



Montessori Children's House Wanaka

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17th June 2014

Application for Dr Nicola Chisnall Memorial Award

Montessori Children's House Wanaka wishes to submit our application for consideration in the above award.

Background:

Montessori Children's House Wanaka (MCHW) is an incorporated society and charitable trust. As such we are a not for profit organisation. Our school is run solely for the benefit of our children and the community. MCHW provides a safe, nurturing and educational environment for up to 56 children per day aged from approximately 1 year to six years old. From its inception in 1998, our vision was founded on Maria's Montessori hope to ensure this valuable educational experience was accessible for all children including those families who may not otherwise be in a situation for whatever reason, to afford to provide this. Wanaka is a tourist destination and a life style choice and as such the cost of living is higher which made this even more reason to establish a commitment to the families living here. With this vision foremost in our sights, our Charter was written to incorporate a Scholarship to assist families financially. The number of children we are able to sponsor annually, is dependent on our financial situation.

What we did

My aim was to ensure the children I believed required a speech assessment be entitled to access one. Over the past 10 years the funding cuts within early childhood have equated to fewer children receiving assistance for speech language, yet the number of children that present with issues is growing. Many of the children we saw experiencing learning issues through impaired speech are either not eligible for funding, or the wait time between applying to be assessed and receiving assistance is often so great they miss out on the most beneficial stage of learning.

I meet with our local Speech Language Therapist to discuss the service she could provide, the cost that would be involved and the time frame. Montessori Children's House commitment included fundraising to assist with costs, providing a workable space and gaining parental consent.

Community Involvement

I submitted a funding application to the local Rotary Club requesting a grant to assist with the cost of the speech screening programme I wanted to implement. The request outlined the importance of early intervention along with a supporting letter from one of the families that I had identified in need. We were very fortunate to receive a grant of \$1000.00, and along with our fundraising contribution of \$700 we have begun to start the process of supporting several families with 1 on 1 appointments with a Speech therapist.

What results have we seen?

Our experience with this venture is still in the early stages, however, it is already showing great results. The children are embracing the opportunity and loving the 'homework' tasks they are being set. The relationships with whanau's is being strengthened as often parents are at a loss about what to do when faced with issues. The teachers are noticing more involvement and peer interaction as confidence grows with the children.

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Where do we go from here?

With such a positive response, we would like to ensure we are able to complete what we have started, but to also cement this opportunity for future families within our community.

In September our Managing Teacher and the Speech Language Therapist will meet with the local Rotary group to present this pilot programme to them, in the hope that they too will see the benefit and seek to make it a part of their regular funding round.

I have shared my success with the head teachers of the six early childhood centre's in Wanaka. We meet once a month to discuss issues and support one another which is crucial living in a small rural town. As a result of my funding application another centre has applied for a grant for speech intervention and had success.

Alongside this as part of our professional development, our staff have also undertaken Makaton Sign language lessons to assist with a child with Special Needs.

We realise we will need to develop a funding plan to enable this programme to continue and as a team we will come up with an action plan, encompassing not only our community but the wider community.

Outcome:

Staff have explored in detail the difference that can be made to children if their confidence is lifted and they are able to express themselves clearly. It empowers these children to interact and participate fully as an active member of their community. Their learning experiences have been enhanced and made more enjoyable for the children and their families.

It has made a difference for our children.