

PLAY

BAY OF PLENTY

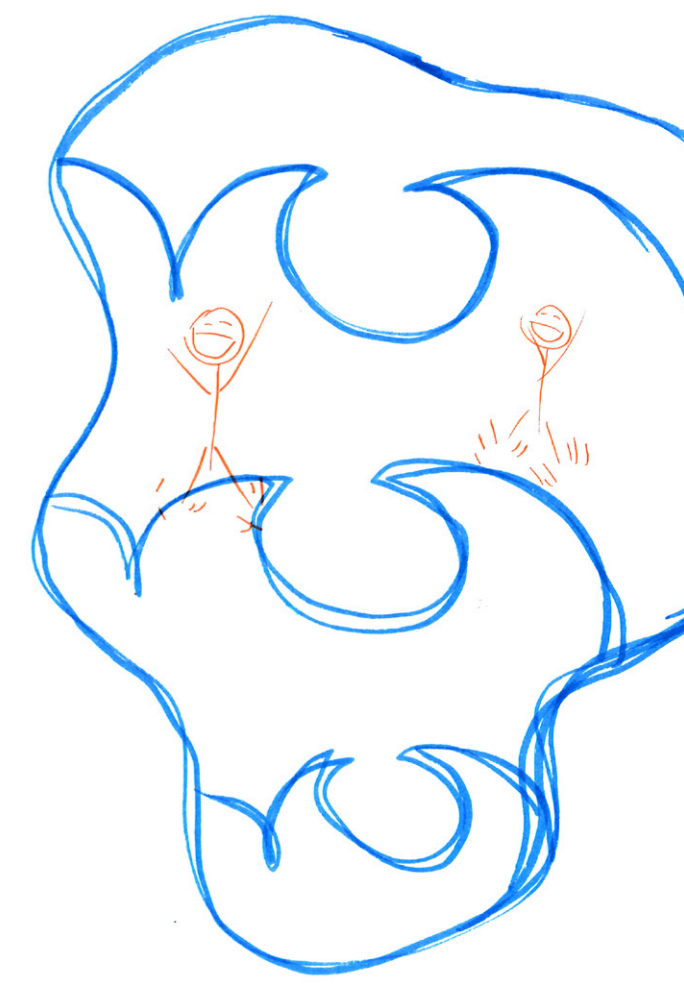
Perceptions and experiences of play from sector stakeholders, whānau and tamariki in the Bay of Plenty.



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*"Kei te kaukau ahau i roto i te wai
(I am swimming in the water)."
- Tamaiti*



Mā te ahurei o te tamaiti e ārahi i ā tātou mahi.

Let the uniqueness of the child guide our work.

This report explores findings from a study by Sport New Zealand Ihi Aotearoa and Sport Bay of Plenty, supported by Healthy Families East Cape He oranga whānau and the Innovation Unit.

Sport New Zealand is proud to be the kaitiaki of the country's play, active recreation and sport system. We are committed to promoting quality experiences so New Zealanders value play now and into the future.
sportnz.org.nz

Sport Bay of Plenty is a charitable trust on a mission to transform lives through physical activity. Its vision is to contribute to the enhanced wellbeing of the Bay of Plenty and to inspire a lifetime love of play.
sportbop.co.nz

Healthy Families East Cape is working to shift conditions in Te Tairāwhiti, Ōpōtiki and on the East Cape, so every person can be healthy and thrive.
healthyfamilieseastcape.co.nz

The Innovation Unit is a not-for-profit social enterprise that works to develop new solutions for social issues and create impact at scale.
innovationunit.org

Thank you to the stakeholders, whānau and tamariki who shared their precious play memories with us. Your experiences will help us understand what it will take to give more children quality play experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Thank you also to the team at Sport Bay of Plenty for bringing together a great group of people from across the sector and for connecting us with tamariki and whānau in the community.

Drawings throughout are by Bay of Plenty children and adults.



Sport Bay of Plenty boundaries

Why play?

How might we create more quality play* experiences and lay the foundation for a life-long love of being active?

Play is a vital part of children's physical and cognitive development. It helps them build the skills, competencies and attitudes they need to be active for life, including: fundamental movement skills, social and emotional connections, resilience, independence and leadership.¹ However, the play opportunities children have access to is changing due to social, environmental, technological and economic trends. 'Play deprivation' is becoming an increasing international concern.^{1,2}

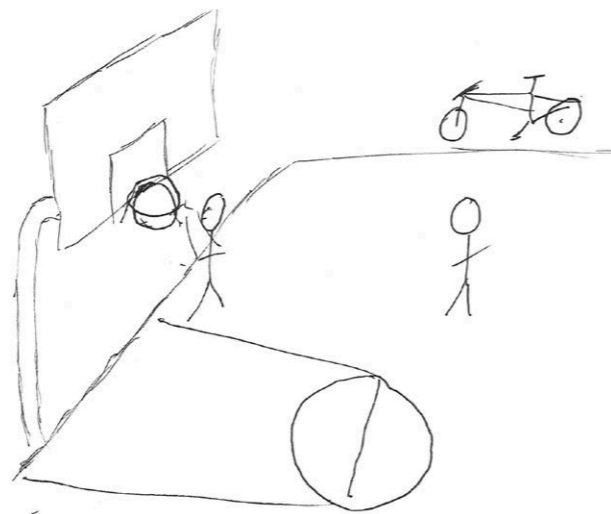
We know that children have the time, place and permission to play in their communities, when:

- Play is widely understood to be a crucial part of their physical, cognitive, social, emotional and spiritual development.
- Adults understand their role in enabling play and everyone shares responsibility for supporting play.
- They have access to varied playful experiences within their local environments, including risk-taking and the opportunity to be active.

Sport New Zealand Ihi Aotearoa is committed to increasing opportunities for children to access quality play experiences and has started a project that explores what play looks like in Aotearoa New Zealand today.

Play helps tamariki build social and emotional connections, resilience, independence and leadership skills.¹

To gain a better understanding of communities' perceptions and experiences of play, and what helps or hinders children's access to it, Sport New Zealand has partnered with Regional Sports Trusts and the Innovation Unit to help hear from people across Aotearoa New Zealand. The findings will inform Sport New Zealand's planning and strategies for play, and spark a nationwide conversation about its role in the wellbeing of young New Zealanders.



*For this project, we did not define what is and isn't within the scope of 'play' so we could, instead, hear how communities themselves understand and describe it.

Highlights

The Bay of Plenty community shared many thoughts and experiences about play, this section outlines the highlights.

State of Play

Play in the Bay of Plenty is influenced by the strong connection the community has to te taiao and Te Ao Māori. Other unique aspects of play in the region include:

- easy access to nature
- a strong sense of community in Ōpōtiki
- good facilities in Tauranga
- celebration of Te Ao Māori in Rotorua
- community programmes in Whakatāne.

Read more on page 7

Play over time

People said they remember play 'back in the day' as being about the outdoors and nature, doing mahi and with little adult supervision. Social, environmental and physical changes in the region have, however, contributed over time to how children play. This includes:

- more structured play
- the influence of information and technology
- increased fears around safety and risk
- more supervised play and less roaming
- increased safety restrictions, rules and regulations
- fewer opportunities for children to build confidence and skills
- lack of time due to busy schedules.

Read more on page 13



Barriers and enablers

People describe the influences on play in the region today as:

- creating space and time for play
- involving whānau and friends in play
- accessing play spaces, equipment and opportunities
- prioritising and resourcing play
- establishing rules, frameworks and perceptions of risk versus reward
- managing the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic
- recognising the perceived value of play.

Read more on page 22

Future of play

In the future, the community hopes that the Bay of Plenty might provide opportunities for play to be:

- freely available and accessible
- nature-based
- for the whole whānau
- embedded in the urban fabric
- balanced between safety and risk
- valued and normalised
- child-led
- enhanced by technology.

Read more on page 34

STATE OF PLAY

This section discusses what play looks like and what is unique about it in the Bay of Plenty today.



