



families commission
 kōmihana ā **whānau**

RESEARCH REPORT NO 7/08
 DECEMBER 2008

> Giving New Zealand families a voice *Te reo o te whānau*

new kiwis, diverse families

MIGRANT AND FORMER REFUGEE FAMILIES TALK ABOUT THEIR EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION NEEDS

The Families Commission was established under the Families Commission Act 2003 and commenced operations on 1 July 2004. Under the Crown Entities Act 2004, the Commission is designated as an autonomous Crown entity.

Our main role is to act as an advocate for the interests of families generally (rather than individual families).

Our specific functions under the Families Commission Act 2003 are to:

- > encourage and facilitate informed debate about families
- > increase public awareness and promote better understanding of matters affecting families
- > encourage and facilitate the development and provision of government policies that promote and serve the interests of families
- > consider any matter relating to the interests of families referred to us by any Minister of the Crown
- > stimulate and promote research into families, for example by funding and undertaking research
- > consult with, or refer matters to, other official bodies or statutory agencies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Families Commission would like to thank the organisers of the focus groups: Rhonda Cowell-Bari, Apolonia Pius, Rebecca Fraser, Anya Filipphochkina, Maureen Zaia and Mehari Hagos. This work would not have been possible without their help.

The Commission would also like to acknowledge the contributions of key informants Ben Gresham, Wellington Somali Council; Rhonda Cowell-Bari, Baitul Ilm Trust; Kumar Murali, Naomi Tocher, Adam Awad, Sue Driver, Flora Toma, Marieke Jasperse and Patrick O'Connor for their contributions to the identification and recruitment of focus group participants.

A special thank you to Bridget Wislang for assistance with two of the focus groups, Katie Mawson for organising travel, catering and other requirements and Farhat, Sarah and Yvonne for their contributions as interpreters.

We would like to express our gratitude for the invaluable contributions of the group of experts: Judi McCallum, Wellington Multicultural Service Centre; Judith Loveridge and Lisa Terrini, Victoria University of Wellington College of Education.

We would also like to thank the peer reviewers: Rose Cole and Richard Walley, Ministry of Education; Judith Loveridge, Wellington College of Education; previous Chief Commissioner, Rajen Prasad, Commissioners Sharron Cole and David Smythe, who guided the work with input from Margaret Retter, Jo Cribb and Paul Curry, Families Commission.

Finally, the Commission would like to convey a heartfelt thank you to all of the parents who participated and contributed so generously and thoughtfully in the focus groups: Aminah, Anastasiya, Anastassia, Antwaneit, Angela, Apolonia, Asrigul, Bahgu, Baifa, Christine, Emma, Gina, Hanaa, Helen, Jasmine, Joy, Klara, Lana, Lili, Linda, Lojana, Martha, Mehari, Musarrat, Nadia, Najwa, Olga, Pascal, Rebecca, Soham, Sveta, Tabitha, Takashi, Tasnim, Tatyana, Volka, Yodit, Yordanos, Yulianna and Zaid.

Families Commission
Public Trust Building
Level 6, 117-125 Lambton Quay
PO Box 2839
Wellington 6140

Telephone: 04 917 7040
Email: enquiries@nzfamilies.org.nz
www.nzfamilies.org.nz

Giving New Zealand families a voice *Te reo o te whānau*

ISSN 1177-3545 (Print)
ISSN 1178-1289 (Online)

ISBN 978-0-478-32827-1 (Print)
ISBN 978-0-478-32828-8 (Online)

families commission
kōmihana ā **whānau**

> Giving New Zealand families a voice *Te reo o te whānau*

new kiwis, diverse families

MIGRANT AND FORMER REFUGEE FAMILIES TALK ABOUT THEIR EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION NEEDS

A FAMILIES COMMISSION REPORT

ANNE BROOME AND SARA KINDON

CONTENTS

Introduction 3

- Background 4
- Research method 4
- Findings, discussion and conclusions 6

Pan-ethnic Muslim mothers in Auckland 7

- Characteristics of the group 8
- Preferences and priorities for ECE 8

Mandarin-speaking Chinese, Taiwanese and Japanese parents in Hamilton 11

- Characteristics of the group 12
- Preferences and priorities for ECE 12

Russian mothers in Christchurch 15

- Characteristics of the group 16
- Preferences and priorities for ECE 16

Sudanese mothers in Lower Hutt 21

- Characteristics of the group 22
- Preferences and priorities for ECE 22

Eritrean parents from Wellington 27

- Characteristics of the group 28
- Preferences and priorities for ECE 28

Assyrian mothers in south Wellington 31

- Characteristics of the group 32
- Preferences and priorities for ECE 32

Discussion 37

- Differences and similarities in the families' characteristics 38
- Overall priorities and preferences for ECE 38
- Needs for more and different ECE services 39
- Utilisation of 20 free hours ECE for three- and four-year-olds 40
- More affordable options still needed 40

Cultural needs and ECE 41

- Inclusion in mainstream ECE services 42
- Professional development for ECE teachers working with diverse communities 43
- Preservation of heritage languages during early childhood 44
- Acquisition of English by children of migrant and refugee families 46
- Informal support for ECE for migrant and refugee families 46
- Conclusion 48

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

High-quality early childhood care and education (ECE) for pre-schoolers is a key to achieving good outcomes for children and to ensuring parents can balance their family responsibilities and paid work.

In 2006/07 the Families Commission consulted migrant and refugee families about their needs. This consultation highlighted a need to explore options for ECE to respond to the distinctive requirements of these families, particularly:

- > cultural and integration needs of families, and the need for childcare to help parents access English language learning¹
- > needs that arose for some migrant and refugee families from the lack of informal support for childcare from close family or friends².

The Families Commission was particularly interested in filling gaps in both existing research evidence and planned research initiatives on the ECE needs of migrant and refugee families³ as part of its *Even up* programme of work, aimed at supporting changes to make life easier for families.

RESEARCH METHOD

This small-scale qualitative study provided an initial exploration of migrant and refugee families' preferences and priorities for ECE. It was carried out by a social geographer with cross-cultural research experience working with refugee communities, who is the mother of a pre-school child. She was supported by a researcher and project manager from the Families Commission who is a grandmother. Both researchers are Pākehā.

The particular cultural or ethnic communities approached for inclusion in the research were recommended by key informants either because their voices had rarely, if ever, been heard, or because they came from communities that faced extra challenges settling in New Zealand. Within each community, local leaders or resource people recruited parents with pre-school children to participate in a focus group and explained the research and its intended outcomes. They arranged a suitable location and in some cases provided transport for participating parents to attend the focus group.

There were six focus groups:

- > seven pan-ethnic Muslim women who assembled at a community centre in Auckland for a regular Islamic playgroup
- > six (Mandarin-speaking) Chinese and Taiwanese mothers and one Japanese father from Hamilton
- > eight Russian mothers who take their children to an established, full-immersion Russian community kindergarten on Saturday mornings in Christchurch

1 Wislang, B. (unpublished). *Migrants Now and in the Future – Issues Paper*. Families Commission, Wellington.

2 Bellett, D., & Dickson, M. (2007). *When School's Out: Conversations with parents, carers and children about out of school services*. Families Commission, Wellington.

3 Identified in consultation with the Ministries of Education and Women's Affairs and the New Zealand Council for Educational Research, and took account of: the Ministry of Education's 10-year strategic plan for ECE (2002 – 2012) – *Pathways to the Future: Ngā huarahi arataki*, which identifies communities where participation is low, particularly Māori, Pasifika, low socio-economic and rural communities; information that will be collected as part of a longitudinal evaluation of *Pathways to the Future* from ECE providers and users and from external researchers about changes resulting from implementation of the *Pathways to the Future* action plan; and major projects on participation and access for Māori and Pacific families, and for rural families, which are either planned or underway within the Ministry of Education.

- > four mothers and one father of Eritrean families from across the Wellington region
- > eight Sudanese mothers from Lower Hutt
- > eight Assyrian (Christian Iraqi) mothers from Wellington.

At each focus group, participating parents were asked about:

- > their family contexts and history of living and working in New Zealand
- > their current ECE arrangements and needs (including what support they relied on from outside the home, including formal centres, playgroups, family members and friends)
- > the impact of these arrangements on individual family members
- > their experiences of and priorities for ECE
- > their ideal ECE arrangements
- > the reasons why their ideal arrangements are not possible now (where appropriate).

To facilitate in-depth discussion, a participatory diagramming method⁴ was employed in four of the six groups. In these cases, parents produced diagrams as a starting point for further discussion about their current situation, and their ideal scenario for the care and education of their pre-schoolers. This method supported the generation and documentation of parents' realities in terms that were most relevant to them and their own cultural contexts. The method also enabled parents still learning to speak English to participate alongside more confident members of their communities.

There were two groups where the parents simply engaged in a focused discussion. In one case, this was because the group preferred to just talk. In the other, it was because the large number of small babies sitting on their mothers' knees prevented the mothers from drawing.

Parents were informed of the ethical procedures governing the research in terms of the collection, storage, attribution and dissemination of the information. Four of the six groups gave permission to tape-record their discussions, and in the other two groups, one of the researchers took detailed notes. Parents in some groups also gave permission for their diagrams and for photographs of the focus groups to be used in this report, and other papers and publications.

In one group, a professional interpreter supported the Families Commission researchers. In the other groups, either the organiser of the group (who happened to be a qualified interpreter on two occasions), or a person with whom the group felt comfortable, provided additional support as needed. Most participants chose to speak in English for the majority of their discussion. Refreshments and childcare (where needed) were provided for all groups, and parents received a koha as thanks for their involvement.

⁴ Alexander, C., Beale N., Kesby, M., Kindon, S., McMillan, J., Pain, R., & Ziegler F. (2007). "Participatory Diagramming: A critical view from North East England", in S. Kindon, R. Pain, & M. Kesby (Eds.), *Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods: Connecting people, participation and place* (pp. 112–121). Routledge, London.

In addition to the focus groups, two key informants were interviewed: a representative of the Wellington Islamic Community, and the organiser of the pan-ethnic Muslim focus group in Auckland, both of whom were involved in efforts to establish Islamic ECE centres in their communities. Finally, a focus group was held with three Wellington-based ECE experts who had experience of the needs of migrant and refugee communities. This allowed a deeper probing of issues raised by parents and provided another means of interpreting focus group findings. They, too, were informed of the ethical procedures, and gave permission for their voices to be integrated into the report and associated documents. Once focus groups were completed, transcripts were made of the audio-recordings and key themes were analysed. Quotations from parents and ECE experts were then selected to illustrate the key themes and to provide insights into the similarities and differences within and between participating families and communities.

FINDINGS, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The following sections provide findings for each of the parent focus groups, followed by a discussion of themes that became apparent when the findings for each group were considered as a whole, and discussed with key informants and the group of ECE experts. Wherever possible, parents' own voices have been quoted directly to illustrate their experiences, issues and aspirations.

PAN-ETHNIC MUSLIM MOTHERS IN AUCKLAND



Tues - Thursday
10:00
play ground
Stick figures and playground equipment.

Mon - Wed - FRI - 8:30 to 6:00 pm
Stick figures and a house labeled "Home".

Sat - Sun
Stick figures and a shopping cart labeled "shopping".

Stick figures and a park labeled "PARK".
visit the friends

Sun 2:00 pm to 6:00 pm

Stick figures and a fence labeled with an arrow.

Evening

Stick figures and a house labeled "Home".





CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GROUP

This group consisted of seven women. Five were participants in a regular Islamic playgroup for pre-school children, and one had joined the playgroup with her child for the first time that day. The seventh woman worked as a childcare worker and had no children of her own. An interpreter (contracted to support a Pushto-speaking Afghani mother), who had a pre-school child of her own, also attended.

The women came from a variety of national and ethnic backgrounds, and variously identified as being Indian, Lebanese, Afghani, Syrian and Palestinian. Three of the women had worked in ECE, two previously and one currently.

The seven women had a total of 19 children between them (or an average of 3.2 children each). The numbers of children in each family ranged from one to six. The children were aged between nine months and 20 years.

Six of the children were under the age of five years. Two were in the three- and four-year age group eligible for 20 free hours of ECE, and four were younger than three years.

Of the children who were within the eligible age group for 20 free hours ECE, one was about to start attending a centre and one, whose mother had worked in ECE, would receive their early education at home (although they also participated in the Islamic playgroup, and would continue to do so).

Six of the seven women were living with their husbands and two of the women (including the one woman who did not live with her husband) had young adult children living with them. Only one of the women had extended family living in New Zealand, and only one had a driver's licence.

None of the women was currently in paid work, though one agreed she would like to be if there was a suitable childcare option for her child. Another said she would like to go to work once her youngest child reached the age of five.

PREFERENCES AND PRIORITIES FOR ECE

The women indicated a preference for being at home to supervise the care and education of their pre-school children. Comments included:

[I want my child to] stay with me till she is five, it is pleasing for them and me.

[Life] centres around my children.

I do everything with my children.

[I] wouldn't want the children to go to a caregiver.

These mothers were very positive about the benefits of attending the existing Islamic playgroup, which the majority of them did regularly. They valued the opportunities it afforded for their own social contact, as well as for their children to experience Islamic cultural practices.

Before we didn't have this [Muslim playgroup on Tuesdays and Thursdays] and didn't know what to do.

The women all agreed that more Islamic playgroup sessions would be desirable, as would a qualified teacher, more space and learning materials in Arabic.

More hours, more days [in the Islamic playgroup] would be good.

At the moment we need a better place, books in Arabic, a qualified teacher ... every day of the week.

The women placed importance on pre-school years as a time for instilling religious values and for specific opportunities to support the learning of language. They felt that these values and associated cultural practices could be best taught in an Islamic centre, which emphasised how to pray, wash and practise peace, love, care and respect.

We have values ... with an Islamic [childcare] centre they are the same ... [and] the food [is] halal.

We have etiquette for everything ... he can understand what to do if you give him Islamic culture from the beginning.

[It] is very important for us to teach the children to eat with the right hand, to write with the right hand.

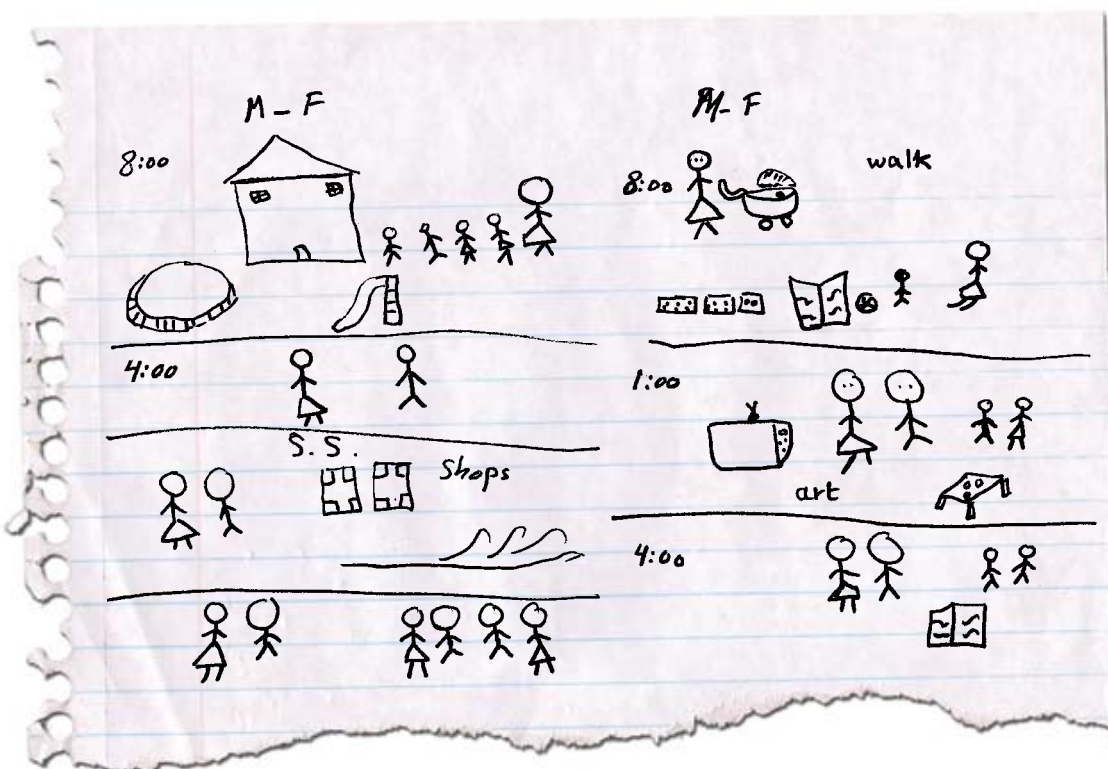
How to eat ... what prayers ... to wash ... when they are in Muslim childcare they do what we do for the children at home.

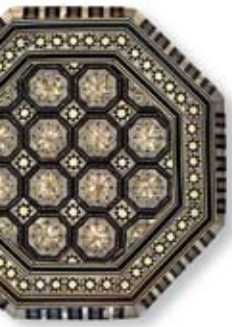
I prefer to go to an Islamic one ... so they won't miss anything.

Learning Arabic for reasons of religious identity and participation was also regarded as important. Books in Arabic and other teaching materials and resources had been accessed for the current playgroup in the past, and were one of its distinctive features. However, these were in limited supply as they had come from Australia and had been very expensive.

Older children were taken to the mosque to learn about Islam but mothers indicated that they needed to learn to read Arabic first.

[It is] very hard to take the children to the mosque when they are very young and don't read.





Alongside ensuring their children's early childhood care and education about their religion and Arabic, these mothers expressed a need to ensure the children were provided with early childhood educational opportunities to prepare them to participate in English-speaking mainstream New Zealand schools.

[I am] very happy to bring him here [the Islamic playgroup] ... he feels lonely at home ... he will be going to kindergarten soon ... here he can get used to Islamic culture, there he can get used to English.

And mainstream early childhood centres were seen as important for ensuring the children learnt English.

I do think about early childhood centres ... for him to pick up language ... and be independent.

[Childcare centres are] very necessary for the children here ... so they know many cultures ... [and to] make life easier in future.

While the women considered "most childcare centres are helpful", they were also looking for more differentiation of the needs of younger and older pre-schoolers, and a generally more structured approach to the provision of ECE than is currently apparent in mainstream centres.

More routine, more discipline.

Everything cannot be taught in play.

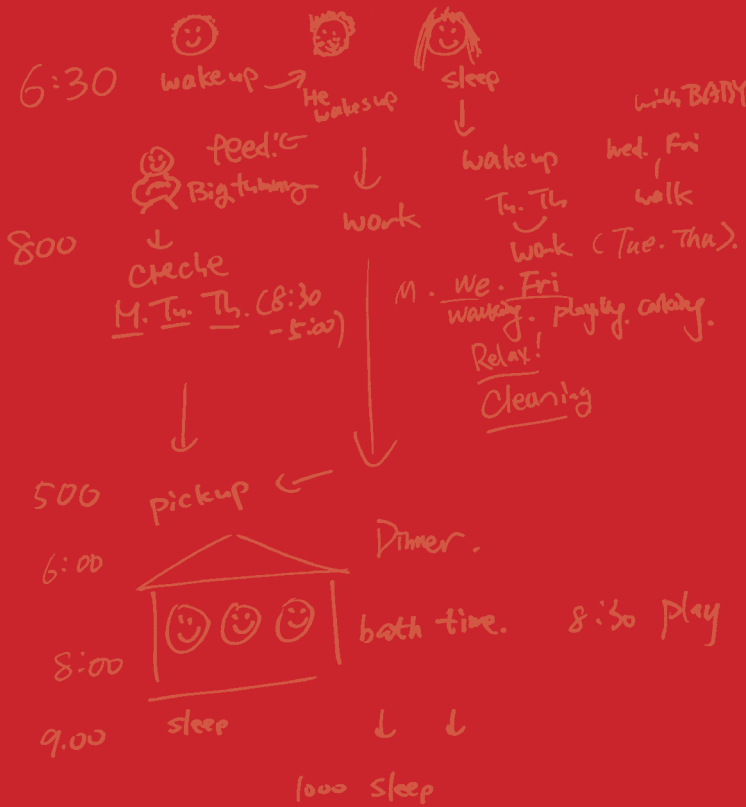
They were also looking for a morning week-day service that provided for the inclusion of fathers and other family members on weekends – for example, through barbecues and trips to the park and zoo. Two of the women particularly stressed the importance of providing opportunities for the children to learn to swim.

Quality of staff in ECE was emphasised, and this included a focus on "experienced teachers", "a teacher who plays with him" and the importance of teachers trained in Islamic culture and faith, qualified to teach Arabic and English. "Trust of the persons providing" to respect their traditions and care appropriately for their children was also mentioned.

While these mothers displayed a marked preference for providing for the care and education of their pre-school children themselves, they also wanted more opportunities for their children to interact with other children and to learn both Arabic and English in trusted ECE settings. Services within walking distance of their homes were important, because most of them were unable to drive. More ECE services that were affordable for under-three-year-olds were needed, as were more Arabic language resources, including for the existing playgroup.

The ideal scenario of an Islamic early childhood care and education centre, offering a teacher-led service for more hours than the existing playgroup, was being actively pursued by the community with the Ministry of Education. A key challenge for the community in progressing with this project was finding suitable permanent premises.

MANDARIN-SPEAKING CHINESE, TAIWANESE AND JAPANESE PARENTS IN HAMILTON



weekend

- Shopping
- Cleaning
- DIY
- Refurbishment





CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GROUP

This group was assembled by staff at the Waikato Migrant Resource Centre and included six Chinese and Taiwanese mothers and one woman's Japanese husband. The mothers:

- > had a total of eight children between them (or an average of 1.3 children per family). The largest family had two children and another on the way. The children ranged in age from nine months to 10 years
- > were all married and living with husbands (including the husband who was present at the interview). The husbands tended to be in relatively well-paid jobs – for example, accountants and teachers. One of the husbands was a PhD student working part-time and one was a full-time house husband, though this arrangement was considered temporary
- > had relatively high levels of education and attachment to paid work. Two of them were currently working full-time, one as a graphic designer and one as a home loans consultant. One of the women worked part-time, but did not disclose her occupation. Two of the women were on parental leave and one of them said she had worked as an accounts officer and had started preparing for her chartered accountant exam. One woman was studying English full-time.

All of the families had computers in their homes and access to the internet.

PREFERENCES AND PRIORITIES FOR ECE

Half of the parents had supportive extended family members either living with them or close by, and one family had a school-age sibling with them. Three of the families were regularly receiving support for childcare from the children's grandparents.

My mother can do all those things for us ... so there's no problem for us and me.

