MAKING SPACE

Discovery Research Findings and Insights

April 2022

MAKING SPACE

Our objective and project purpose

To build **capacity within homelessness and housing services** in Tāmaki Makaurau to **provide safe, non-discriminatory and accessible services** for rainbow people. Through this we hope to **improve the experiences** of rainbow people accessing those services.

In the **longer term**, our hope is that these positive experiences will start to shift **narratives around accessing homelessness services** within rainbow communities, which in turn leads to **rainbow people getting support** with housing when they need it.

MAKING SPACE

RY · **Te Ngākau Kahukura**

Our Discovery approach

We completed 21 empathy-led interviews over a three week period and compiled a Knowledge Brief to build our understanding of current experiences and challenges. We explored and reflected on our findings with our Project Team.

WHO?

We are taking an experience-led approach, understanding what's happening today for service users and providers to inform the solution design. To do this we engaged with a range of people to understand their experiences and needs.

8
Lived experience participants with range of intersecting identities and service experiences

6
People working in service delivery in the sector, as support / key workers or leading those teams

7
Leaders from within service providers and government agencies

HOW?

We primarily used empathy-led 1:1 interviews to gather information about the current experiences of service users and providers, alongside other inputs.

21
Empathy-led 1:1 interviews

1
Knowledge Brief, providing background on rainbow homelessness nationally and internationally, and leading rainbow competency building approaches

3
Project Team sessions to explore and reflect on our findings, acknowledging the Project Team comprises lived experience and provider experience

MAKING
SPACE

Diversity of our participants

The providers and lived experience participants we interviewed brought different perspectives and experiences. All of the lived experience participants were rainbow and another minority identity.

ETHNICITY

FILIPINA MESTIZA
PĀKEHĀ
SRI LANKAN
MĀORI
FIJIAN SCOTTISH
SAMOAN

AGE

FROM 18 TO 52

DISABILITY

ANXIETY ARTHRITIS
DYSPRAXIA
IMMUNOCOMPROMISED
CHRONIC FATIGUE
DEPRESSION AUTISM
SEMI-DEAF PTSD
EHLERS-DANLOS ADHD
SYNDROME CHRONIC PAIN

SEXUALITY

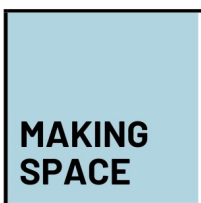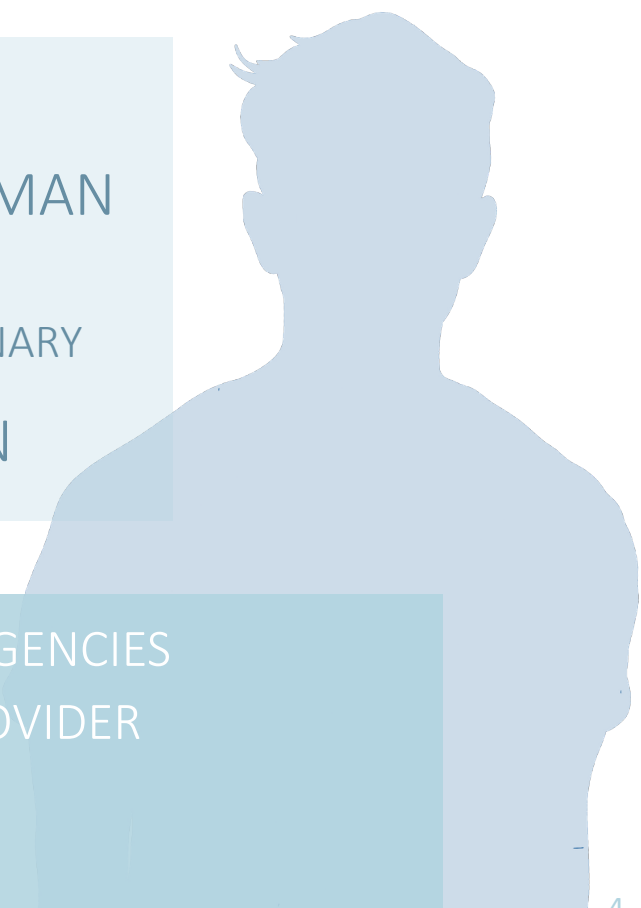HETEROSEXUAL GAY
ASEXUAL
BISEXUAL QUEER
GRAYSEXUAL
PANROMANTIC

