

Psychologist Gabrielle Bisseker explains the rationale behind E Tū Tāngata

Kia ora I'm Gabrielle. I'm a psychologist and the applied practice and research lead for E Tū Tāngata.

Up and down New Zealand, children and young people are struggling. This can be in their relationships with family and friends, at school, with how they view themselves and with their mental health. We wanted to do something about this.

We noticed an underlying culture in New Zealand of criticising and mocking others when they achieve. We are hypothesising that this culture, or social norm, known as Tall Poppy, is having an impact on how our children and young people develop and how they think of themselves and others. We suspect that this tall poppy culture is perpetuating some key risk factors that make our young people more vulnerable.

When the three strands of E Tū Tāngata are engaged with, we predict a shift in culture. These strands are supporting a conversation where people can reflect on their own value and how they interact and support others. When this is followed through, we believe the E Tū Tāngata mindset becomes a protective factor, meaning that children and young people are less vulnerable to struggling and increasing their ability to thrive.

We know an important factor to a young person's mental health is feeling connected and having a sense of belonging. There are greater positive outcomes for young people who have a positive peer group they feel a belonging to, and have a connection with at least one identified adult. This has a positive impact on their mental well-being, sense of self and emotional development.

When we are secure in our sense of self and know that our value is greater than what we are perceived to do or achieve, our ability to get alongside side others and encourage and support them is also much greater.

In Tall Poppy Culture, other people's success, particularly when we assume that it has not be earned or worked for, can become a threat and a reason to criticise and 'humble' them. Unfortunately, we don't see the whole of other's lives and our judgement on how deserved their success is or not, is more a reflection on how we feel about ourselves in relation to this success. E Tū Tāngata seeks to create conversation around supporting others in their success and separating other's success or achievement from our own.

We have been gathering data from those who have been using the strands of E Tū Tāngata. Reports show an increase in pro-social language used amongst peers, playgrounds have been described as calmer and nicer. Friendship issues have decreased. Sports teams have worked to define what success is for themselves, and can then work together towards this goal.

So many people have heard about the E Tū Tāngata conversation and have found it resonating with their personal experiences. It's almost as if collectively it is socially normal to 'pay people out' who are achieving or standing out from the crowd, yet individually we value the right for others to succeed and to celebrate this.

As E Tū Tāngata grows, we will be working to track people's experiences and gather information, to ensure that it is indeed a protective factor that promotes building a stronger relationship with others, increases our sense of belonging and gives a stronger sense of who we intrinsically are.