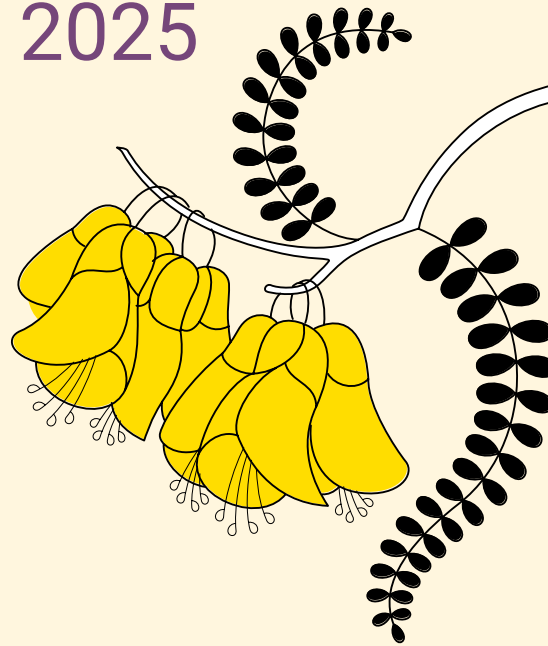


Insights for Community

Te Tai Tokerau
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 Te Tai Tokerau community. We've included an A3 summary for Te Tai Tokerau 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 Te Tai Tokerau, 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 Te Tai Tokerau.

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 Te Tai Tokerau

33	tamariki and rangatahi
13	whānau
28	caregivers
28	representatives from kaupapa Māori / iwi organisations / strategic partners
75	Oranga Tamariki kaimahi
13	Police kaimahi
24	representatives from other government agencies
18	representatives from other non-government agencies
7	group home kaimahi

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 Te Tai Tokerau

Reports of concern

- There are delays in responding to reports of concern and notifiers are not being informed of the outcome
- There is no consistent feedback loop between Oranga Tamariki and the community report of concern tables
- Community organisations at the tables continue to be worried about the safety of tamariki and rangatahi when a report of concern has been escalated to Oranga Tamariki because they don't know whether action has been taken

Other Oranga Tamariki processes and decisions to identify and mitigate potential risk

- The non-accidental injury process is not working well due to rushed practice and limited understanding
 - There are concerns in the community about the quality of decision making when the safety of tamariki and rangatahi is at risk
-

Family group conferences

- A shortage of family group conference coordinators is delaying family group conferences and putting high caseloads on the coordinators who are available
 - Inconsistent funding across sites negatively impacts on how FGCs are convened and the plans that result from them
 - An absence of formal induction training for FGC coordinators is resulting in inconsistent practice
 - The importance of preparing whānau and promoting tamariki and whānau voice in FGCs was recognised but this does not always happen
 - It is challenging for parents in prison to attend family group conferences
 - Transition to adulthood FGCs are inconsistent, impacting on the support rangatahi receive
-

Care options

- A shortage of caregivers and a slow approval process has resulted in tamariki being placed out of region and caregivers having multiple tamariki in their care
 - A lack of specialist care options leads to tamariki and rangatahi with high needs being put in unsuitable care options or moved out of the region
 - A lack of care options for youth who offend and those on bail has resulted in rangatahi being kept in police custody longer than necessary or being held in prison
-

Referrals and information sharing

- Referrals for transition support often come too late for services to build a relationship with rangatahi
 - Oranga Tamariki referrals are missing information or contain incorrect information, making it difficult for community services to support rangatahi
-

Relationships and information sharing

- Relationships between Oranga Tamariki and iwi and Māori services are held by regional and national leadership rather than local sites, impacting on collaboration at the frontline
 - There are still barriers to Waitomo Papakāinga exercising its delegated power to convene family group conferences
 - Relationships between Ngāpuhi Iwi Social Services and Oranga Tamariki regional and local leadership are working well, but the strategic partnership with national office is not being used to the full effect
 - Police relationships with the community are strong on frontline and in development within area leadership
 - Interagency teams and hui lead to better collaboration and delivery of support to tamariki, rangatahi and whānau, however there is room for more
-

Access to services and support

- A lack of services in the region means some tamariki and rangatahi are not getting the support they need
 - Tamariki and rangatahi with complex needs and those requiring mental health services are unable to access specialist support
 - Long waits for psychological assessments can mean rangatahi remain in youth justice residences for months waiting for support
 - Policies and processes are getting in the way of tamariki, rangatahi and whānau receiving services and support that are available
 - There is a misunderstanding about who can give consent for tamariki and rangatahi to receive education and health services, sometimes delaying access
-

Funding

- The new Oranga Tamariki financial approval process makes it difficult to access funding to support tamariki, rangatahi, whānau and caregivers
 - Funding constraints are impacting on connections between tamariki and rangatahi and their whānau
 - Funding cuts are impacting the ability of community agencies to deliver services and support to tamariki and rangatahi
-

Working holistically with tamariki, rangatahi and whānau

- Putting rangatahi in the centre, and working alongside whānau, makes them feel supported and reduces reoffending
-

Key theme: **Reports of concern**

There are delays in responding to reports of concern and notifiers are not being informed of the outcome

Some health kaimahi said they are not hearing back from Oranga Tamariki after making a report of concern. We heard that health kaimahi often have to “chase” up to find out what action has been taken. We heard that waiting for Oranga Tamariki is frustrating for whānau, and health kaimahi feel responsible for ensuring tamariki and rangatahi remain safe. An Oranga Tamariki kaimahi said that when health kaimahi have not heard back after making a report of concern, they will do what they can to follow-up with social workers, check CYRAS (the Oranga Tamariki case management system), or contact the Whangārei community table for information.

We also heard from health kaimahi that the Oranga Tamariki hospital liaison helps them to make reports by ensuring that complex health information is presented clearly and simply – making it easier for Oranga Tamariki to triage and respond.

As we also heard on our recent monitoring visit to Greater Wellington, police kaimahi in Te Tai Tokerau told us there are weeks long delays in reports of concern being sent to sites from the National Contact Centre (NCC) and “cases can be lost”. They noted delays particularly when made on the weekend or have to be transferred from a different region.

Some kaimahi from the Whangārei community table, Te Tēpu, also said there can be weeklong delays in being sent to their table from sites, due to delays in sites receiving the reports of concerns from the National Contact Centre. Police and Te Tēpu kaimahi were also concerned that multiple reports for the same child are not always linked in CYRAS, and that Oranga Tamariki does not consider the safety of siblings and whānau when responding, focusing just on the child for whom the concerns were about.

There is no consistent feedback loop between Oranga Tamariki and the community report of concern tables

We heard kōrero (discussion) about two of the three inter-agency report of concern tables in the region – Te Kahu Oranga Whānau table in Kaitāia and Te Tēpu in Whangārei. These tables work to triage reports of concern, referring those needing early support to community organisations and escalating those requiring statutory intervention back to Oranga Tamariki. We were told that all relevant reports of concern are sent to the tables via the sites. Some community kaimahi felt that all reports of concern should be sent to the tables for triage as they saw inconsistency in the threshold for action at Oranga Tamariki.

Many kaimahi from these tables – both from community agencies and Oranga Tamariki – emphasised that communication between them is important to enable good outcomes for tamariki, rangatahi and whānau referred to the table. A few examples of positive communication and collaboration highlighted this. However, we heard concern that there is not a consistent feedback loop between Oranga Tamariki and the tables about whether reports of concern have been closed or actioned. Neither Oranga Tamariki nor the community agencies from these tables are routinely aware of what has happened once the whānau has been referred to a community organisation for community response, or back to Oranga Tamariki for statutory response.

We heard that once allocated to one of the community agencies the case is closed by Oranga Tamariki in CYRAS (the Oranga Tamariki case management system) and recorded as No Further Action, rather than community referral. This means Oranga Tamariki has no formal record of the community support that was provided by the table. This is despite an Oranga Tamariki representative from each site attending the tables, and a summary of the allocation decisions being sent to them or the site manager.

Whānau can choose whether to accept the support from the community organisation as their engagement is voluntary. If whānau choose not to engage, the table¹ will re-discuss and decide whether another community agency can support the whānau, or whether a new report of concern to Oranga Tamariki is required. In the event of a renotification, community organisations at the tables are unaware of what action has been taken unless the local site refers the report of concern back to the table.

“Feedback loops are very important. We [Oranga Tamariki] don’t know if it [a ROC] gets referred back to the community and they close the case, and we close the case, and no one knows that the case has been closed. We are getting cases back [from the ROC table]. The table is saying family isn’t engaging ... but it is not recorded in CYRAS anywhere and I have to follow up and find out what happened ... Potentially children are not receiving services they need and the original care and protection concerns do not get addressed because it is voluntary for families to engage with services from the ROC table level. I am sure people are aware of that gap, but it is a gap.” – Oranga Tamariki kaimahi

¹ Previously, re-notifications were sometimes recorded as contact records or case notes, but this practice was not consistent; neither in when contact records were used or the amount of information they recorded. A recent practice change now requires all re-notifications to be recorded as new reports of concern.

Community organisations at the tables continue to be worried about the safety of tamariki and rangatahi when a report of concern has been escalated to Oranga Tamariki because they don't know whether action has been taken

Community agencies from both tables we met with told us they were worried about the safety of tamariki and rangatahi and try to reduce this risk by visiting whānau to offer support as soon as cases arrive at the table. Te Tēpu told us that they do this even for those reports of concern escalated back to Oranga Tamariki, due to a lack of trust that Oranga Tamariki will take action and visit whānau themselves. Despite the positive intentions behind these whānau visits by community kaimahi, a couple of Oranga Tamariki kaimahi were concerned that information is being shared with whānau before they can visit them. They felt this makes it more difficult for them to engage positively with whānau. In the past, Te Tēpu kaimahi had escalated reports of concern to Oranga Tamariki for statutory intervention, but the cases were either not actioned by Oranga Tamariki or were referred out to other community agencies without the table being informed.

A few Oranga Tamariki site leaders had concerns they do not have enough input into which cases are escalated to them by the community agencies at the tables – if a table says a statutory response is needed, they felt they must accept the case. However,

they said that many of the cases escalated to Oranga Tamariki by the tables do not meet the Oranga Tamariki threshold for a child and family assessment or family group conference. These cases add to the workload of Oranga Tamariki social workers, who will refer them back to community agencies. Referring back to the community can also create tension between Oranga Tamariki and the community agencies at the tables, as the community agencies had escalated the case for statutory action. The lack of statutory action by Oranga Tamariki in response to reports of concern from the tables was also acknowledged by Oranga Tamariki site leadership.

