ECE Participation Programme Evaluation

Stage 3

Report to the Ministry of Education

Linda Mitchell, Patricia Meagher-Lundberg, Claire Davison, Helena Kara, Telesia Kalavite
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We appreciated very much the assistance of the participation initiative providers who generously welcomed us into their settings, enabling us to undertake interviews and organising families/whānau for us to interview. Participation initiative providers filled in questionnaires and distributed them to their coordinators. They took questionnaires to families/whānau and supported them to complete the questionnaires. Their assistance enabled us to gather very useful information and to undertake in-depth interviews. We valued the willingness of families/whānau to take time to complete the questionnaire and to talk openly about their experiences and views, for it is ultimately the voices of families/whānau and children that will tell us how well the initiatives are working.

Within the Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research, Helena Kara undertook coding and data capture as well as being a member of the research team. Bronwen Cowie was a member of the EWG (with authors of this report) and provided critical feedback, and Margaret Drummond undertook formatting of the instruments and report.
Executive summary

This report is from the third stage of an evaluation of the Ministry of Education’s (MOE) ECE Participation Programme. The overall evaluation focus is on how the Participation Programme and individual initiatives addressed barriers to participation in early childhood education (ECE) for priority groups in target communities.

The Participation Initiatives are:

1. Engaging Priority Families/whānau (EPF)—intensive support programmes for 3- and 4-year-olds and their families/whānau, aimed at leading to enrolment in ECE, regular participation in ECE, support for learning at home and a successful transition to school. The priority for this initiative is families/whānau and whānau in the most vulnerable situations whose children are not participating in ECE and who, without intensive support, are unlikely to do so.

2. Supported Playgroups (SP)—certificated playgroups, with regular support from a kaimanaaki/playgroup educator in areas with low participation.

3. Flexible and Responsive Home-based Services (FRHB)—aim to either expand existing services and community agencies into home-based ECE delivery or to transition informal care arrangements into licensed and certificated ECE environments.

4. Identity, Language, Culture and Community Engagement (ILCCE)—support packages providing identity, language and culture professional support for clusters of services that have available child spaces and are not responsive to their community.

5. Intensive Community Participation Programme (ICPP)—community-led participation projects established to address the specific reasons children are not participating in ECE.

6. Targeted Assistance for Participation (TAP)—grants, incentives and partnership opportunities to help establish new services and child spaces in those communities where new child places are needed most and are not being created quickly enough.

7. High-level evaluation questions are related to ECE participation, outcomes for children/tamariki, family/whānau and communities, provision of quality ECE, and the role of the Ministry of Education. In essence these aim to find out about how well and in what ways the Participation Programme has contributed to enhancing each of these outcomes, and the role played by the MOE in developing and delivering effective participation initiatives.

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This evaluation report integrates findings from across the three years of evaluation to address the evaluation questions, with particular attention to EPF, FRHB, TAP and SP initiatives. The evaluation findings are analysed to pinpoint critical success factors for each initiative, what is worth scaling up and continuing, what changes could improve initiatives and how the initiatives can be designed to best meet the needs of the groups they are working with.
Key findings

ECE enrolments through Initiatives

Prior participation in ECE has increased steadily over the time the Participation Programme has been operating. The government goal, announced in March 2012, is that in 2016, 98% of all children starting school will have participated in quality ECE. The national picture of participation shows participation to be 95.9% nationally in June 2014, representing an increase of 1.5 percentage points from 94.4% in June 2010. Ministry figures show that prior participation for children in Decile 1–3 schools also increased 4.2 percentage points between June 2010 and June 2014. At least some of these figures come from children who left the participation initiatives for school.

MOE figures of enrolments through the initiatives show 3,497 active enrolments at December 2013, with 8,344 enrolments since the start of the Participation Programme. Consistent with policy intent, these were predominantly Māori (54%) and Pasifika (41%) children in low income communities. Contributing significantly to increased enrolments was the establishment of the ECE services funded through TAP initiatives. Once the establishment phase in 2011 was completed, enrolments escalated quickly, from 294 in December 2012 to 1432 in December 2013. The December 2013 current TAP enrolments comprised 40% of the total current enrolments in December 2013. EPF enrolments, for 3 and 4 year olds, have also contributed greatly to overall enrolments making up around a third of total current enrolments for 2011 and 2012 and a quarter of current enrolments for 2013.

However it should be noted that figures for some initiatives need to be taken in context. SP and HB initiatives cater largely for younger children with between 60 to 80% of children enrolled aged 2 years or less. SP and HB are offering a pathway to enrolment in formal ECE provisions. ILCCE does not work directly with families (the initiative was designed to work with ECE services to improve their responsiveness to priority families) and the factors behind a family enrolling their child in a centre in a cluster in which ILCCE was working are unknown. We do not know the reason the families enrolled their child in the centre, whether the families had already attended ECE, or the duration of attendance. Only two of the ICPP projects were directly providing some limited ECE provision (one day per week at most), as ECE delivery was not a feature of this initiative either.

It would appear the enrolment figures reflect what happened with the implementation of the initiatives. EPF and SP initiatives had a model that was easiest to set up using existing community networks and iwi-based providers. This was an extension of the work already being done by many of these providers so carried some momentum from the outset. This momentum continued to support ongoing enrolments. The HB initiative, however, faced some challenges due to initial limitations around community networks and access to appropriate caregivers, impeding enrolments. Where providers ran more than one initiative, particularly SP and EPF, this offered families choice around the type of service appropriate to them which in turn may have contributed to an increase in HB enrolments over time.

TAP-funded projects had a much slower start with entire centres being built in some cases. Delays in gaining building and resources consents and the time taken to complete projects meant that ECE enrolment figures for the first year of the initiatives were non-existent but grew quickly in the second year as projects were finished and children were able to be enrolled. TAP projects started in the first year were being completed in 2013 contributing to the escalation in numbers enrolled in 2013.

However, the Participation Programme has only limited success in sustaining ECE participation. Many children have left initiatives. While some children go on to school and others to another ECE service, we do not know where some 3006 children, a considerable number, have gone or the reasons why they have left.
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EPF

- The EPF initiative is working well in supporting participation in ECE for priority families/whānau in target communities. Cost free participation is largely enabled through the use of the ‘20 hours ECE’ policy and EPF providers enrolling families/whānau in those ECE services which had no costs for families/whānau. In some cases, EPF workers had to negotiate with ECE services to achieve this. Children generally attend up to but not more than 20 hours a week. EPF providers were generally very positive about the effectiveness of EPF in engaging non-participating families in ECE in their local communities.

- Knowledge of community context and issues was considered essential in not only identifying but being able to engage families in EPF and consequently in ECE. EPF providers knew families well and were often from the same ethnic backgrounds as families whom they worked with. The context of the communities required different cultural approaches to support cultural responsiveness to families/whānau enrolled in the initiative. EPF providers and the families they worked with overall considered that community involvement was integral to their organisation being able to identify, recruit and work with families/whānau in their local communities.

- EPF providers addressed barriers to ECE participation in a variety of ways, but underpinning all approaches was the notion of brokering. That is on-going negotiation and discussion, translating the knowledge held by one party to another in order to resolve and address issues that arose in preparing families/whānau to engage in ECE services and with other family support services. Examples were given from parent viewpoints of how the brokering worked in practice: EPF providers finding out about family needs especially in relation to cost, location, transport and philosophy; discussing possible services and explaining why these might suit the family; giving information to parents in forms that were understandable; explaining why ECE is valuable for children’s learning and development; and taking families to visit ECE services to see if they feel comfortable there.

- The time span covered by EPF contracts is for the provider to work with families of 3- and 4-year-olds from the point of contact to the first three months of school. This timeframe was effective in allowing the intensive work that is needed, including regular contact with families/whānau from the point of recruitment until transition into school.

- The time span of EPF contracts also means providers have time to develop a profile in the community, develop the most appropriate systems and processes to support their work in the community, establish networks with other community organisations essential to supporting families/whānau, including ECE services, and build trusting relationships with families/whānau. This span allows enough time to develop foundations for change within EPF families/whānau, often disengaged from education including ECE. While overall the contracting system worked well in providing adequate time to achieve the workload, one concern expressed by providers was that when EPF contracts come to an end, they may have to remove participating families from their lists before work with them is completed. At the time of reporting, negotiations are underway around renewal of contracts for EPF providers which may alleviate these concerns.

- EPF families/whānau’ engagement both with the ECE service used and in early learning in the home, can be attributed to the work of EPF providers and their ability to understand and respond to the needs within their communities, both cultural and socioeconomic. The contracting of EPF providers able to walk in two worlds was important in gaining trust with families/whānau and the resulting engagement
in learning. For families, learning meant understanding the benefits of ECE in terms of understanding how children learn at a preschool age and the importance of this prior to transition to school, gathering knowledge about age appropriate educational activities and learning about incorporating learning into daily routines, and gaining the confidence to view the ECE setting as “their place”. Overall, levels of engagement can be viewed on a continuum of confidence levels, with some families/whānau seeing learning as something that happens externally to them, while others were engaged in the education of the children both at home and at ECE.

- One issue is the number of families/whānau with complex needs which means education diminishes as a priority in and amongst other needs. Increases in participation in target communities appear to have left providers the challenge of now working with those families/whānau remaining, many of whom have high needs including CYF referrals and economic issues. The time required to do this work can be significant. Provider and family/whānau interviews showed that some ECE services are not responsive to the needs and circumstances of priority families/whānau with high needs. Where ECE services are not accommodating community need, there is a place for professional development around cultural responsiveness and working with families/whānau.

- Overall, EPF initiatives work well to address the needs of families/whānau, many with complex needs, support families on a range of health and welfare issues and ensure engagement with suitable and responsive ECE services. EPF providers were successful in developing trusting relationships with many families/whānau with complex needs. For some of these families trust in the system to work to benefit them and their children was established for the first time.

FRHB

- The FRHB initiative has had only limited success in increasing participation of priority families who do not attend ECE. It is the smallest of the initiatives with regard to numbers of children. At December 2013, only 123 children were enrolled or 3.5 percent of all initiative enrolments. The percentage of children who had never attended ECE before varied amongst the providers interviewed and surveyed from 40 percent to 20 percent, suggesting that FRHB is missing the target group for some enrolments. Families who moved from ECE to FRHB did so for practical reasons (cost, flexibility) or because of dissatisfaction with their current ECE.

- FRHB has particular features that cater well for some families. Flexibility of hours is important for families/whānau who work irregular hours or shifts or do weekend work. It appeals to parents for its home-like characteristics and was seen as catering well for the needs of infants and for children with special educational needs (although should not been a default option for the latter). Families using FRHB said they had confidence in the carer (who might be a family member) and thought their child was safe. Some parents who had negative experiences of education services (school and ECE) preferred FRHB for these reasons. Some families had cultural reasons for liking FRHB when the caregiver was from their own cultural background. Sometimes this was a family member. Nevertheless, some providers said there was an inability to recruit Pasifika teachers and Pasifika cultural resources were scarce. Like all ECE services, being free and accessible (locally provided or transport offered) supported the sustained participation of children in FRHB.

- FRHB providers and parents had some similar and some different views of quality. Providers emphasised curriculum principles and strands, especially a holistic curriculum, family and community, and responsive relationships, alongside structural features—educator qualifications, small group size
and educator pay. Parents emphasised activities done by the child, communication, and resources available, and the structural feature of small group size. The main learning outcomes identified by providers and parents were children developing social competence, independence, self-help skills and early literacy and numeracy concepts.

- We found that the level of training of caregivers and professional support varied amongst FRHB providers. The minimum requirements set out in regulation are for each FRHB coordinator to be a qualified and registered ECE teacher and to support caregivers by monthly visits (and take steps to observe each child), to contact each caregiver once per fortnight, and to be available to respond to parents and caregivers. Caregivers themselves are required as a minimum to have training in First Aid. Two providers in our sample went beyond these minimum requirements through more frequent contact, supporting caregivers to obtain early childhood qualifications and providing regular professional development opportunities for caregivers. On the other hand, one provider offered only the minimum and was criticised by a parent as being just a “toy drop off service”. Fees/costs/low rates of pay, minimal training and the uncertainty of work for caregivers when children are withdrawn unexpectedly are resulting in poor retention and instability of educators.

- FRHB may provide a pathway to other centre-based ECE and to school. Several FRHB parents/whānau commented that they now intended to use other centre-based ECE services prior to their child transitioning to school. FRHB providers were supporting parents/whānau to select schools, enrol children and make visits prior to starting.

- Family/whānau engagement was variable in the FRHB that we looked at. When relatives are employed as carers, this aspect was usually strong. A provider and parents at each stage of the evaluation voiced a frustration that the FRHB model did not provide for teachers/coordinators to work directly with parents/whānau.

**TAP**

- The TAP initiative has been successful in supporting ECE participation in the target communities through use of a TAP grant to build facilities or develop existing services in these local communities. By December 2013, TAP had the most enrolments over time of all initiatives. Eighty percent of children had not attended ECE before. These gains in participation are likely to endure over time since once established, the provision does not require further TAP funding, and is a resource for future generations of families in these low income localities. Extensive community consultation prior to establishing new centres took place to find out about needs. Enrolment policies have reduced barriers of cost (all TAP providers interviewed reported on ways to mitigate costs for families of ECE) and about half the providers enabled flexible enrolments that suit families/whānau.

- All providers regarded the initiatives as working well in terms of full enrolments and participation. Providers from the bilingual services, Māori Trust board and hub services also spoke about and emphasised connections with their communities as reasons why they considered their ECE services were working well.

- Three TAP2 services (of 16 TAP services surveyed) reported that TAP funding was used to purchase vans. Of 11 TAP services interviewed, vans were used by two TAP2 and three TAP1 service providers. Most providers used vans as needed; but in two newly built centres, 70 percent of children regularly came in a van. Transport seemed not to be needed where TAP centres are local; but the practice of providing vans and transporting children regularly needs to be weighed up against the disadvantages where parents are not directly connected to the centre, an issue raised by one provider.
Most providers found ways to communicate with families/whānau that would support their involvement and engagement in learning. These were through approaches that could be described as empowering and that valued what parents could contribute. Communication was tailored to the needs of families.

Transition to school practices is one area where there were variable practices, and some potentially unhelpful ideas e.g., narrowly focused skills teaching, suggesting a need for professional development opportunities.

Outstanding examples were provided of how language and culture and support for identity were woven through the curriculum by Pasifika centres and iwi-based centres that we saw. This was enabled for iwi-based centres by local whānau/hapū/iwi deciding what knowledge should be available and how it should be made accessible (Penetito, 2001). In Pasifika centres, it was enabled by having fluent language speakers as coordinators and supporting a bilingual curriculum and parents to use their language with pride. Other ECE TAP services varied in their responsiveness. We were given examples from six providers of staff drawing on the funds of knowledge residing in families/whānau and communities, employing staff from the cultural backgrounds of families/whānau, and offering professional development. But two providers gave minimal or no credit to language and culture as being important, and one of these emphasised poverty as the “common culture”.

In common, all TAP ECE providers interviewed offered a range of opportunities for family support in addition to Early Childhood education. Some services acted as integrated hubs for services offering ECE as well as other services for families/whānau e.g., budgeting, health. Most also held a comprehensive network of relationships with services in their community they could call on if necessary.

Overall, many TAP funded service providers whom we interviewed offered innovative exemplars of practice and provision. Parents reported on engagement in children’s learning through copying ideas from teachers, involvement in assessment, and information. Employment, e.g., as relievers, cleaners, maintenance workers, cooks, van drivers, office staff, recognised skills and was described as empowering. One parent interviewed began an ECE teacher education course. The development of a curriculum whāriki inclusive of language and culture can play a critical role in strengthening identity. The model of ECE centres as a ‘hub’ that houses or brings together interdisciplinary teams to support families/whānau and children would seem to be a model that is well worth pursuing. From the viewpoint of parents who were struggling in their approaches to external agencies such as WINZ, the support provided by the EPF coordinator (who was employed by the same ECE service provider) in finding out about and communicating with them was extremely valuable. It seemed that feeling intimidated or shy were some barriers to effective communication. Parents who became employed in two centres as part of the staffing, did well in their new responsibilities and one went on to further training.

Easy access to ECE has been supported through provision of locally based supported playgroups handy to parents in a local neighbourhood. The exception is where parents want to attend a special character playgroup such as in their home language, or are in a rural community, where travel may be needed. Playgroups are free so they have addressed cost barriers. Most are open for limited hours and a child can attend a maximum of four hours. Some providers offer more than one service and are able to match parents’ needs with a mix of service types, such as kindergarten or home-based and playgroup.
Playgroup works well and has addressed barriers for some playgroup parents: those who do not want to leave their child in another’s care, parents who have time to be with their child in the playgroup session, and parents who have cultural reasons for wanting a community language playgroup.

- For many children too, playgroup is the first step into formal ECE, and they go on to other services. Nearly half the families/whānau surveyed (21) said they had thought about leaving playgroup to move to a formal ECE setting. Reasons included independence for children, socialisation and a formal education programme prior to school.

- Sustainability is a key issue—playgroups fluctuate in roll numbers. All SP providers interviewed/surveyed felt that sustainability is supported by a skilled coordinator working with the playgroup to analyse problems and plan measures to address issues. Sustainability is more likely for playgroups that have a permanent and free venue, something that only some playgroups enjoy. The cost of venues and need to pack and unpack equipment is problematic and a disincentive for playgroup parents to persist. Classrooms in school grounds offer one solution to this issue, but few playgroups were able to access these. The idea of a mobile unit with a qualified coordinator to regularly visit community centres to hold a playgroup is another way that playgroups could be supported, one that has been successfully used in the past. The coordinator would need to have cultural understanding and language to match the community.

- Benefits for families from attending a supported playgroup were
  - opportunities for networking with others; and
  - opportunities for support from knowledgeable coordinators and a chance to take part in courses.

- The coordinator plays a crucial role in supporting playgroup quality, and encouraging families/whānau to take part in the playgroup and early learning. Coordinators described the model as highly successful in engendering parental involvement in the playgroup and in their child’s learning. Parents and coordinators alike are troubled by the future loss of coordinators as their limited contract expires. There was evidence that the curriculum understanding of some coordinators was restricted; and importantly that coordinators who are qualified in ECE, experienced and have “life skills” can work very effectively with playgroups to lift quality and parent learning. This suggests that offering playgroups access to good quality professional support and workshops by a coordinator with these attributes would help sustain the quality of learning for parents and children.

- Resources available from Te Kura and from some providers are welcomed and used by playgroup parents; these offer ideas for activities that parents can do at home.

- Iwi-based providers have played an empowering role in finding out about needs of whānau and constructing a curriculum for puna founded in te reo and tikanga Māori and with their own local stories. This is significant for Māori families/whānau and is contributing to a sense of identity.

- Community language playgroups are successful in offering a service where parents and family are able to speak in their home language and contribute their cultural expertise, enabling them to uphold and strengthen their cultural values and languages. This is empowering and crucial to a strong sense of identity, both for parents and children.
• Playgroups vary in their hours of opening, with most offering sessional ECE. Children are predominantly younger: at December 2013, 76 percent were under three years.

Conclusion
There is robust evidence that good quality ECE can contribute to children’s learning and development and to the wellbeing of families. The Participation Programme and individual initiatives are succeeding in enhancing participation in target communities for priority families. In order to have a greater impact, several challenges could be addressed and note taken of particularly positive features.

First, the targeting of families is only partially successful within the designated localities: there are a high percentage of families “exiting” the initiatives for unknown reasons. Nor does the Participation Programme cater for priority families who live outside the designated communities.

Secondly, despite being able to place families successfully in ECE services, providers reported bypassing ECE services that they did not see as culturally responsive or welcoming, or that charged high fees. Parents reported these to be barriers that prevented them from participating.

The evaluation and international literature has demonstrated that ECE services cater well for priority families and children when they are integrated with wider services to support families. These models were seen in successful TAP services, and in ways in which EPF providers brokered help for families from family support agencies. Many supported playgroups were also providing EPF and many were involved in other initiatives and services within the community. This integrated model of operating is promoted in countries such as England, Australia and Canada and seems to be a factor in successfully working with priority families.

Finally, the evaluation has demonstrated ways in which cultural responsiveness to Māori and Pasifika families can be enhanced through connections with iwi and cultural organisations, and weaving cultural understandings and local knowledge into the curriculum. Exemplars and professional development are ways that could be used to support cultural responsiveness.
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1. Introduction

This report is from the third stage of an evaluation of the Ministry of Education’s (MOE) ECE Participation Programme. The overall evaluation focus is on how the Participation Programme and individual initiatives addressed barriers to participation in early childhood education (ECE) for target groups and communities.

The Participation Programme comprises a package of six initiatives to increase participation in ECE in target communities with the greatest numbers of children starting school without having attended ECE. When it was announced in Budget 2010, the aim of the programme was for an additional 3,500 children to enrol in quality ECE by the year 2014, and to prioritise communities with the greatest number who do not have prior ECE participation. Priority children are deemed to be non-participating Māori and Pasifika children, and children from low socioeconomic communities. Since then, in March 2012, as part of the Better Public Services programme, the Government set a goal that in 2016, 98% of children starting school will have participated in quality ECE.

The participation initiatives are:

1. Engaging Priority Families/whānau (EPF)—intensive support programmes for 3- and 4-year-olds and their families/whānau, aimed at leading to enrolment in ECE, regular participation in ECE, support for learning at home and a successful transition to school. The priority for this initiative is families/whānau and whānau in the most vulnerable situations whose children are not participating in ECE and who, without intensive support, are unlikely to do so.

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5. Intensive Community Participation Programme (ICPP)—community-led participation projects established to address the specific reasons children are not participating in ECE.

6. Targeted Assistance for Participation (TAP)—grants, incentives and partnership opportunities to help establish new services and child spaces in those communities where new child places are needed most and are not being created quickly enough.

The participation initiatives were introduced in waves over 2010 to 2014. The targeting of particular initiatives within target areas was based on a needs assessment and local MOE knowledge.

The Ministry of Education funded an evaluation of the Participation Programme to take place over four years. The purpose of the evaluation is both summative in gauging the effectiveness of the Participation Programme approach and outcomes, and formative in guiding development. A team from the Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational
Research, University of Waikato, was selected to work with the Ministry of Education to undertake Stage 1 of the evaluation in 2011 and 2012, Stage 2 in 2012 and 2013, Stage 3 in 2013 and 2014, and a final stage as agreed. An Evaluation Working Group of Ministry of Education staff and University of Waikato researchers is leading the evaluation. It is responsible for the high-level evaluation objectives and evaluation plans, with further roles and responsibilities being assigned during the evaluation.

**Evaluation questions**

High-level evaluation questions are related to ECE participation, outcomes for children/tamariki, family/whānau and communities, provision of quality ECE, and the role of the Ministry of Education. In essence these aim to find out about how well and in what ways the Participation Programme has contributed to enhancing each of these outcomes, and the role played by the MOE in developing and delivering effective participation initiatives.

Table 1. Evaluation objectives, questions and stage at which data will be collected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective 1: ECE participation for Māori children, Pasifika children and children in low socioeconomic communities. Data gathered in each phase, with in-depth focus in Stage 1 and Stage 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation questions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 How effective has the Participation Programme been in raising participation in high quality ECE?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 How well do the initiatives and their underpinning approach work individually and together to address the main barriers to participation in areas where there is currently low ECE participation?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation questions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Have learning outcomes for participating children been improved?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 How well do the initiatives support parents’ engagement in ECE?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How well do the initiatives support parents’ involvement with children’s education?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Have the initiatives been responsive to family needs for ECE?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Have each of the initiatives and the Participation Programme overall addressed issues of identity, language and culture in the communities where the initiatives are being undertaken?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective 3: Improved responsiveness to participating communities. Key focus in Stage 2. Data gathered in Stages 2, 3 and 4.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation questions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Have the initiatives been responsive to community needs for ECE?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 How does the community involvement support the development of ECE services responsive to the needs of the local community in areas where there is currently low participation?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation question:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Have the participation initiatives contributed to quality ECE being delivered?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective 5: Ministry approach. Data gathered in each stage.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation question:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 How did the role the MOE played contribute to developing effective participation initiatives in areas of low ECE participation? Was the implementation of initiatives effective?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methodology

The evaluation design enabled meaningful information to be gathered about ECE participation of children from Māori, Pasifika and low-income families/whānau about the participation initiatives and the overall Participation Programme. Information needed to be tracked over four years to see what changes and outcomes were occurring for children and families/whānau. The evaluation needed to be able to relate any changes found to the nature of the initiatives and MOE and community involvement in development and delivery of them.

Evaluation questions were addressed through mixed methods, using quantitative and qualitative measures. More information providing an evaluation overview, discussion of the evaluation objectives and questions, and research methods is set out in the baseline report (Mitchell et al., 2013). Stage 2 findings are reported in Mitchell et al. (2014).

In Stage 3, in the period October 2013 to March 2014 we gathered the following data:

- MOE data on enrolments.
- A survey of all participation initiative providers.
- Interviews with staff from a sample of SP, EPF, FRHB, TAP.
- A survey of families/whānau engaged in SP, EPF, FRHB, TAP.
- Interviews with families/whānau from four of the initiatives (SP, EPF, FRHB, TAP).

Research instruments may be obtained from the University of Waikato.

One limitation is in our access to parents. We were reliant on providers to help us contact families/whānau with whom they were working. We asked providers to distribute a survey and support parents to complete it and to invite parents to participate in an interview. In all three stages, providers did not always want to pass on an invitation to recently recruited parents to take part in these tasks. We managed to gain a good number of parent responses and achieve a higher parental survey response rate in Stage 3 of the evaluation than each of the other stages (358, 53 percent of the 680 surveyed, compared with Stage 2, where 310 parents, 33% of those surveyed responded, and Stage 1, where 86 parents, 14.7% of those surveyed responded). One of the reasons for higher response rates was the large number of TAP families/whānau who responded in Stage 3.

