

Making Māngere a suburb of early learning excellence

Early Childhood Education project - insights, opportunities and concepts

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Quality lies at the intersection of multiple challenging roles: community advocate, professional business person, and educational expert.

ECE provider

Acknowledgments

Thank you

The project team would like to thank the Māngere early childhood education (ECE) providers, parents, schools and subject matter experts that have participated and contributed to the work so far. Key partners have included:

- Māngere ECE Providers
- Parents and families
- South Auckland Social Wellbeing Board
- Auckland Council
- Point Research
- Growing up in New Zealand
- Think Place
- The League of Live Illustrators
- Māngere Arts Centre - Ngā Tohu o Uenuku

About the ECE providers

In April 2017 the Ministry of Education as a member of the SASWB invited a cross section of Māngere ECE providers to participate in the project. 24 agreed to participate and these are the providers we have worked with during phase 1 and hope to work with during phase 2 to prototype and test the ideas they have helped to inspire and develop.

About the parents

A key focus of this phase has been to better understand parent's experience of early childhood education and their children's participation. Parents were engaged via ECE providers and the project team's professional and community networks.



Executive summary

1. Executive Summary

National and international evidence is clear that early childhood education (ECE) can be a powerful tool for improving educational and social outcomes for children. It shows that quality ECE helps to buffer the disadvantages experienced by children; particularly those from low-income, vulnerable families.

We also know that interventions and supports provided in the early years are more effective than later interventions, especially for children experiencing disadvantage.

In Māngere the importance of quality ECE and providing families with the right support is paramount.

The first phase of this short project has aimed to take a human-centred approach to understanding opportunities for change and ideas and concepts to prototype and test during phase 2.

A key finding from this project and wider work is that empowering parents is not only about improving services or creating opportunities.

It also requires a concerted effort to remove or alleviate the cumulative weight of stress factors that many families experience in Māngere.

About the project

The Māngere early childhood education project was set up to explore developing insights, opportunity areas and ideas alongside parents, ECE staff and wider stakeholders. The project has been sponsored by the South Auckland Social Wellbeing Board and is part of the SASWB programme of initiatives.

The project team would like to thank both MoE and the SASWB for their support to explore the value of a human-centred approach to the project.

By adopting a co-design approach and starting with the experiences of the people closest to the issues, the project team wanted to develop fresh perspectives that could contribute positive change based on the excellent work many ECE providers and staff are already doing.

Our key overarching recommendation is to make “Māngere a suburb of early learning excellence” by growing and celebrating the passion, skills and togetherness that is anchored in Māngere’s culture, people and identity.



For a child to be ‘school ready’, the whole family needs to be ‘school ready’

ECE teacher



“It’s the whole family that walks in the door, not just the child. Education is secondary.”

ECE manager

This project focused on the following SASWB priorities:

- Increased participation in quality ECE provision
- Parents are empowered and equipped to support their child's learning
- Children are ready to engage and equipped with a strong foundation for learning

As the project has evolved the work surfaced insights from data and the lived experience of front line staff and parents.

The concepts that we're proposing to prioritise for prototyping and testing during phase two are those that align with SASWB priority area and in particular those that focus on the role of parents.

Our approach

SASWB and MoE have been working with The Southern Initiative (TSI) and Auckland Co-design Lab (the Lab) to develop the project, draw on their experience of community and social innovation and apply co-design approaches in South Auckland.

A key focus has been exploring the lived experience of the people closest to the issues through qualitative interviews and workshops. The insights

generated have provided the foundations for the opportunity areas and concepts in this report.

Using qualitative research techniques meant adopting an ethical approach for the project. This included developing thorough research documentation, training the team and ensuring participants had clear information about the project that helped them give informed consent.

The project has also drawn on quantitative data provided by the SASWB, Ministry of Education and the Growing up in New Zealand Study - a longitudinal study designed to follow children from before birth until early adulthood.

The contents of this report have been informed by:

- Working with 24 Māngere ECE providers
- Over 40 interviews with ECE providers, parents and school staff
- Three workshops attended by over 80 people
- Three in depth 'opportunity area' workshops with subject matter experts and ECE staff
- A series of 'open home' drop in sessions attended by over 50 people
- Multiple discussions and meetings with subject matter experts and key partners

1. APPROACH TO THE WORK

Exploring co-design

A co-design approach

A system focus with a human lens

The South Auckland Social Wellbeing Board has been working with The Southern Initiative and Auckland Co-design Lab to develop the project, draw on their experience of community and social innovation and apply human-centred approaches in South Auckland.

A key focus has been adopting a co-design approach to explore the lived experience of the people closest to the issues through qualitative interviews and workshops. The insights generated have provided the foundations and catalyst for the opportunity areas and concepts in this report.

The purpose of the project has also been to adopt a human-centred approach to the work and explore new and novel ideas in response to the insights that emerged. For clarity, the purpose of the project has not been to review individual ECE providers. Neither has it focused on reviewing specific strategy, policy or to develop service blueprints.

The team has adopted a system focus with a human lens, by working with front line ECE staff, parents and subject matter experts the emphasis has been on identifying fresh insights and ideas.

This approach will continue during phase 2 and the development of the ideas from phase 1.

Quantitative data from the South Auckland Social Wellbeing Board, Ministry of Education and the Growing up in New Zealand Study - a longitudinal study designed to follow children from before birth until early adulthood - has also been used to provide further insight and evidence.

The opportunity areas and concepts presented in this report focus on harnessing existing strengths, celebrating Māngere's unique culture and exploring new and existing innovative practice.

Several reports and outputs have been developed as part of the project and they are listed at the end of this report and available on request.

Wider factors and influences

Adopting a co-design approach has created an opportunity to hear from and work with parents and ECE staff.

It is also important to consider the wider system level influences and factors. Some of these factors are explored for families in the next section. Key strategy and policy influences include:

Policy influences

Better Public Service (BPS) - In 2012 a target was set to increase participation in early childhood education so that in 2016, 98 per cent of children starting school will have participated in quality early childhood education (ECE).

Targeted Assistance for Participation (TAP) fund - established to fund to grow new child places in high priority areas. TAP provides start-up funding and incentives to create new child places in communities where they are most needed.

