

Influencing Youth a Passion for Hohaia

The “lightbulb moment” for Hohaia Hakaraia’s pathway in life came when he was a mentor to Year 9 college students taking part in the Stars Programme run by the Graeme Dingle Foundation.

The Stars programme strengthens young people for that tricky transition into secondary school, by training older students to mentor and walk alongside the new Year 9s.

Hohaia discovered he had a natural gift for helping others – “I found that influencing youth is a little bit addictive. The more you see the impact you are making on people, the more you want to see that impact growing, and the harder you try to impact others.”

Without realising it, the Stars programme was impacting on him too.

“I didn’t realise it at the time but the programme gave me more confidence to step out into the world. It ignited a passion to help young people.”

It also changed his perspective on life, and led to a new role with the Graeme Dingle Foundation.

“Having left high school, having had children and working in a full-time job, I realised I needed to spend more time with whanau. So, I got in touch with the Graeme Dingle Foundation and they gave me the opportunity to help influence youth in schools, especially in West Auckland which is a big thing for me.

“When I took that step, it solidified for me the knowledge of how passionate I am for helping people.”

Now, as a leader in the Kiwi Can programme, Hohaia understands its influence on young people.

“Kiwi Can gives kids a break away from normal classes. They are allowed to have fun but at the same time they are learning about becoming a useful member of our community. It is all about positivity and giving them the tools they need for life.”



This is important, he says, because many tamariki have parents who both work in 40-hour jobs and there is limited time to interact with whanau to learn the values of resilience and respect.

“Kiwi Can fills the gaps in tamariki learning about how to be a good individual. There are many times when individuals have amazed me by showing how much they have taken our programme’s teachings on board.

“Watching the transformation of the classes as they come into Kiwi Can, and then the changes out in the playground as people show more respect and caring, is awesome.”

In his other role as the foundation’s bicultural advisor, Hohaia is keen to see Te Reo Māori used in programmes.

“It is an awesome way to spread the love of our language. Our kaupapa, kohanga and tamaraiiki usually have good pass marks but we know that only 20% of our Māori students are in kura kaupapa. The rest of the 80% are in mainstream education and we have to tap them into Te Reo.”

Overall, the main thing about Kiwi Can is its emphasis on positivity, he says.

“In an ideal world, young people need to find happiness. We come from different backgrounds and upbringings, but the beauty of Kiwi Can is it focuses on the positives – for everyone.”

We want every child to know: What they have inside is greater than any obstacle.