

## **SOCIAL WORKER INSIGHTS ON TAMARIKI AND RANGATAHI EXPERIENCES OF LOCKDOWN**

The Voices of Children and Young People team asked Oranga Tamariki social workers how tamariki and rangatahi are coping with COVID-19, and what kind of support tamariki and rangatahi needed during the March 2020 Level 4 lockdown and the weeks following.

We surveyed 812 social workers working directly with tamariki and rangatahi. This included care and protection, youth justice and residence social workers. We received a total of 315 responses.

### **Key insights**

- Devices, data and internet access are essential for connecting with whānau and friends and doing schoolwork, but some tamariki and rangatahi (and some whānau) lack devices and/or access to data and phone minutes. The restrictions on kanohi ki te kanohi (face-to-face) contact, and the difficulties accessing technology, mean many tamariki and rangatahi are really missing their whānau.
- Some tamariki and rangatahi are worried and anxious about different issues eg, the impacts of COVID-19, feeling isolated from whānau and friends, and not feeling that they belong in their current situation.
- Tamariki and rangatahi are looking forward to going back to school, but many have found it difficult to keep up with schoolwork. They may need additional support to reintegrate back into school.
- Some tamariki and whānau are struggling to have their basic needs met, such as having enough food, warm clothing and bedding, and housing difficulties.

### **What social workers told us**

---

*"[Tamariki and rangatahi] are excited to show their parents their space via video call. Then the reality is that they cannot see them face to face, and for some of them their transition plan has been paused. It is very hard for them to manage."*

---

### **Things that have gone well for tamariki and rangatahi during lockdown**

Social workers observed that overall, tamariki and rangatahi are coping with life under Level 4. They identified some positive experiences that tamariki and rangatahi shared with them:

- having more one-on-one time with parents/whānau
- having more attention from whānau, with bigger families enjoying the time together
- enjoying learning from home
- having opportunities for a range of activities e.g. colouring in, getting outdoors, gaming.

Factors that helped enable these experiences included:

- feeling safe and supported at home with caregivers
- having access to devices and data
- having stress management support and information around COVID-19 and the lockdown
- having regular contact with whānau.

### Challenges for tamariki and rangatahi during lockdown

---

*“I have been asked for lots of top-ups and I have been asked for food vouchers for them and their whānau. I have had to help with finding emergency housing.”*

---

Around a third of social workers who participated in the survey reported that tamariki and rangatahi miss their whānau and friends. They want to have contact with their families, including increased contact, while others missed direct kanohi ki te kanohi contact.

*“...they need to know when they will be seeing their families.”*

Some tamariki and rangatahi do not have devices and/or data. This resource gap is impacting access to remote learning and their ability to stay connected to whānau and friends.

*“A few tamariki and rangatahi participate in video calls, however not all whānau have the resource to do this...”*

*“Some families are struggling with not having devices for the older children (Intermediate and up) as they do a lot of their work online and schools haven’t provided what they needed. So this is adding to the extra pressures at home and stresses.”*

Some tamariki and rangatahi, and their caregivers, are struggling to get their basic needs met during lockdown. Caregivers have asked for support for food, warm clothing and bedding, as well as housing assistance.

*“One of my clients is living in a motel with his father who share a bedroom, so confined spaces are challenging.”*

Some social workers highlighted how hard it was for tamariki and rangatahi to keep up with the demands of schoolwork. This was due to lack of devices and/or data and learning needs that are not met by the remote learning model.

A small number of social workers reported that the tamariki and rangatahi on their caseloads were experiencing worry and anxiety about the impacts of COVID-19, feeling isolated from friends and whānau, and feeling that they don’t really belong in their current situation.

*“Some of them are worried about what everything will look like when the lockdown is over... I think they will need support and reassurance that things will be ok.”*

## Difficulties in connecting with tamariki and rangatahi

A few social workers gave feedback that they were not able to connect with tamariki and rangatahi during lockdown. Some shared their frustration about not being able to see tamariki and rangatahi in person. Others noted that they have only been able to engage with caregivers to find out how tamariki are doing. These social workers explained that, because they were not able to have kanohi ki te kanohi contact, it has been difficult to engage directly with tamariki and rangatahi to see how they are doing. Some reasons for this include tamariki being too young to connect directly, and tamariki and rangatahi not wanting to talk on the phone.

## Supporting tamariki and rangatahi to adjust back to daily life

---

*"They miss seeing their whānau, so regular contact is what they've requested..."*

---

To build on the things that have gone well during lockdown, and address the challenges outlined above, social workers highlighted a number of things they feel will be important for supporting tamariki and rangatahi as we move down the Alert Levels and back into daily life.

Social workers highlighted the importance of:

- social workers connecting regularly with tamariki and rangatahi to gauge how they are doing
- reviewing whānau access plans to support tamariki and rangatahi to connect with whānau
- ensuring tamariki and rangatahi have access to devices and data as needed for both schoolwork and connecting with whānau
- ensuring that where needed, learning support is available to reintegrate into school
- providing clear and accessible information about the changes in Alert Levels
- supporting tamariki and rangatahi to connect with and/or re-engage with services.

*"More data and better phones and devices. More food."*

**For further information contact the Voices of Children and Young People team at [voices@ot.govt.nz](mailto:voices@ot.govt.nz).**