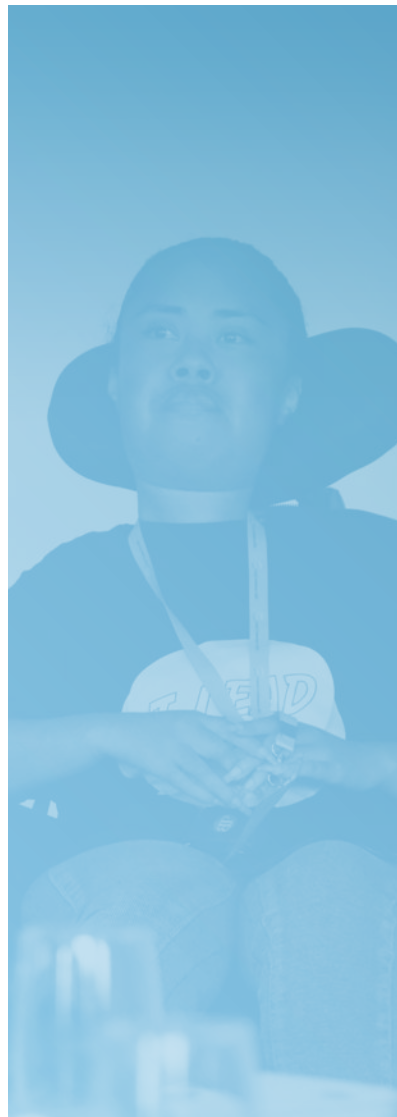




# yes 2024

## Annual Report

[yesdisability.org.nz](http://yesdisability.org.nz)



**EMPOWERED YOUTH  
LEADING THE FUTURE**

**WE MOVE PAST NO  
TO GET TO YES**

# ad Conference 26-27 March 2024



# The vision at YES is to create a collaborative community that is equitable for all New Zealanders.

We actively support all young people, including those with disabilities and their whanau, to take control of their lives. We are able to do this by running a number of programmes, including the innovative I.Lead movement, that empowers, inspires and enables young people to reach their full potential.

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# Board Chair Report

“What an extraordinary year it has been for YES and Shore Junction! Together, we have navigated a period of growth, change, and achievement that has continued to strengthen both our reach and impact.

A highlight of the year was the iLead conference in Wellington, held on the 26th and 27th of March, more than 40 young disabled people from across Aotearoa came together for this remarkable conference which provided a safe space for these young people to share their perspectives on topics and policies that directly affect their lives. Our “hot topics” included Education, Employment, Health, Transportation, Mental Health, Sport and Recreation, Housing, and Emergency/ Crisis Management. This dialogue was invaluable in amplifying their voices and shaping meaningful conversations about their future.

Shore Junction has continued to thrive as a vital resource for youth on the North Shore. It has become a vibrant hub where young people feel supported, connected, and empowered to flourish within their community. Annaliese and her team have exceeded all expectations, establishing Shore Junction as a key space where youth can truly be themselves and thrive.

The year also brought significant changes across the sector, particularly in funding approaches, which introduced both challenges and opportunities. In this evolving environment, we are deeply grateful to our supporters, partners, and funders. Your steadfast support allows us to continue serving our community with resilience and strength. These shifts also position us to innovate and expand our initiatives, and with a strong foundation, we are well-prepared to embrace the opportunities that lie ahead in 2025.

A heartfelt thank you goes to our dedicated staff, whose tireless efforts and unwavering commitment

form the backbone of all we achieve. Their passion for the communities we serve is inspiring.

I would also like to acknowledge my fellow board members for their guidance, expertise, and dedication. This year, we welcomed Lisa Whyte and Jade Farrar to the team. Both bring extensive experience and have made an immediate impact, quickly getting up to speed and contributing meaningfully to the organisation.

At the same time, we bid farewell to Brendon Hosken, who has been a vital part of our organisation for many years. His contributions, especially during the planning and construction of Shore Junction, have been invaluable. Brendon also reminded us of the significant role Rotary has played in our journey.

