OPERATION AND EXPERIENCE

Formative evaluation of the *Transition from Care to Independence Service*

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Citation guidance:

This report can be referenced as Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre. (2018). Operation and experience: Formative evaluation of the Transition from Care to Independence Service. Wellington, New Zealand: Liston-Lloyd, M.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

This report details aggregate findings from a formative evaluation of two Auckland-based Transition from Care to Independence (TCI) services – Launch and Ka Awatea. The original impetus for this evaluation was the Modernising Child, Youth and Family Expert Panel Final Report, which highlighted a need to better support young people transitioning from statutory care to independent living. This report, along with further work from the Investing in Children Programme, identified these specialist TCI services as pockets of apparent good practice, which have the potential to inform the design of a national transition support service.

As an input to future service design work, this evaluation was designed to better understand how TCI services are operating on-the-ground, including key success factors and any challenges faced. The evaluation also sought to understand how young people experience the service and any outcomes they report, along with gathering feedback from others involved in its delivery. A cross section of people involved in existing TCI services were interviewed, including: 15 young people, 10 staff members, six social workers, and two key stakeholders from within Oranga Tamariki.

Key findings from the evaluation are detailed below. These findings are primarily descriptive, and mirror a young person's pathway into, through, and out of, the TCI service.

How young people get involved

Young people are referred to the TCI service by social workers, who consider a range of factors when making this decision

Social workers will usually refer young people who:

- have a permanency goal of Transition to Independence
- lack a network of natural supports, including a parent who is able to provide safe and appropriate care
- may benefit from a community-based service to build living skills and resilience
- are in an unsafe or unstable living situation with whānau.

Social workers will not usually refer young people who:

- have a stable living situation and strong support network
- are highly functioning and do not require on-going support
- are not motivated to engage with the service
- are able to access specialist support within the adult disability system.

The decision to refer a young person includes a degree of discretion, with feedback suggesting that practice can vary across social workers, or be influenced by resource constraints. For example, some social workers stated that the existence of limited whānau support may be used to justify not referring a young person to TCI.

Social workers stated that they often consulted with peers, supervisors and site managers when considering whether to refer a young person. Advice around eligibility may also be sought from Regional Office members of a TCI Reference Group. The ability to take this consultative approach was highly valued by social workers, and may be associated with more consistent and transparent referral decision-making.

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After the social worker's decision has been made, young people progress through a staged referral process

After deciding to refer a young person to the TCI service, the social worker completes a request for assessment form, which outlines key background information and initial content relating to a young person's goals, or what they hope to achieve through engaging with the service.

This request for assessment is triaged at the Auckland Regional Office by a TCI Reference Group member. Here, young people closer to the age at which statutory care orders lapse, or those with high needs, have their assessment prioritised.

TCI workers then undertake a needs assessment for each referral, which outlines a holistic range of information (e.g. background, living situation, wellbeing, connections), along with a young person's goals and the characteristics of their preferred TCI worker. The evaluation found:

- Young people often referred to the needs assessments as an 'interview', which they had to pass in order to work with TCI.
- While social workers are expected to discuss participation prior to referral, for some young people, the needs assessment was their first exposure to the service, and they may not be motivated to engage.
- From a practical perspective, needs assessments are often difficult to organise.
- Social workers thought that needs assessments completed by TCI workers were more youth-centred and impartial.

Completed needs assessments are considered by the TCI Reference Group, with includes Regional Office staff and site managers, representatives from both TCI providers, and practice experts. The majority of young people are accepted onto the service. Exceptions are if a young person has moved out of Auckland, or the group agrees they already have access to appropriate support. The Reference Group also guides decisions around which TCI advisor a young person works with.

Overall, the referral process was thought to be well-functioning, however, a number of key challenges were identified

Interviews with TCI workers highlighted a perception that social workers do not always refer young people to the service for the 'right' reasons:

- TCI staff noted social workers do not consistently make proactive referrals, and tend to perceive the service as 'the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff'.
- Staff noted social workers may perceive that a referral to the service absolves their responsibility for a young person's welfare, particularly around accommodation.

Discussion with TCI workers revealed a perception that young people with complex needs, including foetal alcohol syndrome and high levels of disability, are increasingly referred to the service. Staff highlighted the limitations of the service for these young people, noting TCI does not have the capacity to provide specialist clinical support.

TCI staff cited the importance of receiving comprehensive information about a young person prior to engagement, and noted variability in the quality and quantity of what is received. Staff had mixed

feedback on the potential benefit of accessing CYRAS[1], stating that while it could reduce reliance on social workers providing relevant information, it may bias how TCI workers approach young people.

The existence of long waiting lists, which result from providers having limited capacity to undertake assessments and accept new referrals, was identified as a key challenge facing the service. Timeliness issues have a number of implications:

- Young people lose their motivation/enthusiasm to engage.
- Young people move out of Auckland (where the service is not available) or the service cannot contact them.
- Young people are matched with TCI workers on the basis of availability, rather than suitability.
- TCI staff cannot publicise or discuss the service with social workers, as the additional demand this generates cannot be met.

Feedback about the role of the TCI Reference Group was mixed. Some participants stated that the Reference Group element of the referral process added complexity, exacerbated timeliness issues, and was redundant for some young people. Positive perceptions included the relationship between collective decision-making and transparency/consistency, the importance of the Reference Group as a practice forum, and the value of having a means of escalating issues relating to local sites.

What the support looks like

The TCI service supports young people by taking a 'youth-led' approach

In the context of TCI, 'youth-led' means work is orientated around a young person's individual goals, with the service also giving them the autonomy to decide what these goals are. This approach was seen as distinct from how social workers approach young people, in that it is more responsive, creative and flexible, and is not restricted by the need to operate within a statutory environment.

The service provides young people with a range of practical support

This support includes:

- Collaboratively developing a Transition Plan, which evolves over time, and supports young people to identify and achieve goals.
- Offering young people tangible forms of support (e.g. driver's licence, clothing, bank account, transport), which provides a foundation for growing their independence and encourages broader engagement with the service.
- Supporting young people in crisis situations (e.g. self-harm or suicide ideation) and meeting their immediate safety needs, including ensuring access to nutrition.
- Facilitating access to accommodation. Despite its importance for young people's wellbeing, finding safe and stable housing was identified as a key challenge for the service.
- Supporting young people to identify and engage with community-based supports (e.g. education, health services, counselling), or directly procuring these services.

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[1] CYRAS is Oranga Tamariki's main case management system. It provides for all Care and Protection, Youth Justice, Residential and Adoption Services (CYRAS) task recording requirements.

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- Providing practical support to young people wanting to explore their sense of identity, particularly as it relates to culture and whakapapa. This work was identified as an area of potential improvement for the service.
- Organising group work and giving young people the opportunity to engage in collective activities. This form of practical support was seen to have a number of positive implications for young people, and was highly valued.

TCI staff work to establish supportive, positive and trusting relationships with young people

Along with providing practical forms of support, TCI staff work with young people to establish and build a strong relationship. This process is often informal and occurs over the long-term. The persistence and attitude of TCI staff were identified as key success factors within the relationship-building process. Important characteristics for TCI staff included being: honest, relaxed, non-judgemental, empathetic and reliable.

Providing young people with relationship-based support is a fundamental component of the service

This support includes:

- Allowing young people to access unconditional, on-going, and therapeutic support, which is akin to having a family member available. This support was highly valued by young people.
- Providing young people with mentoring support, which helps them learn from past experiences and understand the consequences of their behaviour.
- Working with young people to identify and develop a network of natural supports (e.g. with whānau, peers, or other members of the community). Despite the importance of having sustainable relationships outside of TCI for young peoples' wellbeing, engagement within the community – and particularly with whānau – was identified as a potential area of improvement for the service.

A number of factors that help or hinder the delivery of the TCI service were identified

Factors that help the TCI service include:

- Having a framework or model to guide practice.
- Staff working autonomously and taking a creative approach when engaging with young people.
- Mobile working within the community.
- Building relationships with community-based NGOs.
- Regular access to training, supervision and clinical support.
- A positive and supportive team culture.
- Collaboration between TCI staff and social workers.
- The long duration of the service (in some cases, up to five years).
- The quality, motivation, and skill-set of TCI workers.

Factors that hinder the TCI service include:

- Limited funding and/or a lack of clarity around funding sources.
- High staff turnover rates (often associated with low pay and a lack of advancement opportunities).
- Caseloads that exceed optimum rates.

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- Challenges accessing Work and Income support for young people.
- Limited collaboration between TCI providers.
- Poor communication from social workers.
- Limited engagement between young people and social workers, and a lack of on-going support from Oranga Tamariki.
- Young people being referred to the service at an older age, which limits the duration of their engagement with the service.

Moving to independence

Young people exit from the service in different ways

Engagement in the TCI service is voluntary, and young people can exit from the service at any time. The evaluation found that young people may cycle through periods of disengagement and reengagement, and that the ability to take this approach was highly valued.

TCI staff and young people work through a staged exit process, which is implemented at the earliest opportunity (ideally, up to a year prior to exit). Given the duration and intensity of the service, and the relationship between a young person and their TCI worker, this staged approach was seen as essential to a successful transition.

The formal exit policy for the TCI service states that young people should be discharged at age 20. While this approach is appropriate in many cases, the evaluation found that the service continues to support some young people post-20, and that a longer service duration was favoured by many participants.

'Success' within the service was identified as variable and subjective

TCI staff stated that 'success' was a subjective notion, which must acknowledge each young person's individual context and goals, and be framed as progress along a pathway, rather than as an objective state. Staff argued that this conception of success was difficult to measure, and that some outcomes (e.g. teenage parenthood) were often wrongly assumed as inherently negative.

Young people defined 'independence' primarily as self-sufficiency, and identified a number of outcomes they wished to achieve

Young people's reflections on 'independence' emphasised the idea of being able to stand on your own two feet. While young people commonly stated that they would still accept support, not having to rely on other people was seen as a key aspect of achieving independence.

Young people identified a number of outcomes they hoped to achieve, or had already achieved, through their involvement in the TCI service. These outcomes related to: budgeting, accommodation, employment, having a driver's license, personal hygiene, education attendance, and nutrition. Young people also often identified a specific career-related goal, which provided motivation as they moved towards independence.

Conclusion and recommendations

Overall, feedback on the TCI service was generally positive

Young people had consistently positive feedback on the service, stating they enjoyed it and would not change anything. Young people credited TCI with supporting them to build independent living skills, and many stated it had made a huge difference in their life.

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Feedback from TCI staff was universally positive, with workers arguing the current service had real value, and all young people should be provided with support throughout the transition period.

The majority of social workers had a positive impression of the service, describing the support provided as of a high standard. Some social workers had more negative perceptions, stating they did not understand how the service operated or the nature of the support provided to young people.

Inconsistent understandings of the service's activities and intent were noted across TCI providers and social workers. These varied interpretations may contribute to differing impressions of the service's overall effectiveness.

The evaluation identified several recommendations for future service design work

This evaluation found that existing TCI services are considered well-functioning and effective, and may provide an appropriate basis for a national transition support model. However, future service design work should consider the following recommendations.

Suggested improvements to the referral process

- Improve the consistency of social worker referral decision-making, including through exploring the potential for universal referral.
- Ensure all young people are given appropriate and consistent information throughout the referral process.
- Improve the timeliness of the referral process.
- Review the status of the TCI Reference Group as a decision-making body.

Suggested improvements to how young people are supported by the TCI service

- Improve the support offered to young people with high clinical needs.
- Explore options for enhancing accommodation support.
- Establish and/or strengthen partnerships between iwi and TCI providers.
- Recognise the importance of group work and activities, and ensure this support is adequately funded.
- Improve work to identify and establish young peoples' networks of natural support.
- Introduce greater flexibility around the age young people exit from the service.

Suggested improvements for supporting the delivery of the TCI service

- Update contracting arrangements to reflect the relationship-based nature of the service.
- Empower TCI staff to better support the needs and stability of young peoples' whānau.
- Consider how to recruit and retain effective front-line staff.
- Consider introducing a set of principles to guide practice and service delivery.
- Ensure performance monitoring accounts for subjective interpretations of success.

Recommendations for improving collaboration between Oranga Tamariki and TCI providers

- Establish a shared understanding of how the service is intended to support young people.
- Clarify the on-going engagement of social workers after referring to the service.

INTRODUCTION

Overview

The Modernising Child, Youth and Family Expert Panel highlighted a need to better support young people transitioning from statutory care

In 2015, the Minister for Social Development established an Expert Panel, tasked with reviewing the existing Child, Youth and Family (hereafter, Oranga Tamariki[2]) operating model, and providing a blue-print for a modernised care and protection system. In their final report, the Panel set out the design of a new operating model based on five core service areas, including specialist transition support[3]. These services support care-experienced youth to grow into flourishing adults, and have the potential to reduce the high rates of adverse outcomes often experienced in early adulthood.

Two specialist transition support services were identified as existing pockets of good practice, which have the potential to inform future service design

While the Panel's Final Report recognised major limitations in the transition support currently provided to care leavers, individual pockets of apparent good practice were identified. In particular, the report acknowledged two specialist Auckland-based transition services, which were seen to build effective relationships with young people, and successfully link them with a range of supports. The Investing in Children Programme, who were tasked with implementing the report's recommendations, see these existing services as 'bright spots'[4], which have the potential to inform the design of a national transition support service.

This evaluation is designed to better understand how these services are operating on-the-ground, along with the experiences of young people and others involved in its delivery

As an input to future service design work, this formative evaluation provides an account of the operation and experience of existing transition support services. The evaluation was designed to better understand how the services are operating on-the-ground, including key success factors and any challenges faced. The evaluation also sought to understand how young people experience the service and any outcomes they report, along with gathering feedback from others involved in its delivery.

This report presents findings from interviews with young people, staff members from existing transition services, social workers, and other key stakeholders

A qualitative approach, involving a total of 33 semi-structured interviews, was used to achieve key evaluation goals. A cross section of people involved in the existing transition services were interviewed, including:

- *Fifteen young people*, of which 11 were currently involved in the service, and four were no longer formally engaged.

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[2] From 1 April 2017, Child, Youth and Family was established as an independent ministry titled the Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki.

[3] For more information, see https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/investing-in-children/investing-in-children-report.pdf.

[4] For more information, see the IIC Service Design Approach and Plan (unpublished internal document).

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- *Ten staff members* from both NGO organisations delivering the service, including seven frontline workers, and three involved in a management and practice leader capacity.
- *Six social workers* from three Auckland Oranga Tamariki sites, including two social workers, three senior practitioners, and one practice leader.
- *Two key stakeholders* from the Oranga Tamariki Auckland Regional Office and National Office.

Interviews were undertaken by a team of three evaluators, including two Oranga Tamariki staff, and one external evaluator brought on to support the project. Twenty-two face-to-face interviews were conducted within a core fieldwork period in mid-April 2017, while the remaining 11 interviews were conducted throughout April and May (10 via telephone and one in person). For more information on the evaluation methodology, see Appendix One.

