



Support worker professional development grants 2024

Feedback report, February 2026

Acknowledgement

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all the support workers who provided feedback on completion of their learning activities.

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Te Pou is a national centre of evidence-based workforce development for the mental health and addiction sectors in Aotearoa New Zealand.

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Key highlights

Support worker professional development grants supported learning across a diverse range of qualifications and workshops. Funding was awarded to 21 recipients, with feedback received from 16 grant recipients who completed their learning activities in 2025. Recipients were based across all Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora regions, with strong Māori representation among respondents.

Key outcomes

- All respondents (n = 16) reported gaining new skills or strengthening existing skills, with strong confidence in applying their learning to everyday support work practice.
- Learning strengthened culturally responsive, values-based, and trauma-informed practice, with clear alignment to Keeping it Real | Kia Pono te Tika values and the seven Real Skills.
- Respondents described practical application of learning in their mahi, including tikanga-based approaches, improved communication and relationship-building, ethical and reflective practice, crisis response, and strengths-based support for tāngata whai ora and whānau.
- Most respondents indicated they would recommend their learning activity to other support workers, reflecting the relevance and quality of the learning.
- All respondents were satisfied with the information, guidance, and support provided by Te Pou, describing the grant process as clear, timely, and supportive. Recipients also reported that the grant had a significant positive impact on their learning, professional development, and practice, reducing financial pressure and enabling greater focus on study completion and supporting whānau and communities.

Conclusion

The Support Worker Professional Development Grants play a role in building a confident, capable, and culturally responsive mental health and addiction support workforce. The grants enable learning that translated into practical improvement in everyday mahi, reduces financial barriers to professional development, and supports improved outcomes for tāngata whai ora, whānau, and communities. It highlights the importance of continuing and expanding investment in grants and supporting programmes for this workforce.

Background

The support workforce plays a vital role in the mental health and addiction sector, with approximately 5,125 fulltime equivalent (FTE) positions across adult mental health and addiction services (Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora, 2024). Support workers provide person centred and whānau centred support, strengthen connections to community networks, and contribute to positive health and wellbeing outcomes. The workforce includes a wide range of roles, including community and residential support workers, kaiāwhina, mataora, kaiwhakapuaki waiora, employment workers, peer support workers, and whānau support workers.

Te Pou offers a range of activities to create learning opportunities to build the knowledge and skills of support workers in mental health and addiction services. One such activity is the professional development grants which support existing support workers to participate in learning that enhances their professional practice and career development. This initiative aligns with the Government’s focus on ensuring the health workforce has the knowledge and skills required to deliver high quality care (Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora, 2025). The grants were available to support workers employed in publicly funded nongovernment organisations (NGOs).

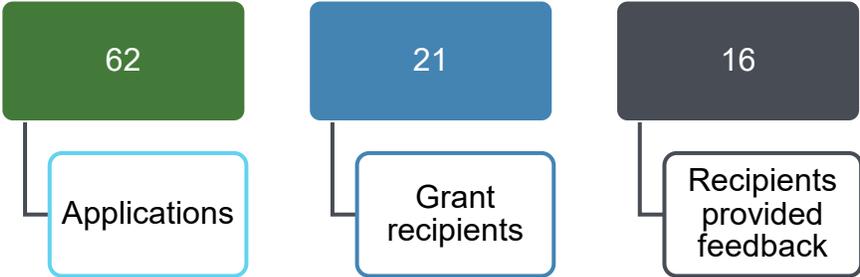
This report summarises the feedback from the recipients’ of 2024 grants following completion of their learning activities in 2025, on their knowledge, skills and confidence gained from their learning activity supported by the grant.

Support Worker Professional Development Grants 2024

A total of 62 applications were received with 21 funded based on the panel decisions. Funding varied, with some applications receiving partial funding and others full funding. Feedback was provided by 16 participants.

Four participants had not completed their courses in 2025: two are expected to finish in mid 2026, one in 2027, and one in 2029. Their feedback will be included in a future report. One recipient was unable to provide feedback and is uncontactable, as they have since left their role.

