

**Te Mana
Whakamaru
Tamariki
Motuhake**

Independent
Children's
Monitor

Experiences of Care in Aotearoa: Key Findings

J U L Y 2 0 2 0 - J U N E 2 0 2 1



Who we are

The Independent Children’s Monitor was set up in 2019. Our role is to monitor the Oranga Tamariki (National Care Standards and Related Matters) Regulations 2018 (the Care Standards).

A big part of our role is to see whether the agencies who care for tamariki, are doing what they need to, to help tamariki reach their full potential.

The Care Standards set out the type of care that every tamariki and rangatahi in care need to be well and do well. It also describes the support that caregivers can expect to receive.

There are four agencies with care responsibilities for tamariki and rangatahi that we monitor. In this report, we call them “the agencies”:

- Barnardos
- Dingwall Trust
- Open Home Foundation
- Oranga Tamariki.

Who we are

We gather information from the agencies to see how they are complying with the Care Standards. We also talk with people in the community, who are in care or who contribute to how tamariki are cared for.

This includes:

- tamariki and rangatahi
- whānau of tamariki and rangatahi in care
- caregivers who care for tamariki or rangatahi in care
- staff from the agencies
- representatives from health, education, justice and social sectors (such as school principals, police officers, lawyers for children, doctors or nurses).

Each year, we write a report to the Minister for Children with our findings. The agencies are asked to respond to our report and let us know what they will do to improve the quality of care. Our report and the agencies' responses are then published on our website.



What we did

To answer our question of how well agencies are doing against the Care Standards, we needed to gather information.

We asked the agencies to provide us with:

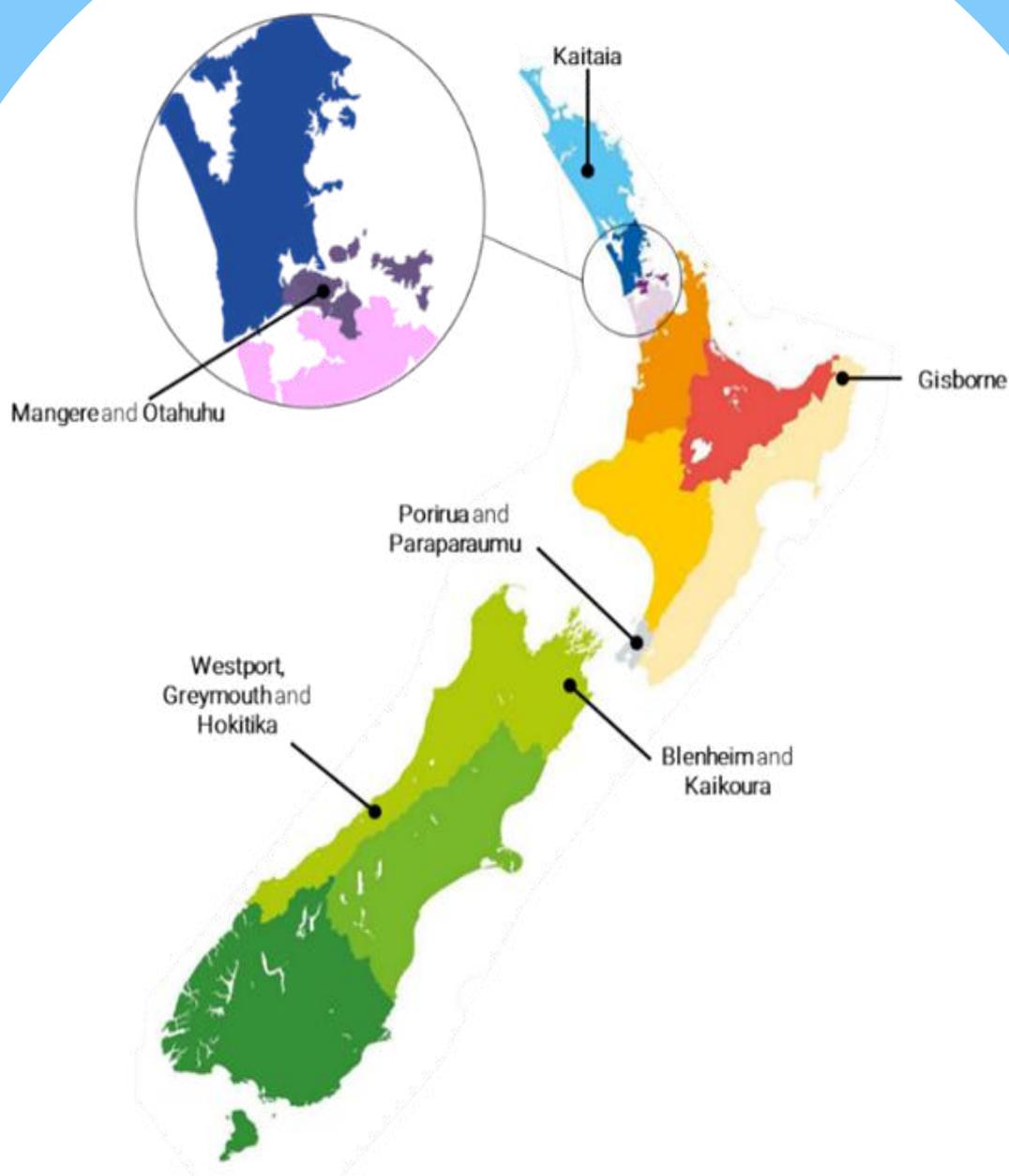
- their assessment of how they are achieving the Care Standards
- their assessment of whether they are providing tamariki in their care with what they need
- their plans to strengthen their self-monitoring¹
- their assessment of areas of concern and non-compliance, and their plans to improve.

