Appendix A

Storytime Foundation Evaluation: Corrections programmes

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Executive summary

In 2017 the Storytime Foundation supported a new visiting initiative, the Breakfast Club, at the Northland Regional Corrections Facility (NRCF) by providing books and resources

In addition to supporting the “Breakfast Club” at NRCF, Storytime Foundation have developed a model of the Early Reading Together® programme, now known as Taonga mō ngā Tamariki, which is presented in prisons (NRCF, MECF, and ARWCF) and in Probation settings in the community (Whangarei Corrections).

The programme incorporates a range of interactive learning activities and games to model the Early Reading Together theory and to provide books and resources for families who have scarce resources at home.

This report builds on earlier evaluative findings (June 2017) of the prison extension to Storytime and the emergence of the Early Reading Together® Programme.

It includes an overview on research that shows the importance of reading to children, and the impact of child visiting on recidivism.

NRCF Child Centred Visits

Feedback in the early stages of the NRCF initiative was collected from two Corrections Officers, a discussion group with six fathers involved with the programme and questionnaires from three mothers of children involved in the programme.

There has been an increase in the frequency and quality of visits with their children. The men spoke of the difference it had made to their children and their relationship with their children. The participants believe the visits have helped to calm the relationship between them and staff and they are more compliant. Staff too, talk about the difference in relationships between the officers and the staff. Interactions around the programme are generally positive and they have noted improvements in compliance, as the men do not want to lose the privilege of attending.

The combination of books targeted at the age of the children, and the activities have not just supported literacy and numeracy activities, they appear to have supported and strengthened the relationships between the men and their children and given the children some `normal' family time.

The children like the book bags and are taking ownership of the bags, books and games.

Taonga mō ngā Tamariki

Taonga mō ngā Tamariki uses books and resources to support oral language, child literacy and numeracy, and support attachment between whānau and their children. Staff can suggest parents or grandparents attend the programme if they are due to be released within the next year and have regular contact with their children/grandchildren. A small group of those interested are introduced to the initiative and provided with information about the programme.

The participants can choose the books that they think their children will enjoy. They are taught how to introduce the book to their child, and taught literacy and numeracy games, that they can play when their child comes to visit. They can make a placemat for each of their children with positive messages for each child.

The resources are provided to the child/ren in a book bag made in the prison sewing room. The book bag is kept at the prison for when the children visit.

To date 61 participants have completed evaluation forms.

There has been a shift in the percentage of parents who said they knew a lot about the benefits of reading to children, before (29%) and after (98%) the programme. Similarly, there was a shift in the percentage of parents who said they knew a lot about the benefits of storytelling and singing to children, before (30%) and after (98%) the programme. There was a considerable shift in the percentage of parents who said they knew a lot about the benefits of playing counting and word games with their children, before (22%) and after (100%) the programme.

Parents and grandparents were also more likely to report feeling confident about reading, telling stories, singing, and playing games with their children, after the programme (98%, compared with 22% prior to participating in the initiative). All the reported differences are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

Overall, all the respondents said they found the programme to be enjoyable and almost all (n=58, 97%) felt that it met their expectations. They liked the programme content, resources and learned a lot. In particular they felt it had made them more confident reading to their children, and that it helped give them insight into good parenting and a way of supporting attachment to their children. Some felt that they would like to be able implement what they learned in child-centred visits and more frequent themed events.

Almost all the respondents (n=57, 97%) rated the Kaiako/educator as ‘fantastic’ with the remaining two respondents still providing a positive rating.

The most important things they said they had learned was the importance of being patient with their children, making time for reading and making reading fun. The respondents said they would be more patient, read with their children and try and make reading more fun as a result of the programme.

Respondents were asked on a scale of 1 (would not recommend) to 10 (totally recommend) how likely they would be to recommend Taonga mō ngā Tamariki to others. All rated the programme highly (7-10) with 93% rating it as 10 (would totally recommend it).

Almost all (97%) indicated they were highly interested in undertaking another parenting support programme (9 or 10 on a 10 point scale) with 93% saying they would be definitely interested, rating it as 10.

Recommendations

The literature overview and early evaluative findings suggest that this programme could potentially contribute towards a reduction in recidivism if implemented correctly.

The key learning is that prisoners enjoy the programme and can see the benefits for their children. To reduce recidivism and have a positive impact on child and family outcomes, however, the programme needs to be administratively tightened to ensure that the cohort participating have the opportunity to implement their new skills with their children.

While the programme has the potential to change outcomes, where prisoners have little or no contact with their families, the outcomes will not be realised. While it is understood that prisoners are sometimes separated geographically from their families, this practice undermines the goals of the programme. **Where strong family bonds are a protective factor against recidivism, it is strongly recommended that prisoners are kept in the geographical area of their family wherever possible.**

1. **That prisoners are kept in the geographical area of their children and family wherever possible.**
2. That the programme be extended to six weeks so that the programme feels less rushed and there is time for the parent to record a story and send it home for their children.
3. That the course outline brochure is shared with all prisoners wishing to participate on the programme prior to the start of the programme. This is not yet happening consistently.
4. That those sentenced prisoners prioritised for participation have six to 12 months remaining on their sentence.
5. That those remand prisoners likely to receive electronic bail are prioritised for this programme.
6. That Corrections staff select participants with a view to staff safety and check the participants' list to minimise potential conflict between attendees, and
7. That Corrections officers maintain a presence by checking in on each of the sessions from time to time.
8. That designated, child centred visits become a regular part of the visits timetable and that activity days are held regularly. These could be co-designed between Storytime staff, Corrections staff and the participants. The visits need to be longer (1-2 hour visits) and to provide refreshments.