This evaluation does not address the extent to which transition services improve young peoples' outcomes

As stated, this evaluation is intended to inform future service design, through better understanding the operation of existing transition support services, and the experiences of those involved in their delivery. Given this focus, the evaluation was not intended to address questions of impact; i.e., the extent to which transition services make a difference to young peoples' outcomes[5]. Rather than taking this approach, the report has a primarily descriptive focus, which privileges the interpretations, feedback, and perspectives of young people, social workers, and NGO staff. For a discussion of additional limitations associated with the evaluation, see Appendix One.

TCI service brief description

The transition support services identified in the Expert Panel report are provided through the Oranga Tamariki initiative Transition from Care to Independence (TCI). These existing TCI services are delivered by two Auckland-based NGOs, Dingwall Trust and Youth Horizons Trust, with services called Launch and Ka Awatea respectively. These TCI services were established as a pilot in 2004, and have since become part of the regular service offering within the Auckland region. The service is aimed at young people aged between 15 and 20 who are, or have been, in out-of-home care.

The TCI services were established in response to a review highlighting the need to support young people transitioning from care to adulthood. The implementation of the TCI service also recognised the challenges young people face throughout the transition period - including experiencing the impact of trauma and abuse, a lack of whānau[6] or community support, and limited independent living skills – along with the risk they will go on to experience poor long-term outcomes across their lifetime.

Both TCI services have a core strategy of supporting young people before, during, and after their transition from care. The TCI services access two core sources of funding when working towards this objective: Transition and Aftercare Programme and Services (TAPS) funding and a Discharge Grant. TAPS funding is allocated to each young person, and can be used to directly purchase a range of discretionary supports. Discharge Grants, which are used to purchase essential items for independent

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[5] The Treasury is currently undertaking a related research project through the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI). This project will examine the descriptive profile of TCI participants and any impact on outcomes associated with the service. It is anticipated that this work will be published in 2018.

[6] In the context of this report, whānau refers to families/whānau.

living, comprise a total of $1,500 and are paid as a lump sum when a young person is discharged from statutory care[7].

An intervention logic developed as part of the evaluation identified the following key activities within the TCI service: completion of a needs assessment, which outlines key introductory information about a young person; a goal setting process conducted through the development of a Transition Plan; one-to-one support provided through a Personal Advisor or Kai Atawhai; and, facilitating access to those services required to support young peoples' needs.

Intervention logic models for both providers are included in Appendix Two.

Report structure

This report discusses:

- The referral process for the TCI service, including criteria around decision-making and key challenges.
- How the service operates on-the-ground, key success factors, and issues facilitating or hindering effective delivery.
- Young peoples' exit from the service, and the outcomes they hope to achieve.
- Overall impressions of the TCI service, along with recommendations for future service design.

While the TCI service is delivered by two providers, throughout this report, evaluation findings are reported on an aggregate basis. The decision to take this approach reflects the fact that no substantive differences between providers were identified; that is, participants' feedback regarding how the service operates, and their experience of it, was largely consistent. However, it is important to note that this reporting approach is not intended to undermine the individual philosophy or unique value of each provider.

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[7] For more information on TCI funding sources, see https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/service-guidelines/transition-care-to-independence.html.

HOW YOUNG PEOPLE GET INVOLVED

This section outlines how young people come to be involved in the TCI service. The section follows the basic chronology of a young person's pathway to engagement with TCI, beginning with referral by a social worker, then assessment and consideration by the TCI Reference Group, and finally, initial engagement with the service. The section also outlines key considerations for those involved in the referral process, along with a number of challenges that lessen its effectiveness, and potentially that of the service as a whole.

Referral process

Social workers consider a range of formal and informal factors, primarily relating to living situation and access to support, when deciding whether to refer a young person to TCI

A young person's entry to the TCI service is governed by a range of formal and more informal criteria. In the first instance, the decision to refer a young person is premised on their having a permanency goal of 'Transition to Independence'[8]. This care goal indicates that a young person cannot safely return home, and has not been placed in a permanent non-whānau care arrangement. As one social worker noted:

> One of the criteria for me is that this is a young person who's… care goal…is transition to independence. So, out of the care goals there's no return home possible, there's no whānau care available. So it's mainly the kids that are in our care and in non-kin placement.

In most cases, a goal of Transition to Independence indicates that a young person lacks a network of natural supports, including a parent who is able to provide safe and appropriate care. This deficiency of community-based supports is a primary criterion within referral decision-making. In these instances, the young person is unable to access the natural supports normally required to guide their transition to young adulthood, and therefore, the provision of a TCI service is deemed appropriate:

> I think, for me, support is a major one. I think the less support they have…in the community or without us [Oranga Tamariki], the more I would need to see somebody else in there to pick up all of those things.

Given this lack of access to natural supports, social workers spoke about the importance of a service able to support young people to establish living skills and resilience. The belief that TCI could supplement a young person's transition to independence, through building these skills, is a further factor motivating referral decisions. A key success factor associated with the service was the statement that it 'was not CYF'; social workers believe that young people will be more receptive to a service that sits outside the formal statutory system, and are therefore more likely to build essential independent living skills:

> As she's reached the teenage years…she kind of needs to build up resilience as well, in terms of what lies ahead for her…and give her some level of confidence and self-esteem and being able to face the world as well.

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[8] Transition to Independence is one of four permanent care outcomes that reflect a young person's living situation whilst in care, along with immediately after statutory orders are discharged. For more information see https://practice-mvcot.ssi.govt.nz/policy/noho-ake-oranga/#null.

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> *They'll phone somebody else that's with a different organisation because it hasn't got the same stigma…it's really easy to go into a meeting with your TCI worker than it is to go in with your social worker from Oranga Tamariki.*

Despite the formal criteria around permanency goals, some young people are referred to the service whilst living with whānau. This discrepancy may be related to informal placement arrangements, where a young person returns to whānau care, but orders are not discharged and the permanency goal not updated. In these situations, social workers make referral decisions based on the perceived adequacy of a young person's support and living situation. If a social worker assesses that a young person may be subject to on-going care and protection concerns, or that their living situation is not stable, they may refer to TCI:

> *One major decision factor to us, in terms of referring her to TCI, would be Mum and Dad's ability to care for her…So… we've assessed that there's no way they'll be able to manage her and it's more around on-going concerns with her parents as well, in terms of historical and current wise. So that's one kind of factor to describe in terms of referring her.*

In some cases, social workers may not refer a young person eligible for the TCI service; relevant factors within this decision-making include stability, motivation, and level of need

In contrast to the previous point, in situations where a young person's living situation is characterised by stability and adequate support, social workers may not refer youth otherwise eligible for the TCI service. In those instances where a young person has a strong support network around them, the addition of an extra professional – in the form of a TCI worker[9] – is deemed unnecessary. These young people also tended to be more highly functioning, and so did not necessarily require the support provided by the TCI service:

> *I've got one young person who is 17…and she is living with her grandmother and she's been in our care for six or seven or eight years; quite a long time. And she's fairly settled. She's a high achiever. She's got a job. She's got her licence. She's quite well-adjusted and I haven't actually referred her to the TCI programme yet just because I think she's got a lot of support. I don't know if she would want it.*

In some instances, the decision to not refer an eligible young person may be entirely appropriate; the provision of a TCI service may be unnecessary, and could be rejected by a young person keen to transition to adulthood without the on-going involvement of Oranga Tamariki or other professionals. However, in some cases, it appears that social workers may be using the existence of limited whānau support to justify non-referral to TCI. While a portion of these young people may successfully transition to independence without the support of TCI, it is likely that a number may have benefited from referral to the service. For example, social workers noted:

> *So – but we've got whānau who, how can I say it, who are doing good enough care.*

> *I mean we haven't generally referred a young person…who's been in a whānau placement…And I think that it's probably that we – the focus has been on – because of resourcing…kids who are in non-kin as opposed to whānau care.*

A further factor influencing social workers' decisions is young peoples' motivation to engage. Social workers reported that while many young people are excited by the prospect of TCI, others are unwilling

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[9] Frontline workers within the Dingwall service are known as Personal Advisors, while Youth Horizons staff are called Kai Atawhai. In the context of this evaluation, where staff are discussed collectively, the term 'TCI worker' is used.

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to engage or resistant to the service. In these cases, the social worker may decide that a referral to TCI is not warranted, as the support provided is unlikely to be effective. Social workers also noted that in some situations, a young person initially adverse to TCI may decide to re-engage, and will self-refer to the service. Social workers discussing young peoples' motivation to engage noted:

> *I've got another person who has not been referred to the TCI programme because of his…unwillingness to participate in the programme…he has been very adamant that he doesn't want to work with anyone else and has been very consistently adamant since he turned 15.*

> *She's been in our system for a long time and has more than one referral for TCI and has actually turned down several referrals but then actually rang up Regional [Office] and asked for her TCI worker.*

A final factor motivating social workers to not refer eligible young people is their level of need, specifically the existence of some form of disability. Social workers noted that in instances where a young person has a disability – particularly foetal alcohol syndrome or intellectual disability – they may meet the criteria to be referred into the adult disability system, where they can access specialist support. These services are seen to provide sufficient support to young people, and therefore, social workers perceive that referral to TCI is unnecessary or unwarranted:

> *I've got one young person on my case load…I haven't referred him because he had support through another agency… We were transitioning him from mainstream school to higher education and he also has carer support hours, so people are going into his home and helping him with things such as, like, banking and showing him how to do those things. So that young person, he's got all the support he needs through other services.*

Social workers often discuss with supervisors, and may also consult the Reference Group, when making referral decisions

Many social workers noted that the decision to refer or not refer a young person to TCI is not made in isolation; social workers discuss with their supervisors and consult with peers throughout this decision-making process. Social workers also commented on the level of support they receive from site management, who often advocate for the TCI service and encourage referrals. This collaborative approach to referrals may lead to a more consistent and transparent decision-making process. One social worker discussing this practice noted:

> *Our practice leader will generally bring it up in what we call care clinics. So every few months, each case which involves kids in our custody have to be…reviewed and updated with the wider team and if the child is of age where we could do a TCI referral then he will suggest it. And he's always said that the [TCI] services are really good.*

Some social workers noted that along with engaging within their site, they also consulted with Auckland Regional Office members of the TCI Reference Group throughout the referral process. These social workers highly valued the ability to access this consultation, noting that Regional Office staff were approachable, and able to provide clarity in cases where the appropriate referral decision was not clear. While early consultation with Reference Group staff appears to be a useful means of ensuring that ineligible young people are not referred, the extent to which this was utilised by all social workers was not clear. One social worker commenting on this consultation noted:

> *The person that we can contact at… Regional Office is quite approachable. We can contact her and say, "Hey, this is a young person, we're not sure if she meets the criteria"….[and she says] "I can see why you think that she might need this. So yeah, you refer her through".*

As an exception to the decision-making criteria already discussed, Regional Office staff appear to have the capacity to take a less rule-bound approach when advising social workers about a young person's referral to the programme. For example, while the TCI service is designed to provide support for young people who have been in care, it appears that in some cases, the Reference Group may accept a referral despite a lack of statutory care history. As one key stakeholder explained:

> So we do go and have a look in CYRAS because there are times when kids probably should have been in care and they weren't. So we will go and have a look and…if [another Reference Group member] reads stuff and is like, "Mm, yeah, go and have a look at this" …I'll go and have a look as well and together we'll make a decision… because sites deal with things differently. So one site who would have automatically taken a kid into care, another site might have avoided doing that and did a couple of temporary care agreements.

After the decision to refer a young person has been made, the social worker sends a request for assessment to the Regional Office

After deciding to refer a young person to the TCI service, the social worker completes a request for assessment form, which is sent to a Regional Office Reference Group member. This form includes key information about the young person, including date of birth, care status, living situation, services currently being accessed, and their care and protection background. The form may also include content relating to the young person's goals and what they hope to achieve through their involvement with the TCI service.

Before an assessment is completed, Regional Office members of the Reference Group triage referrals based on age and level of need

After the social worker's request for assessment is received by Regional Office, a triage process occurs, where a Reference Group member prioritises the young people for whom a needs assessment will be completed. This process is largely based on age; those closer to the age at which statutory care orders lapse will have their needs assessment prioritised over those who are younger. To a lesser extent, assessments are also triaged based on a young person's level of need. Young people with higher needs are prioritised over those who are more stable, or who have a higher capacity to function independently:

> [Regional Office Reference Group member] has them prioritised by age, so if a kid comes in today but they're 16 and three-quarters they'll go to the top of the list; they'll go above the 15 year old…unless there's somebody who's clearly got really high needs and really needs some help.

TCI staff undertake a needs assessment to establish a young person's goals, and whether they would be appropriate for the service

After a request for assessment is accepted, the young person is allocated to either of the two TCI providers to undertake a needs assessment. These assessments are designed to identify a holistic range of information about the young person, including their background, living situation, current living skills, emotional and physical wellbeing, connection to peers and whānau, and spiritual or cultural wellbeing. Along with gathering relevant information, assessments also have a concurrent focus on identifying the young person's goals, the sort of TCI worker they would prefer, and what they hope to achieve through the programme. For example, a TCI worker discussing the needs assessment process noted:

> I guess depending on the young person, they would come with different ideas or different goals that they would want to work towards…There's a section in there that speaks about future planning and what that kind of looks like, and if they have the opportunity to work on specific things, what would it be.

Young people reflecting on their experience of the needs assessment often referred to it as an 'interview', which they had to pass in order to work with the TCI service. Young people also echoed the TCI workers' comments, stating that their views on who they would like to work with, and what they would like to achieve, were sought:

> I had a CYFs worker who thought I could do an interview with [the TCI worker] so I had to pass it to be able to work with [the TCI service].

> My social worker, I think she put in the referral and then one of the [TCI workers]… came and met with me and they just -- we talked about where I'm at with everything; what areas I would need help with and other areas maybe not so much help and about what type of [worker] I would like - if I want them to be young or old, if I want them to be male or female, what sort of characteristics I want them to have.

The needs assessment includes a recommendation regarding whether the young person is considered a good fit for the TCI service. This recommendation is primarily based on the young person's motivation to engage. While social workers are expected to have an initial discussion regarding participation, TCI workers noted that in some instances, the needs assessment may be the first time a young person hears about the service, and they may not wish to engage. While a comparatively rare occurrence, in these situations, the TCI worker would not recommend the young person for the service:

> I've done an assessment where the young person has said, "I actually don't want to be part of the programme. It sounds cool but I don't want to be part of the programme"… and then I… asked the young person, "Did your social worker tell about it?" like, "Oh, no". Like, they didn't even know they were doing the assessment, what the assessment was about.

