



TARARUA COMMUNITY YOUTH SERVICES

The impact of youth
work in a rural
community

Hands for Impact Social Return
on Investment (SROI) Report
January 2026



Hands for Impact and Ara Taiohi Partnership

Hands for Impact and Ara Taiohi are working together to develop a sector-led approach to impact measurement to empower organisations to tell a clear, values-based story about the Youth Work Sector in Aotearoa.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Tararua Community Youth Services (TCYS) is creating substantial and enduring impact for taiohi (youth) aged 15–24 in Tāmaki-nui-a-Rua (Tararua District).

A Social Return on Investment (SROI) report by Hands for Impact (in partnership with Ara Taiohi) found that for every \$1 invested, TCYS generates \$11.65 of social value, empowering taiohi, strengthening whānau, and building safer, more connected communities.

As the only dedicated youth development provider in Dannevirke, TCYS fills systemic gaps left by education, health, and justice systems. Their relationship-based, kaupapa Māori-informed approach delivers value well above the level of investment by equipping taiohi with identity, confidence, and readiness to engage in education, employment, and whānau life.

The Key outcomes identified are:

- Strengthened Sense of Identity
- Develops Skills to Make Better Life Choices
- Achieves Educational Goals
- Gains Employment
- Improved Ability to Be a Parent
- Reduced Offending

Despite the challenges that threaten sustainability such as rural services shortages, short-term funding cycles and limited impact outcome data, TCYS demonstrates how trusted relationships and whānau-centred practice can reshape life trajectories for taiohi in rural Aotearoa. When funding is cut, it's taiohi who feel the impact most immediately and most deeply.

Ensuring the mahi of TCYS is recognised and resourced will be critical to enabling its impact for generations to come.

To read and/or download a full copy of the SROI report, click [HERE](#).

For every **\$1** invested in TCYS, they generate **\$11.65** of social value.

Total social value of outcomes = \$6,895,858.56

INTRODUCING TARARUA COMMUNITY YOUTH SERVICES

Established in 1996, TCYS is a youth development organisation located in Dannevirke.



Community context

Dannevirke is a rural agricultural town in the centre of Tāmaki-nui-a-Rua (Tararua District). Despite boasting the second-largest roading network in the North Island, the taiohi of Dannevirke face challenges of rural isolation, including limited access to education and employment opportunities. In addition, many taiohi are subject to the impact of intergenerational inequality and addiction struggles.

Background

TCYS began as a Friday night drop-in centre, known as Planet Café, in response to community concerns about the growing presence of “street kids”.

Over the past 30 years, TCYS has pioneered a locally-rooted model of youth development that is relational, holistic, and deeply responsive to the real-life needs of taiohi in Dannevirke and Tāmaki-nui-a-Rua, including Pahiatua and Ākitio.





“If a young person has at least 6 positive role models in their life, they will go on to have a bright future.”

– Jeanne O’Brien, Manager of Youth Development

HANDS FOR IMPACT

Hands for Impact is a non-profit organisation working to improve access to social impact measurement for Aotearoa’s non-profit sector through cost-effective, collaborative and sector wide approaches.

Our approach to impact measurement is grounded in Mana Manaaki (nurturing), Mōhiotanga (knowledge), Manawa Māui (transformation) and Puaretanga (transparency).

Why measure social value?

Youth work creates positive, long-lasting change for taiohi, whānau, and communities every day. Yet these changes are not always visible or easily captured in traditional evaluation systems, which tend to measure short-term outputs/easy to quantify outcomes.

Measuring social value helps us tell the real story of change, helping communities, funders, and decision-makers understand why youth work matters from the voices of those who matter, and why it deserves long-term support.

WHAT IS SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT?

Social Return on Investment (SROI) is a way of understanding and valuing the impact an organisation creates in people's lives. SROI captures the stories/voices of those who are most affected to identify outcomes (changes experienced). These outcomes are then given a monetary value using financial proxies, resulting in a ratio to show **how much social value is created for every \$1 invested**.

$$\text{SROI} = \frac{\text{Present value of outcomes}}{\text{Value of inputs}}$$

HANDS FOR IMPACT'S APPROACH TO SROI

The methodology follows the six stages of SROI.

Six stages in SROI analysis



KAUPAPA / DELIVERY APPROACH

The kaupapa of TCYS is that all taiohi of Tamaki-nui-a-Rua are healthy, have opportunities, and strive towards success, no matter the circumstances.

