

# How can government improve results for our most vulnerable (at-risk) children and their families?

## Response template

Deadline: 5pm, 4 December 2014

### Part 1: Your contact details and response summary

<b>Organisation Name:</b>	Community Education Trust Auckland (COMET Auckland)
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<b>What geographical location does your response relate to?</b>	Auckland
<b>What group of people or issues is your response targeted towards?</b>	Children at risk of education failure, and their families; especially Maori and Pasifika families and those from low socio-economic groups in Auckland. This includes most of the categories you have listed under "who do we want to focus on". Our expertise is in the area of education and skills, so our comments are focused on how the risk of educational failure can be reduced for children and families at greatest risk of educational failure.
<b>Does your response relate to a new service or modification of existing services?</b>	We have mostly focused on modification of existing services and on policies and systems that affect service delivery.

## Part 2: Your RFI response

### A: What works best to identify and engage the children and their families most at-risk of poor education, criminal justice and employment outcomes?

For example...

- what are successful ways to find and engage the most hard to reach children and families?

**Parents of young children are often particularly receptive to opportunities to engage with their children's learning**, so it is important to make the most of this receptive phase. Often the most at-risk families don't take their children to ECE but they still want their children to do well. **Taking services to where families are at** can be effective to make first contact with a family and to model how parents can talk with and play with their children. Effective examples include:

- Taking services to the places where families already gather, and use local people who are familiar and trusted as path-makers. For example, running 'Play Day's in shopping malls, sports clubs and local parks – families are there anyway, feel safe, and can therefore experience playing with their children and see what early learning is like, in a non-threatening way. Local ECEs are often keen to help organise these events if an agency provides coordination. Having health colleagues present can give a double benefit to these events.
- Mobile playgroups, such as Counties Manukau Kindergarten Association's PlayTruck<sup>1</sup> can go into residential streets and offer a well-resourced, friendly play experience to show the value of early learning, before introducing parents to some of their local ECEs.
- Local playgroups that combine child learning experiences with an explicit focus on upskilling parents (for more details, see below). Ideally these recruit and train local champions, people who understand their community.

Actively encourage and enable **ECEs and schools to become community hubs**, providing space for activities and services that community members want to engage with. This brings families to the school/ECE on a regular basis, so they feel more at home there and are more confident to engage in more education-focused ways. It also communicates a clear message that the school/ECE cares about its community. Regular attendance at ECE and school is supported when health services are local and easily accessible. At present, schools and ECEs have to put in extraordinary amounts of effort to lobby for combined services and there are a myriad of funding restrictions and bureaucratic obstacles to be overcome. Government could help by offering seed funding for schools and ECEs to re-model an existing building to allow space for ancillary services alongside the learning spaces.

**Effective engagement hinges on warm, trusting relationships** which are unlikely to happen unless there is an **understanding and awareness of social and cultural differences**. **The first point of contact is critically important**. When Maori and Pasifika parents step into an ECE or school they want to hear and see other people who look and sound like them, who speak their language and who respect their cultural differences. For this reason it is valuable for schools and ECEs to employ staff who reflect and represent the communities in which they work and who understand and relate well to the whānau and aiga they are dealing with on a daily basis. Recruitment and retention of Maori and Pasifika teachers is vital as is the support of Maori and Pasifika languages being promoted and spoken as much as possible in mainstream education settings, and the inclusion of knowledge and skills in intercultural understanding/engaging with families as part of initial teacher training.

**Home-based early learning programmes**, especially whānau-based services, can enable family members who care for multiple children from across their extended family to be supported with training, learning resources and assistance to bring their home to the required safety standards. The Wellington Kindergarten association is trialling a service along these lines in Porirua, Etu Ao2, ensuring quality learning for children in a familiar, caring setting, while often providing a pathway to

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.stuff.co.nz/auckland/local-news/papakura-courier/8981300/Teachers-trucking-on>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.wn-kindergarten.org.nz/etuao>

employment for the trained carer.

And/Or

**B: How could existing services or supports be improved to make the biggest difference to children and their families at most risk of poor education, criminal justice and employment outcomes?**

For example...

- how could existing services be better delivered? (this could include services directly provided by government, or by private or not-for-profit providers or other groups)
- what would need to change to improve the effectiveness of services for the most at-risk groups?

**Encourage the joining up services and programmes.** There is a plethora of providers and very little coordination.<sup>3</sup> Most programmes are not to scale. For example; SPACE is a programme for new parents; the Storytime Foundation provides Books 4 Babies (focused on Dep Index 8-10 families; Duffy Books in Homes provides books for school aged children; Computers in Homes supports parents literacy. These services are not connected in any way, nor is there any support for them to align their messages or adjust their age ranges so families can have coherent support.

**The silos within and between government departments create barriers to effective support for tamariki and whānau**, because they make it almost impossible to fund and monitor holistic, preventive support for whānau. Programmes that support families in multiple ways across generations and areas of need can protect vulnerable children in both the short and long term, in a very cost-effective way. However at present, no one agency funds and monitors both short and long term outcomes for children, adults and families; in health, violence-prevention, housing, education, and employment. Whānau Ora is a step in the right direction but the systems for funding and monitoring across departmental areas are still very under-developed and take too much effort for most community organisations to work around.

