



Support worker Professional Development Grants 2023

Feedback report, April 2025

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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Background

The support workforce is crucial in the mental health and addiction sectors, making up to 60 percent of the workforce in adult mental health and addiction services. They provide person-centred and whānau centred support, connect people to community networks, and promote positive health and wellbeing outcomes (Te Pou, 2022). This diverse workforce includes roles such as community support worker, residential support worker, kaiāwhina, mataora, kaiwhakapuaki waiora, employment worker, peer support, and whānau support worker.

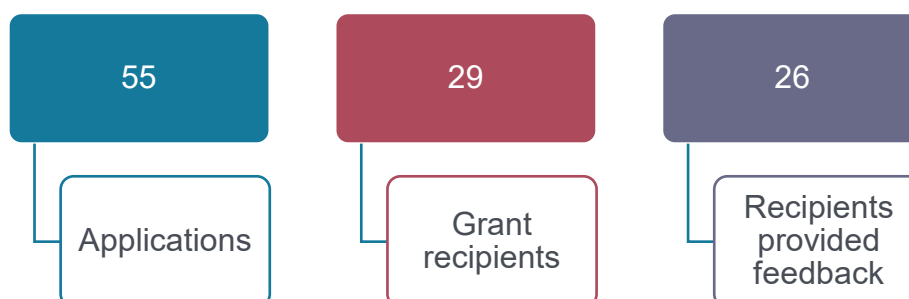
Te Pou offers a series of activities to create learning opportunities, connect the workforce and improve knowledge and skills for support workers specifically providing mental health and addiction services. One such activity is professional development grants, which allow existing support workers to participate in learning activities to develop professional knowledge and skills that enhance their role or career. This initiative supports the Government's focus on ensuring the health workforce possesses the necessary knowledge and skills to deliver high-quality care (Ministry of Health, 2024). These grants are available to support workers employed in publicly funded non-government organisations (NGOs) and can cover learning opportunities ranging from a single day to a full year.

This report summarises the feedback from the recipients' of 2023 grants upon completing their learning activities, highlighting the impact on their knowledge, skills, and confidence because of the grant.

Support Worker Professional Development Grants 2023

The professional development grants for support workers were first offered in 2023 for learning opportunities in 2024. A total of 29 were funded based on an independent panel decision. Funding varied, with some applications receiving partial funding and others full funding. Out of the 29 grant recipients, 26 provided their feedback. Two recipients were unable to complete their courses, and one respondent could not provide feedback.

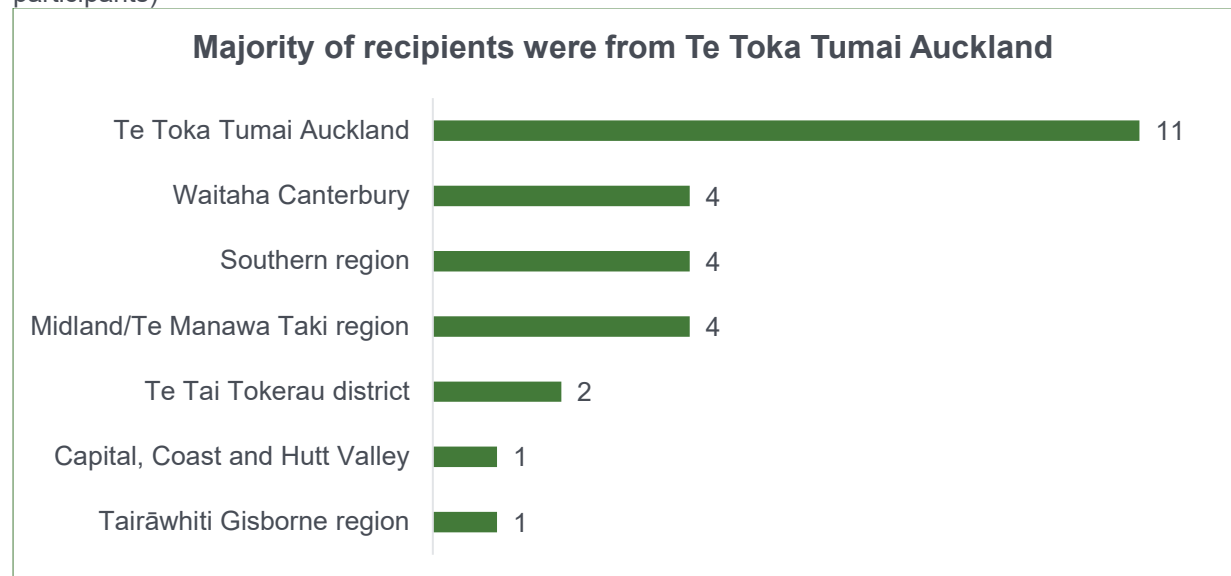
Figure 1. Summary of 2023 professional development grant



