



Fa'atauanau Insights Report

2026



TUIA
WAITĀKERE

**healthy
families**
Waitākere
He oranga whānau

Thank you

To the taura of the Avondale College First XV, their whānau, and the coaches and staff who showed up alongside them – thank you for your openness, your honesty, and your trust in this kaupapa.

To our partners at Wai Ora Recovery & Wellness and the mental health professionals who brought their mātauranga into the mahi – your contribution shaped what this became.

This work was made possible by Sport NZ and the Tū Manawa fund.



Background

Avondale College and Healthy Families Waitākere share a commitment to the mental wellbeing of young athletes. Through their work together, they recognised that the school sport environment — the coaches, whānau and school staff within it — is uniquely positioned to support young people's hauora, including those who may be carrying pressure or experiencing distress.

Working in partnership, Avondale College and Healthy Families Waitākere trialled Fa'atauanau with the Avondale College First XV. This was not a fully designed initiative – it was a deliberate discovery process: an opportunity to understand what shapes wellbeing for young people in school sport, and what conditions enable the people around them to respond. This document shares what was learned. It sets out the insights that emerged from that discovery, the critical success factors they point to, and a foundation for what a more intentional approach to wellbeing in school sport could look like going forward.

About Healthy Families Waitākere

Healthy Families Waitākere partners with local people to bring to life the changes they want to see in their schools, workplaces, sports clubs, marae and community spaces – driving sustainable change that is owned by community, not delivered to community. With an explicit focus on improving Māori health and reducing inequity, the work is about ensuring systems and structures meet everyone's needs.

Healthy Families Waitākere is led by Tuia Waitākere and is one of 11 locations across the motu, working to prevent chronic disease by shaping the environments where people spend their time.



The Team

This work was grounded in the relationships and perspectives of those closest to it. Players from the Avondale College First XV were at the centre, rangatahi navigating school, sport and the pressures that come with both.

Avondale College was a deliberate choice. With a predominantly Pasifika team, it offered the right conditions to explore culturally grounded approaches to wellbeing — rooted in the understanding that what works for Pasifika young people, holistic, relational, community-connected, works for everyone. The cultural grounding was the design principle.

Alongside the players, coaches, whānau and school staff brought their own knowledge of what it means to show up for young people every day. The Healthy Families Waitākere Systems Innovator led the facilitation, building relationships across the season rather than parachuting in for workshops. This sustained presence was deliberate as trust takes time, and the work was only as good as the vā that held it.

Community partners strengthened the wider system of support, including Wai Ora Recovery & Wellness and mental health professionals who contributed specialist knowledge in ways that felt accessible and relevant to players and their families.

This document shares what was learned from the first stage of this work — the discovery phase — and what it points to for Avondale College and other grassroots sport settings.



The Approach

Fa'atauana was designed as a discovery process – not an initiative or pilot to be delivered, but a way of listening, learning and building the relational foundations that any meaningful wellbeing kaupapa requires.

The work moved through two connected phases across the 2025 rugby season.



Understanding the landscape Before anything could be designed or recommended, the team needed to understand the real picture – what pressures players were carrying, who they trusted, what support already existed and where the gaps were. This meant going to the source: spending time with players, whānau and coaches, not just gathering data but building the relationships that made honest conversation possible.



Engaging the wider system Wellbeing doesn't sit with one person or one setting. This phase widened the lens, bringing whānau, coaches and community partners into the conversation, testing what culturally grounded, practical support could look like in practice, and beginning to build shared ownership of the kaupapa across the whole system around players.

The insights and recommendations in this document emerge from both phases.

How we worked

Over the course of the 2025 rugby season we:

- Ran three workshops with players, whānau and the wider school community to build a shared understanding of the pressures facing rangatahi, the support systems around them, and what culturally grounded wellbeing looks like in practice
- Maintained season-long relational contact with players and coaches through monthly wellbeing check-ins, sideline presence and ongoing talanoa — keeping the work grounded in authentic relationships rather than one-off events
- Visited Wai Ora Recovery & Wellness with players, coaches and whānau to explore practical, accessible recovery tools and their connection to mental wellbeing and hauora

All of these activities sought to answer the following questions:

- What are the real pressures facing young Pasifika men in school sport?
- Who do rangatahi trust — and what makes those relationships work?
- What does meaningful, culturally grounded support look like in practice?
- How can coaches and whānau be better equipped to show up for young people?
- What conditions need to be in place for wellbeing to become part of everyday team life?



