

Natasha Lewis

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The McDonald's Te Tai Tokerau Scholarship came into my life when I didn't know what I wanted to do. Getting ready to leave school, I loved sport and wanted to help people – I thought the best mix of those two things was physiotherapy and was devastated when I didn't get accepted. Feeling lost, I considered not going to university anymore, but Hariata had already accepted me for the scholarship and with the safety net of the McDonald's whānau, I thought I'd give university a go. I started in Sport and Recreation with the intention of transferring to Physiotherapy if I got good enough grades.



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The McDonald's whānau provided support when I was broke, tired, and burnt out, and were a constant and reliable source of warmth.

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Turns out, I am terrible at human anatomy and physiology and would make a terrible physiotherapist. But, through the process and path that the scholarship set me on, I found what I was great at - sports management and marketing!

When I discovered sports management and marketing, learning felt easy for the first time in my life. I was captivated and got the learning bug. I decided to extend my learning with a Double Degree in Business and Sport and Recreation. In this study, with the funds from the McDonald's scholarship, I was able to study abroad at the German Sports University in Cologne. I also received the awards of Top Double Degree Student, Top Marketing Student, and Top Māori Business Student and went on to finish my master's degree with first-class honours.

Awards aside, I had found a way to stay true to myself. When I interviewed for the scholarship, I loved sport and wanted to help people. When I combined these to find sports management and marketing, I found I was able to help even more people through the promotion of sport in the community and inspiring others by promoting high-performance sport. In my role now, I am Marketing Manager at AUT Millennium and every day I get to promote community sport, wellbeing, and work alongside Olympians to inspire youth to get involved in sport.

***Graduate: Bachelor of Sport & Recreation,
Bachelor of Business,
Master of Business***

When I look back, I credit a huge amount to the McDonald's Te Tai Tokerau Scholarship because it allowed me to take a chance and find my place in the world. The McDonald's whānau provided support when I was broke, tired, and burnt out, and were a constant and reliable source of warmth. My family back home always felt comfort that I had a sense of belonging in Auckland and I am grateful that my mum's stress was eased!

Looking ahead, I continue to have an urge to give back through sport, health, and wellbeing and hope to bring that to my wider whānau and Te Tai Tokerau in the coming years.

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*Pikipiki Tāwhaki!
Kakekake Tāwhaki!
Maewa, maewa i te rangi, maewa!*

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Kerehi Warwick

Graduate: Bachelor of Māori Development

“The McDonald’s Te Tai Tokerau scholarship was important to me and my whānau because it provided me with opportunities to access higher learning and education that otherwise may have not existed in my life. I was born and raised in Waimamaku, a small rural community in Hokianga on the West Coast of the Far North.

In our remote and isolated community te taiao our maunga, awa, whenua, moana and waka surrounded me and provided me with the best educational activities and opportunities to learn.

As a young Māori naïve to what existed outside of our harbour, I ventured to Whangārei for high school. Leading into my final year at high school, I wondered how it would be possible to attend university. The harder I thought about university, the further away I was from completing an application, so I buried my head. I worried that my application would be denied, due to not having enough English to complete a degree, whether other Māori attended university, and as a young Māori who was raised in such a small community, I worried that there would not be other people like me who understood what it felt like to come from a small rural community and the intricacies of life in the Far North.

Coming into the final term as a year 12 student, I met a wahine who, along with many other people, contributed to me going to university. As I reflect, I remember how disconnected I felt at a mainstream high school and the low number of Māori who socialised the idea of attending university. My turning point was a career expo. I attended a career day expo where I met Whaea Hariata known to many as māmā. She radiated confidence and embodied ‘proud to be Māori’. After attending the career expo, I quickly applied to AUT, submitted my application for the McDonald’s Te Tai Tokerau scholarship and to my surprise, I was successful in both applications.

The most significant feature of this scholarship is how it brings together different undergraduate taura from around Te Tai Tokerau. We had a home that was ours, we had people who looked and sounded like us, and we all related to life in the north. These features were essential in being able to settle at university and cope with our new lives in the city.



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Tia-Lionie Cassidy



The McDonald's Te Tai Tokerau scholarship was important to me and my whānau because attending AUT university would not have been possible for me without it. Due to financial circumstances and being raised by a single mother and having 3 other siblings, a lot of things were out of reach for our whānau.

I have always been academic from a very young age, instilled by my mum who is also an academic, I loved education and to learn. I attended Ōkaihau College and when this amazing scholarship opportunity was presented to me, I jumped at it and I knew in my mind it was already mine. This was my ticket to venture off to the big smoke to make my whānau proud. and I did just that.



After being granted the McDonald's Te Tai Tokerau scholarship I went to AUT University to study a bachelor's degree in Hospitality Management double majoring in Tourism and Food and Beverage. I studied my heart out day in day out, gaining A grades was a normal thing for me because I always did my absolute best and therefore, I could not be disappointed with the grade I received.

