

Fourth Report to Te Rau Puāwai Education Trust: February 2024

Agreed Impact Assessment

Success-within the 3-year timeframe 2022 to 2025

- Outcomes for disadvantaged children will be improved including parents/caregivers reading, talking and engaging more and better with their children
- Parents/caregivers know more about the benefits of reading with their children and model serve and return
- 5000 families/whānau will receive books, information and other resources
- Strengthened collaboration and co-design with partner agencies and community organisations, in particular NZ Corrections, to deliver books, resources and other support to children of parents in the care of Corrections in South Auckland and Northland.

Progress to Date

The COVID pandemic significantly affected our services, however, this situation has improved this year, and we hope to be at pre COVID delivery levels by 30 June 2024 and in some cases, well above those levels. The number of First 1000 Days enrolments nationally has increased from 5623 last year to 6243 of which 1546 were enrolled in Northland and South Auckland. This is in addition to those already participating in the programme so a running total of 3870 families participating in First 1000 Days since we partnered with Cognition Education Trust (now Te Rau Puāwai Education Trust). We also involved 1000 families in our Carepack project so a total of 4870 families participating in Storytime Foundation programmes and a further 300 or more receiving our Taonga mo nga Tamariki services in cooperation with Corrections and including Child Centric Visiting (CCV).

The implementation of digital enrolment has been highly successful with 99% of all First 1000 Days enrolments now online. The process of moving to digital enrolment involved frequently contacting all providers, giving us an opportunity to improve communications while providing training and support to provider staff, and increasing the frequency of newsletter distribution.

Whānau now receive 9 books over the first three years of their child's life along with other resources, information and support, and many receive many more through the tamariki carepack project.

We have continued with the delivery of "tamariki carepacks" that contain key messages, books, games and activities as well as scrapbooks, crayons, chalks, etc, that are personally delivered by Police or Corrections staff, directly to families in South Auckland and Northland. This carepack project delivered 1000 packs to the most vulnerable children in the region in the year to 31 December 2023.

In 2023 we consulted with the Ministry of Education and National Library along with a number of publishers and book retailers to identify titles appropriate for our participating whānau and have increased the proportion of books that are in te reo or Pacifica languages and many that are bilingual.

We worked with Rakau Press (NZ publisher) to design and publish our own bilingual book and are now distributing this title “Nau Mai Pepe” that the Ministry of Education has part funded. This book carries our logo and includes key messages regarding the benefits of reading with a child and some tips to make the experience even more rewarding. This year we are seeking funds to purchase a bilingual fold-out book in te reo and English.

We have continued with the extension to our Taonga mō ngā Tamariki (TMNT) programme to include, in addition to whānau in the care of Corrections, whānau that are impacted in some way by sentenced whānau or are identified and referred to us by Police, Oranga Tamariki or other community agencies. This year we also developed a relationship with Odyssey House in Auckland and have delivered TMNT to sentenced whānau that have come before the AODT Court. Chief AODT Court Judge Her Honour Lisa Tremewen has personally thanked us for our work in this area that she considers will improve outcomes for whānau sentenced for a drug related crime.

Taonga mō ngā Tamariki (TMNT) is based on the programme Reading Together, delivered into schools; and Early Reading Together, designed to be delivered to parents of children in their early years (including the First 1000 Days). TMNT has been developed in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, the Biddulph Group and the Department of Corrections and adapted in accordance with evaluation and regular feedback from participants and Corrections staff.

In 2023/24 the Ministry of Education is funding 15 TMNT programmes across New Zealand with five of these scheduled for Auckland and Northland. These are in addition to 79 programmes funded by Corrections nationally of which 39 are in Auckland and Northland.

Seamless services for Children

Our Books for Babies programme has been delivered in Auckland since 1997 and in Northland since 2012. From 2017 we have gradually expanded Books for Babies to include children from 0 to 3 years of age and engaged with mums before the birth of her child.

In 2023 we commenced the amalgamation of these separate programmes and have combined them under the label of “First 1000 Days”. This amalgamation has been a success, and our partner providers can now easily enroll a child at any stage from pre-natal a to 3 years of age.

The reason for the emphasis on the first 1000 days of a child’s life is based on evidence. The evidence is so clear here on what makes the difference and will have the greatest impact on disadvantaged children. Given there is little political appetite to abolish poverty, we have to look at what mitigates its ravaging effects. If the evidence pointed elsewhere, we would be following that. It doesn't. It points to the profound difference we can make in the preschool years.

Libraries

We are working with ECEs and the Little Libraries project on the development of a reading ecosystem. This ecosystem is designed to ensure that parents connect with libraries and understand that they will not be fined for overdue books as the fear of fines, even in fines free areas, is a significant barrier to parents taking out books. As part of this we have delivered an adapted form of TMNT to parents of preschool children in their communities and including ECE centres. A particularly successful programme was delivered in Bream Bay recently.

Early evaluation by Point and Associates show an increase in people using their libraries for books and children's activities, rather than using the library for warmth and internet.

"I used to go to the library for free internet. I was too scared to take out books as we can't afford the overdue fees. I didn't realise that they had stopped fining people."

"We went to the library in winter to save on power. It is warm and our house is cold, damp and mouldy. I thought it was boring. Now we get books and the kids go to wriggle and rhyme. They love it and it is all free. The librarian there knows the kids and looks for books they might like. So good."

"I take the kids to the library. It gets them out of the house. They like the stories, and we can get books out at the same time."

In cooperation with Point and Associates (Alex Woodley) we are working alongside organisations such as Fine Free Aotearoa to reduce library fining.

