



autumn's village

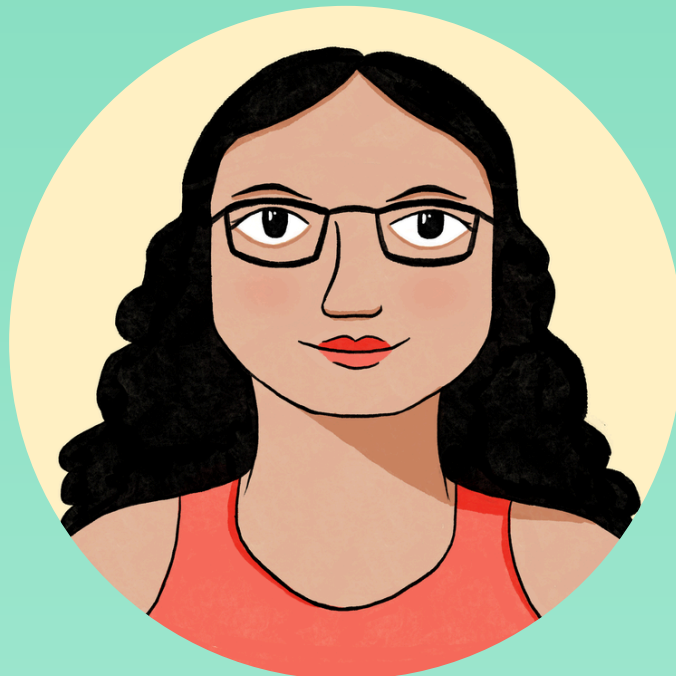
picturing family support
for transgender young
people in aotearoa



project village

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transgender young people in aotearoa

Project Village is researching what good family support looks like for transgender young people in Aotearoa, based on wānanga with them and their top supporters.



Autumn is a young
Māori trans woman.

Here is her village.

I've been instilled with the idea that whānau is kind of everything. It's who you turn to whenever you need help.

For me it's pretty much my immediate whānau – including my auntie on my mum's side.

My two biggest support people would be my parents.

I thought the best way would be to come out to them and gauge from how they reacted initially if I lay my trust with them or not.

That moment onward they really showed me that I could trust them and that I had their full support for whatever was in my path.

I feel incredibly privileged and super lucky honestly that I had a family that wouldn't shun me for something like this.

Whenever I think of who is my biggest support, it's my dad. My dad was the one of the people who kept pushing me to escape from norms and be myself. Me just being me was something that my dad had been preaching forever.

There were a few things that he noticed and one of those was that I felt like I was just a shadow. felt like that for years, I wasn't really the driver of my own ship, I was just kind of there.

