

# Social Impact

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## Two young mothers thriving in work

April 2016

Peresia Mona and Pola Matamua have come through the Welfare to Work programme and are now SKYCITY employees in the Koru Lounge at Auckland airport.

"Having a baby at 17 doesn't mean your life has come to a stop it just means it's taking a different direction than you planned," says 22 year old solo mother Pola Matamua as she waves at a Koru lounge member's child running up and down the lounge.

Pola started her first ever job at the Koru Lounge as a waiter six months ago when she went through the Welfare to Work project.

When Pola fell pregnant during her last year of high school her dreams of being a Police officer, were put on hold as she spent the next four and half years looking after her son Mark with the help of her parents.

"It's good actually, starting to work and experiencing how it is and not having to stay home." She always wanted to work but didn't know how to start looking and what she needed to do to get an interview. She applied for various roles at supermarkets but was never successful. She went to numerous job seminars but still with no luck, until her case manager introduced her to the Welfare to Work programme. She was very grateful for the opportunity and sees it as the first step she needed to be able to provide for her son and make a difference in their lives.

***"It's good actually starting to work and experiencing how it is and not having to stay home."***

The transition was difficult at first because the rostered hours meant it was hard to plan her life with her son. Her roster changed on a weekly basis from morning to evening as business demands changed. Childcare arrangements were difficult to juggle and she was constantly looking for people to look after Mark when he was not at day care, as

well as finding people to drop him off when she was working in the morning. It became too much of a struggle to juggle work and her son. Instead of giving up, she took a risk and put a request forward for set hours. At first her manager was reluctant because flexibility of rostering is important in a hospitality environment, but eventually agreed to the request.

***"I love that he's able to go to day care now so he can interact with other kids."***

For Pola this meant she got to spend the morning with Mark, who finds it hard when she drops him off to day care as he hates being away from her. Pola's mother finishes work and picks him up at 17:30 each day. "I love that he's able to go to day care now, so he can interact with other kids."

It's been hard leaving him after four and a half years but she knows that it's the best thing for both of them. He gets to socialise with others outside of her family, and she gets to interact with her peers at work which is one of the best things about being employed.

Her co-workers are like her extended family and she's made some great friends there. One of them is Peresia Mona, also 22 years old, who shares the same experiences as Pola. The two have built a friendship over work due to their personal circumstances.

Peresia Mona started the same time as Pola at Koru Lounge. She too came through the Welfare to Work programme. Unlike Pola, Peresia had been employed at previous hospitality organisations after leaving Alfriston College. She worked at Eden Park during the Rugby World Cup in 2011 while she was still at high school. Her career choice at the time was to become a counsellor as she enjoys

helping people. She found a full time job after graduating from high school at Denny's in Manukau, where she worked for a couple of years before she had her son, Lazarus, who is now 2 ½.

Peresia kept her entire pregnancy a secret from her friends and family. She continued to work and found morning sickness to be a struggle, but managed to hide it well. It was at work that she fell ill and decided to go to the doctors, who told her she was about to give birth two months early.

After her short labour of 2 ½ hours she decided to contact her family who were introduced to the news of her pregnancy and baby all in the same day. Coming from a strong Samoan Christian family she was nervous but then relieved with the support her family showed her.

When Peresia is at work her mother looks after Lazarus. Her hours are flexible but this doesn't faze her. She likes the challenge and because of the support at home she's able to carry on with her rostered shifts. Starting work again after 2 ½ years of being unemployed is a relief for Peresia. She likes interacting with people and helping out where she can. Peresia has also received glowing verbal and written feedback from numerous customers who have gone through the lounge about her "exceptional customer service".

Both mothers found the work really challenging when they first started. "The lounge is always busy and I had sore toes the first week I started from standing up all day" says Pola. On-the-job training was provided so both had to learn quickly. Both have now found their feet and are enjoying their jobs immensely.

Koru Lounge managers have found them both hard working and reliable and are always calling up for extra shifts. When they were first introduced into the team, one manager was hesitant to take them on board because they were 'solo mothers' and the idea they may not be able to attend shifts due to a sick child or lack of child care. However, both have silenced this idea and have become two of the most reliable team members and top performers in the lounge.

The mothers would love to pursue their dreams of joining the police force and becoming a counsellor one day, but they are going to take it one step at a time.

They are making the most of their current employment opportunity and are on the look-out for other roles around customer service. "This has given me the confidence to know I can do something else" says Peresia.

***"It builds your confidence and gives you a fresh start so you can be a role model for your child."***

Both women say they believe it's about your attitude to work and if you put your mind into it you can do anything. They would also like to encourage others who are in the same situation to take the step into the work force.

When asked what they loved about their jobs and being mothers, both mentioned customer service and watching their sons grow. "I love engaging with the customers and going the extra mile for them" claims Peresia.

Pola adds "Sometimes the people are demanding but we pretend everything is okay and continue to work. Put on a smile and do whatever we can for them. Then we look forward to going home and seeing our boys.

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