



**ORANGA
TAMARIKI**
Ministry for Vulnerable Children

Sam Bishop
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Dear Mr Bishop

I refer to our letter of 27 June 2017 in response to your 19 April 2017 request for information relating to methamphetamine (P). We understand that you were dissatisfied with this response and you requested a review by the Ombudsman.

We have been working with the Ombudsman's Office to assist with their investigation of your complaint and have agreed to provide you with a clearer and more substantial response to the four questions you posed.

I will address each of your questions in turn.

What is the Ministry's policy on methamphetamine (P) use by parents and/or caregivers of children who are already working with the MVCOT?

We do not have a specific policy on methamphetamine use but we do have key information on methamphetamine connected to our Assessment and Decision-Making policy. Our letter of 27 June 2017 provided the following link to the Ministry's assessment and decision-making policy and response procedures set out on the Oranga Tamariki Practice Centre:

www.practice.mvcot.govt.nz/policy/assessment-and-decision-making/index.html.

The policy outlines the practice and process requirements for quality assessment and decision-making to ensure that every mokopuna who comes to our attention has a response that is unique to their needs, strengths, risks and circumstances. Building safety is at the forefront of all our work with children and young people, their family and whānau from intake to case closure, informing placement decisions and ongoing work.

Included at that link is key information on how the use of methamphetamine can affect the care of a child or young person, and specific reference to the Joint Standard Operating Procedures for Children and Young Persons in Clandestine Laboratories. These procedures are also encompassed, under the definition of neglect, in the scope of the Child Protection Protocol for responding to child abuse that may constitute a criminal offence.

Does MVCOT require parents and/or caregivers, who have been informed as being users/suppliers of P, to undergo drug tests for the use of an illegal Class A substance to ensure children are not in the presence of the illegal substance?

As stated in the 27 June 2017 response, the Ministry does not impose mandatory drug testing of parents or caregivers. However, we work closely with families of children

who have been exposed to a drug culture to make sure these children are able to live in a safe and nurturing family environment.

Where a child or young person has been deemed in need of care and protection, a Family Group Conference or Court Plan can include detail of the changes a parent or caregiver must make, and the timeframe for those changes, in order for a child to stay or return home. Drug screens and evidence of progress made with a drug and alcohol service provider may be required.

Does the use/supply of P by parents and/or caregivers warrant the immediate removal of children in their care and if not why not?

Yes it can warrant such action, in certain circumstances.

Any decision to remove a child from their home is carefully considered and must be in their best interests. Children's safety is at all times the Ministry's top priority.

Methamphetamine use is not an automatic determinant of unsuitability to care for a child or young person, but it can be an indicator of wider care and protection concerns.

There are circumstances under which children have been removed when the frequency, severity and/or impact of exposure to drug activity poses serious risks or where there are other contributing or associated factors such as family violence or mental health issues.

At the extreme end, methamphetamine labs are a dangerous place for children to live. The Ministry works closely with Police under the specific operating procedures when children are found to be living in a home where methamphetamine is being manufactured.

When the Ministry is notified that there are children residing in a home where methamphetamine is present, an assessment is made as to the children's safety and alternative care is arranged for them when necessary. If there are any concerns that children have been exposed to chemicals, a medical check is sought to make sure their health has not been compromised. The Ministry takes these health concerns seriously and strives to find the best solution for the children in such situations.

Whenever we receive a Report of Concern our intake process focusses on gathering sufficient information to make an initial decision of the level of risk to the child or young person and to plan an appropriate response.

Does MVCOT leave children in the care of parents and/or caregivers who are known users/suppliers of P and if so why?

Yes, it is possible after a full safety and risk assessment, that children remain at home.

The seriousness of the concern and the risks for the child remaining in the home must be considered alongside the detrimental impact of removal, especially if removal is against their wishes, if they have had a close and secure relationship with the parent/caregiver and/or if they are going to an unfamiliar home.

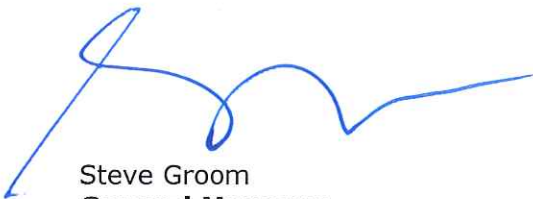
Assessment looks at factors impacting on safe parenting, ability to protect the child from harm and meet basic care needs, the parent/child relationship, parenting skills and willingness to change. The assessment framework is the same for all but

assessment is a continual process tailored to the particular circumstances that brought the child to our attention and the focus of our work with them and their family.

We explore what is working well alongside the things presenting risk to their safety or wellbeing. Countervailing factors include the age of the child or young person, presence of other protective adults in the home, safety plans, involvement with other agencies, and/or the willingness and capacity of the parent/caregiver to engage with remedial services.

I am sure you appreciate the complexity of the questions you have asked and that our initial response was in no way meant to suggest obfuscation on our part. The Ministry is committed to the principles of openness and transparency enshrined in the Official Information Act 1982. If you have any questions, either in respect of this specific request or more generally on this subject, we are happy to discuss things further with you. Please feel free to contact our media team on Media@mvcot.govt.nz.

Yours sincerely



Steve Groom
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Public, Ministerial and Executive Services