



Briefing to the Incoming Minister



MANAAKITIA Ā TĀTOU TAMARIKI
**Children's
Commissioner**



Whānau Centre
SCAP
MAY PROGRAM

Ezekiel -
So we need
to keep o

tell

BIC Vivid
Stephens
8

About the Office of the Children's Commissioner

The Children's Commissioner advocates for the interests, rights and wellbeing of the 1.2 million under 18-year-olds in Aotearoa New Zealand. We are an Independent Crown Entity established under the Children's Commissioner Act 2003.

We have broad statutory responsibilities under several Acts. These include advocating and raising awareness about children's interests and wellbeing, ensuring the voices of children are heard in decisions that affect them, advocating for the implementation of the UN Children's Convention, providing expert advice to government agencies and courts, monitoring and assessing the services of Oranga Tamariki and inspecting places where young people are detained.

OUR AMBITION FOR THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OF AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

Like most New Zealanders, we want Aotearoa to be the best place to be a child – where all children, no matter their background, grow up knowing they belong in loving and supportive families and whānau, who have what they need to flourish.

At present, while about 70 percent of children do very well in New Zealand, about 20 percent dip in and out of hardship and about 10 percent experience persistent, life damaging disadvantage.

Our priorities

A year ago, the Commissioner set five priorities for the Office to guide and inform our work.

1. Advocate for better systems, services and supports for mokopuna Māori and their whānau

We see all mokopuna Māori within the context of their whānau, hapū and iwi. During the past year, this work has been sharply focused around the thematic review of the care and protection of pēpi Māori by Oranga Tamariki.

2. Advocate for improved child wellbeing and a child-centred approach

Child centred means whānau centred. We work with government agencies and other organisations to include children in decisions that affect them and promote the implementation of the UN Children's Convention.

3. The transformation of Oranga Tamariki care and protection and youth justice systems

In keeping with our statutory mandate, we monitor and assess the care and protection and youth justice systems and advocate for systemic changes that support children and young people to remain within their families, whānau, hapū and iwi and wider family group.

4. Education for all, that develops each child's full potential

We raise awareness of the experiences of children and young people and provide expert guidance on how education can be improved, especially for children who are not well served by the system now.

5. Advocating for children's interests, rights and wellbeing in public

An important overarching role for the Commissioner is promoting children's rights and interests as issues are raised in the media and through public forums.



"To be accepted. To be understood and taken seriously. It's important because it gives you confidence in your uniqueness."

Young person from Whangārei ¹

NB, the new Assistant Māori Commissioner for Children, Glenis Philip-Barbara has indicated that her key priorities coming into the role are eliminating racism to address inequity and advocating for increased supports for flourishing whānau. These will be reflected in our upcoming work programme.

The Current Commissioner is Judge Andrew Becroft. Prior to taking up the role on 1 July 2016, he was the Principal Youth Court Judge. His current appointment expires 30 June 2021.

¹ What makes a good life? Children and young people's views on wellbeing <https://www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/what-makes-a-good-life/> this took place in October and November 2018 and asked children and young people what wellbeing means to them, most of the quotes here are from the focus groups, interviews and messages to the Prime Minister.



Key opportunities for Government this term



1 INCLUDING CHILDREN'S VOICES IN POLICY AND DECISION-MAKING

Children have the right to participate and be heard in decisions that affect them and the Office has a statutory obligation to ensure that right is fulfilled.

When children and young people's voices are heard and incorporated it makes policy more effective.

Through our 'Mai World: Child and Youth Voices' work, we collect and share the views of children and help government agencies, schools and NGOs build their capability to listen to children and consider their views.

There are significant opportunities to improve the cross-agency activities of government to deliver on the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy by listening to children and young people. We need to expand our capacity to do this work. We currently have only 2.6FTE staff working in the Mai World team. With increased resources we could: better respond to demand for more views from children and young people, provide advice and support to government agencies, develop better consultation processes, and provide practical, child-centred tools and training.



2 PROGRESS ON CHILD POVERTY

The choices Government makes now about how New Zealand will weather the economic fallout from COVID-19 can set a better course for our children's future.

