



Response from Oranga Tamariki to recommendations from the Mana Mokopuna monitoring visit to:

Epuni Care and Protection Residence

Visit date – April 2024

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Introduction

Epuni Care and Protection Residence (Epuni) is an Oranga Tamariki run care and protection residence for tamariki and rangatahi. The facility is located in Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington).

In April 2024, staff from Mana Mokopuna—Children and Young People’s Commission (Mana Mokopuna) completed an unannounced monitoring visit to the facility.

The facility has capacity to take 15 tamariki and rangatahi. Under the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989, the legal status which rangatahi are detained on remand at the home include:

- section 78 – Custody of child or young person pending determination of proceedings or in urgent cases, and
- section 101 – Custody orders.

The purpose of the visit was to assess the quality of Oranga Tamariki services against the seven domains relevant to Mana Mokopuna’s role as a National Preventive Mechanism under the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT). The seven domains are:

- Domain 1: Treatment
- Domain 2: Protection systems
- Domain 3: Material conditions
- Domain 4: Activities and contact with others
- Domain 5: Medical services and care
- Domain 6: Personnel
- Domain 7: Improving outcomes for mokopuna Māori.

The draft OPCAT report was shared with Oranga Tamariki on 17 July 2024.

Recommendations Summary

The OPCAT report for Epuni makes 12 recommendations, and all are accepted.

We value the feedback we receive from Mana Mokopuna and use recommendations to make improvements. For this report, Mana Mokopuna acknowledged several areas of excellent practice and made a range of positive observations about the high quality of care mokopuna were receiving at the facility.

Oranga Tamariki is committed to strengthening practice as a priority and we continue to work towards ensuring consistent, quality practice, that is inclusive, collaborative, culturally responsive and meets the needs of tamariki and rangatahi. We are committed to achieving better outcomes for tamariki and rangatahi and we value the feedback and insights provided by Mana Mokopuna.

Recommendations	Status
Oranga Tamariki Systemic Recommendations	
1. Urgently cease new admissions into the residence to allow kaimahi time to train and reset the residence culture. (This recommendation was made immediately to Oranga Tamariki in April 2024 and actioned).	Accepted
2. Establish a plan that outlines tangible actions with timeframes to focus on during the residence reset. Core areas of work are to develop a therapeutic, trauma-informed model of care and ensure mokopuna are safe in the residence.	Accepted
3. Target the recruitment of new kaimahi by prioritising applicants that are qualified in either social work or have relevant youth-centred experience, in order to build a therapeutically focused workforce.	Accepted
4. Ensure national training packages include (in addition to the current content) the day-to-day fundamentals of working with mokopuna in residence such as managing behaviours, note taking, incident reporting, and medication dispensation.	Accepted
5. Review the infection control policy to ensure it is being followed by all kaimahi working in residences.	Accepted
6. Urgently review the agreement between the Ministry of Education, Oranga Tamariki and the Central Regional Health School to ensure mokopuna have full access to a comprehensive education whilst at Epuni residence.	Accepted
7. Work with Health New Zealand Te Whatu Ora to develop a model of care and referral process that is prompt and comprehensive to meet all health needs of mokopuna in residences.	Accepted
Facility Recommendations	
1. Reinstate leadership team meetings that focus on connection and re-setting the workplace culture with a focus on mokopuna care and safety.	Accepted
2. Ensure kaimahi have access to professional clinical and cultural supervision, with time to attend during their shift.	Accepted
3. Provide training refreshers to all kaimahi that include kaupapa such as keeping line of sight, grounds for secure care admission, incident reporting and the fundamentals of building relationships with mokopuna including those with very high and complex needs.	Accepted
4. Conduct a review of the use of Secure Care within the residence. In particular the grounds cited for admission and the use of Regulation 48 of the Residential Care Regulations.	Accepted

Recommendations	Status
5. Continue to build and strengthen the relationship with Te Āti Awa and work together to improve outcomes for mokopuna and whānau Māori.	Accepted

The responses to the Epuni OPCAT report recommendations are detailed in the remaining sections of this report.

