

MANA WHĀNAU FINAL EVALUATION



EVALUATION REPORT

September 2020



Acknowledgements

Aki aki te tī o te tangata.

To bring forth the indescribable light in all people.

Every now and then a project comes along which is genuinely transformational, and not only profoundly changes the lives of those it touches but changes our world view. For our team at Point and Associates, this has been that project.

Mana Whānau is inspired by evidence that tamariki generally do better in the care of their whānau. This evaluation journey has shown our team at Point and Associates that for many whānau with tamariki removed or on the edge of care, there are not only safe alternatives, but better alternatives, which keep whānau safely together. Mana Whānau shows that care and protection can be done differently and safely.

The programme has been underpinned by a developmental evaluative approach. There are many, many people, whānau and organisations who have contributed to this evaluation. Those who supported Mana Whānau believed that the removal of tamariki into care should only ever be seen as a last resort. They knew that not all options had in fact been exhausted and were ready to support a new approach. Their readiness to try a new way of working and share their experiences and challenges has underpinned this evaluation, shaping the programme and its delivery.

Firstly and foremost we would like to acknowledge Lifewise, along with Wesley, for developing and implementing the programme, in particular Zoe Truell, Sher Gestro, Robyn Pope and Andrea McKenzie. Their vision and belief that whānau, with the right supports in place, could care safely for their tamariki, has driven this work. Moreover, their openness and strong commitment to reflective practice in weekly meetings were instrumental in iterating and strengthening the programme. Some of the meetings were tough. But adhering to the principles of the programme and ways of working meant that robust conversations could be undertaken in a respectful way; and it was these conversations which advanced the practice.

We would like to sincerely thank the Oranga Tamariki staff involved in this work for the enormous courage they have shown in trying a new approach. Without their referrals the work could not have taken place. They not only funded the programme but worked closely with Lifewise and Wesley to understand who the programme might benefit and to offer it to those whānau. They too believed that whānau, with support, could retain tamariki in their care and wanted to work differently.

A vision only becomes a programme with funding. We would like to acknowledge Foundation North for seed funding the start of Mana Whānau, and Lotteries Community

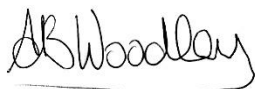
Research Fund for helping to fund the evaluation. The seed funding helped to get the programme underway, and the developmental evaluation was a two-year commitment, instrumental in helping to develop the programme.

It is the kaimahi and their supervisors who deserve a particularly special mention. Each day they show up, and do whatever it takes to ensure that whānau receive the support they need to safely care for their tamariki. It is not always an easy job. The whānau are often traumatised, frightened of losing their tamariki, distrustful of services, and experiencing a range of stressors that make their everyday lives at best challenging and at worst intolerable. The kaimahi and their supervisors are, frankly, extraordinary, helping to reduce the stressors in their lives, holding the hope for whānau, even when whānau themselves do not, and supporting them every step of the way to be the whānau they want to, and can, be. Many, many of the whānau interviewed for this evaluation, in recognition of the relationship, aroha and support they received from their kaimahi and supervisors, now consider them whānau.

Lastly, this evaluation would not have happened without the whānau themselves. Despite many of those interviewed for the project experiencing deep trauma, anguish and pain at having tamariki removed or on the edge of care, they were generous, honest and open in sharing their experiences with us at a time of incredible vulnerability. Their experiences and insights not only informed the evaluation, but shaped and developed the programme, and changed the way our team saw the world. There is a different way. A better way. It has not only brought forth an indescribable light, it has shone light on an alternative pathway. We will leave the acknowledgements with the words of a parent.

“Imagine if all parents who needed it got the support they needed. I now know I wasn’t a bad parent – my mum probably wasn’t either. We were just parents who needed help. In our family, taking kids off their parents stops here and now. No more. It is going to stop with us.”

Ngā mihi nui,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alex Woodley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Alex Woodley, and the Point and Associates team.

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Glossary

Aroha: Love, compassion, empathy.

Awahi: To embrace or cherish.

Bandwidth: The ability of families to think beyond immediate presenting issues and crises.

Executive function: is a set of mental skills that include working memory, flexible thinking, and self-control, needed to plan, strategise and organise.

Family Group Conference: At a care and protection family group conference, the young people and their family/whānau come together to create their own solutions for the safety and wellbeing concerns, with support from Oranga Tamariki.

Iwi: Extended kinship group, tribe, often refers to a large group of people descended from an ancestor and associated with a distinct territory.

Kaimahi: Staff who provide support to the parents and whānau.

Kāinga Ora: Homes and Communities is a crown entity designed to deliver the Government's priorities for housing and urban development, including addressing homelessness and making homes more affordable. It is a public housing landlord.

Kaitiakitanga: Guardianship and protection, from a Māori worldview.

Kaupapa Māori: Māori approach or customary practice.

Mana Whānau: The name of the programme meaning whānau or family are imbued with status, authority and power over their lives.

Manaakitanga: Hospitality, kindness, generosity, support - the process of showing respect, generosity and care for others.

Marae: Courtyard where greetings and discussions take place, and the complex of buildings which surrounds it.

Manuhiri: A visitor or guest.

Matauranga: Māori knowledge encompassing traditional concepts of knowledge and knowing of Māori ancestors.

Mokopuna: Grandchildren.

Oranga Tamariki: A Ministry designed to support children whose wellbeing is considered to be at significant risk of harm.

Serve and return: Interact, respond and encourage positive interactions and responsive parenting.

Tamariki: Children

Tangata Whenua: Local people, hosts, indigenous people of the land.

Tūpuna: Ancestors.

Toxic stress: Toxic stress can result from exposure to strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity. A toxic stress response can occur in children when this is experienced without adequate adult support.

Toxic stressors: These can include physical or emotional abuse, chronic neglect, caregiver substance abuse or mental illness, exposure to violence, and/or the accumulated burdens of family economic hardship.

Whakapapa: Ancestry.

Whānau: Extended family, family group from a Māori worldview.

Whānaungatanga: The links and connections and relating to the people one meets by identifying in culturally appropriate ways, such as whakapapa linkages, past heritages, points of engagement, or other relationships.

Whenua: Of the land where the people's ancestors have lived and where their placenta are buried.

Executive summary

The purpose of the report is to evaluate the first two years of the Mana Whānau programme, to identify the approach, key components and delivery mechanisms, determine how well it is working, capture the outcomes and recommend improvements and next steps.

Mana Whānau is a six-month, intensive, in-home parenting support programme designed to keep tamariki¹ who are on the edge of care, or have been removed by Oranga Tamariki², safely living within their own whānau³ and communities. The programme was developed by Lifewise in Auckland in 2017 following an initial pilot in 2015.

It was subsequently adopted by Wesley Community Action in Porirua in early 2019. Due to the successful outcomes for whānau, the programme was scaled up, with a second Lifewise team starting in October 2019.

The programme is intensive, whānau-led and is based on a theory of change which contends reducing toxic stressors can free up the mental bandwidth⁴ required for parents to care for their tamariki effectively and, where necessary, build new skills and capabilities. It is grounded in the latest neuroscientific research, developed in a New Zealand context and driven by a 'whatever it takes' and 'what works' approach.

The key components of the programme:

- Staff work intensively with whānau in their homes, for up to 65 hours per week. The times and the number of hours worked are those that suit whānau. This can include early mornings, evenings and weekends. They do what it takes.
- It is an authentically whānau-led process with tamariki at the heart. The initial three-way agreement identifying the concerns and overarching goal is agreed by Oranga Tamariki, Mana Whānau and the whānau themselves. The identification of stressors, goals, pathways, priorities, work, and the pace of that work, are determined by whānau.
- There is recognition that stressors need to be reduced or removed in order that whānau have the mental bandwidth to build on their skills and capabilities.
- The programme is flexible and tailored to the needs and choices of each whānau.

The aim is to work with whānau whose core capabilities are challenged by toxic levels of stress and trauma, to:

¹ Tamariki are children and young people.

² Oranga Tamariki is the New Zealand Government's child protection agency.

³ Whānau is family from a Māori world view.

⁴ The ability of families to think beyond immediate presenting issues and crises.

- identify and reduce the stressors
- support strong and responsive relationships between tamariki and adults
- work alongside whānau in their home coaching, modelling, positively reinforcing and providing opportunities to develop and practise the parenting skills they need to care for and parent their tamariki effectively and safely. This includes supporting parents to 'serve and return' i.e. interact, respond and encourage positive interactions with their tamariki
- build natural whānau and community supports for long-term resilience.

Outcomes

In the two years to July 2020, a total of 44 whānau with 139 tamariki started the programme; 26 whānau in Auckland and 18 in Porirua, with 16 (37%) NZ European, 21 (48%) Māori, 12 (27%) Pasifika, 3 (7%) Asian and 3 from other ethnic backgrounds.⁵

Thirty-nine of the 44 whānau (89%) retained or had their tamariki returned. In total, 130 tamariki (94%) are now living safely together with their parents.

Whānau in the programme, staff and stakeholders report:

- Toxic stressors have reduced significantly and the care and protection issues which initiated the involvement of Mana Whānau have been resolved.
- Parenting capabilities have improved.
- Outcomes for tamariki (such as health, education and behaviour) have improved.
- Access to natural and community resources have strengthened, although some whānau still experience feelings of loneliness and isolation.

What is working well

- The programme is strongly informed by evidence.
- There are positive relationships between kaimahi⁶ and whānau.
- Whānau are supported culturally, practically, spiritually and emotionally.
- Mana Whānau is the lead agency.
- There are clear safety goals.
- The practice is whānau-led and tamariki-centred.
- Whānau are fully engaged in the service.
- The service is home-based.
- It is not just intense support, but flexible to meet the needs of whānau.
- The kaimahi work with the wider whānau.

⁵ Note that the ethnicity relates to the ethnicity of the parents. The percentages add up to more than 100 percent as they may share more than one ethnicity.

⁶ Kaimahi are the staff on the programme who work directly with the whānau.

- Mana Whānau provides ‘helpful help’.
- The approach uses modelling and coaching.
- Kaimahi hold the hope even when whānau do not.
- Kaimahi have faith in the ability of whānau to parent.
- The programme receives robust organisational support.
- Fidelity is key; the closer the implementation of the programme is to the theory of change, the more successful the whānau outcomes.

