

Emerge Aotearoa

A Non-Government Organisation's Journey to Enhance Cultural Competence

The path to biculturalism can be difficult for organisations. BARBARA DISLEY of EmERGE Aotearoa talks about her organisation's path.

Emerge Aotearoa was formed in 2015 when Recovery Solutions Group and Richmond Fellowship Trust merged – these were two organisations that worked in mental health, addiction, disability, and housing. Both organisations had been serving a significant number of Māori and Pasifika whānau and knew they could do better. At the time of the merger, a new board was formed. Four of the board members were Māori, one was Samoan, and the remaining four were Pākehā.

The board were committed to making the necessary changes to more effectively meet the needs of communities. This article focuses on how we improved our responsiveness to Māori.

What we did

Clarifying our strategic priorities and our values

To create our values, we brought together kaimahi (staff) from across the organisation and engaged in a process facilitated by Whaea Moe Milne, a Maori health expert. Four core values emerged:

- Whakawhanaunga – Connecting with purpose
- Manaaki – Engaging with respect
- Ako – Walking and learning together
- Whakamana – Acting with integrity.

We then established four founding pou:

- Better meeting the needs of Māori Tangata Whaiora
- Better meeting the needs of Pasifika clients
- Commitment to participation of people with lived experience and peer services
- Social housing provisions to people with mental health and addiction issues

These pou were about moving the organisation towards being bicultural – honouring Māori perspectives in all matters, honouring people's need for connectedness and empowerment, walking the talk, and consistently seeking understanding to inform our day-to-day decisions. Finally, our founding pou looked to honour and value the contribution that comes with lived experience and ensure everyone has the right to safe, warm, dry housing.

Three years on, we refreshed our strategy and the outcomes we aspire to.

Our outcomes are driven and evaluated through a strong social equity lens. We seek to have everybody leave our services healthier and with more control over their lives. Our challenge is to analyse data so that we can look through different lenses to ensure greater equity.

Our priorities, pou, and values form the kaupapa that drives the organisation.

Our Strategy

Our Vision

Realising potential
Tautokohia te mana tangata

Our Purpose

Strengthen whānau together, so that communities thrive
Whakapakari ngātahi i te whānau kia puāwai te hāpori



Investing in the pou

We set up an internal structure that ensures Māori capability is present at all levels of the organisation. The current structure supports a Mana Whakahaere at the group executive level with cultural partners at the regional level. The board have held the chief executive accountable for ensuring we grow Māori capability and responsiveness.

Measuring and reporting on success

Reports are presented through the lens of the pou. We try to present as much data as we can through these lenses. For example, we look at recruitment and retention data through an ethnicity lens and for the whānau we support. We are still developing our data capability so that we can more accurately measure outcomes.

Building cultural competence across the organisation

In February 2016, the Leadership Team completed the first Māori Competency Framework hui at Te Paea Marae, Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland).

As of June 2019, over 650 staff had completed the Takarangi Competency Framework (TCF). This framework was endorsed and partially funded by Mātua Rāki (the Addiction Workforce Development Centre). TCF consists of 14 Māori competencies that can be used in mental health and addiction services. Participants begin by attending a two-day noho marae, then they develop their own portfolios of achievement across the competencies.

Where the TCF portfolios are an individual record, the Poutama is a service-level approach. Each service does a Poutama self-assessment, which is used as the baseline of how they practise the first five Māori competencies. A plan is then developed to move the service to the next level of competency.

Across the group, all staff have learnt, or are in the process of learning, their pepeha and all are encouraged to learn waiata and understand the processes around powhiri and poroporoaki. These are incorporated into daily processes, along with karakia, mihi whakatau, manaaki, and the use of whakatauki.

Developing Māori leaders

Te Ngākau Hīhiko o te Kākā Tarahae (Māori Leadership Programme)

Fifteen kaimahi from around Aotearoa were involved in this 12-month Māori leadership programme. In June 2019, the first cohort of Māori leadership participants attended the pōwhiri at Te Puea Marae. The programme is a combination of external and internal experiences. Indigenous Growth provided the initial leadership course followed by internal leadership programmes, including mentoring and coaching. The group recently graduated from the programme, and feedback from participants indicated that for all participants, this experience has been life-changing.