Throughout my studies in my chosen industry, I am appreciative to have learnt deeper meanings about elements of my Māori culture, to historic aspects of our food and traditions, and even why we eat food. The AUT Māori Liaisons provided ongoing support for all students, and I truly appreciate their help for making me better academically while taking some of stress away by being there talk to.

Graduate: Bachelor of International Hospitality Management

In 2018, I graduated alongside my fellow classmates, and I was granted the honour to be the graduate speaker which I made sure to put my best foot forward.

This was my proudest moment in my life because I was the face of Māori success while making my whānau, hapū and iwi proud.

Without this amazing scholarship opportunity none of this would have been possible for me and I will never ever forget the life changing experiences and people I met along the way.

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Deana Kerepeti-Vaughan

**Graduate: Bachelor of
Communications,
Bachelor of Business**

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I vividly remember the day I first walked into Flat 19 at Akoranga Village, filled with anticipation and excitement, thinking about what the next four years would look like. Well, four years has flown by and now I'm left with precious memories of late-night McDonald feeds, long study sessions, teasing the new babies, DMCs with Māmā and endless laughs. My time at AUT was one of growth, learning and experience. Not only did I learn about business and comms, but I also learnt how to become an adult. I figured out how to pay my own bills and become independent. These times have made me the wahine I am today.

I am humbled when I look at where I am today, reflecting on the things I have achieved, the experiences and life skills I have gained, and I acknowledge Whaea Hariata, the Tari Takawaenga team, and the McDonald's team (especially Simon Kenny) for the endless support and aroha in my journey at AUT.

The McDonald's Te Tai Tokerau scholarship isn't about money, it isn't about the McDonald's vouchers (though they always came in handy), it is about allowing us, young Māori wahine and tane, to create a vision and provide opportunities to make them a reality for ourselves. It is about giving us hope, courage and support to create, develop and achieve our dreams.

I acknowledge the organisation because they saw a need in the North and have been working diligently with AUT to provide resources and opportunities for Māori to pursue a life better for our whānau, hapū and iwi. Thank you to McDonald's and AUT.

Piki kau ake te oranga pai, hauhake tonu iho - Nōu tēnā e Hariata. With such grace, love, and passion for not only us your Maccas babies but every other Māori student at AUT, the fruits of your labour are flourishing and making such a powerful impact in our communities, hapū and iwi. I will be forever appreciative and grateful to know and have experienced your love and power as a wahine, kaiako, hoa and teacher. He mihi rangatira ki a koe e te Mareikura.

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Keani Erstich-Coles



The McDonald's Te Tai Tokerau scholarship was important to me and my whānau because it allowed me to embrace my Māoritanga in a place I felt motivated, appreciated and most importantly, loved. Without this scholarship, I wouldn't be the mana wahine I am today.

Growing up in the Far North my whole life, Te Ao Māori is all around you. However, being of fairer complexion due to my Croatian and English whakapapa, I struggled with a sense of impostor syndrome and anxiety around my identity. When I was put forward to be the candidate for my kura (Ōkaihau College) in 2016, I took the opportunity with both hands and really came into my own.

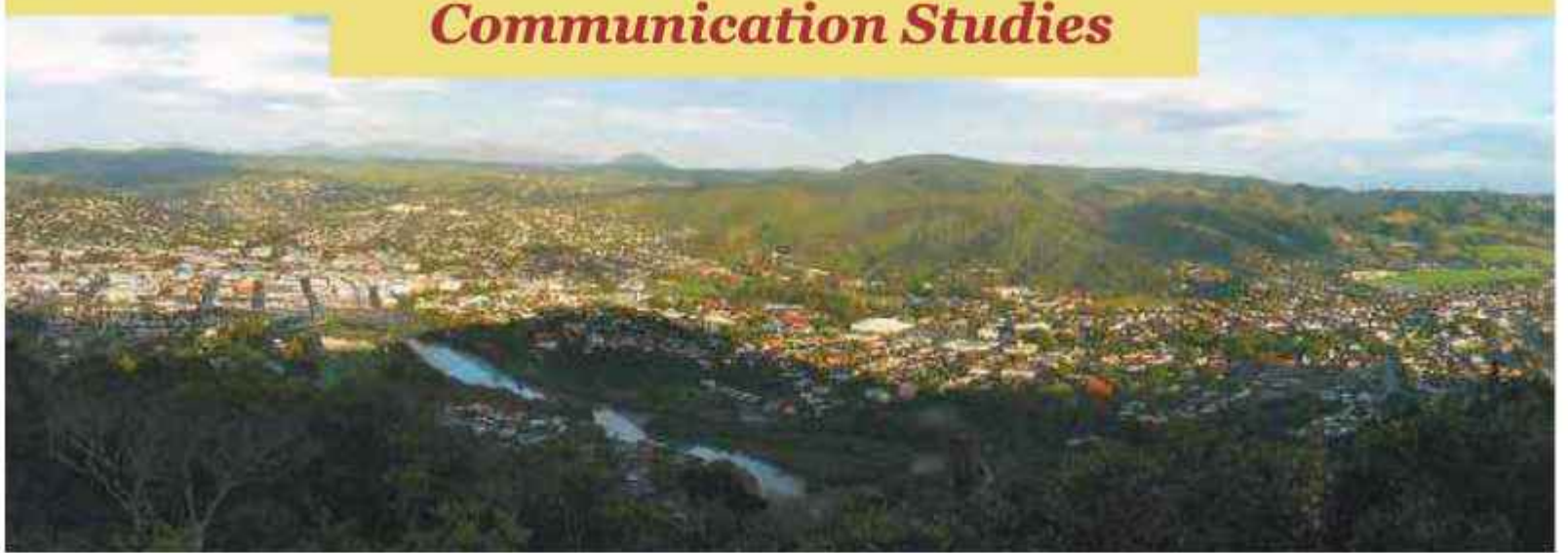
I joked with the panel about being the “māmā” to my friends, soccer tactics with Simon, and love of representing youth and Māori.

