UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY
CHILD WELL-BEING RESEARCH INSTITUTE
TE KĀHUI PĀ HARAKEKE

Nurturing research excellence to support children's holistic well-being.

YEAR IN REVIEW — MARCH 2024 – MARCH 2025

Whiriwhiria, kia ora ai te tamaiti

Braiding knowledge so the child will flourish.

The kōwhaiwhai that is used as a background throughout this Year in Review is the Haehae Moana (or braided river). This is significant for the University of Canterbury as it symbolises the importance of our local waterways and braided rivers across Canterbury for iwi Ngāi Tahu. The Haehae Moana design is based on the concept that healthy waterways are the indicator of excellence and well-being. This report from Te Kāhui Pā Harakehe, the Child Well-being Research Institute, illustrates the excellence achieved through braiding knowledge streams in our research activities to support our tamariki and rangatahi to thrive and succeed.

TE KĀHUI PĀ HARAKEKE
CHILD WELL-BEING RESEARCH INSTITUTE

OUR VISION AND MISSION

Mō ngā uri
Leading real-world research that transforms the waiora (well-being) of mokopuna

CWRI leads at the interface of research and real-world change for children and young people (mokopuna). Our specialty is using our expertise to innovate new and strengthen existing solutions for mokopuna well-being. We partner with government, community and Iwi Māori to effect transformation across policy, practice and paradigms that lift waiora for our mokopuna. We leverage our academic expertise to evidence what works, creating a learning and innovation loop. We combine world class inter-disciplinary researchers with the highest standards of project execution to create measurable and meaningful impact, underpinned by a resolutely strengths-based philosophy.

Global impact and global footprint for solving some of the most pressing challenges affecting children and young people while unlocking the potential of all mokopuna we work with.

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DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Our Institute is focused on advancing excellence in multidisciplinary research to enhance the learning success and healthy well-being of children and young people.

Professor Gail Gillon

We nurture research excellence to support children's holistic well-being. We demonstrate this by working collaboratively and in culturally responsive ways across a wide range of disciplines that are central to the well-being of tamariki and their whanau. We develop evidence-based guidance and insights for parents, government, community groups, iwi, educators, health practitioners and the research community.

We publish our work in international scientific journals and showcase the difference our collective efforts are making in uplifting the wellbeing of children in Aotearoa New Zealand. Our Year in Review 2024 highlights our recent research activities.

Education

By the end of 2024, over 7000 teachers and literacy specialists throughout New Zealand were successfully implementing our CWRI-developed Better Start Literacy Approach (BSLA) . This is an example of a structured literacy teaching approach based on the science of reading, developed specifically for our New Zealand education context. In 2025 all primary school teachers in state-funded schools will be required to support children's oral language, reading and writing development. We are very proud of the success of our BSLA which now involves over 100,000 children. Our research data gathered provides clear evidence that this teaching approach is accelerating the early literacy skills of young children in ways that is significantly advancing more equitable education outcomes.

Strong oral language skills are critical to children's literacy learning and their social and emotional development. The CWRI are running the New Zealand trial of an Oxford University-developed intervention to improve children's oral language and provide educators with the skills and resources to support this.

In this look at 2024 highlights, we also share the results of a project to create, with hapu, storybooks for tamariki based on their ancestral myths and legends. Another story shared in our review discusses details of a programme developed 20 years ago to help educators understand Pasifika children's culture to enhance their teaching.

Well-being

Digital devices are commonplace in homes across Aotearoa. Our researchers studied the prevalence of online harm experienced by children at age eight and identified practical guidance on minimising harm. Funded by a CWRI Small Grant, the research team will analyse television programmes designed for preschoolers and provide rankings for their quality or potentially harmful content.

A programme developed within the CWRI to support the government investment in child well-being friendly initiatives has been taken onboard internationally. We share details of this policy-changing research programme.

The issue of parental burnout and its impact on family dynamics is being explored in another CWRI research project, with a particular focus on fathers who have, to date, been under surveyed in this area.

Global organisations such as the United Nations have acknowledged the need for young people to be involved in decision making and leadership relating to climate change. Climate anxiety is also being identified in youth internationally and several CWRI-funded projects are developing groundbreaking leadership models and exploring, with young people, positive ways to alleviate this anxiety through engagement and action.

Health

CWRI Deputy Director Professor Laurie McLay plays a central part of co-led research and initiatives to improve the health and well-being of Autistic people. We profile the establishment of a national research centre focused on autism and detail the findings of a study to understand and identify ways to better meet the health service needs of Autistic youth.

The CWRI plays a pivotal role in the Research for Children Aotearoa collaboration that involves partnering with other organisations, such as University of Otago health experts, to collectively improve health, well-being and educational outcomes. In a collaborative project, CWRI early childhood experts and UC AI scientists are working with paediatricians to develop a virtual baby that can be used to train medical professionals to assess infants.

Over several years, CWRI researchers have led research probing why vascular disease in Aotearoa New Zealand disproportionately affects indigenous communities. Researchers from Pūtahi Manawa | Healthy Hearts for Aotearoa New Zealand Centre of Research Excellence (CoRE) have identified ways to create better heart health for future generations.

Manaaki

To show manaaki is to respect and take care of people and support them to reach their potential. Supporting communities, emerging researchers, and – importantly – children and young people is a key aspect of CWRI's activity.

Two CWRI-funded PhD students completed their studies in 2024. We profile their work which focuses on improving the teaching of writing to young children and also on support mechanisms for Pacific families.

In its second year, the CWRI's Mokopuna Ora literacy competition gives young people the opportunity to express their voice on a range of topical issues and showcases and champions literacy.

The CWRI annually awards Small Grants to enable researchers to study important topics in exploratory research or to fund the continuation of large, key child-related projects. We share the many and varied projects funded in 2024, which could make a positive impact on a wide range of people; from the whānau of pre-term babies to young people transitioning from home to the workplace or tertiary study.

PROFESSOR GAIL GILLON (NGĀI TAHU)
Founding Director, University of Canterbury Child Well-being Research Institute *https://www.canterbury.ac.nz/childwellbeing/*

Deputy Director, Better Start National Science Challenge E Tipu E Rea *https://www.abetterstart.nz/*

Professor Angus Hikairo Macfarlane

A man devoted to advancing the well-being of tamariki and their whānau

We remember and pay tribute to Professor Angus Hikairo Macfarlane CNZM (Ngāti Whakaue, Ngāti Rangiwēwehi) who sadly passed away in his home in Hamilton on 27 November 2024. He was surround by his whānau as he peacefully left this world. His tangihanga at his marae in in Rotorua a few days later was an incredible celebration of his life and all that he gave us.

Professor Macfarlane was the co-founder of the CWRI and world-renowned scholar in the field of Māori education, research and psychology. He was devoted to improving the well-being of tamariki and their whānau.

Professor Macfarlane was an academic rarity – winning all three of the UC's highest honours; the Research Medal, the Teaching Medal, and the Innovation Medal. His dedication to excellence was recognised by a wide range of organisations including the Royal Society of New Zealand, Te Aparangi, who appointed him as a Fellow for his distinction in sustaining Indigenous and mātauranga Māori research.

Among his many achievements, Professor Macfarlane founded the CWRI with Professor Gail Gillon.

Professor Gillon says her dear friend and colleague was tireless in ensuring his mahi had meaning.

"At the heart of Professor Macfarlane's research endeavours was his pursuit of the advancement of well-being for Māori tamariki and their whānau. He tirelessly dedicated has academic life to furthering our understanding of influences of success and well-being for young Māori. In particular, he is remembered nationally and internationally in education and psychology for his pioneering work in culturally responsive educational practices."

Professor Macfarlane's legacy is present today in classrooms across Aotearoa, from early childhood to tertiary education.

