



If we can imagine it, we can do it:

How towns and cities can work together to improve literacy

A New Zealand Winston Churchill Memorial Fellowship Report, 2015

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Executive summary

Like other developed countries, New Zealand has long-standing literacy issues. 24% of Auckland children leave primary school below the national literacy standards, the consequence of which may be significant. Children with low literacy are particularly at risk for poor life outcomes. Low literacy is intergenerational; many children with low literacy have parents who struggled at school as well. About a quarter of all adults in Auckland have low literacy.

During a five week long Winston Churchill Memorial Fellowship in March 2015, I visited 11 organisations in nine cities in the UK and USA, looking at how organisations are collaborating at a city level to raise the literacy levels of children and adults. Key insights from those visits included:

The enduring cycle of parents with low adult literacy and children with weak early oral language and poor school performance will only be broken by innovative action.

Raising literacy is a poverty reduction strategy. Tackling the challenge takes more than schools.

Social services, employer groups, unions and philanthropy were at the table with cross-sector education groups to work on community literacy action.

Health has the potential to be a major driver for improving literacy. A lack of literacy has a major impact on health, social inclusion and life outcomes generally. Public health funded both initiatives to grow healthy children ready to learn and social inclusion strategies.

Early oral language and school readiness are key factors in education success. Early literacy success matters much earlier now than it used to because the literacy bar is moving up and children are expected to make more progress earlier at school.

Cross-sector collaborations take time to establish, skill and energy to sustain

Having meaningful data is very important. The collective impact projects in the USA had a major focus on data, more so than the UK initiative. Getting meaningful data is only the first step. Using it and helping others make use of it is equally important. A meaningful data system is costly to establish.

We need to pay more attention to parents and families and thinking intergenerationally. Most places were not thinking about intergenerational learning. Initiatives were child-focused and parents were upskilled only to help their children - the economic benefit of upskilling adults at the same time has not been widely recognised.

There is no one magic bullet. Starting with what we have is at least as important as creating new programmes. We need to showcase local initiatives and seek replication and increased scale in ways that suit individual communities.

The trip highlighted the importance of working on Talking Matters, a new early oral language and school readiness initiative, to make sure children get a great start. Overall, my Fellowship reinforced the importance of the role COMET Auckland plays in starting new conversations and actions to make the education system in our city more effective.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the trustees of the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for providing this once in a lifetime opportunity.

This trip would not have been possible (or anywhere near as pleasurable) without the support of family, friends and colleagues:

- My colleagues at COMET Auckland who carried my load while I was away
- the COMET Auckland board funded me to attend a Washington conference *Champions for Change 2015: Leading a Backbone Organization for Collective Impact*
- Jason Vit at the National Literacy Trust set aside a whole day in London and organised other meetings in the UK
- Scott Sutton and Hannah Baker gave me a bed in London, despite the chaos of house renovations, and showed me the delights of dog-owning, gumboots on the commons and Brixton Market 40 years on from when I was last there.
- Peter Lavender and Christine Nightingale, friends in Leicester, introduced me to new staff at NIACE, the delights of live National Theatre Trust movie showings, Richard III's grave and took me halfway to Yorkshire.
- Jan and Barry Eldred were wonderfully hospitable in Barnsley and gave me sage advice, organised logistics and showed me the wonderful Northern College. Jan, a talented and experienced adult literacy colleague travelled with me to Middlesbrough, Liverpool, York and Sheffield.
- Annette Dixon and Ross Grantham opened their home to me in Washington and showed me the wonderful memorials to the Roosevelts and Martin Luther King, as well as the changing of the guard at Arlington Memorial Cemetery.
- Laura Koenig from the E3 Alliance organised an action-packed two day visit to Austin- including a local band singing Lorde's hit Royals in the market on a beautiful spring morning.
- In Mesilla New Mexico, Jim Powers and Heide Spruck Wrigley shared insight into English language learning and the US adult literacy system, peacocks, almonds, ex-pat stories and great Mexican food.

My career in adult literacy started because of my partner, John Benseman. Thank you John for letting me learn alongside you and for being my long distance sounding board.

For more information about literacy action across Auckland, contact me at Alison.sutton@cometauckland.org.nz

Introduction

Background

I work for COMET Auckland Te Hononga Akoranga, an education trust linked to Auckland Council. Our mission is driving systems change to make education and skills in Auckland more equitable and more effective.

Auckland, like New Zealand as a whole, has a literacy challenge that is constraining our social and economic success. Improving the literacy statistics in Auckland would have a significant impact on Auckland's future and on raising the literacy levels for the country as a whole.

Literacy is an essential thread in our work because the 30-year Auckland Plan recognises the importance of literacy in making Auckland the world's most liveable city. COMET has been advocated for years that literacy is a community issue and that current approaches are insufficient (Sutton and Vester 2010). We have instigated and collaborated on projects in family learning and literacy, digital inclusion, financial literacy and family wellbeing, yet we hadn't really tapped into community creativity and resources.

The emergence of collective impact as a way of organising communities to meet complex social issues is giving us a platform for new thinking. Collective impact is "the commitment of a group of actors from different sectors to a common agenda to solve a specific social problem."¹

COMET and partners have established [Learning Auckland](#), a 'cradle to career' initiative that brings together stakeholders from education, community, families, whanau and business around the same priorities.² Literacy is at the heart of the Learning Auckland vision:

- All children experience quality learning in their early years
- Our young people leave school equipped for a successful transition to study or work
- All Aucklanders have the literacy, language and numeracy skills to thrive.

The purpose of my Winston Churchill Memorial Fellowship was to investigate how city-wide literacy action is being organised in England and the USA, so I can influence action in Auckland. The Fellowship would give me the opportunity to see how far towns and cities in England and the USA had gone towards building effective cross-sector collaborations to make a real difference to literacy achievement.

What's our literacy challenge?

New Zealand has a long and proud history of literacy achievement yet, like the rest of the developed world, many people don't get the literacy skills they need to get and retain jobs in this intensely competitive global market, and to thrive socially.

¹ <http://www.fsg.org/OurApproach/WhatIsCollectiveImpact.aspx>

² See [Appendix A](#) for the Learning Auckland Pathways to Success diagram

Literacy starts at home. Children who start school healthy, confident and ready to learn with good oral communication skills (in English or in a home language) are likely to do well. However, many children from our poorest communities start school without those preconditions.

Early oral language is a particular challenge. Some children are starting school with 3,000 spoken words fewer than their middle class counterparts, which directly impacts on their ability to learn to read (van Hees 2011). Children who struggle to learn to read often don't catch up, which is influenced by children's varying rates of development, competence in English language and the extent of their early childhood education attendance.

While some children do catch up (with skilled help from schools and parental support), 24% of Auckland's children are below reading standard at the end of primary school (Learning Auckland 2014). This means they are late in transitioning from learning to read to reading to learn, something expected to happen around the age of eight.

A child struggling with literacy at the start of high school is also highly likely to struggle at 16 and is at high risk of early drop out from school with no qualifications. Insufficient literacy and numeracy is one of the reasons for disengagement, as well as a result of it. About 2,400 young people disengage early or leave school without qualifications in Auckland each year. Maori and Pasifika children, particularly boys, are most at risk. More than 70% of New Zealand's Pasifika students and around 40% of Maori students live in Auckland so we need to do better in Auckland in order to shift the national picture for them.

Low literacy is also an intergenerational issue. There are over 410,000 adults in Auckland with low literacy – about 40% of our adult population (Lane 2010). Many of these adults are parents who want to support their children's learning, but lack the skills and confidence to do so. The children of low literate parents are therefore more at risk of poor educational achievement – and the cycle of low literacy continues. In 2013 there were 16,000 Auckland families with school-aged children headed by parents with no qualifications, a proxy for low literacy - so the scale of this intergenerational cycle is significant (Sutton 2015).

Low literacy reduces opportunities for employment and social inclusion. A growing pool of new migrants needing English language skills adds to the complexity of the literacy landscape in Auckland.

Current approaches are siloed by the age of learners and funding streams. Schooling literacy experts, resource teachers of literacy in primary, secondary school literacy coordinators and adult literacy practitioners hardly ever meet or share practice. There isn't a single vision for a literate New Zealand – but a series of separate strategies; a schooling approach dominated by highly contested national literacy standards, an adult literacy and numeracy implementation strategy, a Maori adult literacy strategy and a Pasifika education plan.

Early learning providers, schools and community groups may be tapping into family and community strengths to create innovative, small-scale local projects but those initiatives are hardly visible. And expertise is very siloed by age. Those who teach literacy and English language to adult new migrants or adults in the workplace are unlikely to be thinking about how to upskill the parents (and future

parents) about the simple, free and easy things that parents can do to support childrens’s learning. Schools very rarely draw on the expertise of their community adult literacy programmes.

Starting questions

I wanted this Fellowship to shine a light on communities that were taking bolder and more connected action:

- How are diverse stakeholders being brought together to work on literacy across the lifespan – early oral language and literacy, literacy in schools and adult literacy?
- What kinds of projects have been effective?
- What evidence is there that literacy levels are improving?
- What are other communities doing to take action across generations and to harness the power of families?
- To what extent are organisations thinking inter-generationally in their literacy work?
- How can COMET Auckland be more effective as a collective impact backbone organisation in support of raising literacy in Auckland?

Visits summary

Organisation	Location/scope	Focus	Staff
National Literacy Trust	London – national organisation	Literacy Hubs in 10 poorest communities Early Words Together Words for Life website Words for Work Talk to your Babies conference Literacy Leadership and schools PD initiatives National Literacy Forum	Jason Vit ,Hubs Manager; Lucy Kerrigan, Words for Work; Jenny Cole, Project Manager Words for Life; Joe Morrisroe, Literacy Policy & research, National Literacy Forum
Middlesbrough Literacy Hub	North Yorkshire	One of 10 Literacy Hubs planned by National Literacy Trust Collaborative action Early Words Together Council host the Hub; major investment by local employer – Teeside Port	Allison Potter, Middlesbrough Literacy Hub Manager Site visit to Early Words Together programme in local ECE centre
The Reader Organisation	Liverpool – local and spreading	Shared reading groups , volunteer led – strategy for social inclusion and mental health	Sophie Clark , Head of Development
NIACE: National Voice for Lifelong Learning	Leicester – National	Place based initiatives Family Learning- Maths for Mums, Digital inclusion Citizens Curriculum	Joyce Black, Assistant Director Development and Research Suzanne Chambers, Head of Family & Intergenerational Learning and lead for Community Learning.
Whatever it takes	Leicester – city wide collaboration, supported by Council	Improve school outcomes, driven by schooling improvement processes; primary and secondary senior staff co-lead Reading for Pleasure	Ellen Lee, project manager
Learn Barnsley	Yorkshire - Local authority	Local collaboration Family learning and literacy	Anne Marie Holdsworth, Barnsley Council's Adult and Family Learning Service manager
Sheffield REAL Raising early achievement in literacy	Sheffield - parent education – with national reach	ORIM framework to help structure how services engage with parents; can be incorporated into many different contexts	Professor Cathy Nutbrown, Sheffield University
Grade Level Reading	National – 140 communities campaigns to raise literacy levels of children by the end of Grade 3	Healthy readers Families as first coaches and brain builders Out of school & school holiday initiatives Volunteer reading programmes	Ron Fairchild, Special adviser, National Grade Level Reading

Baltimore Grade Level Reading	Baltimore – city specific collaboration with health	Mobile library visits high need playgroups Child Health initiatives	Kimberly Mann Baltimore GLR Program Director: Gena O'Keefe, health; Elizabeth Tung, family services
Champions for Change: Leading a backbone Organisation for collective Impact March 24-26			
RAISE DC	Washington DC	New Collective impact cradle to career initiative Opportunity youth, action research with 500 young people	Celine Ferejan, Director, Strategic Initiatives
E3Alliance - Education Equals Economics	Austin Texas	School readiness (state wide standard) and parent engagement Data projects –multi-sector data showcase quarterly Pathways to Promise – STEM alliance workstream Community accountability workstream Stakeholder engagement and policy development	Susan Dawson, Chief Executive; Laura Koenig, Director Schooling Improvement; Khotan Shahbazi-Harmon Director of Communications & Community Accountability; Hannah Gourgey, Vice President of Strategic Alignment; Shawn Thomas, Director of Policy & research
Literacy Works	Mesilla, New Mexico	Collective impact and collaboration for English for Speakers of Other Languages Ready to Work – Seattle collaboration to help get migrants work-ready Rest days	Heide Spruck Wrigley Jim Powers

Findings

Key insights

The enduring cycle of parents with low adult literacy and children with weak early oral language and poor school performance will only be broken by innovative action. A lack of literacy has a major impact on health, social inclusion and life outcomes, so literacy has to be regarded as integral to economic and social regeneration. Linking strategies to lift literacy and reduce poverty enables new and different partnerships to emerge, providing enough time is allowed for partners from different sectors to build trust and find a common language. Those working on collaboration need to be able to see beyond traditional boundaries.

Raising literacy will take more than schools. The communities I visited had some programmes focused on improving teacher quality and education leadership. Equally importantly, they also included a focus on out-of-school factors: improving the health of pre-schoolers; raising parents' confidence and skills in helping children learn; improving attendance, (including challenging employers for employing school-aged children during school hours); building reading for pleasure into after school and holiday programmes; setting up library programmes and summer reading clinics to mitigate against summer reading loss; in-school reading support from volunteers; and partnerships with health and family services to promote language and literacy rich environments and consistent messages in families. The multiple engagement points illustrate the importance of keeping an open mind about what types of organisations to partner with.

