



McKenziePlus

NEWSLETTER NO.9 2023 : Ngahuru



PARENT PLAYGROUP, AN INNOVATIVE RESPONSE TO THE GROWING DEMAND FOR OUR SERVICES.

The increasing number of children needing support in the early years is leading to longer waiting lists for assessment and intervention. Intervening at the earliest stage provides the child and family with greater opportunities for positive outcomes.

In order to address the larger number of referrals to McKenzie Centre and to be responsive to our mission we began a weekly parent led playgroup in December 2022. This playgroup is facilitated by Linda Depledge Brooker, tuakana, with the support of Siobhan Patterson, speech language therapist. We provide a play space where parents attend with their children to meet other parents in similar situations, to build relationships, to begin their engagement with early intervention providers and to see if the support of McKenzie Centre is what is needed in their situation. There is no charge to attend.

The role of parents is critical as they heavily influence their child's development when they are actively involved in the intervention strategies. If a parent feels knowledgeable and confident in their role this will positively impact on their competence and decrease stress that is present when raising a child with disabilities or developmental delays. The playgroup provides an opportunity to hear the parents voices rather than 'wait and see'.

While it is early days in the provision of this initiative, we have seen the numbers of families increase. We are keen to continue exploring a flexible range of service options, to address our concerns about the impact that delayed early intervention has on the wellbeing of children and their whānau.



"We as whānau, absolutely love McKenzie Centre. It is a positive, supportive and caring environment. I can relax knowing my son is in a safe & secure environment. He enjoys playing with all the resources & equipment and we all enjoy connecting with others in similar situations. The staff are all knowledgeable, friendly and kind. It is so helpful to us & I'm grateful we have such a facility available!"

A quote from a new family from the play group.

OUR MCKENZIE CENTRE WEBSITE GETS A MAJOR REVAMP!

Thanks to our physiotherapist Susie Nyika and Stacey Baker, one of our past parents and team members, we now have a gallery of beautiful photos on our recently-launched website. View [HERE](#).

Our McKenzie Centre website is the primary way we communicate with our community of whānau and supporters so using photos and videos is an essential part of that communication.

The front page now features a stunning photo of Oliver (below) and we hope to rotate other photos of our children regularly.



Oliver features on our new website homepage.

Another new feature on the website is the Events page [HERE](#) which has details of upcoming workshops, celebrations, hang outs etc.

And because we have so many funders and sponsors who generously help us in so many ways, we now have a Support Us section on the website.

We will continue to use Facebook to promote McKenzie Centre but we are aware many of our whānau no longer use social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram.

Please let us know your feedback on our website, we are always interested in any suggestions on how to improve it. Just go to the Contact part of the website and let us know what you think.

HOW THE TIDD FOUNDATION SUPPORTS ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY LEARNING AT MCKENZIE CENTRE



Arnie F learning his way around a computer, thanks to AT

THE TIDD FOUNDATION has supported McKenzie Centre since 1996. Every year we have received funds from the foundation and we have used these to support our social worker, playgroups and in particular Assistive Technology at the centre.

Assistive Technologies (AT) include specialised access to computers such as touch screens, switch interfaces to enable scanning, switch adapted mice, large customised mice and big keyboards. Specialised software and apps loaded on hardware assist children with fine and gross motor skills, language development delays and sensory issues to access valuable learning and communication opportunities. Presenting learning in a stimulating and engaging format provides opportunities for extending concentration, repeated arm stretches to activate switches and increased interactions with the adult or child alongside them.

One of the most exciting things about AT is that it is a low-cost way to impact a child's learning and achievement.

AT can also be used to encourage social skills. For example, iPads and tablets can be utilised to develop co-operative play for children with a broad range of disabilities, including autism and Down's Syndrome, who find social interaction challenging, because they offer an exciting incentive for turn-taking and sharing.



Arlo B and Ezra W taking turns

GETTING TO KNOW OUR EDUCATION SUPPORT WORKERS

Rachael Simpson (below) is McKenzie Centre's education support workers (ESW) team leader and an early intervention teacher. In her role as team leader, she works with early childhood centres to ensure the best outcome for our tamariki and provides leadership and support to the ESWs. We asked her to tell us a little about herself.

"I'm originally from Opoutere on the Coromandel Peninsula but have lived in Hamilton Kirikiriroa for 20 years.

My husband Scott and I have two teenage children – Dylan and Kyla. We all love being outdoors and spending spare time water skiing, mountain biking and hiking.

I have worked in a variety of roles in early childhood education, including centre-based teaching across all ages, managing an early childhood centre, programme tutor in home-based care, and being a home-based educator.

Throughout this time I have encountered many children that I now realise could have greatly benefitted from early intervention support.

When I investigated what study options were available so I could better help these tamariki, I discovered the post-graduate qualification for early intervention, which I completed in 2019.

Our son Dylan has also provided us with opportunities to learn and ask more about our neurodiverse community.