He and colleagues from the Te Kāhui-a-Te-Rū-Rangahau team of Māori researchers produced a series of practical guides for teachers, weaving Māori values and cultural practices into learning to benefit Māori and non-Māori students.

The ground-breaking Hikairo Schema series won the prestigious University of Canterbury 2022 Innovation Medal, and the primary school version of the book series was the highest-selling publication for the New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

In the research world, Professor Macfarlane's impact is wide reaching.

He led the development of an approach called He Awa Whiria (the Braided Rivers) that enables the braiding of complex and dynamic knowledge systems, such as academic science and mātauranga Māori.

He Awa Whiria has been used by a range of government departments, national science endeavours such as the Better Start National Science Challenge and higher learning institutions since its inception in 2011. It is also used internationally to improve research relating to Indigenous peoples.

Professor Macfarlane was a leader and mentor of the highest order for Māori academics. Through his establishment of the UC's Te Rū Rangahau as a centre of Māori research and co-leadership of the CWRI, Professor MacFarlane enriched the lives and careers of many within our academic communities.

We will be forever grateful for Professor Macfarlane's immense contributions to the success of our Child Well-being Research Institute. We think of him every day and miss him deeply.

Kia hiwa rā, kia hiwa rā!

Ka tanuku, ka tanuku

Ka tanuku ngā tihi o Ngongotahā me Tiheia.

Hūkerikeri ana te Utuhina me te Awahou.

Pōkarekare ana ngā wai o Te Rotorua nui a Kahumatamomoe e.

Kua riro atu tēnei uri o Ngāti Whakaue, o Ngāti Rangiwewehi, tēnei pononga o Ngā Pūmanawa e Waru o Te Arawa ki te pō.

E kapo ki te whetū, e kapo ki te marama, e kapo ki te ata.

Taka ana te pou whakawhirinaki, mū ana te korokoro tūī, rū ana te whenua o Rangahau, pukepuke ana ngā Awa Whiria, auē taukiri e.

Haere atu ki ō mātua tīpuna, kaungia ō moana, pikitia ō māunga, tāwhaitia atu ngā parae, ā, waiho rā mā ngā ao kapua me ngā huruhuru o ngā manu rangatira o Te Wao Tapu nui ā Tāne e kawe haere tō rongo ki te motu, otirā ki te ao whānui.

Nō reira, e te Ahorangi Angus Hikairo Macfarlane, haere, haere, haere.

Takoto tiraha, takoto okioki, moe mai rā.

Professor Angus Hikairo Macfarlane

A landmark year for literacy and the Better Start Literacy Approach

In 2024 the government mandated the teaching of structured literacy in all state schools from the start of 2025.

The Better Start Literacy Approach (BSLA) has been used by schools nationwide for the past four years and in 2024 achieved the milestone of more than 100,000 children across Aotearoa having engaged with BSLA.

Both developments are significant for the next generation and the country.

More than 10 years ago a team from the CWRI began developing a structured literacy programme. Starting from a small pilot study in Christchurch schools it has evolved over the years into a nationwide initiative for literacy instruction in Year 0 to Year 3/4 classrooms.

Co-founder of the BSLA, Professor Gail Gillon says because studying the approach's impact has been an integral part of the mahi, there is evidence of its success for all learners.

"We have evidence that all learners benefit from BSLA. Their literacy levels all rise significantly, and this includes the same rate of success for Māori, Pasifika and those for whom English is not their first language.

"BSLA was developed for learners and educators in Aotearoa. We have a suite of tools that back this evidence-based approach, including readers featuring te reo, an assessment system that uses AI to give teachers individualised feedback on children's progress, and University-approved micro credentials."

Professor Gillon says the introduction of structured literacy – an approach based on The Science of Reading – in all New Zealand schools can only be a good thing for the future of the country.

"Learning to read and communicate well are fundamental skills for a child's educational success."

Professor Gillon says in 2024 the BSLA team hosted its largest ever workshop for educators from around the country. BSLA trains teachers, provides resources for principals, and has facilitators – many former teachers or speech and language experts – who support the implementation of BSLA in schools.

"We're really excited about the gains that children are going to make with structured literacy in all schools and to continuing the work BSLA has done in accelerating the literacy skills of early learners."

Professor Gillon says the BSLA team have developed the approach for learners up to Year 8 and will be rolling this out to schools in 2025.

"It's really important that the gains made by children with structured literacy in their early years are supported and built on, ensuring their success into the future."

BSLA BY THE NUMBERS

100,000 students across Aotearoa New Zealand have engaged with the BSLA programme.

More than **1,000** schools have been involved in BSLA (which is more than half of all primary schools).

We have trained over **7,000 educators** (over 6,000 teachers and 1,000 literacy specialists) – an additional almost 1,000 educators commenced training in February 2025.

67 books with identifiably New Zealand setting and language published.

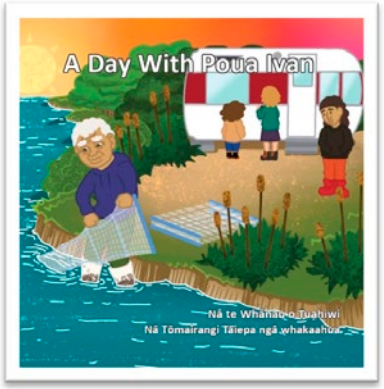
328 lesson plans, plus **80 intensive plans** for those needing more input, are supporting teachers to implement teaching.

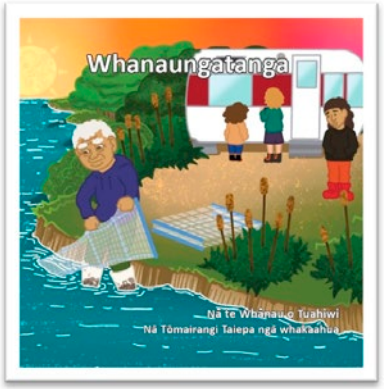
78,196kgs of world class resources distributed to BSLA schools.

Every dollar invested in BSLA delivers $38.20 of measurable good. With recent further investment this could be as high as $60 for every dollar invested.

Creating a forever taonga

Sharing ancestral stories is an ancient tradition in Māori culture, used throughout generations to transfer knowledge, teach values and promote communication. In partnership with Ngāi Tūāhuriri whānau, community and Te Kura o Tuahiwi, researchers from the CWRI developed five story books and assessed their impact on students' literacy and language skills in both English and Te Reo Māori.





Pūrākau is a Māori term for traditional oral narratives, myths, and legends that are passed down through generations.

In a three-year project, researchers from the CWRI joined with the Ngāi Tūāhuriri community as they shared and recorded their unique stories, then jointly developed them into five storybooks, in te reo Māori and bilingual versions.

The story books were curated from 28 different contributors across four generations at wānanga and captured the pūrākau of the hapū as a resource to support children's oral language development and their connection to Māori culture, stories and language.

Jennifer Smith (Ngāti Whātua, Te Roroa, Ngāpuhi), was one of the CWRI project leaders.

"Engaging with shared stories draws heavily on oral language and listening comprehension, important skills for children to develop as literacy learners."

"Given their cultural importance and potential to meaningfully engage and enhance learning for ākonga, a scant amount of research is focused on the use and usefulness of pūrākau for early literacy development," she says.

At Te Kura o Tuahiwi, all students learn te reo Māori and the school provides a range of immersion levels. Many of the students are Māori and whakapapa to the Ngāi Tūāhuriri hapū.

Te Kura o Tuahiwi uses the Better Start Literacy Approach (BSLA) and its world-leading assessment programme. Pūrākau storybooks were added to teaching so their impact on early learners could be assessed.

The research team captured qualitative and quantitative data on the development and usefulness of the pūrākau as an early literacy instruction resource.