¹ Self-monitoring means the agencies are required to collect information about how they are performing against the Care Standards. They are legally required to provide this information to us



What we did

To hear people's experiences of care, we visited six communities across the country. These were a mix of urban and rural locations, and areas with different population sizes.



What we did

We spoke with a range of people about their experiences of care.

59

Tamariki and rangatahi

14

Whānau

78

Caregivers

213

Staff of monitored agencies

100

Representatives from health and education services and New Zealand Police

129

Representatives from NGOs (57 Māori providers and 72 non-Māori providers)

19

Others (including lawyers and psychologists who provide services to tamariki)

We then analysed the information gathered from the communities and the data received from the agencies. This told us how the agencies were complying with the Care Standards, what they were doing well, and what could be done better. If you want to know more about how we put our report together, please refer to our full report available on our website www.icm.org.nz



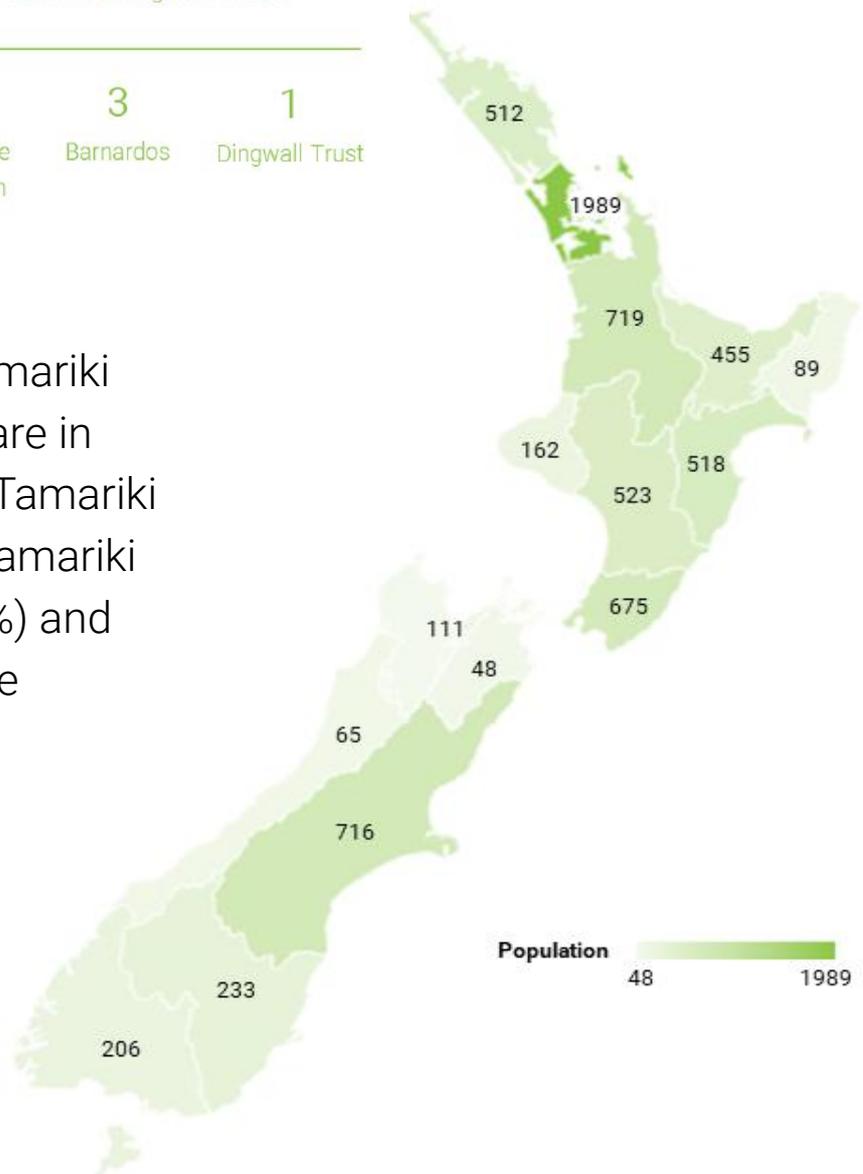
What we found

Demographics

We asked the agencies to provide us with information about their tamariki and rangatahi in care between 1 July 2020 and 30 June 2021.

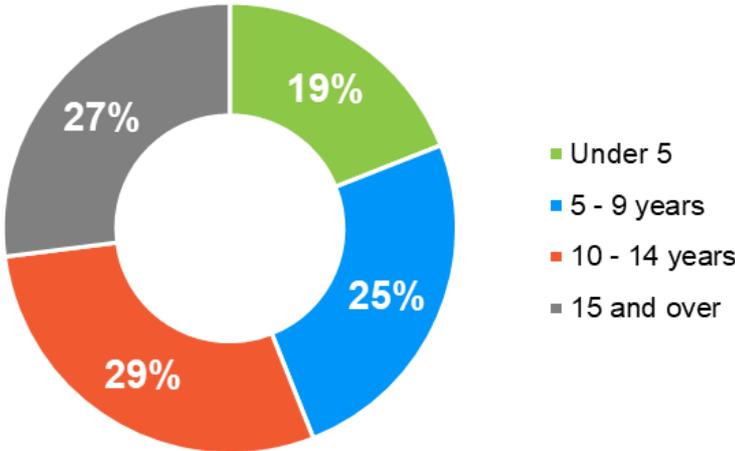


There are 7,153 tamariki and rangatahi in care in Aotearoa. Oranga Tamariki has care of most tamariki and rangatahi (99%) and they live all over the country.



