

# WORD – The Front Line Impact Evaluation Report

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**cogo**

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# Executive Summary



## Background & methodology

WORD – The Front Line (WTFL) is an inter-high school competition that brings together teams of young people to learn how to share and perform their stories via the medium of spoken word poetry. WTFL is currently funded by Creative NZ and Auckland Council and is Action Education’s flagship programme. Key programme goals include improving students’ writing and performance, but also to foster teamwork, personal development, youth voice, identity, leadership and community.

Action Education engaged Cogo to carry out an impact evaluation of WTFL to support potential funders to understand the value delivered by the programme. The two main evaluation goals have been to measure the reach of the programme in terms of numbers and demographics of participants, and the impact on participants in line with WTFL’s programme goals. Cogo collated and analysed information from: WTFL project documentation including annual reports; an online survey of participants, high school teachers and parents/whānau of participants (n=90 participants, n=19 teachers, n=5 parents/whānau), and; interviews with two Action Education team members.

## Summary of evaluation findings & recommendations

Between 125 and 220 young people have participated in WTFL annually, with teams being formed by students from up to 44 high schools each year. Demographic survey data indicates strong diversity among WTFL participants to date in terms of ethnicity and gender, with over-representation of NZ Māori (23%) and Pacific Peoples (56%), and high representation of non-binary (8%), transgender (3%) and genderqueer (2%) young people, and those selecting “Don’t know/Questioning/Unsure” or “I use another term [to describe my gender]” (6% combined). High school teachers play a critical role in recruitment for WTFL, with 61% of all participants saying that they first heard about WTFL when a teacher or other staff member at school told them about it, and 33% at a presentation or workshop at school.

The evaluation findings are extremely positive in terms of the impact that WTFL has on participants in line with its goals. 91% of participants (2022 and alumni from previous years) report that the programme had a positive impact on their overall wellbeing, and 90% said it increased their overall-self-confidence. Most participants also reported that the programme increased their leadership skills (72%) and their confidence that they can speak up to express values and beliefs (88%).

Almost all participants reported that WTFL had a positive impact in terms of their feelings of social connection (90% agreeing that the programme made them more aware that they belong to one or more communities), and their awareness of other peoples/cultures outside their world (96%). 81% reported that WTFL increased their confidence around meeting and connecting with other young people, and 68% reported an increased in their confidence around being able to give back to their communities. These self-reported positive impacts are further supported by parents/whānau of participants: all five of the parents/whānau responding to the survey reported that they saw positive impacts of the programme on their child/whānau member’s self-confidence and overall wellbeing, and four out of five in their ability to meet and connect with other young people and meet and connect with adults. As such, these findings indicate that the positive impacts of the programme on participants can be seen in, and possibly transferred into, participants’ communities including their whānau.

As a result of WTFL, participants reported an increase in confidence around writing to express themselves and public speaking (over 90% reporting an increase in confidence around both areas). This finding was supported by high school teachers who almost unanimously agreed that they saw an improvement in programme participants' writing and presenting skills (18 and 19 out of 19 respectively).

18 out of 19 high school teachers also agreed that their involvement in WTFL had a positive impact on their own professional development, and many made comments speaking to the usefulness of both the skills learnt and resources provided through the programme. Teachers also gave extremely positive feedback about the organisation of WTFL, and the communication and support delivered by the Action Education team, indicating a positive experience overall. It is therefore clear that WTFL is not only benefitting the young people participating in the programme, but also the wider school community including teachers and therefore other students.

Overall, the programme feedback provided by all involved was extremely positive, with comments from participants most commonly referring to the welcoming, supportive and non-judgmental space that WTFL provides (54% of comments) and the expertise and care of the Action Education team (49%). This is particularly powerful feedback given recent insights delivered by Cogo to the Hā Collective around the importance of providing young people not necessarily engaged in typical aspects of school life, including for example sports, with safe coping strategies and adults to talk to about the stress they experience. WTFL could therefore play an invaluable role in supporting the wellbeing of this particular group of young people in providing them with a sense of belonging and community not otherwise found in school, whilst also allowing them to access and witness adults who are happy to verbalise and have non-judgmental conversations about challenging topics.

Very few participants made suggestions for improvements to the programme, but those that did mainly supported information from Cogo's interviews with Action Education staff members discussing the need to make the programme and its events accessible for more participants.

Given the extremely positive evaluation findings, and programme feedback received, Cogo recommends that additional funding is sourced to make the programme and its events available to, and accessible for, more young people. Recommendations for how this funding should be directed include providing financial support and more event locations within Auckland to reduce transport barriers for young people wanting to attend WTFL events, plus the expansion of the programme into more regions across Aotearoa. Given the high workload experienced by coaches relative to the current remuneration, and the support they are required to give participants during what can be an emotionally challenging experience, Cogo also recommends sourcing funding to improve the remuneration and support provided to WTFL coaches.

Finally, Cogo recommends that evaluations of the programme are carried out annually to continue to support the programme with funding applications, and continued development and improvement of the programme as required. As such, Cogo has provided WTFL with an internal evaluation framework for use in the future.

# Introduction





## What is WORD – The Front Line?

WORD – The Front Line (WTFL) is an inter-high school competition running over three school terms (Terms 1-3) that brings together teams of young people from across the Auckland region to learn how to share and perform their stories via the medium of spoken word poetry. WTFL is currently funded by Creative NZ and Auckland Council and is Action Education's flagship programme.

WTFL was launched in 2014 by Action Education and South Auckland Poets Collective, who form a team of youth workers, artists, poets, educators and mentors. Action Education is an independent Incorporated Society set up to engage and empower young people through creative and action-based methods and is a sister organisation to Youthline. South Auckland Poets Collective are a group of storytellers with a passion for using Spoken Word to engage and inspire the youth of Aotearoa.

At the beginning of the year, high schools are invited to register a team. Each school can put forward up to two teams to compete in regional heats. Each team must have a minimum of four and maximum of six students, and all team members must be attending the same high school.

In order to help teams prepare for regional heats, WTFL offers each school two free workshops. These workshops help advertise the programme, gather interest from students, introduce them to spoken word poetry, and support them to work on their poems before Regional Heats. The WTFL team also provide advice on setting up an ongoing spoken word poetry club at the school.

The format has adapted over time, in response to the changing needs of young people but also in response to external events, notably lockdowns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2023, there were four evenings of Regional Heats: two heats for South and West Teams held at the Mangere Arts Centre and two heats for Central and Northwest Teams held at The Auckland Performing Arts Centre (TAPAC).

The rules of the Regional Heats for 2023 were as follows<sup>1</sup>:

1. Each team is required to perform three poems.
2. Poets must perform their own work and cannot read a poem on behalf of someone else. Plagiarised material will result in disqualification.
3. At least three poets from each team must perform at regional heats. Teams can perform solos, duets, or group pieces. Although duets and group pieces are not necessary for regional heats, they are for teams that advance to Semi-Finals and Grand Slam.
4. Poems do not need to be memorised at the Regional Heats stage of the competition.
5. Each poem should be between 1-4 minutes.
6. No accompaniment by sound, props, or costume is allowed.

In total, 14 teams advance to the next stage of the competition. Each team is assigned a coach who works with the young people and students must attend two camps – including one overnight camp (except for when COVID restrictions do not allow) - before competing in one of two Semi-Finals events from which

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.actioneducation.co.nz/uploads/2/9/8/1/29818351/wtfl\\_2023\\_information\\_pack.pdf](https://www.actioneducation.co.nz/uploads/2/9/8/1/29818351/wtfl_2023_information_pack.pdf)



six final teams (three from each Semi-Final) are chosen to compete in the ultimate Grand Slam event. All WTFL coaches are contracted by Action Education and are established artists with slam and performance poetry experience, some having originally experienced WTFL as a participant.

Students are also encouraged to attend – and perform at – other events delivered by Action Education throughout the year (i.e. outside of WTFL) so that they gain experience of being on a stage e.g. Stand Up Poetry Open Mic, Verses & Vibes, and SUP Slam.

WTFL programme goals include improving students' writing and performance, but also to foster teamwork, personal development, youth voice, identity, leadership and community:

*It is a poetry slam with the purpose of engaging and growing the potential of our future leaders. It is the only creative battlefield of its kind, equipping young people with poetry prowess and leadership principles for an opportunity to battle for themselves and the challenges that their generation face.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.actioneducation.co.nz/word---the-front-line.html>

## Evaluation approach

Action Education engaged Cogo to carry out an impact evaluation of WORD – The Front Line (WTFL) in order to support potential funders to understand the value delivered by the programme.

Cogo worked in collaboration with the Action Education team to co-design an evaluation framework that would capture the impacts of this programme on its participants, their families, and the communities within which they operate.

As part of the discovery phase, Cogo carried out an analysis of relevant programme documentation shared by Action Education, including annual reports, and met with key WTFL team members a number of times to understand the programme, including:

- How does the programme work? What does it involve?
- What do team members see as the programme's strengths and challenges?
- What does success look like? For the programme? For the evaluation?
- Who is involved in the programme? How might we best reach them and hear their point of view?
- How would the insights from the evaluation be most powerfully and usefully presented?

Cogo were also engaged to provide Action Education with an internal evaluation framework and tools that will enable them to perform basic internal monitoring of the programme on an on-going basis. This is delivered at the end of this external evaluation report [here](#).

## Main evaluation goals

The two main evaluation goals have been to measure:

1. The reach of WORD – The Front Line (WTFL) in terms of numbers and demographics of participants
2. The impact on participants in line with WTFL's programme goals

### *Reach*

Overall reach in terms of numbers of participating students and high schools was able to be calculated using programme documentation, however participant demographics are currently not collected by Action Education staff and so consequently we are unable to present historic reach of the programme by key demographics e.g. age, gender, and ethnicity. However, we present demographic data collected in the online survey and discuss whether these could be used as an indication of the demographic makeup of WTFL participants.

We also included in the online survey a series of questions to help us understand whether or not there has been a wider reach of the programme's impact, including on peer students in the school setting.

### *Impact*

Cogo used the programme goals described in programme documentation as a starting point to develop the following key evaluation questions:

1. What has been the impact on student participants' overall wellbeing?
2. What has been the impact on student participants' overall self-confidence?
3. What has been the impact on student participants' leadership capability?
4. What has been the impact on student participants' confidence that they can speak up to express values and beliefs?
5. What has been the impact on student participants' social connection, and awareness of other cultures and life experiences?
6. What has been the impact on student participants' confidence that they can give back to their communities?
7. What has been the impact on student participants' writing and presenting/performing skills?
8. What has been the impact on high school teachers' professional development?
9. According to student participants, high school teachers and Action Education team members, what about WTFL works well, what doesn't work well and what suggestions do they have for improving how it operates in the future?
10. Have parents/whānau of participants seen an increase in self-confidence, well-being and social connection in participants at home?

## Data collection tools

### *Programme documentation*

The Action Education team shared six annual reports, beginning with the Financial Year 2014 report that relates to the 2013 intake, a number of registers and other operational excel sheets, and information from their 2019 internal evaluation with 17 participants.

### *Online Survey*

The main data collection tool was an online survey which was designed with advanced logic to allow tailored pathways for the programme's most recent (2022) participants, as well as alumni, facilitators, whānau of participants, and high school teachers who have worked with Action Education on WTFL.

The survey was distributed to an email database compiled by Cogo based on Excel registers (which included participants, whānau contacts and high school teachers) from 2015 – 2022 provided by Action Education and also via social media, sharing the survey link alongside a video of the Action Education team ([view here](#)). An incentive to participate was promoted with all complete survey responses going into the draw to win one of three \$150 Visa Prezzy Cards. Contact details were collected via a separate form that respondents were redirected to after completing the survey, allowing the survey response itself to remain anonymous.

We acknowledge that there is likely to be sample bias towards participants who may have had a more memorable experience with the programme and/or towards past participants who are still connected to the programme and would therefore respond to a call to action from Action Education. However, by going out to the email database the survey invitation itself reached both those having a positive and negative experience with the programme. To ensure that this sample bias is not a consideration in future evaluation work, we recommend as part of the internal evaluation framework presented later in this

report that Action Education include the survey as a compulsory part of the programme, as soon after participants have completed their experience as possible. Cogo has used this approach previously with the evaluation of a health education course and it was successful at ensuring an almost 100% completion rate.

