

Whakatūpato Programme for firearm safety in isolated areas

By Nicole McKee, Firearms Safety Specialists NZ Ltd



In August last year I lost my job at NZ Mountain Safety Council. Along with other employees and volunteers I became a casualty of the MSC restructure.

Never one to stay idle for long, I founded Firearms Safety Specialists NZ Ltd (FSS NZ) and so a new adventure began.

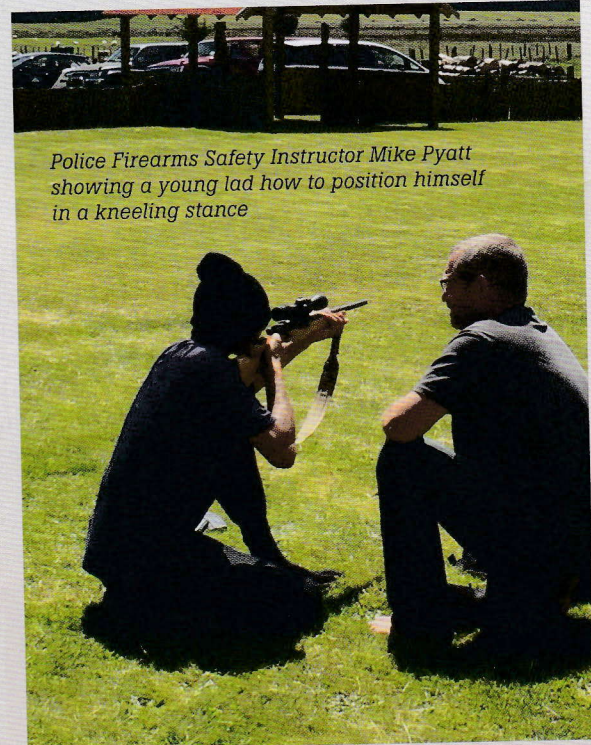
One of the tasks I have been contracted to carry out is firearms safety training and administration of the arms test in remote and isolated communities. This is called the Whakatūpato Programme – a programme that has been around since 2011 but one that FSS NZ has now been contracted to deliver on behalf of the NZ Police. The venue is generally on marae but can be in community halls or schools.

Some have suggested that it is firearms testing handed out on a plate but that is far from the truth. Every person that applies for a firearms licence must attend a firearms safety course and sit the the same police test administered throughout the country. Passing the test is just one part of the

process required.

The subtle differences with Whakatūpato are venue, atmosphere, presentation style and extra course content. FSS NZ instructors provide the standard firearms safety course but spend more time going in depth into its mandatory content. As a result the course can take up to a day and a half. If time allows we can extend the course by covering topics such as hunting and firearms ethics, how to clean a rifle, ammunition componentry and positional shooting techniques.

The success of the programme depends on the participation of isolated rural communities and local marae. A learning environment that is comfortable and familiar helps encourage confidence and creates a positive atmosphere.



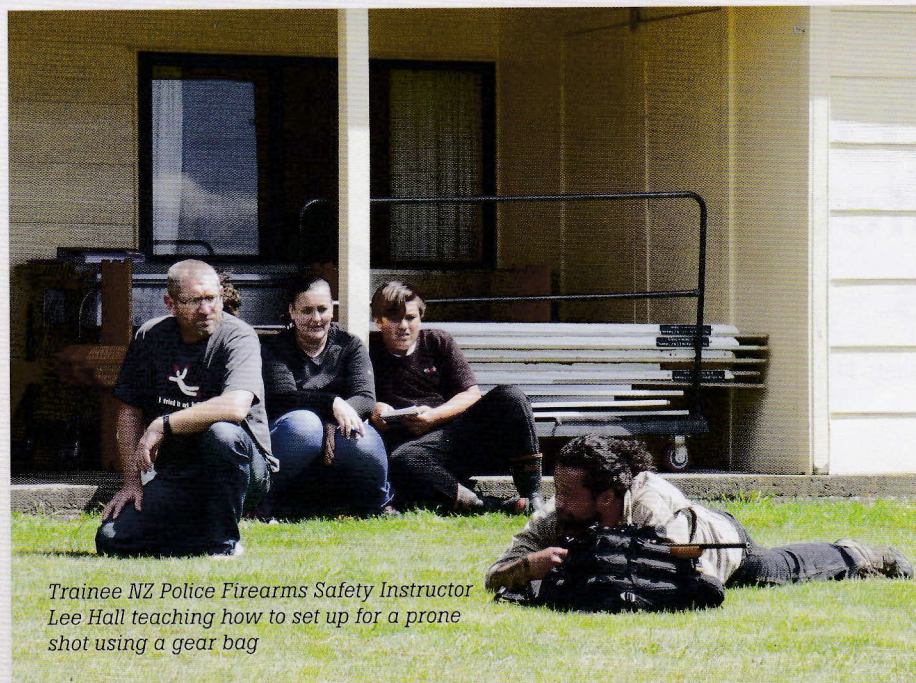
Police Firearms Safety Instructor Mike Pyatt showing a young lad how to position himself in a kneeling stance

