

PLAY IN ŌTAUTAHI

Perceptions and experiences of play
from sector stakeholders, whānau and
tamariki in the Canterbury region



Ko te ahurei o te tamaiti arahia ō tātou māhi.

Let the uniqueness of the child guide our work.

This report explores the findings of a study led by Innovation Unit and commissioned and supported by Sport New Zealand | Ihi Aotearoa.

Sport New Zealand is proud to be the kaitiaki/guardian of our country's Play, Active Recreation and Sport System. sportnz.org.nz

Innovation Unit is a not-for-profit social enterprise that works to develop new solutions for social issues and create impact at scale.
innovationunit.org

Front page illustration by Scarlett, age 7
Above illustration by Isabella, age 4

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Thank you to the sector stakeholders, whānau/families, and tamariki/children who shared their precious play memories with us. Your experiences will help us to understand what it will take to give more children quality play experiences in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

Thank you also to the team at Healthy Families Christchurch who did an amazing job of bringing together a great group of people across the sector and connecting us to tamariki and whānau in the community.
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State of Play

How might we create more quality play experiences, and lay the foundations for a life-long love of being active?

Play is a vital part of children's physical and cognitive development, and helps them build the skills, competencies and attitudes they need to be active for life, including: fundamental movement skills, social and emotional connections, resilience, independence and leadership¹.

We know that children have the time, place, and permission to play in their communities, when:

- play is widely understood to be a crucial part of physical, cognitive, social/emotional and spiritual development for young people
- adults understand their role in enabling play, and everyone shares responsibility for supporting play
- young people have access to varied playful experiences within their local environments, including risk-taking, challenge, and the opportunity to be active.

Sport New Zealand | Ihi Aotearoa is committed to increasing opportunities for children to access quality play experiences, and has started a project to explore what play looks like in Aotearoa, today.

To better understand different communities' perceptions and experiences of play, and what helps – or hinders – children's play, Sport New Zealand has partnered with Innovation Unit to help them hear from a diverse range of people across Aotearoa.

The findings will inform Sport New Zealand's planning and strategies for play, and spark a nation-wide conversation about the role of play in the wellbeing of young New Zealanders.

Play helps tamariki build social and emotional connections, resilience, independence and leadership skills.¹

87%

of children in Canterbury participate in play on a weekly basis, which is higher than the national average.²

In New Zealand, children spend on average

5

hours playing with others per week, and 2 playing alone.²

What we did

Phase one: Ōtautahi, Canterbury region

We know that play will look different across Aotearoa, so we started this process by working with the Christchurch Healthy Families team to hear from sector stakeholders, whānau and tamariki in the Canterbury community about their experiences and perceptions of play. In the following two phases of this project we will follow a similar process for four additional regions.

Play 'huddles'

We facilitated two workshops in the Canterbury region. One with council staff, and one with regional sector stakeholders, including people with backgrounds in health, education and design, many of whom were also parents.

Intercept interviews with tamariki and whānau

We then held a pop-up play event opposite a primary school in Prebbleton to talk with tamariki and their parents/caregivers about what play looks like for them. We decided to avoid defining what is and isn't within the scope of 'play', to instead hear how the communities themselves understood and described it. A limitation of this research is that Prebbleton is in the least deprived quantile, at 1 on the New Zealand Deprivation Index, 2018.

Follow up calls with parents

We held three follow-up calls with parents from the pop-up play event, to dive more deeply into their perceptions and experiences of play for their whānau.

Analysis

Finally we spent time going through the collected data to explore common themes, tensions, and opportunities to consolidate the knowledge from the workshops and interviews into this report. For the purpose of this report, we have not specifically explored whānau Māori perspectives, as this will be the focus of a future piece of work by Sport New Zealand | Ihi Aotearoa.



Images from top: Council staff huddle, sector stakeholder huddle, tamariki playing at pop-up play event, and Sport New Zealand staff member making sense of the research data.

PLAY OVER TIME

What sector stakeholders, whānau and tamariki say play looks like today in Ōtautahi, and what's changed over time

Unique aspects of play in Ōtautahi

Variety of spaces and activities

Sector stakeholders and parents talked about the sheer diversity of natural and man-made play spaces and activities for tamariki to access in the region.

This included the:

- natural environment: Port Hills, beaches, rivers, estuary, recreation tracks
- red zones: pop-up spaces, green-zoning
- playgrounds: Margaret Mahey, Malvern
- recreation parks: bike and skate parks
- green open spaces: Hagley, reserves
- flat streets/land for biking, scooters
- more parking than other large cities, and
- a good climate.

This is supported by Active NZ research that shows that tamariki in Canterbury have higher active participation rates than other children in New Zealand, across all locations outside of school².

“Play in Canterbury has everything you could want - from mountains to sea.”

- Sector stakeholder

Diversity and bi-cultural values

Sector stakeholders said that with its underlying relationship with mana whenua and growing diversity of backgrounds and cultures in the community, Canterbury has unique access to a broad range of perspectives and experiences.

Space for new ways of thinking

Sector stakeholders talked about how the experience of the earthquakes has left Canterbury with a strong focus on wellbeing, as well as new physical spaces brought about by the quakes. This has enabled people to think differently and be open to opportunities and working together in different ways across the sector. Tamariki were seen to bring a 'new wave of thinking' to Canterbury as they were born after the quakes and therefore only see what is, instead of what was.

“Canterbury has a wellbeing focus – driven by passionate people from a cross-section of the community...The earthquake has activated spaces temporarily – there's opportunities brought by the tragedy.”