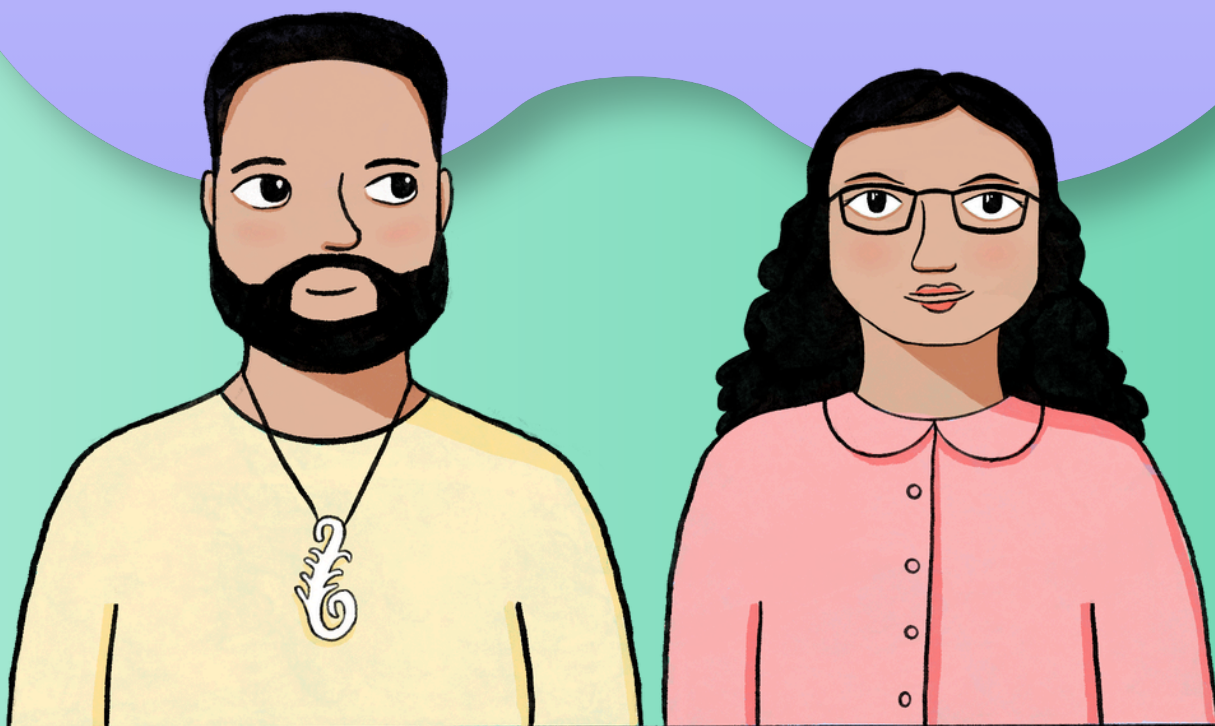
He picked that up and we had a conversation about me being me and being confident in me.

He's always preached that but it never really resonated with me because I never felt like myself, ever. It was like the words were there, but the words had no meaning.

Then I came to fully understand what those words actually meant with me coming out as trans and experiencing myself essentially.

I had my dad come with me to all of my GP appointments. Even with the interview before I was about to go to endocrine, I wanted him to come with me because the trust was there now and I really wanted to hold on to that trust. It was also an indirect way of him getting to know me without really kind of spelling it out to him.

I still get my dad to come with me to these appointments, predominately because I don't have a car, but also just because I feel a lot more secure going to endocrine check ups and stuff like that if I have my father with me. And even if I'm living away from home, my dad will still make a trip out to me wherever it is that I'm living at and come with me.