TCYS approach to youth development is holistic and strengths-based, supporting the whole person, not just one part of their life. Underpinning their mahi are a strong set of values:

- **Youth-Led Engagement:** Listening to and acting on the needs of taiohi
- **Empowerment and Skill-Building:** Supporting taiohi to develop independence and reach their potential
- **Strong Relationships:** Creating safe, trusting environments where taiohi feel heard and valued
- **Equity and Inclusion:** Championing fair, accessible opportunities for all



Hapaitia nga Rangatahi mo ra nga Rangatira mo apopo.
Nurture our young people, for they are our leaders of tomorrow.

– Chester Vella, Shaquille Mihaere

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT

Purpose of analysis

To show the impact of TCYS on the lives of taiohi and to understand the value of holistic, relationship-based support in a rural community.



Scope of analysis

This analysis focused on the impact of TCYS's Youth Service over a one-year period. The cohort includes taiohi aged 15-24 who are navigating key transitions in education.

3-year forecast

Year in scope	July 2024 to July 2027
Taiohi aged 15-24	<i>Rationale:</i> A critical point where taiohi are either disengaged from education and/or need support to upskill/pursue pathways to meaningful work.
Number of taiohi (15-24) in the study	89

Key activities

Guys 4 Guys Mentoring

One-to-one and group mentoring that strengthens identity, confidence, and belonging for young men.

Youth Services (MSD-funded)

Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET): Provides mentoring and wraparound support for taiohi aged 15 to 18 to re-engage with education or get into employment or training.

Youth Payment: Provides financial assistance and wraparound support for taiohi aged 16-17 who can't live with their parents.

Young Parent Payment (YPP): Provides financial assistance and child care support for taiohi who are the primary caregivers of a child.



HOW WE ENGAGED WITH TAIOHI

The Hands for Impact approach focused on whakawhanaungatanga (relationship-building), spending time at the organisation and engaging kanohi ki te kanohi (face to face) through focus groups, interviews, and informal kōrero/talanoa with taiohi, youth workers, and the leadership team.

Youth recruitment and engagement were led by TCYS to ensure a safe and supportive experience, particularly for taiohi participating in research for the first time. Youth workers invited participants based on their existing relationships and willingness of taiohi to participate.

Interviews were also held in person and online with youth workers, staff, and external stakeholders to understand the wider community context and how TCYS's activities contribute to outcomes for taiohi.

How we collected information

We collected primary data through a site visit which included in-person focus groups, interviews and observations. These methods allowed for whakawhanaungatanga and deep exploration of the changes experienced by taiohi as a result of TCYS's activities. A survey was administered to verify the results. Additionally, an Outcomes Survey was administered to verify the results. This survey is foundational to the quantitative analysis of the report.

Key stakeholders



Informant/supporting perspectives



THEORY OF CHANGE

What is a Theory of Change?

A Theory of Change is a visual map that shows how an organisation creates impact. It tells the story of how change happens, starting with the need or issue being addressed, outlining what the organisation does, and describing the short-and long-term changes experienced by the people and communities involved.

Why it is important

A Theory of Change helps organisations to:

- Clearly describe the value of their work.
- Show *how* their activities lead to meaningful outcomes.
- Support learning, reflection, and continuous improvement.
- Build a shared understanding across staff, partners, funders, and the community.

