

Early Years Challenge

Supporting parents to give tamariki a great start in life

Summary report

October 2017

The
Southern
Initiative

THE
AUCKLAND
CO-DESIGN
LAB



Acknowledgements

The Southern Initiative and the Auckland Co-design Lab would like to thank the parents, whānau and organisations that have participated and contributed to the work. Key partners have included:

- South Auckland parents, families and whānau
- SKIP, Ministry of Social Development
- Growing up in New Zealand Study
- Plunket
- Auckland Council
- Point Research

Other participants and contributors included:

Ministry of Education, the Treasury, Ministry of Health, Te Puni Kōkiri, Foundation North, Ohomairangi Trust, Healthy Families, mana whenua and local iwi organisations, Father and Child Trust and ThinkPlace.

About the parents we worked with

We engaged parents who represented facets of the varied South Auckland community. Participants were recruited through our existing professional and community networks including SKIP (Ministry of Social Development), Kōhanga Reo and the Manurewa Parenting Hub. We also invited parents to connect us with parents who they knew had stories to share. We were conscious to ensure we connected with families that may not usually have a voice in local or central government processes.

More than thirty parents shared their stories during the research phase and 15 have actively participated during the co-design phase. Collectively they called themselves the ‘co-design māmās’. We facilitated an ethnographic approach with a strengths based lens, to ensure we understood the strengths of whānau as well as the key challenges.

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About this document

This document is a summary of why we conducted the Early Years Challenge, what we have learnt, and what we and others can do to create positive transformation in young lives in South Auckland.

We hope this paper and the accompanying posters will inform the work of community groups, agencies and other interested people to better understand and respond to the challenges and opportunities for parents and families in South Auckland.

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The Challenge and the potential: Improving the Early Years of children in South Auckland

The first thousand days in a child's life are crucial.

New Zealand and international research has consistently shown this short window is a chance to have a huge and long-term positive impact on a child's life.

We know that early experiences and the environments in which children develop in their first thousand days can have lasting impact on their later wellbeing, learning, behaviour, and health. Getting things right when children are young is easier and more effective than trying to address issues later.



The Southern Initiative's Early Years Challenge has examined the first thousand days through the lens of the lived experience of parents in South Auckland, combined with the insights provided by international neuro-science research, and local big data and longitudinal research.

The analysis of this data shows very clearly not only the need for action during the first thousand days in South Auckland, particularly for Māori and Pasifika families, but also that outcomes for 0-3 year olds are hidden in population level data and significantly worse than for 0-3s in the rest of Auckland.

Our focus through this challenge was to learn more about what everyday life is really like for young families in South Auckland and what will make a difference for families in this crucial period of young children's lives.

Two clear lessons emerged from our work:

Families and young children in South Auckland are carrying a heavy burden of toxic stress.

Growing Up in New Zealand (GUINZ) study data confirms many families with young children in South Auckland are living with cumulative and prolonged levels of stress – at a significantly higher rate than the rest of New Zealand.

It was very clear through our engagement with South Auckland parents that families feel this stress and it has a daily impact on their lives. Parents tell us that stress comes in waves and can be completely overwhelming.

Neuroscientific research helps to explain why this is happening - the cumulative and prolonged weight of multiple stressors is toxic. It is different to other forms of stress. 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. And we can see the impact of this stress very early in the lives of children.

The GUINZ data shows abnormal health and behavioural outcomes for children from families in South Auckland exposed to it from as early as two years of age. Findings from the Dunedin longitudinal study highlight that when not addressed poor outcomes at this age can contribute to a lifetime of poor outcomes, lost opportunities and squandered potential.

There is much to be hopeful about. A different mindset and approach to working with and alongside families may be an important catalyst for change.

The GUINZ data shows us young families in South Auckland can and do move out from under the weight of cumulative stress. For example 1 in 4 children experience a significant change between birth and nine months. Change is possible.

The data and our own experience of working closely with families indicates that South Auckland parents are motivated to do their very best. They are resourceful and creative in their response even when facing a range of challenges. And they have ideas and energy for helping each other and for growing strong and positive communities. This is a significant community strength that local government and the social services sector can be better at nurturing.

There are strong indications that making small changes in how services and agencies that support and interact with families in South Auckland are delivered can be part of making significant differences in outcomes for children. Government and organisations working with families (including Auckland Council) have a key responsibility to remove or alleviate the factors that contribute to toxic levels of stress in families' lives, such as low income, housing, education and health issues.

The Southern Initiative is using these insights and will further test and develop them through partnerships with others working with families in South Auckland.

This paper explores what we've found and provides insights and recommendations for anyone wanting to transform lives of families and children.

The data and our own experience of working closely with families indicates South Auckland parents are motivated to do their very best. They are resourceful and creative in their response even when facing a range of challenges. And they have ideas and energy for helping each other and for growing strong and positive communities.

Background

About the Early Years Challenge

Initiated as a joint project between The Southern Initiative (TSI), Auckland Council and the Auckland Co-Design Lab (the Lab), the Early Years Challenge explores how we can improve outcomes for young, children, families and whānau in South Auckland.

It was not the intention of the challenge to review existing health or social services, or create blueprints for new ones. There is a wide range of agencies and organisations already working in the early years sector including District Health Boards, Whānau Ora, well child providers, primary services, Children's Teams, Oranga Tamariki and many others that were not reviewed as part of this Challenge and are not referenced directly in this report.

Instead, the joint team used data analysis and innovative co-design methodologies to understand more about the lived realities of parenting in South Auckland, to empower families to create solutions that build on local strengths, and to provide guidance to social and government agencies in their own service design.

About the Southern Initiative and the Auckland Co-Design Lab

The Southern Initiative is one of two place-based initiatives in the Auckland Plan. Its role is to champion, stimulate and enable social and community innovation in South Auckland.

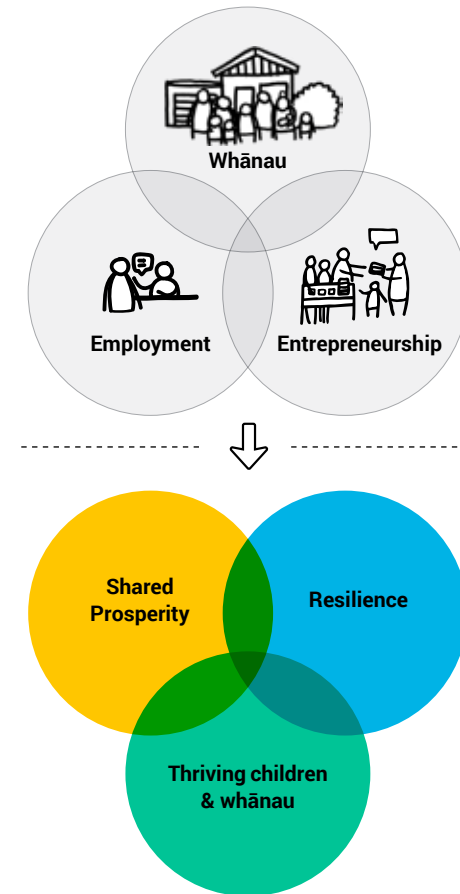
The area it covers spans four Auckland Council local board areas: Māngere- Ōtāhuhu, Ōtara-Papatoetoe, Manurewa and Papakura.

It focuses on selected projects to unlock South Auckland's potential. The team works with whānau, local social change agents, grassroots entrepreneurs, businesses and agencies to explore, create and test radical solutions to some of our most pressing challenges.

TSI works with the Co-design Lab (a collaboration between Auckland Council and eight central government agencies) to bring a human-centred approach to its work, and to support rapid innovation.

The team's central philosophy is strengths based, whānau centric and is based on the idea that "only the hood can change the hood". TSI supports local people and groups in this mission rather than creating more services to 'fix' South Auckland.

TSI is concentrates on three areas where community innovation can create deep change:



Moving from Focus Areas to Outcome Areas

Rising to the urgent challenge to do more for young children in South Auckland



The best scientific research in the world now tells us the greatest social good will be achieved by investing in a child's earliest years.

Professor Richie Poulton MSc, PGDip CIPs (Otago), PhD (NSW), FRSN

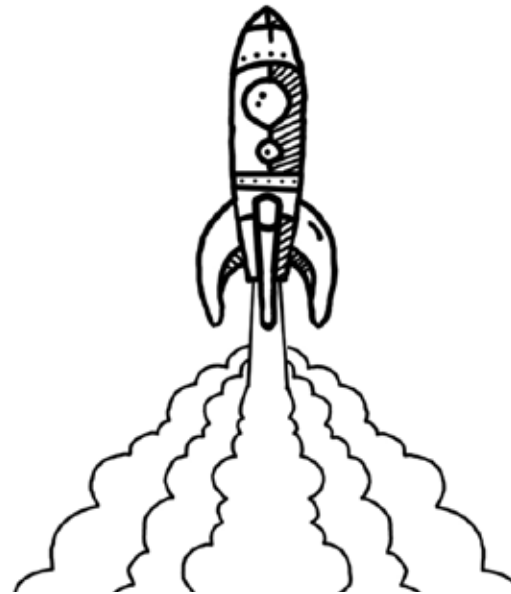
Children are an abundant taonga in South Auckland. In 2013, there were 21,000 children aged 0-3 years living in the Southern Initiative area.

Approximately 13% of all births in New Zealand take place in South Auckland, and almost a fifth of households in South Auckland have children aged 0-3 in them.

Enabling “early, strong family attachment and learning opportunities that set children up for success at school and in life” is a priority for The Southern Initiative, under the Auckland Plan.

The importance of development during the first thousand days of life, and the link to future outcomes, is long established.

Recent brain science research has been the catalyst for a renewed urgency to focus on this period, and new evidence around the factors that can either enable or derail healthy child development, with lifelong consequences.



Some have compared a child's evolving health status in the early years to the launching of a rocket, as small disruptions that occur shortly after take-off can have very large effects on its ultimate trajectory.

(Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, 2010)

We wanted to find out:

- What is really happening for parents of young children in South Auckland, and what particular challenges, strengths, and protective factors can impact on improving early years outcomes in this area?
- What sorts of actions are likely to make a real transformative difference for children and families in South Auckland?
- What can families and communities do, and what can government, council and agencies do to support and enable that?

This Early Years Challenge is focused on understanding what is happening in these first thousand days and what we can do to build positive change.

Throughout this challenge we have focused on parents as the primary nurturers of outcomes for children.

While improving the lives of young children is at the heart of this challenge, our framing question and the co-design approach we have taken clearly places children within the context of their families and whānau.

