

WestREAP INCORPORATED SOCIETY
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
NEEDS ANALYSIS

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1.0 Introduction:

The purpose of this needs analysis is to provide up to date information which will assist WestREAP in directing their forward strategic planning, including developing the Integrated investment Plan for the next three years.

2.0 WestREAPs Current Involvement in Early Childhood Education

For 2014 WestREAP is contracted to provide 472 delivery hours covering curriculum support, professional development, Ka Hikitia, whanau and community services, and collaboration. These hours are to increase for 2015 and 2016. Details can be found in the Integrated Investment Plan 2014-2016. This REAPANZ contract is funded by the Ministry of Education (MOE). Other relevant contracts held are Engaging Priority Families(MOE), Whanau Integration, Innovation and Engagement (Te Puni Kokiri), and Incredible Years parenting programme (MOE).

3.0 Methodology

Information was gathered from Ministry of Education staff in Greymouth and Christchurch, from Ministry publications, 2013 Census, and from staff and parents of ECE centres and schools in the WestREAP area. Most centres and schools were visited in person, with staff of 2 Early Childhood Centres and 5 schools interviewed by phone.

Information was gathered in an informal way, taking care not to ask many “leading” questions. cross-validation was an ongoing process. Participants had been prepared for my visits in advance by REAP and had thought carefully about it.

This report covers the “big picture” needs. Some specific needs of individual centres have been passed on directly to REAP for action.

4.0 Target Population of the WestREAP Area

The area serviced by WestREAP covers the Grey and Westland Districts.

A detailed profile can be found in the Integrated Investment Plan 2014-2016, in which population figures are based on the 2006 Census. Figures given here are mainly from the 2013 Census.

The area has a population of 21,675, just 48 more than in 2006. This is considerably less than projected, and there is evidence that the population of both Grey and Westland Districts are declining; Westland had a 1.2% loss in total population since 2006 and Grey has been identified by the National Institute of Demographic and Economic Analysis as one of the districts showing several of the early warning indicators of accelerating structural ageing.¹

At March 2013 there were 1464 children aged 0-4. This is 114 more than there were in 2006; although the overall population increased only minimally in the intercensal period the number of

¹ Natalie Jackson NIDEA 2013 to be published

preschool children increased by 114 or 8.4%. This is in accord with a “mini baby boom” which occurred over New Zealand as a whole and is now over.

Of the 1464 preschool children 258 or 17.6% are Maori. There are very small numbers from other ethnic groups.

5.0 Early Childhood Education in the WestREAP Area

From Barrytown to Haast there are 8 playgroups, 5 play centres, 3 kindergartens, 7 early childhood education centres, 1 kohanga reo and 2 home-based providers.

For the year ending June 2013 there were 1019 children enrolled in ECE centres, and a further 150 in playgroups.² Table 1 shows a breakdown of the figures for licensed centres according to type and ethnicity.

Table : Participation in Licensed EC Education at 30 June 2013 by Ethnicity and Type of Provision

Licensed EC centres	European/Pakeha	Maori	Pasifika	Asian	Other/Unknown	Totals
Education and Care	555	87	9	10	5	666
Kindergarten	118	21	0	5	3	147
Homebased	53	10	1	2	2	68
Playcentre	84	20	1	2	11	118
Te Kohanga Reo	0	11	2	7	0	20
Totals	810	149	13	26	21	1019

Table 2 shows the participation across all types of provision according to age.

Table 2: Participation in EC Education at 30 June 2013 by Age

Age in years	Licensed EC centres	Playgroups	Totals
Less than 1	44	17	61
1	145	26	171
2	195	48	243
3	303	27	330
4	297	31	328
5	26	1	27
Totals	1010	150	1160³

Over half (57%) of children participating in EC education are aged 3 or 4. Twenty percent are aged under 2, and 20 % are aged 2. This is similar to the age breakdown for New Zealand ECE as a whole.

² www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/ece2

³ There will be some double-counting as some children are enrolled in more than one ECE centre. Figures showing the extent of this are not available.

