



# MANA WAHINE

**Building an understanding of women's  
experience of homelessness in the  
Auckland City Centre**

Commissioned by Te Miringa Trust,  
produced by

**LIFEWISE**

*turning lives around*

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly and most importantly, we would like to thank the women who contributed their stories to this report. We acknowledge your pain and your strength. We thank you.

Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou wāhine toa.

We would also like to acknowledge the Auckland City Mission and Sisters of Mercy New Zealand, Nga Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa who have provided financial support for this project.

Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, engari he toa takitini.

My strength is not that of a single warrior, but that of many.



Nga Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa  
Sisters of Mercy New Zealand

# PROJECT TEAM



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# PROJECT BACKGROUND

**Our intent: To understand the particular needs and experiences of women (including those from the Rainbow community) experiencing homelessness in the Auckland City Centre.**

## TE MIRINGA TRUST AND THIS PROJECT

In 2016, the Sisters of Mercy were invited to form groups to reflect on Pope Francis' encyclical Laudato Si, which called to look at the needs of the earth, our common home.

Groups were asked to explore a practical action by praying, researching and reflecting on a need. Our group consisted of eight women of different ages and backgrounds two of whom are Sisters of Mercy. The strong call for this group was to explore the needs of homeless women in the city of Auckland. We began meeting in February 2016 and now have the name Te Miringa Trust.

The name Te Miringa was gifted to us. It is from the story of a child who was brought forth into the world through gentle massaging. The child was named Te Miringa. We feel privileged to hold this name as the inspiration in our desire to respond in some positive way to women who are experiencing homelessness.

Our vision is inspired by the Mercy tradition and the inspiration of Catherine McAuley who worked to uphold the dignity of women in the Dublin of her day in the 1800's. Today we wish to respond to the needs of women in our time.

This project has been designed to provide Te Miringa Trust the insights and understanding needed to respond to the needs of women experiencing homelessness in the Auckland city centre.

*Written by Sr Leona Garchow*

\*Chronic homelessness refers to people with complex issues who have been rough sleeping continuously for one year or longer or have had at least four episodes of rough sleeping in the last three years.

## WOMEN IN HOMELESSNESS

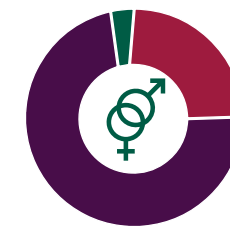
In recent years, the number of women experiencing homelessness in the Auckland city centre has increased. In May 2016, the annual street count hit record numbers with 45 women counted sleeping rough or in emergency beds, up from 31 at the previous street count.

The recent development of Housing First in the Auckland city centre has also provided some valuable data on the number of women experiencing chronic homelessness\*.

In August 2016, a snapshot of data from both the Auckland City Mission and Lifewise showed that women made up 25% of those experiencing chronic homelessness.



## IN AUGUST 2016, THERE WERE 189 PEOPLE EXPERIENCING CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS IN THE AUCKLAND CITY CENTRE



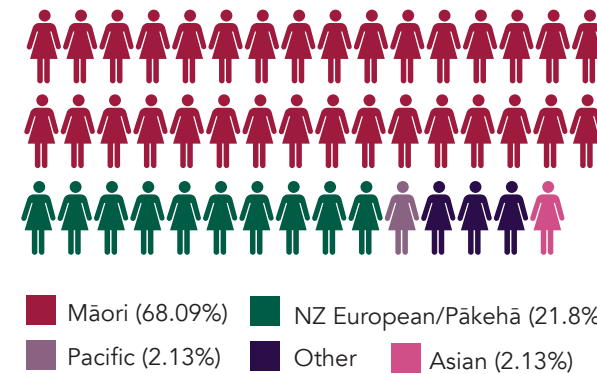
25% of people are women

Female (24.87%)  
Male (73.54%)  
Transgender (1.59%)

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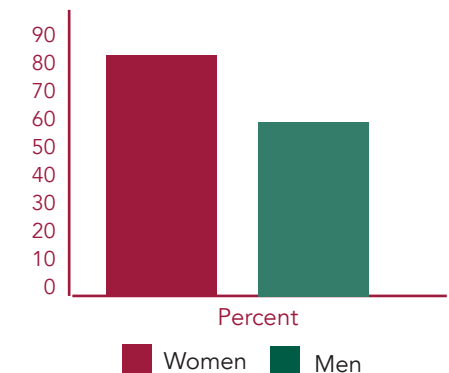
Women are typically younger (39) than men (44) and spend less time living on the streets (6.8 years).

### Ethnicity of women



Almost 70% of women are of Māori descent compared to 58% of men.