Lastly, I want to extend a special thank you to our CEO, Sonia. Her tireless efforts and deep passion for the young people we serve are unmatched. Sonia's leadership is the heart of YES, and we are incredibly fortunate to have her guiding us.

As we look ahead, 2025 promises to be a transformative year. We are ready to embrace the challenges and opportunities it brings. “



Jason Alexander  
**Board Chair**

# CEO Report

**It is always exciting to write this report for the AGM as it is an opportunity to look back and celebrate all that has been achieved in the past year and to look forward to 2025 and the difference we collectively make to the community.**

It has been a year of enormous change for the disability sector, the changes in funding for disabled people and their whanau, the changes at Whaikaha, Ministry for Disabled People, the changes in funding for the disabled community sector. Despite all the upheaval and uncertainty YES and I.Lead continue to thrive and make the changes needed to continue to provide a service of excellence to and with disabled people.

In these uncertain times YES and I.Lead have grown and restructured the way in which services are delivered. We now have regions, regional co-ordinators and regional committees making sure that we continue to focus on local for local as well as the National Committee who addresses the National issues.

YES has a wonderful history of 20 years of service to the community, always driven and directed by disabled people, they co-design all projects and programs to ensure we stay relevant and meeting their unique needs.

Our goal at YES is to create an opportunity where people can be authentically themselves and build a

meaningful life and influence policy at both a local and National level. We are proud to employ many disabled people at all levels of our organisation, this pathway is pivotal to support young disabled people into a career of their choice for the future. Many of our past employees, after starting at YES for their first paid role are now employed in Government, other community organisations and their own businesses. We support and fund external training and qualifications. All this takes time and a huge amount of effort on the part of the individual, but supporting dreams and aspirations is the cornerstone of our organisation.

Shore Junction is part of the YES family and has exceeded all expectations with 4500 plus members. The team at SJ are diverse and young, inspiring others to achieve big and follow their dreams.

We are grateful to the continued support of our funders, the Devonport Takapuna Local Board who grant us the community lease for Shore Junction and their financial support. Thank you to the individuals who support us year after year and the community grant funders who have faith and belief in the service we provide.

My thanks to the staff team, some who have joined recently and some who have been with us for many years, they continue to innovate, inspire and ensure that young people with disabilities are at the centre of everything we do.

Our leadership team at Shore Junction is lead by Annaliese Hewitt who has been a part of the YES family for 15 years, Annaliese leads a small but mighty team of dedicated people.

To the I.Lead committees who are determined to influence policy at many levels of Employment, Education, Health and so much more, they have established themselves as respected, informed and a group of influencers, making the sector better for those coming behind them.

To the Board of Trustees, a group of dedicated volunteers who steer, guide and challenge us to be the best we can be, thank you.

To the staff at YES, who everyday look for opportunities to make sure the voice of young disabled people are heard at all levels of our community, we could not be prouder, thank you.

This year we developed our new strategic plan which says it all.

I am always proud to work with the young people and encouraged by their willingness to change the world for others.



Sonia Thursby MNZM  
**CEO YES Disability Resource Centre and Shore Junction**

## YES: Vision and Mission

### Vision

Empowered Youth Leading the Future

### Mission

We Move Past NO to get to YES

### Values

We are idea generators

We are encouraged to dream

We iterate and learn

We advocate

We change when we need to

# I.Lead Regional Committees

In 2024 we have established regional I.Lead committees in Waikato, Dunedin, and Wellington to add to the already existing Auckland committee. These committees have enabled local engagement with disabled youth and government agencies. Meeting once a month, the committees discuss barriers in their communities and potential solutions, furthering our mission to address the challenges faced by disabled youth.



# Mens Mental Health and Disability Group

This is a new initiative at YES, it was created on the basis that disabled men felt un-heard when it came to their mental health. The purpose of the workshop is to have young disabled men discuss their perspectives of being a man and the impacts their disability has played in their life. A pilot workshop and another workshop occurred at the end of July. The project is continuously evolving as it is a new field that YES is delving into, however based off the discussions and expressions from the young disabled men it is a needed initiative. This new initiative is being run by a disabled young man who is working towards his Graduate Diploma in Mental Health Sector Leadership.

