Home-Based Early Childhood Services: The Case of New Zealand

The main purpose of this policy note is to outline information about New Zealand home-based services. It highlights the importance of Government’s role in supporting the quality of provision for children in home-based care, and it is intended to be of use to other countries developing home-based education and care policies. Increasingly, home-based services in New Zealand are education-oriented, and cater for diversity. The note summarises key details and implications about participation and administration (funding, review, regulation, staff qualifications, and curriculum).

**Definition**

Home-based care involves the care and education of a small group of children in a caregiver’s home. These services (also known as “family day care”) are defined by the Ministry of Education as “a cluster of homes under the supervision of a homebased coordinator. The coordinator places children with caregivers in approved homes for an agreed number of hours per week.”1 Unlike private services in a child’s own home (employment of a nanny, or in some countries, employment of servants) used mainly by the more privileged, home-based care caters for a wide range of families.

**Development and Participation**

During the late 20th century in New Zealand, as in other industrialised countries, the rising participation rates of children in early childhood education services has developed alongside increased participation of women in the labour market. In 2001, the apparent participation in early childhood services of children aged from birth to five years reached 60%. In the 1990 to 2001 period, the percentage of growth of enrolments in home-based services exceeded that of all other early childhood services. By 2001, there were 184 home-based services operating in New Zealand, catering for 8,546 children aged from birth to 5 years. The major clientele of home-based care services are New Zealand European children and Māori children (7,015 and 1,012 respectively in 2001). Slightly more boys than girls were enrolled (4,405 males and 4,141 females in 2001). In 2001, there were 282 coordinators of home-based services; all of them were women.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Service</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>% change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Licensed early childhood services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playcentres</td>
<td>43,792</td>
<td>45,439</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education and care services</td>
<td>22,668</td>
<td>14,786</td>
<td>-34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergartens</td>
<td>29,786</td>
<td>73,192</td>
<td>145.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home-based services</td>
<td>1,611</td>
<td>8,546</td>
<td>430.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te Kohanga Reo</td>
<td>861</td>
<td>947</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>License-exempt EC services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early childhood development funded</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playgroups</td>
<td>5,565</td>
<td>15,457</td>
<td>177.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nga Puna Kohungahunga**</td>
<td>209</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islands EC groups</td>
<td>2,729</td>
<td>2,545</td>
<td>-6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playcentres</td>
<td></td>
<td>404</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licence-exempt Kohanga Reo</td>
<td></td>
<td>214</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>117,120</td>
<td>171,333</td>
<td>46.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Table 1: Number of Early Childhood Enrolments in New Zealand By Type Of Service, with Percentage of Change 1990 & 2001**

Data source: New Zealand Ministry of Education Data Management Unit, July 2002

**Administration, Funding, Regulation, and Qualifications**

Prior to 1986 in New Zealand, the Department of Social Welfare was mainly responsible for administration of home-based early childhood services. In 1986, responsibility for childcare (including home-based services) moved formally from the Department of Social Welfare to the Department of Education. The Ministry of

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3 http://www.minedu.govt.nz
4 Summary definitions of these services include: Kindergartens: free standing, community run, sessional centres (governed by regional associations) for 3- and 4-year-olds. Playcentres: parent-cooperative, sessional centres (governed by regional associations) for children from birth to school entry. The educators and administrators are parents of enrolled children. Education and care centres: Childcare centres, with diverse ownership and governance arrangements, full-day care or sessional care. Home-based care: Family day care, often under the auspices of Barnardo’s NZ in recent decades. Correspondence School: distance early education provided by the state correspondence school. Te Kohanga Reo: involve total immersion of children from birth to school age in Māori culture, language, and values. Centres are governed by a national body of venerable Māori elders. The educators and administrators are parents or elders of the children.
5 Meade, A. & Podmore, V. N. (2002). Early childhood education policy co-ordination under the auspices of the Department/Ministry of...
Education is currently responsible for administration and (partial) funding of the home-based education and care services. Each home-based scheme receives the same level of funding, per child per hour, as that available to centre-based services. Funding levels are therefore linked to participation rates. As the home-based enrolments have increased relative to other services (Table 1), so too have the funding levels.

The rise in early childhood services, including home-based services, has been accompanied by research, lobbying, and government initiatives aimed to enhance the quality of services. Research studies of family daycare in North America support the importance of: licensing and regulation of services, qualifications of providers, and commitment of providers to taking care of children and to learning about children’s development and care. 7 Few New Zealand studies have focused specifically on quality in home-based settings,7 but some small-scale, in-depth studies are now in progress. New Zealand Government initiatives to promote and monitor the quality of the services provided include requirements regarding: reviews, regulations, and qualifications.

Home-based services, along with other early childhood services receiving government funding subsidies, are reviewed externally by the Education Review Office (ERO), the government department with responsibility for reporting publicly on the quality of education in early childhood services/schools. ERO evaluates the safety of children, learning programmes, and the performance of management. Home-based early childhood services are regulated in accordance with the Education (Home Based Care) Order 1992. The Order specifies requirements for premises and facilities, and states that each coordinator must hold a qualification approved by the Secretary (the head of the Ministry of Education). However, to date no formal early childhood qualification requirements are specified for home-based caregivers. Changes to qualifications, requiring a Diploma of Teaching (ECE) or equivalent for coordinators in home-based services, are currently being implemented. 8 A recent strategic plan report to the Minister of Education recommends that the system of qualifications for home-based educators needs further development. The new qualifications requirements for coordinators of home-based services are identical to those required for persons responsible for early childhood centres. There is a national, bicultural early childhood curriculum framework (Te Whaariki) in place for all early childhood services. Te Whaariki was developed in partnership with Maori (the indigenous people), and is inclusive of home-based services. Policy initiatives are also in place to encourage improved outcomes for children through educators’ self-evaluation.

Implications
What are the implications for countries where home-based programmes are in the hands of individuals, with no administration and funding from government? In New Zealand as in other countries where governments are responding to research on the educational and social benefits of high quality early childhood education and care services for young children, priorities are to increase participation and to enhance the quality of a diverse range of services. Integral parts of meeting these priorities potentially include:

- developing appropriate administrative infrastructures, regulations, curriculum, and support systems;
- fostering quality through education (qualifications of coordinators and caregivers, and ongoing professional development).

These requirements are important, to avoid problems of administrative fragmentation, and most importantly to enhance quality. A key reason for Government support and regulation is that the quality of early childhood services, including home-based services, is linked to long-term educational and social benefits for children and families.

Valerie N. Podmore9
Institute for Early Childhood Studies
Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

The UNESCO Policy Briefs on Early Childhood is a series of short, flash notes on early childhood and family policy issues. It seeks to answer various questions that policy makers have about the planning and implementation of early childhood and family policies. For further information and the electronic version of the Briefs, please check:

http://www.unesco.org/education/ecf/briefs

For comments and inquiries, please contact:
UNESCO, Early Childhood & Inclusive Education Section
7, place de Fontenoy, 75352 PARIS 07 SP, France
2: 33 1 45 68 08 15, fax: 33 1 45 68 56 26, sh.choi@unesco.org

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8 A diploma-level qualification requires at least 2 years of full-time (or equivalent) study at an approved tertiary institution.
9 The author acknowledges Dr Anne Meade and Jane Couch, who helpfully previewed an earlier draft of this brief.