

# Rangatahi peer crowds in Aotearoa

Research on young people's values, relationships and worlds, and how they influence their physical activity



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TE HERENGA WAKA



**SPORT**  
NEW ZEALAND  
IHI AOTEAROA



# **This report includes research that helps us understand rangatahi values, relationships and worlds, and how these factors influence their physical activity.**

A key part of Sport New Zealand's strategy is to support the active recreation and sport sector to provide quality opportunities and experiences that meet the needs, wants and aspirations of rangatahi. This research helps us move beyond basic demographics to gain a deeper understanding of rangatahi.

Our Active NZ survey, a nationwide participation survey of young people and adults, indicates a decline in participation levels among rangatahi aged 15 to 17 years, often with lasting effects into adulthood. Our focus, along with the sector, is on reducing this decline.

The next step is to incorporate peer crowd groupings into the Active NZ survey. This will help us understand the size of each peer crowd and their attitudes towards physical activity.

By using the insights in this report and those from the Active NZ surveys, we can better understand and think differently about rangatahi, improving how we communicate and engage with them. This will enable us to improve the opportunities and experiences we offer.

In this report, the term 'young people' refers to individuals aged 12 to 24 years.





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## What are 'peer crowds'?

Young people are often grouped by demographics such as age, gender and ethnicity. However, many other factors affect whether young people see messages or activities as relevant to them.

'Peer crowds' are broad groupings of young people who share similar behaviours, values and norms (creating distinct youth cultures). They can be used alongside traditional demographics to communicate and engage more effectively with young people.

Young people often feel more connected to certain peer crowds – seeing messages or activities associated with those peer crowds as being for people 'like them'. In turn, some peer crowds may feel unrelatable and messages or activities associated with those peer crowds will be seen as directed at 'other people'.

We all make sense of the noise and opportunities around us by subconsciously sorting what is relevant to us and what is meant for others. Peer crowds offer a way to tailor advertising, messaging and programme design to better understand and cater to diverse groups of young people.





# Why we did this research

Research shows that for some young people, peer connections can become as important as family connections. Additionally, young people’s friend groups can strongly influence their physical activity levels and the types of activities they participate in.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

This report is an update of the 2016 New Zealand Peer Crowds, created by the [Rescue Agency](#) and Te Puna Whakaiti Pāmamae Kai Whakapiri NZ Drug Foundation. It aims to better understand the different experiences young people have with physical activity and the influence of their peers.

By understanding young people’s values, differences and what matters to them, we can better tailor messaging and interventions to support them in being active in the ways they want to be.

- 1 [Parental and peer social support is associated with healthier physical activity behaviors in adolescents: a cross-sectional analysis of Texas School Physical Activity and Nutrition \(TX SPAN\) data | BMC Public Health | Full Text \(biomedcentral.com\)](#)
- 2 [Peer Support and Role Modelling Predict Physical Activity Change among Adolescents over Twelve Months | SpringerLink](#)
- 3 [Do peers matter? A review of peer and/or friends’ influence on physical activity among American adolescents - ScienceDirect](#)



# What we did

To update the report, we worked with the Rescue Agency, Te Puna Whakaiti Pāmamae Kai Whakapiri NZ Drug Foundation and Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington to hear from 151 young people, consisting of:

**88** **teenagers**  
15–17 years

**63** **young adults**  
18–24 years

Through interviews and focus groups, we asked participants to sort photos of young people into friend groups and describe what they thought defined each group and what was important to them. We also asked them about the group(s) they personally identified with. This approach allowed us to prioritise the voices and views of those who self-identified with specific groups over those who did not.

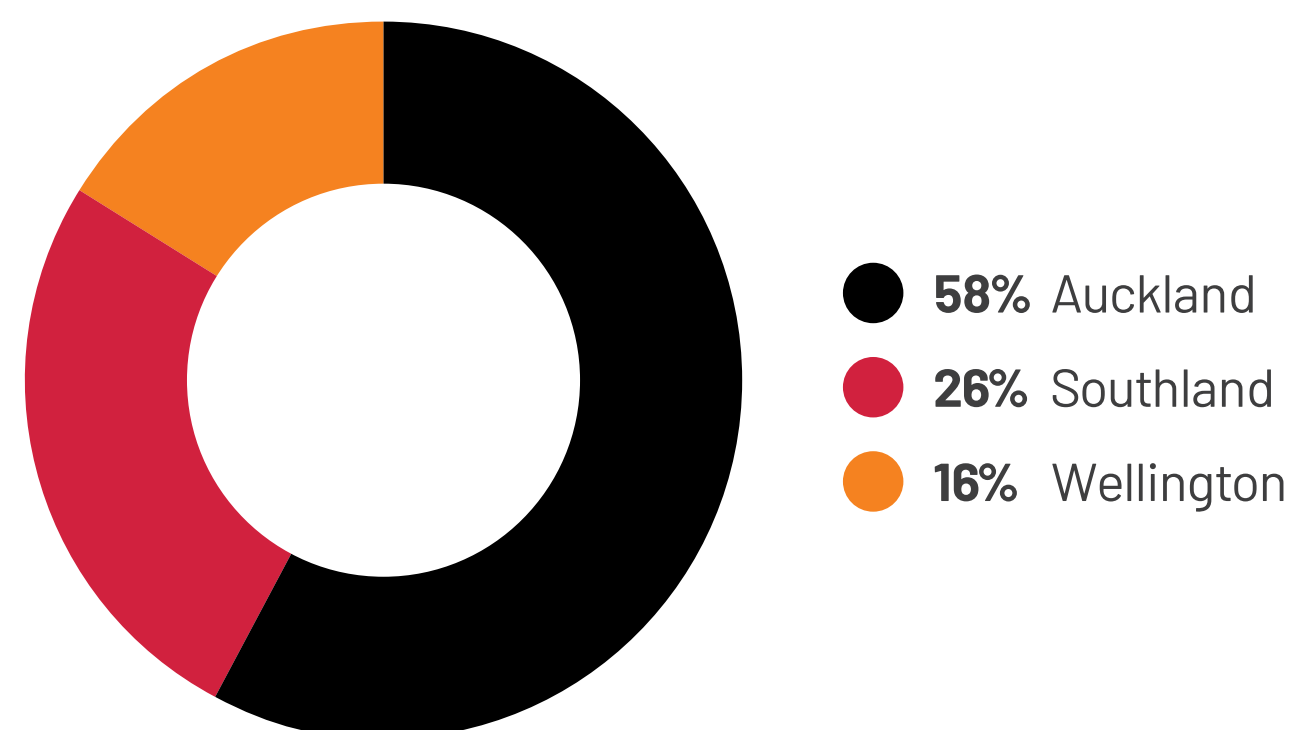
We then looked for patterns from the 151 young people, which we used to update the 2016 peer crowds report.