9. That Storytime provide a box of books in the visiting area for all children, along with learning games which assist with building executive function, so any family can play them during visits. Prisoners who will be having children visit could assist in making the games and coached in how to positively interact with their children.
10. That there is an ongoing commitment to continue resourcing child-centred visits and activity days and if the programme continues the prison staff ensure that children who have been part of the programme continue to have this opportunity.
11. That there is an ongoing commitment to provide ongoing training for staff on why the programme was developed, what it aims to achieve.
12. It would be beneficial if staff supportive of the programme are rostered to work on designated child centred visiting days.
13. That a quarterly programme is planned with activities, books, themes, planned ahead of time so that the continuation/success doesn't rely on who is rostered to work on a particular day.
14. That staff rostered to work on visits are given training to understand the importance of providing the book bags at visiting times and support the interaction between parents and their child/ren.
15. That the policy to discipline prisoners by cancelling child-centred visits is reviewed, and alternative disciplinary actions are explored which do not also punish the child.

Storytime evaluation

Purpose

The Storytime Foundation aims to strengthen vulnerable young children and their families by enhancing the bond between parent and child early in life. Over the past 20 years, Storytime has worked with over forty thousand families and distributed more than 150,000 books.

In 2017 the Storytime Foundation Project Manager contacted Northland Regional Corrections Facility (NRCF) to discuss how children's visits operated in the prison setting. Corrections had been encouraging staff to introduce new child centred initiatives designed to support the relationships between fathers and their children. At that stage, the prison visiting team at Ngawha prison had just started breakfast and afternoon tea visits for fathers and their children. Storytime supported this initiative with its prison initiative, by providing books, learning games and resources to the men and their families.

NRFC bigger themed events, such as the celebration of Matariki, are held at the prison. A holiday programme was introduced two afternoons during each school holiday break. Activities included face painting, cooking pikelets and story times.

In addition to supporting the "Breakfast Club" at NRCF, Storytime Foundation have developed a model of the Early Reading Together®, now known as Taonga mō ngā Tamariki, which is presented in prisons (NRCF, MEFC and ARWCF) and in Probation settings in the community (Whangarei Corrections).

The programme incorporates a range of interactive learning activities and games to model the Early Reading Together theory and to provide books and resources for families who have scarce resources at home.

The purpose of this early evaluative report is to understand the outputs and outcomes to date, and provide recommendations on how the programme might be improved.

Background

Research shows the importance of reading to children, and the impact of child visiting on recidivism. It is noted that a developmental evaluative approach has been used to ensure the programme continuously improves.

Reading to children

There is considerable evidence that being read to significantly increases a child's language development and educational attainment and enhances parent-child attachment both in the short and long-term.

Involving parents in their children's literary activities, however, has also been shown to provide numerous benefits to parents, including "greater skill acquisition, greater confidence and self-esteem, a better parent-child relationship, and increased engagement with learning" (Bonci, 2008). Research has also found that:

LETTER TO STORYTIME

"My husband signed up as he's missed interacting with our children as he would've liked to at home.

He was so happy to be able to read to our children while we visited him it brought him and our children some comfort and some normality in a very difficult time.

Sadly only after two weeks of being involved with the prison Storytime for children my husband was transferred to another prison where they don't run these wonderful programmes.

I really would like to carry on the reading to our little girl and our babies as I seen how happy our little girl was to have her daddy read to her. He's not here but I would like to continue this for him.

Your prison programme is wonderful so please keep it going I've seen first-hand what it's doing at Northland corrections facility hopefully other prisons will follow suit too."

Family literacy is a powerful way to support parents with few skills and show them how they can help their children become confident and effective communicators. It also has knock-on benefits for other family members - parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters. (Bonci, 2008: 17)

The Impact of Family Contact on Prisoners' Recidivism

A range of international studies conducted over many years show compelling evidence that allowing prisoners to have contact with their families during incarceration is linked to reduced recidivism when they're released.

As prison reform advocate Lord Farmer (2017) argues, "We cannot ignore the reality that a supportive relationship with at least one person is indispensable to a prisoner's ability to get through their sentence well and achieve rehabilitation… Supportive relationships with family members and significant others give meaning and all-important motivation to other strands of rehabilitation and resettlement activity." De Claire and Dixon (2017), in their analysis of ten studies conducted since 1991 into the impact of family visits on prisoners, argue along similar lines that in keeping with the findings of Hairston (1988), when prisoners do not have access to their families, they lose hope about the future, and their social skills and emotional resilience diminish, which may lead them to reoffend at higher rates.

Across the board, this general conclusion is backed up solidly by the data: in the UK, the Ministry of Justice's research (May, Sharma and Stewart, 2008) shows a clear, substantial positive effect on recidivism when family ties are maintained, with prisoners who receive visits from a family member reoffending at rates 39% lower than those who do not. And in Mitchell et al's (2016) analysis of 16 studies into prison visiting and its effect on recidivism, results showed a 26% decrease in

recidivism among those who received visits from family or friends. A summary of the literature, and, the conditions under which recidivism may be reduced, is attached in the Appendix.