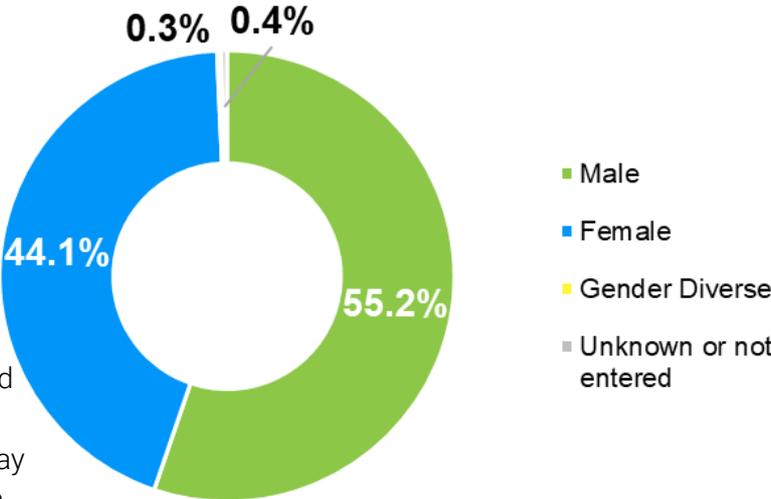
What we found

Age

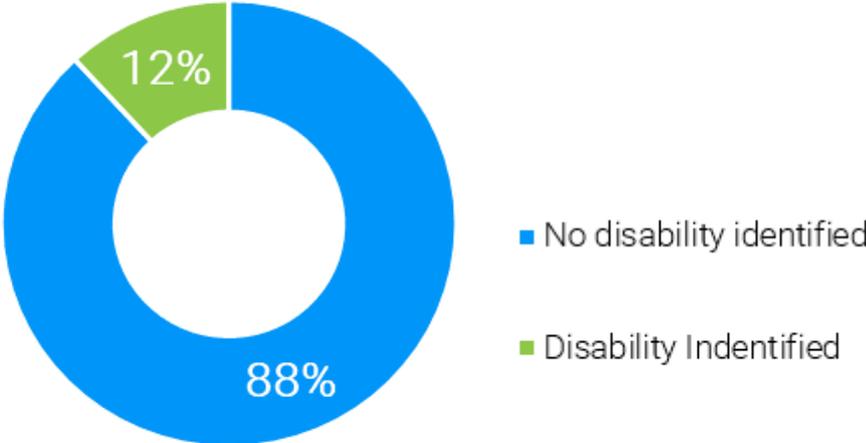


Gender

*Please note, the gender diverse field was introduced recently, so this may not be an accurate representation of the group.