Ākonga were tested before structured literacy teaching with the pūrākau and after ten weeks of the evidence-based teaching.

Preliminary results demonstrate a statistically significant growth in children's vocabulary over the 10 weeks of teaching. This impact was equally great for children in the bilingual and immersion classes.

Smith says using the place-based whānau-connected pūrākau also fostered a more profound sense of belonging and strengthened personal identity for Māori and Pākehā learners alike.

"Ngā Pūrākau o Tuahiwi are a 'forever' taonga that sits within the hapū and local marae have mana and control over further distribution. Although the books are used at the local school for integration into early years reading, the 'hua' or impact can be seen, heard and felt much wider. This includes increased use of te reo Māori, and an opportunity for future generations to learn from the lessons and innovation of their tūpuna."

Boosting crucial oral language skills

More children than ever are starting school with poor language skills, according to teachers nationwide involved in an Education Review Office report published in 2024.

Strong oral language skills are critical to children's literacy learning as well as their social and emotional development.

A collaboration between the CWRI and Oxford University aims to trial the success of an intervention to boost oral language skills in children in Aotearoa New Zealand and support teachers with a package of lesson plans and teaching resources.

The NELI-NZ study is a randomised control trial of the 20-week Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) initiative developed by Oxford University to build the vocabulary and oral narrative skills of children needing support with language and communication skills. The programme is delivered by specially trained teaching assistants working with children individually and in small groups.

NELI-NZ researcher Dr Megan Gath says the research trial will be the first in Aotearoa New Zealand to trial an adapted version of the NELI intervention, specifically designed for boosting oral language skills in New Zealand children.

Oxford University studies have shown the success of NELI - with one finding children receiving the NELI programme made the equivalent of three additional months' progress in language skills, on average, compared to children who did not receive NELI. Children also made an additional two months' progress in early word reading, and positive effects have been found up to two years following completion of the programme.

The NELI-NZ team have recruited 60 schools across the country to take part. The six children in each class with the poorest language skills became part of the trial – with three getting the NELI intervention and three getting standard teaching.

Over the course of the year, spanning mid-2024 to 2025, the children will be assessed and the effectiveness of the NELI approach measured.

Professor Gail Gillon, CWRI director and developer of the Better Start Literacy Approach (BSLA), says if the trial finds NELI is successful in a New Zealand context, it could provide another evidence-based tool for teachers to improve the literacy success of all children.

The trial is being run in schools using BSLA in their Years 0/1 classes and complements the structured literacy approach's existing suite of science-backed teaching supports; this one focused on children who require extra support with vocabulary and expressive and receptive oral language.

"We have a student who is part of the NELI intervention. He is New Zealand born with English as a second language. He's been with our school all year and during the first two terms he did not speak to anyone, and we were unable to gather any information on his verbal ability. After doing the NELI program, he talks all the time! He has conversations with the teacher, unfamiliar adults and his peers. He is even taking part in the production in a couple of weeks. We are all so amazed and grateful."

Feedback from teacher at school involved in NELI trial.

Literacy Symposium gathers latest knowledge

Every year the CWRI hosts a national literacy symposium that brings together researchers, school leaders, speech-language therapists, teachers and literacy specialists to showcase leading research in children's literacy.

This year the symposium featured distinguished Aotearoa education academic Emeritus Russell Bishop (University of Waikato-Tainui, Ngāti Pukeko) who shared his view that BSLA is a taonga that needs to be treasured within schools to ensure its ongoing success and impact for the next generation.

International literacy expert Associate Professor Marleen Westerveld also delivered a keynote talk on the importance of oral language skills in literacy learning and later success. She shared current research showing the enduring positive educational success of students with good early oral language skills.

CWRI researchers shared the latest knowledge on effective interventions for children with dyslexia, screen use and learning, advancing literacy in English language learners and vocabulary development.

Emeritus Professor Russell Bishop (Waikato University) on BSLA:

"There are fabulous, fabulous results coming through. When a school picks up the koha of the BSLA they are picking up all the work that has gone with it. There is an obligation to acknowledge that work and make sure schools pick it up in a way it will be respected and continue to produce outstanding results for our tamariki."

Associate Professor Marleen Westerveld of Griffith University, Auckland on the importance of oral language skills and how BSLA does this.

"Children's skills with oral narratives, or the ability to retell or generate fictional stories, at an early age is strongly linked to their reading and communication ability between 3 to 10 years later. Considering the importance of building good skills in oral language early on, BSLA has a separate strand that really looks at building oral narrative skills in children and provides lesson plans."

From left to right: Dr Jude Bautista, Professor Brigid McNeill, Dr Megan Gath, Professor John Everatt, Professor Russell Bishop, Professor Gail Gillon, Distinguished Emeritus Professor Bill Tunmer, Associate Professor Marleen Westervelt, Emeritus Professor James Chapman, Dr Amy Scott and Dr Lisa Furlong.

Village experience helps teachers connect with Pacific students

Growing up in the coastal village of Vaiafai Iva on the island of Savai'i in Sāmoa, Tufulasi Taleni was taught the dual importance of education and culture by his parents.

His mother walked him to school every day carrying a fala (mat) for him to sit on and shells to help him learn to count. His father taught him to catch i'a (fish) and provided lessons on Sāmoan cultural values such as hard work, respect and service to his family and village.

He studied teaching in Sāmoa and eventually moved to New Zealand where he became a researcher and leader at the University of Canterbury.

In 2003, Dr Taleni led a group of educators from Aotearoa New Zealand to Sāmoa on the first Malaga (trip), as part of the Pacific Education Initiative. The initiative aimed to give teachers the opportunity to experience life in a Sāmoan village and become more culturally aware and responsive to their Pacific students' needs and aspirations.

In the past two decades more than 300 educators such as teachers, principals, school advisers, resource teachers of learning and behaviour (RTLB) and student teachers have taken part.

The visitors spend a week in Vaiafai Iva and take part in village events such as going to church, cultural ceremonies and celebrations, giving them a unique understanding of Pacific students' lives.

Dr Taleni and colleagues from UC's Faculty of Education are now reviewing how the initiative has benefited educators involved, their students, and the host village in Sāmoa, in a new research project called Tautai Pasifika.

"We need to understand the culture and viewpoint of Pasifika learners to improve their outcomes. For Pacific students, research demonstrates that schools need to make them and their educational success a priority. Acknowledgement and valuing of Pacific cultural identities, and connection with families and communities, is crucial.

He hopes the Sāmoa Malaga initiative has played a small part in this and findings can inform future initiatives to improve educational achievement for Pasifika students through cultural understanding.

"Pacific parents, families and communities continue to be part of the art of "lei-making" and "fala (mat) weaving" because they want their children to be a critical part of the fabric of society. They want their children to be connected to an education system that genuinely cares about their educational needs and aspirations, that values their identities, languages and cultures, that guarantees their sense of belonging. They want to see a discourse that recognises what they know of their children, namely that they are not children at 'risk' but competent learners and learners of promise."


WORLD

Healthy hearts

In Western Societies cardiovascular diseases kills one in three people. In Aotearoa New Zealand these diseases disproportionately affect indigenous communities.

Findings from a new pilot study involving CWRI's Dr Susannah Smith have identified ways to create better heart health for future generations.

The one-year pilot study is part of the Pūtahi Manawa | Healthy Hearts for Aotearoa New Zealand Centre of Research Excellence (CoRE). The research team included dieticians, clinicians and psychologists, and sought the opinions of community groups through wānanga, with a particular focus on perspectives of Māori, Pacific People and women.

Dr Smith says the future-focused study interrogated factors related to heart health and found being able to connect with the environment and feel a sense of belonging to a community are essential components that need to be factored into any solutions for creating future heart health.

