



MANAAKITIA A TĀTOU TAMARIKI

Children's
Commissioner

Media release – Time to start moving on outdated children's residences: Children's Commissioner

EMBARGOED UNTIL 5:00am MONDAY 15 MAY

15 May 2017

The conditions for children in many of New Zealand's secure residences are prison-like, dated and bleak, and it's time to move on better alternatives, Children's Commissioner Andrew Becroft says.

A [new report](#) from the Office of the Children's Commissioner shows the care of young people in Oranga Tamariki residences is improving but fundamental changes are needed.

Judge Becroft says *State of Care: A focus on Oranga Tamariki's secure residences* shows the standard of care and conditions across the country's five care and protection and four youth justice residences is far too variable.

"There's no doubt staff are trying their best but the truth is that the children and young people in care and protection residences have committed no crimes and they should not be locked up in large institutions which are unsuitable settings for young people's needs.

"The report shows the overall performance of both care and protection and youth justice residences is middling and there's room for significant improvement. There are some pockets of excellent practice but also sub-standard practice."

The report covers July 2016 until March 2017 and includes monitoring of seven of the nine Oranga Tamariki residences with a total of 174 beds. It includes monitoring of the treatment of young people, protection, material conditions, medical services, activities, personnel, and responsiveness to young Māori, Judge Becroft says.

"These are our children and young people with the most complex behaviours. Bringing them together in secure institutions, and in the case of the youth justice residences effectively in prisons, makes positive interventions difficult. While I have no doubt that Oranga Tamariki wants to do its best by these young people, I hope this report will be a platform for significant change. It should be the catalyst for developing new models.

"We need to have most of these young people securely supervised. However their lives are not set in stone and the current model and conditions don't give them the best chance of becoming productive adults as the mothers and fathers of tomorrow. Most would be much better off in small, community-based centres with proper therapeutic supervision and programmes."

The report found no evidence of systemic abuse in the residences. "However, given the bullying and all-too-common undercurrent of violence, we need more funding to visit each of these residences more often."

The Office of the Children's Commissioner monitors the residences under the United Nations Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture, and the Children's Commissioner Act 2003.

ENDS

For further information or to request an interview, please contact Colin Marshall on:

027 696 5101 or
c.marshall@occ.org.nz