

## WHĀNAU FIT: PROMOTING TE REO MĀORI AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

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### INTRODUCTION

Whānau Fit is an initiative whereby Te Reo Māori (Māori language) and Te Ao Māori (Māori world view) are incorporated into physical activity. Whānau Fit was established in 2016 by the School of Physical Education, Sport and Exercise Sciences (PESES) Te Koronga student Terina Raureti, with the help of fellow students Ngahua Mita, Jordan Skipper, Tukohirangi Pini and Troy Ruhe. The journey began on the University of Otago campus during Te Wiki o Te Reo Māori (Māori language week) with the aim of creating a new, 'fun' space where Te Reo Māori is encouraged. We decided that would hold one session a week during the semester, with locations ranging from the PESES' Smithell's Gym to local maunga (mountains), marae (meeting house complexes) and field spaces around campus.

The initiative slowly became a popular space for people to gather, to make new friends, be active and enjoy being in a Māori environment. The common motivation for participation was the easy, fun and free environment provided to increase participants' physical activity levels throughout the year. Most of those who attended were university students and staff, giving the space further practical application by providing members with an active study break and a kai (snack) before returning to their mahi (work).

A core philosophy of Whānau Fit is "Whakatinana i te Hauora o Te Reo Māori: Physical Expression of the Health of Māori Language." Beginning each session with whakawhanaungatanga (the process of establishing relationships), Whānau Fit has become a space for us to gather as a whānau, encourage Te Reo Māori and embrace a new and innovative way of increasing physical activity levels.

### The state of Te Reo Māori and the physical activity of New Zealand

The statistics for Te Reo Māori in New Zealand demonstrate a decline in the use of Te Reo. Fifty-five percent of Māori adults in New Zealand can speak some level of Te Reo Māori, with 67% of Te Reo speakers using the language outside of their own home (Statistics New Zealand, 2015). The reasons for the decline of Te Reo have not been reported, but one factor may well be the lack of spaces to practice, resulting in people spending a larger proportion of each day speaking Te Reo Pākehā (English).

Running parallel with this statistic, 53.1% of Māori living in New Zealand are physically active (Statistics New Zealand, 2015). This figure is greater than that for non-Māori in New Zealand. Importantly, these statistics provide a positive incentive for us as Māori to be physically active, as such activity helps to prevent, manage and lower the incidence of negative health conditions. In addition to being a tool to improve health, physical activity has been identified as a valuable tool with which to incorporate and encourage the use of Te Reo Māori outside the home.

As explained above, among other things Whānau Fit is a space where Māori physical education and health research is combined with physical activity. The primary objective of this initiative is to enhance our hauora (well-being) as a whānau (family). At Whānau Fit, we provide a fun exercise environment where Te Reo Māori is implemented to encourage participants to use or to learn the Māori language. Examples of incorporating Te Reo Māori include a whanaungatanga (a concept that describes relationships, working together and providing people with a sense of belonging) process where each member introduces themselves and says where they are from – “Ko wai, nō wai.” This ensures that people are acquainted with one another, while allowing an opportunity to acknowledge whakapapa (a concept that describes our history, family and connections back to our ancestors) and the journey that all attending have been on, leading to this point of change. Further, the whanaungatanga process demonstrates that individuals from all walks of life are now bonding to lead a new lifestyle, moving forward together with the same kaupapa (purpose).

To accommodate all levels of Te Reo Māori users, the minimum level of Te Reo incorporated refers to the movements included in the training circuit. In addition, each weekly session is guided by a “kōwhiri o te rā” (Māori saying of encouragement), which is not exclusive to physical activity so that it can be utilised outside of the session as well. As Te Reo Māori is a central pillar of this initiative, increasing the amount of Te Reo used within a particular session is encouraged. Within the physical activity component of the session, members will split into groups using the same level of Te Reo Māori, creating the challenge of speaking as much Te Reo Māori as possible while encouraging each other to get through the exercise itself.

