

Approaching safety differently - Great customer service equals great safety and security

MINISTRY OF JUSTICE

The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) identified violence in courts as a critical safety risk. Their response has been to mitigate this risk through a holistic health, safety and security work programme with a focus on customer service from their front-line court security team. This approach has led to measurable improvements in customer satisfaction and reducing risk as MOJ continues to deliver people centred justice services.

Ministry of Justice context

MOJ is the lead agency in the justice sector and the lead agency on Crown/Māori Relations for the government. They work towards a safe and just New Zealand. To do this they administer the court system, the legal aid system and the Public Defence Service. MOJ collect and enforce fines and civil debts. They also negotiate the settlement of historical Treaty of Waitangi claims against the Crown and ensure that settlements remain durable. MOJ provide policy advice on matters related to justice and the administration of the law, and on Crown/Māori Relations. They work with the judiciary and their justice sector colleagues to help make sure New Zealand is a safe and just society.

MOJ has around 4,000 people operating out of 106 buildings at 99 locations. 64 of these are Courts where a volatile mix of defendants, victims, witnesses, supporters, accused, criminal groups, gangs, MOJ employees, Judges, juries and other members of the public and the justice sector intersect and interact.

What led the Ministry of Justice to enhance safety, security and customer service?

Court processes vary considerably in the types of security challenges they face, ranging from everyday incivilities in a high-volume district court to intimidation of witnesses or jurors in trials of organised crime figures, or strained interpersonal relationships in child custody or child protection matters. Court users may be anxious as a result of a number of issues including threats of intimidation, general agitation or unfamiliarity of surroundings.

MOJ's people may be stressed as a result of working with difficult clients or taking the flak after unfavourable decisions. Dissatisfied clients may target Judges and prosecutors, child protection workers or social workers, counter staff and security staff. The most likely behaviour they experience will be angry outburst or insults, but on occasions they may be subjected to physical violence.

In terms of the impact on court users and those who operate the court, the result is fear, frustration and anxiety. Court participants can be unable to carry out their business in a calm and orderly manner. If those involved in court processes are afraid, it increases the risk that vulnerable people will not feel protected by the law, litigants will distrust the credibility of the process, witnesses may feel pressured to tell their stories in particular ways and observers may question the integrity of the court process. These, in turn, have the potential to undermine the community's confidence in the criminal justice system as a whole.



Court Security team at Christchurch Justice and Emergency Services Precinct

In scenarios where safety or security resolutions are required prior to a court hearing, delays can result. Having to actively delay court hearings if operating in a low security resource environment would ultimately have had an impact on access to Justice and increase the impact on court users and victims who stay in the system longer.

For this reason the Ministry's security eco-system is not just about court users or buildings, critical though they are to the delivery of justice. Their people are central to the story.

An independent threat and risk assessment conducted in late 2016 assessed the threat of violent crime from fixated persons, acutely disaffected persons and

directed violent disruption towards Ministry employees, as well as members of the Judiciary, as high. This assessment confirmed where MOJ needed to focus their activity and resources.

What was done?

- > Appointment of a General Manager for Health, Safety and Security.
- > Over the past year MOJ has invested heavily in leadership across the Health, Safety and Security group to ensure a well-run professional security operation, as well as investing in business intelligence capability and systems that support evidence based decision making.
- > Recruitment of around an additional 100 Court Security Officers (CSO) to deter assaults, prevent weapons entering courts and make building users feel safe. This recruitment, almost doubled the size of their court security team.
- > The deployment of trained CSOs, backed up with legislative powers and screening at a single point of entry is an internationally tried and tested effective security treatment/mitigation to reduce the likelihood of occurrence and reduce the consequence of assault (with or without weapons).

In order to support a substantially increased operational function MOJ need appropriate supporting functions, so they also put in place:

- > a Performance Advisory team
- > increased advisory capacity in Privacy and Security Policy
- > a National Security Operations and created an in-house practice, improvement and training function. This new function is being supplemented by a secondees from the Police training college.

How did MOJ know it was working?

MOJ has seen a significant culture shift and drive to building strong leadership within the Health, Safety and Security group following the appointment of the GM Health, Safety and Security in early 2017.