The parent surveys were completed by the main caregiver and if language assistance was needed, the provider was asked to assist and provide support for completion. Table 2 sets out provider and response rates for completing the surveys in Stage 3.
Table 2. Provider and parent response rate by participation initiative in Stage 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation initiatives</th>
<th>Provider n</th>
<th>Parent n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EPF</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRHB</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAP 1 and 2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAP 3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICPP</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILCC</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>81</strong></td>
<td><strong>358</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The approach to analysing the ways in which participation initiatives and the overall programme enhanced family and community responsiveness was through triangulating survey and interview data from MOE, providers, and families/whānau.

**Focus of the report**

This report covers all the evaluation objectives listed above.

Chapter 2 examines increases in national participation in ECE and participation by priority groups over the course of the Participation Programme.

In Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6, we examine responsiveness of EPF, FRHB, TAP and SP to families/whānau. These chapters address the following areas, with a focus on how the initiatives contribute to each area, what works for whom and how, and what hinders:

1. The nature of the initiative and community involvement.
2. Addressing barriers to participation and regular attendance.
3. Parent aspirations, engagement in ECE and learning and reasons for engagement.
4. Language and culture in ECE as contributing to identity.
5. Special needs, health, learning and development.
6. Responding to needs for quality.
7. Transition to school.
8. Impact of the initiative.
9. Conclusion.
Findings are drawn together in Chapter 7, which integrates findings from Stage 3 to address the focus objectives:

1. ECE participation for Māori children, Pasifika children and children in low socioeconomic communities.
2. Improved learning outcomes for participating children/tamariki and family/whānau.
3. Responsiveness to participating communities.
4. Provision of quality ECE.
5. Ministry approach.

It concludes with a summative evaluation from each of the initiatives of what works at an initiative level so that understanding is built of what are the critical success factors for each initiative, what is worth scaling up and continuing, what changes could be made to improve initiatives and how the initiative can be best designed to best meet the needs of the groups they are working with.
2. National picture of ECE participation and Participation Initiative enrolments

MOE national statistics on ECE enrolments and participation prior to school entry are used in this chapter to show national shifts over the period of the Participation Programme. These data would be expected to include any family whose child had come into ECE because of the Participation Programme, and children in ECE services using the initiatives. We then go on to analyse enrolments in Participation Initiatives over the time of the Programme against targets set for each initiative.

Participation: National picture

The government goal announced in March 2012 as “that in 2016, 98% of children starting school will have participated in quality ECE”. This goal was set after the Participation Programme was up and running. The Pasifika Education Plan for the period 2013 to 2017 set consistent targets for Pasifika children to increase their ECE participation to 98% by 2016, replacing the earlier aim for “more Pasifika children” to participate in ECE. Likewise, the Ka Hikitia—Managing for Success target of 95% participation by Māori children before school in 2012, was replaced with the 98% target for 2016. These children are in groups with low rates of ECE participation and include those described by MOE as “hardest to reach”.

For the year to end of June 2014 participation in ECE before starting primary school was 95.9% nationally. This represented a steady increase from 94.4% in June 2010, 94.6% in June 2011, 95% in June 2012, and 95.6% in June 2013, a total percentage point increase of 1.5% from June 2010. Māori enrolments increased to 92.9% (June 2014), an increase of 3.6 percentage points since June 2010, while Pasifika enrolments increased to 90.3% an increase of 4.4 percentage points since June 2010. These figures may indicate that the Participation Programme is contributing to this positive trend.

Overall enrolments in ECE participation initiatives by ethnicity at June 2014 show that Māori enrolments make up 53% of all currently enrolled and registered children and Pasifika children make up 41%.

The Participation Programme was funded to achieve an additional 3,500 enrolments by priority children, and had enrolled around 7,900 priority children from 2010 to December 2013.

---

1 As at December 2013, 8,344 children were reported as ever enrolled through the Participation Programme. 438 of these children were not Māori, Pasifika or from a low socio-economic community.
MOE data on prior participation in ECE of children starting school shows that the prior-participation rate for children starting at a decile 1–3 school increased to 91.4% for the year ending June 2014, up 4.2 percentage points on the December 2010 rate.

The annual growth in prior participation for Māori children, Pasifika children, and children starting at low-decile schools are all higher than the national growth rate. This is because additional priority children participating in ECE are driving the increase in the national rate, and participation by non-priority groups is growing more slowly. Participation rates need to continue to increase across the board to reach the 98% target in 2016.

**ECE enrolments through initiatives**

Over the three past years of the initiatives (2010 to 2013), enrolments in all Participation Programme initiatives increased, some to a greater extent than others. Not all initiatives started at the same time or with the same resources; these are reflected in the differential levels of enrolment and rates of increase. The biggest gain in current enrolments was made by the TAP initiative with an increase from 294 (as at December 2012) to 1,432 (as at December 2013); nearly five times as many enrolments in 2013 as in 2012. Both EPF and SP initiatives had greatly increased levels of current enrolments between December 2011 and December 2012, sustaining the 2012 levels through to December 2013; EPF initiatives enrolled 390 children as at December 2011, increasing to 814 as at December 2012 with 884 enrolled as of December 2013; SP enrolled 444 in 2011, increasing to 663 as at December 2012 with 611 enrolled as of December 2013.

Between 2010 and the end of 2013 the number of children ever enrolled by EPF increased from 410 to 1807 (23%). The number of children ever enrolled in SP jumped from 888 to 2151 (41%) by the end of 2013. HB1 numbers were lower than previously anticipated with the total number ever enrolled reaching 240 by the end of 2013 (Year 1 targets for HB were 160).
Table 3. Overall enrolments in ECE from six ECE participation initiatives from 2010 to 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Targets for participation programme (first year)*</th>
<th>Enrolments at December 2011**</th>
<th>Enrolments at December 2012</th>
<th>Enrolments at December 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EPF</td>
<td>875</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>814</td>
<td>884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>663</td>
<td>611</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILCCE</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAP</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0***</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>1432</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HB1</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>4***</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICPP</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>7****</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong>**</td>
<td></td>
<td>933</td>
<td>2246</td>
<td>3497</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Includes children currently enrolled; excludes those who have transitioned to school or another ECE, children who have exited the programme, and children registered in EPF but not yet enrolled in an ECE service.

* Initiative targets were set for the first year of the Participation Programme. From year 2, individual initiative targets were replaced by the Government’s BPS Goal 2 (that in 2016, 98% of children starting school will have participated in quality ECE).

** These totals differ from those in the baseline report, as the MOE has revised its data collection processes, and is getting more accurate data from providers (including corrections to historical data).

*** These numbers are very low because these two initiatives, ICPP and HB, had just started in 2011.

**** No TAP projects were operating at December 2011.

***** Children are counted in each initiative through which they participated in ECE. Therefore, the number of children in the ‘Total’ column will generally be less than the sum of the children in each initiative.

The TAP initiative showed the biggest percentage increase in enrolments. It should be noted that there were no enrolments in 2011 as TAP building projects begun in the first and second years were still to be completed. Once these were completed TAP enrolments showed a steep increase. The percentage increase was great for HB, but numbers were very low in 2011. EPF and SP initiatives showed high levels of enrolments, which were sustained over 2012 and 2013. The levels and increases over time are reflective of the varied time for rolling out the different initiatives. ILCCE providers work with services that have spare capacity to support them to be more responsive to their communities. It is not possible to link increased enrolments in these services to enrolment of priority families who have not previously attended ECE, since ILCCE providers do not work directly with families.

The enrolment figures reflect what happened with the implementation of the initiatives. EPF and SP initiatives had a model that was easiest to set up using existing community networks and iwi-based providers. This was an extension of the work already being done by many of these providers so carried some momentum from the outset. This momentum continued to support ongoing enrolments. The HB initiative, however, faced some challenges due to initial limitations around community networks and access to appropriate caregivers, impeding enrolments. Where providers ran more than one initiative, particularly SP and EPF, this offered families choice around the type of service appropriate to them which in turn may have contributed to an increase in HB enrolments over time.

TAP-funded projects had a much slower start with entire centres being built in some cases. Delays in gaining building and resources consents and the time taken to complete projects meant that ECE enrolment figures for the first year of the initiatives were non-existent but grew quickly in the second year as projects were finished and children were able to be enrolled. TAP projects started in the first year were being completed in 2013 contributing to the escalation in numbers enrolled in 2013.

In addition to those children currently enrolled in ECE through the initiatives, there are also those who were enrolled but have now exited. There are a number of reasons for exiting but the MOE data collection focuses on
those most likely to be accurately reported by parents to providers; exiting to school or to another ECE. Additional reasons could be dissatisfaction with the service, relocation of the family, cost or transport issues. Table 4 shows the number of children ever enrolled in ECE by initiative, the total of these children that have exited and the known reasons for this.

Overall 67 percent of children who exited initiatives did so for “unknown reasons”. TAP providers gave a number of answers to why they thought families left; the three most common in rank order were families moving to another area (sometimes without saying where they were going), not having transport and not being able to afford fees. All EPF providers said that families left the initiative because they moved out of the area. One or two EPF providers also mentioned housing evictions, housing overcrowding and other housing issues, custody changes and family violence. This high percentage of children leaving initiatives may indicate a need to delve further into the reasons for exiting in order to provide the appropriate support for these families.

A lower level of EPF families who had ever enrolled (22%) than those from other initiatives left for unknown reasons. This may reflect the work done with families for up to three months following school start and the level of one on one support for these families to engage with ECE. Thirty nine percent of the supported playgroup families exited for unknown reasons, but across the initiatives they showed high levels of exiting to another ECE service, which could be an indication that supported playgroups are bridging a gap to more formalised ECE. Interestingly TAP initiatives have a lower exit to school rate than EPF and a higher proportion of leaving for unknown reasons. It may be that the more recent establishment of services means that children enrolled have not yet reached school age. In some instances it may also be that the systems are not yet in place to gather information on families exiting for reasons other than to school. Similarly, in HB2 initiatives 24 percent of families exit for reasons unknown, while 51 percent of families in HB2 initiatives were known to exit to other ECE (34% and 10% respectively for HB1 initiatives).

Table 4. Total ever enrolled to 31st December 2013 and exit figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Ever enrolled through initiative to 31 Dec 2013**</th>
<th>Total exited n (%)</th>
<th>Exited to School n (%)*</th>
<th>Exited to other ECE n (%)*</th>
<th>Exited to unknown n (%)*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EPF</td>
<td>1807</td>
<td>725 (40.1)</td>
<td>298 (16.5)</td>
<td>34 (1.9)</td>
<td>393 (21.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>2151</td>
<td>1316 (61.2)</td>
<td>144 (6.7)</td>
<td>331 (15.4)</td>
<td>841 (39.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAP</td>
<td>2798</td>
<td>1325 (47.4)</td>
<td>163 (5.8)</td>
<td>265 (9.5)</td>
<td>897 (32.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICPP</td>
<td>719</td>
<td>348 (48.4)</td>
<td>23 (3.2)</td>
<td>96 (13.4)</td>
<td>229 (31.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HB2</td>
<td>238***</td>
<td>181 (76.1)***</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>122 (51.3)</td>
<td>57 (23.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRHB1</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>116 (48.3)</td>
<td>10 (4.2)</td>
<td>24 (10.0)</td>
<td>82 (34.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILCCE</td>
<td>871</td>
<td>730 (83.8)</td>
<td>61 (7.0)</td>
<td>57 (6.5)</td>
<td>612 (70.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total children</strong></td>
<td><strong>8344</strong></td>
<td><strong>4494</strong></td>
<td><strong>670</strong></td>
<td><strong>818</strong></td>
<td><strong>3006</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Percentage of total children ever enrolled. This does not include children who exited EPF before enrolling in ECE.
** Children are counted in each initiative through which they participated in ECE. Therefore, the number of children in the "Total" column will generally be less than the sum of the children in each initiative.
*** Numbers of children for HB2 are for numbers of children registered in the programme.
Overall the numbers of Māori and Pasifika children enrolled in the initiatives were considerably higher than enrolments for other groups.

Table 5. Overall enrolments in ECE participation initiatives by ethnicity at December 2013. Includes all currently enrolled and currently registered children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Māori</th>
<th>Pasifika</th>
<th>European/ Pākehā</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EPF</td>
<td>671</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>611</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILCCE</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAP</td>
<td>661</td>
<td>612</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1432</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HB1</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICPP</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HB2</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total children</strong></td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1538</td>
<td>798</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>3754</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Students who identify with more than one ethnic group are counted in each group they identified with. Therefore, the number of students in the 'Total Responses' column will generally be less than the sum of the students in each group.

** Children are counted in each initiative through which they participated in ECE. Therefore, the number of children in the 'Total' column will generally be less than the sum of the students in each initiative.

Figure 2. Current enrolments and currently registered children in ECE* participation initiatives by ethnicity at December 2013

*Results are provisional

The ages of children enrolled in the initiatives reflect the intents and purposes of each initiative. EPF supports families with 3- and 4-year-olds, while SP, FRHB and TAP initiatives cater for younger children as well.
Table 6. Enrolments in ECE from ECE participation initiatives, by child’s age at enrolment at 31 December 2013. Includes all currently enrolled and registered children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>0 years</th>
<th>1 years</th>
<th>2 years</th>
<th>3 years</th>
<th>4 years</th>
<th>5 years</th>
<th>6 years or more</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EPF</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>569</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILCCE</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAP</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HB1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICPP</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HB2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total*</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>548</td>
<td>759</td>
<td>1262</td>
<td>817</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3876</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Children are counted in each initiative through which they participated in ECE. Therefore, the number of children in the ‘Total’ column will generally be less than the sum of the students in each initiative.

Figure 3. Enrolments in ECE from ECE participation initiatives, by child’s age at enrolment at December 2013.
Summary
The government goal, announced in March 2012 after the Participation Initiative Programme had been established, is that in 2016, 98% of all children starting school will have participated in quality ECE. The national picture of participation shows participation to be 95.9% nationally in June 2014, representing an increase of 1.5 percentage points from 94.4% in June 2010. Ministry figures show that prior participation for children in Decile 1–3 schools also increased 2.6 percentage points between December 2012 and June 2014. While these figures cannot be directly attributed to the effects of the Participation Programme, they do set a context in which data can be interpreted.

MOE figures of enrolments through the initiatives show 3,497 active enrolments at December 2013, with 8,344 enrolments since the start of the Participation programme, predominantly Māori and Pasifika children. Contributing significantly to increased enrolments was the establishment of the TAP initiatives. Once the establishment phase in 2011 was completed, enrolments escalated quickly, from 294 in December 2012 to 1432 in December 2013; this comprises 41% of total current enrolments for December 2013. EPF enrolments, for 3 and 4 year olds, have also contributed greatly to overall enrolments making up roughly a third of total current enrolments for 2011 and 2012 and a quarter of current enrolments for 2013.

However, it should be noted that figures for some initiatives need to be taken in context. SP and HB initiatives cater largely for younger children with between 60 to 80% of children enrolled aged two years or less. For many children too, playgroup is the first step into formal ECE, and they go on to other services. ILCCE does not work directly with families (the initiative was designed to work with ECE services to improve their responsiveness to priority families) and the factors behind a family enrolling their child in a centre in a cluster in which ILCCE was working are unknown. We do not know the reason the families enrolled their child in the centre, whether the families had already attended ECE, or the duration of attendance. Only two of the ICPP projects were directly providing some limited ECE provision (one day per week at most) as ECE delivery was not a feature of this initiative either.

The enrolment figures appear to reflect what happened with the implementation of the initiatives. EPF and SP initiatives had a model that was easiest to set up using existing community networks and iwi-based providers. This was an extension of the work already being done by many of these providers so carried some momentum from the outset. This momentum continued to support ongoing enrolments. The HB initiative, however, faced some challenges due to initial limitations around community networks and access to appropriate caregivers, impeding enrolments. Where providers ran more than one initiative, particularly SP and EPF, this offered families choice around the type of service appropriate to them which in turn may have contributed to an increase in HB enrolments over time.

TAP-funded projects had a much slower start with entire centres being built in some cases. Delays in gaining building and resources consents and the time taken to complete projects meant that ECE enrolment figures for the first year of the initiatives were non-existent but grew quickly in the second year as projects were finished and children were able to be enrolled. TAP projects started in the first year were being completed in 2013 contributing to the escalation in numbers enrolled in 2013.

Many children have left initiatives—some for school and others for another ECE service. However, we do not know where some 3006 children, a considerable number, have gone or the reasons why. Providers whom we interviewed have commented on transience as being a common reason for families “exiting”, but they did not keep track of many of these families.
3. Engaging Priority Families/whānau

EPF and community involvement

The Engaging Priority Families/whānau initiative (EPF), works with families/whānau of three and four year olds in target communities who are currently not participating in ECE. Providers work alongside families/whānau to support their child’s regular attendance in an ECE service that is responsive to their needs; strengthen their involvement with their child’s learning at home and, support their child’s transition to school.

The following discussion on the EPF initiative is based on survey responses from EPF providers (28 out of 30—a high response rate) and families/whānau they were working with (117), as well as in depth interviews with 12 EPF providers and some of the families/whānau (12) they were working with.

EPF participation initiatives were located in Canterbury, Wellington and regions, Waikato, Auckland including South Auckland and Tamaki, and Rotorua.

Table 7. Nature of EPF provider interviewed and type of community worked with

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EPF provider</th>
<th>Nature of approach</th>
<th>Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kākāriki</td>
<td>Kaupapa Māori approach. Identification and recruitment through, walking the streets, door knocking, referral and events. ‘Kanohi ki to kanohi’ with whānau. EPF, SP contract.</td>
<td>Predominantly Māori whānau, also Pakeha; urban and rural settings, low socioeconomic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karaka</td>
<td>EPF caseworker matched with families/whānau by predominant ethnicity in locality. Caseworkers speak a range of languages. Large team. Part of a Trust providing social provision. EPF contract only.</td>
<td>Large urban setting. Māori, Pasifika and low socio-economic families/whānau.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kikorangi</td>
<td>EPF and SP contract part of a Pasifika Trust which prioritises health and education services. Caseworkers are part of the Pasifika community and speak the languages.</td>
<td>Urban setting. Pasifika families, low socio-economic. Pasifika languages first language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kōwhai</td>
<td>Hold an EPF, SP and ICPP contract. Philosophy is to uphold and maintain first language and culture. Staff are part of Pasifika communities across the large urban setting.</td>
<td>Large urban setting. Pasifika families, low socioeconomic. Some Pasifika ethnicities ESL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mā</td>
<td>Kaupapa Māori approach with development of resources to use in delivery with whānau due to gap in local kaupapa Māori service. Run a puna also.</td>
<td>Minor urban/rural setting. Predominantly Māori whānau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mangu</td>
<td>Kaupapa Māori approach. Staff from local area, strong knowledge of tikanga. Philosophy focuses on manaakitanga and whakawhanuanganatanga</td>
<td>Minor urban/rural setting. Māori whānau. High levels of transcience, low socioeconomic.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Typifying EPF provider practice, the 12 EPF providers interviewed matched their approach to the communities they worked with. Their practice was established in response to the type of community they had identified they were working with and were part of.

The type of communities EPF providers worked with impacted on provider practice in terms of approaches used to support cultural responsiveness. As one provider said:

It is important for the community to see that there are ‘like folk’ involved in these organisations … people they can immediately identify with. [Māori EPF provider]

While overall, there were similarities in terms of work processes across providers, i.e. the establishment of good relationships both within communities and with families/whānau usually through face to face contact, the way in which providers worked differed according to the cultural approach appropriate to the community they worked with. Where families/whānau were predominantly Māori a kaupapapa Māori approach was taken and where families were predominantly Pasifika, providers had staff who were from and had knowledge of the families’ communities.

The other variation in approach across EPF providers was one of emphasis on supporting families/whānau in dealing with social and economic issues. The extent of complex need was said to be particularly high in some communities, requiring intensive input from providers. Comment was made that where families/whānau had fewer social issues they were able to gain independence and support could be tapered back.

In some instances EPF providers worked within a structure where ECE services were run, some were contracted to run playgroups, others worked within an organisation which provided formal ECE.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provider</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Setting and Profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Māwhero</td>
<td>Part of an umbrella organisation providing ECE. Contracted for EPF, TAP and SP. Employ Pasifika staff with close links to the communities worked in. Multidisciplinary teams with expertise in ECE, health and community work. Use translators when required.</td>
<td>Urban setting, Pasifika, Māori, migrant, low socioeconomic families/whānau.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whero</td>
<td>Māori provider. Staff have government agency background which supports knowledge required to support families/whānau. No Pasifika ECE services in the locality. EPF and SP contract. Move families from SP to formal ECE.</td>
<td>Minor urban/rural setting. High level of social issues. Māori whānau with a Pasifika cluster many ESL.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pākākā</td>
<td>Kaupapā Māori approach. EPF contract held by a Health Trust. Use of Te Kura supported for isolated whānau. Staff from the community.</td>
<td>Rural setting, Māori whānau some isolated. High level of transience, low socioeconomic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pūmā</td>
<td>Māori provider. Staff worked in the community previously in health so networks established. Also iwi connections. Kaupapā Māori approach, ‘kanohi ki te kanohi’. Local ECE service culturally responsive.</td>
<td>Rural setting. Māori whānau, low socioeconomic.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How well EPF is working in target communities

EPF providers were generally very positive about effectiveness of the EPF initiative in engaging non-participating families/whānau in ECE in their local communities. Providers particularly noted that as they became more familiar with and experienced in the work required by the EPF contract, and what this meant for their families/whānau, the more effective they were in implementing the initiative. As one EPF provider said:

I have noticed the trend of the initial stages’ families/whānau being less transient. They weren’t engaging or were engaging and dropping off. With the more experience we have in promoting the project and outcomes ... families/whānau are staying longer and engaging in the centres and transitioning through to school. [EPF provider]

EPF providers generally considered that the intensity of the work allowed time to engage with families/whānau and to work with the high needs of some families/whānau.

Providers also noted that they had received positive feedback that indicated that their work had been effective in achieving its purpose of strengthening families/whānau’ involvement in learning through to transition to school.

I’ve had some experiences in the last few months in the community that have told me it’s working and that we’re getting out there and it’s actually happening. The example of that is some of my kids that have gone to school, they’re doing well the parents are engaged so awesome to see that kind of stuff, getting good feedback from schools now. [EPF provider]

Community involvement

The key features which underpinned the ability of EPF providers to work in their local communities were: EPF providers building a profile in order to let the community know what they were doing including networking with other local services and agencies, and employment of EPF staff who were embedded in and had knowledge of the community; including staff who understood and/or came from the same culture and spoke the same languages as families/whānau.

EPF providers overall considered that community involvement was integral to their organisations being able to identify, recruit, and work with families/whānau in their local communities. This was also said to be an important means of determining whether the initiative would work in communities. As one provider said:

The strength of relationships determines the success of an initiative; people from the community talking to their friends and relatives, advocating the worth of an initiative. And initiatives being supported by organisations with the infrastructure to ensure they are sustainable. [EPF provider]

Families also spoke about how familiarity with a provider who was part of their community supported conversations around participation in ECE. As one parent said:

She is an old friend but I just recently moved back—used to live up North and we started catching up again. She asked what they doing and I said they too young—they not even four and she said they [preschool] is taking kids at 3. I said ‘OK then’.

Providers all said they established profiles in their communities through involvement in community events and by networking and establishing good relationships with local services and agencies. As providers said:

So the other thing that we did with the community day was that we had a … Safe as Houses Project which meant we knocked on 500 doors in … and it was fire service, a whole lot of
services, fire service, police, ACC, civil defence, safety around that homes was the intent. … I ended up with seven referrals from that as well. [EPF provider]

The use of social media was also important to some providers in profiling EPF in communities and establishing contact with families/whānau, particularly for providers working with Māori families/whānau in rural areas.

Social media (Facebook) was another way that we had targeted some of our families/whānau. So that was just people that I knew personally that had children that weren’t engaged in ECE so it was just getting in contact with them that way, which then led to another referral to another referral to another referral. [EPF provider]

A lot of towns now have a thing on Facebook called grapevine. I got on the [Name] grapevine and you just say what you do and just put it up. It turns into huge conversations with people. [EPF provider]

EPF staff embedded in the community, with knowledge of the community context and issues were considered essential in not only identifying but being able to approach and engage families/whānau. Perhaps a drawback identified by providers is that the familiarity that comes with being embedded could be seen as intrusive. For example, one EPF coordinator had personal knowledge of and relationships with families in a predominantly Māori community. She was well known in the community which supported her drop-in approach to families.

After the main recruitment process, I did drive-bys around the communities and when I saw children I’d go and follow them and look for their parents. Yeah, yeah I would look at the child and say oh that’s such and such’s child right I’m going to go and find your mother or your father because I’d know where to go and find them. [EPF provider]

Another provider working with Pasifika families talked about the importance of cultural connectedness through employing staff from the same Pasifika communities as families.

With EPF the biggest influence for us is that the coordinators understand or come from the same culture and speak the languages of the families/whānau we actually target. ... and then most of our coordinators live in the same communities where families/whānau are. [EPF Pasifika provider]

**Participation and attendance**

Ministry of Education data shows that overall children enrolled through the ECE Participation Programme attend ECE for average 9.6 hours per week. In comparison, EPF providers said that attendance at ECE ranged between 10 to over 40 hours a week, the average being 15 to 20 hours.

Most EPF providers noted that in general participation took some time to establish, but that there was a low dropout rate once families/whānau were enrolled in ECE. However, there were some providers who noted that families/whānau did drop out and that this lowered the overall hours of attendance for their contract.

Over half the 117 families/whānau responding to surveys (61) said their child/ren attended an ECE service 20 to 29 hours a week. A further 21 (19%) said their child/ren attended 30 to 39 hours and 18 said their child/ren attended 10 to 19 hours. In interviews families/whānau said the average was 16 to 20 hours a week. A few families said the children attended ECE more than 40 hours a week. These parents said this was because they were working. Most families/whānau kept the children home during school holidays. Families/whānau were generally satisfied with the hours of attendance, with nearly two thirds indicating the hours were ‘just right’. However,
where more hours were said to be desired, cost was said to be an issue for nearly a third of families/whānau with lack of available hours an issue for around 15 percent.

