



# Young people and their families talk about communication assistance in the New Zealand youth justice system

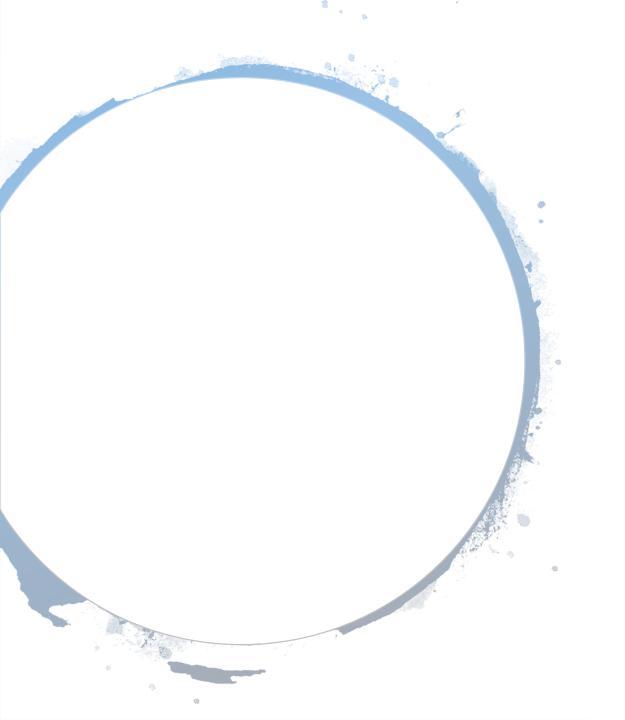
Researcher: Kelly Howard

Supervised by Dr Clare McCann & Dr Makarena Dudley

### 6 out of 10

### young people in youth justice have a communication difficulty

(Bryan, Garvani, Gregory, & Kilner, 2015; Hughes, Williams, Chitsabesan, Davies, & Mounce, 2012).



More likely than not to have difficulties:

understanding what is being said

expressing themselves

#### New Zealand Youth Justice System

- Separate and distinct approach for young people
- Aim to keep young people out of formal court system
- Key pillars: Police youth aid and Family Group Conference
- 80% of youth offending dealt in this way
- Youth Court specialist division of the District Court
- Only 5% of cases reach a defended court hearing

#### **Communication Assistance**

- Legislation in New Zealand Evidence Act 2006
- Similar to an intermediary in England and Wales
- Assess communication needs and make recommendations
- In meetings with lawyers, in Family Group Conferences and in court proceedings

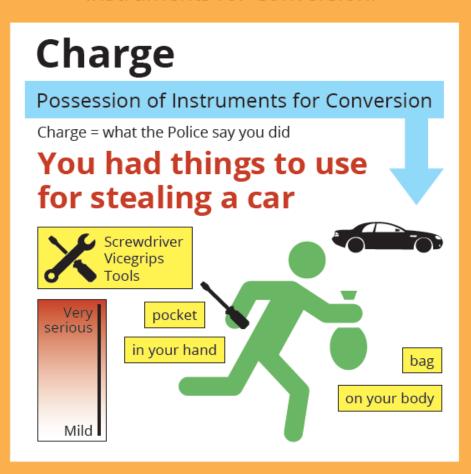
<a href="https://www.benchmark.org.nz/guidelines/communication-assistants/">https://www.benchmark.org.nz/guidelines/communication-assistants/</a>

#### **Communication Assistance**

- Examples of recommendations:
  - simplification of language
  - visual tools such as diagrams and maps
  - tools to minimise stress and anxiety
  - seating arrangements
  - taking of breaks
- Like an interpreter assists in real time

#### **Break it down**

"You are charged with Possession of Instruments for Conversion."



