



## North Harbour Rugby

### Youth Rugby

#### Purpose

The purpose of this discussion document is to provide a basis to better understand the youth, the world they live in and provide recommendations for 2021 in an attempt to provide a more engaging experience for this sector of our Rugby community.

#### Overview

In 2019 the Union led by its Purpose, “Improve Lives, Through Rugby”, Vision and Strategy to Maximise Engagement and Grow Participation with Quality Community Experiences through the following tactics- *Cultivate a Climate of Development, Fun and Safety around our Junior and Youth Rugby Programs; and Build a future focused Participation Pathway (“ladder”) that places the participants at the centre of the experience and provides safe playing opportunities at every level-* with the goal of wanting more kids, having fun, for longer.

The Union, with its community, has introduced several initiatives at Junior Rugby level such as defining a clear value offering of a climate of development and fun, a boys Rugby Rip grade (beyond 9 years old), different forms and formats that promote time on task and skill development, combined club and school grades, replaced Club representative and Union representative programs with Rugby development experiences for all. There have been some highlights:

- The non-contact grade for boys into club rugby system (under 9, under 13) was legitimised and now is a national offering- 22% increase in Club registration
- The girl’s rugby grades (currently at 65 teams) has been promoted nationally by NZR.
- The value offering- climate of development and fun- has been supported and promoted by other major sports in NZ.
- The removal of performance and representative Programs which evidence shows harms the long-term development of youth and discourages participation has been adopted by other sports.

We are in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of our strategy and are committed to keep evolving the Rugby experience with the participants in mind to ensure Rugby and Sport remains relevant in our community.

“The Secondary age group is at risk in New Zealand” (Secondary Age Review, P .3). Young people face many unique challenges, for example pressure at school and wider mental health. They are a very diverse group when it comes to gender and age differences. The Youth also come to understand the value of, and wider health and well-being benefits afforded by, being physical active.

This is also an age group when potential is revealed. Taking steps to better understand how to prepare youth to transition in performance environments successfully, and at the appropriate age without diluting the core enablers that encourage engagement for those who just want to remain active, needs to be balanced.

Unless Rugby provides an experience that meets young people holistic and diverse needs, **they will simply spend their time in other ways**. We must attempt to deliver what they want not what the Rugby system has traditionally supplied.

The Union has taken some time to understand critical information and consult some leading sports organisation- Sport NZ, HP NZ, AUT, NZR, NZRPA- to feed into this discussion document, to answer the following key questions:

Who is the Youth of today?

- Aged 13-18 years old
- Secondary aged young people are characterised by a desire for connectivity, relevance, and choice...at a level, time, cost, and location that suits them, irrespective of the provider. (Pg. 25) "Access opportunity at a level, time, cost and location that suits them"
- Social life becomes more important
- Busy with schoolwork and part time jobs
- Change between organised sport (and coach led) and informal activity (and active)
- Generation Z- more self-reliant and aware, innovative, goal orientated and educated, and self-conscious

What is the Youth saying about Sports?

- Enablers to playing sport- **The majority (76%) of young people participate in physical activity for fun, to hang out with friends (45%),** for fitness and health (31%) and to learn new skills (31%) (Secondary Age School Review (SAS), Sport NZ, 2019)
- Barriers to playing sport- **The main barrier to participation is time (43% would like to more active but are too busy). 78% of adolescents identify schoolwork as being the primary reason i.e. schoolwork assumes greater importance.** 21% are affected by judgement barriers; lack confidence, fear of failure. 25% of mothers fear that their children will get hurt when they do physical activity. (SAS Review)
- 2011, Young People Survey; after increases in Primary schools' years, teenage participation drops off in all areas. Studies suggest sport offering is not meeting their needs. Significant issues that impact quality of young people's experience include
  - Self-confidence, self-esteem, and body image
  - **Overemphasis** on competition and winning *"I do realise that it's quite competitive. You get a bit nervous because you do not want to lose because everyone would be angry with you...But most of the time you're just there to try and enjoy it"* (14 years old, SA Review)
  - Early specialisation
  - Poor player management- overuse injuries, pressure to succeed, selection/deselection
  - Lack of ability

- Peer Pressure
- Parental pressure
- Competing demands- study, friends, family, work
- Sport Structure and offerings not responding to youth expectations/ lifestyles” (Pg. 04, Secondary Age review).
- The Student Voice (Review of NZ SS Rugby)
  - Not wanting to get “smashed” or injured (safety is paramount)
  - No suitable grades- a big step up from Junior grades to First XV
  - The competition is not suitable- too few teams and one team dominate
  - Players lose confidence- getting consistently beaten by large scores- lose enjoyment and motivation
  - Becomes **too** competitive
  - Media influence on concussion
  - Influence of increasing numbers of bigger, more physical players- makes it difficult for smaller players to compete
  - Grow at different rates- late developers get left behind
  - Not prepared to put in the extra work to progress in the game
  - Social life becomes more important
  - Busy with schoolwork and part time jobs

The evidence and trends are supported by current and historical data within the Harbour Youth Rugby system. The key North Harbour statistics are as follow:

- NHRU have multiple offerings at Junior Rugby, and it has grown by 8% over the period 2016-2019
- The introduction of Rugby Rip beyond U9, Girls only grades has seen Club registration increase from 2018-2019 by 22%
- Over the period 2009-2018 the following trends are happening for youth participation on average year on year- U12 (-11%), U13 (-38%), U14 (-34%), U15 (-44%). NZ Sports statistics show the most significant drop off in youth sports occurs at 15 years old however the U13 age group is where a significant shift occurs in Rugby.
- Youth registrations have decreased by 17 % over the period 2016-2019
- Total Youth Rugby team entries have declined over the last 10 years from 94 in 2010 to 71 in 2020
  - Male entries have declined from 89 teams to 55 (Tackle 15 a-side)
  - Female team entries have increased from 5 to 16 (Contact, Non- Contact mix of 10's and 12 a-side tackle, combined Club and School grade)
- Composite teams have increased from 9 into 2019 to 15 in 2020; and player dispensation have increased 2018 (32), 2019 (26), (40+). This shows great collaboration from schools however it reinforces that there are less numbers within schools in certain areas.

It is management’s belief that we need to take considered action now to improve the experience for the Youth in the Province.

Management also believes that the decisions we make now to improve the Youth Rugby experience will have a positive effect on Senior Rugby which is under stress due to less numbers at that level.

With this in mind, and based on the evidence, NHRU have designed and adopted the People in Rugby model or Nga Taangata i te Whutuporo, and identified the following Youth tactics:

1. Unless young people understand the **value of Rugby and the offer**, they will not prioritise it in their lives
2. **Safety** in Rugby is Paramount
3. More **“Choice”** in Rugby is needed
4. Establish clear principles and practices (**age and stage appropriate**) when it comes to **active to performance climates**
5. **Union, Clubs and Schools must collaborate and cooperate** and put the Youth and the centre of the experience.

Other key themes:

- Do not enforce a year-round traditional offering i.e., Balance is better. Allow for untraditional youth led opportunities – supports tactic 3
- Promote a **climate of development and fun**; and discourage early specialisation and deselection in Youth- supports tactic 4
- **Be prepared to change** offerings as young people’s motivations change



*People in Rugby*  
*Nga Taangata i te Whutuporo*

