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# ***Movement for Alternatives to Prison***

## **Is School A Factor In Youth Offending?**

### **INFLUENCES ON YOUNG PEOPLE TO OFFEND**

A number of factors contribute to the trajectory towards youth offending, including being born into a family that values antisocial behaviour or lacks effective parenting skills, peer group influence, neighbourhood factors and low socio-economic status. It isn't just the external environment that negatively affects some children. Some people may be predisposed towards antisocial behaviour and criminal offending. This may be through aggressive and impulsive behaviour, or because of neurological damage and cognitive impairment, possibly as a result of prenatal exposure to drugs or alcohol. There's a link between young people offending and non-engagement with the school system. We know many young offenders were out of school at the time of their offending. Did they leave school to offend or offend because



### **School experiences shape a child's future**

they were out of school?

#### **THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS IN OFFENDING**

From the little research data that exists it is clear educational success and school attachment are key protective factors in preventing offending by young people. However, schools have also been implicated in contributing to young people's risk of criminal offending. These seven "education-created" risk factors are:

#### **1. Inadequate Transition to School and from Primary to Secondary School**

All school transitions present developmental challenges that rely on the previous acquisition of social skills and risk factors that include adapting to an unfamiliar classroom environment, new teacher relationships and reconstruction of their peer group. Children have to adapt to a range of new expectations from previously unknown adults, negotiate

new roles for themselves, form new relationships with peers and incorporate new dimensions into their self-evaluations. The transition from primary to secondary school is particularly challenging as it involves the movement from one teacher to multiple teachers, a few subjects taught in one classroom by one teacher to multiple subjects taught by numbers of teachers in different classrooms, differing teacher styles, more complex academic demands and greater demands for self-reliance with the need to move around several classrooms.

#### **2. An Unhealthy School Climate**

A poorly organised, malfunctioning school has a prevalent sense of despondency among students and staff and high rates of teacher and student absenteeism. Such schools are characterised by teachers routinely late to class and unsupervised students feeling vulnerable; cramped classrooms, overcrowding; poor physical condition of school buildings and grounds; high student-teacher ratios and insufficient teacher training on effective behaviour management. An unhealthy school climate contributes to academic failure, leading to a lack of school attachment, school drop-out, criminal offending and aggressive students' violent behaviour.

#### **3. Schools' Contribution to Academic Failure**

Children struggling academically are more likely to turn to crime than those performing adequately or well. The intellectual functioning of young offenders is at the low-average to average range with significant deficits in reading, maths, written and oral language compared to their non-offending peers. Contributions to academic failure, other than low intelligence, lack of student interest and behavioural problems, include ineffective and inappropriate teaching methods and a school personnel's belief students from lower socio-economic, disadvantaged families and minority groups have only limited potential and don't require consideration or extension. Examinations, testing and class grouping are biased, with children from lower socio-economic homes less likely to be placed in classes that will lead them to university.

#### **4. Anti-social Peer Relationships Formed**

Because they assemble together large numbers of at-risk youth, schools can become breeding grounds for the development of criminal offending, especially where there is little adult supervision. Both inside and outside the classroom, students develop social

## Is School A Factor In Youth Offending?

groups that have a significant influence on their performance and behaviours. Particularly at risk are children who exhibit verbally and physically aggressive behaviours. Once rejected, these children remain isolated from “normal” peers, even after interventions have been implemented to improve their social behaviour. This peer rejection deprives a child of socialising experiences they may obtain from pro-social peers and sets the stage for them to become involved with an antisocial peer group. This process of peer rejection spiralling to disruptive behaviours and youth offending begins in the primary school years and accelerates during the intermediate and high school years, becoming more serious, frequent and covert as the children mature. N.Z’s detention system, where students being punished for school misconduct are grouped together during lunch periods after school and on the occasional Saturday, can become breeding grounds for discontented, embittered and alienated students to mix with like-minded peers.

### 5. Negative Relationships between Students and Personnel

A teacher’s style, attitude and expectations can adversely affect students’ educational and social outcomes. Where the teacher–student relationship is characterised by high levels of conflicting interactions, a vicious cycle can be set in motion with an escalation in the student’s antisocial responses to teacher’s requests, a punitive reaction to this response from the teacher and an intensification of negative behaviour as a reply from the student. Instead of allowing that the child’s behaviours are escalating as a response to their treatment of the child, teachers are likely to blame the student’s challenging behaviours on their unwillingness to be cooperative or on the child’s dysfunctional upbringing. When teachers can’t cope with stress when working with difficult students, they react to minor problems with irritability, fear, counter-aggression and negative thinking, which escalates the frequency and severity of the child’s aggressive behaviours. This can be due to the teachers’ lack of knowledge about how to work with defiant students.

### 6. Mistreatment by School Personnel

Deliberate maltreatment involves punitive disciplinary strategies based on fear, intimidation, verbal assaults, sarcasm and ridicule, isolating a student from his or her peers, ignoring peer humiliation, sexual harassment, humiliating in front of peers related to their learning difficulties, calling them liars and criminals and personal attacks regarding their appearance, family and choice of friends. Unintentional maltreatment provides a low quantity and quality of human interaction and limited opportunities for students to develop self-worth. At the extreme end of teacher abuse is corporal punishment or confinement as a penalty for an offence, racism or other forms of prejudice directed at students already marginalised within the school setting.

### 7. School Policy Abuse

Senior management supported by their school board of trustees, can victimise students by using legitimised but inappropriate disciplinary practices to deter students’ behaviours. Intolerant, zero-tolerance policies such as school stand-downs, suspension, exclusion and early school exemptions provide opportunities for at-risk, alienated youth to associate, unsupervised with deviant peers. Zero-tolerance practices are only effective in stopping undesirable behaviour in school settings simply because the antisocial student is removed from the school grounds and transferred out to the community.

### RESEARCH AIM

It was the aim of this research study, through the stories of young people who have committed serious criminal offences, to better understand the role the school experience plays, if any, in the pathway to criminal offending.



Teachers greatly affect how students feel about school

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

My choice of strategy of inquiry is constructivist theory, based on my conviction we come to know what has happened partly in terms of what others reveal as their social experience through their stories; that knowledge is socially constructed. The research design centred on individual interviews with 25 young people held on “remand” or on “supervision with residence” at one of New Zealand’s three Child, Youth and Family residential youth justice facilities. Through conversations and informal interviews, supported by a pack of “memory-jogging” cards, volunteers were invited to share stories about their primary and secondary school experiences.

