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**Parental decision making in relation to the  
use of Early Childhood Education services**

**Report to the Ministry of Education**

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**RESEARCH DIVISION**



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**Parental decision making in relation to the use of  
Early Childhood Education services**

**Final report**

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## **Executive Summary**

This report presents the results of a research study that examined parental decision making in relation to the use of Early Childhood Education services. The study involved qualitative interviews with 30 parents with a preschool aged child. This was followed by a questionnaire survey of parents of preschool aged children from throughout New Zealand. This survey explored attitudes to children's learning outside the home, reasons for using Early Childhood Education services, factors important in deciding whether or not to use Early Childhood Education services and factors important in choosing between different types of service. Parents were also asked about their use of services and how they might judge the quality of services.

Parents' decisions to use Early Childhood Education services depend on the perceived need for some educational experience for children outside the home. For those families where the mother is in paid employment the need for childcare while working is also an important influence on the use of services. However, even if they have a need for Early Childhood Education services parents will only use them if services of sufficient quality are available. For lower income families the cost of the service and the availability of subsidies are important factors and for Māori children the availability of culturally appropriate services is important.

Having decided to use Early Childhood Education services parents must then decide which type of service to use. Once again the quality of different services is the most important factor taken into consideration by parents when choosing a service. Finding a service that matches their child's age, needs and abilities is also very important to parents and most parents prefer a service that has an educational focus. For some parents, the philosophy of the provider is important, but other parents do not consider this an important consideration. Practical considerations, such as opening hours, flexible use and service location, are also important, particularly for those who are working.

These results would suggest that in order to increase participation in early childhood education it is important to have a range of high quality services available to parents. Parents look to match the service to their child's age, abilities and needs and so it is important that there are a range of services that might fit their children's needs. While some parents will be willing, and have the ability, to pay for services, others need low cost services and subsidies. In particular low income families, who seem to place greater importance on the educational element of early childhood education, will be more likely to use low cost, subsidised, services.

This study illustrates the multifaceted nature of parental decision making in relation to the use of Early Childhood Education services. Selecting childcare involves a complex interaction between family needs,

preferences, knowledge and expectations, made within a specific social and policy context. Choices also occur at different levels (e.g. whether or not to use Early Childhood Education services and which type of service to use) and under different constraints. This study has identified many of these needs, preferences and constraints, but has also raised questions for further research.



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## Introduction

The Ministry of Education has developed a strategic plan for Early Childhood Education (ECE). The plan, *Pathways to the future-Ngā Huarahi Arataki*, aims to increase participation in quality Early Childhood Education. A wide range of policies are being implemented to achieve the goals of the strategic plan and the Government has made a significant investment in these strategies.

Increasing participation in quality ECE is one of the key strategic goals in this plan. The logic model that has been developed by the Ministry (Ministry of Education, 2004) illustrates that in order to achieve this, parents must value ECE. However, there is a relative lack of knowledge about why parents do, or do not, choose ECE, and what the key factors are in arriving at that decision. As Raden and McCabe (2004) concluded, in a recent review of early childhood education research, “few research projects have addressed the basic questions: What do parents know about the options available to them? And what factors influence their decision-making?” (p.32). This research project aims to better understand parental decision-making regarding early childhood education, in the broader context of the family. Having a better understanding of this parental decision-making process will assist the Ministry to implement their strategic plan, and to improve participation in ECE.

This report begins with a review of statistics on the use of Early Childhood Education services in New Zealand. Previous research on parents’ decision-making regarding the use of ECE services is then briefly reviewed. The main research questions are then presented and the research methodology chosen to address these questions is discussed. This mixed methodology involves both qualitative interviews and a quantitative survey, and the details of these two phases of the research are given next.

The main body of the report presents the results of both the survey and the interviews. In some sections the main data is drawn from the qualitative interviews, while in others the qualitative information is used to illustrate the survey findings. Where possible, the qualitative data is used to help understand and interpret the quantitative findings. The final chapter is a general discussion of the results and a consideration of areas for future research.



## Use of Early Childhood Education services in New Zealand

Early Childhood Education services can be broadly categorised into a number of different types of service. Each service varies in terms of the number of hours children attend, the qualifications of staff, the nature of the programme offered, the cost, and the degree to which it is community/parent run or run as a private business. Appendix 1 provides details of the main types of service offered in New Zealand, and how they differ from one another.

Table 1 presents data on enrolments in each of the main types of service for 2005. Almost half the enrolments in ECE in New Zealand are at Education and Care centres. A quarter of the enrolments were in Kindergartens and playgroups are attended by ten percent of enrolled children. Playcentre, Te Kohanga Reo, homebased services and correspondence school enrolments are relatively low in comparison to the other services.

**Table 1 Enrolments in early childhood education by type of service, 2005**

Type of service	Number	Percent
Education and Care centres	83,889	46
Kindergartens	44,920	25
Playgroups	18,561	10
Playcentres	15,059	8
Te Kohanga Reo	10,070	6
Homebased Services	9,770	5
Correspondence School <sup>+</sup>	813	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>183,082</b>	<b>100</b>

Source – MoE Participation in early childhood education

+ Includes Dual enrolments.

The type of service used tends to vary by the age of the child. Younger children, aged 0-2 years, are more likely to be using home based services, or playgroups and childcare centres. Older children, aged 3 to 5 years, tend to use Kindergarten. For example, the proportion of children aged 3 to 5 years of age attending various services is -

Kindergartens - 43%

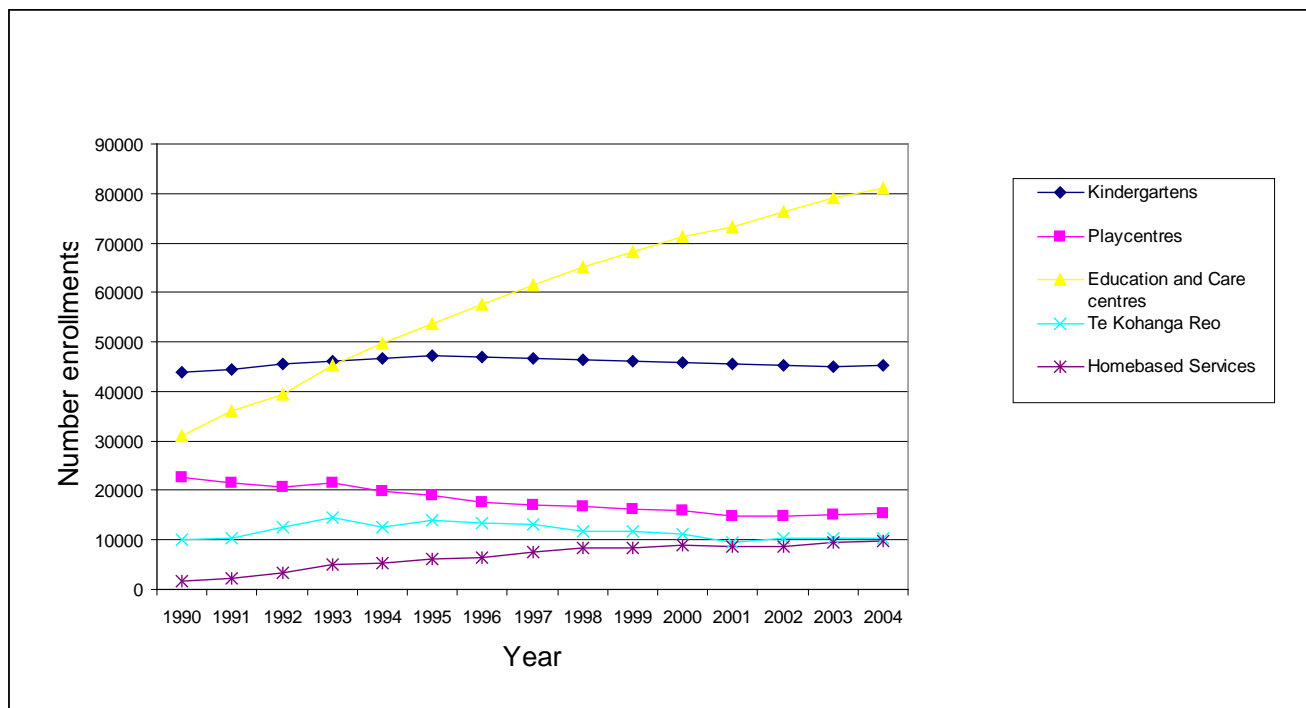
Education and childcare centre - 41%

Centre-based facilities (e.g. pre-schools, Kohanga Reo) - 13%

Home-based care - 3%

Figure 1 presents data on the change in enrolments over the past fifteen years. It shows a dramatic growth in enrolments in Education and Care Centres, with some growth also in the use of homebased services. Kindergarten enrolments have stayed the same over the period, and enrolments in Playcentres have dropped. These changes are generally seen as being driven by the growth in employment of mothers (to be reviewed in the next chapter).

**Figure 1** Change in enrolments by year for different types of licensed services



Source - Ministry of Education, Early Childhood Education Time-series

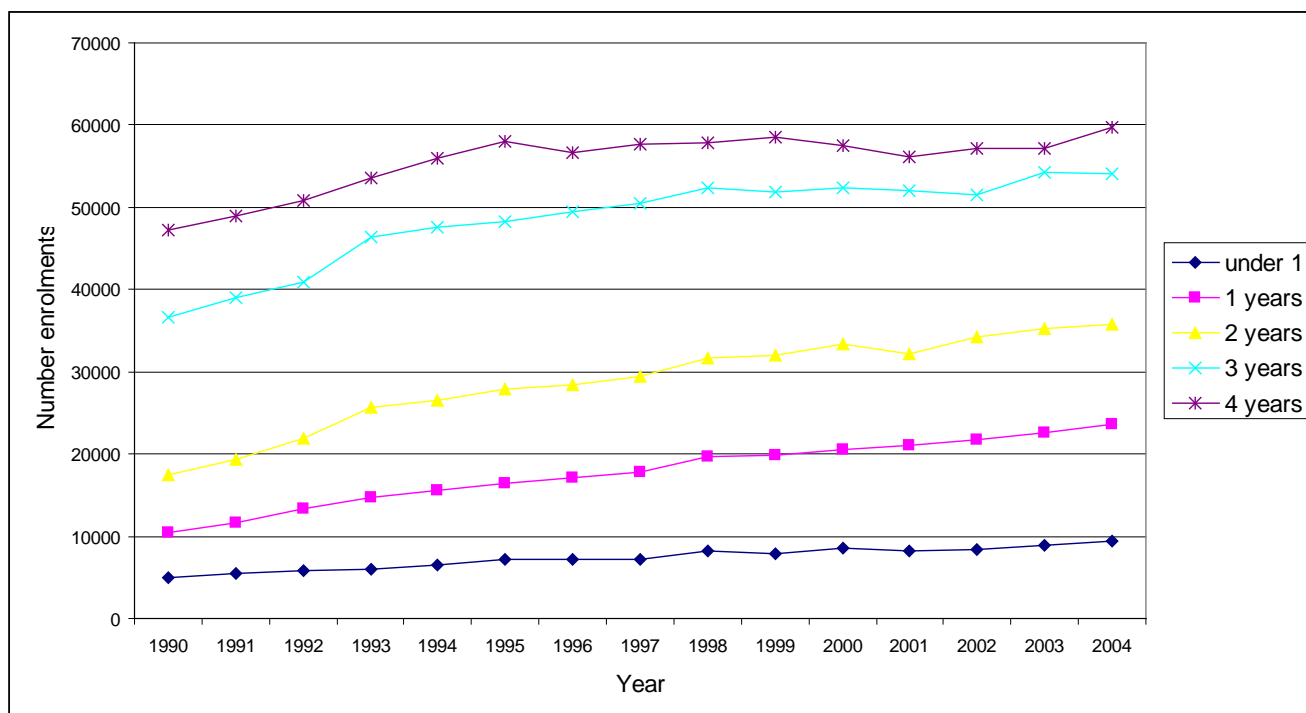
In total almost two-thirds (64%) of children under 5 are attending an early childhood education service. However, these usage rates vary greatly by the child's age, as is shown in Figure 2. Recent data (Ministry of Education, 2006, Participation in Early Childhood Education) provides an estimate of the rates of usage by child's age -

- under 1 year of age - 17%
- 1 years of age - 43%
- 2 years of age - 66%
- 3 years of age - 98%

Since some children may attend more than one service and will therefore be counted twice, these rates are likely to be overestimates.

Over time it appears from Figure 2 that while enrolments for children under 1 have increased only slightly from 1990 to 2004, enrolments for older children, especially 1, 2 and 3 year olds, have increased over this period.

**Figure 2** Change in enrolments by year for different ages of children



Source - Ministry of Education, Early Childhood Education Time-series

Overall, children spend an average of 18 hours a week in Early Childhood Education services. However, the length of time children spend in services varies by the type of ECE service. Table 2 presents the average weekly enrolled hours for children at different types of Early Childhood Services. Children spend the most time in Te Kohanga Reo and homebased care, followed by Education and Care centres. Less time is spent in Kindergartens on average and children are at Playcentre for a relatively short period of time. Over time children have been spending longer in most services (apart from Playcentre and Kohanga Reo), with the greatest growth in hours for homebased care and Education and Care centres.

**Table 2** Average weekly enrolled hours for children at licensed services (excluding the Correspondence School)

Type of Service	Year								
	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Kindergarten	10.4	10.4	10.7	10.7	11.2	11.5	11.8	12.0	12.5
Playcentre	4.3	4.4	4.4	4.3	4.4	4.2	4.3	4.3	4.4
Education and Care	15.0	15.8	15.9	16.4	16.6	17.7	18.3	18.6	19.5
Homebased Networks	15.5	15.2	15.7	16.1	16.9	18.6	18.1	19.7	21.3
Licensed Te Kohanga Reo*	28.5	28.5	28.5	28.5	28.5	28.5	28.5	28.5	28.5

\* Estimated. Most children are enrolled between 27-30 hours per week.

Source - Ministry of Education, Early Childhood Education Time-series

In summary, there are a number of different types of Early Childhood Education Service available in New Zealand. These differ on a number of different dimensions, offering parents a choice of service in terms of factors such as hours of service, cost, programme content and philosophy, and staff training and qualifications. Use of services increases with child's age, with most children aged 3 years and over attending an ECE service. The very high proportion of those over three who attend an ECE service has implications for the extent to which this study can examine non-use by these older children, since non-use is so rare. While it is possible to explore decisions to use or not use in younger children, the issue for older children is rather one of which service to use.

Over time patterns of ECE use have changed, with more use of Education and Care services and homebased services. Children in these services are also now spending longer on average attending the service each week. These trends in ECE use have been related to changes in mothers' employment, and this will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **Research on parental decision making**

This section briefly reviews research concerning parents' decision making with regard to the use of Early Childhood Education services, the type of service used and the assessment of service quality. The majority of the research, especially in the United States, has been concerned the use of childcare, both formal (e.g. childcare centres) and informal (e.g. family care). In the review we will try to make clear whether the focus has been on childcare or on services that have a more specific educational focus. However, since studies do not often go into detail about the 'educational' or developmental focus of the program, this is not always possible.

Childcare decisions have been conceptualised as the result of an interaction between families' needs, preferences, knowledge and expectations of childcare, along with the structural/policy childcare context (e.g. availability, subsidies) in which these families live (Huston, Chang and Gennetian, 2002; see also Foot et al., 2000). In this model family characteristics include childcare needs, resources to meet these needs, capacity for employment, and beliefs and preferences about the kind of care parents want for their children. The specific needs of the child should also be included in this list, although they have largely been overlooked in previous research. Childcare needs are likely to depend on family structure, including the age and number of children, whether the parent is parenting on their own, and presence of other adults in the household.

### **Choosing to use childcare**

The first decision parents must make is whether or not to use Early Childhood Education services for their child/ren. As has been outlined above, this will depend not only on parent's preferences and expectations, but also on families' needs. There are two main aspects of need; for childcare while parents are working, and for services to meet the child's social and cognitive developmental needs. These are, of course, not mutually exclusive.

The need for childcare while parents are working has often been conceptualised as a constraint on parent's choice of parental or non-parental childcare (Pungello and Kurtz-Costes, 2000). It is also a need that has become more important over recent decades, as rates of women's paid employment have increased. For example, New Zealand has seen a number of changes in family work patterns over the past few decades (Johnston, 2005; Callister, 2005). Firstly, there has been a major increase in women's participation in the paid workforce, although New Zealand women's participation in the workforce drops when they have young children (youngest child in the household is under 5). Secondly, most New Zealand men are employed full time, and some work long hours compared to other OECD countries (Johnston, 2005; Callister, 2005). Finally, considered jointly, the average hours worked by couples has also been increasing. These

employment patterns suggest that fathers are often not available to substitute for mothers' childcare when mothers enter the workforce. In these cases the availability and cost of alternative childcare, both formal and informal, becomes an important issue.

Johnston (2005) notes that it has been suggested that the relatively low rates of employment of New Zealand women with preschool aged children, compared to other OECD countries, is due to difficulties parents have in accessing satisfactory childcare. Lack of flexibility in work schedules and the cost of childcare have also been cited as possible factors in mothers' relatively low participation in paid work (Department of Labour, 1999a). A recent OECD report (*Babies and Bosses*, OECD, 2004) notes that the costs of childcare for a one year old are relatively high in New Zealand compared to other OECD countries. For those who are working there are further issues around the hours of operation of ECE services and the ability to use more than one type of service.

As has been shown in the previous chapter, children spend an average of 18 hours in formal ECE services, but full time working parents will require childcare for at least as long again. This may come from parents changing work schedules to enable parental shared care, or from informal care arrangements. For example, Han (2004) has identified non-standard work hours as being associated with more parental care (and less centre care). It appears that fathers are more involved in childcare if mothers work non-standard hours.

New Zealand data on parents' employment and their use of childcare comes from the 1998 NZ Childcare Survey<sup>1</sup> (Department of Labour, 1999a). The results of this national survey indicated that employed mothers of pre-school children were more likely to use formal, rather than informal, care arrangements. The survey also found that use of childcare increased with income. Use of childcare also depended on family type, with employed sole parent mothers more likely to use care arrangements (informal or formal), 'probably reflecting lack of assistance from partners for this group'. There was a tendency for children of sole mothers to be more likely to attend childcare centres, and to be cared for by unpaid relatives, compared to children with partnered mothers.

Interestingly, there were few differences in the use of kindergartens, Playcentres, and playgroups between the children with employed mothers and those with non-employed mothers. It is possible that mothers worked part time, or their partners arranged their work schedules, in order to enable them to use their preferred ECE service. The Childcare Survey also found that forty percent of the children attending a kindergarten and with an employed mother had more than one childcare arrangement. This compared to 26% of children attending pre-school and whose mother was also employed.

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<sup>1</sup> This survey covered both formal (e.g. ECE) and informal care, and the analysis often did not separate these out.



Callister (1999) also cites data from the childcare survey that indicated that the main reason parents gave for not using ECE services was the cost. This was a particularly important factor for ‘work poor’ couples (i.e. neither parent works). Other factors cited were a lack of suitable or flexible hours, and lack of informal care by someone known and trusted. Callister also notes that, surprisingly, lack of culturally appropriate services did not register as being an important factor in use of childcare. In addition to the childcare survey data Callister (1999) cites work by Clark and Garden (1995) on barriers to use of ECE for Māori. These barriers included those which were “attitudinal, informational, cultural, financial, locational, structural, constitutional, philosophical, personnel, capital, educational (legacy), affiliational and intergenerational/cyclical, in character” (Clark and Garden, 1995: p.4).

As outlined above, parents’ preferences and expectations also play a role in determining whether they will choose to have their child attend an ECE service, at what age the child will start, and what type of service the child will attend. Much previous research has lacked direct measures of parental preference, and so has relied on proxy measures, such as education and income. However these may be poor markers for preferences such as for parental vs. non-parental care, for educational experiences out of the home, or attitudes towards mothers working. The research that has attempted to measure preferences and expectations has tended to focus on choice of childcare types, and will be reviewed in the next section.

Most parents see it as desirable for their child to have some early childhood education experience (e.g. Foot, et al., 2000) and see the social and educational benefits for children of attending ECE services. For example, in Howe et al.’s (1996) study parents identified the main benefits for children of attendance at a pre-school service as; the opportunity for social interaction (74%), development of independence (22%), learning routine or discipline (19%), having a range of experiences (15%), and educational foundations (11%). As usage for 3 and 4 year olds is over 90% in New Zealand, the question is not so much whether or not to use Early Childhood Education services, but rather when the child should start using services. We have found no research that has discussed this issue with parents.

Finally, it appears from the above review that mothers’ employment is an important determinant of use of childcare. It is therefore likely that parental preference with regard to the desirability of mothers working is also an important influence on the use of childcare. Given the widely held view that mothers of preschool children should not be working (71% of New Zealanders believe this according to Evans and Kelley (2002)), and the fact that many mothers do work, there is potential for feelings of guilt in working mothers. In addition, although they may not personally believe mothers should stay at home, it is possible that immediate or extended family may do so, creating tensions. However, recent research indicates that tensions between beliefs regarding the desirability of staying at home with young children and mothers actual experiences adjust over time, so over time there is less of a disparity between desired and actual behaviour (Himmelweit and Sigala, 2004; Pungello and Kurtz-Costes, 2000). Mothers may work less and/or change their attitudes

towards mothers working. For example, a mother who believes she that mothers should stay at home to care for young children, but who must work to support her family, may come to modify her belief to allow that it is acceptable for mothers to work out of the home.

