

# Schools as the ultimate investment in New Zealand's future!

*"Ever considered yourself or your school as  
frontline crimefighters?"*

Annual National PB4L Conference  
Wellington 12 August 2016

Judge Andrew Becroft  
Children's Commissioner for NZ  
Kaikomihana mo nga Tamariki



MANAAKITIA A TĀTOU TAMARIKI  
**Children's  
Commissioner**

# My central message

- Anecdotally, up to 80% of offenders in Youth Court are not formally “engaged” with, let alone participating in, the education system
- Behavioural, drug/alcohol, abuse/neglect and learning problems are often at the heart of this “disengagement”
- Technically, many are not truants because they are not enrolled at a secondary school from which to truant!
- Is there a “king-hit” to reduce youth offending? NO!  
But if there was, keeping every young person actively involved in some form of education until the age of 16 would be an excellent start!
- **Note:** Police figures show 25-30% of youth offending occurs - 9am and 3pm

# My central message (cont)

- A problem pupil removed is not a problem solved for the community, it is merely a problem re-located
- Every young person engaged in education, and especially kept within mainstream secondary school education, is one less potential career criminal

Without adding to the obligations you already have.....

- From my vantage point, School Communities have a significant responsibility and opportunity
- Schools, in one sense, are our community's best front line crime fighters

# Schools are builders of resilience in young people

**Schools are not social work agencies. But unless the five core domains of a young person's life are addressed can you educate?**

1. A member of a stable, loving family
2. Active participation in education
3. Involvement with positive - "pro-social" friends
4. Strong & many connections to local community (e.g. sports / cultural and youth groups etc)
5. Spiritual needs addressed

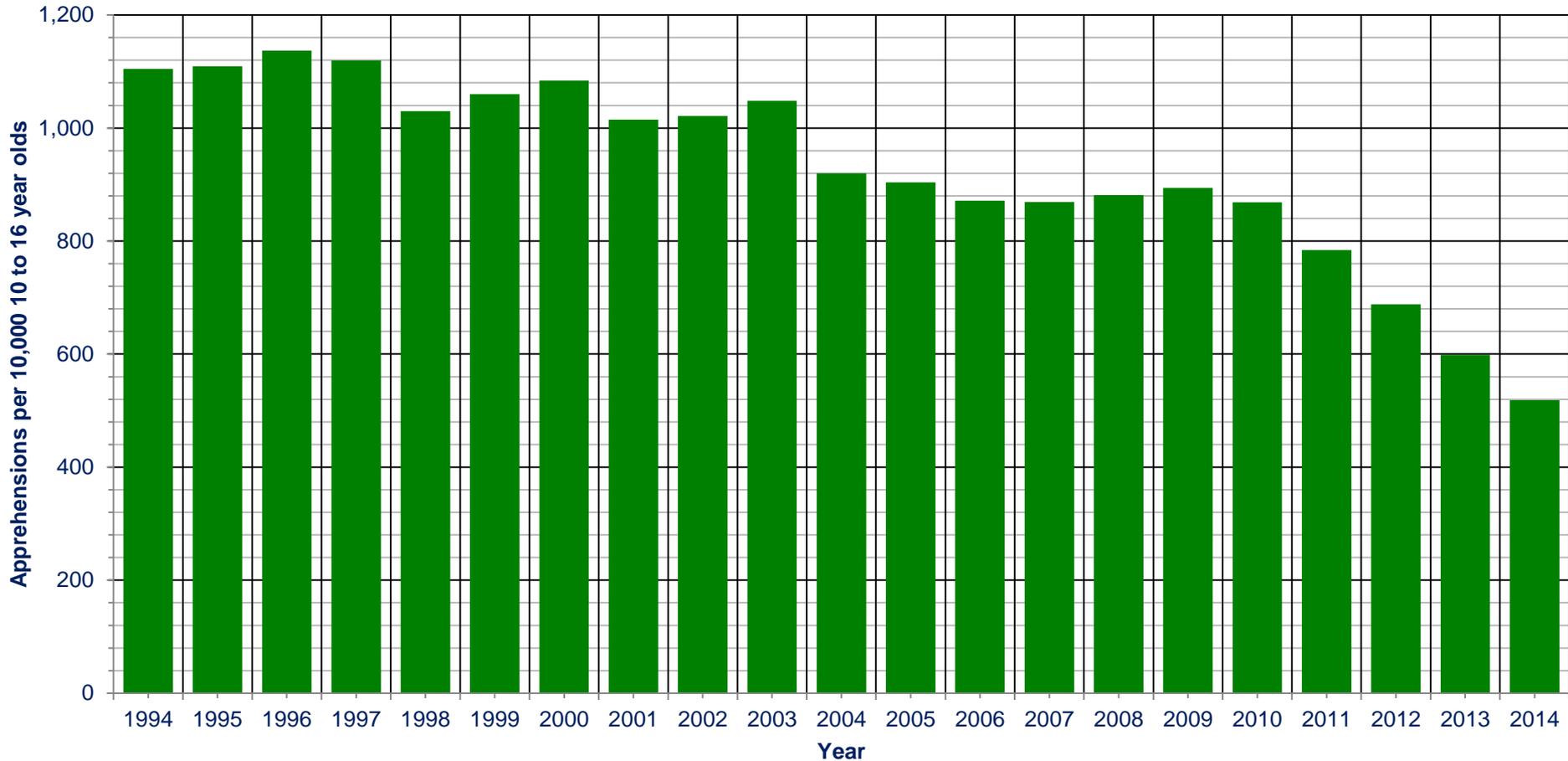
**Schools are involved in "domain 2". But can you any longer avoid ensuring the other 4 domains are addressed?**

