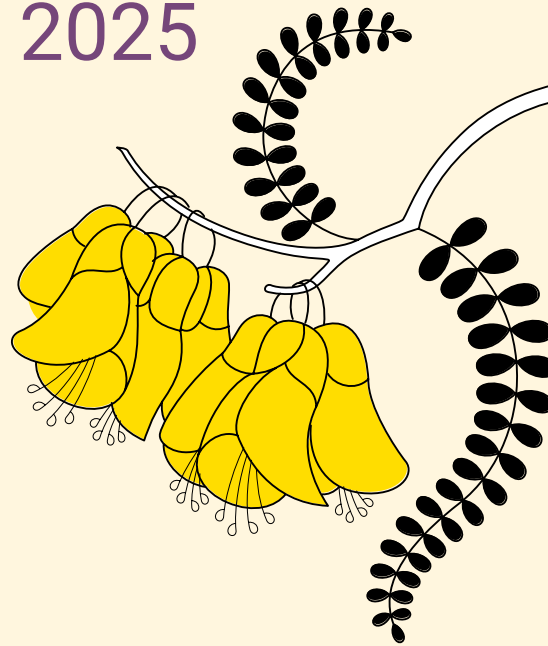


Insights for Community

**Greater Wellington
community visit 2025**



Thank you for meeting with us. What we heard from you, and others in your community, helps us understand how services are working to improve outcomes for tamariki (children) and rangatahi (young people), and their whānau.

This document summaries what we heard from organisations in the Greater Wellington community. We've included an A3 summary for Greater Wellington which we hope will be a useful resource to support ongoing discussion, collaboration, and improved practice across your community. We'll be back in your community in three years to see what's changed.

Over the coming months, we will combine what we heard from your community with what we heard from other communities for our nationwide reports, including our annual Experiences of Care in Aotearoa (Agency compliance with the National Care Standards Regulations) and our new report on outcomes for tamariki and rangatahi Māori

in the oranga tamariki system. You can read our reports on our website: aroturuki.govt.nz/reports

Protecting your privacy is important to us. We make sure individuals can't be identified. You won't find quotes from individuals unless they are part of a group of five or more from the same sector (for example, education).

All the quotes and insights we heard from people in Greater Wellington, whether in this summary or not, will inform our nationwide reports.

Thank you again for your time and for engaging with us. By working together, we can improve the lives of tamariki and rangatahi, and their whānau.

Our visit to your community

Before we visit a community, we request data from Oranga Tamariki and NZ Police to help with our planning. This data provides the context for our visit and highlights areas we may need to look at to understand what is working well or what might need to change.

You'll see some of this data in the key themes in this share back, and in the A3 summary for Greater Wellington.

As with all our reports, data is one part of the overall picture for your community. The voices of tamariki, rangatahi, and whānau, and those like you who support them, are at the centre of our mahi.

Who we heard from during our visit to Greater Wellington

51	tamariki and rangatahi
50	whānau
16	caregivers (whānau and non-whānau caregivers)
43	representatives from iwi and Māori services
75	Oranga Tamariki kaimahi
8	Open Home Foundation kaimahi
52	NZ Police kaimahi
40	representatives from other government agencies
41	representatives from other non-government agencies

Information about how we analyse what we heard can be found on our website: aroturuki.govt.nz/what-we-do

Summary of key themes for Greater Wellington

Funding and contracts

- Funding cuts have created gaps and some organisations are having to cover costs up front
 - There is an expectation services are provided, even though funding has been reduced or cut
 - Layers of financial approval in Oranga Tamariki can create long delays to get funding for tamariki, rangatahi and whānau
 - Funding cuts are hindering collaboration and creating a competitive environment for iwi and Māori services
 - Contracts are not fit for purpose and tamariki, rangatahi and whānau are not getting the support they need
-

Iwi and Māori services

- Oranga Tamariki and iwi services have been working well together but ongoing funding is needed
- Working in a whānau-centred way is benefiting both the whānau and tamariki and rangatahi

Communication between organisations

- Individual relationships between Oranga Tamariki kaimahi and other organisations mean information is being shared to support tamariki and rangatahi
 - Sharing offices (tari) is resulting in more timely support
 - When All About Me plans or information is not up to date, caregivers and community organisations don't always have what they need to provide the right care or service
-

Relationships with Oranga Tamariki social workers

- Communication from social workers can make a big difference to whānau, but it is inconsistent and often relies on advocacy from community organisations
- Iwi and Māori services noted an improvement in relationships with social workers, although there is still some tension with some services

Reports of concern

- There is evidence the Hapori community intake and assessment pilot is reducing Oranga Tamariki involvement and keeping tamariki and rangatahi in their community
- Government agencies and community organisations feel the threshold for Oranga Tamariki action is too high and the response too slow
- Confidence in Oranga Tamariki would be higher if there was better communication following a report of concern

Care and protection family group conferences

- There are currently long waits for family group conferences with little communication before a FGC
- Oranga Tamariki is no longer training FGC coordinators leading to poor facilitation and is asking community organisations to provide more support, resulting in a lack of role clarity
- Parental involvement in FGCs is supported at the women's prison but not the men's prison

Transitions

- Tamariki and rangatahi are often not told about upcoming moves between placements nor given any information about where they are going next
- More resources are needed to support tamariki and rangatahi moving between regions
- When tamariki and rangatahi leave a care and protection residence, there is a high chance of them returning due to a lack of planning, support and suitable care
- Referrals to Transition Support Services come too late, and impact the ability of transition workers to support rangatahi moving to adulthood
- Oranga Tamariki social workers seem to be unclear about their role in planning for transition to adulthood – which should begin when rangatahi in care turn 15
- Disabled rangatahi face greater challenges transitioning to adulthood, and community organisations want to work proactively with Oranga Tamariki to support them
- When transition support is put in place early enough, it is having a positive impact on rangatahi preparing for adulthood

Educational support

- Some tamariki and rangatahi in care are not in school, and have nowhere to go during school hours, because agencies can't agree on who is responsible for funding their educational support
 - Schools seem to be reluctant to enrol tamariki and rangatahi who are in group homes or in care
 - Not replacing the region's Senior Advisor Education and Health has made it harder for social workers to get tamariki and rangatahi back into schools
 - The long waitlists to get learning needs diagnosed, and funding schemes with high thresholds and narrow criteria, prevent disabled tamariki from accessing educational support
-

Accessing health services

- There are long waitlists and insufficient support for ICAMHS, counselling and therapy services as these services lack resources and capacity
- Tamariki are missing out on ACC cover and support for historical injuries and trauma because information is not recorded or shared across agencies

- Tamariki in care face delays to get treated, referred, or assessed because their social workers are difficult to contact or don't understand who can give consent for what
-

Police training, policies, and practices

- Police capacity in the Greater Wellington district is diverted to unique regional demands, which cuts into the time police have to work with rangatahi
 - Youth Aid officers can make a significant difference to the lives of tamariki and rangatahi, when they have the skills and the time
 - More training for police on working with rangatahi would help address the feeling from some rangatahi who offend that they are treated inconsistently and unfairly by police
-

Youth offending – early intervention and alternative action plans

- Community services and cross-agency initiatives provide early intervention support to tamariki and rangatahi, reducing re-offending and supporting successful alternative action plans

Key theme: **Funding and contracts**

Funding cuts have created gaps and some organisations are having to cover costs up front

We heard from Oranga Tamariki regional leadership that community organisations have lost both money and roles after the latest Oranga Tamariki contracting round, leaving tamariki and rangatahi without services.

Some community organisations said that Oranga Tamariki is not paying for services delivered until the end of the financial year. We heard from one community organisation they haven't been paid for seven months and are covering costs via reserves they have from the education and charitable arms of their organisation, putting a lot of pressure on their leadership team. One NGO leader commented they deal with many government agencies which have had their budgets cut and they pay their contracts "but it has not been like that with Oranga Tamariki".

"It will be agreed at the time, but when we try to get the money to pay for the person we employed in good faith, they [Oranga Tamariki] say we will look at the reconciliation at the end of the year." – NGO leader

"They [Oranga Tamariki] haven't paid my contract. I am still waiting for my contract." – Māori services kaimahi

There is an expectation services are provided, even though funding has been reduced or cut

Most community organisations (including those working in prevention, care and protection, youth justice, and transitions) said that even though their funding has been reduced, there is often an expectation from Oranga Tamariki they will keep providing the support and services. In one case, we heard Oranga Tamariki was expecting an organisation to continue picking up referrals after a reduction in funding of \$1.2 million.

"There have been a couple of times like – 'can you just deliver it?'" – NGO leader

"I think if you give [Oranga Tamariki] an inch and they take a mile. They are very quick to ask us different things, pile on [work] outside of the contracts we are working." – NGO leader

Some community organisations spoke of their or other organisations reducing services (such as educational support, respite care and therapy for children with high and complex needs). However, many community organisations were clear a reduction in funding didn't mean a reduction in the provision or quality of their provided services.

"We're going to lose [kaimahi], and it will have an impact. But the philosophy here is that we don't say no to whānau." – Māori service leader

"We have always made a commitment to whānau to look after them regardless of a drop in funding." – iwi service leader

Community organisations used words like "creative" to describe how they juggle the reduction in funding. One leader of a community organisation told us they wanted kaimahi to "do the right thing" and it is their responsibility as leaders to worry about funding.

"Bring back the resources we once had. We were very busy but it's crazy now. You can only be creative for so long." – education leader

A reduction in funding has also meant some kaimahi are working beyond their contracted hours, and/or that the organisation covers the additional costs.

"We definitely make sure a young person doesn't miss out and sometimes it's at our own expense." – NGO leader

"Getting any traction for anything for kids in care like a school uniform. Getting Oranga Tamariki to pay for a school uniform ... so I make the call we are going to provide them with a uniform, they have a right to be clean and feel good about themselves." – NGO leader

"We're not 9–5 ... You'll see kaimahi on a Sunday handing out kai. They're not getting paid for it." – Māori service leader

Organisations recognise that this adaptability of kaimahi is not healthy or sustainable in the long term.

"[Oranga Tamariki] know we have wiggle room, they know that and at some point that will be a catastrophe." – NGO leader

Layers of financial approval in Oranga Tamariki can create long delays to get funding for tamariki, rangatahi and whānau

Community organisations told us about delays in both getting funding approved and then receiving the funding. Oranga Tamariki Deputy Chief Executive (DCE) approval is now needed for expenditure previously approved at a site manager level, and we heard approvals “have to go through several tiers and directions”. As well as the delays this is causing, it can also increase costs – for example, booking flights for caregivers travelling with children in their care. Funding approval is not given until the last moment, when airfares are at their most expensive. We also heard when the situation requires timely action, an organisation may use their own money rather than waiting for funding from Oranga Tamariki.

“The social workers don’t have the authority to approve anymore. Where the social worker would go to their team leader or practice leader for approval, it even sits above the site manager to get things approved now. Where we need staff approved, it’s taken out of region, [the approval] sits above [Oranga Tamariki, Senior Advisor], whereas it used to be approved regionally. The tamariki miss out if [we don’t] step in, but [we do] step in because it’s the right thing to do.” – NGO leader

“It didn’t take long for Oranga Tamariki to approve but [it took] 3 months to release funding.” – NGO kaimahi

“It used to be sitting at regional level and would be faster. Now it goes up the chain to the CE [Chief Executive of Oranga Tamariki] and we are a day away [from travel] and haven’t purchased tickets.” – NGO leader

“Instead of asking Oranga Tamariki for funds, we will use our own money. We had one child who pulls his hair out and eats it. Foster parents wanted suits [clothing to prevent him pulling his hair] for him. Even that, it can take weeks for approval from Oranga Tamariki. For us we can go to buy it straight away. It slows us down.” – NGO leader



Funding cuts are hindering collaboration and creating a competitive environment for iwi and Māori services

Iwi and Māori services said funding was impacting their relationships with each other as they do not like to compete against one another for funding.

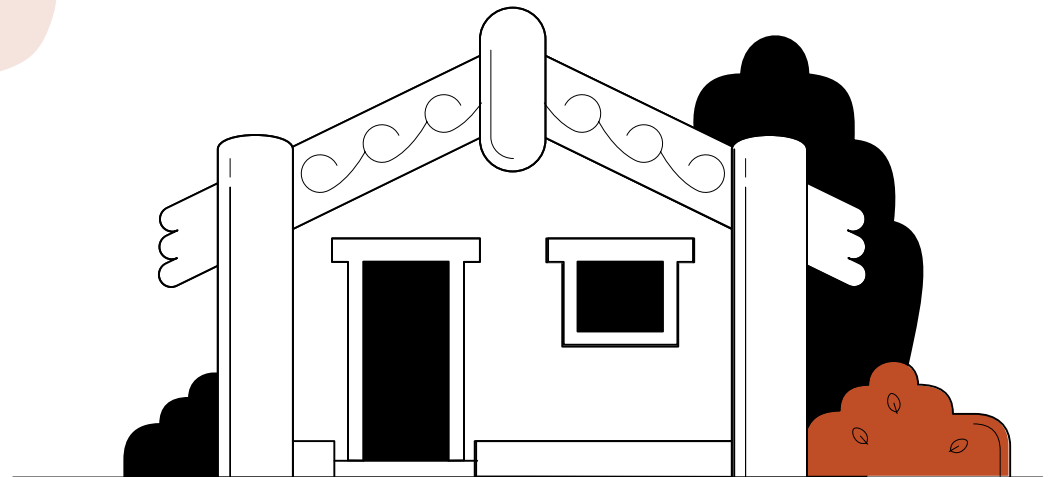
“Whilst there are great partnerships, but as soon as money is on the table everyone is going to compete. It’s unhealthy.” – Māori service leader

“[Oranga Tamariki] wanted us to be on their care and protection panel, but we’ve said no because that’s where [another Māori service] are, so out of respect for them we chose to not be on the panel.” – Māori service leader

Competing for funding may also prevent tamariki and rangatahi from getting the most appropriate service.