### Emergent Themes

The primary messages emanating from the young people’s stories were “I can’t do it”, “I don’t fit”, “I can’t sit and be quiet the way other kids can”, “I can’t survive in this system unless I self-medicate”, “In this school environment, it’s not safe to be me; it’s not me to sit, be quiet and do my work”. For many participants there was an overwhelming sense of unfairness, victimisation, frustration and a search for ways to get out of their school life-world. They felt having to attend school was imposed on them. They didn’t want to attend school; it was never their choice. They felt alienated from the school system and their pro-social peers. Many found learning difficult, especially towards the end of primary school. The majority were bored with classroom routine, behavioural expectations and used this to justify their antisocial, impulsive, aggressive behaviours. They had little desire to comply with teachers’ instructions and while there was an expectation other students should follow school rules, they didn’t accept the rules applied to themselves. Truancy, a symptom of their alienation was routine. Discipline, detentions, stand-downs, suspension and exclusions were common occurrences. But perhaps the most dominant theme was school personnel treated them unfairly.

### School Personnel

In general, the principal was someone they perceived deserving of their respect: someone they’d like to take an interest in them and their school achievements and whom they expected would treat them fairly. Even when the principal was applying zero tolerance, Jace perceived he had his interests at heart: “The principal told me to find another school because he didn’t want to expel me. Instead of expelling me he just let me go. He was just being polite. Rather than expelling me. Making my records look bad.” By treating them fairly young people meant listening to their explanation of an incident before determining they were at fault and taking appropriate punitive action not only against them but against others involved, whether they

were teachers or their peers. An exception to this was Terry, who felt his principal "targeted" him and others: "I didn't like the principal 'cause he didn't like me. I was always on his top ten bad ones." While most saw the principal as trying to be fair, the participants' perception of deputy principals was they were unfair, authoritarian and punitive: "Went to DP's office again and got suspended, my first three weeks I got suspended twice, I'd had enough and just walked out of school." (Alan) Almost uniformly they perceived the deputy principal didn't like them. Two young people explained: "Worst memory of school is my deputy principal. This was at intermediate. She's just a person everyone used to say was racist and that was about it. She used to always suspend me." (Ania) Unable to differentiate the role of school disciplinarian with the person, respondents' negative reaction to the deputy principal increased with the telling of each adverse encounter. Their feelings intensified when the young person sharing the story was Māori and the deputy principal wasn't.

#### Teachers

Participants' stories about their teachers could be separated into teachers they preferred and teachers they disliked. According to female participants, their preferred teacher was female, listened to their personal issues and concerns, offered mutual respect, was kind, sensitive, flexible and looked beyond their behaviour to see what was troubling them. Ania loved one of her teachers: "Oh, I loved her; she was the best teacher you could think of. She respected us in a way, if you gave her respect she'd respect you back and when we wanted to do programs and you was listening and that, you were like being all right at school, in class, she'd do what you asked her. I just liked her cause of that." Siara talked about two teachers she liked: one was in primary school, the other at intermediate. They shared a common language: "They related to us as if they were teenagers. They could talk to us like teenagers and like, if you get aggro, you know, they'll just give it back to you and understand what you're doing to them. It was easy to talk to them, like you could talk to them about anything, like boyfriends and stuff or anything about school and they were always there to listen." Secondary to their need for a nurturing teacher was a teacher with skills and techniques that enabled them to learn and made the effort to explain: "She always explained everything so you wouldn't get laughed at, she would explain it to the class and if you had a problem you'd put up your hand and she'd come and explain it properly." (Elle) In contrast, male participants' preferred the teacher would support them in the classroom and provide them with a sense of accomplishment in an environment that lacked conflict. Secondary to the teacher's ability to promote their learning, they appreciated someone who related to them as individuals, showed them respect, kindness, understanding and was flexible in their classroom management skills. Lee and Terry described their best teacher as

follows: "She was awesome. She was always easy going, understood what was on, that people needed time out, they could have time out. Yeah she taught pretty good. I passed, got good reports, passed all my exams, or whatever." "He'd let me push the boundaries as far as he wanted them to go, but other teachers wouldn't. As soon as I'd done something they'd just hop on it right away and give me detentions and stuff. But my English teacher was like, he'd let stuff go by and then tell me when to stop and when enough was enough." Wayne's story illustrates how the teacher may not know they're having a positive influence: "Best teacher. Just 4th form because all naughty boys went to his class 'cause he was a bit of a hard dude, but he wasn't, he was cool. Just a cool fella. If we didn't finish our work he'd let us finish it in our own time. Like take it home for homework or something. If we didn't finish it he'd help us out, tell us what to do. He was just too much. He probably didn't even know I liked him." The positive stories participants shared about their teachers were far exceeded by the negative stories, supporting evidence that teachers' style, attitude and expectations adversely affect students' educational and social outcomes. All but one of the participants reported negative relationship issues involving personal conflict with teachers. Poto saw teachers as people trying to do a difficult job: "I reckon all the teachers are just doing their job, like some classes I'll go in I'll be good, and like other people will try and the teacher is trying to say something and she's stressing out trying to take on the whole 30 students in the class. I don't know how they do it now, but those places I just blend in." For both genders, the fundamental characteristics of their worst teacher was one who used their position to hurt, harass, shame or humiliate them in front of their peers, punished them unfairly, harassed them for minor misdemeanours and perceived as being unable to teach: "She was this mean as teacher. Like you could be in a big assembly, right, and you're all sitting there, you're just telling your mates to move over, she'll shame you out in front of a hundred and something people that go to your school. You stand! Ow." (Ania) The only gender difference was when the girls talked about a teacher favouring other girls, or isolating them from their friends: "I didn't like the teacher cause she was bossy. She used to always put me with these people I didn't like. Made me sit with them and I wasn't allowed to sit with my mates because my friends are disruptive." (Sina) Other attributes of ineffective teachers identified by female participants included moodiness, being insensitive to their needs, focusing on their negative rather than positive qualities, being authoritarian and delivering boring, uninteresting lessons. Conversely, the boys expressed concern if the teacher focused attention on them in front of their



## Praxis Training April 16 to 18<sup>th</sup> 2012

Praxis is a network of practitioners in youth and community work. Lloyd Martin will be the facilitator for a three day group learning experience that provides strength based strategies for those working with challenging children and youth. For over 20 years, Lloyd and Anthea have shared their home in Porirua, Wellington with local young people and worked in their community as practitioners in outdoor education. Lloyd has written several books around youth work. He holds degrees in anthropology and education. If you are involved with mentoring families, groups of school children or youth in the community, this is the opportunity for you to train with other mentors facing similar issues and difficulties to yourself.

