

**Response to recommendations from the Office of
the Children's Commissioner monitoring visit to:**

Epuni Care and Protection Residence

Visit date - January 2023

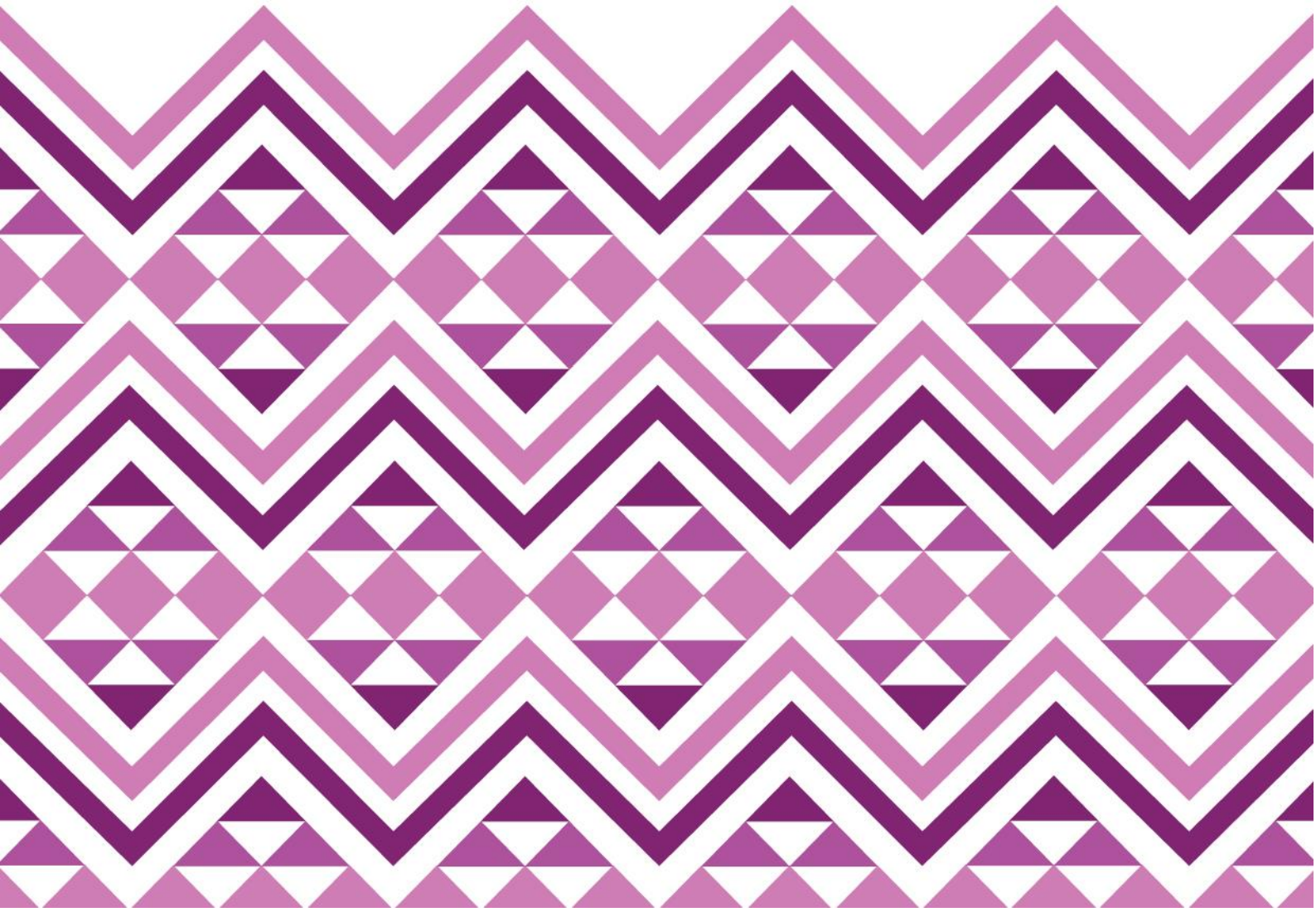


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Introduction

Epuni is an Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children (Oranga Tamariki) Care and Protection Residence located in Lower Hutt. In January 2023, staff from the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) completed an unannounced follow-up monitoring visit to Epuni Care and Protection Residence.

