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Effectiveness of the Breaking  
Ground Programme in  
Transforming Parenting Skills  
and Practice

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Programme in Transforming Parenting Skills and  
Practice

By Dr Melanie Wong, Tania Beekmans, Fuatino  
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# Effectiveness of the Breaking Ground Programme in Transforming Parenting Skills and Practice

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and Liam M. Oades

*Research report for the  
Breaking Ground programme*

## Abstract

The Breaking Ground programme was an 18-month pilot programme to support families and parents in a mana-enhancing process while developing parenting skills and practices, focused on intensive family intervention. Practitioners worked alongside families who were on a trajectory towards having their children placed in state care, with the goal of preventing entry to such care. This research uses a case-study methodology with data collected through interviews with social workers and families involved in the programme. The aims of this research were: 1) to examine the effectiveness of social workers working with families on the Breaking Ground programme; and 2) to examine the effectiveness of social workers providing cultural support for the families on the programme. The research explores the voices of some of the social workers and families participating in the programme to gain understanding of how social workers' engagement with families through the Breaking Ground programme can help families make the changes needed to keep their children in their care. The social workers in the programme learned that to do or discover something new, take the first steps on a new venture, and advance beyond previous achievements were integral to success not only for the families they were supporting but also for themselves as Breaking Ground practitioners.

## Introduction

Social work agencies provide a variety of supports, activities and services to families in their local communities. The Anglican Trust for Women and Children (ATWC) is one such social work agency in Auckland. The agency provides social services and programmes for families and in early education. This research project explores the voices of social workers and families who were part of an 18-month (January 2019 to June 2020) intensive intervention programme called Breaking Ground. This was a pilot programme aimed at supporting families who were at risk of losing custody of their children, run jointly by Oranga Tamariki (OT) in Ōtāhuhu and ATWC. To be referred, by OT, onto the programme, a family must have been involved in multiple services, lacked engagement and appeared resistant to change. All the referred families also had histories of unresolved trauma, affecting the way they cared for their children. Social workers involved in the programme worked alongside families and parents in reciprocal, mana-enhancing safety to develop parenting skills and practices.

The programme had a maximum capacity of 16 families. Two social workers were assigned to work with these families, who were also working closely with counsellors and psychotherapists. Positive findings of the research will increase the possibility of securing funding to extend the Breaking Ground programme into Ōtara, again in partnership with OT.

The research project has two aims:

1. To examine the effectiveness of social workers working with families on the Breaking Ground programme.
2. To examine the effectiveness of social workers providing cultural support for the families on the Breaking Ground programme.

Given these aims, the research project asks:

1. How can social workers work effectively with families on the Breaking Ground programme?
2. How can social workers provide adequate cultural support for families on the Breaking Ground programme?

It is important to note that the order of these aims and questions reflects the order of the research process and is not indicative of any relative importance of the key research aims and questions.

## Background

Oranga Tamariki was established in 2017, and has been working alongside a number of iwi, other government agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to support communities and families. In 2017 there were 5708 children and young people in the Care and Protection custody of Oranga Tamariki (Ministry of Social Development, n.d.), and as of 31 December 2020

there were 5600 children and young people in such custody (Oranga Tamariki, 2021). Once young people in the custody of OT turn 18, they can choose to live independently with support, but the decreased number of young people in custody in 2020 indicates that collaborative work with other agencies and organisations has been helpful.

ATWC is one of the NGOs that work with OT. In 2019, it was confirmed that the Breaking Ground programme could be run by ATWC and OT as a pilot project aimed at supporting families and children. In March 2019, staff from the School of Social Work, Manukau Institute of Technology, met with ATWC members to discuss the possibility of conducting a research project on the Breaking Ground programme. The research began in March 2020 as a one-year research project.

## The Breaking Ground programme

The Breaking Ground programme was an 18-month whānau-intensive intervention programme that had a maximum capacity of 16 families. The programme was run jointly in a partnership between ATWC and OT in Ōtāhuhu. Research and evaluation were carried out throughout the duration of the programme.

