

Message from the Minister

I've been delighted by the level of interest and support from community based organisations since the announcement of the Fresh Start youth justice reforms. Many of you have indicated your enthusiasm to be involved in the development and delivery of services that will help young offenders get their lives back on track.

We all know there is no simple solution to preventing serious and repeat offending. The factors which lead children and young people to commit serious offences, or to go down the path of repeat offending are many and varied, and a 'one-size-fits-all' approach can't effectively address their needs. We do know that something more needs to be done. The judiciary, Police and others working with these young people have been asking for changes and more options to address the causes of the offending.

The Fresh Start reforms will enable us to work more intensively and effectively with our most serious and repeat young offenders, holding them to account while still providing them the supports and interventions that will address their offending behaviour. The military-style activity camps we plan will be fundamentally different from past models such as Corrective Training and will be followed by a long period of intensive services in the community. It will be just one of many new options available to the courts for dealing with the worst young offenders.

We have also identified some areas where we will need to enhance existing or develop new services to young people, for example drug and alcohol and mentoring services. I have asked Child, Youth and Family to convene a focus group from the sector to look at what we mean when we talk about "mentoring", what works well in New Zealand and what effective mentoring programmes could look like for these 1000 youth offenders.

This Fresh Start newsletter, produced by Child, Youth and Family, will keep you informed about developments as things progress. This first issue summarises the Government's proposals, Child, Youth and Family's initial planning around the implications of the Fresh Start reforms, and what this may mean for you.

Hon. Paula Bennett
Minister for Social Development and Employment

Fresh Start at a glance

Fresh Start initially targets the group of around 1,000 serious and persistent offenders, aged between 14 and 16 years, including a small group of around eighty 12 and 13 year olds who are accused of committing serious crimes and those who continue to commit crimes. Fresh Start provides a tougher and significantly more flexible framework, which offers a greater range of options for responding to these young offenders.

The proposed changes include:

- widening the Youth Court jurisdiction to include 12 to 13 year olds who commit serious offences
- tougher new sentences for persistent and serious offenders, longer residential stays and increased supervision requirements
- providing new powers for the Youth Court to order parenting, mentoring and drug and alcohol programmes.

What's our response?

Tougher and longer sentences

We will develop and expand programmes which have already proven to be effective, such as 'supervision with activity' and 'supported bail'. We know the value of these sorts of services, and longer supervision orders will allow us to provide more intensive, sustained and individualised support for young people, so they are better able to make long term positive changes.

We will work with new and existing providers, to ensure their supervision with activity programmes have clear structures and boundaries, and are helping young people to develop self-discipline, personal responsibility and community values.

There has been a lot of interest in the notion of developing a programme aimed at the 40 most serious, recidivist offenders. This will include a military-style activity camp followed by mentoring and interventions such as drug and alcohol rehabilitation, literacy and numeracy, to address the underlying causes of the offending.

We are in productive discussions with the New Zealand Defence Force. They already have proven experience in helping young people gain important life skills, self discipline, and employment through their Limited Services Volunteer programme. While this doesn't specifically target young offenders, it has many of the qualities we are looking for in a successful military-style programme.

New powers for the Youth Court

Research shows intensive programmes for young offenders work best when teamed with therapeutic and educational interventions that help address the underlying causes. The wider range of sentencing orders available to the Youth Court means there will be increased demand for programmes which target parenting, mentoring and drug and alcohol related issues.

Significant work will be undertaken with partner agencies and NGO providers to develop targeted programmes for these young offenders and their families.

12 and 13 year old child offenders

We will develop facilities and options to cater to the special needs of children who commit offences and are sentenced in the Youth Court to residential stays and longer term programmes. This will include supervision with activity programmes, and Treatment Foster Homes as an alternative to supervision with residence.

What happens next?

The Fresh Start reforms have gone into the select committee process, where interested parties have had an opportunity to comment on and influence the final shape of the new Bill. The committee will report back by August 2009. The Government aims to have the new law in place by the end of this year with the new reforms effective from the end of 2010.

We will talk with organisations at the national and local level, and our youth justice agency partners, as we investigate what works well, to ensure we invest in services which make the most difference for young people.

This will involve exploring opportunities around military-style activity camps, supervision with activity and supported bail programmes, mentoring, drug and alcohol and parenting programmes, which are a key part of the Fresh Start proposal.

We will keep you informed of progress and developments through these updates, and information on the MSD website. We will give you more information next month, about how we'll begin working with providers to develop these programmes.

In the meantime, if you have any questions please contact the project team on freshstart@cyf.govt.nz. The Fresh Start project is being led by Bernadine MacKenzie, General Manager, Operational Policy at Child, Youth and Family.