

## **8M8S: a fun way for teens to start participating in sport**

### **Introduction**

Waitakere secondary school students have some of the lowest levels of participation in sport in New Zealand. That's concerning — but a programme called 8M8S ('Eight Mates') is starting to bring positive change.

At the end of 2012, five Waitakere secondary schools are involved in 8M8S. Hundreds of 15- to 18-year-olds who previously did no sport are now regularly playing short, fun versions of cricket, basketball, netball, and AFL in a welcoming and social environment. Better still, fellow students who were already active in sport are helping to coach and run the 8M8S programme.

8M8S is a Sport New Zealand Active Communities Investment Project, with investment for a three-year period. The project steering group consists of: AFL NZ; ASB College Sport Auckland; Auckland Cricket; Basketball Waitakere City; Netball Waitakere; Sport NZ; Sport Waitakere; Auckland Council; St Dominics College; Waitakere College; and Liston College.

The success of 8M8S has seen organisations in other regions ask about launching the programme. Gabrielle Gofton, who with Sport Waitakere got 8M8S established, reckons the programme would work just as well outside Waitakere, including with different age groups if that were a focus. Gabrielle would be delighted if 8M8S benefits other regions, and is happy to see the name and logo freely shared.

This case study briefly outlines how 8M8S began, and how it works. But the focus is an 8M8S Action Planner, suggesting key steps and considerations to get 8M8S (or a comparable programme) up and running in your region.

### **How it began**

Before 8M8S was launched in 2010 (as '[Young Westies in Sport](#)'), [Sport Waitakere](#) surveyed over 3200 Waitakere secondary school students to find out what sports they played and why; and for those not playing sport, why. "The top motivator to playing sport is having fun with their friends. The top reason for not playing is fear of letting friends down. Transport is also a barrier," says Gabrielle.

Armed with information about what sports would appeal to students, she talked with Auckland Cricket, AFL NZ, Basketball Waitakere City, and Netball Waitakere; as well as with Auckland Council and other organisations. That led to a vision of setting up a social sport concept — sport based on having fun.

### **How it works**

The sports organisations each worked out how to modify rules to create a 20-minute game, with eight players a side. Each participating school has one 8M8S afternoon a week, held after school. Students play one 20-minute game in one sport, then a second 20-minute game in another. The number of teams playing at once simply reflects how many students turn up on the day (with 16 players per

game).

It is important that those who are skilled and experienced in sports don't also join in and play 8M8S. The programme covers this off in a deft way. At each school, those already involved in sport are invited to become student leaders who help to plan, coach and run 8M8S.

These student leaders don't only get the satisfaction of helping. They receive training to gain an entry level coaching qualification. Further, there is a modest fee (\$2/session) for playing in 8M8S, and this money helps pay the student leaders' school sports fees.

Another noteworthy success of 8M8S Waitakere is the steering group, which represents all the organisations and schools involved. "You now get sitting round the table on a regular basis the [school](#) sports coordinators, regional sports organisations, Auckland Council and [College Sport Auckland](#). They're all talking to each other," says Gabrielle. "The spinoff is bigger than just 8M8S, it's mainstreaming sport."

8M8S is capturing many students who were previously missing out on sport. Sessions at school have numbered anywhere from about 30 to almost 100 participants. It's still too early for comprehensive results data, but indications are that in the participating schools, the level of involvement in sport has increased.

### **Find out more**

Gabrielle Gofton now works for Auckland Council, though she is still involved in the 8M8S steering group. To find out more about the programme, please contact Gabrielle by emailing [gabrielle.gofton@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz](mailto:gabrielle.gofton@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz) or Emma Haigh at Sport Waitakere by calling (09) 966 3120 or by emailing [emma.haigh@sportwaitakere.co.nz](mailto:emma.haigh@sportwaitakere.co.nz).

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## **Action Planner to start 8M8S**

### **Recruit an 8M8S coordinator**

Sport Waitakere employs a [part](#)-time 8M8S coordinator. You'll need to employ or reassign someone to focus on setting up and running the programme. The person needs to be comfortable spending a lot of time out and about. They need to be comfortable with students — and able to think on their feet. They also need to be comfortable in more formal business situations, such as presenting to the steering group, or meeting with sponsors.