“If a rangatahi says ‘I don’t want to be with you I want to be with them’ [another service] we [used to] say that’s okay that’s a good idea and help them get there. But now maybe it’s a bit more competitive cos it’s all about the funding.” – Māori service leader

We heard there are also some tensions between urban marae and iwi organisations due to sitting in different Te Tiriti spaces. The perception is Oranga Tamariki tends to fund iwi organisations, which means urban marae often cannot access this funding, even though they are doing equivalent work.



Contracts are not fit for purpose and tamariki, rangatahi and whānau are not getting the support they need

Iwi services also told us because funding was targeted at the child, it didn't allow for a more holistic approach of working with whānau, which underpins the way they work. Funding and contracts were also time based rather than need based.

We heard from a community organisation they had the capacity to help more tamariki and rangatahi but were restricted by their contract. Another community organisation waited three months to be given contracted hours, and then Oranga Tamariki gave them an "unreasonably" large number of hours to be used in a short timeframe. We were also told "full time equivalents were insufficient, that the contract funding wouldn't cover the kaimahi roles that the contract required, and the KPIs were outdated and didn't reflect current trends".

"[We] had to reach out to people to let them know they are left in limbo because we don't have hours left ... Funding impacts on how responsive we can be, and children being seen. There's a lot of big question marks for children who need support." – NGO leader

While community organisations told us they are doing their best to limit the impact of funding cuts and contract changes on tamariki, rangatahi and whānau, it can mean tamariki, rangatahi and whānau are only getting partial support.

"Budgets only allowed for a certain number of counselling sessions or equine therapy sessions or family access sessions." – NGO leadership

Oranga Tamariki kaimahi expressed concern about the contract changes, with some community organisations no longer an option to provide help.

"I do worry about our ability to sustain our social structure when so much of our ability is taken away from our community. We're the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff and it is now on fire. We can't go to the community because they don't have the capacity anymore." – Oranga Tamairiki leader

Oranga Tamariki leadership told us because community organisations lost funding and consequently roles, this reduces the ability of those organisations to do social work with whānau. The leader of a Māori service said funding cuts have meant they can't fund social workers and a community organisation leader said they were diverting money from social workers to a team that responds to Oranga Tamariki requests about contract spending, which "feels like it's not a good use of taxpayer money".

"Mum was off meth and she didn't have support. We were going to do work with her. Then the plug was pulled [because of funding]." – NGO leader

Oranga Tamariki leaders said the latest contracting round had eroded the trust community organisations had in Oranga Tamariki and had also led to service gaps, such as mentoring and alcohol and drug counselling. Community organisations also mentioned the broader social issues of overcrowding and working with marginalised communities, and how these would no longer be addressed.

"A lot of the conditions for our families are due to overcrowding. Due to the political endeavours that led to the cut in our funding, we may have no team. Who will carry on the work in our community?" – education leader

One community organisation leader said the impact of funding "always hits the most vulnerable people the hardest". Another leader of a community organisation also commented on how the current environment impacts on kaimahi as well.

"The current funding environment is challenging, that kind of slash and burn approach which is what we're currently operating in. It instils fear and worry in the workforce, losing jobs and [impacts on] our own families." – NGO leader

We also heard examples where funding cuts had resulted in seemingly counterproductive actions. In one, a rangatahi was transitioning out of a home, but the contract had not been signed off. The Oranga Tamariki leader couldn't approve the expense of either additional days in accommodation or a moving van. Instead, the social worker spent "a whole week" helping the rangatahi move, in their own car, and being unable to visit other tamariki.

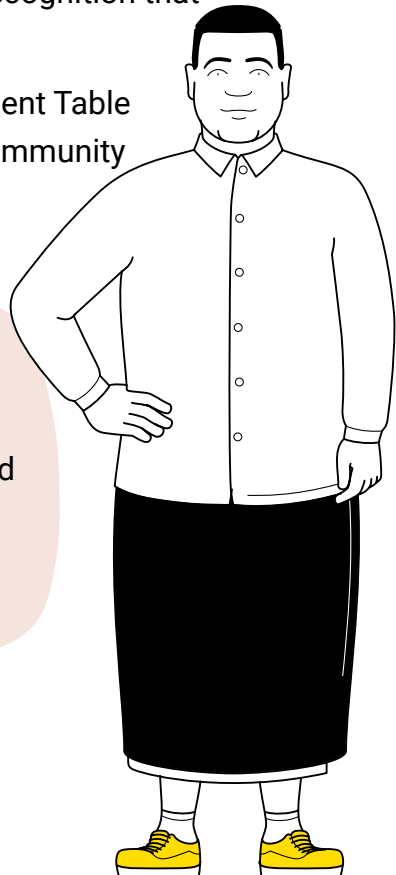
Key theme: Iwi and Māori services

Oranga Tamariki and iwi services have been working well together but ongoing funding is needed

We heard from iwi services Oranga Tamariki is open to devolving services to the community, however they said it requires a continual relationship and process with Oranga Tamariki for that to happen in practice. There also needs to be continual recognition that these services require funding.

The Hapori Community Intake and Assessment Table was mentioned as a successful model of community led decision making and support (this is discussed later in this share back).

“[Hapori] is an example of devolution by OT [Oranga Tamariki] down to local level. That model is now in Whakatāne and OT [Oranga Tamariki] are now looking to extend it out as it’s a massive success.” – iwi service leader



Working in a whānau-centred way is benefiting both the whānau and tamariki and rangatahi

Community organisations acknowledged the benefits of understanding how different families operate from a cultural point of view, as well as involving whānau when working with tamariki and rangatahi.

“One of the beauties of working here is we have access to a diverse group of people from different Pacific cultures, ways for understanding how ethnic specific families operate and then they have connections to people for me to go to and others and elder and young ones who are living in [that] world.” – Pacific service kaimahi

“The [guiding] model – if we are following that, the whānau has to be involved. The whānau need to come along and heal on that journey as well.” – NGO leader

“I think the knowledge I get from [Pacific service] is helping me to help the kids and help me understand what my kids really want.” – whānau

For iwi, Māori and Pacific services, being whānau-centred is central to the way they operate.

"All of us all put the whānau first and that's our approach – whanau first." – Māori service kaimahi

"And that's the core of our [Kaupapa], core tikanga of our practice, whānau is at the centre of everything we do." – Māori service kaimahi

"We are all coming in together to wrap around and uplift the family." – Pacific service kaimahi

We heard how being whānau-centred reflects organisational practices that have a whole of whānau approach, operate from a strength-based kaupapa, and work at the pace of the whānau.

"You can have the Mum learning something, but if the Dad is not learning the same it will be fire with fire, so same programmes learning from a wāhine and tāne view ... You don't start and finish, you keep coming until your whānau can see the change." – Māori service kaimahi

"We're a strength base model. I was talking to a friend who works at [Ministry of Social Development] this morning and they said they had already been told you have to incentivise the whānau to get off the benefit. So, what does that look like? It's a hammer. But we come and say – 'what is something you aspire to?'" – Māori service leader



"It's having someone there to explain, that can show [the support is] very mana enhancing. There are heightened emotions so how do we take on a village approach and surround us with the resources to maintain and build on that family's mana?" – Pacific service kaimahi

"We just go with the wairua (spirit or life force) of the whānau that we are working with, if they are wanting to move on to the next step, we go with that." – iwi service kaimahi

Iwi, Māori and Pacific services report success when using a whānau-centred approach.

"A pilot programme initiative [meant] we could work around intensively to work with the rangatahi and with their whānau for a year from a te ao Māori lens. We are eight months in now and he is where is, doing amazing. From our support. The change has happened through the whānau empowering themselves." – Māori service leader

"The way we've seen [families] use tools [learned in counselling sessions] and utilise them. Seeing the confidence and self-esteem build, they're more talkative about life and upbeat about life and talk around where their future lies and where they're heading to as well. Success is seeing a better outcome than when they came in [to the services]." – Pacific service kaimahi

"It's good for the rangatahi because they will define what success is and what isn't, maybe not for government, but good for them. You are getting them near ready for full time employment or study, so yes good outcomes in that place, they all work at different speeds." – Māori service leader

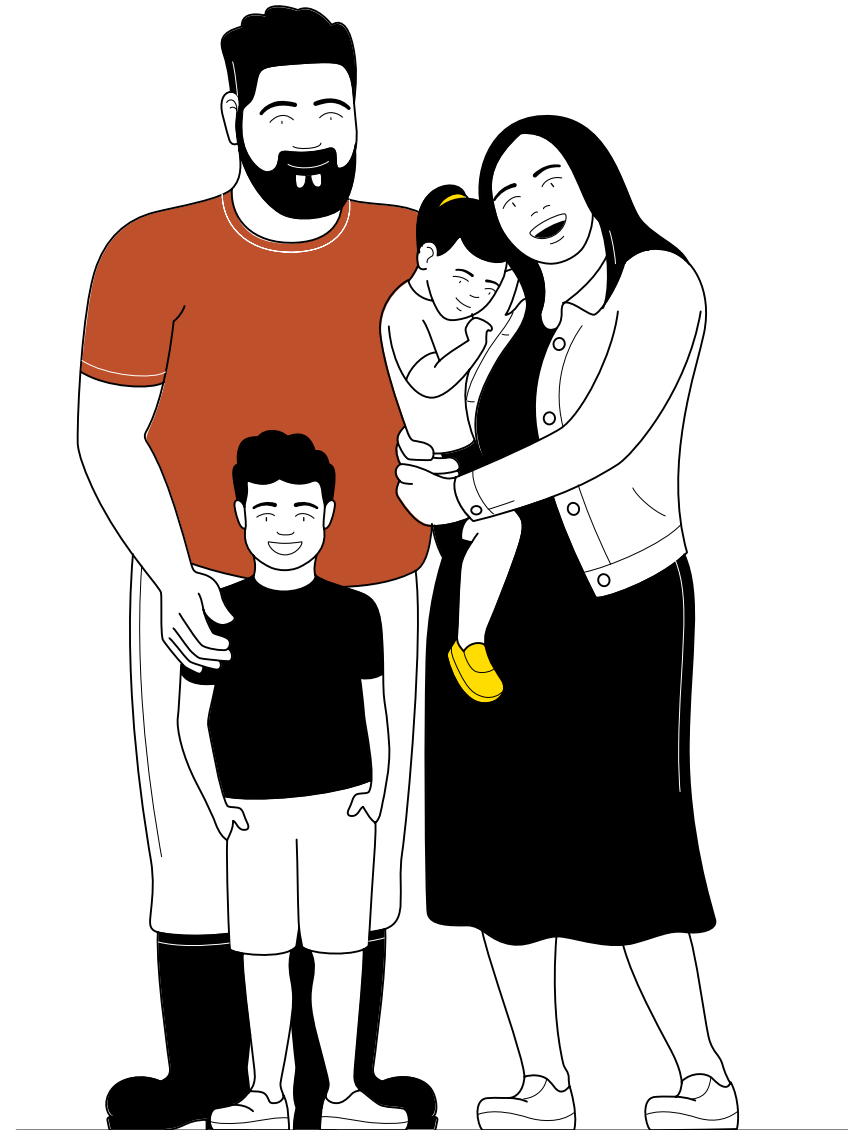
"Their supports have been great because he [the children's father] doesn't talk too much but his thoughts overtake his actions. It's been a long journey, and they [Pacific service] speak the language which is good. He's Samoan. They're amazing. It was really nice to seek the help and to have people that can speak his language and understand his thoughts too." – whānau

As covered earlier in the funding and contracts theme, the current way of contracting by government agencies does not always reflect the more time-intensive whānau-centred approach to helping tamariki.

“It’s always numbers driven. [Oranga Tamariki] want to see huge movements [in statistics]. But if they could see where the family started and where the steps were actually taken, the steps that have been made, but they never look at the qualitative information, it’s about numbers.” – Pacific service kaimahi

“We’re thinking of a holistic approach, but [government agency] say you must do this in six months.” – iwi service leader

“We are running on empty we have caseloads of 20 which we need to reduce to between 6 and 10 ... We talk about a te ao Māori approach, but this is contradicted by how we are operating.” – iwi service leader



Key theme: **Communication between organisations**

Individual relationships between Oranga Tamariki kaimahi and other organisations enable information to be shared to support tamariki and rangatahi

Kaimahi from iwi and Māori services told us there is no consistent approach to Oranga Tamariki communication. Some leaders and kaimahi from government agencies and community organisations told us they have built strong, trusting relationships over time with strategic Oranga Tamariki roles which has helped maintain communication. We heard the current processes within Oranga Tamariki are too “bureaucratic” and “immovable” to ensure tamariki and rangatahi wellbeing, but these relationships with individual Oranga Tamariki kaimahi help professionals navigate the processes. One leader from a community organisation described the Oranga Tamariki kaimahi they worked with as “internal champions” whose support was invaluable.