Response to Systemic Recommendations

Below are our responses to the systemic recommendations made in the Epuni OPCAT report.

Recommendation 1

Urgently cease new admissions into the residence to allow kaimahi time to train and reset the residence culture. (This recommendation was made immediately to Oranga Tamariki in April 2024).

Response

In March 2024, Oranga Tamariki Residences and Homes senior leaders identified the need to make urgent operational changes at Epuni to reset the residence's culture. An interim leadership change was immediately made with the National Operations Manager leading out these changes from within Epuni. On 2 April 2024 an acting Residence Manager was introduced with a mandate to continue implementing the required changes to ensure the safe, effective, and efficient operation of Epuni.

After an immediate assessment of the residence's operations, and with support from the Residences and Homes Senior Leadership Team, a temporary hold on admissions was progressed in mid-March and an action plan was developed (which is covered in more detail in our response to systemic recommendation 2). This supported Epuni kaimahi to focus on transition planning for the planned exit dates for each tamaiti during this period, reducing the number of tamariki in Epuni care from 15 in mid-March, to nine in mid-April, and four by mid-May 2024.

Following the ongoing success of the various actions put in place to support the safe, effective and efficient operation of Epuni from March 2024, it was agreed by senior Oranga Tamariki leaders in May 2024 that new admissions to the residence could resume on a case-by-case basis. This has involved the gradual and controlled admission of tamariki and rangatahi to Epuni, with a more intensive assessment of the safety and wellbeing for each tamaiti occurring for every admission decision through increased national oversight.

Recommendation 2

Establish a plan that outlines tangible actions with timeframes to focus on during the residence reset. Core areas of work are to develop a therapeutic, trauma-informed model of care and ensure mokopuna are safe in the residence.

Response

To further support the actions set out in our response to systemic recommendation 1, and in line with Mana Mokopuna's immediate recommendation, an action plan for Epuni was developed in April 2024. The overall goal of this plan was to support the immediate and long term safe, effective, and efficient operation of Epuni.

The action plan focuses on the following priority areas below:

- lifting leadership capability;
- strengthening practice and training so this is therapeutic and trauma-informed;
- increasing mechanisms to support the safety of tamariki and rangatahi;
- intensive recruitment;
- more targeted quality assurance;
- building and maintaining effective key stakeholder relationships; and
- improving infrastructure.

The action plan was agreed by the Oranga Tamariki executive leadership team and was provided to Mana Mokopuna on 24 May 2024.

The plan has been closely monitored by a panel of senior Oranga Tamariki leaders, ensuring required operational changes embed, and are sustained at Epuni. Monitoring remains ongoing, and we are pleased with the progress of these actions.

Recommendation 3

Target the recruitment of new kaimahi by prioritising applicants that are qualified in either social work or have relevant youth-centred experience, in order to build a therapeutically focused workforce.

Response

Recruitment of new kaimahi at Epuni Care and Protection Residence, and across all residences, that are qualified in social work or have relevant youth centred experience is a priority focus by the Residence and Homes Team nationally and locally.

Significant recruitment has occurred at Epuni since April 2024, including the recruitment of 14 full time youth workers, most of which have previous employment experience in youth work or working with youth. A further eight casual youth workers with a similar background in youth work have also been employed. We have also appointed a third Team Leader Operations, who is a registered social worker with 20 years of experience, which is a valuable addition to the operational component of our leadership team.

A recent attempt to recruit for five new residential social worker positions at Epuni was made but, unfortunately, we did not receive any applicants. The function of these roles is to work collaboratively with residential youth workers to develop and lead a therapeutic care approach, ensuring the delivery of the necessary services to continue to support keeping rangatahi safe, uphold their dignity and rights, and meeting their needs. The lack of applicants at this time highlights the general shortage in social workers throughout the country. Recruitment for these roles will continue.

Recommendation 4

Ensure national training packages include (in addition to the current content) the day-to-day fundamentals of working with mokopuna in residence such as managing behaviours, note taking, incident reporting, and medication dispensation.

Response

Care and Protection Residences national training packages are aligned to the Oranga Tamariki Practice Approach.

