

## Councillors unimpressed with revamped safety group

Charlotte Jones  
Local democracy reporter

KAWERAU councillors are unimpressed a revamp of the Eastern Bay Road Safety Operations Group doesn't believe elected members are necessary to form a quorum.

Last year, the four Eastern Bay councils voted to disestablish the Eastern Bay Road Safety Committee and instead strengthen the Operations Group.

At a recent meeting, Kawerau district councillors reviewed the new terms of reference for the group and councillor Berice Julian pointed out the suggested terms did not state elected members would be necessary to form a quorum.

"I'm just a little bit concerned when we look at the quorum, they're quite happy to have a quorum without any elected members present," she said.

"I was a little bit concerned about that actually."

The proposed terms of reference state that to have a quorum there must be a representative from at least four member organisations of which two must be council organisations – represented by staff.

It states elected members are not included in the required quorum.

"They would obviously have been having meetings and we obviously haven't known or haven't been able to attend," said Ms Julian.

"I am concerned that elected members have been shut out of the requirements."

Mayor Malcolm Campbell said not having elected members attend the meetings could be "dangerous".

"When we've had road meetings that I've attended and things are struck off the list, I start asking some difficult questions," he said.

"I think that is remiss of them to do that."

Councillor Carolyn Ion suggested the council defer approving the terms of reference.

"Typically, during my time, we would have already had the appointed elected member contacted and be in this paper and part of this paper," she said.

The Operations Group consists of staff and elected member representatives from Opotiki, Whakatane and Kawerau district councils, Bay of Plenty Regional Council, ACC, Police, and Waka Kotahi, the New Zealand Transport Agency.

Its aim is to provide oversight of Eastern Bay roads and offer solutions to ensure deaths and serious injuries are reduced.

Councillors deferred their decision to seek more information.



Malcolm Campbell



LIFE SKILLS: Senior Constable Kevin Raynes, left, and REAP attendance facilitator Henare Rangitawa, far right, with Blue Light award winners, Timatanga Herewini, Liam McCarthy and Devyne Aramakutu. Photo supplied

## Eastern Bay teens lead from the front

Hazel Osborne  
Staff reporter

EASTERN Bay youth did the region proud at a Blue Light life skills camp in Taupo earlier this month.

Nine teenagers from Blue Light organisations across the Eastern Bay attended the five-day, defence force-led camp, which teaches discipline and promotes adventure and getting out of your comfort zone.

Three of them received prizes as top achievers.

Timatanga Herewini from Opotiki Blue Light won the prize for overall merit, Devyne Aramakutu from Edgumbe Blue Light won the peer's choice award and Liam McCarthy from Matata Blue Light received the NZDF staff choice award.

The final award presented by the defence force is a rare one, which Liam was rapt to receive.

Blue Light life skills camps have been

running for 12 years, with thousands of kids aged between 14 and 17 attending.

A Blue Light spokesperson said the camp provided participants with critical life skills such as self-development, self-control, and teamwork that would enable them to be successful at home, school, in their communities and in employment.

EastBay REAP attendance facilitator and Blue Light mentor Henare Rangitawa accompanied the group to Taupo.

"Our role was around stepping in and supporting the kids," he said.

Mr Rangitawa was a part of Blue Light in Thames when he was a young man and knows the benefits it can bring.

"I was one of these kids in Blue Light when I was their age ... I've seen the positives that it offers."

The big pay-off for him was witnessing the increase in confidence that came from the camp.

Senior Constable Kevin Raynes attended the final prizegiving as the

reviewing officer and a long-time supporter of Blue Light. He said it was a privilege to see the region so positively represented.

"It was very special to me to see Eastern Bay kids leading from the front," he said. "Our kids really step up to the challenge."

Candidates are selected and sponsored by the various Blue Light groups around the district as a result of exemplary behaviour in the community.

Around 36 kids from across the North Island attended the camp.

Te Kaha police officer Whetu Haerewa is grateful to Opotiki Blue Light for providing Timatanga with the experience, which allowed him to face his fears white water rafting.

"I asked him what was one thing that he learnt, and he said that it was making his bed in the morning and picking up after himself," Mr Haerewa said.

"This has been a significant prevention event and an uplifting time for him and his whanau."

## Joy aplenty at sensory dance party

Hazel Osborne  
Staff reporter

IT is important for children to have the freedom to be themselves, and a sensory dance party for young people with special needs and disabilities last weekend has achieved just that.

Charitable trust 2e Kids founder Nicola Hayward, with the help of volunteers and Jade Brown from Heartspace Studio provided a space for 20 children with additional needs, and their families, to have a boogie on Saturday.

Ms Hayward said events like the sensory dance party were important for the children and their families because they often missed out on these experiences due to their sensory aversions.

"It is often too loud, too dark, too crowded ... the list goes on," she said.

Low lighting and music, along with streamers, lights, and allergy-conscious snacks were provided on the day.

Ms Hayward is mum to Declyn, an energetic young man who has autism. Providing spaces for her son to be himself is a large part of why 2e Kids came to be.

The joy on attendees faces said it all, and feedback from parents was overwhelmingly positive.

"It's great to be able to experience life with people who understand our struggles and our families' different needs,"



BOOGIE: Parents and caregivers joined their kids for a boogie on the dance floor on Saturday.

Photo Brayden Lindsay E1328-02

said Jennifer Fenton.

"We enjoy these things not only for the inclusivity but also the friendships and the ability to openly communicate with people who understand our daily challenges."

Ms Fenton said her son, Robbie, could be particular and it was important to find environments that accommodated his needs.

Kristy Lowe said it was a relief to attend an event where her son could fully participate without fear of judgement or being misunderstood.

"When your child doesn't look overtly

disabled, have a cane or a wheelchair, there can definitely be a lack of tolerance from observers who think your child is misbehaving or that you are bad parents.

"As an opportunity to meet other parents who have similar experiences, it is invaluable, and a powerful way to reduce social isolation that can come with having children who have particular needs," she said.

For future events, including play dates and coffee catchups for parents visit 2e Kids Facebook page at @2ekids-whakatane.