6.0. Summary of Feedback from ECE Centres and Playgroups

- Many centres have waiting lists, while the playgroups in the southern area have low numbers, with many enrolled families having irregular attendance. The waiting lists tend to be of younger children, aged two or younger; there seem to be no shortages for 3 and 4 year olds.
- Some of the town centres have children from the outlying areas for one day a week (while their parents spend the day in town shopping, doing farm errands etc.) Some other country parents take their children to the town centres several days a week.
- Play centres are having trouble getting parents trained so there is less than the ideal amount of training happening. Some families have left because they do not want to do training and/or fundraising.
- Playgroups are struggling to keep up the numbers. This is variously because of changing demographics, parents being busy on the farms, families choosing to take children to the town centres, general lack of interest.
- Transition to schools is a big issue; parents want to know more about what exactly “ready for school” involves. Westland centres are happy with the Transition to School meetings, most in Grey are not. (see further, Section 6)
- There is considerable interest in being able to include te reo Maori and tikanga, but staff and parents do not feel competent and would like some training. Almost every centre mentioned this.
- As well as information on school-readiness, there is a call for parent education from some parents. They want it in short sharp blocks rather than a 13 week programme.
- Most centres mentioned the Early Literacy Programme and asked if there is any way of extending it further.
- They tend to feel isolated in terms of available professional development. Travelling to Christchurch for PD is expensive and time consuming. Even centres such as Kidsfirst, who get training in Christchurch in block courses would like more to happen on the coast.
- All centres appreciated the help they get from REAP and would like it to continue. Most feel that there is a place for REAP to help encourage further participation, particularly in the rural areas.

7.0. Summary of Feedback from Schools

- The schools’ main concern was with whether children were ready for school on entry; there was much variation but overall the feeling was that children were insufficiently prepared. One principal stated that “many children cannot put a sentence together and have very little vocabulary” but this was an extreme case. (see further Section 8.1)
- Some were concerned about the Year One National Standards results and put this down to insufficient preparation in ECE; others had intensive programmes in literacy and numeracy designed to compensate for any early deficiencies

- They had noted that children who had done the Early Literacy Programme did well in School Entry Assessment. Some questioned whether it was accessed by people with the most need.
- A number of schools were keen to have an early learning centre on the school grounds; one had permission from the MoE to do this but had not found a building, others had spare classrooms available.

8.0 Significant Issues

8.1 Transition to School

REAP facilitates Transition to School meetings each term in Greymouth and Hokitika; to help build strong relationships with the schools and early childhood communities and to help with a smooth transition to school. All participants feel these are an excellent idea. It appears that in Hokitika these are functioning well, but the network in Greymouth is currently in disarray; as a result of one incident several ECE centres and schools have decided not to attend.

The root of this appears to be whether “children should be ready for schools” (the position of some of the schools), or whether “schools should be ready for children” (the position of some of the ECE centres). There is actually a wide continuum of opinion and in most cases there is a will to retrieve the situation, under REAP’s guidance.

Different schools have different requirements of children starting school, and this can appear to exacerbate the problems as most ECE centres provide children to more than one school.

Some ECE centres felt pressure and believed that schools “demands” were allied to a desire to “do well” in the Year One National Standards; this appeared to be the case for three schools. The National Standards results for two schools were sighted; the year One results were well below average but this was remedied in subsequent years.

Some schools mentioned that they did not believe that all strands of Te Whariki were covered in ECE, so that there was not a seamless transition into the school curriculum. It is interesting to note that a National Report conducted by ERO in 2013 found a “*highly variable understanding of Te Whariki across (EC) services. Although many services expressed their intent to work with Te Wharika in various documents, this intent was not reflected in practice.*”⁴ In particular ERO found a distinct absence of the *exploration, communication, and contribution* strands.

Another ERO National Report found “*...variability across EC services in how well they identify and respond to priorities for children’s learning. While most services have identified their priorities, in many cases these were not reflected in their curriculum and associated...self-review practices*”⁵ and also noted “*...a distinct absence of some principles and strands in the planned and enacted curriculum of some services, particularly in relation to the principles empowerment and holistic development, and the strands exploration, communication and contribution.*”

Overall it appeared that about 10% of centres nationally were working adequately with Te Whariki.

⁴ “Working with Te Whariki” Education Review Office 2013

⁵ “Priorities for Children’s Learning in Early Childhood Services” Education Review Office 2013

It appears that there are grounds for discussion between EC and schools new entrants staff in order to find agreement about what constitutes “school readiness”. The most immediate problem, however, is to address the rift in the Greymouth TTS network.

8.2 Participation Rates

WestREAP is committed to reaching the government’s 2016 target of 98% participation for children to attend EC education prior to starting school. Everything the REAP does in the Early Childhood sector supports this aim.

