

WORKSHOP HELPS TO REMOVE PERIOD POVERTY AS A BARRIER TO PARTICIPATION

Social Change

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This is ME® is Sport Waikato's targeted women and girls initiative which aims to encourage, support, and celebrate women and girls of all ages getting out there and being active THEIR way. Conversations with Kotahi Aroha's Erina Wehi-Barton, led to the implementation of a workshop for sixteen young women (11-16 years old), in partnership with AWWA Period Care, to remove barriers to physical activity associated with menstruation and period poverty.

A conversation between Kotahi Aroha's Erina Wehi-Barton and Sport Waikato's women and girls initiative This is ME® revealed that period poverty was a significant factor in preventing young waahine from the Waitomo district being physically active.

To help address the period poverty issue for the young women who attend her programmes, This is ME® worked with Erina to identify sixteen young waahine between 11 and 16 years old to participate in a facilitated workshop.

This is ME® partnered with national period underwear brand AWWA who generously donated three pairs of underwear to each of the young women who attended the workshop. The ability to remove period poverty as a barrier and empower women to participate in physical activity despite their period was the motivation behind the initiative.

"AWWA's partnership with This is ME® represents our commitment to ensuring no individual misses out on opportunities to engage in sport, recreation or education due to having their ikura (period). We believe everyone should have the opportunity to participate in activities that are good for their wellbeing, and AWWA want to help remove the barriers preventing some wahine from doing so," said Kylie Matthews, AWWA co-founder.

The workshop created a safe space for the young women to share their feelings and experiences, learn about ikura, understand how to use and care for the underwear provided by AWWA, and participate in a yoga session facilitated by

local yoga instructor Ainslie Speedy (iamyoganz).

Erina says physical activity is important for young women as it empowers them.

“If we’re able to be the example, or the taura, for other communities to do what we’re doing, then we’re doing our job. We’re breeding more than whaanau champions, we’re breeding a great society like we have in Te Kuiti,” Erina said.

The young women left the workshop with an understanding of how to use the underwear and increased confidence in their ability to manage their period. Their confidence to participate and be active has since increased further through using the period underwear provided by AWWA.

“What Erina is doing to promote, support and encourage young women in her community to be physically active is just incredible – she’s an absolute powerhouse and positive influence on all those around her. This is ME® has been proud to support Erina and partner with AWWA, making a real difference to the young women she inspires,” said Roxanna Holdsworth, Sport Waikato’s This is ME® Women & Girls Initiative Advisor.

The workshop and the resulting impact on the young women that participated shows the value of collaborative partnerships and what can be achieved when organisations work together at the local, regional and national level to address personal and practical barriers to females’ participation in physical activity.

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