Conclusion

The theory of change and programme has undergone two years of iteration in response to a strong developmental evaluative approach. The programme’s theory of change contends that there is an opportunity to prevent tamariki from entering or remaining in foster care by providing intensive in-home support, reducing immediate risk, addressing and removing stressors identified by the whānau, building parenting capability and capacity, and strengthening natural and community supports. It is also contended that the approach and way of working is as important as the practical support provided.

The theory of change is robust and is leading to the anticipated outcomes, namely tamariki are living safely together with their whānau, Oranga Tamariki are ending their engagement with whānau, whānau say they are becoming confident and resilient parents able to protect their tamariki.

Although tamariki were not interviewed for the project, feedback from kaimahi suggest they are feeling safe and well cared for by their parents and whānau. It is recommended that their views are sought in subsequent evaluations.

There are whānau for whom this programme is not appropriate. The programme appears to be less successful for those with active addictions. It is unsuitable for those who cannot be left unattended with their tamariki.

The programme highlights the impact of stressors on tamariki and whānau outcomes. Uplifting children to protect them from their parents, particularly when the risk of imminent harm is low, fails to acknowledge or address the social determinants of harm and the key strategies which could prevent it. In fact, it appears to further compound the suffering of whānau, including tamariki, who are already bearing an overwhelming burden of stress and trauma.

The evidence shows there are more effective and compassionate pathways to safety and wellbeing for many of these tamariki and their whānau. The evidence from Mana Whānau shows that developing an intensive programme that focuses on reducing the social determinants of harm, in particular addressing the trauma of whānau, reducing the toxic

weight of risk factors, increasing executive function⁷ and freeing up mental bandwidth may provide a better alternative to out-of-home care for both tamariki and their parents and, for at least some whānau, help to break the cycle of intergenerational trauma.

There are enormous personal, whānau, community and societal benefits in supporting tamariki to stay in the care of their families. Based on the outcomes to date, the evaluation finds, if implemented with fidelity to the principles, approach and key components, Mana Whānau provides a safe and successful alternative to foster care. It is recommended the programme is further rolled out and scaled.

Next steps

- A kaupapa Māori practice framework is close to finalisation.
- Reduce isolation through peer-to-peer groups.
- Strengthen the voice of tamariki.
- The timeframe needs to be flexible.
- Work alongside whānau to review the approach to whānau experiencing family violence.
- Scale up and further roll out the programme beyond Porirua and West and Central Auckland.

⁷ Executive function is the ability to plan, prioritise and focus.

Introduction

The purpose of the report is to evaluate the first two years of the Mana Whānau programme, to identify the approach, key components and delivery mechanisms, determine how well it is working, capture the outcomes and recommend improvements and next steps.

Mana Whānau is a six-month, intensive, in-home parenting support programme designed to keep tamariki who are on the edge of care, or have been removed by Oranga Tamariki, safely living within their own whānau and communities.

The Mana Whānau programme was initially developed by Lifewise in Auckland in 2017 following an initial pilot in 2015. It was subsequently adopted by Wesley Community Action in Porirua in early 2019. Due to the successful outcomes for whānau, the programme was scaled up, with a second Lifewise team starting in October 2019.

The care and protection system assesses, intervenes and can remove children and babies into state care. As of June 2018 there were 6,350 children and young people in state care in New Zealand. The rate of state care for tamariki Māori was almost seven times higher than for non-Māori. According to the Office of the Children's Commissioner, these inequities are continuing to widen over time (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2020).

The Mana Whānau programme is inspired by evidence that tamariki generally do better in the care of their whānau (Baldwin et al., 2019; Doyle, 2013; Goemans et al., 2015; Rapsey & Rolston, 2020) and by the conviction that there are safe alternatives to removing tamariki from their whānau.

Mana Whānau is based on the understanding that:

- Being separated from whānau has a detrimental effect on both tamariki and their whānau.
- It is in the best interest of the tamariki to remain safely in the care of their whānau, wherever this is possible.
- Change is possible.
- With the right support and resources most whānau have the ability to care for their tamariki safely.
- Toxic stressors, such as extreme poverty, violence, household dysfunction, and food scarcity, must be reduced or removed for parents to be able to build their capabilities.
- Change is more likely and sustainable when whānau determine and drive the changes they want to make.

Specifically, the Mana Whānau programme supports:

- whānau who are at imminent risk of having their tamariki removed by Oranga Tamariki
- whānau with tamariki already in Oranga Tamariki care who need support to have their tamariki return home from foster care.

The aim of the programme is to support rapid changes in whānau, who need help with a range of issues so they can retain their tamariki in their care. The issues whānau face are often severe, long-term and overwhelming. They include intergenerational and historical trauma, poverty, family violence, mental health issues, isolation and fractured whānau, hapu, iwi and social connections. Whānau may also need help to meet their basic needs, such as attaining a house, having enough food, or providing their tamariki with beds, bedding and clothing.

The hours of contact are allocated according to the needs of the whānau. Kaimahi (whānau support workers) are available at any time of the day or night and through weekends. Sessions are scheduled at times in the family's day when support is most needed such as early morning, mealtimes and bedtimes or on weekends when both parents or extended whānau members are available.

Mana Whānau focuses on immediately reducing the risk of harm to tamariki as an alternative to removing tamariki from their homes. The programme is designed to create better outcomes for tamariki and their whānau. Mana Whānau is suitable for whānau where there is enough safety for children to be left at home when Mana Whānau staff are not present, and enough safety for staff. If it is not possible to keep the whānau together and the tamariki safe for at least some periods, Mana Whānau is not an appropriate programme.

The whānau need to be willing to engage and to agree that they want to work towards some change.

In the two years to July 2020, a total of 44 whānau with 139 tamariki started the programme; 26 whānau in Auckland and 18 in Porirua, with 16 (37%) NZ European, 21 (48%) Māori, 12 (27%) Pasifika, 3 (7%) Asian and 3 from other ethnic backgrounds.⁸

Evaluation Method

The evaluation is longitudinal in design. Whānau start the programme at different points in

⁸ Note that the ethnicity relates to the ethnicity of the parents. The percentages add up to more than 100 percent as they may share more than one ethnicity.

time, hence some whānau have yet to complete the programme.

Whānau are invited to participate in the evaluation. While programme outcomes for all 44 whānau have been captured, 20 agreed to be interviewed in depth for the evaluation. Those who agreed were interviewed three months into the programme, at the completion of the programme (six months) and six months after completing the programme.

This evaluation is based on:

- a literature overview (appended)
- a review of the findings from the developmental evaluation, including a review of records of the weekly meetings with Lifewise and fortnightly meetings with Wesley where learnings are discussed to inform the programme development
- a review of findings from Community of Practice meetings with Mana Whānau staff across the sites, designed to share ideas, experiences, learn about successes and work through issues and challenges
- a review of the key documents, tools and templates developed and collated on the project's internal website
- interviews with 20 whānau, including extended whānau, who agreed to participate in the evaluation
- interviews with key stakeholders including police (2), schools (3), Oranga Tamariki managers (2), and Mana Whānau staff and managers (9).

The interviews followed a semi-structured interview schedule. Whānau were asked what they felt was working well in the programme, what was not working well, and how they felt the programme could be improved. The materials and interviews were analysed thematically. Because there is so little research in this area in New Zealand, an inductive approach was used, with the themes emerging from the interviews.

This evaluation report will describe the approach, key components, success factors, challenges and assess the outcomes against the theory of change.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are paramount throughout the evaluative process. Ethical practices include:

- obtaining informed consent from whānau
- providing information sheets about the evaluation
- ensuring that participants felt able to withhold their consent and understood that they could stop being involved at any point without any consequence
- encouraging participants to bring a support person/people if they wished
- not rushing the interview, but allowing time to build relationships/whānaungatanga

- being clear about how the information was going to be used, and ensuring confidentiality; incorporating a feedback loop, so that the participants knew what information was to be used from their interviews
- respecting confidentiality
- providing the contact number for services should the interviews cause upset and distress.

The programme participants who agreed to be interviewed are provided with a \$50 voucher of their choice (supermarket, petrol, Westfield) in recognition of their time. It is noted that three whānau have said they would prefer not to participate in the evaluation.

The Mana Whānau programme

Evidence

The Mana Whānau programme is grounded in the latest neuroscientific research, developed in a New Zealand context and driven by a ‘whatever it takes’ and ‘what works’ approach. Although the programme sounds simple and practical, it has a strong theoretical and evidence base and a well-researched theory of change. As the support required by each whānau is so different, the theoretical base and implementation of the programme needs to be fully understood and mastered by Mana Whānau practitioners, with skilled supervision, if whānau are to be supported by, in their words, ‘helpful help’.

Neuroscientific research shows that adults need a core set of capabilities to parent effectively. These fall under the umbrella of self-regulation and executive function, i.e. the ability to plan, strategise and problem-solve. Stressors, such as poverty, family violence, homelessness, and poor mental or physical health, and in particular the cumulative weight of multiple stressors, are not only overwhelming to whānau, but can rob parents and caregivers of executive function and create a toxic stress response in children, disrupting healthy development. Exposure to toxic levels of stress can also rob whānau of the bandwidth required to learn new skills (Center on the Developing Child, 2016). This is why initiatives such as parenting courses can have limited efficacy. For whānau experiencing sustained, prolonged and cumulative levels of stress, rather than helping, these initiatives and multiple agencies working with whānau simultaneously can become additional stressors.

There is compelling evidence demonstrating that prolonged exposure to stressful, adverse conditions or multiple risk factors is not only toxic to tamariki and their whānau, but can undermine even the best initiatives. Moreover, the narrow focus on assessing parenting risk to protect children has meant that little attention has been directed towards social determinants and systemic changes that could reduce child harm. These include the economic, environmental and cultural barriers that contribute to child harm and which, if addressed, could enable children and young people to be cared for safely within their families and communities.

Fresh thinking and new strategies are required if programmes working with whānau facing trauma and adversity are to become more effective.

Principles and theory of change



DEFINING MANA WHĀNAU

The Mana Whānau theory of change contends that there is an opportunity to prevent tamariki from entering or remaining in foster care by providing intensive in-home support, reducing immediate risk, addressing and removing stressors identified by the whānau, building parenting capability and capacity, and strengthening natural and community supports. It is also contended that the approach and way of working is as important as the practical support provided. The Mana Whānau programme is underpinned by principles that guide the way of working; namely, that choices for whānau are maximised, the programme is authentically whānau-led with tamariki at the heart, kaimahi do what it takes to reduce stressors and support whānau to build skills and resilience.

Kaimahi support whānau to work on the goals and priorities that matter to them. The support provided is non-judgmental, empathetic and respectful.

