

Forget Wii, it's woggle time. Rebecca Blithe meets a Devonport boy who's just joined the revived New Zealand scouting movement

WHY does a Scout offer their left hand in a handshake? "I know, I know!" shouts 8-year-old Samuel Turner-O'Keefe. Index finger shooting skyward, he jumps on the spot in earnest, before articulately recounting the story of the Boy Scouts founder, Lord Robert Baden-Powell and his encounter with a shield-wielding Zulu.

"The Zulu dropped his shield and shook Robert Baden-Powell's hand with his left hand," says Samuel.

Immaculate in his forest green vest and First Devonport Scouts scarf, neatly secured with a woggle — not to be confused with a toggle — Samuel became a member of the First Devonport Scouts group five weeks ago. He's got two more years as a Cub before he's a full-fledged Scout.

Enticed by a friend who showed up at school sporting a Scouts vest emblazoned with badges, Samuel decided he had to sign up, too.

His mum, Angee O'Keefe, says she didn't realise scouting was still around. And it might not have been for Devonport boys if Scouts leader Christopher Jones, former Boy Scout from England, hadn't got on board.

"When I started in 2008 there were three cubs," says Mr Jones. Now the club has 52 members and a waiting list.

Mr Jones says there seems to be



Samuel Turner-O'Keefe has recently become a cub at the First Devonport Scouts

KELLIE BLIZARD

Old-fashioned fun

something of a renaissance in the scouting movement as busy parents look for ways to get their children off Playstations and involved in the outdoors, learning basic skills.

"There's been a steady five per cent growth. The numbers [nationally] are the same as back in 1939," says Mr Jones. Mrs O'Keefe says while her son

is involved in lots of other extracurricular activities, Scouts gives him fundamental life skills.

"A lot of kids here have never picked up a hammer before. For kids like Samuel, he has so many things on, so everyday things can get missed out."

As Samuel bounds across the brightly decorated Scout den and

shows off his musical ability on the piano, Mrs O'Keefe smiles.

"I have never seen him so enthusiastic about anything as he is about Cubs," she says. "And it's not just him. I've watched the other children as well. There's definitely something special that happens here. It's fantastic."

WANNA BE A BOY SCOUT?

Find out more about the 101-year-old First Devonport Scouts Club at: www.devonportdirectory.co.nz/1stdevonport/denhire.htm

Samuel's earned five badges in as many weeks, for gaining skills in specific areas such as music and computing. And he's keen to earn more.

"I want to get to eight badges. There's a person here who has eight," he says.

While Scouts offer boys the chance to learn a wide range of skills, Mrs O'Keefe says the opportunities for boys to get out and explore are unique.

"Where else can they get out and have these kinds of adventures," she asks, referring to a recent hike Samuel went on with Mr Jones and his fellow Cubs.

Mr Jones, who made the hike into an adventure by describing a bridge as "a pipe of doom" and a clump of mangroves as a "jungle", says an important part of being a Scout is becoming aware of one's community.

"Scouts help young men recognise their place in the community, their place in society. It also gives them a sense of national identity as they participate in things like the Anzac Parade, which we do each year."

The boys also get involved in a coal drive every winter when they deliver coal to the older people of Devonport.