“If agreement at the table is for Oranga Tamariki to follow up, then we don't go back to site and change the outcome – i.e., agreeing to take it and then not following through with what we said we were going to do. That's a massive breach of that trust. It has happened frequently enough to upset the people at Te Tēpu [report of concern table]. It might be further action from Oranga Tamariki ... what has happened is we will make a separate referral out to community to another agency that isn't part of Te Tēpu [report of concern table] which isn't honest. Just be honest. If you don't agree with what the community are saying then say it to them [instead of reneging].” – Oranga Tamariki site leader

Key theme: **Other Oranga Tamariki processes and decisions to identify and mitigate potential risk**

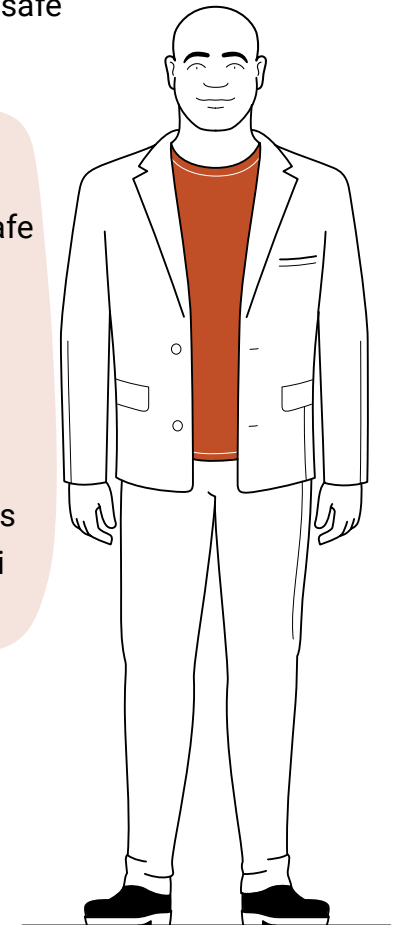
The non-accidental injury process is not working well due to rushed practice and limited understanding

Some police staff and an Oranga Tamariki kaimahi shared concerns that the non-accidental injury process is not working well to identify and address risk to tamariki and rangatahi. They felt that decision making and planning in the non-accidental injury process needs to be more comprehensive and proactive. An Oranga Tamariki kaimahi said they were “chasing their tail” to ensure that everyone has been informed and included in decisions and that safety plans are in place.

An Oranga Tamariki kaimahi believed Oranga Tamariki social workers could benefit from training to help them understand the non-accidental injury process and their responsibilities in it. We heard this training would support social workers to create high quality safety plans before tamariki and rangatahi are discharged from hospital. Training could also help social workers to share safety plans with health professionals, who at times have felt they were left on their own to support upset whānau.

Some police staff and an Oranga Tamariki kaimahi were concerned that the current rushed practice for safety plans can result in poor outcomes, including whānau not wanting to bring their tamariki and rangatahi to hospital, stress for professionals and the risk that tamariki and rangatahi are left in unsafe situations.

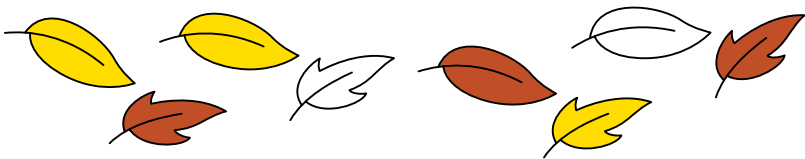
“It can happen where sometimes babies could have gone home to unsafe environments. Don’t get me wrong, we do not miss things, and we will act, even if it is in the ninth hour, we are not sending kids home to unsafe environments. It creates anxiety that plans are happening last minute and is not good practice.” – Oranga Tamariki kaimahi



There are concerns in the community about the quality of decision making when the safety of tamariki and rangatahi is at risk

Many community professionals shared concerns about the decision making of Oranga Tamariki social workers when the safety of tamariki and rangatahi is at risk. We heard from some community kaimahi that Oranga Tamariki social workers ask them what they should do – which left them feeling as though they were training Oranga Tamariki social workers or were somehow responsible for their practice. They felt that many Oranga Tamariki social workers lack confidence and understanding of their statutory role and responsibilities. Some community kaimahi shared examples of times they have held serious concerns about the safety and risk of abuse to tamariki considering decisions made by Oranga Tamariki kaimahi.

A couple of whānau members also shared examples of times when they felt decisions from Oranga Tamariki social workers were not sufficiently focused on the safety and risk to their tamariki and rangatahi.



“[Oranga Tamariki] let me down, baby was being neglected which was what I said was going to happen if they took that route [not applying for custody orders]. They said they were trying to give mum [mother of child] an opportunity to sort her shit out, but I was like our main concern was that baby was safe – wasn’t that their job?” – whānau

Some community professionals also felt Oranga Tamariki lacks strategic direction, transparency and consistent guidance to support their kaimahi. They questioned the level of influence resource availability and media perception has on Oranga Tamariki decision making – as opposed to risk, citing sudden changes in decisions without rationale.

“We find some [Oranga Tamariki] decisions made are in a knee jerk way. The whole plan changes and you’re [the] last to know. I think it’s practice that’s a means to an end and not trauma informed.” – NGO kaimahi

“I think a lot of social workers don’t see the actual danger to tamariki – I get you can’t remove kids willy nilly as it impacts psychologically on tamariki but at the same time some social workers don’t appear to have the ability to identify high risk.” – community professional

Oranga Tamariki site leaders and kaimahi explained that the practice shift messaging to frontline tells them to follow a relational and holistic practice framework. However they feel that, in reality, practice from regional and national office is risk averse and “transactional”. This creates a contradiction between the stated intent of Oranga Tamariki as an agency and the reality of their practice. As a result frontline kaimahi have to justify and advocate for their decisions, delaying support to tamariki and rangatahi.

“We’ve [Oranga Tamariki] become really risk adverse in the regional space. They [regional office] need to get on board with some of our relational ways of working because [not being on board] can be a barrier ... moko are waiting cos we can’t get internal processes in line. In the last three years there’s been lots of training but that comes from the top, they’re not on the same page, we’re told this and that but the thing is young people are still sitting in limbo not knowing what the next steps are. We see lots of anxiety for kids, young people not feeling safe and feeling unsettled. We are needing to get better at that.”
– Oranga Tamariki site leader

“Two members from leadership asked why we didn’t take [care] orders and we had to defend the decision. What annoyed me was that people who had never met the kid were saying this and it was based off other things they had heard.” – youth justice social worker



Key theme: **Family group conferences**

A shortage of family group conference coordinators is delaying family group conferences and putting high caseloads on the coordinators who are available

Most Oranga Tamariki site leaders from Kaitiāia and Kaikohe spoke of no longer having care and protection family group conference (FGC) coordinators at their respective sites, with the Kaitiāia site being without one for over three years. An FGC coordinator from the Whangārei site is currently running FGCs for these sites. This creates delays in FGCs being held and there is a loss of local knowledge. We also heard that there is a lot of time-consuming travel required for the FGC coordinator to cover these sites.

“We have three family group conferences a week. We need two more, but we can’t do that because of the [site] resource is not resourced to do more than three FGC a week.” – Oranga Tamariki site leader

We were told that this impacts on whānau – with FGCs no longer able to be scheduled around whānau commitments due to the FGC coordinator’s time limitations, and in some cases it can be “a long drive” for whānau when FGCs are not able to be held locally.

“We have to do it [FGCs] in their [FGC coordinator] time frame, when we have to get our coordinator from Whangārei. Our previous FGC coordinator, she would hold FGC at a marae to cater to the whānau and at a time that suited them because most of them work, so you want to help the whānau out. You want to try and do it outside of business hours and to have the local relationship working for you and the whānau.” – Oranga Tamariki site leader

Additionally, we heard from a couple of care and protection FGC coordinators that FGC caseloads are high in the region, with one telling us that they felt an additional two care and protection coordinators were needed to meet demand. We also heard that the care and protection FGC team lead is currently holding a caseload, even though they are not supposed to. This is in contrast to a couple of youth justice FGC coordinators saying they have manageable workloads.

A lawyer for child expressed concern regarding FGC delays. They spoke of some FGC referrals not being actioned for a couple of months, telling us that tamariki should not have to wait and that delays put tamariki “at high risk”. When there are delays they sometimes consider reporting their concerns via section 15² of the Oranga Tamariki Act.

2 Any person who believes that a child or young person has been, or is likely to be, harmed, ill-treated, abused, (whether physically, emotionally, or sexually), neglected, or deprived, or who has concerns about the well-being of a child or young person, may report the matter to the chief executive or a constable.

Inconsistent funding across sites negatively impacts on how FGCs are convened and the plans that result from them

Almost all FGC team leaders and coordinators, across both care and protection and youth justice, spoke of a lack of funding available for convening FGCs. We heard that the funding amount per FGC depends on sites and that it is inconsistent. For example, one site has a limit of \$150 per FGC, other sites have a budget of \$5 to \$8 per person, while for one we heard there was no limit.

“... In care and protection, we are dealing with five different managers with their own styles. Some are pretty good, but some will say ‘you got \$150 to cover hire of the building, everything’, while some will say ‘\$150 just for kai’.” – Oranga Tamariki site leadership

We were told that the funding must cover all FGC expenses including kai and venue hire and that FGC coordinators “just make do with what they got” and use their resources the “best they can”. An FGC team leader told us that they “push really hard” not to hold FGC onsite and that they try to hold FGCs as close to whānau or victims as possible. However, we also heard that venue hire can take up most of the budget and to overcome this coordinators will book rooms onsite to make sure they can supply enough kai. A few coordinators also said they will hold FGC at a time where they can provide snacks, rather than at lunchtime.

“... In Kaikohe site, there is a limit of \$150 for an FGC. We need to maximise that amount to cover everything which includes petrol voucher for whānau, venue hire. And venues in Kaikohe are pretty expensive and so we are then left with so little to cover for food, or there is nothing left for other costs. It is hard, you have to really budget that little amount ...” – FGC coordinator



An FGC team leader reported that funding barriers are also impacting on FGC plans. They spoke of the need to agree on the plan pre-FGC. If something new arises during the FGC then further approval is needed, with approval being given around 90 percent of the time. They also said there used to be a number of things that didn't need to be discussed, such as birth certificates and driver licences, but now these are not guaranteed to be funded.

