OFFICIAL

IN THE WAITANGI TRIBUNAL

Wai 3060
Wai 3011

IN THE MATTER OF	the Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975
AND	
IN THE MATTER OF	Te Rau o te Tika: the Justice System Inquiry
BY	Paula Ormsby, on behalf of the Wāhine Toa Chapter of the Mongrel Mob Kingdom and Priority whānau, including Māori women and their children associated with other gangs.

BRIEF OF EVIDENCE OF ESTHER PETERS

DATED THIS 6TH DAY OF OCTOBER 2026

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WELLINGTON

I, **Esther Peters**, Entrepreneur, of Tāmaki Makaurau, state:

1. I provide this Brief of Evidence (**BoE**) for the custodial remand priority hearing in Wai 3060 - Te Rau o te Tika: the Justice System Kaupapa Inquiry. My evidence concerns the practical importance of suitable bail accommodation and community support, the work I have undertaken through the Reintegration Rehabilitation Reduces Reoffending Model (**RRR Model**), and the barriers I have experienced when trying to provide those supports to people in or leaving custody.

2. I whakapapa to Ngāpuhi, Ngāi Te Rangi, Te Rarawa, and Ngāi Tahu.

3. I am a wāhine Māori exercising leadership within the community and non-governmental sector through the development of the RRR Model. The RRR Model was developed as a kaupapa Māori, community-led response to the shortcomings I had observed in the criminal justice and reintegration systems, including the lack of culturally grounded reintegration pathways, the reliance on punitive and risk-focused approaches, and the absence of meaningful whānau-centred support for people transitioning from prison back into the community. I also gave evidence in the Wai 2700 Mana Wāhine Inquiry about my attempts to engage with Corrections regarding the RRR Model, the scrutiny that I subsequently experienced, and the difficulties faced by wāhine Māori-led initiatives seeking recognition, support and resourcing from Crown agencies. I attach this BoE as **Annex A.**

4. That earlier evidence provides important context for this BoE. The RRR Model is grounded in lived experience, whānau-centred support and collective responsibility, and seeks to provide an approach to reintegration that prioritises dignity, accountability, healing and long-term wellbeing. My evidence in this Inquiry builds on that experience and focuses specifically on what I have observed in relation to people on remand, the barriers they face in securing suitable bail accommodation and reintegration support, and the practical role that community-based providers can play in supporting people to return safely and successfully to their whānau and communities.

5. My evidence is informed by my own lived experience of imprisonment and reintegration, as well as my work with people affected by the criminal justice

system. I also rely on documents relating to the RRR Model, my dealings with Ara Poutama Aotearoa/Department of Corrections (**Corrections**), and my engagement with other Crown agencies. Where I refer to particular dates, communications or official positions, I have relied on records.

A: MY BACKGROUND AND THE RRR MODEL

6. In 2017, I was sentenced to four years and one month imprisonment for fraud-related offending. I do not minimise that offending or the harm it caused. I was released from prison in late 2020 and remained subject to parole conditions during 2021. I understand that the priority hearing is in relation to remand related issues, however, I wish to provide this information to put into perspective how I came to be in this mahi.

7. My offending also occurred against a background of unresolved childhood trauma, grief, addiction, unstable relationships, and a long period where I did not have the right support around me. I do not say this as an excuse for my offending. I say it because those experiences are part of the reason I became focused on what is needed to help people make changes after prison.

8. When I was in prison, and particularly when I was preparing to return to the community, I became aware of the gap between the structure provided inside prison and what people can face when they are released. People can leave prison without stable accommodation, employment, a safe environment, or practical support to deal with addiction, debt, grief, family relationships, and ordinary day-to-day responsibilities.

9. This led to the development of the RRR Model. The purpose of the RRR Model was to provide a structured pathway in the community for people leaving prison, or people at risk of returning to the criminal justice system.

10. The RRR Model is based on lived experience, accountability, routine, employment, practical life skills, whānau connection, and community support. The purpose is not to remove accountability for offending. It is to give people a genuine opportunity to take responsibility, make changes, and build a stable life outside prison.

B: WHY COMMUNITY BAIL SUPPORT MATTERS

11. In my experience, a bail address is about more than having a bed available. For a person seeking bail, having a suitable address can be the difference between being released into the community and remaining in custody. The address also needs structure, clear expectations, and people who are able to support the person and respond if problems arise.

