



**Social impact assessment of
the adventure therapy underpinnings and components
of services delivered by St John of God Waipuna
and calculation of social return on investment,
Corrections-pathway participants**

Prepared for
St John of God Hauora Trust
by
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Background

St John of God Waipuna, an Ōtautahi-based service of St John of God Hauora Trust, has been delivering adventure therapy continuously through a range of programmes for 25 years. Elements of this approach are woven across the organisation, but most prominently in Waipuna's delivery of Te Whare Hāpai Tangata, its strengths-based reintegration service for young offenders aged 18 – 25 years (delivered since 2013, and with MSD-funded follow-on since 2021) and adventure therapy 10-week programmes for secondary school students, delivered for the past decade. Formal notice, without prior warning, was received in early March 2025 of the cessation of \$639,432 in annual operational funding from Ara Poutama Department of Corrections from 1 July 2025 for youth specialised reintegration support delivered by Waipuna. To Waipuna's knowledge, there is no other specialised youth reintegration service in Canterbury.

In mid-2024, over 7 months prior to the news regarding the funding cessation from Ara Poutama Department of Corrections, they sought and successfully secured funding from Rātā Foundation to enable commissioning of a Social Impact Assessment (IAIA, 2003). Seeking to evidence the service and its impacts for clients and their whānau, and to explore and articulate their approach, so that other service providers elsewhere in Aotearoa, politicians and decision makers can learn from the Waipuna experience, the focus of the SIA was to be adventure therapy and its application across the organisation and its mahi, and in particular, the reintegration service and schools programme. This research was conducted by Sarah Wylie MA (hons) - psych. Ethics approval was obtained for the research from Aotearoa Research Ethics Committee (AREC25_10).

Following training in Social Return on Investment via Social Value International, the researcher undertook calculation of social value for the Corrections and MSD-funded service provision, at no cost to Waipuna..

Purpose, scope and approach

The key purpose of the research was to develop an understanding of what St John of God Waipuna's use of adventure therapy looks like in practice, why this approach has developed, the value and impact of such an approach, and where it could be strengthened in the future. The research was to briefly explore its context within the research literature, document the history of adventure therapy at Waipuna, develop a theory of change model which captures the realities of application of adventure therapy principles and practices across St John of God Waipuna as an organisation and its service delivery across contracts, assess the impacts of schools and reintegration programmes and of any ripple effects and whānau outcomes, explore how and the extent to which cultural needs of clients are met in the context of adventure therapy and identify areas in which services could be enhanced in the future.

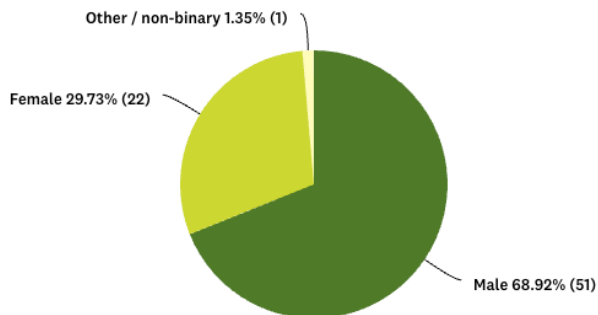
In order to fulfil this, a mixed methods approach was employed in the social impact assessment including a brief literature review prioritising New Zealand and Australian research, development of a theory of change model, used to underpin the research, interviews with a range of staff from Waipuna and review of written material relating to Waipuna's adventure therapy approach, analysis of de-identified client closure interview records for 30 randomly selected school programme participants, staff assessments of progress for 30 randomly selected previous participants in the Ara Poutama and MSD funded adventure therapy programmes and follow-on

supports, an electronic survey (n=75) targeted at people who have taken part in adventure therapy programmes / programme components delivered by SJOG Waipuna in the past, and interviews with 8 male former participants of Ara Poutama-funded adventure therapy programmes, including some who had more recently completed the programme and others who were further along in their journey with Waipuna.

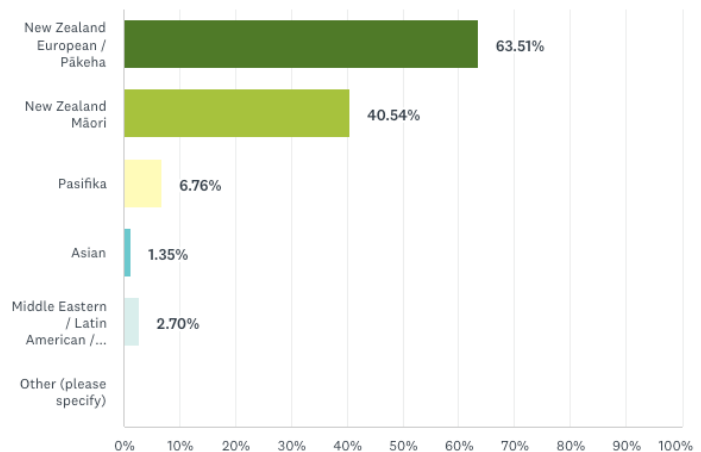
Which former adventure therapy participants did we hear from?

In total, 75 responses were received to the survey from former adventure therapy participants.

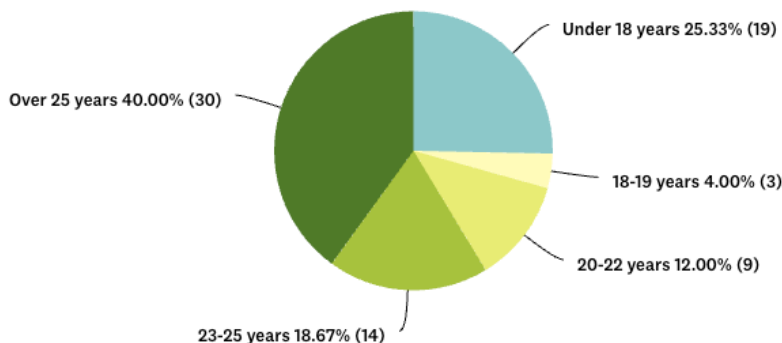
Gender of survey respondents



Ethnicity of survey respondents



Age of survey respondents



Of the survey respondents, **over a third (n=27, 37%) were now parents** with tamariki in their care full or part-time.

Of the former participants who responded to the survey, two-fifths completed the programme more than 5 years ago, two-fifths completed it in 2024 and the remainder completed the programme 2-5 years ago.

Of the 75 survey respondents, around half had taken part in school adventure therapy programmes and half Ara Poutama-funded adventure therapy programmes at Waipuna either during time in prison or on community sentence or following release. Just over a quarter (n=20) had also taken part in follow-on support funded by MSD after completing a programme in prison / on community sentence and after completion. A number identified also indicated that they had received parenting support, counselling or drug and alcohol support or took part in an adventure therapy programme as a follow-on from drug and alcohol treatment.

Eight males who had taken part in Ara Poutama-funded adventure therapy courses with Waipuna were interviewed.

- 3 were aged 21-24 years
- 3 were aged 25-27 years
- 2 were aged 28 years and over

and

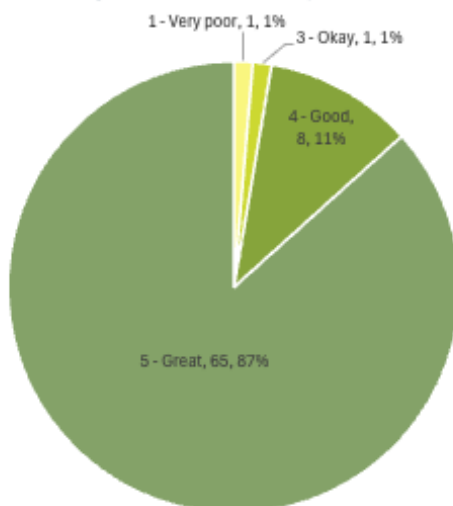
- 4 were New Zealand European
- 3 New Zealand Māori
- 1 Asian

Five of the 8 former participants interviewed were at that time engaged in fulltime work, one was on a trades course, one had got an outdoor activity instructor ticket with Waipuna's support and was applying for jobs and voluntary hours towards his ticket, and one was on leave from his employment due to drink drive reoffending but returning to work soon.

Experiences

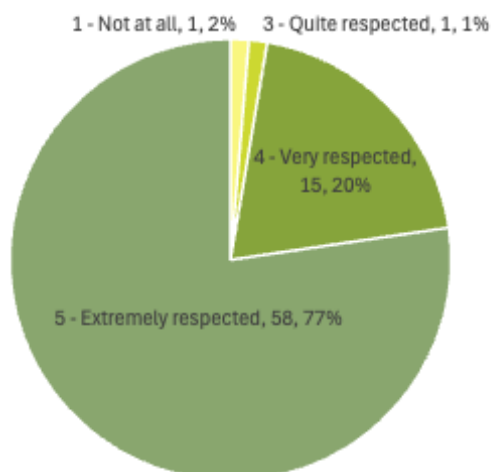
Survey findings:

Ratings of staff and how they related to respondent, connected with them and really got to know them as a person



All but two respondents rated the staff and how they related and connected to them as either good or great, one rating this as very poor and one okay. Ratings of how professional and good at their jobs the staff were on the programme were exactly the same, with 86.7% rating staff as great in terms of professionalism / being good at their job, 10.7% rating them as good, 1.3% as okay and 1.3% as very poor, with nobody selecting '2-Poor'.

Extent to which respondents felt respected on the adventure therapy programme, including culturally



97% of the survey respondents indicated experiencing high levels of respect while on the programme, with only 2% indicating that they did not experience this. The following comments were a selection of those made by respondents regarding the respect they experienced in their adventure therapy programme:

"I felt like I was around family."

