



## Presentation for OMEP 7/9/2017

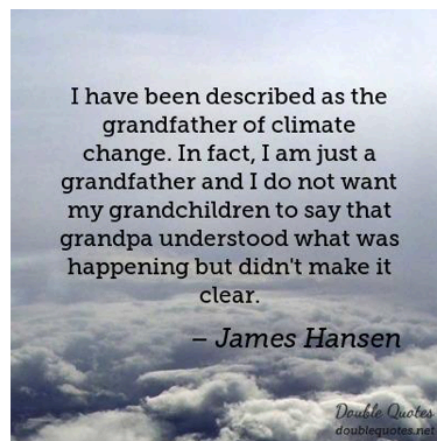
### Marina

I own and teach at Collectively Kids on Carrington Rd. We are a small centre with 30 children aged 0-5. These are my colleagues Zane McCarthy and Kate Harris who are part of the teaching team.

Thank you to OMEP for giving us this opportunity to share our work and thanks to all of you for coming along this evening.

For us this about ako - we hope that all of us will learn something new tonight. Presentations are an opportunity for us to test and refine our ideas and practices. We would really appreciate your comments, thoughts, suggestions, questions – feel free to interrupt at any time, we will also make time for discussion.

You are very welcome to visit the centre or get in touch with us. Our contact details are on the last slide.



I will start by outlining the reasons why environmental education has been our vision and the foundation of our work for over a decade. Just bear in mind that our approach has evolved over time – we haven't and don't expect to arrive at an end point, there is always going to be more that we can do. Then we will move on to what environmental education currently looks like for us in terms of philosophy, policy and curriculum. We will also share some processes and systems which of course link to the curriculum because they are experienced every day by the children.

What motivates us is our concern about the huge environmental challenges that we and future generations face. I am not going to go into details about climate change or environmental degradation, there is plenty of information around. On this slide is a quote from James Hansen, a scientist and expert in climate change who has become an activist – his reasons for that are obvious when you read the slide. He is a good starting point if you are wanting more information and features in lots of YouTube videos.

It's an incredibly complex issue but it's also really simple. At its heart lies the fact that we need a healthy planet to live healthy lives. There is scientific consensus that the problems have been caused by humankind and it is up to us (particularly governments and industry) to find solutions that focus on rapid reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. Climate change is already affecting us and is a big issue for our neighbours – other Pacific islands and Australia as well as many developing countries.



In a world of 7 billion people, with limited natural resources, individuals and societies have to learn to live together and take responsible actions based on the understanding that actions here and today can have implications for the lives and livelihoods of people in other parts of the world, as well as for future generations.

<http://en.unesco.org/themes/education-sustainable-development>

Engaging with this issue seriously can be scary and overwhelming and obviously individual actions don't make a big difference on a global scale so it's easy to feel powerless. But on the other hand, doing something is better than doing nothing. And I know that I would like to be thought of by my children and the children, families and colleagues I have had the pleasure and honour to work with, as someone who tried her hardest.

I believe that as teachers we need to really think about what we can deliver in ECE that will be helpful and useful for children at this time and what we can do to prepare them for an uncertain future. One of the key aspects we focus on is active and engaged citizenship which includes agency and advocacy within and beyond our community. It sees children as competent and powerful members of our community.

The approach we have taken is to actively engage with the environmental challenges that face us, in ways that are meaningful for us and that happens mainly through small place based actions that represent bigger issues. An example is that children clear up areas they have played in and look after resources so that they leave the environment in a good state for the next person. This is something we are failing to do on a global scale.



Demonstrating right here, right now what we would like to see happening in our community, nationally and globally.



Our aim is to demonstrate right here at Collectively Kids, right now what we would like to see happening in our community, nationally and globally. And we hope that our actions create ripples and encourage other people to get involved. We have to work together to bring about change.

In our experience exploring environmental education in depth has been really rewarding, empowering and satisfying for our community as we look at finding different and better ways of living and being in this world. It's creative – you can approach the topic in a number of different ways. It's full of opportunities to provide a really meaningful holistic curriculum for our children that often inspires families. The approach it is openly political and that can be risky but we have found that families really appreciate the experiences children have at CK because the basis of environmental education is really about better relationships with our world and each other.

A few years ago a parent whose children used to come to CK used us as a case study for a sustainable business assignment. A part of that was a questionnaire which over ½ the families answered. For most of the families CKs environmental focus was important or very important when they chose us as an ECE setting. It impacted positively on parent satisfaction and it was something they shared when talking to people about CK.

