

## FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

### *See Here: A Policy Change Advocacy Project*

#### Challenges and Lessons

## **Introduction**

*Implementing a policy change advocacy project over the last 5 years has provided the JR McKenzie Trust with an understanding about the opportunities and challenges of such a project. The purpose of this report is to describe the background to the See Here project and its evaluation, present an outcomes framework for measuring progress, and describe key challenges and lessons. It is hoped that groups doing advocacy work or funding others to undertake advocacy will find this information relevant and useful.*

## **The See Here Project: Why and how**

### **Why See Here was established and what was it trying to achieve**

*See Here* is a policy change advocacy project that was established in 2006. It aims to improve vision outcomes for children with mild to moderate vision impairment. This target group came to the attention of the JR McKenzie Trustees when they noticed an increase in number of funding requests for spectacles through the related J R McKenzie Youth Education Fund<sup>1</sup>. Research was commissioned to investigate what was going on in this field; it revealed that children with less severe vision impairment were falling through the cracks in current health and education policy, and that changes to policy were needed to ensure these children are identified early to get the help they need. The research also identified areas in which the Trust might make a contribution. Based on the findings of the research and after testing the idea with a number of stakeholders in the vision sector and finding strong agreement with the need for advocacy in this area, and that no-one else was advocating for this group, the Trust decided to proceed with funding a policy change advocacy project.

“We define advocacy as “a wide range of activities conducted to influence decision makers at various levels.” This means not only traditional advocacy work like litigation, lobbying, and public education, but also capacity building, network formation, relationship building, organizing, communication, and leadership development.”

(Innovation Network, [www.innonet.org/advocacy](http://www.innonet.org/advocacy))

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<sup>1</sup> The Youth Education Fund is administered totally through Rotary clubs. It is not part of the J R McKenzie Trust. This Fund makes small grants to individuals and families for children's education-related costs. Examples are shoes, uniforms and school fees for families where there is difficulty in meeting these basic costs. There is also a modest special grants fund which can make special grants for disadvantaged children covering such items as glasses and special tuition fees. (<http://www.jrmckenzie.org.nz/j-r-mckenzie-youth-education-fund>)

Advocacy involves mobilising stakeholders and convincing decision makers to take action to address the systemic problems that face people needing services in the first place. Rather than the provision of direct services, advocacy is one way to tackle the roots of these problems. As a result, many non-profit organisations and foundations have added advocacy and policy change efforts to their programme strategies<sup>2</sup>. In New Zealand, the JR McKenzie Trust is one such non-government organisation (NGO) that has incorporated advocacy into its toolkit of strategic approaches “to increase social justice and inclusion, within two main focus areas: disadvantaged children and their families, and Māori development” (JRMT Annual Report, 2010), which complements their traditional funding and community development activities.

The goal of *See Here* was to improve services to children with mild and moderate vision impairment. Through targeted policy and service analysis, and advocacy activities, the anticipated outcomes of *See Here* were to:

- Initiate robust data collection on the prevalence and characteristics of childhood vision impairment in New Zealand.
- Improve vision screening in childhood, particularly as it related to issues with the National Vision Hearing Screening Programme, and the implementation of the B4 School Check.
- Improve information and support available to families whose children require assessment and intervention services.

### **The different project phases: time frame, purpose and activities**

*See Here* developed over four distinct phases that were described in the original project framework. The framework, developed in late 2006, described the anticipated activities, stakeholders and outputs associated with each phase, and was a reference document that was useful throughout the project. The phases also incorporated principles that the Trust were keen to see reflected throughout the project, that is, develop an evidence-based case, draw on the wisdom of the sector, and work for improvements within the system.

#### **Phase 1: Project Set Up (Accumulate), late 2006 to approximately mid 2007**

Establishing the project infrastructure and the governance structure commenced in late 2006, by which stage a part time project manager had been engaged by the JR McKenzie Trust. The following tasks were undertaken by the project manager during this phase.

- Project working group established and Chair appointed. The purpose of the working group was to provide a governance structure, project oversight and guidance for the project manager. Initially, the working group comprised only JR McKenzie Trust personnel – trustees and one staff. By 2009, it was mostly people from the sector.
- A project framework, providing a roadmap for the project, was developed. It was a living document, altered as necessary to reflect changing priorities and issues arising.
- A stakeholder map (categorised by 3 groups; influencers and decision makers, specialist stakeholders, and general stakeholders) and environmental factors, was developed. The map was built on and further refined as the project grew and greater clarity about the sector emerged.

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<sup>2</sup> Speaking for Themselves – Advocates’ Perspectives on Evaluation. A research study commissioned by Innovation Network Inc. Commissioned by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and The Atlantic Philanthropies. 2008. [http://www.innonet.org/client\\_docs/File/advocacy/speaking\\_for\\_themselves\\_web\\_enhanced.pdf](http://www.innonet.org/client_docs/File/advocacy/speaking_for_themselves_web_enhanced.pdf)

- Project materials developed, i.e. a project brand, logo, website, web based newsletter, and stationery.
- Stakeholders engaged to provide broad based support. Key stakeholders included Parents of Vision Impaired (PVI), Vision Hearing Technicians (VHT) Society, and New Zealand Association of Optometrists (NZAO). Their level of involvement increased over time and as the project developed.
- Evaluation adviser engaged. The Trust was keen to incorporate a developmental evaluation approach at an early stage of the project. The evaluator worked alongside *See Here*, supporting ongoing evaluation research and reflection on processes, priorities and progress.