Early oral language and school readiness are key factors. Early oral language at age 2 can predict reading ability on starting school and later attainment (Read On Get On campaign 2014, Warren 2014). The language gap starts early and low income children lag behind on school entry. It is also a risk factor; 20% of children in poverty with advanced oral language skills at age 3 are lagging behind at age 11 (twice as many as high income children). This Fellowship trip reinforced the importance of the new initiative that has emerged from Learning Auckland, *Talking Matters – Growing great early speakers, listeners and readers*.

Health has the potential to be a major driver for improving literacy. People need literacy to receive and understand public health messages; and they need oral language and literacy to manage personal and family health issues and be informed consumers of health services. Children need to be healthy to attend school regularly, see and hear what is going on fully and learn well. There is potential to link much more with Health Promoting Schools, with the Healthy Families initiative and with Whānau Ora, among others.

Cross-sector collaborations take time to establish, skill and energy to sustain and there is no one magic bullet. Collective Impact is an effective approach for working collaboratively, but it not the only answer. It does offer a very useful framework and discipline for creating and maintaining partnerships. However, the funding infrastructure around collective impact in the USA is very different from the New Zealand context. It is very difficult to get funding for collaboration in New Zealand. Typically, funders are more comfortable funding programmes. Cathy Nutbrown made the

point that it has taken 20 years for the ORIM framework to go from being prototyped in one school to national adoption.

Starting with what we have is at least as important as creating new programmes. We have home grown examples of literacy action that are not well known or operating at a meaningful scale in Auckland. As I visited other communities, I realised how little I knew about local community innovations in literacy in Auckland. We need to showcase what we have and to seek replication and increased scale in ways that suit individual communities. Local examples include the Reading Enrichment Programme run by community volunteers at One Tree Hill College, the whanau literacy programme at Findlayson Park School and the Pacific Reading programme at Multi-Educational Support and Services Trust in Onehunga.

Data is key - albeit costly to establish and maintain. The collective impact projects in the USA had a major focus on data, more so than the UK initiative. The creation of large combined data sets of children on collective impact project means that the best run programmes can track a specific intervention – for example, the impact of a school holiday programme on a particular cohort of children. Getting the data is only the first job. Putting in the resource to make use of it is equally important (and costly).

We need to pay more attention to parents and families and thinking intergenerationally. Most places were not thinking about intergenerational learning; initiatives were almost exclusively child-focused and parents were upskilled only to help their children. The economic benefit of upskilling adults for employability at the same time as building their ability to help their children has not been widely recognised. Schools wanted to engage parents and care-givers but often do not realise how much parents don't know about education works; nor do schools always understand the concerns and needs of low-literacy parents. Many people in the schooling system do not realise there is an education specialty in providing adult foundation tertiary education or do not recognise the value of connecting this expertise to schools' parent engagement initiatives.

Answering my questions

How are diverse stakeholders being brought together to work on literacy across the lifespan – early oral language and literacy, literacy in schools and adult literacy?

The great majority of initiatives I saw had as their primary focus school aged children achieving literacy, particularly reading, targets before starting high school. Longitudinal research (Feister 2010, Sullivan and Brown 2013, Read On Get On campaign 2014, Warren 2014) has clearly identified that children who are not reading successfully by about the age of 10 have increased risk of poor education, work, health and broader social outcomes.

Many of those children come from homes with parents with low literacy, yet there was little evidence that collaborations were drawing on the strengths and connections of the adult learning/foundation tertiary learning sectors that are strong in both the UK and USA.

The links between literacy and employment, and literacy and health enabled the collaborations to build a broad platform of stakeholders including educators, employers, public health officials,

hospitals and child health services. The non-education partners were participating because of their belief in the long term economic benefits from upskilling a future workforce.

Most initiatives focused on reading. Local authorities in the UK (such as Leicester and Middlesbrough) are promoting the reading for pleasure agenda, drawing on the National Literacy Trust's annual research into students' reading behaviours (Clarke 2015) and the clear link between children reading for pleasure and improved education achievement in reading and in maths (Sullivan and Brown 2013). Leicester City Council was backing Leicester as a city of readers through community festivals of reading and storytelling, as well as intensive professional development and collaborative innovations in schools. Middlesbrough students were improving from a focus on a specialist inference training programme.

Success in maths (particularly early algebra) is being picked up as a key issue in by the E3 Alliance, as part of the Pathways to Promise work on science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM). Parents were being encouraged to set up early numeracy activities in the National Literacy Trust's Early Words Together. Numeracy and STEM subjects and school readiness work of all the initiatives in the USA. NIACE sees great potential in family numeracy and is promoting specific family learning initiatives such as Maths for Mum and linking with Kumon maths and financial literacy.

Many of the initiatives had similar components. Collaborations started with a research and evidence base (Feister 2010, Read On Get On campaign 2014). They developed a compelling story about the importance of the issue that is broad enough to attract a wide range of stakeholders. Good visuals were important (GLR, Raise DC and E3 Alliance in particular). And above all, bold leadership.

Many of the cross collaborations had similar inbuilt challenges: the need for a common language between education providers from different parts of the sector as well as between education and employment or health; the challenge of competition when education providers are faced with promoting alternative pathways for learners that may well mean they lose students and therefore funding; the need for coordination, people skills and patience and persistence to keep bringing people around the table (and the ongoing challenge to fund those roles); the need for senior staff to publicly endorse the importance of organisations collaborating over years. Flexible funding, particularly in the scoping phases, is important – and appears to be much easier to find in the USA than in the UK or New Zealand.

There is potential for collaborative action to link with new migrants but this is not happening yet in Auckland. Seattle's just established collaborative project *Ready for Work*³ seeks to tackle English language, digital and literacy skills as well as transport and other barriers that stop new residents getting sustainable employment.

What other communities are doing to harness the power of families and to think intergenerationally

Many of the city-level initiatives included a focus on early oral language and school readiness and parent involvement because of the increasingly compelling data on the importance of these early years for building literacy success. Helping parents build their confidence and skills to support children's learning was fundamental to the Grade Level Reading Campaign (GLR) and to Raising Early

³ <http://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/OIRA/ELLRFQfinal.pdf>

Literacy Achievement (REAL) in Sheffield. Similarly, the Literacy Action Hubs in poor UK communities, supported by the National Literacy Trust, involved parents primarily through providing Early Words Together, a parent to parent coaching programme organised by targeted early learning services.

NIACE's policy work on family learning and their exploration of different approaches (such as the maths pathfinders projects) have the potential to link into local enterprise partnerships. However, as NIACE's recent paper on the connections between community learning and local enterprise shows (NIACE 2015), the employability and skills agenda commonly overlooks, or disregards the role community learning can play.

The *Grade Level Reading* (GLR) campaign is promoting a 'broad tent' of stakeholders and when it starts in a community, focuses initial efforts on what the community can do (rather than what schools and teachers can do). GLR connects with health and child development through a 'growing healthy readers' strand; develops family-focused strategies to support parents 'as first brain builders and coaches'; and promotes action beyond school – reading programmes over summer, volunteer-led reading programmes, reading as part of after school care for example.

What kinds of projects have been effective? What evidence is there that literacy levels are improving?

Whatever it takes in Leicester and the *E3 Alliance* in Austin have been in existence long enough to have evidence of change and effectiveness. Many of the others had not. Evidence of change came from a range of sources (not just children's literacy tests) - 'there is no silver bullet for these complex issues, only silver buckshot!'

The *Champions for Change* conference stressed that backbone organisations have to collect data on indicators that measure incremental organisational change, not direct measures of learner gain, particularly at the start. Suggested indicators included:

- organisations working differently together
- development of small-scale, pilot initiatives
- solutions being tried on a larger scale
- projects that brought together new alliances
- spotlighting initiatives that were not widely known yet effective on a small scale and investigating scale up
- new in-kind investments
- success stories being highlighted and other organisations being willing to try similar approaches.

Turning insights into action

I came back more convinced than ever of the need to join up across Auckland if we are serious about making a difference to literacy across generations. What do we need to do differently?

- Grow a broader understanding of the importance of literacy across the lifespan - so more people understand that reading matters and take action locally - in their own families, with early learning and with schools.
- Get family and health services and early learning to share expertise and promote common messages to families
- Promote and scale some of the great community learning initiatives we already have here
- Strengthen the pathways between programmes
- Connect up adult literacy, English language and family learning programmes to the early learning agenda, in order to intentionally tackle intergenerational low literacy.

There are some specific interventions and approaches that I want to continue to watch and learn from, including:

- *Read On. Get On.* This Save the Children, UK initiative is calling for community support to ensure all children are read to 10 minutes a day. This is a simple message, easy for the community to get behind.
- *The Citizen's Curriculum*, developed by NIACE in England, which is weaving together literacy, numeracy, computer skills, health and financial literacy and English for new English speakers
- The NIACE *family numeracy pathfinder* projects
- Evidence of the extent to which NIACE supported *local enterprise partnerships* are able to incorporate community learning
- *Grade Level Reading*. The GLR had the most comprehensive theory of change and a broad and compelling mix of stakeholders. There is much to learn from GLR.
- *Pathways to Promise* – a science, technology, engineering and maths programme of research and development supported by the E3 Alliance
- The *Community Accountability* workstrand of the E3 Alliance, which helps build the idea that improving literacy and education success is a shared responsibility
- The focus on data at E3A Alliance, particularly their 200 slide deck of data, the slide a month approach for highlighting key education topics and their quarterly data seminars
- The *Reading Revolution*, the emerging shared reading project in Auckland based on the Reader Organisation's model of community volunteers reading aloud to small groups, a cost-effective approach for building social connections and improved mental health.
- *The ORIM framework and REAL Sheffield*; ORIM is an easily understood strategic framework for early learning and family services to grow the capacity of parents to increase the oral language and early literacy at home.
- *Ready for Work, Seattle*.

I am left with two overarching insights. First, the Fellowship trip reinforced the importance of new early oral language and school readiness, which has led to the development of *Talking Matters*.⁴ Talking Matters is a 'whole of community' initiative to generate action on the importance of early oral language, so we grow great early speakers, listeners and readers. Action in Auckland will lead to models and approaches that are nationally applicable. Talking Matters will prototype strategies for families and work with 'trusted messenger' organisations to streamline and strengthen the

⁴ <http://www.learningauckland.org.nz/talking-matters>

messages families hear and see about attachment, oral language and literacy. We are keen to connect with other organisations through the Talking Matters network.

Secondly, the Fellowship affirmed the importance and impact of intergenerational learning and dual generation investment. We know that parent behaviour impacts on children's education success (OECD 2012, NZ Children's Commissioner 2013). We know that vulnerable children are more likely than not to have parents with no or low qualifications (Treasury 2015). To tackle low education achievement we have to put parents at the centre, particularly low literate parents.

The Fellowship has also given me much more confidence in the value of collaborative action and the scope of what is possible. I hope to have more opportunity to share insights with others in the coming months. Imagine that we developed a NZ wide cross-sector vision for literacy that brought us together with a common purpose and common measurement that everyone could contribute to. *If we don't imagine it, we will never achieve it.*

The visits

National Literacy Trust, London

The National Literacy Trust⁵ (NLT) in London is unique because it is focused on literacy across the lifespan. I spent a day at the National Literacy Trust.

Literacy Action Hubs

The National Literacy Trust had identified 10 very vulnerable communities by analysing data on community social economic status, school pass rates, adult qualifications rates and health. The NLT is committing to a decade of investment in a literacy action hub⁶ in each of those communities. Three hubs have been set up and others are in the scoping phase. Hubs aim to bring educators, health, social housing, local business and the council together, resourced by a combination of central and local funding from the health and wellbeing agenda of public health, education and social regeneration funding pools. In high need communities, 75% of staff encounter people with literacy issues but less than half take any specific action to refer those adults or support them. Poverty and low literacy are self-reinforcing; typically, the lower the literacy, the smaller the number of social connections a person has in their community.



The hubs can draw on (but are not limited to) the NLT services and programmes which include:

- *Early Words Together*: a 6-session, parent-focused programme run through early learning providers to grow parents' confidence to support children's early oral language and school readiness
- *School literacy leadership and professional development* programmes; much of this is self-funded by schools to encourage local commitment; actions includes whole-school literacy audits, an online literacy community and regular training with other local schools in the network
 - *Research*, particularly findings from the annual surveys of students' reading practices
 - *Words for Work* – a 40-hour programme to grow speaking and listening skills of Year 8-10 students to improve their confidence and motivate them about future work; local business people are coaches
 - The *Premier League Reading Stars* which uses sport to motivate children to read for pleasure

⁵ <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/>

⁶ <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/communities>

- Library programmes to promote *summer reading*
- *Capacity building* for organisations that come into contact with adults with literacy needs (health, social services, social housing providers etc.)
- *Storybook Dads* – a programme to help male prisoners record themselves reading a children’s book to build a bond with their children
- Participation in an annual *Talk to your baby* conference to grow capacity in the education, health and family services sectors for language development of children from birth to five.

Early insights from establishing hubs include:

- Local leadership is vital as is attracting partners who are well connected and to whom the community will listen – radio stations, local newspaper, churches. Bringing in ethnic communities by employing culturally diverse staff has been key – in Bradford, the Asian community champion has focused on bringing in dads to connect to literacy action, which has been hugely successful.
- Innovative facilitation and demonstrating different approaches is essential. The hub manager/facilitator must be highly skilled at building partnership and credible to a range of stakeholders
- The hubs need to map assets in the area and look for a quick win, a festival, event or campaign that many people can contribute to at the start. Festivals that promote local authors, poets, storytellers and local heroes are all important.
- Measuring success has to take into account many factors, not just literacy scores; programmes that were not happening before; attracting more and different kinds of learners and partners; a diverse range of funders investing, partners sharing and making attitudinal shifts in how they talk about issues and act together; partners saying ‘literacy is our business too’ – for example, the local football stadium creating a family learning zone.