Collaborating and Partnering

Since 2016, Emerge Aotearoa has explored opportunities to work with Māori organisations, hapū, iwi, and marae. The board have a memorandum of understanding with Mahitahi Trust, a kaupapa organisation in Manukau, and have worked with Te Taiwhenua o Heretaunga to set up housing support services in Hawke's Bay. Ngāti Whātua o Ōrākei have been part of the governance board to support Emerge Aotearoa to set up a youth-focused addiction service in Tāmaki.

Taking an equity focus

During the recent COVID-19 lockdown, it became clear that we needed to set up a different process to support Māori kaimahi. As an organisation, we had developed a fund to support staff and whānau who were experiencing hardship. Māori kaimahi were not accessing the fund in the proportions expected so we set up a process with more flexibility and found that the targeted fund was more accessible. We also set up a support network where Māori staff were contacted and supported by other Māori staff.

What has changed?

Greater cultural competency and awareness

Over five years, I have observed shifts in cultural awareness at all levels. People have incorporated powhiri and poroporoaki into welcoming staff, clients, and whānau. People report feeling more confident to participate on marae and are much more aware that we all bring different strengths. Staff say they feel they can bring more of their whole self to work.

Embedding values

Staff know and understand our organisational values and are far more likely to refer to them in te reo than in English. People see the importance of our values and try to apply them in their day-to-day work.

Staff engagement

Our last survey showed that our Asian, Māori, and Pasifika populations are slightly more engaged (5 percent higher) than other ethnic groups.

Valued partnerships

As an organisation, we are clearer about our role as a partner. We have benefited from partnerships with iwi providers, and we have been able to offer some tangible benefits in return. One example is the setting up of our youth addiction service in Tāmaki called EaseUp. This service is funded by the Emerge Aotearoa Trust, and we have worked closely with Ngāti Whātua o Ōrākei, who have supported us with governance representation and cultural advice.