**What barriers to participation are being addressed and how**

The main barriers to participation in ECE for EPF families/whānau include: cost, transport, and in some communities limited choice around ECE, ECE which do not welcome EPF families/whānau, limited knowledge and/or understanding of ECE, and the complex or high needs of families/whānau providers are working with including transience.

EPF providers addressed barriers in a variety of ways but underpinning all approaches was the notion of brokering. That is on-going negotiation and discussion to resolve and address issues with families/whānau themselves, with ECE services and with other community agencies relevant to family support and to align the different perspectives was integral to providers engaging families/whānau in ECE. Brokering “involves processes of translation, coordination and alignment between perspectives … It also requires the ability to link practices by facilitating transactions between them” (Wenger, 1998, p. 109).

Discussion on barriers and the ways in which they are being addressed by EPF providers follows.

**Cost including costs for food:** This has largely being addressed through EPF providers using ECE services which do provide 20 hours free with no extra costs to families/whānau. ECE services which provide meals are also the preferred choice. This was mentioned by all families/whānau and in most instances provided the upper limit for hours they would attend, as after this there were costs associated. Services with costs associated were not used. Where families had issues in paying fees providers worked with them and the ECE in developing a schedule to pay-off arrears.

**Transport:** Again for some families/whānau this continues to be an issue, particularly rural families/whānau where vehicles are necessary.

In urban areas EPF providers either supported families/whānau to enrol in ECE services with vans, or services within walking distance. EPF providers often provided transport for visits to ECE as well as for other appointments related to participation e.g. to WINZ to access subsidies. In rural areas providers encouraged carpooling but also enrolled children in Te Aho o Te Kura Pouanamu (Te Kura).

**Limited choice of ECE/ECE hours:** EPF providers and families/whānau both commented that there were waiting lists for preferred ECE services, e.g. kōhanga reo, kindergartens and in some urban areas ECE centres which were cost free. Providers and families/whānau also commented on limited choice around the times families/whānau could attend, e.g., only afternoon hours, or particular weekdays. In rural areas providers noted that the distance to ECE services limited access for some families/whānau. One way in which providers in urban areas circumvented waiting lists was to enrol children in Te Kura, facilitating the initial set up, and following up during visits to homes. Te Kura was also well used by providers working in rural communities. One EPF provider said they often enrolled children in Te Kura, working with Te Kura teachers to develop an early learning plan following this up with visits to facilitate their use of the resources and implement the learning programme. They said:

My rural whānau, they only have one place that they can go … The centre is always full … Yea so the options are very limited for some families because of their location, but the solution to that is the correspondence and I have about seven children involved in the correspondence school, they’ve been awesome. … we do an early learning plan and send it away to my lady at
correspondence school … and she caters the resources and the learning packs that she sends to the learning plan that I’ve created. [EPF provider]

Unwelcoming ECE: EPF providers and families/whānau commented on the issue of ECE services which were unwelcoming and not willing to engage with EPF families/whānau. Typical comments from providers were:

There is one centre in a high needs area that won’t take our children at all. … They talk about ‘those children’. [EPF provider]

ECE centre not being friendly and approachable is another factor that impact on attendance. People haven’t felt welcome so they won’t enrol their children. [EPF provider]

Both EPF providers and families/whānau spoke about misunderstandings which occurred due to lack of flexibility in terms of ECE services’ business models and associated fees policies, and an inability to arrive at a solution agreeable to all parties. A few EPF families who wanted to attend part-time said the ECE service claimed that attending five days was mandatory due to the service’s enrolment rules. In these instances the EPF provider was left to address and negotiate between ECE and family, or, alternatively find another ECE able to enrol the family.

Centres don’t always support our service and that is you have high needs families/whānau that are attending three days then they don’t go and then come back five days later, then they are off again, then … they [centre] are still getting their funding. It is beyond me that they are saying ‘you need to get them back or we will cut them off the roll’. They are not supportive of the fact that we have a coordinator for this programme to support families/whānau to re-engage with the centre. [EPF provider]

A welcoming environment was important for EPF families/whānau. A number (23) said that a more welcoming environment, would help them become involved. Some EPF families/whānau talked about the way they had been received in some ECE services, prior to working with EPF providers. They talked about feeling unwelcome and judged. One family who had exited ECE prior to transition to school did so because they owed money and felt humiliated by the way they were treated. They later re-engaged with an EPF provider who negotiated a payment plan and in discussion with the family found an ECE they were comfortable with.

But when I come over there [Centre] they are telling all the teachers ‘if you see this lady [get her to] come over there’. Embarrassing me. … I like them to let my business be just me but they let all the teachers know we came over there because my kids have a big bill to pay. Last Friday was their last day at [Centre]. I just can’t take it. They are out right now. [Pasifika parent]

Limited knowledge and understanding of ECE with some families/whānau having previous negative exposure to education. In some instances families/whānau had English as their second language impeding communication with ECE services. In other instances families/whānau were said to have low levels of literacy and were unable to read and understand information provided. Shyness and lack of confidence on the part of EPF families/whānau was also said to contribute to non-participation, with families/whānau reluctant to enter into unfamiliar environments for fear of being judged. Walking into a strange situation is probably the biggest factor for parents, other than social and economic things [EPF provider]. In most instances EPF providers were the interface between the ECE service and the family. This ensured that the family understood what they can access and are entitled to, and that enrolment forms were completed in order for their child/children to be involved in ECE. EPF providers also supported the family in understanding the rules around participation e.g. reporting of absences. EPF providers also brokered information from agencies including WINZ, schools, Plunket, Special Education, to ensure child and family have the support in place to enable participation. Families/whānau who
move areas are also linked with other EPF to ensure participation is maintained. Typical comments from EPF providers and families/whānau who spoke about the brokering process were:

The process can be daunting, as you have to meet with the kāhanga whānau and request a place for your child. Staff will go with the whānau to tautoko them and make the process a more comfortable experience. They ensure whānau know the expectations involved in being part of the kōhanga…. [EPF provider]

It’s about brokering and being extra support when they go into centres and schools. If you refer them, you need to there with them. For example, when they go to WINZ you are there for extra support to break it down for them; brokering because of their comprehension. [EPF provider]

[Provider] phoned around a few places and drove around to get packs from different centres I was happy with and in the area. She took the time out and made appointments with centre managers. She would pick me up and take me there and meet up with them. She was the one who would ask the questions I wouldn’t ask. She always gave me the option to ask either before we went in or while we were there but if I couldn’t think of any or was too shy she would think of questions. [EPF parent]

The things I wasn’t sure of I would ring her and she would explain it to me in a way that I can understand. [EPF parent talking about enrolling in an ECE]

I felt good because [coordinator] found the centre and I couldn’t send the kids there before because it was in the middle of winter and I’d just got [Baby] (now 2 years old) in July so we’re still kind of in winter and I didn’t want to take the baby out in the cold and it was raining. [Coordinator] found a centre that picks [child] up. [EPF parent who had been given a list of ECE services by a parenting organisation but did not find this very helpful at all. She looked up the services online but was not really clear on what they provided and was also struggling to manage the needs of all the children in her care.]

Complex needs: All EPF providers noted the increased level of complex needs faced by some of the families/whānau they were working with. A few providers noted that the needs of many of their current families/whānau were really high. When asked what this meant EPF providers talked about families/whānau requiring CYF notifications, alcoholism, gambling issues, involvement with gangs, children and adults with challenging behaviour and learning difficulties including low literacy levels, gang related behaviour, and families/whānau in debt, facing economic difficulties including housing issues due to overcrowding or evictions.

In order to support participation EPF providers were faced with finding ways to alleviate the situation, often requiring intensive levels of brokering with ECE services and time spent referring to and bringing in other social agencies.

Just in the past three weeks we have made two notifications, the needs of the families/whānau are really, really, high. … they forget to take them, get them ready in time for the centre so the van can’t drop them off, … I find too that we seem to be doing a lot more work for centres, in that if families/whānau are not participating, then centres are contacting us to go and find out why families/whānau are not participating…. [Our role] has become a lot bigger and more demanding on the ECE side of things as well as with the family unit having more issues. [EPF provider]

Transience: EPF providers also spoke about transience as a barrier to participation in ECE, for some families/whānau; usually in conjunction with complex needs. EPF providers explained transience as
“families/whānau moving inside and outside communities”, making it difficult to find them. As one EPF provider
noted that they “could have up to five addresses, they go away and come back.” Another provider said:

You enrol them and they are all for it and then you can’t find them again after that … I found out
with one family that they’d moved to Auckland to live with other family members. [EPF
provider]

EPF providers said they addressed transience, where possible by building good relationships and encouraging on-
going contact, even when families/whānau moved and having good systems in place to track families/whānau e.g.,
through social media such as Facebook or by text. As one provider explained:

Facebook is the one; they will contact me and how are you, you know, when I had baby I had a
couple of them go, “oh awesome whaea, congratulations”; and even some that have gone to other
areas and rung me from Auckland and say, “oh I enrolled him in the centre whaea and they did
this, is that right”. [EPF provider]

Parent engagement in ECE and learning

EPF providers said matching families/whānau needs with the most appropriate ECE was instrumental in
families/whānau engaging in ECE and learning. This involved matching needs in terms of cost, transport,
provision of food, hours, and language and culture and supporting families/whānau in the transition. As one EPF
provider said:

When I’m aware tamariki need placing I
look at the whānau and assess their needs. While they
are talking, I think that service or centre, then I wait and listen more. [EPF provider]

A parent explained the process from her viewpoint: “She had a lot of places but I told her I wanted close to home
as easier to walk.” [EPF parent]

EPF providers noted that visits to ECE services with families/whānau were key to getting buy in from
families/whānau as this gave them the opportunity to experience the actual environment.

Visits are done to see if the whānau like the provider chosen…. [EPF provider]

You will take them there [ECE centre] and spend time so that Mum feels comfortable during that
transition time and can ask questions and they can see you playing with their child so they know
you are not just talking and you are getting their buy in. [EPF provider]

Parents commented on the value of EPF knowledge to help them choose, as evidenced in the comments of a
mother who had not been happy with two previous ECE services she had tried:

She actually looked around -she even offered to take me on the car but she had no car seats. So
she said I will look around for you and when I come and see you, which is maybe every two
weeks to a month. Then she would come and see me and give me papers on which one she would
think was really good. She was good like that; she really helped out a lot. She would talk me
through everything. [EPF parent]

Some EPF providers commented that the reputation of local ECE was important when families/whānau were
making choices about where to enrol e.g., ECE that were ‘known’ to be welcoming, or with ECE with
programmes incorporating cultural aspects important to families/whānau were first preferences.
EPF providers also stressed that discussions with families/whānau about ECE were based on prior development of strong trusting relationships with families/whānau in order that families had confidence in the provider to facilitate their choices.

Confidence and trust would be the biggest ones; so your families being able to trust you that you know supporting them to choose the right ECE. [EPF provider]

EPF families/whānau also commented on the importance of their relationship with the EPF provider; as someone they viewed as a friend and as a support person. Typical of comments was:

She [EPF provider] just popped by one time and knocked on the door and I liked the way she was, her attitude and that ... she’s like a friend as well, a support person as well. [EPF parent]

**Maintaining engagement**

EPF providers, and the families/whānau they worked with, talked about the importance of regular contact in maintaining families’ engagement in ECE and their involvement in learning. Regular contact with both families/whānau and ECE services the child/ren attended, was said to be essential in keeping EPF providers informed and so better able to support families/whānau in the most appropriate ways.

Regular contact is the key point, always. You need to touch base with them and the centre/school. … then we know what is happening. [EPF provider]

I’ll catch up with them at least once a month … I will pop over and do a visit, talk to the family about how they are finding … Just following up and maintaining the relationship, make sure they are going, make sure they are still happy … if there are concerns [at the ECE] go in and address it. [EPF provider]

EPF providers said they worked in various ways with families/whānau to involve them in learning with their children. EPF providers spoke of the ways in which they maintained family involvement in learning:

- Setting and working towards learning goals outlined in an Early Learning Plan including:
  - ideas for literacy and numeracy activities which could be done in an everyday context in the home with families/whānau;
  - supporting families/whānau in developmental tasks such as toilet training; and
  - ideas for outings and information on community events.

- Visits to ECE, in some instances taking families/whānau and in other instances visiting themselves and feeding back observations to families/whānau from on the child at the ECE service including information from portfolios.

- Ensuring information relating to health, learning and development is provided to families/whānau, both from ECE services and other health providers such as Plunket.

- Some EPF providers worked with families/whānau enrolled in Te Kura to facilitate the learning programme.

- Where families/whānau had dropped-off attending ECE, one EPF provider developed kaupapa Māori resources so that families/whānau had involvement with learning in the home.
Another EPF provider had whānau days in an ECE centre, bringing families/whānau together who would otherwise work individually with coordinators.

EPF families/whānau also talked about the involvement providers had with them around learning both in the home and in relation to learning about what ECE is. The things they learned from EPF coordinators and being involved in ECE were:

- learning about the benefits of attending ECE for their child/ren;
- learning activities including reading, songs, counting with both the target child and siblings;
- incorporating ideas from activities done with providers into daily activities, such as, counting and naming body parts;
- setting goals. “It [ELP] helps me to touch base on what I want him to work on and it helps me to acknowledge whether the things we chose to work on have come to fruition”;
- behaviour management strategies e.g. star charts and toilet training as well as bed-time practices;
- an increased understanding of what an ECE service can provide in terms of learning and their place in that. “In the beginning I couldn’t understand it … Cos I didn’t know about kindy. But when it comes to [child] now I can know the things I would like done for her and the things to do”; and
- gaining in confidence in the ECE service as their place. One family talked about being confident mixing with other families/whānau who were not “from where we are” [low socio-economic].

Once their child was attending ECE, families/whānau said they felt involved when they received feedback on how their children were doing and what they learned, and were generally reassured as to their children’s wellbeing when they knew the children were happy. Feedback came from a range of sources: the work children brought home, the mood of the child, parents’ experiences in watching their child in the ECE service, and informal and written feedback from teachers e.g. through conversations, phone calls and texts and the child’s portfolio.

[Daughter] comes back and she’s got drawings and lot of stuff she’s been doing. I like it what they are trying to teach the little ones; … they are lovely, they are good.

One parent said she sometimes watched from outside the centre and was reassured to see her children engaged and happy.

If I am not doing anything I will walk down there and watch. I see them playing outside and my daughter likes playing with the playdough and my son loves the paint….

Another parent, employed as a cleaner in the education and care centre, talked about how the staff worked together with parents while cleaning, taking the opportunity to talk informally to parents.

Yes I am usually cleaning with them, I have one of the teachers cleaning with me and we talk about my daughter. I have noticed they do that with all the parents there, walk alongside and talk. It takes a while—I know a lot of them are others who the coordinator put there.

Written portfolios were also a source of feedback on children’s learning, especially when they were open to contribution. One parent talked about the contributions the child’s sibling made to the portfolio
Get portfolios through the van—put it back—comes home once a month and we can add into it—usually the older siblings will draw for her.... The teacher likes it—they had hearts and it was all decked out. We put comments in a sheet on how you’ve seen them change.

A few parents also participated in planning and assessment activities at the ECE service their child attended.

**Continuum of family engagement with ECE learning**

EPF families/whānau varied in their levels of involvement with ECE. Some were more involved than others with both the ECE their child was attending and in learning activities with their child at home; particularly those who had been part of EPF for more than a year. At one end of a continuum some parents were not particularly engaged, in some instances described learning as something external to their family, something which was done by others e.g., the EPF provider or the ECE service, for their child. Many of these families/whānau interacted predominantly with the van driver who picked the children up to take them to an ECE service and the EPF provider during their visits to the home to feedback on the child’s progress at ECE. The latter families/whānau considered that they had limited time due to responsibility for other children and study and work. Interestingly nearly half the families/whānau said relationships with van drivers were important in maintaining relationships with ECE services.

At the other end of the continuum other families/whānau were very involved spending time at the ECE their child was at, engaging in conversations with teachers, being parent help, responding to feedback from portfolios and engaging in planning and assessment, as well as picking up on ideas for activities to continue at home.

Interestingly most families/whānau surveyed (85%) indicated a wish to be more involved in their child’s learning. Some parents commented on things that would support greater involvement in ECE. These were; a more welcoming environment (23), being asked by teachers (46), more time, and being able to take other children to the ECE service (34) e.g. on excursions.

**Learning outcomes**

Learning outcomes due to involvement in ECE mentioned by EPF families/whānau included

- children having improved verbal skills;
- confident, independent children;
- improved social skills and behaviour;
- learning to write names and count;
- learning te reo and other community languages; and
- developmental skills including toilet training.

A typical comment was:

He’s a lot more confident. … now he has gone to a childcare centre helped him get out there more; gained a lot of skills with writing and counting; making friends. [EPF parent]
Language and culture in ECE

EPF Providers

Support for identity, language and culture formed an essential part of the EPF initiative work, underpinning the engagement of families/whānau by EPF providers.

I think the thing that has been really important ... is the language, culture and identity of the parents are strengthened and it is the parents’ confidence in who they are and their ability to be included [on that basis] is the key and that flows thru to the children. But if we don’t build the ILC of the parents then that child is not going to feel comfortable anywhere. That is our focus—strengthening. [Pasifika EPF provider]

The support was two-pronged. Providers positively supported identity, language and culture in their interactions with families/whānau themselves. Staff were often employed whose ethnicities matched those of families/whānau. Language and culture was also important in the choices made around which ECE service families/whānau would participate Support for cultural identity was an important aspect of the work done by EPF providers to engage families/whānau in learning. Providers working with Māori whānau commented that many of their families/whānau struggled with their sense of identity. As one provider said:

Yes it is identity, yes. One because they come onto the programme and half of them do not know who they are or where they have come from. We actually do whakapapa with the parents. That is part of our early learning care plan for whānau as well. … so it eventually comes and especially through their children’s learning because the child can get up and do their pepehā when they have learnt it well learnt the basic one of this area if they don’t know anything else. [Māori EPF provider]

In contrast providers working with Pasifika families/whānau spoke about the need to find ways to both maintain the cultural identity of their families/whānau, many who were born in the Pacific Islands, while helping them learn about the New Zealand culture.

It is hard—Samoan, Palagi? Who am I? … The children need to know where they belong and need to talk with their parents about this. [Pasifika EPF provider]

EPF providers generally said when working with families/whānau to choose an appropriate ECE service they looked for ECE services which encouraged and/or incorporated the language and culture of the families/whānau; including ECE services with a bicultural programme, staff fluent in te reo, or staff fluent in Pacific languages. Providers spoke about the need for families/whānau to feel a sense of cultural belonging when participating in an ECE service:

Cultural—if they walk into the centre and try to do their cultural thing and there is no place or space for it they disengage. [Pasifika EPF provider]

Teachers happen to be fluent in te reo … language, culture and identity is right from the beginning. … This doesn’t mean that they necessarily want to speak Māori to them, or even know the language, or want to discuss any of those things. “It’s just a matter of, if you see your own kind, you feel more comfortable.
However, EPF providers did note that not all ECE services encouraged and/or incorporated the language and culture of the families/whānau and suggested that one way to change this would be to employ more Pasifika and Māori staff in ECE services in those locations in which they were working.

**EPF families/whānau**

The EPF families/whānau interviewed talked about what they wanted from an ECE service in terms of culture and language and also what they had experienced. Like providers language and culture was important to families/whānau.

Parents were asked in what ways they saw language and culture reflected in the ECE service their child attended. Responses were mixed, reflecting different levels of cultural responsiveness in services attended.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways language and culture is reflected</th>
<th>N parents</th>
<th>% total parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language and culture not reflected</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECE staff speak family/whānau language</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECE staff sing songs in family/whānau language</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECE resources and items reflect family/whānau culture</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: parents were asked to tick all responses that applied so sum of % > 100%

Of those families/whānau surveyed 23 said their language and culture was not reflected in the ECE they attended. On the other hand over a third said their language was spoken, and around half said songs were sung in their language and resources reflected their culture. A few parents also said they had taken part in a visit to a local marae with their ECE. One parents said their ECE had cultural weeks. However, three parents said their ECE could do more in terms of language and culture.

Views on what they needed in terms of language and culture were individual to families/whānau, with some families/whānau commenting they wanted their culture represented; others wanted a mix of the languages and cultures represented in their communities both in teaching staff, children and use of language.

They don’t really have that much culture or interaction. I do feel there is no cultural value in regards to my culture I would love for my kids to have that at kindy. Once whaia A left that was it. [Māori parent]

For me being Māori, if you want your child to learn Māori you can teach them that ‘cos that’s your culture but for me I like that [child] is coming back singing a Samoan song or talking about Diwali. [Māori parent]

One Pasifika parent noted that while the staff were not Pasifika they were welcomed at the ECE service provided a sense of belonging.

It is all mixed, Tongan, Palagi; the staff is all right they are Indian, Chinese but they awesome; when you walk in they say ‘Hi’. [Pasifika parent]
Special needs; health, learning and development

EPF providers

EPF providers were asked how they identified special learning needs when working with children and families/whānau, and where special learning needs were identified, what was the process for working with ECE services and how did they facilitate this with families/whānau.

EPF providers overall described themselves as the interface for families/whānau, and the services families/whānau required, both in order to identify and confirm special learning needs, and in dealing with special learning needs once they were identified.

EPF providers said they were often the first port of call in identifying special learning needs, conducting informal assessments then referring children where necessary to the appropriate agencies. Around half the EPF providers said they also invited other health professionals to assist in assessing children. Needs were identified through observing the children often informally in the home or ECE service. Some EPF staff had expertise in conducting assessments and visits were said to provide opportunities to assess children informally, chat to families/whānau and support families/whānau around decisions to seek further help with special needs.

For me it would be referring on. If in a centre would consult with them—they would have documentation and we would consult and both refer. We would talk to the parent about it and what they have seen and if they believe there is something wrong. [EPF provider]

Being the interface for families/whānau was said to be particularly important where special learning needs had been identified but families/whānau were unable or unwilling to deal directly with services.

The advantage of the EPF and … is that we can link the families/whānau, we can refer them to people that are already attached to agencies out there in the community that they would not otherwise be able to find, or want to find, or may hide from ‘cos a lot of them hide from public services, especially in our EPF contracts families/whānau don’t want to sign forms or give addresses because they are always hiding from different agencies. [Pasifika EPF provider]

EPF providers noted that when children were attending an ECE service, referrals were often made to Special Education, Ministry of Education. Providers did comment that there was generally a long waiting period before Special Education was involved.

We enlist the necessary support—thru ECE Special Ed. But that process does take time and it can be a couple of months before we get any response so it is a process. [EPF provider]

However, the relationships and links providers had with other services in their communities meant they were at times able to fast track things.

Having those relationships with community groups like Plunket, it helps us … then we get advice from other community services. … having that relationship things got fast tracked. So having a relationship with both ECE and community services to combine the whole thing and provide support for family. [EPF provider]

EPF providers also

- used the networks they had established through previous work they had been involved in such as Tāmariki Ora health initiatives;
• [some providers] had in-house services e.g., were also Whānau Ora providers, which was said to be beneficial in expediting the assistance to families/whānau;

• ensured before school checks were done and immunisations were up to date; and

• accompanied families/whānau to appointments to ensure that information is being given and understood regarding health issues.

In addition providers said Well Child checks, Before School checks and dental checks were conducted at many ECE services.

**EPF Families/whānau**

EPF families/whānau were asked who spoke to them about their child’s health, learning and development. In addition to EPF providers, most of the families/whānau mentioned Plunket visits to their homes. One family particularly liked that the Plunket nurse was Pasifika.

Plunket always comes here; she’s a Samoan lady. She came in and we had a chat about my son’s language. I talked to the EPF person as well. That’s why we worked hard to get something [ECE] to put him in. [Pasifika EPF parent]

Families/whānau also said the ECE service their child attended provided information on and forms to complete for Before School checks, hearing and vision tests were conducted at the services and links to the local dentist. Two families/whānau mentioned that a public health nurse had visited them following a visit to the ECE service they were using. One family was involved with a Child Development centre, having been referred through CYF.

Families/whānau were generally very satisfied with the extent of the information and advice they received on their child’s health, learning and development.

**Quality**

When interviewed EPF providers were asked what they looked for in terms of quality and what they considered could be strengthened in the ECE services they were in contact with. EPF families/whānau were asked what they thought were the good things about the ECE service they attended and what a good quality service would look like for them and their child. When surveyed both providers and families/whānau were asked to comment on what a quality ECE service would look like.

It is important to note that EPF providers did not place families/whānau in ECE services which did not provide the quality features they wanted for their families/whānau. We know that particular criteria were looked for in order that EPF families/whānau could attend ECE. In particular, they sought services that provided 20 hours ECE free (i.e. no optional charges) and extras such as providing transport where necessary and lunches. Equally important to providers was the responsiveness of staff to parents. A known barrier for EPF families/whānau to participation in ECE is a sense that they cannot trust an ECE service with their child, or that they do not feel welcome within the setting. For EPF providers an essential quality feature was ECE services connecting with families to generate a sense of belonging. Comment was made by EPF providers that some ECE services were unwilling to accommodate what was perceived as the high needs of families.

EPF providers said they looked for ECE services with

• welcoming environments where staff communicate well with families and children;
• ECE staff who are open, friendly and approachable;
• qualified staff;
• induction processes for families/whānau;
• high levels of adult: child interaction;
• child-led learning;
• family centred approaches where services worked in partnership with families/whānau, recognising the vulnerability of families/whānau but not stereotyping or being judgemental;
• consistent and transparent practice over time; and
• support for cultural identity e.g., inclusiveness and collaborative approaches, Māori and Pacific staff.

