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CHILDREN'S TEAMS EVALUATION TECHNICAL APPENDIX A

What we learnt from key stakeholders

ORANGA TAMARIKI
Ministry for Children

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Children's Teams are a community-based initiative, designed to support tamariki and whānau who do not meet the care and protection threshold, but nevertheless have complex needs and may benefit from support. Under its new operating model, Oranga Tamariki has an expanded mandate that encompasses early intervention services, alongside its core statutory care and protection role. As an existing early intervention orientated initiative, Children's Teams have the potential to inform the future delivery of these services.

This technical appendix is an input to an evaluation exploring the implementation and operation of three Children's Teams (Canterbury, Horowhenua/Ōtaki and Rotorua). The appendix outlines findings from semi-structured interviews with 26 key stakeholders involved in delivering the approach. Evaluation findings described in this appendix will be integrated with insight from other activities – including interviews with whānau involved in Children's Teams – to produce a final report.

Feedback from key stakeholders suggests there is broad conceptual support for Children's Teams, and optimism about the approach's potential benefits. Providing multi-disciplinary, holistic and relationship-based support, along with facilitating service access, were highlighted as key benefits. However, in practice, feedback suggests the model is not operating as intended, and therefore, is unable to fully deliver the outcomes for tamariki and whānau originally envisaged.

Key findings highlight the existence of a range of barriers hindering the effective operation of Children's Teams, ranging from community perceptions and buy-in to the approach, to the broader environment in which the model operates. Through better understanding these barriers – along with areas of strength within the model – this evaluation has identified 13 key 'principles for success', which highlight opportunities to reinforce and strengthen the operation of Children's Teams. These principles could also inform the implementation of similar community-based approaches.

A description of these success principles, which are organised by four key topic areas, is set out below. These principles are based on feedback from stakeholders involved in this evaluation.

Designing, implementing and supporting collaboration

1. *Communities must be willing and ready to engage in collaboration:* This evaluation found that some organisations have negative attitudes about collaboration or limited readiness to engage in this approach. Further, not all organisations engage in key collaborative processes, particularly information sharing. Improving community perceptions and understanding of the Children's Teams approach could result in more engagement.

2. *The implementation and design of collaborative approaches should be led by local communities:* Stakeholders commented that the development of the Children's Team model and implementation process was driven at a National Office level and did not necessarily reflect the context or situation of individual communities. This process was associated with a range of implications, for example, limited community buy-in to the approach.

3. *Cross-agency contract arrangements should reflect and facilitate collaboration:* This evaluation found that contracting arrangements would benefit from greater flexibility and integration, as currently, they do not fully support collaboration. The presence of multiple similar services competing for resources was seen to further challenge collective efforts.

Investing in communities

4. *Cross-agency investment in services for vulnerable tamariki and whānau is required:* A lack of service availability within communities was identified as a key challenge undermining the capacity of Children's Teams to effectively link whānau with required supports.

5. *Providing adequate resourcing is central to effectiveness and sustainability:* Stakeholders commented that relying on voluntary contributions, rather than direct resourcing, had a number of implications for the sustainability of the model. Key implications include:

   - a gradual loss of community goodwill
   - challenges for professionals working in Children's Teams and their home organisation
   - the growth of a large community-based workforce, comprised of practitioners only able to contribute small amounts of time to the approach
   - long waiting lists.

6. *Cross-agency capability and capacity building within the children's workforce is required:* Stakeholders identified a need for capacity building and professionalisation within the children's workforce, rather than relying on voluntary contributions.

Supporting whānau

7. *The relationship between, and respective thresholds of, statutory responses and community-based preventative approaches must be clear:* Children's Teams provide an opportunity for early intervention, prior to the escalation of tamaiti and whānau need. However, this evaluation identified a perception that whānau referred to Children's Teams already have increasingly high needs, undermining the early intervention intent of the approach, and resulting in it being positioned as "CYF light". Some whānau may also feel compelled to engage in Children's Teams, or not understand the distinction between this approach and an Oranga Tamariki statutory intervention.

8. *Enabling functions should support, rather than challenge, work with whānau:* The operation of Children's Teams is supported by a number of enabling functions – specifically, the referral process, the Tuituia assessment tool, and the ViKI information management system. Stakeholders identified opportunities to make these functions more fit-for-purpose, in order to better facilitate support for whānau.

9. *Collaborative approaches must be culturally responsive and support the wellbeing of tamariki Māori and their whānau:* Given the high numbers of tamariki Māori and whānau engaging in Children's Teams, stakeholders highlighted the importance of cultural competency. Views on whether Children's Teams were the most effective approach for supporting whānau Māori were mixed, with some stakeholders seeing Whānau Ora as a more appropriate service.

10. *The process of transitioning whānau from Children's Teams should balance meeting their needs and the risk of creating dependency:* This evaluation identified mixed views on whether the Children's Teams transition process was appropriate. Some stakeholders cautioned against service dependency, and supported more short-term engagement. In contrast, other stakeholders saw a need for more flexible and long-term engagement, which reflects the diverse needs and differing capacities of whānau.

Roles and responsibilities

11. *Professionals should have a consistent and clear understanding of their roles and the overall intent of the approach:* This evaluation found that some professionals involved in the Children's Teams approach experience a lack of role clarity, and may have inconsistent interpretations of what their job entails. Further, Children's Teams professionals can experience isolation from each other and feel disconnected from the overall vision of the approach.

12. *Having a key person lead the approach when working with whānau is important; this professional must be competent and supported in their work:* The Children's Teams approach is heavily reliant on Lead Professionals, and stakeholders' views on the level and nature of experience required for this work were mixed. Some stakeholders saw this role as best filled by a qualified social worker, while others saw it as better positioned as a 'navigator' or 'coordinator'. Stakeholders commented that Lead Professionals may benefit from working within the Children's Teams approach full-time, and also highlighted the importance of training and on-going support.

13. *Other key professionals can contribute to the successful implementation and functioning of collaborative approaches:* A range of strengths and weaknesses associated with different professional roles and aspects of the Children's Teams model were identified. These strengths and weaknesses are detailed in pages 29-31 of the main document.

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Oranga Tamariki has a mandate to provide early intervention support to vulnerable tamariki and whānau, alongside its core statutory care and protection role

Oranga Tamariki was established in April 2017 as an independent agency responsible for supporting the wellbeing of any New Zealand tamaiti at risk of harm. As part of shifting away from the prior Child, Youth and Family (CYF) operating model, Oranga Tamariki has an expanded mandate that encompasses early intervention support. This expanded approach was implemented following the Expert Panel Final Report[1] and recognises the importance of providing support to all at-risk tamariki and whānau, not just those within formal care and protection thresholds. When effective, this support can improve wellbeing, reduce the risk of tamariki experiencing poor long-term outcomes, and prevent the need for whānau to engage with statutory services.

Children's Teams are designed to provide early intervention orientated support within a community context

Children's Teams are a community-based initiative, designed to support tamariki and whānau who may benefit from services, but who do not meet the threshold for statutory care and protection involvement. The teams were established in response to the White Paper for Vulnerable Children[2], which highlighted a need to improve the support provided to children at risk of maltreatment. Children's Teams were implemented through the subsequent Children's Action Plan[3] and are currently operating in 10 sites across New Zealand. As an existing early intervention orientated initiative, lessons from Children's Teams have the potential to inform the future delivery of Oranga Tamariki services.

This technical appendix presents findings from an initial phase of evaluation work assessing the implementation and operation of Children's Teams

This technical appendix is an input to an evaluation exploring the implementation and operation of three existing Children's Teams – Canterbury, Horowhenua/Ōtaki and Rotorua. Specifically, this initial phase of work involved interviewing key stakeholders to understand:

- How the Children's Teams approach is operating on-the ground
- Key strengths and challenges associated with the approach
- Opportunities to strengthen how the approach operates.

Evaluation findings described in this appendix will be integrated with insight from other activities – including interviews with whānau involved in Children's Teams – to produce a final report.

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[1] The Expert Panel process started in 2015 under the then Minister for Social Development. The panel were tasked with reviewing the existing Child, Youth and Family operating model, and providing a blue-print for a modernised care and protection system. For more information, see https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/investing-in-children/investing-in-children-report.pdf.

[2] For more information, see https://www.orangatamariki.govt.nz/working-with-children/childrens-teams/.