“It’s not lost on me that we would have been out of this work long ago if it wasn’t for those key personnel in those stakeholder situations. Relationships were what supported us with the most challenging situations, and they helped us navigate the shortcomings, at times idiocracy, of the systems and protocols that we’re operating under.” – NGO leader

“It’s 100 percent down to individual effort in this case, we prioritise [building relationships with Oranga Tamariki] in our region ... My experience in [site] in my role, is the site manager won’t even respond to my emails or calls. We know from knowing others internally in Oranga Tamariki. At another site, you might try to make contact, not hear anything back, have to escalate, but you get something back and it will be the bare minimum.” – government agency kaimahi

Some kaimahi from government agencies and community organisations told us because these relationships are individualised, they can break down when Oranga Tamariki has staff changes or when kaimahi are on leave. For example, one community organisation told us when their Oranga Tamariki contact left they stopped getting communication from Oranga Tamariki and were not communicated with regarding why Oranga Tamariki had changed their contracts.

“Running blind, no one was helping us from Oranga Tamariki and the people you’re dealing with didn’t know themselves and they didn’t have the information.” – Māori service leader

We heard concerns from a couple of kaimahi at Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu, New Zealand's correspondence school, that Oranga Tamariki having a high staff turnover means Te Kura kaimahi don't have consistent or on-going communication with social workers. Social workers don't always understand Te Kura's role as a distance education provider and that they can't supervise tamariki. Sometimes, learners are left without parental supervision or support and lack the proper learning environment to do their schoolwork.

Sharing offices (tari) is resulting in more timely support

Some iwi and Māori services said working in the same tari or near to Oranga Tamariki enables information sharing and prompts Oranga Tamariki to take a more cultural focus in their work. By working physically close to each other, kaimahi can more easily collaborate about how best to support tamariki, rangatahi, and whānau. We heard from leaders in iwi and Māori services that in addition to being physically close, they also meet with Oranga Tamariki every two weeks to discuss cases and escalate concerns.

"We have spent time in there [Oranga Tamariki office] getting to know the OT social workers, it's been good, we have a positive relationship with the social workers there." – Māori service kaimahi

"We have an open hot desk and everyone sits with each other. For example, I will sit next to a CAMHs [Child and Adolescent Mental Health] worker and a [NGO] social worker and we might all share a client and we're talking regularly. The social worker might ask me if everything is going ok and I can say 'oh actually my client was asking me where they can get groceries', and the social worker will have the knowledge, and I can get support, we can communicate to help each other and where to go where to refer to a client externally." – NGO kaimahi

Police told us having access to kaimahi from other organisations helps them to get information. We heard it was helpful to have an Oranga Tamariki kaimahi located with the child protection team, as police can get immediate context about the tamariki and whānau. A couple of health kaimahi told us they would also like to have an Oranga Tamariki kaimahi located in their office.

We heard from one police kaimahi how the hospital liaison role works with health to make sure the two organisations follow their Memorandum of Understanding, get police access to health information about tamariki and rangatahi, and provide feedback on how the two agencies can work better together.

“The need to have a social worker and Oranga Tamariki supervisors in the same building is huge and it would be amazing. It would address all the delays, missed calls etc.” – police kaimahi

Incomplete or delayed information makes it more difficult for services to meet the needs of tamariki and rangatahi

Some kaimahi from community organisations told us when Oranga Tamariki doesn't share information or shares information late, organisations don't know what is happening to the tamariki or rangatahi in their services. For example, one kaimahi told us they had a rangatahi on supported bail who missed set dates because they hadn't received information about upcoming court proceedings from their Oranga Tamariki social worker for six months. One community organisation shared how Oranga Tamariki often makes decisions about FGC plans without including community services, which makes it harder for both the services and tamariki and rangatahi.

Some community organisations told us referrals they receive from Oranga Tamariki about tamariki in their services, including All About Me Plans, are not up to date or are missing information.

“You only get half of the All About Me Plan. Social workers are so busy, but it really makes the process hard. There's information that's outdated. For example, with one rangatahi, I got his All About Me Plan and it was last updated when he was 7 years old but now, he's 14 years old ... Sometimes we will sit down with the kids, and they talk about where they've been and we think, well where's the updated information about this?” – group home kaimahi

“When the young ones don't have any plan ... they think they don't have to do anything. They'll take off as unauthorised absences. It's the anxieties they carry around not knowing what's next. We are told young people are violent, vicious, that there are allegations. We build a relationship with them and it's the complete opposite to the plan. Shows me there's no relationship with the Oranga Tamariki social worker. Sometimes their home life is not great, home factors not great, so that impacts their behaviour. The plans don't match. Or you see they [Oranga Tamariki social workers] just change the date at the top of the plan.” – Oranga Tamariki group home kaimahi

“If it’s a young girl, it could be that they have anxiety that is around men; in this case they might get anxious seeing two men at the door. So, we will organise something. If we know what’s needed, we can get a lot more prepared for them.” – group home kaimahi

While there is understanding that there are times when Oranga Tamariki social workers are not able to provide information quickly or attend to plans easily, up to date information is critical to the success of a placement.

“The updated stuff really helps ... [even if Oranga Tamariki] is only getting the information as we might be getting it, it remains a critical part of the placement going well.” – iwi service kaimahi

One community organisation said information about the health and disability needs of tamariki is not properly shared, preventing them from providing or getting the support needed. We heard the current reporting system for tamariki in care, the care summaries, is not fit-for-purpose and doesn’t record all the needs a tamariki or rangatahi has. Some rely on relationships with Oranga Tamariki kaimahi to gain more information. One community organisation told

us they cannot get the “full picture” in referrals, and this can prevent successful placements.

Leadership from group home providers also told us they want to know what is happening in the future so they can prepare tamariki and rangatahi for any changes in their lives, to help prepare tamariki and rangatahi to reintegrate with whānau, and prepare others in the home for any upcoming changes.

“Sometimes it’s on the go and on the fly ... but whatever information we can get to our kaimahi is best. It’s good to know from the social worker what their plan is for the future, so we can support and guide [tamariki and rangatahi] towards this. Especially if they’re going back to their families. If we knew that it was a month away, we could tell them and there’s something to look forward to.” – group home kaimahi



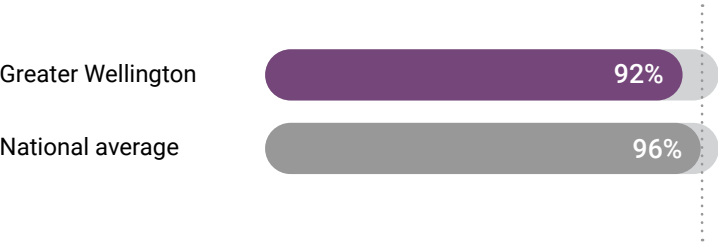
Some government agency leaders and kaimahi told us about two child safety initiatives – the National Child Protection Alert System and the School Alert System – that enable agencies to share information about tamariki and rangatahi with care and protection concerns. We heard these initiatives give school and health kaimahi context to better support tamariki. However, a couple of government agency leaders said agencies and community organisations sometimes fear sharing information across the system through these initiatives. There are not robust privacy processes in place, meaning shared information can be weaponised against tamariki and rangatahi or become “community gossip”.

If the police attend an incident of harm in the home, they will send to us a specific email at school and they will let us know they attended an incident in the home and the student was in the home at the time. We don’t get any details of the situation, but it just allows us to know this kid has had this go on in their life and allows us to put the right things in place with the report of concern.” – school leader

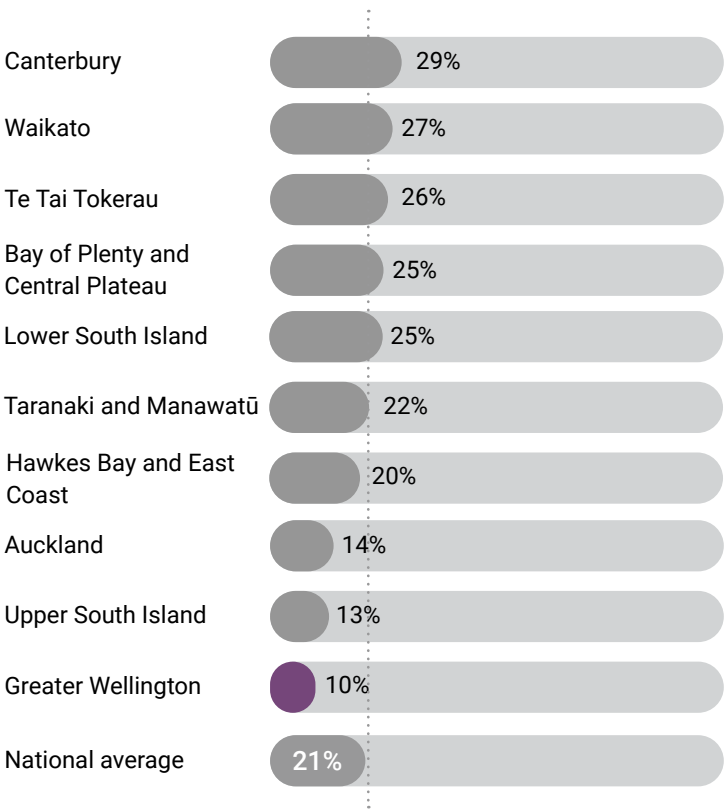


When All About Me plans or information is not up to date, caregivers and community organisations don't always have what they need to provide the right care or service

Tamariki and rangatahi with an All About Me plan after at least six months in care



Tamariki and rangatahi with an All About Me plan updated in the last six months



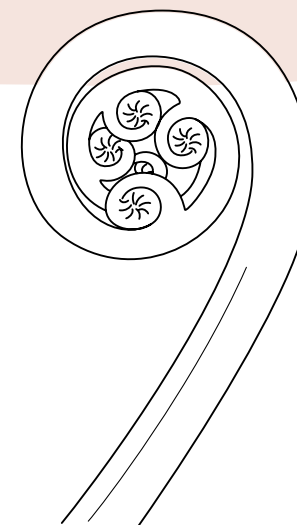
Oranga Tamariki data shows, compared to other Oranga Tamariki regions, Greater Wellington is one of the two regions with the highest proportion of tamariki and rangatahi who do not have an All About Me plan after at least six months in care (8%). Greater Wellington also has the lowest proportion of tamariki and rangatahi who had All About Me plans updated within the last six months (10%).

We heard from caregivers and kaimahi in community organisations that not having current information makes it difficult for them to plan for, and respond to, the needs, including safety, of tamariki and rangatahi. We heard some plans are out of date and don't reflect the current needs or views of tamariki or rangatahi. We heard of plans that were three years old, and one that had not been updated since 2020. We also heard this issue when we last visited the Greater Wellington region.

"Updated information is crucial. No way can you assess a young person based on information from 2020. It can be a bit tricky. With recent referrals I haven't got all the information. It's hard to complete an assessment on gaps." – NGO leader

"There is flowing communication, but sometimes we have to go backwards and forwards to get the right information around the referral. Not every young person has an All About Me plan."
– NGO leader

"I didn't get a history for him when he came into my care. I got an All About Me plan that was three years old. The only knowledge I had was a one-page information sheet from the previous caregivers, information like bedtime and that he likes to spend money on lollies. There was no information on guardianship, who he was allowed or not allowed to see, protection orders. None of that was communicated to me." – caregiver



Key theme: **Relationships with Oranga Tamariki social workers**

Communication from social workers can make a big difference to whānau, but it is inconsistent and often relies on advocacy from community organisations

Some whānau told us about social workers who are reliable and actively engaged, and the positive difference this makes. However, most whānau told us about poor communication and challenges with getting basic information and assistance from social workers and other Oranga Tamariki kaimahi when they needed it. A few whānau told us about the positive difference it has made having community organisations walking alongside them, managing communication with Oranga Tamariki.

Kaimahi from a Māori service told us about a whānau trying unsuccessfully for “about six months” to reach the Oranga Tamariki social worker for their tamariki to organise whānau access visits.

“[Whānau] heard nothing so [they] would get [their] lawyer to call cos [they] wouldn’t hear back [from the child’s social worker]. [They] just wanted to find out what was happening with access.” – Māori service kaimahi

Iwi and Māori services noted an improvement in relationships with social workers, although there is still some tension with some services

Most leaders and kaimahi from iwi and Māori services we spoke to told us their relationship with Oranga Tamariki had improved over the past few years.

“Oranga Tamariki has made a real effort. Three years ago, there was a real barrier for iwi working with Oranga Tamariki. It’s taken hard work on both sides around how to engage with each other.” – iwi service leader

However, kaimahi from a couple of iwi and Māori services gave examples of ongoing tension, such as a perception that Oranga Tamariki social workers feel challenged by them.