An absence of formal induction training for FGC coordinators is resulting in inconsistent practice

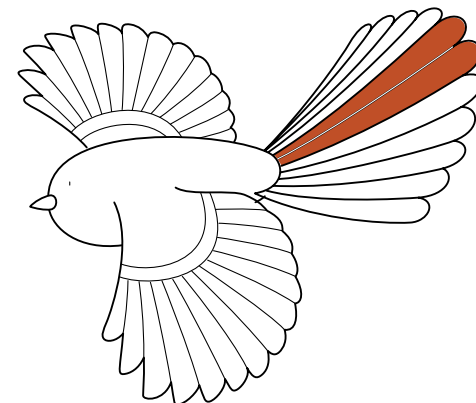
A couple of FGC team leads told us there is no longer formal induction training. Almost all FGC coordinators also told us they did not receive any induction training, or if they did, it was prior to the training ceasing. We heard that there is new induction training in development, but in the meantime there is nothing available for coordinators and they are currently having to learn off each other.

“They are trying to get so much feedback and input [on the development of new induction training] that it can go from this to that and another, people really want to get it right, then they are going off too far, but then we don’t end up with anything. With the 2018 training programme, there was just [previous FGC induction lead] and the one leader in that space.” – Oranga Tamariki site leader

“No induction anymore, that finished nearly three years ago. No formal training for care and protection other than the initial induction pack. It’s more the older care and protection coordinators that will filter that down to the new coordinators, there’s no formal coordinator training.” – FGC coordinator

We heard a few reports from lawyer for child, Oranga Tamariki kaimahi, and police staff that they experience inconsistencies in the capability of FGC coordinators. A lawyer for child said at times in FGCs they have felt “quite targeted” and that they can get a “hostile reaction” from whānau, as they are the ones speaking up on behalf of tamariki. They said that generally coordinators don’t have the skills to manage whānau behaviour. Conversely, we heard that a “good” coordinator will “shut the conference down and get security”.

“[FGC coordinator] wings it a lot and it’s not hitting it right on the head. I’ve seen some awesome [FGC] coordinators.” – government agency kaimahi



The importance of preparing whānau and promoting tamariki and whānau voice in FGCs was recognised but this does not always happen

Some whānau spoke to us about their FGC and their FGC plan. They spoke of not feeling listened to, safety concerns not being adequately addressed, and of having no support person with them at their FGC. One whānau member told us that despite informing their social worker that their rangatahi spoke using sign language, there was no interpreter at the FGC. We also heard from a rangatahi who told us that they didn't know there was an FGC plan and that they weren't involved with the plan.

"Yes [FGC coordinator has made contact], but not around who can support me. Don't know what I need to do around having a plan ready." – whānau

"Family group conference coordinator said 'don't do it in front of the kids'. And I was thinking – so you're saying he [father] can still take drugs?" – whānau

"I don't know [if there was an FGC plan]. My FGC was in November. I don't know if there was a plan – I wasn't even involved." – rangatahi

In contrast, a few rangatahi told us that they had a voice at the FGC and in their plan. A couple of rangatahi felt supported by a social worker to have their voice heard.

"I wrote the [FGC] plan. [Social worker in school] was there, he helped me write up the plan." – rangatahi

"Every time I tried [to speak in the FGC], I'd cry. Someone else [social worker] would word it for me. Started writing my opinions down and then someone [social worker] would share it on my behalf." – rangatahi



Despite this, we heard from many Oranga Tamariki kaimahi from both care and protection and youth justice who recognised the importance of preparing whānau for FGC. This includes making whānau aware of what happens during and following an FGC. We heard that sometimes in hui a-whānau social workers will explain the FGC process to whānau and make sure they understand. This can also help FGCs to be shorter. A kaimahi highlighted that hui a-whānau can prevent the need for an FGC to happen at all if adequate supports are put in place. A couple of FGC coordinators said it would be useful for them to attend hui a-whānau. They could explain their role and prepare whānau for FGC, any concerns could be expressed at hui a-whānau rather than in the FGC, and it “could make the FGC a lot easier”.

“It is important to make sure whānau understand ... Meeting the child and the whānau early on is important. It can make a lot of difference. It’s not just contacting them to attend the FGC, we need to make them aware of what happens and what can happen next.” – Oranga Tamariki kaimahi

Some kaimahi also spoke of ensuring tamariki, rangatahi and whānau have a voice in the FGC. We heard of social workers encouraging tamariki and whānau to speak up in FGC and of them speaking with young people by themselves to ensure they have a say.

“The best forum for them to have a voice is in FGC and I encourage rangatahi and whānau to have their say. It will have more impact coming from them than it would from me.” – Oranga Tamariki kaimahi

Some lawyers for child and VOYCE Whakarongo Mai kaimahi spoke of advocating for tamariki and sharing their voice in FGCs and of notifying tamariki of their rights and entitlements. Despite this, they told us they are regularly not invited to or notified of FGCs. A lawyer for child told us that it’s not good for tamariki and rangatahi when they are not present, as they are their advocate and an independent voice.

A caregiver told us about the impact of this, telling us that the social worker did not engage with a child in their care during a court case.

“... We didn’t have lawyer for child, just her [child] social worker who sat there during case tapping on her laptop and no engagement with us.” – caregiver

It is challenging for parents in prison to attend family group conferences

A parent in prison whose child is in care spoke of not being invited, or being invited too late to FGCs. They also felt that they are made to sound like they are “doing nothing” despite telling us they make regular contact with Oranga Tamariki to get information on their child.

This was echoed by a Department of Corrections kaimahi who told us that FGC notifications aren’t always received in time to enable fathers to attend an FGC. This is further impacted by there being only two days per week where rooms can be booked at the prison for FGCs to be set up via audio visual link. A few FGC coordinators also spoke of barriers to using an audio visual link, telling us that it frequently doesn’t work so they use Teams instead.

The Corrections kaimahi felt that Oranga Tamariki were unlikely to move an FGC to accommodate room availability at the prison and spoke of having to advocate for a father to be involved in the FGC and court process so that he can have a voice.

Despite this, an Oranga Tamariki leader reported there being fewer barriers than there used to be to have whānau in prison attend FGCs online. They attributed this to coordinators having “good working relationships” with Corrections and there being processes in place to enable whānau to attend.

Transition to adulthood FGCs are inconsistent, impacting on the support rangatahi receive

A couple of eligible rangatahi, including one who has already transitioned out of Oranga Tamariki custody, told us they had not had a transition to adulthood FGC. A couple of rangatahi who had a transition planning FGC told us they weren’t listened to during their FGC, there was no clear plan, and little support was provided following the FGC.

“I didn’t know about that [support]. When I left OT [Oranga Tamariki], I did everything by myself. No support from Oranga Tamariki. I have been in and out of jail since.” – rangatahi

“I kept getting shut down by my social worker every time I wanted to talk up.” – rangatahi

“I just don’t know what is going to happen and where its gonna take me cause no one’s on the same page. I don’t think they [Oranga Tamariki] know what’s gonna happen.” – rangatahi

A couple of caregivers also told us about a lack of support provided for their rangatahi, or having to push for support in the FGC held for the rangatahi in their care. One also said that they had to push for the FGC to happen.

“... We just had a transitions FGC. My wife pushed for that.” – caregiver

“She had driving lessons in her plan, but OT [Oranga Tamariki] pushed back and said they would only pay for two driving lessons. That was about nine months ago.” – caregiver

A leader from an iwi service told us it “makes a massive difference” for rangatahi if they are able to have a say in what they want and to have this reflected in their transition FGC plan. They said it “makes them take ownership” of it. We heard it can be difficult when rangatahi are transient. When rangatahi choose not to participate in the creation of their transition plan the service kaimahi will create a plan for them with a focus on the goals of rangatahi.

We heard differing capacities of sites to support rangatahi in the transition to adulthood process. Almost all site leadership from the Kaikohe and Kaitāia sites told us about difficulties – staff turnover, including of transition and youth workers, and high caseloads – which means they “don’t have the time for that conversation”. We were told that in Kaikohe they don’t do transition FGCs. We also heard from a couple of leaders that sometimes rangatahi choose not to engage with the FGC process, or that they don’t have the time to do so.

Rangatahi are eligible for transition support from the age of 15. We have heard from other monitoring engagements that the earlier transition support service kaimahi are able to work with rangatahi to build relationships and understand their needs the better prepared they will be for adulthood.

Conversely, a few site leaders from the Tautahere, Teatohi, and Te Kaipara sites spoke positively of supporting rangatahi in the TTA process. We heard of a youth worker from Oranga Tamariki supporting rangatahi, rangatahi rarely declining TTA referrals at the Teatohi site, and that at Te Kaipara most rangatahi just want a whānau plan in place of a transition FGC.

“We have a youth worker who will walk through process with them [rangatahi]. She’s been fantastic.” – Oranga Tamariki site leader

Some leaders from Kaikohe and Kaitāia also spoke of challenges they face with their contracted transition support services. This included staff turnover at a service impacting on relationships being built with rangatahi, and a service not having the skills to work collaboratively with rangatahi. At Te Kaipara we heard a report of inconsistencies with transition support workers with some “awesome ones who have gone over and above”, whilst other rangatahi experience delays in support.

Key theme: **Care options**

A shortage of caregivers and a slow approval process has resulted in tamariki being placed out of region and caregivers having multiple tamariki in their care

A couple of site leaders from Kaikohe spoke of a lack of care options available in their area. This has resulted in tamariki and rangatahi being placed out of region, which makes it difficult for whānau to visit them and for social workers to support the transition.

We also heard from an Oranga Tamariki kaimahi that there are “not enough” caregivers, with some caregivers having up to eight tamariki in their care. We heard concerns about this from an NGO kaimahi who questioned placement decisions being made by Oranga Tamariki.

“You do worry about their [Oranga Tamariki] train of thought sometimes. Whānau who have three children of their own and taken on four children that belong to a sibling. So, then they have seven in their house and these children have older siblings ... and the social worker will say do you think you can take these kids as well?” – NGO kaimahi

A couple of Oranga Tamariki leaders from Caregiver Recruitment and Support (CGRS) told us about running caregiver advertising campaigns, including holding caregiver recruitment cafes in the Far North. An Oranga Tamariki kaimahi also highlighted that non-whānau caregivers are often identified by tamariki themselves, for example, families of friends from school.

We heard that it can take months for caregivers to be fully approved. We also heard that approval processes are different for whānau and non-whānau caregivers. An Oranga Tamariki regional CGRS leader told us that some social workers place tamariki with unapproved whānau caregivers, which they then “spend a lot of time” tidying up to ensure there are no unapproved caregivers.

“... We need to make sure that non-kin [non-whānau] caregivers are approved to be caregivers. To have them approved, they have to go through that process of training, application and all other stuff. Not an easy one. With whānau, it's a bit easier, because they are whānau and mostly the kid's family prefer to place their children with their own whānau.” – Oranga Tamariki kaimahi

Some Oranga Tamariki kaimahi also highlighted that it is “a very invasive” process to become a respite caregiver, and for some it is traumatic, which is a barrier to the application process being completed.

