



**Te Puni Kōkiri**  
MINISTRY OF MĀORI DEVELOPMENT

## **Case study: Oranga Tamariki**

# **Oranga Tamariki Upper South Island - Local relationships and practice model**

This case study is one of a series which highlight how government agencies are developing good practice in working effectively with and for Māori. These are a resource for government agencies to learn from and strengthen their effectiveness for Māori.

More case studies are available from [www.tpk.govt.nz](http://www.tpk.govt.nz)

## Why does this relationship work for Māori?



Oranga Tamariki management in the Upper South Island region has built and sustained strong partnerships with iwi, hapū and Māori organisations.



Specialist Māori staff were employed to meet the needs of tamariki and their whānau.



All staff in the region have strengthened their understanding of how to work with Māori.



There is inclusive practice in the region: staff share knowledge and learn from each other and from iwi and Māori partners.



Strong, supportive relationships between Oranga Tamariki staff and iwi, hapū and Māori organisations mean services for Māori are provided in a joined-up way.

## Case study overview

This case study examines the model of care for tamariki and mokopuna developed by the Oranga Tamariki Upper South Island regional manager, in partnership with the Māori Women's Welfare League (the League). The Blenheim office of Oranga Tamariki is the focus for this case study, in particular the changes in practice introduced by Kaye MacDonald, the regional manager. She began to work with staff to change practices in 2007 when she first became the site manager.

At first MacDonald made these changes under the radar of National Office. Over time Oranga Tamariki has realised it needs to change its services to better meet the needs of tamariki Māori and their whānau. Oranga Tamariki senior leadership now fully

acknowledges the effectiveness of the ways of working with Māori established in Blenheim. The shift in working culture, practices, and ways of thinking in Blenheim has impacted on the ways in which things are done with and for Māori by Oranga Tamariki staff throughout New Zealand.

Oranga Tamariki's role in the Upper South Island region is focused on the autonomy of whānau, hapū and iwi as the best mechanism of protection for mokopuna. Since 2007, the regional office, in partnership with the League, has created seven specialist Māori roles that reflect the needs of whānau Māori. Evaluations confirm a direct link between these specialist Māori roles and enhanced whānau decision-making. At the same time the model has

significantly reduced the number of tamariki Māori coming to the notice of Oranga Tamariki to discuss their care situation.

Alongside these changes in the region, there are also strong partnerships with mana whenua and Māori social service organisations. This means that local Māori are part of the governance and decision-making for Oranga Tamariki operations in the region.



## Leadership driving a vision

Since 2007, the regional leadership focus for the Upper South Island regional office has been on how Oranga Tamariki (previously Child, Youth and Family Services) can better meet the needs of whānau Māori and their mokopuna. According to all those interviewed, the regional manager has maintained this central focus and never wavered from the vision to make a difference. An Oranga Tamariki staff member said that her mahi has been 30-years in building relationships alongside the community, “these things have been on her mind always.” Kaye MacDonald notes that, “*iwi and iwi are involved at every decision-making point regarding every single mokopuna and whānau Māori and tikanga has guided every step.*”

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Oranga Tamariki staff member

I think that is why you see the difference; it is different when you have a leadership which has the vision and is willing to take that risk and reacts to the needs of the community as opposed to the needs of national office as such.

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Oranga Tamariki staff member

When I look, particularly at Blenheim, I can see the future, it's a real pocket of partnership. I think we have other pockets, it's not the only one but it is one that has endured over time where I think we can push things even further, as far as people want to go.

## Whānau led solutions are key to active engagement in decision making

The changes in the Upper South Island to the way in which Oranga Tamariki works with iwi and whānau are focused on ensuring whānau are actively engaged in decision-making about their mokopuna and that issues are resolved before the need for statutory intervention. If a child needs to go into care, this is provided by an iwi or Māori service. This model ensures that there is a Māori lens for any mokopuna Māori considered for care.

The Oranga Tamariki Māori specialists support a whānau-led approach. They work alongside whānau, supporting them and ensuring that tamariki stay within the wider whānau. As noted by an Oranga Tamariki staff member:

“ *a child doesn't exist without their whānau and . . . children can feel more connected to wider whānau.*”

One of the panel members explained there will always be someone within a child's wider whānau, hapū and iwi to look after the child. Having a *kairangahau ā whānau*<sup>1</sup> ensures whānau are involved from the beginning.

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Oranga Tamariki staff member

Everything is done within the context of whānau and that's the most important thing . . . whatever the circumstances of the family, that is where you start and end.

