

Kia ora koutou katoa...



I have been in this challenging new role for 12 weeks. It has been something of a roller-coaster.

The width of the role is enormous and the statutory task is far more comprehensive, in practice, than I ever realised. Not only does the Office act as a complaints mechanism and advocacy service for all New Zealand's 1.12 million under 18 (24% of the population) but it has numerous other functions, including:

- to raise the awareness of United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child and its application by Government Agencies*
- to increase public awareness of the welfare of a children*
- to enquire into any report or law practice or procedure that relate to the welfare of children.*

Also the office must provide expert and consistent monitoring of Child, Youth and Family Services including the work of the nine Residences

- to ensure that the Grievance and Complaints process for those in the Residences has integrity*
- to be a designated complaints and inspectorate mechanism under the Optional Protocol on the Crimes of Torture and also to provide input onto the Advisory Committee on Assisted Reproductive Technology.*

In anybody's language this is a significant job description. It was important for me therefore to set three key priorities for the first part of my tenure:-

- Constructive input into the 'Investing in Children' (IIC) work and the re-design of the prevention, intervention and youth justice and care systems for our most vulnerable children.**
- Influencing the decision to include 17-year-olds in the youth justice system.**
- Achieving better outcomes for tamariki Māori by promoting better engagement and partnership with whānau, hapu and iwi.**

We have an outstanding staff here at the office who do a wonderful job. They are absolutely committed and highly professional and a joy to work with.

This role is an enormous privilege and also a responsibility to do our absolute best for 24% of those New Zealanders who are under 18. The task is enormous but I am confident that we are up to it. I also take the opportunity to acknowledge the work of my predecessor Dr Russell Wills, particularly in the way that he put the child poverty issue firmly on the national consciousness.

I have just returned from New Zealand's fifth examination by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. Every five years, every country in the world is examined in terms of its

compliance with the most signed international instrument in history – The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC). There was a ten member Government delegation led by Minister Tolley which was certainly put through their paces by the sixteen member Committee. There was a group of about ten NGO representatives who provided advice and submissions from the Community/Civil Society perspective. John Hancock from the Human Rights Commission and I attended as National Human Rights Institutions and as such accorded an independent status with particular opportunities to address the Committee and to provide advice and comment on the Government's response. I was very grateful the Chief Human Rights Commissioner, David Rutherford, who appointed me an NHRI for the purpose of the examination.

I was encouraged by the questioning quality and the Committee's understanding of New Zealand's position. There was a real concern that

New Zealand has not yet included 17-year-olds in its youth justice system. There was also comment that the Government's focus on vulnerable children might unduly restrict the focus of UNCROC so that the interests of all 1.12 million under 18 year olds are not properly taken care of. The Committee's written recommendations will be released shortly. We will await them with real interest.

In the mean time we roll up our sleeves, as committed as ever to ensuring that our office provides the most expert, professional and committed input and advocacy on as many child issues and topics as we can. Thank you all for your support and interest. If you have any questions, or particular areas of concern, please do not hesitate to contact us. We are certainly open to all suggestions.

Judge Andrew Becroft
Children's Commissioner
Te Kaikomihana mō ngā Tamariki

