

“Court in the Act” Police Youth Aid

A newsletter co-ordinated by the Principal Youth Court Judge for the Youth Justice Community

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50 new Police Youth Services officers and 3 new head office staff

From an announcement by the Commissioner of Police, Howard Broad

Police Youth Aid’s diversion and alternative action programme is one of the twin pillars (with family group conferences run by Child Youth and Family youth justice co-ordinators) on which the whole of the Zealand youth justice system stands.

Judge Andrew Becroft
Principal Youth Court Judge for
New Zealand

The Commissioner of Police has announced funding for 50 new Police Youth Services staff.

The 50 new officers will be stationed throughout the country, and work in a variety of Police Youth Services roles. The majority will be allocated to Youth Aid roles, but others will be working in Police Youth Development and Police Youth Education, as well as initiatives such as ‘Cops In Schools’. Selection processes will begin almost immediately.

The 3 new head office staff will work in:

- policing development (with a focus on training and professional development),
- business analysis, research and development, and project work,
- providing support to managing youth development programmes, community partnerships and contract management, as well as developing evidence-based interventions and providing advisory and programme support to district staff.

Police Youth Services National Co-ordinator Superintendent Bill Harrison says the addition of 50



Superintendent Bill Harrison

new officers is the most significant investment in Police services to youth in a very long time. He says the Commissioner had identified that Police Youth Services needed extra resources, in particular, so that Youth Aid would be better positioned to deal with changes in the patterns of youth offending, as well as changes in population.

Bill Harrison says the 50 new frontline staff will be recruited from experienced officers, and will add to the 200 existing Youth Aid staff, as well as the Police’s 250 Community Constables, who also have a role with youth. Superintendent Harrison says the new staff will be stationed throughout the country, because all districts are grappling with youth offending, despite each having its own special issues.

A pillar of the system

When asked about the place of Police Youth Aid (PYA) in the wider picture of the New Zealand youth justice system, Bill Harrison acknowledges that Police Youth Aid have a huge responsibility as a pillar of the system. He accepts, and relishes the opportunity to ensure that Police live up to the challenge of dealing with the majority of the country’s youth offending..

Bill Harrison also acknowledges that Police can’t tackle youth offending alone. He says that a collaborative approach is vital, and pays tribute to the way Police and the Department of Child Youth and Family work together on service delivery and training.

At the front end of youth offending, Superintendent Harrison says the challenge is “very personal”. He says that nearly all of the most serious youth offending

Police and Youth

Police run three separate but related programmes dealing with children and young people.

Police Youth Aid (PYA)

There are 200 specialist frontline Police Youth Aid (PYA) officers spread throughout New Zealand.

PYA work with both children (10-13 yrs) and young people (14-16 yrs) who offend, or are at risk of offending, and may be in need of care and protection.

PYA strive to keep young people out of the formal court system, while, at the same time, making them accountable for their offending. Officers work with young people, their families, communities, and local youth workers to provide interventions that address the reasons for the young person’s offending, as well as repairing any harm done to others.

Because PYA officers are trained in the application of the, sometimes complex, provisions of the Children, Young persons, and Their Families Act, they are also an expert resource for the other frontline police officers, who may have to arrest or question young people.

PYA officers use a Risk Screening Model to assess the needs of child and youth offenders, and a risk screening tool based on that model to help develop targeted interventions that best address the needs of the most serious, or repeat young offenders.

Of the approximately 30,000 offences committed by young people in 2006, 38.7% were dealt with by PYA alternative action plans. A further 23.2% were warned or cautioned, and

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Principal Youth Court Judge very encouraged by new Police Youth Services staff

Principal Youth Court Judge Andrew Becroft says he is very excited and very encouraged by this announcement. The 25% increase in Youth Aid officers is the single most significant increase in the history of Police Youth Aid. The previous increase

of 20 officers in 2005 barely kept pace with the increase in the youth population, according to the Judge. In reality it was not an increase at all.

Judge Becroft commented that NZ Police Youth Aid provide a world leading police response to offending by young people. Police Youth Aid is a shining light, and a cornerstone of the NZ youth justice system. Without Police commitment to programmes of alternative action, and diversion, the youth justice system would “grind to a halt” he said.

As a note of caution, Judge Becroft also said that it was his respectful view that work still needed to be done on optimal average case loads for Youth Aid officers. While the increase in officer numbers was welcome, there was still a gap in our knowledge about exactly how many staff are actually required. There needs to be, at least, a crude formula developed to inform Police managers about what is an appropriate level of workload for each officer, he said. □

The 12 year old burglar is a very high risk individual, whereas a 12 year old shoplifter isn't — unless they repeat the offending.