It is hypothesised that alleviating risk factors, reducing toxic stress levels and building executive function will free up the bandwidth required to parent more effectively, and learn new skills and capabilities. Whānau will be supported to thrive, and tamariki will have responsive adults in their lives who support their wellbeing.

The broad goal is that tamariki are safe and thriving living within their own whānau and their own communities.

So, if we:

- support whānau with intensive cultural, practical, spiritual, emotional, whānau-led and tamariki centred practice, and

- support whānau to reduce or remove toxic stressors such as financial hardship, housing issues and mental distress, and
- support and build on parents' and whānau protective factors, and
- support parents to build on their parenting capability and executive functioning.

By:

- introducing a dedicated worker to whānau for up to 65 per hours per week (initially) in their home, and
- listening to whānau and providing practical empathetic responses to address the immediate stressors as identified by them, and
- providing practical, empathetic and non-judgmental support, and
- identifying, connecting and strengthening resources within whānau and their community, and valuing the role and contribution of whakapapa to restorative healing processes, and
- encouraging self-determination and affirming active skill-building and responsive parenting in their home.

Then this eventually will result in the following outcomes:

- tamariki will live safely together with their whānau
- Oranga Tamariki will end their engagement with the whānau
- whānau will be confident and resilient parents and able to protect their tamariki
- whānau will be more connected to their community and support networks
- whānau will gain confidence
- the tamariki will feel safe and well cared for.

Approach

Mana Whānau is different from most services and requires a very different approach. The key differences are:

- The number of hours that staff work with whānau. Staff work intensively with whānau in their homes—for up to 65 hours per week. The times and the number of hours worked are those that suit whānau. This can include early mornings, evenings and weekends.
- It is an authentically whānau-led process. The initial three-way agreement identifying the concerns and overarching goal is agreed by Oranga Tamariki, Mana Whānau and the whānau. Lifewise whānau write the safety statement that forms the basis of the agreement. The identification of stressors, goals, pathways, priorities, work and the pace of that work are determined by whānau.

- There is recognition that stressors need to be reduced or removed in order that whānau have the bandwidth to build on their skills and capabilities.
- The programme is flexible and tailored to the needs of each whānau.

The aim is to work with whānau whose core capabilities are challenged by toxic levels of stress and trauma, to:

- identify and reduce the stressors
- support strong and responsive relationships between tamariki and adults
- work alongside whānau in their home coaching, modelling, positively reinforcing and providing opportunities to develop and practise the parenting skills they need to care for and parent their tamariki effectively and safely. This includes supporting parents and others in the lives of tamariki to 'serve and return' i.e. interact, respond and encourage positive interactions with their tamariki.
- build natural whānau and community supports for long-term resilience.

Developmental approach

The programme has been underpinned by a rigorous developmental evaluation where aspects of the programme and practice are reflected upon at weekly meetings, and in regular Community of Practice meetings. The programme, including the principles, framework, key components and the way it has been implemented, has been developed and adapted in response to these regular evaluative findings and discussions.

How Mana Whānau works

Referral

Oranga Tamariki makes a referral based on consideration of the following criteria:

- Does the family want to work with Mana Whānau?
- Is it safe for the workers to be in the home (health and safety, aggression etc.)?
- Is it safe for the children to be left unattended in the home as the programme is a maximum of 65 hours per week so the children will be spending time in the home without staff present?
- Are there current drug or addiction issues and what are they (active, heavy methamphetamine users are not suitable)?
- Are there current family or sexual violence issues?
- Does the family accept that staff will be working with them in their home?

While referrals to the programme can only be made by Oranga Tamariki, acceptance is

based on choices made by whānau. The most important factors are that the whānau want to work with Mana Whānau, are open to kaimahi (staff) working with them in their home, and that the home is safe enough for tamariki to be parented when the Mana Whānau kaimahi are not present.

Mana Whānau has worked successfully with whānau with AOD and family violence issues, and those that Oranga Tamariki staff were concerned might not have the cognitive ability to learn new skills. Active and high methamphetamine users are not considered suitable for this programme.

Risk and safety statements

Once the referral is accepted, Mana Whānau uses the concerns from Oranga Tamariki and safety statements, from the *Signs of Safety* framework, as the basis of the agreement with Oranga Tamariki. The risk statement outlines the concerns that Oranga Tamariki, and possibly others, have in a clear and simple form. The safety statement articulates what needs to be happening for Oranga Tamariki to be confident in closing the case. This helps the whānau form the overarching goal or picture of the future. These statements enable the whānau to set the goals and vision for the future. They become the agreed 'goal posts', which previously many whānau felt shifted each time they completed an agreed action. As the safety statement is an outcome rather than a set of actions, the whānau can then own the goal and are empowered to lead what needs to happen to achieve this.

Lifewise whānau write their own safety statements and these are now used to form the basis of the three-way agreement between Lifewise Oranga Tamariki and the whānau.

Mana Whānau becomes the lead agency

Oranga Tamariki and Mana Whānau staff work closely and in partnership in the early stages. Once the safety and risk statements are agreed by all parties, including the whānau, Mana Whānau takes the lead and together with the whānau they focus on the safety statement. Typically, whānau have an average of seven agencies working with them at the time Mana Whānau becomes involved. Whānau can find working with multiple agencies stressful and overwhelming, so they are asked to identify the agencies they wish to continue with or would like to engage with. Mana Whānau asks all other agencies, including Oranga Tamariki, to step back while Mana Whānau works with the whānau.

Home based

The programme takes place in the home of whānau and in their community. As the kaimahi and whānau spend intensive amounts of time together in the home of the whānau, the relationship with the whānau needs to be respectful, warm and compassionate.

Kaimahi

Kaimahi are at the heart of the programme, build the relationship with whānau and undertake the day-to-day support. The kaimahi:

- work to build a trusting, supportive relationship with whānau
- listen carefully and non-judgmentally to the needs of the whānau
- work with the whānau to identify their toxic stressors
- work with whānau to reduce the cumulative weight of those stressors
- work together on parenting, homemaking and safety improvements identified in the safety goal/statement
- help the whānau to build their natural social and community supports, and importantly
- hold the hope that by keeping whānau together change is possible.

This approach is designed to free up bandwidth (the ability of families to think beyond immediate presenting issues and crises) and to build executive function (the ability to plan, prioritise and focus), as prolonged and severe stress can rob the brain of these functions. It is also designed to support parenting capabilities and build resilience.

As of August 31st 2020 there are three teams in Auckland, and one team in Porirua. Each team consists of one supervisor and three kaimahi. Three of the supervisors are Māori and one Pākehā. The kaimahi teams comprise six Māori, four Pākehā, one Pasifika and one Asian kaimahi. The kaimahi have diverse backgrounds, skills and experiences, which enables them to be matched with whānau culturally and on other qualities.

Supervision

Supervisors support the work of the kaimahi. As the role is a critical component of the programme, it needs to be adequately resourced. Supervisors:

- work with Oranga Tamariki to identify whānau and keep the referral process moving
- are available to support staff and provide staff with guidance and advice
- facilitate the weekly goals-setting meetings with the kaimahi and the whānau in the initial weeks of the programmes and then move to monthly meetings
- visit whānau to support staff and deal with challenging issues (it helps to reinforce the approach with whānau and staff)
- are available to work with organisations such as Housing New Zealand to resolve issues at a senior level.

Mana Whānau supervisors are also actively involved directly with each whānau to support the initial goal-setting and agreements, and regular progress reviews. The kaimahi work in teams of three. Each team of three is supported by a supervisor. The team carries a caseload

of around six whānau at any one time.

Whānau Tino Rangatiratanga

The programme is authentically whānau-led with the pathway to safety led by whānau. While the overarching goal is decided in the three-way agreement, because whānau work on the goals, issues and priorities they have identified and which matter to them, they are motivated to achieve them.

Whānau identify their stressors, and decide which ones they want to work on, their priorities, how and when they will work on these, who they want to work with, and the pace at which they will work. Kaimahi follow the lead of whānau. Choices are generated and explored throughout the programme.

Whānau are recognised as experts in their own lives and determine the pathways they wish to take. Kaimahi are partners who bring their experience, skills and knowledge to support the changes.

Post-programme support

At the end of the six-month programme whānau are offered further limited support from kaimahi who can check in over an agreed period by phone or visiting. They can also be connected with Family Start, or other lower intervention community-based services if they want longer-term service support.

Evaluation of outcomes

Outcomes: key messages

A total of 39 of 44 (89%) participating whānau have safely retained their tamariki or had them returned, with 130 tamariki now living safely together with their parents since joining the programme. For early graduates this has now been over two years.

For the whānau in the programme:

- Toxic stressors have reduced.
- Parenting capabilities have improved.
- Outcomes for tamariki (health, education, behaviour) have improved.
- Access to natural and community resources has strengthened.

Involvement of Oranga Tamariki

As of July 2020, 39 of the 44 whānau (89%) retained or had their tamariki returned.

A total of 44 whānau with 139 tamariki started the programme; 26 whānau in Auckland and 18 in Porirua, with 21 (48%) Māori, 16 (37%), NZ European, 12 (27%) Pasifika, 3 (7%) Asian and 3 from other ethnic backgrounds.

Thirty-nine of the 44 whānau (89%) retained or had their tamariki returned. In total, 130 tamariki (94%) are now living safely together with their parents, although it is noted that one tamariki is on the edge of care.

A total of five whānau had their tamariki removed, as:

- The parent was unable to maintain sobriety and had a drug addiction relapse.
- The parent continued with drug-related activities and was unable to make the changes needed to provide the care her tamariki needed.
- The parent was considered unsuitable for the programme as her tamariki was not considered to be safe when left unattended.
- The parent did not engage with the programme.

One mother voluntarily placed her children with grandparents following a Family Group Conference in which she admitted she was finding it difficult following a relationship breakdown.

An additional whānau did not have a child living in the care of a relative returned. The child was not under a custody order, but Oranga Tamariki said they would seek orders if the child was taken back by the parent. Despite repeated advocacy attempts by Mana Whānau to have the child returned, this did not happen. It appears the mother, who was despairing and felt, in her words, “utterly powerless, desperate and hopeless” would need further support if the child was returned to her.

Lastly, one parent sought help from her mother, and they were caregiving together. While not yet in place, it is noted a custody order is being sought for the youngest child following an addiction relapse and a notification regarding neglect.

It is early days to determine any mid- to long-term outcomes. It is noted that the first whānau, five years ago, have not had any subsequent notifications. Other than the above whānau, most have had their orders discharged, or are awaiting discharge, and there have been few or no reports of concern to Oranga Tamariki.

