

21 November 2025

## Retail NZ response to Ministerial Advisory Group on Victims of Retail Crime - Child and Youth Retailing Offending survey

### 1. What concerns do you have about child and youth retail offending?

Retailers are deeply concerned about child and youth retail offending. Retail crime is experienced by almost all retail business (99% COMS Retail NZ Retail Crime Report 2024), with offending by young people and children being a significant proportion of all crime. Among stores with over 10 employees, 56% regarded the issue as serious or very serious (Retail NZ Survey November 2025).

Whilst recent data from Oranga Tamariki shows serious youth offending is trending down from the 2023 baseline, we have good reason to believe that a large proportion of retail crime incidents involving tamariki and rangatahi goes unreported. According to a recent survey of Retail NZ members almost a third (31%) told us they did not report incidents involving under 18s, indicating that the scale of the issue is larger than the data would suggest.

Retail crime impacts the safety and wellbeing of the 230,000 New Zealanders who work in the sector. Staff report experiencing negative psychological impacts as a result of retail crime, including traumatisation, fear, nervousness, and one member told us one in five of their staff left their employ as a direct result of criminal incidents.

*“Staff are terrified of these teenagers coming into the store.”*

The cost of responding to a criminal incident can run into the tens of thousands, and millions of dollars are being spent attempting to prevent retail crime before it happens. For example, one major retailer planned to spend over \$5.5 million on security upgrades across their network in 2025. All these costs are passed on to the consumer.

Police data shows that 10% of offenders are responsible for 50% of the reported incidents, and data from the Social Investment Agency (2023) shows the 10% of young people with the highest needs commit over 75% of all youth crime. This is clear evidence that the current response to youth offending is falling short. Retail NZ recognises the complexity of the issue facing policy makers. It is an urgent issue which requires intervention in the short term, yet the evidence shows that punitive approaches often kick the can down the road, ensuring future reoffending and young people stuck in the adult criminal justice system. Retail NZ

supports the implementation of evidence backed interventions that address the issue for the long term.

Our members want action which prioritises early intervention to stop children and young people entering the pipeline of lifelong offending, and tangible consequences for offenders that act as an effective deterrent, without institutionalising young people and exposing them to an environment that fuels criminality.

*“A continued focus on breaking the negative cycle, interrupting the relationships between the offenders and strengthening their links to their schools, whanau and communities is needed.”*

## **2. Please comment on child and youth retail offending behaviour associated with groups, gangs or adult direction.**

Retailers on the front line of retail crime observe young people wearing gang colours, and several high-profile incidents have been reported in the media involving violent and aggressive behaviour in stores. Whilst we don't know the number of incidents which are associated with gangs, our members report young children appearing to be encouraged, guided or dropped off by adults. Adults sometimes wait outside while youths commit theft. Older teens sometimes direct younger children to steal high-value items.

## **3. Please comment on retailers' experiences of reporting child and youth retail offending to Police.**

A major issue is that reporting is often perceived as not worth it because “nothing is done [that prevents further offending]”. Many incidents are not reported because it is perceived as “not worth it” for low value items, or because police are “too busy to attend minor shop lifting”. 31% of members who took our survey said they did not report crime committed by young people and children.

Retailers remain frustrated at the lack of consequences for the offender following reporting them to the police, as they observe those individuals back in store reoffending.

*“Police do a great job in identifying offenders, courts need to lock repeat offenders up.”*

Retailers experience a huge number of smaller incidents whose cumulative effect is draining and dispiriting. The under-reporting of these incidents masks a profound and pervasive problem of youth crime in retail.

*“Serious reports are reported to the Police. However, we deal with 100s of incidents which never seem to be addressed or tackled in the manner that it needs to be. Us as retailers do not have enough authority to address this emerging issue.”*

There is a broad spread of opinion about the role and effectiveness of police when dealing with youth crime. In our survey, less than a quarter told us they believed the system's (Police, Oranga Tamariki, Courts, etc) response to youth crime was effective.

