

Insights on Positive Parenting in Waitakere

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About Innovate Change

innovate change is a social innovation agency that identifies and implements new and creative ways to design, deliver and review health and social care programmes, services and policy.

Most of our work follows our [innovative action model](#), and this document summarises the insights generated from completing the first stage of this process (questioning) for the **SKIP Waitakere Social Innovation Process**.

SKIP stands for Strategies with Kids, Information for Parents. It's a network of organisations and individuals committed to making New Zealand a better place for children to grow up. Supported by a small team within the Ministry of Social Development, SKIP works with communities to change attitudes and behaviours toward children, and to provide support to parents. The focus is families with children aged 0–5, as this is when the foundations of positive, loving parent–child relationships are established. You can find out more at www.skip.org.nz

SKIP is not about doing things for communities; it's doing things with communities, to grow positive parenting in their space. SKIP looks different in different places because it's about local ideas and local opportunities.

The SKIP team at the Ministry of Social Development engaged **innovate change** to develop community and parent led initiatives that help grow positive parenting in Waitakere.

How we look after children has a huge impact. Good parenting means that kids can thrive, belong and achieve. It affects their behaviour as children, their learning at school, their mental wellbeing and their ability to parent their own children. Although it's never too late to learn new habits, and it's possible to break the cycle, when we parent kids well we set them up for a great start in life.

Our Methodology

The insights that follow have been generated from a range of interviews, parent and whānau engagement and a targeted review of literature.

We trained 11 parents to interview parents in their community and social networks. They interviewed another 39 parents, of which 23% were fathers; 20% Māori; 9% Pacific; 17% Chinese, Indian or other Asian; and 25% under 20 years.

We conducted in-depth interviews with 11 professionals from organisations that support parents, including Plunket and Violence Free Waitakere.

We held a whānau event in Ranui, bringing together 30 local parents and 12 children. At this event, parents and children worked in small groups to discuss what helped families in Ranui.

We carried out a targeted review of New Zealand and international research literature to identify up-to-date evidence about effective parent and community centred ways of supporting people to parent pre-schoolers.

For concise summaries of key findings from provider interviews and the research literature, or for more information about this project or other services and projects undertaken by **innovate change**, please visit www.innovatechange.co.nz.

1. Parenting defines your life





Parenting defines who you are, what you do, and where you go. Even if your children do not live with you, they are a huge part of who you are.

For teenage parents in particular, if you have a baby, suddenly your life is totally different from your friends. Some friends don't even know what to say to you. All of a sudden you are really busy, and your baby is everything. Becoming a parent changes everything.

***Get son ready for kindy.
Drop at kindy. Go to uni.
If I have a meeting on the day,
go to grandparents to pick son up.
Have dinner at grandparents.
Go home, get ready for bed.
Then study.***

Typical day for mother of a 3 year old, Henderson

2. Parents want the best for their children





Parents and families want their children to be happy, healthy, growing and learning. Generally they want to share their own identity and for their children to have the best opportunities possible.

When things are not going well, parents are often their own harshest critics, and they usually try again and again to get it right. The greatest joy, pride and satisfaction that parents express is often about their children's happiness or success.

When I taught my son to be gentle around younger children.

Young Dad from New Lynn talks about a good parenting moment

Insights about: barriers to parenting



3. Isolated parents struggle the most





***You can't bring kids up on
your own.***

Ranui parent

The strongest theme from this project is the importance of social support and overcoming isolation. The parent interviews, the whānau dinner, the children's views, the literature and the providers all stressed that things can go wrong when parents are unsupported and isolated. Isolation is exacerbated when people feel unsafe in public places, as they go out less often.

In contrast, when you have family and friends to support you, when there are people who can come if you are sick, when there is someone to help out when babies won't calm down, when someone brings food when you are exhausted, then you can cope with so much more.

Social support is people who don't judge, who listen, laugh or support, and who sometimes help out. It might come from:

- neighbours and other people nearby
- your own family
- friends (especially those with children of a similar age)
- some online communities.

Research shows that the biggest influences on parenting are the people closest to you. Family, peers and communities support parents and help to parent too. They model what is acceptable and they can be a pathway to help. Outside advice via media or face-to-face contact is most likely to be used if it is from trusted advisers who are known in your community or who seem to have information relevant to you, your family and your culture.

4. Low income and transport are big barriers to parenting well





Lack of money means you have a lack of things to do, you can't get out of the house, you live in a suburb which is not good, you feel unsafe. You can't get a computer to search for jobs. Even in the day scary people hang out in the park. When it's raining you are stuck.

Young dad, Glen Eden

Not having enough money or transport were major barriers for many of the parents participating in this project. A lack of income affects the ability of parents to buy healthy food, to afford childcare, to get to the doctor, shops or friends, and to participate in community activities such as sports or social events.

Lack of income is particularly harmful for those who are socially isolated. For teen parents who do not feel welcome in their local community, not having money for transport prevents them from going to see other young parents with whom they feel comfortable. Similarly, for parents who are recent migrants and also have a low income, it can be hard to travel and meet others who might speak the same language.

5. Some parents don't know what help is available





***I don't have, or ask for, support.
There is nothing for people like me.
I do it all by myself.***


Mum, new to Waitakere

Interviews with providers and with some parents illustrated that there are resources and opportunities to help with parenting. But people need to know about these resources and opportunities, feel confident using them, and be able to get there and/or afford the service.

Providers highlighted resources such as: parks, libraries, events, church support, Playcentres, SPACE, Te Atatu Peninsula Parents, Toolbox Courses, Mainly Music, Mainly Mums, Marvellous Mums, Parent Aid, Incredible Years, Man Alive, Thrive, Plunket, locally based playgroups or coffee groups, Youth Horizons, Violence Free Waitakere, and West Auckland Mummies blog site, as well as other social media sites.