### ***Additional qualitative data collection***

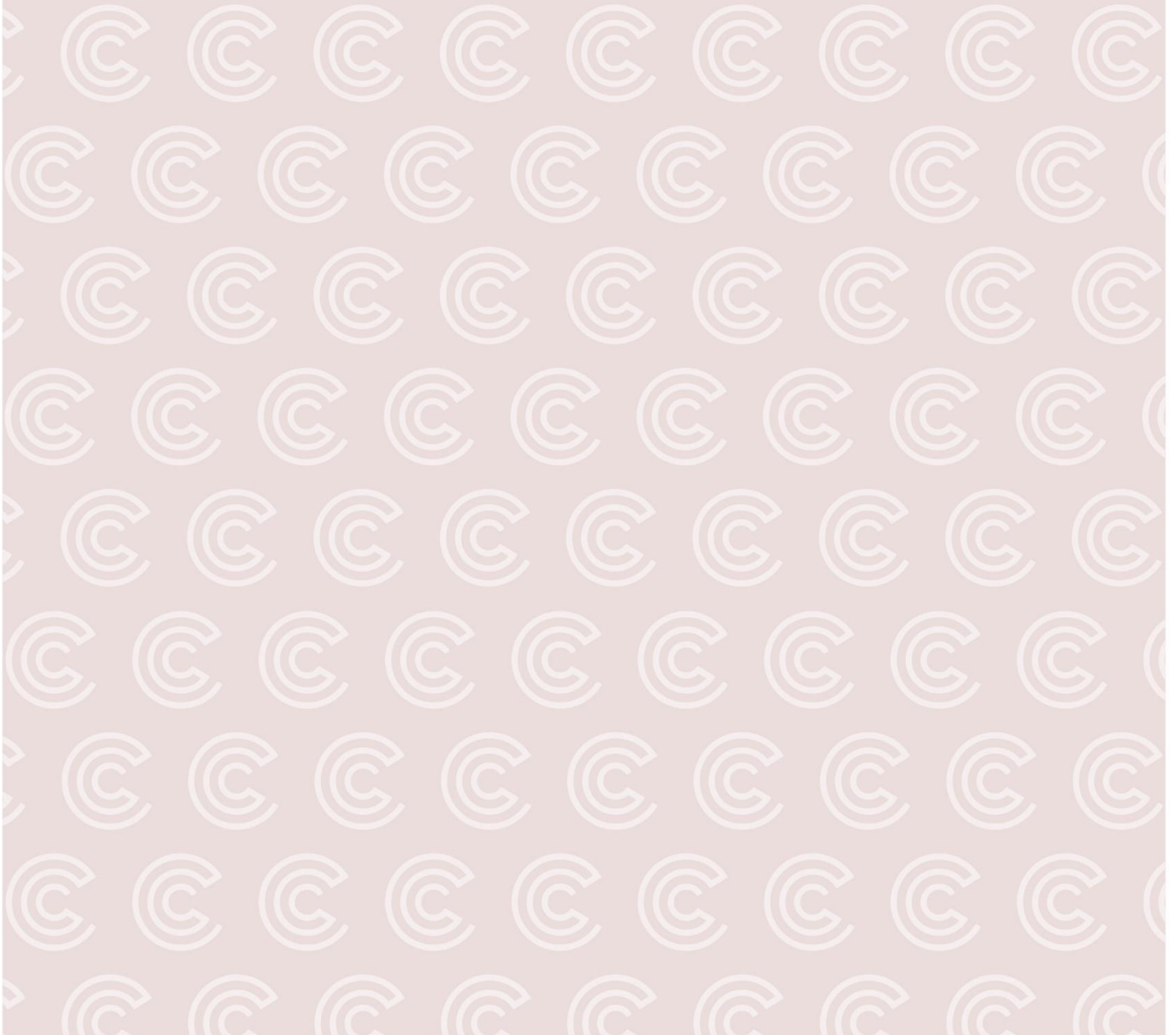
It was critical to offer alternative ways of providing feedback on the programme in addition to the online survey in order to be accessible and responsive to the target audience, i.e. young people who may have preferred to share their experiences via spoken word. We offered participants the option of submitting a video of themselves talking about their experience of the programme, but did not receive any feedback in this way indicating that the online survey method was acceptable to WTFL participants.

The online survey also functioned as a recruitment method for one-on-one interviews. Action Education staff members, judges and coaches who had not also previously been programme participants were asked to enter their email address and then were contacted separately to arrange an interview. Eleven people entered their email addresses, and two people replied offering a time to be interviewed. The two interviews lasted 25 and 40 minutes.

Interview questions centred on the following main areas of inquiry:

1. What do you think the impact of WTFL is on young people's wellbeing?
2. What do you think the impact of WTFL is on high school teachers and participating schools?
3. In your experience, does WTFL "work" for all young people?
4. What do you think needs to change or improve? What would you like to see happen with WTFL in terms of changes or expansions to the programme and how it runs?

# Evaluation results



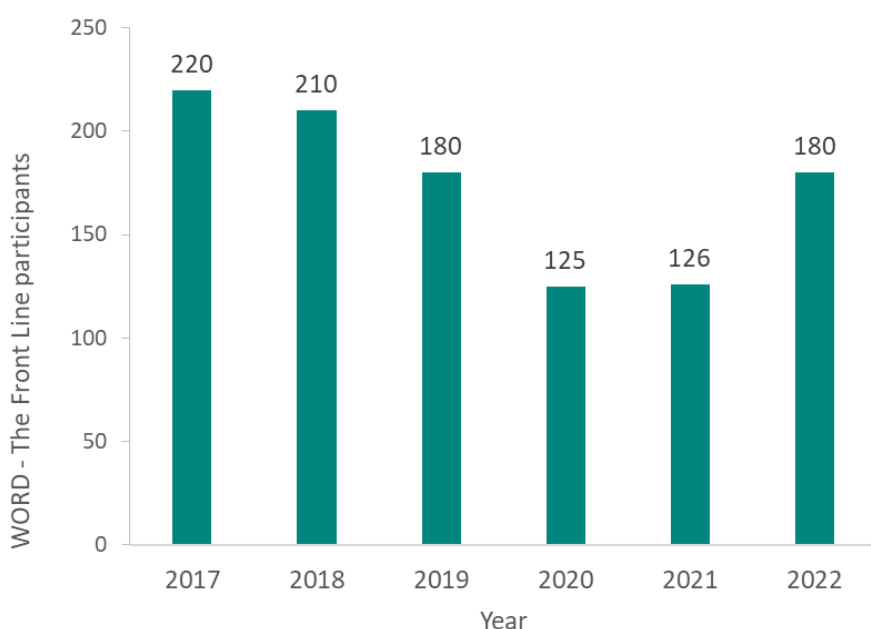
# Reach

## Total participants

Based on Action Education annual reporting available since 2017, WORD - The Front Line (WTFL) has been delivered to between 125 and 220 young people annually (see Figure 1). 2020-2021 saw major disruption caused by COVID-19 lockdowns and numbers of participants naturally declined for these two years. Nonetheless, the Action Education team pivoted all of their programmes to support young people, with online engagement increasing by 4300% (Action Education, Annual Report FY2020).

It is positive to see participant numbers returning this year to pre-COVID levels, however only 17 high schools participated in 2022 compared to 36 in 2019 indicating a narrowing of the reach in terms of schools.

**Figure 1: WORD - The Front Line participants per year**



*Source: WORD - The Front Line documentation*

## Online survey sample demographics

We received 128 responses to the online survey from the WTFL community. Eleven respondents were Action Education staff members, judges and kaiāwhina who were then asked if they would like to take part in an interview. Five responses came from those who had only been involved as audience members and were therefore removed from the sample. Of the remaining 113 responses, 90 had participated in the programme as a student, 19 had been involved in the programme as a high school teacher and five were parents/guardians or other whānau members of participants.

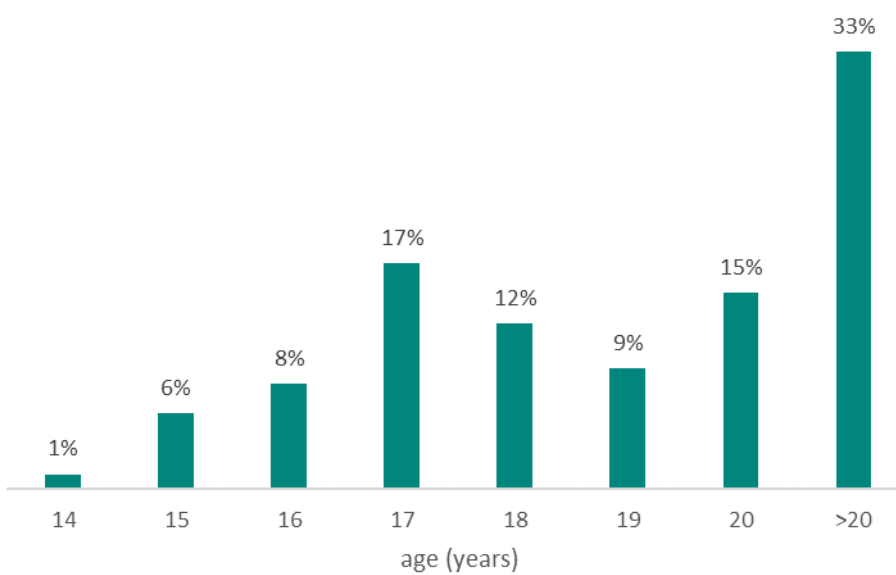
We present here demographics from online survey respondents participating in WTFL between 2014 and 2022. We acknowledge that the survey data is unlikely to be fully representative of the population of

WTFL students but, as the only demographic data available, we include it here as an indicator of the diversity that exists within the sample and the resulting impact evaluation findings.

A third (33%) of programme participants responding to the online survey were more than 20 years old at the time of completing the survey, a further 15% were 20 years and the remaining 53% were teenagers between 14 and 19 years old (see Figure 1).

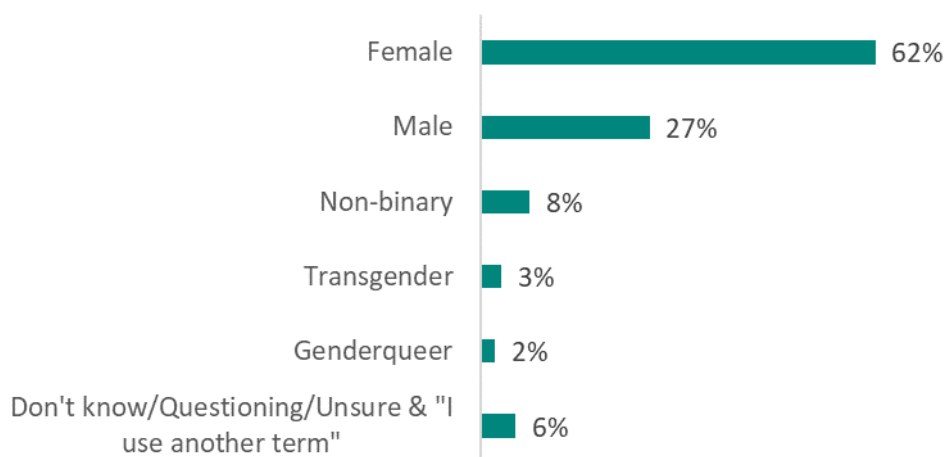
As shown in Figure 3, 62% of our survey sample are female, 27% male, 8% non-binary, 3% transgender, 2% genderqueer and 6% selected “Don’t know/Questioning/Unsure” or “I use another term” (for confidentiality, we combine these two response options). Please note, participants are able to select more than one option for this question.