A lack of specialist care options leads to tamariki and rangatahi with high needs being put in unsuitable care or moved out of the region

A site leader from Teatohi told us there is a lack of care options available in the area for tamariki and rangatahi with high needs. This has resulted in young people staying in unsuitable care options or being moved into places that are unable to meet their needs, such as group homes. They also noted the referral process for high needs care through the National High Needs Hub sometimes takes weeks due to there being so few services. In the meantime, rangatahi are put in motels or family homes.



An Oranga Tamariki regional leader and some group home kaimahi highlighted that group home care is not suitable for the complex needs of some tamariki, and that group home kaimahi don't have the skills or training needed to meet these needs.

"Our kaimahi were asked to do mahi to support tamariki with high needs, complex behaviours, but we can't do what they need to support them. We don't have the resources or kaimahi with enough skills for the complexity of their [tamariki] need." – Oranga Tamariki regional leader

We also heard a few examples of rangatahi being moved out of the region due to the lack of specialist care options, which impacts on their whānau connection.

"... One [rangatahi] was moved to Auckland [which is a] long way from whānau and the other girl is still living with whānau, even though they [Oranga Tamariki] know she's not safe. They said it was because of resource that they left the kids there [in their situation], we were open to any situation to support the kids safely." – NGO kaimahi

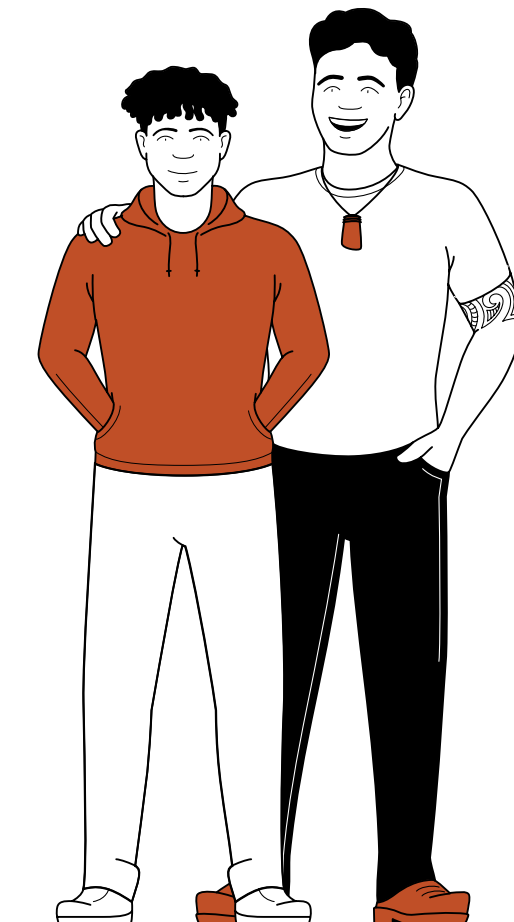
A couple of leaders – site and regional – also spoke of a lack of specialist respite services in the region. One told us that there is only one specialist respite home in Whangārei and that the respite home has no capacity to take on any more tamariki or rangatahi.

A lack of care options for youth who offend and those on bail has resulted in rangatahi being kept in police custody longer than necessary or being held in prison

A couple of police staff told us it is “time consuming” when they apprehend young people. They told us Oranga Tamariki put the responsibility on police to find care for the young person. This is particularly problematic when a young person doesn’t want to go home for safety reasons and other whānau don’t want to take them. One police staff member told us that if it is before 4pm they will direct their staff to take young people directly to the Oranga Tamariki office so police don’t become responsible for finding them somewhere to stay. A police Youth Aid officer also highlighted that when a young person is detained, if there are no safe options for them to be bailed to, it can result in them being held in police custody for longer.

A Māori service kaimahi reiterated this, noting the lack of care options for rangatahi on bail with electronic monitoring, particularly when “whānau don’t want them”. They told us about some rangatahi being stuck in prison as they can’t be released without a bail address, and that there are added barriers when rangatahi age out as they can’t go to Oranga Tamariki.

A leader from an iwi care service also told us it is “very difficult” to find respite carers for rangatahi on remand and that they do not have “a big enough pool” of caregivers. They sometimes use mentors, who already have relationships with the rangatahi, to fill this gap.



Key theme: **Referrals and information sharing**

Referrals for transition support often come too late for services to build a relationship with rangatahi

Transition Support Services and Oranga Tamariki site leadership spoke about a lack of resource, understanding and priority for referrals. This results in low rates of referral and referrals that come too late to effectively support rangatahi before they turn 18. This was reflected in the experiences of many rangatahi we spoke to, with many unaware that they could have a transition support person. A few rangatahi we met with who were receiving transition support spoke positively about their experience.

“He [transition mentor] just showed up months ago, like, I don’t know. Looks like a social worker. I asked him [transition mentor] to support me ... she [social worker] didn’t say he’s [transition mentor] coming.” – rangatahi

“[The transition support service is] cool, take it, don’t take it for granted. I wouldn’t be successful without matua’s [transition worker’s] help.” – rangatahi

One transition service said they will proactively get a list of eligible rangatahi from VOYCE Whakarongo Mai, rather than wait for a list and referrals directly from Oranga Tamariki. They bring this list to Oranga Tamariki to get referrals for those eligible rangatahi. We also heard this transition service and Oranga Tamariki regional transition support kaimahi run workshops with Oranga Tamariki sites to explain how the transition service supports rangatahi and to try and get referrals earlier. When referrals are sent late, often with less than a year before the rangatahi turns 18, transition services told us they must rush to provide support. Often they have to focus on sorting documentation and teaching simple skills to rangatahi that could have been taught to them earlier – such as cleaning and cooking. This means kaimahi run out of time to work with rangatahi on their larger goals and aspirations for their adult life.

“I do not understand how a rangatahi can get to aging out of care age and not have a birth certificate, IRD [number] or bank account. As a young adult they shouldn’t have to ask for it they should already have it. You are starting them off on the back foot from the get go because they don’t know how to manage a bank account because they have never had one ... I think it’s because it’s the social worker is over worked and under resourced.” – NGO kaimahi

Oranga Tamariki referrals are missing information or contain incorrect information, making it difficult for community services to support rangatahi

Some community agencies, including iwi and Māori services said that Oranga Tamariki referrals with incomplete or incorrect information make it difficult for them to contact and support rangatahi. VOYCE Whakarongo Mai told us they will reach out to supervisors and site leadership when they are unable to get contact information for rangatahi from social workers. VOYCE kaimahi will avoid cold calling rangatahi or their whānau, preferring to connect through their social workers to build a positive relationship. However, “seven times out of ten” they do not hear from Oranga Tamariki kaimahi, meaning they must cold call rangatahi. If they do not hear back after a cold call they will return the referral to Oranga Tamariki.

“Our job pretty much is to find the kids which is not always easy when our connection to Oranga Tamariki isn’t always the easiest.” – NGO kaimahi

A couple of transition support services also received referrals that do not record, or incorrectly record, information about the disability needs or complex behavioural needs of rangatahi. We heard that some rangatahi have undiagnosed and unmet disability needs that should have been identified and addressed earlier, while in care. With disability support not in place, transition services must seek funding for diagnosis and then organise support to meet these needs before the rangatahi turns 18. We heard that once rangatahi turn 18, and are no longer in care, Oranga Tamariki often stop providing any support alongside the transition service. This is despite rangatahi being eligible for transition support from Oranga Tamariki until the age of 21, and advice or assistance until the age of 25.



Key theme: **Relationships and information sharing**

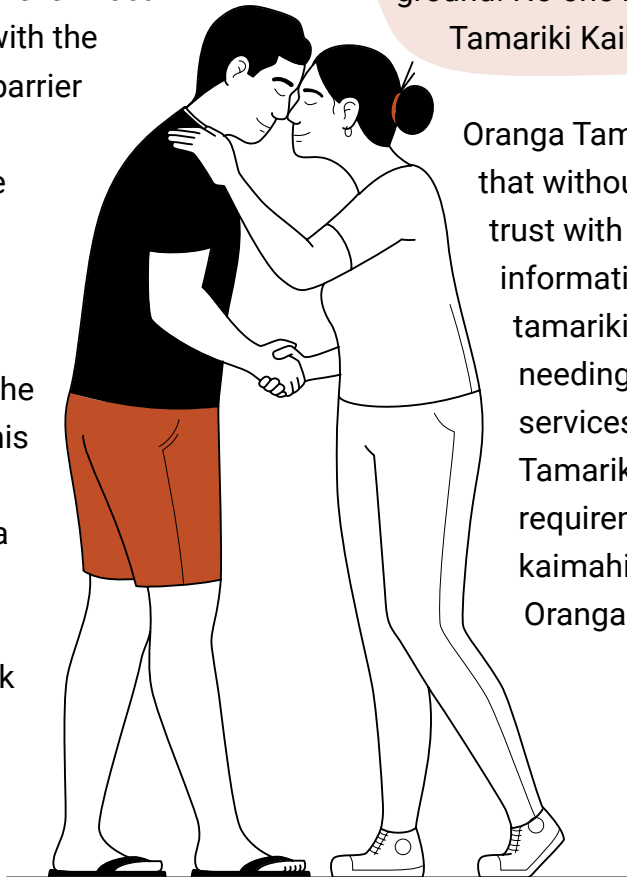
Relationships between Oranga Tamariki and iwi and Māori services are held by regional and national leadership rather than local sites, impacting on collaboration at the frontline

Oranga Tamariki leaders and kaimahi told us the relationships with Ngāpuhi Iwi Social Services (NISS) and Waitomo Papakāinga are held at the regional and national leadership level. Local Oranga Tamariki sites do not have regular hui with the two iwi and Māori services. We heard this is a barrier for the local Oranga Tamariki sites to maintain communication and collaborate well with these two agencies.

In addition, Oranga Tamariki national office leadership do not share information with local sites about the nature of the agreements with the two services, or any decisions made, making this a barrier to collaboration and communication. It can also create tension between local Oranga Tamariki kaimahi and kaimahi from the iwi and Māori services, who may have different awareness and understanding of how they work together.

“We have a strategic partnership with them [Ngāpuhi Iwi Social Services]. It’s not working as such, as a partner. My crew here, they [Oranga Tamariki kaimahi] don’t understand what they [Ngāpuhi Iwi Social Services] do, what is their mahi ... The strategic plan hasn’t been operationalised for us here on the ground. No one knows what it is meant to look like.” – Oranga Tamariki Kaikohe site kaimahi

Oranga Tamariki site leaders and kaimahi were concerned that without strong frontline relationships that build trust with these two services, there are barriers to the information shared with them, and to their visits to tamariki and rangatahi. This included social workers needing permission or supervised access from these services to visit tamariki. This concerned Oranga Tamariki kaimahi as social worker visits are a legal requirement under the National Care Standards. Some kaimahi told us they had raised their concerns with Oranga Tamariki national office but had not heard back.