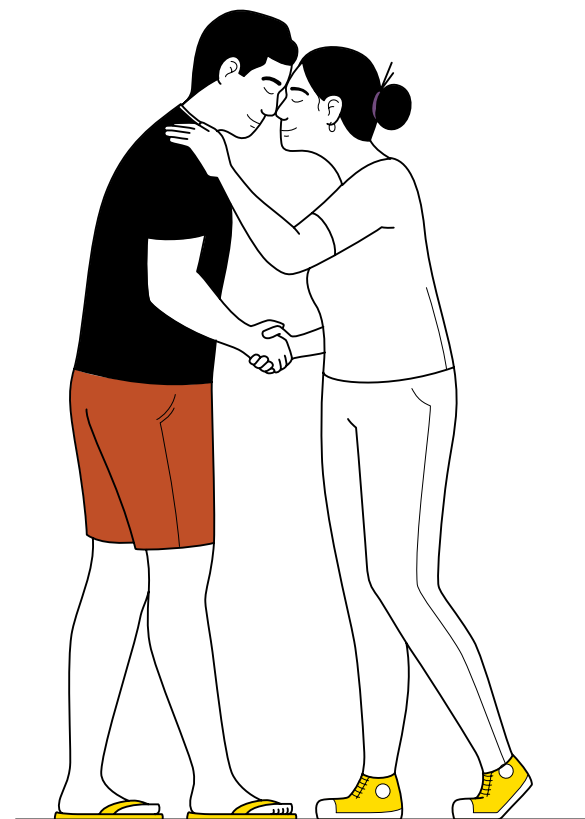
“We didn’t get off to a very good start with some of the social workers because I demand transparency and a lot of the time, they just weren’t forthcoming, and they don’t like to be confronted about that.” – Māori service kaimahi

One leader said they believed this tense relationship led to a lack of referrals to their Transition Support Service, and this then resulted in the loss of the contract.

“Oranga Tamariki got upset with the way we deliver; we state that family come first ... I would say you’ve given us the referral, then you [Oranga Tamariki] need to step back so we can do our mahi ... We had probably five transitional referrals all up from Oranga Tamariki. During that period [we told them constantly] ‘we have the capacity, so we need referrals’. [Oranga Tamariki] didn’t send the referrals to meet the KPI [Key Performance Indicators] so, we lost the contract.” – iwi service leader

A Māori service kaimahi said they believed it was staff capacity issues at Oranga Tamariki sites that led to a lack of referrals, and this had been resolved by Oranga Tamariki creating a team lead role to coordinate referrals for FGCs.

“I hardly got any referrals for the first five months, apparently they were short staffed ... but when Oranga Tamariki put the team lead in place for FGC [family group conference] the referrals started coming ... now I get a lot of referrals” – Māori service kaimahi



Key theme: **Reports of concern**

There is evidence the Hapori community intake and assessment pilot is reducing Oranga Tamariki involvement and keeping tamariki and rangatahi in their community

We heard from some Oranga Tamariki regional and site leaders about an extended pilot for a local community intake and assessment table. The table, Hapori, comprised five partner organisations who would collectively triage reports of concern. One regional leader said that Hapori went further than previous initiatives at Oranga Tamariki, such as the Differential Response Model, because Oranga Tamariki is “not at the head of the table”. Reports of concern were received by Oranga Tamariki and then handed to Hapori to make intake decisions.

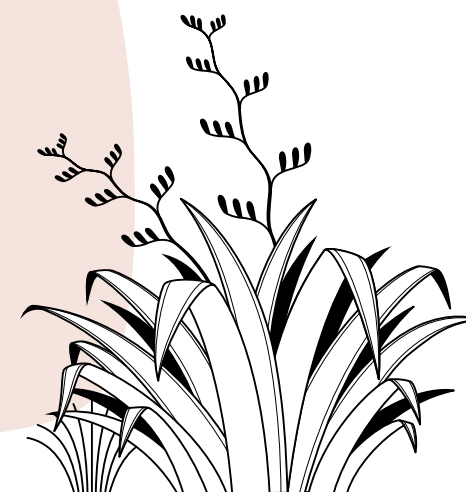
A couple of Oranga Tamariki site leaders shared that whānau are more willing to engage with kaimahi from community organisations than Oranga Tamariki social workers. They saw this approach making an impact and at one Oranga Tamariki site in the region, there had been no entries into care on s101 custody orders for more than a year.

“[It’s about] the State not getting involved with them [whānau]... Better for our community partners to come in. Better for the families. Most of the time they [whānau] are grateful.” – Oranga Tamariki site leader

All the Oranga Tamariki leaders we spoke with about Hapori, said building trust with community organisations underpinned the success of Hapori. Oranga Tamariki and community partners now understood each other’s roles and views better. One site leader said that now if there was raruraru (an issue), the leader of one of the partners would “flick me an email and we will work [out] how we can make it better”.

When we spoke with leaders from one of the Hapori partners, they confirmed that building trust with Oranga Tamariki had taken a concerted effort over the last three years. One leader said that “it took willingness on both sides and Oranga Tamariki has made a real effort”.

“[Our social worker] works in prevention with whānau to stop kids being removed. This is an example of devolution by OT down to local level. That model is now in Whakatāne and OT [Oranga Tamariki] are now looking to extend it out as it’s a massive success.” – iwi service leader



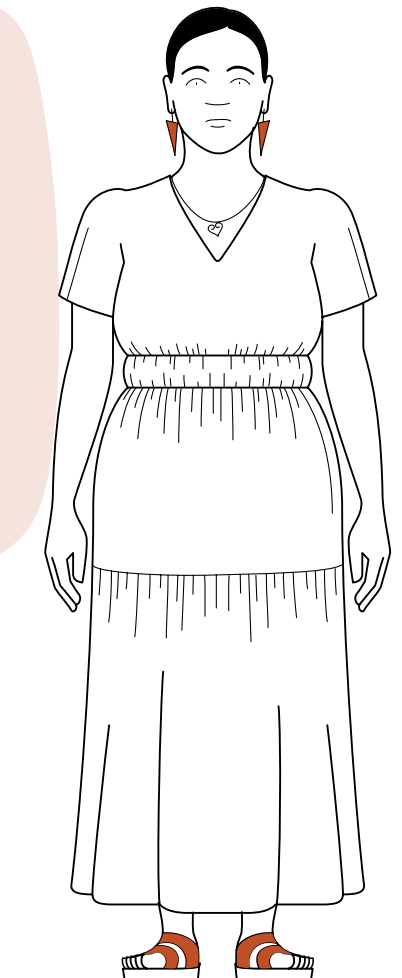
One Oranga Tamariki regional leader said that the partner organisations in Hapori had received funding for one full time equivalent each from Oranga Tamariki. Currently, an Oranga Tamariki practice leader provided quality assurance over the process, but Oranga Tamariki was looking at resourcing a supervisor to oversee it. The regional leader went on to explain that “[Hapori] needs infrastructure”. For example, we heard intake decisions are recorded in spreadsheets outside the Oranga Tamariki case management system (CYRAS), because the system was not designed “to deal with innovation” and the current process “skews all the data.”

We understand that funding has only been approved in six-month increments which made it challenging to recruit dedicated kaimahi. Fortunately, some partners have trusted that the success of the pilot will mean it will continue to be extended and have allocated a dedicated worker – this in turn has led to greater responsiveness.

Some Oranga Tamariki kaimahi told us there had been increased tension between Oranga Tamariki and the community partners because of the recent contracting round and they expressed concern about the impact this could have on Hapori. They said that the success of their site was tied to the success of Hapori and support from community organisations.

“I feel that the relationship with our Hapori team has been under strain because of the funding cuts.” – Oranga Tamariki kaimahi

“Without the Hapori response, this office [Oranga Tamariki site] would fall over. We don’t do it by ourselves, we do it all together, we all work to move our whānau back in their power. We are conscious of the harm, and that Oranga Tamariki are not good caregivers.” – Oranga Tamariki kaimahi

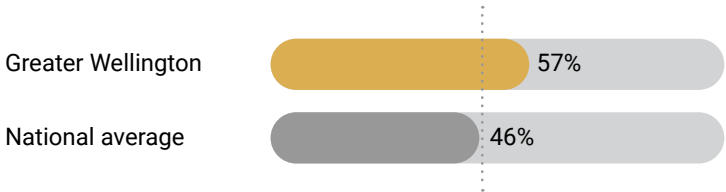


Greater Wellington has a higher proportion of Reports of Concern with an outcome of “No Further Action” compared to the national figure. No further action decisions are recorded for 57 percent of reports of concern in Greater Wellington, compared to a national average of 46 percent. Despite the high level of referral for community support and partnered response we heard about through the Hapori table, this is not able to be recorded by Oranga Tamariki, due to the infrastructure issues mentioned above.

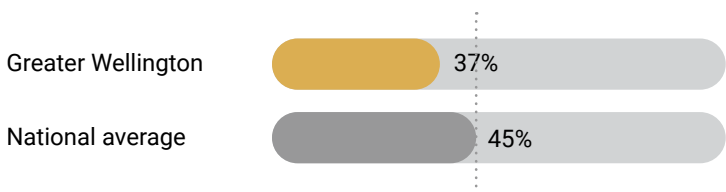
Concerns raised by notification type For Greater Wellington and national data

January – December 2024

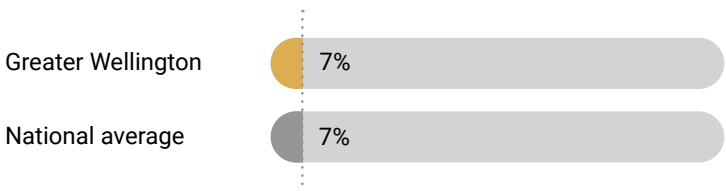
No further action



Further action required



Additional information or intake created in error



Referrals or partnered response



Government agencies and community organisations feel the threshold for Oranga Tamariki action is too high and the response too slow

Police leaders and health kaimahi have concerns about the threshold for Oranga Tamariki actioning a report of concern (ROC).

“With the 16-month-old who was reported [with 16 hospital admissions], however many ROCs, no intervention from Oranga Tamariki.” – police leader

“How bad does it have to get, really?” – health kaimahi

“Oranga Tamariki are very quick [to close]. It surprises lots of police officers. How can you close this [family’s case] from what the police officer has seen? What’s happening?” – police leader

The lack of response from Oranga Tamariki to reports of concern is leading to frustration from government agencies and community organisations.

“We complete [reports of concern]. Go back to families and we can see zero impact, no reach in from Oranga Tamariki.” – police leader

“We send another report of concern. It’s on repeat, repeat, repeat.” – police leader

“We just don’t know what we’re going to get. You might get no action, you might get a big response.” – health kaimahi

“They [reports of concern] have not been addressed though [by Oranga Tamariki], we just keep advocating.” – NGO leader

In addition, we heard responses to reports of concern appear to be slower when the parent needs support or the report of concern is about an older rangatahi.

“We were hoping it would happen a bit quicker. Because the parent was needing the support, there was not a lot of movement.” – education leader

"If they are nearing 17 [years old] they don't really get any help. It doesn't matter how many complaints we do." – health kaimahi

At the other end of the scale, a Māori service felt police make reports of concern unnecessarily, rather than understanding there are other options to get help for whānau.



"We are getting a lot of mothers being revictimized. For example, instead of building a relationship with the mums, and find out who their supports are, who's already involved, if there any services, police are just writing ROCs [reports of concern] to Oranga Tamariki, and also for things is not meeting the threshold. [Even though families] are doing awesome, the mother gets dragged through that process [of Oranga Tamariki] unnecessarily." – Māori service kaimahi

Confidence in Oranga Tamariki would be higher if there was better communication following a report of concern

We heard there is often no feedback from Oranga Tamariki to notifiers on the outcome of reports of concern, including those made due to serious incidents. In particularly serious cases, police and one community organisation told us they escalated follow ups on their reports of concerns with increasingly senior kaimahi in Oranga Tamariki to find out what was happening.

"Kids are running away all the time, and kids are being sexually assaulted every week. And we don't hear back from Oranga Tamariki. It's huge work and it's heartbreaking." – health kaimahi

"We don't get any feedback from our reports of concern, and we're not doing it for fun. We keep rolling it through and we don't hear anything from Oranga Tamariki." – police kaimahi

"For [ROCs] that are severe [already known to Oranga Tamariki], you get nothing [no communication]. I continuously send things." – police kaimahi.

