



# MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

*Te Manatū Whakahiato Ora*

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55 JUL 2012

Alex Harris

[fyi-request-350-1035755d@requests.fyi.org.nz](mailto:fyi-request-350-1035755d@requests.fyi.org.nz)

Dear Alex

Thank you for your email of 7 June 2012 requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, the following information:

*The total number of children removed from their parents within two months of birth in each of the last five years*

*The total number of children removed from their parents within six months of birth in each of the last five years*

*The total number of children removed from their parents within one year of birth in each of the last five years*

The Ministry works hard to ensure the safety of babies, children and young people who may be at risk of harm and abuse. We recognise that toddlers and babies are represented in statistics as the most significant group at risk of serious injury or death from abuse and/or neglect, and therefore we have an emphasis on preventing abuse towards under two year olds.

In addition to carrying out its care and protection work, Child, Youth and Family has a Vulnerable Infants Programme. As part of this programme Child, Youth and Family social workers are now present in at least one main hospital in every District Health Board, and are able to support hospital staff caring for children who have been involved with Child, Youth and Family or who are at risk of abuse.

When a child is admitted to hospital with suspected non-accidental injuries, Child, Youth and Family develops a Multiagency Safety Plan to protect the child. In every case, Child, Youth and Family meets with Police and health professionals to ensure there is a clear and safe plan in place before the child leaves hospital, which includes an agreed process for ongoing monitoring of their safety and wellbeing.

The Ministry was also involved in the Campaign for Action on Family Violence, which includes the *It's not OK* campaign, to contribute to protecting children from abuse by challenging attitudes and behaviour that tolerate any kind of family violence, including to children. The Campaign focussed on encouraging people to notice and take action when things are going wrong with friends and family; and to help each other when they know that violence is occurring.

This has led to an increase in the community's awareness of abuse and family violence, and the accompanying decrease in tolerance of child abuse, and an increased awareness and coordination between agencies involved with the safety of children, such as the Police and Women's Refuge.

You have requested information on the number of babies removed from their parents care and placed into the care of the Chief Executive of the Ministry of Social Development. Children come into the care of the Chief Executive for a variety of reasons, which are often complex. The care may be short term or longer term where care and/or protection issues are present. At any one time there are approximately 4,000 children and young people who have been taken into the care of the Chief Executive and are living in out of home care placements. Many of them will return home, others will stay permanently with their extended family/whānau or an approved non-family caregiver.

There may be times when Child, Youth and Family receives information prior to a child's birth that highlights care and protection concerns. All such notifications are taken very seriously and are investigated. Where concerns exist, we will work with health services so that the appropriate care and support can be provided in order to give the baby the best possible start in life. Where a social worker believes the child is in need of care and protection, Child, Youth and Family will refer the case for a Family Group Conference, in the first instance, to develop a plan to address those care and protection concerns. They may then, depending on the outcome of the Family Group Conference, apply to the Court so that the child can be taken into care on the day of birth.

A baby will be removed from their parents' care when this is considered to be in the baby's best interests. There may be a history of concerns relating to the parents, which may include family violence, mental health, addiction, previous physical abuse of older children, or previous supervisory or medical neglect. In some circumstances, older children may already be out of their parents' care. In many cases however, the first point at which Child, Youth and Family has involvement is following the birth.

The removal of very young children and babies is not a decision taken lightly. However children under the age of two are our most vulnerable and the safety of the child is always the paramount consideration. Whenever possible, support and a safety plan will be placed around the mother and child so that they can remain together. In many cases, the birth of the child can be life changing for the mother and becomes a catalyst for change.

The decision to bring a baby into care is always child focussed and centred on assessing the family's abilities to provide for the care and protection, safety and wellbeing needs of the child. You will see that the numbers of babies aged under one year old who were placed in care has fluctuated over the last five financial years.

The table below provides the number of babies removed from their parents care and placed into out of home placements within one year of their birth, broken down by less

than two months of age, two to six months of age, and six months to one year of age, for financial years 2007 to 2011.

Age of child	Financial Year				
	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
<b>0-2 Months</b>	205	178	185	212	189
<b>2-6 Months</b>	103	91	111	94	84
<b>6-12 Months</b>	118	85	109	101	77
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>426</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>405</b>	<b>407</b>	<b>350</b>

In financial year 2010/2011, babies under one year old taken into care represented nine per cent of all children taken into care.

Please note that Child, Youth and Family may only remove a child from his or her home with the permission of the parent or guardian or if the Family Court has granted custody in favour of the Chief Executive of the Ministry of Social Development. Under the Children, Young Persons, and their Families Act 1989, the custody order enables social workers to place children out of their parents care.

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



Bernadine Mackenzie  
**Deputy Chief Executive Child, Youth and Family**