

[Back to previous page](#) | [Go to the national section](#)

# Youth boot camps proven to fail

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*ONE News*

Clinical psychologists have joined the chorus of disapproval of the Government's planned 'boot camps', saying punishment as a deterrent does not work.

The Government is planning to widen the powers of the Youth Court with a range of new sentencing options including sending the worst repeat offenders to military-style camps run by the army.

Principal Youth Court Judge Andrew Becroft has already put the boot in to boot camps for young offenders.

He said last week that sentencing youthful offenders to boot camp was "arguably the least successful sentence in the Western world".

Physical programmes backed up by mentoring and family support could work, but New Zealand's corrective training camps, programme which ran up until 2002, found 92% of young attendees reoffended within a year, he said.

"It made them healthier, fitter, faster, but they were still burglars, just harder to catch."

He described it as "a spectacular, tragic, flawed, failure".

Mental health professionals have now joined him, with the New Zealand College of

Clinical Psychologists (NZCCP) saying "getting even does not result in change".

Studies had never found punishment for criminal behaviour that was consistently proven to have resulted in reduced reoffending, NZCCP said in a statement.

"The deterrent value of the harshest punishment, the death penalty has been clearly shown to be nil," they said.

In the United States there had been an "abrupt and permanent" increase in violent crime in Oklahoma, when the death penalty was reintroduced there.

Before considering what worked for juvenile offenders the Government needed to be clear whether it wanted to exact revenge, to punish or to rehabilitate, NZCCP said.

"Unless we choose rehabilitation, we have simply accepted that there is no possibility of changing the antisocial attitudes of these young people and it no longer matters what response we make," the clinical psychologists said.

"For any kind of punishment to work, the person being punished has to view the punishment as deserved in light of their own inappropriate behaviour.

"With the antisocial or delinquent, there are some real drawbacksn punishment simply increases hatred of the authority dishing it out."

That would simply increase aggression and reduce the likelihood that the youths will respond to positive overtures that might turn their lives around.

In the US, military style boot camps had shown no effect on outcomes, NZCCP said.

Psychologists would like to see interventions that were grounded in research where there was evidence that they worked.

"The goal is surely to do whatever works to prevent these youths from committing further crimes and to thus protect their future potential victims."

The court will be given a set of new sentencing orders ranging from tight supervision to three-month stays in camps run by the army. Other military-style operations will be run by private organisations.

It will be able to issue parenting orders and its jurisdiction is being extended so it can deal with 12 to 13-year-olds who commit very serious crimes.

The Government intends passing the legislation by the end of this year and its provisions will be fully implemented by 2010.

Initially there will be 40 places in army camps, four sets of 10 offenders, and another 175 will be under similar privately-run regimes.

Children's Commissioner Cindy Kiro has said shock tactics were ineffective and the focus should be on giving young offenders new skills to deal with their problems; and

Penal reform campaigner Kim Workman said boot camps were "correctional quackery" that satisfied the desire to punish but failed to produce results.

Programmes that took a therapeutic approach and sought to inspire were far more effective, he said.



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