Ethics approval for this research was facilitated by Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington.

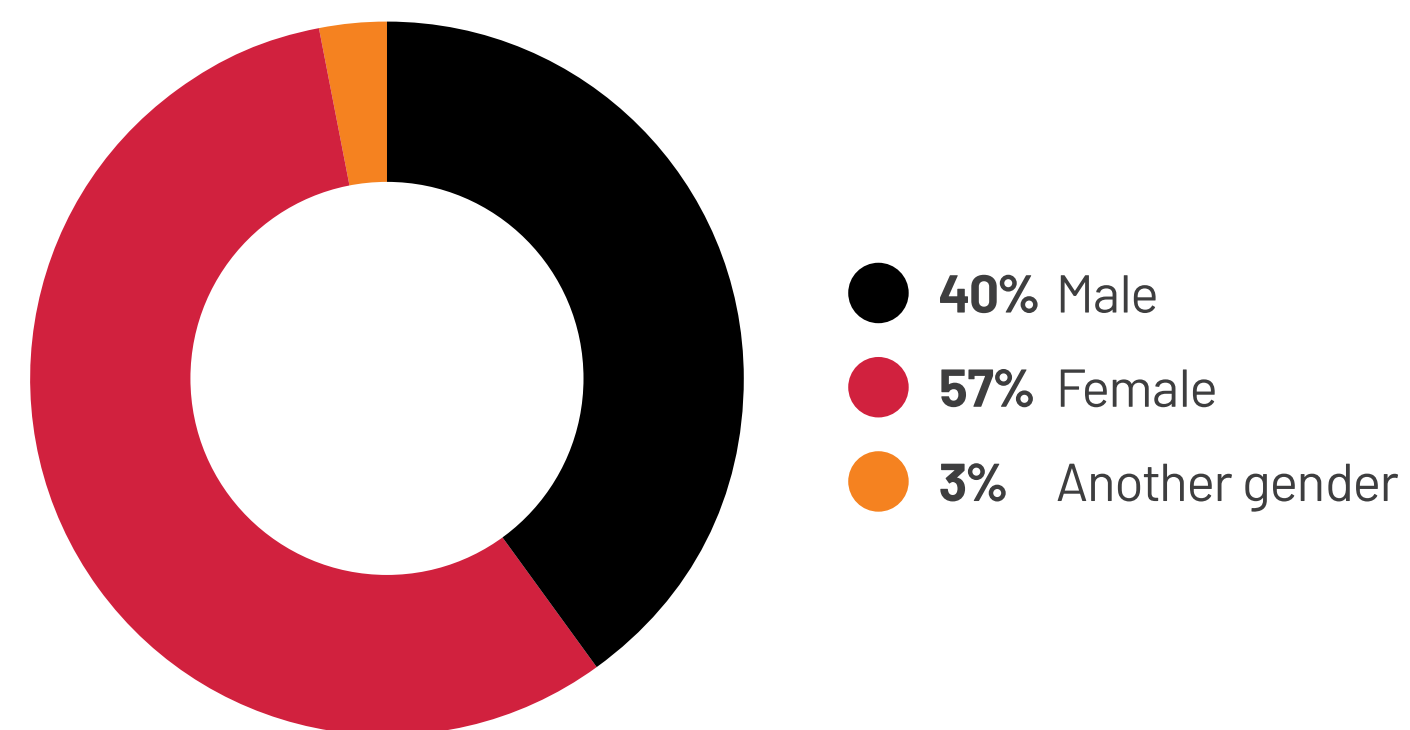


# Who we heard from

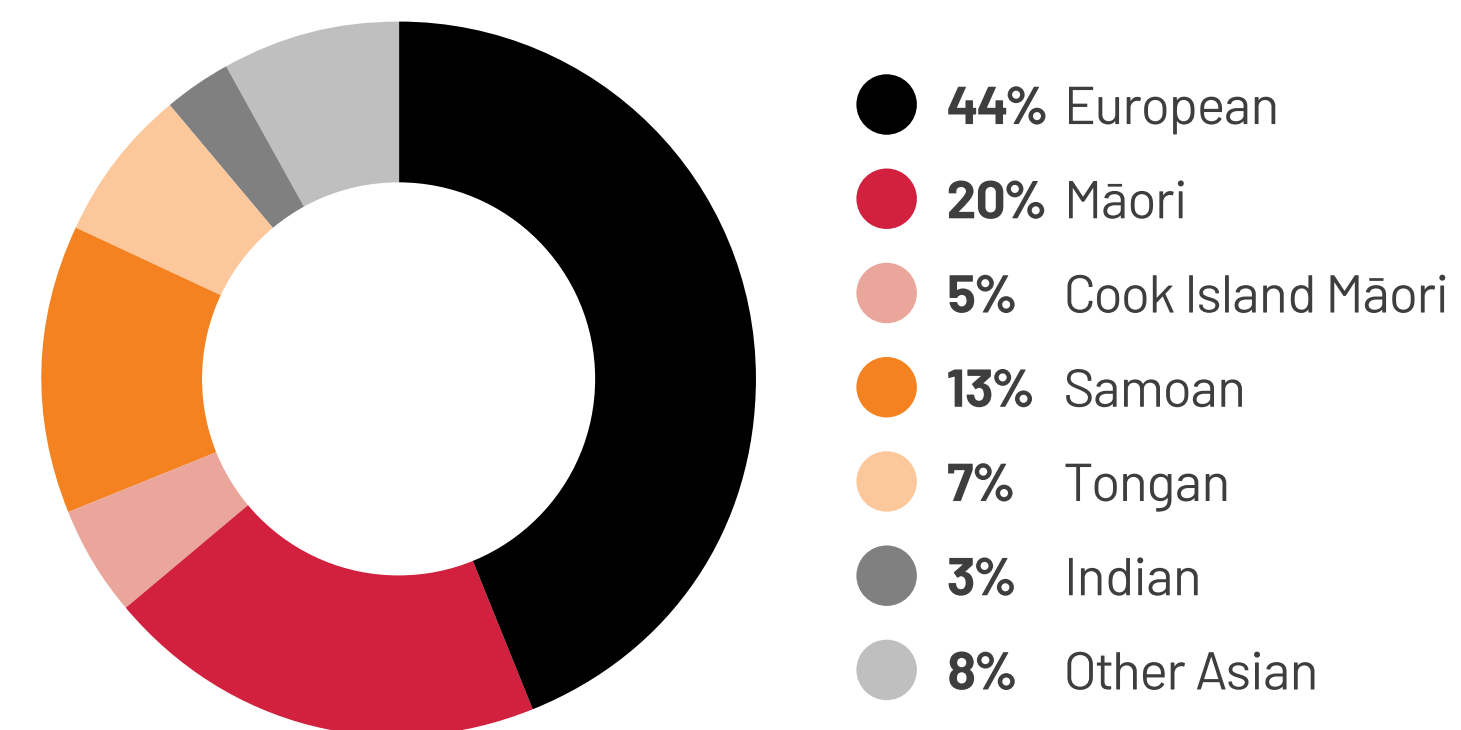
Location



Gender



Ethnicity







## What the research tells us

The research identifies the main peer crowds in Aotearoa, highlighting the diversity among teenagers and young adults.

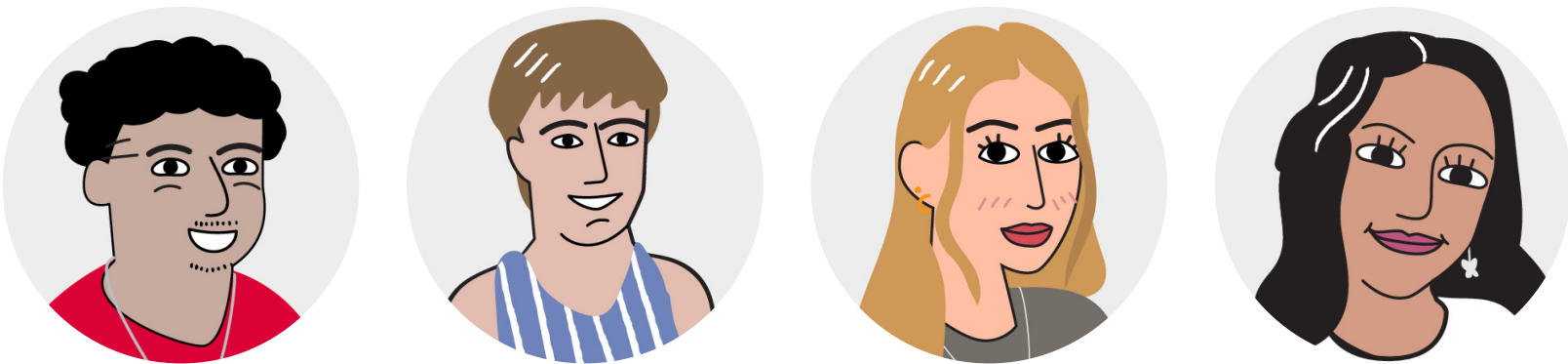
Refer to the following pages for insights into each peer crowd, including their perceived values, interests and activities.

This section includes a range of terms teenagers and young adults use to describe themselves – not every term is used by every individual. It also features illustrations of young people that reflect the photos used in the research. These images give a sense of the young people who make up each peer crowd.