People want reality, people want understanding and non-judgmental and feel like they are not being judged. I know that if I walked through those gates and felt that then they would feel it. It’s not good just one staff being on board and being nicey, nicey it has to be a team effort. … It is a Māori kaupapa yea very much so. It’s like that harakeke out there…. [EPF provider]

For families/whānau the most important feature in a quality ECE was being welcomed by the staff and connections made to support their sense of belonging. Families/whānau said they looked for an ECE which had
• welcoming staff who interacted with them and their child (53);

At [kindergarten], … all four ladies were fabulous, approachable, friendly, knew me and every parents by name. That was a big thing for me that interaction, making me feel comfortable. To me if you call me by my name it seems I can approach you without feeling any whakamā, I can talk about anything. [EPF parent]

• educational activities (38);
• cleanliness (26);
• qualified teachers (16);
• a well resourced ECE (12);
• cultural awareness (9);
• an environment where they could choose to stay and watch; and
• feedback from staff on the child’s learning.

When asked whether they would like any changes made to the ECE their child was attending families/whānau were generally satisfied. Some (14) said they would like more teachers of their ethnicity.
Transition to school

EPF providers were asked about their role in supporting EPF families/whānau transition to school. EPF families/whānau were asked how they had engaged with transition processes and what more they would like to happen.

EPF providers overall said they had developed good processes for families/whānau to follow in transitioning to school, including information on schools available in the local community, sourcing information from the relevant schools on how to prepare children and how to enrol as well as ERO reports. Providers had built good relationships with local schools; in particular with principals and new entrant teachers, letting them know that they will also be engaged with families/whānau for the initial three months of school.

They [schools] knew they were getting EPF children and we monitor them very closely for the first three months of school. [EPF provider]

EPF providers generally saw their role as one of preparing not only the child but the child’s family members for what schools would expect of them as parents/caregivers.

The priority … is the preparedness; and not just preparedness for the child but for mum and dad and other support people. [EPF provider]

EPF providers did note that some but not all of the ECE services children were attending also conducted transition programmes which prepared the children for school; some made school visits.

EPF providers said that their roles in transition included

- ensuring children have the basic skills for school entry including teaching children the basics; literacy and numeracy concepts, colours, classroom behaviour, other school routines around eating and so on;
- educating families/whānau around what is expected of them from the school. This was considered important even when families/whānau had older children at a school to ensure school expectations were actually being met;
- some EPF providers met with school staff, in particular new entrant teachers to discuss the EPF child’s learning and what to expect from the child. One EPF provider had discussions with the teacher about how Te Whāriki was used in children’s learning; “so the teacher has a bit of an insight into what sort of learning has happened in the home prior to going to the classroom”;
- one EPF provider enrolled children in pre-school programmes run at the local schools;
- providing transport for some families/whānau for school visits and helping them enrol; and
- EPF providers had different approaches to ensure families/whānau had arranged to have uniforms, where these were necessary. These included
  - helping families/whānau set up payment plans for uniforms with school;
  - supporting families/whānau to contact schools to get second hand uniforms;
  - one EPF provider subsidised uniforms costs and food so children have these things when starting school. This provider also bought car seats where these were required;
  - encouraging families/whānau to budget for school uniforms
  - in some instances EPF providers encourage WINZ to pay uniform costs directly to school; and
Some EPF providers did note that in their communities families/whānau who ‘fly under the radar’; that is have not registered children at birth, or, are in New Zealand illegally could present a problem when enrolling at school. However, with the advent of the Early Learning Information Project (ELI), providers simply notify the families/whānau that they are able to help them with transition to school “no questions asked”.

EPF families/whānau

EPF families/whānau shared their thoughts on the transition process. Some of the families/whānau had children that had recently transitioned while others were looking toward this happening. Over half (64) the families surveyed already had a child at school, while 47 families/whānau said this was their first child to attend school. Thirty families said the ECE their child was attending had a transition programme.

One family where a child had started school commented on the ease of adjustment for the child entering school. His adjustment between kindy and school was flawless. The teacher was even surprised at his level of learning.

EPF families/whānau were generally satisfied with the input from their EPF provider. One parent said that it had been important in their decision to start on the child’s fifth birthday as the provider explained the class levels. Other families/whānau said they were confident the transition would go well because they were involved with the EPF provider, indicating a high level of trust in the provider decisions. A few families/whānau said they found the information they received from the provider helpful in clarifying their understanding around the process. Support with school visits was also said to be helpful. Some families said that was not something they had thought of doing.

The sorts of things families said would help them choose a school included; a school close to their home, reputation e.g., feedback from other families, and that other family members attend.

Many of the EPF families/whānau said they would follow the same process as with their older children and commented that they did not need as much support from their EPF provider as they had gone through the process before.

Impact of EPF initiative

The impact of the EPF initiative extends beyond the EPF families/whānau and into the communities they reside in. Important areas of impact, identified in previous discussion, are outlined as follows:

- Participation levels have increased in target communities; in particular, participation for Māori, Pasifika and low-income families/whānau with three and four year old children who may otherwise not have enrolled in ECE services.

- EPF has supported the on-going engagement of families/whānau in both ECE services and in on-going early learning prior to starting school. Families/whānau have been supported in developing an increased understanding and knowledge about both what an ECE service is and the benefits of attending, as well as what early learning entails and the importance of this prior to school. EPF providers eased the way for families/whānau to participate and engage with ECE by providing on-going support through regular meetings with families/whānau and visits to ECE services with engagement based on family readiness. Providers supported choices that matched families/whānau’
needs, translating the knowledge they had for families/whānau; resulting in increased understanding and confidence on the part of EPF families/whānau.

I thought OK, you know, all day cares are the same … you see I didn’t know. [EPF family]

- EPF families/whānau are engaged with ECE to a greater or lesser extent, contingent on their level of comfort. Some families/whānau have developed the confidence to participate in making choices as to what they want from an ECE service, to engage with the ECE service their child attends e.g., discuss their child’s progress and participate in planning and assessment. Families/whānau have also expressed their confidence in terms of ‘teaching their child’ due to the early learning EPF providers have conducted in homes. Parenting skills were also learnt.

Actually it’s made a big difference, she’s pulled me out of my shell I was in … She knows what she’s talking about and she sort of lightened up the home a bit more as in teaching me how to act around the kids. [EPF family]

- For some EPF families/whānau working with EPF providers meant they developed a trusting relationship with a ‘family support’ agency for the first time. For these families/whānau trust in the system to work was established for the first time.

I gained heaps of trust in the system. I trusted her [coordinator] to find good people and she did and she worked really hard to.

- Identification of special learning needs was underpinned by the trusting relationship between EPF provider and family. Initial assessments, often informal, were conducted in homes with the EPF provider as the interface, for families/whānau and the services families/whānau required. Families/whānau were referred to the appropriate service.

- As part of developing a profile within communities, EPF providers established networks with other community organizations and agencies. This served two purposes, the first to raise awareness around ECE, the second to provide an integrated approach in order to better support the needs of families/whānau and therefore enable engagement in ECE and early learning, and for families/whānau transitioning to school.

- Transition processes to school were made transparent for EPF families/whānau. EPF providers had robust processes around transition which ensured that families/whānau were informed about and aware of school expectations, and equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills, as well as resources such as uniforms, to support participation in a school setting.

- The employment of staff embedded in the community, with an understanding and knowledge of family culture and language, has provided both an entrée to recruiting and the means of working with families/whānau due to staff having a depth of understanding as to the optimal approach with families/whānau in the communities they are part of.

**Conclusion**

The following conclusions discuss the effectiveness of EPF in supporting families/whānau to participate and engage in ECE, and strengthen their involvement with early learning in the home and in transition to school. It unpacks those features of the initiative that contribute to success and challenges that remain.
The EPF initiative has supported participation in ECE for priority families/whānau in target communities where high levels of non-participation have been identified. Cost free participation was largely enabled through the use of the 20 Hours ECE policy with EPF providers enrolling priority families/whānau in those ECE services which were willing to negotiate so there were no costs for families/whānau. Children generally attend up to but not more than 20 hours a week. The findings indicate the EPF initiative has had some success in enabling those priority children whose families remain with the programme to attend ECE. However, success is only partial; we do not have evidence about the large number of families who left the EPF programme (393 in 2013) and for whom their ECE attendance was unknown.

EPF providers shared both similarities and differences in practice. EPF providers were embedded in communities, establishing trusting relationships with families/whānau which supported transition to ECE as well as to school. However, the context within the different communities required different cultural approaches to support cultural responsiveness to the families/whānau worked with. As well, where communities had high levels of complex need, the nature of the work was more time intensive for each family/whānau.

EPF seems to be successful in alleviating many of the barriers which have commonly hindered families/whānau from participating in ECE. EPF providers addressed a range of barriers in a variety of ways but underpinning all approaches was the notion of brokering. That is on-going negotiation and discussion, translating the knowledge held by one party to another in order to resolve and address issues that arose in preparing families/whānau to engage to ECE services and with other community agencies relevant to family support, and vice versa. Meyer (2010) notes that a helpful concept to theorize knowledge brokering is concept of translation: Translation of knowledge from one world to another. Brokered knowledge is “knowledge made more robust, accountable, usable; knowledge that ‘serves locally at a given time; knowledge that has been de and re-assembled”.

The time span covered by EPF contracts enables the intensive nature of the work, including regular contact with families/whānau from the point of recruitment until transition into school. The time span, particularly where contracts are renewed, allows providers the time to develop a profile in the community, develop the most appropriate systems and processes to support their work in the community, establish networks with other community organisations essential to supporting families/whānau, including ECE services, and build trusting relationships with families/whānau. This time span allows enough time to develop foundations for change within EPF families/whānau, often disengaged from education including ECE.

The work of EPF providers and their ability to understand and respond to the needs within their communities, both cultural and socioeconomic, contributed to families/whānau’ engagement both with the ECE service used and in early learning in the home. The contracting of EPF providers able to walk in two worlds was important in gaining trust with families/whānau and the resulting engagement in learning.

One issue reported by EPF is the increasing number of families/whānau with complex needs, which means education diminishes as a priority in and amongst other needs. Increases in participation in target communities appear to have left providers the challenge of now working with those families/whānau remaining, many of whom have high needs pertaining to social issues, including CYF referrals and economic issues. While provider connections and knowledge within communities are
generally successful in linking families/whānau to the right service at the right time in order to alleviate social and financial issues, supporting effective participation; the time required to do this can be over that contracted for.

- Overall, EPF initiatives do work to address the needs of priority families/whānau and ensure engagement with suitable and responsive ECE services. However, according to most providers, the complex or high needs of some of their EPF families/whānau seem to be a factor in the non-responsive nature of some ECE services to these families/whānau. EPF providers have been and are advocates for quality ECE services responsive to and welcoming of EPF families/whānau. Where services are not accommodating family/whānau needs, there is a place for professional development around working with families.
4. Flexible Responsive Home-Based

Initiative Description and Community Involvement

Flexible and Responsive Home-based (FRHB) initiatives provide the opportunity for ECE to be delivered in a home setting. There are two models of this initiative. Model 1 aims to either expand existing services and community agencies into licensed home-based ECE delivery; and Model 2 aims to transition informal care arrangements into licensed and certificated ECE environments. Qualified and registered teachers are employed as regional coordinators to provide on-going support, training, resources and equipment to home-based (HB) carers. The coordinator visits the carer and children in the home-based setting on a regular basis. The co-ordinator may meet with the children’s parents/whānau although they are not required to do so, although this does not always occur. Some parents indicated they would like this to happen.

Only eight providers are contracted to deliver FRHB. Six of these providers deliver both Model 1 and Model 2, and the other two deliver Model 1 and Model 2 respectively, a total of 14 projects. It is small in size compared with EPF (29 projects), TAP (35 projects), SP (40 projects) and ILCCE (30 projects). FRHB has the smallest number of children enrolled of any of the Participation Initiatives. At December 2013, Model 1 had 123 children enrolled, and Model 2 had 60 children enrolled. Total enrolment in all Participation Initiatives is 3,497; HB comprises only 3.5 percent of these enrolments.

The following discussion on the FRHB initiative is based on survey responses from four FRHB providers (50 percent) and eight families/whānau they were working with, and in-depth interviews with a further five FRHB coordinators and nine of the families/whānau they were working with (one of these families/whānau was interviewed in each stage of the evaluation).

FRHB participation initiatives were located in South Auckland, Te Kuiti, Rotorua, Waitomo and Wellington.

FRHB services operate in Ministry of Education licenced and funded home-based ECE settings. There are up to four children per carer, and carers are usually matched with individual children and families/whānau. Location, travel, culture and hours, for example, may be considered when allocating or selecting carers. Some FRHB providers coordinate carers from within the extended family/whānau. Families/whānau generally expressed confidence in FRHB services because they were home-like and because they knew and had confidence in the carer. These comments were particularly common from the parents/whānau of infants (who often viewed FRHB as a ‘safe’ option), from Māori and Pasifika families/whānau and from those who commented they had poor previous education experiences.

There was some variation between the FRHB initiatives and two differing approaches were evident. In the first approach, providers focused recruitment efforts on priority non-participating children and families/whānau and encouraged engagement in existing HB ECE services. In the second approach, they focused recruitment efforts on existing informal arrangements (for example within families/whānau or between friends) and provided support and funding. There was also a distinction between FRHB services in that some operated a ‘stand alone’ HB operation whilst others offered or encouraged a pathway to centre-based ECE. Another point of difference evident was that some FRHB providers offered ‘wrap around services’ for families/whānau whilst others focused solely on providing HB ECE. Some HB providers charged families/whānau a fee but others offered the FRHB service
free. These differences were evident in the comments of both providers and family/whānau and these points will be elaborated in subsequent sections of this chapter.

The flexibility of HB services was viewed positively. Families/whānau who worked shift work or irregular hours found that when accessing FRHB services they could negotiate early or late starts or finishes and weekend attendance. One provider interviewed offered a regular van service to pick up children where the family did not have transport or as a temporary measure such as a new baby born. In a second, the kaitiaki (carer) offered transport if this was negotiated with whānau. A third provider, who said there were issues around transport, had funds set aside for petrol vouchers. The remaining two did not provide regular transport.

Some FRHB initiatives were allocated to already existing services that had strong links with their community and these initiatives grew rapidly. The comment below was from a Trust that was well established and had relationships with the Tongan and Pasifika communities. At the time of interviewing they reported that they had exceeded their original target of 60 children and had 120 children engaged with 80 more on a waiting list. A new network was about to begin to provide HB ECE for 60 of the children on the waiting list. Eighty percent of the total number of children was from Tongan, or other Pasifika families/whānau.

It is very important [for us], the drive that we have with the community, and working together with the community. [FRHB provider]

On the other hand, it was evident that some new services took some time to build trust, develop strong relationships and become established in communities.

We’re finding it hard to break in to the community—it has taken a while to do. [Name] has been trying to raise the profile within community organisations—she is active within the community. [FRHB provider]

**Participation and attendance**

Both providers and families/whānau indicated that FRHB initiatives were working effectively to increase participation. Providers generally conveyed the view that building trust and developing community relationships were pivotal to their success.

Taking the time to talk with the families develops a relationship. When the families feel that they can trust the service and the people working for the service they then feel confident for their children to attend the service. [FRHB provider]

Also important to successful participation was networking and engaging in community events to inform families about FRHB, allowing time to transition into HB services and the provision of welcoming environments.

While all five providers interviewed said most children were new to ECE, percentages varied and indicated that FRHB was not taking only priority children who were not attending ECE.

Most of the children have not attended ECE before—out of the 120 children, only eight had been enrolled before. [FRHB provider]

One provider commented that 75 to 80 percent of the children enrolled had no previous ECE experience, and another put this figure at around 60 percent.

The average length of time that children spend in the FRHB services varied according to needs. Twenty to thirty hours per week was the most common and 30 hours was standard for the children transported by van. One
provider reported 40 hours per week for some children. Providers commented that the FRHB initiatives were successful not only in engaging children for the first time but in maintaining their participation. Providers helped parents/whānau to maintain their participation through a range of means:

- Most important was regular personal contact from the coordinator/kaitiaki through visits and phone calls, kanohi kit e kanohi (all providers).
- Community events, such as playgroup and drop-in centre offered a forum for children and families to get together.
- Developing an awareness of the value of ECE was said to be important for families. This was done through church meetings in Pasifika communities.
- After providers became established, they said that families came to them because of “word of mouth”.

All the families/whānau interviewed said they were satisfied with the hours they used.

**What supports participation?**

Families/whānau generally appreciated the flexibility in terms of hours offered by the FRHB. For those working shifts, irregular hours or studying, the ability to vary hours was essential.

> It’s a good arrangement and she’s open Saturdays and Sundays—that’s when the weddings are and that’s when I work. [FRHB parent]

> They enjoyed kōhanga but the hours were just crazy—they were from nine to three and that’s just not catering to the working person. And they had holidays—school holidays and that doesn’t help because we work school holidays. We start at six and day care doesn’t open until seven. [FRHB parent]

This latter parent explained that the FRHB initiative enabled her mother to resign her full-time job, work as carer for her two children and come to the house early in the morning so that she could wait until the children woke, and then take them back to her house for the day. Another parent explained that her job entailed working Thursday to Sunday, and into the evenings, and that this was only possible when she negotiated an FRHB arrangement.

The homelike nature of FRHB was viewed by families/whānau as being safe. One mother who was still breast feeding commented on the appropriateness of FRHB for babies.

> It’s just around the corner so it’s convenient (to work) and at six months old, he was too young for day care. I wouldn’t take him to that. [FRHB parent]

The provision of transport or the availability of petrol vouchers was identified by some providers and parents/whānau as supporting participation and attendance. One provider offered a van service on a daily basis, but this was used by only some of the families. Another gave petrol vouchers when particular needs arose rather than as an everyday or general provision. The following comment from a parent using a van service to a question about participation was not atypical.

> Yes, it was going to be quite complicated and difficult. Six children. Pick-up and delivery made the world of difference. It’s unlikely we would have attended without this. [FRHB parent]

Comments by the provider of this initiative confirmed the significance of transport.
The majority of our children, in fact all of our children at the moment, have transport issues. We’ve got kids that are on there in the interim … say for example [name], she’s on there for the next three months because her mum’s just recently had a baby and she also has to share—the mum has to share a vehicle with her in-laws … Maybe dad’s doing a contract job away from home or mum works locally but she has different times from the time that he needs to go into care and then there’s the kids that don’t have any transport at all … The majority of children ‘on the run’ are there because they don’t have transport and we try not to make anything a barrier. [FRHB provider]

Some FRHB initiatives did not charge a fee and this was frequently noted by providers and families/whānau as supporting participation.

Yeah—if you go to kōhanga or kindy WINZ only subsidises so much and then I have to pay the rest through my benefit. Hell no—not with what I get! [FRHB parent]

Other factors that supported participation included the provision of community and ‘wrap around services’. Most of the FRHB providers offered wider support for families/whānau and others developed relationships with community groups that filled this role. It was common for providers to describe the wide range of challenges that families/whānau faced and how these impacted on participation and attendance. Domestic violence, addiction issues, poverty, the inability to provide food or health care and shame were noted as barriers to participation. The provision of social services mediated some of these issues and facilitated participation.

When we first moved here we had no money for my kids, for my sons. So [name, FRHB coordinator] helped us out. For example, like we didn’t have no furniture or stuff in the house and she helped us out by getting them. [FRHB parent]

Providers often commented that they specifically follow up absences as they may be indicative of wider needs which they can help to address. Providers also noted that regular visits, regular phone contact and non-judgmental teachers and carers facilitated participation. Playgroups, one-on-one time with teachers and learning about the benefits of ECE were also supportive. They also noted the importance of committed, passionate staff.

A number of providers indicated that FRHB initiatives provided solutions to common participation issues such as transience.

It’s working really well to date, particularly when there have been barriers to children participating in ECE—with transience for example. The teachers can travel to wherever the children go. If they move home or caregiver, we can follow and give support. [FRHB provider]

There was evidence that FRHB initiatives are providing an entrée to group or centre-based ECE for many families with older children. All but one provider noted that older children tend to transition to other early childhood services, and kindergarten attendance prior to school was specifically noted by three providers. Two of these were kindergarten associations and able to arrange enrolment in their association’s kindergartens, and these were then sometimes used in conjunction with HB. The lack of fees charged by kindergartens was suggested as one reason for this. This transition was particularly common when children reached three years of age. The availability of 20 Hours ECE was often mentioned in this regard and there was a feeling that FRHB provided the opportunity to help families/whānau to learn about the benefits of ECE. Providers and parents said they saw value in the child learning wider social skills in a bigger group before starting school. There was a suggestion that the relationships developed in the more intimate HB setting bolstered child and families/whānau confidence and in combination, these factors created an appetite for ECE.
More often, they move on to another ECE service when they turn three and can access 20 Hours ECE. [FRHB provider]

We are usually the first and then we sort of introduce them to other ECE—particularly when they become eligible for 20 Hours ECE they tend to also attend kindergarten or preschool—as long as the hours aren’t clashing. [FRHB provider]

Some collaboration between the FRHB providers and other ECE providers was described.

Historically it was like everyone guarded their own territory—you know we all want bottoms on seats and it was that mentality. Now we need to collaborate for the best interests of these children. [FRHB provider]

This provider explained how local early childhood service personnel are meeting regularly with other community services. These regular meetings are organised through the local Community Action Group, another of the Participation Initiatives that in this case has been successful in enabling supportive networks to develop in the interests of children and families. This consultative approach enabled the provider to help a FRHB parent who could no longer afford their fees to find alternative, more affordable ECE at a centre near to her home. Families/whānau were generally very satisfied with the FRHB services. Aside from the aspects noted above they reported that observing their children’s enjoyment, knowing their caregivers, a range of learning activities and friendly helpful attitudes were important. Families/whānau showed a preference for home-like settings.

Barriers to participation

A number of aspects were identified in relation to FRHB participation that created barriers or caused problems. The intent of FRHB was for ECE to be available close to home but this has not always proven to be the case. In reality, children and family/whānau are often matched with carers outside the community and this creates transportation issues. Transience, the difficulty tracking children that disappear and a lack of information or consistency when children are removed to CYF care were other barriers to participation.

One provider spoke of difficulties in gaining financial support from WINZ for a parent who wanted to study and needed home-based care. She told another story of a family who “spent hours filling in a form and the WINZ person just ripped it to pieces in front of them and said no you haven’t done that right”. When obstacles such as these are put in the way, families are deterred from ECE participation.

We are feeling frustrated with the bureaucracy and the lack of connection between departments. We need alliances between the organisations and people need to be working with the child in the centre of the focus and not the rules and regulations. I am not saying that you don’t need these but they are using the rules to shut things down rather than thinking how they are going to work within the situation … so the families/whānau go back home and shut the door. [FRHB provider]

Another provider reported a difficulty in finding placements for children for the nine hours covered by the WINZ subsidy and indicated that the restrictive nature of this subsidy created a barrier. This provider charged a fee for FRHB hours not covered by subsidies.

The WINZ subsidy is an issue—nine hours is not enough if you aren’t working. Caregivers want more than—15 hours or two days. It is hard to match nine hours. Over nine hours and the parents have to pay and many simply can’t. [FRHB provider]
Three of the parents who were interviewed had not enrolled their child in ECE before FRHB. The five parents whose children had been to another ECE service had a reason for the change, i.e.

- the hours of a centre not suiting;
- transport being difficult;
- a change in custody arrangements (child in CYFS care); and
- dissatisfaction with a child’s experiences in ECE centres (2 parents):

  [Child] has so many allergies—and behavioural problems. We needed the flexibility. Where he was just wasn’t working at all—he was just getting worse. He was at a childcare centre but was asked to leave because of his bad behaviour at nine months old. I kept him with me but at about two then I sent him to [name centre], my niece went there so it was a family referral and they were happy to have him. But he has epilepsy and food allergies and they just weren’t following anything that I was asking them to do. They were going behind my back and asking my natural mum for her advice and she doesn’t agree with his medication or anything. So, he was coming home sick and upset.

The second parent reported a “really, really bad experience” with another HB provider and not seeing any progress in her child from attending the “kindy”. The vignette below is illustrative from the parent’s experience of the factors making a difference for this parent—holistic support for the family, good communication about the child’s learning and development, and practical support with transport and lunches. The following is an example of a parent’s experience of what supports participation.

He kept the communication lines open at any time and always offered support with anything. It didn’t even have to be just purely about the kids it was about the family. You know things that would just make it easier for myself and my kids to be involved with them, and them keeping me involved and up to date with everything they were doing. He showed me a lot of the progress where kids started and where they are at with this stage in their programme. What changes, they showed me the actual changes in the kids.

Especially with the van driver and the van pick ups that was a godsend because at that time I didn’t have very much money so they always offered to pick them up. If I couldn’t feed my kids they would always provide it and reassure me that don’t think I’m doing a bad job ‘cos I’m not providing lunch for a day, things like that happen. I think that was out of the scope of their programme but they always went over and beyond their role as a HB carer so that’s why I chose them. [FRHB parent]

Other reasons for not engaging in ECE included unstable housing and so families moving, distrust of the education system, not wanting to leave children with someone not known to them and cultural reasons. “It’s a cultural thing where this is my child and my responsibility”. [FRHB parent]

There was also a perception that some families/whānau were concerned that enrolling their child in ECE would be frowned on by WINZ. “Guilt, some fear WINZ might look at it and use it against them.” [FRHB provider]
Parent engagement in ECE and learning

When interviewed, parents/whānau spoke clearly of their aspirations for their children. They were similar in their responses. Most recognised that FRHB was providing an introduction to education and later schooling. Most held a desire for children to learn to socialise, mix with others, to learn to enjoy education and to

A good life—I want the kids to go on and get a good life. To go to school and learn so they can get a good life. [FRHB parent]

The nature of family/whānau engagement in FRHB ECE and their children’s learning varied considerably between projects and across families. Some families/whānau were actively engaged with their carer on a regular basis, through taking the child to the home, or because the carer was a member of the family or friend, or lived close by. Some families/whānau had conversations with the carers about the child/ren and were involved in planning some, but not all, were present when teachers or coordinators visited. Families who were using a van service and who did not regularly meet the carer or have contact with her/him had a connection with the van driver or the coordinator or kaitiaki who acted as a ‘go between’ to the carer.