Of the whānau who have retained tamariki in their care, there have been considerably fewer notifications:

- Two have had a report of concern relating to intoxication.
- Three whānau (one included in the above whānau) have had reports of concern relating to their older children’s offending. These range from school lateness to entering a stolen vehicle and suspected arson.
- One whānau has had a report of concern relating to family violence. It is noted that it is at a lower level than past incidences.

Toxic stressors have reduced

Whānau report a reduction in both the number and weight of stressors.

Common stressors identified by whānau include:

- financial hardship from debt or living on benefits
- housing issues such as living in a motel unit; having too few beds and bedrooms; hoarding
- mental health issues including undiagnosed and untreated depression, anxiety and mental distress.

Some whānau were dealing with the undiagnosed behavioural issues of their tamariki, such as ADHD, or behaviours that saw them fully or partially excluded from daycare or school. For many whānau, involvement from Oranga Tamariki, and the power it has to remove their tamariki or keep them in care, was a primary stressor.

Many of these issues were successfully addressed, with whānau rehoused, debts consolidated, benefit entitlements claimed, hoarding issues addressed, counselling organised, and behavioural issues diagnosed and addressed. Having Oranga Tamariki step back reduced the stress load for some whānau.

“I just felt so overwhelmed. Being told how badly you are doing when you are already not coping made it even worse. It was too much. I didn’t even want to get out of bed. And then she (the kaimahi) came along and took some of the load. It might seem like a little thing, but it was everything.”

While not all the stressors were eliminated, all whānau interviewed reported a decrease in the cumulative weight of stress in their lives. Without exception all the interviewees acknowledged the reduction in the weight of stress had been a relief, improved the quality of their lives and improved their ability to focus, cope and parent. One parent, for example, described how she felt completely overwhelmed by the clutter in her home, found it hard managing her time, and had difficult relationships with her wider whānau. Learning new parenting skills and strategies at a time she felt so weighed down by stress just felt like one more stressor to deal with and more than she could bear. Halfway through the programme she had nearly completed decluttering the house. The process was slow and time-consuming, but she described feeling an enormous sense of accomplishment when it was done. During this period, with the support of kaimahi, she put in place better time management skills, and worked on her relationships with her extended family through counselling. It was only when these were sorted that she felt she had sufficient bandwidth to address her parenting.

Notably, both Oranga Tamariki social workers and some whānau have noted that the relationship between them has improved. At least three whānau have expressed their appreciation in Oranga Tamariki supporting them to undertake the programme. A further three whānau have said that now the threat of having their tamariki removed has been lessened, they are grateful for the ongoing assistance their whānau are being provided with under support orders.

Parenting capabilities have improved

Once the stressors have been reduced, parents are supported to build their parenting capability and executive functioning: the ability to plan and strategise. This includes encouraging responsive parenting, including serve and return where parents respond to their children’s signals and needs.

Some whānau need a little coaching support, others, particularly with a care background, need more intensive support including active skill-building.

“My own upbringing did not give me the skills to look after my children. I knew what

was missing and wanted the best for my children, but I did not know how to do this. I needed someone who could help, give me pointers and who wouldn't judge me. I just needed help."

Whānau, kaimahi and Oranga Tamariki staff interviewed agree that the programme has supported whānau to improve their capabilities. Reported changes include: whānau providing a safe and clean home environment for their tamariki; establishing mealtime and sleep routines; making sure their tamariki are up in the morning, dressed, and attending childcare or school regularly; and ensuring they are taken to their health and specialist appointments. In addition to caring for tamariki, there have been reported changes in the time whānau spend reading, storytelling and playing with their tamariki. Whānau believe the changes they have introduced to manage the behaviour of tamariki have resulted in a calmer household. Some whānau described having had very low confidence in their parenting. Several said that the programme had helped them to find their voice, become more assertive and more able to advocate on behalf of their tamariki.

Whānau undertaking the programme initially found the end of the programme challenging as the support stopped.

"Everything stopped and then I was like 'Oh gosh, now I've got to stand up and do this all myself'. But I did it. I stayed confident and I'm getting things done. Nothing has fallen behind and I'm never missing any important stuff. I'm still getting to all the kids' needs. I feel that way, but I think it's always going to be quite daunting when that person stops coming."

A combination of extending the programme for those who need extra time, and strengthening the links between whānau and supports has made the transition from the programme easier.

Whānau who have graduated from the programme say that the changes they have made have been sustained since the programme ended.

"Every time I struggled, she would say – 'You've got this Kayla, you've got this'. And now every time I struggle, I hear my kaimahi saying 'You've got this Kayla, you've got this'. And do you know what – I can do it – I have got this."

Outcomes for tamariki have improved

Although tamariki were not interviewed for this evaluation, interviews with whānau, kaimahi and Oranga Tamariki social workers indicate that the tamariki who have remained in the care of their whānau are safer and better cared for.

There have been improvements in outcomes for tamariki. The parents attribute this to being

less stressed themselves.

“I felt stressed all the time. I had no patience for the kids at all. I had neglected them, and I felt really guilty. I couldn’t cope with their behaviour. When I felt less stressed the stress levels in our whole household reduced. I now set up activities for the kids and play with them. The whole tone of home has got better.”

This appears to have had a positive effect on the relationships between parents and their tamariki.

“It’s brought a really good relationship with my children. It’s really taught me how to talk to them and how to manage them... Back then I used to yell a lot because they wouldn’t listen, but I’ve found I was just impatient. But yeah, they do take a long time to do stuff but they will do it at the end of the day.”

Reducing stressors appears to have had a positive impact on the behaviour of tamariki. Many of the parents have reported improvements in the emotional regulation and behaviour of their tamariki.

“Having a stable home environment, and living home. Not having your things broken and ruined, I have my own things now and I can keep them and I can have my order in place with Lorna, and I don’t have someone talking to me in a way that makes me feel sick in the head, because I’m too confused by it or I don’t understand it because the hurt and everything.”

Tamariki with unmet or undiagnosed health needs are now receiving treatment. There have also been increases in early childhood education and school attendance, along with a decrease in truancy rates amongst whānau.

Whānau describe having more confidence in speaking up for their tamariki. Several parents described how they found dealing with authorities, schools and medical professionals overwhelming and intimidating. They described how coaching and role modelling has helped them to advocate for their children and get them the help they need.

“(The kaimahi) has given me more confidence to seek more support, I don’t want to be a burden on anyone. It has given me more confidence – the courage to speak up, to be the voice for my children, ask for support and speak up for my children.”

Perhaps somewhat unexpectedly, the police involved with two whānau have reported a marked reduction in the criminal offending of the tamariki. One police officer said in the previous year he had spent around one-third of his time dealing with incidents relating to the whānau, but there had been no reported crimes during the programme. He now visited the whānau weekly to play chess with the children. A police officer involved with a second

whānau assumed they had shifted from the area due to the decrease in reported offending.

Access to natural supports and community resources has strengthened

The programme supports whānau to strengthen their natural and community supports. Most parents did not have strong whānau support, social networks or community supports. Some felt lonely and isolated.

Parents are supported to connect with their wider whānau, tūpuna, whenua, iwi and marae. One parent, for example, who was connected to immediate whānau, described how much she was looking forward to meeting her wider whānau and visiting a unique, culturally and spiritually significant conservation area over which her iwi have kaitiakitanga. She was particularly looking forward to understanding more about the mātauranga Māori approach to conservation.

Kaimahi arranged transport for the parents of another whānau to introduce their baby to her grandmother. This was a significant reconnection as the parents' other babies had been removed and they had not had contact with their whānau for a number of years. The parents now felt they were in a place where they could proudly introduce their mokopuna and start to rebuild and strengthen their relationships. Similarly, two whānau were able to reconnect with whānau following relationships fractured by substance abuse. Another whānau let her mother know she needed her support, and her mother moved cities to live with her and support her and her mokopuna.

Many whānau were not accessing educational, medical or community resources. Kaimahi have supported whānau to connect with sports groups, community groups, churches and access free holiday programmes, events and medical clinics. Some whānau, for example, were not enrolled with a GP despite having severe, undiagnosed or untreated medical needs.

Linking in with community groups and building friendships was particularly important to whānau who felt isolated, had fractured relationships with their extended whānau, and few friends.

“My dream is that my kids have got a social life; they’ve friends coming over to stay the night; they’re involved with the school kids; you go over to the kids’ mum’s house to have coffee, that socialising that I’ve never ever had, and that’s one thing I think that’s affecting my mumminess ‘cos I can’t grow or make my kids grow without meeting new people.”

An Oranga Tamariki social worker pointed out the difference she had seen with families using community resources. While whānau have not necessarily built friendships over the

duration of the programme, some are starting to develop or strengthen their community networks.

“The children are joining sports groups, holiday programmes and they are now visiting the doctor. The programme has done well at transitioning them into their own community. The community can provide multi-layered support.” Social Worker

Evaluation of process

What is working well

What is working well: key messages

- The programme is strongly informed by evidence.
- There are positive relationships between kaimahi and whānau.
- Whānau are supported culturally, practically, spiritually and emotionally.
- Mana Whānau is a lead agency.
- There are clear safety goals.
- The practice is whānau-led and tamariki-centred.
- Whānau are fully engaged in the service.
- The programme is home-based.
- The support is available when and where needed 24/7.
- The kaimahi work with the wider whānau.
- Whānau are encouraged to strengthen natural supports.
- Mana Whānau provides ‘helpful help’.
- The approach uses modelling and coaching.
- Kaimahi have faith in the ability of whānau to parent.
- The programme receives robust organisational support.
- The programme is supported by Oranga Tamariki.

Evidence informed

There is a strong evidence base underpinning the theory of change and the Mana Whānau programme, informed by both neuroscience and the developmental evaluation.

The structure of the programme focuses on removing stressors before expecting whānau to have the bandwidth to focus on building their parenting skills.

“My kids’ behaviours were on top for me. I had eliminated my past addictions and stuff and I was clean. I was on top of that – going to appointments. I had my mind in

the right place. It was just the way I was parenting. I was quite an absent mother before. Not physically absent, I wasn't doing the emotional coaching – the stuff (my kaimahi) has taught me, the emotional regulation, the positive coaching, ignoring the things that don't matter. The little steps are huge."

The kaimahi too, have noticed the difference in whānau wellbeing once the stressors reduce.