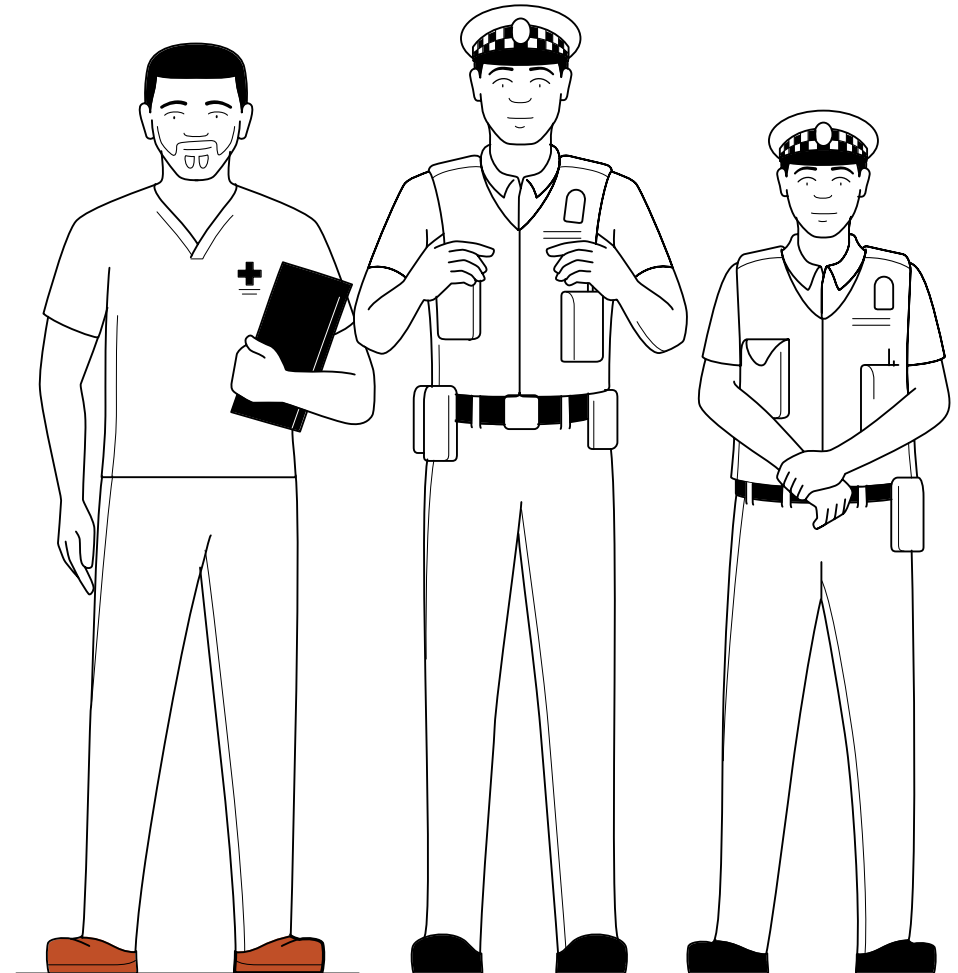
One health kaimahi said they operate on the presumption that making a report of concern acts as a protection. However, when they don't hear back from Oranga Tamariki they are unsure what, if anything, has happened, and whether it did provide protection.

"We make a ROC, then [Oranga Tamariki] don't let us know. We think we have provided a bit of safety by reporting this but then we don't know what happens." – health kaimahi

This lack of communication compounds the worry many organisations have about making reports of concern and how that could impact their relationship with whānau.

"There is still an awful amount of concern about making reports of concern and who makes it, and what that means for our relationships, and even what difference will it make, and also what is the outcome that will occur?" – health kaimahi

In addition to not closing the loop on reports of concern, health kaimahi told us Oranga Tamariki is not sharing information from reports of concern with relevant agencies. As an example, they said they make a report of concern about sexual assault in the home but then the police will pick the child up and return them home.

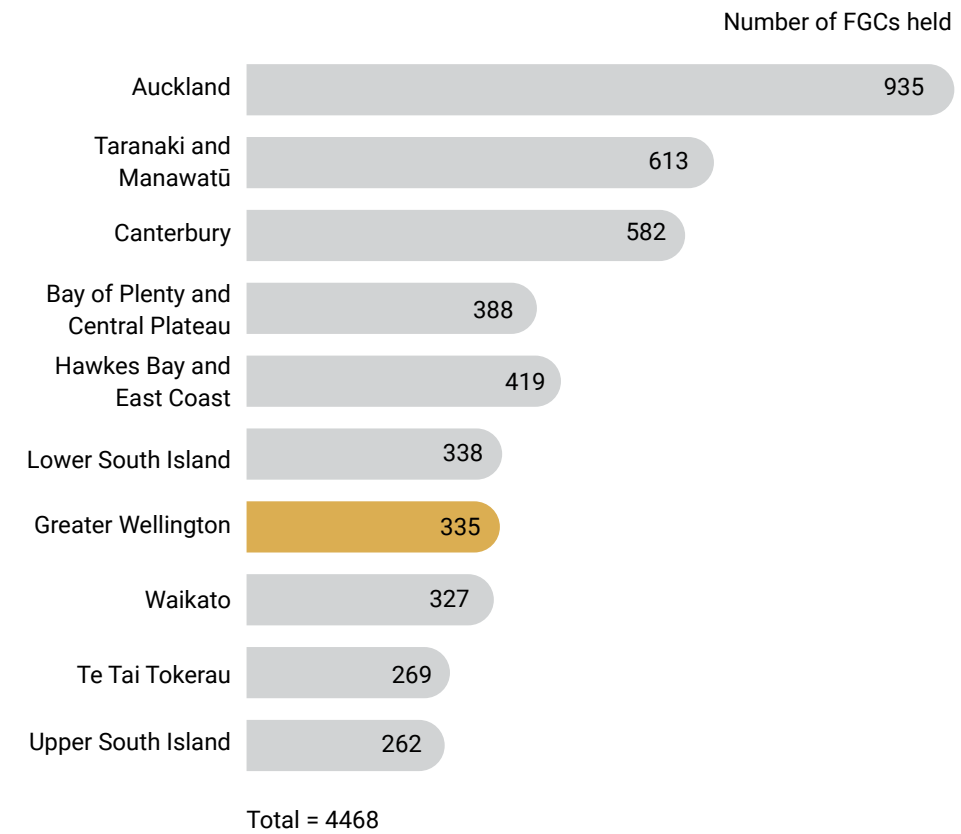


Key theme: Care and protection family group conferences

Family group conferences (FGCs) are an opportunity for whānau decision making following care and protection concerns, including disengagement from education, and putting a plan in place that is appropriately resourced to address those concerns. The FGC is not a kaupapa Māori practice but is grounded in whānau decision making and was intended to incorporate aspects of te ao Māori.

We heard about long waitlists for family group conferences in the Greater Wellington region. While we don't have data on how long whānau wait, we can see that Greater Wellington held only 335 FGCs in 2024, fewer than smaller regions such as Taranaki-Manawatū and the Lower South Island. While this may mean community and iwi and Māori services are stepping in to support families and whānau to address concerns, it may also mean there are missed opportunities to intervene and get the support needed from other government agencies. FGCs can be an opportunity to get resourcing to support tamariki to remain in their families and whānau.

Greater Wellington held the fourth lowest number of care and protection FGCs in Aotearoa New Zealand in 2024



There are currently long waits for family group conferences with little communication before it is held

Within care and protection, Oranga Tamariki frontline kaimahi said that it can take six months between a referral and it “being picked up” by an FGC coordinator. Over this time, the information often changes which results in them having to do another assessment. A Māori service said they are waiting “a few months” for an FGC. The long wait for an FGC delays the provision of services and supports to tamariki and rangatahi and their whānau.

Following long waits for an FGC, there is often little notice of it being scheduled, and some FGCs are then cancelled due to a lack of available Oranga Tamariki kaimahi.

“Ninety percent of the time the [FGCs] are cancelled because it’s busy [including] staff changes.” – NGO kaimahi

We heard from government agencies and community organisations there is a lack of preparation time for FGCs and little communication from FGC coordinators.

“We just get an invitation on the day.” – Māori service leader

“[Oranga Tamariki] have to understand, this is a prison. It doesn’t work like this or that. They can’t ring up last minute and say we have a family group conference tomorrow.” – Corrections kaimahi

Police said if there is time to share information and consult beforehand, then the FGC is more likely to be more effective. The short notice for an FGC also makes it difficult to consult with whānau, ensure they can attend and know what is going on.

“There was no information about [FGC] for a mother and when she went to family group conference, the mother didn’t know what was happening at all.” – Corrections kaimahi

One community organisation kaimahi also told us Oranga Tamariki does not always invite the correct organisations – they got invited to an FGC for a rangatahi who was working with another service.

Oranga Tamariki is no longer training FGC coordinators leading to poor facilitation and is asking community organisations to provide more support, resulting in a lack of role clarity

We heard Oranga Tamariki is relying on other organisations to help navigate and facilitate communication with families for family group conferences – asking for more assistance without funding this mahi. This may have contributed to a lack of role clarity in FGCs. We heard Oranga Tamariki stopped induction training for FGC coordinators during the restructure which has created “lots of gaps” and the plans developed by the FGC lacking what they need to meet the needs of the tamariki and rangatahi and whānau.

“The expertise of running a family group conference is diminishing.”

- NGO leader

A leader from an iwi service said FGCs are not working for whānau because FGC coordinators do not explain what is happening in ways that whānau understand. The language used in FGCs tends to be corporate and legal, which is a barrier to whānau understanding. Corrections kaimahi also said that whānau can feel frustrated sitting there and not knowing what’s going on, which may cause them to “escalate”. Police also said that parents often don’t know what’s going on at FGCs.

We also heard the language used within FGCs is not “mana enhancing” and FGCs are not strength-based or being facilitated with cultural sensitivity. Whānau say they feel judged by Oranga Tamariki kaimahi and feel the FGC process does not allow for everyone to be heard. An iwi service also commented on the judgemental attitudes towards whānau and their unfair treatment.



“There was a lot of hatred and [Oranga Tamariki] looked at us like it’s hard to forgive one another. They only heard from one person [one person’s side of the story].” – whānau

“[Oranga Tamariki] talk in their terms and it’s hard to understand the language.” - whānau

“I’ve had feedback that some of my clients are treated unfairly and judged by Oranga Tamariki which makes them more resistant to working with Oranga Tamariki. Direct feedback is they have not been talked to kindly and have been judged, that creates barriers.” – iwi service kaimahi

A leader from a community organisation said FGC outcomes are pre-determined and there is pressure to support that outcome. This minimises the voices of children and whānau.

The shortage of FGC coordinators is also impacting on schools. We heard from a high school principal who told us FGCs are no longer available to support tamariki and whānau with truancy. As a result, the opportunity to re-engage tamariki and rangatahi in education is lost. Without FGCs, the only other option for schools is to take parents to court, which they are not willing to do.

Parental involvement in FGCs is supported at the women’s prison but not the men’s prison

While there is a lack of information within both men’s and women’s prisons about family group conferences, Arohata (a women’s prison) has social workers who support wāhine to be part of FGCs.

“FGC, our social workers are really onto that. We want all our wāhine to be involved in their tamariki lives.” – Corrections kaimahi

In comparison, at Rimutaka (a men’s prison) there is no social worker for the men, so they are often left out of FGCs. A leader from Corrections said this is intensified because three quarters of remand prisoners are from out of the region.

“This lets the men down and the family down.” – Corrections leader

Key theme: **Transitions**

Tamariki and rangatahi are often not told about upcoming moves between placements nor given any information about where they are going next

Many tamariki and rangatahi had no knowledge of how long they would be in their current placement. They also said when moving between placements they do not understand their care plan and they aren't told in a timely manner about any significant changes to their plan. Some told us they were regularly moved between placements without any reason why, notice or time to prepare. They were also not given any voice about the place they were moving to next.

"The kids' behaviour in the moment changes due to the uncertainty and not knowing when they have to move house. If Oranga Tamariki staff could tell us about the change and keep open communication, before transition happens, so we know it's coming, we can better support them." – NGO leader

"It's fair to say that when there are robust processes and systems in place we hear more success stories ... It's not transition, the impact for the child is not good, we are re-traumatizing these children." – NGO kaimahi

"Feels like I'm in the dark. It's been currently challenging with him getting transitioned out of my care, not knowing what's happening, or boundaries. It feels like a communication breakdown. This has been happening since the day he came." – caregiver

"The communication needs to be better. We agreed to everything, but they didn't keep in contact." – whānau

"[I wish Oranga Tamariki had] let me know beforehand. The day before would have been fantastic ... [The actual experience was] really awkward, really rushed, trying to jam me in there. It was my first time on my own; in an apartment with windows that face everyone else, everyone else can see, like a fishbowl. [It] was creepy." – rangatahi



More resources are needed to support tamariki and rangatahi moving between regions

Community organisations said the limited funding available from Oranga Tamariki made transitions for tamariki and rangatahi moving between regions challenging. Funding is needed for kaimahi who will be supporting the child, and for the cost of travel between the regions. As noted in the funding and contracts section, the time it takes for approval to travel results in higher airfare costs.

When Oranga Tamariki is unable to pay, leadership within community organisations told us they often fund the cost of kaimahi time and travel themselves to support a more seamless transition for tamariki and rangatahi.

In addition to funding constraints, several community organisations shared that a lack of consistent communication from Oranga Tamariki hindered successful transitions between regions for tamariki and rangatahi.

Another impact is that services tamariki or rangatahi need are not set up ready to go in the new region. We heard some government agencies are often not informed of rangatahi moving between regions and this delays services such as rehabilitation.

“We don’t get the changes. If the child’s placement has changed, returned home, whatever the case may be. We often are at [the point of] breaching of that child’s privacy and dealing with the wrong people.” – government agency kaimahi

When tamariki and rangatahi leave a care and protection residence, there is a high chance of them returning due to a lack of planning, support and suitable care

We heard from residence kaimahi there is often a lack of effective support and planning for tamariki and rangatahi transitioning out of Epuni care and protection residence. In addition, kaimahi told us that due to the current lack of caregivers, rangatahi are being placed in homes or with caregivers that are not prepared or suitable for their needs.