**Here are a few more recent comments – they also demonstrate the ripple effect:**

‘We believe the approach to environmental education has made a huge impact on how our boys see the world. They are very conscious now of waste, recycling and worm farming and the importance of taking care of the environment. Quin has carried this through to school too. You have really inspired us to do more at home too, as have the boys in teaching us what they learn at CK!’

‘Just wanted to acknowledge the tremendous work and effort that you do at CK, as highlighted in the presentation you gave to the University of Auckland. It was inspiring to read and I particularly liked how you took massive global issues that often paralyse people and overwhelm them, and broke them down into manageable component parts and how as a community you are working to change the way things are seen and done. It highlighted to me that the work you do can be an example not just to the immediate community but also the way we typically think of early childhood education in NZ. If all children could be part of a community like yours/ours, what a different world we would live in, and how much more respect for each other and the environment we would have and the interconnected nature of all things.’

‘My children haven't been at CK very long, but the way that environment & sustainability is embedded into the everyday life of CK was definitely a major factor in our decision to change day care centres to CK. It is important to me that my kids are exposed to good environmental practice as much as possible and I've already noticed that the education element that CK adds has had an effect with my two boys, for example they've started talking about what items can go in the compost etc - while we have always composted at home, the extra time the teachers take to educate the kids about what they're doing and why obviously has had a lasting impact.’

I am sharing those views to demonstrate that a political, deep approach to environmental education is a positive thing for our community as well as strengthening the work we are able to do because we have the support of our families.

One of the things I think we are effective at is sharing our vision (and our concerns) in a range of ways. You will get a sense of that throughout the presentation. If we think of the 7 r's that are part of education for sustainability (which Kate will talk about in more depth when she tackles consumerism) our focus is on trickier r's - reflecting, refusing and I would like to add an 8<sup>th</sup> one - resisting some of the things we take for granted currently. We certainly can't recycle our way out of this...



**Link to video: <https://vimeo.com/116030323> (Password: collectivelykids)**

The video we are going to show you now is an example of sharing our vision. It was an end of year present for families in 2014 and there were tears at the premiere. It was quite a long and complicated project. The older children identified topics that they felt were important for them in terms of their future and parents took charge of editing the sections. Last year we made a CK eco superhero book with the children.



Next I will talk about developing an environment policy which gave us a framework when we started our journey. We were looking for new premises at the time and I had become interested in addressing environmental issues more effectively within my work. We developed the policy as part of a whole centre professional development programme focused on bicultural practice. We were looking at care of the self, others and the environment within Aotearoa's bicultural context. We were particularly exploring practical things that might be possible in our new premises.

It was a good way to come up with an agreement as a team which accommodated different understanding and perspectives of individual teachers. It meant we had a concrete vision and plan that we could share with our community including the architect.

Once you have a document that is meaningful for your centre, and you actively engage with it, environmental education becomes embedded – it will be part of strategic and annual planning and internal evaluations.

Our policy is reviewed every year and has an action plan. It links to the opening statement of our philosophy:

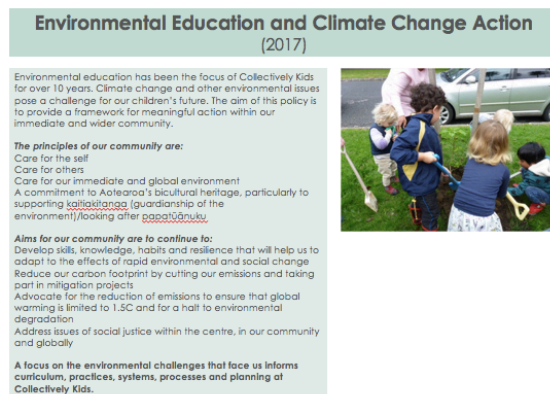
"Children have the right to a peaceful, safe, secure, healthy, socially just, environmentally sustainable present and future."

That still includes the term sustainability, because a sustainable future is the right of children, but it's becoming more unlikely that we will be able to achieve that because some of the impacts of climate change, (for instance rising sea levels) are already locked in, so even if we were to go to zero emissions right now sea levels would still continue to rise. So we are looking at a life on this planet that will be very different from what we are experiencing at this time which is why we now use the term environmental education rather than focusing on sustainability.



Here is a slide of the first part of the policy. It has changed quite a bit and will continue to change – for instance I'd like to explore what we mean by others – is that just people or all animals, organisms...?

It has the standard components of environmental sustainability models – adaption, emissions reduction, mitigation and social justice



The second slide is more specific to our approach. Hopefully the rest of the presentation will make it clear how aspects of our policy are addressed



## Consumerism

Kate is going to talk about consumerism which is driven by a model of continuous economic growth that is definitely not sustainable.