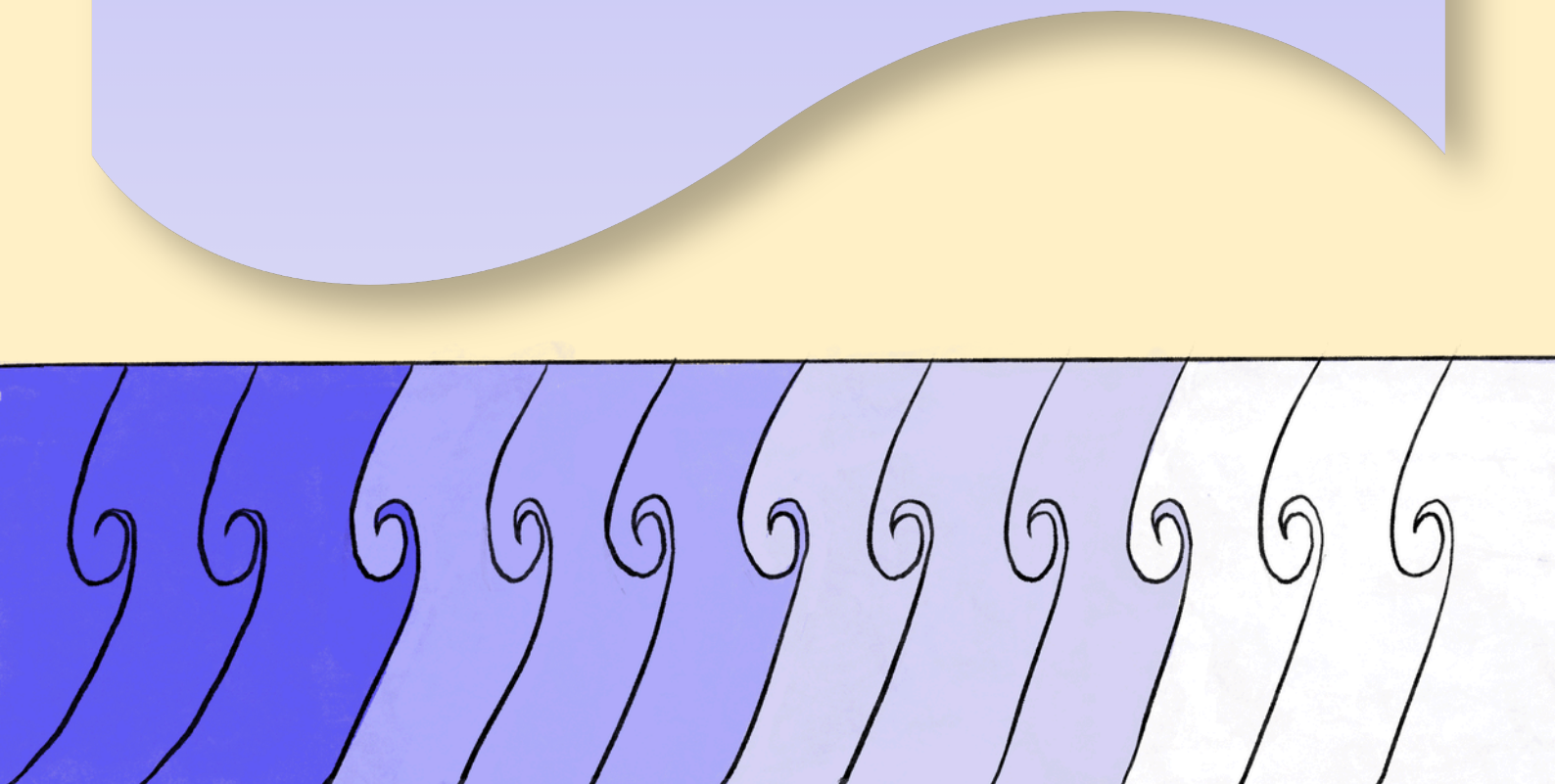


dad

People have to want to open up to you before anything can move forward. Even if you can see something isn't quite ticking, you can't be like 'hey what's going on?' You kinda have to let people walk in that shadow to find that light. You can't force people to open up, it's got to be organic.

It was a good couple of years that she was trying to figure something out, I knew something was going on. Autumn was in the shadow and then came out and light and colours and all of that.

Autumn happened and dams open and conversations don't stop and the journey is taking the path that it should have been on in the first place.



I was proud of her when she came out, I thought that was super cool. The way that she did it was confident. She stood tall, she said 'I'm this, I want to change my name to that', I went 'yeah right let's get this shit!' I was really proud of her the way she did it because I could just see it was authentic.

That's a pretty big conversation of mine with all the kids – you can't be happy in this world if you are not who you are. Whatever that is, that's what you gotta be, because that's the only way that you'll find happiness, and people will be drawn to you for that reason.

I'm just along for the ride, watching her, whichever way she goes, which is pretty cool. She has her downs but watching her pick herself back up and just enjoying the ride and see what happens next.

I just do things – oh you need a hand, OK I'll help. If you need something give me a call, give me a text and I'll come help you out however I can. If you just want to me to be someone to rant to, then cool, if you need a ride to the doctors, cool. It's the same with all the kids, everyone gets the same thing with me.

I take her to appointments and pick her up from uni to come back home or if we're having a family dinner or something. Driving lessons.

Show her how to use the washing machine, and clean for her when she's home. Try to encourage her to come out of her room and cook for everyone every once in a while. Basic life skills really, because they might not always come home, they still gotta know how to cook and do your washing.





We spend a lot of time on the phone when she's at uni. She'll call a couple of times a week and we'll talk for about an hour or something.