**Figure 2: Current age of online survey respondents (n=90 programme participants)**



Source: Cogo Online Survey 2022

**Figure 3: Gender of online survey respondents (n=90 programme participants)**

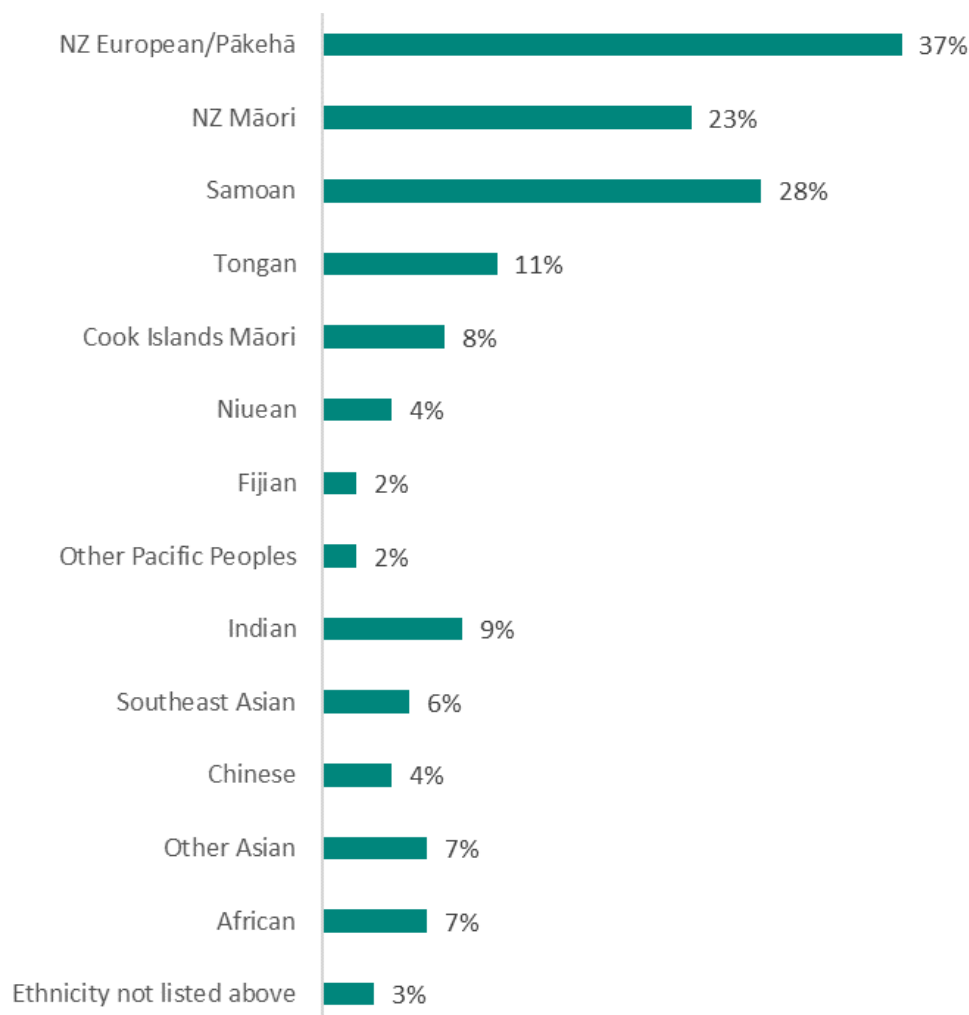


Source: Cogo Online Survey 2022



As shown in Figure 4, 37% of our programme participant survey sample are NZ European/Pākehā, Samoan (28%), NZ Māori (23%), Tongan (11%) and Indian (9%). When grouped, Pacific Peoples make up 56% of the programme participant survey sample.

**Figure 4: Ethnicity of online survey respondents (n=90 programme participants)**

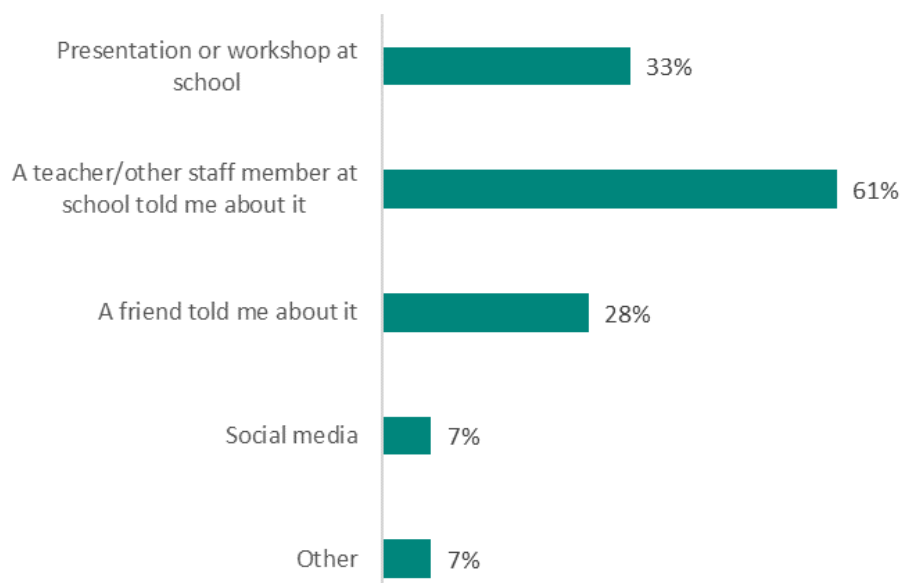


*Source: Cogo Online Survey 2022*

### ***How WORD – The Front Line is reaching participants***

The majority of programme participants (61%) first heard about WORD - The Front Line when a teacher/other staff member at school told them about it (see Figure 5). 33% first heard about the programme at a presentation or workshop at school, and 28% were told about it from a friend.

**Figure 5: “How did you first hear about WORD - The Front Line?” (n=90 programme participants)**



Source: Cogo Online Survey 2022

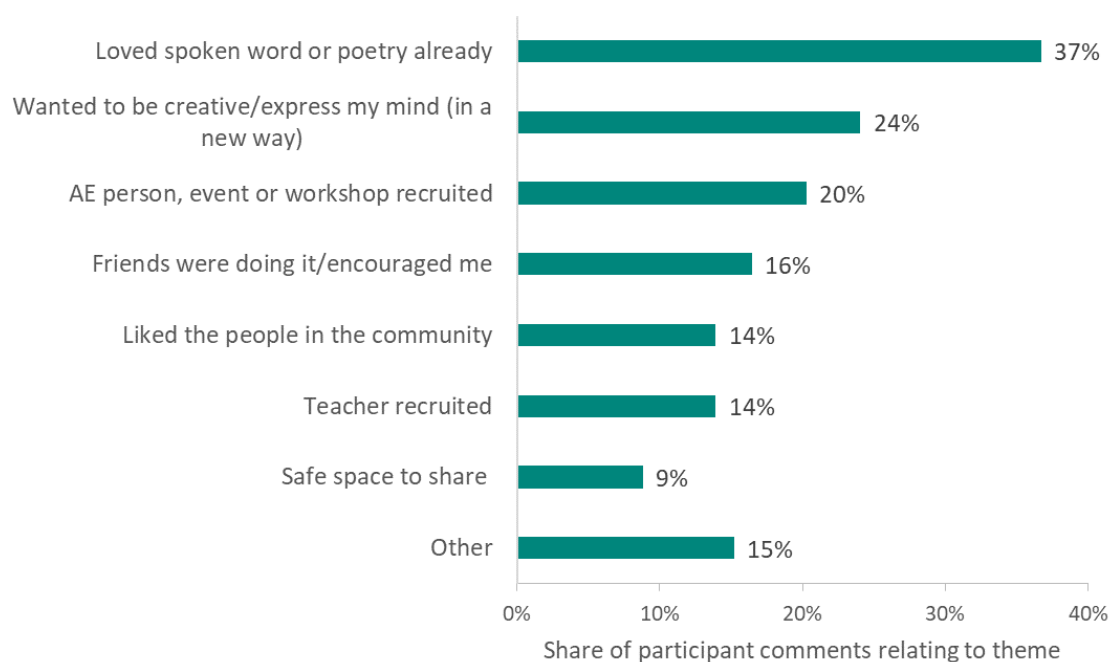
When asked, “What was it that first made you want to be involved with WORD - The Frontline?”, 79 participants chose to make a comment, most commonly stating that they already had a love of spoken work or poetry (37% of comments related to this theme), followed by 24% saying that they wanted to be creative or express their minds in a new way, and 20% made a comment about how they were recruited by an Action Education staff member, event or workshop (please see Figure 6 for a breakdown of the themes that were expressed in these 79 comments). Some examples of comments are:

*“It was different, I'd thought that poetry was all Shakespeare and old English stuff, but when I heard my first slam poem, it was kinda like the power of a speech and the material of an imaginative fiction. Overall it was a bit of a art shock, and I quite liked it.”*

*“listening to other peoples stories through spoken word poetry while also showcasing my own. getting inspired, being touched in my fat i by words and seeing other brown poets like myself on stage absolutely killing it!”*

*“Being able to write whatever we wanted and not feel shame or stupid about it.”*

**Figure 6: “What was it that first made you want to be involved with WORD - The Frontline?” (n=79 comments from programme participants)**

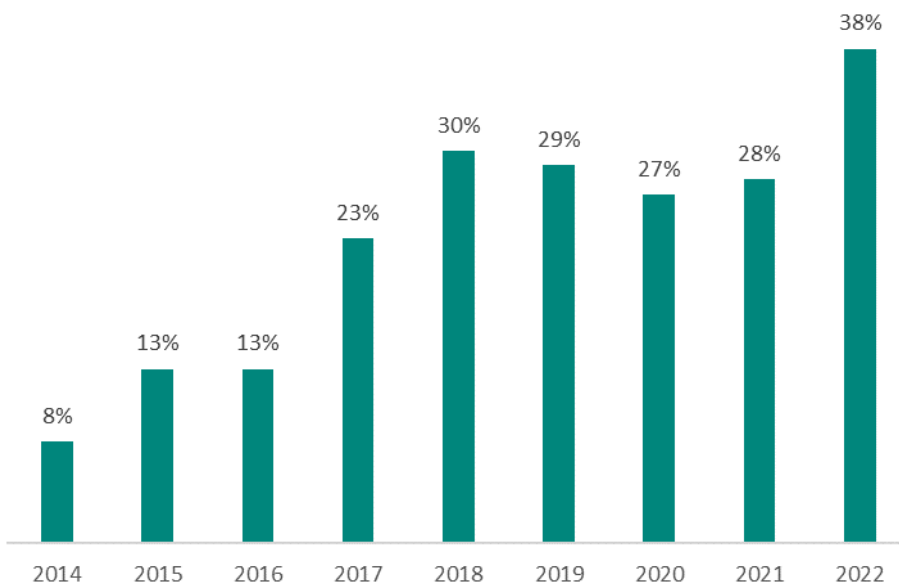


*Source: Cogo Online Survey 2022*

## **WORD - The Front Line respondent involvement**

38% of programme participants responding to the online survey were involved in the most recent intake in 2022 (22% participated in 2022 only, and 16% had participated in 2022 as well as one or more previous years) - see Figure 7. The remaining 62% had participated in one or more previous years. Most commonly, respondents were involved in WORD – The Front Line for one year (42%), 36% for two years, and 14% three or more years (see Figure 8). Please note, five of the seven respondents that were involved in the programme for more than three years included their involvement as coaches/staff in one or more years.

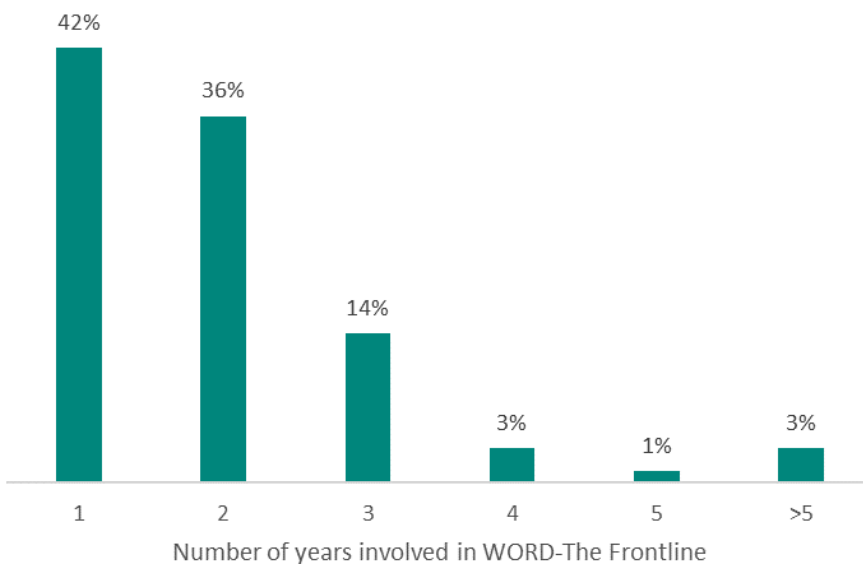
**Figure 7: Year(s) participated in WORD - The Front Line (n=90 programme participants)**



*Source: Cogo Online Survey 2022*

Four of the 19 high school teachers who responded to the survey have been involved in the programme for one or two years, nine have been involved for between three and five years and six for more than five years. 13 of the high school teachers were involved in the 2022 programme, while the remaining six were only involved in previous years.