12. Many of the people who have approached us do not have stable housing. From what we have seen, this can be particularly difficult for people who have served lengthy periods in prison. During that time, their whānau may have moved on with their lives, and when the person is released, they may find that the support they once had is no longer available. Where a person has offended against or otherwise harmed members of their whānau, those relationships can also remain strained, and whānau may continue to hold that offending against them. In some cases, even attempts to reconnect by telephone go unanswered. For others, returning to the same address can place them back into the same relationships, substance use, offending influences, or other circumstances that contributed to their offending in the first place.

13. A community employment hub provides an alternative environment. It can provide a fixed address, daily routine, employment or training, transport, access to services, and people who can support the person to comply with the conditions placed upon them.

14. The RRR Model has always recognised that one type of placement will not suit everybody. Some people can safely live in a community employment hub, while others may need a more remote or more closely managed placement. The level of accommodation and supervision needs to reflect the circumstances and risks of the individual person.

15. The community hub model is intended to provide whānau with a structured and supportive environment, rather than simply an address to stay at. Whānau are supported to establish a regular routine and to engage in study, training, volunteering or employment, while also being subject to appropriate supervision,

monitoring and accountability. An important point of difference with this model is that, where someone makes a mistake or does not meet an expectation, they are not automatically removed from the placement. Instead, we seek to understand what has happened and why, and work with that person to address the issue while maintaining their placement where possible. In my view, this is important because setbacks are often part of the process of reintegrating into the community, and removing someone immediately can place them back into the same instability that the placement is intended to address.

16. The model also recognises that people often need support with grief, debt, relationships, whānau responsibilities, mental health, addiction, and basic life skills. These matters may sit behind a person's offending or make reintegration more difficult. In my experience, simply providing an address without addressing these other factors is often not enough.

17. I consider that community accommodation of this kind is relevant to the remand system because it gives the Court another option where a person's needs can safely be managed in the community. A person should not remain in custody simply because a suitable and supported address has not been identified or verified in time.

18. For this to work, community providers need to be identified and contacted early. The proposed address and support arrangements also need to be assessed and verified before the bail application is heard. Having a bed available does not assist a person if the necessary information cannot be placed before the Court in time.

C: MY 2021 ENGAGEMENT WITH CORRECTIONS

19. In April 2021, I approached Corrections through its Employment Support Service to present the employment and accommodation initiative being developed through RRR Organisations Worldwide Limited. The aim was to provide a pathway from prison into accommodation, employment, and structured support in the community.

20. Corrections advised that it already had existing providers in the Hawke's Bay area and was not seeking any further tenders at that time. We were encouraged to register for future government tender opportunities. Corrections also stated that it preferred to work with providers who could offer services at no cost to people leaving prison.

21. At the same time, I was having direct contact with people in prison who were asking for assistance. A Corrections intelligence report dated June 2021 records that people in custody had been calling me and that I had offered wrap-around support to women at Auckland Region Women's Corrections Facility. The report also records that I was communicating with lawyers to assist with bail addresses and employment for prospective RRR clients. A copy of that intelligence report is attached to this brief as **Annex B**.

22. The work required to put a bail proposal together often has to begin while the person is still in prison. Someone needs to speak with the person, understand what support is required, communicate with counsel, identify an address, and confirm whether the provider can safely support them.

23. My concern is with how the RRR initiative itself was treated. The intelligence report conducted by Corrections focused heavily on my previous offending, my communications with people in custody, and concerns about the programme. I did not see any clear process that allowed us to provide further information, explain the safeguards we had in place, or have the programme properly assessed as a possible community provider.

24. The same intelligence material recorded that I was not an identified gang member and had no known gang associations. Despite this, my contact with people in prison and my attempts to provide accommodation and employment were treated as intelligence and risk matters, rather than also being considered as part of a possible reintegration pathway.

25. Around the same time, Corrections wrote to my partner and confirmed that RRR Organisations Worldwide Limited was not under investigation by Corrections and that my community-based sentence had not affected the decision to decline our offer. Corrections again stated that it already had existing providers and was not seeking further tenders. A copy of that correspondence is attached to this brief as **Annex C**.

26. From my perspective, this was difficult to understand. On the one hand, we were told that the organisation was not under investigation. On the other hand, an internal

intelligence report had been prepared about me and the organisation, including my contact with people in prison and the work we were trying to undertake. At the same time, Corrections continued to refer people to us for reintegration support through to early 2026. Those referrals then stopped. My understanding was that this occurred after Corrections received significant funding to provide reintegration support itself. Despite that, we continued to see people being released into the community without the level of practical support they needed, including people effectively being dropped at our doorstep and expected to reintegrate.

