

Teaching kids the impact of plastic

Kim Cable

Plastic can be very useful, and can be found almost everywhere.

But, as the tamariki from Te Hihiri at Knighton Normal School can tell you, plastic can also be a big problem. Plastic and its by-products are littering our cities, towns, oceans and rivers, and contributes to health problems for animals and humans.

Go Eco is a Hamilton based charity that provides community education, collaborates with and supports environmental groups and projects, provides inspiration for living lighter and advocates on behalf of the environment. They are home to a depot for recycling electronic devices, batteries, light bulbs, toner cartridges, and they



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run Kaivololution Food Rescue.

Go Eco Sustainability Advisor Camilla Carty-Melis recently ran an environmental programme for students from Te Hihiri. Te Hihiri is the Māori bilingual unit within Knighton Normal School, and students are currently learning about 'The impact of plastic on Papatūānuku (Mother Earth).'

Children learnt about what happens to plastic and other waste when you are finished with it. They followed the life journey of plastic, discussing how plastic is created using oil and other fossil fuels. Right through to when it ends up discarded, and may end



Students from Te Hihiri — the Māori bilingual unit within Knighton Normal School — learning about plastic.

Photo / Supplied

up in a landfill, or in the ocean.

Whaea Tash, the kaiako (teacher) of Room 21 said that they decided to study plastic and its impact, after being inspired by students. A couple of students in

Te Hihiri were writing a blog about how their whānau were trying to reduce the amount of single-use plastic they had at home.

In the programme, kids were given different types of rubbish and had to decide how long it would take for the rubbish to break down.

"The kids were amazed that plastic products may break down small, but never disappear completely. Through the programme they were able to understand topics such as micro-plastics, leachate, life cycle of plastic, toxic gases being released into the earth and alternative products to plastic — metal straws, bamboo cups, bamboo tooth brushes and harakeke baskets" says Whaea Tash.

Whaea Whitney, the kaiako (teacher) of Room 20 also said that

teaching kids about kaitiakitanga (guardianship) and their responsibility as Māori to take care of Papatūānuku (Mother Earth) was important.

"The kaupapa fitted really well with te ao Māori — the Māori world view — and plastic is very topical in the news at the moment. More people are becoming aware of the impact of plastic, and shops are starting to phase out using plastic bags" says Whaea Whitney.

Camilla from Go Eco says that protecting our environment relies on all people playing their part.

"Looking after our environment is such an important kaupapa. It is great to see young people taking the lead, and adults taking action too." Go Eco is at 188 Commerce Street, Frankton. There is an eco-shop with environmental gifts for Christmas.