Inspector Chris Graveson
TenOne 29 February 2008

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comes from a pool of 300 families. “We know who they are, what they need, and what to do about it” he says.

Bill Harrison admits that Police could do better in the context of the Youth Court. Even though both institutions have “worked well together over many years”, he says that Police have the opportunity to do court work with more rigour, be better advocates, and better represent victims.

Victims

Harrison says Police are the only tangible way that victims' voices can be heard within the justice system, and Police need to champion victims' needs, and make sure those needs are taken into account.

Bill Harrison also highlights the importance of issues surrounding victims who are also children or young people. These victims are the most vulnerable to abuse, he says, and can grow up to become offenders themselves. He says New Zealand needs a much better standard of victimology—the study of victims of crime.

As an example of the level of victimisation amongst young people, Bill Harrison tells of his staff receiving “dozens of disclosures” from students following the delivery of ‘Keeping Ourselves Safe’ programmes in schools by Police Youth Education officers. □

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6.1% were sent to an intention-to-charge family group conference. 28.7% ended up as prosecutions in court*.

* Source: Jin Chong, Youth Justice Statistics in NZ 1992–2006, published by the Ministry of Justice.

Police Youth Education

Police Youth Education officers work in schools and other learning environments to deliver community safety and crime prevention programmes to children and young people.

Youth Education Service programmes are designed to help young people make sensible decisions concerning their own and other's safety, as well as understanding more about the consequences of offending, and how people are victimised.

Youth Development

Police Youth Development officers and non-sworn case workers offer intensive interventions to recidivist young offenders. These interventions can involve mentoring, as well as other community-based initiatives that provide wrap around services to the families of young offenders.

Youth Development interventions recognise that, to be effective, services must be comprehensive, co-ordinated, and long lasting. As the National Youth Policing Plan says “prevention is not a one-off inoculation”. □

Report shows Police diversion works

Key findings from a recent report written by Kaye McLaren (Victoria University of Wellington's Crime and Justice Research Centre) and edited by Dr Melanie Atkinson (Police Youth Services Group). The report drew on large amounts of research from New Zealand and overseas.

Police work works to reduce youth offending

Police work works. This is one of the key messages from the research. When it is done well Police warnings and diversion (Alternative Action) can be effective in reducing crime and make a positive difference for children and young people who offend. Part of the reason for this is probably that approaches that work outside the formal Youth Court system appear most effective. So Police work works in part because it provides an alternative to formal processing through court.

It works for all kinds of children and young people

Police warnings and diversion work for all kinds of children and young people, including the toughest. Police work is particularly effective with girls, lower risk cases and children under 13 years of age. Children and young people with a high risk of re-offending need not only alternative action meetings but also comprehensive plans and a lot of outside input to come right. Children, young people and victims also tend to be more satisfied with processes such as alternative action than they are when they have contact with the formal court system.

Good intel leads to good decisions

One of the most important foundations for good outcomes from Police work is having good intelligence. This means knowing which children and young people are the most dangerous, who is most likely to get in trouble again, and who needs the most input to turn around. To get this knowledge, Police need to do a brief screen for risk level so they know who is at high, medium or low risk of future offending. This tells them where to go from there in terms of what they do with the young person, and how much time and effort they put in. The other kind of information which is vitally important is knowing exactly what is leading this young person to offend. To find this out a good needs assessment process is needed. But not for all children and young people. It is needed most for high risk children and young people, those at greatest risk of dangerous and chronic offending. Next in line for an assessment of needs are the medium risk kids, while low risk kids don't require one at all. Using assessment tools is not the only form of good information- visits

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to homes and victims can also be a useful source of information, along with cultural assessment where relevant.

Less is more for children and young people at low risk of offending

The reason why low risk children and young people are less in need of assessment is that they seem to do just fine with very little input. A warning or an alternative action meeting with a very simple plan focussing on deeds rather than needs seems to be all they require to come right. For some, just the shame of being brought home by the Police might be enough. What DOESN'T work for low risk children and young people is doing too much with them, and letting them progress too far through the formal youth justice system. In the case of these children and young people, who commit less serious and fewer crimes and have few or no needs, it appears that the best thing the Police can do is make them accountable, then siphon them out of the system as quickly as possible.