"They are the most kindest loving caring people I've ever met."

“Very genuine and friendly people that have well respected values and take and understood and acknowledged my feelings etc.”

When survey findings were considered only for those who took part in an adventure programme while on community sentence or following release from prison, all responses regarding Waipuna staff were positive.

Interview findings:

All of the young men interviewed who had undertaken Corrections-funded adventure therapy interviewed affirmed the staff as professional in their approach, and well-trained for the work undertaken. They appreciated how staff differed in their personalities, cultural backgrounds and life experiences and in terms of their adventurous passions and skills.

It was strongly evident from the interviews with former participants that the staff had at all times taken a strongly relational approach to their mahi, demonstrating the core values of whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, and kaitiakitanga. All felt very much cared for by staff. For three of the young men interviewed, they'd been given housing assistance by Waipuna, one when homeless and one enabling him to get parole.

“I didn't have anywhere to go for my probation and anything. So I had no family. And the only family I had were where I wasn't allowed in the district because of the crime and that. So I had nowhere to go. So I kept getting delayed with my parole. That's three, four times . . . and then [Waipuna staff said] ‘so we actually have a bed free now’. ...Otherwise, I would have had to do my whole time.”

They all felt respected and accepted, and feedback suggested that even where group dynamics were complex, the staff worked hard to successfully develop a strong and supportive group culture. A number of those we met with spoke of a family feel to the adventure therapy.

All participants interviewed reported feeling very safe on the adventure therapy programme and in their interactions with Waipuna staff – physically, culturally and spiritually. At a physical level, this was facilitated by the training/skill of staff and the processes and procedures in place to ensure safety during the various activities. All demonstrated a holistic understanding around safety and what this means within the context of adventure therapy.

“I felt like they actually had a pretty good structure, really, pretty much did everything properly. Yeah, all of us felt safe. There was always definitely like safety procedures we would go through and make sure that everyone's safe...I felt pretty safe actually, to like, let my guard down. Just, yeah, just have a bit of fun.”

“Very safe. In good hands. ... If anything was to blow out of proportion, the staff could easily handle that. ... I've never really felt like scared or anything like that with a new group of people, so it's not really the way I operate. But yeah, no, there's no sense of fear. I felt totally safe.”

“I felt safe in every way, like you could trust what you say to them was between you, ... I know you felt like you could talk to them, or like when we were doing the activities, you felt safe in their guidance, because they seem quite capable and trained in what they were doing.”

Assessment of the short term impacts of schools programmes

Short term impacts were assessed via analysis of a random sample of closure interviews with participants. The information disclosed in these interviews showed that participants were very much challenged physically, mentally and socially in the programme. They commonly overcame challenges through encouragement of others and teamwork, but also internally through their own bravery and courage, a positive mindset, resilience: the analysis revealed a high degree of personal discovery, especially regarding their individual capacity for determination and perseverance, helping others, motivation, connection and leadership. Completion of the programme and its various activities, and especially those which required participants to overcome fear appeared a significant source of pride, and the interviews revealed quite high intent to transfer these learnings to school, home and lifestyle.

Assessment of the short term impacts of Waipuna's use of adventure therapy in reintegration context

Part of the approach to assessment of short term impacts of the adventure therapy mahi with rangatahi in a corrections context was adapted, as the funding changes meant a new intake programme did not run in term 2. To determine short-term impact, two staff members involved in delivery of their adventure therapy programmes independently rated the progress of 30 randomly selected participants retrospectively. Ratings were made on 9 attributes/domains on a 5-point scale (1=not at all, 2=a little, 3=moderate, 4=quite a bit, 5=a lot), drawn from the Theory of Change, with relatively high inter-rater reliability. Average overall ratings for the whole sample are presented in the following table, showing moderate – high impacts on all domains, but with strongest impacts on confidence, capacity to be reflective, level of physical activity and readiness to engage with other Waipuna services.

Attribute/domain <i>'To what extent have you observed this rangatahi to...'</i>	Overall average score 1-5	Score range
demonstrate an enhanced capacity to be reflective	4.1	2-5
grow in confidence	4.2	2-5
be more physically active	4.1	1-5
make social connections – make friends and enjoy own activities alongside/with others	3.5	2-5
increase their connections to positive / wellbeing-supporting things in their community	3.5	2-5
improve their self-care	3.6	2-5
share their experiences with whānau	3.2	1-5
experience improved interactions with whānau – doing their bit	3.2	1-5
shown a readiness to engage with Waipuna post-programme + continue relationship	3.8	1-5

Feedback from participants we talked to showed that some were nervous about the programme at the start, and/or were not particularly invested in it. However by the end of the initial 10-week adventure therapy course, those we interviewed recalled that they had developed a strong sense of connection with the people who led their course and with other Waipuna staff they connected with, growth in their sense of self-efficacy and of confidence, overcoming fear / anxiety, mastering new skills, and helping others. They could all think of tangible examples where they had demonstrated bravery / courage and where they had persevered at something that was hard.

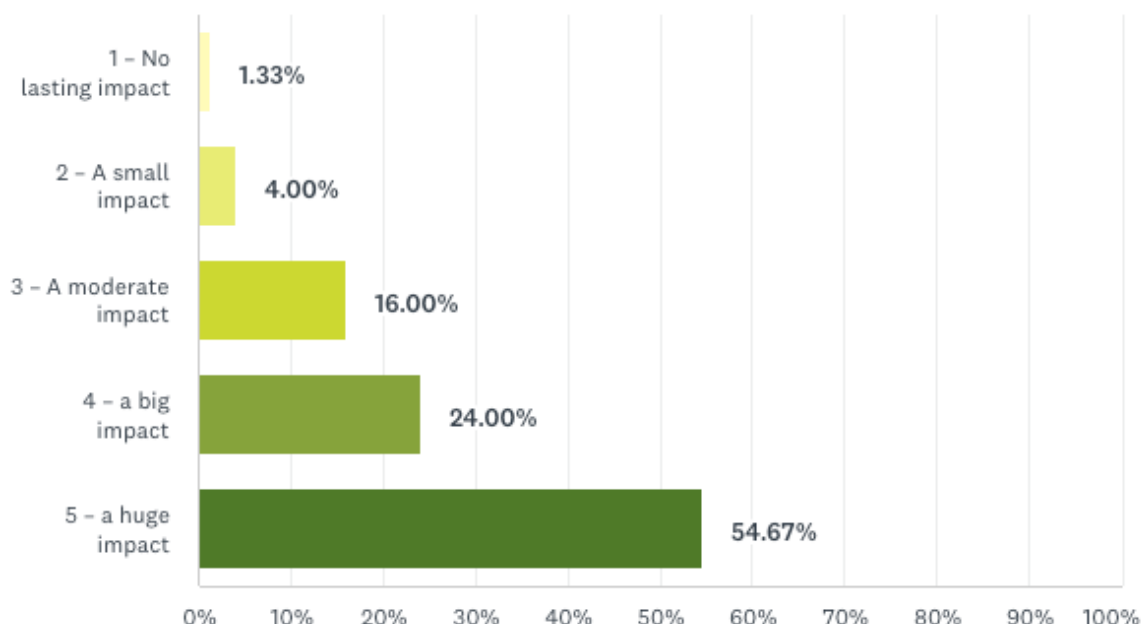
Everyone we heard from agreed that their sense of hope increased through the programme.

Long term impacts of Waipuna’s adventure therapy approach on former participants and their whānau

Survey findings

Asked the question “Thinking about your life now, to what extent, if at all, did the Waipuna adventure therapy experience and the connections you made through it have a lasting impact on you?”, more than three-quarters of the respondents indicated that their adventure therapy experience with Waipuna had made a big – huge impact on them. For those who took part in an adventure programme while on community sentence or following release from prison, 94.7% indicated a big – huge lasting impact. Of the 37 schools programme former participants who responded to the survey 62.1% indicated that the programme had a big-huge impact on them.

Lasting impact of adventure therapy programme on respondents (all programme types)



Open-ended questions invited the survey respondents to share a bit about the lasting impact of the adventure therapy programme, or make other comments. The following comments from those who took part in schools programmes echo the sentiments expressed by many.

“Made new connections and friends, got out of my comfort zone, made a lifelong memory.”

“It was so much fun and really helped motivate me and get me out of a slump.”

“The 10 week course I did at Waipuna had a more positive affect on me than all the years of schooling I did. [Two of the workers] treated me as an equal and taught me life skills I still use in my everyday life.”

"It made me more confident, I feel like I am more open to opportunities that before I started the programme. I've learnt to stop and take a breath when I feel upset or stressed."

"Having been through this at high school I found this made me lean away from crime and joining a gang. The people there were always warm and inviting but most of all understanding of bad backgrounds."

"I have gotten the job I have today because of their help as well as my licence, outdoor and indoor experiences like games which I love very much. I know so many good scenic areas and walks that I can now enjoy with friends. Many good memories shared amongst my now closest friends who I met at Waipuna. My future career is mostly thanks to the experiences I had with Waipuna."

"Absolute life-saving programme that changed the course of my future and therefore my family's future."

"Honestly Waipuna ... they change my life I didn't have anything growing up - no people skills, no confidence, I was neglected, not going to school, turning to drugs/ alcohol, Waipuna made such a massive impact on my life, if I didn't have them I'd probably be in prison or worse right now, however they helped me get work, they taught me how to have a relationship with my family and the community. I'm now living a life that once never thought possible but it was only because of the Waipuna that gave me an opportunity to get my life together and sort my emotions together when no one else looked at me. I just hope one day I can give back to teenagers/young adults cause it's life-changing, I owe my life to Waipuna and the staff that work there, they're amazing!!"

