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**Northland Grassroots Fund supports RainbowYOUTH:**

RainbowYOUTH (est.1989) is a charity that provides support, information and advocacy for intersex, queer and gender diverse youth. Our vision is to see all young people thrive in Aotearoa, he waka eke noa (a waka we are all in together, without exception). We foster safe, inclusive, accepting and diverse family environments that are drug, smoke, and alcohol free.

We’re delighted to have been able to expand our services to Tai Tokerau with the support of the Northland Community Foundation. We know that in Northland there are many rangatahi takatāpui in need of support. In May 2019 our Support Manager and Executive Director travelled around Northland meeting with many services and young people about the needs and experiences of rainbow communities in the region, and the need for support came through loud and clear from youth who felt isolated and unable to be themselves. Our goal is to uplift and empower LGBTI+ youth across Tai Tokerau, along with their friends, whānau and wider communities.

We have a long-running peer support group in Whangārei which is very well attended. In 2019 we secured a District Health Board contract to provide peer support to trans and gender diverse communities in Auckland and Northland, the first of its kind in the country. To this end we were able to hire Sydney Heremaia as our first permanent, part-time Northland staff member and a second group sprang up to cater to this community specifically.

Thanks to the generous support of the Northland Community Foundation’s Grassroots Fund, we have now been able to offer Sydney more hours to expand his mahi as the Tai Tokerau Regional Coordinator. This role is vital in ensuring that our services in Northland go from strength to strength. Sydney provides mentoring and peer support to rainbow young people in the region and a point of contact for the existing peer support groups, as well as for young people who wish to start new ones. The role is also vital for building up local referral pathways for young people who seek out support, and provides visibility and community for rainbow people in Northland by liaising with schools, social services, medical clinics, marae and youth spaces. In the few months since its establishment, Sydney has connected with several services

and schools across the region and made huge inroads. With the continued support of Northland Community Foundation we see a bright future for rainbow young people in Tai Tokerau, including new groups in smaller towns ensuring that rangatahi can access peer or 1:1 support wherever they may live.

Article by Ally Wilson, Rainbow Youth

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