

Student filmmakers take out first prize

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Student filmmaker Charlotte Cleverlev-Bisman

A group of talented Waiheke High School Students took out first prize in the Focus on Ability Short Film Festival.

The festival asks filmmakers to 'Focus on the Ability' of people with a disability and tell a story on film for the world to view.

Sponsors donated over \$140,000 worth of cash and prizes, and the Waiheke students are currently deciding what to do with their \$1,000 prize money.

The win was a massive surprise for all involved. The team of around ten students put their short film entry in and were contacted to attend the screening of all New Zealand entries at the Rydges hotel last Wednesday. When their team was awarded the top prize the students and their Learning Diversity teacher, Claire Mahaki, were elated.

"We had a group of around ten students with various disabilities – a boy with muscular dystrophy, a girl with quadruple limb amputation due to meningitis, a student with autism and another with cochlear implants," says Claire.

"We made a film in which we talked about what we can do and what we're good at. Our student who is dyslexic is very gifted in the realm of technology. Our quadruple amputee is so bright, vivacious and talented. Although she struggles physically, she's an incredible artist and actor. Another student who has autism excels at sport and is incredibly supportive of the other students."

Claire says she thinks their film won because they talked about a range of students and the diverse skill sets they have. They focused on their varied abilities and potential.

"It was about focusing on what we can do – what we're good at and how can we shine."

It took the students about six weeks to make the film. They each received a role – writing, acting, directing, filming, and editing, and Claire says that everyone was motivated and prepared to give their time to the project.

"It was all about encouraging students to extend their abilities and to recognise their unique skills." • *Sophie Boladeras*