The richness of the language cannot exist without knowledge of the world view that underpins the language – so acknowledging Te Ao Māori is also included in the programme. Tāonga takaaro (Māori games) are included in the warm-up process. These games draw on narratives of Māori ancestors and incorporate Māori knowledge and history. Whānau Fit is essentially a space where we as Māori can come together, embrace our identity and work collectively as a whānau to enhance and encourage members' health and well-being.

## **A Maori world view**

As Māori, our world view is holistic and shaped by our history. We venture forward with our eyes on the past, placing emphasis on our ancestors and our whakapapa (Ka'Ai, 2004). Therefore, in order for us to develop and move forward as a culture, we must understand who we are and where we come from. We all descend from larger societal structures such as waka (canoe), iwi (tribe) and hapū (sub-tribe), providing our tribal identity (Broughton, 1993). Being Māori is a process of acknowledging a distinct cultural identity and being concerned with whānau, the whenua (land) and Te Reo Māori (Broughton, 1993).

“Ko te reo te mauri o te mana Māori: The language is a life force of the mana Māori” (New Zealand History Online, 2010). While the Crown has failed to protect Te Reo Māori, Māori culture is part of New Zealand history and identity, with Te Reo lying at the heart of our culture. Therefore, losing our language will mean that something unique will have been lost to the world (Waikerepuru, et al., 1993). An important step for promoters of Te Reo Māori is to work towards restoring the situation where Te Reo is the natural language of socialisation (Reedy, 2000).

## **Enhancing hauora Māori through Durie's Te Whare Tapa Whā model of health**

Hauora Māori (Māori health and well-being) is seen as holistic. It is not simply a measure of numbers and physical ability; instead, it is shaped by many elements that together constitute what it means to be Māori. Te Whare Tapa Whā is a Māori health model that was developed from a hui (meeting) of Māori health workers in 1982 and later described by Dr Mason Durie (1994). The model depicts Māori health in terms of the four walls of a house. The

four walls each reflect an aspect of health that is desired to maintain stability and well-being within our community. These four aspects are taha wairua (spiritual), taha hinengaro (emotional), taha whānau (social) and taha tinana (physical) (Durie, 1994).

Within the environment of Whānau Fit, we acknowledge this health model and use it as a tool to implement and benefit hauora Māori in these areas. We acknowledge that our well-being is not only about being physically active, but it is also about improving our relationships with each other, our connections to our ancestors, to our environment and, most important of all, connecting to our identity on a physical and spiritual level.

### **Taha Wairua**

Te taha wairua is a vital requirement of health and acknowledges the spiritual element of well-being. It acknowledges the need to humble oneself before the elements, reinforcing the importance of building relationships with our surrounding environments (Durie, 1985). At Whānau Fit we acknowledge te taha wairua by incorporating Te Reo Māori, whakapapa and our history as Māori. Through kēmu (games), commonly known as a “warm up,” we are able to loosen muscles and take steps to prevent injuries during our session. However, we do this by including taonga takaaro, allowing us to translate our knowledge of our tūpuna (ancestors) into physical activity. This in turn inspires us to embrace our identity as Māori, and to experience the stories and journeys that our ancestors once embarked on, further connecting us back to a Māori world.

Our language is a vital part of our hauora as Māori. It is one of our strongest connections to our tūpuna and our identity. Our circuit exercises are signposted and referred to in Te Reo Māori, with some activities having a particular emphasis on Te Reo. As we acknowledge the physical journey, incorporating movements suitable for all, we also acknowledge the spiritual journey with Te Reo undertaken by each individual by creating a safe environment in which to freely practice Te Reo.