### **Choosing the ECE type**

When reviewing previous research, Peyton et al. (2001) noted that “there is not a lot of literature on the reasoning processes parents use when choosing care for their young children” (p.192). Most research has focused on demographic factors associated with particular care types. In general income has been found to be most important in influencing childcare choice, with lower income families more likely to use family care than centre care. In the US, younger children tend to be cared for most often by relatives, neighbours or friends (Shlay, Tran, Weinraub and Harmon, 2004). In the United States Fuller, Holloway and Liang (1996) also examined the factors associated with the selection of centre based care, compared to any other non-parental care. They found that parents were more likely to enrol their child in centre based care when the mother was more highly educated, when the child was older<sup>2</sup>, and when there was less (non-parental) social support available to the mother (e.g. a resident grandparent).

United States research also indicates that African-Americans are more likely to use centre-based care and Hispanic families to use care by relatives. This may indicate different cultural preferences for childcare, but it could also reflect constraints on choice based on family income, employment and availability (Shlay, Tran, Weinraub and Harmon, 2004).

According to Peyton et al. (2001) those studies that have asked parents about the factors influencing their choice of childcare sometimes report conflicting results<sup>3</sup>. Some studies found parents rated health and safety as the most important factors, while other studies found that the caregiver-child relationship was more important. On balance, child health and safety have been rated most important in the majority of studies, often followed by the quality of the caregiver’s relationship with the child (Fuqua and Labensohn, 1986, Cryer and Burchinal, 1997). For the most part, parents rate quality characteristics (e.g. provider relationship with the child, an educational emphasis, the physical environment, equipment, and staff qualifications and training) as being more important than practical ones (e.g. location, hours of operation, availability, cost). Shlay et al. (2004) report that parents cite quality as a major consideration, especially in relation to the characteristics of the provider and the physical features of the facility. In particular, parents emphasise the types and quality of interaction taking place between their child and the caregiver, and place less emphasis on structural features of care (e.g. licensing).

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<sup>2</sup> According to Shlay et al. (2004) this suggests that parents prefer the socialisation and educational experiences offered by centres for their pre-school children.

<sup>3</sup> This may reflect differences in the way the question is asked, e.g. open ended or a list of options.

Peyton et al. (2001) examined parent's ratings of the importance of three groups of factors – quality (of care providers, environment/equipment, or program), practical concerns (fees, hours, location and availability) and preference for a specific type of care. Fifty six percent of parents reported quality was the most important factor in selecting a care arrangement, 22% considered practical factors most important and 22% reported a preference for a particular type of care. Mothers selecting on the basis of quality had children in higher quality care and were more satisfied with the quality of the care (but most mother's rate quality as high, regardless of the type or characteristics of the care environment, so satisfaction is not a good measure of observed quality).

What parents consider important has also been found to be related to the type of childcare they use. Johansen, Leibowitz and Waite (1996) found that parents who valued developmental characteristics of the childcare (e.g. the type of programme offered, educational materials used, training of staff, and availability of recreational equipment) were more likely to choose centre-based care. On the other hand, parents for whom adult orientated factors (e.g. hours, location and cost of care) were important chose care based at home. Adult orientated factors were also found to be more important for mothers working longer hours.

While the above research is based in the United States with its specific social and policy context, there has been little research on parent's decision making in other policy contexts. Howe, Foot, Cheyne, Terras and Rattray (1996) conducted research on what Scottish parents wanted from 'pre-school education'. Parents were asked to rate the importance (1='essential' to 4='not important') of 24 factors they may have considered when choosing pre-school provision for their child. Five clear categories arose from a factor analysis of the 24 items, and these were, in order of importance -

- Care and safety (mean 1.2)
- Education (mean 1.7)
- Setting (mean 1.8)
- Convenience (mean 2.5)
- Attention to Parents needs (3.0)

The relative order of these factors did not vary by parent's employment, SES, whether or not they were sole parents, or urban/rural location, suggesting that parental preferences and priorities were broadly similar across all sections of the community.

The type of provision used was related to the above factors, indicating that parent's preferences and priorities were related to their patterns of usage. Although care and safety was of primary importance to parents using all types of service, the educational factor was more important for those using local authority nurseries and less important for those using playgroups. For those using private nurseries convenience and meeting

parents' needs were more important than for those using other care arrangements (Howe, Foot, Cheyne, Terras and Rattray, 1996).

Although the above research indicates that quality is of primary importance to parents, sometimes issues of quality must take second place to issues of practicality. Single parents tend to rank practical factors such as cost and location higher in importance than do married parents (Peyton et al., 2001). Parents who work longer hours are more influenced by practical issues, while higher income families are more concerned with quality. Furthermore, the availability, or unavailability, of certain types of programme sometimes limits choice. Shortages have been noted in services for younger children and for rural families, and in services that qualify for subsidies (Peyton et al., 2001). For example, Foot et al.s (2000) study found that rural parents were less likely to use nurseries in Scotland, even though they had a preference to do so. The authors suggested that this was due to 'a paucity of nursery provision in rural areas'.

Decision making in the real world involves tradeoffs among different childcare characteristics. It is difficult to assess how these tradeoffs occur with survey data. (Shlay, Tran, Weinraub and Harmon, 2004). Shlay et al. (2004) used vignettes to assess how a sample of African American parents made childcare choices and what tradeoffs they made between factors. They found that parents' definitions of quality mirrored professional standards. Parents placed higher value on training and qualifications, and the approach of the staff, than on licensing and accreditation. Given that these factors were present, they were not concerned whether the care was family, neighbour or centre based. The bottom line was for safety and sanitation, small class sizes and higher staff-child ratios.

A further issue regarding the selection of Early Childhood Education services is how parents find out about the various options available to them. There has been very little research on this issue, with the limited existing research finding that although parents said they were well prepared to make a choice, they thought that others were not well prepared (Fuqua and Labensohn, 1986). The authors suggest this apparent contradiction is due to parents unwillingness to admit to being unprepared. Parents indicated that they did not know where to look for childcare (this was a US study). The main sources of information identified by parents were; friends and neighbours (77%), newspapers and phone books (43%), consulting information and referral centres (11%), and checking with government/State departments (15%). Over eighty percent of the parents also reported having visited at least one childcare facility when making their selection of service. Many parents (67%) suggested that information and referral programs at the local level would have helped them. In particular they wanted more detailed information about local programs.

In Scotland, Foot et al., (2000) also asked parents how they had found out about services, with 52% reporting using family and friends for information, 22% using health professionals (e.g. health visitors, social workers or doctors), and others reported using leaflets, posters and directories. Unlike Fuqua and Labensohn (1986)

and some previous English research, relatively few parents (55%) reported visiting a pre-school service prior to making their choice.

Most of the above research has examined parent's preferences and expectations in relation to the use of one type of service. However there is evidence that some children use multiple services at the same time. For example, Foot, Howe, Cheyne, Terras and Rattray (2000) in their Scottish study reported that 17% of parents reported concurrently using two or more pre-school services. In Australia, Bowes et al., (2003a) specifically studied the use of multiple care arrangements for children under three. They found that 45% of the families in their sample were using two or more regular weekly childcare arrangements for their children (Bowes et al., 2003b). However this included both formal and informal (non parental) care arrangements. In addition to the main long day care or family day care setting, most parents used the child's father, grandparents or relatives, friends, babysitters or nannies as regular care providers. Grandparents played a major role for those children under one. Changes in care were generally parents' own choice, based on what they felt was best for their child, rather than being the result of factors beyond their control. Parents gave convenience as a main reason for multiple care arrangements, with affordability and availability of preferred care being cited less often.

The New Zealand Childcare survey provides some information on the use of both formal and informal childcare. While the majority of pre-school children with ECE and care arrangements had only one, 20% had more than one arrangement (Department of Labour, 1999b). Children from families with a sole parent or two parents in employment were more likely to have more than one arrangement (28%) than were children from other families (13%). While this data refers to both formal and informal care, parents may also use more than one formal service concurrently. For example, a child might attend a playgroup once a week and also attend Playcentre sessions. As well as concurrently using more than one arrangement, parents may change services for a variety of reasons. For example children may change from Playcentre to a centre based care as a mother increases her work hours.

An interesting aspect of Bowes et al.s (2003a) study is that they asked parents who had primary responsibility for choosing and organising childcare. Mothers were mostly or solely responsible for choosing childcare in 53% of the families, it was shared equally between parents in 46% of families, and fathers were mostly or solely responsible in only 1%. In terms of organising childcare mothers again had most responsibility (mother mostly 84%, equal 14%, father mostly 2%).

### **Assessing the quality of ECE**

We have seen above that quality is of primary importance to parents when choosing between different types of childcare. There has been relatively little research that has asked parents to identify quality factors without prompting. Much of the research has used survey instruments developed on the basis of expert

judgement as to quality indicators, such as the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale and the Infant and Toddler Environment Rating Scale (Harris, Clifford and Cryer, 2006). Parents are presented with lists of factors and are asked to rate their importance in judging quality. For example the above scales cover items concerning Space and Furnishings, Personal Care Routines, Language-Reasoning, Activities, Interaction, Programme Structure, and Parents and Staff relationships.

Research using these scales indicates that parents identify similar factors to practitioners and researchers when assessing quality, however it also finds that parents are not particularly good at assessing quality. Most parents report being satisfied with the quality of their child's service, even though independent 'experts' judge otherwise (e.g. Cryer, Tietze and Wessels, 2002). What might explain this finding?

Mothers are generally present in care settings only during drop-off and pick-up times (Peyton et al., 2001). They are not able to see the varying interactions caregivers have with the children and therefore do not accurately capture the nature of the caregiving environment. For example, Cryer, Tietze and Wessels (2002) found that parents overestimated the quality of their child's ECE programme compared to trained observers. However, Cryer and Burchinal (1997) report that agreement is closer when the items considered are more easily monitored. That is, many items on their quality measure would require parents to spend time observing the centre and staff-child interactions. They also found some evidence that the importance of quality items varied with the child's age, but relatively little variation by demographic characteristics (e.g. income and education).

### **Summary**

Previous research on parental decision making in relation to use of childcare and early childhood services falls into two broad camps. Firstly, research has used national survey data to explore the relationship between childcare use and selected demographic variables, such as employment, income and education. These find that mothers' employment and income are important factors in the use of childcare services. The second group of studies has examined more directly parents' needs and preferences in relation to their use of childcare. These later studies find that the quality of service or provider is of primary importance to parents, with practical considerations being less influential. However for some parents, such as sole parents, practical considerations play a more important role.

Parental decision making in relation to the use of Early Childhood Education services is perhaps best viewed as involving a complex interaction between family needs, preferences, knowledge and expectations. This decision making also occurs in a specific social and policy context, one that is likely to differ from country to country. This will have implications for the extent to which overseas research can be generalised to New Zealand.

Choices also occur at different levels (e.g. whether or not to use Early Childhood Education services and which type of service to use) and under different constraints. Some factors may be unique to each level, but others will be relevant to both levels. For example quality is potentially important in deciding whether or not to use ECE, but also in choosing which type of service to use.

The following report presents research on parental decision making at these different levels, and explores the extent to which parental needs, preferences, knowledge and expectations contributes to the use of Early Childhood Education services in New Zealand.





## Research questions

This is an exploratory study, with two main goals -

- To understand how and why parents make decisions about whether to send their children to Early Childhood Education. This includes examining what parents want and hope in making decisions about use of Early Childhood Education.
- To identify what type of parents make what type of decisions, and for what reasons.

This research aims, in particular, to better understand parental decision making in the broader context of the family (e.g. number and ages of children, sole or two parent family, family incomes and work patterns).

The following research questions guided our research.

What do primary caregivers understand ECE to be?	Factors to consider are various services, home-based, formal and informal.
How do primary caregivers <sup>4</sup> make decisions about whether to send their child to ECE or not?	Factors to consider may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Family context<sup>5</sup> (work, family members etc)</li> <li>- Community context</li> <li>- Barriers</li> <li>- Needs</li> <li>- Expectations</li> <li>- Beliefs &amp; values</li> </ul>
When primary caregivers choose ECE, i) What factors do they consider? How do they make those arrangements?	Factors to consider may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Experiences</li> <li>- Beliefs /aspirations</li> <li>- Geography</li> <li>- Availability</li> <li>- Quality</li> <li>- Staff</li> </ul>
ii) What arrangements do they make? (How do they use ECE?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Issues to consider:</li> <li>- Number of hours</li> <li>- Service type</li> </ul>
When primary caregivers do not choose ECE, i) What arrangements have they made instead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Issues to consider:</li> <li>- Parents / family members</li> <li>- Friends</li> </ul>
ii) Why have they made this choice?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Beliefs &amp; values</li> <li>- Practicalities</li> <li>- Provision of ECE</li> <li>- Experience</li> </ul>
Do different types of primary caregivers have different perceptions about ECE?	

<sup>4</sup> Primary caregiver in this instance would be the person who makes decisions about childcare provision.

<sup>5</sup> Family context could include: the number of children in the family, the ages of the children, the number of caregivers, family formation, the amount of financial support a family receives, and so on.



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## Methods

As this was an exploratory study in a relatively under-researched area it was conducted in two stages. Firstly, thirty in-depth qualitative interviews, discussing parental decision making in relation to Early Childhood Education, were conducted with a sample of parents of 0-4 year old children. Interviews were then thematically analysed in order to identify factors that contributed to the decision to use Early Childhood Education services and the choice of services. The factors identified by this analysis were then used to develop an ECE survey.

The second stage of the research involved researchers conducting a survey of a larger, more representative sample of parents of 0-4 year olds. The goal was to examine the decision making process for a larger, relatively diverse, sample of parents.

### Qualitative interviews

#### *Development of the interview*

A semi-structured qualitative interview was developed on the basis of prior research on ECE and parental decision-making (e.g. Cryer and Burchinal, 1997; Pungello and Krutz-Costes, 1998; Huston et al., 2002). The draft interview guide was piloted with five parents who were recruited through interviewer contacts. Comment was also sought from project advisors and Ministry of Education staff. As a result of piloting and feedback, minor changes were made to the interview guide.

In general, the interview with parents covered -

- their understanding of early childhood education,
- what early education options they have available,
- their experience of using ECE (e.g. with previous children),
- what they have/will take into account when making decisions about the use of ECE (e.g. staffing, hours, cost, work patterns),
- cultural factors influencing use, and choice, of ECE (e.g. influence of whanau or iwi),
- what the benefits are of ECE, for the child and the parents,
- what they would want ideally from ECE,
- factors they consider important in assessing the quality of ECE,
- reasons they did not use ECE and what alternative arrangements they made.

*Interviewer training*

Three interviewers were used for the qualitative interviews – the senior researcher, a Māori researcher and a Pacific researcher. Interviewers met with the senior researcher and discussed the research goals, the interview guide and the fieldwork procedures. Each interviewer observed the senior researcher conduct an interview, and then completed a training interview on their own.

*Recruiting*

An advertisement was designed by the research team and this was widely distributed in the following areas: Lower Hutt, Newtown, Naenae and Karori. Advertisements were placed on noticeboards in swimming pools, a hospital, libraries, community noticeboards, supermarket noticeboards, and copies were distributed at some Early Childhood Education Centres. In addition the research was covered by the 'Hutt News', which is circulated throughout Lower Hutt. The local Māori radio station included the research in its community notices section. Notices were also placed on a rural women's website and in an e-mail newsletter.

*Response to advertisements*

We had over 35 responses to our advertisements. Most found out about the research through reading the 'Hutt News', but quite a few also responded to notices in the community. We had further potential contacts identified from our existing informants, but because of concerns regarding biases and lack of diversity we were selective in following these up. For example, we were wary of having too many with a postgraduate education.

As we approached our target numbers we assessed the sample to check we had sufficient diversity. While we had good responses from sole parents and from a number of Māori parents, we were lacking in Pacific informants. We were also lacking rural informants, despite some advertising in the Wairarapa. We then focused on recruiting Māori, Pacific and rural informants. Our Pacific researcher used Pacific community contacts to recruit five Pacific families and our Māori researcher used personal contacts to recruit three additional Māori families.

In order to recruit rural families a notice was placed on a website for rural women. In addition a notice was included in a rural email newsletter. We had no responses to this initial notice. In response to this lack of response we used a contact to actively recruit families in a rural area of the South Island. We also requested that the advertisement be rerun in the e-mail newsletter. This brought further responses.

*Details of those interviewed*

Interviews were completed with 30 parents of children aged 0 to 4 years of age. In addition, five of the fifteen parents interviewed in a related study on the use of Out of School Services<sup>6</sup>, had preschool children and in these families there was also some discussion about their use of early childhood services.

Interviews took approximately 45 minutes, the length depending partly on the number of children and use of services. Most interviews took place in parents' homes (three interviews with rural families took place by phone and one took place at the senior researcher's office). Twenty eight involved mothers, one was with a couple and one with a father. None of those interviewed had difficulty with the interview and most seem to have enjoyed the opportunity to talk to the researchers. Twenty five interviews were recorded and transcribed, while in the remainder the interviewers took notes (e.g. the phone interviews).

Five of the families lived in a rural area. Most were in two-parent biological families (26 families), while two were sole mother families and two were stepfamilies. Four of the informants were of Māori descent, four were Pacific peoples and one was African, with the remainder being New Zealand European (21 informants). Children's ethnicity matched that of the informant, except in two cases where the child's father was Māori (i.e. there were 6 families with Māori children).

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<sup>6</sup> This study involved interviewing parents of children aged 5-13 years of age about decision making regarding the use of Out of School Services.

Table 3 presents basic demographic information on those interviewed and their families. Most of the mothers were in some form of employment, as were most of their partners. Only two fathers were not in current paid employment.

**Table 3 Demographic characteristics of those families interviewed – numbers (N=30)**

	<b>Mother</b>	<b>Father</b>
<b>Employment</b>		
Full time	8	25
Part time	9	1
Part time student	4	0
Home duties	9	1
Unemployed	0	1
<b>Education</b>		
No Qualifications	0	0
5 <sup>th</sup> form	4	4
6 <sup>th</sup> form	3	8
Higher school	4	1
Vocational	6	5
Degree	13	10
<b>Household income</b>		
	<b>Households</b>	
under \$14,000	1	
\$14-20,000	1	
\$20-25,000	1	
\$40-51,000	7	
\$51-62,000	8	
\$62-76,000	8	
\$76-101,099	2	
\$101,000 plus	2	

A relatively high number of the mothers had a university degree. There are a number of possible explanations for this – these mothers may be more interested in volunteering for research and/or the topic may be of more salience to them. Despite these higher levels of education, discussed above, household incomes were spread over a range, with relatively few on high incomes.

Table 4 shows the use of Early Childhood Education services by those in the sample. Most were using kindergarten, or a childcare centre, with smaller numbers using Playcentre or a playgroup. Four families were not currently using Early Childhood Education services.

**Table 4** Type of Early Childhood Education Centre used – numbers (n=30)

<b>ECE Type</b>	<b>Total</b>
Kindergarten	12
Childcare centre (e.g. community, university, private)	8
Playcentre	4
Playgroup	2
Non ECE	4

### **Survey of parents and caregivers**

#### *Survey methods*

The aim of this part of the study was to estimate the frequency with which certain factors influenced decisions regarding the use of Early Childhood Services. This enabled the researchers to establish the prevalence and relative importance of the issues identified in the qualitative interviews, and examine whether the concerns of parents differ in terms of characteristics such as family type and work patterns. It was designed to build upon and complement the qualitative interview data. It was also hoped to examine any differences in decision making for Māori compared to NZ European parents and sole parents compared to those in a cohabiting relationship (married or defacto).

The researchers considered a number of different methods for identifying eligible families. For example, one possibility was to conduct a telephone survey of a random sample of New Zealand parents with children aged 0-4 years of age. However, given an estimate that, at most, 15% of households would contain a 0-4 year old child (based on National Population Statistics), a telephone survey would entail a very labour intensive, and expensive, screening exercise to identify eligible parents<sup>7</sup>. Having identified these parents via phone, it was considered likely that there would be a relatively high refusal rate for a telephone interview. Households with young children were likely to be very busy, making refusal more likely. In these circumstances parents were also less likely to be able to give considered responses to questions.

Other options considered included accessing doctors patient lists, Plunket lists, schools, and street surveys, but these were likely to produce problems with sampling bias. There were also major Privacy Act constraints on accessing and using information from another organizations database.

<sup>7</sup> Mail out surveys are cheaper than ones involving interviewers (e.g. telephone) (Groves et. al., 2004). We obtained quotes for a telephone survey and these exceeded to total project budget.

The researchers then contacted ACNielsen and discussed the possibility of accessing their survey panel databases. These panels consist of New Zealanders who have been recruited, and agreed, to be available to take part in ACNielsen surveys. ACNielsen take considerable efforts to recruit nationally representative samples for their various surveys. They also have basic demographic data on these households in their database, including whether there is a child under five years of age in the household. Thus it was possible to identify a sample of eligible households, without an expensive and time consuming screening exercise. We obtained an agreement from ACNielsen to work with them to survey the eligible households identified in their national database.

This approach had the advantage of being a cost effective method of obtaining a fairly representative national sample of parents/caregivers of 0-4 year old children. In comparison to other methods it was hoped it would minimize sampling bias, achieve reasonable response rates and enable busy parents to complete a questionnaire at a convenient time. It was felt that a self-completed questionnaire would produce better quality data.