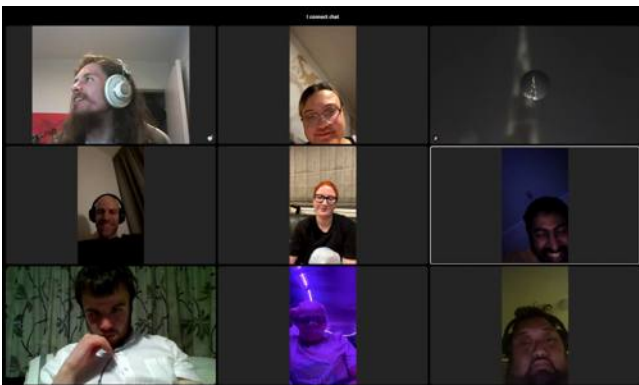


# I.Connect

I.Lead's programme I.Connect is a weekly event that is hosted on Facebook through our messenger group. Each week, I.Lead members join the I.Connect chat to discuss weekly topics that are current and relevant to the young disabled members. I.Connect aims to lessen isolation among young disabled kiwis by allowing the participants to be a part of a casual weekly discussion about what is happening in the world around them. I.Connect has I.Lead members that attend from across the country, connecting members that would otherwise not have the opportunity to hang out together.

Along with the more casual sessions, we have also enjoyed inviting special guests to help facilitate discussions on important topics. Examples of previous topics include: World Cultural Diversity Day, Animation, NZSL Week, and Superheroes.

We have hosted 46 I.Connect sessions since the 30th of June, 2023, with an average of 8-10 attendees each week. When asked what they enjoy about attending I.Connect, one participant said: "It's nice talking to people when I have no one else to talk to".



# I.Drive

I.Drive is an interactive workshop that is designed for those that are aiming to gain their driver's license. There are different workshops for different licenses, there is a two day Learners license workshop for people that struggle learning the road code book. I.Drive is used to break the barriers for people that have learning disabilities and reading difficulties, we use picture flash cards and toy cars as a learning tool. After the two day workshop the individual is given a practice test link that they can do to continue their learning, once they are ready to take their real test, we provide them support to pay for their first test attempt. These workshops are facilitated by young people with disabilities and their full driving licence.

I.Drive has gone through some exciting and positive changes this year, as more interests have come through from around Auckland. The I.Drive workshops are not just available in the North Shore but also moving out to having bi-monthly workshop in South Auckland too. Breaking the barrier of travelling further distances for some participants, making it more accessible to those that are outside of the North Shore area. As more I.Lead regional committees are developing around Aotearoa, I.Lead programs are also being developed in those regions. I.Drive held it's first workshop in Dunedin in July, with some of the Dunedin I.Lead committee members being present. We have had interest in other regions such as Waikato and Wellington.

Additions have been made to I.Drive with the adding of 'I.Drive Testing Day' the event is targeted for I.Drive participants that felt the environment of the driving agency too overwhelming. I.Drive partnered with VTNZ to bringing out the portable testing units from VTNZ to I.Drive workshop locations, as the location is familiar to the participants and we had control over the environment setting. This is the feedback from one of the participants that attended the testing day event (Vanessa's statement).



# I.Lead Conference 2024

We were thrilled to host our third I.Lead conference at Te Papa and Parliament on the 26th and 27th of March 2024. This year, we invited 48 disabled youth from across Aotearoa to attend the event in Wellington. The conference provided a safe and supportive environment for these young people to voice their opinions and discuss topics and policies relevant to their lives.

The key areas of focus for the conference included:

- Education
- Employment
- Transport
- Health
- Mental Health
- Sport and Recreation
- Housing
- Emergency Management

On the second day of the conference, recommendations developed by the participants were presented to ministers. This direct engagement ensured that the voices of disabled youth were heard at the highest levels of government. Moving forward, I.Lead will be presenting report cards to various government departments, tracking progress and accountability on the issues raised during the conference.