NRCF Child Centred Visits

Early Feedback

Feedback in the early stages of the NRCF initiative was collected from:

- Two Corrections Officers
- A discussion group with six fathers involved with the programme
- Questionnaires from three mothers involved in the programme.

Improved visits

Interviews with both the men and Corrections staff found an increase in the frequency and quality of visits with their children.

The men spoke of the difference it had made to their children and their relationship with their children. They spoke of how boring it was for their children at visiting time as there was nothing for them to do, and that the children were reluctant to visit.

""The kids didn't like coming. There was nothing for them to do other than watch TV. They were bored and played up just sitting there.""

"Visiting felt like a question and answer session not family time. 'How is school.' 'Good'. 'What have you been up to.' 'Nothing'.

Corrections staff agreed. The men and their children sat at a table. Those children who couldn't sit still would be running around. There were a few games, but these had missing pieces and were broken.

"The kids used to run around. There was little engagement between the children and their fathers. The TV was a babysitter."

The men say they and their children now really enjoy the visits. They like reading with their children and playing with them. They say it is as close to the normal family time that they have while in prison, and they strongly believe it is improving their relationship with their children.

The staff say that the prisoners are reflecting on their role as fathers. One dad, for example, told staff that he had not spent much time with his children outside of prison, and he was looking forward to spending time with his children. Staff note that

maintaining relationships on the outside is important if the prisoner is to integrate successfully into the community.

Staff noted that the TV is no longer a babysitter and has not been on in the past eleven months.

FEEDBACK FROM CORRECTIONS STAFF

"Staff asked a 12-year-old if he would like a book. His reply was "I don't really read". Staff suggested he have a look at a couple and see what he thought. A bit later when the staff member went past he said the book was pretty good. Then at the end of the session, he came up and asked if they had a bookmark. He said "Dad and I have had turns and we've read about 12 pages. We want to mark where we are, and we're going to read more each time I come to visit." This young guy and his Dad are also doing the journal – the boy is struggling a bit, but the Dad is right into it."

The participants believe it has helped to calm the relationship between them and staff down and they are more compliant. One participant observed:

"We don't want to lose this (programme). We make sure that we don't do anything to lose it."

The men believe staff seeing them playing with and reading to their children has had a humanising effect on staff, who see them in a family context.

"It has always been the screws and prisoners – them and us. I think they see a different part of us."

Staff too, talk about the difference in relationships between the officers and the staff. Interactions around the programme are generally positive, with the men and their families thanking them. They have also noted improvements in compliance, as the men do not want to lose the privilege of attending.

"One guy came with a real chip on his shoulder. He was aggressive and non-compliant. He is completely engaged and has lost that chip. He has seen the difference it has made to his family and is motivated. He apologised now he has seen what it is about."

"I have seen the difference it makes to the relationship between us. This is something good they see us doing - it has made a difference to how they see us."

"Breakfast and afternoon tea visits are a privilege. Families who enjoy book club with Dad are putting pressure on the men to behave."

During the evaluative discussion, one of the men stood up and gave the Corrections staff and Storytime a short speech of thanks for making this happen.

At one of the events, two men also stood up and said how grateful they were for the opportunity to be able to do an activity and for the children to learn with them.

A mother and a grandmother also stood and spoke about how amazing the visit had been and how much they appreciated the efforts of the staff.

What has worked well

The combination of books targeted at the age of the children, and the activities have not just supported literacy and numeracy activities, they appear to have supported and strengthened the relationships between the men and their children and given the children some `normal' family time.

Because the men value the programme, they do not want to jeopardise it, which appears to have improved compliance and behaviour.

The relationship between the staff and men appears to have improved, with the men appreciating the staff implementing the programme and the men believing the staff are not just seeing them as prisoners, but as fathers wanting a relationship with their children.

The children like the book bags and are taking ownership of the bags, books and games. They are also looking after the resources. It is observed when the resources were communal games they tended to be `trashed'. Staff say that it took a while to understand that the books were to be left at the prison but the children now understand the process.

Taonga mō ngā Tamariki

The opportunity to offer the Early Reading Together® programme in prisons emerged as a result of Storytime Foundation supporting the child centred visits at NRCF. The Early Reading Together® Programme uses books and resources to support oral language, child literacy and numeracy, and support attachment between whanau and their children. Staff can suggest parents or grandparents attend Taonga mō ngā Tamariki if they are due to be released within the next year and have regular contact with their children/grandchildren. A small group of those interested are introduced to the initiative and provided with information about the programme.

The participants can choose the books that they think their children will enjoy, with guidance from the Project Manager about which books are suitable for the age and stage of their child/ren. They are taught how to introduce the book to their child, and taught literacy and numeracy games, that they can play when their child comes to visit. There is discussion on extending children's oral language skills with activities and ideas. In addition to the books and games, programme attendees make a placemat for each of their children with positive messages for each child.

The books, together with the literacy and numeracy resources and placemats, are provided to the child/ren in a book bag made in the prison sewing room. The book bag is kept at the prison for when the children visit. At the end of the programme the book bags are taken home by the children. Book bags for children who do not visit regularly are posted to the child and include a handwritten letter from Mum/Dad/Grandparent.

As part of Taonga mō ngā Tamariki a values-based board game has been created where the participants discuss in a group the values they want to impart to their children. Respect, honesty, and helping at home are the most commonly identified values. These values are then used to create choices cards for the board game developed by each prisoner to play with their children.

