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Hon Karen Chhour
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Parliament Buildings
Wellington

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Tēnā koe Hon Chhour

Congratulations

Congratulations on your appointment as Minister for Children. We look forward to working with you to make a real difference for people living in New Zealand. The PSA has been the voice of people working at Oranga Tamariki and each of its predecessors since their establishment. We have met regularly with each of your ministerial predecessors and we would like to meet with you to discuss the issues and challenges faced by our members. We would also like to invite you to our National Delegates hui in Wellington on 22 February 2024. This will provide you with an opportunity to meet with kaimahi from all parts of Oranga Tamariki.

About the PSA

The Public Service Association Te Pūkenga Here Tikanga Mahi has over 90,000 members working across public and community services, over 3150 of whom work for Oranga Tamariki in all areas of the organisation and all parts of the country. We have included a leaflet with information about the PSA, its purpose, strategic goals, governance and membership.

Through our democratic structure within Oranga Tamariki we are in touch at all times with the “temperature” and issues in Oranga Tamariki workplaces and have a well informed and independent view of this. Our structure includes elected workplace delegates, national delegates and Rūnanga delegates, rūnanga national delegates and their national delegate convenors who comprise the Oranga Tamariki National Delegates’ Committee. They work with members across all areas and engage with the department on both a strategic and operational level.

PSA view of the care and youth justice protection system for children and young people

We have contributed to numerous inquiries and supported the consistent recommendations for change that have been made. The implementation of these recommendations has been slow, and we know that change requires additional resourcing if it is to be fully implemented and successful.

We are seeking a commitment to the investment needed to improve the system, and a recognition of the kinds of change needed to do better for rangatahi and tamariki. Alongside this, we need to see a continued commitment from Oranga Tamariki to work with kaimahi and unions to address the biggest barriers that prevent kaimahi from providing the best possible care and protection and youth justice services to tamariki and rangatahi.

Right now, levels of staffing mean workers don't have the time to do their best work. Care and protection and youth justice work is delivered by people doing the best with what they've got, rather than people given the tools, training, resourcing and support to deliver the professional care they entered the sector to provide.

Maintaining equitable pay for social workers

The 2018 pay equity settlement for Oranga Tamariki social workers made a significant difference to the ability of Oranga Tamariki to recruit and retain skilled social workers, as well as recognising the level of skill and responsibility involved in this work. It addressed long standing undervaluation of this work. As is now required by the legislation, the settlement agreement includes a commitment to maintain the pay equity rate for social workers and this mechanism needs to be agreed and applied.

Key components to a successful system of care

The following is a set of components we consider essential to care and protection and youth justice services. It applies to all of these services whether delivered by Oranga Tamariki or by the community.

Workers supported to develop in their profession

Social workers play an essential part in improving people's lives by advocating for and creating social justice, equity, unity and cohesion in our communities. Social workers work with people to gain confidence and to address the challenges they face in their everyday lives. They are invaluable. They are also professionals and when registered must meet the high standards of professional practice set by the Social Workers' Registration Board. Oranga Tamariki, as New Zealand's largest employer of social workers, has an obligation to ensure its staff are well supported to meet these standards, both through ongoing access to training and professional development and supervision, and through ensuring safe workloads.

Kaimahi in residences want to be part of a more professionalised workforce in which they can develop in their roles and be recognised for that development. They also want a workforce in which their professionalism can be visible, and where that professionalism holds people in the system accountable. This should include good access to training and professional supervision. Workforce development will require planning and investment to develop both existing and new workers on an ongoing basis.

Te Ao Māori approach at the heart of good services

We do not support the removal of s7AA of the Oranga Tamariki Act. A Te Ao Māori approach is vital to ensure the Crown meets its Te Tiriti responsibilities in its services to children, young people and whānau and reporting is needed to ensure progress is made. More than half of all of the tamariki and rangatahi in care are Māori. We need to protect, embed and continue to invest in the current practice framework which draws on Te Āo Māori principles of Oranga. It is also important to retain and continue to invest in Māori specific roles, and the cultural capability and competency of all kaimahi within Oranga Tamariki.

