

# The perceived benefits of occupational therapy students community development placements to community partners in Aotearoa New Zealand



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# Community Development Definition

- A form of critical occupational therapy practice that aims to redress occupational injustice.

(Peters, et al., 2025, P.429)

- Distinguished from community-based programmes by:
  - A community centred approach
  - Community sets agenda and identify needs
  - Occupational therapists facilitate, educate and resources
  - Aims to enhance community capacity
  - In partnership and collaboratively with stakeholders

(Leclair, et al., 2019)



# Community Development Placements

## Final Fieldwork Placement

- 8-week duration
- 150 hours
- Student groups of 2-8
- Community organisations
- Community Partner
- Academic Supervisor

Purpose: Identify, plan and provide resources to meet an occupational need

Local  
Government

Non-Government  
Organisation

Non-Profit Sporting  
organisations

Schools

Charities

Community  
Trusts

Church  
Projects

Cultural  
Groups

Tertiary  
Education



# Background

Based on Hyett's Community-Centred Practice Framework (Hyett et al., 2019)

Student's work with Community Partner to:

- Identify/address occupational need for community population,
- Adopt a social justice and equity focus (Irvine-Brown et al, 2021)
- Demonstrate Te Tiriti o Waitangi responsiveness (OTBNZ, 2023)
- Complete project-based teamwork in a real-world setting (Melville et al, 2023)

## Role-Emerging Placement Learning

“certain aspects of their professional and personal skill development are only possible when they are put in such a unique environment.”

(Lau & Ravenek, 2019, p.17)



# Study Aim and Design

## Aim:

to investigate the perceived benefits of the community development placements to the community partners

## Methods:

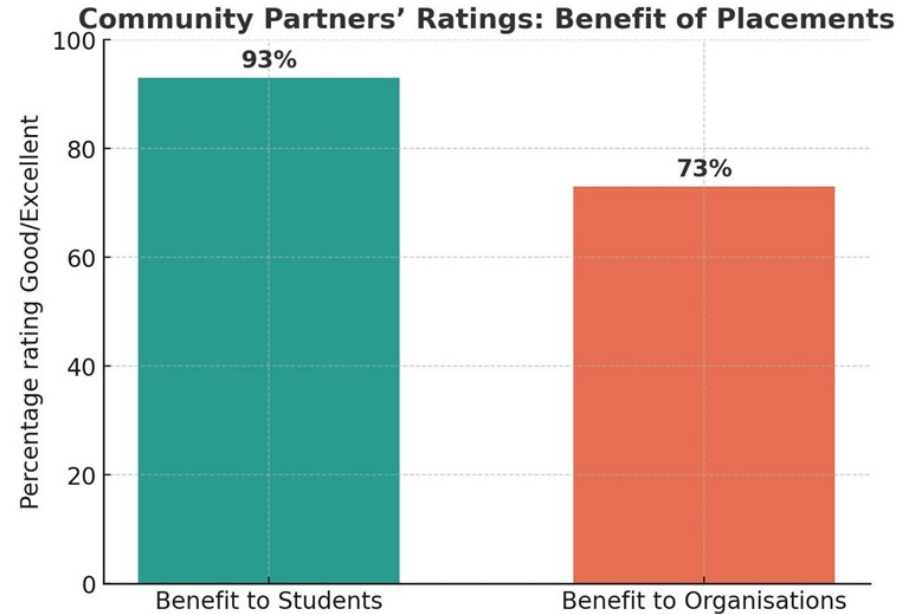
- Online survey using Qualtrics 2023 and 2024 (30 responses)
- Individual online interviews (4 Community Partners)



# Survey Finding

Community Partners rated the benefit of the placements highly:

