

BETTER OUTCOMES: COLLABORATING ON THE GROUND

The justice sector is responsible for some ambitious crime reduction Better Public Services targets: 20% reduction in total crime rate (increased from 15% initial target), 20% reduction in the violent crime rate, 25% reduction in the youth crime rate and 25% reduction in the re-offending rate.

The Hutt Valley Justice Sector Innovation Project, which ran from mid-2012 to December 2013, was a collaboration between justice sector agencies and the community. Its purpose was to test whether this on-the-ground collaboration would contribute to achieving Better Public Services targets and priorities. The project won an IPANZ Public Sector Excellence Award for achieving collective impact.

Did it work and several years on, is this collaborative approach still working for the justice sector?

MARGARET MCLACHLAN investigates.

If you are a low-level offender, the Police can direct you to front up to a restorative justice iwi panel. These might be comprised of community members or kaumātua, and you would have to talk with them about why you committed the offence.

Pre-charge iwi panels were a new intervention trialled during the Hutt Valley project and still in use, says Dr Saskia Righarts, Manager Sector Strategy, Ministry of Justice. They are provided by Community Law Wellington and Hutt Valley in conjunction with Te Rūnanganui o te Atiawa.

“The panels use a problem-solving approach to address factors that contribute to the offending. They also focus on repairing harm caused by the offence, for example referring offenders to a training programme and/or commit to good behaviour for a stated period.”

Dr Righarts says evaluation shows the panels help identify factors associated with offending and connect the offenders with the services and support they need to change their behaviour and get their lives on track.

“The biggest barrier in delivering shared services is establishing a joint understanding of the issues. What is the problem we wish to address and how will we work together and think differently?”

“This support also helps improve broader social outcomes for people, by helping them obtain driver licences, undertake volunteer work and engage in education or training programmes.”

The future of iwi panels – which are currently funded to 30 June 2017 – is being actively considered. Dr Righarts says research into whether those who appear before iwi panels reoffend is needed to see how effective they are long-term.

Justice system a pipeline

The Hutt Valley Innovation Project recognised that the criminal justice system can be conceptualised as a pipeline, where the actions and decisions of one agency can often impact on others. Agencies such as Police, Corrections, Courts, and Child, Youth and Family (CYF) had previously been working beside each other instead of with one another. The Hutt Valley Innovation Project changed this by setting up cross-agency teams with a common purpose provided by the justice sector’s Better Public Services targets.

“The biggest barrier in delivering shared services is establishing a joint understanding of the issues. What is the problem we wish to address and how will we work together and think differently?” Dr Righarts said.

It also took a ‘local solutions to local issues’ approach to innovation. This meant that the local teams generated their own initiatives, informed by advice and data, to address the problems in their community.



Some of the Hutt Valley initiatives included:

- A justice sector mobile community office: justice, social sector, NGOs and community agencies taking their services (such as emergency preparedness, victim support, probation, and clearing warrants to arrest) out to the most vulnerable people in the community.
- Justice sector agencies conducting intensive, multi-agency operations, such as visits to people’s homes to address drivers of crime (alcohol related harm, at-risk youth, family violence).
- Implementation of a truancy initiative in Naenae to help raise youth achievement.

The approach taken during the project was critical to its success. Agencies were involved in collective problem solving, for example, to minimise tension between gangs in court, Police, Corrections and Justice were able to adjust hearing schedules so that rival gang members’ appearances were on different days.

Dr Righarts says the shared justice sector BPS targets provided a common agenda, and a reason for frontline staff to work together.

“Having access to BPS data at a local level and being able to compare this to national progress helped sharpen focus on results. Local BPS data was a key driver for generating shared discussion and collective action.”

The Hutt Valley BPS measures surpassed the national trends (except for re-offending). At the end of the project, total crime in the Hutt Valley was down by 23%.

Police Inspector Sean Hansen, Area Commander for the Hutt Valley, says the momentum generated by the initial project has not been lost.