The event was a resounding success, fostering meaningful dialogue and generating valuable insights into the issues that matter most to disabled youth. The feedback and ideas gathered will inform our ongoing mahi at I.Lead.



Given that this was my first I.Lead conference, I went largely out of curiosity. I wanted to see what was what and listen to new perspectives on disability rights. It was, in a word; Great. The atmosphere was very welcoming. The keynote speakers were insightful and inspiring. I particularly enjoyed the energy Cam Calkoen brought to the table. The opportunity to analyse problems and develop recommendations was a welcome one, the ability to discuss and bounce ideas off people is what really made that second day for me. All things considered, I gained a fuller perspective on the topics discussed and a few new friends to boot! – **Jack**







## Shore Junction

I am delighted to report on the journey of Shore Junction as we continue to go from strength to strength.

Having celebrated our third birthday in March 2024, it fills me with immense pride to see the transformation of Shore Junction into a well-known and important fixture within the North Shore community in a relatively short space of time. Shore Junction has become a safe haven for over **4,500 young people**, offering them a place to come together, explore new interests, share their skills and cultivate enduring friendships. This membership figure has doubled since the last financial year and we have seen over **14,000 visits from young people** which is just outstanding!

One of the most significant aspects of Shore Junction is the sense of community it has created. We continue to foster this with a diverse membership of young people who come together, often with shared interests, to use the various spaces and facilities and sometimes just 'be'. This has led to them forming many meaningful connections. As one of young person said, *"I've made some incredible friendships here. It's amazing to spend time with people who share my passion for music."* *"This place is my dream come to life"*

Shore Junction is not solely about what happens within the walls; it also serves as a catalyst for positive change within the wider North Shore community. By bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds, our centre is actively removing barriers and fostering mutual understanding, and respect. *"Young people from various walks of life come together here, learning from one another. It stands as a beacon of positivity for our community."*

At Shore Junction we actively encourage young people to be themselves.

We were fortunate this year to obtain the lease to the adjoining bowling green. This has enabled us to further expand our offerings by utilising this and the adjoining buildings. We are now able to hold safe outdoor events, as well as providing the opportunity for our membership to use their creativity in co-designing the use of these spaces. Our thanks go to the Devonport Takapuna Local Board for the granting of this lease.

We continue to evolve Shore Junction and our activities thanks to our three dynamic youth advisory groups: the Youth Engagement Group (YEG), the Technology



Engagement Group (TEG), and Rainbow Junction (RJ). These groups ensure that we continue to offer a space and services that young people want.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our wonderful Patron and her family for their ongoing support and guidance and to all our supporters, partners and stakeholders who have remained steadfast in their support through the last three years and beyond. You all ensure the success and sustainability of Shore Junction. Your support has been instrumental in shaping the dynamic and transformative space that Shore Junction has become, offering high quality spaces, activities and programmes. We have had over 40 different organisations visiting Shore Junction this year and each organisation walks away saying that we need more Shore Junction's throughout New Zealand! As we look to the future, we are excited about the possibilities and potential for further growth and even greater impact. With ongoing support, we are certain that Shore Junction will continue to be a safe space, that engenders positivity and empowerment of the young people within the North Shore and wider community.

Lastly, we all know that it is people who are any organisations' greatest asset. We are so fortunate to have an amazing team at Shore Junction who work incredibly hard, with our membership at the centre of all that they do. They consistently deliver events and programmes that are interesting, fun, relevant and creative. A huge thanks to each and every one of our fantastic team who run Shore Junction every day!

Thank you for joining us on this incredible journey.