GENDER

MALE
TRANS MAN
FEMALE
NON-BINARY
TRANS WOMAN

ORGANISATIONS

3 GOVERNMENT AGENCIES
1 FAITH-BASED PROVIDER
3 NGO PROVIDERS

MAKING SPACE

4

Introducing our findings

Our interviews generated over 700 data points, which were synthesised and led 14 insights across four key themes.

WE SYNTHESISED OVER 700 DATA POINTS FROM INTERVIEWS INTO...

...58 FINDINGS....

...AND 14 INSIGHTS ACROSS FOUR THEMES:

1 | Housing and homelessness services are generally perceived negatively within rainbow communities

2 | Providers demonstrate real care for service users, and often don't have the tools to provide a service experience that aligns to that aspiration

3 | Rainbow people face discrimination and violence in this space, and often aren't being protected by services

4 | The sector recognises the need for change and is optimistic about collaborating to improve equity

MAKING SPACE

1 | Housing and homelessness services are generally perceived negatively within rainbow communities

1.1 Rainbow people view accessing services as a last resort and through resourcefulness, resilience and community support they often manage to avoid 'needing' services for a period of time.

1.2 The provision of housing services doesn't always align with the needs of rainbow service users to create a home and participate in community.

1.3 Rainbow service users' safety and outcomes are often compromised in housing and homelessness services, largely due to providers not taking rainbow identities into account as part of service provision and taking a 'one size fits all' approach.

"You either sacrifice your rainbow identity for a house or sacrifice a house for your rainbow identity"
- Rainbow service user

"[Providers] are really queerphobic, and they really don't understand trans people...I find a lot of them, a lot of tokenism exists as well...a service that say advertises as being rainbow friendly and go there and it turns out they're not." –
Rainbow service user

MAKING SPACE

1 | Housing and homelessness services are generally perceived negatively within rainbow communities

1.1 Rainbow people view accessing services as a last resort and through resourcefulness, resilience and community support they often manage to avoid 'needing' services for a period of time.

1.2 The provision of housing services doesn't always align with the needs of rainbow service users to create a home and participate in community.

- A strong narrative persists within rainbow communities that housing and homelessness services are generally unsafe or unhelpful.
- Rainbow service users anticipate discrimination in services, particularly for those who have had poor experiences in the past. Regardless of whether that experience was with a housing or homelessness service, this contributes to a reluctance to access services.
- There are incredibly strong peer networks and dedication within rainbow communities to support others to help them avoid sleeping rough. Many of the lived experience participants we spoke to (young people in particular) were providing advice and support to other rainbow people in unstable housing situations.
- There is a widely held view (especially amongst young people) that if you have somewhere to stay that night, your situation doesn't 'qualify' for services – and this is reinforced by services requiring service users to exhaust all other options or be in crisis before being accepted into services.
- Not having housing or support needs met through accessing services (which is a common experience for young people in particular) undermines trust and confidence in the ability of services to help, and can be a catalyst for disenfranchisement.

- Rainbow service users speak to the importance of whānau* and connections to feel like a place is home. The delivery of housing and homelessness services typically focus on housing an individual, which can compromise connections with their wider whānau and community.
- Manaakitanga is deeply woven through the communities and cultural identity of many service users, and at times the individualistic approach to housing is at odds with this cultural practice.
- Persistence to practice manaaki by hosting others can then be perceived as troublesome or evidence of problematic behaviour, where this practice goes against tenancy or facility rules.
- Many service users spoke of the feeling of mental and/or emotional homelessness persisting despite having housing, where their community and connection needs are unmet.