Feedback from a Corrections officer said that the discussions around values was important as it allowed prisoners to reflect on their value base and what they wanted to impart to their children. As a direct result of the values discussion one prisoner at NRCF wrote a values-based story for his children which was turned into a book. When released on electronic bail he was able to take the book home to his children.

Questionnaire

A standardised evaluation questionnaire was used to collect baseline data from participants. A follow-up questionnaire at the conclusion of the programme was then used to capture changes in knowledge of the benefits of reading, singing, telling stories to children, playing numeracy and literacy games, and to find out what the participants might do differently as a result of having attended the programme. Participants were also asked whether the

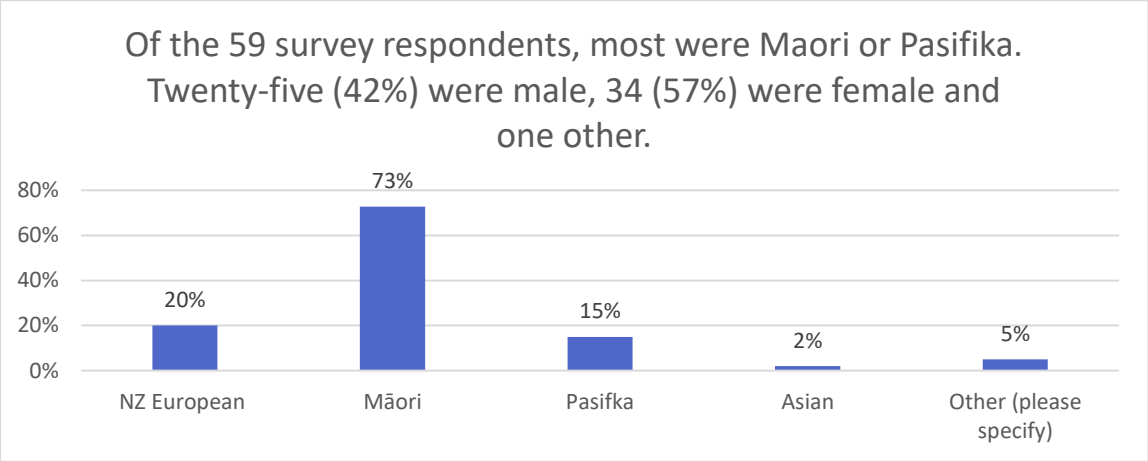
programme was enjoyable, if they would recommend it to others and if they would do further parenting training.

The questionnaire was administered to 64 participants across three prison sites, AWRCF, NRCF and MECF. Three questionnaires have not been included as it appears they were not filled in correctly and the ratings, while positive, may have distorted the results, leaving a total of 61 respondents.

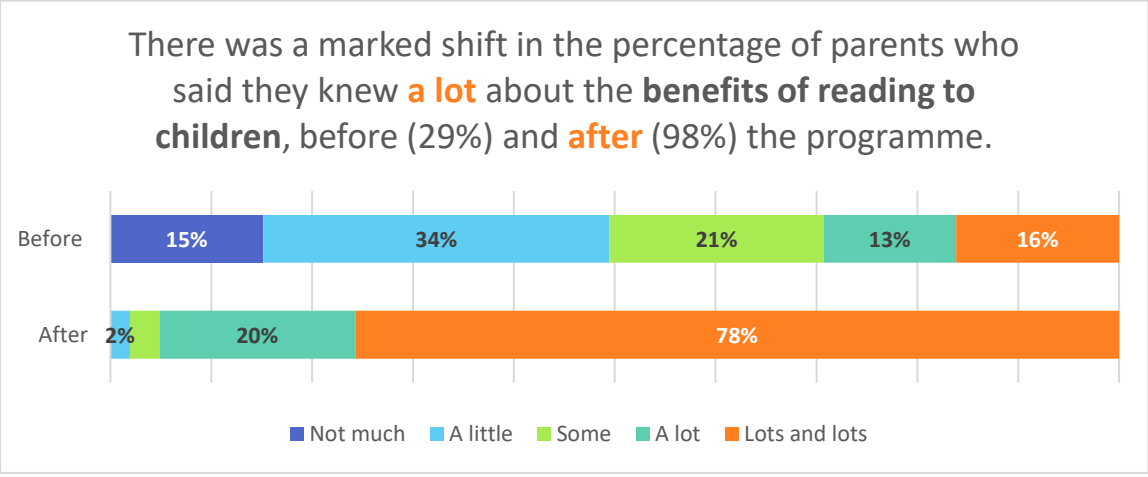
It is noted that the numbers at this stage are small so the findings from the standardised questionnaire have not been disaggregated by facility or the respondents' Correction's status (remand, serving time or on probation).

The results have been significance tested ($p < 0.05$).

Taonga mō ngā Tamariki Findings

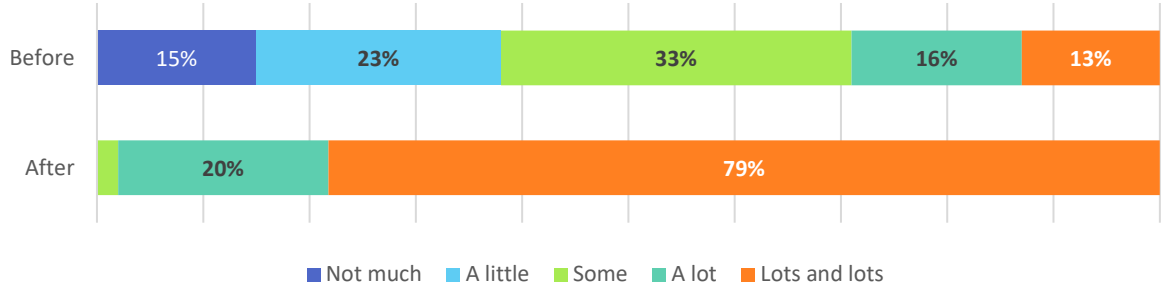


n=59 (NB The total percentage exceeds 100 percent as participants could select more than one ethnicity.)