How it was developed

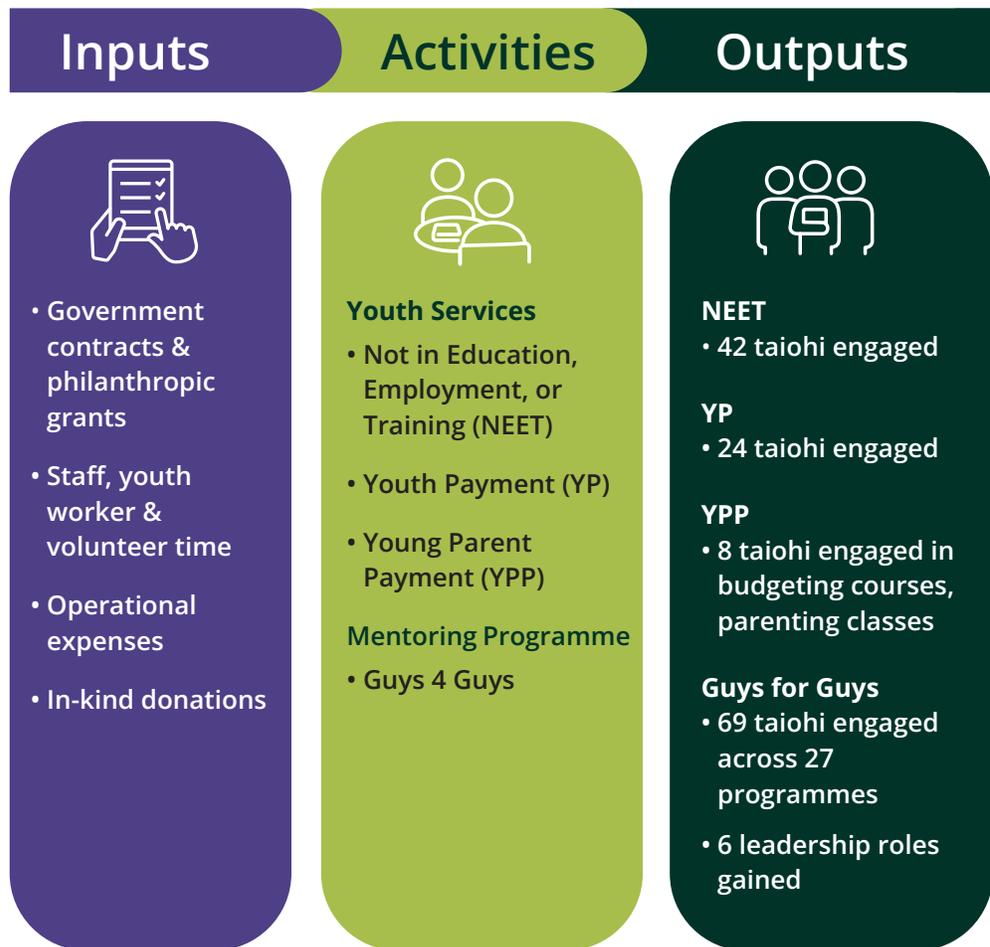
We developed the Theory of Change by listening closely to taiohi and the people who walk alongside them. Through kōrero, observation, and shared reflection, we mapped how TCYS creates change in real life. We then tested and refined it together with the TCYS team to make sure it reflected the way taiohi were experiencing change.

The TCYS ToC shows the journey of change for taiohi aged 15-24 engaged in government youth services and mentoring.



TCYS THEORY OF CHANGE

The story of change for taiohi aged 15–24 engaged in mentoring, education and employment pathways with TCYS.



Enablers

Feeling safe

Basic needs are met

Feeling validated and listened to

Building & sustaining a trusting relationship with a youth worker

Forming meaningful relationships & a sense of community

Increased connection to the wider community

Outcomes

Youth Outcomes



Strengthened sense of identity



Develops skills to make better life choices



Achieves educational goals



Gains employment

Justice System Outcome



Improved ability to be a parent



Reduced offending

Impact



TCYS empowers taiohi to achieve independence by managing their education, employment, and personal responsibilities with confidence. At the same time, communities are strengthened through positive role-modelling, safer environments, and stronger whānau relationships.

KEY OUTCOMES

As a result of TCYS's holistic, relational approach to youth development and delivery of Youth Services Taiohi experience:

Strengthened sense of identity

What this means in practice:

- Taiohi build confidence in *who they are* and where they come from. Through consistent mentoring and belonging to a safe community, they learn to trust themselves, speak up, and take pride in their cultural identity and personal strengths. As confidence grows, many step into leadership roles, supporting their peers, contributing to their community, and shaping their own futures.



[TCYS had] made me have hope in myself... that I have a potential of being somewhere or something.

– Taiohi, 16

Develops skills to make better life choices

What this means in practice:

- Taiohi learn how to navigate challenges and make safer, more confident decisions in their everyday lives. Youth workers support taiohi to regulate emotions, resist harmful influences, and take responsibility for themselves and others.
- Learning often happens through doing (e.g., safe, structured activities such as gym sessions, kapa haka, golf).
- Youth workers celebrate progress (e.g., choosing to peacefully resolve conflict, reducing substance abuse, organising events for other taiohi).

Achieves educational goals

What this means in practice:

- For many taiohi, school has been a place of stress, exclusion, or disconnection. TCYS begins by restoring stability and safety, making sure basic needs like kai, transport, and essential documents are sorted so that learning feels possible again.
- From there, youth workers co-create education pathways that fit each young person.

Gains employment

What this means in practice:

- TCYS supports taiohi to take the next step into work. Youth workers help taiohi gain the skills and readiness they need to enter and stay in employment. This includes practical support like getting a driver's licence, creating CVs, preparing for interviews, and arranging work experience.



For both my children, TCYS gave them that feeling – that they mattered.

