



UNSEEN HEROES

2024 Annual Impact Report

www.unseenheroes.org.nz

Executive Summary

2024 has been a remarkable year for Unseen Heroes, filled with growth, achievement, and deepened commitment to supporting young carers across Aotearoa. We proudly expanded our services and created the Te Ara Marama programme, which has provided vital support to 72 new, beautiful young carers and their whānau. This programme has allowed us to meet the growing needs of young carers, offering them the respite, guidance, and community they deserve.

A major milestone this year was securing our first government contract, a testament to the importance of the work we do. We also received generous support from several philanthropic trusts and companies, whose contributions have been instrumental in enabling us to continue our mission. Additionally, we undertook a rebrand from Camp Unity to Unseen Heroes to more accurately reflect our young carers and the invaluable work we do in their lives.

We were also thrilled to see our co-founder, Char Rain, recognized as a semifinalist in the Kiwibank New Zealand Local Hero of the Year Award for her tireless dedication to Unseen Heroes and the young carers we serve.

While we've faced challenges, particularly in securing sustainable funding, we remain determined. Despite operating on limited resources, we know we cannot give up. For too long, young carers have been invisible in New Zealand, silently struggling behind closed doors. We are committed to driving change and ensuring these young heroes are seen, heard, and supported.

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to the incredible communities who have consistently supported our fundraising efforts. Without your unwavering commitment, none of this would be possible. Together, we are making a lasting impact in the lives of young carers and their whānau.



**Kiwibank New Zealand
Local Hero of the Year**

TOP 10 Semi-Finalist

Kiwibank
New Zealand Local Hero of the Year
Te Pūa Take o te Tau 



Char Harris
2025 Semi-Finalist



WHO WE ARE

Ensuring Young Carers are seen, heard and found

Unseen Heroes previously known as Camp Unity is New Zealand's leading Young Carer organisation. We support young people aged up to 25 years who provide care for a family member affected by disability, chronic or mental illness, addiction, frail age, socio-economic factors, or who provide significant care to their younger sibling(s).

We are a specialised service co-designed by lived experience of young carers with the specialist skills to cater to the complex needs and challenges that come with being a young carer. We are grounded in holistic healing meaning that the values and principles that underpin our programmes, are inclusive and extend beyond physical well-being, to incorporate spiritual, emotional, mental, and whānau well-being.

Unseen Heroes is an alternative and prevention into an already overwhelmed mental health and addiction service. We aim to support Young Carers by helping them realise that they are important, they matter, and they are not alone.

Our Vision

We envision a New Zealand where all young carers are flourishing by learning to love who they are and understand their potential is limitless.

Our Mission

To transform the lives of Young Carers by providing holistic healing, and an environment and opportunities to connect, heal, have fun, and learn.

Young Carers are
FLOURISHING

Young Carers
feel important and
that they matter

Young Carers
are on their
holistic healing journey

Young Carers
feel seen and heard

Young Carers
have a vision for
their futures

Young Carers
are thriving in
education,
training and
vocation

Young Carers
have a sense of
belonging

Young Carers
feel nurtured
and safe

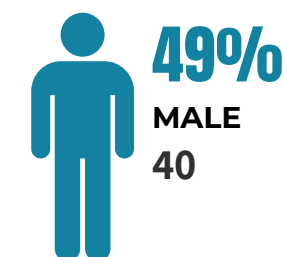
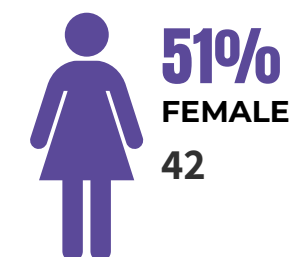


Who are our Young Carers?

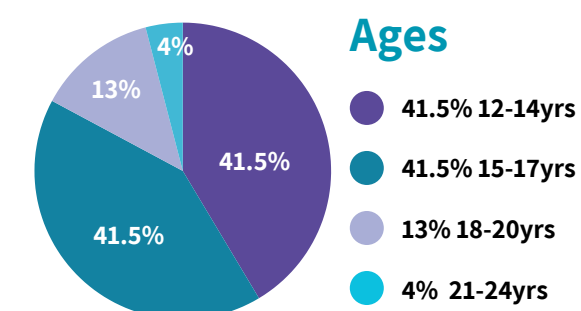
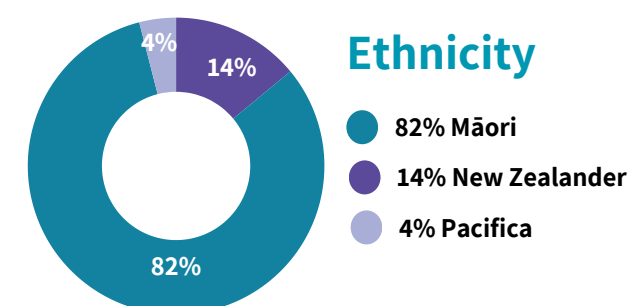
Young carers in Te Ara Mārama 2024

82 YOUNG CARERS
ENROLLED

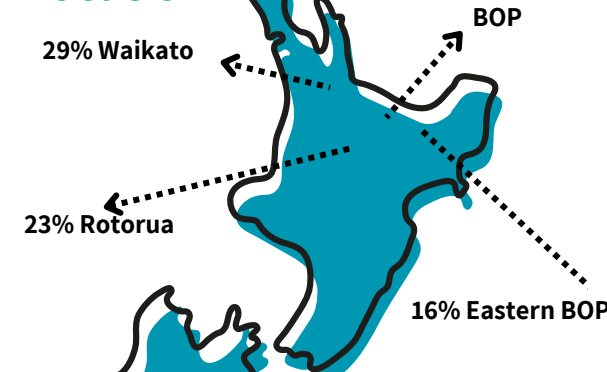
72 YOUNG CARERS
COMPLETED
TE ARA MĀRAMA



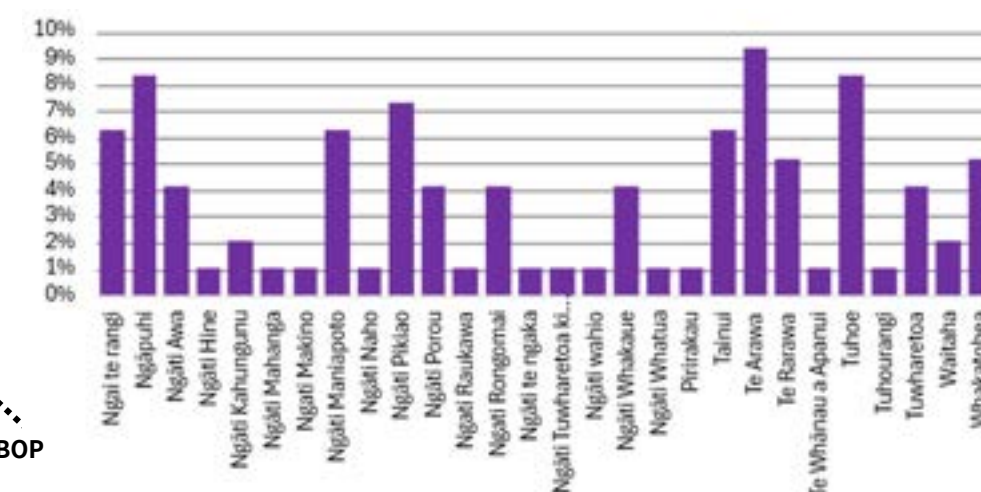
*Data below is based on the 72 Young Carers that completed Te Ara Mārama