He was diagnosed with autism when he was 5, and then epilepsy at age 6. Through his journey we have had many experiences, both positive and challenging, in navigating the health and education systems. We love hearing his outside-the-box perspectives and can always count on him to see things in ways we could never have imagined. The world is definitely a better place for the unique thinkers among our neurodiverse community!

My dual roles at McKenzie Centre give me an amazing opportunity to be the contact person for our centre whānau and provide support for our ESW team.

It is truly a great privilege."



Education Support Workers (ESW) team leader and Early Intervention teacher, Rachael Simpson.



Karen Berry (ESW)

Karen Berry (above) knows every day she goes to work she's doing a job she loves and making a difference in the lives of the children she works with.

As an education support worker for McKenzie Centre, Karen spends her days with children who have varying degrees of learning support needs.

Some children are autistic, some have Down's Syndrome, others are nonverbal or in a wheelchair.

It varies, she says. "What you see from where they start from and when they leave at five or six years old is amazing."

Karen has been an education support worker (ESW) for 10 years with McKenzie Centre. She had always been around children and was interested in the special needs' area where she felt she had something to offer.

"I haven't looked back since the time I applied," she said. "From day one, the job was for me, and it still is."

Building up children's social skills, getting them to communicate and achieve their goals is so rewarding.

"It's what you see from the children as you work with them. It's so nice when you have that special bond with them."

So, what makes a good ESW? "Patience, a lot of patience and passion. You've got to be passionate about what you do. If you don't have that, to support our children, it would be a very hard job."

Karen supports children at the early childhood centre their whānau choose, so on any day she could be going from a kohanga reo to a Montessori or a kindergarten.

She has learned to fit in wherever she goes because it is important the early childhood centre includes the child and helps them develop towards the next stage of their education journey.

McKenzie Centre provides ESW staff with collegial support, the opportunity to discuss the children they all engage with and professional development and learning.

"They're like another family to me at McKenzie Centre," says Karen.



Elijah Tonihi discovering music.

ELIJAH'S LEARNING JOURNEY

The Hamilton parents of Elijah Tonihi say her progress at McKenzie Centre is making them happy and emotional. "She is different and we love her even more for that. She is a very sweet, loving girl."

We follow her journey...

Elijah Tonihi runs inside McKenzie Centre and straight towards the musical instruments beaming with delight when she activates the drum beat on the electric piano and touches the keys.

Watching on are parents Telena Tonihi and Sean Siakia of Pukete in Hamilton who marvel at the journey their 3 ½ year old daughter has been on since she started at the centre in May 2022.

"She wasn't really crawling, it was like a butt shuffle, we were wondering what was going on, it was really odd," says Telena.

By her second birthday, the only words Elijah could say were Mumma and Dadda.

At Sean's urging, the Plunket nurse got them a referral to the Child Development Centre (CDC) at Waikato Hospital – a child-centred and family-focused service for children who have, or suspected of having developmental problems.

"We just thought her joints were very flexible. She wasn't even pulling herself up on furniture or any of those indicators," says Telena.

It was Sean who sensed something was not right because he has an older daughter and so knew about the milestones his second daughter was not hitting, like crawling.

"She liked to scoot her butt around her, she pulled herself along," he says. He also noticed it was hurting her.

"Me as a first time Mum, I didn't realise there was anything wrong," says Telena.

"It was just an eye opener when he thought something was going on and it really was."

CDC recommended McKenzie Centre and the couple liked the idea of their daughter interacting with other children. Within weeks there was a diagnosis of autism which gave Telena and Sean more clarity. By then they had a second child – Bear who has just turned two.

Since starting at McKenzie Centre, Elijah is now walking and running, she is talking – not a lot – but every week a new word. She goes through phases, picking and choosing ones that she wants to use.

"I'm very proud of her. She is very expressive in her emotions and how she does things now. McKenzie Centre has helped very much with her learnings," says Telena.

"Telena is a great mum, we can bounce back on each other. When Elijah needed these things, we just kept pushing," says Sean.

She goes to McKenzie Centre weekly and so does Bear who hit all his milestones on schedule, something Telena found reassuring.

"With Elijah I just thought 'am I not teaching or enough, what am I doing wrong as a parent?' It's very reassuring when I go to McKenzie Centre now and see her interacting with other kids."

It is not just her learning in the environment, so too are Telena, Sean and Bear.

School is 18 months away and no decision has been made about how that looks yet.

"We have been looking for playcentres. We're just taking it slowly. With how much progress we've made through McKenzie Centre, you don't want to mess up all the hard work," says Sean.

"We're just going at her pace really," says Telena which at McKenzie Centre means new challenges, different toys and equipment.

Like the monkey bars.

"She wants to just get up there and swing off or hold herself up there. We never really saw that before. It popped out of nowhere."

So now they have poles she swings on at home or they take her to playgrounds.

Bear loves McKenzie Centre just as much as she does.

"With this environment it helps him. Not only is the structure benefitting her, it's benefitting him too. All the attention we put on her, we put on him also. Without Elijah being so unique, we would maybe never had this journey. Now it's given us a real strong take on what it takes to raise a child," says Sean.

