

Message from the Acting CE

5 September 2024

Tēnā koutou katoa,

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[REDACTED]

I wanted to let you all know that from today until Friday 13 September I will be the Acting Chief Executive of Oranga Tamariki. Chappie will be returning on Monday 16 September 2024.

Ngā mihi,

Andrew

Peter Whitcombe's last day with Oranga Tamariki

11 September 2024

Tēnā koutou katoa,

On behalf of Chappie, I want to take time to express appreciation for the incredible mahi of our former Chief Social Worker, Peter Whitcombe, whose last day with Oranga Tamariki is this Friday.

Joining Child, Youth and Family in 2001, Peter began his career in residential services. He moved to supervise a Care and Protection team and then took up an Executive Manager role. Since this time Peter has worked as a site manager, Director of the Canterbury Children's Teams, a Youth Justice Regional Manager, and a General Manager responsible for the five youth justice residences. In 2022 he became our Chief Social Worker.

As Chief Social Worker, Peter brought a strong social work voice to Te Riu and demonstrated a relentless commitment to doing what's right, for tamariki, whānau, communities and kaimahi. His leadership is grounded in the values of this organisation, his decades of services and genuine care for those he works with.

Time and time again, Peter has shown his ability to bring people together and inspire them to be their best. These qualities have seen him lead and support some significant pieces of mahi that will continue to influence our practice for years to come.

I know you will join me in wishing him and his whānau well.

Ngā mihi

Andrew Bridgman

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Message from the acting CE - thanks to kaimahi, new structure, Social Workers Day and te wiki o te reo Māori

12 September 2024

Good afternoon everyone,

I wanted to take some time to touch base with you today before the end of the week.

I want to acknowledge that for many people across Oranga Tamariki, Friday will be their final day with us.

To those of you leaving the organisation, I want to thank you for your work and commitment to Oranga Tamariki and wish you well for all that the future holds.

Over the weekend National Office will begin its restack – with teams reallocating to their new floors and spaces at 56 the Terrace.

The placement of teams has been well thought through and will put National Office in the best position to start working in the new structure.

Take time on Monday to unpack, get to know your new neighbours and team members – because it's important we take time to settle into our new way of working.

Next week is also Māori language week – Te wiki o te reo Māori. And throughout the week there are videos and activities scheduled to celebrate te reo Māori.

Information will go up on Te Pae on Friday as well as links to resources and posters you can print off and decorate your new workspace with.

Next Wednesday it is also National Social Workers Day and our Chief Social Worker, Nicolette is leading activities to acknowledge the importance of this day which include a rather entertaining video of your favourite DCE's who are putting their poi making skills on display in honour of our social workers.

Chappie will also return next week, which is his final week with Oranga Tamariki before he takes medical leave.

There is a lot going on at the moment in amongst the stand up of our new structure, so next week Chappie will send a message to you all about our new structure, how we intend to put in place the changes you called for through the consultation process and what to expect leading up to 1 October when all the pieces will be in place, the new structure will be fully operational and we will farewell our old ways of working.

Will touch base again next week.

Andrew Bridgman

Message from Acting CE: I love you mum

23 September 2024

As I begin my time acting for Chappie while he is on medical leave, I wanted to write to each and every one of you to introduce myself and to talk about the road ahead.

Firstly, I want to say it is great to be here at Oranga Tamariki. I have thoroughly enjoyed meeting many of you over the past 7 weeks, getting to know the business and gathering an understanding of what sits at the core of the work you do.

When asked by the Public Service Commission to take on the role of Acting CE, I did not hesitate to say "yes" . I immediately knew it would be an opportunity I would never regret taking,

It is true that I have been in the public service for thousands of years – across Health, Justice and Defence and I can honestly say that this is a profoundly special and unique place.

You do the most important work – caring for and protecting New Zealand’s vulnerable children. I want to take this, my first opportunity to speak to you all as the CE, to thank you for the work you undertake every day.

A brief introduction – I grew up in the Hutt Valley, which as you all know is the centre of the universe and the cultural epicentre of Aotearoa.

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Over the coming weeks, I would like to talk about what is important for us, and what as an organisation we need to focus on.

I know over the most recent years, the workload of Oranga Tamariki has been heavy, the biggest challenge was being asked to do too many things all at once. I know, as do the leaders in Te Riu, that we need to give you all permission to distil the important and discard the things that hinder our ability to become a high performing Ministry. We all (myself included) need to really focus, and be disciplined in that focus, and we need to keep things simple. We need to do the basics right – relentlessly, everyday.

