



‘Keep it safe, keep it civil’ workshop outcomes

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Introduction

At ShopCare, our role is to collaborate with the entire retail sector to explore and develop impactful interventions to eliminate or minimise our biggest risks, and share that knowledge with our community. We regularly hold workshops, and on 22nd August 2024 we ran a workshop 'Keep it Safe, Keep it Civil'. This workshop was based on our research into Customer Violence and Abuse in Retail: a literature review, and we are pleased to share a summary of what was covered with our community.

About the workshop

The workshop brought representatives from business, community/social services, council and government together to explore collaborative opportunities for improving safety and civility within the retail sector by addressing some of the root causes of Violence & Aggressive Behaviour (VAB).

Five perpetrator persona journeys, identified through an earlier investigation into VAB in Aotearoa New Zealand, were used to focus workshop discussions.

1. **Young Men**
2. **Teenage Girls**
3. **Young Mums**
4. **Streeties**
5. **Professionals**

Below is a summary of the key findings, insights and interventions that emerged from the workshop.

Priority personas for Interventions

Based on feedback and analysis of workshop participants' responses, the following **three persona** have been prioritised as the focus for targeted interventions.

It is worth noting that although the persona for Streeties and Professionals were discussed, no notes were made on the exercise worksheets. Anecdotally, working to implement collaborative interventions for both these persona is still an important aspect of reducing customer VAB and may be incorporated into the VAB work programme at a later stage.

A more comprehensive range of Providers and Programmes will need to be identified for each locale as the interventions are progressed and scaled for delivery in other communities. Local knowledge, connections and expertise will be essential in achieving the desired impact town centre by town centre.

1. Young Men

This group was identified as one of the primary personas engaging in VAB in retail.

Young Men	Home	Community	Town Centre	Store
Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drugs • Alcohol • Mental Health • Abuse and neglect • Unsafe environment • Negative role models 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack connection with local community, facilities and services • Lack of connection with local retailers and retail staff 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shoplifting
Provider/ Programme		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School • Sports Clubs • Community Centres • Libraries • Churches, mosques, temples, etc • Youth workers and agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Libraries • Community Centres • Plunket • Churches, mosques, temples, etc • Business Association 	
Solutions		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater connections between Retail Industry and Restorative Justice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build connections between retailers, community and Business Associations • Connect with education and employment services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address drivers of shoplifting • Create and participate in pathways to employment • Establish and resource early intervention programmes • Security Hardware • Build employee resilience

2. Teenage girls

This persona emerged as a high-priority group, particularly with regard to abusive and aggressive behaviour.

Teenage Girls	Home	Community	Town Centre	Store
Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media • English as a second language • Aimless/ Lack of ambition • Negative role models 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor literacy and numeracy • Personal/Sexual health and wellbeing • Fighting and abusive behaviours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal/ Sexual health and wellbeing • Fighting and abusive behaviours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shoplifting • Abusive behaviours
Provider/ Programme		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School • Sports Clubs • Community Centres • Libraries • Churches, mosques, temples, etc • Financial literacy • Women's health and wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Libraries • Community Centres • Plunket • Churches, mosques, temples, etc • Business Association 	
Solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive parenting • Mentoring programmes • Positive behaviour social media campaigns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater connections between Retail Industry, schools and community organisations • Career talks and events • Financial literacy Programmes • Personal health and wellbeing campaigns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build connections between retailers, community and Business Associations • Connect with education and employment services • Promote access to free sanitary hygiene products, pregnancy kits, etc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harness social media • Create and participate in pathways to employment for young women • Greater connections between Retail Industry and Restorative Justice • Promote/Provide access to free sanitary hygiene products, pregnancy kits, etc for staff and hardship community • Product donations • Training older generation staff to engage more effectively/ appropriately with teenage girls and younger women

3. Young Mums

The stresses associated with balancing shopping, childcare, and financial pressures were acknowledged as contributing factors to VAB incidents among this group.

Young Mums	Home	Community	Town Centre	Store
Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isolation • Domestic violence • Disconnection from neighbours • no neighbours (rural) • none known (urban) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack connection with local community • Sense of isolation • Ease of access to services and facilities • Community is different for everyone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mum-friendly facilities and activities • Access to mental health and wellbeing facilities and services 	
Provider/ Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plunket • Tamariki Ora providers • SKIP and support resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plunket • Marae • Parent Groups • Coffee groups • Play groups • Community Centres • Libraries • Churches, mosques, temples, etc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Libraries • Community Centres • Plunket • Churches, mosques, temples, etc • Business Association 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free food in grocery stores



Solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Services Directory available through provider, ante-natal classes, birthing centres/ hospital • Digital • Hardcopy • SKIP information more available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote ECE options • Promote primary healthcare community programmes and resources eg South Seas, Fono and Whanau Ora 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public messaging campaigns promoting self-care • Promotions of recreation and leisure events, activities and services • Retail sponsored 'Mum-focused' events in town centres • Town Centre Ambassadors trained to support mums • Walking groups and similar hosted by Town Centre Ambassadors • Connect with education and employment services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loan or hire products available for appliances under repair • Problem-solving training to help frontline workers think differently and resolve issues • Build empathy and skills in frontline workers • Improve Security Staff interpersonal skills • Stores can rapidly escalate response to more senior staff • Innovative de-escalation options eg cup of tea and a biscuit • Proactive communication around consumer rights
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Collaboration as a path forward

Participants widely agreed that collaboration between different stakeholders is essential to make meaningful progress in reducing VAB. Consciously and deliberately combining the strengths, skills and resources of businesses, community, council and government agencies is more likely to develop effective, sustainable interventions to reduce and minimise the frequency and ferocity of VAB incidents. AUT's 'Cup of Tea and a Biscuit' continuum of response, developed in partnership with Lifewise, was raised as an example of collaboration as it incorporated training for frontline staff in identifying and managing behaviours plus provided an easy to follow play book and list of internal and external resources and contact numbers if the incident needed additional assistance.