The NLT visit highlighted the compelling evidence of the importance of reading for pleasure. The results of the Children and Young Person’s Reading in 2014 report (Clarke 2015) showed one in four children agreeing ‘my parents don’t care if I spend any time reading’ and a quarter of young people did not recognise a link between reading and success.

Reading for pleasure has longer term benefits. In a longitudinal study of 6,000 young people tracked from age 5 to 16 on reading, maths, vocabulary and spelling, those who read books at or above their age level and more often than once a week did better in all tests at age 16 (Sullivan and Brown 2013). Children who were regularly read to performed better at 16 than those who were not. The intergenerational relationship was clear. Children of parents with reading problems did significantly less well than the children of parents who did not.

[Words for Work](#)

Just as in New Zealand, employers call out for young people to have soft skills, communication skills, but speaking and listening are not priorities in the secondary curriculum and usually only speeches are formally assessed. NLT has developed *Words for Work* to help connect students to employer-mentors and build work-relevant oral communication and confidence. Contacts with employers are a protective factor. Young people who have four or more contacts with employers were five times

less likely to be Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) according to a [research study](#) by Education and Employers Taskforce (Mann 2012).

Feedback from employers, students and schools has been very positive, but to be able to be scaled it needs streamlining, to reduce the demands on volunteer coaches and to fit more easily in school timetables. We will watch to see the results of this evaluation and re-focusing.

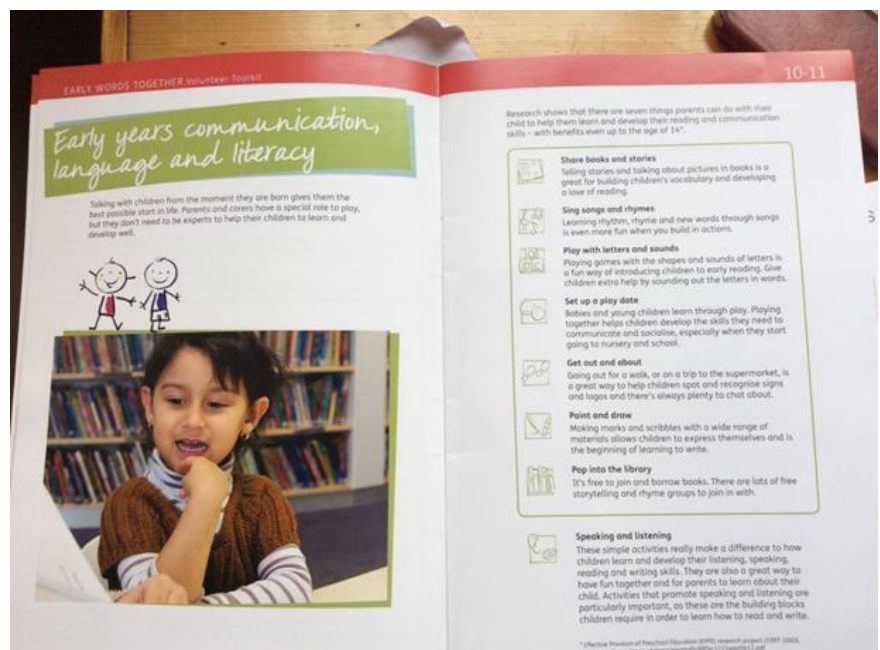
[Words for Life](#)

Words for Life a website to provide parents and family with age-specific information about growing language and literacy from birth until age 11 (starting secondary school).

[Early Words Together](#)

Early Words Together is a flagship programme for the Trust and the hubs are all using it. Parents are trained to coach other parents to communicate more with their children, supported by a trained ECE teacher. Key issues in screening families to enter the programme – how frequently they read to children, the number of books in homes (less than 30), do they sing and tell nursery rhymes to their children.

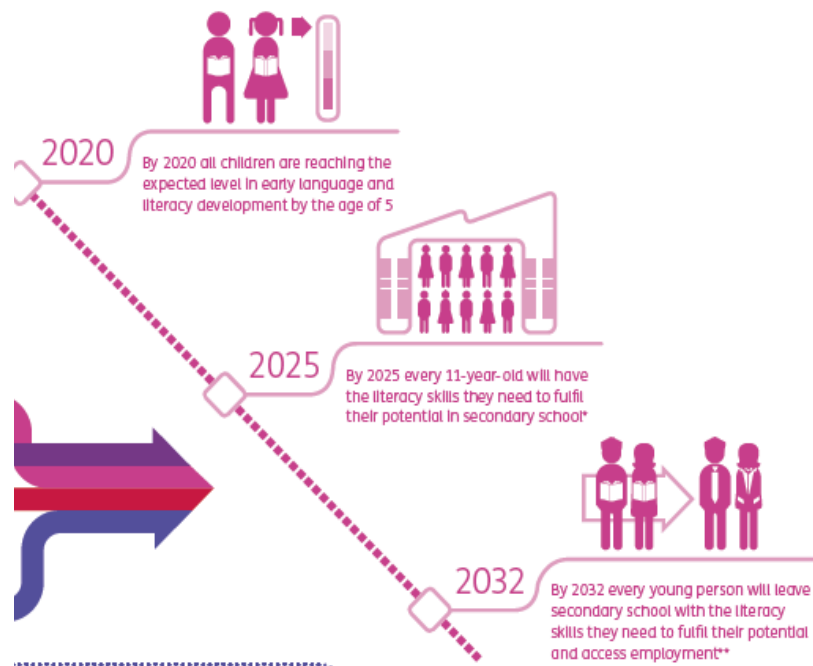
EWT makes an appreciable difference to girls and the confidence and literacy practices of participating parents. The impact on boys is less marked (Wood, Vardy et al. 2015). Parents from non-English-speaking backgrounds found the programme particularly helpful as an opportunity for them and their children to practise spoken English.



[The National Literacy Forum](#)

The NLT coordinates a collaboration of Chief Executives from major literacy organisations to meet twice a year. The collaboration created A Vision for Literacy 2025 (National Literacy Forum 2014) taking a cohort approach so all the children who start school in 2020 at 5 are seen to be successful when they leave high school. The collaboration has been used for advocacy during the current general election campaign in the UK.

Our National Standards and Better Public Service Targets focus on similar indicators but they haven't created a powerful story of success moving across a cohort of young people and haven't captured the public's imagination or sense of aspiration. Not do they create any coherence or compelling reason for collaboration across the age sectors.



Middlesbrough Literacy Hub, North Yorkshire

To see a hub in action, I travelled up to the north east of England to Middlesbrough with a colleague Dr Jan Eldred and met Allison Potter, the Middlesbrough Hub Manager⁷ (and also Middlesbrough Council's Literacy Adviser).

Middlesbrough has a population of around 134,000 (about the size of Howick), many of whom are low income or benefit dependent. There is high unemployment, yet the town is alongside the major North Sea port of Teeside, where there is a skilled labour shortage. This is a similar picture to South Auckland, where manufacturing hubs and the airport have employment opportunities but local people don't have the right skills.

The vision and drive of the Council's Chief Executive was instrumental in getting this first NLT Literacy Hub started. Health is a major partner in this hub, and contributes to the funding of the coordinator position, because of health equity targets around mental health and general health poverty. The Hub's initial three priorities are:

Ensuring children are ready to start school (including a focus on Early Words Together, having every child read to and common messages about the importance of regular bed times, routines and story reading)

Raising awareness among parents of premature babies of the value of reading to newborns and providing parents (and siblings) with suitable reading materials to read to their new baby to build attachment in a strange and difficult environment

Improving the literacy outcomes of teenage boys.

⁷ http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/communities/literacy_hubs/middlesbrough

A Strategic Steering Group sets the action with Council staff responsible for care and wellbeing, local public health advocates, education services for children aged 0-19, the local port and a major philanthropic trust that wants to promote local employment for local young people.

Local community action has involved giving away 9,000 free books on buses heading to the poorest part of town, having book swaps on Neighbours Day and running community learning sessions in the local social housing centre. A network of schools has started collaborative professional development. Inference training (specific comprehension strategies) has been made available to boys as part of the Premier League Stars programme

The quality of UK careers advice and guidance in schools nationally has come under scrutiny, which has led to local action through the Hub. Hub partners realised how little local education providers knew about the major work opportunities available at the port, so the company took hundreds of stakeholders up the river by ferry to see the scale and diversity of employment and training possibilities. The Hub partnered in a local careers convention and there has been an increased focus on local work experience.



In a local prison there is a focus on reading materials in the playgroup provided, parents can have 'Read with your child' visits and the prison has organised a family reading event.

We also visited an Early Words Together session based in a children's centre. The quality of materials is excellent and local families and schools have reported the benefits. We could both immediately see the challenge of organising a programme based on parent volunteers who don't always attend and the demands that placed in centre staff to fill in. Parent volunteers had varying degrees of ability to model to other parents the behaviours the programme is trying to promote. Having said that, parent to parent initiatives are a great way to build local community capacity. Our home grown examples - HIPPY and Playcentre among them - upskill local parents and for many, are the first steps on the pathway to employment.

[Read On. Get On.](#)

The National Literacy Trust drew my attention to a new campaign, Read On. Get On. because of the overlap with Learning Auckland's overall interest in a joined-up approach to literacy. The campaign has an overarching target of all UK children reading successfully by the age of 11, putting out a call to

action to communities to make sure all children are read to 10 minutes a day. Read On Get On has been set up by a coalition of literacy organisations, spearheaded by Save the Children UK. [Evidence](#) about the poor life outcomes and the limited employment trajectory of children who leave primary school with insufficient literacy, and the scale of the challenge with poor boys in particular, has led Save the Children to initiate this campaign, the first ever they have done within the UK (Read On Get On campaign 2014, Warren 2014).

NIACE, Leicester

NIACE is the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, the national voice for lifelong learning, based in Leicester.⁸ NIACE has had a long standing and important role in shaping adult education in the UK particularly adult literacy and family learning. I met with Joyce Black, Assistant Director for Development and Research and Suzanne Chambers, Head of Family & Intergenerational Learning and lead for Community Learning.

NIACE is supporting Local Economic Partnerships, relatively new and unique partnerships at the sub-regional level to support local economic regeneration. LEPs bring together employers, further education, third sector partners for locality-level strategic planning to work on growth priorities - infrastructure, transportation, business growth, housing, employment and skills. NIACE is providing a bespoke consultancy service to promote adult learning and training in a variety of forms.⁹ There is real (but as yet unrecognised) potential for the community and family learning sectors to play a role in local economic development (NIACE 2015).

E-learning and digital inclusion are key platforms for NIACE. They have created a 'Citizen's Curriculum'¹⁰, a core set of skills needed for the 21st Century, including English, maths, ESOL, digital, civic, health and financial capabilities. They are at proof of concept stage and doing early trials in 13 different learning contexts.

NIACE has been a long time champion of family learning.¹¹ Recent family learning work has focused on: increasing men's involvement in family learning (in conjunction with the Fatherhood Institute); 'Maths and mums' short courses and linking with Kumon to do maths coaching for parents alongside interventions for children; peer literacy mentoring in prisons and financial capability. A set of pathfinder family numeracy projects are currently underway, delivered through community collaborations. NIACE has created a Family Learning Forum for national advocacy.

NIACE also has an increasing interest in health, in a variety of innovative forms – intergenerational learning through community choirs (supporting people with dementia) and the literacy needed for engaging successfully with Telehealth (health services delivered online or by video conferencing).

⁸ <http://www.niace.org.uk/>

⁹ <http://www.niace.org.uk/our-resources/promoting-learning-and-skills/2015-localism-prospectus>

¹⁰ <http://www.niace.org.uk/our-work/life-and-society/citizens-curriculum>

¹¹ <http://www.niace.org.uk/our-work/life-and-society/family-and-community-learning/family-learning>

Whatever it Takes, Leicester

Leicester is a city of about 350,000 people (comparable to the size of the Southern Initiative in Auckland - the four local boards of Mangere-Otahuhu, Manurewa, Otara-Papatoetoe and Papakura). After a history of poor education achievement, Leicester City Council backed their city to be a place where every child is a reader and has funded a School Development Support Agency to lead a range of initiatives.

*Whatever it Takes*¹² is a five-year old collaboration of schools and community organisations focused on reading achievement. . After nearly a decade, Leicester has become the second most improved city in England in terms of reading achievement as a result of this sustained collaborative effort. I had a brief meeting with the project lead, Ellen Lee as she came out of the end of a week-long festival that catered for 1,000 children.



Whatever it Takes seeks to inspire literacy outside the classroom and encourages schools to adopt a whole school ethos about reading excellence and reading for pleasure. The chairs of the primary and secondary schools networks co-chair an over-arching strategy board that includes unions, adult literacy and community education representatives.

Strategies include professional development networks, programmes for reluctant readers, for new English speakers and for boys. Inspiring a love of reading is core to the work. The city hosts an authors' festival that draws in 50 vulnerable students from each school to workshop creative writing approaches with local writers.

Everybody's Reading is a city wide annual nine day festival that takes place across Leicester in schools, libraries, bars, cafes, pubs, and coffee shops. Events offer local people the opportunity to hear spoken word artists, poets, authors and community writers in local venues. Young people volunteer at the festival for work experience. The City Council provides small grants to a range of local organisations to encourage them to take part. Each year Leicester City Council sponsors a celebration for 600 young people whose reading has improved during the year.

Every Child a Reader is a government-sponsored strategy to build up reading recovery teachers in high need schools.

¹² <http://www.sdsa.net/ourwork/1/whateverittakes/>

The [Just Read](#) campaign is focusing on getting free books to children and encouraging parents to read to children for 10 minutes a day.