[3] For more information, see http://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/policy-development/white-paper-vulnerable-children/white-paper-for-vulnerable-children-childrens-action-plan-summaries.pdf.

This evaluation involved interviews with a number of key stakeholders from three Children's Teams sites

Within this technical appendix, a qualitative approach was used to explore key evaluation questions. This approach involved semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders from the Canterbury, Horowhenua/Ōtaki and Rotorua Children's Teams sites. A total of 25 interviews with 26 key stakeholders[4] were undertaken, comprising 12 participants from Canterbury, six from Horowhenua/Ōtaki and eight from Rotorua. A range of key stakeholders[5] were interviewed, including:

- Children's Teams staff: directors, coordinators, administrators and work-force leads (seven participants in total)
- Lead Professionals (four)
- Service brokers (three)
- Panel members (four)
- Governance Group members (four)
- Community partners[6] (four)

Evaluation findings were largely consistent across sites, so are usually reported on an aggregate basis. Where important distinctions between sites were identified, these are highlighted. The findings included within this appendix represent key themes that were universal across all stakeholders interviewed. Given this focus, detailed analysis of any differences in opinion across participant types is not presented. Evaluation findings reflect feedback from the group of stakeholders interviewed only. A full description of the evaluation methodology and limitations is set out in Appendix One.

The Children's Teams approach

Original vision and implementation

When originally proposed, the Children's Teams approach was described as a new way of working, where professionals from across the health, education, justice and welfare sectors are mandated to collectively support vulnerable children. The teams had responsibility for ensuring that:

- children at risk of maltreatment or vulnerability have their needs addressed
- the professionals and agencies needed to address children's needs are brought to the table
- a single integrated plan for each child is developed, and services are coordinated and delivered according to the plan
- the plan is monitored and progress towards achieving outcomes actively reviewed[7].

Further, the teams were intended to reflect the composition of local sites, build on existing community relationships, and reinvigorate interagency networks and processes.

Responsibility for implementing Children's Teams was held by the Children's Action Plan Directorate, an independent cross-agency entity. The initial implementation process was described as having differing mixes of local and central control, and involving alternative phases of co-design and centralised service-design[8].

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[4] One group interview, involving two key stakeholders, was completed.

[5] With the exception of community partners, a brief description of these stakeholder roles is included within the 'Children's Teams approach' section of this document.

[6] 'Community partners' refers to stakeholders from NGO organisations that contribute Lead Professionals to work within the Children's Teams approach.

[7] For more information, see https://www.orangatamariki.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Documents/whitepaper-volume-ii-web.pdf

[8] SuPERU. (2014). *Assessment of the design and implementation of the Children's Teams to January 2014.* Wellington, New Zealand: Author.

Overall approach

As noted, Children's Teams are designed to support tamariki and whānau who do not meet the threshold to be involved in care and protection services, but nevertheless have complex needs. Engagement with Children's Teams is intended to be voluntary and whānau must consent to participation. Children's Teams support these whānau through an integrated approach, where agencies, non-government organisations (NGOs) and community members share information, collaboratively assess tamariki and whānau need, develop a single plan of action, and broker access to required services. This approach is built on the understanding that a single organisation alone cannot protect and promote the wellbeing of tamariki.

Referral process

Whānau are referred to the teams by professionals within the community or Oranga Tamariki social workers, though in some instances may also self-refer. Professionals complete a referral form, which outlines key background information about tamariki and whānau. Referrals to some sites are initially managed by the Vulnerable Children's Hub, which undertakes an assessment and triage process. Across all sites, referrals are mediated by a local Children's Teams Panel, who collectively decide whether this approach is appropriate for tamariki. After a referral is accepted, tamariki and whānau are assigned a Lead Professional who coordinates the support provided.

Key roles and responsibilities

The majority of practitioners involved in Children's Teams are drawn from organisations within the community. These include:

- *Lead Professionals:* are the main point of contact for tamariki and whānau throughout their engagement. Lead Professionals are responsible for leading an assessment and planning process, which supports tamariki and whānau to identify their needs and any required services.

- *Children's Action Network (CAN):* works with the Lead Professional to undertake the assessment and develop a plan for the tamaiti. The CAN includes practitioners involved in providing care, support and services, along with tamariki and whānau.

- *Service broker:* facilitates information sharing and access to required services.

- *Panel:* is comprised of specialists from across the sector who make decisions regarding whether referrals are accepted by Children's Teams. The Panel also provides on-going clinical support to Lead Professionals.

- *Local Governance Group:* includes agency regional managers, NGOs and iwi. The Governance Group has a strategic focus, secures resources from home agencies, and champions the approach at a community level.

Some practitioners involved in Children's Teams are directly employed as Oranga Tamariki staff. These include:

- *Director:* is responsible for building collaboration and growing the approach at a community level. The Director is guided by the local Governance Group when undertaking this work.

- *Administrator and coordinator:* support the Director and ensure that other aspects of the approach are functioning effectively.

- *Work-force lead:* provides a range of practice and strategic support.

Figure One sets out a visual description of this approach
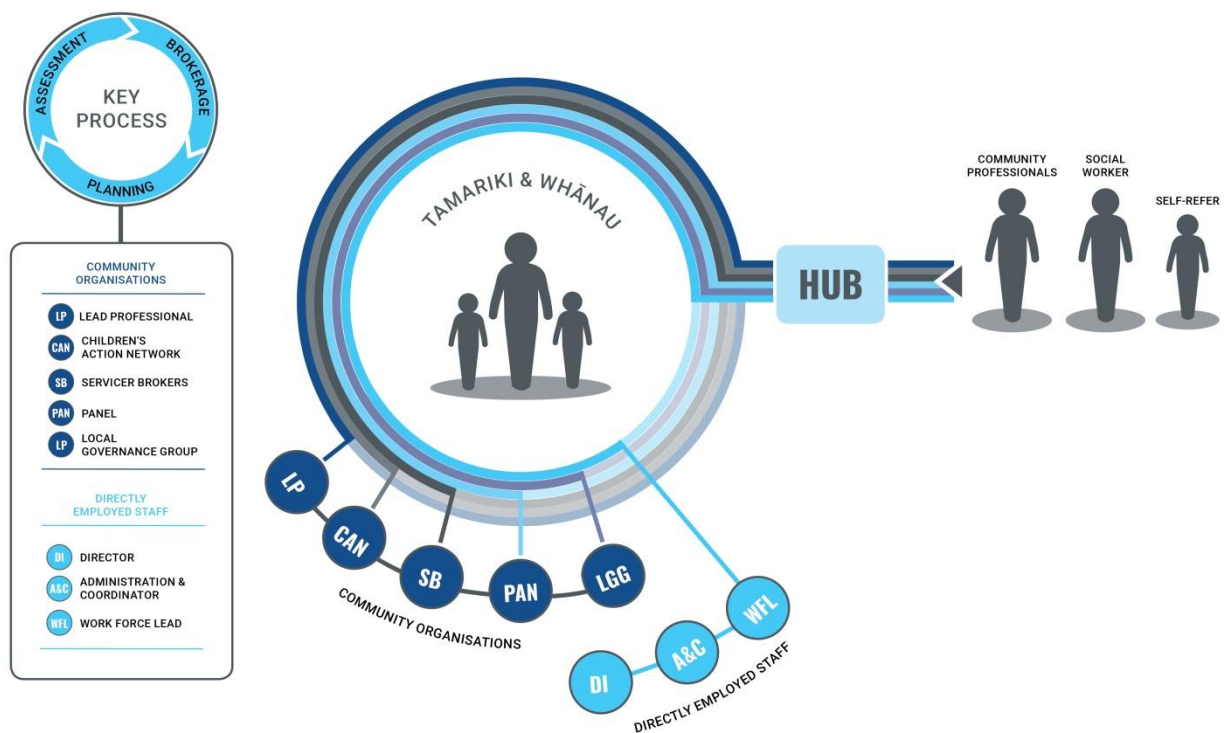
Structure of this document

This appendix first provides an in-depth discussion of the purpose and potential of the Children's Teams approach, which includes stakeholders' reflections on the nature of 'success' and the extent to which this has been achieved. The appendix then sets out key evaluation findings. These findings are framed as 'principles for success', and reflect what was learnt from stakeholders regarding the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the current approach. Finally, the appendix discusses the relative importance of identified principles within efforts to successfully support tamariki and whānau.

UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN'S TEAMS

This section initially describes the operational purpose and potential of Children's Teams, including direct support to whānau, and organisational change across the community. The section then outlines feedback from stakeholders regarding the nature of Children's Teams 'success', and perceptions on the extent to which this has been achieved. Finally, the section outlines stakeholders' overall judgement of the approach, and an initial discussion of factors driving these perspectives.

Purpose and potential of Children's Teams

Stakeholders described Children's Teams as a collaborative approach to working with vulnerable tamariki and whānau

Rather than constituting a new agency or directly providing services, stakeholders described Children's Teams as a "whole of system *approach*'" to supporting the needs of whānau. Stakeholders identified collaboration as a key aspect of this new approach, highlighting the ability of Children's Teams to facilitate the integrated involvement of several professionals. This approach was contrasted with the status quo, which stakeholders argued was often characterised by siloed engagement from multiple professionals across a range of disciplines. Some stakeholders also commented on the strength of this approach as allowing for a deeper understanding of whānau need, creating the potential for more long-lasting change.

The provision of multi-disciplinary support allows Children's Teams to more effectively respond to whānau need

Stakeholders highlighted the provision of multi-disciplinary support as a key benefit of collaboration. Rather than focusing on the specific lens or discipline of an individual provider, Children's Teams provide whānau with a broad network of support. This approach allows professionals to share skills, perspectives, knowledge and responsibility for supporting whānau, which stakeholders saw as resulting in a more comprehensive and targeted response. Stakeholders also argued that this approach is appropriate in a context of complex need; access to a range of expertise is required in situations where whānau experience multiple and overlapping issues, and may benefit from a cross-sectorial response.

This collaborative approach removes bureaucratic barriers to accessing services and support

Stakeholders commented that facilitating better access to required services was a further benefit of collaboration. Through building strong connections across the community, professionals have greater visibility of supports potentially available to whānau. Stakeholders also argued that collaboration can support "breaking down barriers between agencies", giving professionals greater capacity to advocate for service access. Some stakeholders also identified the ability to escalate or prioritise whānau in need of support as a further benefit of collaboration. Facilitating faster access to appropriate services was identified as a key aspect of how Children's Teams support tamariki and whānau.

At a community level, this collaborative approach relies on the development of strong relationships and shared vision

Stakeholders highlighted the importance of developing strong relationships when describing how they work to establish collaboration. The process of building connections across the community was seen as essential to socialising and facilitating buy-in to the approach. Stakeholders also stated that networking supported work with whānau, through improved communication, access to information, and knowledge of available supports. Some stakeholders commented that establishing shared vision and trust was a crucial component of effective relationship-building. These stakeholders described a process of moving beyond organisational self-interest to an "alliance model", which is built on a foundation of honesty, trust, and common intent.

When working directly with whānau, professionals involved in Children's Teams use a holistic, child-centred approach

Stakeholders described the Children's Teams approach as involving holistic engagement with tamariki and whānau. Rather than being restricted by appointment times, office hours or formalised ways of working, professionals focus on holistically understanding needs and connecting whānau to the supports required to thrive. Stakeholders also saw a focus on understanding the "voice of the child" as a key component of how the approach operates. This child-centred focus encourages professionals and parents to understand and prioritise the needs of tamariki. However, stakeholders also acknowledged that this approach does not preclude supporting adults; as tamariki are part of whānau, Children's Teams must also provide this broader support.

Along with child-centredness, stakeholders identified self-determination and empowerment as key aspects of how Children's Teams engage with whānau. Stakeholders commented that professionals should encourage whānau ownership of planning and decision-making, rather than dictating this process.

Building relationships with whānau was highlighted as a key aspect of this direct engagement

Along with supporting community-level collaboration, stakeholders highlighted the importance of relationships when directly working with whānau. At its core, the Children's Teams approach is based on engagement between Lead Professionals and whānau. Given this focus, stakeholders commented that quality engagement and relationships were critical to generating buy-in. When describing this relationship-building process, stakeholders highlighted a need for rapport, generating solidarity, non-judgemental engagement, empathy, listening to whānau, and taking time. Stakeholders also saw relationships as essential within the context of a non-statutory approach, where whānau volunteer to engage with Children's Teams.

Through building relationships and generating buy-in, professionals provide whānau with a range of support

- *Access to services:* Alongside relationship-building, the core role of Lead Professionals is to support whānau to access community-based services. Rather than directly providing support, Lead Professionals work with the CAN to undertake a needs assessment, broker access to services, and coordinate the involvement of other professionals or community members.

- *Advocacy:* In addition to their core coordination role, Lead Professionals also provide advocacy support to whānau. This advocacy role primarily encompasses facilitating access to services, but may also involve supporting referrals and encouraging other community-based professionals to take a child-centred approach.

- *Emergency support:* Several Lead Professionals also highlighted the provision of emergency support as a further component of how Children's Teams operate. These Lead Professionals identified ensuring access to appropriate nutrition as one example of this support.

What Children's Teams hope to achieve

Through direct engagement, Children's Teams seek to enhance the wellbeing and outcomes of tamariki and whānau

When asked to describe 'success' for tamariki and whānau engaged in Children's Teams, stakeholders identified a number of positive outcomes they hoped would be achieved. These outcomes related to:

- adult and youth offending
- education enrolment and attendance
- mental health
- primary health enrolment
- emergency department admissions
- drug and alcohol addiction
- family violence
- safety and nutrition
- housing.

Stakeholders also identified access to increased informal support – for example, from neighbours, family and friends – along with community connectedness and participation as other key success characteristics.

Along with improved outcomes, stakeholders also identified behaviour and mind-set change as key components of whānau success. Stakeholders acknowledged that while whānau will continue to experience challenges, 'success' was demonstrating resilience and having the capacity to independently respond. Increased knowledge of available supports, and whānau having the confidence and ability to access these services, were also highlighted as key success characteristics. Finally, stakeholders identified improved parenting behaviours, including the ability to provide a loving, safe and nurturing home environment, as a key aspect of whānau-level success.

Other additional success characteristics identified by stakeholders included whānau:

- having no need for statutory care and protection involvement
- having their needs adequately supported through a single-agency response
- not being re-referred to Children's Teams.

Stakeholders acknowledged that while this vision of success had been achieved for some whānau, this positive outcome was not systematic

Stakeholders reflecting on the extent to which whānau achieved this vision of success had mixed feedback. Some stakeholders commented that while you seldom reach "nirvana" due to complex need, Children's Teams can be effective at supporting whānau to access required services. In these cases, improvements in tamariki and whānau wellbeing were noted. However, half of stakeholders interviewed revealed a perception that these examples constituted 'success stories', rather than evidence of systematic change. These stakeholders commented that beyond some instances of positive change, not all whānau were effectively supported. Some stakeholders also cited examples of whānau continuing to cycle through Children's Teams as evidence of limited success.

However, stakeholders also argued that 'success' must be perceived as subjective, and that it is important to acknowledge the limitations of what Children's Teams can achieve. Stakeholders saw success as presenting differently for all whānau, and often involving small improvements in wellbeing, rather than extensive and measureable change. Some stakeholders also commented that not all whānau "have the capacity to change within themselves", indicating that, as a voluntary intervention, Children's Teams are inherently limited in their ability to influence wellbeing and success.

A number of additional factors contributing to a limited perception of whānau success were highlighted:

- Children's Teams have been operating for a limited time in some sites, making it difficult to gauge the extent of success.
- Limited outcomes-focused data collection creates challenges judging Children's Teams effectiveness, relative to their intended objectives.
- A limited number of whānau have transitioned from Children's Teams, reducing the ability to judge effectiveness.
- Accurately understanding success requires hearing the views of tamariki and whānau.

At a community level, Children's Teams hope to shift organisational attitudes and enhance collaboration; stakeholders identified on-going progress towards this aspect of success

At a community-level, stakeholders identified changes in organisational attitudes – particularly a willingness to engage in collaboration – as a fundamental component of Children's Teams success. In the first instance, stakeholders described organisational change as increased awareness of, and buy-in to, the Children's Teams approach. A willingness to change organisational practice, particularly around increased integration and taking a "joined up approach", was also identified as a key aspect of this behavioural change. Finally, stakeholders saw community-level success as a willingness to embrace the child-centred and holistic mind-set that characterises the Children's Teams approach.