The basics to me can be easily explained in 2 parts. The ‘our core purpose’ – which is the actual caring and protecting of children and rangatahi and secondly, ‘becoming a high performing Ministry’ – how we manage the business in a way that enables us to care for the children – our finances, our kaimahi, our ministerial and public reporting obligations. Over the coming weeks I will explain this in more detail.

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Finally, I want to tell you a story, this will probably help explain the subject line of this email better.

It's a true story about one of our rangatahi in a youth justice residence. Like many of the young ones we work with, he and his whānau face some pretty significant challenges. Progress is measured in the small things, the little changes. Recently he has taken it upon himself to call his Mother every night. His Mum let us know that for the first time since he was a child, he told her that he loved her. In fact, he now ends each nightly call with "I love you Mum".

The small things matter. The little changes count. Because in the end they mean a son can tell his Mum he loves her, and a Mum can end each day knowing her son is going to be ok.

Have a great week, and thanks again for all your great work.

Nga mihi nui

Andrew

Message from the Acting CE: Roll out of our priorities and focus areas, PSC awards and looking after ourselves

30 September 2024

Each Monday morning Te Riu – the Oranga Tamariki leadership team – meet to discuss agenda items ranging from health and safety to investment and budgets, to new initiatives and current operations (like Military Style Academy).

Last Monday we met and discussed how we would prioritise our work effort across Oranga Tamariki to help us all focus on the important and re-prioritise or discard the non important. It goes to that old principle, that if you try to do everything you don't do anything that well.

Over the coming weeks we will roll out the priorities, which will not be of any surprise, and that is a good thing. I thought I would set the scene by talking briefly about our three focus areas – Delivery on our core purpose, changing our culture, and getting the basics rights.

Delivery on our Core Purpose – is about our core statutory functions and our Minister's priorities – it is about how we go about delivery of them and addressing and working with the challenges of doing that.

Changing our Culture – is about lifting our management and leadership capability, improving accountability, and leading the culture change require to help us deliver our core purpose.

Getting the Basics Right – it's about the essentials/sound communication, sound budget management, sound people management, sound reporting and management of ministerials, OIAs, Written PQs – Privacy Act Requests.

Over the coming weeks, I will talk about this in more detail, but I am hopeful this will give you a sense and the distilled approach that Te Riu is taking to help us all focus.

Last week was an exciting week of recognition for Renee Conway and Oranga Tamariki.

Renee was a finalist in the Te Hapai Hapori Public Service Commission Spirit of Service Awards Young Leader of the Year Award. Renee was nominated for the award for her work not only as a social worker, but also as a leader of her team to provide effective and innovative services for her community.

The award ceremony was held at Tākina in Wellington on Thursday night, which Renee and Caz Anderson attended.

Congratulations Renee!! Well done, a terrific recognition for you, and through you, for Oranga Tamariki.

Finally – look after yourself! Last week (I generally operate a week behind schedule) was Mental Health Awareness Week.

Phil posted on Te Pae videos on this. Suffice to say, you all work in a very challenging environment. I know the rewards are enormous, but they don't happen every day. You are a resilient kaimahi that do the hard yards, and to be frank, it won't get any easier. But, that is why it is really important to think about what you enjoy, what gives you fulfilment and peace outside of work and be disciplined (easier said than done I know!) about setting aside time for that.

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Look after yourself – you are important – not only here, but more importantly, to your family and friends.

I hope you have a good week.

Nga mihi nui

Andrew

Message from the Acting CE: More on our 3 focus areas and Jane Addams, the first social worker

21 October 2024

Over the past two weeks, Te Riu has been giving life to the set of priorities we agreed upon on 25 September, and I referred to in my email of the same day. We will publish them online shortly, but firstly I wanted to give you a brief outline of what they look like.

There are three focus areas:

1. Delivery on our core purpose
2. Culture change
3. Getting the basics right

This focus helps us to distil and prioritise what is important and what is not.

Our focus areas in detail

Focus area 1 is delivery on our core purpose.

It prioritises activities like allocation of cases, residences operating safely, locating missing children, our Minister's expectations around social worker visits, and improving the way we manage complaints, to name a few.

Focus area 2 is about changing our culture – which is about lifting our management and leadership capability, improving our accountability, and leading cultural change.

This includes embedding and delivering a cultural framework, designing and rolling out a performance management system, and ensuring that we have a financially sustainable operating model.