### *Sampling*

The sample was drawn from a panel consisting of those who had participated in ACNielsen's Consumer Finance Monitor (CFM) and who had agreed to further contact by ACNielsen. The ACNielsen Consumer Finance Monitor (CFM)<sup>8</sup> survey covers the whole of New Zealand, including rural areas. The selection procedure in all areas used Statistics New Zealand Area Unit data as defined for the purposes of the 2001 Census. The sampling fractions in all statistical areas of New Zealand were in strict proportion to population<sup>9</sup>. This sample design ensured that the sampling areas were widely spread and thoroughly representative of both urban and rural areas throughout New Zealand. Within each selected area, a small cluster of households was called upon, beginning from a randomly chosen start point and selecting every third household from then on. Interviews for the Consumer Finance Monitor are conducted face-to-face. After the interview informants are asked if they are willing to take part in further ACNielsen surveys and those agreeing are added to a database.

### *Development of the survey questionnaire*

The survey questionnaire was developed on the basis of a thematic analysis of the qualitative interviews, guided by the research questions. Feedback on various drafts was sought from the research advisors and

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<sup>8</sup> The Consumer Finance Monitor has the advantage over the alternative, Access Panel, as the later draws its sample primarily from telephone interviewing. This means that this sample is limited to those with telephones. The Consumer Finance Monitor samples households, with or without telephones.

<sup>9</sup> In terms of coverage of the household population, the combination of area probability frames and face-to-face interviews is viewed as the 'gold standard' for surveys (Groves et. al., 2004).



from the Ministry of Education. Versions of the questionnaire were also piloted with parents. The survey was limited to four sides of A4, as longer questionnaires were likely to significantly reduce the return rate.

### *Survey procedures*

ACNielsen extracted from their database the addresses of 1,700 households who had indicated that they had a child aged 4 years of age or under. The survey sample of 1,700 was based on a target of 500 parents/caregivers (of whom 100 would be Māori), with an estimated return rate of 33% for NZ Europeans and 25% for Māori. We over-sampled Māori in order to achieve a sufficiently large sample for subgroup analysis and comparison to NZ European parents.

The researchers then supplied ACNielsen with a pre-notification letter, a covering letter and questionnaire, and a follow-up reminder letter. ACNielsen then printed and addressed the letters<sup>10</sup> and was responsible for sending them out to the households. The survey was accompanied by an addressed return envelope, so the responses were returned to ACNielsen. They then removed any identifying information and passed the questionnaire form on to the researchers. The researchers at the Roy McKenzie Centre were then responsible for data entry and analysis.

### *Data checking and cleaning*

The surveys that were forwarded to the researchers were entered into an SPSS dataset. Data cleaning then involved checking 10% of the surveys for errors in data entry. Once entered the data frequencies were inspected for –

- Out of range values

- Excessive missing data and patterns in missing data (e.g. random vs. non random missing data)

- Logic and skip checks

### *Analysis*

The data from the survey are analysed using a range of statistical tests. The choice of the statistical test was dependent on the nature of the variable/s being investigated and the degree to which they meet the assumptions of the particular test (parametric or non-parametric). With parametric tests, such as the t-test, problems arise when variables are highly skewed and when they are not normally distributed. In general where the data do not meet parametric assumptions the approach taken has been to use non-parametric tests, even though they have less ‘power’ than parametric tests. The main parametric tests used and their non-parametric equivalent (in brackets) are:

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<sup>10</sup> Note that neither panel identifies who the primary caregiver is, so the communications have been addressed to the 'The main caregiver'.

- Pearson correlations (Kendal tau-b) - Correlations measure whether two ordinal or interval variables are related to one another. The size of the correlation indicates the strength of the relationship, with correlations of 0.2 indicative of a small effect, 0.5 a medium and 0.8 a large effect size (Cohen, 1992).
- t-test (Mann-Whitney U test) – these test whether the mean responses of two groups are statistically different, for example do working mothers rate cost as more important than non-working mothers.
- Wilcoxon signed rank – tests whether individuals rate items differently. For example, whether individuals rank child factors as more important than practical factors when choosing an ECE service.
- Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) test – this tests whether two variables, such as ethnicity and employment status, are related to one another.
- Regression – in this study this technique is used to examine whether two variables are related once other variables have been taken into account. For example, is household income related to use of early childhood education once education and employment status have been taken into account.

This is an exploratory study and so involves a relatively large number of statistical tests. This can result in some results being significant by chance. For example, with a .05 significance level it is likely that 5 out of 100 comparisons will be tested as significant even though there are no real differences. There is therefore a danger in conducting a large number of statistical tests, and by doing so increasing the chances of finding significant differences due to chance. This needs to be kept in mind when considering these results.

In general, only statistically significant findings have been presented. Occasionally the fact that variables were not associated has been mentioned if it was thought useful to make it clear these associations had been tested. Finally, a distinction also needs to be drawn between statistical and practical significance. A difference maybe statistically significant, but so small that it makes little practical difference. In order to assist with judging the practical meaning of statistically significant mean differences the actual values (e.g. means or percents) for the groups compared will be presented in the text.

#### *Achieved sample*

In total 345 surveys were returned. The return rate, based on all sampled households being eligible was therefore, 20%. However, it was evident from a number of contacts with those sampled, that some of the households were not eligible, i.e. they did not contain a child aged under 4 years of age. There are two main reasons for households not being eligible. Firstly, it is likely that a proportion of the families will have moved from the household between the time they volunteered to be part of the ACNielsen panel and the sending out of the survey. Secondly, it is likely that a proportion of the children who were aged three or four when their parent volunteered, are now over four years of age. Unfortunately it is not possible to estimate

the extent to which this reduced the pool of eligible households in the sample, and therefore not possible to establish the ‘true’ return rate for the survey.

#### *Details of those surveyed*

We received 345 responses with useable data. The great majority of responses were received from the child’s mother (92%), with a relatively small number of responses from fathers (5%), grandparents and others (e.g. foster parent) (3%)<sup>11</sup>. These results are in line with previous research on this issue (Foot et al., 2000) where the vast majority of respondents have been mothers.

Almost three quarters of the children were living with both their parents in a formalised union (marriage or civil union) (Table 5). A further one in ten were living with both their parents who were in a de-facto relationship. Another one in ten were living with only one of their parents. A few children were living in a stepfamily or with a foster parent. Living in a stepfamily is relatively rare for children in this age group (under 5 years), compared to older ages, as parents of older children have more time in which to separate and repartner. Relatively few children (8%) were living in households with extended family/whanau.

**Table 5 Family situation of child – number and percent (N=345)**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Living with my partner and our children (Married or Civil Union)	253	73
Living with my partner and our children (De facto)	41	12
Living on my own with my children	42	12
Living with my children and a new partner (Married or Civil Union)	1	
Living with my children and a new partner (De facto)	2	1
Living with foster children	2	1
Other	4	1

The most common educational qualification held was a degree or tertiary qualification, held by over a third (Table 6). Relatively few reported having no formal educational qualifications, with approximately equal numbers with intermediate qualifications (e.g. fifth and sixth form certificates). These figures show that the current sample is biased towards those with higher educational qualifications. Comparative New Zealand Census data indicates that the current sample under-represents those with no qualification and over-represents those with tertiary qualifications. This is common in these types of study. For example, an Australian study of multiple childcare arrangements (Bowes et al., 2003) found a high proportion of those with a degree (39%) in their sample recruited through childcare centres.

<sup>11</sup> In the following text respondents will be referred to as parents, rather than parents/caregivers, in order to assist readability.

**Table 6 Highest educational qualification – number and percent (N=340)**

	Number	Percent
No Qualification	31	9
Fifth Form certificate	52	15
Sixth Form certificate	57	17
NZ University entrance	43	13
NZ A or B Bursary, Scholarship	31	9
University degree	126	37

Respondents were asked if they and their partner were in paid employment and 56% indicated that the mother of the child was in paid employment. Table 7 presents the employment status of the mothers, including those on benefits and 'home duties'. Most of the employed mothers were in part time employment, and some combined studying with part time work. Almost a third of mothers were employed exclusively on 'home duties'. Finally, some mothers were studying or were beneficiaries.

**Table 7 Employment status of mother – number and percent (N=344)**

	Number	Percent
Paid employment	192	56
Full time (30 hours plus)	84	24
Part time	99	29
Work and student	9	3
Not in paid employment	152	44
Home duties	106	31
Beneficiary	22	6
Student	10	3
Other	14	4

Mothers of older children were significantly more likely to be working ( $\chi^2(4, 310)=18.8, p=.001$ ). While only 31% of mothers of children under one were in paid employment, this rose to just over half of mothers of one and two year olds. Approximately two thirds of mothers of three (63%) and four (67%) year olds were in paid employment. Only 38% of mothers with no educational qualifications were in employment, compared to 63% of those with degrees.

Employment also varied as a function of the family situation of the mother (Table 8). Mothers who were living with a partner were more likely than sole parent mothers to be in paid employment. Working sole parent mothers were more likely to be employed full time, while mothers in a partnership were more likely to

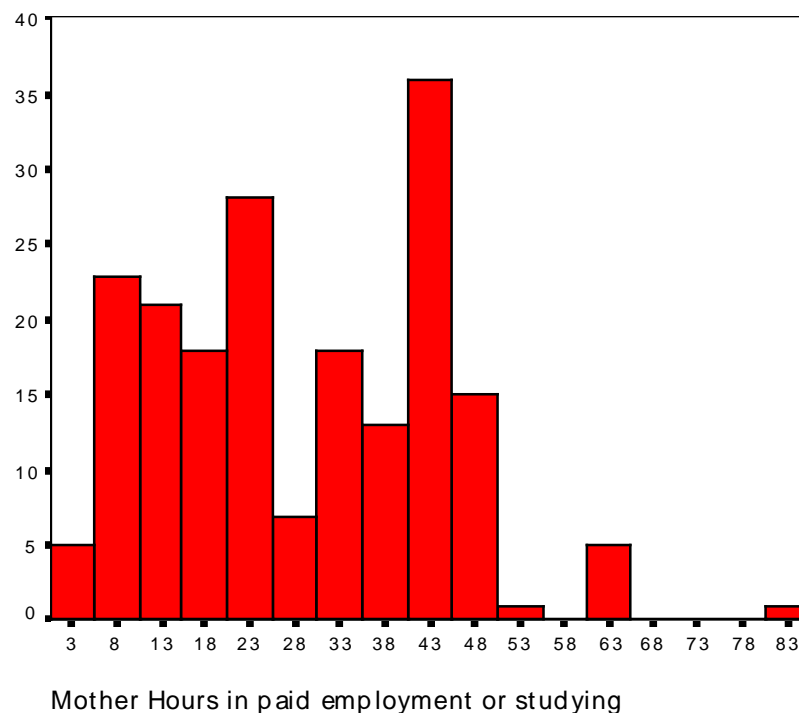
work part time. Table 8 also shows the employment status of fathers (for those in a cohabiting relationship) with the majority of fathers in the survey sample being in full time employment. Comparative data on parental employment from the 2001 Census is also presented in Table 8, and indicates that the present sample is a reasonable match to national population employment patterns. In the survey sample slightly more sole mothers were in full time employment and more fathers are in employment compared to the 2001 Census.

**Table 8 Comparison of employment status of Sole parents, and Mothers and Fathers in couple households, with 2001 Census data**

	Sole parent mothers		Mother - couple		Father - couple	
	ECE		ECE		ECE	
	survey	Census	survey	Census	survey	Census
Employed Full-time	18	13	24	24	91	81
Employed Part-time	16	16	32	29	5	4
Not in labour force	66	71	44	47	4	15

Source – 2001 census data – employment status for parents of dependent children aged 0-4 years of age.

Those who were in paid employment or studying reported working between 2 and 80 hours, with an average of 26 hours (median 25 hours). Figure 3 presents the range of hours mothers were working in paid employment and/or studying.

**Figure 3** Mothers hours spent in employment or studying - numbers (N=191)

Those who were working or studying indicated which days they worked and whether this was morning or **afternoon only, or the full day. Most mothers working full time worked in the morning and in the afternoon** each day (80%) with very few (approx 5%) not working on any given day of the week. Table 9 presents the days and times of work for mothers working part time (i.e. less than 30 hours per week). The data shows that work days were evenly spread across the midweek days and that mothers were less likely to work on Monday or Friday. If mothers worked on a given day then for over half these parents this included work both in the morning and in the afternoon.

**Table 9** Days and times mothers spend working or studying part time (<30 hours per week) – percent (N=85)

	am	pm	am and pm	Non work day
Monday	13	12	35	40
Tuesday	15	19	32	34
Wednesday	14	14	38	34
Thursday	17	13	37	34
Friday	15	11	22	52

Respondents were asked how many hours a week the child's resident father worked or studied. Fathers worked an average of 45 hours a week (median 40 hours), with a range from 5 to 80 hours a week. There

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was far less variation in hours worked for fathers, compared to mothers, with 75% working between 40 and 50 hours.

Reflecting the greater, and less varied, hours worked by fathers is the pattern of their work hours. The majority of fathers worked both mornings and afternoons (over 85%), and very few had days where they did not work (1%). On the whole then, fathers are not likely to be available for childcare on a regular basis, due to the relatively high number of hours they work and the fact that these work hours cover most week days and work day hours.

In order to assess the joint work and study patterns of the parents in the family, the reports of mothers' employment or study hours were combined with their partners' employment or study hours. Table 10 shows this new variable<sup>12</sup>. The most common arrangement was for fathers to be in full time employment, while mothers were not in paid employment or studying (31%). Just over a quarter of the families had fathers working full time while the mother worked or studied part time, and in one in five families both parents worked (and/or studied) full time. On the whole, fathers in the sample worked fulltime, with little variation compared to mothers. Therefore in the following analysis we focus on mothers' employment status and hours working.

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<sup>12</sup> This variable combines work and study hours and therefore is different from the figures presented previously for paid employment. For example, as a number of sole parents were studying this means more are occupied with work or study compared to the number in paid employment.

**Table 10** Family employment (or study) status – number and percent (N=337)

	Frequency	Percent
Father full time and mother not employed	105	31
Father full time and Mother part time	94	28
Father full time and Mother full time	69	20
Mother full time and Father part time	4	1
Mother full time and father not employed	5	1
Father part time only	6	2
Both part time	4	1
Neither working	7	2
Sole parent part time	11	3
Sole parent full time	10	3
Sole parent beneficiary	22	7

Some comparative data comes from the New Zealand Census 2001, where half the families had both parents were in paid work (in the current sample 56% of couples were both working). The current sample had one parent in paid work in 41% of families (42% - 2001 Census) and in 2% neither parent was in paid work (8% - 2001 Census) (Callister, 2005). The current sample is therefore broadly similar to the national population in terms of couple's employment patterns, although it under-represents 'work poor' couples.

Finally Table 11 presents the ethnicity of the child. As 19% of children had multiple ethnicities, ethnicity has been priority coded. Those with any Māori ethnicity were coded Māori (21%), and of the remainder, those with any Pacific ethnicity were coded to the Pacific Peoples ethnic group (5%). Finally, those coded with another non-European ethnicity are coded to that ethnic group. There are more Māori in the sample than would be expected from NZ population estimates because we deliberately over-sampled Māori. The percentage of Pacific children is slightly less than would be expected from the census.

**Table 11** Prioritised Ethnicity of child – number and percent (N=345)

	Number	Percent
New Zealand European	232	67
Māori	74	21
Pacific peoples	18	5
Other groups	21	6

Māori children were significantly more likely to be residing in a sole parent household (24% Māori compared to 8% NZ European) ( $\chi^2(1, 295)=12.5, p<.001$ ). Partly as a result of this Māori children resided



in homes with significantly lower household incomes ( $\chi^2$  (9, 296)=21.1,  $p=.012$ ), for example 25% of Māori children lived in households with incomes under \$30,000 compared to 12% of NZ European children<sup>13</sup>.

Although slightly more mothers of Māori children were in paid employment (Māori 64% vs. NZE 52%) this was not a statistically significant difference. This finding is at odds with previous research that suggests NZ European women have higher labour force participation rates (Johnston, 2005)<sup>14</sup>. Mothers of Māori children, in both sole parent (41%) and couple households (72%) were more likely to be working than NZ European mothers (32% sole parent and 53% couple household). There was a tendency for NZ European children to be younger, but this was not significant (NZ European children were more likely to be 1 year old, while Māori children were more likely to be 4 years old).

Perhaps reflecting these patterns and hours of employment, household incomes were reported to be in the higher range (Table 12). Relatively few had low household incomes and these tended to be sole parent families (68% had incomes below \$25,000, compared to 5% of couples' households). Household incomes were higher in those families where the mother was working ( $\chi^2$  (7, 336)=35.8,  $p<.001$ ). Table 12 also presents comparative household income data from the 2001 census<sup>15</sup>. The survey sample has fewer low income households and more high income households, compared to the 2001 census data.

**Table 12 Household income per year, before tax – number and percent (N=336)**

	Number	Percent	Census 2001
Under \$15,000	10	3	16
\$15,001 to \$20,000	20	6	8
\$20,001 to \$25,000	14	4	6
\$25,001 to \$30,000	10	3	8
\$30,001 to \$40,000	33	10	12
\$40,001 to \$50,000	39	12	12
\$50,001 to \$60,000	34	10	
\$60,001 to \$70,000	43	13	18 (\$50 to 70)
\$70,001 to \$100,000	67	20	10
\$100,001 or more	66	20	10

Source – 2001 census

<sup>13</sup> There was no difference in household incomes for Māori children compared to NZ European children living with both parents.

<sup>14</sup> Of course the current figures are for mothers of Māori children and these mothers may not be Māori themselves, but rather partnered to a Māori man. This may partly explain the differences with Johnston.

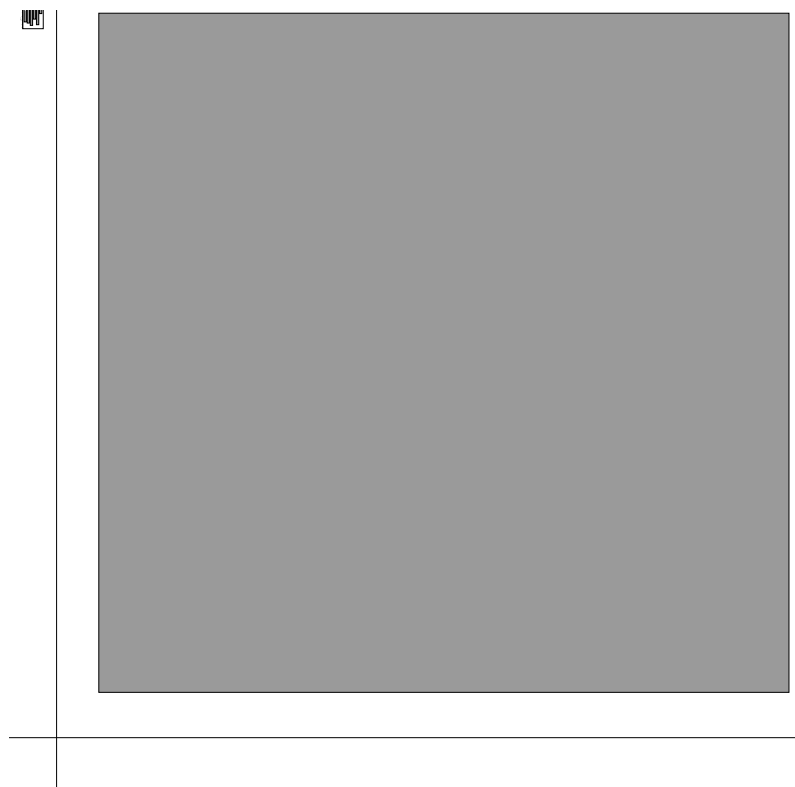
<sup>15</sup> These family incomes from the 2001 census are for families with dependent children, the youngest of whom is aged under five years of age.

Most families (75%) had one child under five years of age living in the household. A further 25% had two children in this age group, and relatively few had three or more children under five. Sixty percent of families also had older, school age children, with a third having one older child, 18% having two older children and nine percent having three or more older children.

Responses were received from parents living in a wide range of locations throughout New Zealand. Most (52%) were living in metropolitan centres and another 22% were living in provincial cities (e.g. Palmerston North, Nelson, Wanganui, Hamilton). Of the remainder approximately equal numbers were living in towns (e.g. Balclutha, Greymouth, Ashburton) (14%) or in rural areas (12%).

Finally, parents were asked to answer the survey with respect to the youngest child in the household. This was done in order to ensure a spread of children's ages. Figure 4 presents the age of the youngest child in the household and indicates that approximately even numbers of children are in each age group. There were a small number of responses from parents with children who were now five years old, answering in retrospect with regard to their child's use of ECE.

**Figure 4** Age of the youngest child in the household – percent (N=302)



*Limitations of the sample*

As has been discussed above, it was difficult to calculate the response rate to the current survey. The response rate is likely to be relatively low and this is a major limitation with the current sample. Although the sample is diverse it does under-represent some sections of the population, e.g. those on low incomes and those lacking educational qualifications. This limits the degree to which these results can be generalised and they will need to be validated by further studies on larger, more representative, samples. The current sample size is also relatively small with regard to some groups (e.g. Pacific peoples) and this limits subgroup comparisons.

In summary, although we did not achieve our target of 500 responses the final sample obtained is diverse. Although it under-represents low income households and those without qualifications, the sample has reasonable numbers of these groups. The age range of the target children was fairly evenly spread across the 0-4 year's age group and we consider the information on these children and their use of ECE in the following chapters.



## Deciding to use Early Childhood Education

As has been discussed in the earlier review of previous research, parents' preferences and expectations towards early childhood education are likely to be important in influencing whether, and when, they use these services. In this chapter we explore the attitudes of parents towards the use of Early Childhood Education services. We also consider the reasons that parents might have for using these services.

