

Response to Independent External Rapid Review into Secure Residences & a Sample of Community Homes



Chief Executive's Foreword

Ko te mihi tuatahi ki te Matua kore, nāna nei nga mea katoa

Ka mihi nei ki o tātau tini aitua

Ka ki hoki, ko rātau te hunga mate ki te hunga mate

Ka hoki mai ki a tātau te hunga ora

No reira, Tēnā koutou, Tēnā koutou, Tēnā tātau koutou

After being informed of two serious allegations involving staff and young people in residences, I asked former Police Commissioner Mike Bush to join Oranga Tamariki to temporarily lead our Youth Justice and Care and Protection residences, and to provide me with assurance that tamariki, rangatahi and our kaimahi are safe and the community can have confidence that we are doing the job we need to be doing.

Mr Bush commissioned a small independent team to undertake a rapid review of our residences and some of our Oranga Tamariki-run community homes. They were supported in this work by Shannon Pakura, a leader in the Social Work profession and member of the Oranga Tamariki Ministerial Advisory Board.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the team for preparing the report and thank all of those who have provided information to support the review. I would also like to acknowledge all of those staff who come to work every day and focus on doing the best for the Tamariki and rangatahi they care for.

Most importantly, I want to acknowledge the rangatahi and tamariki who have been or continue to be cared for in our residences. You deserve the very best of our care and support. The review reinforces the voices of many rangatahi who have called for change, who have asked to be understood in the context of their whakapapa and who have bravely shared their own experiences so that things can be different. My leadership team and I are committed to making sure your voices are at the centre of how we respond, both now and into the future.

The review provides me with valuable insight on what is needed to ensure that my expectation of all Oranga Tamariki facilities being safe, supportive, and rehabilitative places for New Zealand's most vulnerable young people is realised; this is non-negotiable.

I am confident in the immediate changes we have made to strengthen safety and wellbeing in our residences and remain committed to the significant changes ahead.

It is also abundantly clear to us that there is an urgent need to ensure our approach to residences and group homes is fully integrated within the organisation's change programme. The proposed roadmap set out in the review offers a logical approach to how this can be achieved. As well as continuing to lead the residence group until



December 2023, I have asked Mike Bush to stay on in a governance capacity and Chair the Transformation Governance Group to support the Leadership team through this next critical phase of change into 2024.

I also acknowledge the importance of continued transparency about how Oranga Tamariki is responding to the matters identified in this review. I am committed to reporting publicly in more detail on the further actions we will be taking once my leadership team and I have had the opportunity work with Mr Bush to integrate these insights into our ongoing planning.



Chappie Te Kani
Chief Executive Oranga Tamariki

Response to the report

We have already taken action to improve the safety of tamariki, rangatahi and kaimahi in our residences

The report confirms our view that the vast majority of staff and leaders in our residences and group homes are focused on doing their best for the tamariki and rangatahi they care for. However, it also makes clear that there are conditions within these environments that have enabled unacceptable and harmful behaviours towards both rangatahi and staff to occur in some cases.

Their safety has remained a top area of focus for the Oranga Tamariki leadership team since announcing the review and we have not awaited its completion to take action. We have already substantially strengthened leadership, directed considerable additional resources and made a range of immediate improvements to our residences. These actions provide a firm foundation for the broader changes that the review identifies are required.

When we announced this review, we made it clear that it was likely that further allegations and concerns about tamariki and rangatahi may come to light as a result. Creating an environment where this was able to occur was an important outcome of the review itself. Indeed, as a leadership team we encouraged this by establishing a reporting line to make it easier for any staff to come forward with concerns and standing up an Incident Management Team (IMT) to ensure that we were able to respond to such concerns in real time.

As of 19 September 2023, the report line had received 46 complaints or allegations involving staff potentially causing harm to young people in care. These complaints include inappropriate language, supplying contraband, and more serious allegations of physical and sexual assault, all of which are unacceptable. Some of the complaints are historic dating back to 2015; 28 of the allegations have been referred to Police for investigation, with the remainder being progressed as employment matters.

We have continued to work with Police to investigate the most serious of these allegations, including the two incidents of sexually inappropriate behaviour that led to the commissioning of the review. We have worked closely with the rangatahi involved and their whānau to ensure they are receiving the support they need.

Twenty-two kaimahi have been removed from our residences since 1 June 2023. There have since been three staff members charged by the New Zealand Police for offences under the Crimes Act 1961. Whilst investigations into individual staff conduct are ongoing, we have also commissioned an independent investigation by an experienced solicitor external to Oranga Tamariki to ensure our responses to these incidents are sufficiently robust.

Since the review was announced, our residences are now operating with improved staffing levels, rostering and better screening and vetting of new employees. We have taken steps to rapidly develop standard operating procedures for residences that will,



in the short-term, provide consistent approaches to practice while longer term suggestions are incorporated. Infrastructure and equipment changes have occurred at pace to improve the safety and the overall environment of care within some of the residential settings.