Play today

Tamariki in the Bay of Plenty spend more time being active through play than the national average.³

Tamariki and adults in the Bay of Plenty described various spaces and places to play. Playing outdoors was a common trend across the region, with activities relating to opportunities at home, in neighbourhoods and the wider community. All interact and engage with each other across the region.

Tamariki play with their siblings, friends, cousins and whānau in many ways, from backyard games to obstacles on the driveway, from zooming down hills on cardboard to imaginary games, and being fully active in the recreation on offer. Tamariki in the Bay of Plenty are more likely to be active in outdoor locations than indoor facilities.³



Play activities described include the following.

Home

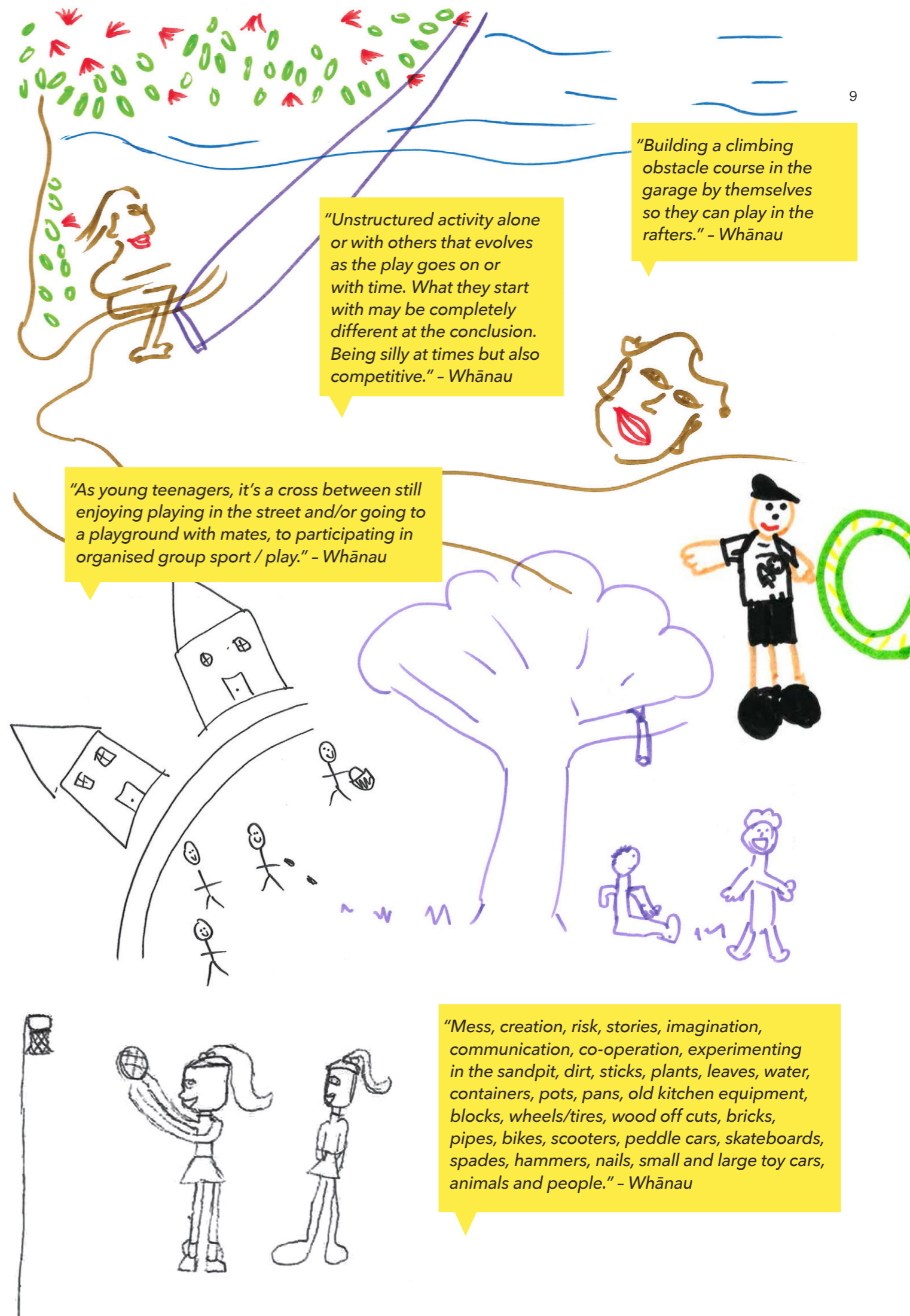
- **Technology:** iPads, Wii, computer games, gaming, online friends
- **Games:** hide and seek, board games, cars, puzzles, cards, dart board
- **Imagination:** play fighting, Barbie dolls, crafts, sandpit, painting, trains, dress-ups, creative writing
- **Construction:** tools, drawing, Lego, blocks, marble tracks, playdough
- **Active:** soccer balls, trampoline, swing, tree climbing, skipping
- **Pets:** feeding the sheep, running around with the dogs, horse riding
- **Backyard:** trampoline (flips, spiderman), running around, table tennis on outdoor dining tables, swinging on the washing line, rolling down the bank at the farm, backyard cricket, balloon volleyball, bowls, tennis, rugby, badminton, basketball, digging, treehouse, water play, playing with mud kitchen, swing set.

Neighbourhood

- **Games:** farm runs, tag with the dog, zooming down hills on cardboard, throwing balls, hide and seek, skipping ropes, playing memory games, chase inside, tag, spot light
- **Streets:** chalking footpaths, playing with neighbourhood friends on local streets, basketball, baseball
- **Imagination:** making forest huts, finding creatures, dress-ups, water fights, making magic potions, pretending to be characters in imagination games, imaginary games of families, holidays and hospitals
- **Active transport:** biking, mountain biking, scootering, skating
- **Spaces and places:** skatepark in Papamoa, climbing trees, school playing fields and courts with balls, bats, racquets, local stormwater reserve, spinning and swinging on bars.

Wider community

- **Sports:** water sports, football, water polo, longball, swimming
- **Active recreation:** dancing, surfing, swimming, gymnastics sessions, outdoor adventures
- **Kai:** diving and fishing, gathering kai, hunting
- **Organised:** Kapa Haka, rhythm and rhyme at the library
- **Nature:** forest, trails, beach, lake, river, snow, the reserve, trees, hillsides
- **Music:** singing, ukulele.



"Unstructured activity alone or with others that evolves as the play goes on or with time. What they start with may be completely different at the conclusion. Being silly at times but also competitive." - Whānau

"Building a climbing obstacle course in the garage by themselves so they can play in the rafters." - Whānau

"As young teenagers, it's a cross between still enjoying playing in the street and/or going to a playground with mates, to participating in organised group sport / play." - Whānau

"Mess, creation, risk, stories, imagination, communication, co-operation, experimenting in the sandpit, dirt, sticks, plants, leaves, water, containers, pots, pans, old kitchen equipment, blocks, wheels/tires, wood off cuts, bricks, pipes, bikes, scooters, peddle cars, skateboards, spades, hammers, nails, small and large toy cars, animals and people." - Whānau

Unique aspects of play in the Bay of Plenty



The Bay of Plenty has a special connection to nature, the community, the people and their heritage. Green space and nature are unique and special aspects in the region, where the connectedness to and with Māori culture and heritage is celebrated. The celebration of Te Ao Māori is evident across the region, with iwi and collaborative initiatives being provided for communities.

Recreational activities are strongly promoted and used by tamariki and their whānau because they are easy to access. Utilising nature provides both structured and unstructured play opportunities. Activities that are available for different ages see intergenerational use. Having these opportunities available brings a sense of connectedness with whānau and tamariki, and a community 'feel'.



Tauranga

Stakeholders identified the natural environment and climate as Tauranga's strengths, where people can spend time in and out of the sun.

Proximity and access to beaches and the harbour in Tauranga are prominent. Nature walks, biking and outdoor activities are all accessible to the community, as are local and school playgrounds during the weekends.

Local council assets, such as pools, parks and facilities, are regarded by stakeholders as important spaces for play for residents.