Epuni has capacity for up to 20 tamariki and rangatahi. Under the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989, the legal status which rangatahi are detained at the residence include:

- section 78 – Custody of child or young person pending determination of proceedings or in urgent cases, and
- section 101 – Custody orders.

The purpose of the visit was to assess progress against the recommendations made as part of the previous monitoring visit. The last monitoring visit to Epuni was in May 2022. During the 2022 visit, the quality of Oranga Tamariki services were assessed against the seven domains relevant to the OCC's role as a National Preventive Mechanism under the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and Cruelty (OPCAT). The seven domains are:

- Domain 1: Treatment
- Domain 2: Protection systems
- Domain 3: Material conditions
- Domain 4: Activities and contact with others
- Domain 5: Medical services and care
- Domain 6: Personnel
- Domain 7: Improving outcomes for mokopuna Māori

The draft OPCAT report for Epuni Care and Protection Residence was shared with Oranga Tamariki on 20 March 2022.

Recommendations Summary

The January 2023 OPCAT report for Epuni Care and Protection Residence examines progress against nine previous recommendations following the May 2022 monitoring visit. We value the feedback we receive from the OCC and use recommendations to make improvements where possible.

Strengthening practice is an organisational priority and we continue to work towards ensuring consistent, quality practice, that is collaborative, culturally responsive and meets the needs of tamariki and rangatahi. We are committed to achieving better outcomes for tamariki and rangatahi.

Recommendations – May 2022	Progress
Systemic Recommendations	
1. Develop a therapeutic model of care for Care and Protection residences which aligns with trauma informed practice and Te Tiriti o Waitangi.	No progress
2. Review the grievance process to be independent and impartial.	No progress
3. Develop and implement a workforce strategy to address appropriate staffing levels, recruitment and training in all residences.	Limited progress
4. Ensure all placements into Care and Protection residences are appropriate and staff are trained and able to work with mokopuna who have very high and complex needs.	Limited progress
Facility Recommendations	
1. Ensure all Individual Care Plans are maintained to a consistent standard and with mokopuna and whānau involvement.	Limited progress
2. Fix the technical phone issues and allocate a private room for mokopuna to use for making and receiving calls.	No progress
3. Provide regular supervision for all staff, including cultural supervision.	Good progress
4. Refurbish the sensory room.	No progress
5. Take appropriate action to address staff behaviour that is inappropriate and does not adhere to the Code of Conduct of the residence.	Complete

The Oranga Tamariki progress updates to the Epuni Care and Protection Residence OPCAT report recommendations are detailed in the following sections of this report.

Updated Response for May 2022 Systemic Recommendations

Below are the Oranga Tamariki progress updates for the May 2022 systemic recommendations made in the Epuni OPCAT report.

Recommendation 1

Develop a therapeutic model of care for Care and Protection residences which aligns with trauma informed practice and Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Updated response

Oranga Tamariki is currently undertaking a fundamental and significant shift in our approach, operating model and practice so we can truly be tamariki and whānau centred. To do this, we have developed a [Future Direction Plan](#) that draws together themes from across [Hipokingia ki te Kahu Aroha Hipokingia ki te Katoa](#) (the report of the Oranga Tamariki Ministerial Advisory Board) as well as recommendations from previous reviews.

Building on the work of the Future Direction Plan, the Minister for Children asked the Ministerial Advisory Board to review the provision of care in Oranga Tamariki care and protection and youth justice residences. The [Residences Review](#) and the [Minister's formal response](#) to the Residences Review were published on our website on 18 August 2022.