Peer crowd

Popular



Terms used

Popular  
Party  
Sporty  
Outgoing  
Social media  
Fashionable  
Rich  
Attractive  
Influencers

Value statement and description

**Perceived to place strong value on social perceptions and appearance**

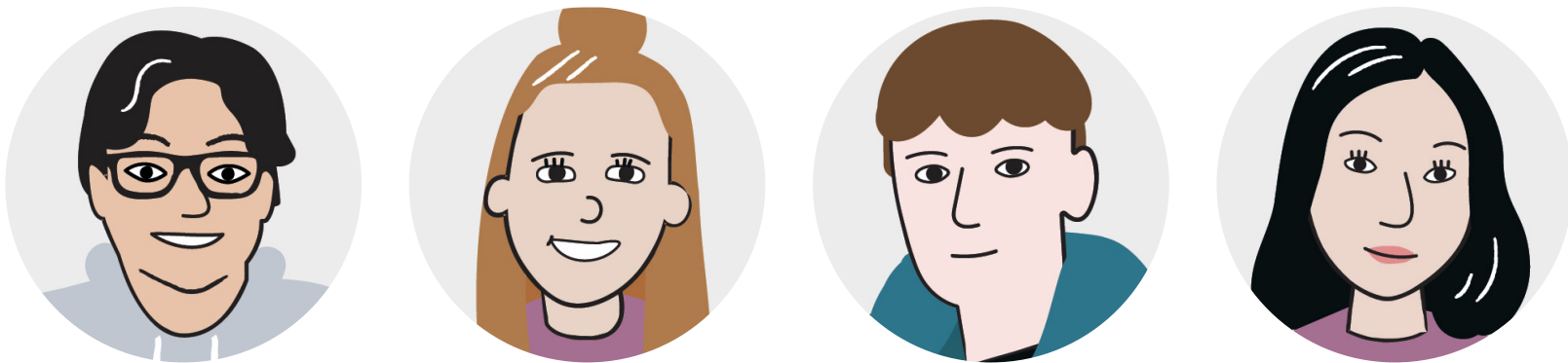
Value feeling seen and validated by peers. Highly engaged in social media and partying. Focused on appearance, fashion, and following and setting trends. May take cues from other peer crowds but can be seen as exclusive.

**Subgroup: Sporty all-rounders**

Perceived to be less exclusive and more welcoming than the general popular crowd. Engaged in traditional team sports, for example, rugby, netball or basketball.

Peer crowd

Mainstream



Terms used

Nice  
Happy  
Kind  
Comfy  
Successful  
Quiet  
Studious  
Supportive

Value statement and description

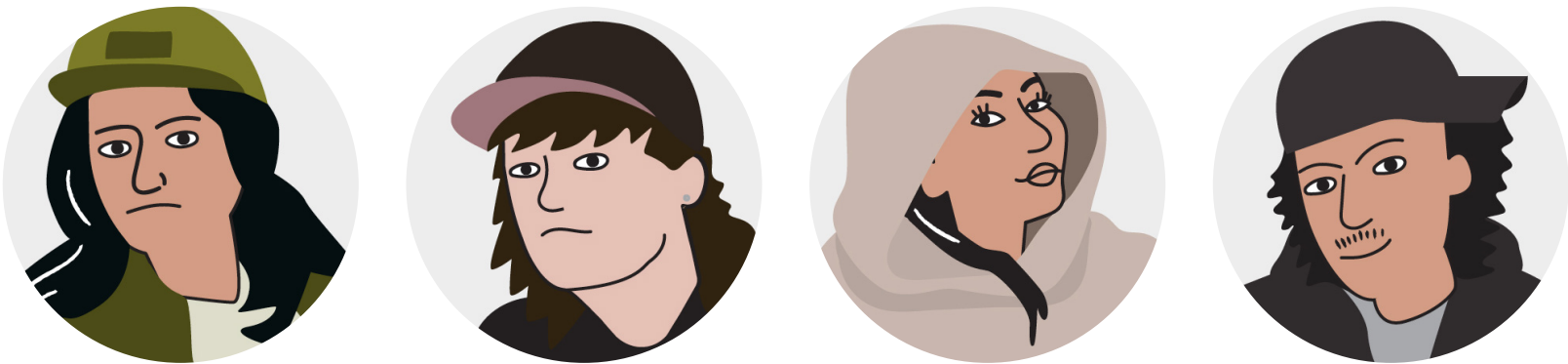
**Perceived to place strong value on positive behaviours and academic success**

Seen as approachable and friendly; focused on success instead of trends. Have strong relationships with a small group of friends. Enjoy wholesome activities such as family BBQs, racket sports and gaming (online and board games).



