Whānau Āwhina

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Executive Summary

The Whānau Āwhina Project is part of a whole of community approach to parenting in Tamaki.

The Whānau Āwhina are six local parents placed on 12-month scholarships with six local organisations who worked 10 hours per week to inspire and motivate local Tāmaki Parents of 0-5 year olds to become a part of the HEART project parenting journey and create parent-led initiatives throughout Tāmaki.

The project used a co-design process to come up with ideas and prototypes for intentional community spaces where parents could engage with other local parents.

Throughout the project, a team of evaluators from Point Research walked alongside to continuously orient the group to help them make sense of observations, insights and findings and to intervene by questioning, seeking information, pausing and reminding.

Interviews conducted with the Whānau Āwhina and their organisations midway through the co-design part of the project found considerable frustration from the Whānau Āwhina around timing, a lack of understanding around the co-design process, the value they thought they could bring and their desire to work more collaboratively with each other. These concerns were addressed and the project confidently moved forward into the prototype and testing phases of the co-design process.

Information from the Whānau Āwhina, their organisations and parents indicated there were several positive outcomes of the Whānau Āwhina project, including

- Reducing social isolations for some parents;
- Reaching parents who would not have otherwise been involved;
- Creating connections between organisations which gave parents better access to support; and
- Offering parents opportunities to create change beyond parenting programmes.

The organisations involved in the project said they now valued informal parent networks more than they had, that because of Whānau Āwhina and they now work together more effectively to better support parents.

Involvement in the project also helped with personal growth and skill development of the Whānau Āwhina, several of whom have gone on to other roles in the community or into further work or study.

Whilst the evaluation has shown a range of improvements for organisations and some individuals, the success of broader community engagement for isolated parents and whānau is less clear.

The Whānau Āwhina project was a learning experience for all involved and much was learned during this time that can be shared with others preparing to undertake this type of work. Any future work in this area should note that:

- Project workers with existing connections and experience require different levels of support than those new to a role, who need scaffolding and support;

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1 The HEART Movement uses a community mobilisation approach to promote healthy relationships and prevent family violence. Their 20-year goal is Glen Innes and Point England homes actively grow loving, safe and supportive relationships. HEART Parenting is a strategy to prevent child abuse and neglect by supporting the development of new skills (like positive parenting) within whānau to help transform relationships and the way children are raised.
A flexible approach requires a strong developmental and reflective approach;
Ongoing collective and individual support is important;
The engagement process may only work for the willing;
Alternatives to group interaction with parents need to be considered;
Everyone brings individual strengths to a project; these need to be identified and used where possible;
Sustainability must be considered and planned for in the very first stages of the project; and
Opportunities to unleash further potential in the community should be exploited where possible.

Whilst the Whānau Āwhina project has finished, the learnings and experience from the project have been funneled into a parent-centred social enterprise, *Insight Tāmaki*, launched by The Glen Innes Family Centre which uses local parents to survey Tamaki households. Parents involved have reported feeling positive about making a difference in their community and understanding their community better.
Introduction

The Whānau Āwhina Project is part of a whole of community approach to parenting in Tāmaki. The project mission was to inspire and motivate local Tāmaki parents of 0-5 year olds to become a part of the HEART Parenting journey. The aim was for the Whānau Āwhina Project to work alongside organisations and parents to create parent-led initiatives throughout Tāmaki.

The objectives are to:

- Support and develop strong natural networks of parents throughout Tāmaki.
- Motivate local parents to lead whānau activities in Tāmaki for other local parents.
- Create a Parenting Collective made up of engaged parents, local organisations and community development practitioners.
- Educate identified parent champions (The Whānau Āwhina) in co-design with parents, SKIP Principles and Community Mobilisation through scholarships including placements with local organisations.
- Document and track the progress of parent-led activities throughout the Whānau Āwhina year.
- Create sustainable whānau to whānau connections through out organisation and network practices.

The Whānau Āwhina Project offered six scholarships to local parents in Tāmaki to help boost their capacity and support them in their learning about leading parent-led activities and whānau to whānau practice. The role was non-prescriptive; ongoing training and supervision was provided by a leadership team (3 people). This ensured the role could be carried out by parents with no prior experience of community development or design.