"Formal monthly meetings continue as part of the Hutt Valley Innovation Project where local leaders meet, driving their work together to reach the common goals relating to reducing harm in our communities. We have also focused on developing multi-layered relationships within each of our organisations that are of significant benefit to us all."

Following the success of the Hutt Valley project, similar projects were approved for Papakura, Hamilton and the East Coast of the North Island. Each project was led by a team of local justice sector managers and in total, 25 initiatives have been scoped, planned and initiated. As these projects were managed at a local level, the Ministry of Justice's national office were unable to provide an update on the results for these initiatives.

Challenges remain

The latest Better Public Services results are for the year ended September 2016. They show:

- Total crime rate is down 14% since 2011 (target 20% by June 2018)
- Violent crime rate is down 4.2% since 2011 (target 20% by June 2017)
- Youth crime rate is down 32% since 2011 (target 25% by June 2017)
- Reoffending rate is down 4.4%, reoffending numbers fallen by 25% (target 25% by June 2017)



Justice Minister Amy Adams acknowledged at the time of release (March 2017) that challenges remain in meeting the justice sector targets.

"While there has been great progress in the BPS results since 2011, it's become clear that the easy gains in reducing crime are over and we need to continue to develop new ways to bring crime down further," she said.



Amy Adams

Hon Amy Adams, Minister of Justice

"Across the board, we've been challenging ourselves to think differently about how we tackle some of the complex issues facing our justice system. At the heart of this work is the Investment Approach to Justice which is aimed at assisting justice and social sector agencies identify and address the core issues that can help prevent crime occurring and reduce harm."

Adams explained in a speech to the Government Economics Network on 6 December 2016 (<https://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/using-data-fight-crime>) that the purpose of the Investment Approach to Justice is to boost crime prevention and reduce harm from crime in New Zealand communities.

"The Investment Approach to Justice is



made up of two parts: working out who is experiencing what crimes and where; and then what initiatives work to prevent it."

Adams said the justice sector has committed \$2 million to build an actuarial model.

"It doesn't just test justice sector interventions, but it will be capable of assessing and informing decisions right across the social sector in terms of the impact they will have on future offending.

"The final step is using this information to make better decisions. It will help Ministers decide what to invest in. And it will help police officers, social workers, probation officers and others determine who to focus on and what can be done to help."

Collaboration to reduce family violence

Another example of agency collaboration is around the area of reducing family violence.

A pilot programme, the Integrated Safety Response (ISR), brings together a team of Police, CYF, Corrections, Health, specialist family violence NGOs and Māori service providers to support victims and their families. It aims to better support family violence victims by improving safety and stopping family violence escalating by identifying risks and intervening earlier. It has been operating in Christchurch since July 2016, and a second pilot running in Waikato since October 2016. Additional funding of \$680,000 from the Justice Sector Fund (February 2017) will enable the Christchurch programme to continue.

A key feature is the identification of 'high risk' victims and an independent family violence specialist to support these victims to reduce the risk of further violence.

The new approach has a family/whānau focus – it aims to assess and support the whole family's needs. As well, perpetrators of violence are managed.

"The ISR pilot takes a whole-of-family approach to stop family violence by identifying risks and intervening earlier," Adams says.

Dr Righarts agrees that the Investment Approach to Justice will provide a richer understanding of people who offend, and help guide investment and resourcing decisions to prevent crime from occurring.

"Better Public Services targets, if sensibly set, are beneficial as they make agencies work together and coordinate all of our activity."

The Ministry of Justice is grappling with which programmes have an effect on reducing crime and therefore improving the BPS results.

"That's true of so much in the justice sector; it takes time to see the effect. For example, the first groups have just graduated from the Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Courts so we don't know yet about recidivism rates.

"Better Public Services targets, if sensibly set, are beneficial as they make agencies work together and coordinate all of our activity. For example, a goal of the government is to reduce reoffending so it's a measure that makes us publicly accountable to New Zealand."