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Top chef teaching about healthy kai

Eastern Bay residents are learning how to prepare healthy and nutritious food for their whanau thanks to funding from the BOPDHB Healthy Eating Healthy Action (HEHA) fund.

Meeting Chef John Lee inspired Sandy Watene and her colleagues from the Te Huinga a Matariki ki Tuhoe Māori Women's Welfare League to apply for the funding and develop the marae-based cooking course.

"John is a qualified chef with 30 years experience in the UK as well as health and hygiene and teacher training qualifications," says Sandy.

John's philosophy is that cooking should be fun and not just "a job for women".

"Women are often put in the position of having to cook nutritious meals for their whanau without any training or support and it can become a chore," says John. "The classes help to raise their self esteem by giving them confidence in their abilities. It's a win-win situation because the whole whanau benefits."

But the cooking classes are not just for women, there is an open door policy for anyone who wants to attend.

"We aim to reinforce health and well-being with men and women of all ages and make the healthy choice the easy choice," says John. "Our youngest participant was a 16 year old boy and our oldest was a 77 year old lady who came along to be nosey and couldn't stay away!"

John makes sure that participants are hands-on with the food from day one.

“One of the simplest things that people learn is ‘less meat, more vegetables’,” says John. “One lady told me she was using four kilos of mince to make a meal for her whanau of 11. I showed her how to substitute two of the kilos with vegetables. She was surprised to discover that her whanau actually preferred the taste!”

John also helps people to shop within a budget, giving examples of what to do with discounted veggies from the supermarket.

“One of the best things about the course is learning how to budget for the whole whanau,” says Meniz Hiko-Reha who is attending the course currently running in Waimana at the Tataiahape marae.

“I have five big eaters in my house and John showed us how to make a stir fry using just three pieces of steak, I would never have thought that was enough!” says Kahu Hiko.

One of the highlights of the course for many people is learning how to make sushi.

“Making sushi was easier than I thought! It’s good fun working as a team,” says Meniz.

“Baking our own bread is great because I can make lunch rolls for the kids and they enjoy helping at home,” she says.

John keeps the eight week course interesting and varied by linking knowledge about traditional food sources, planting and harvesting by seasons, with healthy food choices and modern food preparation methods. The aim is to ensure that the community continues to use what they’ve learnt and becomes self sufficient where possible.

“Part of the funding goes towards helping the community to set up gardens on their land,” says John.

As well as hands on cooking, participants learn about the nutritional value of food and get involved in physical activity sessions such as Tai Chi.

“The course is about overall well-being and making healthy choices,” says John. “One group ran a Biggest Loser competition. Each week they all put in \$5 and whoever lost the most weight over the week got to keep the money. The marae can be a very competitive environment, so this worked really well to keep people motivated.”

The Nga Mahi a te Ringawera Takaoakai - Cuisine and Nutrition Skills Development Course has been run in Ruatoki, Kawerau and Ruatahuna. The women who attended the course in Kawerau have taken their knowledge and skills to the next level and with John's help are setting up their own catering business.

"Most of the women on that course were grandmothers and the course gave them the focus and drive to do something for themselves. They are a very close-knit group who started to think differently than just being grandmothers. Theirs is a great success story," says John.

Hapu and marae-based communities can apply for funding from the BOPDHB. Applications for the current round of funding close on November 14. For more information or to submit an application, contact Cynthia Turuwhenua on 07 579 8555 or visit the website www.bopdhb.govt.nz, click on the HEHA logo, then go to Community Info.

Healthy Eating Healthy Action (HEHA) is the Ministry of Health's strategic approach to improving nutrition and increasing physical activity. This is a joint strategy at a national level between the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, and Sport and Recreation New Zealand (SPARC). The goals of the HEHA strategy are to improve nutrition, increase physical activity, and reduce obesity. Regionally, the BOPDHB works alongside its health, education, and sport partners to develop a variety of projects to meet these goals. For further HEHA information visit www.moh.govt.nz/healthyeatinghealthyaction.

Maori Community Action Projects - funding available now

- Hapu and marae-based communities can apply for funding to improve nutrition through increasing vegetable and fruit intake and increasing physical activity.
- Funding can be used for projects such as building a community garden, cooking demonstrations and cuisine courses.
- Projects must be led by the whanau with good planning and vision to ensure long term change.



Kahu Hiko makes fresh wholemeal bread with the help of Chef John at the Tataiahape marae in Waimana.