

# Play in Ōpōtiki

Creating a Playful Future

August 2022





...

***He manu aute e taea te whakahoro!***

**A flying-kite made of paper  
mulberry bark can be made to fly  
fast!**

...


This whakatauki speaks about the manu aute (kite) that are made of paper mulberry bark and were known to fly fast, and fly away with speed.

For fun and play, other manu aute, such as manu taratahi and manu paititi (children's kites), were flown.

For Māori, manu aute were used for a multitude of activities, such as weather forecasting, battle outcome prediction, communication with neighbouring Iwi, and celebrating Matariki, Te Mātahi o Te Tau Hou Māori (Māori new year) when children would fly manu aute during the cold, and windy winter months.

This whakatauki acknowledges that manu aute are for more than entertainment, and that all types of play should be seen in the same way. Play is more than something to pass time for tamariki, and it is more than just playgrounds. Play is fundamental developmentally for tamariki, and creates space for creativity, joy and connection for whole whānau.



A group of children are sitting around a table, engaged in a drawing activity. They are using various colored markers and pencils on a large sheet of paper. A white tray containing more markers is visible in the center. The children are focused on their work, with some holding markers and others using them to draw. The background is slightly blurred, showing more children and the outdoor setting.

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"How I like to play"  
Mania, Age 11



# Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone who shared their precious play memories and aspirations with us. Your kōrero has brought this kaupapa to life, stressed its importance, and provides a vision for the future where our communities thrive.

## Purpose

Our intent is to ensure everyone in Ōpōtiki has the opportunity to play. Through understanding the state of play from the eyes of our tamariki, rangatahi and whānau, we are creating change to make our environments more conducive to play. This report shares insights about play, informed by conversations with whānau and sector stakeholders in Ōpōtiki. These insights can inform and guide community conversation, collaboration and action to protect and enhance play opportunities in Ōpōtiki. This is the beginning of a conversation, our understanding will continue to unfold as we get the chance to hear from more of our whānau within our district.

This document draws on Ōpōtiki specific information that was gathered to contribute to the broader 'Bay of Plenty - Power of Play' report (1). The regional report was led by Sport New Zealand Ihi Aotearoa and Sport Bay of Plenty, with Healthy Families East Cape supporting the synthesising of more than 100 data points from across the wider Bay of Plenty region.

## Methodology

Healthy Families East Cape continues to be a mobilizer, researcher and back bone support for championing the importance of play for our tamariki, rangatahi and whānau. We have been connecting with communities, community champions and tamariki (the experts of play), to better understand how play can be enhanced in their everyday lives.

Healthy Families East Cape engaged with Ōpōtiki residents of all ages by attending community events in the township and at Tōrere Marae, a school holiday programme, and facilitating a sector stakeholder workshop alongside Sport Bay of Plenty.

# Healthy Families East Cape

Healthy Families NZ is a large scale prevention initiative that aims to create a healthier Aotearoa by addressing the systems and environments that impact our health and wellbeing. It aims to improve people's health where they live, learn, work and play by taking a systems approach for prevention.

Healthy Families NZ has an explicit focus on equity, improving health for Māori and reducing inequities for groups at increased risk of preventable chronic disease.

Play allows tamariki the space to practice, learn and develop skills they need to be active for life, including fundamental movement skills, self-directed creativity and innovation, social and emotional connections, resilience, independence, leadership and informed risk taking. Play has often been acknowledged as the thing that we, as adults, so dearly remember and are fond of, but have not been able to sustain or care for due to the systems and environments that impact our every day lives. Healthy Families East Cape are exploring how play can be centered in prevention solutions for health and wellbeing.





# Healthy Families Principles

Collaboration  
for  
Collective Impact

Leadership

Line of Sight

Equity of  
Outcome

Adaptation

Experimentation

Implementation  
at  
Scale



# What is Play?

Sport New Zealand defines play as "spontaneous, child-led and directed, freely chosen with no pre-determined outcome, fun, accessible, challenging, social and repeatable" (2). It is also usually based outdoors in nature, highly active with elements of challenge and risk that test boundaries in an imaginative way.

Play is vitally important for young people's cognitive, social and emotional development. Play helps tamariki to process and regulate their emotions, as well as understand themselves and the world around them (3).

Play provides a foundation for physical literacy, as children's earliest physical experiences are through play. Active NZ Survey data shows that, in Aotearoa, play contributes the largest number of physically active hours for 5–18-year-olds on a weekly basis (4).

