



Ngā Kōrerorero Stories of Odyssey



ODYSSEY



Together it's possible

We are exceptionally privileged at Odyssey to share in so many journeys each year, journeys of acceptance and growth, of aroha and connection.

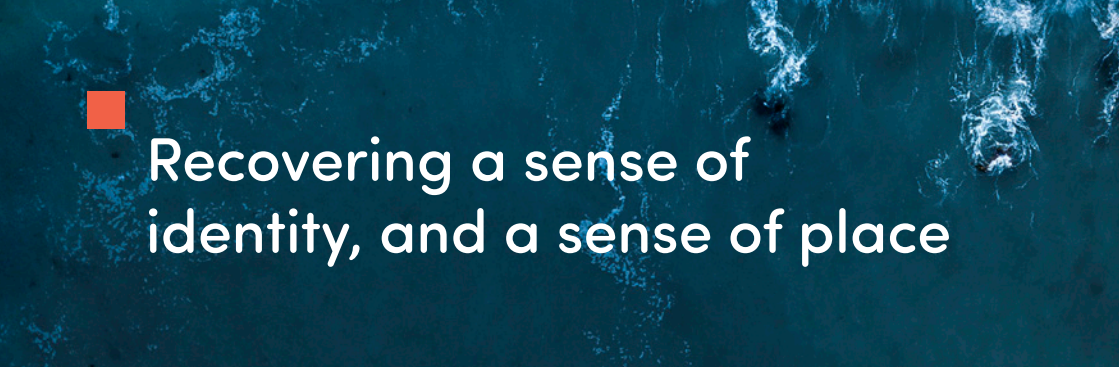
For many people, connecting with Odyssey is a turning point in their lives. Accessing our services provides the space and opportunity for reflection and discovery, for learning and practicing new skills, for working towards goals that support wellbeing.

This is true for tāngata whai ora and also for kaimahi.

Together, we learn, grow and challenge ourselves to move forward - with tika | trust, pono | honesty, kaitiaki | responsibility, manaaki | concern and aroha | love.

To celebrate our 40 years, we wanted to share with you some of our stories – stories where people, whānau and communities are connected and supported to live the lives they want.

Ngā mihi nui Melody. He tino rawe tō mahi! It's great to see the work you're doing with rangatahi in Waikato.



Recovering a sense of identity, and a sense of place

Melody Nepe took up the role of Cultural Adviser for Youth INTact at the beginning of 2020 to provide cultural support and education for kaimahi and taiohi. She knows from personal experience the strength that can be derived from a sense of identity, a sense of belonging and place.

Melody grew up in Papakura, in south Auckland, where she says she had limited understanding of te ao Māori and not as much connection to her whakapapa as she'd like to have had, but began reconnecting when she started studying her Bachelor of Arts in Māori and Pacific Development at Waikato

University. She was increasingly drawn to her own marae. "I knew my pepeha, I knew my whakapapa, but only here at my marae did I really start to acknowledge the maunga, and feel the ground, and put my feet in the river."

Melody initially started working in the AOD sector after leaving school, first at Whakatakapokai, a care and protection facility in Manurewa. "I left school without qualifications, but enjoyed that work so much I went on to study at MIT and AUT, and began working as a mental health support worker, as a community support worker and as a youth worker. Then I realised I needed to further my qualifications, that we could do better for Māori and Pasifika people."

"When you realise that you are part of a bigger picture, you realise you're not alone, and the loneliness that some of our youth feel starts to lift off. And they then start opening up to us as the support workers and to their whānau."



Youth INTact Waikato

Youth INTact is based on a model of care co-designed with rangatahi. It provides alcohol and other drug (AOD) support and education in the community and at schools for rangatahi aged 12-19 years old across the Waikato region.

We offer mobile outreach and walk-in services, and we work with community, sports, church and cultural groups to ensure rangatahi are supported in places that work best for them. Odyssey has supported 1,468 rangatahi through Youth INTact since the programme began in 2016.


She was halfway through her degree when, in 2017, she and her family moved to Huntly. With five children, studying, and being a long way from her parents and immediate family in Papakura, it was a demanding time. She was encouraged by both family and University teachers, and by a growing sense of place. "Moving down here was like giving me back my home lens. That gave me the courage to apply for this job. I just told myself, 'you can do it.'"

Working for Youth INTact has given her the chance to put what she has learned into action, to realise her dreams for a better future

for Māori and Pasifika. "I'm so honoured to be in this position," she says.

Melody leads group sessions among rangatahi, often young people who have inherited the damage caused by inter-generational substance use. Her focus is on reconnecting them to their Māori identity, where and who they have come from, to make them proud of who they are, to make good decisions in their own lives.

"So it's about showing them where Māori came from. The statistics show we are not where our people wanted us to be. They didn't sign



“I knew my pepeha, I knew my whakapapa, but only here at my marae did I really start to acknowledge the maunga, and feel the ground, and put my feet in the river.”

the Treaty for us to go that way. So I acknowledge all those that have gone before us and done so much mahi for us not to go that way.”

Among the groups she supports are the Te Rangimarie Girls’ Reference group at Huntly College that uses principles and practices of Mana Wāhine to empower participants, supporting them to build positive relationships and strong value systems. In October, she launched a fortnightly Kaupapa Māori drop-in group for young people in Hamilton to support learning of tikanga principles, mythology, purakau (stories), pepeha and visits to marae and other sites.

Her classes are aimed at educating young people not only of the consequences of drugs and alcohol, but what it is to be Māori, in a fun and interactive way. Many

of the young people she works with have grown up in Huntly, and their marae is nearby but they have had little connection with it.

Contemporary technologies have made this much easier than it once was. “I can use websites such as Māori Maps, so they can find their marae, their iwi identity, and then to learn their pepeha, and start learning about our people from there.”

Nurturing a sense of cultural identity is crucial in young Māori, she says, and young people love learning about it.

“When you realise that you are part of a bigger picture, you realise you’re not alone, and the loneliness that some of our youth feel starts to lift off. And they then start opening up to us as the support workers and to their whānau.”

Many thanks to Margo White for writing our 2020 Annual Review stories.