Location



Iwi of young carers



OUR YOUNG CARERS

The Heart of our Mission





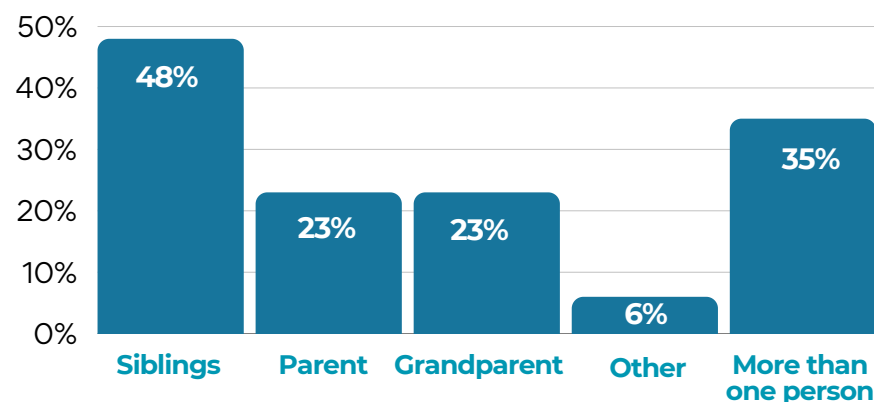
WHO ARE OUR YOUNG CARERS



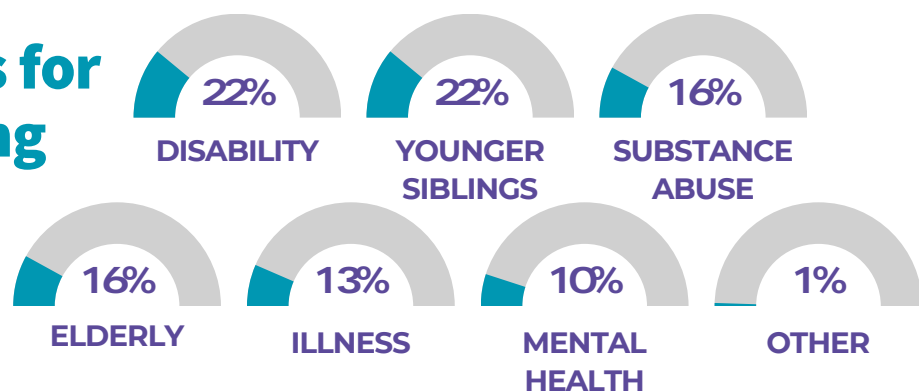
WHO ARE THEY CARING FOR?

"I help look after my dad who has an addiction and take care of my baby sister"

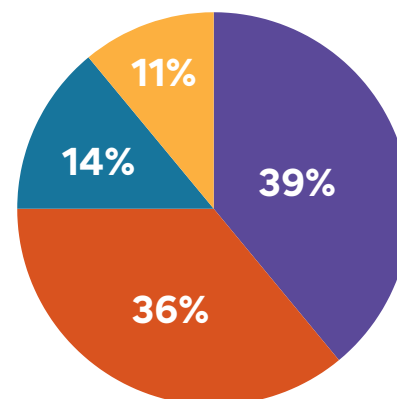
- 12 yrs old



Reasons for providing care



LEVEL OF CARING



Very High
High
Moderate
Low

*Burden of caring levels based on the MACA

How young carers may help

- Take responsibility for shopping for food.
- Help with financial matters such as dealing with bills, banking money, collecting benefits. Interpret, sign or use another communication system for person they care for
- Help the person they care for bath, shower, or wash
- Keeping an eye on them to ensure they're ok
- Keep them company eg. sitting, reading, talking with them

75%

YOUNG CARERS PROVIDE
HIGH TO VERY HIGH LEVELS OF CARE

Young carers supporting loved ones

A 16-year-old carer supports their parent who has a spinal injury, requiring full-time assistance with mobility and daily tasks. They help with getting in and out of bed, dressing, and managing personal hygiene. In addition, they assist with household chores, meal preparation, and ensuring their younger siblings stay on track with schoolwork.

A 17-year-old carer supports their parent who has cancer and is undergoing chemotherapy. They help with medication management, ensuring their parent takes medications on time. The carer also looks after their younger siblings, making sure they are fed, attend school, and receive emotional support during their parent's treatment. They manage household chores, grocery shopping, and overall family care.

A 15-year-old carer looks after their parent who struggles with alcohol addiction. They ensure their parent's basic needs are met, such as cooking meals and keeping them safe. The carer also takes responsibility for their younger siblings, ensuring they get to school, assisting with homework, and providing emotional support when their parent is unable to care for them due to their addiction.





IMPACT ON YOUNG CARERS



IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

YOUNG CARERS FEEL:

Stressed
Like running away
Very lonely
Can't cope
Have to do things that make me upset
Can't stop thinking about what I have to do
Feel so sad I can hardly stand it
Don't think I matter
Life doesn't seem worth living
Have trouble staying awake

42%

YOUNG CARERS
HAVE A HIGH LEVEL
OF NEGATIVE
FEELINGS AS A
RESULT OF CARING

50%

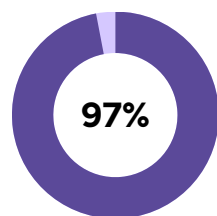
are **STRESSED**
"a lot of the
time"

36%

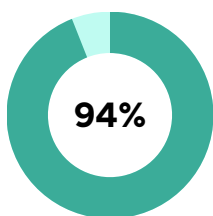
CAN'T COPE "a
lot of the time"

77%

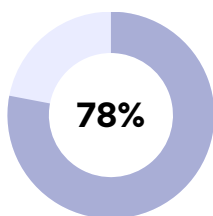
of Young Carers with High Level of Negative Feelings Feel "Life doesn't seem Worth Living"



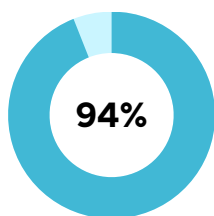
Anxiety



Depression



Addictions



Suicidal
Ideation

"I care for others out of respect and love but sometimes I feel like it strips away my childhood"
- 15 yrs old

Although young carers report poor emotional & mental health

46%

Feel closer to their families

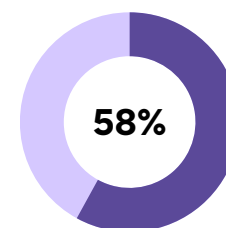
44%

Feel like they're doing something good

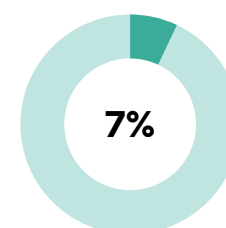


IMPACT ON EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT

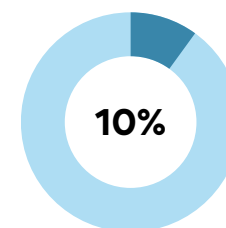
"The pressure of school on top of what I have to do is too much"
- 15 yrs old



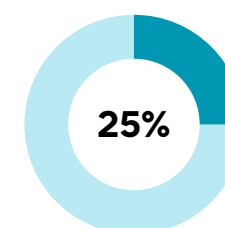
Education



Training



Employment



NEET

*Over 50% of the young carers in education were at risk of withdrawing

*NEET = Not in Education, Employment, or Training

52%

of Young Carers are often **tired and distracted**

27%

of Young Carers often **miss days of school/work**



IMPACT ON SOCIAL LIFE

33%

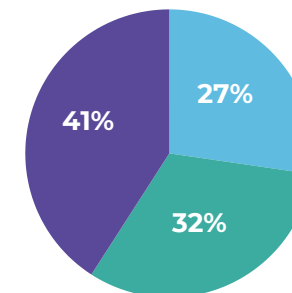
Young carers friends don't understand their caring role

BECAUSE OF MY CARING ROLE...

