



Hamish Lawes.



Jaun Odendaal.

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Young Kiwis are flipping expectations while quietly growing into tomorrow's leaders.

Walk into any McDonald's across the country and you'll find something remarkable happening behind the counter. Teenagers and young adults are managing teams, solving problems on the fly, training others, and picking up life skills they'll carry long after they leave.

As one of Aotearoa's largest youth employers, McDonald's employs more than 10,000 people across the country, with around 70 percent of them being under 25. While it's often seen as just a stepping stone, what's becoming increasingly clear is that Macca's can be the launchpad for something much bigger.

Seventeen-year-old Hamish Lawes, from McDonald's Fenton Street Rotorua, is proof of just how far a young person can go when given the tools and encouragement to grow. Having joined the crew a year ago, the John Paul College student and avid musical

performer, was drawn to the flexibility Macca's offered.

"I liked the hours and the team," he explains. "When I started, I thought I'd come and get the job done, but the more I learned, the more I realised how much opportunity there actually is."

He's now assistant shift manager preparing to take on the shift manager role and will soon be attending McDonald's Advancing Your Leadership course.

"I love that no two days are the same," he adds. "Teaching others different stations keeps things fresh, and the problem-solving skills I've gained are things I'll use forever."

Down in Taupō, Jaun Odendaal has had a similar experience. At 23, he's been at McDonald's for four years.

"I started while I was still in school, just to make some money," he says. "I enjoyed the job so much I decided

to stay and work up the ranks."

Now a crew trainer with a hand in kitchen operations and maintenance, Jaun is aiming for a management role.

"It's not just about flipping burgers," he says. "For me, being a crew trainer is about understanding people. I like figuring out how they learn and adapting the way I train," he says. Looking ahead, Jaun adds, "I want to be the best manager I can for my crew."

There's still a tendency to underestimate jobs like these. But, in many ways, what young people learn at Macca's, including valuable skills like communication, time management and teamwork under pressure, are the same skills that carry them forward in life, no matter what they choose to do.

For Hamish, Jaun and many others, it's not just a job. It's where they learned to back themselves. **U**

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