The Future Direction Plan has set a clear direction for the actions required by Oranga Tamariki over the next several years, and we are progressing this work. This focuses on developing a workforce strategy that supports high quality social work practice, and the development of a new model of care and operating model that drives locally led, centrally enabled ways of working. Assurance on the progress of this work is monitored by the Ministerial Advisory Board.

Work is underway to develop new options to transition away from the current care and protection residences, which includes a comprehensive new model of care for our tamariki and rangatahi with the highest needs. This model will sit within a broader set of care arrangements and support for high needs tamariki including Māori, Pasifika, and those with disabilities.

The new model of care is being aligned to the practice shift we are making across the organisation towards relational, restorative, and inclusive practice that sees te tamaiti in the context of whānau and within an oranga frame. This approach also considers the impacts of individual and collective trauma when tamariki and whānau have experienced challenging events. This work is scheduled to be completed in 2023.

Within Epuni there is a programme of work currently underway to enhance the physical environment to improve the sensory aesthetics and create a more homely space for tamariki and rangatahi. The proposed works include: an upgrade of floor coverings, replacement and installation of new autex panels, creation of gaming rooms (also suitable for use as music studios), upgrade of the phone booths, replacement of furniture, creation of specific sensory rooms and installation of imagery across the residence (decals etc). We are currently in the process of researching appropriate products and materials for floor coverings and furniture to meet the brief of sensory, homely and safe. The design for the imagery across the residence is currently underway and the first design phase is due to be completed shortly.

Recommendation 2

Review the grievance process to be independent and impartial.

Updated response

As part of the Oranga Tamariki (National Care Standards and Related Matters) Regulations 2018, every tamariki and rangatahi is entitled to receive information about what they can expect in our care or custody, and to be supported to raise any concerns they have. This includes ensuring information about making complaints, accessing support services, and independent advocacy is available to all tamariki and rangatahi.

In August 2021, the Manaaki Kōrero project commenced a review of the Oranga Tamariki feedback and complaints systems. Manaaki Kōrero involves Oranga Tamariki partnering with VOYCE – Whakarongo Mai to enable tamariki, rangatahi and whānau to co-design feedback, complaints, information, advice, and assistance processes that are 'fit-for-whānau' and also addresses Action 1.4 of our [Future Direction Plan](#).

While this co-design work is underway, in September 2022 Oranga Tamariki began implementing a set of immediate improvements to the residential grievance process based on feedback from tamariki and rangatahi. These include:

- improving the language and accessibility of tools/resources,
- developing multiple mechanisms to support tamariki and rangatahi to make a complaint,
- improving investigation standards and training for kaimahi,
- increasing the profile of advocacy in residences, and
- teaching self-advocacy as a social skill.

Current work underway in each of the five areas above includes, in consultation with VOYCE – Whakarongo Mai, working to update forms that emphasis advocacy, and simplifying the language used in outcome letters; scoping IT options to develop an interactive digital form and functionality to send a voice message for grievances; scoping of a programme of work to teach self-advocacy as a social skill; developing a new training package to strengthen investigations; holding training workshops with kaimahi to strengthen recording and reporting for all complaints processes; and strengthening understanding of grievance advocacy through improved resources and communication.

VOYCE – Whakarongo Mai has regularly visited Epuni while tamariki and rangatahi are present at the facility. VOYCE – Whakarongo Mai has open access to our care and protection residences, and their presence is always welcomed.

When tamariki and rangatahi arrive at our care and protection residences, they receive introductory packs that include information about how to make a complaint and access independent advocacy. This information is explained in a way that is appropriate to their age, development, language, and considers any disability. Care and protection residences also display information about the role of VOYCE – Whakarongo Mai around each residence.

Rangatahi can have access to a phone to contact VOYCE - Whakarongo Mai and the option to meet representatives when they visit the residence. They can also request a visit from a VOYCE representative when they need advocacy for a specific concern. In addition, other options for expressing themselves, such as video calling and recording, can be used with tamariki and rangatahi as required.

