

15 December 2020



Tēnā koe [redacted]

Thank you for your email of 17 November 2020 to Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children (Oranga Tamariki), requesting the following information under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act):

- 1. The number of young people who have escaped from a Care and Protection Residence in the last five years*
- 2. The number of days it took before the young person was apprehended.*
- 3. The age of each young person who escaped.*
- 4. Changes made in the Residences as a result.*
- 5. Can I have the figures broken down by year and residence.*

Please find our response to your request below. Each of your questions will be responded to in turn.

The number of young people who have escaped from a Care and Protection residence in the last five years:

The purpose of our Care and Protection Residences is to provide a safe place for tamariki and rangatahi who are at the highest risk of harm. The Care and Protection residences are not places of detention. Despite our very best efforts to keep tamariki safely in our care, at times young people leave the residences of their own accord. The term absconding includes leaving a placement or the care of a caregiver without authority or neglecting or refusing to return. It is important to note that tamariki in Care and Protection Residences are often engaged in

community activities as a part of their day programme and as a part of our commitment to keep tamariki connected to the community. It is not possible for us to delineate whether the tamariki in the data below absconded from the residential environment or from their community activity. We can advise that 47 out of 100 young people who absconded did so during the weekend or a school holiday period. During these times, tamariki are more frequently accessing community activities.

In February 2019, the Whakatakapokai Transition Project transitioned Care and Protection services out of the Whakatakapokai Residence facility in South Auckland, into smaller, family-like homes based in the community, so that tamariki could experience better outcomes in a community-based setting. We have included the data we have available for Whakatakapokai until February 2019.

Please refer to the tables below for the total number of young people who absconded between F2016 and F2020 – where ‘F’ denotes the financial year 1 July to 30 June of that year – broken down by Care and Protection residence and year. Overall, there were 86 absconding incidents in this period, involving a total of 100 young people. Please note that it is possible for several young people to be involved in the same absconding incident, hence the slightly higher number of young people compared to the number of absconding incidents. It is also the case that one particular young person has multiple absconding incidents.

Figures broken down by year and residence:

Total number of young people who absconded between F2016 – F2020, broken down by Care and Protection residence	
Residences	Count
Epuni Care & Protection Residence	12
Puketai Care & Protection Residence	40
Te Oranga Care & Protection Residence	11
Whakatakapokai Care & Protection Residence	37
Total	100

Total number of young people who absconded between F2016 – F2020, broken down by year	
F2016	10
F2017	27
F2018	25
F2019	26
F2020	12
Total	100

The number of days it took before the young person was apprehended:

This information is held in the case notes on individual case files and is not centrally recorded. In order to provide you with this information, our staff would have to manually review, in detail, the file of every young person who had absconded. As such, I am refusing this aspect of your request under section 18(f) of the Act, as the provision of this information would require substantial collation and research.

I have considered whether we would be able to respond to your request given extra time, or the ability to charge for the information requested. I have concluded that, in either case, our ability to undertake our work would still be prejudiced.

Oranga Tamariki has clear protocols and policies for staff to follow when a child in our care or custody absconds or is missing. Often the child or young person's whereabouts is known or can be quickly established through contact with the young person or by speaking to their whānau and friends. However, when a child or young person goes missing who is considered to be 'high-risk' (particularly vulnerable tamariki or young people who could be at risk of offending or putting themselves in danger) these cases are escalated to the Oranga Tamariki Leadership team for stronger oversight, with a weekly update provided until the young person is located.

We also work closely with New Zealand Police to locate young people in our care who have absconded. New Zealand Police assist in searching for young people day-to-day, checking in on places a young person has been sighted or is known to visit, as well as assisting in searching possible addresses where a young person could be staying. If we have strong concerns for a young person's safety or wellbeing, Police will utilise their social media channels to reach out to the public.

Additional information on how Oranga Tamariki reports and manages children in care who have absconded, including our 'Working with tamariki and rangatahi who are missing, or whose absence is unauthorised' policy, is publicly available on the Oranga Tamariki Practice Centre. Please find this information via the link below.

<https://practice.orangatamariki.govt.nz/policy/working-with-tamariki-and-rangatahi-who-are-missing-or-whose-absence-is-unauthorised/>

The age of each young person who escaped:

Please refer to the table below for the ages of the young people who absconded from Care and Protection residences between F2016 and F2020. The ages of young people who absconded from Care and Protection residences varies from 10 years old to 16 years old.

Age	Number of absconding incidents per age group
10	1
11	3
12	12
13	36
14	25
15	14
16	9
Total	100

Changes made in the Residences as a result:

As mentioned above, Care and Protection residences are not places of detention. As such, there were no specific changes made in relation to a young person leaving a residence.

Oranga Tamariki intends to make the information contained in this letter available to the wider public shortly. We will do this by publishing this letter on our website. Your personal details will be deleted and we will not publish any information that would identify you as the person who requested the information.

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact OIA_Requests@ot.govt.nz.

If you are not satisfied with this response, you have the right to ask an Ombudsman to review this decision. Information about this is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or by contacting them on 0800 802 602.

Nāku noa, nā



Steve Groom
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