



Sir Graeme Dingle and his wife Jo-anne Wilkinson established their organisation to provide young people with skills and self-belief.



Turning young lives around

In her job as research and evaluation manager for the Graeme Dingle Foundation, Julie Moore reads plenty of valuable feedback from principals and teachers about the programmes the foundation runs in schools around the country. But the day she read a note signed ‘from the girl with the ponytail, the brown eyes and the big smile’, she knew she’d received something very special.

The girl attends a primary school in the Waikato that runs Kiwi Can - the foundation’s values and life skills programme that encourages children to develop confidence and self-belief. She explained how at her previous school she was picked on and bullied a lot, and wasn’t at all happy. Then she changed schools and found it completely different. “I feel that people care and it’s all down to Kiwi Can being in the school, so I just want to thank you guys,” she wrote.

That feedback made Moore’s day. “That’s so impactful,” she says. “It’s one little voice who was miserable at school but now loves going to school.”

Kiwi Can is one of many programmes run by the foundation Sir Graeme Dingle and his partner Jo-anne Wilkinson, Lady Dingle set up in the mid-1990s. The couple wanted to take their passion for mountaineering and the outdoors, and establish an organisation that provides New Zealand young people with the skills and self-belief they need to climb their own metaphorical mountains.

Says Dingle: “These ‘mountains’ are in the form of personal obstacles too many Kiwi kids have to face on a daily basis, as a result of living in a country where not all childhoods are created equal. Graeme Dingle Foundation programmes is how Jo-anne and I have been working to turn these statistics around for nearly a quarter of a century.”

“Every child should have equal opportunities to realise their full potential, understand their selfworth and aim as high as they possibly can. That ability comes from within and we provide them with the tools to make it happen.”

The foundation uses activity-based learning, outdoor education, and inspiring speakers and mentors to help young people right throughout their formative years, giving them the skills they need to face the future confidently. They’ve helped more than 250,000 Kiwi young people, and developed valuable partnerships with organisations such as NZ Rugby.

Alongside these impressive credentials, Moore says the foundation is committed to evidence-based evaluation and ongoing research to make sure all its programmes remain relevant and effective in an ever-changing world, and to share that research with other organisations within the youth development field.

“We see the big picture of youth development, and that big picture view helps us improve our programmes and prove they are working,” she says.

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