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HOME-BASED *education* AND CARE:

A QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION OPTION



Tracey

As a Visiting Teacher in home-based settings for eight years, Tracey Hooker became aware of the value of home-based learning.

"It was a privilege to be part of children's learning journeys in home-based settings," Tracey says. "Throughout this time, I became more and more aware of the ways in which children are supported to develop and learn, particularly in their relationships and interactions with others, in this environment."

Tracey, like many others passionate about home-based education, began her journey with her own small children. She feels this common basis for becoming a home-based educator is part of why the experience can be so special: "With a limit of four children, and often one or more of those children being the educator's own, there will develop a real sense of family – and the children themselves love that. Having the chance to be the big sister or big brother, and also the little brother or little sister: to play both these roles is a lovely part of a child's socialisation and development, which may not naturally occur within their own family."

While Home-based Education and Care is common internationally – often referred to as Family Day-care – the service offered in Aotearoa New Zealand is different. "It really is, even internationally, a unique alternative for

children and their whānau. Home-based educators are fully supported by qualified Visiting Teachers, and there is a clear curriculum to work with – the New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum Te Whāriki – which is of course exactly what qualified teachers in other early childhood education settings are using. By basing the everyday experiences and interactions afforded by home-based education and care on the holistic practices outlined in Te Whāriki, educators engage children in rich daily learning."

Tracey stresses that home-based education may not be ideal for every child – some may benefit from a larger peer group, for example. On the other hand, the smaller numbers of children accommodated in home-based education helps educators to build exceptionally solid, caring relationships with children and their whānau, meaning their individual and diverse needs are met in a responsive and caring way. "This sense of a 'home away from home' is particularly important for children under the age of two years, as a strong attachment to their carers helps them to thrive. Home-based Early Childhood Education (ECE) settings are also a great way to foster relationships between the educator, child, whānau, provider and community – which is a vital part of lifelong learning."

Educational experiences are around every corner in a home-based ECE

setting. Opportunities to practice numeracy and literacy skills are numerous – counting pegs at the clothesline or measuring ingredients during a baking session are fun ways to build numeracy, for example. "It is through these everyday experiences associated with running a home, close and ongoing relationships, and extra activities such as playgroup or gym sessions, that children in home-based settings develop social skills and a love of learning," Tracey explains. "The home-based educators I worked alongside were highly attuned to learning experiences in everyday activities and encouraged children to be part of these. Children in a home-based setting can be exposed to experiences that enhance and expand their development and learning every day, all while their individual needs are met in a responsive and caring way."

"Home-based education and care should be considered, alongside other ECE services, when deciding on what is right for your particular child. In the end, it is the child's own particular learning and developmental needs which will drive your decision, of course – and I love that Aotearoa New Zealand has built this strong and supported network as one of our early childhood options."

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Dr. Tracey Hooker is the Academic Leader for the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) at Wintec (Waikato Institute of Technology).