The first phase involved defining the key aspects of heart health. This included nutrition, medication, the environment and built environment, education and research.

Dr Smith says initial findings showed the dominant view of good heart health now and in the future involved passing on current best practice such as healthy lifestyles, with a focus on more medicalised solutions.

However indigenous voices focused on collective and environmental factors when suggesting how to create better intergenerational heart health. These were things such as ensuring energy, water and natural resources for future generations. They also identified crucial concepts such as kaitiakitanga or the Māori worldview that humans are part of nature and are responsible for the environment.

Dr Smith says there is a current unconscious consumption of health cultures and behaviour, such as the need for individuals to monitor their diet and exercise or take medication for heart health. Heart health is hugely impacted by the built environment which encourages sedentary behaviour and easy access to things such as food.

She says feedback during wānanga emphasised the need for easy access for all to places within and beyond the built environment.

The research team identified an ideal scenario for the heart health of future generations is for people to feel connected to the land and have a sense of belonging with a community of their interest, rather than feeling isolated or individually responsible for their heart health.

Dr Smith says to reach this requires a focus across institutions and governance and an intergenerational approach to heart health is essential for new research and policies.

"Connection - to the land, people, culture and resources – is critical to intergenerational heart health. The environmental connection to heart health is a superpower that can be used to empower people."

Plans to progress the study include creating case studies of bicultural approaches that disrupt the built heart health environment in both rural and urban settings and producing tools for use by different sectors such as government, community and public health agencies.

Digital media impact in early childhood

Digital devices are present in almost every New Zealand home. But despite their prevalence, little is known about the impact using devices has on the smallest members of a household.

New CWRI research has identified the prevalence of online harm before age eight, factors that place children at extra risk, and ways to help keep them from harm.

Approximately a quarter of New Zealand children experience online harm by age eight. This means encountering content or people that cause upset or distress, such as adult content, cyberbullying or interactions with strangers.

There was a clear connection between being harmed online in early childhood and lower self-worth and depressive symptoms – highlighting the importance of finding ways to prevent early negative online experiences.

Dr Megan Gath led the ground-breaking Canterbury Medical Research Foundation funded study.

"Previous research examining online risks has largely focused on school-age children and adolescents. We wanted to understand the impact exposure to the online environment has on younger children and find practical solutions or guidance for parents."

She and her colleagues used data from the Growing Up in New Zealand longitudinal study to explore the device use of almost 5000 children at 4.5 and 8-years-old.

They found a quarter of 8-year-olds reported experiencing at least one type of online harm. More than 62% said they had not experienced online harm with the remainder saying they 'didn't know'.

The most common type of experience that worried or upset children was encountering sites, games or images meant for grownups.

Dr Gath says children with behavioural problems were more likely to experience harm and the more personal devices a child had, the greater their risk.

"Every additional personal device a child has, increased their risk of online harm by more than 20%. The odds of children experiencing harm are significantly increased when children have personal desktop computers or laptops, televisions, gaming consoles and tablets, with gaming consoles being the device where children were most exposed to harm."

Dr Gath says the study looked at the impact of time spent on devices but found this did not raise the risk of harm.

"The connection in our study between online harm and depressive symptoms and low self-worth really highlights the critical importance of considering online harm as a contributing factor to child and youth well-being and mental health in our media-saturated world."

Dr Gath says to minimise the risk of online harm, parents and caregivers could limit the number of personal devices a child has in early and middle childhood.

This research has been published in Frontiers in Developmental Psychology.

Television and preschoolers' development

Television is the most common type of media consumed by young children. In a new CWRI Small Grant funded study, researchers will analyse popular television shows for preschoolers for inclusion of aggressive or prosocial themes, educational content, emotional and mental content, and pacing. Using data from the Growing Up in New Zealand longitudinal study, they will then determine the connection over time between television programme features viewed by preschoolers and their social, emotional and behavioural functioning at ages 5 to 12.

The study is led by Drs Megan Gath and Cara Swit and will produce a better understanding of how families can safeguard their children's development through quality screen content. The researchers will also provide evidence-based guidelines for parents, health and education providers, and television content creators, including a ranking of popular television series for preschoolers.

Autistic youth's health needs

More hospitalisations, more specialist appointments and more prescriptions for mental and physical health conditions.

These are some of the ways Autistic youth's use of the health system differs from their non-Autistic peers, according to findings from a study of more than 1.5 million young New Zealanders co-led by CWRI's Professor Laurie McLay in partnership with Dr Nick Bowden from the University of Otago.

Professor McLay says international research indicates many Autistic youth have complex health needs and frequent use of services. However, this study was the first to detail their patterns of physical and mental health service use to provide guidance on how their needs could be better met.

An estimated one in 40 children in Aotearoa New Zealand are Autistic, and countless more are on an ever-increasing waitlist for diagnosis.

"Autistic youth in New Zealand use healthcare services more frequently than their non-Autistic peers, especially for mental health support and specialist appointments. Our study highlights significant demand for appropriate healthcare for Autistic youth and the need to further explore specific health conditions driving service use, demographic differences, and barriers to accessing support and wider support needs. It can also inform development of services and training for healthcare professionals to upskill them in specific community needs."

Nothing about us without us – The Autism Research Centre

Nothing about us without us.

This principle from the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is central to all aspects of the research being undertaken within the Autism Research Centre (ARC).

Established in 2024, the ARC is Aotearoa New Zealand's first centre dedicated to autism research, hosted by the University of Canterbury, with networks nationally and internationally.

Led by UC's Professor Laurie McLay and Associate Professor Anne-Marie Kennedy, all ARC activities are done in collaboration with Autistic Partnership Aotearoa, which includes academics, students and autism community members.

The quotes below, from Autistic people involved in the Centre's mahi, highlight the essence of this approach:

"We have a right to be involved in research about us."

"It is important to involve Autistic people in research to challenge biases and stereotypes within and about Autistic culture."

"Autistic people can have insight into results … it can be very difficult if you are not autistic to understand what results might mean for an Autistic themselves."

"It's about reciprocity and respect … recognising that 'ownership' and the 'home' of autism research should not be confined to the academic space."

Professor McLay says the centre was set up to enhance the health and well-being of Autistic people and their support networks through collaborative, community-engaged, world-leading research.

Current research by the centre includes creating a digital education programme for health professionals to improve experiences among takiwātanga rangatahi (Autistic youth), evaluating a tool to assist early childhood educators to identify children showing early signs of autism, and evaluating health and well-being outcomes for Autistic children and their caregivers.

The team behind the centre have already developed a suite of digital supports for Autistic children and their caregivers, including mental health and sleep support.

From start to finish this work has been driven by the need of the autistic community – including the limited access to timely supports for those diagnosed and awaiting diagnosis – and as each part of the research has evolved, we share what's happening with those it is designed to support.

Virtual reality baby

A virtual reality baby prototype created to help early childhood education students to learn complex pedagogical relationship skills is being developed for bicultural application in both educational and medical contexts with infants.

A team comprising UC Early Childhood Education and virtual reality experts have spent the past few years developing a virtual reality (VR) baby that gives student teachers opportunities to gain the critical relationship skills they need to work with infants.

The initiative was the brainchild of Professor Jayne White of the Faculty of Education. She identified difficulties in providing Early Childhood Education students opportunities to learn the complex relational and sensing skills needed to establish effective relationships with 'real' infants and uphold the babies' mana and well-being.

Working with Professor White, UC Associate Professor Heide Lukosch and her team at HIT Lab NZ designed a VR infant prototype and virtual environment to simulate an experience with a real-life infant.

With funding from the CWRI, the team led the first trial of a VR prototype which identified its promise as a teaching tool.

