



## Kahu makes 23.

**Community:** Stewart Island/Rakiura  
**Theme:** Working together in place

### ***Our Changing Community***

Halfmoon Bay School is central to our Island community. With 400 residents living around the Island's one township, our primary school provides an opportunity for families to live on the island and hold permanent jobs to support our three main industries (fishing, marine farming and tourism). Because there's no high school on the Island, families have always had to make alternative plans for their children's secondary school education.

30-40 yrs ago there were four full time teachers, teaching 100 kids in four classes at Halfmoon Bay School and it was thriving. There were also 60 fishing boats operating out of Halfmoon Bay... but times have changed. Our community has been through some major changes in the last thirty years – all of which have impacted on the viability of our local school. Key drivers in changing community dynamic over this time include:

- ***The New Fishing Quota System:*** the introduction of the fishing quota system provided a new opportunity for big business to buy rights to fishing in the area. This pushed up prices and encouraged local people to sell their quotas, making it also increasingly difficult for young families to buy their own quota to fish and/or make a profit. Instead local people became employed by big companies based off the Island, often with seasonal rather than permanent contracts. Over time, locally owned fishing boats based out of Halfmoon Bay have reduced from 60 to 6.
- ***Rising land values:*** in the new millennium the Island experienced a rapid increase in land values. Houses literally went from \$70,000 to \$280,000 in the space of a few months, making it unaffordable for local residents to own their own homes. As a result, more families have rented in a market where long term rental is much less profitable than running a holiday home and landlords often request the right to take over the house for a holiday once or twice (or more) a year. Insecurity of tenure has added to increased transience of the Island's general residential population.
- ***Smaller family sizes:*** mean less children have generally being born on the Island.
- ***Increase in tourism:*** new eco-tourism enterprises, such as guided walks on nearby Ulva Island, have brought an upsurge of visitors to Rakiura and a created a new industry to support the Island's declining economy. However, to meet the demands of summer season visitor peaks, many of these new jobs are seasonal in nature, resulting in more casual/temporary jobs rather than permanent ones.
- ***Family relocation pressures:*** an increase in casual local job opportunities has brought with it more temporary households. As a result of many of the changes noted above, we have noticed that new families were more inclined to shift their whole family off the Island when it came time for their eldest child to start high school – which often meant removing several primary school siblings at the same time.

By 2009, this had all taken its toll on our Island's school. There were only 13 children left at Halfmoon Bay Primary, which meant losing funding for the last remaining teacher and becoming a sole-charge school.

### ***Taking Action to Save our School***

As a community we saw it essential to keep our school. A small group came together to work with the school to brainstorm how to both protect the school and enhance its future.

The immediate challenge at hand though was to attract families to the Island and to retain the kids we did have. We began implementing a number of diverse strategies including:

- Fund raising to pay wages for a second teacher to keep working in the school.
- The School's Principal sacrificing her non-contact hours to help pay for a second teacher's wages.
- Asking local employers to aim employment opportunities towards families to help increase primary school age student numbers on the Island. We also tried to link jobs to create full time equivalent positions and/or find additional work for partners.
- Using the opportunity of knowing each child individually for Kath (our school principal) to focus on the assets and skills of each child, showing them the school was right for them.
- Bringing in the skills of people into the school to help create new educational opportunities for kids – eg. an artist spent time with older children focussed on art; retired teachers volunteered to give their time and skills to enable additional 1-1 learning; and one child especially interested in wildlife was given an afternoon each week buddying up with a team at DOC to go out and learn more about conservation.
- Holding community working bees to spruce up the appearance of the school to give a good first impression for new parents considering bringing their children over to live on the Island. We also installed:
  - a new playground and sand pit on school grounds – both for local children and visiting ones.
  - a new native garden around the school's fence line and existing gardens were also tidied up.
- Resurrecting early childhood education opportunities on the Island. The Island's previous fully functioning play centre had closed its doors 16 yrs ago. We knew that having a local early childhood education (ECE) facility was also essential to attracting, retaining and supporting families with pre-school children – who we hoped would then stay on to attend the local primary school too. Over time, our hopes have been realised. 'Rugrats,' a new community ECE centre is up and running to Ministry of Education specifications, with one teacher and 20 students now attending .
- Fundraising and community working bees to upgrade and re-open the school's indoor, solar heated swimming pool which had been closed 6-7 years ago prior when Ministry of Education pool regulations changed. Having a fully functioning [swimming pool](#) now enables:
  - swimming lessons for Island children with trained instructors. We were shocked to discover that while many children spent so much time on and around the water, they didn't always know how to swim.
  - the pool to be open for a much longer season - in good years from August to April.
  - people over 14 years of age to 'purchase' pool keys for the season, enabling community access to the pool outside of school swimming hours – thus creating a new recreation option on the Island.
- Strong local encouragement for pro-creation! May be due to local community pressure (and there's PLENTY of that!) or something in Rakiura rain water, but in 2011 there were 7 babies due to be born to local Island families.



In the last two and a half years, committed community action has helped increase the Halfmoon Bay School roll by 10 pupils. We are all really proud of what's been achieved, with much of our success due to:



- A fabulous and committed bunch of parents with children under 5 who have helped re-establish an awesome Rugrats centre
- A resilient community getting behind the need for a healthy, vibrant school on our Island
- Our action plan incorporating a whole range of strategies to make our school more viable, attractive and exciting for children's learning and wellbeing
- Funding support from both the community and the Community Trust of Southland; and
- A passionate principal and teacher, willing to go the extra mile.

So... that is all just a bit of background to our story. Our story is that Kahu turned 5 and started school on the 31<sup>st</sup> of May 2011, bringing the school roll up to 23 pupils.

#### **Intent:**

- Increasing the roll at Halfmoon Bay Primary School to ensure the school's ongoing viability.
- Sustaining and enhancing local educational opportunities available for Stewart Island residents aged 0-12 years.

#### **Learnings:**

- There's nothing like an impending crisis to spur people and creative thinking into action!
- A number of actions across the system are often required to achieve change. Eg. new early childhood, improving appearance of the school, upgrading facilities, tailoring learning approaches, new funding strategies, encouraging local businesses to prioritise hiring workers with families etc.
- Additional resources and assets are often in our communities but we don't often take time to look for them eg. there were actually many local people who could lead activities and/or support student learning.
- While the initial call to action may have focused on increasing the school roll, in looking more deeply we realised other key educational aspects were also missing in our community beyond the school eg. an early childhood centre, a safe place to teach Island children how to swim.

#### **Outcomes:**

- An increase in the school roll from 10-23 pupils.
- Creative funding approaches enabled 2 teachers to remain working in the school
- Community working bees and targeted fundraising enabled upgraded school facilities: including the school's pool, playground, grounds and gardens – making the school more attractive for potential new families and better supporting existing students and their families.
- A community run early childhood centre 'Rugrats' is successfully re-established to support 0-5's and their families, thus providing a pathway for children's education and learning from 0-12 years.
- Personalised learning programme developed for each local primary school child that builds from their interests and talents.
- Linkages between the school and its community strengthened, enabling the school to access to new 'people' resources, contributions and experiences essential for broadening local children's learning.

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**June 2011.**

PS: the roll at Halfmoon Bay Primary has continued to grow, with 32 children now enrolled (May 2012).