



**ACTING CHIEF DISTRICT COURT JUDGE FOR NEW ZEALAND  
TE KAIWHAKAWĀ MATUA O TE KŌTI-Ā-ROHE  
Judge John Walker**

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**29 August 2019**

**Court to develop new approach to young adults**

A new approach to those aged 18-25 who appear in court is being developed for the Porirua District Court.

Judge John Walker, the Principal Youth Court Judge and the Acting Chief District Court Judge, is leading the development, with the support of the Ministry of Justice and Judges from the Porirua District Court.

“We know from the Youth Court that a high percentage of young offenders suffer from neuro-disabilities such as dyslexia, acquired brain injury, FASD, and they often come from a background of being exposed to trauma and abuse.

“Those challenges do not expire when they come into the Adult Court and we also know their brain is not fully developed. Currently we treat them as fully functioning adults when demonstrably they are not,” says Judge Walker.

The disabilities, and simply the level of maturity, affect their ability to understand the current court process. Judge Walker says if the law is to deliver effective interventions to reduce reoffending, then the underlying issues need to be identified and taken into account.

The court process is likely to involve separating young adults from others who appear in court, using language which is understood by them, identifying any disabilities early in the process, and engaging the young person in the whole process.

Recently Judge Walker has been meeting with community leaders in Porirua to help plan how such a court would operate.

He has also met local court professionals and others who would provide the services to young adult defendants which such an approach would require.

“There is much planning to do, in conjunction with the community, which I know has many resources to assist our young people to be fully contributing members of society,” he says.

Work on the proposal\* is continuing, with the many moving parts to be brought together to ensure the young adult list court comes to fruition.

Ends

**\* An outline of the proposal can be found on the District Court website**

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