

Findings from the evaluation of community Tikanga Māori programmes

Policy Strategy and Research Group

August 2008

Overview

- 1 An evaluation, focused on levels of participant learning and change, has been completed on Tikanga Māori Programmes (TMPs) delivered to offenders in the community. The results are largely positive, with moderate improvements shown across assessed participant responses. Improvements were either still evident or had increased at three months post-course completion.
- 2 Participants were observed to be successfully engaged in TMP group activities, and in general considered that the experience was worthwhile, and helpful to them.
- 3 Issues associated with the referral processes to TMPs were raised by the evaluation, and point to a need to improve processes for ensuring offenders commence the programmes to which they are referred.
- 4 In light of the fact that TMPs are low-intensity interventions of relatively brief duration, the main findings are encouraging, and validate the delivery of this form of intervention to offenders as an element in general offender management.

Background

- 5 A number of community-based providers currently deliver TMPs to offenders in prison or in the community¹. Considerable variety exists across the various TMPs in terms of course length, structure and content. However, they are similar in the use of Māori beliefs, knowledge and practice, and the involvement of whānau, to promote participants' understanding of Māori cultural values, their desire to become a positive role model for those who depend on them, and their motivation to address their offending.
- 6 The current evaluation was part of a series of evaluations of culturally targeted programmes and services undertaken in response to the 2005 Ministerial Review Unit (MRU) review of culturally targeted services. The MRU report resulting from that work noted at that time that the Department's services targeted at Māori and Pacific peoples were based on a clear need to reduce re-offending by Māori and Pacific peoples. However, the report concluded that the Department lacked sufficient evidence supporting the value and effectiveness of these services.

The evaluation

- 7 Evaluation of the TMPs was undertaken by external contractors, Kahui Tautoko Consulting Limited (KTCL). Fieldwork occurred between April 2007 and March 2008. A report on findings, titled *Process-Outcome Evaluation of Community*

¹ A recent PSR survey of providers working with community offenders identified nearly 30 separate agencies with whom we have current contractual relationships.

Probation Service (CPS) Tikanga Māori Programmes (TMPs) was received in May 2008 (a copy of this 112-page report is available on request from PSR).

- 8 The evaluation focused on five TMPs located at Christchurch, Manawatu, Napier, Hamilton and Auckland. These providers were selected because they each delivered an established programme that had been operating for several years, and individual courses tended to reliably commence with reasonably substantial numbers of participants.
- 9 A relatively straightforward question was posed in this evaluation: after course completion, to what extent do participants demonstrate improvements in personal domains which the course is designed to address - cultural knowledge and skills, relationships with family/whānau, desire for further cultural development, and motivation towards a pro-social lifestyle?
- 10 To obtain data to answer these questions, evaluative information was collected from participants immediately prior to, immediately after, and at three months following, course participation. The latter stage sought to determine the extent to which gains made were maintained, and to obtain evidence of relevant behavioural change.
- 11 The evaluators were also asked to consider all information obtained in the evaluation, to provide feedback on more general issues concerning TMPs. This included identifying specific elements of TMPs which appeared particularly to contribute to outcomes for offenders, and issues of importance regarding general support and delivery of these courses (e.g., recruitment and referral, provider support, follow-up).
- 12 A single course cohort from each of the five providers was selected for inclusion in the study. A total of 61 offenders were scheduled to participate in these five TMPs, however, 35 actually commenced as expected². All of these individuals agreed to participate in the study. By the time each course had concluded, a total of 27 remained and were available to participate in the post-course assessment. A further five of these could not be located for the three-months follow-up assessment.
- 13 Fieldwork for the study involved:
 - (i) *interviews with the participants*, and administration of a structured assessment tool
 - (ii) *assessments of participants' learning* and change completed by course providers
 - (iii) *interviews with whānau members* of programme participants (at the post-programme and three-months follow-up stage)

² Investigations into the reasons for non-attendance (from interviews with the offenders or their Probation Officer), included being unaware they had been registered to attend, having no form of transport, being unable to get time off work, or simply not wanting to participate (for some, attendance was not a condition of the sentence or order).

