetaulaki	encounter
ilo	learn
koloa	valuable
mafana	warm-hearted
mo'oni	truth
Pasifika	people of Pacific ethnicities living in New Zealand
talanoa	focused discussion and telling stories
vā	relational space

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Appendices

APPENDIX 1: TRANSCRIPTS OF TALANOA WITH THE PARTICIPANTS

File name: XXX

Interview No. X for Truancy

Q: How many schools have you been to?

A: Two.

Q: Which schools were they?

A: Tuakau Primary and Tuakau College.

Q: Thank you. What age were you when you stopped going to Tuakau College regularly?

A: 14.

Q: Can I ask why did you stop going to Tuakau College regularly?

A: I got kicked out for fighting.

Q: Prior to being kicked out, how many classes were you going to a day?

A: Like two or three.

Q: How many is there altogether?

A: Six.

Q: Oh, there's six, okay. So, two out of six?

A: Yeah.

Q: Was that normal, Monday to Friday, that you would do that?

A: Yeah.

Q: Thank you. Did you enjoy going to school?

A: Like some days, yeah.

Q: What was good about them?

A: Like seeing the bros and like, I don't know, some days were just good days.

Q: Were there bad days?

A: Yeah.

Q: Tell me about a bad day.

A: I'd get annoyed.

Q: Who are you annoyed at?

A: Teachers and like students.

Q: From class?

A: Yeah.

Q: What happens when you get annoyed?

A: Like I'll swear at people. Sometimes hit.

Q: Hit with a closed fist or open fist?

A: Closed.

Q: And you're hitting the person or like desks and chairs?

A: Like objects.

Q: Like walls or something?

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you get consequences or did the school management get involved with your hitting? Yeah? What happened there?

A: I just kept having interviews and then I'd get like suspended or stood down.

Q: So, you've been suspended?

A: Yeah.

Q: How many times?

A: I don't know.

Q: Can't remember? Is it several times? Many times? Okay. All of them is for fighting?

A: Sometimes for just my language.

Q: And it all relates back to being annoyed? Yeah? You said that you were annoyed at the teachers. What were they saying or doing that was annoying?

A: Like I'll just get the blame for everything. Oh, not everything. Most of the things.

Q: And was it you?

A: Nah.

Q: Thank you. Did you do well at school?

A: I don't know. I'd done my work.

Q: Did you pass?

A: I got a silver diploma in Year 9.

Q: Wow. What's that for?

A: I don't know. I think it was like for overall, from Year 8 to Year 9.

Q: That's cool. Anything else that you've done really well like that? Because I think you said you liked your extra classes, options. What classes were those?

A: Like food tech and woodwork.

Q: So now that you're on course, what does a normal day look like for you? What time are you waking up?

A: Like eight-ish.

Q: Eight? Go to class? How do you get to class?

A: I get picked up by Paula.

Q: Then what happens?

A: Then she drops us off at course and we just stay there till two.

Q: Then what happens?

A: Go home and yeah, that's about it.

Q: Are you working?

A: Nah. I do [04.41].

Q: What days is that?

A: Wednesday, Thursday, and Sunday.

Q: That's full on, eh? Talk to me about your home life. Who do you live with?

A: My mum, my dad, my brother, and sister.

Q: No one else?

A: Nah.

Q: Tell me about your mum. Is she working?

A: Yeah.

Q: What does she do?

A: Makes school lunches.

Q: What does dad do?

A: He works at Greenhub. I don't know what he does.

Q: Has mum or dad ever been to jail?

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you know what for?

A: Yeah. My dad.

Q: What happened to dad?

A: Him and his friend beat up this guy, like ages ago, and they both went to jail.

Q: What happened to that guy?

A: He died.

Q: How does that make you feel?

A: I don't know. Like curious at why he did it.

Q: You've never talked about that with dad?

A: Nah.

Q: Are you close to dad?

A: Yeah.

Q: Interesting. Thank you. Do you have dreams for yourself, for like that you wanted to achieve this year?

A: Not this year, but I want to go to the army.

Q: That's really cool. Tell me about that dream. Who's inspiring you to do that? Where is that coming from?

A: Like myself. I just wanna become... I just wanna be in the army.

Q: What do you like? What have you seen that you think you might like in there?

A: I reckon it'll teach me some like... I don't know the word. It's like... it can just teach me.

Q: I think you mean discipline.

A: Oh, yeah, discipline.

Q: Is that what you mean?

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you have relatives in the army?

A: My uncle was in the army.

Q: He's not anymore?

A: Nah.

Q: To achieve that goal, what do you need to do? Have you done some homework to figure out the path to that dream?

A: Nah, not really. Not yet. But I've been talking about it to my course teacher and stuff.

Q: What did they say?

A: She's just telling me how I get it, like what I need to do.

Q: Like credits and stuff?

A: Yeah.

Q: Talk to me about your credits. Have you got enough?

A: I don't have any credits yet.

Q: None? That's for Level 1?

A: Yeah, because we start Level 1 at Year 11 and I'm still Year 10.

Q: So you can start all this next year?

A: Yeah.

Q: How old do you have to be to go to the army?

A: I'm pretty sure like 17, 18.

Q: So you think next year you might be driven and disciplined to get some credits? Yeah? That's really cool. Thanks for sharing that. Does your family have dreams, do you know? Don't know. Do they talk to you about what they want you to achieve?

A: Nah, not really. They just tell me to be good. Stop getting in trouble and stuff.

Q: Two more to go. What are your biggest challenges that you face?

A: Nothing.

Q: Is there anything stopping you?

A: Anger issues.

Q: Tell me about your anger. How often are you angry?

A: I don't know. Not so much anymore, but sometimes.

Q: I'm wondering, do you go from calm to angry quickly? Or you're good?

A: Nah. Kind of.

Q: Are you in control when you're angry?

A: I can't control what comes out of my mouth, but like physically I can.

Q: This is very helpful. So you're telling me your biggest challenges that you face is controlling your anger?

A: Yeah.

Q: Any other challenges?

A: Nah.

Q: Last question. Is there anything else – so for the teachers out there, what's some advice that you have for them to help them be good at their job? What do they need to do?