*Phase 2: Case Preparation (Information Gathering and Analysis), April 2007 to launch of the case in July 2008.*

An evidence-based case covering the issues that impact on children with mild and moderate vision impairment, and the rationale for a set of recommendations to improve services to these children, was prepared during this phase. Research was either commissioned<sup>3</sup> or conducted<sup>4</sup> in order to fill gaps in knowledge that became apparent while preparing the case. Many people and organisations in the sector were consulted. A consensus statement in support of the recommendations was endorsed by many stakeholders.

The intended audiences were government officials, politicians, stakeholders and other interested parties, and the case aimed to present a compelling research based rationale for policy and service change. It served to build the credibility and legitimacy of *See Here* with these groups.

*Phase 3: Launch of the Case (Advocate), mid 2008 and ongoing.*

The case, in the form of a detailed report and summary brochure, was launched and released in July 2008 and represented the culmination of several months of work and preparation. It also represented the commencement of the lobbying phase. A public relations company initially provided support and assistance with the launch of the case and the media strategy, not only at the time of the release, but during the weeks that followed. Their activities included:

- Advice about the release of the case, including timing of release
- Managing the press release and follow up of media contacts
- Advice about following up with politicians and Ministry of Health (MoH) officials.
- Ongoing advice about strategies for lobbying politicians.

Overall, this phase involved:

- Distribution of 400 hard copy reports (and many more electronic ones) and 2000 brochures to a range of interested individuals, groups and organisations.
- Rapid follow-up with politicians following the release of the case to set up meetings.
- Continued work on collecting endorsements from a broad range of interest groups to demonstrate support for the project, case and recommendations.

*Phase 4: Post launch (Policy Development), late 2008 and ongoing.*

The purpose of this phase was to progress implementation of the recommendations presented in the case. Activities included:

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<sup>3</sup> Maskill, C & Hodges, I. (2007). *Review of evidence relating to provision of interventions for children with less severe vision problems*. Auckland, Unpublished: HealthSearch Ltd. for the JR McKenzie Trust.

<sup>4</sup> Two surveys conducted by *See Here* with parents and educators.

- Cross-party lobbying of politicians and meetings with health and education government officials with the purpose of finding ways to work together to implement the recommendations or other solutions identified. Lobbying commenced a few months prior to the 2008 general election. The elections resulted in a change of government which meant that ministers who supported *See Here* prior to the elections were less able to influence change when they moved into opposition. Briefing material was sent to incoming ministers, and further rounds of meetings were held with ministers.
- Presenting at conferences to raise the profile of the project and gather support, network, build relationships with stakeholders, and answer questions from stakeholder constituents about the project.
- Continuing to seek endorsements from stakeholder groups for the case.
- A wide range of activities to progress implementation of recommendations, such as:
  - Developed referral protocols
  - Identified and supported local research projects
  - Developed communications material in a number of languages to inform parents about the MoH spectacle subsidy.
  - Facilitated MoH and MoE to work together and ensure their respective databases can provide vision screening results to teachers.

(See *See Here* Final Progress Report, May 2011, for a review of activities to progress implementation of the 11 recommendations<sup>5</sup>).

### **Project resources and assets: Getting the foundations right.**

Assets to support the project, including personnel, funding and governance structure, were established early in the project and provided a strong base for implementing and managing the advocacy project.

The project manager had considerable experience with advocacy work and was able to apply her experience to establishing the project, for example, ensuring the project structure and planning provided sufficient scope to be flexible and take risks. Three members of the working group also had prior experience of advocacy projects, and they remained involved with *See Here* for the duration of the project. Such commitment has enabled the project to manage the changes and unanticipated events that have arisen during the course of the advocacy project, and the complexity of the issues. They all brought relevant skills such as partnership working, dealing with resistance, and decision making.

The support of the JR McKenzie Trust was widely acknowledged and viewed positively by stakeholders. The Trust was seen as an appropriate organisation to focus on an issue such as children's vision. The Trust lent its positive reputation to the project, its altruistic agenda, and brought legitimacy and credibility to the project, enabling it to achieve more than what may have initially been expected by stakeholders. The Trust's funding meant *See Here* could respond to opportunities as they arose, for example, funding the publication of brochures to implement one of the recommendations.

The project manager was considered critical to the achievements of *See Here*. Communicating regularly and openly with stakeholders, showing integrity and a high work ethic, and demonstrating

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.jrmckenzie.org.nz/sites/default/files/attachments/Progress%20report%20-%20May%202011%20%281%29.pdf>

immersion in the context and content of the sector, helped build trust with stakeholders. The project manager undertook a wide range of activities, from detailed project work within the sector to lobbying politicians. In deciding which activities would be undertaken, she applied pragmatic criteria, for example, the likelihood of the activity contributing to the implementation of recommendations. It was acknowledged that the JR McKenzie Trust had supported the project manager by providing a broad working brief, and the scope to develop the project as required and in response to needs being expressed by the sector.

### **Evaluation of *See Here***

Evaluations of advocacy projects and other types of projects and programmes have a lot in common. Both involve the collection of data using a variety of methods in order to judge the success or otherwise of a projects efforts, and identify areas for improvements and learning. However, advocacy projects present a further level of complexity as they; a) work in the area of highly ambiguous, irrational and complex policy making, b) expect long time frames before changes will occur, c) involve evolving and shifting strategies, activities and milestones, and d) work with multiple and changing actors. Advocacy evaluations focus on contribution (can a credible case be made that the advocacy effort contributed to a policy outcome?), rather than attribution (is there a causal link between the advocacy effort and a policy outcome?)<sup>6</sup>.

