

## **Summer Program: Culture and Language Immersion Scheme 2016 – University of Auckland**

*You can enjoy the marvelous views and breathe in fresh air at Mount Eden*



*Volunteer placement at the Salvation Army Family Store*



This was an invaluable and unforgettable experience for me. In summer 2016, I joined a summer program at the University of Auckland English Language Academy. New Zealand is a peaceful place to visit, where you can enjoy marvelous views and breathe in fresh air.

During the trip, I did voluntary service with the Salvation Army. My voluntary placement was in Penmure, a place where many poor and unemployed people live. Before I came to Auckland, I thought it was a very wealthy city. However, the volunteer work made me realize that there were many people living in poverty. It was my pleasure to be able to help them. I helped them to price second-hand goods and place them in the shop. Sometimes, people would go there asking for food and daily necessities. I often saw children walking on the street without shoes. They were really pitiful. When I asked a staff member why children were walking barefoot without any shoes, she told me that it was common because many parents could not afford to buy shoes for their children. Usually, at the start of the school term, many parents come to the Salvation Army and ask for shoes for their children. Fortunately, many people come to the shop and donate things, including clothes, furniture and food. From this valuable experience, I learned that it was more of a blessing to give than to receive.

I have learned many things through this program. First, I have improved my interpersonal and communication skills. In New Zealand, I spent a lot of time with my host family. My host mother told me, "You do not have to stay in your room all the time. Come down and join us." Therefore, with her encouragement, I often spent time playing with her two daughters. We always prepared dinner together while she asked me how my day had been. After dinner, we would play some card games or watch a movie. At the same time, she liked to invite her friends to join us for dinner. Hence, I could meet a lot of people and learn different cultures. One day, her Japanese friend cooked some local Japanese food for us. It was really yummy. We also learned some Japanese words together. Another day, her French friend came and taught us some French, which was interesting. I realize that my interpersonal and communication skills have improved because my social circle has widened and I have spent a lot of time communicating with other people face-to-face.

Second, I have become more independent. The transportation system in New Zealand is totally different from Hong Kong and is not as well developed. Finding bus stops there is quite difficult. In the first week, I did not know how to get home. I was very nervous because it was already dark. I went to the transportation center (Britomart Transportation Center) and asked the staff the way home. Although I got on a bus, I did not know which station I should get off at because there was no screen on the bus and I did not know where I was. I had to recognize the roads and routes. Also, every day, I had to get up at 6 o'clock in the morning to prepare my breakfast and leave enough time to walk to the bus stop. I learned that I had to take care of myself and solve problems by myself. I have become more independent, and I do not want to rely on others to solve my problems. What is more, I found that my time management skills also improved, probably because I needed to prepare my time schedule every day in New Zealand. If I did not prepare my schedule well, I had to wait more than an hour for a bus!

Third, my global awareness has been enhanced. In New Zealand, I met people from different nationalities at school and at home. They told me about their own cultures and their special stories, which I could not have learned about in Hong Kong. In New Zealand, I could immerse myself in another culture, and I knew what was happening around the world, not just in Hong Kong. The most impressive thing is the disparity between the rich and poor. You may think that Auckland is a very wealthy city. In fact, the cost of living is increasing rapidly, and I saw homeless people sleeping on the street, some of them begging for money. I have changed my mindset about the world since I went to New Zealand. Participating in this program taught me a lot about the world.