We are using whānau to include chosen family and whānau beyond birth connections.

MAKING SPACE

"They left me in the abusive household and managed to make things worse and so I just decided to screw them and move on my own, move forward on my own"- Rainbow service user

"Home is where you heart is and where your family is and where you feel safe" – Rainbow service user

"So, I've got like 4 lots of people that I've got a run of rules from, plus I've got my tenancy agreement to stick to." – Rainbow service user

1 | Housing and homelessness services are not set up to serve rainbow people

1.3 Rainbow service users' safety and outcomes are often compromised in housing and homelessness services, largely due to providers not taking rainbow identities into account as part of service provision and taking a 'one size fits all' approach.

- Many providers have binary gendered facilities (e.g. men and women), and while we heard of instances of flexibility from service providers offering for the service user to choose which facility was most comfortable, some service users would prefer mixed gender and/or gender expansive options to feel safe and calm. Service users spoke of having to weigh up how much dysphoria* they might experience with how unsafe their non-service housing options were (if any).
- Emergency housing referral pathways require the service user to exhaust all other options before accessing services. Sometimes an unaccepting family home is seen as a viable housing option that means service users are ineligible for emergency housing.
- Work and Income have declined rainbow identities as a 'reason' for not accepting accommodation in a boarding house or lodge, despite many first-hand accounts of verbal and physical violence experienced from other tenants/lodgers. This is interpreted as the service user being uncooperative in doing everything they can to avoid being homeless, which undermines the lived experiences of rainbow service users.
- Many conversations about the nature of housing required forces the service user to disclose their identity, which requires a very intentional relational approach to create safety, which isn't always present.
- At times where rainbow identities were recognised, service users felt that their rainbow identity was treated as the root cause of their homelessness and that providers struggled to see their needs and who they were beyond that aspect of their identity.
- With a couple of exceptions, there is generally no data capture regarding the presence of rainbow service users in services, or formal monitoring of their experiences and outcomes. This meant providers were unable to speak to the rainbow service users' current experiences or presence in their services at an organisation-wide level.

MAKING SPACE

Gender dysphoria is a clinical term referring to dissonance between one's assigned gender and/or body, and their personal sense of self. Originally the DSM diagnosis was "transsexualism", which was later changed to "gender identity disorder", followed by "gender dysphoria". In each case the diagnosis was updated as it led to gender variance being stigmatised and misunderstood as a pathological condition. "Gender Dysphoria" is now similarly being moved away from, in favor of "Gender Incongruence". Gender Minorities Aotearoa.

"Yeah I mean like why did I have to make that choice between...being unsafe and comfortable versus safe and uncomfortable. So I could have been housed with females where I would have felt safer but my dysphoria would have been a whole lot worse." – Rainbow service user

"If someone said no, I don't want to live in a boarding house, well then it's like you need to give us a good reason why because you're making yourself homeless sort of thing. So with the rainbow community it's like people don't always want to tell us they're rainbow" – Service provider

"If it's this [boarding house] or sleeping at a bus stop. If I did sleep at a bus stop the chance of a hate crime were lower than if I did sleep in that space." – Rainbow service user

"My feeling that is for the rainbow community that's not always safe. Boarding houses, lodges, the kind of people there, that's not always safe, the bullying, discrimination. You've got to look at the environment, is it safe for this person" – Service provider

2 | Providers demonstrate real care for service users, and often don't have the tools to provide a service experience that aligns

2.1 — Service providers are afraid of getting it wrong when trying to talk about rainbow identities and related needs, and this typically leads to inaction.

2.2 — Providers demonstrated real care for rainbow service users, however there was also a lack of understanding of the depth and complexity of the issues.

2.3 — Providers lack knowledge around rainbow service users' needs, and there is a sense of urgency and desperation from them to have a 'solution' to turn to.

2.4 — The sector has been experiencing huge levels of need which is stretching services and minimising capacity for provision of professional development – for example regarding rainbow service user needs.

