

South Island Family Participation in Taekwon Do

Background

In 2009, I.T.F.N.Z conducted a road show across New Zealand proposing a new brand. As part of their market research the Board found that when the general population seen I.T.F.N.Z. one of the nine things they seen was 'Family'¹. They also noted that the ability for a family to do Taekwon-Do together was a "big differentiator for ITFNZ, both in terms of other martial arts, and other sports". This was endorsed by asking why people joined Taekwon Do, the fourth highest reason being 'activity with Parent/Child'². No surprise then that our ITKD website talks about International Taekwon-Do as a 'family' organisation.

So in considering what to write as part of this essay, and as a family who have been participating in Taekwon Do for over seventeen years, trying to strengthen the understanding of family participation for the South Island seemed like a sensible place to start.

There are nine Taekwon Do Clubs in the South Island; four in the lower South (*Central, Alexandra, Mosgiel and Dunedin*); two in Canterbury (*Pulse and Riccarton*); three in Nelson Marlborough (*Redwoodtown, Wairau and Nelson*).

The South Island is geographically the biggest Taekwon Do region in New Zealand which poses a number of challenges in terms of travel, support, training, preparation for tournaments; attendance at seminars etc. However, even though distance can be an issue sometimes, there has always been a strong sense of the South Island Taekwon-Do family.

What does the essence of the South Island Taekwon-Do family mean to me?

Interpretation of 'family' means different things to different people. In contemporary times we have a number of definitions of nuclear families, blended families, work families etc. In the wider context 'whanau' is not just the nuclear Mum, Dad and kids family unit, its everyone who can be connected through whakapapa, so its wider than the extended whanau unit of Nana, Grandpop, Aunties, Uncles, Nieces and Cousins, but your 10th cousin twice removed will always be part of your 'whanau'!

Personally, the key elements of the South Island Taekwon-Do family for me are:

1. We share similar values. Some of those values are contributions from the tenets of Taekwon Do, that we embed in our every day lives, in and outside of the dojang. We not only practice these values as individuals, we teach these values to our own families and to our students.

¹ Along with not just fighting; women; disciplined; lifestyle; democratic; character building; way of life/way of living.

² Fitness, Fun and Self Defence being the top three.

2. Fun is also an important aspect of our family. We don't meet that often as a collective, but when we do, we ensure that we learn and train as hard as we can. There are always fun activities planned outside of the dojang (and often inside the dojang as well!) to ensure that we can meet and enjoy each others company. Pain weekends are pain weekends, but there is still a level of enjoyment underpinning the weekend. It's not just the BBQ dinners, or ten pin bowling, laser strike events etc, it's the being and wanting to spend time together as a family.
3. From another lens, its also about that sense of belonging. Most individuals have a range of 'families', and we are fortunate to belong to the South Island Taekwon Do family, who in essence is part of the wider National and International families. Whenever we do all meet regionally, the first thing we do is acknowledge and celebrate our relationships and friendships. At National tournaments, we stay together as the South Island family which further enhances those relationships.
4. As family, we support each other in times of need. From a training perspective, if anyone needs help setting up a new club, access to training materials, guidance or advice, setting up tournaments or seminars, we simply all pitch in. That's the way it should be.
5. From a personal perspective, if there are tragedies or illness in the family, then we are all there to support. Had it not been for the support of Taekwon Do, the loss the Eade family suffered would have been too unbearable to cope. The support we received is too difficult to describe, all I can say is that it made, and still makes a huge difference to us. Having said that, we also celebrate the good times across the South with engagements, weddings and birthdays. In other words, we're there for (*and care for*) each other, good times and bad.
6. There is a sense of encouragement and protectiveness of younger students. As Seniors we watch them dutifully and try to shape them into Taekwon Do practitioners and the best children, teenagers and young adults as we can. It's not a parental role, but it hopefully supports what Mum and Dad are trying to achieve in the home. No matter which club you derive from, and even if it's a few words of encouragement from Seniors, that contributes significantly to their self esteem and growth in Taekwon Do.
7. Where-ever we travel in the South, there is always a bed for you. It might be a single bed with a broken spring and Harry Potter duvet, or a two seater couch, or a mattress on the floor, but room is always found; and the company is always appreciated.
8. The South attitude around the bureacracy and politics of Taekwon Do can be challenging at times. Its essential to get varying views of issues and debate them thoroughly. We don't necessarily all agree at times, but always respect each others opinions and willing to listen to other ideas.