Two of the families either had received support in the past with the care of their small children from extended family members from China, or saw this as an option for the future so that both parents could participate in the paid workforce.

In the one family that had no extended family members in New Zealand helping to care for the pre-school child, the father, who was a university lecturer and enjoyed very flexible working conditions, had been heavily involved. This same family had their child in crèche three days a week. In other families, husbands were also involved in childcare and activities (such as cooking) that supported their wives.

Every day at seven o'clock my husband gets up ... [he] cooks for ... all of us ... and for the baby... After that ... he goes ... to work and I feed the baby and have breakfast.

During my work my husband looks after the baby ... plays with the baby and listens to music ... and feed the baby and ... do some cleaning and washing.

Both mothers and father were concerned with maintaining their position at work to earn a living, but also wanted a balance between paid work and home.

I think ... between working and looking after baby, is very difficult to find a balance. Because I really want to look after my baby by myself but I have to work sometimes because if we don't work we don't have money.

Before I was pregnant I was preparing for my ... Chartered Accountant Certificate ... cause it's a three-year procedure ... so I want to pick up as soon as possible... I need a lot of time to do the exercise and the workshop.

I want Monday work, Tuesday look after baby, Wednesday work, Thursday look after baby, Friday work, and the weekend look after baby. I mean if I stay home all the time look after the baby I will feel very boring... If work all the time still very boring and no time look after baby is very, is very sad. So ... three days work, four days look after baby [each week]. I think that's a good balance.

They also emphasised the social and educational needs of the children in their requirements for early childhood education.

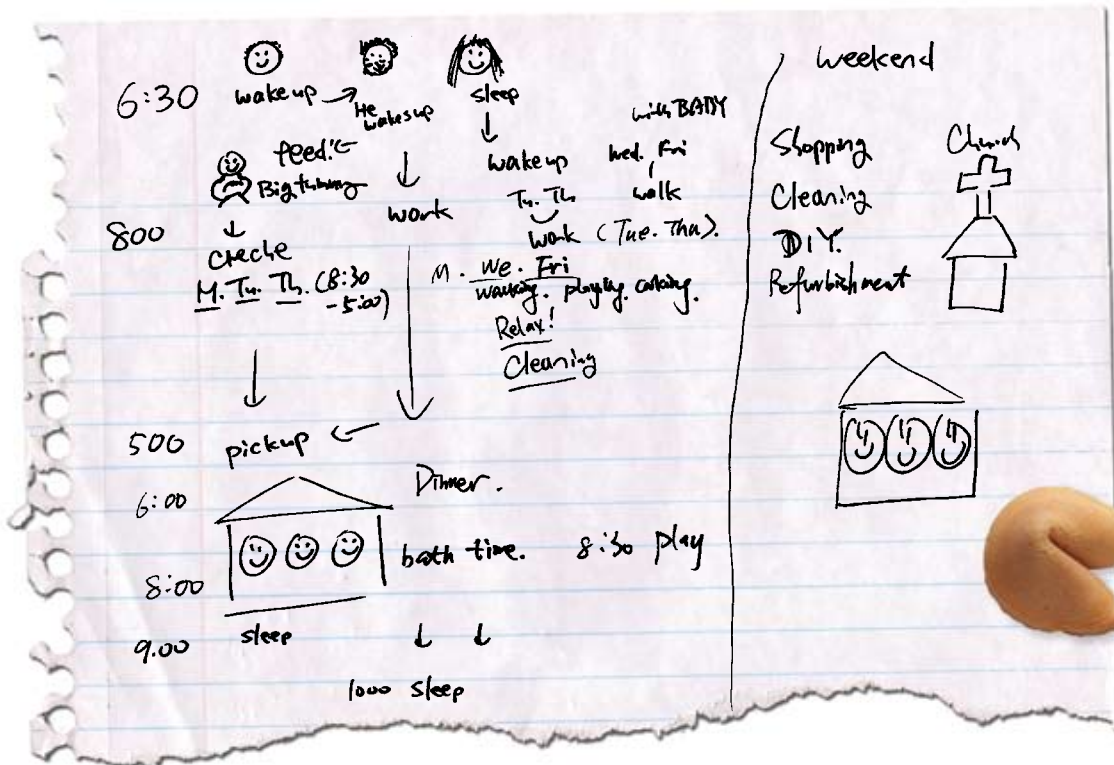
I think [s]he need a class to meet other babies, to meet other cultures ... and to study, study how to communicate with others ... that's very important for her I mean.

She need to learn how to get along with the other baby, how to share, how to help the other people.

All of the participants indicated they would like more support for the children to speak Chinese. They regarded the early childhood years as a special time for learning their language, and thought it was difficult for parents to achieve this for their children on their own.

[In] China ... every Chinese student have the second language, is start from primary school ... not like here. Second language is not compulsory... New Zealand education attitude is that kind of laid back. It's up to the children or the parents if they want to push, push the kids to learn or not but actually when the kids were young their ability to learn another language is huge.

Is it possible, like if the government set up a totally Chinese-speaking ... kindergarten or childcare? I'm just wondering ... [what] percentage of the Chinese mothers or parents are willing to send their kids to there so they can learn the ... Mandarin very well?



The most pressing priority for these parents, however, was accessing childcare services where they reported a serious shortage of places.

Because always we are waiting for the daycare or kindergarten ... I think ... the government can open more kindergarten to fit the increased baby numbers.

We tried to send my daughter to go to the some children's care but [are] ... very frustrated because ... of the waiting list, so we got to wait.

[A] lot of parents have found that that [the 20 free hours ECE for three- and four-year-olds] means nothing to them. They have difficulty to get access to that 20 hours per week because not many childcare can take, you know, the kids.

I heard in Hamilton you have to book in about, like, one year ahead before your child turns three so they can go to kindergarten... I heard even some daycare you have to wait for a while before you can get your baby to a daycare.

Let's hope that there is more kindergarten or childcare to open in New Zealand so that, you know, when the parents want to put the baby in childcare they can and so they can pursue their own career and study and things.

One parent also expressed concern about the cost of childcare.

If we can send him to kindergarten without worrying about money I'd love to.

The parents expressed a need for more accessible and comprehensive information about available childcare options, including information on their location, cost, subsidies, opening hours, child-teacher ratios, teaching models and methods.

I think a tricky thing is you don't know which one is good... You have to spend time looking for a good daycare. You really have to ask around and go in there, stay with them probably couple of hours before you can find good one.

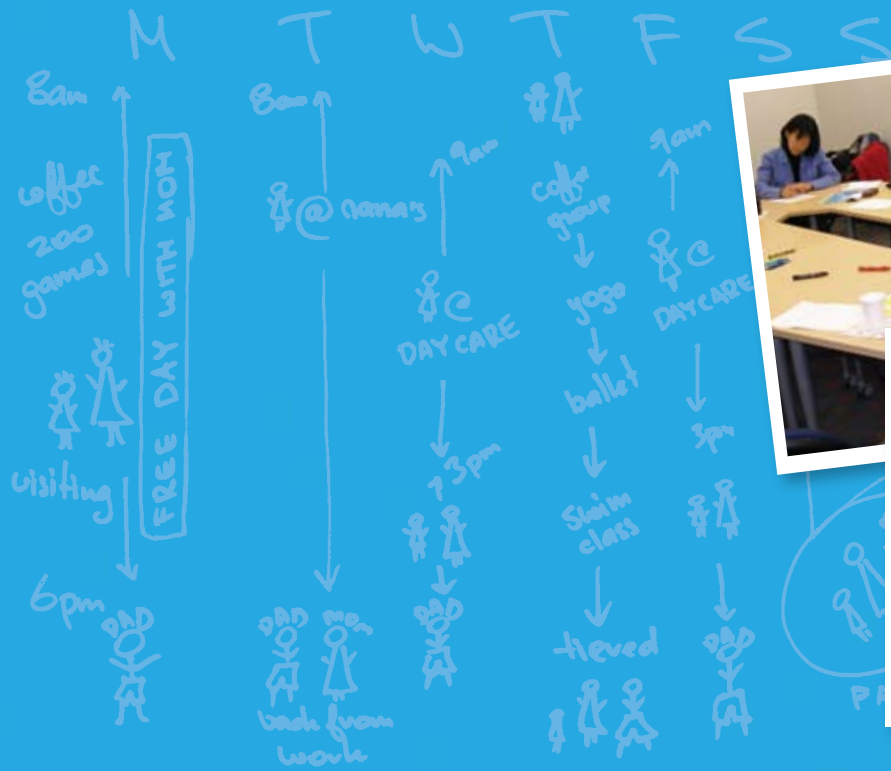
Finally, as with other groups, these parents spoke of the importance of being able to 'trust' the people providing the childcare for their children, and of these people being suitably qualified.

We tried the home care but in my opinion I don't trust the home care... I give them my child to their home and the teacher maybe just organised by government but my concern is about the family have another member during the daytime like a husband or some stranger I couldn't trust. But I trust the school or more qualified or organised system.

To summarise, the Mandarin-speaking parents were interested in having access to more formal, high-quality early childhood services for children at different ages, primarily so parents could undertake more paid work or related training. They were concerned about affordability, especially where they had little or no support from extended family members to help with childcare. They were concerned with having very comprehensive and detailed information on which to base decisions about childcare services for their children. Finally, these families were interested in accessing more support for teaching and maintaining their children's heritage languages.



RUSSIAN MOTHERS IN CHRISTCHURCH





CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GROUP

This group consisted of eight mothers plus the organiser of the Russian community pre-school that their children attend at the in Christchurch Community Centre on Saturday mornings. The mothers:

- > had a total of 10 children between them (or an average of 1.25 children each). The children ranged in age from 18 months to 12 years. Nine of the children were under the age of five. Three of them were in the three- to four-year age range eligible for 20 free hours ECE and six were under the age of three years
- > were all married and living with their husbands, four of whom were New Zealanders.

Two of the women were full-time at-home mothers. The others included one who was self-employed; one who was working as a relief kindergarten teacher; one who worked in a childcare centre; one who worked on the weekends only, but did not say what she did; and one who was studying English full-time.

Only one of the women mentioned having extended family close by.

Six of the women had a New Zealand driver's licence.

PREFERENCES AND PRIORITIES FOR ECE

Even the two mothers who did not work outside the home used mainstream ECE services for between five and 40 hours a week, and the others not yet accessing ECE intended to do so in the future.

It is difficult... I want some rest ... when they a little bit grow... I would like some childcare.

Without much extended family support, they were concerned about the supply of childcare places, and like the parents in Hamilton, they described long waiting lists and widespread difficulties finding places in ECE centres run during the week.

There are some good ones [childcare centres] but they are hard to get into.

We live in town but take her to Sumner [because there were no places available closer to home and there are lengthy waiting lists].

The lack of family support close by and competition for places also created anxiety among the women about their health and the amount of family time they could expect to share. One made a clear link between the need to take care of herself and get sufficient rest to avoid becoming sick because this was difficult without support from extended family.

It is hard when you get sick, that's why mama's time is very important.

Another woman got around her problems accessing childcare by working on the weekend when her husband was available to take care of their child. However, she said that the situation "doesn't work that well because we don't get family time".

There was some acknowledgement that the Government had "tried to do something" with the provision of 20 free hours ECE for three- and four-year-olds. However, the women described some problems with the implementation of the policy, particularly:

- > the situation where mothers are “afraid to lose [scarce] places” if they question the terms on which their children are admitted
- > the numbers of daycare centres not participating in the scheme at all
- > daycare centres in the scheme, but making parents pay a ‘voluntary contribution’.