“We’ve put it in an email, and it gets escalated to the national office. We might have a meeting with them [site manager] to verbally raise our concerns. We raised a couple of concerns, I put it in an email and had a hui with [Oranga Tamariki kaimahi]. I talked about the worries and then they said they would talk to [Oranga Tamariki executive leadership]. I never heard anything after that ... Nothing got sorted, you kind of feel defeated ... There are too many greys and unknowns and no clear direction.” – Oranga Tamariki Kaitiāia site kaimahi



In contrast, a member of Oranga Tamariki site leadership highlighted the benefit of sites holding relationships with community rather than regional leadership. They said the Oranga Tamariki restructure had returned relationships from a regional level back to sites, which has re-connected them with community contacts.

“[Oranga Tamariki sites] were just this blip at the end of something with no connection to community. It [previous structure] stripped away our relationships and accountability, cos someone from regional was meeting with education, meeting with community. So I love the restructure, I feel more connected [to the community]. Have had to rebuild a lot of relationships, lost connections with so many people, so it’s been a lot of reaching out and connecting again. It’s not hard, but it has struck me how much was lost when regional [Oranga Tamariki] got in between site and provider.” – Oranga Tamariki site leader

There are still barriers to Waitomo Papakāinga exercising its delegated power to convene family group conferences

Under the Oranga Tamariki Act (1989), certain powers can be delegated to approved agencies. Oranga Tamariki has delegated the ability to convene FGCs to Waitomo Papakāinga, however we heard that there has not been an FGC convened by the service since the delegated power began. Oranga Tamariki kaimahi were unable to say why this was the case as they understood training had been delivered to Waitomo Papakāinga kaimahi. We heard Oranga Tamariki FGC coordinators are understaffed, with one Whangārei coordinator covering both Kaikohe and Kaitāia sites. This is creating delays in FGCs being held for tamariki and rangatahi and making it harder for whānau to get to the FGC. Part of delegating powers under the Oranga Tamariki Act (1989) is for services to run the FGCs as originally intended and to reduce the number of Oranga Tamariki convened FGCs.

“[We’ve been asked] what are you up to, what is taking you so long to do an FGC ... The section 396 [service – Waitomo Papakāinga] is supposed to provide it [family group conference] ... but I still haven’t seen one [from them]. It’s like a vicious circle. If we don’t have systems [in place], our kids are waiting, whānau are getting shitty ... That has an effect on us as well, as workers. We’re always apologising.” – Oranga Tamariki Kaitāia site kaimahi

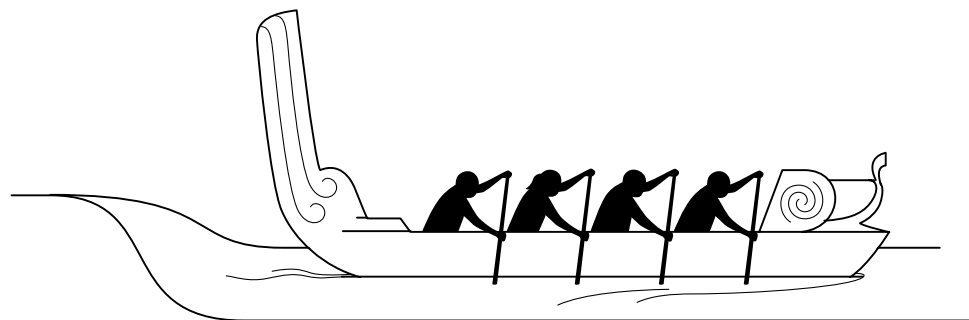
Waitomo Papakāinga kaimahi told us that they were given training on the FGC process three to four years ago. However there had been a two year delay in granting them access to CYRAS (Oranga Tamariki information system), which gives them access to the information needed to convene the FGC. In the year or so since CYRAS access was granted, the relationship and collaboration at the regional and national leadership level has had setbacks, with the Oranga Tamariki restructure creating more delays.

A couple of Waitomo Papakāinga leaders and Oranga Tamariki site leadership also shared views that hui a-whānau should happen before all FGCs, and in place of FGCs as often as possible. A couple of the leaders also felt that FGCs should only be used for custodial matters in family court.

“My practice philosophy is that you hui [hui a-whānau] first. You need to do whānau hui and family led stuff, and if things escalate then FGC. But the hui [hui a-whānau] has to occur first. There has to be evidence ... Hui a-whānau is a strength, that is standard practice. Sometimes if you’re not provided with good oversight or support then things are escalated. My thing is you’ve got to have hui a-whānau. The practice here is really excellent.” – Oranga Tamariki site leader

Relationships between Ngāpuhi Iwi Social Services and Oranga Tamariki regional and local leadership are working well, but the strategic partnership with national office is not being used to the full effect

Some Ngāpuhi Iwi Social Services (NISS) leaders spoke about the strategic partnership with Oranga Tamariki national office, noting that the collaboration and model for the relationship worked better at the beginning. We heard there is an unequal balance of power and information sharing with Oranga Tamariki national leadership. NISS leaders were positive about their access to datasets relevant to Ngāpuhi. However, they felt that Oranga Tamariki should be more “active” in seeking Te-Rūnanga-Ā-Iwi-O-Ngāpuhi (Ngāpuhi) input in their strategic approaches and devolution of services, rather than contracting NISS for smaller pieces of work. NISS leaders also felt Oranga Tamariki could be more proactive in their communication, with less reliance on NISS leadership to follow up on contractual planning and identify initiatives they can support.



“We are not able to reach any of our aspirations because we think differently about the way that we want to progress our vision. For example, we are looking at the population of Ngāpuhi mokopuna just in care. We have a good breakdown of how many are in care, where they are, what they can manage to do and how they would do it. We want them to take that seriously, but we continue just to be contracted for very small, discrete focus areas of work. So many examples, even the youth justice, the serious offenders - we have the data of how many are Ngāpuhi. We have been advocating for a programme we have got. It’s very impactful and successful but we can’t get any further traction for it.” – Ngāpuhi Iwi Social Services kaimahi

NISS leaders also told us they value their monthly meetings with the Minister for Children. They feel they can be honest and the minister is interested in the reality of their work and experience. However, they were disappointed they do not have regular meetings with Oranga Tamariki national office and that previous meetings have been at the request of Ngāpuhi, rather than prompted by Oranga Tamariki national office.

At a regional leadership level, a couple of NISS leaders spoke positively about their relationship with Oranga Tamariki. We heard they have monthly meetings and weekly consults with Oranga

Tamariki youth justice regional leadership, the Māori Partnership and Community Manager, and the Oranga Tamariki Tāmaki hub. The Tāmaki hub sends most of the referrals for rangatahi on the Mahuru remand programme. These collaborative meetings check Oranga Tamariki social workers are visiting rangatahi on the Mahuru programme, and planning for their transition out of the programme. A lack of transition planning had previously been an issue on the Mahuru programme. With the regional focus on transition planning we heard this is no longer an issue.

The Oranga Tamariki Regional Commissioner also highlighted their priority to work alongside Ngāpuhi under the Enabling Communities programme, along with Te Kahu Oranga Whānau, and Tai Timu Tai Pari. They felt that the strategy for Oranga Tamariki to devolve services must be “in confidence and with confidence and not censoring”. They spoke of their intention to remove silos between Oranga Tamariki, their partners, and iwi services to build stronger relationships together.

“How do we engage and interact with our hāpori [community] in a way that is purposeful and genuine? If we are working in true hononga [connection] or partnership with each other then we shouldn’t be having predetermined outcomes ahead of the kōrero.” – Oranga Tamariki regional commissioner

Police relationships with the community are strong on frontline and in development within area leadership

A Whangārei Kaipara area leader told us that they previously lacked capacity to build relationships with community. They have recently started building relationships at their leadership level, but were mindful that restructures at other government agencies have impacted on those relationships.

“In the NGO space I am conscious to not promise something we can’t deliver. I don’t need to hold those relationships [with non-government organisations], frontline do, and I am conscious of that.” – police leadership kaimahi

Kaimahi from other community and government agencies generally spoke of a good relationship with frontline police. We heard that police staff are communicative and share information. At the Tautahere site, Oranga Tamariki youth justice kaimahi spoke positively of their co-location with some Youth Aid staff. However, one iwi service noted that while they have a strong relationship with frontline police and Police National Headquarters, they lack a relationship with Police District and Area leadership in the region. One Oranga Tamariki youth justice leader also felt that while they share information with police, they do not receive all the information they need in return.

A few police staff were also unsure what information they are allowed to share with other agencies without Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) in place, both in regards to their accountability as an agency and to the privacy and safety of tamariki, rangatahi and whānau. Police specifically referenced the information they can share with an iwi service amidst discussions of the service running Alternative Action plans.

Interagency teams and hui lead to better collaboration and delivery of support to tamariki, rangatahi and whānau, however there is room for more

We heard about a few interagency hui and teams in the region, with many speaking of them positively. Some kaimahi identified opportunities for new interagency hui or teams or for greater investment and collaboration in those that already exist. A couple of kaimahi from an NGO and a Māori service noted that successful interagency collaboration requires someone to lead, delegate and coordinate professionals from the different organisations. We heard that often this role is not filled, which can lead to confusion and a lack of action.

A couple of Oranga Tamariki regional leaders raised the need for a new Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) between their agency, iwi, Ministry of Social Development, Kāinga Ora, Police, Education,

Health, and NGOs. They felt an MDT in the region could provide greater support for whānau and include a focus on youth justice. They referenced Auckland and Hamilton as examples of well-established MDTs who are well resourced and achieve good outcomes for the “most vulnerable”. This included FastTrack being set up through the Auckland MDT.

A couple of education leaders spoke positively about the Tautoko panel – a group of regional inter-agency professionals who support tamariki known to Oranga Tamariki to access education. This includes providing information to support high and complex needs applications and connecting tamariki, rangatahi and whānau with the right services or contacts. Gateway assessments were also raised, with a couple of health leaders feeling that, while education kaimahi listen to their recommendations, they are not always completing their actions in Inter-agency Services Agreements. One health kaimahi suggested it was due to a lack of capacity for school staff to complete the required paperwork.

A health leader said their interagency consultations with different youth justice services allows them to share information to give targeted wraparound support to rangatahi. The consultations allow them to share their recommendations directly with youth justice kaimahi ahead of family group conferences, court appearances and the implementation of plans and funding.

Some Oranga Tamariki regional leaders also spoke positively about the interagency “care clinics” run in the region, though wanted them to be held more regularly. These clinics are attended by police, lawyers, disability support services, and the Oranga Tamariki social worker assigned to the case. We heard clinics enable consultation and planning to provide support for whānau and caregivers, with the ultimate goal that tamariki and rangatahi are able to return home.