Recommendation 3

Develop and implement a workforce strategy to address appropriate staffing levels, recruitment and training in all residences.

Updated response

An important part of the [Future Direction Plan](#) is the development of a workforce strategy that will support high quality social work, as detailed in Action 2.5. A key part of this work focuses on training, career progression pathways, leadership and professional development and workforce planning. It is anticipated this will help to better support all existing kaimahi in their respective roles, and with future recruitment. The work is scheduled for completion in 2023.

While the Oranga Tamariki workforce strategy is being developed, there are some immediate actions being undertaken across Oranga Tamariki residences to assist with this:

- Standardising job titles and requirements for these roles across care and protection and youth justice residences. This work is due to be completed by the first quarter of 2023.
- Progressing the workforce development strategy with new training and development opportunities for Oranga Tamariki residence kaimahi.
- Working with Social Service Workforce Development Council Toitū te Waiora to design and develop qualifications for the care sector in partnership with New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA). The Safe Tactical Approach and Response NZQA qualification has since been developed, and implementation will occur early in 2023 after this work is aligned to the broader Oranga Tamariki micro-credential strategy and process. Other care-related qualifications will follow in 2023.

A national marketing and recruitment campaign for Oranga Tamariki was launched in March 2023. This work followed a nationwide workforce shortage across the organisation and the New Zealand labour market as a whole. Recruitment for Oranga Tamariki residences is a specific focus within the broader campaign.

A Care Residences Governance Group has been established to support Care and Protection Residences to deliver key strategic priorities and recommendations made in reports by our external oversight agencies. The Governance Group, which comprises of senior Oranga Tamariki staff, maintains collective responsibility and accountability for strengthening Care and Protection Residences and working towards our Future Direction Plan.

Recommendation 4

Ensure all placements into Care and Protection residences are appropriate and staff are trained and able to work with mokopuna who have very high and complex needs.

Updated response

As noted in our response to Systemic Recommendation 1, Oranga Tamariki is currently undertaking a fundamental and significant shift in our approach, operating model and practice. Oranga Tamariki accepts that care and protection residences are not the right environment for the most vulnerable tamariki and rangatahi in our community. That is why we are developing a model that puts the interests of tamariki and their whānau front and centre.

A residential placement provides intensive support with a focus on thorough assessment from a range of professionals, such as health and education, so that we better understand and meet the needs of tamariki and rangatahi. The goal of any residential placement is to create sustainable change which enables the tamariki or rangatahi to return to their community.

The decision to place a tamariki or rangatahi in an Oranga Tamariki residence is never one that is made lightly. In these situations, the tamariki or rangatahi will have complex needs, which at the time cannot be

met by caregivers, other specialist services or by their whānau or family. Areas of complexity may include:

- harmful or concerning sexual behaviour,
- alcohol and/or drug use,
- significant self-harm or suicidal ideation,
- high levels of violence towards others,
- excessive absconding,
- ongoing disengagement from education despite extra support and guidance,
- intellectual disability,
- mental health or learning difficulties that impact on their ability to manage in education settings or with everyday caregivers, and
- diagnosis of ADHD, conduct disorder, attachment disorders or depression or other diagnosed behavioural problems.

Nearly all tamariki and rangatahi who are considered for a care and protection residential placement are already in the custody of Oranga Tamariki. This involves either a section 78 or section 101 order, as per the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989.

When a social worker believes that the complex needs of a tamariki or rangatahi cannot be safely met at that time in the community, and a care and protection residential placement is in their best interests, a referral to the National Care and Protection Residences Team is made. The National Care and Protection Residence Team carefully assesses the referral to determine if admission criteria are met.

Part of the assessment includes considering the likely fit of the tamariki or rangatahi with others already at a residence. The home region of the tamariki or rangatahi is also considered in the assessment. We acknowledge that these factors are dependent on national bed availability.