1. The Kairangahau ā whānau is a specialist Māori role with the literal meaning of a person who is a weaver of whānau connections.



### Strong partnerships with Māori organisations create influential change

The region has seen fundamental changes in how Oranga Tamariki works with iwi, hapū and Māori organisations. This includes maintaining strong relationships with mana whenua, the League and other Māori organisations as noted by MacDonald, *“iwi and Māori are involved at every decision-making point regarding every single mokopuna and whānau Māori and tikanga had guided every step.”* Oranga Tamariki staff, members of the League, mana whenua and Maataa Waka ki te Tau Ihu Trust say there is no sense of an ‘us’ and ‘them’. An Oranga Tamariki National Office staff member said that at the Blenheim office, *“I couldn’t tell you . . . who works for Oranga Tamariki and who is with the League.”*

The long-term partnership with the League and mana whenua has led to a Māori model of care guided by te ao Māori values and meeting the National Care Standards that sets out Oranga Tamariki obligations for children in care. According to all interviewees, this model better meets the needs of Māori, and according to Margaret Bond of the League, it reduces the negative impact past engagement has had on whānau, hapū and iwi.<sup>2</sup> The Waitangi Tribunal noted that the ‘Blenheim model’ has demonstrated promise and *“show constructive ways of engaging with and supporting local Māori communities.”*

Oranga Tamariki also has a whānau ora navigator from Maataa Waka based at the Oranga Tamariki office in Blenheim. Community-based whānau ora navigators work alongside whānau, identifying strengths and mentoring them to achieve their aspirations. These partnerships, along with the development of specialist Māori roles within the Oranga Tamariki regional office, has meant that over the last three years the region has consistently had a low number of children in care, including tamariki Māori.

### Relationships matter

Strong partnerships with Māori in the region means Māori have a strong influence over decision-making and governance concerning the way in which Oranga Tamariki works with them. This takes place primarily through two key advisory boards, for example in 2016, a formal partnership began between Oranga Tamariki, the League and mana whenua, this was part of a Te Toka Tumoana (Oranga Tamariki’s indigenous and bicultural framework) trial and resulted in the establishment of an Iwi/League Advisory Board.

The Iwi/League Advisory Board identifies and supports kaitiaki to look after tamariki that come to the notice of Oranga Tamariki. The Board has also established the Tangata Whenua Care and Protection Resource Panel. The Panel is made up of mana whenua, the League and other key community members. It provides a specific te ao Māori lens for all tamariki that might come to the attention of Oranga Tamariki as needing support for their care.

Although the board was only established in 2016, the League, mana whenua and Oranga Tamariki staff already had well established relationships well before that time. MacDonald came to the role with strong community connections and sees the relationship with the League as key to the success of this model of care. As she commented, *“these women have been doing the mahi, going and visiting them, dropping off parcels to them, dropping off kai, they have been my strongest influence.”*



Tangata Whenua Care and Protection  
Resource Panel member

Underpinning the panel, the Māori values that build the foundation . . . there are those foundational values of manaakitanga, whakawhanaungatanga, tika and pono and they all weave in and link together to what we have seen here<sup>3</sup>

2. Joint Brief of Evidence of Kaye MacDonald and Margaret Bond, 19 November 2020 for the Oranga Tamariki Urgent Inquiry: WAI 2915.

3. Manaakitanga-hospitality, kindness, generosity. Whakawhanaungatanga-process of establishing relationships, relating well to others. Tika-to be correct, true, upright, right, just, fair, accurate, appropriate, lawful, proper, valid. Pono-be true, valid, honest, genuine, sincere.

4. More information on Te Toka Tumoana is available from the Oranga Tamariki website: <https://practice.orangatamariki.govt.nz/practice-approach/working-with-maori-te-toka-tumoana/>

### Specialist Māori roles work together building a cohesive and supportive practice

Māori specialists in the Upper South Island work together and support each other, ensuring cohesive practice in the way Oranga Tamariki works with whānau in the region. Since the introduction of the first specialist role in 2007, the understanding of the importance of these positions to serve the needs of the community has grown and more specialist Māori positions have been created. This point was noted by a Maataa Waka staff member,

“ *from the outside looking in, Oranga Tamariki has more of a community flow to it now because these guys are involved in the community, it is the community . . . those are the advantages that I see, once all of these jobs were done by the social worker but now there is support for that role.* ”

