

# Teens jailed for burglary spree

TWO Nelson teenagers who took part in a string of burglaries in Nelson, Richmond and Motueka, leaving a trail of distraught victims, have been sent to jail.

Dylan Hartley, 18, was sentenced to 2½ years in prison on 36 counts of burglary in the Nelson District Court yesterday.

Adrian John Vercoe, 17, an associate of Hartley, was given an 18-month jail term after he earlier admitted taking part in 14 burglaries.

Judge Tony Zohrab said that between May 1 and September 22 this year, Hartley, Vercoe and other associates broke into houses in Motueka, Blenheim and Nelson.

Judge Zohrab said the group targeted houses in middle to upper-class areas with no security alarms, taking valuables and cash.

The houses were targeted between 6pm and 11pm when it was possible to determine whether occupants were home if lights were on or not.

Judge Zohrab said the offenders walked around the houses looking for insecure windows or a cat door that could be used to gain entry.

During at least two burglaries Hartley was involved in, food items were thrown around the house. Hartley was found after fingerprints left at the scene by one of his associates led police to him. In Hartley's case, more than \$36,000 in reparation was sought.

The burglaries meant a significant number of people were left out of pocket through either having items taken or through being forced to pay for extra security features, such as alarms or deadlocks, for their properties.

Victims reported being upset at losing items of sentimental value, and elderly victims said they lay awake at night fearing that every

creak they heard in the garden could be burglars returning to their house, Judge Zohrab said.

Two teenage boys, aged 15 and 13, had saved to buy an X-box and it had been stolen. Another man had bought a \$3000 television set which had a knife put through its screen. The TV was not insured and the man was still paying off the loan he took out to buy it, the judge told Hartley.

Judge Zohrab said while both Hartley and Vercoe were first-time offenders when they carried out their first burglary, by the end of the nearly five-month period, they were well-practised burglars.

While the burglaries were not sophisticated, they were clearly pre-meditated. None of those caught claimed to have played a key role in the ring, blaming peer pressure for their offending.

Judge Zohrab gave both teens credit for their early guilty pleas and their young age, but said the offending was serious and the need to deter others and the seriousness of the offences overruled home detention sentences.

However, he gave Vercoe leave to apply for a community-based sentence only if a place could be found at a residential treatment centre such as Odyssey House.

Vercoe's lawyer, Mark Dollimore, said Vercoe had been addicted to cannabis from the age of 13 or 14, and his addiction to that drug had played a role in his offending.

Hartley's lawyer, Herman Roose, said Hartley had owned up to several burglaries when asked by the police and if he had not confessed, it was unlikely the police would have been able to pin them on him.

On top of the prison sentences, Judge Zohrab ordered Vercoe to pay \$3980 in reparation and Hartley \$9000.