Keeping people safe

Exploring mental health and wellbeing with young people requires care. Some of the steps taken to ensure everyone was kept safe throughout this process included:

- Players and whānau chose to take part — participation was voluntary at every stage
- All student-athletes involved were secondary school age, with appropriate school oversight in place throughout
- The Healthy Families Waitākere Systems Innovator maintained consistent, trusted relationships with players across the season, ensuring support was available beyond formal workshop settings
- Clear processes were in place for responding to any disclosures of a serious nature
- Players, whānau and coaches were connected to relevant wellbeing and mental health support services throughout the process



What we found

Insights on the challenges and opportunities for supporting rangatahi wellbeing in school sport.

The insights that follow reflect strong themes that emerged across workshops, talanoa and season-long engagement.



01

Wellbeing is held collectively — by players, whānau and coaches together.

The young people don't experience wellbeing in isolation. The relationships between players, their families and their coaches are the infrastructure that either holds pressure or lets it compound.

When those relationships are strong and connected, rangatahi have somewhere to land.

Players were clear that they wanted their parents more involved — and better equipped to support them. — Players, Workshop 1

Parents spoke about needing everyone to be on the same page — coaches, whānau and school — with consistent messages flowing between home, sport and the classroom. — Whānau, Parents' Talanoa

Coaches, families and players being aligned — that's what makes the difference for young people. — Parents, Parents' Talanoa



02

Young people need space – and permission – to put down what they're carrying.

The pressures facing rangatahi in school sport are real and layered: selection anxiety, injuries, balancing school and rugby, family expectations, and the cultural weight of not wanting to let people down.

Mental health pressures were present, but often went unnamed until intentional space was created to surface them.

“At the end of the day, even if the talanoa had not gone as well as it did, we are still opening up a space to talk about mental health.”

— Coach, Avondale College First XV

””

Players spoke about worries over selection, injuries, and the fear of falling behind – pressures that stayed hidden until the right conditions existed.

— Players, Tuia Challenge

””

Mental health pressures were there, but players rarely named them until space was created to talk.

— Facilitator observations, Workshop 1



03

When mental health is resourced in school sport – through time, relationships and sustained investment – hauora improves.

Players and whānau didn't treat this as optional. They wanted recovery and wellbeing woven into everyday team life, not delivered as one-off events. Initial resistance from coaching staff to anything beyond the rugby shifted once they saw players engage and whānau step forward.

Players said they wanted recovery and mental wellbeing to be part of normal team culture – not something that happened once and disappeared.

— Players, Workshop 3

————— ” —————

Parents didn't see this as a nice-to-have. They identified funding pathways and asked for longer-term access to the kaupapa.

— Whānau, Parents' Talanoa

————— ” —————

Early resistance to wellbeing content shifted as coaches watched players open up and whānau actively back the work.

— Implementation reflections



What made it work

Four conditions created the foundation for everything that followed.

- 1 Start with player voice.** The kaupapa was shaped by what players said, not assumptions about what they needed. That's what built the trust that made everything else possible.
- 2 Ground it in culture.** Talanoa, faikava-style connection, the Fonofale model — approaches designed for those most marginalised tend to work better for everyone — the cultural grounding here was the design principle, not a modification of it.
- 3 Hold it across the whole season.** One-off sessions don't shift culture. Consistent presence — at camp, on the sideline, in monthly check-ins — is what turns a programme into a kaupapa.
- 4 Bring the whole system in.** Players, whānau, coaches and community partners all need to be in the room. Wellbeing held by one person or one setting is wellbeing that won't last.

Where to next

Fa'atauana at Avondale College has shown what becomes possible when wellbeing is treated as a shared responsibility.

Held by players, whānau, coaches and community together, and grounded in the cultural strengths already present in the room.

This is a beginning. The insights and success factors in this report provide a foundation for strengthening the kaupapa at Avondale College and for adapting it in other grassroots sport settings across the motu.

The ask is straightforward: resource the conditions. Time, relationships and sustained investment in the environments where rangatahi spend their lives — that is what hauora is built on.

This report was developed by Healthy Families Waitākere
For more information please contact:
Pelenatino Malo, Pacific Systems Innovator
Pelenatino.malo@tuiawaitakere.org.nz
www.healthyfamilieswaitakere.org.nz

The logo for Healthy Families Waitākere features a stylized white icon of a person with arms raised, resembling a caduceus or a symbol of health and care. Below the icon, the words "healthy families" are written in a lowercase, sans-serif font. Underneath that, "Waitākere" is written in a smaller font, and at the bottom, "He oranga whānau" is written in the same smaller font.

healthy
families
Waitākere
He oranga whānau



Tuia Waitākere is a community movement led by the people, for the people of West Auckland.

We connect with local leaders and whānau where life naturally happens: in schools, sports clubs, marae, workplaces, churches and community spaces. From there, we walk alongside communities, sharing the tools, resources and support needed to create meaningful change together.

We don't impose solutions.

We grow them – locally, collectively, and with care.

www.tuiawaitakere.org.nz