

SEPTEMBER 2021 UPDATE

The Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre



Vasantha Krishnan
General Manager

Kia ora koutou katoa,

It feels a bit like we've been on a roller coaster since my last newsletter's optimistic introduction – all that talk of trans-Tasman travel bubbles now seems quite distant. I hope that wherever you are, your bubble is well and coping with whatever alert level you find yourself in.

I'm so encouraged by New Zealand's rapidly increasing uptake of the COVID vaccine – the programme has really stepped up and it's been amazing to see the health sector respond to the dual demands of vaccinating the population and managing the massive increase in testing that we've seen during August and September.

Understanding more about system capacity and structural and personal resilience has become central to many organisations' planning activities, including of course ourselves. The work that the Evidence Centre has released in the last quarter reflects some of these very topical concerns.

Following on from Te Mātātaki, a survey on the wellbeing of rangatahi and tamariki in care, we have now released the first report from Nga Haerenga | Transition Journeys. This paper explores the experiences and aspirations of rangatahi who are moving from statutory care into the world.

Other reports include a literature scan looking at models of parent and family advocacy around the world and what works best, outcomes from a supported bail pilot designed to help young people successfully manage

bail conditions, and early evidence from a new collaborative model based on Whānau Ora. [Ngā Tini Whetū](#) is a prototype that aims to support more whānau with early, tailored services, by partnering with kaupapa Māori organisations and other agencies.

The direction of our work is changing as we respond to an environment where we are being challenged by the community to engage more meaningfully, more often and more effectively. We have responded by working more closely than ever across agencies and with NGOs, our caregivers and social workers to [keep tamariki safe and support whānau through COVID alert levels](#), making sure we stay connected to the community.

I for one am encouraged by the opportunity for deeper collaboration with community, iwi and other research partners as we work together to demonstrably improve the lives of Aotearoa's tamariki and whānau

Ngā mihi,
Vasantha.

Our Recent Publications

The Evidence Centre works to build the evidence base that helps us better understand wellbeing and what works to improve outcomes for New Zealand's children, young people and their whānau.



Understanding Factitious Disorder

This condition, formerly known as Munchausen syndrome by proxy, is when an adult falsifies or induces disorders in a child in order to fulfil their own psychological need to be recognised as a carer. While this is a rare condition it tends to involve young children and can often present among siblings. Our research highlighted early warning symptoms for kaimahi to be aware of and this disorder will also be the subject of our October seminar. This will be an online event and registration and other details are below.

[Read the report here.](#)

Entries into care

The number of children and young people in the custody of Oranga Tamariki continues to fall – and we want to know why. Both quantitative and qualitative sources are canvassed in this series of reports which looks at who is most affected and considers potential reasons for the decline in entries to care. We consider the impact of changes in legislation, policy and social work practice, and there is a supporting data review of the Unsupported Child Benefit.

[Read the report here.](#)

Supporting rangatahi

There has been a recent focus on support for young people and we have released several reports in the last quarter that relate to this group.

We published the first phase report of **Ngā Haerenga | Transitions Journey** – a longitudinal research project that aims to learn more about what matters to young people as they prepare to move from statutory care to independent living. The report finds that there are three elements that are most important to this group: personal skills and resilience; strong connections with whānau, caregivers and support networks; and confidence that the necessities of life will be available to them. This is a cohort that can need substantial support to move successfully into adulthood, and thanks to Ngā Haerenga, we are beginning to gain insight into what that support should look like.

[Read the report here.](#)

Social bonds are an innovative approach to improving outcomes, and Oranga Tamariki has been involved in a partnership with Genesis Youth Trust to pilot a programme aimed at **reducing youth offending**. The complexities of the

arrangement have meant slower progress, and the number of participants has also been lower than contracted for. However our initial evaluation is cautiously optimistic and sees some positives for the rangatahi involved.

[Read the report here.](#)

Supported bail is a community-based programme that supports rangatahi remanded on bail who might breach these conditions or be detained in custody without this intensive support. Oranga Tamariki has been piloting an enhanced supported bail programme with five established community service providers since 2019, and our evaluation looked at implementation and outcomes.