Whilst workshop participants generally agreed that working together is a good path forward, knowing who should be involved and how to contact them was raised as an issue. Responsibility for implementing and/or coordinating collaborative initiatives and interventions was also identified as a critical success factor as outlined below.

Challenges in engagement

A significant barrier raised throughout the workshop was the challenge for retail businesses in knowing how and with whom to engage in order to address the issues of VAB. The lack of clear guidance and connection with support organisations or agencies often hinders retailers from taking proactive steps. On the flip side, it was also acknowledged that external stakeholders, such as community groups or restorative justice organisations, might struggle to identify or approach the right retail partners. This mutual disconnect represents a key area that needs improvement to ensure smoother communication, engagement, and collaboration moving forward.

Providing retail staff with access to a simple directory of community and social services was raised as a potential solution for increasing their awareness of the types of support available as well as how to contact the relevant provider and/or how to refer a customer. Such a directory could also be promoted or made available to customers their own use.

Manurewa Business Association's (MBA) Town Centre Ambassador programme was highlighted as an incredibly successful initiative that facilitates and delivers connections between local retailers and their community. Ambassadors are local people recruited and supported through MSD's Flexi-wage Scheme. A comprehensive training programme covers a diverse range of subjects including situational awareness, de-escalation and conflict management plus communications and engagement.

Disconnection between staff and customers

A recurring theme during the workshop was the growing disconnection between retail staff and customers, which contributes to instances of VAB. Several layers of disconnection were highlighted:

- **Cultural disconnection:** Misunderstandings or cultural differences between customers and staff can lead to tension and conflict.
- **Age-related disconnection:** Younger customers and older staff members (and vice versa) may have differing expectations around communication and behaviour.
- **Interpersonal disconnection:** A general lack of empathy or understanding of each other's challenges, whether related to stress, workload, or personal circumstances, often leads to negative interactions.

Whilst the pre-workshop Keep it Safe investigation noted that VAB is less likely in customer/retail interactions in rural and provincial centres, workshop participants identified a general need for better communication, empathy-building efforts, and training on cultural competency and interpersonal skills.

Young people, including the Young Mum persona, were identified as priority audiences to engage with as they have all been highlighted as both victim and perpetrator of VAB incidents. Interventions relating to employment and career pathways were seen as prime opportunities to drive engagements and increase interpersonal connections and understandings of the retail operating environment.

Understanding the motivations behind VAB

The workshop also underscored the importance of gaining deeper insights into the underlying motivations and reasons for VAB in retail settings. Participants suggested that a better understanding could be achieved through restorative justice processes and interviews with offenders who have engaged in violent or aggressive behaviours in retail spaces.

This approach has been highlighted as a valuable channel to understand more about the root causes of VAB and guide the creation of targeted interventions that address those causes directly.

Challenges of implementing large-scale solutions

While the workshop generated a number of ideas for addressing VAB, there was also recognition that some solutions may be too complex or costly to implement in the short to medium term. For example, social change campaigns or broad cultural shifts require substantial investment of resources and time.

As a result, participants emphasised the need to prioritise more immediate, affordable and practical solutions while keeping long-term initiatives in mind. This phased approach could ensure that progress is made while still working toward larger societal goals over time. Accordingly, five interventions are proposed for consideration, resourcing and implementation.



Intervention	Ready to Go	For Development
<p>Town Centre Ambassadors - a 6-month on-the-job training programme facilitated by Manurewa Business Association to establish cohorts of friendly faces who have the skills and confidence to pre-empt and de-escalate VAB situations in town centre and retail environments.</p>	YES	ShopCare Generic Framework
<p>World of Work - a 3-day programme introducing young people and job seekers to careers and employment opportunities in the retail industry. Participating young people and job seekers are mentored by staff from participating retail stores and town centres providing a unique environment to break down barriers between retail staff and customers.</p>	YES	
<p>Kai for Kids - Connect local retailers and community agencies to provide healthy after-school snacks for children and young people congregating in town centres, community facilities and recreation spaces. Kai for Kids provides an authentic, informal space for local retail staff and business owners to engage with local children and young people.</p>	YES	
<p>VAB Offender Engagement - collaborate with Restorative Justice agencies and facilitators to directly engage with VAB offenders to understand their motivators and gain their input into creating solutions.</p>	YES	
<p>Family-Friendly Retail - Collate, curate and distribute a range of resources to support retail businesses better engage with young mums, parents and families.</p>		YES

Conclusion

The ShopCare "Keep it Safe, Keep it Civil" workshop highlighted the importance of collaborative, community-driven solutions to tackle VAB in retail settings. Participants acknowledged the need to better understand the root causes of these behaviours through greater engagement with restorative justice processes and directly with offenders.

Strengthening communications and connections between retailers and the external support agencies that work most closely with the key VAB personas is also extremely important in reducing the impact on retail businesses, staff and customers.

While large-scale social change campaigns may be challenging to implement immediately, a collective effort focused on the proposed practical, short-term interventions will provide some quick initial wins and set the scene for the larger, more complex interventions.





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