### **Role of evaluation in *See Here***

The JR McKenzie Trust was keen to investigate the effect of *See Here*, not only to demonstrate impact and inform the JR McKenzie Trust Board, but also to strengthen its own and others' future advocacy efforts. In order to do this, a developmental evaluation approach has been used, emphasising a process of reflection and continuous improvement, and enabling the evaluation to respond to an evolving project and strategy. Throughout the project, a range of evaluation activities were undertaken, including a mid-point evaluation in 2008, mapping stakeholder interests and expectations, and regular meetings with the project manager. In addition, the project manager reviewed and rated progress towards achieving the recommendations throughout the project. The evaluation used a variety of evaluation tools and visual representations to; a) help see the big picture, especially when at times there seemed good reason to get involved in detail or diverted into tangential projects, and b) monitor progress.

### **Purpose of this final evaluation**

The purpose of this final evaluation is to draw together a range of information about *See Here* (previous evaluations, documents, and other records) to reflect on what the project has achieved, and to identify the key challenges and lessons learnt. For this evaluation phase, interviews were held with politicians and officials whom *See Here* has tried to influence, and key project advisors. In total, 10 took part in the research, 7 people were interviewed, and 3 provided a combined written response. Further input and feedback was provided by members of the working party.

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<sup>6</sup> Coffman (2009), Overview of Current Advocacy Evaluation Practice, Centre for Evaluation Innovation, October 2009.

## **Key Project Outcomes**

Outcomes refer to changes or impacts that result from project or programme efforts. At the beginning of *See Here*, outputs and outcomes were identified as part of the project framework, and provided the basis for ongoing monitoring of progress. For the purpose of this final report, the Organisational Research Services (ORS) advocacy and policy outcome framework (2007) has been used to capture and describe strategies utilised and outcomes achieved by *See Here*.

ORS reviewed a broad range of advocacy and policy evaluations, outcome categories, and indicators of progress. They found that repeatedly, the same categories of outcomes emerged. ORS distilled these outcomes into six distinct categories, that represent essential changes in lives, community conditions, institutions and systems that result from advocacy and policy work<sup>7</sup>.

The ORS framework builds on the notion that preconditions need to be in place prior to policy change being achieved. Policy change has traditionally been the measure of success for advocacy and policy work. And while this is certainly the focus of such work, it is rarely achieved without achieving changes in the preconditions to policy change.

For the purpose of presenting outcomes from *See Here*, four of these six categories<sup>8</sup>, along with relevant strategies and outcomes, are presented in the following table. The first three outcome categories represent the interim steps and infrastructure that create the conditions for change, and the fourth category reflects the end goal of policy and service improvements. The outcome table shows that a significant range of outcomes have been achieved across the spectrum of categories, and that the preconditions have been laid for further policy and service improvements in the future. We need to remind ourselves that policy change and social change takes time, and the work of *See Here* is continuing.

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<sup>7</sup> From 'A guide to measuring Advocacy and Policy, The Evaluation Exchange, Volume XIII, Number 1&2, Spring 2007. Issue Topic: Advocacy and Policy Change'.

<sup>8</sup> 'Strengthened organisational capacity' and 'Changes in impact' are the two outcome categories not included in the *See Here* outcome analysis. Strengthened organisational capacity was beyond the scope of the project, and changes in impact would be better measured in 5-10 years. In addition, for the purpose of *See Here*, the first ORS category 'Shifts in social norms' has been adjusted to reflect 'increase in awareness', which is a subset of shifting social norms.

Outcome area	Why is this important to <i>See Here</i> ?	Strategies	Outcomes	Comment
Increase in Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information provision was one of <i>See Here</i>'s original aims and outcome areas.</li> <li>The issues raised by <i>See Here</i> required clear communication.</li> <li>Children are valued and their health and educational needs to be promoted.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Published evidence based case for policy changes for children with mild to moderate vision impairment, plus an eye-catching summary for a wider audience</li> <li>Prepared brochures in several languages about; a) MoH spectacle subsidy, b) informing parents about vision screening, and c) informing educators about vision issues.</li> <li>Set up project website supported by regular stakeholder updates, also emailed.</li> <li>Published articles about <i>See Here</i>, such as in the Education Gazette and Ngā Kōrero.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive feedback and high regard for quality of all material produced.</li> <li>Decrease in the number of applications to the JR McKenzie Youth Development Fund.</li> <li>Increase in MoH spend on the MoH Spectacle Subsidy (from approx. \$700K - \$1.2M per year prior to <i>See Here</i>, to approx. \$4.4 to \$4.7 mill after the brochure was distributed<sup>9</sup>).</li> <li>Brochures available on official websites (MoH – Well Child Programme, MoE, and <a href="http://www.kidshealth.org.nz">www.kidshealth.org.nz</a>)</li> <li>156 people receiving the <i>See Here</i> newsletter. (It is known that some recipients forwarded the newsletter to others,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Surveys of increase in awareness were not undertaken. However, stakeholders who took part in qualitative interviews noted increased awareness about the issues raised by <i>See Here</i>.</li> <li>A communications strategy implemented early in the project would have been helpful.</li> <li>As <i>See Here</i> was a new group, and broke new ground in terms of the issues it raised, there was few experts, and limited relevant local research to refer to when developing the case. Some aspects of the case may have been compromised as a result.</li> <li>The link between <i>See</i></li> </ul>

<sup>9</sup> This includes increases that resulted from increasing the subsidy to include 8-16 year olds which cannot be attributed to *See Here*.

