

Investing in People

Executive Summary

Background to the evaluation

The Auckland Airport Community Trust (AACT) was formally established in October 2003 as a result of a decision made in the Environment Court. The Area of Benefit for the Trust is "those areas most impacted on by current and projected aircraft movements to and from Auckland International Airport". The first of three charitable purposes to which Trust funds can be applied relates to the mitigation of effects associated with noise from aircraft operations. It is the second charitable purpose that is most directly relevant to the present context: "to ensure positive effects on the external environment to offset the other adverse effects." This is further explained in the Trust Deed; "While physical means can go only so far in mitigating adverse effects, there is the possibility of adverse effects being "at least partially offset by providing positive effects in the form of enhanced cultural, recreational and other opportunities and facilities to those living and working in the Area of Benefit..."

Up to June 2008, the Trustees had either given, or were committed to giving around \$1,250,000, the major part of which was allocated to Literacy projects/programmes in schools, and to a lesser extent pre-schools. The Trustees commissioned the evaluation with two main objectives a) to assess the impact of the Trust's grant making decisions on the wider community and b) to evaluate the Trust's own processes and their performance of their role as custodians of the Trust Fund and grant makers into the 'Area of Benefit'. Five projects funded by the Trust were selected as a pathway into the first objective. By focusing on five projects in diverse settings it was expected that the second objective would also be accomplished. A decision to evaluate the following five programmes was made after visiting the respective locations to confirm their agreement:

- Papatoetoe South School: Equipment for Physically Impaired Inclusive Centre;
- Papatoetoe Kindergarten: ICT Literacy Project (stage 3); Making Literacy Visible for our Children and their Families;
- De La Salle College: Techno Literacy Project (SuccessMaker for year 9 and 10 students);
- Rongomai School, Otara: Computers in Homes and Effective Writing;
- Tyndale Park Christian School Trust: Books for a Phonics Based Literacy Programme.

Findings

In the event, the evaluations proved to be more of a journey of discovery than anticipated. The SuccessMaker project at De La Salle College was found to be still in its formative¹ stages. Because

¹ Patton M.Q. (1987) *Qualitative Evaluation Methods*. California, USA: Sage.

SuccessMaker is directed towards helping students to master the building blocks of literacy, and this takes time, impacts information that could be gleaned from the evaluation was limited.

Notwithstanding, the evaluation yielded valuable information about the collaborative processes involved in setting up a complex ICT project in a secondary school, and maximizing sustainability.

The Rongomai School evaluation underscored important lessons about community ownership of projects and emphasized that there is 'a time for every purpose'. At Rongomai, building a relationship of trust with the local community and establishing a working partnership with parents in the interests of the children were essential precursors to the Computers in Homes and Effective Writing Project. Earlier foundation building initiatives received funding support from the AACT. It is also noteworthy that new opportunities opened up after the AACT approved their funding application. The high level of communication which the AACT maintains with organizations it funds paved the way for those new opportunities to be taken up, taking programme impacts to an unanticipated level of success.

The Papatoetoe Kindergarten's funding application for ICT equipment was informed by a pilot project at another kindergarten and the experience of other kindergartens within the Auckland Kindergarten Association. The project fitted particularly well with a community with a preponderance of recent immigrant families with little or no English. Photographs taken with the digital cameras made the children's learning at kindergarten visible to the families, thus serving as a bridging language between the kindergarten and its community. There were also direct beneficial impacts for the children, facilitated by the teachers' understanding of child development and behaviour and of empowering and promoting learning and social development. The teachers' expertise became an integral part of their use of the technology. Findings here were consistent with those at Roskill South Kindergarten: that learning gains from ICT technology become probable only in the presence of certain setting-specific mediating factors working in synch.

The Principal of Papatoetoe South School was thinking along similar lines when he emphasised the importance of professional development to support the introduction of ICT in schools. He was referring to training not only in use of the technology, but in curriculum mapping to link the technology into the curriculum. Their own constantly updated intranet served as a valuable aid in linking ICT technology with the curriculum. The evaluation focus at Papatoetoe South School was on the Physically Impaired Inclusive Centre (room 10). Observations in mainstream classrooms were a necessary adjunct for gaining insights into the potential of SMART Boards as a classroom teaching tool. It emerged that, while the SMART Board was undoubtedly a useful learning tool in room 10, there were significant accessibility issues around educational software currently available, which meant that SMART Board use was below potential. An educational software package that has attracted positive comment from teachers of special needs children was identified.

