

22 December 2020



Tēnā koe 

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):

- *What percentage of kids in OT care find long term foster families?*
- *What is the average number of times a child will move homes?*
- *Currently, How many children need foster homes and how many foster homes are available?*
- *What percentage of children in care are eventually returned to their biological families?*
- *How many children are removed from homes for drugs and alcohol?*
- *How many children in care experience physical abuse?*
- *What % of kids in care maintain relationships with their birth parents?*
- *What % of foster kids are formally adopted?*
- *What % of foster kids attempt to take their own lives*

On 24 November 2020, we contacted you to clarify the time period you would like the data for. On 25 November 2020, you confirmed that you would like data for the period 2010-2020. In addition, we provided you with a link to the *Safety of Children in Care* reports on our website in response to your request concerning physical abuse in care.

Please see our response to your request for information below.

- *What percentage of kids in OT care find long term foster families?*

Children and young people achieve their greatest potential in homes where they are safe, secure and feel that they belong. When a child or young person is unable to live with their family or whānau, Oranga Tamariki seeks to find them a care arrangement, preferencing wider whānau, hapū or iwi, where they will feel loved, and valued, and where their significant connections are maintained and strengthened. This is known as 'permanency' and aims to reduce the amount of time children and young people spend in our care as well as reducing the number of changes in living arrangements they may experience.

Our current approach to this, Noho Ake Oranga, focuses on ensuring that decisions are taken about the permanent care needs of tamariki are done so in the best interests of tamariki, in consultation with wider whānau, hapū and iwi, and a plan developed to ensure any changes in care arrangements are as smooth as possible. This may mean that tamariki will be returning to the care of their parents or usual guardians or, if this is not possible, an alternative permanent (long term) care arrangement. Noho ake Oranga is defined as a permanent care arrangement for tamariki that provides continuity of relationships with nurturing adults where there is a sense of emotional, cultural, and personal belonging, and the opportunity for lifelong attachments. For all tamariki, this includes building and maintaining important relationships, ensuring that these connections are enduring, enabling access to cultural beliefs, practices and values, and developing links to significant places.

In most cases, the end goal of a permanent care arrangement is that custody orders are discharged and tamariki are no longer in the care of Oranga Tamariki. It removes the obstacles that caregivers, whether whānau or non-whānau, may have when deciding to care for a child permanently. In most cases, caregivers will become the child's legal guardian in addition to the child's birth parents. Although Noho ake Oranga is a way of securing a child's permanent place within a family, the legal relationship between the birth parents and tamariki is not severed, as may occur in adoption. Further information on permanency and Noho Ake Oranga can be accessed in the links below.

<https://practice.orangatamariki.govt.nz/previous-practice-centre/policy/caregiver-assessment-and-approval/key-information/securing-permanency/>

<https://practice.orangatamariki.govt.nz/previous-practice-centre/policy/noho-ake-oranga/>

A child or young person who is still in the care or custody of the Chief Executive of Oranga Tamariki, whilst placed with an approved permanent caregiver who has agreed to provide a permanent home, is considered to be part of the total number of children in care, as the legal orders in favour of the Chief Executive have not yet been discharged. Children and young people are considered to have achieved permanency when the caregiver obtains legal orders and becomes

recognised by the Court as a permanent caregiver. These tamariki will not be included in the total number of children within our care or custody.

For the purposes of this request, we have interpreted what percentage of children in the care or custody of Oranga Tamariki who find 'long term foster families' to refer to the number of children and young people who have achieved permanency for the period F2011 to F2020, where 'F' denotes the period from 1 July to 30 June. Please find this information in the table below.

Table One: Total number of children and young people who have achieved permanency for the past ten financial years.

Year	Children and young people who achieved permanency
F2011	430
F2012	489
F2013	440
F2014	417
F2015	396
F2016	405
F2017	340
F2018	335
F2019	304
F2020	326

- *Currently, How many children need foster homes and how many foster homes are available?*

Our priority is to find caregivers from within a child's wider family, whānau, hapū or iwi who can offer them a safe, stable, loving home for as long as needed. We do this in several ways, including through family group conferences, hui a-whānau, whānau searching and our Whānau Care partnerships. Sometimes we also need non-kin caregivers for a child or young person until they can safely return home or to a caregiver from their wider family or whānau.

As at 30 June 2020, we had 1,326 non-family/whānau caregivers and 2,230 family/whānau caregivers. Please note, family/whānau caregivers and some non-family/whānau caregivers are approved for specified children and young people only. In addition, Oranga Tamariki caregivers can be approved to provide more than one type of care and many caregivers provide care for more than one child.

For the purposes of this request, I have interpreted how many children currently need 'foster homes' to refer to the number of children and young people who have entered the care and protection of Oranga Tamariki and are waiting to be

placed in a permanent placement. Information regarding a child or young person's intended placement would be held in the case notes of their individual file. The provision of this information would require us to review, in detail, thousands of individual files, as this information is not centrally recorded by Oranga Tamariki. As such, I am refusing this part of your request under section 18(f) of the Act, as the information cannot be made available without 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.

It is important to note that Oranga Tamariki is dedicated to supporting any child whose wellbeing is at risk of harm now, or in the future and there are a range of options when bringing a child into care. For example, when there are immediate and serious concerns for a child's safety, the child can stay in Emergency care while other arrangements are made. For further information regarding the types of care our caregivers can provide, please see the following links.

<https://practice.orangatamariki.govt.nz/our-work/care/caregivers/assessing-and-approving-caregivers-and-adoptive-parents/types-of-care/#guidance>

<https://orangatamariki.govt.nz/caregiving/types-of-caregiving/>

- *What is the average number of times a child will move homes?*

The number of times children and young people move homes would be held in the case notes of their individual file. The provision of this information would require us to review, in detail, thousands of individual files, as this information is not centrally recorded by Oranga Tamariki. As such, I am refusing this part of your request under section 18(f) of the Act, as the information cannot be made available without 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.