– Parent

Improved ability to be a parent

Subgroup: Young parents

What this means in practice:

- For young parents, TCYS provides support that is practical and grounded in care. Youth workers create mana-enhancing spaces where babies are welcome,

kai is shared, and learning happens without judgment. They also walk with young parents through systems, advocating with schools, health providers, housing, and income support, so that daily pressures are reduced.

Reduced offending

What this means in practice:

- While many taiohi experience the benefits of positive behavioural change, for others the impact comes from continuing and strengthening the positive behaviours they already demonstrate. In both cases, the measurable effects of these behaviours are also evident at the system level.
- Dannevirke has notably low youth offending rates compared with other regions. Trusted relationships, belonging, and positive alternatives to risky environments provided by TCYS mean fewer taiohi come into contact with the police, courts, or youth justice services, resulting in safer communities and cost savings to the government.
- This has been attributed to TCYS as the only longstanding youth service in Tāmaki-nui-a-Rua.



HOW WE VALUED THE OUTCOMES

Why assign dollar values?

The outcomes people experience are real and meaningful, but they often don't have a price tag in the market. To communicate the scale and significance of these changes to funders and decision-makers, we use financial proxies: credible dollar values that represent what that change would cost to create (or avoid) in the real world.

How we chose the values

We asked:

"If TCYS didn't exist, what would it cost to create similar change?"

To answer this, we used credible, real-world comparisons, drawing from:

1. **Market values** for equivalent programmes or support.
2. **Treasury CBAX**, a set of Aotearoa wellbeing and cost values used to estimate how changes in people's lives translate into real-world value.
3. Average entry-level salaries in the region.

What this means in practice

→ refer to the table on page 17 (adapted from Table 7)

Doing the maths (how we calculated the total value)

Once each outcome had a credible dollar value (the unit of analysis being one taiohi), we calculated how many taiohi experienced that outcome during the financial year of 2024/25. These numbers were based on internal monitoring data, accountability reporting, and the survey results.

**Total value of outcomes
= \$6,895,858.56**

The total value shown is the projected social value TCYS is expected to create over the next 3 years, based on what happened during the 2024/2025 financial year. We have also made careful adjustments to ensure the estimate is realistic, fair, and not overstated.

Outcome	Method of valuing outcomes	Value*
Strengthened sense of identity	The CBAX (row 187, valued at \$4,354 in 2025) "Cultural expression" proxy is used because it directly captures the personal, emotional, and cultural aspects of identity development such as confidence, belonging, and authentic self-expression as reported by taiohi.	\$4,354
Develops skills to make better life choices	Two CBAX proxies are used for this outcome as it is valued for taiohi as well as the New Zealand government. The first proxy , (CBAX row 142, valued at \$655 in 2025) avoided health system costs, is used because stronger behaviour regulation and reduced risky activities lower the likelihood of acute harm, resulting in savings to the health system. The second proxy , (CBAX row 240, valued at \$1,291 in 2025) physical activity, is used because better decision-making often leads taiohi to adopt healthier routines. This proxy captures the resulting improvements in wellbeing, resilience, physical health, mood, and functioning.	\$655 + \$1,291= \$1,946
Achieves educational goals	We used the CBAX proxy for the annual income uplift associated with completing NCEA qualifications compared with leaving school with no qualifications (CBAX row 119, valued at \$2,788 in 2025).	\$2,788

* unit of analysis: 1 taiohi, in 2024/25

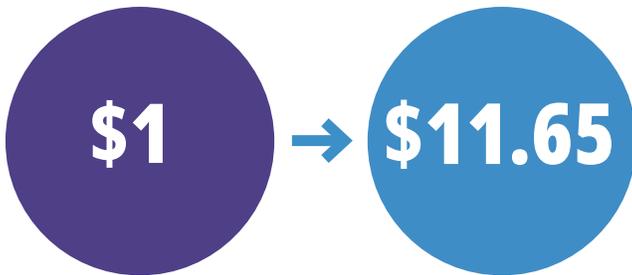
Gains employment	<p>Two measures are used to value this outcome as two stakeholder groups (taiohi and the New Zealand government) benefit from this outcome. The first proxy (CBAx row 24, valued at \$16,688 in 2025) is the CBAx estimate of government savings achieved when Jobseeker benefit payments are not required.</p> <p>The second value is based on wage estimates for common entry-level roles available to taiohi in Dannevirke (averaged at \$47,840) are based on official and reputable sources and reflect realistic, market-aligned earnings for entry-level employment.¹</p>	<p>\$16,688 + \$47,840 = \$64,528</p>
Improved ability to be a parent	<p>We used the cost of a recognised parenting programme that supports positive child development (Triple P Parenting, 10-session course).</p>	<p>\$982</p>
Reduced offending	<p>Two measures are used to value this outcome as two stakeholder groups taiohi and the New Zealand government (the latter includes the regional justice system/ local government) benefit from this outcome.</p> <p>The first proxy is the cost of a diversionary response for a low-risk youth offender, such as a warning or referral to Police Youth Aid (CBAx row 265, valued at \$4,638 in 2025). It is appropriate because when taiohi reduce their likelihood of offending, they avoid entering the early stages of the justice system.</p> <p>The second proxy is based on the CBAx WELLBY changes in life satisfaction scale (CBAx row 242, valued at \$7,343 in 2025). Abstaining from anti-social behaviour is strongly linked to improvements in taiohi wellbeing, confidence, safety, and overall life satisfaction.</p>	<p>\$4,638 + \$7,343 = \$11,981</p>

