

Briefing for Government Stakeholders



Child-Rich Communities: Aotearoa New Zealand's 'Bright Spots'

Requested actions:

- 1 Please read and share this information widely.
- 2 Draw on the findings of this report to inform your work.
- 3 Ensure your decisions are made in partnership with affected communities, so that you build on their strengths.
- 4 Integrate and jointly resource community building and social service delivery in local communities.
- 5 Support and promote workforce development opportunities that will strengthen community-led practice and working with communities.

Background

This Child-Rich Communities project explored local community initiatives that are making a positive difference to children and families. This short paper provides background about the project and the useful learning that emerged from it.

Our objective was to understand how twenty-one community initiatives – places we described as 'bright spots' – were working in the best interests of children and families. We deliberately focused on the question 'what is working?' so that we could learn and share stories illustrating what's possible through respectful relationships, collaboration and practicing in strengths based ways.

This work is a timely reminder of the value and power of communities, where people are connected and committed to enabling safe, families/ whānau and neighbourhoods.

Through conversations with people working in diverse ways in communities, we have identified ten important lessons relevant to current Government, Non-Government Organisation, business and community efforts to enable children's wellbeing. It illustrates the capacity of community-led development to make a difference and the need for this approach to be better understood and supported by Government, and all New Zealanders.

Factors that help bright spots were:

- Longer-term funding and flexible funders who are supportive, experimental, and keen to learn as well.
- Being able to measure and demonstrate impact and achievements. Assistance, guidance, capacity building in how to measure impact. Links with academics and researchers often useful for both parties.
- Inspiration and support from other 'kindred spirits'.

This collaborative research project was commissioned by Inspiring Communities, Royal NZ Plunket Society, UNICEF NZ and Every Child Counts. The work focused on twenty-one initiatives, ranging in size and scale, age, geography and type of entity to identify ways of working that others could replicate.

In order to share these success stories, we are publishing a short report that shares the 'what works and why' experience from communities we spent time with; four short learning stories or case studies, and a summary.

All of these are available electronically at <http://everychildcounts.org.nz/resources%2BIndex/Community+led+development>.

The Project Partners will follow with further community discussions and workshops.

While there were many different approaches to working and supporting children, families and communities, ten key learnings emerged:

1 See 'the poor' as the greatest asset, not a 'problem to be fixed'

- Local people are the most important resource and the greatest asset. They are not 'problems to be fixed'.
- You can't build on broken' – if you see people as 'vulnerable', 'high-needs', or 'broken', positive change becomes very difficult. Instead, you have to build upon people's existing assets and aspirations.
- Bright spots do not see people as 'in need' – instead they see people as strong.

2 If families are well, then children are well

Bright spots tend to work holistically. They see that children live in families, and that families live in neighbourhoods.

3 Counter the culture of disempowerment – enable people to "dream" again

Bright spots shared concerns about a culture of non-engagement or disempowerment that has built up in a whole section of New Zealand society. Bright spots work on shifting the 'disempowered mindset' by getting people to 'dream' again and helping people to uncover and talk about their aspirations.

4 Go beyond 'social service delivery' – walk alongside people, use 'soft doors', and ensure reciprocity

Bright spots argue that for long-term social change, we need 'more than service-delivery'. This 'more' comes through bright spots' philosophy and world view – their underlying beliefs; their approach to 'the community' and families; as well as their activities. Bright spots use 'soft doors'; they walk alongside people; they listen and ensure reciprocity. Bright spots do not assume an 'expert role'.

5 No judgement. No stigma. Accessed by free-will

Bright spots have 'no judgement' in their work with people. In bright spots, people tend to choose to participate, rather than be coerced or forced to receive 'help'.

6 Change takes time – be there for the long-haul

All too often, funders want to see results; and they want to see them fast. However, real change for individuals takes time. And real change for a community takes even longer, sometimes decades.

7 Build on the positive first. (Generally, before tackling the 'negatives')

Build up positive relationships; build up a positive community identity before tackling some of the 'harder stuff'.

8 Relationships and individuals are key

There must be on-the-ground relationships of trust. The 'key person' who leads a community-led-development project is vital. However, this often means that this 'leader' is the project's "greatest asset and greatest liability".

9 Being a 'local' gives you a head start...

Some bright spots were started or championed by a member of the same community they are trying to effect change in. Being a local resident of a so-called 'high deprivation' community, gives you a strong head start.

"To do community-led work – you have to have someone from that community, who knows that community and can see its strengths"

10 But 'externals' can still make a difference

Some bright spots were started by an external person/organisation, for example, Te Aroha Noa, Great Start Taita, and the Common Unity Project. These bright spots had to work harder to build relationships and gain the community's trust and ownership.

For more information about Child Rich Communities visit everychildcounts.org.nz/resources%2BIndex/Community+led+development