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Switching to water for a lifetime in the Far North

As the NZ Dental Association's 30-day Switch to Water challenge draws to a close this week, Far North tamariki look set to continue reaping the benefits of making water the best choice of drink for the rest of their lives.

The challenge, held throughout November to build upon National Oral Health Day on November 3, saw the association invite individuals and workplaces to sign up online at www.healthysmiles.org.nz and be in the draw to win a range of prizes.

However, for two Far North schools, the real prize is a commitment to the nurturing of health promoting environments that safeguard the overall wellbeing and learning outcomes of their students.

Broadwood Area School switched to water several years ago when it became a test site for Hauora Hokianga to trial solar water purification. The system proved so viable that it has since been rolled out across several Hokianga-based marae, says principal Pani Hauraki.

She says the school's rain water supply is used to fill up water dispensers and the water quality is tested monthly to maintain high quality.

"The kids use them and we don't make a big deal about it. They just have a drink. But in the beginning, we had to convince families first. Whānau are used to having Coke and Fanta because it's cheaper than water. That was the ridiculous scenario. But now we just do it," she says.

She says the school stressed the value of "mahi tahi" with the community in making water the best choice of drink and removed the perceived stigma of water as a "poor" drink in favour of promoting it as the best drink to quench thirst and promote good health.

Meanwhile, Te Rangi Āniwaniwa is at the beginning of its journey with a water-only policy currently before the Board of Trustees for approval, to be implemented at the beginning of next year.



Tumuaki Irirangi Tawhara says the policy will make the kura SSB (sugar sweetened beverage) free on a daily basis and during events when external caterers use the kura premises.

This comes after the success of the inaugural Indigenous Youth Basketball Tournament 2017, which saw the kura, Kaitāia Basketball Association and Healthy Families Far North enter a memorandum of understanding to make the event water-only and provide healthy kai options.

“I’m all about promoting health and drinking water should be normalised anyway. It’s a bit like excellence in kura, or our reo. It’s the same with hauora. The expectation should already be there that kura should facilitate or support having wai inside kura or at events and have tikanga to support that, or a rāhui on sugary drinks,” she says.

She adds that having tohunga, or special advocates that lead the kaupapa within the kura, will also be powerful in visiting the school, checking up on progress and helping the kura implement action plans on its water only journey.

Healthy Families Far North kaiwhakahaere Shirleyanne Brown says the SSB free movement and the availability of clean, drinking water is a national priority for Healthy Families NZ in its work to improve chronic disease risk for populations at scale.

“Sugary drinks have no nutritional value and contribute significantly to a raft of health issues, including the erosion of teeth and obesity which puts you at greater risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke and some cancers. Making a commitment to a SSB free lifestyle and making water the best choice of drink is one of the best things you can do for the health of you and your whānau,” she says.

Ends

CAPTION:

Cool down: Broadwood Area School senior students quenching their thirst with water, the best choice of drink.

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