The last government laid strong foundations for progress on child poverty by linking benefit increases to wage growth, establishing a wellbeing strategy for young people and children and by setting targets to halve rates of poverty and hardship within ten years.

We believe those targets are appropriate and achievable and we look forward to the new Government making the big bold changes needed to make that happen.

We understand that the economic implications of COVID-19 increase the challenge of making progress on these targets, but in our view, this is a reason to do more for children and young people, not less.



3 STATUTORY CARE AND PROTECTION

The wellbeing of tamariki and pēpi Māori is dependent on them living with whānau and maintaining whakapapa links within their whānau, hapū and iwi. This central dimension of wellbeing has not been adequately understood or appreciated by the statutory care and protection system.

The Commissioner has heralded his upcoming recommendation for a transformation of the care and protection system to a by Māori for Māori approach.

While this will be challenging for the State, it is also an opportunity, after more than 30 years of getting it wrong for whānau and tamariki Māori, to finally get this right.



**WHAT CHILDREN
AND YOUNG
PEOPLE SAY ABOUT**

Being accepted and listened to*

**"That children
should be accepted
for who they are so
they won't be judged...."**

**13 YEAR-OLD SAMOAN TONGAN,
NIUEAN GIRL¹**

**"Listen to the students
more on what's going on
between the students which
could be harmful."**

**SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENT,
FIJIAN-INDIAN²**

**"Whānau and
whakapapa. Knowing
where you come from
builds confidence."**

15-YEAR-OLD MĀORI GIRL¹

*The quotes throughout this briefing were taken from four reports where children and young people were asked for their views on a range of different things. Each quote has been numbered according to the report they were taken from. We've grouped them by theme. These are listed at the back of this briefing.



About us

OUR MONITORING TEAM (PRIMARILY ORANGA TAMARIKI)

- Undertake performance reviews of all Oranga Tamariki residences under s13 of the Children's Commissioners Act 2003 - to assess how well they are positioned to implement the changes and improve the outcomes for children and young people in care.
- Undertake thematic reviews into policy and practice across a range of Oranga Tamariki sites .
- Review Oranga Tamariki care and protection and youth justice residences, remand homes, youth mental health, and youth forensic units under OPCAT².
- Investigate the quality of Oranga Tamariki's case management of individual cases brought to the notice of the Children's Commissioner.
- Review s47 reports³.
- Help to develop capability within Oranga Tamariki and/or contracted care providers to deliver excellent services for children and young people in state care and custody by highlighting areas for service improvements.
- Robustly and systematically obtain the views of children and young people in state care or custody or involved with other Oranga Tamariki services. Increase transparency of the monitoring work by publishing annual aggregated public reports.
- Provide professional advice and assistance to inform the policy and legislative work to transform Oranga Tamariki's services.

OUR STRATEGY, RIGHTS AND ADVICE TEAM

- Advocate for systemic changes on issues that affect children and young people, including researching and raising awareness of these issues.

- Provide independent advice to Select Committees, Ministers, Government agencies, and Crown entities on policy and legislation on the interests, rights and well-being of children.
- Encourage children and young people's participation and voice, including modelling and promoting best practice engagement, and providing advice and resources for practitioners.
- Raise awareness of children's rights and monitor how they are being upheld and advanced by the state, in line with our statutory role to uphold and promote the Children's Convention.
- Maintain a Child's Rights and Advice service that provides advice and individual advocacy for children in certain circumstances.

KEEPING YOU INFORMED

You will receive:

- Quarterly reports on our activities and progress (2 in-depth and 2 summary)
- Monitoring reports throughout the year that assess the performance of Oranga Tamariki and contracted care providers
- Copies of any of our upcoming publications.

The Commissioner is available to meet with you regularly. Staff can also provide expert advice on issues concerning the rights and wellbeing of children and provide guidance on taking a child-centred approach.

We operate on a no surprises basis. We will always inform your office of upcoming publications, speaking events, and times when we have given media comment that may significantly impact you.

Under the Children's Commissioner's Act you also have the right to require the Office to advise you on any matter relating to the Act⁴.

² Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT), reflected in the NZ Crimes of Torture Act 1989.