In the year ending December 2013 277 children started school; the proportion who had had prior participation in ECE for the six months prior to starting school was 94.5% for the Grey District and 97.3% for the Westland District⁶. Prior participation for Maori was 81.8% in Grey District and 95.2% in Westland. Figures are unavailable for children of other ethnicities as the small numbers involved (n<<20) are too small to be reliable.

These figures look reasonably satisfactory in terms of the 2013 overall national figure of 96%, and of the Government aim to achieve 98% by 2016.

There does not appear to be an exact definition of what is considered “prior participation” other than “regular attendance for the six months prior to starting school”. This could mean once a week or several times a week. Research shows that ideally 15-20 hours a week for that period is necessary to achieve school-readiness.⁷

In terms of average hours per week that these children spent in ECE those in Grey averaged 18 hours and in Westland 14 hours per week. Overall nationally four year olds averaged 22.9 hours per week. Children in Play Centres averaged around 4 hours/week and those in Playgroups fewer again.

The lack of a more precise definition of prior participation raises questions about the value of the objective; overall nationally 11.6% of those starting school in 2013 averaged less than 15 hours a week of Early Childhood education. This interesting statistic, however, is not a matter for WestREAP to grapple with!

8.3 Te Reo Maori and Tikanga Maori

Staff and parents do not feel competent to teach te reo and tikanga and would like some guidance and training; almost every centre mentioned this. Some mentioned the REAP courses, but many chose not to attend because they involved too many evenings. It seems that this issue is very much in the too hard basket, with other explanations including “our parents are very “anti” the whole idea”, and “we would have to find someone who is Ngai Tahu or Ngati Waewae, and we don’t know how to find them”.

The will is there, but some help is needed. At the risk of sounding politically incorrect the following observation is made; that for Te Reo at least iwi affiliations should not be a barrier at this level.

⁶ www.educationcounts.govt.nz

⁷ V.Ruth, Ministry of Education Manager Early Childhood Education, Southern Region (pers. comm. 7/3 2014)

8.4 Parent Education

There was considerable interest shown in education for parents, covering early childhood development, preparation for school, how to help with enthusing children about reading . They are not interested in a multi-week course as they feel their time is limited. Many of the topics they are interested in are covered by ASG NZ.

8.5 Time

Time is a recurring issue, not only for parent education. One of the reasons for low rate of attendance at playgroups is said to be that many parents are busy seasonally on farms. A lack of time is also responsible for problems with the necessary fundraising for playgroups and Playcentres, and this further erodes support for these centres.

8.6 Possible New Centres

Franz Josef School and South Westland Area School would both like to have an early childhood centre on site. Both are constrained by political issues. The Franz Josef community is hoping Kidsfirst will provide a centre; a good deal of funding has already been raised by the community but no centre is forthcoming. There is a relatively small number of children in the area (87 altogether in Franz Josef, Okarito and Whataroa), possibly insufficient for a commercial centre. In Harihari the community case for a new community centre hinges largely on the perceived need for a new home for the playgroup; the Draft Annual Plan for 2014-15 says that the council will “keep working” with the Harihari community over this but in the meantime the Area School’s idea is on hold.

8.7 And Possible Closures....

Several of the Playgroups had very small rolls, and only a few of those families attending each time. Playcentres were also struggling with falling numbers. These centres tend to be servicing sparsely populated areas and/or competing with commercial centres in nearby towns. They have difficulty finding office-bearers; several women were still helping out after their children had moved on to school because nobody else was prepared to. Many spoke of “raising awareness” as the answer to this problem.

9.0 Conclusions

All ECE centres were appreciative of what WestREAP is doing for them individually.

Many schools were not happy with the ability of children to make a

Issues that impact most centres at present include

- Making sure that children are ready for school when the time comes, and having a common understanding amongst centres, schools and parents, of what this means.
- An inability to access teachers of te reo Maori and tikanga.
- Raising awareness among parents and empowering them to see themselves actively part of their children’s education.
- Difficulty in accessing professional development, including formal professional development where New Entrant and preschool teachers come together to share professionally.

Both “ends” of the WestREAP area have a single significant need at present:

- To the north, including Greymouth, this is the need to heal the rift around the Transition to Schools network and get the network back to full strength..
- South of Hokitika the need is to promote and strengthen the many community-led centres, most of them playgroups.

Across the REAP area the identified needs impact on the community-led centres more so than on the commercially-run centres.