“Transition is difficult because we don’t want to keep them here longer than we need to. But the [Oranga Tamariki] sites struggle to meet that end date, as there isn’t another placement for them. They often go to placements that are not ideal.” – residence kaimahi

Weekly multi-agency team hui are the conduit to discuss transition plans, although we were told residence kaimahi don't always have a space to have a voice, and decisions are made "higher up" at national office.

Some tamariki and rangatahi are staying at residence for extended periods because there is nowhere else for them to go. Some are moved on without plans because of the pressure to admit others. Some move to unsuitable placements without enough set up or wraparound support in place. We heard the changes are "just too big" for tamariki and rangatahi to cope with and in some instances, lead to unsafe and unsuitable situations, such as staying in a motel or a return to residence.

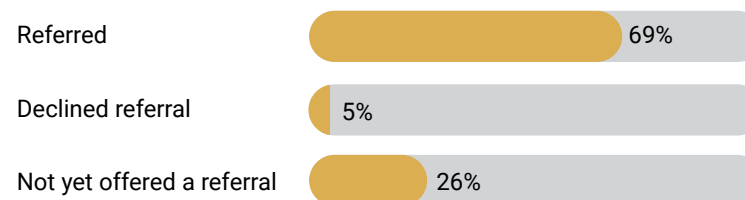
"Yeah, it's a big step. That young person did brilliant while she was here, as it was mostly drugs that she was on. I would've liked her to do things in the community as she was 17. She said she needed something to occupy her all day. Instead she went from doing nothing all day here and within one or two days she's back on the street." – health kaimahi

"Transition is important because they can do well here, but if everything isn't set up when they go, they are often back to square one." – case leader

Referrals to transition support services come too late, and impact the ability of transition workers to support rangatahi moving to adulthood

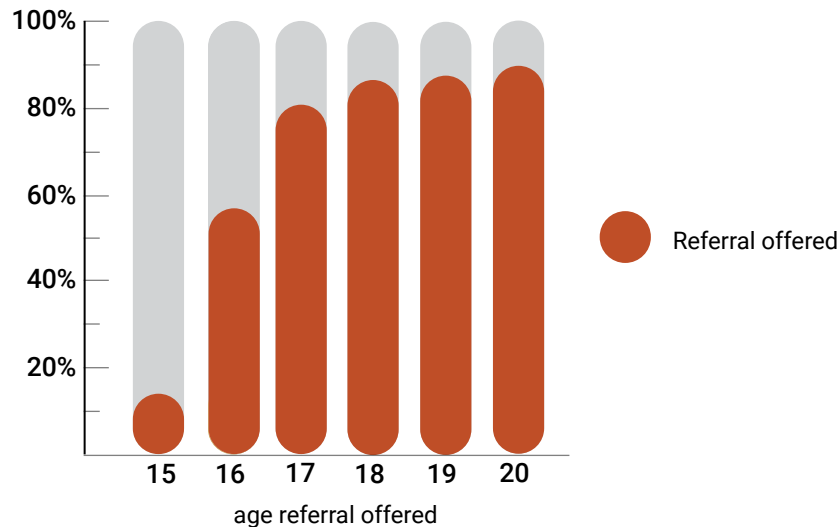
While we don't have data for Greater Wellington, national data shows that more than a quarter of rangatahi are not being offered a referral to the transition support service at all, and only 14 percent are offered a referral at the earliest opportunity – when they are 15 years old. This is consistent with what we heard in Greater Wellington about transitions – referrals often come too late, or not at all.

Percentage of rangatahi offered a referral to external transition support services



Transition support services referral offer rates by age (as at 30 June 2024)

Oranga Tamariki data



Despite rangatahi being eligible for transition support from the age of 15, we heard that referrals are often coming too late. While more than half of 16-year-olds have been referred to a service, there are 18, 19 and 20-year-olds who have not been offered a referral. Kaimahi from iwi and Māori services and community organisations who provide transition support services told us this limited their ability to provide rangatahi with the supports and services they need to live independently. The reduced timeframe placed stress

on both rangatahi and transition workers. Many kaimahi we spoke to told us that early referral to a provider is even more important for disabled rangatahi as there are additional factors to consider for their transition. We were told that working with disabled rangatahi can take longer and transition contract timeframes can be a barrier.

“We might not hear anything but then it’s one month before they [rangatahi] turn 18 years of age then all of a sudden there’s pressure. [Oranga Tamariki] are not putting the young person in the centre.” – NGO leader

“They kick [rangatahi] out of Oranga Tamariki housing on the day of their 18th birthday. It’s too last minute, and then every time we have to fight [Oranga Tamariki] to keep them there until we can find somewhere else for them. There should be a 6 month warning to prepare for that rangatahi turning 18, get the benefit sorted, get the house sorted etc. It’s not done well.” – Māori service leader

“I wasn’t offered it at first. Before my [Oranga Tamariki social worker] left she told me she would put in a referral or something then have a meeting with them, but she left, and I haven’t heard anything.” – rangatahi

“I don’t know [what my plan is], that’s what stresses me out.” – rangatahi

Leadership from an iwi service and kaimahi from Māori services shared how they are often not given enough time and resources to create and support positive transitions to adulthood for rangatahi. They said they often had to advocate for more time to secure additional funding and housing options for rangatahi.

As mentioned earlier in this share back, there can be delays in convening FGCs and communicating with whānau to prepare them and make sure the whānau is empowered to make informed decisions. We heard from a few NGO kaimahi that these issues also affected FGCs to support the Transition to Adulthood process.

Oranga Tamariki social workers seem to be unclear about their role in planning for transition to adulthood – which should begin when rangatahi in care turn 15

Kaimahi and leaders from transition support services said there is a lack of training and a need to upskill Oranga Tamariki social workers about transitions to adulthood. Many kaimahi and leaders expressed frustration at Oranga Tamariki social workers not knowing their roles and responsibilities within the transition to adulthood process.

“They [Oranga Tamariki] just need to know their role, a lot of the social workers don’t know their role. They should be telling us what to do, not us telling them”. – NGO kaimahi

“Some social workers will email us directly, and you can tell they don’t know the process, so we’re having to go back to them and say this and that. We got a young person who needed housing yesterday, but it’s not our process. It is for the Oranga Tamariki social worker, that’s theirs to own.” – NGO leader

Kaimahi from transition support services also observed that “social workers appear to be under a lot of pressure and stress”. This is consistent with what we heard from Oranga Tamariki sites and social workers themselves, with high numbers of vacancies across the region and significant delays in recruitment.

In our last visit to Greater Wellington in 2022, community organisations also identified the need for training for social workers.

Disabled rangatahi face greater challenges transitioning to adulthood, and community organisations want to work proactively with Oranga Tamariki to support them

Changes in funding allocation have had a direct impact on high and complex needs rangatahi and the amount of support and care they receive transitioning to adulthood. One organisation explained it is common for rangatahi with high and complex needs to remain in their care due to the lack of available services in the region. The organisation expressed that a good transition involves allowing rangatahi to stay in their care until supported living options become available. Importantly they emphasised the importance of not shifting rangatahi out of their community due to the support networks the rangatahi rely on.

“They’ve slipped under the radar in what is a high and complex needs placement. No one wants to rock the boat. As a consequence, he’s slipped under the radar, and we are not being supported.” – NGO leader

As rangatahi with disabilities approach the age of 18 they also are not being supported with transition plans and plans for the next step or care that they will be moving into. Referrals to adult services are made too late and as a result increases in tension and anxiety are common.

“That would be terrifying when you don’t know. Sometimes you’d see behavioural changes when you get closer to that time [transition time].” – NGO leader

However, one transition service is having more conversations directly with Oranga Tamariki to implement more effective preparation.

“I’ve asked [Oranga Tamariki National Disability Advisor] if we could have a spreadsheet of those who have a transition coming up who have a disability. We can start doing our work early. It’s about how can we escalate it to a national level to MSD [Ministry of Social Development] as there’s no funding there.” – NGO leader

When transition support is put in place early enough, it is having a positive impact on rangatahi preparing for adulthood

As we reported in Experiences of Care in Aotearoa 2023/24, the Transition Support Service works well for rangatahi who engage with it. This is consistent with what we heard from many rangatahi engaged with transition support services in Greater Wellington. Rangatahi told us how they felt encouraged and supported by their transition workers.

“Challenge 2000 helped teach me my rights as a tenant then helped me as I was transitioning into different spaces. I learnt the dos and not to dos.” – rangatahi

“[Vibe transition worker is there for] anything I need basically. Just whenever I need him, we use WhatsApp to keep in contact. I like having that independence. For example, doing my own washing, doing the things that look after me.” – rangatahi

“At Challenge 2000, [transition support kaimahi] is helping by extending my transitional support, so I can get it for another two years because with [Oranga Tamariki] it's up to 21 and then usually it's just over the phone ... he's really pushing that I get that extension, which I'm really happy about.” – rangatahi

“I told Vibe I was in a rough situation, ‘can you guys help?’, and immediately [Vibe] jumped on it. [They] got in contact with family, got me to appointments, [Vibe supported me with] everything I needed. Whiplash. I was not sure how to handle it. [I didn't know how to trust] people who [said] we can do it, people [who] actually help. [That was] new territory for me. [It was] great for me, [to be able to] have a conversation, break down what I need, and a week later sorted, [to have support of people who actually] make the effort. Most of time, [things have only taken a] couple of days max, [and if it takes longer I] get a message. [They keep me] updated, ‘this is what we can do’, ‘let us know if there is anything else needed’. [It is] great.” – rangatahi

Kaimahi from transition services across the region noted the key to supporting a successful transition is taking a holistic approach, supported by a strong relationship with rangatahi and a clear understanding of their individual needs.

“Our approach would be a wraparound support, offer more than transition, yes there's a transition plan, but we also have other things like foodbank as an example. It helps us with rapport and engagement with young people. It goes a long way, and our relationship becomes quite rich.” – NGO leader

“Depends on what they look like when they come to us. It could be as simple as a rangatahi getting up in the morning. It varies where the young person is at.” – NGO kaimahi

“Everyone is family, they treat you like they’ve known you for a long time. I’m getting used to be settled here [at Ōrongomai], it’s grown on me a lot.” – rangatahi

“[Challenge 2000 transition worker is], more like a friend that I can have conversations with and that’s what I really wanted, in terms of working with someone.” – rangatahi



“We provide the holistic wraparound support. They can access any services we can provide. Similar things, help with driver licence etc. The key is being consistent, they’ve come from background where there has been a lot of inconsistencies – like change of workers etc. It’s about the consistency, it is part of our space. There’s myself and two transition workers. We like to introduce all of ourselves when we have a new rangatahi so we’re not complete strangers and if one of us is away, at least the rangatahi, knows us. It’s little things that goes a long way.” – NGO leader

While Oranga Tamariki data¹ for 2023/24 shows that, nationally, 70 percent of rangatahi who are eligible for a referral to transition support services have been offered one, data also shows that referrals were only offered to 14 percent of rangatahi aged 15 and 57 percent of rangatahi aged 16. The earlier a referral is made, the more time to build trusted relationships between the transition support worker and the rangatahi, and the more time they have to assess and meet their needs – such as life skills, obtaining a driver licence, gaining work experience and finding accommodation.

¹ <https://aroturuki.govt.nz/reports/eoc-23-24/part-five#oranga-tamariki-compliance-with-part-five>

Key theme: **Educational support**

Some tamariki and rangatahi in care are not in school, and have nowhere to go during school hours, because agencies can't agree on who is responsible for funding their educational support

A couple of education leaders told us Oranga Tamariki and the Ministry of Education do not have high-level agreements about who should fund educational supports for tamariki in care. Other agencies expect the Ministry of Education to be responsible for all funding during the school day. However, their funding is not flexible enough to provide the individualised support some tamariki need. This lack of clarity results in tamariki and rangatahi not attending school at all.

"It sucks basically – I really want to go back to school." – child

"[Ministry of Education] says Oranga Tamariki should pay ... Who and where does the responsibility sit with? ... It's not clear on who pays. Government only has so much money, but it would be good to understand who has responsibility." – caregiver

"I think there is a huge misunderstanding that only education needs to deal with 9am–3pm ... Maybe an agreement [about who will fund what education support] at very high level needs to occur so there is very clear guidance so it can be more transparent. There's always that slightly fuzzy part." – government agency leader

We heard from tamariki and rangatahi, government agencies, and group home kaimahi that tamariki and rangatahi in group homes or caregiver placements who are disengaged from education sit in Oranga Tamariki offices during the school day. We have also heard about this issue in other regions. One group home leader told us they do not get funding during the day because tamariki should be at school, but many of their children aren't enrolled in education. One government agency leader felt Oranga Tamariki were trying to save money by making the Ministry of Education responsible for funding during the school day. We heard that current funding processes make it very difficult for Oranga Tamariki kaimahi to get funding for during the school day signed off.

