Do you like “bug hunting”? How about in the river?

Students at Coroglen and Puriri Schools have just completed an experiential learning programme about freshwater conservation and catchment restoration, The Whitebait Connection.

This is the second year the programme has been offered by provider organisation The Friends of Te Whanganui-A-Hei Marine Reserve Trust. Local area resident Amber Boyd delivers the programme to schools in the region.

The Trust would like to thank Waikato Regional Council’s Environmental Initiatives Fund for their three-year funding of this programme. With this funding we can offer the programme at no cost to schools. (photo students in stream)

The program consists of a power point presentation which teaches about freshwater systems, how to monitor freshwater, what rivers need to be “healthy” and also all about whitebait. The best part of the program is getting the children out to the rivers to test the water health. The “bug hunting” being the favourite part of this for many children.

Coroglen School tested 2 parts of the Waiwawa River. First, by the Coroglen Bridge and then upstream at the Riverglen Campground. They found that both spots were reasonably healthy, with the Riverglen spot having more riparian vegetation, which has many, many positives to water health. They caught a swimming mayfly which are extremely sensitive to pollution and indicates that the water is very healthy. At the Coroglen Bridge they caught a whitebait, or Inanga which are currently migrating from the ocean up streams to grow into adults in the higher reaches of the river.

Currently Amber is talking with the Waikato Regional Council and the TCDC to help the school with some planting which will mean they can help the river that gives them so much joy.

Every Friday the entire Puriri School heads up the road to the Puriri River for ‘river class’. Amber was lucky enough to be able to tag along with the school and test the water with them. Again, they found that the water is reasonably healthy but the riparian vegetation is lacking. Downstream below a river crossing, they caught inanga. Although, the upper testing spot was not a long way up the river, they didn’t catch any up there. Amber believes this is due to the inanga not being strong climbers and not being able to climb up the rocks to access upstream. This is something the school want to investigate and hopefully remedy. The school is also looking at purchasing nets and making the testing a regular part of their learning.

Amber gets a lot of satisfaction teaching this program to schools. She loves being able to teach the children about our environment which we rely on so much. The children are our future and we need them to love and respect our environment that we are so lucky to have.