

Hospitality education in New Zealand prisons

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New Zealand has one of the highest imprisonment rates per capita when compared to the rest of the developed world. People who offend in New Zealand have a 43% chance of reoffending within the first 24 months of their release [1]. It is estimated that approximately 60% of people who offend have literacy and numeracy skills lower than the NCEA Level 1 competency, and 66% of adults have no formal qualifications [2, 3]. A focus on literacy and numeracy, support through baseline education, and specific trades like hospitality, can start to refine the options of a person who offends, further enabling them to start developing goals that will support their futures [4].

Since 2014, the Department of Corrections/Ara Poutama Aotearoa has been upgrading the prison-based educational programmes available to people who offend to achieve this. Goals have been set to integrate the in-prison education with the nationally recognised level of education along with practical elements such as kitchen work, housekeeping and other service-based vocations such as hairdressing and customer service. The courses are relatively short, ranging from six to 12 weeks, and provide key skills and the foundations for further study. Evidence from overseas has found that hospitality and, specifically, catering programmes are a tool that positively impacts the way people who offend engage with their rehabilitation; creating an experience through the sharing and giving of food is seen as a way to reintegrate and regain a sense of achievement and being of service through meaningful social connections and employment.

Our study carried out a systematic literature review of the effectiveness of hospitality training and education in correctional facilities. Evidence was found of the effectiveness of educational programmes within prisons and their positive impact on recidivism. It was also found that hospitality training initiatives, such as those provided in prison training restaurants open to the public for dining, could offer a unique opportunity that allows people who offend to change the negative public perceptions held about them. In New Zealand, we have unique tikanga-based initiatives that support people who offend to reintegrate back into the public environment and their families, with reduced reoffending [5]. The literature showed, convincingly, that education leads to opportunities for post-release employment and the ability to manage work-life balance, reintegration into society, and gain skills that support long-term prosperity [3]. Czerniawski [6] sees education as a key step in making a positive change in the lives of people who offend, especially if followed by a period of post-release support.

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Our study also revealed the challenges of providing hospitality education in prisons. Prison security risks, risk of lockdowns, student mental health, lack of educational resources and support services, and lack of set-up and sustainable funding for educational programmes were seen as hindrances to the success of prison education programmes. Lack of post-release support and the negative stigma of people who offend perceived by the public and employers were further noted issues of concern. Likewise, prison culture, staff retention, general misconduct and mistrust were also cited as aspects of concern [7]. Giousmpasoglou and colleagues [8] suggested that people who offend would prefer education programmes that were carried out by external facilitators over in-prison programmes. The importance of networks between educators, support workers and employers are important in this regard.

With the hospitality industry facing a skills shortage and with its low barriers to entry, there is potential to build upon the success of existing hospitality education programmes to build skills, pride and a second chance for those who are engaging in rehabilitation. There is also an opportunity to consider tertiary pathways for these hospitality graduates and entrepreneurs. Furthermore, the Department of Corrections/Ara Poutama Aotearoa could consider the success of initiatives such as The Clink Charity training restaurants in the UK in supporting rehabilitation through hospitality training and work.

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