### Kate

*This evening I'm going to speak briefly about consumerism, and some of the strategies and practices we use in our centre to combat, cope with, and create other options to it.*

At Collectively Kids we are trying to provide children with an alternative to the current focus on consumerism. We want them to begin to understand the impact mass production has on the environment.

The reason we are in this current climate and environmental 'mess' is that we, particularly in the developed world, consume too much of everything.

This has multiple negative effects – for example in terms of the non-renewable resources we use, the pollution created in the manufacture and transportation of the goods, and in the waste generated from the goods themselves (which unfortunately isn't all able to be reused, recycled or composted!).

Consumerism and its consequences are complex issues. So, rather than get too tied up in knots, I suggest the key is keeping things simple.

Framing the wider issues in ways we can all relate to - in our everyday lives and within our own terms of reference - makes them more manageable.

For us - *in our place* - respecting and looking after the resources we have is an integral part of our centre culture. Children are encouraged to tidy up after themselves and help others too. Leaving a place as good (or tidy) as you found it - or better (or tidier) - is a small reflection of how we should all live in the wider world.

In addition, looking after our resources means they last longer and we do not need to replace them so frequently. Toys and equipment are fixed rather than chucked out.

Indeed several partners and children of staff - and even the odd parent - have been involved over the years in repairing resources like toys, books, dress-ups, and equipment for us.

Consideration is given to the raw materials and labour that go into manufactured items. The cost is not just the retail price. There are also issues like social justice and the rights of the child that relate to mass production, and different labour laws in countries we import goods from for example.

Sadly children and childhood in developed countries are framed within a context of having to have stuff. Advertising is aimed relentlessly at children and parents. Free stuff is ubiquitous – just look at the promotions supermarkets seem to have frequently giving away small plastic toys or sets of cards etc.

Just being able to begin distinguishing the difference between ‘want’ and ‘need’ is an important step in thinking more critically about the pressure to buy and consume. This can be challenging (even for adults) so it can be a really useful place to start conversations about consumerism, and consider carefully where our actions fit.

Before we buy goods or use resources even just asking ourselves:

Do we need this?

Do we want this?

Or is it just easier?

can be a good habit to get into.

If we do need it and can justify getting or using it then what are the best ways of doing that?

It can be better in the long run to spend a little more on quality products that last a long time than buying cheaper, poorer quality items which end up needing replacing sooner.

When buying resources, we also consider environmentally friendly options (including packaging), ethical issues, and we try to source second hand when possible (including asking parents before buying as sometimes families have just what we need).

When asking “do I need it, do I want it, or is it just easier?” sometimes, making life easier is important too. The main thing is that over all we aim to consume less and be more thoughtful about what we do consume.

Another issue we looked at was our cleaning products. The range of products on offer can be overwhelming and often we are persuaded to buy a whole lot of different ‘cleaners’ for supposedly different purposes. In terms of cleaning the truly eco-friendly solution often just involves more elbow grease and fewer chemicals. We have reduced our use of bleach to bathroom and food areas and have tried to source more eco-friendly products generally.

With our cleaning products we looked at a number of products and decided to go with Ecostore. While there are many other suppliers whose products are as good or better, Ecostore offered us a wide range of items (from nappy cream to detergents to slug pellets) and we can order wholesale and in bulk.

We also offer parents the opportunity to order products which is partly a fundraiser and partly a way of advocating for more eco-friendly products. We use baking soda as a scourer, reuse our spray and wipe bottles (filled with diluted general cleaner) and our (cloth) nappy wipes and handtowels are colour coded and washable - we started with old towels that had been ripped up but now use different coloured flannels.

At Collectively Kids we want to offer children and their families a place where they experience different and “better” pleasures, not just ones focussed on buying and consuming goods. By offering such alternatives we hope they begin to internalise this to become “refusers” and more able to resist (or to at least think about) the current pressure to be consumers.

This even extends to our food choices which are mainly unbranded, Fairtrade, and organic. We try to cook from scratch and in bulk – for example things like crackers, baked beans, hummus, low sugar loaves, bread, and seed spreads. Many of the recipes we have are very forgiving and are used as part of the curriculum cooking we do with and for the children (for the



morning and afternoon teas we supply). Associated with this is gardening and producing ingredients for centre use – and it goes without saying how good it is for exploring science and science process skills as well, kaitiakitanga...

As well as looking after our things we also recycle, reuse, or better still refuse when we can.

These are part of what are known as the 7 R's: reduce, reuse, recycle, respect, repair, reflect and refuse. It includes questioning current ways of living (and yes, this can be challenging at times).