"I think one of the challenges, in thinking about [organisation], is that its really easy to say that we want to be a really diverse organisation or we want to deliver [services] to the rainbow community, but I think the biggest challenge is actually doing it, and I don't know why we just don't do it."
– Service provider

"I guess the reality is that when you're working in the frontline, you're really reactive and you get so overwhelmed with the work you know and business as usual"
– Service provider

"I wasn't prepared for what she came back with [regarding gender identity]. And I wonder... Are those the people we're actually missing to support, I felt caught off guard." –
Service provider

2 | Providers demonstrate real care for service users, and often don't have the tools to provide a service experience that aligns

2.1 Service providers are afraid of getting it wrong when trying to talk about rainbow identities and related needs, and this typically leads to inaction.

2.2 Providers demonstrated real care for rainbow service users, however there was also a lack of understanding of the depth and complexity of the issues.

- Many providers acknowledged that this is a conversation they should be having with their service users, but they didn't know how to navigate it.
- There is a common fear of getting it wrong or saying something to offend a rainbow service user. This fear is stopping providers from engaging in the conversation at all.
- Service users feel uncomfortable when providers project their fear and discomfort and centre themselves in these conversations.

- There is strong hope and desire from providers for rainbow service users to no longer face inequities in service provision and society more broadly, demonstrating provider acknowledgement of and passion for addressing these issues.
- Some providers shared work being done internally to support rainbow staff and wider diversity and inclusion work, but acknowledged this hasn't translated into service delivery.
- Many service providers proudly shared that they treat everyone the same, regardless of gender or sexuality, and saw this as evidence of equity in their services. This is an applaudable perspective however demonstrates a lack of awareness of the different needs and approaches that a rainbow identity can require and the 'equality vs equity' dilemma.
- Further, providers spoke of the ideal future being where gender and sexuality are no longer considered – rather than a future where rainbow service users can access the services they need in a relevant and safe way, for example. This highlights a surface-level appreciation for the unique needs of rainbow service users.

MAKING SPACE

"There is an incredible desire to not do any damage, and they're reluctant to embrace some of those conversations, because they feel out of their depth, they're not sure if they're going to cause offense so they would rather remove themselves from the possibility of causing offense" – Service provider

"We wouldn't, I would hope we wouldn't treat them any differently, to anyone who wasn't in that community"- Service provider

2 | Providers demonstrate real care for service users, and often don't have the tools to provide a service experience that aligns

2.3 Providers lack knowledge around rainbow service users' needs, and there is a sense of urgency and desperation from them to have a 'solution' to turn to.

2.4 The sector has been experiencing huge levels of need which is stretching services and minimising capacity for provision of professional development – for example regarding rainbow service user needs.

- Most providers are not offering rainbow-specific training or professional development for their staff.
- Service users are often providing the most accessible avenue to learning about rainbow identities and experiences, which has led to service users feeling they are in a difficult position having to educate providers while seeking services.
- Many providers spoke of their desire for bespoke, specialised rainbow services to refer service users to – rather than what rainbow inclusion in their organisation or services would look like. Lived experience participants also spoke of bespoke services as an important component of any solution, but not the only part.
- Providers spoke of their desire for tools and resources to support them when they are working with rainbow service users, and how difficult it is for them currently to find information.
- Many service providers find it difficult to know where to look for resources and information, and lack awareness of rainbow organisations that could work alongside them. There is a desire for tools and resources for supporting rainbow service users that can be easily accessed.

- The growth in need has been faster than the growth in housing supply and workforce, which is stretching services. The pandemic and private housing market challenges have amplified this pressure.
- The pace needed by services to keep up with need means that there is limited capacity to take people out of their roles to participate in learning and development.
- Significant effort has been needed from organisations to recruit support workers to fill new roles across the sector, and to provide them with homelessness specific training and development.
- Large numbers of accommodation facilities (i.e. hotels and motels) have had to be brought on quickly, making it difficult to have robust systems in place to manage safety in these facilities.

