

NZ Hi-Tech Foundation Activity Report 2025

Nurturing future leaders for
Aotearoa's tech sector



The NZ Hi-Tech Trust

The NZ Hi-Tech Trust's mission is to celebrate and catalyse the growth of New Zealand's Hi-Tech sector.

As a not-for-profit, the Trust promotes the tech sector's contribution to the country's economic success and its evident global-quality level of innovation. The Trust manages the prestigious NZ Hi-Tech Awards, an annual event designed to recognise and honour the achievements of New Zealand's most innovative tech thinkers, creators and doers.

It also runs the NZ Hi-Tech Foundation and the NZ Hi-Tech Endowment Fund. These support the future of the sector, championing diversity and inclusion, and reducing barriers to working in the tech sector.

The Trust is a team of sector leaders and collaborators who deeply believe in New Zealand's tech potential, sector talent, and the tech sector's capacity to become New Zealand's greatest economic endeavour. Everything we do is driven by a desire to see New Zealand's tech ecosystem thrive, both at home and on the world stage.



Sarah Ramsay – Trustee, NZ Hi-Tech Trust

"The scholar candidates are 100% focused on what they can do to make the world a better place, and how they can influence their families and communities. Their drive, resilience and agility to overcome odds is what we need to help us grow a more diverse, holistic and value-added sector."



The NZ Hi-Tech Foundation

The NZ Hi-Tech Foundation is a charitable initiative of the NZ Hi-Tech Trust, created in collaboration with Perpetual Guardian.

Through scholarships, grants, mentorship and career development programmes, the Foundation helps build the capability and confidence of future tech leaders - whether supporting young people taking their first steps into a tech career or accelerating the journey of professionals ready to lead on a global stage.

At the heart of this work is the NZ Hi-Tech Endowment Fund - our goal is to build a multi-million-dollar initiative aimed at ensuring sustainable investment in education, training and international opportunities.

The He Whetū Mārama Ngā Karahipi / Leading Light Scholarship Programme is part of this.

He Whetū Mārama Ngā Karahipi / Leading Light Scholarship

Thousands of talented, ambitious young New Zealanders face significant barriers to reaching their full potential, particularly those who are first in their families to pursue tertiary education, come from low-income households, or are from communities underrepresented in our tech sector.

At the NZ Hi-Tech Trust, we believe that talent lives everywhere, but opportunity does not. That's why, in partnership with the **First Foundation**, we established the He Whetū Mārama Ngā Karahipi / Leading Light Scholarship Programme.

This life-changing programme supports young scholars through their final year of high school and into tertiary study. It includes invaluable paid work experience, financial assistance, and a strong support system to help students adapt and thrive, especially when moving from their communities to university, sometimes in a different city.

Through these efforts, the Foundation is building a diverse, resilient, and innovative tech sector - one where all Kiwis, regardless of background, identity, or circumstance, have the opportunity to succeed. In turn, our scholars enrich the industry with their unique perspectives, dedication, and talent.

Mā te huruhuru ka rere te manu
Adorn the bird with feathers so it may soar





Kirk Sargent - CEO, First Foundation

"For New Zealand to achieve its ambitions, we need a highly functioning workforce where everyone participates in society. We know there is no poverty of talent, but there may be a poverty of aspiration. That is what we seek to change."

Initiatives We've Supported

The NZ Hi-Tech Foundation has supported a variety of initiatives that inspire or support underrepresented communities through engagement with tech.

Recent examples include:

- **Land of Voyagers**, the digital platform that tells the incredible story of the Tuia 250 Voyage from Tahiti to Aotearoa - one of the greatest migrations in the history of mankind.
- **Fundraising initiatives** such as helping the NZ high school robotics champions get to the world championships in Texas.
- **Supporting Take2**, an organisation that works with prisons in Aotearoa to break the cycle of crime through tech.

We believe that building a stronger, more vibrant tech industry means making sure the path is open to everyone. We are committed to investing in the future technology leaders, offering them the tools, resources, and most importantly, the belief that they can, and will, make a difference.

We are counting on you to help because doing so means that you will do the right thing for our rangatahi, sector, and Aotearoa.