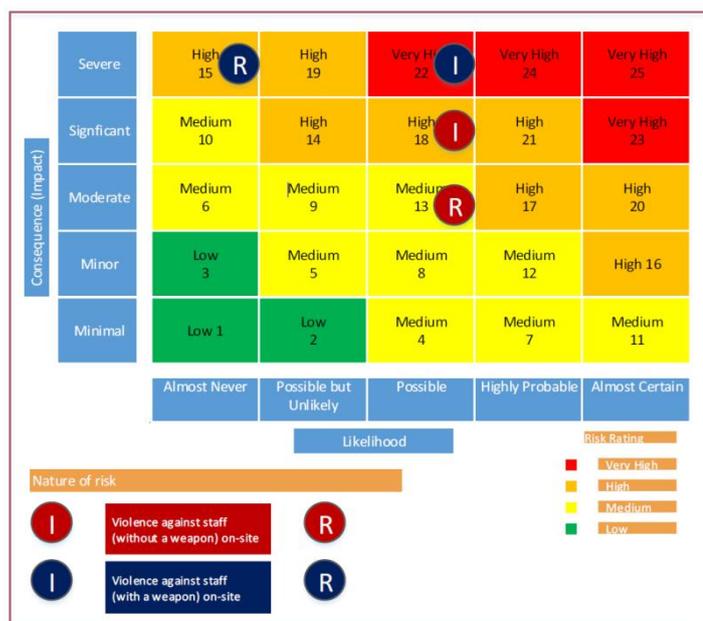
Increased numbers of highly visible, professional CSOs has been proven to significantly decrease serious security incidents in the courts and improve the safety and security – both perceived and real - for Ministry employees, their customers and those who work in their buildings.

Through the success of it's people, MOJ has been able to recognise high performance through both formal recognition and increased visibility of the work they do. They take pride in their team's professionalism and support their people to succeed through ongoing training, drive a closer customer focus and are building a culture of continuous improvement to drive the team forward.

Over recent times the numbers of court users screened, the number of security incidents reported each week and the number of weapons identified and removed from people trying to enter the courts has significantly increased due to the increase in CSO numbers.

When assessed as an inherent risk, the Ministry has assessed the likelihood of an assault without a weapon as Possible and the Consequence as Significant. This reduces to still being Possible but a Moderate consequence due to their mitigations.

Similarly, as an inherent risk, the likelihood of assault with a weapon is assessed as Possible and the Consequence as Severe. This reduces to Almost Never and Severe consequence due to their mitigations. MOJ know that a primary mitigation in their sites for both these risks is the presence of a highly trained, customer focussed court security officer and screening at a single entrance.



SUPPORTING DATA

Number of assaults vs attempted

- > In 2016 out of a total of 363 assaults, 323 were classed as attempted (i.e. minor assaults or have the potential to escalate to an assault if CSOs did not intervene).
- > In 2017 out of a total of 444 assaults, 406 were classed as attempted.

Number of weapons seized

- > In 2016, the number of weapons seized or taken into temporary custody was 11,520.
- > In 2017, the number of weapons seized or taken into temporary custody was 16,080.

Number of searches conducted

- > In 2016, the number of searches conducted (either through a walk-through metal detector, an x-ray or a handheld scanner) was 4,105,934.
- > In 2017, the number of searches conducted was 4,458,968.

Ministry employees are surveyed annually regarding “how committed they feel the Ministry is to Health and Safety”, with results demonstrating their increased commitment:

- > In 2015 out of 82% of their employees who responded said that 55.2% of them agreed with the statement.
- > In 2016 out of 75.6% of their employees who responded said that 60.8% (up 5.6%) of them agreed with the statement.
- > In early 2018 out of 72% of their employees who responded said that 69% (up 8.2%) of them agreed with the statement.

Results from court user surveys confirm that the customer feels an increased level of reassurance and their experience is enhanced by their shift in security settings.

Their Court User Survey 2017 found that:

- > The most important driver of court user satisfaction was feeling safe and 90% of people surveyed reported that they felt safe
- > 90% of respondents observed court security staff at the court entrance
- > 83% of respondents who observed court security said security staff were approachable

Learnings from the approach

Security has sometimes, in the past, been misrepresented as being in conflict with customer experience and organisational performance. MOJ used improving the customer experience as an effective mechanism to simultaneously improve safety and security measures to help the organisation manage its critical risks.

More information

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