Recipients of grants

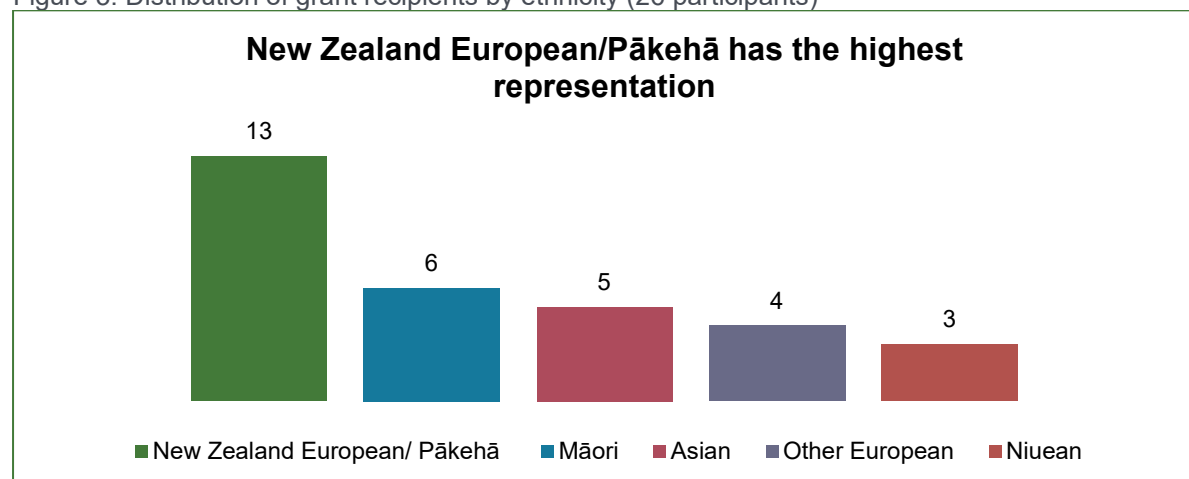
The grant recipients come from various parts of the country, with the highest number from the Te Toka Tumai Auckland region. See Figure 2. for breakdown.

Figure 2. Distribution of grant recipients by Te Whatu Ora Health New Zealand region (26 participants)



The grant recipients came from diverse ethnic backgrounds, with significant representation of New Zealand European/Pākehā followed by Māori and Asian. Some recipients selected more than one ethnicity. Figure 3. shows the distribution.

Figure 3. Distribution of grant recipients by ethnicity (26 participants)



The support workers who were funded through the grant were supported to complete courses from a one-day workshop to bachelor's and postgraduate diplomas. See Table 1. for a detailed list of courses support workers were funded to complete.

