

Storytime Foundation lockdown care packs evaluation 2021

Draft report

ALEX WOODLEY,
POINT & ASSOCIATES

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Please note that to preserve confidentiality, the photos used in the report are not of participants or their whānau.

CONTACTS

Chief Executive, Storytime Foundation: Tony Culliney: Tony@storytime.org.nz; Contract Manager, Interventions, Northern Region, Corrections, Ara Poutama Aotearoa: Mark.Lynds@corrections.govt.nz; Chief Advisor Iterative Best Evidence Synthesis (BES) Hei Kete Raukura, Evidence, Data & Knowledge, Ministry of Education, Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga: Adrienne.Alton-Lee@education.govt.nz

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On the 17th of August 2021, in response to an outbreak of Covid-19, New Zealand moved into lockdown. Parts of Northland remained in lockdown until 11 November and Auckland remained in lockdown until 2nd December 2021.

Storytime, funded by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and in collaboration with the Department of Corrections, mobilised to provide 500 care packs to tamariki with whānau under the management of Community Corrections or affected by family harm incidents.

FINDINGS

The findings are consistent with previous evaluations.

Probation Officers, police and whānau themselves reported whānau faced increased stress, with some experiencing severe material hardship and loss of emotional supports, during the Covid-19 lockdowns. Whānau had very few resources and appreciated these at such a stressful time.

The resources, books and games developed for Taonga mō ngā Tamariki, successfully used in prison settings to strengthen the relationship between parents and tamariki, can also be used during lockdown to mitigate toxic levels of stress, and support whānau resilience during stressful times.

As whānau found home-schooling and homework during lockdown stressful the packs were framed as fun. This made a difference with whānau saying while education packs increased their stress, Storytime packs reduced it.

The provision of books and reading appears to be supporting attachment and wellbeing.

Staff from Corrections and the Police believe it is helping to strengthen relationships between staff and whānau.

Interviewees would like to see the initiative offered during future lockdowns. They would also like to see the packs offered to those under the management of Corrections and tamariki involved in family harm incidents on an on-going basis in order to grow and sustain the wellbeing outcomes of the initiative.

EVALUATION NOTES

PURPOSE

The evaluation describes the Storytime Foundation Lockdown Care Packs project in 2021. As previous evaluations have focused on evidence and outcomes, this report has a future focus; namely outlining the process which has been developed and making recommendations which would allow the packs to become 'business as usual' and would enable the partner organisations to mobilise quickly should New Zealand face future lockdowns or emergencies.

METHOD

A total of ten staff and 39 whānau were interviewed to understand the process and outcomes. Tamariki were also asked to provide a word to describe the packs. While some were too young to answer, fifteen provided feedback.

The next steps and recommendations are based on this and previous evaluative findings.

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to evaluate the Storytime Covid lockdown care pack project, funded by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and in collaboration with Ara Poutama Aotearoa, Department of Corrections (Corrections) in September 2021.

A further thirty packs were funded by the Rotorua Energy Charitable Trust for Rotorua whānau and 150 by the Cognition Education Trust to provide packs to Southseas Health Otara, and in the Far North, Ngati Hine, Plunket, and Te Rarawa.

The evaluation is designed to capture how the project was implemented, to share what was learned, the critical success factors, and to make recommendations about potential next steps.

Background

On 11 March 2020 the World Health organisation declared the outbreak of Covid-19 a pandemic. In response, New Zealand introduced a four-level alert system on 21 March to manage the outbreak. At Alert Level 4, New Zealanders were `locked down' and only able to leave their home for physical activity in their own neighbourhood, to go to local supermarkets, dairies, and pharmacies, and to seek medical assistance.

During an Alert Level 4 lockdown in 2020, Storytime Foundation Trust Board (Storytime), supported by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Department of Corrections (Corrections) distributed 685 lockdown care packs of books, games, and activities to tamariki with whānau under the management of Corrections or involved in family harm incidents. The Covid-adapted initiative drew upon knowledge and expertise developed in the delivery of Taonga mō ngā Tamariki, a Storytime Foundation whānau reading and literacy intervention based on the Reading Together® programmes. Taonga mō ngā Tamariki has been delivered to parents and caregivers in the care or management of Corrections since 2017.

An evaluation of the Covid-adapted initiative found most whānau (98%) loved the packs and said they were fun, well used, and a good cultural fit with their whānau. They particularly enjoyed reading the books and playing together with their children. Most whānau also said the packs helped to alleviate the stress and boredom of lockdown. The evaluation recommended that the intervention be repeated and extended nationally should there be any future lockdowns.

