

Parents of Snow Sports New Zealand Athletes' Perceptions of the Developmental  
Environment: A qualitative study.

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## Abstract

Parents provide moral and emotional support for their children in high performance sport. This support can be hindered by the stressors parents face, in particular, organisational stressors, when children start specialising and investing more time in their chosen sport.

This qualitative research study explores Parents of Snow Sports New Zealand (SSNZ) athletes' perceptions of the developmental environment and how this perceived environment affects the way parents support their children. There has been increased media attention on the well-being of high performance athletes in New Zealand, while there has been no research exploring parents' perceptions of their children's developmental environment at SSNZ or in any other High Performance Sport New Zealand (HPSNZ) organisation.

The participants in this study were 16 parents of existing and past SSNZ athletes who had been selected on to the SSNZ High Performance Pathway between 2015 and 2022, having received varied access to world-class coaching and performance support dependent on their level in the pathway.

Evidence was gathered via one focus group and the remaining from one-to-one interviews. Using reflexive thematic analysis, one overarching theme and three dominant themes were identified to summarise parents' perceptions; 1) SSNZ lack understanding of the importance of shared values and beliefs between parent and organisation in the developmental environment; 2) SSNZ athlete centred approach lacks developmental appropriateness; 3) Parents Lack Agency in SSNZ; 4) SSNZ is overwhelmed by rapid growth and success. This research showed that SSNZ does not always recognise the value of involving parents. Parents are well aware of the importance of considering a child's developmental stage and their individual needs, accordingly, which they perceive is not always occurring at SSNZ. Participants suggested they lack the power and platform to influence change in the developmental environment and crave a sense of belonging and inclusion in the team. Parents in this research held concerns about the ensuing effects of an organisation overwhelmed by rapid growth and success.

Parent support of their children was affected by the stressors of balancing the responsibilities and demands of family, work, school and location. While some of the SSNZ organisational stressors experienced, contributed to challenges for parents with funding, family commitments and travel planning, while heartache was felt watching their children in times of adversity.

Parents perceived, by building trusting parent-organisation relationships with transparency and clarity in communication, alongside open exchange of, crucial holistic

knowledge of their child and values and beliefs, this will ultimately benefit the well –being and performance of athletes and achieve an athlete centred approach at SSNZ, in line with their Developmental framework model.

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**Attestation of Authorship**

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”

Signed.....

Sally Soper

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## **Ethical Approval**

Ethical Approval Ethical approval was granted on 27<sup>th</sup> September 2022

by Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC):

Reference 22/233 (Appendix A)

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

The changing face of youth sports has been fuelled by accelerating shifts in elite sport and society. Modern sports recently included in the Olympic Games, such as freestyle skiing, surfing and skating, continue to attract youth participation and grow in popularity as they reach out to a new breed of athlete while delivering something fresh and different to audiences.

### **Snow Sports New Zealand Context**

Snow Sports New Zealand (SSNZ) is the national sporting organisation representing adaptive snow sports, alpine ski racing, cross country skiing, free skiing and snowboarding in New Zealand. They have experienced unprecedented success in recent years. New Zealand's second and third ever Winter Olympic medals, after a 26 year hiatus, were both won at Pyeong Chang in 2018. Zoi Sadowski-Synott won bronze in the Snowboard big air while Nico Porteous also won bronze in the Men's half pipe. Both athletes were only 16 years old. Those same two athletes claimed three more Olympic medals at Beijing 2022, this time two golds and a silver, at the age of 20. SSNZ boast many successful former and existing high performance athletes inside the developmental years of 12-18. The success of these young snow sports athletes has provided a somewhat novel situation in High Performance Sport New Zealand (HPSNZ) whereby selection of National Development (ND) team members at SSNZ is occurring from age 11 -12 years. What is also unique is these young athletes often separate from some or all of their families for a large portion of the year to train at the SSNZ training facility based in Wanaka. Moreover, athletes travel to the Northern Hemisphere during the NZ summer to train and compete at junior competitions. The training itself requires a high level of commitment. For instance, on snow training involves long, consecutive days on the mountain, making the most of weather windows. In addition, athletes attend strength and conditioning (S & C), physiotherapy and trampoline sessions, all while balancing their school work, social and familial relationships. Developmentally appropriate considerations are crucial when supporting and motivating these young athletes to thrive in a performance environment (Côté et al., 2010).

### **Wider Context**

Parents provide critical support to young athletes, including the financial and emotional resources necessary for participation (Knight et al., 2017). Through their day-to-day actions, parents can both enhance and detract from their child's sporting experience (Burke et al., 2021). Current literature suggests stress felt by parents of athletes who have specialised in competitive sports can compare to the stress felt by the athletes themselves (Harwood et al., 2010). When parents can manage stressors they are more likely to support,

praise and understand their child (Knight et al., 2009). Through the later stages when athletes have committed to a sport, the role of parents becomes primarily for emotional and moral support (Keegan et al., 2014). Research highlights the age of SSNZ developmental athletes and their professional status may require more parental support (Knight et al., 2017) than older elite athletes, while parents require the tools to provide optimal support for their children in the developmental environment (Harwood & Knight, 2016).

### **SSNZ Development Framework**

SSNZ has developed a framework specific to the developmental athlete (Appendix B). This framework consists of 5 key principles; Athlete Centred, Resilience, Optimal Performance, Supportive Environments and Evidence Based. 'These principles guide SSNZ in decision making and planning for their development athletes and their whanau.' In representing the journey these youth athletes undertake, the principles are categorised into The Foundation, The Core, The Climb and The Peak. As requested by SSNZ, associated findings in this research project relate back to the framework.

### **Rationale for research**

The Development Framework was established to create a world class environment for young athletes to reach their potential. SSNZ goals were to ensure their strategies, actions and processes were tailored specifically to the developmental athletes' needs. A key understanding of the role parents play in the positive outcomes of the developmental athlete has become a key area for further understanding and investigation at SSNZ.

Currently there is no evidence utilising the voice of New Zealand parents on their perceptions of the developmental environment in high performance sport and how it affects the way they support their children. This research aims to address this gap in the literature and provide SSNZ parents the opportunity to share their thoughts and experiences on this environment. High Performance Sport New Zealand (HPSNZ) see value in this research across other sporting disciplines, as such, they have funded the project. This study will also provide SSNZ and HPSNZ with some recommendations on how to enhance parents' and their child's journey and overall developmental experience within the performance pathway.

### **Research Question**

SSNZ seeks to better understand the role parents play in athlete development. The researcher has been engaged by SSNZ and HPSNZ to conduct the research.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how parents of athletes competing for Snow Sports New Zealand (SSNZ) perceive the developmental environment. The two key questions for this research are:

1. What are the perceptions of SSNZ parents of their children's developmental environment?
2. How does the perceived SSNZ developmental environment affect the way parents support their children?

### **Structure of report**

The manuscript is written as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2022) as best practice for reflexive thematic analysis. Chapter two of the report provides a review of relevant literature and its influence on athlete motivation, drawing on the tenets of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The review provides a background into the psychological needs underpinning motivation, in particular. It reviews research that further supports athlete motivation, introducing autonomy supportive coaching environments and the importance of the coach-athlete relationship. A Coaching Model (CM) (Côté et al., 2010) is evaluated to highlight the importance of developmental appropriate support to reach desirable outcomes in sport for young athletes. Marcia's (Marcia, 1966) adolescent identity model is examined in relation to protecting against identity foreclosure on a life outside of sport. Finally, the role of parents in supporting their child is reviewed, as well as their relationship with the coach and organisation.

In chapter three, the research methodology of the study is presented, oriented as Braun and Clarke (2022) recommend for reflexive thematic analysis. The theoretically informed framework and philosophy underpinning the study is introduced, as well as the qualitative methodology used. Participants, procedure, data collection, researcher's positionality and data analysis are explained. Ethical considerations, Treaty of Waitangi principles and methodological rigour are also presented, to provide the context within which decisions regarding the quality of the study can be drawn.

Chapter four presents the thematic analysis, with combined findings and discussion to contextualise observations in relation to theory and existing research (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Where text is displayed in brackets it represents an interruption from another speaker or the interviewer, or refers to people without naming them. Extracts are identified by numbering participants and whether they were in a focus group. Individual interviews often occurred with both parents, this is not considered a focus group.

Chapter five concludes the thesis and summarises findings with discussion of implications, limitations and future directions and recommendations.

References will be supplied in the APA, 7<sup>th</sup> format. The reference list and Appendix A and B will be provided at the end of the manuscript.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

Although research on parental involvement in youth sport is extensive, there is a need to explore specific sports and their unique dynamics to further understand parenting experiences from a wider variety of sports and cultures (Knight et al., 2017). High performance skiing and snowboarding provide an intriguing context for examining the parent and sport organisation relationships in the developmental journey of young athletes. Parents are often separated from their children and coaches for long periods of time, parents and families can be split by location for training purposes, all the while, children are beginning their high performance journey as young as 11 years. This literature review will explore theoretical frameworks and current research which help elucidate the themes discovered in the present research of how parents of SSNZ athletes perceive the developmental environment.

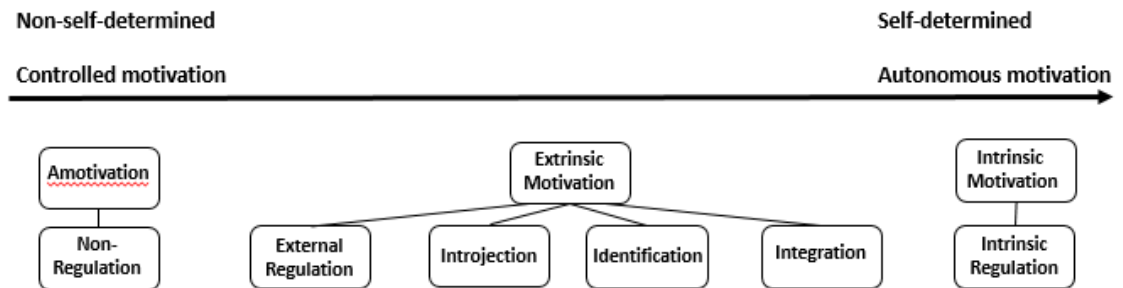
The review summarises Self Determination Theory (SDT) and how it informs athlete motivation and well-being, how autonomy-supportive coaching further provides the later and the importance of a strong coach-athlete relationship. A Coaching Model targeted at high performing young athletes and their desirable outcomes is examined, specific to the developmental stages of youth. Marcia's Adolescent Identity Model is introduced in respect to the risk of athlete identity foreclosure. The role parents play in youth athlete development and the stressors they face alongside Structuration Theory, are investigated to understand how parents can better support their children and influence change in sporting structures. A review of literature pertaining to parent-coach interactions highlights the importance parents place on a positive parent-coach relationship to benefit outcomes of athletes.

### **Self-determination theory SDT**

Self-determination theory informs athlete motivation and well-being, two crucial elements when investigating sport participation in developmental environments. It is a theory that can be drawn from to help understand how the different types of motivation either contribute to optimal functioning in sport and physical activity or hinder it. To understand the complexities of motivation and how it affects youth sport participation, a continuum can be used (Figure 1). This continuum conveys the sub-theory within SDT, called Organismic integration theory (OIT), which Deci and Ryan (1985) introduced. It details the different forms of motivation in terms of the degree to which they are self-determined.

**Figure 1**

*The Organismic Integration Theory (within SDT) Showing Types of Motivation with their Regulatory Styles*



Adapted from Ryan and Deci (2000, p. 72)

On one end of the continuum is intrinsic motivation. This type of motivation is experienced when a young athlete voluntarily engages in sport for their own pure enjoyment and satisfaction. It is an entirely autonomous form of motivation on the self-determination continuum. A step down on the continuum lies extrinsic motivation. This type of motivation is experienced when a young athlete engages in sport for reasons external to themselves. Extrinsic motivation is broken into 4 different kinds, dependent on the degree to which the athlete has internalised the external reasons. Integrated regulation is the most autonomous kind of extrinsic motivation. It is experienced when a young athlete's participation is guided by the realisation that the values of their sport are in line with their own. Accordingly, the extrinsic reasons to participate are integrated into their value system and sense of self (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Next is identified regulation. This is also an autonomous form of extrinsic motivation where athletes play sport because of the important value it holds for them. Introjected regulation, a third form of extrinsic motivation, is non self -determined and occurs when a young athlete participates because they feel pressured to do so externally (e.g., by a coach) or internally (e.g., by their own guilt) and reasons for participation have not been integrated into their value system and sense of self (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). External regulation, the final type of extrinsic motivation, is the most controlling and exists when a young athlete participates to satisfy external demands, like receiving rewards or avoiding punishment. Amotivation, which is non-regulated motivation, is when a young athlete's participation in sport is without any interest or desire (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

SDT theory suggests that "all humans have a need to feel competent, autonomous and related to others" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.15). The extent to which one can achieve self-

determination is dependent on the extent of satisfaction of these three basic psychological needs. An athlete's need for competence is met when their performance is perceived to be effective and their ability adequate, while autonomy is satisfied when an athlete initiates and has control over their actions. Athletes fulfil the need for relatedness when they encounter security and a sense of belonging or connection with others (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Needs satisfaction provides athlete outcomes associated with feeling good and functioning well, while on the other hand, need frustration is negatively associated with integrated motivation, psychological growth, integrity, and wellness leading to non-optimal functioning and performance (Ryan & Deci, 2019).

Research broadly supports that intrinsic motivation and basic need fulfilment determine a youth's motivation to continue in sport (Balaguer et al., 2017), while self-determined extrinsic motivation is positively associated with youth sport participation (Ryan et al., 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Both types of motivation can also enhance performance and, crucially, contribute to an athlete's optimal functioning (Vallerand & Rousseau, 2001).

Understanding the determinants of athlete motivation is critical in the developmental environment. However, under researched and of interest to this study is what determines parent motivation in supporting their child's participation. By meeting parents' basic psychological needs of autonomy, competency and relatedness, from SDT, they too may benefit from increased intrinsic motivation, enhancing continued parental support and parent well-being.

### **Autonomy Supportive Coaching**

Athletes seek autonomy when participating in sport. Autonomy is met when a young person's actions align with their values and are not controlled by external influences or internal pressures. It is suggested autonomy support will promote more agentic, volitional behaviours in sport by providing autonomy for the athlete. It also relieves psychological constraints about how they should think, feel or behave and allows the athlete to own the origin of the behaviour (Ryan & Deci, 1987). A vital area in sport research has focused on autonomy supportive coaching behaviours (Amorose et al., 2016; Coatsworth & Conroy, 2009; Mossman et al., 2022).

In sport and exercise, autonomy support relates to a variety of coach-led behaviours, that together produce a supportive, caring and understanding environment for the athlete (Reeve, 2015). A recent meta-analysis showed autonomy supportive environments are strongly, positively associated with an athlete's well-being while negatively associated with athlete distress and are consistent with supporting autonomous motivation and basic psychological needs (Mossman et al., 2022).

Mageau and Vallerand (2003) developed a motivational model where autonomy supportive coaching; 1) provides the athlete opportunity for choice, 2) stresses the relevance of a task, 3) gives explanation for underlying rules and limits, 4) considers athlete's feelings and perspective, 5) allows athlete initiatives, 6) gives non-controlling feedback on competency, 7) avoids using controlling motivational strategies and 8) prevents ego-involvement in athletes. Mageau and Vallerand (2003) found in supporting an athlete's autonomy, and providing structure with high levels of involvement, a coach creates an optimal environment to satisfy an athlete's needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. This subsequently fosters the development and maintenance of an athlete's intrinsic and self-determined extrinsic motivation as well as their ability to adapt. This optimal environment positively influences determinants of performance and persistence of the athlete.

More recent literature suggests that autonomy can be conceptualised into two behavioural themes; participative and attuning behaviours (Aelterman et al., 2019; Curran et al., 2013; Delrue et al., 2019). Participative behaviours require coaches to engage in dialogue, encourage athlete input and provide choices with meaning. Attuning behaviours encourage athlete interest and enjoyment by clarifying goals, giving meaningful rationales for tasks, accepting displays of negative affect and striving to understand the athlete's perspective. Supported by specific research in sport, Balageur et al., (2012) found male soccer players' (aged 11-14 years) psychological needs' satisfaction was enhanced when they were given opportunities for input and decision making, rationale behind coaches' requests and recommendations and by coaches showing consideration to the athletes' perspectives. Enhancement of needs satisfaction provided by an autonomy supportive coach also decreased levels of burnout, suggesting its contribution to continued participation in youth sport.

Hodge et al., (2008) found New Zealand rugby union players with 'high-burnout' symptoms suffered lower competence and autonomy scores compared to those athletes with 'low- burnout' characteristics. Meanwhile, Gagne (2003) discovered that autonomy support from coaches and parents influenced needs satisfaction, which was a significant predictor of well-being in adolescent female gymnasts. Their research determined that an autonomy supportive coaching environment in which athletes' concerns were heard, some choice was given, athletes held strong connections with teammates and received positive competence feedback, led to sustained positive emotions, increased energy and a higher and more stable self-esteem for athletes. Additionally, it was shown when the needs of athletes are supported by parents and coaches, the athlete's training methods attribute to a decrease in injury and burnout.

Importantly, autonomy-supportive behaviours have been found to have links to performance. Gillet et al., (2010) looked at the motivation and performance of judo athletes under the influence of autonomy supportive coaches. Athletes from 14-43 years filled out a questionnaire prior to competition that evaluated perceived autonomy support, alongside situational and contextual motivation. Results showed the level of perceived autonomy support from coaches was associated with their level of self – determined motivation to participate and their situational motivation. Desirably, both contextual and situational motivation were positively related to performance. This suggests an indirect relationship between autonomy-supportive behaviours and performance. Other research has supported this in penalty kick performance (Makaruk et al., 2020) and elite rugby (Hodge et al., 2014).

In contrast, research shows that controlling coaching behaviours, involving coercive, pressuring or authoritarian ways, constrain athlete's thoughts, emotions and behaviours, compromising their health and functioning (Bartholomew et al., 2011), as such, the external pressures are perceived then to be the locus of behaviour (Ryan & Deci, 1987). When a coach takes control from an athlete, the style of coaching is referred to as 'coach-led'. The coach may attempt to control athlete behaviours not only in competition and training but in their life outside of sport. This limited approach disempowers the athlete, taking away their contribution to, and ownership of learning and problem solving (Kidman, 2005).