"Those things have saved me and become the foundation of my life. The things I centre the meaning of my life around and want to share and invest in when I have tamariki. It has led me to feel a deeper appreciation for my whakapapa. I think it's helped me to see the world differently adventure therapy."

The following feedback regarding impact was provided by respondents who had taken part in adventure therapy programmes either while serving a prison or community-based sentence or following:

"Without Waipuna in my life I wouldn't have passed my learners or have better self-awareness. It got me out of the house and stopped me doing crime. That course changes life's ask anyone."

"If it wasn't for the support of Waipuna I'll be in prison no doubt about it but thanks to them I'm able to be in the community and even made a little family on my own. I had ... a high chance of coming back to prison ... I was last in prison in 2022 and still going strong - crime doesn't even come into my mind and that's thanks to Waipuna."

"Before I done the programme I rarely had respect for other people let alone myself - the way I spoke, how I reacted to things, my anger, frustration was all over the show but on the programme I learnt so much about myself and about other people that I feel like I became a better version of myself. Being surrounded by Waipuna staff has had a massive impact on the person I am today and I couldn't thank them enough. I haven't reoffended since I've been off the programme and I'm not going to again. They taught me that I am good enough and that I can achieve anything I put my mind to. I'm now working fulltime, I have my own house, I'm in a beautiful relationship with my

partner, I see my son more than I did before I done the programme. I'm so grateful for taking part in the programme and I would do it again in a heartbeat just to experience it once more."

"Waipuna engage with me heaps since I been out of jail, take us out for the day, do something fun with our kids too."

"If it wasn't for this programme I would be dead or in jail for a very long time."

"Everything about Waipuna helped me become to person I am today."

"Good relationships have come from it, cool experiences that I would never thought of doing in my own time I love doing and to this day it helps me with thinking and gives me my little escape when the head gets a little much I head out and do some adventures to clear the mind."

"The programme showed me that if I ever feel like things are getting too much for me I can use physical exercise and or walks to help me think about the situation I am in and to think about what actions I want to take and what the consequences or rewards are. The programme also provided me with activities to fill my day while I was re integrated into life outside prison."

"I'm still out of jail. Haven't been in trouble since Waipuna. Waipuna is the stepping stone for young males to return to normal population."

"Still to this day I use my tools I've taken from this course and can hear [staff member]in my head ha!"

"I've learned a lot of life and social lessons from Waipuna to take on my journey and use them to today."

"Being there definitely helped me be at making better decisions by realising I'm more than what I thought of myself."

"To breakdown a lifetime of bad habits and no direction, they help me find my direction and create the habits that will carry me in the direction I choose to go."

Not just the adventure therapy programme but also the never ending support from the whole Waipuna team especially [Community Development Manager]. Best programme I ever committed to when I was younger it has helped me drastically through my life so far and decision making."

"I was in a position where it was death and or jail with a life of being a patched up gang member & doing things that I didn't really want to be doing, to being in a position where they guided me and helped me lose that connection with the gang and to this day they still help me deal with keeping my life on the straight and narrow."

"I used to be a drug smoker, alcohol drinker, sex addicted, thief. I now have a job, a car, a stable income, a safe home and a girlfriend I would like to marry and make my wife. I am fit and motivated to be anything close to the staff of Waipuna. My dream job is to become anything close to [staff members]. They are my absolute idols."

“Waipuna has changed my life and the ongoing support is awesome I would be back in prison without their support they do a awesome job here in the community.”

“The time [staff members] spent with me changed the trajectory of my journey from negative to positive.”

“If it wasn’t for Waipuna and the staff there helping me turn my life around I’d be serving time in jail or dead. I was heading down a dark path with crime and addiction and they helped me overcome that dark path as well as unlimited support with getting sober.”

“I wouldn’t be who I am today without the help of Waipuna they have changed my entire life around.”

“This programme made my life change from being down a very dark tunnel with no light in sight to a place where now even if I ever end up in a dark tunnel again I have the skills, knowledge & support to break out of it.”

“Just all worked out for the better - being able to have that support from all the guys there made it feel like a family. Got me on the right path to living my life to the fullest and stopping thinking and making much better choices in life.”

“The tools I still use - My understanding of things/situations/environments. Overall great team. I enjoyed my time there - created relationships with participants and staff. Years down the track and a whole new perspective on life, still in contact with [Community Development Manager] and others.”

“Just grateful a place like Waipuna exists. I’ve seen a lot of people start the programmes angry and come out a whole different person! It’s incredible to see how much of a positive impact Waipuna has on everyone that has attended this programme. Even when you don’t attend the courses, most people still go back to see the staff because they put in time to each individual that has attended this place - go well over above! It’s a life changing programme. It’s like winning lotto! I doubt most people would find a special place like Waipuna. It’s like another home. You know you’re always welcome back and it’s just so amazing! I love this place and I’m grateful I got to be a part of Waipuna.”

“Before joining Waipuna, I wasn’t going down a good path. Waipuna helped me get into rehab, finding housing and a full time job. They helped me learn to connect with my family and I knew if I ever needed anything, I could reach out to them. They have made a huge impact on who I am today, I really hope Waipuna is able to continue helping others like they have helped me.”

It was clear in much of this feedback that it is hard to separate the adventure therapy components of Waipuna’s mahi from the holistic wraparound support.

Grounded in the theory of change articulated for Waipuna’s adventure therapy approach (refer Appendix A), the survey sought to determine what (if any) lasting impact Waipuna adventure therapy programme(s) and the relationships and connections made through this had on a range of domains for the individual, including relationships with others, active lifestyles, self-awareness, feelings of hope, self-efficacy, social connections, support networks and pro-social

behaviour. Respondents rated impact on each desired outcome individually, as presented in the following table.

Strongest impacts were evident for awareness of own emotional state (80.0% rated impact big-huge), feelings of hope (78.1% rated impact big-huge) and perceived social connection (78.6% rated impact big-huge).

Looking at the responses only for those who received adventure therapy during a community sentence or after release from prison, the greatest impacts were on sense of hope (100% indicated a big – huge impact on their feelings of hope), making good choices around drug and alcohol and offending behaviour (94.8% indicated a big – huge impact), relationships with others (94.8% indicated a big – huge impact), awareness of emotions (94.8% indicated a big – huge impact), and self-belief (94.8% indicated a big – huge impact), and impact was stronger on all domains than for the respondent group as a whole.

Respondent ratings of lasting impact – all programme types

Domain	1 No lasting impact	2 A small impact	2 A moderate impact	4 A big impact	5 A huge impact
Your relationships with others – professionals, service providers, whānau, friends, peers	2.7% (n=2)	5.3% (n=4)	14.7% (n=11)	28.0% (n=21)	49.3% (n=37)
Having an active lifestyle where physical activity is a habit – you make time for sport and/or active recreation and try and stay fit in body and mind	4.0% (n=3)	2.7% (n=2)	20.0% (n=15)	28.0% (n=21)	45.3% (n=34)
How aware you are of your emotions – knowing how you are doing	2.7% (n=2)	6.7% (n=5)	10.7% (n=8)	32.0% (n=24)	48.0% (n=36)
Your feelings of hope	4.1% (n=3)	-	17.8% (n=13)	28.8% (n=21)	49.3% (n=36)
Your self-belief – knowing you can achieve things – backing yourself and taking risks	2.7% (n=2)	2.7% (n=2)	16.0% (n=12)	17.3% (n=13)	61.3% (n=46)
How connected you feel to other people, and a two-way valuing of each other	2.7% (n=2)	6.7% (n=5)	18.7% (n=14)	21.3% (n=16)	50.7% (n=38)
How many different people, groups, services, activities and places you have around you to support your wellbeing and that you know you can get support from when things are tough	4.1% (n=3)	4.1% (n=3)	21.6% (n=16)	24.3% (n=18)	46.0% (n=34)
Making good choices (around drug and alcohol use, offending etc.)	5.5% (n=4)	8.2% (n=6)	15.1% (n=11)	23.3% (n=17)	48.0% (n=35)

The survey asked respondents to think about their whānau, and to rate the impact they thought their experience of the Waipuna programme and the relationships and connections they made

through it had had on a range of domains. Filtered only for those 27 survey respondents with tamariki in their care at least some of the time, findings are presented in the following table.

Strongest impacts were evident for their hopes and dreams for their tamariki, how they relate to their tamariki and how much of a priority the wellbeing of their whānau is to them, with 88.9% indicated a big – huge impact for all 3 domains.

Domain	1 No lasting impact	2 A small impact	2 A moderate impact	4 A big impact	5 A huge impact
Their hopes and dreams for their tamariki	3.7% (n=1)	3.7% (n=1)	3.7% (n=1)	11.1% (n=3)	77.8% (n=21)
How much time they spend with their tamariki doing active outdoor stuff	3.7% (n=1)	-	22.2% (n=6)	18.5% (n=5)	55.6% (n=15)
How they relate to their tamariki – whether they think about the way Waipuna staff relate to their tamariki and try and be like them	7.4% (n=2)	-	3.7% (n=1)	14.8% (n=4)	74.1% (n=20)
How connected they and their whānau are to their community – clubs and groups, friends, Waipuna staff, marae, parks, the beach and other natural places etc.	3.7% (n=1)	-	22.2% (n=6)	18.5% (n=5)	55.6% (n=15)
How much of a priority the wellbeing of their whānau is to them – knowing what to do to help their tamariki and wider whānau thrive and live a great life	3.7% (n=1)	-	7.4% (n=2)	14.8% (n=4)	74.1% (n=20)

Looking just at those 19 survey respondents with tamariki who took part in an adventure therapy programme either while on community sentence or following release from prison:

- 94.7% indicated a big-huge impact on how much of a priority the wellbeing of their whānau is to them – knowing what to do to help their tamariki and wider whānau thrive and live a great life
- 94.7% indicated a big – huge impact on how they relate to their tamariki – whether they think about the way Waipuna staff relate to their tamariki and try and be like them
- 88.5% indicated a big-huge impact on their hopes and dreams for their tamariki
- 79.0% indicated a big-huge impact on how much time they spend with their tamariki doing active outdoor stuff
- 79.0% indicated a big – huge impact on how connected they and their whānau are to their community – clubs and groups, friends, Waipuna staff, marae, parks, the beach and other natural places etc.

