
Denise Turner

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The McDonald's Te Tai Tokerau Scholarship was important to me and my whānau because it gave me so many opportunities and it was the key that unlocked my hidden, and otherwise unknown, potential. It was the reason why this small-town country girl from Hokianga was thrust into the hidden heart of Auckland City to discover myself and to truly understand where I come from, where I belong and where I want to go in life. It provided me with a forum to experience University and it gave my parents the opportunity to ease their financial burden to get me through uni to fulfill my dreams and that only enhanced my eagerness to succeed.

The most precious, monumental and grounding aspect of the scholarship was the fact we got to live and share our 3 years with 5 other Northland youth – Tracey (Going) Finau, Annie (Wordley) Sedgley, Natalya (Bradley) Grant, Calkin Rameka and Jason Poata. That gave us all a sense of belonging and direction and we were brothers and sisters. The personal growth, knowledge and skills I gained and developed because of the scholarship is insurmountable - how to work a room and mingle, how to be professional and punctual, how the big bad world works outside of Hokianga and so much more. The whanaungatanga, the experiences, the friendships, the many many memories, the opportunities, the support, the networking and the Mana that comes with it all is irreplaceable and is something that I still boast about 19 years later.



Graduate: Certificate in Business & Bachelor of Māori Development

My fondest memory was at a McDeez dinner held at the culinary school on campus and I sat next to Colleen and she ordered us a \$40 bottle of wine. I'm not sure who paid for it, but to put that into perspective of a pōhara student back then I would spend no more than \$20 a week on 10 bottles of cheap premixed liquor that would last me the whole weekend, together we drank 2 weekends worth in an hour.

I spent 5 years at AUT and achieved a Certificate in Business, half a Diploma in Business then cross credited onto a Bachelor in Māori Development majoring in Business. I successfully graduated with a bachelor's degree, along with my sister Karen and was awarded my McDonald's Scholarship Taonga.

A story that is legendary for me.

My parents and I traveled from Hokianga for the ceremony which was such a successful and proud occasion for us. I got my Taonga and we travelled home that night where I lost the Taonga somewhere in Wellsford. I was absolutely shattered; all my years of hard work and I have lost the very gift that symbolized my success. It haunted me for years and was a bittersweet story all my family and friends knew.

Fast forward to today and my partner Steven has just signed on as an AUT Supplier for the McDonald's Scholarship Taonga. The ultimate pay back for my huge loss and a beautiful declaration of how the McDonald's Scholarship still helps me to this day and influences my everyday life.

I have since graduated with a Certificate in Animal Care and a Diploma in Veterinary Nursing at UNITEC which is a dream of mine that I am still pursuing. But I am currently working as a Personal Assistant at the Northland District Health Board – Mid North.

To Mama Hariata, Kitea, Colleen, my mentor Byron Maxwell, and my personal sponsor Al Dunn, I could not have achieved my goals or have become half the person I am today without your undying love and support through the McDonald's Scholarship, ngā mihi aroha ki a koutou katoa.

I am a proud McDeez Baby (2002 - 2004) and always will be.

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Wesley Higgins

**Graduate: Bachelor of Sport
& Recreation**

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An opportunity to be a recipient of the McDonald's Te Tai Tokerau Scholarship was seemingly far-fetched. Not only in the sense of achievement but the idea of attending University was not a common thing coming from a Māori whānau in Ahipara, Northland, a small community in the Far North of NZ.

When I was awarded the McDonald's Scholarship it was important to my whānau and me because it shaped a direction. It provided a sense of achievement and reward. It also gave me vision, witnessing so many people who allowed their lives to be heavily influenced towards gang life, alcohol and drugs, the McDonald's Scholarship provided me with so much hope.



I will be forever grateful for the opportunity presented to me way back in 2005.

The skills that are instilled through this amazing channel of communication and networking, ultimately prepared me for a life that I felt was so improbable.

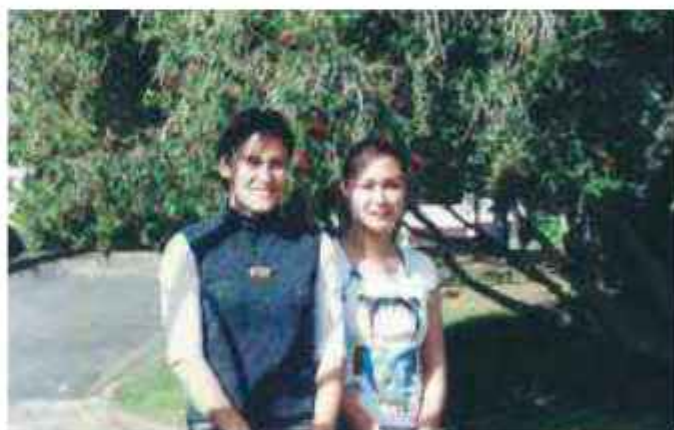
Here I am 17 years later still networking and sharing the aroha and tautoko of the McDonald's Scholarship. It's an unbelievably opportunistic forum that made a potentially impossible outcome possible.

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*Ko ngā tikanga whai hua, o tō tātou Māoritanga,
Ko ngā mea nō konei ake nei, nō tēnei whenua kura,
Kia whakatapua hei taonga tuku ki Niu Tīreni.*

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Chelsea Bilich-Petersen

When I applied for the McDonald's Te Tai Tokerau Scholarship in 2011 I had no idea the impact it would have on me and my whānau to come. I was an independent and troubled youth growing up in Whangārei. Attending Tikipunga High School I was lucky enough to have our kuia Whaea Ngawai Anaru, our kaumātua Mātua Hoki Tua and our HOD Māori Whaea Te Amohia Taua-Glassie and her whānau see potential in me that I couldn't. Komiti Māori selected me to apply for the scholarship and to my disbelief, I was a 2011 recipient.