Staffing

Last year we appointed Vicki te Wano as the new Service Coordinator. Vicki is doing a tremendous job, particularly in relation to reconnecting with providers following the impact of COVID, and is leading us in cooperation with Riki Consultancy to improve our cultural capability.

We more recently appointed Wendy Dreadon to help deliver Taonga mō ngā Tamariki and other services in Auckland and Northland, and Wendy, who is also Māori, is assisting Vicki in the cultural capability project. The project also has two trustees to support the staff.

All staff that travel for work are completing First Aid and Mental Health First Aid courses.

Child-Centred Visiting

In our work with incarcerated parents, we have recognized the impact on the children, the innocent victims of crime. We also know from research that close relationships between incarcerated parents and child (and wider whānau) reduces recidivism. Corrections also recognize these factors (and the cost benefits).

There is a plethora of evidence to support the positive impact of child-centred visiting (CCV) in prisons. A 2023 evaluation of our Taonga mō ngā Tamariki programme recommended that Corrections consider this a priority and recognise the positive impact on recidivism.

We have established CCV at Northern Region Corrections Facility in Kaikohe (NRCF), Auckland Women's (ARWCF) at Wiri and also at Christchurch Women's Prison.

A special Christmas CCV was held at NRCF in December 2023.

Storytime Books

It has been a vision for some time to develop a social enterprise that could sell books to the general public. Storytime Books is based on the Eat my Lunch concept where one purchases a book, and the profits are used to provide a book for one of our families.

In 2023 we contracted a project manager, based in Auckland, to help establish Storytime Books (previously referred to as GOGO Books). We are now planning a "soft launch" including a marketing campaign. This campaign will be designed to not only promote Storytime Books but also to raise the profile of the whole organization and its programmes.

We are working closely with Storylines and The Values Trust, that purchase books in large quantities, to purchase titles at reduced cost for Storytime Foundation for Storytime Books and for our children's services.

Cultural Awareness

We are very much aware of our obligations under Te Tiriti, and that we work closely with Māori. While we do employ Māori staff we are a mainstream organisation. It is important therefore that we work closely with iwi and that we strive to work together to deliver programmes, and in a way that benefits all of our programme participants.

The Board and staff have undertaken cultural competency training with Core Education. As part of this we developed a "why statement":

"At Storytime, we are committed to honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi. By connecting with our partners and whānau in authentic, culturally responsive and mana-enhancing ways we can support whānau to thrive".

More recently staff have undertaken courses in te reo Māori and a course on Te Tiriti with Riki Consultancy with a view to being better prepared to engage with Māori including staff developing their own pepeha introduction and mihi.

Business as Usual

Of course, much of the day-to-day work with families continues. and we are in regular communication with our partner providers to get books, key messages and other resources into the homes of the most vulnerable whānau in South Auckland and Northland.

Impact

A national evaluation of our Books for Babies: First 1000 Days programme was carried out by Point and Associates and completed in June 2023. The evaluators found that the programme is definitely having an impact:

- It is enhancing provider and whānau relationships, particularly with families reluctant to engage with providers
- It is providing infants and whānau with access to Books that were previously out of reach
- The families and whānau are enjoying the books
- The books are beautiful, quality and are valued by whānau
- They are helping to support the culture and identity of whānau
- The books are encouraging serve and return responses, the back-and-forth exchanges of verbal and nonverbal communications, where the parent or caregiver responds to the infant's cues and the infant responds to the caregiver's signals. This exchange helps the infant learn how to regulate their emotions, develop language and social skills, and form secure attachments with their whānau.
- The providers say that the books are promoting attachment. They are encouraging whānau to snuggle up with their babies and toddlers and read to them so that they baby hears their voice. The interaction promotes feelings of security and closeness.
- The providers say the books are helping to reduce stress in the parent and infant at stressful times
- The providers see the books as helping to support the development of oral language
- The books align with the child development stages and support cognitive development which the providers see as helping support their mahi.

There are challenges:

- Whānau sometimes shift house and change providers, making them difficult to find to give the books to
- Providers believe linking whānau to community infrastructure such as libraries so they can access more books could strengthen the programme. There are barriers to library use, such as fining, which need to be addressed if this is to occur. We do link families to libraries but there is obviously room for improvement
- Providers say having to decide which families and whānau will get the books when there is so much need is challenging, and the providers would like to see the programme expanded so that more families can be enrolled.

Conclusion

We are pleased to report that:

1. Outcomes for disadvantaged children continue to be improved, regardless of the ongoing impacts of COVID and weather events, and we work to ensure that parents/caregivers are reading, talking and engaging more and better with their children
2. Because we are able to work with our partner providers and because we have developed alternative service delivery methods at difficult times, we know that parents/caregivers know more about the benefits of reading with their children and model serve and return. We also have an evaluation report by Point and Associates that supports this including interviews with participating whānau
3. Regardless of events that have impacted our work, enrolment data shows that we are well on target to exceed engagement with 5000 whānau.
4. Our collaborative approach and a need to think outside the square has in fact strengthened our work with partner agencies, Government and community organisations.

We have, in particular, come to work very closely with NZ Corrections, Ministry of Education and Police to deliver books, resources and other support to children of parents in the care of Corrections and those impacted by family harm in South Auckland and Northland

5. With the input from our partner agencies and the evaluators we have co-designed services and now continue to build on that work to ensure that the most effective programmes are delivered to the most disadvantaged families in South Auckland and Northland.
6. A further evaluation of First 1000 Days is planned for 2025.

Tony Culliney

February 2024