Catherine Lamb  
**CHAIR OF SHORE JUNCTION SUB COMMITTEE**

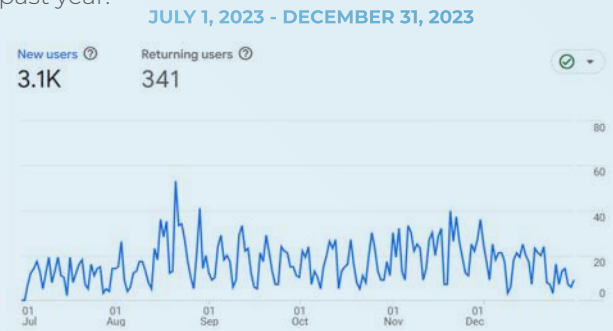
# Future Ready

In 2021, a group of i. Lead members conceived the idea of a transition plan to provide disabled youth with easy access to information that will help them smoothly transition from high school to the workforce or the broader world. In August 2021, a website called 'Future Ready' came into existence.

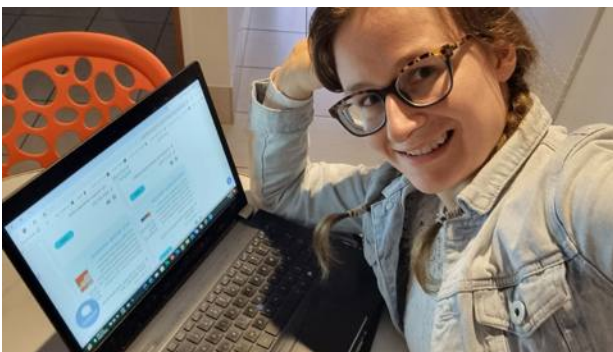
Future Ready is a game-changer for disabled youth, facilitating their transition from school to work, training, education, or recreational activities. From the very beginning, young people have been actively involved in shaping and designing the website's content and overall feel. Future Ready also employs disabled young people regionally to maintain all the information on this website. Future Ready provides readily available information from all over New Zealand.

What initially started small has now expanded to include five administrators across the country who frequently update the website with the latest information. Our first administrator, who is also a volunteer at Yes!, joined us in December 2022. In June 2023, we hired four additional administrators from across the country. Our administrators currently oversee Auckland, Hawkes Bay, Wellington, Canterbury, and Dunedin.

Here is a summary of our website visitors over the past year:



Here is a comparison of our website visitors over a period of time:



I've been working on the Wellington listings for Future Ready since March last year. I enjoy learning about all the great programmes that are out there in the region, and it's also been a springboard for getting involved with iLead in other ways – such as attending this year's conference and helping to set up the Wellington committee.

Rachael – Future Ready Administrator Wellington

# Duke of Edinburgh

“It’s not the destination, it’s the journey”.

I wanted to open with this literary quote, as I think it perfectly encapsulates my involvement with the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

I have been involved with the program for the past five years and I cannot emphasize enough that it has been the most fulfilling and life-changing experience I have been a part of. It has given me new skills and taken me through situations I never thought I would have been able to accomplish, whilst giving me the realisation that there was more in me than I had thought; through becoming aware of this realisation, it has given me greater confidence in my self-esteem. By doing the award, I feel like a whole new person than I was five years ago and ready to embrace life to the fullest. I was born and have lived with Autism and Hydrocephalus all my life, so a lot of skills like socialising and fine- motor skills can be tricky for me. However, because of the award, I was able to overcome these barriers. I remember for the volunteering section for my Silver Award, I was involved in work where I interacted with members of the public; this was an experience I enjoyed, and this section of my silver award was one of my favourite parts of my overall award journey. The skills I learnt here contributed greatly to my future pursuits and interest though most importantly, they helped me become a better person, and gave me a greater amount of confidence in my life and for that, I am extremely grateful.



I have recently completed my Gold Award and, although I found it easier than the previous levels of the award. Interestingly the difficulty of the adventurous journeys for both my Silver and Gold Awards, where I did horse riding and kayaking respectively, were the most challenging part of my overall award journey. In both journeys I was pushed to my limit and learnt to become more independent; the things I learnt in each of these areas, will set me up for success in other areas of my life. Earlier on, I mentioned how much fulfilment and joy I got from the volunteer section for my Silver Award and how it gave

me the skills to be successful in life. The volunteering section in all three awards was my favourite section out of the whole program; I went from a curious and shy individual to a passionate and dedicated citizen committed to serving his community. This is what I feel is the essence and the beauty of the award, it teaches you the value of service, what it means to be a good citizen, whilst also allowing you to explore what is unique about you and who you are. I recommend anyone who has a thirst for adventure and a passion to discover their potential consider taking up the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award Program because it will change your life. I am grateful to the many people who have helped me on my award journey: from my many award leaders, all my amazing assessors and everyone else who supported me on this journey. I may be finished with my award journey; however, the skills I have learnt and the experiences I have had will continue to serve me well in my life and my future.