As the needs assessment involves a face-to-face meeting between the young person and the TCI worker, it is facilitated though the social worker. This approach is considered appropriate, as the social worker has an existing relationship with the young person, and from a safety perspective, is able to provide information about the young person's circumstances. Difficulties arranging the needs assessment were noted by both social workers and TCI staff:

> Sometimes the issue [the TCI workers] can have is they can't find the young person or they don't turn up for appointments and all that kind of stuff. (Social worker)

> I would say the assessment itself is all good, but it's just arranging the assessment. Sometimes it's quite difficult to get the social worker to – because you get the social worker to arrange the assessment - and to make sure the social worker's there. (TCI worker)

Social workers commenting on the needs assessment process noted the value of these being undertaken by TCI staff. This approach was seen to introduce a degree of impartiality to the process, as social workers' reflections have the potential to be coloured by the quality of their relationship with a young person. Social workers also stated that needs assessments completed by TCI workers better reflected the voice and perspectives of young people:

> Social workers generally write referrals to get what they want the outcome to be, which doesn't mean that everything they write is a complete reflection of exactly what's going on…they might leave out bits that the young person thinks is important.

Completed needs assessments are considered by the TCI Reference Group, who collectively decide whether a young person will be given the opportunity to engage with the service

The TCI Reference Group meets once a month to consider completed needs assessments, and make a final decision regarding whether young people may engage with either of the two organisations delivering the TCI service. Membership of the Reference Group includes Oranga Tamariki Regional Office staff, who coordinate the referral process and provide guidance regarding whether young people are eligible for the service. The group also includes representatives of the TCI providers, a disability advisor, practice leaders from Oranga Tamariki site offices, and site managers.

The vast majority of young people whose needs assessments are considered by the Reference Group will be accepted by a TCI provider. The iterative nature of the referral process means that young people inappropriate for the service are generally identified prior to this point. Discussion with

Reference Group members revealed two reasons why a young person would not be accepted by the service: the young person moves outside of the Auckland region, or it is agreed that a young person already has access to an appropriate level of support. A Reference Group member reflecting on these exclusions noted:

> So most kids get accepted. The times when it's messy is if they're actually in the process of moving to another part of the country because the providers don't cover those other areas. Or on the very odd occasion – and this is not very often at all – we might actually say a kid has got a hell of a lot of support and they don't actually need this on top of that.

In addition to the core decision around whether a young person is accepted, the Reference Group also guides decisions around which TCI provider – and specifically, which advisor – they will work with. The matching of young person with TCI worker is designed to reflect the young person's preferences, as articulated within the needs assessment process. As one key stakeholder noted:

> …we make a decision about whether they look like they're the right kind of kid for a TCI service and then we look at which provider thinks they've got the right match, in terms of an advisor.

Young peoples' initial perceptions of the service were mixed; some were nervous about the programme, others were not sure what it involved, while others were comfortable engaging

After a young person is accepted by the service, the assigned TCI worker reaches out to them and begins engaging. When asked to reflect on their perceptions of TCI at this point, young people had mixed feedback. Some described being initially wary or nervous, although this feeling usually dissipated once they learnt more about the service:

> Well it was a bit scary at first. I wasn't sure what I was going into because it… sounded like I was …going out of CYFS then going into another thing that was pretty much like CYFS…And then when they kind of came and talked to me the first time -- they came to my home -- and they explained what they were all about and everything and…it just changed everything.

Other young people stated that they had a limited understanding of what the service involved, beyond providing some form of support throughout the transition period. These young people tended to have a neutral perspective on the service:

> I thought it would've been all right – I wasn't sure what you had to do in the programme, but I just knew they were there to help.

> To be honest, I didn't really think about it. I just came because I…needed to do things, I guess.

A further group of young people had positive initial perceptions of the service, and were enthusiastic about engaging. Some of these young people had family members who had participated in TCI, and who reflected positively on their experience. It is likely that this family connection helped these young people feel more comfortable and positive about the service. For example, one young person from within this group reflected:

> *All I heard is that they can help you get your licence…help you get into accommodation. I mean, it sounded good. It sounded like a real support system.*

Key considerations and challenges

Overall, feedback from participants highlighted a perception that the referral process generally functions at an acceptable level. However, some key considerations and challenges were noted by all parties involved in the process. These factors may mitigate or enhance the overall effectiveness of the TCI service, and ought to be considered within any efforts to scale-up a service based on the TCI model.

TCI staff have a perception that social workers tend to refer young people with high needs to the programme, particularly those who do not have stable accommodation

TCI staff reflecting on their perceptions of the referral process noted their belief that social workers tended to refer young people with severely high-needs to the service. While the service is intended to support this population to an extent, TCI workers noted that social workers do not take a proactive referral approach, and tend to perceive the service as 'the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff':

> *…the high needs kids do get referred because the social workers are pulling their hair out going, "Oh, God, this kid's going to be a train wreck and I'm carrying it all and…the world should get involved, you know. I'll refer them".*

TCI staff and other key stakeholders also argued that – deliberately or otherwise – some referring social workers may misunderstand the intent of the programme. It was noted that social workers may perceive that a referral to the service absolves their responsibility for a young person's welfare. This discharge of responsibility was seen to be a particular issue in the area of accommodation; social workers may refer young people to the programme believing that the TCI worker is obligated to find them accommodation:

> *When I first started doing this…it was pretty clear from the way they [social workers] wrote their referrals that they thought TCI was somewhere for kids to live when they turned 17. So the TCI worker would find them somewhere to live, which is not what TCI is at all. (TCI worker)*

> *I mean, for me, I do refer them…specifically those ones that we are struggling or I am struggling to find a home for life placement. (Social worker)*

Young people with high levels of disability – who may or may not have been formally diagnosed – are increasingly being referred to the service

As discussed previously, social workers stated that they will not refer young people to the service who are eligible for support within the adult disability system. However, discussion with TCI workers revealed a perception that young people with complex needs, including foetal alcohol syndrome and high levels of disability, are increasingly being referred to the service. Several factors contributing to these referrals were identified: incomplete assessment practices result in a failure to identity the presence of disability; and, young people do not meet the formal criteria to be diagnosed with a disability, despite having high and complex needs. TCI workers commenting on these issues noted:

And those kids on the cusp of intellectual disability, that haven't met the threshold, that might be a little bit higher functioning but still have all the trauma stuff from their time in care and very chaotic lifestyles… are going to be very vulnerable.

So she'd graduated from TCI but was still living in a children's home. And so I'm going, "Well, how does that work? They're clearly not independent. They're clearly not living independently. They've done a whole lot of programmes within [TCI] but --" and it transpired that she was intellectually disabled at a level that… could be supported by the Ministry. So we…reopened the case and eventually got her moved into an adult residential provider, which was a more appropriate outcome.

Staff highlighted the limitations of the service for young people with disabilities, noting that TCI does not have the capacity to provide specialist clinical support. The lack of a formal diagnosis for some young people also leads to challenges accessing specialist services within the community, which may exacerbate existing issues. Staff also noted the challenges associated with discharging these young people at age 20, when the TCI service ends. Comments relating to these issues included:

That's probably an area that I think is a challenge, that we probably need more robust clinical input around some of those high-end kids, either forensically or just on that disability side.

We had a young person that you could see on paper [had a disability, but] there's no assessment or anything in place to open up doors for other supports.

What do you do with them, post 20, when they're supposed to be off the programme?

TCI staff highlighted the importance of receiving good information from social workers throughout the referral process

TCI staff said it is important to receive comprehensive information about a young person, prior to beginning the process of engagement. Staff noted that while social workers provided a level of information within the initial 'request for assessment', its quality and quantity was inconsistent. For example, TCI staff noted:

You get as much information as you can from the social worker…the more information you have the better it will be.

Our assessments were only really provided with why they came into care, sometimes a bit extra, depending on what the…social worker wants to put it.

When asked about the benefit of having access to CYRAS[10], TCI workers had mixed feedback. Some staff were positive about the potential to access this information, noting that it would reduce a reliance on social workers providing relevant information. In contrast, other staff noted the risk that access to CYRAS could bias how TCI workers approach young people:

Sometimes I think too much information is a bad thing. You don't really want to judge a young person based on the background information…it's good to know the young person's history but don't let that dictate your work with them.

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[10] CYRAS is Oranga Tamariki's main case management system. It provides for all Care and Protection, Youth Justice, Residential and Adoption Services (CYRAS) task recording requirements.

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TCI providers have a limited capacity to undertake assessments and accept new referrals, which has led to long waiting lists for the service

Interviews with all stakeholders involved in delivering the service highlighted limited capacity and the existence of long waiting lists as key challenges. Waiting lists were identified as a relatively new phenomenon, which were more likely to be experienced by those referred to the service at a younger age[11]. The staged referral process – which encompasses the initial request, followed by the needs assessment, and finally, consideration by the Reference Group - was also seen to exacerbate timeliness issues. For example, one social worker commented:

> The timeframe at the moment is huge…so the other thing is it depends how old you are, right. So at the moment…we've got a girl that we referred just before she turned 16, so we referred her quite a while ago but she hasn't even been assessed.

The existence of long waiting lists has a range of implications for the service, particularly for young people. The long duration between initially hearing about TCI, and finally meeting their TCI worker, may impact on young people's motivation and enthusiasm to engage. It was also noted that in some instances, young people may abscond, or move out of the Auckland area, in the time they are waiting to engage in the programme. Further, capacity issues may result in a young person being matched with a TCI worker on the basis of availability, rather than suitability. These issues are illustrated by the following comments from social workers:

> I think the main thing is….getting the process happening a lot faster so that our young people don't get disillusioned by it. Like, "We're going to refer you to the service and then we wait ages and then there's assessment….and then it's ages before anything actually happens".

> So he absconded in the time [before]…I received the assessment.

> I get a sense it's [the process of matching young people with TCI worker] basically who's available…and that might potentially not be the best approach.

TCI workers also commented on a broader implication of these waiting lists; namely, a perception that their ability to publicise the service was reduced. TCI staff noted a belief that social workers may not have a consistent understanding of the service's intent, or how it works to support young people. In the past, this issue was addressed through efforts to publicise the service, such as holding road-shows at Oranga Tamariki sites across the Auckland region. However, due to long waiting lists, these efforts have ceased, which may have implications for social workers' understanding of, and what young people are told about, the service:

> I think the social workers may just not…have a proper understanding on what we do…I think it would be helpful if…social workers had an outline of what our programme is.

> I know that we used to do road-shows [where the TCI providers] would go around and provide education to different CYF sites but I think that stopped…with our wait list, so we didn't really want to provoke a longer waiting list.

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[11] As discussed previously, young people referred to the service are triaged on the basis of age and level of need; while a limited capacity to accept new referrals means that relatively older young people are prioritised, 15 and 16 year-olds face long waiting lists for the service as a result.

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Parties involved in delivering the service had mixed feedback regarding the effectiveness and value of the TCI Reference Group

Feedback regarding the value of the TCI Reference Group was mixed, with negative perceptions of the group largely relating to the added complexity it brings to the referral process, and it's potential to exacerbate timeliness issues. Some stakeholders also noted that the Reference Group process may be redundant in instances where young people clearly meet entry criteria, and are motivated to engage in the service:

> I think that it's just an extra process, you have to make a request for assessment, then that has to be allocated out and an assessment has to be done, and then that assessment has to be taken to a monthly meeting. To me, that's a lot of hoops to jump through to be able to access a service that we should just say, "You've got a goal of independence, you need this service".

However, a number of positive aspects of the Reference Group were also noted. TCI workers articulated a belief that the collective decision-making approach lent greater transparency and consistency to the referral process, which was highly valued. The importance of the Reference Group as a space to discuss practice issues was also highlighted, particularly in the context of young people with increasingly high clinical needs being referred to the service. Finally, TCI staff stated that their relationship with the Regional Office, provided through the Reference Group, functions as a useful conduit to local sites, and can be used as a means to escalate practice issues. Examples of relevant comments are included below:

> It [the Reference Group] was about ensuring transparency and integrity around the referrals that came to us. (TCI staff member)

> I think the Reference Group has huge benefit for getting together regularly to talk about some of the issues and themes, particularly to talk about issues to do with…Child, Youth and Family. (Key stakeholder)

> What worked with the Reference Group was…that if there were issues you could escalate it to someone who could then action it, especially in Auckland where you're dealing with so many different sites, and sometimes you might want something escalated above a site level. (TCI staff member)

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WHAT THE SUPPORT LOOKS LIKE

This section outlines the nature of the support provided to young people by the TCI service. The section initially describes practical forms of support young people receive, which are designed to meet their immediate needs and enhance their independent living skills. The section then discusses the relationship between a young person and their TCI worker, and how this functions to provide emotional support and build resilience. Finally, the section details a range of factors that may enhance or mitigate how effectively the service is able to support young people. This discussion includes a particular focus on the role of Oranga Tamariki in supporting the service's delivery.

Practical support young people receive

The TCI service takes a 'youth-led' approach, reflecting each young person's goals and what they want their future independence to look like

TCI staff from both organisations described their service as fundamentally 'youth-led'. In the context of TCI, this means that work is orientated around a young person's individual goals, with the service also giving them the autonomy to decide what these goals may be. Rather than taking a directive approach, TCI workers see their role as supporting young people to identify goals and motivating their achievement:

> And what that looks like is…talking with our young people and identifying what their goals are and what they want their future independence to look like. So they will come up with their own goals…and we are just there to support them…to achieve their goals.

Young people reflecting on the extent to which TCI workers embodied this approach were generally positive. While it appears that a young person's goals are sometimes negotiated with their TCI worker, overall, young people felt that their voice drove the process, and that TCI staff were receptive to their ideas:

> It's about asking, "What do you want to do later on in life? Where do you want to be? What do you want to achieve?" And it's from there where they help you achieve those steps to get to your goal.

While TCI staff emphasised the primacy of a youth-led approach, they also drew attention to the nuanced balance between supporting young people's decisions, providing advice, and motivating engagement with pro-social supports. In this context, TCI staff recognised the limitations of the support they can provide, noting that their role often requires giving young people space to explore risk-taking behaviours:

> You can only advise and guide. So an example: one time there was a young girl that wanted to be a sex worker and, of course, we didn't want her to be a sex worker so their [TCI worker] talked about her concerns [but] the young person was still going to do it. So then [the TCI worker]…connected her with the Prostitute Collective, so that she had a safe space and someone was actually monitoring her. Because…at the end of the day, it's up to them.

Young people, TCI staff and social workers all commented on the distinction between a 'youth-led' approach, and how Oranga Tamariki works with young people. In contrast to social workers, who are restricted by the need to operate within a statutory environment, TCI staff have greater autonomy and the capacity to be more responsive to young people's needs. Social workers commented that rather than maintaining a core care and protection perspective, TCI workers were flexible and creative in their approach to young people:

I'm the kind of social worker who would set all the rules. That's not to say that the TCI worker doesn't set the rules but I guess they're more kind of flexible around it.