A residence specific induction package called Te Waharoa Mihi Whakatau is provided to all new frontline kaimahi. This package provides an orientation to the organisation and residential practice and is a starting point of ongoing professional development for kaimahi.

The package includes:

- Practice Fundamentals: Practice Standards, Practice Approach, 3 Worlds Practice tool.
- Safety interventions Foundation level: Supporting and working with individuals experiencing distress.
- A location specific orientation which includes medication processes, managing a safe environment, recording (note taking, incident reporting), and the rights of tamariki and rangatahi in care.
- National E-learn models on using the MySafety incident reporting tool, (health, safety, and security process), information security, and privacy.

Oranga Tamariki has also recently upgraded and deployed packages in:

- Promoting Resilience: A trauma informed approach to supporting behaviours and building resilience of tamariki and rangatahi in care.
- Promoting Resilience for Leaders: A leadership package focused on creating a supportive team and environment for trauma informed practice.
- Supervision practice for First Line Leaders: An introduction to the role of supervision in supporting ongoing professional and practice development of kaimahi.

Epuni has also seen the introduction of the New Zealand Certificate in Youth Work (Level 3) for Youth Workers, which is delivered by Te Pūkenga. There are currently 32 kaimahi enrolled in this programme from Epuni and the community group homes connected to Epuni. Youth Workers are due to graduate by the end of 2024. Additional Youth Workers have indicated their desire to enrol in 2025.

All training packages are reviewed 12-monthly or earlier if needed to ensure they are fit for purpose and based on best practice. They are also reviewed to ensure they are consistent with the Oranga Tamariki practice approach as this work evolves.

Recommendation 5

Review the infection control policy to ensure it is being followed by all kaimahi working in residences.

Response

Oranga Tamariki hazard control plans are used for hazard and risk management. These plans cover a range of hazards including biological substances, such as exposure to bodily fluids, and communicable diseases.

Each plan identifies the type of hazard and the potential harm and provides controls and actions to safely manage these. These plans also outline monitoring requirements, the correct use of personal protection equipment and links to any other useful information and websites (for example, links to Ministry of Health resources including their control manual).

Locally at Epuni, when a tamaiti or rangatahi become unwell they are offered bedrest in their rooms, creating a natural separation from their peers and thereby helping to prevent the spread of sickness. Arrangements are then made by kaimahi for the tamaiti or rangatahi to visit our onsite health provider, Vibe. Any planning that is required to manage the health condition of the tamaiti or rangatahi is then guided by medical advice. Kaimahi are very familiar with this process which has been in place for many years.

It is noted that your monitors were told by multiple kaimahi that there had been instances of scabies and gastroenteritis related viruses spreading through the residence. This is incorrect. There were isolated cases of scabies and gastroenteritis, with the appropriate health advice followed once these issues were known. This significantly limited the spread of these infectious conditions.

To support upskilling of kaimahi, all kaimahi have undergone training on required protocols and controls for managing infectious biological substances.

Recommendation 6

Urgently review the agreement between the Ministry of Education, Oranga Tamariki and the Central Regional Health School to ensure mokopuna have full access to a comprehensive education whilst at Epuni residence.

Response

All tamariki and rangatahi have a right to receive an education. Oranga Tamariki acknowledges the need to ensure tamariki and rangatahi in residences have the appropriate levels of support in the classroom, and as they transition out to their community school setting, to enable them to participate and achieve in education. This is a priority.

Oranga Tamariki and the Ministry of Education have been working together to build a stronger relationship, with work underway to support improved educational outcomes for tamariki and rangatahi. Through the Oranga Tamariki Action Plan and in response to the Education Review Office report on education provision in Oranga Tamariki residences, there has been joint work programmes between the two Ministries. This has included developing "National Guidelines for the Provision of Education with Care and Protection and Youth Justice Residences" which sits as a new Schedule to the Memorandum of Understanding.

The purpose of this Schedule is to:

- set out a description of the key roles and responsibilities of the various organisations involved in the provision of education within care and protection residences and youth justice residences; and
- specifically outline the commitments made by the parties to this Schedule to each other.