The *kairangahau ā whānau* position was established in 2007. This role includes identifying and engaging significant whānau, hapū and iwi members in decision-making for their tamariki (as early as possible) and supporting and/or facilitating hui ā-whānau. The *kairangahau ā-whānau* role is now standard in other Oranga Tamariki regional sites in the country, though at times it has different names.<sup>5</sup>

Another role, the *kairaranga* supports offices with bicultural practice, provides training and mentoring of senior staff and social work teams. They also support the various site offices to embed Te Toka Tumoana principles and build staff confidence and competence in working with Māori. Oranga Tamariki recently published a synthesis of research on the *kairaranga* role. The research found that this role was making ‘*deep connections helping the young people and families get involved . . . they experienced the service as helpful and empowering for them, which for many whānau in the child protection system is a new experience.*’<sup>6</sup>

Another role, the *kaiatawhai* was developed in partnership with iwi and the League to support whānau caring for their mokopuna (whāngai care). Having a *kaiatawhai* has meant less need for Oranga Tamariki care and protection services to be called on. It has also strengthened relationships within the whānau.

Many of the Māori staff work hand in hand with whānau to explain how the Oranga Tamariki child protection system works. An interviewee spoke about how it was important to support whānau in this way, “*a lot of them don't understand terminology, they don't understand our processes . . . it is a privilege because they allow you into their whānau, we form some sort of trust.*” In many senses, much of what is done for whānau is taking away layers of process and paperwork and understand whānau needs:

“ *I will āta whakarongo, really listen to what their needs are and from there I will develop a plan of support.* ”

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Oranga Tamariki staff member

What I love about this job is hoping to get it right and then getting it right and that is the learning. Once you've done a thorough job and seen the best outcomes for the child, that overrides everything else. You are always going to get your challenges but being able to see at least one family or the mauri of a child and their outcomes, that is worth all the battles, all the stress.

5. The *kairaranga ā-whānau* role may have different names depending on the tikanga or customs of mana whenua (the local whānau, hapū and iwi in the area). Some of the names used now include *kairaranga-a-whānau*, *kairangahau-a-whānau*, *kaitiaki* or *kaiwhakawhanaungatanga*. The general sense of meaning across these names is that of a person who weaves and connects together families, whānau, hapū, iwi and whakapapa (people, places and values).

6. Dr Catherine Love, Shamia Makarini, Charles Waldegrave, Dr Giang Nguyen and Wayne Makarini (February 2019), Enhancing tamariki and whānau participation in decision making: External Evaluation Summary Report. A Report by the Family Centre Social Policy Research Unit for Oranga Tamariki.



## Māori specialist staff with knowledge and skills are supported to work with whānau Māori

Most Māori specialist staff in Blenheim working for the Oranga Tamariki office whakapapa to the area and are actively involved in their communities, including the League. These relationships are important to them alongside the relationships they develop with whānau they work with.

They bring a particular skillset to these jobs and are enabled to work creatively to meet the needs of their community. An example was provided about being able to develop a framework for . . .

“ *working with, engaging and assessing mums and babies. So rather than the normal process - intake, intervention then core assessment team, it comes to the rōpū (group) and we work together to see who would be best to go out and listen to the story of the Mum and whānau, use all our skills.* ”

Māori specialist staff were able to develop processes to meet community needs, often in partnership with the League, such as those for assessing kaitiaki or caregivers. According to interviewees, Māori had not wanted to be caregivers because they found the process cold. Oranga Tamariki Māori staff came up with an assessment framework based on Te Toka Tūmoana in which the Iwi/League Advisory Board identifies and endorses kaitiaki candidates.

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Oranga Tamariki staff member

Because we are all those things, you wear so many different hats, Māori, a league member, it is just what you do and who you are and you bring that to work, keep those relationships going.

## Respect and use for tikanga Māori

All staff in the Oranga Tamariki Blenheim site have some understanding of reo me ōna tikanga Māori. For the Māori specialist staff, this understanding is implicit, and they naturally work from the ao Māori perspective,

“ *when 7AA came out and a name was put to it, we had discussions in our rōpū about how people are finally catching up [with their Treaty obligations], it was an acknowledgement, but still a minimum standard for us. We were working like that anyway, there is a uniqueness to the specialist roles and in the whole office, I think it really comes out in relationships.* ”

Section 7AA of the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 confirms its commitment to Treaty of Waitangi obligations and prioritises the whakapapa of children. The organisation has developed five quality standards to ensure it meets these commitments and shifts to a Māori-centred approach.

