

# Can further assessment of UCB Caregivers by Oranga Tamariki mitigate risk?



ORANGA TAMARIKI  
Ministry for Children

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CYRAS case records were reviewed for a random sample of **55 tamariki** who **experienced subsequent harm within 12-18 months of a UCB placement**, where UCB arrangements were made **following a care and protection concern**. This review focused on **exploring the level of Oranga Tamariki assessment which happened prior to a UCB care arrangement and whether more comprehensive assessment and/or support for the caregiver, whānau, or tamariki would have mitigated the subsequent harm event**.

The general definitions of maltreatment used by Oranga Tamariki guided the interpretation of subsequent harm and included physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, neglect, and situations where tamariki safety/ wellbeing is at risk. The results will work to inform policy decisions about the recommendations of the Poutasi review into the tragic death of Malachi Subcez.

## Key takeaways

Improving caregiver assessment may promote safety for a small group through identifying historical and current areas of concern and gaining a better understanding of the household, including living conditions.

Most UCB arrangements which follow a Report of Concern are made without the benefit of an FGC and any assessment of tamariki needs and caregivers is poor.

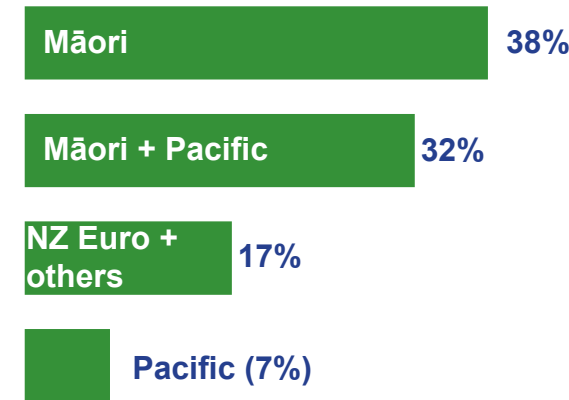
Gathering information, and acting on concerns, regarding the caregiver and the household environment, may increase safety for those tamariki who are harmed by their caregivers.

Assessing and arranging support for caregiver and tamariki needs and planning for return home may help to mitigate risk of subsequent harm, particularly if this promotes service engagement.

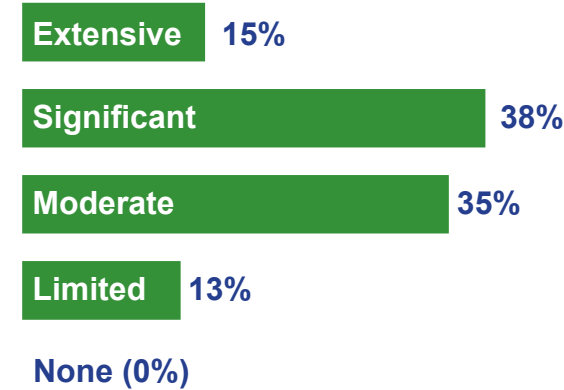
Responsibilities between Oranga Tamariki and Work and Income need clarifying to ensure that effective and consistent caregiver assessment takes place.

## Of the 55 tamariki who experienced harm within 12-18 months of a UCB placement following a care and protection concern:

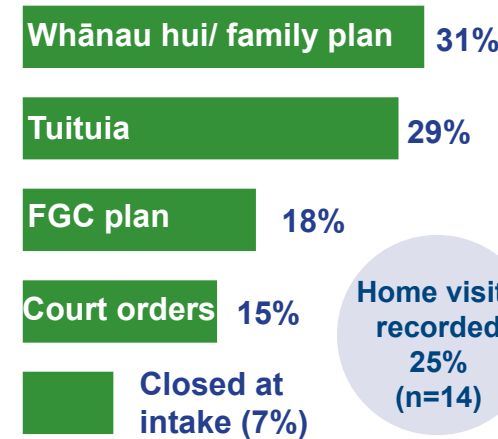
Tamariki Māori were more likely to experience subsequent harm than other ethnicities:



All had some level of prior Oranga Tamariki Care and Protection history:



There were a variety of plans in place:



However, only

**4%**  
had full Oranga Tamariki assessment

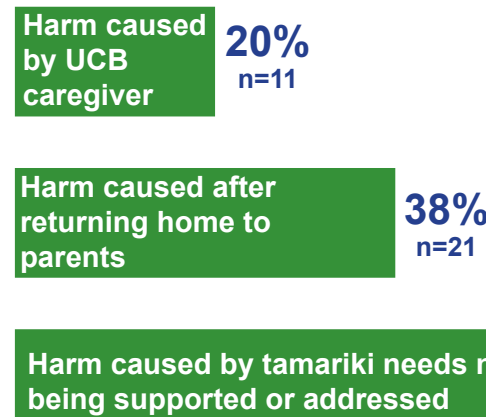
While **65%**  
UCB Caregivers were not assessed\*

**31%**  
UCB Caregivers were partially assessed

Home visits recorded 25% (n=14)

\*Includes 7% that were closed at intake

The subsequent harm event involved:



Insufficient support for caregivers threatens stability of care for tamariki whose needs are left unaddressed. Tamariki needs included:

- 22% Poor school attendance
- 20% Trauma needs
- 16% Challenging behaviour/ aggression
- 16% Suicide/ self harm
- 13% Infant needs
- 9% ADHD

## Assessment of caregivers may not mitigate harm, these key issues were identified as contributory:

### Poor visibility of whānau needs and agreements:

- As many matters do not proceed to FGC there is poor visibility of whānau needs. Better agreement is required across whānau about what safety looks like, the role of whānau, and agreements about care.
- The Investigation or Child and Family Assessment are processes in which this assessment and planning should happen. These often occur prior to, or concurrent with, a UCB placement.

### Expectations of other agencies are not visible in the pathway:

- Where matters were closed at intake because agencies were engaged, the rationale for closure, expectations of agencies, and circumstances for re-referral were not clear in the pathway rationale. This contributes to a lack of accountability with regards to how tamariki safety and wellbeing will be met.

### Unaddressed mental health and behavioural needs can lead to subsequent harm:

- A group of tamariki continue to be at risk in UCB supported care due to a lack of support for caregivers around tamariki needs.
- If needs were assessed in depth, conversations could be had around how the caregiver is managing, how to provide support, and how to increase safety for tamariki in crisis situations.
- Without this, there were placement breakdowns as caregivers were unable to cope with tamariki needs and/or risky behaviours.

### Unplanned return home can be unsafe:

- Tamariki are sometimes returning home in an unplanned way. Often concerns which have led to tamariki requiring a UCB placement have been left unaddressed and this contributes to tamariki returning to unsafe environments where exposure to subsequently harmful events occurs.

- A plan about the return where expectations are clear will provide a clear understanding of safety and the conditions which would be acceptable for a return home.

### There is variability in the level and nature of assessment of UCB Caregivers:

- The Family Breakdown Assessment for UCB is usually commissioned by Work and Income but can be waived if there is supporting documentation from Oranga Tamariki. This creates variability in the level and nature of assessment across UCB caregivers.

### Predicting future maltreatment is an uncertain process:

- However, increasing the level of information available for conversations around safety can strengthen decision-making.