Day-to-day operational responsibilities are agreed to on a residence-by-residence basis between each School Board/Contracted Provider and Oranga Tamariki in a separate Residence Education Operational Agreement. We acknowledge this is yet to be implemented between Epuni and their education provider,

Central Regional Health School. The schedule for this work is still being agreed and under active consideration.

It is the intention of both Ministries to maintain and strengthen these relationships and agreements with the goal of improving the educational experience for tamariki and rangatahi in residences and during transition back to the community.

Recommendation 7

Work with Health New Zealand Te Whatu Ora to develop a model of care and referral process that is prompt and comprehensive to meet all health needs of mokopuna in residences.

Response

Six Te Whatu Ora Districts have been providing (or subcontracting) co-located health services for Oranga Tamariki care and protection and youth justice residences since 2012.

To improve health service provision and collaboration between Oranga Tamariki and the local health and mental health agencies, interagency manager groups have been established across four regions to meet the needs of residences within Counties Manukau, Mid Central/Capital Coast, Hutt Valley/Capital Coast and Otago/Southern districts.

Te Whatu Ora and Oranga Tamariki are presently establishing a series of regular forums for the range of stakeholders including clinicians, Te Whatu Ora contract managers, and a steering group which would sit across both. The purpose is to support and enhance health service delivery across residences.

Advice is being provided to Ministers in September to obtain approval for a work plan that includes referral and escalation pathways, for young people in residence.

In a previous budget round Te Whatu Ora allocated funding to enhance the provision of specialist mental health services to tamariki and rangatahi in Oranga Tamariki care and protection residences. This funding was specifically targeted at ensuring the appropriate level of mental health support is provided and to complement the in-reach services already received.

Response to Facility Recommendations

Below are our responses to the facility recommendations made in the Epuni OPCAT report.

Recommendation 1

Reinstate leadership team meetings that focus on connection and re-setting the workplace culture with a focus on mokopuna care and safety.

Response

Weekly leadership team meetings have been in place from April 2024. The leadership team comprises the following roles:

- Residence Manager
- Manager Residence Operations
- Team Leaders Operations (x3)
- Team Leader Clinical Practice
- Team Leader Support Services
- Training Lead
- Kaiwhakaako (cultural advisor)
- Programme Coordinator

These meetings support the leadership team to come together and discuss any important matters relating to the operation of the residence. Each meeting has an agenda and minutes are taken so the progress of actions can be tracked each week.

The weekly leadership meetings are further supported by two additional meetings that occur at the start and end of each week. These support the leadership team to review any matters that have arisen during the weekend, and to focus on planning for the coming week. The end of the week hui allows the review of planning for the week and consideration of arrangements for the weekend.

In addition to the weekly leadership forums, a regional monthly hui has been established which includes Epuni Residence leaders, Site, Education, Health and Iwi.

We have also engaged in culture-setting for all kaimahi across residence based on the concept, 'The behaviour you walk past is the behaviour you accept' to ensure that the wellbeing of tamariki is paramount in everything we do. This work has focused on the leadership team supporting kaimahi to better understand:

- where we have been as a residence and how we can learn from this
- legislation, regulations, policy and practice guidance requirements
- how we deliver high quality care where tamariki are safe, flourish and are free from harm
- engaging in regular training to support delivering high quality care
- our 'why' or the reasons we want to help and support tamariki at Epuni.

Recommendation 2

Ensure kaimahi have access to professional clinical and cultural supervision, with time to attend during their shift.

Response

Oranga Tamariki is committed to delivering supervision and encourages kaimahi to make use of all forms of supervision (supervisor/supervisee supervision, group supervision, peer supervision, cultural supervision) to reflect, learn and stretch. Focusing on kaimahi ora is also an important part of the supervision process.

We recognise the importance of regular professional supervision. As per our professional supervision policy, the Social Work Registration Board's policy requires that social workers "... access regular and appropriate supervision at least monthly and in a manner that is consistent with reasonable expectations of the levels of skill and practice ability of the individual." In this regard, registered social workers at Epuni undertake regular supervision, which is facilitated externally. As per the same policy, youth workers are required to have group supervision every three weeks.