Whilst connections between parents/whānau were evident, all the families surveyed said they would like to be more involved. This could be helped by being asked and having more time. All these families said the FRHB provider encouraged involvement with their child’s learning in various ways. These included, talking about the benefits of ECE, giving them ideas for activities, contacting them if they do not attend, and telling them about local educational events. Phone calls, texts, Facebook and visits to homes as well as portfolios and diaries were some of the means providers and carers used to keep in touch with families.

What supports engagement in ECE

Providers used a range of practices to encourage family/whānau engagement in FRHB and their child’s ECE. Families/whānau were encouraged to be present when co-ordinators visited caregivers and children. One provider specifically commented that their co-ordinators timed their visits to fit in with parents/whānau. The providers spoke of these visits as an opportunity for co-ordinators to talk about children’s learning and development and discuss the benefits of ECE with caregivers and parents/whānau jointly. Invitations and encouragement to attend regular playgroups worked in this same manner. Providers believed that when parents/whānau understood the benefits and observed their children developing and learning, they were more likely to engage.

If they don’t understand the benefits of ECE, if they are not working or studying they think why would I give my child to someone else? [FRHB provider]

Gently and continually showing them the benefits of ECE. Not rammed down their throats but done in a positive, gentle way. [FRHB provider]

Learning journals and daily diaries provided a means of engaging families/whānau in their child’s learning. These journals contained records of children’s interests, abilities and achievements and photos of children ‘in action’. Some provided suggestions for how caregivers and families/whānau could extend children in the home setting.

Providers explained the necessity of developing sound relationships in supporting family/whānau engagement. Building trust, actively listening and talking, “using the parents’ language” and providing teachers and carers of the same culture supported these relationships.
Regular, flexible communication was also noted as being essential to encourage family/whānau engagement. Providers used a range of methods to communicate and one commented that they tailor their communication to whatever method the families/whānau preferred.

> We try to find the best way to communicate—for some parents this is email, others text, for some it’s Facebook…. [FRHB provider]

Hosting fun events for children was another practice providers employed to encourage family/whānau engagement. One provider explained that they kept a small pool of funds to provide petrol vouchers to help families/whānau attend meeting with teachers or such events.

> We pay for petrol—we get the caregivers to record their usage and pay them. [FRHB provider]

Families/whānau were generally satisfied that FRHB initiatives were meeting their needs in terms of hours, days, cost and cultural responsiveness. Where caregivers were related to the child or had a strong relationship with the families/whānau there was likely to be dropping in to spend time with children.

> I stay about half an hour and say hi to the other kids. He doesn’t care—he doesn’t need me. I talk to T (carer and grandmother), let her know if he’s feeling under the weather or something. She has other kids…they are his cousins and I might play with them too. [FRHB parent]

> My dad is the home-based teacher in our house … he has four kids here and they go to playgroup every week. I help my dad all the time because I want my kids to learn more. I know my dad, he is one of the preachers so I know he is looking after my kids … we sit down two times a week after school—we sit down and talk about my kids. He tells me what my kids are doing well and all that. [FRHB parent]

**Barriers to engagement**

There was some variation in parent/whānau engagement in FRHB. Crises within families/whānau, ill health or disability of parents or other children and large families/whānau with lots of young children were said to be barriers.

A father of six young children described the reasons for his lack of engagement.

> The need for me is the break during the day—it is marvellous. I have another one year old so I’m a fulltime dad. A bit of time for myself is welcome. [Name] is picked up by the van at 8.30 am and dropped off at 3.00 pm. [FRHB parent]

He was, however, able to describe the activities of his child during the day from conversations with her, knew about her playgroup attendance and was planning for her to attend kindergarten prior to school.

Providers also commented that where parents worked long hours this impacted on their engagement.

In other instances, families/whānau were aware their child was safe and happy and did not see it as their place to be involved.

> I don’t know what they get up to, I don’t know but he’s very happy when he comes home. [FRHB parent]

A lack of interest was said to be another main reason for limited engagement. One parent thought her presence in the setting would disrupt the child because she was unable to control the child’s behaviour.
Learning outcomes

Families/whānau indicated that they wanted their children to be socially competent and enter school well prepared, speaking clearly, interacting with others, and confident. They recognised a need for children to be independent and a few mentioned that they wanted their children to learn the alphabet or letters. Families/whānau reported positive outcomes and satisfaction with children’s learning and development. There were numerous comments also to the effect children now “knew how to behave” or had “settled down”.

But he’s done so well yeah. He can talk, he talks to me hard out and he likes to do his own thing now. He’s not so clingy like before. [FRHB parent]

Programmes tailored to children’s interests and needs and recording children’s learning and development to discuss with families/whānau supported learning outcomes. The provision of a range of age appropriate resources, changed regularly to extend children’s development and match their changing interests was also appreciated. Providers noted the importance of on-going professional development training for teachers/coordinators and carers, role modelling by qualified teachers and good resources. However, these opportunities varied.

Most carers were chosen for their community knowledge and were matched with the ethnicity of families/whānau. FRHB carers were generally not qualified early childhood teachers, although they are all supported by coordinators who are registered teachers. The level and frequency of professional support varied for those interviewed. All FRHB services had regular coordinator visits to the carer. One kindergarten association, as also reported in the Stage 2 evaluation report (Mitchell et al., 2014, p. 17), supported the training of its carers in an eight week course to obtain an NZQA level 3 certificate and required carers to bring their children to a weekly playgroup, where a qualified teacher takes the programme, modelling and discussing teaching and learning and offering workshops. The other kindergarten association also offered training, workshops, seminars, conferences, and paid for attendance at a conference. An iwi-based FRHB project had weekly wananga for professional development with carers. One provider, also reported in the Stage 2 report (Mitchell et al., 2014, p. 10), voiced a desire to work directly with families/whānau rather than just with carers.

The provider survey responses (n=4) emphasised professional development as ways the FRHB offered quality. Two of these providers commented on the need to be more culturally responsive through ensuring “all educators are comfortable with the implementation of a bicultural program” and employing “more Māori and Pasifika people”. A third stated, “more educators could provide more choice”. Three providers interviewed commented on a lack of sufficient cultural resources available to them, specifically Pasifika and Māori resources. All three commented on a need for publications and other resources that they thought the Ministry of Education should provide. The issue for one provider was that the resources from Learning Media that used to be available were seemingly no longer available and were not sent out to them. Another held a view that ECE centres were given resources that were not available to FRHB.

We want more of what we used to get from Learning Media—reactivate the music and stories. They used to send these out a few years ago and that support was just phenomenal! The stories are powerful—they help form a bridge. [FRHB provider]

I’ve seen within centres, beautiful resources that they, you know the resource packs that they give out, CDs and booklets that go with them. Our kaitiaki could use more of those, could absolutely use all of those. [FRHB provider]
Employing staff from the cultural communities of families and inviting families to contribute was seen as a means to support cultural knowledge available to providers.

**Language, identity and culture in ECE**

There was a desire expressed by both providers and family/whānau for language and culture to be reflected in FRHB services and for carers to be culturally sensitive and understanding. Families/whānau had differing views on the degree to which they wished their language and culture to be incorporated and their needs were individual to families/whānau. Two FRHB providers interviewed were from initiatives that were serviced specific cultural communities (Māori and Pasifika).

All providers said that family/whānau aspirations with regard to language and culture were discussed at enrolment.

Providers said where possible they recruited caregivers and teachers/coordinators from a diverse range of backgrounds to match families/whānau. Providers also advocated the value of recruiting members of the wider family/whānau (especially grandparents) as carers who could transmit language and immerse children in their culture. Families/whānau likewise spoke positively of this aspect of the FRHB initiative and appreciated the ability for these people to be recognised and paid for this work. Describing a grandfather carer one parent commented:

> He does the culture and dance and Tuvaluan language … they speak Tuvaluan all the time but sometimes he uses English—like to count numbers. It’s good. [FRHB parent]

Resources reflecting different cultures, but particularly Māori and Pasifika cultures were said to be important for families using FRHB, especially books and music. Providers said that these needed to be funded and freely available.

> I was working with some Chinese children in the home-based and I played a CD with some Chinese songs on it and from that moment how they interacted with the environment totally changed! It was the music; it was incredible! [FRHB provider]

Providers commented on the need to be open to new or different ways of doing things in order to respect cultural beliefs and practices. They sought advice and resources from community groups and networks. One provider employed a Māori resource teacher and another employed a Pasifika resource teacher on a national basis.

Families/whānau spoke positively of the ability for their children to be exposed to or immersed in their culture through FRHB.

> The last [carer] was awesome—she pulled me aside and asked me if I was Māori and how much te reo I’d like my girls to use and understand. I asked her to teach the girls about their iwi, the language and how to understand it, Māori songs. She fulfilled everything. [FRHB parent]

Some families/whānau said that their children’s FRHB involvement helped them as well as their children to develop language and confidence.

> My boys come home singing all these Samoan songs and I’m like I don’t even know these songs. It’s impressive, especially with my family members. Especially if they have not seen them for a while and from not talking to walking around my parents house singing along. My family is like hey, what’s going on here? It’s like extreme learning! [FRHB parent]
My husband is Rarotongan and [caregiver and grandmother] is. I like it that she speaks the language to—I can’t speak it and his father isn’t so good. It’s more important to T and so she does all that. [FRHB parent]

As in other ECE services, the shortage of Māori and Pasifika carers and coordinators/teachers was as a barrier to providing culturally responsive FRHB.

It is a real struggle to get Pasifika teachers which I think is really sad, they are just snapped up or busy doing what they are doing. It’s a real shame because we have lots of Pasifika families/whānau and language is an issue. [FRHB provider]
**Special Needs**

FRHB providers talked about the need for collaboration between carer, coordinators and families/whānau and the value of outside support agencies in identifying and supporting children who have additional needs. Families/whānau raised concerns with carers and coordinators and provided information about already identified issues. Providers relied on carers and teachers/coordinators to identify needs. They did this through their usual observations, working alongside children, applying their knowledge and training.

> Quite often the teacher recognises first and raises it sensitively but sometimes we are approached. We engage with the Ministry Special Ed., local marae based services. We are trained but we aren’t specialists. For example, one boy has recently been diagnosed with autism—we organised the assessment and now he is receiving support. Lots of our children have suffered trauma or past abuse so milestones are likely to be delayed. It takes a few visits to build a relationship, pick up on special needs and provide support. [FRHB provider]

The ability to identify and work with children who have additional needs is reliant on carers and teachers/coordinators’ training and expertise and this varied from one initiative to another.

Families/whānau commented that FRHB works well for children with additional needs and health issues. The small group size and individualised care facilitates close monitoring and frequent administration of medication.

> She [carer] keeps on top of his medication and always notes it down. Anything to do with if he’s not feeling well. She offers tips on what can help … emotional support as well. [FRHB parent]

The flexibility of FRHB can also support families where there are health issues. A father of a young child who had significant health issues and was awaiting surgery, explained that he was not able to leave this younger child to take his slightly older daughter to the closest centre-based service. FRHB collecting and delivering the daughter home enabled her to participate in ECE.

**Transition to School**

One FRHB provider had not had any children transition to school but was working with a 4 year-old in child in preparation. Another provider reported that few children had transitioned to school because of their young starting age. All FRHB providers interviewed described supporting some families/whānau and children through the transition to school process. Typically, providers identified children approaching five years of age and supported them according to individual needs. Three providers specifically commented that the majority of their children attended kindergarten immediately prior to transitioning to school sometimes in conjunction with FRHB. This dual enrolment relied on collaboration between services.

Some FRHB families/whānau said that they had received information from providers on the types of schools available, how to enrol and how to go about visiting. While still too early for some families, others would like support with school visits and information on how they can help their child transition.

Providers assisted with school selection and visits. They encouraged selecting a school well in advance and provided information about local schools, referring families/whānau to ERO reports, the ERO website and Ministry of Education publications. Providers encouraged families/whānau to take their child on school visits and would accompany them if they felt this was necessary. Three providers arranged visits, sought permission and took the children for school visits.
Providers described how they prepared children for transitioning to school—encouraging literacy and numeracy on an informal basis and encouraging independence skills.

Self-help skills are emphasised, practising opening lunch, washing hands, putting things away. We don’t sit and do flash cards but some are becoming interested in literacy and numeracy – we encourage that on an informal basis. [FRHB provider]

Many providers said that they supported attendance at kindergarten prior to transition.

The majority of our children go to kindergarten as well as [name] before going to school and we encourage that. [FRHB provider]

Over the past two months we’ve had five children that have turned five and out of those five we’ve put three into our kindys … because their parents wanted them to have a little bit more…they noticed they needed to get used to a bigger crowd. [FRHB provider]

Parents also said:

But I do think at four I would put him one or two days a week at kindergarten where there’s more children so he doesn’t get a shock in the classroom environment. [Family/whānau]

I was thinking of putting her into kindy when she is four—to get a feel for what it is like, [name] kindy, I’d rather take her myself at first. [FRHB parent]

**What more is needed**

FRHB providers would like more culturally based resources to support transition to school, simple pamphlets in a range of languages providing information and advice. One provider surveyed made comment that the MOE pamphlets were too complex and required too much reading, but did not specify which pamphlets.

Providers said that responsibility for other children made school visiting difficult. Collaboration between early childhood services was often necessary to enable children to attend kindergarten or another centre-based early childhood service as well as FRHB prior to transitioning to school and processes to facilitate collaboration among these services would benefit children.

**Quality**

There were a number of ways in which FRHB providers understood and said they provided quality:

- learning through play is promoted;
- the rights, needs and cultures of children are respected;
- relationships with educators are responsive (“quality for our home-based service is a person who can respond, respond to the kaitiaki and whānau and the tamariki needs”);
- a holistic approach to whānau and children is taken (“you can’t cut the tamariki off from the whānau, it’s a whole package, if you’re going to take the children then you’ve got the whānau coming with you”);
- contribution of all participants—children, whānau, carers and coordinators—is encouraged;
- programme planning and effective implementation of the learning programme is a factor.
Structural features of FRHB were highlighted by providers as supporting access and quality. FRHB is flexible in hours, location and allocation of carers, enabling a match to family needs. All providers employed qualified and registered coordinators or teachers, as required to meet licensing requirements. Carers receive training in health and safety and some providers offer a range of other professional development opportunities for them although these varied (see section ‘Learning outcomes’ above). Small group sizes were said to facilitate the development of relationships with children. These features, when combined with the home environment prompted some providers and families/whānau to comment on the particular suitability of FRHB for infants, for children who have additional needs and to support language, identity and culture through matching carers with families.

However, some providers commented that fees/costs/low rates of pay, minimal training and the uncertainty of work for caregivers when children are withdrawn unexpectedly are resulting in poor retention and instability of educators in some schemes. One parent also reported having four separate teachers/coordinators in less than a two-year period—each with a very different approach.

The environment was identified by providers as an aspect of quality in FRHB. FRHB homes are required to meet HB licensing standards. Providers supported HB carers to meet licensing standards by providing advice and funding with some providing contractors to carry out work to ensure that properties achieve licensing requirements. These create ongoing challenges and quality requires constant monitoring. One provider spoke of a neighbouring property where pit bull dogs were kept, necessitating the loss of the FRHB carer’s backyard as a play area because of dangers this posed.

Parents and whānau identified quality in terms of activities for their child, communication with the carer, resources, and that they saw visible progress in their child’s learning and behaviour.

- The activities for children are stimulating. (“She offers a lot of tasks that involve making and creating and being innovative. That’s what my boys are into, they like to build stuff at home you know with their blocks. Now they are using other materials to build things other than blocks. Use outdoor stuff and make mud pile out the back with leaves and branches. Now they are more inclined to do that and create their own activities. When we go to the shop ‘we want this’ they are not like that anymore ‘cos they know they can create their own stuff.”

- Communication with the carer is frequent, meaningful and regular – this included informal communication and documented “photos and stories”. On the negative side, one parent criticised the limited communication, claiming that the service from the coordinator became a sort of “toy drop off thing” This parent was critical of the limited contact (once a month) the coordinator had with the carer (who was his mother).

- A range of learning resources is available for children.

- Improvements in speech, confidence and behaviour were noticed by some parents.

Like coordinators, parents and whānau commented on structural features of access and quality: access and flexibility, and one-on-one attention. Two parents liked the social interaction with a bigger group in an FRHB provision where a playgroup was run in conjunction with FRHB.

The main issues for quality identified by providers were around the environment. The willingness of providers to provide support to ensure properties meet HB licensing requirements was strong. However, they encountered difficulties when the houses were state or private rental properties. Carers in state houses in particular faced ‘red
tape’ in order to make the changes required for licensing. One provider noted that this was their main quality concern.

> It would be the requirement for the status of the homes. There are restrictions of criteria for suitable homes … Because so many of the carers are in state houses, there is a lot of red tape to get things fixed to bring them up to the requirement for home-based care. [FRHB provider]

Professional development opportunities offered by FRHB providers ranged from workshops to modelling by teachers on monthly visits and handouts on a range of topics with suggested activities and experiences to extend children. These handouts were provided when teachers visited and focused on children’s current needs or interests. One provider described how they supported their carers’ training however this provision went beyond that offered by other initiatives.

> We offer training—workshops, courses, attendance at conferences. We appraise them every year and we weave all their wants and dreams and needs and provide the opportunity for them to meet these. We provide $400 per educator. This year we provided the opportunity to extend their work in outdoor education and sustainability and we provided a mini-conference and we all provided the learning for each other. [FRHB provider]

**Impact of FRHB**

FRHB initiatives are engaging a limited number of children in ECE. The MOE figures of enrolment in 2013 show 35 Māori and 56 Pasifika children from a total of 123 are enrolled in FRHB. Our sample is too small to make generalisations, but interviews indicated that families with the following characteristics who might not otherwise attend ECE found FRHB a good option for them:

- Pasifika families who wanted their home language and culture reinforced and their child to be cared for with a family member;
- families who had need for flexible hours and easy access;
- families who distrusted larger educational institutions; and
- families who are transient and could be followed up by the coordinator, and continue participating within the same provider network of homes.

FRHB are providing a homelike, small group setting that particularly is particularly able to respond to the needs of infants and can facilitate individualised approaches for children who have additional needs. The selection and matching of caregivers with families in FRHB enables children to be immersed and develop within their own language and culture. Children are said to develop social competence and confidence and interact with others. They share in learning experiences and are introduced to a range of learning activities. For many children FRHB provides a pathway to other forms of ECE but for others it facilitates transition to school, helping them to develop independence, self-help and early literacy and numeracy concepts.

When carers and families/whānau engage in FRHB and learn about the benefits for children they are more likely to emphasise or extend the learning experiences and carry them through to the home setting, reinforcing children’s learning and supporting their on-going development.
Conclusions
The following conclusions are a reflection on the key features that contribute to the FRHB initiatives’ effectiveness and the factors that hinder this.

Factors contributing to FRHB success:

- The FRHB initiatives are engaging children that otherwise would not participate in ECE. The flexibility of hours caters particularly well for families/whānau who work irregular hours or shifts. Some FRHB is free (no fees) and when this aspect is combined with local provision or the provision of transport this is supporting the engagement of priority children.

- The ability to match carers with families/whānau means that FRHB initiatives are able to be culturally responsive—recognising the value of and reflecting language and culture. Children are able to be immersed in their culture. The ability to employ relatives as carers was endorsed by providers and family/whānau for this and other reasons.

- FRHB is providing a non-threatening entry to ECE for those distrustful of the education system and was perceived to be a ‘better’ option by some who had previous poor experiences of centre-based ECE. It was also perceived as a ‘safer’ option than centre-based ECE by some parents/whānau especially for infants and children who have additional needs.

- FRHB provides opportunities for carers and families/whānau to learn about the benefits of ECE. Qualified teachers and coordinators demonstrate good practice on their visits to educators, provide resources and materials and explain children’s learning and development, although the frequency and depth of support varied between providers. Resources, equipment and information are shared with carers and in some instances with family/whānau. FRHB is available for children from birth to school starting age.

- The outcomes that some participants identified were children developing socially and in their behaviour, and children participating in learning activities. Some parents noticed progression in learning where this information was shared with families.

- Some collaboration between ECE and community services was evident for the benefit of children and this was facilitated in one locality by a Community Action Group (another of the Participation Programme initiatives.

- FRHB is providing a pathway to other centre-based ECE and to school for some families. FRHB parents/whānau frequently commented that they now intended to use other centre-based ECE services prior to their child transitioning to school. This may well be because they have learned about the benefits of ECE and children being well prepared. FRHB providers were supporting parents/whānau to select schools, enrol children and make visits prior to starting.

Factors hindering the success of FRHB:

- Inability to afford fees and lack of transport impact negatively on FRHB engagement.

- Qualifications and professional support are established in the research literature as structural features of quality. The training of carers and the provision of professional development varied from one provider to another. Caregivers are directly responsible for children’s day-to-day experiences and learning. Two
providers expected and supported high levels of caregiver training and provided hands-on role modelling and workshops from a qualified teacher on a weekly basis. Both providers conveyed that this level of support was critical.

- The FRHB providers who were interviewed all had established connections with agencies to identify and support children with special learning needs. These referrals are especially important since coordinators, while qualified ECE teachers, are not specialists. Parents/whānau commented that FRHB was meeting the special needs of some children.

- The matching of caregivers with family/whānau and children relies on the ability to recruit and retain caregivers from diverse cultural backgrounds. A lack of Pasifika teachers in particular was described by providers alongside a lack of culturally based resources (both for children and parents/whānau).

- Similar to other factors described above, family/whānau engagement was variable in FRHB. When relatives were employed as carers this aspect was usually strong. Some parents had extremely close relationships with caregivers; a few barely knew them but communicated through the coordinator.
5 Targeted Assistance for Participation

Targeted Assistance for Participation (TAP) provides grants, including for partnership opportunities, to help establish new services and child spaces in those communities where new child places are needed most and are not being created quickly enough. TAP funding has three streams:

- **TAP**—A full funding stream that will fully fund the establishment of new child places in a small number of the highest priority areas.
- **TAP 2**—A partial funding stream that provides incentives (such as part funding for the establishment of new child places) and partnership opportunities in a wider range of high priority areas.
- **TAP 3**—A low-cost, high-value funding stream that establishes new child places in a broad range of priority areas that have pockets of low participation.

In the first two stages of the evaluation, many services were in the early stages of establishment and were not then operational so the information we could gather was limited. In Stage 3, we interviewed 11 providers (6 TAP1, 4 TAP2 and 1 TAP3) and 15 families/whānau. Survey responses were received from 16 providers who had received TAP1 and 2 funding and 11 who identified as receiving TAP3 funding, and 182 of the families/whānau they were working with. Four of the 16 TAP1 & 2 providers also identified as receiving TAP3 funding. There was strong synchronicity between interview and survey data with providers interviewed also completing surveys.

**Nature of TAP services and community involvement**

All providers were located in communities serving priority families/whānau (low income, Māori and Pasifika). Table 5 below sets out the kinds of provision offered by service providers interviewed. The profile of families/whānau shows priority families/whānau are enrolling in the services. More than half the families/whānau completing surveys received a government benefit, around a third received family support and most identified as Māori or Pasifika.

In common, all ECE services offered a range of opportunities for family support in addition to early childhood education, some more extensive than others. Some ECE services had existed and offered these opportunities before the Participation Programme; in others that were newly developed, providers made a conscious decision to make services more responsive to families’ needs. Four centres were notable for their extensive networks (Kowhai centre, Punga centre, Totara centre and Puriri centre). This model of ECE as a “hub”, in which ECE is provided alongside integrated access to inter-disciplinary teams able to provide health, welfare and parenting support, and the potential for family and community participation has been shown to be highly successful internationally and in New Zealand (Clarkin-Phillips & Carr, 2009, 2012; Munford, Sanders, Maden, & Maden, 2007; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2003; Whalley & the Pen Green Centre Team, 2007). The difficult situations faced by some families/whānau, and described by EPF providers suggest this model would have capacity to alleviate some issues. Three services were bilingual or immersion in the home Pasifika language of families/whānau and English. Kauri centre was an iwi provider committed to Māori language, culture and identity. These integrated service hubs and the four services with a language and cultural focus were embedded in their communities through a network of relationships.
### Table 9. Provisions made with TAP funding by providers who were interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provider</th>
<th>TAP</th>
<th>ECE provision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Punga centre</td>
<td>TAP1</td>
<td>Bilingual in Tongan and English. Open 35 hours per week. Through umbrella organisation “hub”, links are made to WINZ, Salvation Army and other services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hibiscus centre</td>
<td>TAP1</td>
<td>Open school day (30 hours per week). Started as immersion Cook Islands, changed to bilingual in Cook Islands and English to cater for other families/whānau in community. Relationships with range of services, including Plunket, HIPPY and health services. Close support from GSE for children with disabilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totara centre</td>
<td>TAP1</td>
<td>Children from range of ethnicities. Three operating models: a weekly model, a school model, and a sessional model. Relationships with community groups and members built from the start; centre brings in resources from community, hearing, vision and dental services. Has plans for classes for parents. Focus on family contribution and building on families/whānau’ cultural knowledge and identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kowhai centre</td>
<td>TAP1</td>
<td>Children predominantly Pasifika. Flexible hours (sessional to full day), most attend 30 hours per week. Bilingual in Tongan and English and close links with health services. Children attend from a number of areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karaka centre</td>
<td>TAP1</td>
<td>Flexible hours. Children predominantly Pasifika and some Māori. Decision made to employ mainly Māori and Pasifika staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puriri centre</td>
<td>TAP1</td>
<td>Used TAP funding to build a whānau room. Flexible hours. Children predominantly Māori and Pasifika. Whānau-based centre, offers a food bank, budgeting advice, legal advice, counselling, court advice. Relationships with a range of external organisations. Parents employed in many capacities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kauri centre</td>
<td>TAP2</td>
<td>Established a HB service, an ECE centre and a puna. There is a whakatau for families/whānau and their whānau to feel welcome and an open door policy—a whānau room is available where whānau can go and “hang out”. Parents are employed in many capacities, and supported into training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaka centre</td>
<td>TAP2</td>
<td>Flexible enrolment times. Free “pick up and drop off” service. Works closely with social services and Government agencies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pohutukawa centre</td>
<td>TAP2</td>
<td>Sessional centre, a few children stay longer hours. Main responsiveness to community is through location and offering free ECE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rimu centre</td>
<td>TAP2</td>
<td>Allowed expansion of provision from owning one existing centre to purchase of three further centres. Flexible hours. Vans pick up and drop off 70 percent of children. Employs a family liaison person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikau centre</td>
<td>TAP3</td>
<td>Established a puna reo and supported another puna reo that was struggling, used funding for scoping and ‘play days’ to highlight ECE and benefits, and promote local ECE services, library and tamariki ora—mornings only.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TAP providers said extensive community consultation took place before new ECE services were established in order to determine the initiative would work in the community. TAP3 funding was used by some providers to scope the community need. Two of the three bilingual services (Punga centre and Hibiscus centre) were established already as ECE services in their communities—one had to move from its premises and had waiting lists; the other was a playgroup wanting to build a licensed centre. In both cases, an umbrella organisation was contracted to manage the development of the new centres and support management and governance. The Māori Trust Board surveyed 320 of its own families/whānau about their needs, finding 196 with children not participating in ECE—this was said to be “just scratching the surface”. Kowhai centre had its own cultural
networks through its umbrella organisation. Other providers of fully funded new ECE services (Totara centre, Karaka centre) worked extensively in the communities to make connections, generate community support and find out about needs. The rest were existing ECE services or had bought land in the community.