"When their mind isn't so cluttered with things like not having enough food in the house or the kids being sick all the time, you know what I mean, you can do the rest."
- Kaimahi

In interviews, programme participants identified the reduction in stressors as a key success factor in their journey. Some acknowledge that while experiencing such high and prolonged levels of stress they found it difficult to focus on parenting and found it challenging to learn new skills.

"I felt so stressed and overwhelmed. My life felt out of control. I had no space to think. It all kept piling up. Sorting some of the stuff out calmed everything right down. I felt like I could take a step back from it all and start thinking again."

Moreover, several whānau noted that the reduction in stress has had an impact on the 'tone' of the house. It has helped to calm the household down and has enabled the parents to focus on the needs of their tamariki and have fun.

"It has made the house calmer. There are more fun times in the home with kids playing with each other."

Relationship between kaimahi and whānau

The relationship between kaimahi and whānau is a key success factor and underpins the programme's outcomes. To work well, whānau say kaimahi need to be compassionate, kind, empathetic, respectful and, most importantly, non-judgmental. The kaimahi and whānau need to be well-matched.

Although matched on demographics where possible, life experiences and temperament are important considerations.

"I found her really helpful because she's had similar life experiences. You know with someone who hasn't, it causes a whole different outlook on support, but she just understands. I can't stress that enough because someone will not understand where you're coming from or what you're going through unless they've done it themselves."

Each team of three kaimahi comprise different ethnicities, strengths and skills.

Where whānau are not well matched to their kaimahi, the families are offered an alternative. Three of the whānau asked for a change in kaimahi early on in the programme which they attributed to personality differences. These have been accommodated and the whānau have worked well with their new kaimahi.

Engaging whānau

Having a dedicated kaimahi spend time with the whānau helps build trust. Once trust is established whānau feel more comfortable sharing the complexity of their lives and being more open about their circumstances, which they often consider quite painful to discuss.

Some whānau are relieved to hear that Mana Whānau is available to support them. Others undertake the programme as they are desperate to do whatever it takes to keep their tamariki.

Whānau spoke of their initial concerns that the kaimahi were there to watch them and that any 'slip-up' could result in the removal of their tamariki. Some were also fearful that the complexity of their lives, which may have been hidden from agencies including Oranga Tamariki, would be discovered. The kaimahi say that they need to establish very clear boundaries and expectations on the types of actions which will result in a notification to Oranga Tamariki, to allay the day-to-day fears of whānau that kaimahi are there to watch them.

"We got involved with Mana Whānau at the Family Group Conference. At the time we were that desperate we were willing to give anything a go ... we were so desperate to have our kids and get OT off our case we were prepared to give you a go. For a long time I didn't trust you either."

The first weeks of the programme are spent engaging with whānau and establishing a relationship through actively listening, responding and providing practical support. While it takes time to build the deep, quality relationships whānau describe they have developed, it is not just about taking time. One of the key aspects of engaging with whānau who have had poor service experiences is providing practical support and establishing early wins and successes.

"If the cupboards are empty and they need food for school lunches, we don't go to a foodbank, we make sure we pick up stuff for sandwiches. Down the track we can look at their budget, how to make sure they have stuff for school lunches the day before they need it. But if they need it, they need it and we try and make it happen there and then." - Kaimahi

Whānau value this 'do what it takes' approach, and that kaimahi are willing to help out with

whatever is needed at the time, whether it is folding washing, doing dishes or running them to the shops.

“Straight away she stepped in and helped. She saw we didn’t have any food and how worried I was, so she brought me a food parcel. I was so relieved. We talked while she helped with the dishes; she helped me hang out the washing; she played with the kids. It felt that like someone else was taking the load. It was like my stress levels halved.”

Whānau are supported culturally, spiritually and emotionally

In addition to providing practical support, the programme aims to support whānau culturally, spiritually and emotionally.

*“I just love their support. I think I wouldn’t be in this position without you. I’d probably be in a real ugly position where my kids are taken and now I’m doing everything that I should have, but thank f*** you are involved and I’ve got the right support. Thank you. I wish it happened sooner.”*

The kaimahi provide strong cultural support for whānau, based on, in their words, “manaakitanga, aroha and awahi”. One kaimahi talks about having an awareness and willingness to use what comes naturally to her as tangata whenua. Kaimahi say they look for opportunities to connect whānau with their whakapapa and ask how they can help them journey to enhance their cultural connections.

“Some things are innate, our Māori heart, there is a natural flow, you know when it is right as it feels right. Language is important. For example: ‘how are OUR kids today?’ – the whānau see you are in it with them.” - Kaimahi

Lead agency

Most agencies working with the whānau, including Oranga Tamariki, are asked to step back, unless whānau identify them as providing the support they need.

On average, whānau had seven agencies involved in their lives. While many whānau would be considered by agencies as hard to reach, in fact most were being reached by multiple agencies and professionals.

For some, dealing with different agencies and staff turnover was identified as an additional source of stress in their lives. Many whānau were juggling multiple appointments, consistently having to demonstrate that their needs fit the assorted criteria for service provision, having difficulty meeting the criteria of the organisations they were interacting with, and trying to manage conflicting requirements. For example, one mother was required by the court to keep her phone on and adhere to a strict curfew. She was also required to

attend an anger management course and counselling, which were scheduled outside the curfewed hours and which required her to turn her phone off. When the police visited and she was not there she was cited for breaching her bail conditions. The kaimahi had to intervene and provide evidence that she was complying with another aspect of her bail conditions to persuade the police not to seek a warrant for her arrest. Another mother, who appeared to have around 15 services working with her whānau, said she was unsure exactly who some of the professionals were, why they were there and what they were meant to be doing.

Poor service experiences had left some interviewees feeling disempowered and distrustful of services and professionals.

Whānau were asked to identify which services they wanted to continue with and which they would like to step back. Most agencies, including Oranga Tamariki, were asked to step back as a result.

Many of those interviewed said that having a lead agency listen to their needs and respond with a 'do what it takes' attitude was more valuable than having a multitude of agencies providing, largely, limited or 'unhelpful help'.

"I've done every programme but no, they are not really helpful. Mana Whānau helps. They're in your home and actually physically helping you."

Clear safety goals

Whānau say having Oranga Tamariki clearly document their concerns and develop safety goals is helpful, as previously they had not always been clear about Oranga Tamariki's concerns or what they needed to do to address them.

Many whānau felt that in the past they had followed the directions of Oranga Tamariki, and undertaken everything required of them, but had still not had their tamariki returned as the goal-posts kept shifting. This was particularly frustrating to those who felt that Oranga Tamariki were basing their decisions on inaccurate or historical information, and that changes asked of them that they had made, such as leaving an abusive relationship, were not taken into consideration.

"OT looks at the past – they never let it go. All I wanted was the dream – my baby daddy taking them to the sports, always involved, but that was a dream. I chose my kids over the baby daddy. He was abusive. That was used against me even though I chose my kids and my heart hurt."

Those interviewed felt that the safety statements, whether written by themselves or Oranga Tamariki, were clear, and they not only knew what they had to work towards, but it would keep Oranga Tamariki accountable to the agreement. Notably, most whānau have met the

safety goals and the care and protection orders have been discharged, or are awaiting discharge.⁹

Whānau-led and tamariki centred practice

Being authentically whānau-led is critical to the success of the programme but challenging to implement.

Early interviewees did not always feel heard and said they found kaimahi giving unsolicited expert advice disempowering and unhelpful.

In response to early feedback the practice has developed. All interviewees in the past year have reported that they felt they were in the driver's seat; they were supported to identify what they wanted to work on and prioritise, and they set the pace. They say staff supported them to work towards the agreed end-goals.

The kaimahi interviewed say they now seek permission before giving suggestions, ideas and options, they are respectful and non-judgmental and are very careful in the language they use. When they make suggestions, they make it clear that the whānau do not have to follow them.

“Telling people what to do doesn't work. It doesn't work for me and it doesn't work for them either. Giving options and choices, or naming the issues and saying how are we going to solve this, works so much better.” - Kaimahi

While working well for whānau, staff acknowledge it can be challenging to work in this way. Many of the kaimahi are from a services background and more used to giving advice and making referrals. They found it challenging when whānau made decisions that they disagreed with or would not have made themselves. The whānau-led approach requires constant support through supervision and reflective practice.

Importantly, however, the wellbeing of tamariki remains at the heart of the mahi. The work centres on the safety and care of the tamariki, and meeting the agreed safety goals. Although Oranga Tamariki have clearly documented their concerns and developed safety goals, kaimahi are clear these must be met for whānau to retain their tamariki or have them returned.

There is an important tension between being whānau-led and challenging behaviour that is not tamariki-centred. There are times when courageous conversations are required, as the tamariki are at risk of being uplifted if the whānau do not meet the goals they have agreed to, or if their tamariki are unsafe. For example, where school attendance is a goal for the

⁹ There have been court delays with Covid-19 which have delayed the hearings for some whānau .

tamariki and the parent hasn't got out of bed, the kaimahi will remind them their tamariki need to go to school, and encourage them to get up, get their tamariki up, dressed, breakfasted, and out the door by 8.30am. In several whānau the parent had to be woken every day, then every couple of days, before they reliably got up to attend to their tamariki. In the meantime, the kaimahi would get the tamariki up, make their breakfasts and lunches and take them to school, with the parent gradually taking over more and more of the tasks until the parent reliably and regularly implemented the routines which had been established.

The safety of tamariki remains at the heart of the programme. With immediate safety risks, such as a methamphetamine addiction relapse where the goal is sobriety, or if kaimahi witness the rough handling of tamariki, the aim remains to have courageous conversations with whānau, keep Oranga Tamariki informed of concerns, and put supports in place that prevent the behaviours occurring. In cases where whānau have not been able to care for their tamariki, Oranga Tamariki have been notified. Reports to Oranga Tamariki are written in conjunction with or shared with the whānau.

Home-based

Whānau found the home-based support practical, hands-on and timely.

Providing support in the home allows stressors and issues to be identified and addressed, sources of support strengthened, and for kamahi to thoroughly understand any parenting and safety issues. This enables the kamahi to help whānau reduce the risk of harm to tamariki.

“There is a big difference between sitting in a room being told things and shown things and seeing it on a video, with other parents there and getting their feedback, than when it is in play and happening at home in your living room.”

All whānau interviewed said they found the home-based support valuable, largely because it involved hands-on practical support at the time it was needed. The hands-on help was described as ‘helpful help’. If laundry needed folding the kaimahi rolled up their sleeves and helped out.

“I’ve done every programme but no, they are not really helpful. Mana Whānau helps. They’re in your home and actually physically helping you.”