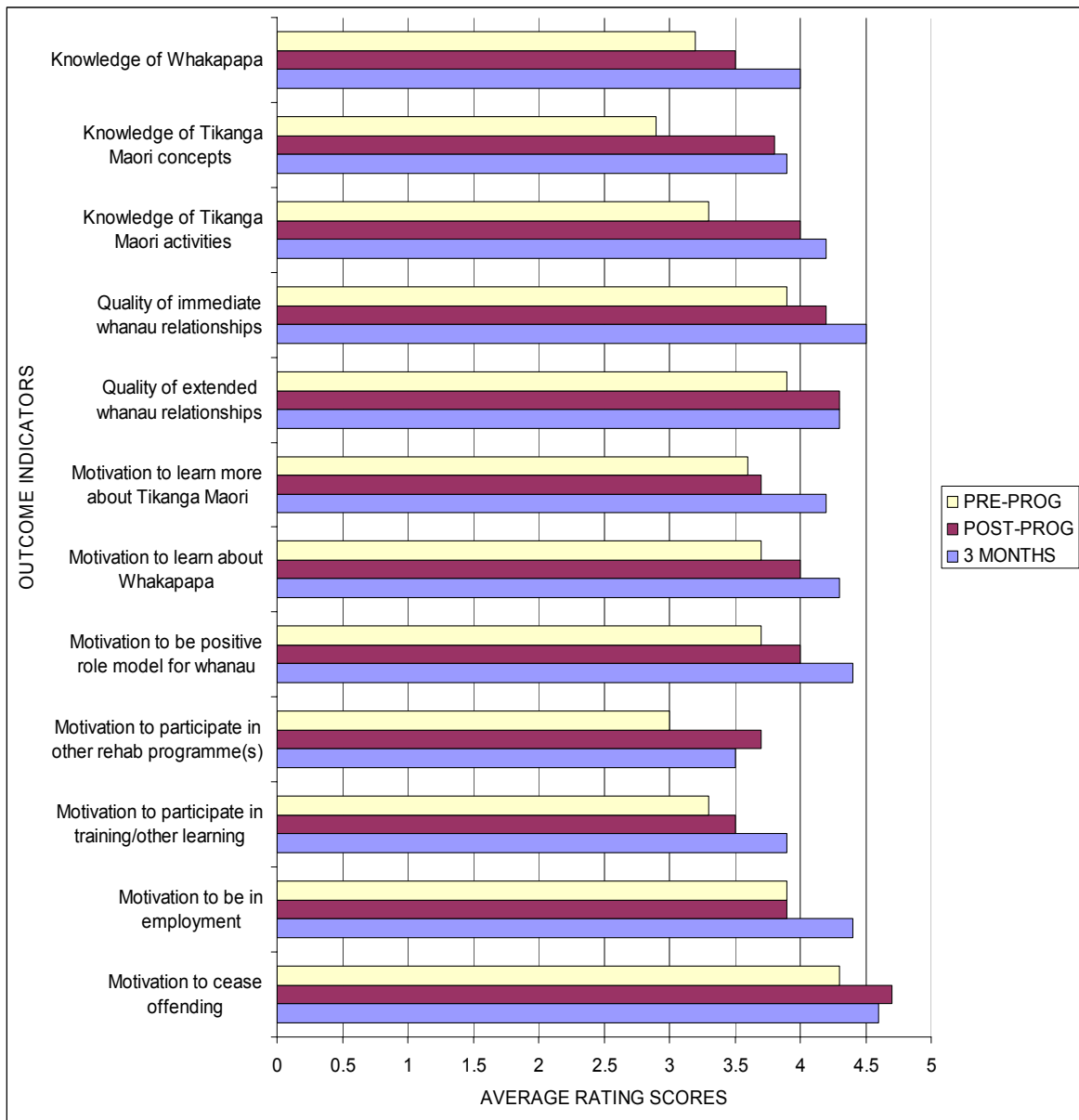
- (iv) *observation of participants* during programme activities. This focused on each participants' behaviour in the group setting (e.g., evidence of learning, level of participation, responses to challenge and conflict)
 - (v) *interviews with personnel* associated with the five TMPs on their general perceptions of programme impact, and on wider factors affecting TMP success (referrals, provider support, etc)
 - (vi) *interviews with Probation Officers* responsible for liaison with the providers in the region, as well as with Probation Officers responsible for the participants.
- 14 A structured assessment tool was used in face-to-face interviews with participants. The instrument was based on an earlier version developed for, and used successfully with the SMCA evaluation. This adapted instrument was designed to measure programme participants' learning and motivation across both cultural and offending-related domains, and utilised a five-point scale upon which participants rated their current status in relation to each domain.
- 15 The rating instrument used was reasonably "transparent" in the sense that offenders could readily identify the more socially desirable response options. However, the interviewer was required to pose specific questions relating to the items on the scale, as a means of ensuring that offenders' responses were reasonably aligned to their current level of functioning. Their responses to questions thus were used to either confirm or modify the ratings given.
- 16 Assessed domains were chosen on the basis of expected course outcomes as specified in the Department's service description document for TMPs. A range of factors were evaluated within the following areas: cultural knowledge, quality of relationships with immediate whānau, commitment to whānau, motivation to improve cultural knowledge and commitments, and motivation towards a law-abiding lifestyle.
- 17 Thus the principal findings of the study are derived from participants' responses to this assessment instrument, with wider interview and observation data used to both validate and provide context to participants' responses.