Benefit to students rated more frequently than benefit to organisation



# Benefits to Students - Interviews

Growth is student confidence and independence

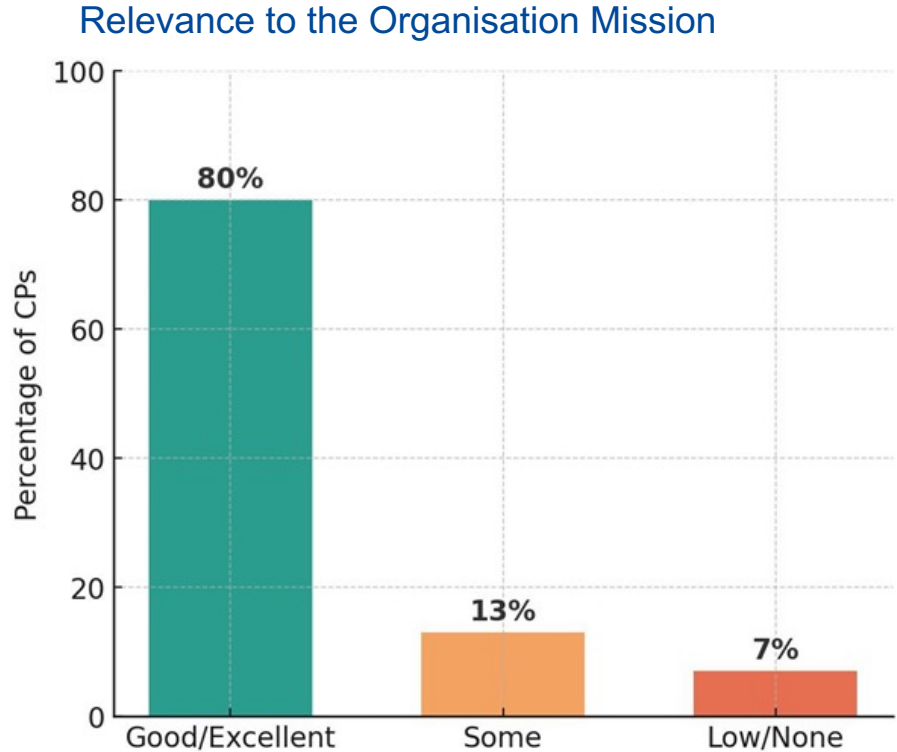
Development of work- readiness skills and professionalism

Enhanced career prospects and occupational therapy role



# Student Findings

- Project were mostly relevant to the organisations mission (80%)
- Project tackled an occupational need or justice issue (76%)
- Community partners reported students projects were of a high standard (83%)



# Benefits to the Organisation

- Extra hands and fresh energy
- Useful resources and high quality outputs
- Students were professional and organised

*They exceeded expectations ...  
we really felt supported*

*The students create something in 3 weeks that will endure for years*

*We still use the resource they created – it's been valuable for staff*



# Community Partners Perception

- Appreciative and grateful
- Keen to continue in future
- Recognised the value of student work
- Acknowledged students strengths; research skills and occupational focus

*“every year, after the students are gone, we go wow OK! that was an idea that we hadn't thought of, and we've been looking at this thing for three years and we didn't think about that!”*

*(Community Partner 1)*

# Future Application of Outcomes

*“And with the survey results we have something that we can actually measure, that we can use to show funders, show government, show anybody, what our employees get from having real work”*

(Community Partner 3)

*“We now have a report which can be shared with other relevant housing providers [on] getting functional housing available to people (including seniors) in dire need.”*

(Community Partner 2)

# Mutual Benefits

*Students need to see the real world and they can learn from us. And we greatly benefit from their skills, their research.*

*(Community partner 3)*

*“The [Occupational Therapy School] have wonderful students who can potentially do wonderful projects for your organization... a complete gift.”*

*(Community Partner 4)*

# Discussion

- Benefit to community organisations demonstrated
- Confirmed occupational need and justice focus
- Project outcomes had long term value
- Partnerships strengthen visibility of the profession

## Implications

1. Maintain and strengthen community partnerships between placements
2. Develop strategies to follow-up outcomes of projects and resources, and provide feedback to graduates



# Final words for future students

*“Don’t be disappointed if at the end, instead of changing the world, you only managed to get a sign post erected on the corner of a street, because ...its about the relationships and the stories and the learning. That is the journey, that’s as important as the outcome, as the final product”*

Community Partner 1

# References

- Hyett, N., Kenny, A., & Dickson-Swift, V. (2019). Re-imagining occupational therapy clients as communities: Presenting the community-centred practice framework. *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 26(4), 246–260. <https://doi.org/10.1080/11038128.2017.1423374>
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