

When the I Have a Dream programme started 10 years ago, we had two things: a classroom full of children, and a desire to know whether we could make a difference to their lives by helping them reach tertiary education.

It wasn't just our intention to provide mentoring and support, we also wanted to measure outcomes and find out what kind of help was most effective - because if we could help one classroom of kids, maybe we could help others.

The I Have a Dream programme has now completed its tenth year and, significantly, the tenth annual evaluation report by The Education Group is now in hand. It is important to us to share our insights into what interventions lift academic performance among students whom, statistically, are not expected to achieve.

It gives great satisfaction to say that we do have answers to our original questions. We can make a difference: just over 80% of our children, now young adults, have entered tertiary education. We are proud of them and continue to have high hopes for them.

To set the scene, the 53 students in the I Have a Dream programme came from Wesley, a low socio-economic community in the Auckland suburb of Mt Roskill. In 2003 we resolved to work with all Year 4 pupils at the local primary school, promising to work with them until they reached the end of secondary school, and if they made it, to fund their tertiary education.

Our Dreamers' primary school was the lowest-ranking decile 1. Most of their parents were either unemployed or worked long hours to make ends meet. Eighty per cent are Pasifika, the other 20% are of North African, Maori or Indian descent. Some are refugees, and English is a second language for most of them. Many have been exposed to gang activities in the streets where they live.

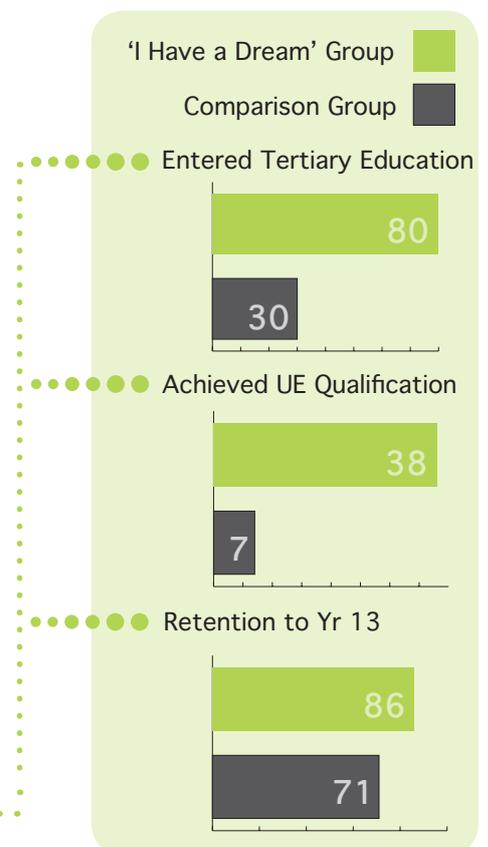
Most of the Dreamers still live in the Wesley area. While 15 have moved overseas, mostly to Australia, we stay in touch where possible. We made an enduring commitment to them back in 2003 to provide longitudinal, wrap-around support.

This included mentoring, tutoring, social enrichment, and exposure to future tertiary and career pathways. We worked alongside their schools, communities and families, and provided accessible resources so dreams could be nurtured into reality.

To measure the programme's results, we have for a decade compared our students to a comparison group of peers (a classroom of children from the same primary school, but a year older).

In a nutshell, the latest evaluation report suggests the I Have a Dream programme substantially increased the Dreamers' chance of success.

The 38 students who remained in New Zealand achieved



• better results than their comparison group peers across all aspects of performance measured:

- 80% of Dreamers have entered tertiary education compared to 30% in the comparison group.
- Dreamers are 50% less likely to be unemployed or in the 'unqualified workforce'.
- 38% of Dreamers achieved the University Entrance Qualification compared to 7% in the comparison group.
- Dreamers were more likely to achieve Merit and Excellence across all NCEA levels.
- Dreamers had better NCEA Level 1, 2, and 3 pass rates (33% more of Dreamers gained Level 3).
- Dreamers were more likely to stay in school (86% finished Year 13, compared to 71% in the comparison group. The national retention rate for Pasifika students is 79%).