KEY

- A lot of the time
- Some of the time
- Never

I don't have time to hang out with friends



"I'm left with you no time for myself unless the whare is sleeping at night, then I get an hour or two to myself before I fall asleep"
- 20 yrs old

"I have no friends. It's hard."
- 14 yrs old



TRANSFORMATIVE OUTCOMES

How our young carers have flourished

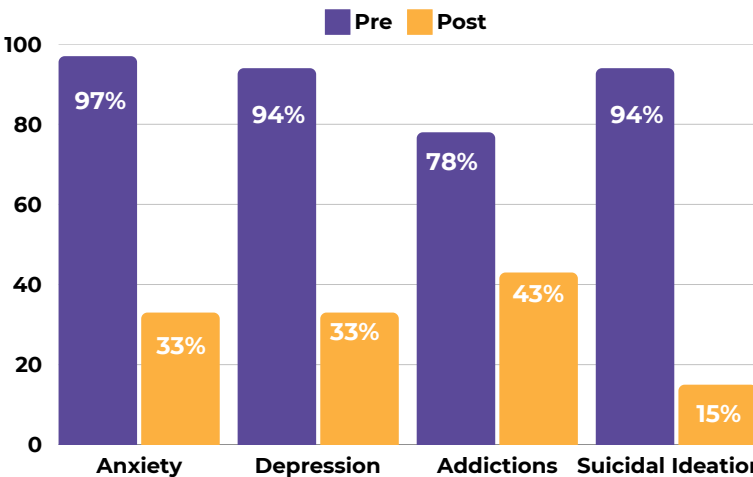
Outcomes

2024 Overview

Unseen Heroes has seen outstanding outcomes in supporting young carers over the past year. Our programs have had a profound impact, helping young carers to improve both their mental health and their educational and employment prospects. These positive changes are a testament to the tailored support services we provide, which empower young carers to build brighter futures.

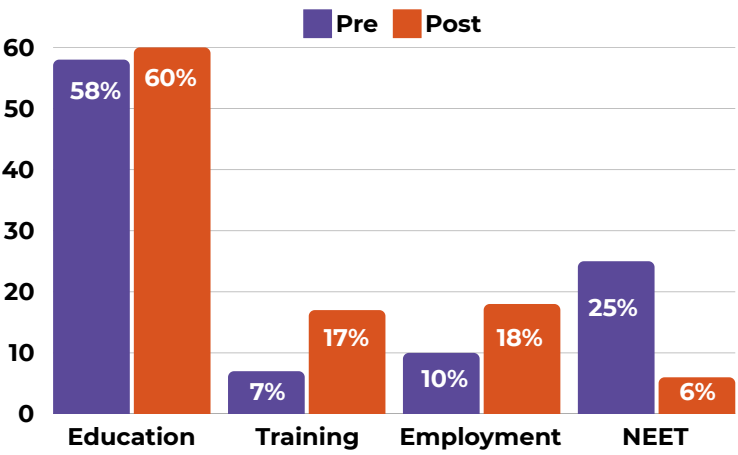
Significant progress has been made in the area of mental health, with many young carers reporting a reduction in anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideations. Additionally, we have seen fewer instances of substance abuse and other harmful coping mechanisms. With our holistic healing approach, we've been able to help young carers build resilience and improve their emotional well-being, leading to better overall mental health outcomes.

Changes in young carers mental health



*Table displays the difference in the ratings pre and post programme.

Changes in young carers education, employment and training



*Table displays the difference in the ratings pre and post programme.

In terms of education, training, and employment, we've seen a noticeable reduction in the number of young carers classified as NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training). Many have been inspired to stay at school, motivated by the support and guidance they've received. This shift reflects the effectiveness of our programs in helping young carers stay engaged with their education and pursue opportunities for personal and professional growth.

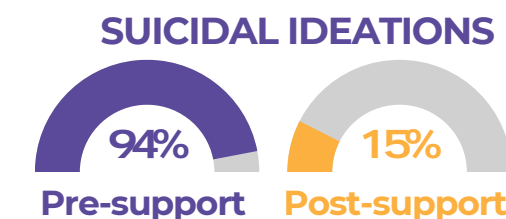
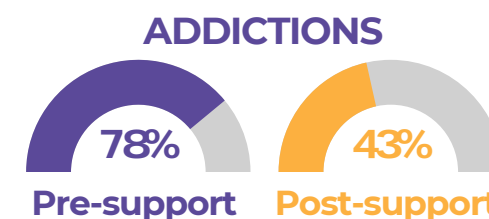
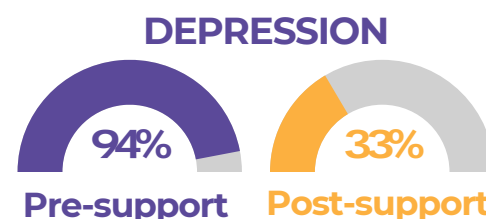
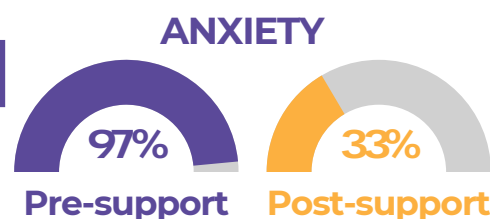


OUTCOMES OF SUPPORT UNSEEN HEROES

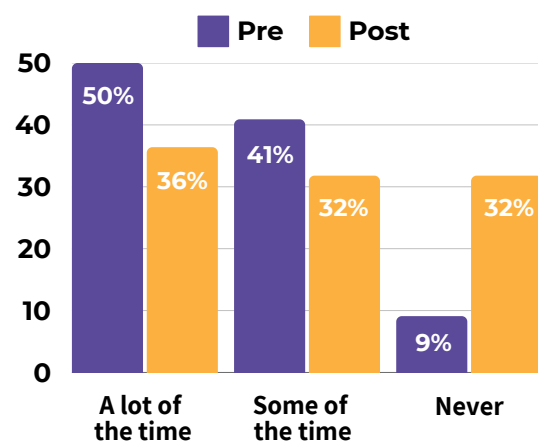


MENTAL HEALTH

IMPROVEMENTS IN RATINGS
POST-PROGRAMME

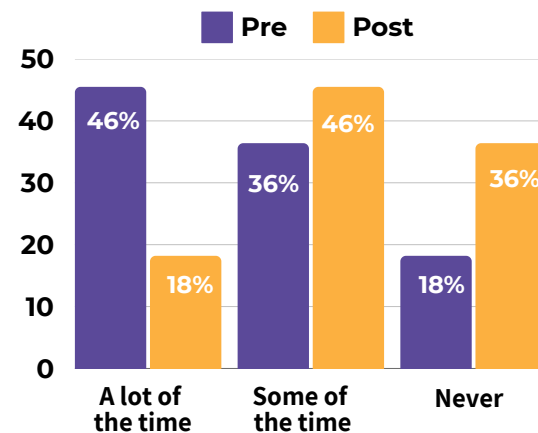


BECAUSE OF CARING I FEEL STRESSED



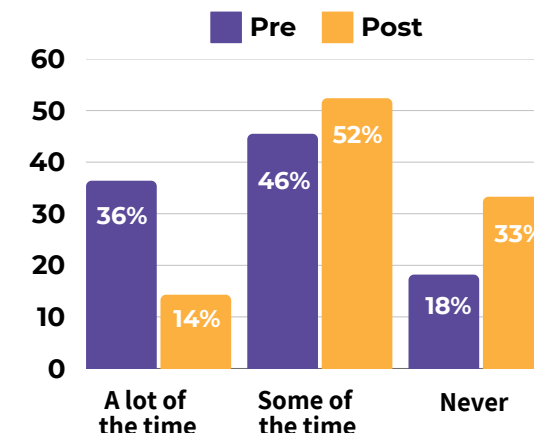
Improvements between pre and post ratings for stress; "a lot of the time" decreased by 13.6% and "never" increased by 22.7%.

