



2024 Annual Report

The Christchurch Early Intervention Trust

July 2023 - June 2024
CC22708



www.championcentre.org.nz

FROM OUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

The Chair

During the 2023 - 2024 year, the Champion Centre continued to deliver the same world-leading early intervention service to 214 children and their families/whānau with 50 graduating from the service and another 45 being supported in their early childhood centres.

This last year has been one of change for the Champion Centre. In December we farewelled Wendy Entwistle, our Executive Director and in May, Lauren Porter, our Clinical Director also left. Wendy and Lauren led the service through changes essential to ensure the Champion Centre remained financially sustainable and the introduction of new programmes. My sincere thanks go to Chloe Hewitt and the other Steering Group members, who stepped up and led the Centre while we recruited for the new General Manager role. The Board were very pleased to be able to appoint Deborah Nind to this role. Deb started in September.

Financially the Champion Centre continues to be in good shape. Our Fundraising and Marketing Coordinators Tracey Horsham and Charlotte McGregor have been very successful in fundraising from small scale events; and from both corporate and personal donors. These funds, along with the annual generous donation from the Champion Foundation Trust, supplement the contracts we have with government departments. These funds allow the Centre to provide additional programmes that enhance the service we provide and to support more children and whānau than we are contracted to.

During the year I had the opportunity to speak with many past and present Champion Centre team members. I was blown away by the passion, professionalism and commitment of all who work with our children and whānau. My thanks to all who have worked, volunteered and supported the Centre this year.

I would also like to acknowledge the tireless work done by our colleagues of the Champion Foundation Trust, and particularly Emma Newman. They have led a number of fundraising events over the past year for both the Foundation and for the Champion Centre as well. They keep the name of the Champion Centre at the forefront of the charitable sector. This year, the Foundation Trust launched the Champion Centre Alumni. A new initiative that enables family and whānau of Centre graduates to remain in touch with the Centre and each other long after their time with the Centre has ended. Two very successful events were held during the year.

Huge thanks to my fellow board member colleagues, Ruth Richardson, Vince Barry and Gill Connell, and to our colleagues on the Champion Foundation Trust; our directors, and all of the Centre's incredibly committed and talented staff. Also thanks to our stakeholders, funders and supporters for sharing and believing in our vision and finally to the children and their families who attend the Centre, without whom the Champion Centre wouldn't exist.

Noho ora mai
Lisa Brennan

The General Manager

As I write this piece, I am completing my sixth week in this role, and I am honoured to be part of the Champion Centre's remarkable journey. Originally from the UK, I moved to New Zealand in 2003, starting my career here as a nurse in the Christchurch Hospital Emergency Department. Over the years, I've held a range of roles across the health and disability sectors, eventually earning my Master of Business Administration from the University of Canterbury. Most recently, I served as General Manager at the Laura Fergusson Brain Injury Trust. My connection to the Champion Centre, however, began during my time in Child Health at Christchurch Hospital, where I frequently heard from families about the exceptional support they received here. So, when I saw this role advertised, I was eager to learn more and contribute.

My first six weeks have been spent immersing myself in the work of the Centre - learning from our talented staff, meeting some of the children and their whānau, and understanding the heart of what makes this place so special. For over 45 years, the Champion Centre has been at the forefront of early intervention and child development in New Zealand, building a legacy that not only commands respect but also requires a commitment to excellence. It's a legacy we uphold with care, asking questions, listening with open minds, and continuously challenging ourselves to better meet the needs of the children and families we support.

I am consistently inspired by the skill, professionalism, and positivity of our committed staff. Their willingness to guide me as I settle into my role has been invaluable. Our multidisciplinary team of allied health professionals, educators, and teachers is second to none and is excellently supported by our admin team of Jane and Nic, and our fundraising team of Tracey and Charlotte.

Thank you to the tamariki and whānau who welcomed me into their programmes. Your strength and dedication is truly amazing. While there were many laughs and lots of fun in the sessions I attended, I know you are working tirelessly every day to give each child the best start in life and the chance to reach their full potential. We understand the responsibility we carry in partnering with you, and I am committed to ensuring that your voices, ideas, and experiences are heard and valued.

I would also like to extend heartfelt thanks to our Board of Trustees for their dedication and expertise. Your support and guidance ensure the Centre maintains high standards in governance and strategic direction.