Stakeholders appeared to view achievement in this regard as generally promising. For example, increased awareness of the Children's Teams approach, along with changing attitudes, greater flexibility, and a willingness to engage in more collaborative practice, were highlighted. However, most stakeholders noted that changing organisational attitudes was a long-term project, and while progress embedding this approach was being made, "we've still got a fair way to go". A small number of stakeholders also noted that as community collaboration was not a new concept, an increased willingness to engage in this approach cannot be solely attributed to the introduction of Children's Teams.

Children's Teams hope to facilitate culture change and the organic growth of this approach across the community; stakeholders suggested that success in this regard has been limited

Along with improved collaboration, stakeholders identified organically embedding the Children's Teams approach across the community as a key aspect of success. Stakeholders highlighted a need for community ownership and acceptance of this way of working, rather than it being seen specifically as the 'Children's Teams' approach. Along with this broader culture change, stakeholders also highlighted the role of Children's Teams in promoting the status of child safety and wellbeing as a community issue, which requires a community-led response. Stakeholders argued that 'success' for Children's Teams was mobilising and strengthening the capacity of communities to collectively meet the needs of vulnerable tamariki and whānau.

Some stakeholders identified positive examples of progress towards this broader culture change. For example, one stakeholder stated that this "natural evolution" was embedding, while others cited changes within organisational culture, particularly the NZ Police, as examples of this emergent shift. However, the majority of stakeholders stated that evidence of broader community-level change and ownership was limited. Stakeholders commented that while this was a long-term process, "we're not there yet", and highlighted a perception that most organisations – beyond those directly engaged with Children's Teams – had continued to maintain the status quo. Several stakeholders added that broader socialisation of the approach appears to have been limited, and that many community members would not understand or be aware of the Children's Teams approach.

Perceptions and principles of success

Overall, stakeholders stated that while they supported the concept of Children's Teams, the approach would benefit from improvement

When reflecting on the success of Children's Teams, most stakeholders interviewed were conceptually supportive. Stakeholders appeared to be generally positive about the approach's potential, reflecting that it had excellent "vision and philosophy" and that a collaborative response to the needs of vulnerable whānau was appropriate. However, alongside these comments, a majority of stakeholders also noted that Children's Teams were not functioning effectively overall. For example, stakeholders identified several gaps in the model, stated that progress embedding the approach had been slow and appeared to be stalling, highlighted a lack of structure and discipline in some areas, and noted they did not feel the original aspiration of Children's Teams had been achieved. A number of stakeholders also questioned whether Children's Teams were the most relevant or effective way of supporting vulnerable whānau.

Stakeholders identified a range of barriers they believed prevented the intended functioning of the model, and contributed to a limited perception of effectiveness overall. Some stakeholders identified issues with the design of the model, noting inherent barriers relating to how it is set up, along with process-related challenges. Stakeholders also referenced several capability and capacity challenges at both a community and organisational level, which were seen to hinder effectiveness. Finally, several "structural inhibitors" that undermined efforts to collaborate were identified. These barriers are discussed in detail within the following section of this document.

In response to these challenges, most stakeholders saw a need for change and improvement in how the model operates. Stakeholders acknowledged that Children's Teams in their current form were an "unfinished product", and that aspects of the model and broader enabling structures would benefit from redesign. Some stakeholders – particularly from the Canterbury site – also stated that many of these challenges constituted "teething issues" and that successfully embedding the approach requires a commitment to on-going revision over time. These comments support the notion that while the fundamental concept of Children's Teams is sound, there are opportunities to improve how the current model operates.

The following section of this document outlines key principles for successfully embedding a collaborative, community-based response to the needs of vulnerable whānau

Overall, comments from stakeholders reveal a perception that the operation of Children's Teams on-the-ground does not consistently reflect the model's intent (as described in pages 11-12 of this section). Consequently, stakeholders believe Children's Teams have not achieved 'success' as originally envisaged, and that general effectiveness has been limited. To further explore these challenges, the following section outlines key findings relating to strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities to bolster the Children's Teams approach. These findings have a particular focus on understanding current barriers to the effective functioning of the model. Findings are orientated around key 'principles for success'; these draw on evaluation findings and are intended to inform the successful implementation of a community-based response to the needs of vulnerable whānau.

PRINCIPLES FOR SUCCESS

This section outlines key principles for success, which are drawn from stakeholder feedback relating to the strengths and weaknesses of the Children's Teams approach. These principles are organised by four topic areas: designing, implementing and supporting collaboration; investing in communities; supporting whānau; and roles and responsibilities. Each principle reflects what was learnt from stakeholders regarding the effective implementation of community-based approaches to supporting tamariki and whānau.

DESIGNING, IMPLEMENTING AND SUPPORTING COLLABORATION

Communities must be willing and ready to engage in collaboration

While collaboration is central to the Children's Teams model, some organisations have negative attitudes or limited readiness to engage in this approach

Stakeholders highlighted varying levels of organisational buy-in to Children's Teams. While some community-based organisations and government agencies appear to be highly motivated to collaborate, others may be unwilling or unable to engage in the approach. For example, stakeholders noted that some organisations were "difficult" or refused "to come to the table", and that the process of generating buy-in was often slow. Further, stakeholders commented that organisations may struggle to embrace the Children's Teams 'lens' – particularly as it relates to holistic and child-centred practice – and remain constrained by bureaucratic barriers and process. Some instances of individual professionals being unwilling to change their practice, or actively resisting engagement with Children's Teams, were also noted.

Information sharing is a key aspect of collaboration; however, some organisations could be more engaged in this process

Stakeholders commonly identified increased information sharing – as empowered by the Children's Teams consent process – as a key strength of the approach. Stakeholders described information sharing as a collaborative process, which is a key input to improved planning, decision-making and service brokerage. Overall, it appears that most professionals and organisations actively share information. However, a number of stakeholders noted examples of organisations or professionals being unwilling to engage. These stakeholders cited a lack of understanding around confidentiality and privacy processes, organisational restraints on information sharing, and the attitudes of practitioners, as key drivers for this limited practice. One stakeholder also noted that information sharing would be supported by better integration between the information management systems of different agencies.

Changing community perceptions and understanding of the approach may result in stronger engagement

Stakeholders identified several ways to improve collaboration and organisational buy-in to the approach:

- Promote the understanding that Children's Teams are a new approach to supporting existing clients, rather than requiring extra work, or being distinct from 'business-as-usual'.
- Improve socialisation and awareness of the teams.
- To avoid disappointment, community partners should be aware that Children's Teams do not provide additional services or resource.

- Children's Teams should be perceived as a community-based approach, rather than part of a government agency.
- Organisational engagement in Children's Teams should be genuine and free from external pressures.

The implementation and design of collaborative approaches should be led by local communities

Development of the Children's Team model and implementation process was driven at a National Office level and could have better reflected community conditions

Stakeholders commented that while Children's Teams were portrayed as a "locally-led" approach, designed to reflect community conditions, this intent had not been achieved. A majority of stakeholders stated that the design and implementation of Children's Teams had been driven at a National Office[9] level, and that local knowledge around how to best serve whānau was not reflected. Stakeholders highlighted a perceived lack of genuine consultation, a sense of being "done to" by central government, and feeling compelled to accept a particular and pre-existing model. Stakeholders from the Rotorua site also gave examples of staff receiving a punitive response after questioning this approach. This perception of a top-down process was particularly strong during initial implementation of the teams. However, stakeholders also highlighted recent improvements associated with personnel changes at National Office and the integration of Children's Teams into Oranga Tamariki.

This level of involvement by National Office is a key challenge that has had a number of implications at a local level

Stakeholders identified several implications of the Children's Teams implementation process:

- The model implemented was felt to be highly prescriptive. As a result, Children's Teams became process-driven and bureaucratised, detracting from a focus on supporting whānau.
- The implementation process missed the opportunity to leverage off existing collaborative processes, infrastructure, and sources of strength within communities.
- The process of implementing the model was not felt to be empowering, creating a lack of community buy-in and ownership, and a loss of goodwill.

However, when functioning effectively, the relationship with National Office is an important source of resources and support

While tension in the relationship with National Office was noted, stakeholders also highlighted the potential benefits of this association:

- The relationship with National Office provides a strong mandate and government backing for the Children's Teams approach.
- Children's Teams can access resources, training and support from National Office. The level and quality of this support was seen to have increased over time.
- Integration and information sharing encourages connectedness between the 'Wellington' political environment and regional sites.