The charge for registration is \$20. Venue in Hawkes Bay TBA. To register for this group learning experience where you can develop abilities to disengage from adversarial encounters, connect with adult-wary youngsters, restore bonds of respect and create climates where young people can flourish, **contact Roger** by phone on **06 8706448** or by email at [info@sharingthecaring.org.nz](mailto:info@sharingthecaring.org.nz)

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mates; this was interpreted as being “picked on”. The boys disliked teachers they considered unhelpful, difficult to understand, were overly punitive, yelled or used excessive physical force to gain compliance. “She was an Indian, she couldn’t speak English properly and she couldn’t write, like we couldn’t understand her language and writing. Science was just a bit hard for me, too. It didn’t help with her being the science teacher.”(Terry) Several boys talked about corporal punishment: “We used to get a smack on the bottom with ah, this was the first time at school, smack on the bottom with a fly smacker. [She] used to smack us. It sat up on the computer.” (Lee) A few male participants shared stories indicative of subversive, physical aggression being used by teachers to gain compliance or punish troublesome behaviour: “At high school I was being real naughty one day, he grabbed my undies and wedgied me.” (Robbie) “I like PE, but this guy’s a psycho. One day he tried to strangle me. Because we’d just finished the beep test, we all had to do push-ups and I said no, I couldn’t be bothered and he grabbed me around my neck and tried to choke me.” According to participants, the fear of a teacher’s anger, lack of support from school management and the threat of ongoing punishment created a hostile environment that provoked their own aggressive response. The excessive use of what young people saw as management-condoned punishments, including being shouted at, harassed for misdemeanours, long periods spent in time out and zero-tolerance policies such as stand-downs, were traumatic for them, particularly the boys.

### Their Role in School

Friendships played a major role in the school life-world of participants and it became evident in their stories that rather than being rejected by pro-social peers and left with little alternative but to mix with and be negatively influenced by their antisocial peers, it was the participants who rejected their pro-social peers, seeking out friends who shared similar interests such as cigarette smoking, truanting, drinking alcohol and using drugs at school. These relationships with antisocial peers proved to be particularly toxic for female participants, who attached themselves to older or same-age boys at school, not as boyfriend and girlfriend but as role models – people they wanted to be like: “That’s where I got my cheeky mouth from, my intermediate boy mates”. (Siara) “I like basketball and rugby. Because in school I don’t hang around with girls. Cause I’m used to hanging around with heaps of boys.” (Sina) Sporting and

academic achievement at school has been identified as a protective factor for youth offending, primarily because success within the educational arena is considered to strengthen the attachment to school. Several of the young people achieved success in school sports: “I got quite a lot of awards from school, mostly for P.E. sports. I love sport. That’s my best. That’s my goal, to be a rugby player.”(Albert) However, like attachment to positive teachers and friendships with pro-social friends, participating in sports wasn’t sufficient to stop the young person from serious offending. This may be because participation and success in school sports is only a protective factor when connected with another component, such as a supportive home environment and a parent or parents who actively encourage pro-social activities. It is possible that academic rather than sporting achievement is a stronger protective factor against criminal offending. None of the participants reported gaining success in any external or significant school examinations and several connected underachieving academically and their behavioural problems at school, although there was confusion as to whether their behaviour caused them to underachieve or their lack of ability led to their antisocial behaviour: “When I nearly got kicked out of school they realised I couldn’t do the work. I had dyslexia or whatever they call it. Because I wasn’t doing work, I was getting into trouble at school.” (Nick) Some participants reported having learning

difficulties but most attributed their lack of academic success on a “disability”. Thom explained: “I don’t really like writing. I tried but it’s just something I can’t do. I think it’s just another one of my disabilities.” (Thom)

### Moral Reasoning

Blaming others rather than taking responsibility for their own behaviours permeated the participants’ stories. It was their perception they were victims of an unfair system and therefore justified in breaking school rules. All antisocial behaviours exhibited in school by participants had an explanation. For example, unlike bullying or physical aggression, fighting was just playing, done in self-defence or to maintain a place in the social hierarchy. Poto saw fighting at school as a leisure activity: “Lunch times. Oh I used to just play, just going off for games, or get into fights. Mostly fights or, lunch times I, missed those days. Got expelled cause I just, too much fighting.” Bullying was retaliation for perceived insults, or because they’d been bullied in the past, or their victims deserved it because of their diversity or relationship with teachers: “I used to pick on Chinese, um Indians because they’d get smart to me and they’d come to school like, wear this bandanna or something, on their head.” (Poto) “I just beat them up. Cause they’re ugly [or] because they’re a teacher’s pet, someone that licks the teacher’s bum.” (Ford) Physical aggression and assaults were blamed on their own anger and frustrations. Smoking,



Children seek out groups of like-minded friends

drinking alcohol and using drugs in school was acceptable because it was part of their "out-of-school" life-world; they resented the expectation they should act in a different way, be different people from who they were in their home setting: "When I was 10 I still kept taking [drugs] at school. I don't stop things when I go to school. I'm not like, I'm one person here and then I'm one person at school. I'm always the same person." (Georgie) Despite contrary evidence that taking drugs contributes to academic and behavioural problems, young people claimed it relaxed them, made them more compliant and better students in the classroom: "Sometimes when I was taking dope it made school better for me. It would calm me down and I'd just sit by myself, talk to no one and do my work. I'd rather get stoned than do my work and go in straight, because I'm all hyped." (Wayne) They saw vandalism of school property as a way of venting anger, communicating among like-minded adolescents or a form of social currency that provided the young person with an identity and status among their peers: "Tag to get famous, to make memories. Like if you go somewhere, you just take a nap there, then go out and people that have been here, you'll meet them and they'll go, 'Ohh, what's your name?' and we say our tag. Because every time we introduce our names by our tag and they go, 'Ahh, I've seen your tag,' like that." (Sina)