Challenges and opportunities in South Auckland

To understand how to support parents to give their tamariki a great start in life, the team explored research and statistics around the reality of life in South Auckland for households with young children. Experience has demonstrated that human-centred solutions often lie in

the intersection between the opportunities and challenges that people encounter. As experts in their own lives people can often identify these solutions themselves, or have created “work arounds” to manage their environments that can inspire solutions others can share.

Challenges

Outcomes for households with infants are hidden in population level data
NZ Census

Region	Households without 0-3 year olds	Households with at least one child aged 0-3 years old
South Auckland	~4%	~17%
NZ	~1%	~4%

Common risk factors in South Auckland
Growing up in New Zealand

The five most common risk factors for vulnerability for households with two year olds are:

1. Living in an area of deprivation
2. Income tested benefit
3. Highly stressed by money problems
4. Crowded household
5. Maternal depression

Concerning behavioural data (strengths and difficulties scores)
Growing up in New Zealand

1 in 3 children (37%) have a borderline or abnormal behavioural score at the age of two years. Those children with four or more risk factors are much more likely to have abnormal scores.

Unwanted/frequent residential mobility disrupts social cohesion
Growing up in New Zealand

26% of families moved between nine months and two years.

Those at high risk of vulnerability were much more likely to have shifted.

35% moved between nine months and two years.

Lack of appropriate nutrition before and after birth
Growing up in New Zealand

Only 5% of pregnant women meet the Ministry of Health nutrition guidelines.

Few families access services
Growing up in New Zealand

Only 9% of families had contact with Whānau Ora, CYF, Family Start or other social service agencies.

Opportunities

Change is possible - reducing risk factors can have an impact on outcomes

Reducing risk factors and moving to a lower risk group appear to have a significant influence on child outcomes at the age of two.

There is significant movement in the levels of vulnerability between 0-2 years of age

People's lives are not static which creates opportunities for change. Between nine months and 2 years the risk category worsened for 14% of the babies in South Auckland for 15% of infants their risk category improved.

Parents start with a positive outlook and a sense of agency

Prior to the birth of their child,

89% of parents in the South Auckland believed that they would be better than average parents.

88% feel like they belong to their community.

89% believe they can make a moderate or large impact on their neighbourhood.

What makes a difference

Social capital and neighbourhoods matter

Neighbourhood integration reduces mobility and helps to create connection to community. This is a strong protective factor against vulnerability.

Social networks, in particular peer-to-peer groups positively influence child behavioural outcomes amongst those most at risk from vulnerability.

Those in high vulnerability risk groups who read to their children regularly were more likely to have children with normal behavioural scores.

Whānau-centred solutions

South Auckland has many assets and strengths

- Cultural capital - Rich cultural diversity and strong communities, networks of churches and marae.
- Economic capital - Infrastructure, employment, industry, transport hub, entrepreneurial skills.
- Key focus area for Auckland Council and central government.
- Wide range of local assets such as parks, libraries, leisure and community facilities.

Our approach

Putting people at the centre, and understanding the science and data

Whānau-centric co-design

In approaching the Early Years Challenge, the team adopted a co-design approach to explore, imagine and test new ideas and involve the people closest to the issues in identifying solutions.

A whānau centric design practice was developed using a kaupapa Māori framework. The framework is derived from kaupapa Māori research principles, and enables a culturally appropriate process built around whānau and communities. It also supports a strengths based approach, and a focus on building capability, social connectedness and social capital. The on going development of this practice will include a focus on how we share power and control with whānau and communities, for a partnered approach to designing fit for purpose and sustainable solutions.

The early stages of the co-design process focus on framing and exploring the challenge from different perspectives and create new insights about the issues. The latter stages bring partners together to imagine possible solutions based on that insight, and to test new ideas and prototypes that evolve into new solutions that can be shared with partners, communities and funders.

In the Early Years Challenge, ethnographic research focused on understanding the experience of parents and whānau in South Auckland. The six insights

identified through this research were then explored further and used as the jumping off point for ideas in a series of co-design “sprints” which brought together parents and their children, along with representatives from a range of partner organisations to explore, design and test ideas.

The purpose of these sprints was to identify ideas and initiatives that could improve the experiences of families in South Auckland, and also to learn more about taking a whānau-centric approach to service design and concept development.

Reports covering the co-design sprints, including the process, findings, actions and lessons, are noted in the appendix to this document.

Linking evidence-based practice with practice-based evidence

The co-design framework allows TSI and its partners to combine a range of different data to find solutions that are evidence-based and grounded in lived experience.

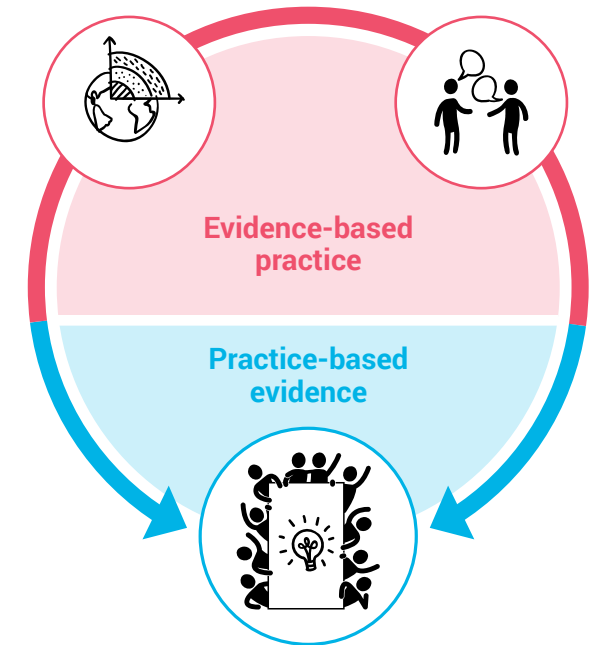
A recent review from The Australian Centre for Social Innovation commended this approach, describing it as combining big data (in this instance from sources such as the census and the Growing Up in New Zealand study) with thick data (qualitative research, participant stories, ethnography)

Big data, Quantitative

Focus on ‘what’, ‘where’ and ‘who’ is experiencing various indicators of disadvantage.

Thick data, Qualitative

Focus on ‘why’ and ‘how’ people experience disadvantage, and what can help to shift indicators.



Testing, prototyping, learning what works

Working with communities in context to create action and foundations for shifting outcomes.

Through the framing phase the team drew on and synthesised insights from the following sources:

Ethnographic research in South Auckland

This research set out to understand assets, strengths and broad challenges faced by parents in South Auckland, and engaged a group of parents who were representative of South Auckland's social and economic demographics. A full report on this research and its findings are an appendix to this paper.

Growing Up In New Zealand study

The Southern Initiative commissioned Point Research to draw on data from the Growing Up in New Zealand (GUINZ) study, a longitudinal study designed to follow children from before birth until early adulthood. It uses information collected from families during the first 1000 days at three points in time: Antenatally, when babies are nine months old, and when the child reaches two years of age. To better understand what is happening specifically for children in South Auckland. The Southern Initiative collaborated with the Growing up in New Zealand study to analyse anonymised cohort data for 1252 South Auckland families. This has provided new and unique perspectives on what's happening for families in South Auckland and what changes could have the greatest impact for child development and

behavioural outcomes. This analysis is articulated in three separate reports, which are an appendix to this paper.

The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University

This work uses science and research to develop more effective policies and services focused on the early years of life. The Center has produced a number of reports on its work, which have significantly informed the Early Years Challenge. Links to those reported are included in the appendix to this report.

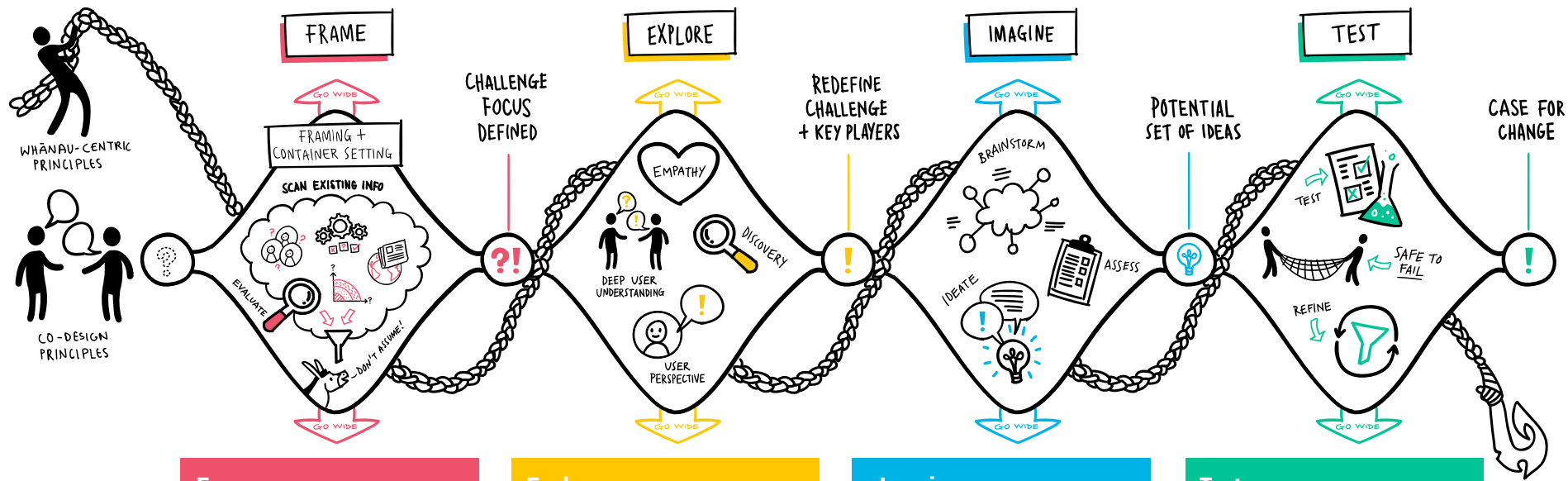
Other inputs include existing academic research, Statistics New Zealand's Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI), and Census 2013 data.

When these data sources are combined with the prototyping and testing approaches inherent in the later stages of the whānau-centric co-design framework, we get a clearer picture of the sort of actions that have potential to make genuine and lasting change.

Our approach to the challenge

Whānau centric co-design approach

For the Early Years Challenge we have adopted a co-design approach and infused it with kaūpapa Māori research principles. This has enabled a process that puts parents at the centre and frames the work in a whānau-centric way that is culturally relevant to South Auckland and Aotearoa, New Zealand.



