

News Release for the Grey Star 16 October 2009

QUALIFICATION OPENS THE DOOR TO A LIFE OF ADVENTURE

On Wednesday night a group more used to donning outdoor gear turned out in their finery for a graduation ceremony at Tai Poutini Polytechnic.

After two years of study, 11 students graduated with a Certificate in Advanced Leadership and Guiding, a programme catering for outdoor enthusiasts who want to share their passion for the outdoors with others.

One of those to graduate was 36 year-old Sarah Harvey, a former child and adolescent counsellor who has her sights set on 'adventure therapy', ideally on the West Coast.

"In terms of therapy, being in the outdoors is a more real situation than sitting in a room talking to someone, especially for children and adolescents.

"It's more of a preventative therapy; you let young people know they can go into the outdoors any time and it will make them feel better."

Harvey, who has become enamoured with the outdoors since immigrating to New Zealand from the UK seven years ago, says the programme was "great, although quite challenging sometimes".

"Being the older one on the course meant I wasn't quite as reckless as the younger ones. I had the fear to contend with!"

She describes the tutors as "awesome". "They were some of the best teachers I've ever experienced."

Like all the tutors, Programme Coordinator Jo Parsons has plenty of hands-on experience leading groups in the outdoors. She has worked for many years as an instructor in New Zealand and overseas, including three years at Outward Bound and a season at the New Zealand Kayaking School.

Parsons says a lot of graduates go on to work as guides or instructors seasonally, spending the season (summer or winter depending on the discipline) in New Zealand before heading to the States or Europe for their season.

“Kiwis are highly regarded overseas and it’s a great way to be paid to go travelling.”

While Harvey isn’t going to be working overseas, she is heading to Africa, where for three weeks she will accompany a friend who’s a leader on an overland tour as “her unofficial trainee”. Then it’s on to the UK to visit family for Christmas, before returning to New Zealand via India early next year, to begin her life as an adventure therapist.

The typical path students follow – and the one Harvey took – is to enter the Certificate in Advanced Leadership and Guiding directly from Tai Poutini’s Certificate in Outdoor Recreation. During that first year students get to experience a range of activities and this year had to specialise in three or four pursuits, choosing from rafting, rock climbing, mountaineering, sea kayaking, white water kayaking or snow sports.

Learning is about 75% practical, 25% theoretical, with students teaching clients as well as honing their own skills. “We supervise them teaching,” says Parsons.

Most of this takes place on the West Coast – in what the Polytechnic describes as “the ultimate classroom”. A typical day might involve rafting the Arnold River, rock climbing on the Charleston sea cliffs, ice climbing at Fox Glacier, mountaineering at Arthur’s Pass or kayaking on one of the West Coast’s many lakes and rivers. Sometimes students travel further afield to Murchison, D’Urville Island or Christchurch.

Theoretical subjects include pre-hospital emergency care, meteorology, teaching skills, career planning, risk management, leadership, adventure-based learning and instructing and guiding clients.

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For more information please contact:

Sarah Harvey, Graduate - 021 101 0960 or 03 782 6149 email salharv@hotmail.com

OR

Jo Parsons - 027 246 0590.

Programme Coordinator - Certificate in Leadership and Guiding, Tai Poutini Polytechnic

About Tai Poutini Polytechnic:

Tai Poutini Polytechnic (TPP) offers a range of exciting programmes including outdoor education, ski patrol, ecotourism, jade and hard stone carving, professional chef and civil construction. Tai Poutini Polytechnic has campuses in Auckland, Cambridge, Christchurch, Wanaka, Invercargill, Westport, Greymouth, Reefton and Hokitika.