On the 17th of August 2021, in response to a further outbreak of Covid-19, New Zealand moved once again into lockdown (Alert Level 4). Northland remained in Alert Level 4 lockdown until 2nd September, and Auckland until 3rd September. Auckland remained locked down in Alert Level 3 until 2nd December 2021.

The 2021 lockdown care pack initiative

Storytime, funded by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and in collaboration with the Department of Corrections, mobilised once again to provide 500 care packs to tamariki with whānau under the management of Community Corrections or affected by family harm incidents. It was planned that:

- 50 packs would be provided to the Family Harm teams in the mid-Northern regions and Whangarei, with a further 100 packs to whānau identified by their Probation Officers
- 100 packs to the Family Harm team in Manukau (The Manukau Multi-Disciplinary Community-Based Action team, or MDCAT)
- 100 packs to whānau in South Auckland identified by their Probation Officers
- 50 packs to whānau in Rotorua identified by their Probation Officer and funded by Rotorua Energy Charitable Trust
- 100 packs to be distributed where need is greatest, in recognition of the importance of allowing for agile decision making in response to opportunity.



The evidence

The process for delivering the packs drew on the findings of evaluation of Taonga mō ngā Tamariki and the earlier Storytime Foundation Lockdown Packs evaluation in 2020.[1]

These evaluations found evidence for the value of supporting the children of a parent in the care or under the management of Corrections or involved in family harm incidents. Early intervention and support is associated with better outcomes for children and a reduction in negative intergenerational effects (Lambie, 2018; Lambie, 2019). Reading or literacy schemes involving prisoner-child contact, in particular can foster supportive family relationships (Nutbrown, C., Clough, P., Stammers, L., Emblin, N. & Alston-Smith, S., 2017). Earlier evaluations had found that the resources, books, and games developed for Taonga mō ngā Tamariki, being successfully used in prison settings to strengthen the relationship between parents/caregivers and their tamariki, could also be used to protect the whānau in the community against toxic levels of stress, providing an important protective factor and supporting whānau resilience during stressful times (Woodley, 2020c). The evaluations found that:

1. Reading to children helped to reduce household stress.

An analysis of Growing Up in New Zealand data showed that reading to children positively impacted child outcomes in whānau experiencing persistently high levels of stress (Woodley, 2017). The Storytime Foundation Lockdown Packs evaluation found that whānau under the management of Corrections were experiencing high levels of stress during the Covid-19 lockdowns. Many whānau were living in crowded households, experiencing food insecurity and were isolated from their usual sources of emotional support such as friends and family. Moreover, many whānau had limited resources. Reading to and playing with children appeared to help reduce stress during lockdown by giving whānau "things to do other than watching TV." The parents enjoyed reading to and playing with their tamariki (Woodley, 2020c).

2. Reading to children works best when it is fun

An OECD report (2002) found that reading for pleasure is a critically important indicator of a child's future success. It is an even more powerful factor in life achievement than socio-economic status. But the evidence suggests if it is not fun, it can become a vicious circle in which children who struggle to read, become less motivated to read, affecting their feelings about reading and creating a vicious circle where poor readers remain poor readers (OECD, 2002).

[1] For further background, including a literature review, see Woodley, A. (2020) Storytime lockdown care pack evaluation 2020.

A key finding from the evaluation was that the packs needed to be framed as "care" packs, and fun rather than educational. Many whānau said they found home schooling and homework to be a major source of household stress during the lockdown periods. The educational packs whānau received were seen as school work rather than enjoyable, and undertaking the activities often lead to conflict. Although the Storytime packs contained similar material to the educational packs, whānau found the Storytime packs to be fun and said they helped to relieve stress (Woodley, 2020c).

3. Working in a more compassionate and relational way can achieve better outcomes for children and their families

Emerging evidence suggests that a more compassionate and relational response to addressing stressors such as family violence can make a difference to wellbeing and outcomes. There are examples of how this can work. In 2015, Woodley, for example, evaluated a project where the Police, Corrections, and other agencies, in an effort to reduce family violence at Christmas time, delivered food hampers to fifty families with the highest and most severe family violence offending rates in the previous 12 months in the Manukau district. In addition to delivering hampers and organising fun days for whānau, police talked to the adults about their plans over Christmas, how they were going to resolve conflict at such a stressful time of the year, and asked them to contact them early if things were starting to escalate. While the family violence rates at Christmas peaked in Counties Manukau and New Zealand, there was a marked decrease in family violence incidents amongst the fifty whānau cohort over that period ($p<0.05$).

