

17 April 2026

s9(2)(a)

Tēnā koe

Thank you for your email, received on 7 April 2026, to Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children (Oranga Tamariki) requesting information regarding ‘failed adoptions’ circa 1950s-1980s. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act).

Oranga Tamariki plays a number of roles in the adoption process, that includes supporting parents who want to place a child for adoption, assessing and approving adoptive applicants seeking to adopt within New Zealand or from other countries, reporting to the Court and responding to requests for information from parties to past adoptions.

You have requested:

- *We request stats/information regarding failed adoptions circa 1950s -1980s.*

There is no specific statistical information available that describes ‘failed adoptions’ for this period. This is mainly because when the court makes an adoption order under the Adoption Act 1955, the adopted child is legally deemed to become the child of the adoptive parent, and the adoptive parent becomes the legal parent of the child, as if the child had been born to that parent in lawful wedlock. (Section 16 (2)(a) of the Adoption Act).

This means that once an adoption order is made, there is no legal distinction between an adopted child or any other child. Therefore, our case recording system does not capture whether any child or young person who may come into care is an adopted person or not. Children who might come into the care following a ‘failed’ or disrupted adoption are not treated (or recorded) any differently from the population of children or young people as a whole.

There is also no consistent definition of what a ‘failed adoption’ might mean. This could mean different things depending on when any adoption plan changed e.g., before or after the court had made an adoption order; whether or not a child or young person subsequently came into ministry or state care and whether there was any subsequent adoption placement. Due to the variety of potential scenarios involved in a ‘failed adoption’ e.g. where an adopted child is subsequently growing up outside of their

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original adoptive family, there is no one source of comprehensive information, and it is therefore not possible to make an assessment of the numbers involved.

As we have not identified any statistics or information regarding 'failed adoptions' circa 1950s -1980s, your request has been refused under section 18(g)(i) of the Act as the information requested is not held by Oranga Tamariki and we have no grounds for believing that the information is either held by another department.

Oranga Tamariki may make the information contained in this letter available to the public by publishing this on our website with your personal details removed.

I trust you find this information useful. Should you have any concerns with this response, I would encourage you to raise them with Oranga Tamariki. Alternatively, you are advised of your right to also raise any concerns with the Office of the Ombudsman. Information about this is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or by contacting them on 0800 802 602.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Darren Lee', written over a vertical line.

Darren Lee
Acting General Manager
Tamariki and Whānau Services