Rotorua

Stakeholders identified the celebration of Te Ao Māori as a strength within their region. Māori cultural reserves, and bilingual and cultural activities all allow for the celebration of Māori opportunities within the region.

Natural spaces are in abundance, with 71 urban reserves in the area. Showcasing the natural environment and providing active recreational opportunities, such as cycleways, walking tracks, mountain biking, the Puarenga park, and swimming in hot pools, were identified by stakeholders as unique aspects in Rotorua.

Community access, where school gates are not closed after school, bikes in schools initiatives and subsidised funding for swimming and athletics programmes are also considered by stakeholders as standout for the region.





Whakatāne

Ease of access to Whakatāne's beaches, forests, rivers and the natural environment is unique to the area, according to stakeholders.

Community initiatives, festivals, programmes and opportunities are available for residents across Whakatāne, which provide engagement for friends, whānau, neighbourhoods and communities. They are well received for a range of ages, from under 5 year olds to adults. These activities allow families to go out and play in their community, and bring businesses together to share equipment, materials, expertise and create partnerships.

One stakeholder commented that "so much outdoor stuff" is available alongside the natural environment that provides active recreation opportunities in the region.

Ōpōtiki

Stakeholders identified a strong connection to te taiao in and around Ōpōtiki. The beaches, bush and rivers were referred to as accessible spaces, where children can be children for as long as they want to be, at a pace where (in general) they are not rushed.

The sense of community in this small district is visible through the connections people have, for example, looking out for each other, and connecting as whānau and hapori through the process of whanaungatanga. Some tamariki are able to be by themselves to scooter along the streets or at the skatepark.

PLAY OVER TIME

This section outlines what sector stakeholders, whānau and tamariki say play used to look like, how it has changed over time and what has stayed the same.

Play 'back then'

The stakeholders and parents we spoke with said they remember that play from their childhood was about:

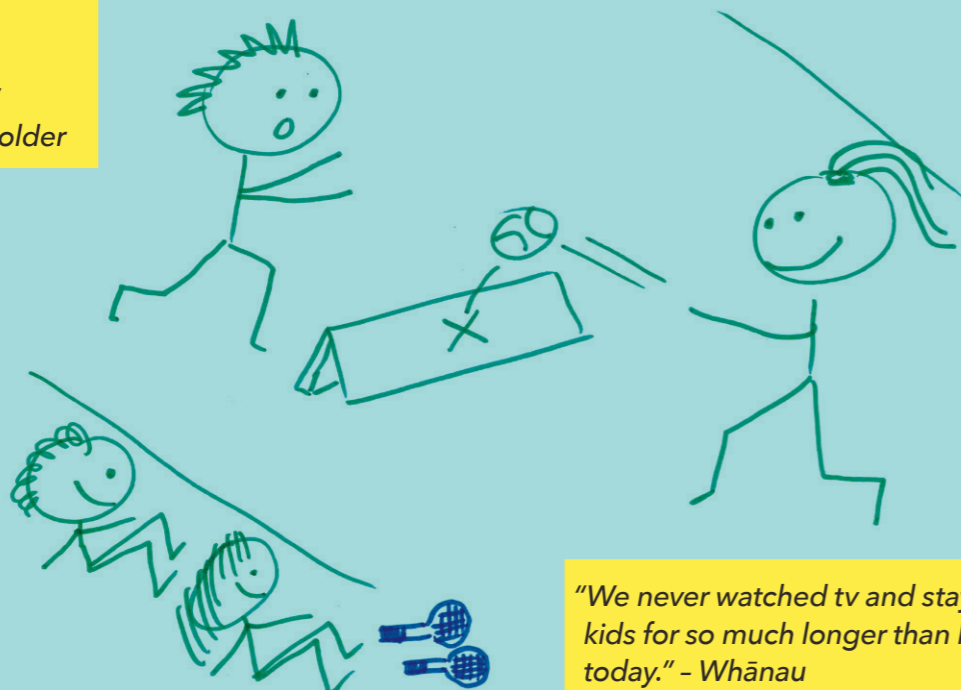
- being outside, in nature and connecting with the whenua
- survival and finding food with and for their whānau
- child-led, unstructured, non-formal play with no time constraints
- big groups of children, whānau, with little adult supervision and a greater sense of freedom. Levels of trust were higher and the connected community made them feel safe and cared for.

Play was often with friends, siblings and neighbours, or through doing mahi with adults. Although, stakeholders and parents remembered some lonely children growing up, either because they were an only child or were bullied because of a disability.

Play activities people shared included:

- **Imagination:** dress-ups, making huts, make-believe, adventures at home, role play, Pokémon, play shop, pretend cook, tea parties with toys
- **Marae:** Iwi Māori games, panga, passing te reo on to mokopuna
- **Mahi with whānau:** milking the goat, gathering pipi, fishing, cooking with mum, hunting, eeling
- **Places:** tennis court, beach, pool, wetlands, school playgrounds, down at the park, river, neighbourhood, bush, creek, ngahere, jungle gym, hayshed
- **Outdoors:** tree climbing, water slide down hills, biking, running, playing ball, bug hunting, playing in the streets, water, mud, clay, train tracks, collecting lamb balls, swimming, building sandcastles, digging trenches, building forts, mud pies, hiking, education expeditions with parents, kayaking, building tunnels, building dams, tree houses, marble runs, flying foxes
- **Indoors:** quiet play, making pompoms, paper planes and flowers, books
- **Games and sports:** gutterboard, rugby, backyard cricket, batdown, soccer, skipping ropes, hopscotch, hide and seek, bull rush, go home stay home, tag, basketball, kick the can
- **Toys:** trampolines, swing and slide sets, board and card games, running races
- **Animals:** pets, horses, insects, pigs
- **Transport:** horse riding, biking, skateboards, Barbie dolls, scooter, Cindy dolls.

"We had the best childhood - not restricted." - Ōpōtiki stakeholder



"We never watched tv and stayed kids for so much longer than kids of today." - Whānau

"Play sadly today looks like my kids / grandkids focused on their screens and not using their imagination. For my youngest son, play is changing out with his friends on skate board basketball court and biking behind the school on jumps. As they get older, it seems they are able to self regulate more and find balance. While younger kids are having screens used as babysitters." - Whānau

"All the kids would come and play on the tree after school - sometimes, at the end of the day, there would be heaps of kids still at our place and we had to call their parents and let them know where they were." - Rotorua stakeholder



"... big, old, anchor [by the beach]. It wasn't a big space but my brother and family friend would play in this area. Small space and a simple thing with the anchor created so many memories." - Whakatāne stakeholder



"Used to have to be home when the street lights came on." - Whānau



"We left the house in the morning and if we came home during the day we were asked, 'What are you doing here?'" - Whānau



"I rarely played team sports, as I was never picked, to this day I struggle to read team play. I used to read a lot and take myself to adventures that way - Enid Blyton's Famous Five and Secret Seven." - Rotorua stakeholder

"Very free from adult intervention." - Whānau

"[We thought] we are MacGyver and we can make stuff." - Whānau



How play has changed over time

Parents and stakeholders across the region said significant changes have occurred in the way children play today. Overall, people found it difficult to describe how play had changed for the better.



"Council policy says, park every 500m so everyone has access, but it's difficult what to do with those spaces and if you're allowed to do anything with it."
- Tauranga stakeholder

"Back in the day, we used to use a stick as a gun, now kids need a plastic gun."
- Tauranga stakeholder

Wider social, environmental and physical changes

Stakeholders and whānau in Tauranga, Rotorua, Whakatāne and Ōpotiki spoke about the wider interconnected changes in the world, and how these have affected play opportunities today.

These included:

- **Family structures:** emergency housing is more common now, as are smaller families with fewer children, more transient families, more one-parent families, and networks have gone that help with the upbringing of tamariki, we used to have a stay-at-home parent for younger years, and cost of extracurricular activities is too high for some families
- **Community connection and safety:** people are less likely to know their neighbours now, more and faster cars are on the road, we have heightened fears of stranger danger, stray dogs and (currently) fear of infection with COVID-19
- **Spaces:** playgrounds are more formal, fewer green spaces are available and backyards are smaller
- **Sport:** sport is not loved as much
- **Equipment:** the abundance of toys limits creativity and imagination.