Peer crowd

# Roots and Resilience



Terms used

Chill  
Funny  
Vibes  
Confident  
Struggles  
Culture  
Family  
Friends

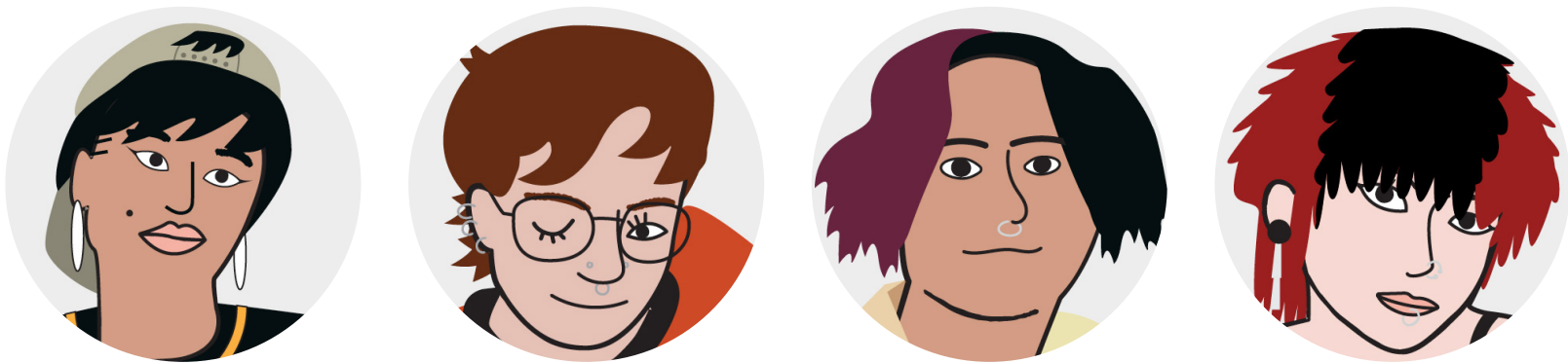
Value statement and description

**Perceived to place strong value on family and community**

Connected by shared experiences of adversity. Values loyal friendship and family connection. Perceived as less academic and more interested in practical/manual career pathways. Sometimes perceived as resisting or challenging those in power. Enjoy playing sport and socialising in small friendship groups. It can include groups of young people connected through their shared culture.

Peer crowd

# Alternative



Terms used

LGBTQIA+  
Grunge  
Indie  
Skaters  
Creative  
Woke  
Festivals  
Activism  
Bands  
Rock music

Value statement and description

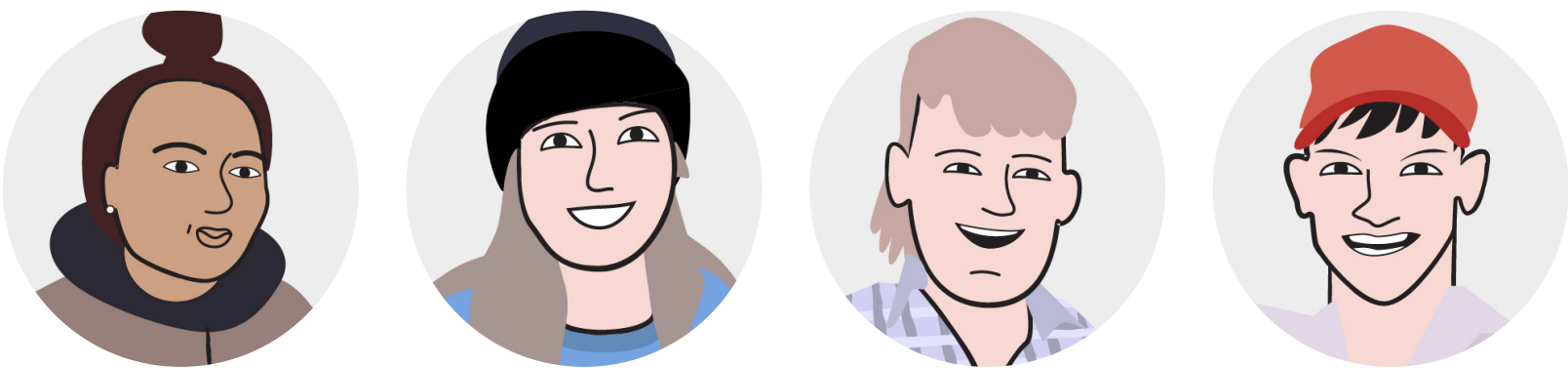
**Perceived to place strong value on creative expression**

Care about expressing their individuality, creativity, and speaking up for what they believe in. They are interested in social justice causes, music and the arts, including visual arts, theatre and dance. Includes a spectrum of people who have ‘found their tribe’ versus people who are perceived as ‘different’ and therefore can be isolated.



Peer crowd

Rural



Terms used

Outdoors  
Rural  
Mullet  
Farmers  
Practical  
Adventure

Value statement and description

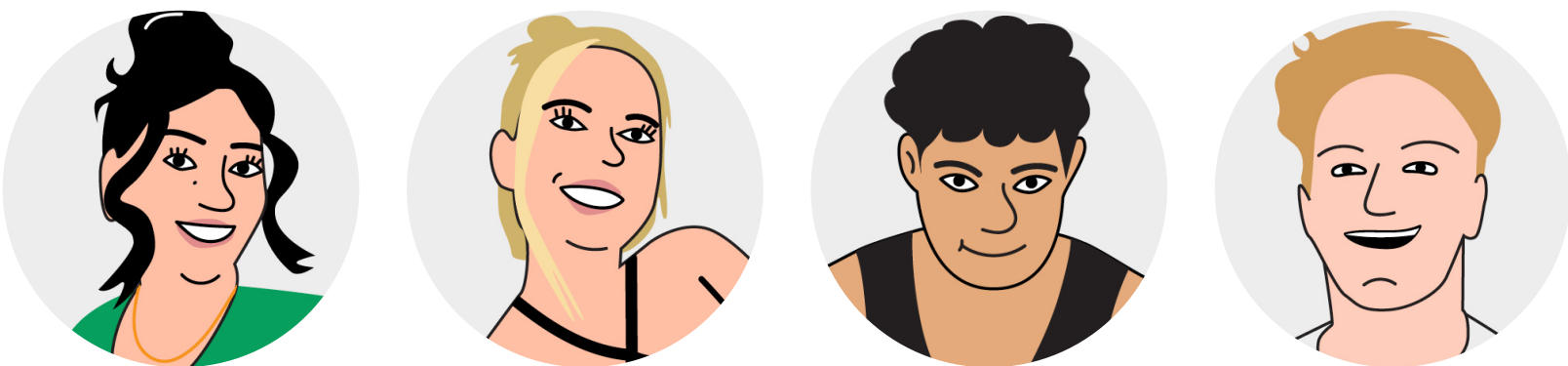
**Perceived to place strong value on a rural lifestyle including the outdoors and close community**

May come from close-knit communities with strong ties to the land. Engaged in agriculture and outdoor activities, such as hunting, fishing, horse riding and motorcross. Value family, tradition and community. May face challenges such as limited access to jobs. Proud of their rural roots; blending traditional values with modern influences through digital connectivity.