Focus area 3 is getting the basics right.

This is about running a healthy organisation. It is simple but important stuff like managing our finances and delegations, ensuring that we operate within budget and taking annual leave because that keeps us refreshed.

It also includes complying with our special obligations as a government department, like crafting Ministerials, responding to Official Information Act and Privacy Act requests.

These obligations are really important, because they fulfil that critical function of being transparent and accountable to the public for the work we and Ministers do. And this transparency is one of the hallmarks we need for people to have trust in us.

Discovering Jane Addams

While I was lying on the couch in the weekend, exhausted from doing nothing, I thought to myself "I wonder who was the first social worker? When did it all begin?"

So, I picked up my phone and half an hour later after I revived the battery from being very dead (but an unintentional method of ensuring you remain uninterrupted). I found the answer

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– Jane Addams. To those of you that know this already, my apologies, but I thought for everyone else you may find this interesting.

By all accounts Jane Addams was a formidable woman, regarded as the founder of social worker profession. She was born in the United States in 1860 and died in 1935.

Her interests and activities spread across a number of areas, but the common link was the relationship between the actions of the government and its impact on the individual, and in particular mothers and children.

She was a proponent of “settlement houses” to bring together cross sections of society in a single location to help those less fortunate. Those houses were to provide support like daycare, health care, education and other initiatives that alleviate and improve the lives of those people.

Jane Addams received the Nobel Peace Prize for her work in 1931. The central thrust of this work though was to take a more reform-based approach to social work that looked at the underlying causes of disadvantage and how society can practice and address those using social theories and practices involving government and the community.

I hope all of you have a good week ahead – and thank you for all your work.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew

Message from the Acting CE: Three boys

4 November 2024

Ten days ago, we had 13 boys break out of their residence building to climb onto the roof at Korowai Manaaki.

Once the deed is done, the issue is, what next?

This is my first experience with a major event at Oranga Tamariki. What took me by surprise, but maybe shouldn't have, was the immediate intense interest of the media and in fact the public. Suddenly we were more of the centre of attention than can often be the case.

What didn't take me by surprise was the professionalism of our people.

In my first engagement with Iain Chapman, Acting Deputy Chief Executive, Youth Justice Care and Protection Residences and Homes, he made it very clear – the single objective was to get the kids down safely.

This of course is easier said than done. 13 teenagers, high on adrenaline and keen to make a noise on the roof, some parts steep, ready for a good time as the evening was setting.

Aimee Hunter, our new Manager Residential Services Youth Justice, who had only been with us for five weeks, had arrived that day for her first visit, so that was quite an induction! Aimee became the Incident Controller.

Over the following 11 hours, the whole Korowai Manaaki team swung into action, many members staying when their shifts ended and many other members of the team coming in from home to help out – to talk with the boys on the roof, to try and persuade them that the best thing they could do was to come down. And they did, the first coming down shortly after the event started at 10.45 pm and the last at 9.45 am in the morning.

They all came down safely. The objective was achieved.

I would like to pay tribute to Aimee, to Iiti Aufai, the site manager, and to Soane Mokoï, the Manager Residence Operations, for their great leadership over this time – for their clarity, patience, and resolve. I would like to thank all the Korowai Manaaki team for the effort huge they collectively put in to bring this to a good outcome.

In particular, I would like to acknowledge their ability to leverage their personal relationships with the boys built over time and their perseverance in talking to the boys all night to create the conditions that meant they came down.

There were many in the background that also played a role – our media team, the Police, and the Fire Service – all contributed to this effort.

And to Iain Chapman for his calm leadership, and the great job he did fronting the media at the conclusion of the incident.

The heroes of the time were 3 boys. Residents in Korowai Manaaki. They were the boys who said "no". They were the boys who did not go on the roof. They were the boys who said to the others "don't do it".

We forget in our distance from the teenage years, how overwhelming, and engulfing the beast of peer pressure is to the thoughts and actions of young ones in that age group. Which is why, in the heat of the moment, in the milieu of the chaos, the presence of mind of these

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three boys to mentally step back and decide “we are not going to be part of this” is truly admirable. If they can make good choices under such extreme circumstances, they have a great future.

Nga mihi nui

Andrew

Message from the Acting CE: Update on Chappie's return

6 November 2024

Kia ora everyone,

Today I was advised that although Chappie's surgery went well, he needs more time to recover.

I have been asked to remain as Acting CE.

We wish Chappie all the best for his recovery, and I will update all staff on his return once dates are confirmed.

