



Media release
11 May 2016

**PRINCIPAL YOUTH COURT JUDGE – KEYNOTE SPEAKER
FOR NEURODISABILITIES FORUM**

Principal Youth Court Judge Andrew Becroft will highlight how neurodisabilities have been an 'invisible presence' in the court system, underlying some of the most serious youth offending, in a presentation to the 2016 Neurodisabilities Forum in Wellington tomorrow.

Judge Becroft, who takes up an appointment as the Children's Commissioner in July, is one of two keynote speakers for the forum. The second is Chair of the NZ Institute for Educational and Developmental Psychologists Rose Blackett. The forum, hosted by Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand, will be opened by Minister for Disabilities Hon. Nicky Wagner.

Judge Becroft's presentation will look at the significant prevalence of neurodisabilities in the youth justice system, the importance of knowledge regarding neurodisability to justice system responses, and how New Zealand's youth justice system is now taking a pioneering approach to focus on recognizing and dealing with neurodisabilities that in many cases underlie the most serious and complex cases of youth offending.

With Youth Court age proposals currently before Cabinet, the forum is a landmark event bringing together Justice Department representatives, NGOs, Ministries, Police and academics to explore how neurodisabilities create vulnerability when they come into contact with the justice system, evidenced by gross over-representation of neurodisabilities in NZ court and prison statistics.

Guy Pope-Mayell, DFNZ Chair of Trustees, says young people with neurodisabilities – from learning differences like dyslexia, through to intellectual disability, foetal alcohol syndrome and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder – are particularly vulnerable in a justice system geared towards achieving convictions.

"Difficulty with the acquisition of basic skills like reading and spelling, slower cognitive processing speeds and comprehension issues, among other things, can contribute to this. Just as you wouldn't ask a person in a wheelchair to run a marathon, you shouldn't ask a person with communication difficulties to agree to something they do not comprehend.

"Police and court processes are designed to deliver a specific result – a guilty plea and a conviction. These are key performance indicators of the judicial system. When this KPI meets neurodisabilities, the results are often unjust." Pope-Mayell says.

There are well documented direct correlations between neurodisabilities and youth offending and prison populations. Judge Becroft has estimated 65-70% of offenders that come before the Youth Court are not formally engaged within the education system. Results from a Ministry of Education screening tool trialed in 2008 on 197 prison inmates showed that 90% were not functionally literate and 80% were not functionally numerate. British, American and Swedish studies all estimate that 30-50% of prisoners are dyslexic.

Pope-Mayell says common and shared characteristics of neurodisabilities are often misunderstood in a justice context.

"If someone is refusing to make eye contact that can be misinterpreted as guilt or belligerence. In reality, it is just a very common symptom of a number of neurodisabilities, from foetal alcohol syndrome through to dyslexia, autism and ADHD and cannot be ascribed any specific significance."



2016 Neurodisabilities Forum
How vulnerability intersects with justice in NZ



As well as keynote speeches, the forum also features presentations from key stakeholders, including CYF Youth Justice Support, Just Speak, FASD-CAN, and Talking Trouble. Principal Youth Court Judge Research Counsel Kate Peirse-O'Byrne will also speak about neurodisabilities as they impact youth offending. In 2014, Peirse-O'Byrne published the first comprehensive analysis of neurodisability and youth offending specific to New Zealand, noting that neurodisabilities may result in reduced capacity to comprehend the criminal process, and that without adjusted processes and special explanations, the young offender may disengage from the process.

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2016 NEURODISABILITIES FORUM

How vulnerability intersects with justice in NZ

8am-1pm, 12 May 2016

Lambton Rooms, Intercontinental Hotel, 2 Grey Street, Wellington 6011

FORUM SCHEDULE

Setting the scene:

8.00am. Opening address – Minister for Disability Issues Hon. Nicky Wagner

8.15am. Keynote address – Andrew Becroft, Principal Youth Court Judge

8.30am. Keynote address – Rose Blackett, Chair of the NZ Institute for Educational and Developmental Psychologists

8.45am. Closing comments – Guy Pope-Mayell, Chair of Trustees, Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand

9:00am. Tea, coffee, and breakfast refreshments

Stakeholder Dialogue:

9.30am. 5 minute 'Snapshots' from stakeholder representatives

10.30am. Small group discussions

11:30am. 5 minute group findings

12.30pm. Closing comments – Dr Ian Lambie, Justice Sector Science Advisor

12.45pm. Dialogue wrap up – Dr Nessa Lynch, Faculty of Law, Victoria University of Wellington

12.55pm. Close of Forum – Guy Pope-Mayell, Chair of Trustees, Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand

1pm. Finish

For further information, please contact DFNZ Chair of Trustees Guy Pope-Mayell, 0275 449 496, guy@dfnz.org.nz

ABOUT DYSLEXIA FOUNDATION NEW ZEALAND

DFNZ's mission is to increase the awareness, recognition, understanding and acceptance of dyslexia as an alternative way of thinking. DFNZ is focused on action-oriented activities to champion change for dyslexic individuals, and on providing information, tools and resources to inspire others to do the same.

Since inception in November 2006, DFNZ has built its reputation on successful advocacy and action. From lobbying the Government for dyslexia to be officially recognised, achieved in 2007, through to working closely with the Government on the inclusive education agenda, the landscape of dyslexia has been fundamentally changed. DFNZ remains remain fully engaged with the education agenda. In parallel, it has activated a second agenda of youth justice and is backing proposals to raise the Youth Court age from its current level of 16 years.