

Children's Commissioner's Top Priorities

1 July 2019 – 30 June 2020



Children's Commissioner Judge Andrew Becroft represents the 1.1 million people in Aotearoa New Zealand under the age of 18. They make up 23% of the total population. The Children's Commissioner is independent from the Government, committed to honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi and advocating for meaningful engagement with Māori as tangata whenua.

The Office of the Children's Commissioner wants Aotearoa New Zealand to be a place where all children thrive. The Children's Commissioner has a broad role, including advocating for the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Office advocates for the interests, rights and wellbeing of New Zealand children. We monitor the services provided under the Oranga Tamariki Act. We also develop means of consulting with children. In all our work we listen to and are informed by children's voices. We do this because it adds quality to policy and practice and because it is their right.

Our goal is for New Zealand to be the best place in the world to be a child, where New Zealand's children experience neither poverty nor disadvantage, where families, whānau, hapū, iwi and wider communities are supported and resourced to provide their children and young people with safe loving homes and create the best possible platform for a good life.

Where do we want to see the most change?

Four priorities for the year to June 2020



1. Improved systems, services and supports for mokopuna Māori and their whānau

“Māori are not problems to be solved, we are potential to be realised.”

(Rangatahi, Ngā Manu Kōrero, 2017).



3. Encourage Oranga Tamariki in its transformation of the care and protection and youth justice systems

“Get to know us, listen to us, talk to us!”

(Care experienced child, Views and voices of younger children in care, OCC).



2. Enhanced child wellbeing

“Being happy, confident, and not living in poverty.”

(13 year old student, when asked what the word 'wellbeing' means to them, OCC).



4. Access to education for all

“When people recognise me and my skills I feel I can do better and achieve more.”

(Student in secondary school, Māori).

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1. Improved systems, services and supports for mokopuna Māori and their whānau

We see all mokopuna Māori within the context of their whānau, hapū and iwi. We advocate for services and policies to reduce inequalities and improve outcomes for mokopuna Māori. We respect mātauranga Māori, and see it as an integral part of improving systems, services and supports.

Our focus areas:

- Hear the voices and learn from the experiences of mokopuna Māori
- Understand the way whānau work collectively so we can better advocate for their hopes and the aspirations of mokopuna Māori
- Work effectively with whānau, hapū, iwi and communities and influence others to build positive relationships with them.



3. Encourage Oranga Tamariki in its transformation of the care and protection and youth justice systems

We advocate for systemic changes that support children and young people to remain within their families, whānau, hapū, and iwi and wider family group.

Our focus areas:

- Encourage Oranga Tamariki to continue to build respectful and positive relationships with whānau, hapū, and iwi Māori, as tangata whenua, and to support and resource them to care successfully for their own children and young people.
- Encourage Oranga Tamariki to continue to develop and tailor more community-based care options to meet the needs of children and young people who require specialist or custodial care.
- Advocate for the phased closure over time of the national care and protection residences and the reduced use for remand purposes of the national youth justice residences.
- Advocate for removal of the option allowing the Youth Court to remand young people into police cell custody as contained in the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989.



2. Enhanced child wellbeing

We encourage all organisations to take a child-centred approach to enhance the wellbeing of all children. This means considering the best interests of children in the context of their family, whānau, hapū, iwi and wider family group. We promote children's rights, including their right to participate in decisions that affect them.

Our focus areas:

- Encourage government agencies and community groups to prioritise child rights, interests and wellbeing, and to take children's voices into account
- Provide input and advice, underpinned by the rights of all children, on developing the government's Child Wellbeing Strategy
- Advocate for agencies to use child impact assessment tools in policy development
- Provide systemic advocacy and advice to improve the outcomes of all children. We also give advice on how to engage with children.



4. Access to education for all

We want all children to be able to exercise their right to full-time education that supports them to develop to their full potential. We raise awareness of the experiences of children and young people and how education can be improved, especially for children not currently well served by the system.

Our focus areas:

- Listen to children and take account of their views at all levels of education
- Improve education systems, services and supports for mokopuna Māori
- Improve responses to and prevention of bullying
- Improve support for children with neuro-disabilities and other learning difficulties
- Reduce suspensions and exclusions from school, and support a pilot appeal mechanism for reviewing board decisions
- Ensure children in care of Oranga Tamariki have equitable and stable access to education.

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