



TWO-STEP JOURNEY TO A UNITARY ORGANISATION

*The Neonatal Trust New Zealand, Wellington,
Auckland, Otago, Canterbury and Waikato*

THE NEONATAL TRUST'S JOURNEY OF UNIFICATION WITH WTMF SUPPORT, BEGAN WITH A SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION IN MID-2015...

BACKGROUND

The Neonatal Trust's journey of unification with WTMF support, began with a successful application in mid-2015. A grant of \$17,500 was approved to centralise administration, policies and processes within an "efficient and effective National Office." The motivation for this was to "free up more time to deliver support and services to neonatal families and raise the quality of that support and those services," said then Executive Director of the Trust, Neil O'Styke. At that stage, the focus for centralising was three individual trusts in Otago, Canterbury and Waikato, with the process led by The Neonatal Trust New Zealand based in Wellington.

Their 2015 application explains neonatal trusts exist to "support families dealing with the stress and anxiety of a neonatal journey and make a difficult start in life that little bit easier." It notes that over 5000 babies spend time in either a Special Care Baby Unit (SCBU) or a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) each year, about 8-10% of all babies born.

The majority of those 5000 babies are born premature (between 24-37 weeks gestation) and the balance have health complications resulting in a stressful time for fami-

lies. The Trust works to reduce stress in various ways including providing Welcome Packs, access to information, and practical, financial and emotional support while the doctors and nurses focus on providing the required clinical support.

The Trust also supports the NICUs, by purchasing or contributing to the cost of specialised equipment, funding for staff professional development, purchasing furniture for parents to use in the Units as well as helping fund neonatal-related medical research.



ACHIEVEMENTS

The initial WTMF grant allowed Neil's team to focus on developing a business case and running a workshop, while covering travel, accommodation and other costs. The desired outcome at that point, was achieved. A national office was established, the organisation's administration, policies and processes were centralised, and more time to deliver better quality targeted support was available.

While bedding-in the changes involving the Otago, Waikato and Canterbury trusts continued, the intention was formed to follow the same process with the remaining neonatal trusts in Auckland and Wellington. A second WTMF grant, of \$15,000, was approved. The trust, still led by Neil, used this to carry out due diligence and investigation, hold a second workshop, and then start the merger process. Neil said, "As we are a small organisation with only two part-time employees, undertaking this was simply not possible while continuing to deliver support to parents and 'business as usual'. As it turned out, it was a stretch even with WTMF support."



Planning and holding a second workshop resulted in development of a detailed plan and drafting of documentation to start the process. "Crucially," Neil said, "by the end of the second workshop, agreement in principle was achieved to formally merge the entities into a single unitary organisation."

It remains early days for the full benefits of this impressive amount of work to fully bear fruit. The merger has created a sound platform for greater efficiency and reduced costs, and freed time and resources to increase support directly to families. Neil notes that the Working Together More funding was a key component of their successful unification,

WHAT WAS LEARNT?

Bringing the geographically spread regional trusts together to discuss the benefits of a unitary organisation worked well and, despite the amount of work and effort required, the outcome was successful.

Neil notes “It was useful to involve an independent person in the process of change.” He added that the process cannot be rushed, and good preparation was the key.

Regarding the second merger process, Neil said “It was beneficial to have been through a similar process already.” Prior to the journey all parties had agreed in principle to the need for, and benefits potentially to be gained, of becoming a unitary organisation. He said “There is no substitute for face-to-face discussion. We will be a single entity and a fundamentally stronger organisation. This means better engagement and accountability with all our stakeholders and more (and better quality) support for families. Ironically, the Trustees firmly believe that the subsequent challenges generated by the COVID-19 pandemic have been more successfully managed as a unitary organisation than would have been achieved as three disparate organisations – the first real test of our organisational resilience.”



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