BECAUSE OF CARING I FEEL LONELY



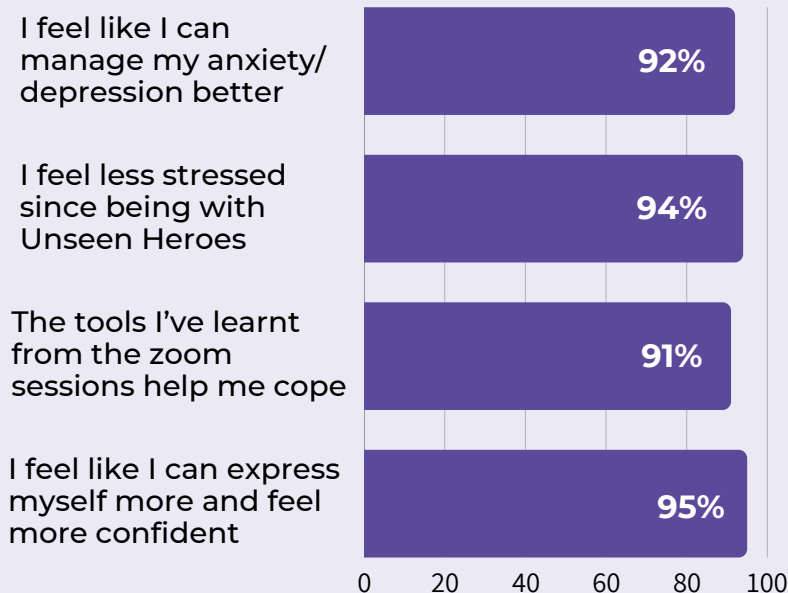
Improvements between pre and post ratings for lonely; "a lot of the time" decreased by 27.3% and "never" increased by 18.2%.

BECAUSE OF CARING I FEEL I CAN'T COPE



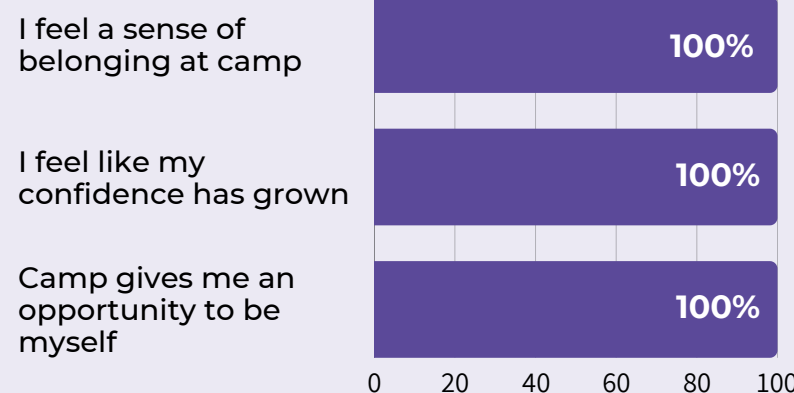
Improvements between pre and post ratings for I can't cope; "a lot of the time" decreased by 22.1% and "never" increased by 15.1%.

IMPROVEMENT SURVEY



95% of Young Carers reported that their mental health has improved since being with Unseen Heroes

CAMP I RESPITE SURVEY



"Since being with [Unseen Heroes] I feel like I can express my feelings more openly"
- 15yrs old

"Being a young carer is not easy it can have a real impact on your mental health but with this programme helps you so much and really give you big opportunities and helps you realise it's time to think about yourself." - 18yrs old

"[Unseen Heroes] will give you all the support you need. And they would let you be you."
- 16yrs old

"I used to sleep all day and hide in my room when I wasn't caring for anyone. But now I can care for my family and cope with the emotions I feel constantly." - 14yrs old

"Before I came to camp I was just overall sad all the time I dealt with a lot and just having something to do and look forward to showed me that I control myself and I choose what I want to be doing." - 15yrs old



