Te Mātātaki 2026: A summary

Background

Te Tohu o te Ora is a regular survey run by Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children about the experiences of tamariki and rangatahi in care.

Te Mātātaki 2026 (available from https://www.orangatamariki.govt.nz/about-us/research/our-research/te-matataki/, or shortened URL: https://tinyurl.com/mvzcf4b5) is the report of findings from year 3 of Te Tohu o te Ora. Te Mātātaki makes public the commitment by Oranga Tamariki to listen and respond to the voices of tamariki and rangatahi in care and identifies four priority areas for action.

Acknowledgements

Oranga Tamariki wants to acknowledge the 938 tamariki and rangatahi who chose to take part in the third Te Tohu o te Ora survey, including those who chose not to, or were not able to participate.

Oranga Tamariki hears their voices and is committed to acting on what we have heard, to improve the experiences that tamariki and rangatahi have with Oranga Tamariki and its services.

How the survey worked

The year 3 survey ran between September 2024 and May 2025. Kaimahi (mostly Oranga Tamariki social workers) offered Te Tohu o te Ora to 46 percent of the 10- to 17-year-olds in care at the time of the survey.

The survey questions

The survey included questions about things tamariki and rangatahi have told us are important to them. Most questions asked tamariki and rangatahi to rate how strongly they felt or how often something happened. The same questions are asked each

time we run the survey, which makes it possible to see if things get better or not over time.

In year 3 of the survey, we added new questions about goals, identity and safety and provided two places in the survey where tamariki and rangatahi could type their answer in their own words. Because we asked about feelings of safety and gave options for tamariki and rangatahi to share openly, we made sure that any safety or wellbeing concerns raised in the survey were individually followed up.

Who took part?

A total of 938 tamariki and rangatahi chose to take part in year 3 of the survey (around 23 percent of the total care population). There was an even split between male and female participants and just under two percent who identified as ‘another gender’. Tamariki and rangatahi who identified as Māori made up 61 percent of participants, followed by 48 percent who identified as New Zealand European. Samoan (10 percent), Cook Islands Māori (7 percent) and Tongan (4 percent) were the other main ethnicities identified.

What tamariki and rangatahi told us

Overall, much of what tamariki and rangatahi told us in year 3 was similar to the first two surveys, with slightly more positive responses to some of the questions. Compared to year 2 of the survey there were more positive ratings for tamariki and rangatahi knowing their whakapapa and feeling that they could talk to their social worker. Compared to year 1 there were more positive responses for tamariki and rangatahi feeling accepted for who they are, keeping in touch with whānau as much as they wanted to, having friends they could talk to and having opportunities to learn about their culture.

Experiences of being in care

Tamariki and rangatahi were asked questions about their experience of being in care.

Most tamariki and rangatahi said the adults they lived with looked after them well all of the time (80 percent) and they definitely felt safe where they lived (80 percent).

Many tamariki and rangatahi said they definitely had people in their life that loved them no matter what (78 percent), the adults they lived with definitely accepted them for who they are (75 percent), they definitely felt settled where lived (69 percent), they definitely had a friend, or friends, they could talk to about anything (68 percent), and they definitely had somewhere they felt they belonged (66 percent).

Around half the tamariki and rangatahi said they definitely felt supported to achieve their goals (56 percent), definitely got to keep in touch with their birth family/whānau as much as they wanted (52 percent), definitely found it easy to express their identity (52 percent), and definitely got the chance to learn about their culture (49 percent).

Some tamariki and rangatahi thought they would definitely have a good life when they got older (38 percent), said they got to have a say in decisions about their life all of the time (35 percent), and said they definitely knew their ancestry/whakapapa (25 percent).

The role of Oranga Tamariki

Tamariki and rangatahi were asked questions about the relationship with their social worker and whether they felt Oranga Tamariki made things better for them.

Around half the tamariki and rangatahi said they definitely felt they could talk to their social worker about their worries (48 percent) and said their social worker did what they said they would do all of the time (47 percent).