Whakapapa portrays relationships between groups of people, and places an emphasis on our connections to our environment. Relationships reach out beyond human interactions and include relationships between humans and the universe, underlining the reality that the whakapapa between the physical world and the spiritual world is what binds and strengthens the different elements of Māori culture (Ka’Ai, 2004). At Whānau Fit we acknowledge the relationship with both worlds by building relationships with atua (gods). For example, our relationship with Papatūānuku (Earth Mother) is acknowledged when our sessions are held at the local maunga, climbing them together and sharing stories about our surrounding environment. In addition to setting group tasks within each session, we encourage members to “get out there” in their own time, climb their maunga and embrace the journey that our ancestors once took as a means of keeping our stories and our culture alive.

### **Taha Hinengaro**

Taha hinengaro highlights the importance of thoughts and feelings for well-being. As part of an holistic world view, health is seen as an inter-related phenomenon, emphasising that ‘thinking’ embraces a number of realms which include not only oneself, but also the whānau (Durie, 1985). Within the Whānau Fit environment, we are all on the same journey. We use the knowledge of our history, of our hauora and of our whānau to enhance our well-being. Knowledge is our greatest currency and forms a strong connection back to our tūpuna. Kaupapa Māori values such as whanaungatanga and manaakitanga (a concept that describes caring for and encouraging others) are our greatest influences. We incorporate these values by ensuring that everyone has introduced themselves and said where they are from before we begin each session. We also acknowledge that there is a distinct difference between exercise and physical activity, although people often use these terms interchangeably.

We make sure that everyone plays a positive role, not only for themselves but also for those around them, throughout the exercise session. Physical activity is never easy, so whether a person is a frequent exerciser or is new to physical activity, Whānau Fit offers a space for everyone to work together; incorporate manaakitanga and whanaungatanga and work together to finish the workout. In turn, this means that all participants are incorporating kaupapa Māori values as a means of supporting each other as a whānau. Using these concepts, we can learn, teach and grow our knowledge and understanding of a Māori world view together; through the vehicle of physical activity. This means that we will have knowledge to pass on to our tamariki (children), to our mokopuna (grandchildren) and to further generations of Māori.

### **Taha Whānau**

Taha whānau emphasises the importance of relationships and support (Durie, 1985). Our whānau and our whakapapa are important for our well-being. Our whānau play a central role in our understanding of who we are, where we are from and our identity as Māori. Therefore, it is important that as tuakana (older/more experienced person), as parents and as a whānau, you can play your part in being a positive guide for our rangatahi (youth). The environment and the role models surrounding our rangatahi influence their identity – who they become and how they view well-being. Whānau Fit provides an opportunity to show leadership for whānau members and to work together to reach hauora goals.

The first kaupapa for every session is whanaungatanga. We make sure to acknowledge everyone who has joined our journey and gain an understanding of who we are and where we are from. If someone has moved away from their home town, this helps create a space to gather with others who share the same values, have similar journeys and share similar visions of the world. Having this time means that we can relate to each other and create a whānau atmosphere within the group. Essentially, we are combining to tautoko (support) and help each other get the most out of being physically active.

### **Taha Tinana**

Taha tinana focuses on the physical element of being healthy – an element that is more familiar in Western perspectives on health. However, taha tinana is not only about being fit, but also about rituals and procedures, and the separation of tapū (restrictedness) and noa (unrestrictedness) (Durie, 1985). Physical activity is important for the health of our tinana (bodies). Our tinana are tapū and should be looked after properly. Increasing physical activity levels may decrease the incidence of obesity, heart-related diseases, diabetes, some cancers and many other health-related issues. Having an understanding of a Māori world view, it becomes evident that suffering from one of these conditions will not only affect you as an individual, but can create a pattern that your tamariki and your mokopuna will see, encouraging them to think that this is normal and creating consequences that will impact on everyone. At Whānau Fit, although we have a big focus on te taha tinana, all our activities are heavily influenced by the other three elements. However, te taha tinana is the driver for each session. Whānau Fit is about getting whānau active as a collective in an attempt to increase well-being under the auspices of a Māori world view.