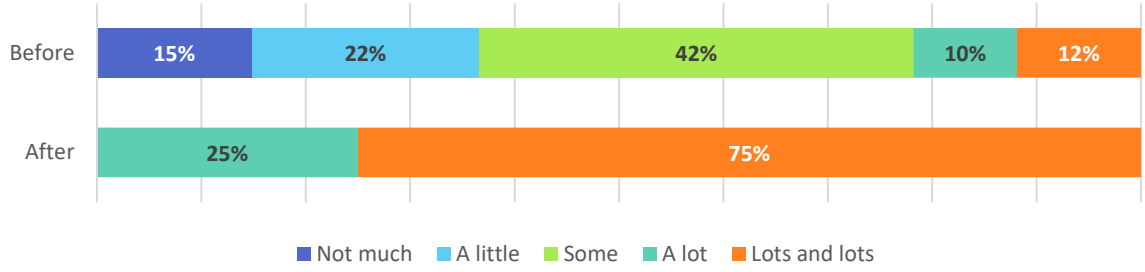
n=61 The differences are significant ($p < 0.05$).

Similarly, there was a shift in the percentage of parents who said they knew **a lot** about the **benefits of storytelling and singing** to children, before (30%) and **after** (98%) the programme.



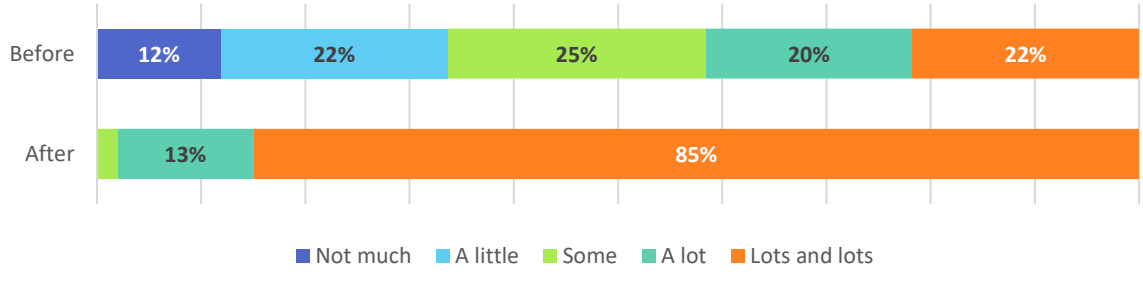
n=61 The differences are significant ($p < 0.05$).

There was a considerable shift in the percentage of parents who said they knew **a lot** about the benefits of **playing counting and word games** with their children, before (22%) and **after** (100%) the programme.

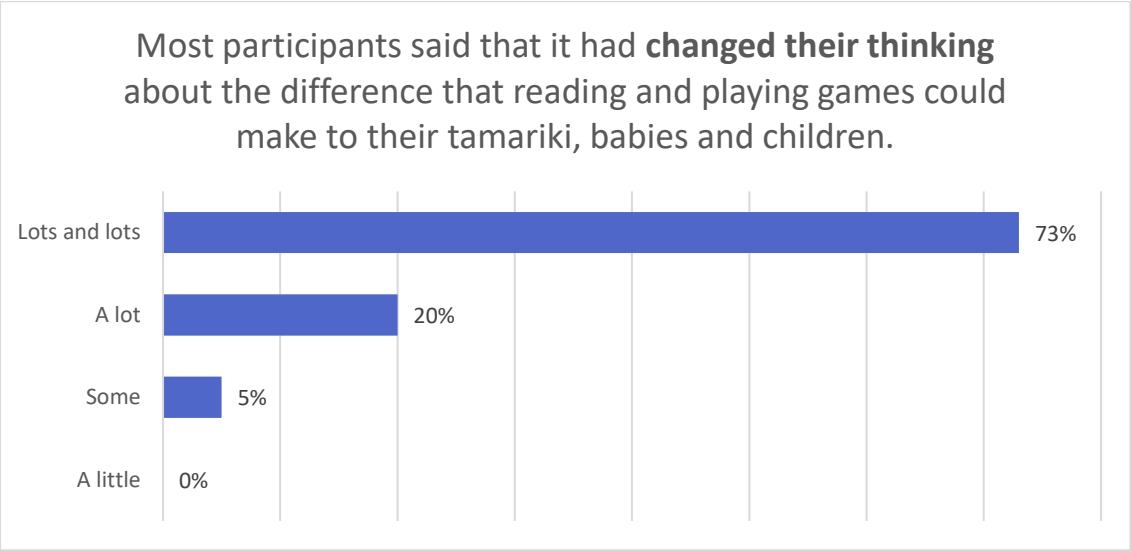


n=61 The differences are significant ($p < 0.05$).