Table 1. Distribution of funded courses by the level of study

Trainings	Diploma and level four/ five courses	Bachelors' degree	Postgraduate certificate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivational interviewing • MHERC Trainings • PATHS & MAPS Planning Tool • The Power of Connection: Applying Attachment theory to Clinical Practice • Maternal mental health training • Engagement in Mental Health and Addiction Work • Professional development in Counselling • New Zealand Sign Language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition Course • Health and Wellbeing (Level 5) Applied Practice • Te Reo (Level 4) • Graduate certificate in Addictions • Applied Addictions Counselling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nursing • Health Science Mental Health and Addictions • Applied community • Social Work • Applied counselling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postgraduate Diploma in Bicultural Professional Supervision

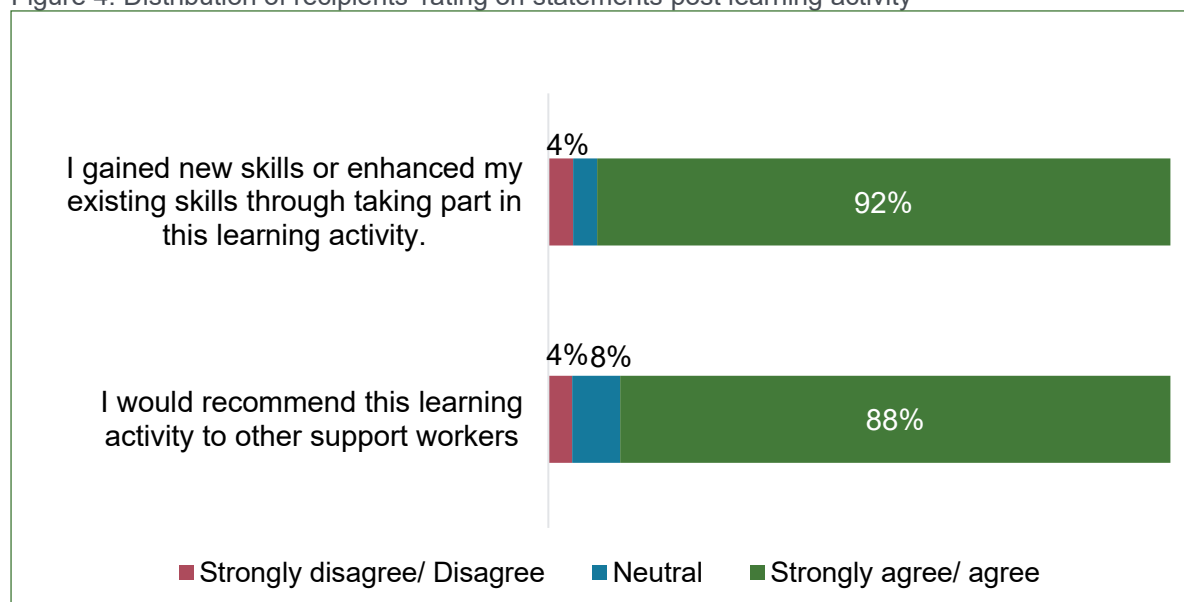
Method

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

Following the learning activity, grant recipients shared their feedback. Ninety-two percent (24 people) strongly agreed or agreed that they gained new skills or enhanced their existing skills through participating in the learning activity. A majority (88 percent or 23 people) indicated they would recommend the learning activity to their fellow support workers.

Figure 4. Distribution of recipients' rating on statements post learning activity



Use their learning in their role

Support workers who received grants were asked to share three examples of how they plan to use what they learned in their roles. The examples were varied, reflecting the diverse nature of their learning activities.

Key themes included relationship building, enhanced cultural safety, actions to embrace diversity, and use of health and wellbeing models in practice as follows:

Relationship Building

The support workers shared they are building better relationships with tāngata whai ora. One example includes “Working alongside with the individual as we develop their Path or Map and working in partnership with others including family/whānau, other social services as we start to narrow down the Dream Space to an actionable target”. Other examples included:

- Whakawhanaungatanga
- Building better rapport with tāngata whai ora
- Active listening

- Empathetic communication

Use appropriate cultural practices and safety

Many support workers shared their plan to incorporate culturally informed care practices. One shared “I plan to incorporate Māori healing practices and perspectives into the care plans, such as incorporating elements of taha wairua (spiritual wellbeing) and taha whānau (family wellbeing).” Some others include:

- Being more aware of different cultural practices and safety
- Recognising and respecting tikanga (customs) and kawa (protocols)
- Using karakia to open and close meetings
- Integrating Te Ao Māori (the Māori worldview) into supervision

Embracing diversity

Some support workers took specific language courses such as Te Reo Māori and New Zealand Sign Language and shared that they plan to use what they learnt more confidently with their colleagues and tāngata whai ora. They also showed a greater understanding of the importance of embracing diversity and focusing on the individual. For example: “I now position the people I support more easily as the expert in our working relationship and see that my expertise is there to support them in ways that matter to them in their journey towards enhanced wellbeing.”

Use of health and wellbeing techniques and models in practice

Some support workers shared their plan to use wellbeing techniques including

- Educating tāngata whai ora on how proper nutrition can improve mood and energy levels.
- Focusing on the sensory aspects of food and eating
- Mindful techniques to reduce stress and promote emotional balance.
- Motivational interviewing
- Non-outcomes-based play with tamariki and rangatahi
- Trauma-informed approach
- Holistic health model
- Te Whare Tapa Whā model
- Pharmacology

- Counselling skills

Activities to support and promote equity

Support workers were asked to share if they have implemented or are in the process of implementing methods, activities, or events that support equity. Most participants shared that they are in the process of planning or ensuring activities to promote equity and inclusivity. The feedback can be summarised in three broad categories: being respectful to various cultures, empowering tāngata whai ora and promoting an inclusive environment.

Respectful to various cultures

Respecting various cultures was a prominent theme in the comments from the support workers. They shared diverse approaches, including celebrating different cultures, and planning to incorporate traditional healing practices. Some examples include:

“Since completing this course, I have taken steps to ensure that my approach to nutrition is inclusive and culturally respectful. This has been done by incorporating foods that hold cultural significance in their diets, such as root vegetables, fish, and tropical fruits. By emphasising the nutritional benefits of these foods and suggesting healthier preparation methods, I can support clients in maintaining cultural connections while also prioritising their health.”

“Including activities that celebrate their culture, such as kapa haka outings or practices for a day program and playing Pacific music more often.”

“After my course I have been more mindful and have started being more conscious about simple actions, like taking shoes off when entering a home and offering karakia before meetings.”

Empowering tāngata whai ora

Support workers shared they have been using their knowledge and skills to empower tāngata whai ora. Some examples are:

“Using MI (motivational interviewing) with communities that are made to feel smaller, less important by society has shown to be more effective. Because you can help to empower them, and start to understand their beliefs using evoking, focusing, and engaging with the clients.”

“I now feel more confident in using basic Te Reo with some of the people I support. I am ensuring Māori people have more support through advocacy & also ensuring there is spaces to prevent Māori people having experiences of inequity.”

Promoting an inclusive environment

The comments from support workers also reflected their efforts to promote an inclusive environment after their learning activities by incorporating cultural values, respecting traditions, and engaging with communities. Some examples are:

“I’ve contributed to developing educational resources and toolkits that highlight best practices for engaging with Māori and Pacific peoples. These resources include guidelines on effective communication, understanding cultural protocols, and integrating culturally specific approaches into everyday care.”

“I regularly consult with Māori and Pacific cultural advisors to make sure that the care plans are culturally appropriate and effective.”

Learning activity enhanced recipients’ knowledge, skills and confidence

Support workers shared how the learning activities have enhanced their knowledge, skills, and confidence. Due to the range of learning activities undertaken, the knowledge and skills gained through these opportunities vary among support workers. Most have aligned their learning with the skills and values of the *Let’s get real* framework, now updated to Keeping it real | Kia Pono te Tika. The knowledge and skills shared will be summarised against the skills and values of Keeping it real | Kia Pono te Tika. See Table 2.