The primary aim of the Breaking Ground programme was to reduce the number of children entering state care. The programme supported families who were at risk of losing custody of their children, through teaching them to 'parent safely.' Success was achieved when caregivers demonstrated a significant improvement in parenting skills and practices. Breaking Ground aimed to provide support in a mana-enhancing way, working alongside whānau in a reciprocal and respectful manner, providing opportunities for growth and learning, and for caregivers to develop their parenting skills and techniques.

According to Ruwhiu (2008), working in a mana-enhancing way values people's wellbeing by respecting their whānau, their space and the relationship. The Breaking Ground programme protects clients' mana, and focuses on families and their needs. The programme provides a way for social workers to engage with and care for their clients in a holistic way, including spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual aspects (Royal, 2006). The families are involved in decision making, meaning that their mana is enhanced; they work alongside the social workers to find solutions to ensure that their children do not enter statutory care. The social workers involved in this programme do not undermine the important requirement to protect clients' safety. Throughout the programme, the social workers sensitively acknowledge the past painful and traumatic experiences of the families.

# Breaking Ground as a programme is self-evolving: Learn – change – evolve

## PROGRAMME GOALS

- To keep children with their whānau
- To identify and reduce risk through parent education

## REFERRAL CRITERIA

- The whānau has children on a trajectory to entering state care
- A referral has been made to a family group conference (FGC)
- The whānau includes a toddler or pre-schooler
- The whānau lives in the Ōtāhuhu site catchment area
- Family members must be able to communicate well in English

## REFERRAL PATHWAY

While staff at OT (Ōtāhuhu site) could contact the Breaking Ground programme administration directly to discuss a potential referral, referrals could only be formally made via an FGC in consultation with the clinic in general or directly from the FGC co-ordinator.

Once a referral was accepted, Breaking Ground programme practitioners engaged with the family to gain their consent. At the FGC it was written into the plan that Breaking Ground programme practitioners would take responsibility for full case management; the family then became a silent case in OT's caseload. If OT was notified of further concerns about children in a family already on the programme, these new concerns were redirected to the Breaking Ground programme social workers. If there were critical concerns about child welfare, OT and social workers from the Breaking Ground programme would respond jointly wherever possible.

## MONITORING

Breaking Ground practitioners provided a monthly written report on each family's progress to the ATWC, Practice Leader and FGC co-ordinator.

A monitoring meeting was held bi-monthly to discuss the programme's progress, discuss and resolve any challenges, and provide additional information that OT may have needed to fulfil mandatory requirements.

## MODELS OF PRACTICE

"I'm very grateful, just to have everyone who helps me and the kids in my life. I'd have had no one, probably lost my kids a long time ago." (A parent in the Breaking Ground programme)

Breaking Ground used a trauma-informed practice framework that included a focus on relationships, creating a safe space and attachment, embedded

within the Māori health model Te Whare Tapa Whā. This model emphasises four dimensions that contribute to human wellbeing (Durie, 1994, 2011). The Ministry of Health (2017) describes the four cornerstones of Te Whare Tapa Whā as foundations to support our wellbeing: taha tinana (physical health) – that people have to have capacity for physical health; taha wairua (spiritual health) – that our life force influences who we are and what we do; taha whānau (family health) – that everyone needs to care and be cared for and feel that they belong to whānau; and taha hinengaro (mental health) – that our mind and emotions associate with our body and soul. Each of these dimensions is the foundation for building resilience and strength in life, and all four are equally important.

Throughout the 18-month duration of the Breaking Ground programme, the participating social workers provided care and guidance that nurtured families to improve these four dimensions. The families were able to reconnect to the four dimensions while learning and implementing parenting skills. The social workers at ATWC were sensitive to families' previous experiences and current challenging situations, and understood that these might be influenced by past trauma. Knight states:

Trauma-informed practice requires the practitioner to understand how the working alliance, itself, can be used to address the long-term effects of the trauma. Emphasis is placed on helping survivors understand how their past influences the present and on empowering them to manage their present lives more effectively, using core skills of social work practice. (2014, p. 34)

The Breaking Ground programme acknowledged the implications of families' painful experiences so that their current situations and problems could be understood. Some families had already faced challenges after asking for help; this programme therefore focused on relationships between the social workers and the families. The social workers were open to feedback from the families and through supervision, to enable them to continuously improve their practice. The programme itself focused on improvements in parenting skills and practices rather than only viewing families as survivors of trauma.