High risk children and young people need more to come right

High risk cases – those youth at risk of long careers of chronic and dangerous offending – are a different story. Like low risk children and young people, they do better when they are dealt with outside the formal court system as much as possible. But unlike the lower risk cases they need a LOT of input from Police and other agencies to come right. For these young people an Alternative Action meeting is a must, with a plan that not only addresses deeds but does a great deal to address needs. Not just any needs, but particularly those needs that we know directly contribute to offending. Assessment of cultural needs is also indicated for high risk young people to make sure that plans are tailored to fall within their 'cultural comfort zone' and therefore more likely to be complied with. For those with a moderate risk of offending, or who start coming to notice as teens, the need for assessment and input falls

somewhere between very little and a lot.

Get children and young people and families on board for better results

Getting young people and their families on board with Police plans seems important in making them work. While not essential, having family buy-in and cooperation from the young person does seem to make the whole process more effective. One way of doing this is to visit families and get their input. Setting goals in partnership with families and young people can also help engage them. Relating to families in ways that they feel comfortable with – including showing sensitivity about cultural matters – can also help get them on board with the Alternative Action process.

Young people need to make amends for their wrongdoing

One thing that definitely works in reducing offending is making sure that young people do something to make up for the wrong they have done. The effects on offending are modest but significant. Making amends is therefore an essential part of any plan. For young people with a lower risk of future offending, making amends by doing community work or writing an apology can be enough in itself to stop them coming back to notice. Care needs to be taken with community work that it does not provide an opportunity for groups of young people to get together and plan crimes, or influence each other towards further offending, which means either very careful supervision or arranging individual placements. Paying a sum of money to the victim as reparation is also effective, although paying money to a charity does not seem to work as well. For those with a medium to high risk of re-offending, more is needed. But whatever their risk level, young people need to get a clear message that what they have done is not right and they must make up for it in some way. Meeting the victim of the crime and apologising in person is part of making amends, but only where

the victim feels able to cope with such a meeting.

Good police plans are the key

When it comes to police diversion, the heart of what works is a good Alternative Action plan. This sets out what the young person must do to address the consequences of their deeds – such as community work or reparation. For those assessed as having a moderate to high risk of future offending, it also sets out how their needs will be met. The focus here is on the needs that are directly contributing to offending. Unless these needs are addressed, there will only be a very modest reduction in offending, if any. If they are addressed well, the impact on crime is proven to be much greater. So a good police plan for these groups will outline what the needs are and how they are to be met, usually through referral to services of other agencies. It will also give an indication of just how much input a young person needs to be turned around, in terms of hours, weeks, months etc.

Plans seem to work best when everyone involved – victim, child or young person, family, Police – agrees on what should be in it. They are also more likely to be effective when they set out consequences for actions. These include negative consequences for doing the wrong thing, or not doing what the youth agrees to. Including positive consequences for addressing needs is also important. If linking pocket money to school attendance makes going to school more likely, it's well worth doing. However, it would be inappropriate to include positive consequences for making amends, as this is something that the young person should do to make up for their wrong doing without being rewarded for it.

Give plans support to make sure they work

Good plans are essential, but even a good plan falls over if it doesn't get support. This means that someone needs to take responsibility for monitoring the plan to make sure the young

person does what is in it. The best plan in the world can't work if the young person does little or none of it. The good news is that plans that are developed through restorative justice processes like Police Alternative Action seem to get higher compliance from youth than plans that come through more formal channels, such as Youth Court.

Staff do make a difference

Having good staff is important to making a positive difference to offending by young people. Not just anyone is effective in this area. Good Police Youth Aid officers are firm but fair, skilful communicators, competent and good role models of positive, law-abiding values and behaviour. These are the staff qualities most linked with reduced offending by youth. While some of these qualities you either have or you don't, good staff training does make a difference to impact on offending. This includes good initial training and regular follow-up training.

Staff need backup to do their best

Like plans, staff need support so they don't fall over. This includes regular supervision from competent people who are familiar with 'what works' in policing and work outside the organisation. Such supervision has shown the potential to help staff keep doing the things that are known to work, and not drift off track doing things that may be more attractive but are not as effective. Cultural supervision by someone who understands Police work and is expert in the culture of some of the youth and families that Police Youth Aid work with is also useful. Lastly, good manuals that give a clear and full picture of what is expected of staff and how to do their job are also useful for keeping staff on track with doing what works. □

NZ Police - the best Youth Aid officers in the world

Inspector Chris Graveson, Police Youth Aid national co-ordinator 1995-

It should be no surprise that NZ's top Youth Aid police officer is complimentary about his own staff. To hear Inspector Chris Graveson talk about the qualities of Youth Aid officers is to listen to someone who is genuinely proud of his workforce.