Frame
Clarifying the challenge and key focus areas for the work

- Reviewed qualitative and quantitative data
- Engaged key partners
- Growing Up In NZ study collaboration
- Ethnographic research planning and development

Explore
Developing new insights and perspective by speaking to parents

- Ethnographic research with 30 parents, leading to six key insights
- Prioritisation workshops with parents and stakeholders
- Co-design māmās group formed
- Further data analysis and research

Imagine
Generating new ideas with parents and stakeholders

- Capability building with co-design māmās
- 2 x three day co-design sprints with parents and stakeholders
- Ideas developed based on key insights and wider research and data analysis



















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

- Parents led testing of prototypes in community e.g.. libraries, plunket, parks
- Review and prioritisation of ideas
- Low res / fail fast approach to testing, leading into an eight week pilot

The practice of whānau-centric co-design

The practice is constantly evolving in response to the team's learning and changing environmental factors. The whānau-centred work and the co-design process interact constantly and have their own underlying principles and rhythms.

An interesting insight is that co-design corresponds naturally with culturally-rooted practices that create mutual trust and learning and shared power and momentum.

<p>Whānau centric principles</p> 	<p>Manaakitanga</p> <p>Hosting whānau in a way that empowers them, and removes any barriers to participation.</p>	<p>Whanaungatanga</p> <p>Establishing meaningful relationships in culturally appropriate ways. Engaging whānau in a way which builds trust.</p>	<p>Tino Rangatiratanga</p> <p>Whānau has the autonomy to decide how and when they will participate. Co-decide as well as co-design.</p>	<p>Mana</p> <p>Whānau are the experts in their lives. Ensuring a balance of power.</p>	<p>Ako</p> <p>Mutually reinforcing learning.</p>
<p>Co-design principles</p> 	<p>Human-centred space</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Create a neutral, creative, empowering space  Be user/whānau-centred rather than system-centred  Embrace ambiguity: we don't know the question let alone the answer 	<p>Humble, curious, empathic mind set</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Beginner's mindset: humility not expertise, suspend judgment  Empathy: immerse, observe engage, ask why  Seek to understand drivers and emotions beneath the surface 	<p>Radical collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Seek and harness a diverse range of skills and experiences  Partnership: Design 'with' not 'for'  Start with lived experience  Redefine the question to reflect diverse perspectives, then work together to generate multiple ideas 	<p>Iterative learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">  Build capability in partners as well as learning from them  Bias towards action; learn by doing  Use the power of duos and groups  Build to think - harness kinaesthetic skills  Iterate and test in multiple rounds of empathy using tangible prototypes 	
<p>In practice</p> 	<p>Creating the space</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create safe spaces - physical, emotional, spiritual, cultural • Provide respite from toxic stress <i>i.e. a calm space away from worries with all immediate needs catered for</i> • Reduce whānau-defined barriers to participation <i>e.g. enabling tamariki to attend, within school hours</i> • Avoid trauma triggers <i>e.g. institutional settings and symbols</i> 	<p>Relationship and nurture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite people in a way that shows that they are valued • Never judge • Practice deep empathy <i>i.e. listening, accepting</i> • Show respect • Establish genuine, consistent and caring connections <i>e.g. same people each time, real relationships</i> 	<p>Flipping assumptions and sharing power</p> <p>Demonstrate that whānau are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An asset not a problem • Partners not subjects or recipients • Co-deciders and co-producers not just co-designers • The experts in their own lives not the beneficiaries of experts' knowledge/advice • Professionals share power and act as conduits, partners, container builders, coaches and learners. 	<p>Intentional skill building</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deploy skillful coaching and deliberate confidence and skill building • Provide 'biodegradable' support that fosters independence not dependence • Allow people to be reflective and to build self-awareness • Provide the conditions and container for peer-to-peer learning • Create opportunities for learning through doing 	





What we found: Insights from the data, research and co-design

This section combines findings and insights from the sources noted in the section above. Each of those sources has its own powerful and unique insights. The purpose of this document is not to repeat those in full here, but to synthesise them in order to share what we have learnt about working for positive change for families with young children in our South Auckland community.

1

Children's wellbeing depends on adults' wellbeing

It is now well understood the first thousand days of a child's life are crucial for healthy development, and that the impact of what happens in these first thousand days reaches into adulthood. Longitudinal studies have shown that positive consistent and responsive care and wellbeing in these early years translates into positive outcomes in adulthood, and conversely, negative situations in the early years can lead to life-long negative consequences.

What has perhaps received less focus in recent discussions is the parallel importance of building the capability of the adults in a child's life. In a New Zealand context we have focused on parents and whānau as the focal point for influencing and improving outcomes for children.

TSI's Early Years Challenge ethnographic research revealed South Auckland parents' resilience, positive intentions and efforts to do the very best they can for their children in often stressful circumstances, during the early years of their lives.



My families really struggle with making ends meet. I couldn't do what they do. Many cannot get to the doctors or appointments they don't have the money. How do you get around and get the help you need when access is hard.

Well child provider

Most parents are acutely aware of the impact that the stresses and challenges in their living circumstances can have on their children, work hard to create solutions to keep their children healthy, and to protect them from stress and harm. Parents often find creative solutions to the problems they face but also experience pressures and judgments from services that make things harder.

Insights from working with families elsewhere³ combined with our practical experience of co-designing with whānau suggests positive changes can arise when we deploy an intentional capability building approach to working with whānau (focused on executive functioning and self efficacy), which can create ripples of positive change that go beyond the duration of the co-design experience. New skills and confidence can be built by acknowledging as parents experts in their own lives, taking a reciprocally valuable approach to learning, giving people the opportunity to learn by doing, and creating new peer-to-peer relationships.



Achieving breakthrough outcomes for children experiencing significant adversity requires that we support the adults who care for them to transform their own lives.

Babcock, Elisabeth & Ruiz De Luzuriaga, Nicki (2016). Families Disrupting the Cycle of Poverty: Coaching with an Intergenerational Lens

The work of the Harvard Center on the Developing Child shows that people can develop self-efficacy and life skills into late adulthood. For this reason, the Center recommends investing in building the capabilities of the adults in children's lives, in order to protect children and nurture child development:

³ <http://taccsi.org.au/project/family-by-family/>

Toxic stress: The cumulative and prolonged weight of risk factors can rob parents of bandwidth and derail child development



When a person lives in poverty, experiences family violence, or is exposed to other severe or prolonged stressors, research suggests the body is constantly sending fear and stress messages to the brain. This overloads the brain's ability to solve problems, set goals, exercise self-control and complete tasks in the most efficient ways.

The resulting lack of emotional and mental “bandwidth” (brainpower that would otherwise go to less pressing concerns, planning ahead and problem-solving) can happen to anyone in response to a one-off event, such as crashing a car. Families in poverty have the added burden of ever-present stress created by the cumulative weight of everyday challenges like overcrowded housing and severe financial pressure.



It was hard because I felt like a failure yet again ...why am I broken? Why does childbirth bring that out? Why does it break me like that?

Parent

The Early Years Challenge ethnographic research showed this clearly, and the six insights arising from that report highlight the complexity of the challenges that families face, and the complex and layered stresses that come with some of these challenges.

For example, the research found:

- While poor quality, limited availability and low affordability of housing creates stress for families, the inability to control their own housing circumstance can be especially stressful and impacts on parenting
- Mothers and fathers experience different kinds of stress relating to parenthood - and for mothers, this can come in two waves: before the birth of the baby, and a second wave after the baby has been born. Mothers in South Auckland report they were particularly unprepared for the second wave
- Parents in South Auckland feel a lot of pressure and judgment from services, the community, whānau/ families and even themselves. This can create feelings of guilt and anxiety, and contribute to them being physically and emotionally unwell
- Some social services, may actually be increasing stress and adding burdens for families and parents by being judgmental and by having systems that overload and deplete parents' coping skills consequentially adding the cumulative weight of stress.

The Harvard Center on the Developing Child has found that high and persistent levels of stress can be literally toxic - having a negative impact on the developing child's brain structure and chemistry.



Sometimes I call the Plunket line just to cry. They said “it will get better”...I said “it's not getting any better!” I don't feel able to go out and meet people.

Parent



The day-to-day stress of people's lives is overwhelming. Never knowing if you can get by this week, ill kids. Nowhere to go during the day, stuck at home. No food for the lunch boxes so it's easier to keep the older kids at home. That way they can help with the babies too.

Well child provider

The impact of experiencing toxic levels of stress

Reducing the multiple vulnerability risk factors faced by stressed families with young children in South Auckland is urgent. The first 1000 days pass quickly and the experience of prolonged and cumulative stress can lead to a lifetime of poor outcomes.

When a person lives in poverty, experiences family violence, or is exposed to other severe or prolonged stressors, research suggests the body is constantly sending fear and stress messages to the brain. This overloads the brain's ability to solve problems, set goals, exercise self-control and complete tasks in the most efficient ways.*

The resulting lack of emotional and mental 'bandwidth' can happen to anyone in response to a one off event, such as crashing a car. People in poverty have the added burden of ever-present stress. They are constantly struggling to make ends meet and often bracing themselves against blame and stigmatisation.

For children in families facing high and persistent levels of stress caused by factors such as poverty, the impacts are literally toxic - changing brain structure and chemistry.*

Although individual factors like family violence can cause a toxic stress reaction, the cumulative weight and persistence of more everyday risk factors can also rob children of healthy brain development.**

Children exposed to four or more risk factors (classified as high risk of vulnerability) like overcrowded housing, living in a low income area, low household income and where parents experience extreme financial stress, are more likely to suffer the behavioural and health impacts of toxic levels of stress.***

* Economic Mobility Pathways, "Using Brain Science to Design New Pathways Out of Poverty, 2014

** Harvard Center on the Developing Child

*** Growing Up in New Zealand

"It's daunting going to play group I had to give myself a prep talk. Look if you want to make friends you have to go out and do things. I know I'm depressed but I have to force myself to do things all the time. I do this not for me but for my baby."