## Methodology

This evaluation of the Breaking Ground programme is a qualitative research project underpinned by an inquiry approach. McDermott (2020), Fortune et al. (2013) and Maxwell (2013) describe qualitative research as aiming to understand other people's experiences, and this research sought the voices of social workers and parents who participated in the Breaking Ground programme. The data were collected through face-to-face interviews with participants in the Breaking Ground programme. Interviews, unlike surveys, require interaction with participants. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) state that interviews allow researchers to gain a deep understanding of participants' experiences and knowledge.

## PARTICIPANTS

The 10 participants in the research were all actively involved in the Breaking Ground programme; seven were professionals currently working at ATWC or OT, and three were participant families. The ATWC participants were a senior social worker, a supervisor and a student who completed her practicum placement with the Breaking Ground programme. The OT (Ōtāhuhu site) participants were an FGC co-ordinator, two senior social workers and the site manager. All of the participant social workers were either Māori or Pasifika. The three participant families were Māori, or Pasifika people who had migrated from a Pacific Island. The researchers approached the social workers working in the Breaking Ground programme and the supervisors. ATWC introduced the researchers to the professionals at OT and to the three families involved in the programme.

## ETHICS

The Manukau Institute of Technology Ethics Committee (MITEC) approved the Breaking Ground research project. The research complies with all of MITEC's ethical requirements (Manukau Institute of Technology, 2017) pertaining to the participants, such as informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity. For example, to ensure anonymity, the participants have been assigned pseudonyms in all reports, publications and presentations arising out of the research.

### *Interpretive research*

This research project embraces an interpretive research paradigm, meaning that it looks at how people interpret, provide meanings to and understand the world around them (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). Thus, the methodological approach involves people, as the goal of the research is, through careful analysis and interpretation of the data, to better understand the participants' experience of the Breaking Ground programme. The research team acknowledges that as some information is likely to be sensitive, the data collected have to be anonymous. However, data collection still needed to be performed in a manner that enabled the researchers to connect specific comments to the participant who had made those comments. Interpretive research also requires data to be collected in a way that allows for the rich complexity of language and personal experiences; which is described in the Findings section. The data collection methods used in this research are all about human interaction, to allow exploration of the views of the participants and their interpretation of the world without any overlying judgements from the research team. Through collaborative interaction with the participants, the researchers construct meaning relating to the reality and reflect the participants' perceptions of the world around them (Chilisa, 2011; Burr, 2015). To ensure that the data collected were as rich as possible, the researchers used interviews consisting of open-ended questions. This research values participants' voices, and participants' comments will not be judged.

## Findings

This research project aimed to explore the effectiveness of the social workers in supporting the families during the 18 months of the Breaking Ground pilot programme. The participants shared their views on several aspects of the programme during interviews and conversations with the researchers. The participants' views on and interpretations of various aspects of their experience with the social workers and the programme are discussed below.

### BELIEF IN THE PROGRAMME

All the research participants had many positive things to say about the Breaking Ground programme. Practitioners involved in the programme evidenced significant change in parenting skills and practice. They believe that the programme was helpful for families. Examples of the views shared follow:

"The programme is beautiful ... because I can see it, that programme can work."

(Mele, senior social worker at OT)

"I must say that the Breaking Ground programme is a really good programme ... it has been successful for some of our cases."

(Anne, FGC co-ordinator)

"If you can keep one in whānau care then you've succeeded. We've kept all but one of our 16 – of the cases we've worked with."

(Kristy, supervisor at ATWC)

"The philosophy or the principle of Breaking Ground is good in the way that [it tries] to provide a wraparound process of services for the family that Oranga Tamariki identify that would benefit from the programme, to prevent the children coming to care."

(Mele, senior social worker at OT)

"... the lawyer for the child has gone back to court saying that Oranga Tamariki needs to take orders, but Breaking Ground has been there in place and they had been advocating for this whānau ... the lawyer has now agreed [that] the kids [can] remain and that Breaking Ground continue their work. So, there are some really good cases at the moment that are going so well with Breaking Ground."