Of the survey respondents with children, almost three-quarters reported engaging with other services at Waipuna, with 7 receiving parenting support, 2 accessing the preschool, 2 antenatal classes and one baby massage. Eighty-five percent reported still being connected with Waipuna staff.

Interview findings:

All of those interviewed:

- identified a strong sense of connection with the people who led their course and with other Waipuna staff they connected with, and this sense of connection had endured since.
- indicated growth in their sense of self-efficacy and of confidence as arising from the adventure therapy programme. All could identify specific things they had done where they overcame fear / anxiety, mastered a new skill, helped other people, and tangible examples where they had demonstrated bravery / courage and where they had persevered at something that was hard.
- recalled the various activities they had experienced as part of the adventure programme, and the adventures undertaken through Waipuna, and all experienced something that was new to them, and went to places they'd never been before, many have returned to some of these with their tamariki or to enjoy the activities and places again, either alone or with friends / whānau.
- agreed that their sense of hope increased through the programme.
- really enjoyed the time spent reflecting at multiple points each day on the programme.

There was strong evidence of improved interactions with whānau. For tane Māori, some had really strengthened their sense of cultural identity – of whakapapa through the adventure therapy course and their interactions with Waipuna since.

Looking at longer term impacts, short-term outcomes had endured. Participants expressed feelings of gratitude, and for a number, much more insight into their emotions and how they are feeling at any one time. This had been very helpful for preventing further offending, and holding down employment. It did seem like a testament to the approach that the majority of former participants interviewed were engaged in employment and that they typically had remained with the same employer for some time and/or progressed in their career. It seemed from the feedback of at least some of those interviewed that learnings around decision making and emotional recognition and regulation were a key part in this. While we can only rely on the information passed on in the interview, it appeared that the Waipuna mahi had made a tangible impact on offending behaviour and drug and alcohol use across the interview cohort. One young man, whose offending history is intertwined with alcohol use, has reoffended with drink driving. No other interviewees reported reoffending, and the level of their alcohol and drug use has reduced, certainly with a shift from use of Class A and B drugs.

All the former participants interviewed were now much more physically active than they were before their time with Waipuna, in physical activity that engages them, running, working out, surfing, playing touch rugby, ju jitsu, hiking or cycling. All were demonstrating or were on a pathway to much better self-care than they experienced before connecting with Waipuna.

The former participants interviewed all remained connected to Waipuna, and this connection was utilised for recruitment for the interviews: this is obviously not the case for everyone who takes part in the adventure therapy programmes. For the people we heard from, they were all in a place in their lives where they had strong support networks around them – people they could

reach out to and talk with if they needed to, or for advocacy support around housing, training and employment or in the courts if they did reoffend. They also had an open door to a range of social supports including counselling, alcohol and drug support, antenatal classes and parenting support. A number of the men we heard from had utilised a range of supports provided by Waipuna.

Both via the survey and the interviews with rangatahi who had taken part in Ara Poutama-funded adventure therapy, feedback from those we heard from who were parents showed that the approach was impactful in terms of their hopes and dreams for their tamariki, how much time they were spending with their tamariki in the outdoors, how they relate to their tamariki, the whānau's levels of community connection, their prioritisation of the wellbeing of their whānau and their understanding of what it means to be a 'good parent'. The adventure therapy had most strongly impacted on their hopes and dreams for their tamariki, how they relate to their tamariki and how much of a priority the wellbeing of their whānau is to them.

How and the extent to which cultural needs of St John of God Waipuna clients are met in the context of adventure therapy

Across both survey and interview findings, it was very strongly apparent that those who have taken part in the adventure therapy activities led by Waipuna felt strongly respected, including culturally. The staff interviewed articulated a very holistic approach, seeing and responding to the person as a whole and understanding and utilising the power of nature. Adventure therapy at Waipuna has always strived to employ bicultural practice, and this has strengthened with input from key staff along the journey. Te ao Māori values of manaakitanga and kaitiakitanga are particularly well embedded. It was apparent from feedback that at least some of the staff / former staff recognise some fragility around this: it should never be taken as a given, and the journey to grow cultural competency need to be consciously nurtured over time.

It was highlighted that as a non-Māori organisation, Waipuna are a place that Māori who may feel disconnected from their culture, are more likely to engage with, but this needs to happen in a manner which puts rangatahi at the centre and responds to their individual needs. Via interview with some of the rangatahi who have taken part in the reintegration adventure therapy activities, it seemed that a lot of the language expressing the bicultural approach and te ao Māori concepts embedded in Waipuna's adventure therapy was new to participants. We heard from one former participant (non-Māori) who'd spoken up about this and seen staff respond really well to unpacking the te reo Māori used so he and his mates understood. However for Māori and non-Māori alike, it is important that all use of te reo Māori is clearly explained in a way that is accessible to everyone, and is at all times mana-enhancing. The Māori researcher who assisted with interviews and helped sense-make findings suggested value in employing a tuakana-teina approach - a concept from te ao Māori referring to the relationship between an older sibling (tuakana) and a younger sibling (teina). This mentoring approach has been applied to learning contexts between those who are more and less knowledgeable about a topic - the 'tuakana' or more knowledgeable person guiding the 'teina' who may be less knowledgeable. However, this learning relationship is also reciprocal, meaning that the teina will also guide and teach the tuakana at times. In the context of an adventure therapy course, this could look like

having those with more knowledge of te reo Māori and tikanga Māori leading and guiding learning within the group and include the participants as well as the staff.

The suggestion of a Māori former staff member that Waipuna place more emphasis on sharing the cultural narrative of the places in which adventurous activities are delivered, both pre- and post-tiriti is well worth following up with action.

Adventure therapy approach of Waipuna within wider research context

In terms of the research literature, there is a greater body of work available to substantiate the value of the schools adventure therapy mahi than its use as part of a wraparound approach employed with rangatahi involved in the criminal justice system. Via several major meta-analyses (Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997; Bowen & Neill, 2013; Beck & Wong; 2022), there is a growing body of evidence supporting the value of adventure therapy approaches, especially in terms of positively impacting on self-esteem, self-efficacy / locus of control, self-awareness, confidence, and delinquency, and as meta-analyses have been conducted over the years, it seems that adventure therapy approaches are becoming more impactful as practitioners learn and develop this approach.

In a New Zealand context, adventure therapy has been identified as promising in meeting needs of Māori where programmes are grounded in a te ao Māori world view, just as programmes are for Waipuna (Phillips, Berghan, Clifford, Arahanga-Doyle & Totoro, 2022). Regardless of their referral pathway, participants in adventure therapy activities delivered by Waipuna more often than not bring with them a history of trauma, and positives impacts of adventure therapy have been identified in recent research with such populations, including in New Zealand (Pringle, Boddy, Slattery & Harris, 2022; Wylie & Scown, 2024).

The rapid literature review undertaken set out as one of its aims to identify markers of best practice service delivery. To respond to this, the conclusion of a recent rapid systemic literature review focused on effective strategies and interventions for engaging ‘at-risk’ youth (Toews, Letourneau, Pohl & Ruse, 2024) seems most apt. There is no single best approach, and rather, a variety of strategies can and should be combined to fit the individual needs of young people and the resources available. Waipuna’s less clinical and prescribed, and more organic, sometimes a bit messy delivery of adventure therapy does this really well, holding rangatahi at the centre, taking a deeply relational approach centred on identity and respect. The research literature highlights the importance of relationship to adventure therapy outcomes: the unique approach of Waipuna in delivering adventure therapy within a setting where relationships endure well beyond the duration of a 10-week programme, continuing as long as is needed would seem to be strongly endorsed by prior research findings.

Looking more at Waipuna’s use of adventure therapy with its Ara Poutama and MSD-funded clients, Lee & Wong’s (2025) Canadian-based exploration of strengths and barriers of wraparound interventions targeting high risk young people are highly relevant. They identified a need for strong case management practice in the face of complexity, something that the present research suggested that Waipuna again does very well. They suggested that wraparound approaches enable flexibility and a tailored, individualised and youth-centred approach: the

present research saw that in action. They and others (Bartlett & Freeze, 2020) also suggested that operating in the context of a young person's broader social environment enables greater consideration of risk and protective factors. Lee & Wong's review noted that the strengths of the wraparound model lie in its flexibility and facilitation of natural, sustainable and relational community support for those involved. Again, the present research revealed multiple tangible examples of this. They recommended implementing processes to mitigate risk of staff burnout and using an approach delivering persistence and consistency. Staff shared how this was working for them, enabling work-life balance, while rangatahi shared their common experiences of persistent, consistent support.

The approach to the social impact assessment was underpinned by a theory of change for Waipuna's whole-of-service adventure therapy approach, with the outcomes framework designed to evidence extent of impact and the truthfulness of the model: does adventure therapy operate in the manner it is designed to, and in what ways, if any, does it make a difference in the lives of participants and their whānau in the short, medium and long term.