What makes a good Youth Aid officer?

According to Inspector Graveson, NZ Youth Aid officers are a match for any other police in comparable jurisdictions when it comes to knowledge of the law, and the skills needed to apply it when working with young people and their families. Youth Aid police are knowledgeable about the whole of the youth justice process. This includes custody, arrest, interviewing, family group conferences, Youth Court procedures, risk profiling of offenders, and the care and protection provisions.

Inspector Graveson says he is most proud of the high regard in which Youth Aid officers are held. Youth Aid staff enjoy their work, have considerable experience, and support each other both locally and nationally.

Chris Graveson says that a good Youth Aid officer is one who is thinking, flexible, and creative. No two situations involving young people are the same, and Inspector Graveson is a great believer in Youth Aid officers using their discretion based on a thorough knowledge of the communities they work in. Although Youth Aid cops in small communities can sometimes feel isolated, the relationship between the police and the community in these towns and regions is often closer than it is in larger cities. He also says the fact that many Youth Aid officers are men is important, especially for young people who have few good adult male role models.

Chris Graveson says it is important for a local Youth Aid officer to know who the best youth workers are in a community in order to have the greatest chances of

success. He highlights the lack of skilled youth workers in New Zealand as "the biggest crisis facing youth justice" in this country, as these skills are not easily learnt.

Young offenders are complex, and in order for their dealings with Police to be successful, there must be proper time-frames, good Alternative Action plans, and good monitoring of those plans.

Inspector Graveson rejects criticism of alternative action plans as soft options for offenders. In fact, he says, many families who monitor alternative action plans for their young people who offend are "much tougher than the authorities would be in the same situation". He also says that the victims of young offenders would often rather see a young person's family take charge of holding them to account, repairing damage, and restoring any broken relationships.

Key issues

Although rates of apprehensions for most categories of youth crime are, at least, static, Inspector Graveson acknowledges that crimes of violence by young people are worryingly on the increase. From his perspective, crimes of violence by young people are increasing, and are increasingly violent. When asked about the possible causes of this increase, the Inspector says that the relationship between alcohol and violent youth crime cannot be ignored. A high proportion of youth offenders who commit violence are affected by alcohol at the time of the offence. Data collected for apprehensions for traffic offences show that lowering the age at which young people can buy alcohol has had an irrefutable impact on offending, according to the Inspector. "Young people are drinking alcohol that they can't handle".

Despite Maori being over-represented in youth crime statistics, Chris Graveson says

Maori young offenders have the same needs as other young people. If they get strong whanau support, good FGC plans, and stay at school, then they will be successful. There is also a great need for more Maori to become highly skilled youth justice professionals, says Inspector Graveson.

The Inspector plays down any need to panic about young people in gangs. He says many of those associated with gangs are not young people, and those that are, hang out on the street more and are less organised than their adult counterparts. In general, youth gangs are not a new problem for the police.

The two risk factors that most concern Inspector Graveson are the tendency for some young people to commit crimes on their own, and the serious consequences of the domestic and sexual abuse of young people. Abuse "is a huge risk factor" according to Inspector Graveson. He says the trauma suffered by young victims is catastrophic and they need skilled interventions to cope with drug and alcohol taking brought on by their abuse. Police Youth Aid officers find these cases particularly challenging. □

Inspector Graveson worked as a police officer in Auckland, Dunedin, and Masterton, before taking up an instructor's role at the Police College in Porirua. After that, he worked in senior sergeant roles in both Lower Hutt and Upper Hutt before becoming national co-ordinator Youth Aid in 1995.

...over-intervening with these young people can have negative impacts, including increasing the risk of re-offending. An appropriate and proportionate response is therefore required for this group, which is not excessively costly or interventionist.

Youth Offending Strategy
Key Focus Area 5

Police Youth Aid officers — multi-skilled youth justice workers in the community

Wellington Police Youth Aid Sergeant Simon King

According to Wellington's top Police Youth Aid officer Simon King, a good Youth Aid officer must be hard working, highly motivated, and multi-skilled. They need to remain focused on their role as police officers, and avoid duplicating services offered by other agencies. Youth Aid officers need to be authority figures, not only for the young person, but also as a service to other agencies who need them to monitor some young people's behaviour.

