

talking matters

Growing thinkers,
talkers and readers

Kōrerotia mai!

ACHIEVEMENTS 2017

What we've done, what we've learnt, and what has
happened as a result of our path-finding year



What is Talking Matters?

Talking Matters is a campaign to ensure children in Aotearoa New Zealand have the language they need to get the start they deserve. Our vision is that all our children will flourish as thinkers, talkers and readers. Achieving this vision requires actions at individual, family, community and agency level. COMET Auckland, an education trust connected to Auckland Council is leading Talking Matters, with the support of a range of partners and collaborators.

Our first year

In September 2016, with seed funding from the NEXT Foundation, Talking Matters set out on 18 months work to find out if we could generate community interest in and action on early language. Four strategies drove this pathfinding work: promoting and supporting *community action*; *building capability* of whanau, services and organisations; developing and sharing *resources and tools*; *advocacy* for early language.

Community action

Talking Matters has worked with organisations and whanau in three diverse low income communities to (a) increase the quality and quantity of interaction and talk experienced by babies and young children and (b) to demonstrate the power that talk has on shaping children's development. Community action underpins all other strands of our work and it has been vital for revealing how families and services in different communities think about early language.

- *Māngere – Ōtāhuhu (the Akaaka Kōrero initiative) | Predominantly Pasifika families*

We brought together a mix of social service organisations, education groups and libraries to try out community action ideas, using a quality improvement methodology

- *Tāmaki (The Talking Matters Movement) | a mix of Māori and Pasifika families*

We connected to groups with strong existing relationships in the community (a parent-led social enterprise, urban marae and family service centre); this has become a community co-design project (strongly parent-led)

- *Puketāpapa | the most ethnically diverse community in the country*


Two small strands of work got underway midyear

- We are working with services co-located on a primary school, supporting them to try out simple, free and easy ideas with diverse local families.
- Seven local primary schools are trying out Early Reading Together (ERT), a 3 session engagement programme for parents with small children.

Early achievements

We are delighted in the response to Talking Matters so far, even on the small scale at which we have been working. Some families in our demonstration communities are responding and talking more and differently to their children. Families have told us that talking more and talking differently makes a positive difference at home, where small children spend most of their time. Services and community networks are building stronger connections with families.

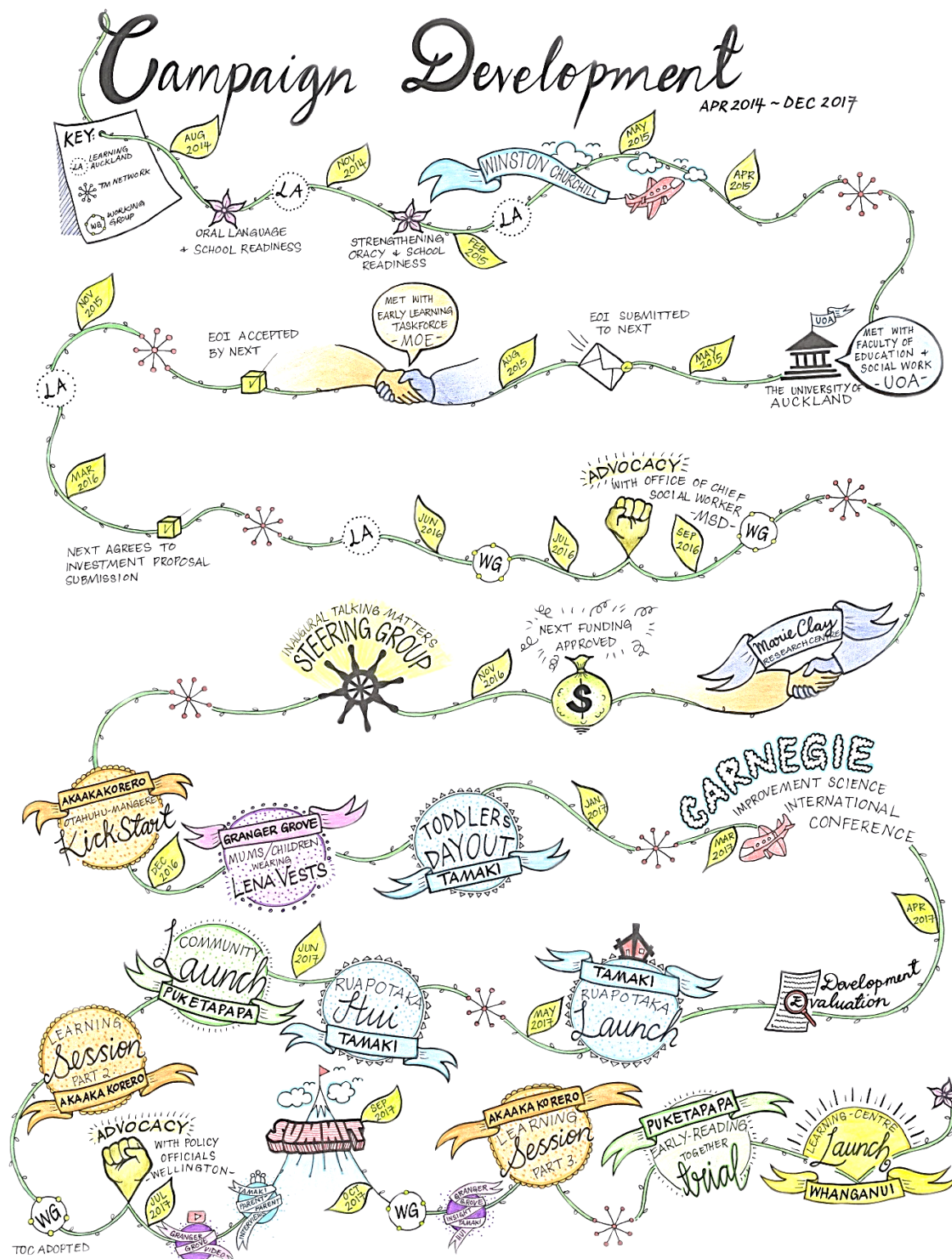
Talking Matters is growing like a kūmara vine. More people and organisations want to join the campaign and more people around the country are talking about talk. Kūmara provide nourishment for individuals, whānau and communities. Talk is nourishment for babies and enables children and whānau to flourish.