Figure 1. Overview of applications, funding decisions, and feedback status for the 2025 funding



Method

The support workers were asked to provide feedback through a series of scaled and open-ended questions at the end of their learning activity. The themes of these questions aimed to understand the practical application of their learning in their roles, identify actions taken to promote equity and inclusivity, and assess the overall impact on their knowledge, skills, and confidence. The feedback also sought to determine their satisfaction with the information and support provided throughout the grant process (questions attached in Appendix A). The quantitative data was analysed using Excel, while the open-ended questions were analysed using MAXQDA.

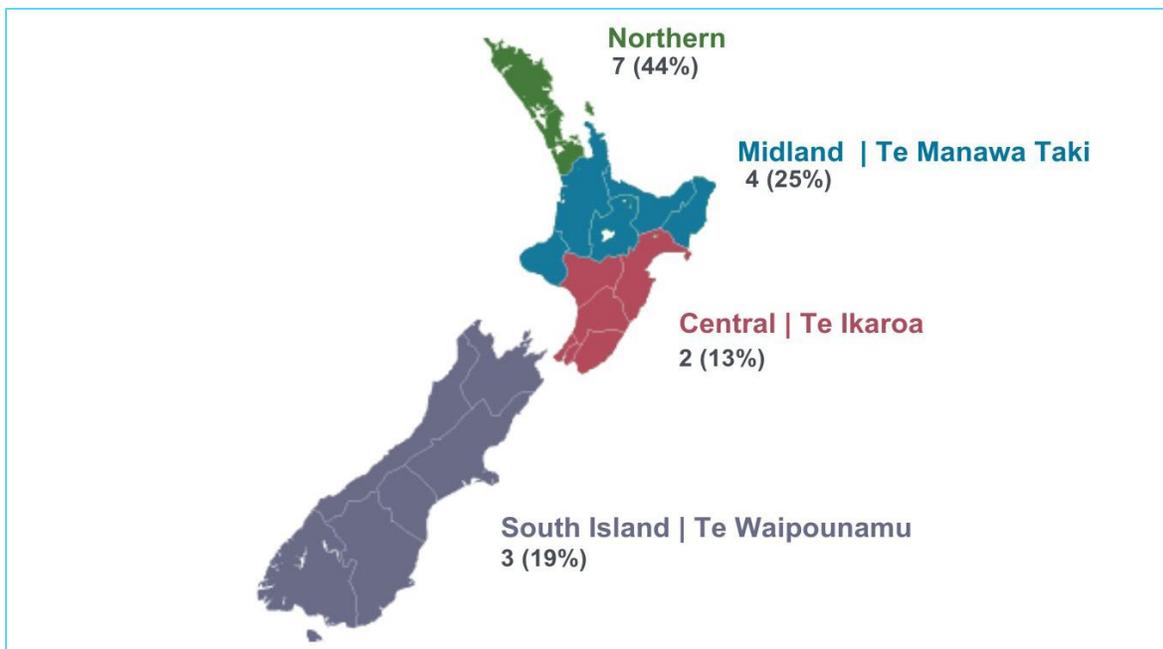
Results

This includes profile of the recipients who have submitted their final report. The complete profile of the grant recipient is attached (Appendix B).

Respondents' profile

Nearly half of the respondents were from Northern region (n=7) followed by Midland | Te Manawa Taki (n= 4), South Island | Te Waipounamu (n= 3) and Central | Te Ikaroa (n=2).

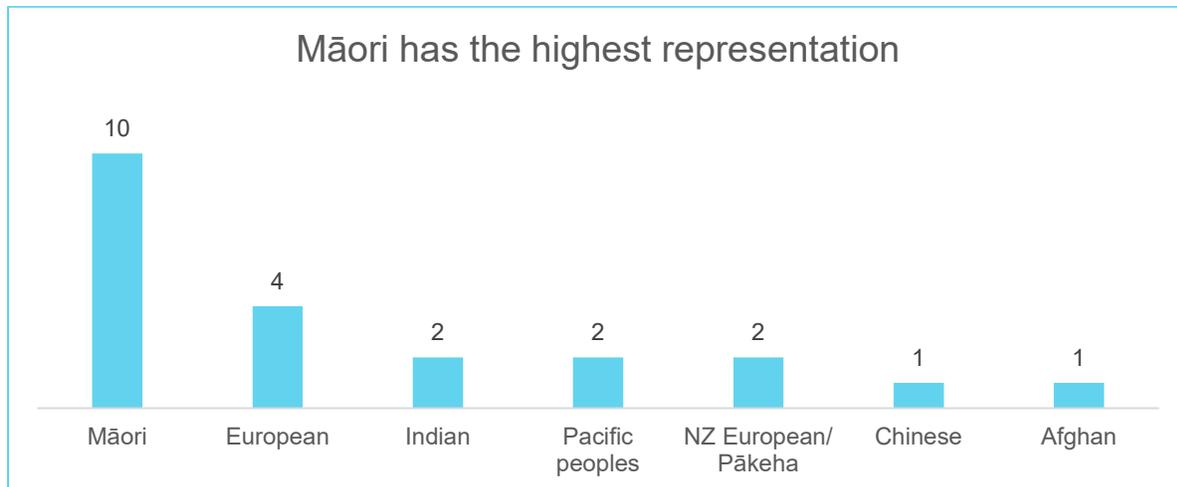
Figure 2. Distribution of respondents by Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora region (16 respondents)