Each year high needs early learning services dedicate a week to storytelling. Teachers and parents are trained in storytelling techniques. Parents are encouraged to 'Stay and Play' at early learning centres and the pre-schoolers receive free books.

A new transition pilot programme will trial the impact of offering support to 300 Year 6 school students who are below curriculum level as they transition to secondary school. They will be matched with a secondary student mentor midway through their last year at primary school, take part in a summer reading /motivation programme, have home visits focused on reading from participating schools and take part in a synthetic phonics programme to improve their reading fluency.

There were a great many strands to the Leicester work and substantial investment. With some many initiatives, both in school and in the community, I wondered how the strategic group was able to establish what was really working and making the difference.

The Reader Organisation, Liverpool

The *Shared Reading* Programme, although a single initiative, was interesting to me because of the particular cross-over of this approach with health and social inclusion agendas. The Reader Organisation, a social enterprise, has set up more than 360 groups for reading aloud in community settings, libraries, dementia units, old people's homes for mental wellbeing and social inclusion. I spent the afternoon with Sophie Clark, the head of programme development, in Calderstones House, a tired Georgian mansion that is being renovated into an International Centre for Reading.

Volunteer readers are trained in managing groups, book selection and reading aloud techniques. The books range in genre but are typically fiction and intended to be thought provoking and to 'speak to people'. Groups operate at a slow pace and the readers stops and asks open-ended questions; the last thing always read is a poem. People connect informally.

Volunteer readers take part in a three day *Read to Learn* course and commit to working with their group weekly for about a year. Recruitment criteria are kindness, broad life experience and being 'book bold' – i.e. keen and eclectic readers themselves. Some communities are training up unemployed



people to be the readers, building up their confidence, communication skills and providing a sense of purpose.

Most of the funding for the groups is coming from health and social inclusion budgets. They have started a 'Reader in Residence' programme in rest-homes; the evidence is those groups improve the residents' social interaction and confidence, improve relationships with staff and reduce doctors' visits. The Reader Organisation is developing pilot programmes in prisons and [Stories for you and yours](#), a course to help parents read to their children. Shared reading is also being used as a staff development tool in Tesco, to build connections between staff.

I was delighted to hear that an Auckland woman Kate Jackson recently took herself to Liverpool for training and has come back keen to set up groups in Auckland, branded as *the Reading Revolution*. This is a powerful idea and something I am keen to stay connected with. Kate and I have had a preliminary discussion about bringing trainers from the Reader Organisation over here to train New Zealand trainers in the approach.

Learn Barnsley, Yorkshire

Local authorities in the UK are directly involved in education and learning for people aged over 19, a major difference between UK education policy and New Zealand. Barnsley is a community of about 250,000 - about the size of two Auckland local boards. Local authorities employ staff to coordinate adult learning and apply for national funds for local provision. I met Barnsley Council's Adult and Family Learning Service manager Anne Marie Holdsworth.

Learn Barnsley is a collaboration between tertiary providers, Council, the local job centre and other agencies with a broad interest in adult education. Learn Barnsley endeavours to get competitive tertiary providers to collaborate, to align initial assessment processes, Information, Advice and Guidance (career education functions); and to focus on ensuring provision fits local learners needs. Learn Barnsley is both a referral organisation and a provider of literacy (English, maths or computer skills), leisure education and short courses that pathway learners to training, voluntary work or employment.

The family learning service's short courses include: family maths and family literacy – building parents' confidence in helping their children learn; six-week Cook and Eat courses that embed numeracy; programmes on child development (*Now I am 1, now I am 2*) and a *Book Start* programme that includes free books and home visits to promote reading. There is a growing emphasis on including digital literacy in the suite of programmes available.

An increasing national focus on young people and functional literacy has reduced the focus (and innovation) in family learning. A 25% funding cut for adult learning was announced in this year's budget which means the job just got harder

REAL Sheffield - Raising Early Achievement in Literacy

The short meeting I was able to organise at the last minute at the University of Sheffield with Professor Cathy Nutbrown was an unexpected highlight of the trip because of her breadth of skill and experience helping services engage with families to develop the early learning, language and literacy of their children. The REAL¹³ project resulted in the ORIM¹⁴ framework, applicable in many settings, that helps parents notice and use four key components of literacy - environmental print (the reading that is all around us in signs, notices, billboards, food packaging etc.), books, early writing and early oral language ([ORIM: A framework for practice](#)).

Parents and carers are initially supported by home visits from family support organisations: to provide *Opportunities* to develop literacy, for example by providing books and writing materials; to *Recognise* milestones in their child's progress; to *Interact* by writing a birthday card or reading a book together; to *Model* literacy skills such as reading a newspaper or writing a shopping list. For many parents these seemingly simple skills are not second nature and they need support to see the value of their role as children's first teacher ([Parents' roles in children's literacy development](#)).

A key component of REAL's initial approach was to train clusters of 20 practitioners who then trained 20 others each –it was estimated the first phase of training spread out to 6,000 parents.

STRANDS OF LITERACY

	<i>Environmental Print</i>	<i>Books</i>	<i>Writing</i>	<i>Oral Language</i>
<i>PARENTS CAN PROVIDE</i>				
<i>Opportunities</i>				
<i>Recognition</i>				
<i>Interaction</i>				
<i>Model</i>				

The ORIM Framework

There is now substantial evidence over years about the benefits of using ORIM to change family literacy practices. Most benefits have accrued to mothers with no qualifications. The programme has been effective for both poor working class parents and the parents (and siblings) of Pakistani dual language families. ORIM is used in a wide range of settings, including in both men's and women's prison.

Cathy talked of the 20 years of development and trialling it has taken to get a sufficiently robust approach for there to be a national roll out, via the National Children's Bureau. A rollout process is happening in [8 local authority areas](#) including home visits, practitioner training, community literacy

¹³ <http://www.real-online.group.shef.ac.uk/index.html>

¹⁴ Opportunities, Recognition, Interaction and Models of literacy

events and a special focus on bilingual families. Cathy is coming to a conference in Australia in 2016 and I am keen to see if we can get her to New Zealand as well.

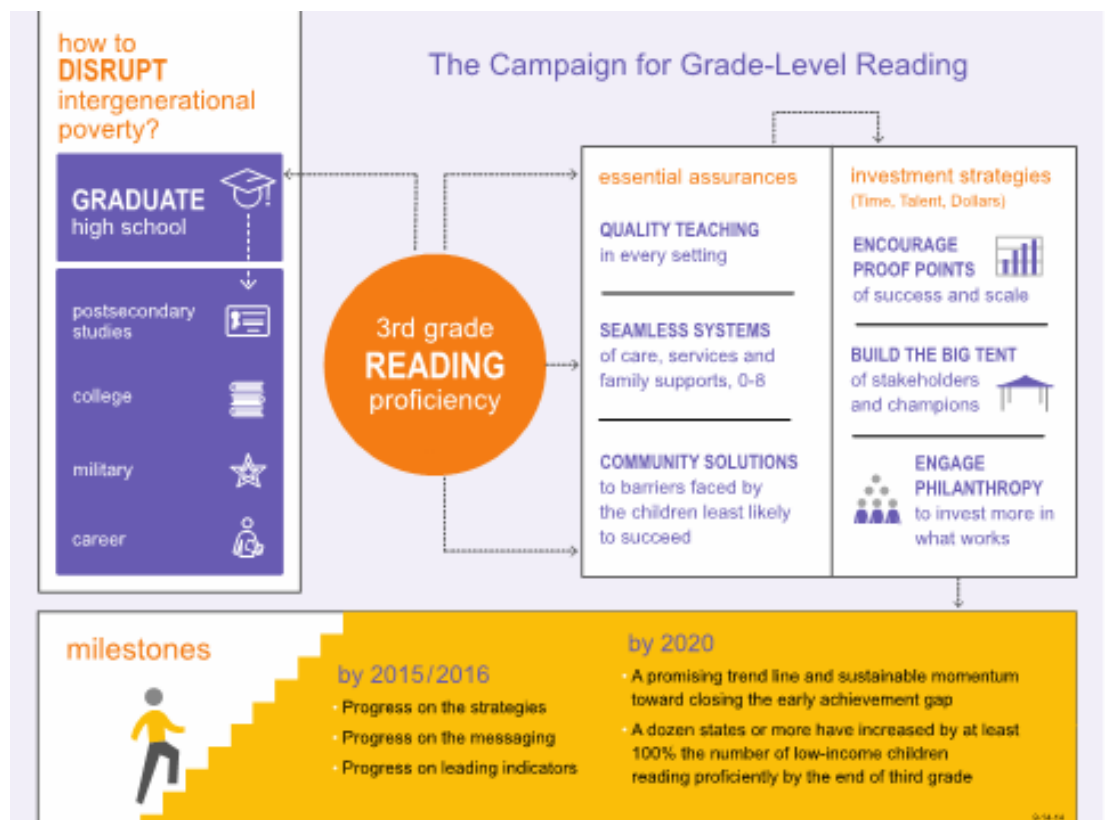
The Campaign for Grade Level Reading

Grade Level Reading¹⁵ focuses on community action to raise literacy by the age of 8. GLR operates in 140 cities and communities across the USA. Baltimore has a population of 620,000, low population growth and high poverty. Its size was useful relative to Auckland and it is only a 45 min fast train ride away from Washington where I was staying.

On a beautiful early spring morning, waiting at the station to be collected, I had my shoes shined by an elderly black man who read the King James Bible between clients - and thought I was both aristocratic and from "some country near Switzerland!"

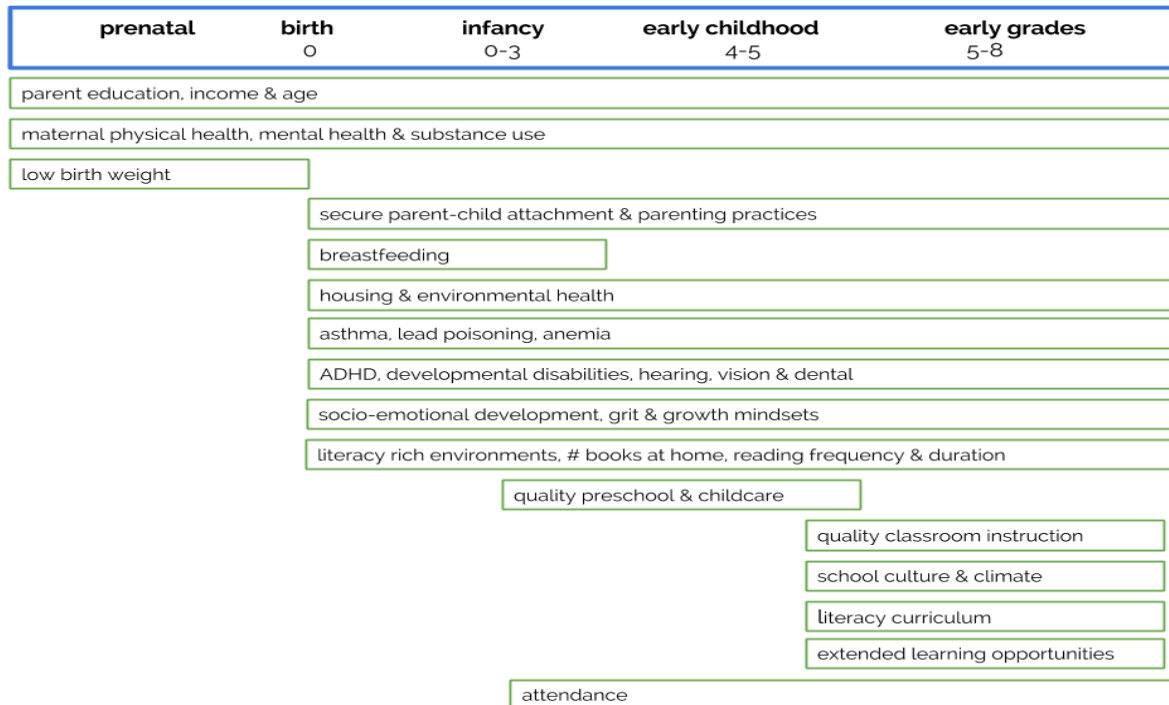
I had the day with Ron Fairchild who leads the community solutions workstream for the National Grade Level Reading Campaign and Kim Mann, the Baltimore GLR programme director (based at the Baltimore Community Foundation). The GLR is a collective impact initiative driven from the findings of [Early Warning: Why reading by the age of third grade matters](#) (Feister 2010). This research has similar findings to the UK's Read On. Get On, mapping the poor life outcome trajectory of those (primarily poor) children who don't learn to read satisfactorily.

The Campaign overview diagram shows how GLR positions literacy and education success as the poverty 'disrupter' and illustrates how improving reading is a community challenge, not just a schools' problem.



¹⁵ <http://gradelevelreading.net/>

The table below shows the factors that influence improvements in reading scores, which provides the underpinning theory of change GLR communities use to decide what they will take action on. It shows how health, child development, early oral language and education success are interwoven and need a 'big tent' of collaborators to make a difference.



Finally, the last diagram shows the Baltimore GLF collective impact framework and how the emphasis is on finding out and supporting what works, testing new approaches and focusing on systems change. It took years with a multiple- stakeholder group focused on child health to recognise that adult literacy expertise needed to be at the table and for early oral language to be recognised as a key marker for later success in literacy.

In Baltimore, poverty is so rife and overall school performance so poor they don't need to target. Creating an Attendance Collaboration is a new stream of work because 25% of children are chronically absent.