Triangulating across all components of the research and the various data gathering techniques, the evidence was strong that Waipuna are delivering adventure therapy in a manner well-aligned with these theoretical underpinnings, with a great, diverse, well-equipped team in place, sound processes and approach and strong values and tikanga that are appropriate for mana whenua, tangata whenua and tangata Tiriti. Whanaungatanga – connection / relationship, whakaute – respect, manaakitanga – hospitality, and kaitiakitanga – care and stewardship are especially strong through the approach and are values which appear to quite quickly spill over to many of those who participate in adventure therapy activities delivered by Waipuna.

Delivering on the value of managed risk, feedback gathered via survey of and interviews with former participants strongly endorsed Waipuna as delivering physical, cultural, emotional and spiritual safety in their adventure therapy mahi.

Areas for enhancement

Besides the value in embedding cultural narrative, and striving to use te reo Māori and te ao Māori terminology in a more mana-enhancing manner, outlined above, former participants did not offer suggestions for improving the adventure therapy approach: they just wanted to see it continue. This was obviously also a sentiment echoed by Waipuna staff. They expressed a hope that funded could be secured to at least enable the programmes to continue in their current forms, and that staff could continue to be looked after in these roles. There was also a keenness to see adventure therapy expand within Waipuna, to include delivery to parents as well as young people, extending to reach more of Waipuna's counselling clients and moving into the ACC Sensitive Claims space to address trauma alongside other therapeutic interventions. Delivery to young people on cancer journeys was hugely impactful in the past through a collaboration with CanTeen, and some were also keen to see this mahi be offered again in the future, with others keen to see development of the approach for people with disabilities. There was also an appetite to reach into more schools if funding allowed.

It is hoped that the present report proves valuable in educating decision makers and politicians about the enormous impactfulness of adventure therapy as delivered by Waipuna.

‘Rehua’

Rehua is tane Māori in his late 20s, and he lives with his partner and her tamariki, while he has his own tamariki also in their care every weekend. His tamariki attend kohanga reo and kura kaupapa Māori. While Rehua never grew up learning te reo, it’s really important to him that his tamariki have this opportunity.

Rehua connected with Waipuna while in the prison youth unit around a decade ago, serving a sentence for a violent offence committed when he was 17 years old. He still remembers lots about the activities he took part in with Waipuna. After release he stayed connected with Waipuna for a while on and off, and took part in 4 Coast to Coast races, and lots of cycle and running events.

Right from the outset in the programme, Rehua found the Waipuna staff really welcoming. For him, it felt strange being around what he described as ‘normal people’, and said he was quite ‘observant’ of the staff at first, and it took a while before he felt like he could be open with them. As his relationship built with them and with others on the programme, he found the relationship with staff friendly, with the group feeling really ‘family-orientated’. He developed a lot of understanding through the programme, especially around “thinking traps”, and also learned to recognise his emotions much better and respond more appropriately to them.

“If I felt like, instead of bottling up my emotions, which is, I’m pretty bad for, and then explode, I would, if I could feel it coming, actually acknowledge what’s happening instead of keeping it quiet.”

Rehua saw some of the other participants not really engage with the programme, but he’d consciously decided to make the most of it. However in the time following his release, he feels like he got too relaxed, and was drinking and using drugs, and things at home “turned to shit”. He reached out to the staff at Waipuna for help, and to him, it felt like reaching out to friends - it felt safe. They let him repeat the programme and helped him get his life back on track. Staff at Waipuna helped him get a job, and he’s now been with the same employer for 6 years, doing work he really enjoys.

Rehua feels like he developed a lot of people skills through the support of Waipuna, and feels like his communication skills improved a lot because of the time spent with Waipuna staff.

“Talking to normal people - my vocabulary was pretty bad when I was younger, just from not hanging out with a wide range of people, so just more people skills. I guess I learned more of a leadership as well.”

The programme got him out of his comfort zone and helped him build confidence, becoming a bit less standoffish over time. While the on-going relationships with staff at Waipuna since he completed the programme have been really important in supporting positive change in Rehua’s life, he feels like these only came about because of the adventure therapy aspects of the programme – the “getting out of the classroom”.

“You know, it’s kind of a must have, yeah? Because you won’t build that relationship. For me, I feel like, yes, you can build a relationship inside a room, right? But not the adventure. That’s when you can get someone’s true self, you know, through adventure.”

Rehua described his large whānau as “a bit all over the show”, and he keeps his distance because while he has changed his life, they don’t want to change. He’s very focused on doing the best he can for his partner and their tamariki. As a whānau they try and get away tramping every 3 months or so, something he got into through Waipuna. He’s also strongly focused on self-care and continues to make this a priority. Right now, having a strong support network around him through the staff at Waipuna just feels like a “normal thing”.

'Nick'

Nick is a New Zealand European male in his mid-20s. He is the only former participant involved in the interviews for the impact assessment who was not interviewed in person (interviewed instead via video call), because he now lives and works overseas, and has done for 2 years. He was involved with Waipuna and their Ara Poutama-funded adventure therapy programme back in 2018, court-ordered to undertake the course while on home detention. As well as the course itself and the various adventurous activities that formed part of that, Nick also competed twice in the Coast to Coast with Waipuna and also got involved in various cycle races and other competitive events. He also undertook drug and alcohol counselling with Waipuna.

Nick says he was quite standoffish with the guys from Waipuna in the first couple of weeks, but especially connected with one staff member whose story he could relate to. Within a couple of weeks it felt like good relationships were formed with all the team, and a good team feeling also developed across the participants, who had some shared experiences and all enjoyed the activities they took part in. This carried on beyond the 10 week course because of the Wednesday evening programme that followed.

"On my course, quite a lot of us, we were in similar circumstances, being in trouble and stuff like that, and then a lot of us just clicked really well. We got along. We just, like, I don't know, we just kind of formed a good group bond early in the course which made it quite enjoyable. And, like, then everyone would start turning up a lot, because they enjoyed being there with the people that were there and on the group and stuff like that. And it wasn't about being forced to go there. We were going there to hang out with each other and then with the tutors and like, learn new things and go do cool activities and stuff like that. ... What helped was that Wednesday night group, because we got to meet and get to know other people who had done the course before."

Nick really liked the way te ao Māori concepts were woven into the way the course was delivered, and felt that this clicked with a lot of the guys on the course, including non-Māori. He felt really respected and safe on the course, and really liked how the staff delivering the adventure therapy activities were all varied in their skills and interests, complementing each other really well. He also thought it worked well that they all have different personalities.

"They all, like, they were all easy to get along with. They're all slightly different personalities. So, that could reach a wider variety of people and get a wider variety of people feel more comfortable and easier for them to, I don't know, benefit from doing the group."

The staff at Waipuna made Nick feel really cared for as a person, and he still feels this way, years on from his programme.

"A lot because, and I still feel they do. They still check in with me now, and how I'm going. And anytime I come back to New Zealand, they always want to, you know, we always catch up."

Nick got to experience a lot of new things and places on the programme. He described his learnings from the adventure therapy course as follows:

"How much you could push yourself to the limits, and then how much you could use adventure therapy to test your mental strength, and like, I guess, strengthen it and because then you could use that same mental strength in other aspects and areas of your life. If you can control the hard times when you doing those adventure tasks like cycling, running, or, you know when you're pretty worn out or whatever, and you want to give up, but if you keep telling yourself not to give up and you don't, you can also translate that into other areas of your life. ... A lot of those activities probably pushed me outside my comfort zone, and at that time and point of my life. Look, if they had asked me a year beforehand to go and do that sort of thing, I would laugh to you every single time, no matter which of the activities. ... And I would have never thought I'd be able to accomplish any of those activities, or even some of those, like some of those races and that, but then also just doing some of those adventure therapy things we did, like the cave walk and all that, I wouldn't have even considered doing that before and then, so then I wouldn't have, I guess, had had trust or hope in my ability to do it. But now, after doing that with them, I know I'm perfectly capable."

Nick enjoyed the opportunities available for reflection on the programme.

"You always had the time while you're in the van going from, and then normally, we're just like, you know, everywhere all day, you know, we'd have a lunch break and we'd do like, a group talk thing. ... It was, like, things you're grateful for that day, positive, negative, and just think how you were feeling, or something like"

that. We'd normally start every morning off like that. ...We'd do that before we leave, and then we'll do another one again at lunch time to see how it changed from the morning. That was good. Not only think about it for yourself and try and reflect on it, and I guess, have an understanding of how you were actually feeling, but also how other people perceived it as well. The others on the group, if they were feeling similar or in a different way, and try and look at it from their perspective as well. So you kind of not always, I guess, focus, not always, just focused on yourself as much as it was about you. It kind of teaches you to be considerate of others and how they're feeling as well."

Nick recognises that he made some significant changes in his life through involvement with Waipuna.

"At the time, I didn't have the opportunities, and for at least 12 months, if not longer beforehand, I hadn't had the opportunities to do anything like that, like even just get out and do any sort of fitness or anything, and the being out in nature, being out in the fresh air and just being able to relax and not have anything to stress about, you know. I was actually fortunate enough because of I guess it was a lot to do with everything I'd learned on the course and stuff like that. I had made so many changes within myself and in my life and all that. I was actually the first person ever that probations petitioned to get their sentence finished early and go. So I my probation officer petitioned to the court and put an affidavit into the judge that she didn't think I needed to do the last month of my home detention or any of my after release conditions stuff like that. So I actually got my bracelet off a month early and quashed all my release conditions and stuff like that. And if, well, if it wasn't for that, cause that definitely wouldn't have happened, and I probably wouldn't have changed my life, to be honest, I probably would be dead or in jail, probably still be on the same path. Yeah, it was a mixture of things. It was the judge. It was the judge sentencing me having faith in me because ... she said that in her personal opinion, she thought sending me to jail at the point in time, the age I was as well, what I was up to and all that wasn't going to benefit me. It was just going to make me worse. Wasn't going to help me in any sort of way. And she was right. If she had sentenced me to jail, I'd probably still be there. I'd be dead. And if it wasn't for her doing that and then her sending me to the course to meet [Waipuna staff] and them teach me this life's not only the life skills, but the emotional and mental skills about yourself and how to deal with things, and you know, how to get, I don't know, see a light at the end of the tunnel when things are tough or whatever, whatever you're going through, just ways of dealing and coping with it for wasn't for all of that combined. Yeah, I'd be dead or in jail."

