



MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Te Manatū Whakahiato Ora

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Leigh Baillie
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Dear Ms Baillie

Thank you for your email of 17 May 2013 with questions about how Child, Youth and Family assesses and approves caregivers. There is information that should help answer your questions publically available on Child, Youth and Family's on-line Practice Centre at <http://www.practicecentre.cyf.govt.nz>. However, the following information may also be helpful to you.

Family, whānau, hapū, iwi and the family group have the primary role in caring for and protecting children and young people and we always look to placing children with whānau where possible.

When children and young people require placement away from their usual caregiver, they are entitled to a safe placement meeting their particular needs. The approval of a family/whānau or non-family/whānau caregiver by Child, Youth and Family creates a partnership between them and the caregiver to ensure that all of the child or young person's needs are met.

The approval requires careful consideration, to ensure the safety of any child or young person placed with the caregiver. It is also important that the public has confidence in Child, Youth and Family to make appropriate and safe decisions regarding the placement of the child or young person.

All caregiver applicants, whether family/whānau or non-family/whānau, have full Police checks completed on them as part of their caregiver assessment. They are exempt from the Criminal Records (Clean Slate) Act 2004 and, as such, there is full disclosure of any criminal convictions.

Where the applicant has any criminal convictions, careful consideration is given to their approval. The approval of caregivers with serious criminal offending, particularly sexual or violent offences, could only occur in exceptional circumstances following special consideration and consultation. This also applies to situations when Child, Youth and Family are considering placing or returning a child to a parent who has committed serious sexual or violent offences.

Generally, caregiver approval is given by the caregiver supervisor. However, Child, Youth and Family view criminal convictions very seriously and this is reflected by the delegation of approval: the more serious the criminal conviction, the higher the level of management is required to consider and provide approval. Details of the levels of delegation in relation to criminal offence are available on the Child, Youth and Family Practice Centre.

The Ministry does not use a formula in its assessments of parents and caregivers. The safety of any child or young person is paramount in any consideration of their living environment, and Child, Youth and Family is guided by the Children, Young Person's and Their Families Act 1989 in this respect.

Similarly, the decision to return a child home is based on written robust re-assessment of the family's situation. The wider family and professionals who are engaged with the child and their family actively participate in this decision. It may also be appropriate to carry out a Police check on the parents or caregivers and/or other members of the home that the child is returning to.

The assessment of a caregiver applicant begins with the gathering of documentary information, which includes Police checks, internal Child, Youth and Family checks, medical information and referee checks. This information is analysed with consideration given to the safe care of any child or young person and the assessment of the applicants' strengths and vulnerabilities.

The facts and an 'on balance' consideration of the information need to relate to the attributes of the caregiver applicant and detailed in the assessment report. Social work supervision and consultation with other relevant professionals takes place to ensure any decisions regarding approval remain child-centred and are cognisant of the safety and wellbeing of a child or young person.

Caregiver applicants are not automatically disqualified if they have criminal convictions or a history with Child, Youth and Family. Their account of the circumstances of the offending or involvement, the distance in time and their learning from the experience are considered as part of their assessment. Areas that are considered include:

- whether the nature or circumstances of offending or involvement indicates any specific or general risk to children or young people
- the severity of the offence
- the time of the offending - timeframe since the offence occurred, whether any further offending occurred, whether behavioural change has occurred in the interim
- the frequency of the offending - number of convictions of this nature, other offences committed
- whether the offender was in a relationship of trust and confidence with the victim
- if any treatment was undertaken, the assessment of successful rehabilitation and future risk
- other risk factors present in situation, includes use of alcohol or drugs, mental illness, violence
- attitude of offender – is there genuine remorse or learning from the experience
- attitude of non-offending proposed caregiver
- views of their extended family and friends
- views of others professionals.

While obtaining the applicant's information is necessary, it is also important to access independent verification of the details of any offending to ensure that an accurate assessment can be completed.

Thank you, once again, for writing. I trust that this information successfully answers your questions.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Thomas', with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

Pat Thomas
Manager
Ministerial and Executive Services