

School camping trips face new obstacles

By Esther Bennett

Some Auckland schools are deciding whether to pull out of running camps for their students because of concerns over safety.

They say this is because of a change in health and safety legislation that officially puts the blame for accidents onto principals and their Board of Trustees.

Principals and school trustees face fines of up to \$500,000 or two years' jail under the Health and Safety in Employment Act.

Garth Gulley, the director of the well established YMCA Shakespear Lodge camp, thinks cancelling camps is a knee-jerk reaction.

"Principals who cancel camps are generally ignorant. They're the ones that have no bloody idea about anything."

But not all schools are put off by the legislation.

Some North Shore schools are embarking on bigger and better adventures than ever.

Many are doing away with traditional dormitory camps and exploring more exciting outdoor activities.

Takapuna Normal Intermediate School Year 7 students go on a two-day tramp around Motutapu Island with backpacks, while Year 8 students take on a two-day cycle tour of Waiheke Island.

"Principals who cancel camps are generally ignorant. They're the ones that have no bloody idea about anything."

Principal Owen Alexander is aware of the risks, but is still a strong advocate for school camps.

"There are always going to be accidents. Principals can be sued, but

we're doing a huge disservice to this generation if we don't do outdoor education properly.

"It's good to take students out of their comfort zones and have them learn the skill of cooperation."

Students are made to assess their own risks as part of the learning process.

For more affluent schools, professional instructors are contracted to do the high-risk activities. Year 8 students at Pinehurst School in Albany go on an annual winter camp involving skiing, snowboarding, white-water rafting and caving.

Pinehurst's principal, Glen

Radojkovich, says hiring a company, Adventures Within, meets students' needs and keeps them safe.

"It's a highlight of the year for the kids. It's a good challenge. It builds confidence and cements friendships."

Warren Patterson, principal of Sherwood School, knows the high risks camps have for principals.

"The awareness has never been higher. If something goes wrong and we haven't done our homework, we can go to jail."

But he values the benefits of camp too much to scrub it from the curriculum.

"Camps are one of the highlights

in education. It's a really special experience that children will remember for their entire life."

Mr Patterson says the downside to expensive professional instructors is that small schools with few resources will miss out.

But Gordon Peterson, principal of Birkdale North Primary School, a decile four school, says they find a way around resource issues with fundraising efforts, and by holding a senior camp only once every two years.

"A good way to avoid criticism is to do nothing, but you can't quantify the impact camp has on children.

"We haven't had to cancel camps, but we've had tight times."

Beach Haven School is decile three, and principal Kyle Brewerton says there are always ways around expensive instructor-based activities. Their senior camp is also held every two years.

"The extra cost makes life harder, but if you're a bit creative, you can make a bivouac instead of doing fancy stuff and balance it out a bit."

Despite accidents previously, in the 11 years since the Health and Safety in Employment Act came in, no school has been prosecuted by OSH in relation to outdoor activities.



CAMPING: Beach Haven school students learn how to light a camp fire on their senior camp. Concerns over safety at school camps has not scared North Shore schools into cancelling them.

PHOTO: ESTHER BENNETT

New policy to shine light on gifted kids

By Kiely Groombridge

Children with an exceptional learning capacity and talent beyond their years are finally being recognised by a new Government policy.

From January 2005, all schools must report to the Ministry of Education, detailing educational programmes they have on offer for gifted children.

The ministry will offer the schools some ideas and programmes to cater for gifted children in a newly published booklet.

The ministry says that although schools have become aware of gifted children, many are still unsure of how to meet their needs.

Rosemary Cathcart, national director for the George Parkyn Centre for Gifted Education, says the ministry's new focus on gifted children has been a slow process, but she is thankful progress is finally being made.

"Let's be grateful for the fact we currently have a ministry that will take notice and acknowledge these children," she says.

Deputy principal of Ponsonby Intermediate School, Dianne Chambers, agrees.

Ms Chambers feels this acknowledgment by the ministry "should have been happening 20 years ago".

Ponsonby Intermediate has had programmes for gifted children for about ten years, in years seven and eight.

"We have created a whole class of gifted children for each year group. It is important for like-minded children to come together to share their exceptional talents with one another," she says.

Gifted children are selected by recommendations from parents and old primary schools.

The children are also tested in standardised reading, maths and writing.

The classes then move through a similar curriculum as other students in their year group.

The children also participate in critical thinking and broadened types of activities to expand their minds.

Ms Chambers says the focus of the gifted children's class is on "breadth and width, rather than height".

"I don't think there is a simple straight-forward answer, but at least efforts are being made in the right direction," says Mrs Cathcart.

"Gifted children are those with an exceptional capacity in any area of learning — not necessarily academic," she says.

The policy will recognise the needs of gifted and talented children and help extend their learning capacity.

However, Mrs Cathcart says that parents, teachers and specialists in the field all need to get involved to improve what is currently available for gifted children.

"Quite definitely it's a shared responsibility," says Mrs Cathcart.

Graphic design students queue up to go to Church

By Laura Crooks

Auckland graphic design students now have the chance of gaining practical experience before leaving university to find a job.

Their saviour is The Church design agency that has recently opened its doors in Auckland.

Started four years ago in Wellington by Victoria University students Paul Soong and Peter Dixon, The Church was created to give graphic design students the chance to work for real clients in a realistic industry environment.

"We're basically a structured mentoring company which has access to the freshest, cutting-edge talent," says Auckland's managing director Simon Velvin.

Mr Velvin believes the students coming through are "some of the most talented people in New Zealand".

In April the agency expanded to Auckland and now, in its New North Rd office, Mr Velvin, creative director John Raymond and production assistant Anna Danby are on the lookout for Auckland students to work for the agency.

Students from Auckland University of Technology, Unitec, Elam School of Fine Arts, Whitecliffe College of Art and Design and Media Design School have been asked to submit an application piece to The Church.

Around 60 graphic design, illustration, photography and media students will be chosen to work for the design agency's Auckland clients, which include *Tearaway* and *Taiohi* magazines, Ministry of Education, Subway and IHC.

The need for a company such as The Church arises from design courses not totally preparing their students for the workplace, even though there has been a trend in many institutions to shorten and add more practical components to courses, says Mr Velvin.

He believes design schools are still not equipping students with the skills to deal with the commercial reality of working in a design company.

Programme leader and principal lecturer of graphic design at AUT Peter Gilderdale says the "professional studies" programme in the Bachelor of Art and Design, which covers setting up small businesses, intellectual property and also includes an industry internship, is a step towards getting students ready for the workplace.

"I think this looks closer to what The Church are talking about, but what they do will certainly add to the mix. I don't think that we lack business focus in the way that The Church perceives it elsewhere in the country, but nor would I say that it could not be improved on."

The mentor-supported and paid

experience that students get at The Church is a specific benefit of the concept, says Mr Gilderdale.

And students are also responding positively, he says.

Meredith Smith (20), a final year Bachelor of Art and Design student majoring in graphic design, was interested in the unique work experience The Church offered.

"I was quite impressed that they would do this. People don't usually give you opportunities like this."

She believes working with The Church will help her find a graphic design job after she graduates.

"In most jobs people want experience. Having work in your portfolio gives you a better chance of getting work as well as experience in business and production."

There has also been supportive feedback from the graphic design schools, says Mr Velvin.

"All of them are like 'wow, thank you' or 'bring it on!'"

Going by the response that The Church has been getting since its arrival in Auckland, it appears it has tapped into a vital market.

Mr Gilderdale says The Church is the first agency interested in mentoring students that has approached AUT.

"The Church's concept is unique," he says.