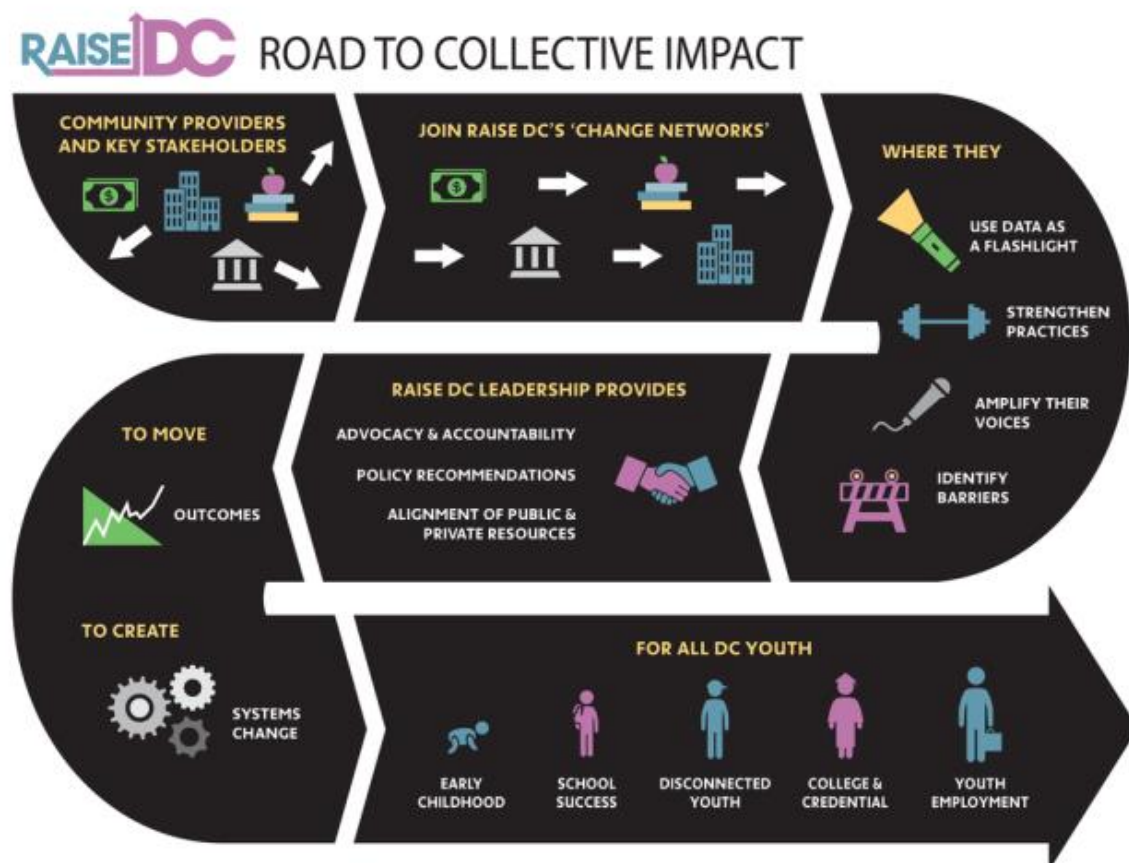
Of all the visits I did across the five week trip, Grade Level Reading may have the greatest impact long term impact. Their arguments, resources and approaches were applicable to our Auckland context and they were generous in sharing resources.

RAISE DC

RAISE DC¹⁶ is a three year old collaboration based on the Strive Together 'cradle to career' collective impact methodology. It started under the auspices of the Mayor's office but now a community foundation provides backbone support. They use the metaphor of collective impact moving initiatives from being like incandescent lightbulbs (90% heat, 10% light) to being LED lights – 10% heat, 90% light.

RAISE has already created five action groups. Early action around school readiness has been challenging with a crowded field. One early win was a multi-sector agreement on how to screen children for developmental disabilities. Other foci include school success, post-school qualifications disconnected young people, and youth employment (creating a work experience structure). An action research project, finding out the experiences of 500 disengaged young people gave them early credibility and data that has influenced all the other workstreams.

A key strategy is getting meaningful local data triangulation, drawing on national data, local data and local community voice – the intersect point is the sweet spot that is likely to influence action. Staff stressed that the collective impact approach is process heavy, with progress only coming at the speed of trust.



¹⁶ <http://www.raisedc.org/>

E 3 Alliance (Education Equals Economics)

Austin Texas is a vibrant, rapidly growing and newly culturally diverse city like Auckland, with a population around 1.8 million. I spent two days there, meeting key staff at the Education Equals Economic Alliance¹⁷ which has been working on a cradle to career education pipeline for seven years, organised by Laura Koenig, School Readiness Director.

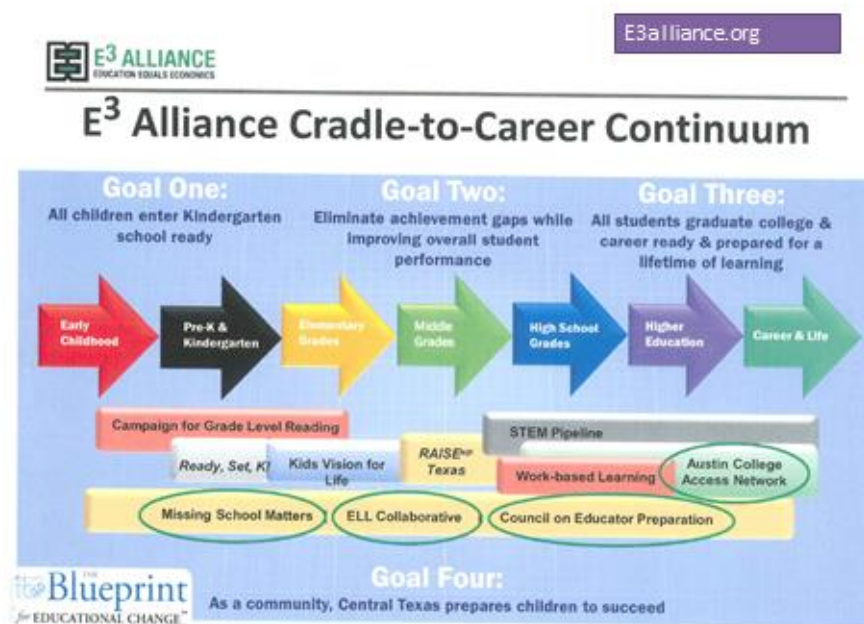
The E3 Alliance is an independent non-partisan entity, created when a long-established network of city leaders could not get meaningful data about what education strategies really worked to ensure young people were successful. A thought leaders' summit in 2006 led to the creation of a regional profile and an agreed data footprint. A community 'deliberative dialogue process' resulted in a Blueprint for Education Success and four goals: school readiness; eliminate achievement gaps; high school, college and career readiness; community accountability. The community accountability goal has been really useful for promoting broad ranging conversations and action about everyone being accountable for student attendance.

After seven years, the Alliance has had some major wins. For example the early win in the school readiness area

was creating a state wide standard so early learning and early school years had an agreed common target. E3 Alliance has created a major initiative around Pathways of Promise (initiatives around science, technology, engineering and

maths) have increased enrolments in STEM subjects in high school from 500 students to 7,500 in seven years. Maths is seen as a key component of meaningful career pathways. They were one of the few initiatives that was including a focus on English Language Learners and intermediate (middle school) aged students.

Data is central to the Alliance's approach. They run a deck of 200 slides on key education indicators, updated at least annually. Quarterly data workshops are well attended and the Chief Executive focuses on one data slide a month in regular conversations with stakeholders. All the data



¹⁷ <http://e3alliance.org/>

conversations are focused on how to translate understanding into action. For example a workstream on improving attendance worked out that the cost to local school districts of lost attendance (3 days lost attendance per student per school) reduces funding by \$34 million a year! There was strong impetus to collaborate.

This visit was inspiring and thought provoking. The E3 Alliance's cradle to career continuum shows the span of initiatives they have seeded or now lead. The scope of their advocacy and activities means I will be mining information and ideas from them for a long time.

Champions for Change conference Washington DC

Funders and backbone organisations of collective impact projects from hundreds of communities attended this three day conference concerned about dozens of issues: Strive Together (cradle to career education action) and Grade Level Reading (Reading success by age 9) were education focused; there were obesity initiatives alongside food poverty collaborations (places where people are so poor there is not fresh food, where children have never consciously eaten a vegetable): homelessness; environmental action; a global coffee coalition; a woman (from Tauranga!) working globally on developments in island states(Cuba, Mauritius, Solomon Islands); reducing violence and health coalitions of many kinds; and two other organisations from New Zealand (Water Safe NZ and a whanau well-being collaboration).

Many of the groups were like Learning Auckland, still forming and keen to draw on the insights from the [Collective Impact Forum](#).¹⁸ Some of the standout points for me included:

The mantra across the conference was *work smarter, work faster, work together*. Building relationships and a common understanding of issues across sectors is key, yet fraught and it can be challenging for funders to acknowledge the time that takes. There is a substantial tension in organising early wins while also building solid relationships. Progress is at the speed of trust. An example was of six chief executives meeting monthly over drinks for a year before there was enough trust to get a facilitator to work with them to create a common agenda.

The Backbone makes collective impact happen, but often without being seen (shining the light on the work of others, supporting everyone to get the credit, attract funds to the action), which makes it challenging to raise funds for backbones.

Collective impact starts with a long term aim and put data and systems change at the centre, rather than a 'project'. Collective impact is not like partnerships of the past.

Collective impact is 'bricolage' – something new made up of bits of other things. Backbone organisations have to navigate relationships with other initiatives and bring them together, not start new ones. Start with who you can get in the room, take what you have and recombine; recognise that you can't wait to get recruitment right.

¹⁸ The Forum is an alliance of FSG (a social issues consulting firm) and the Aspen Institute's Forum for Community Solutions, charged with developing capacity across the collective impact spectrum.

Backbone organisations need particular capacities. They have to take both the helicopter and worm’s eye view – know the political scene and know how to work at a small, local scale as well. To get different sectors to work together differently, the backbone organisation has to demonstrate excellent and innovative public facilitation skills. And they have to shift from people thinking about problem solving to co-creating the future. Technical skills in understanding change are very important – tools like human centred design approaches, natural system design thinking, ecosystem analysis.

Understanding community strengths and data at the local level is key to moving a community toward collaboration. Systems or asset mapping is a key way to get started – and a mindset that says we have everything we need in the room to solve this problem. *“If we can imagine it, we can do it.”*

Specific strategies included:

- Build a buzz so people pay attention. Where possible, focus the energy on what is possible. Start with a story – and have examples of success (for example, a family changing because of a mother’s education). Those stories are part of the compelling reason to get involved.
- Create a database of interested people – an important tool that funders will pay attention to
- Describe the change you want to see. Create a collaborative plan and write it down. Signatories to the plan will own it and promote it. Attach the plan to funding applications
- Create a governance structure. Expect to have to reshape it periodically to fit changing circumstances. Make sure you have representative positions so organisations are committed, not just interested individuals.
- Get the right people in the room. Who are the 100 people who, if they signed up, could bring this change about?

Groups want backbones to tell them what to do. But the essential shift is when stakeholders say ‘What are we doing to contribute to the issue? How are we going to contribute to the solution?’

A useful message in cradle to career education thinking was that most people in a community don’t have children at school – they are relating to schools as they were 20 years ago or more. And even people with children at school don’t necessarily understand the challenges in the education landscape.

Sharing the story

Presentations to date

- COMET Auckland Annual General Meeting October 7, 2015
- July 2015 National Centre for Literacy and Numeracy for Adults Annual Symposium
- 2015 Literacy Aotearoa National Hui
- Talking matters coalition: an Auckland network of 41 education, health, family services and parent education groups
- Literacy North Shore board meeting, June 2015

- Project PETER strategic advisory group (Puketepapa Education, Training and Employment Readiness) May 2015
- Literacy Auckland, a coalition of the six community literacy organisations in Auckland, April 2015
- Learning Auckland leadership table, April 2015

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Winston Churchill Trust Fellowship Blog

Those of you who follow this newsletter may remember that our Strategic Analyst, Alison Sutton, was awarded the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship last year, recognising her skill and passion for literacy and education.

Alison spent a whirlwind month traveling in the USA and England on her Fellowship tour, observing working processes across digital, gender, and action hub literacy strategies, as well as strategies to support cohesive and dynamic cross-sector literacy collaborations.

In a series of insightful blog posts on the [COMET Auckland WordPress blog](#), Alison details her efforts to find more ways to link education, community and business to raise literacy for children and adults. With oracy becoming an increasingly important issue in work environments across Auckland, Alison's observations focused on ways to develop oral communication skills and decrease the number of youth not in education, employment or training (NEET).



This was an opportunity for Alison to gain new insights on issues of importance to Auckland's social and economic wellbeing. Over the next few weeks, Alison will be reflecting on her findings and identifying implications to feed into the way we plan and deliver our work. She will also be presenting to various relevant groups and forums so others can benefit from her experiences.

[WINSTON CHURCHILL FELLOWSHIP: REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS](#)

About 21,500 bright eyed, excitedly nervous five year olds head off each year for their first day at Auckland schools. Healthy, confident ones with support from home and with strong oral language skills and a few pre-literacy skills will do well.

But for many, starting school is hard. Some don't have the language skills they need because there wasn't much talking or much reading at home. Others may be new to learning English. Children whose parents have low literacy are much more likely to struggle to learn to read – and it's learning to read easily and early that is a key to education success later.



With this on-going intergenerational literacy challenge in mind, I embarked on my month-long Winston Churchill Fellowship. I visited towns where early learning, schools, community groups, employers and local councils are coming together to raise literacy levels. I was lucky enough to visit nine different organisations and programmes in eight towns and cities.

Three key themes stood out for me

Improving reading is being positioned as an important way out of poverty: Across England and the USA, improving children's literacy by the time they start high school is being seen as an economic imperative as well as important for wellbeing throughout life.