Some whānau found it difficult at the start to have someone in their home. Initially, the hours spent in the home were high. In response to whānau finding the number of hours kaimahi spent in the home onerous, the hours are now negotiated with whānau to ensure the intensity and timing works for them.

“(I thought) OMG they are going to be coming in every day. I am an only child. When I am around a lot of people I need to go home to re-energise. I wasn’t sure how it would work. The first week I really felt it. I couldn’t do all the days in a row, I voiced how I felt ‘I don’t think I can do this’. They were open to hearing it and came less often. It is now working really well.”

Kaimahi are aware and respect that they are always manuhiri in the home of whānau. It is the values of the whānau, their ways of doing things, and their culture that guide the work.

Several whānau had been offered residential care options as an alternative. They pointed out that while they may have learned new skills, they would be returning to their home environment, friendship groups and communities, and they did not have confidence that they would be able to bring what they had learned into their home environment.

“I need to be able to live in the community where the temptation is. I need to be able to manage this, and the boundaries around it.”

“It made sense to me to learn parenting in the environment in which I would be parenting.”

Intensity of the support

Whānau get the support they need at the time they need it.

It was anticipated the kaimahi would provide up to 65 hours per week support in the first few weeks, which would reduce over time. In response to some whānau finding the intensity onerous, the hours are now negotiated. Any reduction in hours must be balanced against the need to provide sufficient hours to ensure tamariki are safe, cared for and whānau make progress towards their goals.

In the early weeks of the programme the focus tends to be on building a trusting relationship, and identifying and addressing stressors. The hours tend to be fewer than 65 hours a week during this phase while kaimahi and whānau build the relationship. The hours tend to increase while stressors are identified, and work is undertaken to address these. Then the hours typically reduce over time as kaimahi and whānau work on parenting skills and building natural supports. It is noted, however, that there is considerable variation between whānau. The whānau on the programme often have complex lives with very little capacity to absorb or bounce back from unexpected events.

Both kaimahi and whānau agree it is not the intensity of the support, but the flexibility to intensely support whānau when they need it, at the times they need it which makes the difference. Having 65 hours available, day or night, weekdays, or weekends, is critical to this. Mostly, whānau are supported early mornings, when getting tamariki up and ready for daycare or school, and after school until bedtime. For some whānau the support they need

is during weekdays, others need it during weekends.

Working with the whole whānau

Where possible the kaimahi work with the wider whānau.

A parent early in the development of the programme pointed out that working with her and her youngest child who was on the edge of being uplifted into care, without working with intensively with her partner, older child and mother-in-law, with whom she had regular contact, limited the efficacy of the programme. The programme was starting to create conflict between the parents as the parenting styles were increasingly diverging. It highlighted the importance of working intensively with the whole whānau.

While the main focus might be on the parents and children, working with the whole whānau helps to build the capacity and understanding of the parents' natural supports.

“She doesn’t judge. She gives us the same respect we would give her. It is not one way. And she has dealt with the whole family. A lot of services ignore the dad. They don’t include the dad, especially when you are not living together. It has been the whole family. Respect.”

Many of the families receive intergenerational support from their parents and in-laws, who say they too have benefited from the programme. The graduation celebrations are often attended by extended family, who are there to support and celebrate the changes whānau have made.

Helpful help

The help provided by Mana Whānau has been described as ‘helpful’ help, and ‘help that has made a difference’.

“It is the first time I have received helpful help. The staff are on my side. I want to keep my kids and they want to support me to keep my kids. They believe in me, they listen to me, and they support me. I didn’t need judgmental help, I needed helpful help.”

Several of the interviewees described how they had reached out for help in the past. For some the attempts had been met with a punitive response.

“Every time I asked for help it backfired. This is the first group that hasn’t backfired. The school said they would provide lunches if I don’t have any. I was taking advantage of that every day as I wanted more food for my kids at home. But that backfired. The school notified OT that I wasn’t giving my kids lunches. Same with daycare. They offered to provide free lunches. I thought yay and took advantage of it

as it meant more at home. It became a notification of concern to OT – Pardon??? I just wanted more food for my kids at home. There is a big difference between getting by each month and having enough – having more at home.”

Other interviewees described how in the past instead of being offered the help they needed to keep their tamariki, they were threatened with having their tamariki removed.

“At the first OT meeting I said I needed help. What was I supposed to do? But I was told that it was Mana Whānau or residential care, or my children would be taken off me. I just needed help, not threats of having my children taken.”

Whānau say one of the aspects of the programme which they value the most is that the kaimahi make things happen. They don't just provide information, advice or referrals, they provide practical and emotional support.

“She helped me pack up the house and move. She would help me hang out washing, help with the kids. All of it really helped. It was help that helped me.”

Modelling and coaching

Building the capabilities of adult whānau is a key component of the programme as responsive relationships are essential to the wellbeing of tamariki, including their future wellbeing.

Without exception, whānau interviewed for this evaluation wanted to be good parents and wanted the best for their tamariki. Whānau say they find the modelling, coaching and support, including the 'show not tell' approach, helpful.

“She's just so strong and she is such a role model for me... so understanding and kind and she's just helped me so much.”

Kaimahi are able to show rather than tell whānau what to do. This includes encouraging culturally responsive ways of supporting serve and return interactions between adult whānau and their tamariki.

“I've done parenting courses before where they teach you things but this is different because you've actually got someone with you walking alongside you, and showing you real time. You know it's different to teaching someone something and then you have to go home and use those skills. It can be hard. But I had someone next to me, encouraging me and teaching me along the way which was good.”

Staff are able to provide timely and practical support as situations unfold.

“The last time I had to just work to a programme where I had to do the work and they’d say right we’ll learn this today, we’ll do this today, we’re doing that. Like being told what’s happening and stuff whereas with them they would say ‘we’re here if you need us, call us, we can come and visit you, and if you need anything just ring us it doesn’t matter what time of the day it is’.”

Some parents describe kaimahi as whānau, or like having a helpful mum or Aunty, who provides suggestions and parenting tips.

“They know me and they see my parenting and they suggest things. It is not negative input. It is what your mum would tell you. ‘Remember he is only little, he might not understand that – maybe you could try something like this’.”

The coaching and role modelling is critical in supporting whānau to meet their goals. One parent, who felt very close to her children, said that she learned to play with them. While providing meals, keeping an immaculate house, and deeply loving her children, she felt her substance abuse issues had made her an absent parent. Her kaimahi first role-modelled playing with and reading to her children, and then coached her on ways they could have fun together.

“I was always strongly emotionally attached, it was being present and taking time out to do what I would normally find boring.”

These changes appear to be sustained beyond the programme.

“Even when (the kaimahi) is not there I am doing what she would do if she was there. Reading with them, sitting on the floor, mat time, playing with blocks. Things I didn’t do before.”

Hold the hope

Whānau say one of the most critical components of the programme is that kaimahi have faith in their ability to parent and hold the hope, even when at times they or Oranga Tamariki do not.

“OT said they didn’t think I had the capacity to carry on parenting my children – (my kaimahi) who had been watching me said I do have the capability. I always knew that I did but coming from someone who had seen me was really helpful. It helped me to believe in myself.”

Some whānau described how their parenting confidence had been ‘shattered’ and they had very low self-esteem or self-belief. One described how she felt her ‘spirit had been broken’ and she felt a ‘deep sense of shame and failure’. Others talked about feeling defeated.

“I was a mess, my defensive mechanism was up. Knowing my kids were at risk, I was

shattered.”

Several said it was the first time someone, including themselves, really seemed to believe they could make the changes, and they began to believe they could make the changes required of them too.

“The staff believed in me. They believed I could do this. It made all the difference. Even when I felt I couldn’t do this and felt overwhelmed, or like ‘piss off I don’t like you’, they were positive and encouraging and told me ‘you have got this’.”

“The best thing about the programme is that it gave us a new outlook. It gave us hope. There is still hope. It came into the picture to say there is hope. It was fresh eyes on our family, and it gave us fresh eyes.”

Robust organisational support

The programme receives robust organisational support. It is supported by strong leadership within organisations more broadly committed to providing innovative, whānau-led services.

There is a commitment to a learning culture. Senior managers are hands-on and strongly support and advocate for the programme, practice model and way of working. They meet with practitioners weekly in Auckland and fortnightly in Porirua and provide input and insights into the programme. They support a Community of Practice between senior staff across both organisations, and, more recently, a Community of Practice between kaimahi. This provides a forum in which staff can share their knowledge and experiences, raise questions, find solutions to problems and grow good practice.

Oranga Tamariki support

The relationship between Mana Whānau and the Oranga Tamariki offices is positive and on the whole the organisations are working well together to keep whānau together.

In the early stages of the programme, it was challenging to get referrals to the programme. In Auckland there is now a wait list and a social worker has said they would “refer many, many more families to Mana Whānau, tomorrow, if they could” but they were constrained by current capacity.

An Oranga Tamariki social worker said they tend to take a cautious approach when making referrals to community organisations as they are dealing with serious concerns and want to ensure tamariki are safe and the programmes will make a difference to whānau. The social workers interviewed believe the support provided to whānau has been a ‘game changer’

and instrumental in parents retaining their tamariki. The social workers have said they would like to see the programme extended to parents who need support before their tamariki are on the edge of care. One Oranga Tamariki social worker noted that staff from other offices had seen the outcomes for whānau and would like to see the programme extended beyond West and Central Auckland and Porirua into their areas. Lifewise has fielded enquiries from Oranga Tamariki offices and agencies from other areas.

Challenges

Challenges: key messages

- Criteria must be implemented; the programme does not work as well for whānau who don't meet the criteria.
- Whānau are meant to choose whether they undertake the programme but some feel they have no choice if they want to keep their tamariki or have them returned.
- The efficacy of the programme can be derailed by systems-level barriers which can be unresponsive and difficult to shift.
- Whānau can feel unheard.
- Most whānau find the end of the programme challenging.
- It is a challenge to find suitable staff for the programme.

Implementing the criteria

Both Lifewise and Wesley originally started with broad criteria for acceptance onto the programme. As the programme developed it became increasingly apparent that Mana Whānau does not work well for all whānau.

The background, goals and circumstances of whānau need to be considered before they are accepted onto the programme. For example, it tends not to work as well for whānau who do not believe there are any issues to address and who do not believe they need to make parenting changes. For these whānau the programme appears to be an additional stressor and they can be difficult to engage with. Similarly, it can be difficult and risky to work with active methamphetamine users.