³ Where a child or young person is placed in the custody of the Chief Executive of Oranga Tamariki under section 39, 40 or 42 of the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 and is released within five days from that custody before being brought before the Court, a report is to be sent to the Children's Commissioner.

⁴ Section 13 (1)(d) of the Children's Commissioner Act 2003



DECISIONS MINISTERS WILL MAKE REGARDING THE OFFICE

- The appropriate budget for 2021/22.
- The recommendations in the upcoming Te Kuku o te Manawa, report 2.
- Finalising the previous government's commitment to bring the Independent Children's Monitor (ICM) into the new Children's Commission and exploring the extent and scope of the ICM's monitoring. This is a major issue.
- Legislation regarding the shape and ongoing services and functions of the new Children's Commission.
- The future of a co-commissioner Māori model for the new Commission.
- The future and role of the newly appointed Assistant Māori Commissioner for Children (currently a one year appointment).
- Commissioner appointment from 1 July 2021.

UPCOMING PUBLICATIONS

- *Te Kuku o te Manawa - Moe ararā!* Haumanutia ngā moemoeā a ngā tupuna mō te oranga o ngā tamariki. The second report in the review of Oranga Tamariki and pēpi Māori (November).
- *Life in Lockdown* – Children and Young People's views (November).
- Annual Report (December).
- *Statement of Performance Expectations* (to be published as soon as agreed by the Minister for Social Development).
- *The 2020 Child Poverty Monitor* in conjunction with J R McKenzie Trust and Otago University (December 2020).
- *Getting it Right* – The fourth report in the Children's Convention Monitoring Group series, focussed on COVID-19 and children's rights (March 2021).

BUDGET BID 21

We propose an increased Budget 21 bid which is currently being developed with MSD and KPMG to ensure continued support for the expanded OPCAT monitoring and enhanced strategy functions for another year, while future needs are still being determined.

The Office received \$4.157m in Crown funding and \$250,000 in capital funding for 2020/21. This includes \$2.157m in "baseline" funding which has not been adjusted for ten years, plus \$1m for extended independent monitoring and a \$1m adjustment to cover unmet cost pressures. The Office would benefit from an updated funding formula that resets the baseline at a realistic level incorporating all contemporary monitoring and advocacy responsibilities. The outdated, ad-hoc model has contributed to confusion over the level of resourcing needed to deliver current services for children, including additional OPCAT monitoring. MSD has engaged KPMG to assess our resource needs. In the meantime, the current funding formula applied to 2021/22 would amount to a 25 percent funding cut for the Office. This seems to be a clear error which would prevent us from providing the advocacy and services children and young people deserve. This can't be intended. I am happy to brief you further on this urgent matter.

This year, even with our Crown funding of \$4.157m, and \$250,000 in capital funding, we will be spending \$5.205m to be able to deliver on our statutory performance expectations.



2020/21 Budget	Amount (000s)
Crown Revenue	\$4,157
Other Revenue	\$651
Interest	\$10
Capital Funding	\$250
Total Revenue	\$5,068
Personnel Expenditure	\$4,159
Operating Expenditure	\$690
Projects (incl. Capital Projects)	\$352
Depreciation	\$4
Total Expenditure	\$5,205
Projected Deficit \$ (spending reserves)	-\$137
Reserves at 1 July 2020	\$510
Reserves at 30 June 2021	\$373



Policy Initiatives	2019/20 Final Budgeted \$000	2020/21 Budget \$000	2021/22 Budget \$000	2022/23 Budget \$000	2023/24 Budget \$000
Baseline Funding	2,157	2,157	2,157	2,157	2,157
State Care for Children and Young people – Improving Outcomes through Independent Monitoring	1,000	1,000	-	-	-
Addressing Cost Pressure and Additional Capacity	-	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
Capital Injection	-	250	-	-	-
Total	3,157	4,407	3,157	3,157	3,157

	Assistant Maori Commissioner for Children	Strategy Rights and Advice	Development, Monitoring Investigations	Commissioner for Children	Corporate	Comm-unications
Staff Count	1	14	12	1	5	3
Staff FTE (Positions filled)	1	12.63	10.13	1 (fixed term)	5	3
Vacancies	1	2	2	0	1	1 (secondment)



OPPORTUNITIES TO
make
a real
difference



FOR
children
and young
people

Ensuring COVID-19 recovery tackles child poverty and wellbeing

The choices Government makes now about how New Zealand will weather the economic fallout from COVID-19 can set a better course for our children's future.

