

# Hei Matau Paddlers

## CASE STUDY

Young Women on the Rise: A Whānau Centred Approach.

### Hei Matau Paddlers: Ko Wai?

Hei Matau Paddlers (HMP), was started in 2005 by Kelley Korau and Ray Timihou as an all inclusive, whānau focused, water sports club. In the early 2000's Waka Ama was a predominantly Māori sport; HMP was a club that welcomed all paddlers keen to give Waka Ama a go, attracting local rafters and kayakers to the sport. Nearly 20 years on, their welcoming 'vibe' remains strong at the club, with over 130 members, ranging in age from 5-85yrs. A big focus of the club is their Rangatahi/Tamariki programme and encouraging Māori to reconnect with their whakapapa through the sport of Waka Ama.

HMP have close relationships with local schools who use the Haumanu St Reserve as a base for their teams. HMP work as kaitiaki for the waka from these local schools, cleaning and maintaining equipment in return for using the waka.

Within the club there are strong leaders and world class paddlers, both male and female, to guide and develop the rangatahi. That is a testament to the whanau values that make this club strong; where experienced and capable paddlers give back to their club as coaches or mentors.

In 2023, HMP received funding from He Puna Korikori to support the development of young women/kōhine within their club by buying 3 W1 Waka (one person, single-hulled waka). The Kōhine Programme works to build stronger, more competent paddlers and develop self confident, self managing young Māori women.

### Ngā Whāinga Matua o HMP Kohine Programme

- To build confidence within young women to feel safe on the water.
- To develop the skills of young women in paddling.
- To foster healthy relationships both competitive and non competitive with the participants peers, mentors and coaches.

### Building Paddlers of the Future

Waka Ama is one of the fastest growing sports in NZ with huge growth in the Wahine, U19 and U13 sectors. Findings from the *Waka Ama NZ 2023 Annual Report* showed that from 4880 affiliated paddlers (43% increase) nationwide, compared to 2022 statistics:

- **2688 Wahine Paddlers (46% increase)**
- **1241 U13 Paddlers (182% increase)**
- **2128 U19 Paddlers (106% increase)**

HMP showed similar growth within their club and at the 2023 Waka Ama Nationals they had two Intermediate W6, one J16 W6 and three Midget W6 kōhine teams. Interest and members are growing and HMP is set to supersede these numbers at 2024 Nationals.

HMP's Kōhine Programme was created to cater for this growth and build on water safety and waka paddling skills for young women within their club, forging positive relationships along the way.



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### A Whānau Centred Approach

Traditional Māori family units were a group of children, parents, grand-parents, uncles and aunts that shared a common ancestor; and worked together to support the whole whānau. This concept is the foundation of Māori community and extends wider into hapū and iwi. From a Māori world view, this concept is encapsulated in the Harakeke (Flax) plant; where the Rito (the centre shoot) is the child, the most important part of the plant. It is nurtured and protected by the outside leaves (the parents and grand-parents) and if the Rito is removed, the plant perishes.

HMP's whānau centred approach to Waka Ama puts their youth first, for they are the leaders of tomorrow.

***'As a club, we've never looked at how well our adults are doing, it's about how are we mentoring and bringing our young ones up. When they are doing well, I think us as a club are doing well.'***  
***(Mel Rika. HMP 2024)***

It also creates an environment for adults, elders and experts to share their skills and knowledge. This ensures sustainability and continuity for the sport, its tikanga and values. HMP's Kōhine Programme relies on mentors such as Ray Timihou, Ngatuirī Hapī and Mel Rika to train and educate the girls in skills, techniques and processes to ensure they are safe and competent on the water.

**He Waka Eke Noa - Together As One**  
***'As Māori we have a connection with the water and we share our stories whilst paddling. We want to encourage and support our young Māori women, in particular, to participate and compete in a sport that has positive outcomes for all.'***  
***(Mel Rika. HMP 2023)***

**Whanaungatanga** is about relationships and connections and at HMP it is one of their most important values. Communication plays a vital role in all team sports, especially Waka Ama, and the ability to form positive relationships and understand your teammates is important. Through the Kōhine Programme, participants develop communication skills and make friendships that transfer outside of the sport. It was noted, through interviews with participants, that making friendships was an important factor of participating in Waka Ama at HMP.

Reweti and Severinsen (2022) state that **“Beyond the physical health benefits for paddlers, waka ama enhances wellbeing, connecting paddlers to each other through whanaungatanga (process of forming and maintaining relationships) and manaakitanga (generosity and caring for others), and to the environment through the practice of kaitiakitanga (guardianship).”**





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**Kaitiakitanga** within the club, each team is on a roster to clean and tidy their base at the Haumanu St Reserve, promoting active kaitiakitanga and kotahitanga values, developing a unified team culture. Twice a year the club holds a big 'working bee' where they all get together and clean, sand and address any maintenance issues on the waka and other equipment. At HMP looking after their equipment and environment is a priority.

**Accessibility/Inclusiveness** HMP is a low cost Waka Ama club (Club Fees \$20 Child, \$45 Adult), removing financial barriers for participation. Their Kōhine Programme supports young women by providing free equipment, resources and training, exemplified by the purchase of three W1 waka through He Puna Korikori funding. This approach broadens access and encourages diverse community involvement.

### Hauora - Te Whare Tapa Whā Model

HMP promotes holistic well-being. Waka Ama activities enhance physical fitness (taha tinana) and mental resilience (taha hinengaro). The club's whānau-centred approach strengthens family bonds (taha whānau) and fosters a supportive community. Emphasising cultural connection and values like kaitiakitanga and whanaungatanga nurtures spiritual well being (taha wairua).

### Ngā Hua - Key Success Factors

**Whānau Centred Approach:** HMP prioritises family values and youth development, ensuring a supportive environment for all ages. This strengthens community bonds and promotes collective well-being.

**Inclusiveness and Accessibility:** HMP is welcoming to all, offering low-cost membership and free access to equipment. This inclusivity broadens participation and removes financial barriers to participation and involvement in Waka Ama.

**Strong Leadership and Mentorship:** Experienced paddlers mentor younger members, fostering skill development and reinforcing the club's values. This ensures knowledge transfer and continuity.

**Relationship Building:** Whanaungatanga emphasises teamwork and communication, essential for success in sport and life, fostering strong, supportive relationships that transfer outside of the sport.

**Commitment to Kaitiakitanga:** Active guardianship of equipment and environment instils responsibility and respect for resources, promoting sustainable practices.

### Survey Insights: HMP Members 2024

#### Why Do You Do Waka Ama?

- 21% Competitive drive
- 21% The people
- 23% Connection with the environment
- 21% Physical fitness
- 13% The culture
- 1% Other

#### Why Did You Choose Hei Matau Paddlers as Your Club?

- 31% Strong whānau culture
- 19% Affordable club fees
- 25% Convenient location
- 25% Quality leadership and coaching

#### How Does Waka Ama Most Affect You?

- 23% Improved physical health
- 26% Enhanced mental well-being
- 24% Deepened spiritual connection
- 27% Strengthened relationships

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### References and Readings

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