

Empowered Local Communities and Hapori

CASE STUDY:

BENNEYDALE SCHOOL, WAITOMO DISTRICT

Benneydale Hall



SPORT
WAIKATO
Hei painga mō te iwi

Benneydale School & Community

In the heart of the King Country, Benneydale School is a small rural primary school with an equity index of 559 and a roll of 33 students. While its size creates a close-knit learning environment, it also presents unique challenges when it comes to physical activity, sport and recreation opportunities.

Unlike larger urban schools, Benneydale students face significant barriers to participation.

Many organised sports and recreation opportunities are located in Te Kūiti or further afield, requiring families to travel considerable distances. For many families, the time, cost and logistics of transport in a high deprivation community make regular participation difficult. The school's small roll also limits its ability to field teams in traditional sports, often requiring students to play outside their age group or combine year levels.

Principal Steve Bodger says the challenge has always been finding activities that suit a small rural school while providing students with the same opportunities enjoyed by their urban peers.

For Benneydale School, physical activity is about more than just sport. It is about connection, confidence, wellbeing and belonging. As the only playground and recreational hub in the township, the school grounds are used by children and families well beyond school hours.

Through Tū Manawa Active Aotearoa funding, Benneydale School has been able to introduce new and innovative opportunities that overcome many of the barriers associated with rural living. Skateboarding, pickleball and the He Awa Whakamua martial arts programme have provided students with opportunities to be active, build confidence, develop new skills and strengthen their sense of belonging.

“They (students) just don't get those opportunities. They're so far away, and I don't even know if they're aware of a lot of things. Everything is in Te Kūiti or further away - Principal Steve Bodger”

“It means we can dream and have a bit of hope. That we can give these kids experiences that town kids get. - Principal Steve Bodger”



Skateboarding Opens New Pathways

When local community organisation *Thrive* identified an opportunity to bring a skateboarding programme to Benneydale, the aim was to provide young people with access to an activity they would otherwise never experience.

Professional Learning Partner Sarah Ryan worked with Nichola Painter from Thrive to explore her idea of bringing skateboarding opportunities to Benneydale. The initial concept of securing coaches and ramps was a strong foundation, which Sarah helped expand by proposing that the Tū Manawa funding application also include skateboards for each child.

This enhancement would ensure that the learning, skill development, confidence-building and enjoyment gained through the programme could continue well beyond the initial activation, providing lasting benefits and ongoing opportunities for participation. The impact was immediate.

Working alongside professional skateboarding coaches and supported by Tū Manawa funding, students participated in coaching sessions that transformed the local park into a temporary skate park. However, the project went beyond simply introducing skateboarding.

Students who had never skateboarded before quickly learned new skills, supported one another and spent break times practicing together. Principal Steve Bodger observed the strong social connections the programme created.

“It was amazing. The unity. It was everyone just there together. They were helping each other, holding hands, doing it together.”

The success of the initial skateboarding project drove the Principal to source some secondhand ramps to ensure students could bring their skateboards to school and continue the enjoyment they were getting from skateboarding.

For many students, the skateboards became more than sporting equipment. They became a means of transport and a reason to be active outside school.



“ I was skateboarding this morning. I have my skateboard here right now. It's fun. Because before I had a skateboard, I'd been just walking everywhere, but now I could, like, ride my skateboard everywhere
- Student ”

And the benefits continued well after the programme finished. Students were regularly seen using their skateboards around town, at the school and throughout the community.

Nichola says that continued participation was one of the project's biggest successes.

“They all left with the skateboard. The reason for that is because I wanted them to continue using it. It's transport, it's play, it teaches them so many things.”

The programme also sparked ongoing community conversations about future developments, including aspirations for a pump track and other wheeled-sport opportunities in Benneydale.

Without Tū Manawa funding, Nichola believes the project would never have reached the same scale.

“They definitely wouldn't have had the skateboards. That was a massive investment.”