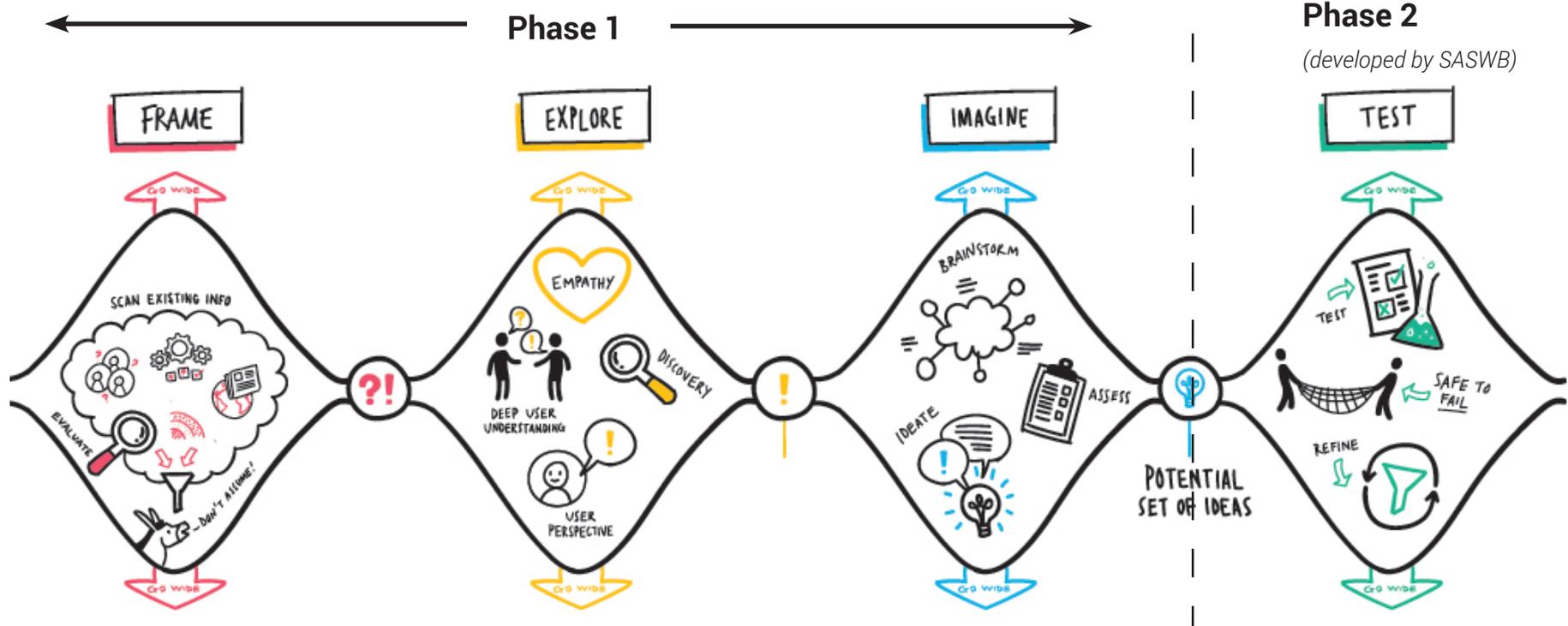
20 hours a week subsidised ECE - government subsidies all children who attend ECE. 20 Hours ECE is a higher funding subsidy. It means that if a child goes to an ECE service, the cost can be fully subsidised up to 20 hours a week.

Te Whāriki - ECE curriculum - sets out the curriculum to be used in ECE settings and provides guidance for its implementation.

Communities of Learning (CoL) - Part of the Investing in Educational Success (IES) initiative are designed to enhance teaching practice and leadership by providing opportunities for collaborative enquiry and knowledge sharing, and extending career pathways.

A co-design approach

Co-design process and timeline - Phase 1



Frame
Clarifying the challenge and key focus areas for the work

- July - Pre-engagement with ECEs
- Team formed
- Project planning
- 28 Jul - Intent workshop with ECE providers

Explore
Developing new insights and perspective by speaking to parents

- 2 Aug - Interview training
- Interview planning and recruitment
- 7-18 Aug - Interviews with parents and ECE staff
- w/c 28 Aug – Synthesis and insight mining
- 1 Sept – SME workshop

Imagine
Generating new ideas with parents and stakeholders

- 8 Sept – Ideation workshop with ECEs and SMEs
- 18 Sept – Ideation sessions with parents and children
- 11-29 Sept – Opportunity areas and ideas development
- Oct > Nov – Open home and workshops
- Dec – Report development

Test
Testing new ideas and prototypes in low cost, low risk way

- Prototype and test key concepts with parents and ECEs
- Safe to fail
- Iterative learning
- Evaluation and prioritisation
- Report findings

A co-design approach

Ripples of impact

Adopting a co-design approach has helped to shape the insights and ideas in this report. The participative and collaborative way of working, including alongside MoE staff, has also created early ripples of impact for some of the ECE providers.



Connecting local ECE providers and sharing learning

Prior to the workshops in July and September that brought ECE providers together most reported they had few opportunities to engage with each other in an open way and share learning. Feedback interviews at the end of the workshop emphasised. Later one provider specifically reported applying ideas they had heard at the workshop to their own centre.



Collaboration between home-based providers

To help explore the experiences of home-based providers in Māngere we invited two providers to a small workshop. They had not met each other prior to the workshop but quickly connected and started to share ideas and experiences and committed to meet again following the workshop.



Advice and support to help ECEs thrive

The in depth interviews with ECE providers highlighted some of the challenge many centres can face in terms of participation, quality and financial sustainability. The insight gained from the engagement alerted MoE staff to opportunities to provide direct advice and support that may not otherwise have been identified or resulted in a compliance led approach.

2. MĀNGERE SNAPSHOT

Key data and analysis



What's happening for families with young children

Introduction

In addition to speaking directly to parents and ECE staff the project team has drawn on existing evidence and data from the Growing up in New Zealand study, MoE and the SASWB.

This section provides a brief overview of what is happening for families in Māngere.

1. Demographics

The 2013 New Zealand Census had the following key findings for the Māngere-Ōtāhuhu Local Board area :

- The usually resident population count for the Māngere-Ōtāhuhu local board area was 70,959 and the area has not experienced particularly high population growth in recent few years.
- Proportions of Pacific peoples were more than four times higher in Māngere-Ōtāhuhu (60.1%) than in Auckland as a whole (14.6%).
- Te reo Māori, Samoan, Tongan and Hindi were spoken by a greater proportion of people in Māngere-Ōtāhuhu than in Auckland as a whole.
- The median personal income for adults in Māngere-Ōtāhuhu was \$19,700 per annum – significantly lower than that for Auckland as a whole at \$29,600.