The Whānau Āwhina were placed within a local organisation over the duration of their scholarship which created a base from which each could work and initiate parent-led actions in the community. The organisations, geographically across Tāmaki, were:

1. Orakei Health
2. Tāmaki Community Development Trust
3. Glen Innes Family Centre
4. Te Whare Piringa
5. Glen Innes Play Centre
6. Just4Dads
Evaluation and methods

The evaluation had two purposes. The primary purpose was a developmental approach to support the project, using a ‘check, reflect and adapt’ process of reflection. The project leadership team met regularly with the evaluators to:

- **Continuously orient** the group to ensure the strategic aims were not lost in the complexity of the unfolding initiative.
- **Make sense** of the information that was produced through the developmental evaluation process.
- **Intervene** through: questioning; facilitation; seeking information; mapping; pausing and reminding. These interventions were aimed at ensuring that the initiative stayed on track to achieve its strategic aims.

A theory of change was constructed by project leaders, the Whānau Āwhina and the evaluators to link activities to outcomes and to uncover any assumptions behind the initiatives. The theory of change is on page 20.

The findings from the developmental evaluation along with material or ideas were shared with participants over the duration of the project. Some of the learnings, which might be pertinent to others undertaking similar work, have been shared in this report.

A secondary purpose of the evaluation was to capture some of the outcomes of the project through interviews with parents, the Whānau Āwhina and those representing the organisations involved in the project.
The Process

The Whānau Āwhina project was designed to create intentional community spaces where parents could engage with other local parents. These spaces were designed to fill the gap between the private spaces (e.g., home) and public spaces (such as a supermarket, playground or other community space). It was envisaged that a different kind of conversation could be created in these kinds of settings. The Whānau Āwhina were key to creating an atmosphere that would enable authentic conversations around parenting to take place.

A co-design process was used to design and shape the initiative. The process moved through several stages of co-design, namely:

- **Empathy**, where the Whānau Āwhina listened to what Tāmaki parents had to say about parenting in their community.
- **Define.** Several themes identified by Tāmaki parents as significant problems or hindrances to their parenting journey were reframed into opportunities.
- **Ideate.** Several “how might we” questions (right) were presented to local parents, who were asked to generate as many ideas as possible as to how they might be addressed.
- **Prototype.** The group voted on the most popular ideas to take to the next stage.
- **Testing.** The final testing stage involved working out how the prototypes worked “in real life”.

**HOW MIGHT WE?**

The co-design process generated several “how might we” questions aimed at generating ideas for parent activities in the Tamaki area:

- *How might we better support co-parenting?*
- *How might we grow positive parenting in Tamaki?*
- *How might we ensure more parent to parent interaction in the Tamaki community?*
- *How might we create positive environments for our tamariki to become confident teens?*
- *How might we help parents find space or time out in their everyday lives?*
- *How might we help all parents in Tamaki have the confidence to ask for help and keep asking?*
Several prototypes emerged from the co-design process aimed at creating connections for parents of 0-5’s at suitable locations with activities for children to allow social interaction for both adults and children. In total, four of the prototypes reached testing stage.

The prototypes were:

- A “breathing spaces” project for parents to connect and form trusted networks through play and interaction;
- A series of workshops around scheduling and budgeting to support co-parenting;
- Creating positive environments to grow confident tamariki using a series of portraits and images of local dads (prototype only);
- Building parenting confidence through impromptu Playback theatre (prototype only);
- A community dinner to build whakawhanaungatanga and reduce social isolation; and
- A free circus-themed event to encourage quality parent-child time and interaction.

**Findings from the co-design process**

Interviews were conducted with the Whānau Āwhina and their organisations midway through the co-design project to gauge their experience and re-orient the project towards its strategic aims.

The findings from these interviews were mixed; primarily due to frustrations at the time of the interviews around:
1. **Timing.** There was considerable frustration about the time the process was taking. Overall some felt the pace of the co-design process was too slow and that by this stage in the project (about one-quarter to one-third of the way through) they should already be working with parents.

