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Learning fitness through dance and music

By KATE GUDSELL - The Timaru Herald

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NATASHA MARTIN/ The Timaru Herald

CUTTING SHAPES: From left, Lenon Wakuwa, 18; Caleb Love, 17; Dannika Rameka, 14; Jay Tewake, dance instructor; Jotahn Crowell, 7; Alan Lieu, 17 and Lui Peeti, 15.

Mika and his crew are in town, bringing their unique dance fusion classes to Timaru youth during the school holidays.

The Mika Haka Foundation runs an Auckland-based holiday programme called Ka Wellness in Schools and the team has ventured south to its creator's home town, motivating children to get active through dance.

The classes merge hip-hop and Maori dance styles with musical theatre in a bid to build children's confidence and encourage them to think about their health.

Ka programme team leader and dance instructor Jay Tewake said the dance styles and music appealed to youth of all ages.

"It's enjoyable for the kids, you get fit from the programme. They gain that confidence to get a bit fitter and get active in a way that they like. The dance styles we teach are unique and different."

The programme runs every day this week at Timaru Boys High and is open to all school children. So far 15 had enrolled, and Mika was enthusiastic about Timaru as a venue for the programme. He said the nature of the town was conducive to children taking part and continuing to progress what they learned in class. "The kids still have to go home and it's much better in smaller towns because the whole community knows each other. Kids are generally more active in the South Island. Maybe they still ride their bikes to school."

The programme, which is part-funded by the Health Ministry, received funding from Timaru Council's Youth Initiative Fund and Creative Community New Zealand Arts Scheme to bring it to Timaru.

As part of the ministry funding, the foundation is doing a two-year research project investigating how better to encourage children to become active. Mika said they would be asking the Timaru participants to complete a survey. "We're doing research into what kids want, but what the youth want and what we think the kids want are quite different."

The foundation is planning to expand its classes to run throughout New Zealand and intends to return to Timaru. "The mayor asked me to come back next year – it's about giving back."

* The classes run every day from 10am to 2pm until the end of the week. The cost is \$20 a day, per child. Phone Jay Tewake on 021 206 4095.