

# Young People and Young Adults in Corrections' Custody

## Quick-read summary

Poipoiā te kākano, kia puāwai – Nurture the seed and it will flourish.

This report was written in 2024 by the Office of the Inspectorate. We are part of the Department of Corrections, are operationally independent, and work to make sure prisoners are treated fairly.

This report looked at how Corrections manages people under 25 in prison. We looked at the good things that are happening, and what can be improved.

We looked at the needs of young people in prison, and how they can be helped to stop offending and safely return home.

We know that young people think differently from older people because their brains are still developing. Young people also have needs relating to their culture, gender, sexual orientation and health.

We also looked at different laws and codes (from New Zealand and overseas) to find out if young people are being managed in line with their legal rights.

**We made 26 recommendations for Corrections.**

If we can improve how young people are managed in prisons, this will lead to safer communities for all.

### What we did:

- We visited all **18 prisons.**
- We spoke to **206 young people in prison.**
- We spoke to prison staff to hear about their work with young people.
- We spoke to experts in many areas (such as Te Ao Māori, women, gangs, mental health, neurodiversity).
- We spoke to people who had been in the criminal justice system, and then turned their lives around.
- We spoke with many others, including lawyers and officials, in New Zealand and overseas.



## At a glance:

- Since 2018, there has been a **drop in the number of young people in prison.**
- Since 2019, people aged 17 mainly go to a **Youth Justice facility, not prison.**
- Many young people in prison have lived with poverty, violence at home, little schooling, and a parent or caregiver in the criminal justice system.

### In 2023/24 there were:

- Up to **880 people under 25 in prison** (with 2 or less aged under 18).
- **6 out of every 10** were on remand.

## What did young people tell us?

They told us about the highs and the lows of prison life, and what they wanted to change.

They told us about their goals, talents and hopes.

### They want:

- to have good relationships with friends, partners, and family and whānau.
- to be good parents to their children.
- somewhere safe to live, to get a good job, and to have a settled life.

We asked young people in prison what would help them reach these goals and live crime-free in the community.



## Young people told us about prison:

“The cultural connection is important once you learn and immerse in it.”

“I can’t read and write well... Haven’t talked to health and don’t know how to contact health.”

“There are no issues seeing medical when I need to and they’re generally good.”

“I wish we could have kapa haka and I could learn my culture in the unit... I learned to speak te reo Māori from programmes on TV.”

“I’ve had good access to mental health services and access to the cultural side of health.”

“Drug and alcohol courses should start sooner in prison and not have to wait until we are sentenced.”

“It’s hard for officers to understand ADHD. You go from zero - 100 really quickly. Some officers think that I’m cheeky or obnoxious, but that’s not me at all.”

“There’s a good team that’s here today. They follow the routines and let you do stuff. The other team lock you up all the time. They don’t engage, they just supervise.”

“It would be good for staff to sit and chat once a week, to see how things are going.”

“There are two different staff. Some don’t care, and others try hard, especially with the younger ones. It helps when some want to help.”

“Some people have not had a father role model. It’s good to learn from the staff and have boundaries put in place. Staff are proactive in this unit to sort out issues.”

## Our main recommendations

### We asked Corrections to:

- Make a plan so young people in prison can get what they need to return to the community and live crime-free
- Work with other government agencies to better support young people
- Offer more cultural support to young people
- Communicate in ways young people can understand
- Make sure young people are put in the best place for them in prison
- Make sure young people get their health or disability needs met
- Make sure young people get help with alcohol and drug use
- Give young people more to do in prison (education, rehab, jobs, recreation and physical activities)
- Teach young people basic living skills
- Help young people move from prison back to the community
- Help young people connect with whānau, family, and people in the community
- Keep young people away from gangs
- Improve training for Corrections staff so they can help young people succeed

The full report, **Young People and Young Adults in Corrections' Custody Thematic Report**, is available in prison libraries and online at <https://inspectorate.corrections.govt.nz/>

Thank you to  
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