Although, most of these societal changes are seen as negative, one positive change noted is that play is more inclusive.

- **Sport:** minority sports are becoming more accessible, and the change in sport-gender stereotypes means more girls are playing rugby and more boys are playing netball.
- **Environment:** heightened interest in sustainability, good access to natural areas in New Zealand, more diversity in playgrounds, and other opportunities such as bike tracks.
- **Equipment:** this can help with physical and cognitive development, toys are more sustainable and a wider range is easily available.

"Kids have same amount of time, but more of their time is 'organised' for them."
- Ōpōtiki stakeholder

"...Kids are rushed around on adult schedules with little time to allow their play skills to develop through imagination."
- Whānau

"When we were kids, we would just 'go and play' - there are a lot more scheduled activities than free time, many tamariki have no time outside of their extracurricular activities." - Rotorua stakeholder

More structured play

Stakeholders and parents commented that play opportunities have become more structured and restricted, with parents often being the initiators or supervisors of play, compared with the freedom they remembered from their childhoods. Time is becoming a major factor in limiting play for children. It is common for both parents to be working full-time, meaning children are being rushed around by adults to fit their schedules, and the amount of extracurricular activities now available is also a factor impeding free play.

Other people spoke about the proliferation of information and how parents can be too focused on creating specific changes or results instead of allowing free play. Concerns were raised that this is affecting the ability of children to instigate play and their fundamental play skills, like using their imaginations or being creative.

Active NZ data contradicts this, however, with tamariki in the Bay of Plenty spending more time being active through play than the national average (eg, playing or hanging out with family or friends). Tamariki are also more likely to be active in an informal (eg, playing) rather than organised way (eg, training with a coach).³

Influence of technology

People across the region saw the spread of information and technology available as a double-edged sword in relation to play. On one hand, stakeholders saw that the internet can encourage tamariki to be active outdoors with games like Pokémon Go, as well as having and being connected to online play friends.

On the other hand, people had strong concerns about the dependency of tamariki on technology, that it limits creativity and affects mental health, is a distraction and disrupts play. People were also concerned about parents using devices to entertain their children. The Ministry of Health guidelines recommend no more than two hours of screen time a day,⁴ which tamariki in the Bay of Plenty exceed: 46 percent have more than two hours of screen time on a weekday and 68 percent on a weekend day: around 17 hours a week.³

"More online play friendships. Can still connect with others through gaming but some friendships may only be online. There are positives and negatives to this."
- Rotorua stakeholder

"Kids are often left with a device, particularly tamariki with disabilities."
- Rotorua stakeholder

"Need to find a way to work with technology, find time without it, ipad is absorbing them for hours." - Tauranga stakeholder

Increased fears around safety and risk

Parents and sector stakeholders felt a significant shift had occurred in perceptions of safety and appetite for risk-taking, along with a disconnection from neighbours and communal living. This was seen as being influenced by a heightened awareness of safety issues across New Zealand and the world stemming from an increased flow of information (for example, about child abduction). Other significant factors affecting play today include: an increase in traffic and a car-centric transport system, a much stronger focus on safety rules and regulations, not knowing your neighbours, and unsafe neighbourhoods with gangs or stray dogs. Stakeholders in both Tauranga and Rotorua mentioned that children living in transitional housing are staying for longer than they used to, because of a shortage of housing. Normally, the location of transitional housing means the facilities available do not always allow for play.

"... you hear about a wider range of information (not just regional) [it] heightens your own sense of risk." - Tauranga stakeholder

"Stranger danger, some streets people are scared of. Neighbour goes out regularly with a drug induced rage. I used to feel safe going out with my dog by my side, now I don't even go out as it doesn't feel safe." - Whakatāne stakeholder

"Less safe - stray dogs, gang presence, naughty kids." - Whānau

"Adult limiting kid exposure to risk for good reasons: used to be a lot more freedom in the past and more injuries. Things are more controlled, yellow lines on trees telling you how high you can climb and some games are now banned i.e. bull rush." - Tauranga stakeholder

"Used to go to the marae and set the table (eat kai there), we still go to the marae but there isn't as much freedom for my kids to do what they want and don't know everyone." - Ōpōtiki stakeholder

People felt perceptions around safety have created an increase in supervised play, and less space and permission for children to roam freely, with parents fearing judgement from others for letting their children play unsupervised. A Tauranga stakeholder felt this is for a good reason, given safety concerns these days, whereas a Rotorua stakeholder talked about the helicopter parent who wraps their tamariki in 'cotton wool'.



Increased safety restrictions, rules and regulations

Stakeholders across the region spoke about the heightened focus on health and safety across the country, through rules and regulations, and the challenges this creates to letting children learn and play outdoors. This includes schools not being open for tamariki to play in the playgrounds, and having lines on trees to show how high children are allowed to climb.

"H&S [health and safety] regulations - puts responsibility onto businesses." - Whakatāne stakeholder

"Too PC - Too much health and safety." - Whānau

"Play enablers e.g. council are very risk adverse." - Whakatāne stakeholder

"Schools used to be available to the community but are often fenced off and not accessible." - Rotorua stakeholder