3. Analysis of reach and coverage of universal and targeted services in Māngere

Analysis by the SASWB has highlighted issues relevant to this project.

Analysis of Primary Health Organisation (PHO) data highlighted the dynamic nature of the Māngere population – 12.5% of children aged 0-5 years had shifted out of the Māngere area in one year period. A further 13% had changed address within the Māngere area and a smaller number had shifted into the Māngere area.

This is an important factor for this project to consider when designing, implementing and evaluating the concepts included in this report.

Wider findings suggest there are substantial opportunities to improve the reach and coverage of universal services, including ECE services.

For targeted services, the referral to and availability of special education services is a potential area for additional focus.

4. Growing up in New Zealand data - Māngere-Ōtāhuhu local board area

There are many factors beyond ECE (e.g. family life, housing, income, health etc.) that can have a significant influence on participation and engagement even if ECE provision is excellent and accessible.

Analysis of data from the Growing up in New Zealand (GUINZ) longitudinal study for the Māngere-Ōtāhuhu Local Board cohort has provided significant insight into the risk factors and opportunities facing families with young children and the impact of the cumulative weight of stress factors on families lives.

GUINZ data shows that exposure to multiple risk factors is associated with significantly poorer child behaviour outcomes (SDQ scores) and health outcomes. This has been shown to be of great significance for child development, school readiness and outcomes later in life.

Risk factor and toxic stress

Recent analysis of what makes a difference for parents in South Auckland has identified two clear lessons relevant to this project:

Many families and young children are carrying a heavy burden of toxic stress. GUINZ study data confirms that many families with young children are living with cumulative and prolonged levels of stress that has a daily impact on their lives.

The cumulative and prolonged weight of multiple stressors is toxic. It crowds out and suppresses resilience and protective factors than can help families exposed to this type of stress cope. This



form of stress impacts directly on parents' abilities to plan, focus attention, prioritise tasks, set and achieve goals, and control impulses.

The GUINZ data shows abnormal health and behavioural outcomes for children from families in the Māngere-Ōtāhuhu Local Board exposed to toxic stress is from as early as two years of age. Data for four year olds is currently being analysed.

Risk factors

The most common risk factors children in Māngere-Ōtāhuhu were exposed to in their early years were:

1. Living in an area of deprivation. More than two-thirds of children in Māngere-Ōtāhuhu live in the two most deprived deciles (deciles nine and ten, NZ Dep2006);
2. Living in an overcrowded household. While one-third (30%) lived in an overcrowded household before the birth, this increased to half (49%) at nine months;
3. Living on an income tested benefit. This increased from one-quarter before the birth (26%) to almost one-third at nine months (30%);
4. Living in a family with highly stressful money problems, particularly in the antenatal period; and
5. Living in public rental accommodation. Although

this is a risk factor in that the families living in social housing are often at risk of vulnerability, it is noted that it also acts as a protective factor by improving residential stability.

The GUINZ data shows it is the cumulative weight of multiple risk factors rather than any one single risk factor that has the greatest impact on child health and behaviour outcomes. The type of risk factor is less important than the toxic weight of a combination of risk factors.

Children and their families exposed to four or more risk factors are at high risk of vulnerability. Children and their families exposed to between one and three risk factors are at risk of vulnerability.

Change is possible

The GUINZ data shows us that young families in Māngere-Ōtāhuhu can and do move out from under the weight of cumulative stress. This can be the result of removing or reducing the impact of stress factors but also developing and nurturing protective factors and resilience.

In summary, if our goal is increase parental engagement and empowerment there needs to be a twin focus on alleviating the impact of stress factors and creating bandwidth and space to empower parents to use the skills they already have. Where needed

additional capability building and support can be provided.

Sources of support

Families in the Māngere-Ōtāhuhu belong to family and whānau networks, community groups, and churches in particular. They largely draw support from their partners, parents and extended families, where available, which they find helpful.

Fewer than ten percent of families (in the GUINZ study data) said they access or receive support from family or parenting services.

Making a difference to child outcomes

Analysis of GUINZ data suggests that there are four key areas that could make a difference to children living in the Māngere-Ōtāhuhu local board area.

1. Reduce the toxic weight of risk factors by reducing the number of risk factors families are exposed to - Working with families to reduce the number of risk factors that families are exposed to can help reduce the toxic stress levels families face. Fewer risk factors are associated with better child behavioural and health outcomes.
2. Peer to peer parenting groups, such as community or voluntary groups like Plunket, or

Māngere snapshot



parent and baby groups - These appear to have a positive influence on child behavioural outcomes amongst those at risk of vulnerability.

3. It appears that the mothers in Māngere-Ōtāhuhu have a sense of agency in their community, believing that people can make their neighbourhood a better place to live. This potential could be unleashed.
4. The GUINZ study has found that storytelling and reading to children is positively associated with child behaviour outcomes. This link is well established in the literature as having positive and lasting influence on language and literacy, and could be further supported in the Māngere-Ōtāhuhu Local Board area.

A key opportunity for the SASWB is to continue to focus on and nurture these strengths and protective factors across wider SASWB initiatives and ways to reduce the burden of stress in family's lives and create the conditions for positive change.

3. KEY INSIGHTS

Informed by interviews and engagement with Māngere parents and ECE staff

Key insights from engagement with parents and ECE staff

1. 'Quality' early childhood education means different things to different people making it difficult to foster shared goals and ambitions across the community.

ECE provider's perspective

- A high rated provider we met has a mantra of 'ERO every day', which sharpened their focus on quality education and children's outcomes. However, we heard that new providers are not assessed until they have been in operation for two years so are effectively flying in the dark.
- Quality ECE is not only about the quality of education. It also applied to governance, leadership and management plus an ability to engage with parents.
- High quality providers (judged against ERO ratings, parents' experience and academic, cultural and social school readiness) set high expectations around children's learning amongst staff and parents. They are then skilled at translating these into corresponding quality educational practices that result to confident, school ready learners.

- We also heard that ECE teachers often feel the tension between the role as a teacher, providing family support and the ECE's need to balance the books financially.
- ECE staff told us they often feel like an undervalued part of the education system, with a lack of recognition and opportunities to work together a consistent theme.



"The language is the most important thing...making her feel comfortable and a sense of belonging" Parent

Parent's perspective

- Parents have a wide range of ideas around what quality means and how they judge this. Overall, parents seem to trust ECE providers to know what they are doing but are using various ways to make this judgement.
- We heard from some parents who valued having options when selecting an ECE Provider. Some focused on quality but others also valued language and culture. Some parents told us they sometimes

value this above the educational quality.

