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'Jobbortunities' success as programme enters second phase

By [Richard Davison \(/author/richard.davison%40odt.co.nz\)](/author/richard.davison%40odt.co.nz)

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Previously solo Balclutha builder Hayden McElrea (right) says a new funding initiative overseen by the Clutha District Council has enabled him to take on apprentice Nico Tuhura. PHOTO: RICHARD DAVISON

A second phase of the Clutha District Council's "Jobbortunities" programme is under way.

Following a successful series of job fairs last month, the \$500,000, Ministry of Social Development-funded Mayors' Task Force for Jobs community recovery programme — which is overseen by the council — has been fostering apprenticeships in the building industry.

Clutha Mayor Bryan Cadogan said the apprenticeship incentivisation programme, which could eventually be worth more than \$100,000 to local building firms, had already brought seven new apprentices under the wing of South Otago employers.

The initiative addressed a long-standing issue for the local building industry, he said.

"This has been a critical area of concern for more than a generation, with little continuity of apprenticeships in this industry locally.

"The MSD Jobbortunities funding has allowed us to help firms out with some of those initial and ongoing costs of taking on an apprentice, thereby encouraging them to do so.

"As you can see it's working already, but we'll continue to look for more prospective placements as interest grows."

Helping his new employer build a two-bedroom house in Kaitangata this week was 16-year-old former South Otago High School pupil Nico Tuhura.

Formerly a sole trader, builder Hayden McElrea said he had been toying with the idea of taking on an apprentice when he became aware of the new initiative.

"There's just so much work out there at the moment, and everyone's flat out, so this has come at the perfect time for me.

"I began as an apprentice in 1997, and I'm grateful for that start. It's a fantastic way to get a broad understanding of the job and what's required, while doing your book learning alongside.

"The funding has helped me take that step and maybe just do a little bit to pay things forward with Nico here."

Nico said he, too, was grateful for the chance to don his tool-belt full time.

"Something like this helps open up a lot of opportunities in future.

"I get to earn now while I qualify as a carpenter, and then I can take my career anywhere I want after that."

Mr Cadogan said the apprenticeship programme was just one of several planned Jobbortunities strands.

"The funding came with the target of filling 50 new full-time positions within the year.

"We're already at 27 in the first month, so the programme as a whole is really uplifting for the district, and for the region as a whole."

richard.davison@odt.co.nz (<mailto:richard.davison@odt.co.nz>)



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Mayors taskforce celebrates milestone

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The Mayors Taskforce for Jobs (MTFJ) is celebrating a significant milestone, having guided 500 mostly young and COVID-19 displaced workers into sustainable employment through its Community Recovery Programme.

The Community Recovery Programme is a partnership between Industry Partnerships at Ministry of Social Development and rural councils around New Zealand, through MTFJ.

Started as a pilot in mid-2020 with four small rural councils, the programme has now grown to include 23 rural councils, and has been hugely successful in supporting young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), particularly youth disproportionately impacted by the economic impacts of COVID-19, into sustainable employment pathways.

“Mayors and councils know their rangatahi, their local businesses, their industries, and where the gaps are, and with the support and resources of the Ministry of Social Development, have risen to meet the Covid employment crisis,” says MTFJ Chair, Max Baxter.

“MTFJ has been advocating for this level of support for many years, and the Community Recovery Programme shows that when you empower and enhance the capacity of councils, amazing things can happen.”

MTFJ is a nationwide network of all 67 New Zealand mayors, all striving towards zero youth unemployment in their districts, and holds a memorandum of understanding with central Government agencies to work together to achieve better outcomes for young New Zealanders.

“We now need a further 650 placements to reach our target of 1,150 employment placements and are confident that we will exceed that number,” said Mr Baxter.

“The programme, in partnership with MSD is changing lives for those young people who are living in the regions. Working with MSD, we’re able to provide flexible funding that ensures our approach is individualised for each employer and young person, helping break down the barriers often faced when entering the workforce.”

Social Development Minister, Carmel Sepuloni says the Community Recovery Programme has produced excellent results in the face of a big challenge.

“The Community Recovery Programme has gone from strength to strength and I congratulate the participating councils and MTFJ on reaching this 500-job milestone,” said Minister Sepuloni.

"Our investment in councils is \$11.6 million through MTFJ, and it's paying off," she said.

"The MTFJ is a valuable programme which has grown from a four-council pilot in June 2020 to now involve 23 rural councils working with MSD to deliver an outstanding result. It's a fantastic example of a locally led solution delivering for young people in the community."

"The 23 rural councils now engaged in the programme are all taking unique approaches to delivering the programmes and I look forward to seeing even more progress and job growth."

Central Hawke's Bay District Council is engaging with job seekers in its community by refurbishing an old campervan to create a mobile employment hub. Clutha District Council runs speed-dating events with employers across the wider Otago Region, with a goal of filling some 8,500 jobs identified by Mayor Bryan Cadogan and his Jobbortunities team.

"The rural recovery is remaining strong, with 149 employment placements made so far through the programme associated with agriculture and primary industries. This is expected to increase as the programme continues," said Mr Baxter.

"With the four well-beings being reinstated into the Local Government Act, councils now have a clear mandate to deliver economic and social outcomes. The MSD funding is a key driver and is providing the 'human' element to council functions," he said.

"The Mayors Taskforce for Jobs partnership is proving to be one of my most engaging roles as Mayor of the Grey District so far. It is a great opportunity to be able to engage with our employers and our young people in our district," said participating Grey District Council Mayor Tania Gibson.