Becoming a Macca baby didn't only help me financially, but it opened a door to a whānau away from home. Coming from a decile 1 high school of 500 students to a lecture theatre of what felt like double was daunting, however I was lucky, I wasn't tackling it alone. It was comforting to be living with the 3 recipients from my year Trisha Smith, Riana King, and Bella Jackman. We were also lucky to have a 2nd year Macca baby, Joe-Vaughan Rakete-Tane as our 5th flat mate.

Whaea Hariata filled AUT with a Tai Tokerau warmth that some days I desperately needed. She was a huge support in transitioning from High School to Tertiary. If there was anything we needed she was and continues to be there to support and guide us.



Becoming a part of this whānau opened doorways to lifelong friendships, experiences, and perspective. Making connections with alumni students gave me a glimpse at the light at the end of the tunnel. I was able to connect with alumni who had graduated and were now working in their trained industries.

Through my connection with AUT, Whaea Hariata gave me the opportunity to do some work in recruitment with Kei Ā Tātou Te Ihi. This not only helped me financially while studying but it gave me a chance to encourage and support rangatahi interested in tertiary education.

“ Whaea Hariata filled AUT with a Tai Tokerau warmth that some days I desperately needed.

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Graduate: Bachelor of Sport & Recreation

To me this was one of the many highlights of my experiences at AUT as it was a chance to give guidance like the guidance I received in High School. I worked with KATTI throughout my 3 years living in Auckland.

With the support of the Scholarship, hard work and loads of awahi, I graduated before starting my own whānau. I am now a mother of two sons, Tyson and Sonny. My experiences with the McDonald's Te Tai Tokerau Scholarship have left me with ambitions to do something similar. I am currently studying a Post Graduate Diploma in Business to help with my pathway to giving back to our community. I aim to create a pathway to trades through our family roofing business for our rangatahi to become qualified sole traders themselves. I want to be the person that believes in our young people and give them the tools to create a better life for themselves and whānau just like the AUT McDonald's Scholarship did for me.

It is important to me as a mother and a wahine Māori to create opportunities for our next generation and I truly believe this perspective is a result of the opportunity to learn in tertiary education alongside kids just like me.

They say it takes a village, and I am so grateful that I am a part of this one.

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*They say it takes a village,
and I am so grateful that I
am a part of this one.*

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Bella Scott

Graduate: Bachelor of Communication Studies

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The McDonald's Te Tai Tokerau scholarship was important to me and my whānau because it provided me a community to be a part of upon my arrival to Auckland University of Technology.

Being Māori on the lighter end of the skin tone spectrum, I sometimes struggle with feeling like an outsider. Upon leaving school, if I had not been a recipient of this scholarship part of my identity as a wahine Māori could have diminished. Receiving the McDonald's Te Tai Tokerau scholarship gifted me a community that features many intelligent and successful people who I could aspire to, all of whom were ready to welcome me into their generous whānau.

Leaving school and entering adulthood is an unexpected journey and thanks to this scholarship the pathway forward was always a little clearer. I knew every year there would be an event that would always have familiar and friendly faces that over the years would grow to be great friends and mentors. I knew every year that my tie to Te Ao Māori would be reinvigorated. And I knew that every year there would be new anxious babies who I could in turn be a friend and mentor to.

There are the obvious other benefits such as the financial backing, the first-year accommodation unit and the shouted dinners, but the overall and overwhelming support that this whānau provides is worth so much more.

There is no other aspect of my life in which I am part of this type of community. I have been a McDonald's baby for 10 years now and I am forever grateful that I was a recipient of this fantastic scholarship.

Attending university (and completing my degree) may not have happened if it weren't for the opportunity provided by this Scholarship. Coming to a different city, doing different things in a totally new routine is a huge change and the underlying support and network of people wanting you to succeed really keeps you moving forward and committed.

Me te mihi nui ki a koe Māmā Hariata, mo to manaakitanga me tō kaha ki tēnei karahihi ēnei tau katoa. You have had a huge impact on my life, and I will be forever grateful to you and the team you have built to make the magic happen!

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Bethany Shepherd

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The McDonald's Te Tai Tokerau scholarship was important to me and my whānau because it allowed me to connect with a great support system to help me through my university journey. For me personally, the connections I made, especially with Māori Liaison Services, I don't know that I would have made it without this scholarship.

These connections were a massive support system for me. The awhi and encouragement they gave helped me push through many of life's struggles and my feelings of wanting to give up.

The other important factor about this scholarship was the people I got to meet and become close with. Not only did I become friends with the recipients in my cohort, but I got to know previous recipients and later recipients. Being someone who came from a large extended family, it really made a difference to my experience to have these connections.



Graduate: Bachelor of Laws, Bachelor of Arts

This scholarship also took a lot of financial pressure off myself and my family. This was especially significant in my first year of university, when I was transitioning from a small town to the university halls. Without this I wouldn't have had that ability to live in the halls and my transition would have been a significantly different experience. I am grateful for the opportunity the scholarship gave me in providing me with an amazing foundation to set me up for my years of study and change to independent living.

My overall university experience and what I got out of it was made so much better by this scholarship. I am forever grateful for the support and connections that the McDonald's Te Tai Tokerau scholarship has brought me. It has been a significant factor in my success.