These women also described a requirement to pay for days when the children would normally attend the service if:

- > the child was sick and stayed home
- > the day coincided with a statutory holiday, which results in a tendency for there to be more places available on Mondays and Fridays as mothers try to avoid paying for services they do not receive
- > the day coincided with the holidays of other education providers, where women needed the service during term time so they could undertake courses of study, but wanted to spend time with their children during the breaks and kept them home then for that reason.

One of the women suggested that the childcare they paid for should be tax deductible.

On the matter of quality in the mainstream centres, the women provided examples of good practice, such as individual teachers attempting to recognise and respond to the needs of their children by trying to learn about the Russian alphabet and staff who “I think ... love kids” and are “doing it for love”.

However, the women had also had some unsatisfactory experiences.

They don't take me seriously... I don't call it racism ... they don't say hello ... even though I pay the same.

The point was made that much depended on the individual staff member and the attitude of the centre manager.

In the conversation about quality, the women also referred to:

- > the need to separate under-two-year-olds and over-two-year-olds in centres
- > concerns about the children being allowed to play outside and get wet in cold weather
- > the desirability of providing the children with hot meals at lunchtime
- > discomfort about the toilets being in the middle of the centre
- > disquiet about children sharing beds (especially because of the risk of head lice) compared with Russia where “everyone had his own bed”
- > concerns about how often children were taken to centres when they were sick and could infect the other children.

The women associated this last point with what they considered to be a relatively meagre entitlement to sick leave in New Zealand, noting that in Russia children would not be taken to centres if they were sick because the parents had unlimited sick leave that they could use for the care of their sick children.





In addition to the use of mainstream ECE services, these mothers all brought their children to the Russian community pre-school, run for two hours every Saturday morning. They shared a commitment to ensuring that their children, at least six of whom had been born in New Zealand, had the opportunity to learn to speak Russian.

The class was led by a fully qualified early childhood teacher who was a fluent speaker of Russian and was very popular with the families. The women indicated that the children particularly enjoyed the class, and that this was not always the case in other mainstream ECE sessions.

[My daughter loves coming here.](#)

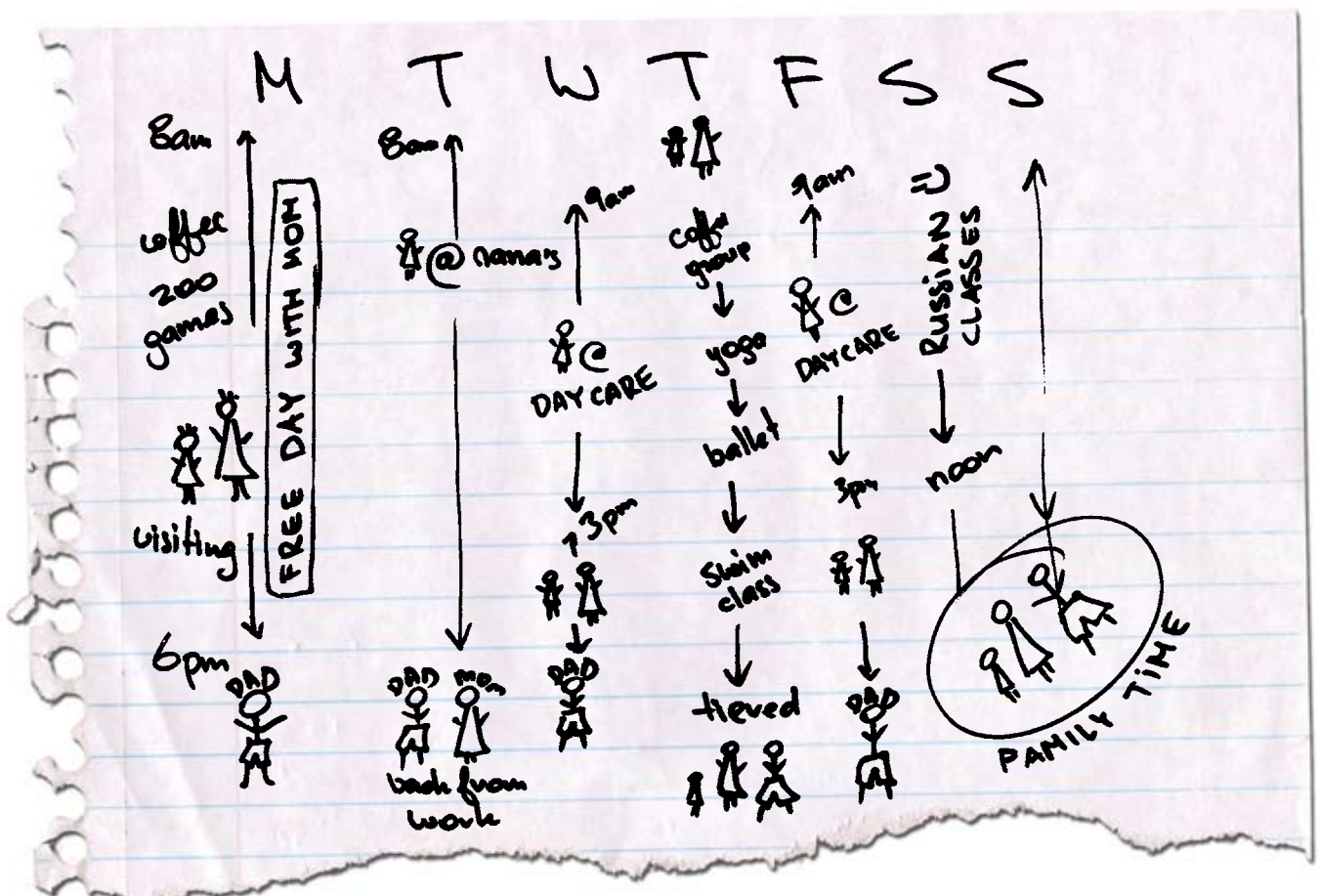
They thought this was because of the quality of the activities in the class, which was said to be quite structured and busy.

[We are very grateful to have this Russian class on the weekend.](#)

Another reason the women were grateful for the Russian community pre-school was because they thought teaching the children Russian at home would be very difficult without the support that the children received in the class. They said the children found English easier to learn because the words were often easier to pronounce than Russian words, and the children were surrounded by English.

[Even in Russian-speaking families ... kids don't understand why they should speak Russian.](#)

[My kid was born in Russia ... first words were in Russian ... but after six months speaks English all the time.](#)



One of the women said that as a community they tended to be invisible, and their concerns about the loss of their language and culture were not recognised.

We're not always heard because of that. You don't hear 'we're losing our culture', which we are and we are concerned ... we are happy to help ourselves ... to keep Russian culture alive [but would like more help from government to do so].

Others agreed that they needed more government support for the Russian community school because it "can't continue on pure enthusiasm". They also thought the Government should provide more support for community schools generally, as in Australia. The group thought that the Russian class, which was run on the weekend, was not eligible for funding from government.

They were quick to add that, while they were concerned with preserving their language and culture, they were "not trying to make a little Russia here".

However, the women were part of a community that was interested in sharing its cultural assets with New Zealanders.

We can offer very interesting experiences as a community.

Kiwi kids are welcomed to the Russian class ... and well treated there.

All of the women agreed "very strongly" that they would like more cross-cultural exchange, with two particularly indicating that they thought the children should learn about a variety of other cultures, not just Russian.

Overall, the Russian women had three clear priorities for ECE, which grew out of their experiences both here and in Russia. These were:

- > more affordable, high-quality ECE places in mainstream centres
- > more flexible services to meet more parents' needs, including participating in education as well as paid work
- > more government support for the Russian community school to help the children's acquisition and maintenance of their heritage language.





SUDANESE MOTHERS IN LOWER HUTT



My sister Sch



CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GROUP

This group consisted of eight women, including the interpreter and a member of the community who spoke Dinka, a dialect of Arabic. These women:

- > had a total of 30 children between them (or an average of 3.8 children each). The children ranged in age from nine months to 19 years. Twelve of the children were of pre-school age and five were within the three- and four-year age group eligible for 20 free hours of ECE
- > were all married, and all but one were living with their husbands. Three of the women shared information about their husband's occupations: one was delivering pizzas, another was working as a carer of intellectually handicapped children and the third was a full-time student.

Three of the women had extended family members living close by and one had a sister-in-law living with her family.

Five of the women were engaged in study, in subjects including aged care and ESOL. One of these women was also employed in aged care. Three of the women were at home full-time looking after children.

PREFERENCES AND PRIORITIES FOR ECE

The current situation for the Sudanese mothers and their families was characterised by a pressing need to improve their English to cope with daily life and to improve their chances of finding paid work.

For us who came to this country as war victim, we never gone to school, we never know anything.

If I decide to stay at home it will be really difficult for me, even I can't go for shopping to go and buy some things I can use ... I can't go and get it because of the language.

When I came here to New Zealand I ... can't communicate with anyone because I don't know English.

Meeting this need was challenging as women had relatively large families, with dependent children of different ages, and this resulted in some complex care arrangements.

My daughter goes to college, and the second-born following her also is into college and ... and my four-year-old is in kindergarten ... and my baby I normally leave with my cousins ... when I was going to my classes... Then my daughter come from school at four always, I leave her with the other kids to look after the kids because ... she can help now...

Women relied on a range of people, including their older children, mothers, mothers-in-law and husbands for support with childcare, as well as formal ECE services. This situation was sometimes less than ideal for various family members involved.

Here in New Zealand, not like Africa or Sudan ... [the children] can't stay by themselves. And even my eighteen one [daughter], I can't leave the children to her whole day or two days ... maybe they will run out on the road and something happen... On December ... while I was not there, very big accident ... [my son] he want to take the, the shoes off the door and then the wind blow the door to his head, cut this place up to here and a hand up to here ... they call, called for ambulance, ambulance people make a victim of you at

home and my daughter used to answer them that 'I'm eighteen years, I supposed to look after my little sisters and brothers... Is better for me to call you guys to come and help my brother, taking him to hospital and I will stay with the little one who are unable to stay by themselves.'

Is really, really very difficult for us ... like me when I stay with my children I get up at six so that I can help them prepare their things for school ... my big girl's just schooling at ... college. I usually take her to train station and leave the kids by themselves, close the door and let them stay for a while and then I come home and take them ... [my] boys usually stay with the little ones ... there are five plus me and I have no seat for one.

The women were concerned about how stressful the situation was, and the pressure this put on their husbands.

The most difficult thing, I've found is just, is so much of stress on my partner because he has to keep running up and down collecting the kids from school, take them to my mum's, the little one drop them to my mum's house and take my mum to the ESOL and bring her back. It's just a lot of work.

And my husband always said 'Oh well, you have abandoned me already, you just looking after the kids and yourself.'

My husband will stay awake all night studying. And in the weekend, he work to Friday and Saturday ... because that student loan is not enough for all of us, so he have to work and on Saturday.

They also expressed concern about the pressures on their mothers and mothers-in-law in their community, upon whom many of them relied for childcare.

Because the mother, mother-in-law, they are really so stressed that they can't help, and we can't help but feel bad about it ... by doing that [asking them to care for children] we are actually giving a lot of burden to them, really ... [but] I got nowhere else. And that why I feel is very, I feel guilty sometime but I really don't know how I could help it.

They [the women's mothers and mothers-in-law] are very happy to do that, to look after the children... They need really to stay with the children but sometime I feel sorry about them because it is stressful for them to look after five to four children from morning to ... it's very hard for them.