“The care clinic is about working out what I really require and how do we resource and if we aren’t well resourced how do we lessen the impact. So the care clinic is awesome for that. It is having the consultation with a multi team approach.” – Oranga Tamariki regional leader



Key theme: **Access to services and support**

A lack of services in the region means some tamariki and rangatahi are not getting the support they need

We heard from some community and government agencies that it is difficult to get tamariki and rangatahi the support they need due to a lack of services in the region. We heard from some Oranga Tamariki kaimahi in Kaikohe and Te Kaipara that because the area is isolated they have fewer resources to choose from. This means tamariki and rangatahi often miss out on services and may have to travel to Whangārei or outside of the region to access the support they need. This was echoed by an Oranga Tamariki youth justice kaimahi who said it was challenging to implement supports outlined in FGC plans when there are no services available or rangatahi are referred to the same services on repeat. Likewise, some Oranga Tamariki kaimahi in Kaitiāia said Waitomo Papakāinga is the only s396 service who delivers a range of services in the area. We were told that if whānau choose to opt out of receiving support from Waitomo Papakāinga, there are no other options to refer tamariki and whānau to. A couple of Oranga Tamariki kaimahi raised concerns about whānau being repeatedly referred to the same service, even when it may not be the best fit for their needs, which could lead to prolonged involvement in the system if those needs aren't met. One kaimahi also raised concern that whānau may feel "forced" to participate in programmes due to a lack of options available to them.

"We are not in an urban area, we have to drive for two, four, six hours to access services." – Oranga Tamariki Kaikohe kaimahi

"It can be hard here in Kaipara to find services. We are at the bottom of the totem pole and most funding gets used up in Whangārei." – Oranga Tamariki Te Kaipara kaimahi

"The geographical location is an issue, [because] there is not much services available in those areas. It's a challenge for us, what services we could offer. If we plan a, b, c, and there are no services around there, what can we do?" – Oranga Tamariki youth justice kaimahi

"Unlike any other places I know we have 'a' provider. It doesn't work well for a lot of our community ... Our kids and whānau say 'not them' and we have nowhere else to go." – Oranga Tamariki Kaitiāia kaimahi

We also heard there are not enough health services available in the region, including alcohol and drug services for young people, psychologists, and General Practitioners (GPs). For example, in Kaitiāia and Kaikohe, we heard that it is difficult to get doctor's appointments or enrol tamariki with a GP as GPs are at full capacity. A Kaikohe Oranga Tamariki site leader said this has resulted in long waitlists and can mean tamariki have to travel out of the region to see a doctor. We heard from some tamariki and rangatahi that they are not enrolled with health and dental services or have not used these services for a while. Some tamariki and rangatahi told us they did not get support when they were sick or when they had mental health needs.

"I've been sick for ages, coughing, I spewed up, there was no doctors, it just went away." – child

"No [I don't have a doctor here]. No one else can enrol me into a new doctor other than my mum or social worker." – rangatahi

"In 18 months up here, I can't get a doctor's appointment, [even] a doctor [that we could do online consult] or go [to] see a practice nurse even at the hospital, after hours. Accessing health [service] is hard up here, there's no enrolments [to GPs], because they are full." – Oranga Tamariki kaimahi

"There is a lack and need for AOD [alcohol and other drug] services as well ... I tried to get [rangatahi] support, but I got told he was too young to access support from alcohol and drug service." – Oranga Tamariki kaimahi

Tamariki and rangatahi with complex needs and those requiring mental health services are unable to access specialist support

We heard from some kaimahi and leaders from across government organisations, NGOs, and iwi services, of a lack of services in the region to support tamariki and rangatahi with disabilities or mental health concerns. This includes a lack of training, as many government and community agencies told us they do not have the training they need to work with tamariki with disabilities or mental health concerns. The need for training was evidenced in the experience of a rangatahi we spoke to.

"When it came to me being suicidal and my self-harm ideology, the thing is that I would talk about it. I had overdosed a few times. I just wanted to be heard. But they [Oranga Tamariki] kept telling me that trying to self-harm was not helping. When I tried to explain why they were dismissive of me – so that's the stone wall I was meaning." – rangatahi

One Oranga Tamariki regional leader spoke specifically about youth justice, telling us that some youth justice services are not equipped to work with neurodiverse rangatahi or those with disabilities. They told us that supporting young people in youth justice with these needs is “a challenge”. We also heard that the one service in Kaitiāia supporting rangatahi mental health needs was over capacity and understaffed.

“Through all the services there is not enough support for trauma. A child’s behaviour becomes the focus, and the root cause may never be addressed. Every child that comes into Oranga Tamariki has trauma and it has such a huge impact on behaviour, mental health, school, and everything else and the problem is – right across the system – there is not enough support for trauma.” – health kaimahi

“We got a kid in court with an IQ of 65 tomorrow. Family full of offenders. The psychologist said to me that for that kid, jail is going to be his support network.” – police Youth Aid

A couple of Oranga Tamariki kaimahi in Whangārei spoke of difficulties accessing mental health services, telling us it is “a huge process” to get an appointment. One told us that when there are delays to getting a parent’s mental health assessed it can impact on tamariki being returned home.

“I can’t do a diagnosis and I’m not a mental health worker. Sometimes I need to assess the mental health of a mother who is telling me there’s nothing wrong with her. I end up getting stuck because she needs the help before the child can return home safely.” – Oranga Tamariki kaimahi

Some Oranga Tamariki kaimahi and leaders also spoke of the high thresholds that need to be met for Te Roopu Kimiora (child and adolescent mental health and addiction services) to provide tamariki and rangatahi with mental health support. We heard that mental health concerns are frequently dismissed as behavioural, including cases where young people are self-harming or have suicidal ideation. This results in Oranga Tamariki kaimahi having to manage tamariki behaviour without specialist support. A couple of Oranga Tamariki regional leaders said they will push back on mental health services to access support, with one telling us they will repeatedly escalate their concerns “because it’s the wellbeing of mokopuna”.

“They [mental health services] are atrocious. There is nothing. There is just nothing at all. It’s not about the people, it’s the system. They are probably under resourced and the threshold that they work to, and their lack of resources mean that it [assessments] is all behavioural.” – Oranga Tamariki site leader

“We end up managing them [tamariki] but the problem is that is not our expertise, [it is] not within our skill set. We got one mokopuna who was hospitalised for self-harm and then brought back to us after a while, they said [the self-harm behaviour] was not mental health.” – Oranga Tamariki regional leader

A health kaimahi shared that some issues, such as environmental factors, are “not seen as a treatable issue within the mental health space”. They said there are services available in cases where a clinical diagnosis is not possible. Where lower levels of intervention are not successful, this provides evidence that higher level support is needed from mental health services.

The Whangārei Police Area Commander also reported that it is difficult for their frontline and Youth Aid teams to get support from health professionals when working with youth who have disabilities or mental health concerns. They said that their staff are “amazing” with what they do know but that they still need support as they don’t know everything.

In contrast to this, a leader from a s396 iwi service spoke positively of the relationship they have with Te Roopu Kimiora. They told us that the mental health services team work alongside their mentors to support young people on medication who come into their care.

Some education, police and Oranga Tamariki leaders highlighted the negative impact on school engagement when tamariki and rangatahi are not able to have their disability and mental health needs met easily and early. Education leaders told us that regional Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO) tables, Ongoing Resourcing Scheme funding, Gateway Assessments, and skilled specialists like liaison teachers all help deliver support to tamariki and rangatahi. However, that support is limited by a lack of funding and high thresholds which make them inaccessible to many tamariki and rangatahi. Caregivers also told us about tamariki and rangatahi having to change schools because of not having adequate supports like teacher aides, disabled access or having long waits between enrolments because of hold ups in funding.

“They didn’t have the teacher aides, and they didn’t have financial or practical things for disabled kids. Like disabled toilets or staff on hand for hygiene needs.” – caregiver



Long waits for psychological assessments can mean rangatahi remain in youth justice residences for months waiting for support

We heard of delays for s333 psychological assessments for rangatahi in youth justice, as there are not enough health professionals to complete these reports. A couple of Oranga Tamariki youth justice kaimahi said that when reports are delayed, rangatahi can remain in residences for months while waiting for support. This risks young people being involved in the youth justice system longer than necessary.

“TRK [Te Roopu Kimiora, Infant, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service] do it [s333 reports] up here and they have two or three people that can do it. Otherwise we have to wait for contracted professionals to come up from Auckland to complete the report.” – Oranga Tamariki youth justice kaimahi

“... s333 [medical, psychiatric, and psychological report ordered by Youth Court Judge] reports are taking six months to get done ... Rangatahi are sitting in YJ [youth justice] for longer because they can't have the assessments completed that they need to get them support.” – Oranga Tamariki youth justice kaimahi

Once an assessment has been completed, an Oranga Tamariki youth justice kaimahi said it can be difficult to implement recommendations from s333 reports based on what is available within the area – giving an example where it took five weeks to find a psychologist to support a rangatahi.

We also heard from a youth justice kaimahi that supported bail services are full and have a six month waitlist. This can result in young people continuing to offend while waiting to access a service.

Policies and processes are getting in the way of tamariki, rangatahi and whānau receiving services and support that are available

Gateway assessments

In some cases we heard that, though services and supports are available and have capacity to support tamariki, rangatahi and whānau, there are barriers in the referral policies and eligibility criteria to access these services. For example, funding and referral for some services is specific to family group conferences (FGCs) as opposed to a hui a-whānau. However, as outlined earlier in this share back, there are delays in FGCs being held, putting tamariki and rangatahi waiting for an FGC at a disadvantage.

This includes tamariki and rangatahi with FGCs being prioritised for faster Gateway assessments. Without an FGC, the Oranga Tamariki hospital liaison told us that social workers can, with whānau consent, apply for a Gateway through the Child Health Centre. However, this is a more resource intensive and non-mainstream pathway which not all kaimahi may be aware of. Ultimately, without FGCs whānau can wait months or years in the public health system for a Gateway assessment – while the needs of their tamariki and rangatahi remain unidentified and unaddressed.

“There is no good options available for hui a-whānau because there is no funding attached to it. It is not official and we still have to go to through the FGC [family group conference]. Because of this process, it’s a hit and miss process, while if we go straight to FGC we can create a robust plan, and we could get funding for it.” – Oranga Tamariki site leader

Mahuru remand programme

Some NISS and Oranga Tamariki regional leaders shared concerns about changes to the referral and eligibility policy for the Mahuru remand programme. We heard Mahuru was originally intended to be a remand programme for rangatahi who live in Te Tai Tokerau, and who would join the programme immediately after their arrest and court appearance.