Main findings

(i) Participant impacts

- 18 Table 1 sets out offenders' self-assessment of their level of knowledge and motivation at the time of TMP commencement, at the end of the course, and three months later. Moderate but positive gains were recorded across most assessed domains when participants were evaluated following course completion, with the most pronounced positive change found in relation to knowledge of cultural concepts and of cultural activities.
- 19 Prior to course commencement, ratings of participants indicated on average a moderate level of knowledge, skill or motivation in relation to most of the domains listed above. Exceptions were in relation to motivation to cease offending and to be in employment, for both of which average ratings were already at the higher end of the scale.

Table 1. Average pre- and post-programme ratings of offenders' knowledge and motivation, before and three months after TMP completion.



- 20 Significantly, improvement appears to have occurred over the following three months, which is reflected in the results. In interview, several individuals were found to have extended their learning of tikanga knowledge and principles through undertaking further courses and placements. Many reported having begun to work on improving relationships with their immediate whānau. Several mentioned having accepted responsibility for the effects of their offending on whanau, and especially children. An enduring motivation to cease offending was very commonly reported
- 21 Given the primarily motivational purpose of these courses, and their relatively low intensity, analysis of reconviction data was not considered to be an appropriate outcome measure. Nevertheless, more than half of those who dropped out of these courses had either been arrested for new offences, or had breached their current sentence or order within the three months period; none of the course

completers had been re-arrested or breached in that same time period. However, this follow-up period is of course very short³.

- 22 Importantly, almost all participants who completed the TMPs described the experience in very positive terms. In-course observations of participants generally confirmed a good level of participation in the group process. Although a proportion did drop out prematurely, the facilitators of each of the courses were largely successful in engaging the majority of participants, and creating an experience that was described by participants as both rewarding and meaningful.
- 23 Information reported by the evaluators, based on their interviews with whānau members (usually partners or parents) is quite encouraging, and largely confirmed the sense of positive course impact. Instances are reported of a participant who, as a father, had become more attentive and involved with his children, another whose mother described him as so much more pleasant to have around, and others who are reported as being generally more motivated towards positive pro-social activities.

(ii) *Course elements*

- 24 In terms of questions concerning factors supporting programme effectiveness, participants identified a range of course factors which they regarded as important. Most frequently mentioned were the tikanga knowledge and competence of the tutors, the involvement of kuia and kaumata in delivery, and generally the course content itself.
- 25 Providers and facilitators emphasised the importance of being able to quickly create a positive group dynamic between participants. Once this was achieved, learning was able to occur. They also affirmed the importance of having highly competent and knowledgeable facilitators, able to speak authoritatively about tikanga. Also noted was the importance of support to individual participants from the CPPS and whānau. Probation Officers (POs) were seen as having a critical role in actively supporting their clients, firstly in ensuring they got to the course sessions, and then as they progressed through it. Having POs attend clients' graduation ceremonies was noted as a powerful signal to offenders that the PO valued the course.
- 26 Facilitators also reported that, from their perspective, course content *per se* was important. Participants' learning about Māori history and whanaungatanga, and taking part in culturally-based activities (kapa haka, taiaha, and raranga), was the essential medium for growth and change. Some courses involved visits to local organisations, linking participants to their communities, which was also noted as very helpful. On the other hand, a commonly expressed idea was that an "holistic" design meant that it was not necessarily possible to specify particular elements of a programme as of greater or less importance in supporting successful outcomes.

(iii) *Other issues*

- 27 The importance of follow-up was often mentioned as an area of weakness. Providers do not offer follow up services, although a few offenders did have some

³ Breach and reconviction information was obtained from Probation Officers managing the offenders

limited contact with their provider after the programme was completed. Some facilitators were of the view that more could be done to ensure support and assistance to participants to build on gains achieved in the course. Some felt that they themselves were often well-placed to do so, if funding was made available for this purpose.