Professor White says armed with insights from the trial and funding from the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, the trans-disciplinary group is now creating specialised training environments through VR.

"We'll identify key elements needed to support relational skills for professionals working with infants in bicultural contexts and across the disciplines of health as well as education."

Dr Ngaroma Williams of UC's Faculty of Education has joined the team to advise on the cultural nuances of engagement with infants for well-being and learning, in particular with regard to the kaupapa Māori principle of whanaungatanga and associated tikanga practices that will infuse the design and project engagements.

"We aim to create a virtual, immersive and culturally nuanced learning environment that enables the user to really feel 'present' with the infant," says Professor White.

A pair of gloves incorporating haptic technology (which creates a sense of touch through forces such as vibrations and motions) enables users to feel the 'infant', whether it be to change, soothe, feed, entertain or, in the case of medical users, assess them.

The UC team are working with paediatrician Professor Tony Walls and Dr Niki Newman of the University of Otago on the virtual baby's potential for training nurses, doctors and other health professionals to assess infants.

"Relationship skills are much needed in these contexts – assessing infant heath is an intuiting encounter. With educational colleagues, we will develop a nuanced script and grammar for use in the paediatric training environment, with opportunities to identify overlaps and differences between professions in the kinds of relational skills needed," Professor White says.

"The potential is overwhelming. We're so excited to be able to progress this transdisciplinary mahi. Being able to interact with a virtual baby who is specifically designed with a focus on whanaungatanga in bicultural contexts will allow users – whether they be students learning to be professionals, professionals who seek to enhance their skills and knowledge, or first time parents - to practice, test and trial a series of strategies for intuiting and responding, to make mistakes but, importantly, learn from them in a safe environment that will ultimately benefit real infants across Aotearoa."

He Ara Wairoa lifting well-being for all

A CWRI-led initiative to identify and act on factors that enhance New Zealanders' well-being is being used by Treasury in all new investments.

In 2021 Treasury commissioned the CWRI to lead development of an indigenous and uniquely Aotearoa response to understanding what well-being means and how to put it at the centre of government spending and policy. It is named He Ara Wairoa, which means pathways to well-being.

Associate Professor Sacha McMeeking, along with many of the country's leading Māori academics and luminaries, developed He Ara Wairoa in close collaboration with Treasury so it could become a transformative tool.

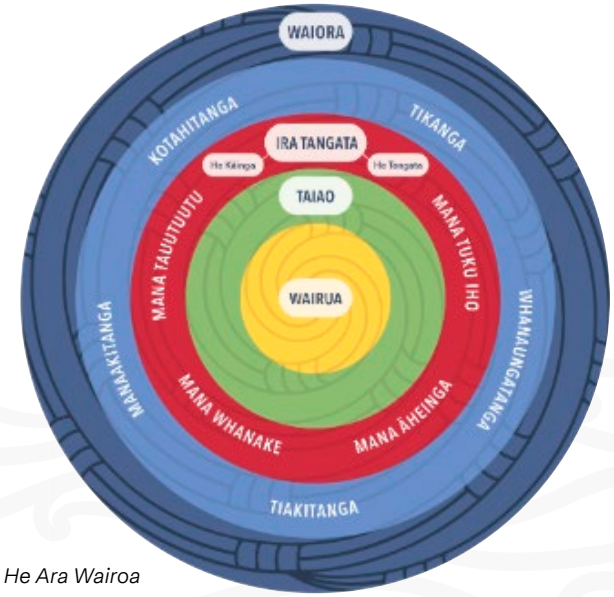
In the past year He Ara Wairoa has been applied to all new government spending and the team behind it have recently developed a suite of resources to make it even easier to use.

"He Ara Wairoa looks at the deeper components of well-being; things we need to feel a sense of achievement and for a life we value. It is now at the centre of government so has the potential to deeply impact government policy and action and raise living standards for all New Zealanders in a way that is meaningful for them.

"We are really excited to have launched a whole suite of policy making tools that we hope will help policy analysts and makers to engage with root causes that impact on well-being."

Associate Professor McMeeking gives the example of poverty to explain the different levels related to well-being that are essential to address for policy to make an impact.

"Policy interventions usually focus on what is visible such as how much income is available within a household. That's important. Some policy interventions might take a step upstream to look at behavioural influences such as the capability of the household to budget or financial literacy levels. Others might look at the nature of the labour market. But few engage with intrinsic elements such as a household's lived realities and levels of hope and aspiration. What we are trying to do with He Ara Wairoa is capture head, hand and heart. The ultimate purpose is to shift the dial on the complex, ingrained and pressing issues that we are all facing in this turbulent time and behave differently to achieve the different and better outcomes our future generations deserve."



He Ara Wairoa

Understanding parental burnout

Parental burnout is a significant issue affecting parents worldwide, with serious consequences for them and their families. Despite its severity, this common phenomenon remains under-studied.

With support from a CWRI Small Grant, Dr Cara Swit is focusing attention on parental burnout amongst fathers in Aotearoa New Zealand.

This is part of a wider investigation by the International Investigation of Parental Burnout consortium, which Dr Swit is part of, to understand burnout, how it presents in different countries and cultures, and ways to mitigate its impact for the benefit of families.

The global project – and Dr Swit's Aotearoa-focused part of it – explores the physical, emotional and cognitive indicators of parental burnout, particularly the differences between mothers, fathers and gender-diverse parents.

To ensure fathers experiences are well represented as part of the research, Dr Swit is using the CWRI Small Grant to focus on recruiting more fathers to the study to understand their unique stressors or protective factors and enhance understanding of differences in gendered experiences of parental burnout.

"Supportive parent-child interactions are a key driver of well-being and resilience. For school age children, parental interactions and experiences set the foundation for their relationships with peers and teachers. Understanding the various factors that strengthen and weaken supportive parent-child interactions is therefore central to the development, growth, and advancement of young children's social, emotional, and psychological well-being. Parental burnout is a factor we are exploring because of its prevalence and impact on parents and their offspring."

Dr Swit says she hopes the findings will progress strategies and interventions to support the positive well-being of parents.

Technoference in parenting

Dr Cara Swit is leading a Marsden-funded study into the impact of technoference - or when the use of technology interrupts interactions – on parent/child relationships.

The research involves understanding the perspectives of both parents and their children.

"Parents and children are not in isolation. They work together, they react to each other."

Dr Swit says with more flexibility in working from home, it can become harder for parents to separate the two. The prevalence of devices in homes is also almost universal.

Part of the study looks at the impact on relationships when parents stop interacting with their children to engage with a device.

She has also designed animations for studying children's responses to technoference in the home.

CWRI competition nurtures literacy and an understanding of peace

"The strategy of consciously choosing our words and inserting the culture of understanding can bring about the transformation of conflict into cooperation and thus the realisation of a peaceful and unified society"

Raabiah. Winner of the Mokopuna Ora 15-18 year-old section.

In its second year, the CWRI Mokopuna Ora literacy competition draws entries from five to 18-year-olds around Aotearoa in a celebration of the power of literacy and its importance for all people to flourish.

This year's competition theme was focused on literacy for mutual understanding and peace. It follows the International Literacy Day theme, which centred on promoting multi-lingual education.

CWRI founding director and internationally renowned literacy expert Professor Gail Gillon says fostering sound literacy skills in a person's early years provides them with a world of possibilities for their future. This includes understanding others' views and perspectives and being able to share their unique view on life.

"We were so proud and excited about the quality of the literacy skills of the hundreds of children and young people who entered Mokopuna Ora. Each one was excellent and gave us insight into their perspective on creating a more inclusive shared world for peace."

The judges were impressed with Raabiah A., the winner of the 15-18 year old category with her very compelling examination of the language of peace and war. She articulated the importance of choosing our words carefully to have a hope of a peaceful word

Nathaniel Z. won the category for eight-to 10-year-olds. He and his peers were asked to create a recipe book with dishes from various countries and explore how food can help people appreciate different cultures and languages.