As with the women in the other groups who had older family members in New Zealand, there was a limit to the amount of support that could be expected from their elderly relatives, and a requirement for elderly relatives themselves to be provided with support.

Of course I have my mum there, she doesn't know how to speak English. I have to go and help her, do shopping for her, if she's sick she want to go to the hospital. It's me, every time it's me. So I'll be stuck in the middle between my children, my school and my mum.

And there was a concern that relying on older community members for childcare had its shortcomings in terms of their children's opportunities to learn English. This group was more concerned about whether or not their children were being provided with adequate opportunities to learn English than the other groups.

[My] mum doesn't speak English and the kids are there, you know they communicate in my language which is really good but I, I find it hard because when my kids go to school they don't speak English well.

These mothers recognised that their older children also faced their own challenges at school.





The boy can make breakfast some time for all of us. And the girl can do some time but not every day because it is hard for our children to catch up with other children at the school they have got really difficult times, in school our children are overworked because they want to catch up.

Yet when the women were sick they were especially reliant on their older children, who “won’t see their homework ... you just focus and do something for the little ones”.

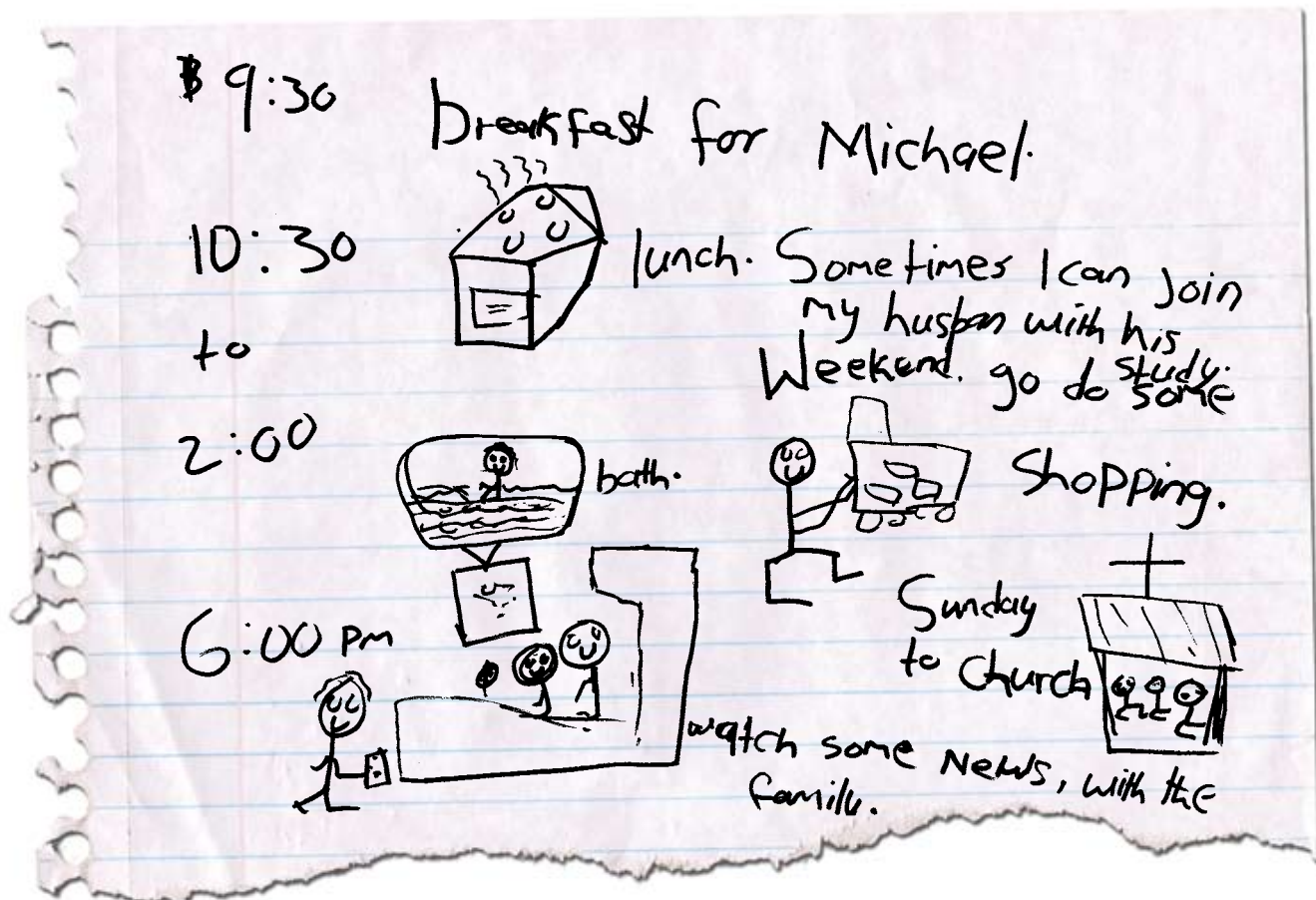
I am just forcing myself to get up and do something for my children. And if I can’t I will just stay on the bed until they come back from school. The older children will start preparing for [dinner themselves].

I used to pray a lot not to sick. Because if I’m sick I’ll just stay until my daughter come from school and come and cook for the children.

The women’s three- and four-year-old children were enrolled for the 20 free hours ECE. However, the mothers couldn’t always get the children to the childcare centres because of competing commitments, including their own work or study, or the needs of their other children.

If I’m wanted to go for a meeting I’ll have to leave my other girls especially [child’s name] because she goes to kindy and that day, that particular day she won’t go to kindy if my husband has any meeting in the morning. So she will go to my mum house and stay at my mum’s place, which is also affecting her because I wanted her to go Monday to Friday to kindergarten ... and I can’t say ‘Oh I am not going for my study because I have to take her to kindy.’

The cost of childcare was also an issue for these families, and the requirement to pay for childcare (above and beyond the free 20 hours) for the purpose of studying (especially English) was particularly problematic for these women.



I didn't go in to any school, I just stay at home because no one can look after the little one. And I got no money to take her to childcare because I am not working, I am staying alone using the little bit of money Work and Income used to give me to feed them with not to take child to the childcare.

I'm a midwife back home so, but since I come here it's a bit difficult for me to do that midwifery course, cos it's taking three years, three or four years, I don't know... Cos of the kids, yeah, it's difficult for me to study there now. I'm thinking if I go and study three years or four years, who's going to look after those kids. It seems that we don't have enough money to put them in a child centre, it's really hard, that's why I just decided to do this caregiver course. It's just for one year.

The price was really high [for childcare] ... for each child I have to pay 150 dollars or 170 dollars. And I don't work, it's only my partner who works. I'm a full-time student.

[Y]ou forget about money, forget about the school because no one can help you.

And for those who have totally nothing [by way of help from family members] you stay home, nobody to give that burden to any, you just stay home, nothing you can do.

These mothers also had many ideas about what would help them to attain their educational and employment goals and to achieve a better balance in their families' lives. Their priorities were:

> More affordable and flexible service provision

If it [a childcare service] can run for more than 12 hours a day that will be helpful, cos we all have different times. Maybe in the morning you want to go for ESOL classes, then in the evening you want to go to work and if we have this childcare running out throughout the day, that will be the time when you can fulfil all those needs, you can do whatever you want to do with the support of the community and the New Zealand community itself.

> More service provision for under-tuos

If there's any help I think it will be good for us even if it's just to get stress out of my mum's shoulders, taking the [younger] kids out maybe to a childcare maybe two hours a day or maybe five hours a week is good, it can give her time to rest ... we don't rest now.

> More, and more affordable, after-school care options

After three [o'clock] they [the young school-aged children] need to be taken care of.

[When] I was in Upper Hutt ... there was a place there ... they used to keep up to 12 [years old] who came from school and go there and stay until your parent will come and pick you up. Is not only three, three years or two years old, is really difficult for those who have under age. If they see the little one different from the big one, they may come from school and you are not there no one will look after.

One of the women noted the efforts she had seen made by workers in the community, and that there were some initiatives running to increase participation in ECE.

I know about St Josephs [referring to the example alluded to in the previous quotation], is a very good principal trying very much to help... I don't know how many young mothers there, there might not be so many as we are. We are quite a few. If anything like that could happen ... children going to school and kept in one place ... if there's any way ... that could be very good help for us.



However, they did tend to rely on communities to contribute resources such as accommodation for the home-based options, which represented a challenge for these women. They were still keen, though, to establish relationships and to explore options.

I'm sure there's a lady I knew trying to move in the homes, trying to help mothers and children, seeing their developments and all that kind ... if they can work out something and get some two people to come down here and set things [up] for us and they'll pay for us the place, what we need is a place to be rented and what [is] required and they ask [for] our contributions, what we can contribute and what they could help out, could also be good.

Finally, they indicated that the circumstances of the women and children in their community might warrant more attention from the agencies that support vulnerable families and refugees.

Maybe they didn't hear from us, the way we are ... they never come to talk to us and they may want to treat us as the refugees and we are already here and this [is] what our needs [are].

You are the first person to come to our community, this is the first time we are sitting down and we are telling our problems to you because you're doing your research but otherwise there's nobody talked from any organisation that thought 'Oh well, these people been migrated to New Zealand and they're settled in such places. What are they doing? How are they progressing?' ... so we just come here and we're given houses and we have our kids going to school. Nobody knows what is going on behind the curtain and is all very hard. We need people to come into the community, to come into the ground and see what is happening, not just doing the research on the internet.

In conclusion, the Sudanese mothers had an acute need for more flexible, accessible and affordable childcare to meet the needs of relatively large families with:

- > a number of dependent pre-school and school-aged children whose needs sometimes conflicted
- > very few extended family members able to provide support for childcare
- > other significant challenges for some parents (for example, limited English or problems finding paid work).

The Sudanese mothers were also concerned that their current arrangements for their pre-school children were not necessarily providing adequate opportunities for the children to learn English before starting school.



ERITREAN PARENTS FROM WELLINGTON





CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GROUP

This group consisted of four mothers and one father representing a total of four families. The families:

- > had a total of 15 children between them (or an average of 3.8 per family), ranging in age from a few months to 20 years, with three of the children in the eligible age range for 20 free hours of ECE. Two out of three of the eligible children were attending.
- > all consisted of married couples who were living together with their children.

One of the women worked part-time at a supermarket and the other three women were full-time mothers at home. Two of these women indicated that they would like to study and work when their youngest children were old enough to attend childcare.

I'm thinking for future, cause all the time is lost at home ... when she start, like, school, kindergarten, I want ... I want to that time [to start studying].

All of the families' fathers were in paid employment, working, for example, as a storeman and as taxi drivers.

The father and one of the mothers interviewed, had a New Zealand driver's licence.

PREFERENCES AND PRIORITIES FOR ECE

The parents were accessing kindergarten services for their three- and four-year-olds and felt that the number of free hours provided was helpful, particularly for non-working parents.

For me ... two hours away from his mother, their mother is enough for three years old ... but some people work, they have problems. For me it's good.

They were generally happy to have these opportunities for their children.

I thought it was good for the kids. You know instead, ah, just like being at home. It's good to see that learning, you know like ... to see the other children, what they do, what they learning about, how they speaking, you know, they just learn. I think it's just great.

The children also they together play ... if they meet together they're happy ... it's good.

I am happy with the kindergarten because children together with each other.

However, one woman wished that there was greater provision from the Government so that she could work full-time.