Another significant barrier to effective support for whānau is the **lack of funding for coordination**, to make it possible for several organisations that deliver different services to work together to provide more holistic, seamless services to families. Holistic services are more effective because they address several of the causes of vulnerability at once. However it is almost impossible to deliver services in a seamless way across organisations without an explicitly funded coordination function. At present, apart from Whānau Ora, it is extremely difficult to find such funding. We have had experience for 12 years of trying to get multi-agency funding for a family learning programme for adults with no qualifications (TEC) in an empty classroom on a school site (MOE) that needed support services and coordination to achieve family wellbeing outcomes (MSD). There was no mechanism to fund what is an essentially simple idea; coordination funding could only be found from philanthropy, which is no way to bring effective programmes to scale.

Think family! Invest in intergenerational learning, initiatives that focus on both raising parents and children's literacy at the same time.

Several **existing programmes now have strong evidence of effectiveness and need to be expanded.** For example:

- **Early Reading Together** (the pre-school version of Reading Together<sup>4</sup>). This should be made available on a fully-funded basis to all early learning services that work with priority families.
- HIPPY, which provides in-home training and support for parents to educate their pre-school children at home, is extremely well-researched<sup>5</sup> and backed by strong evidence of

<sup>3</sup> See diagram that shows some of the stakeholders currently working with families.

<sup>4</sup> Tuck, B., Horgan, L., Franich, C., and Wards, M. (2007). Reading Together: School leadership in a school-home partnership. Ministry of Education: Wellington.

<sup>5</sup> BarHava-Monteith, G., Harre, N., & Field, J. (1999a). HIPPY New Zealand: An Evaluation Overview. *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, vol. 12, pp. 106-121.

effectiveness, both for the child's learning and for the parent's self-efficacy and positive parenting. It is now available in many high-need communities but could be further expanded. It would also be valuable **to invest in creating and trialling a "junior" version of HIPPY for 2 to 3-year-old children.**

- **Supported playgroups based in schools** have been shown<sup>6</sup> to lead to literacy levels at age 6 as high as, or higher than, children who have attended formal ECE, while also promoting changes in family relationships, parent engagement with learning, and preparing some parents for future careers in ECE teaching. A watered-down version of this model was implemented over the past three years but the playgroups were not on school sites and were evaluated on outcomes focused on attendance rather than on supporting family practices in the home. We suggest that a new implementation be planned, using the original successful model and with a parent support, rather than an ECE, focus.
- **Supporting family learning in prison**, again to break intergenerational cycles of low literacy. The Howard League for Penal Reform is providing Storybook Dads<sup>7</sup>. Pillars provides supports to families and programmes for children of prisoners. Substantial evidence indicates the increased truancy and offending risks to children of prisoners.

There needs to be greater support for **teacher training providers to include family engagement skills** in all pre-service training and to include whānau engagement skills in ongoing professional development.

There is opportunity for **greater engagement between national and local government in supporting parents and children to learn together outside of formal education settings.**

Libraries, sports fields, swimming pools, museums and zoos are just some examples of resources provided by local government that support learning in the community. At present the links between these resources and centrally-funded formal education are patchy and ad-hoc.

Invest in long term collective impact thinking and initiatives with baseline funding for a decade. Part of our problem is endless cycles of pilot programmes. Government and philanthropy often look for another new idea rather than backing and scaling local ideas that work. A Collective Impact approach would bring local and national government, educators, business and community together to plan connected action towards shared goals, and would have potential to engage parents, whānau and learners in the process. Such a Collective Impact approach could happen in Auckland through strengthening the central government involvement in Learning Auckland, which already has strong engagement across all education sectors, local government and the community sector. We would be keen to discuss this possibility further with appropriate officials.

And/Or

### **C: What issues or problems are not currently being addressed that increase the risks to some children of not achieving in education or employment?**

For example...

- what are the particular issues in your community?
- are there any services needed which aren't currently available? What are they?
- are the underlying causes of poor outcomes being addressed?

We can see five key issues that are being ignored or under-emphasised in our area of work at present:

Bring what works to scale in a meaningful way for Auckland and fund coordination and joining up. There are 7,700 new born babies from Dep Index 8-10 in Auckland alone. We know that the number of books in homes is a factor in education success. Books4 Babes gets to 3,500. There are 26,000 families with school aged children in Auckland without internet access. There are

<sup>6</sup> Widdowson, D., and Dixon, R. (2011). *Final report for the evaluation of the Parent Mentoring project in Manukau*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

<sup>7</sup> <https://akoatearora.ac.nz/download/ng/file/group-3300/making-a-difference-in-prison-with-storybook-dads.pdf>

410,000 adults with low literacy yet Computers in Homes is funded to work with 1,5000 nationally – the scale of delivery of effective programmes is simply insufficient.

