

# Structure, service and self-belief in Palmerston North

Former naval specialist Lance Tahiwī leads Queen Elizabeth College's service academy in Palmerston North – helping students build leadership, discipline and self-belief through structured, military-based training.

Lance Tahiwī served in the New Zealand defence force for 22 years, specialising in underwater warfare. He never thought he'd become a teacher.

"I thought I'd be in the navy forever. But here I am," says Lance, beginning his 13th year at Queen Elizabeth College in Palmerston North.

Lance directs the college's service academy, an optional course that provides students with valuable life, leadership, outdoor and vocational skills in a structured, military-based setting.

"I suppose I could sum it up as work experience for the military," says Lance, who runs five courses per year for ākonga based in Manawātū.

"I take them to Waiouru, Trentham, Ohakea, and Devonport Naval Base. They see it all: getting used to living on base and what it's like to be in the military."

## Building resilience and responsibility

Service academy outings can be intense. They include bush survival lessons in the Pohangina Valley (where students can earn NCEA credits in outdoor education), adventure courses, and multi-day endurance challenges.

"[The courses] are not easy," says Lance. "You've got to be a certain fitness and a certain mental capacity."

Lance also teaches general service knowledge like the phonetic alphabet and the 24-hour clock, as well as drill and marching exercises.

He emphasises mental and physical fitness – you won't find any chips, sodas or cell phones on his courses. What you will find is a focus on punctuality, uniform, and personal responsibility.

"I say to [ākonga], it's your first feeling of doing something for someone other than yourself," says Lance.

*"It's amazing to see a young person believe in themselves. To see them believe that they can do something."*

Lance Tahiwī



Caption.

"For some, it's a real chance to break a cycle and to get out of Palmy – to make a better life for them and for their whānau, to achieve something.

"You have two choices in life: right and wrong, and it's up to you what you do and how you make those choices. That's what I teach, really."

While his courses prepare ākonga for a career in the military, police or fire services, Lance stresses that not all students choose those paths.

"[The academy] is not a recruitment tool," he says.

"Service is just another pathway in our kura."

"What we want to turn out, through our service academy, are good citizens for New Zealand, whether they go into the military, nursing, or building. Wherever they go, they just need to be good citizens."

## Serving whānau and honouring Anzac spirit

The Queen Elizabeth College Service Academy began in 2012 with just over 10 Year 12 students. Since then, enrolment has grown significantly. It now involves over 80 students from Years 9–13.

"It's grown so big and whānau want to have their child involved," says Lance, explaining how most of the students on his courses now come from schools across Manawātū.

Both Lance and Queen Elizabeth College principal Chris Moller believe the school's emphasis on service and citizenship is best displayed on Anzac Day – a date they take very seriously.

During the Anzac Day parade, uniformed service academy students walk alongside veterans, reflecting hours spent marching and practising in the academy drill yard.

"Our students give up their own time in the holidays to support these events and do so with pride," says Chris.

"They understand the service and sacrifice given in the past and do the same themselves. The students run the majority of the assembly and play the Last Post as well as read poetry."

Lance adds that, "Our Anzac Day parades are [...] to give back to our forefathers who fought for us and gave us the freedom that we enjoy today.

"[Anzac] parades, these Poppy Day sales, and these Armistice Day parades are our way of saying 'thank you' and showing respect to what has been before and to those who have served."

Over half of Queen Elizabeth College's school roll identify as Māori. Lance says that, for whānau, seeing tamariki marching in the Anzac Day parade is incredibly meaningful.

"It means everything to me," says Lance, who describes the service academy's parade as a powerful example of the Anzac spirit.

"I'm proud of the nation. I'm proud of my forefathers and the Māori Battalion, I'm proud to have served," continues Lance. "That's all it means for me: giving back."

## Transforming futures through belief

Lance has seen the service academy transform many students over his 13 years at Queen Elizabeth College. He recalls one example of a young woman who, in Year 9, faced two choices: expulsion or enrolment in one of his courses.

The young woman took her first course in Year 9, spent the entirety of Year 10 with the service academy, continued into Years 11 and 12, and recently became a prefect.

Lance recalls her acceptance speech.

"She's a role model for our students because she said the truth: she said, 'In Year 9, I enjoyed myself but I got in trouble. I went the wrong way. Then I came back and I worked on myself and I joined the academy and it saved me'.

"She's gone from lacking the confidence to do anything to a role model student at our school."

Ultimately, fortifying his students' confidence is Lance's kaupapa as director of his service academy.

"It's amazing to see a young person believe in themselves," he says. "To see them believe that they can do something."



Caption.