### Attitudes towards the child learning and development

In order to explore parents attitudes towards the impact of various care arrangements on children's learning and development, parents were asked to rate their agreement with a number of statements (where 1=disagree and 5=agree). As indicated in Table 13 most parents felt that they were the best people to support their child's development, but at the same time felt their child also needed educational experience outside the home. There was less support for the view that children learnt best when spending time with other adults, including extended family/whanau. The view that parent's work and career assisted children's development was supported by relatively few parents, with most disagreeing with the statement. This later finding mirrors other research that finds that most people believe that it is preferable for mothers with children under 5 to be at home with the children (Evans and Kelley, 2002).

**Table 13 Agreement with statements regarding child learning and development – mean (N=314)**

	<b>Mean</b>
Parents are the best people to support children's development	4.5
Children need some educational experience outside of the home	4.4
Children learn best when they spend time with a range of other adults	3.3
Children learn best when they are with extended family/whanau	3.2
Parents work and career are good for children's development	2.5

1=Disagree, to 5=Agree

Mothers who were working were more likely to agree with the statements that parent's work and career were good for children's development (employed 2.7 vs. non employed 2.2;  $U=10629.5$ ,  $p<.001$ ), and that children learn best when they spend time with a range of other adults (employed 3.4 vs. non employed 3.1;  $U=11896.5$ ,  $p=.007$ ). They were also less likely to agree that parents are the best people to support children's development (employed 4.3 vs. non employed 4.6;  $U=11820.5$ ,  $p=.001$ ). Reflecting the association with employment, those with higher household incomes were more likely to agree that children learn best when they spend time with a range of other adults ( $r=.10$ ,  $p=.020$ ) and that parents work and career

were good for children's development ( $r=.10$ ,  $p=.030$ ). Those with higher household incomes were also less likely to agree that parents are the best people to support children's development ( $r=-.16$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

There was also a significant tendency for those with older children to be more likely to agree with the statement that children need educational experience outside the home ( $r=.13$ ,  $p=.006$ ), that children learn best when they spend time with a range of adults ( $r=.11$ ,  $p=.020$ ), and that parents work and career were good for children's development ( $r=.13$ ,  $p=.003$ ). Interestingly, mothers of Māori children were more likely to agree that children learn best when they spend time with a range of adults (Māori 3.5 vs. NZE 3.2;  $U=6872$ ,  $p=.042$ ), although this may be due to the fact that slightly more Māori children were aged 4 years old. Finally, agreement with these statements was not related to the mother's highest educational qualification or to being a sole parent.

These findings indicate that in some respects parents hold different attitudes towards various influences on children's learning and development, particularly when it comes to the impact of parents' work and contact with other adults. In part these differences in view are a function of the age and developmental stage of the child, but they also reflect parents' attitudes towards the impact of mothers' employment. Information from the interviews illustrates parental concerns about the impact of mothers' employment and children spending time with other adults.

This issue tended to be mentioned more often by those parents using more full time care for younger children. Handing over the care of their children was difficult for some of these parents, although for others this was not such a concern as long as they were confident of the quality of the service.

*Didn't realise at the time quite how difficult it would be to hand my child over to someone else to look after. I thought at time we were planning before we had him that I will just go back to work and it would be OK, didn't take into account the emotional factor and it has taken me the best part of a year to accept that decision, that we have no choice financially to do that.*

*Went through mental process of 'no one can care for him as well as I can care for him'. . . went through process of do we want him in care and someone else care for him. What age is an appropriate age for him to start going into it. He would have been 5 months when started. No will we or wont we, but my needs meant we were going to do it. Really visiting crèche and meeting supervisor and staff, watch other children there and put mind at rest. Saw young and babies there.*

*Some of it was guilt, and some of it was we wanted to make sure it was the right place. Guilt is a big thing. You are handing over to people to basically raise your children on your behalf. There was [guilt] initially, and some days when he doesn't want to, he's a bit clingy, if he doesn't sleep well, or he's going to come down with something, yeah, there's a long crying train trip all way to work. . . . and then you have him on the weekend, for that two week break, and it's like 'I can't wait for you to go back (laughter) – you're bored, I'm bored, man.'*

Part of the concern for these parents was the potential impact on their child's development. As the mother in the above quote said

*You hope you get it right. We won't know till he's 30 and lying on someone's couch. 'I don't remember my early childhood'.*

A second mother, with a young child in daycare, was also concerned about her child's adjustment, and had researched the likely impacts

*I had fears about him going into childcare (I have not found evidence either way). One is that he will have abandonment issues when older and the second is that he will become institutionalised in a way that they have a very set routine there. If he is there for five years before he goes to school he's had 5 years of OK its five o'clock where's my tea. Then goes to school and spends next 15 years at school ...*

### **When do parents start thinking about ECE?**

Parents responding to the survey were asked what age their youngest child was when they had started thinking about Early Childhood Education for him/her. These ages are presented in Table 14. Only 14% had not thought about Early Childhood Education for their child, and most of these were parents whose child was still young (just under two thirds of those who had not thought about it had a child under one).

**Table 14** Age of youngest child when you started thinking about Early Childhood Education services – percent of all parents, and percent of those who had thought about it (N=314)

Age	Percent	% thought about it
Not thought about it	14	-
0	33	39
1	27	31
2	22	25
3	4	4

An examination of the data for the separate age groups suggested that the older the child, the later the parent had thought about ECE for that child. Parents who responded with younger children maybe more likely to have thought about using Early Childhood Education services. Perhaps the best indication of the age at which parents generally begin considering ECE for their child is to examine the figures for children currently aged 3 and 4 years of age. For these children, at least half the parents indicated that they had started thinking about ECE before the child was 2 years old. Some parents had considered early childhood education prior to the child's birth and in some cases had put the 'yet to be born' child onto a waiting list at a childcare centre.

Those parents who had not yet thought about early childhood education had younger children, with just over a half of parents of children under one having not yet thought about use of ECE. This dropped to 18% for parents of one year olds and 7% of two year olds, suggesting that a child turning one is an important point at which parents start thinking about using Early Childhood Education services. Thinking about use of ECE services was also significantly associated with the employment status of the mother ( $\chi^2(1, 344)=19.4, p<.001$ ), with 93% of employed mothers having thought about ECE, compared to 77% of mothers who were not working. However, mother's employment status is confounded by the age of the child, with mothers of younger children less likely to work. Once child's age is taken into account, mother's employment status is no longer associated with having thought about Early Childhood Education services.

Although those with another child under five in the household were less likely to have thought about ECE, this was due to the fact that in these households the 'target' child was younger. Having a school aged older sibling had no effect on the likelihood of having thought about ECE for the youngest child. Having thought about ECE was not associated with household income, mother's education, urban or rural location, or being a sole parent.

Parents were more likely to indicate they had thought about ECE for their youngest child when they more strongly agreed with the following statements –

- work and career are good for children's development ( $U=5293.5, p=.010$ ),
- children learn best when they spend time with a range of other adults ( $U=4842.5, p<.000$ ), and
- children need some educational experience outside the home ( $U=5886, p=.047$ )

Although causal conclusions can not be drawn from cross-sectional associations, it is probable that parents considering employment, or who are employed, are more likely to be considering ECE services and hold more positive views regarding parental employment and out of home learning. Whether these attitudes are held prior to working or develop once employed is difficult to determine with the current data. It is likely that parents who return to work hold these views already and also that they are further strengthened once parents are working.

### **Reasons for using Early Childhood Services**

All those parents who had thought about early childhood education for their youngest child were asked to indicate the importance of a number of different reasons for using these services (where 1=Not at all important to 5=extremely important). Table 15 presents the results for this set of questions. Rated most important were the use of ECE to meet the child's social development needs, closely followed by the child's educational needs. Meeting the child's language and cultural needs was rated as 'important' or 'very important' by over a half of parents. Although Māori tended to be more likely to rate language and culture



as extremely important (39% compared to 27% NZE), over half of the parents in each ethnic group rated this as important or extremely important (4 or 5 on the scale)<sup>16</sup>.

**Table 15** Importance of reasons for using Early Childhood Education services for youngest child - mean (N=268)

	Mean
Child's social development needs	4.5
Child's educational needs	4.3
Child's language and cultural identity	3.6
Childcare while you are working	3.2
Time out for you (e.g. for leisure or housework)	2.6
You learn skills from your involvement in ECE	2.7
ECE provides social opportunities for you (e.g. meet other mums)	2.6
So you can care for extended family	1.6

1=not at all important, to 5=extremely important

The importance of using ECE for childcare while the mother worked was rated important by half the parents and unimportant by the other half. As might be expected the rating of importance of childcare while working was significantly related to the mothers work status, with those in paid employment (3.8) rating this issue as more important than those not in paid employment (2.3) ( $U=5247.0$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Those who were employed were also less likely to see 'time out' for the parent (employed 2.4 vs. non employed 2.7;  $U=8432.5$ ,  $p=.039$ ) or providing social opportunities (employed 2.5 vs. non employed 2.9;  $U=7954.0$ ,  $p=.004$ ) as important reasons for using Early Childhood Education services.

The next three items (i.e. time out, parental learning, and social opportunities) were rated as important by similar proportions of parents. However, it is possible that the rating of these needs will distinguish between parents using different service types, and this will be explored later (p. 66). Using ECE so the parent could care for extended family was relatively unimportant to most parents, but for a few, probably where this issue was relevant, it was rated as extremely important.

Household income and educational qualifications were related to some of these reasons for using ECE. Those with higher educational qualifications were *less* likely to see social development needs ( $r=-.11$ ,  $p=.036$ ), educational needs ( $r=-.25$ ,  $p<.001$ ), language and cultural identity ( $r=-.20$ ,  $p<.001$ ), and parents learning of skills ( $r=-.23$ ,  $p<.001$ ) as important reasons for using ECE. Similarly those with higher household incomes were less likely to see educational needs, language and cultural identity, parents learning

<sup>16</sup> Note that the question referred to 'language and cultural identity' and many European parents may have responded with respect to the language element of this item, rather than to the cultural element.

skills, or social opportunities for the parent as reasons for using ECE. These findings might reflect the fact that those who were in paid employment tended to be more educated and have higher household incomes<sup>17</sup>. Since those in paid employment rate childcare as a main reason for using ECE, perhaps they then rate other reasons as less important, although the items were to be rated independently. It may also be that more educated mothers feel their child's educational needs are met at home and therefore ECE services are less important in these areas. It needs to be noted however that although placing less importance on these factors than less educated parents, more highly educated parents still rated these factors as relatively important<sup>18</sup>.

It needs to be noted that the importance attached to each of these reasons was not related to the age of the child, so the above differences by employment status are not likely to be due to differences in the proportion of mothers who work at each age of the child. Regressions were run to assess whether the importance attached to each reason was independently<sup>19</sup> associated with child's age, mothers educational qualifications, mothers employment status, and household income. In each case it confirmed the above findings –

- childcare while working was more important for mothers who were working
- social development, education, and language and culture were less important for those with higher education.

To examine the relationship between these items exploratory factor analysis was conducted. This analytic technique examines the extent to which parents respond to items in a similar way, for example whether they give high ratings to all items concerning child development. If these groups of items appear to represent a single concept then it is often preferable to create a composite variable by averaging the scores on the items. This reduces both the number of items used in analysis and any redundancy in measurement (e.g. using items scored the same way). It can also provide more reliable measures of a concept.

In this case exploratory factor analysis indicated that the items fell into three groupings of reasons for using Early Childhood Education services. Each has been given a name that summarises the underlying content of the items -

- Child development – social development needs, educational needs, and language and cultural identity
- Parent development – parent learns skills and gains social opportunities
- Factor 3 – childcare while working, time out for parent, and care for extended family

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<sup>17</sup> For both these variables employment rates were very different for those in the highest compared to the lowest groups, however mid range income and education levels had similar levels of employment.

<sup>18</sup> For example means for those with degrees were - social development needs (4.4), educational needs (3.9).

<sup>19</sup> That is, a factor was still associated with the item once the other factors had been taken into account.

The third factor, here labelled ‘factor 3’, had poor reliability and did not seem to consist of items representing an obvious underlying construct. It was decided to create new variables representing the first two factors, by averaging the relevant items, and these are used in future analysis. In future analysis the ‘childcare while working’ item will be used as an item on its own, i.e. not as part of a composite variable.

To examine whether parents, on average, rated the importance of child development differently from parental development, these new composite variables were compared. ‘Child development’ (4.3) was rated as significantly more important reason for using early childhood education than the ‘parental development’ (2.7) (Wilcoxon signed rank  $z=-13.7$ ,  $p<.001$ ). For full time employed mothers child development (4.4) reasons were still more important than childcare while working (3.9) (Wilcoxon signed rank  $z=-2.9$ ,  $p=.004$ ). However for this group, childcare while working (3.9) was more important than parental development (2.7) (Wilcoxon signed rank  $z=-4.4$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

### **The importance of factors in deciding to use Early Childhood Education**

Parents were asked to rate the importance of a number of factors that may have influenced their decision whether or not to use Early Childhood Education services for their youngest child (Table 16). The quality of the services was rated as extremely important by eight out of every ten parents. Availability of suitable services was seen as next most important by parents, followed by the affordability of suitable ECE services, with the majority of parents rating these factors as important. Factors related to the child’s age and abilities, and the match of the service to the child’s abilities and temperament, were also seen as important by most parents.

**Table 16** Importance of factors in deciding whether or not to use Early Childhood Services – mean (N=269)

	<b>Mean</b>
Quality of Early Childhood Education services	4.8
Availability of suitable Early Childhood Education services	4.4
Affordability of Early Childhood Education services	4.0
Your child’s age and abilities	3.8
Suitability of Early Childhood Services for the way your child is	3.6
Availability of subsidies to reduce cost	3.0
Availability of alternative informal arrangements	3.0
Flexibility of you or your partners work	2.9
Availability of a culturally appropriate service	2.7
Arrangements for your other children	2.7

1=not at all important, to 5=extremely important

The availability of subsidies to reduce ECE costs was important for some parents but not so important for other parents. As might be expected, parents with low household incomes rated the availability of subsidies as more important than higher income couples ( $r=-.429$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Likewise sole parents were significantly more likely to rate the availability of subsidies as important (75% rated it 4 or 5, compared to 36% of married couples).

Those with lower household incomes also rated as more important the affordability of services ( $r=-.30$ ,  $p<.001$ ), the availability of informal arrangements ( $r=-.154$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and flexibility of work ( $r=-.12$ ,  $p=.008$ ). One interpretation of these findings is that those on low incomes rely more on informal arrangements and work flexibility to provide alternatives to relatively expensive formal childcare. Low income families were also more likely to rate the child's age and abilities ( $r=-.10$ ,  $p=.030$ ), and suitability for the way the child is ( $r=-.183$ ,  $p<.001$ ) as more important factors in deciding whether or not to use ECE.

The flexibility of the parents', or their partners', work was also a factor for some parents, but rated as less important by others. Those parents, who were working, were significantly more likely to rate flexible work arrangements as important in deciding whether or not to use early childhood services (employed 3.2 vs. non employed 2.4;  $U=8633$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The availability of a culturally appropriate service was seen as less important than the above factors (27% rated it important or very important), but perceived importance varied by the child's ethnicity. For example 44% of parents with a Māori child rated this as important (4) or extremely important (5), compared to 18% of NZ European parents. Parents' arrangements for their other children were not particularly important overall, but were more so for those with other young children, compared to school age children. Sixty three percent of parents with another child under 5 rated the arrangements for this child as being important or extremely important in the decision whether or not to use ECE services. For those where siblings were at school (aged 5 to 13 years), 35% of parents said arrangements for this child were important or extremely important in deciding whether or not to use ECE services.

As there seemed some pattern in the ways that parents were rating factors, exploratory factor analysis was run in order to assess whether parents responded in similar ways to different sets of items. This analysis indicated that the items could be placed into two groups -

- Child centred items – quality, availability of suitable service, child's age and abilities, and suitable way child is
- Practicality items – affordability, availability subsidies, availability informal care, flexibility work, and arrangements for other children

Both these factors have face validity and so these two composite variables were created by averaging the scores for the relevant items. The 'Child centred' and Practicality' variables were used in later analysis. The

availability of a culturally appropriate service was slightly more strongly correlated with the child centred factors and so was included as part of that new variable. The ‘child centred’ composite variable (3.9) was rated as significantly more important than the ‘practicality’ composite variable (3.2) (Wilcoxon signed rank  $z=-10.9$ ,  $p<.001$ ), for both mothers who were working and those who were not. However practical issues were significantly more important factors in deciding whether or not to use ECE for mothers in paid employment (employed 3.3 vs. non employed 2.9;  $U=8660$ ,  $p=.016$ )

In order to cross validate the ratings on the 1 to 5 scale, parents were also asked to select the three most important factors in their decision to use ECE services. Table 17 presents the frequency with which each factor was selected as one of the three most important. The frequency with which these factors were selected reflected the mean ratings given each item in Table 16.

**Table 17**      **Three most important factors in deciding whether or not to use Early Childhood Education services – percent (N=199)**

	<b>Percent</b>
Quality of Early Childhood Education services	89
Availability of suitable Early Childhood Education services	56
Affordability of Early Childhood Education services	48
Availability of alternative informal arrangements	25
Your child’s age and abilities	24
Flexibility of you or your partners work	18
Suitability of Early Childhood Services for the way your child is	15
Availability of subsidies to reduce cost	8
Availability of a culturally appropriate service	6
Arrangements for your other children	6

### **Finding out about Early Childhood Education services**

We have seen that parents regard early childhood education as being important for their child’s social and educational development. We have also seen that quality considerations and availability are the most important factors in deciding whether or not to use ECE services. However in order to make the decision to use ECE services parents first need to establish whether these services are available and assess whether they meet their quality criteria.

In our interviews we asked parents about their knowledge of Early Childhood Education services and how they found out about these services. All parents were aware of at least one Early Childhood Education Service, and in fact most could name a range of different services.

*Yes – knew about Day-care, Barnardo's, Kindy, Kohanga reo.*

*Crèche, kindy, Kohanga, Day-care.*

*Kindy, Play-centre, some knowledge about Porse, Play-group.*

*I know there's Kohanga Reo ... is that what you mean. I know there's crèche, kindergarten. That's all I know really. I haven't used them all, but I know of them. [Māori]*

Not all were aware of the specifics of each service, but others had a fairly comprehensive knowledge

*Kohanga-for Māori kids to learn the language-hours 9-3 or 4:30pm and closes during the Christmas break.*

*Pacific preschool- (Samoan and Tokelauan preschool)-teaching the language  
Barnados-in house only.*

*Main childcare centres – for 3mnths-5 years old.*

*Kindy-3-5yrs old, morning and afternoon sessions.*

*Full day care-for parents that are working full time. [Māori]*

*Kindy-afternoon sessions for younger children & morning for older children. No flexibility.*

*University crèche-very flexible in attendance to suit part-time study.*

*Private preschool-e.g. Marsden and St Mark.*

*Montessori school-services from 2 ½ - 6 yrs old. They prefer 5 mornings a week or full days a week.*

*Kohanga-for Māori, learning about the Māori language*

*Daycare-options for working parents-full time hours [Māori]*

Many made a distinction between home-based and centre based services.

*Daycare – in a centre.*

*Home-based care-through Barnados. Flexible.*

*I was aware of daycare centres around P, and the in-home education such as Barnados and Porse, and they do the in-home education where it's one caregiver for up to 4 children, or where they provide a nanny and a sole care or shared care situation; or other private nanny agencies. Kindies, which is obviously not quite where we're at yet. And Playcentres, although you've got to go with your child to that.*

All Māori parents mentioned Kohanga Reo (as indicated above) as did many of the non-Māori families. All Pacific parents specifically mentioned options for their cultural group, but these were not mentioned by non-Pacific families.

*Kohanga-primarily Māori families. [NZ European]*

*Tongan preschool-son used to go to one here at P. It's now closed down. Around 10 children used to attend. The lady who used to run it said she is tired. There is a Tongan preschool but it's at UH.  
[Tongan]*

*Samoan centre-to teach Samoan language.*

*Kohanga Reo-to teach Māori language.*

*Tongan preschool-run by Tongans, teaching Tongan language and culture. [Tongan]*

Parents also often noted those services that required parents to attend and some made a distinction between private and community or parent led services.

*Play-group the parent has to stay with the child.*

*Playcentre-from birth to 6yrs old, parents cooperative.*

Some also distinguished part time services from those offering full time services for working parents.

*Know there is care for those children whose parents work full time but not an option for us. Wasn't interested in checking out any others. One of us parents always at home so wasn't interested in finding out about other services.*

*Daycare-options for working parents-full time hours.*

*Home-based care-flexible for working families.*

Those recently arrived from overseas were less well informed on what was offered in New Zealand.

*Absolutely nothing to be honest. What I found out I found out through friends and colleagues. [recently arrived from America]*

*I looked through the paper and the Yellow Pages, because I came back from Australia at that time so I sort of had no idea of what was available, only what was available in Australia.*

Parents mentioned a range of sources of information. Friends and family were most often cited as the main source of information on services.

*Friends at work-they talk about ECE for their kids.*

*Word of mouth from other mothers. Went to day-care facilities to gather more info. Yellow pages.*

*Family members, friends, church.*

Other sources of information were work colleagues, the internet, yellow pages, newspapers and community notice boards.

