

# Giving every child a chance at a great start in life

by increasing enrolment and participation in early childhood education

## ① Why is this important?

Early Childhood Education (ECE) has been identified as a key factor in supporting vulnerable children, which has led to its inclusion in the New Zealand Government's Better Public Service programme.

As part of this programme, the Government set a goal that by 2016, 98% of children starting school have participated in quality early childhood education. There is licensed capacity within many ECE centres to take on more children.

Research indicates that vulnerable children benefit from starting ECE when they are two years old and sustaining regular attendance until starting school.



## ③ What is our approach?

The group used the Institute for Healthcare Improvement's (IHI) Break Through Series (BTS) approach. This created a short term (12 month) learning system across the centres, for them to come together for three Learning Sessions (LS) to learn improvement theory. These sessions are separated by Action Periods, where data collection, idea testing, theory refinement and change implementation take place. When the Centres come together for a LS, they all teach and all learn from each other on two common challenges. The first of these is how to do improvement. The second is their shared overall purpose; increasing the enrolment and participation of children at their centres.

The action periods are facilitated, with ECE centre staff having regular catch-ups with the collaborative Project Manager (PM), Improvement Advisor (IA) and the project lead from the Ministry of Education. This is the first time that ECE centre staff have used a structured approach for testing and implementing changes. This is the first time the IA and PM have applied this methodology outside of health, and are finding the approach works just as well.

## ② What are we doing?

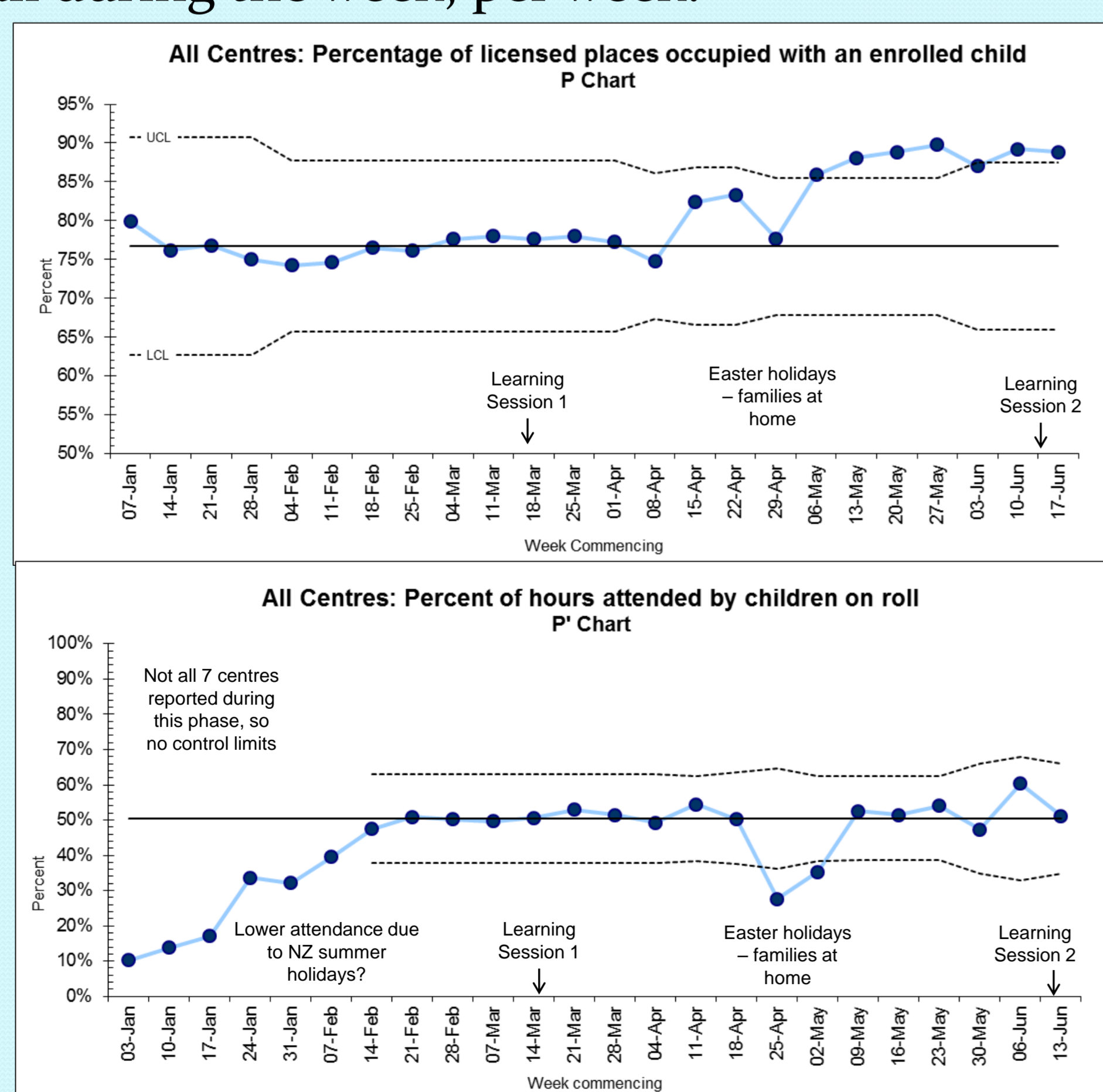
An Improvement Team from Ko Awatea, in partnership with the Auckland Project Lead from the Early Learning Taskforce from the Ministry of Education (MoE), has been working closely with seven Early Learning Centres from the Clendon and Weymouth areas in South Auckland.