- Sector stakeholder

Freedom

One mother who also cares for other children talked about how much freedom children have to play in Canterbury, New Zealand, in comparison to her home country of South Africa. Interestingly, by contrast, most sector stakeholders said that the level of freedom that children have to play today is much less than it used to be. Active NZ research shows that 42% of tamariki in Canterbury use active ways to get to school, which is higher than the Aotearoa average².

“Tamariki here have a lot more freedom. Riding scooters, bikes, walking to school on their own - in South Africa they'd never do that...It's really nice to be able to see tamariki out and about.” - Mother of two

Play today

The tamariki we spoke with in Canterbury described play as any activity that is fun.

While parents and sector stakeholders tended to divide play into types, such as 'structured/organised', or 'online/offline', all described a huge variety of activities and spaces in which tamariki play in Ōtautahi, listed below. This included playing on their own, with others such as pets, friends, siblings and family members, or games/sports in larger groups. The top five physical activities Canterbury children participate in each week are: playing on playgrounds (58%), swimming (47%), scootering (43%), cycling (42%), and trampolining (35%), and tamariki in Canterbury are more likely to participate in active recreation for fun than other children in Aotearoa². Although Sport New Zealand is particularly interested in physically active play, for tamariki, play is synonymous with fun - active or not.

Home

- **Toy play:** Lego, figurines, trains.
- **Online/digital play:** Minecraft, Rublox, brain-test apps, Xbox.
- **Outdoors:** swing, trampoline, tree-house, hopscotch.
- **Sports/ball games:** netball, football, dodgeball².
- **Music:** guitar.
- **Imagination and role-play:** fort-building, spell-casting, cat dress-ups, tea parties, kitchen.
- **Card/board games:** Monopoly, Uno, Go fish, Old maid, Rubix Cube Race, Battleships, Guess who, Checkers, Chess, Dominos, Jenga.
- **Other:** i-spy and knock-knock jokes, chasing each other.

Neighbourhood

- **School:** cops & robbers, imaginary games, touch, sports, swimming, climbing, tug of war, and dodgeball, tag, foursquare².
- **Parks & playgrounds:** slides, swings, tree climbing².
- **Streets:** bike rides, scooters, running around².
- **Friends' houses and after-school care:** play dates, birthday parties.

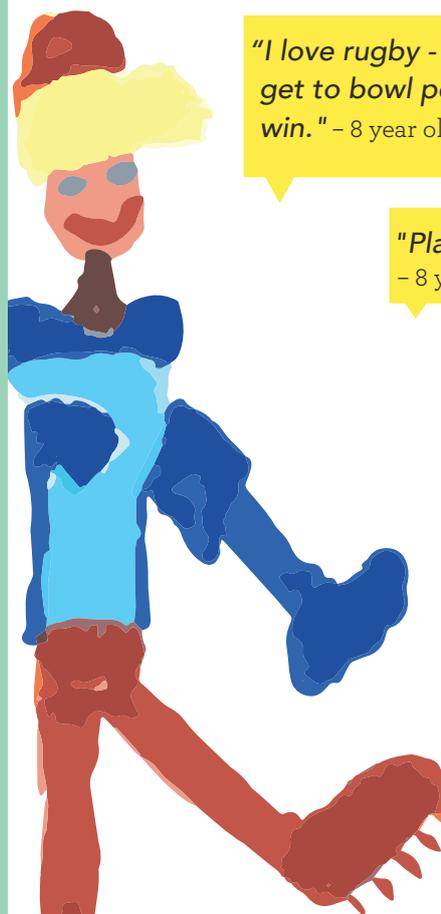
Wider community

- **Organised:** swimming lessons, Weet-Bix triathlon, sports e.g. soccer, netball.
- **Nature:** hills/mountains, rivers, lakes, beaches, skiing, camp-grounds, sea biscuiting.



"Trampolining - jumping with my brother at home. We have a swing set and a trampoline at our house."
- 9 year old girl

"Slides, playing with friends... hopscotch, jumping, beach, swimming pool, speaker telling children 'one at a time', trampoline, ice cream place." - 7 year old girl



"I love rugby - you get more contact, get to bowl people over and try to win." - 8 year old boy

"Play is about having fun."
- 8 year old boy.

Illustrations by Ayla, Max, Holly, Lukas



"Playing is fun! If there's a nice rainbow in the sky I like it better." - Boy

"Playing with my friends, swimming. One-touch. Kicking the ball at the wall at school or in the alleyway close to the domain." - Boy

"Making up games, like animal games. Someone is the owner and someone is the pet and they get looked after - at school with all my friends." - Girl

"My favourite game is tug of war. It's a competition and I use it to build muscles." - Tamaiti

"A biscuit on the boat. I can go slow or faster. I like going slow. My brother likes going fast." - 4 year old girl

"My girl is great at playing by herself or with others. With dolls, pretend kitchen, tea parties. My boy is older, he uses technology with Xboxes, Minecraft on the tablet." - Mother of two

"I love climbing. We have a climbing frame and a slide at school. The slide goes really fast and the climbing frame is really high." - 6 year old girl

"A bag and a train horse. A train set. Playing by myself." - 4 year old girl

"Play is Lego - he also loves Rublox and Minecraft on his tablet...He'll help [with the gardening] and it always turns into an imagination game - he turns the perfect branch into a sword or lazer beam...his idea of play is to sit down and make the cat become something. His imagination is amazing." - Mother of one



Play 'back then'

The sector stakeholders we spoke with said they remember play from their childhood in the South Island as being about freedom and risk.

Play 'back then' in the South Island centred around being unsupervised and being able to: roam and explore, take risks, be creative and active, get dirty, be in the natural environment, use natural materials, meet and play with other local children. The majority of memories were of unstructured or incidental play, with very little time restrictions. Exploring risk was a large part of these memories and many felt that this was missing for tamariki today.