(A senior social worker from OT)

### RELATIONSHIPS

A factor that contributed to the success of the programme was that the social workers involved in the programme set relationships as their focus. The importance of relationships to the programme's success was repeatedly mentioned in the interviews. For example:

“... it was that relationship part; we always knew it was going to be important.”

(Jackie, OT site manager)

“The relationship was integral ... the relationship is really important.”

(Casey, student social worker)

“The relationship right from the start of the programme has been ongoing and we’ve had to work at it, you know, the relationship, because, you know, it’s all very well to go in there to advocate ... and sometimes that takes some to-ing and fro-ing at the table.

Our relationship is not just with the whānau; the relationship to be maintained and nurtured is also with those professionals who are involved, specifically Oranga Tamariki.”

(Ra, senior social worker at ATWC)

## WHAT THE PARTICIPANTS LIKED ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

In their comments, many participants highlighted that relationship was the key aspect of this programme. Families were not treated as trauma survivors; instead, throughout the programme their past experiences were acknowledged, and their current difficulties were addressed. The participants shared that there were many things they liked about the Breaking Ground programme because it focused on the working relationships between social workers and families, or working together.

Caleb, a senior social worker at OT (Ōtāhuhu site) said, “For me what works well [is] ... that we are working together.”

Another senior social worker at OT, Mele, said:

“What [works] well, I guess is for the whānau. It’s [the Breaking Ground programme] giving them some encouragement, some hope, to make the change. But yeah, that’s what worked well for them. And it’s just like, at some point, giving us the assurance that the safety is there.

... for me, it’s a good programme. Okay, it’s a good programme. If everyone works together, and it’s about, you know, communication really, everyone works together for one goal, and if the right people are in place, you know, the right people, it’s about being transparent ....”

The family participants also shared positive views of the programme. One parent, Tara, said that the programme was about “having the extra support between OT and myself ... helping me understand what they were wanting and pretty much just advocating for me.” She then explained in more detail: “Helping me find ... his father. Programmes like drug and alcohol courses for us to do. What he’s to [do to] keep our family together.”

Ruth, another parent, shared that she had not had enough support in the past, so had become disengaged. However, she said that the Breaking Ground programme “[is] getting my kid sorted through Gateway, so I knew what he

had. Yeah. And getting the kids to – trying to get the kids assessed.”

Luke, another parent, said that the Breaking Ground programme provided information to parents that enabled them to understand “what was expected, what was going to be needed [to be] ready.” He noted that:

“What went well was having someone there to give us context. So, context and structure of what was going to happen. What was expected, because very little information from Oranga Tamariki came if at all, and that had to come from Breaking Ground. That’s what went extremely well. Because without it ... there would have been very little information whatsoever. So that was the best.”

Luke was full of praise for the programme:

“I can’t think of anything else that they could have done. Or what they could have done, that was, that was better. Yeah, they were perfect ... I just I feel it’s an absolutely fantastic programme. Without it, we would have felt very much alone and alienated ... Now, without the programme, I think the outcome would have been completely different. Which, which is really quite sad ....”

#### *Relationship between ATWC and OT*

The relationship between ATWC and OT has been central to this project, as both organisations have been working towards the same goals. All the participants commented on aspects of the relationship between the two organisations.

Jessie, a senior social worker at OT, said, “For me, what works well, when we work together ....”

Kristy, the supervisor at ATWC, said:

“That’s been the most positive thing and the thing that is doing Breaking Ground work – the relationship at the beginning. We had to build the relationship, and that took a bit of time, to build the relationship of trust from OT to us, from that upper level – their site manager, their practice manager, FGC co-ordinator, and me and my manager. So working at that level, and then bringing down to the social worker [level] ....”

Ra, a senior social worker at ATWC, stated that forming the relationship had been an ongoing process:

“Just in visiting, in coming together with them [Oranga Tamariki], that’s one thing I’ve found works really well .... I go up there when there’s a situation – I don’t like talking on the phone, I don’t like writing emails, so I go into the office and I actually meet face to face ... regardless of what the take [situation] is, we’re there and we still maintain professionalism, and that’s the good thing about face to face. And that there has built a really good relationship, we have built a really good relationship, so much [so that] they’ve given us a key to their front door. So that’s pretty good.”