## What's special about play in Ōpōtiki?

Stakeholders and whānau identified a strong connection to te taiao in Ōpōtiki. The beaches, bush and rivers are accessible – and provide opportunities for play, as well as hunting, fishing and biking.

Ōpōtiki has a slower pace than other big centres, and whānau shared that this means tamariki can generally be tamariki for as long as they want to be.

The sense of community in our small district was indicated through our connection to people and marae, as well as the community spirit and sense of looking after each other.

2 Sport New Zealand (2017) The Importance of Play. <https://sportnz.org.nz/media/1654/sport-new-zealand-play-principles-nov-2017.pdf>

3 International Play Association (2014). Declaration on the Importance of Play. [http://ipaworld.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/IPA\\_Declaration-FINAL.pdf](http://ipaworld.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/IPA_Declaration-FINAL.pdf)

4 Sport New Zealand (2018) Active NZ Key Findings 2018 Data Survey. <https://sportnz.org.nz/media/1439/active-nz-key-findings-2018-2.pdf>



What are the things that  
mean to you? How do  
you know?  
Māori  
Cultural  
Contributions to  
the  
community

Spoken  
Words  
Facts  
Values

to have like  
writing  
knowledge



# Play over time

**"All memories are based outside. We felt safe, parents (didn't really need to be) involved, there was no supervision"**

**"Play back then was getting kai. Milking the cows by hand, gathering kai, passed on by life skills"**

**"My memories are of always going to the farm, magic carpet rides on the tractor, swing off rope to swimming hole"**

Stakeholders and whānau across Ōpōtiki were asked "What did play look like for you growing up?"

Stakeholders and parents remember play from their childhood as:

- Being outside, in nature and connecting with the whenua
- Doing chores and learning life skills at the same time. This includes activities such as farm work, hunting and gathering kai for whānau
- Child-led, free, unstructured, imaginative play with no time constraints
- Big groups of children, with very little adult supervision and a greater sense of freedom.

Parents spoke fondly of the deep levels of trust across whānau units that contributed to the overall sense of connection in the community, and how that made them feel safe.



# What has changed for play today?

Stakeholders commented on the structure and opportunity for child play having changed across time and generations. The below themes were highlighted through conversations:

## **Impact of technology**

Technology use has increased generationally. While technology can provide options for play, people voiced concern about tamariki dependency on technology, it limiting creativity and time outside, being a distraction and disruption to play, and parents overly using devices to entertain their children.

## **Time is more organised for young people**

Stakeholders and whānau shared concern that this means tamariki and rangatahi have less opportunity to be imaginative as they are engaged all the time. Because of this, there's a fear they are becoming less creative over time.

## **There are more parks and a greater range of toys and equipment**

While toys and equipment provide options for play, they can limit creative and unstructured play. Playgrounds provide important spaces for play; however, it is important that play is enabled and prioritised beyond parks/playgrounds, and is embedded in the design of all public spaces.

## **Safety concerns have increased**

Stakeholders and whānau shared that parenting styles have changed overtime, there's more monitoring of tamariki now, and parents are generally more risk-averse. There was also an overarching sense that public spaces in Ōpōtiki are less safe now, especially in urban settings – due to stray dogs, cars, gang presence, as well as some unsupervised poorly-behaved young people.



# Play barriers and enablers

What helps, or gets in the way of, stakeholders and whānau providing play opportunities?

## Understanding and valuing play

Stakeholders and whānau shared that understanding and valuing play was an important part of creating play opportunities. Having parents who value and make time for play was seen as an important part of this.

In the school context, one stakeholder shared that play-based learning is supported by research and is beginning to be more widely valued in the community. They also shared that support from parents is making it easier to integrate play-based learning into schools.

Many of the benefits of play come through unstructured play, when tamariki are able to play freely and creatively. Stakeholders and whānau shared that adults can get in the way of free play through imposing their ideas of what it should look like.

Some whānau shared that they didn't know what rangatahi were interested in, or how they like to play, and that made it difficult to provide opportunities.

“I don't know how teenagers play”

“My 13 year old isn't interested in play - there aren't any options for him”



- Haio, Age 7



# Play barriers and enablers

## Time Pressures

Time pressures were shared as a barrier across both organisational and whānau settings. Whānau shared that having to navigate work and chores at home means they don't have time to relax and play with their tamariki. In the school setting, stakeholders shared that the curriculum, exams and expectations of the Ministry of Education and ERO can be barriers to making time for play.

