

## **Grant Report for Cognition Education Trust**

Whangaehu School was awarded the Stewart Germann grant of \$15,000 in May 2019.

The purpose of the grant was:

1. Rural Outdoor Education Camp for approximately 37 Whangaehu School students (whole school) in October 2019 - \$8473
2. Rural Schools' partnership Outdoor Education camp across 7 schools, that form the Whanganui East Rural Cluster, for year 7 & 8 students in February 2020 - \$6,707.

### **October Camp**

Whangaehu School attended the Makahika Camp in Levin from 30<sup>th</sup> October to 1<sup>st</sup> November 2019. 37 students and 8 adults attended. Student ages ranged from 5 years to 13 years.

The programme:

Day 1 – Arrive, 3 rotations of activities (High Ropes, Low Ropes and Flying Fox). Board games played before dinner. Roast Dinner and dessert. Swimming in the river for Seniors, showers for Juniors. Bingo and bed at the lodge in dorm rooms.

Day 2 – Breakfast and tidy. Belongings packed in bags to be taken to the bush camp. Bush walk in two groups, Seniors and Juniors. Juniors walked for an hour, had lunch and built bivouacs in teams then returned to the camp and swam in the river. Seniors tramped for 4 hours, had lunch, returned to camp and swam. BBQ dinner and stories around the camp fire. Bed in tents.

Day 3 – Breakfast and packing. Fed the eels and learned about their environment and lifecycle. Bush walk. Learned how to make a fire in the bush, 6 teams. Made bivouacs under time pressure. Returned to base camp (lodge). Lunch and departure. Arrived at school at 2.45 pm.

Prior to departure, our students assessed themselves against our values rubric (attached). They identified where they were placed on the rubric for our 3 values, Respect, Responsibility and Resilience. They also considered what their next steps were and which of these could possibly be achieved on camp. They set their goals prior to camp and reflected on the actual impact camp had on these targets. Happily, all students managed to make progress through the rubric for the 3 values. Some made larger gains than others but all students moved forwards.

One of our desired outcomes was to build student confidence. This certainly happened. All children, bar one, came down the Flying Fox. The Flying Fox runs for 400m over a river. Some of our adults were very nervous about the challenge. It is testament to the growth in self-belief and being able to put trust in other people and equipment, that so many of our students participated. Another activity that showed this confidence boost and improved capability was the High Ropes course. This course is 15 metres high. All students participated and many reached the very top. It allowed them to improve their capability as they were allowed two turns. Many improved the height they achieved on the second turn as their confidence grew

and as the team spirit kicked in. The children were encouraging each other and cheering regardless of how high their friends went. Everyone was encouraged to take one more step when they asked to come down and each student did just that.

The highlight for me was one student, who is terrified of heights, finally managing to cross the high swing bridge that crossed the river. He tried 3 times and kept saying that he couldn't do it. We finally managed to persuade him to walk directly behind one of our parents (who is a fire fighter) holding onto his shirt, head against his back. I then walked behind him and held his shoulders talking to him the whole time. He was elated when he got to the other side and his class mates clapped him and cheered. He wasn't able to do the Flying Fox but returned over the bridge for a second time with no help!

During camp, adults get to know the children at a deeper level than before. It gave us the opportunity to talk about health and well-being, especially with regard to food and healthy choices. For some of our children, the experience of sitting around a dinner table, quietly conversing with a friend, is not a normal or regular part of their lives. A favourite saying I heard recently is, 'You can't be what you can't see'. During camp, adults model behaviours and manners that are needed to progress in life. Expectations are set and met. Camp gives the adults time to make a difference and explain why things are done in a certain way.

We took some board games such as Snakes and Ladders, Jenga, Frustration and Twister. This afforded us the opportunity to talk about taking turns, not quitting when you are losing, respecting other people's belongings and being fair. One student, who struggles with friendships, organised a game of cards for some of the younger children, explaining what to do, helping them correct mistakes and making it a fun thing to do. These leadership qualities have never been seen in this student in the 2 years I have worked with her and yet, on this camp, she had the confidence to let her skills be seen.

