Youth justice forum addresses high risk offenders

Representatives from the Judiciary, Child, Youth and Family (CYF) and the Department of Corrections gathered at Tāmaki recently to discuss developments in the area of youth justice.

At the University of Auckland Youth Justice Practice forum, research was presented by the Judiciary on children called the ‘Crossover Kids’ - those who have dual status of Care and Protection, and Youth Justice with CYF; child arsonists; a new programme being run for high risk youth offenders by CYF; and the new Department of Corrections Youth Offending programme.

The second to be held, the forum featured Judge Tony Fitzgerald who spoke about recent changes to the function and work of the Cross Over Court at Auckland District Court, while organiser and Associate Professor of Clinical Psychology Ian Lambie, from the School of Psychology, discussed findings of recent research on child arsonists, including recidivism data and risk factors.

Other participants included Jo Smith, project manager for the Engaging and Challenging Youth team at CYF and Louisa Webster, a psychologist with the Department of Corrections talking about the new Youth Offenders programme run by the Department.

“The aim of the forums is to bring practitioners who work with youth offenders together to improve clinical practice and share ideas,” Dr Lambie says.

“The key thing that came out of this was the need to comprehensively address the needs of those children with Care and Protection histories within CYF and to develop programmes for child offenders in order to stop them going on to become youth offenders, and ending up in the adult prison population.

“CYF are doing some very new and innovative work looking at extremely intensive work around those high risk children and we applaud them for their efforts.”

Secondly, he says, the Department of Corrections has revised its programmes of working with youth offenders and is fine tuning its interventions.

Both agencies are working with the highest risk offenders, that in the past, society has turned its back on and this marks an important change in direction from previous practices which have been non-existent and ineffective.

Dr Lambie says he intends to run two practice forums a year, with the next planned for November, when he hopes there will be input from Māori and Pasifika response around youth justice.
Message from Head of Tāmaki Innovation Campus

Dear Colleagues

Welcome to my first issue of the Tāmaki Update and I hope you enjoy reading about the many and varied activities taking place on campus. I have accepted the role of Acting Head of Tāmaki Innovation Campus while Associate Professor Greg Anson is the Acting Dean of Science, and I am enjoying the role and the opportunity to learn more about all the activities on this campus. I really look forward to working with you over the next few months.

It is wonderful to see all the enthusiastic students bringing life to the campus now that Semester One is well underway. The Orientation programme organised by Tāmaki management in collaboration with Population Health, Sport and Exercise Science, the Library and student service groups was a huge success and I thank all those involved in organising it and making it happen. I know that a number of other groups held programmes to welcome Tāmaki students to University life and this is also greatly appreciated.

Recently, the Director of Property Services Peter Fehl, and the Vice-Chancellor Professor Stuart McCutcheon, spoke to the campus about the anticipated sale of the Tāmaki Innovation Campus. The transfer of Colin Maiden Park and its associated facilities to Auckland Council was completed on 31 January 2014. The University has received a number of expressions of interest for the eastern side of the campus and is meeting with interested parties, who will be visiting the campus from time to time.

The refurbishment of the Engineering buildings at the Newmarket Campus is progressing well and it is anticipated that the Faculty of Engineering at Tāmaki and associated groups will be moving to Newmarket this year. There are no confirmed plans for other groups at Tāmaki to move, with some of the moves dependent on completion of projects such as the new Science building on the corner of Symonds and Wellesley Streets.

We understand that major change such as this can be very unsettling and that many of you are concerned about the continued delivery of services on campus. Please be assured that the University is committed to maintaining a vibrant and active community at Tāmaki, and if you believe there are any areas where services could be improved, or you have other concerns please do not hesitate to contact me. In the meantime, I am meeting with the head of each school, department and group on campus to gain an understanding of your priorities, goals and issues.

I encourage you to support the Head of Campus Seminar Series this year, as we look forward to bringing you a range of interesting speakers. The first in the series is Professor Mark Taylor, Director of the NZ Product Accelerator on 11 April at 3pm in 731.201. He will present on the development of high value manufacturing in New Zealand and the part the NZ Product Accelerator is playing. Last year they were awarded $12.7 million over six years from MBIE, a very impressive achievement as they seek to bridge the gap between basic research and commercialisation. Look out for the schedule of other seminars and events we will be sending out soon.

