



A Pool to be Proud Of....

Community: Stewart Island
Theme: Working together in place

The Beginning....

The Halfmoon Bay Community Pool was first developed in the early 1970s as a basic, concrete, cyclone-fenced, rain water filled extension of the wider ocean that the Halfmoon Bay community literally has as our constantly changing vista. However this pool of water is not so deep and doesn't contain big biting fish, crashing waves or seaweed!!

This 'community' pool was erected on Ministry of Education land and was subsequently run by funding provided by the Ministry and through the School Board's fundraising initiatives. However, fund raising for the pool itself was very much a creative local effort.

The local Stewart Island Lions Club raised some initial funding to build the pool. Momentum grew, especially with the local publican leading a bike tour from Cape Reinga to Bluff in 1971- a real challenge given the bikes were steel framed, roads rough, there were no energy drinks and lycra and chamois pants were nowhere to be seen. Plus the abundant number of pubs along State Highway 1 made this a treacherous journey. Nevertheless, all those around supported the cause both financially and in time and energy – particularly energy! A substantial amount of cash was thus raised to enable a community pool to be built.

At the time the pool was built there were three full classes at Halfmoon Bay School, an active play centre and a thriving fishing community. Having a pool marked a new era at the school. Swimming lessons could now be held on site rather than require a walk over the hill to 'Bathing Beach' where previous lessons had often been held.

Always Room for Improvement

Living on an Island, local kids spend a lot of time on wharves and boats, meaning that learning to swim is a priceless skill.

Since its opening, numerous children have learnt to swim in the community pool. There have also been many improvements made to the pool as there is a constant desire for the pool to better serve the community's needs. The first obvious improvement implemented was to raise the temperature of the water. Whilst there was no seaweed or tidal action, the temperature remained **very** cool- thus reducing the practical amount of time available for teaching children to swim.

More funds were raised and the pool was converted to an 'indoor pool' - the old fence now replaced with a steel frame and translucent cladding. Then, due to the very high price of electricity (at this point only available by individual generators), an innovative and cost effective method of heating the pool was installed. Solar energy was captured through polythene pipes on the roof. At the time, there were many people who again said "it'll never work!" But creative, lateral thinking is evident throughout the history of our community pool. Solar water heating via the polythene pipes proved to be a very effective solution and at times the pool reached 20 degrees, considerably warmer than the ocean!!

Changing Times

As our community has changed over the years, the number of families here on the Island has dwindled. Fishing is no longer the main income and as a consequence there has been a change in population dynamics. By 2005, we had a school roll of around 16 children.

In addition, the Ministry of Education introduced tighter regulations and more accountability around school pools. This brought new challenges for small communities like ours –new guidelines required water testing every hour and a lifeguard to be constantly present. Pool maintenance was also becoming a big, expensive issue with cladding requiring an upgrade, heating pipes and pumps failing and cracks in the concrete base all becoming serious concerns. These issues, combined with high running costs, meant the community pool suddenly became prohibitive to run and maintain for a very small school.

Stepping Up

The School Board at the time were at an impasse. They desperately wanted to keep the pool running, but were not adequately funded to do so and Ministry of Education's new pool regulations were so stringent that it was deemed impossible to meet the required standards.

Then two Mums of six children stepped up - active and vocal in their desire to ensure that the pool remained open. Some serious brainstorming as to the 'how to' and "with what funding" conversations were had. Many great achievements have been made over a bottle of wine! The Health and Safety regulations for the Ministry were satisfied with a change to a new salt chlorination system that does not require the same stringent testing as regular chlorine pools. A volunteer has been checking the water daily (as opposed to hourly) ever since and is all AOK.

A successful application was submitted to the Community Trust of Southland for upgrading the solar panels, heating system and cladding. The Trust approved the grant on the basis that funding was for a 'community' pool as opposed to a purely school pool.

Yet another working bee was then organized with many locals turning up to fix up the cladding and install the new heating system. The enthusiasm was infectious throughout the community and the children were wildly excited about the prospect of having a warmer pool.

Warm it is, and long lessons the children now have. It is now also warm enough (29-32 degrees being optimal) that the under 5's can also have several classes each season – as part of the Rugsrats early childhood centre timetable during term time, with their own families and under the watchful eye of a volunteer Mum during school holidays.

The pool is now open from late October to April (or when temperatures deem it suitable) allowing a huge increase in the amount of time that the school children are now able to swim. Many others in the community now swim also - once they have purchased a key (a small fundraising measure) and agreed to the conditions of use. The pool now provides a great new way to get fit and an excellent rainy day activity!! Halfmoon Bay school children are now very competitive with mainland schools in swimming competitions, and the confidence of water safety that it gives parents who have children around water is immeasurable.

Today there is more to happen still! More solar panels are to be installed as our cooler Southland conditions mean that we should have 20% more panels that we currently have to ensure optimum usage from the available sun. Next summer is going to be even warmer in the water!!

Very recently, over another bottle of wine, a bright and enthusiastic community member mooted the idea of an entirely new pool! This would be deeper, longer, wider and more appealing to a wider range of the community. I believe that this will eventuate as we have the history of dedication to a project that is somewhat unprecedented - anything can be done here on Stewart Island.

Intent:

- Increasing community safety around water.
- Maximising opportunities for local children to keep pace with swimming skills of their off-island counterparts.
- Providing another option physical activity and exercise in our community.

Learnings:

- Good ideas gain momentum when good minds of local leaders are prepared to get the ball rolling.
- Good ideas can still face hurdles and not all hurdles show up at the onset. Some emerge long after the initial motivators have moved on and require new people to step forward.
- Times of crises can be useful tipping points for others to 'step in/step up' to help.
- Facilities are empty opportunities unless people use them – and then they become priceless.
- It is not disrespectful to take a great achievement and improve on it.
- Central government does not always respond well to the needs of individual, unique communities – 'one size fits all' policies do not generally fit all!
- Communities know themselves best and are best placed to make decisions that achieve local needs.
- There are ways to work 'with' regulations - they don't always have to stop things from happening.

Outcomes:

- While many other schools and towns have lost their pools, Stewart Island has retained and enhanced theirs –for both school and broader community use.
- Upgrading of the pool has enabled a much longer swimming season for local pool users, with temperatures of 34 degrees now achievable in the height of summer.

- Having a community pool and access to swimming lessons, means Stewart Island children are now more competent swimmers, with a much better sense of water safety – both essential ingredients for Island living!
- Halfmoon Bay children have the chance to be competitive with other NZ kids in swimming and water based sports.
- Adults have reconsidered the importance of their children learning to swim. Many are now spending time at the pool with their kids –something that didn't really happen before.
- Under 5's are now easily able to gain their first experiences in water in a planned, relaxed and comfortable way – without having to leave the Island.

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