### Percent of people experiencing mental health issues



Women seem to experience a greater rate of mental health issues (81%) compared to men (60%).

Homelessness is an issue that is highly gender bound in most western countries (Bukowski 2009). While there is some information available relating to the experiences of homelessness in the city centre more generally, there is little that dives deep into the experience of women.

This document is designed to highlight the unique and particular experiences and needs of women who find themselves homeless in the Auckland city centre.

It is hoped that the insights, alongside the Opportunities for Change from this document will enable Te Miringa Trust and other organisations to explore solutions that are person centred, and meet both the explicit and latent needs of women experiencing homelessness in the city centre.

# WHAT WE DID

The project team carried out a co-design process from the understand phase through to synthesis/define phase.

Co-design reflects a fundamental change to traditional service or programme design. Rather than service providers designing services or programmes in isolation, the co-design approach enables a wider range of

people, including those that you are designing for, to make creative contributions in both the

formulation and solution of a problem. To do this, we formed a project team that included the women with lived experience of homelessness.

The project team contributed to all elements of the research including developing the statement of intent, devising the research questions, carrying out empathy interviews, analysing the data and providing feedback on the results.

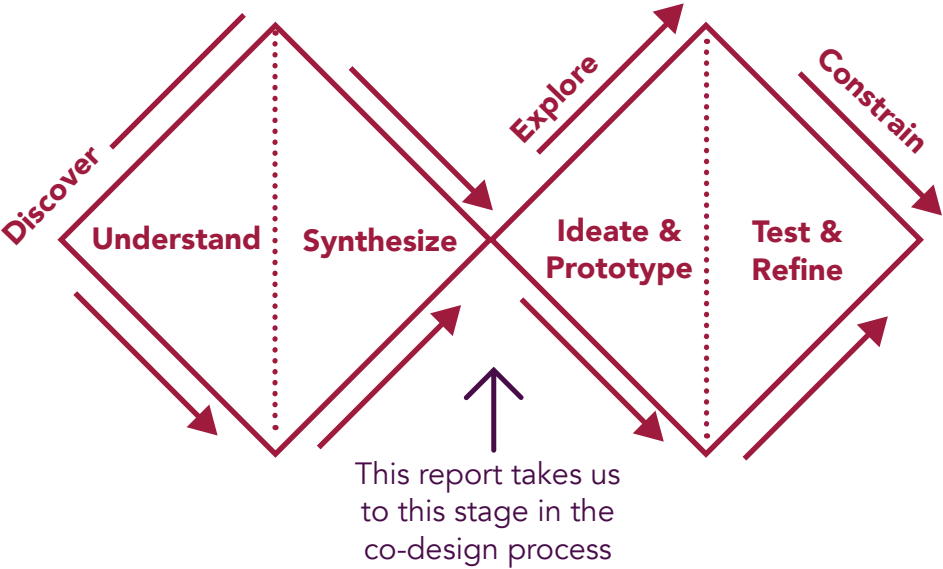
The project team carried out ten empathy interviews with women who have lived experience of homelessness.

Participants were asked to share their story of homelessness. Additional information was sought on a wide range of relevant topics including: pathways into and out of housing; the practicalities of everyday life; and engagement with formal and informal networks. Participants were offered a \$50 supermarket voucher in appreciation of their time.

Over two story telling sessions, the women's empathy interviews were shared back to the whole project team. The interviews were then themed and synthesised into seven broad insights highlighted in this document.

The team then hosted a wahine workshop that brought the interviewees and other women with lived experience of homelessness alongside Te Miringa Trust to share the initial learnings and insights and to gather feedback from the women.

## THE CO-DESIGN PROCESS



**Formed a design team**  
We formed a design team to work through the co-design process



**Develop the intent**  
We developed our intent statement to guide our design process



**Empathy Interviews**  
We carried out empathy interviews with ten women with varying stories experiences



**Insight mining**  
We made sense of people's stories and clustered around themes and insights. We developed design challenges.



**Wahine workshop**  
We brought back the women we interviewed along with other women with lived experience of homelessness to test our initial learnings.

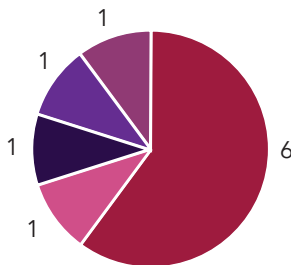


**Develop opportunities for change**  
We developed design challenges based on the feedback from the wahine workshops and the insights gathered.

