



MEDIA RELEASE

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Over \$1.3 million for Canterbury kids to get a 'good start' to their school years

Over \$1.3 million has been approved by Rātā Foundation, across two innovative and complementary education projects, which will see school entrants getting a 'good start' to their school years.

Rātā Chief Executive Leighton Evans says \$587,250 was approved to the CORE Education project, which is aimed at developing the practice of new entrant teachers to enable children to have a successful transition to a school environment; and \$734,165 to the University of Canterbury, A Better Start project, which focuses on empowering early childhood teachers to build strong oral language skills in children aged three to four.

Both projects will be conducted over two years from a strong evidence-based platform to enhance children's transition from early year education to school.

"This is a major investment under our Strategic Funding programme and underscores the importance we, as a Foundation, place on the future of our tamariki."

"We are committed to enabling a positive start for children and their whānau, setting them up for later success, in education but also in life," he says.

The CORE Education project will reach 120 out of the total 446 new entrant teachers across Canterbury, with benefit extending to 2300 of the estimated 6,688 children transitioning to school – roughly one-third of the total children transitioning to school in Canterbury over the two years of the project.

Mr Evans says "the teachers involved in this project will act as champions for change within their schools and across school networks."

Dr Sarah Te One, lead researcher of the CORE Education project says "starting school is a significant time for tamariki and their whānau.

"A good experience during this time can make a real difference to how tamariki feel about being at school which can have a lasting impact on learning."

"For many years the emphasis has been on getting the child ready for school, the shift we are aiming for ensures the school is ready for the child.

“We are excited about supporting teachers to innovate with a real focus on the experiences of our youngest learners in schools. We believe the work undertaken in this project could have an enduring positive impact on the lives of many of tamariki, their whānau, and teachers in the Canterbury region and beyond.”

The University of Canterbury project will provide research informed professional development to early childhood teachers across 30 early childhood centres in Canterbury. The approach will be focused on strategies teachers and whānau can use to enhance three and four-year old’s oral language and self-regulation ability.

The project, which is particularly focused on supporting children from lower socio-economic areas, will follow children through to their first year of schooling to identify the impact of the approach on children’s early schooling. A key outcome will be building an online professional learning and development resource, as well as, an interactive site for parents so the outcomes from the research continue long after the period of funding.

Associate Professor Brigid McNeill, the lead researcher of the University of Canterbury project, says “it is truly exciting to be embarking on a project which has the potential to make such positive change in our community”.

“We know strong oral language and self-regulation abilities are key to children’s wellbeing and successful transition to school. Oral language provides the foundation for later literacy skills. Supporting oral language and self-regulation are important in post-earthquake Christchurch. We think the most value will come from working with teachers and whānau in the early childhood period to ensure children get the best start to their education.

“The funding of these two interlinked projects by Rātā Foundation presents a great opportunity to create real change for young children in Canterbury,” she says.

A Steering Group will guide both projects and involve representatives with a range of stakeholders in the Canterbury community.

“Rātā will ensure the resources from these innovative projects can be accessed widely by teachers and whānau throughout New Zealand,” Mr Evans says.

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