To the Champion Foundation Trust, our generous donors, and supporters of every size: thank you. Your contributions bridge the gap between our contracted funding and the essential services we currently provide, helping us continue our mission for the future.

Finally, to our whānau who entrust us with their children's growth and development: you are the heart of what we do and our constant inspiration.

Noho ora mai
Deb Nind

CENTRE HAPPENINGS

Another year has passed, and we are excited to share what we have achieved in this time. We have invited our team to reflect on their achievements from this period and are proud to share some highlights:

Paediatric Autism Communication Therapy

The provision of PACT (Paediatric Autism Communication Therapy) that was started in 2023, is now embedded into a weekly programme. The PACT Programme is a scientifically, evidence-based early intervention programme for children with neurodiverse presentations, including autism. The research findings indicate longevity of improved child communication and social engagement.

The delivery of PACT is fortnightly which allows for the children to receive developmental therapy on alternate weeks. The team of therapists within the Multi Years weekly Programme includes PACT Practitioners, an early intervention teacher, speech and language therapist and occupational therapist. The programme also provides additional support through a family support worker, feeding therapist and psychologist.

In February, we welcomed our first 8 families to the programme. Sessions aim to work alongside parents to meet the children's regulation and sensory needs, so they are better able to engage in communication and learning opportunities. This is aided by reducing the transitions for children and having the option to flex to the child's needs on the day. Instead of children moving to therapists, highly skilled therapists move in and out of the child's play, working alongside their parents.

Reflections from parents have been very positive including. "Before I used to run around after him desperately seeking connection. Watching myself on video has helped me see I needed to slow down because I was hindering him. I didn't have the tools. Watching the video and learning the tools has helped me bond with my son and I have had so many more times of connection. I see him more through his eyes rather than mine". Alongside the therapy team maintaining current, best practice approaches to ensure neurodiverse children receive the best intervention, regular feedback from families and staff continues to be sought.

Academic Partnerships

We are thrilled to be advancing our partnership with Victoria University of Wellington. Our Music Therapy Team has become an approved placement provider for the university's Master of Music Therapy Programme. This year, we hosted a first-year student for a two-term placement, and we look forward to welcoming a second-year student for a full placement year in 2025. This partnership is enriching the field of music therapy in New Zealand and fostering vital research in paediatric music therapy. In addition to music therapy, we regularly host students studying occupational therapy, physiotherapy, speech-language therapy, and early childhood education.

Family Support Team Initiatives

- **Community Engagement:** We facilitated a gathering at the Rolleston Community Centre for mothers in the Selwyn area, creating an opportunity for connection and friendship that has continued beyond the initial event.
- **Health Collaborations:** Led by Nikki, our Family Support Team partnered with Public Health Nurses to offer flu vaccinations, as well as hearing and vision screenings, right in the CC Whānau Room. This initiative was a resounding success, giving families easy access to important health services while reducing the need for additional appointments. The free flu vaccinations were especially well-received by our whānau.

New Light/Sensory Space

This term we have opened a new light and sensory space for our Tamariki. It has been gifted the Māori name, "Te ruma whakatau wairua," which means, "a place to settle your soul." This new dark, quiet, and engaging space has been a huge success with our children and their whānau. It has been incredibly useful as a regulating space for our children who need support to reach a calm state. The space also provides a high-contrast area for our children with visual difficulties, and a quiet and visually stimulating space for our children with auditory difficulties. For some of our children, this space is the only space where they can truly engage at the Centre. For our parents and whānau, the new light and sensory room has become a place within the Centre where they can rest and connect with their children.

Lego Therapy

Over the past year, 8 children have been able to enjoy the benefit of our weekly Lego Therapy. Children have the opportunity to build their social communication skills and peer relationships within a structured, supportive, small group setting. The predictable but flexible routine of Lego group enables children to practice and experience the 'specifics' of social communication with peers during a highly motivating and enjoyable shared activity (Lego!).

The children practice skills such as waiting their turn, listening to others share their story and complementing others' work, and being part of a team to accomplish a goal together. Shared play following the Lego build has seen children create imaginative games together that they enjoy returning to every week. Parents have noted they love being able to meet with other Mums on a similar journey, while seeing their children build gentle friendships with others in an environment that's safe and enjoyable. Parents have shared that their children have started to talk about their Lego friends and describe their play ideas with others in a way they've not been able to before, and they look forward to coming along every week.

WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

Who we are:

The Champion Centre is an internationally respected early intervention centre for preschool children (birth to age 6) whose development is impacted by conditions such as Down syndrome, other genetic disorders, Cerebral Palsy, the consequences of prematurity, Autism Spectrum Disorder and brain injury. The Centre is based on the Burwood Hospital campus in Christchurch and provides services to families in the Canterbury area.

What we do:

Our multi-disciplinary team includes physiotherapists, early intervention teachers and educators, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, music specialists, psychologists, social workers and technology assisted learning specialists. All work in partnership with parents, caregivers and whānau to help each child reach their full potential. Our approach is holistic, evidence-based and family-centred. Families who attend the centre regularly find support from other families on similar journeys.

There are two parts to our service:

- An Early Intervention programme which typically provides weekly sessions to families
- A Monitoring programme for children who are at developmental risk due to prematurity or other health related vulnerabilities.

All referrals are made by a Paediatrician via the Early Intervention Coordination Service.

Mission:

The Champion Centre is committed to providing high quality family/whānau based early intervention services for children/tamariki with multi-faceted developmental delays. In partnership with our local rūnanga (Te Ngāi Tuāhuriri), the Champion Centre will educate about early intervention and act with parents/mātua/tamariki with developmental delays as advocates for adequate and appropriate community services for them and their children/tamariki.

Family Feedback:

Results from our recent survey show that we have continued to provide families with the support they need. This year we gathered results using a Net Promoter Score (NPS) which is a global metric used to understand levels of satisfaction within the Centre's services.

We received an 'excellent' level of satisfaction in response to the following statements:

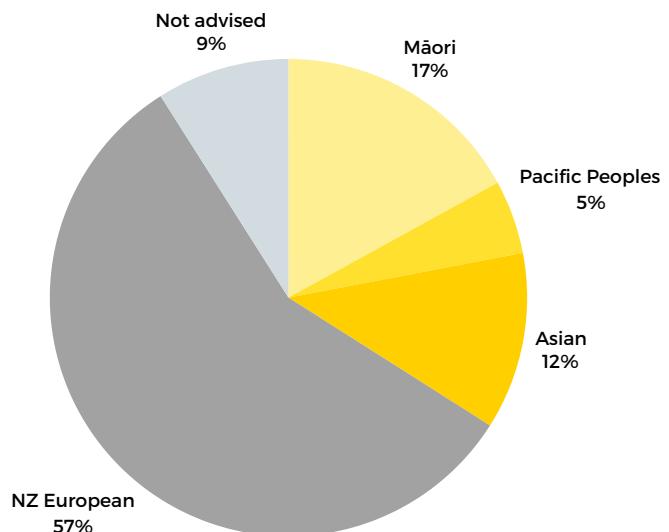
- "My child is understood and respected"
- "I feel supported to understand my child's needs and development"

We are proud to have received a 'world class' level of satisfaction in response to the following statements:

- "Our cultural values, spoken language/s and spiritual needs are respected and included"
- "I would recommend the Champion Centre to others"

A huge thank you to all our families for completing our annual survey.

Ethnicity of Children:



50 TAMARIKI
'GRADUATED'
FROM OUR
PROGRAMMES

214 TAMARIKI
AND
THEIR FAMILIES
RECEIVED OUR
SERVICES

45 TAMARIKI
SUPPORTED AT
THEIR EARLY
CHILDHOOD
CENTRE

OUR IMPACT

Jody and P

As their final term with us draws to a close, we caught up with Jody to reflect on her time at the Centre and how P has grown over the past few years.

Walking through our doors for the first time

Before arriving at the Centre, Jody said, "There had been a real period of what felt like isolation because we'd only just got her diagnosed. When you first get a diagnosis, it feels like you go, 'Here's what's happening,' and then everyone kind of goes, 'And now what? What does this mean for our lives?'

So, our first day here, I remember coming in and just breathing a sigh of relief. I realised that there are people here, there's a community, people to keep their eye on her and people to support us. It felt like a real wrap-around really quickly. Because for so long, it had felt like we had just been floating and kind of hoping, not knowing what the next steps were or what life looked like for us now. Then we came in and everyone was like, "We know what life's like for you, it's cool, we've got this." It was the first moment that I thought, "We're going to be okay."