*Neighbours, local paper, community notice boards in coastlands.*

*Play-centre – found out about it at a parent and child show.*

*Another way I found out as well was the ERO reports on the internet.*

*Mainly from work and the phone book.*

*Porse: I got a pamphlet at the Parent and Child Show, I hadn't heard of it before that.*

*I really had to have a look around because I didn't have a clue what was available, so community notice boards and stuff like that, newspapers.*

Others had prior experience of Early Childhood Services, either as an ECE teacher, having nieces/nephews who attended, or having a relative who worked in ECE.

*Trained ECE teacher. Have BA education ECE and Teacher trained.*

*General knowledge, sisters with children who went to Kohanga reo.*

*Montessori trained ECE teacher-work in sector.*

*Found out from cousin who is a kindy teacher.*

*Work experience while at college at daycare and kindy.*

Some mentioned getting information when pregnant or soon after their child's birth, particularly from Plunket. Given the waiting lists for many services for young children, this information was appreciated, although often overlooked in those first months.

*When in hospital having eldest child- got pamphlets from Plunket.*

*Playgroup - was introduced to me by Plunket nurse.*

*Bounty pack when pregnant. Early childhood magazine.*

Most found the information they got was useful, but some also commented that much of it was general information about a service and did not provide specific information about local services.

*Yes - word of mouth is useful, because other people have been and use other services and have their opinions about these services.*

*Got what I needed, too much info may make you/it feel to hard.*

*Not really. I had to ring around the area then went to centres myself and had a look. Most useful way.*

*Not really because I had to ring around and find out what's available-took a bit of time.*

*No, it wasn't. The Yellow Pages was a bit useless, and so was the local paper.*

*Some places I rang, and I said I was just at the stage of wanting to find out more about it, and if that's an option for us, and one place, a home education place just gave me names and numbers of caregivers to contact, so I still didn't end up knowing anything about how it worked or anything. But another home education place - I got off the phone feeling I'd got quite a good understanding.*



Parents made suggestions for what would have helped them learn more about Early Childhood Services. They also identified specific information needs, for example, information on local services, costs, hours, waiting lists, financial assistance, and service philosophy.

*Would have liked a website that looks at childcare in this region.*

*Information booklet that has all the information for particular areas.  
Services, cost, facilities, philosophy of providers.*

*Yes – cost, whether they educate the kids, child teacher ratio, hours, safety of the child in crèche, (how do you assess safety because she's so young).*

*Actually it would have been nice, you know you get a Bounty pack when you have a baby, and you get a book and everything, it would have been nice to have a sheet of information of where you could ring for Playcentres, kindies, all your different options, because you haven't got a clue being a first time parent. And it's quite daunting because there is so much out there, but you don't know where to look.*

### **Who made the decision?**

A related issue to finding out about early childhood education concerns which parent took on the responsibility for doing the research on ECE options and who made the decision about whether to use these services (and which one to use). In the interviews mothers reported that they were primarily responsible for gathering information on ECE options.

Most mothers did the research on Early Childhood Education services themselves, but most also discussed the options with their partner and many considered that they had made the final decision jointly. Many also talked to friends and family who, as has been seen above, were one of the main sources of information on early childhood services.

*Discussed arrangements with partner, mother, other people who have gone through ECE.*

*No, I just went (kindy) and did it myself really. He (partner) doesn't really care – oh, he does care, but as long as he doesn't have to organise something.*

*Me being the one at home, and he's a teacher so he's not in the position where he can make enquiries from work, so I've been the one doing the enquiries, and I'd sort of find out about it, and say 'this is how this works, what do you think?' And he'd say 'oh, yeah, I think that sounds good', or 'I don't think that's very good.' So it's me making the initial thing, but I'd definitely want his opinion on what to do.*

*He wasn't. He's quite shy, so he's not too good at going to new things, which made it even harder. It was primarily left up to me.*

*Oh yeah, we discussed it for sure. And when we talking about the Kohanga Reo, would he be offended if he [child] didn't go, and did he want him to go, culturally and stuff.*

Often mothers identified preferred services and they and their partner would visit the service.

*Both went down and had a look. Was a mutual decision.*

*Well, me primarily, and I would talk to A about it, and if we found one that I thought was ok, he'd look into it with me. But most of the time we did rely a lot on our friends' experiences as well.*

### **Summary**

Parents generally believe that they are the best people to support their child's development, but at the same time most also acknowledge the need for children to have educational experience outside the home. There is rather less agreement that children's learning benefits from spending time with other adults and/or with extended family and whanau. In line with other research on attitudes to mothers of preschoolers working, there was relatively little support for the notion that children's development benefited from their parents work and career. However mothers who worked held more positive views of children benefiting from their work and career, and children being exposed to a range of other adults. They were less likely to believe that parents were the best people to support their child's development. As children got older there was more support for them being exposed to learning opportunities outside the home.

Parents generally started thinking about early childhood education for their child when they were quite young, with approximately a third of parents beginning to consider the issue before their child turned one. Employed mothers were more likely to have thought about ECE for their child, but this was largely due to the fact that mothers were more likely to be working when their child was older. Other demographic factors, such as education, household income, urban or rural location, and being a sole parent were not associated with having considered early childhood education for the youngest child. However, parents were more likely to have considered early childhood education for their child if they held attitudes supportive of educational experiences outside the home.

Parents who had thought about early childhood education indicated that the primary reasons they would use ECE was to assist their child's social and educational development, and to a lesser extent to assist with their language and cultural development. Using ECE as childcare while the parent was working was important for some parents, especially those in paid employment, but unimportant for others. Parents who were employed were also less likely to cite using ECE for their own benefit, either through 'time out' from childcare or for providing opportunities to socialise with other mothers.

Interestingly those with higher household income and educational qualifications were less likely to be using ECE for their child's social or educational development, or their language and cultural needs. This finding did not change when other demographic factors were controlled, suggesting that more educated parents place less emphasis on early childhood education service to provide for their child's educational and developmental needs.

The parents were also asked to rate the importance of various factors in influencing their decision to use Early Childhood Education services. In line with previous research, the quality of available services was of prime importance to parents, with eight out of ten rating it extremely important. The affordability of Early Childhood Education services was also important, particularly for those on lower incomes. A group of items relating to the readiness of the child and the match of the services to the child's age and abilities were the next most important factors, rated as important by over half the parents. The next items related to the availability of subsidies and alternative care arrangements, including those dependent on the flexibility of work schedules. As might be expected, flexibility of work schedules was more important for working mothers, and the availability of subsidies was more important for those on low incomes. Finally the availability of culturally appropriate services was rated as relatively unimportant, but was more important for Māori compared to NZ European children.

These results show that parents give primary consideration to their child's development when choosing whether or not to use Early Childhood Education services. These factors outweigh the practical issues associated with the use of these services, both for employed and non-employed mothers. However practical issues in making the decision to use ECE are more important for parents in paid employment.

During interviews, parents also discussed how they found out about Early Childhood Education services and who had made the decision about using them. For the majority of couples it was the mother who had done the research into what services were available. They had used a number of sources of information, but the main source had been family, friends and neighbours. Some had also used the yellow pages or the internet, and some had consulted newspapers or magazines. Many parents felt that they would have liked more detailed information on services available in their area.

It was also mainly mothers who had made the decision about the use of early childhood services although this was generally done in consultation with fathers. Some fathers had come along to check out the mothers recommended early childhood service, but in other cases fathers had deferred to the judgement of the mothers.



## Deciding which Early Childhood Education service to use

Having decided to use early childhood services for their child parents then have to decide which service to use. This chapter explores the factors that lead parents to choose one type of service rather than another. Children's current use of services is then detailed, including the type of service, the days and hours of attendance, and use of multiple services.

### What is important in deciding which Early Childhood Education service to use?

Parents were asked to rate the importance of a number of factors in deciding which of the ECE services to use for their child (Table 18). Service quality was the most important factor in choosing between services and was seen as extremely important by over two thirds of parents. How parents judge quality is discussed in the next chapter. Matching the service to the child's age, needs and abilities was next most important, rated extremely important by half of the parents.

**Table 18** Importance of factors when deciding which Early Childhood Education Service to use - mean (N=211)

	<b>Mean</b>
It is high quality	4.6
Suits my child's age, needs and abilities (e.g. temperament)	4.2
Has an educational focus	4.1
It is close to home	4.0
It has suitable opening hours	3.7
The providers philosophy (e.g. Playcentre, Steiner, Montessori)	3.4
It doesn't cost too much	3.4
I could use it part time, flexible hours - sessional	3.2
There is no long waiting list or wait for a place	3.2
I and/or my family have used this ECE service previously	2.9
It fits with arrangements for your other children	2.9
It is close to work	2.5
Meets my child's special needs e.g. health or disability	2.5
Parents take part/run the programme	2.3
It is based near a school	2.1
It is close to transport	1.7
It is home based	1.7

1=not at all important, to 5=extremely important

Parents considered it important that the service had an educational focus. Parents of Māori children were more likely to rate having an educational focus as important (Māori 4.3 vs. NZE 3.9;  $U=3143$ ,  $p=.036$ ). Parents were also slightly more likely to rate this as important if they had older children ( $r=.11$ ,  $p=.047$ ).

However, over 70% of parents of younger children (aged under 2 years) rated this as important or extremely important.

Parents also preferred services that were close to home and had suitable opening hours. The provider's philosophy and the cost of the service were rated as important by just over half the parents. Those with lower household incomes were more likely to rate cost as important when choosing between services ( $r=-.30$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Those with other children, either preschoolers or school aged, were more likely to cite as important their prior use of the service ( $U=1990.5$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and fitting into arrangements for the other children ( $U=1774$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

Although having a service that meet the child's special needs was not important for most parents, it is likely that this is particularly important for the relatively small group of parents with high needs children. For example, one parent who was interviewed said –

*Our little boy's got a lot of food allergies that are quite bad, so I was interested in how they would deal with him, as he might possibly need adrenaline. . . . So I wanted to go to work feeling happy that he's not going to constantly be exposed to danger.*

For this mother, her child's health needs were the most important consideration in choosing a type of service. She had considered centre based care, but was worried that her child might eat another child's food, triggering an allergic reaction. She had yet to make a final decision, but was investigating home based care options.

Having a service close to work was rather less important. However, mothers who were in paid employment were more likely to rate as important the service being close to work (employed 2.8 vs. non employed 1.7;  $U=3298$ ,  $p<.001$ ), having suitable opening hours (employed 3.9 vs. non employed 3.3;  $U=4407.5$ ,  $p=.003$ ), and being home based (employed 1.9 vs. non employed 1.4;  $U=4314.5$ ,  $p=.006$ ). Sole parents were more likely to rate as important the cost (sole 3.7 vs. couple 3.3;  $U=2276.5$ ,  $p=.032$ ), being close to home (sole 4.2 vs. 3.9;  $U=2602.5$ ,  $p=.043$ ), suiting the child age, needs and abilities (sole 4.5 vs. couple 4.2;  $U=2255.0$ ,  $p=.011$ ) and suiting the child's special needs (sole 3.3 vs. couple 2.3;  $U=1810$ ,  $p=.002$ ).

In terms of location, it seems parents prefer having services close to home, irrespective of whether they are in paid employment, or not. However, those who are in paid employment regard having a service located close to work as more important (35%) than those who don't work (10%), but overall still prefer a service being located close to home (Wilcoxon signed rank  $z=-6.4$ ,  $p<.001$ )<sup>20</sup>. This preference holds even for mothers in full time paid employment. Those with other school aged children rated location near a school as more important than those without school aged children ( $U=4647.5$ ,  $p=.023$ ).

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<sup>20</sup> Seventy one percent of employed parents rated being close to home as important.

Parents were once again asked to indicate the three most important factors in their decision making between different services (Table 19). The frequency with which factors were selected mirror closely the average ratings shown in Table 18. The quality of the service was selected by 73% of parents, and was selected almost twice as often as suitability of the service for the child's age, needs and ability.

**Table 19** Three most important factors in deciding which Early Childhood Service to use – percent (N=181)

	<b>Percent</b>
It is high quality	73
Suits my child's age, needs and abilities (e.g. temperament)	38
Has an educational focus	36
It is close to home	28
It doesn't cost too much	23
I and/or my family have used this ECE service previously	20
The providers philosophy (e.g. Playcentre, Steiner, Montessori)	17
I could use it part time, flexible hours - sessional	13
It has suitable opening hours	13
It fits with arrangements for your other children	8
It is home based	7
It is close to work	7
Parents take part/run the programme	6
It is based near a school	6
There is no long waiting list or wait for a place	5
Meets my child's special needs e.g. health or disability	2
It is close to transport	1

### **Actual use of Early Childhood Education services**

Of those who had considered ECE services for their child (n=269), over three quarters (79%) of these children were attending a service. Use of ECE services varied with age; 21% of those under one were attending, 60% of one year olds, 81% of two year olds, 91% of three year olds and 97% of four year olds. For one and two year olds, these figures are higher than the Ministry of Education data cited in the introduction (under 1 year of age - 17%, 1 years of age - 43%, 2 years of age – 66%, 3 years of age - 98%) indicating that the sample contains a relatively high proportion of younger children who are using ECE services, compared to the general population. This comparison also suggests that those parents with a child attending Early Childhood Education services were more likely to respond to the survey.

Looking specifically at those children where the parent had thought about using early childhood education Table 20 presents data on the number of children in each age group attending an early childhood education service. As would be expected for this group, where parents have thought about using ECE actual participation increases with age. Given that parents have thought about the use of ECE for their child, why

are some attending a service and others not? The next section examines this issue for children under three, since there are very few three and four year olds who are not attending an ECE service.

**Table 20** Child's age and whether attending Early Childhood Education services – numbers and percent of those who have thought about it (n=263)

Age of Child	Attending		Not attending		Total N
	N	%	N	%	
under 1	13	46	15	54	28
One	39	75	13	25	52
Two	59	87	9	13	68
Three	42	93	3	7	45
Four	68	97	2	3	70

Parents' comments during interviews illustrated some of the reasons for not using early childhood services. Parents of younger children had started thinking about ECE for their child, but did not consider their child yet old enough to start attending a service. Some of these parents had put their child on a waiting list for a place at an ECE service, for example

*I didn't at first think about sending my son to ECE but realized when he was growing that he needed to go to some kind of ECE-important for his development.*

One four year old child was not currently attending an ECE service because she had recently moved to a new area. There was a waiting list at the local kindergarten and the mother had made arrangements with her mother to care for this preschool child and her school aged siblings. The mother did not consider it necessary to have her child in ECE as she was due to start school within a few months. Although she had tried commuting back to use her child's old ECE service, this had proved too time consuming, as she was working and studying.

### **What predicts the use of ECE for children under 3 years of age?**

Since most of the children aged three and older were attending an early childhood service we will focus on the factors associated with the use of early childhood service for the younger children in our sample. Here we consider the group of children under three whose mother indicated that they had thought about the use of early childhood education for the child. Parents who had not thought about ECE for their child are excluded, as it did not make sense to ask them about factors in their decision making when they had not yet thought about ECE (although the difference between parents who had thought about it and those who had not has been considered above).



Children were more likely to be attending an early childhood education service if their mother was working (employed 85% vs. non employed 63%;  $\chi^2(1, 148)=8.7, p=.003$ ). Although sole parents were more likely to be using Early Childhood Education services (89%), compared to couples (73%), this was not statistically significant. However, when analysis is conducted controlling for the child's age, mothers' employment status, household income and mothers' education, sole parents were statistically more likely to use Early Childhood Education services. These results confirm similar findings from the childcare survey (Callister, 1999) and an Australian Bureau of Statistics childcare survey (2005) that found higher use of childcare by sole parents.

Those whose child was attending Early Childhood Education services were more likely to cite the child's educational needs (attending 4.5 vs. non attending 4.0;  $U=1490, p=.008$ ) and childcare while working (attending 3.4 vs. non attending 2.7;  $U=15555, p=.030$ ) as reasons for using them. They were also less likely to cite the quality of services as important in deciding to use early childhood education (attending 4.7 vs. non attending 4.9;  $U=1774, p=.033$ ).

Although those who were not using ECE were more likely to report using their partner for informal care (67%) than those who were using ECE (49%), this difference was not statistically significant.

### Current use of different Early Childhood Education services

Children were attending a number of different types of service (Table 21). Childcare centres were being used by almost a half of the children attending a service, followed by those attending kindergartens (a quarter). Home based services within someone else's home were being used by over one in five and Playcentres by just under one in five. Playgroups were being used by just under ten percent, and relatively small numbers of children were using the remaining service types (e.g. Montessori or Steiner and Te Kohanga Reo). None of the children in the current sample were attending a Pasifika childcare centre.

**Table 21** Types of Early Childhood Education Service used, with comparison to MoE (2005) enrolments - percents (N=211)

	ECE Survey	MoE figures
Childcare centre (includes crèche, preschool, or daycare)	46	46
Kindergarten	30	25
Home-based care in someone else's home (e.g. Barnardos, family day care)	22	-
Playcentre	16	8
Playgroup	9	10
Home-based care in your home (e.g. Porse, nanny)	5	
Montessori or Steiner services	5	
Te Kohanga Reo	2	6
Pasifika childcare centre	0	-

- due to definitional differences it is not possible to compare these figures

In order to compare the current sample with national use of ECE services, data from a Ministry of Education survey of ECE enrolments has been included in Table 21. Where comparison is possible, the current sample provides a good match to national enrolments. Kindergarten and Playcentre use is higher in the current sample, while use of Te Kohanga Reo is less than that nationally. Homebased care also appears to be higher in the current sample, although some of this care may not be formal ECE. Part of the difference in these figures may be due to the current sample having a higher proportion of younger children compared to national enrolments, which might push up use of homebased services.

Analysis confirmed that the type of service used varied with the age of the child. Home based care in the parent's home tended to be used for younger children (aged under 2) and two year olds were more likely to go to playgroups. Playcentre use reduced when children reached 4 years while Kindergarten was used more by parents of 4 year olds. Use of Childcare centres was evenly spread across ages. These results mirror previous research (Foot et al., 2000) that found that children moved from play group to local authority nursery as they became older, although use of private nurseries stayed fairly constant. This is no doubt a reflection of parents' beliefs that as children approach school age they need an ECE service that prepares them for entry to primary school.

We next sought to identify factors that distinguished parents using each of the main types of early childhood service being used by the sample; Kindergarten, Childcare centre, Playcentre and Home-based<sup>21</sup>. Listed below are the main differences between those using a specific service type and those not using that service.

Those parents whose children were using Childcare centres –

- Were more likely to be employed mothers ( $\chi^2$  (1, 233)=13.6,  $p<.001$ )
- Rated parent development as a less important reason to use ECE (U=5256.5,  $p=.029$ )
- Were more likely to cite childcare while working as a reason to use ECE (U=3275,  $p<.001$ )
- Rated practical considerations as more important in their decision to use ECE (U=5196,  $p=.003$ )
- Were more likely to cite being close to work as important in choosing a service (U=3956.5,  $p<.001$ )
- Were more likely to cite the possibility of part time or flexible use as important in choosing a service (U=5099.5,  $p=.014$ )
- Were more likely to cite having suitable opening hours as important in choosing a service (U=4848,  $p=.002$ )
- Were less likely to cite parents taking part or running the programme as important in choosing a service (U=4068,  $p<.001$ )
- Were less likely to cite being home-based as being important in choosing a service (U=4818,  $p=.009$ )

<sup>21</sup> For these purposes home based services in their own home and someone else's home have been grouped together.

Those using home-based services –

- were more likely to be employed mothers ( $\chi^2 (1, 233)=9.9, p=.002$ )
- using childcare while working was a more important reason to use ECE ( $U=1981.5, p=.035$ )
- being close to transport was less important in choosing a service ( $U=2647.5, p=.031$ )
- being based near a school was less important in choosing a service ( $U=2596, p=.021$ )
- as expected, being home based was more important in choosing a service ( $U=827, p<.001$ )
- not having a long waiting list was more important choosing a service ( $U=2603, p=.036$ )

Those using Playcentre –

- were more likely to cite parent development as a reason for using ECE ( $U=1642.5, p<.001$ )
- Were less likely to cite childcare while working as a reason for using ECE ( $U=2193.5, p<.001$ )
- Were less likely to cite being close to work as a deciding factor in choosing a service ( $U=2386, P=.002$ )
- Were more likely to be living in towns/boroughs or rural locations (just over a third used Playcentre) than those living in a provincial city and metropolitan area (one in ten used Playcentre)
- Were more likely to cite parents running or taking part in the programme as a deciding factor in choosing a service ( $U=1428.5, p<.001$ )
- Were more likely to cite that they or their family having used the service before as a deciding factor in choosing a service ( $U=2827.5, p=.045$ )
- Were less likely to cite having an educational focus as a deciding factor in choosing a service ( $U=2808, p=.042$ )
- Were more likely to cite the provider's philosophy as being a deciding factor in choosing a service ( $U=2525, p=.012$ )

Those using kindergarten –

- Were more likely to cite being based near a school as important in choosing a service ( $U=3903.5, p=.001$ )
- Were more likely to cite that cost was a deciding factor when choosing a service ( $U=4292, p=.022$ )
- Were less likely to cite childcare while working as a reason to use ECE ( $U=3923, p=.001$ )
- Were less likely to cite the providers philosophy as being a deciding factor in choosing a service ( $U=3906.5, p=.009$ )
- Were less likely to cite having suitable opening hours as important in choosing a service ( $U=4146.5, p=.013$ )
- Were less likely to cite the possibility of part time or flexible use as important in choosing a service ( $U=4361, p=.032$ )

- Were less likely to cite being close to work as a deciding factor in choosing a service (U=4131, P=.014)

It is of note that ethnicity, sole parenthood, household income and mother's education were not related to the type of service being used.