At the time of your visit, we acknowledge kaimahi were unable access supervision in a timely manner due to staffing shortages. We are pleased that this matter has been resolved with our vacancies being filled, and the

appointment of a third Team Leader Operations which has greatly increased our capacity to deliver supervision to youth workers.

Following our culture setting work, as noted above in Facility Recommendation 1, the second phase of this work has involved implementing a learning and supervision culture for the residence. In May 2024 the leadership team undertook 'Supervision practice for First Line Leaders: An introduction to the role of supervision in supporting ongoing professional and practice development of kaimahi.' Immediately after this training we implemented one-to-one supervision for all youth workers, which included putting in place supervision agreements, and the practice of making supervision notes.

Cultural supervision for all Epuni kaimahi can be accessed through the Kaiwhakaako. The Kaiwhakaako also has a regular session during the training days held every three weeks to support kaimahi to develop cultural competency. In addition, kaimahi who do not have an operational interface with tamariki also receive one-on-one meetings with their applicable line managers

In addition to supervision, we are focused on ensuring Epuni kaimahi attend daily briefings and debriefings both before and after each shift to enable open communication and planning, providing another forum to support individual and team learning and reflection. Kaimahi also take part in training days every three weeks, which include a range of training opportunities to further develop their practice.

The Quality Lead at Epuni, as part of their quality assurance work, is tracking the completion of supervision to ensure this important function is closely monitored.

Recommendation 3

Provide training refreshers to all kaimahi that include kaupapa such as keeping line of sight, grounds for secure care admission, incident reporting and the fundamentals of building relationships with mokopuna including those with very high and complex needs.

Response

Since April 2024, a series of training workshops provided by the Epuni Training Facilitator for all front-line kaimahi. These sessions have focused on practice fundamentals, including line of sight, secure care practice, recording and incident reporting, relational approaches to practice, and supporting tamariki and rangatahi with high and complex needs.

Professional development and refreshers in practice fundamentals will be ongoing and are scheduled to occur every Tuesday. The Training Facilitator is also providing coaching and practice feedback to kaimahi during their shift, to support a transfer of learning into practice. This is a central component to the supervision and learning culture we are building at Epuni.

There has also been a range of other training provided to kaimahi since Mana Mokopuna's visit including:

- A culture-setting presentation by the Residence Manager to all kaimahi which centred on the 'behaviour you walk past is the behaviour you accept', looking at where we have been, where we want to go and how we are going to get there.
- A full two-day Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) *Safety Intervention™ Foundation* training for Care Team kaimahi, which is for those who need to prevent and/or intervene in crisis situations. The programme focuses on prevention and teaches staff de-escalation skills as well as non-restrictive and restrictive interventions.
- A one day training course for the Care Team kaimahi on Promoting Resilience: A trauma informed approach to supporting behaviours and building resilience of tamariki and rangatahi in care.
- Understanding neurodiversity, Intellectual Disability and Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder
- A full two-day refresher training on Te Waharoa, the residence-specific induction programme.

We undertook a three-day leadership training in May 2024 which included:

- Promoting Resilience: A trauma informed approach to supporting behaviours and building resilience of tamariki and rangatahi in care.
- Promoting Resilience for Leaders: A leadership package focused on creating a supportive team and environment for trauma informed practice.
- Supervision practice for First Line Leaders: An introduction to the role of supervision in supporting ongoing professional and practice development of kaimahi.

We undertook Team Leader Operations-specific training in August 2024 including:

- A two-day Te Waharoa training for frontline leaders
- A two-day Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) *Safety Intervention™ Foundation* training for frontline leaders.

Since April 2024, all new kaimahi for Epuni Care and Protection Residence have undertaken a comprehensive three-week induction training programme which includes elements of all the previous training listed above that is not leadership specific.

Recommendation 4

Conduct a review of the use of Secure Care within the residence. In particular the grounds cited for admission and the use of Regulation 48 of the Residential Care Regulations.

