

# Recreation IS a social investment

“Recreation is socially organised for social outcomes”

(Cushman and Laidler)<sup>1</sup>

## Investing in recreation

National and local governments, charitable and community organisations value the contribution that recreation makes to society – at individual, whanau, and community levels. This is reflected in significant financial investment in spaces and places, organisations and campaigns; and in the human investment of expertise and time made by myriad recreation workers and volunteers.

There is a positive relationship between the investment cost and the benefits to New Zealanders.

## Investment informed by Insights

The Government’s **Social Investment Model**<sup>2</sup> is designed to use evidence, analysis and planning to drive action and benefit communities. It focuses on vulnerable or high-risk groups and invests early in the lifecycle, using local organisations in communities to provide services.

## Principles of recreation

Recreation provides “opportunities for the development of human potential, social wellbeing, self-reliance and a sense of belonging to the community”<sup>3</sup> which is why people participate. Recreation benefits the individual and collective.

## What is the impact of recreation?

### Social Return on Investment (SROI)

The Sport NZ SROI study<sup>4</sup> “demonstrates that recreational physical activity generates significant value for society across multiple outcomes.”

For every \$1 spent, there is a social return of \$2.12 to New Zealand, a value of \$16.81bn<sup>5</sup>. The value of the wellbeing outcomes for New Zealand is **greater** than the costs of providing these opportunities. Recreational physical activity is a cost-effective investment!



Figure 1. <https://www.easterncommunity.co.nz/about-us/community-projects/2-pool-at-rawhiti-school/>

Positive impacts occur in: physical and mental health; subjective wellbeing; income consumption and wealth; employability, work satisfaction and work life balance; volunteering including caring for people and place; family and friends and emotional and physical safety.

Health outcomes are the most significant wellbeing domain for measuring the impact of sport and physical activity.

### Spaces and places

Invest in networked and accessible community facilities designed for flexibility, such as Eastern Community Sport and Recreation Hubs.

Remove barriers to inclusion and expand perception of facilities to focus on wellbeing.

Increase access to nature and its associated health benefits through accessible spaces, and opportunities to develop skills for participation. Design safe, multi-use urban environments with opportunities to play, connect and be active. Remember that immigrant experiences of the outdoors may differ.

Also see: Sport NZ Spaces and Places Framework.

### Activities, events and programmes

Invest in tailored activities and events with opportunities to participate in ways that reflect cultural identity and promote a sense of belonging. Read about the Samoan Participation Profile. Offer diverse opportunities across the play, active recreation and sport continuum.

Community and national events can build awareness, leverage engagement, support local economies and encourage tourism. A good example is Palmerston North shines.

Invest in rangatahi and tamariki to create positive foundations for life. Child poverty and intergenerational inequity leads to unfair outcomes. See Child Poverty report 2024.

## Case Study 1: Te Pou Toetoe

(Linwood Pool), Christchurch City Council

With extensive community consultation and engagement before, during and after opening, the focus for Te Pou is on participation: a facility for having fun, being social, and spending time with family and whanau. The voice of mana whenua has been woven into the planning, design and building of Te Pou, as well as programming.

The mānu pool, kitchen/community room, family spa, and access to the outdoors for events and socialising encourage whole-whanau engagement. Partnerships with youth providers, and women-only sessions reflect the diverse community and need for tailored programmes. In the 2022/23 year 309,566 saw pool users,

Te Pou received [National recognition](#) at the RA awards in 2022.

For the full SNZ Case Study use this [link](#).

## Case Study 2: Te Oranga Kaiora:

Wānanga Moana Programme

Nurturing Māori wellbeing through connection, culture and community, Harbour Sport, Auckland.

Through community consultation and partnerships, Harbour Sport developed a Wānanga Moana programme for 2023 with two local Kura Kaupapa Māori: Te Kura Kaupapa o Hoani Waititi and Te Kura Kaupapa o Te Raki Paewhenua.

Te Oranga Kaiora uses a multi-pronged approach to develop water safety practices, instil life skills, foster confidence, build capability in kai gathering, and revive the ancestral knowledge of tīpuna Māori. The programme has a strong emphasis on te reo Māori, tikanga, and mātauranga Māori, fostering a deeper connection to Te Ao Māori.

While focusing on wellbeing and skill development, the programme also addresses ethnic disparities in drowning rates for Māori. Water Safety NZ noted a need for “culturally tailored water safety education and outreach programmes” (Water Safety NZ, 2023, p.8).

Read the Recreation Aotearoa Case Study [here](#).



Figure 2: Umukaria (Chief) sculpture  
Artist: Tukiri Tini - Tūhourangi Ngāti Wāhiao, Ngāti Whakaue, Ngāti Hinekura, Tainui, Ngāi Tahu; Source: <https://www.tuhourangi.iwi.nz/blog/teputakeotawaunveiling>

## Case Study 3: Te Pūtake o Tawa Mountain Bike trail

Whakarewarewa Forest, Rotorua

Whakarewarewa Forest is iwi land, returned to its original owners in a Treaty of Waitangi settlement in 2006.

Diversified activity on this park includes mountain bike trails, accessible tracks and walks, an art trail, food franchises, as well as MTB events. Local iwi Tuhurangi hold whanau days including Kapa haka, BBQs, bouncy castles, the Great Race, etc. Artwork also forms part of the project with five taonga sharing the kōrero of tūpuna that are important to Tūhourangi people, mana whenua.

Partners in management of the Forest are CNI Iwi Holdings<sup>6</sup> Tuhurangi Tribal Authority, Te Komiti Nui O Ngati Whakaue, Rotorua Lakes Council and Kaingaroa Timberlands Forest Management.

### Insights into action

The following are relevant Insights publications that summarise evidence and action.

[Making Facilities Hum](#)

[Celebrating Green Havens](#)

[Urban Refuge, Restoration and Renewal in urban Aotearoa](#)

[Spatial Justice - fair provision of places to play](#)

[Outdoor Recreation in a Super-diverse NZ](#)

### References

1 Cushman and Laidler, Recreation, Leisure and Social Policy, 1990 Occasional Paper for Lincoln and Victoria Universities)

<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/35461483.pdf>

2 Social Investment Agency, [Social investment approach](#).

3. Cushman and Laidler

4 Sport NZ [Social Return on Investment key takeaways](#)

5 This is likely to be a conservative figure as this does not include Māori outcomes, which were deliberately not monetised.

5 The Treasury Social Investment: [The Role of Data in Social Investment](#)

6 CNI is a central North Island iwi collective of 8 iwi