2. **A lack of understanding about the process.** Some of the Whānau Āwhina did not yet fully understand the purpose of the co-design processes, the phases, what was coming next and where it was all going. Neither was the co-design process well understood by the local organisations, which meant they started planning activities and then were told they couldn’t undertake them. At first this meant the local organisations did not see the value of the co-design process and felt “paralysed”. They too said that it would have been helpful to have greater clarity about the objectives of the co-design process to ensure everyone fully understood the process and was on the same page.

Some of the Whānau Āwhina found it difficult to engage other parents because they could not explain the purpose, process or benefits to them. The Whānau Āwhina also noted that if they had understood the process better, they would have found parents who could be part of the whole process and get follow through, rather than engaging new parents for each step of the process.

3. **The Whānau Āwhina felt undervalued.** As local parents, the Whānau Āwhina wanted to bring their own knowledge and experience to the table. It was felt as if the design process only got ideas from parents that they had already heard from and had not generated the number of ‘new’ ideas they hoped. Furthermore, the Whānau Āwhina believed that several suggestions had already been trialled in the community and had not worked. The organisations also believed that running the process undervalued the knowledge of the Whānau Āwhina and missed an opportunity to gather insight from them as they were “right there at that moment and had the information”.

4. **The Whānau Āwhina wanted more opportunities to work together.** The structure of the project and the fact that the Whānau Āwhina were embedded in different organisations meant they didn’t have a lot of week-to-week interaction with each other. For many, the interaction with other Whānau Āwhina and the project leaders was one of the highlights of the project, and they felt that more frequent interaction would have helped them learn from each other and address confusion. They felt this would have enabled them to get on with their work.

**Checking, reflecting and adapting**

The project leaders ably responded to these concerns and adapted the project where they could. Within a month after the interviews the co-design process moved into the prototype stage, meaning that the Whānau Āwhina could see the process gathering traction and their frustration with the timing eased. One of the project leaders developed a “birds eye” view of the co-design process in Prezi², which was disseminated to the Whānau Āwhina and their organisations and helped the Whānau Āwhina understand not only the process but why the perspectives of the parents were important:

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² The Prezi is available [here](#).
“As much as this is a project for us involved – ultimately – we need to be consciously aware that we are not the experts and that we are trying to draw out ideas from other parents.”

Whānau Āwhina Prezi presentation, original emphasis

The Whānau Āwhina were situated in different organisations and as their roles were for only 10 hours a week, getting them together on a regular basis was challenging. The leadership team attempted to overcome this challenge by using an online project management tool, “Trello”. Whilst some of the Whānau Āwhina used the tool more effectively than others, it was a creative and effective way of connecting, supporting, informing and updating a geographically diverse team. Lastly, once the co-design process reached the “prototype stage” the Whānau Āwhina could explore opportunities for “cross pollination” and where the projects might work together.

It should be noted, too, that there were positive experiences with the co-design process. Some Whānau Āwhina believed it “was a good fit for the community”, allowed them to connect with parents in natural settings e.g. school parents, and said the empathy interviewing had helped them to understand other parents’ experiences. One said that the process enabled a deeper level of analysis to be brought to existing projects and for deeper conversations to occur. This was because parents were engaged in a different way and that different conversations were happening and were being recorded.

Reflecting on the co-design process several months later, some Whānau Āwhina felt that it was a “highlight” of the project, and helped them learn about and gain an insight into the everyday lives of Tāmaki parents. One said that although it was challenging, it ultimately gave her confidence, particularly around talking with others. Another appreciated that the process was flexible enough so that their prototype could change and become more responsive to the needs of the parents who were feeding their ideas into it. Lastly, one used the co-design process within her organisation to assist them to come up with parent-designed activities and projects.
Prototype Story
The “Breathing Spaces” project was designed to create connection and friendship among parents of 0-5 in Tāmaki. Led by Playcentre Whānau Āwhina Nikki Korte, the project was created from an intensive co-design process involving local Tāmaki parents.

