

Care and protection in Aotearoa New Zealand

Issue Snapshot | 2026



New Zealand Council Of Christian Social Services

Child protection in Aotearoa

Oranga Tamariki is the system responsible for supporting children and young people at risk of harm and those who have, or are likely to, offend in Aotearoa. The Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 is the primary legislation that guides how this system functions.

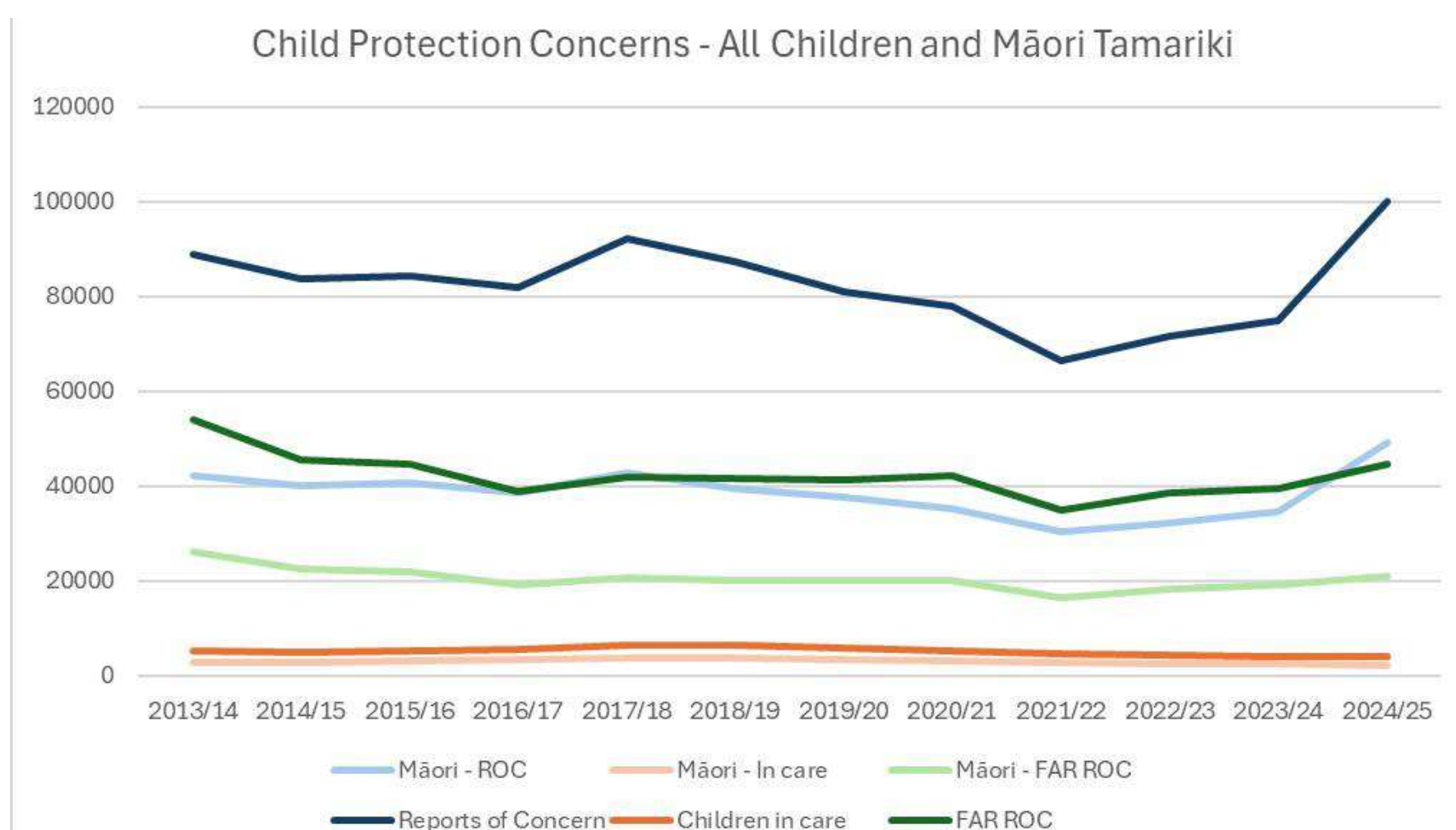
Oranga Tamariki contracts services from community organisations, such as NZCCSS members, aimed at preventing harm or providing early and/or intensive support to whānau where children may be at risk of, or have experienced harm. In recent years funding for these services has reduced, making it more difficult for our providers to respond to the needs of children and families in their communities.

