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Otago Teen Sets Sights on Air Force After Blue Light Camp

For Grace Jackson, a 15-year-old student from East Otago High School, attending Blue Light's Life Skills Camp in Burnham from 14–18 July 2025, turned out to be “one of the best weeks” of her life — and cemented her dream to one day join the New Zealand Air Force.

“Before the camp, I was pretty nervous when it came to talking to new people,” Grace admitted. “But during the camp, there were ample opportunities for me to give leadership a try, and by the end of the week, I had discovered that I was a pretty good leader.”

Her hard work didn't go unnoticed. At graduation, Grace was awarded the Overall Merit Award, presented by Blue Light and NZDF staff, given in recognition of her consistent progress, self-discipline and support of others.

“I was surprised when I won the award...there were heaps of great people at the camp. Of course, I was very pleased with myself. Winning an award from the military was something I could certainly be proud of, and the trophy and certificate have a special place in my room,” said Grace.

Since returning home, Grace has been more motivated than ever to pursue her Air Force dream.

“I'm looking at joining the Air Cadets in Dunedin to get more experience,” she said. “I also want to continue to strive towards excellence at school, so I can give myself the best possible chance at being accepted into the Air Force. I am now sure that I am going to try to join the Air Force once I leave school.”

The Blue Light Life Skills Camp, run in partnership with and NZ Defence Force, is designed to build confidence, resilience, and purpose in young people. Grace believes it does exactly that.

“I would certainly recommend it to people who are looking to improve themselves and for anyone who enjoys meeting new people and getting outdoors,” she said. “It would be a great experience for anyone as long as they're willing to push themselves out of their comfort zones.”

Erin Kempthorne, year 9-10 Dean at East Otago High School, said the whole school is backing Grace's ambitions.

“We are all so proud of her achievement and will also do everything we can to help support Grace in her pathway to apply for a position in the New Zealand Air Force. This opportunity helps young people develop resilience, empowerment, and determination to achieve all challenges faced.”

Blue Light’s Life Skills Camp, run in partnership with the New Zealand Defence Force, provides young people with a unique opportunity to develop confidence, leadership, and resilience. Grace’s story is just one of many where teens discover their strengths and set goals for a brighter future.

This highly successful programme has been run by New Zealand Blue Light in partnership with the NZ Defence Force for the past 14 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, Waiouru, and Burnham locations.

For more information about the Blue Light Life Skills camps, visit www.bluelight.co.nz.

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

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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 70 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, Fiji, Cook Islands, and Scotland.

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PHOTO ABOVE: L to R: Reviewing Officer Senior Sergeant Rachel Walker, Area Response Manager, Canterbury and Overall Merit Award Winner Grace Jackson.



PHOTO ABOVE: Blue Light Life Skills Camp Graduation, Burnham Military Camp, 14 – 18 July 2025.