- Connections to a centre can also be strong because of its affiliation with a church or community group.

Home-based providers

- Licensed home-based provision is a relatively new innovation which presents compliance challenges but also opportunities to grow and develop an innovation that provides choice to parents and meets their needs.
- Home-based setting has extra quality challenges in terms of the newness of many services, and (initial) expectations from both families and home-based carers that the core focus should be safe, loving childcare rather than focusing on educational outcomes.
- Home-based owners and coordinators (qualified ECE teachers who coach the home-based carers) say they need extra skills to develop adult carers' capabilities and expectations, and to translate resources and policies into relevant language and practices.
- Current professional development courses are not seen as relevant to the home-based setting and engagement with co-ordinators infrequent.

2. ECE providers believe there are too many new providers opening leading to surplus places - competition is crowding out collaboration and compromising quality

The value of collaborative learning cultures between education providers is well established. It can enable good practice to be shared, supports skills building, leadership development and reduce siloed thinking.

A consistent theme we heard from ECE leaders and staff was the perceived oversupply of ECE places in Māngere, which creates competition that creates disincentives to collaborate.

The Better Public Service participation target and supporting policy has led to an increase in choice for parents and children's participation in ECE. However, drawing on our engagement with ECE staff and parents it appears there are also a number of unintended consequences.

Many providers lamented the proliferation of providers, which they say make it difficult to fill their rolls and can create financial issues. It impacts on cash flow and ongoing sustainability with knock on effects to staff and recruitment.

Providers challenged (based on their experiences) the idea that there are still large numbers of children not participating in ECE in Māngere that requires a continued focus on increasing the supply of places.



“If all these extra children were there, we’d find them”

ECE provider

Small centres say they can't compete with large chains that offer no fees and other inducements as incentives. They believe a small, intimate and culturally-based setting provides better quality and parental engagement and support, but the large commercial providers have economies of scale they cannot match.

Even high quality ECEs (as rated by ERO) say that the level of competition means they must focus time and money on marketing that would otherwise be spent on things like quality improvements and parental engagement.



“Competition hurts collaboration”

ECE provider



“We are here for the kids but it is business first here... the business needs to pay your wages”

ECE provider

3. School readiness and transition - there is a mismatch in expectations about what it means and whose job it is

We heard that there is no shared definition of school readiness. It means different things to different people, and this results in the mismatch of expectations and understanding of the positive roles parents, ECE staff and schools can play.

Parents

- Parents have different levels of engagement with and understanding of school readiness:
- Some believe it is important but find it difficult to know what they can or should be doing to help their child.
- Other parents have not thought about their role; they may lack the 'bandwidth' to think about it or it is something to think about when their child is older – a 'just in time' approach.
- Many trust the expertise of ECE staff or assume that getting a child school ready is the job of ECE – so it is effectively outsourced by parents.
- Parents value having their child in an immersive

or bilingual ECE either because they are connected to their culture or seeking to reconnect.

- Some parents have high (possibly unrealistic) expectations of what school readiness means e.g. a child should be able to read and write when they start school



ECE, I thought they just played, so dropped the kids off daily at lunchtime.

Parent

ECE providers

- Language and cultural understanding are seen as a crucial part of ECE by providers and is one of the reasons many staff are so passionate about their work.
- There was a feeling by some staff (and parents) that this strength is not always reinforced when a child starts school.
- The desirability of bilingual or immersion ECEs means 'parental choice' might need to be thought about differently. In Māngere their choice might actually be one of only a few ECE providers offering

a specific cultural focus.



Helping to prepare children for school is what we're all about.

ECE provider

Schools

- We heard that for schools, the basics of school readiness are being able to sit still, hold a pencil, and being able to go to the bathroom on your own.
- Whereas, an ECE may have a strong focus on cultural confidence, social interaction and play as a learning philosophy, and are less concerned with whether the child can sit on the mat.
- Having committed to a bilingual or immersion early childhood education, parents can be disappointed when their child transitions to primary school and their child's development is viewed negatively if their first (and strongest) language is not English. e.g. Teachers may focus on assessing reading and writing skills in English only.

Key insights

- Parents' expectations are often driven by their own school experiences, and may focus strongly on literacy. For example they can be disappointed when school does not build on this straight away or other aspects of learning are prioritised first.

Transition

- A major driver of an effective school transition is a strong relationship between the ECE and the school and shared transition processes - this is reflected in MoE advice.
- Many ECE staff we spoke to share their challenges engaging with local schools. Good relationships and practice was identified but there is no shared approach and experiences vary from school to school. This can be time consuming and frustrating and there are opportunities to make the process more consistent.
- A further challenge is that relationships are based around individuals and changes in personnel at the ECE or the school mean the relationship has to start again. For example, a new school principal.
- A common theme was that ECE staff feel that they often need to make the most effort to develop and sustain the relationships with local schools. This is not always reciprocated.
- Parents shared different thoughts and

experiences about transition: some find it difficult to navigate their child's education pathway. For example, if a bilingual unit at school is important, that decision will likely impact what school the child goes to, which in turn might impact what ECE the child participates in.

Positive examples include the ECE taking the children for a school visit ahead of time, or the school and the ECE having similar structures and processes that give the child confidence and certainty.



School readiness for children means school readiness for parents.

ECE provider



I feel like I don't know, to be honest I haven't looked at, so I don't really know what the processes are

Parent



I think transition school readiness is a big thing for us because I don't think our parents understand how important it is.

ECE provider



The attitude from the Primary schools towards ECE isn't pleasant, would like a relationship with schools but disconnected.

ECE teacher

4. Many families in Māngere experience stress in their lives that impacts on participation, parental engagement and child development outcomes

A recurring theme has been impact of wider factors in family's lives on ECE participation, engagement and transition to school. For many families in Māngere the cumulative weight of stress is a major factor that impacts on decision making, planning and following routines.

- The Growing up in New Zealand study tells us that almost one third of families in Māngere face toxic levels of stress due to the cumulative weight of financial, housing, health and various other stressors.
- This robs parents of the 'bandwidth' to plan, create routines and think beyond day to day needs. This in turn affects children's ability to develop the executive functioning skills necessary for learning. Removing stress factors is an important way to improve children's outcomes.
- A lack of understanding from ECEs, schools and other services about what is happening in a family's life can lead to additional stress that

drains on mental 'bandwidth'.

