

Iwi-led Care and Protection Family Group Conference Evaluation Summary Report

prepared for

Rangitāne o Wairarapa Inc.



and

Oranga Tamariki,

Professional Practice Group



by

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Tū Mai Rā

Tū mai rā, tū mai rā
Ngā uri o Rangitāne
Whakamau ki tō tupuna
Tō whakapapa rangatira
Me mau tonu i ngā hononga
O ngā karanga maha o roto rā
Nā reira Rangitāne mā
Tū mai rā, tū mai rā e

“Te Korokoro Tamaiti”

Each child has their own voice,
and it is up to us to recognise the
unique of that voice

SUMMARY REPORT

This report outlines the findings of a process evaluation of the Rangitāne o Wairarapa Inc. (Rangitāne) iwi-led care and protection family group conference (FGC) initiative. The aim of the evaluation was to understand how the iwi-led FGC initiative is working and to explore the experiences of tamariki/rangatahi, whānau and stakeholders associated with the coordination process. The evaluation fieldwork was carried out between December 2018 and February 2019. In total 24 people participated in a series of individual and small group qualitative semi-structured interviews.

Context and the emergence of the iwi-led FGCs

The initiative arose as an outcome of over twenty years of critique about the State's role in the continued marginalisation of Māori. Most notably, Pūao-te-Ata-Tū (1988) detailed systemic deficiencies in law and practice that negatively impacted the journey of Indigenous Māori children and their whānau through New Zealand's State systems for care and protection and youth justice (Pūao-te-Ata-Tū, 1988). Pūao-te-Ata-Tū led to sweeping statutory reforms. Most significantly was the introduction of the Children and Young Persons Act (1989) which placed FGCs as a central process.

In Wairarapa, and prior to the initiative's development, the local Oranga Tamariki site faced a number of FGC-related challenges. These challenges provided a fertile ground for the initiative's development and included:

- a shift away from a culturally appropriate approach to whānau decision-making to a heavily bureaucratised approach, occurring outside of the original intention of the Act and in opposition to the cultural frameworks that led to the development of FGCs;
- long waiting lists and backlogs for FGCs;
- a lack of resourcing to enable adequate levels of pre-FGC whānau meetings which compromised the level of whānau preparation;
- whānau perception that the outcomes were predetermined by Oranga Tamariki;
- a perception that many Oranga Tamariki staff relied on institutional and whānau bias; and,
- a lack of confidence among whānau to challenge the process and the outcomes arising from the process out of fear of negative repercussions for the whānau in question.

In April 2017, Rangitāne and the Oranga Tamariki Regional Manager met to discuss how the iwi might assist with coordinating the FGC process. At this point Oranga Tamariki was experiencing a backlog of FGC cases which was aggravated by the dual occurrence of not having enough staff and high levels of staff attrition.

As a result the following contracted service description was agreed: "An iwi led social service for Care and Protection Family Group Conferences (FGC) that is child-centred, whānau focused and culturally responsive in order for the FGC process to support whānau to develop their own solutions to the issues they face. Whānau and professionals work together to agree how they can keep mokopuna safe keeping their welfare and interests at the centre, listening to them to assist in the preparation/development of the plan leading to positive outcomes for mokopuna".

While Oranga Tamariki encouraged Rangitāne to develop their own local and culturally appropriate approaches to running care and protection FGCs there was need to ensure that legislative requirements were followed. As such, Oranga Tamariki and Rangitāne jointly agreed on the need for training around the requirements outline in the Oranga Tamariki Act (1989). This training took place in April, 2017.

Rangitāne convened their first FGC process in July 2017.