Importantly, the impact does not just lie in the food parcels, fun days, or in the case of Taonga mō ngā Tamariki and the Lockdown Care Packs, the books, although the value of these to families with few books and resources cannot be underestimated. The value appears to lie in the attempts by the Police and Corrections staff to develop supportive and caring relationships with whānau. Changing the nature of the relationship between those under the management of Corrections, whānau and staff from punitive to care-based responses was considered highly symbolic by the families, particularly for those who felt they did not receive a lot of empathy or compassion in their lives. Agency staff and those under the management of the Department of Corrections or involved in family harm incidents, along with their whānau found the initiative changed the nature of their relationships; it was deeply humanising. (Woodley, 2015).

> *"Police, families, and community organisations identified the same key benefits of the project. It built trust and strengthened relationships between and within families, organisations, and the Police. The project also supported families by providing practical support at a stressful time of year." (Woodley, 2015)*

While this evaluation does not seek to determine whether there has been an impact on the incidence of family violence amongst whānau provided with packs, it does explore whether it has had an impact on relationships between staff and whānau.

The evaluation

While this evaluation has collected evidence on impact, it has a strong focus on capturing the process so that Storytime can activate the project immediately, safely, and effectively, should there be future lockdowns, or should the project become "business as usual," as recommended.

The evaluation comprises the collection of administrative data, in depth interviews with nine staff from Corrections, the Police, and Family Harm teams, Ngati Hine Health Trust and a Kaiako from Storytime. In addition, emailed feedback in response to the interview questions was received from staff at South Seas Healthcare.[2]

Thirty-nine whānau were also interviewed. Where the whānau referral was received from a Probation Officer, and if the whānau agreed, a phone call was made to gain feedback on the pack, in particular, what they liked, what could be changed and the response from their tamariki. Corrections and Police staff involved in the Family Harm teams were asked to pass on comments from whānau, including tamariki. These comments have also been collated, themed, and included in the evaluation.

Limitations

It is noted that compared with earlier evaluations, this evaluation was difficult to undertake. After 107 days in lockdown and being close to Christmas, staff and whānau interviewed acknowledged they had limited bandwidth to participate in interviews. There was a low response to emails, texts, and phone messages, particularly from frontline distribution staff.

[2] While the packs distribtuted to the Ngati Hine Health Trust and South Seas Health were not funded by MOE, but by Cognition Education Trust, the insights from staff have been included in the project as they have helped to inform the evaluation.

Process

This section provides an overview of the process. A more detailed guide is appended (Appendix One).

Contract

Within ten days of New Zealand going into lockdown the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with Corrections, had secured an agreement and funding for the Storytime Lockdown Care Packs Project 2021 project to proceed. This enabled the packs to start being distributed to whānau within two weeks of going into lockdown.

Referral process

Corrections staff and the Police were contacted, and a number of champions identified. They were asked to let their staff know about the initiative and encouraged to make referrals or distribute the packs.

At Corrections, a standard referral process was put in place, where the referrer contacted the whānau, sought permission for a pack to be sent out, found out the ages and home languages of the children, and asked whether the whānau would give permission for a follow up call. Importantly, whānau were assured they would receive packs whether they agreed to a follow-up call or not. The referrals for each site could then be collated and the template sent to those packing the books at the end of each day so the packs could be sent out the following day.

Bulk resources

Agencies providing packs to whānau involved in family harm incidents were given bulk resources so staff could collate the packs themselves. The Police, for example, were provided with a range of generic packs with activities, games, and resources, along with a pile of books suitable for a range of ages, and a bag of extra resources such as bubbles and games for older children. This allowed the police officer delivering the pack to grab a pre-made pack and choose a couple of books matched to the whānau they were giving them to.

Ordering the resources

Storytime staff considered the resources tamariki and their whānau might enjoy in lockdown. The previous evaluation had found that books in home and heart languages and activities such as bubbles and outdoor chalk were particularly popular. As tastes and trends change over time, feedback from whānau was sought in follow-up calls to ensure the books and resources provided were being enjoyed.

Content of the care packs

The care packs were customised to the age, ethnicity, and home language of the children. They contained a combination of:

- Books, where available in home and heart languages
- Games such as snakes and ladders, playing cards
- Dice or counters with a safety card
- Exercise books or notebooks
- Felts or coloured pencils, HB pencils
- Outside chalk, playdough and bubbles
- Sticker packs
- Activity books

The packs also contained a sheet on reducing stress (attached), SKIP Parenting pamphlets, and 500 SKIP Tiny Adventures Activity Packs from the Ministry of Social Development which contained around eighty ideas of low cost, fun activities for young children

Costs

Each care pack costs $55 + GST. Additional funding was needed for Māori, dual language and Pasifika language books and resources as these tend to be more expensive.