Pelletier et al., (2001) found when coaches' behaviours were perceived to be controlling it was associated with athlete amotivation and non- self-determined motivation. Blanchard et al., (2009) found in adolescent basketball players that coaches perceived to have a controlling style, negatively impacted the players' feelings of autonomy but when coaches were perceived to be cohesive, this positively predicted satisfaction of basic needs. Subsequently psychological needs predicted self-determination in sport, resulting in enhanced sport satisfaction and positive emotions.

In developmental environments like high performance snow sports, the importance of an autonomy supportive setting extends further than on snow coaching alone, and consideration to an organisational autonomy supportive space should be considered. For example, in such areas as, strength and conditioning, nutrition, administrative tasks, training plans and competition schedules, autonomy support could enhance athlete ownership of their journey while attending to their holistic and individual needs.

## **Coach-Athlete Relationship**

Research has identified the coach-athlete relationship as one of the most important influences on athlete motivation, optimal functioning and resulting performance (Jowett & Shanmugan, 2016; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Mallet, 2005). Jowett (2007) define the coach-athlete relationship as being a state where coaches and athletes' feelings thoughts and behaviours are reciprocally and causally interconnected. Jowett et al., (2017) argue that the coach athlete relationship relies on interdependence, and suggest an athlete-coach-centred environment may be more appropriate than an athlete-centred one. An interdependent relationship is shaped by mutual feelings of closeness and commitment, whereby each other's behaviours are complimentary. Commitment is powered by the intent to create a close, healthy and long relationship, where closeness is experienced through emotional kinship between coach and athlete, demonstrated by appreciation, trust and mutual respect. Complementarity in the relationship provides co-operation in each other's key roles while showing traits of friendliness, responsiveness and willingness (Jowett, 2007; Jowett et al., 2017).

Developmental psychology research consistently highlights supportive adult relationships and appropriate role models facilitate positive development in youth (Benson et al., 2006; Lerner et al., 2000). While research in sport development psychology stresses the critical role coaches play in healthy youth development through sport. This places significant responsibility on athlete development coaches, however without clear coaching guidelines (Petitpas et al., 2005), some expert coaches are operating without specific training in the developmental space (Erickson et al., 2007).

As athletes strive for excellence, the coach-athlete relationship is crucial. Moreover, the complexities of children competing in a high risk snow sports context, requires a trusting relationship where children build confidence to perform. Vella et al., (2013) found a positive, coach-athlete relationship, which is developmentally appropriate, increases an athlete's confidence via positive role modelling, leadership and trust, while offering encouragement and rewards. With this in mind, careful consideration when selecting coaches for developmental environments seems warranted.

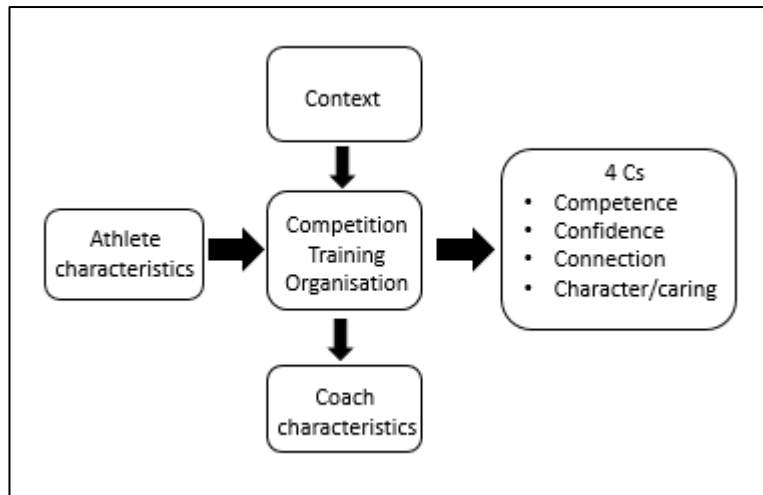
## **Coaching Model**

The revisited coaching model (CM) (Cote et al., 2007; Cote & Gilbert, 2007), describes important inputs of the coaching equation, and how they combine to produce age and stage-appropriate developmental outcomes. Fraser-Thomas et al., (2005) suggest that not only coaches, but parents, sport programs and policy makers, focus on the developmental stage of

young athletes when attempting to deliver positive sporting experiences, including the enhancement of personal qualities.

**Figure 2**

*Coaching Model*



Adapted from (Côté et al., 2010, p. 67)

Figure 2 illustrates the core components of the model and how they interact. In sum, to guide what is needed for positive developmental outcomes in competence, confidence, connection and character/caring (4 C's) the coach evaluates what they bring to the relationship (i.e., the coach characteristics), the athlete characteristics and the contextual influences.

The 4 C's

Cote et al., (2010) define competence as a belief one's actions are positive and can cross domains including social, cognitive, academic and vocational. Research shows that higher perceptions of competence are associated with greater intrinsic motivation, better performance, increased self-esteem, effort, persistence and happiness, with lower levels of anxiety, for the athlete (Weiss & Ebbeck, 1996; Weiss & Ferrer-Caja, 2002). Confidence reflects one's internal sense of global positive self-worth and self-efficacy (Côté et al., 2010). Confidence, within a sport context, is crucial to the cognitions, affect and behaviours of athletes (Vealey & Chase, 2008). Connection represents the positive mutual bonds and exchanges between people and institutions, where both parties contribute to the relationship (Côté et al., 2010). Connection (as identified as relatedness in SDT), is the psychological need to feel connected and cared for, while being close to others and their community (Ryan et al., 1985). Sport psychology research supports the significance of connections between youth and others, including peers and coaches, to promote wellbeing (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007; Smith, 2007). Character

and caring, the final positive outcome of the 4C's, suggests one holds a sense of empathy and sympathy for others. In sport this reflects the athlete's character development, often expressed as moral development and sportsmanship, while caring can be viewed as a goal of moral development (Côté et al., 2010).

The 4 C's provide specific outcomes for a coach to strive towards. However, a shift in either context, coach or individual characteristics needs to be considered, as it may affect the learning environment and consequently the athlete's development. Crucially, the athlete's developmental needs, within the outcomes of the 4Cs, can be explored specifically as athletes navigate adolescence and reach elite status. This information is critical for a coach to evolve and developmentally align their practice, alongside parents, sport programs and policy makers.

### Competence

As a child moves into adolescence they begin to be able to compartmentalise their perceptions of competence in different contexts, due to cognitive maturation and social-cultural environment. The skill development required for higher order abstractions about self is not smooth, and the process frequently requires adolescents to reconcile cognitive confusion of one self (Harter 1999). In sport, athletes will look to their social-cultural environment, in particular, feedback from coaches and peers to work through this confusion. Once athletes start investing in their sport to enhance performance, an increase in deliberate practice and a decrease in deliberate play is required and many hours of training are invested. Athletes often become motivated by extrinsic factors like winning and establishing an international sporting career. Ideally this behaviour should be self-determined and integrated into their normal life outside of sport (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Psychological skills, such as goal setting, imagery and arousal regulation, from a young age, will facilitate competence development in athletes while enhancing performance (Munroe-Chandler et al., 2007). Walton (1992) suggests to reach elite level it takes more than developing motor, perceptual, cognitive and psychological skills and a great coach will contribute to the overall human competence of athletes. A holistic coach contributes to an athlete's integrity, values, personal growth and social values.

The concentrated effort required to improve performance is not always enjoyable and negative consequences like burnout and injuries can occur. Impacts of reduced accomplishments, physical/emotional exhaustion and sport devaluation have been found to negatively impact young athletes (Raedeke, 1997). Coaches and organisations should provide the physical and social resources needed to combat such issues and recognise the athlete-coach

relationship will likely evolve in the investment years to become more collaborative with ideas being interchanged (Cote & Sedgwick, 2003).

### Confidence

Adolescents' confidence is connected with their self-perceptions around athletic competence, physical appearance and overall self-worth (Harter, 1999). Social acceptance and physical appearance promote global self-confidence at this age, so sport settings should foster environments supporting a culture of social acceptance of all team members and not tolerate negative comments around physical appearance. Vealy et al., (2017) suggests the broad variations in physical maturation in youth athletes requires coaching that is individualised, specifically with feedback and mastery goals. Parents and practitioners should encourage athletes to adopt a growth mind-set, with the use of productive attributions for success and failure, this enhancing athlete confidence and motivation. Short term lapses in confidence and competition nerves can be worked through by developing mental skills.

Through adolescence, low levels of self – worth can cause depression, delinquency and anti-social behaviours (Harter, 1999), so it is crucial to be cognisant of an athlete's confidence levels and how best to support them.

Performance athletes benefit from developing confidence outside of sport like enhancing social, leadership and communication skills. Deliberate play activities offer an ideal platform for this to occur (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005) but as this opportunity is decreased in investment years, coaches may suggest an off-season sport or activity for relaxation or as a cross training function (Côté et al., 2010).

### Connection

Adolescents value friendships and they require an environment where they can satisfy the SDT psychological need of relatedness, attaining security, a sense of belonging and connection with others. This can help an athlete's motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Athletes, once invested in their sport, must be encouraged and enabled to nurture healthy relationships between coaches, peers (in and outside of sport), community and parents, to gain a healthy perspective on sport and life while promoting wellbeing (Côté et al., 2010). Coaching adolescents in their chosen sports, must bring physical and social resources to assist athletes in overcoming constraints experienced with an increase in deliberate practice. This requires a close, committed athlete-coach relationship where each brings out the best in the other (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007).

## Character/Caring

Coaches have an important role in developing an elite athlete's character so that they become a valuable and caring member of the team with high morals and social values which ultimately will be transferred into real life (Côté et al., 2010). Gould et al., (2010) found Olympic champions held character attributes such as sportspersonship, positive values, resilience, optimism and a good work ethic and emphasised the significant role coaches played in these athlete characteristics. Shields and Bredemeier (1996) suggest elite sport is instrumental in learning and transforming social values and moral reasoning patterns, as such, they recommended coaches, in the investment years, use language and techniques that cross over into real life, so athletes exercise these learnings outside of sport.

### **Athlete Identity Foreclosure**

Literature reflects the importance of the integration of social, moral, and psychological learnings from sport into real life. Athletes readily run the risk of foreclosing on life beyond sport and Marcia's Adolescent identity model (Figure 3) illuminates the complexities in achieving an identity separate from sport.

**Figure 3**

*Marcia's Identity Statures*



Adapted from [www.researchgate.net](http://www.researchgate.net)

An adolescent identity model can be used to examine the processes adolescents use to reach identity achievement. According to Marcia (1966), in his study, identity was achieved after a crisis period, followed by commitment to an occupation and ideology. Elaborated from Erikson's (1956) ego identity concept, Marcia (1966) describes four different approaches that late adolescents and young adults use when making decisions about their identity in vocational, ideological and sexual domains. 'Identity achievement' occurs when commitment has been made following exploration. 'Identity moratorium' characterises the process of exploration before moving to a place of identity achievement. 'Identity diffusion' is where there is no exploration or commitment towards a place of identity achievement and 'Identity foreclosure' represents commitment without meaningful exploration of other options.

An identity can be separated into a self-identity (how one views themselves) and a social identity (how one's self is viewed by others). Elite athletes accept promoted levels of social reinforcement for their physical abilities and develop much of their identity and self on their own athletic performance. Therefore, their self-identity is created exclusively on being an athlete and their social identity built on the opinions of how others see them as athletes (Beamon, 2012).

In examining athletic identity foreclosure, athletes are inclined to elect this self-identity prior to consideration of other possibilities by not exploring different talents, interests and occupations and solely reaching identity around athletic participation and achievement. Missing the exploration of other options which contribute to who or what one is in relation to self-concept and social identity (Gecas & Burke, 1995).

Exploratory behaviour is limited when athletes devote their time and energy to their sport so the development of a personal identity outside of sport can be stagnated (Petitpas & Champagne, 1988) and selecting an athletic identity may appear to offer the most rewards and encouragement (Danish et al., 1993).

Identity foreclosure has its drawbacks and is associated with low career maturity and difficulties in deciding on a career (Brown et al., 2000; Good et al., 1993; Murphy et al., 1996). For athletes, this can result in problems when sport comes to an end. Beamon (2012) found Collegiate Division 1 footballers' transitions out of their sport, struck not only career issues, but the loss of status and self and found it hard to see themselves as a regular person. In their study, identity foreclosure had occurred young, when athletes hadn't explored other roles, talents, occupations or self-identities. Participants in retirement wrestled with their lack of familiar identity, resulting in an identity crisis and were not equipped to establish new identities. While

empirical evidence suggests identity foreclosure represents a unique risk to an athlete's mental health in the social context of competitive sport (DeFreese & Shannon, 2021).

Literature supports the importance of athletes not foreclosing on other opportunities outside of snow sports. The developmental environment should encourage such aspects as education, other sports and activities, family and friendships outside of snow sports. This will assist in achieving healthy adolescent identity achievement and decrease the risk of problematic moves out of snow sports when the time comes.

### **Parent support**

Parents provide resources for their children to assist in the participation of sport, as they progress through adolescence, this becomes predominantly in the way of emotional and moral support (Keegan et al., 2014). Knight et al., (2009) suggest that if parents perceive a situation to be nonthreatening to their values and beliefs and/or are capable of managing concerning stressors, they are less likely to feel strained and more likely to demonstrate positive behaviours, such as support, praise and understanding towards their child. However, when parents encounter stressors in a sporting environment, this may impact the support they provide their children (Knight & Gould, 2016).

Lienhart et al., (2020) found the parents of elite French athletes faced a variety of organisational, developmental, competitive and personal stressors, such as time, financial, logistical, health and education worries, which all affected the support they provided their children. The research showed that parents adopted six coping strategies to handle the stress; detaching from sport, information seeking, managing emotional stress, avoidance, taking control and turning to other parents for support.

Harwood and Knight (2009) found organisational stressors were foremost among British tennis parents, when players began specialising and investing in their sport. Organisational stressors comprised of challenges related to finances, time, training, coaching and governing body systems.

With this research in mind, to establish a developmental environment, which is non-threatening to parents' values and beliefs, where they are able to manage stressors, will allow parents to better support their children.

### **Agency**

Parents require and desire agency in the developmental environment. Structuration theory (ST) can be used as a framework to understand the interplay between parents and the

SSNZ organisation and how this interaction can be developed and allow opportunity for organisational change. Positioning the SSNZ parent as the agent and the SSNZ organisation as the structure, this literature can be considered in developing a recursive relationship between the two in effecting change.

ST examines the interaction between an individual and their environment(s) across time (Giddens, 1984). While mostly researched in the organisational context, ST has also been applied in sport to examine how young people construct their participation experiences (Cooky, 2009; Flaherty & Sagas, 2021; Ogden & Rose, 2005). The foundational constructs of ST are agency and structure. Every environment has a structure. Defined as the contextual rules and resources that dictate the range of possible decisions and behaviours, structure affects the way an individual acts within an environment.

Agency, in this research context, denotes the capacity of the parent to act. More specifically, it is the ability to intervene, or to refrain from intervention, with the effect of influencing a specific process. Agency is lost when a parent cannot exercise power. In sum, the key tenet of ST is a recursive relationship between agency and structure, meaning that while parents influence the structure of SSNZ, SSNZ also influences agency. They do so by controlling the range of possible decisions and behaviours that can be made by the parent. (Giddens, 1984).

Within a structure are allocative and authoritative resources (Giddens, 1984). Allocative resources are those that are tangible, such as material goods or access to employ them. Examples in sport include the opportunity, financial means and access to participate, as well as the perceived competence of an individual within their environment, in this context the parent. Allocative resources are required to influence change within SSNZ. Authoritative resources are less tangible, such as power or platform, and provide the capacity to employ allocative resources, to have an effect on the organisation (Cooky, 2009; Veliquette, 2012).

Flaherty & Sagas (2021) used the relationship between agency and structure to examine sustained participation in youth sport by investigating the compounding of personal and structural factors over time. Findings showed that an athlete's authoritative resource holding to be the most significant factor of their experiences, where authoritative resources represented their impact on play and on the group or structure, positively influencing sustained participation. This supports the fundamental element of ST, that an agent with allocative and authoritative resources can affect structure (Giddens, 1984). The vital structural elements to influence continued participation were coach demands (delivery) and coach expectations. Environments with clear and predictable expectations, irrelevant to the valence of coach communication, created a positive environment, sustaining youth sport participation. When coaches'

expectations were unclear or inconsistent participants reported negative environmental structures, detracting from continued participation.

In support of these findings, key to a recursive relationship between parents and SSNZ, will be a positive developmental environment created by clear and predictable expectations from the organisation with parents holding authoritative resources and agency to influence change.

### **Parent-coach relationships**

Parents cherish a quality parent-coach relationship, believing ultimately this will benefit their child. Wolfenden and Holt (2005) suggest parent-coach relationships that are smooth, enhance sport experiences for the child and Brustad (2011) maintains encouraging positive parental involvement and interactions between coach and parent will only benefit outcomes.

However, parent-coach relationships are not always easy, where parents state a lack of communication and coaching practices as stressors (Harwood et al., 2010; Harwood & Knight, 2009), coaches specify parents are the prime stressor in their environment (Reade & Rodger, 2009). In view of the affects parents and coaches have on each other's and children's lives, consideration to what enhances a parent-coach relationship is key.

Research is light when examining parent-coach interactions, however research on parental stressors in children's sport does reveal parents experience stress when coaches act unprofessionally, have poor organisation and communication skills, favour athletes and when they do not seem to understand child development and psychology Harwood and Knight (2009). Parents also identified stressors associated with a lack of commitment and feedback from coaches and coaches not showing respect for parents (Harwood et al., 2010; Harwood & Knight, 2009).

Positive parent-coach relationships in tennis talent development occurred when parents respected and trusted their children's coach to do their job while achieving strong communication between the two. This provided smoother transitions and successful talent development (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). Knight and Holt (2013) investigated parents' expectations of a professional coach in national level youth tennis players. Findings suggest parents seek a coach who can provide technical and tactical knowledge with a holistic approach and also appreciate coaches who are supportive of parents' own needs, in particular with emotional support when facing challenging circumstances like athlete disappointment. They suggest a positive parent-coach relationship helps the parent to be involved in their child's sport

in the most positive way while Gould et al., (2008) suggest it benefits in facilitating coaches' work with athletes.

This research reflects how positive parent-coach interactions may benefit athletes and parents however, more research on parent-organisation relationships may also contribute to positive outcomes for athletes in the developmental environment.

### **Summary**

This literature review provides a deep understanding of the literature that underpins the findings of this research project. It also identifies gaps in recent research that highlight and justify the need to capture the parents' voice and investigate how parents perceive the developmental environment at SSNZ and how this affects the way they support their children.