Critical success factors

A number of critical success factors were identified as contributing to the initiative's success. Four primary success factors were identified:

- **Relationships** - relationships were found to underpin the iwi-led FGC's implementation and its sustained operation. Especially noted was the importance of clear and transparent communication between Oranga Tamariki and Rangitāne. Relationships were also underscored by the fact that a trusted relationship, based on previous contracts between Oranga Tamariki and Rangitāne, enabled the initiative's speedy implementation. The critical importance of relationships was also discussed at a community level; as existing relationships with community-based organisations were essential for community stakeholders to have a sufficient degree of trust in Rangitāne so that stakeholders would have the trust to make referrals.
- **Tino rangatiratanga** - a key tenet of the iwi-led agreement to coordinate FGCs was that Rangitāne would design their own processes and practices. This was fully endorsed by the local site as there was a clear intention that the iwi-led process and practice should not duplicate the mistakes made by Oranga Tamariki.
- **Local Oranga Tamariki site champions** – tino rangatiratanga was synonymously discussed as something that needed to be guarded, a continual process of protecting iwi independence and ensuring tino rangatiratanga was not eroded by unintentional behaviours and/or policy dictates arising out of Oranga Tamariki. In this sense, while Rangitāne had been clear that they wanted to design their own processes in accordance with tikanga Māori values and practices the success of the initiative needs to be appreciated in light of a small number of local Oranga Tamariki staff who were acutely aware of the difficulties facing Māori providers and engaged in a rigorous process of 'protecting' Rangitāne from influences that could detract from their practice. Within this context, the critical importance of champions, based in the local Oranga Tamariki site, were identified as a critically important.
- **Whānau transformation** - Rangitāne adopted a strengths-based whānau-centric approach to ensuring the attainment of the child's wellbeing. The approach rests on a therapeutic model whereby whānau are empowered to make their own decisions and be accountable for the various decisions arising out of the whānau decision-making plans. Importantly, whānau empowerment is premised on the need for many whānau to relearn to function as a unit, free from intergenerational dependency on a third party intervention.

Successes

All participant groups viewed the implementation and ongoing provision of the iwi-led FGC process as highly successful. The initiative's success was indicated by:

- **Realignment of FGC decision-making processes with the original intent of the Oranga Tamariki Act (1989)** - Oranga Tamariki staff, community stakeholders and Rangitāne kaimahi stressed that the iwi-led FGC process has reclaimed the original spirit underlying the advent of FGCs. This has been achieved by emphasising whānau autonomy and ensuring that iwi-led processes support whānau decision-making. As a consequence, emphasis has been placed on hui-a-whānau. Oranga Tamariki staff unanimously noted that the iwi-led approach has resulted in fewer care and protection FGCs and an increase in hui-a-whānau. Associated with this emphasis is the likelihood that care-related concerns are addressed earlier through the hui-a-whānau approach. This was attributed to a willingness of whānau to engage with a non-statutory body, the importance of tikanga Māori guiding whānau interactions and the whānau-decision making process, and Oranga Tamariki not being constrained by having to form a belief of concern before initiating a referral.
- **Decreased FGC waiting periods** - Oranga Tamariki noted that waiting times for a FGC have significantly decreased.
- **Whānau participation** – whānau participation was noted as having significantly increased and was evidenced by a noted shift from few whānau representatives attending a FGC to wider representation; and
- **Positive whānau outcomes** - three types of whānau outcomes were identified. First, whānau were described as being better positioned to develop whānau-derived responses to address child-related concerns. As a consequence, children were noted as being placed in positive whānau environments with pertinent plans in place. Next, due to Rangitāne emphasising a whānau-centric focus, whānau were treated holistically. As a consequence there was an increased likelihood of wider whānau needs being identified with the increased likelihood that wider issues impacting on the whānau being addressed, all to the betterment of the child. Finally, some degree of whānau transformation was noted. These transformations were attributed to Rangitāne having developed their own therapeutic model.
- **Young people's voice** - all participating whānau stress that the iwi-led approach, embedded within manaakitanga, established a safe environment that naturally led to the young person's engagement and facilitated a process of the young person disclosing their perspectives.

Opportunities

A number of development opportunities were identified. The primary opportunity focused on extending the role of the iwi-led FGC process. Other considerations arose in relation to contingency placements, developing mechanisms to acknowledge core activities, funding considerations and the development of service guidelines.

- **Extending the role of the iwi-led FGC processes** - this was identified as the primary opportunity and included Rangitāne being given responsibility for coordination of all FGCs and that the role should be formally extended to include monitoring and review of whānau plans. Extended responsibilities were regarded as a natural progression from existing functions and the centralised provision of coordination, monitoring and review would ensure holistic service provision.

