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Surfing an internet crime wave

Andrew Board

An internet crime wave is heading our way but a Nelson man is leading the fight against it, showing New Zealanders how to surf the internet safer. And his message is receiving the highest praise from local police, convinced he is changing lives for the better.

John Parsons, along with his business partner Ryan Clarke, has developed modules for school children and adults about the risks the internet poses and how to navigate it without leaving themselves open to comment. The module is already used in several Nelson schools and community groups and is now gaining nation-wide attention. The module is the only one of its kind in New Zealand and is a very "simplistic but effective" way of getting the internet safety message to people. John says overseas trends show



John Parsons.

New Zealand is in the firing line for an explosion of cyber-crime including identity theft, burglaries and predators taking advantage of young people. He says the module is about health and safety and keeping people from making lasting mistakes on the internet.

He cites Facebook as a common place for people to post comments and photos that can come back to haunt them.

"Employers call it the real CV and can get an idea of what people are really like when they are not putting on their best behaviour in an interview," he says.

The four-hour module has been taught to students at Enner Glyn, Parklands, Murchison Area School as well as at SeniorNet and with community health education courses. John says he has seen the effects of cybercrime in Nelson

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SING IT LOUD: Off Your Rockers singer Italina Sowman performs at Stepping Out in Tahunanui on Sunday. Photo: Andrew Board.

Singing up at Stepping Out event

It was hard to tell who was having more fun, the acts on stage or the families that turned up to watch them.

But with about 80 families taking part in this year's Stepping Out in Tahunanui, organiser Trish Duthie is going to give it to the spectators, just.

Stepping Out in Tahunanui is a free family event that gives local families a chance to visit and participate in dozens of activities around the suburb before putting on a party at Burrill Park, next to the Tahunanui Community Centre.

Those that visit the activities get their entry form stamped with all entries going into a prize draw at the end of the day. Trish says entries were about the same last year and the entertainment had a strong crowd sticking around until the 4pm prize draw. "The entry box was packed, it was really good."

Trish says the day was hugely rewarding and shows the community spirit in Tahuna.

"It was fantastic, it really was. Such great weather and such a great turn out. I'm thrilled with how it went."

Providing entertainment were the Plinkers, Off Your Rockers, Belly Dancers, the Celtic Band and Tahunanui School students who performed their Jump Jam routine. Earlier in the day families could have a go at 14 different events around Tahunanui.

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Nelson man leading the way in internet safety

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John says he has seen the effects of cybercrime in Nelson and how it can damage people's lives.

"What we do isn't an IT thing; it is about health and safety, keeping people safe. Things you should watch out for and things you should not do."

He talks about one Nelson family that had a younger member make friends with a person via an online game. That friendship lead to the child sending photos of themselves to the predator, thinking it was a person of the opposite sex. John says it took a family effort to cut ties, learn how to protect themselves and move forward. "This kind of thing can be absolutely devastating for families," he says.

Nelson senior constable John O'Donovan has the highest praise for John's work and says all internet users should listen to him.

"John is passionate about keeping people safe and he relates to people of all ages very, very well. We are indeed very lucky to having him live in our region. He has the entire subject nailed. I can't say enough about him."

John O'Donovan says he would like to see the module go nationwide.

"Every year cyber crime is going up and criminals have recognised that it is a good medium to choose victims. So we need to give potential victims the tools to not get sucked in. That's what John does, his messages are messages endorsed by police," he says.

Seeing how the programme works, John Parsons says he would like to see schools across Nelson and indeed New Zealand introduce the module, as he is certain it would protect

thousands of potential cyber-crime victims. But John insists he is not anti-internet or anti-Facebook, in fact he is exactly the opposite. "I love the internet and work with it all the time, we

try really hard to make sure we don't come across as anti-internet because it is wonderful, we just need to use it correctly," he says.

For more information about the module visit www.s2e.co.nz.



Aimee Lewis dances in front of Tahunanui School's Jump Jam performance at Stepping Out in Tahunanui on Sunday. Photo: Andrew Board.