Surveyed TAP3 providers (n=10) identified that funding was used to:

- pay staff wages, employ a qualified teacher/coordinator (5);
- purchase resources and equipment (5);
- purchase vans to transport children and families/whānau (3);
- modify or purchase buildings for pre-existing ECE provision (2);
- pay venue costs (1);
- pay for professional development (1);
- pay for home visits (1), school trips (1); and
- improve the playground (1).

One provider established a Pasifika FRHB service.

All providers regarded the initiatives as working well in terms of full enrolments and participation. Providers from the bilingual services, Māori Trust board and hub services also spoke about and emphasised connections with their communities as reasons why they considered their ECE services were working well. This focus reflected their priorities for what was important.

**Participation and attendance**

Attendance of children, according to TAP providers varied from 12 hours per week to 45 hours per week. TAP providers generally said that attendance was regular. Families/whānau also indicated a variation in hours of attendance, although half (79) said the hours attended per week fell between 20 and 29. Most families/whānau were satisfied with the hours they attended. For two thirds of families, this was the first time their child had attended ECE.

Five centres offered flexible times—Punga centre, Totara centre, Karaka centre and Puriri centre and Pohutukawa centre. Kauri centre offered flexibility through HB coupled with centre-based ECE and puna. The desire for flexibility of enrolment times has been expressed by parents in several New Zealand studies, including this evaluation. Inflexibility and unsuitability of hours are barriers to participation, and it is likely that this is one reason for full enrolments in these TAP-funded services. Below is an example of flexibility, not only of hours but also of service type, and most of all an overarching aim to be iwi driven and to strengthen identity as Māori in this place.
Exemplar 1: An iwi driven service, flexible in hours and service type

This was the reason behind Kauri centre’s development of services:

[Through the survey] then they came back to us and some said we want an early childhood centre, some of them said well I do want to attend but I need someone early in the mornings to look after my children because I have to travel to [locality] for mahi, or yeah I do want to go to a place where I can at least be with my child for one day and allow them to go to a centre on another day. So [we] identified the need for home based so that we could do each end of kōhanga reo this is where it came from, because some of them were saying my baby can’t go to kōhanga because they open at nine and close at three. So we said okay, we set up the home based and other whānau said that they wanted a service that actually helped them find out who they were in terms of being [iwi] and that’s where … the determination to find funding to build this place came from.

Two of the bilingual Pasifika centres offered similar—30 and 35 hours per week; one of the Tongan bilingual centres was open for 50 hours but children attend about 30 hours.

Consistent with findings for this evaluation, fees were said to be an issue that could affect participation. TAP providers interviewed made varying arrangements to mitigate effects of cost, displaying adaptability to the circumstances of families/whānau. Sessional centres were free, as were 20 hours for 3- and 4-year-olds:

- Sessional ECE is free (Nikau centre playgroup, Pohutukawa centre sessional centre).
- Very low fees (Totara centre, Kowhai centre).
- Twenty hours is free for 3- and 4-year-olds, charges are made for extra hours (Punga centre, Hibiscus centre), nothing is charged for extra hours (Totara centre).
- Nine hours is free for babies and toddlers; fees over that amount charged, particularly for toddlers whose funding rates are less than for babies; fees for babies are discounted because of higher rates (Karaka centre).
- Fees are based on individual circumstances and individual agreements are signed (Hibiscus centre.).
- Those who are not eligible for WINZ subsidies have a debt right-off (Kauri centre); debts are written off (Kaka centre).
- Alternatives are made to replace paying fees (Punga centre offset fees against parents spending time and helping the teacher).
- Fees are frozen if parents cannot pay, sponsorship is found (Puriri centre).

Two providers spoke of families/whānau leaving when they could not pay.

… in the first 12 months when we opened. They left in droves when they realised they couldn’t pay so they did a runner. So I make sure that when I do the interview now that I hit that target straight away and say don’t run away we can talk about it. Some of those were the dads and it
was the pride thing. Some of the dads we have got in here now I remember when they were little and at childcare. There were quite a few that absolutely disappeared but then [I] realised that some of them were going by WINZ and doing a fiddle or something. Even those sorts of things you can work through so it’s about keeping working on it and getting that relationship fast. You may think you have got relationships but they don’t and it’s about trying to work that out. (Puriri centre)

We have found that about 30 percent are centre hopping. This is why many have been involved in ECE before. (Karaka centre).

About a third of families/whānau were said to have irregular attendance for a variety of reasons: weather, family commitments (especially Pasifika families/whānau), and transport. Vans picked up and dropped off 70 percent of children at Rimu centre and three vanloads of children were picked up and dropped off each morning and afternoon. This regular use of vans on a daily basis raises an issue of how parents can become engaged in ECE and learning if they have little contact with their child’s teachers and whether the ECE services are located in the family’s community. In Totara centre, where a number of parents would like a van to pick up their children, the provider was willing to consider this, but reinforced the importance of parental involvement. “We’re happy to do that but we still want to see you, so we can pick you up sometimes as well as bring you back”. Vans for whānau and children started to be used by Kauri centre when it was realised that families/whānau were walking for miles and not coming in the rain. Puriri centre had a van driven by a teacher who picked up the child and parent when needed. Hibiscus centre had a family liaison person who visits families/whānau whose child is not attending.

Parents who were interviewed all commented that their child/ren attended regularly. One of the driving reasons was that their child wanted to come—“our kids did not want to miss school and they want to come to school every day” (Tongan mother) and “… they make children want to come to school so we have no problems asking our children to come to school as they are always eager to come” (Tongan mother).

At June 2014, 2746/3417 (80%) of children enrolled in TAP had not participated in ECE before. This figure excludes 44 whose participation was unknown. 46% of children identified as Māori, 44% as Pasifika, and 77% were from low socio-economic communities.

**Parent engagement in ECE and learning**

Parents were asked what they hoped for their family from attending the TAP centre. All parents had broad aspirations for educational outcomes and their children to be happy and socialise with others. Parents attending the Pasifika centres all emphasised language and culture as something they valued very highly—a reason for coming to the centre (see section on “Identity, language and culture” for a more detailed discussion).

Overall parents felt a sense of belonging at their ECE centres and were encouraged to be involved in a variety of ways including helping with excursions, talking to staff about events and activities, and through feedback on children’s work sent home. Interestingly most families/whānau said they would like to be more involved but things such as lack of time and not being able to take other siblings hindered this. Many said they would like to be asked to do more, suggesting that shyness or a lack of confidence continues to hinder engagement to a certain extent.

All parents interviewed emphasised the comfort they felt in being in the ECE centre and that they trusted it, such as a Tongan mother who said “It is their home and I feel good and I trusted that they are safe here as their own home”. Another mother said, “I trust the Tongan staff because I know that they are Tongan and that they have the
love for our Tongan kids. … I am so comfortable to drop my kids here and I go on with my daily life”. A mother from Totara centre spoke of choosing the centre from a variety of factors

First of all, I like the place, how it is set up. And then secondly I like the environment of the staff, like the welcoming … Not really like a school but it’s a playcentre, you know, where they can feel like home. Not really like a home, but it’s somewhere that you can leave the baby and feel okay that she’s there, and she’s being looked after by someone who really cares about her.”

Parents in a group interview at another centre liked the welcoming atmosphere and that ‘Anyone’s welcome’. They appreciated that they were not judged by where they lived. A grandmother spoke of the easy informal communication every day with staff.

Some parents commented on the flexibility of the centre, such as a mother who could just ask if she needed to be there a little early.

These findings suggest barriers of not being welcomed and concerns for the child’s safety found in the Stage 2 research (Mitchell, et al., in press) are being addressed. Inflexibility, another barrier to participation is also being addressed.

The practices described by providers showed they understood the crucial importance of a welcoming environment and good communication with families/whānau. Providers described different methods to connect with families/whānau and support their engagement in ECE.

- All providers spoke of having a comfortable atmosphere where parents often stayed and in many, food and drinks were on hand. The exception was that in one centre, where vans transported most children, families/whānau were unlikely to stay. Contact was then maintained with the van driver.

- Staff who were from the same cultural backgrounds as families/whānau and were able to communicate in home languages where English was not the first language helped build connections. “We employ speakers of Pasifika languages—Samoan, Niuean, Tongan, Cook Island—the parents spot a teacher who knows their language and go to them, it’s magic!”

- Most providers held social events on regular occasions.

- Some providers tailored their communication to what would work for families/whānau, such as using Facebook, newsletters and text.

- Some providers involved families/whānau as parent helpers both during the normal programme and when going on excursions.

- Some providers also engaged families/whānau in planning for activities and assessment.

Parents who were interviewed described taking up opportunities and enjoying special events, reading newsletters and being well informed. It was important to be welcomed and well informed on the first visit.

I felt welcome when I came here. The first day [name manager] let me in, showed me where the kids were and showed me the rooms, how to fill in the papers. She explained everything to me and I liked it when she explained everything. I liked it when I came in.
I think you know we got such a warm welcome when we came. It was just like you know all the teachers coming up to us and interacting with us. We didn’t get that at any other daycare. They basically just said, “Oh go have a look around and come back to us when you have questions”.

Most providers said ways were found to support parent engagement in their child’s learning and for parents to contribute and develop their own skills. This was through approaches that were portrayed as empowering.

Not only listening to parents’ desires for their children but also acting on these was important at Totara centre:

Again, it's just that relationship with the parents, knowing that they can talk to us about what they want for their children and if they want their children to … I don't know, learn a specific skill, maybe we're toilet training this week, we're starting him on the potty and we'll be able to support and knowing that then okay, we know that that child will have our support as well, our teachers will be keeping an eye, reminders about what that job is.

Several providers spoke of children’s portfolios as a way to connect with families/whānau. Totara centre providers described the care taken to ensure documentation was able to be read by families/whānau and that whānau had opportunity to contribute to assessments through the portfolios and informally:

**Exemplar 2: Connecting with families/whānau through ‘permeable’ documentation**

We’re going to do the learning story narrative photographs kind of approach, everything visual as well so that parents who have English as a second language [can read it]; … but we want to encourage parents to be here and stay with their children and be part of what's going on. And where was it, we were listening to something about the opportunity for … the elders just sitting in the centre having a space just to sit and talk about the talents that children have…, those will come out with our learning stories as well and observations. And food will be there too. We've got a cook and we're going to provide meals for the children but we want that to extend to families/whānau if they're coming in.

A strength of ‘thoughtful’ ECE assessment documentation (Mitchell, et al., in press) is that it reflects a curriculum that is “permeable”, open to contribution from others (Carr et al., 2001). Totara centre, valued and documented assessments that could be read by children, families/whānau and teachers, and invited contribution into assessment. Parents at this centre also commented on the value to them of this documentation:

Yeah, they've got these books that they got for each child and it's just like a progress book, where every day they come and take photos. And they write like a story about what the photo is … So that really gives me a peace of mind coming in. And then I read in her book to see what she did the day before. Or know what she's been—what she's learnt, so that all goes into that progress book that they have.

Every day there's a new story. Yeah, every day there's a new story in the book for the parents to have a look at.

I'm really glad they've come up with something like that.
Some parents commented on copying what they had seen the teachers doing. A Tongan mother tried to ‘carry on’ from the teaching she saw at the centre (this parent was employed in administration at the centre).

Employment is a ‘key driver’ for whānau to be engaged within the Kauri centre services where parents are employed e.g., as relievers, cleaners, maintenance workers, cooks, and one young mother has gone on to begin her early childhood training. Some parents had had bad experiences in ECE services and the name of the Kauri centre—whānau ora unit—is one way to show they are different. Whānau were employed as a van driver, kitchen person, cleaning relievers and in the office at Puriri centre. This was portrayed as empowering. These providers saw the competence and potential in people.

**Exemplar 3: Employing parents in the centre: A practice that is empowering**

If you think about [name] in the office, she is from the community. Some people said “You are kidding me, you are not going to put her in there” and I say “She is in there and the safe is still there”. Some people are like that you see. It’s trying to pop people around into leadership roles ‘cos you can see they’ve got it.

The kitchen person is out of the community as well. Trouble is you can get involvement but not ownership until you give them a go, warts and all. One of the parents is a cleaning reliever and sometimes at night she is here by herself and has to do lock down and whatever but she is the most thorough cleaner. I knew she didn’t have money and we talked about giving her some work because she can’t pay the fees but said she can work and I found out she was a cleaner by trade so she has been doing relieving and had just got a contract. She does all the laundry in the childcare as well and is very thorough and is great at what she does. She asked for more hours for her boys and I said I would see what I can do so I rung her today to say there was some gaps for her boys today and tomorrow and I saw her running up here this morning. (Puriri centre)

Kauri centre supported parents into training for themselves, including one parent who was doing an ECE certificate. Two other providers were planning parenting courses. One of these, whose course was run by the umbrella organisation, had not been able to encourage parents to attend. Another was keen for parents to understand how children learn and was taking a considered approach to supporting involvement.

I want to run a parent evening; probably give them time to settle in first a little bit, and then just to have a play-based parent evening so where they can do some of the things that the children will be doing and learn and try and get an understanding of what the children are learning through being involved in that themselves. So there isn't this big focus that they understand that children don't have to sit down and learn their letters and their numbers but they can play through those different areas. So that's kind of a more user-friendly way to introduce it to them to start with. (Totara centre)

Some parents expressed being supported by teachers who understood their situation.

As a parent I stress too much. My main parenting issue is I tend to yell but yeah, you’ve got five kids and they’re all ‘lalalala’ aue and crying and fighting and everything else you kind of like pull your hair out and go [makes crying noise]. Go to your room. What do you think you’re
doing? Don’t touch that, get off that. Don’t do this, don’t do that [laughs]. I don’t know how, it’s like I said, to [the teacher], “I don’t understand how you can come here be a daycare teacher, kindy teacher and then go home and deal with your own kids. Hell no.

Well, I used to always talk to [the teacher] when I picked them up, you know, how the kids are doing and all the rest of it. [The teacher] was really good because she understood, you know, my situation, she came to my Strengthening Families/whānau meeting and a few other things and, yeah, but it was a bit of struggle just like when [partner] died....

Special needs and inclusion

In most centres, qualified teachers identified children with special needs and brought in specialist staff. Just over half the providers completing surveys said they made referrals to Group Special Education, with most of these inviting professionals with expertise in the requisite areas to support them in assessments. A number of families/whānau surveyed (23) said their child had been referred for extra assistance. Two providers, when interviewed, referred to a process of systematic observations, followed by discussions with parents and referrals to Group Special Education or other agencies if necessary. Most centres had regular health, hearing and vision checks at the centre where families/whānau felt comfortable to be involved.

Several providers spoke of children enrolled who were diagnosed as having a disability. One of these providers said the family of a child with a physical and intellectual disability had tried to enrol her child in another centre before coming to the TAP centre and been told “basically they weren’t welcome”. The impression was of TAP centres being open to inclusion.

Priority families may be excluded through inflexibility of enrolment policies that privilege families who might enrol their child all day, e.g. because they are in full time paid employment, or who are able to plan ahead and enrol their child in advance. The TAP centres were generally inclusive in the flexibility of their enrolment policies.

Transition

Several of the centres were new and had not developed transition processes, although they had policies in place. Intentions were to make contact with local schools.

Around half the TAP providers said they gave some form of information to families/whānau about transition to school including the types of school available in the community, how to access ERO reports, and discussion on enrolment process and what the child needs to know about school. Two thirds of all families/whānau said they had received some form of information on transition from their centre.

Individual centres had developed some transition practices:

- Relationships developed with school principal and new entrant teachers, and shared visits.

- A transition group within the centre focused on motor skills, counting and ABC; a work book for older children focused on literacy and numeracy; for children to learn to sit still and hold a pencil.

- Group visits to the school.

- A child being supported at school by older peers who had previously attended the centre and were now at school.
• Advocacy for use of the child’s portfolio, described as “incredibly important not only for the teacher but also for the child to take and share with their new peers to share a little bit about themselves and give them a little bit of mana coming into a new classroom like that”.

The practice of focusing on a narrow range of skills as described by three providers above may not be helpful in supporting on-going learning and continuity at transition, since as another provider commented, schools teach these things and are more interested in key competencies such as managing self and social interactions. The recent overview report on Continuity of Early Learning: Learning Progress and Outcomes in the Early Years (Mitchell, et al., in press) highlighted productive possibilities that occur when ECE and schools work together to construct transition goals and pathways that support children and families/whānau through transition to school. There was value in connecting the broad curriculum strands of Te Whāriki and the key competencies of the New Zealand Curriculum. The overview report commented on “The challenge for both sectors about coming to a shared understanding with each other of what should be the focus of assessment and what productive learning activity might look”.

An excellent example of primary and ECE teachers working together to encourage parents to read to their children is described in Exemplar 4 below.

**Exemplar 4: Primary and ECE teachers working together to encourage parents to read to their children**

One thing we did this year was that the primary school came and asked us if they could do a reading programme here because a lot of the children tend to go here … They were already running programmes [at the school] but they couldn’t get parents in schools.

Anyway, so we started that, and so they go upstairs. I said we may have a problem because there are a lot of families/whānau that may not be able to read. [The primary teacher] said that is why you are going to have to talk about it really well and sell it because it’s not actually reading words. We went up as staff and we did it and it’s about reading the pictures. What you are trying to do is also develop your child ‘cos a lot of children may not like books let alone read one. So if you start off reading pictures in time the child will associate that with words. Now there are a whole heap of parents coming and every time they come they get a bag of books and are appropriate for whatever age. Now they are not shy about reading. One of them bought her moko and said she is in a kōhanga and said how is she going to get on? She sat there and said that is okay and pulled out her te reo readers and gave them to her and she started reading.

The teacher said you don’t have to pull up every little thing just find the important things that might have changed the story. That made it a lot easier. They didn’t just give them the books they let them pick them, and then parents would pick up and see if they could read them and then they could take five.

On the last week she bought the whole primary class in and worked with them with the others around. Some of the ones that felt more confident joined alongside as a teacher and the children would read to them.
Kauri centre had definite plans to support their children, be given information and ensure the children were appreciated at school. They had taken the initiative in advocating for a formal transition process:

We went to one of the schools making sure that they realise that they’re receiving a taonga from us, our babies are a taonga and you’re not just taking a taonga you’re taking a whānau. [We say] what is the Powhiri whakatau process when we take them there?, that we want to be a part of their life’s journey in school … and they’re not just going there and they’re going to be left, that we’re going to be tracking them, we want some form of information coming from the schools to us about our babies that they’ve got.

Many parents surveyed (57%) already had a child at school and were therefore familiar with the school context. However most parents indicated they would like to receive information on transition including the types of school available, how to prepare the child and the process around enrolment and visiting school. Some parents who were interviewed had not started to think about transition because their child was too young. A Tongan mother of a four year-old was worried about her child going to an English speaking school and wanted to talk with the ECE teachers about what she might do, and what transition programme they might put in place. One parent from another centre had been on a group visit to school, but the overall impression was that transition was not a big focus.

Identity language and culture

Identity, language and culture were a primary focus in all but one centre. In the three Pasifika centres and the Māori Trust board and iwi centres, language and culture were woven through the curriculum.

Parents from the Tongan centre who were interviewed emphasised broad educational outcomes and most especially learning the Tongan language and culture and the church doctrine as being essential for their own child’s identity and communication with the wider whānau.

Exemplar 5: Tongan parent views of language and culture as crucial to identity

The Tongan language opportunity—that is very important. It is important to me because growing up in New Zealand I want them to have that knowledge of growing up knowing their own culture…. When they go to school, it will be all English. They will have that knowledge of their background, their language and culture.

We want them to go to the Tongan schools so that they could understand the Tongan language and the Tongan culture. So that they could be able to communicate to their grandparents. It is very important to us for our children to be able to get along well with their grandparents and all the Tongan family. … I like them to know that they are Tongan. … When I grew up in Tonga I was a bit wanted [sic] to be a palangi and when I came here I tend to understand the importance of being Tongan so I began to value my identity as a Tongan so that is why I want my child to learn the Tongan language and culture and to value that part of themselves.

One mother said her four older children who had not attended ECE found it very hard to speak Tongan—she could see the difference with the three younger ones. She noticed that her children who had attended ECE were also ‘smarter’ academically. “I can see it is better for our Tongan children to come to this Tongan ECE. I can see
they are better off in their learning other than going to a Palangi ECE.” She noticed differences by comparing her own children attending each type. A Tongan mother spoke of her child learning the language, the culture, and verses from the Bible.

Language was also seen as essential for sustaining and revitalising languages.

We held onto that Cook Islands language and culture to promote within the community, not only with our own people…. We know the language is dying, even in the Cook Islands the language is dying.

They told us—you need to teach the Tongan language to the children. They talk straight to us. Families/whānau have kids who don’t speak in Tongan.

Yet another Tongan mother whose son was going to a Palangi centre, was happy that he could speak Tongan at home and English in the centre.

The Māori Trust Board had developed its own curriculum within the framework of Te Whāriki.
Exemplar 6: A curriculum embedded in iwi values, stories and reo.

We still have the framework of Te Whāriki but for us and the families/whānau the important issue was identity. Who, where, why Maniapoto? We’ve come to develop a curriculum about our pou. We’ve got eight of them out there who are Rereahu’s tamariki. Maniapoto is out there and his sibling. Each pou has got an expertise and skill and that is what drives our curriculum here. We relate everything we do here like if we are talking about the moana, seafood then that is Kinohaku Maniapoto’s sibling. So, everything we do here does relate because they have a wider range of skills and expertise.

We come down to our five key curriculum components whānau ora, whānaungatanga, taonga tuku iho, te taiao, and [he anga whakamua]. We are also guided through those through our programme planning, curriculum, and our individual plans and oranga all fit into it.

Everything is done from a Maniapoto base. We don’t do the generics well, we do Ranginui and papatūānuku but for us there are also the realms of Huni and Puna. We use all our stories from Maniapoto to drive the learning and outcome. We are trying to get more of the mita of Maniapoto, the language, the words and start using that way more. Our waiata we want to relate it to Maniapoto. For many of them they don’t know those things. Even our staff thought they knew a lot about Maniapoto but they didn’t.

(Kaumatua speaking) That programme is carried out in the other services as well and the staff meet and share ideas like in the three different services. We keep those relationships. Someone gets an idea and then shares it around so we are all working from the different tūpuna and are doing it at the same time so we can share ideas and extend the learning to food to gathering food to growing gardens. We have got gardens at our puna and gardens here for our children. There is a lot of sharing and working together.

Traditional practices of growing and sharing kai like they did at Matariki. You know the ones that are by the sea bringing kai and swapped over and stuff. We don’t celebrate Western like Christmas and that we are trying to revive things like Matariki and things that were important to Maniapoto and Māori as a whole like Treaty of Waitangi and all those. Those are our celebration days. We do acknowledge, but we try and bring something in that is more important to us. The reason we don’t do Christmas is because it is a trying time for whānau who don’t have enough for presents and kai. We have a time that we just bring them all here and feed them all. We tell them that the holiday times are about whānau time and caring and loving each other. Those are the key simple things we tell them.

Penetito (2001) appealed to teachers ‘to ‘know’ the Māori children we teach, as individuals, as members of whānau, as tangata whenua, as manuwhiri, as members of hapū and iwi, as New Zealanders, as thinking and
feeling human beings” (p. 18). He argued that local whānau/hapū/iwi must decide what knowledge should be available and how it should be made accessible. The exemplar here is of one iwi doing this.

Other centres appeared to be less responsive to the valuing of the languages and cultures of families/whānau:

- In two of these centres, language, culture and identity were portrayed as pivotal. Wall displays and documentation made language and culture visible. Efforts were made to find out about and build on family funds of knowledge.
  - In one of these, an ethnically diverse centre, language and culture was described as “one of the most important things for families/whānau and children”. Te reo and tikanga Māori was conveyed as being essential for this centre as a foundational bicultural ideal. “And being Māori myself we'll be using te reo Māori a lot and there is [one other staff] who is studying with me te reo Māori and she, together with our teachers, will be looking at our language, the English language and then all the other languages that come in, so there's going to be Tongan and Samoan teachers.” This new centre was expected to be “rich in languages and we expect that the children will pick up those languages fairly quickly”.
  - In the other centre, with a high Māori roll, parents were asked about their iwi when they filled in the enrolment form. “The ones who are strong with who they are will go straight in and fill in the iwi and then we have so many Māori here who don’t know who they are, very sad. That needs to be a bit more of a work in progress where you could bring someone in who could talk about the different iwi. I mean some people don’t want to know because that’s where assimilation has worked well.” This centre had been supported by the matua from Te Ara Hou to encourage families/whānau to find out about their iwi and tell stories.

