



First Foundation scholarships

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resource

There are many scholarships available to students. *First Foundation* specifically targets students from families with a low income, and provides significant support for four years. The programme has been running for 25 years, and has had a real impact for about 1,000 students. NZASE Science Communicator Mike Stone investigates.

How First Foundation started



Steve Carden, left, was born into privilege in a mixed community. He went to university but few of his friends did – and he wanted to change that. To remove the barriers that blocked university as an option, he found corporate sponsors (called scholarship partners) and mentors, and started First Foundation in 1998.

Steve says, “Typically these are kids that have not had any family member ever go to university. The failure rates in the first year of university for kids like this are extremely high. So what we’re trying to do is provide that transition pathway from schools through university.”

How does it work?

First Foundation gives recipients financial assistance, exposure to the world of work and a dedicated mentor.

The project is currently funded by 71 scholarship partners – businesses, trusts and personal funders.

Successful applicants are given a mentor to support them to achieve success in each of their four years, and help them navigate the

First Foundation scholars, from left: Helena Tafua, Henderson High School, 2021 Restaurant Brands scholar; Derek Filimoehala, De La Salle College, 2021 T & G Global scholar; Hayley Austin, Karamu High School, 2021 Briscoe Group scholar; and Mark Watkins, Mairehau High School, 2021 Tycab NZ Ltd scholar.

transitions to university and into paid work.

The support begins in Year 13 with mentors helping students choose their subjects, keep their grades high, and apply for university and other scholarships.

Scholarship partners provide scholars with at least four weeks of relevant, paid internships in the holidays to give on-the-job experience that helps increase their work and relationship skills and boosts their CV.

Other support

Each student receives \$12,000 of financial assistance as well as other support.

Each student gets \$4,000 a year for three years, beginning just before they start university. They typically spend that first instalment on accommodation deposits, a laptop or phone, as fees are free for all first-year university students.

First Foundation also provides programmes; eg, to help students learn financial skills, expand their careers knowledge, learn about the value of failure, and focus on growth.

Criteria

To be eligible for this support, students need to:

- Come from a family with a maximum annual household income of \$75,000 for 1-2 dependants; OR \$90,000 for three or more dependants
- Be enrolled in Yr 12 at a New Zealand secondary school



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- Have an overall Merit or Excellence endorsement in Level 1
- Be a New Zealand citizen, resident, or have refugee status.

Students apply in term 1 of Yr 12, followed by an interview with both First Foundation and their scholarship partner. Students are advised of success in term 4 that year and receive their scholarship at an awards ceremony the next May.

Their mentor starts supporting them in Yr 13, and from October that year they're eligible for ongoing support for uni.

Changing lives

The First Foundation programme not only changes the lives of the scholars, but also those of their whānau. Scholars:

- Are often the first in their family to benefit from university education.
- Can earn significantly more, which many use to help their whānau buy a house or attend university.
- Become positive role models for others.

After receiving a First Foundation scholarship, **Roseanne Ulunga's** paid work with Gerard Roofs meant she could support herself and help her whānau while studying.

Since graduating from her chemical and material engineering degree at the University of Auckland, Roseanne says: "I am proud that I was able to provide the opportunity for my parents to go back to the islands. Mum is Samoan and Dad is Tongan; they'd never been to each other's birthplaces."

Jade Humphrey was at Wainui High School when she was accepted as a First Foundation scholar. She received support from scholarship partner Spark and mentor Julie Hall, a scientist, to study earth sciences at the University of Canterbury (UoC), with summer studentships at QuakeCore and GNS. She has since received scholarships from UoC for both her master's and her doctorate.

Jaxson Tautala-Hanita, from Taita College, comes from a single-parent family. He received support to complete a Bachelor of Applied Science at the University of Otago.



Top: [Jade Humphrey](#) is a PhD student in Geological Sciences, and founder of Predator-Free Riccarton. Above left: [Roseanne Ulunga](#), who has helped build science classrooms in the Solomon Islands, and is now a First Foundation mentor. Above right: [Jaxson Tuatala-Hanita](#), on his FF awards night.

Jaxson was supported by mentor Dougal Hamilton, and was one of only a few Māori students in science.

Ngā Kupu

Āhei – Opportunity, access
Karahipi – Scholarship
Kaiārahi – Mentor, guide
Kanorau – Be diverse; diversity
Kiriwhakatauirā – Role model
Manawaroa – Resilience, staying power
Ōritetanga – Equality; equal opportunity
Tautoko – Support; to support
Umanga – Career, profession
Whakamana – To empower; empowering
Whakatutukitanga – Achievement.

Te Aka Maori Dictionary and Paekupu



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