MAKING SPACE

"It would have been nice to just sit down with them and talk openly about what was going on with me and not have to worry about educating them at the same time because that's a huge burden on someone who's just trying to get help" – Rainbow service user

"If I look back on the last 5-10 years, it's changed a lot, if for the better? I'm not sure. I'd like to say we have more permanent and appropriate housing.... The way we are going there is just more emergency housing on stream that is not safe and secure" – Service provider

3 | Rainbow people face discrimination and violence in this space, and often aren't being protected by services

"It's [buiding/tenancy manager doing] things like deactivating swipes [of rainbow tenants] to not allow access or when visitors come, stopping visitors coming through but not to anyone else." – Service provider

"I get told to be grateful to have a roof over my head, just ignore it [harassment]." – Rainbow service user

"When you're in the in the [common area] and maybe having a coffee It seems to be acceptable to call people a faggot, or you know seems to be acceptable, gender slurs, but you know, racial slurs they don't get much attention either" – Rainbow service user

"If I push forward with my rainbow identity then I won't get a roof over my head. If I have a roof over my head then I accept the discriminatory practice." – Rainbow service user

3.1	Transphobia, biphobia and homophobia are prevalent within the street community and housing facilities, and sometimes also perpetuated by rainbow people.
3.2	Rainbow service users are experiencing discrimination and violence in accessing, or trying to access housing and homelessness services. This is amplified significantly for transgender, disabled, Māori and migrant folks.
3.3	Structural inequities are disproportionately disadvantaging rainbow service users who are also young, transgender, Māori, migrant and/or disabled when trying to access housing.
3.4	The delivery of housing and homelessness services is often fragmented and involves multiple services or teams, which makes it difficult to identify where accountability for rainbow service user safety sits, and to have a consistent approach.
3.5	Providers generously shared stories from their services, including injustices faced by rainbow service users. At times it was unclear whether the organisations condemned these actions or accepted them as an unfortunate reality.

3 | Rainbow people face discrimination and violence in this space, and often aren't being protected by services

3.1 Transphobia, biphobia and homophobia are prevalent within the street community and housing facilities, and sometimes also perpetuated by rainbow people.

3.2 Rainbow service users are experiencing discrimination and violence in accessing, or trying to access housing and homelessness services. This is amplified significantly for transgender, disabled, Māori and migrant folks.

- There were several stories shared of service users experiencing violence and harassment from other tenants in housing facilities or from others in the street community, on the basis of their rainbow identity.
- Service providers are (sometimes unintentionally) enabling these behaviours by not delivering consequences for perpetrators, or a having consistent approach to managing tenants in the same facility who are under the care of different providers.
- Discriminatory rhetoric is sometimes perpetuated by rainbow people, as part of being a member of the street community. This can lead to peer-led service spaces which unwittingly perpetuate the harmful rhetoric.

- We heard of several instances where the human rights of rainbow service users were not upheld by service providers, including being declined services on the basis of their gender or sexuality. None of these stories involved accountability or consequences for individuals or organisations.
- Transgender service users shared stories of consistent – and sometimes intentional, deadnaming*, alongside forms and paperwork that don't include expansive gender options or names that can be distinguished from legal/deadnames.
- Transgender and POC service users in particular are experiencing verbal and physical harassment/abuse in housing complexes, both from other tenants and from building management due to their gender identity, race and/or ethnicity.
- Disabled service users spoke of some providers dismissing their accessibility needs, and saying they should be grateful to have housing at all, despite it not meeting their access needs.
- Where a rainbow service user is experiencing bullying or harassment they have been encouraged to 'just ignore it' and 'don't let it get to you', with minimal consequences for the perpetrators.
- Where a housing situation becomes untenable because of harassment, typically rainbow service users are the ones moved, sending a message that they are the 'problem'.

*Some transgender people call it "deadnaming" when a trans person's birth name is revealed without their permission, but the term is not universally accepted as it implies a trans person "dies" when they transition. GLAAD.

