

Phil Irons from Sanitarium Weet-Bix is quoted as saying "The Sanitarium Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon has become a New Zealand icon since its inception 20 years ago, and hundreds of thousands of young New Zealanders have experienced the joy and pride of crossing the event finish line to receive a medal for their efforts,"¹ Television advertisements, newspapers and websites are full of images showing children smiling and enjoying themselves crossing the finish line for what they could rightly interrupt as their first "Big Event" Competing in the Sanitarium Weet-Bix TRYathlon is a '*rite of passage*' for many New Zealand families with older brothers and sisters encouraging the participation of their younger siblings. This essay will examine whether the Weet-Bix TRYathlon is in fact an iconic, defined by Oxford English Dictionary² as '*very famous and well known*' kiwi event as stated by Irons, and a rite of passage for young children in New Zealand. If so then it will have major impact on New Zealand Society has there have been over 200,000 young New Zealanders participating in the event in the last 20 years...

In a survey of 200 Year 7 and 8 students³. The first question asked without any reference to the sponsor's names or association with the event was whether they had competed in the 'Weet-Bix'. Over 90% of the students indicated they had at one time or the other competed in the event. However, more significantly they associated the phrase 'Weet-Bix' to mean the Sanitarium Weet-Bix TRYathlon. When events, places or people are referred to by a nick name and it has instant recognition, then by definition the event is famous and well known. According to the Oxford English definition this indicates iconic status. Therefore with people referring to the event by it using the shortened the 'Weet-bix' it truly indicates its status as an New Zealand iconic sporting event. Other examples of this are '*the Coast*' meaning the Speight's Coast to Coast Multi Sport Event.

An end result is individuals taking responsibility for their own health by maintain regular exercise combining with the association of a Healthy nutritional breakfast food. The New Zealand government would welcome this 'Healthism' approach, where individuals take responsibility for their health, as there are potential benefits in reduced Health costs and increased productivity. However, the amount of physical activity and nutritional intake does not rest with the child alone. Throughout a child's upbringing they are met with numerous influencing factors such as parents and family, income, opportunities, schooling and the home life that will also determine what if any further physical involvement they will have.

An interview with a family who recently emigrated from the United Kingdom to New Zealand gave a very contrasting point of view to that commonly associated to the Sanitarium Weet-Bix TRYathlon⁴. They would be described as a very active family that promoted sports and healthy lifestyle choices. High level of sporting involvement was a characteristic of the family. They competed in the event for only one year and did not return in subsequent years. Both the parents and the children were very surprised that there was no competitive element to the competition. The event was quickly dismissed as not worth it has there were no opportunity to compete and compare individual performance against other children of similar ages.

¹ Trathlon NZ Website

² Oxford English Dictionary

³ Survey Results – Aquinas College Y7 & 8 Students 2012

⁴ Interview with Local Tauranga family 2012

As a result the family have not participated in the event since. Is there need to rethink the basis on which the 'Sanitarium Weet-Bix TRYathlon' is modelled on? If there is some correlation between a competitive event and future attitude to sport then should we make it more competitive and allow children to compete against their own age group and gender?

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However, this is not a forgone conclusion or result. The facts state that over 200,000 children have participated in the event in the last 20 years. It is a reasonable assumption to make that Triathlon New Zealand, which is a separate body from the event organisers, would see increased participation levels in their sport over the last 20 years?

I believe that the end result of having over 200,000 participants in the Sanitarium Weet-Bix TRYathlon (over a 20 year period) is going to have a positive impact on New Zealand society. The large major of children are going to experience a positive influence on their hauora. Hauora is a Māori philosophy of well-being that includes the dimensions spiritual (taha wairua), mental and emotional (taha hinengaro), physical (taha tinana), and social (taha whanau)⁵. Each dimension is said to influence and support the others, overall creating positive well-being. A child participating in the Sanitarium Weet-Bix TRYathlon is going to gain a physical benefit from the increase in physical activity during the preparation and by doing the actual event. By completing the event in front of their friends and family they will gain a sense of achievement and there by having a positive influence on both the social (taha whanau) and the mental and emotional (taha hinengaro) dimensions of hauora. The flow on effect to the spiritual (taha wairua) dimension comes through from children achieving goals and gaining confidence. This increase in hauora of young children caused by participation in a physical activity is incredibly important. As a result of this positive experience they are going to form an association between involvement in sport and feeling of improved health and well-being. This in turn is going to encourage further involvement in sport and activity. Although the involvement may not be triathlons it is going to be some type of sport or activity. This is going to have two major effects. Firstly, a reduction in the amount of screen hours per week (computers, mobile phones and gaming) of young New Zealand children. Secondly, an increase in the amount of physical activity which will help to tackle two of New Zealand's major health concerns, heart disease and diabetes. Inactivity is proven to be one of the leading casual factors for obesity and diabetes according to Ministry of Health.⁶ The benefits to New Zealand society are numerous. A healthier population that have had positive experiences from involvement in physical activity. A reduction in the health costs carried by the government because of an overall increase in the hauora of young people. Also the potential for ongoing involvement in physical activity through to later life.

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⁵ New Zealand Curriculum – Ministry of Education 2010

⁶ www.health.govt.nz