

Child Rich Communities: Aotearoa's 'Bright Spots'

This project explored local community initiatives that are making a positive difference to children and families.

A total of 21 'bright spot' initiatives ranging in size and scale, age, geography and entity type were engaged to learn more about their success factors. Stakeholders from philanthropic and government sectors were also interviewed.

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

- 1 See local people as the greatest asset, not a 'problem to be fixed': Local people should be viewed as an important resource, rather than being 'vulnerable', 'high-needs', or 'broken'.
- 2 If families are well, then children are well.
- 3 Counter the culture of disempowerment: Local people should be encouraged to recognise their own power, reignite their dreams and aspirations. The focus is on what is working already in communities.
- 4 Go beyond 'social service delivery': walk alongside people, use 'soft doors' (e.g. informal coffee groups, local events), and ensure reciprocity.
- 5 No judgement. No stigma. Accessed by free-will.
- 6 Change takes time – be there for the long-haul.
- 7 Build on the positive first (before tackling the 'negatives'): start with strengthening social connectedness and building trust.
- 8 Relationships and individuals are key.
- 9 Being a 'local' gives you a head start: some bright spots were started or championed by a member of the same community they were trying to effect change in.
- 10 'Externals' can still make a difference: Some bright spots were started by an external person/organisation. They had to work harder to build relationships and gain the community's trust and ownership.

Factors that help bright spots were:

- Longer-term funding and flexible funders who are supportive, experimental, and keen to learn as well.
- Inspiration and support from other 'kindred spirits'.
- School principals and police officers have noted positive changes in local families have resulted in increases in participation at school and decreases in local crime statistics.

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