- **Contingency placement plans** - opportunities exist for whānau placement contingency plans to be developed at an early stage in the FGC process. There is currently a risk that, should agreement not be reached, the child may be placed with a stranger, rather than within a whānau placement.
- **Acknowledge core activities and clarify terminology** - some misalignment existed between codes used by Oranga Tamariki to track the various forms of whānau engagement, the various stages of the coordination process and the type of encounters actually provided by Rangitāne. Moreover, there is a lack of mutually agreed terminology surrounding core activities. It is noted that terms, such as whānau hui and hui-a-whānau, while used by Oranga Tamariki and Rangitāne, have very different meanings. As a consequence, it suggested that the various whānau engagement activities are mapped in collaboration with Rangitāne, defined and coding developed to reflect these activities. It is believed that the process will provide a true account of the activities undertaken and provide an evidence based for future funding allocation.
- **Funding considerations** - Oranga Tamariki acknowledged that the original funding allocation had not properly included adequate costings for an iwi-led FGC co-ordination process. Further, Oranga Tamariki suggested that any future contracts should provide Rangitāne with the ability to manage their own budget.
- **Service guidelines** - due to urgency, the iwi-led FGC contract was implemented without time to develop a service description. This appears to have been a missed opportunity as a service description would have provided a possible template to assist other sites, should the initiative be implemented elsewhere. As such, there remains an opportunity for service guidelines to be developed and that the process could provide guidance for similar initiatives. Moreover, there is a notable tension between the iwi maintaining tino rangatiratanga and the requirement to work within the dictates of a contractual relationship and a legislative framework. In light of this tension it is recommended that service guideline co-development place tino rangatiratanga as a central tenet and use this as a basis to map ways in which challenges to rangatiratanga might be addressed. At the least, it is anticipated that processes underpinning the service guidelines, and the associated contract, reflect both flexibility and agility.

Implications

The process evaluation interviews have identified implications for Oranga Tamariki and suggestions as to where continuous improvements may be made. These are listed below.

It is recommended that:

1. Attention to the critical success factors underpinning the initiative's implementation and ongoing support inform future similar initiatives. This is especially noted in terms of the importance of relationships, ensuring iwi tino rangatiratanga, the development and implementation of local Oranga Tamariki site-based champions and encouraging iwi to develop their own therapeutic models.
2. Oranga Tamariki investigate how the role of iwi in the coordination of FGCs could be extended to include coordination, monitoring of whānau plans and convening plan reviews. Of note, the responsibility to monitor and review plans was believed to more appropriately reside with the iwi as the iwi has forged a relationship with whānau through its coordination role. As such, the provision of a monitoring and review function was believed to be a natural continuation of that relationship.

3. Iwi activities and the various coding frames are reviewed and aligned to capture the nature and extent of activities undertaken by the iwi. It is noted that such reviews need to occur in partnership with Oranga Tamariki and iwi.
4. A mutually agreed terminology surrounding core activities is co-developed by Oranga Tamariki and the iwi. It is noted that tino rangatiratanga needs to be adhered to in the development of mutually agreed terminology.
5. The development of future contracts between Oranga Tamariki and iwi should be based on a practice co-development.
6. That service guidelines are co-developed between the iwi and community stakeholders and the following development principles are followed: the process needs to be led by Rangitāne, a co-development process should be utilized at a local level, service guidelines need to be locally defined, and the process should incorporate community stakeholders to ensure attendees have a shared understanding of the purposes, roles and accountability structures.
7. It is noted that there is a tension between iwi maintaining tino rangatiratanga and the requirement to work within the dictates of a contractual relationship and a legislative framework. In light of this tension it is recommended that service guideline co-development place rangatiratanga as a central tenet and use this as a basis to map ways in which challenges to rangatiratanga might be addressed. At the least, it is anticipated that processes underpinning the service guidelines, and the associated contract, reflect both flexibility and agility.
8. That contracts between Oranga Tamariki and iwi should reflect actual costs associated with iwi leading FGC processes and that iwi are given full responsibility for budget management.

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