## Funding Barriers and Enablers

Funding barriers were shared from both organisational and whānau perspectives. Having access to funding streams such as Tū Manawa Active Aotearoa through Sport Bay of Plenty, was seen as a play enabler, and having relationships with organisations who provide funding and grants was seen as important. While there are one-off grant funding opportunities available, stakeholders were not aware of many funding streams that could cover on-going operational and staff costs to provide play opportunities. This creates a barrier for play investments which require staffing and on-going maintenance.

## Safety and attitudes towards risk

Stakeholders and whānau shared that safety concerns can get in the way of play. Stray dogs and traffic in the Ōpōtiki township create barriers to allowing tamariki to travel on foot and play in public spaces.

Covid is another current safety concern, especially for schools and kura who have had to, at times, lock school grounds after hours.

In organisational settings, increased concern about health and safety means there's more administration required before enabling play. Stakeholders shared that dedicating the time and energy required for health and safety and RAMS forms can be a barrier to this.

“Health & Safety and Risk Assessment and Management Strategy forms [are a challenge]”

“We have long walks [to the park] with my daughter in her pram and we are scared of stray dogs”

# Play barriers and enablers

## **Having access to spaces for play**

Community spaces, including nature spaces, the library, parks and playgrounds were acknowledged as key for whānau, providing low / no-cost opportunities for play. Having play opportunities incorporated into community events was also acknowledged as important for whānau.

Stakeholders and whānau shared that physical spaces for play in Ōpōtiki are variable in quality and location. There isn't currently a public pool in the district, meaning those who want to go swimming in a pool, or join a learn to swim class, need to either drive to Whakatāne to do so, or access through a school/kura during limited hours.

The design of the township means it can feel disconnected and people often don't consider walking or other active modes of transport for short trips. The difficulty and unpleasantness of crossing and walking along State Highway 35 as a pedestrian adds to this. While it is great that investment has been made recently into footpaths, there are still a number of streets which do not have footpaths on both sides.

Whānau shared that the lack of shelter/trees to take a break from sun, and to play on rainy days was also a barrier.

Natural spaces e.g. the beaches and rivers were highly valued as enablers of play, however pollution was a concern and expected to become a greater issue over time. Rural whānau were specifically concerned about the impact of farming on the local awa.

## **Youth voice – being led by tamariki and rangatahi**

Stakeholders and whānau acknowledged that being led by tamariki and rangatahi was important to enabling play. Understanding their perspectives and centering their interests is a big part of this.

Stakeholders shared that there is an opportunity for greater consideration of youth voice within Ōpōtiki District Council, and suggested that a youth policy and youth council would be useful.

# Play barriers and enablers

Stakeholders also shared concern for some of the local mindsets people have towards rangatahi in Ōpōtiki – and how deficit-thinking about rangatahi can mean that rangatahi might not feel welcome to hang out in neighbourhoods.

## Playing together

Stakeholders spoke about the importance of whānau involvement in and role-modelling of play. Brothers, sisters, cousins and friends were seen as important enablers. Being in a good mood, understanding each other, and allowing ourselves to be bored were seen as important to “hitting the play button”.

“Forging relationships with kids to focus on their interests”

“Having young people around and tuning into their way of seeing”

“There is a community facebook page that people use to complain about kids loitering. Behaviour and attitude shift is needed to encourage kids and rangatahi to play.”









# Future Aspirations

Stakeholders and whānau envisioned a future where:

## **Neighbourhoods are safe, with more opportunities for active modes of transport**

Roads are safe for bikes, scooters and other modes of active transport. There are less stray dogs in the Ōpōtiki township.

## **Community-led thrives**

The voices of youth and whānau guide decisions that impact our built and natural environments in Ōpōtiki. The histories and stories of our people are incorporated into playful environments and our taiao.

## **Play infrastructure is invested in**

There is investment into playful environments that include things such as: a new slide at the wharf front, bike lanes, better street designs where people and play are prioritised, community swimming pool with sun and wet day cover, and more play-based opportunities





# Future Aspirations

Stakeholders and whānau envisioned a future where:

## **Nature-based play is still important**

We continue to feel connected with te taiao. Tamariki are still able to look for eels. The moana and awa are still important sites for water-based play. This means being active kaitiaki and making decisions now which protect te taiao.

## **Play opportunities are inclusive and accessible**

All people can access spaces for play.

## **There are spaces for rangatahi**

Teens have spaces where they can just be.

## **Mindsets that enable play**

Creative mindsets enable play and build on the capability of young people in Ōpōtiki. Stakeholders envisioned a future where we make time for play, and where we prioritise the needs of rangatahi and tamariki in public places.










## Call to Act.

If you are interested in partnering and would like to find out more about this kaupapa please contact:

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