

The Buddle Findlay & Halberg Career Experience programme: Q&A with Thomas Chin

9 July 2019

Late last year, Buddle Findlay found out that the Halberg Youth Council members, mostly university students, find it really difficult to get work experience during the holidays so, with the help of the Halberg Foundation we created the **Buddle Findlay & Halberg Career Experience programme**.

The main objective of this programme is to assist university students from the Halberg Youth Council, who all have physical disabilities, to gain work experience.

Thomas Chin was the first Halberg Youth Council member to gain work experience at Buddle Findlay, joining our Christchurch office from 24-28 June. We spoke to Thomas before, during and after his placement to gain insight into his experience and find out about the benefits and challenges of the programme.

Before placement

Tell us a bit about what you are studying and your long-term career goals.

I am studying first year law and Māori and indigenous studies. My hope is that my passion for the protection of the rights of indigenous communities, as well as my interest in the empowerment of rangatahi particularly, but not limited to, disabled individuals can lead to a position as one of, if not the only wheelchair bound lawyer in the country. In doing this I hope to show the true capacity of a disabled person to contribute to society, in turn showing that tertiary education is a viable option for someone in a wheelchair. However, what my work at Halberg has shown is that my true passion is putting myself in positions to achieve the greatest level of influence.

Tell us a bit about what you like to get up to outside of work.

I enjoy kapa haka and all things Ao Māori, however most of my enjoyment comes from coaching sport (Boccia). Other than that, any spare time I have is mostly spent enjoying a few laughs with mates.

Are there any major gaps in your skill set that you are looking for help with? For example, understanding budgets or communication with others?

As a law student, any and all things about this opportunity excite me. However, beyond seeing law in practice, my main hope is to gain connections and advice surrounding law.

What are you most looking forward to ahead of your work placement?

Opportunities for disabled people looking for work are limited, thus simply having the opportunity to work and contribute to a work environment is personally exciting, not to mention the wider implications of having an organisation that is so willing to combat issues surrounding access for people with physical disabilities to employment in the future.

What do you think will be the biggest challenge?

Lack of experience in a workplace due to lack of opportunities, may lead to a personal adjustment needing to be made.

What is the main thing you are hoping to gain from your placement?

Practical experience as well as connections and networks.

During placement

What are you enjoying most about your work placement?

What I am enjoying most about the Buddle Findlay placement is just meeting people. I thrive off being able to talk and think through ideas and see how things work. There is a lot to be said about a company that's willing to go to the extent that Buddle Findlay has been in terms of inclusion and actually walking the talk. It is easy to say that we need to do better in terms of business and in terms of law in inclusion and those sorts of things, but it is another thing to be so welcome and open to the idea in a practical sense and actually following through with it.

How is the placement helping you?

On a personal level, the placement is helping me in the sense that it's hard to see the end goal when you are sitting in a lecture listening to someone talk for an hour. Getting to see the practical side of things, and getting to work out what a week in a law office looks like, and how I would have to adapt in terms of my disability and working on how things work in that sense. In terms of how I am able to maneuver myself around a work placement, I guess that is the greatest thing that this opportunity has given me is that ability to really cement what I want to achieve and give me something to aim for in the later stages of my degree.

Has anything been more difficult than you anticipated?

I think I knew what I was getting myself into when I initially came across this opportunity and so work is work at the end of the day and there are going to be good bits and there are going to be hard bits and I think that's just the reality of it. And yes, it is tiring but that is just work and is part of living.

The placement is helping me in terms of solidifying why I am going down the path I am in terms of my career and what I want to achieve in that career and knowing the good bits and the bad bits and being able to make an informed decision as a result.

What is the one thing you still want to achieve before the end of your placement?

I think I just want to ask as many questions as possible, and get the experiences of as many people as possible from the lawyers to the support staff. Everybody's opinions are valuable and everyone's thoughts on the whole running of the system. Without the support staff, things wouldn't happen so getting everybody's perspective is important as opposed to just the people you expect to engage with when you come to a law firm.

Following placement

What are you most proud of, following your work placement?

I'm most proud of the potential doors that I have opened for people in similar positions to gain valuable work experience in meaningful employment, leading by example and showing what is possible.

Did you enjoy working in an office? Was it in line with what you expected?

It was more or less what I expected, however, there is no substitute for real-world experience and so this is perhaps the most valuable takeaway from the experience.

How do you think this work placement has benefitted you and your career?

The experience has reignited my purpose for choosing law as my chosen field of study and allowed me to grow my understanding of law on a much deeper level.

Has the work placement made anything clearer for you? Do you still have the same goal?

It is hard to see the end goal when you are only at the very beginning of a law degree, and so, if anything it has demonstrated that I am doing the right thing and law is indeed what I want to do.

What is the one thing you would improve about your work placement?

There is nothing I would change about the experience. I am grateful for any and all opportunities that come my way and hope that this initiative can act as a catalyst for greater inclusion in employment.

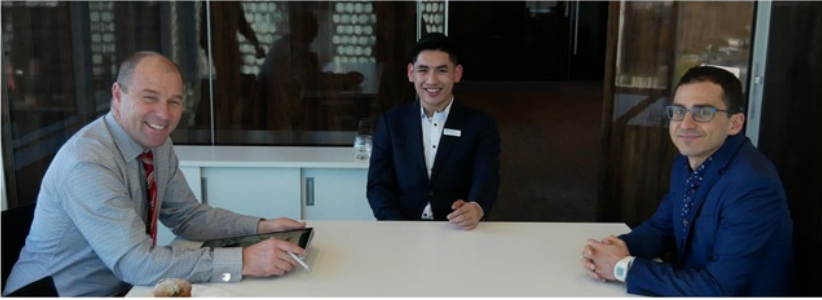
Would you recommend a work placement to others?

Nothing beats the real thing!!

I would absolutely recommend this programme.

Find out more about Thomas Chin's experience in our Christchurch office via [NZ Lawyer](#) and [Te Karere Maori News](#):

[NZ Lawyer: Firm-led work-experience program inspires physically disabled law student to pursue his dream](#)



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