#### Two main providers:

Talking Trouble <a href="https://www.talkingtroublenz.org">www.talkingtroublenz.org</a>

Moretalk www.moretalk.co.nz



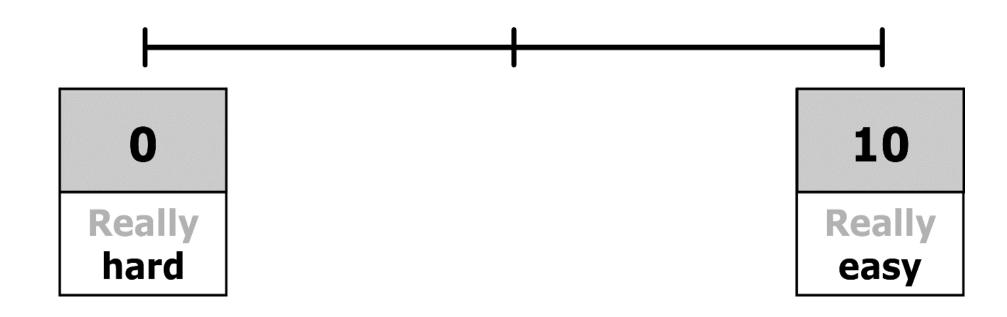
#### Main research question

What are rangatahi (young people) and whānau's (family's) experiences of communication assistance in the New Zealand youth justice system?

#### Method

- Qualitative research framework
- Semi-structured interviews with 5 rangatahi (young people) and 5 whānau (family) members
- Criteria aged between 10 and 17 and had worked with a communication assistant in a justice process (or a family member of such a young person)
- How the interviews were conducted was important