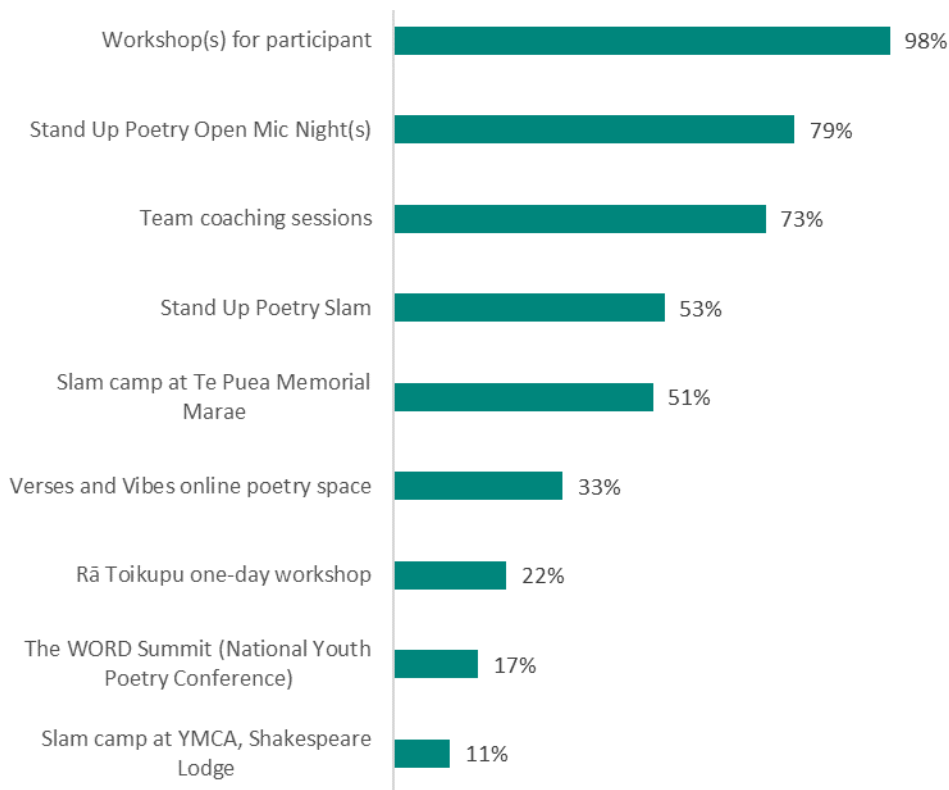
**Figure 8: Number of years involved in WORD - The Front Line (n=90 programme participants)**



*Source: Cogo Online Survey 2022*

Almost all (92%) programme participants responding to the online survey qualified for and participated in a semi-final event, and 67% participated in a Grand Slam event. In terms of other interactions with the programme - most commonly, 98% had attended workshop(s) for participants, 79% a Stand Up Poetry Open Mic night(s), and 73% team coaching session(s) (see Figure 9).

**Figure 9: WORD - The Front Line activities participated in (n=90 programme participants)**



Source: Cogo Online Survey 2022

## Impact

### Impact on programme participants

#### Awareness

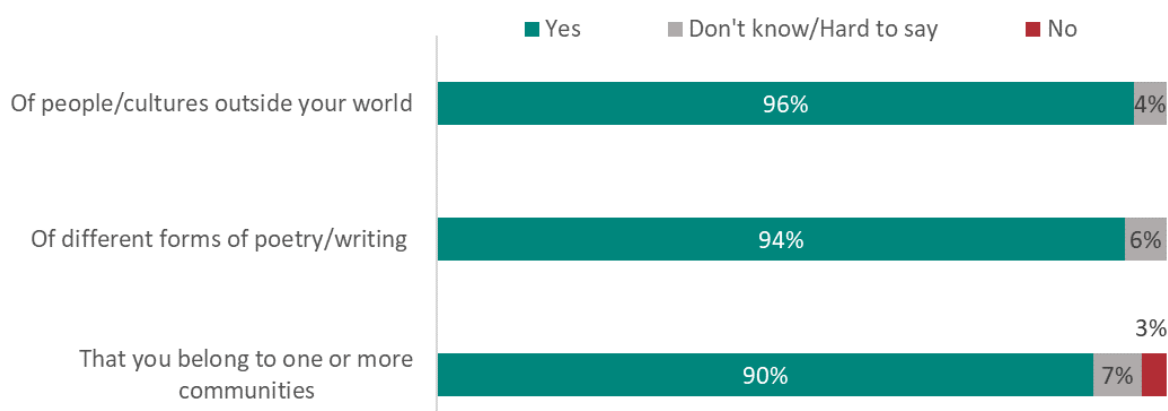
Almost all programme participants reported that the programme increased their awareness of peoples/cultures outside of their world (96% saying “yes”), their awareness of different forms of poetry/writing (94%), and their awareness that they belong to one or more communities (90%) (see Figure 10). When invited to elaborate (optionally) on their response to this question, some examples of comments include:

*“WORD was a really important experience for me in terms of meeting people from and appreciating cultures other than my own. I became involved in WORD at the age of 13, and it was probably the first time I felt like my ethnicity (NZ European) and my background made me stand out in a NZ context. That was really important in helping me challenge my perspective on what was “default” and better understand how my experience growing up in NZ was affected by my Pākehā upbringing.”*

*“In all honestly I was not a progressive person in society. Meaning I didn't understand the perspectives of young women in society, the LGBTQ+ community, and how some Polynesians and different ethnicities were treated in the shadows of Auckland as the media and other people tried to cover up the discrimination that occurred in schools and public places. WORD - The Frontline on the other hand brought those problems to the light, without a filter to hide the truth, which is what I loved about the spaces they created.”*

*“Yes! I heard poems articulated in so many forms, rap, soft tone, straight up just stating lines. I seen performing arts incorporated in writing etc.”*

**Figure 10: “Did your involvement as a participant in WORD - The Front Line increase your awareness:” (n=90 programme participants)**



Source: Cogo Online Survey 2022

In our interviews, coaches’ comments support the finding relating to increased awareness that young people belong to one or more communities. In our discussions they describe how for many young people, WTFL provides an important safe space for them to connect, that they haven’t previously found at school or elsewhere. For example:

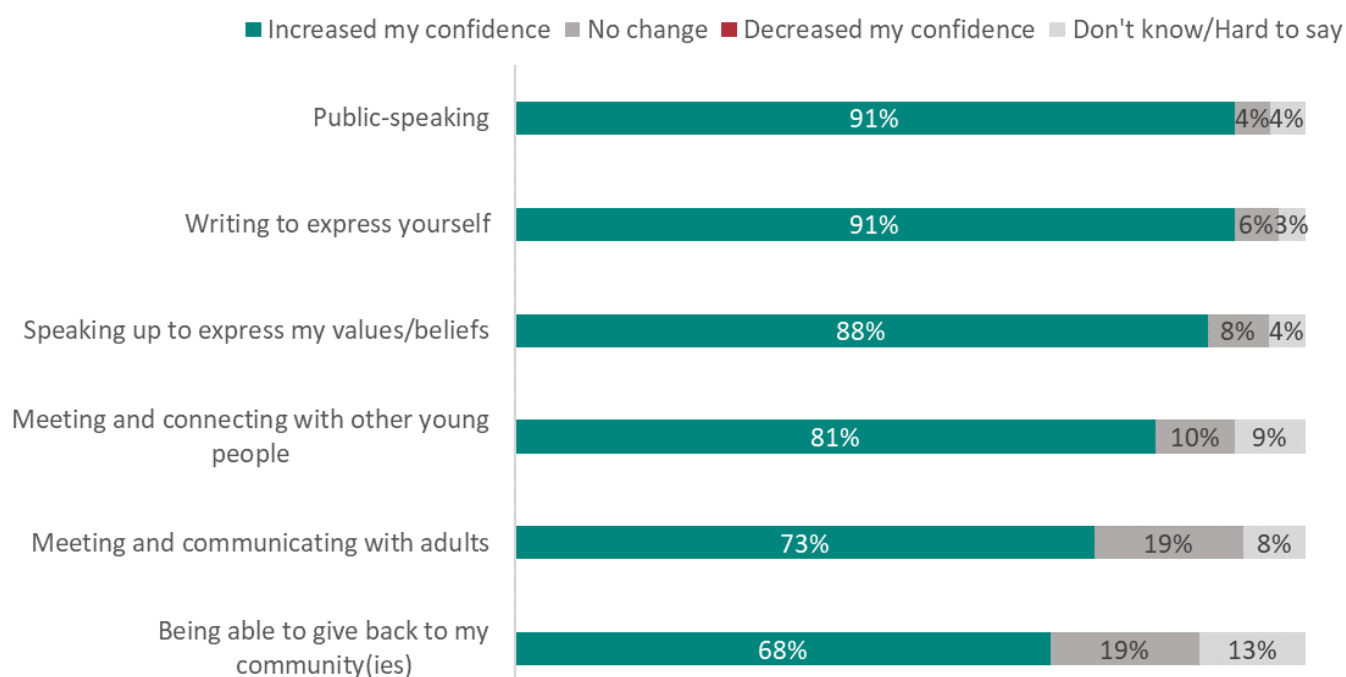
*“I have seen that WORD provides a place for young people where the schools don’t and over the years that has broken my heart – the lack of support that some of these students get. Especially when this is where they find their voice and they go from being a quiet wallflower to being passionate about who and what they can do. I think it’s a really terrible thing to be told that you will be supported and you finally go up to share your voice and then your voice gets shut down by the institution.”*

*“Half of my kids [at one school] are queer. I think pretty much the entire team at [the other school] are queer. I think it kinds of fits into that misfits thing, they don’t feel super well represented or super comfortable in a lot of school spaces... This comp was a safe space where they could be themselves. It was an opportunity for them to say things that they either couldn’t say outside in the rest of the school, or they could say it but they would be judged about it and they would hear about it. Incredibly valuable for LGBTQI kids. Especially in an environment like that. When you don’t have opportunities to express yourself in that way and to be yourself a programme like this – if it’s there – is remarkable. There are a lot of kids who really look forward to this programme and really view it as a sanctuary in a lot of ways.”*

### Self-confidence

Programme participants also report positive impacts on various aspects of self-confidence as a result of their involvement in WORD - The Front Line (see Figure 11). Most notably, 91% reported that their involvement in the programme increased their confidence around public speaking and their confidence around writing to express themselves. 88% reported that their involvement in the programme increased their confidence around speaking up to express their values/beliefs, and 81% around meeting and connecting with other young people. Not one respondent said that the programme had decreased their confidence in any of the aspects presented.

**Figure 11: “What impact did your involvement as a participant in WORD - The Front Line have on your confidence around:” (n=90 programme participants)**



Source: Cogo Online Survey 2022

90% of respondents said that their involvement in WORD - The Front Line had increased their overall self-confidence (see Figure 12). 4% reported no change and 6% selected “Don’t know/Hard to say”, but again, not one respondent reported that their involvement in the programme decreased their overall self-confidence.