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[9] Children's Teams were established by the Children's Action Plan Directorate, which was an independent cross-agency entity with a National Office located in Wellington. On 1 April 2017, Children's Teams were integrated into Oranga Tamariki.

Cross-agency contract arrangements should reflect and facilitate collaboration

Current contracting arrangements do not adequately support collaboration

A majority of stakeholders commented that contracting arrangements within the NGO and broader sector create a set of conditions that challenge collaboration. Stakeholders reflected that contracts often did not align with the Children's Teams approach, and that work to collaboratively support the needs of whānau could be restricted by pre-existing obligations and competing priorities. A need for greater flexibility and better integration between contracts was often cited, along with the importance of implementing a response to these issues across the sector. Several stakeholders noted broader implications of the current contracting approach, namely competition between organisations and uncertainty due to short-term funding cycles. Stakeholders saw these issues as undermining collaboration and challenging the sustainability of the Children's Teams approach.

The presence of multiple services competing for resources can further challenge collaborative efforts

Some stakeholders reflected on the presence of multiple community-based initiatives, including Children's Teams, contracted to provide whānau with similar forms of support. Commonly cited examples of these initiatives included Whānau Ora, the Integrated Safety Response Pilot, Strengthening Families, Social Sector Trials, and Right Services, Right Time[10]. Stakeholders noted that this duplication created tension and confusion within the community, along with further competition for contracts, referrals and resources. Several stakeholders commented on the potential benefit of greater integration between these services, for example, implementing an overall governance group. Finally, a number of stakeholders commented that some pre-existing services, particularly Strengthening Families, had been replaced through the implementation of Children's Teams, and that this process undermined community willingness to engage.

INVESTING IN COMMUNITIES

Cross-agency investment in services for vulnerable tamariki and whānau is required

A lack of service availability within the community is a key challenge experienced by Children's Teams

As noted, Children's Teams do not directly provide services to tamariki and whānau, instead relying on brokerage and referrals to other community-based organisations. A majority of stakeholders identified limited availability of these supports as a key barrier to implementing the Children's Teams approach. Challenges relating to high demand, long waiting lists, strict criteria around entry thresholds, and service gaps, were seen to undermine Children's Teams' capacity to effectively connect whānau with required supports. Some stakeholders also identified limited awareness of available supports, along with a lack of appropriate or approachable services for whānau, as other related issues. When reflecting on how to resolve these challenges, several stakeholders commented that improving service availability was outside the direct control of Children's Teams, and instead required a response from across the sector.

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[10] Several of these initiatives existed at the time Children's Teams were implemented but have since ceased operation.

Providing adequate resourcing is central to effectiveness and sustainability

Children's Teams are not resourced to directly employ professionals, consequently relying on voluntary contributions from across the community; this issue is a key challenge within the approach

Stakeholders highlighted an overall lack of Children's Teams resourcing as a key challenge, noting that the approach receives minimal direct funding. As a result, Children's Teams rely on voluntary workforce contributions from organisations across the community. Rather than relying on goodwill, stakeholders identified several alternative models, which may result in more effective support for tamariki and whānau. For example, several stakeholders recommended that Children's Teams are funded to directly employ Lead Professionals, or that organisations receive additional funding to recognise their time and resource contribution.

Stakeholders commented that relying on voluntary contributions had several broader implications for the sustainability and effectiveness of the model:

- Limited availability of practitioners, particularly Lead Professionals, as organisations are unwilling to commit resources to the approach.
- Organisations have limited resources and are already fully occupied delivering their core business, meaning that they are unwilling or unable to contribute to Children's Teams. This issue is exacerbated by a perception Children's Teams constitute additional work, rather than a new approach to supporting existing clients.
- Additional and competing demands gradually erode community goodwill and willingness to collaborate.

The need to undertake Children's Teams work in addition to their day job has a range of implications for involved professionals

With the exception of staff directly employed by Children's Teams, the majority of involved professionals undertake this work in addition to their day job. Stakeholders identified a range of potential challenges associated with this approach:

- Staff may struggle to commit time to Children's Teams alongside their regular work.
- Training, assessment, planning, or direct engagement with whānau, may not be completed due to competing demands for professionals' time.
- Additional time commitments can create stress and burn-out, resulting in high staff turnover.
- Challenges relating to practice oversight and management, as professionals have dual accountability to their home organisations and Children's Teams.
- Engagement with Children's Teams can create additional capacity issues and reduce service delivery within home organisations.

Relying on voluntary support has resulted in a large community-based workforce, comprised of practitioners who contribute small amounts of time to the approach

Due to the expectation that organisations provide voluntary staff contributions, issues relating to the allocation of practitioners' time were noted. Stakeholders described the fracturing of roles into small FTE contributions, resulting in the growth of a large workforce; this approach was seen to be inefficient. Stakeholders highlighted challenges training and supporting this workforce, and noted that small FTE contributions can result in Lead Professionals having a poor understanding of the approach and limited time to engage directly with whānau. Rather than multiple, small FTE allocations, stakeholders supported consolidation of the Children's Teams' workforce.

Current resourcing conditions have led to long waiting lists, which have a number of implications, particularly for whānau

Stakeholders from the Canterbury and Rotorua sites noted that increasingly, whānau may experience long waiting lists after being referred to Children's Teams; this issue was most evident in Canterbury. Stakeholders commonly cited capacity issues, specifically, a lack of trained practitioners able to act as Lead Professionals, as a key driver for these waiting lists. Several implications for whānau resulting from this issue were highlighted: while waiting to engage, whānau may change their attitude around participation, or the challenges they are experiencing may worsen. Waiting lists were also seen as a missed opportunity to immediately engage with whānau after some form of incident, for example, a Police family violence call-out.

Several broader implications associated with waiting lists were also identified:

- Challenges publicising and building awareness in the community, as Children's Teams struggle responding to additional demand.
- A loss of mana in the community, as referrers observe long waiting lists before whānau can engage.
- A triage process, where whānau with high-needs are prioritised over those who may require less support, or who have self-referred.
- Difficulties determining who is responsible for the wellbeing of tamariki and whānau while they are on the waiting list.

Cross-agency capability and capacity building within the children's workforce is required

Stakeholders identified a need for capability building and professionalisation across the children's workforce

Stakeholders highlighted challenges accessing skilled and capable practitioners, particularly Lead Professionals, to work within the Children's Teams approach. This issue may partially relate to how willing communities are to contribute a voluntary workforce. However, stakeholders also noted a basic lack of availability, particularly within more rural areas. Accordingly, several stakeholders advocated for an increased focus on, and investment in, cross-agency workforce development. Many stakeholders also identified a need for professionalising, and providing increased training and support to, the existing Children's Team's workforce. These stakeholders noted the importance of establishing clear expectations and core competencies, along with providing professional development, clinical support, training and supervision. This capacity building was seen as central when practitioners are drawn from different professions and have varying skill-sets.

SUPPORTING WHĀNAU

The relationship between, and respective thresholds of, statutory responses and community-based preventative approaches must be clear

Children's Teams are intended to be an early intervention response, which prevents the escalation of issues and avoids the need for statutory care and protection involvement

Stakeholders identified the early intervention orientation of Children's Teams as a key strength. Rather than acting as "the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff", stakeholders saw the role of Children's Teams as supporting whānau to have their needs met before they escalate. When this work is effective, Children's Teams act as a "safety net" that can prevent the need for a statutory care and protection response. One stakeholder also noted that Children's Teams filled a previous support gap for whānau where universal services are not sufficient, and nor is a statutory intervention required.

Increasingly, whānau referred to Children's Teams are high needs clients, undermining efforts to provide an early intervention response

When discussing the nature of whānau referred to Children's Teams, a majority of stakeholders reflected on the increasing complexity of their needs. Stakeholders described whānau with chronic and severe vulnerability, intergenerational issues, and challenges relating to housing, mental health, employment, finances and domestic violence. Some stakeholders also described tamariki with "scarily complex needs", who have significant trauma and display violent behaviours. Stakeholders noted that many of these whānau fall "just below or at" the statutory threshold, and that this complexity undermines their capacity to provide an early intervention response, intended to prevent the escalation of need. A small number of stakeholders also noted that tamariki referred to Children's Teams tend to be older than originally anticipated, further challenging efforts to provide early intervention orientated support.