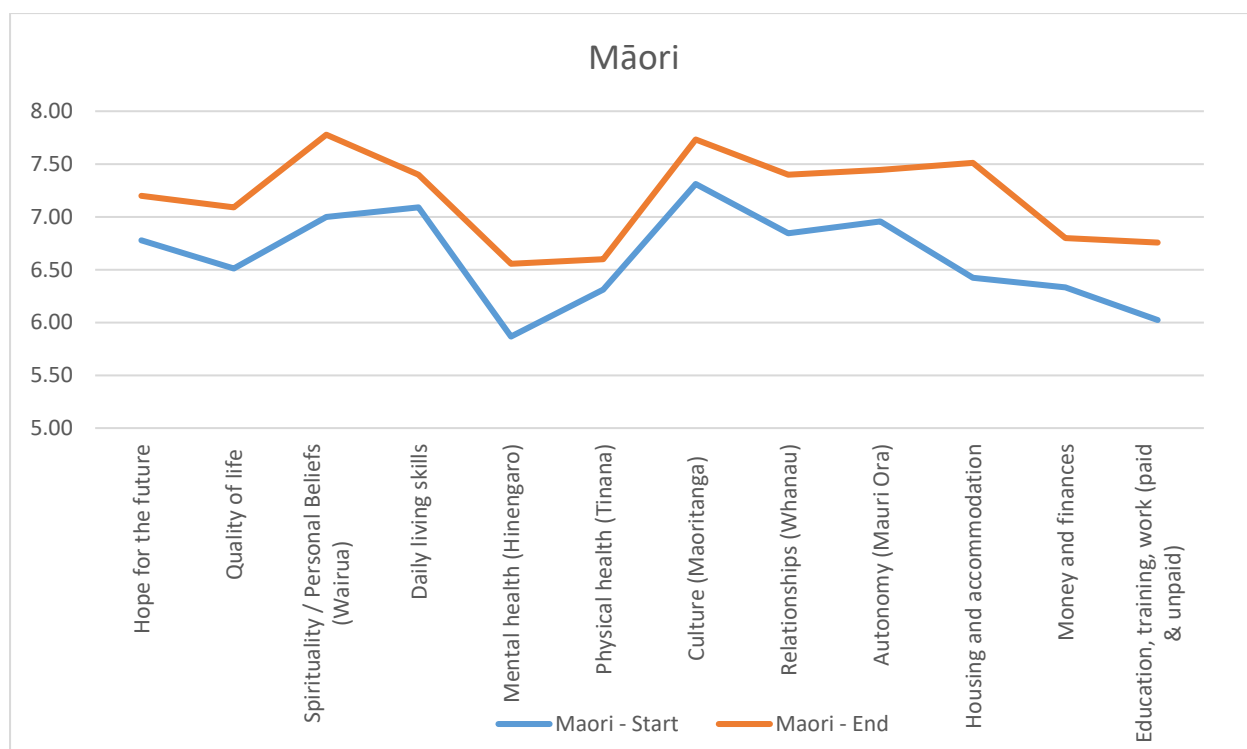
Outcomes for whaiora and clients

It is always challenging to measure the change. While we are unable to be definitive as to exactly what might work best across all contexts, we are beginning to interrogate our outcomes.

We annually survey people who access our services. Last year’s survey was completed by 530 people (23 percent of clients). The return rate for Māori was nearly 29 percent and 14 percent for Pacific Peoples.

The vast majority (92.5 percent) of Māori clients agreed or strongly agreed that staff understood the ways of their culture or community.

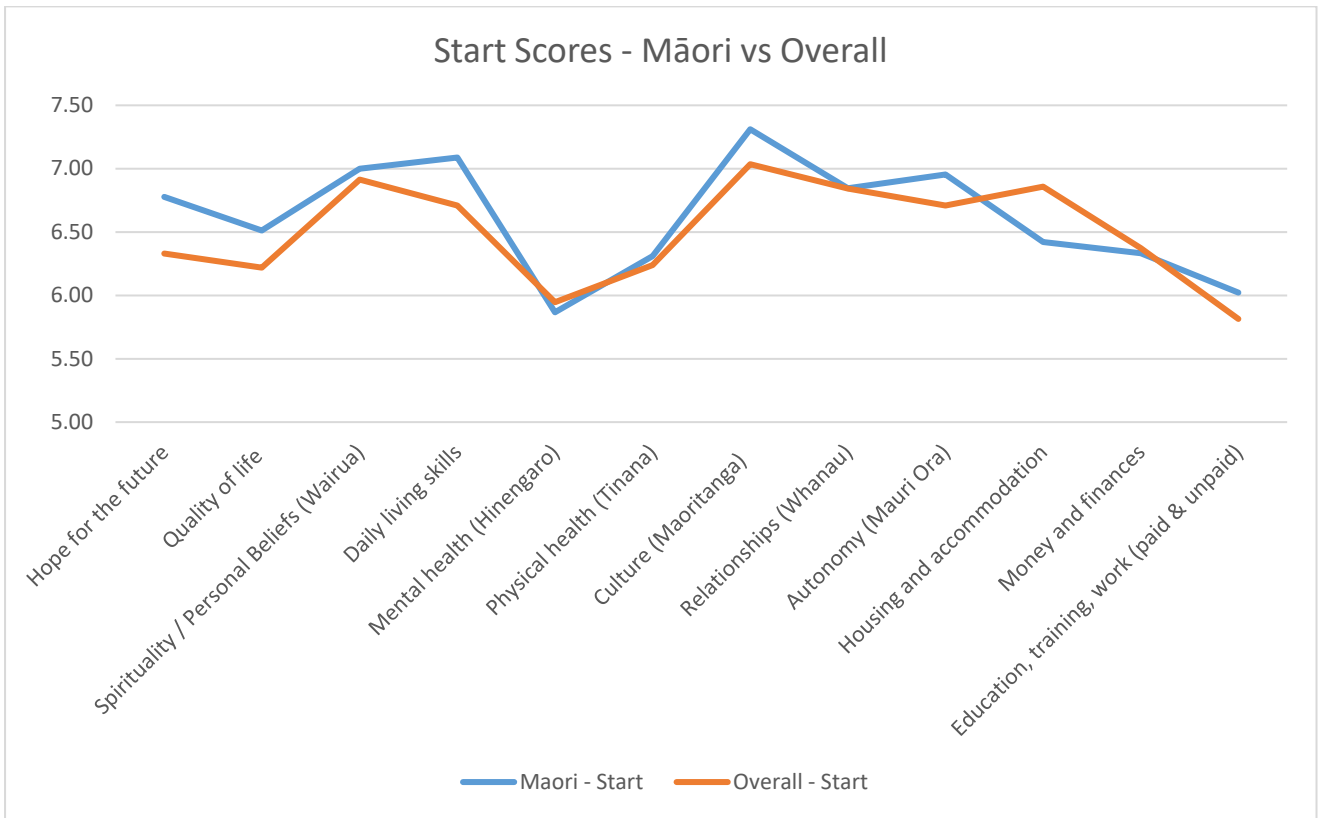
We collect data using a self-rating wellbeing matrix. The following data has been collected from clients over 18 months. It comes from 255 clients who had two assessments on a matrix that covers 12 wellbeing indicators.