“Kūmara is grown in the ground, but the vine goes all over the place. We are in many different places and spaces... and there has been much work done to prepare and till the soil, and we are all on board to assist the Talking Matters kaupapa as it grows”. Kataraina Pipi, 2017

How Talking Matters developed

The seeds of the campaign started back in 2014 when we began to see the connection between COMET's work on family learning and literacy, the lack of improvement in school literacy and low oral language. The diagram below shows key events in our campaign history.

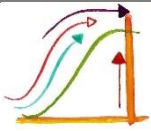


ACHIEVEMENTS SUMMARY

	Objectives Run three prototypes with family-facing organisations and develop/support local collaboration	✓	What happened Community action in 3 communities. Initiated action in Māngere; Tāmaki and Puketāpapa. Recruited 15 diverse organisations focusing on early language, reaching 700+ families, to try out approaches to build oral language.	
	Learn what is effective in small-scale community projects		In progress – it takes more than one year to find out what works. We have tried out three different methodologies (quality improvement (QI), community co-design, responsive coaching). Different settings need different approaches. In 2018, we will help organisations to focus on fewer, more specific ideas and collect data on what works in shorter cycles.	
	Develop strategies, tools and approaches		In progress. Organisations have tried ideas relevant to their context, gathered their own data from QI cycles, and developed their own resources. These context specific ideas need further testing. Ideas to try out in 2018 include: strategies that build children's emotional language and self-control; multi-lingual resources; parent-created video clips for coaching other parents; tips for parents delivered by text.	
	Develop and share easily-understood communication	✓	1,200 TM Facebook followers and our website illustrate approaches that work and fit with the cultures and aspirations of local families. Practitioners led 12 Action stations at the Summit , practical 'how to' sessions on strategies for connecting with families and promoting early language.	
	Establish TM as a centre of expertise	✓	240 people from 112 organisations attended the first national TM Summit; representing health, education, social development, corrections and parent education sectors Meeting with officials: Office of Chief Social Worker, Ministry of Education senior staff, Treasury, Children's Commission.	<p>"In one sense you're our front line crime fighters. If you do your job well it flows into justice issues and health issues and education issues. It's linked and why it's so important." Judge Becroft, TM Summit, 2017</p>

Wrote submissions on Te Whāriki (national early learning curriculum) , Auckland Council's play strategy and ERO report on early language.

Responded to 47 organisations' requests for action ideas, information and support.



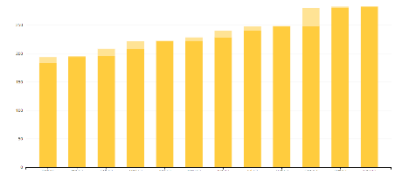
Build capability of practitioners



Ran 30 PD sessions for different groups across Auckland, Whanganui, Palmerston North and Christchurch, reaching 500+ practitioners.