We are currently developing an acquisitions, purchasing, and disposals policy which will include criteria for accepting donations of second hand goods, as well as new goods we may have to purchase. We will share this with families and children and hopefully that will lead to some shifts in the practices within our community and homes.

We also support families to pass on clothes or household items which no longer fit or are needed. Families and the centre also share surplus fruit and veges from their gardens with the wider Collectively Kids community. We believe these things help (in some small way) to reducing our consumption of new or packaged goods, and reduce waste.

In the past we have done a rubbish audit to help us get a better picture of what is being bought and where we might reduce consumption (and waste) – e.g. cleaning products, food packaging, art resources - including paper. We will be doing a rubbish audit again this year – advice and support is available from the council for this which we will include in our list of links.

Pleasure is also taken in celebrating the old things we have – the worn pages of books once loved by teachers' children - or sometimes even the teachers themselves. Furniture, clothes, toys, and household items which hold memories and have stories to tell. As part of our avoidance of consumer culture we don't show toys at mat time. Toys are made at a cost – resources, pollution, child labour and poorly paid workers (which is something we discuss with the older children).

Old traditions are given new angles – for example the advent calendar with fun activities to do together instead of chocolates to eat; the Easter hunts where the children make their own treats for each other or plan and map the concealing of toys; Christmas presents made by hand or in the form of books or videos rather than items which require various resources to be bought and assembled for example. Exploring alternatives to traditions and getting the children to come up with suggestions on things they can do for parents and family instead of buying presents.

Also, highlighting and celebrating the occasions which focus on things other than buying stuff like being together, sharing kai and celebrating the seasons or festivals, which we value and enjoy. Here I'm thinking about celebrations like Matariki and Diwali for example – and you may have other celebrations and traditions that are meaningful to your community or centre.

We try to invite expert visitors to talk to children, for example - What are things made of?

Ron Sperber, who was working for the council at the time, came to talk to us about this. He is still prepared to support but charges for that. We'll include his contact details. He had some great resources which included small jars containing the raw products of common household items. For example: sand used as part of the manufacture of glass, crude oil for plastic, bauxite for aluminium.

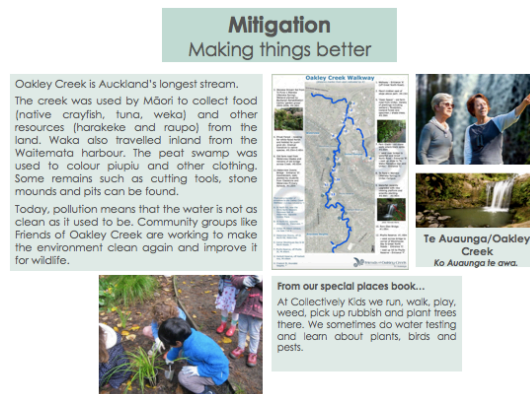
It was a effective way of starting the conversation about the resources used for making things, and how many of these are non-renewable.

*I should add here that there were some changes made at the council and the resources are now out at the waste minimisation learning centre at Henderson where they hold workshops for adults and are open for school (and centre) tours too. Details will be included with some links in our notes for you if you'd like them. I'm sure you could conduct your own project into this within your centre as well...*

Researching and making your own books with the children – for example the book compiled by Marina's daughter Maya about the manufacturing of toys, looking for books on this topic...

Books – eg Patricia Grace 'the Trolley' about a mum who makes a Christmas present from old items for her kids (partly because she doesn't have enough money but is a good way of introducing the idea of alternatives to buying new and the value in making things yourself) – 'George saves the world by lunchtime' – esp loved by the children when we use their names instead of "George".

Making games for the children to play eg bingo type games, matching games, board games (which support their understanding of the wider issues including consumerism).



## Marina

Mitigation is a way countering consumerism by making things better/making up for our emissions. What we do as individuals or small communities makes a minimal difference to reducing emissions but it demonstrates a willingness to act and sharing our work is advocacy for the environment – so again it's about that ripple effect.

An ongoing project in this area has been our involvement with friends of Te Auaunga, Oakley Creek. Some of you might be familiar with the walkway. The slide is from our "Special places book". Through volunteer help and environmental mitigation required as part the Waterview tunnel project the area has improved hugely and has become a lovely adventurous walk, with a generally clearer and cleaner Creek. Over the years the children have planted trees, collected rubbish, weeded, tested water and have generally enjoyed the place - for instance running along the path, telling stories and playing games.

There are lots of environmental projects happening in Auckland and it's worth exploring what is in your area. The idea here is that we do something tangible and real to improve an area we are privileged to be able to access. Our focus as humans is often on taking something from our natural spaces (even if it's just taking them for granted.)



