

## Whanau Nui – Free family swimming and water safety lessons

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Whanau Nui is a successful 'learn to swim' and water safety programme which has been run in Counties Manukau since 2002. The programme has been coordinated and funded by Injury Free Counties Manukau region of Auckland and WaterSafe Auckland. The success of the programme has seen it replicated in Auckland City locations.

The programme offers five free 30 minute swimming and water safety lessons delivered by swim school instructors at local aquatic facilities. A criteria for entry into the programme is that at least one parent/caregiver is in the water with their child during each of the five lessons. The programme has a significant focus on parent/caregiver supervision and basic water safety messages and skills. Swim schools have supported the programme by agreeing to teach a greater level of water safety, having differing ability levels in their classes and drastically reducing their lesson charges.

To supplement the water safety messages that parents and children receive in the water, water safety educational resources are also given to participants at the conclusion of each day. Where required, resources are distributed in Te Reo Maori Pacific, Mandarin and Korean languages.

### The aims and objectives of the Whanau Nui Programme are to:

- Give children an opportunity to learn basic water safety skills and increase their confidence in water
- Teach parents/caregivers water safety skills which they can continue to reinforce with their children once the free lessons have finished
- Deliver water safety messages to parents/caregivers focusing on active child supervision when in, on or near water
- Deliver the programme in such a way that the water safety skills are fun and enjoyable for both the parent/caregiver and the children
- Target at risk population groups including Maori and Pasifika

Historically, Whanau Nui was designed to target Maori and Pasifika families due to the high drowning statistics of these two ethnic groups. Unfortunately many of these families are of a low socio-economic status and thus cannot afford to put their children through paid swimming tuition. This programme is targeted towards families who are not currently enrolled in paid swimming tuition.

Unique to the programme is the criteria that a parent/caregiver must accompany their children in the water during the lessons. This criterion is included so parents/caregivers learn the importance of close supervision when their children are near water, and to also teach parents simple swimming and water safety skills they can then teach to their children once the free lessons are completed.

Approximately 600 children and 350 parents participate in the Whanau Nui programme each year in the Counties Manukau and Auckland areas. Around 25% of these families enrolled in paid lessons on completion.

The evaluation revealed several key findings which are important for the future planning of the programme and have informed recommendations for the programme.

- Learning new skills and being in the water were what children identified as being the most enjoyable aspects of the programme, with water safety third
- Being in the water with their children was what parents identified as the most enjoyable aspect of the programme for them, providing justification for this criteria for participation
- Parents cited learning how to teach their children and learning about water safety as the two things they learnt most
- 87% of parents now feel confident in their ability to teach swimming and water safety skills, with 97% of parents indicating they will take their children to the pools more often

Findings on the skill learnings of the participants will be presented.

The success of Whanau Nui has led to this project being replicated across the whole Auckland region.

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