Just a general convo, see what she's up to, what she's been going through for the week, and I'll give her whatever advice I think fits the narrative we're talking about at that time.

She'll definitely ring up if she's passed something, she loves that shit, she rings up and I'm like 'yo, that's the one!'

But she also rings up when she's not having a good time, so it's good to just sit and listen so she can vent, get everything off her chest.

dad's tips

Accept
your kid
for who
they are

Put their
needs first

Go at their
pace

Be
available

Share in
their joys
& sorrows

Help build
their
confidence

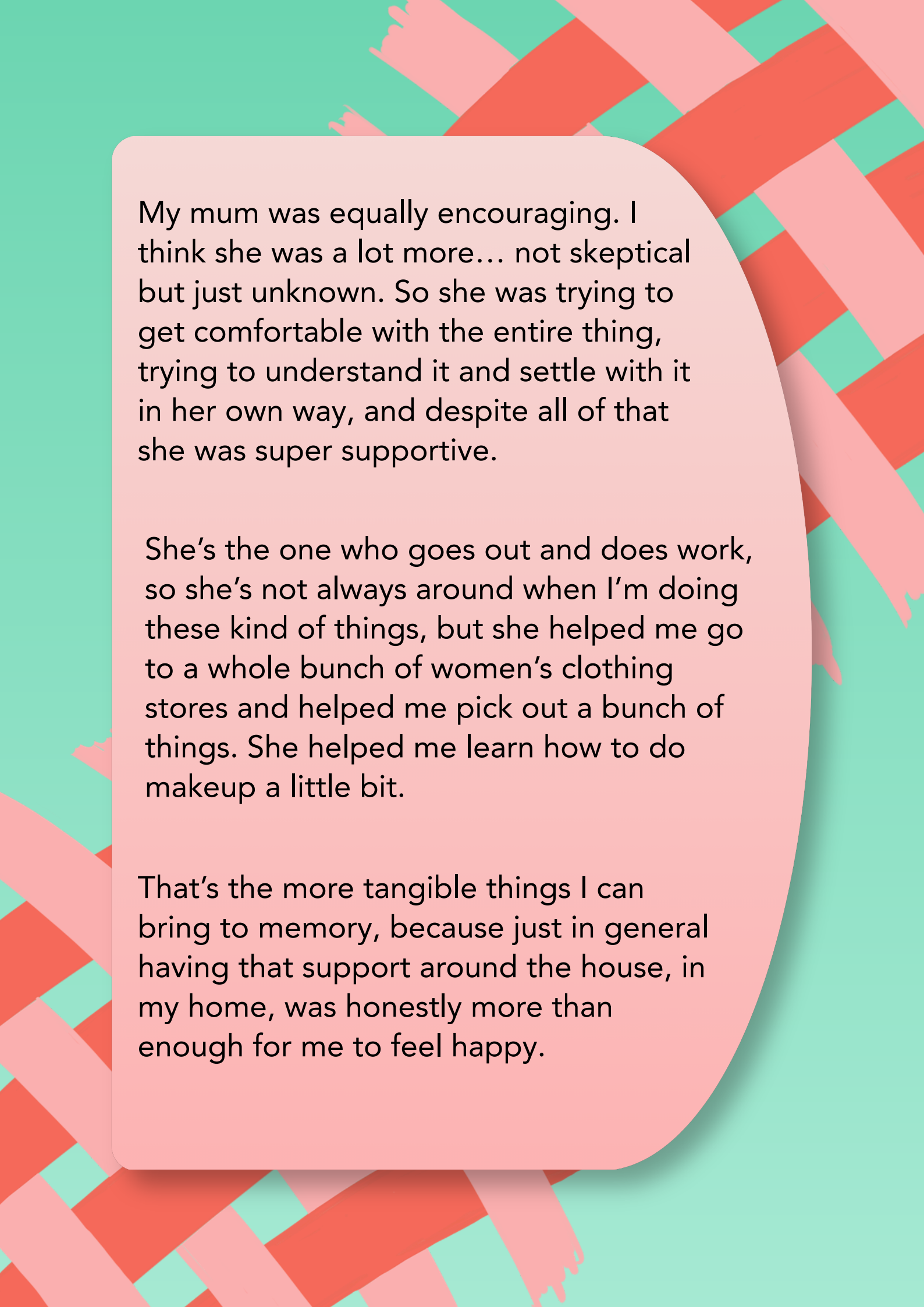
Remember
they're the
same
person

Think about
things from
their
perspective

Be staunch
with other
family
members

Give
advice
where you
can

Help them
with
whatever
they need



My mum was equally encouraging. I think she was a lot more... not skeptical but just unknown. So she was trying to get comfortable with the entire thing, trying to understand it and settle with it in her own way, and despite all of that she was super supportive.

She's the one who goes out and does work, so she's not always around when I'm doing these kind of things, but she helped me go to a whole bunch of women's clothing stores and helped me pick out a bunch of things. She helped me learn how to do makeup a little bit.

That's the more tangible things I can bring to memory, because just in general having that support around the house, in my home, was honestly more than enough for me to feel happy.

mum

Autumn was quite closed off, prior to opening up about being Autumn. While we knew that she was very unhappy, there wasn't much we could do to draw it out of her.

She's grown to become a lot more assertive and I love that...She's becoming an independent thinker.

A lot of our communication is through text message but the other way is I go out with Autumn for lunch once a week. I normally get a coffee and Autumn will get some sort of milkshake.

Most things we do are centred around kai, pretty much everything we do and any time there's anything, we always celebrate with kai.



I think acceptance is a really big part of dealing with any of these conversations, whether it's gender, whether it's sexuality, all those kinds of things. Just having that accepting attitude that it's actually not something we can control but it's got to come entirely from them, just accepting Autumn for Autumn.

We try to live that pōwhiri process, taking your time to do all these things and having that kōrero first, and then that kōrero at the end. That's just part of who we are and how we do things. We always go back to that pōwhiri process, it just takes as long as it takes.

We went to a family reunion this time last year and one of my uncles started asking me questions about what her name used to be and I was like 'it's actually not relevant, she doesn't go by that name anymore'.