Workforce development for kaimahi in care and protection residences, and for all Oranga Tamariki kaimahi, is an important priority and a current focus of our [Future Direction Plan](#). Please refer to our response to Systemic Recommendation 3 for more detail.

Epuni is currently in the process of recruiting to a number of additional roles. From this, the current focus is on providing induction training that includes modules on values and practice, Safety Interventions Foundation levels, and First Aid training. In addition, we are able to offer online modules for both new and existing kaimahi that include key areas of learning that support the Oranga Tamariki principle-based practice approach, which includes elements of working from a trauma-informed lens. Nationally, Residential Services have a very limited number of trainers and therefore are focused on providing the essential training as a starting point while we recruit additional training facilitators. As capacity is increased further training opportunities will be enabled for delivery.

Updated Response for May 2022 Facility Recommendations

Below are the Oranga Tamariki progress updates for the May 2022 facility recommendations made in the Epuni OPCAT report.

Recommendation 1

Ensure all Individual Care Plans are maintained to a consistent standard and with mokopuna and whānau involvement.

Updated response

We acknowledge the importance of ensuring Individual Care Plans (ICP) are maintained to a consistently high standard and that tamariki and rangatahi are involved in the development of those plans. This is a requirement as per regulation 3 of the Oranga Tamariki (Residential Care) Regulations 1996 (the Residential Care Regulations).

Regulation 3 of the Residential Care Regulations specifies that each tamariki and rangatahi in an Oranga Tamariki Residence who remains for longer than five days must have an ICP. The ICP sets out the objectives tamariki and rangatahi are required to complete while at the Residence and their responsibilities when achieving these. The ICP also outlines the supports, programmes and services tamariki and rangatahi can access to help them do this.

The requirements for needs assessments and related planning for tamariki and rangatahi are further set out in the Oranga Tamariki (National Care Standards and Related Matters) Regulations 2018 (the National Care Standards). The 'All About Me' plan is designed to enable kaimahi to support and respond to the needs of tamariki and rangatahi in our care in line with the National Care Standards, and this helps to inform the ICPs for rangatahi at Epuni, including their transition planning.

Kaimahi at Epuni and across Oranga Tamariki must ensure that tamariki and rangatahi have the information and support they need to freely express their views and actively participate in their care planning. This is a requirement of our ['Participation of tamariki — providing information, ensuring understanding and incorporating their views'](#) policy. Similarly, it is equally important to involve whānau at every step of the care planning process.

Since the OCC's visit to Epuni, the Team Leader of Clinical Practice (TLCP) has undertaken a review of recent and current ICPs. This work has focused on addressing inconsistencies and identifying areas to further lift quality. The report findings have been discussed with clinical staff and they have been reminded of the importance of keeping accurate records so that key actions and decisions are clearly evidenced and transparent. The TLCP will continue to monitor this aspect of practice when new ICPs are developed.

A new Quality Lead role was appointed to Epuni in September 2022. This role oversees quality assurance functions at Epuni and reports directly to the Residence Manager as part of the management team. This role is also supported by a National Quality Lead who has oversight of all national quality assurance functions for care and protection residences. The National Quality Lead, Epuni Quality Lead, and Quality Leads from other care and protection residences are simultaneously developing and trialling a national quality assurance framework. This framework will thoroughly examine all elements of practice across care and protection residences including requirements for ICPs. The framework is expected to be fully completed and embedded over the next two years.

The Epuni Quality Lead and National Quality Lead will together monitor progress against this recommendation, undertaking monthly quality assurance audits and if there are no further concerns identified over the next six months, we will consider this recommendation completed.

Recommendation 2

Fix the technical phone issues and allocate a private room for mokopuna to use for making and receiving calls.

Updated response

We recognise the value and importance of whānau contact for the wellbeing of tamariki and rangatahi. We will continue to work with all tamariki and rangatahi at Epuni around strengthening communication with their whānau.