There is an abundance of literature and understanding on athlete motivation, framed by SDT theory while developmentally appropriate coaching environments are found to be key for positive outcomes for young athletes. Parents can contribute to this environment with their holistic knowledge of their child and insight into family values and beliefs. Coach-athlete relationships are crucial in achieving athlete motivation and optimal performance but also crucial are the strong, trusting relationships needed between parent and coach and parent and organisation to achieve a parent's optimal support of their child.

The literature review supports athletes achieving an identity outside of snow sports, while parents see the importance of schooling, family and peer connections, by a coaching and organisational environment that encourages the same, athletes will enjoy adolescent identity achievement and decrease the risk of foreclosing on options after a life in snow sports.

## **Chapter Two: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

This chapter discusses the theoretically informed framework and philosophical underpinnings of the research. It provides a description of the research design, with Treaty of Waitangi considerations, ethical considerations, participants, procedures, data collection, and an in-depth data analysis, detailing how I navigated reflexive thematic analysis.

### **Philosophical Underpinnings**

This study was approached from within the Interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivism deems reality to be multi-layered and complex, recognizing that a single phenomenon can have multiple interpretations. It acknowledges that reality is subjective and socially constructed and past personal experiences, one's cognitions and personal beliefs, are used to form perspectives. As such, this study adopted a constructivist ontology, recognizing that knowledge is co-constructed between the researcher and the participant (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2021) and epistemologically recognised that data is subjective and data analysis is informed by theory and existing research.

### **Methodology**

The general principle for qualitative research design is the coherence or "fit" of the research aims and purpose, philosophical, theoretical, and methodological assumptions, and methods. (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Willig, 2013). To study how parents of SSNZ athletes interact with the developmental environment I needed to understand their perspective. To this end, a qualitative interview study was deemed appropriate.

### **Research Context**

All data was collected from parents of athletes involved in the SSNZ High-Performance pathway (See Table 1).

**Table 1**

*SSNZ High Performance Pathway - Selection Criteria*

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***The SSNZ High performance Pathway has 4 Levels***

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**Elite Level**

1. **Elite Podium**
2. **Elite**

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**National Development**

3. **High performance Development**
4. **National Development**

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Adapted from [www.snowsports.co.nz](http://www.snowsports.co.nz)

To summarise, elite level athletes are usually over 18 years. Elite Podium athletes are expected to achieve podium finishes at most of the top tier events, such as World Cups and World Championships. Elite athletes are expected to reach finals in these events and make 1 -2 podium finishes per season. HPD athletes are expected to place at the top, for their age, at International level and are World Cup eligible, which is from 15 years. National Development (ND) athletes are usually aged 14 years and under and have been identified as future High-Performance Development (HPD) athletes that are recognised as having potential to podium at future Olympic Games.

All levels of athletes on the pathway receive access to performance support and world-class coaching, outlined in the six domains of quality coaching (New Zealand Cricket, 2023). Support is prioritised based on program level and individual athlete needs in relation to their Individual Performance plans (IPP). Athletes are eligible to receive Tailored Athlete Pathway Support (TAPS) from HPSNZ. SSNZ applies for this support on behalf of the athletes, and if approved by HPSNZ, may include all/ or a combination of the following; Training grants, Excellence grants, Performance support and Insurance cover (Snow Sports New Zealand, 2023). For the purposes of this study data will be discussed in the three levels of ND, HPD and Elite for privacy protection.

## **Participants**

Sixteen parents of existing and past SSNZ athletes were recruited for this study. Participants were parents of athletes who had been selected into the SSNZ High Performance Pathway between 2015 and 2022. In sum, the children of the participants consisted of National Development athletes (aged 11 to 15 years) between 2018 and 2022 and elite athletes (from 15 years) between 2015 and 2022. Parent participants were made up of 9 mothers and 7 fathers, between the ages of 43 and 59 years at the time of the interviews.

## **Procedure**

Ethical approval was obtained from AUT Ethics Committee prior to starting the study, Potential participants were then sent an email from SSNZ in which they were sent details of the study. Participants were asked to contact myself if they were interested in participating. I then sent those interested a participation information sheet explaining the inclusion criteria and what the study was about. They had two weeks to respond. Voluntary consent was required before participation could occur and parents signed a consent form.

On the recommendation of the ethics committee, participants were offered either the opportunity to be interviewed in a one-on-one situation, to protect privacy and confidentiality and allow for very honest and open data to be shared, or a focus group interview. Four participants took part in the focus group interview and 13 took part in individual interviews with a mix of both parents or one parent present. Bookings of interviews and focus group interviews were made via email and phone.

The data set was guided by those who responded to the original advertisement from SSNZ, although I gathered a few participants by encouraging those who had signed up to ask others they knew in the community and via mutual contacts. Sixteen participants completed the data set and the decision to limit it there was encouraged by the industry contact at SSNZ who was very happy with the number of participants. The interview process was already stretching out to 6 weeks, leading into Christmas and the researcher had to consider the huge investment in time, as it was becoming unfeasible to continue to collect more data. Fortunately, the data already gathered was rich.

## **Data Collection**

Data collection occurred through either semi-structured interviews or focus groups. The interview design was chosen to gather detailed accounts of participants' experiences and where participants selected one-to-one interviews, it permitted the deep examination of social and

personal matters (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006) and participants delivered open, honest, and insightful perceptions.

Meanwhile, the focus group worked well as both couples were good friends and as Morgan (1996) suggests, synergy in focus groups makes them more productive. The group enjoyed sharing their varied views and experiences and opinions were sometimes changed or developed further because of the rich discussion. This proving a strength of the interactional aspect of focus groups. Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) found in focus groups, participants respond and shape their responses from others, which generates a wider scope of knowledge, insight, and ideas than individual interviews provide. The focus group method reduced the likelihood of the interviewer holding power and influence over the group (Wilkinson, 1998) and the discourse was analysed to distinguish between dominant voices and collective voices, as recommended by Smithson (2000). The discourse displayed no power imbalances between participants, in what was a mutually respected dialogue.

The interviews took place between October 2022 and December 2022. Dr Craig Harrison, primary supervisor, interviewed four parents in Auckland as parents were located there at the time. Other interviews occurred via Zoom meetings, at participants' houses, or at a neutral venue in Wanaka (Bayleys office) to protect confidentiality. A mobile phone was used to record all conversations.

The interviews and focus groups were guided by indicative research questions which were devised by the researcher, to reflect the purpose of the research and specific research questions. Connelly and Peltzer (2016) emphasise the intent of the interview must ensure the data collected will answer the research questions and cover the overall purpose of the study. Semi-structured interviews are usually prepared around a series of predetermined open-ended questions while other questions arise as the dialogue progresses between interviewer and interviewees (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). This was the case in the present study. Existing, relative research findings were useful to ascertain what parent stressors exist in developmental sport environments and how parents cope, this informing indicative questions. Some interview questions related to the SSNZ Developmental Framework. SSNZ had requested findings relate back to this Framework where appropriate in the research (Appendix B). Other questioning related to how the environment could be improved as SSNZ were seeking recommendations from findings.

After each interview, I completed a reflective journal. It included a small summary of the situation of the family, how I felt I had connected with the participant(s) and why, comments around articulation and clarity of answers, description of the tone of the interview as parents

were often visibly emotional when discussing experiences and how improvements could be made for the next interview. After a few interviews I began to notice patterns and similarities in the material around potential themes, which was also noted. The Journal was continually referred back to throughout the research process as a reflexive tool.

### **Positionality**

Reflecting on researcher positionality is a critical step of the reflexive process, as it ultimately influences the construction of data (Trainor & Bundon, 2020). I am very familiar with a snow sports environment. A member of the New Zealand Alpine Development Team as a youth, I hold a full ski instructor certification and have New Zealand and International experience ski instructing and race coaching children. I have been a Personal Trainer for 20 years and a Coach in a Youth athlete development program for 5 years under the mentorship of Dr Craig Harrison. I am a parent to three athletic children who have been involved in various sports including competitive snow sports at a junior level. My post graduate diploma in Sport and Exercise at AUT involved papers centred around the development of elite and non - elite athletes, youth athlete development, Maori Health development and leadership models.

Braun and Clarke (2013) maintain qualitative researchers engage subjectively and bring their own histories, values, assumptions, perspectives, politics and mannerisms into their research. Their interpretation of the data is informed by their assumptions, values and commitments. I enjoyed continually engaging my subjectivity throughout the research, and that of my supervisors', due to robust, collaborative, insightful discussions around topics.

My position as the researcher also aided the research design as it enabled me to quickly build rapport, trust and understanding with participants. To diminish any preconceived motivations, values and assumptions influencing participants, a practice interview with a past SSNZ parent, who did not participate in the study, took place prior to the research commencing. This was shadowed by the Primary Supervisor, Dr Craig Harrison, who gave insightful feedback on how to further probe for answers with further questioning and instructed me to display a neutral emotional stance. He also analysed the first couple of research interviews, stating that significant improvement in these areas had occurred and that the interview technique was effective.

### **Data Analysis**

Thematic Analysis (TA) is widely used in qualitative psychology and specifically in sport and exercise research. Its flexibility is more or less constrained by the chosen paradigm and epistemology underpinning the research (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Reflexive TA (RTA) was chosen

as the best fit to answer the research questions and with the interview design (Trainor & Bundon, 2020). RTA processes reflect qualitative research values, where engagement with data is subjective, organic and deeply reflected upon by the active and reflexive researcher, which is key to the success of RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2022).

**Table 2**

*Phases of Thematic Analysis*

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Description of the process</b>
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract

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examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis

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Adapted from (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87)

The phases of TA (Table 2) were used to aid data analysis. However, analysis is not a linear process and its reflexive nature resulted in movement backwards and forwards between these phases (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An in-depth description of the data analysis process follows, to highlight how reflexivity occurred in this process.

The first stage of RTA involved becoming familiar with the data. This was achieved by transcribing each interview with assistance from Otterai software, at the completion of data collection. Transcripts were read through several times while listening to the recording at the same time and any reflexive notes were added to the journal. Recurring patterns in the data emerged quickly.

To generate initial codes, transcriptions were printed out and I highlighted small extracts and notes were made in the margins alongside. Codes related to the research questions, interview questions or, were re- occurring perceptions not necessarily related to the questions. Latent codes were used, which capture underlying ideas in the raw data of the phenomenon being investigated (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It helped to continually check that the raw data chosen related back to the research purpose. I transferred these codes on to post – it notes, each one including the source of the data and the page number so it was easily found in the transcript for later reference. The post it notes were fixed on to a very large roll of robust paper. They were grouped under 10 different headings, characterizing either potential themes or common perceptions or in one case answering one of the research questions, ‘How does the perceived SSNZ developmental environment affect the way you parent’. Some post -it notes straddled across two or three categories. I became very familiar with the data, in this form, as it sat in the living room for weeks and was continually deliberated upon and codes shifted across groups.

At this stage there was joint consultation with supervisors about condensing the data and starting to generate 4-5 themes. Helpful advice was given that themes may not be present in the existing data and that the researcher was to look ‘upstream’ of their codes, to the highest level, the interpretive piece. Generating thematic maps was useful to understand the

relationship between a code, the behaviours supporting it and further upstream to what was causing it. Braun & Clarke (2006) suggest themes tell a story across the data, which was useful in theme conceptualization. I then reduced potential themes into 6 headings, listing condensed relative codes under each, to fit on to one A4 page. This was emotionally rewarding to reach this stage however I was soon to learn more about the recursive nature of reflexive thematic analysis and that throughout the whole journey you never arrive or enjoy completion for long before you think back on oneself and the research evolves again. Further critical discussion with supervisors occurred around themes and supporting theories.

I then established one overarching theme and four main themes, one of which had three sub themes. One theme at a time, the codes which strongly supported that theme were noted down. The transcripts were referred back to, quotes of longer extracts were found to use in the thesis while often new extracts were discovered which related well to the now, decisive themes. Extracts were chosen because they were vivid, compelling, insightful, perceptive or articulate. Crucially, they also clearly illustrated analytic claims (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process was repeated for each theme.

A deductive orientation in RTA engages pre-existing theory to interpret the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Theoretical frameworks and existing research were investigated to support the themes. I investigated several theories to discover the best fit with a theme. Further consultation with a Primary Supervisor occurred once I had started writing the thesis. Throughout this part of the process, data was still being analysed and critically discussed as to how it related to theory supporting the theme, plus further interpreting occurred, resulting in merging two themes together as one theme was interpreted to cause the other. Plus, condensing of three sub themes down to one occurred.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval was granted for this study on the 27th of September 2022 by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (Appendix A).

To satisfy conditions of the Ethics Committee;

1. Participants were offered individual interviews as well as focus groups for participants' confidentiality.
2. An alternative, neutral venue was found, outside of SSNZ to maximise participant confidentiality.
3. Amendments of the Participant Information Sheet to include:
  - a. Inclusion of HPSNZ as the funder

- b. Inclusion of Health line contacts as well as AUT as a counselling option
- c. A revision of how the participants were identified to reflect SSNZ sending out the advertisement of the research to potential participants.

### **Treaty of Waitangi**

As this research is being completed in New Zealand, I was cognisant of the Treaty of Waitangi and its three principles of protection, participation and partnership. Each will be discussed in relation to how they were considered in the research design (Hudson & Russell, 2008).

### **Partnership**

The researcher and participant both had active roles in this project and worked together. I provided the opportunity for the participant's voice to be heard and the participant provided valuable data about their feelings, experiences and ideas around the SSNZ developmental environment, for me.

The design of the research encouraged a mutual respect in this partnership. The interview method provided a two-way conversation where the researcher asked questions that the participant/group could answer with autonomy and know that their feelings and experiences were their own as an individual and as a parent community in this specific SSNZ environment.

The interaction between researcher and participant was honourable and in good faith ensured by participants being fully informed of the study design and protocols. Prior to data collection, consent forms were signed by participants and the primary researcher was available to address any of their concerns. Participants were told they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequence.

The selection of participants was based solely on their meeting of the inclusion criteria regardless of ethnicity, culture, class, sexuality or member of specific collectives and the data was not split by any of these groups ensuring equity. Researchers ensured the social and cultural requirements of all participants was respected. Information and knowledge provided by participants was acknowledged by the researcher and SSNZ by sharing the results and using them to develop a best practice framework for parents and the SSNZ developmental environment.

## **Participation**

The role of the participants in this research was to discuss their feelings and experiences of the SSNZ developmental environment within a focus group or individual interview situation. Their principal involvement in this research was sharing information and data and they had no other role. The focus group method allowed the participant to interact with myself and other participants in the group so feelings and experiences could be shared, discussed, argued and established. This interaction is beneficial as the participant had a chance to be heard while also learning from the group about their feelings and experiences. Individual interviews allowed participants to share their data in a more confidential environment. I provided investigative questioning to seek out this rich and valuable data.

## **Protection**

I protected participants by eliminating inequity, participants and the data they provided was not split by ethnicity, culture, class, sexuality or member of specific collectives. Researchers ensured the social and cultural requirements of all participants were respected. Consultation with SSNZ industry contact, Dr Cameron Ross, provided insight into any diverse cultural or social requirements within the participants and the researcher offered to phone or email any participants to ask if there was anything that could be provided throughout the project to assist needs. However, this protocol was not required.

The potential discomforts and risks to the participants were lessened by assuring that all data would be confidential (participants will not be identifiable in the research) and that data will not be passed on to any third party. To assist with confidentiality and reduce the chances of participants being identified by SSNZ staff, the interviews were held in a neutral, private venue or at participants' residents.

Participants were asked to sign a consent form where they agreed to the opportunity to ask any questions throughout the project, understanding the method and information provided about the research and understanding their ability to withdraw at any time. I was protected myself by receiving AUT ethics approval to ensure the ethical safety of not only the project and participants but crucially, myself.

The participants and I protected each other as I carefully considered and managed any power imbalances that may have occurred. This occurred by following set interview questions to manage any potential coercive influences between myself and the group or individual participant. I am considered to be similar to the participants as I am a parent of athletic children, very familiar with the snow sports environment, of a similar social, financial and cultural group,

also living in Wanaka. This scenario likely decreased the power participants had over the myself, as the moderator. Any coercive influence within the focus group was mitigated by the ensuring each participant had a chance to answer and by analysing the discourse to show a collective voice was reached over a 'dominant voice' in the group.

### **Methodological Rigour**

It was a rigorous study aligned with the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. Smith and Caddick (2012) suggest a non-foundational approach to judge validity, commonly used in sport qualitative research. A modified list of criteria was applied to this research accordingly. Impact was achieved as I was affected emotionally and intellectually throughout this project (Richardson, 2000). Width was met by quality interviews, observations and proposed interpretations, with many quotations to support this. Coherence was encountered as interpretation created a meaningful picture by supporting theories and current literature (Lieblich et al., 1988). Resonance was achieved as results can be transferred to other organisations, (Tracy, 2010), this key in the present study, as HPSNZ hope to use the findings of this research more widely. Transparency was reached as both supervisors acted as critical friends throughout the whole research process, including scrutinising supporting theories and analysing and interpreting data, all the while they challenged me to reflect and explore these interpretations (Tracy, 2010).

I have achieved dependability as a logical and definite process was followed and clearly explained.

In agreement with Tobin and Begley (2004), I am confident confirmability has been achieved as findings have clearly been obtained from the data and how conclusions and interpretations have been reached is clearly documented.

I am confident a quality reflexive thematic analysis has been used as there exists conceptual coherence between the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the research and methods of data collection and the reflexive thematic analysis chosen. While, as this is applied research, reported themes appear to have the capacity to derive actionable outcomes for SSNZ.

## Chapter 3: Analysis

### Introduction

This chapter provides an in depth analysis of the results together with the discussion. Analytic observations are contextualised in relation to theory and existing research in reporting the themes. Through reflexive thematic analysis, this research has produced four dominant themes (Table 3).

The first is an overarching theme that; SSNZ lack understanding of the importance of shared values and beliefs between parent and organisation in the developmental environment. Parents felt strongly that coaching and the SSNZ organisation needed an awareness of the values and beliefs families hold to better support and understand their child.

Theme 2 proposes that; the SSNZ athlete centred approach lacks developmental appropriateness, with the subtheme that; Coach and/or organisation does not always consider an athlete's developmental and individual needs. Findings demonstrated that parents value a developmentally appropriate coaching and organisational environment to meet athlete's developmental and individual needs.

