

RURAL

Mum's my hero - proud son

Delilah Whaitiri
Staff reporter

A YOUNG woman who has overcome difficult circumstances and has battled her own personal trials, has been hailed a hero by her oldest child who stripped his mother of her hi-vis vest and parading around for superhero day at kura.

Having survived the loss of both her parents, 27-year-old Trinity Burling, of Whakatane, said she continued the teachings of her father, who taught her to be independent and to stand on her own two feet.

A sole mother of three children aged nine, four and three, and a former beneficiary, Ms Burling said she worked as a seasonal worker picking kiwifruit in various orchards and has since taken on a fulltime role at Miro Berries in Te Teko.

Before starting work at the berry orchard, life for this wee family was tough and Ms Burling said she felt as though she was restricted and going nowhere on a benefit.

Living below the breadline and boarding at a family member's home, money was tight. However, Ms Burling's neighbour came to the rescue, offering her a job, albeit with one day's notice.

"I had to sort care for my children really quickly, but I was determined to begin working. I showed up the next day, ready to start," she said.



MIRO SUCCESS: Trinity Burling, a sole parent of three children and an employee of Miro Berries, is one of the faces behind the new development of 18.8 hectares at the berry farm in Te Teko.

Photo Delilah Whaitiri D9626-01

However, with limited whanau support, Te Mahoe School principal Tammy Wallace stepped in to help, throwing her a much-needed lifeline.

"Without her support I'd have to come to work with my big boy and with too many health and safety risks, it

wasn't ideal,' she said.

Ms Burling said before she started work she also admitted to suffering persistent anxiety – a bi-product of the relationship with her ex-partner.

"I found it hard to fit in at my new workplace and make friends, but since

I started working my confidence levels have risen and I find it easy to communicate now.

"We have to mihi to the board of trustees at every AGM and let them know about our progress, so it's really helped me to talk more," she said.

Ms Burling said the best part was now seeing her children thriving and doing well in school.

"My son received sports awards and is a lot more confident at school. My attitude has rubbed off on my children," she said.

The Ministry of Social Development-run programme, which enables people into employment and is a component of Miro Berries, has helped many previous beneficiaries.

Orchard manager Heidi Rosewarne said Trinity was one of the two staff members she was most proud of.

"Her journey is inspirational and what she puts into work is outstanding. She's always happy and comes with an excellent attitude, even though she's young and has a lot going on in her life," she said.

The development of the 18.8-hectare farm has already started and the team is well on its way to completing Block A, a total of nine hectares, before beginning work on blocks B and C, a further 20 hectares, which will continue to provide work for employees for several months.

"I hope to see the project finished before I move on," Ms Burling said.

Young Maori thriving

Delilah Whaitiri
Staff reporter

A YOUNG man who wasn't sure about his long-term future has changed his perspective after starting a fulltime job at Miro Berries.

Prior to working at the berry orchard, Tihema Hare, of Waiohau, admitted to spending a little too much time sitting on the couch at home playing video games. However, after desiring change, he decided to join the team at the Te Teko orchard.

Mr Hare said he became a father at the age of 18 and had to learn how to provide for his two children. However, having the ability to live off the land and knowing how to hunt and gather was what sustained his whanau through the hard times.

"I know how to fish and get our own meat, so, having a full freezer has never been a problem for us," he said.

But, food is just one expense and with soaring petrol and rental prices, a weekly benefit barely scratched the surface of what seemed like insurmountable costs. Although there were obvious financial benefits to working fulltime, "there are many other benefits too", he said.

"I feel more positive and proactive about my life and long-term future.

"I feel a lot better now. I have more motivation to do things. Before I never really wanted to do anything except jam on the PlayStation. I get out with my kids more and after work we hang out more," he said.

Orchard manager Heidi Rosewarne said all the staff at Miro came from unique backgrounds, but they have needed to overcome a lot of personal



MAORI WHENUA: Tihema Hare is one of many employees hired to develop more than 18 hectares of Maori land. Photo Delilah Whaitiri D9626-02

obstacles and hardships.

"We are very proud of Tihema and what he puts into work. He's never a problem. He's always happy and has an excellent attitude about work.

"He has his own stuff going on, and he's still very young, but he still manages to come to work," she said.

A government-run programme which helps people get off the benefit and into work has resulted in a partnership between Miro Berries and the Ministry of Social Development.

New staff are involved with the development of an 18.8-hectare berry farm and the Meihana-Koata land blocks on Macdonald Road in Te Teko.

Work, including irrigation, planting, tunnelling and building structures, is part of the Miro project and provides jobs for many Maori, mainly those who whakapapa back to the whenua and local iwi.

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