In 2019 over 300,000 children experience income poverty (below 60% median after-housing cost measure), over 150,000 children are living in material hardship (go without 6 or more key things they need for their wellbeing) & 92,300 children live-in low-income households and in material hardship⁵.

Poverty affects physical and mental health, education and life outcomes. Poverty is not just financial and material hardship; it also is about children having less time with their parents and fewer opportunities and experiences in life.

“Money may not be the key to happiness, but it is the key to living and I know many people who struggle.”

17-year-old girl⁶

COVID-19 has highlighted both what works well for children and young people (for example more time with their parents) and the existing holes in our social safety net, some of which were made even worse. With increased unemployment, underemployment, rising house and food prices families are increasingly doing it tough.

While meeting government targets to reduce poverty and hardship will be challenged by the fallout from economic downturn, COVID-19 is a reason to do even more to address child poverty, not an excuse to do less.

Government actions in the past 3 years – including the Child Poverty Reduction Act with measures, targets and the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy – all lay a strong foundation for progress. Now is the time to ramp up efforts to improve child wellbeing. We note your manifesto commitments to reduce poverty by continuing the welfare overhaul and implementing the recommendations of the Welfare Expert Advisory Group and your pre-election announcement to increase abatement thresholds so people can earn more while on a benefit. We also note many initiatives to mitigate the impacts of poverty such as expanding the Free and Healthy School Lunch programme and more mobile dental clinics for children and young people.

We recommend you:

- Consider other initiatives that would make a substantial difference to child wellbeing, including: passing on the child support payment to the child's caregiver; a full review of rates and practices to ensure beneficiaries are getting their full entitlements; and universal or targeted Child Support payment for ages 0-5.
- Commit to improving housing quality and affordability, prioritising families with children.

We welcome your thoughts about how we could support your efforts to reduce poverty. We are interested in encouraging business, philanthropic, local government and community sectors to play a greater role in reducing and mitigating child poverty and aligning their efforts with the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy.

⁵ Child Poverty Monitor, 2020, Draft Report

⁶ What makes a good life? Children and young people's views on wellbeing <https://www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/what-makes-a-good-life/> this took place in October and November 2018 and asked children and young people what wellbeing means to them, most of the quotes here are from the focus groups, interviews and messages to the Prime Minister.



**CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE
TOLD US ABOUT**

Life during COVID-19 lockdown

**"I was just really
lonely man, I felt
like I couldn't talk to
people."**

15 YEAR OLD GIRL³

**"Going for walks with my
Dad. I felt happy because we
could walk and talk. It was fun
because we got to spend more
time together."**

11 YEAR OLD BOY³

**"I'm pretty sure it was one
of the most significantly
distinctive experiences of my life,
i loved it, got scared at times, and
made me want to continue online
school forever. but i do miss my
friends so much."**

14 YEAR OLD GIRL³

**"Online school was
hard at sometimes
when we were learning
about something new and
the teacher couldn't really
explain to us that well."**

12 YEAR OLD TAMARIKI³

**"I will remember how
bored I got in the lockdown
not playing with friends is
the thing I will remember
the most."**

12 YEAR OLD BOY³



**WHAT CHILDREN
AND YOUNG
PEOPLE SAY
ABOUT**

Poverty and opportunity

"Not being able to afford things - like sports or activities. People try to help us to make it easier but it's shameful."

CHILD FROM GISBORNE¹

"I think that it is incredibly important that families have enough money to be able to pay for basic things like food, clothing, bills and other necessities. When children go to school hungry or without enough warm clothing it impacts their ability to learn, communicate and participate in class. Without being able to do these basic things, it can impact their future career, and most importantly their wellbeing."

15-YEAR-OLD NEW ZEALAND EUROPEAN GIRL¹

"Enough for the basics, plus a little bit more"

YOUNG PERSON FROM DUNEDIN¹

"Better job opportunities and higher minimum wage so my parents have more time to spend with me, my brothers, and sister."