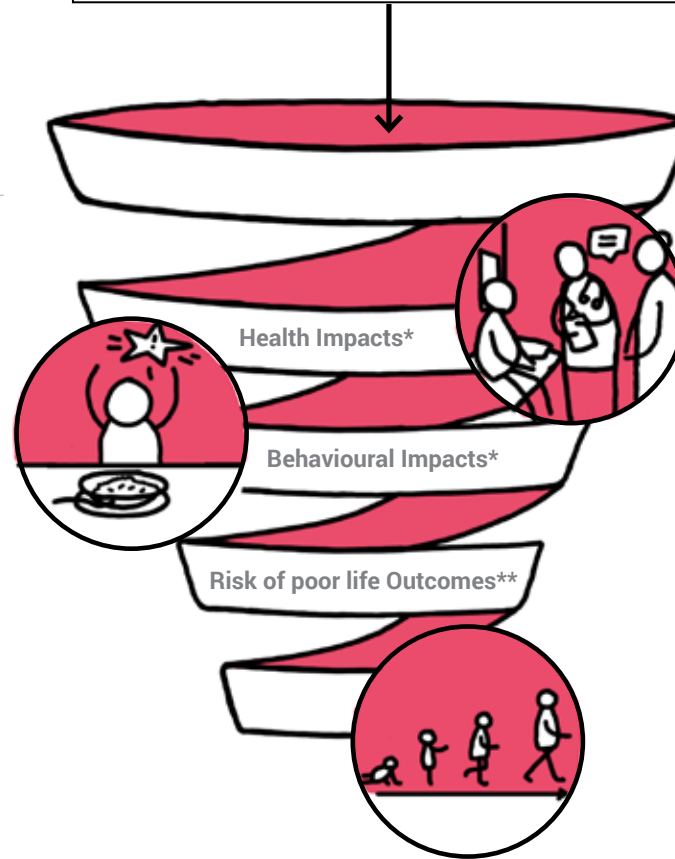
Behavioural impacts*

- Children exposed to high vulnerability of risk (four or more factors) before birth or at nine months were 7–8 times more likely to experience behavioral difficulties at age two.
- One in five children in The Southern Initiative cohort had an abnormal behaviour score at the age of two years.
- An additional 17% had borderline abnormal behaviour, meaning that **more than a third of children in South Auckland had self-regulation and behavioural challenges**

*Growing Up in New Zealand Longitudinal Study, at two years.

**Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study

Greater levels of stress*
Families in South Auckland are significantly less likely to be in the low risk group (0 risks), and more than twice as likely to be in the high risk of vulnerability group (four or more risks), than the Growing Up in New Zealand participants as a whole.



"I have two kids a two year old and a two month old. Since I have lived here my baby has been in hospital for three weeks with chest infections and a virus...the water is running down the walls when it rains. I use one room to live in to keep warm, it's all I can afford. My landlord knows it's bad but doesn't seem to care."

Health Impacts*

South Auckland families in the high-vulnerability risk group at two years were significantly more likely to report that their children had:

- seen a doctor and been hospitalised for chest infections, bronchiolitis, bronchitis, pneumonia or croup
- experienced skin infections and gastroenteritis, than those in lower vulnerability risk groups.

Risk of poor life Outcomes**

The landmark Dunedin study concludes that children who are displaying a lack of self-regulation skills at three years are far more likely to experience negative outcomes including lower income, a criminal record, and addictions at 40 years of age.

"I need to get out the house. There are three families living together it just get hard. I hate all the noise there."

The cumulative weight of stress effectively reduces people’s ‘bandwidth’ to pay attention, make decisions, resist temptations and solve problems.

The link between cumulative, or “toxic”, stress and brain development is clear. The Harvard Center found that severe, prolonged or cumulative stress can affect the development of executive functioning in children. Executive functioning acquired in the early years of childhood enables children to learn, plan, focus, remember instructions and control impulses. Without these skills children can find it difficult to interact and learn in early education and school.

“Toxic” levels of stress also impact parenting, robbing parents of their executive function and self-regulation skills (or suppressing their development) and the “bandwidth” to provide stable and responsive care in the face of unmanageable pressure.

The Growing Up in New Zealand research has backed up these findings, indicating that children exposed to four or more “every day” risk factors⁴ like overcrowded

housing, living in a low income area, low household income, and experience of extreme financial stress, are more likely to suffer the behavioural and health impacts of toxic levels of stress.



I’m always juggling the demands of school, kids, ex-partner and never having enough money.

Parent

GUINZ determined that vulnerability could be measured by the number of risk factors a person is exposed to (rather than solely the severity of any one risk).

The data showed families living in South Auckland were more likely than other Auckland families to be living with four or more risk factors. The disparity is even higher when the data focuses on Māori and Pacific families in South Auckland, and families with very young children.

Proportion of children in each GUINZ risk group

Risk Group	Risk Two Years			
	All GUINZ	Southern Initiative	Māori	Pasifika
Low	41%	17%	14%	7%
Medium	46%	55%	47%	54%
High	13%	28%	40%	39%

⁴<https://cdn.auckland.ac.nz/assets/growingup/research-findings-impact/report04.pdf>

3

For both parents and children, reducing immediate environment stress makes a difference

The Growing up in New Zealand study shows that removing even one stress factor can positively impact on children's outcomes by moving them to a lower risk group. Where there are multiple risk factors (more than four) more than one risk factors may need to be removed.

The ethnographic research and co-design approach suggest that when stresses are removed and opportunities are designed to create rather than diminish 'bandwidth', parents can learn and solve problems together.



This South Auckland work – backed up by findings from the Harvard Center on the Developing Child – indicates that often the most effective role of professionals is not in providing information or advice, but rather in removing stressors and providing safe and respectful environments that contribute to removing stress and in turn provide opportunities to develop new skills or rediscover existing ones.

The Growing Up in New Zealand study reinforces these findings, showing that removing or adding risk factors present in people's lives makes a difference to the health and behavioural outcomes of children.

The first 1000 days of child development, from conception to two years, are critically important.

Early childhood experiences provide the foundation for future health, well-being and resilience. Positive experiences support child development, and research has shown that experiencing stable and responsive relationships is the single most important factor for healthy development.*

Part of this vital development in the early years is the acquisition of "executive function" and "self-regulation" skills. These enable children to learn, plan, focus, remember instructions, switch tasks and control impulses. These skills are critical to learning, achievement and behaviour. Severe, prolonged or cumulative stress can affect the development of these skills.*

These 'toxic' levels of stress also impact parenting, robbing parents of their executive function and self-regulation skills and the 'bandwidth' to provide stable and responsive care in the face of unmanageable pressure.

Importantly, executive function can be bolstered into adulthood through active learning, and bandwidth can be increased. Removing stressors is the most effective way to free up bandwidth and research shows that removing even one stress factor positively impacts children's outcomes.

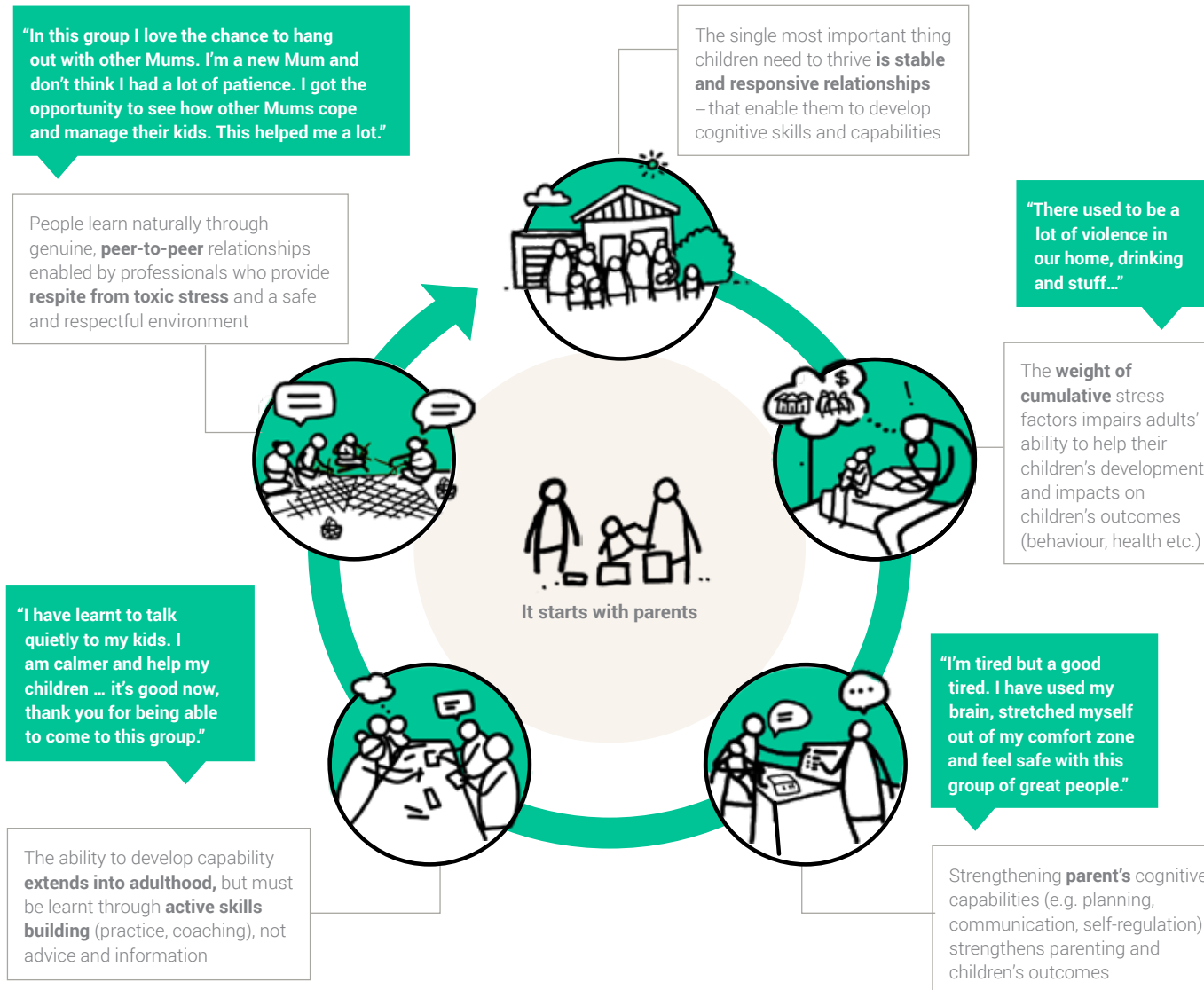
However, there are a number of protective factors that can make significant difference for children's behavioural and health outcomes in South Auckland. These are parent's connection to community, peer-to-peer interaction (initially) supported by professionals, and to a smaller extent, reading to children.**

*Harvard Center on the Developing Child

** Growing Up in New Zealand

Opportunity: To give children the best start, we need to empower parents to be brain builders

Giving parents respite from stress and supporting them to learn from each other and connect to their community can create new skills that can be invested in their children's development.



4

Vulnerability can and does change

The Growing Up in New Zealand study shows there is a significant amount of movement between vulnerability groups, and it only takes a small change in circumstance to either reduce or increase vulnerability.

A quarter of children in the South Auckland cohort had already moved in or out of a vulnerability risk group by nine months of age. The study showed that removing risk factors and moving to a lower risk group appeared to have a significant influence on child outcomes at the age of two.



It was hard cause I felt like a failure but I'm proud of my certificate and achievement. I know it will help me get work in the future.

Parent

Adding risk factors and moving to a higher vulnerability group appeared to significantly worsen health and behaviour outcomes for children.