Open text comments from participants in the online survey supported these results relating to increased confidence, for example:

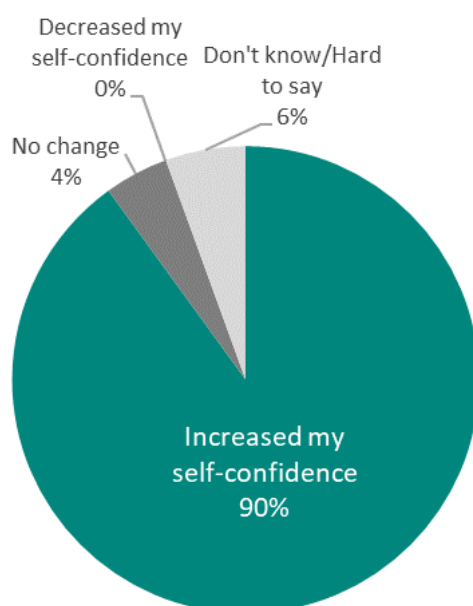
*“I had severe social anxiety and WTFL helped me past it. It pushed me to think bigger and be more confident. I have always been an advocate but it made me even more outspoken and I have made genuine change wherever I go when I see something that needs to change. I met people I still keep connected with today and look back fondly to my time in WTFL.”*

*“At the beginning I would throw up from being so anxious before performing. By the end I was still anxious but it wasn't paralysing and I was excited to speak.”*

*“WTFL fostered a space where I felt that I did not have to be ashamed of myself. To have a safe space to share my stories gave me the confidence to do so outside of spoken word and into other areas of my life.”*



**Figure 12: “What impact did your involvement as a participant in WORD - The Front Line have on your overall self-confidence?” (n=90 programme participants)**



Source: Cogo Online Survey 2022

### Overall wellbeing

91% of respondents said that their involvement in WORD - The Front Line had a positive impact on their overall wellbeing (see Figure 13). These respondents elaborated on this impact in the optional open text box with examples as follows:

*“Yes WFL actually helped me start liking myself! It saved me from a lot of mental health issues, it gave me purpose actually”*

*“As well as giving me a space where I can be authentic, it also gave me the opportunity to be an active member within the community. As someone who was previously very reclusive and did not have many connections beyond friends I spoke to on the internet, this improved my wellbeing and made me feel more secure about my place in the world as a whole.”*

*“This made a huge positively impact on all 4 dimensions of my wellbeing”*

*“WFL definitely challenged me to go deep within myself and pull things that were sitting in the dark that I didn't even know were sitting there. I can recall a specific workshop that I will never forget, you were to write a letter to your past self and you were to write down certain things that you would say to that person eg what do you need to forgive yourself for etc etc that encouraged me to step up to my front line and also along the way enabled my healing journey that I'm still currently on but am now aware of.”*

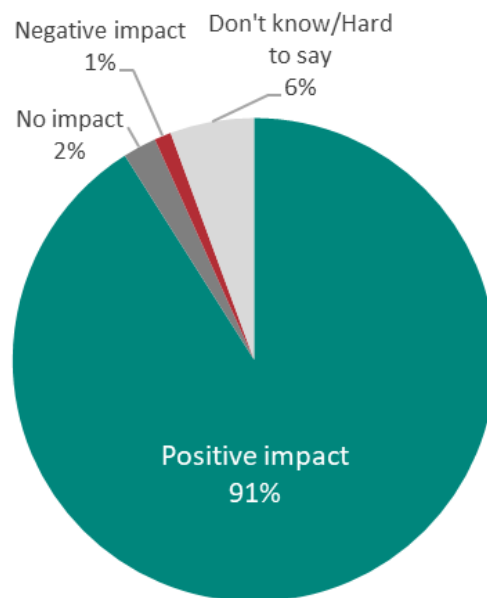
2% reported no change to their overall wellbeing and 6% selected “Don’t know/Hard to say” (see Figure 13). One respondent reported a negative impact on their overall wellbeing and elaborated in optional open text by saying:

*“This year, it was a lot juggling schoolwork and trying to prepare poetry pieces for the competition”.*

Interestingly, it appears the response to this survey question may develop over time. One respondent gave a neutral response to the quantitative question presented in Figure 13, but added in the optional open text:

*“It’s hard to say whether my involvement with WORD was necessarily good or bad for me mentally. Though I am leaning towards a negative...As I’m a little older, I certainly appreciate every bit of my experience there ... I think long-term I will continue to reflect and further appreciate the lessons and support. But for who I was at the time (an immature, frustrated teenager) I don’t think it did me any favours mentally.”*

**Figure 13: “What impact did your involvement as a participant in WORD - The Front Line have on your overall wellbeing i.e. mental and physical?” (n=90 programme participants)**



Source: Cogo Online Survey 2022

Our interviews with coaches also spoke to the potential beneficial impacts of WTFL on young people’s overall wellbeing, but that it can also be challenging. For example:

*“I think it has a positive impact on kids’ mental health and I can say that quite confidently. It gives a format for kids to talk about things that they don’t always get a chance to talk about and they can do it without it necessarily being a big deal. If they drop a really serious thing into casual conversation, some people might be like...ohh I don’t really know what to do with that...but if it’s in a poem, it doesn’t mean that it’s any less serious but a lot of times it’s just easier to say something in a poem than it is to say to a friend. Also it’s not just the poetry but it’s also the spaces...so in the workshops that I ran, among themselves they would quite often talk about some quite serious things. The only really negative thing I would say is that sometimes the stress of the competition can get a lot, especially if they are putting a lot on themselves. But I think quite often you’re just going to get that with teenagers, especially when they’ve committed themselves to ten things and they’ve got a part-time job, and activities after school every day...”*

## Skill development

72% of programme participants responding to the online survey said that the programme had helped them to develop leadership skills for the future (see Figure 14). 89% also said that it had helped them to develop other skills. These respondents were asked to elaborate on the additional skills that they had developed. 70 chose to respond, most commonly making a comment relating to having developed empathy/social skills to connect with new/different communities (44% of comments), public speaking/performing skills (41%) and writing skills (39%) – see Figure 15. Some examples of comments relating to this reported skill development are:

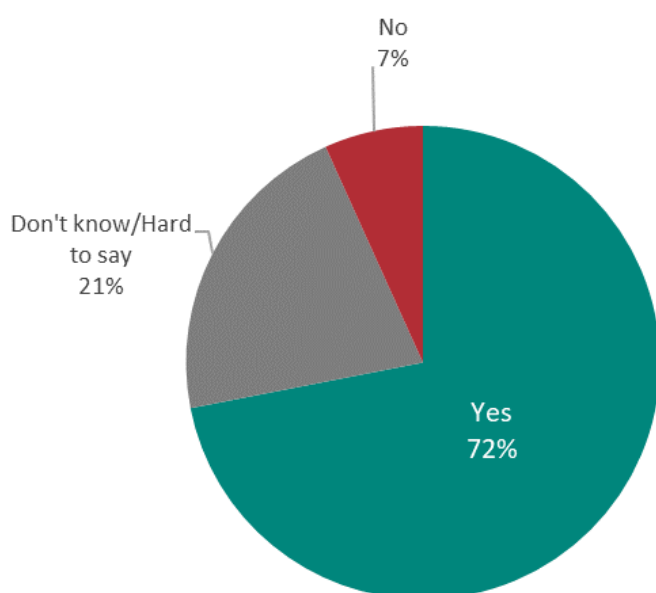
*“WORD & action education have helped me hone my skills as a performer. They have helped me navigate all the spaces in which i enter as a queer, Māori woman. I have also gained skills in facilitation and self-management. And ultimately, WORD & Action ed have helped me become the best badass that i can be < 3”*

*“Stage presence and utilisation and breath control is helpful when performing. But also it gave me a new way to look at and apply empathy. Not only did it give me performance and writing skills, but also raised my social skills.”*

*“Writing skills, being more vulnerable with strangers, being able to make connections with strangers, inviting people into conversations, a whole lot!”*

*“Growing up I have never been very confident with my writing in English as English is my second (written & read) language. After taking part in WORD - The Frontline, I have become far more confident and have performed all over the world.”*

**Figure 14: “Did your involvement as a participant in WORD - The Front Line help you develop your leadership skills for the future?” (n=90 programme participants)**



Source: Cogo Online Survey 2022

**Figure 15: Thematic analysis of open text comments from the 89% of respondents that reported developing other skills as a result of WORD – The Front Line (n=70 programme participant comments)**



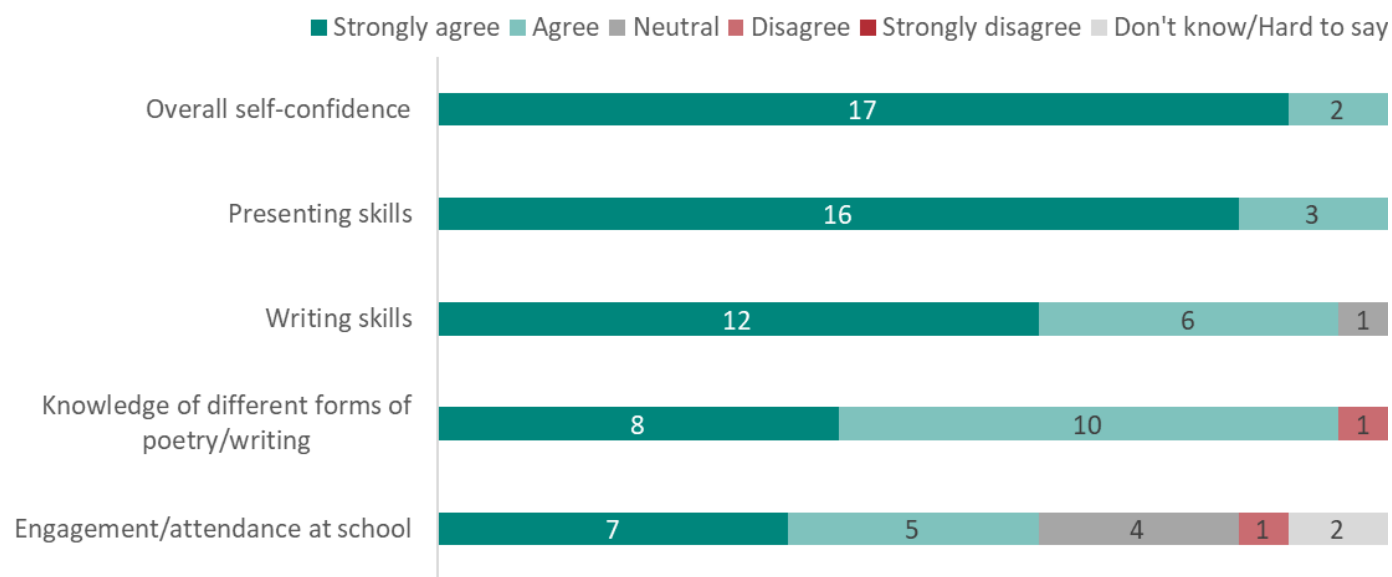
*Source: Cogo Online Survey 2022*

84% of programme participants responding to the online survey said that WTFL resulted in opportunities that they wouldn't otherwise have had. We are unable to include verbatim comments here, as it risks participants' anonymity, but many credit WTFL with supporting them to go on to be published authors, paid performers and facilitators working with youth, to be accepted into leadership positions, and to travel internationally.

### ***Teacher perceptions of programme impact on participants***

High school teachers involved in the programme noticed a range of positive impacts of WORD - The Front Line on students that they interact with. All 19 high school teachers that responded to the online survey agreed that students that participate in WORD – The Front Line see an improvement in their overall self-confidence (17 “Strongly agree” and 2 “Agree”), and also in their presenting skills (16 “Strongly agree” and 3 “Agree”) – see Figure 16. 18 agreed that they see an improvement in their writing skills, 18 in their knowledge of different forms of poetry, and 12 in their engagement/attendance at school.

**Figure 16: “How strongly do you agree that students who participate in WORD - The Front Line see an improvement in their:” (n=19 high school teachers)**



Source: Cogo Online Survey 2022

14 of the 19 high school teachers responding to the survey said that overall, their schools’ involvement in WORD - The Front Line had had a “Very positive” (2) or “Positive” (12) impact on other students at the school, and 17 said that it had had a “Very positive” (3) or “Positive” (14) impact on the wider school community. Some examples of comments entered by high school teachers supporting their responses to this question include:

*“It has provided the students with a way to develop their skills and passions and give them confidence and a voice. Provided a teaching and learning forum that hasn't be done through the school curriculum”*

*“It's helped me form stronger connections with students. I see them form string connections with each other. The kid's have loved having the chance to meet kids from other schools in a way that supports friendship and whanaungatanga.”*

*“Our Ākonga have benefited by finding their voices, crafting their writing and building their confidence I have grown and found the poets who take workshops and coach the students role model how to create safe spaces for creativity There is now a spoken word club that i hope will keep building and strengthening”*

*“In the classroom it gave me resources for teaching poetry writing and performance that I have used and adapted over and over again. My students grew immensely in the process - both personally and as poets / scholars. Their self confidence grew out of a team spirit. They were often a motley crew who didn't know each other before the first meeting, and the programme brought them together in a way that make the whole much greater than the sum of its parts. The school, especially the English department, became far more aware of poetry and the role it plays in contemporary youth culture. Word's PD and resources helped a lot of teachers start to take some calculated risks with poetry in the classroom - which is always good for teaching and learning.”*

*“Spoken word has had an interesting perception at our all boys school. It is something that I know many boys are too afraid to take, but in recent years, it has become a safe space for many of the boys who are often stereotyped or labelled in school as the 'bad' or 'naughty' kids. I have been grateful that I could hold space for this in this way, and give them a place and an opportunity that would restore their mana and sense of confidence in who they are. Being able to challenge and change some of the perceptions that staff have of these students has been so important to me and a mark of the impact of WTFL. Word the Frontline has been a lifeline for these boys and I will always be grateful for Ramon, Ken and the team for their mahi that makes this possible.”*

### **Parent/whānau perceptions of programme impact on participants**

Feedback from the small sample (5) of parent/whānau respondents supports the participant feedback around the positive impact of the programme, with:

- five out of five saying that involvement in WORD - The Front Line had a positive impact on their child/whānau member’s overall self-confidence,
- five out of five saying it had a positive impact on their child/whānau member’s overall wellbeing,
- four out of five saying it had a positive impact on their child/whānau member’s ability to meet and connect with other young people, and
- four out of five saying it had a positive impact on their child/whānau member’s ability to meet and communicate with adults.