## Rubbish

The most successful mitigation project over many years has been waste minimisation within the centre (for instance by introducing cloth nappies) and picking up rubbish.

We have been collecting rubbish in our neighbourhood for many years and the children love it. It's so visible, they can make a big difference, feel proud of themselves and express their annoyance about the behaviour of other people. They often receive compliments from people who are passing by. This interest has also spread to home – with some parents mentioning that walks almost always have a rubbish collection component. One of our two year olds recently picked up rubbish on a beach in Tonga.

The focus of our current rubbish project is on writing a letter to Margi Watson who is a councillor on the Albert-Eden Board and has previously come to talk the older children about what the council does. This has been a long process - we started our exploration in March.

The idea is to share the good work the children are doing picking up rubbish on Sutherland Road, our street, once a month and at Whatua Kaimarie, a Maori mental health unit across the road from us where we regularly enjoy active games and



tree climbing. You can see Manawanui the Wharenui on the slide and the children picking up rubbish by the Pohutukawa trees.

I also wanted to use this opportunity to ask the children to share their thoughts about rubbish with the council. This meets the advocacy section of our policy as well as giving children agency. Environmental degradation is a problem that impacts on their present and future.

The project includes - science (particularly environmental science), literacy/language, maths, technology and the visual arts.

**After months of discussion there was agreement about the following things which will form part of our letter:**

Rubbish should go in the bin - maybe we need more bins and some signs to remind people so they don't drop it on the ground and on the road (we could make the signs)

If there isn't a bin people should take the rubbish home or hold onto it until they find a bin

We like going on rubbish collections

We can make new things from rubbish (recycle)

Rubbish can be dangerous - it can hurt you and sometimes there are rats when there is rubbish

We're not impressed by the rubbish under the bridge at the start of the bike paths which includes tyres and a shopping trolley. We can ask about organising a community rubbish event to clean that up – just for adults though as the motorway is very close by.

**We have discovered some things children might want to learn more about:**

They are familiar with the rubbish truck coming to pick up the rubbish but are not so sure about where it goes after that.

They are also not sure about the wider environmental impact of rubbish so that is something to explore (we have discussed plastic in the sea)

We have now made a sign so we can send Margi a photo of that. You can see that on the slide. One of the children came up with the words – no rubbish in the whole world. It was powerful experience – the older children took part in the design and in writing the letters. On the photo they are wearing the eco superhero capes made with the children out of old t shirts by one of our parents which we usually put on when we go on rubbish walks.

Now it's just a matter of compiling photos, drawings, signatures and text and sending the letter. I am pretty sure that Margi will reply and perhaps send our letter on.

Our next step might to approach our local paper. Which would give children another avenue for expressing their thoughts and sharing their work.



This year a child has shown great interest in the election signs that he has seen on the way to the centre. This sparked a conversation with his mother about voting, political parties, and government. He was then given the opportunity to share his knowledge at the centre with children and teachers.

With input from the children we are making banners to put along the fence asking people to vote at the election and to consider the planet and children when they vote. Recently the children made a sign asking people not to litter and this is something they are incredibly proud of.

This sign was a talking point on a recent outing. The intention of this outing was to march up and down the street with our climate change banner for the children to be exposed to another form of action that they can take. As we passed the rubbish sign the children commented on it and we determined that it would be a good idea to chant 'don't put rubbish in the whole world' as we marched with our banner. The children loved doing this but commented afterwards that perhaps if they had said please people would have listened more to what they had to say.

We also hope to take advantage of the advance voting place near the centre to show the children the process of voting. During the last election project we did this and the children were quite eager to recreate this back at the centre, which we did for the speaking order of our meet the candidates evening for parents.



## Social justice

### Marina

Social justice is an important topic because when things get tough invariably the most vulnerable members of society get left behind and that's not OK. It's a big topic for New Zealand with our complex history and current inequalities. If we don't address those things now they will just become worse as climate change complicates life.

For us at CK social justice is about interacting in peaceful, equitable and fair ways in our community and beyond – which is complex, with difficult decisions to be made including the way the centre is run as a business. There are always competing interests. Essentially this is about how we think about and exercise our rights and responsibilities and the tensions between individual rights (which are currently given a lot of focus even in ECE), and the rights of communities.

Understanding diversity and equity is important for social justice. The key areas for us are exploring te Tiriti based practice in a number of ways and seizing the opportunities for highlighting and celebrating diversity that exists within our community.