The co-design process showed that Tāmaki parents were keen for connection, whilst doing something fun with their children. Inspired by the parent’s feedback, Nikki’s prototype used a local, fenced playground as a gathering place, where parents could bring their children to play and take part in fun activities like play dough, bubble making and ‘gloop’ play.

Unfortunately, the project’s timing initially made the playground idea difficult.

“It was the middle of winter” Nikki explains. “I knew I would have to find an inside space while I waited for the weather to improve.”

Nikki identified the local Tāmaki library as a suitable venue, and ran her event in partnership with Plunket who were also trying to start up a group of parents in the library area. The library venue did not work as well as Nikki thought it would.

“We just didn’t get the numbers at all”, Nikki says. “People were just coming in to the library to do what they had to do and then leaving.” The library groups were held in the morning, which Nikki believes was one of the reasons for the low numbers. “Most people who do activities with young children do them in the morning,” she says. “And people that come along to these things are doing other things, generally.”

As spring and the warmer weather approached, Nikki used her experience from the library group along with the information gathered during the co-design process to work out the best time for the playground group. As a mum, Nikki also understood that after 3pm was often a time when parents were looking for a brief activity to fill in time before dinner.

“The playground was a lot more successful, and it’s been going for a couple of months now”, Nikki says. “We’ve got people who come along intentionally, and then we get those along who are coming to the park anyway. We have some regulars.”

One mum who attends regularly with her children and two older children for whom she provides after-school care says her children enjoy the activities, while she enjoys talking with Nikki and other parents. She often brings a friend, which Nikki has noticed other parents doing.

“It’s mostly word of mouth,” she says, “people do come and bring someone they know.”

One of Nikki’s biggest learnings is that building quality connections (i.e. friendship and trust) between parents takes time, and that building these connections through a once-a-week project that runs for just a couple of months is unlikely.

“It takes such a long time for people to get to know each other, because they are there with their kids, who are their priority,” Nikki explains. “Also, only having something once a week is tricky - if someone misses it then it makes it hard to form those relationships.”

Nikki also believes the time-frame has made it hard to engage hard-to-reach parents.

“We’re not getting people who are socially isolated.” Nikki says. “I think it’s really hard to get them to come along to something with a short time frame. It’s not that they don’t want to. It’s just hard for people because of where they are at.”

Nikki learned a lot about engaging parents in the short time that her activity was running.

“Keep things simple,” she says. “Word of mouth is so important, as is timing, location, and frequency. The more often you can have it, the better.” Were she to do something like this again,
Nikki would be more realistic about the time it takes to build connections and the capacity of parents of 0-5’s to commit to something on an ongoing basis.

Overall, Nikki feels she accomplished something good and is grateful for the opportunity to get involved. She has learned a great deal about, and now has a deep appreciation for, other parents in her community.

“There is obviously a need for (Whānau Āwhina) in Tāmaki”, she says. “This was a really good opportunity to be able to do something different in the community. It’s work that I haven’t done before. And a good life experience as well.”

The Breathing Spaces project has captured the imagination of local Community partners exploring how they can continue to support this drasing on their strengths and resources for parents in Tamaki
Outcomes
Parents and children
Parents involved in the project, along with the Whānau Āwhina and the organisations believe that there have been positive outcomes for families and whānau who have engaged with the initiative.

The initiative helped to reduce social isolation for some parents

The organisations believe that the Whānau Āwhina have been catalysts of change for some whānau in the community. They cited examples of having seen changes in some parents “overnight” because of having someone to talk to who understands them. They say they have seen socially isolated parents become more engaged in their community, open up, let people ask them questions and say what they need. Authentic relationships, connection and inclusion have played an important part in these parent’s willingness to engage.

The Whānau Āwhina too believed that some of the initiatives helped to reduce social isolation, especially for young parents finding it hard to negotiate their first steps back out into the community with a new baby. For some parents this meant connecting with other parents for the first time, or giving their child new experiences like taking them to the beach. The initiatives have also created a range of different spaces throughout the community where parents can connect.

Parents too reported that they are less socially isolated. They appreciated the additional opportunities for connection. Some of the parents involved in the co-design process appreciated the opportunity to be involved as “designers”, and not just service-users.