Theme 3 suggests that; Parents lack agency within SSNZ, interpreting the reason for this, with the subtheme that; SSNZ parents lack a sense of belonging and inclusion in the team. Findings revealed parents do not hold agency to influence change in the developmental environment, but by achieving a sense of belonging, a key psychological need, and inclusion in the team, this could be accomplished.

Theme 4 proposes that; SSNZ is overwhelmed by rapid growth and success. Parents showed understanding of the issues this causes but feel frustrated when poor communication, organisation and planning disrupts families and impacts athlete well-being.

Within these themes, findings are revealed on how the parents' perceptions of the SSNZ developmental environment affect the way parents support their children and future recommendations for SSNZ are provided.

**Table 3**

*Summary of Themes of Parent Perceptions of the Developmental Environment at SSNZ*

<b>Overarching Theme 1:</b>	<b>SSNZ lack understanding of the importance of shared values and beliefs between parent and organisation in the developmental environment</b>
<b>Theme 2:</b>	<b>SSNZ athlete centred approach lacks developmental appropriateness</b>
Subtheme:	Coach/ Organisation does not always consider an athlete's developmental and individual needs
<b>Theme 3:</b>	<b>Parents lack Agency within SSNZ</b>
Subtheme:	SSNZ parents lack a sense of belonging and inclusion in the team
<b>Theme 4:</b>	<b>SSNZ is overwhelmed by rapid growth and success</b>

**Overarching theme 1: SSNZ lack understanding of the importance of shared values and beliefs between parent and organisation in the developmental environment**

Parents play a crucial role in the lives of their children during adolescence. In sport, athletes between the ages of 12 and 18 years benefit from support and facilitation when their parents are involved (Keegan et al., 2014). However, evidence would suggest that sporting structures concerned with developing adolescent athletes do not always reflect this concept. This is further complicated in sports that see athletes as young as 16 years of age competing and winning, at the highest level. Moreover, when winning occurs at a young age, identification and development of talent tends to happen even earlier. Certainly this study shows that children are being selected by SSNZ from 11 years. However, data shows that SSNZ does not always recognise the value of involving parents. More specifically, the sharing of holistic knowledge, values and beliefs between organisation and parents appeared limited.

Parents hold their values and beliefs firm when raising their children and cherish the opportunity to share this knowledge with SSNZ.

Well, I think initially, we were still quite determined to do our own thing and to, because we'd always travelled umm overseas and did seasons, or some time away in the northern hemisphere as a family and we didn't want to lose that. Umm we still don't want to but you know, we, this is the first year we're going into the first season, Northern Hemisphere, when we're not traveling as a family. So we kind of put our family

considerations first before umm this exactly what Snow Sports wanted us to do, I suppose, because we wanted to be very involved in, in their care. (FGP2)

ND parents felt strongly about supporting and caring for their children for as long as possible in the developmental environment, by communicating such values with SSNZ, the organisation may better understand individual parent's and children's needs, and work towards meeting them.

Parents of an elite athlete stressed the importance of being involved with their child's developmental environment past the age of 18 years.

We just said, tight team. Right? Parents are in the tight team, (and they've moved to that now) they've got to understand that we we know what [Name]'s schedule is and her commitments outside of your calendar. Right? And your expectations of her. We understand all of that other stuff that's going on...it's not, it's not that we're possessive of our child. We are protective of them and supportive of them. And we don't necessarily, and we and we want the best for them. But they they don't they they don't get in my view that that there is no 18 year old cut- off date. (P6)

Parents feel strongly that they understand their child holistically and see the day to day demands they face. Parents perceived they offer value in the support they provide their child, and would appreciate SSNZ including them to help with this support.

## **Theme 2: SSNZ athlete centred approach lacks developmental appropriateness**

SSNZ's Development Framework is made up of 5 key principles, one of which is an 'Athlete-Centred' approach. The principal states that, an Athlete-centred approach ensures young athletes can express their individuality within the programme. It means athletes should be given ownership of their journey. It also ensures decision-making processes are framed with the question "what is best for the individual?" (Appendix B). Specific findings within this theme have been considered with this principle in mind.

### Subtheme: Coach/ Organisation does not always consider an athlete's developmental and individual needs

Parents recognised the importance of considering a child's developmental stage and their individual needs. However, analysis showed this was not always the case within the SSNZ developmental environment. More specifically, parents identified some concerns about appropriate coaching pedagogy, athlete-coach relationships, age of selection into ND, support in the Northern Hemisphere, enjoyment of the sport, achieving balance in training and life outside of snow sports and individual needs in training and competing.

Parents were impressed by coaching in the ND program that accounted for the developmental needs of younger athletes transitioning into adolescence. More specifically,

coaching that recognised the difference in needs of children aged 11-13 years and those of the older, more elite athletes, was appreciated. Coaching focused on building close and caring relationships with the athlete and parent was also highlighted by the participants.

[Name], as a coach is really good because (yeah) he he truly understands they're in this transition phase, learning to be a bit more independent, driving themselves instead of being skills coached at 12, 11, 13. Look do this now. Now getting them to think for themselves and work through what problems are, coming to a solution about how to adapt that trick or do this thing...and it varies by stage and by age for individuals, (he's very good at it) up to about 16, you've got to manage the kids (it's a transition) in a very different way. (P1)

Aligning the coaching approach to the developmental stage of an athlete is crucial. Analysis showed coaching that encourages athletes to make decisions for themselves is cherished by parents. This finding is supported by a number of previous studies highlighting the benefits of autonomy-supportive coaching (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Makaruk et al., 2020; Mossman et al., 2022), while enhancing the development and maintenance of an athlete's autonomous form of motivation (Mossman et al., 2022).

Parents also shared that they value coaching that is based on strong relationships. An ND parent was pleased with their relationship with their child's coach and the coach's relationships with the athletes

...but since then we kind of, we really kind of umm yeah come together pretty well and became quite good friends and have developed a lot of trust in what [Name] was in and realized how much he cared, you know, and (Ahm) that he really, really did care about the kids. Probably too much (right). He is a really caring guy and did have really good attention, but we definitely banged heads at the start. You know. And then, like, ongoing now, though, I think they're all awesome. Like, really, really, really good. You know. (FGP2)

The importance of these relationships has been shown in previous research. Jowett et al., (2017) found that when athletes perceived a high quality relationship with their coach, basic need satisfaction, self-determined motivation and well-being, were all achieved. By coaches building strong relationships with parents, it can optimise parent involvement and consequently enhance the experiences of parents, coaches, and especially children (Knight et al., 2009). This is not always easy but is essential so coaches can acquire an abundance of information, from parents, about their child, including how receptive the child is to training and their general well-being (Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005). Enhancement of the parent-coach relationship can also provide parents with a greater understanding of the sport, essential in strengthening optimal parental involvement (Holt & Knight, 2014).

Parents were pleased with the training environment at the SSNZ training facility, that met the developmental needs of the athletes. They perceived it to be a healthy, fun environment in which the children all really encouraged each other. They also talked of how inspiring it is for the ND athletes to be training alongside elite athletes who had won Olympic medals.

I think the facility in Wanaka is great ... it's such a great vibe going... like it was the kids that they aspired to, to be like, who, you know, I mean, they kind of knew them, but they didn't really know them, like Nico and Zoi and, you know, like, when they won their first medals, you know, like, it was just really exciting for them to be involved in that space, and umm part of, you know, part of that kind of community I guess. (P3)

Encouragement between team members supports an athlete's basic need for belonging (Côté et al., 2010). In line with SDT, sport psychology literature suggests connections athletes have with peers contributes to their well-being (Smith, 2007). Additionally, positive peer relationships in youth sport are linked to enhanced motivation and continued sport participation (Allen, 2003; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Patrick et al., 1999). While when the high performance athletes share a training space with developmental athletes it offers the opportunity of enhancing character and caring in the older athletes (Côté et al., 2010).

Analysis from this study also revealed an environment that did not meet the children's developmental needs. Specifically, coaching that did not account for specific needs for early adolescence. One ND parent spoke about coaching that valued sport performance over personal development.

...well my feeling was at a distance he was very one dimensional...trying to teach them a skill, didn't appreciate that these were young kids developing themselves, going through this transition, needed the different approach to get to the point he wanted them where he could probably do a very good coaching job cause he was a very good coach, but I think he'd be probably much better with 16, 17, 18 year olds (Yeah) who were now in that high performance, independence (and parents were out of the way...already...does that make sense?) and yeah, there wasn't the parent – coach – athlete triangle anymore. (P1)

And and I think it's that, you know, we've heard the concept of athlete centred, coach led and I think that there's a strong emphasis on coach led for performance and results. (P4)

A coach centred approach to coaching exercises a higher level of control and direction, disempowering the athlete and depriving them of an active role in their learning (Kidman, 2005). Previous research shows while coach centred coaching may lead to short term performance outcomes, it can hinder athlete productivity and performance quality and decrease athlete motivation and commitment (Usher, 1997). Accordingly, careful thought about what approach is best for a developing athlete is required.

Elite parents commented on cracks that appeared in the coach-athlete relationship during moments of adversity, resulting in stress for both the athlete and their parents.

But I also think no one was treated like [Name] was, that badly by their coach. I've been told that by the other guys. Now being told you're the best then being told you're no good and you're hopeless. And yeah, um and just the way that [Name] spoke to him a lot of the time. Umm. It was like bullying apparently. Um but I never saw that. And that's why I used to back [Name] over [Name] and I'd say, 'Well, you you know, you're sure you're not being this and this'. And it's just years later that I've been told even by the other guys, the other kids that it was awful. I hated it. I hated the way he was treated. (P5)

In another example, SSNZ encouraged an athlete to take ownership of an adverse situation they found themselves in. However, the athlete's parents felt this was an inappropriate request given their stage of development and stress at the time.

And then she was going to year 13. Anyway, and I just saw, I saw, I felt the weight on her shoulders, and how torn she was. And I would say, 'Do you want me to go talk to them?' 'No, no, Mum I'm gonna do it.' But there was this whole element of I can't really communicate. I I can't really actually communicate with my coach anymore. Because if I say anything negative, I'm kind of afraid to or whatever, right? And she kept saying, 'No, Mum, I'll deal with it.' And I just saw, I mean, you see, you know what it's like, I mean, you see them going through this and it's killing you. (P6)

Parents in these adverse situations experienced ongoing stress from seeing their children struggle and felt helpless to support them, as they were discouraged to be involved in the SSNZ developmental environment. One of the parents still feels heart broken by the idea they failed their son by not speaking up. These examples also increased levels of stress in the parent-child relationship as the child was forging autonomy encouraged by SSNZ, while denying help from parents. Frederick and Eccles (2004) suggest parents extend reassurance emotionally when their child experiences stress, especially in times of injury, anxiety, decreased performance and loss of confidence (Knight & Gould, 2016).

Parents shared how the athletes in this adverse circumstance were seeking a coaching style and level of coaching appropriate for their developmental and progression needs.

I think that's why (the coach) got annoyed with [Name] because he would question. Whereas the other kids didn't, they they just, most of them just did what they were told. You know, but, my son didn't. Well he obviously did to a point... (P5)

Yeah, and maybe like, you know, not every coach and athlete is gonna get on. Either. You know, and I know, sometimes you just gotta get on with it. But um [Name] had a strong desire to coach with [Name], his style suited him, was very technical, which is what [Name] needed and wanted. I mean, when he had his accident, he didn't get the trick. And he kept saying, I don't get this. And [Name] just said, 'Just go boost it,' you know, got angry with him... (P5)

[Name] wanted to progress. And I think she got to the point where she felt that [Name] was at a coaching level that was not, which was not going to deliver what she needed to do for progression, to some degree. (P7)

Analysis from this study, for reasons not directly assessed, showed a lack of connection between some SSNZ staff and their athletes. Relationships are complex. The formative experiences, sporting environment and communication skills of all parties involved contribute to how it functions (Côté et al., 2010). However, when children are involved, a higher responsibility to make the relationship work lies with the adult.

The SSNZ environment carries a selection discourse (Snow Sports New Zealand, 2023), resulting in inevitable competition and pressure. Accordingly, quality coach-athlete relationships and connections are crucial and formative to an athlete's well-being. However, when psychological needs are thwarted it can lead to ill-being (Jowett et al., 2017). Costa et al., (2014) found need thwarting was negatively associated with interpersonal competence and, in line with SDT, argue, the more individuals feel controlled and suffer feelings of rejection and incompetence, the more it will negatively impact their relationships and optimal functioning. Moreover, research suggests thwarting an athlete's basic psychological needs predicts maladaptive outcomes such as eating disorders, burnout, depression and negative affect (Bartholomew et al., 2011).

Coaching knowledge and characteristics that align with the developmental stage, characteristics and ability level of an athlete are necessary for an athlete to improve their competency (Côté et al., 2010). While Jowett & Shanmugan (2016) suggest coach-athlete relationships rely on adaptability, flexibility and accessibility as athlete's needs and wants from a coach can be very different between athletes.

Jowett and Timson-Katchis (2005) suggest parents are integral in helping arrange opportunities and providing positive information for youth athletes while also crucially they play a role in developing and supporting a coach-athlete relationship. Parents in this example at SSNZ were not provided with such an opportunity.

This research study showed parents are aware of the pressure young ND athletes face, particularly around selection. They understand that kids develop at different ages and stages so it is difficult to identify future elite performance at 11 or 12 years of age. What's more, concerns were raised about athletes who do not get selected for the team at different points of the development pathway.

You know, there's a lot of water that goes under the bridge between having an athlete at 12, that's showing a little bit of promise to actually making a career out of it...I think, it's very hard for a young kid to be told you're not going to make it if they pinned their

whole hopes on being, oh I'm going to be, I'm going to be a skier, or I'm going to be a snowboarder, and to have that pulled out from under them at 14 or 15...Because we know they all grow at different rates, stages and ages. (P8)

Parents highlighted they are concerned about the capability to identify future elite athletes at such a young age. Understanding the combination of biological-psychological-sociological development of young people within a sport context is under researched and there are multiple implications and challenges in relation to talent identification (Till & Baker, 2020). More research may provide solutions to this dilemma, however macro-level policy decisions in sport can be considered, where decisions unify across major sporting contexts. Research has recommended delaying the age of talent identification and widening talent development opportunities (Baker et al., 2009; Copley et al., 2009; Till et al., 2014) and some sports like rugby have implemented this and optimised talent development (Till & Baker, 2020).

Analysis showed there are many stressors and constraints placed on athletes and families once selected, particularly those families living away from Wanaka. This usually involves splitting families between home and Wanaka and removing athletes from their peers and schooling. Additionally, parents perceived some environments at SSNZ did not support the importance of schooling and athletes competing in other sports.

...You know, like, I just think it needs to be kept in perspective and when families uproot their whole lives to come down here. How does that kid feel when one; if they don't go further or two; change their mind and don't want to be an athlete...it should be decentralised...Go back to their regions, leave them in school, and leave them with their friends...so they have a life outside of skiing. (P8)

Because we saw some of the kids that didn't have their parents with them that were in the team house, (they didn't do anything) Their schooling just disappeared. (Right) Yeah it was non-existent. (Yeah, yep) You could see that, umm (Yeah) And and look, you don't know if...(P4)

I don't know what the cause of that of that, I can't comment but ... I do think that more could be done from Snow Sports to recognise that these guys are still very young and they don't want to put all their eggs in one basket, umm and that they should be developing more rounded children umm than just Olympic skiers or snowboarders. Umm and that's a really strong feeling from me. (P1)

Parents perceived the developmental environment is not developmentally appropriate when families are split, athletes are removed from schools, while parents' resources are stretched. Parents who have to split families shared how detached it feels living away from Wanaka and their child and spouse during the southern hemisphere winter months, while they support the rest of the family at home in the North Island. While parenting from Queenstown was revealed to be exhausting, with the extra travel required. Most parents shared there were difficulties and challenges as a SSNZ parent due to balancing other children in the family, their

own work commitments and schooling of athletes, around their child's busy snow sports schedule.

Findings demonstrated parents are uneasy with the concept of young athletes foreclosing on other opportunities provided by school, living at home, peers, family and other sport. All of which contribute critically to a life outside of snow sports. Marcia's (1966) identity theory suggests that adolescents must spend time in exploration (moratorium) to achieve their own identity. Athletes risk prematurely adopting an identity established exclusively on their role as a sportsperson without knowing who they are and what they want to do with their lives after sport. By doing this they can feel lost and helpless when they drop out, are de-selected or retire. Furthermore, athletes who have failed to experience exploration and identity achievement may forgo the advantages of a well-rounded development through adolescence (Lavallee & Robinson, 2007). By SSNZ providing a developmental environment that ensures there is no confusion over 'who they are' with 'what they do', the athlete will ideally exit with a strong sense of identity and healthy prospects for a life after snow sports.

For multiple reasons it is very difficult for parents to be able to fully support their children in the northern hemisphere. Parents perceived that the support provided by SSNZ does not meet the developmental needs of the young athletes.

Parents reflected what a massive role it is for the Team Mums in the Northern Hemisphere and how they are not equipped for the complex role. Parents travelling with the team often have had to step in to help children having a difficult time or assist with injured athletes.

So, umm yeah, so I think more support systems in place for the kids when they're traveling, they're just too, they're so young... and the team umm the team Mums, that's what that's what they call them, the umm person who travels with the team, umm they've all been lovely, but they're all very young, and they haven't had children themselves... and they doing the job to the best of their ability, but they just lack the experience of someone who has dealt with youth, and young kids in a high pressured environment like that, I mean, you know, these kids umm are aiming for the Olympics, you know, there's no higher kind of goal than that in terms of, your sporting kind of prowess and the pressure on them plus to do you know, plus their schoolwork. Umm and, you know, any other interests that they might have, you know, just managing that whole kind of thing and traveling, being in a new environment, often in countries where they don't speak the language. They're not familiar with the food, there's just so much going on that umm I think they need more support in place, yeah. (P3)

Given the material highlighting parent's unease with the support offered by SSNZ when their children were away, an environment better suited to young adolescents and the pressures they face would be beneficial Cote et al., (2010). Consideration to the change of context and

pressured environment in the northern hemisphere and what the support looks like to achieve the 4Cs is crucial for a successful developmental environment.

Some parents feel so strongly about supporting their own children in the Northern Hemisphere that they travel with them. Although with some parents who travel, this can bring its own challenges to the team environment for complex reasons, that were not discussed.

