

Out of the mainstream, into the Y

The traditional school system doesn't suit everyone, so it's fantastic to have an alternative. The YMCA offers free education programmes for students aged 16 to 19 to gain NCEA Level 1 or Level 2 credits, and life skills – with small class sizes, real-life learning and a fantastic social atmosphere. Our education programme covers Whanganui, Manawatu and Tararua districts, and students learn both in the classroom and on outings and trips.

“We get a lot of young people who arrive feeling anxious and not sure what to expect,” explains Sarah Quinn, who delivers the NCEA Level 1 programme and is herself a YMCA Education graduate. “They gain a lot of confidence and they tell us that it's a lot better than school has been for them. Our tutor approach means they feel like they can talk to us about anything and often people who never mingled at school start making new friends.”

Sarah says it's enormously satisfying to see students try new activities, get outside their comfort zones and develop the kinds of skills that set them up for a successful life. The tutor team works hard to ensure students see the real-world benefit of every lesson, whether that's writing a CV, using percentages to work out discounts in a shop or knowing how to apply maths to effectively manage their money.

“Students who were anxious when they started develop lovely attitudes and we've had some awesome outcomes: some of our recent graduates have moved into hospitality, building and hairdressing, for example.

Without their NCEA qualifications, I don't think their outcomes would be so positive.” All the programmes are targeted at helping young Kiwis prepare for the workforce or further training. With typically just eight students per class, there's plenty of time for learners to move at their own pace, and for strong supportive relationships to develop with tutors and fellow students.

“I love working with my students and watching them develop and achieve,” says Sarah. “It would be great for more parents and students to understand that this is a fantastic alternative for those who are disenchanted with mainstream education.”

Check out ycentral.nz for more YMCA programmes.

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