### **Survey students**

Survey a range of students in your region who will potentially be involved with your programme. Make sure you survey students who don't do sport, as well as students who do. Find out what sports both groups would like in an 8M8S programme. Find out what would encourage them to get involved, as players or

student leaders. Find out any key barriers or issues. For sample survey questions, please contact Sport Waitakere.

### **Approach and work with sports organizations...**

Select the most popular sports, and approach the relevant regional sports organisation or clubs. Find out if they'd like to be involved. If so, work with them to develop a modified game that can be completed in 20 minutes [with teams of eight](#). Sport Waitakere have recently introduced a MoU with the sport organisations. Some sport organisations have a relatively high turnover in staff so the MoU will provide some consistency each year.

### **Approach and work with schools...**

Find out which schools would like to be involved. They need to be able to commit to indoor court and outdoor field space on a certain afternoon each week. (For each school, most or all sessions should be held onsite to avoid the barrier of travel.) Develop a clear and succinct MOU (about one page long). This should state all key points, such as the duration of the programme; the overarching vision and objectives; the specific desired outcomes; and the responsibilities of the lead agency (such as the RST), the programme coordinator, and the school. For a sample MOU, please contact Sport Waitakere.

### **Talk to potential sponsors**

In Waitakere, 8M8S is supported by The Edge radio station. This is ideal because the station sponsors prizes of CDs and iPods, and provides music to help create a carnival atmosphere at launch days. The station likes being involved because they gain a presence on school grounds. Whatever your sponsor, ensure there's a good match: it needs to be appealing to students but also appropriate for the school environment.

### **Develop collateral and communications.**

Communications channels like a web site and Facebook page will help to build enthusiasm and participation. So will things like posters, branded drink bottles, stickers and caps. If you wish, the 8M8S logo can be used, captioned with your region. Contact Sport Waitakere for details.

### **Work with student leaders**

Students who are already active in sport help to enroll, coach and support 8M8S participants. You need to work with these student leaders to plan and promote the school's 8M8S programme launch, and work out how the sessions will be run.

### **Launch the programme to the school**

A lunchtime launch is recommended. Ensure each sport has an area where students can try it out. Set up a registration desk where students can sign up and give permission to receive TXTS (for younger children, parental consents will be required). Ensure everyone who signs up goes in a prize draw to win: at Waitakere prizes are iPods and music CDs from The Edge.

### **Plan the timetable**

Work out a timetable: which sports go to which schools on which dates. At each school, run one afternoon session a week. Two sports every two to three weeks is recommended, to keep things fresh and fun. Develop a timetable for the full term and send it to the schools and the sports organisations for approval.

### **Hold the draw**

Return to the school. Ideally at an assembly with all potential participants, talk about the programme, and hold the prize draw. Make it clear when and where the sports will be held. Invite anyone else to register, or to become a student leader.

### **Start the sports**

Start the 8M8S programme as soon as possible. Ideally, create a fun atmosphere, for example with music. At each session, there needs to be the 8M8S coordinator, a facilitator from the sport, plus as many of the school's student leaders as possible.

The coordinator should get all the students who turn up on the day to group into teams of eight. The more students who turn up, the more teams. Students play one 20-minute game in one sport, then a second 20-minute game in a different sport. The student leaders are the coaches, and give tips and support. Games have a winning team, but there's no recording of wins.

At Waitakere, there's been a \$2 charge per session. This money has helped to pay the sports fees of the student leaders, in recognition of their help. You'll need to decide whether you charge, how much, and how the money is collected. Ideally get participants to pay in a lump sum, to avoid weekly administration.

### **Train the student leaders**

As quickly as possible, hold a training day at each school for the student leaders, and get them to choose one or two sports in which they can receive training. The first half of the training day should offer them general coaching skills; the second half should be specific to the sports they choose. The idea is that student leaders gain the skills to help run 8M8s, plus gain skills and experience that will support their own sport.

### **Hold ongoing steering group meetings**

From the programme's inception, make sure all the stakeholders are represented at regular steering group meetings. At Waitakere, these meetings are held quarterly. At meetings, discuss what's working and what's not, and make changes to the programme accordingly.

### **Get and share feedback**

At the end of the year's 8M8S programme, each school's student leaders should talk to participants and gather feedback. They should aim to find out what was enjoyable, what could change, and what sports could be added. The student leaders should then have the opportunity to present a report and the feedback to the steering group.

**Grow the programme**

In line with feedback, approach new sports organizations, and make any changes. Keep moving forward!

/ENDS.