

Promoting Emergent Leadership



It is a situation many centres will understand ... a committed group of individuals continually putting in the hard yards to create a quality educational environment for their whānau. While they are willing parents, sometimes the burden takes a toll. We reflected on our practices and realised that the packhorses were stuck in their own cycle of recognising that a job needed to be done, and responding by getting on and doing it themselves. Not only did this create an unhealthy workload for them, but made it hard for others to become involved. At times the packhorses felt overwhelmed with all that needed to be done.

The idea of a team-approach to office bearer roles was born out of this dilemma. We received feedback that our new parents were keen to be involved and expected to do so, but really didn't know how! We also learnt that the more experienced members were eager to pass on knowledge and responsibility, and recognised that they were keepers of the culture within the centre. Their actions and support of newer families ensured that the centre practices were handed on, and maintained. When they didn't take the time to share this information, processes and systems began to fall down.

After considerable consultation and deliberation with our centre members and the Canterbury Playcentre Association handbook, a parent put together a team-based approach. Working collectively in teams is also another way in which we can honour our bicultural commitment. Single office bearer roles such as health and safety officer and public relations officer scared people off and sounded like a lot of work. Becoming part of a team is much less daunting. We created the following teams:

- Public faces (president, vice president, public relations)
- Information and education (information, rolls, rolls administration, education)
- Library (librarian, Scholastic Books)
- Healthy and safety (health and safety, Healthy Heart, end of term clean-up, daily clean-up)
- Property and maintenance (maintenance, gardeners)
- Centre review (self review)
- Fundraising (party hire, fundraising projects, grant applications)
- Secretary (secretary, correspondence secretary)
- Centre administration (parent help roster, name tags & profile books, photos, office)
- Equipment (equipment, housekeeping, resource room, grant spends)
- Social (social coordinators)
- Treasurer Team (treasurer, fees treasurer).

Now if one person can no longer do a task, there will be someone who holds the knowledge to take the role over. We hope that things won't fall down quite so easily as a result!

The approach has only just been rolled out at our centre, but already it has increased communication amongst the centre members as we share ideas on how to approach things in our teams. The involvement has enhanced the sense of belonging amongst parents, and helps them to build relationships with other parents. The packhorses are able to re-focus their energy into where it is most important – our children's education.

To get the ball rolling, everyone without a role was approached to join a team; which they were all happy to do. Moving forward, new families will be encouraged to immerse themselves in Playcentre life for the first term. In their second term, someone from the information team will help them to find a team to join – based on their skills, interests and availability. While it could sound daunting, all teams have smaller tasks that a new person could do. Meanwhile the value of being involved in the team outweighs any initial concerns.

Perhaps another benefit of the teams is that more parents may become involved in the Playcentre Diploma courses. Usually the parents who undertake Playcentre training are also the ones who are involved at centre level.

Sometimes a really efficient centre can drive people away because the centre members all appear so busy and intent, that a new person finds it difficult to break into the perceived social network. We hope that this new system will make it easier for new members to transition into involvement and develop a sense of belonging at the centre.

The teams create excellent opportunities for emergent leadership as all teams have a combination of more experienced Playcentre people mentoring newer members. The culture and the experiences are shared within teams and passed on.

Emergent leadership in Burwood is now about working together, passing on the batten of knowledge and supporting whānau. Encouraging new families to be involved gives them a sense of belonging – which is just as important for the parents as it is for our tamariki. It is about distributing the load so that we can all contribute. The myriad of experience, skills and education that our parents bring to Burwood Playcentre can now be fully utilised to strengthen the centre as a whole.