Young people also commented on the contrast between their social worker and TCI worker, highlighting a perception that TCI staff were more receptive to their needs, and therefore, provided a higher standard of care:

I had about 12 [social workers] and every time I had one it was like they would ask me questions and everything and I'd tell them but it wasn't – it was like they weren't listening and they kind of just did what they thought was right even though I would tell them exactly what I wanted.

TCI staff commented that a further aspect of being youth-led was flexibility around the regularity and nature of their engagement. As such, the TCI service does not have structured rules to guide how staff work with young people; this method is designed to facilitate a fluid, youth-led approach. As a TCI worker commented:

What I do with each of them is different but all based around the same of idea of becoming independent, but, obviously, the outlook's different for everybody….and they're all at different stages. Some of them I see weekly, some of them I see fortnightly, some of them I see monthly. It just depends on their situation, I guess, and what they need at that moment.

Young people identify and achieve their goals through a transition planning process, which is facilitated by their TCI worker

A core component of TCI is a Transition Plan, which is developed collaboratively as a means of realising the service's youth-led approach. The primary intent of the planning process is to support young people to identify and achieve goals, with a view to building their overall capacity for independence. A TCI worker discussing the plan gave examples of the sorts of questions they might ask a young person within this process:

Where are you up to? What do you want to do?...What's going on? Do you want to study? Okay, well what do you want to study? Do you want to work? Okay, how do we do that, where do you want to work? Can we get some…experience or something? Then you just go.

Transition Plans are designed to be living documents, which are updated over time to reflect a young person's journey. TCI staff commented that early in the planning process, the focus tended to be on concrete short to medium-term goals, with broader or longer-term goals not usually identified immediately. For example, TCI workers noted:

It [the Transition Plan] changes. You know, like sometimes in a year's time they might come up with another goal. Another goal might be put aside. It's not as important as another goal.

I'm always gentle at the start like, "…What do you want to do? Who do you want to be? How do we make that happen?" And if they're like, "Oh, I don't really know", because at 16 who really does, sometimes it can take a while. So there's often not a lot of plan right at the beginning.

TCI workers commented that over time, Transition Plans have evolved from being relatively strict documents, to reflecting a more informal approach. While practice varies across TCI workers, not all Transition Plans are formally written down, with some reflecting a more conversational approach to goal setting. TCI staff noted that while a degree of overarching structure and order is important, they valued the freedom associated with a less structured approach:

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The way assessment and transition plans were done over time changes. I think to begin with we had quite formal transition plans which were set up to really meet the needs of funders, and they weren't really meeting the needs of young people. They were clunky, the workers hated doing them, the young people didn't engage with them.

TCI staff also highlighted the need to balance being youth-led, with a more structured and feasible approach to goal setting. Again, practice in this regard appeared to vary across TCI workers; while the majority of staff favoured a collaborative approach, others were more directive and gave young people less scope to identify their own goals. For example, one TCI worker discussing the need for structure within the planning process noted:

We have a transition plan that we work off, so it still has to be within the TCI programme…but it's really awesome to be able to help young people realise what their goals are and that they are actually realistic…[but] the goals do have to kind of align with what we offer.

This abbreviated scope, or need to fit within the Transition Plans' existing parameters, was also noted by some young people engaged with the service:

When you first come here…I think they do you a chart…a progress chart. And they'll just set you heaps of goals – like not goals, like something to work towards to try and get…we just go off the chart.

However, regardless of their personal approach, all TCI workers cautioned a need to provide balanced feedback to young people regarding their goals and what they hope to achieve. Within the planning process, TCI workers saw it as their role to mediate between a young person's aspirations, and a more practical approach to goal-setting. For example, one TCI staff member commenting on this balance stated:

To some extent, if you let the young person completely drive it then they're going to say, "I want to be an astronaut, and I want to do this, that and then play for the Blues", and if you just say, "Yes, okay", is that a reasonable response?

The TCI service offers young people tangible forms of support, which meets their immediate needs and provides a foundation for growing their independence

Young people and TCI staff reported that the provision of tangible forms of support – such as getting a driver's license, clothing, bank account, form of identification, CV etc. - was considered a valuable component of the service[12]. In the first instance, this support ensures that a young person's basic or everyday needs are met. For example, one TCI worker described this support as providing a young person with their "needs to haves". Beyond meeting immediate needs, this support was also seen as a means to "get a young person on their feet", and provide a foundation for growing their independence.

Young people reflecting on this support described how it helped them to "sort out their life" or "set them up". Young people were particularly appreciative of support getting their driver's licence, which they perceived as a key step towards achieving independence:

We first started with just the very basic stuff:…getting me drivers plates and getting me driving courses with AA so that I could be sort of independent and that was really important.

The tangible support provided to young people also extends to financial transactions and physically ensuring that young people are able to attend appointments, or travel when required. In some cases,

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[12] TCI workers use a young person's TAPS funding or Discharge Grant to provide the discretionary support discussed within this section.

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TCI workers appear to go beyond simply meeting a young person's minimum needs, to providing a more personalised standard of care. Examples of this support include buying an imprisoned young man underpants to "make their stay a little easier", and supporting a young woman to attend her school ball by buying her a dress. Comments from young people relating to this form of tangible support include:

> *[The TCI service] was helping by…topping up my HOP card so that they would make sure that I'd go to course.*

> *Everyday stuff she helps me with…she'll help me get my groceries if I need a ride to the supermarket or if I don't have any [cellphone] credit, she might buy me credit.*

TCI workers have a perception that providing young people with tangible supports encourages engagement with the service, and therefore, builds independence more generally. For example, workers described the ability to purchase things as a valuable way of "proving yourself a little bit", which was particularly helpful in a context where "lots of times they've [young people] been promised stuff that they haven't come through with". TCI workers believe that the achievement of small, tangible goals helps young people to 'buy in', and supports the development of independent living skills. This belief was articulated by one young person, who commented:

> *I think by achieving those physical or tangible things that does make me feel more independent…like feeling more confident in my abilities.*

The TCI service provides young people with support in crisis situations, and ensures their immediate safety

Along with providing tangible support, TCI workers saw crisis intervention and ensuring the immediate safety of young people as a key part of their job. Commonly, this work takes the form of responding to self-harm, suicide ideation, and relationship or living situation breakup. At a more rudimentary level, this work may also entail meeting young people's basic nutritional needs – i.e., ensuring they have something to eat. For example, one TCI worker reported:

> *I was taking her grocery shopping and topping her up in terms of putting food into her, because food is not a nice to have, it's a need to have. It's an absolute human need…Pragmatically, I'm not letting this kid go without.*

The importance of being able to access nutrition, and the support provided by TCI workers in this regard, was also echoed by young people:

> *When I first started flatting, I wasn't getting much youth payment; I only had, after rent and all that, there was only like 15 bucks for groceries. So she [the TCI worker] took me grocery shopping and that was really helpful; I don't know what I would have done without that.*

Feedback from young people suggests that the support provided by TCI workers in crisis or emergency situations was highly valued. Young people perceived this support to be constant and unconditional; i.e., that no matter the situation, the TCI worker would be available to help:

> *But you knew, I think, no matter what, you knew that if you were really stuck, you could call them and that was what made a difference.*

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TCI staff acknowledged a tension between this crisis management work, and retaining a goal setting or long-term planning focus. While crisis management may sit outside the intended remit of the TCI service, staff argued that work to stabilise and secure young people's safety was foundational. For example, one worker noted that goal attainment was not feasible in a context where a young person was stressing about: "Where am I sleeping tonight", or..."What am I eating?" Another TCI staff member also commented that crisis situations provided a valuable learning experience for young people:

> *I think in those situations our young people learn such valuable skills...unfortunately for everyone, we have to go through hard times to see good stuff. And I think for our young people them going through situations like that they kind of realise how resilient they are.*

However, staff also recognised the potential for crisis management work to limit opportunities for a more proactive focus on goal attainment:

> *Actually a lot of your work is just crisis-based work, constant crisis to crisis, and you're not actually having the chance to move them forward.*

> *Trying to encourage workers to be more proactive and aspirational in their thinking around the young person, rather than reactive, because I think this is a very chaotic service group and it's very easy to get bogged down in reactive practice and very easy to align with that.*

Facilitating access to housing is one way that TCI workers ensure young people's immediate needs are met; despite its essential nature, safe and stable accommodation is increasingly hard to find

As previously noted, the TCI service is not intended as a means of providing young people with somewhere to live. However, interviews with TCI staff revealed that their work to support young people through crisis, and ensure their immediate safety, often involves facilitating access to accommodation. TCI workers noted the relationship between stable housing and a young person's wellbeing, highlighting stable accommodation as a foundational need, which must be met:

> *If the young person has not had...stable accommodation, then – you know, your home is a foundation. If you don't have a stable foundation, then it's hard to build around that.*

Despite its importance, TCI staff reported that accessing safe and stable accommodation was one of the biggest challenges they faced. Facilitating access to accommodation was seen as a time consuming activity; as something technically "outside their scope of practice", TCI workers "don't have accommodation just available for us". Young people describing how TCI workers supported them to find accommodation noted:

> *At the moment, we've been looking for houses, like apartments and stuff, somewhere to stay. And that's pretty much our main focus at the moment.*

> *Even when I used to be homeless, she used to help me, like, find a place. She would put in quite a lot of time for me.*

TCI workers, social workers, and young people also drew attention to the limited supply of housing - particularly youth friendly options - available within the Auckland region. As young people engaged in the service often lack natural supports, they are forced into the private rental market, which offers limited options for youth. For example, one social worker commenting on this issue noted:

> *People are reluctant to take on 18 year olds and the cost of a room is really expensive. So then you look to family and if there's not a lot of options with family, it's pretty tough. There's not really anything out there designed for our young people.*

A tenancy rule that you must be at least 18 in order to sign a lease was also seen to exacerbate this issue. Until 2017, statutory care orders for young people lapsed at age 17, meaning they were often in a position where they did not receive support from Oranga Tamariki, but could also not sign a lease for a flat. For example, one TCI worker noted:

> They were getting discharged at 17...and 17 is really young and it's also quite difficult because at 17 you can't sign a tenancy agreement, so renting is out of the option unless you're going to flat with somebody who can sign a tenancy agreement.

Young people, TCI staff, and social workers noted that difficulties accessing housing often led to homelessness, inappropriate living situations, or young people being forced to return to unsafe whānau living situations. For example, comments related to this issue included:

> My living circumstances are pretty difficult. When I was arrested over a year ago...I was put into a flatting arrangement, you know, a residential house. But I have severely special needs and that is difficult. (Young person)

> So that kid, homeless, there's nowhere for him to go, a 16 year old kid. He shouldn't be with his mother. He's gone back to his mother, where he was uplifted for a very good reason. (TCI worker)

> They were looking at a boarding house in West Auckland and I know that boarding house and I know it wouldn't have been great. Like, she [the young person] would have been exposed to a lot of criminal activity, drug use, that type of stuff. (Social worker)

Those interviewed made a number of recommendations for more youth-focused housing. Primarily, all stakeholders saw a need for supported accommodation options, which provide a balance between allowing young people to live independently, and ensuring they still have access to structure and support. As one young person commenting on this need for balance stated: "I am turning 17 next week and...I'm pretty scared to stay on my own..[it] sounds exciting too, but I feel I'm a bit too young".

Supported living arrangements provide young people with the opportunity to explore risk-taking behaviours, and build independent living skills, within a more managed environment. While examples of these types of accommodation options do exist, they are relatively limited. One TCI staff member commenting on the value of these arrangements noted:

> I would love to see – maybe like a head tenant who isn't a parent with a stick, but has some capacity to say, "Well, actually...you've signed a contract to be here. It's a privilege, not a right, so if you're not going to meet your contract, we're going to have to ask you to leave". But within that contract there's learning opportunities...in terms of how to run a house, how to engage with each other, how to budget, how to problem solve, how to conflict resolution etc. Natural environments by way of learning.

The TCI service also has a focus on ensuring that the longer-term needs of young people are met, through facilitating referrals to community-based supports

Along with ensuring young people's immediate wellbeing, TCI workers help meet the longer term needs of young people by supporting them to access community-based supports. TCI staff reported that in the first instance, their role is to identify possible sources of support, before socialising these potential services with young people, and finally, facilitating referrals. If necessary, TCI workers may also advocate for a young person, to ensure they are able to access required support. One TCI staff member discussing this process noted:

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It's about connecting them with education providers, showing them what's out there...For example, taking them to an educational institute, getting them to feel the vibe; what it's like, seeing if it's something they want to do...And then to meet up with the people that are there...or set up a meeting with the education provider.

TCI staff stated that frequently accessed supports included education, health, and counselling, with the latter seen to be particularly common. Where possible, the TCI service will refer young people to supports available for free within the community; if these are not available, they may consider directly purchasing services. The decision to fund these services reflects their perceived importance for, and relationship to, young people's wellbeing:

They're able to fund more options. And funding in a lot of areas in other agencies is limited. But with these guys it's almost anything is possible. If it's something that's really needed. (Young person)

So I had a young person that lost her – or had her child removed, and we ended up paying for five sessions of counselling or therapy, just to address the grief and loss stuff. (TCI worker)

TCI workers acknowledged that while young people may benefit from accessing a range of supports – for example, alcohol and drug services – they did not see value in taking a paternalistic approach to referral. TCI workers recognised that young people must make the final decision regarding whether to engage with supports:

If there's an issue with drugs and stuff, [you can] suggest counselling and the youth have to be on-board with that. You can't force them to do it because it they're not on-board with it, they don't want to go it, and it won't work anyway.

TCI staff also commented on the importance of accessing youth-friendly services, which can be difficult to procure. TCI workers noted that young people tended to be resistant to accessing mainstream services, and struggled developing sustainable relationships and actively engaging with other professionals. TCI staff saw a need for services that "walk alongside" young people, and are flexible and patient when working to address their needs:

A youth-friendly service is a service that gives youth so many chances, it's not just a one-off and then you'll give up on them.

The TCI service may support young people to develop their sense of self-identity, through better understanding their culture and whakapapa

The TCI service also provides practical support to young people seeking to better understand their culture and whakapapa. TCI staff stated that this work can be essential to developing a young person's sense of identity, or "who they are"; in a context where many young people lack relationships with their family, and are disconnected from their culture, this outcome was perceived as highly important. This work may take a number of forms, but practically, could involve facilitating whakapapa research, taking young people to marae, or connecting them with community workshops and events. One TCI worker commenting on this work noted:

One of my young people at the moment, has only met their dad once and he's from the Cook Islands...And they want to know more about that side of themselves...so [my role is] just supporting them on that journey.

Feedback from TCI staff suggests that while young people are routinely offered this form of support, not everyone has "the willingness or desire to learn about those things". TCI staff noted that in some instances, young people are alienated from their culture, or may associate their background with negative life experiences:

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A lot of the young people that I come in contact with, their culture is not to the largest degree a positive experience in their life anyway...which is kind of sad, because there is so much positive within those cultures.