It appears from the above results that for childcare centres and homebased care, whether or not mothers worked was an important factor in choosing that service. However this was not the case for Kindergarten and Playcentre, a result that is in keeping with the findings of the New Zealand Childcare Survey. Use of these services was also influenced by work related practical factors such as opening hours, location, and expectations of parental involvement.

For those using Kindergarten there were a number of factors that were important in choosing this service. The relatively low cost of the service was important to these parents, but parents were less likely to be using it as a source of childcare while working. Kindergarten is also seen as more appropriate for those about to start school and this is reflected in the desire of these parents to have a service located near school.

On the other hand the choice of Playcentre was related more to the factors associated with the particular philosophy and characteristics of the programme. For example parents are more involved in running the programme which is based around a philosophy of learning through play. Hence the above results reflect the desire by these parents to be involved in a service that has less of an educational focus and offers parents opportunities to learn.

One interesting finding with respect to the use of Playcentre is the greater use by families in small towns and those living in rural areas. This result is in line with the interviews we had with rural families. They noted that rural families had to rely on playgroups or rural Playcentres for their early childhood education. The only other option was to travel into the nearest town in order to access Kindergarten or other ECE providers. Some rural parents preferred using a service in town where they could drop off their children, as it gave them time to shop or visit banks and accountants.

It is not possible to make causal statements that these factors cause parents to choose a service, although in some cases it seems likely (e.g. past use of the service). In other cases, such as the importance of the providers' philosophy, the selection of certain factors as being important may have developed after the service has been chosen and is being used.

### Use of multiple ECE services

While most children (78%) were attending only one type of ECE service, some (20%) children were using two services and a small number (2%) used three services. This figure is close to that found for Scottish parents (Foot et al, 2000), where 17% were concurrently using more than one pre-school service. In the present study the most common combinations were the following –

- Childcare centre and kindergarten (n=14)
- Childcare centre and playgroup (n=5)
- Childcare centre and Playcentre (n=4)
- Homebased and childcare centre (n=6)
- Homebased and Playcentre (n=5)
- Homebased and Kindergarten (n=6)
- Homebased and playgroup (n=4)

It appears that the main combinations of the services<sup>22</sup> are the use of sessional services with a more childcare orientated services. This probably indicates that parents want their children to attend Playcentre, Kindergarten and Playgroups, but need to use additional services to provide cover the full hours of childcare needed.

Very few factors were associated with use of multiple services. Use of multiple services was less common for children under 2 years of age, although there was not a statistically significant difference in use by age. Interestingly, neither mothers employment status nor the number of hours she worked were associated with use of multiple services. The New Zealand Childcare survey had found some evidence of greater use of multiple caregivers by employed mothers, but this related to use of both formal and informal care, rather than use of multiple types of formal ECE.

This raises the question as to why mothers not in paid employment are using multiple services. It is possible they need the extra childcare to allow them to engage in non-employment activities, such as voluntary work or caring for relatives. It is also possible that some children are in a transition between services, and these may be the children attending a playgroup and a Playcentre. Other children may be attending a service that is really used mainly by a sibling.

*D spends 3 afternoons a week at Kindy - Monday, Tuesday and Thursday from 12:45-3:15pm. He also goes to a playgroup on Tuesday morning. It is really for A [younger sibling] but he comes along too.*

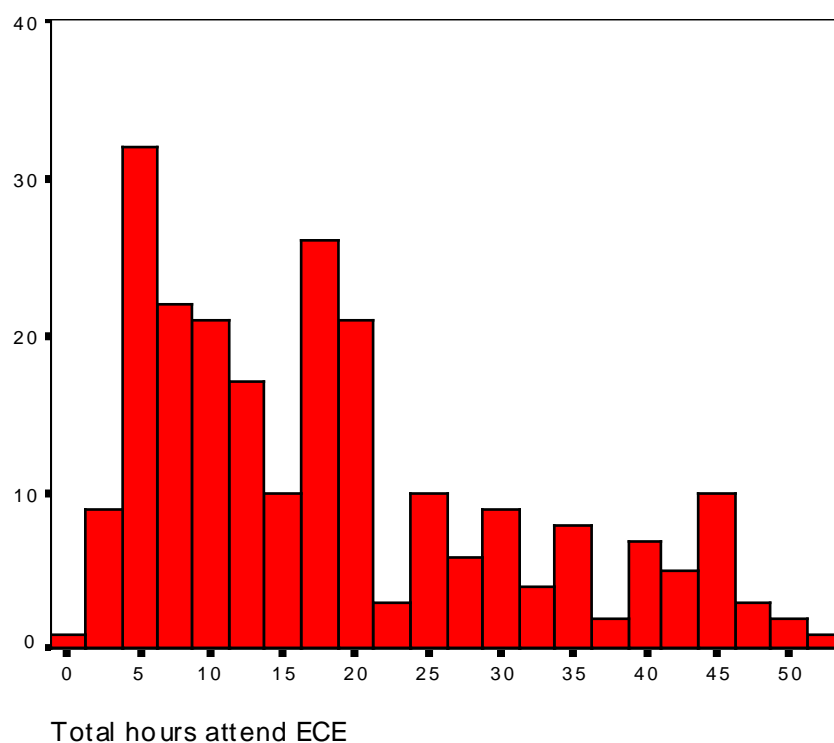
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22 Although parents were asked which service their child 'uses' it is possible that some parents were reporting services that had been used recently, rather than were using concurrently. That is, it is possible that a parent may have mention two services if her child had recently moved from playgroup to Playcentre.

### Time spent in Early Childhood Education services in a typical week

Children spent on average 19 hours a week attending Early Childhood Education services. This includes those who were attending more than one service in a week. Figure 5 shows that attendance varied from 1 hour to 52 hours per week. Although those using multiple services spent on average more time in ECE (21 hours) than those attending one service (18 hours) this difference was not statistically significant. This further suggests that multiple services are not being used to provide more hours of ECE, but rather that, as we show below, parents choose the service type that will provide the hours needed.

**Figure 5** Average hours of attendance at Early Childhood Education Service - numbers (N=178)



Younger children spent fewer hours attending ECE each week ( $r=.18$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Those aged under one spent on average 12.5 hours, those aged one spent 15 hours, and two to four year olds spent 19-20 hours on average attending ECE services.

Children whose mothers were in paid employment were attending ECE services for longer each week (22.6 hours) compared to children of non-employed mothers (11.2 hours). This difference held once child's age was taken into account, although the difference was reduced. The average number of hours a child spent in Early Childhood Education services was positively related to the number of hours mothers reported working ( $r=.374$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

To identify how long children spent on average in each type of service it was necessary to examine those attending only one service<sup>23</sup>. For some services, that are often used in combination with other services, this significantly reduces the number for whom we have data on hours of attendance. The greatest number of hours on average were spent in Te Kohanga Reo, Home based care and in a childcare centre, all with average attendance of over 20 hours (Table 22). Kindergartens had average hours of attendance of 13 hours. Children attend Playcentre and Montessori or Steiner services for less than 10 hours on average per week. Where comparison is possible with Ministry of Education data (Table 2), the hours of attendance in this sample are close to the national data.

**Table 22 Average hours attendance by type of Early Childhood Education Service, those using one type only - percents (N=178)**

<b>Hours</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Average</b>
Te Kohanga Reo	3	30
Home-based care in someone else's home (e.g. Barnardos, family day care)	9	25
Childcare centre (includes crèche, preschool, or daycare)	77	24
Home-based care in your home (e.g. Porse, nanny)	5	20
Playgroup	-	-
Kindergarten	45	13
Montessori or Steiner services	9	9
Playcentre	23	7

- data for playgroups was unreliable, but these have limited hours of operation.

In terms of the days that children attend ECE services, over a third (37%) of the children spent every weekday attending an ECE service. The next most common pattern was to spend three (25%) or two days (18%) attending. Relatively few spent four (13%) or one day (7%) attending. Those attending a service up to three days per week, spent on average 4 hours a day at that service. Those attending four days a week, did so on average 5 hours a day and those attending every weekday, attended on average six hours a day.

In terms of the number of days children were attending services, this varied by both the age of the children and the type of service they attended. The older the child the greater the number of days they attended an ECE service ( $r=.39$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Children attending kindergarten tended to attend for either three days (27%) or five days (49%). On the other hand those attending Playcentre tended to attend for two (65%) or three days (26%). There was a more diverse pattern for those attending a childcare centre, with most (36%) attending five days and approximately equal numbers attending two (21%) or three (22%) days a week.

<sup>23</sup> This is because parents were asked about total hours in ECE rather than hours for each service attended.

### Hours in Early Childhood Education and the ‘care gap’

Having obtained both the number of hours mothers were working and the number of hours children were attending Early Childhood Services, we were able to identify those parents who had a ‘care gap’. That is, those parents whose hours of ECE were not sufficient to cover the time mothers spent at work, or studying. Table 23 shows the gaps in care that parents faced.

**Table 23**      **Difference between hours parents work or study and childcare provided by ECE – numbers and percents (n=331)**

	Number	Percent
Not working	146	44
None or ECE exceeds work hours	68	21
Up to 5 hours deficit	33	10
5 to 10 hours deficit	18	5
10 hours plus deficit	66	20

Thirty five percent of families had a ‘care gap’, including those who were not using ECE but were working. While for some this deficit was relatively small (under five hours) for twenty percent the difference between hours worked and early childhood education attendance was over ten hours. In these later cases the question arises as to how this additional ‘informal’ childcare is arranged, especially when most fathers are working full time. The gap was similar for those mothers living alone and those living with a partner, although, as has been shown earlier, sole parents are less likely to be in paid employment.

Another way of looking at this issue is to examine the proportion of work hours that are covered by Early Childhood Education services. For 44% of working mothers, their work hours were less than the hours their child attended Early Childhood Education services<sup>24</sup>. Early Childhood Education services covered under a half of mothers work hours for 22% of those in paid employment, while for the remaining 34% ECE hours covered between a half of mothers work hours and the full hours of work.

### Informal childcare

Parents were asked about other sources of childcare they regularly used for their youngest child. Partners were most often called upon to provide childcare, with just over half the parents using them as a source of regular informal childcare (Table 24). Forty one percent said they shared care with their partner.

<sup>24</sup> The hours of ECE attendance do not necessarily match the times that the mother is working.



Grandparents were also used for regular informal childcare by half of the parents. Other extended family members helped provide childcare for almost a third of the children. Friends were another major source of informal care, with almost a third of parents regularly using them to help care for their children. Although some parents used private arrangements and neighbours to help provide childcare this was relatively uncommon. Similarly care by older siblings was not often used, probably because most young children did not have older siblings who could provide this care.

**Table 24** Who regularly cares for your youngest child when you need informal childcare – percent (N=312)

	Percent
Care by my partner	53
Care by child's grandparents	52
Partner and I share care	41
Care by friends	32
Care by extended family (e.g. your sister)	32
Private arrangement (e.g. nanny)	7
Older children care for younger ones	6
Care by neighbours	4
Other	4

Mothers who were working were more likely to use grandparents for informal care (employed 57% vs. non employed 43%;  $\chi^2(1, 342)=6.1, p=.014$ ) and sole parents were more likely to use extended family, compared to married couples (sole 48% vs. couple 29%;  $\chi^2(1, 335)=5.3, p=.021$ ). Examples of the use of both early childhood education and informal care were given by some of the interviewed parents –

*Kindy: Mon, Tues, Thur 9-11:45am, Wed & Friday 8:30-12pm.*

*Family members drop and pick up son from kindy.*

*Family members look after son before mum gets home from work at 1pm every day.*

*When mother is working-grandma takes son to kindy. If raining then he stays home because grandma is too old and can not drive.*

*Mother in law or sister-in-law drop son off and pick up from kindy.*

*Friend used to look after him after kindy.*

Unexpectedly, the 'care gap' was unrelated to the use of any of these informal sources of care. This suggests that informal care was not being used to fill the gap between the time mothers were at work and the time they were attending early childhood services. A difficulty with this data is that we do not know how long

children were spending with these informal carers. It is possible that although those with a care gap are no more likely to use informal care than those without, the real difference is that the former use the informal care for longer. It is also possible that parents are using flexible working hours, or work non-standard hours, in order to provide care.

### **Informal care and use of ECE for children under three**

If children are not attending early childhood services then who is caring for them? Care by a partner is the only source of informal care that is used more often by those whose child does not attend an early childhood education service (65%), compared to those whose child attended an ECE service (49%), ( $\chi^2(1, 193)=4.2, p=.039$ ). If this analysis is repeated for those mothers who are employed compared to those not employed then this difference is found to persist, but only for those who are not employed. This suggests that partners are not being used to cover non-ECE hours for mothers who are working, but rather that mothers who are not working are using partners to cover in place of ECE.

### **Summary**

This chapter examined the decision making process with regard to choice of type of early childhood education service. When choosing a service the most important factor rated by parents was the quality of the service, and this is in keeping with previous research on parents' choice of childcare. Being suitable for the child's age, needs and abilities was also important for the majority of parents, as was having an educational focus to the service. Next most important were practical considerations regarding the location of the service, its hours of operation, cost, flexibility of use and waiting list. The cost of the service was more important for those on lower incomes.

Having another child was a consideration for some parents as these parents were more likely to have prior experience of a service and to have to consider these other care arrangements when choosing a service. For those mothers in paid employment, the location of a service close to work was important, as were practical considerations such as opening hours.

Over ninety percent of three and four year olds were attending a service, so we examined the factors that were associated with the use of early childhood education by those under three years old. These children were more likely to attend a service if their mother was working and if they lived with only one parent. Parents of those attending a service were also more likely to cite the child's educational needs as a reason, and the quality of services as a deciding factor, for using ECE.

The actual type of service used was partly a function of the age of the child, but also varied in terms of mothers employment (for childcare centres and homebased care), some of the reasons and factors important in deciding to use early childhood services, and some factors associated with the choice of the type of

service. Many of these differences related to the use of childcare centres and home-based care for childcare while mothers worked, and some related to the different levels of participation in the services along with differences in provider philosophy.

A fifth of children were attending more than one type of early childhood education service. Those who did so tended to attend a sessional ECE programme along with a service more closely associated with the provision of childcare (e.g. home based care or a Childcare centre). There were no factors identified as associated with the use of multiple services, although the use of multiple services tended to be less common for younger children.

The hours that parents reported their children using services was close to National survey data and mirrored the patterns found in that data, with longer hours spent in home based care and childcare centres compared to Kindergarten and Playcentres. Children whose mothers were employed spent longer in ECE on average each week, as did those children who were older.

Since we had information on both the number of hours children spent in early childhood education and the number of hours mothers worked or studied, we were able to identify any disparity in these hours. A 'care gap' existed for thirty five percent of the families and, although for eleven percent this was less than five hours, for twenty percent it was over ten hours. Use of informal care did not seem to relate to whether there was a 'care gap', although we did not have data on the hours of informal care used. It did not appear that extra hours of care were being accessed informally in order to make up the hours parents needed to cover the gap between their work commitments and the hours their child spent in early childhood services. It is likely that a number of strategies are being used by parents to fill this gap, including working non-standard hours (e.g. evening and weekends), working from home, or using flexible work hours to share care with a partner.



## **Judging the quality of Early Childhood Education services**

The preceding analysis indicates that parents are very concerned with the quality of the ECE service they choose for their child. Concern for quality was universal and did not distinguish those who used ECE or the type of service used. Table 25 provides information on the importance of a number of factors that parents use to judge the quality of services. Parents cited three main factors as being of primary importance in judging quality; the quality of the care provided by staff, child safety and how happy the child was with the service. Almost 90% of parents rated these as extremely important.

A further set of items were rated as extremely important by 50-60% of parents. These concerned staff qualifications, staff welcoming parents, staff-child ratios, lack of overcrowding, good resourcing and clean and tidy facilities. Parents also indicated that the quality of the programme provided by the service was important, as was the feedback they got on their child's activities and progress. Interestingly the quality of Education Review Office reports was rated as relatively less important, although the majority still rated it important and only eight percent said it was unimportant (1-2 on the scale). What others said about a service was important to many parents, but compared to other factors was of lesser importance in rating quality.

Finally, the meeting of a child's cultural needs was also relatively unimportant. However, when considered in terms of the ethnicity of the child it was rated more important by parents of non NZ European children ( $F(3, 333)=5.47, p=.001$ ). For parents of Māori children, 53% considered this an important (4-5 on scale) factor in judging service quality (compared to 33% of parents of NZ European children and 41% of Pacific parents).

**Table 25** Importance of factor when judging the Quality of Early Childhood Services – mean (N=312)

	<b>Mean</b>
Quality of care (e.g. staff interact well with the children)	4.9
Children are safe	4.9
My child is/will be happy there	4.9
It has well qualified and trained staff	4.6
A good child-staff ratio	4.6
There aren't too many children, it is not overcrowded	4.5
It has good resources (e.g. toys, play area)	4.5
Staff are welcoming to parents	4.5
The facilities are clean and tidy	4.4
The quality of the programme (e.g. the curriculum)	4.3
It provides reports on my child's progress	4.2
Good Education Review Office reports	4.0
Others (e.g. friends) say it is good	3.8
The service matches my child's cultural needs	3.1

1=not at all important, to 5=extremely important

The first three items are rated as extremely important by most parents, and therefore they are unlikely to distinguish between different groups of parents or users of different types of services. Also, given past research findings that quality is important for all parents irrespective of factors such as income, education and employment, it is surprising that ratings of importance were found to differ in terms of income and education. Consistent with some of the earlier findings (p. 42), parents with higher household incomes and higher education as *less* likely to rate most of these factors as important in judging quality. Most correlations were in the .1 to .2 range, which suggests relatively weak associations, with higher income and the more educated still rating most of these items as important, although less so than the less educated or those with lower incomes.

Parents were more likely to rate the above items as important in judging quality when they also rated their reasons for using ECE, and the factors influencing their decision to use ECE, as important. This perhaps reflects the general importance they attach to Early Childhood Education services. Those for whom it is important are likely to rate reasons, factors influencing their decision and factors with which they judge quality as important, compared to those for whom use of ECE is relatively unimportant.

The rating of the importance of these quality factors also differed for parents using different services.

For those using home-based care –

- The quality of the programme was less important
- Having well qualified staff was less important
- Matching the child's cultural needs was less important

For those using kindergarten –

- Having well trained and qualified staff was more important
- Having a good staff-child ration was less important

For those using a childcare centre –

- Providing reports on the child's progress was more important, perhaps reflecting the longer period of attendance

For those attending Playcentre –

- Others saying it was good was less important
- Having well trained a qualified staff was less important
- Having good ERO reports was less important
- Providing reports on the child's progress was less important,
- Having good resources was more important

It is plausible to link some of these differences to the higher levels of parental participation in the Playcentre programme. Parents who are with their children and observing their activities are less likely to need progress reports, to have to rely on what others say about a programme, and to be concerned with staff qualifications.

Once again it is important to point out that these are statistical associations and do not tell us whether or not these differences preceded use of a service or whether they develop out of the experience of using a service.

The interviews provided some interesting insights into how parents assessed quality, particularly when they were selecting a provider. Often this visit led to a 'gut feeling' about the service, based on factors such as how the staff interacted with the children and how they treated parents. As has been discussed above this was one of the most important factors for parents when choosing a service.

*But so far as [quality] criteria, I guess ultimately it was really a gut feeling, just the sort of environment I wanted to leave her in, and she was quite clingy, yeah, she was always quite clingy. But you can spend hours and hours at these centres, though, and they allow you to leave your child running around. And as long as I was there she played quite happily, and I could really just, I could stay for hours actually, and just watch, and I did.*

*Way the staff interact with children and how they talk to them. How they treat you as well. Whether they are happy for you to come in and ask questions and be quite open to what they are doing.*

*Friendly and approachable staff.*

*The way people conduct themselves is a big thing, like the teachers. Everything set out clearly for the kids. They've got to have their rules, their guidelines, maintaining them, being quite strict with them. And how welcome them make you feel as well I think, because if they're really welcome you they want you there, and they want your kid there. And they take time out to actually acknowledge each child individually, which is a real big thing, I think. Whereas some kids can just walk in and do something great, and no one ever notices.*

### **Summary**

In keeping with previous research, and with other findings in this report, the quality of Early Childhood Education services is rated as extremely important by most parents. Quality is judged on a number of different criteria, the most important being the quality of care provided by staff, the safety of the child and how happy the child is with attending the service. Staff qualifications and how welcoming they are of parents is also important, as are factors such as child-staff ratios, overcrowding, and quality of the facilities. Many parents judged services on the basis of the quality of the programme and the feedback they gave on their child's activities and progress. Of lesser importance (although still considered important) was feedback from ERO and from others who were using the service.

Understandably, the meeting of children's cultural needs was more important in judging service quality for non-European children. More unexpectedly, but in keeping with earlier results, those with higher household incomes and higher education rated most of the quality factors as less important than those on lower incomes or with lower educational qualifications. There were also some differences in the rating of these quality indicators by the type of service being used.

Those using homebased services were less concerned with the quality of the programme, having qualified staff and the matching of the service to the child's cultural needs. Having reports on the child's progress was more important for those using childcare centres, perhaps reflecting parents concern to know what the child is doing when they are away from them for relatively long periods. For those using Kindergarten, having well-trained and qualified staff was more important, but having a good staff-child ratio was of lesser importance. Perhaps reflecting the fact that parents are usually more actively involved in Playcentre, a number of factors relating to staffing and reporting on progress and quality, were judged to be of lesser importance in judging quality.