Additional actions taken since the announcement of the review include:

- Adding additional leadership with substantial social work experience to have day to day oversight of the Residences and Homes.
- Establishing a Triage Panel of leaders from key areas of the organisation to support assessment and provide oversight and assurance of the allegations and complaints received.
- Addressing remediation and infrastructure work to fix property issues in the residences. This includes addressing the damage from various rooftop incidents, commencing a programme of work to upgrade units, and fixing all CCTV issues. In the course of all remediation and repairs, we have also sought further opportunities to strengthen and improve the physical environment.
- Making immediate changes to vetting of staff, recruitment and provided additional staff directly into residences.
- Actively reviewing drug and alcohol policies and in the short term introduced drug and alcohol questions into recruitment for screening, interviews and reference checks.
- Piloting new ways for rangatahi to lodge a grievance (in three residences)
- Reviewing health and safety settings for residences and considering necessary enhancements for the environment with graduated responses (e.g. PPE, soft furnishings)
- Trialling 100 new radios at Te Puna Wai. New radios mean kaimahi working in residences can instantly communicate with each other, supporting a safe operational environment, keeping kaimahi safe and rangatahi protected.
- Deploying 280 new shared laptops into residences to support kaimahi in their work as it is often difficult for kaimahi to get time in front of a computer.
- Deploying new procedures, processes and training for medications and contraband and new processes and guidance to identify and investigate significant incidents.

The review provides a roadmap for residences and the group homes attached to them which aligns to the direction of change Oranga Tamariki has underway

There are no recommendations in the review, rather a set of insights about how residences and associated group homes are currently operating and suggestions on how Oranga Tamariki should work to consider the changes needed. Helpfully, the review sets out a proposed roadmap of change from current state to future state covering areas such as workforce and culture, leadership and governance, vision and strategy, child and staff experience and finally resources and facilities. The roadmap covers proposed areas of activity over the next three years. We accept the review high-level insights and we are already working to integrate the proposed solutions into our existing change programme.



- In particular, there are a range of insights within the report which we recognise to be priority areas of focus and where we have a programme of work underway. These areas of focus include: Placement pressure, mixing of cohorts and lack of effective programmes are placing the achievement of safe and effective outcomes for rangatahi at risk
- There is a misalignment between the complex and high needs of the tamariki and rangatahi being cared for, the workforce in place to care for them and the clarity, structures and support needed to provide the required level of care
- There is a need to further strengthen health and safety culture, accountability and reporting within residences. Reporting and response systems for both staff and rangatahi need to be easier to access, more timely and more effective in responding to the issues raised
- The Oranga Tamariki values should be translated into specific behaviours, for which all residence staff and managers are held to account through more rigorous performance management and coaching systems
- There is a need to lift the level of leadership expertise (especially in first line leadership roles) within these environments through increased investment in induction, professional development, coaching and leadership development
- Standard Operating Procedures need to reflect best practice rather than reinforcing how things are currently done and supporting tools, systems and processes need to be modernised and aligned
- The secure residences are tired assets that are not conducive to securing good therapeutic outcomes for young people and there is a need to better align the property portfolio to enable the service model needed.

Whilst several of the immediate actions we have already taken are beginning to address these issues, we recognise there is substantially more work to be done.

The review includes a clear narrative of Oranga Tamariki facing 'review fatigue' and comments on the impact of the various reviews, recommendations, and scrutiny that Oranga Tamariki has been under for a sustained period. As a result, the review notes staff continue to be impacted by change which they experience as fragmented, overwhelming and which they find difficult to connect to a longer-term vision or plan.

The review makes it clear that changes within residences and associated group homes cannot be undertaken in isolation from the rest of our organisation. The prolonged isolation and lack of integration of residences and group homes within the organisation's wider purpose, strategy, operating model, and workforce is identified as a fundamental root cause of many of the challenges experienced in these environments. It recommends a fundamental reset of the role, vision and purpose of our residences and group homes and an integrated change programme.

The review further reinforces the findings of the Ministerial Advisory Board's Report Te Kahu Aroha. Oranga Tamariki is already making significant shifts across a broad range of the domains signalled in the review through the Future Direction Plan endorsed by Cabinet. More recently we have been focused on building on this first set of shifts towards a more targeted and integrated transformation plan for the organisation as a whole. To take this work forward we have recently appointed a Deputy Chief Executive Transformation who will work collaboratively with the wider leadership team to ensure delivery. Significant progress has been made on refining



our whole of organisation strategy, vision and purpose. Alongside this work, we are continuing to consolidate and strengthen our approach to investment, partnership, workforce, and service delivery.

Importantly this review, alongside others, highlights the complex and multi-dimensional needs of the young people who require care in these settings, noting that often these young people have not had these needs met earlier in their lives, when harm could have been prevented and that Oranga Tamariki becomes an agency of last resort. Whilst the Oranga Tamariki Action Plan has seen collaboration between agencies in the children's system begin to increase, the review makes it clear there is a considerable way to go to ensure the system as a whole is working together to meet, in particular, the health, education and disability related needs of these young people. This report will be shared with Chief Executives across the Children's System in the expectation that they will continue to explore how they can improve service responses to these rangatahi.

The Oranga Tamariki leadership team are committed to ensuring the insights and suggestions from this review and previous reviews inform the change programme we have underway.