Peer crowd

Partier



Terms used

Influencers  
Party  
Popular  
Extroverted  
Social media  
Make-up  
Trends  
Gym  
Clubbing

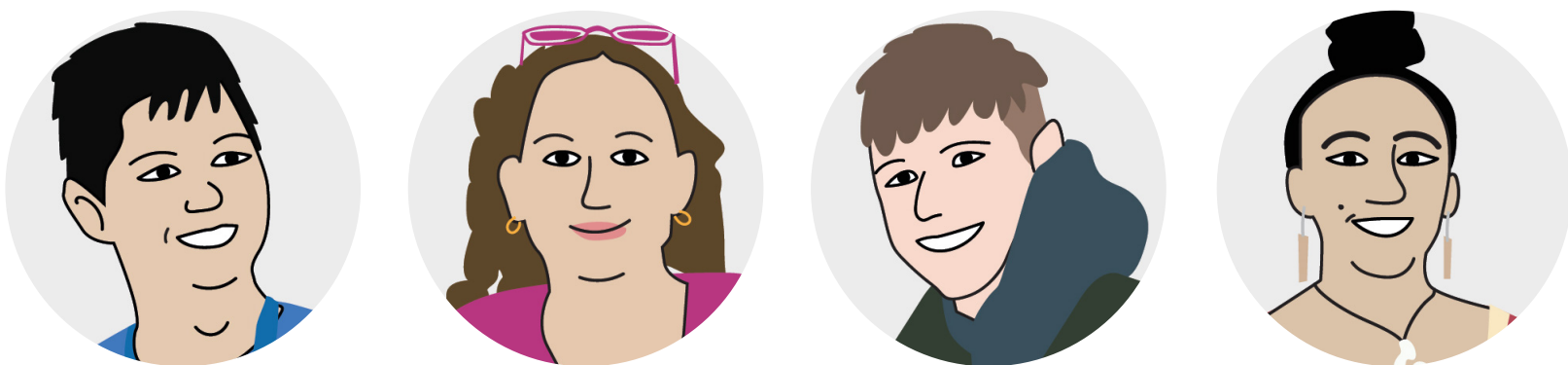
Value statement and description

**Perceived to place strong value on social status and having fun**

Active in the party/clubbing scene and on social media. Enjoy going to the gym and fitness workouts, with a focus on physical appearance and body image. Have an interest in fashion, trends and shopping. Seen as fun, sociable and outgoing.

Peer crowd

Mainstream



Terms used

Friendly  
Normal  
Genuine  
Chill  
Casual  
Community  
Wholesome  
Comfy

Value statement and description

**Perceived to place strong value on family and life experiences**

Seen as friendly and low key/casual. Have jobs and/or go to university, but not strongly career driven. Tend to spend time at home with friends, family, significant others and pets. Perceived as wholesome. Participate in sports and play games.

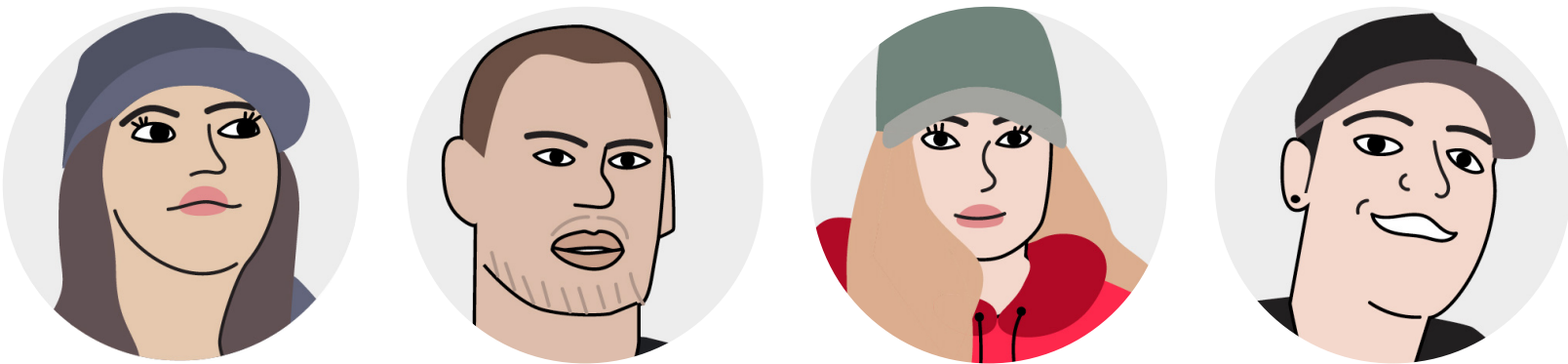
**Sub-group: Academic**

Perceived to place high value on academic success. Often more introverted, preferring online games or activities done in smaller groups.



Peer crowd

Roots and Resilience



Terms used

Lived experience  
Mana  
Pride  
Cultural advocates  
Family  
Relaxed  
Funny  
Loyal  
Vibes

Value statement and description

**Perceived to place strong value on friends and community**

Connected by shared experiences of adversity. Values loyal friendship and strong family connection. They are more likely to be employed in manual jobs. Enjoy playing sport and socialising in small friendship groups. It can include groups of young people connected through their shared culture.