Determining the respective thresholds and populations of Children's Teams and statutory responses can be challenging

Stakeholders noted a perception that over time, due to resource and other constraints, the Oranga Tamariki threshold for statutory involvement has increased. In response, whānau referred to the Children's Teams may have met historic Oranga Tamariki thresholds and consequently, may be better served by a statutory care and protection response. Some stakeholders also highlighted challenges determining which whānau should be referred where, and noted high levels of 'churn' between Children's Teams and Oranga Tamariki statutory responses. These issues were seen to further challenge efforts to provide an early intervention response, and also result in Children's Teams being positioned as "CYF light", or a de facto version of a statutory response.

The majority of referrals to Children's Teams come from Oranga Tamariki, further challenging efforts to provide an early intervention response

Stakeholders noted that while in some instances, whānau are referred to Children's Teams by professionals and others community members, the majority of referrals come from Oranga Tamariki. A referral rate of over 60 per cent from Oranga Tamariki social workers was commonly cited. Stakeholders associated this rate with a perception that social workers see Children's Teams as a way of lightening their workload, or that these referrals are perceived as a means of avoiding direct responsibility for tamariki. Some stakeholders commented that these referral patterns reinforce a perception that Children's Teams are closely associated with a statutory response, and further challenge efforts to provide early intervention support.

While Children's Teams are intended as a voluntary intervention, some whānau may feel compelled to engage; this has implications for their willingness to participate

Children's Teams are intended as a *voluntary* intervention for whānau with some level of need; this aspect of the approach was identified as a key strength, particularly as it relates to facilitating engagement. However, it appears that in some cases, whānau may feel compelled to participate. Stakeholders noted instances of whānau having to choose between engagement with Children's Teams or an Oranga Tamariki statutory response. A range of implications associated with this non-genuine consent were highlighted, particularly around whānau willingness to engage. These issues included a potential lack of mutual trust and respect, difficulties establishing relationships and completing assessment/planning processes, a lack of commitment to behaviour change, and disengagement.

The integration of Children's Teams into Oranga Tamariki has shifted some whānau perceptions around the nature of the approach

Stakeholders noted that since the structural move to integrate Children's Teams within Oranga Tamariki, some whānau increasingly struggle to differentiate between the two. As a result, stakeholders highlighted instances of whānau refusing to engage with Children's Teams due to a perception they would "uplift their children". Some stakeholders noted that this hesitancy may also relate to whānau having had negative experiences with CYF or Oranga Tamariki in the past. After integration, examples of whānau experiencing further confusion over the voluntary nature of the approach were also cited. Stakeholders' beliefs on the extent to which integration is problematic were mixed, with some noting that confusion can usually be resolved through discussion, and is not experienced by all whānau.

Enabling functions should support, rather than challenge, work with whānau

The Children's Teams referral process can be challenging and may deter community-based organisations from making referrals

Stakeholders described the referral process for Children's Teams as overly-complex and cumbersome, noting that the current set-up "was probably not that sustainable" and could be improved. Further, some stakeholders associated this complexity with a lack of community-based referrals, suggesting that organisations may struggle to engage with a process seen to be not straightforward or user-friendly. Other opportunities to improve the Children's Teams referral process were also identified:

- Organisations need to understand the process for referring whānau, including how this differs from a referral for a statutory response.
- Lead Professionals benefit from the inclusion of full and accurate information within referrals.
- Community-based professionals should retain a sense of responsibility for supporting whānau, even after making a referral.

The difficult nature of the Children's Teams assessment process – completing a Tuituia – was identified as a key challenge undermining efforts to support whānau

Stakeholders commonly stated that completing a Tuituia was a difficult process that could detract from, rather than contribute to, efforts to support whānau. Stakeholders described the tool as unfamiliar, overly complicated and time-consuming, and also questioned its quality, noting it can be too subjective, lacks an evidence-base, and is unsuited for reflecting the voice of tamariki. Practitioners also commented that the current eight to 10 week completion time-frame could be extended. The need to use this tool was associated with a loss of buy-in from existing staff and difficulties attracting additional Lead Professionals. Some stakeholders also noted that Tuituia was seen to reflect a social worker paradigm, undermining engagement by professionals outside this discipline.

Many stakeholders questioned the need for a standardised tool, commenting that the use of practitioners' existing tools may be appropriate, or highlighting the potential benefits of alternative assessment processes. However, recent improvements, particularly around condensing the tool and collating the assessment of multiple children, were also noted.

The ViKI information management system creates an administrative burden, which can detract from work with whānau

Stakeholders – particularly from the Canterbury site[11] – highlighted a perception that rather than acting as an enabling function, the ViKI information management system created administrative challenges within their work. ViKI was described as often unreliable, and not consistently user-friendly. Stakeholders noted that due to these challenges, practitioners may disengage from entering content in ViKI, undermining its intended use as a reporting and monitoring tool. Several stakeholders also noted that the tool exacerbated frustrations regarding Tuituia, as practitioners must navigate through ViKI to use it. In response to these challenges, stakeholders supported redesign or simplification of ViKI. A need for adequate training around use of the tool, and better integration with other information management systems and Children's Teams processes, was also highlighted.

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[11] At the time that evaluation fieldwork occurred, of the three sites, only Canterbury was using the ViKI system. Despite not using the system, some comments relating to the use of ViKI were also received from stakeholders at the Rotorua and Horowhenua/Ōtaki sites.

Collaborative approaches must be culturally responsive and support the wellbeing of tamariki Māori and their whānau

High numbers of whānau Māori are referred to Children's Teams and professionals must have the cultural competency to effectively engage

Stakeholders highlighted the large numbers of whānau Māori referred to Children's Teams, and stated that given these demographics, practitioners must have the cultural competency to effectively engage. Stakeholders commented that levels of cultural competency within the current workforce were mixed, and noted the potential to build cultural awareness, sensitivity and understanding. Improved training and access to cultural advisors were identified as key aspects of this process. Many stakeholders also highlighted challenges engaging sufficient numbers of Māori practitioners to act as Lead Professionals, and supported a strengthened focus on this recruitment. However, several stakeholders also noted that depending on their skill-set, practitioners from other ethnicities can effectively support whānau Māori.

Perceptions on whether Children's Teams are the most effective approach for supporting whānau Māori were mixed

A number of stakeholders noted a belief that Children's Teams are an appropriate fit with a Māori world-view, and therefore, have the potential to be a culturally responsive intervention. These stakeholders highlighted the holistic, relationship-based and voluntary nature of the approach, along with its complementary focus on self-determination and empowerment. However, in contrast, some stakeholders questioned whether Children's Teams were the most effective approach for working with Māori. These stakeholders highlighted a disconnect with a Māori world-view, particularly around how 'child-centred' support is conceived, and noted that Children's Teams do not necessarily reflect a culturally sensitive approach.

Further, a number of stakeholders argued that the best approach for supporting whānau Māori was "by Māori for Māori", and that other models, particularly Whānau Ora, may be more appropriate. These stakeholders commented that Whānau Ora used principles broadly similar to Children's Teams, but was delivered in a way more culturally responsive for both practitioners and whānau. A small number of stakeholders also noted that the implementation of Children's Teams had led to challenges engaging with local iwi; this was seen to be a particular issue within Horowhenua/Ōtaki. These stakeholders highlighted a lack of consultation, the belief funding should have been directed to iwi organisations, non-genuine engagement, a lack of representation, and a greater sense of ownership over Whānau Ora, as key drivers for these relationship challenges.

The process of transitioning whānau from Children's Teams should balance meeting their needs and the risk of creating dependency

Some whānau may disengage from Children's Teams before a formal transition process occurs; several drivers for this were identified

Stakeholders identified that in some instances, whānau may disengage from Children's Teams before a formal transition process has occurred. Feedback from stakeholders suggests while a level of disengagement is to be expected due to the voluntary nature of the approach, this does not occur to an unreasonable degree. As discussed, in some cases this disengagement may relate to a lack of genuine consent, whānau perceptions of an association with Oranga Tamariki, or long waiting lists for the service. Other drivers identified by stakeholders include:

- Relationship-based challenges or a lack of 'fit' between whānau and Lead Professionals.
- A perception of poor engagement and responsiveness by Lead Professionals.
- Whānau may disengage when professionals "get close to the root problems", and they are scared or unwilling to change.
- A need for greater understanding around how the approach operates and the nature of the support provided.
- Whānau concerns around information sharing or the assessment process.
- The complexity of issues faced by parents, leading to challenges maintaining engagement.
- In some cases, whānau may simply move out of the area.