We include here supporting comments made by all five parent/whānau respondents:

*“He Mana wāhine ia! Her wellbeing is supported. She learns from every wānanga and her confidence grows. The space has opened her eyes to event production, time management and event management. Interactions with other kura also a bonus . Gives space for her Māori identity to shine bright! Use of te reo rangatira! Exposure to successful poets via the calibre of judges! It really is an amazing kaupapa well done to Ramon and his awesome team!!!”*

*“Life changing. Increased confidence, increased ability to express themselves. Led to volunteering and then a career in the field.”*

*“Very big impact on her self esteem. She loves Word and she is now an A+ Student at [university name and degree] She wants to work with young people. Self esteem, knowing young peoples voices matter, feels she has something worthwhile to contribute An experience of being continuously with respect and kindness”*

*“WORD has radically improved the quality of how my daughter views herself and the world she lives in. She is now an active member of her community and challenges her peers and elders to make positive changes in the world. My daughter injects spoken word into every aspect of her life. Any external community she is involved in, she constantly finds ways to embed spoken word. This is because of the positive aspects of using her voice and having it heard and valued in the WORD community. This even went as far as advocating for her fellow female students at school when there were cases of sexual misconduct against them. She rallied her peer group and went directly to the principal and senior leadership to have their voices heard. She truly believes that her voice brings value in any space, and makes sure that others know that about themselves also. She was always a confident kid, but WORD has elevated the quality of her communication and turned her into an activist for social justice.”*

*“The challenge gave a lot of confidence to child. Also enhanced their creative approach”*

## Impact on high school teachers involved in the programme

Nine of the nineteen high school teachers said that their school’s involvement WORD - The Front Line had had a “Very positive” impact on their own professional development, and another nine a “Positive” impact. Fifteen of the 19 high school teachers responding to the survey had attended one or more of the professional development workshop(s) for teachers that WORD - The Front Line provide but the sample is too small to determine where the impact findings differed for those that did, or did not, attend these workshops.

In one of our coach interviews, we received the following data relating to the impact of WTFL on high school teachers’ professional development:

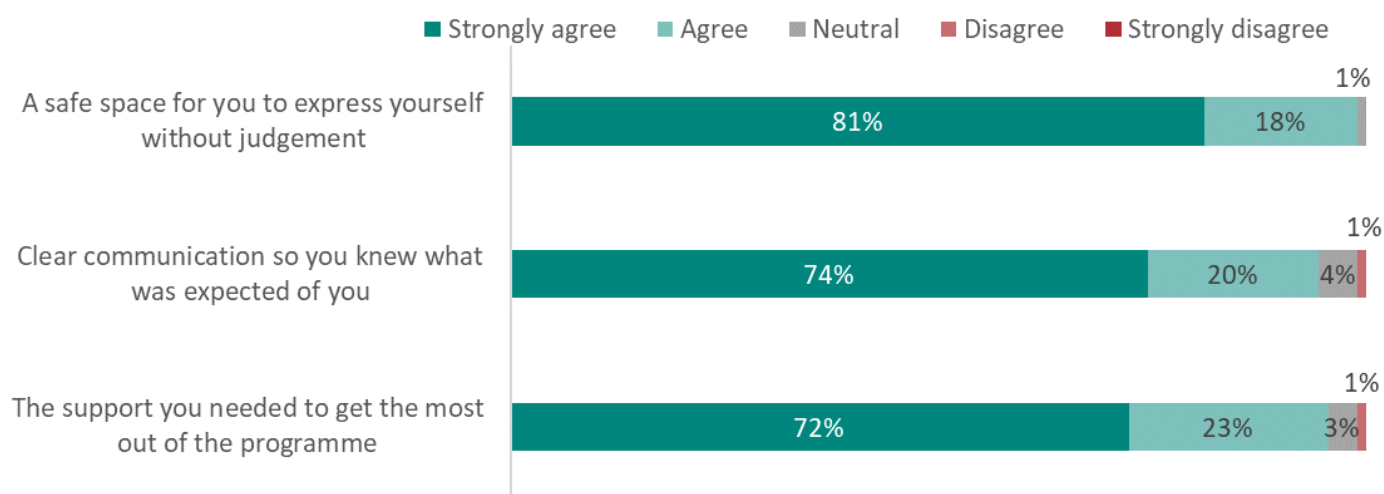
*“I think that is a great way to show embodied literacies to show that language can be a helpful tool in a way that focussing solely on page work doesn’t allow us to. It’s through stuff like this – I didn’t get the spoken word thing at high school, but I know that some of the alumni are now training as English teachers and the only reason why is because they got to understand the passion or the beauty of writing for English as a subject through a different medium and mode.. by engaging in this they’ll be more curious about the writing and the different techniques that are implemented within other writing practices or poetry that is primarily on the page.”*

## Programme feedback

As well as positive scores around the impact of WORD - The Front Line on participants, online survey respondents also gave positive scores concerning the environment, communication and support provided by Action Education staff during the programme. 99% of programme participants responding to the survey agree that the Action Education staff provided “A safe space for you to express yourself without judgement” (81% “Strongly agree” and 18% “Agree”) – see Figure 17. 94% agree that they provide “Clear communication so you knew what was expected of you” (74% “Strongly agree” and 20% “Agree”), and 96% agree that they provided “The support you needed to get the most out of the programme” (72% “Strongly agree” and 23% “Agree”).



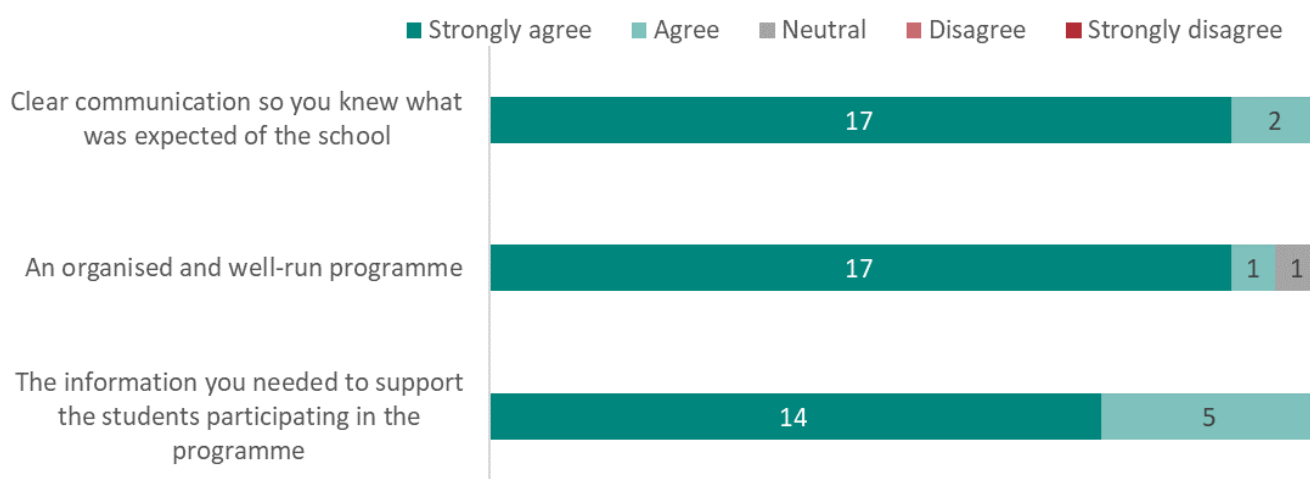
**Figure 17: “When you were a participant in WORD - The Front Line, how strongly do you agree that the Action Education staff provided:” (n=90 programme participants)**



Source: Cogo Online Survey 2022

Programme feedback from high school teachers aligned with the participant feedback with all 19 agreeing that the Action Education staff provided “Clear communication so you knew what was expected of the school” (17 “Strongly agree” and 2 “Agree”), and “The information you needed to support the students participating in the programme” (14 “Strongly agree” and 5 “Agree”) – see Figure 18. Overall, 18 agree that the Action Education staff provided “An organised, well run programme” (17 “Strongly agree” and 1 “Agree”).

**Figure 18: “How strongly do you agree that the Action Education staff provided:” (n=19 high school teachers)**



Source: Cogo Online Survey 2022

## Final feedback

Finally, survey respondents were invited to enter optional feedback in response to three questions: “What works well about WORD – The Front Line?”, “What does not work well about WORD -The Front Line?”, and “Is there anything we've missed? Is there anything else you think is important and would like to tell us about WORD - The Frontline?”.

### What works well?

71 respondents chose to enter a response to “What works well about WORD – The Front Line”, and these comments were coded into themes (see Figure 18). Most commonly participants chose to comment about the welcoming, supportive and non-judgemental space that the programme provided (54% of comments), including comments that related to it being a safe space for teens who do not feel they belong anywhere else, for example:

*“I think it's the idea of bringing all rangatahi together to recognize that as much as the competition is a "COMPETITION", it is also a place to acknowledge one another's stories and skills as performers. So every time a person from another school goes up, every school just feels the need to awahi or hype each other. It's that family vibe WORD installs into these rangatahi through the Slam Camp, workshops, etc.”*

*“It's an incredible space and opportunity to take a bunch of young people who have something to say, are passionate enough to get into the competition, and spend weeks on building them up to be confident performers who get to speak their piece in front of a large audience. That's magical. The idea that this sort of thing exists is already what works well about it. However, this is only accentuated that much more when you appreciate the immense work done to provide as many avenues and opportunities for the competitors before the competition date to really connect with their fellow peers and get as much out of their talent as they can. Huge. Also, the points don't matter. They never do. You're going to stomp on your enemies and conquer the world just to win a poetry competition. That's not the message that's projected. For most of these young people, they get into this medium because they feel like they don't have a voice, they have things to say that they feel aren't being heard, and as a result, many of them feel like outcasts or outsiders. WORD gives them the opportunity to build comradery and to bond with people who get them, understand them, and give them a platform to speak without judgement and to be listened to for once. WORD achieves this very well.”*

*“I would say that overall WTFL is such an important programme for Young People in General, my three years that I attended WTFL were my best times during high school, considering I didn't have the best experience as young person in High school. WTFL was my safe haven and safe space to unapologetically be my most authentic self. I was able to do and be that whilst being supported by the best people ever! a massive massssive shoutout to all the people involved facilitating WTFL but a special speaciallll shoutout to RAMON STEVIE & KEN!!!! yall have my hearts forever < 3 xoxoxo”*

The second most common theme from the open text responses to “What works well...” was the expertise and care provided by the Action Education team (49% of comments relating to this theme), for example:

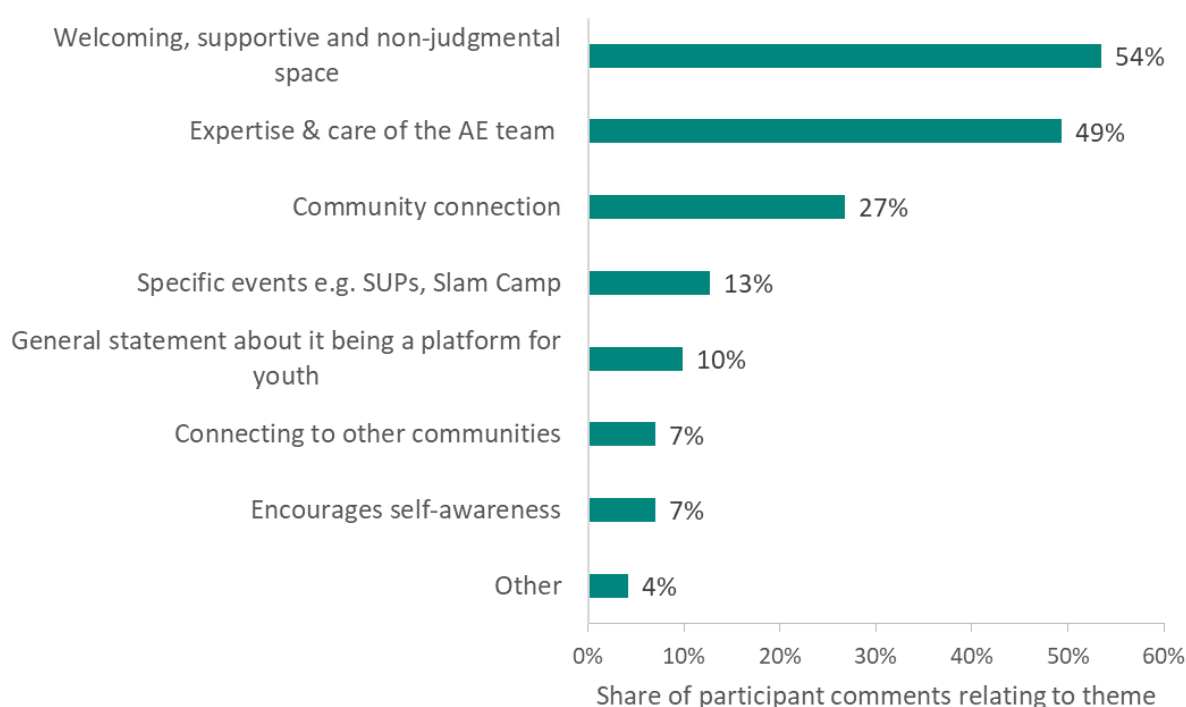
*“The fact that Ken and other Action Education members were so supportive and understanding. I never felt like I was being forced to do something or to speak up about any issues or questions I had because the team is just so nice and kind. Honestly, some of the kindest people out there. I also like the*

numerous out of school activities held during WORD such as having a poetry coach, slam camp etc which really builds a safe space for poets, or simply people who want to explore poetry. It also adds to the professionalism of the competition as a whole.”

“The people and the heart they showcase and give so generously. That's always the best of any community/group/organisation, is the true heart behind it and that's what drives the mission of truth and word”

“The staff. The fact that the staff are not half-assed people and genuinely love what they do, sets the energy and entire atmosphere of the collective. It's such a beautiful environment to always be in, good memories only!”

**Figure 18: Thematic analysis of open text comments in response to the question “What works well about WORD - The Front Line?” (n=71 comments from programme participants)**



### **What does not work well/suggestions for improvement**

44 participants chose to leave a comment in response to the question, “What does not work well about WORD – The Front Line” but over half (25) said that nothing did not work well, or “NA” and so only 19 useable comments remained which is too small a sample to code and present formal themes for. Within the remaining 19 comments suggesting improvements, we do note that three respondents felt that the more emotional poems were judged favourably, and another three respondents found the locations of some events hard to get to. For example:

“I can't really say they're doing anything poorly (and I don't know what has changed since my time there), but during that period I felt that the sympathy card was a bit of a cheese strategy to garner a faux-reaction from the crowd. I understand that it's a difficult space to navigate in terms of how to really address that sort of thing, and it seems to have been a natural come-up of the culture that was quickly exploited by a few. But, I definitely remember having conversations with many frustrated

*competitors who felt they had put more effort and respect behind their pieces just to be outshone by lower-grade pieces, relying on heartstring tugging and fabricated angst to get a better crowd reaction. And it usually works.”*

*“I would say coming from a low-income family sometimes the location of workshops would be far from where I lived. The workshops would sometimes be in the City at the Auckland library and this could just be a me problem lol but yeah other than that WTFLLLL IS THE BEST THE BOMB.COM!!!!”*

Coach interview data lines up with this participant feedback relating to improving the accessibility of the current offering of Auckland locations by better connecting the other parts of Auckland e.g. West, East and North. They see this being resolved by offering additional venues and events across Auckland and by reducing transport barriers (cost and availability) to get young people to them:

*“If we had budget to help provide the transport and access, because that is the barrier when I talk to my students half the time – if we did have that it would be a weight off and they would be also able to practice more. The number one issue for a lot of students is that – oh, I can’t get a ride there and AE only has like two cars...need more connection for the West and North Shore kids, finding ways to bring them in a bit more to help them feel more like part of the community, not just part of the competition.”*

*“In terms of what’s offered, definitely location-wise if we were able to have better venues. and more events leading up into the semi-finals...More performance opportunities actually. Funding for transport to get the kids to the open mic nights around Auckland would be great. For example, Funding for transport to get to more performance opportunities that don’t just live with the comp”*

Both coaches interviewed spoke about improvements to the programme that they would ideally like to see in terms of the remuneration and pastoral support that coaches receive. For example, relating to remuneration:

*“I think if we had more time as coaches with the team, we get paid, we’re expected to have 20 hours of contact and that’s kind of what we’re paid for, you know contracted, and I always do more than that. They pay us well, and I don’t think we need to get paid more, but if there was the expectation of more hours I think that would... I think more contact hours would be great.”*

*“Definitely more of a programme to help the coaches coach better...I think about my time. last year ... I also doubled the hours of my contract because I believed in [my team] and because I felt that these kids deserved that. I was in a privileged position to be able to do that, however I also know that a lot of the other people [coaches] they can’t do that.”*

And relating to pastoral support:

*“I think this is where the quality of the coaches comes in and I know that Action Education tries to hire the best, but I think where I’m fortunate that I have lot more training than others to hold that. I see some of the newer coaches with less experience... I see that’s one of the really rough parts for them.*

*I think some form of pastoral care for the coaches while they attempt to hold space for their youth. Because I think the beauty of a lot of coaches is they’re a similar age to their students and because of that – and because they have a safe space – they just want to tell you their life stories.*

*The power of professional supervision is like - oh my goodness - to have that person or have people around who can catch you and make sure that you thrive so that the people you’re looking after can thrive too.”*

# Evaluation findings & Cogo recommendations



## Evaluation findings

Cogo's evaluation of WORD – The Front Line (WTFL) finds that during 2014-2022, Action Education has overall delivered a successful youth programme, based on an assessment of our evaluation results against WTFL's programme goals.

In our evaluation, we investigated two main areas: (1) the overall reach of WTFL in terms of numbers and demographics of participants, and (2) the impact on participants in line with WTFL's programme goals and structured by the evaluation questions outlined in the [introduction](#).

### *Limitations*

Please note that the Cogo evaluation has investigated combined overall impact for all years of delivery and as such will not be suitable to use as a baseline against which future annual evaluations can be compared. A further limitation is that there may be a sample bias towards participants who have had a more memorable experience with the programme and/or towards past participants who are still connected to the programme and would therefore respond to a call to action from Action Education. We recommend that future internal evaluations are carried out with all participants shortly after they complete their experience of WTFL, which will reduce the potential for sample bias.

### **Reach of WTFL**

Based on Action Education annual reporting available since 2017, between 125 and 220 young people have participated in WTFL annually, with teams being formed by students from up to 44 high schools each year.

In our view, the overall reach of WTFL in terms of participant numbers is excellent when considering the programme's resources in terms of team size and budget. It is positive to see participant numbers returning this year to pre-COVID levels, however only 17 high schools participated in 2022 compared to 36 in 2019 indicating a narrowing of the reach in terms of schools.

Demographic data from online survey respondents participating in WTFL between 2014 and 2022 (n=90) indicates strong diversity among high school students who participate in WTFL in terms of gender. The Cogo survey sample showed high representation of non-binary, transgender and genderqueer young people with 8% selecting non-binary, 3% transgender, and/or 2% genderqueer as options. A further 6% selected "Don't know/Questioning/Unsure" or "I use another term" while 62% of our survey sample selected female and 27% male.

The Cogo survey sample also shows strong diversity among high school students who participate in WTFL in terms of ethnicity, with over representation compared to population of NZ Māori (23%) and Pacific Peoples, who make up 56% of the sample when grouped (28% Samoan, 11% Tongan, 8% Cook Islands Māori, 4% Niuean and 2% for Fijian and Other Pacific Peoples). The programme has also attracted high numbers of Indian (9%), Southeast Asian (6%), Chinese (4%), Other Asian (7%) and African young people (7%).



Some impact findings also speak to the programme having a wider reach beyond the main programme participants, both through participants reporting that their confidence that they can give back to their communities has increased as a result of their participation in the programme (68%), as well as other flow-on positive impacts on their peer students in the school setting (as reported by high school teachers). 14 of the 19 high school teachers responding to the survey said that overall, their schools' involvement in WTFL had had a "Very positive" (2) or "Positive" (12) impact on other students at the school, and 17 said that it had had a "Very positive" (3) or "Positive" (14) impact on the wider school community.

### ***How were high school students recruited for WTFL?***

The majority of programme participants (61%) first heard about WTFL when a teacher or other staff member at school told them about it, 33% first heard about the programme at a presentation or workshop at school, and 28% were told about it by a friend.

The most common reasons students gave for wanting to participate in WTFL were that they already had a love of spoken work or poetry (37%), they wanted to be creative or express their minds in a new way (24%), while 20% made a comment about how they were recruited by an Action Education staff member, event or workshop.

When looking to increase reach (in terms of total participant and high school numbers), these results speaks to the importance of teachers as a recruitment channel and the importance of Action Education staff members getting into schools to promote the programme. As well, the reasons participants gave for wanting to participate in WTFL may help Action Education in developing future communications approaches.

## **Impact of WTFL**

### ***On participants' overall wellbeing***

91% of respondents said that their involvement in WORD - The Front Line had a positive impact on their overall wellbeing and WTFL coaches also spoke to the beneficial impacts of the programme on young people's wellbeing. However, we note that some data indicates that the programme can be challenging mentally for some.

### ***On participants' overall self-confidence***

90% of respondents said that their involvement in WTFL had increased their overall self-confidence, and not one respondent reported that their involvement in the programme decreased their overall self-confidence. All 19 high school teachers that responded to the online survey supported this finding, agreeing that students that participate in WTFL see an improvement in their overall self-confidence.

### ***On participants' leadership skills***

72% of programme participants responding to the online survey said that the programme had helped them to develop leadership skills for the future.

### ***On participants' confidence that they can speak up to express values and beliefs***

88% reported that their involvement in the programme increased their confidence around speaking up to express their values/beliefs.

### ***On participants' social connection, and awareness of other peoples/cultures outside their world***

Almost all (96% of) programme participants reported that the programme increased their awareness of peoples/cultures outside of their world, and their awareness that they belong to one or more communities (90%). 81% reported that their involvement in the programme increased their confidence around meeting and connecting with other young people.

WTFL coaches support this finding by discussing how the programme provides an important safe space for young people to connect and create community, that many haven't previously found at school or elsewhere.

### ***On participants' confidence that they can give back to their communities***

68% of programme participants reported that their involvement in the programme increased their confidence around being able to give back to their community(ies). This is by no means a poor result but, when compared to results for increased confidence around other aspects of personal development, it is comparatively low. If having a wider impact on participants' communities becomes a critical goal of WTFL, then this is an area that could be improved on.

### ***On participants' writing and presenting/performing skills***

91% of programme participants reported that their involvement in the programme increased their confidence both around writing to express themselves, and around public speaking. Almost all programme participants also reported that the programme increased their awareness of different forms of poetry/writing (94%).

18 of the 19 high school teachers who responded to the online survey supported this and agreed that students that participate in WTFL see an improvement in their writing skills. All 19 high school teachers agreed that students that participate in WTFL see an improvement in their presenting skills.

### ***On high school teachers' professional development***

Eighteen of the nineteen high school teachers who responded to the online survey said that their school's involvement in WTFL had had a positive ("Very positive" or "Positive") impact on their own professional development.