**4. Please comment on alternative action meetings and Family Group Conferences in response to child and youth retail offending behaviour.**

Retail NZ has heard anecdotally positive experiences of attending FGC. The research around FGC is less robust than one might imagine, although some research suggests a 70% reduction in the frequency and/or seriousness of offending from a year prior to the FGC to one-year post-conference. However, there is a need for robust analysis of the efficacy of FGC to reduce reoffending. Comparison with non-FGC cohorts, the importance of victim attendance, and an examination of the over-representation of rangatahi Māori in FGC should be prioritised. Retail NZ would support further study of FGC so decisions regarding its role in preventing retail crime can be grounded in robust evidence.

William R. Wood & Juan Tauri (2025) Revisiting New Zealand's "gift to the world": demythologising youth justice family group conferencing in Aotearoa New Zealand, *Contemporary Justice Review*, 28:2, 220-244

**5. Please comment on accountability, consequences and rehabilitation in response to child and youth retail offending behaviour.**

Many of our members feel strongly that offenders must be held accountable for their actions, and many advocate for more serious consequences for repeat offenders. Some retailers believe there is "an insufficient deterrent factor" and offenders should receive "longer sentences [and] lower discounts". Others suggest that parents should be held more accountable for the actions of their children. There is a view that older rangatahi should experience more serious consequences than younger tamariki.

These views are balanced by other members who lean towards compassionate and rehabilitative responses that are grounded in evidence. These views reflect the data which says that the 75% of offences are committed by 10% of offenders who have the greatest exposure to hardship and disadvantage. The breadth and mix of views was neatly summarised by one member who said:

*"Engage super early - many are lost causes by the time they get out of primary schools. Find models that work and replicate them, giving resources to the not for profits that have programmes that work to stop reoffending."*

*For older teens - real consequences - between 15 and 18 they are really not kids anymore and should have greater sanctions/consequences for their actions, especially for recidivist offenders...”*

On balance, Retail NZ and our members recognise the need to prevent retail crime in the here and now, but also the need to intervene in such a way that does not institutionalise young people and perpetuate the cycle of reoffending.

## **6. Please comment on repeat retail offending behaviour by children and young people.**

Repeat retail offending is understood to be highly concentrated among a small cohort of high-needs young people, which contributes significantly to the challenge faced by retailers.

Data from the Social Investment Agency shows that the 10% of young people with the highest needs commit over 75% of all youth crime. This suggests that efforts to reduce crime must effectively address the complex issues facing this specific group.

Research shows that nearly two-thirds of children who offended before age 14 continued to offend up to the age of 18, and there is substantial evidence that offending as a child predicts further offending.

Our members find the prevalence of repeat offending hugely frustrating and often feel powerless to prevent this. In addition, our members report that offenders exploit the perceived lack of powers a retailer and the criminal justice system can exercise to stop the crime for occurring in the first place.

*“Aggression, anti-social behaviour, entitlement, abuse, threatening behaviour, try to intimate staff, the youth tend to come at staff with the ‘you can’t touch me’ so I will do as I please attitude.*

*As there are no consequences for their behaviour, no follow up and they aren’t held accountable for their actions they just treat staff with contempt and aggression.”*

We know the majority of recidivist offenders are known to services, and this has the knock on effect of eroding trust in the ability of the system to deal with the issue. More needs to be done to ensure a coordinated multi-agency response is properly resourced and can target and support young people at risk of reoffending.

The Oranga Tamariki Fast Track pilots show that coordinated, rapid multi-agency responses can have a positive impact on reoffending. International evidence demonstrates that intensive multi-agency work can stop the cycle of costly and damaging offending, and criminal justice system interaction. Retail NZ encourages Oranga Tamariki to conduct a robust impact evaluation, including a cost benefit analysis (reduction in criminal justice interaction and wider social impact vs cost of intervention) as soon as possible.