13-YEAR-OLD BOY FROM ŌTARA¹



Supporting pēpi, tamariki and rangatahi Māori to remain in the care of their whānau

While only 25% of New Zealand children identify as Māori, over 2/3 of those in the care of the state are Māori. On average, 170 pēpi are removed from their mother each year shortly after birth⁷, causing immediate and intergenerational harm. Evidence shows the statutory care and protection system is not working for Māori, and repeated attempts to improve the system have failed.



We have been the independent monitor and assessor of the state care system since 1989 and have been reporting publicly on our findings since 2015. Māori are not well served by the current statutory care and protection system, and urgent change is needed. Recent reforms that established Oranga Tamariki are not delivering the transformational change needed.

After conducting a year-long review into what needs to change to enable pēpi Māori to remain in the care of their whānau in situations where Oranga Tamariki has Reports of Concern, we concluded Māori must be recognised as best placed to care for their own, and be supported to lead this transformation. This requires transfer of power and resources so that iwi and Māori organisations can design, develop and deliver authentic kaupapa Māori support and services. We note your manifesto commitments to ensure Oranga Tamariki partner with iwi, hapū, and Māori organisations to find appropriate solutions for children in need. We can support you to take this even further.

“That children should be accepted for who they are, so they won’t be judged....”

13-year-old Samoan, Tongan, Niuean girl

We strongly urge the Prime Minister and Cabinet to:

- Commit to transferring power and resources, from Government, to enable by Māori, for Māori approaches that keep pēpi Māori in the care of their whanau.

⁷ Averaged over the six years to June 2019.

Mai World: Hearing children's voices in policy and decision-making



1.2 million children are 24% of the population and need their voices heard. Children have the right to participate and be heard in decisions that affect them. Gathering children's views and considering their interests will ensure that policies meet their needs and better decisions are made. Through our 'Mai World: Child and Youth Voices' work, we collect and share the views of children. We encourage, advocate and provide advice to government agencies, schools and NGOs to listen to children and consider their views.

For example, we are proud of our efforts working alongside DPMC and Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children, to hear the voices of over 6000 children and young people, informing the development of the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy. Our report, *What Makes a Good Life?* has also informed many other areas of policy development. We are releasing *Life in Lockdown*, sharing the experiences of children in the COVID-19 lockdown. These demonstrate how we can support young people to exercise their right to be heard, and agencies to consider their views and make better policy.

Consultation processes, including Select Committee and agency policy development, should be constantly evolving to provide innovative opportunities for children to have a say in matters that are relevant to them. Agencies have committed to doing this, but there is a significant need for our expertise, support and guidance to ensure engagement processes reflect best practice child and youth engagement in Aotearoa New Zealand. With increased resources, we could better respond to growing demand, and continue to help improve public sector policy development and consultation processes, providing children's views as well as practical child-centred tools and training. This is an area of policy making and public engagement that is seeing significant growth and needs expert guidance.

"I think all children need to start on the same platform, all with strong family relationships, food, shelter and necessities, as well as being able to go to school feeling happy and safe... I strongly believe that all children in New Zealand need to be offered the same opportunities so they have an equal and fair chance of being successful."

18 year-old Samoan girl⁸

We recommend you:

- Urgently increase resources for Mai World, so we can help improve public sector policy development and consultation processes, providing children's views as well as practical child-centred tools and training.

⁸ What makes a good life? Children and young people's views on wellbeing <https://www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/what-makes-a-good-life/> this took place in October and November 2018 and asked children and young people what wellbeing means to them, most of the quotes here are from the focus groups, interviews and messages to the Prime Minister.



**WHAT CHILDREN
AND YOUNG
PEOPLE SAY
ABOUT**

The climate and our environment

**"Help them learn how
to take good care of the
environment."**

**12 YEAR OLD NEW ZEALAND
EUROPEAN BOY¹**

**"Create laws/regulations/policies
to ensure the Kaitiakitanga
and sustainability of the natural
environment for future generations"**

AGE 17⁴

**"Clean environment,
plastic free, respect the
environment, no pollution,
no littering."**

**YOUNG PERSON FROM MT
MAUNGANUI¹**

Upholding children's rights

New Zealand ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Children's Convention) in 1993. The Children's Convention provides a framework for thinking about and addressing all the interrelated issues affecting children - like health, education, play, family, language, culture, identity, privacy and having a say - in a way that enhances their wellbeing. The Children's Convention applies in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand and Te Tiriti o Waitangi. When embedded in our laws, policies and practices across all areas of government, children's rights can help ensure better outcomes for children.