Since the OCC's visit in February 2023, the technical phone issues have been resolved. A new mobile phone has also been allocated solely for the use of tamariki and rangatahi to make phone calls to their family or whānau.

We have sought feedback from tamariki and rangatahi about their preferred space for making and receiving phone calls. They have identified the whānau and TV rooms, which will now be allocated for this purpose. Within these rooms, the acoustics are better due to the furniture and lack of background noise, making it easier to hear. Tamariki and rangatahi also have the option of using Bluetooth headphones to lessen any background noise.

As noted in the response to Systemic Recommendation 1, there is a programme of work underway to enhance the physical environment at Epuni. This will include improving the acoustics in the phone booth.

We now consider the recommendation completed.

Recommendation 3

Provide regular supervision for all staff, including cultural supervision.

Updated response

We are pleased your report identified that Epuni has made good progress providing regular supervision for all staff, and that this has contributed to their wellbeing and contributed to a cultural shift within the residence.

Oranga Tamariki is committed to developing supervision and encourages kaimahi to make use of all forms of supervision (dyad or supervisor/supervisee supervision, group supervision, peer supervision, cultural supervision) to reflect, learn and stretch. Focusing on kaimahi ora is also an important part of the supervision process.

The development of supervision is an organisational priority and forms part of the [Future Direction Plan](#). We have committed to working with the Social Workers Registration Board to introduce micro-credentialing for supervision and other specialist areas, which recognises the skills and knowledge that are required by supervisors and other specialist roles, as set out in Action 4.3 of the Future Direction Plan.

In line with our new practice shift and framework, Oranga Tamariki is also updating its supervision policy to reflect our commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi, mana-enhancing practice, and Te Ao Māori principles of oranga that support mana tamaiti, whakapapa and whanaungatanga. This is an important part of meeting our obligations under section 7AA of the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989. We are developing a permanent policy for cultural supervision in line with our section 7AA commitment, as increasing the cultural competence of our workforce is an organisational priority.

We recognise the importance of regular professional supervision. As per our professional supervision policy, the Social Work Registration Board's policy requires that social workers ". . . access regular and appropriate supervision at least monthly and in a manner that is consistent with

reasonable expectations of the levels of skill and practice ability of the individual.” In this regard, registered social workers at Epuni undertake regular dyad supervision, which is facilitated externally. As per the same policy, youth workers are provided with group supervision every three weeks. In some instances, when youth workers have specific development needs, one to one supervision is provided.

The Epuni Quality Lead and National Quality Lead will continue to monitor supervision, undertaking monthly quality assurance audits as part of their routine work. Given supervision has now been embedded at Epuni, we have reflected the status of this recommendation as complete.

Recommendation 4

Refurbish the sensory room.

Updated response

We acknowledge the need to refurbish the sensory room at Epuni. The sensory room is a quiet, calming space that tamariki and rangatahi can use to self-regulate their behaviour, and ensuring the condition of this space maximises opportunities for them to do this is essential. The room also contains a variety of sensory items such as bean bags, and tactile items such as fidget spinners and popping noise toys.

The sensory room forms part of our suite of sensory tools at Epuni. Epuni kaimahi are training in the Alert Program®. This program takes complex behavioural theory and breaks it down, teaching staff how to use simple sensory strategies, placed in routines at the right time to support self-regulation.

The refurbishment of the sensory room has been referred to the National Infrastructure Team and work is underway to establish the resourcing required to complete this. The work will then be tendered, and a contractor will be allocated to complete this.

Alongside the programme of work outlined in response to System Recommendation 1, input will be sought from tamariki, rangatahi, and kaimahi including the Kaiwhakaako to determine what activities are desirable, while also considering how we can utilise our inside and outside environment and Te Ao Māori practice to enhance the range of sensory activities on offer.

Recommendation 5

Take appropriate action to address staff behaviour that is inappropriate and does not adhere to the Code of Conduct of the residence.

Update response

This recommendation has been completed.