**7. Please comment on retailers' experiences of trespassing or attempting to trespass children and youth from retail premises.**

Retailers say they encounter a perception of immunity from young people, who believe they are protected from the full force of the justice system because of their age. This is frustrating to retail staff.

Trespass notices are often issued verbally by retail and security staff as offenders do not stay to be issued with a written notice. Verbal notices are problematic, as they do not allow for the necessary detail or documentation of a written notice.

Furthermore, written notices prepared for adult offenders may not be easily understood by young people. Alternative methods of delivering notices in a manner comprehensible to rangatahi and tamariki should be explored.

**8. Please comment on community crime prevention measures designed to reduce child and youth retail offending.**

Our members recognise that whānau and community plays an important role in youth crime. Whilst not directly a crime prevention measure, many retailers cite cost of living, truancy from school, and a lack of meaningful community activities as having a knock on effect on youth crime. The data shows that young people who have contact with Oranga Tamariki and experience poverty are more likely to commit crimes. For example nine-year-olds at a decile 1 (measure of deprivation) school were 2.1 times more likely to offend than their peers at a decile 10 school. This suggests deep rooted structural and societal factors have a significant role to play.

Some of our members would like to see a greater police presence in the community, and efforts made to keep young people in education. Ensuring police are adequately trained and resourced to work with young people from traumatised backgrounds and from different cultures is essential to building and retaining community trust in the police force and improving the perception of safety.

Addressing Māori over-representation in criminal justice statistics requires reform that honours Tino Rangatiratanga and follows a 'by Māori, for Māori' approach. Community-led initiatives run by everyday people, directly targeting high-risk youth, have shown clear success in Australia and elsewhere.

**9. Please comment on informal outreach measures to address child and youth retail offending behaviour.**

There is strong evidence that early intervention is vital to preventing future criminal behaviour. Schools are important places for young people to learn to build and maintain

healthy relationships with others and explore their strengths and interests. Children who are expelled or suspended from school are significantly more likely to offend.

Informal outreach programmes such as E tū tāngata may provide the external expertise to support schools to engage with young people. Innovative partnerships with community organisations and retail could enhance the connection with the business and the community. PAK'nSAVE in Rolleston has partnered with E tū tāngata, showcasing how an organisation with a clear social mission can innovate and engage with business to reach young people.

#### **10. Please comment on reducing child and youth retail offending harm.**

Given the short time available to respond to this consultation, we have been limited in our ability to consider and develop comprehensive suggestions for solutions to reducing child and youth retail offending harm. We hope the MAG will provide the opportunity for follow-up consultation where we can thoroughly explore appropriate and effective ways to address this issue.

The evidence consistently highlights that reducing the harm caused by child and youth retail offending requires a holistic, long-term approach that moves beyond reactive measures and focuses on early intervention, addressing underlying social needs, and effective multi-agency cooperation.

Early intervention is essential to prevent children from entering the revolving door of offending and criminal justice interaction.

Almost all young offenders come from backgrounds that include poverty, abuse and neglect, domestic violence, and mental health issues.

It is crucial to balance consequences with the reality that these are still children with underdeveloped cognitive and decision-making power. The harm they cause is often a result of trying to navigate complex and unstable lives defined by violence and trauma.

A systemic, wraparound approach across multiple agencies is essential. This requires collaboration across health, education, police and child welfare agencies.

The Oranga Tamariki Fast Track service provides a model for reducing harm through a rapid response pathway delivered by a multi-agency, multi-disciplinary team.

Reducing harm relies heavily on relational work and anchoring young people within supportive community structures. Support should be culturally embedded and evidence-based.

While the focus should be on support, many of our members feel that reducing harm also requires consequences that act as a deterrent for older, recidivist offenders. Punitive options for offenders that put staff and customers at risk of harm should be on the table. However,

all efforts should be made to support offenders exiting prison to reintegrate positively into the community, for example through support with gaining qualifications and work.