Parents and grandparents were more likely to report feeling **confident** about **reading, telling stories, singing, and playing games** with their children, after the programme (98%, compared with 44% prior to participating in the initiative)



n=60 The differences are significant ($p < 0.05$).



n=59

Overall, all the respondents said they found the programme to be enjoyable (n=9, 15%) or very enjoyable (n=50, 81%) and almost all (n=56, 97%) felt that it met their expectations.

Almost all the respondents (n=57, 97%) rated the Kaiako/educator as 'fantastic' with the remaining two respondents still providing a positive rating.

They commented that they liked the programme content, resources and learned a lot. In particular they felt it had made them more confident reading to their children, and that it helped give them insight into good parenting and a way of supporting attachment to their children. At least was surprised at how much fun reading could be.

Some felt that they would like to be able implement what they learned in child-centred visits and more frequent themed events.

The most important things they said they had learned were the importance of being patient with their children, making time for reading and making reading fun.

WHAT WERE THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS LEARNED?

"That reading to my children is beneficial to us both and how much it has changed since I was young."

"Be patient with my kids. Getting involved. Moving with them."

"Reading to my children really helps us to bond."

"How important and easy it is to help your kids to learn and teach them good things."

"No matter what age a child is its never too late to read or sing to them."

"That by playing counting games can help my kids associate the counting of numbers with the number itself and being patient while reading with them is important. Also praising them for doing good when reading."

Respondents were asked if there was anything they might do differently as a result of the programme. The respondents said they would be more patient, read with their children and try and make reading more fun.

At the NRCF remand programme, prisoners have the opportunity to choose a book for themselves as they do not have access to the prison library. All prisoners to date have

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WOULD DO DIFFERENTLY AS A RESULT?

"Be more patient when reading with my kids, enjoy it and make it fun."

"Have more fun with my babies."

"Make time to read and enjoy. Encourage my daughters more."

"Try and have more time talking to my kids and maybe read to them on the phone."

"Encourage other parents to read to their children and to never be ashamed of making sound effects."

"I've never read a book in my life and been able to remember it at the end. I am now on my second book in three weeks."

returned the book the following week with discussion and borrowed another book. At least one respondent commented that it had also had a positive effect on their own enjoyment of reading.

Recommendations by attendees

Respondents were asked on a scale of 1 (would not recommend) to 10 (totally recommend) how likely they would be to recommend the Early Reading Together® programme to others. All rated the programme highly (7-10) with 93% rating it as 10 (would totally recommend it).

Similarly, they were asked on a scale of 1 (not at all interested) to 10 (definitely interested) how interested they would be would you be in taking part in other parenting support programmes. Almost all (97%) indicated they were highly interested in undertaking another parenting support programme (9 or 10) with 93% saying they would be definitely interested rating it as 10.

Although some commented that the programme felt rushed and wished it were longer, most expressed appreciation in having been able to attend it and said that they enjoyed it.

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

"More sessions so there is no rush."

"Thank you ladies for everything you are doing for our children, more sessions."

"Really enjoyed this programme thanks."

"Thank you for thinking of children who's mums are in prison!!!!! Cheers."

"My older child loves what we have learned and loves reading to everyone, thank you."

"Tautoko te korero."

"Thank you (teacher), your enthusiasm for teaching is amazing, loved the resources, please put me down for the next one."

"Keep up the awesome work and never stop this programme."

"Bummer we had to come to jail to learn this."

"I knew a lot about the benefits or reading to children, but didn't know how to go about it."

Learnings from Taonga mō ngā Tamariki

It is noted that the programme is still in a learning and development stage and is able to be adapted to meet the requirements for each Corrections environment. For example, at MECF the programme is being held in a variety of formats, for example, four sessions over two days, one session on three consecutive days, and one session per week over four weeks. The flexibility of delivery is important to making the programme work well in different environments, particularly in the remand environment. Nonetheless, there are recommendations that would help support and improve programme delivery and outcomes.

Keeping prisoners close to their children and families

The literature overview and early evaluative findings suggest that this programme could potentially contribute towards a reduction in recidivism if implemented correctly.

The key learning is that prisoners enjoy the programme and can see the benefits for their children. To reduce recidivism and have a positive impact on child and family outcomes the programme needs to be administratively tightened to ensure that the cohort participating have the opportunity to implement their new skills with their children.

While the programme has the potential to change outcomes, where prisoners have little or no contact with their families, the outcomes will not be realised. While it is understood that prisoners are sometimes separated geographically from their families, this practice undermines the goals of the programme. Where strong family bonds are a protective factor against recidivism, it is strongly recommended that prisoners are kept in the geographical area of their family wherever possible.

KEY RECOMMENDATION

1. That prisoners are kept geographically close to their children and families

Programme length

The participants feel that the programme can be rushed. The programme currently comprises an introductory session and three teaching sessions.

RECOMMENDATION

2. It is recommended that the programme be extended to six weeks so that the programme feels less rushed and there is time for the parent to record a story that their children can take home and listen to at home.

Cohort selection

Selection onto the programme is key. Parents and grandparents selected need to have children who visit regularly so that they have the opportunity to put the skills they are learning into practice.

At the suggestion of Corrections Department staff a course outline brochure has been created for case managers to share with prisoners with more detailed information about the programme to assist with cohort selection.

RECOMMENDATION

3. That the course outline brochure is shared with all prisoners wishing to participate on the programme prior to the start of the programme. This is not yet happening consistently.
4. As the aim is to reduce recidivism it is recommended that those sentenced prisoners prioritised for participation have six to 12 months remaining on their sentence.
5. That those remand prisoners likely to receive electronic bail are prioritised for this programme.

