



MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Te Manatū Whakahiato Ora

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25 MAY 2012

Alex Harris
requests@fyi.org.nz

Dear Alex Harris

Thank you for your email of 3 April 2012 requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, information in relation to five Family Start providers: Turuki Health Care, Papakura Marae Society, Te Whānau o Waipareira Trust, Te Ha o Te Whanau Trust and Te Ropu Awhina Family Start. Specifically, you requested:

- *All performance reports for the past year for the five named providers*
- *all correspondence with the five named providers about their performance and the contract termination, including any warning notices.*

Family Start is an intensive home visitation programme for families with young children. The programme targets the highest-need families and provides practical advice, support and parenting education to ensure that these children have the best possible start in life. Family Start works with families with a wide range of needs, including unsupported parents, parents with mental health needs, and families with domestic violence and child health and development issues.

In late 2009, the Minister for Social Development and Employment commissioned Dr Jo Cribb to carry out an independent assessment of the Family Start programme. This review concluded that there was variable performance amongst providers and that work needed to be undertaken, both at a national level and with individual providers, to increase the overall effectiveness of the programme.

As a result of the review, Cabinet directed the Ministry of Social Development in March 2011 to undertake a work programme to make Family Start more effective. As part of this work the Ministry established the dedicated Family Start Directorate to work with and support providers to improve the delivery of the programme. In particular, the Directorate focuses on ensuring that:

- the programme is child centred
- outcomes align with prevention of child abuse and neglect
- there is strong social work practice
- there is quality supervision
- there is increased focus on programme fidelity
- providers find and retain the children who need the programme most and transition families at the end of the programme.

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The Directorate has worked intensively with all Family Start providers over the last year to improve their performance against these objectives. This has included guidance through the development of performance plans, work to refine referral criteria, implementation of new performance measures, tighter contract monitoring (including monthly monitoring visits for the majority of providers). The directorate has also provided practical support through the establishment of dedicated Regional Practice Advisors positions. The Practice Advisors are working with providers to improve their social work practice.

Providers were advised that if their performance was not meeting the performance requirements as a result of this work then contracts would either not be renewed or would be terminated at 30 June 2012.

All providers were made aware that final performance assessments would take place in early 2012 and that decisions would be communicated in March 2012. These assessments were formed by reviewing performance against key performance indicators, the quality of social work practice, implementation and compliance of core programme components and the viability and capability of the organisation.

As a result of the assessments, nine providers were assessed as performing well, 18 were performing adequately and were advised they would receive a contract for one year only with the Ministry having the right to terminate at any point during that year if performance did not continue to improve. Four providers were advised that their contracts would not be renewed beyond June 2012 and one provider was advised that their Family Start contract would cease at that date.

While some of the underperforming organisations made some improvements recently against key performance indicators, when all the relevant factors were taken into consideration it was determined that these providers had not shown sufficient or sustained improvement that would provide enough assurance regarding the on-going delivery of the programme, particularly as it is targeted at some of the most vulnerable families in New Zealand.

The Ministry will tender all contracts that are not continued beyond June 2012. The changes announced represent a commitment to quality programme delivery. Family Start provides support to some of the most vulnerable children and families in our communities and I believe New Zealanders expect us to take action when providers are consistently failing to take the necessary steps to keep children safe and/or improve their wellbeing.

Please find enclosed the documentation you have requested. I am releasing copies of all performance monitoring reports as well as key correspondence from the Ministry relating to provider performance. The Regional Funding Advisors and Practice Advisors worked intensively with providers during this time and therefore I have not included email correspondence that does not directly relate to decisions made on the contract, for example emails of an administrative nature setting up meetings, or those responding to queries from the provider. A list of the documents released is attached to this response.

I have withheld the names of some individuals under section 9(2)(a) of the Official Information Act to protect their privacy. Details of Family Start cases are also withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Act where they could cause the identification of individual clients, in order to protect their privacy. Finally, detail about the performance of specific Family Start workers, including details about how they are being performance managed has also been withheld under section 9(2)(a) of the Act to protect their privacy.

Some information is withheld under section 9(2)(g)(i) of the Act where it contains the free and frank expression of opinion. The ability of staff to provide free and frank advice to the Ministry should not be prejudiced as would be the case if these types of comments were to be regularly released. I believe that the public interest in the decisions made is met by the release of the final decision documents.

When Family Start works well it can really make a difference to the lives of our most vulnerable children. And so, as with everything we fund, we need to make sure that services are effective. The Family Start programme has been re-energised and many providers have made good progress improving their performance. The flow on effect from this is better, safer lives for vulnerable children.

We also need to make sure we that we get the best return possible on the taxpayer investment in Family Start. This means we cannot afford to continue to fund services that do not meet performance standards. We need to make sure that providers are delivering high quality, effective services.

I hope you find this information helpful. You have the right to seek an investigation and review of my response by the Ombudsman, whose address for contact purposes is:

The Ombudsman
Office of the Ombudsmen
PO Box 10-152
WELLINGTON 6143

Yours sincerely



Murray Edridge
Deputy Chief Executive Family and Community Services