

Adrian conquers challenges with a smile and confidence alongside his dedicated mentor

15 year old Adrian is one of the hundreds of Canterbury students who have taken part in the Graeme Dingle Foundations Project K programme.

Project K has, for nearly 30 years, been the flagship programme run by the Foundation. Its purpose is to help students engage and take on physical and emotional challenges, equipping them with all they need to achieve great things in their futures. The programme includes a three week wilderness adventure challenge, followed by one on one mentoring with a trained adult.

When Adrian was first offered a spot on the Project K Wilderness Adventure, he was a bit 'freaked out' his first thoughts were "what about my phone?" and "I'm going to be away from my family the whole time" he told us he was really doubting himself and wondering if he could really do the wilderness adventure part of Project K. Quickly, this perspective shifted when he was brought together with other participants to take part in what would become the experience of a lifetime.

"It was an experience that I will forever remember as the best time of my life as a 15 year old camping, tramping, biking, crossing rivers, rope climbing work, meeting new people, and simply trying new things. Even better I had a group other people my age alongside me the whole time, people I thought I would never talk to, that became a big part of the whole program and my life."

"I will never forget the times where we all cried, laughed, talked around a campfire under the bright night stars, shared tents, and a roof over our heads, biking up high mountains encouraging each other to 'Keep going! You can do this!' We truly became a family out there and, of course, had many more memorable moments!"

The experience, as one might anticipate, came with plenty of challenges for the students too.

"Having to carry tons of weight on your back for a long time throughout the day was very tiring, especially when we had to walk up steep hills and mountains - it felt like I was going to collapse at any point. Then there was the biking, when I was biking up the mountain it felt like it was never going to end. My feet just constantly on the move trying to keep up. Even though it sounds bad I'm glad it all happened, and I got to face these challenges because every step I took was worth it!"

Following the wilderness adventure Adrian was paired with his Mentor, Lance. Mentoring is a key component of the programme with mentors and their mentee meet regularly to set and achieve goals together throughout the year.



After wilderness, we had our mentor pairing...it was pretty nerve racking I didn't want to meet these strange people coming out of nowhere, but after meeting them and getting to know who they are and their stories [I thought] all of them were lovely, kind and open minded people and it wasn't as nerve racking as I thought!"

Lance is a teacher who saw mentoring as another opportunity to work with and help young people. "Mentoring gives them another adult in their life that they can lean on and provides another perspective for them to draw on" he said.

Lance observed Adrian as being motivated to give things a go, keen to help others and give back. He was not scared of a challenge and was open to ideas of others. "He is part of a large family, but Dad was working overseas at the time. My mentee was the oldest child in the home, and this came with expectations that he would step up and help a lot around the house."

Adrian revered his mentor, saying he couldn't have asked for a better pairing.

"My mentor [Lance] was truly amazing, and I couldn't have asked for a better, or any other mentor! He was a very trustworthy, kind, a goal setter, understanding and many more great things. He helped me see new [perspectives] in life and how to goal set, for example when we went out for a simple walk somewhere we set a distance and time for how long we would walk. Teaching me goal setting I think is very helpful especially [when] thinking about my future. I'm so grateful he took the time to mentor me along the way! So big thanks to him!



"Before taking [part in] this programme I would describe myself a very slow paced, non-proactive but very outgoing. This programme certainly affected me in the most positive way. I realised things about myself and those around me that I wouldn't have even realised being out in the world. It showed me how to respect, communicate, become independent, to use my voice, to hear other people's voices, to open-up to new things in life and to NEVER GIVE UP on challenges ahead no matter how scary it can be and face it with a strong smile and with confidence. Qualities that I thought I never had until joining this programme."

Adrian continues to succeed at school and is excited for all the opportunities that lay ahead. "I'm still a school student studying in year 11 and I'm currently looking for a job. I certainly want to travel to more places in the world. I want to get a job and continue studying - I was also thinking of studying abroad in South Korea or Philippines - but achieving school is my main goal and then going to university... I want to start back up my hobbies as soon as I can, which are hip-hop, martial arts and volleyball".

Adrian's mentor Lance said he learned a lot about himself as well as others during the process "I have signed up to mentor again. My very positive experience last time leaves me with high expectations. I feel that I need to wipe the slate and go in with no expectations."