### ***On the whānau setting***

Feedback from our small sample of parents/whānau of participants speaks to the positive impact of the programme being experienced within the whānau setting and not just in the programme and school life. All five parent/whānau respondents reported that they saw an increase in self-confidence and overall



wellbeing in their child/whānau member, and four of five reported seeing a positive impact on their child/whānau member's ability to meet and connect with young people and meet and communicate with adults.

## Programme feedback

Programme participants responding to the online survey gave positive scores concerning the environment, communication and support provided by Action Education staff during the programme.

99% of programme participants responding to the survey agree that the Action Education staff provided "A safe space for you to express yourself without judgement", 94% that they provide "Clear communication so you knew what was expected of you", and 96% that they provided "The support you needed to get the most out of the programme".

Programme feedback from high school teachers aligns with the participant feedback with all 19 agreeing that the Action Education staff provided "Clear communication so you knew what was expected of the school", as well as provided "The information you needed to support the students participating in the programme". Overall, 18 agreed that the Action Education staff provided "An organised, well-run programme".

### *What works well*

71 programme participants responding to the online survey chose to enter an open text comment to "What works well about WORD – The Front Line", and these were coded into themes. Most commonly participants chose to comment about the welcoming, supportive and non-judgemental space that the programme provided (54% of comments), including comments that related to it being a safe space for teens who do not feel they belong anywhere else. This aligns with the evaluation findings relating to a positive impact of the programme in terms of young people finding social connection and community.

The second most common theme from the open text responses to "What works well..." was the expertise and care provided by the Action Education team, with 49% of comments relating to this theme, aligning with the quantitative programme feedback presented above.

Recent insights delivered by Cogo to the Hā Collective around stress and coping strategies in young people in Aotearoa<sup>3</sup> showed that a proportion are turning to high-risk coping strategies when it comes to handling stress (including alcohol, drugs, self-harm and vaping) and these individuals are less likely to be engaged in typical aspects of school life, including for example sports teams. The data also shows that these young people using higher-risk coping strategies for the stress they experience are less likely to have an adult that they feel they can talk to about things that are causing them to feel stressed out. The programme feedback collected in this evaluation indicates that WTFL could play an invaluable role in supporting the wellbeing of this particular group of young people in providing them with a sense of belonging and community not otherwise found in school, whilst also allowing them to access and witness adults who are happy to verbalise and have non-judgmental conversations about challenging topics.

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<sup>3</sup>[Hā Collective Schools Vaping Survey Report for Protect Your Breath \(2022\)](#)

## *What doesn't work well/suggestions for improving how WTFL operates in the future*

44 programme participants chose to leave a comment in response to the question, "What does not work well about WORD – The Front Line" but over half (25) said that nothing did not work well, or "NA" and so just 19 useable comments remained. This is too small a sample to code and present formal themes for, but we do note that three respondents felt that the more emotional poems were judged favourably, and another three respondents found the locations of some events hard to get to.

Coach interview data lines up with this participant feedback relating to improving the accessibility of the current offering of Auckland locations by better connecting the other parts of Auckland e.g. West, East and North. They see this being resolved by offering additional venues and events across Auckland and by reducing transport barriers (cost and availability) to get young people to them. Both coaches interviewed also said that they would ideally like to see improvements to the remuneration and pastoral support that coaches receive.

## **Cogo recommendations**

1. Participant numbers are returning to pre-COVID levels, however the number of high schools participating has declined to less than half what they were in 2019. We recommend that Action Education reflect on the reason(s) for this decline and include measuring the number of high schools as a key outcome indicator (KOI) for their ongoing internal evaluation. This will help the team evaluate the success of their renewed recruitment efforts.
2. Given Cogo's positive impact evaluation, we recommend that additional funding is sourced so that WORD – The Front Line can be delivered across Aotearoa New Zealand.
3. To ensure better engagement in all aspects of the programme and other performing opportunities provided by Action Education, we recommend that funding is sourced to reduce the barrier that accessing transport presents to many participants.
4. Increasing the number of locations and venues across Auckland will also improve engagement and equity of access for more participants. We recommend that additional funding is sourced for this purpose.
5. Improving their remuneration and increasing the level of pastoral care provided, potentially including professional supervision, would support WTFL coaches to continue to deliver their high standard of care. We recommend that additional funding is sourced for this purpose.
6. We recommend that evaluations are carried out annually, using the internal evaluation framework designed and delivered by Cogo.

# Internal evaluation framework



## Purpose

In addition to the external impact evaluation, Cogo were engaged by Action Education to deliver an internal evaluation framework - including data collection tools - that would enable them to perform their own internal monitoring of WORD – The Front Line (WTFL) on an on-going basis.

We present an evaluation framework that will allow Action Education to monitor the success of the programme in terms of: reach within key demographic groups; impact on participants, and; impact on the wider community, including high school teachers. These measures are intended to support Action Education with future funding applications and reporting. The data collection tools are also designed to provide detailed information to allow Action Education to understand how the programme may be improved and modified over time in order to optimise its reach and impact.

## Evaluation measures

The internal evaluation will focus on measuring the reach and impact of the programme. We include ten key outcome indicators (KOIs) which are designed to give a high-level insight into the success of the programme in terms of reach and impact, alongside supplementary measures aimed at supporting the Action Education team to understand how the programme is functioning, why it may be performing the way it is in terms of the KOIs, and how it may be improved.

Evaluation measures were selected based on the 2022 external evaluation, whereby the document analysis highlighted the main purpose areas of the programme, and the online survey allowed us to understand how variables may be linked, and which measures could potentially become redundant. For example, high school teacher perceptions of the programme's impact on participant confidence matched well with how participants self-reported, so we removed teacher perception questions from the internal evaluation tools but kept as areas of enquiry where teachers were asked about improvement in participant skills as these could be objectively assessed (e.g. writing skills).

## Key outcome indicators

Based on the information collected in the 2022 external evaluation, we recommend that the following ten measures are used as key outcome indicators for the internal evaluation going forward:

- 1. Reach:** total number of participants
- 2. Reach:** total number of schools participating
- 3. Reach:** number of non-Auckland participants (we understand this will only move from the baseline value of zero if funding is secured to allow this programme expansion)
- 4. Impact:** share of participants reporting that the programme had a positive impact on their overall wellbeing
- 5. Impact:** share of participants reporting that the programme helped them develop their leadership skills
- 6. Impact:** share of participants experiencing increased confidence that they can speak up to express values and beliefs

7. **Impact:** share of participants reporting that the programme increased their awareness that they belong to one or more communities
8. **Impact:** share of participants experiencing increased confidence that they can give back to their communities
9. **Impact:** share of high school teachers reporting that the programme had a positive impact on participant writing skills
10. **Impact:** share of high school teachers reporting that the programme had a positive impact on participant presenting skills

Target values for each of these indicators should be set by the Action Education team prior to programme delivery each year, based on (1) baseline measures from 2022 and (2) an understanding of the challenges and opportunities that are likely to be faced in the coming year. For example, if Action Education decide to deliver to regions outside of Auckland, and as such require expansion of the team, improvement in all impact outcomes may not be realistic, but reach outcomes would improve.

## Supplementary evaluation measures

We also include the following in the data collection as supporting measures:

- **Reach:** number of participants by ethnicity, age, gender
- **Impact:** share of participants reporting that the programme increased their awareness of people/cultures outside their world, and of different forms of poetry/writing
- **Impact:** share of participants reporting that the programme increased their confidence around public speaking, and writing to express themselves
- **Impact:** share of participants reporting that the programme increased their self confidence
- **Impact:** share of high school teachers reporting that the programme had a positive impact on their own professional development
- **Impact:** share of high school teachers reporting that the programme had a positive impact on the wider school community
- **Programme feedback:** share of participants agreeing that the Action Education staff provided a safe space for them to express themselves without judgement, the support they needed to get the most out of the programme, and clear communication so they knew what was expected of them
- **Programme feedback:** share of high school teachers agreeing that the Action Education staff provided an organised and well-run programme, the information they needed to support participants, and clear communication so they knew what was expected of the school

We encourage Action Education to assess the relevance of these supplementary evaluation measures each year, ensure they line up with what is being delivered, and amend and/or add questions to the online forms if there are specific areas of delivery that they would prefer to receive feedback on. For example, if different marketing methods are used for the programme, the team may wish to measure how participants first heard about the programme, and the success rate of the new marketing channel(s) for getting participants, perhaps of specific demographics, into the programme.

## Data collection tools

The data required to deliver the evaluation measures presented above will be collected using the following data collection tools.

### Action Education Records

The number of participants and number of high schools involved in the programme, both in total and by region (even if the programme continues to only deliver in Auckland this should be recorded) should continue to be recorded by Action Education within their own project documentation.

### WORD – The Front Line Participant Online Form

Cogo have designed a Google Form “WORD – The Front Line Participant Online Form” to collect data directly from participants relating to their demographics, the impact of the programme on them personally, and programme feedback. The form can be viewed [here](#) and editing access can be requested from Cogo.

We recommend that this form is distributed by email and text to each individual upon their completion of the programme. This will mean that there will be three main distribution phases – after Regional Heats, after Semi-Finals, and after the Grand Finals. We would ideally recommend that completion of the survey is framed as compulsory and attached to the official “completion” of the programme. We have seen success before with this process triggering a certificate of completion which, for WTFL, could include mention of the stage of competition achieved and be sent to their high school for presentation.

### WORD – The Front Line Teacher Online Form

Cogo have designed a Google Form “WORD – The Front Line Teacher Online Form” to collect data directly from high school teachers involved in the programme relating to the impact of the programme on them personally, the impact of objective aspects of participant impact (e.g. improvement in their writing skills), and programme feedback. The form can be found [here](#) and editing access can be requested from Cogo.

We recommend that this form is distributed by email and text at the end of the programme each year and framed as a compulsory part of participation for high school teachers if possible.

## Reporting

The evaluation measures and relating tools are summarised in Table 1 below. We recommend this table be used as a reporting tool, with columns added to the right hand side of the table for each year that the internal evaluation is completed and results input for each evaluation measure. Responses from the participant and teacher forms are automatically collated, analysed and graphed within Google Forms so measures can be easily pulled into the table.

**Table 1: Summary of evaluation measures**

Area	Evaluation measure	Data collection tool	KOI
Reach	total number of participants in regional heats	Action Education records	Y
	total number of schools participating in regional heats		Y
	number of non-Auckland participants in regional heats*		Y
Impact	share of participants reporting that the programme had a positive impact on their overall wellbeing	WORD - The Front Line – participant online form	Y
	share of participants reporting that the programme helped them develop their leadership skills		Y
	share of participants experiencing increased confidence that they can speak up to express values and beliefs		Y
	share of participants reporting that the programme increased their awareness that they belong to one or more communities		Y
	share of participants experiencing increased confidence that they can give back to their communities		Y
	share of high school teachers reporting that the programme had a positive impact on participant writing skills	WORD - The Front Line – teacher online form	Y
	share of high school teachers reporting that the programme had a positive impact on participant presenting skills		Y
Reach	share of participants - target 1 (e.g. non-binary, transgender, genderqueer)	WORD - The Front Line – participant online form	
	share of participants – target 2 (e.g. Pasifika)		
Impact	share of participants reporting that the programme increased their awareness of people/cultures outside their world	WORD - The Front Line – participant online form	
	share of participants reporting that the programme increased their awareness of different forms of poetry/writing		
	share of participants reporting that the programme increased their confidence around public speaking		
	share of participants reporting that the programme increased their confidence around writing to express themselves		
	share of participants reporting that the programme increased their overall self-confidence		
	share of high school teachers reporting that the programme had a positive impact on their professional development	WORD - The Front Line – teacher online form	
	share of high school teachers reporting that the programme had a positive impact on the wider school community		
Feedback	share of participants agreeing that the Action Education staff provided a safe space for them to express themselves without judgement	WORD - The Front Line – participant online form	
	share of participants agreeing that the Action Education staff provided the support they needed to get the most out of the programme		
	share of participants agreeing that the Action Education staff provided clear communication so they knew what was expected of them		
	share of high school teachers agreeing that the Action Education staff provided an organised and well-run programme	WORD - The Front Line – teacher online form	
	share of high school teachers agreeing that the Action Education staff provided the information they needed to support participants		
	share of high school teachers agreeing that the Action Education staff provided clear communication so they knew what was expected of the school		





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