Collating the care packs

The packs were collated and sent out in tracked courier bags. A tracking system was used to make sure the books had been delivered and the date was marked on the spreadsheet. If the pack was not delivered within 7 days, the courier was contacted.

Follow-up

Each family, who had given permission to be contacted after delivery, were called to see if they had received a pack and were asked for feedback e.g.: *"we are just giving you a quick call to make sure you received the pack. We want to make sure the packs are the best they can be - how did the books go for the ages of your children, was there anything they enjoyed, was there anything they would have preferred to see in the pack?"*

Outcomes

A total of 500 packs were funded and allocated to whānau as follows:

- 205 packs to those involved in family harm incidents – Northland (80), South Auckland (100) Rotorua (25)
- 295 packs via Probation Officers to those under the management of Corrections – Northland (87) South Auckland (168) Waitemata (11) Auckland Metro (4) Rotorua (25).

Of the 180 packs to South Auckland, whānau in transitional accomodation and isolating in Managed Isolation and Quarrantine (MIQ) were prioritised as COVID case numbers grew. One whānau with multiple children in MIQ received a large box of resources, books, and games. There were also large families with many children isolating at home who were sent generous packs.

Although the initiative did not originally include the Waitematā or Auckland Metro areas, fifteen packs were provided in response to referrals from these sites.[3]

Findings

Process

The books and resources

The feedback on the books and resources has been positive. Whānau appreciated the quality of the books and resources they received.

It is noted that te ao Māori books were popular, particularly those about Matariki, stories of legends and birds. Storytime is now working with National Library to better understand the range of books available so that the choice of books can be extended. Bilingual books tend to be chosen before books completely in Te Reo, particularly for whānau where the tamariki are more fluent than their parents. The bilingual books provide a learning opportunity for the entire whānau.

"The kids were rapt. Honestly, the pack is 100% on. They loved the books, stickers, bubbles and then went outside to play with the chalk."

[3] It is noted that additional funding enable resources to be provided to children in Whakatane, Starship and Middlemore hospitals, some hospitalised and others there because their parents had contracted COVID.

Ordering the resources

Sourcing resources was more difficult than during the 2020 lockdown due to produce shortages and shipping delays. This necessitated using many small, non-mainstream suppliers.

There is a balance between ordering resources in bulk to take advantage of discounts and ordering sufficient quantities to make packs up, but not ordering books and resources *too far* in advance. Staff need to be able to respond to the feedback from tamariki and their whānau on the contents of the packs.

Space

The resources take up considerable space. It helped to have:

- A drop off area for contactless delivery in Alert Levels 3 and 4
- An area for storing the resources as they arrived and throughout the packing process - approximately 6-8 weeks
- Tables or trestles to lay out the resources ready to pack
- A small area to repack bulk items such as chalk and counters into smaller packs
- An area to store the parcels ready for the courier to collect with contactless deliveries (separating this area from the drop off helped to keep those delivering and picking up parcels separate from each other and safe).

Collating the care packs

It took around 90 minutes to collate and get ten packs ready for the courier (around 45 minutes each for two people).

A template with the ages and home languages of the child to:

- Choose a book suitable to the age and home language of the child
- Choose a range of age-appropriate resources
- Place the books and resources in the courier envelopes and address them.

One person collated the contents of the care pack and a second person put the contents into the envelopes. Having a second person was helpful in that they were able to provide an additional pair of eyes on the appropriateness and even-handedness of each of the packs.

Bulk packs

Initially the resources sent to staff who had attended family harm incidents and face to face Corrections visits were sent out in bulk. Staff were provided with generic packs along with a selection of books and extra activities so staff could customise the contents to the need and interests of the whānau. As the initiative progressed, the approach was adapted. Rather than providing a solution, it had added another task to the day of those distributing the packs. So that those providing the packs did not have to make decisions on content or take the time to collate them, Storytime moved to providing complete packs with books for 0–3 year-olds, 4–7 year-old and 8–11 year-olds. This meant staff could pick up the packs and go.

By sending the fully completed packs out to offices in bulk, courier costs were significantly reduced which meant more resources could be provided in each pack. I recommend this process for the future.

Follow-up

This feedback call to whānau was an invaluable part of the project as it provided Storytime with an opportunity to learn and adapt their approach, in real time, and improve the likelihood they were providing books, resources and activities that interested and matched the ages of the children.

Note: Feedback was not sought from families receiving the family harm packs as the Police delivering the packs are stretched. Only general feedback was asked so as not to add to their stress levels.

Evaluation

The evaluations of the Storytime initiatives, including the evaluation of the lockdown care packs, have provided consistent evidence on the efficacy of the programme. It is recommended that unless there are further adaptations to the programme, that any future evaluations are kept to a minimum.