Look, I know, I appreciate that some families can't do it. But, I wouldn't do it. There's no way I'd do it. I wouldn't send my young kid over there, without support... no one parents as well as you parent your own child do you?...My advice to any parent would be I wouldn't send them. Yeah. (P8)

I'm stuck here, I couldn't travel. Some of the other parents of the National Development team did travel and they'd go over there themselves on their own back, I believe umm which again was ahhh, for the last trip, it actually made things worse...it was probably the off snow antics that created a problem that actually grew on to the on snow stuff...There was a lot...of factors but I still believe it could have been handled a little bit better... (P9)

In this case, the parents left behind felt stress that their child was not happy in the team environment and had difficulties communicating with SSNZ to improve the situation, and prevent it happening in the future. In some cases, parent's involvement in the northern hemisphere caused conflict amongst the team. There are difficulties when some children are being supported by their parents outside of the team house, and there appears to be confusion around how these families integrate with the athletes in the team house. Parents who cannot travel expressed they would appreciate input into how their children's needs could be best met while away. This relates back to the overarching theme in this research, where parents are not given the opportunity to share values and beliefs with the organisation, ultimately assisting their children's needs.

Parents discussed the pressures on children traveling away from home for long periods and that it was important to have appropriate time frames relevant to the athlete's age.

And that was, he was 11 or 12? (He was just 11, he turned 11 in the January) And and they were looking for a six, eight week, or six week Camp? (P4)

Yeah, probably five weeks, I think, umm at that point, and we said, No, we just pushed back on it. Umm and then he went back again to do, so he did a three week at the end of January, early Feb, and then did a 2 week camp in April around the USASA nationals... (P1)

Parents felt strongly that the northern hemisphere experience be as developmentally appropriate as possible under challenging circumstances. Parents understand that the logistics for travel are complex but feel open, transparent, continued communication could assist in

planning. This would also provide comfort for parents facing stressors around not being able to be there to support their children overseas.

In sum, parents recognise it is not the coaches' role to support their children off snow in the northern hemisphere. Therefore, a role dedicated to caring and connected athlete support while traveling seems critical.

The SSNZ framework states that 'SSNZ will adjust the balance to most appropriately suit the individual and seek a balance of training, competing, organised play and no contact' (Appendix B). Analysis suggested that this was not always the case. Parents talked about the stressors on athletes and parents to fill out forms at inconvenient times. Parents felt there was little consideration and coordination within the organisation in requesting information at often very short notice. Many parents discussed the process of team selection, its poor timing and the unnecessary stress it provides every 6 months in applying.

Umm it's having to happen every six months. That doesn't make sense. How can you build a program where you put the people, parents and (yeah) kids through that kind of stress? Every six months, it might be some kind of formality, but what's the point? Umm and it's just causing, that it came at a time where we just umm was at the very end of the season. They were trying to do spring camp. Umm it was mentally and physically draining and then they were having to come home and write. My kids sat in front of the computer for hours doing this thing. Umm [Name] told me it would take them 15 minutes so she obviously doesn't understand my kids if she thinks that. Like umm. So yeah, I mean, I've felt it was like a bad process to go through. (P10)

Oh in order to, in order to ah enter the the program ah for this coming year, right? There's now this new big form you've got to fill out. And we've got to get you to write something, and then the coach to write something. This comes out right in the middle, right, of their key (peak training) peak training block ... You got to remember these are full time athletes at that level. Right? That everything is scheduled. Right? How, however, you know these these ancillary people want you to fill out a form right in the middle of the peak training or a peak competition period or whatever...There's no one sort of coordinating in my view. No, we don't need to do this now. If you need the form done by the 31st of October, then the athlete's downtime is May through beginning of the season, or they might be on camps. But ask for Christ's sake someone as to when the best time to get that done. (P6)

This material shows that parents have concerns about athletes achieving balance in their non-contact time. Parents and athletes would appreciate involvement in coordination and planning around the selection process and administrative demands, to lessen stressors. An autonomy supportive environment, where the individual is offered opportunity for choice and the relevance of the task is stressed, will grant athlete initiatives and crucially consider athlete's feelings and perspective (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). This subsequently providing the athlete with more balance outside of snow sports.

ND and HPD parents spoke of the importance of the athletes having fun and being creative in training and they appreciated coaching that provided this. However, when there was no play, in some cases because of constraints such as injuries and time, the athletes missed the enjoyment.

A little bit more unstructured. So they can go on, they can hit whatever feature they like and they can do what trick they like and they can mess around and they can lie down and snow and do snow angels and stuff if they felt like it (Yep) or go and do a side hit...it's not having to follow, do this do this do this. It's a bit more expressive. And you do that when you're riding a line in a comp', you're, you've got that structure, but you're also, unless you can be expressive, you're not gonna get the high um style points. (P11)

[Name] kind of wants to ride, he didn't get to ride much when he was at Snow Sports. It's just the work, which I always thought was a shame, because all these guys, it's like an art, really. Um and to keep that passion alive, you know, I mean, they say, you've got to want this and it's like, yeah, but they talk about balance too and a lot of the time, there wasn't any balance. (P5)

Analysis indicated parents are uncomfortable when there is a lack of enjoyment in training. As athletes invest more time in their sport, the focus is on developing competence, involving increased levels of deliberate practice, which may come at the cost of less deliberate play (Fraser-Thomas & Cote, 2006). Deliberate practice ultimately leads to increased skill level, key at high performance level. However increased training can lead to burnout, injuries and loss of enjoyment (Côté et al., 2010). This highlights the need for enjoyment in training and how necessary it is to develop creative ways to keep the fun in and outside of the developmental environment while ensuring recovery is occurring (Young & Salmela, 2002) to protect athletes from injury and burnout.

The SSNZ Development Framework states the importance of considering athlete's individual needs. 'An Athlete-centred approach ensures young athletes can express their individuality within the programme. It means they are given ownership of their journey. It also ensures our decision-making processes are framed with the question "what is best for the individual?". Specifically, the framework states that 'SSNZ will adapt their coaching to cater to the uniqueness of each athlete' (Appendix B). However, parents communicated that tailored coaching was not always occurring in the ND program but when parents questioned this with a SSNZ member of staff, they felt like they were closed down.

...it was like, you're getting in the way kinda. How how I felt was, shut up, go away. (P1)

The framework also states that 'SSNZ will give their young people the opportunities to explore and grow their own identities and lead their own journeys' (Appendix B). There were examples from the parents of HPD and Elite athletes where individual athletes had desperately

wanted to enter certain events but had been denied to do so, for various reasons. In some cases, athletes had 'gone rogue' from SSNZ and competed in their own capacity.

Anyway he won it. And, which is a big deal, and it was great. And part of his prize was to go to do the [Name] event, which say this was February or whatever, it was in March or something. Um and he really, that was like a dream come true, it would be like going and doing F1 racing with all the pros. Um but because of his age, um I don't know if he was allowed to go by himself or Snow Sports wouldn't let him go by himself. But (the coach) wanted to go home. So he said, You can't do it. And [Name] was like, but this is what I want to do. You know, this is like, I've won this, I deserve this, you know. And he was shot down over it. And that's one of [Name]'s biggest regrets, that he never got to do that. (Um and so he managed to get um a spot to go the following year. But then we had COVID. So he didn't get to go.... And if I'd known whether or not I could have gone, I don't know if I could have gone to, I would have got on a plane and gone but, I don't know if that was even an option. I don't know if he had to have a coach or not. (P5)

Conversely, there was an example where an athlete did not want to enter an event but was coerced into it because of the individual success they had experienced and the points SSNZ could benefit from by entering the athlete.

There was pressure on [Name] to go and do this [Name] Champs...it was in the middle of the season during training, you know, prime time, [Name]'s very much driven progression. But there was complete breakdown between what ....[Name] wanted in terms of points, right? Outcome points for the organisation. What the coach thought...[Name] just did not want to be there or do the comp, but really...um [Name] was coerced into doing it... (P6)

But remember we had this, cause we, we had an agreement collectively, we all agreed. ([Name] wasn't doing it) It was you know, [Name] doesn't need to do this.... anyway it was a terrible time. [Name] didn't do well [Name] came out. (P7)

Parents maintained consideration and support of an athlete's individual needs is not always happening in the developmental environment. An autonomy supportive style structure gives the athlete opportunity for choice, stresses the relevance of a task, gives explanation for underlying rules and limits, considers athlete's feelings and perspective, allows athlete initiatives, gives non-controlling feedback on competency, avoids using controlling motivational strategies and prevents ego-involvement in athletes (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). In using the constructs of Mageau and Vallerand's (2003) motivational model, an athlete can satisfy the basic needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness therefore fostering intrinsic and self-determined extrinsic motivation, enhancing athlete performance and persistence.

## **Summary**

Analysis showed parents felt strongly about SSNZ providing a developmentally appropriate environment in areas such as coaching, northern hemisphere travel, age of selection into ND and enjoyment and balance for athletes. They understand the importance of strong

relationships between athletes, parents, coaches and the organisation, to meet the psychological needs essential for athlete motivation and well-being. Parents seek a developmental environment where athletes are encouraged in a life outside of snow sports, to help achieve adolescent identity while not foreclosing on possible future options.

Analysis also provided findings on how, by the SSNZ athlete centred approach lacking developmental appropriateness, it affects the way parents support their children. In sum, parents face stressors and constraints once an athlete is selected into the SSNZ Performance Pathway, in particular when children have to move to Wanaka for the season. These include feelings of detachment when families are split, educational stressors when children are removed from their schools, and most parents feeling exhaustion from balancing family and work commitments around their snow sports athlete's busy schedule. Parents suffered stress when their child faced adversity in coach-athlete relationships but battled to extend emotional reassurance in support of their child. While parents who could not support their child in the northern hemisphere found it stressful when their child was not receiving the support required. Parents of ND athletes felt there was unnecessary stress experienced by having to go through a 6 monthly team selection process and parents also felt administrative form filling at inconvenient times provided stress for both athletes and parents.

### **Recommendations**

In line with recommendations from Cote et al., (2010), SSNZ could further foster their healthy, mutually encouraging environment by introducing a mentor program for athletes within the organisation and developing links with local schools and other community groups. This could provide opportunity for the athlete to further develop their 4C's by increasing their social reinforcement and confidence, growing their perceived competence, enhancing their character and relationships while caring for others.

SSNZ could better provide the care and support athletes need at different developmental stages, better prepare their coaches in teaching developmental age athletes, consider coach characteristics and intervene sooner when a coach-athlete relationship breaks down and when an athlete is suffering stress.

To encourage athlete identity development outside of snow sports Lavallee (2005) recommends a holistic view of the athlete and not to limit athlete assistance to their sporting life but supporting the development of multiple identities. Lavallee and Robinson (2007) recommend that retirement or de-selection from sport should be planned from a young age and participation should be reduced gradually with a well thought and meaningful replacement.

It would be advised that Northern Hemisphere support provided by SSNZ in the future should be a person who has a diverse set of skills to manage the complex situation in developmentally appropriate ways. Key outcomes for the athlete should include development of connection, competency, confidence and character and caring. While, crucially strong relationships between child and support person and parent and support person are built well in advance of the northern hemisphere winter, to be able to provide optimal support. Constructing the context in the northern hemisphere both in and outside of the team house, for example with parents supporting their own children, may take some preparation and planning from SSNZ to optimise outcomes for all athletes. A debrief after each trip would assist in this and open communications with all parents while athletes are travelling, would be of benefit.

By encouraging athletes to stay involved with a small amount of deliberate play, either inside or outside of snow sports, it will grant them the intrinsic enjoyment received from sport participation (Côté et al., 2010). All the while, bringing their training, competing and life outside of sport into balance and ideally enhancing enjoyment of snow sports, promoting continued participation in it.

### **Theme 3: Parents Lack Agency within SSNZ**

Theoretical frameworks of structuration theory (ST) and self-determination theory (SDT) alongside existing research are presented to underpin the analysis and discussion of data around the theme that, Parents lack Agency within SSNZ. Followed by the subtheme in explanation as to why this is; SSNZ does not provide parents a sense of belonging and inclusion in the team. To help disseminate current findings while reflecting the role of parent involvement and how it contributes to their child's sustained sport participation, the parent is acting as agent and SSNZ as the structure.

Parents spoke of the incredible support SSNZ provide athletes and what that means to families. Benefits included the high level of coaching, support from experts, invaluable life and mental skills, funding opportunities and the aspiring training facility in Wanaka.

I don't think we can go much longer. There's just no more give financially. So, but yes, when you get carded, the funding starts and for [Name], you know, it, it definitely started so that those trips overseas, were funded, and all of that stuff, which was a huge burden off of us, off of her in so far as feeling like, you know, 'cause you have other kids, and they're like, (how come she gets to go overseas) and we never go on holiday. (P6)

He's very professional and very dedicated. He looks after [Name] really holistically, everything from, you know, umm talking to his sponsors through to, I don't know, talking about, you know, he makes sure he's on top of his game with nutrition. He's got the right foot beds. He's got all his equipment is bang on and you know, that sort of stuff. It's not just on the snow, he's really, yeah. (Yeah., he's been pretty awesome) Yeah. He's,

he's very good at communication" (Yeah. He keeps you in the loop, you know, like, I'll be at work and he'll send me a video. Like, as soon as [Name] does a trick that he thinks I'd like to see, I get that video straight away, you know, probably before [Name] is back up the lift ...And it's, yeah it's, it's pretty good. A lot of stuff isn't necessarily expected, but happens, (Ahm) you know, and [Name]'s the same, [Name]'s been amazing in a similar way, you know. (Ahm) Really cool). (P2)

Parents are very grateful for the support SSNZ can provide their children, especially for those families who would otherwise struggle with funding. This is supported in research, where allocative resources, such as finances and offerings prove particularly salient for low SES families (Cooky, 2009; Veliquette, 2012). Parents talked about how busy life is with juggling work, family and athlete commitments and how simple support from SSNZ, like transport up and down the mountain, has helped parents manage day to day stressors. Leinhart et al., (2020) included financial, time and logistical stressors in their study of parents' of elite athletes.

Parents value the support SSNZ provide, however there are concerns about how it is provided, particularly around the process of selection and its effects on athletes.

And the approach is quite different in New Zealand, I think compared with so like in the US, for example. Umm Snow Sports (NZ) comes into the picture a lot earlier. But it's almost like creating this, I don't know, this this sort of weird scenario where it's like, we're plucking kids out of economy class, upgrading them into business, umm first class, business class, and saying, 'Here you go, you've got all these extra luxuries. You guys stay back in (yeah) economy class and try and work your way back up, work your way up. Umm you might make it, you might not. Umm but then, like, a couple flights into it, you go, Oh, actually, you're not that good. You go back to economy class, but you probably won't make it back here again'. (Yeah, yeah) It feels a bit like that. (Whereas like, say, if you come through the States, you might be in Mammoth where they have like your program. And if if, if you're not achieving, you're still in the team, you're still progressing through, you're still doing your thing, you're part of this thing. Umm and some ways our system is great, because we support athletes who might not have got support otherwise, like for us, it's worked okay. It's worked good in that respect, because we couldn't afford all the expensive coaching, like, say, if we were in Mammoth, we wouldn't have been able to take that path.)... But, I can see the other kids around who didn't quite make it. And they have nowhere to go. (yeah) They've been left. Like they've just been left to to flounder around and find their own way. Instead of just being part of this, this team that stays together... Because I think these kids still have lots of potential... (P10)

Parents feel powerless to help create a better process of selection. For the recursive relationship between structure and agency to exist in ST, the actor needs to be positioned with a balance in the distribution of resources, both allocative and authoritative, to have agency, and therefore influence, on the structure (Flaherty & Sagas, 2021). Pozzebon and Pinsonneault (2016) found that ST sits between structurationist approaches, where external environmental influences largely shape an organisation and hermeneutic approaches which regard the actions and communication of agents to be most influential in developing structures. A developmental

environment where parents have authoritative resources, in the capacity to act, will allow parents to contribute to the transformation and development of the organisation. Parents believe there is a better way of selection to develop more athletes and consider the effects on youth athletes who miss out.

Parents whose children were partially supported by SSNZ for different reasons, appreciated the benefits of having control over their child's coaching team and program. This data relates to an alpine racer who has forged their pathway independently with limited support and restrictions from SSNZ.

... there are strengths and weaknesses about having a federation, that's not that powerful in that we can do what we want, (Yeah) to a degree, ahh that that wouldn't be the case if she was, had been, umm you know, brought up in one of the European federations and one of the countries over there or the North American Federation where you got to stick to the plan with whatever they want to do. (P12)

When parents hold the allocative resources of finance and access they have the ability to support their children how they see fit. They also hold authoritative resources in the capacity to act. The organisation of power in this context allows parents to hold agency and the opportunity to make decisions (Giddens, 1984). While Flaherty & Sagas., (2021) suggest an agent's holding of authoritative resources across time and different contexts is a crucial aspect of continuation in sport. By parents holding authoritative resources and agency, this too could enhance a parent's continued support of their child in sport.

ND parents shared concerns about transparency and clarity from the organisation in general, but especially around team selection. Parents have concerns about speaking up with transparency themselves because they risk feeling stupid, were intimidated, felt SSNZ knew best, didn't want to make a coach annoyed and/or did not want to jeopardise their child's position.

In one example there was confusion around the pathway an athlete should be taking when continuing to compete in the Northern Hemisphere outside of the SSNZ team, when the child had not been re-selected into ND.

We said, well, well, can we come to Switzerland though and still have a place in that event? And he's, [Name] said, no, I don't think so because [Name] and [Name] were really right up there. And I don't know where [Name] sat in those six so he goes you should go to America and take (another athlete) and blah, blah, blah. Then when we came back, they said, Oh, no, well [Name] didn't go to Switzerland and compete. He didn't turn up. And we said, but you told us not to go. And he goes, no, no, I would have never said that. I mean, [Name] was sitting there right under (two SSNZ athletes). But they'd cut us out of everything...So it just didn't make sense. And we just didn't know what to say...we didn't challenge them. We just let it go...and we're always just thinking

of [Name], we don't want to jeopardise his position...So we're always the quiet parents.  
(P13)

Parents communicated that they appreciated a structure with clear contextual rules, clarity and transparency. Research has found environments with clear and predictable expectations created a positive environment, sustaining participation. When expectations were unclear or inconsistent, participants reported negative environmental structures, detracting from continued participation (Flaherty & Sagas, 2021). Parents appear resigned to the fact that their input will not be heard so don't speak up. When parents are not valued by an organisation with agency supportive behaviours, perceptions of agency and impact are reduced limiting belief action can produce outcomes (Flaherty & Sagas, 2021).

ND parents shared that there was confusion when transitioning into SSNZ and they had concerns around the level of communication and clarity.

