



Mr William Martin
fyi-request-11181-708b2c5b@requests.fyi.org.nz

24 DEC 2019

Dear William Martin

On 10 September 2019, you emailed the Ministry requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, the following information:

- *The number of families requesting food grants from Work and Income in the Auckland region since 26 October 2017*
- *The number of families receiving food grants based upon the Otago Food Survey in the Auckland region since 26 October 2017*
- *The average food grant amount broken down by the number of dependents since 26 October 2017 in the Auckland regions*
- *The number of times a beneficiary was only permitted to buy food from a single location using their payment card in the Auckland region since 26 October 2017.*

Please provide the above information by quarters and provide a breakdown by ethnicity, age and sex.

On 25 September 2019 you clarified your definition of family as either sole parents with children, or a couple with dependent children in their care.

The Otago Food Survey (OFS) is an annual food cost survey that identifies the cost of a basket of food designed to meet dietary needs of different people. In 2016 South Auckland Work and Income sites began using the calculator that drew on the OFS as a guide for staff to understand the starting cost of a healthy and nutritious diet. From 31 July 2019, the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) tested the use of the OFS calculator across the Auckland region to provide greater consistency across food grant applications.

The OFS calculator was used for guidance and insight only as part of the test. It is important to note that information from the OFS Calculator was only one aspect that staff considered – staff also looked at each person's all-round needs including dietary requirements. The OFS calculator was not utilised by the Contact Centre nor outside of the Auckland Region.

The Ministry identified that the OFS Calculator provided little use to staff, as in practice decisions are driven by an assessment of individual need and circumstances to ensure clients are well supported and receive their full and correct entitlements. The Ministry discontinued the use of the OFS Calculator on 8 October 2019.

The Ministry publishes its manuals and procedures on the Work and Income website and information specific to food grant applications are available at: <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/extra-help/special-needs-grant/food-01.html>.

For the sake of clarity your questions are answered in turn:

- *The number of families requesting food grants from Work and Income in the Auckland region since 26 October 2017*

Please find enclosed Table One, showing the number of Special Needs Grants for food granted, the total and the average amount granted in the Auckland Region by relationship status and child status, broken down by quarters from September 2017 to 30 June 2019. These Special Needs Grants for food were processed in Auckland region service centres and do not include those granted in contact centres or through online services.

The Ministry records the number of food grants provided for people with children attached to their benefit, however, it does not record this information for declined food grant applications. This also applies for food grant applications for families, broken down by clients' ethnicity, age and sex. We are unable to provide you with this information as it is held in notes on individual case files.

In order to provide you with this information Ministry staff would have to manually review thousands of files. As such I refuse your request under section 18(f) of the Official Information Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

We have considered whether the Ministry would be able to respond to your request given extra time, or the ability to charge for the information requested. I have concluded that, in either case, the Ministry's ability to undertake its work would still be prejudiced.

- *The number of families receiving food grants based upon the Otago Food Survey in the Auckland region since 26 October 2017*

Information regarding families receiving food grants based upon the Otago Food Survey is held on individual case files. In order to provide you with this information we would have to manually review thousands of files. As such we refuse your request under section 18(f) of the Official Information Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

- *The average food grant amount broken down by the number of dependents since 26 October 2017 in the Auckland regions*

We are still determining if we can provide you with this information. As this is taking longer than anticipated, we will respond to this aspect of your request separately. We apologise for any inconvenience that this may cause.

- *The number of times a beneficiary was only permitted to buy food from a single location using their payment card in the Auckland region since 26 October 2017.*

During the period of the OFS calculator trial, clients in Auckland receiving hardship grants for food were given a wide choice of grocery retail outlets and locations at which to use payment cards. For this reason, there were no cases where clients did not have a choice on where to spend their payment cards, and were only permitted to buy food from a single location.

The principles and purposes of the Official Information Act 1982 under which you made your request are:

- to create greater openness and transparency about the plans, work and activities of the Government,

- to increase the ability of the public to participate in the making and administration of our laws and policies and
- to lead to greater accountability in the conduct of public affairs.