Outcome area	Why is this important to <i>See Here</i> ?	Strategies	Outcomes	Comment
Increase in Awareness			although numbers are not known).	<i>Here</i> and ‘core and enduring social values <sup>10</sup> ’ (such as children’s rights and social justice), could have been better identified and promoted as part of progressing <i>See Here</i> ’s work.
Strengthened Alliances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationships and alliances between stakeholders are important for ensuring common messages and common goals are identified and pursued.</li> <li>• Partnership work within the sector is valued and provides leverage for policy change.</li> <li>• Partnerships with stakeholder groups increase the legitimacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholder mapping and monitoring throughout the project.</li> <li>• Establishment of the Working Group which represented some key sector organisations.</li> <li>• Active contact with stakeholders across the health/education sectors throughout the project.</li> <li>• Input and review sought from stakeholders for</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actions taken by stakeholders to promote <i>See Here</i>’s recommendations e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ met with and lobbied politicians and officials,</li> <li>○ provided funding for brochures,</li> <li>○ wrote letters to officials.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Strengthened partnerships between stakeholder groups e.g.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>See Here</i> built links between groups that hadn’t worked together previously. Over the last 5 years these relationships have developed and new alliances forged. Sector development has been an unanticipated outcome for the project.</li> </ul>

<sup>10</sup> ‘Core and enduring social values and behaviours’ is one of the components of the ORS first outcome category of ‘shifts in social norms’. They describe social norms as the knowledge, attitudes, values and behaviours that comprise the normative structure of culture and society. They note that advocacy and policy work increasingly has focused on this area because of the importance of aligning advocacy and policy goals with core and enduring social values and behaviours. In the case of *See Here*, this refers to the value of children in our society, children’s rights and social justice.

Outcome area	Why is this important to <i>See Here</i> ?	Strategies	Outcomes	Comment
Strengthened Alliances	<p>for <i>See Here</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acknowledgement of key individuals/ influencers in the sector not affiliated to a particular group.</li> </ul>	<p>any written material produced, and information prepared for politicians.</p>	<p>some stakeholder groups had no contact with each other prior to <i>See Here</i>, but are now working together jointly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>115 meetings held with the working group (20), with team members outside the working group (50), and other stakeholders (45).</li> <li>Contributed to national training and monitoring for VHTs.</li> <li>Well managed project succession and project sustainability<sup>11</sup>.</li> </ul>	
Strengthened Base of Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The level of support amongst stakeholder groups, officials and politicians for <i>See Here</i> will potentially set the scene for policy change.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sought letters of endorsement from stakeholder organisations to support <i>See Here</i> and the case.</li> <li>Stakeholders involved with meetings and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>26 letters of endorsement received (an indicator of support).</li> <li>114 meetings with politicians (51), officials (60), and select</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A survey of level of support for <i>See Here</i> wasn't undertaken. However, politicians and officials who took part in qualitative interviews noted strong</li> </ul>

<sup>11</sup> Succession was successfully managed due to the relationship with PVI, and other key groups. PVI are continuing the work of *See Here* and following up outstanding issues/recommendations. Once it was notified that *See Here* was winding up, PVI and the *See Here* Project Manager organised meetings with stakeholders to ensure continuity of relationships.

Outcome area	Why is this important to <i>See Here</i> ?	Strategies	Outcomes	Comment
Strengthened Base of Support	.	lobbying of politicians, either independently or with <i>See Here</i> . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cross-party lobbying of politicians to initiate policy/service changes.</li> <li>• Met with officials within MoH and MoE to get buy in to recommendations and exert pressure on politicians.</li> <li>• Presented to Select Committees (Health, Education and Science and Māori).</li> <li>• Sought to identify political champion.</li> </ul>	committees (3). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support from some politicians including emergence of a champion.</li> <li>• Support from officials for some recommendations.</li> <li>• MoH have permitted access to screening data for research purposes.</li> <li>• MoH and MoE working together on a specific project.</li> <li>• The Health Select Committee will continue to monitor the MoH's progress in acting on <i>See Here</i>'s recommendations and have requested an update in a year's time.</li> </ul>	support for <i>See Here</i> and what it has been trying to achieve.
Improved policies and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data analysis and research sets the scene for further policy and service change in the area.</li> <li>• We can expect further policy change to take</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Push for data sharing between MoH and MoE (databases) and increased collaboration between the MoH and MoE.</li> <li>• Promoted the MoE and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognition of the need for more substantive quality management for vision and hearing screening. As a result, the MOH contracted for external provision of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In retrospect, more joint meetings between the MoH and the MoE, held much earlier on in the project, may have facilitated more progress in these</li> </ul>

Outcome area	Why is this important to <i>See Here</i> ?	Strategies	Outcomes	Comment
Improved policies and services	place as the previous categories highlight that significant progress has been made to put the preconditions for policy change in place.	<p>MoH to work with a key stakeholder to undertake research to inform policy regarding undiagnosed sensory impairment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promoted the MoH to undertake research on service quality amongst VHTs<sup>12</sup>.</li> </ul>	<p>this service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agreement from MOH not to change criteria for spectacle subsidy.</li> <li>Budget allocated for MoH and MoE database interface.</li> <li>Improved information available from both Ministries for families of children with mild/moderate vision impairments.</li> <li>Development of referral protocols for suspected vision impairment.</li> <li>Contributed to achieving funding for an additional 20 Resource Teachers Visions (RTVs).</li> </ul>	strategies leading to policy and service change.