Anne, the FGC co-ordinator, and Casey, the student who was on

placement with the Breaking Ground programme, both stated that the relationship between ATWC and OT was pivotal to the success of the programme. Jackie, the OT (Ōtāhuhu) site manager, said, "I had offered to give [a social worker at ATWC] a tag so she could get into the office; those little things, just to try and show they are part of our extended team." And Kristy, the supervisor at ATWC, commented, "That's worked well, and I really like the site manager at Ōtāhuhu; she's fantastic with us."

Ra, a senior social worker at ATWC, pointed out that:

"[OT are] trying their best, but we come out of it slightly ... even though our interests are similar, they're working with the child, or children; we work with the whole whānau. So, we don't work in isolation, that's how we come at it ....

... what works well, when it's working, is the engagement, and being able to communicate what's really happening. What's happening for the family, what's Oranga Tamariki doing, and informing us of those decisions."

#### *Relationship with whānau*

The families participating in the Breaking Ground programme were happy with the relationship between ATWC and themselves. Alexander and Charles (2009) point out that mutuality of care and interdependency between social workers and clients provide a significant opportunity for meeting the needs of the clients. Tara, a parent, said, "I felt comfortable enough to be able to message her [the social worker in the programme] and ask her for help if I needed it. She communicated pretty well." Tara repeatedly said that the social worker "wasn't judgmental. She tried to do what was best for me and [my son]." She concluded, "I felt like I have some ... support if I needed [it] and I got the support I needed from them."

Casey, the student on placement with the Breaking Ground programme, shared that:

"Being able to work as a community organisation in their place, I felt like people – the families we worked with – were more willing to engage in the process ... I felt like we got more information, so we were better equipped to work with the families ....

I think that the relationships that we were able to make with the families, and also being able to have the opportunity to come back in when things didn't quite go to plan. Like it wasn't a 'You've made a mistake; we're going to take your kids now,' it was 'You've made a mistake, so let's [see] we what we can do; we can advocate for [you with] OT.' So I feel like people were given more of an opportunity to address the concerns with OT, than if it had been OT working with these families directly ....

The programme was that initially we did everything for them, and then we started walking backwards; and as we moved backwards, they moved forwards. So initially we help them, we show them what that looks like; next time, we help them to do it, so that that way

you are developing their skill sets, their understanding of how the world works so they can do it themselves. I guess it's just a little bit like community development, right – teaching them to be able to advocate for themselves.”

Ra, a senior social worker at ATWC, talked about the importance of creating a positive relationship with whānau, saying that it is a key aim of the programme:

“For me, nothing's going to happen if I can't build that relationship with them [whānau], and like everyone, for me it's ... you're in their home, you're with them. That's been my experience, the opening up of those relationships, and they haven't all been like that ... but they always end up like that ....

I want to extend on that: part of that is about that relationship, that we can go in as we do. We invest into the relationship. That's what that is, that's what allows you to .... And so this is the great thing about the programme, that it allows you the time to invest, which is so key.”

Ruth, a parent, recounted how the Breaking Ground social worker was able to help her with her son, who had undiagnosed autism:

“[The social worker in the Breaking Ground programme] was picking me up and taking me to those [appointments] because I knew something was wrong with my son, but no one was listening. And then we found out he had autism. So, you got to get that sorted out through Gateway or else I would never have known, you know? Sort of be wondering 'Is he just a naughty kid?' sort of thing. Just that was a big help ....

I was trying to tell people but ... no one was like hearing me ... then when they put [the social worker from the Breaking Ground programme] on with me, you know, I started going to the appointments – she'd pick me up and take me to ... Manukau and that, get it sorted. So, she got it done .... Once you come on board, yeah, I got it done. Finally got it done. Found out my son had autism. My son might have something else, my other son. Yeah, that helped out big-time ... just a mother going nuts thinking why their kid's not listening all the time.”