Table 2. Examples shared by grant recipients on their enhanced skills in alignment with the Keeping it real | Kia pono te tika framework

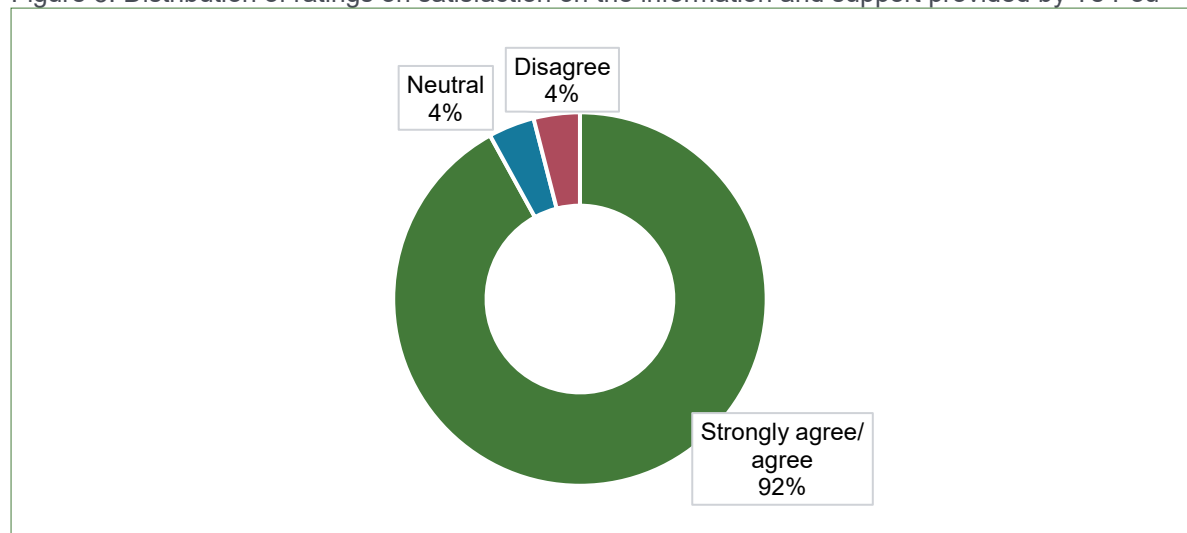
Skills and values	Examples
Working with tāngata whenua	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• integration of kaupapa Māori health models and traditional practices into care plans• working collaboratively with Māori health providers and cultural advisors.
Working with whānau	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• involving whānau in the care process, recognising their critical role in supporting the journey of tāngata whai ora• improved skills in communicating with families about the impacts of mental health and addiction.
Working with tāngata whai ora	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• improved active listening and empathetic communication skills• working alongside people to set achievable goals

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> gained insights into how neurodiverse individuals experience the world and services, shaping effective and beneficial work with them combining cultural knowledge with structured, evidence-based supervision techniques to advocate for bicultural approaches in practice
Working within communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> collaboration with local community resources, such as food banks and community gardens, to provide comprehensive support Starting wellbeing groups for tāngata whai ora in the community to enhance and support their wellbeing
Challenging discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> more confident in advocating for people's rights and educating others about the negative impacts of stigma and discrimination on tāngata whai ora commitment to promoting equitable access to services for Māori and Pacific peoples
Maintaining professional and personal development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> motivation to continue learning and improving practice based on the values and competencies highlighted in the <i>Let's get real</i> framework. enhancing reflective practice skills has enabled them to continuously assess and improve their approach to supporting people.
Manaaki	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> enhancing the capacity to show empathy towards people impacted by mental health and addiction. understanding that mental health and addiction always has a whakapapa - it comes from somewhere. Having compassion for tāngata whai ora, Māori and members of other minority, marginalised groups, can activate their own capacity to have compassion for themselves, supporting further healing.
Respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> respecting tāngata whai ora identity, mental health journey, culture, autonomy, and maintaining integrity in practice.

Satisfaction with the grant process

Most support workers (92 percent; 24 grant recipients) strongly agreed or agreed that they were satisfied with the information and support provided by Te Pou through the grant process.