<sup>12</sup> The purpose of the survey is to find out about the equipment VHT's use, their screening practise, and their use and opinion of the brochures published by *See Here*. The survey was prepared by *See Here* and is awaiting distribution by the MoH.

## **Surprises and unintended effects of *See Here***

Projects and programmes can reap unexpected consequences (positive and negative) as a result of their implementation. Some of the unintended effects of *See Here* were:

- *Sector Development*: When *See Here* started, the group of organisations that represented stakeholders were not organised as a sector. Some of the stakeholders hadn't met each other and were operating independently. Over time, and as trust built, *See Here* found common ground around which the groups could unite and mobilise and as a result, a sector emerged.
- *Evidence base*: The case published by *See Here* was highly regarded by stakeholders as presenting a compelling and thorough argument. It's regarded as a strong, well-researched, evidence based case that sets the benchmark for other organisations planning to use a research based approach to their lobbying.
- If *See Here* hadn't done this work, no one else would have. "*Would never have happened otherwise*" (politician)

## **Challenges**

This section highlights and reflects on some of the key challenges faced by *See Here*.

### **The political environment:**

#### **a) Changing government context**

In November 2008 (two years after *See Here* commenced) there was a change of government following national elections. By that stage, *See Here* had released the case (in July 2008), was four months into cross-party lobbying and had achieved high level ministerial support for the implementation of *See Here's* recommendations. However, following the elections these ministers moved into the opposition and lost influence over budgets and Ministry activities. On the other hand, prior to the election some opposition members were supportive, but became unavailable to meet once they were in government. *See Here* had to identify other potentially supportive politicians and form new relationships, and progress was slowed. New services, such as the implementation of the B4 School Check (which includes vision screening), also changed the environment. Implementation of the B4 School Check varied from DHB and DHB, which was inconsistent with *See Here's* recommendation of a nationally consistent vision screening, referral and data collection system.

#### **b) Interdepartmental silos**

*See Here* argued for an emphasis to be placed on the importance of clear vision, along with the collection of quality data and the provision of accurate information to parents and educators. As a result, *See Here* worked with officials across the MoH and the Ministry of Education (MoE), and facilitated them to work together to progress *See Here's* recommendations. While *See Here* had identified a very specific issue for them to work on, and despite officials' support in principle, progress has been very slow. Indeed, interviewees widely acknowledged that government is not very good at working across departments. It was hoped that presenting to the Health Select Committee and the Education and Science Select Committee would help speed up the pace of progress, and those committees countenance a ground-breaking joint session. While this didn't

have the desired effect, presenting to the select committees provided the opportunity to highlight the educational implications of undetected vision impairment, and raise awareness amongst politicians.

After significant delays, progress has been made, partly due to the support of an effective political champion. *See Here* has played a significant role in linking officials together, facilitating input of external expert advice, lobbying, and facilitating information flow between the various parties.

#### **c) Interplay between politicians and officials**

The role of an advocacy project is to raise issues with politicians that promote a particular cause or policy, but with which officials do not necessarily agree or have authority to progress. In the case of *See Here*, while officials supported and saw the need for a project that raised equity issues facing children with mild to moderate vision impairment, there were some aspects with which they didn't agree. For example, some officials regarded some *See Here* recommendations as unrealistic, and considered some of the supporting evidence as inconclusive. However, politicians noted they were satisfied and indeed impressed with the information provided by *See Here*. This creates tension between the various parties, more work for officials, raises stakeholder expectations, and raises questions about whose version is the truth (is the case evidence based or not evidence based?), different perceptions of progress being made, the quality of advice, and who is setting the political agenda.

#### **d) State of the public sector**

The public sector has been subject to many changes in the last several years, some of which may have impacted on *See Here's* progress with implementing the recommendations. On-going restructuring, reductions in staff numbers, increasing contracting out of quality management of key services, and reduced budgets all contribute to a sense of uncertainty, loss of organisational memory and entrenched organisational silos. *See Here* stepped into this environment and at times, felt progress on the part of both the MoH and MoE was very slow. Progress was partly hampered by not getting to the right level of seniority. Several key staff with whom the project manager built a relationship, changed roles or left the organisations. The workload of those who remained appeared to increase and this resulted in greater competition for *See Here* to be "on top of the in-tray".

#### **Achieving widespread political support**

*See Here* struggled with a lack of broad based political will to drive implementation of the recommendations. *See Here* reflected frequently on how it could improve the level of political buy-in, get politicians to take action on the issues, and influence policy. Some of the strategies used/suggested included:

- *Find and engage political champions:* Support for *See Here* was evident amongst politicians across the political spectrum, highlighting that cross-party advocacy was an effective strategy. This approach attempted to locate strong political champions for *See Here*. A couple of champions from both main political parties were found, and they raised issues with officials and lobbied within their party for wider political support and action. In 2010, a political champion emerged who was prepared to take the issues forward to senior politicians. By this stage, the barriers to achieving some of the key recommendations were

very clear, e.g. the interface between MoH and MoE database had been identified as a significant issue, and the political action required to progress this issue was clear. Progress made was as far as possible at the time.