Police Youth Aid officers must also be good frontline cops, with the skills to work creatively with young people, families, and community groups. He cites one example of an alternative action plan for a young person found by the police to be carrying knives. The Youth Aid officer in this case organised that the young person attend a special talk by a paramedic on the treatment of knife injuries.

Alternative action and the community

Sergeant King says Youth Aid officers are often out of the office making connections in the community, in an effort to build up a diary of local providers. As well as this general knowledge, they also need to understand which programmes are designed and staffed to the highest standards. Wellington, he says, is lucky, because it is a generally wealthy area with good community resources. WellTrust drug and alcohol programs, and the Salvation Army are two community options often used by Wellington Youth Aid officers as part of young offenders alternative action plans.

What makes alternative action plans successful is the support of community and family, according to Simon King. For those young people who are the most difficult, Youth Aid officers find themselves "propping up" their parents in an effort to minimise any further offending. Supervision of alternative action plans is done with the support and participation of the parents, and

often, "the parents are a bit tougher than the cops" when it comes to designing plans that reinforce accountability, as well as promote restoration.

The decision to prosecute

Simon King acknowledges that the burden of deciding whether or not to prosecute a young offender is often "intense". Despite this, Sergeant King says most of these decisions are "cut and dried". Young people who come to the attention of the Police have either made a silly mistake (and are unlikely to be charged), or are recidivist offenders and will probably end up before the Youth Court. Simon King says Youth Aid officers are aided in making these decisions by making sure they are well informed about the background of individual offenders.

Judicial monitoring

Based on his experience as a Youth Aid prosecutor, Simon King has a mixed view of the practice of judicial monitoring of young offenders. In general, he says, it works better for some kids than for others, and decisions about the extent of judicial monitoring for a young person

should be based on that young person's particular circumstances.

According to Simon King, judicial monitoring is better for kids who have few other support networks, or who are not responding to existing monitoring. For the others, the requirement to regularly turn up to Court can place considerable strain on parents, and will ultimately reduce the impact of the Youth

Court. Despite the best efforts of Court staff, regular appearances also provide young offenders with more opportunities to mix together.

Wellington has 6 fulltime Youth Aid officers, 2 each stationed at Kilbirnie, Johnsonville, and Central.

The Wellington YOT

Sergeant King is also currently the chair of the Wellington Youth Offending Team. He says this is an important position, and he has some firm views on the proper role of the YOT within the Wellington youth justice community. In the debate over whether a YOT should proactively undertake its own operational programmes (see *Court In The Act* Issue 34), Simon King is firmly of the view that a YOT committee's main functions should be information sharing, co-ordination, and "sorting out issues" between the four foundation government agencies (CYF, Police, Education and Health). The Wellington YOT committee is made up of representatives from each of these agencies, and meets monthly. Once every quarter, the commit-

tee invites representatives from community groups to participate in the meetings.

Alcohol the top risk factor in youth violent crime

Simon King says that, in Wellington, alcohol is a major risk factor for young people at the moment, especially when it comes to violent street offending. Almost without exception, all youth street violence is associated with alcohol. Local council liquor bans work well, but other effective measures would also include: fewer outlets, reduced hours, an increase in the age limit, less 'alco-pops', and making bulk buying more difficult by reducing '12-packs' to '4-packs'. □

Sergeant King has been in the New Zealand Police for 15 years. He has worked in general duties policing, the CIB and Youth Aid. He has also worked as a fraud investigator for the Prison Service in the UK. He now heads the Youth Aid team in Wellington.



Sergeant Simon King

Further reading — Police Youth Services Resources

Diversion Report 2002

In 2002 Gabrielle Maxwell, Jeremy Robertson, and Tracy Anderson at Victoria University produced a 99 page report presenting findings from research into Police Youth Aid decisions.

1,794 cases were studied, and findings made about the number and nature of offences by young people, characteristics and backgrounds of offenders, and the types of outcomes offered to offenders.

The authors concluded that Police policies and practices were consistent with the CYPF Act, and that decisions about outcomes were mostly appropriate and in keeping with the main statutory objective.

They also found that there was considerable inconsistency both in the information available to Police making diversion decisions, as well as in the way in which that information was used.

The report flagged the issue of staffing, both at the frontline,

and at national office. It suggested that more staff would be required to provide quality information about young people and their offending, and to implement best practice policies which would arise from good analysis of that information.

This report is cited as:

Maxwell, G.M., Robertson, J. and Anderson, T. (2002) Police Youth Diversion: Final Report, prepared for New Zealand Police and Ministry of Justice, The Crime and Justice Research Centre, Victoria University of Wellington through Victoria Link, Wellington.