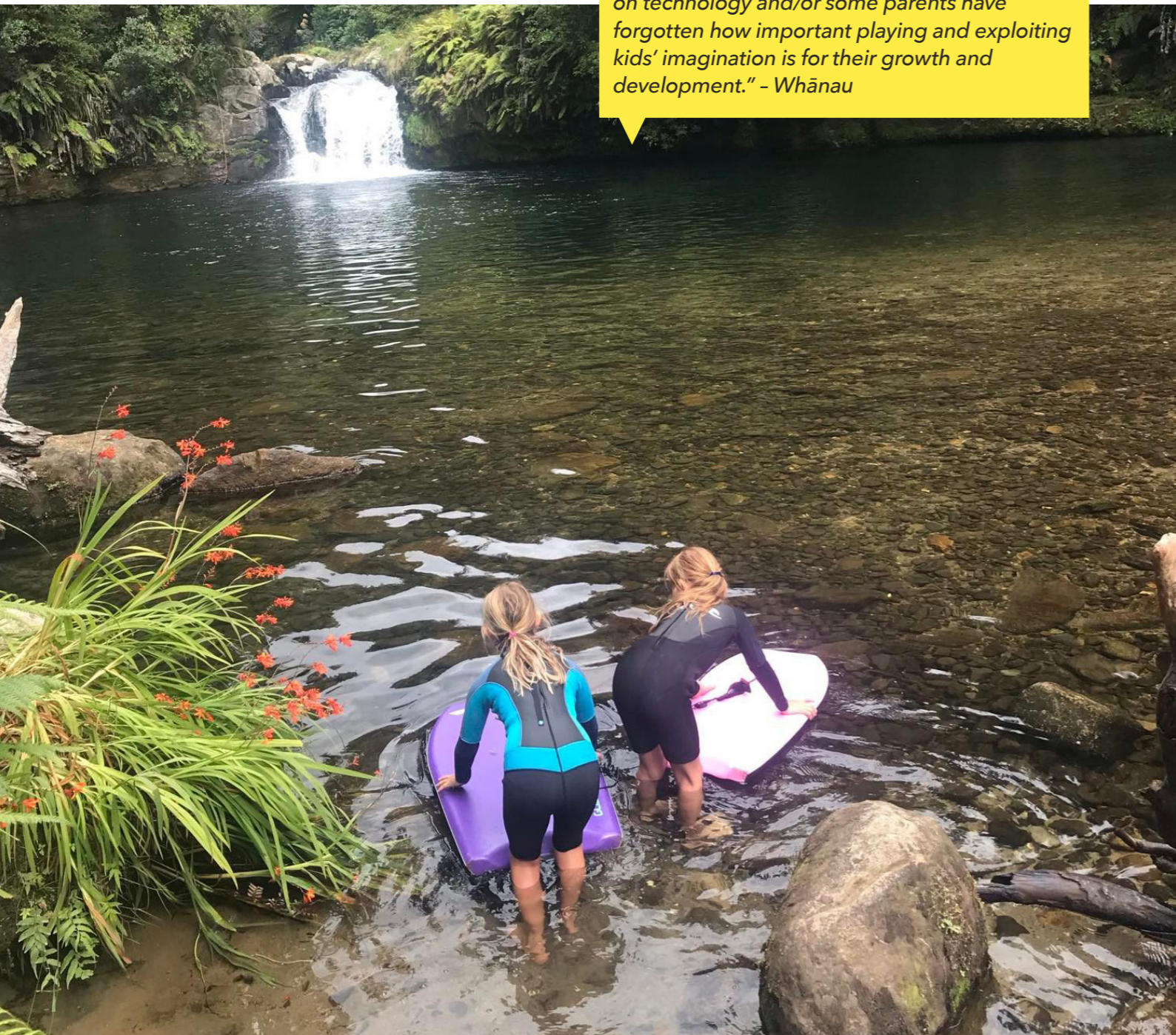


Less opportunities for children to build confidence and skills

People spoke about how increased safety concerns are leaving less room for children to develop fundamental skills and confidence through risk taking. Interestingly, tamariki in the Bay of Plenty are less likely to state “I feel confident to take part in lots of different activities” than the national average.³

“Kids are really uncoordinated in preschool, parents are working and are tired at night, so the kids just watch the ipad.” - Tauranga stakeholder

“Some children have become dependent on technology and/or some parents have forgotten how important playing and exploiting kids’ imagination is for their growth and development.” - Whānau



What has stayed the same

Although stakeholders and parents found it difficult to identify what had stayed the same about play today, compared with their childhoods, they believed the fundamentals had remained constant. This included the innate want and need to play, the benefits of play, who, how, where and why children play.

“I make sure to play with my kids like my parents played with me.” - Parent

“Kids attract kids - many are still able to play in their neighbourhoods and in the streets, they come together.” - Rotorua stakeholder

“More sustained when with other children with little restrictions in terms of space/noise.” - Whānau



“I have shown our younger generations games I used to play as a kid and they loved them - so I also think passing play/games down the generations has stayed the same for our whānau.” - Parent

- **Innate ability:** need and want to play and move their bodies, self-directed.
- **Benefits of play:** learning and cognitive development, resilience, learning about emotions, teamwork, sharing, imitation, imagination and creativity.
- **Who children play with:** friends, whānau, neighbours.
- **How they play:** exploring, inventions, Māori games, folk dancing, dress-ups, Lego, spinning and sliding, duck duck goose, handball, toy cars, riding bikes, getting dirty, books, huts.
- **Where they play and the free natural resources available:** beach, bush, rivers, farm, playgrounds, schools, indoors.
- **Why they play:** have fun, learn, challenge themselves, to feel happy.
- **Adult influence:** need for guidance and love, time and space, parents have similar worries, observation and supervision, learning from ancestors.
- **Risks:** consequences are still the same, injuries, stranger danger, busy streets.
- **Relationships:** friendships that last, bullying, exclusion of disabled tamariki, practising social development, hierarchies.

BARRIERS & ENABLERS

What helps, or gets in the way of, stakeholders and families providing play experiences for tamariki

Community

Creating space and time for play

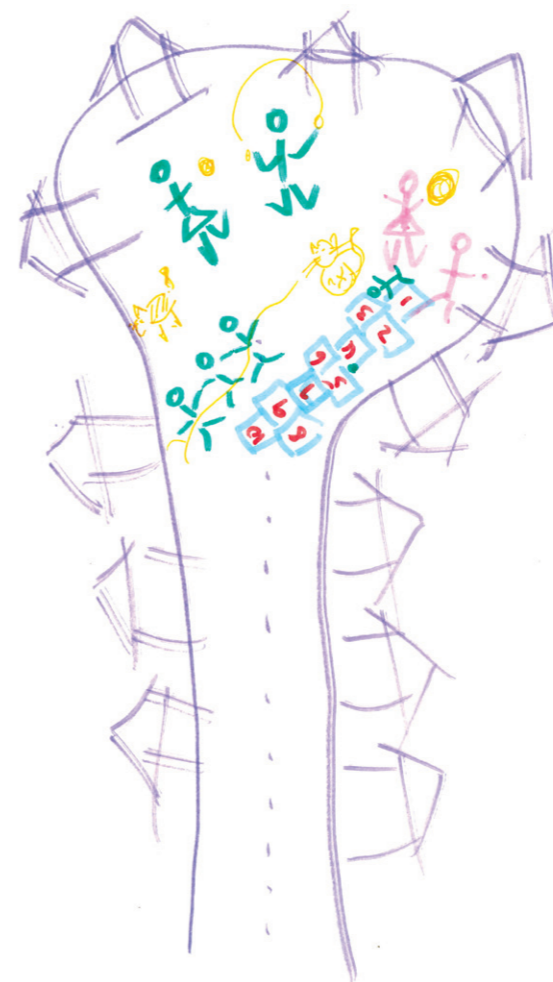
Whānau across the region talked about the tension between wanting to support play and having to work long hours to meet the needs of their whānau. Both parents and children had “heaps of commitments” to balance, with sport and scheduled activities often seen as taking priority over unstructured play.

Prioritising play is not realistic when the ability to buy food and petrol and to pay rent are not certain, and when cost is a significant barrier for programmes that are “only for schools and parents who can afford it”.

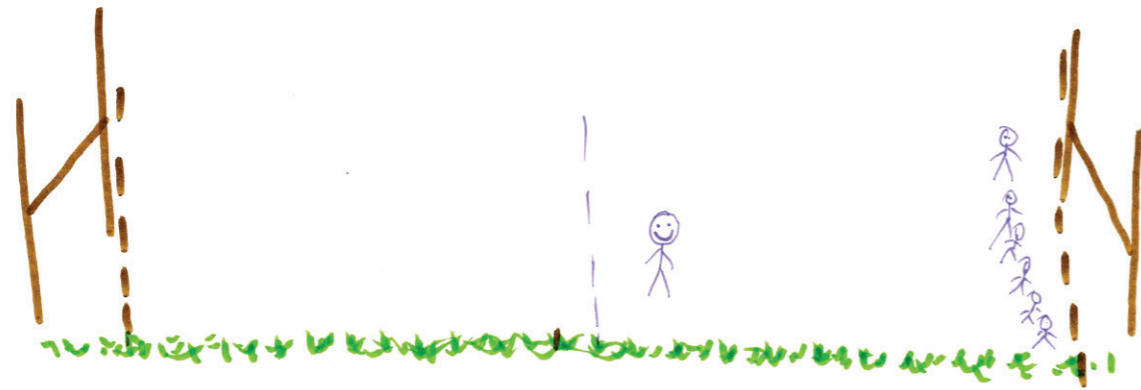
Whānau and friends’ involvement in play

Stakeholders spoke about the importance of whānau involvement in and role-modelling of play. Brothers, sisters, cousins (of a similar age) and friends were seen as important enablers. For some tamariki, not having friends nearby or someone to play with is a challenge. Playmates help tamariki to find the confidence to try new things. For the adults in their lives, finding the time and energy to come up with ideas and actually join in with play is challenging. Some adults also expressed not really knowing how to play or encourage it, particularly when their children were a bit older. It was suggested that “we need structure to facilitate unstructured play”.

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



Some of the simplest things were seen as the most powerful for enabling play. Other kids, sunny days, free time, good moods and space were mentioned by stakeholders. Whānau told us that “booting them outside”, when tamariki couldn’t agree with each other, when cooking dinner, or at other times might be met with initial resistance but soon led to fun and play that then led to better health, sleep and other positive outcomes. While being available to supervise and be active parents was seen as important for giving children confidence and encouragement, the ability to “get out of the way” and let children lead and direct their own play, using their imagination, was also mentioned.