#### Their Ideal School

If the young people had power in the school, they'd primarily focus on supporting students who have difficulty with their learning. They'd achieve this by employing teachers whom the students can understand and respect, provide more meaningful subjects, offer more opportunities for success, put incentives in place to motivate the reluctant learner and alter the teaching styles of teachers so they're more compatible with the learning styles of struggling students. They'd encourage teachers to design more interesting lessons, allow students to work in groups, have more time to share with friends and put fun back into the classroom. Having established positive, inviting learning environments, some participants believe this would reduce behavioural problems in school, including the use of drugs. In response to the "magic wand" question, Nick became animated: "Oh, I'd do heaps. I'd change the classrooms, change the way the teachers teach, just always be there when someone's in trouble and tell them to keep on doing good things. I hope they'll do their best because I hate to see them stop their work and doing drugs at school." While recognising the need for a disciplinary process, they'd improve the detention system so it is fairer as well as more productive and meaningful. To reduce stealing and bullying in school they'd meet the economic needs of students, providing food at appropriate times and offering monetary incentives to reduce the effects of socio-economic inequality. They suggested reducing the cultural gap between family and school values by increasing the line of communication between home and school. Safety in school was a concern for some participants. Elle recommended the designation of "safe areas" within school grounds that are closely monitored by adults, not only during unsupervised lunch and interval breaks but for students who require, "time out" so they can calm down: "I would have an area for the handicaps and people that got picked on so they wouldn't get picked on and they'd be alright at school." The changes participants would make to their children's school were similar to what they'd implement for themselves. Because the majority want their children to experience success within the education system and perceive this to be achieved through effective staff, they'd focus on teachers. Teachers they'd select for their children would be kind, committed adults who are good role models, trustworthy, sensitive to their children's needs, have no preconceived prejudices and treat all students equally. They wanted teachers who offered diverse teaching styles that would complement their children's learning styles and who communicated in ways the children could understand.

#### DISCUSSION

Although a positive bond with a teacher can act as a protective factor for at-risk children there was no evidence to suggest attachment to a teacher reduced or even paused the antisocial behaviour

of the young person on the developmental trajectory towards criminal offending. The participants' stories indicated that the primary benefits of teacher attachment for the young person at high risk of offending was a temporary increase in self-esteem, a higher level of academic achievement than might otherwise have been mastered and positive stories of the school experience to share with their own children which might help them to make the transition into the school system. Many participants' memories of their school experience involved negative incidents with school personnel. Frequently punished for their behaviours, the young people perceived they were unfairly treated by individual teachers and the school's senior management team. It became apparent this sense of "unfairness" extended to the expectation they attend school. **Forced to be educated against their will, they were offered what to them were meaningless subjects that had no relevance to their real life-world.** The imposition of compulsory attendance was aggravated by a lack of academic success, having to mix with peers they couldn't relate to and having teachers they perceived had authority over them. These feelings of victimisation grew to become an energising force they used to fuel their escape from the compulsory school system, justifying their acts of non-compliance, verbal and physical aggression, truancy and use of illegal drugs. The school system, under-resourced and ill-equipped to tolerate severe, often aggressive behaviours that disrupt the learning process, endangers teachers and other students, applies zero-tolerance policies that include stand-downs, suspension, exclusion and expulsion. Freed from the obligation to attend school, the ejected students turn to their out-of-school community, rejoining other disenfranchised, antisocial peers and family. With no legitimate means to satisfy their needs, these youth, many of whom are already involved in criminal activity, continue on their pathway towards serious offending. It became apparent as I listened to their stories that the participants brought pre-existing risk factors into school with them. These included conflicting values and expectations between the home and school environment, poor parenting, historical physical/emotional abuse, family relationship problems, antisocial peer relationships and other out-of-school traumatic experiences. Many had been raised in lower socio-economic neighbourhoods and the majority, being Māori and second-generation Pacific people, carried negative effects of an "involuntary minority ethnic status". The cumulative effect of negative school experiences advance an already vulnerable young person towards truancy and school dropout, which have been identified as major risk factors for youth offending. Given the emotion demonstrated as participants told their stories, the effects of negative school experiences don't diminish with consequences or time but fester inside the young person, with each traumatic experience adding to existing feelings of resentment, frustration and anger. Repeated throughout their stories are feelings of boredom, unfairness, humiliation and favouritism; excessive use of physical force; being yelled at, harassed, misunderstood; and racism. As each injurious event is added to the student's portfolio of negative school experiences, the damage accumulates and feelings of hostility intensify until the student is completely alienated from the school system. It is this sense of alienation, sometimes accompanied by a final confrontation with an adult that gives the young person the opportunity to break the imposed umbilical cord between him or her and the compulsory school system. Some adolescents walk away from the educational system while others require a volatile altercation. If the ensuing explosive outburst doesn't result in the desired indefinite

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stand-down or exclusion, the student keeps repeating the process until it has the desired effect. I refer to this as the "tsunami effect".

### The "Tsunami Effect"

The most crucial wave of the "tsunami effect" is the foundation of critical risk factors the child brings to school: familial risk factors, low socio-economic status, involuntary minority ethnic status and association with criminally minded friends and associates. Entwined with pre-existing risk factors is the second wave: negative school experiences that fester, build up resentment, frustration and anger in the young person. These may include a negative transition into a new school; a detrimental, despondent school climate; academic failure with few opportunities to achieve success; anti-social friendships formed at school; negative student-teacher relationships; deliberate or unintentional mistreatment by school personnel and excessive use of punitive disciplinary practices. The "tsunami effect" isn't an invisible process: symptoms of the young person's alienation from the school system become apparent through their attitude towards school and school personnel and the problematic behaviours they display within the school setting such as persistent expressions of boredom and hostility towards teachers, increased truancy and substance abuse during school hours. The degree of a student's reaction to minor disciplinary consequences may be an indicator of their scale of alienation from school, as is the lengths they will go to avoid being apprehended when truanting from school. What became apparent through the young people's stories was the less they cared about being caught by school personnel, the greater their alienation from the school system. What was also revealed was the positive influence some teachers had on the participants' school experience. Teachers who took the time to explain things to them, who cared about their wellbeing, who spoke a common language and demonstrated a mutual respect were remembered with affection.

### CONCLUSION

The majority of participants exhibited severe, aggressive behaviours in the school setting and carried negative memories of their compulsory educational experience from an early age. Although there was no evidence to suggest the school experience influences a young person to offend, it is possible an accumulation of negative school experiences exacerbates pre-existing risk factors that place a vulnerable young person on the pathway to criminal offending. What also emerged was the unique opportunity schools provide to identify children most at risk of serious offending.

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**Dr. Alison Sutherland  
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## Ricken Patel Brings Global Authorities to Heel with a Click!

If public opinion is the new superpower, is Ricken Patel its prime minister? The 34-year-old Canadian is the founder of one of the world's biggest online communities, the campaigning network Avaaz (meaning voice in Farsi) which has seven million members. Fashioned in the citizen-politics spirit of MoveOn in the US and 38 Degrees in the UK, it galvanises public opinion online and uses it to influence those with power to implement change. While MoveOn and 38 Degrees focus on national issues, Patel and the Avaaz faithful want to fix the world.