Ran 3 TM Network sessions for 150 practitioners; the Network now has **290** members from 80 organisations.

Network membership over time



Provided tailored professional development to demonstration community groups.



Act as a catalyst for action



Examples of change influenced by TM:

Two national TM partners have increased focus on EOL in their BAU (Brainwave Trust and Storytime Foundation).

ATWC has changed their parenting programmes, and the structure of Granger Grove influenced by LENA / TM experience.

A Whanganui city-wide early language collaboration *Start Ahead Stay Ahead* has started with our support. This is the first example of TM spreading out of Auckland.

Wright Family Foundation **incorporated messages on interaction and talk** in the 'Love grows brains' video clips.

University of Auckland has funded a **second Ph.D scholarship** for early language research, as a consequence of Talking Matters funding one scholarship. We are growing our own expertise in early language.

We had over 43 requests for action and support from organisations around the country.

What we have learned during our path-finding year

People agreed on the need for more focus on early language. There is an appetite for action all over the country.

Organisations we connected with report that many five year olds are starting school with language and communication skills more typical of three year olds

Parents want their children to thrive but don't always know how important early language is to children's development

Families and services want to know more about children's language capabilities at varying stages and ages

Messages alone are not enough. People want both information and practical strategies

Important insights to guide future work

TM will only be successful if families, services and organisations pick up on the importance of early language for themselves and build it into their business as usual (BAU).

This takes time and we have to listen carefully to local issues and contexts to find out how to initiate and support action in diverse communities and groups with different kaupapa.

A particular feature of our families is their diversity. We got real traction once we began to acknowledge bilingual families and home languages.

Supporting families and services to talk more and talk differently to their children is intensive and intimate work; a one off short term project won't achieve the significant social impact NEXT and Talking Matters are seeking.

It is more effective for us to collaborate with others to strengthen early oral language into their work than initiate action from scratch ourselves.

Measuring the oral language of small children is challenging because children reach milestones at different times.

An international literature review by Marie Clay Research Centre identified the difficulties in measuring small children's language development over time.

Nonetheless, to influence policy, we need independent evidence about the impact of Talking Matters on children's language.

We must take an equity lens. Children in poorer communities are more likely to experience limited interaction and talk because of poverty and family stress

Services and local families are looking for ideas and strategies that really connect with their lived experience, here in Aotearoa NZ.

To be effective, TM has to be relevant to how culture, language, family values and community aspirations interweave here.

Early indications are that co-design approaches with community will be more sustainable and powerful than a pre-determined curriculum.

Community action stories

Using LENA to increase talk at home

Talking Matters conducted a first, very small scale trial of LENA devices that record the language children experience and provide feedback direct to parents. Talking Matters imported 6 Language Environment devices (LENA) from the LENA Foundation at the start of the year, the first community project to use them outside the U.S.

A child wears the vest for a whole day once a week and the parents get feedback via graphs. The aim – to increase the amount of talk the child hears and to increase the number of conversational turns the child takes. LENA can be used as soon as babies are vocalising, from about 4 months.



RECORDING

A full day of talk is captured by a small, child-safe recorder worn in a comfortable vest.



DATA & FEEDBACK

Recordings are translated into data about talk, provided in clear reports shared with families.



MANAGEMENT & EVALUATION

Secure online tools enable efficient program management with built-in, real-time measures of fidelity and effectiveness.



Seven parents were involved from Granger Grove, a residential parenting programme run by Anglican Trust for Women and Children (ATWC). The average age of children taking part is 29 months. There has been an overall upwards trend in the number of words and interactions from all parents. The parents worked together to understand the data and to find out strategies to increase talk. The parents actively supported one another and collaboratively strategised about increasing talk. Parents recognised the importance of whole whānau engagement in talking to babies. ATWC is delighted with the impact of the data direct to parents about talk, and how that has enhanced other parenting strategies in their programme.

"I'm absolutely impressed with the progress I've made -we're doing so well. It's not a chore and I don't actually need the vest now".

Patrese Herewini, Granger Grove mum

Parents in Tamaki, our second community began been using devices late in 2017. All parents have increased the amount of talking they are doing; two increased significantly. LENA in Tāmaki will expand to 10-15 parents at a time next year using a tuakana/teina model of more experienced parent coaching a parent new to Talking Matters. Tamaki work is very much family led.

