

**GOT A
TRADE?**
**GOT IT
MADE!™**

CHRISTINA TAEFU

Mental Health & Addiction Support Worker

By Deborah Hady

Christina Taefu is, as clichéd as it might sound, exactly where she wants to be right now.

She is working her dream job as a programme facilitator for Framework Trust, won last year's Ms. Samoa New Zealand crown, and has just bought her first home in Auckland!

Framework Trust delivers community-based mental health and intellectual disability services. Christina's day-to-day tasks at work are many and varied, from creating personal development and wellness programmes, and educating people about self-care and personal hygiene, to teaching Zumba and yoga. She says she has a wonderful workplace, incredibly supportive bosses, and works with colleagues who have genuine empathy and real passion for helping people get better.

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Indeed, talking to Christina, there is an air of graceful contentment about her.

Yet Christina's journey has not been smooth sailing. While her father wanted her to be a lawyer, and she took subjects that prepared her for law, she realised it was not where her passion was.

“I got a little bit unwell after school and I ended up having to ask for help. But it was from that experience that I built so much resilience and emotional awareness and intelligence into myself. That led me to discover what I truly wanted to do with my life – and that was to help other people in the same situation I was in.”

Christina has come very far since those days and has built an incredible life for herself. She is six years into recovery, and that's her proudest accomplishment.

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"I have learned so much about myself after high school. I had to navigate my way into the world. I didn't know what I wanted, or what I needed really! It was just a year - or years - of discovery."

She has had to work very hard, but she learned to believe in herself, and she's found her passion. Having her own story of healing and recovery, Christina understands what it was like to be in a situation of poor health.

Her passion for the mental health industry shows. She lights up as she explains the different things she does in the sector, and how multi-faceted mental health really is. It isn't just about counselling or taking medicine, but also physical health, wellness and self-care. For example, she is facilitating a personal finance course that her economist partner helped her create. She emphasises the strengths model, where the focus is on people's innate strength and building people's confidence to look good and feel good.

"I wish people had a greater awareness of mental health, that it is not a scary thing. It is okay to ask for help, and it is actually very important to support people facing mental illness. People heal through compassion and love."

Christina, a Got A Trade Hero, reckons the organisation allows teens to learn from people in the industry, to identify the different careers that would suit them. She loves learning on the job, and finds it awesome that what she studies aligns with her work. Doing an apprenticeship within her workplace allowed her to discover what suits her, and what she wants.

Her advice to teenagers facing tough decisions ahead? Be courageous, be willing to work hard, explore opportunities and don't give up.

"Talk to some government organisations and NGOs. There are many different avenues [you] can go down to get some placement and work experience before you start. I know that my work, for example, has some students doing placements."

Five years ago, she listed out the goals she wanted to achieve. She has accomplished all of them. Now, Christina can confidently look forward to achieving even more - from travelling and having a family, to continuing her amazing work in reducing the stigma around mental health.

'Got a Trade? Got it Made!' Is a national campaign to raise awareness of on-the-job training and careers in New Zealand's trades and services. It also celebrates the talents and achievements of young people making headway in their chosen vocation.

Got a Trade week runs 22-26 August 2016. Visit www.gotatrade.co.nz to keep up with all the action!



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