To create his entry, eight-year-old Nathaniel interviewed a wide range of people in his community about special recipes from their culture. His book contains recipes from Aotearoa, China, North America, Italy, and Nigeria.

"I got this recipe (for seafood chowder) from our friends Naomi of Ngāpuhi and Ngāti Kahu descent. Her experience was that the Nanas and Aunties teach each other by showing how to cook rather than giving them the written recipe. At Matariki and other big gatherings the people eat hangi and have fun."

A multilingual book of peace

CWRI introduced a new category to this year's Mokopuna Ora competition: a group entry. Each member of the group contributes something in a different language or style to a book of poems, stories or illustrations.

The group entry was won by Class Rima at Wharenui School and as soon as it arrived the judges knew it was a winner. It reduced some of the CWRI team to tears as it so beautifully showcased the amazing languages and cultures that were part of Room Rima.

Supporting indigenous youth leadership in a changing climate

Children and young people are agents of change and have the right to be involved and supported in playing a part on policy and decision making.

So says the United Nations 'Declaration for Future Generations' passed in September 2024.

One of the big issues of today – and the future – is climate change, particularly for indigenous young people who are directly experiencing climate impacts.

Funded by a CWRI Small Grant, a team led by UC Professor Bronwyn Hayward, Distinguished Professor Steven Ratuva and Associate Professor Sacha McMeeking is progressing an initiative to support indigenous young people to be leaders and part of policy making, such as at a local body level, on climate change.

"Children born in 2020 will experience at least a four-fold increase in exposure to extreme weather events in their lifetimes as the world warms over 1.5 degrees. This means young people will require skills and resilience of a different order."

As part of the Deep South National Science Challenge Professor Hayward and her team worked alongside Māori and Pasifika rangatahi aged 10-14 to support them to be leaders and find new ways to live under increasing climate extremes.

A CWRI Small Grant enabled the team to extend the work to develop a toolkit of ideas for supporting Indigenous young people to be leaders and part of decisions that impact them and their future.

It involved young people living in Christchurch East where the risk of climate change-related issues of flooding is high.

"There are examples of youth leadership internationally, such as Greta Thunberg, but we wanted to develop something that was more collective and created by and for Māori and Pacific young people and their whanau /aiga living in Aotearoa."

The efforts of pupils involved in the project have been inspiring with akonga from Te Pā o Rakaihaūtu, a Christchurch school involved in the initiative, nominated for a global sustainability award (the Zayed Sustainability Prize) to be awarded in January 2025 and students from Te Aratai College, the other school involved in the project, presenting twice to city councillors about their visions for the future of their neighbourhood.

Kaiārahi rangatahi mō anamata – youth leaders for the future will explore how the Declaration for Future Generations can be applied in New Zealand and test the model developed in the National Science Challenge.

The grant will also enable researchers to do more work on ways to co-create policy with children and young people.

"Our work is inspired by the whakatauki of Ngāi Tahu: Mō tātou, ā, mō kā uri ā muri ake nei, working for us and for children after us, supporting young people with skills and insights from indigenous knowledge and science to face a vastly different future."

Assessment to support early writing

Writing is an essential literacy skill and under-achievement can have life-long adverse consequences. But few evidence-based tools have been available to assess early learners' writing skills.

Experienced primary school teacher Anne McIntyre focused her PhD thesis on developing early writing assessment tools so educators can assess the skills of beginner writers then track and boost their progress.

She and a team of experienced teachers trialled the new writing assessments among children in Yrs 1 and 2.

Dr McIntyre's findings identified the assessment tasks that were strong indicators of children who would make good progress in writing during their first year of learning and those who would need extra support.

Her findings showed assessments focused on foundational skills such as alphabet copying and writing their name were the most reliable indicators of children's skill level at school entry.

Tasks that assessed skills such as writing the alphabet from memory and writing a sentence after it was read aloud were best suited to children with phoneme awareness and some letter-sound knowledge.

Dr McIntyre says there is consensus on the importance of good oral language skills in children's future literacy success.

"What my research found is that having good writing, spelling and handwriting skills at an early age are also important skills for later success. Being able to put ideas onto paper is very much a skill that should be fostered and assistance given to those children who don't have foundational skills when they start school."

Dr McIntrye says she hopes her assessments will be integrated into teaching in the early years to provide teachers, students and families with further ways of ensuring children acquire the literacy skills they need to succeed in life.

Intergenerational parenting in Pacific families

A new study on intergenerational parenting in Pacific families of Aotearoa has found that mothers' nurturing care was a resilient protective factor for child well-being.

It also found that the majority of mothers are providing nurturing care to their children - even those who experienced harsh or punitive parenting in their own upbringing.

Deborah Bowen did her PhD on the impact of intergenerational parenting practices on Pacific families living in Aotearoa.

"Pacific youth and their families are increasingly challenged by inequities in health and overall well-being. I was interested in answering the question: how do intergenerational parenting practices impact next-generation behaviours, and what factors can make a difference for families today?"

Dr Bowen used data from the Pacific Islands Families (PIF) study which has tracked more than 1300 Pacific children and their family environments since they were born in 2000.

Dr Bowen says study findings showed most mothers who grew up in a Pacific nation were able to navigate the change in culture and adopt a parenting style that gave their children a good foundation in life. Mothers' nurturing parenting was associated with positive child behaviours, self-perceptions, and parenting practices in the next generation.

"Mothers who recalled their maternal upbringing as often nurturing had significantly greater odds of frequent use of nurturing parenting practices with their children. This was the only parenting style that carried through into contemporary times. Mothers who had experienced punitive parenting as a child had adopted a nurturing style for their offspring rather than copying what their parents did."

The study found that young people who frequently experience parental acceptance and nurturing have a significantly higher sense of self-worth and belief in themselves, such as in their ability to make friends.

Having a higher level of education and greater familiarity with local cultural contexts were also associated with more frequent use of nurturing parenting practices.

Dr Bowen found the only factors significantly associated with the use of harsh disciplinary practices and maladaptive child behaviour were indicators of material hardship, such as low income.

"Targeted, culturally responsive parenting support could benefit mothers who lacked frequent nurturing in their own upbringing and those who are experiencing challenging child behaviours or a lack of economic resources."

Small grants

Parent-baby emotional engagement for pre-term infants

Project leaders: Professor Lianne Woodward and Dr Samantha Lee

About 1200 infants are born very preterm every year in Aotearoa New Zealand. More than half experience learning, mental health and social challenges that are poorly explained by medical and brain injury factors. Research effort is now shifting to understand the impact of other Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) and postnatal experiences. This Small Grant-funded study will identify factors in the NICU and transition to home that positively support parent-infant emotional connection and infant regulatory development which is critical for healthy child development.

One hundred and sixty infants and their families will be involved in the study which will contribute to improved strategies for supporting infant development and whānau needs during the critical period of child brain development.

Te Reo Māori Speech Audiometry

Project leaders: Jen Smith (Ngāti Whātua, Ngāpuhi), Professor Greg O-Beirne. Masters of Audiology Students: Hannah Allcock, Isiah Atherton and Mae Bell.

A standard component of diagnostic hearing assessments involves testing someone's ability to understand speech. For assessments to be valid, people must be tested in the language in which they are most proficient and comfortable. There is a lack of robust diagnostic speech tests in Te Reo Māori. Funded by a Small Grant, the research team developed and will trial three speech tests in Te Reo Māori. This will enable accurate testing across the lifespan, from tamariki to kaumatua. To ensure easy integration, the tests will be modifications of existing tests used in Aotearoa. The funding allows these newly developed tests to be trialled with Māori clients at Whangārei Hospital and the specialist Audiology Department of Te Whatu Ora Te Tai Tokerau.