Outcomes

Overall, both staff and whānau agree the project has made a difference to whānau wellbeing during lockdown. As one dad said:

> *"I tautoko the kaupapa."*

The packs help to reduce stress at a stressful time

Whānau reported facing increased stress, including material hardship and loss of emotional supports during the Covid-19 lockdowns. The stress was compounded by having to home school their tamariki.

Staff distributing the packs said many whānau do not have access to the books and resources other families have. Food security was a significant issue for whānau. With libraries, schools and school libraries closed whānau had limited access to books and activities and few were able to purchase these. Probation Officers pointed out the difficulty for those on home detention while in lockdown.

> *"They can't even leave the house to go get the kids things. It's had an even bigger impact for my guys because being stuck at home 24/7 and to get this arrive when they couldn't go out and get it for them either was huge."*

Whānau commented that there was little for their tamariki to do and many of the children spent time watching TV all day. While the education packs were a source of stress, the Storytime packs provided whānau with books and activities that they found fun

> *"The Storytimes pack is more fun … than the school stuff."*

Matching the books and resources to the ages and home languages of the children, according to whānau, enhanced their enjoyment of the activities. Some whānau would like to see more reading and discovery material in the pack. Tamariki commented that the packs were *"fun", "great"* and *"awesome".*

The Probation Officers believe having the packs to help entertain the children during lockdown was *"huge for our families."*

"The lockdown care packs really helped a lot of whānau."
Probation Officer

Whānau are enjoying reading to their tamariki and playing with them

Many of the whānau who had received books said they had enjoyed reading them to their children. In some cases, older children were also reading the books to their siblings.

> *"The older daughter enjoys reading Rapunzel to her four-year-old sister."*

One dad, who had also attended Taonga mō ngā Tamariki, believed the initiatives had helped him connect with his tamariki. *"It has allowed me to engage with my children and have a closer relationship with them."* The boys "love" their dad reading to them.

Another parent told their Probation Officer: *"I've been able to read to my kids which I've never done before."*

Many of the parents commented that the children were not on their devices as much.

> *"She loves the pack. She's 4 and only wants to be on her phone all day. But she didn't want to be on her screen today. I was amazed. She loved the playing cards and the felts. She was right into the books and when she went to sleep at 9.30pm she was reading a book".*
>
> *"I would rather see my children doing these kind of activities than watching tv or looking at an iPhone or iPad."*

The packs provide staff with an opportunity to check in when things are calmer and make sure the whānau, and the children in particular, are okay.

It provides an opportunity to strengthen relationships between staff and whānau

The feedback from Corrections staff and the police has been overwhelmingly positive. Interviewees say that it has helped to improve relationships with the whānau they work with. Family Harm staff note that whānau, and tamariki, often see them at the time of a crisis

Those involved in family harm say the packs are helping to open doors, which in turn support their prevention efforts.

> *""Ultimately for the Police, most of the time when we're dealing with families, we're dealing with them in crisis. So, we don't have a very good rapport a lot of the time with the victims and their children because we're seen as the bad guys, going in there and taking dad away and that sort of thing. Having something to go in with at a later time, pretty much bearing gifts, it changes the relationship with our victims and with our children in that situation. So, we're seen in quite a different light, and it gives us a positive contact with our families."* **Police**

> *"It enables the police to get in and build that rapport with the families that would sometimes be quite stand-offish with police or anything to do with them. It's allowed them inside the homes and started to build that positive relationship."*

Family Harm staff believe the packs can also help build rapport with children. Children are often wary or frightened of the police officers who they have seen take their dad away.

> *"The packs help to show we are there for them, we are trying to help and they can contact us in the future as we are there to help them."*

They may also provide a distraction during a time when children may be feeling stressed, upset, and traumatised.

> *"If we can get these delivered to those kids who have just witnessed and been traumatised by family violence, it just takes their focus off what they're thinking about or ruminating on to 'oh wow.' It is something positive in their day."*

Probation Officers too believe it is helping to change the nature of their relationships with whānau. Those interviewed say they have noticed that the parents who received the packs have shown them better respect.

> *"With the probation officers, when they've been reporting over the phone and stuff, 'oh hey, you've got three tamariki there, do you think they would like Storytime pack?' and just seeing the positivity of linking in with those families and the families have really taken that as 'we're wanting to do something positive for them."*

As one interviewee pointed out many of the families they are attending do not normally contact, nor want to make contact, with Police or Corrections staff.

> *"People don't usually like Corrections turning up on their doorstep, so it was great to be able to visit for a positive reason and to explain that their Probation Officer had put their name forward."*

After receiving the first pack, some of their families contacted police and Corrections to ask if there are any extra packs as they have enjoyed them. Additional packs were provided.

