

# AUT lags behind Auckland Uni's childcare, say student mothers

by Chelsea Burke

Some mature students say support for parents at AUT University is second-rate compared to the University of Auckland.

The University of Auckland has five childcare centres in the city and two at its Epsom campus.

Its student union provides a parents space room and other support.

AUT has a creche at its Wellesley campus but there is a six-month waiting list, and nothing at its Akoranga site.

The only other AUT facilities for parents are changing and breast-feeding amenities and a small, child-friendly study room in the library.

Some students with children say they need a similar level of assistance to that provided at the University of Auckland, including somewhere they can take their children, study and talk to other parents.

"Other universities have a parents' chill-out room they can go to if they have to bring their child, somewhere they can study and make a cup of tea and talk to other parents," says Jemimah O'Leary, who has a six-year-old son, Keziah.

"That's what does my head in - having nowhere to go. I don't feel that parents are a valued part of AUT."

Aroha Treacher, mum to 9-month-old Kahu, agrees.

"I think it's a bit slack. There's no support for students studying with children."

John Williams, AUT's general manager of services and opera-



PHOTO: CHELSEA BURKE

HELP WANTED: Student mother Aroha Treacher wants better support networks at AUT for studying parents.

tions, says AUT does provide specific areas for minority groups but this does not include a particular space for student parents.

"We're aware of the waiting list at the creche and AUT is exploring different options to expand childcare numbers by investing more money into the number of qualified early childhood educated staff," he says.

O'Leary, who is in her final year of a Bachelor of Communications degree, says the changes couldn't come soon enough for stressed parents.

"You have less time to study

and issues with time. You almost feel apologetic for having a child.

"It's really poor. They have a tiny creche and you can't even get your kids in there."

Jan Herman, president of the Auckland Student Movement at AUT (AUSM), says he will raise the issue at his next meeting

with vice chancellor Derek McCormack.

"AUT wants to be the first choice of university for mature students," Herman says.

For example, it has aligned its semester holidays to coincide with most primary school holidays.

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O'Leary says it's great she can spend time with her son during the breaks. But she says studying with a child is a bit of a nightmare, and she is doing everything she can just to keep her head above water.

"I feel having more support and somewhere to go would enhance my school work.

"There are things in place for other minorities. Why not us?"

Parent Space is funded by the Auckland University Students Association (AUSA) and has tea and coffee making facilities, a microwave, highchair, a changing table, portacot and clothing bank.

There are also toys and books, a study area and couches.

Parent Space was started up in the 80s by students wanting a space where they could meet," says student parent resource officer Sarah Adams.

A parent herself, Adams is employed by the student association.

She helps with any academic, financial or childcare issues, or grievances and any other parent-related problems.

"We aim to provide a voice for student parents," she says.

"Meeting other parents can be such a valuable source of information and support while studying.

"Once you become a parent you become part of a huge club and you just want to help other parents as much as you can."

Jane Ferguson, mother of 11-

month-old Mania, says she does most of her studying at Parent Space.

Sometimes she brings her son, knowing he will be entertained by the toys and books or other parents offering to help.

"It's much more peaceful and not as frenetic as other areas," she says.

Ferguson says even with the help she gets from the University of Auckland, she finds studying and being a single mum challenging and already has had to drop two papers this semester.

"Being able to come to Parent Space and chat to other parents

has definitely helped my support network and as a result, my study," she says.

Students at AUT feel the few child-friendly facilities that are available aren't well publicised.

They say nothing is included in the prospectus or orientation about studying with children at the university.

Williams acknowledges AUT doesn't hand out "a list of things that you might be interested in as a student parent".

He says the university may look at adding parent information to its student services and facilities guide, as well as training Student Information Centre employees on what amenities may be helpful to student parents.

"AUT does have the space for parent facilities and is happy to work together with the student union to provide something for parent students," he says.

## Maori uni scholarships to be cut

by Ramarea Pedersen

Cuts to Maori funding will leave tertiary students seriously out of pocket this year.

After 15 years, Manaaki Taurira, the one grant available for all Maori students, has been cancelled.

In May last year the Government announced the \$4.3 million used to fund the grant would be reallocated to Te Kotahitanga, a programme for secondary students.

Manaaki Taurira was established in 1991 to encourage Maori students into tertiary study.

Unlike most Maori scholarships and grants, it was not based on tribal affiliations, and provided financial assistance to around 9000 students a year.

AUT University Maori liaison service manager Hariata Mareroa is disappointed by the cancellation, and is concerned about its effect on students.

"A lot of the barriers that Maori face when trying to enter tertiary education are financial, so for many this is what kept

them at university," she says.

Mareroa says last year 351 AUT students applied for the grant, and all received on average between \$800-\$1000.

Criticisms of the grant began in 2004 after a State Services Commission review reported it was not effective in reducing economic disadvantages for Maori students.

Mareroa says such findings

**"The reality was that money helped students to survive."**

are ridiculous.

"You can not tell me that \$800 does not make a difference when you have bills to pay," she says.

"The reality was that money helped students to survive the academic year, paying for books, bus passes or the rent."

Maori Party education spokesman Te Ururoa Flavell agrees, saying "even though relatively small amounts of money were distributed, it all helped, especially for low-income whanau".

AUT student Phillipa Cooper has received Manaaki Taurira awards for the past two years and is upset by the cancellation.

"People might think there are a lot of Maori scholarships out there, but there aren't.

"It was a big help, and it's going to be a lot tougher this year to buy everything I need."

The Government has said the grant's funds will be better off invested in the Kotahitanga project, which aims to provide secondary school teachers with the best methods to teach Maori and Pacific Island students.

Student Daniel Pryor questions that logic.

"What's the point in spending all that money on trying to get Maori students to university if they can't afford it?"

"With Manaaki gone there's not much financial support left."

Mr Flavell says his problem is not with the Kotahitanga programme itself, but with taking funding from tertiary students to improve teacher performance.

"This is a government which boasts it is supporting families. Yet by slashing Manaaki Taurira Maori families bear the brunt."

## Free classes and iPods adding to te reo's allure

by Chloe de Ridder

AUT University is giving students in its te reo Maori classes an extra bonus.

The classes are already free to most students from AUT and other universities and are now based around interactive learning using the latest technologies, including iPods.

Course co-coordinator Jason King says the classes have seen many technical developments and are going "better than ever".

Maxine Graham, 24, is taking Te Reo 1 this semester and says she definitely wants to carry on.

She decided to learn Maori after she and her family came from Australia for a tangi and no-one really knew the language or felt a sense of belonging.

She says the te reo classes will help her work in AUT's Te Ara Poutama, the Faculty of Maori Development.

"It also helps me to gain confidence for myself, and learning the language for future whanau events will mean I can stand proud," she says.

Her son also attends most of the classes, but she wants to learn it fully herself so she can then teach him too.

A recent initiative is the trial of iPods this semester.

King says they have a "guinea pig" class of 10 students trialing the use of the iPods, which they hope will become a permanent feature of the course.

Students were given an iPod early on and get to keep it for the duration of the course.

"The interactive style of learning makes you want to learn even more," says Graham.

King says this use of iPods is pioneering, but adds it is "just one leg of the octopus".

"We would never take away the one-on-one tuition."

Hohepa Spooner, multimedia lecturer for Te Ara Poutama, says the use of podcasting through the AUT Online platform is really positive for students.

He says "creating digital content in Maori learning" is a valuable learning and teaching resource.