MAKING SPACE

"[Colleagues] just referring to the trans people as trannys and 'do you know that this person is actually a guy' and you know, trans women are accepted as women in some ways but I have heard some staff refer to them as 'that thing' – Service provider

"I do see some quite discriminatory behaviour by some members of the sector...like the number of transitional housing providers that had just flatly refused to take transgender for example. And you know, some still insist on having segregated areas and kind of their definition of genders might leave a little bit to be desired." – Service provider

"[Service user said to me] I am really struggling here, I can't go out of my room [at the motel] because they know I'm transgender." – Service provider

3 | Rainbow people face discrimination and violence in this space, and often aren't being protected by services

3.3 Structural inequities are disproportionately disadvantaging rainbow service users who are also young, transgender, Māori, migrant and/or disabled when trying to access housing.

3.4 The delivery of housing and homelessness services is often fragmented and involves multiple services or teams, which makes it difficult to identify where accountability for rainbow service user safety sits, and to have a consistent approach.

- Disabled rainbow service users spoke of their additional safety and wellbeing considerations in finding suitable housing, including physical accessibility, proximity and access to healthcare. This made it difficult to find suitable housing (within services or the private housing market).
- Participants spoke of the trade-off between safety, accessibility and affordability, with most safe and accessible housing being unaffordable. This had led to significant debt for some service users.
- Immigration status, legal names, and age have presented barriers for service users in accessing services, where they have been ineligible or denied service on the basis of these things.
- Disabled and migrant folks spoke to the difficulty of finding employment and the implications on their ability to access safe housing that meets their accessibility needs.
- Experiences of discrimination and harassment by rainbow service users were often intertwined with racism, ableism, and classism.

- Service users typically engage with multiple agencies in seeking to address their needs surrounding housing and homelessness, and may be referred or handed over between organisations and teams as needs change or emerge.
- A common challenge identified was when there are service users from different agencies in emergency accommodation, which makes it difficult to have a hard line about rainbow inclusion and safety, with consistent consequences or restorative action.
- Private landlords, body corps, building managers, and motel/hotel management are technically involved in service delivery, operating as a business but not actively working in the sector. There is no responsibility or accountability for service user management. This proved to be a gap in the ability to cultivate safety for rainbow tenants in some facilities.

MAKING SPACE

"Giving me a roof over my head isn't enough, I need it to accommodate my disability and my needs as well... I'm unable to financially support myself because of my immigration status...financially it has been a difficult stance being a young person navigating homelessness." – Rainbow service user
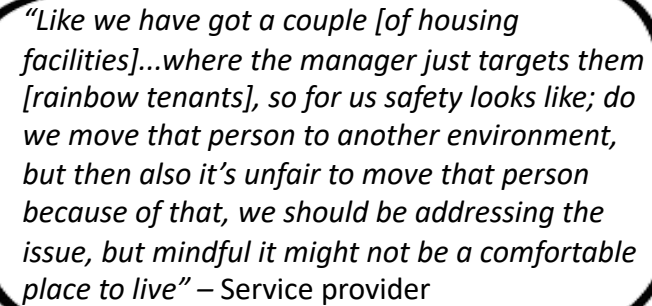
"We've got to be mindful. I can say how I expect my staff to treat service users and rainbow community members. But when you think about [large organisation], I can't say that every staff member is doing the right thing, is understanding the rainbow community and factoring in the appropriate things they need to be doing. And I guess a lot of agencies can say the same thing." – Service Provider

3 | Rainbow people face discrimination and violence in this space, and often aren't being protected by services

3.5 Providers generously shared stories from their services, including injustices faced by rainbow service users. At times it was unclear whether the organisations condemned these actions or accepted them as an unfortunate reality.