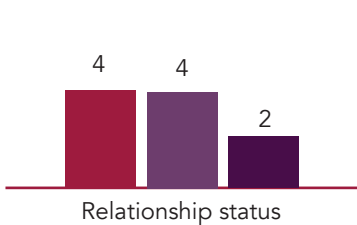
## WHO WE TALKED TO

We spoke with ten women including one trans woman with lived experience of homelessness. It was our intent to speak with people with a broad range of experiences and backgrounds. To do this, we spoke with women from

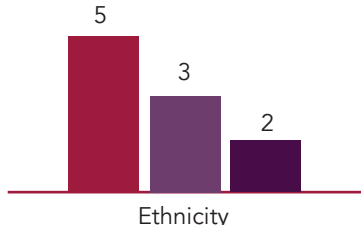
different ethnicities, relationship status and housing situations. The following provides a breakdown of the women's current experiences.



■ Rough sleeping  
■ Couch surfing  
■ Emergency Accommodation  
■ Housed  
■ Staying at partners



■ Single  
■ In a relationship  
■ Absent partner (death or prison)



■ Māori  
■ Pākehā  
■ Pacifica

## WHAT WE WANTED TO FIND OUT:

What are the key moments that lead women into and out of homelessness?

What are women's experience of homelessness, particularly around safety and daily practicalities?

What formal and informal support networks do people have and what impact do they have on their lives?

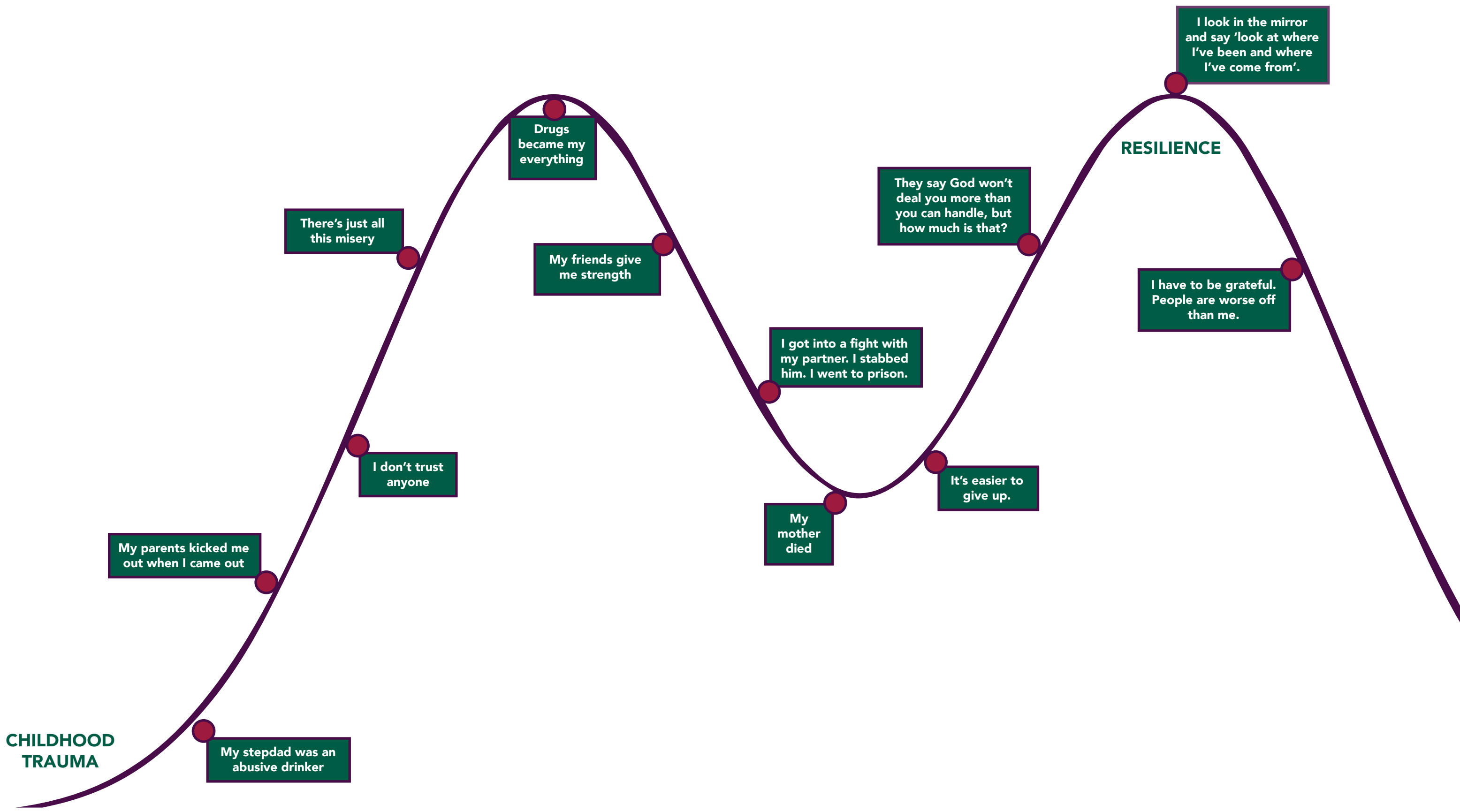
What are women's wants and desires, particularly around housing and support?