A: I don't know, but like know the full story before you do something.

Q: What does that mean? You said know the full story before you do something. Is that back to you said they're blaming you?

A: Yeah.

Q: But they haven't really...

A: Like they don't know the full story, but I get blamed.

Q: So maybe teachers should...

A: Not assume.

Q: I like that. Any other piece of advice?

A: Nah.

Q: Okay, so know the fully story before you do something, and don't assume. Ka pai? Thank you for your time. We will cut the interview there.

[End of recording 11.21]

File name: XXX

Date: 3 January 2024

Interview No. X for Truancy

Q: How many different schools have you been to?

A: I've been to six schools.

Q: What were those schools?

A: Henderson Primary, Tangaroa, not Tangaroa, Otara Primary, Tapu, Waikato, Paerata, Puke North and what was the last one? That's about it, primaries. Then my last high school was Auckland Girls then Puke High.

Q: Possibly seven schools?

A: Umm.

Q: What age were you when you stopped going to school?

A: I was 16 I think, just turning 17.

Q: What year was it?

A: The year before last year.

Q: Like Year 11 or Year 10?

A: Yeah Year 11.

Q: Why did you stop going to school regularly?

A: Because I work my attendance was low and they referred me to course so I went to a course.

Q: This is at Puke High, the last kura?

A: Yeah that was my last one.

Q: So your attendance was low. Do you know what it was?

A: Yeah it was 22.7.

Q: [01.39]

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay, 22.7. Attendance was low because you went to mahi, which is Māori for work, correct?

A: Yeah.

Q: What were you doing for a job?

A: I was a pick packer at XXX.

Q: Can I assume that money was more important than getting an education?

A: Yeah to me, I mean we were struggling then.

Q: Struggling with what?

A: Just everything with dad kicking us out with nothing at all and come back to our house with nothing cos he's taken it all. My mum's just done me to be honest, she had everything off everything and never came back with anything.

Q: Why was he kicking you out?

A: Kicking mum out. You know they just, you know, domestics. Not vicious, no abuse, just yelling.

- Q: Sorry, mum and dad are together with how many kids?
- A: There's four of us...
- Q: Right and they're arguing and so mum leaves?
- A: Yeah.
- Q: So you went to work to help mum out financially?
- A: Yeah.
- Q: I was working with my best friend so I got offered the job and just took it.
- Q: So you finished school in Year 11.
- A: Yeah.
- Q: Did you enjoy going to school?
- A: Yeah I like my friends (laugh).
- Q: What did you enjoy about school?
- A: My maths teacher, my maths class, everything except English, yeah that I hated, but I loved art the most.
- Q: Let's start with maths. Maths you said was good?
- A: Yeah.
- Q: Talk to me about that class, about that teacher.
- A: My maths teacher, nah the class was cool as, like everybody there is friendly and like being the only Māori in that class actually I was all good as. My teacher, she understands me, you know, and she personally talks to me if I don't understand anything.
- Q: You said she's understanding. What did she do that makes you feel like she understood you?
- A: Cos when I don't, like you know, ask what's this stuff I don't know cos I didn't learn algebra and she just tells me everything like step-by-step. Not like you know those You Tube videos, she doesn't show me videos, she just shows me her technique and then ended up whacking out algebra yeah, I liked it all. Yeah she left, she had to go to a different class. That's why I didn't go back to maths and then I changed my classes heaps.
- Q: At the one school?
- A: Umm.

Q: The one you didn't like was English. Tell me about that one? What's the difference?

A: She's embarrassing.

Q: How so?

A: You know she like pulls you up, out of the mix, yeah she speaks weird like she's picking favourites. To be honest I was actually the brownest person in that class. There was no Polynesians in that class except me. I just thought it was racist to be honest.

Q: What nationality are you?

A: Māori.

Q: Full Māori?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. Any other Māori in the class?

A: No.

Q: Can you recall an incident with that teacher, give me an example?

A: Yes, when I was on my phone trying to search out that movie that we were watching because I didn't get to watch part of it, I was [05.27], and she called me out pretty loud eh, like she says, "Show me what's on your phone." I didn't want to be embarrassing because you know I was just searching out what the movie was and I could read about it and I didn't want to show her, so she kicked me out of the class. That was the most embarrassing one.

Q: Did she speak respectfully to you?

A: No, she's got an ugly way of talking.

Q: Tell me about that.

A: She has a tone, you know aggressive tone, yeah, that's why I didn't like [06.00] she just too over her head of herself.

Q: Did other teachers treat you well at school?

A: I feel all the teachers were nice, except the English teacher and this one lady that walks around. I don't know if she was a teacher or like yeah, but she was...

Q: Tell me about that lady.

A: Umm she would yell my name, she yelled my name even if I'm just trying to go to the toilet. I go, "I have a toilet pass." Then she'll be like, "Ataahua, get back in." And I'm like oh,

what the hell. And then I'll just run, I'll just run and then I go to a different toilet in the school. Then she'll come to my classes because she's got the phone, she knows which class I'm in. She'll like yell, "Stop bunking." I'm like, "I'm not, I had a toilet pass, you can ask miss." She's like, you know how they're all in your business?

Q: You don't like that?

A: Nah.

Q: We'll come back to that business comment, thank you. Do you have dreams?

A: Yeah.

Q: Talk to me about your dreams.

A: First I [07.24] just to get my anger out somewhere, somehow and like once I get, you know like pro fighting, you like get paid, I want to invest in that money, yeah. I just want to be rich, not for myself but for my family, so they don't have to like ask for anything, they can just get it.

Q: Any other dreams?

A: Yeah a house full of boats, you know, and a lot of canoes (laugh).

Q: You like that stuff?

A: Yeah.

Q: You've mentioned the word 'anger' a few times. Can you talk to me about where that comes from?

A: Yeah, well it starts off with my nan. She's a very aggressive person. She's kind to people that are kind to her, but I think the anger comes from my nan onto my dad, you know, back in the days how they used to, you know, 'come here, come here, get a hiding.' Then my dad carried it on to us because we've watched it every day.