Save the Children UK has just launched **Read On. Get On in England**, a national campaign to improve the number of eleven year olds reading well. New research on **How Reading can help children out of poverty** investigated the likely trajectory of children who don't read well when starting high school shows the future is bleak and the economic cost high for working class white boys and poor Anglo-Caribbean boys with low reading ability. A similar analysis has been done by the Annie Casey Foundation in the USA, which has led to the national **Grade Level Reading Campaign**.

Raising literacy takes more than schools: all the initiatives I saw included some focus on improving teacher quality and education leadership, some of which was government funded. In towns like Leicester, Baltimore and Austin, communities were playing a big role in getting children to school ready to learn and keeping them there.

In Leicester there was a major focus on building reading for pleasure and supported city-wide reading and story-telling festivals. They also had 'Pens Down' days where the focus was on oral language and talking.

Many programmes sought to get an intentional focus on literacy into after school & holiday programme. Others put on fun summer reading clinics. There were many variations of in-school reading support from volunteers. Leicester was also about to experiment with a targeted programme for 300 low literacy boys over the summer when they moved to high school, linking them with high-school mentors, providing summer enrichment and family visits as well as providing specific specialised reading help. Most cities were encouraging family-facing social services to promote the importance of early oral language and literacy-rich environments in families and in community settings.

Health is a major driver for improving literacy: people need literacy to receive and understand public health messages. And they need oral language and literacy to manage personal and family health issues and be active and consumers of health services. The public health net was cast wide across some of these cities and programmes.

The Grade Level Reading Campaign is backing Growing Healthy Readers – linking pre-natal care to get normal birthweight babies, asthma management, warm houses and pre-school screening.

Austin was supporting community public health messages about asthma and keeping sick children away from school – while also publicising data on the link between regular attendance and achievement.

In Baltimore, public health specialists were at the table with educators, bringing antenatal and early parenting programmes into early learning centres, where the mobile library also called in.

Taking a different approach, Middlesbrough was about to trial providing books and messages about talking, storytelling and reading to the parents of premature babies, to promote family bonding

[E3 ALLIANCE – EDUCATION EQUALS ECONOMICS](#)

by [Alison Sutton](#)

My last site visit was to [E³ Alliance](#) on two hot days in vibrant and fast-growing Austin in Central Texas – with a couple of cowboys, Elvis look alikes, lots of country music, wild flowers, guns, and BBQ. Central Texas has a rapidly growing population (about 1.8 million, with rapidly



increasing diversity) where, like Auckland, there is a mismatch between the skills of local people and industry demands.

E³ Alliance is a specially created backbone organisation, driving collaboration around the [Blueprint for Education](#), to build the best skills pipeline in the country. Their four goals: school readiness; eliminate achievement gaps; high school, college and career readiness; community accountability.

Making the economics of education (and the cost of failure) visible in their organisation strapline is strategic – it helps bring business to the table and keeps return on investment front of mind when planning what actions to take up. The small Board of Directors is always chaired by a business person. To maintain neutrality, their organisation bylaws preclude any elected politicians.

E³Alliance does not see itself as a grassroots organisation. ‘Engaging with community’ in their case means powerful and on-going collaboration with stakeholders with the power and influence to change the system.

The change process is iterative, with data central to everything they do. They actively work to grow the capacity of stakeholders to understand and use data and hold quarterly data shows that draw in large crowds! The organisation promotes a graph a month, so over time stakeholders become exposed to a wide range of issues. A common question ‘What 2 things could you/your organisation do now to make progress toward shifting that data?’



The community accountability workstream is one aspect of their work that is different to Strive Together’s cradle to career model and has proved to be one of the most powerful. It enables conversations about success being everyone’s business. An example – attendance comes under community accountability because families, health services and employers have roles to play in keeping young people at school. For example, fast food outlets have been challenged about employing school aged students during school hours.

E³Alliance staff were very generous with their time and expertise. Seeing the depth and progress here after nearly a decade was inspiring. I came away loaded up with good ideas, new understanding of collective impact in action – and having had wonderful Tex-Mex food.

[RAISE DC – BRINGS PEOPLE, RESOURCES, AND DATA TOGETHER TO IMPROVE CRADLE TO CAREER OUTCOMES FOR EVERY YOUNG PERSON IN DC.](#)

by [Alison Sutton](#)

[Raise DC](#) was a terrific choice as my last Washington collective impact visit because they are operating in a city roughly comparable in size to Auckland and have only formed over the last three years.

A small group of ‘thoughtful people’ seeded the idea, initial sponsorship came from the Mayor’s office and a forum of 150 stakeholders endorsed the concept. Now the local community foundation hosts the backbone staff. A large leadership table of key stakeholders meets quarterly, a smaller executive committee meet regularly and importantly, Raise DC is actively connected to a local research institution. The establishment

process has been iterative and their leadership table has changed twice in three years (in a process similar to changes in Learning Auckland).

It's reassuring to hear staff still struggle to find a straightforward and compelling elevator pitch to describe collective impact and use something like 'we provide a city-wide infrastructure to support education and skills alignment' (which doesn't exactly flow off the tongue). To explain the intent of collective impact, the Raise DC strategic director says many partnerships and collaborations are like incandescent light bulbs – for all the heat they generate, only 10% ends up as light. The aim of new collective impact is to work like an LED light – get 90% of light for only a 10% expenditure of energy.

Raise DC has five goals, each with an action network. Each network has co-chairs who collectively make up the executive table that meets every two months. The aspiration is to have co-chairs who have sufficient reach and authority to bring about change in their respective areas- but the lived experience is that you have to work with who is in your circle to start with – it wasn't always possible to get the 'A list' of CE level business people or senior officials. Not all goals can be high priorities at the same time – because of resources and staff capacity, and also the readiness of the workstream for collective impact.

The first three goals are similar to Strive Together: school readiness, high school graduation and post-school qualifications. Although school readiness seemed a logical starting point for collaborative action, it has proved to be challenging. After an initial project (setting up a common screening tool for developmental delays), the network is still deciding how best to add value to a landscape crowded with stakeholders and projects.

The school success workstream has started with a [stocktake](#). The post-school graduation network are focusing data sharing protocols to get accurate data on post-school results and destinations.

In addition to the Strive-type goals, Raise has two different networks: disconnected youth (our NEETS – not in education, employment or training); and helping young people find work experience and employment (somewhat like Auckland Council's Youth Connections project). More energy appears to be going into these areas.

Raise DC is endeavouring to use the Strive Together data triangulation approach – national data, local data and community 'voice'; the action point is where those three points intersect. A 'quick win' for the Disconnected Youth project was [Connecting Youth to Opportunity](#), an action research survey of 500 disengaged young people, the data from which was concrete (and new) to put in front of key stakeholders. As a result, a Re-engagement Centre is being developed, rather like the Youth Hub piloted over the summer in Puketepapa which had education providers and social services available in one place.

The Strive Together model advocates for bringing in business voices, but the Raise DC experience is that this is challenging and problematic, particularly initially. A lot of the work is process, building trust and getting organisations (education and social sector) to share data. This is not compelling to business people. Yet 'collaboration can only move at the speed of trust'.

Raise DC is certainly worth following because their challenges and scale are similar to Learning Auckland.

[CHAMPIONS FOR CHANGE 2015 – THE WORK OF COLLECTIVE IMPACT BACKBONE ORGANISATIONS](#)

by Alison Sutton

I spent an eventful three days at the **Champions for Change 2015** conference in Washington.

Funders and backbone organisations of collective impact projects from hundreds of communities attended, concerned about dozens of issues: Strive Together (cradle to career education action) and Grade Level

Reading (Reading success by age 8) were education focused; there were obesity initiatives alongside food poverty collaborations (places where people are so poor there is not fresh food, where children have never consciously eaten a vegetable); homelessness; environmental action; a global coffee coalition; a woman from Tauranga working globally on island developments (Cuba, Mauritius, Solomon Islands); reducing violence; health coalitions of many kinds; and two other organisations from home (Water Safe NZ and a whanau well-being collaboration).

Many of the groups who attended were still forming, wanting to draw on the insights from the Collective Impact Forum (an alliance of FSG and the Aspen Institute's **Forum for Community Solutions**). This is a new field and FSG and Aspen have been charged with developing capacity. They want 'escape velocity' – hopefully we will know it when we feel it! The **Tamarak Institute** from Canada were major players, which was useful because key staff have both been to NZ several times.

The first challenge was thinking how to tell our collective impact story without jargon in three minutes including me/you/us – I am not even sure the presenter passed that task. Almost everyone found their collective impact story hard to describe. The mantra – work smarter, work faster, work together.

Some quick observations:

The Backbone makes collective impact happen, but often without being seen (shining the light on cradle to the work of others, supporting everyone to get the credit). Of course this makes it challenging to raise funds for backbones

Maybe collective impact isn't new, it's just a new label for collaboration. But some of the speakers had been in other sorts of collaborations for years and say it is fundamentally different; it puts outcome and data and systems change at the centre. And it starts out expecting a long haul.

The backbone has to be conscious that it will be measured on whether there is any policy and/or systems change. It's not about 'projects' or initiatives with short term funding. Much easier said than done because everyone keeps going on about quick wins. *Idea*: To keep the mission at the front, read out the core purpose statement at every meeting

Backbone organisations are cat-herding jugglers!

Groups want Backbones to tell them what to do. But the essential shift is when stakeholders say 'What are we doing to contribute to the issue? How are we going to contribute to the solution?'

Backbones have to take both the helicopter and worm's eye view – know the political scene and know how to work at a small, local scale as well.

Collective impact is 'bricolage' – something new made up of bits of other things

One big event – during the lunch-break between the conference and a leadership workshop, all my stuff was thrown away – my notebook for this whole trip, conference papers and business cards I collected. Talk about stressed! I couldn't hear anything during introductions at the start of the workshop because I was so preoccupied. Eventually, with the help of one sympathetic kitchen staff member prepared to bend the rules, I was allowed into the garbage bay to search for the right bag. To everyone's chagrin, I buried my arms in the huge sacks of stuff and emerged triumphant, papers in hand. Nothing that a bit of a wipe wouldn't fix.

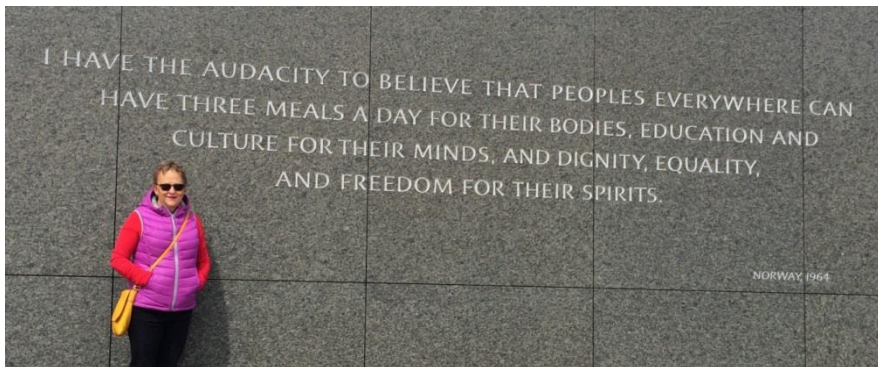
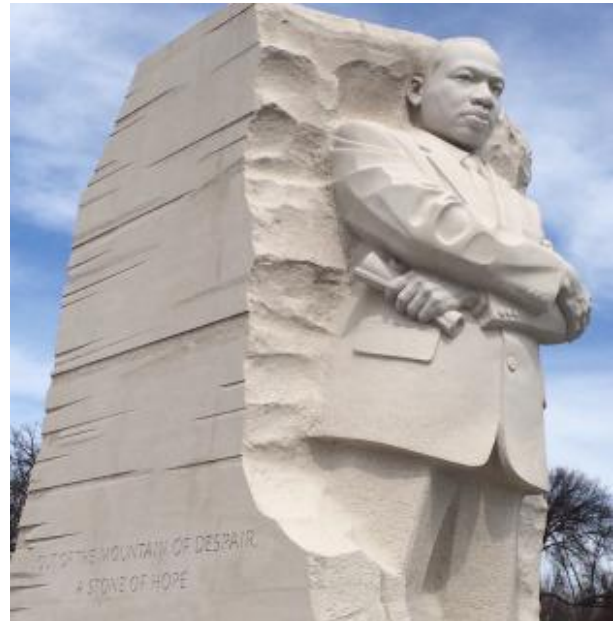
There was a metaphor there for working in collaborative projects I commented back at the workshop: being unable to think because of pressure, finding a mentor who was prepared to help, hunting through rubbish, looking for treasures. According to the South African standing near by, hardly anyone understood what I said. But everyone could see my relief. Much to mull over.

WORDS TO REMEMBER -2

by [Alison Sutton](#)

The stunning (and ironically very white) statue of Martin Luther King – the Stone of Hope, next to FDR’s memorial. The long curved wall depicts only a few of his aspirations – but one in particular spoke to me. There are millions of US born citizens who can’t read this.

Humble aspirations – 3 meals a day, education, dignity and respect – so hard to achieve.



BALTIMORE GRADE LEVEL READING

by [Alison Sutton](#)

My first US meeting was in Baltimore, a 45 min train ride from DC. Waiting to be picked up at the station I had my shoes shined by a man who read his King James version of the Bible between jobs. He loved the stories in it and how he had to study and look up the meaning of words. He thought I was an aristocratic, a really nice lady from England – and then wondered if NZ was anywhere near Switzerland. The Bible wasn’t going to help his geography.

The scale of the challenge to raise education achievements in many US towns and cities is daunting. An influential [report](#) from the Annie Casey Foundation in 2010 highlighted the link with low socio-economic status and low literacy, which led to the development of a nationwide [Grade Level Reading Campaign](#). Currently 140+ cities have signed up to collective impact-type partnerships.