Meet Our 2024 Scholars

These are the kinds of future leaders we're proud to support. Meet three of our 2024 Hi-Tech Scholars whose journeys exemplify resilience, potential, and promise.





Awatea Poutai

Awatea Poutai is a young man with a clear vision for his future. He credits his smarts to his mum, Joan, his work ethic to his dad, Wayne, and his ambitions to the mentors who have supported him along the way.

Awatea is a “Dreamer” - a recipient of the I Have A Dream (IHAD) programme - and now a Hi-Tech scholar, with his eyes on an Otago Polytechnic degree and a career in product design.

Awatea started life in Perth, where his dad worked in construction. Times were tough, and the family stayed with relatives as they looked for a place they could call home. Eventually, the extended whānau moved back to New Zealand and settled in Whangārei. Awatea enrolled at Tikipunga Primary School, where his talent and work ethic were quickly noticed.

Now at Tikipunga High, Awatea is head boy, excelling in art, writing and maths. He loves to mix his creative and analytical skills, building little cardboard models at home to sharpen his thinking around product design.

Awatea’s journey toward the Hi-Tech scholarship can be traced back to the IHAD programme. After being encouraged to sign up by his parents, he entered the programme and was matched with mentors, known as navigators. Awatea credits his current navigator, Lucia Kutze, as having made a significant impact on his life, helping him explore scholarships, life skills, and career pathways. It was Lucia who encouraged Awatea to apply for the Hi-Tech scholarship.

“I am a hard worker - I try my best at all things I do.” Awatea says. “My dad was a hard worker, and any time we had free time together he would teach me to use my initiative and try and figure out a way to solve any problems.”

Awatea’s dad suffered a major seizure two years ago and fell into a coma. He has been in a slow recovery since, with the whole family looking after him. When Awatea was announced as a scholarship winner - a night he describes as like being at the Oscars - Wayne rose from his chair and delivered a powerful haka, backed by Joan.

The scene was beautiful, with the footage doing the rounds on social media and ending up on the New Zealand Herald website. “I was just so proud of my dad for doing this,” Awatea says. “I was just so happy he could just be there, but even happier he was able to get up and be proud of me, and show his love for me.”

Awatea and his family, including his much-loved nan Arizona Heke, are planning a South Island road trip in the final months of 2025; an adventure in which they can all be together before sending him off for his university adventures.

Awatea will be the first in his family to attend university, and he’s excited to show his siblings and family what he can achieve. “My whole family is proud of me,” he says. “Proud of the opportunities I have for my future.”



Isabella Baldwin

Isabella Baldwin loves her sport, is fiercely intelligent, and dedicated to family. She's also a Hi-Tech Trust scholarship winner, about to become the first in her family to attend university.

It's not been an easy journey. Isabella's 53-year-old mum Angela recently suffered a severe stroke, leaving her with vision loss and fatigue. Angela's life became immeasurably harder, but her commitment to Isabella's future never wavered.

"My family is the reason for my success," Isabella says. "They always provided me with the foundation of love and encouragement and were always there to boost my confidence and motivation.

"My parents, Angela and Bruce, really care. They want me to be the best and want me to succeed. They try to help me out wherever they can," she says.

Sport is a huge part of Isabella's life. Originally from the small South Island town of Renwick, she now plays tighthead prop for Marlborough Girls College and Tasman's Under-18 Mako team. She dreams of one day playing for the Black Ferns. She's also a musician, playing in the Marlborough Pipe Band and the Nelson Celtic band, where she plays the side drums.

She loves photography and editing, particularly the more technical aspects, and sees a future where she can mix playing sports with capturing it in images or on the screen.

Mostly, Isabella just loves to learn. "I love going to school," she says. "I love learning, and I love taking leadership opportunities and bringing my knowledge back to my communities."

Isabella credits her success to many people but acknowledges three teachers in particular. As a young girl, Isabella was shy and didn't have much confidence. Then, she says, "I met Heather Jameson, who became my singing and piano teacher. Through her guidance, I began to grow in confidence, and she truly instilled in me a passion for jazz singing.

She also gives a shout-out to Harris Arthur, her rugby coach for four years. "He helped me improve my skills and techniques, and he consistently promoted the values of perseverance, self-belief, a strong work ethic, and focus."

