



Newsletter - Issue 29

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Contents

<i>The Ups and Downs of a Child's Development</i>	1
<i>More Academic Success</i>	1
<i>NCEA, Streaming and Other Concerns</i>	2
<i>Our Response</i>	2
<i>Dreamer Tramping Club's 2nd Adventure</i>	3
<i>End of Year Celebration</i>	3
<i>Corporate Support</i>	4
<i>Volunteer Profile</i>	4
<i>The USA Connection</i>	4
<i>Quote of the Day</i>	4

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We have completed 7 years of our project, and we hope that you've enjoyed following our journey as much as we've enjoyed travelling it. There have been some concerns along the way, but also many, many highlights, only some of which we've been able to share in these newsletters. We wish all our readers and supporters a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

The Ups and Downs of a Child's Development

Robert Beniamina has featured in a number of prior newsletters (Issues 10, 13 and 18) with good efforts in showing initiative, hip-hop dancing and the "Go for the Peak" programme. There was also a great story in Issue 20, about Robert's interaction with his mentor, Spencer Willis, which lead to a career change for Spence so that he could follow his own dream to become a chef!

So we were saddened when Robert's schoolwork started declining last year, he had a number of "incident reports" at school, and his Mum reported troublesome behaviour at home.



Luckily, the Pacifica culture encourages and enjoys very strong family bonds, so Robert was sent to live with an uncle, and attend a new school. This new environment has worked well for Robert, who has undoubted abilities but perhaps needed a stricter environment (as most teenage boys probably do!). Ant and Lynn were thrilled to attend the prize giving at Robert's new school last week, where Robert was awarded a prize in English and distinction in food technology. He also sang a solo part in a quartet that performed on stage. Perhaps the best news for Robert, however, was the appearance of his father at the prize giving, after a long absence from Robert's life.

More Academic Success

Tevita Fualalo, Janita Siva, and Amelia Unufe also performed well with their studies this year. Janita was 1st in her class overall, Tevita came 2nd in his class and Amelia 2nd in her class (*read more about Amelia's success in the Volunteer Profile on page 4*). It was great to see four other students - Talilotu, Raela, Luke, and Robel awarded subject and house group certificates for their efforts this year as well.

We were also thrilled to notice that many of our tutors were recognized for their academic success at the school prize givings. We are deeply indebted to these young people who give so generously of their time and talents, and we will be encouraging the Dreamers to act in a similar capacity when they are seniors.

NCEA, Streaming and Other Concerns

This has been a crunch year for the Dreamers, and it has highlighted some concerns with their learning achievements. They are in Year 10 this year, which means that they have recently had to select their desired subjects for NCEA Level One next year. Unfortunately, however, many of them are being directed towards doing "unit standard" subjects rather than "achievement standards." While this might help improve the academic scores of the school overall and provide a better "feeling" of success for each student, it means that these kids are no longer on a track towards university study, as many "unit standards" courses at high school do not qualify for entrance to degree level courses at university.

In schools that stream their students, it is difficult for kids in the lower streamed classes to select the "achievement standards" subjects unless they have standout grades. And for various reasons, some of our Dreamers have not achieved such grades... ☹️

There are two major reasons for this, but please see the article, "Closing the Achievement Gaps" in Issue 11 for further background:

1. Children from under-resourced communities often start school without the basic skills that makes them ready to learn. This could be due to coming from English-as-second-language homes, extreme poverty meaning no books in the homes, over-employed parents have no time to read to their kids, etc.
2. When they arrive at school, such children need the very best teachers to accelerate their learning, create a love of learning, etc., but this is not usually how schools in poorer communities are resourced.

We have some sympathy for schools that are serving large populations of under-performing students, but the proper solution is better resourcing (higher quality teachers, more remedial work, etc.), rather than sorting students according to their learning achievements in their schooling to date.

You also have to wonder how this level of sorting negatively affects a student's esteem and view of "self" which in turn reflects on effort and behaviour in the classroom environment.