Storytime staff safety

RECOMMENDATION

6. To support the safety of Storytime staff it is recommended that Corrections staff select participants with a view to staff safety and check the participants' list to minimise potential conflict between attendees.

7. It is further recommended that a Corrections officer maintains a presence by checking in on each of the sessions from time to time.

Child Centred visiting regularly and frequently

Child centred visits are focussed on the child and their parent/grandparent and are not the usual family visit.

The early findings suggest that child-centred visits, where parents and grandparents are able to read to and play with their children have been successful in supporting these relationships. Activity days, such as the celebration of Matariki, pancake making etc, have been particularly successful.

RECOMMENDATION

8. It is recommended that designated, child centred visits become a regular part of the visits' timetable and that activity days are held regularly. These could be co-designed between Storytime staff, Corrections staff and the participants. The visits need to be longer (1-2 hour visits) and to provide refreshments.

The children of parents who have not participated in the programme may feel as if they are missing out.

RECOMMENDATION

9. It is recommended Storytime provide a box of books in the visiting area for all children, along with learning games which assist with building executive function, so **any** family can play them during visits. Prisoners who will be having children visit could assist in making the games and be coached in how to positively interact with their children.

Consistency

The change from a visiting model where children must sit compared to the breakfast/afternoon tea model is so immense that it would be hard for children to go back to this model of visiting.

RECOMMENDATION

10. That there is an ongoing commitment to continue resourcing child-centred visits and activity days and if the programme continues the prison staff ensure that children who have been part of the programme continue to have this opportunity.

Staffing

Staff understanding and support is integral to the success of the child centred visiting approach. There needs to be a strong partnership between Corrections and Storytime Foundation to ensure that the programme runs smoothly. It is noted that at NRCF, initially some staff expressed concerns about the programme.

> *"I was not supportive initially, but I have seen the difference it has made to the children."*

RECOMMENDATION

11. That there is a commitment to provide ongoing training for staff on why the programme was developed, what it aims to achieve.

12. It is recommended that Storytime offer a session for staff about the impact of talking and reading to children and the importance of attachment on whaanau relationships. It would be beneficial if staff supportive of the programme are rostered to work on designated child centred visiting days.

13. It is also recommended that a quarterly programme is planned with activities, books, themes, planned ahead of time so that the continuation/success doesn't rely on who is rostered to work on a particular day.

Children's visits during the programme

To support the programme outcomes, encouragement is needed to ensure programme attendees receive visits from their child/children during the programme. Staff rostered to work on visiting days need to understand the importance of providing the book bags at visiting times and encourage the parent during visiting time.

RECOMMENDATION

14. It is recommended that staff rostered to work on visits are given training to understand the importance of providing the book bags at visiting times and support the interaction between parents and their child/ren.

Discipline

Currently, "child centred" visits are considered a privilege. Disciplinary processes result in the cancellation of the visit or a booth visit. This form of disciplinary action has a serious impact on the child, as the child is also deprived of the visit.

RECOMMENDATION

15. It is recommended that this policy is reviewed, and alternative disciplinary actions are explored which do not punish the child.

Appendix One: Literature overview

The Impact of Family Contact on Prisoners' Recidivism

A range of international studies conducted over many years show compelling evidence that allowing prisoners to have contact with their families during incarceration is linked to reduced recidivism when they're released. As prison reform advocate Lord Farmer (2017) argues, "We cannot ignore the reality that a supportive relationship with at least one person is indispensable to a prisoner's ability to get through their sentence well and achieve rehabilitation… Supportive relationships with family members and significant others give meaning and all important motivation to other strands of rehabilitation and resettlement activity." De Claire and Dixon (2017), in their analysis of ten studies conducted since 1991 into the impact of family visits on prisoners, argue along similar lines that in keeping with the findings of Hairston (1988), when prisoners do not have access to their families, they lose hope about the future, and their social skills and emotional resilience diminish, which may lead them to reoffend at higher rates.

Across the board, this general conclusion is backed up solidly by the data: in the UK, the Ministry of Justice's research (May, Sharma and Stewart, 2008) shows a clear, substantial positive effect on recidivism when family ties are maintained, with prisoners who receive visits from a family member reoffending at rates 39% lower than those who do not. And in Mitchell et al's (2016) analysis of 16 studies into prison visiting and its effect on recidivism, results showed a 26% decrease in recidivism among those who received visits from family or friends. Likewise, Hairston (1991) cites six studies that show that maintenance of family ties during incarceration is linked to lower rates of recidivism and fewer parole violations, with a 1972 study by Holt and Miller finding that only 2 percent of men who had three or more different visitors during the year prior to their parole were returned to prison the following year, whereas 12 percent of those who had no contact with family or friends were returned.