A Journey Through Music: P's Story of Growth and Discovery

Eighteen months ago, P began attending a programme that included Musical Play Therapy sessions. At that time, music and sound were a source of distress for P. There seemed to be no clear pattern to what caused her discomfort, which meant she wore headphones constantly. As a result, activities that her family had once enjoyed together - visits to markets, the mall, or any event with live music - became impossible, leaving her parents longing for the moments they used to share.

The first few months in the music room were a careful, gentle experience for P. Slowly, she began to trust both the music environment and her therapist, knowing that she was in control of her experience. This space soon became a place of safety and exploration. P began to delicately play instruments, create her own songs, and even express herself through dance.

Today, P eagerly looks forward to her music sessions and has extended her creativity to choreographing her own dances at home. She no longer needs her headphones and now enjoys experiencing live music once again - at markets, in the mall, and even most recently at TimeZone. Her family, too, is back out in the world, cherishing each moment with their musical girl.

Advocacy

When discussing what she would take away from the Champion Centre Jody said "the confidence to be an advocate. As you move into this whole sphere of disabilities you realise that you are the driving force behind the support that your children get. Before coming here, I wouldn't have known just how much advocacy was going to be important in this journey for P".

A multi-disciplinary approach

"I think there's a lot of misconceptions about what the Champion Centre does and often when people say, "Oh, what do you do at the Champion Centre?", it's kind of hard to sum everything up.

One thing that I always try to emphasise is that there's a real focus on a multi-disciplinary approach. If there's something you need or something you're struggling with, you're always going to find someone to help you.

For example, if you've had struggles with sleep, someone will point you to a specialist who can help with that. Or if it's about food or different types of play, there's always someone who's there to say, "I know how to do that. I can support you with that. Here's what we can do." This comprehensive support system is what makes the Champion Centre truly special."

Building a community

"For us, the thing that's special about the Champion Centre is the sense of community. When you have a child who has special needs, sometimes everywhere feels hard. It can feel like no one is experiencing the same thing you're experiencing. So, there's something really special about coming somewhere where everyone goes, 'Oh, I felt that too, I know that too,' and professionals that say, 'Oh, I understand. I've heard this story before. It's not a unique experience.' While it feels really unique, there's safety in feeling like this isn't something that no one else has done before. So, I think that's something really special about Champion Centre — it's the community that it creates."



There's safety in feeling like this isn't something nobody has done before.



OUR FUNDING

Closing the Gap:

Our services are funded by a combination of government contracts and fundraising initiatives. This includes individual and corporate donors, grant making trusts and organisations, private trusts and community groups as well as the generous donations from our wonderful community.

Every year we work hard to bridge the 'gap' between government contracts and our operational costs. This 'gap' includes vital aspects of our services like our Musical Play Therapy programme and the Technology Assisted Learning programme. This year we had a shortfall of approximately \$703,455.

We are so thankful to everyone who has supported our mahi. Each and every one of you have made a difference to the lives of over 2000 children and families throughout Canterbury. We are so lucky to be a part of such a caring community that jumps at every opportunity to support us.

We also thank our government funders, including the Ministry of Education and Whaikaha (Ministry for Disabled People).

Finally, a huge thank you to all of our regular givers, payroll givers, individual donors and everyone who has fundraised on behalf of the Champion Centre. Your kindness and generosity ensure that we can continue to provide the best support possible for our tamariki and whānau.

A snapshot of our supporters:

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THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING US!



We absolutely love our time at the Champion Centre. We feel extremely well supported & we know how lucky we are that our child gets to attend.

We are continually impressed at the excellent standard of support that the Champion Centre has provided for the development of our child and for the emotional needs of us as parents.

Thank you. The Champion Centre has made a profound difference to our child and family.

We always appreciate (the) Champion Centre for their amazing support for my son and our family. I think their loving words and actions help to build my son's confidence.

It has been an absolute pleasure to be part of the Champion Centre family - which is what it feels like. How you accept and love our child has been beyond and you don't just care about the child - you discover and care about our whole family.



Thank you for offering a premature baby programme (under 30 weeks). I had no idea this existed, until I was part of it. But it has been such a godsend, from the early days with feeding help, to the regular assessments leading up to school.

We would be lost without you guys and thank you very much for everything you continue to do for us.



I have been very blessed with the support that my whole family has received from members at the Centre on multiple levels.

I love that the staff are so amazing at understanding and supporting my child.

We love that we are a part of CC, and we are already sad at the thought our journey with you will be coming to an end. We truly feel like a family whenever we walk in.



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