Access to play spaces, equipment and opportunities

People across the region spoke of differences in access to spaces that enable play. Community spaces, including nature spaces, libraries, parks and playgrounds, were acknowledged as essential for whānau in providing low or no-cost opportunities for play. At the same time, the quality of these spaces was variable, locations were not evenly distributed and did not consistently meet the needs of disabled whānau. Playgrounds did not always feel like safe spaces for tamariki, due to older children “hanging around”, may not have shade and didn’t always have welcoming spaces for whānau, for example, to get coffee, sit and watch.

Natural spaces, such as the beach and river, were highly valued as enablers of play, but pollution was a concern and expected to become a greater issue over time. Rural whānau in Ōpōtiki were specifically concerned about the effect of farming on the local awa. Specialist equipment wasn’t seen as particularly important for play; however, rules were seen as stifling play in some environments, for example, bans on climbing trees, using chalk on the ground in school settings and time limits for teens visiting the library.

“Let our child determine their own play using their imagination and natural environment.”
- Parent

“Large outdoor spaces with plenty of climbing and hiding places, nooks, crannies.” - Whānau

It was not always easy actually getting to play spaces. Work pressures make it hard for whānau to take tamariki to play spaces, and urban environments make independent travel difficult and potentially unsafe. In Tauranga, people shared how some suburbs are not well connected to play spaces, with one stakeholder saying some children in Merivale have never been to the beach. In Ōpōtiki, people shared how disconnected the town feels, particularly with some streets not having footpaths and State Highway 35 running between one of the schools and the main township and playground. Pressures on housing and housing development were seen as exacerbating this problem, creating barriers to play spaces. People in Tauranga and Rotorua expressed concern about housing being prioritised over public spaces and section sizes becoming smaller.

Specific programmes, such as Future Leaders for rangatahi in Whakatāne, Kawerau and Ōpōtiki, were acknowledged as supporting play. For example, in Ōpōtiki, rangatahi Future Leaders have been active in promoting and creating space to play taonga tākaro - Kī-o-rahi (a Māori ball game) at community events. In Whakatāne, people acknowledged the aquatic centre, CREW (the community recycling centre) and the toy library as providing space and opportunities for play. Awareness of these opportunities for play is vital, and stakeholders in Rotorua mentioned the importance of knowing what is available in the community, and how communication and advertising is important, as well as community organisations in building relationships and collaborating.

Sector

Prioritisation and resourcing of play

Stakeholders from across the region spoke of competing pressures on those working within the education and wider play system. The expectations of the Education Review Office, the Ministry of Education and society more broadly create overwhelming and sometimes contradictory responsibilities for those within the education sector. Specifically, stakeholders spoke of a lack of relief teachers to support play within early childhood settings, pressure to prioritise exams, qualifications and the curriculum within school environments, and a widespread lack of human resources. Together, these factors paint a picture of a sector that is overstretched and struggling to prioritise play. Adding to this is a sense of moving goalposts, with Whakatāne stakeholders expressing frustration that “models come and go and always leave, so there is a lack of trust when new things come in”.

Despite these challenges, many examples were given of those operating within the system finding creative ways to enable play. Resources, training and education are seen as essential to this. One participant mentioned that their background in circus helped with integrating play. Organisations such as Strategies with Kids, Information for Parents (SKIP) and the Department of Conservation were named as providing resources and opportunities that support schools and other learning environments to incorporate play into learning. Upskilling teachers, elevating the voices of rangatahi, providing visits to rural and nature settings, and sharing research and materials that help others to understand the value of play and play-based learning approaches are seen as ways to overcome these barriers.

“Having kaiako at daycare who know to prioritise play and child-led activity is crucial.” - Parent

For all stakeholders, funding was a challenge. Limited availability of funding, lack of information on what funding is available, low engagement and short turnaround processes to unlock funds, which tend to be short-term only, were all named as significant barriers to prioritising play. This has led to an over-reliance on volunteers who are often doing things out of their own pocket and on their own time in an unsustainable way. The fact that “funding makes things happen”, was tempered by the understanding that it could be quickly lost, and once funding is lost so are the programmes it has enabled.



Effect of the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic is seen as having exacerbated many of the existing barriers to play. Playgrounds became inaccessible, school grounds were locked after hours, programmes became less flexible because bookings were required and numbers limited. Alongside this, pressures on whānau, mental health challenges and stress increased, and both parents and children became fearful of playing with others because of the focus on social distancing.

Rules, frameworks and perceptions of risk versus reward

The unstructured nature of play can be challenging for organisations to honour and manage. Not knowing how to ‘measure’ success, to dealing with compliance and health and safety responsibilities and rules and frameworks, were seen as barriers to rather than enablers of play.

“Compliance/regulations to give us a framework to work within. Also, can act as a hindrance to creative play i.e. kids can’t just build their own dirt track on an empty plot of land and ride their bikes on it,” - Rotorua stakeholder

“We are KPI driven and play isn’t very measurable.” - Tauranga stakeholder

Parents’ desire to know “what is being achieved” was also felt as a pressure on play providers. System stakeholders spoke of the “competitive focus” of adults who prioritised sport, especially elite sport, with the limited time available to them. Stakeholders shared that they struggled to communicate the value of play to whānau, teachers and others in a way that would justify its prioritisation over sports or other activities. People who champion play were seen as a vital part of this work and who could support organisations to navigate these tensions. Leadership was also vital in providing stakeholders with the flexibility to do what is needed.

“Parents who pay a lot of money for dance lessons expect dance to be delivered not play,” - Tauranga stakeholder

“People (adults) wanting things to be perfect, rather than just making play happen.” - Ōpōtiki stakeholder

Partnerships being forged and conversations across sectors, organisations and communities, and between whānau, were seen as holding great promise for overcoming these barriers. Relationship building and trust are seen as fundamental to this mahi, forged through establishing a deep understanding of what the community wants and, especially, elevating the voices of children.



Perceived value of play

Stakeholders spoke about how peoples’ mindsets within organisations influence how easy it is to create play opportunities. This includes leadership and wider teams’ attitudes and trust to engage with play and respond to children’s needs and wants. Play needs to be a priority in organisations, and key performance indicators should align to support the delivery of play, with dedicated resources to allow for whānau and community engagement. An understanding of barriers to play and recognition of the lack of play as being a problem provide knowledge on how to enable play.

“Play is important for our tamariki as it’s sacred. Play is life’s rehearsal.” - Ōpōtiki stakeholder

“Grumpy adults who don’t understand the value of play. Not many spaces to explore in our town.” - Whānau

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE REGIONS

The section discusses what sector stakeholders say is happening in the Bay of Plenty, what has and has not worked.



What has been successful

We asked stakeholders in Tauranga, Rotorua, Whakatāne and Ōpōtiki about what they know is available in the region, what they might have participated in or have organised, and what has worked well. They described several spaces, places and programmes.

Many activities related to the outdoors and using the natural environment in the region, with its playgrounds, parks, pools, cycleways and other facilities. Programmes and classes run by local sport clubs and schools were said to work well, along with holiday programmes from the library and one-off community and whānau events and festivals.