What are women's hopes and dreams for the future?

How is the rainbow experience different or similar?

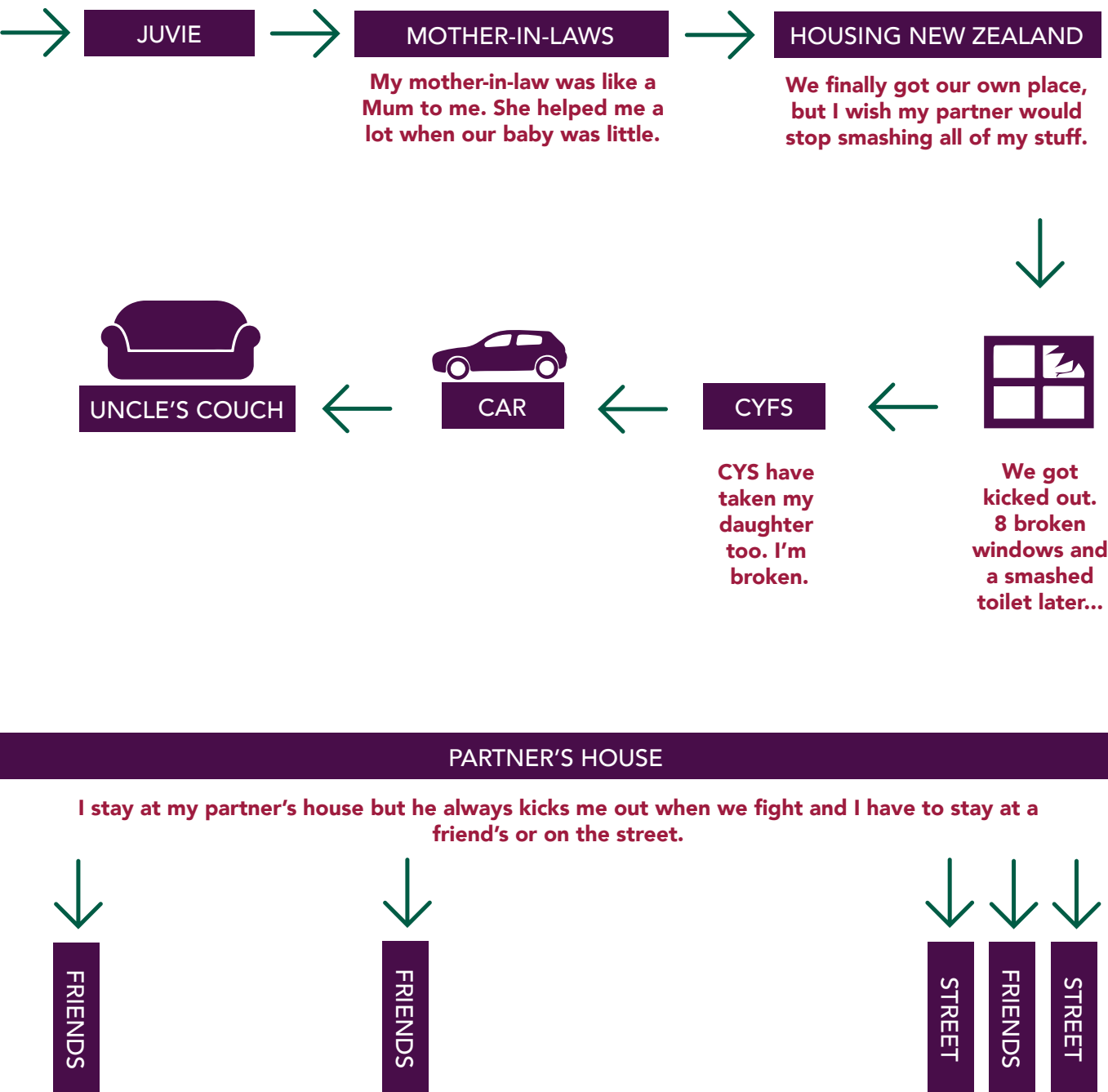
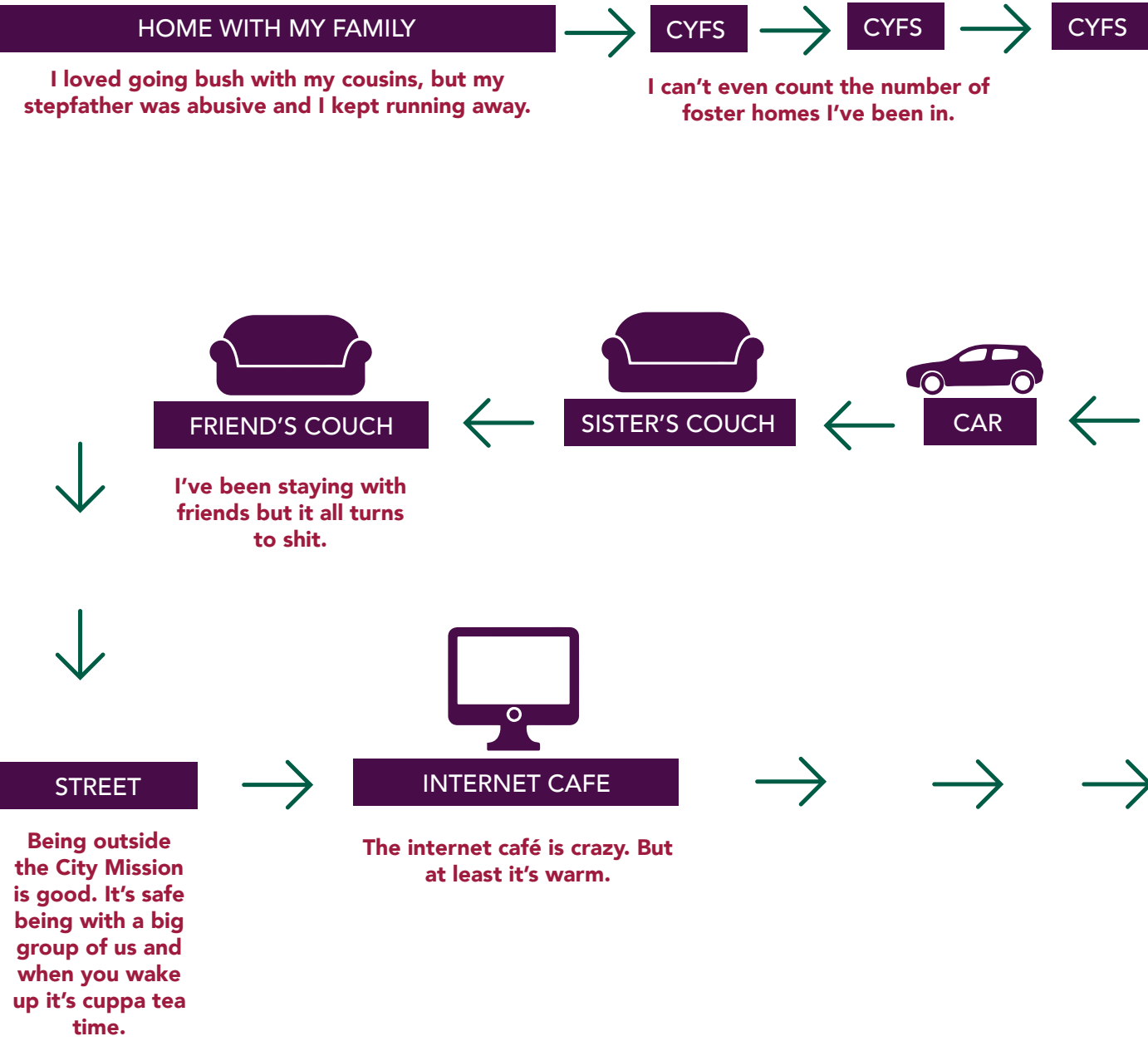
# TRAUMA & RESILIENCE

Women experiencing homelessness often encounter multiple and ongoing traumatic and painful events. These are not just isolated to incidents in childhood. In spite of this, women find ways to cope and have developed huge amounts of resilience.



# FROM PLACE TO PLACE TO PLACE








Women often move from place to place to place often with very little control over their space. This often leads to multiple experiences of insecure housing and homelessness. The following provides an example of a typical housing journey.





# MEETING BASIC NEEDS

Women are incredibly resourceful at getting what they need, but it’s not always easy or straightforward. Here is what we heard works and what doesn’t.

