



McKenzie Centre



# McKenziePlus

NEWSLETTER NO.10 2023 : Kōanga / Spring

Welcome to our Spring 2023 Newsletter!

It has been a very wet winter, let's all hope for calm and beautiful spring weather.

In this newsletter we'll let you know about the things that have been happening around McKenzie Centre. There have been some staff changes, and we would like to highlight some of the wonderful work that our Tuakana do for our whānau.

You will also find a story of one of our whānau, Emery (above) and her family, where they share about their experience with our service.

Warm wishes,

Suzanne Kok  
*McKenzie Centre, Service Manager*



[www.mckenziecentre.org.nz](http://www.mckenziecentre.org.nz)



Emery loving the beach, with mum Kathleen.

## CENTRE WRAPS EMERY IN LOVE AND SUPPORT

Emery Cooper (above & cover) has been a regular at McKenzie Centre in Hamilton for nearly a year and her progress has given parents Kathleen and Stefan hope for their daughter's future...

Born in October 2020, Emery is the Te Awamutu couple's third child after Myla, 10, and Arlo, 7.

When she was about a year old, she was still not crawling or rolling so Kathleen took her to a physiotherapist.

"Around 14 months old she regressed in her speech and social skills. She stopped babbling, she no longer looked anyone in the eye, and she wouldn't respond to her name.

"She also lost weight and her head had stopped growing. We were incredibly worried and went desperately searching for answers, and as she lost the use of her hands, we were led to the devastating diagnosis of Rett Syndrome," says Kathleen.

Rett syndrome is a rare genetic neurological disorder that occurs almost exclusively in girls and leads to severe impairments, affecting nearly every aspect of the child's life: their ability to speak, walk, eat, and even breathe easily.

First identified by Austrian paediatrician Andreas Rett in 1966, it is usually recognised in children between six to 18 months as they begin to miss developmental milestones or lose abilities they had gained.

Recent research has shown that gene therapy has the potential to treat or even reverse several aspects of Rett Syndrome by restoring the body's production of methyl cytosine-binding protein 2.

Kathleen says they hope Emery will have gene therapy in her childhood.

"Although we love her just the way she is, we hold on to the hope that she will be able to access gene therapy in her childhood. We think this will give her a chance to gain back the skills Rett Syndrome has stolen from her."

In the meanwhile, the team at McKenzie Centre provides the expertise Emery needs.

"They're like a family to us, we go there and feel like the team of therapists and other parents wrap us in their support, care and knowledge," says Kathleen.

Being with other whānau is another big plus. "I have learned so much from other families who give us ideas."

"Our concerns are always listened to, and they are great at brainstorming new ideas to help Emery and put into place in her life.

"She's definitely communicating better with her eyes and she's getting stronger physically since starting at McKenzie Centre."

Rett Syndrome is so rare there are fewer than 100 children in New Zealand with the condition.

Emery attends McKenzie Centre every Wednesday morning during term time.

"That's when we can really talk about Emery and what she needs. If there is equipment, we feel she needs, McKenzie Centre do what they can. We bring it up with the occupational therapist or the physio and they make it happen."

Like Emery's adaptive push chair.



"That's something McKenzie Centre hooked up for us," says Kathleen who found the previous chair was not good for Emery as she was always slumping to one side.

Having the right support is critical as those with Rett Syndrome are susceptible to scoliosis.

Emery also sees a McKenzie Centre speech therapist who uses a low tech eye gaze Augmentive and Alternative Communication system to help learn how much she really understands.

"She is smart, she very clearly communicates what she wants by looking at the correct symbols.

“We are so excited for when she has access to an eye gaze device as she will be able to tell us so much more.”

In three years, Kathleen hopes Emery can mainstream into Te Awamutu Primary School, where her older children go.

“We do think she can keep up intellectually wise. With the right adaptation, she should be able to learn with everyone her own age.”

McKenzie Centre offers a variety of programmes for tamariki, delivered in partnership with families/ whānau. A team of passionate and skilled therapists, teachers, education support workers and tuakana (peer workers) deliver multiple services while specialists provide information and skills relating to their professional background.

Practical services and support help children/tamariki and families/whānau enjoy and use the time they spend together, every day, as valuable learning opportunities.



