

# Learner Profile

From the Ako Aotearoa co-funded project:  
**‘Evaluating the effectiveness of support interventions for adult dyslexic learners in New Zealand’s multiple learning environments’**

## Mikalah O’Riley’s Journey

### Background

Mikalah O’Riley was one of the participants in an Ako Aotearoa co-funded project to discover how best to support adults with dyslexia in industry training, tertiary education and the workforce.

An inspirational young woman, Mikalah is personable, articulate, warm, bubbly and obliging. Although she has dyslexia, she is not defined by it.

Growing up, she attended a number of schools – as is the case for many people whose parents are developing a career in the dairy industry. Like many with dyslexia, Mikalah was seriously short-changed by the education system, particularly during intermediate school. She also recalls a discouraging college teacher who told her she would never attain NCEA 1, 2 or 3, let alone obtain a university degree. Actively involved in hockey during secondary school, Mikalah credits the sport for her perseverance at secondary school.

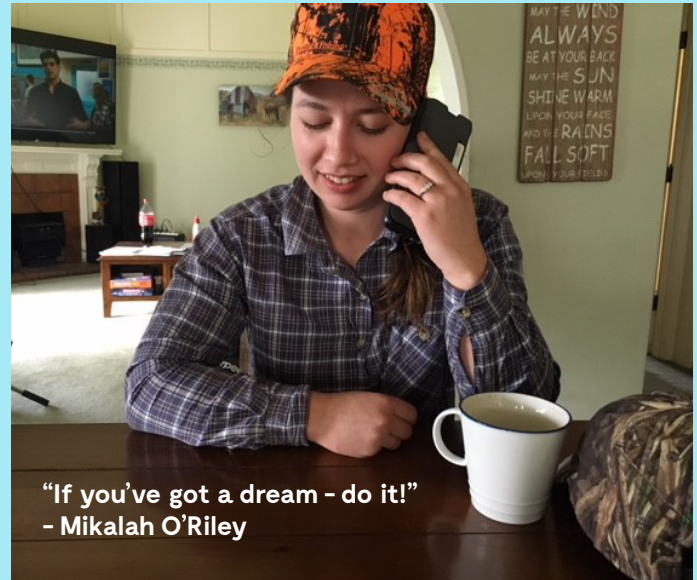
### Achievements

“Mikalah is one reason I love our programme. Empowering adults with dyslexia to realise their potential is heartwarming”, says Mike Styles, the project leader for the research.

Mikalah holds a Bachelor of Computer Graphic Design from Waikato University and takes a lot of satisfaction in proving her doubters wrong. She is currently studying towards an Agribusiness Diploma with direct support from the Primary Industry Training Organisation (ITO).

With technological aids and mentoring support from Primary ITO Learning Support Coordinator Karen Dawson, Mikalah is a perfect example of why Primary ITO has engaged in this project.

Mikalah is a role model for people with dyslexia everywhere. She has the personality and character traits that all successful adults with dyslexia demonstrate. She is extremely self-aware, highly



focused, and a self-starter. She is project-oriented, articulate and able to see the big picture. According to her mum she, “is a determined person – a real fighter and very competitive.”

Mikalah’s success results from a number of factors:

- **Early detection:** While she was still at primary school Mikalah’s parents researched and arranged for a dyslexia assessment.
- **Sector support:** Primary ITO is proactive when helping those with learning differences and facilitate her training.
- **Technology:** She has obtained and uses smart technology available to assist people with dyslexia.
- **Positive attitude:** She understands her own circumstances and is aware of her difficulties. Even more so, she acknowledges her talents and skills in order play to her strengths.
- **Motivation:** Obtaining inspiration from a wide range of musical and film sources, Mikalah uses this to motivate her to achieve her goals.

Mikalah’s determined attitude is encapsulated by a line from one of her favourite films, The Pursuit of Happyness. Addressing his son Will Smith’s character says, “don’t let anybody tell you, you can’t do anything – not even me”.

## More information

As part of a recently completed research report on the support interventions for dyslexic learners, Ako Aotearoa aims to champion increased positivity and awareness around adult dyslexia within the New Zealand tertiary education sector.

This comprehensive project report provides valuable insight to how a range of industry training organisations have collaborated to utilise a new effective model to support these learners, but the project team has also developed:

- A short fact sheet on the project report
- Posters to assist with recognising some common signs of dyslexia in adults and where to go next
- Profiles of two talented and hard-working adults with dyslexia who were participants in the research project.