The charges ... that I got convicted for, which was the reason I was doing the course was, I got sentenced, convicted for two counts of supply of Class A drugs, a count of supply of Class C drugs, four counts of possession of firearms, which was all drug related. ... And then doing that course, and doing the drug programme ... just taught me a lot about how I was using that to mask what was going on inside my head and there were other ways to deal with it, instead of turning to drugs and alcohol, and how being around pro social people and doing pro social things like outdoor education and things like that has such a benefit for you when you're trying to transition away from those things."

Nick sees the drug and alcohol programme he took part in through Waipuna as a really important part of his journey away from crime and to where he is today, employed in a well-paid and highly rewarding career, in a place he enjoys, and with prosocial family nearby, but he also sees the Wednesday evenings programme as critical to his change.

"Like so the adventure therapy course, that's a component of it. ... I obviously did the drug and alcohol thing while I was doing the course. But then the main service probably was that after care, Wednesday night group was the main service I benefited from, because I guess that just ran all those other extra activities, events and stuff like that. It was all bundled under that – the wraparound stuff I think, I think the wraparound stuff carried on for 5 years. ... adventure therapy was probably 40 to 50% of what helped me change. And probably another 30% would have been the people and, like, the conversations and all that, and [drug and alcohol counselling] and the support I had from them, and then the other 30% or whatever would be just me, myself and how much I wanted it kind of thing, yeah, yeah. 50% would probably be due to the adventure side of it, helping me, making, putting me in a positive environment and doing positive things. And then the half of the what was remained, it would be the support from [staff member] and everyone at Waipuna that I had while I was trying to make those changes. And then the leftover would be the, I guess, the willpower I had to want to do it."

He feels that the support of Waipuna had a really positive impact on his relationships with his family.

"100% - my relationships before doing that course, were pretty bad, especially before, getting in trouble. They were bad, but now I've got really good relationships with my family. [Interviewer: "They must be so proud of you."] Yeah, yeah. They are, yeah."

It also strongly impacted his self-care.

"One main thing is, beforehand, I didn't really bother. I didn't really have much care or whatever. And I wasn't, didn't really look after my teeth very well beforehand, and then during that course and all that, after all that. And then I ended up getting a job through [a friend of one of the Waipuna team], I worked for him for a couple years. And while I worked for him, I had gone and had done about between \$10-12,000 worth of work, fixing all my teeth. I'd saved the money to do it."

Coupled with assistance from Waipuna to get his full drivers licence, Nick believes this made him a much more appealing prospect for employers, and helped get him to where he is today. He was strongly appreciative of the impact of Waipuna on his life.

'Cassidy'

Cassidy (New Zealand European) is in his mid-20s. He had what he described as a "pretty rough upbringing". He first came into contact with Waipuna when he was in Christchurch Prison, when a friend was doing the course. Cassidy talked to his probation officer to find out if he could do a programme as a condition of release, and his PO took it to the judge who agreed. At the time Cassidy did his Waipuna adventure therapy programme, in early 2024, he was living on the streets, so life was quite tough, but he enjoyed attending the programme. He remembers lots about that programme and all the activities they took part in – going to Castle Hill, MTBing, hiking in the Part Hills, coasteering and going to Laser Strike. Part-way through the programme, Cassidy told one of the other boys that he was homeless, and that boy reached out to let the Waipuna staff know. They moved him straight away into the Waipuna transitional house, and subsequently advocated strongly to help him secure his one Kāinga Ora house. He's really grateful for this support.

"If it wasn't for them, I don't think I would have had the confidence to actually tell my housing manager what position I was in. Yeah, they just stepped in, you know, like he's homeless. He needs a place, yeah? That's when I realised I would get a house."

Cassidy is a naturally very reserved person, and he struggles a lot with mental health. He's often got into confrontations with other people in the past. On his course, there was another guy who Cassidy had had trouble with, but this changed thanks to the tikanga of the programme, even out in the community.

"There's some people don't want to be there, but on the group, there was one person that on the street, we would always fight - we would not get along. In this environment, one of the rules is, whatever happens on the outside, you leave it on the outside, that's a neutral environment, and it stayed that way."

Where there were a couple of times earlier on where he didn't feel safe on the course because of the presence of his previous co-offender, and he was concerned that he might get into trouble with him, this improved over time as the group culture was embedded.

Cassidy enjoyed the way te ao Māori was reflected in the programme even though he is not Māori, and he enjoyed learning through this. He felt really respected and valued for who he is on the programme and by Waipuna staff. He really liked the way Waipuna staff related to others and the sense of connection they developed on the programme.

"There's just a sense of like being welcomed, a family feel."

Through the Waipuna team, he's discovered a passion for running, and is training to complete Te Araroa trail, running the length of Aotearoa. On the day of the interview, he was working on carving a headstone for someone he knows who has passed away and does not have one. Following on from the programme, Waipuna staff supported him to get his driver licence since his learner licence had lapsed, and encouraged him to enrol in a career-focused training programme at Ara.

"They helped me build up the confidence where I was able to just go in and actually enrol myself."

Cassidy had been estranged from his family for a long time, but with the support of Waipuna staff he'd been to see his dying Mum just a week before the interview – something that he said had taken a lot of confidence to do, and that he is very thankful that he has done. Waipuna have offered Cassidy counselling, but he's still working up to that – he said his life story is “a bit deep”. Through the programme and the support he's had from Waipuna since, Cassidy said he's *“learned how much and how strong my voice can be”*. For him, Cave Stream had been the most challenging activity because he was really nervous, but speaking up in a group setting was also something that took a lot of courage and bravery, and that he had to work really hard at.

“Just speaking out - it's a group of strangers that I've never met. And here I am sharing my life with them.”

He sees huge wellbeing benefits in his life because of the programme and ongoing support from Waipuna, tangibly in getting him into secure housing and much better physical health because of that, but also a much more positive mindset and lifestyle, and getting him much more active because he feels more confident in himself and his abilities.

“Things like the running and stuff, I never got into that but now I'm confident enough to do it. I used to worry about what everyone would be thinking of me and all that sort of stuff.”

Cassidy has now been out of trouble and not using drugs for just over two years, and he displayed obvious pride in sharing this in the interview. He feels much more hopeful about his future.

'Chase'

Chase is a tane Māori in his mid-twenties who had moved to the local area a few years ago to get away from the type of life he was living in the North Island. He was serving part of his sentence on a home detention ankle monitoring bracelet when he was referred by a judge to the adventure therapy course a couple of years ago. Most of Chase's whānau are still based in the North Island but he has one whānau member nearby. Chase has a primary school aged tamaiti from a previous relationship and his current partner is recently hapū, so it is an exciting time for him.

Chase decided to stay involved with Waipuna after the adventure therapy course finished. Reflecting on the activities he was able to take part in, Chase felt grateful for the opportunities he was given.

"I was quite fortunate; I did the Coast to Coast with the boys. That was quite a cool experience. I'd have never got anything like that if I wasn't connected into this type of group, which is pretty cool. Did a run with the boys, a trail run, was like 15k or something. Did surfing, mountain biking...a bit of a range...even like snowboarding as well."

Over time, Chase felt like he was able to connect with some of the staff.

"With some I feel like I'm quite open, and I can just talk about whatever, and they're like, quite good, because they give you helping tips and kind of lead you into a path where you- like if I feel confused, they'll just kind of make it a bit more clearer for you...felt like they were pretty helpful. You could ask them anything, and they'd tell you..."

Chase felt like his culture was respected within the course and liked the fact that tikanga Māori was included in the sessions too.

"I feel like [my culture was included]... I would always do karakia. And the boys would like give us the option if we wanted to open up or close [with a karakia]..."

The feeling of care was extended by staff to his whānau too.

"Feel like they [the staff] care a lot, even though I'm like busy working and stuff like the boys are always checking see how I am and see how my family is, like, even when I bring my little fella to touch and that like all the boys kick the ball around with him and give him lollies and drinks."

Looking back at what he learnt from the programme, Chase spoke about being courageous, open-minded and learning how to communicate. Doing new things in a group helped him feel less alone and being able to travel to new places like Wānaka was exciting for him. Chase shared that kayaking on white water was probably the activity that took the most bravery while opening up emotionally in the group took a lot of effort but was worth it.

"Well, just being honest to yourself and keeping an open mind when you're learning new things and just giving it 100...just giving everything a go. Maybe, like communication, I was pretty closed off and I didn't really know to communicate properly...there was, like, a few boys that were quite new to it, and that just made it more comfortable, because knowing that I wasn't one of the first ones on it, so kind of made it a bit easier."

"They've given me a few tools, like, just like entering something new, of, like a fresh mind, like, yeah, just being open minded about things, and like, taking a step back from it and then having a look at it from different angles."

