



EQUIP'D

CASE STUDY

—
ENCOURAGING PASIFIKA TEENAGE
GIRLS TO ENJOY AND PARTICIPATE
IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

EQUIP'D



Equip'd helps us exercise but have fun at the same time without winning or anything, we're exercising for fun"

- STUDENT PARTICIPANT

Encouraging Pasifika teenage girls to enjoy and participate in physical activity is the catalyst for the Equip'd programme, but it's not the end goal.

Created by the Harbour Sport SportSPasifik team in 2013, the Equip'd programme came about in response to evidence suggesting low rates of participation in sport and active recreation and high rates of mental health concerns for young Pasifika women.

The school-based programme targets young Pasifika females. It offers weekly physical activity sessions that aim to use positive experiences in sport and recreation to engage students and increase confidence, overall wellbeing and leadership skills. Session content is co-designed with participants so as to best meet their needs and build on the strengths of that group.

Originally working with two secondary schools, Equip'd now works with three secondary schools and one intermediate on Auckland's North Shore and expects to reach more than 200 students in 2018.

Important success factors for the programme have been:

- Identifying someone to champion the programme at each school
- Engaging programme facilitators who have empathy and cultural competency
- Co-designing sessions so they are more engaging and effective
- Acknowledging that parental values and expectations are highly influential for this target market.

GETTING STARTED

To get started Harbour Sport staff collated a number of pieces of research to help guide their work.

The 2007 "Youth2000 National Survey of the Health and Wellbeing of Secondary School Students" indicated that nearly half (47%) of Pasifika teens did not participate in sport, largely due to feeling inadequate, shy or embarrassed. It also showed high rates of obesity in Pasifika teens.

Further compelling evidence came from the Statistics New Zealand and Ministry of Pacific Affairs 2011 report Health and Pacific Peoples in New Zealand, which stated:

- Pacific young people were approximately twice as likely to have depression, be anxious or make suicide attempts, compared with the rest of the youth population
- Among young Pasifika women, there are significant mental health concerns, with:
 - 15% reporting significant symptoms of depression
 - 29% reporting they had deliberately harmed themselves.

Through focus groups and insights like the **Fonofale model** (Pacific model of health), Harbour Sport recognised a lack of culturally relevant sport or health programmes for Pasifika teenage girls in the region. It also identified that finances, time and family commitments were significant barriers to sport and recreation for this demographic.

THE INITIATIVE



We want to provide fun experiences that weave in elements or conversations that challenge our Pacific teens to pursue higher goals.”

– ANNA TUINUKUAFE, HARBOUR SPORT,
PACIFIC COMMUNITY MANAGER NORTH

We are always looking at the students, listening to what they say, checking to see if they’re happy and enjoying the sessions too. Suggestions from students are very broad from opening and closing with a prayer session through to rock-climbing.”

– ANNA TUINUKUAFE, HARBOUR SPORT,
PACIFIC COMMUNITY MANAGER NORTH

These insights led Harbour Sport to develop a culturally relevant, secondary-school based programme with a focus on engaging young Pasifika women.

While targeted at non-active Pasifika teenage girls, the programme is open to all female students, regardless of ethnicity or activity level.

Connecting with schools

To establish Equip'd within a school, a crucial first step was to develop a relationship and build buy-in within each school. Taking time to understand the pressures each school was under and to share the benefits of the programme for their school and students was important.

Equally important was identifying the right person within the school to “champion” the programme, with the “right” contact varying from sport staff, guidance counsellors or the school’s Pacific liaison.

Equip'd staff communicate regularly with identified school staff throughout the programme and, for planning purposes, the team seeks feedback from the school’s liaison in term four.

Co-designed programme structure

Initial consultation with schools identified that a weekly session in terms two and three would work best for students, with some running sessions after school, others at lunch-time and one during the last period on a Monday.

Weekly activities are varied and include gym-based ball sports, including basketball and volleyball, Zumba and skateboarding. At least three sessions cover nutrition, including cooking classes, with facilitators sharing nutrition messages creatively through games. Interwoven throughout these conversations are topics such as body image, which are either prompted by facilitators or student led.

Each session begins with a few set ice-breaker activities. Facilitators then open the floor for suggestions for the last half of the session and future sessions. This co-design model has proven popular with the students.



THE INITIATIVE



What I like about Equip'd is like, it brings all the Polly girls together. Once we're there we're like a big family."

- STUDENT PARTICIPANT

Offering a programme that's holistic is really important, especially with Pacific girls as they're likely to be involved in so much – school, church, work and family commitments, etc ... With a holistic focus, we can offer them the chance to improve their health, well-being and physical activity levels in one package."

- ALEXANDRIA NICHOLAS, EQUIP'D PROGRAMME LEAD

We want to work with groups/people with the same vision as us and know how to work with young females who are inactive."

- ANNA TUINUKUAFE, HARBOUR SPORT, PACIFIC COMMUNITY MANAGER NORTH

Being culturally relevant

The programme's main selling points are that it is culturally relevant, tailored to Pacific peoples' holistic view of health, and an opportunity for girls to socialise in a fun, non-threatening environment.