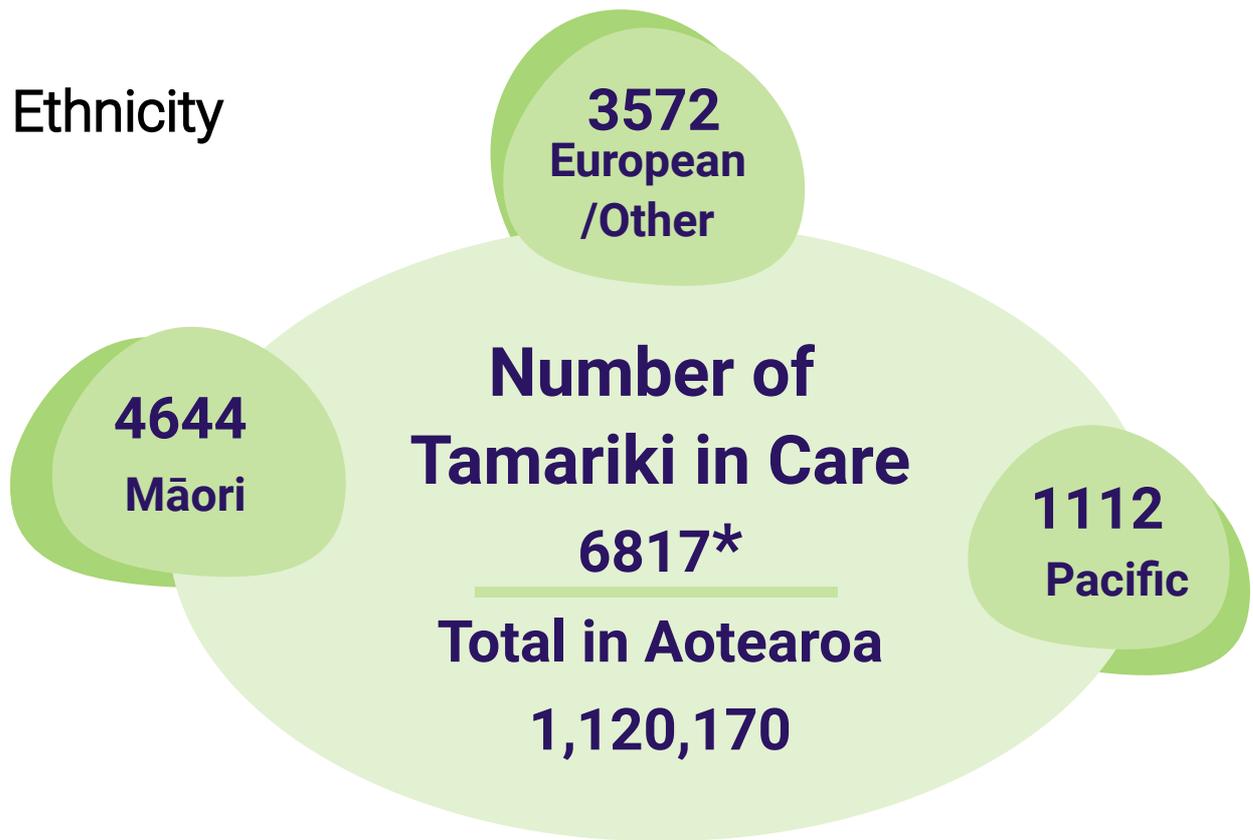


Disability

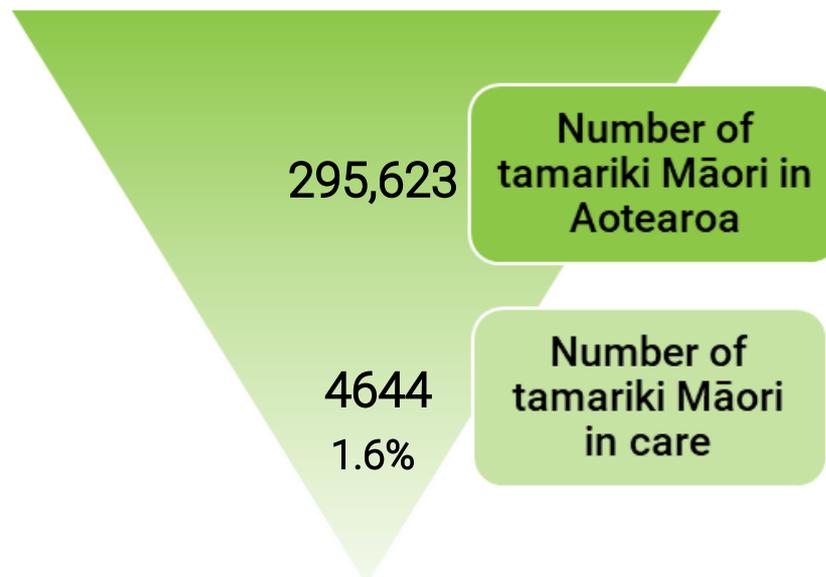


What we found

Ethnicity



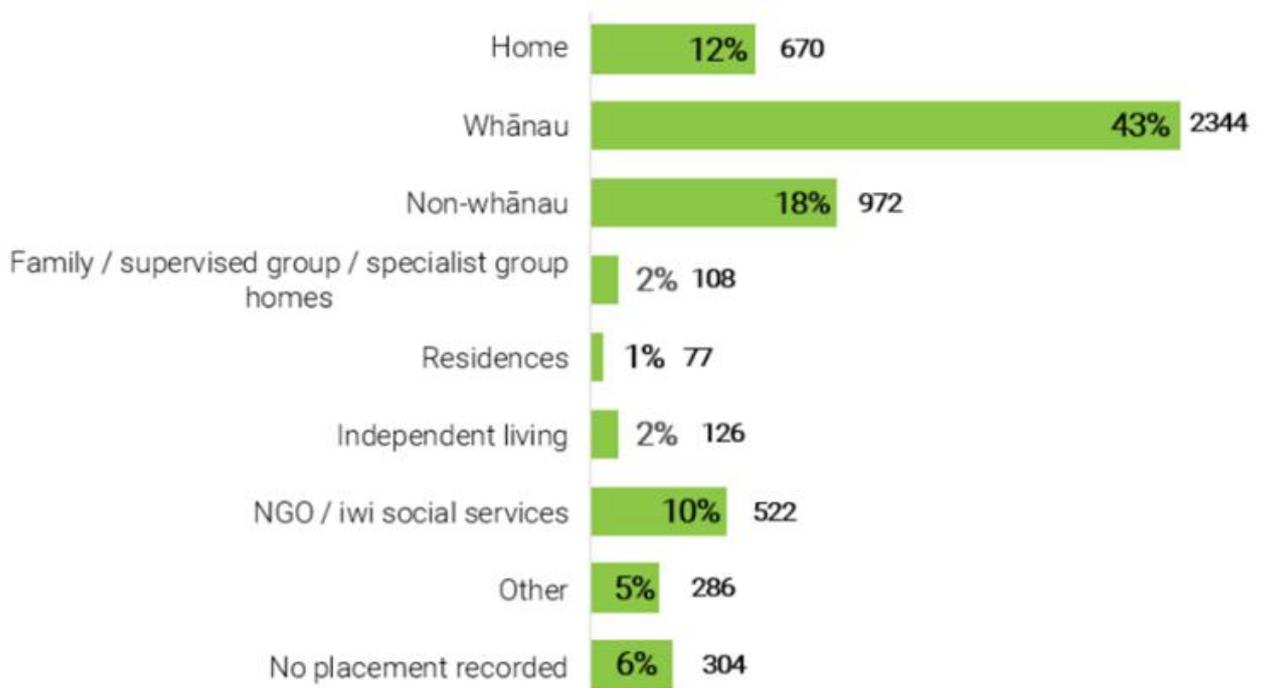
Note: *The total tamariki in care excludes those 18 years and older and so will differ from the 7,153 reported elsewhere. Source: Ethnicities of tamariki and rangatahi in care were provided by Barnardos, Dingwall Trust, Open Home Foundation and Oranga Tamariki and Statistics New Zealand data from 2019.



What we found

Living Situation

Tamariki and rangatahi in care live in many different types of families and whānau. Many live with whānau or non-whānau caregivers, some live in residences run or funded by Oranga Tamariki, or other specialist accommodation. Some live independently or have returned to live with their parents but remain in the custody of Oranga Tamariki.





What we learnt