"Can we be here forever?" pleads Telena, knowing they cannot.

McKenzie Centre provides early childhood intervention and support for children from birth to school age.

The team of early intervention specialists partner with whānau to realise a child's potential. The centre's focus is on understanding and supporting the whole family to learn, grow and develop.

Sean has advice for other parents in a situation like they were before McKenzie Centre.

"You've got to keep knocking on that door. You've got to push and say 'please, it's only an hour, one assessment. You be that squeaky wheel and you'll get the oil."

"You have to show you put your heart out there and they can see you genuinely want it for your kid," he says.

"You know your kids best, you've got to push against the expertise and if you really show your concern, they're not just going to treat everyone the same. I just ask as many questions as I can. When they see that, they won't turn you away."

"This whole journey – everything you learn as you go. At McKenzie Centre, you learn all the kids are not just

a spectrum where your kid has got black and white in this, purple and green in this. They're all so unique and different," says Sean.

"McKenzie Centre teaches that individual growth that I felt from the start that my kid was an individual, she needed her special attention that only she could learn in her own pace and McKenzie Centre agreed and once I knew that we both connected and saw eye to eye in that sense. I knew something was there."

Elijah needs to strengthen her core muscles and on McKenzie Centre's recommendation has been going to Waikato Equitherapy in Newstead which provides riding for therapy, recreation and sport to children with special needs.

Sean says his family thrives in the whānau environment McKenzie Centre operates in and he always looks to the positives.



Elijah with her parents Telena, Sean and little brother Bear.

"It is always putting that little baby step, put that brick on the wall, one brick every day."

"These kids are special. You can see how they grow and interact with each other."

He wants to make other parents and the community aware.

"When you're in public and you're shopping and other parents will look at your kids and go 'crazy, your kids are acting funny.' It's not that, my kid is special and once everyone gets more into it, we can have momentum as a community."

McKenzie Centre has motivated him to change his outlook on what drive and passions he needs in life.

For him it is investing back in the kids "just like McKenzie Centre does."

Meanwhile they are constantly looking for new things for Elijah to do but being wary of over or under stimulating her.

They pay attention to detail with whiteboards all around the house. Charting Elijah's learning journey.

STAFF COMINGS AND GOINGS

A WARM WELCOME TO:

Diana Montgomerie
Kia ora koutou!

I am so excited to introduce myself as the newest member of the McKenzie Centre whānau.

From my early days working as a nurse, I have always enjoyed working as a team and look forward to learning alongside you all as we nurture each other and our mokopuna.

After having my family, I retrained as an early childhood teacher and as a kindergarten teacher for the last 12 years. I have worked hard to ensure children had every opportunity to stretch their learning through play. Having recently finished my specialist teaching training I can't wait to begin my early intervention journey with you all.

Growing up on a farm in Cambridge fostered a love of nature and I cherish time spent exploring papatūānuku, riding my mountain bike, river walks with my dog and connecting with friends and family.

Tania Tawhara

Tania joins our team as a tuakana in the Tuesday session. Tania has had three children attend McKenzie Centre and is very happy to be able to support other whānau with her knowledge and experience. Welcome Tania.

Kia ora, I'm **John Brooker**.

I'm privileged to be working at McKenzie Centre as an early intervention teacher for the next six months.

I have been teaching in primary schools (junior levels) for 25 years. I have six kids including Stan who attended McKenzie Centre, and I'm married to Linda, who also works here! Looking forward to it.

Cassandra Chong

My name is Cassandra Chong and I am from Singapore. My family and I moved to Hamilton 10 years ago.

I am an occupational therapist and I used to work at the Ministry of Education.

I have two children, TJ and Lynn. I love to cook, bake, watch movies and go to the beach. Oh not forgetting enjoying kai with family and friends!

FOND FAREWELLS TO:

Cath Hudson, early intervention teacher, finished with McKenzie Centre at the end of 2022. We will miss her cheerful smile and steady hand. Cath has decided to find work closer to home to help support her growing boys.

Janne Nottage was with us briefly during term four helping to support our team in a service manager role. She has moved back to Enrich+ now.

Margaret Crawford, psychology intern, has finished her studies at McKenzie Centre and continues her work for Enrich+. It was lovely getting to know Margaret and thank you to Richard for supporting Margaret while she was at McKenzie Centre.

Tricia Pauley, occupational therapist, left us on 17 March. She brought a wealth of knowledge that she freely shared with both her workmates and with the families. We will all miss Tricia's obvious delight in achieving positive interactions with children and families.

CONGRATULATIONS TO

Stephanie Wacker who has taken on the role as acting service manager. We are delighted that Steph has stepped into this role, and we wish her all the best in her new position.

Suzanne and Chrissy who've had their babies. Suzanne had a daughter (Lily), and Chrissy a son (Kahurangi -Kahu). We are happy to report that so far, new parenthood is proceeding as it should – sleepless nights, but incredible moments of joy and delight too!

Mā te huruhuru, ka rere te manu
Adorn the bird with feathers to enable it to fly.