Despite NISS and Oranga Tamariki leaders telling us there is demand in the region for the Mahuru programme, referrals for the programme have been under its capacity. This availability, coupled with a lack of capacity in Tāmaki Makaurau youth justice services, has pushed NISS and Oranga Tamariki regional leaders to accept Mahuru referrals for rangatahi who whakapapa to the region but live in Tāmaki Makaurau. Oranga Tamariki regional leaders felt local rangatahi should be prioritised in Mahuru referrals. They were concerned that local rangatahi can miss out on local support and need to be moved to different sites or out of region, severing their connection to their whānau.

“Once they [rangatahi] are outside of our area, they have little connection with their whānau. The idea is Ngāpuhi kids stays in the area and live in an iwi home [Mahuru]. But that is not always the case.” – Oranga Tamariki regional leader

We heard that the majority of the rangatahi currently referred to the Mahuru programme are coming from youth justice residences or group homes in Tāmaki Makaurau. NISS and Oranga Tamariki regional leaders were concerned that the programme is also not intended to support rangatahi who have been in youth justice residences and come from a big city – these rangatahi can have more complex histories in their exposure to offending and interaction with the youth justice system.

“Now we are getting them [rangatahi] from residences and group homes, and they [Oranga Tamariki] call it a ‘step down’. Like, they have been in YJ [youth justice] residence and they are coming to us for a six week period to reintegrate them back into community, which wasn’t the initial objective of our programme. So we are getting kids who are institutionalised, whereas before we would get them beforehand. They all know each other from all the residences.” – Ngāpuhi Iwi Social Services kaimahi



Education

We also heard that many tamariki and rangatahi in group homes and non-whānau placements are not engaged in education. An Oranga Tamariki site leader told us Kia Puāwai will only accept group home and caregiver placement referrals for tamariki and rangatahi who are already enrolled at school. This is difficult when a child has been excluded from school due to disruptive behaviours as Oranga Tamariki kaimahi need to coordinate support with the Ministry of Education – which can take a long time. Meanwhile they cannot provide tamariki and rangatahi with a stable and secure living arrangement, which could help address some of the concerning behaviours they are showing.

A NISS kaimahi told us Mahuru kaimahi are helping rangatahi on the programme sit exams to gain educational credits, but Oranga Tamariki social workers are not enrolling rangatahi in Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu (Te Kura, previously known as The Correspondence School). Without rangatahi being enrolled, Mahuru kaimahi cannot record the educational credits rangatahi have earned from these exams.

There is a misunderstanding about who can give consent for tamariki and rangatahi to receive education and health services, sometimes delaying access

We heard from some caregivers, education leaders, and iwi services kaimahi that it is difficult for them to access education and health services for tamariki and rangatahi when a lack of information and slow communication makes it difficult to get the consent of their legal guardians. Caregivers told us that, unless it is a medical emergency, the process for confirming a health care appointment can be very frustrating and slow while they wait for whānau consent. This issue was highlighted in our Experiences of Care Reports, where sometimes caregivers and social workers are unclear as to when guardians must consent to health appointments or procedures. This remains an issue in Te Tai Tokerau.

“When we have to take her [rangatahi] to the doctor, we have to go through all these people. We have to go to CCS, who have to go to OT, who then have to get in touch with her mum. It takes so long to get an answer.” – caregiver

Some education leaders and an iwi service kaimahi noted that without guardian consent they cannot enrol tamariki and rangatahi in school, or it is more difficult. Seeking guardian consent also delays support to tamariki and rangatahi who are enrolled at school. One education leader specifically highlighted difficulty contacting guardians for consent when they are in prison, especially as Oranga Tamariki do not readily share that information with them. When consent to enrol and support tamariki in education is delayed, all kaimahi noted that it is the child who is negatively impacted. Without support a child will struggle to engage in class and can disrupt other tamariki.

“We need whānau consent. If there is no consent, we can’t work with the young person. This can be problematic, when they [caregiver] are not the birth parents or no legal authority to share information or to sign any referrals. I came across a child who is with a foster parent, the foster parent cannot sign off any document or any referral. Then we asked Oranga Tamariki and they also cannot give us permission either to refer the tamariki. This case goes around and around and while the child is sitting there waiting for the service to arrive ... It’s the children who suffer more than anyone else - and this affects the entire classroom, when the tamariki misbehaves, then other children in the class are affected.” – education kaimahi

Key theme: **Funding**

The new Oranga Tamariki financial approval process makes it difficult to access funding to support tamariki, rangatahi, whānau and caregivers

Most Oranga Tamariki kaimahi and leaders told us they felt an increasing need to justify and rationalise their spending because of financial constraints within the organisation. Some expressed concern about having memos and requests “knocked back” and the resulting delay to support for tamariki and whānau. We heard examples of Oranga Tamariki kaimahi having difficulty accessing funding for kai and petrol vouchers for whānau and caregivers, to support whānau visits, and for holiday programmes, activities and clothing for tamariki and rangatahi.

“Petrol vouchers were cut off few weeks ago ... [Oranga Tamariki] said no funding. I asked about helping with transport to visit his dad and was told to go to MSD [Ministry of Social Development] to get help.” – whānau

“It took four days to get a mother approved to see their baby. The manager was away, and their stand-in wanted rationale after rationale. They weren’t coming forth with the sign-off easily. After a lot of back and forth and being told no to different things they finally agreed to my original request.” – Oranga Tamariki kaimahi

“We need to prepare a memo for travel cost to refer cases with high needs, we need a memo on everything.” – Oranga Tamariki site leader

Ultimately, we heard that the Oranga Tamariki financial approval process is laborious and takes too long to get approval. This impacts the ability for Oranga Tamariki kaimahi to provide timely support to tamariki and whānau. A kaimahi told us that because of this, when supports are eventually approved they may no longer meet the needs of tamariki. We also heard from a couple of kaimahi that they must submit weekly requests for finance and provide forecasts every six months for hui ā-whānau funding requests. This is a cumbersome and unsuitable process for kaimahi as they cannot predict how often they will have a hui ā-whānau. Consequently, we heard that funding requests for hui-ā-whānau can be denied with social workers funding kai out of their own pocket.

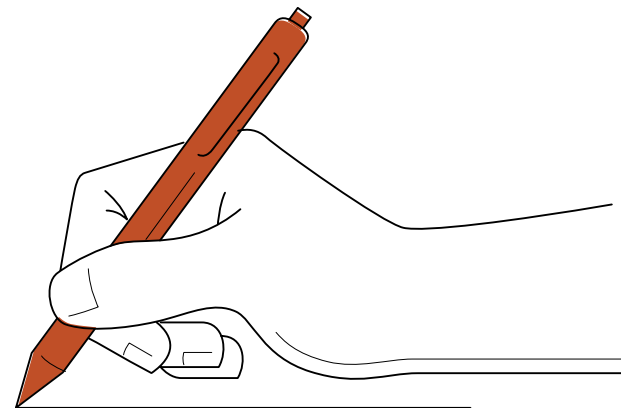
“It could be one or two weeks, and it takes too much physical work time. I get a quote, send it to my manager, who sends it to the site manager. I have to chase my manager up over and over to see what stage the approval is at. Hours wise, it is huge, which then takes time away from working with the kids.” – Oranga Tamariki kaimahi

Caregivers told us that delays in decision making about financial support impacts their ability to meet the needs of tamariki and rangatahi. We heard that it takes a long time to get approval for things, and for many caregivers, the delay is exacerbated due to the process of going through their supporting agency, who then must get approval from Oranga Tamariki. A few caregivers told us they work around this by paying out of pocket and putting in claims for reimbursement. We also heard from one caregiver that Oranga Tamariki did not pay for a young person's school fees and excursion costs, instead informing the caregiver that they would need to pay for this themselves and then be reimbursed.

We heard from Oranga Tamariki leaders at one site that they must provide a memo to the Oranga Tamariki Deputy Chief Executive 21 days in advance to approve travel expenses. We heard an example of the site working around submitting a memo and subsequent delays by using support from Senate Nursing Group staff to assist in a transition for a young person outside of the region. However, there was concern across site leadership that this does not meet the National Care Standard Regulations and social workers' obligations to support a young person transitioning between placements.

"In the National Care Standards, the social worker has the obligation to support the young person from transitioning from place to place and Senate Nursing Group is the quick fix. There is no transition required, the process is different and [contradicts National Care Standards]." – Oranga Tamariki site leader

"We have to put in a 21 days' notice for a travel memo – this is how the restructure has impacted us on the frontline, the memo process is so laborious - it requires Deputy Chief Executive's approval. The site manager has no approval [authority] at all." – Oranga Tamariki site leader



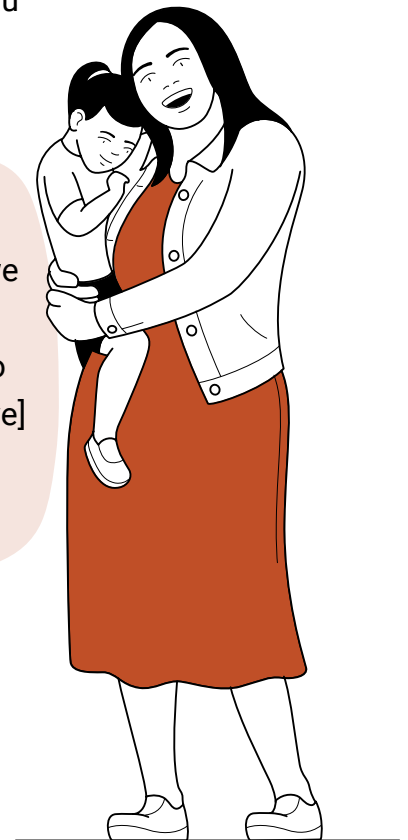
Funding constraints are impacting on connections between tamariki and rangatahi and their whānau

When we met with tamariki, rangatahi and whānau, we heard how important it was for tamariki and rangatahi to keep in contact with their whānau. For some, Oranga Tamariki and community services are supporting tamariki, rangatahi and whānau to keep those connections. However, we heard from caregivers that it can be difficult for tamariki and rangatahi to see their whānau – with the distance to travel and limited support from Oranga Tamariki some of the reasons why maintaining a connection with whānau has been challenging. We also heard this from whānau, with one whānau member telling us that whānau visits didn't seem to happen as it's "all to do with funding".

"I was taking girls to supervised access on Saturdays, taking them every week, it was exhausting. One of my friends told me about resource workers, the system didn't tell me. Some things are ok, but sometimes you have to do your own homework." – caregiver

A youth justice kaimahi shared that cuts to funding have meant it is more difficult to get financial approval for whānau visits for rangatahi in residences, and that alternative options, such as driving, are not always feasible for some whānau. Similarly, some Oranga Tamariki youth justice leaders said they are struggling to fund travel for whānau visits and, as with other funding requests, must provide a memo in advance to get approval for this, which is a "huge barrier" to maintaining whānau connections for tamariki outside of the region.

