**Stories**

For Bridget Churchman the “Duke of Edinburgh’s Hillary Award was a dream of mine from a young age, after hearing the exciting and sometimes terrifying stories of an older sibling completing it.” Bridget, who completed her Award through Joshua Youth Award Centre, was unable to complete her Award through her school to begin with. “Initially unavailable through my school I learnt that if you want something that’s not in front of you, you have to make it happen yourself. After enlisting the help of my older sister who kindly agreed to do the paperwork to become an assessor, and my mum who taught us some of the outdoors skills, I was proud to both help facilitate and join a group of mostly younger students to complete the Bronze Award during my last year at college.” Nearing 25, Bridget had the opportunity to complete the Award, “which I did mostly to show 8-year-old me that I could achieve the same things I had once dreamed of.”

Bridget set an ambitious goal for her Physical Recreation section, aiming to train for and compete in triathlons, with end goal being a half-Ironman. Bridget has shown dedication and a strong competitive spirit in her training and development. She placed third in the Forest Run Fest Frost Edition and entered a number of races in the next few months including the Peak-to-Peak multi-sport race in Queenstown.

In addition to her multi-sport training, Bridget has also put a significant amount of volunteer time into training with NZRT1 RATS, a technical rope rescue team. Much of this training in the past few months has focused on rope access work, with a strong emphasis on personal rope skills, abseiling, and the development of new techniques and systems. Bridget has been a valued team member and her professional skills were a boon for the organisation. She contributed well during training and deployments (operational time). Prior to getting to this point Bridget had to make it to their team selection process which requires more than three months of effort and ends in a pass/fail (in/out) result. Her team leader, himself a Gold Award holder had no hesitation in valuing her contribution to the Volunteer Service.

Coming back to the Award journey after high school, discovering her inner artist was a wonderful development in her Skills section. Bridget completed the Mixed Media Class, successfully and showed improvements along the way. She developed her new skills and persevered with techniques that were challenging. She was an enthusiastic learner and always produced great work.

Her experience as a medical student was a valuable asset in her Adventurous Journey, a highly competent tramper who performed exceptionally well during this experience. For Bridget, though challenging to complete her Award while sitting her medical exams, the Award was a gift. “The biggest learning for me has been the importance of sticking with things even though they are hard and making time for personal growth through the cultivation of a wide range of skills.”

Emma Millar, from Havelock North High School, found her vocational calling completing the Gold Residential Project Project through one of the Awards Accredited Activity Providers: New Zealand Business Week’s ‘Brave Thinkers’ course. New Zealand Business Week is about building Brave Business Leaders. It’s fun, it’s challenging and it’s for anyone that’s ever been interested in business or had a business idea. During the intensive one-week programme, students are encouraged to be bold in their thinking, learning about new business models, meeting other businesspeople and combining academic learning with business decision making. By forming a virtual company, they make decisions about marketing, personnel and production in order to develop and grow a successful business. The week has a strong emphasis on personal development – confidence, leadership, teamwork – and includes an extensive, supervised, social programme.

“New Zealand Business week provided me with the opportunity to step outside my comfort zone and complete tasks and activities with people I had never met before. The very best part of this week however was what I learned about myself through meeting new people. Working in groups with people of all different strengths and skillsets taught me so much more than a book ever could. Taking part allowed me to learn such strong life skills that I never initially thought I would come away with at the end of NZ Business Week. Not only did this opportunity teach me valuable skills in the business sector, but also allowed me to be certain in my decision for studying commerce/business at university.”

2020 Wairarapa College Head Girl Molly Donald, now studying for her Bachelor of Agriculture, has continued her immense contributions to her community as the Secretary of the Tasman Region Young Farmers association. Molly was one of five young people to be awarded a Silver Fern Farms Plate to Pasture youth scholarship in 2021. She believes “The Duke of Edinburgh Hillary Award changed my life.”

She was recognised by her Adventurous Journey instructor as the unspoken leader of the group, a hard worker, not afraid to do the menial jobs, able to articulate her thoughts and ability to verbalise them, and able to learn as she goes and teach others at the same time.

Molly has been outstanding going over and above what was required for her Award in many areas, especially her Volunteer Service. Molly undertook a wide variety of voluntary work at our community Hospice as part of her Duke of Edinburgh’s Award. “It takes a special kind of teenager to volunteer in a Hospice,” her Assessor commented. This spirit of compassion and dedication to helping others is a key part of who Molly is, and its uplifting to see this carry on in her life post Award completion. From Molly, “this Award has been one of the most rewarding and biggest achievements of my life to date, without forgetting the support from friends and family along this incredible journey.”

Piper Pengally, one of our South Island recipients, is currently Youth Advisor at the **Ministry of Youth Development.** Developed in recognition of the consistent message that young people want their voice heard in the decisions that impact them and their future, MYD has created this team to support and enable inclusion in the conversation about shaping a productive, sustainable and inclusive Aotearoa New Zealand.

