

Just Take a Second to Breathe
Atawhai 2019
University of Waikato Research Project
By Sue McAllister



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

2020

The Research

Why did we do the research?

The research was a team effort between The Kindness Institute and The University of Waikato. We wanted to find out what effects the Atawhai programme has on a group of rangatahi and how learning things like mindfulness, meditation and yoga might be of benefit to them.

Why is research done?

Research on programmes can help organisations figure out what is working well and what may benefit from a change. Research can also help organisations get more funding to increase the help they provide.

Who did the research?

Two students (Sue and Courtney) and their supervisor (Associate Professor Robert B. Isler, Ph.D) made up the research team. They are all from The University of Waikato. The research was part of Masters degree projects for Sue and Courtney.

What are the main things the research team looked at?

We focused on three areas.

1. What skills did rangatahi learn at Atawhai and do they help them deal with challenges?
2. What effect does the Atawhai programme have on rangatahi happiness and other emotions?
3. Are rangatahi able to share the mindfulness skills they learn outside of Atawhai to help others?

What did the research team do?

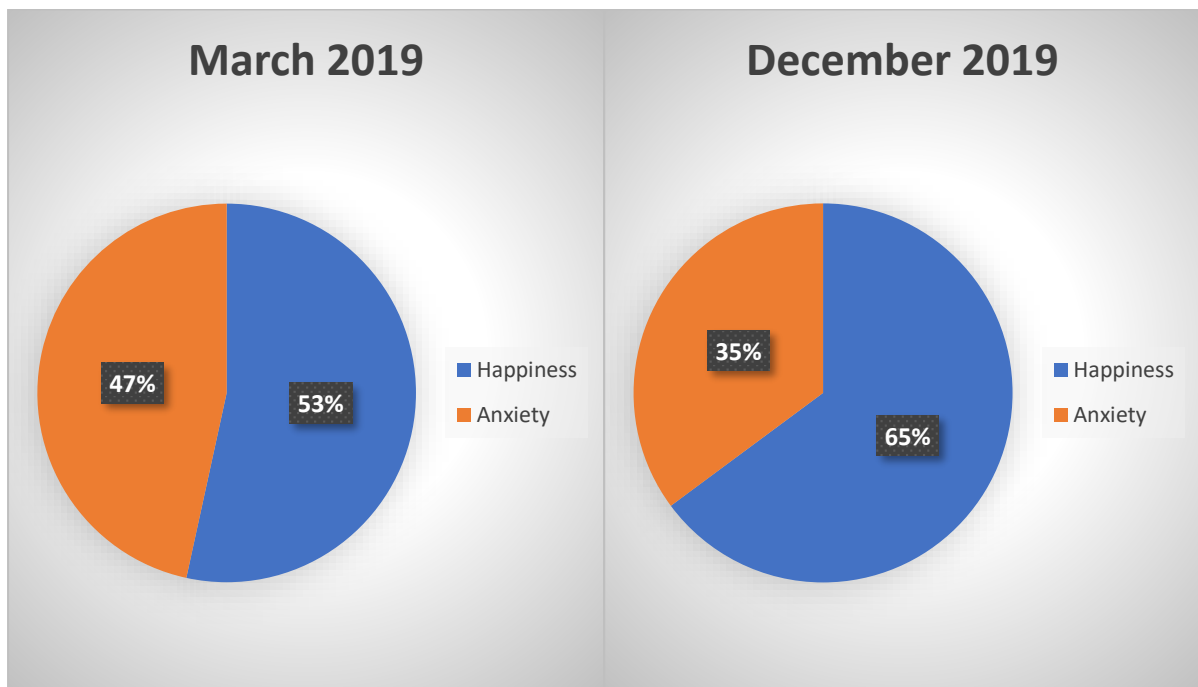
We asked rangatahi to answer questions about happiness, mindfulness, anxiety and lots of other things. Rangatahi answered the same set of questions several times during the 2019 year. At the end of 2019 we compared all the answers they had given us to see if their answers stayed the same or changed over the year.

What did we find?