27. This affected my trust in the way Corrections dealt with us. It also made it harder to understand what we were required to do to be considered as a legitimate provider. If community organisations are expected to assist with bail addresses and reintegration, there needs to be a clear process for them to do that work and address any concerns raised by Crown agencies.

D: THE PRACTICAL SUPPORT PROVIDED THROUGH RRR

28. The RRR Model has always focused on practical support. In Hawke's Bay, the programme operated as an employment and accommodation programme. Participants were provided with rooms, daily expectations, assistance to obtain work, transport and access to services, and support to reconnect with whānau.

29. The programme required people to take responsibility for their own reintegration. Participants were expected to work, contribute, save money, meet their obligations, and establish a routine that could continue after they left the hub.

30. The records I have kept include participant portfolios showing changes in work habits, confidence, relationships, savings, rent payments, and progression into more stable employment. In my view, those records show the difference between simply providing an address and providing a structured pathway around the person.

31. Structured community support can work. A proposed provider should be assessed on the support and safeguards that are actually available, and on whether those arrangements are suitable for the individual person. Providers should also be given an opportunity to provide information and respond to any concerns.

32. For people on remand, that assessment needs to happen quickly. A provider may be able to offer accommodation, employment, transport, supervision, and access to treatment or cultural support, but that will only assist the Court if the relevant information is gathered and provided before the bail hearing. In my view, the communication pathway therefore needs to begin at the earliest possible stage, with lawyers engaging with providers from the outset and ensuring that the information needed to support a bail application is identified and put before the Court in time.

E: THE PŌKENO COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT HUB

33. By 2025, the Pōkeno Community Employment Hub (**Hub**) at 9 Selby Street was being put forward as a proposed Electronically Monitored bail (**EM Bail**) address. The Hub was a continuation of the RRR Model and focused on the principles of the RRR Model.

34. A Crown memorandum dated 3 November 2025 relating to an EM Bail application recorded that Police had been unable to contact me and had not confirmed the occupants of the proposed address. That did not reflect my experience. I was never contacted by Police or by the Crown in relation to that proposed address.

35. The Crown also relied on my historical fraud offending, the liquidation of RRR Organisations Worldwide Limited, and concerns about my business history when opposing the proposed address. From my perspective, the circumstances surrounding the liquidation were not properly understood. The company had taken on workers in reliance on a government employment incentive involving Corrections and MSD. I also wrote to the relevant company seeking confirmation that the incentive had been received in relation to employing migrant workers. When the expected support did not eventuate, I was placed on a 13-week stand-down period and was not in a position to continue taking on further debt while waiting for a response. In my view, those circumstances contributed directly to the company going into liquidation, but that context was not reflected in the way my business history was later used against me. A copy of the relevant correspondence is attached to this brief as **Annex D**.

36. The Crown memorandum described the address as being "purportedly" leased by the Hub and described me as a "purported" support worker. The Crown concluded

that the Hub and I were not suitable to provide the level of oversight and support required for that particular applicant. A copy of that memorandum is attached to this brief as **Annex E**. From my perspective, there is a disconnect between that assessment and what is seen by those working directly with people in the community. The people working on the ground can see that the model works in practice, but decisions about whether our support is recognised or accepted are ultimately made at a higher level, often by officials based in Wellington who are removed from the day-to-day operations of the community.

37. My concern is that the assessment should also consider the provider's present capability. This includes who lives at the address, the level of supervision available, the rules of the house, drug and alcohol controls, employment arrangements, how concerns will be reported, and the particular risks of the person seeking bail.

38. If Police or Corrections cannot verify an address, there should be a direct process for identifying what information is missing and obtaining it from the provider. In my view, a person should not lose a potentially suitable bail option simply because the relevant information has not been obtained by the Crown before the hearing.

39. There also needs to be a pathway for a provider with a criminal history to demonstrate whakahoki mauri and current suitability. A criminal history may give rise to legitimate concerns, but lived experience can also help a provider understand and work with people who have spent significant time in the justice system.

F: EFFECTS ON MĀORI AND WHĀNAU

40. The people who come to community providers do not come as isolated individuals. They have whānau, children, partners, whakapapa, employment, debts, addictions, trauma, and other responsibilities that continue while they are in custody.

41. When somebody remains on remand because there is no suitable address, or because a proposed address has not been verified, the impact extends beyond that person. Housing and employment can be lost, whānau can come under further pressure, and tamariki can experience prolonged separation and uncertainty because of their whānau makeup.

42. For Māori, I have seen the importance of reconnecting people with whānau, identity, cultural support, and a sense of purpose. These matters do not replace public safety considerations. They can, however, form an important part of a safe and successful reintegration plan.