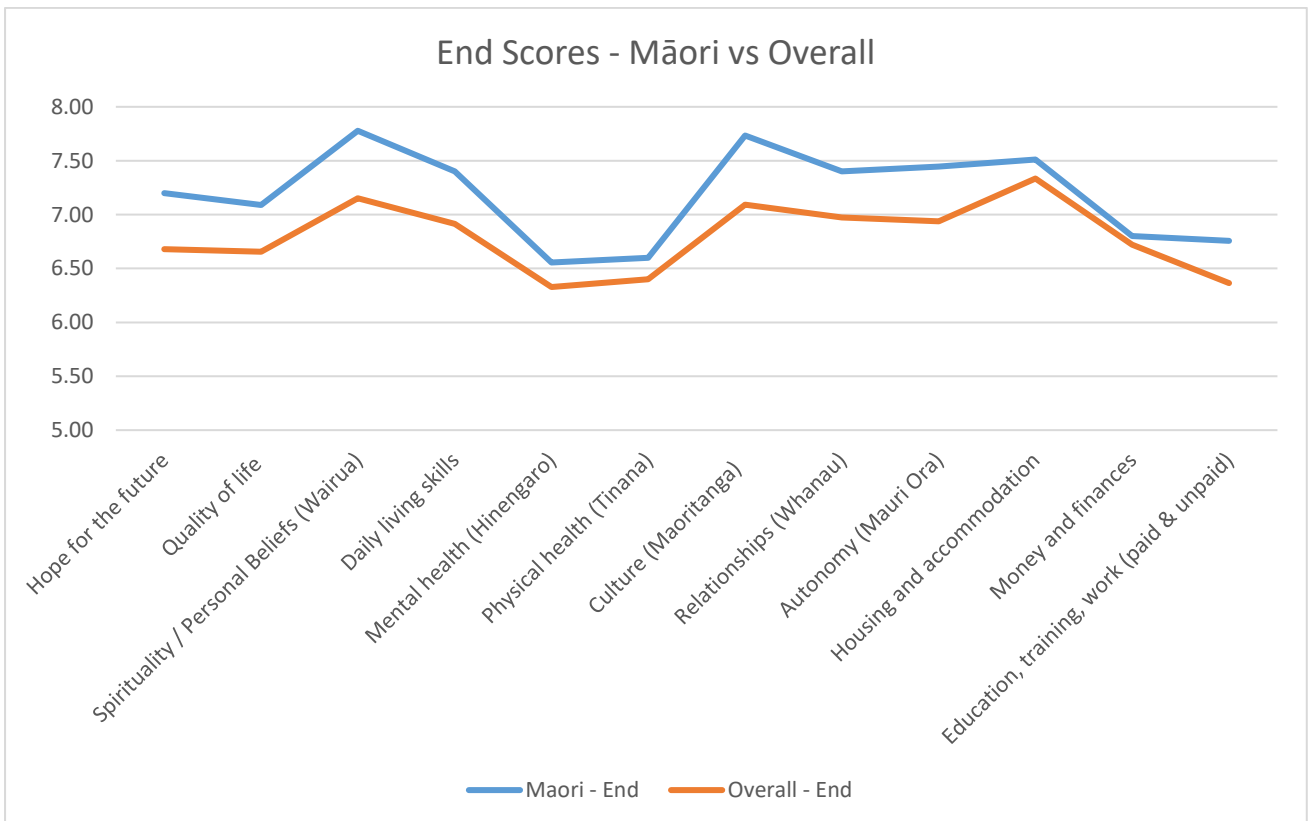
Graph 1: Māori wellbeing assessment scores at the start and end of the time period.

