

2018 Child Rich Communities Evaluation Summary



Photo image: Waitangirua Community

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Introduction

In early 2015, Inspiring Communities, Plunket, UNICEF and Every Child Counts began the Child Rich Communities initiative¹ or CRC. CRC aims to grow a 'child rich, community-led' movement to improve child and whānau wellbeing, by:

- learning about local champions and community-led activity making a positive difference to children and whānau across Aotearoa
- profiling, connecting and supporting these champions and their activity
- nurturing and advocating for community-led action to improve child and whānau wellbeing.

In 2015, CRC produced the Bright Spots² report, which showcased 21 examples of local community initiatives that are making a positive difference to children and families. The Bright Spots provided a means to profile CRC and surface key principles behind CRC.

In 2016, the Bright Spots were brought together at a national hui to connect, share and strategise. Ideas from this hui were used to create a CRC Action Plan. S.K.I.P agreed to fund this CRC Action Plan in 2018, which took the form of three webinars, three regional workshops and four communities of practice. Inspiring Communities facilitated the delivery of the 2018 Action Plan, with Barnardos, Plunket and UNICEF part of a wider project team. The Action Plan aims to grow CRC awareness, engagement and capability.

This report evaluates the 2018 CRC activity. It begins with a report summary, before presenting the CRC context, the 2018 CRC Action Plan, the evaluation purpose, methods and findings, and implications.

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Thank you to S.K.I.P for funding CRC activities during 2018

¹ See <http://inspiringcommunities.org.nz/child-rich-communities/> for background on the initiative.

² See <http://inspiringcommunities.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Child-Rich-Communities-full-report.pdf>.

³ This 2017 webinar <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMivN2ikKJI> shares some of the lessons from the Bright Spots report.

Summary

Child Rich Communities is community-led development in the child and family space. It is about supporting ground up leadership and self-organising to improve tamariki and whānau wellbeing, through local community resources, skills, wisdom, strengths and relationships. It is about capability building, growing a constellation of people and practices and a system of influence that can influence systems. It is about doing and learning and adapting over time. It is a modern and Aotearoa expression of the old adage that “It takes a village to raise a child”.

The 2018 CRC activities were designed to increase awareness and engagement with CRC, build CRC capability and practice and help grow a CRC movement to benefit children and whānau.

The child rich, community-led framing of CRC attracted diverse participation across the activities. It is strengths based and places power and agency in community hands.

160+ unique participants were actively engaged in these CRC activities in 2018⁴:

3 one hour webinars attracted 100 attendees; 84% stayed for 45 minutes or longer.

3 half day workshops attracted 64 people: Whangarei (39), Ohakune (7), Whanganui (18).

4 communities of practice each held 4 two hour sessions, in Wellington, Christchurch and two online. Participants per session ranged from 3 to 9; with around 26 total unique participants.

Each community context is unique and tailored preparation and follow-up to each activity by communities and Inspiring Communities is important. Having external Inspiring Communities support working with local people to organize and run these activities built energy, attracted different kinds of participants and was highly valued.

The CRC project team has learned that having a mix of CRC activities to refer people to is invaluable and that the flow of activity is important. Ideally webinars would happen first and generate local workshops and COPs. That was the intent in 2018 but due to required timing of webinars didn't eventuate – the workshops and COPs began before the webinars were held.

The CRC webinars were promoted widely and generated interest. Attendees reported finding their content useful and applicable, feeling inspired, learning new things, feeling motivated and connected to a community of practitioners. People were especially interested in hearing about “tricky stuff” and learning edges and in asking questions. Balancing structured content with informal discussion was the main challenge. In follow-up calls with three participants, all recalled key messages and described how they had actively applied learning from the webinar.

⁴ Note that some people took part in more than one activity.

The CRC workshops provided empowering platforms for community conversation, learning, sharing and relationship building. Seeds were sown for ongoing community collaboration and action.