It wasn't an easy process. Um, it sounded easy. Umm but there wasn't a lot of clarity, exactly what was going on and what things cost, where things would lead to and what they were going to. There was say somewhat of a difficulty in communication. I guess if I, you know, rattled some cages and knocked on some doors, I'd probably find the answers, but I didn't feel that was easily to do, or I should be doing it. (laughs) (Right) And that was really difficult for me, because I'm not a skier. Right. So I don't know the industry. I don't know, how things, you know, are normally done. Umm I don't, didn't really know who to contact, I had to rely on asking other people. And most of the time, it was potentially good answers. Most of the time, some of the times it probably wasn't. So I was a little bit lost. Umm and then felt, one, a little bit stupid having to go and ask for a clarity and too a little bit, I wouldn't say scared, 'cause I'm not scared but intimidated or felt you know, that I shouldn't be. Yeah. So I was doing the wrong thing by asking. (P9)

Parents find it difficult to transition into SSNZ without clear communications and clarification around who they approach for help. This is especially difficult for parents who have little experience in snow sports and do not have the confidence to seek answers from the organisation, this results in parents seeking information from other sources which are not always reliable. Leinhart et al., (2020) found parents of elite athletes use Information seeking as a coping strategy to manage stress while Knight et al., (2016) found parents should be considered as individuals not groups when sport organisations introduce parent support. At SSNZ parents require different amounts of support depending on their familiarity and confidence within the snow sports environment.

Analysis from parents demonstrated they see value in strong parent – coach relationships and communication, right from the start of a parent-coach relationship.

No not until, not at the start, where I would expected to have it, we sort of had it this year with [Name] umm probably halfway through the season (Ahm) or three quarters

the way through the season when he was having a few breakdowns and it just wasn't handling things right, (ahm) which was a complication of a lot of things and change of coach was one. (Ahm) Umm so, yeah, there was that they knew better than what the parent did. And I'm no stranger to sport umm at a high level, myself, so I have a reasonably good background and reasonably good understanding. Now, I'm not a skier, and I would never question anything they did on the slope but as far as teaching young kids, and my son, I sort of know a few tricks. (Laughs) Or, you know, even not necessarily teaching him but I know how he is, (ahm) and how his behaviours and what he's going to do when he's behaving a certain way. (Ahm) Um. That you know you would with your kids. (Absolutely, yep) You know. Why they throw a tantrum was cause this, this and this, oh I didn't know that, oh you should have asked (laughs) you know, I would have told you, then you could have maybe dealt with it a little bit earlier instead of half a season being pretty mixed, and pretty average until the later of the season when we got things in line. (I see) Umm but once once they warmed up the coaches yeah fine. Now I have a good relationship with [Name] and I'm pretty pretty sure I have a reasonably open relationship with [Name] now, which is great. But it's taken a little bit longer than what I expected to make and gain each other's trust. (ahm) Yeah. (P9)

Parents revealed they want to share their holistic knowledge of their child with SSNZ staff and especially with coaches, which they strongly believe will benefit and support the development of their child. Parents hold valuable allocative resources, in particular, the holistic knowledge of their child. Boden (1994) identified, ST acknowledges the concurrent, reciprocal influence of agent and structure on each other. Each functioning as a resource for and a product of the other. A structure where SSNZ allows this reciprocal collaboration to occur, as early on in the relationship as possible, will benefit coaches, parents and the organisation, while ultimately and crucially, the athlete and their level of success.

Parents shared they struggle to speak up because they perceive that SSNZ knows best and they do not want to jeopardise their child's position in the team.

cause they are sort of perceived as you know, especially [Name] as God. (Laughs) Coach you know. So what do you say if you upset him, and he pisses off and you know [Name]'s out or, you know, do you say nothing and hopefully sort things just carry on... (P9)

because if you said something that he didn't like, he would probably take it on your son, or get in a bit of a huff at the time. So that made it difficult. Um. And if you did try to talk to anyone else, at Snow Sports, it would be referred back to the coach. So it kind of made it quite difficult to get anything sorted. Um. So, [Name], had some issues of trust with (the coach) as a result of a number of issues and also accidents. So, I tried to approach umm [Name], the other coach who [Name] would prefer to have worked with, and, umm and the psychologist and we were told that there was sort of nothing, you know, well he was encouraged to do his better so that he could go with the [Name]. And then um ahh the psychologist said, don't speak with anyone, you'd be risking things if you spoke with anyone. So risking [Name]'s situation, or it would make [Name] look bad. So we went around and around probably for about two years, till it became really untenable. I mean, you know, he was asked, or or de-carded, as they call it, but really, that was so destructive for [Name]. And for me, and I didn't realize quite how much... but I didn't know, to the degrees that it went to. And I mean, it was, it was awful,

absolutely awful. The things that happened. So I'm angry that I didn't speak up. But I don't know that I was able to. (P5)

The word was, if you spoke up, your child would be disadvantaged, wouldn't get chosen for something or, you know, so that was always, yeah, as the parents we were almost put to the side while the kids were doing their things. And um it was almost like you had to treat the Snow Sports people, this is when we were involved with it, not necessarily with the carding thing, um, but actually, even with the talent development when they were younger, that Snow Sports were the gods, and you had to just suck up to them a bit you know. Um I think it helped when you had a child that was good. You know, which [Name] was good... (P5)

These extracts highlight the perceptions that parents felt risk in expressing any concerns they held about their child, to the coach or organisation, as they feared this would affect their child in a negative way. This concept also appeared to be supported by a SSNZ member of staff in one example.

Parents would appreciate a parent-coach and parent-organisation relationship built on trust, where communication in both directions can be honest and transparent with no risk to an athlete's outcome. Knight & Gould (2016) suggest coaches need to work hard in building open, honest and trusting relationships with parents, which takes effort and creativity, but ultimately can save a lot of time in the long run and limit chances of conflict.

In sum, findings suggest SSNZ parents possess agency over allocative resources, holding the tangible resources of access to participate and competency in parenting and understanding their child holistically. However, the recursive relationship between agency and structure is lost when parents do not hold authoritative resources needed to employ agency over allocative resources, because SSNZ is not providing them with the power or platform to do so. As a result, parents cannot influence current practice within SSNZ. Analysis showed that parents recognise SSNZ hold all the power by providing extraordinary resources and funding to accelerate athlete performance, if access is removed it is clearly difficult to reach elite performance alone. Parents have concerns around the methods SSNZ use to employ this power, for example team selection protocols, but without agency they cannot influence this situation.

Further interpretation of these findings suggests that the leading reason parents lack agency within SSNZ is due to the subsequent subtheme, that; SSNZ does not offer parents a sense of belonging and inclusion in the team.

#### Subtheme: SSNZ does not offer parents a sense of belonging and inclusion in the team

Parents desire strong relationships with their children's coaches and the SSNZ organisation to help build a supportive environment for their child. Parents cherish a sense of belonging and inclusion in the team, though participants suggested this is not always happening

at SSNZ. Parents discussed difficulties with transitioning into SSNZ, communication and feeling excluded from the organisation. However, parents appreciated forming their own parent community which satisfied their need to connect and create a sense of belonging.

Most parents in this study, when asked, felt they did not receive a formal transition into SSNZ.

they don't really want you at any meetings. Umm. The kids you know, go to do all these developmental meetings and courses or whatever, which is great, but you're almost discouraged to go, to be a part of anything. Or to ask...That was my experience. (P5)

This study demonstrated parents would appreciate a formal transition into SSNZ so they knew what to expect, what resources were provided and who to approach for information. Research showed parents received limited information prior to their children joining football academies and there was a lack of education around expectations and procedures which left them feeling much was unknown and they had little information (Harwood et al., 2010). Thrower et al., (2017) suggest by acknowledging that parents are trying to learn, especially if they come to the sport with limited experience, it would be of benefit to guide them through their questions, concerns and issues. Through educating parents around expectations it can minimise potential sources of conflict down the track.

Parents felt frustrations over the lack of communication from the SSNZ organisation and had concerns they were not told what was happening.

There's no communication. I never got any communication. Umm, if, it was even hard actually to seek communication sometimes they very much want to empower the athlete, which I'm all for that, but I think informing the parents so they can sit back and know what's happening...I think if parents were involved, they could support their children as well as being a support with Snow Sports. But they've always been inherently bad at communication. From day one, even before [Name] was carded, you never knew what was happening. (P5)

This research supported that parents place great importance on the provision of clear communication from SSNZ. They understand the importance of athletes taking ownership of communication and organisation in their sport however they feel strongly about wanting to know what's going on so they can help support their child. Parents named the quality of communication with staff as a key ongoing stressor in the specialising stage of athlete development in professional football academies (Harwood et al., 2010). While Knight & Holt (2014) suggest that coaches should communicate realistic expectations and share any potential problems with parents, encouraging parent support. By all SSNZ staff communicating clearly with parents it will promote a less stressful environment for parents while crucial knowledge can be exchanged.

Analysis in this study showed parents had concerns about not receiving communication about their child's training plan. By parents not being involved with planning, an HP parent shared that it also adds stress to the parent – child relationship effecting the support the parent could provide.

I know all the athletes were discouraged from discussing it with their parents or talking about anything with their parents, most of them, from what I gather... But yeah with me, I, I was copied into it. But I um I think a couple of people at Snow Sports were like oh, are you type of thing? So it's like, Well, I think I should be, you know, I need to know where, where they're looking at sending him and stuff. I just think, why wouldn't you? You know, I mean, I wasn't going in there and changing things and writing things or anything. I wasn't even ringing them up and saying I don't agree with this. But I think that you should be a part of that... I think it's important to know I mean, it was, it was sometimes hard to try and talk to [Name], and not just cause he's my son or a boy or whatever, but it's almost like they were told, 'Don't discuss this with your parents'. And so it made it hard when you're trying to support them. And they're like, oh look, don't worry about it, type thing. Um, because I get that they want to empower these kids to look after themselves when they're away and all that stuff, I get all that. But as I say that the parents are the ones funding it. Um and as the bank, you must have some rights, but not just as the bank, but you know, um in terms of knowing what they're going to be doing and where they are. (P5)

SSNZ parents value communication from the coach and organisation about their child's training plan and other vital knowledge. Parents will be better equipped to support their child through the stressors of high performance sport and adolescence if they are not having to rely on their child for critical information. Knight & Gould (2016) stress the importance of regular communication about goals, plans and expectations, if coaches spend time informing parents about current training and competitive goals they have developed for their children, parents will be more inclined to provide their support.

Analysis found that parents feel uncertain about SSNZ excluding them from the developmental environment. Parents of an ND athlete were blown away when, in America, a member of staff asked the parent when she would stop travelling with her child and they would go into the team house.

I'm kind of blown by that question still. Umm because my view is that umm they, I feel like quite often it's go away parents, we know what we're doing. You you try, you have to trust us. Whereas for me, if they said, Hey, come on and see what we're doing. Yeah, we'd love to show you what we're doing. Umm we would probably be more comfortable to go hey, over to you. Umm and I've actually said this to [Name]. When I met with him in May type time, I said, I'm only going to step back when I feel confident that what you're doing is the right thing for my child. Umm as at the end of the day, part of what you're doing here is raising my child and I need to be involved. Umm and I definitely think there's a lot of umm yeah, a lot of push back from a parent perspective. (P1)

Parents place great importance in the understanding and knowledge of how SSNZ will support their children, for example, while travelling in the Northern Hemisphere. Parents lack

confidence in SSNZ when they are excluded. However, by building an open, trusting environment that parents can be involved in, this may not be the case.

Elite parents were excluded in communications even when athletes had specifically stated that their parents were to be involved in their 'tight team'.

Oh their communication, is absolutely terrible. Even now, you know, they cannot understand like, even like, right from when the kids were young, that they sometimes needed you, to have, include the parents in communication, they cannot just make decisions. There is, you know, the parents actually have their child hol', as probably the only one that has a holistic view of what their child is up to. And whereas Snow Sports just, yeah, like even now, when they send out a little email about umm you know, [Name] or [Name] they won't CC me into it, if it's something that's like, you know, they call about their tight teams. And so, you know, their tight five you know, like, so it might be the support whoever their athlete says is in my tight team, you know, so it might be the physio, (S and C), the Sports Psych, the coach, they will not acknowledge that umm I'm in that tight team, or that (the Dad's) in that tight team... And so I understand that if [Name] or [Name] go to someone and say, I don't want my parents involved, or to be sent, I don't have a problem with that. But if they're saying to them, look, she's on my tight team, then you need to include them. You need to be included. Whether you're an employee of Snow Sports, or not. Yeah. (P8)

... happened was sort of like 18th birthday. Right? She turned 18. All of a sudden, they tried. There was tried to push, stop the communication with the parents. Right, it was quite clear...we basically fought and spoke with [Name] 'cause she wasn't ready to take on all of this responsibility, right? I mean, sure, 18 is just a number. It's not where you're at. It's not navigating something new, where there's not a lot of peers or education provided, right? That says what to expect or, you know, and all of this other stuff...To be honest, it created a bit of stress for a while. But we kind of got it resolved. (Well) We just said, tight team. Right? Parents are in the tight team... (P7)

This study demonstrated that parents feel concerned when they are excluded from important communications and the SSNZ environment. Cooky (2009) suggests constraints by structural parameters determines an actor's position in accessing and employing resources. Parents value a structure of inclusion and to hold a position where they have the opportunity to employ resources and influence change in the developmental environment.

Parents also discussed their concerns of feeling excluded once their child was de-selected from SSNZ.

I think if you're in, it's a nice feeling and they're all over you. And we have, you know, [Name] was included in the early days. (Ahm) So we kind of know that feeling, where your kid is one of the chosen ones and it's good. And then we feel like when he was excluded, umm just about everyone in the office, I don't think anyone has even, they don't speak to any of us. It's almost like a light switch went off...umm not a single person would even say hello to him. Look at him, umm yeah it's kind of really icy...we just feel like we've been on both sides. (Ahm) And it's not very, not a nice feeling. (FGP13)

Data from the same focus group showed parents with selected children also had concerns about these behaviours from SSNZ.

And I think I want to say too like, if we're talking about the organization, we see that as well. And umm and that doesn't endear me to them at all. I've seen what these guys have gone through and umm (emotional tone) and like [Name] sees what [Name] has been through, he doesn't understand. Umm so even though we might be on the the the inside group, the in group. It doesn't make us feel happy when we we don't understand what's happened with these guys, for example. Yeah, and and their situation is not unique (And other people, other kids as well, yeah). (FGP10)

Parents are uneasy about the handling of athletes and families who have been de-selected or have missed out on selection. They have trepidations about the stressors this places on athletes and families. Harwood et al., (2010) found parents, of professional youth football academy athletes, held concerns about the lack of empathy and consideration of athlete well-being when their children were released from academies and the insensitive approach that was taken.

When parents were asked whether they felt a sense of belonging in SSNZ, there was little evidence to support there was any. Parents felt the lack of parent involvement in general meant the loss of potential mutual benefits for parent and organisation and ultimately the athlete.

Sense of belonging? Of me as a parent? (Yep) Ahh no I think as soon as they push me out the door and I disappear the better. Is my feeling...So there could be some mutual stuff if they actually maybe took some stuff on board from parents. (P9)

Parents talked about the importance of making their own parent community because parent involvement hadn't been encouraged within SSNZ.

I feel really fortunate that umm the other parents that umm have been involved have become really close friends as well. And those relationships that umm we've forged, and I think, in some ways, because the communication hasn't been and hasn't not the communication, but that sort of parent involvement hasn't been great, in terms of the Snow Sports side, we've formed our own community, and made it you know, like, and supported one another around that and that's been really, umm that's, you know, has been really valuable... and they're friendships that we'll have, you know, that I'll have for life type thing, you know, and these, you know, potentially wouldn't have had that had the kids not been in the same team. Had we not been exposed to that? So? Yeah, it's been, it's been really, really cool. (P3)

Analysis showed parents value a sense of belonging and by forging their own relationships with other parents involved with SSNZ, they have satisfied the key psychological need of relatedness. Social contexts that support the three psychological needs will encourage wellbeing and effectiveness, whereas if any one need is thwarted there will be noticeable negative consequences, such as ill being and less effective functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Warner et al., (2015) suggest youth sport programs play a role in fostering community by building comfort and belongingness for parents within a sport organisation, while connecting people to other parts of a community.

In sum, data revealed parents desire a sense of belonging and inclusion in the team. However, by SSNZ not providing a formal transition for parents into SSNZ, or clear communication, as well as parents feeling excluded from SSNZ, it is challenging to achieve this.

### **Summary**

Analysis of this research showed parents lack agency in SSNZ as they do not hold authoritative resources, in power or platform, to employ agency over their allocative resources, in the holistic knowledge of their child, to influence change in the organisation. Parents see value in SSNZ fostering robust, trusting parent-organisation relationships with transparency and clarity in communication. Parents crave the exchange of knowledge and values with SSNZ to mutually benefit parents, athletes, coaches and SSNZ staff. Data demonstrates parents aspire to feel a sense of belonging and inclusion in the team, and in achieving this, parents hope to hold the authoritative resources, in platform and power, to influence positive changes, together with SSNZ, in the developmental environment.

Findings also revealed how, by Parents lacking agency within SSNZ because SSNZ does not offer parents a sense of belonging and inclusion in the team, it affects the way parents support their children. Parents were pleased once financial stressors were eased after their children were selected on to the SSNZ Performance Pathway. They also found day to day stressors were reduced when transport was provided for athletes to travel to and from the mountain. Most parents perceived they did not receive a formal transition into SSNZ and in cases where the parent was new to the sport, they felt lost and intimidated. Without clear communication, they were unsure who to ask for help. Parents perceived, in general, there was poor transparency and clarity with communication, in particular around the team selection process. They experienced the team selection as a stressor for parents and children and felt it was unnecessary to be put through this process every 6 months. Parents experienced stress when their child was not re-selected into the team and were anxious about applying again as they wanted to protect their child from further disappointment. When parents felt excluded from the team, it provided stress between the parent and organisation and the parent and child. Parents also perceived the lack of communication around their child's training plan as a stressor, as they did not know what was going on and where they were travelling to, this made it difficult to support their child and also added strain on the parent-athlete relationship.

## **Recommendations**

It would be advised that in future SSNZ implement an official, comprehensive induction to transition new parents into SSNZ. Where expectations are clearly outlined and parents have a chance to build relationships with appropriate SSNZ staff and coaches so they know who to approach for assistance down the track. Education around parenting elite athletes would also be of benefit to parents. As Leinhart and Nicaise (2022) suggest, parents may demand differing levels of induction dependent on their experience in snow sports and confidence levels. While teaching of coping strategies and familiarisation of different coping resources will better prepare parents for the stressors involved in parenting high performance athletes.