The Office of the Children's Commissioner is required by statute to monitor how well the Government is implementing and upholding the rights of children. We convene the Children's Convention Monitoring Group (with membership from the Human Rights Commission, the Children's Rights Alliance Aotearoa, Save the Children and UNICEF New Zealand) as part of this monitoring role. We also work closely with the Ministry of Social Development on the cross-government Children's Convention Work Programme.

In 2019, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern made a pledge to recommit to the Children's Convention and therefore the promotion, protection and realisation of all rights for all children in Aotearoa. The Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy is a vehicle for putting children's rights into practice and includes the Children's Convention as an underpinning principle.

We strongly support:

- Your commitment to ratifying the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure and to removing all reservations to the Convention as articulated in Labour's policy manifesto. We look forward to supporting you in this work over the next three years.

Reducing harm to children and young people in the youth justice system

1,443 young people were before the Youth Courts between 1 July 2019 - 30 June 2020. Of this number, 909 were Māori (63%).



Some of the greatest risks to children and young people in New Zealand exist and are exacerbated within and across our youth justice system. For safer, better and restorative outcomes we need whānau and community-based responses for children and young people to be prioritised and resourced. These responses need to be designed to reduce the stark inequities, particularly for rangatahi Māori and disabled young people, in the youth justice system. While it's been encouraging to note the development of remand home care, and a commitment by Oranga Tamariki Youth Justice, to reduce the numbers of young people placed in the large secure residences, further change is required.

In August 2020 we published a State of Care monitoring report and made significant recommendations for improving the statutory system response for children aged 10 – 13 with offending behaviour and for their families and whanau.

Effective and coordinated cross-agency intervention, accessed as early as possible, will reduce the numbers of these children transitioning into the higher tariff care and protection and youth justice systems.

In our statutory role to monitor and advocate for the advancement of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child we would welcome the opportunity to advise on implementing the manifesto commitment to remove the reservations to the Children's Convention, and its implications for youth justice.

In particular we continue to call for:

- In cases where children and young people, under 18 years of age, need to appear before a court, this should be solely before the Youth Court.
- Prioritise and resource strengthening of the cross-agency response system for children who offend in the 10 – 13 age group, ensuring leadership by Oranga Tamariki and the Police, involving the Ministries of Health and Education and in close consultation with iwi, Māori and NGOs, nationally and locally.
- An end to “police pursuits” when there are reasonable grounds to suspect anyone in the vehicle is under 18 years of age.
- Stop the remand of young people in police cells. We recommend that the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 be changed to remove the option for the Youth Court to remand young people in police custody.
- The minimum age of criminal responsibility to be raised to 14 years.

Improving child and youth mental wellbeing

We have particular concern about the mental wellbeing of children and young people in Aotearoa. There has been a doubling in depressive symptoms and suicide attempts amongst young people in the past 5 years, on top of a consistent, internationally high youth suicide rate.

It is now clear that we can make the greatest impact on wellbeing very early in a child's life; in the critical first 1000 days from conception to age two. This is therefore a priority period in which to remove stressors for families and whānau.

We welcome the establishment of the new Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission, the review (and necessary extension) of Well Child Tamariki Ora and commitments to roll-out mental health supports in schools. To be successful, the mental health support in schools needs to be delivered alongside initiatives to remove the stressors that the supports are designed to help children cope with.



We recommend the following steps to trigger system-wide change:

- Move to a collective and structural view of mental wellbeing (away from individual) that prioritises a te ao Māori worldview.
- Prioritise action to support those facing the biggest mental health inequities, including disabled, Māori, Pacific and rainbow children and young people.
- Prioritise children and young people in the mental health and wellbeing reforms underway and planned.
- Remove the key stressors that impact on mental wellbeing, such as poverty, social exclusion and discrimination.