Figure 5. Distribution of ratings on satisfaction on the information and support provided by Te Pou



Many expressed appreciations for the support, particularly those balancing work, study, and personal responsibilities. Several support workers highlighted the positive impact on their professional development and expressed gratitude for the opportunity and support provided by Te Pou. The application process was described as quick, easy, and well-communicated. Unfortunately, the recipient who disagreed did not share any feedback, making it difficult to understand their experience.

Additional comments shared by recipients on the impact of the grant

Recipients shared how the grant impacted their role and career. Specifically, one person shared that the grant helped them to take on a course in an area they wanted to expand their knowledge on. Another said the learning activity they undertook built their confidence in applying the *Let's get real* values and competencies and significantly improved their ability to deliver person-centred support. Others reported they were grateful for the grant, and one, mentioned that the grant helped them in their journey to becoming a social worker.

Comments are shared in quotes below.

“Thank you very much for this opportunity for more professional development in an area I had been wanting to expand my knowledge on. Great communication throughout the process.”

“The learning activity was highly valuable in building my confidence and competence in applying the *Let’s get real* values and competencies. It provided practical tools and a deeper understanding of culturally responsive practices, which have significantly improved my ability to deliver person-centred support. The emphasis on cultural competence for Māori and Pacific peoples was particularly impactful. Overall, the program has been instrumental in enhancing my professional growth and effectiveness in my role.”

“I am very grateful for support from Te Pou, contributing to my studies, as a single mother, working full time and studying full time I appreciate the support which helps me in my journey to become a social worker.”

Conclusion

Support workers funded by Te Pou through the Professional Development Grant for learning activity in 2024 indicated that the grants enabled them to gain new skills or enhance their existing skills, and most would recommend the learning activity to other support workers.

The diverse examples shared by support workers illustrates their commitment to applying their learning in meaningful ways. They report building stronger relationships with tāngata whai ora and whānau through whanaungatanga and developing language skills. Support workers report using health and well-being techniques, including nutrition education and mindfulness, in culturally appropriate ways to improve overall wellbeing. Various health models, such as motivational interviewing and the Te Whare Tapa Whā model, are being implemented to provide holistic support.

Support workers shared various ways they have been working towards promoting equity. These activities are particularly important as they align with the Government Policy Statement on Health and Pae Ora legislation, which focuses on achieving health equity for diverse communities, particularly for Māori, Pacific peoples, disabled people and other groups with poorer health outcomes (Ministry of Health, 2024).

Feedback highlights significant strides in promoting equity through respectful cultural practices, empowering tāngata whai ora, and fostering inclusive environments. The learning activities have significantly enhanced support workers' knowledge, skills, and confidence, aligning with the competencies and values of the Keeping it Real | Kia Pono te Tika framework. These advancements ensure that support workers can effectively support tāngata whai ora and their communities, contributing to a more equitable and compassionate health system.

Future considerations

Overall, the positive feedback from support workers underscores the importance of continuing this funding programme to benefit more individuals and enable the workforce to access professional development opportunities they may not otherwise have been able to. The clear advantages of this funding are evident in the enhanced knowledge and efforts towards equity. To ensure we have well-skilled and confident support workers, the funding needs to continue to support a diverse range of programmes and participants. This aligns with the Government Mental Health and Addiction targets and Health Strategy's focus on having a skilled, diverse, and confident workforce, and fostering a culture of continuous learning and innovation (Ministry of Health, 2024). Future evaluations will place greater emphasis on the impact of receiving a grant, while regular feedback from support workers will continue to guide improvements in Te Pou's processes.

References

Minister of Health. (2024). *Government Policy Statement on Health 2024 – 2027*. Wellington: Ministry of Health. [The New Zealand Health Strategy | Ministry of Health NZ](#).

Te Pou. (2022). *Support worker scopes of practice: Literature review*. Auckland: [SW-scope-of-practice-lit-rev.pdf](#).

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