Andrew

Message from Acting CE & Chief Social Worker: Our national apology

12 November 2024

Kia ora everyone

Today I have asked Nicolette, our Chief Social Worker, to write to all staff ahead of the National Apology.

Andrew Bridgman

A message from Nicolette Dickson

Nga mihi nui ngā kaimahi o Oranga Tamariki,

***He moemoeā ō ngā purapura ora mote heke mai
– Survivors dreams for the future –***

a next generation where every child, young person and adult is loved, safe and cared for in a manner that supports their growth and development into thriving contributors to society.

Tomorrow will be a day of significance for all of us who call Aotearoa home as the Prime Minister delivers a national apology to survivors of abuse in care.

It will be a day of mixed emotions, of sadness, of acknowledgement, of reflection on the past and of hope for the future.

It will be a day that many survivors of abuse and their whānau have waited a long time for, and some have not survived to see.

As kaimahi, whatever role we play, we are united by a vision that all children are safe, loved and nurtured. And so there is no doubt today will be an emotional day for us all.

In particular, I want to acknowledge those of you who continue to walk your own personal journey as survivors of abuse in care or have held the hand of someone in your whānau or community who is doing so. May you particularly find some comfort in the meaning and importance of today.

I want to let you know a little bit about what to expect.

In an event at Parliament, our Acting CE, Andrew Bridgman will join the leaders of Health, Education, Police, Crown Law, Public Service Commission, and the Ministry of Social Development who will apologise in person for the failings of the public service and the harm that survivors have experienced.

The Prime Minister will then deliver the National Apology in the house where many survivors will be present. At the same time, survivors will gather in events in Wellington, Otautahi and Tamaki Makaurau to hear the apology together.

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The apology will be broadcast live, and a video of our apology will be shared across all of our external and internal platforms. I would encourage you to take the time to watch the apology and to talk to your teammates about what it means.

I want to acknowledge Andrew for representing us as he gives this apology. It will be a reflection of the evidence we gave during the commission.

We acknowledged that through the decades, the state child protection agency had made multiple failings in preventing and reporting the abuse of children in care.

We acknowledged that often children were not believed when they told us they had been harmed and that those who had harmed them were often not held to account.

We acknowledged that Māori, Pacific and disabled children in particular experienced harm that was often more severe than their peers.

We acknowledged that poor record keeping practices means that many of those who were in care will never have the opportunity to know and fully understand their past.

And we acknowledged that our failings have created ongoing mistrust between Māori and non-Māori involved in state care.

Tomorrow, as Government, we say we are sorry. And although no words shared will make up for the harm caused, it is an important step in moving forward not just as Oranga Tamariki, but as a country.

Survivors have been clear, for an apology to be meaningful it must also be seen as a renewed call to action.

Survivors want every whānau supported so they can provide loving care themselves and that when, from time to time out of whānau care is needed, it is provided in plain sight, with children safeguarded and the whole community working together to return that child home. I know this is something each and every one of you work hard every day to realise for the children who come to our attention.

... And yet, if we are honest, there is much more ahead of us to make sure every child is safe, every child is loved and every child is nurtured. As we reflect on the magnitude of today's events, let it be with a renewed commitment to the journey ahead, to the work still to be done and to the safe future for children that survivors want for their next generation.

In the following days, I will share some thoughts through a video on Te Pae, a reflections session to look back on the journey we have been on, the importance of today's National Apology and the work we must do moving forward.

To all staff, tomorrow will likely be a tough day for many. Take care of yourselves, take care of each other – and we will talk soon.

Nicolette Dickson

Chief Social Worker

A national apology to survivors of abuse in state care

18 November 2024

On 12 November 2024 the Government delivered a national apology to survivors of abuse in state care.

Oranga Tamariki Chief Executive, Andrew Bridgman, joined leaders of Health, Education, Police, Crown Law, Public Service Commission and the Ministry of Social Development to apologise for the failings of the public service.

To every survivor, and every person who did not survive.

To the children who we failed.

To the adults those children have now become.

We are sorry.

[Our national apology](#)

Message from Acting CE: The Promise

22 November 2024

Last Tuesday the Prime Minister apologised in parliament to the survivors and those that did not survive, of the abuse in state care. The apology was in response to the Royal Commission Report “Whanaketia - through pain and trauma from darkness to light” delivered in June 2024.

