

Regatta takes on a sensitive issue

By Denise Piper

Paddling the waka together for suicide awareness is the aim of a new waka ama regatta.

The idea for Waka Oranga or Waka 4 Life came from 16-year-old Kieran Wetere-Hepi, whose uncle died a couple of years ago.

"It was sort of unexpected," says Kieran.

"That's what it's all about – the people who get left behind don't know what it was for."

The regatta, organised by waka ama group Te Puu Ao Trust and Otangarei Trust, has several aims.

It will create a forum for people to access information about suicide prevention and awareness plus give space for whanau to share their experiences.

The regatta is also a fundraiser for youth leadership, including running an annual Northland Waka Ama Youth Leadership Wananga.

Otangarei Trust's Martin Kaipo says everyone in Northland is aware suicide exists in the community.

"It's out there, it's rife, it's happening every day," he says.

Northland's suicide rate is three times the national average - 39 deaths per 100,000 people. Mr Kaipo says the aims of the regatta are very important.

"There are families out there who are not aware who they can approach. Suicide affects all family members," he says.

The leadership programme will invest in young leaders and help young people address social issues impacting them, he says.

"If we start addressing some of the issues at a young age, hopefully they will have more ability to cope."

Waka Oranga encourages people to talk about the affects of suicide, he says.

"It's not a tapu word and something we don't discuss. Not discussing is the reason why people tend to self-harm because they feel like they can't talk," says Mr Kaipo.

Te Puu Ao Trust waka ama project manager Ralph Ruka says the suicide of a friend or

family member can impact a young person for the rest of their life.

"It is important to have a venue or a safe place for our whanau to talk about suicide and just having somewhere for our kids to look to."

Te Puu Ao aims to support young people in any interest, he says, and has kapa haka and dance teams as well as waka ama.

Mr Ruka says waka ama clubs are always looking for races or challenges, so he expects the regatta to be well supported.

There will be sprints, fun races and water activities and the chance for people to have a go at waka ama or kayaking, and the main race is 15km.

Waka Oranga will be held at Kowharewa Bay, Tutukaka, from 8.30am on Saturday, March 28 – entry \$40 per paddler, including kai and t-shirt.

Paddle power: Supporting young people and suicide prevention is the aim of Waka 4 Life says Kieran Wetere-Hepi, left, Martin Kaipo, and Jamielle and Ralph Ruka.



CollaborationNZ: Jewellery box fusion of copper, silver, pohutukawa, deer antler and gilding by Len Kay, Rupert Newbold, Greg Wilbur, David Marks, Stephen Hughes and Steve Haywood.

Collaborating

Artists will be once again throwing out the rule book to create cross-medium masterpieces in CollaborationNZ this month.

The art conference and workshop, held every two years, brings together more than 70 leading national and international artists for one week at Whangarei Heads.

One organiser, Shona Firman, says the aim of the event is to bring together top professional artists who usually work in isolation.

"It's a collaboration of enthusiasm – anything's possible," she says.

The artists get a chance to learn different mediums or techniques under the guide of resource artists – who supply materials, tools and advice.

Mediums covered this year include glass, fibre, jewellery, and painting.

The artists work together to create up to 200 rare artworks that are auctioned in a no-reserve fundraiser for CollaborationNZ.

Shona says the biennial auction now attracts art collectors from throughout New Zealand.

"Previously unheard

of combinations of artists have produced a spectacular range of works," she says.

The aim of CollaborationNZ is for the event to eventually pay for itself, so no artist has to pay a conference fee, says Shona.

It is well on the way, with two-thirds of the artists being sponsored this year through the previous auction.

Shona says the resource artists, who are only ever invited once, are world renowned in their field.

The international resource artists this year are United States blacksmith Farrell Rupert, Hawaiian wood and furniture maker Tai Lake, Rarotongan painter and glass flame worker Tereapii Rongo and United States wood worker Paul Sasso.

CollaborationNZ will take place at McGregors Bay, Whangarei Heads from March 21 to 27.

Members of the public can see the artists in action during a public open day from 10am to 6pm on Wednesday, March 25.

The auction will be held at Forum North on Saturday, March 28, with viewing from 11am and auction at 1pm.

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