Well, it's not enough. I could work full-time, but I think about it and it's costing me a lot of money [to pay for more hours childcare] so it's just not worth it.

The parents also commented that they did not think the staff in early childhood centres knew much about their children's culture.

They do know where they come from because when you fill the form. But I don't think they know about our culture or something because they don't know actually. Cause they don't ask anyway. But they know whether their religion is Christian or Muslim, where their country is, they know that, the teacher knows, because [in the form you put] the details down. But I don't think ... [the teachers know] about culture.

Nor did the parents think the kindergarten staff could necessarily be expected to go very far in teaching the children about Eritrean culture, given the presence of children from a number of cultures and religions in kindergarten classes.

It's complicated for them to teach our, you know, culture I think.

Outside of formal ECE provision, parents worked together to care for their children. All of the husbands were described in terms that suggested they were very supportive of their wives, and the husband who was present acted as the interpreter (when needed) and provided transport for most of the group.

Yeah he help me because he knows my problem ... sometimes I can't get up ... and he help me with everything.

When I am sick, my husband look after the children.

The support of husbands was important because none of these parents had any extended family living in New Zealand and there were few (Tigrinian-speaking) people from Eritrea living in the Wellington region to call upon.

We getting better now but we are small [and] ... spread around in Wellington, Lower Hutt ... Petone.

So it's little bit hard, specially we don't have a family here... I have a lot friends, Kiwi friends from church so I can just see them and visit them. They come to my house. We have a cup of tea and lunch. [But] it is nice to have this people you know, specially our people. I like everyone. It just, it's the closest, it's like my mum or sister, this family.

The parents were confident about their children learning English, thinking that they would acquire it relatively easily because they were surrounded by it.

The children, they're not having a problem [learning English], I don't think so.

And, as with other groups, while they wanted their children to learn English, they were also concerned about the preservation of their own languages.

Their English, English after six months they go very quick, they speak very well. If they speak to me at home they speak to me by my language [Tigrinian]. But if they've gone out the door, they speak each other English ... outside all they, they speak English.

At home, therefore, the parents were committed to teaching the children their heritage language and culture.

We have to teach them at home [about their culture]... They can't teach them our culture or our thing. They have to learn at home and not in the kindergarten. Kindergarten's English, that's all.

I try to speak our language. I [bought] CD our language, classic video, our language ... to teach them.

However, one family whose children were born in Sudan, had also lost its facility with Arabic, and the parents had very limited options for preserving this language.

My children, all of them they born in Sudan. When they were young they speak Arabic, very, very fluent. But when they came here they lost it all, Arabic because their parent, we are not using Arabic speaking at home.

The parents were also very concerned with improving their own English to ensure they could continue to communicate with their English-speaking children, and to cope with the challenges of living in New Zealand.



When the mother stay at home, the children goes, their language English ... if we stay at home, maybe we have a problem, listen them, talk with them.

Many paper come to my house ... if I couldn't read this letter I couldn't understand.

Because the mothers they want to get out of the house, they want their own languages.

Accessing education and study with young children was problematic, however, particularly for mothers.

The problem is the mother is stay in the house looking after children and then not educating. For example we came, like, 2003 and [my wife] is still not speak English because we ... [can't] to go to school ... the problem is the school. They didn't have mothers to school to take the children.

I can't speak fluently. I use simple words, always the same words. I want to learn, like home teacher ... [when] I won't need the time with my baby.

Some possible solutions to their current situation generated by the group included the extended provision of English lessons in the home, which was regarded as being especially important for mothers without transport or those who couldn't drive.

[Some of us] need in the house to help with some English or like that sometimes.

However, they also commented that trying to learn English while caring for children was challenging.

Some tutors come to visit our, in house. But... It's complicated you know, when you look after the kid and you wanna learn. It's very hard ... you can't understand what the teacher said you know, when you look after the kids.

The more effective solution, they decided, was for the women to have English lessons while childcare was provided.

I think it's the best.

Yes.

It is important [to have someone care for the children while the mothers learn English].

These parents were very focused on the need to access childcare for their pre-schoolers so that they themselves could learn English, and could continue to communicate with their English-speaking children. The parents were also committed to ensuring their children maintained their heritage language and culture by teaching the children about them at home. They saw this as difficult, but they also saw it as their best option, because of the relatively small size of their community in New Zealand, and the extent to which their language was still unusual here. They did not think it was realistic for ECE providers to teach their children about their culture, because of the diversity of cultures in some communities.



ASSYRIAN MOTHERS IN SOUTH WELLINGTON



CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GROUP

This group consisted of eight mothers, plus an organiser who had no children. The mothers had 11 children between them (or an average of 1.4 children each) ranging in age from five months to seven years. Nine out of 11 of the children were of pre-school age and two were in the three- and four-year age range for 20 free hours ECE. Two of the children were soon to turn three.

All of the women were living with their husbands and three had adult extended family members living with them. The majority of the husbands were working as taxi drivers, though one worked as a store person in a supermarket.

Half of the women had arrived in New Zealand as school-aged children themselves and had attended secondary school here. All of the women had a New Zealand driver's licence. One of the mothers worked full-time and another worked part-time.

PRIORITIES AND PREFERENCES FOR ECE

Overall, the women emphasised a strong preference for staying at home and providing for the care and education of their pre-school children themselves, even where extended family members were available to help.

I don't work because I, I think as much, like it doesn't matter how my mum or my mother-in-law love to look after my kids but it's still my duty to look after them you know, especially there are two ... I feel I have to teach them. My mum teach them something and my mother-in-law teach them something else so they're getting confused. So I'd rather me sit at home and teach them.

Even I have my mum or my mother-in-law, my husband doesn't like me to leave her with someone else. He like [her] to be with me and to learn the thing I wanted. My husband you know, he doesn't like to leave her with somebody else and he doesn't like me to work ... he just say you look after her, that's enough.

My husband's the same. He said I don't want anyone to teach him anything, just you, you are the mum, you have to teach him.

Most, most Middle East women, they can't, you know leave the kids with the babysitter, no way.

However, one of the mothers who did undertake some paid work indicated that the husbands did sometimes compromise in the interests of making ends meet.

It depends on, you know, like, how they live. I mean if they're really tight you know with money and everything, they have to work both, then that's OK, then she can work. But if they know they're all right, you know with moneywise and stuff, the mum can stay with the kids. I mean if I have another one I don't think I'll be working. Just because I've got one, then she can take care of it, but if I have another baby then you know I wouldn't be working till they probably go to school.

Within the group, three of the mothers had parents or parents-in-law living with them or close by, and these grandparents were involved in childcare and valued for this role.

My daughter stays with my mother, she's at home. We live together me and my mum, my sister and my husband of course... She actually sleeps beside my mum because she loves her grandma... She's always with her so she takes care of her ... it's working very well. I'm loving it cause my mum, I mean I can't find any better place to go than my mother, to be honest... I'm one of the luckiest people probably cause we live together ...



we are very close and she takes very good care of him, better than me, I think so, cause she's done really well with him.

I call myself a lucky person or a lucky mum, because I have my mum and my mother-in-law. My story is very similar to her story because it's me and my sister and my mum, we're very close ... my mum and my mother-in-law, they're both very helpful.

[I start] work at seven o'clock ... and usually I got my parents-in-law who lives just next door to me. So we give them a call and they just come in and when it's eight o'clock they wake him up and get ready to kindy and then walk cause they can't drive... And then when it's time to pick up at 11.30 or 12.30 they walk and pick him up again... When it's raining I feel sorry for them.

Three of the women had no extended family in New Zealand, and five out of the eight were in families that were sending money to members still living overseas.

While most mothers saw their role, or that of close family members, as primary in their children's early childhood care and education, husbands were seen as the key source of support and back-up for childcare, especially when there were no extended family members available to help. In response to a question about what happens when the mothers are sick, some of the women said:

For me, my husband, he's gonna stay home.

Yeah, same.

There has to be someone there you know.

That's why they [husbands] are there for us.

A number of the women indicated that their husbands were, however, working long hours to make a living, leaving little time for family life.

They have to work hard to get money.

My husband is working 14 hours per day.

My husband sometimes he leaves very early and he just stays until very late ... sometimes when he comes back they [the children] are already asleep. He like to wake them up but I don't like to do that.

Sometime he's working night shift to morning, sometime morning shift till eight and then when he came he's seeing our kids for two hours ... he don't have time to see his kids.

You know, you've been working, and your husband's been working and there's not time to see each other.

Alongside these informal arrangements, the women recognised the benefits for their children of participating in formal ECE.

Because we need them to learn, that's why. If wasn't that, maybe not.

They were familiar with kindergarten from Iraq.

I think in my country they've got kindergarten, and so we know, you know. Yeah, we've got in my country.

Most of them they go to kindergarten [in Iraq] and then school. So we know about this.

The women were confident that their children would continue to speak their heritage language (Assyrian) and learn English at the same time.





It's easy for him, yeah, he know, he understand everything cause the teacher talk to him, yeah, but in, at house, we speak with him in Assyrian only, yeah. When you go to kindergarten he, now he understand everything, yeah, he's speaking. He knows all ABC ... when someone talk to him, the name, address, everything.

But not all of the women felt the benefits for the children were worth the effort involved in getting them to kindergarten all of the time. This was particularly the case if they had more than one child to care for, or if they had elderly parents to support.

I take him to kindergarten ... he want to play with other children, he want to play with the teacher, yeah, he want to go to kindergarten but I don't have time ... [it's] only two hours.

Like the hours at the kindergarten, if you have another one it's too much, it's not worth it, you know to take care of another baby it's too much ... it's not worth taking two hours or three hours, wake your little baby up ... it's not fair.

Whoever works in a kindy they like full-time and the morning starts at eight ... no one likes to go in at ... cause they are only three years old, they don't want them to go long hours...

I've got my mum ... [but] my mum she's old and ... she's only with one eye ... and I have to look after my mother and my father too you know, doctors or hospital...

My mum she's old woman, she can't take care of my kids... We have to take care of our family. They're not gonna take care of us.

And they don't speak English, that's the problem for old people.

They can't drive, and like everyone knows they don't speak English.

And cost was mentioned by several of the women as a barrier.

I really wanted to take him to kindy because there was kindy [available] ... was \$200 a week.

You have to pay for that... It's so expensive, each thing adds up... By end of the year, you be paying. If you look at what you're paying, it's too much ... two dollars, three dollars or five dollars, yes. I pay for her schooling. You know it's too much, it really is too much.

However, the women also saw television as an important means by which children acquired English (and Arabic) language.

My son he learn more from TV than kindergarten you know. We've got Sky, Disney Channel all from morning till night-time. He was just watching Disney Channel... That's why he learn English from the TV, not from the kindy. Maybe I told you last time he's talking four language my son, Assyrian, Armenian, English. He can understand Arabic ... he can speak Arabic but not, yeah, not fluent.

Same as my daughter. Even she, like she is born here in New Zealand but if someone speaks in Arabic she understand everything. That's because of the TV as well. We don't speak Arabic at home but she still understands [because of the Arabic channel].

The women also said that despite the misgivings they had about parting with their children so they could attend kindergarten, their experiences had been very positive.

As soon as you walked in you told them that they don't speak anything in English, and they were quite happy with that... They are very good... Seriously we will be like, scared the first day but second day OK, now I know how to talk to the teacher.

And because New Zealand has like different, you know different citizens from all over the world so it's not, you know, something strange that he is from different country.

Especially Kiwi people are more helpful than other countries.