Our key findings are discussed below. While these findings are about all four agencies we monitor, a focus is specifically on Oranga Tamariki who has 99% of tamariki and rangatahi in their care.

Gaps in agency information make it difficult for us to fully understand how the agencies are meeting their obligations under the Care Standards

We are unable to say Oranga Tamariki and Open Home are meeting all obligations for tamariki Māori or disabled tamariki, or for all tamariki and rangatahi in care. This is because of gaps in their self-monitoring.

We can say based on our analysis of information from the agencies and our visits with communities:

- Open Home Foundation is mostly meeting its obligations under the Care Standards and supporting positive outcomes against the standards it was able to provide information for.
- Oranga Tamariki is meeting some of its Care Standards obligations based on the information they gave us.
- Barnardos and Dingwall Trust are meeting most, if not all obligations.

Staff and caregivers genuinely care for tamariki in care and want to improve their outcomes

Across all of our visits, we heard about the hope to improve outcomes for tamariki and rangatahi in care.

Staff from health, education, police, NGOs and caregivers shared examples and stories that reflected their desire to improve the lives of tamariki and rangatahi they work with or care for.

“The most rewarding things is when they (tamariki) put their arms around you, and they tell you how they feel. We create a magic. I don’t know how.” – Caregiver

Staff who work at the agencies also told us about their hope to improve tamariki lives. While they said their genuine care for tamariki is their organisations’ strength, staff openly recognised that more work is needed to improve the experience of care.