# Key messages

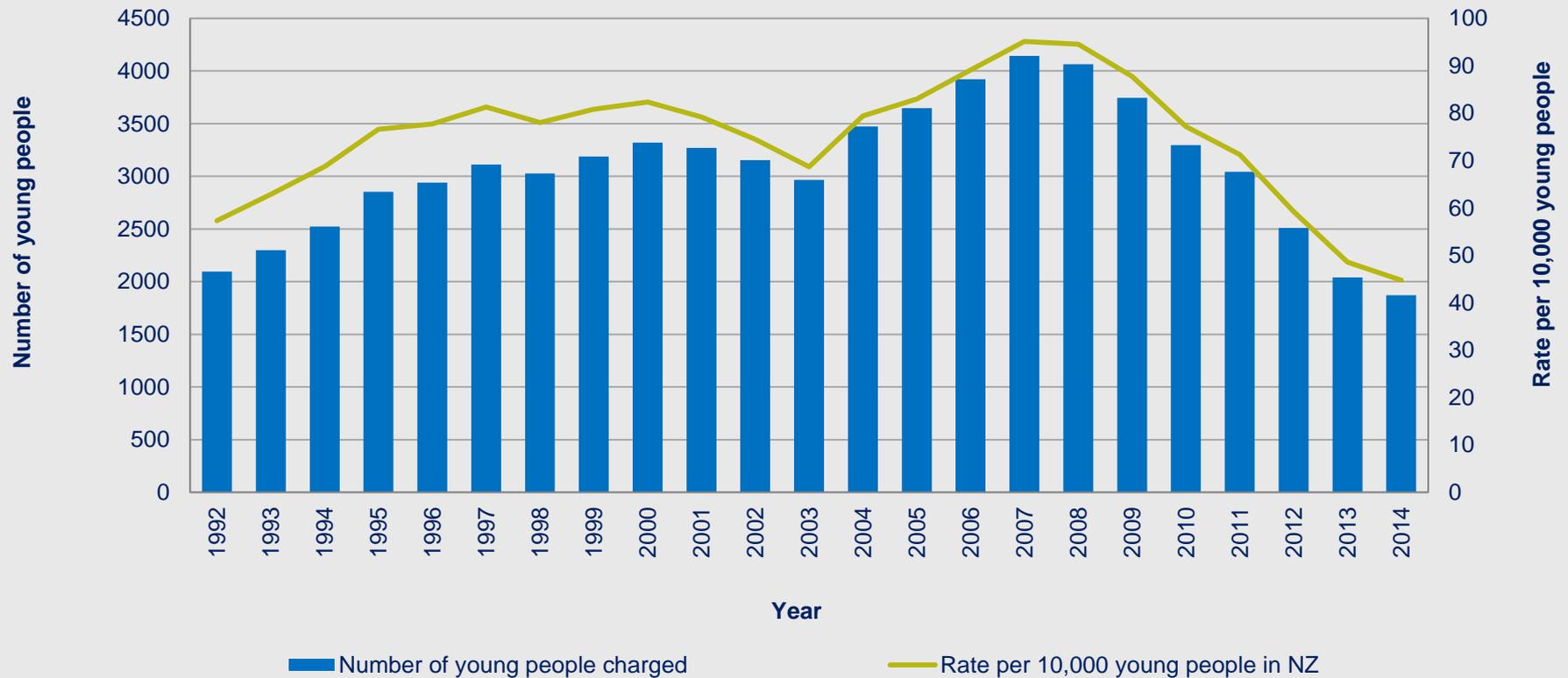
- Virtually nothing is more important in building resilience and a life of a young person than active and meaningful engagement and retention in school
- School engagement builds resilience
- ‘Resilience’ is a protective factor against risk
- More resilience = less criminal offending (and other adverse life outcomes)
- Youth apprehension and Youth Court appearance rates have been steadily decreasing over the last five years