Efficacy of micronutrients and mindfulness for emotional dysregulation

Project leaders: Dr Mairin Taylor, Professor Julia Rucklidge, Mel Tainui, Dr Kelly Tikao, Professor Elena Moltchanova, Professor Laurie McLay, Alix Harding, Parris Theobold

This study will test the effectiveness of the online mindfulness training programme MindKiwi and broad-spectrum micronutrients to improve the symptoms of emotional dysregulation in children, particularly negative emotions such as anger, fear and sadness. The children, aged from six to 10, will be divided into groups to enable researchers to understand the success of both interventions together, separately and with placebos.

If successful, the tools could complement existing treatments and interventions aimed at reducing the likelihood of children developing severe psychological distress.

MindKiwi is a UC-developed programme in which mindfulness is merged with mātauranga Māori through collaboration with Ngāi Tahu researchers. Broad spectrum micronutrients have been shown to demonstrate improvement on a variety of mental health conditions in double-blind trials.

Mortality risk for neurodiverse children and young people

Project leader: Professor Philip Schluter

Existing research shows a significant increased risk of mortality in those with neurodevelopmental conditions (NDC). However, there is a gap in information about the risks for children and young people with NDCs.

This project will for the first time explore the relationship between NDC's and death in children and young people; with risks specified for different conditions such as ADHD, autism, and intellectual disability.

This study will draw on expertise from the Universities of Canterbury, Otago and Auckland as well as community groups. Researchers will use data from a national study of all children born between 1995 and 2009 and examine risks for death due to medical reasons, injury and suicide.

Results will be shared via publications and a policy briefing for government.

A digital companion for youth mental health support

Project leaders: Dr Bahareh Shahri and Associate Professor Simon Hoermann

Transitioning from high school to university can be a stressful journey, and for many rangatahi, it feels overwhelming. Limited access to professional mental health support in New Zealand, with some waiting over a month for help, leaves many young people struggling alone.

To address this, a team of experts in product design, psychology, and artificial intelligence is co-designing a digital companion to support youth mental health. This innovative project aims to co-design the companion with rangatahi and mental health professionals, ensuring it meets their needs and provides engaging, effective features.

The team aims to co-create and understand what design features are needed for a digital companion that offers meaningful support during life's transitions, empowering young people to navigate challenges with confidence and resilience.

The health burden of maltreatment

Project leaders: Dr Sarah Whitcombe-Dobbs, Professor Robin Turner and Associate Professor Charlene Rapsey

This Small Grant supports a team from the Universities of Canterbury and Otago working on a series of studies on the health burden of maltreatment for children in state care. Researchers have already identified outcomes for children experiencing maltreatment in state care. A second ongoing study is examining the health outcomes for children who experienced placement instability during key developmental periods and will also identify risk and protective factors.

The project will examine the recurrence of maltreatment in children and the links to low or no ongoing involvement with child protection services. By mapping trajectories of service involvement and maltreatment recurrence the researchers can identify protective factors that may assist in policy design and intervention.

Well-being in a Minecraft community

Project leaders: Dr Kongmeng Liew

Multiplayer games such as Minecraft are increasingly popular with young people and can function as communities that reinforce players sense of belonging but problematic factions such as hate or extremist groups can hijack these communities.

This research project will explore the psychological mechanisms that spur community-building in online gaming environments and how they impact individual's attitudes and beliefs.

Researchers will create an online Minecraft community and conduct surveys and interviews with players over the course of six months. The study's second phase is a collaboration with a youth services organisation in Singapore to pilot a positive digital intervention for at-risk youth for mental health issues to be conducted on the Minecraft platform.

Cleft Research Centre

Project leaders: Dr Kenny Ardouin, Dr Phoebe Macrae and Tika Ormond

The Cleft Research Centre has been piloting interventions to improve the quality of life of children and young people born with Aotearoa New Zealand's third most common congenital condition, cleft lip and palate.

This has included introducing patient reported outcome measures into hospital cleft services, running a Speech Language Therapy and Clinical Psychology cleft clinic at UC and offering a three-day camp for children aged 10 to 17-years-old with cleft.

For research activity to have the greatest impact, it requires sharing research findings and seeking feedback on recommendations and dissemination with existing partners such as hospital cleft teams, support organisations and other university teams that work with cleft. The team will do this with the support of a CWRI Small Grant.

Climate change and youth

Project leaders: Dr Claudia Schneider, Dr Oindrila Bhattacharya, Professor Don Hine and Miranda Huston

Two Small Grants are supporting research into climate change and youth.

The first seeks to understand factors that influence climate anxiety in youth and identify ways, in collaboration with young people, to alleviate this increasingly common experience.

Recent research has shown positive emotions play a role in promoting and sustaining ecofriendly behaviour and climate change engagement. Researchers will survey a wide range of young people, recruited through high schools and via community groups, for a set of studies looking at positive ways to alleviate climate anxiety.

The second study will undertake a survey in Aotearoa that will contribute to a wider international study on rangatahi's emotional and cognitive responses to climate change and identify effective strategies that support the mental, emotional and social well-being of young people.

Headgear to reduce impact of collisions in junior rugby

Project leader: Professor Nick Draper

There is clear evidence collisions inherent in rugby increase the risk of injury, including concussions and resulting short and long term symptoms such as vision disturbances, cognitive impairment, and difficulties with attention, information processing and executive functioning.

A team led by UC's Professor Nick Draper and involving neurologists, product designers and medical imaging experts has been examining the potential of specially designed rugby headgear to reduce the magnitude of collisions with the head.

Supported by a Small Grant, the research team will progress development of their novel headgear and examine data from mouthguards that collect information during games on collisions.

Lead transformative research with real world impact for and with mokopuna.

OUR STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

CWRI is committed to being a research centre of excellence that materially advances UC's Tangata Tū, Tangata Ora strategy by:

Leading high impact inter-disciplinary research;

anchoring local, national and international research collaboration for impact; and

building our collective reputation for high-impact research.

We also contribute to UC's goals of:

Being strongly locally connected through our presence in the Health Precinct of Ōtautahi and locally embedded relationships;

Recognizing and serving Ngāi Tūāhuriri's aspirations, as mana whenua, as well as contributing to the goals of Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu and a number of Papatipu Rūnanga;

Contributing to the aspirations of Pacific communities;

Promoting understanding of Aotearoa New Zealand's unique place in the world by leading culturally responsive, strengths based research and impact; and

Making a positive impact to hauora (well-being).

Our strategy is anchored in the UC values, with tangible commitments and practices to ensure that we embody the values that unite us as a community.