Q: You've watched what every day?

A: You know like angriness, anger, domestics.

Q: Physical anger?

A: Yeah. Fights, heaps of fights.

Q: Who's fighting?

A: My dad. My dad would fight with anybody when we were little. We would watch it but we wouldn't cry because we knew not to, like if we cry we are a bitch, we're a little shit or we're...

Q: He would say that to you?

A: Yeah and we'd actually listen because to be honest crying, when you see someone fighting, is not very helpful is it? So you just sit there quiet and just watch it all. We'll just sit in the car. You hear about when they have road rangers?

Q: So help me understand. Your dad is physically hurting someone?

A: Yeah well...

Q: Who's he hurting.

A: You know like when we were little, like other people, not my mum, he never touched my mum. Not in front of us anyways. My dad's a good person, it's just the anger. He's a really good person. Just anybody that messes with him, he won't take shit, he'll do whatever he can to kill them or dong them.

Q: The other thing you mentioned was money. You want to have a house for your whānau that you could have anything and yet you left school to make money, so I'm wondering if that's a problem.

A2: Security by the sounds of it to me.

A: Nah money, I don't see school taking me further. I'm not good in school anyways.

Q: Explain that to me?

A: Well to be honest school for me wasn't good, only maths. I wanted to become a maths teacher because of my maths teacher, but then when I realised everybody else was shitty in the school like the people, it's not the school, it's the people, right? So the people just fucked up my whole entire school, my school life. I liked it, it's just the fighting.

I was in a fight almost every day in school because of like, you know girls, they think, you know, they think something's funny yeah and they think you're like a little girl to them, so you just take out your anger. Even like my birthday, it was my birthday, and I was trying to not have domestics, so I like had a fight on my birthday because a girl wanted to stab me. Straight up. I [11.08] of it too. I was like oh nah, never again. And then even my next birthday, like when I dropped out, that year I dropped out, yeah I had a fight on my birthday again. I had so many fights.

Q: Okay so possible anger is...

A: But I can control mine, it's just see like even when someone hurts me I won't hurt back, I'll just look at them, but if it's my siblings (laugh) no, if it's my siblings I'll hurt them back.

Q: Thank you. I want to go back to your comment – "I don't see school taking me further." Do you believe that?

A: Yeah cos right now my work took me further than I did in school. My school was like, it never took me anywhere, like it just... I got my NCEA Level 1 though. I was nearly about to get my NCEA Level 2 but because of my attendance I couldn't, I got dropped down, put down, yeah.

Q: Would you do anything different in hindsight looking back?

A: Yeah, I regret leaving school to be honest. Not because of my friends but because I looked dumb in my NCEA, you know like, yeah, certificates, house certificates and stuff, that's all I got in NCEA Level 1.

Q: So if you could do it again what would you change?

A: I would change my whole background (laugh). That's what I would do, I'd change like my whole... but I want to go to a different school see because people always see me as how I used to be.

Q: Amazing.

A: It's trippy though cos I can't (laugh).

Q: Last question if it's okay with you, have you got any comments for teachers on how they can do their job well, or what makes a good teacher?

A: Yeah don't pick favourites, just be understanding. Give the kid a second chance. If they don't know it then maybe tell them personally instead of calling them up. That's all. And don't be a bitch (laugh).

Q: The teachers?

A: Yeah, teachers have got to be nice sometimes too. Maybe be cool too, because you love cool teachers.

Q: What's a cool teacher?

A: You know like someone that's like you, see I'm like this, like I'm funny, be funny and stuff, joke around.

Q: Thank you for today. I really enjoyed your story.

[End of recording 13.58]

File name: XXX

Date: 20 November at 3:00 pm

Interview No. X for Truancy

Q: How many different schools have you been to?

A: Like before course?

Q: Yeah.

A: Just two, like primary and college.

Q: Here in Tuakau?

A: Yeah.

Q: Before you started your course, what age were you when you stopped going to school?

A: I just turned 15. Right on my birthday.

Q: When did you start the course?

A: The next week, like because my birthday was on Friday and then I just started on Monday.

Q: Were you 14?

A: Yeah. Oh, I was 15 when I started course.

Q: The school you were going to, how was your attendance?

A: It was good, but I would stay home if I was sick or something or like [01.10] that's it. Yeah [01.12].

Q: Tell me about that.

A: Oh, but I can't lie. In Year 8, I would fake being sick to just stay home because I just didn't like school.

Q: Tell me about that. What didn't you like?

A: The kids, how they would bully me, con me into fighting them, because all that. It still went on until like Year 9 and 10 but I wouldn't fight. I'd just keep to myself.

Q: Did you do well in class?

A: No. I would mostly [01.58]. Year 9 was a good year until it hit Year 10. Year 9 I would just be in my classes but not really doing stuff and they wouldn't help me. They would help me but not help me.

Q: What are they doing? Are you talking about the teachers?

A: Yeah. I would ask for help; they would just sit there until they'll come last minute, and I'll be like done my work but then half of it will be wrong.

Q: So you're saying you were physically in class, but the teachers are not helping you?

A: Yeah.

Q: And then they would help you at the last minute, but it's already done. Is that what you're saying?

A: Yeah. And then when the test comes out, it will be wrong.

Q: Why do you think they were doing that?

A: I don't know.

Q: Did they treat you with respect?

A: Yeah, half of them. Except the other half.

Q: What would they do?

A: They wouldn't really care. They would just think I'm a bad child because I'll goof around in class but then get on top of my work. It was because I'm a loud kid.

Q: Are you?

A: Yeah.

Q: Alright.

A: All you'll hear was my voice from the other side of the class.

Q: Tell me about a teacher who was good.

A: My Spanish teacher.

Q: Tell me about her.

A: She's good. She would help me to like... like she'll push me to do my work, like not in a rude way, in a nice way. Like come on, you can do it, like all that. And she'll sit down and help me with it and read through it with me and like help me sound out the words because I'm a slow learner, like a slow reader. But if you show me like, say, a car's got a flat tyre and you need to chuck on your spare, show me that one time, I can do it. I'm a hands-on.