Removing or giving parents respite from stress and supporting them to learn from each other and connect to their community can create new skills that can be invested in their child's development.



Making a bit of extra money helped me to get to the end of the week. It takes the stress off me.

Parent



5 The dual importance of building executive function and offering biodegradable support

When faced with difficult situations in their lives many people are natural problem solvers and can resolve situations and manage their lives without the need for services.

One of the challenges presented by traditional service models for families is that expert-led solutions do not always provide families and whānau with the support they actually need. Traditional service models can deprive them of the support that would have helped them solve the issues themselves. Dealing with services can also add to the cumulative weight of stress families face.

While many families and whānau have those skills, others need support to rediscover or develop them. For those living with toxic levels of stress, the ability to problem solve or develop these skills is severely compromised. There is compelling evidence that shows that just as four or more risk factors rob families of bandwidth, reducing risk factors frees up the bandwidth. Services need to work with families in a way that creates or frees up bandwidth.

The importance of alleviating the factors that contribute toward experiencing toxic stress were set out earlier in this report. In addition services also need to work with families in ways that free up bandwidth.

Our work with parents in South Auckland also suggests that where services are to play a positive role, offering this support in a “biodegradable” way may be an important factor.



People think that I’m a super-woman, but sometimes I feel overwhelmed and it’s hard to ask for help

Parent

A beneficial environment for children is one that provides a “scaffolding” (for example, helping children with complex tasks or breaking big tasks into little ones or routines and reminders that prompt children into being organised and attentive).



I hate the way they look at me like I’m a dumb, young, brown mum

Parent

Helping children develop executive function capabilities means also encouraging them to reflect on their experiences, to talk about what they are doing and why, monitoring, assisting and helping children evaluate both their decisions and actions. Then, gradually, as they grow so the “scaffolding” comes down and adults step back, allowing children to manage the process by themselves, learning from their mistakes, becoming independent as they are both able to ready to do so.

This emphasises how important it is to support parents to develop their own skills and create bandwidth.

This means not taking a one size fits all approach. Where needed services should focus on creating the condition for whānau led solutions through relationship building, creating safe, nurturing, low stress engagement that frees up or generate bandwidth. This in turn supports the development of problem solving skills including planning, goal setting and self-regulation.

The work of the Harvard Center reinforces this finding, and shows that although adults can build their executive functions, this has to be learnt, practised and built as a skill. There can be an important role for practitioners in support of this process.

Within the context of building executive function skills, the variety of information and brochures (for example about good parenting or healthy eating) parents are frequently provided with are often ineffective. They don't provide a practical opportunity to start using and growing executive function skills and they also assume parents with stressful lives have time and bandwidth to read and act upon the advice they offer.

For example, families with young children are offered or told to attend parenting programmes. This type of support can be helpful, but for families already experiencing high levels of toxic stress it can be an additional pressure further robbing them of bandwidth rather than an opportunity to develop new skills.



I see a lot of anxious mothers who have to leave their children and go back to work or go on course. In many cases they are not ready to be parted from their children

Well child provider

Another important factor in building executive function is the absence of judgement. The ethnographic research showed that pressures and judgement are heavily present when parents are dealing with some services, and that these factors can add stress for parents and are a further disincentive to engage with these services.

Providing 'biodegradable' support to parents can help unleash skills and capabilities

Summary of practice shifts

Mindset

Scarcity → Abundance

Fixed → Growth

Power balance

Dependence → Partnership

Power with agency → Shared power

Culture

Culture blind → Culture infused

Process

Design for → Design with

Leadership

Expert-led → Whānau-led

Focus

Task/silos → Holistic

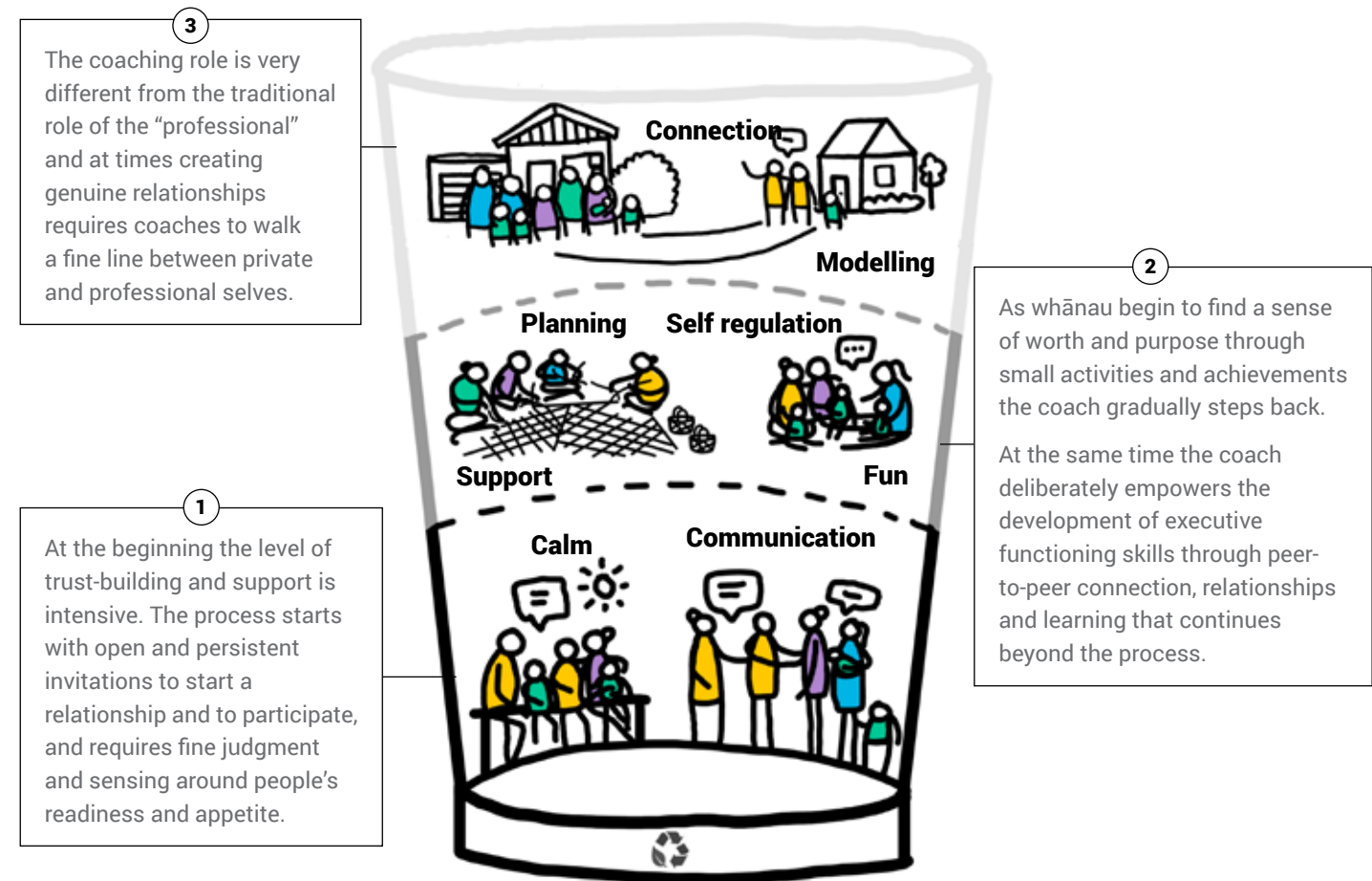
Skillset

Teach/advise → Coach/learn

Relationship

Professional to client beneficiary → Peer-to-peer and collaborative

For some parents helpful support might be 'biodegradable' and the role of practitioners is to create the space for confidence, skills and new relationships to develop.



6

Putting people at the centre: Applying whānau-centric and co-design approaches can unleash potential and build bandwidth



The Early Years Challenge has shown the way services and agencies engage with parents can be as important than what we are engaging about.

One way of doing this is conscious and careful co-design, particularly if it is whānau-centric. This approach has been informed by the following kaupapa Māori research principles.

Manaakitanga: Hosting whānau in a way which values and empowers them, and removes barriers to participation and make them feel welcome.

Whanaungatanga: Establishing meaningful relationships in culturally appropriate ways. Engaging whānau in a way which builds trust, and values enduring relationships.

Tino Rangatiratanga: Whānau have the autonomy to decide how and when they will participate. Whānau have the ability to make decisions within the process.

Mana: Whānau are the experts in their lives and their communities. Actively sharing power and control within the process.

Ako: Mutually reinforcing learning, which acknowledges the expertise and experience of all within the process and the potential to learn from each other.

Such processes - and other methods - go beyond just delivering services or support to parents. By putting people at the centre they are valuing their contribution, creating a sense of the purpose and meaning, increasing confidence, and building executive function and creating positive ripples of impact beyond the services or initiatives themselves.

The emerging whānau-centred co-design approach developed through the Early Years Challenge indicates that problem solving capability can be nurtured and developed in environments that are designed to build bandwidth and that combine technical expertise with peer-to-peer learning and support.

An unexpected consequence of the co-design approach was that a number of participants started to make changes in their lives outside of the co-design process utilising the problem solving skills they had developed. Participants have reflected that the experience of being valued and respected, developing genuine relationships, learning from one another and building new skills has fuelled their confidence and sense of purpose.

This has in turn allowed them to build confidence and a sense of agency that has encouraged them to tackle new challenges and make positive changes to their lives, their relationships, homes and communities.

Our experience (and the experience of others working with families) suggests that by creating a sense of purpose, connections, and being valued and listened to can help to increase confidence may start happening

quickly. It is likely that for change to be lasting we should think about how this effect is maintained and topped up. The more that services and agencies ask families to participate in (and lead) the planning, designing, and ongoing development of their own communities, the more agencies actively share power and control, the more opportunities there will be to practise and grow these skills.



It's daunting going to play group and I had to give myself a prep talk. Look if you want to make friends you have to go out and do things. I know I'm depressed but I have to force myself to do things all the time. I do this not for me, but for my baby.

