

Entry for the Dr Nicola Chisnall award 2017

Nominating Wee Wisdom Montessori Paeroa – “a little wisdom goes a long way”

Kia Ora, my name is Kwan and I am the Centre Manager of Wee Wisdom Montessori Paeroa. I wanted to take this opportunity to nominate my team and school community for the Nicola Chisnall award 2017.

1. Where you started from: *What did you see as needing action or help? Where did you get your idea for action from? Who did you consult with before deciding on the action?*

To understand why I am nominating them I need to tell you a story.....

I have lived in Paeroa for around 10 years and during that time I have worked in various service positions in restaurants and cafes. As I worked I observed many sad situations involving families and their children mainly from the lower social economic population that makes up a large percentage of the Paeroa community. Through my observations I had seen a lot of children and families suffer in many different ways from the effects of gambling, drug and alcohol addiction. In my last position as a manager at the local pub, I saw first-hand how the gaming room destroyed people's lives, especially affecting the children in so many negative ways. I also cleared these machines every night so I know how much money was going into them on a daily basis, out of the pockets of those who could least afford it. This made me very sad because in order for me to raise my children, I was indirectly part of the problem, not the solution.



Over a period of a few months, I noticed a group of people who were not locals, dining frequently at the restaurant during the week. I got friendly with them and discovered they were the owners of the new Montessori pre-school that had popped up in the middle of town and they were getting it ready for opening. I soon got to know these people, who I now know as Anna and Colin, and they shared their dream with me. Anna and Colin wanted to help the people of Paeroa by offering quality preschool education to the young children of the town. They explained to me Maria Montessori's vision of effecting society by impacting on the young child. I was so excited by this dream that I wanted to join their team, I wanted to make a positive difference to those children that I had seen affected by drugs, alcohol and gambling.

2. What you did: *What you set out to do and what actions did you take? How did you carry out these actions and what did you do differently? What roles did people in your community play?*

So I joined the team at Wee Wisdom Montessori Paeroa and our work began...our aim....to create a legacy for the children of Paeroa. We wanted to show them that there is a future for them and they don't have to choose what their parents and grandparents have, we can show them a different way. (In some cases there are 4 generations of beneficiaries in one family)



Initially, I started working for Wee Wisdom as a part time enrolments officer while still working at the pub. Gradually through the relationships I made in the gaming room I was able to enrol more at risk children. I already knew most of the children and families at risk as I had seen the children waiting outside the pub in their PJ's for Mum and/or Dad to come out of the gaming room. I was already in their world; the difference now was I had something worthwhile to offer the parents for the future of their children.

Part of working with these families has been forming reciprocal relationships with other local agencies. We have worked with local iwi, The Hauraki Maori Trust Board (Family Start), CYFS, Plunket, NZ Police, Paeroa College and The Care House (Baptist Church). All of these organisations were ready and willing to encourage at risk children and families to send their children to pre-school regardless of their circumstances, we could help them all.



3. Progress you have seen: *What did you learn and discover? What evidence do you have of positive change or that your actions made difference? Were the changes as you had planned and expected, or did you have unexpected outcomes?*

As time has gone by, the team at Wee Wisdom have helped get children who would never have attended any sort of pre-school into attendance. Through the children attending school we have also linked to and supported their parents to understand the importance of education and to take pride in their child's and their own achievements. In some cases parents have been inspired to take on new learning of their own, boosting their self-confidence and personal worth. To ensure that there are no barriers for any child to attend school we have initiatives in place to minimise excuses. We supply a van to do pick-ups and drop offs for those parents who don't have transport and we operate a zero scholarship programme – no fees – which is used by a large majority of families who struggle with the basics such as buying groceries and paying the bills.



In conclusion, I believe that from our journey we have learnt that although we are not able to directly help the parents of these children, we can definitely help the children, who in turn encourage their parents to want to change and be a better parent/person for their children's sake.

The evidence that we have made a difference can be seen in the stories of our children and their parents who change before our eyes. Some have been inspired to get clean from addiction through seeing a positive change in their children.

4. What you may do next: *What did you learn that may provide strategies to build on your success? What potential is there to gain additional support from other partners in your community? Do the actions and outcomes have application to wider communities than your own?*

Our original intention still stands strong, to leave a legacy for the children of Paeroa to have a better life and not be the 4th generation of their family to be a beneficiary, they know they can break out of that cycle if they want to with our support. I was not sure we could have such an impact but it was like magic watching these children and parents change and evolve into better people for themselves and their children. We are truly inspired by our children and families on a daily basis.

We have learnt through our journey to never judge individuals because of their circumstances. Every single person deserves a second, third and sometimes a fourth chance to help them learn to help themselves and their families.

So with this story in mind I wish to nominate my team who work hard with these families everyday come rain or shine. They problem solve to work through differences and barriers to ensure each and every child gets the chance in life that they deserve. As part of this nomination I wanted to acknowledge the Paeroa community who have embraced and accepted us as part of their community, who work with us to create our dream and legacy for the children of Paeroa.



E tipu , e rea mō ngā ra o tōu ao
Ko tō ringa ki ngā rākau a te Pāhekā, hei ara mō to finana,
Ko tō ngākau ki ngā taonga a ā tapuna Māori hei tikitiki mō tō māhuna
Ā, kō tō wairua ki tō Atua nāna nei ngā mea katoa

Grow tender one to meet the needs of your time,
May your hand master modern ways for physical wellbeing,
May your heart cherish your ancestral roots for dignity,
May your spirit be with God the maker of all things.