Tauranga

Events:

Family New Year, Golden Sands, Matariki in Te Puke, dinner in the domain, Pop-up water play, Parafed whānau days

Places:

Community centres, Te Akau Ki Papamoa Primary School (purpose-built playgrounds for different ages), adjustable basketball courts so smaller tamariki can participate, ice rink (temporary), climbing trees, geocaching (children finding things in nature by using technology), Marine Parade (age-appropriate play areas)

Programmes:

Tumble time Bay Active (equipment is available so tamariki can do what they want), Plunket collaboration with gym sports (Plunket pays for families to attend)

Schools:

Steiner schools (access to forest and bush, with a philosophy that allows tamariki to play), play-based learning at forest schools (connecting with nature)

Collaboration:

Local hapū stories used in the development of Waihi Beach playground, with links to Tuhua/Mayor Island, and used as an educational and learning opportunity, incorporating native animals

Rotorua

Events and organisations:

Fun in the park series every January for at-risk communities (collaboration with community and other organisations, such as Kimiora Trust, Plunket and gangs), Te Papa Takaro o Te Arawa (supporting traditional Māori games), Children's Day (Redwoods), conservation week, fun and festival days, adaptive bike day and bike month

Places:

Lakes High School with Eastside Community Centre, jumping rock, Okareka, Redwood Forest, Lakefront playground

Programmes:

Child equity programme in schools, Stand Tall in Fordlands (every Monday: music/connection, kai, play activities), Maramataka programme (culture centre with Tato Ponamu), Toyota Kiwi Guardian (Okere), orienteering, iwi initiatives, Making a Difference swim programme, Share the Ride

Other:

Bikes in school, council bikes in community, Parafed promote play for tamariki

Whakatāne

Events:

Teddy bear picnic, beach dig, 2020 street festival, Christmas parade, Xmas in the park, light party, music and dancing in the park, Toi's challenge, Sunday Ohope markets, experimental sound project

Places:

CREW upcycling centre, Whakatāne Observatory, Ruatoki School observatory

Programmes:

Playgroups: Waimana, Kawerau, Awatapu, Whakatāne

Ōpōtiki

Events:

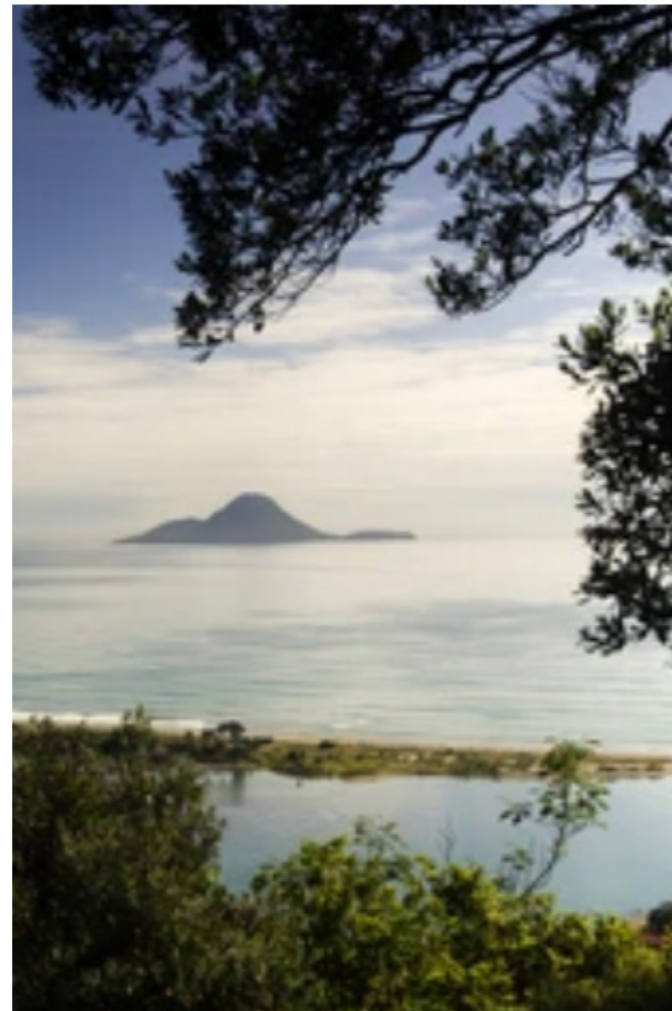
Kapa Haka regional competitions, pā wars, drive-in movies, sports days for all age groups, Maraenui fishing competitions, top town community event, Matariki community event, fun days at Magpie Park, little 3, big 3 (hunting and fishing competition), iwi events for all ages (Taunga waka)

Places:

The Children's Art House (music, dance, carving, exhibitions), wharf swings and slides, fun park, river floats with inner tubes

Programmes:

Digitech, sport at memorial park



What hasn't worked

Along with asking what programmes have been successful, we also asked stakeholders in Tauranga, Rotorua, Whakatāne and Ōpōtiki about what has been tried but not worked in the region, and what processes and issues could be improved.

Stakeholders talked about unavailable and one-off funding as barriers to delivering quality projects. Where no community engagement has happened and programmes are not community led, it is difficult to build relationships, so programmes stay as one-off, even though they might have been a success. Similar issues were mentioned with long-term planning, the follow through on ideas and the inclusion of a youth voice. Specific examples noted were the lack of facilities to store boats and waka ama, which meant a successful programme ended, and that existing facilities are not maintained and so are not used.



Tauranga

Places:

- Children in social housing: it is hard to offer much because no space is available for play
- Playgrounds that are not accessible for children with disabilities
- Community halls in Western Bay are run by separate communities and a volunteer group, but could be better used due to accessibility

Programmes and events:

- 'Golden sands' fun runs and walks, take a lot of volunteer time
- Well Child days: collaboration of under-5 agencies, costs involved were high, parents working

Other:

- Increased competitiveness in sport means many tamariki and rangatahi drop out of sport and even from all physical activity
- Lunchtime equipment for tamariki in schools gets stolen, or no equipment is available at all at low decile schools because it is too expensive to buy
- Athletes with disabilities, Funky Fridays, generally lack of inclusivity



Rotorua

Places:

- Tourist attractions, the local perception is to avoid these places because they will be too busy

Engagement and capacity:

- Planning happens but doesn't progress
- Past playgrounds built without involving the voice of young people
- Long-term planning (ideas don't progress)
- Budget cuts for open space delivery; the community wants more than we are able to deliver, which leads to disappointment and disengagement. Differing projects due to higher needs elsewhere
- Sustainable funding models, constantly chasing funding rather than delivering
- Great programmes stop when funds dry up. An expectation exists that communities have capacity to take on and deliver programmes. Sometimes it's okay if an organisation delivers
- Free parking was a national model. Poor execution strategy because the community didn't have capacity to secure the funding and make it sustainable. We need to take care not to assume that community organisations can manage expectations

- Lakefront development: stakeholders recognised the lack of appropriate and clear communication with residents about the scope of how they could spend available funds, because the community had reservations around 'why the ratepayer should fund this'

Other:

- Bikes getting stolen
- Bomb competition at blue lakes was not accessible
- Mud festival was too expensive

"Initiatives have fallen flat as adults have assumed they know what tamariki want. Getting the children's voice is important."
- Tauranga stakeholder

Whakatāne

Capacity:

- Very challenging to coordinate groups to make things happen
- Under-resourcing staff is a challenge
- Lifecycle of initiatives and infrastructure is not always considered in future funding and resourcing, so maintenance can fall back on council and ratepayers

Events:

- People celebrate Matariki in their own ways but they need to come together and it needs to be grass roots

Places:

- The Observatory is an under-used space and has limited opening times
- Things being dangerous and so they are removed, for example, high slides and the pirate ship. Too much blame happens for risk.

Ōpōtiki

Places:

- Schools don't keep gates open because of vandalism
- Youth centre didn't take off because there were too many rules to get in and to follow when there
- Community garden hasn't been sustainable
- Picnic area in town is where people spread ashes. It is not aligned with tikanga to eat there
- Location of natural spaces and town planning and connecting people to them
- Pump track built but not maintained
- Playground is good but doesn't have baby swings
- Waka ama, tried and didn't work: nowhere to store waka, need to tow trailer to site and rig up. Would be better to have facilities on site. Same problems with other boats

Programmes:

- "Fix the bike" project and "bike kitchen" were not sustainable because no one was available to move into role when main person left

Engagement:

- Community conversation about young people without much follow through
- People and organisations coming to our community and then leaving, which makes it difficult to build relationships



FUTURE OF PLAY

This section looks at the opportunities and next steps for play in the region.

Opportunities

Stakeholders, whānau, tamariki and rangatahi saw that, in the future, the Bay of Plenty might provide opportunities for play to be:

Freely available and accessible

Play facilities are freely available and accessible across the Bay of Plenty. These spaces are attractive, safe, weather-proof, maintained and developed with and integrated within the community through the clever design of new and existing spaces. They include wheelchair accessible surfaces and swings. The barrier of cost is removed for low-income families.