Some parents were aware of many of these resources. These were mainly parents who had been in a local area for a long time and/or had transport, and spoke English as a first language. In contrast, those who were new to a suburb or to New Zealand were much less aware of what was available.

Research highlights that, as well as knowing what is available, families need to feel comfortable and welcome to use resources, and have non-threatening opportunities to get involved. Local, free and regular opportunities to get support are key.

A photograph showing the lower half of an adult wearing dark jeans and a child standing inside a wire shopping basket. The adult is walking on a light-colored tiled floor. The child is wearing a dark t-shirt and khaki shorts. In the background, a grocery store aisle with shelves is visible.

6. Social judgement keeps some young parents at home



If I had a magic wand to change one thing it would be to get rid of judgements.

Young mum, Massey

One of the barriers to parenting well is feeling judged and unsupported. Parents described others' judgements as making it hard to have faith in themselves and as increasing isolation by making them feel shy about going out or asking for help.

This was particularly apparent for teen parents. Teen parents often felt isolated from friends without children, whose lives were so different. Yet they were not always comfortable in settings with other parents or in their communities. Some said that they felt so looked down on that they didn't go to the shops and only ventured out to see family, friends or perhaps a teen mums or dads group.

Other parents (not teenagers) also discussed feeling judged or looked down on, particularly if their child might be sick or misbehaving, if they had several children, or if they seemed like they were poor or not doing it right.

7. Parenting is tough when you face many challenges at once





All parents need support sometimes. Perhaps it is the hardest for families who face many challenges at once.

Professional working with parents in Waitakere

All parents face challenges sometimes, even those who have resources, know an area well and have good access to support. However, parenting can be particularly tough when you face many challenges at once.

Parenting can be particularly challenging when:

- families have many young children and/or multiple births
- parents are separating, recently separated or beginning blended families
- family members face issues such as violence, alcohol or substance use, or justice issues
- a parent, child or family member has a disability or chronic illness.

These issues can be particularly problematic in combination with long standing issues such as:

- social isolation
- financial pressures
- lack of transport
- not knowing about services
- feeling unsafe, judged or unwelcome in communities.

**Insights about:
possible ways
to support
positive parenting**



8. Increasing social support would make a difference





Playgroups, close to home, with people who accept you. That would change things for me.

Mum, Ranui

When we asked parents and families what would make a difference to support their parenting, overwhelmingly the most common suggestions related to reducing isolation and increasing social support. Parents considered that things that would really support them would be options to meet others and develop connections, for instance through:

- regular and free playgroups and child friendly events within walking distance of their homes where they could get to know other parents
- groups with peers, particularly for groups such as new migrant parents and young parents
- getting to know neighbours
- encouraging online connections with parents and the community.

Many parents considered that such groups would become informal social supports for them and would provide opportunities to learn from and encourage each other.

9. Parents want child friendly places to go and things to do





If you are new to an area you need an introduction to know what is there.

Dad, Henderson

Parents want child friendly places to go and things to do with their children in Waitakere.

Parents said they want these places to be safe, easy to get to (often by walking), and to include some shelter in case of rain. Parents in Waitakere want things to do that are regularly occurring (e.g. every week or every few weeks) and in their own communities, so that they can have fun with their children and build relationships with others.

Examples of child friendly places to go and things to do included:

- child friendly parks (with shelter and toilets)
- child friendly cafes and shops
- playgroups and meetups in parks
- inviting activities in libraries, sports clubs churches and community centres.

It is not enough for these places and activities to simply exist. Parents need to know about them and they need to be easy to access and regularly available.

10. Online and face-to-face parenting support can help





I would like local support groups for parents please.

Ranui parent

We need a New Lynn facebook page for parents.

New Lynn parent

Parents, professionals and the research suggest that there are several areas of support that can make a real difference for positive parenting.

Parent support groups or parenting classes are valued by parents, especially where these:

- are culturally relevant, consistent with parents' own values and use new migrants' own languages
- are experiential, use good learning and behaviour change principles and build skills that are relevant to the participants at the time
- build connections between parents
- include mothers, fathers and other family members
- include follow up and/or build connections with those who can provide support and encouragement in the future.

Some parents would welcome home visits from mentors or professionals to help them keep on track and grow their parenting skills.

Many parents reported using social media to connect with other parents and to gain support in a quick and easy way. They said this could help them know what is available in their community and could provide parenting support at their fingertips. Media and social media campaigns about parenting and about issues such as child safety and reducing violence can be helpful. Parenting skills can be successfully shared via high quality TV programmes.

Voices of Children



**We are proud and
confident and we love
spending time with
our families**





No alcohol in the playground or fields.

Child on what could be better about Ranui

The whānau event we held in Ranui brought together 30 local parents and 12 children. Some of the photos in this document were taken at that event. This section presents some of the children's perspectives on family life in Ranui.

What is good about being in Ranui?

The children we met put a lot of emphasis on playing sport, and playing generally. Playing in the local park was seen as a really positive part of being a child in Ranui, as was kapa haka.

There were many positive comments about the school. School plays a strong part in these children's lives.

What could be better about being in Ranui?

The children wanted to see gangs, drugs, alcohol and crime eliminated. They wanted more sports facilities and a bigger and better library.

Hopes and dreams

These children spoke and drew about aspiring to do well in sports, in school and in music. Some wanted to be famous and live forever.

The children reported many positives about family life in Ranui, including speaking te reo Māori, playing games together, and spending time with family and friends.

Children did not express the same deep concerns about personal safety as adults.

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