



“Percy is thriving at the YMCA Education Centre... He clearly has great potential, his peers look up to him as a leader.”

Growing up on a farm in rural Gisborne was a perfectly natural fit for young Percy Takao. Following the sudden death of his father, Percy and his 8 siblings were taken in by his grandfather when he was 5 years old and raised entrenched in Maoritanga and taught how to live off the land.

In April 2012, when Percy Takao saved all of his money to buy a one way ticket from Gisborne to Wellington he had no idea what to expect. Living in Wellington with his grandmother and cousins, Percy was a long way from the tight knit community he grew up in. In fact when he first arrived in Wellington he recalls thinking “am I still in NZ?” Needless to say it was a huge culture shock as he was challenged to form new friendships and assimilate into the Wellington ‘Youth Culture.’

Shortly after settling in Wellington, Percy’s grandmother passed away. With no means of income Percy was left to fend for himself hustling for food, clothing, and other necessities. Throughout 2012 and 2013 Percy found himself in ‘survival’ mode spending most of his time in and out of the attention of the police, struggling to keep out of trouble. In the earlier months of 2013 Percy stumbled across the YMCA Education Centre with a friend and after attending the “free lunch”, Percy decided to enrol. Even though he engaged quickly in the education programme, Percy still failed to resist trouble as he floated from home to home without any reassurance of where he would sleep next.

Recently as part of the culture change at the YMCA Education Centre, Percy undertook a holistic assessment where it was discovered that Percy was living on the streets, involved in excessive consumption of alcohol and junk food and addicted to synthetic drugs.

YMCA Staff moved quickly registering Percy with Study Link, connecting him to More than Numbers Social Services and accessing funding through the YMCA Hardship Grant to secure accommodation. Within a few weeks Percy was receiving a student allowance, engaged in Drug and Alcohol Counselling and living in a safe and supportive home.

Today at 19 years old, Percy is thriving at the YMCA Education Centre and aims to achieve his NCEA level 1 & 2 by the end of this year. He clearly has great potential, his peers look up to him as a leader and he is beginning to come out of his shell since incorporating Te Ao Maori teachings and Tikanga into the Education programme.

Percy has many dreams and aspirations but above all he aspires to own and operate a farm. With this in mind, YMCA staff have connected Percy with the opportunity to expand his farming skills through work experience at Camp Kaitoke.

Things are starting to come together for Percy and with the support he has in place through the ‘Y’ he is confident that he will achieve his goals, “I’m not there yet” he states “but I know I’m close!”



PERCY'S STORY