

What changes have we made to ensure Care in OHF is Safe?

Introduction:

Don Irwin – Chief Executive

Firstly, I want to reiterate the apology that the OHF board chair, Trish McConnell has made for abuse and harm suffered by children and young people in the care of OHF. I also want to talk about our ongoing commitment to ensure that all children in the care of OHF are safe and free from harm and abuse in the future.

Caring for someone else's child/young person is something we take very seriously.

- Over the last 10 years we have invested in becoming a trauma informed organization
 - We expect all foster parents and staff to commit to this journey also. This means giving our foster parents and staff the right tools, training and support to understand the effects of trauma on a child/young persons development.
 - As part of this we want all foster parents and staff to be trained in de-escalation so that they and we are not viewing behavior simply as naughty or defiance
- We have dedicated regional roles to support our trauma informed journey and to support children and young people with disabilities.
- We now have the National Care Standard Regulations and as a result the Independent Children's Monitor watching over our care. I can say that OHF has implemented all care standard regulations into policies and processes and our compliance on these is reported annually and publicly available.
- Social workers must see children (at least) every month and must talk to them away from their foster parents. As well as giving tamariki the opportunity to meet with their social worker on their own, we ask that social workers have the opportunity to see tamariki in their usual home environment to ensure they have all their needs met and everything they may need.
- Tamariki have their own statement of rights which is presented to them in a way they can understand, this also includes who they can talk to if they have worries and where they can get help.
- Each tamariki has their own in-depth assessment and plan that covers all aspects of their life and how to best support them. This is reviewed at least every 6 months.

- We have dedicated Foster Parent Social Workers, whose job is to make sure foster parents and whānau carers have the right support. Foster Parents and whānau carers now have a support plan for each tamariki they care for, tailored to the unique needs of that tamariki. Our Foster Parent assessment, approval, training and process has been strengthened by an additional 12 hours of training.
- It is important for children and young people to know why and how they came into foster care and what their time in care has been like. All rangatahi who leave care at 18, receive a care story that documents their time in care. They also have a memory box to keep photos, art work and other important items in.
- Te Roopu Māori (OHF's Māori caucus) and their leadership (Te Whaitahitanga) support the organisation to improve our practice with Tamariki Māori and their whānau. Ensuring Tamariki are connected to their whakapapa, whānau, hapū and iwi is important to us.
- We have a dedicated team who oversee the continuous improvement of OHF practices. The team take an in-depth look into the way we are supporting whānau and tamariki, raise any practice worries with managers and flag things for follow up in regular set meetings. They make sure the voice of the tamariki is captured and the appropriate tools and resources are being used.
- There is more oversight of the care and social work today than ever before. This oversight shows us where we need to make improvements so we can strive to get it right for tamariki. This includes reviewing our policy, practice and systems so that we can continue to safeguard Tamariki.
- Unrelated young people are not placed together unless an exception has been granted by a group of senior managers.
- For many years it has been our mandatory policy to report all allegations of abuse to Oranga Tamariki. Allegations of abuse are also reported to the Executive Team and to the OHF Board. We regularly review and update our allegation of abuse and care concern policy and processes as part of our ongoing continuous improvement.
- If you would like to talk to us about your experience of being in OHF care, please make contact with us using the link here on this web page.

Closing:

I wish the above things would allow us the ability to wind the clock back so that every child/young person ever cared for by OHF experienced unconditional love and a sense of safety. Unfortunately, this isn't possible. But what we will do is continue to strive for safe and nurturing care for every child or young person cared for The Open Home Foundation of NZ.