Continued, clear communication should be shared with parents throughout the developmental years and beyond if athletes are naming parents in their tight team.

Initiating parent representative groups, where parents are given the opportunity to have a voice and provide feedback about the program, may lead to more useful two-way communication between coach and parent (Newport et al., 2020) and coach and organisation. SSNZ could encourage establishing a parent group to help support parents on their journey, especially to support new parents and families transitioning into the environment.

### **Theme 4: SSNZ overwhelmed by rapid growth and success**

SSNZ has experienced phenomenal growth since a restructure in 2010 saw five separate snow sports come together under the one umbrella. In 2012, SSNZ and HPSNZ united and developed a high performance training centre in Wanaka, which included a gym, medical and physiotherapy consulting rooms, a dryland training facility with trampoline, mini ramp, dry slope and rails and staff office space.

The rapid evolution of a new generation of snow sports, and New Zealand's rise to success in free skiing and snowboarding, has further fuelled the growth of SSNZ. Free skiing developed roots in the 1990's and the first halfpipe competition was held in New Zealand in 2000. The first National championships in halfpipe, slopestyle and freeride took place in 2002 with specialised on snow training facilities being developed near Wanaka at a similar time.

Halfpipe and Slopestyle debuted at the 2014 Winter Olympics Games, with seven New Zealand athletes competing and Jossi Wells gaining a 4<sup>th</sup> place in halfpipe. History was made at the 2018 Olympic Games in PyeongChang when Nico Porteous and Zoi Sadowski-Synott both earned a bronze medal at just 16 years of age. Then, in Beijing in 2022, Nico and Zoi won golds and a silver medal, respectively.

Although not an Olympic sport yet, New Zealand freeride athletes are also enjoying great success on the World Freeride Tour, with Jess Hotter taking out the Women's title in 2022. Concurrently, since 2014, adaptive alpine skiers Adam Hall and Cory Peters have both won medals at the Paralympic Games. Current alpine skier, Alice Robinson, is also gaining incredible success on the world stage.

The analysis in this study showed SSNZ parents perceived that with such accelerated growth and success of this young organisation, that resources can become overwhelmed. Participants were understanding of this scenario and rationalised some of the decisions made and the organisational issues present were down to this somewhat inexperienced organisation struggling to keep up and navigate through, often 'making things up as they go along'. Parents in this research hold concerns about the ensuing effects of an organisation overwhelmed by rapid growth and success. Concerns included the last minute selection process and Northern Hemisphere travel organisation, attention given to the qualitative aspects of processes, professional development of coaches, opportunity for parent feedback on coach performance, the gossip grapevine and support post Olympics.

Analysis indicated in this study that some parents felt well supported when their children were first selected into the first ND program, however as the years progressed parents had concerns about the diminished communication.

Yeah, I do, one thing I do really remember within that first year was that it was exciting to be involved with this new program and what have you, and I think in many ways, I think the excitement of being involved with it sort of, umm you know, because we were learning and we knew they were learning at the same time... umm I actually felt probably most supported in that first year. Umm. Then I did probably over the ensuing years, I think, I think they did quite a good job of on boarding, you know, umm us and umm yeah, yeah and including us in the umm you know, really informing us about what was going on, 'cause it was new for them as well. So it was sort of that feeling of like we were all learning at the same time. (Right, yep, okay, umm) and I think for the coaches, it was, I think, for the coaches it was, for a lot of them, it was first time they'd had such young kids as well, you know, being umm responsible for. (P3)

Umm look it used to be really good... I would pretty much usually communicate directly with [Name], and he was our main point of contact... and he was always really good at umm, you know, at communicating what have you, but I found umm last year umm that that really diminished umm often would not get responses and umm would have to follow up on things and what have you. And umm I put that down to being the Olympic', you know, the year before the Olympics umm and perhaps him not having the capacity...I think his role has outgrown his capabilities...cause he, he was, in my opinion really, really good. And it's just dropped significantly...I think he's perhaps overworked and a bit overcome, I think he needs more support in that role. (P3)

Parents could understand the difficulties in resourcing especially around Olympic preparation however when it came to more critical times and decision making which affected families significantly, parents felt frustrated.

Parents of ND athletes crave communication, clarity and visibility around program expectations. Parents experience challenges around how team selection and northern hemisphere travel is organised at the last minute. Analysis revealed parents need more time to arrange finances and family support for those left behind, plus coordinate and book their own travel arrangements.

There haven't really been anymore sessions since then have there? Like in group, as a group. (No) Saying what's going on, this (no) is where we're at, this is where we're going, this is what's gonna happen next, even for Northern Hemi'. There's been one email, just a couple of paragraphs. (P11)

Yeah [Name] was really slow, really slow. Umm...(P14)

And that's not even finalized. That's just this is what we're looking at. I know they've got challenges with booking accommodation and flights and stuff. Umm and past months, they've been focused on getting um the big international events done. So there's only so many people do the jobs which is completely fair. Umm I would have thought now, now ish, or even before everyone left Wanaka they would have had a sit down. Say this is our plan. This is what we're trying to do. We've got some logistical challenges around flights, accommodation, events and things. Umm so we'll keep you updated. But I just would have thought as the season wraps sort of early October before people left town, cause there's a lot of people that aren't based there. (P11)

[Name] is one of five, ah um all between the ages of 14 and 18. (Laughing) So completely different, logistical planning that needs to happen. Umm and like we didn't even get told like the start date was of the season, when she was needing to be down there. At the beginning of the season.

We just made assumptions based on when the mountain opened. (P14)

There's a very short timeframe in which the kids get officially selected for the northern hemisphere camp til' they go. And financially, it's a massive, you know, it's a massive outlay for us as a family to, you know, to have for that ahh but to not know until about I think it was last year, I think, I think it was the first of November actually, that were it was confirmed last year. Umm and they were leaving in the middle of January. So it was two and a half months to raise \$25,000 to, you know, to get him overseas, which was huge for us, especially because our oldest is just went off to university this year. And we have, you know, just there was just a lot. Umm. Yeah, a lot ahh of pressure. And, umm you know, and I, and I really think that they should be able to offer umm more time leading into that to, to be able to prepare, even umm as well, just organizing, you know, ahh for other umm you know, 'cause I ended up going over as well. Umm, this ahh for this trip, not all of it, but some of it. Umm but you know, that meant I had to organize stuff for umm, you know, for the rest of my family while I was away and someone to come and look after the kids, you know, just, and all of those sorts of, there's just such such a bigger picture. (P3)

Parents would value better organisation and planning from SSNZ, with consideration of family dynamics and what is involved for parents and families who are sending their children overseas. Parents with children still at home find life can be difficult for the rest of the family and grapple with concerns around sibling disenfranchisement. Harwood et al., (2010) found sibling inequality to be a prominent challenge for parents of elite football players and the subsequent guilt they suffered with their perception of neglect. By SSNZ granting families more time to organise and prepare for example, overseas trips and southern hemisphere season starts, parents hope to be able to better support other crucial family commitments. It appears organisation of Northern hemisphere travel is not organised earlier in the year as during the winter months, resources are stretched.

ND parents perceived that SSNZ strengths lie in communication and intelligence around their quantitative knowledge, this is an area that appears to be well resourced.

And Snow Sports are all about numbers, you know, like they love crunching numbers and they're really good at that. However parents perceived that SSNZ are struggling to attend to the qualitative side of their communications and actions. (FGP2)

They're really good at the analytics. (FGP10)

And um they, you know, they, you know, you can see, they've shown me graphs of Nico's where Nico was tracking, tracking, tracking, tracking, and they, they've pretty much plotted what's going to happen in the final of the games. And, you know, (2026) yeah, so umm they're really good at that, but probably what they're not so good at is putting out clear, concise information (Ahm) umm to parents and to kids of, of how you can function through the year and what's expected. Umm and you know, about selection criteria and umm trick goals. (Ahm) And how you can... (FGP2)

But it's the qualitative stuff. And they've got the quantitative, it's the qualitative stuff. Umm the more holistic approach, the yeah, can I I think they just need to, a slightly softer approach and a little bit more, I think there's an element of making things up as they go along, a certain, you know, with when it comes to the selection process, and that's okay. Because it's evolving, we can understand that to a certain degree. But when you when you're not considering people's, the, the people behind it, how you might be affecting them from a mental point of view, (Ahm) then that's a problem. Because I think that's what's happening um to a large extent. (To a lot) (FGP10)

Parents shared they feel happy about the more technical, quantitative analysis resources provided for athletes in the developmental environment and how this is communicated with parents. However, parents have concerns about SSNZ lacking a qualitative, holistic approach in their support of athletes and parents. In particular, parents value consideration, support and understanding of how a selection process can impact athletes and families from a psychological perspective. With limited resources and an organisation overwhelmed, there appears to be disparity between quantitative and qualitative resources.

ND parents were really impressed with a professional development workshop that was provided for parents and coaches.

And I think, I think the other thing is the recognition that the coaches are not trained teachers or parents, and they actually need some support in how to these, these are children, not young adults, and they need some help and support in, in umm how (how to deal with that transition) to how to deal with them and how to yeah, how to help them through teenage years. And they did, they did a bit of work with Nathan Wallis this year, which was really good. Umm I think expanding on that even more doing more of that stuff is probably a really important thing that they should be doing with the National Development age. (P1)

Yeah that was a good one off prompt. And we thought there was going to be stuff coming from that, 'cause I think it, even the coaches that were in the audience listening to him and everything, like, oh, yeah, okay, I hadn't really thought about it, you know, brain development, (the teen brain) and actually, you know, it goes on way beyond actually 17, 18, it's into the early 20s, and stuff and nothing like, ahh okay now that's why, actually, my athlete's still behaving like this or doing that. So I think there's a real opportunity there to dig into that and just seeing, arm the coaches a bit more. (P4)

Parents see value in ongoing professional development for coaches and the importance of coaches gaining further insight into developmental age athletes. They understand that resources are strained, particularly during the winter, to organise more workshops like this, however they saw the huge benefit for coaches in relation to supporting the developmental needs of athletes.

Parents also shared that they would appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on aspects such as coaching and the re-hiring of coaches, they perceived this would also offer development opportunities for coaches.

And then I think the other thing is feedback, umm, is, you know, they didn't, they never checked with us before they offered [Name] another 4 year contract. So then it became awkward... (P1)

...Yeah. The feedback from the parents and the athletes is to is a, it's performance development type thing, you know, what does your coach do well, for you, and what do they not? And then they can develop themselves as well. Umm whereas if they don't have that feedback process in place, then they just no idea. They see results. (What they don't know, they don't see, they're not there on the ground) (P1)

Parents can see value on a performance style feedback process around the coaching provided, taking into consideration athlete, coach and parent relationships while advising where improvements could be made. Parents perceived developmental opportunities are missed because availability of resources, at the end of the season, are limited.

Data from ND parents expressed how much they appreciated the excellent communication from the health experts in SSNZ however had concerns that information coming through from management was delayed and that the grapevine worked faster in some cases.

We've had a lot of communication with the doctors, doctor, physio, ahh gym trainer, umm that side has been amazing. Umm yeah really good, umm easy, open communication. Umm...from a management perspective, it's been a bit delayed sometimes or (quiet) quiet. (P14)

The grapevine works a lot faster than the communications (sometimes). (P11)

Ahh it took three days for them to tell us that the coach wasn't coming, but we already knew. (Right) Umm and I know they're probably just trying to find the right words around it. But actually, we already had been told, someone had heard or had, who wasn't actually being coached by him this year. So umm, ah so that was one example. (P14)

Analysis of this research consistently shows parents appreciate timely, transparent communications and would value receiving accurate information and updates from SSNZ directly, but due to the rapid growth of the sport and organisational demands this is not currently possible.

Parents of elite athletes shared data about when the first Olympic medals were won in 2018 and how the organisation was ill-prepared to deal with such success. In one example, an athlete and their parents had a very stressful post- Olympic year for various reasons which was difficult to comprehend after achieving such huge success.

You're supposed to fill out this whole thing that says, okay, post Olympics support, and this and that. It was again, one of those things that got filled in... But it was like, all they ever wanted you to do is fill in this stupid form. No one ever, like (followed up)... 'cause everyone knows that there's an element of kind of post -Olympic is it blues, is it (We're at the start of a cycle again) Is it when does that start again? How does, you know? And I think the whole organisation, obviously we hadn't, but the whole organisation had never experienced that level of success. And finally there were the medals. (P6)

Data showed parents and athletes value support and follow up after an Olympic campaign and education around what to expect in an Olympic cycle so athletes and parents can be supported and plan for the next round. Parents perceived SSNZ was overwhelmed, taken by surprise and ill-prepared for the incredible success when the first Olympic medals were won.

## **Summary**

SSNZ is an incredibly successful young organisation and parents are understanding of the growing pains that come with accelerated triumph in new sports while supporting such young athletes. Parents perceived the organisation provides expert quantitative knowledge to

reach optimal athlete performance but need to improve on qualitative aspects of the developmental environment, which will better support athletes and parents.

Analysis demonstrated that by SSNZ being overwhelmed by rapid growth and success, it affects the way parents support their children. Parents perceived that the last minute planning and organisation, in particular, of ND team selection and subsequent Northern hemisphere travel, meant families were pressured for time, struggled to organise finances, their own travel and organise support for their families left behind. There appears to be little understanding from SSNZ, in particular when parents have large families, about the added stress this places on parents and families. Parents experienced stress from the lack of a qualitative and holistic approach from SSNZ, in particular around the lack of support throughout the process of team selection and the stress and disappointment it can provide for parents and athletes.

### **Recommendations**

Consideration to the process of de-selection of athletes should be looked at, to ensure the well-being and support of athletes and families navigating life outside of SSNZ.

SSNZ could better prepare their coaches and support staff with continued professional development in workshops like the Nathan Wallis seminar, which provided excellent insight and understanding into adolescent behaviours and development, essential knowledge when coaching young athletes.

Parents would value the opportunity of providing feedback about coaching, not only as input for re-hiring coaches but as a coaching performance review.

Communicating with other HPSNZ organisations could better prepare SSNZ for post-Olympic success. In particular, how to support athletes and parents after the highs and lows of Olympic competition.

## Chapter 4: Conclusion

Children from the age of 11 years are being selected into the SSNZ Performance Pathway, having been identified as future Olympic snow sports athletes. Results found parents of these young athletes have concerns that SSNZ do not understand the importance of involving parents in this developmental environment. Parents claim they not only provide financial, emotional and moral support for their children in this high performance space, but hold vital holistic knowledge of their child and family values and beliefs to share with coaches and the organisation. Parents understand the complexities of their own children and the demands they face outside of snow sports and what's important to them as a family. They wish to share any insight and support that may benefit their child's performance and well-being outcomes.

Findings in this research showed parents have a great understanding of the developmental needs of young athletes and are aware these needs are not always being met in the SSNZ developmental environment. They appreciated when coaching was developmentally appropriate and were impressed with the expert support and positive SSNZ training facility offered off snow. However, parents revealed cracks in the developmental environment, such as, the quality of relationships, support in the northern hemisphere, achieving balance and enjoyment for athletes and ongoing professional development opportunities for coaches and staff, to better support adolescent athletes.

Parents found difficulties with communication, planning and organisation from SSNZ. Results showed communication was delayed and lacked clarity and transparency. Planning was often last minute, in particular, for team selection and subsequent northern hemisphere travel.

Resulting stressors on parents from the perceived developmental environment affected the way they supported their children. SSNZ organisational issues caused challenges for families, with limited time to organise funds for travel, managing family commitments and arranging their own travel in advance. Increased levels of stress in the parent-child relationship and for parents themselves were experienced when parent involvement was discouraged from SSNZ and parents felt helpless to support their children through adversity. Families suffered feelings of detachment when split between Wanaka and home and shared concerns of siblings suffering disenfranchisement, as so much of the family's funds and time is focused on the athlete. Parents revealed they suffer exhaustion while trying to balance work and family around their child's busy snow sports schedule.

## **Limitations and future directions**

While the current research provides new insight into how parents perceived the developmental environment and how this affects the way they support their children, it is important to acknowledge limitations of the study. A limiting factor in this research was that only parent perceptions of the developmental environment are investigated. To achieve a greater understanding of the SSNZ developmental environment, future studies should investigate the perceptions of coaches, organisational staff and athletes.

Another limiting factor is some of the parents' perceptions and experiences were from as far back as 2015 and there have been positive changes in the developmental environment made since then.

## **Future recommendations**

- Parents having the opportunity to exchange family values and beliefs with coach and organization
- Formal induction/education of parents into the developmental environment required
- Coaching and organisational practices that are developmentally appropriate
- Offering an autonomy supportive developmental environment
- Increased professional development, with an adolescent focus, for coaches and the organisation
- Building trusting, strong relationships across athlete, coach, parent and organisation
- Encourage athlete identity outside of snow sports
- Encourage athlete intrinsic enjoyment via deliberate play in or outside of snow sports
- Opportunity for parent feedback and coach performance reviews
- Providing developmentally appropriate support in the northern hemisphere
- Providing parents with a sense of belonging and inclusion in the developmental environment
- Parent support groups
- Enhanced support and consideration of athletes and families when children are de-selected
- Greater support for athletes and families post-Olympics

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## Appendices

**A : AUTECH approval for study**

27 September 2022

Craig Harrison  
Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences

Dear Craig

Re Ethics Application: **22/233 Parents of Snow Sports New Zealand athletes' perceptions of the developmental environment.**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTECH).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 27 September 2025.

#### **Standard Conditions of Approval**

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the [Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research](#) and as approved by AUTECH in this application.
2. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using the EA2 form.
3. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using the EA3 form.
4. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTECH prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form.
5. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTECH Secretariat as a matter of priority.
6. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTECH Secretariat as a matter of priority.
7. It is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard and that all the dates on the documents are updated.
8. AUTECH grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management approval for access for your research from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

For any enquiries please contact [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz). The forms mentioned above are available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>

(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTECH Secretariat  
**Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee**

Cc: [sallysoperpt@gmail.com](mailto:sallysoperpt@gmail.com)

## **Appendix B: Documentation related to interviews and SSNZ organisation**

## Participant Information Sheet

### Date Information Sheet Produced:

16/08/2022

### Project Title

Parents of Snow Sports New Zealand athletes' perceptions of the developmental environment.

### An Invitation

Hello, my name is Sally Soper and I am exploring what parents of Snow Sports New Zealand (SSNZ) athletes think and have experienced in the developmental environment of SSNZ and how this has affected the support you offer your children. This research will be completed as part of my master's degree in sport, exercise and health at AUT University. Would you be interested in being a part of this study?