Chase credited the staff and the programme with being a part of the key supports which have helped him disengage from negative behaviours and have helped him stay positive and out of trouble, alongside his own mahi of attending wānanga and having support from his whānau.

"...it all kind of helped me move towards a different life. I just, yeah, there's really nothing in there for me... just keeping me active, the boys giving me things to do, checking up on me too was quite a big one."

Already a sporty person, Chase has continued to stay active after finishing the course and sees this as remaining in his future. When thinking about how the course impacted on his feelings of hopefulness, Chase could definitely see positive impacts.

"Just knowing that I had the support around me was pretty good. If I was in a dark spot, I could always talk to the boys, and they'd just throw their whakaaro out. Quite good having people to reach out to... I'm a pretty shy guy."

Although he prefers activity type therapy, Chase did try some talking therapy. Although it wasn't the right fit for him, he would not have given it a go if not for his connections and journey with the Adventure Therapy course. In terms of self-care, Chase doesn't think too much has changed as he continues to use sports and activity to care for his mental health. Now however, he does make a point to connect with his sporting friends to both socialise and share how he is feeling.

Considering the role the programme has played in his life, Chase feels positive. His only regrets are that he may have been a bit rude to some of the staff early on in his journey.

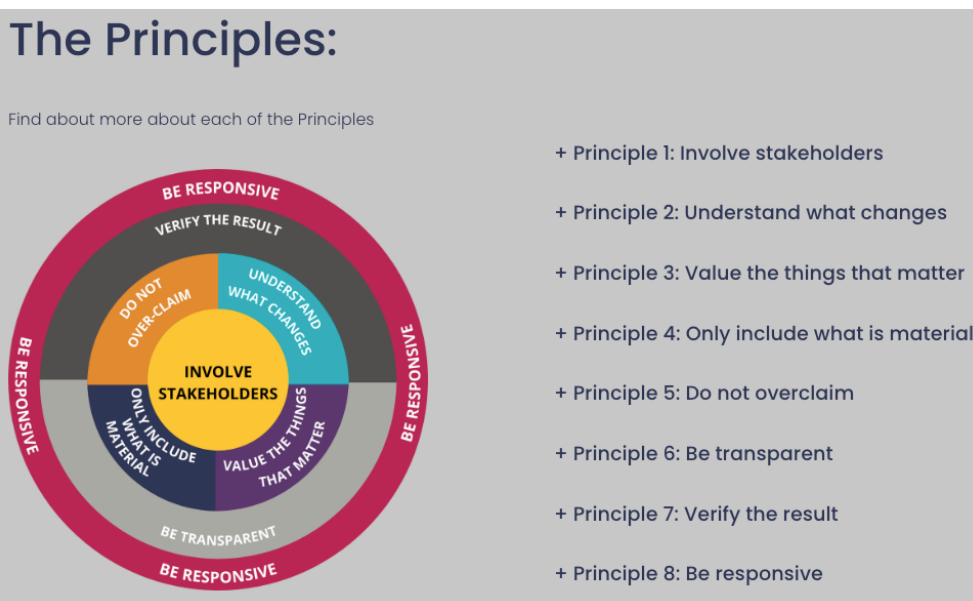
"I'd say that it like, definitely helped me, it's given me a bit of triumph for life and stuff, and just like, 'You're the main priority.'

Chase felt really proud of his high attendance rate when he graduated the programme and when asked if he would recommend the programme to others, he said he would.

"Yeah I would.... It definitely changed me, definitely gave me a better look on life. Definitely proud I came here. It's awesome."

Social Return on Investment

Social return on investment (SROI) is a model for quantifying the social and financial benefits and value of a service, policy or programme to the society in which it operates. It seeks to understand the relative importance placed on changes to people's wellbeing, so that the insights gained to make better decisions. SROI has become a popular approach, providing evidence of value for money and combining the results of other evaluation methodologies such as theory of change / programme logic modelling and outcomes frameworks to describe the value of services / interventions. It is not without its limitations though: there is more than a small degree of subjectivity in the approach. Analysts have to apply their own discretion when measuring and evaluating effects, and applying financial values can be tricky and open to discretion. The principles in which the social value / SROI approach should be delivered is described in this diagram (Social Value International).



For the present calculation of Social Return on Investment, the social impact assessment had already been completed. A theory of change model had been developed, but for the overall adventure therapy approach taken by Waipuna and not specific to the Corrections referral pathway. Not all outcomes assessed were material, and as such, able to have a financial value applied to them. However a large body of rich qualitative data had been gathered, along with extensive discussion around outcomes that it was possible to determine impacts on a number of material outcomes, which are core to the purpose of the Corrections and MSD-funded service. In collaboration with Waipuna leadership, additional information was gathered to quite readily put the programme in a position where SROI could be retrospectively calculated. The focus of the SROI calculation is the 2024-2025 funding period, but number of participants was based on a yearly average for the past 4 years.

The whole purpose that Corrections funded the programme was to reduce risk of reoffending, and the logic behind the approach was that this could be achieved through a holistic, wraparound approach grounded in te whare tapa whā. In the short term, the programme increased participant feelings of respect, sense of connection, perceptions of self-efficacy and courage. They get to experience perseverance, engage in self-reflection and from these things, a sense of hope and overall wellbeing are enhanced. These short-term outcomes were strongly evidenced by the research. Medium term, by around 10 weeks into the programme, stakeholders see participants build on these short-term outcomes, and see a growing willingness to engage with supports to address the drivers of their offending. Self-care is enhanced and the increased physical activity builds on wellbeing. Waipuna staff increasingly take on a place of friend / role model in the participants' lives, and all these outcomes continue to grow over the first year of the programme and through the second year for those who remain connected via MSD and philanthropically-funded supports, the Wednesday night programme and adventurous activities and connection with other Waipuna services.

As the survey findings and interviews revealed, this programme is quite unique in that many participants continue to engage in supportive relationships with staff and formal programme delivery for several years following referral. Well before this point, it is common for Waipuna to have connected participants with employment, supporting participants to stick with this and overcome barriers. Long-term, staff commonly see improved relationships with others including professionals, whānau and pro-social peers/friends, enhanced emotional awareness, feelings of hope and self-belief, connectedness and a valuing of others and increased capacity for decision making. By this point active lifestyles are a habit, strong support networks are in place and drug and alcohol use is in many cases reduced.

The material outcomes on which the calculation of SROI was based were determined from a combination of the logic modelling and resulting outcomes framework developed early on in the social impact assessment, the data gathered during the course of the SIA, and stakeholder assessment of proportion of caseload to experience the material outcomes described, along with additional data gathering from Ara Poutama Corrections regarding the particular caseload. The researcher strived to adhere to the principles of SROI at all times.

From the social impact assessment, there was evidence that the adventure therapy-grounded wraparound approach experienced by Corrections-referred young men had made a tangible impact on the following material outcomes for a measurable proportion of participants:

- Engagement in employment and employment retention – reduced financial dependency on Work & Income and increased tax contribution to IRD
- Reduced alcohol and drug use
- Increased physical activity
- Reduced alcohol and drug offending
- Reduced violent offending (including family violence)
- Reduced traffic offending
- Reduced property offending
- Reduced time spent on custodial and community-based sentences
- Reduced family harm and strengthened relationships

There was also evidence that the adventure therapy grounded wraparound approach experienced by Corrections-referred young men had made a tangible impact on:

- Engagement in training
- Overall wellbeing and life satisfaction

But these material changes were not included in the SROI, for reasons outlined in the following page.

To assist in the calculation of SROI as accurately as possible, additional information was gathered from Waipuna, as follows:

- Average intake size per year, 2021/22 – 2024/25: 28
- Proportion of participants who continue on to the year 2 MSD programme: 71% (20)
- Proportion of participants still engage with Waipuna in year 3: 47%
- Number of participants highly engaged with over a year: 31 (2024)
- Disengagement rate (taking highest rate over the past 4 years): 19%
- % showing positive change in terms of desired outcomes (based on lowest rate in last 4 years): 81%
- % active clients in the community in employment: 54%
- % active clients in the community in training: 29%
- % reducing alcohol and drug use: 48%
- Increased physical activity: 71%
- Reduced family violence: 25%
- Active participants in the 2024-25 year included 19 parents, with 22 tamariki in their care at least part-time.

Total funding: Ara Poutama Corrections	\$639,432 (2024-25)
MSD	\$225,000 (2024-25)
Tumanako Trust	\$42,000 plus up to \$10,000 activity costs per year
TOTAL	\$706,432 “ “

Corrections data suggests that in terms of offence type leading to their conviction for rangatahi referred to the programme:

- 19% were convicted for predominantly alcohol and drug-related offences
- 56% were convicted for violence offences
- 17% for traffic offences and
- 8% for property offences

We also know from the participant group that alcohol and drug misuse is often one of the drivers of their offending.

Corrections provided deidentified data showing whether or not participants over the latest two year period had reoffended, and if so, if the level of harm had been reduced in the offending.

Of 56 participants in the programme, 13 had reoffended, 23.2%. Of the 7 participants who reoffended, 2 (28.6%) had reduced the level of their offending. More than 75% had not reoffended. The two-year percentages were applied in the analysis, because using only one year of data would result in reliability and validity issues due to small numbers.

For participants who were parents during the programme or became parents since, there was evidence of improved financial wellbeing for whānau, through the engagement in employment, reduced family harm resulting from increased emotional awareness and regulation and reduced alcohol and drug use. Through whānau engagement with other services delivered by St John of God Waipuna, there was evidence of increased antenatal care engagement and enhanced wellchild outcomes. These material outcomes were not included in the SROI calculations because it would be difficult to proportion the level of contribution of the service to the outcomes.