The evaluation at Tyndale Park Christian School turned out to be disappointing. The benefits of phonics teaching methods could not be fully explored. Had we known at the outset that the school's Board of Trustees would not permit any access to an important stakeholder group (i.e. parents) the Trust Administrator and I would have proposed an alternative location for the fifth evaluation. The most valuable information to emerge from this evaluation concerned the AACT's processes.

The remainder of this report summarizes main points in the expectation that the AACT and possibly other funding providers may find them useful.

The AACT

- ◆ Generally excellent feedback about the AACT and the Trust Administrator, Janis McArdle, in particular.
- ◆ The AACT is working in an effective partnership with the community.
- ◆ Excellent communication
- ◆ The importance of accountability was acknowledged and some said that knowing that they will be monitored deters them from straying.
- ◆ The AACT is very fair, takes its responsibilities very seriously, and rightly places importance on accountability to public. They are prepared to go 'the extra mile' to hear people's perspectives (highlighted during the process of the Tyndale Park Christian School evaluation).
- ◆ Supportive but not interfering.
- ◆ Organizations have appreciated the site visits and ongoing interest shown by AACT members. (Site visits occur post funding approval).
- ◆ The funding has provided resources that recipient organizations could not have purchased otherwise/ or for which they would have had to wait a long time.
- ◆ It is appropriate that the AACT asks for more information re larger items of expenditure, e.g. Success Maker literature review.
- ◆ Sometimes applicants are asked to make a presentation to the AACT. An example of a situation where this may be required is if it is thought the project could duplicate an existing service.

Designating a specific area of activity for funding

- ◆ It is desirable to set some boundaries on what type of community projects will be funded:
 - It keeps number of applications received within manageable limits.
 - It implies less waste of time for potential applicants and puts limitations on building up of false hopes.
 - There may be greater synergy between projects e.g. Janis McArdle put a Pacifica Pre-School, Tautua Aoga Amata Charitable Trust in Otara, in touch with Papatoetoe Kindergarten re development of a digital camera project.
 - In maintaining a specific focus, the AACT gains more knowledge of the community than with a 'scatter' approach.
- ◆ It is appropriate to give extra merit points for projects with potential benefits that extend beyond the recipient organisation.

Literacy as a focal area

- ◆ Literacy as a priority area emerged from AACT 's consultation with the community.

- ♦ Literacy is an appropriate area to fund in South Auckland. It can embrace all age groups; helps towards a better future for children; promotes long term, possibly intergenerational benefits.
- ♦ This is not to suggest that Literacy should be the focus forever. The focus should be reviewed from time to time so different sectors share in the benefits.
- ♦ Schools and pre-schools are centres of community. Consequently they are a productive channel for disseminating community wide benefits.

A December 2006 KPMG ² report on costs of literacy difficulties in the United Kingdom had three components a) a review of research on the long term consequences of literacy difficulties to individuals and for society; b) estimating the costs to the public purse that result; c) estimating the return on investment of early intervention to address literacy difficulties. A main conclusion was:

The research reviewed showed that literacy difficulties are linked to costly special educational needs provision, to truancy, exclusion from school, reduced employment opportunities, increased health risks and a greatly increased risk of involvement with the criminal justice system. These risks operate over and above those associated with social disadvantage in general, and those associated with lack of qualifications.