“Whānau Āwhina captured my attention because I wanted to help mums that are like me. The ones who are isolated, who have no one, who don’t know that there’s people out there that can help.”

Parent

The initiative reached parents who would not have otherwise been involved

Some Whānau Āwhina and those representing organisations have described how they reached parents that would not usually get involved with community initiatives. The community spaces and multiple places in which they connected has provided parents with choices and opportunities to engage both with the Whānau Āwhina and other parents.

Connections between organisations gave parents greater access to support

The structure of Whānau Āwhina and collaboration between organisations meant that parents could get help and support (e.g. access to social workers) if they needed it from different organisations involved in the project.
Whānau Āwhina offered parents opportunities to create change beyond parenting programmes

For parents who want to make change in their whānau, Whānau Āwhina was something to be a part of beyond parenting programmes and was a vehicle to capture the motivation for change within the community.

Whānau Āwhina

Being involved in Whānau Āwhina has helped with personal growth and skill development

The Whānau Āwhina were not employed but on scholarship. There is general agreement amongst the interviewees that project has increased the capacity of the Whānau Āwhina and given them pathways to employment. Moreover, the parents involved in the project believe that they too could undertake this role.

Most of the Whānau Āwhina said that being involved had helped them to develop their personal skills and that they felt they had grown as people. They said the initiative had taken them outside their comfort zones, and that this had helped them to develop new skills or strengthen existing skills. These skills included listening and speaking skills, having empathy, and developing the discipline not to take over with their own ideas.

Some said the initiative had helped them to gain confidence speaking to people, and given them the confidence to get back into the workforce after having children. Others said the things they had been a part of that had help them to grow (e.g. doing courses, other paid and voluntary roles). Two of the Whānau Āwhina used the project as a stepping-stone into further work and study.

Organisations

Organisations said the project had fundamentally changed the way they worked.

Valuing informal networks

Organisations described how the project had created a change in their mind set to value informal parent to parent activity and give it space to grow. They saw it as important to have people in the Whānau Āwhina roles who are good at connecting and building relationships and who the community can connect with. Authentic connection, relationships and inclusion were key to engaging in this way with whānau/families.

Collaborative structure of the initiative works well

Whānau Āwhina was described as bringing all the local parenting services together to see who was working in the community. However, the initiative is about more than parenting. The group wanted to work with organisations focused on parenting but also on creating real change in the way parents
are supported. The organisation partners said they had a goal of reducing “the number of cars [agencies] in the driveway”. One said “it’s actually about a whole collective parenting approach that no one person could claim responsibility for but anyone could celebrate hearing about real change.”

The group say they now have a more thorough and evidence-based understanding that collectively they can do things differently and more effectively than when they worked as separate entities without connections. They have worked together more effectively, and worked together to better support parents.

Family-friendly spaces

One participant said that the initiative so far had made their organisation a more family-friendly place to be, with people dropping in and feeling comfortable there. They have ideas about how to build on these new connections with whānau/families and make their spaces useful to parents. Having local parents in the Whānau Āwhina role was key to this shift they said.
Parent Impact Story

*S is a mum of five who has lived with her partner in Tāmaki for 19 years. Her oldest child is 16, and her youngest is 7. She first became involved in the Whānau Āwhina project as a local parent when it was in the prototype stage.*

“I first started volunteering at the local homework club that my kids were part of. I had just had enough of sitting around and doing nothing. I wanted to be out there and meeting people, because I’m a people person. I like to involve myself.

I heard about Whānau Āwhina from Roxanne at the Tāmaki Community Development Trust. She told me there was this programme running where they got the community to come together and to see what they wanted. I wanted to get myself enrolled because when my kids were little it was just me. I was a young mum and I didn’t have any support. I had a hard life with my partner. I would cry over anything. There were times when I was like man, I’ve had enough of this. There’s no one I can go to. My mum wasn’t around, my partner’s parents weren’t around, there was no one. Just myself. I didn’t know there was such a thing called play dates. I didn’t know that mums could meet up for coffee. I didn’t know mums could meet at the park. I didn’t know that all that existed or that it was happening.

