



FEBRUARY: Wanganui SLSC



RESCUE OF THE MONTH

RECOGNISING OUTSTANDING RESCUES

NATIONAL WINNER

In it for life

Date: February 18, 2018

Location: Kai Iwi Beach

Lifeguards involved: James Newell, Phil Gilmore, Matthew Newell, Laura O'Keeffe, Clarissa Nowak, Sophie Couper, Laurie Gil, Alex Forlong and Kaya Dobbie

Just after midday on Sunday February 18, Wanganui Surf Life Saving Club Chairman and lifeguard James Newell received a call from Police with reports of two swimmers missing off Kai Iwi Beach. They requested that the club deploy a search team from the beach. The sea was too rough for Coastguard to get out but they were put on standby.

Within 30 minutes, James had lifeguards Laura O'Keeffe and Alex Forlong on the water in an IRB assessing the situation. The surf was 30 minutes away from being a high, king tide and storm waves were reaching over two metres high with shore dumps smashing along the cliffs.

Fellow lifeguards Kaya Dobbie and Matthew Newell were stationed in the newly built watch tower, acting as the base of operations between lifeguards, Police and Coastguard. They communicated reports from Police to the IRB that the last sighting of the swimmers was when they went out directly from the Mowhanau Stream, which dragged them south of Kai Iwi. The lifeguards headed south in the IRB and quickly located them under the cliffs in a small cove, trying to get out from the smashing waves.

Experienced IRB driver Laura attempted to get in close and dropped crewmen Alex into the water to collect the patients. She got in close enough to identify and check that they were ok but the storm surf was too powerful against the cliff and, in the process, Alex injured her hand against the rock and swam back to the IRB. They identified the patients as an adult male with his young teenage daughter who had an injured foot. The IRB then sat off the cliffs and kept a visual watch while James reassessed the situation from the communications base at the watch tower.

Police had called the rescue helicopter as an option to winch the patients out but lifeguards had decided to dispatch a second IRB from Castlecliff. The police called the fire service as a back up to abseil down the cliff. The second IRB was deployed with lifeguards Phil Gilmore and Sophie Couper while the first IRB waited for them and the helicopter to arrive.

Knowing the conditions, they started to set up an extraction plan using the two IRBs and swimmers as James felt it would be a safer option than a helicopter extraction. They assessed the cliff as too unstable for abseiling or helicopter winching. The helicopter arrived at 1:30pm and they also deemed it too risky to try winch the patients out due to the storm surf and wind. The IRB was the only option.

At this time, the tide had slowed down, giving the lifeguards small, 30 second to two minute intervals with no shore dumps. They took the opportunity in a flat period to take an IRB into the cliffs and hide in the sets behind a slip which had formed a small island about 50 metres down from the patients.

Once in place, they waited for a second flat period when a second crewmen Clarissa Nowak swam to the patients, rescuing the young girl and taking her back to the IRB. They waited for a further calm patch before returning to shore where the patient was carried to lifeguard Laurie Gil who was waiting with the ambulance and the girl's family. Meanwhile, lifeguards in the second IRB were using the same procedure to rescue the girl's father who was unharmed.

The whole operation utilised nine lifeguards, two IRBs, one ambulance, approximately eight Police officers, two fire engines and one helicopter. Their plan was formulated and they all followed it strictly with great courage in what were trying conditions.

All of the lifeguards involved performed extremely well using good radio communication between themselves and fellow rescue services from the watch tower base. The IRBs were also instrumental in this rescue as were the high skill levels of the guards.

It was a very good outcome for the victims with the lifeguards receiving high praise from Police for a job well done.