WHAT WORKS	<p>When I’m not well, I can go to the Calder Centre.</p> <p><b>I get a free sexual health check at Greenlane every 3 months.</b></p>	<p>My depression? I block it out with drugs. They really help.</p> <p><b>I get my inner strength from my sisters and aunts.</b></p> <p>I need to have a shower to just feel I’m doing ok.</p>	<p>I go to all the free church feeds around the city.</p> <p><b>I just live off the Mission.</b></p>	<p>Gambling - I try to make \$20 into \$100.</p> <p><b>I always share what I’ve got. I’m not stingy.</b></p> <p>Hustling is the only way I get money. It’s good.</p> <p><b>I just sell my body now if we are really broke.</b></p> <p>I just live off everyone around me.</p> <p><b>I’m on the benefit.</b></p>	<p>We sneak into the backpackers. It’s ok when we don’t get caught.</p> <p><b>I can use the motels if my clients pay.</b></p> <p>Sometimes I just say to my friend ‘Can I have a shower, bro?’</p> <p><b>I go to the tepid baths.</b></p>	<p>Once I walk in my house, I know no one can get a hold of me. It’s swipe card access.</p> <p><b>I take my cardboard to a bush and don’t tell anyone where I stay.</b></p> <p>I sleep at the Mission. It’s safe because of the lights and other people there.</p> <p><b>I’ve learnt to keep my mouth shut - it’s the only way to keep safe.</b></p> <p>I slept outside the bank. They have cameras there.</p>	<p>It’s too expensive now. \$100 for a point.</p> <p><b>I went to rehab instead of prison.</b></p> <p>I’ve been on methadone for 25 years. It really helps.</p> <p><b>At least I’m not using needles.</b></p>	
								
WHAT DOESN'T WORK	<p>I have a gum infection. I’m worried I’ll lose my teeth.</p>	<p>My whole family have been on meds. I don’t want to end up like them.</p> <p><b>When I don’t look after myself mentally, that’s when I fall.</b></p>	<p><b>I try to get high as many days as I can so I don’t have to worry about food.</b></p>	<p>I don’t know how to apply for a benefit.</p> <p><b>I won the jackpot, but that was years ago.</b></p> <p>Makes me feel like ratshit going from a wage to nothing.</p> <p><b>The work on the streets has been really quiet recently.</b></p> <p>It’s so embarrassing not having enough money all the time.</p> <p><b>It’s a shock when you move indoors. You have no money.</b></p>	<p>James Liston is so far away and it’s only open 9-11.</p> <p><b>There’s nowhere to go in the weekends.</b></p> <p>Sometimes I have to dry shave. It’s hard when you have manly facial hairs.</p> <p><b>I use the fire hose sometimes, but I’m getting sick because of the cold water.</b></p>	<p>I feel unsafe all the time.</p> <p><b>I was attacked. Before that I wasn’t afraid of anything.</b></p> <p>Usually when you close your eyes you’re not sure if a drunk person is going to kick you or not.</p> <p><b>It’s harder to keep safe when you are coming down.</b></p> <p>I was scared of my neighbours - the gangsters.</p>	<p>Synnies are rampant in Auckland City. It makes people steal stuff.</p> <p><b>I need to detox but I don’t want to go to rehab.</b></p>	

# CHALLENGING RELATIONSHIPS

Women have complex relationships with their partners, particularly around housing. Relationships make it hard to manage tenancies and tenancy conditions make it hard to manage relationships.



# MOTHERHOOD

Women love and care for their children and want what's best for them. However, separation from children causes tension and pain for both mothers and children.





# SUPPORTING WHAT WORKS

Women get support from different places. We heard that this support can be helpful or unhelpful at times.

HELPFUL	SUPPORT	NOT HELPFUL
<p>A friendly atmosphere</p> <p><b>Relatable staff</b></p> <p>Being heard</p> <p><b>Doing what they say they will</b></p> <p>Getting basic needs met (food, clothing, showers etc)</p>	SERVICES	<p>An unsafe atmosphere</p> <p><b>Being told what to do</b></p> <p>Not feeling heard</p> <p><b>Getting kicked out or trespassed</b></p> <p>Changing staff</p> <p><b>Feeling whakamā about asking for help.</b></p>
<p>High trust</p> <p><b>Getting good advice</b></p> <p>Sense of belonging</p> <p><b>Financial support</b></p> <p>A place to go back to</p>	WHĀNAU	<p>History of abuse</p> <p><b>Lacking the ability to support</b></p> <p>Disowned</p> <p><b>Lack of trust</b></p> <p>Sense of shame/embarrassment</p>
<p>Street mums being a motherly figure</p> <p><b>No-judgement</b></p> <p>Having a sense of shared pain</p> <p><b>Honesty - telling it like it is</b></p> <p>Strength of sisterhood</p> <p><b>Joy, laughter, fun</b></p> <p>Getting basic needs met - (food, clothing, showers, food etc)</p> <p><b>Reaching out so I don't have to ask for help</b></p> <p>Feeling safe</p>	FRIENDS & STREET WHĀNAU	<p>People leaving or dying</p> <p><b>Lack of trust</b></p> <p>Fear of unwanted sexual advances</p> <p><b>Jealousy</b></p> <p>Feeling unsafe</p> <p><b>People taking advantage of you</b></p>
<p>A sense of safety</p> <p><b>Financial support - hustling</b></p> <p>Provide other necessities - (sanitary items)</p>	PUBLIC	<p>Fear for personal safety</p> <p><b>Sense of shame/embarrassment</b></p>

