

Malia The 'Helicopter Girl'

It often takes an incredible amount of bravery and courage to step into the unknown. For some of our Project K students, their self-efficacy and resiliency is so low that when offered a life changing opportunity, the prospect is so daunting they are overwhelmed and decline.

This was the case for young Malia. Malia was so low in confidence when we met her she said 'no' when offered a position. After talking to a graduated Project K student from Waitakere College, Malia reluctantly accepted.

Mentoring through Level 4 lockdown during COVID-19 was a difficult start to her Project K experience. Amongst her shyness, matching happened on Zoom, which for a young person lacking confidence, meeting new adults online was scarier than in person. Malia was committed to the process and matched with a mentor who in many ways was the opposite to her.

Her mentor was from a top Law firm, confident in herself, talkative and open. Over the process of online matching, games nights and group sessions, Malia grew to trust and open up to her mentor.

At times, there was difficulty in trying to encourage Malia to see her potential as she had not yet done Wilderness. However, her mentor was intentional in creating opportunities that pushed Malia.

While mentoring starting before Wilderness was difficult, it also provided the opportunity for Malia and her mentor to work together setting goals to get the most out of the opportunity and prepare for Wilderness together.



Induction arrived which involves meeting 11 other young people and hearing about what they will be doing on their Wilderness adventure, Malia was so terrified she sat in her car crying refusing to leave. Eventually Malia joined the group in the van and headed for induction. However, she was still so scared she refused to take off her hoodie – this acted as her only protection. Over the process of a few hours, instructors and some fellow students got alongside Malia to encourage her, she settled into the group and became open to the opportunity of the challenge knowing she was supported.

After completing 13 days in the Wilderness and doing tasks she never thought possible, Malia injured her knee hiking with the only safe way to look after her and the group was to airlift her out. Malia feared heights, had never been in an airplane before, nor been to hospital. In an instant she was forced to face these fears as she was lifted out in a basket and pulleyed into the helicopter being transported alone with strangers.

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

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Through Malia's injury it was expected the family would be upset and want her pulled out instantly.

However, the opposite occurred and instead the family responded with calm and gratitude of looking after her – and even wanted her to complete the journey. In hospital Malia sat in her bed with a giant smile and the affirmation cards from her mentor – the biggest source of encouragement through her journey.

Not long after arriving at hospital she asked if she would be able to return to Wilderness and complete the journey – a vast difference from the girl who previously sat in her car crying refusing to remove her hoodie. After medical clearance and a night's rest at home, she returned to the group to complete the journey.

Malia continues to grow and push herself. Wilderness acted as an anchor for her as she discovered her strength and confidence. Malia returned confident delivering a speech at 'Welcome Back' that encouraged her mother to also give a speech on behalf of families.



Malia is committed to the relationship with her mentor, flourishing and building a genuine connection. Her mentor is gentle and caring, yet constantly pushes her to better herself.

In a recent goal setting event, Malia was terrified to do rock climbing. She still feared heights, that the harness would not hold her and that the belay system would fail. Initially Malia said no, however over the course of an hour, Malia and her mentor took baby steps to become confident and attempt the climb. She first tried on the harness, then slowly felt how strong the belay system was, slowly stepped up to the wall to try a few holds. Eventually Malia attempted a climb – and failed. However, she stopped, looked at the wall tried again. And failed.

She tried again for a third attempt and succeeded. Amongst this entire climbing process, her mentor stood there in tears of pride that a once scared young girl no longer feared obstacles.

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