

Dear Sir/Madam

I write with regard to the enormous problem in Australia of the over representation of Aboriginal youth in our courts and prisons. I would like to make a submission based on experience I had as a Youth Aid Officer working for the NZ Police.

I was working in Youth Aid in the early 1990's when NZ changed its legislation in the way it dealt with young offenders (those 17 and under). No longer was Court the first option when a young person offended. The YP had to appear before a Youth Justice committee comprised of the offender, the victim, supporters (usually family) of the offender and victim, a Police Officer (a Youth Aid officer) and a **Youth Justice Co-ordinator**. This was the biggest change as this position did not exist before. He/she was employed by the Social Welfare Dept. At these meetings everyone was introduced, the YJC outlined the purpose of the meeting, the Police Officer read out the details of the offence, the young person had the opportunity to say what they wanted to say, the victim explained how the crime had affected them. This was very important as often the YP had not thought about the effects of their crime on the victim. The victim was also able to say what they thought should happen to the YP. The committee then, *as a group* decided what the consequence of the offence should be.

Consequences could be:

- letter of apology to victim/so
- community work
- paying back what was damaged, stolen etc
- drug and alcohol counselling
- Court appearance (for serious crimes, as a last resort)

We found people, including the victim, to be very reasonable usually when deciding what should happen to the YP. We usually had at least one follow-up meeting to monitor how the YP was going with what they had agreed to do as a result of the previous meeting. Sometimes the YP was put in contact with wider family members (Whanau) who were willing to help them through this difficult period.

I'm not sure what happens now in NZ as I've been living in Australia for 10 years now but I believe Australia could benefit from the NZ experience in dealing with Aboriginal youth as they share many of the issues NZ has with its Maori youth.

Kind regards

Frances de Jong