Then, there is Isabella's school dean Sialele Alipia. Sialele encouraged Isabella to apply for the scholarship, knowing the difficulties the family would face in financing a university degree. "I was from this little school in Renwick, and came to college, where I didn't know many people. Sialele was so supportive, she was always helping me. And with my mum having a stroke, she has continued to support and help me.

"I think I knew I wanted to go to uni, but there was something in the back of my head: What happens if I can't do this, if there isn't enough money, or something else?"

Now, as a scholarship winner, Isabella can take her pick and is considering Canterbury, Otago, or Lincoln University.

Ultimately, Isabella aspires to a career that blends sport, tech, and creativity. But what matters most to her is being part of a team, supporting others, and proving that coming from a small town doesn't limit where you go.



Taurus Tumoana

Six years ago, Taurus Tumoana was placed with respite foster carer Lucy MacLeod. The arrangement was meant to be short-term, but Taurus asked to stay. Lucy said yes, and Taurus's life trajectory changed.

Taurus is now a St Patrick's School House Captain, Kapa Haka Kaitātaki Tāne, and Hi-Tech scholar. A teenager who had never thought about attending university is now considering a degree in design or law.

Taurus has talent, ambition and now, belief in himself. Along with Lucy, a religious studies teacher at St Patrick's College, Taurus has been inspired by other teachers: Brothers Mike and Peter Woods, his careers advisor and tutor respectively, and Ian McFadyen, his Māori teacher.

"What changed for me was the fact I had people around me who told me I could do this stuff," says Taurus. "Like my teacher, who looked at my subjects and saw how I got high marks in English. So he told me I could qualify to do law."

When Taurus was named as one of the Hi-Tech Trust scholars, he was thrilled - but also relieved. "It feels good to know there is a programme and a mentor to support me. No one in my family has gone to university - I would be the first. It makes you feel like the man. Like you're building a legacy."

Taurus is exploring courses such as Waikato University's Bachelor in Communication Design with a minor in Māori. He's still undecided, however, as he learns more about his own talents and skills.

Whatever future he chooses, Taurus has already proven that a difficult start doesn't define your future. And that it only takes one person - someone like his foster mum Lucy - to change everything.



Help Us Change More Lives

90 Scholars, 700 Applicants

In 2024, the First Foundation had over 700 applicants. Through the Hi-Tech Foundation, we were able to offer three Leading Light Scholarships. But there were 610 other future Awateas, Tauruses and Isabellas that together we could help steer into the tech industry.

Awatea, Taurus and Isabella are just three of the thousands of young New Zealanders who have incredible resilience, work ethic and determination, but face barriers to reaching their full potential. We are proud to support these scholars and excited to see them grow into industry leaders.

But there are so many more rangatahi who deserve our support. And there is so much more we can do.

We're asking you to get involved in one of these three ways:

1. Become a Mentor

Offer your time, expertise and experience to guide our future leaders. Be that person who changes the trajectory of someone's life.

We would love to hear from you if you are keen to get involved by becoming a mentor.


2. Offer Work Experience

Our scholars - and other young leaders like them - will bring invaluable insight and experience to your organisation. Offer them professional opportunities that allow them to learn, upskill, and contribute. Internships or work experience allow you to discover standout talent, while also creating new opportunities for our young future leaders and valuable income support for their whanau.

We would love to hear from you if you are keen to get involved by offering professional opportunities at your organisation.

3. Donate to Our Programmes

We want to fund more scholarships and expand access to work experience placements. Right now, only a small fraction of potential scholars gain the support they deserve. With your help, we can change that.



**Let's invest in our people,
our industry, and the
future of Aotearoa.
Together, we can build a
truly extraordinary future.**

If you're able to offer mentorship or professional opportunities, we'd love to hear from you - get in touch at foundation@hitech.org.nz.



**Keen to donate to the
scholarship fund?**

Visit givealittle.co.nz/org/the-hi-tech-foundation or
scan the QR code - we'll take care of the rest.

Together, through initiatives like the NZ Hi-Tech Foundation, we are reshaping the face of the tech industry in Aotearoa. Thank you for supporting this journey - one scholar, one opportunity, and one future at a time.