Q: Did you have many teachers like your Spanish teacher?

A: No. I would say she's the only nice one.

Q: So the majority were not treating you well?

A: No. English one was worse. She was the worst of all of them.

Q: Tell me about her.

A: This one time I went to go class – like every single time, I missed how many classes in a good term with her, like say we'll have English like five times a week, I'll miss like half of that because of my earring, this bar in my ear. She would always make me go to the office and get it removed and that'll like stop me from learning and I would shut down. They know how grumpy I would get over it, so they just left me in the office until I go to my next class. This teacher was just not nice.

Q: Did you do well at school?

A: No.

Q: No good?

A: No.

Q: Are you doing well on your course?

A: Yeah.

Q: What's the difference?

A: More help. My grades have improved and all that and it's going at my pace.

Q: That's a good point.

A: Because if say you go to a school and you've got a slow brain like mine and they just chuck something in front of you, like, oh, here, do this, you're not gonna know what you're doing. It's like half the kids at school just want a person to sit with them and help them learn.

Q: Say that again. Half the kids...

A: Just want like a teacher to sit with them and help them learn. You know, like teacher aides, how they help those – not being rude, but like autism kids and all that. Like a person just wants a teacher aide like that, like a normal kid, but you can't get those as much now. It is hard for that teacher because there's, say, three max in a class and you see how many kids ask for help and all of that, they'll just move to the next, move to the next.

Q: That's really valuable, thank you.

A: [07.03].

Q: What does a typical day look like for you now?

A: Getting up, going to course. Goofing around and all that. Making fun of each other, like classmates.

Q: Question three. Do you have dreams for this year?

A: I've already accomplished it.

Q: Tell me about that?

A: I'm attending more, getting higher grades and all that.

Q: Attending course?

A: Yeah, more. And higher grades.

Q: What's your big goal for the end of course?

A: Getting a job. My license.

Q: Driver's?

A: Yeah and working on a farm.

Q: Working on a farm?

A: Yeah.

Q: What kind of farm?

A: Dairy.

Q: That's what you like?

A: Yeah.

Q: How long is the course to go?

A: When you hit 16, they give you a choice, you can stay for like your levels or you can go into another course and find other things around [08.41].

Q: You said you would like to get a job and get your license and your job is – you like dairy farming?

A: Yeah.

Q: That's fascinating, thank you. Last question. What are the biggest challenges that you face?

A: I guess one's bullying because I've got bad anxiety, I get shy. Meeting new people. Course, I really didn't wanna go because I was shy but then I needed change in my life, but then I got used to it. I'll get that used to that person more and then yeah.

Q: Are you still getting bullied?

A: Oh, no.

Q: Still got anxiety?

A: Yeah. That still sticks with me. Say if I go to a [09.45] I'll sit in the car. I don't like big groups of people. I don't like giving people hugs, there's only certain people. That's because I like my bubble to myself and there's only like a very few people I talk to and let out what I want to let out. Like Auntie Beck's daughters, them.

Q: You like them?

A: Yeah. I let my feelings out to them the most.

Q: Okay. You said that the English teacher was not helpful.

A: No. She was mean. She was really mean.

Q: Again, I'm a teacher and I would appreciate your thoughts. What do we need to do better?

A: Listen to the child. Don't push them because the more you push them, the more they're gonna dislike you and just push away from you. Yeah, so don't push them or yell at them because they probably have like bad lifestyles. You don't know what's going on behind their doors, like closed doors.

Q: The interview's finished. Any last comments?

A: No.

Q: Your input is really valuable. Nothing further?

A: No.

Q: Okay. Thank you for your time. We will stop the interview there.

[End of recording 11.50]

File name: XXX

Date: 9 November 2023

Interview No. X for Truancy

Q: I am sitting here speaking with one of my interviewees with her mum. Right. We will start at the beginning. Please tell me about your experiences at kura.

A: Yeah, it's okay, but...

Q: How many different schools have you been to?

A: Two. I've attended Tuakau Primary for all my primary years then attended Tuakau College. At first, I enjoyed college, teachers were awesome, I was doing well, but when Covid happened, I started to lose interest in school as I got too comfortable staying home. I didn't do much of the home learning as it wasn't the same as having a teacher in front of the class [00.58] activities. Zooms were boring as my teachers wouldn't always explain tasks properly and everyone spoke at once, so it was hard to concentrate on the main points, so I stopped attending those too.

Q: When you were going to school, did you enjoy it or did you not? Tell me about that.

A: Yes, I enjoyed it. I enjoyed being with my mates a lot. The schoolwork was pretty fun.

Q: What year are you now?

A: I am Year 11.

Q: So 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 at Tuakau College.

A: Yeah.

Q: Did you do well at school?

A: I was, say, in Year 7 to 9, and then Year 10 and now no.

Q: Why?

A: I just got, well, last year, which was Year 10, I just started getting really lazy in the mornings and didn't want to go school, had the mindset of like school's dumb, pointless, stuff like that. And then just kept mucking around and then lost interest.

Q: Can you pinpoint why? Why was it dumb, why was it pointless?

A: Just experiencing new teachers. As I got older, they were like boring and harsh and strict. Yeah.

Q: Can you tell me more about that? Those teachers?

A: Like jewellery, if it was like meaningful to my culture, they would ask me to remove it. I would be sort of like say no and stuff. Earrings, shoes, nail polish, rings, stuff like that.

Q: Can you tell me more about that cultural jewellery? What happened?

A: I was just wearing a pounamu, yeah, but I also had another necklace on and so, yeah, they asked me to remove my pounamu and keep the necklace on. I said no.

Q: Was the pounamu of significance to you?

A: Yes. I got it when I was born.

Q: From who?

A: From poppa? Oh, mum (laughter).

A2: Mum and dad.

A: Mum and dad (laughter).

Q: Okay, so did you remove it?

A: No.

Q: And then what happened?

A: I just got sent down to the dean's office, had a little talk about it, and then they just said, oh, okay, since it's meaningful to you, I guess it's okay.

Q: So you were allowed to keep it on?