The Communities of Practice (COPs) provided useful vehicles for peer support, reflection, practice development and learning. The dynamic nature of the groups required skilled facilitation and flexibility to go with group energy. Some breakthrough insights and tangible impacts from the COPs were reported.

In essence, the webinars were a national vehicle for profiling CRC and sharing useful knowledge; the workshops created a space to empower the community and COPs support individual practice, learning and networking. Much was learned about the three activities in 2018, as summarised below.

	Webinars	Workshops	Communities of Practice
ACHIEVED	Informed, inspired, connected, motivated, generated interest and energy, grew a sense of community	Informed, inspired, connected, motivated, 'joined dots', sowed seeds for collaboration and ongoing action	Peer support, built capability, informed, connected, energised, inspired, some tangible impacts, ongoing action emerging
STRENGTHS	Accessible, useful content, good for inspiring, connecting and motivating, national level tool, can be used ongoing	Platform for local community connection and conversation, sowed seeds, joined dots	Connected people, shared wisdom and experience, built capability, some breakthrough insights, vehicle for peer support
CHALLENGES	One-off, sustaining momentum and energy, messages may not be retained, potential for technical issues	One-off, sustaining momentum and energy requires local energy and commitment, need to read community readiness and needs prior to maximize value	Dynamic nature of groups and participation, sustaining momentum and energy, finding right people, right time, right place (physical or online) for COPs, success rests heavily on facilitators
IMPLICATION/S	The webinars were effective in sharing CRC messages, growing practical knowledge and a CRC community	The workshops provided useful platforms for local community connection, discussion and ongoing action	The COPs provided effective peer support, reflection, practice development and peer learning mechanisms for most participants

Community knowledge and expertise in webinars, workshops and COPS and skilled external support by Inspiring Communities have been the keys to success.

The key challenge across all activities is how to sustain sparks from the energy created. While the 'why' and 'what' of working in child rich ways are often clear, people can struggle with 'how' and this was a key contribution of these activities; showing people how to do this work effectively in their contexts via the CRC principles and through sharing grass roots wisdom and experiences. More focus on 'how' to build individual and collective CRC action is needed.

The CRC workstreams in 2018 fulfilled their aims of growing awareness and engagement with the CRC principles, connecting people and building capability around CRC ways of thinking and working. They also affirm the seven CRC principles, and especially those of connection, relationship building, collaboration, engagement and empowerment. The 2018 CRC workstreams have grown the CRC ecosystem by socialising the CRC principles and building local and national networks of people working in CRC ways.

Working in communities with children and families is rewarding, yet can be intensely challenging and at times isolating for CRC practitioners. This evaluation has identified that people working in the CRC space are hungry for connection, peer support, CRC stories, discussion around successes and challenges, and for safe spaces to share their issues, be inspired, be assisted and support others. More sharing of stories is needed to make the CRC principles concrete.

“CRC is valuable and we want to do more of it (IC team member)”.

CRC participants and the project team want this work to continue. Current project partners also wish to continue their involvement and strengthen their strategic contribution, with Inspiring Communities continuing to project manage and implement CRC. The desire is to carry on all three activities to build on 2018 momentum, alongside:

- Expanding and experimenting with online and digital platforms to spread CRC knowledge and practice, connect and converse, including webinars, Zoom sessions and web based information.
- Having a stronger focus on storytelling to bring the CRC principles to life, share CRC messages, community experiences, successes and challenges.
- Continuing centrally held project management, organizing, facilitation and mentoring support, while partnering closely with local people and organisations and always being directed by community interests and energy.
- Undertaking more strategic work to develop the CRC field, understand the systems at work and influence national conversations around community-led action to improve child and whānau wellbeing.
- Exploring how Te Ao Māori and other indigenous models can inform CRC thinking and practice.
- Consciously targeting and infusing CRC principles and ways of working across child and whānau focused organisations such as Plunket and Barnardos.
- Continuing to evaluate and take a learning frame to CRC activity, to help direct efforts for maximum effect.

Going deeper with one or two CRC activities in the short term, such as webinars and COPs, or more light touch with more activities, is a strategic issue to consider.