However, it also appears that some young people may reject assistance on the basis that they are comfortable exploring their background and identity independently. For example, some young people commented that while they are interested in their culture and whakapapa, they choose to explore this aspect of their identity "in their own time".

TCI staff recognised the challenges associated with work around self-identity, stating that it can be time-consuming, and also requires specialist knowledge and a high degree of cultural competency. One staff member noted the opportunity to improve how the service operates in this space, particularly through enhanced partnership with iwi. Given the clear relevance of cultural identity and understanding for supporting young people's wellbeing, these opportunities may warrant further exploration.

Young people highly valued group work, and the opportunity to engage in collective activities provided by the TCI service

A final form of practical support provided by the service is the opportunity to engage in group work and activities. Examples of this support include rafting, ski trips, beach days, youth job fests, and workshops relating to self-love, sexual health and supportive relationships. Young people said they highly valued these activities, and commonly cited group work as one of their favourite aspects of the service. The importance of this support was also echoed by TCI staff, who saw group work as an important and positive experience for young people:

Over time we started to put a priority on the group work because we could see that it had huge benefits for young people. In fact, probably if I look at what made the biggest difference over recent years...the group work was probably the biggest change that I think made the most impact for young people.

Young people reflecting on the benefits of this support highlighted the importance of feeling connected, sharing their background with others like them, making friends, having fun, and experiencing new things:

Being able just to be together in one room and connect with each other and do stuff and be able to talk about stuff is key to evolving as a better human being.

I've got two pretty good friends now and one of them is also doing health science so I hang out with that person....And I met her on the camp

I went to Mount Ruapehu...it was my first time down there. It was so beautiful.

TCI staff similarly acknowledged these benefits, seeing group work as an opportunity for youth to meet others with a similar background, build their networks, share stories, have new experiences, engage in pro-social activities, and gain confidence. Staff also stated that group work gave young people the opportunity to develop relationships with others within the organisation, and exposed them to the broader network of support available beyond their individual TCI worker.

A number of funding challenges associated with this work were highlighted, with TCI staff noting that due to cost, activities were organised on a sporadic basis and often involved staff working overtime for no additional pay. As such, current contracting arrangements for the TCI providers do not include specific funding allocated to organising these activities; given young people's perspectives on the value and benefit of this work, this approach may be worth exploring.

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Relationship between young people and TCI workers

Establishing a supportive and positive relationship between a young person and their TCI worker is an essential component of the service

The relationship between a young person and their TCI worker was identified as an essential component of the service. Staff and young people explained that rather than immediately working on the Transition Plan, or providing practical support, the initial stages of engagement involve gaining trust and forming a relationship. For example, one TCI worker noted that the service isn't strictly restrained to goal-setting; "obviously, we want to get to know our young people as well".

TCI workers stated that the relationship building process can initially be quite challenging, as young people may be wary about the service and resistant to engagement. Young people also acknowledged this hesitancy, stating that due to their life experiences or situation, they sometimes rejected the TCI worker's initial efforts to engage:

> *Most of us people that have come from CYFS and come into programmes like this…because we've been moved so many times from places to places, and have met so many people, that it's hard to trust people again.*

TCI workers use an informal approach to overcome these challenges, explaining that the initial relationship-building process often involves "hanging out, going out for lunch, and chatting". Over time, TCI workers hope that young people will learn to trust them, and gradually become more willing to engage. For example, one TCI worker discussing this process explained:

> *I'm just forming a relationship with a young woman who's at the Teen Parent Unit with her little boy…So to start off with its actually quite social, because I need to form a relationship with [her son], so that he's comfortable when I'm around mummy…[For our first activity] we went along to the pools…and we had a swim…so it was playful and it was fun, and it's about building a relationship.*

Young people and TCI staff identified persistence and attitude as key success factors within this relationship-building process. Given the challenges inherent to youth engagement, and particularly with young people who have been in care, TCI workers were valued for their ability to be persistent and to give young people a "second chance":

> *Perseverance is pretty big because sometimes it just takes a long time to establish a relationship and…the young people are just sick of social workers and adults and they'll often flick you off for a good couple of months at first.*

Young people also reflected on the importance of persistent and reliable support, noting that even in instances where they "stuff up", their TCI worker was patient with them, and remained focused on opportunities to provide support. For example, one young person reflecting on his time in prison stated:

> *Went I went to prison he came and visited me. He was the only person that came…so that was like the big trust…me and him both gained with each other.*

Young people and TCI workers highlighted the importance of staff having a positive and open attitude. TCI staff identified the ability to be empathetic, interested, and caring as key characteristics required for the role. Young people also echoed these comments, stating that in order to build a positive relationship, TCI workers needed to be a 'good fit', honest, relaxed, and non-judgmental:

> *I wanted to work with someone who was honest and everything, because I can judge a person on their personality to see if I could fit with them, and [my TCI worker] was perfect for that.*

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> *He's not so uptight. I've met a lot of people that are uptight and [my TCI worker] was one of the first people that I've met that's like real, real chilled.*

Social workers reflecting on the relationship between young people and TCI workers acknowledged key differences in how they work with youth. While the quality of relationships between young people and social workers vary, social workers recognised that TCI workers had the capacity to act as a "critical friend" or ally, rather than as someone in a position of authority. Social workers also acknowledged the importance of perseverance when developing effective relationships, and stated that they were not always able to achieve this approach:

> *So I think the difference is that they persevere and they don't give up, opposed to us where we just really have to move on to the next thing and we don't have that time to…really work on building that relationship.*

The relationship between young people and TCI workers provides an inherent, and highly valued, source of support

Young people and TCI workers argued that while access to the practical supports outlined in the prior section was useful, the relationship-based support the service provides is fundamental. At its most basic level, the support young people receive is as simple as having someone akin to a family member, who is constantly available and who will do their best to help. Given their care and protection background, and the relatively limited support provided by their social worker, this may be the first time a young person has been able to access this unconditional support:

> *I don't have my family…I don't really have anyone to depend on or whatever, but they're constantly there and it's kind of like texting your mum for a ride, because that's kind of what they are.*

The importance of the relationship as providing an enduring, consistent and reliable source of support was also echoed by TCI workers. One key stakeholder reflected on the nature of the programme as a 'support net', which provided unconditional support when other sources were not available. TCI workers also recognised the importance of taking a 'trauma-informed' approach, which acknowledges the impact of a young person's care and protection background on their current behaviour:

> *I think the fact that lots of people have had lots of changes of workers, changes of placements; they've been let down a lot. Having that consistent reliable relationship, they learn a lot about themselves.*

Young people spoke about how the nature of the support they received through TCI differed from that offered by social workers. Young people described social workers as operating "in the shadows", or as perceiving them as "just another file"; in contrast, TCI workers were seen to provide a more responsive, personal, and caring level of support:

> *My case worker, she takes care of me like she's supposed to, like legally. But [my TCI worker] was more like a friend. She was actually like a friend to me, or like even more than a friend, like close to family-ish. Let me put it like that.*

Young people also commented on the therapeutic nature of the support provided by their TCI worker, which they appeared to value over a more practical focus on goal setting and attainment. Young people stated that their TCI worker was someone who they felt comfortable talking to and who would listen to them:

> *[My TCI worker] is someone that I can really open up to and release a lot of bad energy and stuff. I feel better afterwards when we've had a korero.*

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TCI workers recognised the need to set clear boundaries and acknowledge the limitations of relationship-based support. TCI workers stated that while they should not act as therapists, they often found themselves caught up in that role; this tension required awareness and careful management. TCI workers also stated that as their support could sometimes be perceived as maternal or paternal in nature, clear boundaries needed to be imposed:

> So sometimes we can be – they don't have parents and being aware that they do have attachment issues. So, I think setting boundaries early on is very important.

Young people reflecting on the relationship between them and their TCI worker also acknowledged these boundaries, often referring to their TCI worker as a "professional friend".

Having a strong relationship with a young person gives TCI staff the opportunity to act in a mentoring role

TCI workers support the emotional development and resilience of young people by acting in a mentoring role; the development of positive relationships was identified as a prerequisite for providing this form of support. TCI staff highlighted the importance of mentoring support, particularly in regards to helping young people learn from past experiences and understand any consequences associated with their behaviour:

> You're developing a strong relationship so that you can have more of a mentoring and coaching focus to say, "Is this the best thing to be doing in the circumstance? Let's just have a little bit of a think about how this might have worked before".

TCI staff provide this mentoring support through a combination of offering advice and guidance, and acting as a "role-model". TCI workers discussing their mentoring role stated that all advice must be grounded in the lived experiences of young people. For example, one worker noted the importance of "giving [young people] examples that are real for them, because that's the only way they're going to understand". Staff also saw their role as providing a range of options and open advice; "it's not just saying, "Oh, it's just bad", but, "Why is it bad? How does this affect you?"

TCI staff discussed a need to provide balance between "teaching" or providing advice, and practice, stating that as mentors, it was important for them to role model pro-social behaviours. Staff acknowledged young people's background within this approach, stating they can be a "role model they may not have had in their lives before". One TCI worker discussing this aspect of their work noted:

> If we are trying to demonstrate support, security and structure, we need to be role-modelling that ourselves to our young people so that they know what it looks like…What we do shouldn't be regarded as…to act for ourselves. It's to inspire, it's to show and demonstrate exactly what they want for their future and what they want to achieve.

Comments by some young people demonstrate the value of this mentoring support. Young people reflected that through engaging with the service, and developing a relationship with their TCI worker, they learnt new things, gained self-confidence, developed emotional resilience, and changed their behaviour. For example, one young person stated:

> [My TCI worker] has helped me see that there's more than alcohol and drugs, because I used to be addicted to weed and alcohol. So he's helped me see that there's a better life than that.

TCI staff highlighted the importance of reinforcing guidance and providing advice multiple times over a sustained period. Staff also acknowledged the limitations of mentoring and the need to maintain a youth-led approach; TCI workers perceive their role as providing information and advice, rather than compelling young people to act in certain ways:

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We might say, "Actually, have you considered these factors when making that decision?" and they might go, "Yeah, but I'm going to do it anyway", but at least you've helped them think a bit more broadly about what they're doing".

Through their relationship, TCI staff and young people may work together to identify and develop a network of natural supports; this work is an area of potential improvement for the service

TCI staff identified a key aspect of their role as working with young people to identify and develop a network of natural supports. Given the time-limited nature of the TCI service, staff saw value in supporting young people to develop pro-social and sustainable relationships. These relationships - which could involve whānau, peers, or other members of the community - were perceived as essential to achieving independence, or interdependence:

What we do is help the young person find another person in their life, apart from us, who is a positive influence on them and who they can…rely on or go to when they need support. Because at 20 years old they're discharged from our programme and we want them to be set up in a way that they're going to be independent, and if they have little setbacks they…have someone to work through it with.

TCI staff argued that that the quality of their relationship with young people was a key enabler for this work. Staff stated that the process of identifying potential sources of strength for young people involved engaging within their natural environments, including potentially meeting and relating to whānau and friends. This process was seen to require a high level of trust and rapport, and therefore, was premised on having a strong relationship with a young person:

What they [young people] have to say is important…listening to them and being curious about their lives, so asking them questions and getting to know who they are. And that helps us better understand them and their family or friend dynamics.

While staff articulated a belief in, and commitment to, this work, they also acknowledged limitations in the support they provide. TCI staff described having limited capacity to prioritise work with whānau or in the community, seeing it as a "small part of my time but a big part of the role". Management and staff also identified the development of natural supports as an area of potential improvement for the service:

There probably needs to be a renewed focus on saying, "What are the other supports and what work do we need to do with family members?"

Comments from young people demonstrated the need for an enhanced focus on building natural supports. Those young people able to access positive influences within the community acknowledged this support as highly valuable, and as a key factor contributing to them "doing so well". However, when asked about the extent to which the service helps them build connections, the majority of young people stated that this was not something they had experienced.

TCI staff stated that the quality of whānau support was a key challenge within this work. Staff argued that in some instances, encouraging engagement with whānau was not appropriate for young people; while they can try to facilitate engagement, if whānau still exhibit the sorts of behaviours that led to Oranga Tamariki's initial involvement, this approach may not be safe:

What we know is whatever caused them [the young person] to be removed is still sitting there, 17 years later or whatever, and so they go straight back into it.

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Given this challenge, TCI staff saw a need for an enhanced focus on supporting the needs and stability of whānau alongside young people. Staff argued that as young people must be considered in the context of their whānau – particularly in situations where they return home – limiting the scope of their work was not always feasible. TCI staff stated that they often had to take on a 'dual role' as the family social worker; while this work was perceived as highly valuable, the TCI service is not currently resourced to fulfil this role:

> *To be able to work with families….it takes time….that would require much smaller caseloads than what they currently have….all the young people are going back home once they leave care anyway and so we could be doing a lot more to repair that relationship and to make that a safer and more sustainable relationship…so I definitely think that needs to be a focus of TCI services.*

A key success factor associated with quality relationships – and therefore, the effectiveness of the service as a whole – is time and duration

Young people and TCI staff identified the long duration of the service – in some cases, up to five years - as a key success factor associated with the development of quality relationships. Young people described their relationship with their TCI worker as "cemented" and "comfortable", and noted the sense of reassurance and enhanced trust associated with the service's duration:

> *You have someone there who hopefully will be there for the next, you know, three or four or five years.*

> *Just the fact that I know him [the TCI worker] and I've known him for a long time so I trust him.*

TCI staff also reflected on the long duration of the service, and its association with strong relationships. Workers argued that developing and building trust with a young person was a long-term process that required time:

> *I think trust comes through time. You know, youth are not going to just trust if you buy them a meal, you know. It's just seeing them every day, them seeing that you're honest, that you care about them. And…that's a process. It takes time.*

Staff also saw the long duration of the service as having inherent value, in that it provides enduring support that spans the transition period. TCI staff stated that the longevity of the service allowed young people to experience "a model of a relationship that they could rely on over a sustained length of time". Workers also saw value in a service that allows young people the time to make mistakes, and which continues to support them before, during and after their transition from care:

> *My gut is what works with this programme is the length of the relationship, is that actually what young people need is someone to walk alongside them as they do this journey to adulthood, because there are so many ups and downs.*

The long duration of the service also allows TCI workers to implement a core strategy for building independence – gradually withdrawing and allowing young people to do things for themselves

TCI staff commented that along with allowing for the development of strong relationships, the long duration of the service facilitates the implementation of a key strategy for building independence. Staff discussing the development of key independent living skills described taking a long-term and staged approach, which evolves alongside the young person.