For one week, two weeks, first few weeks you feel oh my god, what's gonna happen to my son in the kindergarten, what's gonna, what's he's gonna do, you know. You gonna be worried... [But] for me ... the teachers ... they was saying he's very smart boy. Even he can't speak, like, too much English but he's smart boy.

In summary, the Assyrian mothers were very committed to providing care and education for their pre-school children at home. They did appreciate the opportunity for their children to attend ECE and had some very positive stories about their experiences of it. However, they also had some practical difficulties in getting the children to ECE, especially if they had more than one child, and did not always think it was worth the effort.

This community was relatively confident about the children's acquisition of languages. This included English, which they noted the children learned very rapidly from television and ECE, and Assyrian, which they were surrounded by and expected to use both at home and in their close-knit community.





DISCUSSION



DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES IN THE FAMILIES' CHARACTERISTICS

The families represented in the focus groups around the country were similar to each other in that they all had come to New Zealand as migrants or refugees and were from non-English-speaking backgrounds. The vast majority of participants' families consisted of married parents living together with at least one pre-school child. All but two of the focus group participants were women, as women rather than men tended to have primary responsibility for the care of pre-school children.

However, the groups were also very different from each other and, while the members of each group had some things in common, there was considerable diversity within some of the groups.

All of the focus groups included at least one woman with only one child. However, the Eritrean, Sudanese and Muslim families were often larger than the other families, with average numbers of children of 3.8, 3.8 and 3.2 respectively. The Assyrian, Russian and Mandarin-speaking families all had only one or two children each. The complexity of various families' childcare arrangements and needs, and the resulting pressures and opportunities of individual family members, was strongly influenced by the number of dependent children.

The Mandarin-speaking and Muslim families were from large, relatively visible communities in New Zealand. The Sudanese and Eritrean parents were from small, emerging communities. The Russian and Assyrian parents were also from communities that are not highly visible in mainstream New Zealand. The inclusion in the research of families from a number of less well-known communities was important to refine current understandings of ECE arrangements and the needs of diverse migrant and refugee families.

Families also varied in terms of their settlement history in New Zealand and their relationships to their ethnic, religious or cultural homelands. The Eritrean and Sudanese families were resettled here as refugees. Some Assyrian family members had also settled in New Zealand as refugees but others had joined family here through family reunification processes, or migrated independently. The Muslim families were mainly independent migrants, but also some refugees. The Mandarin-speaking parents had migrated to New Zealand. The Russian-speaking mothers had also migrated to New Zealand, and half of them were married to New Zealand men. These differences influenced individual parents' expectations and experiences of ECE in New Zealand.

Finally, the Sudanese, Eritrean and Assyrian families generally faced greater financial pressures than the other families involved in this research. This was often related to low levels of formal education, or parents' level of English, and problems gaining work experience in New Zealand or qualifications that would be recognised here.

OVERALL PRIORITIES AND PREFERENCES FOR ECE

Participants in the various focus groups described different priorities and preferences for ECE. While these depended on individual family circumstances, they often followed from the shared characteristics of each of the focus groups. For example, the parents in the Russian and Mandarin-speaking groups, who were more likely to be in paid work than the parents in the other groups, particularly emphasised the need for more places in childcare centres. In both cases, they spoke of a shortage of ECE places, including for three- and four-year-olds, and long waiting lists in their areas.

The Sudanese and Eritrean parents, who had relatively large families, needed childcare for their pre-school children and nearby childcare services for school-aged dependent children. These families often needed childcare so parents could undertake basic courses of study as a precursor to gaining paid employment, but had very limited ability to pay for the childcare they needed, even where Government subsidies were available. These families needed more hours for more of their children at less cost.

The Assyrian and pan-ethnic Muslim mothers expressed a strong preference for mothers themselves to provide the care and education of pre-school children. The Muslim mothers saw the pre-school years as crucial for instilling Islamic values and practices and were looking for Islamic childcare services to support this and for the children to learn Arabic. The Assyrian mothers, who had received helpful responses to their cultural needs from mainstream ECE providers in New Zealand, appreciated the opportunities for their children, but did not necessarily find it easy or see it as a high priority to get the children there.

All of the groups were concerned about the preservation of children's heritage languages, and considered that the pre-school years provided a special opportunity for achieving this. They also considered that the preservation of children's heritage languages required a deliberate effort because of the extent to which children in New Zealand are surrounded by spoken English. Opportunities for preserving children's heritage languages tended to be better for families that were part of larger, more established communities, but this was challenging even for them.

Conversely, participants expressed considerable confidence about the ability of their pre-school children to acquire English, more or less automatically, by interacting with other English-speaking children, and from the media. The one exception to this was the Sudanese group. They were concerned that their reliance on members of their own communities for childcare might limit the children's opportunity to learn English before starting school.

NEED FOR MORE AND DIFFERENT ECE SERVICES

All of the focus groups provided evidence of a shortfall in available and affordable services to meet their childcare needs, recent improvements in Government provision notwithstanding. This was often related to:

- > models of service provision that did not necessarily meet the needs of parents undertaking paid work or study – for example, where parents needed to drop children off early or collect them late, or needed more hours per day than those offered by some providers
- > a lack of Government funding for many children under three years old, and for three- and four-year-olds beyond the 20 free hours
- > the need for services that are close to other services for families and close to home.

The ECE experts group indicated that the call for co-located services was consistent with overseas models that offer a range of services (for example, English lessons, parenting programmes, primary healthcare services and childcare) in a single location to meet the sometimes complex needs of refugee and migrant families.



For example in London, New River Green, Islington Childcare Centres, the Child Centres that had been funded by Sure Start particularly in London, that had a model where they were providing a range of facilities for families, not just the care and education, they were linked in very much more with other [services].

The thing about this for the refugee and migrant mothers was the English, the English language acquisition that was really crucial to them, took place next door to where their kids were.

We think it's a model that's incredibly appropriate for this instance.

UTILISATION OF 20 FREE HOURS ECE FOR THREE- AND FOUR-YEAR-OLDS

While it did not meet all of the families' needs for ECE, the 20 free hours ECE policy is clearly useful, and families in the focus groups were largely accessing this for their eligible three- and four-year-old children. However, they noted some specific barriers to accessing their entitlement, including:

- > a shortage of places and long waiting lists in some areas
- > the requirement for parents to pay a 'voluntary contribution' in some centres
- > service hours that were very limited (for example, to two or three hours per day), and were not always compatible with other commitments
- > services that provided helpful but limited responses to the needs of parents and families from other cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

MORE AFFORDABLE OPTIONS STILL NEEDED

The need for ECE to be more affordable was mentioned in all of the groups, despite the subsidies available from Government for childcare for some families and the 20 free hours ECE for three- and four-year-olds.

And you gonna pay here money, the bills, money, the rent money. What you gonna save?... We can't pay any money besides. – Assyrian mother, Wellington

If we can send him full-time to kindergarten without worrying about money I'd love to. Japanese-speaking father, Hamilton

This was especially so for families needing care for children under the age of three, or for more than 20 hours a week. It was acute for families needing to access childcare for activities other than paid work, such as study.

I really want to go back to school because otherwise I'll forget everything. But there's no other way because [the baby] is still small, so I always with him at home and we don't have enough money to take him to the childcare, I have to look after him at home. Sudanese mother, Lower Hutt



CULTURAL NEEDS AND ECE

INCLUSION IN MAINSTREAM ECE SERVICES

Participants reported varying experiences with the reception of their children in ECE centres and in having their culture acknowledged there, including some very good examples of inclusive practice.

In, in my daughter's kindergarten they even had like, a welcome. It's in our language, which means a lot, you know, to her, cause she knows she is part of, like, known community. Assyrian mother, Wellington

However, this was not universal, and the Eritrean families did not necessarily think it was realistic, given the variety of cultural backgrounds of the children in particular centres. The Muslim women, who were very concerned about ensuring their children's religious and cultural traditions and practices could be accommodated in centres, were part of a community that aimed to establish its own ECE centres and was working with the Ministry of Education to do that.

There were some specific areas where cultural understandings about the needs of children provided fundamental challenges to current practice. These were:

- > the emphasis placed on the mother as the person who should be responsible for caring, socialising and educating pre-school children and the understanding of the importance of high-quality ECE outside the home for reasons of social and language development in this context
- > the desired degree of structure and formality in the programme provided for ECE
- > the physical environments of New Zealand's ECE facilities – for example, the location of toilets in childcare centres, sharing of beds, taking children outside for exercise or play in cold weather
- > food that, depending on the group, needed to be hot, healthy, halal, vegetarian or suitable for children with allergies.

In discussion with the ECE experts, they described a need for ECE teachers to be able to work with parents to achieve the necessary degree of mutual understanding, and to make parents who wanted to become involved feel welcome in ECE centres.

It has to be explained ... it's unpacking and making explicit the pedagogy and the approach to learning that we have in New Zealand.

Any really good-quality early childhood centre would say please stay, please come and be part of us, we want you here, we don't want you to leave ... we don't send parents away like you do at school ... if you look at *Te Whāriki*, the principles...

However, the ECE experts acknowledged that working with parents in centres can be difficult for many reasons, including physical environments in ECE centres and constraints on teachers' time.

There's no place for parents to often interact ... when there's a howling southerly the cloak bay gets congested and so I think if you want early childhood centres to be really inclusive you have to think about the structural design.

Ideally teachers should be able to have the time to sit down with their families and really go through things like what the expectations are in the centre ... certainly I've had parents say ... 'We really would have like to have had a formal meeting with you as the teacher' but I was too busy, you know I was running around you know, million things to do and you know there's a time issue.



The ECE experts also shared the concerns of parents about other aspects of the physical environments in ECE centres, especially the lack of privacy for children, including but not only in the toilets.

All of early childhood centre buildings are very much designed around the need ... to survey children... [Nowhere] else in this world would we expect to spend, you know, long periods of time with 45 other people, without having a place to go away and kind of go, whew ... the lack of privacy for children I think is a real issue.

The ECE experts group was unconvinced by arguments that relate this lack of privacy to safety. They said that in New Zealand we have 'cultural baggage' around safety issues. They emphasised the role of skilled teachers who can keep children safe without necessarily being able to see them all the time.

You can usually tell if something's going on eh, you can hear, someone's getting hurt you can hear it ... some of it's about the regulations ... some of it's about teacher attitudes and what's, what's allowable ... but actually, I think skilled people can allow children places where they can have retreat and quiet.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR ECE TEACHERS WORKING WITH DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

The group of ECE experts emphasised the specific skill and knowledge requirements of teachers working with people from particular ethnic groups or cultures different from their own.

There's implications in that for the kind of teachers we're pumping out of our teachers' colleges ... we need people in the teaching force who refugee communities can readily identify with.

There were two aspects to this. The first was for teachers from one culture to be able to understand people from another culture and put that understanding into practice. This is currently covered in ECE teacher training.

I think it takes a lot of insight to know that what's operating here is a different cultural paradigm, not a personal kind of affront to our, what we think is good practice.

As a trainer we do, we do talk about these things.

Our graduates have heard all of this. But whether they can translate it into practice in a centre when they're one of eight who think differently, that's the challenge.

The second aspect was the need to achieve greater cultural diversity in the trained ECE teacher workforce.

Another thing is reflecting within the teaching force some of the cultural and ethnic diversity of the kids.

The experts saw bridging courses to help people meet entry requirements for undergraduate teacher training programmes as an important initial step to achieving this diversity in the workforce, as well as recognition of prior learning, language skill and cultural knowledge in the context of degree programmes for ECE teachers.