When I meet Patel at his headquarters in Manhattan he is chewing over the language of a campaign e-mail. His computer pings incessantly with Skype alerts. In the three days I spent with him he takes dozens of calls from his internationally scattered team but also from royalty, diplomats, politicians, activists and non-governmental organisations looking for guidance on how to set up similar projects. Posters from campaigns decorate his office walls. One urges Robert Mugabe to recognise Morgan Tsvangirai as winner of the 2008 Zimbabwean election. Another shows Tony Blair alongside the caption "Even He Is Pulling Out/Block the Escalation in Iraq".

Looking up from his computer, Patel explains why the minutia of messaging is important. "There are two types of fatalism. The belief the world can't change and the belief you can't play a role in changing it. If in a few hundred words you produce a convincing counter-argument, people respond." The message he is pouring over asks for a show of solidarity with protesters in Egypt calling for Hosni Mubarak to step down. A sentence of the rallying call personifies the ethos of Avaaz: "There are moments when history is written not by the powerful, but by the people. This is one of them". The campaign aims to collect one million signatures and encourage members around the world to telephone their governments to demand they support Egyptian citizens quest for democracy. The campaign is also seeking donations to pay for satellite internet terminals to thwart attempts to shut down public communication channels.

The theory is such massive attention from the international community can reduce the potential for human rights abuses, encourage governments to do the right thing and keep open communication channels vital to the democracy movement. "Our goal is to support Egypt's protesters by showing that the world stands with them," Patel explains.

This rapidly employed, results-focused campaigning has made the pressure group, whose mission is to "Close the gap between the

world we have and the world most people want", one of the most important new voices on the global stage. It has members in all 192 UN countries, including Iran and China where the site is illegal. The UK has over 500,000 members making it the fifth most "Avaazie" nation after Brazil, France, Germany and the US. Desmond Tutu, Al Gore and Gordon Brown are fans. Rather than separate politicians into good and bad guys it "slams" them when they're judged wrong and supports them when they're right. Brown has been on the receiving end of both, yet still praises the group for "driving forward the idealism of the world".

In an era of issue-numbness how did the group earn such eminent cheerleaders and become one of the favourite meeting places for global netizens? "People with compassion and public spiritedness in their hearts were yearning for it," says Patel, a man described by his employees as a Mr Miyagi character. "It's like we put a call out saying 'Practical idealists of the world unite' and they have." This union has achieved impressive results, including upholding the EU ban on GM crops; preventing the introduction of a law to gag the media in Italy; halting an Uganda law that would sentence homosexuals to death; stopping the international whale-hunting ban from being overturned; helping Iranians to access news by keeping banned internet sites live during the 2009 election; pushing through a law in Brazil to block politicians convicted of corruption from running for office and bypassing the Burmese Government's block on international aid after Cyclone Nargis by depositing \$2 million of donations in a local businessman's account to pass to monks running the relief effort. "In terms of lives saved, that's one of my favourite campaigns," says Patel.

These victories have been achieved by collating petitions with vast numbers of signatures and then dropping them into inboxes of their targets. If this doesn't work

the organisation stages sit-ins, rallies, phone-ins and media friendly stunts such as taking a herd of cardboard pigs to the doors of the World Health Organisation to demand an investigation into links between swine flu and giant pig farms. It created a three mile human chain handshake from the Dalai Lama to doors of the Chinese Embassy in London to request dialogue between the parties. If such genteel acts are ignored, campaigns are honed into hard-hitting adverts on billboards, TV channels and in newspapers.

Patel assures me such bare-knuckle tactics are employed only when an individual or organisation refuses to negotiate. For example, when the Hilton hotel group failed to act on a petition requesting it introduce a scheme to help staff identify guests trapped in the sex trade, it was given four days to come good, otherwise adverts highlighting its inaction would be run in the chief executive's hometown newspaper. Hilton signed up. Some might see this as blackmail but for others it's an efficient way of forcing corporations to put people before profit and is the quintessence of the group's "the world in action" motto. "Hotels are ground zero for the rape trade," says Patel. "Now 80,000 eyes and ears [Hilton employees] will be trained to spot it. I'm not going to lose any sleep over how that was achieved."

Patel regards the Internet as a tool that allows people, whatever their agenda, to do things they've always done but faster and on a larger scale. "To reduce our actions down to clicking is silly. It's what happens after the clicks - how we use that support - that's what brings about incredible change." For all his potential foes Patel has no security. He doesn't feel his job puts him at risk, though a group opposing female genital mutilation did threaten violence unless he got behind their campaign. But he's concerned there may

## Reintegrating Women

Traditionally within criminology, research has been gender blind, often focussing on male offenders. Women have been put in the "too hard" basket due to the much smaller proportion of females processed through the Criminal Justice System, or they've tended to be categorised as evil misfits, beyond help. The latter is due to what feminist researchers term double jeopardy, whereby women who offend are not only stigmatised for the criminal act they commit, but also for being women - mothers and wives who have defied social expectations of femininity.

If we look at New Zealand today, the most recent September 30<sup>th</sup> prison snapshot showed female offenders to contribute to 6.3% of the total prison population. This was made up of 412 sentenced and 103 remanded incarcerated women housed within the three female prisons in NZ: Auckland women's correctional facility, Arohata women's prison in Wellington and Christchurch women's correctional facility. The female prisoner reconviction rate sits at around 36% but increases to 54% for repeat offenders.

Of these, 117 women are housed at Arohata women's prison. This is the female facility in which most women from Napier are held. Currently there are 20 sentenced and 6 remanded females from the Napier, Hastings area incarcerated in NZ. 17 of these are serving sentences at



Arohata. These sentences range from a few months to several years. These numbers often tend to fluctuate quite significantly at each quarterly snapshot due to the number of women sentenced to short prison sentences. Although there has not been a significant amount of research conducted in NZ on female offender populations, what we do know is that female prisoners overwhelming share a number of commonalities which have shaped their lives prior to prison and while in prison. Consistently, research produces evidence

## Ricken Patel Brings Global Authorities to Heel with a Click!

be risks ahead. If Avaaz is to make a real impact against the international rape trade, then the main benefactors, organised crime cartels, will take a hit.