The SROI did include increased child physical activity and reduced family harm as outcomes, but in the case of the latter, a very conservative proxy value was used, Police time.

The following sources were utilised to determine costs and assumptions:

NZ Treasury CBAX:

Reduced offending

- Cost per offence (violent, robbery, burglary, theft, drug offences, serious traffic) – Treasury 2006, adjusted to 2025 value. To take a conservative approach to the analysis, reoffending offence cost was based on just one reoffence. This is very likely to mean an underestimation of the SROI, but this is in line with the principles of the approach.
- These were calculated in proportion to offence type for participants referred to the programme, as indicated by Corrections (19% alcohol and drug-related offences, 56% violence, 17% for traffic offences and 8% property offences – taken as burglary).

Reduced time spent on custodial and community-based sentences

- Marginal cost of keeping a sentenced inmate in prison – Roper & Thompson 2006, 2025 value.

- Marginal cost of administering a community sentence – Dept. of Corrections 2023, 2025 value.

Only around 35% of male prisoners serve 2 years or less in prison¹, so 2 years was used to calculate SROI. To be as conservative as possible, the calculations do not take into account subsequent reoffending and resulting reimprisonment. The Community Sentence calculations were based on one year.

According to Ara Poutama Aotearoa Corrections NZ, the reimprisonment rate of first timers is 30% and for recidivists this increases to 60%. This was used to inform deadweight, along with the SIA findings.

Engagement in employment and employment retention – reduced financial dependency on Work & Income and increased tax contribution to IRD

- Jobseeker benefit (without children), Work & Income 2024, adjusted to 2025 value, 25% of income tax and ACC levy – average annual income – no qualifications – IRD 2021, 2025 value

(Note that in New Zealand qualitative research, both Mills, Low & Latimer (2025) and Morrison, Bevan & Bowman (2018) identified that finding employment post-release does not necessarily protect against offending, with work stress and financial resources sometimes enabling reoffending. Morrison et al (2018) cite New Zealand research around what works best in engaging offenders in work post-release and this practice aligns strongly with what the evaluator saw and heard in the SIA regarding employment.

Morrison & Bevan (2017), in research for Corrections NZ, stated that *“While participants generally concurred that employment could help prevent re-offending and was critical in achieving long-term desistance, employment only became viable once other foundations were in place, namely: stable and sustainable accommodation, social supports, healthy relationships, and good mental health and addiction management.”*

Morrison & Bowman’s 2017 *What happens beyond the gate? Findings from the post-release employment study* was used to estimate deadweight - how many prisoners might find employment anyway without specific employment support – 40%.

Increased physical activity and embedding of an active lifestyle

- Adult 300+ minutes moderate – vigorous exercise per week
- Adult individual AND group activity weekly (Sport NZ 2018)
- Adult physically active at MOH physical activity guidelines

Increased child physical activity

Child physical activity at MoH guidelines – Sport NZ 2018 – 2025 value.

¹ <https://www.corrections.govt.nz/resources/statistics/corrections-volumes-report/past-census-of-prison-inmates-and-home-detainees/census-of-prison-inmates-and-home-detainees-2003/4-current-sentence/4.1-sentence-length>

Based on the survey findings, where the majority of respondents who are parents indicated some degree of impact of the adventure therapy approach on how much time they spent in active recreation with their tamariki, it is assumed that 75% of parents engage in this and that their children meet Ministry of Health child physical activity levels. To assist in calculation of deadweight, Sport NZ Active NZ Survey (March 2023) reported that 58% of young people meet the physical activity guidelines, which are defined as getting at least 7 hours (420 minutes) of physical activity per week. The Aotearoa New Zealand Physical Activity Report Card (2022) found that around half children and young people get insufficient physical activity.

In the 2024-25 active participant cohort, there are 22 tamariki across 19 parents.

Reduced alcohol and drug use

- Quality-adjusted life year (QALY) gained²

This is the metric recommended in the UK's SROI guide for alcohol and drug programmes:

<https://www.ndtms.net/resources/public/A%20guide%20to%20social%20return%20on%20investment%20for%20alcohol%20and%20drug%20treatment%20commissioners.pdf>

Research regarding the likelihood of reduction in harmful drug and alcohol use without intervention was not identified. Deadweight was therefore calculated as amount of reduction in proportion of population drinking alcohol at harmful levels from 18-24 years to 25-34 year age group (Health Promotion Agency).

CBAX is a spreadsheet model first released by the New Zealand Treasury in 2015, containing a database of values to help agencies monetise impacts and undertake cost benefit analysis, and more recently, SROI analysis. The CBAX version for Budget 2025 was released in October 2024. The CBAX tool was designed specifically with social sector agencies in mind. Given that the programme in question should be government-funded, given its outcomes, measures within CBAX were used because they have credibility with the New Zealand Government.

While a strong outcome identified through the research, wellbeing was not included in the SROI calculation because the physical activity costings were also included in those of wellbeing (both Sport NZ), and the SROI sought to avoid double-counting. In addition, the physical activity costings were considerably more conservative than were wellbeing costings. It should be noted that Treasury has undertaken a large amount of work around the concept of wairua, outlined in its He Ara Waiora framework (<https://www.treasury.govt.nz/information-and-services/nz-economy/higher-living-standards/he-ara-waiora>).

As Articulated by Treasury, “He Ara Waiora presents a holistic, intergenerational approach to wellbeing and deepens our understanding of living standards. While its principles are derived

² This measure (presented in CBAX) was used at the recommendation of Public Health England's paper “A guide to social return on investment for alcohol and drug treatment commissioners. Reducing harmful alcohol and drug use is a strong focus of the programme, with alcohol and drugs lying at the heart of the offending of many participants. The article presents evidence that interventions tend to have a long-term, sustained impact. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82024140f0b6230269a596/a-guide-to-social-return-on-investment-for-alcohol-and-drug-treatment-commissioners.pdf>

from Mātauranga Māori, many of its elements are relevant to lifting the intergenerational wellbeing of all New Zealanders.” It seeks to articulate both the ends – the important elements in Māori perceptions of wellbeing and living standards, and the means – the tikanga values or principles that help us achieve the ends. The ends are identified as:

- **Wairua** (spirit) is at the centre to reflect that it is the foundation or source of wellbeing. Values, beliefs and practices related to wairua are essential to Māori conceptions of waioara.
- **Te Taiao** (the natural world – the environment), is paramount and inextricably linked with human wellbeing. Humans have responsibilities and obligations to sustain and maintain the wellbeing of Te Taiao.
- **Te Ira Tangata** (the human domain) encapsulates human activities and relationships, including the relationships between generations. The concept of mana (power, authority) is seen as key to wellbeing.

The means, or key principles, are:

- **Kotahitanga** – working in an aligned, coordinated way
- **Tikanga** – making decisions in accordance with the right values and processes, including in partnership with the Treaty partner
- **Whanaungatanga** – fostering strong relationships through kinship and/or shared experience that provide a shared sense of wellbeing
- **Manaakitanga** – enhancing the mana of others through a process of showing proper care and respect
- **Tiakitanga** – guardianship, stewardship (e.g. of the environment, particular taonga or other important processes and systems).

(Treasury, 2022)

To determine likely duration of outcomes, attribution, deadweight, displacement and drop-off, the SROI calculations were guided by literature relevant to each of the outcomes measures, as follows:

- Engagement in employment and employment retention – reduced financial dependency on Work & Income and increased tax contribution to IRD
<https://socialvalueuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/socialreturn.pdf> Social Return on Investment of Ready to Work (UK)
- Reduced alcohol and drug use
<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82024140f0b6230269a596/a-guide-to-social-return-on-investment-for-alcohol-and-drug-treatment-commissioners.pdf>
- Increased physical activity
https://sportnz.org.nz/media/nhqbuato/sroi-new-zealand-summary-report-6_17.pdf
- Reduced violent offending
- Reduced traffic offending
- Reduced property offending
- Reduced time spent on custodial and community-based sentences

In addition, because the survey undertaken as part of the Social Impact Assessment was retrospective, and this research was in-depth, it was also possible to make informed assessments based on the specific programme and former participant experiences. Both the present research findings and relevant literature guided the calculations made, with the latter only used where there was a reasonable level of confidence in the validity of the findings.

Full calculations are available via spreadsheet.

Valuing the outcomes

The estimated lifetime social value that this programme generated for participants in a one year period \$2,846,158.21.

Dividing social value by the total costs of the programme, the SRIO analysis shows that for every dollar going into the programme, it returned a measurable social value of \$15.44

Total cost:	\$906,632
Total Social Value	\$14,002,701.97
Social Value per person completing	\$500,096.49

³ According to the Corrections 2023/24 annual report, 26.5% of 20-24 year olds released from prison are reimprisoned, and 47.1% resentenced. For 20-24 year olds, these figures are 33.1% and 47.9% respectively. For those beginning community-based sentences, 5.9% of under 20 year olds are subsequently imprisoned and 28.2% resentenced, while for 20-24 year olds the figures are 4.1% and 20.2% respectively. Based on these figures and taking the mid-point, if there was no intervention additional to what is already offered, we might expect 75% of those on community sentences to not reoffend, and 53% of those who have served a prison sentence. This data shows a drop-off in offending from age 40 years, so the projected duration of outcomes is taken as 15 years, recognising that offending naturally decreases without intervention in middle age.

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Appendix A – Theory of Change for use of Adventure Therapy within Waipuna

Theory of Change for St John of God Hauora Trust – Waipuna Community Development use of adventure therapy



Vision: To foster healing, hope, connection, enhanced self-efficacy and courage in rangatahi by starting where rangatahi are at and enabling experiential learning through risk taking