One of the most important insights we have gained is that subject choice at high school is critical in determining whether a student can reach university. From the start of secondary school in Year 9, this is what sets them on the pathway to higher education.

In order to gain the University Entrance Qualification, our students needed to take at least 42 credits at NCEA Level 3 (including 14 credits in each of two university-approved subjects; or, from 2014, including 14 credits in each of three or more university approved subjects). Taking three or more university-approved subjects positions them well to enter university.

The contrasts with the comparison group are stark:

- 53% of Dreamers took three or more university-approved subjects in Year 12, compared to 18% of the comparison group
- 41% of Dreamers took three or more university-approved subjects in Year 13, compared with 10% of the comparison group

However, just over half of the Dreamers required advocacy and/or intervention from the programme to ensure they were able to enrol in these subjects. Sometimes schools set entry criteria to exclude students they don't believe will succeed. The I Have a Dream Programme Co-ordinator's knowledge of both NCEA and school systems, persistent advocacy and ongoing academic counselling were pivotal to the academic success of many students.

While the number of Dreamers is relatively small, the data sends very important messages to secondary schools:

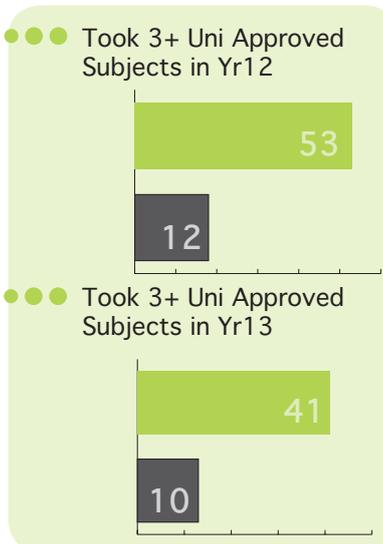
- Teachers must have high expectations of students like the Dreamers from the time they enter secondary school at Year 9, well before they enter the NZQA qualifications programme.
- Secondary schools' own prerequisites for course entry must be closely monitored.
- High-level advocacy and support makes a difference to academic outcomes.

Without such support, more Dreamers would have left school without an NCEA Level 2 qualification, and many who qualified for certificate, diploma or degree courses (80%) would not have done so.

The Dreamers themselves have consistently rated the after-school programme as the most helpful intervention, throughout the decade of evaluations. We can see why - it is here that they had a positive and supportive environment, a sense of belonging, tutoring help on tap, and access to the resources they needed.

And while entering university is not every student's goal, the data shows Dreamers are on track to exceed the Government's target of 55% of 25-34 year olds having a qualification at Level 4 or above (which is considered the minimum standard for competency in vocational occupations).

It is interesting to note that the gap widened between the Dreamers and the comparison group as the students moved through secondary school. Once again, this reflects the importance of supporting students in their decisions. Adult advocacy and academic mentoring are fundamental to raising achievement levels.



And while it can be concluded that advocacy and mentoring are very effective frontline interventions, the evaluation report also demonstrates how the foundation blocks of literacy and numeracy must be laid in early education.

At the start of the programme, most of our Dreamers were behind in school. This did not change until we investigated and addressed underlying issues such as reading ability, glue ear, eye glasses and dyslexia. Establishing basic educational skills required 10 years of after-school support, so that over time the Dreamers developed the abilities needed to aim high - and achieve - when they reached the critical secondary school years.

They have come a long way.

For the immediate future, the "Once a Dreamer, always a Dreamer" philosophy means the programme continues to support those now pursuing tertiary education, encourages those still finding their way, and keeps tabs on those who chose not to pursue it. Our goal is to see all of them become productive citizens.

At the same time, we hope New Zealand society can learn from our programme and our Dreamers' achievements. Our long-term dream is to be a catalyst for more kids being helped in this way.

The evaluation report's Executive Summary is available on request by emailing [info@ihaveadream.org.nz](mailto:info@ihaveadream.org.nz). We welcome engagement and enquiries from schools, other educational programmes, potential project sponsors and other funding agencies.