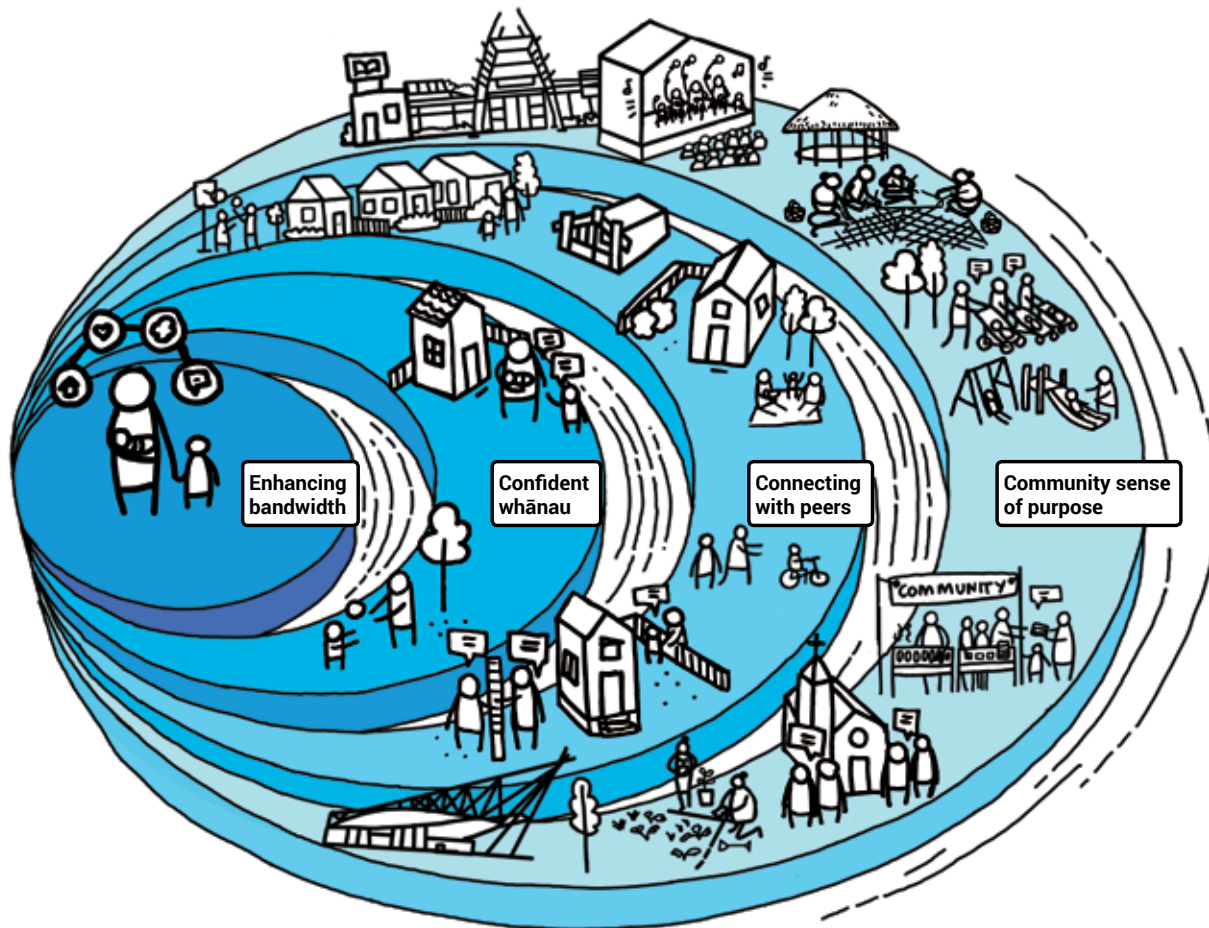
Parent

What the Harvard work and our own experience of working with families in South Auckland indicates is that if we carefully focus on how we work alongside families then, with relatively low effort, we may be able to support significant changes in their lives.

The practice creates ripples of impact

The emerging whānau-centric co-design practice has created noticeable impacts at many levels of whānau's lives. Whānau have reflected that the experience of being valued and respected, developing genuine relationships, learning from one another and building new skills has fueled their confidence and sense of purpose. This has in turn allowed them to tackle new challenges and make positive changes in themselves, their relationships, homes and communities.

Interestingly, the ripples do not always start at the centre and radiate outwards – a peer-to-peer based observation can empower people to try new approaches at home, or the confidence built presenting within the safety of the group can inspire someone to speak up at work or to participate in a community level experience.



Enhancing bandwidth

- Creating new skills and rediscovering old ones
- Reducing stress factors
- Self awareness
- Having confidence in myself

Confident whānau

- Confident in my home
- Communication
- Story telling
- Creating routines
- Calming the chaos
- Modelling
- Intentionally testing new approaches

Connecting with peers

- Belonging
- Finding like-minded people
- Confident with my peers
- Creating new networks
- Easy to ask for help
- Mutual learning
- Support

Community sense of purpose

- Success and change
- Confident in my community
- Contribution
- Sense of purpose
- Able to ask for help
- Inspiring and being inspired
- Reciprocity
- Participation bias

7

Protective factors can build resilience and help to balance risk factors

Analysis of data and research identified a number of protective factors are highly relevant in South Auckland, and can work to balance risk factors and improve children's circumstances.



I need to get out the house, there are 3 families living together and it just gets hard. I hate all the noise there. Parks are good place for me to take my children. When the weather is good we hang out for hours playing together. Some of the parks are not good for my toddler there's not enough for him.

Parent



The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2010, 2015) has also identified key components that provide the foundation for child well-being and resilience:

Stable and responsive relationships.

Most families in the Southern Initiative say they are providing warm and responsive parenting. They report enjoying and interacting with their children.

Secure and appropriate nutrition from preconception onwards.

Food security and adequate nutrition are a significant issue in the Southern Initiative area. Many women are not getting the nutrition they require to meet their needs during pregnancy. Only a small minority (2%) of pregnant women met all their daily servings from all four food groups recommended by the Ministry of Health.

A safe and supportive physical and built environment.

There is a high degree of residential mobility (shifting house) in the first 1000 days of life. There are indications that some families in the Southern Initiative area may not consider their neighbourhoods to be safe for children. High residential mobility may be associated with lower perceptions of neighbourhood belonging. Only one-third (32%) of those in the Southern Initiative agreed they would be sorry if they had to move from the neighbourhood.

Culture by providing a sense of identity and belonging.

Antenatally, mothers in the Southern Initiative had positive feelings towards their own culture, were involved in their own culture and had knowledge of their own culture. This is particularly the case for Pasifika parents.

That a safe and supportive physical and built environment is identified as a protective factor is particularly pertinent in South Auckland. Both the GUINZ study and the South Auckland ethnographic research indicate issues relating to poor quality and crowded housing significantly affect parenting activities with their children. Places that parents can meet other parents and children can interact are also very important, as parents instinctively gravitate to local facilities where they can connect, which is a protective factor.

Parents showed ingenuity in the ways they managed housing issues, to try and create safer and healthier spaces for their children both at home but also "creating home away from home" using local facilities, places and community assets.

The importance of the wider built environment and the ways parents leverage community and council assets is relevant to Auckland Council's urban planning and amenities strategies. These factors are known to be both risk and resilience factors, and can play a significant role in making a difference for children.

Importance of culture

Connection with culture has been identified as an important protective factor which is relevant for South Auckland. The GUINZ study highlights that most mothers in South Auckland had positive feelings towards their own culture, were involved in their own culture and had knowledge of their own culture. For all of these indicators, the positive response of Pasifika mothers was significantly higher, as was their likelihood of associating with others from their own culture and feeling the importance of maintaining their own cultural traditions and practices. Māori mothers had

Analysis of the GUINZ data for South Auckland identified protective factors that can help to improve outcomes for children.

Our analysis identified several factors that appear to be linked to positive outcomes. They were:

- **connecting with peers**, especially in a situation that is curated by professionals (e.g. Plunket parent groups) and
- **connecting with community.**

GUINZ revealed a third factor which early indications suggest might also have a protective effect, which was **reading books to children.**

The first two protective factors in GUINZ were further evidenced through the South Auckland ethnographic research, in which parents reported they sought out positive peers and community interactions due to their intuition that this would be good for their own wellbeing and their children's.

The third element - reading to children - echoes a further finding of the Harvard Center relating to the importance of "serve and return" interactions between young children and adults.

Finding ways to support, model, encourage and enable parents and other adults to spend time closely listening to and responding to their children is an essential part of protecting children from harmful stress and growing their resilience. This is vital not only in very early childhood but throughout a child's development.

'Serve and return' interactions are when an infant or young child babbles, gestures, or cries, and an adult responds appropriately with eye contact, words, or a hug. It is the playful back and forth when babies and children genuinely connect with their parents and other caring adults about things that matter to them.

This is one of the main reasons why reducing stress and building executive function skills in adults is so important. Through doing so, it is possible to build the conditions that make it easier for whānau to be sensitive and responsive to their young child's signals and needs, and to provide an environment rich in serve and return experiences.





**What this means, our learnings
and recommendations**

1

Do whatever you can to remove or relieve stresses for parents with young children

Tina's story

Tina is 21 and has two daughters, a five year old and a baby who is 15 months. She lives in Mangere with her children and her 19 year old cousin Shayla who also has a one year old baby. Tina has spent the last five years caring for her children.

Although she sees parenting as the most important job in the world she can sometimes feel frustrated and invisible, and that she is treated as a nobody. Her dream is to combine her love for children and a career so would like to train as an early childhood educator.



To have the greatest impact on outcomes we need to understand the cumulative stress factors on families, and work with them to remove, or at least reduce toxic levels of stress. Many families find interacting with services that are intended to provide help and support stressful due to fear of judgment, past negative experiences or word of mouth stories. Services need to be designed in a way that do not further add to the stress families might be experiencing.

The more challenging a family's life is, the less bandwidth is available for decision making and positive change - regardless of how good the opportunity or available service might be.

Removing even one stress factor can have an impact on outcomes - and on people's ability to engage, learn and put changes in place. This is particularly important for families with babies and young children. Nurturing and protecting the wellbeing of adults in the lives of children can make a big difference, particularly in the first 1000 days.

The Early Years Challenge has shown that there are lots of ways to reduce stress, and all of them matter. Working hard and urgently on big and complex issues such as violence, abuse, addiction, poverty and homelessness is vitally important.

At the same time there are many little things that can also make a difference. These can include:

- Supporting or creating opportunities for friendship and fun
- Being alert to how our actions might feel judgmental or threatening
- Having warm and friendly staff who make people feel welcome
- Creating beautiful public spaces
- Contributing to safe neighbourhoods and well-lit streets
- Improving transportation
- Having fewer and simpler forms to fill in, respecting cultural differences, creating little pockets of kindness.

All of these are examples of actions that can reduce the overall burden of stress parents are carrying, and contribute to their ability to provide a positive and engaging environment for their children.

The practical experience of working with the 'co-design māmās' in the Early Years Challenge highlights the importance of creating bandwidth to support active participation by giving respite from daily stresses.

For the parents in our project we believed that the more bandwidth we could help create, the more likely it was parents would be able to commit time and energy. We learnt that identifying and minimising the barriers to participating - no matter how small they seem - can increase bandwidth and make a big difference to participation, building capability and outcomes.

