

What's new?

Behavioural Science Aotearoa (BSA) works to help justice sector participants make better choices and ensure Aotearoa's justice system puts people first. Understanding how people make decisions, and the barriers they face, is the first step to ensuring justice policies and practices work effectively.

Māori wardens encourage voluntary appearances at court

BSA are partnered with Māori wardens and Eastern District Police, working in collaboration to get people with Warrants to Arrest to show up at court.

There are about 900 Māori Wardens in Aotearoa who volunteer their time to support their communities. In the Eastern District, Police are working with Māori wardens to encourage people with active Warrants To Arrest (WTAs) to make a voluntary appearance at court. During the initiative, called Whariki Haumarū, two Māori Wardens make phone calls to people with active warrants, reminding them of the WTA and asking them to attend court. BSA, Māori wardens and Police have high hopes for the project, because the wardens have strong connections with the local community and are able to build rapport and communicate effectively.

BSA are supporting the design and evaluation of Whariki Haumarū. Mahinarangi Hakaraia (BSA Senior te ao Māori Advisor) produced a script for the Wardens, that was shaped by both te ao Māori principles and behavioural science.

Inspector Damin Ormsby, Māori Responsiveness Manager for the Eastern District, explains what he's hoping this project will achieve:

In the Hawkes Bay area, it can be difficult for Police to keep up with the number of people with active WTAs. We are hoping that people receiving a phone call from the wardens will be persuaded to turn up to court – this will help them clear their warrants more quickly, reducing long-term stress for them and their whānau, and of course reduce the backlog of WTAs for Police.

Inspector Damin Ormsby, Māori Responsiveness Manager for the Eastern District



Māori Wardens at the launch of Whariki Haumarū

The trial launched in March and will continue for six months. BSA will be checking in with the Eastern District Police to monitor progress, and are supporting the Evidence Based Policing Centre (EBPC) with evaluation.

BSA join frontline police to understand what drives decisions

BSA joined Wellington Central Police in the field to learn about how police make decisions and the environment they work in. This fieldwork will contribute to work helping police make better use of supported resolutions.

At the end of last year, BSA joined frontline police on a series of ride-alongs in Wellington, to learn more about the environment police work in and how they make decisions in the field. In particular, BSA wanted to understand how police use supported resolutions, which are alternatives to formal prosecution.

To further their understanding of officers' decision-making processes, the team also conducted hour-long interviews with several officers based in the region. As part of the interviews, the team created prompt cards displaying a range of different resolution outcomes frontline police are faced with. These include 'arrest', 'prosecute', 'issue formal written warning', 'Te Pae Oranga', 'do nothing'). The team used the cards to spark discussion – and they worked a treat.

Supported resolutions are an important part of the Police's new Reframe strategy, keeping people out of court and prison and addressing the underlying causes of offending. BSA are working with the Māori, Pacific and Ethnic Services team (MPES) and Reframe, bringing a behavioural lens to the supported resolutions workstream.



The prompt cards were a great way to help officers tell their story in a visual way. By the end of each interview, we had a better understanding of how the officer weighed up the different options and what influences them to go with a Supported Resolution – or something else.

Dr Matthew Davies, Principal Advisor, Behavioural Science Aotearoa

The team created prompt cards to gain insight into officers' decision-making processes

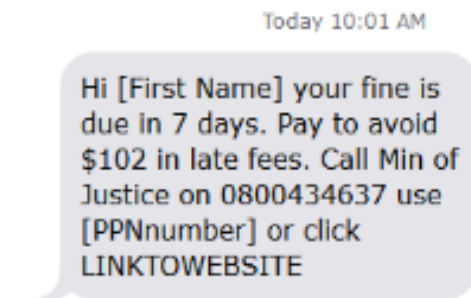
The team are now analysing their findings from the fieldwork and interviews. Over the next few months, BSA will continue to work with Reframe and the Māori, Pacific and Ethnic Services team (MPES), designing solutions to help improve uptake of supported resolutions.

