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New Zealanders urged to consider careers in care and support

The vast majority of New Zealanders believe people working in community support roles are important to society but less than half of New Zealanders would recommend it to family as a career, according to new research.

Yet, it's a hugely rewarding, varied and often life-changing career choice as revealed in a new public awareness campaign [Life Changing Careers](#) supported by the Tertiary Education Commission's COVID-19 response fund.

The UMR research underpinning the campaign shows that while more than 80% of New Zealanders place high value on people working in care and support roles across social services, disability, mental health and addiction, community health and aged care, under half (47%) would recommend a career working in the sector to a family member.

"Clearly New Zealanders celebrate the work of people who support and care for those more vulnerable and that's fantastic," says Jane Wenman, Chief Executive of Careerforce, the Industry Training Organisation that is leading the campaign on behalf of its sectors.

"What they might not realise, and contrary to some negative perceptions, is the meaningful, varied and often life-changing career opportunities available in this work. People can see that for themselves in the stories we're telling through our [Life Changing Careers](#) campaign."

For Alex Lyde, a navigator for mental health and addiction support provider Pathways, he now looks forward to going to work every day and coming home to his wife and two young daughters energised, relaxed and fulfilled.

It's a far cry from the 38-year old's former career as a high-performing sales representative which he resigned from in 2019, burnt out and unfulfilled.

"On a big day as a sales rep I could change a ledger. Now even on a small day I can change a life."

The UMR survey also shows that Māori were far more likely to recommend a career in the sector (67%) than New Zealand Europeans at 42%. While under half of people aged 18-44 years would do so.

"We want to build a workforce that better reflects the diversity of those that they are supporting, people of all ages, genders, cultural identities and lived experiences," says Ms Wenman.

Dr Garth Bennie, Chief Executive of the NZ Disability Support Network says there's a huge opportunity for younger people and males, especially Māori and Pasifika, and people with lived experience of disability to make a difference.

"We're always working hard to find the right match for people as it's such an empowering thing. For instance, if you're an 18-year-old Samoan male in a wheelchair, having someone who's a peer as your support worker can be life-changing - for both of you."

Ms Wenman says remuneration for care and support roles has improved dramatically off the back of the historical caregiver pay equity settlement of 2017. By July 2021, workers can earn \$27 per hour, pending their qualifications and tenure.

"Hourly rates are way ahead of the current minimum wage of \$20.00 and of what potentially COVID-displaced workers across retail, hospitality and tourism would be earning, many of which are minimum wage roles."

Not only are care and support roles hugely rewarding, interesting and fun, but they are also flexible with opportunities for full-time, flexitime and contract roles that can be managed to fit around personal commitments.

"And this work comes with high levels of job security given the growing need amongst our increasingly diverse and ageing population."

Ms Wenman says there is a vast variety of opportunities within the sector ranging from working with at-risk children, young people and whanau to supporting those with mental health and addiction issues, disabilities, community health and aged care.

"For people with a desire to make a real difference in others' lives, this work can bring deep life fulfilment that will help people live their best life.

"It's all there in the heart-warming and compelling stories we are telling in [Life Changing Careers](#). Whether you're seeking a new career pathway that better matches your values in life or you're a school leaver wanting to 'earn while you learn', working in the sector is an opportunity to forge meaningful careers, supported by qualification pathways."

Find out more, take the quiz, see our people stories and apply for jobs at www.lifechangingcareers.org.nz

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Careerforce is the Industry Training Organisation (ITO) for the health, mental health, youth work, disability, social services and cleaning sectors. Careerforce support employers across New Zealand's health and wellbeing sectors to run workplace training programmes, allowing staff to achieve nationally recognised qualifications on and off the job. We are the Government appointed body that sets skill standards, develops and facilitates achievement of NZQA qualifications across all our sectors. For more information please see: www.careerforce.org.nz