Māori concepts permeate how kaimahi work internally and with whānau. An Oranga Tamariki interviewee commented that the Blenheim model worked because it was focused “on understanding and using tikanga Māori, working in partnership with mana whenua, organisations social service providers and shifting non-Māori staff in understanding concepts and applying them in the workplace.”

Staff in the region are supported by the Kairaranga to work alongside whānau. Local iwi developed a training package for staff to better understand the Upper South’s history because, as one interviewee noted, “when you knock on the door of the whānau, you need to understand the history of those people and why you might see some broken families today when you think about the impact of colonisation.” These staff are also trained in Te Toka Tūmoana, the bicultural framework for working with Māori. They are also supported to learn te reo Māori.

Staff from the Blenheim Oranga Tamariki site said they were learning from each other in terms of the processes developed for working with Māori. The office is considered a place for everyone to learn and share practice on improving outcomes for all children.

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Tangata Whenua Care and Protection Resource Panel member

One of the things I worried about when I first came, I was thinking we are bringing all these roles in and how do the social workers feel? But honestly, the tikanga around the site is so good and so beautiful that it just doesn't matter whether you are Māori or Tauīwi. People absolutely get that they are not the best placed people to do that stuff. It is genuine, it really is genuine.



**What can agencies do to develop good practices in working with Māori?**

**1 Consider the needs of the Māori community in which you are working**

There is no one-size fits all approach to meet the needs of the iwi, hapū, whānau and wider community in which your agency is based. Consider how policies, programmes and services might meet these needs and design approaches that will work.

In this example Oranga Tamariki developed seven Māori specialist positions to work with iwi, hapū, and whānau Māori. This has led to one of the lowest rates of tamariki Māori coming into Oranga Tamariki care in New Zealand.

**2 Partner meaningfully with iwi, hapū, whānau and Māori organisations**

Partnering with Māori organisations is about building a meaningful relationship between two equal partners and finding common ground. It is not focused on a purely contractual relationship but on developing an understanding of how each works and a trusting relationship.

In this example, Kaye MacDonald had strong connections with the League and mana whenua prior to taking up her role as site manager in 2007. She has also been clear that the relationship has never focused on putea (a sum of money) but rather on trust and shared good will, *“iwi and Māori are involved at every decision-making point regarding every single mokopuna and whānau Māori and tikanga had guided every step.”*

**3 Transform organisational culture to be more supportive, inclusive and equitable for staff and for clients**

Agencies can develop a culture that supports all staff in the organisation to build an understanding of effectiveness for Māori. In this example, not only were specialist Māori staff employed but non-Māori staff have taken part in training to upskill themselves. The *kairaranga* role ensures that all sites are encouraged to develop bicultural practice.

Agencies can also ensure that their processes are inclusive and meet client needs. In this example, Oranga Tamariki staff have taken time to gain the trust of whānau, explain the system and ensure their input into the process. This has led to whānau feeling trusted and invested in the process.

**4 Look to local solutions to address local issues**

Local iwi, hapū and Māori organisations understand their local issues. By working alongside these organisations and understanding the local issues, better outcomes are achieved for Māori. This process can be supported through strong local relationships and knowing what is happening in each community.

In this example, the recruitment of Māori roles in the Upper South Island Oranga Tamariki region reflects the diverse make-up of community within which it operates. An example is the recent recruitment of a social worker with Pacifica expertise to reflect the increasing Pacific population in Marlborough. It was noted by Oranga Tamariki staff that the key to their success was that they worked alongside the local community to meet their needs as opposed to *“Wellington providing systems, controls and processes thinking they will work but they won’t.”*

**Further information on the case study is available from the following sources:**

1. Joint Brief of Evidence of Kaye MacDonald and Margaret Bond, 19 November 2020 for the Oranga Tamariki Urgent Inquiry: WAI 2915.
2. Dr Catherine Love, Shamia Makarini, Charles Waldegrave, Dr Giang Nguyen and Wayne Makarini (February 2019), Enhancing tamariki and whānau participation in decision making: External Evaluation Summary Report. A Report by the Family Centre Social Policy Research Unit for Oranga Tamariki, Ministry for Children.
3. Radio New Zealand article accessed 7 April 2021, <https://www.mz.co.nz/news/te-manu-korihi/428975/blenheim-held-up-as-exemplar-of-iwi-working-with-oranga-tamariki>.
4. Te Toka Tumoana, Oranga Tamariki’s bicultural framework for working with children: <https://practice.orangatamariki.govt.nz/practice-standards/working-with-maori-te-toka-tumoana/care> in the Upper South Island.