Overall, there was a strong perception from many sector stakeholders that play in Aotearoa is not as good for tamariki today, as it was for them growing up. Interestingly, this does not align with research from Active NZ, which shows that children in Canterbury want to, and enjoy being physically active, more than other children across Aotearoa².

Home

- **Outdoors as the backyard:** rural, hay-sheds, forests, farmland, creeks, coastal, golf courses.
- **Nature play:** dirt, cutting trees, playing with animals, climbing trees, dirt, doughnuts.
- **Role play:** doctors and nurses, dolls and teddies, war
- **Building:** huts, dams, go-carts, explosives.

Neighbourhood

- **School:** PE, sports, tyres (swinging, balancing, being dragged behind a tractor).
- **Parks & Playgrounds:** skateboarding, rugby, riding bikes.
- **Friends houses.**

Wider community

- **Natural environment:** beaches, baches, surfing, camping.
- **Cultural play:** Māori performing arts, weaponry.

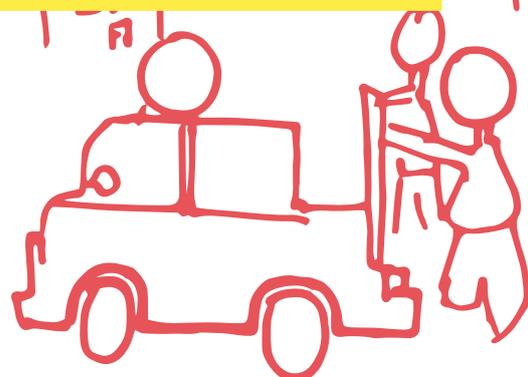
"Me and my little brothers (3 & 5 yo) walked nearly 1 km from our house on our own to play, climbing up in the hayshed. Oh boy was it risky...We'd catch the mice and hold them up by their tails. It was a wonderful free-range childhood."

"Out of play came trouble. Once I stepped on wood with a nail on purpose to find out what shoes are made of...In the cellar of our house making bottle rockets and shooting at each other. It felt like a real war."

"The playground was a starting point/meeting point for play..When new people came along – 'what are you doing in my park? Let's play!'"

"In my early teens me and a large group of Māori boys took up surfing and became mini weather forecasters. Driving up and down the north coast, camping, lighting fires, thinking we were mini philosophers. I loved Māori performing arts, weaponry. Living in a community with lots of young boys, lots of energy, playing touch and surfing - [it was] a rich place to grow up in."

Illustrations by council staff and sector stakeholders





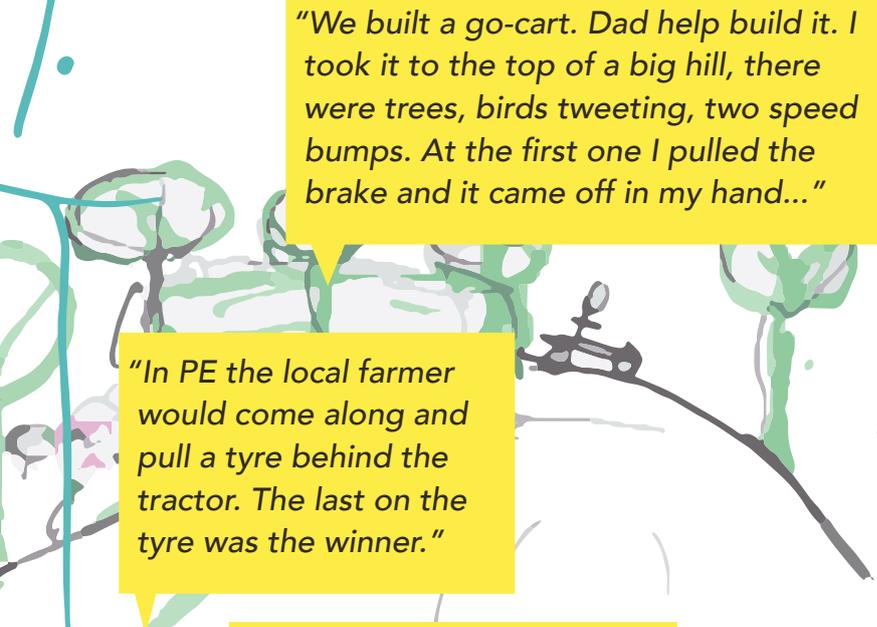
"Childhood today is not nearly as much fun!"

"The whole Peninsula was one big playground."

"I walked 1 km down the road to my mates' to play in the cul-de-sac on skateboards."



"One friend was banned from coming to my house because he was getting home too late. Running around, building, timeless..."



"We built a go-cart. Dad help build it. I took it to the top of a big hill, there were trees, birds tweeting, two speed bumps. At the first one I pulled the brake and it came off in my hand..."



"For me it was a caravan on the beach playing with other families, building speedboats in the sand. I can smell the water, the sea and sand...Now when we go away our boys build speed boats in the sand too."

"In PE the local farmer would come along and pull a tyre behind the tractor. The last on the tyre was the winner."



"A huge amount of risk...if Oranga Tamariki knew..."

"We were swept down rivers, and around water a lot... Me and my 7 year old sister would cut branches with a machete to make a hut."

"At midday play started. Play was outside, the coastal area was my backyard."

"Mucky, messy, nature based."

What has stayed the same?

The fundamentals: fun, creativity, risk

Council staff, and sector stakeholders and parents said that the fundamental elements of play remain the same for tamariki today, such as their:

- natural tendency to play and have fun
- inherent creativity, imagination, and curiosity
- desire to spend time with others
- drive to experiment, explore and take risks to learn.