A just transition to the future state

Change to the care and protection and youth justice services is needed and must happen. We are mindful of the desire of Oranga Tamariki to continue to develop partnerships with iwi and community, and we support this. This will impact the people working at Oranga Tamariki and also require significant

investment from Government in the capability of iwi and community organisations. We need a clear commitment from Oranga Tamariki and any iwi and community partners to a just transition for kaimahi that builds capability and that delivers jobs with decent and equitable pay rates and good conditions. This needs to include taking an integrated approach to workforce development and planning across the whole workforce – both those employed by agencies and iwi and community partners.

Health and safety

Appropriate resourcing

Kaimahi need the resources to do their jobs properly. This includes having the time needed to do that properly. Safe staffing is essential.

A safe and secure workplace and home

Safety for rangatahi, tamariki and kaimahi needs to be a bottom line. In residential facilities in particular, health and safety needs to take into account that they are both workplaces and homes – and that these different uses bring different health and safety needs. This requires creating environments that feel like homes and not prisons, where tamariki and rangatahi can feel safe and that their rights are respected, while at the same time taking practical steps to reduce the most serious safety risks such as:

- Greater ability to search tamariki and rangatahi and conduct searches to prevent contraband from entering facilities.
- The capacity and capability to group people with those of similar ages and levels of behaviours and risk factors, to avoid those in care becoming victimised by those older and at the more serious end of the offending scale.

Positive workplace culture

Consistent and constructive management and good relationships between kaimahi and management is important to ensure that kaimahi feel trusted, valued and respected to do their jobs well, and supported to improve and address issues when they arise.

Good work design and good design of working conditions, including rosters, creates mentally healthy work. Local and national structures to ensure kaimahi have input into their work and the workplace will improve both work and services.

It is difficult to create a positive working environment with a culture of trust and loyalty when the agency and kaimahi face constant criticism externally and are told their work creates harm for rangatahi and tamariki they are working with. Positive and active leadership is necessary to overcome this.

Good services

Kaimahi, tamariki, rangatahi and whānau having a voice in service design and delivery

For services to meet the needs of everyone involved, they need to be developed with a shared vision, and those most involved in the operation of these services need to have a say in their design and how they operate.

This requires Oranga Tamariki to enable multiple voices to contribute constructively without an ‘us-and-them’ mentality. Design of services needs to include kaimahi, recognising their expertise in their field. This means a continued Oranga Tamariki commitment to build strong, trusting working relationships with

all PSA delegates and national delegates through consistent monthly meetings and ongoing agreements. It also needs to include the people in care and their whānau.

A home-like family environment

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that all children should grow up in a family environment. Residences will require significant investment from government to achieve this.

Resourced education services

The system needs to prioritise and invest in sufficient resourcing for things like education programmes, which provide a pathway to better outcomes for tamariki and rangatahi and keep them engaged in constructive activity. These can be the first things to go if resources are tight, so the system needs to invest in them to ensure they're sustained, accessible, and that tamariki and rangatahi are supported to transition into other forms of education when they leave care.

An integrated approach to all care and protection, youth justice and whānau services with a strong focus on prevention

Kaimahi at Oranga Tamariki work with many whānau, tamariki and rangatahi who never enter the care system and investment must happen in the phases of the model before care is the only option such as family group conferences, and stronger partnerships are needed to refer work out that does not meet the threshold. Social work services, residences and other care and protection and youth justice facilities and services are at the bottom of the cliff. They need to be integrated into a coherent overall approach to tamariki, rangatahi and whānau across the justice, housing, social development, education and health systems and these services need to be sufficiently funded. This approach should include investing in meeting tamariki and rangatahi unmet needs and their aspirations, and eliminating the drivers that contribute to tamariki and rangatahi requiring a service from Oranga Tamariki including homelessness, poverty, family violence and poor health.

We look forward to meeting with you to further discuss these issues and challenges.

Nāku iti noa, nā



Kerry Davies
PSA national secretaries



Duane Leo