As it is not initially always apparent if whānau meet the criteria, systems need to be in place to support it. This includes receiving accurate information and reports from Oranga

Tamariki.

Whānau choice

Whānau are meant to engage with Mana Whānau by choice. It can be challenging to ascertain whether the programme is a genuine choice for whānau or whether they are agreeing to it to get Oranga Tamariki 'off their backs'.

Mana Whānau staff try to ensure that the choice is authentic, by providing other options. However, at least three whānau interviewed felt they did not have a choice if they wanted to keep or have their tamariki returned. While kaimahi were able to work alongside this reluctance, it is challenging to do so. While all three whānau would have had their tamariki removed without intervention, and acknowledge that as a result of participating in the programme they were able to keep their tamariki or have them returned, they were unhappy they had to participate. Two attributed some positive changes in their life to the programme, with one believing the change in her life was in the end, transformational.

"It is not easy at all, but it has changed my life."

Systems are creating barriers to change

Kaimahi say that changes which could make transformational differences to whānau are hampered by systems which can be unresponsive and difficult to shift.

Unresponsive systems are derailing outcomes for whānau. For example, one whānau living in a motel could not have her tamariki returned until she was allocated a Housing New Zealand home, but she was not prioritised for a Housing New Zealand home as she did not have tamariki with her. Similarly, whānau who have tamariki transitioning home, do not have the finances and resources to take their tamariki for weekend visits as they do not receive additional benefit entitlements to cover the costs of their children when they stay. The experiences of their tamariki returning home are compromised by empty cupboards, no petrol in the car and a lack of money and resources. The visits become an additional stressor.

Some whānau, at least, who are considered 'difficult' or as not taking responsibility for their actions and blaming others, appear to be responding in deep frustration to unresponsive systems. They need practical support, not advice. The narrow supports available are not the supports they require.

Kaimahi frequently advocate for whānau, with Work and Income, Kāinga Ora and other social agencies, but in particular with Oranga Tamariki. Whānau constantly report feeling unheard and disempowered by the services that are meant to be there to help them.

"At the FGC OT didn't listen to me. They wouldn't listen so I just stopped talking."

As kaimahi report having little traction or a limited ability to influence systems-level barriers, they require support at manager-to-manager level and deep organisational support. Even then, many of the challenges have not been able to be resolved. For example, one large whānau with parents who had been fostered themselves wanted ongoing support at the end of the programme to help address ongoing issues with hoarding and cleaning. Despite a long history with Oranga Tamariki, over 50 notifications, and the level of hoarding and cleanliness in the home being a concern to both Oranga Tamariki and Housing New Zealand, a recommendation from Mana Whānau to fund a regular cleaner to support the whānau was not adopted. This small investment could have made a significant difference to the stress levels and outcomes of the whānau.

Experts deciding what is right for whānau

A recurring theme both whānau and kaimahi mentioned was the lack of control whānau had over their lives. Whānau talked of their frustrations at not being listened to or heard, and the profound, life-challenging impacts of that.

One whānau, for example, said despite being asked for her opinion at a Family Group Conference she stopped talking, as she was not being listened to. She spoke of her frustration at being told she was putting her children at risk on the basis of having been in a violent relationship she was no longer in, and because of past circumstances which she had addressed.

“Even though I felt like I had done the right thing, it was still being dragged up. They wouldn’t listen. I did the right thing but I couldn’t leave it behind. I just stopped talking as they weren’t listening anyway.”

Similarly, at a professionals meeting where a case was being discussed without the mother present, the plan decided upon included her son taking up martial arts to help him reconnect with his culture. The mother felt she and her whānau were as involved in their culture as they wanted to be and did not want her son attending the martial arts as she found it violent. Moreover, her son had no interest in taking it up.

Time and time again, the interviewees said they only got what they needed when kaimahi spoke for them. While whānau are supported to advocate for themselves and their tamariki, this only works if they are listened to and heard.

End of the programme

Despite the reduction in hours over the course of the programme, most whānau found the end of the programme challenging after receiving such highly relational and intense support.

Although whānau are offered phone calls and visits from their kaimahi, along with support from other organisations such as Family Start, many of those interviewed missed their kaimahi. It is particularly hard for whānau who have already experienced considerable trauma and loss in their lives, for those who have fractured relationships with their wider whānau, or have left friendship groups to support their pathway to sobriety, and for tamariki. While the programme encourages efforts to start building natural supports in their wider whānau and community, these take time to develop and are often fragile.

There is a tension between the professionalisation of the work, which requires the programme to end after six months, and the warm whānau-like relationship that the kaimahi foster. Due to the programme intensity, the closest, deepest and most positive relationships they and their tamariki have is often with their kaimahi.

Staffing the programme

It has been challenging to find suitable staff for the programme.

It has become clear in the recruitment process that few candidates have the ability to work the flexible hours required, along with the mix of skills and experiences, both theoretical and contextual. Training, ongoing group reflective practice and supervision are required to grow the skill-base and reinforce the paradigm and way of working.

Interestingly, the kaimahi employed to date have very different backgrounds, qualities and skills from each other. They do, however, share a value base, of being respectful, compassionate, kind and empathetic. They also have a willingness to listen, roll up their sleeves to help, and balance whānau-led practice with the need to have courageous conversations to ensure tamariki are safe.

The shift from a service delivery model to the Mana Whānau approach requires constantly checking in and re-orienting. Staff at all levels, including supervisors, need training to understand the theory of change and how the approach can be implemented.

Without close, supportive supervision and reflective practice, it is possible for staff to slip into taking over, giving advice or working on their own priorities rather than the priorities of the whānau, to be caught up in the immediate and presenting issues (and chaos), or become counsellors or fire-fight immediate issues. Keeping the focus on the goals by checking progress with the whānau each week, and then staff discussing progress with their supervisor, appears to help reinforce the change in approach.

Not all staff employed have been able to work in this way, however, and as the mix of values, qualities, experiences and skills required to undertake this work has become better understood, it has become easier to identify and recruit staff who share this way of working.

Next steps

Next steps: key messages

- A kaupapa Māori practice framework is close to finalisation.
- Reduce isolation through peer-to-peer groups.
- Strengthen the voice of tamariki.
- The timeframe needs to be flexible.
- Work alongside whānau to review the approach to whānau experiencing family violence.
- Scale the programme beyond Auckland and Porirua.

Practice framework

A kaupapa Māori practice framework for Mana Whānau has been drafted from a Te Ao Māori perspective

Discussions are underway to finalise this. When completed, it will be woven into and embedded in the practice framework.

Growing natural supports

Loneliness and isolation are common stressors. Natural supports take time to develop.

Kaimahi are working together with whānau earlier in the programme to identify, map and work on strengthening natural supports; however, they take time to build.

“I don’t have my family; I’m not involved with my family at all. I do have a big family, but I don’t know where they are.”

There is evidence that peer-to-peer support groups can be a protective factor amongst whānau facing toxic levels of stress. Lifewise is starting peer support groups so whānau can connect and engage with others with similar experiences.

Strengthen the voice of tamariki

The voice of tamariki needs strengthening in whānau and evaluations.

Kaimahi are currently discussing ways of working more intentionally to ensure that whānau

are responsive to the voice of their tamariki. At the Community of Practice, they have been sharing ways of working with tamariki to ensure their voice is both heard and listened to. It is recommended too, that future evaluations capture the voice of children and young people.

The timeframe needs to be flexible

The timeframe of the programme requires flexibility to accommodate the needs of some whānau.

Some whānau have needed longer-term support than the programme currently offers, not only to further reduce stressors, but so whānau can work towards their goals, strengthen their support system and grow their parenting confidence. Whānau themselves have noted that trauma has multiple points, impacts and triggers, and resilience developed over the time of the programme can be fragile.

It may also be necessary to consider providing 'top up' support to some whānau at times needed. Those with care experiences themselves or a background of trauma have noted that six months is not long, and that they are concerned about being able to sustain the changes when faced with new stressors or crises. This is particularly the case for whānau with fragile social supports.

At least two of the whānau who have had tamariki removed while on the programme were facing sudden and major stressors at the time of the uplift. One whānau, for example, experienced a job loss and a long-term relationship breakdown. Despite doing well, the ability of whānau with a background of trauma to withstand further traumatic experiences can be fragile.

"I had 21 years of abuse. It is not going to change. To go from intensity to nothing at all is really hard."

Offering intensive support to the whānau when needed post programme could potentially change the outcomes for parents and tamariki. The programme is continuing to work on ways to strengthen supports to enable this.

Family violence

Many of the women on the programme are in controlling or violent relationships and the whānau often have a history of family violence. Staff, including kaimahi, have identified this as an issue that requires a more effective approach.

Lifewise Family Services is planning to undertake design work and prototype a family violence approach that can be used in-home to address this issue more effectively. A staff member will then be available to work alongside those from Mana Whānau kaimahi to

respond more effectively to issues of power, control and other forms of family violence commonly experienced by Mana Whānau families.

Scale the programme

It is recommended that the programme is scaled.

The programme has been extended from Auckland to Porirua and from one team to four. The evaluation has shown that it provides a safe and viable alternative to uplifting tamariki. For it to be scaled successfully, there needs to be fidelity to the principles and care taken to understand the nuances of what has made the programme successful.

Evaluation against the principles and theory of change

Evaluation against the principles and theory of change: Key messages

- The programme follows the principles and theory of change.
- Regular supervision and reflective practice are critical to ensuring that kaimahi, are not caught up in day-to-day crises, but continue to progress work on reducing stressors and working towards the overarching goal. The more closely the programme is to the theory of change, the more successful the outcomes.

Evaluation summary against the principles and theory of change

The programme's principles and theory of change is now robust and is leading to the anticipated outcomes, namely tamariki are living safely together with their whānau.

While the early results of the programme, both in Auckland and Porirua were mixed, the principles and theory of change has undergone two years of iteration in response to a strong culture of reflective practice, and the outcomes have improved.

The principles underpin the practice, and regular supervision ensures they are closely adhered to. The work is designed to maximise whānau choice, be whānau-led with tamariki at the heart, to do what it takes to reduce stress and build skills and resilience. Because the principles provide direction rather than a prescribed way of working, and can be interpreted with different understandings, regular supervision is used to reflect on decisions and planning. This helps to keep the principles and way of working at the fore.

MANA WHĀNAU - INTENSIVE IN-HOME PARENTING SUPPORT

The challenge

Problem: Tamariki are removed from their whānau because their parents are coping with multiple toxic stressors, lack of parenting capability, and are unable to meet the needs of their tamariki.

