

Sustainable Tourism Adviser in (North Canterbury) Regions 2009 Activity Hanmer Case Study, March 2010



i. Business Vision

When we arrived in New Zealand in 2002, we felt we'd taken "a step back in time" with regard to sustainability. We'd lived in communities that championed alternative energy and managed an Environmental Education Centre in the UK. Steve sees community leverage as his natural role and I'm passionate about household sustainability and procurement. We believe that we need to have 'our own house in order' and by doing so, provide community leadership and inspiration. Leadership and getting PR for good news stories is a part of what builds motivation within the community.

Activity Hanmer is committed to running a sustainable business. Our vision to minimise our environmental impact and maximise environmental benefits through our programmes ensures that sound environmental principals underpin all aspects of our operation. We also understand the value in us developing marketing leverage based on sustainability to increase visitor numbers to Hammer Spring, and so influence the larger tourism operators to adopt more sustainable practices.

ii. Business Background

We started Activity Hanmer started in 2003. Both from the UK, with backgrounds in Outdoor Education, we've now built up a company in Hanmer Springs, delivering outdoor activities for school camps; providing safe, professional and challenging activities to school age pupils (Year 5 to 13).

Activities include:

- Bush skills
- Orienteering
- Mountain biking
- Rock climbing
- Tramping and over night camping trips
- Team building activities (e.g. Mission Impossible)
- Leadership programmes

School camps are the core business for Activity Hanmer with over 250 school camps and 15,000 children having taken part in outdoor programmes over the last 5 years.

Activity Hanmer has also been steadily building a corporate market over the last 4 years, with groups taking part in one of many Activity Hanmer team building challenge activities. These corporate activities in effect help to subsidise the cost of school camp activities which although are our core purpose and drive, have very slim margins.

The company employs up to 5 full time instructors during peak season from September to June. Steve is the technical director and operations manager in conjunction with the Senior Instructor, and Lynne is the administrative manager.

iii. Sustainable Business Practice

We believe in strong top-down leadership and showing an obvious commitment to improving sustainable practices based on personal values and integrity. All business decisions involve some form of resource use, and each decision is now reviewed against the principle of "First reduce, then reuse, then recycle".

An example of the sustainable business practices we have developed and introduced:-

- Staff induction on sustainable practices and a commitment to achieving good practice is in place. The seasonal changeover of our staff means that we need to continually inspire *eco-warriors* on our team
- We provide tailored employment agreements including staff-share arrangements with Boyle River Centre (Lewis Pass) in order to maximise available hours, provide varied and consistent work for staff and so retain workers throughout the season and encourage staff to return in following years
- On site activities have been developed to reduce the need for transport once camp groups are in Hanmer
- Online administration procedures have been developed to minimise use of postage and paper, and a new web site incorporates sustainability as 'business as usual'
- A recycling scheme operates for the businesses and staff, and is being expanded to involve educating clients to use the correct bins and showcasing our worm farm
- We have adapted a buying policy for all goods and services. It questions the environmental supply chain of each product. We purchase environmentally friendly office products and avoid chemical cleaning agents
- Our recent major initiative enhances the environment as we've set up and run the Hanmer Weedbusters scheme. Groups involved in activities with Activity Hanmer are given the opportunity to "put back" into the environment by participating in a conservation project. Wilding pine eradication and broom clearance from Squirrel Lake here have been two major projects in 2009/10

iv. Analysis of Sustainable Business Practices

The bonus benefit of adopting our buying policy is its domino effect. By constantly asking suppliers for "green" products, it is raising their awareness of their own environmental impact. More often, the 'green' products are more expensive but by reducing the amount consumed, economies can be made.

The main benefit of our Weedbusters programme has been the value-add seen by our clients in our product and operation. Groups have been asked to stop and think about their impact and to make a valuable contribution to the environment to offset this. Looking at the numbers of re-booking, we know we have both enhanced their experience and increased our potential of repeat business.

The main cost has been time. The organisation of Weedbusters is purely voluntary and has taken a considerable amount of time and effort on Steve's part. Activity Hanmer instructors occasionally help with this work, a direct staffing cost to the company. The activity is free to participants so we do risk it being seen as an alternative to our paid activities, so it needs to be managed as an add-on to existing programmes.

Activity Hanmer is closely involved with the Department of Conservation and has recruited a number of local volunteers who want to work with the groups. This has increased local respect for the work Activity Hanmer does, and has helped to raise our profile. This is particularly valuable for our long-term plans as we hope to expand activity packages into the St James Area, again with an element of educating groups to put back into the environment.

v. Assessment of the STAR programme

Involvement in the STAR programme has given us a wealth of information, resources and a great back up through our STAR Adviser (Carol Taplin). Participation was an awesome opportunity for us to analyse, formalise and implement our environmental vision for Activity Hanmer. The expert help and advice helped us come up with a detailed plan of how to improve our sustainable business practices in real terms, with day-to-day initiatives and long term goals. The overall benefit was really the 'focus' it brought to what we had been striving to achieve, combined with practical 'how to' support with regards to improving and implementing appropriate initiatives.

vi. Future plans and outlook

Although we started the programme looking to get 'our own house in order', we've actually significantly invested in community leadership and inspiration. It's time to regroup. After this year's experience, we feel that we'll have a bigger long-term impact role-modelling than trying the drive community initiatives.

Looking back on the year and all the steps we have taken, we feel that our main focus must be in our own business, continuing to improve on how we operate, improve how we tell our story and educate others; visiting school children, parents teachers and corporate groups. We will continue to fly the green flag and to increase the value of the service we offer, while raising awareness in our clients.

Future Goals and aspirations:

- A business that is well respected for its total commitment to the environment
- More consistent year-round working patterns
- Ability to help other businesses to go down the sustainable route
- Have a very strong schools market as a foundation block which allows us to confidently expand corporate teambuilding, adventure tourism and apply for a concession to the St James area through DOC
- Become an integral part of the local business network and a shining light for sustainable practices

Contact Details:

Steve and Lynne Brodie
51 Chalet Crescent
PO Box 67
Hanmer Springs 7360

Phone 03 315 7383
Mobile 027 315 7383
Fax 03 315 7380
www.activityhanmer.co.nz