



Case Study:



Virtual Reality Training in Corrections

From Proof of Concept to Proof of Value:
Virtual Reality Training for Reintegration



About

The Department of Corrections NZ, in partnership with the Ministry of Social Development (MSD), is responsible for supporting the rehabilitation and reintegration of people in prison across New Zealand.

Their goal is to reduce reoffending by providing pathways to employment, education, and positive community outcomes.

Preparing people in prison for employment and reintegration is uniquely complex. Traditional classroom training often fails to engage learners due to a combination of systemic and situational barriers:

- **Low literacy & high anxiety** – many learners find written or lecture-based training intimidating and disengaging.
- **Limited technology exposure** – digital skills are often minimal, making confidence-building challenging.
- **Cultural mismatch** – Māori learners, who are disproportionately represented, frequently experience mainstream education as irrelevant or alienating.
- **Security restrictions** – high-security environments restrict access to internet and digital devices, limiting conventional e-learning.
- **Lack of practical relevance** – learners struggle to see how lessons translate to real-world job opportunities, lowering motivation.

The result: low retention (20–30%) and limited employability outcomes, leaving learners underprepared for life after release.





What we did

Corrections New Zealand face unique training challenges:

- Training must work within high-security environments with strict controls.
- Many learners have low literacy, high anxiety, and limited prior success in education.
- Māori are significantly overrepresented in the prison population, highlighting the need for culturally relevant, accessible approaches.
- Together with Skills^{VR}, Corrections and MSD sought to explore how immersive Virtual Reality (VR) training could overcome these barriers and deliver measurable reintegration outcomes.

Skills^{VR} partnered with **Corrections and the Ministry of Social Development to design a VR programme** that addressed these barriers directly:

- **Offline, secure delivery** – all modules run entirely offline to meet strict security protocols.
- **Short, focused modules** – 10–20 minute experiences fit within prison routines and sustain engagement.
- **Job-linked, practical content** – covering site safety, PPE, conflict management, and financial literacy.
- **Trusted facilitation through VR Champions** – Corrections staff trained as facilitators, mentors, and technical guides, providing personal support and encouragement.

Learners could interact with immersive, realistic scenarios in a safe environment, gaining skills and confidence they could immediately see the value of.





Results & Impact

The initial seven-month pilot demonstrated both measurable outcomes and transformative personal impact:

Quantitative Outcomes:

- **233 VR sessions delivered** across multiple high-security sites.
- **140 digital employability badges earned** (site safety, conflict management, financial literacy)
- **139 Site Safe Passports issued**, enabling eligibility for construction and related jobs.
- **73% employment rate** among Site Safe graduates (97 participants secured work soon after training).
- **Training time reduced 88%** (from 6 hours to 45 minutes per learner).
- **Cost per learner cut 95%** (from ~\$1,000 to ~\$50).



Qualitative Impact / Human Stories:

- A learner completing conflict management immediately phoned his daughter – the first conversation in months – to share his success.
- One previously silent participant became engaged, speaking with pride about how earned credentials could help future employment.
- Another learner requested additional modules, describing VR as *“helpful for when I get out.”*
- Facilitators consistently observed **pride, motivation, and hope** emerging in learners who had previously struggled in traditional classrooms.



Why It Works

The success of this programme lies in a blend of **cultural relevance, human connection, and technical adaptability**:

1. **Cultural & Contextual Fit** – Short, visual, interactive modules reflect real-life workplace scenarios, making learning accessible and less intimidating, particularly for Māori and learners disengaged from traditional education.
2. **Trusted Facilitation** – VR Champions act as mentors and guides, providing encouragement and building trust, which drives persistence and engagement.
3. **Technical Adaptability** – Offline VR delivery overcomes strict prison security and infrastructure limitations.
4. **Pathways to Employment** – Recognised credentials such as the Site Safe Passport link directly to industry opportunities, giving learners tangible outcomes.
5. **Broader Benefits** – Improved communication skills, stronger whānau relationships, increased motivation, and enhanced institutional trust.





What's Next

Building on the proven impact and cost-effectiveness of the pilot, the programme is already scaling and adapting more widely:

- **Expansion in New Zealand** – extending VR training to additional high-security and medium-security sites to reach more learners.
- **Broader applications** – potential rollout in youth justice, community reintegration programmes, and other high-barrier training environments.
- **Continuous innovation** – developing new modules covering additional vocational skills, life skills, and culturally relevant content to further enhance reintegration outcomes.

The programme has moved from **proof of concept**, testing whether VR could work behind prison walls, to **proof of value**, demonstrating measurable employment outcomes, higher learner engagement, and institutional adoption. **This programme is changing how participants see themselves, their capabilities, and their futures.**

[*Click to play video testimonial*](#)





Transform workforce development with immersive training

Discover how Skills^{VR} can:

- Engage learners in high-barrier environments.
- Reduce training time and costs while increasing retention.
- Deliver measurable outcomes for employability, safety, and skill-building.
- Provide scalable, culturally relevant, and flexible training solutions.

Contact us today to see a demo, explore your sector-specific solutions, and start building safer, smarter, and more confident learners.

contact@skillsvr.com