Emery and her family; parents Kathleen and Stefan with brother Arlo and sister Myla.

Photos by Jemma Chan Photography



## TRANSITIONING TO SCHOOL

Entering the formal school system is a major milestone in the educational biographies of young children. For children with disabilities and their families, starting school is considered a particularly sensitive phase, holding potential for development but also challenges. After all, the transition involves a wide range of changes for children and families alike. These include, for example, changes in the support structures surrounding them, as early childhood-sector support services are replaced by school-based support practices.

At McKenzie Centre, we provide focused support for transitions from early childhood centres to schools, so that the experience is well-planned and prepared by the team supporting the child, to achieve a more successful result.

If your child and your family are getting close to this milestone, join our online workshop for more information.

## ONLINE WORKSHOP

### Transition To School

WHEN: 8pm - 9.30pm

DATES: Tuesday 19 Sept.

WHERE: Online, via Zoom

COST: Free

Is your child getting closer to starting school? Are you looking for information and support to work through those next steps with your child?

Join us online and listen to other parents share their transition experiences, practical tips and ideas they used to prepare their child for school.

There will also be support from an Early Intervention team worker to assist with questions, such as any concerns you may have around the subjects of mainstream/specialist schools, ORS funding.

BOOK TODAY!



[MCKENZIECENTRE.ORG.NZ/  
EVENTS-AND-WORKSHOPS](https://www.mckenziecentre.org.nz/events-and-workshops)



# ONLINE WORKSHOP

**WHEN:** Tuesdays @ 8pm - 10pm  
**DATES:** 10 Oct – 28 Nov  
**COST:** free

We all want our children to thrive, and you make the biggest difference as parents and carers. By building on our children's strengths, we can help them to lead a good life. Now & Next™ is an award-winning programme that makes that happen.



BOOK TODAY!

[MCKENZIECENTRE.ORG.NZ/  
EVENTS-AND-WORKSHOPS](https://www.mckenziecentre.org.nz/events-and-workshops)



## INTRODUCING OUR PEER WORKERS (TUAKANA)

Our peer workers (tuakana) work as part of a cohesive team to provide cover through all early intervention sessions at McKenzie Centre.

They actively engage with whānau and planning supports to meet identified needs. Tuakana focus on the key relational elements when they are working alongside other parents and McKenzie Centre staff.

'Connections, Education and Advocacy' are the key elements for this Family Peer Facilitator Approach. We are intentionally building strength and capacity in these three areas, which gives a strong focus and intention to continue building family leadership using a tuakana lived experience model.



*Linda Depledge-Brooker*  
Whānau Support  
Coordinator / Tuakana

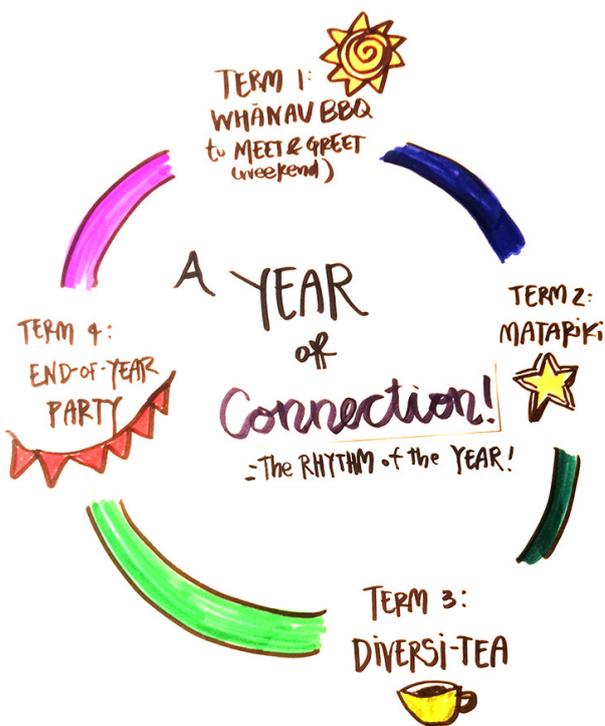
## A BIG THANK YOU

A huge thanks to The Legacy Trust and Lion Foundation for supporting us with our roof repaint. It not only looks great but will mean we won't have to do any maintenance on it for years.