- *What percentage of children in care are eventually returned to their biological families?*
- *What % of kids in care maintain relationships with their birth parents?*

Assessing a parent's skills and knowledge, and their ability to provide safe care, is an important aspect of the assessment that is undertaken when a child comes to our attention. Where there is a need to support a parent's ability to safely care for their tamariki we can refer them to appropriate support services to build this knowledge and capacity. Oranga Tamariki funds NGOs to support children and young people who are at risk of harm, as well as provide support for their whānau/families. These organisations deliver a range of family support, social work and counselling support services, and work with whānau/families to flourish

and thrive within their home and communities. We only consider seeking custody of a child when no other option exists to keep the child safe.

Oranga Tamariki recognises the importance of maintaining family and whānau connections. We aim to support children and young people to establish, maintain and strengthen connections with their family/whānau, hapū, iwi, marae and family group, and anyone else they or their family/whānau identify as important. Please see the following links for further information.

<https://practice.orangatamariki.govt.nz/previous-practice-centre/policy/caring-for-children-and-young-people/key-information/maintaining-family-whanau-relationships/>

<https://practice.orangatamariki.govt.nz/our-work/care/caring-for-tamariki-in-care/supporting-whanau-connections/>

Information regarding children and young people who come into the care and protection of Oranga Tamariki and maintain a relationship with their birth parents, or who subsequently return to the care of their biological families, is held in the case notes of their individual file. The provision of this information would require us to review, in detail, thousands of individual files, as this information is not centrally recorded by Oranga Tamariki. As such, I am refusing this part of your request under section 18(f) of the Act, as the information cannot be made available without 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.

- *What % of foster kids are formally adopted?*

Oranga Tamariki does not initiate the legal adoption process for children or young people who have previously been in the care or custody of the Chief Executive. Our general position is that a child does not need the step of adoption in order to secure their permanent care – as guardianship and parenting orders under the Care of Children Act 2004 will achieve that. Where a caregiver seeks to adopt a child, they would be required to make an adoption application to the Family Court (the Court), after they have received guardianship and parenting orders. It is important to note, this could be considered some years after Oranga Tamariki is involved with the child. We do not hold a centralised record of the adoption orders that are made in the Court.

It may be of interest to you that when an adoption application has been made to the Court, the application is referred to us for an assessment and a Social Work report. This assists the Court to determine whether the applicants are fit for the role and whether the adoption promotes the welfare and interests of the child.

Oranga tamariki holds a record of Social Work reports that have been provided to the Court where the child concerned has previously been in the care or custody of Oranga Tamariki. I can confirm there have been 11 Social Work reports provided

to the Court for the period F2013 to F2019. Please see the table below for a breakdown of this information. Please note, these reports can recommend that the Court does not make an adoption order; therefore, the number of social work reports below do not necessarily equate to the total number of adoption orders that are granted by the Court. In addition, a change to our reporting system has meant that this number is not available for F2020. Finally, where the number of young people is four or below and information provided may result in identification, or can be calculated, this number has been withheld – represented in the table with an ‘S’ – in order to protect the privacy of these young people, in accordance with section 9(2)(a) of the Act.

Table Two: Total number of Social Work Reports provided to the Family Court for the period F2013 to F2019.

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total number of Social Work Reports	S	S	0	S	0	S	S

- *How many children are removed from homes for drugs and alcohol?*

Our purpose is to ensure that all tamariki are in loving whānau and communities where their oranga tamariki can be realised. Our focus is on children and young people who are at significant risk of harm now and in the future as a consequence of their family environment, and/or their own complex needs. Every situation we deal with is unique and there are a range of reasons for a child or young person to come to our attention. Under section 15 of the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989, any person who believes that a child or young person has been, or is likely to be, harmed, ill-treated, abused (whether physically, emotionally, or sexually), neglected or deprived, or who has concerns about the well-being of a child or young person, may report the matter to Oranga Tamariki or the Police. You can find more information about our intake and early assessment guidance at the following link.

<https://practice.orangatamariki.govt.nz/our-work/assessment-and-planning/assessments/intake-and-early-assessment/>

Information regarding the reasons children and young people have come into the custody of Oranga Tamariki is held in the case notes of their individual file. The provision of this information would require us to review, in detail, thousands of individual files, as this information is not centrally recorded by Oranga Tamariki. As such, I am refusing this part of your request under section 18(f) of the Act, as the information cannot be made available without 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.

- *What % of foster kids attempt to take their own lives*

The death of any child is a tragedy and when a child in our care dies, we invest significant effort in understanding what happened and whether anything could have been done to prevent it. It is important we are vigilant and responsive to potential suicide risk. The Oranga Tamariki Practice Centre outlines risk factors, triggers and indicators of self-harm, to assist us in identifying potential warning signs and risk areas. You can read more about this on our website at the following links.

<https://practice.orangatamariki.govt.nz/policy/assessment/#suicide-psychological-distress-and-substance-abuse-sks-screens>

<https://practice.orangatamariki.govt.nz/our-work/assessment-and-planning/assessments/conducting-an-assessment/preventing-suicide-and-self-harm/>

Information regarding the personal experiences of children and young people while in the care and protection of Oranga Tamariki is held in the case notes of their individual file. The provision of this information would require us to review, in detail, thousands of individual files, as this information is not centrally recorded by Oranga Tamariki. As such, I am refusing this part of your request under section 18(f) of the Act, as the information cannot be made available without 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 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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