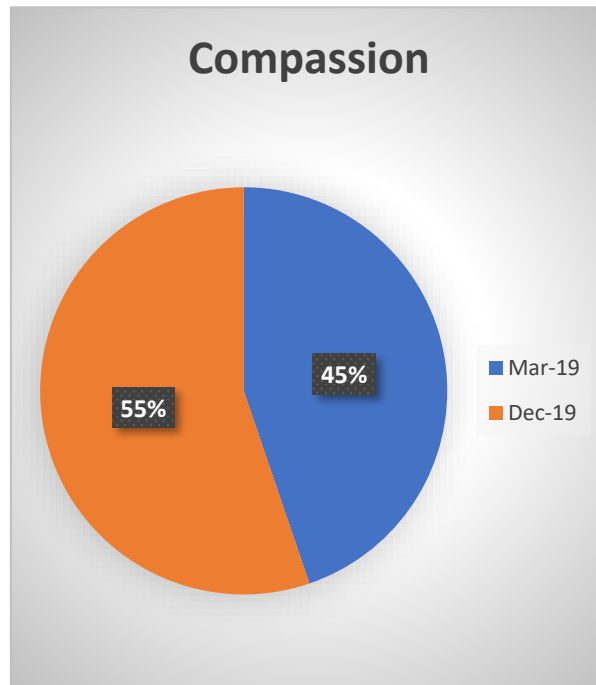
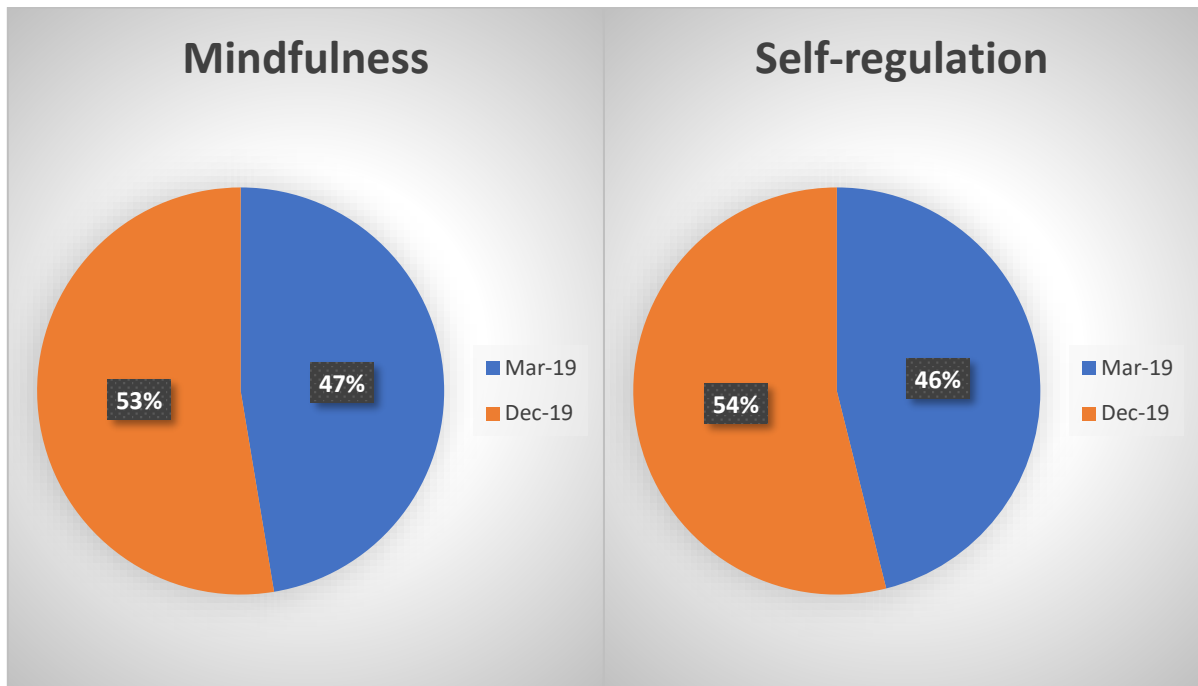
We found that over the course of the year rangatahi answers changed in a very positive way. After attending Atawhai rangatahi were happier and less anxious. The longer rangatahi spent on the Atawhai programme the happier and less anxious they were.

We found the biggest positive changes in happiness and anxiety occurred during the April and October week-long wānanga. This showed us it is very beneficial for rangatahi to attend these week-long events. We found attending one wānanga had great benefits for rangatahi and attending two was even better.

The charts below show the overall positive changes in rangatahi happiness and anxiety during the 2019 year. Happiness increased by twelve percent and anxiety reduced by twelve percent from March to December 2019.



We also found increases in mindfulness, self-regulation and compassion. Rangatahi mindfulness increased by six percent, self-regulation increased by eight percent and compassion increased by ten percent.



We found some other interesting things too.

1. Culture is important to rangatahi. The Atawhai programme includes many cultural elements such as Te reo, Te whare tapa whā (wellbeing model), Māori thai chi and Io Matua Kore' (breathing exercise). Rangatahi said

"I feel connected to my culture because Māori has been intertwined with Atawhai"

2. Tautoko (support) is important to rangatahi. Rangatahi talked about Atawhai as whānau. They talked about the whole whare (house) being connected, being together, and making friends. Rangatahi said

"Atawhai is a supporting calm place to be"

3. Mentors are important to rangatahi. Rangatahi said mentors were supportive and helped them learn the mindfulness based skills. Mentors encouraged rangatahi to use the skills inside and outside of Atawhai. Mentors encouraged rangatahi in the creative arts and on the final performance night.

4. Rangatahi found the mindfulness based skills beneficial. They said using the skills helped them let go of the past, be brave to face challenges, deal with pressure, anger, and challenging people. Rangatahi had favourite skills they enjoyed using.

5. All rangatahi learned to teach the mindfulness based skills. Many of them continue to teach their whānau, friends and students at school.

Comparing this research with previous research

The results from dozens of previous research projects tell us that youth who complete mindfulness programmes develop increased mindfulness, happiness, physical health and better relationships. Youth also experience a decrease in anxiety, stress and anger. These positive changes are found as soon as a programme finishes and can remain long-term.

Our research found Atawhai 2019 had a significant and large positive effect on the wellbeing of rangatahi that attended. The significant result tells us the Atawhai programme works. The large positive effect tells us it works very well.

Conclusion

Based on the positive research findings, The University of Waikato Research Team is happy to endorse The Kindness Institute's Atawhai programme.

We found the Atawhai kaupapa (purpose) of embracing and promoting culture and wrapping rangatahi with love, support and kindness can change rangatahi lives.

Atawhai uses proven methods to support rangatahi wellbeing such as mindfulness-based skills, culture, mentoring and the creative arts.

The Atawhai programme is interactive, long-term, has consistent caring leaders, and involves youth in decisions.

Atawhai gives rangatahi the skills to improve their own lives and strengthen their community. It gives rangatahi confidence and empowers them to become teachers and leaders in their communities.

The University of Waikato Research Team is convinced Atawhai has a profound and significant positive effect on the wellbeing of rangatahi.