
**From social anxiety, to flying a plane –
Project K Student and Mentor team up to step
out of their comfort zone.**

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

Chelsea Verdonk is an Operations and Client Services Manager in the finance industry who, over the past years, has generously committed her spare time to mentoring young people in Graeme Dingle Foundation's Project K Programme in Canterbury.

"I first heard about the organisation through word of mouth. I had been looking at ways I could volunteer within the community and thought the organisation and its programmes sounded like something I would love to get involved with" explains Chelsea.

Project K is a programme designed to push 14 year olds out of their comfort zone, helping them to gain confidence, and set and achieve goals with the support of a Mentor. Students take part in a Wilderness Adventure before beginning weekly 1:1 sessions with an adult mentor, whose role is to keep them engaged and setting and achieving their goals - that's where Chelsea stepped up to help.

"I think mentoring gives a young person encouragement and guidance as they navigate their teen years. It provides support, connection, and social-emotional skills. It also offers an ear that is outside of their school circles and family."

Chelsea Verdonk has been a Mentor with the Graeme Dingle Foundation since 2021 and in 2023, was paired with 14 year old Hornby High School student, Bronté.

"My Mentee Bronté told me she would get anxious in social situations and was more comfortable playing games on her computer than interacting face to face." said Chelsea.

Bronté's mother, Louise, described her daughter as quite shy with not much self-confidence. "She only had a few friends and found it hard to talk to strangers [but through the programme] Bronté's confidence grew every week. Bronté really liked her mentor Chelsea and enjoyed spending time with her. "



In 2023 Bronté and Chelsea decided together, to take part in the Foundation's 'Fly for Youth' fundraiser, where they would fundraise for the Foundation, and in return have the chance to fly a helicopter or plane.

"Chelsea did a flight lesson and took Bronté up in the plane as a passenger - the reason Bronté chose to fly a helicopter is because she's scared of flying in a plane, but with Chelsea's encouragement, Bronté went up with her (she said it was scarier than when she flew the helicopter - but she did it!)" said mum, Louise.

Chelsea highlighted her mentee Bronté's determination and growth throughout the Fly for Youth fundraiser, especially her taking initiative to come up with her own fundraising idea.

"Not only did she raise a great amount of money, but she also stepped out of her comfort zone by getting out into the community to sell her biscuits she made and share her Project K journey with others at the same time.

She is a superstar, and I watched her confidence grow throughout our journey."



Chelsea says she has learnt a lot about the challenges facing young people today particularly in a world influenced so much by social media and technology and praised the work of the Foundation.

"Graeme Dingle Foundation is an excellent organisation and I feel lucky I have had the opportunity to be a part of it."

Bronté's Mum, Louise says Bronté continues to grow and form stronger relationships with her peers, even gaining the confidence to stand in front of a crowd and complete a speech at the end of her time with Project K.

"Bronté gained so much confidence, she stood up and did a speech at the awards evening, which she would never have done before Project K. She's made more friends at school and others have noticed the change in her. Mentoring the students gives a chance for the students to relate and socialise with adults that are not their parents or teachers. Project K was an amazing experience for our daughter to be involved in - thanks so much."