

Mila's Story



**GRAEME DINGLE
FOUNDATION**

Empowering kids to overcome life's obstacles
Whakamanawatia ngā tamariki kia eke panuku

“Ugly, Loser, Pathetic. No one will ever love you. Do everyone a favor, kill yourself.”

The toxic mindset of a 14-year-old. Raised in foster care, abused, exhausted, unstable and insecure. Live in a bus shelter or make the choice to join a program where I will be fed and have a roof over my head. Even if just for a few weeks.

I'd have been a fool not to take the opportunity for kai and friendships. So, I did. I started my wilderness adventure with Project K. The selection process is incredible it managed to select me not at just one high school, but two. I was destined to be a part of the program.

Wagging, abusing drugs and alcohol, on a self-destructive path that would lead to imprisonment or death. Every day I count my blessings the Graeme Dingle Foundation came into my life. The wilderness adventure was something I never thought I would enjoy, but not only did I enjoy it, I thrived off it. With the attitude that I was going to make no friendships because I already had friends at school, I was shocked to find the group I went on my journey with would soon become life-long friends.

Returning home from the bush was hard. Back to reality; back to useless, self-serving friends. I had changed without even realizing it. I was stronger, more resilient and reflective. Doing the community challenge and having the chance to explore careers, meet people in worse situations than my own and give back to my community I saw my world exploding with opportunities I could not see before. Time to make change.

I can really be anyone I choose to be so why had I been choosing to be like my birth



parents? Abusive, sick, manipulative and addicted to drugs and alcohol. There was more for me out there!

But my 12 months of Mentorship is what sealed my fate. Being invited into a normal family home, to decorate a Christmas tree, to bake cookies. My mentor helped to get my first proper job, and a driver's license, she helped me to understand that I am the only person who is in control of my path and I can choose whether it's a path of greatness or a path of failure. Greatness it is!

This program, this organization it became my backbone, my value set and my reason to live. Whenever things went wayward connecting back with the organization, I realigned my priorities and values to that which my 14-year-old self had made my goal. To be someone, to have the ability to give back. Volunteering to share my journey at any opportunity as I became a successful young person. A Rotarian, a voluntary firefighter, a Project K mentor myself.

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

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I couldn't get enough of the feeling of giving back to an organization that gave me so much, so I became a Kiwi Can Leader too, I believe in all these programs and their messages. If I could have one wish in the world, it would be that all Tamariki across Aotearoa got to experience the amazing programs this organization has to offer.

Beautiful, Strong, Resilient. People love me and I finally love me too. I will not become a suicide statistic, I will become an advocate for those around me who struggle, I will fight to give this country the support it needs.

Won't you please join me?



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