Our Response

Ant and Lynn have implemented three important measures to help our Dreamers, supported by their Mentors, to achieve academic success:

1) Academic Mentoring

Ant has positioned himself more permanently in the schools during the school day to meet with Dreamers, reflecting with them on their grades, progress and areas for improvement, as well as ensuring they are selecting subject options for the years ahead that create a pathway to the best possible future for them

2) Introduction to the Tertiary (College) Preparation Programme

This great resource was developed by the "I Have a Dream" foundation in the US. It helps explore each Dreamer's 'Skills and Interests' and 'Future Career' possibilities, and helps to 'Plan' and 'Prepare' their future pathway through high school and beyond.

3) My Pathways - My Progress Form

This is an informative document created to track the academic pathways and progress of each Dreamer. This will provide better information about how the Dreamer is doing at school, and help direct all conversations & interactions we have with them and the associated adults helping them when discussing school progress, future career planning or goal setting.



Dreamer Tramping Club's 2nd Adventure

We just got back from a great weekend, staying at a ski lodge on Mt Ruapehu. We had hoped to do the Tongariro Crossing (www.tongarirocrossing.org.nz), but the weather didn't cooperate.

However, as you can see in these photos, we had an excellent time doing some day walks in the area, and providing plenty of bonding time for the group of 11 Dreamers, 5 Mentors, 3 Staff, 1 Parent and 3 Friends. What was especially encouraging is that the Dreamers cheerfully took on the job of cooking **all** the meals, and cleaning up **most** of the mess!



End of Year Celebration

After a terrible rain storm the day beforehand, our prayers were answered, the sun came out and we held a great event at Shakespeare Regional Park on December 5th to celebrate the end of another school year and the onset of Christmas, but mostly to show our appreciation for our volunteers. We gave a movie voucher to every one of our wonderful Tutors, and a fantastic book ("*The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything*" by Sir Ken Robinson) to our incomparable Mentors. If you want a preview of the book, look at his excellent speech to a TED conference www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity.html



This book addresses some of the issues raised in the story about NCEA etc, on page 2 above. Many children do not thrive in the industrial-era school system that we have today, as it is increasingly less resourced for uncovering each individual child's special passions and abilities, which might lie outside the Maths, Science and English classrooms.



Above: The girls soak up the rays of sunshine by the seaside, whilst the boys discover that playing rugby in a big puddle is much more fun than the beach any day!

Corporate Support

Once again we are pleased to report on the generous support of our project by some companies:

1. UPS presented us with a cheque for US\$5,000, which was especially gratefully received as our capital base has been severely damaged by the global financial crisis. The UPS Foundation supports community groups worldwide, wherever they do business, and is a great example of the power of CSR (corporate social responsibility).
2. Penguin Books provided us with a discount on the book purchased for the Mentors.



Scott & Ant receive cheque from UPS team

Volunteer Profile - Therese Clark

We ask our Mentors to aim for three goals with their Dreamer:

1. Connect their mentee's Dream to achieving success in school
2. Support their Dreamer's academic efforts
3. Exposure to new opportunities and experiences

Therese Clark, who mentors Amelia Unufe, has been a standout example of the 2nd goal this year, as well as being an excellent all-round Mentor.

Therese has been helping Amelia with preparation for the end-of-year exams, which included a 6 hour session on a recent Saturday! It clearly worked very well, as Amelia scored 91% in her end of year maths exam at Mt Roskill Grammar School this year, and was awarded 2nd in her class at the end of year prize giving. Congratulations to the both of you!!



Left: Amelia Unufe (Dreamer) Right: Therese Clark (Mentor)

The USA Connection

One of the strongest benefits of the "I Have a Dream" programme is its proven model and long history in the USA. This was demonstrated to us (again!) recently, when Mark and Margie Buchbinder visited us. Mark and Margie sponsor an "I Have a Dream" project in Miami, FL, so we had a very instructive day with them, sharing ideas and resources.

They told us about a great book that captures the essence of what we're all trying to achieve. *"The Pact: Three Young Men Make a Promise and Fulfil a Dream"* tells the story of three fatherless black boys in Newark, NJ, and their shared commitment and journey to becoming Doctors. For more on their incredible story, please see: www.threedoctors.com/ourstory.php

Quote of The Day

Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education.
- Martin Luther King, Jr.

"The "I Have a Dream"® Programme helps children from low-income areas reach their education and career goals by providing a long-term program of mentoring, tutoring, and enrichment, with an assured opportunity for higher education."