Sometimes this involved simple things like the timing and location of workshops. Other times it involves extra time and resources running workshops to build skills and capability so parents could confidently participate. For example during a three-day co-design sprint with parents and stakeholders the participation of parents was supported by the provision of meal bags at the end of each day. Transport and childcare was also provided.

Making sure we welcomed babies and toddlers into our co-creation space with resources and people for their care was also important. By doing this we not only allowed families with young children to fully participate but also created lots of small opportunities to model, encourage and support easy 'serve and return' interactions between adults and children.



Key questions for organisations wishing to relieve stress and increase bandwidth

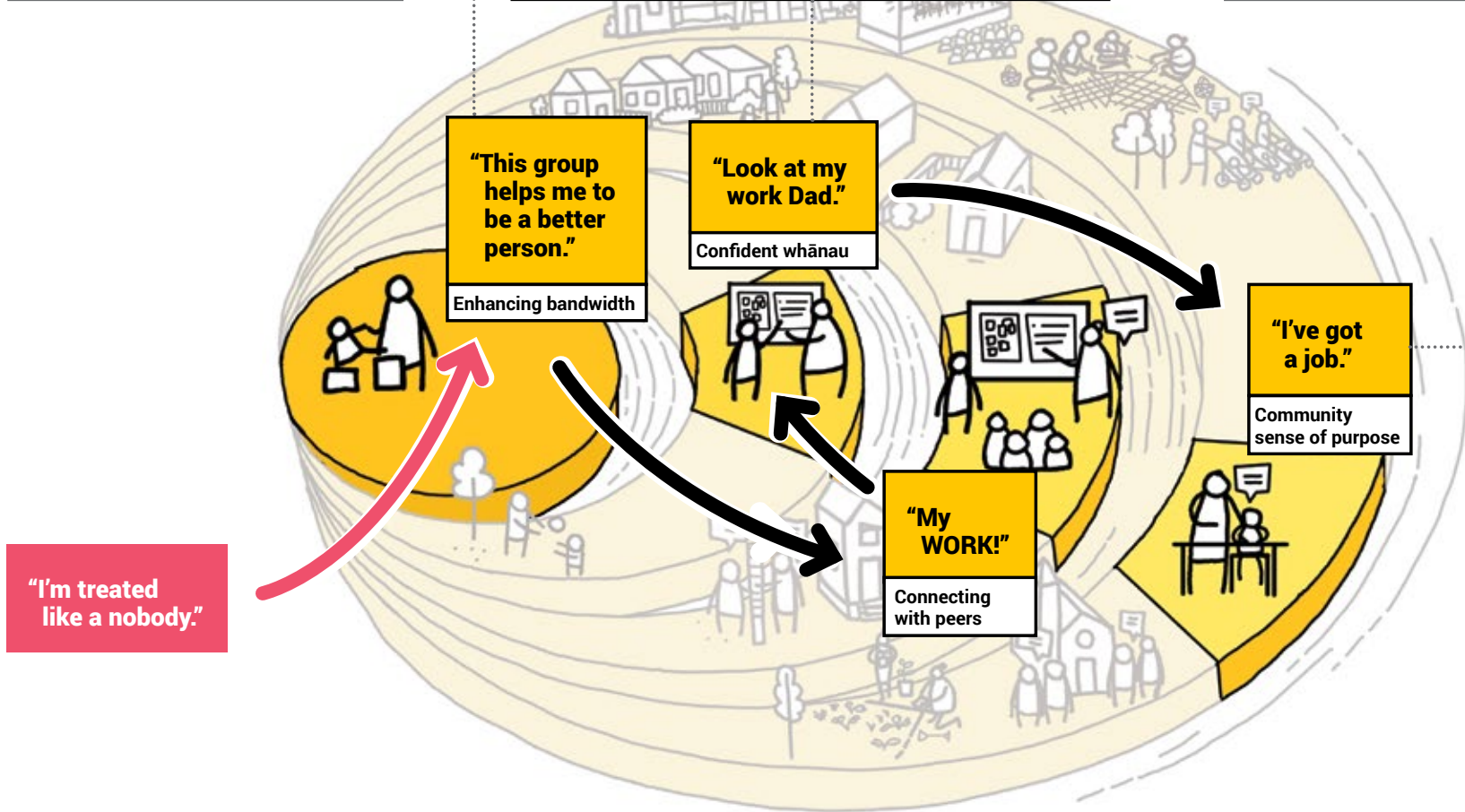
- How would a parent describe their relationship with your organisation or with the services you provide?
- Do interactions with your service add to or reduce the stress a family experiences?
- Does an interaction with your service or activity reduce or diminish bandwidth? What little, immediate things could you do to that might reduce parents' stress, make their day a bit easier or make them feel cared for? How could you create interactions or environments that grow bandwidth?
- Is there a stressor that you can immediately help to take off the top, that will reduce the cumulative weight of stress on a family?
- How well do you understand the challenges and day to day priorities of families you work with/are designing for?
- How do these priorities align with the priorities of your organisation, service or project? If they are different - why?
- How could you find out from parents what interactions, systems or environments could be different?
- How could you nurture protective factors and strengths?

Tina's story of impact

Her neighbour told her about an opportunity to give her insights around parenting and she jumped at the chance. She enjoyed creating a photo diary and the interviewer Sophie was great, she even folded the washing while they were talking.

Tina was invited to attend a hui to prioritise the insights, and to join a group of parents to come up with ideas to help other parents. After feeling like no one cared or listened, it was great to have her opinion heard and valued. She loved meeting the other mums, and watching how they interacted with their children. She was so proud of the work they were doing she invited her dad in to see.

When Sophie told Tina about a teacher-aide job Tina applied. She is now working school hours and paying her cousin to look after baby. She feels much happier and confident and is keen to start on her studies towards an ECE qualification once she gets a year or so working under her belt.



Work with and build protective factors

Annie's Story

Annie is 32 and has three children aged one, three and seven. She and her partner and children live in a two bedroom flat in Papakura which was the best they could find in the area when they had to move out of their last rental when it was sold by the landlord.

Annie was finding it depressing to be living in a small house where the children had no safe place to play outside. She found it a huge effort to get out of the house and she and her partner often argued.



When we are reducing toxic levels of stress and building executive function in adults we are helping to create enough calm and space in their lives they are better able to have the responsive, loving relationships they really want with their children.

We can also take action to actively model and support regular, positive interactions with children. Sometimes this might look like co-creating programmes and services with parents to learn and practice positive 'serve and return' interactions. And there are also lots of other ways that communities or service providers can do more.

Having clean and welcoming changing areas and places to feed children, giving staff encouragement and permission to get to know and respond to the children that come into their spaces, creating community spaces that is obviously welcome and value babies, toddlers and children, celebrating and thanking adults who take time to value and support children in their community, workplaces that work arrangements that help families have predictable routines and space for positive relationship building – all of these are examples of actions that can help to create whole community environments that are rich in serve and respond interactions for children.

One of the insights from this challenge has been that peer-to-peer connections and learnings - especially those that are well facilitated - may be playing an important role in helping to support resilience and to encourage positive adults/child interactions.

Approaches that link people to each other and which help families to be connected into informal networks of support are likely to help to build protective factors for children.

South Auckland's diversity and people's connections to their culture can also help to counter stress by supporting resilience. Feeling a connection to your culture is a potential protective factor and an existing strength that can be nurtured and developed in South Auckland.

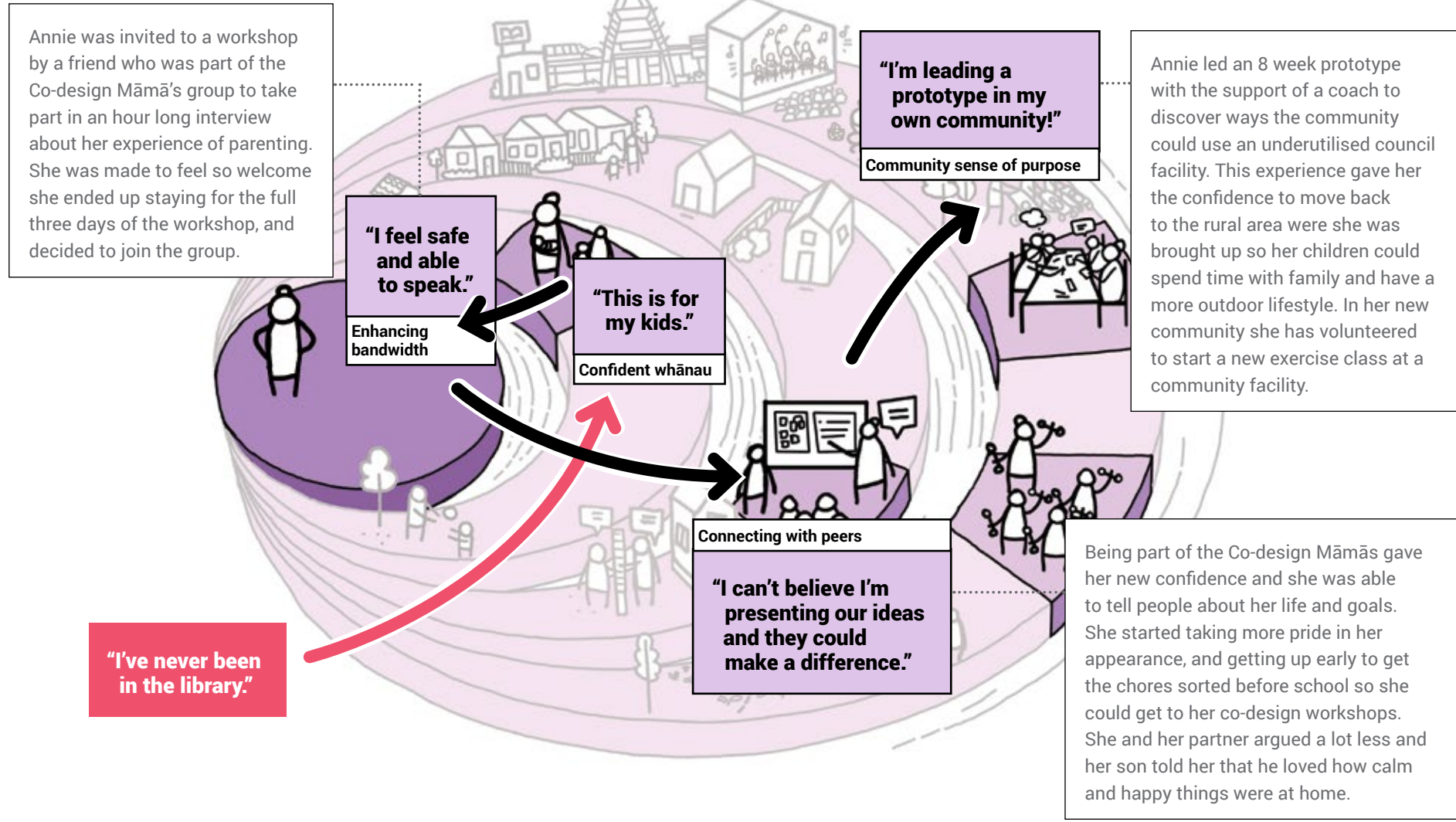
There are other actions that local government and services can take to help support positive outcomes for children. In particular providing a safe and supportive physical and built environment, which allows for an active lifestyle and exploration, and provides support to young families.