### **Physical activity**

The physical activity component of the sessions is the element that weaves together all aspects of Māori health. When we are located indoors, we will usually warm up the body by playing games. These games can range from sports such as basketball through to tāonga tākaro like poi toa (a Māori game). This is an important part of our

session as it warms up our muscles, encourages our love for sport and increases the whanaungatanga between the participants. The exercise movements that we perform can all be modified to suit the individual's own level, so it does not matter whether you are a master of the movements involved or just beginning – everyone works together to strive for collective goals. There are always people there to ensure that you are comfortable and understand the movements involved, as well as the support of your whānau group to make sure you are giving it your all and enjoying every minute of it.

## Whānau Groups

The Whānau Fit roopū (groups) are broken into smaller whānau groups, which serve multiple purposes. Firstly, they provide support from others who can keep members accountable as well as mitigate the fear of physical activity. There is a great deal of evidence that group exercise classes increase participation rates and enjoyment (Bell, et al., 2001; Afele-Fa'amuli, Katirai & Dignan, 2009; Clark, et al., 2011; McNamara, Pavol & Gunter, 2013; Rowan, Riddell & Jamnik, 2013). Secondly, each of the roopū earn points for their effort and participation levels, which in turn creates incentives and competition between groups. For every member of your roopū that turns up to Whānau Fit, you get a point – so your whānau group is already waiting for you to help them. However, you can also gather your whānau and bring your own roopū to join the challenge. Not only will you get a point for turning up, but you can also accumulate points by extending your own hauora goals and the goals of your whānau as a collective. We use this competitive element to help initiate an individual's hauora pathway; it also creates a sense of excitement in the Whānau Fit atmosphere. However, everyone has their own challenges, so your whānau group will be there every day to encourage and help you on your journey to the greatest taonga (treasure) of all, hauora and Te Reo Māori.

## CONCLUSION

Whānau Fit is a space where members combine their love of hauora Māori and physical activity to provide a safe and fun space to be active as a collective. While members all have different goals and different barriers to achievement, if we are able to focus on our whakapapa, our values and our identity as Māori we will be able to support and uplift each other as a culture and as whānau.

“Ko **Terina Raureti** tōku ingoa, no Otaki ahau. Ko Ngāti Raukawa, ko Ngāti Rangitihī ōku iwi. My name is Terina Raureti and I am from Otaki. My genealogical links are to the tribes of Ngāti Raukawa and Ngāti Rangitihī.” Terina is currently studying for his Masters of Physical Education, with a focus on Māori PE and health.

**Anne-Marie Jackson** (Ngāti Whātua, Ngāti Kahu o Whangaroa, Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Wai, Te Roroa) is a lecturer in Māori physical education and health at the School of Physical Education, Sport and Exercise Sciences at Otago University. After obtaining her Bachelor of Physical Education (Hons) and Master of Physical Education at Otago, she completed a doctorate in Māori studies and physical education which examined rangatiratanga and Māori health and wellbeing within a customary fisheries context. Anne-Marie is part of Te Koronga, a Māori research group that

aims to strengthen Māori communities. One of Te Koronga's many strands is Te Koronga Korikori Tinana, better known as Whānau Fit.

"Ko **Hauti Hakopa** ahau. Nō Tūwharetoa ahau. My name is Hauti Hakopa and I am currently a Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga postdoctoral Fellow, based within Te Koronga at the University of Otago, School of Physical Education, Sport and Exercise Sciences. I co-lead the research group Te Koronga, a Māori research group that aims to strengthen and inspire Māori communities through the quality of our work. One of Te Koronga's many strands is Te Koronga Korikori Tinana, better known as Whānau Fit."

"Ko **Troy Ruhe** ahau. Nō Ngāpuhi me Tūwharetoa ōku iwi. My name is Troy Ruhe. My genealogical links are to the tribes of Ngāpuhi and Tūwharetoa, as well as the island of Mauke in the Cook Islands. I am studying towards a Masters in Physical Education with a focus on clinical exercise physiology in Pacific populations."

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