Wishing you all the best for a fulfilling and successful year.

Professor Peter Thorne
Acting Head of Tāmaki Innovation Campus

Once again, the Tamaki Innovation Campus staff and postgraduate community showed their enormous generosity at a time of need for many people.

For a number of years, Tāmaki has collected for the local food bank which is run by the Glen Innes Citizens Advice Bureau. Organised to coincide with the annual Tāmaki Christmas Party, the food is displayed for all to see and celebrate in the act of giving.

At the party in December, Bernard Kendall, food bank chairperson, expressed his sincere appreciation and thanks to the campus for the impressive contribution made.

The food bank has been operating for over 20 years and is completely run by volunteers with Peter Odgear, the food bank manager, working almost full-time unpaid. According to food bank secretary, Kristen Jones, one of Peter’s favourite occasions is attending the Christmas party, mingling with everyone and collecting the food donation.

Each year the food bank provides between 1500 to 2000 food parcels designed to feed a family for about a week. They rely on organisations such as the University, local bakeries, supermarkets, primary schools and members of the public for food donations.

Kristen says until recently they received no regular funding, however last year they applied to the Mount Wellington Trust and received $9,000 which made a huge difference to the stability of the food bank.
Life is better with coffee!

Researchers and scientists pulling all-nighters and relying on caffeine boosts may have PhD researcher Charlotte Connell to thank for putting sound science behind the theory.

She’s entering her second year of PhD study in the exercise metabolism laboratory, supervised by Dr Nick Gant. Charlotte is looking how fatigue can influence the way the brain receives, processes and responds to visual information.

“The objective,” she says, “is to provide insights into methods which help overcome fatigue and may help those suffering from disorders characterised by fatigue, such as chronic fatigue and mild brain injury.”

Her poster, ‘Coffee: more than meets the eye’, won first prize at both the University-wide ‘Exposure’ Postgraduate Research Exposition, and the Faculty of Science poster competition.

Although she describes designing the poster as ‘a nice extra-curricular activity’, its roots reside in a conference she attended last year, the largest vision science conference in the world. There she presented the results of her BSc (Hons) research which examined the effect of fatigue on the control of eye movements.

Her caffeine-rich research is evaluating the powerful effects of caffeine on both visual and cognitive capabilities and the dosages required to achieve this. An endurance athlete, for instance, will be looking for a moderate dosage where they experience optimal perceptual and cognitive benefits without the potential negative side effects such as dizziness or tremors.

Over the summer Charlotte has been investigating the effects of caffeine on visual and cognitive function at high altitude. Not all of the impairments that mountaineers experience are caused by low oxygen and caffeine may help restore brain function.

Charlotte began her academic career with a BSc in Sport and Exercise Science as it gave her an opportunity to spend time learning about the things which she is most passionate about - science, the human body and exercise.

She competes in a range of sports and recently completed her second marathon - but is unwilling to say whether it was coffee-assisted!

Charlotte has received a number of awards and scholarships including the University of Auckland Chancellor’s Award for Top Māori and Pacific Scholars.

Cycling infrastructure more economic

Cycling investment has long term health benefits for Auckland according to a recent study undertaken by the School of Population Health and funded by the Health Research Council and NZTA. The research is a world first in systematically exploring the future effects of realistic policy options to increase cycling.

The study demonstrates the clear long term benefits to Auckland’s health of making the right kind of investment for cycling.

“We know already that shifting to walking and cycling for the trip to work can create a lot of benefits for health and the economy, as well as making for a fairer society,” says lead author Dr Alex Macmillan. “We also know that in cities like Auckland, where motor vehicles dominate, fear of traffic numbers and speeds is uppermost in preventing people from taking up cycling.”

Researchers were interested in uncovering the complex factors shaping trends over time in cycle commuting. “We wanted to use this understanding to find the best policy options for Auckland and other similar cities where cycling levels are very low”.

The authors found that the best kinds of policies involve investing in specific road changes that effectively improve cycling safety while also helping a wide range of people feel safe while riding.