At this point I commend Whanau Ora ki Tūwharetoa and their initiative to encourage and support licencing their people. Ngati Tūwharetoa iwi have opened their marae to the Whakatūpato programme, enabling FSS NZ to work among the central North Island's more isolated communities. Ngati Tūwharetoa have also identified current and future leaders to be trained as firearms safety instructors. That means important on-going education opportunities for multiple marae, delivered by the people for their people.

Whanau Ora ki Tūwharetoa are financially assisting some of the licence applicants with



Most of the applicants who sat and passed their firearms licence tests at Otūkou, wearing their sponsored Ridgeline tops



Trainee NZ Police Firearms Safety Instructor Lee Hall teaching how to set up for a prone shot using a gear bag

their course fees. They are the select few who hunt and gather food for their marae and community. There are also wholesalers helping the Whanau Ora ki Tūwharetoa initiative, such as Ridgeline with hi-viz clothing for those that pass their

test, and Steve's Wholesale Limited with Birchwood Casey targets for accurate rifle sighting. Negotiations with other wholesalers to support the Whakatūpato Programme are continuing.

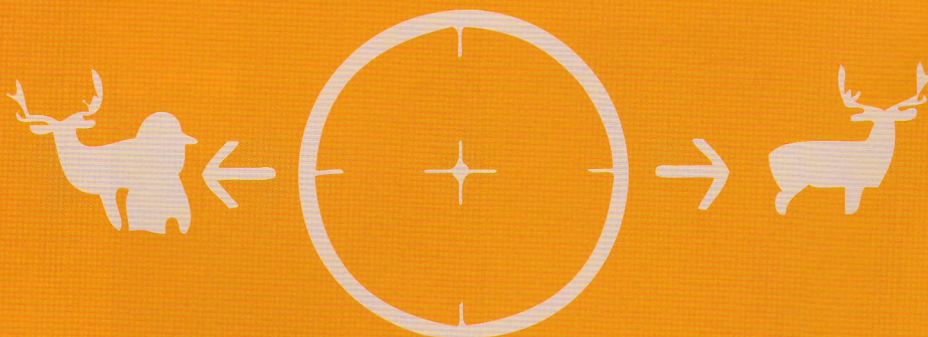
At the end of November 2015 FSS

NZ delivered its first course on behalf of the police at Otūkou Marae, beside Lake Rotoaira at the base of Mt Tongariro. Twenty-four participants stayed for one and a half days. By the end of the first day, all 24 had passed the firearms safety test, so that FSS NZ was able to deliver the extended course content the following day.

Police support for the programme and this course is invaluable. Police vetting officers were on hand to answer questions about security and to complete as much vetting and referee checking as possible during the day and a half on the marae. FSS NZ and the police also encourage the entire whanau to attend the course and learn about firearms safety. We are firm believers that safety education should be taught to all where firearms will be in the home.

What the Whakatūpato Programme is bringing to the local communities is a sense of awareness, safety, education, pride and legality in the handling and use of firearms. FSS NZ is proud to be a part of this. The new adventure is well underway. 🦌

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