**Sub-group: Heavy Roots and Resilience**

Often perceived as resisting or challenging those in power. Similar values to Roots and Resilience but may also become involved in dissocial activities. Terms used include gang affiliated, hard and tough.

Peer crowd

Alternative



Terms used

LGBTQIA+  
Bold  
Skaters  
Quirky  
Artsy  
Creative  
Activists  
Passionate  
Queer  
Music  
Gigs

Value statement and description

**Perceived to place strong value on creative expression**

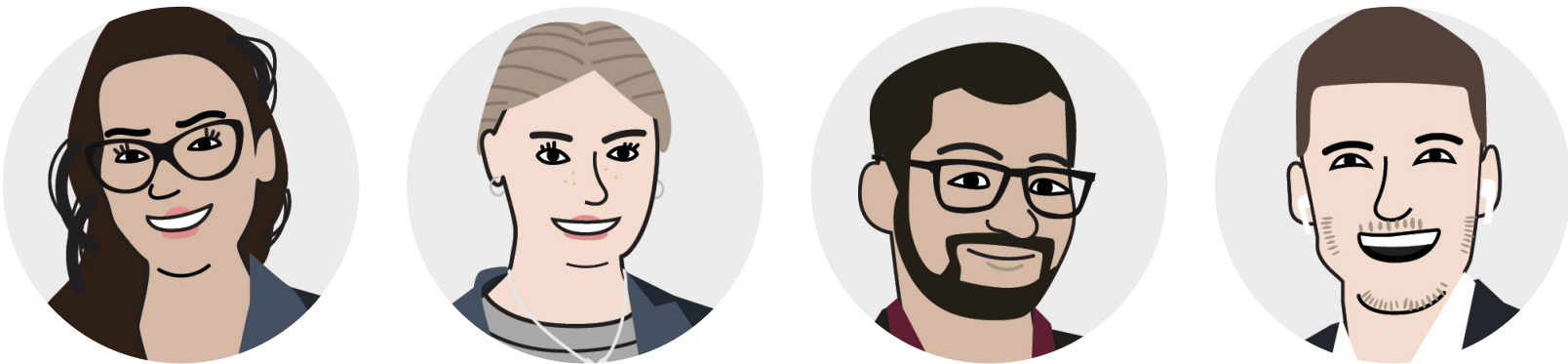
Values expressing themselves through style and music. Seen to advocate for social justice causes. Enjoys thrift shopping, attending music events and the arts. Physical activity includes participating in ‘counterculture’ sports such as surfing, skating and climbing.

This peer crowd contains a variety of subgroups, on a spectrum of people who have ‘found their tribe’ versus people who may be perceived as ‘different’ and therefore isolated. There is also a spectrum of ‘light’ to ‘heavy’ aesthetic, ranging from styles like vintage clothing and indie music (light) to bold makeup, piercings, and goth or metal music (heavy).



Peer crowd

Young Professional



Terms used

Educated  
Business  
Finance bros  
Corporate  
Entrepreneurial  
Ambitious  
Confident  
Aspiring  
Sophisticated

Value statement and description

**Perceived to place strong value on career and health**  
  
Seen as goal-oriented and responsible, with well-paid office jobs enabling an affluent lifestyle. Attend networking events to advance their social sphere and build connections. Seen as confident, ambitious, health conscious and physically active. Subscribe to clean and balanced living.

Peer crowd

Tradies



Terms used

Tradies  
Workers  
Manual labour  
Blokey  
Laid back  
Hometown  
Not afraid of getting their hands dirty

Value statement and description

**Perceived to place strong value on self-reliance and a strong work ethic**  
  
Engaged in manual labour or trade roles. Values financial freedom and career progression from apprentice to business owner. May have pursued trade qualifications rather than a degree. Seen as being active in sport, hunting, fishing and using recreational vehicles such as jet skis, boats and trucks.



Peer crowd

Outdoorsy



Terms used

Outdoorsy  
Adventurous  
Explorers  
Active  
Healthy  
Travellers  
Motivated  
Road trips

Value statement and description

**Perceived to place strong value on exploring the outdoors and environmentalism**

Motivated to be outdoors and passionate advocates for nature. Perceived as physically active through adventurous outdoor activities and recreation. Enjoy making social connections through shared interests. May overlap with the mainstream and alternative peer crowds. ‘Mainstream outdoorsy’ terms include tramping clubs, outdoor leaders and camping. ‘Alternative outdoorsy’ terms include hippies, vans and beachy.



# Changes in peer crowds since 2016

## Language has changed

How young people describe themselves and different peer crowds has changed since 2016. For example, teenagers often see 'emo' as a negative term, and for young adults, 'hipster' is no longer used. 'Hip Hop' was not used as a peer crowd term by either teenagers or young adults. Language also varies regionally and will often include references to specific locations or venues when describing peer crowds. For example, the peer crowd term, 'Alternative young adults Wellington' was described as 'Newtown'.

## Preferences and behaviours have changed

Social media preferences have changed with TikTok now being the most widely used channel. Since 2016, the term 'influencer' has emerged to describe how different peer crowds engage with social media. For example, the 'Popular' and 'Partier' peer crowds are more likely to follow influencers and engage in social media trends.

## Some peer crowds are shifting

Many of the 2016 peer crowds still exist but have shifted. For example, 'Young Professionals' have become more varied and are not always corporate in style. Words used to describe 'Young Professionals' now include entrepreneurs and creatives. 'Hip Hop' (for both teenagers and young adults) has less of an association with Hip Hop music and style, so has been renamed to 'Roots and Resilience' to better reflect what we heard from the young people. The 'Alternative' peer crowds have a much stronger association with social justice causes and activism, as well as strong links to the LGBTQIA+ community.

