

Epuni Care and Protection Residence – Oranga Tamariki response to OPCAT monitoring visit by Mana Mokopuna

Recommendation		Outcome	Response
<i>Systemic recommendations</i>			
1	<i>Urgently implement the Team Leader Operations training that has been promised and outlined in OPCAT monitoring reports in 2024.</i>	Accepted	<p>A new role of Training Lead in the Youth Justice Services and Residential Care (YJSRC) group was established following the 2024 restructure. Alongside this, Oranga Tamariki has recently updated its week-long Team Leader Operations (TLO) training programme focusing on the TLO role clarity, practice delivery and management (for example, trauma informed care), people leadership and experiential learning via case studies.</p> <p>For the Care and Protection Residence and Homes area, this training included a number of leaders, wider than the TLO role, including Team Leader Clinical Practice, Team Leader Group Homes, Night Supervisors, as well as emerging leaders. The first group went through the training from 24 to 27 June 2025. The next group is scheduled to attend from 12 to 15 August 2025.</p> <p>There has also been a focus on building the Epuni senior leadership team and embedding a positive leadership culture. Weekly leadership team meetings alternate between a focus on business and operations, and a focus on team and leadership development. From this, Epuni has also identified the need to develop the Shift Leader function to support the delivery of consistent practice and management.</p> <p>Epuni has introduced weekly trauma-informed leadership training, supported by the Clinical Psychologist provided through the Infant, Child, Adolescent and Family Service (ICAFS). This includes providing coaching for the Team Leader Clinical Practice (TLCP) to lead out a format enabling the team to consider particular needs of the rangatahi and how best to coach the kaimahi to provide the optimum response. As the shared model of care for Epuni has been developed with the local ICAFS team, the work is currently focused on weekly multi-disciplinary team (MDT) meetings addressing the needs of individual rangatahi. As kaimahi are recruited into that service for Epuni, a broader approach to practice will be implemented.</p> <p>The Manager Residence Operations and the Residence Manager have ensured there is a focus on how the TLOs work closer together as a team, reestablishing weekly TLO meetings. The first priority has been a collaborative approach to managing unplanned leave across the residence. The Residence has designed a Shift Leader training programme to be delivered fortnightly led by the TLOs. This is focused on building the capability of the TLOs to be able to deliver, coach, and support their shift leaders.</p> <p>This recommendation is considered complete.</p>
2	<i>Ensure social workers are developing transition plans for mokopuna early. Plans need to detail comprehensive wrap around supports for mokopuna and whanau, to ensure mokopuna do not remain in secure residences longer than necessary.</i>	Accepted	<p>Oranga Tamariki accepts the intent of the recommendation made by Mana Mokopuna and acknowledges that it is crucial to develop transition plans for tamariki and rangatahi early, to ensure tamariki and rangatahi do not remain in secure residences longer than necessary.</p> <p>We aim to ensure that from the very first day te tamaiti or rangatahi is in a residence, planning for transition from residence is captured in their All About Me Plan (AAMP).</p>

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			<p>However, what we know from practice is that the care journey for tamariki and rangatahi with higher needs that require a residential placement is unpredictable, and even when a transition plan is in place, unexpected circumstances may arise which could result in an extension to a residential placement.</p> <p>Our ongoing work to develop transition plans ensures that the needs of tamariki and rangatahi are identified including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care arrangements • Whānau or family support • Education and/or vocational options <p>Linking into appropriate health services and other identified specialist support services (such as alcohol and drug counselling or anger management support).</p> <p>Professionals, whānau and caregivers will work with tamariki and rangatahi to develop and monitor the objectives of the transition to make sure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information about te tamaiti or rangatahi is shared appropriately with those involved with them • Post-placement visits are arranged • There is assistance to help get their next placement back on track if it is needed. <p>Practice Leaders review each AAMP for tamariki and rangatahi in care and support supervisors and social workers to update those which are not current.</p> <p>The Epuni SLT is committed to focusing on improving transitions between placements over the next year. Sites, the residence and National Office actively manage the movement of rangatahi and tracking of placement length. Where it is identified that a tamaiti or rangatahi may need to stay longer in the residence than previously expected, a multi-agency team closely reviews the reasons, and work to identify any possible alternatives to extending the placement.</p> <p>A joint approach between teams is important to ensure there is good communication and thorough planning for tamariki and rangatahi transitioning between placements. The site team generally leads the planning process and multi-agency team meetings but will collaborate with the residence team. The residence will be focusing on this area in the second half of the financial year to develop practice and ensure tamariki and rangatahi are ready for their transition from the residence.</p> <p>Oranga Tamariki considers this recommendation complete as the issues raised are already being addressed through our existing work programmes.</p>
3	Review the staffing ratio need at Epuni to ensure there is adequate 1:1 support available for mokopuna with very high and complex needs.	Not accepted	<p>This recommendation is not accepted.</p> <p>Working with, and responding to, tamariki and rangatahi with high and complex needs requires a multi-disciplinary approach and good planning, widespread consultation, and a willingness to think creatively about how the needs</p>