- 28 It was noted by course personnel that chronic problems occur in the wider referral process. From their perspective, CPPS staff knowledge about the courses appeared variable, and some were perceived as being reluctant to refer clients. Having a dedicated liaison person was important, but these responsibilities (including necessary marketing of courses to colleagues, and ensuring that flow of referrals was adequate) were not always sufficiently attended to. TMP personnel stated that they would welcome more involvement between Probation Officers and the providers, which they felt would help POs' understanding of the programme, and better enable POs to support the offender after completion.
- 29 One additional barrier to successful course outcomes mentioned to evaluators related to the numbers of referrals who failed to appear at course commencement (over 40%). On the other hand, once offenders had commenced in these courses, the proportion who then dropped out prematurely was somewhat lower (23%). The fact that some POs provided transport to support participant attendance at the programmes was mentioned as an useful strategy in overcoming this issue.
- 30 Finally, the evaluators received a range of comments from providers over the current funding arrangement, which the providers felt was a constraining influence on course success. Mentioned were issues such as:
- that payment was based on referral numbers, but referrals were often low, perhaps because many POs were not well informed about the course, and aware of the option of making referrals
 - uncertainty over whether annual funding would be renewed making it more difficult for providers to recruit and retain quality staff
 - that even when courses were fully subscribed, the current funding levels did not cover all course costs.

Limitations of the evaluation

- 31 The evaluation is subject to a number of limitations. Firstly, main outcome findings were based on 27 participants, considerably fewer than the 60+ that was hoped for. Small sample size inevitably raises questions over representativeness of findings. It was hoped that information drawn from files on previous participants would augment findings, but variability in this data made it difficult to assess outcomes for those individuals.
- 32 Secondly, the absence of a comparison group makes attribution of changes to the programme itself problematic. However, experience has shown that, unless enormous efforts are made (and funds expended), it is seldom possible to collect research information from community-based offenders who are *not* in programmes, as these individuals typically have no interest in complying with such requests.

- 33 Thirdly, the use of a self-report measure of learning and change has obvious limitations, being subject to social desirability factors, as well as individual variability in self-assessment responses. On the other hand, several sources of information were utilised to identify progress made, and there was sufficient convergence from these to support confidence in core findings.
- 34 Fourth, the evaluation focused on five specific TMPs. Given that TMPs generally vary considerably in terms of duration, intensity, content and facilitator skill level, the findings reported here cannot necessarily be generalised to all TMPs.
- 35 Finally, the three-months timeframe for follow-up with offenders and assessment of the retention of the programmes' benefits is relatively brief. It is not therefore possible to report on whether these gains were retained in the longer-term. Further, no information is available on whether gains reported as a consequence of course participation translated into actual behavioural change, such as reduced offending.

Summary and conclusions

- 36 Though based on a relatively small sample completing one of five TMPs contracted to the Department, the evaluation indicates that TMPs currently being delivered to community offenders have value in promoting positive changes, both in terms of cultural development, but also in motivation towards a leading a pro-social lifestyle. Analysis suggests that gains achieved at programme end points were maintained three months out for participants who completed the programme.
- 37 The particular instances of TMP delivery studies in the evaluation were well-received by the offenders, with participants reporting the experience as enjoyable, rewarding and helpful.
- 38 The evaluation highlighted again a number of issues, with most of which we are already familiar:
- that ensuring adequate volumes of referrals to services requires on-going attention and effort on the part of field staff
 - once referred, active management of offenders is required to ensure that they do in fact commence on courses, and then complete it
 - active involvement of case officers during and after course participation will support offenders in building on what they have achieved
 - providers generally do not consider funding to be adequate.
- 39 CPPS may wish to consider ways in which a greater proportion of referred offenders can be assisted to commence with programmes.
- 40 The limitations to the evaluation notwithstanding, however, there is sufficient evidence presented in the report to confirm that the evaluated TMPs had a range of positive impacts on those offenders who completed these courses. As such, field staff can have confidence that, when delivered by suitably skilled facilitators, beneficial outcomes will be achieved by the offenders that are referred to these

courses. At the Head Office level, staff can also have confidence that expenditure of funds to support such services is justified. While TMPs should not be considered a stand-alone intervention, the findings provide grounds for regarding them as a useful element in the wider sentence management experience of appropriately referred offenders.