

Quakers

The Religious Society of Friends - Te Hāhi Tūhauwiri
Aotearoa/New Zealand

1 March 2019

Submission to the Safe and Effective Justice Advisory Group

This submission is made by the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa New Zealand, Te Hāhi Tūhauwiri.

Our reason for this submission:

Quakers have, since our earliest days in the seventeenth century, had a deep interest in the reform of the justice system, and penal reform in particular. Originally this was a pragmatic response to the jailing of our members in appalling conditions, where many suffered and died. Later, Quakers were jailed for conscientious objection to war and its causes. Our testimonies to peace, equality and social justice make it imperative that we join with others to fix an inequitable and broken justice system in Aotearoa/New Zealand. We offer this submission in the hope that the current system can be transformed in ways that we know it can be. Quakers are committed to move this important work forward.

High incarceration rate for Māori needs to be addressed.

We want a society that has an equal distribution of power and control for its treaty partners. The high rate of Māori incarceration needs to be addressed in a way that signals a greater action on the Government's part, where there is equal participation in the decision-making processes for the design, implementation and evaluation of a reformed penal system. We want to see the high incarceration rate of Māori significantly reduced. If this is going to have any chance of success there must be Māori input, including from Māori inmates, throughout the whole process of deciding how it will be done.

Incarcerated individuals including Māori

High numbers of incarcerated individuals suffer from mental health problems (90%), poor literacy and numeracy, head injuries, childhood trauma, addictions and socio-economic disadvantage. We understand these are complex issues that are mediated by other factors such as poverty, poor social environments and difficult family and interpersonal relationships. We want to see our penal system respond quickly and appropriately in identifying and intervening effectively for those with these kinds of vulnerabilities.

We want to have exit strategies that are effective for all people. We want to see the values of kindness, care and compassion in which all people will thrive and prosper without fear and injustice. The contributing factors to these issues we recognise as a cultural mismatch which has deprived inmates of useful and relevant education, whanau-based approaches to health, wellbeing and continuous on-going supportive relationships with their communities. We feel there needs to be more emphasis on relational rather than custodial care.

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The research tells us that connected communities which align with the values of compassion, empathy and kindness are the therapeutic elements that help people become purposeful members of society. If they are connected to community they are less likely to reoffend. (Ministry of Justice, 2012)

This approach will enhance the following:

- Connected communities with small, local and regional support systems
- More compassion
- Empathetic education systems beginning with their own children especially those at the early childhood age.
- Less judgement and wider positive long-term meaningful results
- An extension of the drug courts
- More well-trained parole board members and prison staff
- A closer examination of the role of media reporting on NZ's response to crime and punishment.

Summary

In summary we want to see changes in the system from focusing on *punishment to a systematic approach* where people are connected and welcomed back home into their communities with *care, compassion and kindness*. *The evidence clearly highlights that employment, a focus on education and effective therapeutic programmes alongside supportive, positive and caring families are factors that are more likely to deter people from re-offending and away from a life of criminal activity.* This approach will more likely *provide them with the necessary attitudes, motivations and tools to navigate a new journey within their chosen communities.*

We conclude with a quote from early Quaker prison reformer, Elizabeth Fry "When thee builds a prison, thee had better build it with the thought ever in thy mind that thee and thy children may occupy the cells".

Yours in Peace and Friendship



Lesley Young
Yearly Meeting Clerk