Decisions around a child's education need to be seen in the wider family context

- We heard that some parents don't want to be engaged or find it difficult to engage. When life is chaotic and stressful, children's participation in ECE represents an opportunity to have a break from the pressure of parenting. ECEs are frustrated because there is only so much that they can do, and would like greater family engagement.
- We heard that, for some families, the needs of the wider family are important and decisions related to early childhood education are being made that balance those wider needs. This can sometimes look like the (youngest) child's education needs are not being prioritised.
- Consequently, centres are committing to supporting children and their families (especially those suffering hardship) in ways that extend beyond education. This can mean providing support or advice around housing, WINZ, advocacy and acting as translators. This takes significant time and effort but is not something they are funded to deliver. Staff see that this support is essential to supporting children's learning and ongoing participation.
- ECE teachers we spoke to highlighted the mixed

attendance patterns they observed. They reported that the positive impact of regular attendance can be quickly lost if attendance is mixed. On their return time is needed to settle the child back into the ECE environment and routines.

"We end up helping with food, electricity, elderly or babies"

Homebased ECE provider

"It's the whole family that walks in the door, not just the child. Education is secondary."

ECE provider

5. The Māngere community possess many strengths that can play a role in improving outcomes for children and families

One of the standout and reoccurring insights from the project has been the commitment of ECE staff, existing innovative practice plus the strong relationships and connection to culture that many parents and staff possess. There is a collective pride in Māngere as a place and community, which is a strength that can be celebrated and used as a catalyst for change.

ECE providers

Workforce – Many ECE staff live and work in Māngere. They are proud of their role educating young children and preparing them for school. However, we heard from many staff that they feel like an undervalued and underappreciated part of the education system. There are few opportunities to recognise and celebrate the roles ECE staff and volunteers play in their community.

Existing innovative practice – Several ECE providers are developing and applying innovative practice focused on quality education, financial sustainability and community engagement. The ECEs most highly rated by ERO are often finding a sweet spot between all three.



Oh who doesn't dream but the best for their kids. Healthy, happy and specifically university... and could help out with the community

Parent

Some centres are creative around providing opportunities for parents to engage. For example, encouraging parents who struggle to pay fees to volunteer at the centre. Others centres are using van drivers as outreach workers to connect with and engage parents in their child's education. For example sharing information and engaging parents in their children's learning.

There is also emerging innovative practice in the home based sector which (along with a focus on compliance) could be nurtured and developed to ensure a relatively new service innovation can continue to evolve with a focus on quality outcomes.

Beyond ERO reviews there is little opportunity to celebrate or share this innovative practice across the ECE sector in Māngere.

Community

Role of culture - GUINZ data tells us that antenatally, mothers in Māngere-Ōtāhuhu had positive feelings towards their own culture (90%), were involved in their own culture (64%) and had knowledge of their own culture (77%).

Celebrating culture (through food, songs, language week etc) is cited by ECEs as a great way to engage parents with the provider and their child's learning. This is strongest when culture was a factor in choosing an ECE provider and parents already have a strong connection or who want to reconnect.

Trust and relationships - We heard that trust between the family and the ECE is an important part of building greater engagement but takes time and effort. Some ECE centres have long-standing relationships grounded in the community and the culture, making it easier to engage with parents. Face-to-face conversations and peer-to-peer relationships are important ways for parents to find out about or choose an ECE or be engaged in activities.



4. OPPORTUNITY AREAS AND ACTION AREAS

Headline themes and ideas based on engagement with ECE staff and parents

Concepts

Insights into action

The following concepts have been developed through the project process. These are the ideas the team believe could be prototyped and tested during phase 2.

They have been informed by the insights, opportunity areas and over 50 ideas that emerged from an ideation workshop in September 2017. They have been tested and refined through engagement with a range of stakeholders.

As the project has evolved the ideas and concepts that emerged clearly overlap between SASWB and MoE priorities. Some of the ideas could be progressed through existing MoE activity.

Approach to prototyping and testing

Key principles for our prototyping approach would include:

- Low cost and safe to fail testing – starting small and local and then growing what works
- Iterative learning – using the testing process to learning and adapting and improving ideas
- Building on existing strengths in Māngere
- Creating space for the active participation of ECE staff and parents.

Opportunities areas

The project team identified five opportunity areas for further exploration and development.

#1 - Support parents to support their children's learning journey and school readiness

#2 - Enable smooth transition from ECE to school

#3 - ECE settings as site for services and engagement (inter-agency eco-system).

#4 - Support and scale existing innovative and quality practice and service delivery.

#5 - Making Māngere a suburb of early learning excellence



#1 - Support parents to support their children's learning journey and school readiness

#1 - Support parents to support their children's learning journey and school readiness

Planning a learning pathway

We learnt that for a child to be school ready, the whole family needs to be school ready. A major part of school readiness is a child being able to do the basics such as getting their uniform ready, parents providing lunches the night before, and other routines.

In addition to everyday routines ECE providers and other services could provide information, advice, and opportunities to help parents plan and shape their child's learning journey from home, to ECE and to school.

We learnt that some parents don't realise they have a range of choices in relation to their child's learning pathway. For example, the type of ECE they attend, comparing different primary schools, bilingual options, etc.

Supporting parents and ECE staff to be brain builders

Another key role for parents is supporting the cognitive development of their children. This can be done through simple activities and games at home that combined with activity at ECE can make a significant contribution to school readiness.

For children in families facing high and persistent levels of stress extra activities can be an additional burden. A key opportunity is to find ways of supporting parents that both alleviates this stress and creates 'bandwidth' for parents to actively support their child's development.

Acquiring "executive function" and "self regulation" skills is important to help enable children to learn, plan, focus, remember instructions, switch tasks and control impulses. These skills are critical to learning, achievement and behaviour.

There are a number of protective factors that can make significant difference for children's behavioural and health outcomes in Māngere. These are parent's connection to community (including culture), peer-to-peer connections and to a smaller extent, reading to children and they provide key areas from which to develop new ideas.



Some parents seem less concerned about school readiness

ECE provider

Concept 1 - Develop self regulation and executive function skills at ECE

Relates to opportunity areas:

#2 - Supporting parents and ECE staff to be brain builders

An extensive evidence base highlights that success in many of life's tasks depends on one's ability to self-regulate. Self-regulation involves behaviour (hyperactivity, impulsivity), cognition (executive functions such as attention and memory) and emotion regulation (anger and frustration tolerance).

An initiative that the project team has explored is based in Dunedin and led by the Methodist Mission. They are testing a self-regulation programme for preschool aged children, for widespread delivery in Early Childhood Education (ECE), to support improvements in adult life-course achievement and enjoyment, for children from deprived and high-stress backgrounds.