A: Yeah, but some teachers were more strict about it than other teachers.

Q: How does that make you feel?

A: I'd say sad in some way, but I also find it stupid that you can't wear something that represents your culture and something that means a lot to you.

Q: You're at school now?

A: Not right now but I've finished for my senior years.

Q: Are you going back next year?

A: Yes.

Q: Well done. Can I ask you what does a typical day look like for you?

A: At school, pretty much just sitting in class at the back with my friends, playing on our phones, not really paying attention.

Q: Do you have dreams for this year?

A: Not really.

Q: Have you got dreams for next year?

A: Maybe just focus a lot more and just get my Level 2.

Q: Oh, so you got Level 1?

A: Yes.

Q: Oh, well done. At achieved? Merit? Do you know?

A: Achieved, yeah.

Q: You did good. Well done. In regards to school, what's your biggest difficulty or challenge?

A: What does that mean?

Q: Do you want to go to school?

A: For next year? Oh, yes, I do, but I just need to be in the mood and have the energy for it, I guess.

Q: You have no energy?

A: This year and last year I didn't, but I wanna change that for next year. I want to be more onto it and be able to receive more awards and just pay attention a lot more.

Q: Do you know what papers you're taking or the direction you're going?

A: No.

Q: In summary, you've made comment about the pounamu, you didn't like them asking you to take it off. Was there anything else that you would like to share with me in regards to school that's stopping you possibly doing your best?

A2: Talk about the teacher that's always on your back. Talk about Manaaki Marae.

A: Like how I wasn't able to attend?

A2: How her attitude towards you in regards to... because you hadn't yet done your speech she tried to make you.

A: Oh, yeah.

A2: Just talk about that type of...

A: One of my options for this year was te reo Māori and to earn my credits in there I had to say two different speeches in te reo about what I like to do in my main time, and I chose cooking, and the other one was an event you have attended. Because I was struggling going to school, stuff like that, I didn't really have a lot of credits for me to pass so some other teachers organised for students like me who were low on credits to still come into school so we could pass our NCEA Level 1. There's this thing called Manaaki Marae and it gives you 16 credits. You do like paperwork, cooking, talking about hygiene while cooking, and stuff like that.

But because I didn't do the work in te reo Māori, I wouldn't be able to do Manaaki Marae and that upset me because I'm not really much of a speaker when it comes to saying it in front of people and I was more comfortable with Manaaki Marae, but the teacher refused to put me in there because she'd rather me do the speech work.

That upset me because I really wanted to pass. So I spoke with other teachers and just asked them if they could talk to her and be like, oh, can you put me in Manaaki Marae, I really need to pass, I need these credits, stuff like that. And yeah, I ended up being put in Manaaki Marae, which was good and that's the reason why I have passed my...

Q: Oh, really? Okay. You got all 16 credits?

A: Yes, so I have 91 credits and 21 for next year (laughter).

Q: Wow, congratulations.

A: Thank you.

Q: That's huge. Well done. Lucky that the person let you on, right?

A: Yeah. Yeah.

Q: How many for next year? 21?

A: 21, yeah.

Q: Well done. Thank you for sharing your story.

A: No worries.

Q: I really appreciate it. I am intrigued in listening. Is there anything else you want to add?

A: No, I'm okay.

Q: Thank you. We will end it there.

[End of recording 11.37]

File name: XXX

Date: 20 November 2023

Interview No. X for Truancy

Q: I am here with participant number two who is on a course because he has been truanting since Year 9. He's now Year 11, yeah? Cool. We will get started. Right, thanks for coming today. How many different schools have you been to?

A: Four or five.

Q: Four or five, okay. Tell me about those experiences at school.

A: Basically, the teachers just gave up on me, so I gave up on myself midway through so [00.35].

Q: Teachers gave up on you? What does that mean?

A: Not really paying attention or helping me do my work. Teachers just gave me a computer, said I could do anything I want, and that was my school experience for me.

Q: Okay. Were they able to teach you?

A: No. I taught myself. Oh, tried to teach myself how to read and write.

Q: I'm gonna be rude. Have you got Level 1 NCEA?

A: No.

Q: No, okay. Nobody's helped you? Okay. Fascinating. What age were you when you stopped going to school?

A: I think it was 14. Stopped going at 14.

Q: Can you tell me why you stopped attending?

A: Well, since they wasn't really paying attention to me, they weren't like – they were just giving the funding for me to the school so I just stopped coming. I stopped coming for a whole year till I went to course.

Q: The course you're on now?

A: Mm-hmm.

Q: Okay. So how long have you been on that course?

A: A year now.

Q: Going well?

A: Yeah.

Q: What is the difference between the course that's going well and the school you went to prior?

A: Much teachers actually pay attention to me other than the other ones that I have been through over the years.

Q: When you say they pay attention, gosh, that fascinates me. They weren't paying attention? What were they doing then?

A: Just saying like, oh, there's XXX, there he is again, here's a computer, that's it. They won't bother me at all, they'll just give me a computer, that's it. I wasn't... oh, I've got to admit, I was a naughty child, but they just didn't get to know me, so I just stopped – just gave up on myself.

Q: I like that, you said they didn't get to know you. Tell me about that.

A: Well, they didn't know what I was like, they didn't know I was – because I was actually a smart child, I knew what they were talking about, I just didn't show it, so if they don't give me attention or like help me, I don't give 100% back.

Q: Did you have any teachers...?

A: No.

Q: Oh wow. Do you think if a teacher did give you attention...?

A: 100%. If someone was there to respect me, help me, I'll give 100% back to them. I do it now.

Q: Right. So if they respected you, you think you would have given respect back?

A: Yeah.

Q: You said you were naughty?

A: Yeah, I was naughty.

Q: Tell me about that.

A: Well, when I went to XXX, I was actually – well, not naughty, but just protecting my little sister because I was the one that raised her.

Q: Where's your parents?

A: I come from a bad home. There wasn't really much there. Dad was in jail, mum was out there drinking.

Q: Are they still doing that?

A: No. My dad's working now, looking for a job. Mum's still... she's just doing – I don't really stay in contact with her.