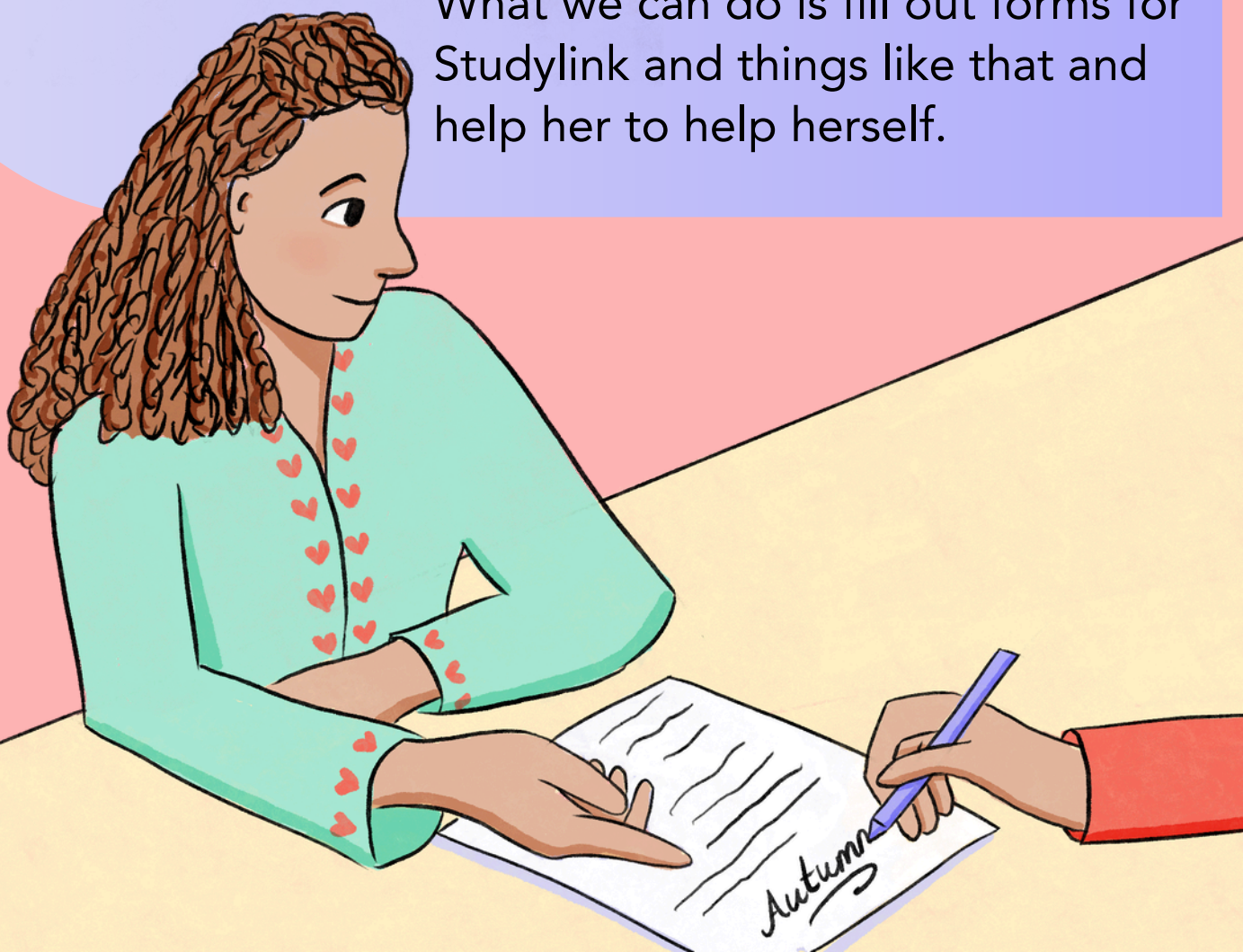
And actually I'm not having it. This is Autumn's life. And actually if this is who she is, then who are you to stand in her way?

It's also allowing her space to live the way she's living, in her university accommodation and then giving her the space to come home and be looked after, those times where her laundry's done for her and all her bills are paid for her, I think that's how we kind of feed her and support her at that time of year.

We try to support her financially. We were giving her a weekly allowance for a little bit.

We can't afford that anymore, times are tough, but what we do do is sometimes I'll take her out and take her shopping and get her some food, and we also cover her mobile phone so we know she can always call.

What we can do is fill out forms for Studylink and things like that and help her to help herself.



mum's tips

Spend time
with your
child

Be there for
them

Give financial
support when
you can

Show
unconditional
love

Stay in
touch

Celebrate their
achievements

Accept your
child

Enable them to
share their voice

Mediate
relationships with
whānau members

Give your child
opportunities

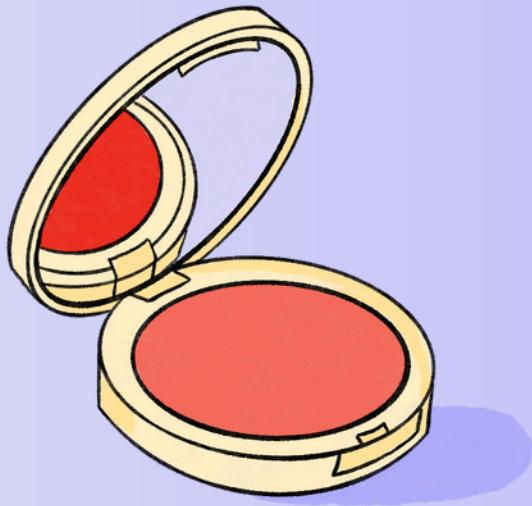
Help them with official
processes like changing
their name

Be playful

Support them
in their living situation
and welcome them
home

Include them
in your plans

Find friends who
support you too



My auntie is part of the extended family, but she was also a big support feature.