We now have 30 LENA recorders and during 2018, 5 organisations will try out LENA in different contexts. Families will use the vests for 3-4 months each. By the end of 2018 we will have richer data about the impact of LENA on talk at home from at least 120 children.

The game-changer: parents become co-constructors of knowledge



Parent-to-Parent: The Talking Matters Movement

The Talking Matters Movement is the result of connecting the inspiring mothers from Granger Grove with Insight Tamaki, a collective of parent social researchers associated with the Glen Innes Family Centre. Together they're sharing knowledge and starting a parent-led movement to encourage more talk between parents and children. The Talking Matters movement has been an unplanned and powerful development.

The parents from Glen Innes were galvanized by the stories and positivity of the Granger Grove mums at a hui at Te Poho o Tāmaki Marae. Tamaki parents are adapting and expanding the idea of homemade tablecloths to promote talk at meal times. Local parents are leading the trial of LENA in Tamaki, as well as the discussions that come from looking at the data.



First group of LENA parents share experience with the new Tamaki group

The two groups have set up the Talking Matters Movement, a closed Facebook Group where they encourage one another and share tips and advice. A Talking Matters Movement group meets weekly at the Panmure Community Library and are actively reaching out to other local parents.

[Talking Matters Pathfinding Year report](#)

"You (Talking Matters) really 'get' parent empowerment. You've also helped us go far, far deeper when it comes to conversations, attachment and connection."

Anne Purcell, Tāmaki Parenting Connections

Akaaka Kōrero - Testing ideas to increase talk in Māngere-Ōtāhuhu

The six organisations working together in Akaaka Kōrero have been trialling different ways of supporting parents to talk more and talk differently with their babies and toddlers. Organisations try out small scale, low-cost or no cost ideas with a few children or a couple of parents and gather data to determine if the idea is worth developing.

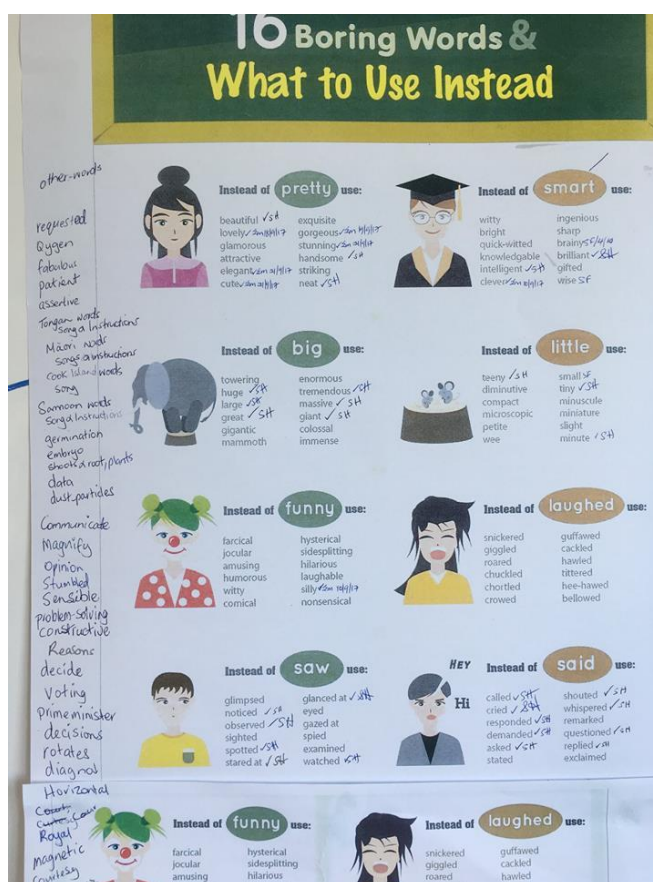
Parents (and service providers) have told us that even if they know talk is important, they are not sure what to talk about or how to get started. The Akaaka Kōrero organisations worked together at a Learning Session to think of ideas to try in the car, outside and at mealtime. To find out more, watch the video about the session:

<https://vimeo.com/239011610>

Everyone wanted ideas for starting conversations and introducing new vocabulary that extends children – 'juicy words'. Good Seed Trust has been trying out a prompt for choosing exciting words to share with children. It's sparked a lot of interest since we first shared it on our Facebook page. Since then the ECE teachers have added to the list and collected data on how frequently they use the words.

"It's led to some great discussions with the kids. Like, 'It helps us think of ideas we wouldn't have before'."

