

Waikato schools embrace non-traditional sports

Wheako Frisbee run by Waikato Ultimate

CASE STUDY



Waikato Ultimate, the regional body for Ultimate Frisbee, designed *Wheako Frisbee* to introduce tamariki and rangatahi across the Waikato to an emerging fun and inclusive sport.

Supported through Sport NZ Tū Manawa Active Aotearoa funding, the programme focused on Year 7 & 8 students, aiming to grow participation, promote teamwork, and embed Spirit of the Game values unique to Ultimate Frisbee, that also addressed school challenges.

The goal was simple: give every student the chance to “give it a go”, equip schools with frisbees and resources to keep the momentum alive, and empower young people to stay active with friends and whaanau - whether at school, competitively, in the park, or at the beach.

Each one-hour session included: Basic throwing and catching skills, Game movement and strategy, Spirit of the Game - emphasising fairness, self-refereeing, communication and ultimate frisbee games. Every school received a class set of frisbees and teacher resources aligned to curriculum, ensuring ongoing opportunities for play beyond the facilitated sessions.

Sport Waikato staff supported the team to ensure alignment to school curriculum, advice and access to funding via Sport New Zealand's Tū Manawa fund, delivered in the Waikato region by Sport Waikato. Waikato Ultimate was successful in their application and the funding was then used to deliver the training sessions into schools in 2025.

Delivering across such a wide region brought challenges - particularly in scheduling and resourcing volunteer coaches. Key learnings for future rollouts include: Allowing additional lead-in time for schools to prepare and promote sessions, providing opportunities for follow-up visits or competition days, Enhancing visibility of the programme through school and community channels, and offering resources in both English and Te Reo Maaori to better support kura engagement.

Ultimate Frisbee Intermediate School Tournament

Following the success of the Wheako programme, the Intermediate Schools Ultimate Frisbee Tournament was launched. 15 of the 18 teams in the first year (2024) of the Tournament were from schools who engaged with the in school programme, which continued through to August 2025. The second year of the tournament (2025) showed strong and positive growth, with two well-attended events delivering high-energy competition and great feedback from players and staff.

Across both tournament days, teams played multiple games in a supportive environment that celebrated not only performance but also spirit, fair play and positive attitudes, alongside MVP recognition. Compared to 2024, there was a clear increase in school involvement and overall participation, with improvements in skill level, particularly among the leading teams, as players developed better teamwork and understanding of the game.

This progress is encouraging, and we are now seeing players who started at Intermediate level coming through into secondary school teams, with growing Year 9 interest helping drive the formation of new secondary school teams and strengthening the long-term pathway for the sport.

2024

18

teams

7

schools

156

players

2025

28

teams

13

schools

245

players

“ We learned lots of new throws, like the hammer, back and forehand. Playing the game was fun. It's like playing touch and netball combined into one sport! - Peyton ”





IMPACT

5,124 Students

24 Schools

367 Sessions

541 Frisbees

Wheako Frisbee lowered common barriers to participation:

- No cost to schools or students
- Equipment + resources provided
- Sessions held in school
- Sessions offered bilingually and within a kaupapa Maaori framework

“ I liked learning different ways of throwing the frisbee. I didn't know it was a sport. I'm very keen to play regularly. - Ben ”

School and Community Outcomes

Teachers observed increased teamwork and communication among students, where the requirement to self-referee games reinforced positive behaviours and reduced negative sideline behaviour.

With over 500 frisbees gifted, and a Teacher's Game Manual provided, schools were equipped to continue play without financial or resource barriers.



Looking Ahead

The success of Wheako Frisbee demonstrates the appetite for new, inclusive, and low-barrier sports in Waikato schools.

Waikato Ultimate is committed to building on these results, exploring opportunities for inter-school competitions, holiday programmes, and further embedding frisbee culture across the region.

“ Frisbees were being used at breaktimes by many of the kids who got hooked by the session. It was awesome to see ”