"We want them [whānau] to do the visit regularly, but we can't because we do not know where we get the money to cover the cost of travel. We need to get a memo for the CE [chief executive] to do that, that is a big barrier." – Oranga Tamariki youth justice leader



Funding cuts are impacting the ability of community organisations to deliver services and support to tamariki and rangatahi

We heard from Oranga Tamariki and some community organisations that funding cuts have resulted in a reduction in available services and supports in the region – including in transition support, disability services, youth justice intervention programmes and services recommended in Gateway assessments. For example, an Oranga Tamariki site leader from Kaikohe told us that while Gateway assessments can be done, the reduction in funding has made it difficult to implement Gateway recommendations. Similarly, a kaimahi from a Māori service said they do not have enough funding to support youth justice intervention programmes, which limits what they can offer to rangatahi who have offended.

“... A lot of that [funding] stops our kaimahi being able to do more stuff for our rangatahi ... If there was better funding, there would be better opportunities. Doors would open up for YJ [youth justice] boys.” – Māori service kaimahi

“Cutting contracts has a huge impact and there just aren’t the services around anymore.” – Oranga Tamariki kaimahi

“The effects of the loss of funding are that contracts and supports that once were there aren’t there now. There is no more fee for service, that impacts a lot, it means I can’t just go find someone to do something that is needed.” – Oranga Tamariki kaimahi

We heard from a couple of health kaimahi that there is already a lack of services in the region, and Oranga Tamariki cuts to community contracts and funding have exacerbated the issue. A couple of health kaimahi told us that they are stepping in to provide services and supports, despite not having the capacity to do so. Likewise, we heard from an NGO that Oranga Tamariki contract cuts have left gaps in what services are available, and as a result are being asked to step in and support with other mahi such as mentoring or coaching.

“A lot of these organisations that are being reduced are funded by OT [Oranga Tamariki] and this seems to be the first contracts OT [Oranga Tamariki] defunds when they are needing to cut costs. Which then causes things to be stretched.” – health kaimahi

“All the programmes got dropped in Kaitiāia. No explanations or anything just dropped, and nothing replaced them. There is this awkward silence for someone to pick up the slack ... the social workers start asking is there anything else you can do because their [tamariki or rangatahi] funding has gone.” – NGO kaimahi

A couple of whānau and rangatahi shared the impact of funding cuts on them. A whānau member told us that their child was unexpectedly returned to their care because of service funding cuts. Another whānau member said a court-ordered supported bail programme that their rangatahi was referred to lost its funding and as a result there was no other option for their rangatahi. Likewise, a rangatahi told us that they were unable to access therapy because Oranga Tamariki and the service had no funding.

“[Rangatahi] was a in facility and when released he was referred to Tokotoko [supported bail service], then just one day they didn't show up. They just bailed cos they didn't get funding for the next round even though the judge had ordered him to be on the supported bail programme. So there was no more options, so it was on me to keep him occupied. Then he reoffends again, then you get all this wraparound after he offends.” – whānau

We also heard from some community professionals that it is more difficult to get funding from Oranga Tamariki. Kaimahi and leaders from an NGO told us that they must apply days in advance for funding, and delays in getting approval can result in needs not being met swiftly enough and tamariki behaviour escalating. Similarly, we heard from a couple of community professionals that Oranga Tamariki denies funding when they make requests to support tamariki and whānau needs, such as accessing housing or therapeutic support.

“... If it's a housing issue ... then I will advocate for a cabin and I will get a 'no funding' reply. Or the policies will change, their [whānau] basic need for a home is met with 'we can't pay for that' by Oranga Tamariki. It's a real problem and I have threatened to go to the CE Oranga Tamariki about it. Decisions made by government impact kids directly, they [tamariki] would get these things if they were at home but they don't get it in care of Oranga Tamariki.” – community professional

Key theme: **Working holistically with tamariki, rangatahi and whānau**

Putting rangatahi in the centre, and working alongside whānau, makes them feel supported and reduces reoffending

Some rangatahi noted organisations in the region, including Oranga Tamariki and Māori and iwi services, put them in the centre of their plan. This made rangatahi feel supported and cared for as well as having a voice in their plan. Many rangatahi also told us they felt seen and had their needs met, giving them a new sense of direction. We heard from whānau and rangatahi that these services engaged with and supported the whole whānau.

“I was recognised [as a person]. I don’t really know I was doing bad, until someone told me from the course, I started to open my eyes.” – rangatahi

“Pretty much what ever support there is. Not only checking on me, but also checking on my kids, with my family, how they are.” – rangatahi

“Yeah hard, I’ve lasted this long [three weeks] here in the community without reoffending.” – rangatahi

Some kaimahi from Oranga Tamariki and community organisations spoke highly of focusing on whānau needs and the home environment, as they all approach their work with the goal of rangatahi being able to one day return home.

“I talk to whānau even though the rangatahi are 18. I talk to the mother and the father and say is it alright if I take such and such and they say yeah. I’ve done it before, and the parent will say ‘she’s 18 why you are you asking me’ but at least I asked first, and now I know your whakaaro.” – iwi service kaimahi

“I think Waitomo saved us. We kind of just missed out from going through to Oranga Tamariki. If he [participant] didn’t go to jail and I didn’t go here [Māori service] I think the kids would’ve been gone to Oranga Tamariki. But since we have attended the programme here at [Māori service] it’s been good for us.” – whānau

“They have social workers here. If they [kids] want to talk to anybody, they can talk to the social worker. They help me with kai and a place for them [kids] to stay and myself. They helped – have been a huge help to be honest.” – whānau

“Manaakitanga, valuing those tamariki and nurturing their potential. With the right conditions they [tamariki] can become the best they can be. It’s important to listen to them because something good can come from doing this.” – Oranga Tamariki kaimahi

Some rangatahi and whānau spoke positively of the strong te ao Māori approach of many of these organisations. We heard this supported them to engage with their plans in a way that reflected their values and made the experience more enriching for them.

“I reckon, it’s around taking the culture seriously. The tikanga. They make you grounded, the spiritual side of that.” – rangatahi

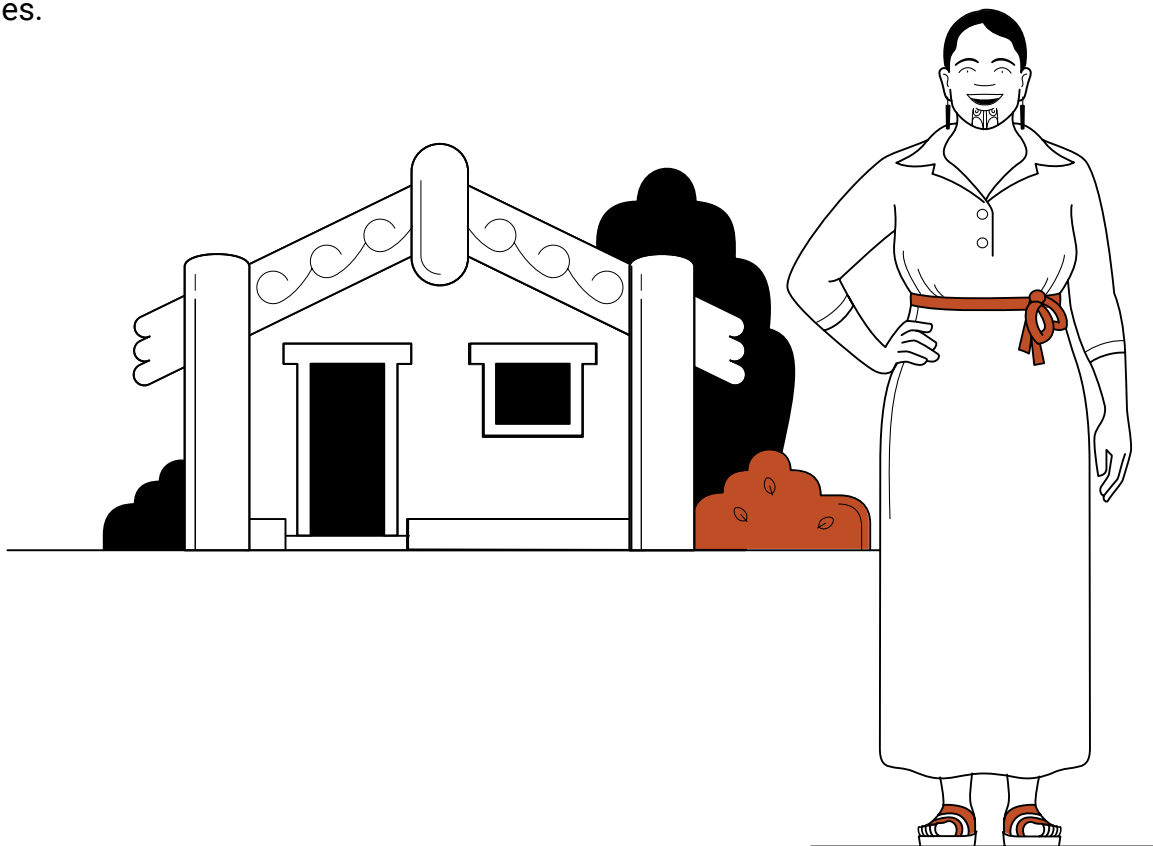
“It [te ao Māori approach] feels humbling, makes me more grounded. Gives me strength.” – whānau

Some Oranga Tamariki kaimahi and a couple of NGOs told us they have been increasing their cultural competency, but there is still a need for training and a te ao Māori focus to policy and practice. For example, we heard from an Oranga Tamariki kaimahi that there is a reliance on kaimahi Māori to guide and uphold competency in te ao Māori. In contrast, Māori and iwi services told us they embed te ao Māori throughout governance, leadership, and practice frameworks to ensure positive and enriching experiences for tamariki and whānau Māori.



Other things we heard:

- We heard that the Fast Track programme is not fit for purpose in the region as it was implemented at the national level without input from those locally, including those on the ground. We also heard that it is has been improperly resourced and there is a lack of collaboration from some agencies. A police Youth Aid leader told us in its current form Fast Track can impact on rangatahi by delaying court processes.
- Te Ao Mārama is a whānau centred programme led by local iwi in the region to support whānau around the court system and its processes. The initiative has helped judges explain court processes and outcomes to whānau more clearly, increasing their understanding. Lawyer for Child and VOYCE spoke positively of the programme and how it has enabled whānau to feel heard.





**Aroturuki
Tamariki** | Independent
Children's Monitor

aroturuki.govt.nz