As stated previously, family means different things to different people. Just like one's own family, the South Island Taekwon-Do family is about encouraging, supporting, caring, teaching and valuing each other.

The Process

Several South Island Instructors were requested to forward a survey to one of their members families, where there were either siblings, and/or siblings and parents training in Taekwon-Do. Six family groups participated which encompassed eighteen individuals. Only one member per family was asked to fill out the survey on behalf of the family group. Age ranges of family members involved in Taekwon-Do ranged from six years of age to 50 years of age.

Surveys were received from Dunedin, Christchurch, Nelson and Blenheim.

What were the key questions asked?

What made you personally take up Tae Kwon Do?

A range of responses were provided which centred around four key themes:

- (a) Family or friends participation:
 - a. One respondent identified that attending a class with a friend, made the first experience less daunting and provided that essential support for the initial beginner.
 - b. Having a family member (either parent, sibling or extended family) who is already a student, the beginning student already has some sense of awareness of Taekwon Do.
- (b) National Tournament: Watching a National Tournament where the highest calibre of Taekwon Do practitioners showed their skills, inspired others to join.
- (c) Self Defence: Strong parental view to learn self defence to protect self and/or others.
- (d) Taekwon Do Skills and Experience.
- (e) To toughen up.

Why did the rest of the family take up Tae Kwon Do?

In one instance the direct cause was a child being bullied at school. Another respondent talked about the club being family orientated, welcoming and providing encouragement.

Fitness was another key aspect, as was training being regarded as a fun activity.

Cost was also an issue. Four members of one family were able to take up Taekwon Do as it was cheaper than only one of their children taking up gymnastics.

Self esteem was also identified as was the skills and experience you gain as a Taekwon-Do practitioner.

Doing things as a 'family' was also another strong reason, strengthening the family bond.

Why do families think Tae Kwon Do is so popular with families?

There was a sense of unity in having a number of your children participating in Taekwon Do. Developing a combined interest was value added to the family. In addition, siblings are able to practice together outside of the dojang and support each other as they progress through the ranks. No matter what one's age, strengths or weaknesses are, Taekwon Do is suited for everyone.

A sense of achievement was another reason for participating, especially when there are individual goals set and attained, gives that personal sense of success.

Affordability was raised again, the cost continuing to be a major factor in family participation.

The tenets were identified and linked towards helping children developing values and life skills.

Travelling to tournaments and seminars as a family was also a plus. While not considered a 'holiday' as such, spending time away from home yet participating in the same events/interests was seen as strengthening the family unit.

The friendships that are made both regionally and nationally were another reason, with Taekwon Do in New Zealand being seen as the bigger family.

What makes it easy for families to participate?

Having training sessions early evening, allowing enough time to have dinner, and then children can be put to bed at an appropriate time.

The 'old' South Island 'family' feeling was raised. This being associated to the way things used to run in the South, which was more relaxed and family orientated.

There were consistent and several responses around the affordability to participate, especially for families with several children participating.

Having children enjoy participating in Taekwon Do increases their motivation to continue training and work towards their goals.

Did family members leave Taekwon Do or were taking time out from Taekwon Do? If so, what were the reasons?

The reasons for taking time out or leaving Taekwon Do were consistent with three key themes:

- (a) Other priorities (*work, other sports or activities, relationships etc*) impacting on the ability to dedicate time to Taekwon Do training. Where that has occurred, one parent who trained 12 years ago and while raising a family had not had the time to return, now sends the children to Taekwon Do. In addition, there may be periods of absence but one respondent returned after a four year break.
- (b) As a senior belt there is time spent training coloured belts which takes time away from one's own development. For smaller clubs this is a challenge if there are limited seniors to assist with the training schedule.
- (c) One respondent talked about the commercialisation of Taekwon Do in New Zealand.

What value did Tae Kwon Do add to individual family members, and the family unit itself?

Installing the tenets of Taekwon Do into younger members of the family, gives them a good grounding in life and the continuation of living to the tenets will help transition young people into adulthood. It also extends the discipline and respect that is taught within the home, endorsing what is taught in the home.

Students who are encouraged and enjoy the positive approach of Taekwon Do, share those skills outside the dojang with their peers and friends.