Once I got the call that I was successful, I broke down. Coming from a small town and a low-decile school, I never would have been able to go to university without a scholarship. For my whānau, it was a relief that they didn't have to bear any further financial burdens through trying to support my studies. They were able to continue to support my younger siblings whilst I was taken care of.

My parents could finally see me step into university studies at a young age, something they themselves could only do once my siblings and I were well into school. All the sacrifices they had to make by moving from Whangārei where my pāpā had a stable job to Ōhaeawai, where my nānā was close and could be looked after by my māmā full-time. They were all worth it for them to see me succeed.

This left me in the capable hands of Whaea Hariata and all my extended whānau at Te Tari Takawaenga Māori. My home away from home, my sanctuary. I credit a lot, if not all of my university success to them. Also, especially to Simon and McDonald's Big Macs.

Graduate: Bachelor of Communication Studies



Straight away I thought, McDonald's will be able to help me.

In my final year, I had to complete one of my last assignments for Radio that was an advertising campaign. We had to approach a business and see if they would let us design an advertising campaign for them over the semester, that would air across our station and social media. Straight away I thought, McDonald's will be able to help me. I emailed Simon and I pitched my advertising campaign to him at one of our yearly dinners at McDonald's HQ. Not even 5 minutes into my pitch and he was convinced saying "We always say we're happy to help our recipients with their studies in any way we can, and you're probably one of the first to take us up on that offer." He was in! I managed to get hundreds of Big Mac vouchers and some pūtea that helped me ace the assignment and get my degree. In a full circle moment, my graduate job was doing advertisements for McDonald's!

The McDonalds Te Tai Tokerau scholarship for me became about so much more than money. It was a chance to finally be embraced and acknowledged for not only my academic successes, but also who I was as a young Māori wahine. I gained such a confidence that I hadn't had before. I formed life-long bonds with my fellow recipients at Akoranga Village, in our whare that we dubbed, "Freshies Palace". It helped me gain work through Te Tari Takawaenga Māori during my studies. I got to speak to hundreds of students about my experiences at university, and my future aspirations to help Māori stories be told and represented in the media field.

A once in a lifetime experience and Kaupapa that I'm forever indebted to and honoured to be a part of.

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Ryland Hutana

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The McDonald's Te Tai Tokerau scholarship was important to me and my whānau because it allowed me to fully embark on my journey to telling my stories, our stories, and bringing them home. Gisborne is very different from Auckland. While I had been up here plenty when I was younger, I never had to face it alone. I was very excited to move up, but I never would have been able to imagine the true vastness that is Auckland.

Without the scholarship, I doubt I would have survived Auckland. The culture shock and unfamiliar faces left me feeling rather alone, but meeting the people I came to call my other whānau did a lot to help me adjust, and are still lifelong friends. In a place as diverse as Auckland is, it was lovely to have a place I could feel safe and welcome. Auckland sure has its moments of struggles and difficulties but with the scholarship and the unwavering support and aroha from the AUT and McDonald's whānau, I was able to persevere.

I can't ignore the financial support either, as it helped immensely, not only in alleviating some of the stress, but helping me to pursue my creative endeavors, which have helped me continue to expand on my skills and help grow my work portfolio.

The regular events that brought us all together were a reminder that I was not the only person braving this crazy place, and it is awesome to see those that have come after me do amazing things.





Graduate: Bachelor of Communication Studies

I can't ignore the fact I was the first from Te Tairāwhiti to have the honour of receiving the scholarship too, it wasn't until the big 25th anniversary dinner that I felt the weight of that. It has been an absolute pleasure to represent my home in the big smoke, and I will carry the mana of that forever.

I haven't even touched on what I am doing currently. After a brief but tumultuous time without a house or a job after graduating, I managed to plant my feet at Whakaata Māori, and have been there since. I have been able to tell our stories in fun, short ways, as well as expanding my knowledge of the social media platforms.

My ultimate goal is to create features, however, this was more than the perfect starting point for me, and I am excited to see where this pathway takes me. It will only be onwards and upwards from here.

I am extremely grateful for the opportunities and support this scholarship provided, and I can confidently say I am in a much better place because of it. I hope this scholarship continues to awhi our whānau for the years to come.

Thank you.

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