Necessary improvements or significant maintenance – such as the roof repaint – are impossible without funding support.



## A YEAR OF CONNECTIONS



A huge part of what our tuakana/peer workers focus on is **CONNECTION**. At McKenzie Centre connection/whanaungatanga is very important. It is one of the keys to well-being, growth and empowerment, and one of our main roles is nurturing connections and building relationships with whānau.

Apart from the connections that happen in our daily sessions, we also provide opportunities for intentional connections – like the café/playground hangouts, Dads' hangouts and various workshops. In Term 2 our Matariki gathering is a wonderful annual event, where whānau dress up warmly and gather for hot kai under the twinkly lights! Our end of year party is always a wonderful way to celebrate the year and the arrival of the summer holidays.

At these events we hear from families about how nice it is to meet people who attend McKenzie Centre on other days, who they wouldn't otherwise get to connect with. It is also nice to have a different context in which to connect, and to meet other members of the family who aren't usually able to attend during session time.

So we have decided to add two more events to the year's calendar, then there will be a whānau gathering every term.

**DIVERSI-TEA** will be happening on Wednesday 6 September! This was inspired by one of our lovely mums bringing some beautiful Somalian tea to the end-of-year party last year... and how much we all enjoyed trying it, finding out about how it is made, customs associated with tea-drinking, and this sparked some lovely conversations. From that, the idea grew to host an event that celebrated and embraced the diversity within McKenzie Centre, to connect and share stories, and learn from each other. We are so excited to make this event a regular Term 3 happening!

At the start of 2024 we will have a weekend **BBQ** to meet and greet, and the rhythm of the year will begin again!

A celebration of our  
**DIVERSI-TEA!**

Come and celebrate together!  
We will share kai and tell stories,  
embracing the diversity within McKenzie Centre,  
and connecting!

**WEDNESDAY 6TH SEPTEMBER 2023**  
**[AT] MCKENZIE CENTRE**  
**4.30 - 6.30 PM**

Please bring some kai from your culture to share.  
Bring the whole family!

## STAFF NEWS



Welcome to Fiona Denton-Giles who is Operations Manager for Specialist Services.

Congratulations to Stephanie Wacker who has been appointed team lead, Early Intervention.



A big welcome back to Suzanne Kok, who has returned from maternity leave and joins us for two days a week until November.

Ange Li Calsi has increased her days.



Also good-bye to centre director Trisha Bengé who's off to her new role within the Enrich Group after working for 26 years for McKenzie Centre.



## AUTISM GROUPS

Enrich+ offers four small-group sessions catering to autistics and those with Asperger's for ages five to 25 years.

Through games, activities and discussion, we assist with important life skills such as:

- < Social & Communication Skills >
- < Building Friendships >
- < Increasing Independence >



Visit the Enrich+ website for more information:

[ENRICHPLUS.ORG.NZ](http://ENRICHPLUS.ORG.NZ)

## EDUCATION REVIEW OFFICE REPORT (in brief).

ERO has reviewed our service. Below is a **Summary of Review Findings:**

- Children's preferences are respected. They are involved in decisions about their learning. There is a range of experiences and opportunities to extend their learning and development.
- Adults engage in meaningful and positive interactions. They demonstrate an understanding of relevant theories and practices in early childhood education.
- The curriculum is language rich and informed by assessment, planning and evaluation. It is inclusive and responsive to children as confident and competent learners.
- A continual focus on the regulatory standards is required to achieve ongoing maintenance of the licensing criteria. Leaders should ensure they can access records of safety checking of children's workers when required.

To view the full report, please visit our website ERO page: [www.mckenziecentre.org.nz/ero-report](http://www.mckenziecentre.org.nz/ero-report)

There are a fresh lot of workshops and events on offer throughout each term.

[VIEW OUR WEBSITE EVENTS PAGE HERE](#)

# Ahakoā he iti he pounamu

Although it is small, it is a treasure.



### THANKS SO MUCH TO ALL OUR VOLUNTEERS AND SPONSORS.

We are very grateful to the many people and organisations that support McKenzie Centre and the work we do. We could not do it without you!