Youth Offending Strategy

The report mentioned above coincided with the Youth Offending Strategy policy document, released in 2002 by the Ministries of Justice and Social Development. First contact with Police is one of the key focus areas of the Strategy, and addresses the need for appropriate and proportionate responses to offending that stop further offending, and increase young peoples'

achievement at school and their links with pro-social peers and activities.

The Strategy echoed the concerns of the VUW Diversion Report, and proposed that

- Police should properly support their Youth Aid officers, and develop consistent practices across the country,

- Co-ordination and collaboration between Police and other key practitioners be improved, and

- Good information should be available for families and Youth Aid officers when making decisions at the informal end of the diversion process.

The Youth Offending Strategy is available to download at www.justice.govt.nz/pubs/reports/2002/youth-offending-strategy/index.html.

The Impact of Police Responses to Young Offenders With a Particular Focus on Diversion (2005)

This report follows on from the

2002 study mentioned above, and was authored by Gabrielle Maxwell and Judy Paulin. It focuses on describing the relationship between Police responses to offending by young people, and re-offending.

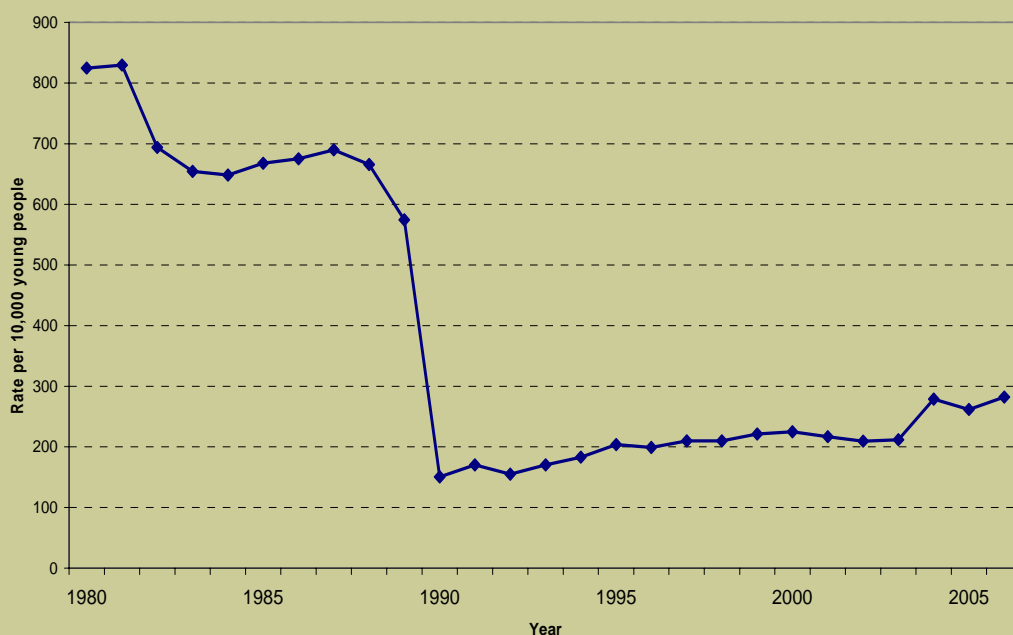
This study found that, in general, 20% of the young people in the sample re-offended during 18 month follow-up period. Not surprisingly, the researchers found that young people who had been sent to the Youth Court were more likely to re-offend than those responded to at a lower level.

Below is a table representing the sample sizes, and number and percent of those re-offending by the type of Police response.

Response	Total	Re-offending N	%
Warning/other	649	60	9.2
Diversion	464	74	15.9
FGC	94	35	37.2
Youth Court	231	118	51.1
All responses	1438	287	20.0

Cases appearing in the Youth Court 1980-2006 (rate per 10,000 population of 14 to 16 year-olds)

G Maxwell, *Achieving Effective Outcomes in Youth Justice: Implications of New Research for Principles, Police and Practice*, n 27, 8.



The graph above illustrates the dramatic effect of the introduction of the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989 on the rate of young people appearing in the Youth Court, and, by implication, the huge rise in Police diversionary practices.

Court In The Act is published by the Chambers of the Principal Youth Court Judge Judge Andrew Becroft and edited and produced by Tracey Cormack and Tim Hall Research Counsel to the Principal Youth Court Judge.

Court In The Act welcomes contributions or comments from anyone involved in youth justice in New Zealand or overseas.

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