With Whānau Āwhina I gave ideas and I gave advice. I became good friends with Anne and Ane and Pauline, so whatever they would do, they would ask me to take part. We would share stories and advice. Somehow I was always just around them, doing something. On Thursdays I go down to Te Whare Piringa and cook a meal for families for them to come together, meet new people and have a free dinner. To me it’s the joy and the fun of doing it and cooking with other people instead of just cooking at home by yourself. So it’s connecting. And you’re doing something good for people.

Volunteering and doing things in my community has changed my life. I don’t feel isolated anymore. I have friends I can talk to. I have people I can ask to watch my youngest for a while so I can do my shopping without any kids. Or there’s people I can talk to instead of taking it out on my kids because I’m too stressed and there is no one I can vent to. I’m more confident and not ashamed. I won’t close myself in and get stressed and cry and look at the next beer or the next bottle of wine to let my stress out. Now I’m like – I’m going to go for a walk to the beach, I’m going to go for a jog, I’m going to text my friend.

It’s a big change.

I think Whānau Āwhina is important because they’re all over the place. And they’re mums as well. They’ve come as far as me, and they understand what happens in the community. It’s awesome to have people who know the community to do this sort of stuff. An outside group wouldn’t have been able to do this. But it’s bigger than Whānau Āwhina. Everything in this community is joined to everything else, it’s like it’s all connected and everything is linked.

My partner and I have been through so much together. He’s changed too. Now he takes the kids to the park, he takes them crab hunting, he’s never done much like that but now he does. And he’s supporting me in what I’m doing and he doesn’t say anything negative. He always says if you wanna do it, go for it.

I wanna say that people can change. I’m like – man, if I can do it then you can do it. Sometimes if you have the right support, the right group of friends and if you just stand up and say I’m gonna break the cycle. I need to change. You just look at your kids and say this is for my kids, instead of just thinking about yourself. Your kids come first. People can change and you can do it. It takes a while but you can do it with support. You can get so far.”
Learning points

The Whānau Āwhina Project was an intensive learning experience for the Whānau Āwhina, the project leaders and the participating organisations. Much was learned during this time that can be shared with others preparing to undertake this type of work.

Those with existing connections and experience require different levels of support than those new to a role where the approach needs scaffolding and support

Whānau Āwhina is different way of working and used a tight - loose - tight approach where an initiative is tight on vision and outcomes, but flexible on the activities that may achieve these.

One organisation said that they realised they needed to let the Whānau Āwhina develop their ideas and direct their own work, and not get in the way but to be there to help and support when needed. A lack of involvement, however, can be perceived as a lack of engagement and support.

The experiences of the Whānau Āwhina differed markedly. Those who had existing relationships and connections and experience working in the community could weave Whānau Āwhina into the things they were already involved with, and seemed more comfortable with Whānau Āwhina. Those less experienced and connected struggled to make the role purposeful and found it frustrating. Whilst the organisations valued the flexibility of the roles and felt it worked well with experienced staff, this flexibility can be too loose when staff are new to a role. Where the Whānau Āwhina were unsure what they were doing, or could be doing, the approach needed considerable scaffolding until staff had the confidence to try activities to achieve the goals.

Any future work in this area should note that flexibility works best when initiatives have activities that could be tried and wish to explore those that could work. Where staff are unsure what they are meant to be doing, the flexibility of this approach may be overly loose leaving them feeling directionless, without purpose and wasting time.

A flexible approach requires a strong developmental and reflective approach

A flexible approach requires a strong reflective and evaluative framework to underpin it to make sure the outcomes are being achieved and the vision is being achieved. Others preparing to undertake this type of work can support the flexibility of the initiative while engaging fully using reflective practice. A check, reflect, adapt agenda at meetings can help to keep the ‘loose’ part of the project focused and ensure that activities are intentional and are continually refined to be effective. This involves reflection at each monthly meeting on activities to:

- Check and describe the activities and outcomes – what the Whānau Āwhina have been doing
- Reflect on how the activities met the vision, which worked well, didn’t work and for whom (along with how they knew this to be the case
- Adapt the activities to try the following month.