To ensure cultural relevancy, the team used the Fonofale model alongside feedback from the target population. These insights helped to identify what activities engage young Pasifika females, barriers that affect participants' holistic health and how beauty and positive role modelling is defined from a cultural perspective. The team continues to use participant feedback to guide and shape the programme and to support the mapping of cultural identity.

Seeking like-minded partners

To increase the opportunities offered through the programme, Equip'd has aligned with various other like-minded external providers and funders that seek similar outcomes.

This year, Equip'd took a group of senior student leaders to the Young, Free and Pasifika annual leaders' conference and worked with the Sisters of Shred female skateboarding group, to introduce a new recreational activity.

Since 2017, Aktive Auckland's HERA Everyday Goddess programme has offered support, enabling participants to try new activities, like rock climbing, yoga and swimming, that, due to financial or social barriers, they may not have previously tried.



IMPORTANT SUCCESS FACTORS



Sometimes, if the contact is from the sports department they know the girls who are already active. While it is great to have these students in the mix, we really want those students who are not confident with physical activity or are shy.”

– ALEXANDRIA NICHOLAS, EQUIP'D PROGRAMME LEAD

Feedback last year showed that some of the girls found it very helpful to have someone of Pasifika descent to talk to as they felt there was a greater understanding of what they are going through. This strong rapport helped the programme's quality and growth.”

– ANNA TUINUKUAFA, HARBOUR SPORT,
PACIFIC COMMUNITY MANAGER NORTH

Yeah, and like Anna being our tutor, she's a Pacific Islander herself, so she knows where we are coming from and stuff like that, ... it's so fun coming to every Equip'd session because she makes it fun for us, and she understands how we feel and stuff being a Pacific Islander as well.”

– STUDENT PARTICIPANT

I did play netball, but I only got to play three games because there was like legit no-one to look after my little siblings, so I pulled out, and it's just that your parents they say that there's better things to do other than go and waste your time, like go play that sport, whatever.”

– STUDENT PARTICIPANT

Yeah, there's more responsibility on me, because I'm the oldest girl, so I'm always doing stuff for my family and stuff. So, sports like not really in the category of my first priorities.”

– STUDENT PARTICIPANT

Identifying a school champion is crucial

When school connections weren't strong, usually due to staff turnover, the Equip'd programme leaders found it has negatively affected the success of the programme at that school.

Having a staff contact who is also a positive female role model, whether Pasifika or not, is an added benefit because students the programme aims to engage will often already have connections with them. Staff in roles like guidance counsellor or Pacific liaison (if the school has one) are often the best people to identify students who would benefit most from the programme.

Programme facilitators need empathy and cultural competency

A facilitator who understands the culture and commitments of Pasifika female students is central to the success of the programme.

To build trust, facilitators must be someone the participants' can relate to and, importantly, who can relate to them. Equip'd facilitators often share their own journeys with students to foster stronger relationships and attend school cultural activities to support participants outside of the programme.

Co-designed sessions are more engaging and effective

The Equip'd of five years ago is very different from what is delivered today. Initially, the programme was structured and focused on encouraging students to play sport and learn about nutrition.

Thanks to feedback and regular evaluations, Equip'd has now morphed from this solely facilitator-led programme to one that enables the students to “have a voice” and guide the content of weekly sessions. This ensures content remains relevant and has helped to build the confidence and leadership skills of some of the participants.

Parental values and expectations are highly influential for this target market

Participant feedback highlighted the influence that parental views (regarding the value of physical activity and the expectations of their teenage daughters) have on their engagement and ongoing involvement in sport and physical activity opportunities.

Given time pressures and family commitments, often students and their parents will ask if they receive NCEA credits for participating – which is something the programme doesn't currently offer. Equip'd is looking for ways to more actively share the programme's benefits with participants' parents, including holding parents' evenings.



OUTCOMES



I used to play volleyball when I was a junior but family responsibility at home meant I had to drop out. So, I come to Equip'd to help me get fit. I can see that maybe I have a way to join the senior volleyball team again."

- STUDENT PARTICIPANT

A lot of girls gain more confidence over the duration of the course, they'll start speaking out more often in the session, and over time you can see they begin to look fitter."

- ANNA TUINUKUAPE, HARBOUR SPORT, PACIFIC COMMUNITY MANAGER NORTH

The integration of participant feedback from evaluations, and a co-design model, has transformed Equip'd into a much more student-led, holistically focused programme that includes wellness sessions and leadership opportunities.

Equip'd has been successful in engaging many young females. In 2017, the programme worked with four schools on Auckland's North Shore, with 95 students taking part. Most participants have been from a Pasifika background and many were not previously engaging in sport and physical activity.

Programme evaluations show an increase in participant physical activity levels and positive changes to their confidence. Many participants have also taken on leadership roles, including mentoring younger Pasifika students and volunteering for other Harbour Sport programmes and events.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express special thanks to the organisations that developed these initiatives, for their willingness to share their stories, and for supporting more communities to benefit from sport and active recreation in Aotearoa.