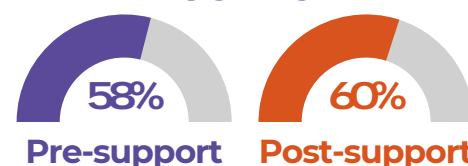
OUTCOMES OF SUPPORT UNSEEN HEROES



ASPIRATIONS

IMPROVEMENTS IN RATINGS
POST-PROGRAMME

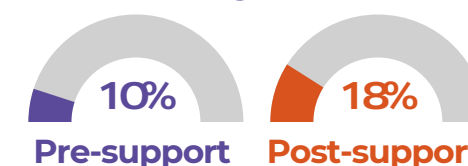
EDUCATION



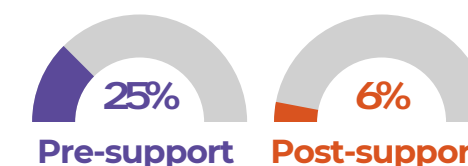
TRAINING



EMPLOYMENT

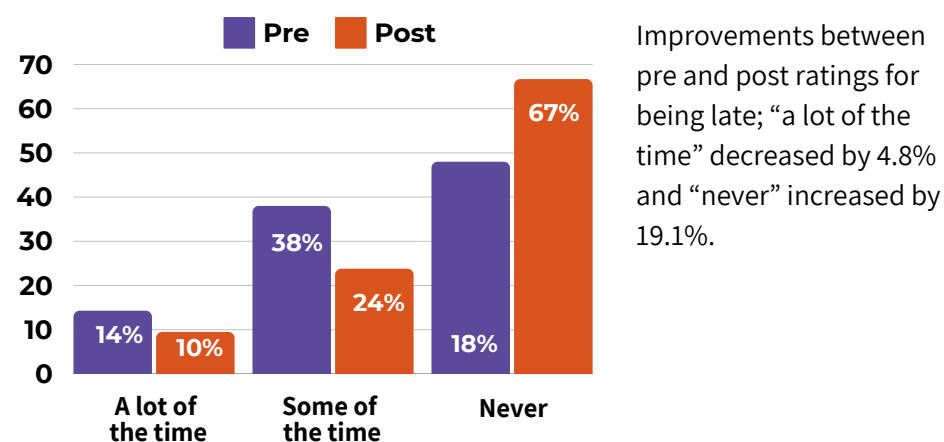


NEET

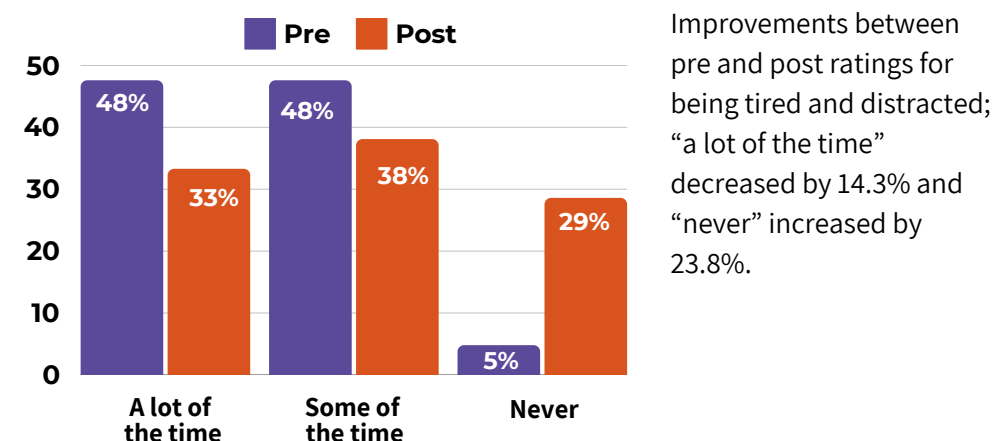


*NEET = Not in Education, Employment, or Training

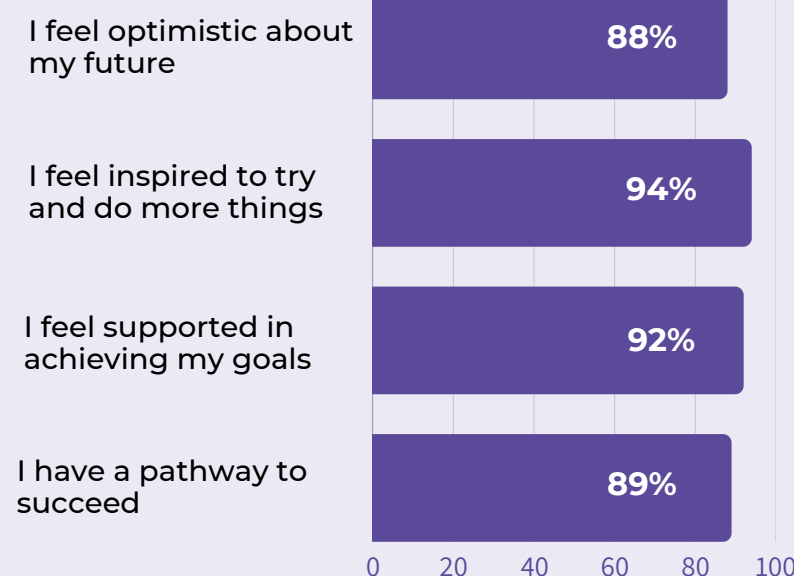
BECAUSE OF CARING I AM OFTEN LATE TO SCHOOL/COURSE/WORK



BECAUSE OF CARING I OFTEN TIRED AND DISTRACTED



IMPROVEMENT SURVEY



PATHWAYS SET FOR THEIR ASPIRATIONS

Youth worker Hairdresser
Pilot Naturopath Carpenter Army
Butcher Roadworks Machine Operator
Makeup Artist Veterinary nurse
Psychologist Horticultural Barista
Builder Zookeeper Science
Civil Engineering Hospitality
Ta Moko Artist Agricultural

"Make me feel more confident about my future"
-15yrs old

"You guys have taught so much over this small period of time. I feel like I can do things I put my mind too."
-16yrs old

"I used to not try at school but now I try hard at school."
-17yrs old

"Gave me confidence and helped me gain some leadership skills and helped me heal."
-18yrs old

"Unseen Heroes has shown me I am capable to succeeding in what ever I want to do as long as I believe in myself and work hard to keep my hauora balanced."
-18yrs old

"I see what a passion could be, I am inspired to grow my skills in a way that suits who I am as a person."
-21yrs old



OUTCOMES OF SUPPORT UNSEEN HEROES



WHĀNAU FEEDBACK

To whom this may concern,

My daughter just attended last weekend's camp with Unseen Heroes. This is her second camp and has been an attendee for Unseen Heroes for about 6 months, and I just wanted to say a huge massive THANK YOU to everyone from Unseen Heroes. Char especially. Louie, the Board, the Volunteers, camp venue operators and staff and anyone else involved. Without you all none of what I am about to say would be remotely possible.

Unseen Heroes has changed my daughter's life. Literally! Char you are amazing and I will always and forever be grateful for what you have done for her already.

Since being involved with Unseen Heroes, and the Te Ara Mārama program, she has been absolutely thriving. The stories of camp last weekend have been non-stop!! The activities and the seminars, all of it. She absolutely LOVED every single second of it. And the HAKA ... WOW!

After a short time of being involved with Unseen Heroes, she is attending school everyday and she is now thinking about her future. A future she almost didn't have. Char saved her from that fate and now Unseen Heroes has given her the community and support she deserves. She is still stuck on a few choices, but I am sure she will get there with the ongoing support she is already receiving. She also can't wait to see everyone in the Zooms everytime! Unseen Heroes is THE best program and it fits her needs perfectly!

I am so so so grateful for everything you have all done for her. I don't know where she would be without Char or Unseen Heroes today. She had the most fun, and has grown so much! I can see it, and she can feel it. Her bubbly personality that had been missing for so long is back! So, Thank You all so very very much for operating a program like this.

P.S. Other special mentions must go to some of the volunteers Grace, Ruby and Nate. She hasn't stopped talking about you guys. To the other volunteers, she can't wait to teach you all the "hand shake", or she didn't get time to teach it. I could be wrong there, my apologies, she was talking so fast sometimes it was hard to keep up.

Wishing everyone the absolute best, you all deserve it! UNSEEN HEROES ROCKS!!!

Leonie - Mum of a young carer aged 14 years

"She attended the seminar, and it triggered something in her. She called me to pick her up, but the healer helped calm her down. Afterward, she asked if there was another camp, and I couldn't thank Unseen Heroes enough for having her. It made her so much more confident in speaking out. I'm so grateful that she had the chance to freely express herself and learned that it's okay not to be okay.

When she came home, she ran to me and said it was the best weekend she'd ever had. At first, it was tough, but when she overcame it, it felt so good. I noticed a huge change in her—she came back glowing, not like before when there was always a dark cloud around her. She even participated in the haka, something she never showed interest in before. It was amazing to hear her embrace her culture. I can't thank Unseen Heroes enough for the difference it made in my baby's life. She's so much brighter now."

Aunty/Mum of young aged 16 years

"Absolutely stoked. She had nothing but good things to say—it sounded like she had found her people. There was no pressure to do the activities, but she took part in all of them. She's been to other camps, but this one felt different, like it was truly focused on her. I saw it on Facebook and sent it to [her]. She looked at it, but it kept showing up on her newsfeed, so we decided it was a sign. We emailed, and within minutes, the navigator called. [My daughter] had wanted to leave school when she was 16, but my only condition was that she had something else to do. She's come back from camp with a new mindset, now open to looking for more opportunities. She even participated in the haka, something she wouldn't normally do."

Mum of young carers aged 15 years

"Aunty was amazed that she done all the activities and that she came home in the van. She felt comfortable with the older boys. Said that it was "humongous" that she opened up and told volunteers about her anxiety. Confidence that she did the activities around people she didn't know. She was afraid to open her mouth because of repercussions, family have only just got her to open up to them, so the fact that she opened up to camp unity was huge. She went up for second for food when she doesn't eat in front of people. She did not want to go on a school outing but has come back from camp saying she will go and wants to try new things."

