

## Press Release – Just Speak and Children's Commissioner

8 October 2012

### **Young people speak up on crime, police and justice issues**

Nearly 100 young people from throughout New Zealand have given views on youth justice issues as part of a consultation on the review of the Youth Crime Action Plan.

JustSpeak spokesperson Julia Spelman said that when the review was announced, JustSpeak approached the Children's Commissioner to undertake joint consultation so that young people had a chance to contribute.

"JustSpeak's driving ethos is that young people have a lot to offer to the national conversation about justice. We saw the review of the Youth Crime Action Plan as an opportunity for JustSpeak to advocate so that a range of young people's views could be considered by the Minister," she said.

JustSpeak, the youth arm of Rethinking Crime and Punishment, is a network of young people calling for positive and visionary change in our criminal justice system. JustSpeak works to involve young people in developing policy and holds community forums each month in Wellington and Auckland on justice topics that matter to young people.

"The ideas that have come out of the review are a reminder that there is value in making the time to ask what young people think," Ms Spelman said.

Far from being disengaged or apathetic, it is clear that young people care about these issues and are looking to decision makers to introduce policies that address the underlying causes of offending.

Children's Commissioner Dr Russell Wills said the feedback from the young people was insightful, balanced and constructive.

"They told us that while it was fair to be held accountable, many of the conditions imposed on them (such as curfews) set them up to fail and consequently return to the youth justice system," he said.

The young people said external pressures also lead to failure and re-offending. This included abuse of drugs and alcohol, problems finding a job and homelessness.

"Many spoke about the value of sports and cultural groups – places where they could develop a sense of community and belonging. They suggested these types of programmes should be available to young people before they get in trouble as a preventative measure.

“For example, while the young people said police generally did a good job, most had concerns about the way they were treated. They suggested that police need to take the time to listen, be helpful and supportive and be more encouraging – especially when young people are doing the right thing,” the Commissioner said.

Many expressed concern about how they were treated by police, particularly in their first encounter with the law. Some felt police treated them harsher because of their age, sex or ethnicity.

The consultation report is available on the Children's Commissioner's website at [www.occ.org.nz](http://www.occ.org.nz) and on JustSpeak's website at [www.justspeak.org.nz](http://www.justspeak.org.nz)

### **Examples of feedback from the young people:**

*“Need access to programmes before you get into trouble, not after you are in trouble”*

*“What we need is an undercover Minister – just like that TV show – undercover boss. They need to come spend some time in our shoes and see what it's like for us, how we get hassled by the cops and stuff.”*

*“They [police] need to have similar backgrounds to the people they are supporting – this helps with connections i.e. Pacifika people can make connections easier with other Pacifika people.”*

*“In Sweden they have nurses and doctors that drop into schools – this would be a good idea for New Zealand.”*

*“Youth should all learn life skills at school like information about flatting – applying for jobs – your rights as an employee.”*

*“They [police] can be intimidating which makes building relationships hard.”*

*“A good cop is polite, says hi how are you doing, just checks you are staying out of trouble or they might let you off and buy you McDonalds – just treat you like you're a normal person instead of a criminal.”*

*“If you make a good point [at a Family Group Conference] they actually listen to you.”*

*“They just told me I had to apologise to the victim [at a Family Group Conference], I didn't have any time to think about it and I didn't know what to say – I was shy as and then they nussed at me for not getting it right.”*

Ends.

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