The programme brings together ECE staff and parents deliver activities in centres and the home. The programme has been developed with Otago University.

Concept 2 - Building parents skills and knowledge through peer networks

Relates to opportunity area:

We learnt that a common determinant of educational outcomes for children is the level of engagement of their parents (and other family members in the home) in their education journey. And having certain skills or knowledge can help to engage parents. We also learnt that people learning from peers with similar experiences and backed up by experts is a powerful learning model, versus an expert-only delivery model.

Summary of the proposed solution

Rather than a formal service or product, the solution is about activating existing communities and networks of people by arming them with the toolkit and expertise they need to run a learning session.

For example, a group of parents could decide they want to meet once a month and share parenting stories.

They are able to access some basic resources that include conversation topics, practical tips and advice, and suggestions for how the participants can share

stories with each other.

They are able to access specialists free-of-charge who are able to come in and speak to the group (e.g. a child psychologist with a strong Pasifika cultural understanding who is able to give families some basic understanding of what is happening within a child's brain in certain situations.)

How we might prototype and test elements of the solution

The major assumption at this stage is whether people living busy lives are able to commit the time to regular group session, or even a one-off session.

The approach to prototyping and testing would be to identify a small number of existing communities (e.g. a group of parents from an ECE) and run a single session with the parents.

It would be facilitated by a suitable expert/specialist, and would have stories from people from the same community about learnings as a parent. It would enable an open conversation where parents are able to ask questions, and provide advice to each other.

#2 - Enabling smooth transition from ECE to school

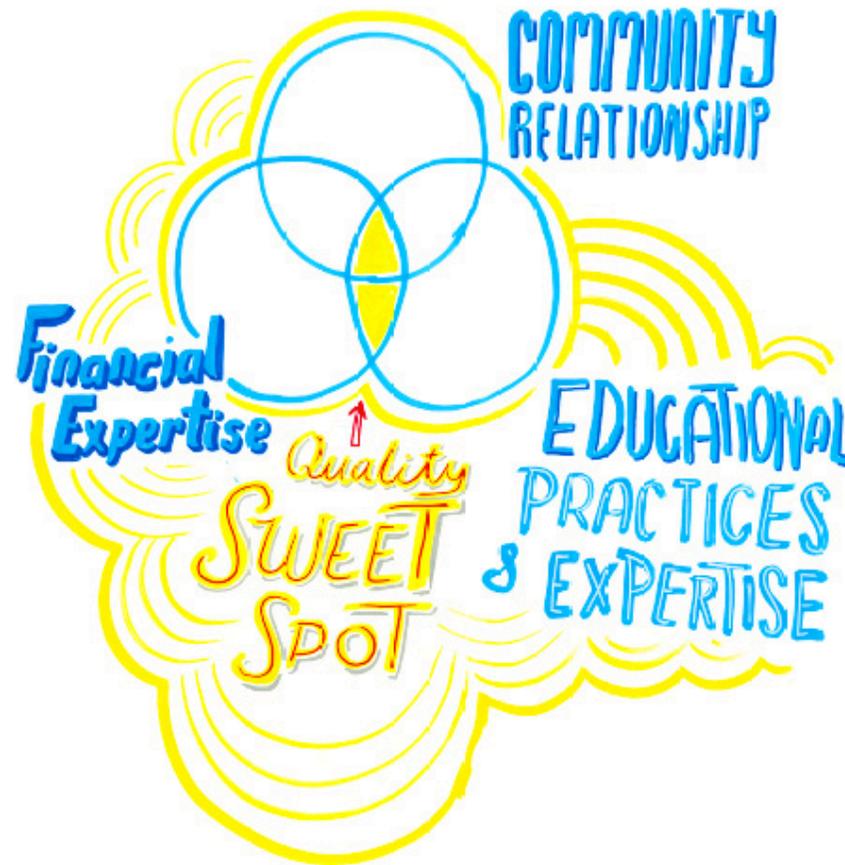
#2 - Enabling smooth transition from ECE to school

Shared expectations about the transition to school

We learnt that the move from ECE to school is a key transition but there can be a significant mismatch between expectations of parents, ECEs and schools. Cultural understanding is a crucial part of quality ECE for many parents and providers, but from their perspective this does not always appear to be understood or valued by schools – or gets lost in transition.

We heard stories of ECE's and primary schools that had built relationships and worked together to ease the transition for children and their parents, but that this approach is not widespread and can be time consuming when approaches vary between schools.

There is an opportunity to make the process of choosing a school and the transition from ECE to school more consistent and easier for parents to navigate. If everyone does it differently it can make life difficult for parents who are time poor or lack confidence engaging with staff in schools.



Concept B - Establishing an ECE Community of Learning

Relates to opportunity areas:

#1& #4 - Making Māngere a suburb of early learning excellence to support and scale existing local innovative and quality practice and service delivery

We learnt that ECEs are often run independently of each other, with light touch system stewardship in place and few opportunities to collaborate. Whilst many ECE's are connected via social relationships between staff, there is generally not a lot of formal collaboration or partnership. In fact, we learnt that most relationships between ECE's are viewed as competitive and there is a certain level of mistrust that exists. As a result, opportunities are missed for ECEs to learn from each other and grow the quality of ECE education collectively.

How might we make it attractive and easy for ECEs to share knowledge with each other to improve outcomes for the children of Māngere?

Summary of the proposed solution

Extend the Kahui Ako (Communities of Learning) model to be more inclusive of ECE as well as primary schools. This could start as an informal ECE Kahui Ako that enables ECE providers to build trust and a shared understanding of mutual opportunity areas. It could progress to cover ECE and primary schools (which would

progress to cover ECE and primary schools (which would have the added benefit of building relationship between ECE's and schools that would ultimately help with the school transition).

The goal is to break down barriers between ECEs (and schools), getting them talking and building a platform of trust to enable greater collaboration and partnership in the future.

How we might prototype and test elements of the solution

The major assumption at this stage is that there is interest from the ECE providers in being part of a Kahui Ako community.

The approach to prototyping and testing would be to leverage the existing primary school Kahui Ako learning and infrastructure. We would invite a very small number of ECEs to be part of the cluster and would evaluate early interactions in terms of value to the ECEs before inviting more ECEs.

This could prepare the ground for wider participation and engagement.

**#3 - ECE settings as a site for services
and engagement (inter-agency eco-
system)**

Opportunity areas

#3 - ECE settings as a site for services and engagement (inter-agency eco-system).