These are parents' perceptions and show what they look for in a service in order to judge its quality. However when it comes to rating the quality of service on these factors, previous research has shown that



parents are not able to make clear distinctions in quality, compared to ‘experts’ (Cryer et al., 2002). This is understandable given parents often limited opportunity to observe programmes, although some parents reported making a point of dropping in unannounced in order to see ‘what really happens’.



## Comparing decision making with regard to out of school services and Early Childhood Education services

While the out of school services (OSS)<sup>25</sup> and the Early Childhood Education services (ECE) research were conducted independently, it is instructive to compare the findings of the two studies. It needs to be noted however, that there are differences in the general aims and the provision of these different services. Early Childhood Education services tend to be more diverse, both in provider philosophy, hours of operation, cost, range of services available locally, educational focus and degree of involvement of parents. Furthermore, attendance at an early childhood education programme is near universal for New Zealand children. On the other hand there is less diversity in out of school services, there are less of them, and these services are used by only one in ten children. Out of school services tend to focus on activities and primarily serve a childcare function rather than an educational role.

### Difference in samples

Both the out of school and the early childhood education samples were drawn from ACNielsen's database of volunteers. The response rate was higher for the early childhood education sample, possibly reflecting the greater awareness and use of such services compared to those for school aged children. However in terms of mothers' education, household incomes and proportions of different ethnic groups, the samples were very similar. The out of school sample had more children living in sole parent households (24%), and in stepfamilies (6%), compared to the ECE sample (12% in sole parent households and 1% in a stepfamily). As a result fewer children in the OSS sample were living with their parents (66%) compared to those in the ECE sample (85%). Given the older age of children in the OSS sample these differences are expected, as older children have had more time in which to experience these family transitions.

Mothers in the OSS sample were more likely to be in paid employment (80% vs. 56% in ECE sample), mainly because more mothers of older children worked full time (45% vs. 24% in ECE sample). Similar proportions of mothers worked part time (approx 30%) in both the OSS and ECE sample. The proportion of fathers in employment was also similar in both samples, at over 90%.

### Reasons for using services

In both samples parents indicated that they preferred children to be cared for by parents or extended family. However parents often had multiple preferences, involving combinations of parental and extended family care along with informal care by others and use of more formal services. Parents also acknowledged that

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<sup>25</sup> Parental Decision making in relation to the use of Out of School Services, a report for the Ministry of Social Development.

children benefited from spending time in programmes outside the home. Younger children's development was seen as benefiting from attending Early Childhood Education services, with the main reason for using these services being to assist children's social and educational development. Although childcare while parents were working was the main reason for using out of school services, school aged children were also seen as benefiting from the social and learning opportunities offered by out of school programmes.

Demand for both out of school and Early Childhood Education services was related to mothers' employment. The need for out of school services was greater when mothers were in paid employment, especially when they worked outside school hours. For preschool aged children, just over a half of the mothers indicated that an important reason for using Early Childhood Education services was for childcare while they were working. Employed mothers of preschool children were also more likely to indicate that they would use out of school services in the future (once their child started school). While childcare for working parents was not the only reason parents choose to use services, it was an important reason for parents of both preschool and school aged children.

### **Use of services**

As the samples (especially the OSS sample) are not nationally representative of all parents caution needs to be taken in comparing rates of service use and in identifying the extent of unmet demand. The data suggest that parents found it easier to access Early Childhood Education services, especially as children approached school age. Compared to parents of preschool children, parents of school aged children encountered greater difficulty in accessing out of school services. Just over half the parents wanting out of school services had been able to access them, compared to over three quarters of parents who had considered using early childhood services. Furthermore, only a third of those using out of school services had a choice of services for their child.

Interviewed parents had less understanding of out of school services, compared to their more detailed knowledge of Early Childhood Education services. Some parents had not heard of the phrase 'out of school services', although some were aware of OSCAR services. More information was available on Early Childhood Education services, although both groups of parents wanted more detailed information on local services. Both groups of parents cited using a range of information sources, including family, phone books, friends and work colleagues, and the internet.

Although the data is not strictly comparable, it appears that barriers to accessing out of school services arose through the limited availability of services, their limited hours of operation and their cost. The availability and cost of Early Childhood Education services appeared to be of less importance in deciding whether or not to use these services. However the cost and hours of operation of Early Childhood Education services depended on the type of service being used. Parents reported being more concerned with practical

considerations (e.g. cost and hours) when looking for fulltime/all day care, and such care is much more expensive than time limited sessional services.

Parents wanted Early Childhood Education services that were close to home, while parents wanted before or after school programmes that were attached to a school. Parents also wanted holiday programmes to be based at school, although a similar proportion also wanted these programmes located close to home. These preferences are understandable given the need for children to move to/from school and the out of school programme.

As indicated above, parents' preferences are not always restricted to one form of childcare or service. In both samples parents often preferred a combination of formal and informal childcare, and this is reflected in their use of informal childcare (Table 26). Interesting differences are apparent in the use of different types of informal care for pre-school compared to school aged children. Grandparents are more likely to be used for childcare for younger children, while friends and neighbours and extended family are used more often for school aged children. These findings no doubt reflect the greater care needs of pre-school compared to school aged children, and the trust parents feel they must have in caregivers.

Parents also report using private arrangements more often for older children and being more likely to use older siblings to care for younger brothers/sisters. This later finding is not unexpected, given that older children are far more likely to have siblings who are over 14 years of age.

**Table 26** Informal sources of childcare for preschool (ECE) and school aged (OSS) children – percent using regularly

	ECE	OSS
Care by partner	53	52
Care by grandparents	52	44
Care by friends and neighbours	36	48
Care by extended family	32	44
Private arrangement	7	13
Older children care for younger ones	6	29

Our interviews provide some illustration of the issues raised above. Some parents of school aged children made the comparison with their earlier use of early childhood services when commenting on out of school services. They reported having less choice of before and after school services, compared to Early Childhood Education services. While some wanted the after school programme to help their child with homework, most wanted out of school programmes with a range of age appropriate activities. In comparison, parents

spoke of the need for early childhood programmes to prepare children for school and to assist with their social and educational development.

Parents also acknowledged that it was easier to leave older children with neighbours and friends for limited periods of time. Older children required less active ‘care’ and were not seen as imposing such a burden on family and friends. Changes in arrangements were also seen as less unsettling for older children, and the children themselves played a more active role in deciding on childcare arrangements.

### **Judging service quality**

Parents in both samples were asked to rate the importance of a number of factors in judging the quality of Early Childhood Education services and out of school services. Table 27 presents the mean ratings on similar items. As can be seen from the data in the Table parents ratings of aspects of service quality were very similar, both in the mean rating given the factor and the ordering of the factors. In both samples child safety was of paramount for parents, with almost all parents rating it as extremely important.

Although the items are slightly different, the results suggest that the quality of care is of less importance for older children (4.4), compared to those under five years old (4.9). This probably reflects the expectation that older children are more able to care for themselves, although parents still rate good supervision as important.

**Table 27 Importance of factor when judging the quality of Early Childhood Education services and out of school (before/after school) services – means**

	<b>ECE</b>	<b>OSS</b>
Children are safe	4.9	4.8
Quality of care (ECE) / good supervision (OSS)	4.9	4.4
My child is/will be happy there	4.9	4.7
It has well qualified and trained staff	4.6	4.6
There aren't too many children, it is not overcrowded	4.5	4.3
It has good resources	4.5	4.3
The facilities are clean and tidy	4.4	4.5
The quality of the programme (e.g. the curriculum)	4.3	4.4
Others (e.g. friends) say it is good	3.8	3.7
The service matches my child's cultural needs	3.1	3.5

1=not at all important, to 5=extremely important

### **Summary**

Childcare decisions have been conceptualised as the result of an interaction between families' needs, preferences, knowledge and expectations of childcare, along with the structural/policy childcare context (e.g.

availability, subsidies) in which these families live (Huston, Chang and Gennetian, 2002; Foot et al., 2000). This framework can be used to examine parents' decision making with regard to both the use of early childhood services and out of school services. However there are a number of differences revealed in our research data that suggest that decision making with respect to out of school services is driven more by one dominant need and is under greater constraints than the decision to use Early Childhood Education services.

While parents generally have a preference for parental care they also acknowledge that both informal and formal care is necessary to balance conflicting demands on their time. If they can arrange work schedules with their partner or call upon family or friends then parents do not need to use out of school care. However when they do need to use formal care they often find it difficult to access before and after school services that fulfil their needs. Hours of operation may not match parents' needs, costs maybe high or their maybe no local services available. Compared to Early Childhood Education services the choice of services is often very limited, and thus parents' decision making is restricted to electing to use services rather than choosing a type of service.





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## Discussion and conclusions

In the previous chapters we have presented a great deal of information on the decision making processes that parents go through in choosing to use Early Childhood Education services and selecting a service provider. This chapter attempts to draw together these findings and to describe, and illustrate, this decision making process.

In an earlier chapter we reviewed past research on this topic and outlined a general model of the process parents use in selecting childcare. Previous researchers (Huston, Chang and Gennetian, 2002; Foot et al., 2000) have proposed that selecting childcare involves a complex interaction between family needs, preferences, knowledge and expectations, made within a specific social and policy context. Choices also occur at different levels (e.g. whether or not to use Early Childhood Education services and which type of service to use) and under different constraints. Some factors may be unique to each level, but others will be relevant to both levels.

Our results can perhaps be best viewed within this model. We have found that while most parents agree that children's educational development is best supported by parents, there were different views on the impact of parent's work and career and children learning from adults outside the home. These differences in attitude were related mainly to the employment status of the parent and to the age of the child. Parents who agreed more strongly with these later statements were more likely to have considered using early childhood services for their youngest child.

Parents cited their child's social and educational development as being the primary reason for using early childhood education. Other reasons related to parents needs were less important, but for those who were in paid employment, 'childcare while working' was an important consideration in choosing whether or not to use Early Childhood Education services. An unexpected finding was that the child's social and educational development were rated as *less* important by more highly educated parents, compared to less educated parents. For example 89% of those with no qualifications or fifth form only rated educational development as important compared to 62% of those with degrees rating it important. Both groups of parents regard social and educational as important, but less educated parents rate it as more important. It is unclear why this should be the case, but one possibility is that more educated parents may feel that their child's educational needs are being adequately meet at home or through participation in other activities. For example, a child may be attending a sports group, which the parent may feel provides for the child's social development.

In line with previous research, the quality and availability of suitable services were the most important factors in choosing to use Early Childhood Education services. Parents were also concerned to find services that matched their children's needs, both in terms of their age and abilities, but also in matching the child's nature or temperament. The affordability of services was important to the majority of parents, and the cost and the availability of subsidies was particularly important to those on low incomes. Although factors associated with the child's needs were more important than practical factors in deciding whether or not to use ECE, these practical factors were rated more important for those who were working (although still less important than child factors).

Parent's decision to use Early Childhood Education services therefore appears to depend on the perceived need for some educational experience for their child outside the home. For those families where the mother is in paid employment the need for childcare while working is also important. However, even if they have a need for Early Childhood Education services parents will only use them if services of sufficient quality are available. For lower income families the cost of the service and the availability of subsidies are important factors and for Māori children the availability of culturally appropriate services is important.

Having decided to use Early Childhood Education services parents must then decide which type of service to use. Once again the quality of different services is the most important factor taken into consideration by parents when choosing a service. Finding a service that matches their child's age, needs and abilities is also very important to parents and most parents prefer a service that has an educational focus. For some parents, the philosophy of the provider is important, but other parents do not consider this an important consideration. Practical considerations, such as opening hours, flexible use and service location, are also important, particularly for those who are working.

Parents' different criteria for the selection of services were reflected in the different levels of importance attached to these selection factors by those using different types of service. Those using childcare centres and home based services were more likely to be employed and to be more concerned with practical issues. On the other hand, those using Playcentres are more likely to choose a service on the basis of the service philosophy and the extent to which it involved parents. For those using Kindergarten cost factors and location were the most important selection factors.

These results would suggest that in order to increase participation in early childhood education it is important to have a range of high quality services available to parents. Parents look to match the service to their child's age, abilities and needs and so it is important that there are a range of services that might fit their children's needs. For non-European children, parents consider cultural needs to be an important factor in deciding to use Early Childhood Education services and it is important that services are able to meet these needs. While some parents will be willing, and have the ability, to pay for services, others need low cost services and

subsidies. In particular low income families, who seem to place greater importance on the educational element of early childhood education, will be more likely to use low cost, subsidised, services.

This research has identified mothers' employment as an important factor in the use of early childhood services. This is in line with previous research, both overseas and in New Zealand, and is reflected in the rapid growth in the use of childcare centres and home based services. Mothers who are in paid employment, while giving prime importance to the quality of services, are more likely to consider practical issues in deciding to use early childhood education. They are more likely to use services if they can be used for longer, have flexibility in use, do not require parental input and are located close to work. Once again, having a range of services available to parents is likely to increase participation in early childhood education. However it is also likely that factors associated with this employment, e.g. hours worked, working from home and working non-standard hours, will impact on the use of early childhood education and also the use of other informal sources of childcare.

This research suggests there are also some specific family circumstances that impact on the use of early childhood services. For example, rural families often have a limited choice of services or have to travel some distance to access available services. When petrol prices rise this has a major impact on the cost of using Early Childhood Education services. Low numbers of rural children and the transience of many in the rural community make sustaining rural Early Childhood Education services difficult. However, those interviewed spoke of the great importance of such services in the rural community, both for the children and as focal point for parents in the community to meet, socialise and learn about parenting.

Sole parents' needs for Early Childhood Education services are in many ways similar to those living with a partner. They see these services as important for the child's social and educational development, and are equally concerned with the quality of services. However sole parents were more concerned with the costs of services and the availability of subsidies, reflecting the generally low household incomes in these families. Sole parents are also less likely to be in paid employment and so their decision making is less likely to depend on employment related factors.

Finally, previous research has tended to neglect the specific needs of individual children and how these might impact on parental decision making. Obviously the child's age and developmental level is important, and that is borne out in the above analysis. However children may also have 'special' needs that have a major impact on the use of early childhood services and the choice of type of service. The different cultural needs of children have been examined in the above analysis, and these are also likely to play an important role in selecting services. This does not mean parents necessarily choose a 'cultural' service, as they will often choose a 'general' service if they are confident that their child's cultural needs are met by this service.

**Study limitations**

There are a number of limitations with the present study. The design is cross-sectional and therefore it is not possible to draw conclusions regarding what causes parents to make certain decisions. The data presented here are evidence of association only, but are valuable for guiding further research. It would be worth considering conducting a prospective longitudinal study of parents with newborn children, to fully explore the various childcare and early childhood education experiences of children and to relate these to various family, policy, social and economic factors.

Although the sample is diverse it does under-represent some sections of the population. This limits the degree to which these results can be generalised and ideally they should be validated by further studies. Some results are in line with previous research in New Zealand, e.g. the Childcare Survey. The current sample size is also relatively small with regard to some groups, and larger samples of Pacific families, those with older children who are not attending ECE, and lower income families would be desirable.

Finally, as was cautioned in the methodology section, this analysis has involved a relatively large number of statistical tests and comparisons. The greater the number of tests, the more likely it is that some of these are significant by chance. As a result it is important that these findings are confirmed by further research and that these results are regarded as tentative until further support is provided.

Despite these limitations this study has produced a number of interesting findings. Some support commonsense notions, e.g. that practical issues are more important for those who work, but others raise interesting questions, e.g. why do more educated mothers put less emphasis on the educational element of ECE. The next section makes some suggestions for further research.

**Need for further research**

This study is exploratory in nature and as such it has identified a number of issues that require further investigation. Firstly, given the limitations with the current study design, it is important to explore how parents' attitudes towards and expectations of Early Childhood Education services develop over time. From a policy perspective it would help to know to what extent these attitudes and expectations can be influenced in ways that support the use of Early Childhood Education services. Longitudinal research could also examine the transitions between different types of early childhood education, both those that are associated with children getting older, and those associated with changes in family circumstances.

Secondly, further research is required to examine the decision making of parents using Te Kohanga Reo, Pasifika childcare centres, and Montessori and Steiner services. It is possible that parents using these services have unique needs and make decisions about early childhood education based on different factors. More research is also needed on the specific needs of rural families. A number of challenges to the use of

Early Childhood Education services were identified by this research, but we interviewed relatively few rural families.

Further research is required to understand why mothers with higher education and household income seem to place less importance on the educational components of early childhood education. We have speculated that these parents may believe their children get these needs met in other ways, but this issue needs to be specifically examined. This has policy implications in terms of how early childhood services are 'sold' to lower, compared to higher, income families.

While this research has examined the relative importance of factors in parental decision making it is also important to examine the actual trade-offs that parents make between these various factors. Compromises will often have to be made, and certainly parents we interviewed spoke of these, but the survey data was not able to examine these trade-offs. Research could also examine how satisfied parents are with various aspects of the service they are using.

Finally, the current research identified that for twenty percent of families there is a substantial gap between the hours a child spends in early childhood services and the number of hours mothers work. There were some suggestions that this 'care gap' was covered by the use of flexible work hours, working from home and working on the weekend. However we did not have information on the number of hours these children spent in informal childcare, and such data is necessary to fully explore this issue. The data is most likely to come from a national survey with a sufficiently large sample of parents of preschool children and with detailed data on the use of Early Childhood Education services and informal childcare.

### **Putting it all together**

We want to close by illustrating the decision making process, and the trade offs involved, by presenting four brief case studies. These are not meant to represent every 'type' of family circumstance, but rather to show how a range of constraints, individual and family circumstances and preferences, and wider socio-economic context interact in the decision making process.

#### ***Case 1 - Working mother, early full time childcare***

This mother and her partner had been in New Zealand for a relatively short time before she became pregnant. She and her partner had no family in New Zealand and therefore care by extended family was not an option. Their personal circumstances meant that she had to return to work soon after the birth of their child. Since she would have preferred to have stayed home for longer, *'It was quite an emotional decision'*.

She knew nothing about Early Childhood Education services in New Zealand -

*Absolutely nothing to be honest. What I found out I found out through friends and colleagues.*

She considered a number of options, and the strengths and weaknesses of these options –

*We wanted flexibility. Read about the pros and cons of a nanny. If we had a nanny and he or she got sick then we still have to get childcare. With a childcare centre even if the main person in charge gets sick there will always be someone else there. I wanted to have flexibility rather than the carer to have the flexibility.*

*At the very beginning we did look at other options, because we thought it might be easier if he was in a Barnados. The child to carer ratio is smaller and it was more of a nanny setup than a daycare set up, but we liken the day care to a tribal way of looking after children, if you like, and we prefer that.*

Fortunately a colleague was able to provide information -

*A colleague in a similar position to me at work with children, said my kids are at this centre, which was just down the road from our work, and its great.*

She and her partner visited the centre and were on the whole suitably impressed –

*When I first walked through the door there was a child covered from head to toe in paint, and all the children were sought of allowed to express themselves and things like that. I just thought that's fantastic, they are not worried about that. It has a large open area at the back. Second time I went they were out the back playing with the fire house and absolutely soaked and I just thought that's great. They are not being told they can't do that, they are being encouraged to do it.*

*They also had two male staff members. That's quite unusual. One full time and one who does cover. Also I liked the staff members themselves.*

The first visit occurred before her child was born –

*I was five months pregnant. There was a six months waiting time. I booked him in before he was born. We had to call on a regular basis to say we were still interested.*

Her child was attending the childcare centre four days a week. Because the centre was close to work she was able to feed him at lunchtimes for an hour -

*When I went back to work I was still breast feeding so I used to go up and down the hill to feed him and they allowed me the flexibility to do that and they still allow me to go down there and spend an hour every day.*

*Now I am quite happy with that balance, even though it is quite difficult to juggle the working day. I need to work very intensively for three hours in the morning.*

Fortunately there was flexibility in her work hours –

*With my present employer, we have an arrangement where I do shorter contact hours, but I actually work in the evening to make up. My work is up and down, when I need to do long days I do, but take advantage of slack time.*

She was very happy with the childcare centre –

*It's a brilliant location and it is run by a parents' cooperative. I am now on the committee as well, as I wanted to get more involved in the running of the centre. Parents are the ones who make the major decisions about what happens, budget, how the money is spent. That I really like as well. To be honest that was the only centre I looked at because for me it was only one I wanted to go to. I really liked the people there, the location was brilliant.*

*I think they do a really really good job, and I think they try to meet the needs of everyone who has children. Do child profile books, photo and write up. Do Te Whariki.*

However reaching this point (her child is now 18 months old) had not been without its difficulties, even though she had found a good childcare arrangement at the beginning –

*He was seven months when he went into care and that was just awful, absolutely awful. I was crying all the way up the hill and crying all the way down. It was just terrible, really terrible. It was my pressures or guilt, or whatever it was, but I felt I was being judged.*

She felt that it was more socially acceptable to have children attending childcare after they turned one. She had also read widely about the effects of childcare on young children, although had not found any consensus in the research. Despite her concerns and her child often being tired, there were positive aspects for her child –

*Confidence really, being around other people and children of other ages and I think he has to learn to be able to be his own person earlier than he would have done.*

### **Case 2 - Mum at home full time but intending to work part time**

This mother was living with her husband and three children (aged 6 years, 2 and a half years and 7 months). Her youngest children were attending playgroup, but she had started considering the ECE needs for her 2 and a half year old. She had knowledge of Early Childhood Education services, partly through her experiences with her school aged child. She was considering returning to work for 10-12 hours a week.