# Apprehensions for Offences by 10-16 Year Olds – National Rates (Source: NZ Police)

1994 to 2014



# Young People Appearing in the Youth Court – Nationally



# Key messages

- The youth justice system is working!
- The contribution from the “Education Sector” has been significant
- Already, there has been a significant return on investment from school wide PB4L programmes
- School communities are truly “front line crime fighters”

# The Reality of School Life

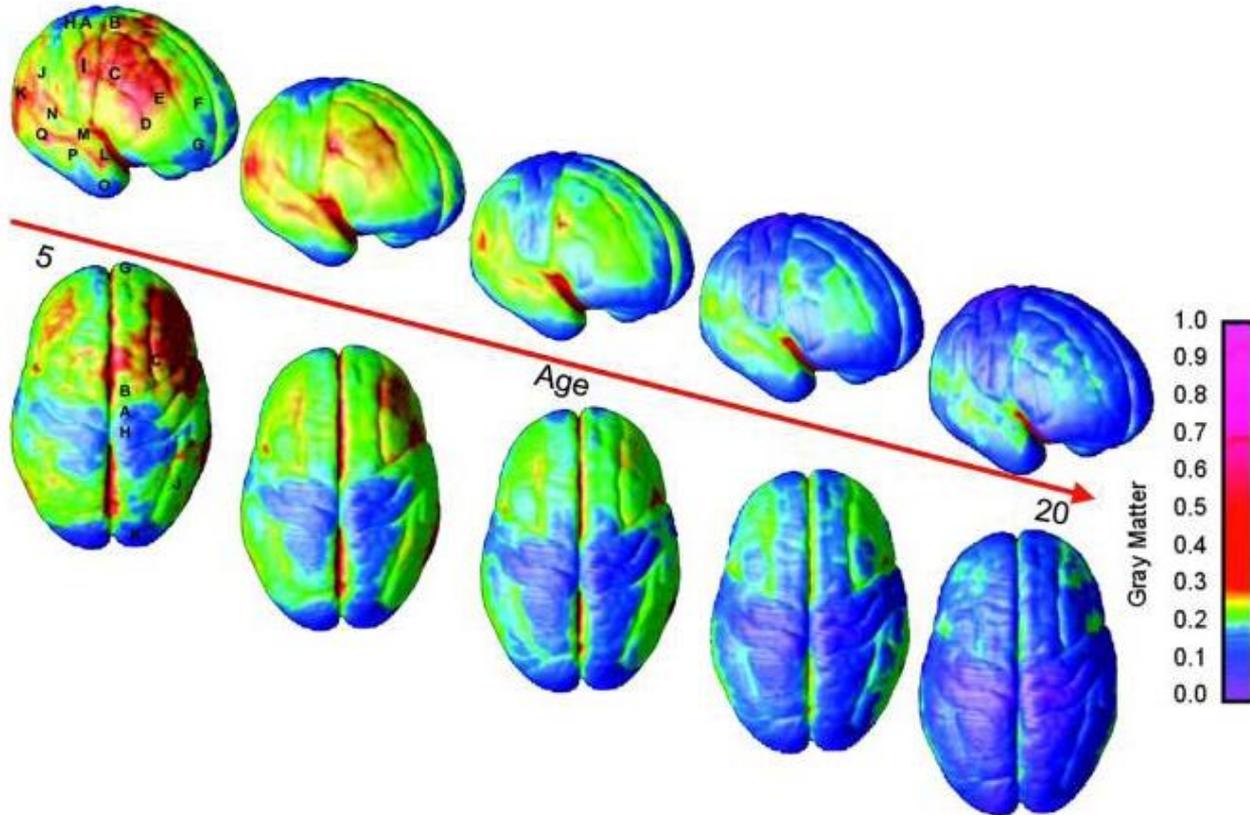
# An introductory point to remember

Recent research shows that frontal lobe development (good judgement etc) is not completed until early - 20s...yet puberty has never started earlier. Adolescence has never lasted so long.