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			<p>of te tamaiti or rangatahi can best be met. Tamariki and rangatahi with high and complex needs are regularly admitted to Epuni, and careful planning is undertaken to ensure there is robust support available for their placement. It is our view that the current rostering arrangements are sufficient to meet the needs of the tamariki and rangatahi, including those with high and complex needs.</p>
4	<p><i>Review recruitment and development within the workforce strategy for residences, to ensure that all kaimahi onboarded have the right attributes for the role, and develop skills to work effectively with mokopuna who have high and complex support needs.</i></p>	Accepted	<p>Oranga Tamariki is committed to ensuring that residences can meet the high and complex needs of tamariki and rangatahi. Meeting those needs is achieved through decisions about what roles and skills will most benefit young people as part of care teams, how we recruit the right people for roles in residence, what ongoing professional development our kaimahi receive to support them to develop skills in relevant areas, and which agencies we partner with to support mokopuna in care.</p> <p>We are actively strengthening recruitment and development practices. Since February 2025, enhanced candidate engagement and pre-employment screening have been rolled out across all residences. Cognitive and situational judgement assessments are being piloted to help identify candidates with strong potential.</p> <p>Training is tailored and progressive, with initiatives such as weekly Trauma Informed Leadership Training at Epuni, supported by ICASF, and coaching for clinical leaders to guide kaimahi in responsive practice. Revised approaches to induction and leadership training support this focus on development, and significant work is underway to consider development and qualification pathways for residential care kaimahi.</p> <p>Work with community providers, health sector partners etc, is ongoing to provide tamariki and rangatahi with interventions and programmed activities that meet their needs, and additionally to provide kaimahi with new skills.</p> <p>These efforts reflect our ongoing commitment to meeting mokopuna needs both through our residential workforce and other interventions provided for young people in residence. We consider this recommendation complete based on the ongoing work programme.</p>
5	<p><i>Ensure social workers adhere to their practice responsibilities for mokopuna and minimum contact visits as per Oranga Tamariki Policy</i></p>	Accepted	<p>All tamariki and rangatahi in care are entitled to be visited by their social worker in line with their individual needs. These visits are an opportunity to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build and maintain relationships • Help the social worker to understand what is happening in the life of te tamaiti or rangatahi • Monitor their safety and oranga • Ensure their plan and care arrangement is meeting their needs. <p>The National Care Standards require that Oranga Tamariki identifies how often te tamaiti or rangatahi should be visited based on their individual needs. Visiting frequency needs to be reviewed regularly and updated as the needs of te tamaiti or rangatahi change. There are circumstances where it is not advisable have social work visits eight weekly, for example when the rangatahi has asked for the social worker to visit less often, when a social work visit is negatively triggering for a tamariki or rangatahi, or when the tamariki or rangatahi has another engagement that takes priority.</p>