Piper’s experience of Debating in the Skills section of the Award has armed her with the right tools to advocate for young people in this new role, and her experience as secretary for the Christchurch Youth Council, as well as her tenure as the Environmental Leader and Chair of the Sustainability Council. An enthusiastic community member, Piper is on the Youth Voice Canterbury Management Team and has many years of volunteering behind her. A large portion of her volunteering endeavours was through the Christchurch Youth Council where she was an Executive member from 2017-2020.

On her Gold Residential Project, BLAKE Inspire 2019, Piper gained a more in-depth understanding of environmental issues facing Aotearoa and was inspired “to curate solutions on how I can implement this learning in my own communities.” Since then, she has pursued her passion for environmental leadership and continues to encourage others to care about the importance of protecting our home and biodiversity.

Blake Inspire is a week-long, leadership development adventure for 15–18-year-olds passionate about the environment. 56 young people from across Aotearoa in Piper’s year were selected to take part in the programme. Highlights of the programme included a powhiri at Turangawaewae, a climate policy debate, learning about our marine environment in Raglan and eco-tourism at the Waitomo Caves. She demonstrated her commitment to apply her learnings to her every-day actions when she returned home introducing changes such as an enviro month challenge at her school. If anyone can kindly influence others to get on board with a cause, it’s Piper!

Piper is a Law and Political Science student at the University of Canterbury and a recent graduate of Burnside High School in Christchurch. Her aspiration for the future is to work in a field which champions environmental conservation – such as environmental policy or resource management law. Her hope that “young people can be a part of the kōrero in decision making without the stigma. In a world facing intergenerational injustice by way of climate change, making sure young people are heard and valued is super important” will certainly be ably supported by her in the future.

Gold Awardee James Ashby has been making sweet music throughout his Award journey. His Skills assessor commented “it has been wonderful to see him grow into a young adult and blossom as a musician. His dedication to detail both technically and musically is inspiring. As he has matured, his passion for reaching his full potential has grown rapidly. Music is a very important part of his life.”

One of the critical elements in the Award programme is to help our participants to realise their potential, and to develop their skills and passions. James’ attentive and diligent commitment to his music has paid off, with James being accepted into the cello section of the NZ Secondary School’s Orchestra. Entry is by audition, drawing from New Zealand’s top secondary school orchestral instrumentalists, and is highly competitive with limited places on offer. This is an annual event where successful applicants have the opportunity to represent their school in a full-size orchestra. The course is widely regarded as a significant training ground for young players aspiring to membership of the New Zealand Youth Orchestra and ultimately to a career as a professional musician. Unfortunately, due to the Covid19 Lockdown the course was cancelled for 2020. Nonetheless, we congratulate James on his highly significant achievement of being selected at a national level.

His ambitions extend beyond reaching people with his music, after his Gold Residential Project in New Caledonia inspired a new direction; pursuing more French language learning “so I have a good basis for the future, and I’ll learn about their rich culture. With my French, I plan to travel round Africa when I get my medical degree as a volunteer doctor, and I’ll be able to communicate with the locals. It was truly a fantastic experience I’ll never forget.”.



“Participating in The Duke of Edinburgh Hillary Award challenged me to become an all-rounded person. It encouraged me to incorporate volunteering, sport and music into my everyday life – and through these activities I gained valuable friendships, memories and skills.”

So says Anjali Gentejohann, another one of our outstanding Gold Awardees this December.

An active, bright and engaged young woman, her Award was full of opportunities to develop and achieve success. Her Gold Residential Project was a valued chance to allow her passion for science to be supported and encouraged every step along the way. Thanks to the Royal Society Te Apārangi, she attended Asia Science Camp in Manado, Indonesia, along with four other New Zealand students. This opportunity to discover more involved a six-day camp, where Nobel Laureates and world-class researchers shared their science experience through plenary sessions, round table discussions and student master classes. This encouraged Anjali to engage in deeper thinking about science and scientific knowledge. Anjali reflected on the value in this; “the fact that there’s no limits to what you can discover, and that science helps us make sense of the world around us.”

Inspired by this, Anjali aimed to study medicine, hoping it was “a career that will allow me to interact with people, and help others in whatever way I can”. Her end goal? To combine her Volunteering Service ethos with travel, with volunteer work in a developing country. She says: "I am committed and excited to be a part of our country's future scientific community and want to gain all the experience and inspiration I can, in order to contribute in the best way that I can. I'm not only very curious and enthusiastic about learning and experiencing new things, but I also welcome any opportunity to step outside of my comfort zone and give new things a go."

“More than anything else, I am grateful that this programme pushed my limits and tested my comfort zone – and taught me how to look for the good in an unexpected situation.”