“New MRI scanners have looked at the brain over time to see how it matures and several studies have shown quite dramatically that the last parts to mature deal with things like logic, judgement and wisdom. Those x-rays show they may not be mature until people are 25 to 30”

– Prof P Gluckman, Liggins Institute Auckland, Sunday Star Times 12/10.2008

# Maturing of the Brain (as seen in MRI Studies)



Cortical regions, which deal with:

- Judgement
- Responsibility
- Wisdom

..do not fully mature until the second or third decade

NB: blue matter resembles maturation of cortical areas



# What I see now..... New Zealand's children and my role!



*New Zealand  
has 1,122,000 children  
- that's **24%** of the  
population*



# Most children are European, with Maori, Pacific and Asian being other major ethnicities

71%



European or other including NZer

*Note: ethnicities add to over 100% because some children have more than one ethnicity*

25%



Maori

13%



Pacific peoples

12%



Asian

1%

Middle East, Latin, American or African

## FAQS

**Q:** How many babies are born each year?

**A:** About 60,000 each year. 52% male and 48% female.

**Q:** How many babies are born to teenage mothers each year?

**A:** In 2015 there were 2865 babies born to teen mothers. The teen fertility rate has been falling since 2008.

**Q:** How many children die each year?

**A:** 251 babies under 1 year old and 122 aged 1 - 14 years died in 2015. Most frequent causes of death are car accidents, drowning/ disease/illness,

**Q:** How many children live in each area of New Zealand?

**A:** Greater Auckland: 316,000. Wellington, Hutt Valley and Porirua 76,600, Christchurch City 63,500.

[More cities and regions here.](#)

**Q:** How many children live in two-parent and one-parent families?

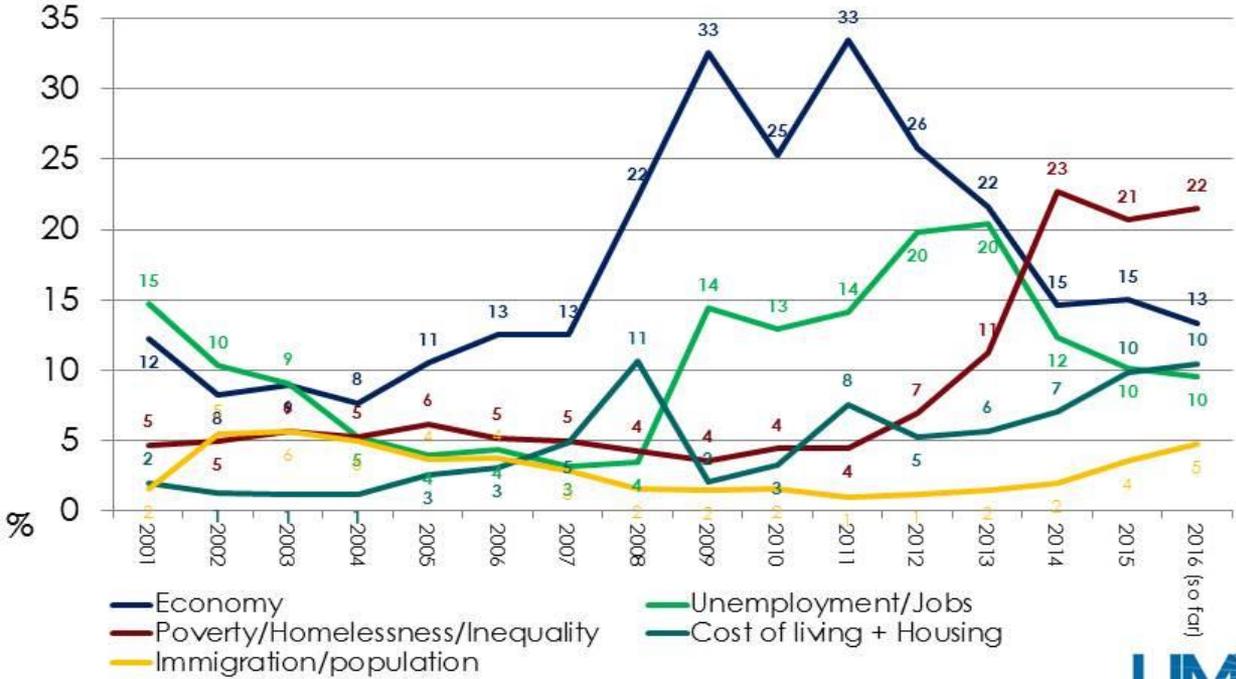
**A:** About 69% of New Zealand children live in two-parent households, with 18% living in sole-parent households and 12% living in multi-adult households (i.e. with grandparents).