Dr Macmillan says the study demonstrates that, far from being expensive, high quality changes to main roads and local streets across the region are extremely cost effective, bringing more than $20 in benefit to society for every dollar spent over the next 40 years.
What can we learn from fruit flies? Can they help improve pedestrian safety when crossing roads and can they help reduce ‘wrong lane’ vehicle crashes? These questions are being asked by PhD researcher Junli Tao.

Junli explains her curiously intertwined research interests as pedestrian intention analysis (e.g., pedestrian body direction classification and head pose recognition), high density fruit fly 3D trajectory reconstruction, and wrong lane detection.

Junli is a third year international PhD student in the Department of Computer Science. She received her Master of Automation from Hunan University, China in 2011, and with the support of the Chinese Scholarship Council started her PhD programme at Tāmaki Innovation Campus the same year.

Her research focuses on multiple-object tracking theory with two applications. One aims to help biologists study the behaviour of Drosophila Melanogaster (fruit fly). Drosophila Melanogaster is one of the most popular organisms to study the nerve system, according to Junli, who says the control of locomotion is related to the nerve system.

“Tracking the fruit flies automatically in the image sequences captured with several cameras, enables biologists to analyse their behaviour more efficiently. In order to obtain the three dimensional trajectory of each fruit fly, matching the corresponding fruit fly in different camera views and adjacent frames is a challenge, especially in high density scenes,” says Junli.

“A tracking system has been developed to track up to 200 fruit flies in a simulator. We are working alongside Muenster University, Germany and I was invited to visit the Computer Vision and Pattern Recognition research group for five weeks in November, funded by DAAD-Förderprogramm: STIBET-Doktoranden.”

Recently Junli gave a presentation, ‘3D Trajectory Reconstruction for Drosophila Melanogaster’, at Computer Science’s Joint Korea - New Zealand Workshop on Multimedia Imaging. The first workshop of its kind there were participants from KAIST and Chonnam National University in Korea, and from other institutions in New Zealand.

Junli’s other project aims to protect pedestrians and is part of research on advanced driving assistance systems. She is currently trying to propose algorithms to predict pedestrians’ intention such as attempting to cross.

“I am currently working on Random Decision Forest classifiers to classify the body direction of a pedestrian. Body direction is the extra information used to improve pedestrian tracking performance, compared with the more commonly used appearance and motion information,” explains Junli.

She says there have been many highlights of her time so far at Tamaki, but attending the Microsoft’s Imagine Cup 2013 in New Zealand and becoming one of the 24 finalists was a special experience. For the competition, she spent three weeks developing a wrong lane detection system. “A third of the world’s population drives on the left hand side while the rest drive on the right. This system aims to prevent tourists driving on the wrong side of the road,” she says.

Junli’s ultimate plan is to return to China, but in the interim she has applied to undertake an internship in the computer vision group of Daimler in Germany, who are leaders in research for advanced driver assistance systems.

Third year international PhD student, Junli Tao, is helping biologists study the behaviour of fruit flies, and at the same time is aiming to protect pedestrians through her research on advanced driving assistance systems.
Tāmaki academic honoured

Tāmaki’s finest are again in the news, with Dr Margaret Agee named in the New Year Honours List as an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to mental health education.

Dr Agee joins other academics to be honoured over the years. She says the award came as a complete surprise and considers it validation of the contribution that others have made to her work.

A senior lecturer in the School of Counselling, Human Services and Social Work, Dr Agee has been involved with mental health and counsellor education for the past 40 years.

She was appointed as a lecturer at the University of Auckland in 1990 and has been leader of the counsellor education programme since 2006. Before that, her professional background included teaching, then practising as a counsellor in school, tertiary and private practice contexts.

Working in South Auckland she developed a strong interest in cultural perspectives on well-being and therapeutic approaches that are now reflected in her teaching and research.

Dr Agee has also been involved in volunteer work with Lifeline and as a practitioner and researcher in the areas of suicide prevention and education, and loss and grief. In 1986 she established the first support group in New Zealand for people bereaved by suicide.

In 1990, she helped found the National Association for Loss and Grief, and was President from 2007-2013. In 1999, she was elected to membership of the International Work Group on Death, Dying and Bereavement.


