



MANAAKITIA A TĀTOU TAMARIKI

Children's
Commissioner

Media release – Once in a lifetime opportunity to do better for New Zealand children and young people

31 March 2017

The Children's Commissioner says there will never be a better chance in our lifetimes to improve the lives of the children and young people who need it most than with the launch of the new Oranga Tamariki.

Judge Andrew Becroft says the new agency's vision must make a genuine difference to children and young people in either care and protection, or in the youth justice system.

"For years the Office of the Children's Commissioner has been advocating for a child-centred approach in the care and protection of children. Oranga Tamariki has been set up to do that so I'm hopeful it is starting on the right path.

"Unless we genuinely seek children's voices and their views on what's best for them, we can't possibly give them a real opportunity for a good life.

"Right now, there are pockets of permanent third-generational disadvantage throughout New Zealand. Not all children from this group experience poor life outcomes. But, the inescapable reality is that a strikingly disproportionate number of children who are abused and neglected, or who break the law, come from this group.

"That is why Oranga Tamariki can't solve everything alone and it won't all happen on Saturday morning when the agency takes over. It will take the whole community, other service providers and a combination of government agencies. When things go wrong for a child we cannot just blame Oranga Tamariki."

Judge Becroft says the organisation must deliver for Māori. "The bottom line is that if Oranga Tamariki does not deliver better outcomes for tamariki Māori, it will have failed. Greater iwi involvement will be vital."

Judge Becroft says two changes coming into force on 1 April show a change of approach. "Young people will be able to stay in care until they are 18. That is a big improvement rather than being shown the door by the State at age 17. The move to ensure children get independent advice and the ability to air their concerns about the services they receive from Oranga Tamariki is also important."

The Office of the Children's Commissioner has a role in monitoring the services Oranga Tamariki provides and will continue to work with the organisation as it transitions to the new child-centred model.

"It's critical that these services don't deteriorate while the changeover happens between Child, Youth, and Family and the new Oranga Tamariki," says Judge Becroft.

"There is a genuine challenge for Oranga Tamariki to improve both the quality of social work and the number of workers, and then how to maintain that over time. These are the building blocks of a great service. We need them to hold them accountable for delivering that service.

"Children and young people in the care and protection and youth justice systems are among the most vulnerable in New Zealand. We have failed too many of them for too long. The new agency must not drop the ball. It has to ensure these children thrive. We need the new agency to listen to them and give them the best possible chance in life."

ENDS

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