Before the interview finished, Ruth said, “Just thank her for everything she's done ... she's done a lot. You know, support.”

Luke, one of the fathers in the programme, noted that the “greatest success is being, I think, the way that they tempered the relationship between us and Oranga Tamariki – myself especially – trying to get an outcome that both parties were happy with.” He explained that the social workers in the Breaking Ground programme were like “middle people” for them, connecting the families in the programme with other services if needed. He said, “Having that middle ground was extremely important, and ... I seriously do not because there is no one to temper, temper both sides.”

## CULTURAL SUPPORT

One of the aims of this research project is to explore the cultural support provided for the families while they were participating in the programme. However, the participants shared few perspectives on the cultural aspect of this programme or the cultural support provided by the social workers; some participants did not offer any information about this area.

When addressing cultural support, Casey, the student social worker, said, "I think our programme did [meet the families' cultural needs]; our programme tried to as much as possible."

Ra, a senior social worker at ATWC, explained what cultural support means to her, and how important it was to the success of the programme:

"Well it's just about us going in and giving respect. You always go in with a mind that – okay when I read the referral, I say to myself: 'Okay, what is the ethnicity?' And when I know something like that, it activates my cultural principles. Respect. What does respect look like for that whānau? It's always about going in – you might not know [anything] about their culture, but for me I always go in with the mindset, 'Okay, what do I know about these people? What do I know about their family?' It's really important. 'Is there abuse in their background?' And being very specific to culture – or ethnicity I should say. Asian-Indian is not the same as Māori, but there is respect, and it's about going in, for me. To be honest, I haven't had problems with that side of it yet, to date. But I'm always thinking, though, I'm always thinking, going in – don't assume, don't assume, and I take that with me ....

It will help with the success or the outcome for the family, to have a social worker [who has] a level of understanding about that dynamic or a culture or whatever of their family."

## THE COMMITMENT OF SOCIAL WORKERS

"Just [so] you know, no matter how much I was a bitch, she was always good to me."

(Ruth, a mother in the Breaking Ground programme)

"I was treated as a person ... we were treated as people, which was respected."

(Luke, a father in the Breaking Ground programme)

Jackie, the OT (Ōtāhuhu) site manager, praised the programme's flexibility and the commitment of the ATWC social workers:

"Just looking at how she [Ra, the senior social worker at ATWC] operates ... her whole role is dedicated to doing what she needs to do, to make sure that child is safe. So, when we've had consults, we're able to just decide then and there, I'm gonna go visit them, two days a week, or every day – there's no structure like 'for each family, this is going to be exactly the same,' so there is flexibility."

Jackie also commented on the success of the face-to-face meetings between OT and the programme's social workers:

"The intention was to have it monthly, I think ... when we did have it, it was great, and everyone – like we had – we knew – we had the same issues, same worries about families, there was always that co-ordination ...."

Casey, the student social worker, was very enthusiastic about the programme: "These families are going to have a better life! Now I'm like ... celebrating the small wins. That's what I learned."

Kristy, the ATWC supervisor, commented on the importance of changing the narrative and holding on to hope:

"Sometimes it is easier to go, 'This family is aggressive; this family's transient,' rather than saying, 'Actually, if we hold hope for this family ...' So, it might not be exactly how we bring our children up, but those kids are still okay, they're safe, they're loved. So yeah, it's just changing ... and that's something I talk about in the presentation, changing the narrative, changing our narrative to working, and holding hope, changing Oranga Tamariki's narrative, that change can happen, and changing the family's narrative that they are worthy and they can do it. You can see I get really passionate about Breaking Ground; I can just talk and talk and talk."

Kristy also said, "We have expectations of our social workers to work with our families, like holding hope, and aroha – having all those things with the best intentions to the families, that as a supervisor, you have the same for your social workers."

Comments from Luke, a father in the Breaking Ground programme, illustrate that the ATWC social workers were meeting Kristy's expectations:

"She [the social worker from the Breaking Ground programme] never made us feel uncomfortable. We were always aware of why she was coming. And guess that the respect was built up over, I suppose, the first three or so months of engagement with her and it just grows, to be honest .... She never made me feel as though she was judging us for the situation ... which ... made us return that respect. So, I suppose that's where this started from – the fact that they were there to help us [and] we never felt judged – that was a huge portion of it ....