She has supported me by just letting me be me, and she accepted that off the bat – she hasn't changed how she has viewed me.

I never felt like I couldn't trust my auntie. She is one of the few people that I have consistently lived around that I didn't feel like I needed to build trust with, because I already had trust fully.

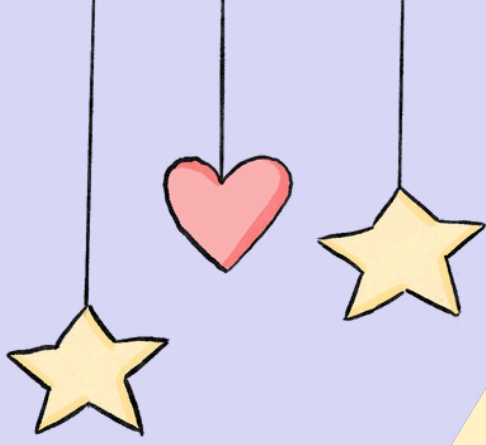
I kinda had the idea she would support me, so much so that the interaction was just 'I'm trans now. I go by Autumn'. Pretty much end of conversation.

One of my auntie's friends has an insane amount of makeup and she's very generous and has given me like three boxes essentially full of just a bunch of different makeup products.

Makeup is insanely expensive and I haven't paid for it since the beginning of last year.



auntie



Autumn is incredible and it doesn't matter what she does, I will love her. She's just perfect. I have always thought that since she was born, that's she's perfect.

She's spent lots of time at my place and at other places I've lived, since she was born. Even when she was like 6 weeks old, I would have her for the weekend. And she was always pretty happy to come and spend time with me.

There was a period that probably ties in with her having a lot of questions

about herself and sorting stuff out where she wanted to live here for a bit, and I was prepared to figure out how to make that work, but only if it worked for her parents as well.



I've always thought of myself as an integral part of Autumn's whānau. Michalea often refers to me as the other mum of Autumn and I think that's pretty appropriate.

There have definitely been times where we've had big emotional chats, and I know there have been times where she felt she had no one else she could call and she would call me.

My love language is quality time so it is super fun getting to spend time one on one. We meet every week at the same cafe through the year. We meet so often that the cafe brought us a Christmas present.



Around the time that she was sharing her full self with us is also when she started to get more interested in school and that's when I swooped in and 'OK what do we need to get you to university?'

