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Padding in a positive direction

By DENISE PIPER - Whangarei Leader

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ALL ABOARD: The Pink Dragons get plenty of psychological and physical benefits from dragon boating.

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again and getting fit in the process."

The Pink Dragons compete nationally and internationally against other breast cancer survivor teams, plus locally and nationally in an open division.

Breast cancer survivor dragon boating began in Canada in 1996 after a study found upper body exercise improves breast cancer recovery – contrary to previous opinions that survivors should avoid strenuous upper-body exercise after surgery.

Because men can get breast cancer too, the teams are not limited to just female survivors.

Robin, who admits she was never good at sports at school, says dragon boating is for anyone.

"I'd never been part of a sports team and most of us had never been on a dragon boat before," she says.

"When you first climb into this narrow, tippy boat, you do so with a bit of trepidation. But when you get the rhythm of the boat going, it's magic."

They practise twice a week, plus go running and do other training to get fit.

Robin expects for the first summer, a new Northland team may not be able to get 100 percent breast cancer survivors, so will have to compete in the open division.

But she says she would like to see corporate and community dragon boat teams form alongside the breast cancer survivors and hopes to entice people to the experience.

The association is willing to lend a new team one of the old boats and a set of paddles to get it going.

Robin will hold a talk, hosted by the Breast Cancer Support Northland Trust, about the team and dragon boating.

A sport which breathes the life of the dragon into breast cancer survivors is being promoted in Northland.

Robin Gamble from the Auckland Dragon Boat Association is hoping to start a dragon boating team for Northland breast cancer survivors.

The team leader of Auckland-based Ascot Radiology Pink Dragons, Robin says dragon boating improves fitness, movement and self-esteem in breast cancer survivors with 20 paddlers in a boat.

"It empowers women who have lost their way a little bit. When you get a breast cancer diagnosis it's very disempowering – the whole medical conveyor-belt takes over," she says.

"Dragon boating is a whole journey. It's about reclaiming our lives

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Anyone who is interested in finding out more about dragon boating – especially breast cancer survivors – plus those interested in supporting or sponsoring a team, is encouraged to come along or contact the trust.

• The meeting and talk will be held on Monday, June 22, at the YWCA Lounge, Rust Ave, from midday and includes a shared lunch. Phone the Breast Cancer Support Northland Trust on 021-046 -8718 for more information.

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