- *Extend the base of lobbyists:* Key ministers (Health and Education) were unavailable to meet following the elections. An interviewee suggested that in these situations, it may be helpful to get families, parents and children to meet with these ministers as members of their local electorates. This would serve to increase the profile of parents and children involved with the issue (i.e. it's not just an advocacy group), and ensure the same message is communicated to politicians from different sources. Politicians can feel more confident to take up an issue if there is widespread support and potential political mileage. In these situations, it's important that parents are communicating the same message consistently.
- *Put politicians in the limelight:* It was suggested that *See Here* needed to better understand what was going to get politicians votes, and frame the issues accordingly. For example, develop an angle that makes children's vision a compelling issue for politicians, such as linking vision impairment to other issues. (See next section of Using the Media)
- *Quickly establish credibility with politicians:* As part of generating political support and establishing credibility, *See Here* provided evidence of and demonstrated wider sector support for *See Here* and relationships with sector groups.
- *Position See Here in relation to other disability issues:* It was noted that one of the barriers to achieving wide spread political support was that some of the recommendations were unrealistic within the current fiscal environment and were competing with requests from other disability groups advocating for improvements. For example, free vision assessments for children under 18. Progress with these recommendations might have been enhanced if a cost benefit analysis had been undertaken. However, and from another perspective, other interviewees noted that with its target group of children with mild to moderate vision impairment, *See Here* has the potential to reach a large number of children, compared to fewer children with severe vision impairment. It is the children with less severe difficulties that need to be identified appropriately, as early as possible and to have appropriate follow-up.
- *Get traction on the political agenda:* On reflection, more political advice earlier in the project may have assisted *See Here* to get on, and then move up, politicians' and officials' priority lists.

Several interviewees noted that *See Here* did all that it could to achieve political buy in, and from their perspective, there was nothing else it could have done. They commented that *See Here's* presentation to the Health, and Education and Science Select Committees addressing cross-departmental issues was a tremendous achievement. The fact that the committees' chairs declined to meet to talk about it, despite a high quality presentation, was beyond the control of *See Here*. However, the Health Select Committee have continued to be interested in *See Here* and vision screening, and requested a briefing from the MoH in May 2011. They noted that they will continue to monitor the MoH's progress in acting on *See Here's* recommendations and requested an update in a year's time.

### **Using the media – do we risk relationships or play safe?**

Finding the balance with using the media to achieve leverage for policy change, along with maintaining relationships with officials was an ongoing challenge for *See Here*. On two occasions when *See Here* considered that the MoH's inactivity was hindering progress, a media release was prepared and sent to an official prior to release (which was consistent with the collaborative relationship brokered between *See Here* and officials). However, their response was to change the wording to such an extent that the key communication messages were lost. They held a different perception to that portrayed by *See Here* in the media release, and did not want a negative image presented to the media. *See Here* grappled with whether to go ahead with the media release and jeopardise relationships with officials and risk the Trust's collaborative reputation, or not release it and compromise the role of the advocacy project. In both cases, *See Here* withdrew the media release. The rationale being that *See Here* was keen to operate without having to use the media as a tool of leverage and sought to work with stakeholders to create solutions and achieve outcomes for the target group.

It was suggested that one way to address this tension is for advocacy groups to acknowledge early on with officials that there will be times when officials and the advocacy group will not see eye-to-eye. Their roles are different - officials' aim to minimise risk, and advocacy groups aim to hold the government accountable to stakeholders and the public. An advocacy group needs to set expectations and boundaries for how they will behave, and know that they're not an arm of the government and are entitled to voice their opinion.

On reflection, and based on interviewee feedback, *See Here* might have used the media earlier in the project, and more frequently and effectively to; a) tell stories about children, covering the impact of mild or moderate vision impairment, what should be done to help, and allowing the reader to come to their own conclusion about why *See Here's* work is important, b) frame issues with the language that holds political currency i.e. if this is not addressed, there are cost implications due to school drop outs, unemployment, or lost productivity, and c) position *See Here* as a group working towards social justice, which would have entitled *See Here* to take a more activist stance.

### **Achieving consensus in the sector – how close is close enough?**

The initial *See Here* project emerged from a gap identified by the JR McKenzie Trust, rather than in response to a groundswell of interest amongst stakeholders in the sector. This provided some challenges in terms of stakeholder engagement at the beginning of the project, especially with limited sector representation on the working group. However, once networks, relationships and a sense of collaboration were built between stakeholders, along with transparent information exchange, strong support was achieved. Networks and relationships between stakeholders have continued to build throughout the project, and spinoffs from these are described in the outcomes section, such as stakeholder groups collaborating independently on *See Here* issues. However, there are two stakeholders with whom relationships have shifted over the last 5 years.

One stakeholder group from whom resistance was anticipated was the VHTs (Vision and Hearing Technicians). This group conducts vision screening in schools, and had been neglected for several years, with no national training or nationally consistent monitoring in place. *See Here* had to argue to the MoH that without these systems in place, the quality of screening could not be assured.

Perhaps surprisingly, the VHT Society supported this argument initially on the basis that improvements were necessary, despite the implications that their work was not consistently meeting adequate standards. However, some VHTs considered that this argument was undermining their work, and casting aspersions on their practice. The VHT Society managed these tensions internally for most of the project and supported *See Here*. However, latterly, following some leadership changes, support for *See Here* has been withdrawn. Ophthalmologists also didn't engage with the project, however, in recent months, individual ophthalmologists have expressed support for *See Here*.

