BBM Youth Support Award for Highland Dancing

I have been involved in highland dancing since I was about 4 years old. Over the years I have demonstrated a significant amount of commitment and dedication towards the sport and I believe this is why I was nominated for the scholarship. I have completed many exams, been successful in various competitions and championships and have performed in a number of displays at different fetes and events.

We travelled around Scotland, visiting places including Edinburgh, Stirling and Inverness. Edinburgh, Scotland's capital city, features the beautiful Edinburgh Castle within view from much of the medieval old town. Stirling also possesses the trait of an incredible castle above the city. Inverness is an old town up the northeast coast of Scotland that features 18th and 19th century cathedrals and churches.

The competitions we went to were all highland gatherings so the atmosphere was fantastic. There were different sporting events including things such as the cable tossing that I'd generally seen in Australia at Celtic festivals. The scenery at these places was absolutely amazing. My very first competition had me dancing in front of the greenest mountains I'd ever seen, fog tracing the top of them. It looked picturesque. We did the really traditional highland dances at each competition which is different to in Australia where we generally do many more lesser-known dances.

Although I enjoyed just about every minute of my trip to Scotland, there were a few highlights that made the experience that much more spectacular. Sites including the Scott Monument and the Wallace Monument allow you to climb old steps in an enclosed, narrow passage way to gain the most terrific view of the cities. We also saw amazing views and learnt a little bit of interesting history while cruising along the Loch Ness and the banks of Loch Lomond. Another highlight was taking dance classes at the Debra-Ann School of Dance. The students, parents and teachers were absolutely amazing, all so friendly and welcoming. As well as this, I was given great corrections and tips to help me better my dancing. Some things that were interesting about Scotland include the public transport system and the way dance competitions are run. It took a little while for us to adjust to these differences but it was a good learning experience.

There are a few recommendations I would make to future awardees to ensure that they get the most out of their experience. Prior to travelling, it is important that you have a structured itinerary for the course of the trip but allow a couple of days for unexpected plans or rest periods. Also, be open-minded and prepared for a change of plans because it

may not be possible to do that particular thing, you m ay have underestimated the time needed to travel to a particular place or you may find something better to do. On this topic, it is a good idea to get a better understanding of the distances between places by speaking to someone who has been there. Otherwise, it is very difficult to ensure that you will make it to every planned event.

Although the whole of Scotland is phenomenal, there are specific places I would recommend future awardees to visit. In Edinburgh there is a show called the 'Spirit of Scotland' which is a true Scottish experience. This is where we tried haggis and black pudding and watched highland dancers and bagpipers. There is a famous fish and chips shop near St Andrews, called Anstruther Fish Bar, which was delicious and has a beautiful sight of water and boats across from it. Dunoon is another place that is stunning. It also houses the ground used for the Cowal Highland Gathering which is the world championship for Scottish highland dancing.

Overall this was one of the best experiences of my life. I learnt so much, not only about dancing, and this knowledge will benefit me every day of my life. I met great people and made lifelong friends. This opportunity has and will continue to benefit my dancing career. I am truly honoured that I was able to participate in such an incredible experience.