Ethnicity

The respondents reflected a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds, Māori were the most reported ethnicity (n = 10), alongside European (n = 4) followed by Indian, Pacific peoples and NZ European / Pākehā (n = 2 each), and people identifying as Chinese and Afghan (n = 1 each). Respondents could identify with more than one ethnicity.

Figure 3. Distribution of respondents' ethnicity (16 respondents)



Course

The courses funded for the respondents include:

- Bachelor of Social Work (including bicultural social work)
- Bachelor Counselling and Addiction Practice
- Diploma in Applied Addictions Counselling (Level 7)
- Level 5 Diploma in Mental health and wellbeing
- Calm Under Pressure Workshop
- Foundations for Lived Experience Based Practice.

Key outcomes

Strengthened knowledge, skills and confidence

All respondents (n= 15) strongly agreed that they gained new skills or enhanced their existing skills through taking part in their learning activity (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Percentage of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed the programme helped them gain or strengthen skills



Grant recipients were further asked to describe how the learning activity built their knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. Overall, participants reported that the learning strengthened their confidence and capability across practice, particularly in applying values-based and culturally responsive approaches. Feedback has been mapped to the Keeping it Real | Kia Pono te Tika values and Real Skills. Table 1 presents selected participant quotes illustrating how the learning supported the development and application of values and skills in practice.

Table 1. Examples of learning aligned with Keeping it Real | Kia Pono te Tika values and Real Skills

Keeping it Real Kia Pono te Tika	Learning demonstrated (direct quotes)
<p>Values: Manaaki, respect, hope, Whanaungatanga and Kotahitanga</p>	<p>“Through the value of Manaaki, I practice care, compassion, and kindness by advocating for mana-enhancing support that respects people’s decisions, space, and integrity.”</p> <p>“Building genuine, trusting relationships with tāngata whai ora allows me to connect with them on a deeper level and</p>

provide holistic support that honours their whānau, culture, and community.”

“I’ve become more self-aware and professional in my approach, ensuring my support is person-centered, inclusive, and aligned with values like compassion, respect, and partnership in a cultural space. I have gained Manaaki, Respect, Wellbeing and Hope.”

“The values of hope and partnership guide me to believe in the potential for positive change and resilience.”

Real Skill: Working alongside tāngata whai ora

“It has also given me confidence to support people from different cultures, including Māori and Pacific peoples, by respecting their values and making sure services are fair and inclusive.”

“Engaging with kaupapa that centre whānau wellbeing, trauma-informed practice and culturally grounded therapeutic approaches has deepened my understanding of how to work respectfully, safely and effectively with diverse communities, especially Māori and Pacific whānau.”

Real Skill: Working alongside tāngata whenua

“Tikanga-understanding Māori practices and values, applying participation, protection, and partnership and doing the right processes or seeking help from my kaumatua if I am unsure.”