"Tamariki are still wild." – Sector stakeholder

"'Daddy, can you play with me?' can mean anything - that's why my toenails are painted blue today." – Sector stakeholder

"You can put them there with anything and they'll find something to play with - it doesn't have to be toys, even just rocks. We had a jet-ski over Christmas and they couldn't care less - they just wanted to float on a biscuit and make up their own games." – Mother of one

"Nothing gets in the way of play."
– 7 year old girl.

Activities and equipment

Sector stakeholders and parents said that a strong focus on games is still a large part of play today, and many play activities that they did when they were younger were still popular, such as:

- imagination play on own, with friends, family, or animals
- toys: Lego, figurines, dolls, puzzles, board games, balls, bikes, books
- equipment/spaces: sand boxes, tree houses, forts, swings, trampolines
- games: tag, cops and robbers, pets, rough & tumble
- organised activities: swimming, gymnastics, music
- sports: soccer, rugby, netball.

"Lego has not gone away...he's good with the cat and dog, makes forts...terrorizing his mother as well. The game of throwing the pillow on the ground and jump on it hasn't gone away (laughs)."

– Mother of one

Places and spaces

Open spaces, parks, playgrounds, outdoors and nature were still seen as common elements and enablers of play for children today, by sector stakeholders and parents. However, the sector stakeholders did see that children spent less time in the natural environment, and more at designated play spaces such as playgrounds.

"Any place is a play space."

– Sector stakeholder

What has changed?

Council staff and sector stakeholders said there are some significant changes in the influences on play. Overall, there was a strong perception from most sector stakeholders that play is not as good for tamariki today as it was for them in their childhoods, while the parents we spoke with had a more balanced view.

More diverse communities, reduced children's social skills

Sector stakeholders and some parents saw that children today had less skill in making friends with children or people of other ages. They saw the drivers of this as an increase in access to technology, smaller family units, fewer organised social groups e.g. clubs, and less social connection in neighbourhoods. On the flip-side, they saw that children have greater exposure to different cultures and languages, meaning an increase in empathy and understanding of people who may be different to them.

"It can be quite sad. Now you put the tamariki together, all they can talk about is are you on roadblocks or fortnight. If not, there's not much in common, and you wonder why they don't have friends - but not everyone has full access to the games."

- Child carer

"All parents used to know each other - you don't know other parents like you used to."

- Council staff member

"They're the most socially connected unsocial generation" - Council staff member

Increased access to/time spent on technology

Sector stakeholders discussed the increase in indoor time and a tendency towards passive play via technology compared to their childhoods, however, research shows that tamariki in Canterbury have lower levels of weekly screen-time than other New Zealand children, at 16 hours per week². Some sector stakeholders discussed how Augmented and Virtual Reality have provided new play opportunities, and some parents said that technology has always existed, but is now more diverse.

"We had Atari. I don't think play has changed so much, there's just more options in the IT world with the tablet."

- Mother of one

Increased parental involvement; supervision, structure, interruption

Sector stakeholders saw an increase in parental supervision of children's play, children's involvement in adult-led play (e.g. gym, ballet, sport), and programmatic, organised or prescribed play. They saw this as being driven by urbanisation (ie. fewer open spaces), time-restraints, parent's increased concerns around safety, and a reluctance to get expensive clothes or gear dirty. Some sector stakeholders also said that their child wanting them to be involved in their play has changed from when they were young.

"Play is fractured." - Sector stakeholder

"[Now]...it's mostly organised by parents and often supervised, whereas I was free to roam far and wide." - Sector stakeholder

Increased safety concerns, less risk-taking

Parents and sector stakeholders talked about how they believed that parents' perceptions of safety had significantly changed from the freedom and risk-taking of their childhoods. The saw reasons for this to include: an increase in safety standards and regulations (e.g. playgrounds), a higher awareness of risks based on education from sector stakeholders (e.g. kindy), normalisation of after-school care, social media, and a perception that parents need to feel like they know what's 'going on'. Active NZ research shows that in Canterbury, 20% of parents and 32% of children worry that tamariki might get hurt when being active². This matches the national picture on perceptions of risk, or getting hurt, while being active.

Interestingly, when sector stakeholders reflected on this perceived change, they were unsure whether their parents did actually worry about them as children, or not.

"People worry about safety and restrict what they [children] can do. Parents didn't seem to worry back then, we might not have had as many restrictions...Safety has evolved - playground standards and regulations - and at kindy we're told what's safe and what isn't." - Mother

"Through social media, there's more perceived risk." - Council staff member

"Less wandering around the neighborhood alone." - Sector stakeholder

Increased access to structured play resources

Sector stakeholders and parents saw that some children today have greater access to personalised play equipment, such as swings and slides etc, in their own homes. However, there was a perception that it can contribute to greater isolation and an increase in unequal access to safe play environments and resources.

Some sector stakeholders also believed that greater access to stimulative technology and resources meant that children were less likely to get bored, and are less creative in their play today.

"I grew up extremely rural. It wasn't so easy to go find a cool playground. Now there's heaps of new subdivisions with great new play areas, so you stop and let them have a play. Bike and skate parks are great - they take the scooters. We didn't have that growing up." - Mother of one

"There's less boredom, and boredom breeds creativity." - Council staff member

"Tamariki are less inventive these days [with their play]. They need toys or some other form of stimulation." - Council staff member

Decreased outdoor space at home

Sector stakeholders discussed how they see urbanisation having an impact on children's access to play spaces at home. This included an increase in population resulting in more condensed, smaller housing and backyards, and an increase in the number of families renting due to unaffordable house prices. However, Active NZ research shows that home is a popular play space for tamariki and more-so in Canterbury than across the country².

