

Taurikura: A transformative approach to swimming for māmā and pēpi.

He pukenga wai he hononga tāngata. He hononga tāngata, he pukenga kōrero
– Where water meets, people meet. Where people meet, knowledge flows.”

TAURIKURA to harness the power of mātauranga māori in a transformative approach to swimming and water confidence.

By Ranui Maxwell



Pictured: Justine (Comet Swimming instructor) Māmā and Pēpi of Taurikura at Elgin School Swimming Pool

Te Tairāwhiti is surrounded by 80% of water, between 2012 – 2022, 50% of drownings in Gisborne occurred at beaches. All-year round activities involving water is common practice for the region. Subsequently the region continues to be impacted by severe weather events including significant flooding in some areas, the importance of water safety and water confidence is paramount for the region.

Drowning is one of the top ten causes of death worldwide (WHO, 2014). Last year, Māori accounted for 31% of all drownings in Aotearoa, New Zealand despite only making up 17.1% of the population (Statistics New Zealand, 2021; Water Safety New Zealand, 2021). The 2021 Māori drowning toll was slightly higher than 2020, and 43% higher than the five-year average, recording the highest number of Māori drownings since 2001 (Water Safety New Zealand, 2021). Most of these drownings for Māori occurred while swimming (Water Safety New Zealand, 2021).

From a Te Ao Māori perspective, the relationship with water is considered important to many of our tikanga and kawa (protocols and practices). Most believe that we are born from water, it is a giver of life and the connection to water is embedded in our cultural identity. However our drowning rates paint a different picture.

Tomairangi Higgins (Healthy Families East Cape, Manager), is a current board member of Comet Swimming Club. Tomairangi first attended learn to swim lessons with the club when she was 5 years old, making this kaupapa a full circle moment for her and her whānau. Comet established in 1958, earlier this year was unsuccessful in their application for the learn to swim tender, which was awarded to an overseas provider for the newly established Kiwa Pools. Comet still run lessons out of the Elgin School swimming pool. They recently won the Best Swimming Club Innovation Award for 2023, the Taurikura kaupapa formed part of the application for the award.



“I feel deeply connected with the kaupapa and whānau in this space. I am truly blessed to be able to hold and grow this space for our māmā, pāpā, pepi and whanau where we combine valuable swimming skills, positive experiences, Waiata, Kōrero, Te Ao Māori as one. I hope to encourage more whānau to come and be a part of this kaupapa”, says Justine, Comet Swimming Instructor.”

After the birth of her first baby in January 2023 Tomairangi inquired about swimming lessons that could be offered to māmā and pēpi through another sub provider, they incurred a number of barriers including long wait lists and costs. Through Tomairangi’s relationship with Comet Swimming Club she approached them with the idea to run classes for māmā and pēpi. Within a couple of weeks, funding had been secured to offer free lessons to 10 māori māmā and their pēpi between the ages of 3 to 6 months. The Taurikura kaupapa began to take shape, with a building and flying the plane approach started. We have named this kaupapa Taurikura this translation means ‘to be prosperous, to be thriving’. This is the opportunity we are giving both our māmā and their pēpi through building a positive connection to waiora.

“Tomairangi found a group of local Māori māmā and pēpi, Justine, our Comet instructor, to take the jumped at the opportunity to begin bilingual lessons. Her ultimate goal is to teach these lessons 100% in Te Reo Māori” says Rochelle, Comet Swimming Club Manager.



Through a systems mapping exercise, there is a need for more water safety and confidence classes to be offered. Taurikura is the only kaupapa offering classes to babies under 4 years of age. Other providers are focusing on high needs tamariki or tamariki 4 years and over. There were over 1200 Māori pēpi born in Te Tairāwhiti between 2022 and 2023. Healthy Families East Cape’s aspiration is that Taurikura is able to be scaled and offer classes beyond the 10 māmā and pēpi the kaupapa is currently serving. From a health prevention lens, we can see the potential and the need for these classes to be offered in the future.

Healthy Families East Cape, has been partnering with a number of kaupapa partners using maramataka to understand our natural environment and how the marana has an impact on our overall health and wellbeing. The Taurikura prototype seeks to harness the power of mātauranga māori by using the maramataka to guide the lessons, waiata and karakia māori as a form of transitional knowledge while normalising te reo māori in places we live, learn work and play.



It is a trend that Māori are drowning and most of these incidents are preventable, by testing māori frameworks, belief systems and knowledge systems allows us to determine if Māori connect better to values and ideas that are indigenous to them. This is an opportunity for Healthy Families East Cape team to test our assumptions that maramataka and mātauranga māori can help us predict what dangers might be on a particular marama phase or read tohu (signs) better to ensure safety.

We know that each marama can dictate if it is a good time to be around water or not. These same principals can be applied when interreacting with any body of water and will be taken into consideration when planning Taurikura lessons in the future.

Western water safety and water confidence lessons play a role in lowering the drowning rates, however costs and timing can often be a barrier to whānau Māori. We understand that there are minimal opportunities for whānau to access kaupapa māori based water confidence lessons throughout Aotearoa. Through the Taurikura kaupapa, Healthy Families East Cape have connected Nati Pēpi and Turanga Health with discounted classes with Comet for the māmā and pēpi they are working with. Our kaupapa partners Māori Women's Welfare League – Ngati Uepohatu are also supporting Taurikura in access resources to support the kaupapa in 2024.

The investment from Comet Swimming Club into Taurikura over the last three terms is over \$5,000 which has allowed our māmā and pēpi to continue.

By taking a mātauranga māori approach we are building a capacity of whānau, hapu, iwi and community to understand how the marama plays a role in how we interact with water. We are strengthening the prevention in the high fatality rates in Te Tairāwhiti while nurturing healthy relationships with water and play from an early age in attempt to prevent long term chronic illness later in life. We are committed to working alongside māmā pēpi and their whānau to build a kaupapa māori approach to water confidence. The programme is designed to prioritise those most at risk. Our overall aim for Taurikura is to create environments where mātauranga māori is used to address the need to have a Māori understanding swimming and water safety programme that aims to uplift whānau health and wellbeing.



We asked our māmā to share their experience with us, this is what they had to say;

- These swimming lessons with my pēpi have been an incredible bonding experience. Starting at just 3 month old, my pēpi and I embarked on the best journey of wai exploration.
- Justine has been simply amazing, her patience and skill in teaching and ensuring Xaves safety in the water have made every lesson enjoyable and reassuring.
- My cousins and I grew up swimming for Comet and to be welcomed back as a parent has been awesome. Comet has been so responsive generous and community-minded with the Taurikura kaupapa. Taurikura has given us the opportunity to learn, play and connect with other whānau in the wai.
- I would love to see Taurikura thriving with more pēpi and matua , with older tamariki and their wider whānau.
- Love sharing this swimming experience with my darling girl and seeing the joy she gets from it. Thank you so much Comet for the opportunity to grow our confidence in the water.
- As a first time māmā being able to bring our pēpi to the Taurikura classes with Comet has been an amazing experience. Being a coastal nation, swimming should be a normal part of our lives of our tamariki. Being able to introduce our daughter to wai through these classes we hope the hononga (relationship) she establishes with wai will enable her to be safe and enjoy many waterways throughout the rest of her life.
- Since starting her in swimming I have noticed her love for water unfold as well as my confidence in her being around it. We still have a long way to go in learning how to swim but these classes have been a great way to start.

Healthy Families East Cape are continuing to partner and have conversations that seek to elevate the growth of Taurikura into the future.