- In six centres, efforts were made to employ staff from different ethnicities in order to reflect the community and there was recognition of the need for more resources and professional support.

- Two providers gave minimal or no credit to language and culture. In one of these centres, te reo was said to be used for “karakia, that sort of stuff, and songs” and English and Māori captions were available on wall displays. In the other, the provider commented: “I’m not pc on this aspect at all” and “The common culture is not Māori or Pacific Islander or Asian or whatever, it is poverty.”

**Quality**

There were a number of ways in which the TAP providers understood and provided high quality ECE.

- All emphasised responsive and comfortable relationships with families/whānau and children, and knowledge of children’s interests and needs.

- Several talked about having a vision and philosophy for their centre, based on Te Whāriki or their own ideals.

- Curriculum and curriculum processes were identified by a few providers, in particular, the education programme, finding out about parental expectations, goal-setting, self-review, and “permeable” assessment processes.

- Good space and environment were mentioned by two providers. One of these elaborated on good resources and culturally appropriate resources. Natural resources were mentioned.
Several emphasised structural features of quality, i.e., high adult: child ratios better than regulated; qualified teachers.

Teacher professional support through non-contact time, professional development, staff meetings and teacher registration mentoring were highlighted by several providers.

Some providers considered inclusiveness, including cultural responsiveness essential to quality

One provider talked about shared leadership.

Families/whānau described a good quality ECE centre as

- an environment which is warm, welcoming, safe and caring;
- having educational activities and good resources;
- where staff interact with both parent and child;
- clean; and
- culturally responsive.

**Impact of TAP initiative**

The TAP initiative has been successful in increasing the number of child places in target communities and encouraging enrolment of priority families/whānau. This was done through addressing barriers of cost, inflexibility and transport, and through offering a welcoming environment.

- All the TAP centres offered free or almost free provision, thus reducing the key barrier of cost.
- They were largely flexible in their hours so that families/whānau might choose days of the week and hours to suit their circumstances. Cost and inflexibility were two of the most prevalent barriers encountered by families/whānau.
- Another key barrier of lack of transport was addressed by most providers through provision based in the local community. Some centres were providing vans—this may get the children to attend but questions remain about whether this practice inhibits parents from being involved in ECE and their child’s learning if it is an everyday occurrence.
- Most TAP1 and 2 initiatives provided mechanisms for wider family support and contribution through several means. Some services acted as integrated hubs offering an early childhood education programme/s as well as services for families/whānau enabling parents to access, for example, health, budgeting advice, social work support etc., from the centre. Most held a comprehensive network of relationships with services within their community that were called upon as necessary. This model recognises the wider role of family and community in children’s lives and is one way to help address the “complex needs” of families/whānau described in the chapter on EPF. From the viewpoint of those parents who were having difficulties in their approaches to external agencies, the support provided by the coordinator or centre in finding out about and communicating with them or in providing the support themselves was extremely valuable.
She is really handy with a lot of things she has helped me with. Helped me with WINZ so she usually comes with me and asks the questions that I am too shy to ask. I will talk to her about it before so then she knows where I am coming from. She’s someone that I can talk to and not feel intimidated. [EPF parent]

For myself, I am not 100 percent taking my kids [for a health check] on time—it can be overdue for a week—if we come here, we don’t have to worry—if they check their teeth. At the school, the truck checks their teeth and ears and throat and we get a note home. And now they are checking the skin—my daughter comes home with fatty cream for the skin—it gets really dry and itchy when it is hot and she scratches. So they send it home—sometimes they send her home. If they do it her would be good as well. [TAP parent]

Parents and providers commented on a comfortable environment that was inviting to families/whānau and where parents could stay if they liked. Not feeling welcomed is a barrier to participation that the TAP services overcame. Being there and feeling comfortable is a first step in parents’ becoming engaged in ECE and learning. Ways in which parents described their involvement were through attending social events, reading newsletters, contributing to portfolios and in some cases being employed by the centre.

Teachers found out about children’s special needs through their own observation and discussion with parents. Referrals were made to support services where necessary.

Some of the TAP centres had been open for only a short time and although policies for transition to school were in place or being constructed, these had not yet been enacted. Transition practices varied. One of the practices described by three different TAP centre providers conveyed a focus in special transition classes on a narrow range of skills that are unlikely to be helpful in children’s long term interests of building learning dispositions that are positive about learning and able to support further learning. Yet, an exemplar is offered of constructive work with a local primary school in encouraging parents to ‘read’ picture books to their children and another TAP centre provider described the thoughtful efforts to develop assessments that could be ‘read’ by families/whānau who had limited English and that could support the transition to school. Transition to school could be a focus in professional development support.

Identity, language and culture were a primary focus in all but two centres. The three Pasifika centres and the Māori Trust board and iwi centres provided outstanding examples of how language and culture were woven through the curriculum. The Māori Trust Board had developed its own curriculum within strands of Te Whāriki, deciding what local knowledge was needed. In this way parents and children are developing a strong foundation for knowing who they are within their whānau, hapu and iwi. General TAP ECE services were on very different levels in respect to the valuing of the languages and cultures of families/whānau. The exemplars discussed offer ideas on ways forward.
Conclusion
The conclusion discusses features that help or hinder TAP centres from encouraging participation, supporting parents to engage in ECE and early learning in the home and in transition to school, and strengthening language, culture and identity, and supporting quality.

- The philosophy and values of the provider organisation seem to be crucial in setting policies and practices that encourage the outcomes considered.

- The TAP initiative has supported ECE participation in the target communities through use of a TAP grant to build facilities or develop provisions. Enrolment policies have reduced barriers of cost and enabled flexible enrolments that suit families/whānau—these have been major barriers to participation. Yet cost is still a problem for many families and avoiding debt is one reason, according to providers, why some children attend an ECE centre for just a short time or are moved from one centre to another (“centre hopping”).

- Most providers found ways to communicate with families/whānau that would support their involvement and engagement in learning. These were through approaches that could be described as empowering and that valued what parents could contribute.

- Transition to school practices is one area where there were variable practices, and some potentially unhelpful ideas, suggesting a need for professional development opportunities.

- Outstanding examples are provided of how language and culture and support for identity were woven through the curriculum by Pasifika centres and iwi-based centres. This was enabled for iwi-based centres by local whānau/hapū/iwi deciding what knowledge should be available and how it should be made accessible (Penetito, 2001). In Pasifika centres it was enabled by having fluent language speakers as coordinators and supporting a bilingual curriculum and parents to use their language with pride. General ECE services varied widely in their responsiveness. In general, ECE services responsiveness was encouraged by drawing on the funds of knowledge residing in families/whānau and communities, employing staff from the cultural backgrounds of families/whānau, and professional development.

- Overall, TAP funded services offer innovative exemplars of practice and provision. In particular, the development of a curriculum whāriki inclusive of language and culture can play a critical role in strengthening identity. The model of ECE centres as a ‘hub’ that houses or brings together interdisciplinary teams to support families/whānau and children is a model that is also well worth pursuing.
6 Supported Playgroups

Supported playgroups are certificated playgroups that are offered regular support from a kaimanaki/playgroup coordinator in areas with low ECE participation.

In the first two stages of the evaluation, we gathered extensive information through interviews and surveys with participants. In Stage 3, we interviewed three providers (operating SP in two localities) and six, families/whānau. Surveys were completed by 15 providers and 51 families/whānau. Providers were operating in Canterbury, Wellington, Auckland, Northland and Manawatu.

Nature of SP and community involvement

Supported playgroups operate in different venues within the community and few have their own dedicated space, usually in a classroom in a local school. Parents are present during playgroup sessions where the ratio standard is for more than half the children attending to have a parent or caregiver present, and a ratio of no more than 1:4. The supported playgroup coordinators whom we interviewed were also delivering EPF initiatives and two of them described extensive community networks and access to services to support families/whānau. Over half of the 15 SP providers surveyed also indicated involvement in delivering EPF. Providers were also involved in HB, TAP, ILCCE and ICPP initiatives. These connections with community and with ECE services and schools enabled playgroup coordinators to tap into a fund of resources to support their work with families/whānau. Coordinators described the model as highly successful in engendering parent involvement in the playgroup and in their child’s learning.

Supported playgroup providers built a profile through inviting community involvement with the playgroup rather than individual referrals. They collaborated with other playgroups in excursions and events where “families/whānau met families/whānau” and collaborated with other community organisations in events to raise awareness about ECE. They were visible in their communities.

A further strength of supported playgroups is their ability to be responsive to community language and culture. Within our sample were examples of community language playgroups that are bilingual and immersed in culture—Samoan, Cook Islands, Tongan, Tongan/Samoan and Chinese playgroups, administered by a Pasifika organisation. An iwi-based runanga regarded it as important to deliver a kaupapa Māori initiative; its supported playgroup was a puna. (Responsiveness to language culture and identity is discussed later in this report). The nature of community involvement is perhaps reflected in the families/whānau contributing to the evaluation, with the majority predominantly identifying as Pasifika (38), with somewhat fewer Māori (13) and Asian (7) families.

Participation

Opening days and times for supported playgroups varied according to the purpose of the playgroup. Providers said that the attendance at supported playgroup ranged from four to 20 hours per week. This was reflected in responses provided by the 51 survey families/whānau where attendance ranged from less than 10 hours a week to 30 hours. It is not meaningful to give an average attendance however, because attendance depended both on what hours were available and the needs of the family. The longest hours were for families/whānau who were also involved in the EPF initiative that attended every day with one provider who offered both EPF and supported playgroups. This combining of initiatives seems to work well in offering families/whānau extensive support and access to services.
Another arrangement was for families/whānau to attend playgroup alongside another ECE service such as a kindergarten or education and care centre. Families were generally satisfied with the hours they used.

Playgroup enrolments fluctuated as families/whānau ‘come and go’ and specific communities shift. The playgroup model seems to suit parents of younger children who want to stay with their child. “It is the nature of the community and of playgroups too. As the children get older the parents leave and we are always looking to have new families/whānau.” For many children too, playgroup is the first step into formal ECE, and they go on to other services. Nearly half the families/whānau surveyed (21) said they had thought about leaving playgroup to move to a formal ECE setting. Reasons included independence for children, socialisation and a formal education programme prior to school.

Providers identified the key factors in supporting participation to be

- the playgroup is advertised as free;
- coordinators are known in the community and make personal contact;
- funding for the paid coordinator means that all the grant money can be used for the venue, resources and excursions;
- maintaining a varied programme at times suited to families/whānau;
- development of resources and information in community languages e.g. Samoan and Tongan; and
- parents gaining confidence through their involvement, e.g., to go into work, to take their own children to places in their local community.

Playgroups can become tenuous when numbers fall too low. Coordinators described some playgroup rolls as getting as low as two children, and in one community we were not able to interview families/whānau because the playgroup had lost all its children—perhaps temporarily. There were new coordinators for this playgroup. The numbers exiting playgroups also varied widely across those providers surveyed with as few two families leaving one playgroups in the last 12 months and as many as 30 leaving another.

What seemed to work when playgroup rolls declined was specific support provided at the time to try to address needs. Coordinators from a Pasifika organisation described taking the following actions:

- Continued support for several supported playgroups when the contract to deliver the initiative ended.
- Support for playgroup maintenance.
- Help with recruitment when numbers in some groups decreased. An analysis by the Pasifika organisation of the nature of playgroups that had attendance issues and declines in rolls found that the groups did not have an established community. Moving to a different venue where the community was located was successful in some instances, as was holding specific recruitment drives.

In this provision, another factor that seemed to help sustain playgroup operation was having coordinators who remained the same over the years of operation (stability) and were skilled, experienced and qualified ECE teachers.
Two main issues and barriers for supported playgroups hinder their sustainability and ECE participation. One barrier is not having a free venue where equipment can be left out. All providers commented on the difficulty on limited playgroup funding in being able to rent somewhere, an issue that has been raised in all previous reports. The second issue is the limited term contract and a fear that playgroups will not be sustained when the funding for a paid coordinator ends since the role played is vital. In addition, playgroup is a model that suits only some families/whānau who want to attend with their children.

**Quality and engagement in ECE and learning**

Most playgroup parents preferred a playgroup for their child, although several parents wanted a different ECE service; a parent who thought there were not enough children at playgroup, a parent planning to work full time, parents planning for their children to be independent i.e., an older child to ‘detach from mother’, and parents looking for ‘formalised learning’. One parent had a dual arrangement so she could spend time with her child at playgroup, as well as using childcare.

> I like that it is during school hours. Because it means I get one on one time with them. When they have finished they come home and have their nap and I get to potter around and set up dinner and pick up the other two. [SP family/whānau]

Those who preferred playgroup had various reasons, including that they were ‘stay at home’ mums and that the hours suited. By its nature, playgroup families/whānau were all engaged in the playgroup, attending with their child/ren. Opportunities for families to be involved were available and inviting:

- parents attend with their child;
- parents help according to their strengths—cleaning, preparation, liaison, administration and teaching;
- parents undertake training related to the playgroup; and
- parents become coordinators.

Two characteristics of playgroup especially appealed to families/whānau: that the parent becomes a teacher through involvement, and in community language playgroups, that the home language is spoken. In common, parents talked of becoming aware of possibilities for helping their child learn.

> When you involved you have to create a programme and you become a teacher. If you put them in a school [preschool] you don’t know who teaches them. Also, I think for the bilingual the playgroup is powerful.

> I guess you learn things here and you can teach the kids at home.

> Being at playgroup has made me open my eyes and use my brain.

> I am alert to any opportunity for them to learn.

Many of the parents also liked the support offered by ‘knowledgeable’ coordinators around behaviour management, including the opportunity to attend parenting courses and workshops.

Parents appreciated the playgroup resources and some were able to take these home. Te Kura (Correspondence School) packs were valued, providing ideas for activities around a topic, music resources, books, puzzles and so on. The runanga provider had developed kaupapa Māori resources for the puna and for parents to be involved with
at home. The use of home resources is strongly encouraged. The runanga is now developing a stronger kaupapa Māori curriculum that covers literacy, numeracy and works with other aspects of Te Whāriki.

Parents also gained from the opportunities for networking with other families/whānau for themselves and their children.

I think the most important thing for the children is networking. Asian networking. The parents have a place to meet each other, they can encourage each other. The community helps each other, some families/whānau have a divorce but because of the climate—orientated, feel supported. (Parent)

It is also like I get to have social time with other mums too. Sometimes it can get lonely being just at home with your child and trying to do something with them, it makes it a little bit more fun having another friend for me having someone there as well. I get to do activities with the kids as well. (Parent)

From coordinator perspectives supported playgroups offer a welcoming environment set up for children and families/whānau. There are a variety of activities and resources and parents are encouraged to engage with their child’s learning. At the most engaged level, parents are demanding, initiating activities and ideas and organizing the programme.

A lot of the time it was initially the parents came in, they let the children do everything.

But over time, they are the ones setting up the play area or taking note of “Oh we need some more of this stuff because the children have this interest”, using the terminology.

That for us is success—engagement and understanding around aspects of play and learning as opposed to just play. [SP provider]

In summary, what works for parents in terms of engagement in their child’s learning is that they learn from playgroup and do parallel things at home. Some supported playgroup coordinators offered workshops for parents. Parents are able to contribute their different strengths and in the highest level of involvement, parents take initiative and make demands.

The qualities and leadership of the coordinator were portrayed by providers as most important in encouraging playgroup parents to engage in ECE and children’s learning. Coordinators need to understand the ECE curriculum, be able to develop an education programme with families/whānau and support understanding about how children learn and develop through play and the role of adults. Coordinators were also portrayed as needing to have life skills and being able to offer wider opportunities for adults, such as cooking and gardening. In playgroups that were successful at engaging families/whānau in their child’s learning, the changes engendered were described as follows:

But there is also a better [parental] understanding around learning through play, that their children are learning through play. Their expectation was that their children needed to learn to read and write. There’s not so much of that now but [understanding] that when they are doing messy play or water play or any kind of play that there is learning going on and they are able to make those connections. As well as they bring things from home and introduce them to playgroup. [SP coordinator]
Parents commented also on the influence of the coordinator such as a mother who told of the coordinator giving ideas to help teach the children:

Sometimes I didn’t realise like how to make playdough and … I did not know you could take your children and make little vege gardens with them and grow things—it is just all about the ideas. [SP family/whānau]

There was evidence of coordinators in some playgroups having a somewhat narrow understanding of learning and outcomes, such as a coordinator emphasising a need to work on phonetics and skill recognition, and in another provision a coordinator regarding children learning to use a ‘pincer grip” to hold pencils and pens as being a core concern of the playgroup. By comparison, the ECE curriculum, Te Whāriki, and the New Zealand Curriculum focus on broad educational outcomes that include key competencies/learning dispositions and knowledge and skills—they refer to the competencies and skills that enable children to keep learning.

A huge issue for parents from several supported playgroups was that the funding for the coordinator was coming to an end, potentially affecting the quality and viability of the playgroup. Families attending a unique Chinese playgroup expressed particular concern, because it was the only one of its kind in that locality.

As a parent I feel disappointed for my child, I feel pressure ‘cos I have to make a decision to carry on or not. If I carry on I will struggle looking for funding by myself. Also, I will contribute as a volunteer so there is a lot of things to think about. As a parent I think if it carries on that will be great and if it stop that is a waste. Because for our community the playgroup is different—there is only one bilingual Chinese playgroup so if it stops there is nowhere to go. Other playgroups they can go to another one, maybe the location is different. But for our Asian community if it stops there is no option. [SP parent and coordinator]

The MOE funded research on quality in parent-whānau-led services (Mitchell, Royal Tangaere, Mara, & Wylie, 2006) found playgroups scored low on levels of quality and had limited opportunities for adult learning about children’s development and learning and how to support them. It found the key issue with respect to playgroups was their need for professional support. This challenge may be tested for playgroups in priority areas if playgroups are no longer supported and coordinators’ limited term contracts end.

**Language and culture**

Providers had different ways to find out about the priorities of families/whānau with regard to identity, language and culture. Discussion with the families/whānau themselves was common. The runanga provider had a form for parents to fill in about their needs for language, culture and identity when they enrolled. This and discussion with the parent, helped in the selection of the most appropriate ECE service from the runanga three options. The runanga provider has also worked with ECE services in their community to help support whānau.

Families/whānau were portrayed as being at different ends of a continuum in respect to language, culture and identity.

- Families/whānau who are disenfranchised and don’t speak their language; and
- Families/whānau with a good grasp of their language and culture.

Most of the families/whānau said their language and culture was reflected in the playgroups they attended. Upholding the community languages and cultures was regarded as an important attribute of playgroup. Parents
gave examples of their child’s main learning as learning to socialise with other children, learning about cultures of families/whānau, and in community language playgroups learning and maintaining their home language.

We utilise Cook Islands Language, we speak with the children. We have a mixture of other parents: Niue, Samoan, Māori, Cook Islands and Tonga, We have been saying to them “Open up. Use your language”. [Cook Islands parent]

Talking is very important for maintaining the language, that is what the playgroup provides. You pick up language through conversation. [Chinese parent]

I would like to keep going with it because my babies are part Samoan and Māori and so I like them learning a lot about their culture as well … I think it is good for a child to learn as many things as they can about another culture. [Parent]

Parents from bilingual playgroups see their languages and cultural values adopted in the programme (bilingual Chinese, Cook Islands and Samoan playgroup families/whānau). Playgroup was described as a place where parents and children are comfortable to speak in their own language and contribute activities important to them. Writing, artefacts, food, languages of all different families/whānau are used and represented. This open opportunity to contribute family funds of cultural knowledge is one distinctive and positive characteristic of playgroup and was empowering for parents.

Acknowledging and uplifting them for who they are because for some of them it has always been “Oh, I cannot speak English”, but now it is about “Oh, I can speak Cook Island or Samoan”. And “My child is now speaking two languages and can walk in multi-worlds. Although most of our programmes are mainstream, we do encourage our parents to speak to their child in whichever language they have the strength in. (Coordinator)

Strengthening language, culture and identity of parents flows through to the children. What works is the positive reinforcement of language and culture of families/whānau and children, encouragement for parents to use language they are fluent in, and an inclusive and welcoming playgroup.

**Special needs**

Identification and support for children with special needs was shown to be highly dependent on the skills of the coordinator and support of the provider organisation. The coordinator was a lynchpin for introducing behaviour management strategies, identifying needs and linking families/whānau with special education and health services, and organising for specialists to visit the playgroup. Some coordinators (8) said they invited professionals to assist in assessing children where they had concerns. Many of the parents surveyed (34) said coordinators had talked to them when there had been concerns about a child’s learning, health or development. Parents also talked to other parents attending the playgroups about such issues. Books and DVDs were another source of information.

Parents who were interviewed mentioned Plunket coming in to do checks and give advice, referrals by the coordinator to special education services, referrals to the family doctor, e.g., for allergies, and mobile trucks for the dentist and health services. A few parents wanted more information or guidance on autism, food allergies and delayed speech development.

**Transition to school**

There were varying arrangements made by parents for transition to school. The majority of parents, both surveyed and interviewed, had made no plans, particularly if their child was young. Others had in mind that they would talk
with their child about what school is like or had an older child at the school who would help the child know what to expect. There was an indication from one parent that she was becoming aware from her experience in the playgroup that some preparation would be beneficial.

My older daughter when she came we just dropped her off. But now by observing how kids get transited, it is quite different…. Will do school visits. (SP family/whānau)

The Chinese bilingual playgroup offered help for families/whānau whose English is not good through meeting the principal and interpreting. Another playgroup provided a pack with information and enrolment forms. Others provided information on ways to prepare the child for school, how to enrol and the compulsory starting age. A few (3) supported families/whānau who had older children in visits to school.

Some parents wanted advice on who to speak to and who to meet, the type of schools available and how to enrol.

**Impact of initiative**

Supported playgroups located in low socioeconomic communities have enrolled 2151 children, most from priority families/whānau, and in these ways increased participation. Sustainability of enrolments is an issue however, since the roll numbers fluctuate as families/whānau leave. There are particular fears about the future since coordinator contracts are coming to an end.

One main positive impact of supported playgroups is that parents are engaged from the start in attending with their child. The playgroup encourages parents’ involvement in their child’s learning through role modelling and advice from coordinators and other adults, provision of interesting resources and ideas for activities, workshops, and opportunities for parents to take on roles and responsibilities. The examples in this study suggest that the qualifications and skills of the coordinator are critical, as is professional support (workshops etc.) from a provider organisation.

Secondly, supported playgroups are playing important roles in strengthening language, culture and identity:

- This is a feature of puna in which te reo and tikanga Māori are embedded as foundations within the curriculum. Iwi are in a powerful position to support puna and contribute local knowledge.

- Supported playgroups that are bilingual or immersion in a community language are working with families/whānau and children to uphold and strengthen their cultural values and languages. This is empowering and crucial to a strong sense of identity, both for parents and children.

- Some general playgroups play a role in a multicultural society by positively reinforcing the language and culture of all families/whānau.

These positive roles are evident where the playgroup offers a comfortable and welcoming environment, contribution is welcomed and invited, and there is language and cultural expertise within the group.

Finally, supported playgroups offer a chance for children and adults to socialise together, and to form networks of support and in this way can make a valuable contribution to support for isolated families/whānau, with young children and parents from cultures outside of New Zealand.
Conclusion
The conclusion discusses features that help or hinder supported playgroups from encouraging participation, supporting parents to engage in ECE and early learning in the home, and strengthening language, culture and identity.

- Barriers to participation have been reduced through provision of locally based supported playgroups handy to most parents. The exception is where parents want to attend a special character playgroup such as in their home language, where travel may be needed. Playgroups are free so have addressed cost barriers. Most playgroups offer limited hours which suit only some parents. The exception is where providers offer more than one service and are able to match parents’ needs with one service type, or a mix, such as home-based and playgroup.

- Sustainability is a key issue—playgroups fluctuate in roll numbers. Providers and families/whānau considered a skilled coordinator working with the playgroup to analyse problems and plan measures to address issues important in supporting sustainability; with the coordinator providing stability of knowledge. All providers interviewed felt that sustainability is more likely for playgroups if they have a permanent and free venue, something that only some playgroups enjoy. The cost of venues and need to pack and unpack equipment was identified as problematic and a disincentive for playgroup parents to persist by all providers interviewed. Researchers suggest that classrooms in school grounds offer one solution to this issue, as does the idea of a mobile unit with a qualified coordinator to regularly visit community centres to hold a playgroup. Mobile units were also proposed by one provider. Coordinators would need to be matched to communities in respect to language and culture.

- The coordinator plays a crucial role in supporting playgroup quality, and encouraging families/whānau to take part in the playgroup and early learning. Parents and coordinators alike are troubled by the future loss of coordinators as their limited contract expires. There was evidence that the curriculum understanding of some coordinators was restricted; and importantly that coordinators who are qualified in ECE, experienced and have “life skills” can work very effectively with playgroups to lift quality and parent learning. This suggests that offering playgroups access to good quality professional support and workshops by a coordinator with these attributes would help sustain the quality of learning for parents and children.

- Resources available from Te Kura and from providers are welcomed and used by playgroup parents and offer ideas for activities that parents can do at home. These support participation.

- Iwi-based providers have played an empowering role in finding out about needs of whānau and constructing a curriculum for puna founded in te reo and tikanga Māori and with their own local stories. This is significant for families/whānau and is contributing to a sense of identity.

- Community language playgroups are successful in offering a service where parents and family are able to speak in their home language and contribute their cultural expertise. This is empowering for families/whānau and children.
7 Conclusion: Addressing the evaluation questions

In this concluding chapter, data is integrated from across the three years of evaluation to address the evaluation questions, with particular attention to the focus questions for Stage 3. The evaluation findings are analysed to pinpoint critical success factors for each initiative, what is worth scaling up and continuing, what changes could improve initiatives and how the initiatives can be designed to best meet the needs of the groups they are working with.