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In the first instance, staff saw their role as "more hands-on", where they actively support young people by modelling how to complete tasks. By then gradually withdrawing this direct support, staff encourage young people to take on increased self-responsibility and progressively learn to "do it themselves". This process reflects a young person's age and development, and matures over the duration of their engagement with the service. For example, one TCI worker describing this process noted:

> So you don't want to do everything for them….I would say once they're 18 or 19, basically ask them to do everything, as much as they can, for themselves. Say if they wanted to get some furniture for their house…I think when they're younger you'd take them to the store, show them what the options are, get a quote. Once they're 19, what you do is ask them to get a quote themselves.

TCI staff acknowledged a risk that the service's long duration could be associated with fostering dependence, and saw this strategy as a key mitigating factor. While staff describing struggling with the tension between 'doing' and 'supporting', they recognised the importance of respecting the boundaries of the service through learning to say no. For example, one worker describing a situation where a young person requested money after spending their food budget on cigarettes stated:

> She made a choice and it wasn't a good choice and all I would have done if I had brought her food was reinforce the fact that she can make the choice, and if she does it again, somebody will save her. That's not the world we live in and I didn't feel brutal doing that.

Given the importance of building a strong relationship, the motivation and quality of TCI workers was identified as a key success factor within the service

Overall, feedback from all parties involved in the TCI service – including young people, staff and social workers – highlighted the perceived importance of relationship-based support. Given the centrality of this relationship to delivering the service, along with achieving outcomes relating to young peoples' resilience and emotional wellbeing, the motivation and quality of TCI workers was identified as a key success factor.

Interviews with TCI staff revealed that the majority are highly committed to supporting young people, and display a clear passion for their work. Many TCI staff stated that they "loved" their job, and were particularly motivated by supporting young people to achieve success. For example, TCI workers reflecting on their work stated:

> It's the best thing I've ever done in my life…I love it. I love the work that I do.

> In order to do this job and do it effectively, the desire for a young person to succeed is crucial.

Young people reflecting on their experience of the service, particularly in relation to the quality of their TCI worker, also acknowledged this commitment and motivation. Comments from young people about their TCI worker included descriptions of them as "a good person", who is passionate about young people, and who genuinely wants youth to succeed:

> He wants you to succeed. He's genuinely here to help you…He has a passion for young people.

> I would describe [my TCI worker] as a go-getter. Doesn't sit on his arse, he wants to get out and help youth in the area, or help wherever youth needs to be helped.

Social workers and TCI staff also identified the ability to engage with youth as a specific skill-set. Social workers acknowledged having a general preference for working with young children and

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whānau, and stated that they often found engaging with youth highly challenging. In contrast, TCI workers were seen as passionate about young people, and as having an inherent skill-set that made them more readily able to engage. For example, one social worker noted:

> *Something that's really important about the [TCI workers] is they're really good with young people because there's lots of social workers who aren't. Social workers can get really afraid of young people…a lot of social workers don't have the right skillset.*

While the majority of TCI staff are motivated to support the achievement of young people, it appears that in some instances, less effective workers are recruited to the service. A small number of young people gave examples of having conflict with their TCI worker, or believing they were not representing their interests. In these situations, young people were able to "get them changed". TCI management also described contending with workers who "have just not gone to appointments and make up what they're doing", although this appeared to be rare.

Social workers also noted a number of negative experiences relating to the quality of staff. Several social workers noted that their experience of TCI workers was variable; while some are "very good", in other cases the limited effectiveness of staff meant that "we needn't have referred, we would've done a better job ourselves". Social workers also described examples of TCI workers not being actively engaged, failing to attend meetings, or breaking commitments to young people. Again, this negative feedback was relatively limited and did not appear to reflect a typical experience of the TCI service.

Factors that help or hinder

TCI staff from both organisations recognised the importance of having a framework or model to guide practice. Staff stated that these frameworks help to formalise and standardise how TCI workers engage with young people, and the intended scope of the service, whilst still providing a large degree of autonomy at an individual level. Practice frameworks tend to take a principle-based, rather than task-orientated, approach. Staff described these frameworks as holistic, strengths-based, therapeutic, trauma-informed and pro-social.

TCI staff valued their capacity to work autonomously, and to take a creative approach when engaging with young people. Both TCI providers were described as 'high-trust' organisations, where staff working with young people were empowered to be responsive to their needs. Staff saw this freedom as a way of ensuring that the service's youth-led philosophy was maintained. Staff also identified the ability to access TAPS funding as a key enabler for this creative approach.

Staff identified their ability to work in the community as a key aspect of this autonomy. Staff from both organisations are given a car, laptop and phone, allowing them to take a mobile working approach. Given the dispersed nature of Auckland's geography, and the fact that young people may live anywhere within the region, this was seen to be a key success factor supporting TCI staff in their work. Having access to a car also supports key service activities, particularly in relation to providing young people with tangible forms of support.

Staff recognised the ability to build relationships with community-based NGOs as a key attribute. This skill-set was associated with an increased awareness of available supports, and therefore, greater capacity to support young people's needs. Having positive relationships with NGO providers was also seen as a means of overcoming service availability issues, particularly in relation to housing. The presence of strong relationships between professionals was also seen to increase the consistency and quality of support provided to young people.

Staff identified regular access to training, supervision and clinical support as a key factor supporting their work. This support was considered particularly important within efforts to effectively support high-needs young people, and when responding to crisis situations around suicide or self-harm. Case-level supervision, where workers discuss how to best engage with and support young people, was also seen to be useful at a practice level. TCI staff also stated that they are able to request ad hoc training to develop skills relevant to their work, for example, motivational interviewing.

Staff from both TCI providers spoke about the importance of a positive and supportive team culture. Good relationships with other staff were seen to provide consistent access to peer support. This informal support network was useful from a practice perspective, but more importantly, provided an avenue for ensuring the self-care of frontline workers. Staff commented that they were often exposed to challenging material or experienced vicarious trauma, and that self-care was important to the sustainability of their work.

TCI staff and managers identified funding as one of the key factors restraining their work. Staff have access to TAPS funding, along with a one-off discharge grant of S1, 500. Staff acknowledged that funding limitations could constrain their responsiveness to young people's needs. Staff also stated that it was sometimes unclear what funding source to access, that it was often difficult to determine what Oranga Tamariki was obliged to pay for, and that at an organisational level, financial management could be a challenge.

Funding was also identified as key issue in regards to TCI worker pay and staff turnover. TCI staff argued that they were underpaid, and that their experience and work were undervalued. As a consequence, staff turnover rates were high within both TCI organisations. TCI workers also acknowledged that their roles were 'time-limited'; low pay and limited opportunities for advancement meant that TCI workers often moved on after several years. Staff turnover was seen to have a range of implications for young people, who spoke about the difficulties they experienced adjusting to change and developing new relationships.

TCI workers reported that their caseloads were slightly greater than what was considered manageable. On average, TCI workers appear to have a caseload of between 16-20 youth; an ideal caseload was considered to be approximately 12-15 young people. TCI workers acknowledged the compromised practice associated with overstretched capacity, stating that they were often forced to be less proactive, or to provide a lower standard of care. This reduced quality was seen to be particularly evident when some young people on a TCI worker's caseload are in crisis, and have to be prioritised for support.

TCI staff identified a range of challenges associated with accessing support through Work and Income. Young people may receive the Youth Payment while under the care of Oranga Tamariki; however, accessing this support was described as a bureaucratic and challenging process, and the financial support provided was seen to be extremely limited. TCI staff also cited challenges assessing young people's full entitlements through the adult benefit system, which was described as not user or youth-friendly. These difficulties had a range of implications for young people, including stress and going without basic necessities.

Collaboration between the two providers delivering the TCI service is limited. While staff from both organisations could see value in having positive working relationships and collaboration, no examples where this was practically achieved were identified. Poor collaboration across the service reduces opportunities to discuss practice issues, share positive experiences, identify effective community-based supports, and develop a shared understanding of what the TCI service involves. The role of competitive contracting arrangements in undermining this collaboration was also noted.

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Table 1: Factors that help or hinder service delivery – example quotes

FACTOR	EXAMPLE QUOTE
Factors that help service delivery	
Practice framework	*Change has been probably in the area of starting to implement a model and some framework of practice that provides greater guidance to [TCI workers] in and around what they do in their role. (TCI staff member)*
Creativity and autonomy	*Organisationally, I think we're really free to do what we think needs to be done, which I love. I genuinely love being able to say, "All right, somebody needs this can we do it?" "Yes" (TCI worker)*
Working in the community	*I can't imagine what the job would be like if we didn't have cars. It definitely makes it a lot easier. (TCI worker)*
Networking and relationship building	*So we have good relationships with providers in the community because we're often talking to them and they can be also helpful…referring us on to other people who may have accommodation available or different resources available. (TCI worker)*
Mentoring, guidance and clinical support	*The training has been good and there's also…the clinical support, which is really helpful. I think that's essential, actually, to have that clinical support, just to ensure that you're doing everything you can to make sure the young person is supported in the best way. (TCI worker)*
Positive and supportive culture	*In a role like this it is stressful…it's vital we have that interaction with each other and be able to express what's going on and support one another. (TCI worker)*
Factors that hinder service delivery	
Funding	*I think there should be clearer guidelines when young people get referred on to the TCI programme about funding. So, what Oranga Tamariki still funds for the young person…things like accommodation and personal documents…sometimes we get expected to pay for them out of grant money. (TCI worker)*
Pay and staff turnover	*I feel as though with being in the frontline work especially it's important that we are valued and sometimes I feel that it…would be nice to be paid what I think we're worth. (TCI worker)* *Because going through foster care, there's a lot of broken relationships. You become close with somebody and then you have to let go. And I'm sad it's one of those situations again. (Young person)*

Caseloads	*At the moment I'm at 18 but I'm…exiting one person, so 17. And I think a comfortable caseload is 15, to be fair. Because you always have a balance of young people engaging and young people maybe a bit quieter. So when you have a higher caseload and they…all need stuff it can be very stressful. (TCI worker)*
Support from Work and Income	*Once the young person is no longer under orders and there's no custody or guardianship, they're 18, like every other young adult in this world, and it's off to WINZ. So the kids and I are struggling together to do that, I'll be perfectly frank with you, because it is not user friendly. (TCI worker)*
Collaboration across TCI service providers	*If the providers had a stronger relationship there could have been benefit to both…even if you just came together once every two months to go, "These are the services that I've found really helpful and here's a contact person". (TCI staff member)*

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Role of Oranga Tamariki

Some examples of positive collaboration between Oranga Tamariki social workers and TCI staff were identified. Social workers and TCI staff highlighted the importance of communication and information sharing, on both a regular basis, and in instances where a young person is in crisis. Social workers and TCI workers may also use a co-working approach, where they plan collaboratively or share responsibility for completing relevant tasks. Several social workers said they were appreciative of this collaborative approach, stating that TCI workers often had greater capacity to support young people.

TCI workers stated that they often experienced challenges engaging with Oranga Tamariki. Workers noted that while individual social workers can be "amazing", overall, communication with Oranga Tamariki was considered poor. Staff stated that social workers often did not respond to emails or provide updates on young people, which undermined their capacity to effectively perform their role. TCI staff also highlighted a lack of formal guidelines or policy around the regularity and content of communication with social workers.

TCI staff and social workers acknowledged that high caseloads undermined Oranga Tamariki's capacity for effective engagement. Social workers stated that they had limited time to develop strong relationships with Tamariki, or support them through in-depth work. TCI workers argued that high caseloads reduced social workers to minimum levels of engagement (once every eight weeks), and that this was effectively "a waste of time". TCI workers also acknowledged the relationship between high caseloads and poor communication, and stated that they did have some empathy for the challenges social workers faced.

Young people and TCI workers have a perception that social workers discharge their statutory responsibility after making a referral to the service. In general, young people had limited on-going involvement with their social worker after being referred to TCI, and some reported feeling a sense of abandonment, or believing that their social worker "no longer cared". TCI staff also argued that after referring, some social workers did not prioritise young people, or failed to meet their obligations for providing support.

While TCI staff and social workers noted the value of early referral to the service, both parties acknowledged that this does not always occur. Early engagement with TCI was associated with enhanced opportunities for young people to develop strong relationships and key independent living skills. Despite the importance of early referral, social workers do not always take a proactive approach, and relatively older youth are often referred to the service. This issue may be exacerbated by the presence of long waiting lists for the service.

Other issues relating to how Oranga Tamariki supports the delivery of the service included:

- TCI workers cited challenges accessing funding through Oranga Tamariki, including for expenses they have a statutory obligation to meet.
- Young people's discharge from care was described as a sometimes drastic process, which occurred at too young an age. This process may result in young people experiencing added stress and trauma.
- Other practice issues included inconsistent decision-making, a lack of creativity, traumatic uplift experiences and a lack of youth-centred practice.

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Table 2: Role of Oranga Tamariki in supporting and challenging service delivery – example quotes

FACTOR	EXAMPLE QUOTE
Support provided by Oranga Tamariki	
Collaboration	*[The TCI worker] would always share information, which is good…Because [the young person] is quite a high-needs young girl, we touched based almost weekly or every other two days. (Social worker)*
Challenges posed by Oranga Tamariki	
Engagement and communication	*We email them, just letting them know updates and asking them questions. And then when they don't reply for months, it can be a bit of a joke. I understand everyone is busy but replying to an email can take five minutes….It's frustrating because we want to do the best work we can for our young people. (TCI worker)*
Caseloads and effective engagement	*We can be involved with our Tamariki but what does that involvement look like? Is it just turning up every six to eight weeks and saying, "Hi, how are you Johnny? Everything going ok?" And then going away again. That's not in-depth work. (Social worker)*
Discharge of responsibility	*She's [the social worker] sort of just blurred off and did her own thing because she thinks…that she don't have to worry about me now…I guess she thinks that there's nothing to worry about, which is a load of shit. (Young person)* *I think they [the social worker] put the young person on the backburner because our services are involved, so they feel like they don't need to be as involved. (TCI worker)*
Age of referral	*Usually we get referrals six months before they turn 17…I think it would benefit getting them earlier because then we can build that therapeutic relationship with them over the course of two years…that way when they do transition we've got that relationship in place. (TCI worker)*

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MOVING TO INDEPENDENCE

This section initially describes the different ways young people exit from the service, along with their experiences of this process and suggested improvements. The section then discusses how 'independence' can be defined, and the sorts of outcomes that may be associated with engagement in TCI. This section has a particular focus on reflecting the experiences of those young people who have formally exited from the service, and who are living independently within the community.

Exit from the service

Some young people may choose to disengage from the service before a formal exit process can occur

TCI staff stated that the voluntary, youth-led nature of the service means that young people are able to disengage at any time. In these instances, staff will often expend significant effort to reengage the young person, including calling, contracting whānau, and physically trying to locate them. For example, one TCI worker describing their efforts to re-engage a young person noted:

> We'll do a lot to track people down. I had a guy that disappeared off the rails for probably about a year but I had just enough scraps of contact to think he was still around...I heard he was homeless and on drugs - great combination - so I was going around to the police stations, looking under bridges, you know, wandering through the parks that I thought he might be.