	<p>“I use Māori models of wellbeing such as Te Whare Tapa Whā and Pōwhiri Poutama to guide engagement and support planning. This allows conversations to focus on whānau, wairua, culture, and connection.”</p>
<p>Real Skill: Working alongside whānau</p>	<p>“My understanding of working with Māori and whānau was strengthened through kaupapa Māori and Te Tiriti–informed practice, enabling me to support hauora, self-determination, and whānau-centred outcomes.”</p>
<p>Real Skill: Applying law, policy, and standards</p>	<p>“The papers have helped me feel more confident in the Real Skills of applying law, policy and standard.”</p>
<p>Real Skill: Maintaining learning and kaimahi wellbeing</p>	<p>“My practice continues to evolve — I will never stop learning and filling my kete of mātauranga Māori.”</p> <p>“I regularly reflect on my own practice and biases, use supervision to challenge assumptions, and adjust my approach to ensure it does not reinforce inequities.”</p>

Implementation of learning

The respondents were asked to share three examples of how they intend to use their learning in their role and how they are applying the learning as support workers. These can be summarised into five themes.

Examples of how they intend to use the learning:

Trauma-informed and culturally grounded practice

The application of trauma-informed, and tikanga informed approaches to create safe, mana enhancing spaces for whānau was highlighted by some respondents. This includes tikanga based practices, and cultural responsiveness that honours identity and lived experience. Some examples are:

“One of the most meaningful ways is by creating and facilitating safe, tikanga-based healing spaces for wāhine Māori. I want to support wāhine to heal from trauma, addiction, grief and violence in ways that uplift their mana and reconnect them to whakapapa and identity.”

“I have a deeper understanding of trauma informed care and Te Tiriti O Waitangi to better support our whānau”

“I will use trauma-informed and reflective practice to support people safely and ethically, maintaining professional boundaries and promoting long-term wellbeing.”

Relationship building, trust, and communication

Respondents shared building strong, respectful relationships is central to their role. They shared their use of active listening, empathy, compassion, encouragement, and clear communication as ways to help people feel heard, valued, and safe to share their experiences. Some examples are:

“Active Listening and Empathy: In a residential setting, I use active listening skills to understand the experiences and emotions of individuals struggling with mental health issues or addiction, I utilise āhurutanga-the principle of creating and maintaining a safe space in any kaupapa, environment and relationship. This has allowed residents to feel heard and validated after they share their struggles with substance use and mental health.”

“Build better relationships – by using good communication, listening skills, and culturally respectful engagement.”

“I have gained strong listening and communication skills, creating strong compassion and cultural knowledge to understand and respect the cultural worldview and pacific lens.”

Ethical, reflective, and professional practice

Respondents shared their intention to work in line with ethical guidelines, the law, and their organisation's policies. They also described keeping professional boundaries, reflecting on their practice, and using critical thinking to support safe, consistent, and respectful engagement.

Some examples are:

"I have learned the importance of maintaining clear boundaries between personal dilemmas and professional responsibilities while supporting tāngata whai ora and adhering to organisational policies."

"I learnt a lot of the important legislation which affects my support work with people in the AOD (Alcohol and other drug) how some clients may need to receive compulsory treatment under the law, and how this interacts with my ethical DAPAANZ obligations."

"I use critical thinking to assess situations, this helps me respond appropriately to risk, relapse indicators, and conflict while supporting positive outcomes."

Crisis response, safety, and holistic support planning

Respondents shared their intention to provide a crisis response, deescalation techniques, and holistic support for people during distress while promoting long term wellbeing. Some examples are:

"By remaining calm and using de-escalation skills, I can help residents feel safe and supported during critical moments. My learnings have been applied into my role as managing actual potential aggression. I have also been in a crisis of self-harm and followed all the policies and processes of my organisation."

"I will apply holistic assessment and planning skills to identify needs and strengths, develop practical support plans, and advocate effectively across health and social service systems."

"Provide holistic support – by considering physical, mental, spiritual, and family needs when working with clients."

Strengths based, mana enhancing support and empowerment

Respondents shared they would support people to identify strengths, build confidence, and take an active role in their recovery. They intend to help people set meaningful goals and work toward positive futures using strengths based and solution focused approaches. Some examples are:

“I have learnt new skills and strategies to encourage and empower the clients to make their own decisions for better solutions and positive goals that will support their everyday lives.”

“This experience strengthened my understanding of how to support tāngata whai ora and connect them with appropriate services and resources that promote stability, empowerment, and independence.”

Application of learning in their mahi

Many respondents shared practical examples of how learning is already being embedded in everyday mahi. This included integrating tikanga Māori and Pacific practices such as mihi, pepeha, te reo Māori greetings, karakia, waiata, and whakawhanaungatanga to create culturally safe and respectful environments.

