ORANGA TAMARIKI
Ministry for Children

Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government

Military-Style Academy Pilot

Second Preliminary Evaluation Report
Community Phase

April 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 runs from July 2024 to July 2025. It consists 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 second preliminary report for the evaluation covers the first three months in the community and focuses on rangatahi transitions from the residential phase to the community.

- An earlier preliminary report examined lessons learnt up to the end of the residential phase.

- The final evaluation report is due in October 2025 and will examine the remainder of the community phase and provide a final summative assessment of findings across the whole MSA pilot.

- This is a **process evaluation**, with a focus on how the intended design for the MSA was implemented in practice, lessons learnt to inform **continuous improvement** and examining **early outcomes** for rangatahi

Topline Findings: Some overall takeouts

- Past research and experience has shown that this is a challenging transition, particularly for this cohort.
- MSA participants have struggled with the transition from a highly structured environment to the community.
- Sadly, the biggest challenge faced has been the death of one of the boys, which has had a deep impact on the others.
- Transitions were planned for but were not fully implemented as intended, with planning not starting early enough.
- No re-offending was an ideal outcome but stakeholders saw reduced severity and frequency of offending and spending longer in the community as successes.
- Some rangatahi have returned to residence but most spent longer in the community than on their previous transitions out of residence.
- There have been successes for some of the boys and positive wellbeing changes across Te Whare Tapa Whā domains that indicate that a foundation for future positive changes has been laid.
- There have also been positive changes for whānau, including accessing stable housing and parenting support. These changes support not only the MSA participants but their siblings too.

Topline Findings: Early indications of outcomes (i)

What worked well

- Tailored support for rangatahi through mentors, social workers and MDTs connected with positive outcomes achieved in the community.
    - *I think that's what's key as a social worker, the mentor and the rangatahi working together, I hear from them every day. They hear from me every day, and it's yeah, it's just been amazing to see the growth, the maturity, the engagement, because he previously, he wouldn't last [in the community]. I think the longest he's lasted is maybe three days, and we're going on to week four. (Site social worker)*
- Positive education, training and employment outcomes contributed to wellbeing outcomes
    - *A [Rangatahi] said, 'man, it feels so good to buy my own s**t with my own money....he hasn't lost a job, they've run out of work and so that's the bummer is he was really looking forward to signing a contract. (Site social worker)*

Key Learnings: Foundational Steps

- Realistic expectations for rangatahi outcomes included reduction in the frequency and seriousness of offending, spending more time outside residence.
- Rangatahi could achieve positive outcomes in their broader wellbeing even where they had returned to residence.

Topline Findings: Early indications of outcomes (ii)

Te Whare Tapa Whā was used in the evaluation as the framework for assessing early outcomes.

- **Taha wairua**: Examples of progress were seen where cultural activities and connection to whakapapa strengthened in the residential phase were continued in the community.
  - One rangatahi had participated in a noho at his marae and did mau rakau.
  - Rangatahi performed their MSA haka at the tangi for the member of the cohort who passed away.
  - *"The cultural connection for [rangatahi] was returning back home, so that kind of then allowed for that connection to flourish, which it has. It's been amazing." (Site social worker)*

- Challenges included both rangatahi themselves and social workers struggling with competing priorities and crises (eg lack of medication, no Work & Income money) in the community phase, which meant that cultural connections got de-prioritised.

- **Taha tinana**: Some rangatahi continued to build their physical wellbeing through regular physical activity in the community, with participation in team and individual sports and mentor support:
  - *"He definitely did quite a bit of work with [Mentor] at the gym, even though he didn't always want to go. But he ate well." (Site social worker)*

- Challenges included the consumption of alcohol, which resulted in two rangatahi having to leave an independent living arrangement, thus destabilising their living situations.

Topline Findings: Early indications of outcomes (iii)

- **Taha hinengaro**: At the start of the community phase almost all rangatahi had a positive mindset and hoped not to reoffend. In some cases this was seen in pride at not returning to residence:
  - *He's quite proud of himself for being out this long. He's mentioned it too. Like, he was like, 'Bro, they all thought I was going to be the first one to get locked back up.' He's like, 'Nah, I don't want to go back in there.' So yeah, I think he's quite proud that he's doing good as well. (Mentor)*

- Challenges included feeling overwhelmed and stressed, particularly with the passing away of one rangatahi which lead to deep feelings of grief and loss. One rangatahi mentioned learning a breathing exercise that helped him with self-regulation, but others turned to alcohol, cannabis and methamphetamine to cope. There were challenges establishing continuity of therapeutic support in the community phase.