Aunty of a young carer aged 12 years



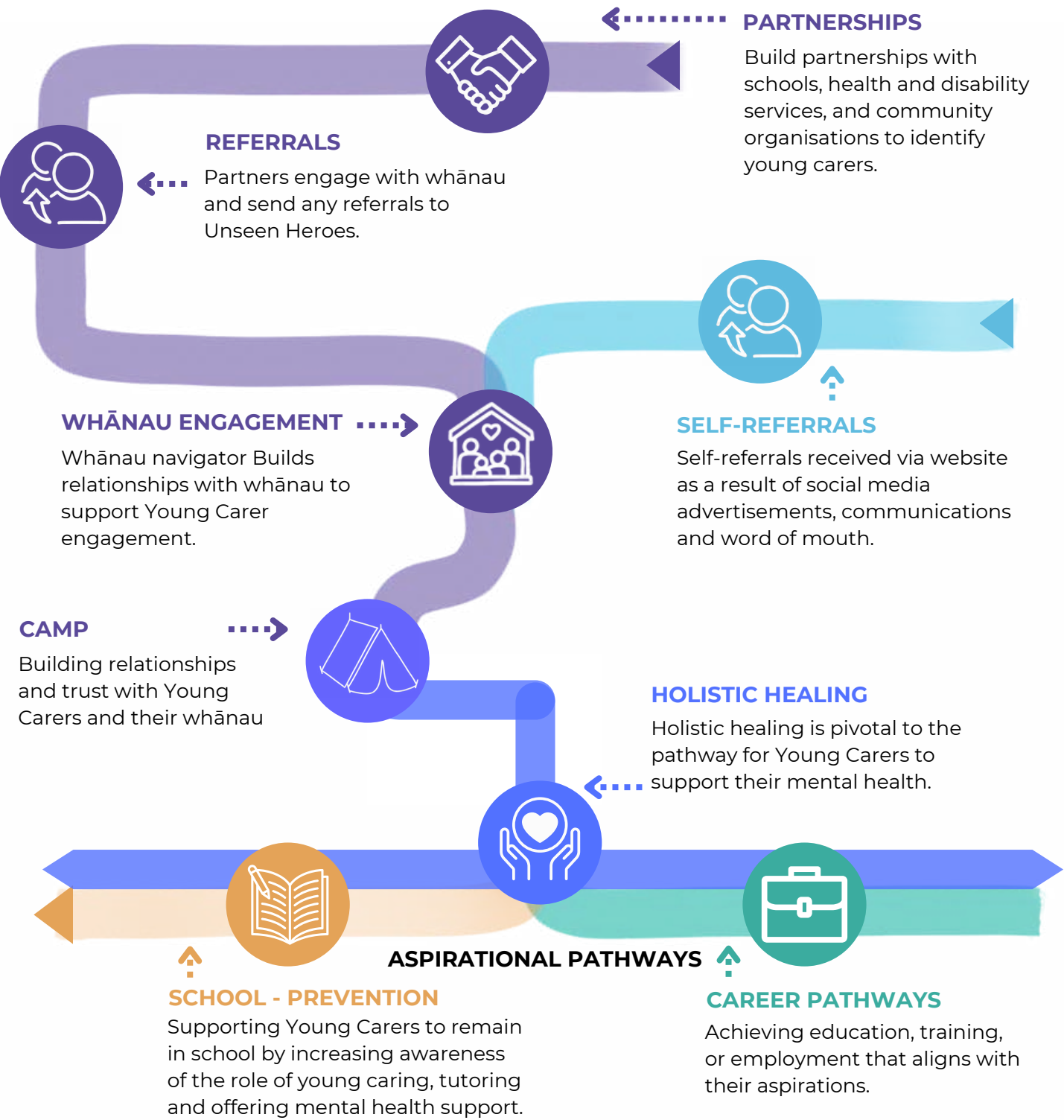
TE ARA MĀRAMA JOURNEY

Holistic approach supporting young carers

Te Ara Mārama

Holistic healing is at the heart of Unseen Heroes. We prioritise the mental health and wellbeing of young carers, understanding the heavy emotional toll their role can take. Often shouldering responsibilities far beyond their years, young carers face stress, isolation, emotional strain, and the weight of responsibilities that leave little room for themselves.

Our programme is built to not only address the impact of young caring but to help these incredible young people rediscover their self-worth, embrace self-love, build self-confidence, and equip them with tools to manage the anxiety and anger that come from years of emotional strain.



Case Study 1

Young carers journey through Te Ara Mārama

Rangatahi Profile:

A 20-year-old female Māori rangatahi from Rotorua had been shouldering the responsibility of caring for her mother, who suffers from cellulitis, lymphedema, sleep apnea, and other health conditions. In addition to her mother's care, she also took on the role of looking after her three nieces and nephews, aged 4, 13, and 15, as her mother was unable to do so. Her caregiving duties began at 6am and extended until 8pm when the children were in bed. These responsibilities included household chores, meal preparation, medical and emotional support for her mother, and helping her nieces and nephews with school. Despite her resilience and maturity, her caregiving role had significantly impacted her social life, aspirations, and mental well-being.

Pathway into the Programme:

Her journey into the Te Ara Mārama programme began when she saw an advertisement on Facebook. Recognizing the need for support, she reached out to Unseen Heroes and shared her story with the Whānau Navigator, ultimately enrolling in the programme. She revealed that, just two days before camp, she had been contemplating suicide, but something urged her to hold on. At Unseen Heroes, she was able to open up about her struggles and begin the healing process.

Support Provided:

Once enrolled, she was welcomed into a supportive community of peers and mentors who understood her challenges. The Te Ara Mārama programme offered a holistic approach to care, with various forms of support:

- **Respite Care:** She attended Camp Unity, where she experienced temporary relief from her caregiving responsibilities. This camp allowed her to connect with peers who understood her daily struggles, providing a safe space to express her feelings while balancing fun and meaningful connections.
- **Holistic Healing Zooms:** Group sessions facilitated by a Holistic Healer allowed her to explore her emotions, discuss the difficulties of her caregiving role, and learn strategies to manage anxiety. Over time, she developed greater self-love, self-worth, and resilience, learning to appreciate her individuality.
- **One-on-One Healing Sessions:** Working closely with the Holistic Healer, she was able to delve deeper into her trauma, processing her feelings in a safe, supportive environment.
- **Aspiration Support:** With the help of the programme coordinator, she was able to identify her career aspirations and create an individualised plan for achieving her goals. She expressed a desire to work with horses, and the coordinator supported her in enrolling in a Horse Care course with Learning Cloud, connecting her with a mentor to assist with course-related tasks.
- **Mentorship:** Through Camp Unity, she was paired with Kristy and her horse Smokey, meeting weekly to learn horse care and receive guidance on her course work.

Challenges Overcome and Achievements:

Throughout her time in the Te Ara Mārama programme, she faced and overcame numerous challenges:

- **Aspirational Growth:** She initially believed that her dreams and aspirations were out of reach due to the overwhelming caregiving responsibilities. However, through the programme, she found a safe space to explore her passion for working with horses and began to believe that she could build a future for herself beyond caregiving.
- **Emotional Resilience:** She has described the programme as life-saving. Through holistic healing, she learned to prioritize her mental well-being, recognize her limits, and set boundaries. She now acknowledges the need for a change in her living situation and has expressed the desire to move out into her own home in order to improve her mental health.
- **Personal Growth:** Despite her challenging circumstances, she has blossomed into a young woman with renewed self-esteem, self-worth, and a sense of empowerment. For the first time, she has asked her mother for help with caregiving, which led to her mother showering the 4-year-old—an important milestone in their relationship. With the help of the Whānau Navigator, her family is now accessing external support to ease her caregiving burden.
- **Advocacy:** She has become an advocate for young carers, representing New Zealand at the International Young Carers Conference. She shared her story in a video project with other young carers from around the world, contributing to a project supporting the Commonwealth Charter for Young Carers. Her involvement in this initiative has allowed her to use her voice to raise awareness for the issues faced by young carers globally.

Conclusion:

Her journey through the Te Ara Mārama programme highlights the transformative power of holistic support. By providing her with the tools, community, and guidance she needed to prioritize her mental health, set goals, and reconnect with her aspirations, the programme has not only saved her life but has empowered her to embrace a future she's excited to live.



PARTNERSHIPS

Identifying Young Carers

In 2024, Unseen Heroes established and strengthened partnerships with health and disability services, kaupapa Māori services, and community organizations in the Bay of Plenty and Waikato regions as a starting point. We conducted in-services with their teams, educating them on how to identify young carers within their services and creating referral processes tailored to each organization. These collaborations ensure young carers receive the specialized resources and holistic support they need, enhancing our reach and the impact of our programmes.

REFERRALS

Reaching Young Carers

31%
REFERRALS
69%
SELF-REFERRALS

Unseen Heroes welcomes both referrals and self-referrals from individuals, families, and organizations. We encourage self-referrals via our social media platforms, making our services accessible to all young carers. Once they reach out, our Whānau Navigator contacts their parents or guardians to begin providing support. These pathways ensure young carers are connected to our programmes, empowering them to seek help or receive it when they might not have otherwise.



CAMPS

A place to be free, A place to be me

At Unseen Heroes, we understand that young carers often don't have the time or space to focus on themselves. That's why our camps provide a much-needed respite, offering these resilient individuals a safe environment to relax, connect, and recharge. During camp, young carers are surrounded by peers who truly understand their challenges, and they are guided by compassionate mentors and facilitators.

Through fun activities, holistic healing sessions, and emotional support, our camps give young carers the opportunity to heal, grow, and discover their potential beyond their caregiving role. It's a transformative experience that helps them regain their sense of self and empowers them to continue their journeys with renewed strength.

3 CAMPS HELD
AT TUI RIDGE
PARK



HOLISTIC HEALING

Mental Health Support

Holistic healing is at the heart of Unseen Heroes. We prioritise the mental health and wellbeing of young carers, understanding the heavy emotional toll their role can take. Often shouldering responsibilities far beyond their years, young carers face stress, isolation, emotional strain, and the weight of responsibilities that leave little room for themselves. Our programme is built to not only address the impact of young caring but to help these incredible young people rediscover their self-worth, embrace self-love, build self-confidence, and equip them with tools to manage the anxiety and anger that come from years of emotional strain.