“I have been able to share mihi and pepeha with clients as part of everyday practice to support all cultures that come through my mahi.”

Many participants reported applying holistic frameworks such as Te Whare Tapa Whā and Fonofale to support physical, mental, spiritual, and whānau wellbeing, particularly in recovery, housing, and AOD contexts.

“I utilise Te Whare Tapa Whā in educating whānau about taking care of their needs.”

Participants highlighted advocacy roles that reduce barriers for Māori and Pacific peoples, including culturally appropriate referrals, accompaniment to services, and support navigating complex systems shaped by trauma and inequity.

“I advocate for Māori and Pacific wahine by ensuring they have fair access to health services, addiction support, education, and legal processes.”

Some respondents described supporting tikanga-based wānanga, peer support groups, noho marae, and community wellbeing events that prioritise Māori-led solutions and reduce barriers to participation. This included engagement with Māori and Pacific providers, involvement in steering groups and noho marae, and referrals to education and training pathways that strengthen cultural capability and hauora knowledge.

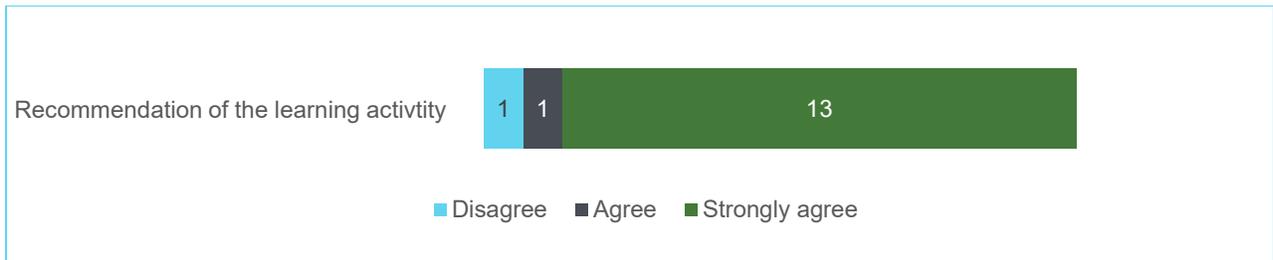
“These groups are free, confidential and accessible with no referral required, ensuring whānau have safe, non-judgemental spaces to heal.”

“Being part of a Noho Marae strengthens taha wairua, hinengaro, tinana, and whānau in a culturally therapeutic environment.”

Recommendation of the learning activity

Most respondents (n = 14) would recommend the learning activity to other support workers, indicating high perceived relevance and value.

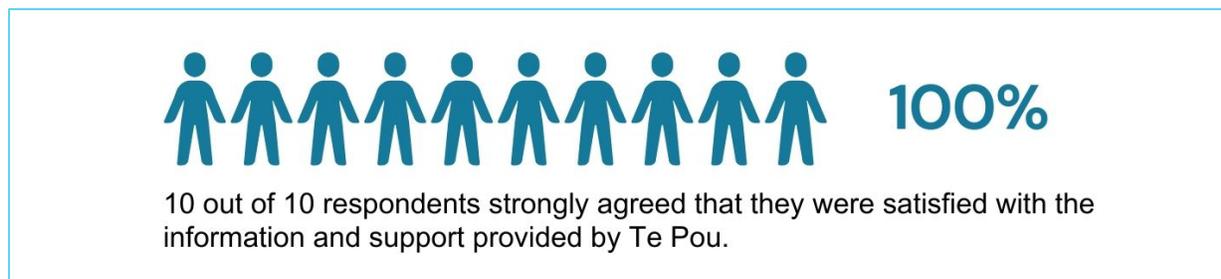
Figure 5. Respondents' rating on the recommendation of the learning activity they undertook



Impact of grant and grant support

All respondents (n =15) strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the information and support provided by Te Pou.

Figure 6. Percentage of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed they were satisfied with the information and support provided by Te Pou



Recipients reported that the grant had a significant positive impact on their learning, professional development, and practice. The financial support reduced pressure and enabled recipients to focus on completing their studies and strengthening their ability to support whānau and communities.

“Your generosity removed significant financial pressure and allowed me to focus fully on my learning, growth and the completion of my study. I am deeply grateful for the investment you have made not only in me, but in the future wellbeing of the communities I serve. Ngā mihi maioha ki a koutou.”