Findings show that 63% of rangatahi in the programme kept to their bail conditions and avoided custodial remand and they reported improved wellbeing and other positive changes in their lives. Skilled and experienced kaimahi and whānau support workers were key to the success of the pilot. Their support extended to working with rangatahi and whānau at family group conferences and Youth Court appearances, and having a positive influence on the wider whānau.

[Read the report here.](#)

Parent and family advocacy services

Recommendations that Oranga Tamariki develop advocacy services for parents and whānau whose children come to our attention have emerged from a number of reviews. The Evidence Centre has conducted an initial literature review to gather information on definitions, models and success factors for such services in operation internationally. The research found that while there are many models in existence, best results seem to be achieved when there is a combination of advocacy support from lawyers, social workers and parent advocates. Unfortunately our search found little evidence of specific advocacy support for indigenous populations.

[Read the report here.](#)

Voluntary information sharing

In mid-2019, voluntary information sharing amendments to the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 came into force and in 2020 we commissioned surveys and an evaluation study to gauge the sector's knowledge and use of these new provisions. This research shows that the provisions are still being embedded into practice and the interviews revealed that the sector was keen for ongoing training and guidance in applying the provisions to real-life situations. The research also revealed that the provisions have potential to improve information sharing practice, especially when good working relationships and high levels of trust exist.

[Read the report here.](#)

View [our website](#) to catch up on all of our latest research.

Our Research Seminars

Seeking transformational change

Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith, a renowned scholar of indigenous education and Kaupapa Māori research, presented at our June seminar on Seeking transformational change. If you missed this popular event, we now have the footage available on our [web page](#).

NZCVS & youth justice

In August we ran a seminar with a youth justice focus, with colleagues from the Ministry of Justice. Dr Tadhg Daly and Kate Preston, researchers who work on the NZ Crime and Victim Survey, shared their insights into survey findings as they related to young New Zealanders.

Sarah Richardson, acting manager of the Evidence Centre's Analytics and Insights team (see profile below), supplemented this with a presentation on pathways into the youth justice system – an in-depth look at the intersection of care and protection experience, education and health factors with involvement with the youth justice system.

Presentations and footage is now on our web page: [Evidence Centre Seminar: August 2021](#)

October webinar

Looking ahead, we are planning a webinar and panel discussion around our research on [Factitious Disorder](#) at 10.30am on 12 October. Register to join the online audience by emailing research@ot.govt.nz.

MEET SARAH RICHARDSON: ACTING MANAGER, ANALYTICS & INSIGHTS



Sarah and son Harvey enjoy Wellington sunshine.

Sarah's been part of the A&I team for two years now, and this month stepped up to acting manager, to cover Rosie Deutsche's secondment to the strategy team.

Originally from the sunny Bay of Plenty, Sarah has called Wellington home for over a decade. She lives with her husband, two boys (Zac and Harvey) and her first child – a cat called Loki – so "I guess I'm a Wellingtonian!"

She enjoys languages having learned German at high school and since then some Spanish and Mandarin and is now slowly learning Te Reo Māori.

Sarah's Academic – a BSc in Psychology and Religious Studies – may seem tangential but after Uni she 'fell' into data analysis, and found it suited her skillset.

For most of her career Sarah has worked with justice sector statistics, and she has a particular interest in youth justice. Her unique knowledge of the Youth Court and wider system has been welcomed by the team, as is her ability to take complex data and make it intelligible and meaningful. This is a key skill and it adds real value to the analytics that the team produce when users can readily understand and engage with it.

Sarah says that the best part about working in the Analytics & Insights team (aside from being an awesome group of people) is that they work on such a diverse range of projects.

"There is always something interesting to learn on no matter what part of the business you're interested in."

In her new role, Sarah says she's looking forward to seeing the organisation from a different perspective and to taking a bigger role in supporting team members to develop and continue doing awesome and interesting work.



We hope you've enjoyed learning more about our published work. If you have any feedback or queries, feel free to email the team at research@ot.govt.nz