If these efforts are not successful, young people have the option to reengage with the service at any time (up till the age of 20). It appears that this option is taken-up on a relatively frequent basis, with many young people reflecting on their experience of making this decision:

> But you can jump on and off the programme as much as you want. If you move to different places and then end up coming back to Auckland, they're always going to be here for you until you're 20.

Staff and young people noted that the choice to disengage often related to young people moving outside Auckland, either through choice, or a criminal justice sentence in a prison outside the region. Staff also noted that the choice to disengage does not always reflect a negative outcome; in some instances, young people have achieved a degree of stability and security, and no longer need the support of the service as they move to independence:

> Maybe they're 18 or 19 and they've kind of got a job, they've got a good house and they're pretty set up then they're like -- don't really need your support anymore.

TCI staff work through a staged process to exit young people from the service

TCI staff and young people highlighted the importance of a staged exit process, which is implemented at the earliest opportunity. Staff noted the value of beginning this conversation up to a year prior to exit actually occurring. Given the duration and intensity of a young person's engagement with the service, and the nature of their relationship with their TCI worker, this staged approach was seen as essential to a successful transition. Young people who had exited the programme also recognised this staged approach, describing their experience as "planned" and "gradual". Comments relating to this issue included:

> It was real planned...We always planned everything. (Young person)

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They don't like the thought of leaving the service even if they've been independent for quite some time…So that can be I think a bit daunting and overwhelming for our young people. That's why we like to like start talking about it early on so it's not like a complete surprise. (TCI worker)

Formally, young people are discharged from the service at age 20; however, some young people remain engaged beyond this point, and many supported having longer involvement with the service

The formal exit policy for the TCI service states that young people should be discharged at age 20. In many cases, this was seen to be entirely appropriate; young people have often reached a stage where they are able to move forward with their life independently. However, in some cases, it appears that the TCI service will continue to provide support to young people after formal exit should have occurred. While TCI workers acknowledged that this approach challenged the 'transitional' basis of the service, they argued that on-going support was often necessary for chaotic or high-needs young people, or those who had become parents themselves:

I must have had a handful of young people that were 20 and I kept them on because either they were parents and getting their children removed, and there was just no way I was going to back out at that stage, and/or young people that had no accommodation and suffered with mental health.

A majority of young people stated their preference to be given a longer opportunity to engage with the service. While some stated that "all good things end in time", many young people indicated that they did not feel ready to leave the service and wished it could continue. Young people cited 22 to 25 as being a more appropriate age for exit. For example, one young person discussing the age of discharge from the service noted:

I think 20 is still very young. I mean at 20 you're not fully grown, you're still learning, you know? I think it would be good for [TCI] to go to at least 22.

Comments from young people who had left the service also reflected this desire for on-going involvement, and highlighted some of the challenges they faced exiting. While these young people generally believed they had the skills to support themselves independently, they missed having access to the relationship-based support provided through their TCI worker. Young people missed having someone "you can talk to…that will help you and motivate you", and stated that it was difficult finding others within the community able to provide a comparable level of support.

Understanding independence

The service's youth-led approach acknowledges 'success' as a subjective notion, which looks different for all young people

TCI staff reflecting on the nature of a 'successful' transition highlighted a need to perceive this as a subjective notion, which looks different for all young people. This conception was seen as consistent with the service's youth-led approach, which acknowledges a young person's individual context, goals and perspectives as valid. TCI staff described 'success' as comprising "little things", and as being related to progress along a pathway, rather than of an objective state. For example, one TCI worker reflecting on the success of a young person noted:

I've got one young person and she consumes a lot of drugs and she went to rehab and then she came back out. And even for me a success for her is going one week or one day without a substance.

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Some staff drew attention to the challenges associated with measuring 'success', particularly within a contracting environment that may not allow for more subjective interpretations. Staff argued that it was difficult to accurately reflect some positive outcomes, such as reduced self-harm or an improved ability to interact with others. Staff also cautioned against assuming some outcomes as inherently negative. For example, TCI staff talked about "kids have children", and argued that this was not always a negative outcome, particularly if they are able to successfully parent them:

> *You may think that being a young parent is a negative thing but in my view, being a young parent and having your child, keeping your child in a well and safe and healthy environment is a success.*

The notion of 'success' as subjective is demonstrated by the different stories of young people who have left the service

The stories of four young people who have left the service demonstrate the fact that conceptions of success can vary considerably, along with some of the outcomes they have achieved:

- One young person, who described themselves as having foetal alcohol syndrome, said that they did not go to school or training and "just stayed home", but were happy to be "still breathing".
- After six years, one young person had recently completed their postgraduate degree, and was working in their chosen field.
- Another young person described not "doing much" after they first left the service, but after quitting drugs, "got a job and held it down", and felt "pretty positive" about their life.
- One young person was pregnant, sober, working two jobs, and determined to be involved as much as possible in the life of all her children.

Despite this variability, young people articulated a consistent vision of 'independence' and the outcomes they hoped to achieve after leaving the service

Young people's reflections on 'independence' included several common themes, particularly a definition or vision that emphasised being able to "stand on your own two feet". While young people stated that they would "still accept support", "not having to rely on other people" was seen as a key aspect of achieving independence:

> *You don't need to rely on someone to help you or look after you; you can do it yourself.*

> *So you can live by yourself, fend for yourself without other people helping you or anything. It's still good to get help, but doing it on your own.*

Young people's definitions of independence also included a number of outcomes they hoped to achieve, both before and after exiting the service. These outcomes primarily related to developing independent living skills, or "being able to get things done". Outcomes identified by young people included: knowing how to budget, having your own house, getting a fulltime job, having a licence, keeping up good personal hygiene, being able to go to a course every-day, and having food in the cupboards.

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Most young people also articulated a specific goal that they wished to achieve, or were already achieving, on their pathway to independence

On an unprompted basis, the majority of young people identified a specific goal they wished to achieve, or were already achieving, as they moved towards independence. These goals often related to careers young people wished to pursue, and included joining a defence force (Air Force, Army, and Navy), becoming a mechanic, getting a Master's degree, completing a hospitality course, becoming a hairdresser, and working in health sciences.

Young people described being "excited" by identifying, working towards and achieving these aspirations, and many stated that they "loved" engaging in this process. Young people reported that they were sometimes "surprised" by what they were able to achieve, and that the goal setting process was a powerful source of pride and motivation:

> *I go [to course] every single day. I got like 99% attendance and back in school I had the worst attendance in the whole school. That's what the principal told me and I was like, "Look at me now"...I never thought I'd be able to do that. It's cool.*

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CONCLUSION

Overall impression of the TCI service

Young people were consistently positive about the TCI service, and believed it had a meaningful impact on their life

Feedback from young people consistently included comments highlighting positive impressions of the TCI service. Young people stated that the support they received was "good", and described the service as fun and "like family". A majority of young people also commented that they would not change anything about the service, and that they supported having it offered more widely. Comments demonstrating these impressions included:

> No [I wouldn't change anything], this programme's pretty fun, eh. To be honest, everyone's really friendly here, easy to talk to.

> I think…it [the service] should be open to more people because I know a lot of people that would really benefit from this.

Feedback from young people also included testimony relating to the impact they believed the service had on their life. While most young people didn't "feel perfectly independent yet", they saw the service as helping them build a foundation from which to move forward. Other young people credited the service with making a "huge difference", noting that without TCI they would "not be where I am today". When asked how their life would be different without the service's support, some young people stated:

> The truth? I think I'd either be dead or in prison.

> I probably wouldn't be alive right now, to be honest, because when I came into [the service] I think that year I was really suicidal.

TCI staff were universally positive about the service, and saw real value in some form of transition support being offered across New Zealand

Feedback from TCI staff was universally positive, with workers describing the service as "brilliant" and of "real value". Workers argued that without some form of support, young people may die prematurely (e.g. through an accident or overdose), commit suicide, or be "left behind or forgotten". Given its perceived importance, staff supported establishing some form of TCI service across New Zealand. For example, one TCI worker reflecting on their impression of the service noted:

> I genuinely see the value in it…I've met too many young people now with not enough support…It's just too hard being 17 and doing it on your own…we need support like this to help people or else they'll just die.

While most social workers were positive about the TCI service, a small amount of more mixed feedback was also received

Overall, the majority of social workers had a positive impression of the service. Social workers described their experience of the service as "very good", and reported that the support young people received was "helpful" and "working really well". Social workers also acknowledged that TCI workers were able to provide a standard of care "much more [higher] than what we were". One social worker reflecting on their impression of the service noted:

> *I was really impressed with the type of work that they [the TCI service] were doing with her…They just provided her with emotional support and goal setting and all that kind of thing. And they were very good.*

However, a small amount of more mixed feedback on the overall quality of the service was also received. Some social workers reported being unsure of the intent of the service, describing it as a "big piece of cotton wool", or stating that it was sometimes unclear how the TCI providers were operating. These social workers argued that while they could see its potential value, the service could benefit from an overhaul:

> *I think that the aim of the service is awesome and I think that it's absolutely needed for our young people and it would be very beneficial to be rolled out over the country, because other parts of the country don't have this service at all. I just think things need to be streamlined a bit more.*

Inconsistent interpretations of the service's intent were noted across those involved in its delivery; this discrepancy may lead to different conceptions of effectiveness

Inconsistent understandings of the service's activities and intent were noted across those involved in its delivery, particularly between TCI providers and social workers. Some social workers appeared to have a perception of the service as being constrained to goal setting and practical skill development. For example, one social worker noted their belief that a TCI worker was overly focused on "voicing what the client wants", at the expense of providing more practical support.

In contrast to this perception, TCI workers saw their role as varied and multi-faceted, and highly valued the ability to provide young people with relationship-based support. TCI workers argued that the service is not limited to achieving young people's goals, and that social workers "don't know 100% what we do". It is likely that these inconsistent interpretations may be a factor contributing to differing impressions of the service's overall effectiveness.

A national model for the TCI service

Overall, feedback from young people, staff, and social workers highlights a perception that existing transition services are generally well-functioning and effective. Findings from this evaluation suggest that these services may provide an appropriate basis for a national transition support model. However, this evaluation also identified a range of factors that may improve how future transition services operate, along with some key recommendations that could inform service design. It is important to note that the following suggestions do not constitute an exhaustive list; some key areas – for example, overall funding – have not been discussed.

Suggested improvements to the referral process

- *Improve the consistency of social worker referral decision-making, including through exploring the potential for universal referral.* As such, current decision-making around referral is not 'codified' and includes a degree of individual social worker discretion, which may result in some young people being excluded from the service. A universal approach, which supports all young people exiting care who are motivated to engage, may be one option for improving consistency.

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- *Ensure all young people are given appropriate and consistent information throughout the referral process.* Within the existing referral process, the level and content of information provided was variable, which may have implications for young people's assumptions about the service and their willingness to engage. The provision of consistent information, which accurately describes the assessment process and the TCI service, could resolve this issue.

- *Improve the timeliness of the referral process.* The existence of long waiting lists was cited as a key challenge facing the service, which had a range of implications, particularly for young people. Increased resourcing for TCI staff – including potentially 'ring-fencing' the completion of needs assessments within a specific role – may help resolve this issue. Future service design could also explore how to streamline the referral process.

- *Review the status of the TCI Reference Group as a decision-making body.* This evaluation found that while many functions of the Reference Group were highly valued, it did not have a meaningful role as a decision-making body. Future service design work could include examining other decision-making approaches and reassessing the on-going role of the Reference Group, for example, as a practice forum or more generalised governance group.

Suggested improvements to how young people are supported by the TCI service

- *Improve the support offered to young people with high clinical needs.* Existing TCI services are not resourced or intended to support young people with high clinical needs, despite anecdotal evidence that an increasing number are being referred. Future service design could include the introduction of a stratified approach, where a specialist or more intensive TCI service is provided to young people who require a higher level of support. Service design could also explore opportunities for enhanced partnership with specialist disability support organisations.

- *Explore options for enhancing accommodation support.* A lack of youth-friendly or supported accommodation options was identified as a key challenge facing the TCI service. Exploring options to enhance this support, including through direct provision or partnership with other community organisations, should be an essential component of future design work.

- *Establish and/or strengthen partnerships between iwi and TCI providers.* This evaluation highlighted challenges supporting young people to develop their sense of self-identity, particularly as it relates to culture and whakapapa. Building partnerships between iwi and TCI providers may facilitate this work, and also enhance efforts to establish community-based sources of support for youth.

- *Recognise the importance of group work and activities.* Despite feedback highlighting the value of this work for young people, existing TCI services do not have specific funding allocated to supporting group work. The potential to better resource this support may warrant future consideration. In addition, the TCI service could explore opportunities to partner with other youth-focused organisations to deliver this support, for example, VOYCE – Whakarongo Mai.

- *Improve work to identify and establish young peoples' networks of natural support.* A limited focus on building young peoples' connections within the community was identified as a key factor undermining the effectiveness of the service. Given the importance of this work, the TCI service would benefit from a strengthened focus on providing this support.

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- *Introduce greater flexibility around the age young people exit from the service.* Feedback from young people suggests that a chronological approach to age of exit is not always appropriate. Introducing greater flexibility around age of exit, and acknowledging that some young people will need on-going support, may therefore be warranted. This approach is also consistent with legislation changes relating to young peoples' on-going right to access support.

Suggested improvements for supporting the delivery of the TCI service

- *Update contracting arrangements to reflect the relationship-based nature of the service.* The importance of relationship-based support was identified as a key component of the service, which was highly valued by young people. Despite this perspective, current contracting arrangements for the TCI service primarily emphasise goal setting and tangible support. Future service provision may benefit from contracting arrangements that more accurately reflect the nature of the support provided. This approach may also contribute to a more consistent understanding of the service's intent across key stakeholders.

- *Empower TCI staff to better support the needs and stability of whānau.* Feedback from this evaluation identified a need to support young people within the context of their whānau; however, TCI workers argued that they are constrained in their ability to undertake this work. Future service design could assess whether supporting whānau is considered TCI 'core business', and if so, how staff could be resourced and supported within this work.

- *Consider how to recruit and retain effective front-line staff.* As a relationship-based service, this evaluation identified the quality of TCI workers as a key success factor. Feedback also identified high-levels of staff turnover as a key challenge. Future design work could include considering recruitment approaches that attract skilled and motivated staff to the service. A focus on retaining staff – for example, by building more opportunities for advancement and recognising the specialist nature of the role in levels of remuneration – is also important.

- *Consider introducing a set of principles to guide practice and service delivery.* Feedback from this evaluation highlighted the role of practice frameworks in formalising and standardising service delivery. Future design work for a national TCI service could include developing a set of principles to guide service delivery, and ensure consistency across all providers. These principles should ensure that individual providers are able to maintain a creative approach, which is responsive to local or community-level factors.