Q: You are 15 years now?

A: Mm-hmm.

Q: When were you last in touch with your parents?

A: A couple of weeks ago I was in touch with my dad. Mum, I never get in touch with her. Me and her have issues. I'm never getting in touch with her again.

Q: Do you think that's impacted your not going to school?

A: No. I do blame myself, but I mostly blame my parents of like not pushing me to go to school or like not giving me grounds, rules. I usually just blame it on my dad until I forgave him and then my mum, I've forgiven her too many times, so I just gave up. I told her straight up, you know, I'm not gonna forgive you, that was the last forgiveness you'll ever get out of me. Don't contact me, don't contact me. If you see me, please walk the other way. Now that's how it is between me and my mother.

Q: You're very mature for 15.

A: Thank you.

Q: I'm serious. That's incredible. Fascinating. When you did go to school, what did you enjoy?

A: Nothing. It was hell.

Q: Tell me about that.

A: I was sad every single day. I knew I had to go otherwise I was gonna get taken and I didn't want to leave my siblings alone.

Q: Taken by who?

A: CYFS. Oranga Tamariki. I didn't wanna get taken. We've been in CYFS for like three, four years last time I used to go to school, so I used to just keep going to school. They told me if I didn't go to school, I would get taken so I just kept going. That's how my attendance was 100%. So like on my sick days, I went. Cold days, I didn't want to go, I was like giving up on myself, but I still went, I still had to push through.

Q: What was the breaking point?

A: Breaking point is just I think when I just started staying home. My one idoliser that I looked up to was my koro. He told me, boy, you don't have to go no more.

Q: Your father?

A: No, my koro.

Q: Father's father?

A: My mum's dad.

Q: Right, koro. Tell me about koro.

A: He just told me, you don't have to go no more, boy, stop trying. Because I used to – my siblings could stay home for months on end and my koro just saw me keep going and he just told me, you can stop now, boy, so I just said, I'm done, and I just dropped out. I just told them it's the last day I'm coming. Done.

Q: And you were Year 9? 14?

A: I think I was Year 10, but I didn't keep track of the year, I just kept going.

Q: Wow, you've got an amazing story. Did you do well at school?

A: No. Since primary up to high school, I didn't know how to read or write or my maths, but I knew how to communicate. I just didn't talk so much to the teachers. Tried to, but I just gave up.

Q: Can I be rude? Can you read or write now?

A: Yeah. Yeah, no, it's like I'm getting better at my reading and writing. I know how to spell words now more than I usually did before [07.25] but now I do.

Q: And maths?

A: Oh, yeah. I love math. I'm actually pretty good at math.

Q: That's so cool. I'm pleased. Did any teachers treat you well at school?

A: There was only one teacher that I actually liked out of the whole school because I used to get bullied from heaps of kids. I used to just take it, just be silent. It was... am I allowed to say her name?

Q: Yes. Whatever.

A: Her name was Miss Vili and I forgot the school's name, but she was an awesome teacher. She was Samoan, she was an Islander. When the kids used to bully me, she used to tell me – she will speak in her language and just tell them to be quiet and they'll just be quiet straightaway. So [08.08] her, I appreciate her very much. Thanks to her that I just kept going.

Q: Have you said thank you to her?

A: No, but I wish I have. She was one of the favourite teachers I ever had going to school.

Q: So Miss Vili would speak in her native language to the bullies? So are they the same race?

A: Yeah.

Q: And then that would stop them bullying you?

A: Mm-hmm. Because I couldn't understand them, but they were like – everyone could. There would just be four group of boys. One of their names was [08.43]. I remembered his name because I used to hate him the most.

Q: Okay. Would be amazing to see Ms Vili again, right?

A: Yeah.

Q: Question two. What does a typical day look like for you?

A: Now?

Q: Yeah.

A: I wake up around 6:30, 7:00, get ready. A normal day is just they're coming to pick me up, going to course, and just doing some mahi, joking around with some bros at course.

Q: Mahi at course?

A: Yeah, mahi at course, just like doing my work, joking around with some boys, and getting in trouble from the teachers telling us to be quiet. That's a normal day for me.

Q: What time does that finish?

A: 2:30.

A2: No, two o'clock.

A: Oh, two o'clock.

Q: And then what do you do?

A: I usually just come with them for a ride to here, pick them up and then go home. I don't go home straightaway.

Q: Who do you live with?

A: I live with my brother-in-law and his family.

Q: With the in-laws. Are you working?

A: I tried to look for a job, but the new rules say they're only hiring 17-year-olds now because I wanted to go to course and also do work. I have to be 17 to be able to work at night times, night shifts.

Q: When are you turning 17?

A: Next year because I'm turning 16 this year.

Q: Oh, right, yes, of course. Number three. Do you have dreams for this year?

A: Yes.

Q: Tell me.

A: I have dreams with course. So the plan is to get my Level 2 and my learner's and then after that work at KFC or McDonald's for two or three years and then move on to... hope moving onto forestry.

Q: Forestry?

A: Mm-hmm. That was my koro's old job so I wanna work there.

Q: Is he still alive?

A: Yeah. He's still working there.

Q: Where is the forestry?

A: It's in Puke, I think. Yeah, near Puke. I don't know. I haven't text him in a while.

Q: Oh, you don't live with koro?

A: No.

Q: Okay, thank you. Number four. What are the biggest challenges you face?

A: Moving in with the in-laws, away from my siblings' home. Biggest challenge I have was going to course. I used to fear and hate teachers a lot. My teachers that come around now are just actually respectful. So that's the biggest challenge for me.

Q: If you could say anything to them, what would you say?

A: Thank you. Just thank you.

Q: Like Ms Vili?

A: Yeah, especially to Ms Vili.

Q: The ones who weren't helpful?

A: If I could say this word right now, oh, F U C K Y O U. I could hear them talking about me, like they'll be in the break room and I'll go past, you can hear my name just getting thrown around left and right.

Q: What are they saying?

A: Bad stuff. Some of them will say, oh, yeah, he's definitely gonna end up homeless, and shit like that. Yeah, I had bad teachers, man.