"The young person might not be attending fully, but between 9am–3pm, Oranga Tamariki would see it as our responsibility of that child. If they are not attending though, they are not in our system, and so that can sometimes be a point of conflict and challenge." – education leader

"Hundreds of dollars a night [spent on group home placements] and kids go missing. We shouldn't have our babies sit in an office, it's punishing our babies." – Oranga Tamariki kaimahi

Schools seem to be reluctant to enrol tamariki and rangatahi who are in group homes or in care

Some group home kaimahi told us schools are not supporting their tamariki and rangatahi to enrol in their schools. Kaimahi feel their tamariki and rangatahi are treated as too difficult. One group home leader told us some schools in the Wellington region will only enrol a certain number of their rangatahi, so they have to use a personal connection at the Ministry of Education to ensure their learners can get enrolled in school. Last time we visited Greater Wellington, we heard similar concerns about schools providing less support or not accepting enrolments when they knew tamariki or rangatahi were involved with Oranga Tamariki.

"With our kids who have the greatest need, education don't want to have a bar of them because they are too hard. That is the reality. The other day one of my site managers told me that a school have said that a child will never go back to their school and no other schools will take them." – Oranga Tamariki regional leader



However, some school leaders and education kaimahi told us a lack of information and support from Oranga Tamariki is a barrier to supporting learners. In some cases, schools are unaware their learners are involved with Oranga Tamariki. In others, as one school leader shared, important information is intentionally withheld from them, and the consequence is they now refuse to enrol rangatahi without having a representative from the Ministry of Education (MoE) present to discuss what support the rangatahi needs. The school leaders we spoke to emphasised they do not reject rangatahi with specialised needs, but need to make sure rangatahi can get the wrap-around support they need to successfully participate in school.

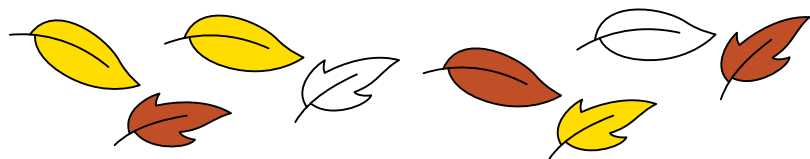
“We were told about a child who had committed sexual assault – it didn’t mean we rejected them, it meant we reached out to MoE to get full wrap around support to have a teacher aide to help teach this student what is right and what wasn’t. We worked with Wellstop, he left school with qualifications, and he never did anything inappropriate. The times he did minor things, we got Wellstop. So, this thing about not telling schools to prevent prejudice is not right, we are not like that, we will accept and support, if we know there is funding available and we can accept and support them.” – school leader

“[Rangatahi] didn’t get funding and the school withheld him from starting school if he didn’t get teacher aide [support].” – group home kaimahi



Not replacing the region's senior advisor education and health has made it harder for social workers to get tamariki and rangatahi back into schools

As we found in our Experiences of Care in Aotearoa 2023/24 report, the needs of tamariki and rangatahi in care are better met when government agencies collaborate. In all four regions we visited in 2023/24², kaimahi from different agencies spoke positively about the senior advisor education and health, which is a regional role at Oranga Tamariki. Kaimahi we spoke with described the role as an important connector between Oranga Tamariki social workers, Ministry of Education service managers, and kaimahi from both schools and health providers. The involvement of the senior advisor education and health was seen as a key enabler for securing school enrolments, additional supports in health, and education service prioritisation.



When we last visited Greater Wellington in 2022, we heard that the senior advisor education and health had resigned, and the decision was made not to fill the vacant role. On this visit, nearly three years later, we heard from social workers about the impact of not having a senior advisor education and health for more than two years. A couple of Oranga Tamariki kaimahi told us about tamariki and rangatahi in care who had been disengaged from education for three or more years. They said the Ministry of Education was “unhelpful” when it came to trying to find schools that were willing to enrol the tamariki and rangatahi. The senior advisor education and health would previously have taken the lead in negotiating with the Ministry of Education and schools.

“We are aware some of the [Ministry of Education] advisors have problems with us [social workers], they are open with how they struggle with Oranga Tamariki and the way we have done things in the past. What that role [Senior Advisor Education and Health] did was negotiate that stuff and keep us [frontline social workers] out of it, but we are here now, and [we] have to do it. But MoE just won’t have a bar of it.” – Oranga Tamariki kaimahi

2 Upper South, Taranaki and Manawatū, Canterbury and Tāmaki Makarau – Auckland.

One Oranga Tamariki site leader said they had a strong working relationship with a manager at the Ministry of Education. This manager understood what Oranga Tamariki could and could not fund and would intervene with schools who expected Oranga Tamariki to provide additional support for tamariki and rangatahi not in care. However, the site leader said without that individual relationship it was uncertain how well they would be able to work with the Ministry of Education.

“I could be like I’m going to this school and struggling and [the manager] would fix it. That’s been amazing, but it’s just one person [in the Ministry of Education].” – Oranga Tamariki site leader

The long waitlists to get learning needs diagnosed, and funding schemes with high thresholds and narrow criteria, prevent disabled tamariki from accessing educational support

Government agency and group home leaders and kaimahi told us assessments for neurodivergent diagnoses have years-long waitlists. Tamariki and rangatahi can’t access the educational support they need until they get diagnosed.

“A child had not attended any early childhood education as he was too naughty according to the family. We got the child to a GP and got an assessment and there were lots of people involved, but we were the centre piece. The family were not doing well. He got diagnosed with autism and then he could get a connector.” – NGO leader

“In education, they [tamariki and rangatahi] need more support, more funding. Without an assessment you are putting them into mainstream.” – group home leader

This issue has not changed since our previous monitoring visit to the region, when leaders and kaimahi told us some assessments had long waitlists because they lacked funding and capacity.

One education leader said assessment reports from educational psychologists can be “revolutionary” in understanding how to provide support. However, it is becoming very difficult to get appointments. Aotearoa New Zealand has a large shortage of educational psychologists.

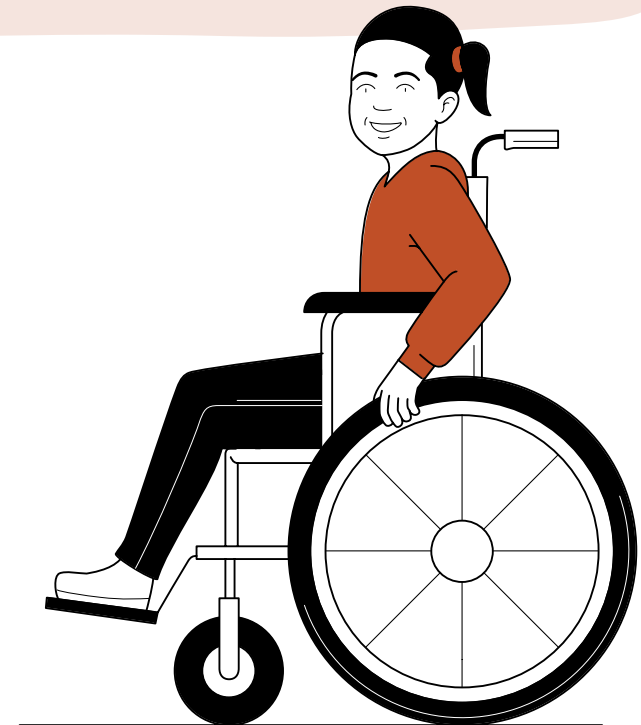
We heard that funding policies to get assessed or to access services are not always fit-for-purpose for rangatahi under 18 years old. Funding has narrow criteria that excludes learners with disability needs if they do not have the right diagnosis.

“Most of our kids have FASD [Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder] or ADHD [Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder] but we don’t take that under disability [funding], so the poor child has all of this, and you don’t get disability unless you have ID [intellectual disability] or autism, and then we have a big fight with mental health sector.” – NASC kaimahi

We heard the Ongoing Resource Scheme (ORS) gives tamariki access to specialised support and services so they can participate in school, such as teacher aides or accessibility infrastructure. However, it has high thresholds and is not available for tamariki in Early Childhood Education (ECE).

“We currently have ... ORS [Ongoing Resource Scheme] funded kids and they’re in the heart of our school. Literally in the middle of the school, not out the back! So, they are often doing their own programmes so often they are part of mainstream classrooms wherever appropriate. In my years that I’ve been here, bullying is not a thing, our disabled high needs students are part of the school. The learning hub, the students we have in there could be ORS [Ongoing Resource Scheme] funded kids but they don’t meet the criteria or whatever, they are quite often the ones who slip between the cracks.” – school leader

“I struggle with the processes around funding. We don’t have for example, a ramp. We used to, it was at the back [of the building], not at the front, it was deemed sufficient, but it’s not. We have pool fencing all around. If you are late and in a wheelchair, you can’t open the fence. We got so sick of waiting for the Ministry [of Education] to fund it. But I was sick of waiting for the dignity of these students to be acknowledged, not necessarily the funding, we are not being supported to give them that dignity.” – school leader



Key theme: **Accessing health services**

There are long waitlists and insufficient support for ICAMHS, counselling and therapy services as these services lack resources and capacity

Some health leaders told us the government does not prioritise on-going funding for preventative care, secondary health services, or health services to support whānau. One leader told us the lack of family support in health services impacts on tamariki wellbeing.

“It is economically sensible, to put money up front than to be running at the bottom of the cliff.” – health leader

Some caregivers told us the tamariki and rangatahi in their care face long waitlists and delays for funding to access services like intensive therapeutic support. This is similar to what we heard from health and community organisations about long waitlists for ICAMHS and therapy. A couple of kaimahi told us ICAMHS lacks resources, and referrals to access ICAMHS can be waitlisted for over six months.

We heard New Zealand has a national shortage of therapists. Needs Assessment Services Coordination (NASCs), who assess and provide services for disabled people, have a backlog of clients needing therapy. Health kaimahi told us it is difficult to recruit trained professionals because the job lacks support and it is “disappointing” to work in such an understaffed space. One Māori service kaimahi said General Practitioners (GPs) can only refer tamariki and whānau for six counselling sessions, which is not enough to properly address their trauma and complex needs. Another Māori service kaimahi told us culturally appropriate therapy is not available in the region.

“A referral was made, specialist service for severe trauma, waiting lists were long. It was a two year wait. [We] got taken off the list.” – caregiver

“Māori stories [pūrākau], art and music therapy is what helps tamariki and rangatahi, that’s what is needed.” – Māori service kaimahi

Tamariki are missing out on ACC cover and support for historical injuries and trauma because information is not recorded or shared across agencies

Some health and group home leaders and kaimahi told us there are missed opportunities for tamariki to get early rehabilitation for significant injuries because there are issues with communication within and between agencies. For example, a couple of health kaimahi told us it is common for injuries and non-accidental injuries to not be reported to ACC when they happen. This is a barrier to health kaimahi being aware of these tamariki and monitoring them for any long-term health issues because of their injury.

Some tamariki and rangatahi in care don't have health records, which prevents them from knowing their medical history, which can impact getting education and health support. The lack of records can prevent tamariki and rangatahi from accessing ACC support, even when ICAMHS assessments show they have significant existing trauma.

"We don't have systems that talk to each other. I understand the privacy issues, but if a child has suffered trauma, they will likely have educational needs but the systems aren't talking." – group home leader

Tamariki in care face delays to get treated, referred, or assessed because their social workers are difficult to contact or don't understand who can give consent for what

We heard from some government agencies it is difficult to identify who holds guardianship when tamariki or rangatahi are involved with Oranga Tamariki. Health and education need information from Oranga Tamariki to know who can provide consent. In cases of potential abuse, kaimahi also need to know who in the family is safe to contact. Without this information, health services are delayed for tamariki, including referrals for assessments.

"Some children make good recoveries if we step in early. The long wait [to get consent] is not ideal. It limits their opportunity of gaining independence." – health kaimahi

We heard it can take health kaimahi a long time to find out which social worker is connected to a child. One kaimahi told us it is a barrier that the Oranga Tamariki disability advisor role (which previously enabled contact between health and Oranga Tamariki for physical injuries) has been disestablished in the Greater Wellington region. We heard about examples where Oranga Tamariki kaimahi had sent health the wrong documents; said they did not have information about who the guardian was; and that they could not open the file of the child to find the information. Sometimes Oranga Tamariki don't respond to health kaimahi at all.

Key theme: **Police training, policies, and practices**

Police capacity in the Greater Wellington district is diverted to unique regional demands, which cuts into the time police have to work with rangatahi

Many police leaders and kaimahi said Greater Wellington, as the capital city, has unique policing demands that other regions don't have. Leaders must pull kaimahi from their normal duties to handle region-specific events, such as protests and significant events.

"If we have three events in three weeks it'll feel like it's their [police kaimahi] world and that's all they're doing. We're lucky we've only had one event this year, but it doesn't feel like that. As soon as there is an event that's the focus. That happens a lot." – police district leader

Specialised teams that offer youth services, like Youth Aid, are also diverted from their regular work to these duties. A couple of police leaders said some Greater Wellington areas struggle to hire Youth Aid kaimahi and have staffing gaps in its youth services team, especially in prevention. As a result, police in youth teams do not have time to provide the same quality of services to tamariki and rangatahi.

