

Warwick Fenton, Harbour Rugby: Club → School → Club Programme

Warwick Fenton's position as School Liaison Officer at Harbour Rugby is the only job of its kind in New Zealand. His role involves administrating Secondary School Competitions, working with the Management Committee, assisting with programme development in schools and liaising with the clubs and schools for the movement of players and volunteers.

The School Liaison Officer position was created by NHRU to also assist and address the growing concerns over dropout rates amongst players and volunteers when transitioning from junior clubs to secondary schools and from school leavers moving on to senior club.

Warwick has been able to apply his knowledge from his past experience as Director of Sport at Pakaranga and Whangaparaoa Colleges, and Head of Physical Education and Sport at Matamata and Rangitoto Colleges, to develop a School-Club-School flow Programme.

The objective of this programme is to create and promote a positive flow of both players and volunteers going from junior club (and Intermediate schools) to secondary school, and then facilitate secondary school leavers being attracted back into senior rugby clubs. There are indications that already the programme is beginning to work in its first year with most clubs actively working with their local schools to facilitate and promote this transition.

There are several benefits for both schools and clubs in linking together including:-

- Kids spend most of their time at school amongst people they can identify with. It is the perfect place to let the kids know what opportunities are available to them.
- At school, the kids are in an environment where they have the opportunities to play and throw a ball around at lunchtime and after-school. They are encouraged to be active.
- By linking in with schools you are also creating a pathway to the parents who may be interested in volunteering as coaches, referees, admin, etc.
- You are also hooking into the use of the school facilities and through the school you can make links with the community and therefore encourage local people to get involved. Overall, it increases people's awareness of the rugby clubs in their local area.
- For the school, their sporting capability can be increased through increased player and volunteer numbers. In a number of schools the rugby "Culture "is developing because of increased junior rugby player intake, and because of the collegial atmosphere created with increased numbers of teachers and volunteers from outside the school working together and pooling their resources. All of great benefit to the school and for the local club(s).
- When developing the School-Clubs-School programme, issues that needed to be addressed were that clubs find it difficult to approach and to work with schools, and the schools had a fear of letting a club (outsiders) in. This has already begun to change for the better.

Each rugby club, therefore, appointed a liaison person for their local school. This liaison works closely with the teacher in charge to facilitate the programme.

For the Junior Club / Intermediate School transition the secondary school teacher in charge approaches the Club Liaison Officer and hands out information sheets and pamphlets at the club to

prospective players and promotes the school programme. Programme information and application forms are also put school enrolment packs.

The teacher also goes to the local Intermediate School(s) (the Club Liaison Officer may also attend) to speak and hand out information on their programme. Many schools are now beginning rugby development programmes which also particularly attractive to retaining local players in their local schools.

The Club Liaison Officers also come into schools to speak to the school leavers, especially those who have represented their club as a junior player. A number of clubs have been involved in working with schools to promote "Stayer v Leaver" games where club coaches work with the leavers, and other clubs have held leaver games versus their presidents team or u/19 sides in an effort to open communication lines with school leavers and promote the club programmes.

As the RSO, Harbour Rugby, supported the clubs through meeting with the liaison and providing them with the School-Club-School programme, sample material to hand out to school leavers and provide a database of the school leavers so clubs can keep track and get in touch with them. Harbour Rugby also facilitates meetings between the Club Liaison and the local schools.

To provide support to the schools, Warwick tries to visit every school 2-3 times a term, but for the developing schools or schools which have a new teacher in charge he will visit the school every 2-3 weeks.

The main effect already apparent is the increased communication between many of the schools and clubs. The 1st year of the programme is going well and as more clubs buy in and adapt their programme North Harbour Rugby hope for even better results.

North Harbour Rugby has also made links with AUT, who have provided fitness trainers to work with the squads in a number of the schools. Some schools have also taken on board trainers from their local area, and a number have also begun rugby development programmes. A particular success story as a result of this is Kingsway School. The local Silverdale Rugby Development Officer devised a pre season weight training programme for Kingsway that began in November. Kingsway School reaped the benefits from this training and from the coaching programmes created by the coach, and with good organisation by administrators involved. The school shocked everyone by becoming runners up to Massey in the Seven's Tournament. The team is now very competitive in the 1st xv B division in its first year in the grade.

Now that clubs and schools have seen how successful the programme has been for others, they are showing a greater interest in pushing the programme for next year.

Further developments and promotion in North Harbour Secondary School Rugby proposed and already being instituted in some cases are are:

- A 1st XV Open Day was held where all teams were at the same venue
- A "School versus School Day" where as many teams as possible from one school are lined up to play against teams from the same school as their 1st xv is playing against on the same day. Teams play over the morning in a build up to the 1st xv game.