Reports of concern have increased over the past year, as well as the rate of children re-notified to Oranga Tamariki after an initial report of concern was made.



Inequities in the care and protection system

Māori tamariki experience disproportionate levels of contact with the care system. While Māori tamariki and rangatahi represent around a third of the child and youth population, 67% of children and young people in care are Māori.



These inequities are intergenerational, with a recent report by Aroturuki Tamariki finding that 70% of Māori parents who had previously been in state care also had children who had contact with the Oranga Tamariki system.

Despite numerous reports and reviews highlighting the need for the care system to better reflect the needs and approaches of Māori, these inequities persist.

For the year July '24 - June '25
(Source: OT Annual Report 24/25)

4,009

children and young people in care

152

young people in Youth Justice custody

108,032

reports of concern

44,332

reports of concern requiring further action

41%

proportion of children and young people re-notified to OT within 12 months of a report of concern where no further action was required, or support was referred to partners

What does it mean for children and young people?

Child maltreatment can have lasting impacts on children's development, and lead to poorer physical and psychological wellbeing. Research suggests that those with experience of the care system in Aotearoa are more likely to experience poorer health and educational outcomes which flow into adulthood.

State of Care Report (VOYCE, 2025)

This report draws on over 140 reports on the care system in Aotearoa, bringing the voices of tamariki and rangatahi to the fore through the lens of VOYCE's Six Promises campaign:



"Help me be safe" (p.30)

"I just want to stay long term in one space. I'm always moving. I don't want to anymore" (p.38)

"I miss my siblings being together" (p.67)



"A place to talk peacefully" : Mokopuna voices on healing from family violence and sexual violence in Aotearoa (Mana Mokopuna, 2024)

This report shares the experiences of children and young people, in their own words, in response to what helped and what hindered them when accessing support after experiencing family violence and sexual violence.

Recent research and reporting

Aroturuki Tamariki (2025) Outcomes for tamariki and rangatahi Māori in the oranga tamariki system

This report explores how the child protection system delivers outcomes for Māori, including tamariki and rangatahi currently involved in this system, and adults who were previously involved in the system during childhood. It finds that:

- Māori adults aged 27-30 who had previously been in care were much more likely to access mental health and addiction services, emergency housing, to have been hospitalised for self-harm or be victims of crime, than Māori who were not known to the Oranga Tamariki system.
- The vast majority (92%) of tamariki and rangatahi who were referred for a youth justice family group conference had had a previous report of concern made about a care and protection concern.
- Tamariki and rangatahi Māori are likely to be responded to more severely in youth justice proceedings than non-Māori.

Moullin, S. & Milne, B. (2025) The effects of unconditional cash transfers on child abuse and neglect in early childhood: Evidence from New Zealand

This research finds that increased income for mothers in Aotearoa via the Families Package, which included unconditional cash payments to mothers of children under three years, was associated with reduced referrals to family services for suspected child abuse and neglect, in particular for Māori children and children for whom a child protection notification had been received for an older sibling. This research also found an estimated 40% reduction in the odds of substantiated neglect among single mother families.

Family for Every Child. (2025). Strengthening Kinship Care in Aotearoa New Zealand. Written by Clark, B. J. F., & Egan-Bitran, M. New Zealand

- Between 16,000 and 22,000 children may be living in a kinship care arrangement supported by a state benefit or Oranga Tamariki.
- Kinship carer's face financial disadvantage due to reduced employment, housing factors, legal costs, and costs associated with meeting the needs of children in their care.
- Kinship carer's are not always able to access the support they need, and there are inequities in support available to kinship carers between statutory and non-statutory arrangements.

How are NZCCSS members responding to this issue?



Granger Grove

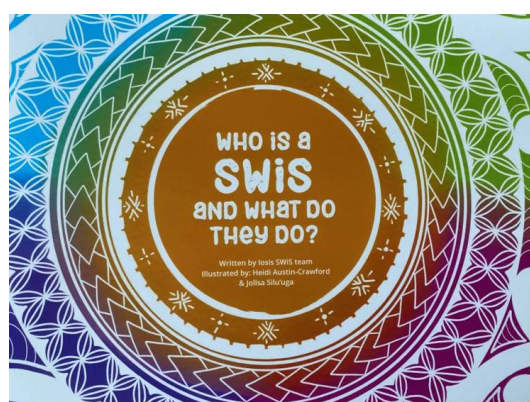
This is a trauma-informed, strengths-based, live-in service for families with complex needs. It enhances parenting and attachment, promotes children's safety and addresses long term and intergenerational trauma, resulting in safe, nurtured, and healthy tamariki and resilient parents. For more information please email info@atwc.org.nz