A toast to success for Aphasia

People with aphasia are tackling a toastmasters-type course, in an initiative from Speech Science and the Centre for Brain Research, named ‘More Than Words - a gavel club for people with aphasia’. Run in conjunction with locally based AM Toastmasters, and under enthusiastic guidance from speech and language therapist Celia Moore and Toastmaster Claire Reed, the Gavel Club has been meeting each week for the past 18 months.

Philippa Friary, Clinical Director of Speech Science, says it aims to encourage people with aphasia to build confidence, gain leadership skills, make friends and support each other in their goal to live well with aphasia.

“We’ve grown from 5 to 13 participants, along with a number of volunteers and supported by speech language therapy students. As well as making speeches and talking on ‘table topics’ the group runs itself, with a chair, secretary and joke master.

“It’s a helpful tool for people with aphasia who have lost confidence in many aspects, from forming or finding words through to understanding or listening. We’re fortunate to have a number of supporting partners, like the Centre for Brain Research, AM Toastmasters and the UK’s Tavistock Trust.”

Building on the success of the More Than Words - Gavel Club, the Speech Science team is intending to start a similar group for people diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease. For more information please contact Philippa Friary (nee Williams) on pm.williams@auckland.ac.nz.
Symposium agrees on sugar sweetened beverages policy

New Zealand’s rising rate of childhood obesity alarms Boyd Swinburn, Professor of Population Nutrition and Global Health at Tamaki Innovation Campus. He says the demise of funding for the Healthy Eating Healthy Action programme and allowing the junk food industry free reign in marketing to children is creating a ‘sad legacy of increasing diabetes and chronic diseases’.

He also believes commitment at government level is pivotal to turning around New Zealand’s obesity epidemic and he is pleased that the government is planning to adopt the very promising systems approach to obesity prevention being taken in Victoria.

Other key policies recommended by the World Health Organisation, such as restricting unhealthy food marketing to children and having healthy food policies for schools, will also need to be implemented to have maximum effect on childhood obesity.

Professor Swinburn was one of the international line-up of speakers at the inaugural Sugary Drink Free Pacific 2030 symposium, which looked at sugar and sugar sweetened beverages, and population health in the Pacific and New Zealand.

Two prominent US academics, Professor Richard Johnson and Professor Robert Lustig, were keynote speakers.

Other leading academics included Dr Mike Rayner (Director, British Heart Foundation Health Promotion Research, Oxford University) and Professor Cliona Ni Mhurchu (National Institute for Health Innovations, University of Auckland). There was also strong representation from Māori and Pacific health and research experts.

The symposium was hosted by the University of Auckland and the University of Otago, and was organised by Dr Gerhard Sundborn from the School of Population Health. Dr Sundborn also heads the advocacy group FIZZ, a group of researchers and public health doctors who have come together to advocate ending the sale of sugar sweetened beverages from New Zealand.

Dr Sundborn says that the 200+ participants represented a wide range of industry, NGO, academic, government and international interests and provided feedback on a draft sugar sweetened beverages policy brief, prepared by the FIZZ NZ Beverage Guidance Panel.

The draft policy, now out for consultation, calls for leadership and commitment to support them is long overdue.

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The draft policy, now out for consultation, calls for leadership and action from government, in terms of programmes and policies, to promote and create healthier food environments. Some recommendations include introducing a 20 percent excise tax on sugar sweetened beverages with funding used for health promotion; implementing effective restrictions of marketing to children of unhealthy foods and beverages; ensuring sports sponsorship from a beverage company relates only to a sugar-free product; and that beverage companies promote sugar-free beverages as their flagship products. It calls also for a change in supermarket stocking and promotions which favour the sugar-free beverages.

Professor Swinburn says the current spate of media attention on sugar has raised the debate in the general public, but cautions that focusing on a single nutrient in an issue as complex as obesity could take on a life of its own as dietary fat did 10-20 years ago.

“New Zealand needs to get to the forefront of public health to stop this rise in childhood obesity,” he says. “The evidence is compelling, the strategies are agreed, the public is highly supportive, and children and their parents are clearly losing the battle of the bulge. Some government leadership and commitment to support them is long overdue.”

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