Aspects of the organisation as a consideration in decision-making:

- ♦ The AACT places appropriate importance on quality of programme staff – their track record.
- ♦ Some projects need professional development/training if they are to be maximally effective (e.g. SMART Boards in classrooms). Staff-wide professional development/ training may have sustainability benefits over high investment in a few people.
- ♦ Timeliness – e.g. Rongomai School; foundation work in building a relationship of trust and understanding with the community was a necessary precursor to Computers in Homes.
- ♦ Community context (the community served by the organisation, for example:
 - providing mini laptops for homes can be justified for a school serving a very socio-economically deprived community but not a school serving an affluent community.
 - Success Maker - extra challenges of setting up the same programme in a secondary school, compared with a primary school.
- ♦ Schools can make a contribution in turning around communities characterised by high levels of dysfunction. Projects that support schools in providing pro-social models merit funding support. The Principal of Rongomai School commented on schools as a place where children can observe other adult role models and values reflected in actions and behaviour, in contrast to what may be socially corrosive standards communicated and modelled at home.
- ♦ How a project links into the wider community is important – e.g. linkage with the Otara Computer Clubhouse Trust can potentially enhance sustainability of Rongomai School's Computers in Homes - Effective Writing project. Janis McArdle actively fosters linkages between projects.

² <http://www.readingrecovery.ac.nz/research/download/ECRcosts2006.pdf>

Flexibility /accountability balance

- ◆ In the case of 3 projects, there was variation in expenditure, compared with what was set out in the funding application. New information can emerge once a project gets underway, or something may happen that requires a re-assessment. (Rongomai School, De La Salle College and Papatoetoe Kindergarten.) If variation is envisaged, the organisation should first check with the AACT Administrator.
- ◆ Responsible community ownership is desirable, so that the community makes operational decisions, e.g. Rongomai School did not ask parents to sign a written contract. This did not compromise compliance with conditions that were part of their funding application.
- ◆ Patience is in order– some projects require an extended set-up time – e.g. Success Maker at De La Salle College.

Funding application form and agreement form

- ◆ The application form should have space for applicants to nominate the key person to contact should the AACT require information about operational aspects of their project/programme. Professional evaluators seek to work through the correct channels.
- ◆ The application form should incorporate a question re training: e.g. If professional development/ training is needed to implement your project, please provide a summary of what this will consist of and who will provide it.
- ◆ The agreement signed on acceptance of funding should state that if changes are considered advisable with respect to items purchased, the AACT should be contacted.
- ◆ One of the evaluations raised an important issue: What is the entitlement of custodians of public funding with regard to having access for evaluation purposes to organisations receiving funding? The AACT have now incorporated a new clause in their funding acceptance form, making openness to evaluation a condition of receiving funding.

The evaluation

It was encouraging to learn from all organisations where evaluations were completed that the evaluation had added value and understanding to their project/programme or school. A frequent comment was that reading their reports was affirming for staff members, helping them to feel appreciated and acknowledged. In the case of Papatoetoe Kindergarten, a copy of the evaluation has been passed on to the Auckland Kindergarten Association and is being seen as a useful complement to an earlier research report on a pilot ICT project at Roskill South Kindergarten. Likewise, the De La Salle College evaluation could serve as a useful reference for New Zealand educators wanting to introduce SuccessMaker into a secondary school.

Background to the Evaluation

The Auckland Airport Community Trust was formally established in October 2003. This was a direct result of a decision made in the Environment Court on 10 December 2001 that Auckland International Airport Ltd. would establish a trust fund as a condition of the company being granted approval to build a second runway. The court decision specified the amount - \$250,000 per annum adjusted by the rate of the consumer price index each year.³

The charitable purposes of the Trust are set out in a Trust Deed. The Area of Benefit for the Trust is "those areas most impacted on by current and projected aircraft movements to and from Auckland International Airport". The first of three charitable purposes to which Trust funds can be applied relates to the mitigation of effects associated with noise from aircraft operations. It is the second charitable purpose that is most directly relevant to the present context: "to ensure positive effects on the external environment to offset the other adverse effects." A later section of the Trust Deed provides further clarification. While physical means can go only so far in mitigating adverse effects, there is the possibility of adverse effects being "at least partially offset by providing positive effects in the form of enhanced cultural, recreational and other opportunities and facilities to those living and working in the Area of Benefit..."⁴

The Trustees designated support of Literacy as the focus for funding for three years commencing at the start of 2005. Importantly, the Trust's funding application form requires applicants to specify among other things, envisaged outcomes for their project/programme, who will be targeted as beneficiaries, how the project/programme will be assessed, and indicators of its success. This conveys a sense of responsibility on the part of Trustees with respect to directing Trust funding to projects/programmes that will maximize benefits for their target community, and to recipient organisation being attentive to self-monitoring.

