



**ORANGA
TAMARIKI**
Ministry for Children

**Te Kāwanatanga
o Aotearoa**
New Zealand Government

Military-Style Academy Pilot

Final Evaluation Report Topline Findings

September 2025



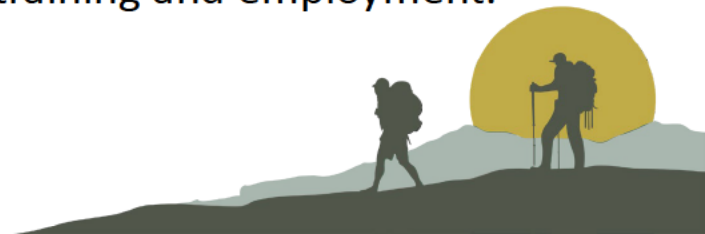
The Evaluation of the Military Style Academy Pilot

- The MSA Pilot was developed for small groups of serious and persistent youth offenders sentenced to time in a Youth Justice Residence. The pilot ran from July 2024 to July 2025. It consisted of three phases: assessment; a twelve-week residential phase in a Youth Justice Residence; and a nine-month transition back into the community supported by intensive mentorship.
- This final report for the evaluation draws on mixed methods evidence collected across the full pilot to draw evaluative conclusions on the pilot as a whole.
- Two earlier preliminary reports examined lessons learnt up to the end of the residential phase and the first three months of the community phase.
- This final evaluation report presents findings on how the intended design for MSA was implemented, **early outcomes** for rangatahi and lessons learnt to inform **improvement** of any future academies and youth justice programmes.



Topline Findings: Enabling Factors & Positive Results

- A military-style approach, complemented by existing evidence informed the design of the MSA pilot. The design was supported by expert advisors and intended to change the trajectory of repeat young offenders.
- Key elements that were found to be supportive of positive outcomes and were different to other youth justice programmes included:
 - A stable cohort of rangatahi
 - Emphasis on therapeutic support
 - Intensive support through mentors, social workers and multi-disciplined teams (MDTs) to assist rangatahi in their return to the community
 - Extending support to whānau and siblings
- The residential phase saw **improved safety** for kaimahi and rangatahi, without the physical conflict seen in other youth justice residences
- There were indications of **improvements in rangatahi wellbeing** across Te Whare Tapa Whā domains that are indicative of a foundation for future positive changes in offending outcomes. Changes included physical and mental health, reconnection with whānau and stable living situations, involvement in training and employment.
- **Psychometric assessments** evidenced these positive changes.



Topline Findings: Positive Changes in Offending Outcomes

The Oranga Tamariki Social Impact & Research team compared reoffending outcomes for the MSA pilot cohort with their own offending histories and the offending patterns of a matched Supervision with Residence (SwR) cohort. Due to the small numbers involved these results may not be generalisable to other young people who undertake MSA.

Comparing the six-months before the residential phase to the six-months after release showed:

- **Overall reoffending:** The majority of MSA rangatahi reoffended within two months of release, largely like the matched SwR cohort.
- **Time before reoffending:** MSA rangatahi were slower to reoffend compared to the matched SwR cohort.
- **Seriousness of offending:** Two-thirds (67%) of MSA rangatahi reduced the maximum seriousness of their offending compared to only 22% of the matched SwR cohort.
- **Violent offending** (including robbery-related offences and injury causing acts) by MSA rangatahi reduced by two-thirds (67%) in the six-months after exiting residence compared to the six-months before entering residence.
- **Combined view of reoffending results:** Five (59%) of the nine rangatahi on the MSA pilot reduced the frequency, total seriousness and maximum seriousness of their offending compared to only two (22%) of the nine matched SwR cohort.