Prior to the Prime Minister’s apology, seven public sector chief executives whose departments had been specifically mentioned in the report, also each gave an apology in the Banquet Hall of the Beehive. I delivered our apology as the current Chief Executive and on behalf of Chief Executives past of Oranga Tamariki and former manifestations of this ministry.

After such a historical day I walked away with a number of reflections and a promise, that I want to share with you.

Firstly, it was a day that needed to happen, and it was a day for the survivors. The state needed to acknowledge the horrendous harm and breach of trust that it had inflicted on innocent and vulnerable people over decades.

Secondly, in the case of the state’s role in childcare and protection, not only was harm committed, but even when it was not, it is evident from the report that the lack of fulsome care and protection, which we should have provided, meant that many of the children would have been better off to remain in the homes that they came from.

Thirdly, many of those that survived did much more than just survive. They have gone on to have full and productive lives demonstrating tenacity and resilience of herculean proportions – they are the heroes of the story. And in the children we care for today, despite the challenging family environments that they come from, you can also see in many of them a resilience and tenacity, that if given the right encouragement and opportunities, will hold them in great stead for the rest of their lives.

Finally, the promise.

In my speech I talked about the fact that the care system had changed, it had improved – there is no question that it is very different to what it was then – and this is due to you, your colleagues and the people before you that work tirelessly every day to improve the lives of our young tamariki.

But I also acknowledged an uncomfortable and unacceptable truth, that harm is still occurring to children in our care – whether that is because children are harming children, and we are failing to prevent it or whether it is we are harming our children.

What I have seen in my limited time here is that in amongst the enormous array of pressures we are under and work we have to do; we have a remarkable ability to make traction when we focus.

We need to focus.

There must be no harm – it is never OK, it is never tolerable, it is never explainable.

I know that the vast majority of you come to work each day to do good.

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But for those that cause harm there is no place for you in this organisation.

When harm occurs, we will find it and if our people have been found to have caused the harm or to let harm happen, then they will be removed from Oranga Tamariki.

The tolerance for harm is zero – that, for our tamariki, for the parents of the children in our care, for the survivors who fought to remove this behaviour from the system, for the public of New Zealand - that is the promise.

Ngā mihi nui

Andrew

Message from Acting CE: Keeping our Promise

22 November 2024

Kia ora,

Today the Minister has announced the establishment of a new unit inside Oranga Tamariki – the Child Protection Investigation Unit.

I spoke earlier this week about the impact of the National Apology, our commitment to ensuring tamariki and rangatahi are not harmed while in our care and the need to draw a line in the sand – like I said in my earlier email, *“when harm occurs, we will find it and if our people have been found to have caused the harm or to have let harm happen they will be removed from Oranga Tamariki”*.

This unit is how we put action to that promise.

There are thousands of us that work for Oranga Tamariki, that walk the values we are all very proud of. The large majority come to work each day to help and not harm – this isn't about you. You do a wonderful job, and I am grateful to you as are the thousands of children, young people and whānau that you work hard to help every day.

But the Royal Commission's report into abuse in state care showed us the cost of not doing more to prevent and stop harm happening to children in care. The price is paid not just by the survivors of the abuse, but the generations of whānau that come after them.

So, we are going to do something about it.

The Child Protection Investigation Unit is us putting action to our words.

The unit will be established by independent experts led by Janis Adair who is the current Chief Inspector at the Office of the Inspectorate.

Janis Adair was a nurse in the Army Medical services and then became a Police Detective in the United Kingdom. She has worked for the Independent Police Conduct Authority and in 2014 she returned to the United Kingdom and worked at the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual abuse. She is now the highly regarded Chief Inspector at the Office of the Inspectorate independently monitoring New Zealand's prisons.

The objectives of the Child Protection Investigation Unit are to:

- Conduct rigorous and transparent investigations into cases where the care provided to a child by the state has caused harm
- Identify systemic failures to reform to the systems and practices of Oranga Tamariki
- Provide a voice for survivors by working with the Crown Response Office – ensuring the experiences of survivors inform ongoing improvements in care standards
- Promote accountability at all levels of the care system

Janis Adair will lead the development of the Terms of Reference and the operational structure of the Unit before the end of the year.

The unit will be operational at the beginning of 2025.

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I know the drive every Te Riu member and I have to protect the children and young people in care is shared amongst you all.

Not one of us wants harm to come to those we care for.

That's why we, all of us are committed to not repeating the mistakes of the past.

That is our promise as Oranga Tamariki – and we are keeping it.

Ngā mihi nui

Andrew