# Celebrating the Empowered Program: Cohort 2 Report

In August 2023, at Waipuna Lodge, the Empowered Program welcomed its second cohort with great anticipation and enthusiasm. Twelve remarkable individuals from diverse backgrounds — Eleanor, Eilish, Rebecca, Ana-Leigh, George, Joshua, Esme, Jemma, Naomi, Faithleen, Newaye, and John — came together with a shared passion: to make the world more awesome, especially for young people.

## **Dream Big, Achieve More:**

The journey began with the theme “Dream Big, Achieve More.” Here, participants identified their dreams and set ambitious goals. They discovered the power of collaboration and the steps needed to turn their aspirations into reality. The session resonated deeply, as reflected by the feedback: “Thank you to everyone who moved with me”, “I’ve never seen my dreams like this before”, “I’ve seen I can do so much more” and “Can’t wait for the next one!”

## **Turning Rejection into Affection:**

The cohort’s resilience was tested and strengthened in Christchurch during “Turning Rejection into Affection.” Participants learned invaluable lessons on overcoming setbacks, supported by Cam’s facilitation of wellbeing and resilience plans in partnership with Hummingly. Significant breakthroughs occurred as each member discovered actionable strategies to navigate unexpected challenges.

## **Building Connections and Mentorships:**

Between sessions, a virtual and social bond grew among the cohort. Friendships blossomed, with members like Rebecca, Eleanor, and George began mentoring one another, while others, like Naomi, Faithleen, and John, formed supportive travel companionships. These connections exemplified Empowered’s goal to foster lasting relationships among like-minded individuals.

## **Bend Perception and Eliminate Assumption:**

Te Papa, Wellington hosted the third session, “Bend Perception and Eliminate Assumption.” Participants embraced the power of storytelling, unlocking personal stories that enhanced social connections and professional opportunities. One participant, inspired by Empowered, went on to deliver a speech at his brother’s wedding, the speech received a standing ovation, igniting a newfound passion for stand-up comedy, of which he’s since performed twice to audiences.

## **Leadership at I-Lead Conference:**

Empowered participants took center stage at the national disabled youth conference, I-Lead, showcasing their leadership skills and experiences honed through the program. Their contributions highlighted the program’s impact beyond its workshops, having an awesome impact within the community.

## **Live for Awesome in Queenstown:**

The program finished in Queenstown with “Live for Awesome,” where participants reflected on their transformative journey. They embraced risks, shared experiences, and built a robust “Backpack of Belief,” filled with memories and inspirations that affirmed their newfound empowerment. The graduation ceremony marked not just an end, but a new beginning for each participant.







**Testimonial:**

Reflecting on his journey, one participant shared, “During this past year, I applied and got accepted into Empowered. It was a transformative experience. Despite my challenges, including adjusting to vision loss, I found a supportive community that felt like family. From dreaming big to turning setbacks into opportunities, Empowered helped me grow personally and pursue my dreams with newfound confidence.”

**Looking Ahead: Cohort #3**

As we celebrate the achievements of Cohort 2, we eagerly anticipate welcoming Cohort 3 to embark on their own journey of empowerment. The Empowered Program continues to evolve, guided by the belief that every individual has the potential to create positive change in their lives and communities.

Let’s continue to Dream Big, Achieve More, and Empower Others!

# William Pike Challenge

17 I.Lead members have registered to take part in the William Pike Challenge for the first time this year, marking a significant milestone for both I.Lead and the William Pike Challenge. Over a period of 6 months, the participants (all with various ability levels) will be encouraged to get inspired by the outdoors; building their resilience, wellbeing, confidence, and skills through outdoor adventures, community service, and passion projects. Disabled youth are often used to feeling left out of exciting opportunities and adventures, making this programme a game-changer. Participants, no matter their abilities or skill level, will have the opportunity to go sailing, rock climbing, nature-walking, and more.