Some tamariki and rangatahi said Oranga Tamariki definitely helped to make things better for them (42 percent).

Differences by age, gender, and ethnicity

Generally, older tamariki were more likely to say that they got to keep in touch with birth family/whānau as much as they would like, they did not want to keep in touch with their birth family/whānau, they got to have a say in important decisions about their life, and they got the chance to learn about their culture. However, younger tamariki were more likely to say that Oranga Tamariki helped to make things better for them.

There were very similar findings between male and female tamariki and rangatahi. However, those who identified as male were more likely to say that Oranga Tamariki

helped make things better for them. Due to the small number of tamariki and rangatahi who identified as ‘another gender’, significant differences for this group were unable to be tested. However, there was a trend where those who identified as another gender tended to give more negative responses than tamariki and rangatahi who identified as male or female.

Tamariki and rangatahi who identified as Māori, one or more Pacific ethnicities, or both Māori and one or more Pacific ethnicities were more likely to say they got the chance to learn about their culture. Tamariki and rangatahi who identified as at least one Pacific ethnicity were more likely to say that Oranga Tamariki helped to make things better for them.

In their own words

Open-ended questions were introduced for the first time in the year 3 survey, and participants could choose to add their own words to the following questions:

Do you feel safe where you live now?

20 percent of participants added their own thoughts, usually to tell us about the circumstances that made them feel safe, for example, being in an environment free of physical, verbal and emotional harm.

Some tamariki and rangatahi told us about what made them feel unsafe, including changing placements and temporary housing, missing family or not feeling accepted.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

About 20 percent of participants responded to this question. Many responses were about their experiences with social workers, including both positive and negative responses.

Other topics that were mentioned included having their rights upheld within the care system in relation to contact with whānau, making complaints or providing feedback.

Four priority areas for action

To respond to what tamariki and rangatahi told us, four priority areas for action have been identified:

1) Supporting and enabling younger tamariki to participate in decisions about their lives.
2) Increasing awareness of and engagement with Transition Support Services to help tamariki and rangatahi feel more confident as they become adults.
3) Improving tamariki and rangatahi safety.
4) Strengthening and promoting channels for tamariki and rangatahi voice.

Some of the ways that Oranga Tamariki is taking action in these areas include:

- Ongoing training and support for social workers to support tamariki and rangatahi to be involved in decisions about their lives.
- New planning tools, technology, and channels to improve how tamariki and rangatahi voices are recorded in our systems and then used to support their care needs.
- Social worker training and support that helps improve planning and provide information as rangatahi transition into adulthood.
- Launching a more accessible Report of Concern process for whanau, professionals, and members of the public, so that Oranga Tamariki can respond more quickly to safety and wellbeing concerns.
- Improving ways to understand and record the needs of disabled tamariki and rangatahi in care. This helps caregivers be informed about any specific care needs and for the right support to be put in place.
- Promoting Oranga Tamariki Transition Support Services and independent advocacy services provided by VOYCE – Whakarongo Mai.
- Increasing the range of ways that tamariki and rangatahi in residences can raise concerns, give feedback and reach out for advocacy support.

Oranga Tamariki will continue to run Te Tohu o te Ora and hear directly from tamariki and rangatahi about their experiences in care.

Contacts

Oranga Tamariki:

Website: www.ot.govt.nz

Freephone number (24 hours): 0508 326 459

Email: contact@ot.govt.nz

Transition Assistance helpline - for any Transitions support or questions:

Website: Transition support for rangatahi | Oranga Tamariki — Ministry for Children

Freephone (emergency support is available 24/7 on this number): 0800 55 89 89

Email (Monday to Friday 8:30am to 5pm): transitionsupport@ot.govt.nz

VOYCE Whakarongo Mai:

Website: voyce.org.nz

Phone: 0800 486 923

Email: contactus@voyce.org.nz

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