“Your own presence is important to be the best practitioner we can be...If that was your boy or girl, would you treat them any different? By walking in and treating them as if they are our own, it lifts our practice. Some of our young people aren’t getting love and if they can get that from us, why not? The more love to share with young people, the better off they will be in my opinion.” – Oranga Tamariki staff member

Agencies' self-monitoring of compliance with the Care Standards needs to improve so we can understand the quality of care

The law requires the agencies monitor their compliance with the Care Standards, and then share this information with us. The agencies do not have strong systems in place for them to do this yet.

We are concerned that Oranga Tamariki and, to a lesser degree, Open Home Foundation, do not yet have strong systems to self-monitor how well they comply with the Care Standards.

We asked Open Home Foundation 192 questions. They were able to give us a response to 43% of the questions about all tamariki and rangatahi in their care.

We asked Oranga Tamariki 199 questions. They were able to answer 57% of these, and only 5% of the questions could be answered for all children in their care.

Not all tamariki and rangatahi in care know and understand their rights

Oranga Tamariki data shows that not all tamariki and rangatahi in care know their rights. This includes knowing their right to be asked about things that affect them, and their right to complain if they are unhappy.

Tamariki and rangatahi also told us this when we spoke with them.

“No one is listening to me. Who is giving rights to kids?”

– Rangatahi

Whānau members we spoke with told us they are not involved in decision making or told about things that impact their tamariki. We also saw this in the Oranga Tamariki complaints data, where over 75% of complaints about Oranga Tamariki were made by whānau members. Reasons for complaints included concerns about fair treatment, including worries not being addressed by Oranga Tamariki, and not enough support being provided.

Connections with whānau and culture are important for tamariki Māori in care

Having connections with whānau is important for all tamariki and rangatahi, and having cultural connections is particularly important for tamariki Māori.

For 85% of tamariki Māori, Oranga Tamariki had identified important members of their whānau, and arranged to make connections with them.

However, in a sample of 352 tamariki Māori in the care of Oranga Tamariki, 38% had not had an assessment of their identity, cultural, connection or belonging needs; and 61% had not had their wider cultural connections identified (this includes making contact arrangements with important members of their hapū and iwi).

Some tamariki Māori told us they wanted more time with their whānau, and others said they felt completely disconnected.

Staff of service providers say that the system (bureaucracy, policies and processes) gets in the way of tamariki Māori connecting with their whānau. When communication or contact with whānau gets lost, it prevents tamariki building their cultural identity.

“Some of them have never seen their moko, and some tamariki have never met their nannies and this can be overwhelming.”
– Iwi social services provider

Oranga Tamariki respond well when tamariki enter care; practices weaken during their time in care

Oranga Tamariki self-monitoring suggests good practice is happening when tamariki and rangatahi first enter care. For example, most tamariki plans include identifying safety and general support needs, and promptly providing financial support to meet those needs. However, practices weaken as tamariki progress through care.

Oranga Tamariki data told us:

- In nearly two-thirds of cases, tamariki are not visited by social workers as often as outlined in their plan. This means there may not be opportunities to continue assessing their safety, wellbeing, and health and education needs.
- In 40% of Oranga Tamariki planned changes in care arrangements, the necessary steps for a positive care transition were not assessed.
- For 70% of planned changes in care arrangements, Oranga Tamariki did not develop a care-transition plan or identify the support tamariki would need during this change.
- The data shows that 55% of tamariki did not know why their planned care transition was happening and were not encouraged or helped to take part in planning.

We also saw a similar trend in addressing allegations of abuse and neglect: performance starts strong and then drops off. When there are allegations of abuse against tamariki in care, agencies complete initial actions well. As they continue to manage those allegations, they share less information and perform fewer actions.

Oranga Tamariki data told us:

- In 87% of allegations reviewed by Oranga Tamariki, the initial response and safety response was prompt.
- However, for following investigations, only 31% were completed on time.
- Only 33% of tamariki and rangatahi were told of the investigation outcome, when appropriate to do so.

