

Empowering others through mana and respect

Jonno Webster (Ngāpuhi) is an Assistant Contract Manager for Downer at their Taranaki hub. He received an invitation to participate in Te Ara Whanake, the Downer Māori Leadership Programme through one of his colleagues.

Despite his initial reluctance about going on a Māori leadership course, he was encouraged by his colleague, who had spoke highly of the programme to go. The first of three wānanga was held on the East Coast at the beautiful rural marae in Whāngārā just north of Gisborne.

Like many of the participants he felt a mix of nervousness and excitement at their first wānanga. Knowing a couple of the people who had similar work experiences and were there for the same purpose helped put him at ease.

For Jonno, having a marae as the classroom is a great leveller. Jonno believes everyone is equal on the marae and learning through wānanga and kōrero is a much better way to learn versus sitting at desks in a classroom.

“They did an excellent job of putting this wānanga together,” Jonno said. “Everything was clear; nothing was hidden so you knew what was expected of you. And from day one, you felt like you belonged.”

A particular highlight for Jonno was the ‘Talking Horses’ session at the second wānanga. Horses are highly intuitive and act as an emotional mirror for participants. Jonno admits to being more than a little anxious while standing in front of a huge horse. “It is intimidating,” he said.

“It’s interesting to watch yourself on the video of you and your horse after the first day, you think you are coming across in a certain way and finding out that you aren’t coming across that way at all so is a bit of a shock. You learn a lot about yourself.”

The group was divided into two groups for the ‘Talking Horses’ session so Jonno said his group really bonded. His kids got a good laugh too at the photos of him and his horse.

At the final wānanga at Hongoeka Marae, Jonno had mixed feelings again this time a mix of satisfaction and sadness.

“We’ve all gone through this journey together and now it’s going to be over,” he said. The participants have intentions of keeping in touch but Jonno realises that it will be difficult to maintain that bond since they have such busy lives.

Jonno feels as though he is more positive as a result of the programme and he is more aware about how he comes across to his family and work colleagues. He makes a real effort to focus on the ‘good stuff’.

“It’s easy to get caught up in the negative things but making the effort to turn this around has made a huge difference and it is working.”

He also learnt that younger participants saw him as a role model, which was humbling. It was an insight that Jonno had been oblivious to until then.

Programme Facilitator Dan Gerrard says this was one of his observations too of Jonno’s role in the group.

“Jonno is a quiet leader who holds a lot of mana and respect. He has a very strong understanding of who he is as a person which will continue to help him grow as a leader.”

Māori culture wasn’t a huge part of Jonno’s life but this programme reinforced who he is, where he is from and his place in the world. Jonno is immensely proud of his Māoritanga.

When asked about the most important thing that he got from the programme, Jonno said to him it was watching one of his younger colleagues on this journey.

“The way he took this on and seeing the change in him has been incredible. This is definitely the best wānanga I’ve ever done and I’ve been to a few, I couldn’t recommend it highly enough.”

In total Te Puni Kōkiri has supported 1767 cadets through the Cadetship Programme, which was implemented in 2009. The Cadetship programme came about following the Māori Economic Summit and the Prime Minister’s Job Summit.

Te Ara Whanake – a pathway to development

Te Puni Kōkiri sponsors Te Ara Whanake Leadership Programme that supports employers to develop, mentor, train and grow full-time permanent Māori staff in order for them to take on more senior roles within an organisation.

The course has been running since 2014 and has 135 personnel have been through the training.

Downer provide leading engineering and infrastructure services in Australia and New Zealand. Their company has a strong focus on personal development for their staff and promoting diversity in the workforce.