Although Patel steers the ship, big decisions are made by the community. An annual poll of 10,000 members guides what issues are focused on. Before a campaign goes live it's tested to gauge uptake and campaigns are tweaked or dropped according to majority rule. This January all aspects of the organisation - staff salaries, office rental, campaign costs - became 100% member funded. These costs were previously covered by a start-up fund raised from various foundations on the understanding they had no influence over the group. "That was vital to remaining true to the global citizenship model," says Patel. "People lead, not members of a board and that's why it works. People aren't bogged down with bureaucracy. They see the big picture and want what's best for all of us. That's what makes it an amazing powerful community. My role in it is an honour and a tremendous responsibility."

Patel has probably been preparing for this role all his life. Born in Edmonton, Canada, to a Russian-English mother and a South African-born Indian father it's no surprise his affinity is with a global rather than national idea of citizenship. Aged 3, he knew about the Cold War, the structure of the human cell and by 6 was striking up conversations about colonialism. He went to school on a Native Indian Reservation where he endured bullying but, having read about the communities' plight, claims

to have felt empathy with his persecutors.

"I've always felt solidarity with people suffering injustice," he says. "My theory is my Mum gave me so much love I've always had extra to give."

He went to Oxford to study Politics, Philosophy, Economics and it's there his passion for activism was born. He played a central role in the 1998 tuition fee protests, drafting an alternative graduate tax plan. At Harvard, where he took his Masters in Public Policy, he joined the living wage campaign for the institute's workers, a formative experience that saw the first on-campus occupations since 1969 and gained support from national press, local congressmen and even the wife of the University's president. For four years he worked in war torn nations such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, Sudan and Afghanistan. He lived locally with families and says that through jobs for the International Crisis Group he learnt how to bring rebel forces to the negotiation table, monitor elections (covertly), restore public faith in once corrupt political systems and spot when foreign forces were being manipulated. After returning to the US he volunteered for Move On, which voiced opposition to the Bush administration's attempt to marry support of war to the Patriot Act. Through this experience he grasped the power of organising public opinion online. His travels had already convinced him nations were more united than divided on issues that really mattered and so his idea for a global advocacy

citizenship was born.

Despite campaigning against and witnessing the shortfalls of the institutions of formal politics, Patel has never lost faith in them. If the UN council were an elected body he'd be "excited" to run for a seat and he regards Black Block and other disaffected youth libertarian movements that use violence to express disenchantment with the status quo as tragic. "Refusing to engage in politics declares victory to all the unscrupulous forces trying to use it for their own ends," he says. His mission is to reform the present system into an injustice-free, alpha version of itself. But if the path to this utopian land is to be laid by governments, why choose advocacy over politics? "There's massive consensus on human rights, poverty, corruption, the environment and finding diplomatic ends for war. What's lacking is political will to implement these things. The only way to achieve that will is if a global community pushes for it."

So if that community is Avaaz, does that make you the prime minister of the new superpower of public opinion? He looks aghast. "No, more like its steward."

**Original article by**

**Sarah Bentley**

**from The Times UK,**

**February 9th. 2011**

## Reintegrating Women

to show female pathways to criminality as contextualised by lives which have been subjected to victimisation and abuse, alongside experiencing unstable family homes, poverty and poor education. Furthermore women are also more commonly the primary or sole caregivers of children showing not only the lives of women are affected but also that of children. These issues are often then exacerbated when women are incarcerated due to the loss of connection with the outside world, the geographical positioning of female prisons and the inability of prison institutions to be able to deal with and address gender specific problems.

The problems mentioned along with the previously identified stigmatised label of 'criminal woman' create a number of struggles for offenders upon release. These can

include but are not limited to the inability to find stable employment or housing and difficulties that arise around child custody and family relationships.

A study conducted in the United States by Beth Richie uncovered a number of key issues that women face when re-entering the community. These included problems accessing treatment for substance abuse problems, health care, mental health issues, violence prevention, education and employment services, safe, secure and affordable housing and child advocacy and family reunification. Another important note is cultural factors may further problematise successful reintegration. This is significant to the research as Maori women make up around 60% of the female prisoner population, with Pacific Island women also greatly over-represented. This percentage then increases to 77% when looking at women from Napier.

## Reintegrating Women

Aside from just asking the question 'how do women transition from prison back to the community' there are a few sub questions that interviews must develop around. These are:

- What needs do women, released from prison, have?
- What skills, if any, did women learn/gain in prison to help them on release? (E.g. NZQA qualifications, attend drug and alcohol service, engaged with Māori programmes, reached goals of sentence plans, coping strategies etc).
- What services/ assistance have women received on their release from prison?
- What factors have assisted, or hindered, women to successfully transition from prison into the community?

This research is an opportunity to yield helpful insights for Napier and New Zealand to produce positive strategies, services and provisions for women being released from prison. Together the Napier community can show the rest of the country the way to move forward and create positive change which will not only help women, but also the future offenders of whom women are the mothers.



### Community projects aid reintegration

**Hannah Bentley holds an Honours degree in Criminology and is the first recipient of the Napier Pilot City Trust research grant to conduct research with women offenders based at the John Robson Collection, Napier Library**

## Crime in the neighbourhood: measuring public perceptions of crime and disorder

### **The Research**

The research project consisted of two main components. The first was a survey of residents in four case-study communities in the North Island: Murrays Bay (North Shore), Otahuhu (South Auckland), Westown (New Plymouth) and Havelock North (Hawkes Bay). The second, and the source of our qualitative data, was a series of follow-up focus discussion groups in each of the four areas.

The case study communities were selected using three main criteria: socio-economic profile (median income), demographic profile (age, gender & ethnicity), and police recorded crime rate. The aim was to get a mix of high and low crime areas, high and low socio-economic profiles and at least one area with a diverse ethnic composition (Otahuhu) to contrast with the predominantly European make up of the other communities.

In total, 5000 survey questionnaires were distributed to households in Havelock North (1000), Murrays Bay (1000), Westown (1000) and Otahuhu (2000). Almost 1500 completed surveys were returned for a response rate of around 30%. Following an initial analysis of the survey data two

follow-up focus group discussions were held in each study area and involved a total 61 self-selected volunteers.

Respondents were asked about perceived trends in crime, relative to other social and economic issues, to compare their local crime trends to other communities, to rate the seriousness of crime in their local neighbourhood and whether local crime problems were escalating. There followed a similar series of questions about the severity and trends in crime on a national scale. Respondents were asked to rate local and national crime problems relative to other neighbourhoods and other social and economic concerns, so that local crime issues would be considered in context rather than in isolation.

### **The Survey Findings**

Overall, in stark contrast to what we often hear from politicians and read in the newspapers, it quickly became apparent that communities are well informed about local crime issues and have a sophisticated understanding of them: One that was often at odds with the prevailing political rhetoric and media portrayals of crime.