Oranga Tamariki social workers told us it is often challenging to maintain effort beyond the initial focus on keeping tamariki safe when they first come to their attention. Reasons for this included caseload numbers and competing administrative tasks. We were also told that balancing the needs of tamariki already in care, with assessing or investigating Reports of Concern² (ROC), is a challenge when urgent actions are required.

²Anyone who is worried about a child or young person can make a report of concern to Oranga Tamariki or the Police. This happens usually when they believe a child or young person has been or is likely to be harmed, ill-treated, abused, neglected or deprived, or they have serious concerns about the child or young person's wellbeing.

Caregivers need more support

Supporting caregivers supports them to provide a stable and safe home for tamariki and rangatahi in care.

Agencies' data shows that their processes to screen and approve potential caregivers are strong.

Oranga Tamariki does not record the ongoing support it provides caregivers. The information it was able to provide us, suggests that ongoing support for caregivers is less than required:

- The data showed that less than half of caregivers have a caregiver-support plan or receive support to meet the needs of tamariki in their care.
- In just over three-quarters (76%) of cases, social workers did not meet caregivers at the frequency stated in caregiver-support plans.

We also heard from caregivers that ongoing support from Oranga Tamariki was limited.

"I applied for the house as soon as I found out I was going to get the five kids - I went and I filled out all the paperwork. And then they came and told me that my bedroom was too small to have all the kids! But they knew I was gonna have the kids, which is why I applied for the housing! So, they split the kids." – Caregiver

Agency support of health needs, especially mental health needs, is variable

Having access to health care is important for all tamariki and rangatahi to support them to live healthy lives and improve overall wellbeing.

Oranga Tamariki data told us:

- 40% of tamariki and rangatahi are not currently registered with a general practitioner (GP) or medical practice (almost all tamariki in care of the other three agencies are).
- Oranga Tamariki data could not tell us if tamariki have annual health or dental checks.
- While 83% of tamariki in Oranga Tamariki's care had at least one Gateway assessment³, many of these were very old, which means they may no longer be accurate.

Oranga Tamariki screening for substance abuse, psychological distress and suicide risk was low.

Oranga Tamariki staff frequently told us that it can be difficult to get tamariki and rangatahi the support they need. Reasons included agencies not sharing information with each other, resources being unavailable in the areas where rangatahi live, or services being overwhelmed or understaffed.

³Gateway Assessment is an inter-agency process between health, education and Oranga Tamariki that helps to identify ways to address the health and education needs of tamariki in care.

Caregivers also spoke of these difficulties. They told us that while some tamariki have their physical health needs met, they may not have support for their mental health needs. We were told about how hard it is to get assessments done, and it was noted that caregivers would benefit from training to help deal with tamariki and rangatahi mental health needs.

Tamariki and rangatahi told us that even if they know they need support, they are unsure where or how to find help. It may also not be the right fit for tamariki.

“We need better people in the system. How to look after a kid, how to understand a kid. What to do when a kid is angry. Try to let them calm down.” – Rangatahi

On the flip side, tamariki and rangatahi say that when the right supports are in place for their health needs, it can help them experience positive outcomes.

“[I] had counselling, [it] helped [me] open up, I want to go again.” – Rangatahi

Agencies not communicating and working together effectively is a common barrier to achieving outcomes

People we spoke with told us that better outcomes are achieved for tamariki and rangatahi in care when the agencies work with iwi, cultural specialists, and NGOs.

We were told that connections between Oranga Tamariki, health and education providers, and NGOs are splintered. We were also told that communication between different organisations can be inconsistent. Also, the role and responsibilities of each organisation for supporting tamariki in care to achieve the best outcomes, are unclear. This can result in confusion for everyone involved and the tamariki missing out.

Keeping tamariki, rather than agencies' needs, at the centre of decision making is critical to improving outcomes.

"We say we put the child in the middle, but then every agency just goes off and does their own thing." – Staff member (NZ Police).

If you would like to read more about our findings, please refer to our full report on our website www.icm.org.nz



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