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			<p>Improvement to the timeliness of social worker visits is a priority for Oranga Tamariki and is outlined in the Te Riu Implementation Plan. It is also an expectation of the Minister for Children that all children in care should be visited by their social worker as least once every eight weeks or in line with their AAMP.</p> <p>Weekly hui with Tamariki and Whānau Services leadership team are held to review Delivery Priorities data and actions and agree to priorities regarding visits to tamariki and rangatahi for the coming week. Regular case file analysis is also completed to monitor engagement by social workers.</p> <p>As at May 2025, 94.8% of tamariki and rangatahi in care had a recorded visit within the previous eight weeks.</p> <p>On 4 July 2025, updated guidance was distributed to all Tamariki and Whānau Services kaimahi to support timely and quality visits to tamariki and rangatahi in care, and to remind kaimahi about common recording errors in the case recording template in CYRAS.</p> <p>Epuni has identified the need to be more proactive with the recording of the frequency of social worker visits in AAMPs and this is an area of focus.</p> <p>This recommendation is in progress.</p>
Facility recommendations			
1	<i>Urgently refurbish the secure care unit</i>	Accepted	<p>Epuni is currently undergoing a physical refresh, with the secure care refurbishment underway. The unit has been completely repainted and flooring has been replaced. Work on the separation between the shower and toilet area, and the sleeping area is also being progressed.</p> <p>This recommendation is in progress.</p>
2	<i>Ensure kaimahi receive specialised training in mental health, neurodiversity, and trauma informed practice to ensure appropriate and high quality care for mokopuna.</i>	Accepted	<p>Kaimahi should receive regular training to enable them to care for rangatahi to the best of their ability and we consider that the existing training that is already in place is sufficient. Although it is accepted that the residence needs to provide adequate training and support to kaimahi, it is necessary to ensure that the foundations of the role are well established and can then be built onto over time to include other additional training. We do not accept that all kaimahi should be required to have additional specialised training. It is important to acknowledge that the residence workforce are predominantly residential youth workers who are not required to have a specific qualification or previous experience to be appointed to the role. We also note Safety Interventions training, a trauma informed programme, is provided to all kaimahi before they begin working on the floor and is refreshed every year.</p> <p>This recommendation is complete.</p>
3	<i>Implement a schedule of meaningful, culturally inclusive programmes for mokopuna outside of the structured school day and ensure kaimahi receive training on how to facilitate these programmes.</i>	Accepted	<p>A trial of a national programming approach commenced at Korowai Manaaki Youth Justice Residence in late April 2025. It is expected that learnings from this trial will be rolled out to other residences, with Epuni being the next trial site, ensuring there is consideration and recognition of Epuni being a care and protection residence.</p> <p>Regarding the need for kaimahi to receive training to facilitate programmes, Epuni has implemented a leadership programme for shift leaders, focused on developing their leadership skills. The first four months are largely focused on building their team and building safety. However, kaimahi themselves have also identified the need to build their</p>

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			<p>skills in developing, implementing and facilitating programmes. Epuni is currently working with the school to consider how we might build these skills, drawing on the expertise of the teachers. In addition, as part of the development of Youth Councils and grievance process, Epuni is also developing some new resources for kaimahi to utilise to support their programme delivery.</p> <p>This recommendation is in progress.</p>
4	<p><i>Ensure all kaimahi working directly with mokopuna have access to regular, external professional supervision in line with Oranga Tamariki supervision Policy.</i></p>	Not accepted	<p>Oranga Tamariki is required to support professional supervision as necessary for kaimahi to fulfil their professional registration requirements. For example, the Social Workers Registration Board policy requires registered social workers to have professional supervision at least once a month.</p> <p>The majority of professional supervision at Oranga Tamariki is one-to-one individual sessions with a supervisor. The supervisor assists the supervisee to reflect on their practice, identify areas that could be strengthened, and learn how they may practice differently in the future.</p> <p>It is not considered necessary or appropriate for all kaimahi to have external or clinical supervision unless identified as necessary for their professional registration requirements (eg. Social worker, psychologist) or another specific need has been identified. External professional supervision is not a requirement of Oranga Tamariki policy, however, in some circumstances, professional supervision may not be readily available within Oranga Tamariki. In this event, external supervision may be accessed as long as it's provided within the Oranga Tamariki policy and standards.</p> <p>At Epuni, there are significant opportunities for all forms of supervision. If a kaimahi requests something beyond that, they have the opportunity to go through the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and further sessions may be granted on a case-by-case basis.</p>
5	<p><i>Invest in support for kaimahi to build cultural competency in tikanga, te reo and mātauranga Māori to better support mokopuna Māori.</i></p>	Accepted	<p>The Epuni leadership team has identified the need to develop kaimahi competence and confidence in te Ao Māori. The Kaiwhakaako role will shortly be vacant and the leadership team will take the opportunity to ensure the Kaiwhakaako role meets the current needs of the residence, with a greater focus on intentional learning and development for kaimahi and tikanga and kawa being prioritised. Epuni recognises that cultural responsiveness is the responsibility of all kaimahi, not solely the Kaiwhakaako; however, this important role will provide leadership to the residence in this space.</p> <p>In addition, the residence will engage community kaupapa Māori providers to support the cultural programme at Epuni. It is expected that by October 2025, there will be a comprehensive plan for the design of internal and external cultural programmes, and a significant proportion of this plan will have been implemented. Epuni is conscious that there will need to be a parallel programme of staff capability development and this will take time to implement.</p> <p>The Tū Māia training programme is available to all Oranga Tamariki kaimahi, which is designed to lift cultural capability. A number of kaimahi from Epuni have been supported to engage with this programme which began in July 2025.</p>

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		This recommendation is in progress, however additional cultural competency training will not be introduced until the Epuni leadership team feel that a strong practice foundation has been embedded at the residence.