We also heard that many ECE centres support children and families beyond education. They play a key role as a connector or conduit to other support, advice and help a family need.



We're working with whole families.

ECE manager

Social services - For example, providing support or advice to parents around housing, WINZ, advocacy and acting as translators. This takes time and effort, but they are rarely acknowledged or funded for that work. Staff see that this support is essential to supporting children's learning and ongoing participation.

It is also within a context of wider social services that find it difficult to engage families in Māngere. There are opportunities to explore how ECEs and social services might provide more joined up support as part of the wider SASWB focus.

Working parents - We also heard that working parents experience a great deal of tension between their work responsibilities and being involved in their child's learning. For example, the ECE start and finish times may not align with their work shifts. Or the nature of their work makes it difficult for the parent to attend an ECE session. Although many centres do offer web based platforms for following and engaging with a child's learning.



I like that I always got greeted in the morning. That makes me feel special."

Parent



"Families require us to be a one-stop shop and deal with issues such as budgeting.

ECE provider



We need to go out onto parents' turf so they will come onto ours."

ECE provider



We end up helping with food, electricity, elderly or babies.

Homebased ECE provider

Concept 3 - Fund 'Social Engagement' out of ECEs

Relates to opportunity areas:

#5 - Support and scale existing innovative and quality practice and service delivery.

We learnt that many ECEs are finding themselves providing advice; information and support that helps their families navigate the social services space. They are filling a need that exists for many people, and the fact that they are pulled into this space is an indicator of the positive relationships that often exist between the ECE and the family.

How might we

- Better recognise and support the role ECEs can play supporting families?
- Ensure targeted and universal services better align to the lived experience of families?
- Find ways for services to collaborate to reduce the cumulative weight of stresses in families lives given the positive impact this can have on child outcomes?

Summary of the proposed solution

SASWB agencies (e.g. a collaboration between

Ministry of Education, Health and Ministry of Social Development) allocates funding that enables ECEs (and other community groups, e.g. churches, Marae, etc.) to provide social support/engagement services to their community. The funding would recognise that many ECEs already offer beyond their core offer.

ECEs can apply to be an accredited provider, subject to meeting certain criteria.

The funding allows the ECE to hire people with the appropriate skills who can spend time with the families and act as a referrer/navigator as appropriate.

How we might prototype and test elements of the solution

The major assumption at this stage is that value can be delivered to families via an intermediary (e.g. the ECE engagement worker). The risk is that the service landscape is further complicated and for no real benefit to families.

The approach to prototyping and testing would be to focus on similar examples of where ECEs and other organisations are already undertaking this kind of activity, and to understand the value and conditions for success from the perspective of families. Assuming this is positive, the next step would be to develop/co-design a basic prototype of the funding model.

Concept 4 - Cross agency collaboration around ECEs

Relates to opportunity areas:

#5 - ECE settings as a site for services and engagement (inter-agency eco-system)

We heard from ECE staff and parents about the healthcare challenges young children face. Related to this was broken patterns of ECE attendance and the impact this has on their learning and development.

An existing example of a programme that works to address this in schools is Mana Kidz.

**#4 - Support and scale existing
innovative and quality practice and
service delivery**

#4 - Support and scale existing innovative and quality practice and service delivery.

A clear theme from the work so far is that Māngere is a place where innovative practice is already happening. A key opportunity is to better champion and nurture this at a system level.

Hitting the sweet spot - quality and sustainable ECE

Some ECEs have been established for 20-30 years and have undergone renewal and adaptation that has increased quality and built on their strong cultural heritage. As a result they are thriving culturally, financially and educationally. These ECE providers are modeling ways of working that could guide both new ECEs and established ones that are struggling to adapt while also maintaining and preserving the culture, language and wellbeing the centre might provide the wider community.

Key opportunity areas include:

- Educational expertise and practice
- Being business savvy
- Community engagement and advocacy

The ECEs that hit the sweet spot either possessed

expertise across these three areas or knew where to find it if they did not. Others did well with two points but a lack of business savvy brings ongoing challenges.



Home-based providers: iterating an existing innovation

We heard that formal home-based provision has grown very quickly, and is less mature than other providers in the Māngere ECE eco-system. One, the one hand home-based care is not new at all but the establishment of licensed home-based provision has created compliance challenges but also educational, social and economic opportunities.

There is currently no umbrella organisation or sectoral source of advice and support that home-based providers can tap into. There is an opportunity to support these providers with a commitment to quality educational outcomes to set one up.

Home-base setting has extra quality challenges in terms of the newness of many of those services and initial expectations from both families and home-based educators that the core focus should be on safe, loving childcare versus a focus on the curriculum and quality.

While a teacher at an ECE centre works alongside other teachers, home-based educators are typically unqualified and are working alone day-to-day. This presents specific challenges in terms of quality education and providing professional development opportunities.

The home-based arrangement can also be limiting for the children. If there are many children in the home, it may be difficult for the educator to take them outside the home for other learning experiences. There is an opportunity to think of the place of care more widely than just the home.

Concept C - Sharing Best Practice for Home-Based with Other Providers

Opportunity area

#1 - Making Māngere a suburb of early learning excellence

#4 - Support and scale existing innovative and quality practice and service delivery

We learnt that the home-based ECE landscape is fragmented. Providers have little to do with each other, and view each other as competitors. Educators are typically working alone with limited interaction with their co-ordinators and no interaction with other educators. Comparing this with an ECE centre, the educators are working in a team and can learn from each other and share roles.

In addition, children are often 'stuck' in the home without the opportunity to engage with other children and have diverse experiences outside the home.

How might we take a local place-based approach to supporting existing home based providers to:

- Connect educators with local community assets (e.g. parks, libraries, leisure centres)
- Increase quality by creating a peer learning network of local educators to share knowledge and provide mutual support.

Summary of the proposed solution

The solution is multi-faceted. It ranges from providing informal and enjoyable professional development and networking experiences for home-based ECE educators through to providing out-of-home activities for ECE educators to bring children to. The out-of-home activities serve the two purposes of providing opportunities for children and educators, and would benefit from provision of underutilised facilities (e.g. community halls, libraries, parks, etc.).

How we might prototype and test elements of the solution

We know that some home-based providers have started doing 'play-dates' within their educator network and are seeing the value in it. The major assumption at this stage is that home-based providers who are currently not doing this would be interested and see they value if they were given the opportunity to experience it.