How might we:

- *make existing play spaces fun, attractive and accessible?*
- *integrate play into our community spaces?*
- *include the community when designing these spaces?*
- *make public spaces and facilities more accessible for low-income families?*
- *consider the full lifecycle of play spaces and infrastructure?*

Embedded in the urban fabric

Play is prioritised in city planning, strategy and policies, meaning that play flows beyond the boundaries of playgrounds and is integrated into everyday community spaces and events. Low and slow traffic, good urban design, as well as strong community relationships allow tamariki to safely roam in and between neighbourhoods. The whole whānau can 'play on the way' to destinations by using safe cycling and walking networks, and bus connections are good.

How might we:

- *prioritise play in our regional planning, strategy and policies?*
- *better consider play and active transport in urban design?*
- *change mindsets so all public spaces are considered as places for play?*

Valued and normalised

Play is seen and valued at all levels of the community (from whānau, schools and councils) as a fundamental right and developmental need for tamariki. People who champion play in their community and whānau are supported to do so through funding, connections, professional development, collaboration and support.

How might we:

- *better support our play champions and parents?*
- *work together across the region to normalise play?*
- *better promote Tu Manawa play funding available?*

Nature-based

Play in te taiao is celebrated and prioritised over manufactured play equipment, and nature play is brought back into parks. Natural taonga are protected and regenerated, to future proof nature-based play, and are easily accessible for everyone. Reserves are rewilded with natural features, such as trees to climb, and waterways and beaches are clean.

How might we:

- prioritise natural over manufactured play resources in our play spaces?
- protect and regenerate our natural resources for future generations?

Enhanced by technology

Technology enhances experiences with the environment by being used to pass on local stories of the maunga, moana, awa and whenua to the next generation. It is used to enable play virtually, and device-free zones are in place so tamariki can focus on nature and play. Technology is embraced and a healthy balance is found.

How might we:

- use technology to enhance the connection between whānau and whenua?
- use technology to enable play?
- incorporate te reo Māori?



For the whole whānau

Play spaces and equipment encourage and enable play for the whole whānau. More adults are involved in play, they provide a space for unstructured and informal play and model a love for play. Play is inclusive of people from all walks of life.

How might we:

- ensure play spaces and equipment are fully functional for the whole whānau?
- include tamariki and rangatahi when designing play spaces?
- support intergenerational play?
- ensure space for informal and unstructured play?
- make play and play spaces inclusive?

Balanced between safety and risk

Risk-taking and risky play are seen as normal parts of tamariki development. Parents and whānau are confident to teach their tamariki to assess risk for themselves and let them push boundaries. Parents aren't afraid of judgement from others when tamariki learn through making mistakes. Whānau feel comfortable to let their children roam freely, tamariki and rangatahi feel safe to do so and play spaces and their surroundings are safe.

How might we:

- change the whakaaro around risk and safety in the region?
- empower whānau to give their children greater freedom without fear of judgement?
- ensure play spaces and the way to them are safe?

Child-led

Tamariki and rangatahi are leaders of play in the region. They are actively involved in the design of new spaces and events and are empowered to bring fresh thinking and creativity to the design processes. Tamariki and rangatahi have time, permission, space and resources to play the way they want to. Diverse activities are provided that nurture imagination and creativity.

How might we:

- engage with young people to incorporate their creativity to bring play to life in our communities?
- give young people the time, space, permission and resources to play their own way?

"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."
- Ōpōtiki stakeholder

"Trees in park in Ōhope is better play areas than playground in Whakatāne." - Whakatāne stakeholder

"Educating kids on the dangers but encouraging freedom with understanding." - Tauranga stakeholder



Next steps

This report is the start of an exciting play movement at the local, regional and national level. Sport Bay of Plenty is committed to increasing opportunities for tamariki, rangatahi and whānau to access quality play experiences across the region's towns, rural and coastal play catchments.

At a local level, the next steps for this kaupapa will be to:

1. share back, test and build on what we have heard from the community and stakeholders
2. support councils to review or develop a play, active recreation and sport strategy
3. create new partnerships, initiatives and collaborations across the region
4. create a local play champions network to support each other to identify and grow play opportunities across the Bay of Plenty in the short, medium and long term
5. increase awareness of the importance of play within the wider community through accessible information and promotion
6. gain an understanding of the history, context and purpose of play for whānau, hapū and iwi within the Bay of Plenty
7. support groups and initiatives to access external funding for play resources.

If you would like more information about play in the Bay of Plenty, or to be involved in these next steps, please contact: Steph Reichardt, Regional Play Systems Lead, Sport Bay of Plenty. Email: Stephr@sportbop.co.nz

Sport New Zealand Ihi Aotearoa will continue to support regional leadership through the Regional Sports Trusts to learn more about what play looks like and how it has changed, what is special about it and what opportunities are available to create more play across the motu.

APPENDIX

How this report was created

Bay of Plenty region play 'Huddles'

Sport New Zealand Ihi Aotearoa, with help from the Innovation Unit, supported regional sports trusts in Christchurch, Southland, Whanganui and Te Tairāwhiti to explore play in their regions. Following the success of this initiative, Sport Bay of Plenty indicated it was ready to delve deeper into exploring the past, present and future of play in the region.

With support from Sport New Zealand, four play Huddles were delivered in Tauranga, Rotorua, Whakatāne and Ōpōtiki in November 2021. Each huddle involved stakeholders from local council, the education, health and community sectors. Sport Bay of Plenty had help from Healthy Families East Cape to facilitate an Ōpōtiki Huddle. Engagement with sector stakeholders, whānau and tamariki across the Bay of Plenty helped to form the basis for understanding lived experiences and perceptions of play.



Engagement with tamariki and whānau

Sport Bay of Plenty engaged with whānau and tamariki across the region to hear about their experiences and hopes for play. This included a 'Power of Play' survey that was promoted through social media and on email footers for all emails sent by Sport Bay of Plenty staff throughout September 2021. Sport Bay of Plenty engaged with tamariki at a school holiday programme in Welcome Bay, Tauranga, asking them to draw their favourite way to play and encouraging them to answer a few questions about what enabled or stopped them from playing. Healthy Families East Cape engaged with tamariki at a holiday programme and with local whānau at two community events, one at a local marae in Ōpōtiki. This gave us information on parents' perceptions of play and images to show how young people aged 5 to 12 like to play currently.

Analysis

Sport New Zealand, with support from Sport Bay of Plenty and Healthy Families East Cape spent time going through the data to explore common themes, tensions and opportunities, to consolidate the knowledge gained from the workshops, surveys and existing research, to form this report. This report reflects play in the past and the present, and aims to shape the hopes for the future of play in the Bay of Plenty.

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Image credit: Mike Dawson | Sport BOP



Te Reo Māori glossary

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Aotearoa | New Zealand |
| Awa | River |
| Hapori | Section of a kinship group, family, society, community |
| Hapū | Subtribe |
| Iwi | Tribe |
| Kai | Food |
| Kaiako | Teacher |
| Kaitiaki | Guardian |
| Kaupapa | Purpose or initiative |
| Mahi | Work or chores |
| Maunga | Mountain |
| Moana | Sea |
| Mokopuna | Grandchild or grandchildren |
| Motu | Country |
| Ngahere | Forest |
| Pā | Fortified village |
| Panga | Riddle, guessing game, puzzle |
| Rangatahi | Young people |
| Tākaro | Play |
| Tamaiti | Child |
| Tamariki | Children |
| Taonga | Treasure |
| Te Ao Māori | The Māori world |
| Te Arawa | People descended from this canoe from Hawaiki who form a group of tribes in the Rotorua-Maketū area |
| Te reo Māori | The Māori language |
| Te taiao | The environment |
| Tikanga | Protocol |
| Whakaaro | Thinking |
| Whānau | Family or families |
| Whanaungatanga | Relationship through shared experiences and working together, which provides people with a sense of belonging |
| Whenua | Land |

