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Doing it for the whanau

A Whakatane grandmother's determination to give her family a better future has seen outstanding results. Florence Hamlin and her whanau recently completed the 10 Week Healthy and Active Hapu Challenge and haven't looked back since.

"I did it for my mokopuna (grandchildren), so they wouldn't get into bad habits like me," says Flo. "I really want to point out the change in nine year old Caleb. He has ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) but since we all completed the challenge and have changed to a healthier diet, his behaviour has improved so much that he is no longer on his medication. We are all very grateful for that. Maryann is 10 and was the youngest to take part. She loves exercise but doesn't have good eating habits. Now she is eating fruit and has made some real changes," she says.

The Ngati Raka Hapu took part in the pilot programme which was funded by the Bay of Plenty District Health Board Healthy Eating Healthy Action (HEHA) fund to help encourage Maori to get more active and have fun in their own surroundings. Mataatua Sports Trust Kaiwhakahaere Waihi Leabourn says that the fundamental theory behind the project is that the activities are designed by the participants, so they are doing things they are interested in and that suit their environment.

"I had a plan of activities ready before we started but I wanted to make sure I was flexible to support what the hapu wanted to do, so that's what we did!" Waihi says. "It was really important to make sure they would continue what they had learnt after the 10 weeks, which is why we encouraged the participants to facilitate as well. One lady runs jump jam classes which are a big hit."

Each person had their own individual goals but it was the group activities that were the most popular such as table tennis, aqua jogging and jump jam.

“We would meet on Sundays and listen to how people were getting on and help people get back on track if they were falling behind. We could suggest the activities we wanted to do. Jump jam, which is exercise to music, was really good fun,” says Flo.

The physical activity element was only part of the challenge, the funding also went towards nutrition education.

“We organised for Aporina Chapman from Sport Bay of Plenty to come along one Sunday and talk to the group about portion sizes and the importance of 5+ fruit and vegetables a day. We made sure the messages got through in a meaningful way,” says Waihi.

“Aporina had a chart with her which showed the sugar and fat content of certain food. I used to eat hot chips every day, now I have a healthy sandwich instead,” says Flo.

Due to the strong support given by Waihi and the Mataatua Sports Trust, everyone is continuing with their good habits.

“I am still doing lots of walking and because of Waihi we still meet on Sundays and make sure no-one is falling off the track,” says Flo.

Word has started to get around other local hapu and Waihi is overrun with requests of “When can we start our 10 week challenge?” Funding is available for three hapu this year and Waihi hopes that they will be able to increase the number in the future.

“It really works because the participants have ownership of their goals and how they’re going to achieve them. And it doesn’t finish at the end of the 10 weeks. We continue to support them and help them facilitate ongoing activities. Ngati Raka is now buying their own table tennis table and are keen to challenge other hapu - they are really competitive!” says Waihi.



Flo Hamlin (Nanny) did the 10 week challenge for her mokopuna, Caleb Friis (left), Maryann Friis (front centre) and John Friis (right).

ENDS

For more information please contact:
Rebecca Silvester
Communications Officer
Bay of Plenty District Health Board
Tel: 07 579 8033
rebecca.silvester@bopdhb.govt.nz