OUR TEAM

Directorate

Professor Gail Gillon (Ngāi Tahu) – Founding Director

Professor Laurie McLay – Deputy Director

Advisory Team

Professor Cathy Andrew (Executive Dean Te Kaupeka Oranga | Faculty of Health)

Professor Stuart Parsons (Executive Dean Te Kaupeka Pūtaiao | Faculty of Science)

Professor Joce Nuttall (Executive Dean Te Kaupeka Ako | Faculty of Education)

Professor Brigid McNeill (Te Kaupeka Ako | Faculty of Education) (Dean of Postgraduate Research | Deputy Vice Chancellor – Research)

Professor Don Hine (Head of School Psychology Te Kaupeka Pūtaiao | Faculty of Science

Dr Tufulasi Taleni (Kaiārahi Pasifika) Senior Lecturer (School of Leadership and Professional Practice)

CWRI Academics

Dr Amy Scott – Senior Lecturer (Te Kaupeka Ako | Faculty of Education)

Dr Lisa Furlong – Senior Lecturer (Te Kaupeka Ako | Faculty of Education)

Dr Megan Gath – Senior Lecturer (Te Kaupeka Ako | Faculty of Education)

Jen Smith – Senior Lecturer (Te Kaupeka Ako | Faculty of Education)

Dr Jude Bautista – Senior Lecturer (Te Kaupeka Ako | Faculty of Education)

Dr Mark La Venia Senior Lecturer (Te Kaupeka Ako | Faculty of Education

Dr Andy Vosslamber - Lecturer (Te Kaupeka Ako | Faculty of Education)

Dr Anne McIntyre – Lecturer (Te Kaupeka Ako | Faculty of Education)

Key Professional Staff

Sally Trethowan – Institute Manager

Janet Radley – Finance Manager

Charlotte Endres – Institute Administrator

Better Start Literacy Approach (BSLA) Educators

Dr Jo Walker

Amy Fleming

Catherine Fairhall

Marie Shipston

Nicole Plummer

Rebecca Lindsay

Rachael Robertson

Bex Kerr

BSLA Support Team

Kate King

Bridget White

Julia Martin

Abbey Davison

Kaiārahi

Mel Tainui (UC Māori)

Liz Brown (Ngāi Tahu) Executive Director (Office of Treaty Partnership – UC Māori)

CWRI Grant researchers, doctoral students, research assistants, and staff

We are fortunate to have numerous talented researchers, research fellows, facilitators, practitioners, doctoral students, and research assistants associated with our many interdisciplinary research grants and institute activities.
We would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the success of the Institute (see our website for full staff details).

RESEARCH THEME LEADERS

Learning Success

Professor Brigid McNeill
(Te Kaupeka Ako | Faculty of Education)
(Dean of Postgraduate Research | Deputy Vice Chancellor – Research)

Professor John Everatt
(Te Kaupeka Ako | Faculty of Education)

Autism and Well-being

Professor Laurie McLay
(Deputy Director, Te Kāhui Pā Harakeke | Child Well-being Research Institute)

Social and Emotional Well-being

Associate Professor Yvonne Crichton-Hill
(School of Health Sciences)

Child Population Health

Professor Philip Schluter
(Te Kaupeka Oranga | The Faculty of Health)

Pasifika Education and Well-being

Dr Tufulasi Taleni (Kaiārahi Pasifika)
Senior Lecturer (School of Leadership and Professional Practice)

Early Years Learning

Professor Jayne White
(Te Kaupeka Ako | Faculty of Education)

Nutrition and Well-being

Professor Julia Rucklidge
(Te Kaupeka Pūtaiao | Faculty of Science)

Aligned to our key themes our researchers are producing creative, innovative and unique research that advances knowledge in child and youth well-being.

PROFESSOR GAIL GILLON

RESEARCH FUNDING AGENCIES AND PROJECT TITLES FOR 2024 INCLUDE:

The Child Well-being Institute hosted grants in 2024 with a total value of approximately $26 Million.

Projects include a range of exciting collaborative research and practice based partnerships.

We are grateful to the funders for these research opportunities and partnerships we have developed.

We are grateful to the funders for these research opportunities and partnerships we have developed.

STAFF MEMBER	GRANT ACCOUNT/CONSULTANCY NUMBER AND NAME	FUNDER	START DATE	END DATE
Gail Gillon	NSC A Better Start: Co Director Gail Gillon	MBIE National Science Challenge - A Better Start	01/07/2019	30/06/2024
Brigid McNeill	NSC A Better Start: Theme Leader (Successful learning)	MBIE National Science Challenge - A Better Start	01/07/2019	30/06/2024
Mairin Taylor	MindKiwi: Mindfulness treatment for children and families with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in Aotearoa New Zealand: A feasibility study	Cure Kids Innovation Seed Funding	01/02/2020	02/02/2024
Gail Gillon	Understanding the onset of vernacular reorganisation	Marsden Grant	01/03/2021	28/02/2025
Amy Scott	Understanding the onset of vernacular reorganisation	Marsden Grant	01/03/2021	28/02/2025
Susannah Smith	Outreach and Education (OnE Team member)	University of Auckland - TEC CoRE Healthy Hearts for Aotearoa	01/07/2021	31/12/2024
Samantha Lee	Adolescent outcomes of prenatal methadone exposure	CMRF General Project Grant	01/08/2021	31/07/2024
Lianne Woodward	Targeting human milk fortification to improve preterm infant growth and brain development	National Institute of Health Research Project Grant	01/08/2021	31/07/2025
Nick Draper	Collisions in junior rugby: Incidence, peak linear accelerations, peak rotational accelerations and the potential of headgear to reduce impact accelerations	Canterbury Medical Research Foundation	01/01/2022	31/08/2024

STAFF MEMBER	GRANT ACCOUNT/CONSULTANCY NUMBER AND NAME	FUNDER	START DATE	END DATE
Kay-Lee Jones	Nga purakau o Te Kura o Tuahiwi. A Kaupapa Maori Case study: a mixed methods approach	NZ Council for Educational Research Teaching and Learning Research Initiative	03/03/2022	30/09/2024
Amy Scott	Nga purakau o Te Kura o Tuahiwi. A Kaupapa Maori Case study: a mixed methods approach	NZ Council for Educational Research Teaching and Learning Research Initiative	03/03/2022	30/09/2024
Jennifer Smith	Nga purakau o Te Kura o Tuahiwi. A Kaupapa Maori Case study: a mixed methods approach	NZ Council for Educational Research Teaching and Learning Research Initiative	03/03/2022	30/09/2024
Dr Laurie McLay	Evaluation of programmes at Early Steps (Autism NZ)	Laura Ferguson Trust: Joyce Fisher Endowment	01/05/2022	28/02/2025
Brigid McNeill	Whiriwhiria, kia ora ai te tamaiti: Building health, wellbeing and learning success for tamariki and rangatahi through matauranga Maori and systems science approaches	MBIE National Science Challenge - A Better Start	01/09/2022	30/11/2025
Dr Laurie McLay	Optimizing a Personalized Health Approach for Virutally Treating High-Risk Caregivers During COVID-19 and Beyond	Purdue University	23/09/2022	30/06/2025
Susannah Smith	Which pulse matters? Learning from environments to enact equitable, intergenerational heart health	University of Auckland - TEC CoRE Healthy Hearts for Aotearoa	01/09/2023	31/12/2024
Nick Draper	Collisions in junior rugby: incidence, magnitude and possible mitigation	Neurological Fondation Project Grant	28/01/2024	31/12/2025
Sacha McMeeking	Evidencing the Causal Mechanisms of Kaupapa Maori Health Transformation	Health Research Council	01/02/2024	31/01/2028
Cara Swit	Understanding Technoference from the Childs Perspective	Marsden Grant	01/04/2024	31/03/2027
Gail Gillon	Research Informed integrated professional support system for teaching of literacy using Better Start Literacy Approach (BLSA)	Ministry of Education	06/05/2024	31/12/2026
Brigid McNeill	Research Informed integrated professional support system for teaching of literacy using Better Start Literacy Approach (BLSA)	Ministry of Education	06/05/2024	31/12/2026
Prof Gail Gillon	Accelerated Learning Research Report	Ministry Of Education	11/05/2024	09/08/2024
Megan Gath	The impact of childrens screen exposure on developmental outcomes	Canterbury Medical Research Foundation	01/09/2024	31/08/2026
Nick Draper	Collisions in Junior Rugby: Incidence and magnitude and potential health effect	Maurice and Phyllis Paykel Trust	01/12/2024	30/11/2026

Whiriwhiria,
kia ora ai te tamaiti.

Braiding knowledge,
so the child will flourish.

TE KĀHUI PĀ HARAKEKE | CHILD WELL-BEING RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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