Centres were chosen from these geographical areas, as they were identified as having the highest levels of deprivation in the region and the most challenging statistics around non-participation. Each centre has its own aim answering the question of "how much, by when?" A common aim is "To have 95% enrolled occupancy of our licensed places by the end of November, 2014."

## ④ Results

PDSA (Plan-Do-Study-Act) cycles have been used as a method for collecting data, testing theories, developing changes and implementing different ways of working. This allows teams to build energy for change, increase knowledge, test small, fail small and change quickly and with confidence.

Each centre is collecting a set of data common across the collaborative. This data has shown improvements in enrolment and participation (see below). Some centres are collecting extra detail to provide more detail on their specific areas of focus, such as number of children not attending at all during the week, per week.



## A Mother's Story

One centre has tested changes around how to personally support families to help their children attend. This is what one family had to say: "Thanks to the team, I am now stable and my son's attendance has improved. He has learnt a lot, made friends and improved with his speech. I cannot thank you enough for everything you have done for my family" – Young Mother at an early learning service

## ⑤ Changes Tested

ECE centres have got more creative and bold with their change ideas, with confidence built up by using PDSAs as a lower risk way of testing change. Changes include:

- Hot drinks for parents for on-time drop-off
- Free hours for children to gain enrolments
- Activity days during quiet periods – attract kids!
- Hot meals on quiet days (Monday and Friday)
- Home visits for low attendance families
- Understanding and addressing health issues

## ⑥ Learning

The group haven't used an improvement methodology before, this is generating a lot of learning for them – not only about how to go about developing changes but also how they work:

1. They now no more about the barriers to their aims (by knowing what their communities need and want)
2. Working as seven centres on one problem let's them learn quicker from each other's mistakes, unsuccessful tests and great ideas
3. Start as small as possible, especially when something is new or you have less confidence in it
4. Be brave and try new things, or expect the same results as before!

### Collaborative Team

**Improvement Facilitator:** Matt Cope  
**Project Manager:** Monique Davies  
**Ministry of Education Lead:** Jilly Tyler  
**Team:** Antonia Crawley, Naomi Diack, Mary Barthow, Angela Harris, Elisapeta Aati, Pip Orr, Kristelle Taylor, Lynn Rule, Julie Brice, Moana Honetara-Paea, Saswati Basu, Judy Murray