Family units become closer as there is a lot of time spent together training and travelling for Taekwon Do.

In times of ill health or personal tragedies, the positive attitude Taekwon-Do has instilled, along with the support of the South Island Taekwon Do family supports the recovery process.

There was also 'lessons learnt', in that Taekwon-Do has its own set of rules and these should be adhered to, unfortunately some practitioners have broken the 'rules' and seem to 'get away with heaps'.

What does your family most about Tae Kwon Do?

- (a) Being able to set and achieve goals.
- (b) Making friends.
- (c) Strengthening the family unit.
- (d) Travelling to seminars and tournaments.
- (e) Having a sport the family can all do together.
- (f) Teaching others and seeing them develop not only in Taekwon Do but also their self esteem, confidence and personality.
- (g) Entering competitions.
- (h) Discipline and hard training.
- (i) Teaching respect.
- (j) Games played with children.

Were there any suggestions on how ITFNZ could increase family memberships?

- (a) Develop Taekwon Do School Holiday programmes.
- (b) Run regular open nights where students are encouraged to bring a friend.
- (c) Advertise more in schools, and in the general community.
- (d) Keeping the costs affordable, especially grading and registrations.
- (e) Offer family groups free month trials.
- (f) By supporting all instructors and not charging them for learning any new changes in the syllabus.

Were there any comments that the rest of your family would like to make in relation to Tae Kwon Do?

"Taekwon Do is an awesome family sport that all families can participate in"

"Good for fitness, strength, flexibility, confidence and self esteem"

"Camps in the South Island similar to those held in the North Island as we found those an expensive exercise, this is why not many from South attend. Good experience but costly".

"Not to focus so much on the World Champs teams, but invest a little in the grass roots, that is the Clubs and the Instructors. They dedicate their time for years to help students through gradings, tournaments, seminars etc. Even a free dobok would be appreciated"

Summary

In addition to those parents and children participating as Taekwon-Do students, there were also parents who took up supportive roles not only on club committees, but the general operations of Clubs, fundraisers, tournament or seminar organisation etc. This level of support cannot be underestimated, as it enables the Instructor to focus on teaching as opposed to a wider range of duties in terms of club management.

This brief survey endorsed that Taekwon-Do has a lot to offer families. Parents appreciate the key elements taught in class, the tenets, discipline, fitness, self defence, respect and Taekwon-Do skills.

All of this, is seen as contributing to encouraging children and young people to meet their goals, builds their self esteem and confidence, and extends the values taught in the home.

Providing support in times of need or at club or regional level is apparent, however further work could be done at supporting grass roots level and Instructor development.

Affordability was raised several times as a key factor in family participation. Ensuring Taekwon Do is cost competitive to other sports or activities should be considered at club, regional and national level.

Taekwon Do is seen as a 'family' whether we consider that nationally, regionally or at club level. It clearly strengthens the family unit.

Anyway, gives us something to think about when we start marketing the benefits of Taekwon Do to families.....

Lorraine Eade

APPENDIX – SURVEY FORMAT

Instructions: Could one family representative fill out this survey on behalf of the entire family. Other family members are most welcome to contribute towards Question 11.

Why do families participate in Tae Kwon Do?

1. How long have you been a student in Tae Kwon Do?

Under 3 years

3 to 5 years

5 to 10 years

10 to 15 years

15 to 20 years

20 to 25 years

25 + years

2. Please identify how many members of your family are (or have) been students (or hold official roles such as Treasurers/Presidents/Secretaries/Coaches/Board members etc) in Tae Kwon Do (including yourself)?

Age	Male/Female	Current Rank	For how long?

3. What made you personally take up Tae Kwon Do?

4. Why did the rest of the family take up Tae Kwon Do?

5. There are many families who participate in Tae Kwon Do? Why do you think Tae Kwon Do is so popular with families?

6. What makes it easy for you as a family to participate?

7. Have any members of your family left Tae Kwon Do or are taking time out from Tae Kwon Do? If so, what were the reasons?

8. What value has Tae Kwon Do added to you, individual family members, and the family unit itself?

9. What do your family enjoy the most about Tae Kwon Do?

10. Are there any suggestions you have on how ITFNZ could increase family memberships in New Zealand?

11. Are there any comments that the rest of your family would like to make in relation to Tae Kwon Do?