One limitation is that the parents/whānau whom we interviewed, were all currently enrolled in a Participation Initiative. Their experience may be different from those who were approached but declined to take part or those who have left initiatives after initially participating.

Another limitation is that 2013 was the first year in which we had a reasonably large amount of data from TAP providers and families, since in previous years, most of the TAP initiatives had not been operational. Some TAP providers were still at an early stage in recruiting families.

ECE participation for Māori children, Pasifika children and children in low socioeconomic communities

Effectiveness of the programme in raising participation

Consistent with the policy intent, the Participation Programme was effective in raising participation in ECE of Māori and Pasifika children and children from low socioeconomic communities. There were 3,497 active enrolments at December 2013, with 7,906 enrolments of priority children since the start of the Participation Programme (out of a total of 8,344 children ever enrolled). TAP and EPF initiatives stand out a making the largest contribution to increasing the number of priority children participating in ECE. TAP funding has been used to build or develop services in target communities that are responsive to community needs. At December 2013, TAP funded services had 1,432 enrolments. Around 80 percent of children had not attended ECE before. These services are permanent and located in low income communities; they will continue to attract new enrolments into the future without need for additional participation funding thereby increasing their value for money. EPF coordinators also enrolled a large number of children in ECE; 884 children at December 2013.

Some of the families with whom providers were working (especially EPF providers) were described as having “complex needs”. At an extreme, providers talked about “families/whānau requiring CYF notifications, alcoholism, gambling issues, involvement with gangs, children and adults with challenging behaviour and learning difficulties including low literacy levels, gang related behaviour, and families/whānau in debt, facing economic difficulties including housing issues due to overcrowding or evictions” (p. 20/31 of this report). Poverty is an overarching concept associated with this array of needs. Recent research by the Social Policy Research Unit of The Family Centre (Waldegrave, 13 April, 2014) has shown that some 23 percent of New Zealand children live in households below the poverty threshold. Attending an early childhood service is down the list of priorities if families live in substandard housing, have no spare money and may not afford basics, encounter problems in negotiating the welfare system, contend with other difficulties and if early childhood education incurs costs. EPF providers were well placed to support families with these complex needs. EPF providers did this through brokering support, i.e., ongoing discussion and negotiation to resolve and address issues with families/whānau
themselves, with ECE services and with other community agencies relevant to family support. Through these means, EPF providers helped to translate the knowledge held by one party to another in order to resolve and address issues that arose in supporting families/whānau to engage in ECE services and with other family support services. Some TAP providers were also particularly effective in offering wider family support. Successful TAP providers whom we interviewed integrated family support services into their ECE provision or made use of close connections with services to bring them into the ECE service.

Not all families had ‘complex needs’, and the evaluation found that in general providers tailored their level of support as required. In this context, the Participation Programme was highly effective in helping address needs and encouraging participation in ECE.

**Value for money**

One evaluation question asked how effective have been the initiative cost in terms of value for money. Ministry of Education figures provided provisional costs per initiative enrolment for EPF, SP, and FRHB and per child place for TAP.

**Table 10. Provisional costs per initiative enrolment (EPF, SP, and FRHB) and per child place (TAP).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Provisional costs per initiative enrolment at June 14*</th>
<th>Intensity of engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EPF</td>
<td>&lt;$10,000</td>
<td>EPF providers work closely for up to two years with a caseload of priority families of 3 and 4 year-olds who are not attending ECE. The aim is to support the child’s enrolment and regular attendance at ECE, and successful transition to school. Families often have complex needs that the EPF coordinator helps to address.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>&lt;$1,500</td>
<td>SP providers establish and run certificated playgroups that are intended to be responsive to the needs and identity language and culture of their particular communities, and provide a kaimanaaki/playgroup education to support curriculum delivery and parent engagement at the playgroup and at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRHB</td>
<td>&lt;$2,000</td>
<td>FRHB providers established responsive, licensed home-based ECE services and/or supported existing informal care arrangements to move into a licensed home-based service within target communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAP</td>
<td>$10,300</td>
<td>TAP providers establish new ECE services and child spaces by in target communities where new child places are needed most.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Provisional costs were calculated by dividing the total contract cost for each initiative by the number of enrolments as at June 2014 rounded, as the additional children that will be enrolled before the contracts end will mean the value per child will definitely decrease.

This calculation excludes a small number of providers whose enrolment numbers are not yet reported. The total number of enrolments for each initiative will not be known until all of the contracts are completed and the Ministry of Education receives final reports.
The “value for money” question cannot be addressed without further data. However, it is notable that the cost per enrolment is highest for the most intensive service, EPF, which this evaluation has shown is helping meet a range of complex family needs through playing a brokering role with external agencies and groups as well as support for children’s ECE participation. In addition, TAP (where the cost per created place is comparable to that of an EPF enrolment) will have a lower cost per enrolment over time as more children are enrolled in each created place.

Addressing main barriers to participation

Cost of ECE was found in Stages 1 and 2 to be the most prevalent barrier to participation in ECE. EPF addressed this barrier through negotiating with ECE services and finding affordable or free ECE for families. TAP, SP and some FRHB providers were effective in addressing this barrier within their own provision and making a difference to encouraging participation. They did this through various means, some applying to all children:

- ECE being entirely free, offering flexible hours (so families were not required to pay for hours they did not want);

and other practices that showed adaptation to family circumstances:

- offsetting parental work done within the centre against fees payable, having a scale of fees related to individual circumstances, finding sponsorship, and writing off debts.

While fees are not usually charged in playgroups, no additional operational funding was given to TAP or FRHB centres, suggesting it is within the capacity of any ECE service to address cost barriers if there is management willingness to do so. These measures taken by providers were in response to their understanding that cost and inflexibility constitute barriers to participation.

One of the FRHB providers offered free ECE by subsidising the service in the first years of operation from other aspects of its organisation until FRHB had built up sufficient enrolments to become viable. The FRHB provider held a wider long term view of the value of offering a diversity of provision to meet family needs, and that cross subsidisation in the short term would enable sustainable diversity of provision in the long term.

Some provider and parent examples show that priority families enrolled in EPF are leaving ECE services if they get into debt for not being able to pay and may also feel stigmatised and shamed. EPF providers bypass services where fees are high, enrolment policies are inflexible and services are not responsive to families. Addressing these barriers is a critical success factor in encouraging priority families to participate in ECE. It may be worthwhile to consider how to encourage more ECE services to address these barriers through their enrolment policies. This is because priority families are found throughout New Zealand, not just in low socioeconomic communities.

Ministry of Education data (Ministry of Education, 2014) shows a significant rise in participation in 2008 for all groups of children, that was attributed to the implementation of 20 Hours ECE. Cost barriers were being addressed under the 20 hours free ECE policy. Fees paid by households fell 33.6% in the year from June 2007 to June 2008 following the implementation of 20 Hours ECE; and affordability rose by 36.9%.

Transport was found to be the second most prevalent barrier to participation in Stages 1 and 2. The need for transport was often addressed through referrals to local ECE services within walking distance of priority families (EPF) or provision of such services (SP, FRHB and TAP which were planned for low income communities where ECE participation is low).

Some providers were wary of offering transport as a regular event, preferring one off petrol vouchers, or use of transport on occasions and for parents as well as the child. In rural communities, car-pooling was encouraged and
some use was made of Te Kura. Some EPF providers referred families to services where transport was offered, and some FRHB and TAP services were routinely transporting most children by van on the grounds that they believed families would not attend otherwise. Connections could be made between the ECE service and home, through for example, home visits, child portfolios going home, but this was not universal—some parents said they had never met the teachers/educators or been to their child’s service.

Providers using vans to transport children did so because they thought families would not attend without such transport; and families using vans welcomed this. Other providers were somewhat critical of such practice. The practice of routinely picking up and dropping off ‘van loads of children’ warrants critical scrutiny in terms of the ways in which families are viewed (is their contribution welcomed?), the capacity of ECE service staff to form relationships with families and the value for children if they are being transported outside their local community. Some of the providers supplying vans made efforts to form relationships with families through practices such as giving the profile books to the van driver; having teachers doing the van driving and visiting homes; and bringing parents into the service in the van along with the child.

**Provision that is not culturally responsive and welcoming of families** was the third main barrier to participation found in Stages 1 and 2. In Stage 2 we found that families’ needs and experiences varied. Many Pasifika parents chose Pasifika playgroups where language, culture, religion and family connectedness were core values. Some Māori families (particularly EPF) were somewhat alienated from their language, culture and identity and some had taken the position of maintaining language and culture at home rather than in an educational setting. Most providers made efforts to address cultural barriers, either through referral only to culturally responsive and welcoming centres (EPF), or through practices to develop a culturally responsive curriculum. Some supported playgroups were provided in the home language of participants and this was a drawcard especially for Pasifika families. In all but two of the TAP centres where we interviewed providers, identity, language and culture was a primary focus. This factor is more thoroughly discussed below under “Addressing issues of language, culture and identity in the communities where initiatives are being undertaken.

**Improved learning outcomes for participating children/tamariki and family/whānau**

**Learning outcomes for children**

In all stages of the evaluation, families had high educational aspirations for their children and many families interviewed commented on improvements to their child’s behaviour, social and communicative competence from attending ECE. Specific benefits gained through enrolment in ECE and mentioned by families/whānau included children having improved verbal skills; confident, independent children; improved social skills and behaviour; learning to write names and count; learning te reo and other community languages; and developmental skills including toilet training.

Providers also identified outcomes for children. Those providers who were qualified ECE teachers were more likely to pinpoint outcomes consistent with strands and indicative learning outcomes of Te Whāriki. Some FRHB, SP, TAP and EPF providers who lacked these qualifications focused on a narrower range of discrete skills, raising questions about the range and depth of advice and support they are able to offer around learning outcomes. While EPF providers are not expected to be teachers, they are charged with working with families on an Early Learning Plan, helping families evaluate the suitability of ECE provision and supporting transition to school.
Most providers used informal observations to identify special learning needs, following up with referrals to agencies if necessary. Only some providers said they had staff with expertise in identifying special learning needs.

Where providers had close connections with health services, regular checks were made of children’s health. Providers could “fast track” referrals where they had built established relationships. Some providers organised Before School Checks, Plunket visits, and so on.

**Parent engagement in ECE and in their child’s education**

Somewhat different opportunities were offered for parent engagement in ECE and their child’s learning through each type of initiative, which reflected the nature of each provision. Within all initiatives, parent engagement varied.

Supported playgroups required parents to attend with their child and offered opportunities for engagement in the playgroup and education at home. Strong features that supported parent engagement were the presence and modelling of a “knowledgeable” coordinator, use of Te Kura resources, and delivery of workshops and training. The parents whom we interviewed and surveyed all commented on their high level of involvement in the playgroup, that they all benefited particularly through working alongside the coordinator, from workshops, and from talking about personal and child-related issues with other adults. They used ideas gained from the playgroup in activities at home. Some parents were able to take Te Kura resources home. Their engagement was deepened by the playgroup being a place where they felt comfortable and that they enjoyed through meeting other adults socially. Parents reported a continuum of engagement in the playgroup, from being there with their child and interacting with others, to participating in courses and offering ideas, to becoming a coordinator themselves. Participation was usually accompanied by an increase in parent confidence and contribution.

FRHB offered differing opportunities for parent involvement depending on the scheme and parent/whānau needs. In some but not all FRHB schemes, ECE qualified coordinators visited the homebased educator when parents/whānau were also present, enabling a three way flow of information and discussion. Invitations and encouragement to attend regular playgroups worked in this same manner. Portfolios were sent home by the educator and parents/whānau were invited to contribute. In others, parents barely knew the educator and there was minimal communication. Therefore, parent engagement in FRHB varied from virtually no engagement, for example a father whose child was taken to the educator’s home by van, to frequent informal and formal communication between three parties (the coordinator, educator and parent/whānau).

TAP services also varied in opportunities for parent engagement in the service. Opportunities were offered through invitations to contribute to assessment and planning, attend social events, workshops and excursions, and through communication from the centre tailored to families. Some parents became employed in various capacities in some centres. Parents reported a continuum of engagement from ensuring their child attended e.g., getting their child ready and putting their child on the van where this was provided, to involvement and contribution in the life of the centre and assessment and planning for their child.

EPF providers offered information about health, learning and development, sometimes provided educational resources and worked with families on their child’s Early Learning Plan. They also facilitated engagement in ECE and learning through matching families with an appropriate ECE service and supporting participation. The ECE service in turn offered various opportunities for involvement.
An analysis and synthesis of the evaluation findings across all initiatives showed that parent engagement in ECE and in their child’s education varied on a continuum according to the initiative, encouragement for parents to participate and parent confidence.

At one level, some parents have very little contact with the ECE service. This is most likely where children are transported to the service and minimal communication takes place. It further occurs where parents are very relieved to have a break from their child, and have faith in the ECE service about their capacity to care and educate.

At a second level, some parents bring their child to ECE, may attend with their child, take up opportunities to communicate with teachers/educators/coordinators (face-to-face, telephone or via social networking), participate in ECE service events, and/or participate in assessment and planning. This was common in supported playgroups, and with some parents in TAP services and centre-based services to which EPF providers had encouraged enrolment. A requirement to be there with the child or strong encouragement through provision of a comfortable welcoming environment in the first place, and personal communication seemed to invite participation.

At a third level, a few parents initiate activities and advocate for their child and children. A few SP parents came into this category, actively recruiting other families and helping run the programme. A few TAP parents in two centres that we saw were encouraged to take on employment opportunities within the centre and one example was provided of a parent being supported to undertake an ECE teacher education course.

Quite a few parents wanted to be more involved but wanted to be asked. It seems that parents thought about their involvement through being asked the question in interview and reflecting on the reasons why they were not more involved. This suggests there is value for ECE services in finding out directly from parents about their preferences for communication and involvement.

The common critical success factors were a view held of parents as competent people with skills and expertise to offer, a culturally responsive and welcoming environment, and a variety of ways offered in which parents can be involved that enables parents to find their own pathway for participation.

**Responsiveness to family needs and participating communities**

Participation Initiatives were responsive to family needs by offering a broader range of services than just early childhood education. These included support and opportunities for families. Brokering was a critical success factor for EPF providers in alleviating barriers to participation because the complex needs of families need to be addressed before ECE could be considered. EPF providers did this well by having knowledge and relationships with community and government agencies, and translating knowledge held by one party to the other and vice versa. They also held understanding of local ECE services, how they operated, including fees and enrolment policies, and their responsiveness to language and culture which they passed on to families. Likewise, TAP services were most responsive when they were connected to the local community through offering an integrated service with early childhood education alongside other family services, or where they held a hub of connections with community agencies and organisations. All but one TAP service provider interviewed did these things and this is what made them successful with priority families. These findings are consistent with arguments made by Leseman and Slot (2014) that “to combat poverty effectively, access to high quality ECEC needs to be accompanied by support to families” (p. 8). There is not a prescribed approach, since family needs and local communities vary.
Providers have identified that community involvement is a crucial element in successfully identifying, recruiting and working with families in their local communities and was supported through employment of staff who were embedded in and had knowledge of the community. Staff who understood the culture and spoke the languages of families were well positioned to develop relationships.
How each initiative and the participation programme overall addresses issues of identity, language and culture in the communities where initiatives are being undertaken

Each Participation Initiative took somewhat different approaches to supporting language, culture and identity in the communities where the initiatives were located. In addition, there were some within initiative differences. The EPF approach was two-pronged. Support for language, culture and identity came from coordinators themselves through culturally responsive interactions and matching of staff cultural understanding with those of families. Some EPF providers found ECE services that matched and catered for family cultural aspirations or introduced families to centres that supported a strong sense of cultural identity. For Pasifika families, this was often maintaining cultural identity and learning about New Zealand. Most families surveyed said there were some ways in which their language and culture was reflected in the ECE service. However, EPF providers said that not all ECE services encouraged and/or incorporated the language and culture of the families/whānau and this was also identified by around a fifth of EPF families who were surveyed.

All FRHB providers discussed family/whānau aspirations with regard to language and culture at enrolment. They addressed aspirations through recruiting caregivers and coordinators, including members of the wider family/whānau who could offer appropriate language and culture. Some providers accessed community advice and support. Cultural resources were offered; providers and families would like more of these. This was a strength of FRHB and reportedly helped some parents gain confidence themselves in their language and culture. An issue however was the shortage of Māori and Pasifika carers and coordinators/teachers.

Identity, language and culture were a primary focus in all but one TAP centre. In the three Pasifika centres and the Māori Trust board and iwi centres, language and culture were woven through the curriculum. These centres drew on community funds of knowledge and employed fluent language speakers. General ECE services varied in their responsiveness to cultural aspirations.

SP providers made efforts to find out about the priorities of families/whānau with regard to identity, language and culture through discussion when families/whānau first enrolled. Commonly, the playgroup provision reflected the cultural values and practices of families. Some supported playgroups used community languages of families or were bilingual or immersion in te reo Māori; these were regarded by parents as important attributes. All playgroups were open to parents to contribute their own funds of cultural knowledge.

Overall, our findings at every stage of the evaluation highlight that the most successful ECE services connect with families to generate a sense of belonging, of feeling connected, of membership. Such practices require teachers to be open-minded about family and community funds of knowledge and cultural capital, and to be welcoming of family contributions not simply on their own terms. This was exemplified in the evaluation by a provider who had faith in the competence of a mother whom she employed against the advice of some other members of the centre who did not recognise the mother’s skills. The employment was a success, enabling the mother to take on responsibilities and do well. Similarly, the support for training of homebased educators has introduced new opportunities that they had not imagined. However, accounts by priority families and providers of their experiences shows that in some ECE settings priority families did not feel welcomed or accepted and this deterred them from taking part. These settings were bypassed by parents and providers whom we interviewed.

The selection of providers with experience and expertise in working with cultural groups, iwi, and whānau provided a foundation for cultural responsiveness, and worked best alongside a foundation of ECE understanding and expertise. Often staff employed were from the same cultural group and spoke the language/s of the families. EPF providers generally looked for ECE services that incorporated the language and culture of families: this was a
success factor. We were given excellent examples of how some SP, FRHB and TAP services were generally highly responsive to the needs of families and are working with their local cultural community/ies to develop forms of provision that weave community and cultural values within their curriculum. These could be scaled up to act as exemplars within their communities and nationally. This has worked well in initiatives such as TLRI, Centres of Innovation, and the publication and professional development around assessment exemplars.

Iwi-based and Pasifika providers were making cultural connections through their own communities. Although not measured, this is likely to contribute to positive outcomes. Marked shifts in achievement for Māori and Pasifika students can occur when “deficit assumptions around ethnicity are challenged, and comprehensive pedagogical and partnership practices are employed and resourced to ensure stronger continuities between whānau, aiga, homes, schools and cultural communities” (Biddulph, Biddulph, & Biddulph, 2003, p. 63).

**Transition to school**

Where children were approaching school age, TAP, FRHB and EPF providers described a range of measures they took to support the transition—most commonly, assisting with school selection and school visits, providing information, including school ERO reports, and encouraging literacy, numeracy and self-management skills that providers thought children need to support their transition. EPF providers explained to school teachers that their involvement with children would continue. One TAP provider made mention of advocacy for the child’s portfolio of documentation to be used to help as a bridge to school. We were not able to obtain a comprehensive picture of what was happening from parent views, since few had children approaching school age; they were all participants in ECE.

**Provision of quality ECE**

The overall aim of the government’s Participation programme is to provide opportunity for children to develop “strong learning foundations” (Ministry of Education, 1996) through participation in “quality” ECE. The primary focus of initiatives has been to encourage participation of priority families in licensed and certificated ECE services. While aspects of process and structured quality have featured in the findings; in general, process and structural features of quality have not been a direct focus for the Participation Programme.

To address the question “How have the participation initiatives contributed to quality ECE being delivered, we have looked at parents’ and providers’ views of the quality of ECE delivered through the initiatives. Parents and providers had some common and different views of quality and these varied somewhat between initiatives. All groups regarded responsive relationships and a welcoming environment as key aspects of quality. In general, the views of parents in the evaluation indicated that the ECE services they were enrolled in were characterised by these attributes. Parents were likely to also identify activities and resources for their children with evidence that their child was learning and developing, and a clean environment. Pasifika parents and some Māori parents emphasised cultural appropriateness. A few parents identified structural features—qualified staff (some EPF, SP and TAP parents) and small group size allowing one on one interaction (FRHB parents). The parent participants were generally happy with quality in their particular ECE service.

In common, providers also emphasised responsive relationships and a welcoming environment, and said they either provided this or referred families to services where these were attributes. Cultural responsiveness was singled out as a process characteristic of quality. In addition to relationships (a principle of Te Whāriki), providers also highlighted other principles, especially empowerment. An empowering approach seemed to be enacted in services where children, families and community were encouraged to contribute, but was hard to gauge in those services where families had little contact. Providers also commented on structural features of quality. The value of
qualified teachers/coordinators and supportive working conditions was a quality feature for FRHB, TAP, and EPF providers, except for one TAP provider. Provisions varied on this dimension. Low pay was regarded as a barrier to employing and retaining qualified educators in FRHB. In SP, concerns were expressed about the potential loss of the qualified coordinator when the MOE contract ended.

As discussed above, parents and providers expressed satisfaction with some features of quality. We found support has been given to enhancing responsiveness to Māori and Pasifika children through the ILCCE initiative and through the creation of new services (some, but not all, TAP, FRHB and SP initiatives) in which a culturally responsive curriculum was generated. This is a significant indicator of quality. However, many EPF providers told us they often bypassed ECE services in their community that were deemed to be culturally unresponsive, and families commented on a lack of welcome by some ECE as a barrier in their initial participation in ECE, indicating that deeper understanding of cultural responsiveness may need to be made more widely if all families, including priority families throughout New Zealand are to access responsive ECE. A second finding was that some providers (especially in those instances of EPF and SP where teaching qualifications were not held) focused their advice about teaching and learning on discrete skills.

Quality is often defined as process quality and structural quality. Process quality refers to a curriculum characterised by responsive, reciprocal, relationships, where children are stimulated to investigate and think for themselves, responsibility and power is distributed to children, and engagement of families is focused on education. Assessment and planning that are based on children’s strengths and enable contributions from parents and children are valuable in supporting outcomes. These features are key to the principle of Relationships foundational to the ECE curriculum, Te Whāriki, which states that “Children learn through responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places, and things”; but variations exist in quality practices and in teacher understanding of Te Whāriki in ECE services in New Zealand (Education Review Office, 2009, 2013a, 2013b; Mitchell et al., 2011; Mitchell et al., 2006).

Early childhood education can play a transformative role in family lives—enhancing children’s learning and development and contributing to family wellbeing, as some stories from families in the evaluation study have told. The literature review carried out on outcomes of early childhood education for the Ministry of Education (Mitchell, Wylie, & Carr, 2008) shows positive outcomes for children and families from high quality education.

The large scale Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education project carried out in the United Kingdom (EPPE/EPPSE), for example, showed engagement in high quality ECEC has lasting effects on the educational performance of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly in terms of English, maths, science and socio-behavioural outcomes after controlling for background characteristics (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2013). Low quality ECE may be damaging: “Negative associations with aggression, antisocial behaviour and anxiety in the short term are linked to an early starting age, long hours in centres rated low quality, and frequent changes in child care” (Mitchell et al., 2008, p. 7).

The researchers suggest that in order to meet the needs of priority families and have an impact on learning and development, the accessibility, quality and cultural responsiveness of ECE services need to be addressed concurrently.
Ministry approach and impact

The initiatives have supported participation in ECE for priority children in target communities where there are high numbers of children not attending ECE before they go to school. Each of the initiatives alleviated main barriers to participation that hindered parents/whānau from taking part.

In Stage 2, we found that the most important factor identified by providers and MOE alike in contributing to success was the selection of providers who are knowledgeable and connected with the community and who have the capacity to deliver the service required. Providers with established connections with iwi, cultural and community organisations, government agencies (especially WINZ and CYFS), social services and health services, used these to the benefit of families. Findings in Stage 3 have reinforced the importance of these factors and additional factors:

- employing experienced ECE qualified teaching staff on EPF teams to act as a resource for all EPF staff;
- being part of an organisation that offers a range of ECE and family services that can use resources from one aspect of operation to support another.

The contracting model was raised as a concern by a number of participants in stages 2 and 3. Providers who have built up experience and knowledge in delivering an initiative are worried they may no longer be funded when their contract ends. They face the loss of staff and expertise. Supported Playgroups that have worked with a co-ordinator may not be sustainable if the parent/whānau group is not able to continue the work of the playgroup. There were concerns too about a loss of quality if a co-ordinator was no longer provided. Findings from this evaluation emphasising the value of co-ordinator support are comparable with those from two research studies on general playgroups in New Zealand (Mitchell & Mara, 2001; Mitchell et al., 2006) where a common need was expressed by playgroup parents for professional support and workshops in the community where the playgroup is located. In each of these studies, ratings of quality associated with gains for children were generally poor unless an ECE qualified co-ordinator was employed.

Conclusion

There is robust evidence that good quality ECE can contribute to children’s learning and development and to the wellbeing of families. The Participation Programme and individual initiatives are succeeding in enhancing participation in target communities for priority families. Overall, Participation Initiative providers are providing or referring families to ECE services that are responsive and welcoming and culturally suited to families using them. Valuable insights have been offered into positive provisions and practices. First, the evaluation findings have demonstrated that ECE services cater well for priority families and children when they are integrated with wider services to support families. The brokering role played by EPF providers also enabled access of families to ECE and support services by enabling and supporting these connections and making information understandable. Second, the evaluation has demonstrated ways in which cultural responsiveness to Māori and Pasifika families can be enhanced through connections with iwi and cultural organisations, and weaving cultural understandings and local knowledge into the curriculum. The examples highlighted in this report offer useful ideas for other ECE services wanting to respond fully to the needs and strengths of children from diverse cultures. There is a need to ensure that quality of ECE services being used by priority families is high, and to address some challenges, including cost and responsiveness, within the broader ECE sector that the evaluation findings highlighted.
8. References