This approach helps to ensure the project remains tight on vision, is focused on outcomes and that the flexibility is continually monitored and the staff can ‘back-up fast’ when thing do not appear to be working.
Support is important

The work is complex and the Whānau Āwhina needed effective support.

The Whānau Āwhina and organisations met together as a Parenting Collective once a month. The Whānau Āwhina found it useful to connect as a group to learn about each other and from each other, to share and discuss their own questions. This Parenting Collective was described as an important group and where the real “cross-pollination of ideas” happened. The Whānau Āwhina shared useful information and ideas with the collective. There was a sense of enthusiasm about what people fed in, shared and what was happening. The group were thinking about how to join the dots better between the organisations involved for the benefit of whānau/families Whānau Āwhina is engaging with.

As already covered in this report, the support from the Parenting Collective was so effective that the Whānau Āwhina wanted more frequent contact.

Innovative ways of working, where there are not clear pathways and directions, require different ways of support and connection. The “Trello” was seen as one of the way to achieve this and also allowed the Whānau Āwhina to reflect on their roles, their work and their projects.

The engagement process may only work for the willing

Start working with the willing.

Whānau Āwhina found connecting with isolated parents in Tāmaki who are not interested in making change challenging.

“It is hard to engage with the parents around here because they are not willing and they just think we don’t want to know, we don’t care.”

For some Whānau Āwhina this was a key group to reach. There were some concerns that the process only worked to engage with those who are willing but for some Whānau Āwhina this was not enough, they wanted to interrupt the negative patterns of parents before they lose their children (e.g. CYF) not when it is too late and they are forced to join parenting programmes.

This is a challenge for organisations planning to undertake this type of work. There will be little engagement until parents are ready to engage. Readiness and willingness to engage changes depending on several factors such as parenting confidence, current circumstances, the perception of what it is parents believe are engaging with and their support from and connection with others, but there are no silver bullets to success.

Working effectively with the willing can help to encourage others to engage. Success is contagious.

Again, an on-going reflective process can help to identify what has been tried, what is working and not working to engage these parents, along with the sharing of issues at meetings with others working with parents.
Need to find ways to interact with parents other than group activities

Future projects should note that asking parents to come to groups may not be very effective and other ways for parents to engage needed to be offered. Some parents want to connect one on one and are motivated to maintain this connection but not to attend group activities.

Identify strengths across the project

Some Whānau Āwhina understood their strengths and skills and could articulate how they used these in Whānau Āwhina. A good example of this is critical thinking; some Whānau Āwhina were naturally engaging in critical thinking and others did not seem to be. By working together, the natural strengths could complement each other making the initiative more effective.

Working with all the Whānau Āwhina to identify their strengths could have helped them to work more effectively. Mapping the skills and strengths of the team could have enabled the Whānau Āwhina with complementary skills to work more closely to address the gaps that they identified.

Think about sustainability

Many of the Whānau Āwhina expressed their motivation to be involved in Whānau Āwhina as a need to help others in the community. They took this seriously and needed space in the process to talk about fears, concerns, worries about what they were inviting the community to participate in. They needed to know what will happen next both personally and for the parents they have engaged and how to manage the rapport they have built with local parents in the long term.

Take opportunities to unleash further potential in the community

Those already working in parenting support will know that there are parents who act as champions for their own friends and whānau. They want to make change and encourage and support their loved ones to do the same. Identifying these champions and keeping connected is an opportunity for greater change and connection as these parents are particularly motivated and can lead others. This is a sustainable approach as they will be involved no matter what resourcing is available.

For some parents that want to make change the parenting programmes may or may not work for them but they will keep looking and trying things that help them to make change. Keeping and nurturing the connections with these parents after groups and programmes have finished will help to sustain momentum.
Conclusion and future steps

The Whānau Āwhina project has now concluded. This document is intended as a reflection on the process, a description of the outcomes and a learning tool for others planning to undertake this kind of work. The evaluators walked alongside the project as it was happening to continuously orient the group, to help them make sense of observations, insights and findings and to intervene by questioning, seeking information, pausing and reminding.