Māori clients rated their health and wellbeing higher across all indicators than they did at the start of their contact.

The graph below compares the start scores of Māori clients with all other clients. It shows a similar pattern at the beginning of contact with our services. This is compared with Graph 3 where Māori clients at the point of re-assessment consistently rated themselves higher than non-Māori clients.



Graph 2: Māori client versus all other clients (overall) scores at the beginning of service contact



Graph 3: Māori client versus all other clients (overall) scores at the reassessment point after service contact

What we have learnt

It starts at the top

Commitment to cultural competency starts at the top. In our case, that was with the board and then with the Group Executive Team. We always knew we needed to do better by Māori whaiora, who are most disadvantaged within our health and housing systems.

You cannot underestimate the role of strategy and values

We engaged staff in the development of our strategy and values, and they have become strong drivers of change. People know what the pou are, and they talk about and understand the values that drive us.

Change needs to be resourced

Applying resources is essential to ensure you have the leadership, capability, and training to support all staff and processes. Resourcing needs to go into visible positions, as well as to staff training and development.

Measure the change you want to see

Provide reports to decision makers that reflect the outcomes you are seeking. Make outcomes explicit, for example, the outcomes being achieved by ethnicity makes it clear who is getting what services and how well they are doing as a result of them. Likewise, measuring and reporting on the number of people in leadership roles or the engagement scores of staff by ethnicity can be powerful. That said, we do not always find this easy to do and it can be quite resource intensive.

Don't let up

There can be no let up once you have charted a course. It is disheartening to see how quickly things drift backwards if the attention, time, or resources are not available to maintain momentum.

Last Words

While we have a long way to go to be culturally competent in all parts of the organisation, we are proud of the changes at Emerge Aotearoa. We have moved from people questioning the importance of cultural competency training and the place of noho marae to staff embracing this as a core learning opportunity and experience. Like all organisations, we experience staff turnover, so keeping pace with training and skills is challenging. At times, some people question the need for a cultural lens and the importance of doing things in a different way. However, to be committed to our kaupapa, the messages must be consistent and told and re-told. We often struggle as a mainstream organisation to make and maintain local connections with iwi and hapū. We have learnt that you have to be relevant to your partners and not only receive but give back. Relationships are built on trust and doing what you commit to, and this takes time.

We have created an environment where people are more comfortable to engage in te reo Māori. We also know from experience that if a service creates good outcomes for Māori, it will do this for everyone. We are heartened by how far we have come in five years, and we are excited and challenged by the organisation we will be five years from now.

*“Kua tawhiti kē to haerenga mai, kia kore e haere tonu. He nui rawa o mahi, kia kore e mahi tonu.”
“You have come too far not to go further; you have done too much not to do more.”*

*Ta Himi Henare
Sir James Henare
Ngati Hine*