Topline Findings: Opportunities to strengthen MSA

- Kaimahi who worked on all stages of the MSA went the extra mile to support the young people and saw the intensive focus as a necessary part of helping them to weather periods of heightened risk. The intensity of the work needs to be factored into future programmes to support sustainability and kaimahi ora.
- The pilot context and timeframes impacted implementation. Future programmes should include:
 - An earlier start on both transition planning for the community phase and whānau support
 - Careful management of media on the programme to reduce privacy risks and unnecessary distractions
- The cultural elements of the design could be strengthened to better meet the needs of rangatahi Māori. Rangitane iwi were not involved in the design process, but their later involvement strengthened the MSA.

With the kaimahi, our teachers being fluent in Te reo Māori, their engagement with the boys right now is mean. Not one of them spoke [when engaged with the Tōhunga Mau Rākau]. They didn't speak, no one mucked around, and they listened, and they engaged in everything he said, and did a performance to us. Massive. (Youth worker)



Topline Findings: Opportunities to strengthen MSA

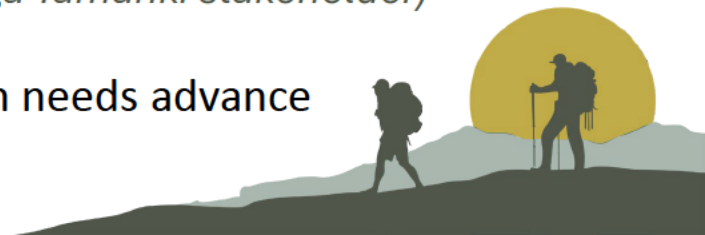
- Increased clarity of kaimahi roles in the community phase would strengthen implementation. This included:
 - How mentors and social workers would work together
 - How both whānau and rangatahi should be supported by the different kaimahi and MDTs
 - How support should be delivered if rangatahi returned to a residence
- Addressing risk factors in the community was required to achieve the intended outcomes. These included:
 - A lack of structure
 - Connections with mates who engaged in/encouraged offending behaviour
 - Substance use
 - Boredom
- Opportunities to mitigate these risks included:
 - Making sure a main activity was in place for each rangatahi before they started the community phase – this could be training, education or employment
 - Considering the use of “step down” homes to give the rangatahi a semi-structured environment to support their transition to community settings
 - Making sure welfare benefits, homeware, food, wifi and other basics were in place
 - Considering timing of the start of the community phase to align with availability of support and courses



Topline Findings: Opportunities to strengthen MSA

(cont'd)

- Increasing continuity and stability of programming and support between the residential and community phases to build on and lock in the benefits of work started in the residential phase. The two key opportunities were:
- **1. Continuity of therapeutic support.** This component of the residential phase was a key point of difference compared to other Youth Justice Residences and was strongly supported by stakeholders:
 - *I think the therapeutic component of it is such a massive step forward in New Zealand in terms of the way we approach youth offending, youth justice and rehabilitation ... I don't think we've really done rehabilitation in this youth justice space in New Zealand in the past ... (MSA clinical advisory group)*
 - Focused sessions were complemented by continuous interaction between the kaimahi and rangatahi, supported by the clinical team:
 - *That relied on the embedded intervention, so the quality conversations and the ability to take those moments over dinner, over breakfast, while you're doing something that looks on the surface to be military or physical, that you can have the right kind of conversations but you need the workforce to do that. (Oranga Tamariki stakeholder)*
 - Transitions to the community broke the continuity of therapeutic support, which needs advance planning for future cohorts.



Topline Findings: Opportunities to strengthen MSA *(cont'd)*

- **2. Connecting the residential and community parts of the programme** to bring the expertise and local knowledge of site social workers into the residential phase and ensure key work done in the residence was understood to enable continuity of support in the community. Stronger connections would look like:
 - Training residential and community kaimahi on the pilot together
 - Site social workers participating and having visibility of rangatahi support in the residential phase
 - Transition planning collaboratively between residential and community kaimahi with rangatahi
 - Enabling continuity in support from residential through community phase by bringing community providers in the residential phase.
- *As for the bootcamp, I have to say it was a success. I knew all the kids weren't going to come up and be miraculously changed, some of them did, but my son needed more help. (Whānau)*