# HOPES & DREAMS

Women have very clear hopes and dreams for their futures and for their homes, however many women are worried about failing and returning to homelessness.



**I WANT TO LEARN**

I'd like to get a diploma in drugs and alcohol.

I would love to do a course.



**I WANT A PLACE THAT'S SAFE & MINE**

I just want to breathe and relax.

Something I can put my hopes and dreams into.

I get anxiety by being around other people.

A place I can call my own.

Alaska would be good - quiet and peaceful.



**I WANT A PLACE WITH SPACE**

I need a balcony so I can smoke.

I need space for my family to stay.

I want to live with my partner.



**I WANT A FAMILY LIFE**

I want my family and friends to visit.

I want to go hunting and fishing everyday.

I want to host Christmas day.

I want to have a cat and a baby.



**I WANT TO EARN**

My dream is to be an early childhood teacher.

In the future, I'd like to be running my own work crew.

I want to find a normal job.



**I WANT TO GIVE BACK**

I have lived experience so have a lot to offer.

I want to help the next woman coming onto the streets, so she doesn't have to go through the same as me.

**I DON'T WANT TO FAIL!**

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE

**“How Might We” Questions provide a powerful platform for developing new solutions and ideas. We suggest working alongside women who have experienced homelessness to prioritise which “How Might We” questions, if resolved, would have the biggest impact on their lives.**

**TRAUMA AND RESILIENCE:**

HMW reduce the burden of trauma and build on the resilience of women?

HMW support women to feel nurtured, loved and worthwhile?

HMW celebrate the success and achievements of women?

**PARTNERS AND MOVING:**

HMW support women to have healthy and happy relationships with their partners?

HMW enable women to live in homes with their partners so that women maintain autonomy over their space?

HMW support women in violent relationships to remain safe?

HMW support men to be healthy partners to women?

**PARENTING AND CHILDREN:**

HMW support women with children to participate in their children’s lives in a way that works for both children and mothers?

HMW support women who want to be reunited and live with their children?

HMW enable women to celebrate their children so that their children know just how proud their mothers are of them?

HMW support women who are grieving the loss of children?

**GETTING WHAT WOMEN NEED:**

HMW enable women who are still rough sleeping to get the things they need?

HMW build on the resourcefulness of women?

HMW find ways for women sleeping rough to feel and be safe?

HMW increase public amenities for women who are sleeping rough?

HMW build on the strategies that women already use around reducing alcohol and drug harm?

HMW increase access to alternatives to medication (both prescribed and self-medicated) to increase women’s mental wellbeing?

**SUPPORTING WHAT’S HELPFUL**

HMW build on support that’s helpful and reduce unhelpful ways of support?

HMW increase the sense of sisterhood with women who have experienced homelessness?

HMW reduce stigma and judgement that women experience?

**HOPES AND DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE**

HMW support women to fulfil their everyday hopes and dreams for the future in a way that doesn’t set women up to fail?

HMW support women to earn?