Note: All CBAx values (valued as of 2025) are sourced from: CBAx Spreadsheet Model | The Treasury New Zealand
1. Refer to pp.61-62 of the SROI technical report for the sources and method of generating this value.

CALCULATING THE SROI RATIO

What the ratio shows

The SROI ratio shows how much social value is created for every \$1 invested in the mahi of TCYS.



For every \$1 invested, TCYS generates \$11.65 in social value

This reflects the real-life impact of taiohi feeling supported, connected, confident in who they are, and empowered to step into leadership and future pathways.

How we calculated it

The ratio is calculated by comparing:

Total Social Value Created ÷ Total Investment

Total Present Value of Benefits (over 3 years, after adjustment) = \$6,895,858.56

Total Inputs (funding, staffing, resources, community contributions) = \$592,073.00

SROI Ratio = \$11.65 of social value for every \$1 invested

Why you can trust this number

To ensure the results were credible and realistic, we used:

- NZ-based valuation data, wherever possible
- Discount filters (e.g., deadweight, attribution, drop-off)
- Conservative assumptions
- Sensitivity testing to ensure the ratio holds under different scenarios

This means that the value is not overstated, and if anything, it is a minimum estimate.

The number was also internationally assured by Social Value International.



HOW TO INTERPRET THE RATIO

1. **The ratio is context-specific, not comparative.**
The ratio reflects the specific context, needs, and operating environment of TCYS and should not be compared to other ratios.
2. **The ratio should always be read alongside the Theory of Change and stories of impact** to understand the full picture.
3. **The ratio reflects the outcomes included – not *all* outcomes.** Only material outcomes were included (those that are significant, experienced, and supported by evidence).

The ratio strengthens the story – it does not replace it

ORGANISATIONAL INSIGHTS

What this analysis tells us about the mahi of TCYS

1 TCYS is essential infrastructure in Tamaki-nui-a-Rua

In a rural area with limited youth services, TCYS fills a crucial gap, serving as both a frontline support service and a connector between whānau, schools, employers, health providers, and the justice system. Without TCYS, many taiohi would have no meaningful youth development support available.

2 Early-intervention and relational support enables long-term outcomes

Outcomes like identity, confidence, and safer decision-making come from consistent, relationship-based support *before* a crisis. Maintaining capacity for early engagement helps prevent escalation and reduces demand on education, health, and justice systems.

3 A safe, youth-defined space strengthens belonging

Taiohi repeatedly describe TCYS as a place where they “feel safe”, “can be themselves”, and “aren’t judged”.

4 Youth work is cyclical and community-led

When taiohi feel seen, supported, and valued, they give back. Some go on to become youth workers themselves, shaping the next generation. This demonstrates a self-sustaining cycle of community-led leadership.



Once they know that someone's in their corner, they become confident and invincible... they ask less and try more.

- TCYS Youth Worker



A whole new family now... Everyone here is so welcoming... I have ADHD... and they get me.

- Taiohi, 15

CLOSING REFLECTION

The findings confirm what the community already knows: TCYS changes lives. Through relational practice, connection, and belief in taiohi's potential, TCYS supports taiohi to build identity, stability, and futures they are proud of. Sustaining this mahi means ensuring TCYS has the resources and funding to keep walking alongside taiohi for as long as they need.





Acknowledgements

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All photos used in this publication are credited to TCYS.

Disclaimer

Hands for Impact has agreed to undertake this SROI Evaluation and produce the Report for the Client (non-profit charitable organisation) on the terms and conditions contained in a Pro Bono SROI Report Agreement.

Although every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the material and the integrity of the analysis presented herein, Hands For Impact accepts no liability for any actions taken on the basis of the contents of this report.

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