> *"We're dealing with families that are generally quite hesitant to become involved in anything. We've had people requesting second packs which is an indication that the kids love them."*

Delivering care packs to whānau provides another opportunity to check in with whānau experiencing hardship, identify those who might need further support and link them with agencies who could provide the support they needed.

Critical success factors

High trust relationships between the partners

The high trust and well-established relationship between Storytime, MOE and Corrections meant that the partners were able to plan, agree on parameters and contract the initiative within days of New Zealand going into lockdown. This was, perhaps, the most critical success factor as it enabled MOE to contract Storytime almost immediately, for Storytime to access funding and begin ordering resources, and to work with Corrections to determine where the need was the greatest and respond to areas of need as it emerged. "We were trusted to get on with it."

Flexibility

Lockdown is a time in which qualities such as adaptability, flexibility and responsiveness are urgently needed. Access to resources, the delivery of resources, collecting the packs for delivery are all difficult under lockdown conditions. It required a creative, problem-solving approach, the ability to reach out for help, and make decisions fast.

> *"Much needed resources were stuck at a depot and unable to be delivered, for example, the police offered to deliver them as they were heading that way."*

It was helpful to have a funding contract which allowed for a flexible approach. Under the contract "100 packs were to be distributed where the need was greatest, in recognition of the importance of allowing for agile decision making in response to opportunity." Having this flexibility enabled Storytime to respond to need and deliver packs to those in MIQ who had few or no resources without having to renegotiate the terms.

Fun

The intention of the packs is important. To reduce rather than add to whānau stress, the focus of the lockdown care packs needs to be about having fun together. Any books, games, or activities, while educational, need to have fun at their heart.

> *" Kids loved the pack and found the bubbles exciting. They loved the books".*

The selection of books and resources

The selection of books and resources are critical to the success of the project. The follow-up calls help ensure the resources selected are a good fit and can be adapted if they are not.

There are some resources, however, that remain popular. Books in the home language of

whānau are consistently enjoyed. Bilingual books tend to be chosen before books completely in Te Reo, as some parents feel uncomfortable when their children know more than them. The bilingual books also provide such a learning opportunity for the entire whānau. Books centred around Matariki are often chosen first, with stories of legends and birds also very popular.

Champions help to keep the initiative on the radar of staff

The success of the project is dependent on people sending through referrals. Identifying champions for each geographical area or organisation helped the referral process to run smoothly. In earlier lockdowns the champions in each organisation were motivated to get the packs out to as many whānau as possible. They were able to collect referrals and remind frontline staff to keep the referrals coming. Both Corrections staff and the Police were busy over lockdown. With competing priorities and limited bandwidth, the initiative often dropped down the list. Storytime were able to remind the champions, who in turn reminded staff to make referrals.

The project unleashes generosity

Good relationships with people and organisations went a long way to unleashing helpfulness and generosity. People wanted to help and often gave extra resources and put in extra effort when they found out what the initiative was about. A book distributor, for example, added stickers to the book order. Similarly, a courier driver went out of his way during lockdown to pick up the packs each day.

Practicalities

Time and space intensive

Undertaking this initiative is time intensive, requires space and can be stressful. Staff undertaking the packing needed to have time, the space for resources, the flexibility to be able to work intensively when required, and, if possible, someone in their bubble who could also be paid to help collate and organise the packs. Completing the work within one bubble helped staff to adhere to the lockdown rules more easily.

Budget

It is critical to be able to run and keep track of the budget to ensure costs are kept in check. Keeping track of costs ensures that all tamariki and whānau get access to books, activities, and resources at a stressful time. It is important to note that those packing the packs need to be able to work quickly and efficiently if wage costs are to stay within budget.

Next steps

The evidence of outcomes, both in the literature and in the series of evaluations of the Storytime initiatives, shows that the initiatives are helping to improve the wellbeing of tamariki and whānau, supporting attachment, decreasing stress at stressful times, and growing shared reading and reading for pleasure. Providing books is also addressing the inequitable access to books in New Zealand, which has been linked to educational outcomes.

At a minimum, those interviewed would like to see the programme offered during future lockdowns. They noted the Auckland lockdown extended beyond the programme dates and, given the need of whānau and the `gruelling' nature of the lockdown, they would like to see the programme extended for the full lockdown period.

> *"I think it's a fantastic initiative and it has so many benefits which I've talked about: Breaking down barriers, building relationships, getting into homes where sometimes police would find it much more difficult. Working harmoniously with those whānau."*

Those interviewed would like to see the programme become part of business as usual and the packs offered to those under the management of Community Corrections and tamariki involved in family harm incidents.