Contrary to the ways in which 'the community' and its attitudes toward crime are typically represented, it was both surprising and refreshing to discover the majority of participants understood crime in proportion to its actual significance and in context.

Set against political and media claims that citizens are particularly fearful, anxious or angry about crime we found that a substantial proportion did not think crime was a serious problem in their own communities. In Havelock North, for example, a clear majority (69.4%) of respondents 'disagreed' that crime was a serious problem compared with other areas and issues. Across all four areas 63% of respondents disagreed that crime was a serious local problem.

In the two areas with high levels of recorded offences (Otahuhu and Westown) respondents were understandably more likely to 'agree' that crime was a serious problem. But even accounting for their higher rate of recorded crime almost a quarter of Otahuhu respondents, and more than 60% of Westown respondents, still 'disagreed' that crime was a serious local problem.

Immediately, then, we have to question the popular conception that

## Crime in the neighbourhood

the public are universally fearful and anxious about crime. When compared with the range of other problems faced by communities most thought that crime was not worthy of the disproportionate level of attention it receives in politics and the media.

A very different picture emerged when respondents were asked about crime in New Zealand as a whole and the majority of respondents (80%) agreed that crime is a serious issue. Local crime problems were regarded as less serious and less extensive than national trends. Even in the high-crime areas, crime was regarded as a more serious problem nationally than it was locally.

The political and media messages the public often receive is that crime is a continually rising problem even though aggregate crime rates have consistently trended downwards since the mid-90s. This research found that across all four study areas less than a quarter of respondents (24.2%) agreed that crime was rising in their neighbourhood. Again, even in the high crime areas, only a minority agreed crime was an increasing problem in their locality compared with other areas.

It's clear, then, that respondents had quite different perspectives of crime in their own localities compared with nation-wide. The explanation for this discrepancy lay in the different conceptual frameworks employed by respondents and that they drew on different sources of information when evaluating local and national problems. Perceptions of

neighbourhood crime were based on interactions with friends, neighbours, engagement with the community and on detailed knowledge of local geography. National crime problems were almost exclusively informed by news media coverage.

It's interesting too that gender appeared to make little difference to perceptions of local or national trends and both men and women had very similar perceptions of both local and national crime. In terms of age, the youngest age cohort (16–24 years) were the most likely to disagree that crime was increasing in the neighbourhood (77.8%). The group most likely to agree that crime was increasing in the neighbourhood were those aged 25–34 years (24%). This is notable because it contradicts the claim that older people are most likely to see crime as an increasing problem. Generally speaking, then, all age groups and both men and women shared similar perceptions and all cohorts were considerably more likely to agree that crime was a more serious and escalating problem across the country as a whole than it was locally.

### The Focus Groups

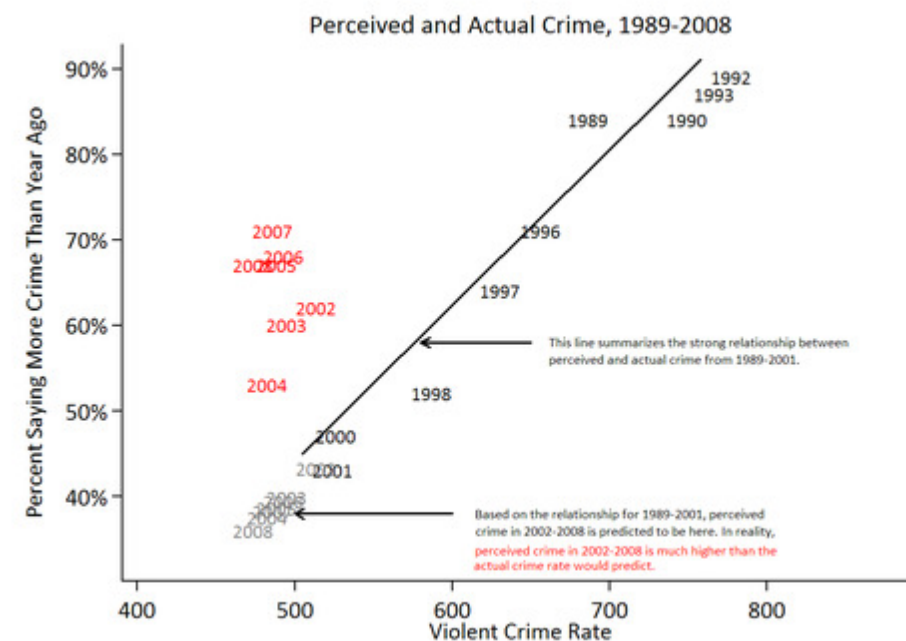
In the follow up discussions, local crime problems were typically discussed in ways that were highly nuanced, complex and conditional. This is, in itself, something of a corrective to much of the prevailing political rhetoric which presents law and order in stark and very certain terms. The focus groups revealed a basic contradiction between populist discourse

about crime and the ways in which crime is actually conceived and discussed by those involved in our research.

The discussions were characterised by a number of common features and similar perspectives. It was common for participants to challenge and debate key terms and concepts such as what was meant by 'serious', 'crime' and 'community'. In debating the meaning and extent of crime, respondents differentiated serious offending from more trivial or nuisance type behaviour, crime was not regarded as some monolithic concept. It was acknowledged that serious crime sometimes occurred but participants suggested it was the petty forms and nuisance behaviours that more often characterised the local experience.

Participants in all areas also differentiated problems associated with young people socialising in public spaces and the challenges posed by more insidious and serious crime. In considering crime in the local community and how the community might be defined, it was often suggested that crime was associated not with their own communities *per se* but with bordering localities or with outsiders visiting their community. When discussion turned to neighbourhood crime problems that did cause concern participants often stressed their very localised nature and that these problems were at odds with the general character of the community. There was thus a tendency to discuss local geographies of crime and disorder in fine grained detail. The discussion centred on specific venues or locations, a particular street, park, beach or bars, during particular times of the day or night or certain periods of the year. These locations were also often associated with neglect and deterioration and thus concern about crime was often conflated with other problems.

Given crime was generally not regarded as a serious or rising problem in these communities, but was across the country, it begged the question: if not here, then where? In every case respondents cited South Auckland. South Auckland was also cited by the Otahuhu groups but they referred to Otara, Mangere and Manurewa. Other groups often cited Christchurch and associated it with violent crime, youth offending and 'boy racers'. Others cited Wellington. When we asked why these



places participants pointed to the news media as their primary source of information about things beyond their own experience including crime.