This Ministry fully supports those principles and purposes. The Ministry therefore intends to make the information contained in this letter available to the wider public. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter on the Ministry of Social Development's website. Your personal details will be deleted and the Ministry will not publish any information that would identify you as the person who requested the information.

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz.

If you are not satisfied with this response regarding the OFS, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Bridget Saunders', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Bridget Saunders

Manager Issue Resolution, Service Delivery

Table One (page 1 of 2): The number of Special Needs Grants for food granted, the total and the average amount granted in the Auckland Region, by, relationship status and child status for the period September 2017 to 30 June 2018

Marital Status	Has Children	September 2017			December 2017			March 2018			June 2018		
		Number of grants	Average amount per grant	Total amount per quarter	Number of grants	Average amount per grant	Total amount per quarter	Number of grants	Average amount per grant	Total amount per quarter	Number of grants	Average amount per grant	Total amount per quarter
Married	No	1,970	\$121	\$237,446	2,124	\$124	\$263,422	2,223	\$120	\$267,737	2,391	\$125	\$299,308
	Yes	2,634	\$145	\$382,999	2,706	\$154	\$416,882	3,017	\$149	\$448,023	2,900	\$155	\$449,146
Single	No	12,852	\$81	\$1,037,374	13,778	\$84	\$1,161,908	13,374	\$81	\$1,083,651	14,231	\$83	\$1,183,860
	Yes	11,990	\$129	\$1,542,181	13,355	\$140	\$1,869,307	12,653	\$128	\$1,614,983	12,813	\$133	\$1,708,151
Unknown	No	189	\$98	\$18,583	170	\$100	\$17,021	224	\$103	\$23,182	S	\$103	\$21,627
	Yes	13	\$135	\$1,751	12	\$168	\$2,010	13	\$154	\$2,000	S	\$148	\$740

Notes:

- Married includes "De Facto" and other forms of relationships with the same nature as a marriage.
- Single includes clients with a relationship status recorded as divorced or separated.
- "Has Children" includes children that are attached to a client's benefit. These children may not have been born to the beneficiary concerned. For example, this can include children added to a client's benefit after they have left their previous caregivers (e.g. a breakdown of custody arrangement, children of a wider whanau or a previous partner).

Table One (page 2 of 2): The number of Special Needs Grants for food granted, the total and the average amount granted in the Auckland Region, by, relationship status and child status for the period September 2018 to June 2019

Marital Status	Has Children	September 2018			December 2018			March 2019			June 2019		
		Number of grants	Average amount per grant	Total amount per quarter	Number of grants	Average amount per grant	Total amount per quarter	Number of grants	Average amount per grant	Total amount per quarter	Number of grants	Average amount per grant	Total amount per quarter
Married	No	2,512	\$128	\$321,517	3,139	\$137	\$429,413	3,081	\$133	\$409,016	3,097	\$136	\$422,424
	Yes	2,764	\$159	\$438,497	3,476	\$185	\$643,893	3,299	\$168	\$554,460	3,276	\$175	\$571,973
Single	No	15,805	\$84	\$1,327,232	18,759	\$89	\$1,666,617	18,058	\$86	\$1,561,648	18,717	\$87	\$1,623,012
	Yes	12,386	\$135	\$1,668,131	17,242	\$167	\$2,872,790	14,024	\$139	\$1,946,830	13,539	\$142	\$1,926,873
Unknown	No	307	\$99	\$30,496	260	\$101	\$26,166	316	\$104	\$32,900	292	\$108	\$31,562
	Yes	18	\$152	\$2,744	14	\$177	\$2,480	22	\$175	\$3,848	10	\$156	\$1,557

Notes on Table One:

- Married includes "De Facto" and other forms of relationships with the same nature as a marriage.
- Single includes clients with a relationship status recorded as divorced or separated.
- "Has Children" includes children that are attached to a client's benefit. These children may not have been born to the beneficiary concerned. For example, this can include children added to a client's benefit after they have left their previous caregivers (e.g. a breakdown of custody arrangement, children of a wider whanau or a previous partner).