

15 OCT 2019

Mr Harry Robson
fyi-request-11207-2cf6cb0b@requests.fyi.org.nz

Tēnā koe Mr Robson

Thank you for your email of 13 September 2019 to the Ministry of Social Development, requesting the following information under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act):

- (1) *In the 2017-2018 period how many cases did social workers and / or health workers deal with that involved conversion therapy [e.g. a social worker responding to a queer young person who was harmed by it]?*
- (2) *Broadly speaking, what were the nature of said cases?*
- (3) *Do you have any data / information at all on the practice of conversion therapy in NZ [e.g. how many licensed health professionals, including psychologists, practice it]?*
- *If so, could you share it?*

Conversion therapy as defined by the AMA:

"Conversion therapy" refers to any form of interventions which attempt to change an individual's sexual orientation, sexual behaviors or gender identity.

On 19 September 2019, you were advised that your request had been transferred, in full, to Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children (Oranga Tamariki), under the Act.

At Oranga Tamariki, our focus is on supporting any child or young person in New Zealand whose wellbeing is at risk of harm. One way we do this is by helping tamariki develop a positive sense of identity, including their gender identity and sexual orientation. Oranga Tamariki Practice Standards provide the foundation for social worker practice to ensure the safety and wellbeing of tamariki, including their identity and sense of belonging. This area is encapsulated within the identity and culture domain of our Tuituia assessment framework and is a specific section of the needs assessment requirements of the National Care Standards. Please follow the link on the following page to the Oranga Tamariki Practice Centre, for additional information on our identity and culture framework.

<https://practice.orangatamariki.govt.nz/our-work/practice-tools/the-tuituia-framework-and-tools/the-tuituia-framework-and-domains/identity-and-culture-tuituia-domain/>.

Social workers are not generally trained to provide professional therapy in their role. However, they may make referrals to agencies and professionals to provide therapeutic support when there is a concern about the wellbeing of a child or young person, which may be related to their sense of identity and belonging. This would not include conversion therapy. We would always try to refer tamariki to agencies who can support them in positive ways around their gender identity and sexual orientation.

We recognise how trauma can impact negatively on tamariki and that family and cultural connections are important for a child's wellbeing and identity. Understanding trauma is important for our social workers when working with children and young people. Our 'Trauma-informed theory', found on the Oranga Tamariki Practice Centre, provides guidance for social workers around how trauma can impact on tamariki and how best to work with tamariki that have been impacted. We are also aware that the children and young people we work with are one of the most vulnerable groups in our society to self-harm and suicide. Our social workers are trained in assessing and recognising the warning signs and indicators of suicide. This guides them when assessing the safety and wellbeing of children and young people who are at risk of harm.

In response to questions one and two of your request, cases where social workers have responded to children or young people who have experienced conversion therapy, would be recorded in the case notes of individual files. To confirm if any cases existed, or the number of cases in the period 2017-2018, would involve our staff reviewing, in detail, hundreds of case files. I am refusing this part of your request under section 18(f) of the Act, as it would require substantial research.

The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service. I have considered whether we would be able to respond to your request given extra time, or the ability to charge for the information requested, and have concluded that, in either case, our ability to undertake our work would still be prejudiced.

You have also asked if Oranga Tamariki has any data or information on the practice of conversion therapy. This part of your request is refused under section 18(e) of the Act as the information requested does not exist.

It may interest you to know that in July 2018, the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) released a statement communicating its strong opposition to the practice of conversion therapy in New Zealand. ANZASW is a voluntary association representing over 3,200 social workers, including employees of Oranga Tamariki and NGOs. They play a significant role in improving the social work profession through undertaking competency assessments and providing professional development training.

Oranga Tamariki intends to make the information contained in this letter available to the wider public shortly. We will do this by publishing this letter on our website. Your personal details will be deleted and we 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@ot.govt.nz. If you are not satisfied with this response, you have the right to ask an Ombudsman to review this decision. Information about this is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or by contacting them on 0800 802 602.

Nāku noa, nā



Steve Groom

General Manager Public, Ministerial and Executive Services