

20 DEC 2018



Mr Elliot Ikilei
fyi-request-9066-146b783b@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Mr Ikilei

Thank you for your email of 18 November 2018 to Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children (Oranga Tamariki), requesting the following information under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act):

- 1. Is Whakatakapokai due to be shut down, either temporarily or permanently, and what are the reasons utilised to justify closing it down?*
- 2. While each young person has an individual safety plan, what are the safety mechanisms for placing young people back into the community, and what is the overall idea? Tracker? 24/7 social worker? Other secure facility? Motel? Whānau?*

I will address your questions separately.

- 1. Is Whakatakapokai due to be shut down, either temporarily or permanently, and what are the reasons utilised to justify closing it down?*

There is considerable support for improving the experience of the children and young people in our care, and moving to more welcoming, therapeutic environments with shorter stays to provide the best opportunity for tamariki to flourish. The future of care is not in large institutions, which were disconnecting our children and young people from their whānau and communities. The safety of our children, young people, their families and whānau and the wider community is of the utmost importance to us. Any change in care placements involves an assessment of safety considerations.

Oranga Tamariki is building its capacity for alternative, community-based placement options for children and young people who have high and often complex needs. Children and young people who could currently be placed at Whakatakapokai range from 11 to 17 years of age, and most of these children have a significant care history and require care and support to stabilise their immediate health, mental health and educational needs and to address any at-risk behaviours present.

During our transition out of the residence, the Whakatakapokai facility will continue to be used for admissions and assessments of children and young people in need of care and

protection. It is intended that the wharenui on the Whakatakapokai site will be utilised for this purpose, however, it is currently undergoing refurbishment to ensure that it is fit for purpose. In the meantime, one of the Whakatakapokai residential units will be used for admissions and assessments. Following assessment, the child or young person can then be transferred to one of our community houses.

We are therefore also considering what other else the Whakatakapokai facility could be used for if we move to more community-based options in Auckland. From 1 July 2019, changes to the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 (the Oranga Tamariki Act) will expand the age setting for the youth justice system to include 17 year olds, which will result in an increased demand for youth justice placements. This increased demand is being considered as part of our plans for all our residences.

Evidence for transitioning to smaller, community-based homes for care and protection

A new set of regulations, the Oranga Tamariki (National Care Standards and Related Matters) Regulations 2018 (National Care Standards) will come into force from 1 July 2019. The focus of the National Care Standards is making the child's or young person's care experience better. They are just one of the things that Oranga Tamariki is working on to make sure children and young people are in safe, stable and loving homes, and are supported to be well and to do well. From the beginning, the National Care Standards were built around what children and young people said they need when they're in care. Caregivers, iwi social services, care providers, and Oranga Tamariki staff were all consulted in the process. For your reference, I have provided a link to the report which Oranga Tamariki used as a guideline while developing this new set of standards.

<https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/evaluation/modernising-cyf/interim-report-expert-panel.pdf>.

The Ministry of Social Development also commissioned a report, published in 2016, titled *Care and Protection Secure Residences: A report on the international evidence to guide best practice and service delivery*. The report includes an examination of community-based alternatives to care and protection secure residences and rates interventions based on evidence about their effectiveness. A copy of this report can be found at:

<https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/research/care-and-protection-secure-residences/index.html>.

The Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) reports annually on the state of care in New Zealand and looks at the policies and practices of Oranga Tamariki. It has established a framework to monitor and measure good practice and to support a continuous learning culture in Oranga Tamariki. The OCC State of Care report for 2017 focused on our secure residences and includes information about what these should look like in the future. This report is available at:

<http://www.occ.org.nz/assets/State-of-Care.pdf>.

2. *While each young person has an individual safety plan, what are the safety mechanisms for placing young people back into the community, and what is the overall idea? Tracker? 24/7 social worker? Other secure facility? Motel? Whānau?*

When placing young people back into the community, the safety of children, young people, caregivers and the wider community are our top priority and our number one consideration. Care and Protection Residence staff, Supervised Group Home staff, external stakeholders and Police all work together to understand the best approaches to maximise the safety of everybody concerned.

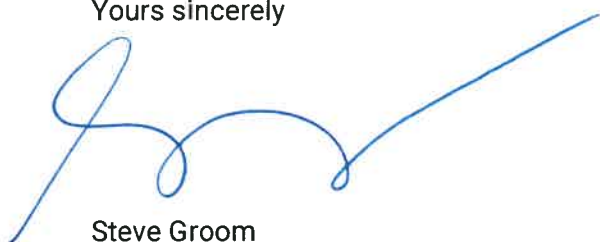
A variety of approaches are used to minimise risk when placing a child or young person back into the community. Oranga Tamariki for example, employs child-centric improvements to admissions, dedicated training and development with staff, closer liaison with community and Police, greater involvement of whānau, and continual access to time-out/secure facilities to stabilise young people if absolutely required.

We intend to make the information contained in this letter available to the wider public shortly. We will do this by publishing this letter on our website. Your personal details will be deleted and Oranga Tamariki will not publish any information that would identify you as the person who requested the information.

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact OIA_Requests@ot.govt.nz.

If you are not satisfied with this response, you have the right to ask an Ombudsman to review this decision. Information about this is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or by contacting them on 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely



Steve Groom
General Manager Public, Ministerial and Executive Services