

# The importance of self-care



Self-care has been so commercialised that we often think of it as separate from our everyday life. Something that we need to purchase to reboot ourselves after a stressful period. Massages, holiday packages, mindfulness apps. But as Volunteering New Zealand chief executive Dr Katie Bruce argues, taking care of ourselves can be a radical practice in a world that places productivity over compassion and wellbeing.

It seems that half the internet is talking about burnout at the moment. Anne Peterson's article on How Millennials Became the Burnout Generation (2019) has struck a collective chord. It's that time of year where we take a 'break' – parenting exempt – and a new year sneaks up on us with its promises of resolutions, change and hope. Maybe we want more time for our own interests, maybe we have health or career goals, maybe we just want more sleep.

The Playcentre model itself is a form of self-care – sharing responsibility with other parents to create a village for your children to grow and learn. With so much focus on individual parents and families meeting all the needs of their children, this model has an in-built support system.

Volunteering itself is also self-care because it is linked to individual health and wellbeing (James, 2018). There are even calls for doctors to prescribe volunteering to patients because the link is so strong (Cahalane, 2016).

But we have to be vigilant so that this collective model of care supports your own self-care rather than depleting it. As Playcentre parents and whānau you are teachers, fundraisers, accountants, gardeners and much more besides. One of the key challenges in volunteer collectives is often how to better spread the load so that it's not always the same few people who take on the extra load.

## Here are a couple of questions to ask yourselves at your local Playcentre:

1. Do we have clear expectations of each other as volunteers? Having really clear expectations really helps as people are often willing, but are reluctant to step forward if they are unsure of what is expected of them.
2. How are we going to support each other when we need to step back? For a culture that supports self-care it's a good idea to have this built into the planning so that people feel they are able to step back when they need to.

Taking action for your own wellbeing needs to be complemented by an organisational culture that supports and values its volunteers equally with its paid staff. This can

mean a whole range of things from including the voices of volunteers when making decisions, training in volunteer management and an inclusive culture that supports new members to be inducted, get involved and spread the load.

## Make the most of the resources

that are already out there. You can find a best practice toolkit with useful resources including guidelines and a goal planner on Volunteering New Zealand's website (<https://www.volunteeringnz.org.nz/resources/best-practice-toolkit/>). You can also find ready to use resources on everything community on Community Hub so that you don't have to constantly reinvent the wheel (<https://community.net.nz/>).

Photo here



Playcentre