## New peer crowds are emerging

Some new peer crowds have emerged such as 'Rural' for teenagers and 'Tradies' and 'Outdoorsy' for young adults.

## Some peer crowds have remained very stable

The descriptions and values of the 'Popular', 'Partier' and 'Mainstream' peer crowds have remained largely unchanged since 2016.

See the Appendix for a summary of the 2016 peer crowds.





## Next steps

Peer crowds will be incorporated into the Active NZ surveys. As part of the surveys, we'll ask young people to select photos of young people who might be similar to or different from their own friendship group. This will help us understand the size of each peer crowd and their attitudes to physical activity. It will also give us a deeper understanding of rangatahi. We'll share the survey results on Sport NZ's website.

Together, we can use this information to make active recreation and sport activities more relevant for all young people. It can help us communicate and engage with young people in a way that resonates with them and different groups, enabling us to improve the opportunities and experiences we offer them.

If you have any questions about this research, please contact [activenz@sportnz.org.nz](mailto:activenz@sportnz.org.nz)



# Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the following organisations, secondary schools and their amazing students – we couldn't have done it without you.

- [Te Puna Whakaiti Pāmamae Kai Whakapiri – NZ Drug Foundation](#)
- [Community Action Youth and Drugs \(CAYAD\) – Auckland Council](#)
- [Rescue Agency](#)
- [Curative](#)
- [Sport Waitākere](#)
- [CLM Community Sport](#)
- [Active Southland](#)
- Massey High School, Henderson
- Heretaunga College, Upper Hutt
- Otahuhu College, Ōtāhuhu
- Aurora College, Invercargill
- Menzies College, Southland



# Appendix

## A summary of 2016 teenage peer crowds

Peer crowds

### Popular

### Mainstream

### Hip Hop

### Alternative

Value statements and descriptions

**Perceived to place strong value on social perceptions**

Values feeling seen and validated by peers; highly engaged in social media and partying. Focused on appearance, fashion and trends. May take cues from other peer crowds but can sometimes be seen as exclusive.

**Subgroup: Sporty**

Perceived to be more goal orientated than the general popular crowd. Participate in organised team sports and show this in their fashion style and social media presence.

**Perceived to place strong value on academic success**

Seen as approachable and friendly, focused on career pathways instead of trends. Has strong relationships with a small group of friends and is less likely to engage in partying or risky behaviour. They can be seen as reserved.

**Subgroup: Chill**

Perceived to be a predominantly Māori or Pacific subgroup of Mainstream who are laidback, chill, and easy going. Generally considered to be responsible, goal and school orientated and strongly connected to family and cultural values.

**Perceived to place strong value on family and community**

Values loyal friendships and respecting elders. Influenced by Hip Hop culture, resonating with messages about overcoming struggles in life. Often actively plays/follows rugby and attends church or community events. Seen to live life in the moment.

**Subgroup: Troublemaker**

Perceived to be more rebellious than the rest of the Hip Hop crowd. Perceived to act tough, party frequently and regularly get into fights or start trouble.

**Perceived to place strong value on creative expression**

Cares about expressing their individuality/experiences, including appearance. Strong interest in alternative/rock music and sharing their knowledge/interests via social media. Seen to vary from 'light' to 'heavy' alternative.

**There are several subgroups.**



A summary of 2016 young adult peer crowds

Peer crowds

Partier	Mainstream	Hip Hop	Hipster	Professionals
<p>Value statements and descriptions</p> <p><b>Perceived to place strong value on social status and having fun</b></p> <p>Focused on physical appearance, including fashion and peer attention and/or perceptions. Active in the party/town clubbing scene and on social media. Perceived as confident and fun loving.</p> <p><b>Subgroup: Uni partier</b></p> <p>Young adults who attend university and live close to or on campus. Perceived to be motivated by having a good time, valuing cheaper alcohol and casual house parties more than being seen in fashionable clothes in nightclubs.</p>	<p><b>Perceived to place strong value on family and life experiences</b></p> <p>Seen as friendly and low key/casual. Have jobs and/or go to university, but not strongly career-driven. Tend to spend time at home with friends, family, significant others and pets. Perceived as conservative/wholesome.</p> <p><b>Subgroup: Chill</b></p> <p>Described as "laid back," "low-key," and "tightknit." Perceived to value family and community.</p>	<p><b>Perceived to place strong value on friends and community</b></p> <p>Values loyal friendships and respecting elders. Influenced by Hip Hop culture and swag style, attends church with family. Seen to live life day-to-day, frequently partying and connecting with friends, their community and family.</p> <p><b>Subgroup: Family Gang</b></p> <p>Perceived to act tough or aggressive and get into trouble more frequently. Seen to be strongly connected with cousins or very close friends who are like family.</p>	<p><b>Perceived to place strong value on creative expression</b></p> <p>Values being unique, and expressing themselves through style/music. Fashion-conscious, and values local/craft. Frequents coffee shops, op shops, quieter bars and music festivals.</p> <p><b>Subgroup: Rocker</b></p> <p>Perceived to be one of the subgroups for this group that was also described as Bogan. Perceived to be or pretend to be defiant towards authority.</p>	<p><b>Perceived to place strong value on career and health</b></p> <p>Seen as goal-oriented, responsible, with well-paying office jobs enabling an affluent lifestyle. Attend networking events to advance their social sphere. Most health conscious, active group, subscribing to clean and sustainable living.</p>