"There's a lot more children living in rented homes - it means you're not fixed to a neighbourhood, and can't decorate or dig up a garden." - Council staff member

"Sections are more likely to be designer gardens now - you can't dig into the ready lawn." - Sector stakeholder

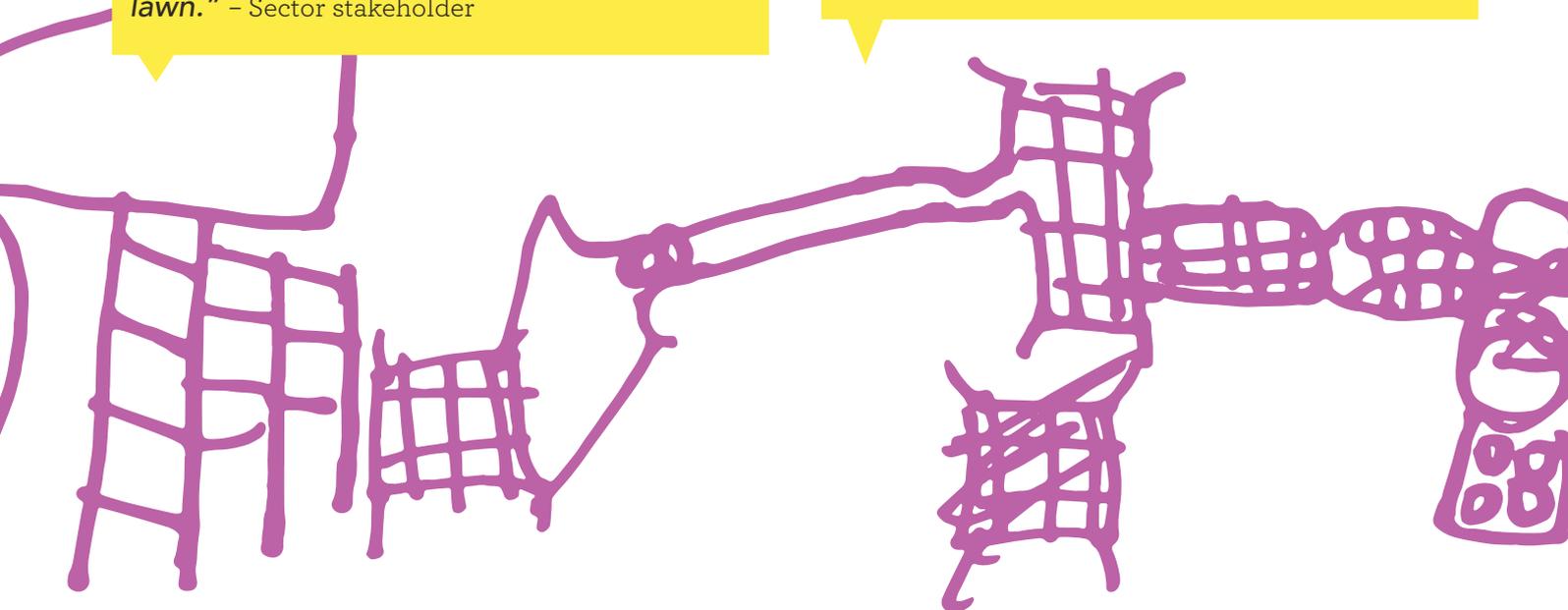
Change in lifestyle, time, and values

Sector stakeholders described how parents spend more hours working and value quiet time once they get home, as well as an increasingly sedentary lifestyle such as driving to school and work. Interestingly, Active NZ research shows that parents in Canterbury are more likely to play active games with their children each week than other parents in New Zealand².

"We drive everywhere now."

- Council staff member

"Outside of caring for [our boy], we sleep and we're employed. My husband works stupid hours - 60 hour weeks. [My job is] supposed to be part time but the reality is that there's always emails on phone after hours." - Mother of one



INFLU- ENCES

The social, access, and design influences on how tamariki play in Ōtautahi, including what helps tamariki to play, and what gets in the way

Social influences

Tamariki

Parents and tamariki talked about how children themselves can influence their ability to play. Their energy levels and injuries can get in the way, as well as their levels of enthusiasm or interest in available play activities, and confidence to try things outside of their comfort zone.

Other tamariki, such as siblings, cousins and friends, act as play role models by exposing younger children to different activities, enabling competition, and encouraging risk-taking to build younger children's confidence to try something new.

"What stops me from playing is my broken arm – I fell off the trampoline – or when my friends distract me or when I'm tired."

– 7 year old girl

"Because she's younger and she's seen her older siblings do it, it wasn't a hard sell to get her to do it...Having the cousins here helps too - we've gone along and watched them do sport." – Father of three.

"Fatigue, after a big week. Mental capacity. It's easier to sit down with a tablet."

– Mother of one

Parents

Parents enable play through providing transport/ access to play spaces and activities, covering activity costs, creating clear boundaries around digital play, and role modelling and encouraging children to play. On average, parents in Canterbury are more likely to play active games with their tamariki each week than other parents in New Zealand, and 86% of parents in Canterbury want to be physically active so their children will follow their example².

However, juggling parenting with work and managing the home can make it difficult for parents to find time to spend with their children. Parents may also withhold permission to play if they have concerns about time or safety, which can restrict the spaces or activities children have access to if parents aren't comfortable with letting them play on their own.

Both council staff and sector stakeholders perceived that some parents put pressure on children to focus on their own interests (e.g. structured sport), with less acknowledgement of child-led play. Parents and sector stakeholders also said that while children often want parents to be involved in their play activities, social pressure can stop parents from doing so.