1. The **importance of oral language development**, especially in the first three years. Evidence shows that the first three years of life are key to ensuring children have the social, emotional, language and learning foundations that equip them for success and contribution throughout life<sup>8</sup>. Programmes that support parents as first educators, from the earliest age (ideally from the birth of the child) can ensure all children have the best possible start in life and engage families with their children’s learning from the start.
2. The need to **see language and culture as strengths** that children and families bring to learning and to life, and for educators to know how to build on these. Evidence shows that early bilingualism brings significant gains in cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, meta-linguistic skills and flexibility of thinking<sup>9</sup>. It also shows that quality bilingual or immersion instruction in children’s first or heritage language brings measurable gains in literacy achievement in the target language and also in English<sup>10</sup>. There is currently no specific support for bilingual or immersion education in Pasifika languages, and very little support in Te Reo Māori. This limits the effectiveness that schools could otherwise have for Maori and Pasifika students, through offering quality bilingual or immersion learning. The key barrier to more effective use of the power of bilingual education is the lack of a national languages strategy.
3. The need for **quality career guidance** before secondary school so young people can see the value of what they learn at school and can make subject choices that support their desired direction, instead of choosing subjects they or their school think are easy.
4. The **impact of housing insecurity and transience on education**. Where students leave a school within months or even weeks of arriving, it is almost impossible for schools to build a relationship with that child’s family. Communication about the value of children staying in one school, and housing strategies that enable families to stay in the same suburb if they are forced to move, would help reduce this issue.
5. The need for extra support for children in foster care and those from abusive, criminal or gang families, so these children can build confidence to participate and succeed in learning. This is particularly important in closed family systems where there is limited external contact outside of the family, and limited positive communication within the household. Mentors, school buddy systems or affordable after school care would assist.

And/Or

**D: What new interventions, services or arrangements could make the biggest difference for at-risk children and their families?**

For example...

- what existing models used in New Zealand or internationally could be used in your area?
- how can services respond to the complexity and diversity of family circumstances?
- how can the government better target and measure results for at-risk children and their families? (eg, through outcomes-based contracts)

**Enabling parents to learn about the child development while also gaining a tertiary qualification.** We have been advocating for a a whanau-focused tertiary foundation qualification as part of the Tertiary Review of Qualifications. This would provide a nationally recognised starting

<sup>8</sup> Infometrics Ltd (2011). 1000 days to get it right for every child: The effectiveness of public investment in New Zealand Children. <http://www.everychildcounts.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/ECCInfometricsInvestmentinchildrenAug11.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Skerrett, M. & Gunn, A., 2011. *Quality in Immersion-bilingual Early Years Education for Language Acquisition*. Canterbury University: Christchurch

<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Education (2008). *Teaching and learning for bilingual Pasifika students in New Zealand*.

point for some tertiary priority learners – a pathways for learners whose main starting interest is helping their children. International evidence shows that family learning strategies, led by schools, are needed to raise achievement and reduce the gap between low and high achievers<sup>11</sup>.

COMET Auckland owns such a foundation level tertiary qualification programme - a local Level 2 Certificate in Family Learning and Child Development. A key component of the programme is endeavouring to break cycles of intergenerational low literacy. This year, 122 have just graduated, an 80% completion rate. Participants are 90% female, 40% Maori and 22% Pasifika. Almost all are sole parent beneficiaries. The full time, year long course enables the adults to systematically build their understanding of child learning and development and family health and wellbeing while increasing their employability. The Certificate pathways to higher level education, social sector and health courses as well as work. 56% intend to head to further study and 32% to work. The length of the course gives parents a year to stabilise their family situation and realistically prepare for work. With only 34% success in moving sole parent beneficiaries onto sustainable work, different types of programmes are required. Parent engagement could be greatly increased by funding a **specific community liaison role in each school**, to work with parents, whānau and community to support their engagement with learning; and with school staff and systems to help the school become more family-friendly and community-facing. It is important that the community liaison position be filled by people who come from, understand and can relate well to the particular community the school serves. Ideally all schools with significant numbers of Māori and/or Pasifika students would have separate part-time liaison roles or parent volunteers for each of these communities, so there can be a match of ethnicity, culture and language.

Given the increased risk of student disengagement at transition points (eg ECE to school, primary to intermediate, intermediate to secondary, secondary to tertiary), there is opportunity to **focus specific support for parent and whānau engagement around these transition points** as a means of smoothing the transition process and reducing disengagement.

The school secretary/receptionist is a key role in making parents and community members feel welcome in the school. **Specific training and/or guidelines for this position** would be a useful resource for schools.

**Specific support should be available to parents whose children are showing signs of disengagement.** This could happen through social media (similar to the Facebook page for teens struggling with mental health issues) and through parent groups in schools run by the guidance counsellor, with support from parent volunteers.

**Supporting a public campaign** to promote reading – the 1,000 Books Before School campaign. A campaign such as this provides benefits for children because it increases their passive vocabulary and prepares them for school. Using a campaign approach creates an opportunity for family, community, marae, church as well as educators to collaborate around a common target.

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<sup>11</sup> NIACE (2013). Family Learning Works: The inquiry into family learning in England and Wales. Leicester, England, National Institute of Adult Continuing Education.