- Providers were upset sharing these stories with us and acknowledged the injustice, however didn't speak of pathways to addressing it. We didn't hear of any instances where an organisational policy provided accountability or a pathway to addressing the inequities.
- Providers shared how common it is for rainbow tenants to face violence and harassment from other tenants. Despite this being a seemingly widely known fact, there didn't appear to be any plans in place to address it.
- We heard of several instances where the human rights of rainbow service users were not upheld, including being declined services on the basis of their gender or sexuality. None of these stories involved accountability or consequences for the individuals or organisations.

"Like we have got a couple [of housing facilities]...where the manager just targets them [rainbow tenants], so for us safety looks like; do we move that person to another environment, but then also it's unfair to move that person because of that, we should be addressing the issue, but mindful it might not be a comfortable place to live" – Service provider

MAKING SPACE

4 | The sector recognises the need for change and is optimistic about collaborating to improve equity

4.1 Feeling safe and well supported in a service typically comes down to service users having trusted relationships with their support worker(s) and the continuity of those relationships.

4.2 There is widespread excitement, positivity, and appetite from the sector to build rainbow competency, and an acknowledgement that this work is overdue

"Having one person I found really easy because she could go out have and have a look at what there was and bring all the relevant information back to me" – Rainbow service user

"I don't see it [rainbow inclusion] as having much of an identity and space at this time... And I think we've been behind the 8-ball until now, and it was only reading about your project online that I started looking at how we do things.... And it worries me" – Service provider

"Actually I see a whole heap of opportunities for change in this, I am really excited" – Service provider

"It's actually...really different, accessing services myself and then going to a support service like RainbowYOUTH and having like their support worker do it for me, I was like thank god! Yes, I am the one receiving support services... and not being the one feeling like I'm the one giving them a service...it's really really nice, that actually makes such a huge difference" – Rainbow service user

4 | The sector recognises the need for change and is optimistic about collaborating to improve equity

4.1 Feeling safe and well supported in a service typically comes down to service users having trusted relationships with their support worker(s) and the continuity of those relationships.

4.2 There is widespread excitement, positivity, and appetite from the sector to build rainbow competency, and an acknowledgement that this work is overdue

- Where service users recognised a particularly useful or positive experience with a service, it was always tied to a relationship with a particular support worker (rather than the overall experience or other facets of the experience with the organisation).
- Service experiences within the housing and homelessness space are often fragmented, with different agencies or teams providing different aspects of support at different times. This compromises the ability to build sustained and deep trusting relationships.
- The approach to service user handovers within and across organisations is mixed, which compromises an integrated and continued relational approach.
- Service users spoke of the huge positive impact of support workers who could help them navigate and gain access to other services and provide information about what's available.
- Support workers who see service users as a whole person and their rainbow identity as one facet of their experience helped service users feel seen and understood, which built trust.
- Rainbow peer support services or connections were identified as part of positive support experiences, but these supports didn't always have access to appropriate resources and housing pathways that could be available through mainstream providers.

- Everyone we spoke to in the sector connected us with others to speak with, and indicated their willingness to continue to be involved and support however they can.
- Providers shared that they don't know where to start, and how they need rainbow expertise and lived experience to guide them.
- Many service providers spoke of internal staff-led rainbow initiatives that have been established and how they are progressing organisational culture around rainbow inclusion.
- There was wide recognition of the alignment between rainbow responsiveness for organisations and the cultural responsiveness work being done in the Māori and Pasifika space in particular, and the partnership model that's needed.
- Providers spoke of the nuanced approach required to ensure widespread buy-in from staff, and avoiding having to take an 'enforcement' approach. Having said that, most providers felt most of their staff would welcome training and development in this space.

MAKING SPACE

"When you come across the wrong person it can really set you off but when you come across the right person it can really uplift your spirit" – Rainbow service user

"They saw me and my identity and it was one thing, it was one story... They would actually treat me as a human and don't put my other problems down to being queer." – Rainbow service user

"It's time. This should have happened a long time ago, and it didn't" – Service provider

"I think we're better than we were, but I don't think we're anywhere near expert or competent yet." – Service provider