### **The ebb and flow of an advocacy project – are we making progress?**

One of the hallmarks of an advocacy project is that progress is generally dependant on opportunities arising and other people doing things. Politicians, officials, other stakeholders are encouraged, supported and/or persuaded to undertake tasks and activities, and progress will be enhanced or hindered by their responsiveness. Sometimes this can be very slow, and over the last 5 years there have been times when progress towards implementation of recommendations has been limited. For the project manager, the sense that significant activity was yielding limited or no returns was at times demoralising. In addition, during quiet times the project continued to carry overheads such as on-going communications. However, bursts of progress can redeem this situation and return a sense of confidence that the project is making progress. Such bursts were marked by others delivering what they said they would, or the project manager reaching tipping point with a particular issue that had taken up considerable time and energy. Predicting the breakthroughs is challenging and *See Here* personnel were often surprised!

### **When do we stop?– planning an exit strategy and project sustainability**

The *See Here* working group started discussing the future of *See Here* in 2008, aware that the *See Here* project (i.e. with a part-time paid project manager and other financial support from the JR McKenzie Trust) was not designed to become a long term programme. In addition, *See Here's* position at the centre of a sector based network was inappropriate for the long term future of the work. It was envisaged that the vision sector might continue the work and momentum of *See Here*, yet how this would happen in practice was unknown in 2008.

The working group revisited the following questions for the next couple of years, refining thinking and planning for the future of *See Here*.

- *What criteria should determine the decision to wind up See Here?* One criterion was that the recommendations are achieved. However, this was considered unrealistic as the recommendations may continue to be implemented incrementally over several years. A second criterion was the idea of diminishing returns, that is, effort taken to progress implementation significantly outweighed progress being achieved. This was certainly the situation for most of 2010, however, an unexpected burst of progress was achieved in late 2010. While this resurgence promoted some further discussion about timing, the working group decided to proceed with winding up the project.

- *Once wound up, how would the momentum of See Here be continued, and which organisation/s were best placed to achieve this?* After considering a number of options, the working group decided that Parents for Vision Impaired (PVI) was best placed to continue to progress *See Here's* recommendations as PVI:
  - has advocacy as part of its core business,
  - represents families with children with vision impairment; historically its main focus was children with severe problems, but it was interested in working more with less severe impairments
  - is able to maintain and build on the strong stakeholder base that had been created, and the relationships built between the project manager and stakeholders.
  - supports a media strategy that includes telling the stories of children with mild to moderate vision impairment, and to get parents involved in the advocacy work as a means to achieve wider political support.

On *See Here's* recommendation, the J R McKenzie Trust made a two-year grant to PVI.

- *What steps need to be taken to wind up See Here?* A communication and transition plan was developed to guide the wind up of *See Here*, and ensure stakeholders were kept informed of *See Here's* plans. The plan highlighted key activities that needed to be undertaken prior to hand over, along with communication to who, when and how. A letter, and final report on progress, achievements and outstanding issues, were sent to politicians, officials and other stakeholders, informing them that *See Here* had wound up and the work was being continued by PVI. At this point the project manager organised meetings with officials and politicians to ensure continuity of the relationships.
- *What other issues impact on the decision to wind up See Here?* Winding up a project after 5 years is not easy – for the working group it involved letting go of a project that had generated motivation and passion, and acknowledgement that some stakeholders were reluctant for the project, as it was, to cease.

## **Lessons and Recommendations:**

### **Success factors for lobbying**

*See Here* made an impression amongst interviewees as an effective lobby group:

*“See Here is the most competent organisation that I’ve dealt with from a lobbying perspective” (Senior Politician)*

*“See Here ran an active and effective advocacy campaign – the McKenzie Trust should be pleased” (Official)*

Factors that made *See Here's* work effective included;

- Project management knowledge and skills:
  - Well organised (reliable, punctual, persevering).
  - Projects aims and intentions clearly communicated.
  - Time spent building relationships.
  - Effective at gaining access to ministers and officials.

- Regular meetings held with stakeholders.
- Thorough and consistent attention to processes and information.
- Good understanding about government processes and how to work collaboratively with government.
- Trustworthy and interviewees felt confident to share information.
- Cogent evidence that supported the case:
  - Demonstrated sector support and evidence of sector relationships to politicians.
  - An evidence base underpinned by robust data and research, along with a high level of analysis that provided a clear rationale for the recommendations, and a compelling argument.
  - Presentation of evidence that was clear and understandable.
- Approach to lobbying politicians:
  - Well prepared for meetings, providing high quality and thorough briefing papers to politicians and officials, and agendas. Meetings were focused and the purpose was clear.
  - Prepared to make a positive contribution.
  - Asked for advice from ministers and officials, and gave feedback on the advice given.
  - Realistic about what could be achieved.
  - Cross-party lobbying.
- Approach to working with MoH and MoE:
  - Leveraged on what ministries were already doing, and provided support and resources to further this work.
  - Engaged positively with MoH and MoE, and provided linkages across the departments
  - Provided continuity of issues and continued to make linkages across politicians, ministries, stakeholder groups, and allied health professionals.

### **Establishing and implementing advocacy projects**

Some key lessons about establishing, implementing and managing advocacy projects have emerged. These are potentially useful for the JR McKenzie Trust, or other organisations, to consider for any future advocacy projects they conduct or fund.

#### **Establishment:**

- Get the right people involved – as part of the governance of the project, as partners or as stakeholders. This includes recruiting people with experience of advocacy projects, either at a project management or governance level. Such people bring relevant skills such as partnership working, dealing with resistance, and decision making.
- Prepare a clear strategic direction, underpinned by a robust project framework (with objectives, activities and anticipated outcomes), and an implementation and communications plan.
- Ensure assets supporting the project (personnel and funding) are in place. Funding enables the project to respond to opportunities arising and progress implementation of recommendations.
- Articulate key messages, even in the face of complexity.