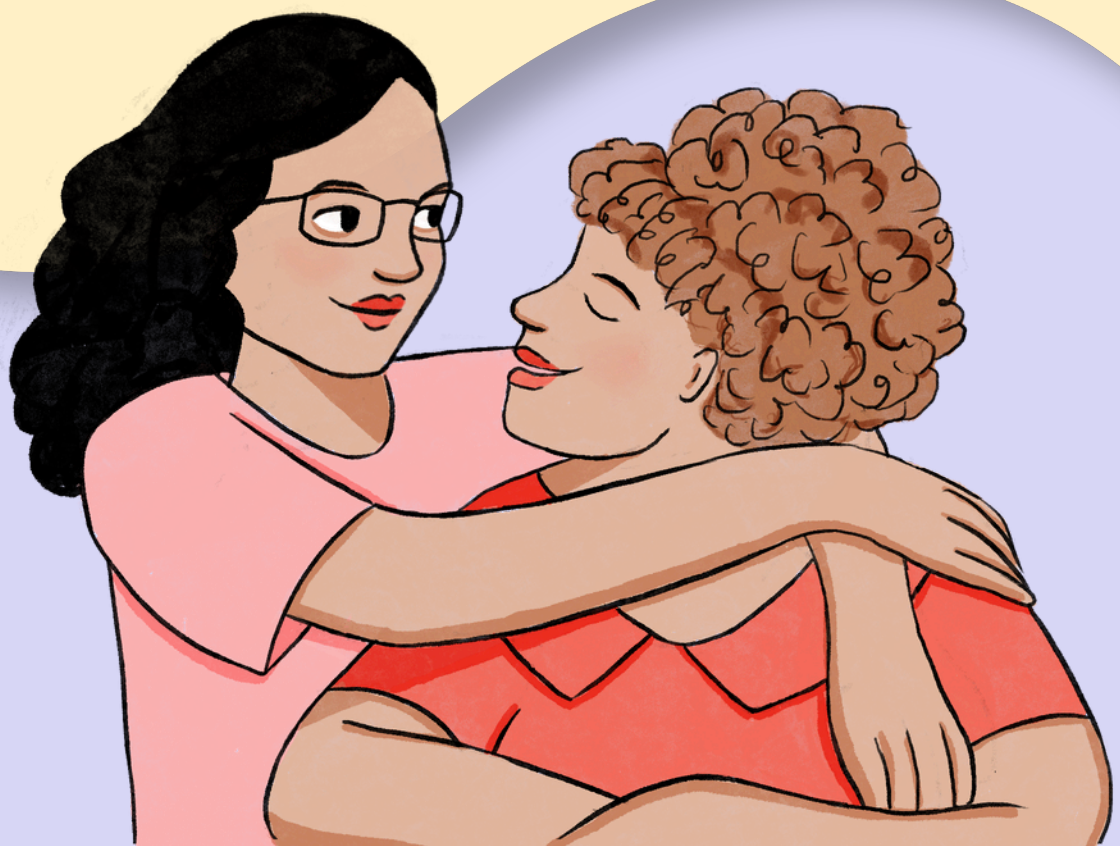
The first year of university wasn't great for Autumn. There were lots of times when she needed emotional support because it was so hard. I talked to Autumn's mum and said we need to be checking in on her holistically.

I made sure that I asked her about how she was she feeling physically, how is your living environment, how's your flatmate, what have you been eating, how have you been taking care of yourself? Asking about classes and how she'd been connecting to people.

Less frequently I would ask 'have you been to your GP lately, how are your meds going?' Making sure she was saying stuff her GP needed to know to be able to give her robust care, those kind of things. So I did that every week.

I'm her auntie, so I don't want to get in her business. I want to show her that I care and I want her to be able to tell me stuff, but I have no interest in receiving anything more than what she's willing to share. I don't have to advocate for her or do things for her like you might have to if someone was younger. But I'd be ready.

I definitely have a special interest in getting her hair just right. I've had 40 plus years of trying to figure out how to deal with curly hair. So this year's Christmas present was a full hair care set, a whole lot of curl cream and detangling brushes and silk pillow cases and that kind of thing. I am definitely on board with her having the best hair of her life.



auntie's tips

Check in with
niece/nephew/
nibling
regularly

Show that
you fully
accept
them

Go at their
pace

Help them
achieve their
goals

Have them
to stay

Be a listening
ear

Give financial
support if you
can

Spend quality
time with them

Support their
relationships

Foster their
gender
expression

shout outs to



Autumn's three grandparents who have passed, who she had the utmost respect for and trust in

Autumn's living grandmother who encourages her to be who she is

An encouraging non-binary teacher who helped Autumn access healthcare and connect to community

Friends Autumn first came out to at work before coming out to her parents

Supportive friends of Autumn's parents

Uni friends that Autumn hangs out with

Siblings she's close to





find support

Below are some support services that can help you in your journey supporting rangatahi takatāpui/transgender young people.

Mana Tipua

<https://www.manatipua.org>

InsideOUT Kōaro

www.insideout.org.nz

Rainbow Youth

<https://ry.org.nz/>

Outline

[0800 688 5463](tel:08006885463)

Gender Minorities Aotearoa

www.genderminorities.com

Be There

www.be-there.nz

NZ Parents of Transgender and Gender Diverse Children

www.transgenderchildren.nz

Find out more at
www.projectvillageaotearoa.com



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Design: ia Morrison-Young
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