# Since 2014, poverty is the most important issue

## Top 5 Most important problems – Yearly average



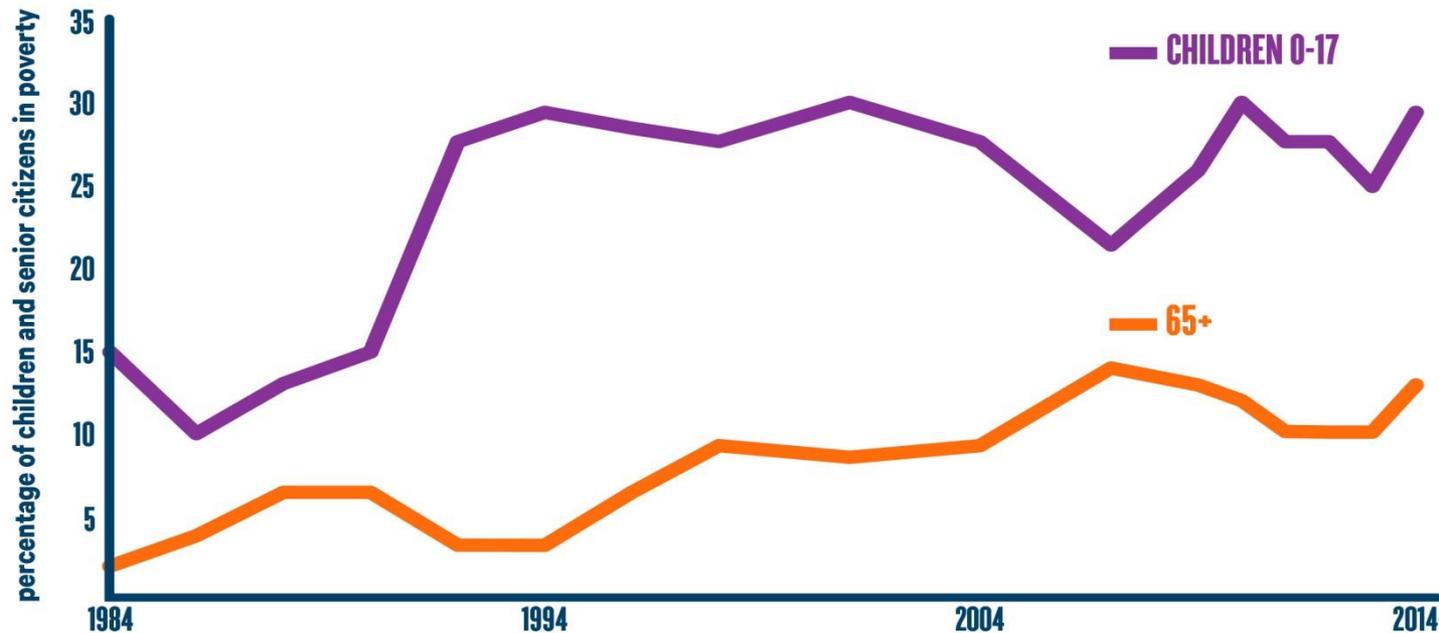
What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today?



# Child Poverty Trends Over Time

CHILD POVERTY IS MUCH WORSE THAN IN THE 1980S, REGARDLESS OF THE MEASURE YOU USE

# OVER THE LIVING IN LAST THREE DECADES COMPARED TO THOSE AGED 65+ **KIWI CHILDREN POVERTY**



CHILD POVERTY IN 1984 WAS **15%** → CHILD POVERTY TODAY IS **29%**

# 148,000 KIWI KIDS GO WITHOUT THE THINGS THEY NEED



**Material Hardship**

THAT'S **14%**

# We do much better for seniors than children

Deprivation rates in nine countries comparing children with older people and the total population in 2007

Country	Children 0-17	Aged 65+	Total population
Czech Republic	20	17	20
Italy	18	14	14
New Zealand	18	3	13
United Kingdom	15	5	10
Ireland	14	4	11
Germany	13	7	13
Sweden	7	3	6
Netherlands	6	3	6
Spain	9	11	11