- Develop a credible and compelling evidence based case for policy and service change. This helps build credibility and legitimacy with politicians, government officials, stakeholders and other interested parties. In the case of *See Here*, credibility was also enhanced by the support of the JR McKenzie Trust. The Trust was seen as an appropriate organisation to focus on an issue such as children’s vision. The Trust lent its positive reputation to the project, its altruistic agenda, and brought legitimacy and credibility to the project.
- Articulate and build in the funder’s values that underpin the project and understand that these values will guide project decision making when required.
- Ensure a working group with project oversight are prepared to commit for a significant period of time (a couple of years), are willing and able to deal with complex information, and have the time available. Such commitment has enabled *See Here* to withstand changes and unanticipated events that have arisen during the course of the advocacy project.
- Ensure any group funded to undertake advocacy work has sufficient advocacy capacity<sup>13</sup>. Funders may consider funding the development of advocacy capacity to enhance delivery of the advocacy work.
- Engage informal advisors. In the case of *See Here*, the project manager identified three people who were available to provide advice, guidance and mentoring.
- Clarify the role and expectations of the advocacy group with officials at the start of the project. This will enable the group to voice its own opinions to the media with no surprises for the various parties.

#### **Implementation:**

- Be patient, persistent, and persevere, especially in the face of slow progress towards recommendations.
- Respond to opportunities as they arise and have the flexibility to work on any project that helps make progress towards achieving the recommendations. *See Here* has worked on projects as diverse as developing brochures, undertaking research, mediating the development of referral protocols, to political lobbying.
- Note that establishing a dedicated advocacy project with an opportunistic approach requires overhead costs, such as ongoing communications activities, to be carried during quiet times. Usually, an organisation would undertake advocacy as part of a wider range of organisational activities which would mean that advocacy is undertaken as required.
- Understand that the policy development process is not always rigorous – it can be a matter of serendipity and being in the right place at the right time. Being able to take advantage of opportunities as they arise requires credibility within the sector, the ability to bring sector voices and concerns together, and the capacity to contribute expertise.
- Understand that different stakeholders will have different expectations about why they should be involved, and what the project can achieve. The project needs to be aware of such expectations, identify areas of potential tension, and develop strategies for managing these.

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<sup>13</sup> Advocacy capacity refers to the knowledge, skills and systems an organisation needs to implement and sustain effective advocacy work.

- Use a range of strategies to achieve traction on the political agenda. Early and frequent political advice may assist an advocacy project to get on, and then move up, politicians' and officials' priority lists.
- Use the media to build awareness and support for an issue by conveying the importance of the advocacy work by using stories that have common appeal (i.e. children), and using the language that holds political currency (e.g. identify the implications if the issue is not addressed).

#### **Evaluation:**

- Develop and incorporate an evaluation and outcomes framework at the beginning of the project. *See Here* used a number of approaches to ensure ongoing reflection on project progress in order to; adjust project focus if necessary, maintain momentum in the working group when progress was slow, and provide information to the funders.
- Recognise that success may be defined in ways that may not have been expected, and capture outcomes that indicate tactical progress towards recommendations. This ensures that any evaluation does not conclude unfairly that the advocacy effort was a failure if a policy shift was not achieved.
- Review progress towards implementation of *a project's* recommendations some years in the future. In this case, it is recommended that a review be undertaken in 2016. This will test the outcomes framework (did *See Here* in its first 5 years lay the groundwork for policy change?), and identify further unanticipated outcomes.

#### **Social change and innovation – the role of advocacy groups**

Advocacy groups take on a significant responsibility when they embark on an advocacy project. They are in for the long-haul once they start, given that policy and social change takes a long time, and the funded project may not result in the desired change within the timeframe. They may also be testing new ground in the type of roles and work that they take up. For example, they may need to mobilise cross-sector interests, and potentially facilitate unlikely allies to work together. Groups also need to ensure that the momentum for change is maintained from a number of sources.

*See Here* was the first project of its type to challenge the efficacy of vision screening and represented foundation work, with potentially many years before the recommendations in full are implemented. *See Here* undertook innovative work with brokering relationships across and between ministries, parents, the community, stakeholder groups, key influencers and allied health professionals. Establishing these links helped to identify and negotiate shared interests and resources that would further the work of *See Here*. This work sets the scene for government and the vision impaired sector to continue to work together and build relationships to determine future service provision; mutually agreeing purpose and outcomes, setting joint targets, and learning how to manage problems together.

#### **Impact on JR McKenzie Trust:**

One final evaluation question is what has been the impact of funding a long term advocacy project on the JR McKenzie Trust? The level of importance placed on advocacy as one of their tools to increase social justice and inclusion has grown. During the time of *See Here*, the Trust has decided to

increase its emphasis on “proactive work” - projects such as *See Here*, initiated by the Trust, compared with responsive grant making. Many of these projects may have an advocacy component to them, implying that advocacy will remain and grow as a significant contribution that the Trust will make to New Zealand.

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Kathryn Nemec, the author of this report, was the evaluation advisor to *See Here* for the duration of the project. Kathryn is a community psychologist and has over 20 years’ experience in evaluation, research and policy work. She has worked in a variety of settings, in both New Zealand and the UK.