Key questions for people and organisations wanting to grow protective factors

- In what way are you valuing and enabling caring, responsive adult child relationships – not just activities and intellectual learning?
- Do you give your staff time to model and encourage positive relationships with children?
- Are the environments in which you are working supporting and encouraging parents to spend time with their children and to respond with sensitivity to their children's needs and interests?
- Are children genuinely welcome to be part of what you are doing – are they valued and encouraged to belong?
- How do you notice and celebrate adults who grow warm and responsive relationships with children?
- In what ways could you encourage adults in the lives of children to know more about the value of caring, responsive, sustained relationships with children?
- Do you encourage and promote healthy eating and nutrition?
- How are your actions improving the safety of the built environment for young families?
- Are there ways you can add value to physical spaces so they encourage

Annie's story of impact



3

Create contexts and processes that enable people to be part of their own solutions

Working in partnership with parents helps generate new ideas and builds and nurtures new skills and capabilities.

A common theme across the research and practice we have explored is that parents have significant untapped potential and a strong sense of agency.

Parents' insights, energy and contribution can help to create and improve community resources and services so they are more likely to restore and grow wellbeing, rather than stress and overload whānau.

When we invite whānau in and consciously create the context for them to be part of the solution we may get a double positive effect. Not only will the solution we design be more likely to work, but the process of designing that solution can help to grow parents' executive function and agency to make changes in their own lives.

The whānau-centric approach applied to the Early Years Challenge is one example of how whānau can be enabled to co-designing solutions.

We note a whānau-centric approach was appropriate for the parents we worked with in South Auckland and will be relevant to many other parts of Auckland and New Zealand but in different communities alternative cultural perspectives might need to be explored.



Key questions for people considering a whānau-centric or co-design approach

- How deeply do you understand the cultural context of the people you are working with?
- Have you dedicated the time and the right people to develop a relationship with the whānau/ community members you are working with?
- Have you considered how you can include whānau/ community in decision making processes? This can include setting the rules of engagement.
- Do you have the right expertise/ advice to ensure a culturally appropriate environment / process?
- Have you considered how you will make people feel welcome within the process and to working spaces?
- Have you ensured a working space and process which people will be able to see themselves (their culture and values) in?
- Have you considered how you will keep the whānau/ community updated as the process progresses?
- Have you thought about how the contribution of the whānau/ community can be acknowledged?
- Do you acknowledge that people are experts in their lives, and how do you show this through your interactions?
- How would a parent or member of the community share an idea with you? How would they know what happened to it?
- Are there a range of different opportunities in your community or organisations for parents to practise and develop their planning, goal setting and self-regulation skills?
- How do you take time to consciously build the capability of the parents you work with?
- Does your organisation have ways of supporting parents to stay engaged and keep practising self-regulation skills - like dealing with anger and frustration, wanting to give up, negotiating and disagreeing - even when they are under significant or several stresses?
- Are you looking for ways to create a "multiplier effect", helping adults see how small actions and successes in one part of their lives can create a reinforcing cycle of positive change in other areas of their lives for themselves and their children?
- Are there examples of biodegradable support in your team or organisation?
- Does your service or programme support peer-to-peer learning and engagement?

4

Have an innovation mindset

A final finding of our Early Years Challenge is the importance of having an innovation mindset.

Our work has highlighted the positive outlook of parents, their untapped potential, the value of peer-to-peer support and a belief communities can make a positive contribution. This makes parents potentially powerful partners in exploring new ideas or participating in improving existing support and services.

Innovation means taking risks, sharing results early, and learning quickly from ideas that don't work.

An innovation-friendly environment allows people to work together, test new ideas, and engage in active learning. There are a few key ingredients that can support innovation in the early childhood field:

- Explore ideas for taking action that are grounded in the latest research and informed by on-the-ground experience
- Develop policy, funding, and professional environments that support experimentation and entrepreneurial investment in new ideas

- Give explicit permission for staff to explore new ideas and support 'safe to fail' prototyping and testing
- Collaborate with people and organisations who are willing to work across sectors to test promising ideas, learn from failure, promote fast-cycle sharing, and lead broader impact
- Involve parents and whānau from the start and don't view them as add-ons to process
- Work in partnership with parents both helps generate new ideas but also builds and nurture new skills and capabilities.



Key questions for people and organisations wanting to have an innovation mindset

- Do you start with a strength based focus and value the assets and resources people already have?
- Where do you look for new ideas and fresh thinking? Are you seeking out new perspective and insights that challenge current approaches?
- What are the barriers to 'safe to fail' experimentation? How can they be managed or removed?
- Where does your organisation fit within the ecosystem? Who else is involved and how can you work together? Are you prepared to cede power and control to achieve positive change?
- How does the learning from current practice inform your future practice?
- How would a parent or member of the community share an idea with you?
- What would a whānau centric approach look like for your community?

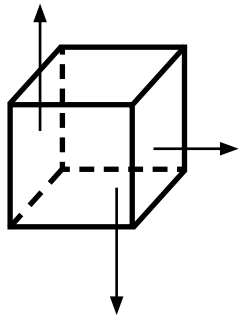


**What's next? What The
Southern Initiative is exploring**

If transformative impacts are to be realised from the Early Years Challenge the next steps need to focus on scaling up, out and deep.

Scaling up

Impacting Law and Policy Changing Institutions at the level of policy, rules & laws



Scaling out

Impacting greater numbers
Replication & dissemination,
increasing numbers of people
or communities impacted

Scaling deep

Impacting culture
Changing relationships, cultural values
& beliefs, including 'hearts & minds'

Different dimensions of Scaling
Impact Source: Allyson Hewitt, MARS

This is based on the view that this approach will more likely lead to the systemic change needed to improve outcomes for children in South Auckland.

Solely seeking agency led or service-based solutions cannot address the complexity of the many factors influencing the first 1000 days of a child's life.

Scaling up

Providing the report findings and recommendation plus the longitudinal research from GUINZ to advocate to decision makers about the importance of focusing on improving outcomes by alleviating the cumulative weight of toxic stress that parents and children experience especially during the first 1000 days,

Scaling out

Applying the challenge findings to new projects The Southern Initiative is involved in, including collaborations with Plunket in Manurewa and the Ministry of Education in Māngere as part of the South Auckland Social Investment Board initiative.

The Southern Initiative is also working within Auckland Council to explore how the network of council assets and resources in South Auckland can be best aligned to supporting parents with young children.

Scaling deep

Continuing work with Point Research and Growing up in New Zealand to explore the longitudinal data for families in South Auckland and what can have a positive impact on child outcomes.

Continue to share and deepen the practice of whānau centric co-design as a means of developing new ideas that build on the strengths, and potential of families and whānau in South Auckland.



Appendices and key sources

Appendices and key sources

This document should be read in concert with the following companion documents:

1. First 1000 Days in South Auckland - data review
2. Growing up in South Auckland: Risk, resilience and opportunities for change
3. Growing up in South Auckland: Pasifika report
4. Growing up in South Auckland: Māori report
5. The lived experience of parents in South Auckland
6. Storybook: 'Creating home' co-design sprint

We have drawn on the following core sources to contribute to the Early Years Challenge. Each of the above reports includes a full list of sources:

Growing up in New Zealand

Website: www.growingup.co.nz/

Morton, S.M.B., Atatoa Carr, P.E., Grant, C.C., Berry, S.D., Bandara, D.K., Mohal, J., Tricker, P. J., Ivory, V.C., Kingi, T.R., Liang, R., Perese, L.M., Peterson, E., Pryor, J.E., Reese, E., Waldie, K.E., and Wall, C.R. (2014a). *Growing Up in New Zealand: A longitudinal study of New Zealand children and their families. Now we are Two: Describing our first 1000 days*. Auckland: Growing Up in New Zealand.

Morton, S. M. B., Atatoa Carr, P. E., Berry, S. D., Grant, C. C., Bandara, D.K., Mohal, J., Tricker, P. J. (2014b). *Growing Up in New Zealand: A longitudinal study of New Zealand children and their families. Residential Mobility Report 1: Moving house in the first 1000 days*. Auckland: Growing Up in New Zealand.

Morton, S. M. B., Atatoa Carr, P. E., Grant, C. C., Berry, S. D., Mohal, J., Pillai, A. 2015. *Growing Up in New Zealand: A longitudinal study of New Zealand children and their families. Vulnerability Report 2: Transitions in exposure to vulnerability in the first 1000 days of life*. Auckland: Growing Up in New Zealand.

Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University

Website: developingchild.harvard.edu/

Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2009). *Maternal Depression Can Undermine the Development of Young Children: Working Paper No. 8*.

Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2010). *The Foundations of Lifelong Health Are Built in Early Childhood*.

Center on the Developing Child (2015). *The Science of Resilience* (InBrief).

Retrieved from

Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2016). *Building Core Capabilities for Life: The Science Behind the Skills Adults Need to Succeed in Parenting and in the Workplace*.

National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2015). *Supportive Relationships and Active Skill-Building Strengthen the Foundations of Resilience: Working Paper 13*. <http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu>

Babcock, Elisabeth & Ruiz De Luzuriaga, Nicki (2016). *Families Disrupting the Cycle of Poverty: Coaching with an Intergenerational Lens*. Boston: Economic Mobility Pathways.

Scarcity and bandwidth

Sendhil Mullainathan, and Eldar Shafir, 2013, *Scarcity: Why Having Too Little Means So Much*, Time Books, Henry Holt & Company LLC, New York

Poverty and decision-making: *How behavioural science can improve opportunity in the UK*, The Behavioural Insights Team, Kizzy Gandy, Katy King, Pippa Streeter Hurlle, Chloe Bustin and Kate Glazebrook. October 2016

Scaling innovation

Scaling Out, Scaling Up, Scaling Deep: Advancing Systemic Social Innovation and the Learning Processes to Support it Prepared for the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation and Tamarack Institute by Darcy Riddell and Michele-Lee Moore (October 2015)

Contact us:

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