

## Community Partnership 2013-14

# Water Babies

**Tauranga is surrounded by water and the desire to keep the community ‘water safe’ prompted Sport Bay of Plenty to develop Water Babies – an HPA funded initiative that provides six free swimming lessons for parents and young children. Around 155 children (under-fives) and their parents have now experienced the delights of swimming together. And they have more confidence in the water as well as great water skills.**

Kirsty Carling is the Early Childhood Team Leader with Sport Bay of Plenty and she coordinated the Water Babies programme. Kirsty sees its success linked closely to the collaboration of several organisations in the Tauranga area.

### Partnering with local experts

“We worked with our own Water Safety Advisor and Swimming New Zealand to deliver the lessons. They have great relationships with the local pools and we got amazing support from the pools — they subsidised the cost of the lessons.

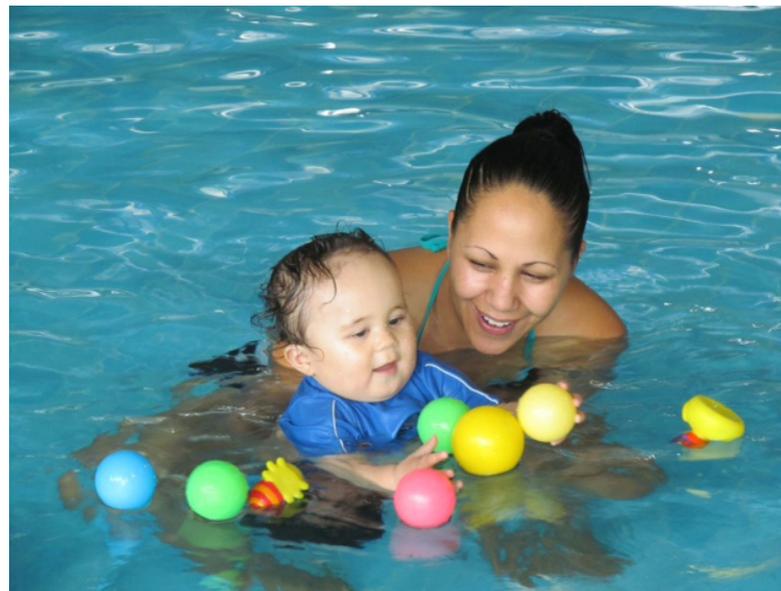
“And then we worked with Plunket, Relationships Aotearoa, Te Kupenga Hauora o Tauranga Moana and Pirirakau Hauora to find the families we wanted to target. We brought them into the mix because we don’t have the direct relationships with families that they do.”

### Clarify purpose and roles

“All the organisations we approached were totally on board as soon as we started talking about the idea. We didn’t have to convince anyone because they understood where we were coming from.”

“But it was also important we were really clear about the aims of the programme and our respective roles. So we drew up an agreement, and that was the key to avoiding any misunderstandings.”

Water Babies was aimed at families that might not be able to afford swimming lessons. “Cost is a real barrier to children learning to swim. We targeted families that don’t have a lot of spare cash to throw



around. And we wanted to make sure that the people who would appreciate this opportunity knew about it.”

### Promote widely to target groups

Promotion was an important part of the planning and Water Babies was advertised through the Facebook pages of all the participating organisations, as well as in the local media. Stories in the local paper helped to promote an online competition which was particularly successful. Entrants had to write why they wanted swimming lessons (in 20 words) and 15 sets of swimming lessons were awarded to the best entries. The competition had an unexpected positive impact on attendance.



## Community partnership “struck a chord”

Kirsty is full of praise for the way the community partnership grants focussed on families being active.

“It’s about families being together, spending time and playing together. That struck a chord with me.”

Kirsty’s advice to others embarking on similar projects is to think outside the box when it comes to who they might partner with. “Try to involve as many people as possible. Who else can we get on board? I went to the Cancer Society for example, and found they have books for young children so we put those in our gift packs, along with stickers about staying safe in the sun.”

“We struggled to get good participation at first — some families didn’t turn up, kids or parents were sick...just life things that happen. We worked with our community partners to phone people to remind them about their lesson. But the competition winners all attended every class! We will certainly run competitions again next time.”

### Parents learn with children

One requirement of the organisers was that parents take part in lessons with their children. “It was very important for the adults to be involved too. It built their confidence in the water, as well as their child’s, and encouraged them to take part in activities with their kids.”

And while Kirsty knew everyone would enjoy the lessons, she says she had no idea how much. “I went down to one of the lessons and I could not believe just how much fun everyone was having! Anything that helps the parent-child bond has to be a positive.”

The parents were asked to fill in feedback forms. Kirsty increased the number of completed forms by catching parents before they got in the pool. “Good baseline data helps you see where you started from.”



## Top tips

- Ensure project partners agree on the purpose of the project and understand their role.
- Think outside the square – who else can we involve?
- Collect good baseline data so you know where you started from.