Recommendations

It is recommended:

- That funding is secured so that the initiative can be offered should there be future lockdowns and implemented without delay.
- That between 500 and 1000 packs are kept on hand and ready to go in case of future lockdowns or emergencies. These can be used and be replaced by Storytime as part of their business as usual, however it means that there will always be packs ready to go. It takes time to get the resources together. There are often courier delays and product shortages. Some purchases, for example, took over a week to arrive. Having a stock of packs would allow the care packs to be delivered to whānau and out to officers immediately.
- That the range of books in home and heart languages is extended, and both te reo Māori and dual language books are offered to whānau. Again, it is noted that having packs ready to go would enable a larger range of books to be made available to whānau as the suppliers of Te Reo books were closed during lockdown.
- Whānau packs are premade and include books for tamariki aged 0-3, 4-7, and 8-11 years old, and games for all age groups. This means that they are ready to be couriered in bulk to offices, saving on courier charges, and stressed and busy staff do not have to spend time collating packs.
- That the initiative is extended to Community Corrections in the Northern Region and becomes part of Corrections business as usual. This could be supported by sending boxes of bulk packs to regions on a quarterly basis. It is recommended that this is then extended to other regions.
- That the initiative is extended to whānau involved in family harm incidents in the Northern Region with a view to extending it nationally. This could be implemented by sending boxes of bulk packs to regions on a quarterly basis.
- That training for frontline staff on why the initiative is being implemented so that staff understand the impact books and storytelling can have on attachment, wellbeing, reducing stress, and longer term educational and wellbeing outcomes and impacts.
- That as the process has been refined, any future evaluations focus on new or significant variations to the initiatives or track the longer-term impact and outcomes of the initiatives. Frontline staff and whānau interviewed for the evaluation, while generous with their comments and insights, said they were exhausted and the engagement with the evaluation was low compared with earlier evaluations.

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Appendix One

Details of the process

Contract

A funding contract with the parameters of the project was put in place, including the number of packs to be delivered, who would receive the packs and in which geographic areas. The contract contained a clause allowing the packs to go where most needed, to allow a flexible response to need.

Referral process

Corrections staff and the Police were contacted, and a number of champions identified. They were asked to let their staff know about the initiative and encouraged to make referrals or distribute the packs.

At Corrections, a standard referral process was put in place, where the referrer contacted the whānau, sought permission for a pack to be sent out, found out the ages and home languages of the children, and asked whether the whānau would give permission for a follow up call. Importantly, whānau were assured they would receive packs whether they agreed to a follow-up call or not. The referrals for each site could then be collated and the template sent to those packing the books at the end of each day so the packs could be sent out the following day.

Bulk resources

Agencies providing packs to whānau involved in family harm incidents were given bulk resources so staff could collate the packs themselves. The Police, for example, were provided with a range of generic packs with activities, games, and resources, along with a pile of books suitable for a range of ages, and a bag of extra resources such as bubbles and games for older children. This allowed the police officer delivering the pack to grab a pre-made pack and choose a couple of books matched to the whānau they were giving them to.

Ordering the resources

Storytime staff considered the resources tamariki and their whānau might enjoy in lockdown. The previous evaluation had found that books in home and heart languages and activities such as bubbles and outdoor chalk were particularly popular. As tastes and trends change over time, feedback from whānau was sought in follow-up calls to ensure the books and resources provided were being enjoyed.

In general:

- The books and resources were sourced from online stores such as USG books, Warehouse Stationery, Creative Classrooms plus small discount stores etc.
- The books ordered were suitable for a range of ages, in te reo Māori, dual and other languages where available
- Small plastic bags were ordered from the Warehouse 155mm by 160mm (14 packs of fifty are approx. $111.00) These were used to divide up bulk packs of chalk, counters etc. Ideally, small, paper-based bags would have been sourced rather than single use plastic bags, but these were unavailable at the time.
- Large plastic bags were ordered for the Family Harm packs (approx. 420mm x 300 mm).

Content of the care packs

The care packs were customised to the age, ethnicity, and home language of the children. They contained a combination of:

- Books, where available in home and heart languages
- Games such as snakes and ladders, playing cards
- Dice or counters with a safety card
- Exercise books or notebooks
- Felts or coloured pencils, HB pencils
- Outside chalk, playdough and bubbles
- Sticker packs
- Activity books

The packs also contained a sheet on reducing stress (attached), SKIP Parenting pamphlets, and 500 Tiny Adventures Activity Packs which contained around eighty ideas of low cost, fun activities for young children

Costs

Each care packs cost $55 + GST each. Additional funding was needed for Māori, dual language and Pasifika language books and resources as these tend to be more expensive.