Q: Well, so far, they're wrong.

A: Yeah. I remember that and now I'm trying to prove them wrong. I feel like the haters is more motive for me so I just use that, pick myself up and do what I do.

Q: I'm a teacher. Have you got any advice for how I can be good at my job?

A: Just listen to your students, to be honest.

Q: Listen, yeah.

A: Because once they get older, they're gonna face so much problems. It's just gonna be like terrible.

Q: So we need to listen?

A: Mm-hmm.

Q: Anything else?

A: Don't be pushy. Don't push your things onto them. They've probably already had enough problems in their house over the years. Just wait for them to come to you.

Q: And one more piece of advice. You tell me. Because I really like that, they have enough problems in their house.

A: Just try and put a smile on their face. A smile can make a big difference to the kid.

Q: That's amazing. They didn't smile at you?

A: Nah. I used to just put a... I used to force a smile on my face. That's how I [13.56] you have a sad face, or you just put on a face, so I put on a face. It's the second face that I have.

Q: But inside how are you feeling?

A: Oh, I'm feeling great now. Before, yeah, oh, no. Nah. Not before.

Q: Tell me about the guy sitting in the class that was the old you. What was he thinking?

A: Killing himself. Life was terrible for him. He used to get bullied by his older brother. He used to get bullied by his brother's friends like while he's in front of his older brother. His older brother's friends chucked his – when he was nine, he chucked the bike in the river, a deep river, that I had to go get out when I was nine and I was sinking through, and they were standing up there laughing at me. I'd have slipped in too if I didn't grab onto the grass. That's the old me. Can't sugarcoat it, that's just how it is.

Q: You've got an amazing story. Thank you for sharing. Is there anything else you want to add before we close?

A: No, thank you.

Q: Okay. Thank you for your time.

[End of recording 15.29]

File name: XXX

Date: 21 November 2023

Interview No X for Truancy

Q: How many different schools have you been to?

A: Four.

Q: Four? Tell me about those four schools. Primary?

A: Yeah.

Q: This one?

A: No.

Q: Tell me which four.

A: I went to Kingsgate, Puke North, Tuakau College, and a kindergarten...

Q: And what age were you when you stopped going to school?

A: 15. Oh, 14.

Q: 14. Can you tell me why you stopped going to school?

A: I didn't like my classes.

Q: What didn't you like?

A: The work. Yeah, I struggled on reading.

Q: What about now? Can you read now?

A: I can read a little.

Q: Did you or did you not enjoy going to school?

A: I did not enjoy.

Q: Tell me why you didn't enjoy it.

A: Too much work.

Q: Too much work? Like academic work?

A: Yeah.

Q: What were your school years like?

A: Fun.

Q: It was fun up till when?

A: Till I was Year 9.

Q: And then what happened in 9 and 10?

A: The work got hard for me.

Q: Did you do well at school?

A: Yeah.

Q: You did?

A: Yeah.

Q: What did you do good in? What subjects?

A: Maths.

Q: Which ones did you not do well in?

A: Māori and English.

Q: Because you're half Māori?

A: Yeah.

Q: And half...?

A: Cook Island.

Q: Cook Island. Nice. You did good at maths and not good at Māori and English?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. Was there a difference between those teachers?

A: Not really.

Q: Just you yourself were just not good at those?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. I want to know, did teachers treat you well at school?

A: Yes. It's just when they talk to me in person, I get a bit bored, and I just like to fiddle with stuff or like touching stuff.

Q: The ADHD?

A: Yeah. Kinda.

Q: Have you been diagnosed with ADHD?

A: No.

Q: No. Okay. Now, you're on a course?

A: Yeah.

Q: Five days a week?

A: Yeah.

Q: Tell me about what does a typical day look like for you? What time do you wake up?

A: I wake up at 8:30.

Q: Then what happens?

A: I get picked up by [03.28].

Q: Then what happens?

A: We go to course. We do our work. We have lunch breaks at 12:40. And the day ends at 2:00 and then we just get dropped off after that.

Q: How many teachers at that school?

A: Three.

Q: And how many students?

A: 17.

Q: Are you at one facility? One location?

A: Yeah.

Q: What are your dreams for this year?

A: To pass my Level 1.

Q: Have you passed?

A: Not yet.

Q: How many credits do you need?

A: 24.

Q: Total?

A: Yeah.

Q: How many have you got?

A: I've got 56.

Q: Oh, so you've passed?

A: They said 81 was to pass.

Q: Oh, you've got 24 to go.

A: Yeah.

Q: Is that possible? Have you got...?

A: Yeah. There's trades that you can go to and it teaches you how to like get past your driver's license and stuff.

Q: You get credits for your driver's license?

A: Yeah.

Q: Woah. I didn't know that. Very good. So you need to get 24 more credits to pass Level 1?

A: Yeah.

Q: And that's your dream?

A: Yeah.

Q: What other dreams have you got? What would you like to achieve?

A: I'm not sure.

Q: No?

A: No.

Q: Is there someone who inspires you?

A: Yeah. My mum.

Q: Your mum. Talk to me about your mum. What does she do that you find inspiring?

A: She helps the family a lot.

Q: Your family is mum and dad?

A: Yeah.

Q: How many kids?

A: Six.

Q: Oh my gosh. What number are you?

A: I'm the sixth.

Q: Oh, you're the baby?

A: Yeah.

Q: They're still together?

A: Yeah.

Q: Oh, nice. Okay. Did they do well in school?

A: Dad didn't really talk about his school life.

Q: And mum?

A: Mum was good.

Q: She's qualified?

A: Yeah.

Q: That's good. Has mum got dreams for you?

A: Just to get a good job.

Q: The other five, have they done well?

A: Yes.

Q: What jobs are they doing?

A: They're doing XXX in Auckland.

Q: What else?

A: One's on a course in XXX. He's working to be an engineer. And the other one... three of my brothers go to school.

Q: Which school?

A: Tuakau College.

Q: They're doing well?

A: Yeah.

Q: Are you following in their footsteps?

A: Following my older brother's.

Q: One of them?

A: Yeah.

Q: Where have they ended up?