43. My own experiences have also taught me that trauma and addiction can sit behind offending for many years without being properly addressed. If the system looks only at a person's risk on paper, it can miss some of the issues that need to be addressed to reduce that risk. This is why I consider wrap-around support to be important.

44. This can be particularly important for wāhine Māori and people who are primary caregivers. Their remand in custody can have an immediate effect on tamariki and wider whānau. Community-based options need to take those responsibilities into account.

45. I also consider that Māori-led providers and providers with lived experience can face an additional barrier. The same experiences that help us understand people in the justice system can be used as reasons not to trust us. If there is no fair and transparent assessment process, this can reduce the community options available to Māori defendants and their whānau.

G: CHANGES I CONSIDER ARE NEEDED

46. I consider that the Crown should develop a clear pathway for approving and working with community bail accommodation providers, including kaupapa Māori providers and providers led by people with lived experience. That pathway should also connect with the wider reintegration system.

47. There should be clear criteria for assessing both the provider and the proposed address. This should include accommodation standards, supervision, safety, drug and alcohol controls, conflicts of interest, financial integrity, reporting arrangements, access to treatment and employment, and the needs of the individual person.

48. The assessment should consider relevant history, but it should also focus on current capability. A past conviction should not automatically disqualify a provider. The

focus should be on whether the identified risks can be safely managed through the safeguards and accountability currently in place.

49. There should also be a clear point of contact so that counsel, Police, Corrections, whānau, and providers know who is responsible for verifying a proposed address and what information is required. In my view, consideration should be given to establishing a dedicated bail assessment team or function within Police and Corrections, responsible for assessing proposed bail addresses, liaising directly with community providers, and ensuring that any outstanding information is obtained promptly. Providers should not have to work through a number of different channels while a person remains in custody waiting for a decision.

50. Referrals should occur as early as possible. If a person is likely to seek bail and does not have a suitable address, community accommodation should be explored before the next bail hearing rather than after an application has already been declined.

51. Community support also needs to be properly resourced. Accommodation, supervision, transport, staff time, drug testing, employment support, and access to services all have a cost. If community-based options are expected to reduce unnecessary remand, there needs to be sustainable funding available to support that work.

52. Where a provider or address is declined, written reasons should be provided promptly. The provider should also be given an opportunity to address any concern that can be remedied. This would provide greater transparency and help providers understand what is required of them.

53. There should also be better information about where suitable accommodation is available. A regularly updated system showing verified community accommodation and support would assist counsel and Crown agencies to identify realistic options earlier.

54. Support should not stop once bail is granted. A person may still need assistance with employment, treatment, transport, appointments, whānau relationships, and compliance with bail conditions. Ongoing support can reduce the risk of a return to custody and improve the person's prospects of successful reintegration into the community.

55. Finally, I consider that Crown agencies should work directly with Māori communities and providers when developing these systems. Community organisations have practical knowledge about what support is available and what is likely to work for the person. That knowledge should form part of the process.

H: CONCLUSION

56. I do not say that every person on remand should be released, or that every community provider should be accepted. I do say though decisions about bail must take account of public safety, the circumstances of the person, and the orders of the Court.

57. Some people remain in custody unnecessarily because the practical supports needed for a safe bail option are unavailable, under-resourced, or not verified in time. In my experience, community organisations are willing to provide support, but there is not a clear pathway for them to do so.

58. My experiences through RRR have shown me both sides of this issue. I have seen people benefit from structured accommodation, employment, accountability, and whānau support. I have also experienced the difficulties that arise when a community provider is viewed mainly through its past history and perceived risk.

59. I consider that there needs to be a better process for assessing and working with community providers. This needs to include timely verification, proper funding, fair assessment of current safeguards, and recognition of the contribution that Māori and lived-experience providers can make.

60. If these changes are made, I believe fewer people will remain on remand solely because they do not have a suitable address or support plan. It would also give people a better opportunity to maintain whānau connections, employment, treatment, and a pathway towards successful reintegration. In my view, there also needs to be greater investment in research and evaluation of the programmes that are already operating in this space.

61. A proper mapping exercise should be undertaken to identify what programmes exist, how they operate, and the outcomes they are achieving. This would provide an evidence base to demonstrate which approaches are working in practice. At present, there are programmes available that can support people successfully, but they are not always trusted, recognised, or enabled by the agencies making decisions about placements and release. In my view, the issue is not simply whether programmes exist, but whether decision-makers are prepared to place trust in those providers and allow them to do the work.

Dated: 6 October 2026

Esther Peters