Text-message reminders help New Zealanders avoid overdue fees

BSA tested the effectiveness of different text-message reminders for people who owe fines to the Ministry of Justice. With a sample of 44,000 New Zealanders, BSA showed that texts are good at prompting payment behaviour – and even better when they make payment easier.

Following the success of our previous trials to increase MoJ fines collections, BSA recently completed a new trial of text-message reminders for people who owe fines. The team tested the effectiveness of seven different text messages, sent to people seven days before their fine was overdue. These text messages featured combinations of a phone number to call to sort out the fine, a link to a website to pay online, and messaging to discourage procrastination.

The trial included 44,585 New Zealanders and ran for three months. Results showed that the text messages were effective at reminding people to pay on-time. People who received any text were more likely to make any behaviour (make a payment, or set up an arrangement to pay) than those who did not receive a text-message



The text message with the widest potential benefit, including a link for paying online, MoJ phone number, and motivational messaging

What is loss aversion?

Evidence shows that the pain of losing is often more powerful than the pleasure of gaining. In other words, people tend to prefer to not lose \$20, over gaining \$20. This means that phrasing which explains how to avoid a loss can be particularly powerful, like in our text-message reminder: "Pay to avoid \$102 in late fees".

reminder, by 10.3 percentage points. Adjusting the message to include a phone number, and using *loss aversion* framing (see explainer box below), were also effective at increasing on-time payments by an additional 2-3 percentage-points.

The team calculated that increasing the number of on-time fine payments could benefit **6,300 people per year by helping them avoid additional fees**, amounting to \$642,600 in additional fees avoided per year.

"We appreciate support from the team at Collections, which has allowed us to build a good understanding about which reminders work best. These results are particularly encouraging, because we've been able to prevent New Zealanders from accruing additional enforcement fees with a simple reminder text."

Brendan Rose, Senior Advisor, Behavioural Science Aotearoa

What else are we working on?

We've got a wide range of projects on the go. Here's a taster of what we're working on – get in touch for more information Helen.Aki@justice.govt.nz

- **Improving communications to help people show up at Criminal Court**
 - BSA is leading a workstream on the Criminal Process Improvement Project (CPIP) to reduce failures to appear at court. We are working to design communications, so people have clearer information about their court appointments and bail conditions.

- **Simplifying language in the Family Court**
 - BSA carried out fieldwork in Family Court to understand how participants can better understand what is going on, have more opportunities to be heard, and understand outcomes. This fieldwork will help inform a workshop for Family Court Judges, on communication in court.
- **Reducing MoJ call centre hang-ups**
 - When people phone the MoJ Collections call centre, they may hang up before they speak to an operator. BSA is developing a trial to test different hold messages callers hear, to encourage people to stay on the line.
- **New how-to guide on sending great emails**
 - Our new step-by-step guide applies behavioural science to make emails easy, attractive, social and timely.

What we're reading

[The Why is Not the Same as the How: Levels of Analysis and Scientific Progress in Psychology](#) by Laith Al-Shawaf

[Kaupapa Māori research- Some Kaupapa Māori principles](#) by Linda Tuhiwai Smith

[The Bias that Divides Us](#) by Keith E. Stanovich

[To Scale Behavior Change: Target Early Adopters, Then Leverage Social Proof and Social Pressure](#) by Philipe Bujold and Madhuri Karak

[Harnessing behavioural science in public health campaigns to maintain 'social distancing' in response to the COVID-19 pandemic: key principles](#) by Chris Bonell et al

Who are we?

Almost everything done within the Justice Sector involves human behaviour, whether it is requiring people to pay their fines, supporting people to stick to their parole conditions, or preventing crimes. We often expect people to respond predictably to laws or incentives without considering all the factors that can inform behaviour, including culture and the environment.

BSA work collaboratively across justice sector agencies to understand human behaviour in order to improve service and policy design. The team has expertise in psychology, criminology, economics, data analysis, research, evaluation and te ao Māori capability. Interventions are tested via trials, so that the impact of changes are measured.

If you'd like to know more about what we're up to or find out how we can assist you with your business or policy issues, please email Helen.Aki@justice.govt.nz

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