Up to June 2008, the Trustees had either given, or were committed to giving around \$1,250,000, the major part of which was allocated to Literacy projects/programmes in schools, and to a lesser extent pre-schools. The Trustees were keen to know whether the allocated funding had made/was making a difference. In other words, what actual benefit was the community

³ Auckland Community Trust 2006 Annual Report

⁴ *ibid*

realising from the Trust's Literacy programme/ project funding?

Notwithstanding reporting requirements for recipient organizations, information reported back to the Trust was likely to be just the tip of an iceberg in comparison with information not being reported. There was also potential for an inherent bias in reports from organizations, as well as unpredicted impacts that had gone unnoticed.

Evaluation Objectives and Overall Strategy

The evaluation objectives were:

1. To provide objective information about direct and indirect outcomes/impacts arising from a sample of Literacy projects/programmes funded by the Auckland Airport Community Trust. Of interest are impacts on participant children/students, school teaching and/or support staff, family/whanau members, schools and/or the wider school community.
2. To express a view on the effectiveness of the Auckland Airport Community Trust's grant making and make recommendations as appropriate.
3. To offer comment to the Auckland Airport Community Trust to assist their ongoing monitoring of funding allocations.

Evaluation Strategy:

I met with the Trust Administrator, and after considering various areas of the Trust's involvement, the five following projects/programmes were included in the evaluation sample:

- Papatoetoe South School: Equipment for Physically Impaired Inclusive Centre
- Papatoetoe Kindergarten: ICT Literacy Project (stage 3); Making Literacy Visible for our Children and their Families
- De La Salle College: Techno Literacy Project (SuccessMaker for year 9 and 10 students)
- Rongomai School, Otara: Computers in Homes and Effective Writing
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Diversity of programmes and settings guided the choice of programmes, with a view to adding interest and value to the evaluation. All five were developments of projects/programmes funded by the Auckland Airport Community Trust in

preceding years and were to be evaluated in that broader context. The evaluation depended on the full cooperation of personnel involved at an operational level with the programmes and their willingness to allow access to their setting and to children’s/students’ records for evaluation purposes. The Trust Administrator and I were open to revising the list of evaluation locations if such cooperation and access were not clearly evident. Although the envisaged locations remained the same, one of the programme on our original list was replaced with another to accommodate what was happening at that site. One of the realities of community settings is unforeseen eventualities that hinder programme roll-out.

The Trust Administrator made the initial contact by phone with all five locations and together we visited each one and spoke with the Principal or equivalent to seek their agreement and support for the evaluation. This involved an explanation of the rationale emphasizing the AACT’s accountability to the wider community, the evaluation aims and interest in wider community impacts, and how they or their staff might be expected to contribute if they agreed to being part of the evaluation.

The AACT Administrator, Janis McArdle was available throughout as my point of contact and liaison with AACT members. I attended AACT meetings at regular intervals to personally report progress.

Types of data collected varied across the locations. Generally, data included documentation, student achievement records where appropriate, other programme reports/records; interviews with key teachers/support staff; observations of the project/programme in action; interviews/chats with students, appropriate to the age group; interviews with others, according to what emerged through the research; academic literature; searching internet web sites. I was always mindful of carrying out the evaluation in such a way as to bring the least possible disruption to work and routines in the schools and kindergarten. This was made clear to Principals and other personnel. At four of the evaluation locations, I asked for feedback on the AACT – communication, help offered, processes etc.

In August/September 2008, draft reports for their particular section of the evaluation were sent to the school Principal or person in charge of the programme/ project, inviting their comment and asking them to highlight any inaccuracies. It was made clear that their project/programme report was one of five which would be made available to the general public. In preparing the evaluation reports, care was taken not to identify children/ students/ family members unless it was seen to have significant explanatory value and to show

the individual in a positive light. Where identifying information is included, often in the form of photographs (i.e. in the Rongomai School and Papatoetoe Kindergarten reports), it is with the written consent of the person concerned or a parent or caregiver.