



MANAAKITIA A TĀTOU TAMARIKI

Children's
Commissioner

Time to make world-leading family group conferences a reality: Children's Commissioner

01 December 2017

The Children's Commissioner has called for significant change and improvement in the way Family Group Conferences (FGCs) are prepared for and conducted for both care and protection and youth justice. This would include greater involvement of families, whānau, hapū, iwi and family groups, and for youth justice, victims.

A review of six CYF sites in 2016 identified a need for better training of FGC coordinators; more resources for FGCs; more preparation to identify, engage and brief those who should attend; and better oversight and implementation of the resulting FGC Plan.

"Before 1989, family groups were effectively shut out from decision-making about their own children", said Children's Commissioner Judge Andrew Becroft.

"When FGCs were introduced in 1989, they were hailed as a New Zealand innovation which at their best, fully involve families, whānau, hapū, iwi and family groups in decisions about the welfare of their children, and give children a voice. In the case of criminal offending, involvement in FGCs can also result in better outcomes for victims.

"When properly resourced and practiced, I believe the FGC process has in it the seeds of genius. However, 27 years on from the original Act, we have only partially put this vision into practice. In particular, holding hui-a-whānau (family meetings) prior to the FGC, and conducting whakapapa searching will help increase participation of children and young people, whānau, hapū and iwi, and of victims for youth justice.

"The launch of the Oranga Tamariki and the supporting revisions to the legislation gives us a unique opportunity to address long-standing deficiencies identified in this report and to significantly improve practice.

"Our review focused on previous practice by Child, Youth and Family. We are encouraged that Oranga Tamariki has already responded to our initial findings and are taking steps to improve the quality of FGC preparation, including funding whakapapa searching and hui-a-whānau across 21 care and protection sites; providing induction training and ongoing mentoring to 15 relatively new youth justice FGC coordinators and 16 care and protection coordinators; and trialling external iwi-based FGC coordinators.

"These concrete actions are underpinned by a child-centred system, high aspirations for Māori children, and a professional practice framework that are intended to provide a platform for child-centred, culturally responsive practice.

"I hope this report will provide a blueprint and incentive for improving the FGC process. Collectively, we can make better, mana-enhancing decisions with our children, young people and their families."

The review was conducted between October and November 2016, and included a review of six Child, Youth and Family (CYF) sites.

The report State of Care report: Fulfilling the Vision: Improving Family Group Conference preparation and participation is available from www.occ.org.nz

Media contact

Catherine Jeffcoat

027 696 5101

c.jeffcoat@occ.org.nz

About the Office of the Children's Commissioner

The Children's Commissioner is an Independent Crown Entity, appointed by the Governor-General, carrying out responsibilities and functions set out in the Children's Commissioner Act 2003. The Children's Commissioner has a range of statutory powers to promote the rights, health, welfare, and wellbeing of children and young people from 0 to 18 years. These functions are undertaken through advocacy, public awareness, consultation, research, and investigations and monitoring. The role includes specific functions in respect of monitoring activities completed under the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1989. The Children's Commissioner also undertakes systemic advocacy functions and investigates particular issues with potential to threaten the health, safety, or wellbeing of children and young people. The Children's Commissioner has a particular responsibility to raise awareness and understanding of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Children's Commissioner's activities must comply with the relevant provisions of the Public Finance Act 1989, Crown Entities Act 2004 and any other relevant legislation.