In terms of te Tiriti based practice I am going to share what we working on at the moment as that has a clear link to environmental education as well as really helping all of us to understand Māori world views.

We are taking part in PD which has been developed by Tamsin Hanly for teachers and consists of 6 books that critically examine the history of Aotearoa/New Zealand from creation stories to the present. The resources are designed to give teachers a better understanding of the very complex, difficult histories and injustices that have shaped Māori/Pākehā relationships. It involves a commitment to read the books over a 1 or 2-year period and to engage in the content to plan curriculum. We are the first early childhood centre to take part in this. We will include Tamsin's contact details in the list of websites and other bits and pieces Kate has compiled.

We're just at the start of the first part of the first book which focusses on the creation myths. This is really enriching for environmental education. The story of Papatūānuku and Ranginui is a great way for the children to understand the interconnectedness of everything, and to see our world as a complex system. As humans, we often see ourselves as above nature which is proving to be a risky and dangerous way of being.

I just happened to open the latest Forest and Bird magazine and found an article about Anne Salmond who describes what I wanted to say much more eloquently. She talks about approaches to environmental issues in New Zealand and the Māori view of humans being "interlocked with other living systems".

#### Here are a couple of quotes:

"In NZ we don't need to invent a brand-new philosophy to replace neo-liberalism, we have a powerful set of indigenous philosophies already available to us."

"We are looking at relationships which are less about rights and control but more about what is right, tika – appropriate, fair and productive. Relationships that are mutually beneficial and creative – where a river and people can be kaitiaki of each other and both thrive. The essence of a healthy relationship is one of manaaki – giving mana to others as well as receiving it from them."

She also talks about "alternative imaginings" and that these can coexist with science.

The Māori creation myths and the stories that follow on from them are not only dramatic and engaging, they lend themselves to exploration in the way Anne describes. We have looked at a variety of versions of the Māori creation myths and discussed the differences and similarities in the text and illustrations. The personification of the earth and sky is really useful for children because it is a great symbol of interconnectedness, deepens engagement and invites an emotional, compassionate response to our environment which is really important – we need to care deeply to bring about change.

It has been interesting to see that as the children are exploring the Rangi and Papa stories their interest in scientific theories has increased. It has been a very exciting and rich project. It has included exploring Kaitiakitanga in relation to Rangi and Papa, science, working theories (an interesting one is how do Tawhirimatea and Ranginui share the sky), representing ideas in different ways, extending te Reo Māori (some of the books are in Māori or bilingual) English language, literacy, the arts... We are also comparing world creation stories and will be engaging in scientific theories such as the big bang.

I expect that we will continue to work on this for many months.

It will be interesting to see how the other books influence our approach.



## Diversity

We are not a hugely diverse centre but we do acknowledge all the cultures within our community and try to support home languages. We are lucky that teachers speak a range of languages and we are all trying to improve our te reo Māori. So the children are familiar with languages and cultures but one of the main ways we explore diversity and live social justice is through providing an inclusive setting, which has been a feature of the centre since we opened over 20 years ago.

### **Inclusive practice - this is an example social justice in action**

We see inclusion as a right. That's not just the right to attend but to participate and to achieve. It doesn't matter what the disability or additional need is (autism spectrum disorder, developmental delay, terminal illness) we will give it a try and that's always worked for us.

This approach is empowering for families with children with additional needs who are often not welcomed in early childhood settings. We make sure that we are welcoming from our first communication. We don't focus on the diagnosis but see the child. When you take that approach potential obstacles or barriers become problems to solve.

The trust parents of children with additional needs place in us is a gift for our community and we all learn so much. Children learn not to be scared of difference but to engage with it, they can be (but of course aren't always) compassionate, patient. They are creative when they communicate, helpful, welcoming and they can consider life from different perspectives. What is it like not to be able to walk? To have difficulty communicating?

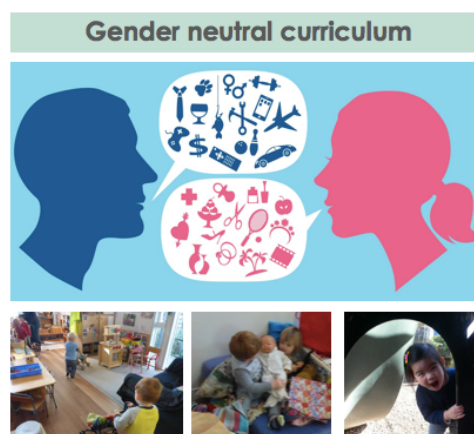
I have to briefly mention our friend Dugald who always appears in our presentations and you can see him on this slide. Dugald has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair. He has been a CK friend since we moved to Pt Chev almost 10 years ago. Dugald does the shopping for us to get a bit of extra income. When children first start, they are often frightened of him but he is a patient man and it usually doesn't take long to make friends with him. We have learnt a lot from Dugald!