"My own time - there's dinner to cook, a house to clean but [she] wants me to sit and play - I have to juggle life and being there for her." – Mother of two

"...I have an innate drive to coach them, and they've got an innate desire to not be coached. It can be frustrating." – Father of three

Digital devices

Council staff, sector stakeholders, parents, and tamariki had subtly different perspectives on the influence of modern technology on children's play.

Council staff and sector stakeholders tended to see it mostly as a barrier that had replaced outdoor or active play.

Parents perceived digital devices as more of a double-edged sword where finding a balance through rules and safety restrictions was key. On one hand, they saw that it could get in the way of play if children preferred it over other more active options, or spent too much time passively consuming content. On the other hand, they saw that digital games could enable connection, creativity, learning, relaxation and provide valuable time for parents to get other things done. Parents recognised their part in role modelling the use of technology, and also talked about how it is often required to complete homework.

Tamariki mostly saw the use of digital devices as just another play activity.

Active NZ research shows that children in Canterbury are more likely to meet Ministry of Health guidelines of less than two hours' screen time on a normal weekday, and have lower levels of overall weekly screen-time than other children in New Zealand.²

"We have digital rules...If they were unmonitored they'd be on it all day. We try to get them out, but (digital) is more attractive than kicking a ball."

- Father of three

"I'm not going to lie, it's an amazing babysitter when you need to cook dinner, or reply to an email, have a phone call...but the flip side is that you pay for it. When you say 'ok time to turn it off'...it's always 'Can i just finish this?'" - Mother of one

"When they're playing Minecraft, they're building and using their brain...If they can't be in the same game together, they sit side by side and play." - Mother of one

"A positive of screent-time is that tamariki are more educated than we are...I've seen the bad side of it as well - taking it away can be like taking the drugs away, they get the shakes and it's really scary. Everything in moderation." - Child carer

"My boy Googled 'cat paws' but spelt it wrong and instead searched for 'cat porn'. I think he was scarred for life by what he saw. Since then we've definitely limited their use." - Mother of two

School / homework

Both parents and tamariki talked about how homework, and restricted time at lunch and interval, gets in the way of play. Active NZ research shows that the top barrier for Canterbury children to increase their participation in physical activity is being too busy, and this is at higher rates than for other children in Aotearoa. 60% of Canterbury children say they are too busy with school work, which is consistent with other children across New Zealand², and 52% of children in Canterbury would like to increase their participation in physical activities.

"...It's parents and teachers who get in the way of play because you have to do schoolwork or come in to have dinner."

- 12 year old boy

"What stops play is when I am learning at school. I like to do more play."

- 7 year old girl

"Homework - it's meant to be 30-40 minutes per night (usually reading a book, spelling or maths) but usually works out to be more." - Mother of two

"Homework is worse as a parent than as a child - trying to get them to do it when they just want to run and play...Homework is the biggest inhibitor for tamariki to play."

- Mother of one

Sport coaches

Sector stakeholders discussed how sports coaches and sports organisation who understand the value of play and advocate for intrinsically motivated, child-led play can act as enablers. However, those who are only comfortable facilitating highly structured activities or sports can get in the way of play.

Park rangers

Sector stakeholders said that park rangers who say no to tree climbing or are afraid of tamariki 'trashing nature' can stop tamariki from playing.

Neighbours

A council staff member said that 'grumpy neighbours' can stop play by complaining to council about activities such as driving motorbikes.

"We live in communities where you don't know your neighbours." - Sector stakeholders member

Illustration by sector stakeholder



Access

Safety

Lack of safety, or parents' concern for their child's safety, can be a barrier for children to access play spaces and opportunities. This extends beyond potential physical risk (such as fast cars on streets), to also include parents needing to judge and manage online risk. While sector stakeholders felt strongly that an increase in safety regulations has become a barrier to play, parents generally agreed that finding a balance between improving the safety of spaces (e.g. providing separate bike paths, lifeguards around water, lights on basketball courts) helped them give permission for children to take safe risks in play.

"We have my Dad's phone at the playground and we go home when he calls us". - 7 year old girl

"When people are driving 80km an hour past, it drives me insane...there's no re-do with their lives, so it's just not worth it...I know children need to be able to challenge themselves and take risks in their play to develop. It's about giving them the tools to set them up for success, and removing outside risk factors of trying to get somewhere to play, like drivers. I don't think we can cotton ball them up but at the same time you're not gonna go ride from this end of town to your friends'. It's about finding those balances." - Mother of one

Cost

Parents and sector stakeholders said that access to a diverse range of play resources can help children to play. Although Canterbury's unique variety of free play options was recognised, so too was the growing divide between those who might be able to afford play resources outside of this. Examples included backyard swing-sets and slides, and key access to the local school pools. Active NZ research shows that 23% of children in Canterbury see cost as a barrier, which is consistent for all tamariki in New Zealand.

Interestingly, both parents and sector stakeholders said that novel play resources don't necessarily have to be expensive - and that often very simple materials were all that were needed to facilitate play (such as rocks, sticks, or planks of wood).

"Being on one income can impact what you can/can't do." - Father of three

"When I was a kid, we didn't have any money so we played basketball because all you needed was a ball." - Sector stakeholder

"The simpler the better...You can put them there with anything and they'll find something to play with - it doesn't have to be toys, even just rocks." - Mother of one

Inclusion

Parents and sector stakeholders said that ensuring that play spaces are accessible for all ages and abilities can help everyone be involved in and encourage play. This can go beyond physical accessibility to making spaces attractive so that people want to be involved in children's play. In Canterbury, 92% of parents believe it is important to be involved in their children's physical activity, and 79% agree that being physically active together is an important part of family life. This is consistent with parents' perceptions across the nation.