The approach to prototyping and testing would be to run an informal 'play-date' or professional development session and pitch the opportunity to a small number of home-based providers. We would assess the value from their perspective, and observe whether they run more sessions on their own. We would also understand the barriers that exists (e.g. venue, transport, food, etc).

#5 - Making Māngere a suburb of early learning excellence

#5 - Making Māngere a suburb of early learning excellence

Māngere has many strengths that makes it a unique community. There is opportunity to generate new energy and optimism by starting a movement to make “Māngere a suburb of early learning excellence” that celebrates success, champions early childhood learning and inspire others. Three ways this could be started include:

1. Start a local movement for change

ECE plays a critical role in setting children and their families up for success in terms of their lifelong education and learning journey.

ERO reports and other feedback highlights that while some ECE providers are thriving others struggle to balance educational, financial and community expectations. There’s an opportunity to create a shared understanding about what quality ECE means and is owned and supported by the whole community and education system.

We heard from ECE staff and parents the premium placed on celebrating language and culture. For many parents it informs their understanding of ‘quality’ ECE and also supports parental engagement and

participation in ECE activities. We also know that a parent’s connection to culture can be a positive protective factor.

2. Support and celebrate the role of ECEs providers and staff

ECE providers often feel like an under appreciated part of the education system. Teachers feel undervalued and that their role is not perceived as being as important as primary school teachers.

While this is not intentional, it was a recurring theme through interviews and workshops. A focused effort to raise the profile of ECE staff and acknowledge their contribution and innovative practice would be a first step to championing the passion, professionalism and commitment of ECE staff and volunteers.

3. ECE centres as a community asset

Trust between a family and the ECE is an important part of building greater engagement and takes time and effort. Some ECE centres have long standing relationships grounded in the community and the culture, making it easier to engage with parents.

Like a school, library, church or sports club, an ECE centre can be a civic and community asset. A place for parents to connect with other parents from their community, growing relationships that strengthen the focus on the value of early childhood education and

generate new social capital.

There is an opportunity to recognise this strength, foster collaboration and ensure increased choice has a positive impact on participation in quality ECE.



Community and school expectations are too low. There is a bit of a mind-shift thing that I would like to see. How do we get our kids ahead of the game?"

ECE provider

Concept A - Celebrating Māngere as a suburb of early learning excellence

Relates to opportunity areas:

#1 - Making Māngere a suburb of early learning excellence

We learnt that there are many strengths across ECE providers in Māngere but also that their role is not valued or recognised. We also learnt that quality can mean different things and for some families, cultural responsiveness is a major indicator of quality.

How might we use stories of learning bright spots to showcase the best of ECE to inspire other ECEs and to empower parents to expect more of their ECE?

Summary of the proposed solution

Create a low cost campaign that showcases ECE teachers, parents and families who are doing amazing things to help children learn. This could be done using social media and/or other community channels. To start with a series of short videos would be created, showing the positive impact that ECE is having in the community. The videos would be told from the perspective of children, parents/whānau, and ECE

teachers.

By creating a campaign/series of videos that are pushed out through a range of social media channels, the intended purpose is to show people what 'good' looks like and to give people something to be proud and that could inspire change.

How we might prototype and test elements of the solution

Finding the good news stories won't be difficult. The major assumption at this stage is that people will be interested in viewing the stories, and that it will help to change opinions.

The approach to prototyping and testing would be to align with a similar initiative that is running in a nearby suburb (Ōtāra). Between the learning on that project and showcasing a couple of Māngere stories, we will be able to quickly and cheaply test the high-level effectiveness of the solution.

Concept D - Supporting ECE teachers to share their cultural understanding with primary teachers

Opportunity area

#3 - Enabling a smooth transition from ECE to school.

We learnt that many ECEs in Māngere have a very strong cultural lens, providing the opportunity for children to be immersed in the language, stories and cultural context of their ancestors. But challenges are created for children that then transition into a primary school environment if it doesn't adequately acknowledge the rich cultural knowledge that the child arrives at school with.

How might we leverage the deep cultural knowledge of ECE teachers to better equip primary school teachers for the newly arrived children? In particular this would focus on newly qualified teachers and or teachers new to Māngere.

Summary of the proposed solution

Relationships are formed between ECEs and primary schools within Māngere. The vast cultural knowledge of the ECE teachers is recognised and shared with

primary teachers by way of learning sessions delivered by ECE teachers. This is useful for growing the base awareness and knowledge of primary teachers.

This would be supplemented by greater financial support for teacher aides or teachers that support children's learning through a cultural paradigm. And it would also be supported by a more specific focus on ECE teachers staying connected with children who are transitioning so that there is continuity.

How we might prototype and test elements of the solution

The major assumption at this stage is whether primary school teachers and principals see value in strengthening the relationships with ECEs, and whether they would be open to learning from ECE teachers.

The approach to prototyping and testing would be to identify a primary school that is open to the idea, and to identify 2-3 suitable ECE teachers who could deliver a cultural workshop for the primary school teachers. The experience of the primary school teachers would be evaluated, after the workshop as well as after the school year has started and they have had the ability to implement some of what they learned.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Conclusions and next steps

The project provided a series of insights about the ECE system in Māngere.

It engaged front line ECE staff, SASWB agencies and parents to explore potential opportunity areas and ideas in response.

In developing the work, the project team sought to model the value and importance of working with and involving the people closest to the issues.

This helped to elevate people's lived experience, highlight genuine challenges but also existing strengths, pride and potential within the community.

These are often overlooked and undervalued but need to be nurtured and championed.

The insights and learning from this phase of work were shared back with ECEs and SASWB stakeholders at a workshop in May 2018.

The next phase of work will be taken forward by the SASWB for further exploration and development.

This report is also an invitation to others to take the learning and insights and use them as a springboard to explore what they might mean for their own ECE services, places and communities.

REFERENCES AND SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

References and supporting documents

Supporting documents

- Project update report - August 2017
- Ideation workshop report - September 2017
- Research insights - summary report
- School Readiness in Māngere - The Southern Initiative, Auckland Co-design Lab and Point Research

References

- Māngere-Ōtāhuhu Local Board Profile - Initial results from the 2013 Census
- Early Years Challenge - summary report, The Southern Initiative
- The First 1000 Days in Māngere-Ōtāhuhu Local Board Areas: Risk, resilience and opportunities for change
- Promoting Collaborative cultures and learning - www.educationleaders.govt.nz/Leading-learning/Collaborative-cultures/Promoting-collaborative-learning-cultures
- Analysis of the reach and coverage of universal and targeted services in Māngere in the Early Years - SASWB