A range of challenges and differing perspectives relating to the current Children's Team transition process were identified

Feedback from stakeholders highlighted a range of challenges relating to the current Children's Teams transition process, particularly around a need to balance the level and duration of support provided. Stakeholders' perceptions on an appropriate transition process appeared to be mixed. Some stakeholders noted that whānau "can't stay with Children's Teams forever", and commented that long-term engagement can result in service dependency. Rather than eliminating risk entirely, these stakeholders saw the role of Children's Teams as supporting whānau out of crisis, building their resilience and capacity to access supports, and then undertaking a transition process.

In contrast, a group of stakeholders commented that transition process expectations were unrealistic, and reflected a short-term or transactional mind-set. These stakeholders argued that transition processes should be flexible rather than "time bound", and needed to account for the diverse needs and differing capacities of whānau. Some stakeholders also described experiencing pressure to close cases, particularly within a context of low resourcing and high waiting lists, and noted that as a result, some whānau may not have the skills to manage independently at the point of transition. The importance of transition planning and ensuring on-going access to services was also highlighted.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Professionals should have a consistent and clear understanding of their roles and the overall intent of the approach

Professionals involved in Children's Teams sometimes experience a lack of role clarity, and can have inconsistent interpretations of what their job entails

Comments from stakeholders highlighted a perception that professionals working within Children's Teams can experience a lack of clarity around their role, and the intent of the approach. Stakeholders noted that professionals within different functions – including the Panel, CAN and Lead Professionals – need more support to understand the specific nature of their work, and how it contributes to the overall Children's Teams approach. Stakeholders highlighted a need for improved training, and job descriptions that establish consistent and clear expectations for professionals. Several Lead Professionals also associated limited role clarity with attempts by other practitioners to "dump everything" on them. This expectation to perform diverse work was sometimes seen to detract from a core focus on supporting whānau.

Children's Teams professionals may experience isolation from each other and the overall vision of the approach

The Children's Teams approach involves participation from a diverse range of professionals, who are drawn from different home organisations, and perform a number of distinct roles. Feedback from stakeholders suggests that a degree of isolation, or disconnection, may exist across these professionals. Stakeholders commonly described "not having much to do with", or not understanding the role of, other professionals, including those in other organisations, performing different roles, and directly employed by Children's Teams. Some stakeholders also highlighted a particular disconnect with the operation of the Governance Group and role of National Office, suggesting that front-line staff may have limited understanding of the overall vision of the Children's Teams approach. In response to these issues, stakeholders saw a need for more opportunities to network, engage and share ideas with other professionals.

Having a key person lead the approach when working with whānau is important; this professional must be competent and supported in their work

Stakeholders' perceptions on what makes a good Lead Professional were mixed

Stakeholders had differing perceptions on the nature and level of experience required for Lead Professionals. Some stakeholders argued that the Lead Professional role was most appropriately performed by a qualified social worker, noting that this level of expertise was important in the context of increasing complexity and whānau need. In contrast, other stakeholders saw the Lead Professional as more of a generalist role able to be performed by practitioners from numerous disciplines. A number of stakeholders also commented that Lead Professionals could be re-positioned as 'navigators' or 'co-ordinators', rather than experts, and that a focus on social work risked alienating professionals from other disciplines.

Additional factors associated with effective practice and engagement include:

- Ensuring that Lead Professionals are appropriately matched with whānau, for example, on the basis of age, ethnicity, or specialised skill-set.
- The motivation and commitment of Lead Professionals, and their passion for working with tamariki and whānau.
- The capacity of Lead Professionals to be persistent, particularly when working to generate buy-in and engagement from whānau.

Stakeholders also described some instances of poor practice by Lead Professionals, and highlighted a need to improve the basic skills of these practitioners, including enhancing engagement, co-ordination, assessment, and planning. Stakeholders also described Lead Professionals who do not understand or ignore the Children's Teams process, instead "doing their own thing", or gave examples of practitioners forming unprofessional relationships with whānau. Stakeholders' feedback suggests the extent of poor practice is relatively limited, and may be compounded by limited supervision and a lack of appropriate oversight.

Lead Professionals may benefit from engaging with Children's Teams full-time; however, some risks associated with this approach were also noted

As discussed, Children's Teams Lead Professionals often only dedicate a small portion of their total time to this work. Rather than this model, some stakeholders highlighted the potential benefits of having Lead Professionals work within the Children's Teams approach full-time. These stakeholders noted that along with resolving challenges associated with undertaking dual work, a full-time contribution results in greater flexibility, more time to support whānau, and better exposure to, and confidence working within, the Children's Teams approach. Stakeholders also commented that full-time engagement supports Lead Professionals to become effective champions of the approach.

However, a number of risks associated with this model were also identified. Stakeholders commented that full-time engagement with Children's Teams, particularly if professionals are co-located, may result in isolation and disconnection from their home agency, along with potential process challenges and issues relating to practice oversight. More broadly, stakeholders also saw this approach as undermining efforts to socialise and embed the approach across the community. Stakeholders commented that while ideally, Lead Professionals should return to their home organisations to embed this way of working, on-going full-time engagement means this is not achieved.

The Children's Team approach is heavily reliant on the work of Lead Professionals; this approach may not be sustainable

As noted, Lead Professionals are the core mechanism for delivering direct support to whānau within Children's Teams. A number of stakeholders reflected that this reliance may be too great, challenging the sustainability and quality of the approach. Stakeholders commented that other professionals or aspects of the approach (for example, the CAN) can be unwilling to take on responsibility for supporting or communicating with whānau, instead relying on Lead Professionals to complete the majority of this work. As a result, stakeholders described Lead Professionals who carry large workloads, experience stress, and struggle dedicating sufficient time to direct engagement with whānau. Lead Professionals and others also argued that the expectation to complete a range of administrative tasks – for example, co-ordinating Police vetting processes – could exacerbate these issues.

Lead Professionals benefit from adequate training and on-going support

Stakeholders commonly identified the importance of providing training and support to Lead Professionals. A number of key success principles, which may guide the provision of appropriate support, were identified:

- The orientation process should ensure that Lead Professionals thoroughly understand the operation, values and culture of the Children's Teams approach.
- Supervision should encompass ad hoc supervision in response to specific challenges, and on-going or external support.
- Support from management, and a team culture that promotes self-care, is important.
- Training should not be overly prescriptive and should acknowledge the existing expertise of professionals.
- Lead Professionals should receive specific training for key competencies of the role, for example, engagement and relationship-building.
- Refresher training is important.
- Given the increased complexity of Lead Professionals' work, training in core social worker skills – for example, risk and safety assessment – may be necessary.
- Training should be responsive to evolving role expectations and should change over-time.

Other key professionals can contribute to the successful implementation and functioning of collaborative approaches

Beyond Lead Professionals, the table below sets out key strengths and challenges associated with other professionals and aspects of the Children's Teams approach.

ROLE	STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES
Director	- Provides support to other Children's Teams staff and professionals. - Represents the needs of front-line practitioners and escalates issues to the Governance Group/National Office. - Key influencer, relationship-builder and community advocate for the approach. - Supports other organisations to be child-centred.	- Risk that Director and other directly employed staff are seen as 'owning' the Children's Teams. - Can be difficult responding to practice and other concerns in the context of a devolved workforce. - Workforce and resource challenges mean that Directors often have to provide practice supervision, detracting from a more strategic focus. - The relationship between the Director and Governance Group is not always clear.
Co-ordinator and administrator	- Provide an important and highly valued source of support to other professionals. - Support integration between involved professionals and agencies. - Produce reporting using ViKI and co-ordinate the Panel process. - Promote timeliness and support professionals to understand their role.	- The fracturing and growth of the Lead Professional workforce has challenged the capacity of co-ordinators to provide effective support. - Are often over-worked and unable to manage excess demand.
Work-force lead	- Supports capability building, quality practice and workforce development. - Socialises legislation and policy changes/expectations. - Builds awareness of the Children's Teams approach within the community. - Supports the Director.	- Sites may not consistently have a work-force lead.