For many, the pressures of their role lead them down paths of substance abuse, using drugs and alcohol as a temporary escape from a world that feels too overwhelming. Through the guidance of our Holistic Healer, they learn that addiction is often rooted in deep trauma. Together, they uncover the reasons behind these coping mechanisms, replacing them with healing tools.

The true power of this healing is seen in the transformation it sparks. These young carers, who once felt trapped by their circumstances, are now free — free to express their feelings without fear, to share their struggles with whānau and friends, and to finally have their voices heard. They begin to feel whole again, able to communicate openly and with confidence, knowing that they are not alone.

WHAT WE DELIVERED

33 GROUP ZOOM
SESSIONS

25 ONE-ON-ONE
SESSIONS

72 URGENT
SUPPORT

"Before Unseen Heroes, I isolated myself often and lacked confidence. Now six months of being with Unseen Heroes I can now confidently express myself more, socialise and believe I can achieve anything I want to do."
- Young Carer 22yrs old





ASPIRATIONS

Education, Training, & Career Pathways

Unseen Heroes provides wrap around support for young carers, who, despite their immense strength and selflessness, often find themselves at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training). These young people carry the weight of overwhelming responsibilities at home, looking after loved ones, often silently sacrificing their own futures. Struggling to balance the demands of caring with school, they arrive late, are distracted, or face burnout that makes it hard to focus on their education. For many, school becomes secondary when the emotional and physical toll of caring takes priority.

In the face of these challenges, many young carers can't imagine a future beyond their caregiving role. Their dreams are buried under the constant stress, and they often feel disconnected from the idea of what's possible. That's where Unseen Heroes comes in. This vital initiative helps these young carers to dream again, but first, we focus on supporting their mental health, ensuring they are in a place where they can start to see a future outside of caring. We take an individualised approach, understanding that each person's journey is different, and we work with them at their own pace to avoid adding to their stress.

Unseen Heroes provides tutoring, work experience, and mentoring to expose these young carers to a world of possibilities aligned with their career aspirations. Through these opportunities, they not only gain valuable skills but also discover passions that may have seemed impossible to pursue. With guidance from mentors, they are encouraged to continue their passions and take ownership of their futures, ensuring they know they have a place in the world beyond caregiving.



WORK EXPERIENCE

Dreaming outside Caring

Keirah's Work experience - 15 yrs old

Aspiration: Veterinarian Nurse

Keirah, a dedicated young carer since the age of 11, has always had a passion for animals and aspired to work with them. Her dream was to become a vet nurse. In partnership with Vetora Animal Hospital, Unseen Heroes arranged a two-day work experience opportunity for Keirah.

During her time at the hospital, she shadowed a vet nurse, learning about the role and the necessary steps to pursue a career as a vet nurse. They discussed the academic requirements and post-school pathways, providing Keirah with valuable insights into her future career.

This experience inspired Keirah to focus more on her studies, motivated by the clear steps she needs to take to achieve her goal.



Iri's Work experience - 15 yrs old

Aspiration: Zoo Keeper

Iri has dreamed of becoming a zookeeper since she was a little girl. Unseen Heroes partnered with Auckland Zoo to organize a special trip for Iri and her whānau just before Christmas. Upon arrival, the Community and Engagement Advisor gave Iri a behind-the-scenes tour, showcasing some of the animals and discussing potential career pathways. Iri participated in zookeeper talks, met with zoo interns, where she had the opportunity to ask questions and engage further.

The visit inspired Iri, motivating her to focus on her studies and take steps toward making her dream of becoming a zookeeper a reality.



Unseen Heroes Partners with Auckland Zoo

Unseen Heroes recently had the incredible opportunity to partner with Auckland Zoo in a heartwarming initiative that brought joy and relaxation to our young carers. Thanks to this special collaboration, our young heroes were treated to a day at the zoo, complete with free tickets that allowed them to unwind, explore, and have fun among the animals.

The excitement began early as our trip kicked off at 6:30 a.m., with buses picking up young carers from Rotorua, Hamilton, Tauranga, and Auckland. A generous discount from Ritchies NZ made the journey affordable, and a dedicated bus driver volunteered her time to ensure everyone arrived safely and comfortably.

Upon arrival, the young carers were greeted with enthusiasm and spent the day exploring Auckland Zoo, marveling at the diverse array of animals, and enjoying quality time with friends. Their smiles and laughter echoed throughout the zoo, making it clear just how much they appreciated the experience.

To support this special outing, Unseen Heroes organized several raffles to cover the costs of the bus and catering. A dedicated volunteer also crafted delicious lunches and snacks for everyone, ensuring a well-rounded and enjoyable day.

This memorable event was made possible by the wonderful partnership with Auckland Zoo, the generous discount from Ritchies NZ, the invaluable support of our volunteers, and the community's enthusiastic participation in our raffles. We are deeply grateful for everyone's contributions and are thrilled to have created such a joyful experience for our young carers.



Taking a break

Unseen Heroes provides young carers with a chance to take a break and connect with others through casual coffee catch-ups. It's a space for them to be themselves, without the weight of their caregiving roles, while building meaningful connections with others who truly understand their challenges.



Case Study 2

Young carers journey through Te Ara Mārama

Rangatahi Profile:

A 17-year-old Māori rangatahi from Kawerau had been living in Australia, caring for his whānau, which was deeply affected by addiction and domestic violence. After his father passed away, the family moved back to New Zealand to be near his father's whānau. He continued caring for his mother and siblings, but the situation took a toll on his mental health. While his siblings had initially given up meth when living with his father's whānau, most returned to addiction once they moved out, further impacting his well-being. He lived with his aunty for a year but never fully settled, struggling with ongoing worries about his mother's addiction and its effects on his schooling.

Pathway into the Programme:

The rangatahi was referred to the Te Ara Mārama programme by his aunty, who manages a Kaupapa Māori service and was aware of how family issues were impacting his mental health. He was unsettled, constantly wanting to move back with his mum, despite her ongoing struggles. His aunty told the Whānau Navigator that he initially did not want to attend the camp, but she encouraged him to go. After a difficult situation with his mum, he arrived 8 hours late at camp, but it was clear he was in need of support.

Support Provided:

Upon attending the Te Ara Mārama programme, the rangatahi was welcomed into a supportive environment that addressed his specific needs:

- **Respite Care:** The programme provided a safe space where he could meet others with similar backgrounds. Although initially reluctant, he began to open up about his mental health challenges and trauma. He found solace in the non-judgmental, fun, and supportive atmosphere, and by the end of the camp, he was grateful for the opportunity.
- **Holistic Healing Zooms:** Group sessions led by a Holistic Healer allowed him to express his feelings, discuss the struggles of having whānau affected by addiction, and learn strategies to manage anxiety and anger. He began to understand his emotions and how to process them in healthier ways, without bottling them up.
- **One-on-One Healing Sessions:** He worked closely with a Healer/Mentor, a male role model who had faced similar challenges but had developed emotional intelligence. This one-on-one support encouraged him to talk regularly about his issues and find ways to navigate them.
- **Aspiration Support:** With the help of the programme coordinator, he explored career opportunities in physical education, aligning with his passion for sports. Together, they identified pathways and secured work experience to help him build toward his goals.

Challenges Overcome and Achievements:

Throughout his time in the programme, the rangatahi made significant progress:

- **Aspirational Growth:** He developed a strong passion for physical education and sports. Although he eventually withdrew from school due to moving plans to Palmerston North and later to Australia, he remains excited about future opportunities and will continue to explore career pathways in Australia.
- **Emotional Resilience:** Having previously struggled with suicidal ideations, he now uses the tools he learned through holistic healing to manage his anxiety and anger. At camp, he felt seen, heard, and valued, which gave him the confidence to address his emotions and recognize his worth.
- **Personal Growth:** The rangatahi reported laughing more and enjoying life for the first time in a long while. He now has clear goals that excite him for his future, showing significant personal growth and self-empowerment.
- **Cultural Growth:** Initially, he felt insecure and had negative perceptions of non-Māori people. However, after working with the Holistic Healer, he shared an experience of racial bullying from a teacher, which helped him overcome these prejudices. He began to feel more confident in his Māori identity and no longer judged others based on past negative experiences.
- **Leadership:** The rangatahi has emerged as a leader among his peers, calling out disrespectful behavior, encouraging others to engage, and promoting the programme to other young carers at school who could benefit from support.

