

# Remy (she/her): Whakawhanaungatanga

## Remy's kōrero

Remy was strong and had always worked hard to hold her own. She was proud that she had a part-time job and worked hard at school to do her best. She felt that she drew on an inner source of confidence and was happy to be with others. Remy was great in a group situation but she didn't always need to be in the spotlight.

She felt the same way about who she was. Remy knew about how she thought of herself but didn't always share this with others. Sometimes it was because she didn't feel safe or comfortable; sometimes it was because others had already made assumptions about her and it was just too much effort convincing them otherwise.

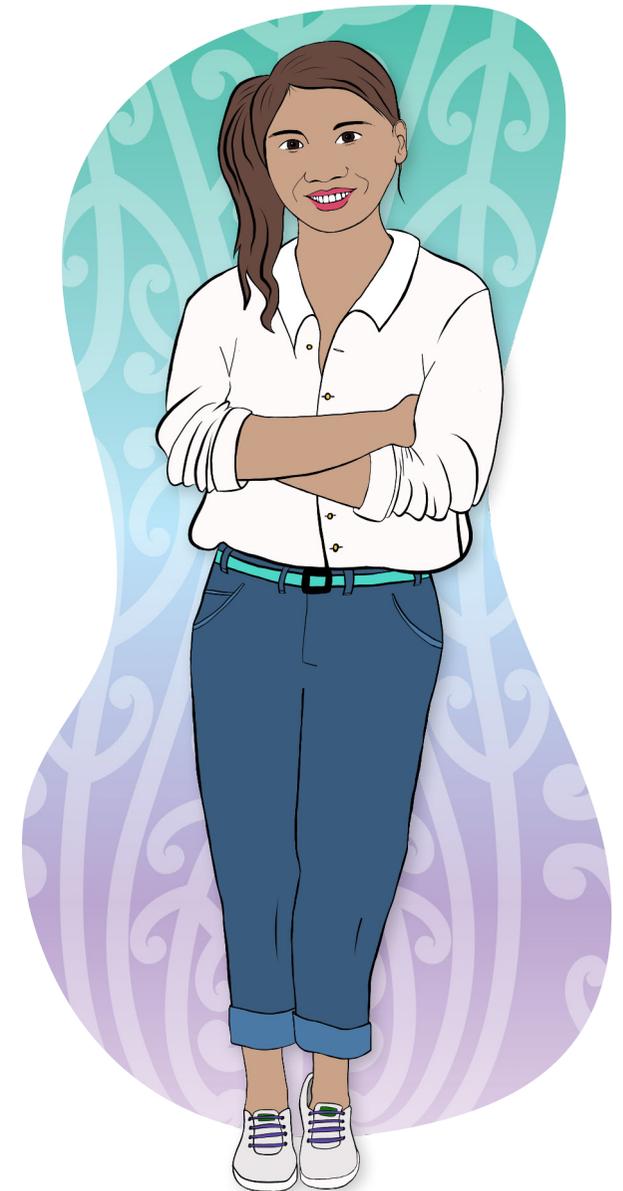
This is what made the wānanga uncomfortable at first. Seeing others share things about themselves and how it made them emotional wasn't something she was used to. But, seeing their honesty made her feel comfortable to share things about herself. In fact, she was surprised at what she told others and what they told her.

The wānanga space was different: people were open, honest and encouraged to share what they saw in each other – this challenged how she saw herself. She made a conscious effort to be part of the space at the wānanga and let herself be vulnerable – tough when you are the strong one. Also, she let herself take in compliments and the positive views others held of her; it made her feel whakamā, but this was eased by the fact she could be kind right back!

### Vulnerability, collective, intentional space

We all have feelings. You can be mean to someone, and you won't know it hurts them on the outside, but it could really affect them on the inside. And you had no idea. And it's sort of the same about the LGBT community. You just need to be kind of generous to everyone. You don't know what's going on in other people's lives.

- Remy



## Whakaaro

Remy's story teaches us about the importance of kindness and the power of leaning into vulnerability.

While no stranger to how unfeeling people can be, Remy doesn't see herself as aggrieved or as a victim. It would be a very human response for Remy to choose to use her words to wound, but instead, she uses them to give life.

Embodying whakawhanaungatanga, Remy encourages others and affirms their strengths. Her kindness often invites connection from others in return, and as she has lived on the margins, this can sometimes be difficult to accept.

Living life this way takes courage and the willingness to be vulnerable; sharing with others a little of ourselves in the hope that they will see our humanity and respond in kind. This can be emotionally charged, and as the rangatahi experienced, crying together fosters deep connection. When we lower our walls and connect on a relational level we learn more about each other and, as Remy points out, begin to see ourselves in new, empowering ways.

It is hard to connect on a relational level when you don't feel safe, and unfortunately for many rangatahi takatāpui, schools are often not safe spaces. Schools can be exclusive, and those in power need to hear and act upon the voices of rangatahi takatāpui to achieve an inclusive redesign of education.

### Whaiwhakaaro

- Rangatahi takatāpui rarely get to enter into spaces in which they feel safe, heard, and able to be their full authentic selves.
- Rangatahi takatāpui are seeking meaningful, authentic connection, and are courageously vulnerable in their pursuit of this.
- There is a wealth of information on and from marginalised communities who have been trying to get their voices heard for many years.

### Pātai/Whakapātaritari

1. Is space provided for mentoring where rangatahi takatāpui feel safe and are able to trust teachers?
2. Is there access to spaces in and out of school where rangatahi takatāpui feel they belong?
3. Are the spaces affirming of diverse cultures and other ways of being than those seen in the dominant culture of 'white spaces'?



### Supporting quotes

**I was a bit surprised what other people thought of me. I definitely didn't see that in myself. It really made me open my eyes and I was like, oh, I can actually, you know, do it.**

- Remy

**As soon as I saw some people start to cry at the wānanga, I thought maybe this wasn't so bad. And everyone opening up - I never thought some of the people there would open up to a big group of people like us. Then I thought, I am in the right place.**

- Pirika

**I don't know how to get to that point of emotional understanding with anyone at school. This happened at the wānanga because of a cultural aspect - with other people knowing that I can just be 'me'.**

- May