Response

We have undertaken a review of the use of secure care as recommended. Our analysis of secure care data has been revised following further updates to the operational data. This has helped to outline that, over the eight-month review period, regulation 48 of the Oranga Tamariki (Residential Care) Regulations 1996 was used 199 times. A further breakdown of this data shows that:

- 30% were based on regulation 48(1)(a) due to extreme emotional disturbance suffered;
- 70% were based on regulation 48(1)(b) to maintain or restore order in the residence;

Regarding the reasons recorded for room confinement in the secure care logbook, the review found that while in most cases (94%) the description referred to matters pertaining to safety or the inability to mix with the young people in secure care, there is a need for further training, coaching and mentoring on how to record the reason for the confinement.

Following the review, action has been taken by the leadership team to provide further mentoring and coaching to care team kaimahi. This commenced on 30 July 2024, with Team Leader Operations undertaking training with their teams on the purpose of regulation 48, the correct use of this practice, and the requirements in terms of completing documentation accurately.

Regarding quality assurance, the quality lead has increased the monitoring of the secure care logbooks, with this occurring daily if secure care is being used. Additionally, monitoring is regularly undertaken by team leaders and night staff. Insights into the use of secure care, if used, are reported to the leadership team to allow an early response to any practice concerns, should these arise.

In terms of the average duration of time tamariki spent in their rooms, the data showed during August and September 2023, average length of time a young person spent in confinement under R48 during each secure care admission was not 250 minutes, but instead 180 and 118 minutes respectively. In December 2023, the average was not 350 minutes but instead 151 minutes per tamaiti.

From November to December 2023, the total number of tamariki placed at Epuni increased from 10 to 15. This resulted in a significant change in the cohort and correlated with the total number of admissions to secure increasing from seven in November 2023 to 23 in December 2023. This was to prevent tamariki from behaving in a manner likely to cause physical harm to themselves or others.

In terms of secure care admissions, the review found a sharp increase in the total number of admissions to secure care in December 2023, February 2024 and again during March 2024 followed by a reduction in April 2024.

The duration of an admission to the secure care unit may range in time between a brief admission to assess and respond to an escalation of risk to young people or kaimahi, through to an extended admission once approved by the court under section 367 of the Oranga Tamariki Act. Therefore, the average length of time a young person spent in confinement under R48 during each secure care admission needs to account for the duration of the admission as well as the complexity of behaviour of the individual and the need to manage order within the secure care unit depending on the number of young people who enter at any given time.

To provide context on the use of R48, please see the revised data in Table 1: Average length of confinement under R48, that reflects both the average length of each confinement under R48, as well as the average length of time a young person spent in confinement under R48 during each secure care admission.

Table 1: Average length of confinement under R48

	Average length of confinement under R48	
	Average length of each confinement (minutes)	Average length of time confinement across each admission
Aug-23	51	180
Sep-23	56	118
Oct-23	33	133
Nov-23	23	38
Dec-23	33	151
Jan-24	26	63
Feb-24	38	98
Mar-24	48	114

Of note the average length of each admission reduced in October 2023 and remained around 30 minutes until March 2024.

Recommendation 5

Continue to build and strengthen the relationship with Te Āti Awa and work together to improve outcomes for mokopuna and whānau Māori.

Response

Continuing to build and strengthen our residence’s relationship with Te Āti Awa to improve outcomes for mokopuna and whānau Māori remains an important priority. As an organisation, and at Epuni, we value our relationship with mana whenua as strategic partners and recognise the important role they have supporting us, and tamariki and whānau Māori engaged in our services.

The Kaiwhakaako, the residence’s cultural advisor, is currently engaged in kōrero with representatives of Te Āti Awa regarding how they can further support and contribute to the culture and operation of Epuni. This includes opportunities to provide representation on the Epuni Community Partners forum and Community Liaison Committee, and we are exploring other opportunities where we can partner in delivering programmes and activities delivered to tamariki.

Te Āti Awa currently provide cultural support and advice to Te Awe, a community whare managed under the management structure of Epuni. Te Āti Awa were instrumental in the design of the model for this whare. Te Āti Awa also have strong links with our other community whare, Te Whitiki Ora o Whakatikei, gifting this name to us. Each of the homes also have kaimahi who whakapapa to Te Āti Awa.