*We like the little bit extra income that you get from me working. . . and the adult company – I think I'd be an absolute idiot if I didn't work.*

She had consulted the yellow pages and phoned some local services, but had also relied on what friends, family and neighbours had said –

*Just through word of mouth, and what other people say – 'oh my childcare centre's got a huge waiting list', and 'mine hasn't', and that sort of thing.*

She had considered a number of options, including using informal childcare by her mother –

*I've just asked my mum to put on her thinking cap, whether she would like to have 2 kids at home two days a week, or should I farm one out. So she hasn't given me an answer yet. But I'm looking at perhaps farming one of them out to Porse or something once a week. Kindy's only 3 days a week, so*

*I'm sure I could work something out. And I don't actually work that far from home, so I could actually come and take C to Kindy.*

*I'm not a childcare centre person, if you know what I mean. Especially not for this age. I've rung the odd one, found out the price, nearly fell over type-of-thing, and they'll take x amount under 6 months, and then x amount over 2 – I can't even remember what the cut off is – is it under 6 months or under 2? Because I don't want to put a young child in them, I'm not that interested – but I did ring a while ago – when he was about 18 months I think, I might have rung a couple. But the waiting lists are hideously long, so I've never really seriously gone down that path, because I don't like that path.*

The cost of childcare, relative to her extra earnings were also an important factor –

*On Friday I sat down and did my sums of how much we get from the government now we've got 3 children, how much we'd get if I didn't go back to work, how much I'd get if I did go back to work, how much I would then be working for an hour because of course it would drop because the government – you know what I mean. How much I could get an hour childcare. I rang WINZ to get a childcare payment form, and they sent an accommodation supplement form which was good of them, so I rang them yesterday to say 'you were quick, but you sent the wrong one'.*

She was leaning towards making a private arrangement with someone locally. She had talked to her husband about their options, but had done all the research herself. This had involved visiting some services, where her impressions hadn't always been favourable –

*I remember when I walked into K Kindy when I enrolled J (eldest son), I had only been inside one other Kindy which was where my nieces went, and that was not a particularly bright or spacious Kindy. And this one is. I remember walking in and thinking 'this is very bright and spacious and well equipped, and the outside area's well equipped, and it's improving, and I just liked the feel of it'. And I'd also been involved the B Playcentre too, which is awfully dusty and seedy. The childcare centres that I've been into – I just don't like them.*

Because she wanted to work part time, she had found it difficult to get suitable ECE hours –

*What I find is not out there, is a place that will look after your children say school hours – you have to pay from 8 till 12 and then 12 to 6, or whatever. The full morning and full afternoon, irrespective of what time you're dropping your child off. Which is a lot of money if you're only working 9.30 to 2.30.*

*There's no part time childcare centre for mums who want to work part time. I reckon I could set one up almost - there's nothing out there for the part time working mum.*

She noted a number of benefits for her eldest child got when he attended Kindy. These mainly concerned preparation for school -

*They learn social skills, and sharing and that kind of thing. They have their little sitting down with books, and they have their little singing time. And that's good, because they do that at school. I think*



*they've got a curriculum to stick to. J (eldest son) couldn't read, but he could spell before he left kindy.*

*Yes, and then the sit down. More structure once a week at morning kindy, and mat time, because of course they do a lot of sitting on the mat at primary school.*

This mother acknowledged she was fortunate in having family support, in being in a financial position where she did not have to work fulltime and in having a range of options.

### **Case 3 - Rural family**

This mother lived in a rural area with her husband, a seven year old and a two year old. She had some experience of Early Childhood Education services with her seven year old, but at that time she was living in a town, and had more services to choose from. On moving to the rural area she had begun searching for a service for her two year old -

*We'd only been here a week or two, and it was the beginning of the term, and the woman up the hill, she said 'oh, did you know this playgroup', and I said, 'yeah, that will be good'.*

Fortunately the play group was only five minutes drive away. It was parent run and met once a week. It also received funding from the Ministry of education -

*They have activities they do when they get there every day. And a range of toys out to play with. It's all on this early learning thing, like they're a funded playgroup. They have a reading time and a song time, and lunch.*

She thought there were definite benefits for her child and for herself –

*Socialisation for him, and for me. Because we all go and have a good natter every week. They're learning all the time, aren't they. It's just a different environment.*

Ideally she would have liked the playgroup to meet two days a week, but lack of numbers was made this difficult –

*Would like another day a week of playgroup. But I don't know if there's enough people round our community.*

*Well they're actually dwindling a wee bit because a lot of them are going off to school and people are shifting away. We can get up to 20 there some days, but, yeah, it's probably halved by now.*

She was thinking about the future and moving her child to a service for more hours, partly so she could work –

*Like I will find more work if I need it. I'm not saying he's holding me back at the moment, and also I think he needs to get away from me anyway. . . Like he's needed me I'd say up until now, but he's got to learn separation and things. . . I'm thinking of putting him in at town somewhere, yeah, because we'll get funded a bit anyway.*

She had not started looking, but knew of a possible service -

*My sister in law, she goes to one, she's told me all about it, and I know about it because of so many people that have gone, that work there. So if I hear something good about something, I tend to not look around too much anyway.*

This service was in a town half an hour drive away, which meant she would try to find work in the town, rather than driving back and forth to home, between the ECE service and home. However with recent increases in petrol prices, there was an additional cost associated with travel too and from the service.

The social and community benefits of early childhood services for parents in isolated rural areas were mentioned by all the rural parents we interviewed. All had local playgroups they could attend, and some had Playcentres. In order to access other services parents would have to go to the nearest town. Some chose to do this in order to have childcare for their children while they shopped or visited the accountant. The Playcentres and playgroups, on the other hand, were parent lead. All rural families mentioned the difficulty in sustaining enrolment numbers. Some mentioned the seasonal nature of attendance, with numbers dropping during lambing and other busy times on the farm. Others noted the relatively high turnover in families in the area as farm labourers and share-milkers moved between contracts. This was particularly the case for younger families.

Recent petrol prices were also mentioned by most parents, and in some cases these had made regular travel to town to access services too expensive. Some rural parents also highlighted the additional concern rural parents had about the quality of early childhood education they could provide their children on their own<sup>26</sup>. This was especially a concern for children approaching school age, with parents feeling their children needed to attend ECE in order to prepare educationally. Having a child attending an early childhood service (e.g. Playcentre) enabled rural parents to meet and discuss parenting and to swap ideas.

#### ***Case 4 - Sole parent household***

This mother was living on her own with her two and a half year old child. The child had regular contact throughout the week with his father, and the parents both worked. They planed their childcare arrangements for the coming months –

*We've got a big sheet, and we plan 3 months out, and we try to take in work, travel and all that sort of stuff as well. . . . it helps organise yourself.*

They had spent some time looking at their options for early childhood education –

*We did a lot of looking around before we put T into day care. We looked at the in-home nanny, I spent a bit of time talking to Porse and Barnados. And we spent a lot of time canvassing friends from our*

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<sup>26</sup> At the same time parents also acknowledged that rural children had unique learning experiences from living on a farm.

*antenatal group to see what they were looking for. And because we wanted more educational focus rather than just glorified babysitting service, we wanted something that was enjoyable, and a learning environment for T as well. So we spent a couple of months doing that.*

*Lots of ringing around, lots of talking to people, downloading loads of ERO reports. Looked into various options in terms of in-home care and things as well, and thought, no, we wanted a bigger staff for a safety feature for T. And we wanted somewhere where he could go – he started at 6 months – somewhere till he was ready for school.*

It was mainly the mother that did the searching –

*Well, me primarily, and I would talk to G (ex-husband) about it, and if we found one that I thought was ok, he'd look into it with me. But most of the time we did rely a lot on our friends' experiences as well.*

She also visited services, and these impressions were important –

*Yes, and we turned up at inappropriate times of the day, and things like that. . . . Sometimes we walked into places, and I have to say that there would be the appearance, if it was scuzzy, or if it was dirty, or children had mucky faces. Yeah, things like cleanliness, and hygiene and stuff, it was really important. . . If you walked in somewhere and it felt ok, and the kids looked like they were feeling ok, and liked being there too. And that was kind of a big plus.*

She described what she was looking for –

*Trained staff. We wanted somewhere that could provide meals, but we wanted to know what the meals were. Because he was probably going to be in there for a whole working day. It was going to replace us. We wanted somewhere that was quite loving, quite warm, there wasn't a high turnover of staff, but it wasn't set in its ways, and they'd kept up with Te Whāriki and things like that.*

She had considered homecare and had made some enquiries, but decided centre based care had advantages –

*It's more the socialisation. I think they [centre] do more in terms of educational – they seem to make a bigger effort to do stuff like that. They seem to have specialised music days when they all get together. But it's just more, I didn't see any respite for the carer, or the educator, in the home. Whereas in the centre there's 2 or 3 other staff, and if you're having a bit of an off day, or if you had too much for dinner the night before, or something like that, then you can say, 'I need a break, can you swap me'. There wasn't that with homecare. It just didn't fit well, it just didn't gel. They were very enthusiastic, they were very driven, they were kind of salesy too, they would ring you a lot. And I suppose that put me off a bit too, it was that sort of car sales approach to childcare.*

She also wanted a community-based service –

*Because we thought parents had more of a voice in what was happening, so that's why we chose a community one as opposed to a private one.*

The only drawback with the service she was currently using was that it was 20 minutes from home by car. They had recently tried out a closer service, but had found it unsuitable -

*It was more of a Kindy [it was not a Kindy] set-up, there was a lot more children, there were 10 more children than where he is now. It was preschool only. It kind of reminded me of Dickens, with the tablecloths at lunch time, and there were knives and forks, and there were rules, and no one told you what the rules were, and children just seemed to go along like little sheep. It was just not what we were used to. I kind of liked the D philosophy, but didn't like how it actually was being practiced in that particular centre.*

The nature of her work helped with her childcare arrangements. She was a self-employed contractor, and so had some flexibility in setting her own hours. She also recognized that her position was perhaps different from other sole parents in that the cost of the service was not such an issue in choosing an early childhood education service.

Her child's father was Māori and although they had considered Te Kohanga Reo they had not felt comfortable with the ones they had visited –

*We judiciously avoided the Te Kohanga Reos, because even though his father is fluent, and is Māori, we didn't like them, simply because they didn't feel nice. They were unclean, there didn't seem to be any structure sometimes in some of them in terms of learning and fun, there wasn't a balance.*

This did not mean that the cultural content of the programme was not important –

*That's [Cultural content] in the curriculum now, it's part of it. They do do marae visits. There's a couple of bilingual teachers there. R gets some of it at home, he can use the words, even though the words tend to come all over the place. It's there, he's not chastised, he's not asked to explain himself when he can't. Someone invariably knows what he's meaning.*

The benefit for her of her child attending ECE was her ability to continue working. Benefits for the child were –

*It's more important that he's safe if anything, and if he's not well I know about it instantly. He's learning stuff, he's learning to share, and I think because he's going to be an only child, or as far as I'm concerned he's going to be an only child, that kind of socialisation is quite critical for him. He's not the greatest sharer in the world, he's only 2 and a half. And I think it's kind of important that he gets that.*

As can be seen above this mother had spent considerable efforts to ensure she got the service that suited her and her child. When asked about this effort her comments provide an appropriate point on which to conclude this report -

*Some of it was guilt, and some of it was we wanted to make sure it was the right place. Guilt is a big thing. You are handing over your child to people to basically raise your child on your behalf. And you've got to make sure, I think, there's a match-up at least with the morals to some extent. Not morals like Thou Shalt Not, or things like that, but morals, like just basically do no harm, and be nice, and come out all right, and not basically an axe-wielding maniac or something when you're 18. Because whatever they're putting in now is going to come out, and we're not entirely sure what's*

*happening during the day, and we ring 2 or 3 times a day, and we read the Profile Books, we're involved in the Trust. We're hoping that we're doing our end, and they're doing theirs. It's trust.*



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## Appendix 1

**Table 13 Agreement with statements regarding child learning and development – Percent rated importance (N=314)**

	1	2	3	4	5
Parents are the best people to support children's development	1	1	11	29	59
Children need some educational experience outside of the home	2	4	6	33	56
Children learn best when they spend time with a range of other adults	5	13	44	27	11
Children learn best when they are with extended family/whanau	5	15	45	26	11
Parents work and career are good for children's development	20	31	35	11	5

1=Disagree, to 5=Agree

**Table 15 Importance of reasons for using Early Childhood Education services for youngest child - percent rated importance (N=268)**

	1	2	3	4	5
Child's social development needs	1	2	8	22	68
Child's educational needs	1	5	15	26	53
Child's language and cultural identity	8	9	27	24	32
Childcare while you are working	31	8	8	15	38
Time out for you (e.g. for leisure or housework)	28	23	24	19	7
You learn skills from your involvement in ECE	24	17	28	18	13
ECE provides social opportunities for you (e.g. meet other mums)	26	22	25	17	10
So you can care for extended family	71	12	9	4	4

1=not at all important, to 5=extremely important

**Table 16** Importance of factors in deciding whether or not to use Early Childhood Services – percent rated importance (N=269)

	1	2	3	4	5
Quality of Early Childhood Education services	1	1	3	16	81
Availability of suitable Early Childhood Education services	1	2	11	28	58
Affordability of Early Childhood Education services	6	7	16	30	41
Your child's age and abilities	5	9	22	34	31
Suitability of Early Childhood Services for the way your child is	8	10	25	22	35
Availability of subsidies to reduce cost	26	13	20	17	25
Availability of alternative informal arrangements	21	16	26	20	17
Flexibility of you or your partners work	29	15	18	16	22
Availability of a culturally appropriate service	26	22	25	11	16
Arrangements for your other children	34	12	20	16	19

1=not at all important, to 5=extremely important

**Table 18** Importance of factors when deciding which Early Childhood Education Service to use – percent rated importance (N=211)

	1	2	3	4	5
It is high quality	0	1	8	23	69
Suits my child's age, needs and abilities (e.g. temperament)	2	2	18	28	51
Has an educational focus	6	3	17	24	50
It is close to home	4	6	20	34	37
It has suitable opening hours	14	6	16	26	39
The providers philosophy (e.g. Playcentre, Steiner, Montessori)	17	10	19	24	32
It doesn't cost too much	12	12	29	26	22
I could use it part time, flexible hours - sessional	23	11	18	22	27
There is no long waiting list or wait for a place	17	9	31	20	24
I and/or my family have used this ECE service previously	34	11	15	12	28
It fits with arrangements for your other children	35	8	15	17	25
It is close to work	40	14	20	14	13
Meets my child's special needs e.g. health or disability	44	15	10	13	18
Parents take part/run the programme	43	16	18	16	7
It is based near a school	55	10	14	13	7
It is close to transport	62	16	12	5	5
It is home based	70	11	6	4	9

1=not at all important, to 5=extremely important

**Table 27** Importance of factor when judging the Quality of Early Childhood Services – percent rated importance (N=312)

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Quality of care (e.g. staff interact well with the children)	1	1	1	8	91
Children are safe	0	0	1	10	89
My child is/will be happy there	0	0	2	8	90
It has well qualified and trained staff	1	1	5	23	70
A good child-staff ratio	1	1	5	24	71
There aren't too many children, it is not overcrowded	1	1	10	29	60
It has good resources (e.g. toys, play area)	0	0	8	35	57
Staff are welcoming to parents	0	1	8	31	60
The facilities are clean and tidy	0	1	12	33	54
The quality of the programme (e.g. the curriculum)	1	1	11	38	49
It provides reports on my child's progress	3	4	15	29	48
Good Education Review Office reports	4	4	19	33	40
Others (e.g. friends) say it is good	3	5	31	37	24
The service matches my child's cultural needs	15	15	31	18	21

1=not at all important, to 5=extremely important



## Appendix 2

### From *Choices in Early Childhood Education* Ministry of Education (2005)

#### Education and care centres

Education and care centres are licensed and/or chartered early childhood centres that offer either all day or part day services. Education and care centres include church, workplace and childcare centres, which may be run by either community or private owners, and may be based in a specific culture. Some services may be based around certain beliefs about, or methods of, education, such as Montessori or Rudolph Steiner centres. The teachers in charge of the centre while it is open must be registered teachers who hold a Diploma in Teaching (ECE) or similar qualification. Other staff in the centre may have different qualifications or experience.

Depending on the centre, they may accept children from birth to school age, or children of specific ages.

Casual services, such as those in shopping malls and gyms, where your child stays only for the short time you're at the venue, are included in this service type. In most education and care services you need to enrol your child for a set period of time. Casual centres may take children when you arrive on the day.

Education and care centres usually charge fees. As parents, whānau or caregivers, you may have an opportunity to be involved with management committees, or as voluntary helpers or fundraisers.

#### Kindergartens

Kindergartens are a type of education and care centre run by a kindergarten association. The main difference between kindergartens and other education and

care services is that all kindergarten teachers must be registered teachers who hold a Diploma in Teaching (ECE) or similar qualification.

Most kindergartens offer services to children aged between two-and-a-half and five-years:

- > older children attend morning sessions five-days-a-week
- > younger children attend afternoon sessions three-days-a-week.

Some kindergartens offer all day sessions and may take children under two years. Each kindergarten is run by a committee made up of parents and people from the community. This committee reports to a local kindergarten association. As a parent, whānau or caregiver, you may have the opportunity to be involved with the committee or association, or as a voluntary helper or fundraiser. Kindergartens usually ask for a parent donation or fee.

#### Home-based care groups

These services involve a caregiver providing education and care for small groups of young children in their home as part of a chartered home-based care network.

Caregivers in home-based networks provide full day or part day education and care. They may also provide emergency care. The work of the caregiver is supported by a qualified co-ordinator from the network. The co-ordinator helps parents choose the right caregiver for their child and this person will support the child's learning programme. The coordinator visits the home-based caregiver

regularly to check on the child's safety and wellbeing and their learning progress. Home-based care services usually charge fees.

### **Playcentres**

In playcentres, parents, whānau and caregivers meet together to support their children's early learning. Most playcentres are licensed and/or chartered services that offer learning through play for children from birth to school age. Each playcentre sets the times for its own sessions and children can attend up to five sessions a week.

People become members of a playcentre when they enroll their child. They are then involved in running the centre and taking part in the daily programme. Each centre is linked to a regional association, which belongs to the national New Zealand Playcentre Federation. The associations provide parent education programmes. Parents, whānau and caregivers are encouraged to work towards the Playcentre qualification to help them teach their children during sessions.

Playcentres usually charge fees. Because parents, whānau and caregivers are so involved in this service, these fees are generally low.

### **Te Kōhanga Reo**

Kōhanga Reo build young children's and parents' knowledge of te reo Māori (language) and tikanga (culture), and parents and whānau are closely involved in the child's learning and development. Children can attend from birth to five years in the Kōhanga Reo total immersion te reo Māori environment (meaning te reo is the only language used). Parents are responsible for the management and operation of their Kōhanga Reo and are encouraged to take part in the daily programme. Kōhanga Reo have a whānau contribution system which may vary according to the needs of the whānau.

This contribution can be koa, donations for food and/or paying fees.

Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust is the umbrella organisation through which all Kōhanga Reo are chartered. The Trust's role as the kaitiaki (guardian) of the Kōhanga Reo kaupapa is to ensure the quality and revitalisation of the Māori language. It does this by providing support and advice to Kōhanga Reo and advocating on their behalf. The Trust provides whānau-based learning to Kōhanga Reo whānau including Whakapakari Tino Rangatiratanga, a three-year training course for kaiako (teachers). It also provides training courses for whānau in te reo Māori, computer training, Te Whāriki and business administration.

### **Playgroups**

Playgroups are community-based groups. They are licence-exempt, which means they don't have to have a licence. These groups give parents, whānau and caregivers the opportunity to meet together and provide play programmes for their children. To be a playgroup, at least half the children attending must have a parent staying with them. The playgroup sessions can run for a maximum of three hours each day and are often set up in community halls where equipment is put out before each session and cleared away afterwards.

Playgroups receive a small amount of government funding to help pay for equipment and hall hire. Parents, whānau and caregivers involved in running the sessions receive information, support and training from the Ministry of Education to help them do so. With the Ministry's help, some of these groups grow into a more formal, Ministry-funded licensed and/or chartered service.

### **Ngā Puna Kōhungahunga**

Ngā Puna Kōhungahunga services are a type of playgroup that builds learning



in te reo Māori and tikanga. These groups help parents and whānau to shape learning programmes to meet their children's needs. Learning may be in both English and te reo or in te reo only. Parents and whānau are involved in running the sessions and receive information, support and training from the Ministry of Education to help them do so.

### **Pacific Islands Early Childhood groups**

These are a type of playgroup that builds young children's knowledge of their own Pasifika language and culture. These groups include many Pasifika cultures from countries such as Samoa, Tonga, Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau, Tuvalu and Fiji. Learning may be in both English and a Pasifika language or in the Pasifika language only. These groups are often church or community based and parents help run the sessions.

Pacific Islands Early Childhood groups may ask for a parent donation.

### **The Correspondence School**

The Correspondence School offers learning programmes for children aged three-to five-years who live too far away from early childhood education services. Correspondence is also an option for children who can't attend other services because they're ill or have a physical disability, or they shift homes at least once a term.

Children who receive the early childhood education correspondence service can also attend a regular service for up to two sessions per week.

The Correspondence School's early childhood education teachers work with parents, whānau or caregivers to develop a programme to meet the needs of their child. Parents, whānau or caregivers receive information and programmes to help them plan play activities and learning experiences to support their child's learning. The Correspondence School also has a range of books, puzzles, educational games, audiotapes, posters and art materials that you can borrow.