- *Ensure performance monitoring accounts for subjective interpretations of success.* For young people within the TCI service, 'success' was identified as a subjective notion, which often presented as progress along a continuum, rather than as an objective state. This finding points to a need to ensure that provider performance is measured in a meaningful and realistic way, which does not set organisations up to fail. Future design work could include developing an outcomes framework or performance measurement approach in collaboration with young people and TCI providers.

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Recommendations for improving collaboration between Oranga Tamariki and TCI providers

- *Establish a shared understanding of how the service is intended to support young people.* Feedback from social workers and TCI staff highlighted inconsistent interpretations of the service's operation and intent. This dissonance had a number of implications, including unrealistic or incorrect service expectations, and differing interpretations of effectiveness. Current and future TCI services would benefit from establishing a shared understanding of how and why the service operates across all stakeholders.

- *Clarify the on-going engagement of social workers after referring to the service.* This evaluation identified a lack of clarity around how social workers should continue to support young people after referring to the service, and the nature of their engagement with TCI providers. Future work could explore how to clarify expectations around communication with TCI workers, on-going engagement with young people, and responsibility for funding and expenses.

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Appendix 1 **METHODOLOGY**

Design

As an input to future service design, this evaluation was designed to gather formative information relating to the operation and experience of existing TCI services. Key evaluation questions included:

- How are existing services operating on-the-ground?
- What are key success factors, and what factors facilitate or hinder effective delivery?
- How do young people and others experience the service?
- What outcomes do young people report as a result of their engagement?

A qualitative methodology was used to answer key evaluation questions. This approach allowed the research team to understand the perceptions of those involved in delivering or receiving the service, along with how it was thought to operate on-the-ground. A qualitative approach was considered the most appropriate means of achieving evaluation objectives.

Evaluation activities

Intervention logic models

Initial evaluation work involved the development of an intervention logic model with each provider. This activity allowed the evaluation team to build their understanding of the TCI service, including its intended operating practice and expected outcomes.

Interviews

A total of 33 semi-structured interviewed were undertaken by a team of three evaluators, including two Oranga Tamariki staff, and one external evaluator brought on to support the project. Twenty two face-to-face interviews were conducted within a core fieldwork period in mid-April, while the remaining 11 interviews were conducted throughout April and May (10 via telephone and one in person). Intervention logic models were used to inform the development of the interview guide.

Recruitment

Young people and TCI staff

Young people were recruited in partnership with the two organisations delivering the TCI service. Some young people were recruited directly by the provider; other young people were nominated by the provider and approached by members of the research team. TCI staff were either recruited directly by the provider, or nominated and approached by the research team.

Key stakeholders and TCI workers

Key stakeholders were identified and approached directly by members of the research team. Recruitment of social workers was supported by the Office of the Chief Social Worker. Initially, this process involved contacting Auckland Regional Managers to inform them about the evaluation and request their support nominating sites to approach for recruitment. Following this, the evaluation team contacted managers from sites who indicated a willingness to engage. Individual social workers were then nominated by Site Managers and approached for recruitment.

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Participants

Participants in the evaluation included:

- Fifteen young people, of which 11 were currently involved in the service, and four were no longer formally engaged.
- Ten staff members from both NGO organisations delivering the service, including seven frontline workers, and three involved in a management and practice leader capacity.
- Six social workers from three Auckland Oranga Tamariki sites, including two social workers, three senior practitioners, and one practice leader.
- Two key stakeholders from the Oranga Tamariki Auckland Regional Office and National Office.

Ethics

This evaluation was peer reviewed by the iMSD internal ethics panel.

The evaluation team took particular care to mitigate any risks associated with the involvement of care-experienced youth, for example:

- To reduce the risk that young people experienced emotional harm by engaging in the research, interviews were tightly focused on the TCI service, with limited questioning relating to their general life experiences or time in care.
- Young people were invited to bring a support person to the interview (none took up this opportunity), and were encouraged to discuss their participation with their social worker, TCI worker, whānau and friends.
- Young people were given a plain English information sheet and consent form prior to the interview. These were verbally explained, and young people were given the opportunity to ask questions. Young peoples' consent was also verbally confirmed prior to the interview.

Analysis

Interviews were transcribed and then coded using the NVIVO software. Coding used an inductive approach to identify key themes and to interrogate different perspectives. The analysis was primarily descriptive, and sought to privilege the interpretations, experience, and feedback of young people, social workers, and NGO staff. Quality assurance of the analysis involved two internal peer reviewers and the external evaluator reviewing the draft report. Top-line findings were also shared with key service design staff and work commissioners, which gave them the opportunity to interrogate findings at an early stage.

Reciprocity

- Young people and TCI staff were given a small koha to thank them for their time and reflective feedback on the service.
- TCI staff were given a draft version of the report, and had key findings reported back to them in a workshop. Staff were invited to provide feedback and comments on the report/findings.
- Young people will be provided with a plain English summary of key findings, which is anticipated to be complete by November 2017.

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Limitations

- The evaluation does not include systematic outcomes information, beyond what was reported by young people. Nor does the evaluation address questions of impact; i.e., the extent to which transition services improve young peoples' outcomes.
- Time and resource constraints meant that data collection was limited to a relatively small number of young people and other stakeholders.
- Participants were purposely sampled and may not be representative.
- There is some risk that providers nominated young people with a positive perception of the service to be interviewed. However, given the range of young people interviewed and the consistency in their feedback about the service, this risk is considered unlikely.

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Appendix 2 INTERVENTION LOGIC MODELS

Dingwall Trust – Launch

GOAL: Young people who have left care are interdependent, contributing adults.

UNMET NEED	TARGET POPULATION	STRATEGY	CHANGES TO AWARENESS, PERCEPTION, AND PRACTICE

Young people (YP) leaving statutory care in New Zealand need support transitioning to adulthood.
 	
These YP often:
• are recovering from trauma and abuse, along with the additional effects of poor care placements
• have developmental delays
• lack the skills required to live independently
• lack whānau and community support structures
• have low social skills/self-esteem, reducing their ability to establish connections with others
• experience poor long-term outcomes across a range of domains (health, education, employment and criminal justice)
• experience intergenerational problems, including on-going contact with the statutory care and protection system.
	YP aged 15 to 20 years who are, or have been, in out-of-home care[1], and who have a goal of independent living.
	
	While transition planning for YP is required from age 15, YP are usually referred to the programme at age 16. Some YP are also referred after formal discharge from CYF care has already occurred.
		The overall programme strategy is to support YP before, during and after transition from out-of-home care to independent living, by building a strong, stable, trusting and therapeutic relationship between the YP and the Personal Advisor (PA)[2].
		
		This relationship is used as a foundation to implement other programme sub-strategies, including:
		• Identifying the YP's immediate and longer-term needs, strengths, challenges and goals, and appropriate services.
		• Supporting the YP to develop their independent living skills and resilience.
		• Establishing a network of supports and services to guide YP through the transition process.
		• Working in a holistic, flexible manner to meet the YP's individual needs.
			SHORT-TERM
			YP's immediate needs are met across a range of domains, including:
			• Accommodation – eg, somewhere to live
			• Health – eg, enrolled with a GP
			• Income – eg, accessing a benefit
			• Food – eg, meeting nutritional needs.
			YP's relationship with the PA results in increased:
			• Trust in the PA
			• Engagement in transition planning
			• Identification of longer-term goals
			• Participation with services
			• Mitigation of crises and risk management
			• Achievement of self-identified tangible goals, for example[3]:
			  o Getting their drivers licence
			  o Opening a bank account
			  o Learning how to cook a meal.

		INPUTS/ACTIVITIES	**INTERMEDIATE**

		Social worker undertakes a *Needs Assessment* within the referral process, which identifies the YP's:
		• Strengths, wishes and needs.
		• Goals, barriers and opportunities.
		• Appropriate assistance and support to meet identified needs.
		Personal Advisor
		• Works collaboratively with the YP to create and regularly update an individualised *Transition Plan*, which:
		  o Identifies goals and tasks across a range of domains
		  o Builds on the YP's previous achievements
		  o Encourages progression towards longer-term goals.
		• Builds a strong, supportive, therapeutic and positive relationship with the YP through:
		  o Providing real-time, one-on-one mentoring
		  o Modelling positive behaviour
		  o Supporting the YP though crisis
		  o Helping them to connect with whānau/community.
		• Facilitates access to grants/services identified in the Needs Assessment or Transition Plan.
		• Builds and maintains strong relationships with the community and service providers to procure services/support that meets the needs of each YP.
			YP has developed connections and sustained, positive relationships with their whānau/community.
			YP is developing resilience skills and the ability to self-manage their own lives, including:
			• Recognition of when they need support
			• Capacity to proactively identify and engage with services
			• Crisis management.
			YP has developed competency across a range of key life domains, for example[4]:
			• Gaining legitimate employment
			• Developing financial management and budgeting skills
			• Engaging in education/training
			• Increasing emotional self-regulation
			• Taking responsibility for health needs
			YP is linked into appropriate supports to address specific needs.

			LONG-TERM
			After exiting the programme, YP can maintain short-term and/or immediate outcomes without the direct support of the PA. Based on their level of need, YP may also: • have the skill set required to function successfully within society • be happy, confident and have aspirations for their future • be engaged in mutually supportive and stable personal/intimate relationships • understand and accept their personal history and identity • break the intergenerational cycle of CYF, and be able to care for and protect their own children.

FACTORS AFFECTING ABILITY TO MEET OUTCOMES

On-going impact of trauma affects every aspect of YP's life and their ability to respond to therapeutic interventions
Incomplete or unavailable assessment can lead to undiagnosed and unmet need, eg FASDS
Significant periods of time out of education can lead to poor academic achievement
Age at time of referral (younger referral age is preferred)
Influence of parental and peer behaviour

Quality of relationship between YP and PA; staff retention issues
CYF culture, which has a priority focus on children, and sees a discharge of responsibility for these YP at age 17
Obligation to discharge at 20 is considered unrealistic, as this does not always reflect the YP's development or readiness for transition
Socioeconomic deprivation and the effects of poverty
Resourcing issues (service and placement availability, particularly housing; lack of employment/education opportunities
Criminal justice issues (no access to imprisoned YP; imprisonment outside Auckland; court involvement for matters outside YP's control)

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[1] And meet other entry criteria.
[2] The personal advisor's role is to support youth in making a planned, successful transition from care to interdependence in the community. There is no requirement to be trained in social work, but all PAs participate in regular internal and peer supervision.
[3] These goals will vary according to the individual goals/needs of each YP.
[4] These goals will vary according to the individual goals/needs of each YP.

Youth Horizons Trust – Ka Awatea

GOAL: Young people who have left care are independent, contributing adults.

UNMET NEED	TARGET POPULATION	STRATEGY
Young people (YP) leaving statutory care in New Zealand need support transitioning to adulthood. These YP often: • have dysfunctional (or no) relationships with their whānau • lack pro-social connections across the community • lack a strong sense of cultural or spiritual identity • have limited independent living skills • experience social isolation and insecurity once orders have been discharged • experience poor long-term outcomes across a range of domains (health, education, employment and criminal justice).	YP aged between 15 years and 20 years who are, or have been, in out-of-home care[1], and who have a goal of independent living. YP engage with the programme on a voluntary basis, and may cycle though periods of disengagement and re-engagement. While transition planning for YP is required from age 15, YP are usually referred to the programme at age 16. Some YP are also referred after formal discharge from CYF care has already occurred.	The overall programme strategy is to support YP before, during and after their transition from out-of-home care to independent living, by employing an *empowerment model*, where the Kai Atawhai works alongside the YP to up-skill them, develop their connections across the community and build their capacity to support themselves. Programme sub-strategies include: • Using an adaptive, *youth-led approach* to provide support based on each YP's self-identified needs and aspirations. • Using a *collaborative working style* to promote engagement with a range of services delivered by other organisations. • Working with *motivated* YP who demonstrate a willingness to engage. • Working within a *multicultural framework* and ensuring that YP receive culturally appropriate services/support.

CHANGES TO AWARENESS, PERCEPTION, AND PRACTICE

SHORT TERM

YP is engaging with services that support their individual needs.
YP is beginning to take responsibility for transition planning and identifying longer-term goals.
YP has improved soft-skills, including:
• Non-violent communication
• Anger management
• Problem solving.
YP has increased capacity to recognise and form pro-social relationships.

INPUTS/ACTIVITIES

Social worker undertakes a *Needs Assessment* within the referral process, which identifies the YP's:
• Strengths, wishes and needs.
• Goals, barriers and opportunities.
• Appropriate assistance and support to meet identified needs.
Kai Atawhai
• Works collaboratively with the YP to create and regularly update an individualised *Transition Plan*, which:
  o Identifies goals and tasks across a range of domains
  o Builds on the YP's previous achievements
  o Encourages progression towards longer-term goals.
• Supports the YP to develop pro-social connections, through:
  o Providing one-on-one mentoring and therapeutic support
  o Coaching the YP in positive communication and engagement
  o Helping the YP to identify and establish a relationship with a 'significant other'
  o Facilitating engagement between the YP and their whānau (where appropriate).
• Facilitates access to grants/services identified in the Needs Assessment or Transition Plan (for example, health, finance, education and employment services), which are delivered by a range of organisations.

INTERMEDIATE

YP is developing the skills required for independent living, including:
• Proactively accessing health and other services
• Managing own income
• Engaging in education, employment or training.
YP has reduced levels of criminal offending and substance abuse.
YP's immediate accommodation needs are met.
YP is developing their self-confidence and initiative.
YP has developed and maintained connections with their 'significant other'/whanau /community.

LONG-TERM

After exiting the programme, YP can maintain short-term and/or immediate outcomes without the direct support of the Kai Atawhai.
YP may also:
• have reconnected with their whānau (where appropriate) and developed a sense of identity
• be healthy, safe, and feel positive about their future
• demonstrate self-reliance, self-motivation and self-confidence
• be living within a safe and stable home environment
• be engaged in full-time employment or on-going education/training
• not be engaged in criminal activity.

FACTORS AFFECTING ABILITY TO MEET OUTCOMES

Service availability (particularly housing and counselling) and lack of employment opportunities.
Age at time of referral (younger referral age is preferred).
Legislation changes have increased the referral rate, exacerbating resourcing/capacity issues.
Obligation to discharge at 20 is often unrealistic.
Limited ability to follow up with the YP, even in an informal way.
Incomplete or unavailable assessment can lead to undiagnosed need; lack of initial comprehensive assessment also makes it difficult to benchmark progress.

The effects of intergenerational poverty, especially if the young person has returned home.
Focus on the YP ignores the influence of whanau and the importance of behaviour change at this level.
CYF staff have a limited understanding of the programme and often expect that the Kai Atawhai will do everything for the YP.

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[1] And meet other entry criteria.