“Having access to stuff, like services. Our mental health system is st.**

Young person from Wellington¹

¹ What makes a good life? Children and young people's views on wellbeing <https://www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/what-makes-a-good-life/> this took place in October and November 2018 and asked children and young people what wellbeing means to them, most of the quotes here are from the focus groups, interviews and messages to the Prime Minister.



**WHAT CHILDREN
AND YOUNG PEOPLE
SAY ABOUT:**

Mental Health

"Assistance with mental health issues like anxiety and depression."

16-YEAR-OLD NEW ZEALAND EUROPEAN BOY¹

"I would make it compulsory for teachers to learn about mental health as 80% of the teachers I have couldn't give a rat's [!@*!] about how we feel."

SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENT, NZ EUROPEAN/MIDDLE EASTERN²

"Better mental, physical and sexual health and support in and out of schools."

17-YEAR-OLD NEW ZEALAND EUROPEAN GIRL¹

Closure of Oranga Tamariki secure care and protection residences

The phased closure of these residences has been a key priority for the Children's Commissioner since 2017. Some of New Zealand's most vulnerable children and young people continue to be placed together in groups of up to 10 in these residences. They interact with each other in ways that exacerbate harmful behaviours and result in children being retraumatised and frightened by the behaviour of their peers.

Our first 2018 State of Care report, *Maiea te Tūruapō: Fulfilling the Vision*, advocated for residences to be replaced by well-supervised, small community-based group homes. These are a far better response for this small group of children and young people who need a very sophisticated level of professional care. These children often have trauma histories and mental health issues resulting in severe behaviour challenges that require tailored specialist care.

We reiterated our serious concerns about the safety and wellbeing of children and young people living in large institutional residences in both our 2017 State of Care report which focussed on Oranga Tamariki's secure residences, and in our 2019 State of Care report sharing the voices of children in these residences: 'A Hard Place to be Happy'.

We recommend you:

- Require Oranga Tamariki to immediately develop and implement a robust, well-consulted and timeframed plan for establishing alternative small specialised care homes to replace Child Protection residences, so that vulnerable children can receive the quality of care they need in an environment specifically designed to meet their needs.
- Ensure this plan is developed in consultation and partnership with iwi and Māori and in accordance with s7AA of the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989.
- Support investment required to implement this plan within the next 3 years.



**WHAT CHILDREN
AND YOUNG PEOPLE
SAY ABOUT:**

Racism and discrimination

**"Stereotypes of being
Māori – crackheads, drug
dealers, crime, black power,
domestic violence, hood rats,
window washers, pohara, hori,
gangs, alcoholic parents."**

RANGATAHI FROM AUCKLAND¹

**"Teach acceptance more...
Just so that people can learn
to accept other cultures, because
I feel like what's happened in the
past is that people have been taught
it's okay to just think within your one
culture, and that's it for your whole
life. But then the thing is the world
is such a vast place."**

YOUNG PERSON FROM WELLINGTON¹

**"The negative statistics
are always reminders of
how we fail... why do we
constantly get reminded of
how we fail?"**

**STUDENT IN ALTERNATIVE
EDUCATION, MĀORI²**



CHILDREN'S QUOTES

The quotes throughout this briefing were taken from four reports where children and young people were asked for their views on a range of different things. Each quote has been numbered according to the report they were taken from.

1. What makes a good life? Children and young people's views on wellbeing

<https://www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/what-makes-a-good-life/>

This took place in October and November 2018 and asked children and young people what wellbeing means to them. Most of the quotes here are from the focus groups, interviews and messages to the Prime Minister.

2. Education Matters to me: Key Insights

<https://www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/education-matters-to-me-key-insights/>

This took place in October and November 2017 and asked children and young people their views on education.

3. Life in Lockdown

This took place in May and June 2020 and asked children and young people about their experiences of COVID-19 level 3 and 4 lockdown.

4. What's important to me?

<https://www.occ.org.nz/assets/Uploads/What-is-Important-Mai-World-Issues-Report-Dec18.pdf>

This took place in the lead up to the 2017 election and asked children and young people about living in New Zealand. The quotes here are an overview of what children and young people told us and encompass the views of those we heard from.





MANAAKITIA Ā TĀTOU TAMARIKI

Children's
Commissioner