"I remember feeling left out at school camps when the outdoor activities weren't accessible to me," says Amy, one of the I.Lead members/participants. "Often, I feel like I'm missing out on opportunities because of my disability. But the opportunity to participate in this programme makes me feel like I can finally be included and gain new skills and confidence in the outdoors".

To complete the challenge, participants are required to complete five outdoor activities, 20 hours of community service, and 20 hours of passion projects over a year. Through these activities, participants are given opportunities to step outside their comfort zones, develop and strengthen 21st-century skills, and have extraordinary experiences.

William Pike, founder and CEO of the William Pike Challenge, knows firsthand the importance of gaining life skills and being able to step outside your comfort zone to face and overcome big challenges. Pike was one of two young climbers caught in a volcanic eruption on the slopes of Mount Ruapehu in 2007, suffering numerous life-threatening injuries which resulted in the amputation of his right leg below the knee. Through extensive recovery and rehabilitation, Pike developed a passion for passing on his life experiences to ensure the next generation of rangatahi develop essential life skills and are prepared to thrive in the future.

"I am thrilled to have Yes Disability join the William Pike Challenge this year. I'm really excited about the impact that these participants will have on their community as well as their own personal development by taking part in the WPC," says Pike.

William Pike's partnership with Yes Disability and I.Lead brings a unique and exciting opportunity to include participants with various abilities and disabilities in this programme, further expanding the reach and impact of the William Pike Challenge and making the outdoors more accessible for everyone; especially disabled youth.



# A Special Thanks

## Board Members

Jason Alexander (Chair)  
Catherine Lamb (Deputy)  
Brendon Hoskin  
Elissa Downey  
Jade Farrar  
Joanne Mahon  
Joe Bergin  
Katie Noble  
Lisa Whyte  
Lucy Anastasiadou-Hobbs

## Auckland I. Lead Committee

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Naomi Vaillima (Committee Deputy Chair)  
Amy Clements (Committee Secretary)  
Ashe Black  
Phil Dalby  
Jaden Movold  
Hayden Clements  
Kathleen Derrick  
Lachlan Nagle  
Prakashni Prakash  
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Matakorama Waipouri  
Ella Smith  
Faithleen Tou  
Grace Lee  
Lael Marshall  
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Abdulla Shibliq

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Kate Harpur  
Liam Carter

Henry Stillwell  
Eleanor Rawson

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Kim Pollock (Committee Deputy Chair)  
Rachel Wiltshire (Committee Secretary)  
Charlie Harrison  
Leo Hoffman  
Sean Prenter

## Dunedin I. Lead Committee

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Hannah Pearson  
Libby McDonald  
Dylan Lloyd  
Jordan Cleaver

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Kim Clark  
Tamara Grant

## Alumni

Kramer Hoeflich

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North Harbour Club  
NZ Community Trust  
NZESports Federation  
Office for Disability Issues  
Pub Charity  
Red Cross  
Rehabilitation Welfare Trust  
Simplicity Foundation  
Sky City  
Te Pou

## Donations (YES)

Aiden Bennett  
Derek & Sally Evennett  
Peter and David Picot Charitable Trust

## Donations (Shore Junction)

Andrew & Catherine Williams  
Cooper Family Charitable Foundation  
Devonport Takapuna Local Board  
Dines Group  
Sue & Trevor Stanaway  
Hugh & Wendy Stedman  
Matariki Trust  
Monk Family Trust  
Playtec  
Smales Family  
Takapuna Rocks

**A very special thank you to our anonymous supporters without whom we could not deliver our amazing services to over 4,500.00 young people.**

**And another very special thank you to all our Shore Junction Heroes and supporters of our fundraising events and activities.**

## Address

Yes Disability Centre  
3 William Laurie Place  
Albany, Auckland 0632





# Conference

