

Scuba dive the coolest thing says prize winner

"IT'S THE coolest thing I've ever done," says eight-year-old O'hiva Williams.

This is how she describes the introduction scuba dive at Aroa lagoon she went on courtesy of The Dive Centre on Saturday.

The Avatea School student won the dive experience for her first prize entry in the Environment Week colouring competition held in June.

Accompanying Williams on the dive was Te Uki Ou student, nine-year-old Tefaatau File who won second place in the competition.

The competition was sponsored by The Dive Centre and ANZ Bank and was run jointly with the ministry of marine resources, the national environment service (NES) and WWF.

With no entries in the 13-17 year old category, the sponsors decided to pick two of the younger entrants to win the introduction dive packages. Mask and snorkel packages went to three students from Te Uki Ou aged 6-7. The school took out nine of the ten prizes.

The Dive Centre's Sabine Janneck says there were around 50 entries in the competition, but William's piece stood out including her winning slogan

'Save our sea for you and me.'

On the weekend Williams and File went on the dive at Aroa marine reserve with ANZ's Christian Mani and NES officer Deyna Marsh – all were first timers.

Williams says she wants to become a marine biologist and was so impressed with her first scuba dive that she wants to tell all her friends about protecting coral, fish and the lagoon.

Mani and Marsh now want to become certified divers.

"I do a lot of educational work on the lagoon but it was completely different to be so close and see it all," said Marsh.

"For me, it makes me feel proud of my work done when the people can see it for themselves as I believe that they become more passionate and responsible which makes it much more easier," she says.

Marsh says seeing so many species of fish and coral in one place really reflected the benefits of the rahui (reserve).

"The message is clear that rahui does work and that we should all respect the rahui and ensure proper and safe lagoon practices so that our lagoons will be full of healthy fish and coral."

The safe practices include no standing on coral, no fishing

from rahui areas, and keeping rubbish out of the lagoon and off the beach.

Marsh says Williams and File

learnt about the importance of keeping the marine environment clean which complemented their artwork and messages

for the environment campaign. She has thanked The Dive Centre for the generous offer to take a representative from NES

and ANZ Bank along as it shows the partnership between government and the private sector is working. ■ HG



The two environment week colouring comp winners 8 year old O'hiva Williams and 9 year old Tefaatau File with ANZ Bank's Christian Mani, NES officer Deyna Marsh and dive master Sean Wichman (right). 09/07/09