Whānau Āwhina was an ambitious project. It sought to take a team of local parents and support them through a co-design process to create parent-led initiatives throughout Tāmaki. One of the biggest challenges of the project was to deal with the diversity in experience of the individual Whānau Āwhina as well as their host organisations, whilst continuing to upskill through a future-focused co-design process. The Whānau Āwhina found the co-design process challenging, and were at times unclear during the process as to what was happening next, what their role was and how they could best support each other. Nonetheless, they all stuck with it and several brought their ideas through to prototype stage.

Throughout the project, the project leaders were quick to respond to feedback from both the Whānau Āwhina and the evaluators and addressed any issues or concerns as they occurred. Thus, several of the Whānau Āwhina now consider the co-design process a “highlight” of the project, and believe it gave them confidence, skills, greater empathy for local parents and the discipline not to take over with their own ideas.

Whilst the evaluation has shown a range of improvements for organisations and individuals, the success of broader community engagement is less clear, particularly for isolated parents and whānau. The Whānau Āwhina found connecting with isolated Tāmaki parents challenging, however it is perhaps unreasonable to expect a group of parents who are new to parent support and engagement to connect with parents that experienced organisations and professionals also struggle to reach. The short time-frame for the project as well as the length of time spent on design also impacted on the ability of the Whānau Āwhina to engage more broadly with the Tāmaki community.

Whilst the Whānau Āwhina project has finished, the learnings and experience from the project have been funneled into a parent-centred social enterprise launched by The Glen Innes Family Centre. The social enterprise, Insight Tāmaki, is focused on undertaking ‘locals by locals’ community research. The purpose of the social enterprise is focused on the GIFC mission, Hei oranga ngakau, hei pikinga waiora, investing in the wellbeing of the whole family for the future.

The Insight Tāmaki Community Research Team has recruited a team of local researchers, mostly parents, who undertook a survey with 420 household in Tāmaki over four weeks, with a 75% response rate of completed surveys. Insight Tāmaki is starting on its second contract in November.

The social enterprise is intentional about being parent-centred both in its purpose and operating practices. The income generated through the social enterprise will be reinvested into parenting initiatives in Tāmaki, contributing to a self-sustaining model of practice. Local parents will actively participate in shaping these opportunities, building up our ‘whānau to whānau’ relationships focused way of working. As is fitting with the skills learned during the Whānau Āwhina project, the local parents are skilled in empathy interviewing. Parents involved have reported feeling positive about making a difference in their community and understanding their community better.
The Whānau Awhina Theory of Change

Our Vision:
A fun, safe and supportive community for Tamaki Whānau to have empowered voices and choices in Parenting.

At First...
- Fostering Relationships and having a space to meet.
- Celebrate
- Promoting organisations and events
- Co-design through-out
- Role Modelling Positive Parenting
- Sharing of Stories
- Conversations/ Talanoa/ Kōrero/rora

So that...
- Whānau Centred: who is involved in raising children?
- Networking Opportunities
- Acknowledging the whānau role in change
- Positive Role Modelling
- Sharing Knowledge and Wisdom

The Whānau Awhina Project will...
- The ideas from our co-design process will be initiated
- There will be a growth in participation of parents
- There will be more confident parents: The parents that engage will have a voice

So that...
- Young and Old, working together with empowered voices
- Opportunities to enjoy and grow with each other
- All in the community has a shift in Mindset and Attitude
- Whānau are seeking help when needed.

The Tamaki Community will...
- There will be positive publicity
- People will start to feel safer
- People will report more use of positive parenting strategies
- We will notice things we weren’t expecting
- There will be an increase in whānau participation and engagement
- People will want to be involved

We will be nourished by our Principles of Practice:
That we will reflect as a collective, bounce off each others ideas, offer respect, be present and engaged, maintain whakawhānauaungatanga, be invested in each others success and wellbeing.

We will uphold our Tikanga in:
SKIP, TIES, The Whānau Awhina Project, The HEART Movement and HEART Parenting