

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

14 year old Trey is one of the hundreds of Canterbury students who have taken part in the Graeme Dingle Foundations He Ara Ākonga programme.

Barb Taylor is a Teacher, Marketing Manager & Consultant, Property Developer & Investor who coincidentally attended Linwood College and later taught at the school. So, it was a happy coincidence when in 2023 she was paired as a Mentor for Trey, a student of Te Aratai College – formally Linwood College.

“I wanted to give back to marginalised youth, particularly students from Te Aratai, formally Linwood High/College, where I went to school and later taught English” says Barb.

The ‘He Ara Akonga’ programme, which is run through the Graeme Dingle Foundation, is an 8-month mentoring programme designed for 14-15 year olds referred from schools and organisations in their community. Through a wilderness adventure, workshops, and mentoring, the programme arms young people with a belief in their own ability to complete tasks, achieve goals, and helps them to find purpose and direction.

Barb knows first-hand the difference Mentoring can make on a young person’s life, an acknowledgement which made her excited to pair up with Trey.

“Mentoring can make a young person realize they have some control over their lives, not just let life happen to them” she said.

“My mentee Trey was very quiet and found it difficult to communicate when he was outside his comfort zone which was often! The major obstacle he faced was believing in his own ability which made trying things outside his comfort zone very difficult.”

Trey was 14 when he took part in the He Ara Akonga programme in 2023. Now aged 15, we spoke to both Trey and his Dad, to reflect on how the programme helped him build confidence in himself.

Before starting the programme Trey described himself as having “Quite low self-confidence” and his supportive father, Corey, says “Trey was a wee bit shy before starting the programme”.



Trey grasped the opportunity of the programme and worked well with his Mentor to begin pushing himself out of his comfort zone, taking on difficult obstacles and setting goals.

“Trey started approaching people he wouldn't normally talk with and also spoke with confidence. The support that Barb had for Trey was amazing! He has changed significantly. He is now confident in talking to people he doesn't know”.
says Corey.

Trey echoed his dad's sentiment explaining his own progress with the help of his Mentor Barb.

“I enjoyed meeting other people and communicating with other people that helped me expand my comfort zone - My mentor [Barb] she was a very nice and a welcoming mentor, she helped me try and get through any hard obstacles with that being either with work or physical.”



Trey now describes himself as “More open and talkative” and while he continues his study at school, he hopes in the next five years to get a job and buy a car too.

Corey highlighted the importance of mentoring and how it can help young people.

“Mentoring is important because it helps our children see things in life from someone outside our household differently. Our entire family appreciates what the Graeme Dingle foundation has done for Trey”.

Barb said she's learnt from the experience too “The turning point for Trey was learning to trust that I wouldn't suggest doing something that he couldn't handle. Patience and perseverance eventually pays off! It's extremely rewarding seeing the growth in your mentee over the year”.