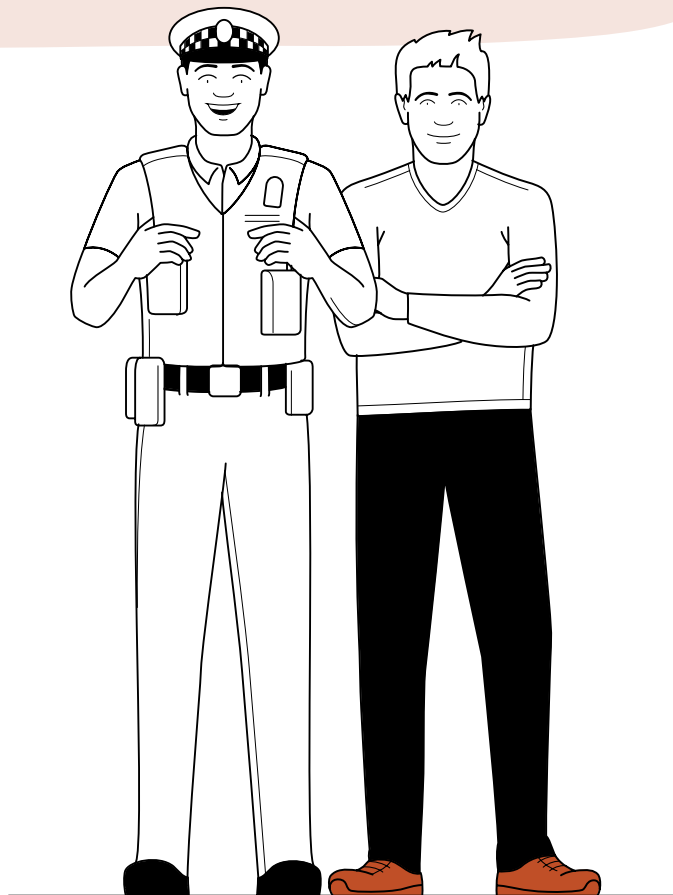
"I felt like my work's not valued enough, and so I don't feel valued, by the leadership. There is an expectation that we get serious crime dealt with. Youth Court is on a Tuesday, preparing for this is big job and not valued. It means a watered-down service." – police kaimahi

Police kaimahi told us when Youth Aid does not have time to complete their work, it prevents them from:

- doing prevention work
- following up on rangatahi with low-level offences and providing early intervention
- attending callouts alongside the frontline
- helping frontline officers learn how to work with rangatahi.

We also heard concerns about how shifting priorities might limit police work in care and protection space. One police leader told us not having capacity to do prevention, or early intervention work will result in them having to do more work in the long term.

“With family harm, it’s the top five addresses we are getting called to and we’d drive to that address again and again. Often, it’s lots to do with mental health. Once we sorted that, we never got called back. It’s difficult to prioritise though, what are we going to do?” – police district leader



Youth Aid officers can make a significant difference to the lives of tamariki and rangatahi, when they have the skills and the time

A couple of rangatahi who offended told us they have positive relationships with police, such as Youth Aid officers. Some police and community organisation leaders and kaimahi spoke about how important it is for police to have time to build relationships with tamariki and rangatahi and their whānau. These relationships can help reduce re-offending.

“[Police officer] – he’s a well-known police in Porirua who deals with kids like me and my mates, he’s really good. ... He’s an islander ... he made an agreement with me. He said if you do this, I’ll do this for you. He said, ‘I’ll pick you up and take you to do drug counselling’ and said ‘actually sit there and engage, because you know they are two different things to be there and actually take it in [information and learning]’ ... He says ‘calm down in the cells and I’ll take you home’. He stuck to his word, we need more police, more like him, [who don’t] use and abuse his badge.” – rangatahi

"If I turn up to a call out, it may help. They recognise me and stop swearing at the car because I'm not frontline and they would have reacted differently if it was not me and was somebody not known to them." – police Youth Aid officer

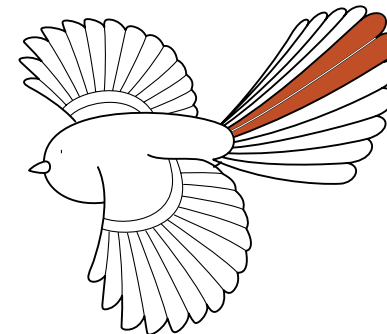
"What we do want is the families to have some support. And police to make themselves available to make some welfare checks. Police here on the coast have been very proactive, heads up to them. We get good cooperation with them." – NGO leader

However, we heard from many police leaders and kaimahi that frontline officers don't have the capacity to spend meaningful time with tamariki and rangatahi and their whānau. Frontline officers work in a "reactive" space. We heard family harm makes up a high proportion of police frontline work in the Upper Hutt and Kapiti-Mana areas, which limits time for other types of work. While police kaimahi are encouraged to try to build relationships and rapport with whānau during family harm callouts, they don't always have the capacity to do this.

"We're emergency response capable only. Job to job. Not getting to all jobs but passing these onto the next shift. No opportunity to be proactive. While some interaction is possible with the offender, its super limited as we are so pressed for time." – police district leader

"Shit rolls down hill and that ends up with us, and it ends up hitting the family. We identify that families have instability. We build relationships and then we are called to do other work. We cancel work with the family and that feeds into poor relationships with other families." – police kaimahi

"You're restricted by resources; you'd love to sit there for a long time talking to whānau, but you can't." – police kaimahi



More training for police on working with rangatahi would help address the feeling from some rangatahi who offend that they are treated inconsistently and unfairly by police

We heard from rangatahi who offended that their interactions with police were inconsistent and often negative. A couple of rangatahi said police tried to intimidate them. A couple of government agency kaimahi shared an example where the police acted in a “scary” way towards a rangatahi and kaimahi present, because they forgot the rangatahi was only 16 years old.

“Some police can be all good about it. The rest can bash us up and stuff and give us little hidings. It depends on who you get.”
– rangatahi

Most frontline police officers told us they have better interactions with rangatahi when they use empathy and know how to relate to rangatahi. Police have ways to de-escalate a situation, such as giving rangatahi space, using language rangatahi understand, and making sure rangatahi feel heard. One police kaimahi told us the National Intelligence System (NIA) allows frontline officers to access information about the disability status or needs of a rangatahi, so they know how to interact with them.

“Section [team] culture can help role model to new cops how we should be engaging with young people. Building on rapport, empathy and calmness.” – police frontline officer

“By ignoring their [rangatahi] behaviour at first, after 10 or 20 minutes, they’ll calm down. When we drop youth home, they often apologise in the car and then we can have a proper conversation about how their offending affects others.” – police frontline officer

Some government agency leaders and kaimahi said there is not enough training for the frontline about working with rangatahi. Police may not know how to recognise the difference between someone with a poor attitude and someone experiencing mental health issues.

Some health kaimahi told us when police and health work together on mental health visits, it enables better interactions and reduces stigma. However, police are not always able to join health for visits involving mental health crises, which limits health’s power to safely engage with – or provide treatment to – rangatahi experiencing mental health issues.

"The only way to help [with a mental health crisis] often is to get police involved because they are the only people with the powers to enter a property or restrain or lay hands outside of common law. They respect us as mental health professionals – I have a lot of experience, but if the shit hits the fan, I've got no resources to lean on." – health kaimahi

"I've been ripped out of the car lots and ripped on to the ground. I've been bashed and punched in the head [by police]."
– rangatahi

"Kids are coming out and assaulting cops. An officer tasered a kid which is not ideal. However, if the kid did not come out [aggressively], we would not have used force. It's the unfortunate reality. I say to the kids it's about playing by the big boy rules." – police frontline officer

Many of the rangatahi who offended said police used force against them or other rangatahi they knew. Their experience changed the way they look at the police. Most police frontline officers told us their use of force is guided by their training and the TENR framework, which helps them make informed decisions to ensure everyone's safety. Their goal is to first de-escalate a situation, but when needed their use of force is guided by rangatahi actions and the situation.



Key theme: **Youth offending – early intervention and alternative action plans**

Community services and cross-agency initiatives provide early intervention support to tamariki and rangatahi, reducing re-offending and supporting successful alternative action plans

Some police leaders and kaimahi told us about referring rangatahi to community services and cross-agency initiatives that provide early intervention to rangatahi at risk of offending or re-offending. These services give rangatahi activities to do outside of school, and life skills to support them to not re-offend. Police highlighted programmes like Cactus and Youth Inspire, as well as services run by various community organisations.

“[They] do some holiday programmes during Christmas time because we identified a cohort of rangatahi that, without anything being open during that time, they were getting into trouble. So we’d pick them up and tire them out to stop them from stealing cars and whatnot. They’re not big cohorts [attending the holiday programmes] – but it’s been good, and we hope to get some funding from Oranga Tamariki to expand this.” – police area leader

Some police kaimahi and leaders told us alternative action plans are more “robust” and “impactful” when police can collaborate with external partners. They work with marae and community organisations to get appropriate services for rangatahi who offend. We heard police partnerships with local iwi can help keep rangatahi from escalating further into the youth justice system.

“... The plan I have now is like helping me not want to re-offend. [My plan is to] get my licence, get a job and come here do the programme. Get my benefit and shit. The old plans weren’t plans they were just words.” – rangatahi

“I was meant to be in Korowai Manaaki youth justice residence. If I didn’t get bail, I’d not be here [with Challenge 2000]. If I went there, I’d be thinking of committing another crime.” – rangatahi

However, one community organisation leader told us they were concerned about the accuracy of the information in police referrals.

Funding and capacity are key to supporting alternative action plans

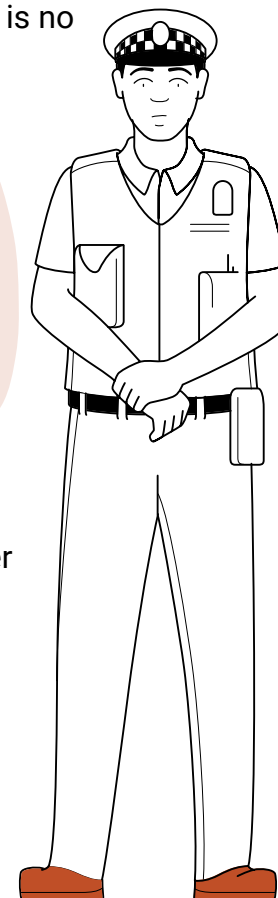
When police kaimahi are given the time and funds to make alternative action plans, they can create “short, sharp, and quick” plans that reduce re-offending. We heard police kaimahi can be creative with funding and will find alternative options when rangatahi don’t meet the criteria for funding schemes like the Children’s Flexi Fund. One police district leader told us the funding for the Flexi Fund has been significantly cut.

A couple of police leaders told us their system ensures youth offending files are completed and passed on to the Youth Aid team quickly, which enables rangatahi to start alternative action plans faster. We heard police kaimahi make better plans when they are aware of the disability needs of the rangatahi, including their disability status and details about the health kaimahi already working with the rangatahi. A couple of police told us they can support rangatahi because they have a neurodiversity specialist on police youth teams or a special considerations list for disabilities.

However, some things get in the way of timely access to systems or interventions for addressing. Some police kaimahi told us the legislation to guide decisions on whether to arrest rangatahi is not objective. Police can spend a lot of time arguing in court when their decision is challenged. A couple of police kaimahi also told us it can take a long time for a referral for intervention to go to an FGC or to youth court to be approved, and there is no support for the rangatahi while they wait.

“Takes seven weeks for a referral to go through to Family Group Conference. That’s seven further weeks of offending. Why does that need to be so long?” – police kaimahi

We covered the long wait times for family group conferences across the region earlier in this share back.



Other things we heard

- A couple of health leaders said the pathway to access gender affirming medication is on hold because the process for gender assessment has not been finalised by the Ministry of Health. These leaders are seeing an increase in teen suicides because rangatahi cannot access the medication they need.
- We heard that often tamariki and rangatahi are referred to Epuni because they have not met the requirements for other services such as the forensic mental health unit, or that services in the community will no longer care for them. The level of support some rangatahi require was described by health kaimahi as that which should be managed at an inpatient unit. We heard of highly complex needs including significant mental health concerns, inappropriate sexualised behaviours and serious psychological distress. Health kaimahi told us that to support these tamariki and rangatahi in ways they both require and deserve, Epuni should be set up more like an assessment unit.
- When professionals need to interview children or guide them through the court process, some police kaimahi said having access to community organisations helps “minimise the trauma” and make tamariki feel more comfortable. Police have access to organisations who can help translate or support disabled tamariki understand what is happening. However, police don’t always get funding approved to hire external partners, preventing them from supporting tamariki.
- Oranga Tamariki and Youth Aid kaimahi told us Youth Court timeframes can create a “pressurised” environment. Information sharing is pivotal to success, but is constrained by the capacity of professionals involved. However, pre-court hui are providing a setting where Oranga Tamariki, Police and Youth Aid all come together - creating opportunities for them to prepare, find common understanding, and “deep dive” into the “tricky” situations, to best support young people. They told us these pre-court hui would not be possible without the Oranga Tamariki Youth Court supervisor role.

“[Residence has young people] using drugs, [experiencing] horrendous PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder] – absolutely we are an assessment unit.” – health kaimahi



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