The funding per pack comprised:

- Resources – around $32 per pack (add $10+ extra for resources in te reo Māori and other languages)
- Staff hours $8 per pack sorting resources, packing the packs @$25 per hour

- Courier costs - averaged $10 per tracked pack
- Follow up - $2 for phone calls to check whānau received the pack and to seek feedback
- $3 administration - including project management, ordering resources, tracking the budget etc.

Collating the care packs

It took around 90 minutes to collate and get ten packs ready for the courier (around 45 minutes each for two people).

A template with the ages and home languages of the child to:

- Choose a book suitable to the age and home language of the child
- Choose a range of age-appropriate resources
- Place the books and resources in the courier envelopes and address them.

One person collated the contents of the care pack and a second person put the contents into the envelopes. A second person helped to provide an additional pair of eyes on the appropriateness and even-handedness of each of the packs.

Tracked courier bags

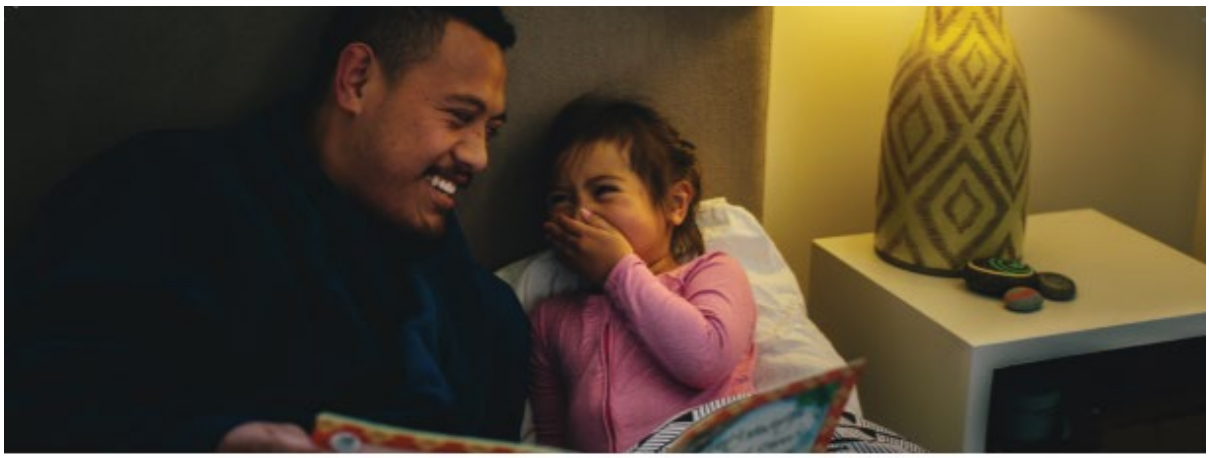
The tracked courier bags were ordered 100 at a time, in sizes 4 and 6. The larger bags were useful where there are a number of children in the family. It helped to arrange for the courier to collect the packs at the same time every day.

A tracking system was used to make sure the books had been delivered and the date was marked the date on the spreadsheet. If the pack was not delivered within 7 days the courier was contacted.

Follow-up

Each family who had given permission to contact them after delivery to check they had received a pack were asked for feedback e.g.: *"we are just giving you a quick call to make sure you received the pack. We want to make sure the packs are the best they can be - how did the books go for the ages of your children, was there anything they enjoyed, was there anything they would have preferred to see in the pack?"*

Appendix Two



Reading to your children can reduce their stress and yours

Children need to feel safe and cared for. When children are stressed they can feel unsafe, overwhelmed, and scared. If the stress is too great or goes on for too long it can become 'toxic'. It will begin to affect their wellbeing, learning and brain development.

So, how can we help children experiencing stress?

The most important thing we can do is to calm them down and help them feel safe. We can do this by:

- spending time with them
- reading to them
- telling them stories
- singing to them and,
- playing with them.

Even very young babies love to be read to. Reading to your children helps them to feel better and develop important life skills. When you read to your children with them on your lap, cuddling them, or sitting close to them, you feel close to each other. It calms them down and it can calm you down too.

Research also shows that the more often children are read to, the more likely they are to do better at school. This is not just in reading but in language, literacy, numeracy and comprehension. Reading to them every day can give them up to a year's head start at school.

Make storytime part of your kids' bedtime routine. When you are being driven crazy or your children are bored, tired, or acting up, pick up a book and read to them. In times of stress, spending time with your family reading to them, telling them stories and playing games is time well spent. The research shows the more the better. Every moment counts. So make time. The results will be lifelong. And the best part – it's not just good for you and your family, it's fun.

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