## Visuals were the main tool... Understanding





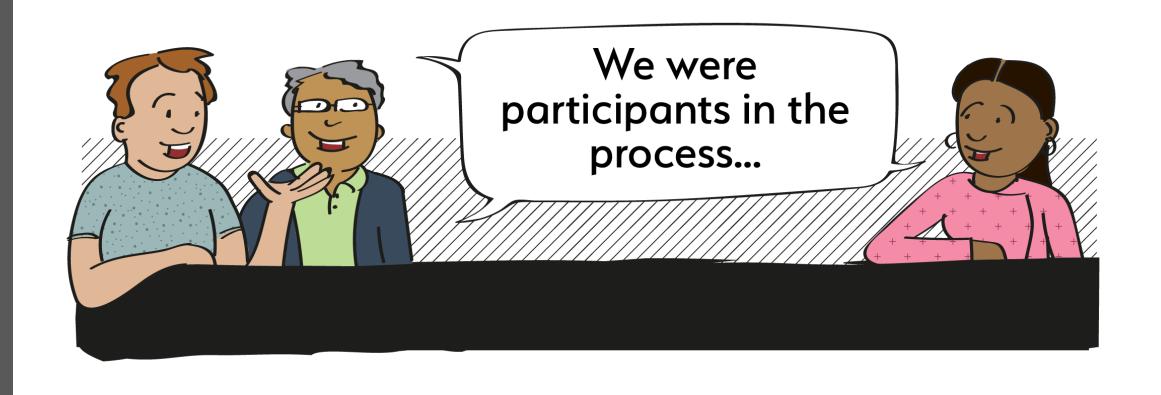




https://www.talkingmats.com/

## Whakawhānaungatanga (relationship building) was key



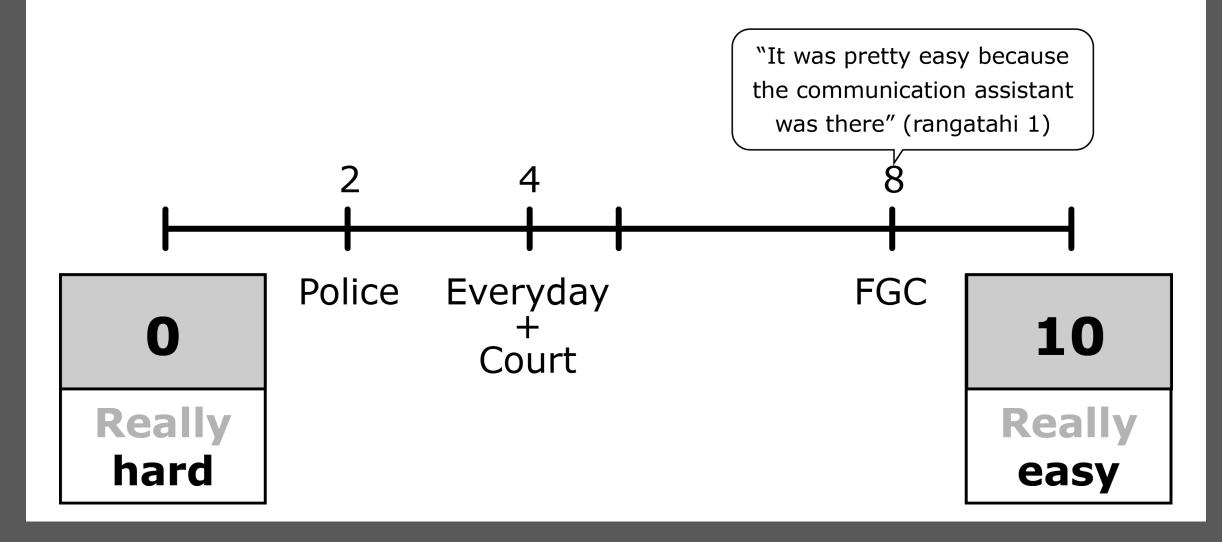


[It was] way easier. Coz he knew what they were talking about.

He would come home and he was like, 'oh yeah, [the communication assistant] said' (whānau 4)

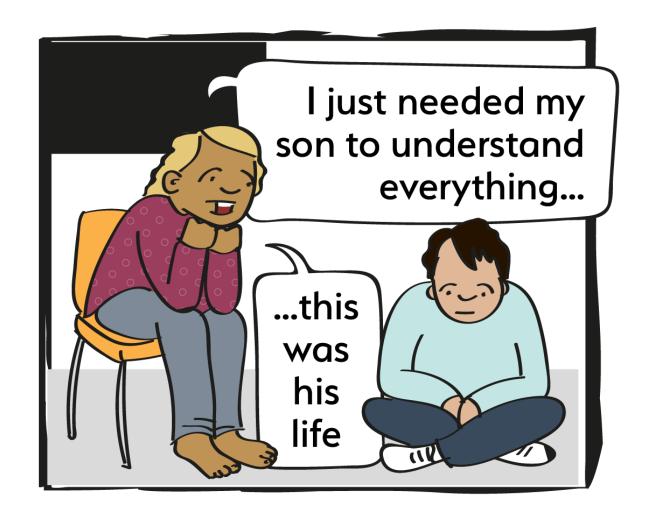
They'd never had anyone like the communication assistant to communicate what the judge was actually saying. Because it is one thing to sit there and hear what someone says, but when it is actually explained to you properly, it makes a difference...and we even took pictures on our phone what [Barbara] had, the details that she'd written down (whānau 1).

#### Understanding





Thank you to Carol Green, Illustrator and Designer – carolgreen.net



The seriousness of the charges was my concern. And I just needed [my son] to understand everything that was going on. What the lawyers were talking about, what the lawyers and the judges were talking about, so that he understood every part of what was happening through that whole process. Because this was his life. His life. A big chunk of his life (whānau 2).

You know I think if I had have had somebody like that when I was younger, I might not have continued to get into the trouble I did (whānau 1).

Researcher: If you were to go to an FGC or court again in the future, would you want someone like that lady to help you again?

Rangatahi 3: Yeah.

Researcher: *How come?* 

Rangatahi 3: Coz she can tell you in an easier way. She'll make it understand. She'll help you.

#### Conclusions and implications...

- Rangatahi (young people) and whānau (family) were overwhelmingly in support of communication assistance
- Findings suggest that communication assistance has a valuable and ongoing role to play in youth justice
- May be one means of addressing the over-representation of communication difficulties in this population
- Techniques used by communication assistants could also be used by other professionals in youth justice – but also in adult justice and with witnesses, as well as defendants