



# **GISBORNE HARRIER'S JOURNEY THROUGH CHANGE**

**CASE STUDY**



# OVERVIEW



In 2018, Gisborne Harrier Club made the conscious decision to transform our events from the 2019 season onwards.

We decided to move away from 'traditional' competitive harrier events to a trail running series that would accommodate all ages and capabilities.

The aim was to revitalize our club which was quickly dying in membership and enthusiasm for the status quo. Now, we aim to provide running events in unique locations that showcase the beauty of our region and provide a challenge to all levels of ability.



## CHALLENGE

- Low membership numbers and low event attendance numbers.
- Keeping our local runners local - a lot were travelling out of town for running events that we could provide ourselves.
- The image and stigma of the sport was that the club was for the serious runner only.



## SOLUTION

- Employment of a part-time Events Coordinator to plan and deliver our events in cooperation with our club committee.
- Switch to trail running - no road races.
- Revamping of event formats - no formal competitive element, change of day/time, new and different distances (short, medium, long) - providing flexibility for participants and allowing them to run to their capability.
- Focus on the atmosphere at each event - music, coffee cart, food, fundraising support, family-centric.
- Run events in unique locations - often not accessible to the public, or where running is not usually appropriate.
- Rebranding 'Gisborne Harriers' as an outward facing entity - #rungisborne brand.
- Making membership packages attractive and worthwhile, as opposed to being a casual attendee at a higher cost, and increase member benefits.
- Increasing the level of promotion to casual runners who did not want to be full members - breaking down accessibility barriers.



## RESULTS

- The club had huge growth in membership from 2018 to 2019. In 2018 we had 5 registered members. In 2019 we had 73.
- The club had high membership satisfaction, as shown from our end of season survey. This showed the mandate to continue what we were doing.
- Massive increase in the number of casual runners - repeat offenders too!
- HUGE increase in the number of interactions on social media - beyond 'likes' to actual comments. Increase in sharing photos to promote our brand
- Increase in families participating - all the family running/participating. This includes volunteering to help on event days!
- Awarded Club of the Year at the 2019 Tairawhiti Sporting Excellence Awards.



## PARTNERS

We didn't have any formal or direct partnerships but we worked on building relationships, especially pertinent with land owners where we were hosting events.

We were also privileged to receive funding in two successive years from Local Trusts to help fund the wages of our Events Coordinator.

In-direct partnerships were established with a local personal trainer to promote her business and in turn, she encouraged her clients to attend our events.

- People like the relaxed feeling of our events - run on your terms
- Social interaction is important - coffee carts are the water coolers of the running world! People like to hang out post run and socialize.
- Water finds its own level - there is always a spot for those who want to run at the competitive end of the spectrum, and we saw an increase in those runners attending who pushed each other along!
- A unique location makes all the difference to numbers attending - as does good weather!
- Do not hold events during school holidays - it means we are focusing on our people from our region. Visitors are always welcome but first and foremost, let's make it about the people of Gisborne/Tairawhiti
- Keep it simple. Gizzy is a casual place. We don't like fuss or formality. Stick to what we know.

## KEY LEARNINGS



## SUMMARY



**In one year, it was a complete 180 for Gisborne Harrier Club – #rungisborne**

- Our club has a positive and inclusive vibe that we constantly get told is why people are joining us for our events.
- We host 12 trail runs, a mud run, Half Marathon, and a 8/9-week summer run series (2.5k/5k options), plus members-only seminars (yoga, nutrition, quiz nights etc.) – all of this is offered to our members.
- The best branding/advertising is from those who participate - word of mouth was our best messaging format.
- We put the needs of our community first - not the needs of the committee or tradition.

### **We do things differently**

- The club continues to refine the administration aspects and but also look at ways of threading the traditional events into the season. In 2021, the club will be 75 years old, so we must be mindful to not throw the baby out with the bathwater. Keep some of our traditional events alive that have history and that compliment what we are doing now.

### **Final thoughts**

The enjoyment of running comes long before the competitive ethos kicks in, but if the competitive element takes over how an event is staged, the enjoyment is the first feeling to be lost.