Kake Oranga Hāhi Katorika
Catholic Family Support Services

Whanau, Family Support and Supervised Contact Services

These services provide extensive support for families and whānau, including parenting guidance, specialist behavioural interventions, child play therapy, and mentoring services to tamariki, rangatahi, whānau and families. Services assist whānau and families in developing effective plans to facilitate change, and address issues related to family violence and relationship breakdown, aiming to mitigate risks of harm or abuse to tamariki. Supervised contact offers a safe environment for children to have contact with a parent/s who is unable to have the child in their care.



Who is a SWIS and What Do They Do?

This book is designed to support children in schools with a Social Worker in Schools (SWIS) to understand the role of a SWIS and that it is okay to ask for help. This resource supports children to have a voice by making the role of a SWIS accessible to them through story format. It supports an early intervention approach by helping to identify issues children are experiencing early to prevent them from becoming bigger problems.

Copies of this amazing resource can be ordered by contacting IOSIS

Parenting Programmes

Many of our members provide parenting programmes to equip, inform and support parents and whānau in their roles raising tamariki and rangatahi.

Te Waka Kotahi Intensive Caregiver Support

The Waka Kotahi Intensive Caregiver Support (ICS) service delivered by Wesley Community Action offers Oranga Tamariki caregivers a short period of intensive, flexible support.



Kaimahi visit caregivers in their own homes for six months, providing a safe space for honest discussion and realistic advice. Their approach is trauma-informed, addressing the intergenerational trauma of both the young people and their caregivers. Caregivers are supported to address specific challenges and achieve their caregiving goals.

Evaluation of the programme found that it has led to significantly more stable placements, better school attendance, happier and more confident caregivers and fewer emergency calls for social workers. All caregivers reported strongly that the service has improved their wellbeing, and their ability to continue to provide safe and loving care for their tamariki/rangatahi. The evaluation also showed that improved caregiver stability means Oranga Tamariki kaimahi are better able to bring in other resources and supports around a child because the child is not being moved around. Find out [more](#).

Care and Protection in Aotearoa New Zealand

Improving the care and protection system in Aotearoa

NZCCSS submissions related to care and protection include:

Oranga Tamariki Long-Term Insights Briefing, May 2025

NZCCSS supports the kaupapa to explore how we can better prevent, respond to, and enable healing from, child maltreatment between now and 2040.

Our submission focused on the following points:

1. Support for a long term, multipartisan strategy
2. Prioritisation of prevention and early intervention, and alleviation of the drivers of maltreatment
3. Increased accountability required
4. Caution in relation to investment in public awareness campaigns
5. Prioritisation of the voices of tamariki and rangatahi
6. Greater clarity needed in relation to devolution
7. Strengthening the children's workforce
8. Ensuring the balance of rights and opportunities in relation to the use of technology

Oranga Tamariki (Responding to Serious Youth Offending) Amendment Bill

NZCCSS challenged the kaupapa to introduce a Serious Youth Offender category and to establish military-style academies for these young people. We call for greater focus on the determinants of offending and the strengthening of children's' rights.

Oversight of Oranga Tamariki System Legislation Amendment Bill, Dec 2024

NZCCSS raised concerns about the enforceability of monitoring recommendations, the timeliness of the monitoring system, and the enactment of Te Tiriti. We strongly support an increase in the visibility of children, younger people, and their rights within the Oranga Tamariki system.

How you can get involved:

Mana Mokopuna's Dear Children Campaign highlights that children's safety is something we all have a role in addressing. Show your support by signing the Dear Children letter [here](#).

Tick for Kids - Tick for Kids is a movement designed to engage candidates every national election in public discussion about what needs to be done to improve life for children and young people in Aotearoa. Check out Tick for Kids' Care & Protection scorecard for information about political parties responses to issues in this area.

Share these resources in your work with children and young people

Mana Mokopuna's resources [Your right to be safe](#) and [What are my rights?](#) are designed to help children understand their rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

VOYCE also has [resources](#) that help children and young people to understand and navigate their rights within the care system.



Find out more

New Zealand Council Of
Christian Social Services

www.nzccss.org.nz