"Parents can be role models - both ways. For example, sitting on the side of the pool on their phone instead of swimming with their children. But do they want to be involved? For example if the pool is cold..."
- Council staff member

"Adults like to play, and to enable children's play. Whether we're 60, 70 or 80 years old, we all want to have fun and connect back to childhood. Play shouldn't be limited to tamariki..." - Council staff member

"There might not be enough budget for rubber surface everywhere, but looking at inclusivity eg. parent in a wheelchair can go to the pipe on the rubber surface and talk through the pipe to their children."
- Council staff member

Water quality

Although Ōtautahi was seen to have a relatively clean environment with lower land and air pollution, sector stakeholders raised that poor water quality could get in the way of play.

"Dirty rivers - can't swim!" - Sector stakeholder

Weather

Bad weather in unsheltered spaces can get in the way of play - with 10% of tamariki in Canterbury saying that weather is a barrier (same as rest of Aotearoa)².

"I'll say 'go outside and play - it's beautiful! Oh, it's raining now.'" - Mother of one

"When it rains on a Saturday it's hard not to think 'great! Netball's canceled!'" - Mother

Travel / distance

Sector stakeholders discussed how limited, costly and time-consuming public transport options or unsafe travel routes can stop tamariki in rural areas from getting to different play spaces. This can mean that children don't have the same exposure to activities such as swimming to build their confidence in play. Conversely, public infrastructure such as separated cycle ways can help tamariki to independently travel to play places.

Design

Decision making

Council staff felt that 'out of touch' decision makers who have their own agendas get in the way of them creating play opportunities for children. Sector stakeholders similarly talked about how top-down, linear design processes that lack genuine partnership and engagement with the intended audience (i.e children, young people, mana whenua and communities) is a barrier.

Interestingly, there was a slight tension between some council staff members who saw their role as building communities' trust in their expertise - or in finding the right expert to refer to - compared to some sector stakeholders saying that experts who don't factor co-creation in their processes can become a barrier.

"Consultation processes that are based on surveys and being at arms-length of people." - Sector stakeholder

"In my role I work on building trust with Community Boards. Trust us as professionals to give the best options within the available budget." - Council staff member

"Experts/professionals who are given responsibility because of their formal role at work for e.g. designing a space, developing policy that co-creation doesn't get factored into." - Sector stakeholder

Regulations

Both council staff and sector stakeholders saw that the 'red tape' of regulations gets in the way of play and new ideas. This included:

- Health and Safety
- Code of Compliance
- LINZ/CC policy, plan, consent
- fear of litigation, with an onus on businesses

They also talked about frustrations when Council cut down or trimmed climbable trees or restricted use of other play activities or public spaces.

"It's very hard to prepare new play spaces with so many restrictions."
- Sector stakeholder

"Health and Safety is over the top! Risk averse." - Sector stakeholder

"Regulations behind playgrounds are quite phenomenal, once you call it a playground." - Council staff member

"The health and safety act ruined a great deal of childhood play." - Sector stakeholders member

Mindsets

Sector stakeholders said that people's mindsets can help, or get in the way of creating play opportunities. A bias towards convention, or fear and divisive thinking in the community can get in the way, whereas as the open-mindedness that many people now have after the earthquakes has provided new opportunities to be creative and proactive.

"The common experience of the earth quake means there's lots of new opportunities and ongoing discussions and action re: child wellbeing and mental health." – Council staff member

"The easy thing to do is put a playground in. I don't like to renew like-for-like, we need more variety and more nature play."
– Council staff member

"Passionate people looking to work in different ways across sectors - education, council, sport..." – Council staff member

Knowledge

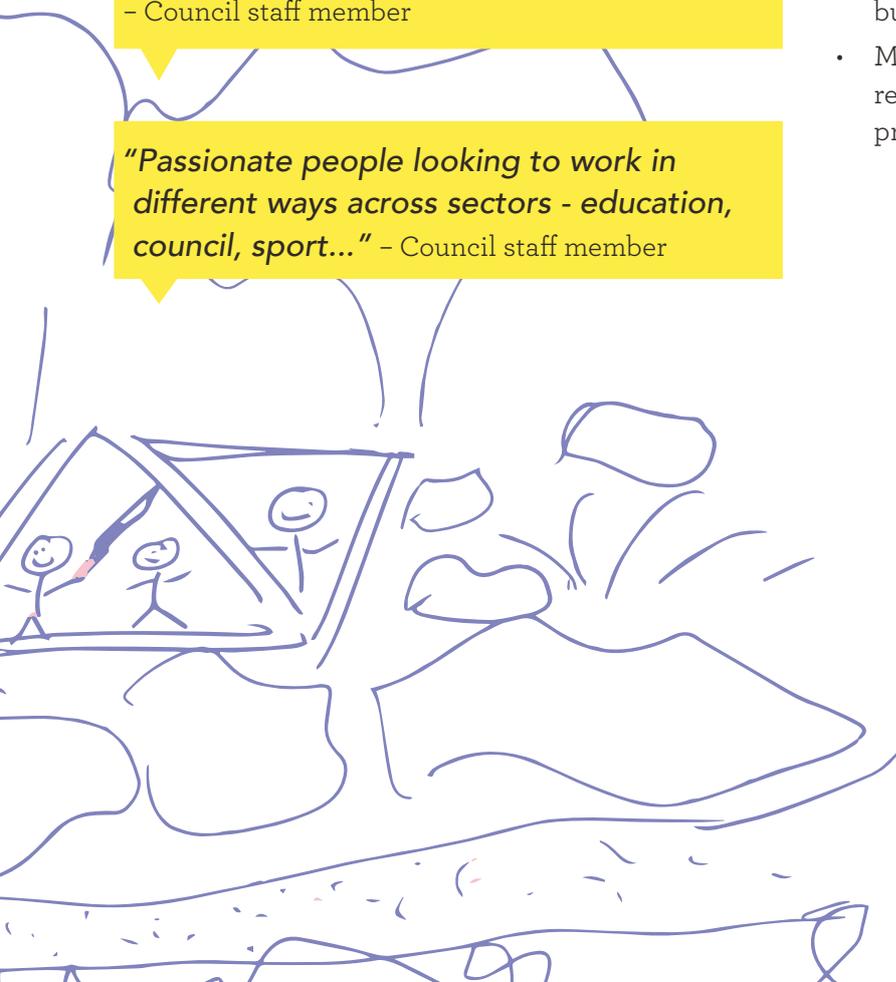
Some council staff felt that a lack of publicly accessible knowledge on what and how people play was a barrier to them creating play opportunities for tamariki.