Now that the weather is warming up why not mix up bath time by having a bath on the lawn! All you need to do is fill up a plastic tub with warm water and your toddler can sit in the tub while you point out all the new things to look around at.



"We've seen such an increase in parent engagement since asking them (parents) about talk with their children. It's really opened up the dialogue and we look forward to continuing with you". Vaolele Walker, Fountain of Knowledge Trust

Where to next: Extending the campaign

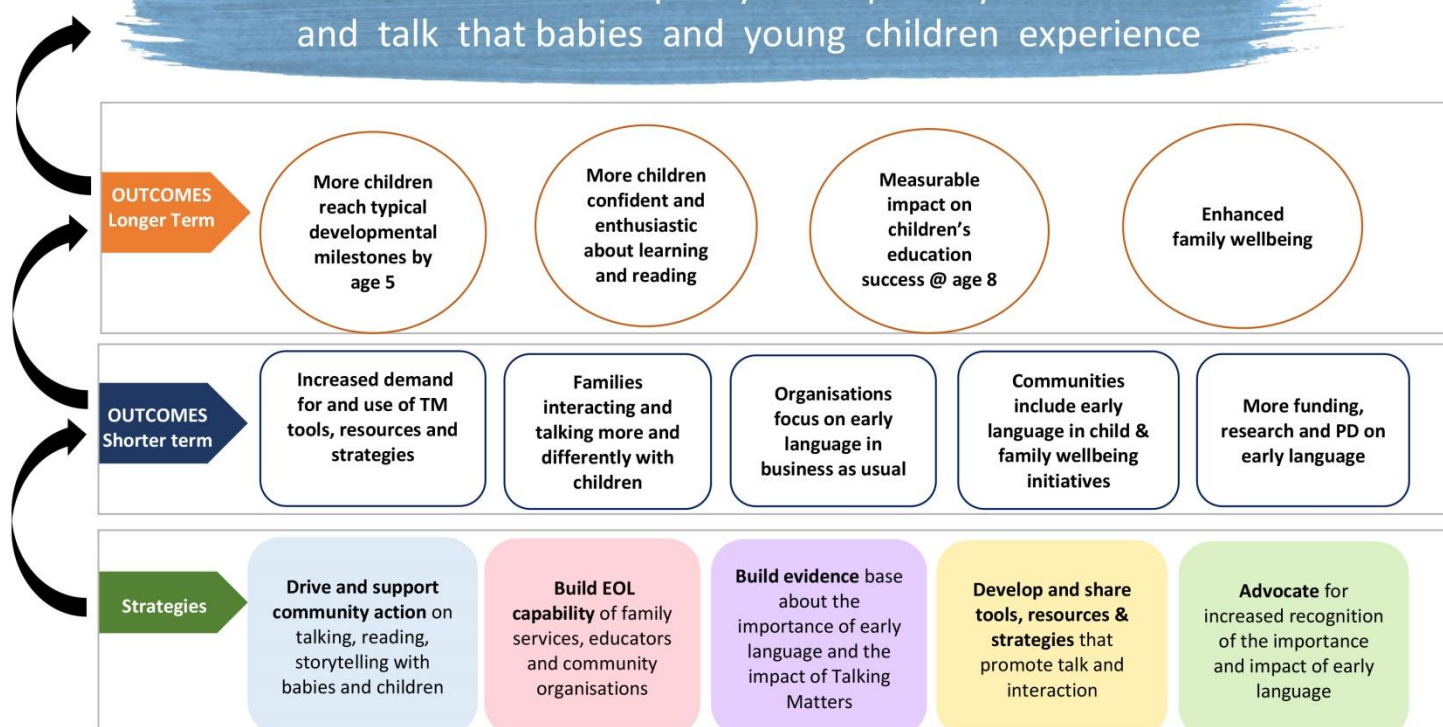
Talking Matters is ready to take the campaign to the next level, and is seeking a longer term investment from the NEXT Foundation. We will test promising ideas on different contexts, take effective ideas to scale and influence the systems that impact on talk. A theory of change will drive our work.

TM Theory of change 2018

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Kōrerotia mai!

VISION: Children flourishing as thinkers, talkers and readers

Mission: Increase the quality and quantity of interaction and talk that babies and young children experience

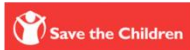


For updates, join the TM Network in [our website](#), and follow us on [facebook](#) @TalkingmattersNZ.

Talking Matters partners and supporters



EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WORK



PLUS A network of 130 people from 60 organisations