

## Dropping kilos and lifting spirits in a tiny Fijian village

ABC - Margaret Burin

Posted Tue 7 Aug 2018, 9:40am

Updated Tue 7 Aug 2018, 2:43pm



Instructors Stino and Mela run an aerogym session next to the community hall.

Image:

ABC - Margaret Burin

**It's 3pm and women begin to flow in from different directions outside the Dranikula community hall.**

They're here to take part in aerogym, their daily date to burn energy and be energised.

Up to 40 women in the village come together each day for the program - aerobics mixed with gymnastics, and a bit of Fijian flavour thrown in.



Evia Raivaka takes charge of the 20 minute daily routines.

Image:

ABC - Margaret Burin

Group leader Evia Raivaka admits that when Pacific Sports Partnerships' gymnastics staff first approached the village, about 60km south-west of Suva, many of the women were too embarrassed to take part.

"Because it's not in our custom, they are ashamed to do the aerobics, to throw themselves up and down, they were all ashamed.

"That's why it's so difficult to convince them because they have a different kind of thinking.

"It's a new thing for them."

The group started with 10, but now has most of the village's women and girls participating.

Before that, Evia says the women would usually only come together to clean.

Now they're bonding over their improved health.

"Most of the women they don't do exercise, they just stay home, do cooking that's their routine. Every day they wake up, they do the breakfast, they do the lunch, and they do the dinner and do the washing, but not exercising.

"I didn't know some of these women very well but after we had this aerobics, I come to know them very well.

"We are feeling good together."



Evia Raivaka says the classes are uplifting.  
Image:

ABC - Margaret Burin

After just over six months of doing the Australian aid-funded program, Evia is one of many women who've noticed significant weight loss.

One woman has lost 15kg.

"To give only half an hour, every day in the afternoon...it changed their lifestyle," she says.

"Of all the women only one didn't lose weight."



The women say the program has also brought them closer together.

Image:

ABC - Margaret Burin

"I think most of the women in villages they are overweight. And I am one of them. But I am very happy that I lost 11.5kg."

Evia says it's also meant she can be more active with her children, including her 22-year-old daughter.

"We used to walk together me and my daughter and she used to take the pace," she says.

"Before it's a big distance, but now I'm catching up to her when we walk.

"I am really happy. And I feel that I am very active now."



"I'm a housewife and now I'm coming outdoors to practise exercise. I feel proud of myself," Eseta Liku says, holding her four-year-old son Junior.

Image:

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Gymnastics Federation of Fiji's Stino Selevasio and Melaia Lutunauca have been introducing the program across Fiji, training community leaders to take charge of the routines.



Aerogym instructor Stino throws his hands in the air.

Image:

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This is Stino's first visit back to the village since handing over the reins.

"Wow, I must say I'm amazed," he says.

"Coming to Dranikula after so many months I'm feeling the joy of it, the joy of the program.

"It just proves to me that the ladies have put in so much commitment and so much effort and so much work.

"And they have fun. So much fun."



Some of the women and children of Dranikula village.

Image:

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Last month the group performed for gymnastics delegates from around the globe as part of International Gymnastics Federation committee meetings hosted in Fiji.

Evia says the program has boosted the community's spirits in more ways than one.

"We can feel that we, women, can be capable of anything."

*This story was produced by ABC International Development as part of the Pacific Sports Partnerships funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.*

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