Conclusion:

The rangatahi's journey through the Te Ara Mārama programme has been transformative. He has gained invaluable emotional resilience, developed personal and cultural growth, and clarified his career aspirations. Although he has made the decision to return to his whānau, where addiction continues to be a challenge, we believe that he now possesses the tools and confidence to ask for help if needed. The programme has given him the ability to communicate his feelings, set boundaries, and feel a sense of belonging. Regardless of the path ahead, he knows he has a supportive community to turn to, including his aunty and the Camp Unity whānau.

Whānau Observations:

The rangatahi's aunty, who referred him to the programme, has seen significant positive changes in him. She noted that his journey has been challenging, but the programme has helped him integrate better into the whānau. While he has struggled with his sense of belonging, he has gained confidence in expressing when he is not okay, a huge breakthrough for him. She acknowledges that he still faces challenges but believes that he is in a better position now, with a clear understanding of his feelings and future potential.





THE POWER BEHIND THE PROGRAMME

Working together to make a difference

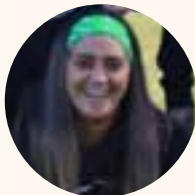
People who make this possible

The work of Unseen Heroes would not be possible without our amazing team. Their dedication, compassion, and expertise are central to supporting young carers. From Whānau Navigators to Holistic Healers, every team member plays a vital role in empowering young carers and making a positive impact in their lives.

Our Team



Char Rain
Co-Founder,
Holistic Healer
0.75 FTE



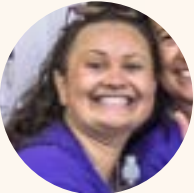
Te Rina Ruru-Pelasio
Co-Founder,
Managing Director
0.75 FTE



Nate Rain
Healer/Mentor
0.4 FTE



Corina Colbert
Whānau Navigator
0.3 FTE



Ruby Maika
Aspirations Coordinator
0.65 FTE

Our Board of Trustees

Volunteers



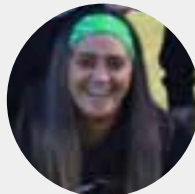
Amy Morse
Chairperson



Dr Philip Morse



Char Rain



Te Rina Ruru-Pelasio



Alana Tumarae



Corina Colbert



Alex Curran-Schrader

OUR AMAZING CREW OF VOLUNTEERS

HOW DO OUR VOLUNTEERS SUPPORT UNSEEN HEROES?

- Camps
- Mentoring
- Tutoring
- Work Experience
- Transport
- Fundraising
- Operational Skills/Expertise

45 VOLUNTEERS

2500 VOLUNTEER HOURS

What is one thing you would take away from camp?

"If I was to take one thing away from camp it would be that for a lot of them, camp can be life changing. It's a change in a positive direction and shows them alternatives to their livelihoods. It also benefits them with the consistent support and other services provided."

- (Volunteer)



Young carers from our first intake flourished and became leaders, guiding and supporting the new intake with their lived experiences and growth.



Building Awareness: Engaging Communities

Creating Connections



In 2024, Unseen Heroes worked tirelessly to raise awareness about young carers by presenting to organizations, community groups, schools, and businesses. These engagements helped highlight the challenges faced by young carers, ensuring they are seen, heard, and supported within our communities. By sharing our mission and the needs of young carers, we've fostered stronger connections with local services and businesses, encouraging broader community involvement. The impact has been transformative, creating a more informed and compassionate environment where young carers can thrive.

What's been happening?

BAY OF PLENTY/WAIKATO

16 Presentations delivered

8 Schools engaged

15 Referral Pathways established with social services



Unseen Heroes Presenting to
Tauranga Business Chamber (Women in Business)



Unseen Heroes Presenting to
Rotorua Business Chamber (Women in Business)



Looking ahead: Growing and expanding in 2025

Expanding reach and strengthening support

Looking ahead to 2025, Unseen Heroes is excited to expand and refine our programmes to better serve young carers. We plan to reduce the number of participants per intake, allowing us to provide more personalized attention and support to each individual. Additionally, we will be increasing our intake frequency from two to four per year, ensuring we can reach more young carers throughout the year. We're also expanding our reach into Auckland and Wellington, bringing our life-changing programmes to more communities across New Zealand. These changes reflect our commitment to delivering even greater impact and supporting more young carers in their journeys.

25
Young Carers

WAIKATO
April - November

Budget: \$129,474

25
Young Carers

AUCKLAND
May 2025 - Jan 2026

Budget: \$131,499.47

25
Young Carers

BAY OF PLENTY
July 2025 - March 2026

Budget: \$131,499.47

25
Young Carers

WELLINGTON
Oct 2025 - Nov 2026

Budget: \$131,499.47

LOOKING AHEAD: 2025
Our commitment to continued growth and support for young carers





Tyson - 18yr old Young Carer Cared for nan and siblings

“I am just putting up this post to say a huge thanks for doing so much work. It takes great courage, care, honor, strength, and selflessness to be such a wonderful human being. You are honestly so amazing for all you do behind the scenes, but also for always being there when we need help. We can always get a hold of you, and you drop everything to help us. That is so amazing, and I’m so thankful for you. Your honesty is incredible, and now you’ve got what you deserve—100% top 10 local hero of New Zealand!”

“In the last 7 years that I’ve known you, it’s been amazing to watch. I’ve been here since the start and have seen every change that you and Louie have made. It’s so amazing and has made such an impact, not only on the people you help but also on the unseen heroes. I love you so much, Char, and I am forever grateful. I’m wishing you nothing but the best for the future and everything it holds for you and Unseen Heroes.

So, I’m going to tell you a bit of my story. Growing up, I always had the instinct to protect my nan and some of my siblings from this cruel, crazy world. There were obstacles along the way, but I got through them, even though it led me to some difficult and sad times. The hardest part was probably a few years ago when I became a people-pleaser. I tried to please people for praise because that’s all I wanted, but I never really liked being a people-pleaser. I was stuck in that mindset.

But 7 years ago, I started working with Char and Unseen Heroes. It’s been a long and difficult journey, but I’ve made it, and I’m proud of myself for working through everything Char gave me. Now, I’m finally able to speak up for myself, say no to people without feeling guilty, because it’s part of my healing journey. A few months ago, in July, I volunteered at the camp I attended for 7 years. Seeing it from the other side, how beautiful Char’s work is behind the scenes, was amazing. From a volunteer’s perspective, it was beautiful to see, and I can kindly say this program has honestly saved my life.

So, this is a thank you to you, Char, and to Unseen Heroes.”



THANK YOU

TO OUR

FUNDERS

INTAKE 1

2024

INTAKE 2



Te Puni Kōkiri
MINISTRY OF MĀORI DEVELOPMENT



Lottery Grants Board
Te Puna Tahua
LOTTO FUNDS FOR YOUR COMMUNITY



abi
NGĀ KAITUKU MĀTŪTŪ
REHABILITATION SPECIALISTS



BAY
TRUST
Supporting
Great Communities



AOTEAROA
GAMING
TRUST



Poutiri Wellness
Centre



ASMUSS
STEEL & FLOW CONTROL



TECT



ACORN
FOUNDATION
WESTERN BAY OF PLENTY

COGS
Community Organisation
Grants Scheme

Life Plus



Rotorua Trust
MŌ TĀTAU KATOĀ

Private Donors

givealittle
POWERED BY perpetual guardian

RITCHIES