ROLE	STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES
Brokers	- Facilitate information sharing and access to services. - Contribute to a comprehensive understanding of whānau and tamariki need. - Contribute to improving communication between different agencies. - Provide support as CAN members and to Lead Professionals.	- Brokers do not always have a comprehensive understanding of their relevant subject area. - Brokers may be disconnected from other Children's Teams professionals. - Brokers are not used comprehensively across all Children's Teams sites.
Children's Action Network (CAN)	- Provides exposure to different professionals and ways of working. - Facilitates information sharing and improved planning. - Builds shared ownership for supporting whānau. - Acts as an accountability mechanism for professionals and whānau. - If a CAN is functioning effectively, it can replace the formal involvement of Children's Teams.	- Lead Professionals can experience challenges establishing CAN membership and co-ordinating on-going involvement. - CAN members may not understand or buy-in to the approach. - CAN members may be unwilling to contribute and rely on Lead Professionals to undertake work. - Not all whānau are comfortable engaging in this forum.
Panel	- Oversees the Children's Teams referral process and makes decisions regarding which whānau are accepted. - Monitors on-going involvement with whānau. - Provides important practice feedback and advice to Lead Professionals. - Supports capability building of Lead Professionals. - Supports developing a deeper understanding of whānau need. - Provides specialist expertise across several disciplines. - Members are highly respected in the community for their clinical and practice knowledge. - Facilitates the provision of cross-disciplinary support and provides visibility of available services.	- Potential to broaden membership to encompass more disciplines, and also include Lead Professional representation. - Lead Professionals may be nervous engaging in this forum. - The level of support provided to Lead Professionals can be variable. - Intensity of work and additional time commitment can result in burn-out. - Meetings could benefit from greater structure. - Panel members may not understand or buy-in to the approach.

ROLE	STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES
Governance Group	- Members represent key decision-makers and people with mana within the community. - Provides governance of Children's Teams and promotes its mandate within the community. - Supports relationship-building and strategic responses to community-level problems, including service availability issues. - Can provide an avenue for escalating issues.	- Can be disconnected from front-line professionals. - May have limited capacity to build awareness of the approach and advocate for change. - Members have different levels of authority and capacity for independent decision-making. - Individual members can dominate discussion and decision-making. - Large membership can be unwieldy. - Could be better integrated with other similar groups within the community.

CONCLUSION

Overall, feedback from key stakeholders suggests there is broad conceptual support for Children's Teams, and optimism about the approach's potential benefits. However, in practice, the model is not thought to be operating as intended, and therefore, is unable to fully deliver the outcomes for tamariki and whānau originally envisaged. Key findings highlight the existence of a range of barriers hindering the effective operation of Children's Teams, ranging from community perceptions and buy-in to the approach, to the broader environment in which the model operates. Through better understanding these barriers – along with areas of strength within the model – this evaluation has identified key principles for success, which highlight opportunities to reinforce the operation of Children's Teams. These principles could also inform the implementation of similar community-based approaches.

While all success principles identified have the potential to inform the effective operation of collaborative approaches, it is important to acknowledge their relative importance. For example, these evaluation findings suggest that as Children's Teams rely on goodwill and collaboration, building community ownership and buy-in to the approach are essential first steps. Once communities feel positive and invested in the approach, this enthusiasm can be maintained by ensuring that enabling functions facilitate its operation. The approach should also be distinct as a non-statutory initiative, which provides Māori whānau with culturally competent and appropriate support. While important, a focus on more specific elements of the model - including the transition process, the nature of roles and responsibilities, and training/supervision – should follow the implementation of other principles.

Findings from this initial phase of evaluation work highlight a need to improve how Children's Teams support at-risk tamariki and whānau. Efforts to enhance the operation of the teams, or effectively implement other community-based approaches, can be usefully informed by the success principles identified through this evaluation. Further planned evaluation activities – specifically, undertaking interviews with tamariki and whānau - will produce a more comprehensive understanding of how Children's Teams are perceived in the community, along with further opportunities to improve the nature and quality of support provided. This work is especially important given the mandate of Oranga Tamariki to support the wellbeing of tamariki and whānau at risk of experiencing harm, not just those already within formal care and protection thresholds.

APPENDIX 1 – METHODOLOGY

Design

This appendix presents findings from an initial phase of evaluation work relating to Children's Teams. The evaluation is designed to explore the implementation and operation of the Children's Teams model and is guided by the following evaluation questions:

- How is the Children's Teams approach operating on-the ground?
- What key strengths and challenges are associated with the approach?
- What opportunities are there to strengthen how the approach operates?

This appendix presents findings from interviews with key stakeholders only. Other planned evaluation activities include undertaking interviews with whānau involved in Children's Teams. A final evaluation report will be completed, which will integrate and summarise key findings from all evaluation activities.

This appendix used a qualitative approach to explore key evaluation questions. This approach allowed the evaluation team to gather experiential data, which provides rich insight into stakeholders' perceptions of how the model is currently operating. A qualitative approach was considered the most appropriate means of achieving the evaluation objectives.

Due to time and resource constraints, the evaluation design involved stakeholders from three Children's Teams sites only; namely, Horowhenua/Ōtaki, Canterbury and Rotorua. These sites were identified through consultation between the evaluation team and Children's Teams leadership at Oranga Tamariki National Office. Sites were chosen considering geographic and demographic factors, size, and time since establishment.

Evaluation activities

Intervention logic development with National Office stakeholders

Initial evaluation work involved the development of a Children's Teams intervention logic model with key stakeholders from Oranga Tamariki National Office. This activity allowed the evaluation team to build their understanding of the team's operation and intended outcomes. The intervention logic was used to inform planning and the focus of subsequent evaluation activities.

Initial site visits

Initial site visits were conducted with the three Children's Teams involved in the evaluation. These visits were intended to provide greater insight into how the teams operate on-the-ground, including the process used when working to support whānau. Site visits also resulted in the identification of emerging themes to be further explored in stakeholder interviews.

Interviews

A total of 25 semi-structured interviews, involving 26 participants[12], were completed by the evaluation team. Twenty face-to-face interviews were conducted with stakeholders across the three evaluation sites, with the remaining five interviews occurring via telephone. Interviews were conducted throughout mid-September and early-October 2017, and were an hour long on average.

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[12] One group interview, involving two key stakeholders, was undertaken.

Interview recruitment

This evaluation used a purposeful sampling approach to recruit participants. Potential stakeholders were initially identified by Children's Teams Directors, assuming they were knowledgeable of, and willing to speak openly about, the approach. The evaluation team then contacted these nominated stakeholders to request an interview. This communication included an explanation of the evaluation approach, along with consent information and a list of key interview questions. Interviews were then scheduled with those stakeholders who consented to participation.

Participant details

A total of 26 stakeholders participated in this phase of the evaluation. This total was comprised of 12 stakeholders from Canterbury, six from Horowhenua/Ōtaki and eight from Rotorua.

A range of key stakeholders were interviewed, including:

- Children's Teams staff: directors, coordinators, administrators and work-force leads (seven participants in total)
- Lead Professionals (four)
- Service Brokers (three)
- Panel members (four)
- Governance Group members (four)
- Community partners (four)

Ethics

The evaluation was peer reviewed through the internal Oranga Tamariki ethics process, and was considered low risk.

Analysis, review and feedback

Interviews were transcribed and then coded using the NVIVO software. Coding was undertaken using an inductive approach. The analysis seeks to present key themes that were universal across all participants. Detailed analysis of any differences in opinion across participant types is not presented. While feedback was largely consistent across the three evaluation sites, important distinctions are highlighted within the document.

The presentation of findings and document structure was informed by a collaborative workshop with all members of the evaluation team. Quality assurance of analysis and reporting was completed through the Evidence Centre peer review process, and involved two internal and one external peer reviewer. Key stakeholders within Oranga Tamariki National Office were given the opportunity to comment on a draft version of the document. The evaluation team also completed workshops with key stakeholders from the three evaluation sites to socialise and test findings.

Limitations

- The evaluation does not include systematic outcomes information or address questions of impact.
- Data collection was limited to a relatively small number of stakeholders within a constrained number of sites.
- Participants were purposely sampled; hence, they may not be representative.
- While substantive variation is not anticipated, detailed analysis of differing opinions across participant types was not undertaken.
- Evaluation findings reflect feedback from the group of stakeholders interviewed only.