2

skateboarding day sessions

33

skateboards given out to participants

\$7,760

Tū Manawa funding received



Pickleball Creates Connections

For a school with only 33 students, finding sports that work with small numbers can be difficult. Traditional team sports often require students to play outside their age group or join larger schools. Pickleball offered an inclusive solution that worked for a small rural school.

Through discussions with Sport Waikato Professional Learning Partner Sarah Ryan, the school identified what they could offer and how to best use the large turf area. Pickleball was an obvious choice, given its ease to play, allowing all students to participate and create a rural schools tournament.

The sport is easy to learn, requires minimal numbers and allows students of different ages and abilities to play together. Principal Steve Bodger saw pickleball as an opportunity to create something unique for Benneydale.

Utilising Tū Manawa funding, Benneydale School purchased equipment and developed pickleball opportunities for students. The school then hosted a rural schools pickleball festival, welcoming neighbouring schools to Benneydale, with each school getting a pickleball set to practice for the tournament and for ongoing use after.

For many students, it was their first opportunity to host an event rather than travelling to one.

The event brought together small rural schools facing similar challenges and helped students connect with peers from other communities.

The festival created new relationships between schools that have continued beyond the event.

"It created a relationship between myself and Mangakino School. We went out to them a couple of times afterwards." said Principal Steve Bodger

“We were often going to other schools, but we weren't offering anything ourselves. This was our opportunity to bring people here - Principal Steve Bodger”

8 Rural Schools received pickleball sets + nets

\$3,615

**Tū Manawa
funding received**

“It was cool for our kids to have other schools come to their school - Principal Steve Bodger”

Beyond special events, pickleball has become a regular part of school life. Students access the courts during organised sessions and free play opportunities.

For a small rural school, the value of having a range of choices to be active is significant. Pickleball has provided an accessible, inclusive activity that can be played by almost every student regardless of age, experience or ability.



He Ara Whakamua

– Building Strong Bodies and Strong Minds

The He Ara Whakamua programme combines martial arts training with journaling, wellbeing education, cultural identity and emotional resilience.

He Ara Whakamua is a kaupapa hauora delivered across the four school terms (4 × 10-week modules) designed to uplift the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing of our tamariki and rangatahi through:

- Whakapakari Tinana – kickboxing, MMA, strength & conditioning
- Ngaa Atua me ngaa kare aa-roto – understanding emotions through our Atua framework
- Te Whare Tapa Whaa – nurturing holistic wellbeing
- Te Pukapuka Aronui – daily journaling and reflection
- Tuakiri, Whakapapa, Mana – strengthening identity, pride and purpose

The programme's vision is simple: **“Kia tū rangatira ai ngā tamariki o āpōpō.”** That our young people stand strong, confident and connected.

Delivered by Lee Gar Martial Arts instructors Billy Pohahau and the He Ara Whakamua team, the programme was introduced to Benneydale School through Tū Manawa funding after the school identified a growing need for wellbeing support alongside opportunities for physical activity.

Grounded in Te Ao Māori concepts, each session combines physical training with structured reflection and personal development and provides students with tools to better understand themselves, their emotions and their place within their community.

Programme facilitators and the Principal have witnessed students grow physically, emotionally and socially over time. Students who initially struggled to participate are now volunteering, encouraging others and asking how they can improve.

For a community where access to wellbeing services can be limited, the programme has become a valuable source of support and connection.

CLICK HERE
TO WATCH



“ I like working out and learning how to, like, defend myself. - Student

Oh, it's fun. It's, like, really cool. It's like we do some games and boxing, I like the boxing. - Student

”



11

Sessions. one per week over Term 2

“ The ones that weren't so confident are more confident now. Seeing kids going off and doing breathing when they've had a little tiff, and strategies to self-regulate - Principal Steve Bodger

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The students enjoy jogging down to the community hall for the sessions



Sport Waikato's Sarah Ryan with Principal Steve Bodger