The children understand that we are all different and that everyone has contributions to make. These are very important things for young children to learn in terms of social justice. Families have mentioned how much they value inclusion and how this expresses itself outside the centre, for example how positively children react when they see someone who has a disability. Specialist advisors have also noted how inclusive the children are.



Another example around social justice is a peaceful play project which is currently in place for our younger children. Zane talk about more about that in terms of gender neutral curriculum.

We have a strong focus on relationships and this project is aimed at helping children to develop the skills to be assertive, express their opinions but also to play peacefully with others which involves taking account of and accommodating other people's perspectives in ways that are fair which is the foundation of social justice and very tricky thing for younger children, older children and sometimes adults...and even our world leaders...



**Gender neutral practice** – an area of social justice that we are beginning to explore in more depth

**Zane**

Something that has always concerned me is the assumptions that we place upon children and the language we use with them depending on their gender.

But this isn't something that all teachers are aware of. I remember a story of one parent whose child had recently left the centre for school. The parent had told me that the child's teacher had made a comment to the parents about girls not being as good at maths as boys. I was shocked when the parent told me this. This teacher has put assumptions on children based on their gender. The teacher hasn't strived to understand the individual, their strengths and interests, how to get them engaged in learning. The teacher has just said 'girls won't be good at maths so I won't expect much from them.'

And how do you think a girl would feel if they heard that sort of comment? They aren't expected to do well so let's not try?

Unfortunately these assumptions are everywhere in society. They are being aimed at children too. Clothing is very gendered. Boys wear blue, girls wear pink. There is polarity of toys too. Girls play with dolls, do pretend home play. Boys play with



trucks, guns, do action role play. Boys are assumed to be rough, reckless, loud, strong. Boys don't cry. Girls are expected to be precious, to be a 'princess', to be tidy in appearance, not getting dirty.

If we tell a child that this is what we expect of them, this is how they are supposed to act and feel, they aren't going to be able to explore and find out who they truly are. What they can do, what they love, what they excel at, what they can do for others. How can you discover who you are in this world and what you can do when you are being told how to act and be?

Confining children in gender stereotypes limits their options, potential, and deprives them from developing different ways of being and thinking outside of gender stereotypes put upon them. These different ways of thinking and being will be important for their futures for problem solving, adapting to potentially unstable and changing social situations, and coming up with creative solutions.

At Collectively Kids we look to create a safe space for children to explore who they are without these social pressures put on them to act a certain way. It is hard to counter learned behaviour and beliefs, as well as the subtle reinforcing of them through the language and expectations that people are often unaware that they have. But we strive to educate ourselves and our community so that we achieve what is best for the children.

We adjust our physical environment, resources, and teaching to make non-gendered play more frequent and actively encourage this. We problem solve how we can encourage children to explore different activities that they might not otherwise be exposed to. Such as mixing up the resources that are placed together to encourage children that might not have played with one of the items.

It is really important that we do these things as all children have the right to explore and develop who they are and what they can do and be. This doesn't happen in education and in society so we need to make a conscious effort to provide children with all sorts of different ways of being. We have to be very conscious of this and actively do it as it doesn't just happen due to external influences.

A recent project on cooperative play for the younger tamariki at the centre has been an opportunity for children to explore different ways of being and playing. There has been a focus on encouraging girls to be wild, adventurous, and active. We have been making a point to highlight this in documentation.

It has had incredibly positive results over just a short time. One girl has become a leader in this play and she is a role model for being inclusive of others. Another girl who had started at the centre a couple of months ago was taking a long time to settle. I found that other teachers weren't giving her opportunity to explore wild active play and she was only exposed to dolls and soft toys. I invited her to play outside and found that she adored roaring and expressing herself in this active play. I have noticed that recently she is now more settled, engaging with other children, and less reliant on teachers.

For boys we have made a point to expose them to quiet, gentle play and being. For several two year old boys they were being quite active and rough with each other. We made a point to expose them to quieter play with dolls, giving them opportunities to be the carer for younger children, a role that is too often put on the shoulders of girls, and imaginative play where the boys have to look after others, such as cooking, or medical play. This exposure to alternative ways of play has also been put in their individual plans.

This strategy started by using their interest in movement and transportation. We provided prams for them to use but emphasised that they had to have a baby in them and walk slowly with the prams as they had to take care of their baby.