The Makahika experience developed qualities that could not have been developed elsewhere in such a short space of time. These include:

- Strong sense of team and community
- Self-management
- Leading by example
- How to ask for help
- Understanding the role/responsibility of being a team member
- Collaboration with their peers
- Comfortable being uncomfortable
- How to communicate effectively
- Understanding personality differences and how to accommodate individual needs
- Comfortable being uncomfortable
- Their personal values and how these align with being a member of a team and community

These identified qualities were very new to some of our younger children and for others, they were strengthening the foundations they already had. We will now continue the journey of learning by setting tasks within our school setting that demand the use of the above to embed these ideals even further. An example of this is our end of term show or production. The children have never performed together before but will be putting on a musical in December. The team building and leadership qualities will certainly be needed. The older children will have the opportunity to lead and support the younger children. Those with more musical and dramatic talent will support those less confident and comfortable. All children will have to be 'comfortable about being uncomfortable' and will have to communicate with staff and peers to ensure that any anxieties or ideas are relayed to their team leader. In creating props and staging, they will have to collaborate and build strength together.

The camp has also led to professional development for two of our current team. I have just appointed a beginner teacher and so being able to talk her through the planning of camp, preparation of RAMS, checking relevant policies and procedures, organizing camp parents and then giving her the experience of being a leader of a group within the camp itself. Following camp, we have reflected on the positives and negatives (mainly how tiring it is and the worry that it will all go well with no broken bones) and this will enable her, one day, to run a camp herself. We also took our student teacher with us. She is in her second year of her degree and this opportunity was invaluable to show her the teaching experiences you can have when outside the classroom. Again, the build up to camp and the procedures that had to be put in place were part of her learning and professional development.

The nature of the camp also meant that we could champion Maori and allow Maori to learn as Maori and appreciate the gifts and knowledge the original settlers had. For example, during our bush walk, many plants were identified by our guide that Maori settlers utilized for food, shelter and survival. Our instructor pointed out a mushroom that grew on the side of a tree that Maori dried out and once hardened, they put ashes from their fire and carried them to the next settling place and still had the embers to start a new fire. We had Maori parents with us who could add detail and support us in knowing how knowledge is passed from one generation to another. We have high levels of respect for all nationalities in our school but being able to focus on Maori achievements, on this occasion was uplifting and allowed that respect to be embedded.

The camp has certainly motivated students to be brave enough to face a challenge and push themselves to the point of being uncomfortable with the knowledge that their safety would never be in question and that, as Principal, I would never ask them to do more than I think they are capable of. For the children, and for myself, this type of learning, in the outdoor environment, contributes hugely to their engagement and determination to succeed.

In February 2020, the remainder of the grant will be used to fund part or all of our Cluster Leadership Camp. We have decided to take the 80+ students to walk the Tongariro Crossing. This is a huge challenge for students and staff alike. I have learned from this recent camp, that most success is achieved when camps are tightly organized and that the team of Principals who are running the camp need to be communicating effectively to leave no stone unturned. I will also be sharing with the leaders the qualities that my students developed during this recent camp and suggest that explicit teaching around these qualities is done before hand so that children are aware of the stage they are currently at and what progress within each quality looks like. Another factor I will take with me to the other Principals is to provide children with activities to do during 'down times'. The games we took entertained the children and maintained engagement reducing any possibility of disruptive behaviour. Children like to know what is going to happen next and become restless if they have little or nothing to do. Planning for the 'down time' is as important as planning the main activities. I will also suggest to the other Principals that, if they have a newly qualified teacher within their schools that this opportunity to grow professionally would be a good one to extend to their staff. Because of the funding you have provided, we are able to hire coaches to shuttle from the beginning to the end of the crossing thus not requiring 3 parents to shift all vehicles from one side to the other. This reduces the possibility of accidents and reduces the number of parents having to attend making life easier for the schools. It also enables us to plan to stay for 2 nights and split the children into 2 groups, crossing on two different days which makes the event more manageable. We will also be able to include a visit to the hot baths or trout fishing. Again, for many, this will be a once in a lifetime experience to see some of the most beautiful, magnificent parts of New Zealand.

On behalf of the children, staff and parents of Whangaehu School, I would like to thank you for the amazing opportunity you have enabled us to have and we are deeply grateful for this.

Trish Reddish  
Principal