One council staff member saw that the increased profile and knowledge around mental health and obesity has meant an increase in demand for play opportunities,

Budget

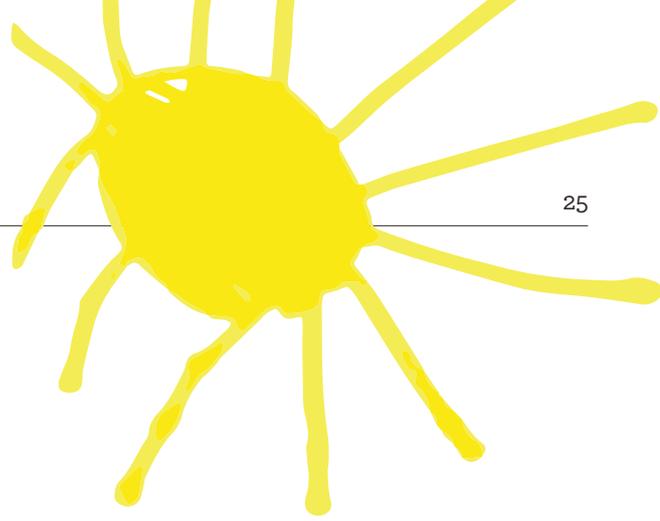
Innovation and creativity within budget restrictions was seen as an enabler, however both council staff and sector stakeholders talked about challenges around budgets getting in the way of creating play opportunities for children. This included:

- Operational expenditure - 'OPEX' no maintenance budgets
- Ministry of Education's health and safety requirements and regulations re: 'funding against premise'.



NEXT STEPS

Opportunities for the Ōtautahi
community and Sport New Zealand
to consider moving forward



Opportunities

Explore the opportunity of making Ōtautahi the most playful city in Aotearoa

Although there are still barriers for children to play, Active NZ research shows that children in Canterbury are more active than most tamariki in New Zealand. Ōtautahi is in a unique position to build on its strengths and make the most of the open spaces and minds in the community to create a collective, community-driven vision of what the future of play could look like in Ōtautahi. By making the most of the existing resources, technology, diversity and creativity, and working with a new generation of tamariki who only see what could be (instead of what was), Ōtautahi would be well-placed to lead the country in what a play-centred city could look like. This could be inspired by both local and overseas examples of how other towns and cities are embracing play.

How might we work towards a future where Ōtautahi is a world-leading play-centric city?

Create more ways to play for all

Parents and family members have a strong influence on children's play. There's an opportunity to work closely with parents and wider whānau to address barriers to Canterbury's rich play landscape, such as safety concerns and accessibility, to make play spaces more inclusive and attractive for all.

How might we create more whānau-centric play opportunities in Ōtautahi?

Put the power of play back into the community's hands

Tamariki naturally create play opportunities where ever they are, however those around them (such as schools) can come across barriers when trying to foster play, such as meeting regulations and curriculum requirements, and a lack of genuine involvement in the design of play spaces. With 60% of children across New Zealand saying they are too busy with school work to be more active, there is an opportunity to re-think 'consultation' and decision-making processes at a regional and national to instead explore meaningful partnerships and co-creation with tamariki and their influences to better address play barriers.

How might we make it as simple as possible for our communities to reduce barriers and create more quality play opportunities?

Further understand the differences in play

As this report shares the perspectives of a very small group of parents and tamariki, Sport New Zealand | Ihi Aotearoa may want to consider further research into play and equity, including the ethnic, cultural, domicile and socio-economic variables to further compare and contrast play experiences for different tamariki and whānau in New Zealand. Mana whenua in particular could provide valuable perspectives around the unique history of play in Ōtautahi.

How might we better understand the diversity of play experiences in Aotearoa?

References

1. Sport New Zealand. (2017). *Sport New Zealand Play Principles*. Source: <https://sportnz.org.nz/assets/Uploads/attachments/Sport-New-Zealand-Play-Principles-Nov-2017.pdf>
2. Active NZ. *The New Zealand Participation Survey 2017, 2018, 2019*.



Te Reo Māori glossary

| | |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------|
| Kaitiaki | Guardian |
| Kaupapa | Purpose / initiative |
| Tamariki | Children |
| Tamaiti | Child |
| Oranga Tamariki | Ministry for Children |
| Ōtautahi | Christchurch, Canterbury |
| Mana whenua | Local tribe / custodians of the land |
| Whānau | Family / families |



Illustration by Rita, age 7.

Back page illustration by Scarlett, age 7.