- **Taha whānau**: All rangatahi had someone who supported them – immediate/wider whānau, friends, a girlfriend or mentors. Some of the rangatahi were able to rebuild whānau relationships where they had been disconnected previously. The mentors had become important figures for some rangatahi:
  - *It's been good with [mentor], we are fine, he comes every day to see what the plan is today and how I'm doing (Rangatahi)*

- Challenges included navigating fragile whānau relationships, and reconnecting with mates who might pressure them into reoffending.

Topline Findings: Planning & Design of Transitions

What worked well

- The design for transitions recognised the importance of supporting rangatahi in the community to achieve the programme outcomes.
- The community phase included intensive mentoring, support for whānau and community MDTs, which stakeholders saw as strengths of the MSA compared to the support for transitions out of other youth justice residences.

    - *I'm just hoping that this work, this plan we have, it's a really great plan. He's never had a full plan before. … The times that [rangatahi] has come out before, it's either wrong time of the year where everything is closing down or finishing up and then just the mentor, it was maybe like two or four hours a week and so it wasn't really hands on deck for [rangatahi] at those times. (Whānau)*

Key Learnings

- Starting detailed planning late in the residential phase impacted individual transition planning, bridging the residential and community phases and preparation of kaimahi for their roles in MSA.
- Beginning detailed planning earlier would have created more opportunities to bring community kaimahi into rangatahi plans, potentially improving the quality and whānau involvement
- Clear boundaries around what could be included in transition plans and what resources were available needed to be set and communicated consistently.

Topline Findings: Implementation – roles & responsibilities

What worked well

- Site social workers had access to training through a community of practice to support their roles in MSA.
- Social workers wanted to apply their expertise to supporting whānau.
- Mentors had an intensive role that allowed them scope to respond to the needs of each rangatahi.

Key Learnings

- Social workers needed capacity freed up to allow them to participate in training and development and to work in different ways.
- Stakeholders advocated for an approach that invested more in preparing social workers for the role and stepping back to let them work.
- Clarifying the roles of the mentors and site social workers in supporting rangatahi and whānau would help all kaimahi prepare for and fulfil their roles.
- MDTs tailored to individual rangatahi proactively supporting rangatahi and whānau were most effective.

> - *Therapeutic support for the families is not something that sits naturally with a youth justice social worker. It should be work that they are able to do in terms of like family assessment and support but it's not work that they ordinarily do. Youth justice is moving in that way but it kind of has very much been young person-focused. (Oranga Tamariki stakeholder)*

Topline Findings: Support for rangatahi to transition to the community (i)

What worked well

- High intensity of support from the community mentors led to strong relationships and was a key point of difference from other youth justice residences.
- Site social workers and mentors demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting rangatahi, working intensively to support rangatahi in the weeks immediately following transitions.
- Most mentors and rangatahi formed close relationships.
- Connecting rangatahi with employment or courses right at the point of transition helped rangatahi move into a new structure.
- Support addressed risk factors for re-offending and engaged rangatahi with positive activities.

    - *Engagement in some pro-social behaviour… I'm not talking about saying manners or anything, clearly, but it's involving the sport, maybe some work skills, you know, and keeping involved in that. Engaging and staying on with the skills, life skills and work programme. (Stakeholder)*

Topline Findings: Support for rangatahi to transition to the community (ii)

Key Learnings

- Transitions from residence were changes in most aspects of the day to day lives of rangatahi. They moved out of the structure and access to therapeutic support in the residential phase and were exposed to risk factors and triggers for offending in the community.
    - *But we know that there was a big risk factor for their offending, and coming from this high structure, where they've never had to think about what to do when they're bored. It's the biggest risk ever. (MSA residential kaimahi)*
- Rangatahi living situations needed more preparation prior to arrival in the community. Making sure basic necessities were in place, Work & Income arrangements made and a main daily activity could smooth the transitions.
- Including a 'step-down' living arrangement before full independent living or return to whānau could help rangatahi adjust more smoothly.
- Transitions to the community broke the continuity of the therapeutic support offered in the residential phase. Connecting rangatahi with new supports in the community was difficult.

Topline Findings: Support for Whānau

What worked well

- Changes for whānau could have positive effects for rangatahi even if they exited residence into independent living.

- Offering support for whānau was a motivator for rangatahi to participate in MSA.
  - *His mum getting stable housing has been probably a bigger factor to [his non-reoffending] than any of the other interventions. Well, the mentoring and that. (Site social worker)*

- Support for whānau through the life coach, mentor support and access to housing made a positive impact.

Key Learnings

- Whānau support happened at the same time as transitions to the community and after transitions, rather than before. This part of the programme could be strengthened by beginning support for whānau earlier, strengthening the whānau role in transition planning offering a broader range of support.

- Connecting with whānau was part of the mentor role but organisations who focused on whānau support appeared more able to extend their role from the rangatahi to the wider whānau.