The link between contact with family and friends and reduced recidivism, however, is not as uncomplicated as these findings would suggest. The picture loses its straightforwardness when looking at studies that have collected data on the effects of contact with children on incarcerated fathers' reoffending. De Claire and Dixon's (2017) review of ten papers reports one "high-quality study" (Bales and Mears, 2008) that followed 7,000 prisoners in Florida and found that although visits from family and friends reduced recidivism significantly, for imprisoned fathers "the higher frequency of child visits was associated with higher recidivism, a result the researchers did not anticipate" (p. 197). Bales and Mears speculate that "it may be that such visitation imposes greater strain on inmates by leading them to become more viscerally aware of their inability to parent their children, leading to increased offending" (p. 314), and argue that more research needs to be done on the nature of children's visits, with it being "possible, for example, that child visitation in which overt

conflict is evident (e.g. a parent yelling at his or her child or vice versa) may be associated with increased recidivism" (p. 314). Or, as Halsey and Harris (2011) put it, because the present prison system provides such a lack of support to family relationships, "having children can…give rise to degenerative dispositions amongst imprisoned fathers since their capacity to 'do' fatherhood is fundamentally restricted to the devices of letter writing, brief phone calls, and occasional visits. It is of little surprise, therefore, that many prisoners feel deeply disconnected from the very children who may have initially inspired a generative outlook." The lack of a substantial base of studies showing these kinds of results, however, limits the extent to which such findings can be generalised from and to which clear-cut conclusions can be drawn as to why children's visits were found to be linked to increased recidivism in the case of Bales and Mears' (2008) study – suggesting there is a strong need for further research in this area.

Evidence does exist, however, of the kinds of frameworks within which visits from prisoners' children might provide uncontroversially positive effects on reducing recidivism rates. These interventions may mitigate the potential for children's visits to trigger incarcerated fathers' perceptions of themselves as poor parents by providing a means for these fathers to engage with their children in constructive ways and, through doing this, retain awareness of the fact that they do have something to offer their children. By and large, these interventions have taken the form of prison parenting programmes where male prisoners are taught parenting skills and facilitated to take part in enhanced family visits. Examples include three parenting programmes run by the UK organisation Safe Ground – "Fathers Inside", "Family Man", and "Parenting Matters" – which are designed to help incarcerated fathers "develop a better understanding of their role as a father, while challenging attitudes, developing skills essential to successful resettlement, and contributing to desistance from crime" (Safe Ground, n.d.). These programmes centre around education and reflection on the role of parenting, and use creative methods such as drama, fiction, games, and written portfolio work by prisoners. A 2011 quantitative and qualitative evaluation study commissioned by Safe Ground (Boswell, Poland and Moseley, 2011) provides considerable evidence of the benefits of such programmes, and focuses in particular on "Family Man", which aims to prevent reoffending by developing social and life skills that help prisoners understand the importance of maintaining family relationships from prison. The evaluation authors attribute a large part of the success of the Family Man programme to the link between education and desistance from re-offending, given that such a large percentage of prisoners have a history of being disaffected by the education system, and "for many of the men, FM was the first time they had achieved educationally in any way."

A number of studies have also demonstrated that reading or literacy schemes involving prisoner-child contact can foster supportive family relationships and motivate prisoners towards a productive future. One example of this is a project known as FLiP (Family Literacy in Prisons), which – as documented by Nutbrown et al (2017) – brought prisoners together in small groups of 10–15 to learn about child literacy and discuss ways to engage children in activities involving words, rhymes, book sharing and early writing, while giving careful consideration to the vulnerability or distress the prisoners might feel when discussing their own literacy experiences or returning to their cells after spending time with their children.

The workshops were followed by six literacy-related family visits. As the authors report, many prisoners found the opportunity to see their children in a different situation from usual family visits motivating, and some fathers acknowledged that the workshops were an effective tool to help them relate better to their children. The authors conclude that the project successfully stimulated the prisoners' relationships with their children and "produced a more positive attitude towards avoiding crime" (p. 7).

As Farmer (2017) has also noted in his review of the UK prison system, being expected to help children with their homework can be a powerful motivator for prisoners' own learning, since it can "provide a significant fillip to men inside, some of whom feel they have never achieved anything in their lives that would make their children proud of them" (p.68). And as Blumberg and Griffin (2013) suggest, making children's schoolwork, and reading in particular, the focus of a parent-child prison visit, rather than the parent's incarceration, can help mitigate awkwardness, discomfort, and unhelpful emotional intensity – as well as provide the parent with "an opportunity to feel a sense of mastery and pride they may not experience in prison… Participation in academic-related activities may enable inmates to feel as though they are not just inmates, but are parents again who are making a valuable contribution in the life of their child" (p. 258-9).

In contrast with male prisoners, the finding that children's visits were associated with higher recidivism in Bales and Mears' (2008) study did not apply to female prisoners; such visits led to improved well-being among women prisoners across all the studies De Claire and Dixon (2017) looked at. Other studies that have examined the effects of women's access to their children while in prison have reached similar conclusions: Carlson (1998) found lower recidivism rates among women who had access to their children in prison through a nursery scheme, and in a meta-analysis of three studies, Shlonsky et al (n.d.) found that nursery programme participants were less likely to return to prison than mothers who were not involved.

However, the picture may become more complicated when looking at non-child visits among women prisoners: as De Claire and Dixon (2017) note in their meta-analysis, while visits by either family or friends were associated with reduced recidivism among male prisoners, this reduction was not recorded for women prisoners. Aside from this, one quality study has indicated that visits from male partners may increase women's reoffending. The takeaway from this seems to be that there may be notably different effects on recidivism based on the gender of the prisoners receiving visits, and further research may be needed to fully unpack the differing effects of contact with children, partners, and other friends and family members on incarcerated men and women, as well as what factors around child visitation lead to decreased reoffending and whether these factors vary by gender. The weight of evidence, however, strongly supports the general principle that better family links reduce reoffending, and that strategies to promote and facilitate positive family contact as part of prison reform efforts – such as those that have already been introduced in the UK – are much needed.

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