The research will be conducted by using focus groups and interviews to explore parents' experiences within the SSNZ context by interviews with past and present parents.

I am currently employed at The Fit Collective, Wanaka where I am a Personal trainer and Coach in a Youth athlete development program so I have a deep understanding of and interest in the developmental environment. Your participation in this research will neither advantage nor disadvantage your child as a member of SSNZ.

### What is the purpose of this research?

To explore parents' experiences within the Snow SSNZ context via interviews with past and present parents of SSNZ athletes. SSNZ hope to use the findings to enhance the developmental environment of their youth athletes. This research will be completed as part of my master's degree in sport, exercise and health at AUT University. The findings will also be presented to the wider High Performance Sport New Zealand (HPSNZ) community and at the AUT Sports Performance Research Institute New Zealand (SPRINZ) conference, as well as in academic publications. HPSNZ will be funding this research.

### How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

SSNZ wish to better understand the developmental environment so they can help support parents of snow sports athletes. You have been identified through SSNZ as your child is an existing or past SSNZ athlete, which is the inclusion criteria for this study. SSNZ used their data base to send out the initial advertisement about this study and I, the researcher do not have access to this database. Parents who have worked for SSNZ organisation in any way will be excluded from this study.

### How do I agree to participate in this research?

Please contact me via email or phone (details at the bottom of this information sheet) to indicate your wish to participate. Options will be provided for the Focus Groups and interviews with different times and dates, which you will confirm. You will need to complete a consent form which is attached and bring it to the focus group or interview session. Your participation in this research is voluntary and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you or your child. You are free to discuss your participation with your family prior to giving consent. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

### **What will happen in this research?**

Focus groups will contain 6 to 8 participants. In these focus groups I will ask you to discuss your current or past experiences with SSNZ in the developmental environment. The focus groups will be 60-90 minutes long and will be recorded for data collection purposes. An interview option will be available for those uncomfortable sharing their feelings in front of others. A different, neutral venue to SSNZ will be used to protect confidentiality. The data collected will only be used for the purpose of this project. A transcriber will be used to transcribe the data and will sign a confidentiality agreement.

### **What are the discomforts and risks?**

You may experience some discomfort when discussing your feelings and experiences about the developmental environment at SSNZ whilst in a focus group with other parents. You will be exposed to a small amount of risk as you will be expressing your thoughts about SSNZ.

### **How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

The potential discomforts and risks to you will be lessened by assuring that all data will be confidential (you will not be identifiable in the research) and data will not be passed on to any third party. To assist with confidentiality and reduce the chances of you being identified as a participant by SSNZ staff, the focus groups will be held outside of SSNZ operating hours.

AUT Student Counselling and Mental Health is able to offer three free sessions of confidential counselling support for adult participants in an AUT research project. These sessions are only available for issues that have arisen directly as a result of participation in the research and are not for other general counselling needs. To access these services, you will need to:

- drop into our centre at WB203 City Campus, email [counselling@aut.ac.nz](mailto:counselling@aut.ac.nz) or call 921 9998.
- let the receptionist know that you are a research participant, and provide the title of my research and my name and contact details as given in this Information Sheet.

You can find out more information about AUT counsellors and counselling on <https://www.aut.ac.nz/student-life/student-support/counselling-and-mental-health>

[For general health advice and information call Health line on 0800 611 116.](tel:0800611116)

### **What are the benefits?**

For you, the participant: This research provides an opening for you to voice your opinions on the SSNZ developmental environment. Often the parents of youth athletes and the stressors they face are not heard so this is an opportunity to share your valuable thoughts and experiences. By doing this, findings will be used ultimately to enhance your involvement and enjoyment in the SSNZ developmental space as a parent, which will also crucially benefit the development of snow sports athletes.

For me, the researcher: To gain my Master's in sport, exercise and health. Research findings and the framing of potential practical applications from them, can be transpired across to the youth athlete development program at The Fit Collective. Our program can benefit by enhancing parent – program relationships and therefore the developmental environment for athletes. By conducting this research, I hope to develop the connection between The Fit Collective and SSNZ whereby we could provide a pathway to SSNZ for junior athletes.

The wider community: Sport is generally considered to be beneficial for youth as it enhances social, physical and emotional development. The perceptions of the developmental environment from parents will provide the wider community and High Performance Sport NZ specifically, with more information about what is currently occurring and if best practice guidelines are being followed to ultimately enhance parent involvement and contribution therefore enhancing our youth's developmental environment across various sports.

### **How will my privacy be protected?**

All information from the results of the study will be confidential. You will complete a consent form which will guarantee confidentiality. Focus Groups and interviews will be held at a neutral venue to assist with confidentiality. Participants will not be identified.

**What are the costs of participating in this research?**

Interviews will take 60-90mins.

**What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

2 weeks

**Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

All participants will receive a summary of results from the research. Should you wish to opt out of receiving this, please indicate on the consent form.

**What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Craig Harrison

+6427 226 5181

craig.harrison@aut.ac.nz

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTECH, *ethics@aut.ac.nz* , (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

**Researcher Contact Details:**

Sally Soper

+6421 659 963

sallysoperpt@gmail.com

**Project Supervisor Contact Details:**

Craig Harrison

+6427 226 5181

craig.harrison@aut.ac.nz

AUT Millennium

17 Antares Place

Mairangi Bay

Auckland, NZ

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *22 September 2022*, AUTECH Reference number *22/233***

## Consent Form

**Project title:** *Parents of Snow Sports New Zealand athletes’ perceptions of the developmental environment.*

**Project Supervisors:** *Craig Harrison and Camilla Knight*

**Researcher:** *Sarah Soper (preferred name Sally)*

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 16/8/2022.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that identity of my fellow participants and our discussions in the focus group is confidential to the group and I agree to keep this information confidential.
- I understand that notes will be taken during the focus group and that it will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- I understand that if I withdraw from the study then, while it may not be possible to destroy all records of the focus group discussion of which I was part, I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes  No

Participant’s signature: .....

Participant’s name: .....

Participant’s Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

Date: .....

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 27 September 2022**  
**AUTEC Reference number 22/233**

*Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.*

## Indicative questions for focus groups

<p><b>Introductory Statement:</b> The purpose of this focus group is to investigate how parents of athletes competing for Snow Sports New Zealand (SSNZ) perceive the developmental environment.</p>
<p>1. Can you please describe your typical week as a parent of a SSNZ athlete (get them talking and get an understanding of what is involved)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. How many kids do you have?</li><li>b. How many in SSNZ or snow sports environment?</li></ul>
<p>2. What do you enjoy about being a SSNZ parent?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. How does this make you feel?</li></ul>
<p>3. What do you struggle with being a SSNZ parent?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. How does this make you feel?</li></ul>
<p>4. How would you describe the SSNZ developmental environment?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. How would you describe the relationship with your child's coach/ SSNZ staff?</li><li>b. If you could change anything about the way your coach/SSNZ staff interacts with you, what would that be?</li><li>c. How do you feel about the communication between your child's coach/ SSNZ staff?</li><li>d. If you could change anything about the communication, what would it be?</li><li>e. How does this environment affect how you go about parenting?</li><li>f. Could SSNZ make any other improvements to their developmental environment in the parent-organisation context?</li></ul>
<p>5. How would you describe SSNZ as a supportive environment for parents (think about on and off snow, in person and digitally)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Do you feel the coach/SSNZ staff understands how you feel?</li><li>b. How do you feel about a sense of belonging in this environment?</li><li>c. How do you feel about the education around this environment?</li></ul>
<p>6. How do you feel about the communication and understanding from SSNZ about your child's specific development?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. About your child's training plan?</li><li>b. About your child's athlete progression?</li><li>c. About your child's planned campaigns?</li></ul>
<p>7. How do you feel about the expectations you had of the SSNZ developmental environment before you became a part of it?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. What parts have exceeded your expectations?</li><li>b. What parts have not exceeded your expectations?</li><li>c. As a new parent what could be done better to help the transition as a parent into the SSNZ developmental environment?</li></ul>



## SSNZ Development Framework

### Executive Summary:

The Snow Sports New Zealand Development Framework furthers Snow Sports New Zealand's system-wide belief in Whakapapa, ensuring we are learning from the past to provide a progressive, holistic, and evidence-based approach to a high-performing programme for young athletes.

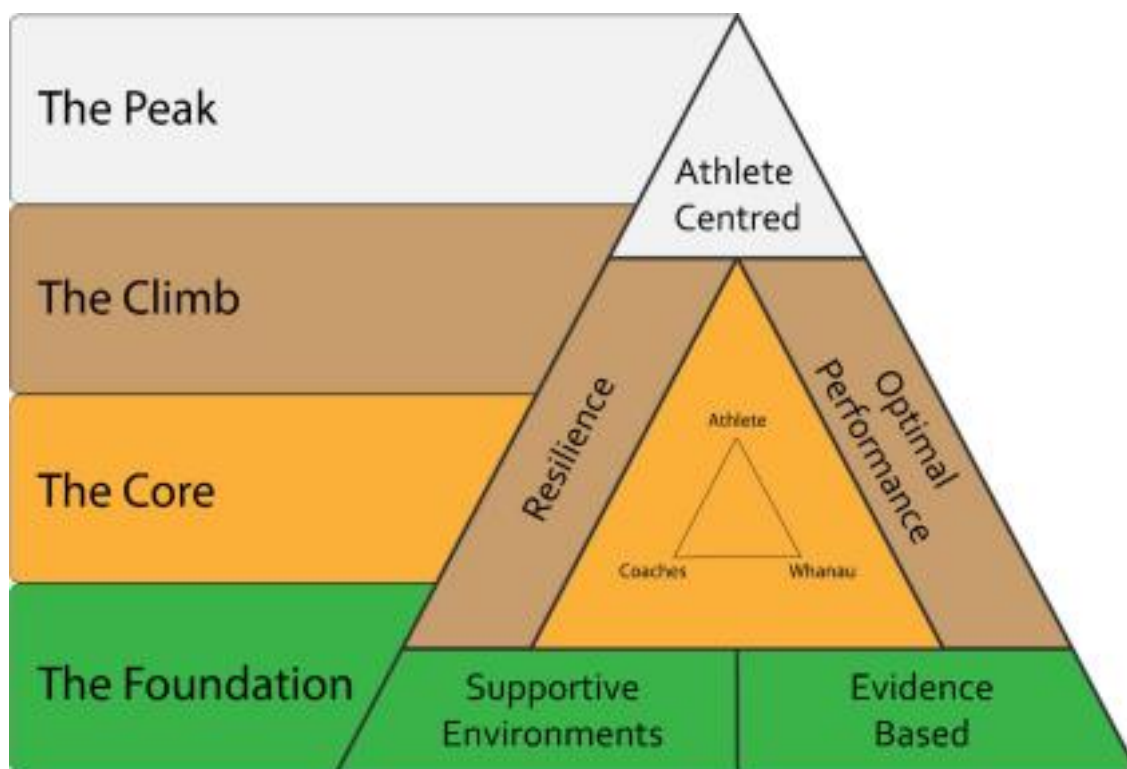
We believe, through a framework based upon past learnings and contemporary research, our development programme provides athletes what they need to reach their ultimate potential while ensuring our actions are in the best interests of our young people.

### Our Mission:

To create a world class environment for young snow sports athletes to pursue their goals by ensuring our actions and strategies are custom fit for young athlete development. We will utilize the SSNZ Development Framework to guide and challenge our decision-making process.

## SSNZ Development Framework:

The SSNZ Development Framework consists of 5 key principles (Athlete-Centred, Resilience, Optimal Performance, Supportive Environments and Evidence Based) that guide our team in making decisions and planning with our development athletes and their whanau. They are categorized into four categories that help represent the immense journey our young people are undertaking: The Peak, The Climb, The Core and The Foundation.



### The Core

The Core of a young athlete's journey is built around the relationship between the athlete, their coaches, and their whanau. The relationship takes an *Athlete-Centred* approach, which means this relationship should always ensure it is framing decision making and problem solving from the lens of what is best for the athlete. The coaches and the family each have their own roles and responsibilities and work together to provide a *coherent* support system for the athlete that limits feedback sources and focuses on quality feedback and support.

### The Foundation

The Foundation provides the support structure for the young person's journey. In our Framework, it consists of *Supportive Environments* and is *Evidence Based*. Our young people need to feel safe to be themselves, to ask questions and be vulnerable, and to be surrounded by others with like-minded attitudes. They also need to trust us, and to build trust we will share our learnings, be transparent, and explain our process.

### The Climb

Young people in our programme have committed to a long climb to the top. Not everyone makes it, but to give everyone the best chance we believe in cultivating

*Resilience* and enabling *Optimal Performance*. Gritty, resilient young people have what it takes to navigate the highs and lows without losing passion for their sport. But even with resilience, we need to ensure our actions enable young people to be the best they can be to make it to the top.

## The Peak

When it comes down to it, athletes are the ones who draw the eye. We choose to frame all our decisions with the athlete's individuality and ownership at the forefront, supporting their decision making but ensuring that they are confident in themselves and are fully connected with their vision.

## Principles

### Athlete Centred

An athlete centred approach ensures young athletes can express their individuality within the programme. It means they are given ownership of their journey. It also ensures our decision-making processes are framed with the question "what is best for the individual?".

### Individuality

- We will give our young people the opportunities to explore and grow their own identities and lead their own journeys.
- We will adapt our coaching to cater to the uniqueness of each athlete.

### Risk Aware

- We will provide support and challenge while allowing athletes to set their own boundaries.
- Our young athletes will learn the inherent risks of freestyle sport and train the skills to manage those risks.
- We will share our learnings around risk with Whanau.
- We will front foot conversations around the incredibly competitive nature of becoming elite athletes

### Achieve Balance

- We value a balance of social connection, intellectual curiosity and physical activity.
- Our training environments will often revolve around "organized play"
- We will seek a balance of training, competing, organized play, and no-contact.
- We will adjust the balance to most appropriately suit the individual.
- We will continually support athletes with their load management and overall wellbeing.

### Confidence

- We believe high self-efficacy leads to wellbeing, excitement, and motivation.
- We will help athletes relate their personal skill and ability to their successes.

## Resilience

Successful people must have the ability to bounce back. To know their “why” and traverse the highs and lows to achieve it. Our younger athletes will develop into resilient senior athletes who seek challenge and are passionate about progressing.

### *Foster Grit*

- We treat courage as a muscle and train it regularly.
- We believe passion and perseverance are key to long term success.
- We will help our athletes understand and live their values, which will help them persevere in the tough times.
- We will help our athletes understand that failure is an opportunity.

### *Growth Mindset*

- We will nurture a Growth Mindset in our athletes by encouraging them to seek challenge and believe in their capacity to achieve that challenge.
- We will applaud and commend athletes who put their energy into personal growth without worrying about external opinions.
- We will create environments that support the idea that success comes from hard work, not from innate talent.
- We will notice and reward effort and progress, as well as achieving competition results.

### *Passion*

- We will work with athletes who are truly passionate about achieving in competitive snow sports.
- We will strive to link each athlete’s individual passion with progress and learning, so when the progress gets tough the passion keeps stoking the fire.
- We will help athletes translate their passion into endurance, steadily holding on to their goals.

## Optimal Performance

Athletes on the Snow Sports New Zealand competitive pathway are up against the best in the world at each step of the way. To enable our young people to have the best chance of success, we need to help each individual achieve *optimal performance* in each unique situation they are presented with throughout their journeys.

### *Appropriate Challenge*

- We believe that each athlete must be presented with challenges appropriate to their individual skill level.
- We believe the challenges set should be developmentally appropriate, both on and off the snow.
- We encourage autonomous challenge. By having clearly defined goals, we encourage our athletes to independently set their challenges so as they mature, they have complete ownership of their success.

### *Intention*

- We believe that encouraging athletes to take the time to craft a clear intention, meaning setting goals and having the intent to accomplish them, leads to optimal performance.
- We believe in giving our athletes clear and immediate feedback that relates to their intent – rewarding both progress towards goals and the accomplishment of their goals.

### *Motivational Climate*

- We believe giving young people leadership in their goals and vision leads to intrinsic motivation – we also believe in working with our young people to set the bar high.
- We reward trying hard, supportive behaviour, and individual expression.
- We believe all our coaches and whanau are role models and are aware our actions can have a transformational effect on our young people.

### *Supportive Environments*

The environments that athletes, coaches, and whanau interact in are fundamental to creating situations where progression and performance can thrive. Our people need to feel a sense of belonging, safety, and support, whether that is on-snow or off-snow, in person or digitally.

### *Strengths of Heart*

- We believe that character strengths of heart, namely being good to each other, will lead young people to feel a sense of belonging, as well as support others to feel the same.
- We actively promote kindness, honesty and compassion in our athletes, our people and ourselves without compromising our vision.
- We encourage our athletes, our people, and ourselves to take the time to empathize with the challenging pathway of a high-performing athlete and their people.
- We respect courage and strive to create environments where the courage to take risks, socially and physically, is enabled.
- We believe that encouraging optimism and hope leads to the ability to reset, re-evaluate, and try again.

### *Psychological Safety*

- We encourage our people to speak up with new ideas, concerns or admitting to mistakes. We believe in *unconditional regard*.
- We frame each interaction as an opportunity to learn, and encourage openness, supportiveness, and curiosity.
- We believe High Performance outcomes result from high accountability and challenge but are not sustainable without *psychological safety*.

### *Evidence Based*

Snow Sports New Zealand is Evidence Based. We use our learnings to set criteria, craft training environments, understand athlete progression, and plan campaigns. We

know our young people are constantly changing, and we need to be adaptable. We will also utilize what we know to help motivate athletes and support progression.

#### *Unlocking Potential*

- We know that Moments of Opportunity exist throughout an athlete's career, and that studying developmental stages will help us plan for athletes to capitalize on those stages.
- We have documented the Rapid Rise and believe that by working harmoniously with specific stages of growth and development, athletes will develop holistically and have the fundamental skills and abilities required for the rapid rise to occur.

#### *Variability in Training*

- We know that exploring movement and trying things in different ways leads to faster and more complete learning of technical skill later on.
- We keep the long-term goal in site, and don't skip steps. We know from experience a solid foundation leads to more robust and high-performing athletes.

#### *Sharing of Knowledge*

- We will utilize our learnings and projections internally and externally. We know that sharing our knowledge will help athletes and their whanau make decisions and be part of the team.
- We believe utilizing a shared platform for athlete profiling can be used for progression and motivation as well as selection.