A: [06.50].

Q: Not much. Okay.

A: Yeah. I don't really talk to them because I just stay with mum.

Q: Oh, they're not living with you?

A: My brother has a new house in XXX that he moved to.

Q: Number four. What are the biggest challenges that you face?

A: My dad passing away.

Q: Your dad passed away?

A: Yeah.

Q: I didn't know. What happened?

A: He had diabetes.

Q: When did he pass away?

A: Last year.

Q: Oh my gosh. That's real recently.

A: Yeah.

Q: What month last year?

A: July.

Q: Okay. How has that impacted you?

A: I don't know.

Q: You were close to him?

A: Yeah.

Q: Were you one of the closest of the children to him?

A: No. My sister.

Q: How's she going?

A: She's doing alright.

Q: Gosh, that's awful. How old was dad?

A: He was 40, 45, I think.

Q: That's so young. 45 and he passed away of diabetes?

A: Yeah.

Q: I'm sorry. That's not nice. You talked about that you want to get your credits and a good job. Do you think that's going to happen?

A: Yeah.

Q: You're pretty determined?

A: Yeah.

Q: What's gonna stop you, if anything?

A: Probably people putting me down.

Q: People putting you down? Has that happened in the past?

A: Yeah.

Q: Tell me about that. People saying things?

A: Yeah.

Q: What do they say?

A: That you're not gonna make it and that you're not good enough.

Q: Who says that?

A: My classmates.

Q: Is that why you don't go?

A: Yeah.

Q: I want to know more about that. When did that start?

A: That was in June.

Q: That's just before your dad passed away.

A: Yeah.

Q: Would you say that's bullying?

A: Yeah.

Q: How many people say that to you?

A: Not much. Just two.

Q: Repeatedly?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. What's their problem?

A: Not sure.

Q: Are they still talking to you?

A: No.

Q: Why do they put you down? Why do they say you're not good enough?

A: I don't think they like me.

Q: Did something happen?

A: Yeah. I just walked away from the friend group, and I don't think they liked that.

Q: But since they did that, is that when you stopped going to school?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. It obviously had a big impact on you.

A: Yeah.

Q: That makes me sad. Where are those two people now?

A: I'm not sure. I think they go to another school.

Q: Would you consider going back to that...?

A: No.

Q: No? Why not? Help me understand.

A: I like it – I feel safe at course. They've very nice and they know how to help me there.

Q: You said I feel safe. Do you not feel safe?

A: No.

Q: Why not?

A: I'm just not... I just don't feel comfortable around heaps of people.

Q: Do you get anxiety or something?

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you? What happens when you're feeling anxious?

A: I just put my head down or I won't talk to anybody.

Q: Okay, so you shut down.

A: Yeah.

Q: How often does that happen?

A: Not really.

Q: Because you don't go into big crowds now?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. And so the course that you're on has got 17 kids and 3 teachers?

A: Yeah.

Q: And you feel safe in that? Yeah, okay. But if we were to take you and put you into a mainstream school, that wouldn't work?

A: No.

Q: It's too much?

A: Yeah.

Q: Wow, that's fascinating. Have you been to get help for your anxiety?

A: No.

Q: When the children were bullying you back in June, did you get anxiety then?

A: Yeah.

Q: Bad?

A: Yeah.

Q: When you were truanting, how often – like how many days off would you have?

A: Four.

Q: Four days off?

A: Yeah.

Q: A week?

A: Yeah.

Q: The anxiety, is that in your family?

A: No.

Q: Just yourself?

A: Yeah, just me.

Q: Do you think it's from the bullying plus dad?

A: Yeah.

Q: So it's pretty much since dad passed away.

A: Yeah.

Q: You said that mum was a big inspiration in your life. Have you talked to her about your anxiety?

A: No.

Q: Oh, she doesn't know?

A: No.

Q: Wow. Who knows?

A: Just me.

Q: Oh my gosh. Thank you for sharing that with me. How do you control the anxiety?

A: I just keep myself away from people. I lock myself in a corner.

Q: Literally?

A: Yeah.

Q: Have you met other people with the same...?

A: Nah.

Q: No? But you haven't talked about it.

A: Nah.

Q: Is this the first time you've talked about it?

A: Yeah.

Q: Wow. Thank you for sharing. Amazing. Sorry, one more question. Is the anxiety under control or is it getting worse?

A: It's under control.

Q: It's under control. Okay. Your story is amazing. I'm intrigued. The question was what are your biggest challenges you've faced. That's possibly the anxiety?

A: Yeah.

Q: When you get anxious, how long does it take to come back? Or does it not come back? That's your new normal?

A: It comes back just for – until they put me down again and then I'm just back in a corner.

Q: The bullying is face-to-face or online?

A: Online.

Q: Can I ask what platforms they're using?

A: Instagram.

Q: Instagram, okay. So the bullying is online at Instagram?

A: Yeah.

Q: Any other platforms?

A: Nah.

Q: Last question. Is there anything else you would like to add?

A: No.

Q: Okay, so if I could ask one more question. I'm a teacher. What would you say to help teachers be better or to do well? What can we do to help children?

A: Just try and get one-on-one.

Q: Lots of one-on-one?

A: Yeah.

Q: What does the one-on-one do?

A: Just to help us understand better.

Q: What helps you understand better?

A: If I know what I'm doing.

Q: For you to know what you're doing, the teacher just needs to explain it properly?

A: Yeah.

Q: Verbally or written?

A: Written.

Q: Written? Okay. You've been very brave today. Amazing. Any other comments to help teachers do better?

A: No.

Q: Thank you very much for your time. That is the end of the interview.

[End of recording 15.39]



What's wrong with school? Listening to students and families

I am looking for Māori and Pasifika students and whānau to interview for my study of non-attendance and truancy. I want to hear about your school experiences and feelings about school.

Are you:

- 13 - 15 years old
- Pasifika or Māori
- Not attending school/referred to an Attendance Service?

Or... do you have a child who fits the above description?

I can only interview people who contact me in reply to this invitation. Leave me a message with your name and phone number or home address. I will contact you.

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Tuakau 2121