We highlight these different types of play in documentation and in conversation with parents so that they know that their child can have interests and strengths beyond what wider societal influenced dictate the child should be interested in.

We are mindful of the language that we use with children. Rather than calling a girl kind and helpful when she helps to carry in a container of feijoas that we collected I will call her strong and tough. This happened and the girl in this example beamed with delight and told others that she didn't need help because she was strong. Flipping the descriptors of children's actions allows them to feel validated for different reasons than they might otherwise be described outside of the centre.

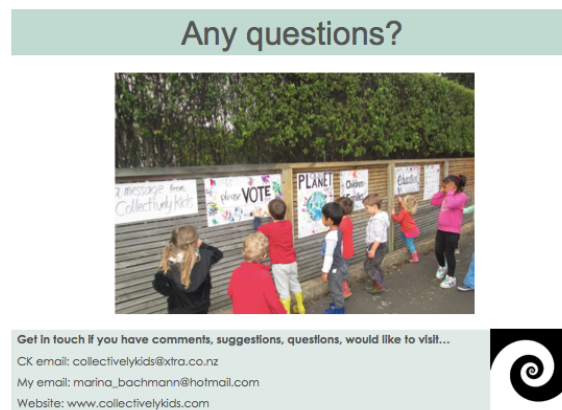
We will frequently change the language in books and songs. We will change the gender of protagonists and antagonists. In songs like Old McDonald we will sing 'my friend (insert name here) had a farm....' A recent example of this is the children's interest in European traditional stories. I was reading the three little pigs and decided to change the gender of the final pig from he to she to show that girls can be inventive and save the day too. Stories like Where the Wild Things Are, the

protagonist, Max, can easily be changed from he to she or they and if the children ask why this is done we can start a conversation about why Max can't be a girl and have an adventure in a faraway land.

There are also stories that challenge gender and gendered roles. Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress, Rosie Revere, Engineer, I'm a Girl, Paperbag Princess.

We also deconstruct with the children what it means when they assume something is for girls or boys. Simple things such as me wearing nail polish to work, or Marina having short hair can be used as evidence or talking points in breaking down the myth of 'girl's stuff' and 'boy's stuff'.

We are starting a process of writing a centre policy on this so that everyone in the centre community has a clear understanding of our practices and beliefs when it comes to stereotyping based on gender.



### **Websites, contact people and links that might be useful**

<https://www.iamightygirl.com/books?cat=55> MG social issues book list

<https://www.iamightygirl.com/books?cat=59> MG environmental issues book list

<http://temp.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/EN/environmentwaste/educationvolunteering/Pages/wasteminimisati onlearningcentre.aspx>

'Wake up freak out' - short animated film. I find this useful to revisit from time to time – gives a clear explanation re climate change, feedback loops etc.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VnyLIRCPajM>

<http://wakeupfreakout.org/script.pdf> is the transcript for the video

(This is from council email/Amber from Council re Resources):

Emails Any environmental/sustainability queries -[sustainableschools@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz](mailto:sustainableschools@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz) General Composting or to host/attend a workshop – [hello@compostcollective.org.nz](mailto:hello@compostcollective.org.nz)

Websites Sustainable Schools online resources - <https://www.pond.co.nz/community/593146/sustainable-schools-auckland-council/1> Compost Collective - <https://compostcollective.org.nz/>

Create your own Eden, composting information kid friendly - <http://www.createyourowndeden.org.nz/> Food reduction information/activities - <https://lovefoodhatewaste.co.nz/> Auckland Council recycling and rubbish information - <http://www.makethemostofwaste.co.nz/>

The Nappy Lady, reducing waste at centres and homes - <http://www.thenappylady.co.nz/>

Ron Sperber (used to work for the council) - [ron@earthwhile.co.nz](mailto:ron@earthwhile.co.nz)

## **Fieldtrips**

Zero Waste Zone, Waitakere Transfer Station -

<http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/EN/environmentwaste/educationvolunteering/Pages/wasteminimisationlearningcentre.aspx>

Visy Recycling Education Centre

Visy Recycling 29 Victoria Street, Onehunga

Located at the Onehunga Material Recovery Facility (MRF), Visy Recycling offers educational group sessions to members of the Auckland community and schools. There is a minimum age of 5 years to visit this site.

Excursions can include interactive presentations and the opportunity to see where materials get dropped off. Bookings: [recyclingvisits@visy.co.nz](mailto:recyclingvisits@visy.co.nz) or 09 975 2000.

**Tamsin Hanly – bicultural PD**

[Critical Histories of Aotearoa: Homepage](#)

[cmph.cybersoul.co.nz](http://cmph.cybersoul.co.nz)