



**PRINCIPAL YOUTH COURT JUDGE OF NEW ZEALAND
TE KAIWHAKAWĀ MATUA O TE KŌTI TAIOHI
Judge John Walker**

Principal Youth Court judge welcomes new report on tackling youth crime

A report on addressing youth crime in New Zealand is a blueprint for change that needs to involve all agencies and communities, says Principal Youth Court Judge John Walker.

Written by justice sector science advisor Dr Ian Lambie, the report, *It is never too early, never too late: A discussion paper on preventing youth offending in New Zealand*, urges agencies to adopt "developmental crime prevention" model.

The report found the number of offenders in the youth-justice system is decreasing, but more needed to be done to understand youth offending.

"With its focus on rehabilitation, reintegration and restorative justice, the report highlights that New Zealand has an innovative youth justice system that works well to address offending by people aged 14 to 17.

"However, if we really want to be serious about getting to the root causes of youth crime, it shows we need to tackle those issues when they're children, not when they turn up in the youth justice system at 14. Too often in the Youth Court we're playing "catch up", dealing with long standing issues that could have been addressed many years before."

A key issue the report highlights is that the causes of youth crime are intergenerational and linked to problems within families and communities, Judge Walker says.

"When the research shows that 80 percent of child and young offenders grow up in homes where family violence is present, breaking this cycle of violence from one generation to another is critical.

"To address the underlying issues and the well-entrenched behaviours we see in young people and young adults, we must target every point in the timeline. We need to be pre-emptive, responsive, and adopt long-term strategies.

"Regular visits to check on the health of toddlers, programmes to help parents and address the mental health of mothers, tackling challenging behaviour by children and supporting early childhood centres and schools are just some of the options the report highlights for addressing the issues that lead to youth offending."

Judge Walker says young people do not grow up in a vacuum.

"Communities play an integral role in providing the framework within which young lives can be reclaimed. What this report pinpoints is that change does not happen just by what we do, but by what we do alongside others."

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