

NEXT invests in Tamariki Wellbeing

NEXT Foundation is investing in Tamariki Wellbeing as part of its investment focus in the first 1,000 days of life.

Tamariki Wellbeing is part of The Southern Initiative, an innovation unit embedded within Auckland Council that is exploring ways to address some of the pressing social and economic challenges in South Auckland. Tamariki Wellbeing is one of four critical areas it is focusing on, looking for new ways to support and improve the outcomes of whānau and their tamariki, especially in the first 1,000 days of a baby's life.

The initiative takes a strengths-based approach, working with communities in South Auckland experiencing significant challenges, to help break cycles of generational inequity. The Southern Initiative also works at a government level to achieve system change.

"New Zealand and overseas research has consistently shown that the first 1,000 days of a child's life is a critical window to have a lifelong impact on children's learning, behaviour and health," says TSI director Gael Surgenor.

"Our vision is that all parents and whānau are supported to nurture their children's foundational brain development and wellbeing so all tamariki to have a strong foundation of love, connections and skills that sets them up for lifelong learning, success and resilience. Many families with young children in South Auckland are living with cumulative and prolonged levels of stress at a significantly higher rate than the rest of New Zealand. The weight of multiple stressors can rob parents of bandwidth and derail child development. Whilst these parents are carrying a heavy burden of stress our research shows they are also motivated to do the very best for their children."

Gael says bold, innovative action is required to achieve more equitable outcomes.

Gael Surgenor.



"This means doing things differently. The good news is even small shifts can make a big difference and create the conditions for whānau to be able to nurture their children's foundational brain development. There is unrealised potential for our community, service and government systems to actively support whānau to be the best brain builders they can be in the first 1,000 days and help break the cycle of intergenerational inequity."

The first phase of Tamariki Wellbeing's work has been partnering with key organisations who have a significant role to play in the early years, including Papakura Marae, Work and Income and Plunket. Some of the whānau-centred innovations it is partnering on include:

- Reducing stress for whānau at the point of engagement with services and supports
- Redesigning existing parenting and child wellbeing services to better align with the strengths, aspirations, needs and lived experiences of whānau
- Creating opportunities for whānau to engage with and share the neuroscience of child development and mātauranga Māori
- Developing whānau-led alternatives to traditional service delivery models, which emerging evidence suggests may produce significantly better outcomes
- Increasing the number of public spaces in communities available to whānau that make it easier for them to nurture their tamariki outside the home
- Building community-led opportunities for more peer-to-peer support and capability building for families with tamariki in the early years.

The Tamariki Wellbeing work is made possible through the support of the NEXT Foundation, alongside other partners that include SKIP, the Social Wellbeing Agency, and significant support from Auckland Council.

NEXT Education Director Frank Janssen said Tamariki Wellbeing's focus on innovations that reduce whānau stresses in the first 1,000 days of a baby's life was powerfully aligned with NEXT's view that early brain development is a foundation for educational development in later life.