Respondents consistently described the grant process as clear, timely, and well supported, from application through to completion. Communication and guidance from Te Pou were highly valued.

“The information, guidance, and support provided by Te Pou throughout the grant process were clear, timely, and well communicated. I am grateful for the opportunity this grant provided and the positive impact it has had on my professional development and ability to support others.”

The grant contributed to increased confidence, capability, and culturally responsive practice. Participants noted strengthened application of professional competencies and improved support for Māori and Pacific peoples.

“The learning has genuinely strengthened my practice and increased my confidence in applying the *Let’s get real* competencies.”

Overall, respondents expressed strong appreciation for funding in workforce development and the wider impact on the communities the grant supports.

“I am deeply grateful for the investment you have made not only in me, but in the future wellbeing of the communities I serve.”

Conclusion and future directions

The Support Worker Professional Development Grants align with Target One of the Mental Health and Addiction Workforce Plan 2024–2027, supporting workforce growth, retention, and capability development (Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora, 2025). The grants contribute to strengthening the confidence, capability, and cultural responsiveness of the mental health and addiction support workforce.

Grant recipients reported strengthened capability in trauma informed care, values based engagement, reflective practice, crisis response, and holistic support planning. Feedback also highlighted improved understanding of cultural approaches such as Te Whare Tapa Whā, Fonofale, tikanga based practice, and whānau centred engagement. These gains suggest links between learning and the ability to provide culturally responsive support for Māori and Pacific peoples.

Financial support reduced pressure on recipients, enabling them to focus on completing their studies and developing their professional practice. High satisfaction with the grant process reflects the value of clear communication, timely assistance, and consistent guidance. Overall, the findings reinforce the importance of investing in the support workforce and the wider benefits this provides for equity, cultural responsiveness, and service quality.

In future, continuing and expanding the grants will help maintain a skilled, supported, and culturally grounded support workforce. Ongoing investment will build capability across the NGO workforce, particularly for Māori, Pacific, and lived experience workers who bring vital strengths

to mental health and addiction services. Recipients emphasised the value of learning that respects their identity, whakapapa, and lived experience. Increasing access to kaupapa Māori and Pacific led training will further uplift cultural capability and strengthen equity focused practice.

Reference

Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora. (2026). *Adult mental health and addiction workforce estimates 2025*. <https://www.tewhatauora.govt.nz/assets/Publications/Workforce/2025-Health-NZ-Te-Whatu-Ora-workforce-estimates.pdf>

Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora. (2025). *Mental health and addiction workforce plan 2024–2027 (2025 refresh)*. <https://www.tewhatauora.govt.nz/publications/mental-health-and-addiction-workforce-plan-2024-2027-2025-refresh>

Appendix A: survey questions

1. I gained new skills or enhanced my existing skills through taking part in this learning activity.
 - Strongly disagree
 - Disagree
 - Neutral
 - Agree
 - Strongly agree

2. I would recommend this learning activity to other support workers.
 - Strongly disagree
 - Disagree
 - Neutral
 - Agree
 - Strongly agree

3. Give three examples of how you will use what you learned in your role as a support worker.
4. Since completing study have you or are you in the process of implanting methods.
5. In what ways has the learning activity built your knowledge, skills or confidence in the competencies, including the values?
6. I am satisfied with the information and support provided by Te Pou through the grant process.
7. Please add any comments about your rating of the above questions and any other feedback or comments.

Appendix B: Grant recipients

Investing in the support workforce



Support Worker Professional Development Grants funded in 2024

Support Worker Professional Development Grants are specifically for support workers providing mental health and addiction support employed in a publicly funded non-government organisation (NGO).

The grant helps to cover the costs of taking part in a learning activity for existing support workers to develop professional knowledge and skills that enhance their support worker role or career.

Number of applications:



62
Applications

Number of applications funded:



21
Applications
Funded

Dates of round:



1-30
November
2024

Geographic spread of successful applicants



Courses funded

- Bachelor of Social Work (including bicultural social work)
- Te Taketake Diploma in Applied Addictions Counselling
- Mindfulness
- Bachelor of Counselling
- Foundations for Lived Experience Based Practice
- Level 5 Diploma in Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Calm under pressure workshop
- Apprenticeship in mental health and addiction support

