



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT**

TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

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13 NOV 2020

Tēnā koe R Gavey

On 11 September 2020, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), information about the material used to train the Ministry's Fraud team staff on the subject of domestic violence.

The Ministry acknowledges that you have made two other requests under the Act. These will be addressed in separate responses.

The Ministry takes its responsibilities very seriously in the administration of public expenditure to provide income assistance and services to more than one million New Zealanders each year. The Ministry works hard to protect the integrity of the system to ensure it remains fair for all New Zealanders.

The Ministry has a dedicated team of specialist fraud investigators across the country, and an Intelligence Unit that identifies emerging fraud risks and trends. The Ministry works with other government agencies to identify and reduce the incidence of fraud and also investigates cases which arise through allegations from members of the public. At the same time, National Fraud Teams and the Integrity Intervention Centre are increasing their focus on fraud prevention and early intervention activities. This ensures that clients understand their obligations to tell Work and Income early about their changing circumstances, as this could affect their benefit entitlement.

Your questions will be addressed in turn below.

1. *I saw that in a previous Ministry of Social Development official information response (dated 8 August 2018), there was an investigation training manual attached – titled "Investigation Unit Training Package" (see: www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/official-information-responses/2018/august/r-20180808-information-regarding-allegations-of-benefit-fraud.pdf).*
 - a. *When was this training manual produced?*
 - b. *Has it been updated since it was first produced?*
 - c. *Is it still being used to train the Ministry of Social Development staff and investigators?*
 - d. *If no, please provide the most recent investigation training manual.*

The Ministry uses the Investigation Unit Training Package to train its fraud investigators on a variety of relevant topics. The training package is broken up into several training modules, which are used in conjunction with on-the-job training and block-training-delivery sessions.

The training manual was originally produced over 20 years ago, and has been updated multiple times. Unfortunately, we are unable to provide the exact date it was first produced as we do not hold a copy in our current information management systems.

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Therefore, I am refusing your request for this information under section 18(g) of the Act, as the information you have requested is not held by the Ministry.

I can also confirm that the training modules were updated in September 2019 to include more information. Please note that the training modules are also currently in the process of being updated to account for changes in legislation. The table below provides a list of the enclosed documents attached to this response, which are part of the current Investigation Unit Training Package:

Document Title – Investigation Unit Training Package
Induction to the Ministry of Social Development and Fraud Intervention Services
Allegations and Fraud Suspicions
Care and Custody of Exhibits
Case Law Policies and Procedures
Community Inquiries
Court Craft
Court Structure
Disclosure
Interviews & Statements
Investigative approach
Investigative Powers and Information Gathering
Making and accessing legislation
MSD & Fraud History
Obligations Reviews and Debt
Offences
Official Information and Privacy Act
Participants in Court
Prosecutions
Relationship debt sharing
Relationship Status
Reviews and Appeals
Risk Management
Rules of Evidence
Search Warrants
Sentencing
The Acts Administered by MSD
Types of Evidence

In addition to these training modules, there are also detailed instructions on how investigations should be conducted, hosted on our internal intranet.

2. Do the Ministry of Social Development benefit fraud investigators receive training on indicators of domestic violence?

- e. The Work and Income website states, under the section on the Family Violence Intervention Programme (see: www.workandincome.govt.nz/providers/programmes-and-projects/family-violence-intervention-programme.html#null): "Our case managers have been trained to identify and respond appropriately to people who are living in or leaving violent family situations."
- f. Please provide any relevant training manuals or policy documents.

Fraud investigators are linked in with the Family Violence Intervention Programme (FVIP). The FVIP works to enhance the Ministry's ability to respond to people experiencing family violence.

Fraud investigators receive further, in-depth training on the topic of domestic violence within the block-training-delivery sessions, which includes discussions about domestic violence.

Please find the following training material regarding domestic violence enclosed in this response:

- *Beth's Story*
- *The Cycle of Violence*
- *Family Violence Intervention Powerpoint*
- *Power and Control Wheel*
- *Prompts for screening clients about family violence*
- *Skills Practice – Trainer notes*
- *Scenarios*
- *Intranet page – FVIP practice guidelines – What the FVIP is about*
- *Intranet page – FVIP operational guidelines – How frontline staff and FVRC's deliver the FVIP*
- *Intranet page – Other relevant policies and guidelines for the FVIP*

3. When conducting benefit fraud investigations, are there specific procedures for situations in which there is suspicion of domestic violence?

- g. Please provide any relevant training manuals or policy documents.
- h. Does the Ministry of Social Development consider indicators of domestic violence (and coercive control) when making determinations on benefit recipients' relationship status?
- i. If so, what role does evidence of domestic violence play in these determinations? e.g. does evidence of coercive control mitigate the existence of a relationship in the nature of a marriage?

The Ministry considers indicators of domestic violence and coercive control when making determinations on a benefit recipient's relationship status.

When there is reason to believe violence may be a factor in a relationship, clients are encouraged to accept a referral to available support. Where there is any reason to suspect neglect or abuse of children, this is reported to Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children. The primary concern of the Ministry is to ensure that the client is aware of the support available to them and to encourage them to seek support.

For a relationship to be considered a de facto relationship for benefit purposes, it must include a level of financial interdependence and emotional commitment to prove that the relationship meets the threshold of being "in the nature of marriage". Where there is violence present within a relationship, including coercive control, the Ministry considers this to be an indicator that the required level of emotional commitment may not be present in the relationship. In these cases, the client could qualify/continue to qualify for a single/sole parent rate of benefit.

All relevant training materials are included in the enclosed Investigation Unit Training Package, mentioned on page two of this response.

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 and any attached documents available to the wider public. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter and attached documents 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 how Ministry staff are trained to respond to domestic violence, 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.

Ngā mihi nui



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