



**PRESS RELEASE:** 4 November 2024

## Palmerston North Teen Wins A Top Award

“I didn't know I was going to be chosen but I was happy and even more happy because I made my family proud,” says Palmerston North teen Taniwaka Waho-Marsden as she reflects on winning the Overall Merit Award at Blue Light’s Life Skills Camp held at Trentham Military Camp from 21 – 25 October 2024.

Taniwaka who is 14 and attends Queen Elizabeth College, stood out amongst an exceptional group of young people from across Aotearoa to win her award, many who were much older than her. Blue Light’s Life Skills Coordinator Nikita Marks who ran the camp comments “Despite being one of the youngest participants, Taniwaka’s compassion and leadership shone through. She was uplifting others, especially her fellow wāhine. With the resilience and potential she demonstrated, I am confident she will achieve great things.”

Taniwaka's growth over the camp was clear. "This camp taught me communication skills, patience, and to participate in things that I didn't see myself doing...Blue Light has definitely made me come out of my comfort zone and think differently" she says.

While at the camp Taniwaka took part in experiential activities “I was nervous and shy at the start because I didn't know anyone” she explained, but after spotting some familiar faces, she quickly overcame her initial anxiety and began forming new friendships.

This highly successful programme has been run by New Zealand Blue Light in partnership with the NZ Defence Force for the past 12 years and has adventure-based experiential learning as a key part of the programme. The programme provides 14-17-year-olds with critical life skills such as self-development, self-control, and teamwork that will enable young people to be successful at home, school, communities, and employment.

Up to 12 courses are held each year in Auckland, Trentham, Central North Island and Burnham locations.

For more information about the Blue Light Life Skills camps visit [www.bluelight.co.nz](http://www.bluelight.co.nz).

Blue Light is grateful for the support of the sponsorship of the Lion Foundation and community supporters.

See [www.bluelight.co.nz](http://www.bluelight.co.nz) or visit [www.facebook.com/nzbluelight](https://www.facebook.com/nzbluelight)

## New Zealand Blue Light

Blue Light is a not-for-profit charity that works in partnership with the Police to create positive connections between young people and the Police, helping young people find direction, fun, and a sense of belonging within their communities, enabling young people to develop life skills, leadership skills and find employment opportunities.

Blue Light believes that it is through the empowerment of disadvantaged youth to reach their full potential that their overall well-being can be improved and in turn the well-being of their communities.

Blue Light achieves this through removing the barriers for disadvantaged youth to participate positively in the community, through both its national and locally-based programmes, activities, and events.

Blue Light's work in the community is unique – it is not a one-size-fits-all approach. We have 78 local branches working with NZ Police to create meaningful experiences for young people in their regions, including cultural, sporting, and educational activities that are alcohol, drug, and violence-free.

Although Blue Light is supported by the Police, the two operate totally independently.

For many participants, the programmes decrease the risk of youth offending and becoming victims of crime through access to positive role models, time with other young people away and the opportunity to see the world outside their current environment.

Blue Light originally began in Australia as a community policing initiative and remains strong in all states. As well as in New Zealand, it is now active in the Solomon Islands, East Timor, Cook Islands, and Scotland.

See [www.bluelight.co.nz](http://www.bluelight.co.nz) or visit [www.facebook.com/nzbluelight](https://www.facebook.com/nzbluelight)



PHOTO ABOVE: L to R: Overall Excellence Award Winner Taniwaka and Inspector Kirsten Evans, Manager Youth Response.



PHOTO ABOVE: L to R: Camp participant, Inspector Kirsten Evans, Manager Youth Response, Overall Excellence Award Winner Taniwaka and camp participant.