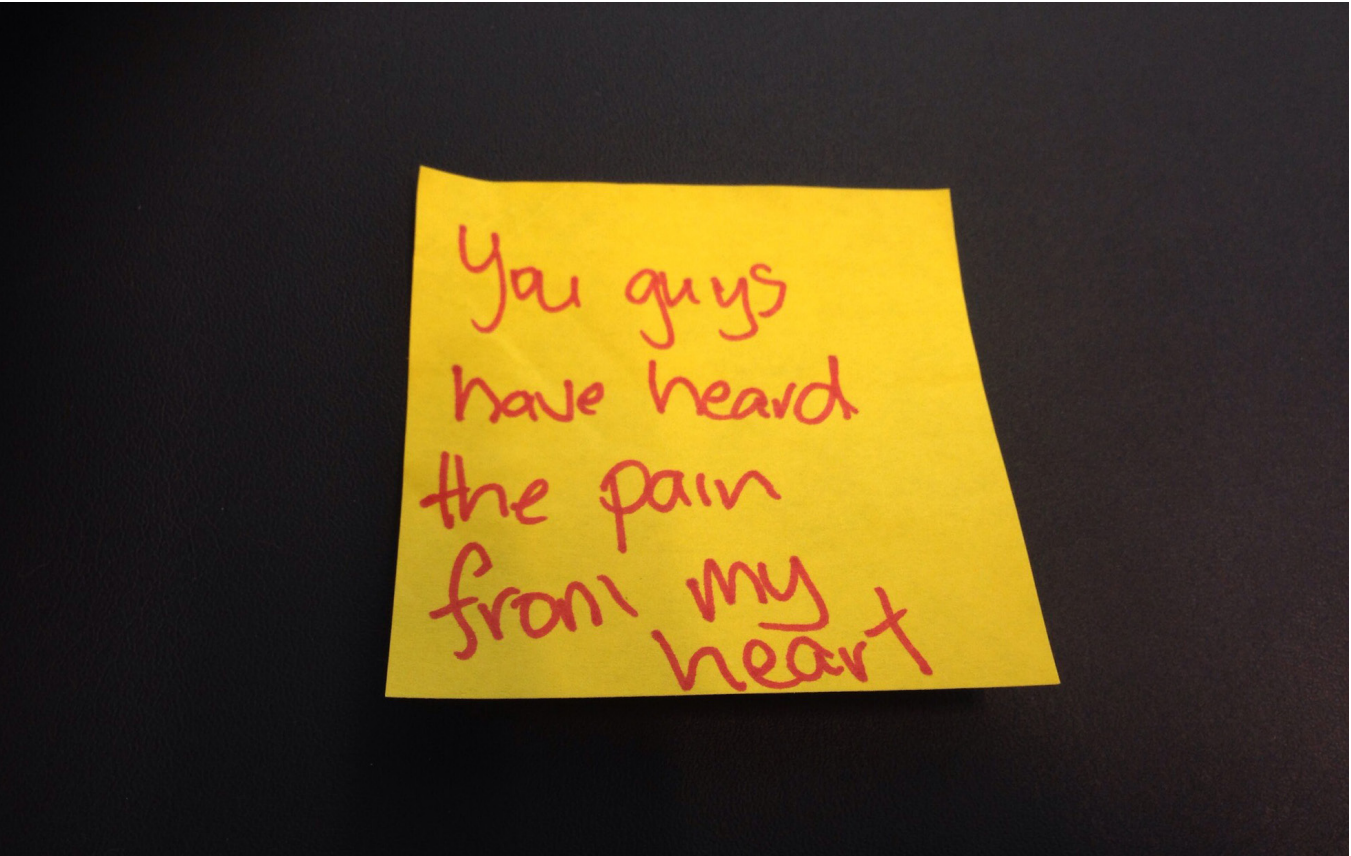
HMW support women to learn?

HMW support women creating a family life?

HMW support women to have peaceful and calm homes?

HMW support women to have a place of their own?

HMW support women to give back to others in the community?



## WHAT NEXT?

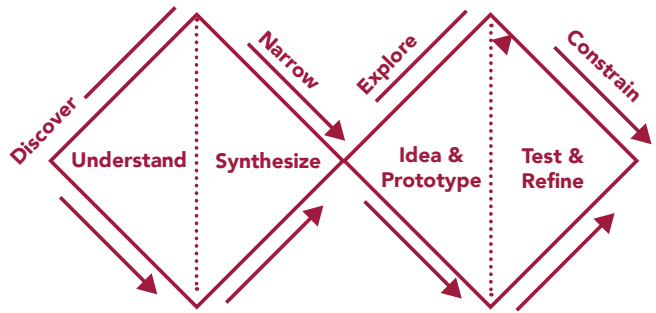
**Moving into the second co-design diamond**

The Wahine Workshop hosted by the co-design team revealed a strong desire from those with lived experience of homelessness to work alongside Te Miringa Trust and others to develop solutions together.

Once the community have prioritised which Opportunity for Change would have the biggest impact on their lives we suggest that Te Miringa Trust continue using the co-design process to ideate and prototype around the specific How Might We questions.

Ideas can then be tested with other women in the community for for desirability, feasibility and viability. Feedback from each testing will allow Te Miringa Trust to refine the idea through to implementation.

The next Steps for Te Mirniga alongside the community:



- 1. Ideate and prototype
- 2. Test and refine

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