In Baltimore two previous local reading initiatives hadn’t changed the statistics. 80% of poor kids in Baltimore don’t achieve the national reading standard by third grade (about age 9); 25% of students are chronically absent. Poverty is so prevalent, targeting any services is not really an issue – any initiative will impact on kids from a low SES background.

City assets for a new campaign- 134 primary schools and 40 high schools, the Casey Foundation that is willing to experiment and prototype approaches locally; and the John Hopkins Hospital, a major employer. A local schooling improvement-focused trust acts as the local backbone organisation with a coalition of 70 organisations meeting quarterly to review progress.

The Grade Level Reading approach is to have action groups working on school readiness, attendance and summer reading programme. In Baltimore they were able to build on existing relationships and networks to set up those work streams. Each work programmes start with a research overview – a literature review and population analysis. The ideal network has a mix of content (researchers, providers, ‘experts’) and context specialists (community leaders, family members, and people with lived experience of an issue). One of the biggest challenges is to get the voice of families and communities represented at the table.

This GLR campaign school readiness network has a strong focus on infant mortality and child wellbeing. They had health data which shows higher literacy has a positive impact across the life course and an existing Maternal and Child Health Network. The questions they asked themselves resonated with those we are asking in Learning Auckland: Do all families know what resources are available and do services connect up so families can transition from one to another? Early actions: providing literacy rich environments in social welfare centres; getting a mobile library to visit all mother and baby centres; training up staff from Head Start (centres that provide early learning for the most vulnerable families) in smoking cessation.

It has taken the multiple stakeholders a couple of years to realise that adult literacy needs to be at the table because of the link between mothers’ literacy and poor birth outcomes. Although they have included ‘family literacy’ in their Maternal and Child Health network, what they were doing to intentionally grow the skills of parents wasn’t obvious to me.

Supporting city school leadership of reading is a second strand, which is particularly challenging given the churn of staff in school leadership. Therefore, GLR staff started with things that could be influenced in the community – getting books into homes and increasing local literacy tutoring and community action on attendance. Staff observed that they have learned to be unapologetic about choosing a focus, that it’s a combination of rigour about the issue and being opportunistic.

Keeping in touch is key – the programme leads for each network meet fortnightly. Baltimore is smaller than Auckland physically and population wise, and apparently meeting that often is not an issue – neither is parking!

What stood out – the link with health, just as I saw in the UK. And the reinforcement of what COMET Auckland has been advocating for years- thinking intergenerationally.

MY UK EXPERIENCE

by Alison Sutton

In two fast-moving weeks I went up England twice – London to Glasgow return and back up to Leicester, then Barnsley in Yorkshire. I also crossed the country – up to Middlesbrough and Teeside port on the east coast and across to the west, to Liverpool and the Mersey, on the west. So much lovely countryside and so much history.

What had I hoped to learn? What’s the experience of UK towns and cities to join up literacy action, across families, early learning, schools and adults. What stands out from these two weeks:

- the powerful link between health and literacy that in NZ we have hardly begun to make. The National Literacy Trust, NIACE, the Middlesbrough Literacy Hub and The Reader Organisation are making that connection and funding from health is enabling and driving a significant amount of literacy action.

- the time it takes to build a shared language and programme of work; every organisation has to make some progress toward their own objectives while also working to the common goal. Getting to the common goal is hard, not helped by competitive systems that mean institutions want to hang onto their own learners.
- The importance of planning for sustainability. Partnerships are fragile when funding shifts. The most sustainable initiative seemed to be ORIM, the framework for working with parents, because the framework has become embedded in teaching and learning practice by a whole raft of organisations. A major factor in that take up was adoption of the ORIM framework by a key national partner.
- The research evidence on the importance of reading for pleasure that underpins work at the National Literacy Trust, the Hubs, Whatever it takes and the Reader Organisation. Reading for Pleasure has moved up my agenda
- The need for strategic champions who understand and resource the coordination required to join things up and who stay around long enough to see results; this is not quick work. It's taken nearly 20 years from the first project in one school to get substantial take up and policy change for ORIM.
- How the adult and family learning landscape has changed and shrunk in recent years as a result of the skills agenda. It's a harsher environment with on-going funding cuts. On the other hand, there is still space for innovations – The Literacy Hubs and the Reader Organisation are new models.
- How public transport makes literacy visible! There was so much time on buses and trains. House plans, health and safety training manuals, newspapers, books, e-readers, homework assignments, bill paying, newspapers.

Who did I see? I've gained strategic and operational level insights from the people who have been generous enough to meet with me:

- Project leads from Leicester's Whatever it takes and the Middlesbrough Literacy Hub, two organisations focusing on city-wide action that involves both early learning and schooling improvement
The service manager and family learning coordinator from Learn Barnsley, a local authority endeavouring to operationalise family learning in a wider remit of adult education and skills
- Senior staff and project development leads from NIACE (the National Voice for Adult Learners) and the National Literacy Trust, national organisations supporting place-based literacy and family learning
- An academic at the University of Sheffield who has lead the development of a parent-focused framework for raising early literacy achievement in Sheffield REAL
- The development manager the Reader Organisation from a relatively new and rapidly growing reading programme that is community focused, draws heavily on volunteers and is promoting reading for social inclusion and wellbeing.

[SUPPORTING PARENTS TO BUILD LITERACY AT HOME](#)

by Alison Sutton

What does a strengths-based approach for working with parents look like? ORIM is a framework for helping parents support and build their children's literacy. Developed out of the University of Sheffield as part of Sheffield REAL (Raising Early Literacy Achievement) and trialled over 10 years, ORIM has spread nationally and is used in a variety of contexts – mainstream early schooling, children's centres, bilingual services, and even in prisons.

There are four components to the framework: Parents create and recognise opportunities to learn; parents recognise children's readiness to learn and their learning activities; parents interact with children and learning and literacy activities; modelling reading and writing, encouraging children to have a go.

Recognition is key – parents come to realise their job is to create literacy opportunities and they become confident at picking up and acting on those learning moments.

What makes ORIM distinctive? First, it is underpinned by an understanding of parents as learners – so it builds on good adult education practice. It's not a pre-determined programme so it can be picked up by diverse providers and services and applied in a variety of contexts; it doesn't assume or require any literacy level – it starts where parents are at.

And it's effective. Children whose parents took part in an ORIM programme when the children were pre-schoolers had their literacy measured at age 7, as part of a randomised control trial. All programme children had an edge over the control group children. The biggest impact was on children whose mothers had no qualifications. This research involved mostly poor white children but similar findings came from another smaller trial in dual language settings with Pakistani families.

It's been 20 years since the first development project in one Sheffield school. It's now embedded in early learning services in many local authorities and has been taken up in Johannesburg, Portugal and Melbourne. I came away from my meeting with Professor Cathy Nutbrown inspired, keen to join the ORIM network and to explore how to incorporate ORIM to our work on early learning and oracy through Learning Auckland.

[LEARN BARNESLEY! ORGANISING FAMILY LEARNING AT THE LOCAL LEVEL](#)

by [Alison Sutton](#)

Visits to the National Literacy Trust and NIACE (the National Voice for Lifelong Learning) gave me a quick picture of how place-based literacy action is being organised nationally and some of the current opportunities and challenges. Visits to Leicester's Whatever it takes and the Middlesbrough Literacy Hub provided some insights into what happens when there is a cross-sector community focus on literacy, driven by raising achievement in early years and schools.

I also wanted to see how family learning has developed in the last couple of years, because COMET Auckland has drawn extensively on insights and research from the UK in advocating for family learning and literacy for over 15 years. A decade ago (when I was last visited the UK to look at literacy) the family learning agenda was well funded and getting policy attention. Family learning was seen to be a major contributor to social inclusion.

My meeting with the services manager and family learning coordinator at Learn Barnsley! revealed that organising local adult learning is more challenging now.

Family learning sits alongside a broader agenda of adult learning and skills which is dominated by functional literacy and numeracy.

Barnsley is a community of about 250,000 – about the size of two Auckland local boards. Local authorities employ staff to coordinate adult learning and apply for national funds for local provision. Learn Barnsley is a collaboration between tertiary providers, Council, the local job centre and other agencies with a broad interest in adult education. Learn Barnsley endeavours to get competitive tertiary providers to collaborate, to align initial assessment processes, Information, Advice and Guidance (career education functions); and to focus on ensuring provision fits local learners needs. A 25% funding cut for adult learning was announced in this year's budget which means the job just got harder.

There were a lot of parallels to issues we have encountered in our employability and Learning Auckland work: the need for a common language between education providers from different parts of the sector as well as between education and employment or health; the challenge of competition when providers find it hard to promote alternative pathways and more coherence for learners if it means they lose students and therefore funding; the need for coordination, people skills and real persistence to keep bringing people around the table (and the ongoing challenge to fund those roles); the need for senior staff to publicly endorse the importance of organisations collaborating years.

[READING FOR WELLBEING AND SOCIAL INCLUSION](#)

by [Alison Sutton](#)

Although I have been looking at city-wide initiatives, I wanted to look at one specific programme [Shared Reading](#), run by the Reader Organisation. This meant Liverpool and a chance to look at the beautifully renovated Albert Docks, the Mersey (and Beatles shop, but not the Beatles experience). I did see the Fab Four's statues at the Hard Day's Night Hotel, from the back of a quick city tour bus.

Shared Reading is reading aloud in the community, primarily to people in small groups but occasionally 1:1. The intention is connecting people to literature and our common humanity, to improve health, well-being and social inclusion, rather than improving literacy per se.

The take up appears to be very diverse, which is part of why it could be of interest to Auckland. The Reader Organisation is a partner organisation in Liverpool's City of Readers, promoting reading for pleasure in schools. They are collaborating with health trusts to take Shared Reading into aged care facilities and dementia units and programmes for children in care. In a few health settings there are now full time Readers in Residence. There are pilot projects for parents in prison and recently released inmates and a couple of companies have set up shared reading groups to improve communication across staff hierarchies.

Readers (Reader Organisation staff, some volunteers or staff trained inside other organisations) run 1.5-2 hour weekly sessions. Some of the volunteers are unemployed, recruited specifically to give them confidence and skills as part of a pathway to work.



Usually, groups have 8-12 people and these groups need the same care and nurturing as other adult learner groups – a warm and friendly environment, a tea break, sometimes cake! The sessions are intended to be 'intimate and safe'. Participation is free. Readers are asked to commit to 3 days training and to running sessions for a year with a group.

The readers stop periodically to encourage listeners to talk aloud about what they are hearing, to share feelings, to discuss what the author is trying to say. Typically, when a group starts, the reader uses short stories for a couple of weeks as a way of exploring listeners' interests. And most sessions finish with a poem, offered as a wind-up (a bit like a chocolate fish or a biscotti at the end of lunch – a little something).

One principle is to use fit for purpose high quality literature, material pitched to each group. What might be read to a group of older unemployed people won't fit children in care or a group of sole parents. Readers are trained to select material; they keep records of listeners' progress; and keep notes on what sections of literature have an impact to the listeners. Listeners have copies of the material in front of them and are

encouraged to follow along and take turns in reading. Accessing multiple copies of books requires partnerships with libraries and book publishers. This harks back to the adult education 'great books' campaigns of the past.

A second key principle is slow reading, reading that is at a pace that enables people to connect to the 'voice' of author and the ideas.

The Reader organisation argues that Shared Reading has a very positive [effect](#) on listeners. The Centre for Research into Reading and Society has run some small scale case study research which found increased social interaction and confidence, reduced visits to doctors, improved relationships with care staff and general improvement in mental health and well-being. A larger scale research project starting in 2015 is needed to provide more robust impact data.

Shared Reading may not be about literacy directly, but it is sufficiently interesting to consider how it might fit in with making Auckland a more skilled and literate city. And there is already a local connection! A keen West Aucklander has just attended a three day Read to Learn training session and is planning to set up a pilot group in the west. I will be following this up.

[EARLY WORDS TOGETHER](#)

by [Alison Sutton](#)

[Early words together](#) is a flagship programme for the National Literacy Trust, now adopted by local authorities across the country. It's a volunteer-led peer tutoring programme where parents run short training sessions for other parents, modelling how to develop early learning and oracy, in preparation for school. It's often delivered in Children's Centres that focus on vulnerable families. The ideal is six sessions for groups of parents who each get 1:1 support from a volunteer while they play/work with their child. A trained teacher and EWT facilitator supervises.

I took part in one EWT session and talked about EWT in many of my meetings across England. It's clear that there is a strong evidence base and the material available for centres and for parents is high quality. An important part of EWT is building the capacity of centre staff to work with families and there's a whole support structure for professional development and support. At the session I attended, the volunteers love talking and playing to the kids and it was easy to see how they were building in vocab enrichment and how they encouraged children to participate and guided their play. Volunteers build up skills and can progress towards qualifications.

Coordination is essential. Sustaining a peer-support programme is a big challenge. A lot of time and energy has to go into attracting and retaining volunteers. The intention is to draw volunteers from among the vulnerable families, but regular attendance then becomes an issue- because their issues aren't so different from other families (transport, sick kids, or family responsibilities). If volunteers don't turn up, centre staff have to step in, which has staff and funding implications. And just from one session I can see the challenge of getting the volunteers to be explicit about what they are modelling to the adults and why. It's like embedded literacy. The best practice makes the intention and purpose explicit.

[MIDDLESBROUGH LITERACY HUB](#)

by [Alison Sutton](#)

Middlesbrough is a North Yorkshire town of about 300,000 people with high unemployment and low literacy achievement. It's one of three towns where the National Literacy Trust is backing literacy hubs as part of their long term strategy to raise literacy levels.