Crime was sometimes recognised as a feature of neighbourhood life but it wasn't so remarkable that it was central to their mental maps of the community. Often participants didn't even use the language of crime or disorder when considering these issues but were instead framed as social problems related to poverty, lack of facilities, run-down and neglected public spaces and minor nuisance behaviour associated with young people. Participants thus made knowledgeable connections between crime and other social and economic problems. In fact crime was often regarded as a by-product of problems such as unemployment, under-employment, alcohol and drug abuse and the lack of leisure-time activities and spaces for young people. An unexpected feature of the discussions was that punitive attitudes toward offenders were very often absent. This is particularly notable since participants were drawn from the electoral register, the same people invoked by political rhetoric about the need for tougher responses to criminals.

Communities presented a much more complex and less punitive understanding than is often assumed. Maintaining a tough on crime approach may therefore actually misrepresent the very public opinion that politicians claim to be representing.

Communities wanted to avoid the counter-productive and very expensive criminal justice response such as boot camps, more frequent use of prison and harsher punishments. In relation to youth offending, the source of one of our most enduring moral panics, participants were more likely to suggest a tolerant, even sympathetic response. Communities were more interested in addressing and resolving those wider social and economic problems out of which crime often springs.

**This presentation was given by  
Dr Trevor Bradley,  
Social & Cultural Studies School,  
Victoria University as part of the  
John Robson Collection Lectures  
Napier library 30th Nov. 2011**



## Rangatahi Court Launch

Te Arawa Rangatahi Court will begin sitting in February at Taharangi Marae. It joins the ranks of Rangatahi courts as the tenth in line, and will be presided over by Judge Louis Bidois, who is a Tauranga-based Judge of Te Arawa descent and who worked as a criminal lawyer in Rotorua before being appointed to the bench in 2002.

Young people who admit a charge in the Rotorua Youth Court will have the opportunity to have their Family Group Conference plan monitored on the Rangatahi Court on Taharangi Marae (with some exceptions – for example, if the victim disagrees with this). This option will be available to both Maori and non-Maori offenders. A Maori Youth Court Judge will preside over each hearing, alongside kaumatua and kuia from the community. Te Arawa protocol will be followed at all times throughout the hearing. The young person and his/her family may also be assisted by a lay advocate, a (non-legally trained) representative appointed by the Court to ensure the Court is made aware of all cultural matters relevant to the proceedings and representing the interests of the young person's whanau to the extent those interests are not otherwise represented.

### The Ceremony

The launch of Rotorua's Rangatahi Court was held on Te Ao Marama marae and presided over by Reverend Tom Poata. A striking element of the ceremony was the obvious commitment to and belief in, the initiative from youth justice professionals from the local community. Several of the ceremony's speakers were professionals with a link to, or who work in, Rotorua.

Child Youth and Family Youth Justice Social Worker Chantelle Walker, who works in Rotorua, spoke of the impact

“It is disheartening to see that so many of our rangatahi don't know who they are or where they come from, its sad to know that they feel more connected to their bros and the colour of their caps then they do to the world around them. They are yearning to feel connected to someone, something, somewhere, this is evidenced by the relationships they have with one another and the offending they commit together. Our rangatahi could achieve this sense of belonging and connectedness through their culture by knowing who they are and where they come from, and by having more of an understanding of tikanga and realizing the potential within te ao maori and this is where I believe Te Kooti Rangatahi will be of benefit to our rohe, it is an attempt to use the traditional values of tikanga Maori.”

*- Chantelle Walker, Child Youth and Family Youth Justice Social Worker, Opening Ceremony Speech*

that a marae based court would have for young people in fulfilling the potential she sees on a daily basis. Judge Louis Bidois reflected on the way in which the Rangatahi Court is able to engage whanau, and the impact of this. He gave the powerful example of a young person who had committed multiple offences and been placed in several different placements. It was having his case heard on a marae, however, which brought his koro (grandfather), a key player in his life, along to the proceedings.



**Taharangi Marae, the location of Te Kooti Ranga-tahi o Te Arawa**



### Art Prevents Court Appearances

Views shared in this newsletter don't represent the beliefs of all MAP members but are offered as an aid to ongoing enlightenment!

WE'RE ON THE WEB!

[sharingthecaring.org.nz](http://sharingthecaring.org.nz)

[napierpilotcity.org.nz](http://napierpilotcity.org.nz)

## Rangatahi Court Launch

Several speakers such as New Zealand Police Superintendent Wally Haumaha and Judge Becroft noted the urgent need to create better criminal justice outcomes for Maori. Many reflected on the unacceptable nature of the statistics for Maori in the criminal justice system, and in particular the disparity between the number of young Maori in the population as compared to the number before the courts and in residences.

The background to, and procedure of, the Rangatahi Courts were ably explained by Wendy Robertson and Warren Morgan of the Rotorua District Court. Tribute was paid by them to the Maori judges who have been instru-

## What is the Kaupapa of MAP?

"Movement For Alternatives To Prisons" (MAP) has been operating for over thirty years. MAP is an independent organisation with no party, political or religious alignment. The movement seeks the adoption of measures which will treat offenders in a manner more worthy of human beings. The purpose is to raise the consciousness of people with how effective changes to present penal policies can improve troubled lives and replace imprisonment with positive alternatives. The members served come from a wide range of different backgrounds including ex-prisoners, criminologists, lawyers, volunteer helpers, community workers, youth workers, social workers and citizens concerned with social justice issues. These people encourage transformative justice practices, support neighbourhood law offices, emphasise prevention, divert offenders from the Court system, promote law changes and support mentoring initiatives to keep rangatahi out of crime.

The MAP newsletter is available within and outside New Zealand and there are committed members from throughout the world who know from social scientific research and reflective study that prisons wherever they be situated, constitute a failure industry and are based on the public's desire for revenge and retribution rather than providing workable habilitation opportunities to assist offenders with reintegration into the community.

mental in providing the rangatahi court service since 2008. Speakers also paid tribute to the many people who have played a role in opening the Court in Rotorua, including special mention of Judge Taumaunu, who acts as the liaison Judge for Rangatahi Courts, and Judge Bidois for his active involvement.

It was altogether a truly moving ceremony that reflected the clear will of the community to undertake to provide this service and we wish them all the very best for the work ahead in the year 2012.

**Source: "Court In The Act" Issue No 57 with appreciation to Judge Becroft from the Youth Court of NZ**

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TO ALL OUR READERS:

**MERRY  
CHRISTMAS**

AND A

**HAPPY NEW  
YEAR!**