# What I saw as Principal Youth Court Judge

- As a generalisation – there are two types of young offenders
- Vital that we understand the difference
- The “**adolescent onset**” offender (desisters)
  - The majority of youth offenders = 80% (?)
  - But may commit only 20-30% of youth offences
  - Usually only offend as teenagers
  - We can work with this group effectively in the community, usually without Youth Court intervention
  - This group of offenders is usually not charged, but some must be, especially if the offending is serious, albeit isolated

# What I saw as Principal Youth Court Judge

- The “**early onset**” “life-course” “persistent” offender
  - Small group (5 – 10% of youth offenders)
  - The unexploded human time-bombs
  - But may commit up to 50% of youth offences
  - 1,000 at a minimum
  - We know their names, and their families are known to many agencies
  - Comprise about 60% of those appearing in the Youth Court

# “Persisters” – life course offenders

‘a substantial body of longitudinal research consistently points to a very small group of males who display high rates of antisocial behaviour across time and in diverse situations. The professional nomenclature may change, but the faces remain the same as they drift through successive systems aimed at curbing their deviance: schools, juvenile-justice programs, psychiatric-treatment centers, and prisons’ (1996:15).

- Moffit 1996, in “Tough is Not Enough” (2000)

# Otago Youth Wellness Trust

Analysis of Dunedin Youth Offenders: Period 1 Jan 2007 – 31 Dec 2010

## Alternative Education (n=33)

- 81% male
- 49% Māori
- 76% CYF care and protection involvement
- 100% specialist mental health service involvement
- 93% poor school attendance
- 86% school suspension / expulsion
- 79% attended greater than four secondary schools / training providers
- 43% offending started aged less than twelve years
- 79% specialist drug and alcohol service involvement
- 75% early sexual activity
- 34% suicide / attempt / self harm by young person
- 46% suicide / attempt / self harm by peer or family member

# Capital & Coast Youth Forensic Services

## Statistics: 2000 – 2004 n = 276

- 83% Male
- Māori over-represented (48%)
- 70% faced cannabis and alcohol issues
  - 16% drug dependent; 14% alcohol dependent
- 18% attending school: 28% attending course/training; 45% unemployed
- 45% excluded/expelled from school
- 55% attended more than one school/transient
- 60% in CYFS care at some stage
- 12% living with both parents; 28% with one parent

# Characteristics of Young Offenders: England & Wales

An analysis of 4,000 young offenders

- 83% Male
- 70% from single parent families
- 41% regularly truanting
- 60% have special educational needs
- Over 50% use cannabis
- 75% smoke and drink
- 75% considered impulsive
- 25% at risk of harm as a result of their own behaviour (9% at risk of suicide)

# Prevalence of Neuro-developmental Disorders

Neurodevelopmental disorder	Reported prevalence rates amongst young people in the general population	Reported prevalence rates amongst young people in custody
Learning disabilities <sup>3</sup>	2 - 4% <sup>4</sup>	23 - 32% <sup>5</sup>
Dyslexia	10% <sup>6</sup>	43 - 57% <sup>7</sup>
Communication disorders	5 - 7% <sup>8</sup>	60 - 90% <sup>9</sup>
Attention deficit hyperactive disorder	1.7 - 9% <sup>10</sup>	12% <sup>11</sup>
Autistic spectrum disorder	0.6 - 1.2% <sup>12</sup>	15% <sup>13</sup>
Traumatic brain injury	24 - 31.6% <sup>14</sup>	65.1 - 72.1% <sup>15</sup>
Epilepsy	0.45 - 1% <sup>16</sup>	0.7 - 0.8% <sup>17</sup>
Foetal alcohol syndrome	0.1 - 5% <sup>18</sup>	10.9 - 11.7% <sup>19</sup>

*From "Nobody Made the Connection: The prevalence of neurodisability in young people who offend", Nathan Hughes et al, October 2012*

# Concluding Comments

- Dealing with damaged and neuro-developmentally damaged children is tough and demanding work
- Disadvantage, poverty, and challenging behaviour is not an “inevitable life script” for failure
- PB4L can and does make a difference = students more engaged and learning better

# Concluding Comments (cont)

- All serious offenders – those in the Youth Court – must undergo a Family Group Conference (FGC) as long as they don't deny the charge.
- RJ and accountability/punishment are not at opposite ends of the spectrum. They are NOT polar opposites.
- A restorative justice/practice approach works!
- PB4L is not there yet.
- The wider community is grateful for the impact of PB4L so far.
- Keep the faith!

**The best solution of all ...**