That's huge. I know just how much work [the social worker from the Breaking Ground programme] put in at times, I know that she literally was up until midnight, some nights, working specifically on our case. And yeah, just, I can't speak highly enough of her, all the programme and her boss, as well, [who] at times when needed came in, and just yeah the openness, the working together, and having someone on your side almost presenting your case."

## Discussion

This research report has presented and discussed the voices of social workers and families talking about the Breaking Ground programme. The conversations with the research participants (seven professionals and three families who were actively involved with the programme) show that their experiences were clearly aligned with the two goals of the programme:

- To keep children with their whānau
- To identify and reduce risk through parent education

It is clear that the participants have a sustained connection to the Breaking Ground programme. Marc et al. (2019) state that having a sustained relationship between social workers and clients can enable change in client outcomes. Many of the research participants had positive experiences during their involvement in the Breaking Ground programme.

This research has confirmed the effectiveness of social workers working with families within the Breaking Ground programme, and has revealed that a significant strength of the programme is an alignment between relationships and communication. Much of the data reflected that the relationships between ATWC social workers, OT and families played an important part in families making changes. The relationships were wrapped around by clear communication. The social workers met with the families and followed the families' progress regularly, so the social workers had a clear understanding about the up-to-date information from the families. The information was useful for the frequent meetings with OT and other relevant support groups for the families. According to Gast et al. (2014), communication is a vital part of social work practice, and can have an impact on the behaviour of families. The Breaking Ground programme was also successful because of the overwhelming support and commitment of the social workers, both from ATWC and OT, who were involved in the programme. Collins (2016) states that the commitment of social workers to their profession and clients positively influences satisfaction with outcomes. Their efforts validate the work to date of the Breaking Ground programme and the care that has been taken to develop a working partnership between ATWC and OT.

Some of the participants' comments indicated that cultural awareness is important in terms of supporting the families. Most of the participants were either Māori or Pasifika, and the Breaking Ground programme has the potential to be even more successful if the professionals working in it recognise the cultural needs of the communities they are working with and approach whānau with respect and cultural awareness. Sevilla et al. (2018) and Vasquez (2015) state that having cultural understanding helps to prevent the possibilities of bias, stereotyping and assumptions. Although one interview question focused on the cultural perspectives of social workers and families, not many participants provided comments on this. After some discussion and reflection between the research team and ATWC, we point out that the social workers in the programme were either Māori or Pasifika and thus had the same cultural backgrounds as the families. The result is that the social workers' practice is already interwoven with their cultural responsiveness

and is thus spontaneously implemented while working with the families. Participants therefore did not identify either a need for improvement or this area being a highlight of the programme.

Many of the participants noted that change is not the responsibility of just one group but is dependent on many different agencies, including families. This correlates well with the model of practice of the Breaking Ground programme, namely that everyone plays a role in bringing about and supporting change. The participants identified a range of approaches and support systems that can help to effect change. A significant aspect touched on in many of the participants' comments was that the families were willing to work together with the social workers of the Breaking Ground programme because trust had been built through the support that the families received, and because the families knew that their voices would be listened to. More importantly, they were respected and were not judged by the social workers in the programme.

## Conclusion

This research project illustrates that the Breaking Ground programme successfully engaged in the process of change. The programme established a foundation for transformative change by exploring solutions with families and helping caregivers to develop parenting skills and practices. The successful outcomes of the programme were that children could safely stay with their whānau, and the probability that children who had previously been identified as being at risk of being taken into statutory care were now not at such risk.

The next step is to build on this foundation and ensure that the families participating in the Breaking Ground programme continue to be engaged and supported to acknowledge the capability they have, so that they can influence and have ownership of change.

Due to the commitment of the practitioners in this programme, families could see that there is hope. This was an important aspect for the families, because the programme's purpose was to prevent children entering into state care. The programme provided an opportunity to restore hope to families who had previously gone through unpleasant experiences and lost hope. Families could see their parenting skills and practice improve, and that they could take care of their children so that their children would not need to be taken away from them.

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