The *Middlesbrough Literacy Hub's intention* is to join up early learning and school readiness initiatives with whole school literacy action around reading (the same aspiration as *Whatever it takes* in Leicester and that is driving the Read On Get On campaign). Hubs use the National Trust 'offers' which include: Early Words Together (a short course on oracy and early learning offered by targeted early learning centres for vulnerable parents) and school literacy networks and targeted professional development.

One major point of difference in Middlesbrough is the link with health and housing. One project will be promoting reading to the parents of premature babies, who sometimes struggle to communicate with their very small and often very unwell babies. Another focuses on increasing reading for children admitted to hospital. Housing project officers are being trained to recognise families where literacy may be an issue – a client who regularly 'forgot my glasses' or houses with no books or a few books unused on high shelves – to direct support to them.

A 'Turning Pages' forum of school leaders, adult educators and the library initially shaped the Hub. Recently, a new strategic steering group has formed to drive the work, council officials responsible for public health and the care and well-being of 0-19 year olds. A new evaluation process across the three pilot hubs identified the need for this more strategic approach. At this point there is no school leadership at the table, which may well be a risk.

Another new workstream is putting on a Careers Convention to showcase to 11-12 year olds the employment opportunities at nearby Teesport, the third largest port in the UK.. Many of the organisations collaborating with the Hub did not know of the scope of diverse and skilled employment available at the port. There are similarities with our Southern Initiative; local employment opportunities, yet high unemployment because locals don't have the right skills for the jobs.

The challenges and opportunities for this Hub are so similar to ours in Auckland that it's worth tracking to see what happens. Things to watch out for in our work.

A **recent paper** on the links and implications of low literacy and poor health is worth reading and I am coming home to explore how we might make better literacy links with Health Promoting Schools and the Healthy Families initiatives

Clear branding (I got confused between the Literacy Hub, the Reading Campaign and Turning Pages) but perhaps the public don't notice or don't care.

The heavy demands made on the skills, energy and commitment of staff leading collaborative work. Its hard. And the need for a serious champion.

Constantly thinking of connections and sustainability. At present the project lead's combined roles in Council of Hub and Literacy Lead provide the connection between early learning interventions and the schooling projects, but a more sustainable strategy is probably needed.

[WHATEVER IT TAKES – CROSS-SECTOR ACTION IN LEICESTER](#)

by [Alison Sutton](#)

Leicester has committed to a ten-year programme to raise children's reading levels, through *Whatever it takes*. The strategic board of WIT includes representatives from a union, adult literacy, community education, as well as schools. Last year, their results were the second most improved in the UK, so stakeholders are pleased with their collaborative action.

I met Ellen Lee, the energetic programme leader toward the end of their week-long Authors Week. Fifty children from each participating schools came to author-led workshops to promote a love of reading (and writing). That equated to more than 5,200 children over the week- a marathon effort.

Interestingly, *Whatever it takes* is co-chaired by a strategic lead from both the primary and secondary sectors, full-time positions that are funded by the schools themselves.

Early aims included: providing inspirational work outside the classroom to promote reading; supporting schools to take a whole-school strategic approach to reading; and quality staff professional development. School clusters meet twice a year to discuss specific local needs. Targets have included supporting reluctant readers, ESOL and boys. Students are surveyed annually about attitudes to reading (as well as what and how much they read) and the percentage of students reading for pleasure is tracking up.

Some students don't transition well to high school, particularly with low reading ability play. A new initiative is identifying about 300 10-11 year olds who are significantly below reading standard during their last year of primary school. They will be offered support through the end of their school year, through the summer and into the second term of their first year at high school. Interventions include synthetic phonics coaching, an inspirational day out and being matched with a older buddy from their new high school.

Given our own statistics – 24% of students leaving primary school below the NZ reading standard – and our summer reading slump, it is worth our while to continue to watch the results of the. focused programme of support across that all important summer of transition from primary to high school.

WORDS IN THE CEMETERY

by [Alison Sutton](#)

With a couple of hours to fill before my train, I wandered out of St Pancras Station. Right outside is the new Francis Crick Institute, a centre of creativity and excellence in science. Francis is the uncle of a dear friend of mine.

Then found the St Pancras Old Churchyard, a treasure! At the very first headstone, there's speaking and listening! *Here lie the remains of Mr John Walker the author of the Pronunciation Dictionary of the English Language and other valuable works of grammar and elocution.* Across the cemetery, with no visible signage, there is also the grave of the wonderful early feminist Mary Wollstonecraft. She wrote *Vindication of the Rights of Women* in **1792**, arguing for education reform and giving women equal rights to education.

Wonderful what you can find in a short time in London!

THE POWER OF STORYTELLING

by [Alison Sutton](#)

On Thursday night in Leicester, dear friends took me to the movies at the Phoenix to watch a play – a live broadcast of the play *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* that was on stage at the National Theatre. The play is based on a book of interviews with people who lived in the Annawadi slum near Mumbi airport, and the script uses their dialogue verbatim. A challenging play. Watching a live stage production in this way was so interesting. Rialto and Bridgeway in Auckland stream some NTL productions apparently – look out for them.

Last night, in Sheffield, other friends took me to a local production of *Playing for Time*, the moving story of the women's orchestra at Auschwitz, based on the autobiography of Fania Fenelon. Having spent the last year reading about WWII, (including studying my father's diaries) and visiting where Dad had been an escaped prisoner of war, the play was particularly poignant.

There was so much power in these two productions because they drew on the voices of real people, real stories.

Whatever it takes, the city-wide initiative to raise the literacy levels of Leicester children is consciously drawing on the power of stories to raise literacy when it hosts an annual Storytelling Week. Early learning centres focus on storytelling, drawing on diverse cultures and backgrounds. Skilled storytellers work with parents, encouraging them to tell family stories, aspirational stories, cultural legends and tall tales. Staff professional development focuses on building the confidence of staff as storytellers, and their skills at drawing parents into telling stories to their children.

Maori and Pasifika are oral cultures – how could we better utilise that strength in our endeavours to raise literacy levels across the city?

READ ON. GET ON. HOW READING CAN HELP CHILDREN ESCAPE POVERTY

by [Alison Sutton](#)

Learning Auckland is a home-grown collective impact initiative emerging in Auckland. The first focus of work is early oral language (oracy) and school oracy. It's a big challenge.

The same challenge is being taken on in a new 10 year campaign *Read On Get On* to help children escape poverty by reading recently launched in the UK, spearheaded by Save the Children. And not only are they focusing on early oracy, in the one campaign they are tackling the linked issue – low reading achievement at the end of primary school <http://www.readongeton.org.uk/>

Education is a key way out of poverty, yet children from poor families are more likely to struggle to become fluent readers. Read On. Get On. aims that by 2025 all children born in the UK will reading well by the age of 11. That means all of those children born this year will be reading at the level they need when they start high school in a decade.

An interim goal is that by 2020, all UK children will achieve good early oral language by the age of 5. Research from Newcastle University commissioned for this initiative shows that by the age of 3 there is already a year and a half developmental gap between the best-off and poorest families.

Another strand of the work is to encourage reading for pleasure. Children who don't read for pleasure are 10 times more likely to have fallen behind in reading. A straightforward focus to start – Increasing the number of parents, carers and those with a child in their life reading with that child for 10 minutes a day.

Read On. Get On is worth watching because Auckland has the same challenges. 24% of children are below the National Standard for reading at the end of primary school. And there is some really useful material about the cost of low literacy in the research report. <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/Read On Get On.pdf>

WORDS FOR WORK

by [Alison Sutton](#)

When planning my Churchill Fellowship, I wanted to find out more about initiatives that linked education, community and/or business to raise literacy – for children and for adults. Oral skills are an issue at work. Employers talk about young people not being able to communicate clearly when they start work. And it's not just young workers. It's very common for employers to look to workplace literacy programmes to improve employee participation in team meetings and their confidence to ask questions.

Setting out consciously to build young peoples' oral communication skills makes sense and it looks like there is particular power when combined with contact with employers. Contact with employers is not a 'nice to have' – it has real potential to have long term positive impact. Research by the Education and Employers Taskforce *It's Who You Meet: Why Employer Contacts at School Make a Difference to the Employment Prospects of Young Adults* found that young people who had contact with four or more employers were more likely to be successful and much less likely to be NEET (not in employment, education or training).

Words for Work is a National Literacy Trust Programme set up to build young people's oral skills and confidence and increase their exposure to employers. http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/words_for_work

Students aged around 13-14 work on communication skills as part of the English curriculum, and work in small groups with a volunteer business mentor for an hour-long sessions over six weeks. Evaluations show that it can really make a difference.

Currently the programme is being redeveloped to better deal with the practical realities of connecting education and business. School timetables are crammed, businesses aren't able to commit to that many sessions and not all business people are able to work with young people. Where there is a good fit, employers are able to describe personal experience of struggling to find a career or life direction, or to succeed at study and are able to commit

Words for Work may not be yet be quite the right structure. But the idea has real merit. Perhaps there is scope within Auckland Council's Employer Pledge to think about ways to increase young people's opportunities to really talk with employers and talk more about work earlier on in their school life.

[WORDS ON THE TRAIN](#)

by [Alison Sutton](#)

I'm on a fast train to Glasgow, a quick visit to see a kiwi nephew and family. In just 20 mins we were out of London and into the smooth pastures of English countryside. Soft light, stunningly green fields – England looks so mellow.

In hopeful anticipation of working, I booked a table seat in the 'quiet' carriage, But sitting facing other people in an area specifically designated for people not to talk is a pretty weird choice for me. Silence is not my natural state.

It's ironic that in the women's toilets at Euston Station there is an ad for **tubetalkers.com** aimed at encouraging people to talk to others during boring train commutes. People sign up and wear a lapel badge to show they are willing to converse with strangers. I could do with one of those in this silent carriage.

Talking is so natural to so many of us, it can be challenging to recognise how difficult some people find it to talk to others outside their social circle. The lower the literacy and education skills someone has, the smaller their social identity and community, observed a staff member at the National Literacy Trust yesterday. Family, people in the street, a few friends and perhaps a local school, or church or sports club – that's their social sphere. Community campaigns to raise literacy have to take that social scale into account. And increasing people's confidence to talk with people they don't know, including on trains. But not in the quiet carriage!

THE NATIONAL LITERACY TRUST

by [Alison Sutton](#)

Today was Commonwealth Day. I know this because the Director of the National Literacy Trust, where I spent the day, was off to meet the Queen at a Service of Thanksgiving. The purpose of the Commonwealth is to promote cooperation and collaboration – I certainly benefitted from collaboration today.

The National Literacy Trust, is a 20 year old charity dedicated to transforming lives through literacy. Major work strands include literacy in the community, working with schools and policy and advocacy work. Creating literacy action hubs in high need communities, drawing in multiple partners and drawing on detailed data to focus the work will be a major driver of the organisation's work for the next decade. The hubs bring together early learning, schools and family learning. More on hubs next week after I visit Middlesbrough.

Using sport-focused literacy to engage boys emerged out of a Boys Reading Commission. A partnership with rugby league is emerging to encourage families' participation in early learning in NZ -but nothing specifically about boys' reading to my knowledge.

It will be interesting to see what comes of the multi-agency 10 year literacy vision developed during the 2014 election campaign. One of the four recommendations was the creation of an Early Years Minister to drive an integrated health, education, welfare and business approach to early learning and early years policy. I wonder if that has attracted much political attention.

A key platform for the Trust has been making the connections explicit between intergenerational poverty and intergenerational low literacy and I am coming home with some powerful messages about that.

The final strand of conversations centred around Early Words Together, a programme designed to raise the confidence of parents to support literacy learning at home. Hopefully next week I'll get to see a training session in action.

As you can see from the photo, I have come away with a lot of reading to do! I have had a great day. My thanks to the Trust staff who were very generous with their time today.

ON THE BUS

by [Alison Sutton](#)

A crisp and sunny start to my first work day, visiting the National Literacy Trust. A 15 minute walk, then two buses. The buses I get in Auckland are certainly not packed with children like the double decker buses in Brixton.

There was plenty of digital literacy in evidence and a bit of numeracy – reading on phones and tablets, and people checking balances and paying bills on line. A couple of kids across the aisle were asking each other times table questions. Behind me, a couple of kids were writing in notebooks, talking to their mother about their work. There were even a couple of library books in sight and one person reading the Times.

Yet hardly anyone spoke to anyone else on the bus – the conversations were all taking place at a distance.

And there was a young mum with three beautiful boys, two smart in their school uniforms and one toddler. It took half an hour in rush hour traffic to get to the Vauxhall station. Mum spoke once to one of the school-aged children but not at all to the toddler, who grizzled and screamed the whole trip. The older children didn't

speak to their little brother either. His frustration was evident to the whole bus – he was very loud. No one reacted, said anything, tried to engage him. It was a relief to get off and get to work.

WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL FELLOWSHIP – DAY 1

by [Alison Sutton](#)

It's a gorgeous day in London – crisp, sunny and spring buds everywhere. Magic place to be.

I am spending a couple of weeks in England at the start of my Fellowship. One strand of my interest is how communities are coming together to raise literacy achievement – for children and for adults. A particular new interest is oracy – the oral language we all need to thrive and survive.

Day 1: I got off NZ2 and onto the tube at Heathrow. A young couple got on at the next stop with a three year old in a pushchair. We travelled for half an hour. Her parents never looked at her or spoke to her the entire time. And she never said a word. She didn't call out to them, didn't ask a question. She sat there bored and silent.

It was a poignant illustration of one of the things I am interested to find out more about – why more children seem to be starting school without enough spoken language. How common would that silence be on the train or bus in Auckland?

Learning Auckland: Pathway to success for Aucklanders