PRESERVATION OF HERITAGE LANGUAGES DURING EARLY CHILDHOOD

All parents in the research shared a commitment to preserving their children's heritage languages. The Russian families also emphasised that even where they encountered very good culturally inclusive practices in mainstream ECE centres, these did not meet their needs in terms of preserving the children's first language. The Chinese-speaking families indicated that they also needed something more than inclusive mainstream ECE services to preserve their children's heritage language.

We like to have our language. We don't want our language to get you know [lost].
Assyrian mother, Wellington

Talking to them in our dialect also is very important. Like my kids especially, they even forget my mother tongue, which is really painful to me. Sudanese mother, Lower Hutt

I don't want my kids to know nothing about China ... [or be unable to] speak Mandarin... My friends' kids they don't even speaking Mandarin any more. They just speak in English and it just feels sad to me. I don't want my kids just like that. Chinese-speaking mother, Hamilton

[W]e would like them [the children] to be at least bilingual. Russian mother, Christchurch.

A number of the participants explained that one of the reasons they thought the preservation of the children's heritage language was important was to maintain relationships between generations within families.

We ah, worry about how my daughter can communicate or talk with my parents ... if she doesn't know how to speak Chinese. Chinese-speaking mother, Hamilton

I don't want them to loss (sic) our language because if they do finish school, if they visit Eritrea and they need like interpreter, is very hard for them. Eritrean father, Wellington

And most of the groups spoke of the pre-school years as crucial in terms of the capacity of the children to acquire (and lose) languages.

When the kids were young their ability to learn another language is huge ... the thing is they learn fast but they also forget fast if you don't keep up they just will, they just forget totally. Chinese-speaking mother, Hamilton

I make sure that she speaks Assyrian cause you know, once they get to school they don't. Assyrian mother, Wellington

[The] first five years are very important. Muslim mother, Auckland

Some groups were more concerned than others with support for teaching their children their heritage language. The Russian mothers and some of the Chinese-speaking parents particularly emphasised the need for support from outside the home to help them to teach their children.

I took him home for a year and so he can speak pretty good Chinese as well as English, as soon as he comes back to New Zealand, he starts school at five years old, he refused to speak [Chinese], he refused to learn, he doesn't want to know anything. Chinese-speaking mother, Hamilton

All the kids who attend Russian school ... are fluent. Russian mother, Christchurch

And the Muslim women were looking for help to teach the children Arabic to prepare them for joining their parents in the mosque, ideally from a Muslim with qualifications as an ECE teacher.

The Assyrian women had more confidence about maintaining their children's heritage language, perhaps because they were part of a tight-knit community that provided total immersion opportunities in the course of children's ordinary lives at church and wedding celebrations, and in the Assyrian community school.

My daughter goes to normal school and she goes to Assyrian school ... on Fridays ... at church... It starts at five o'clock and finishes at half past six, an hour and a half ... they teach them Assyrian writing and reading. Assyrian mother, Wellington

The Assyrian and Muslim mothers also referred to the opportunities provided by satellite television for the children to be exposed to other languages, especially Arabic.

The Tigrinian-speaking Eritrean and Dinka-speaking Sudanese parents were also concerned about the preservation of their children's heritage languages (and the Arabic that some of the children had learned before they came to New Zealand). But none of these families had much opportunity outside of their immediate family to support the preservation of their children's heritage languages, which were relatively rare in New Zealand.

The ECE experts interviewed as part of the research regarded the parents' preference for preserving their children's heritage languages as crucially important. This was because of the proven relationship between a child's literacy in their first language and the overall outcomes for their education in an English-speaking environment.

There's heaps of research on this that shows it [the child's first or heritage language] is really important ... it improves the acquisition of a second language. There's no doubt about it. ECE expert

The ECE experts were careful to clarify the distinctions between the ECE service that allowed parents to leave their children and the community language schools that need to operate at times when at least half the parents are available to participate. This is because it is the parents who have the language and cultural knowledge. For some large communities it is possible to meet the language needs and the care needs within a single service, and there are some examples of this occurring in large centres in New Zealand.

However, the ECE experts regarded the community language school model, which is supported by the Ministry of Education, as the best option for small communities to support the preservation of children's heritage languages by involving the parents.

They're the holders of that cultural information so they have to be there. ECE expert

The ECE experts did not see this as a substitute for the type of childcare service that allowed a parent to leave a child, but as something that should be provided as well.

The ECE experts also acknowledged that communities might lack good information about the funding available for community language schools, and thought this might need to be provided more effectively. They also acknowledged that the organisation of community schools could be a challenge for some communities.

The thing that was an issue for them ... for some communities finding someone that was going to be the coordinator of the group ... someone taking responsibility to coordinate and kind of run it was sometimes difficult in terms of a commitment to that in terms of the people's time. ECE expert





ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH BY CHILDREN OF MIGRANT AND REFUGEE FAMILIES

All groups except the Sudanese mothers expressed confidence about their children's ability to acquire English because they were surrounded by it.

No, no way, they will speak English ... kids learn from environment, yeah, it's just a natural ability, natural ability for him ... they make friends with kiwi kids and the kids in the school they all speak English and the teacher, of course the teacher will use English. Chinese-speaking mother, Hamilton

It's easy for him, yeah, he know, he understand everything cause the teacher talk to him, yeah, but in, at house, we speak with him in Assyrian only, yeah, when you go to kindergarten he, now he understand everything, yeah, he's speaking. He knows all ABC. Assyrian mother, Wellington

And the group of ECE experts agreed with the parents.

Yep, to a certain extent that's true ... kids up until the age of 10 or 11 are like sponges in terms of language. I mean they, they'll pick up languages very quickly ... one of the major places they pick up languages is through their peers and so supposing they're surrounded by peers who are English speakers they'll start interacting with those kids in that language. ECE expert

However, the ECE experts also indicated that this could vary depending on how much interaction children have with New Zealanders and New Zealand media. They acknowledged that there may be a need for support for some children when they first start school. They also considered that parents' varying levels of confidence about their children's acquisition of English may be about confidence levels more generally in their interactions with the formal education.

There are issues of support around the more fragile communities ... that's one of the things that came out of the refugee youth forum ... the fact that they wanted their parents to know the, the demand that was being made on them by New Zealand educational institutions ... those communities need a lot of support around navigating and understanding, maybe becoming familiar with education demands ... and helping them develop their understanding of literacy, or their skills in literacy along with their kids' needs... I think they need different interventions. ECE expert

INFORMAL SUPPORT FOR ECE FOR MIGRANT AND REFUGEE FAMILIES

This research not only confirmed the findings of earlier Families Commission consultations that migrant and refugee families tend to lack support for childcare from extended family members, but also highlighted their significance.

The Mandarin-speaking, Assyrian and Sudanese families all acknowledged the importance of grandparents, particularly grandmothers, for their contribution to the care of young children. The families that did not have support from extended family members felt this lack acutely.

We don't have our extended family here so that's ... a real big issue ... some are very lucky, you have like, parents so they can look after and the grandma ... they're very nice to baby. Chinese-speaking mother, Hamilton

I wish my mother-in-law here but she's in my country. This is my life.

Assyrian mother, Wellington

I am from Syria, my husband from Iraq. I don't have any of family here... I don't have anyone to look after me, only me and my husband, sometime my sister-in-law.

Assyrian mother, Wellington

The Mandarin-speaking families were the most likely to be accessing support from extended family members for childcare. However, the Assyrian and Sudanese mothers, who were receiving help from this source in some cases, expressed concerns that their reliance on older family members for childcare represented a degree of hardship for their children's grandparents and other older community members. Other participants said older family members often needed considerable support themselves and could not reasonably be expected to help with the care of young children.

The Sudanese and Eritrean groups particularly tended to have older children within their relatively large families and often relied on the older children to help with the smaller children and in household tasks. These groups expressed concern about the impact of this on their older children, who faced challenges of their own in participating in education in New Zealand.



CONCLUSION

This study confirmed findings of earlier Families Commission work that identified unmet needs of refugee and migrant families for support for childcare in the context of:

- > pressing needs for refugee parents particularly to acquire basic education and English proficiency to be able to function in New Zealand society and as a precursor to obtaining paid employment
- > a shortage of ECE places generally and services for sufficient numbers of hours to meet the needs of parents wishing to undertake paid work or study
- > widespread concerns about the affordability of ECE, especially for children under the age of three, for families with more than one dependent child and for families on low incomes.

This study also highlighted ECE curriculum needs associated with the preservation of children's heritage languages, which research participants indicated was important for maintaining intergenerational connections within families. The group of ECE experts also related the preservation of children's heritage languages to improved educational outcomes generally.

Some of the findings about parents' preferences for providing the care and education of their pre-school children themselves, and some of their concerns about what is (or is not) provided in ECE centres, point to a need for some ECE providers to work more inclusively with parents. This is to ensure parents, especially parents who are unfamiliar with the New Zealand system, have good information about:

- > all of the opportunities available for the care and education of their pre-school children
- > the approach taken to ECE in New Zealand and the reasons for it
- > their opportunities as parents to be actively involved in their child's ECE if they wish.

The research also highlights the need to understand more about the contribution to childcare of older family members, such as grandmothers, and older children within large families, and the impact this has on them.



Families Commission research reports

- 1/05 *Review of New Zealand Longitudinal Studies*, May 2005.
- 2/05 *Review of Parenting Programmes*, June 2005.
- 3/05 *Beyond Zero Tolerance: Key issues and future directions for family violence work in New Zealand*, August 2005.
- 4/05 *Focus on Families: Reinforcing the importance of family*, October 2005.
- 5/05 *Methodologies for Analysing the Impact of Public Policy on Families: A conceptual review*, October 2005.
- 1/06 *What Makes Your Family Tick?*, March 2006.
- 2/06 *Review of the Empirical Literature Assessing the Impacts of Government Policies on Family Form*, April 2006.
- 1/07 *When School's Out: Conversations with parents, carers and children about out of school services*, February 2007.
- 2/07 *Moving On: Changes in a year in family living arrangements*, February 2007.
- 3/07 *It's About Time: Towards a parental leave policy that gives New Zealand families real choice*, August 2007.
- 1/08 *Elder Abuse and Neglect: Exploration of risk and protective factors*, January 2008.
- 2/08 *Putting the Kids First: Caring for children after separation*, April 2008.
- 3/08 *The Kiwi Nest: 60 years of change in New Zealand families*, June 2008.
- 4/08 *Give and Take: Families' perceptions and experiences of flexible work in New Zealand*, September 2008.
- 5/08 *Reaching Out: Who New Zealanders turn to for relationship support*, September 2008.
- 6/08 *Juggling Acts: How parents working non-standard hours arrange care for their pre-school children*, September 2008.

Reports are available on the Commission's website or contact the Commission to request copies:

Families Commission
PO Box 2839
Wellington 6140
New Zealand
Telephone: 04 917 7040
Email: enquiries@nzfamilies.org.nz

www.nzfamilies.org.nz

Wellington office

Public Trust Building, Level 6
117–125 Lambton Quay
PO Box 2839, Wellington 6140
Phone 04 917 7040
Fax 04 917 7059

Email

enquiries@nzfamilies.org.nz

Commission website

www.nzfamilies.org.nz

***The Couch* website**

www.thecouch.org.nz

Auckland office

AMI House, Level 5
63 Albert Street, Auckland 1010
Phone 09 970 1700