Opportunity: Prevent tamariki from entering or remaining in foster care by providing intensive in-home support – reducing immediate risk, address/remove stressors, build parent capability and capacity.

Beliefs and principles

1. Tamariki have the right and the need to live in a safe nurturing whānau
2. Te Tiriti O Waitangi is the foundation and resource for shaping all our work.
3. The best place for Tamariki is with their natural whānau
4. With the right support and resources parents have the ability to care for their tamariki
5. Being removed from whānau has a detrimental effect on the development of tamariki
6. Sibling groups need to be kept together
7. Change is possible
8. Whānau are the drivers of their own change
9. Tamariki need responsive parenting to thrive.
10. Whānau need connections in their community to support them in their parenting role
11. Toxic stressors must be reduced or removed for parents for parents to be able to build capability
12. It is important to acknowledge and work with the wider whānau system.

The Theory of Change Story



IF WE....

Support whānau with intensive cultural, practical, spiritual, emotional, whānau-led and tamariki-centered practice

Support whānau to reduce or remove toxic stressors e.g. financial hardship, family violence, mental distress, housing issues

Support and build on parents' and whānau protective factors

Support parents to build their executive functioning and parenting capability

BY....

Introducing a dedicated worker to whānau for up to 65 hours per week (initially) in their home (respecting the impact of history and the role of their concepts of wellbeing)

Consulting with whānau and providing practical empathetic responses to address immediate stressors as identified by them

Identifying, connecting and strengthening resources within whānau and their community and valuing the role and contribution of whakapapa to restorative healing processes

Encouraging self-determination and affirming active skill-building and responsive parenting in their home

THEN this will lead to...

Immediate risks to tamariki are reduced enabling them to be at home safely
Parents are working towards achieving their own goals

Whānau stress levels will be reduced, enabling expanded bandwidth and capacity to build executive functioning and enhance mana

Whānau feeling connected to natural supports for sustainable wellbeing and resilience

The whānau will be able to adequately meet their tamariki's needs

The broad goal

Tamariki are safe and thriving within their own whānau and their communities.

and EVENTUALLY this will result in....

Tamariki living with whānau/families will feel safe.
Whānau will feel confident and resilient in caring for and protecting their tamariki.
Whānau will feel more connected to their community and can identify support networks.

ASSUMPTIONS...for this to work, these things need to be true....

Whānau are willing to enter into a therapeutic supportive alliance in their home

Oranga Tamariki makes appropriate referrals to Mana Whānau and works collaboratively with this approach

Whānau workers are suitably skilled, experienced, trained and supported to work in a culturally safe and effective way with whānau in their homes.

There is adequate safety within the home for the tamariki and the whānau workers

As set out in the theory of change, kaimahi are supporting whānau with intensive cultural, practical, emotional, whānau-led and tamariki-centred practice. While the intensity is important, the flexibility to provide support as and when needed is also critical. Although kaimahi are available up to 65 hours per week, there is variation in the number of hours needed.

It takes time for whānau to develop trust that their kaimahi are there to support them, not 'spy on them' or judge them. While having a dedicated worker, matched to the whānau, helps build the relationship, it is providing empathetic non-judgmental support that underpins the development of trust.

The kaimahi are supporting whānau to identify and reduce or remove the cumulative weight of stressors in their life. This is a different service approach from the support services they say they have been offered. Rather than having to fit the criteria of services, get advice or be referred to other agencies, whānau are given hands-on, 'dogged' help in their home. The kaimahi actively listen to the needs, goals and priorities of whānau, and start working on progress towards those goals. In the words of one parent, "they do what it takes, roll up their sleeves up and help".

For some whānau, just having the kaimahi there to share the load when they are so overwhelmed reduces their stress. For others, it takes quick wins to convince them of the value of the kaimahi and to demonstrate that they are on their side, there to support them and can actually provide 'helpful help'. This is particularly the case for whānau who have engaged with services which have not been able to meet their needs or made a difference on the issues they have faced.

The kaimahi also build on the protective factors of whānau, in particular those designed to support parenting capability, by noticing and affirming skills and responsive parenting.

Self-determination is supported through whānau making decisions about their own lives. While kaimahi offer suggestions and options, it is whānau who are in the driver's seat and make decisions for their whānau.

To build natural supports, whānau are encouraged to identify, map and strengthen their relationships with whānau, friends, and community-based supports. An important feature of the programme is the role and contribution of whakapapa to the restorative healing processes of whānau.

While building natural supports had been undertaken in the second half of the programme, in recognition of the time it takes to re-establish and strengthen these, it is now being addressed much earlier in the programme. It is these natural supports which will help support whānau once the programme ends.

Fidelity

This evaluation has found that the closer the implementation of the programme is to the theory of change, the more successful the whānau outcomes.

Those whānau who make a genuine choice to undertake the programme, feel they are in the driver's seat, are supported by kaimahi to address the stressors they have prioritised, have their stressors reduced and are encouraged to build natural supports in their communities, tend to have better outcomes than those who don't.

Whānau with toxic stressors which they prioritised and had not been addressed were less likely to retain tamariki in their care or feel satisfied with the difference the programme had made to their lives. For example, one whānau who said their house was damp, mouldy and in a neighbourhood they felt put their tamariki at risk was unable to get Housing New Zealand to relocate them. While retaining their tamariki, they were unhappy with the outcome and felt their tamariki were being exposed to risk by finding friends in the neighbourhood and 'hanging out with the wrong crowd'.

Appropriate levels of staffing are vital. Two teams of three kaimahi can support six whānau at a time. Each team requires a full-time supervisor who has regular meetings with staff both individually and collectively, meets with whānau regularly and manages the relationship with Oranga Tamariki. A higher caseload compromises the efficacy of the programme. Kaimahi need intensive supervision and support to undertake this work. They work on the front-line, dealing with highly stressful, and often chaotic and urgent situations. In some cases they have felt in danger and unsure what to do. Without an active supervisor, the kaimahi hold both the stress and the risk. A supervisor with a full understanding of the programme, the issues, the way of working, and the whānau they are working with, not only takes the risk from the kaimahi, but provides another pair of eyes on the situation. Supervisors can help the kaimahi to step back and take a helicopter view of what is happening in each whānau, and potentially see pathways to support the whānau that kaimahi in the midst of a crisis may not. The support and space to reflect is needed due to the intensity of the work.

Having a full-time supervisor to support staff and whānau may make a difference to outcomes. While it is difficult to ascertain whether the outcomes for the whānau with tamariki uplifted would have differed had the kaimahi had active supervision, the process for determining the response to crises would have differed, potentially affecting the outcomes.

As a result of this work:

- 130 tamariki are living safely together with their whānau.
- Oranga Tamariki is ending their engagement with the majority of whānau.

- Whānau say they are confident and resilient parents and able to protect their tamariki.
- Whānau are becoming connected to their community and support networks.
- Those working with whānau see evidence of the tamariki being safe and well cared for.

Conclusion

The Mana Whānau programme takes a whānau-led approach to support tamariki at imminent risk of coming into care, and whānau with tamariki already in Oranga Tamariki care who are struggling to meet the requirements for a safe return home.

Outcomes for tamariki in care tend to be poor. This evaluation shows, by using a different approach to child protection, 38 whānau, including 130 tamariki, have been kept safely together and out of care.

Most of the whānau on the programme have a background of trauma, with some having had foster care experiences themselves. Almost all have experienced overwhelming levels of stress that have compromised their ability to parent their tamariki safely.

All wanted to keep their tamariki at home. Without exception, those interviewed for the project found the removal, or threat of removal of their tamariki, deeply painful and traumatising. Most, despite being involved with a wide range of agencies, had not been receiving the help or support they need to keep their whānau safely together. For some, reaching out for help or availing themselves of it had resulted in notifications to Oranga Tamariki.

Whānau interviewed say that removing and reducing the cumulative load of stress, in combination with the coaching and parenting support, has not only been helpful, it has had a profound effect on their lives. They no longer feel overwhelmed, have achieved or are working towards their safety goals, and are safely caring for their tamariki. For those families for whom the programme has been successful, the early indications are that the changes are sustained and that the tamariki are no longer considered to be at-risk or on the edge of care.

The evaluation findings show that it is possible to support whānau with tamariki in care, or on the edge of care, to retain their tamariki safely and improve whānau outcomes for both parents and their tamariki. Spending intensive time with whānau has shown that the tamariki on the programme were not at imminent risk or in imminent danger. Providing support to whānau in particular by reducing the toxic weight of stress they face has allowed them to make the changes they need to safely care for their tamariki.

To do this responsibly requires careful planning and an understanding of the components of the programme that make it work. It is not just the intensity, but adherence to the theory of change, that drives the results.

It requires a process to identify and refer whānau suitable for the programme. This relies on a strong, collaborative partnership between the Mana Whānau agency and the Oranga Tamariki site with information being fully shared by all parties. The whānau need to be

willing to having kaimahi work with them in their home up to 65 hours per week, and open to make the changes required to reach their overarching goal. It works best when whānau have goals they want to work towards. Those who are genuinely engaged in developing their own picture of the future, rather than having goals imposed upon them, are more likely to achieve them.

It requires a step-by-step approach in which the stressors are identified, and practical measures are undertaken to reduce or eliminate them. For whānau to open up about the challenges they face and accept support requires trust. The relationship between kaimahi and whānau is critical and takes time to build. For some whānau, reducing the stressors has been sufficient for the parents to provide the care their tamariki need. For others, it has allowed them the space and bandwidth to learn new skills and capabilities.

More broadly, the evaluation suggests that a child protection strategy which focuses on the removal of children to reduce risk, needs an urgent rethink. The safety of children, in particular concerns relating to risk, need a more nuanced approach. Where there is no imminent and immediate risk of harm to tamariki, the evidence suggests uplifting children and placing them in foster care to avert harm may actually be counterproductive and cause harm. The outcomes for children in care tend to be poor and are deeply concerning. Moreover, the focus on uplifting children to protect them from their parents, particularly when the risk of imminent harm is low, fails to acknowledge or address the social determinants of harm and the key strategies which could prevent it. In fact, it appears to further compound the suffering of whānau, including tamariki, who are already bearing an overwhelming burden of stress and trauma.

The evidence shows there are more effective and compassionate pathways to safety and wellbeing for many of these tamariki and their whānau. The evidence from Mana Whānau shows that developing an intensive programme that focuses on reducing the social determinants of harm, in particular addressing the trauma of whānau, reducing the toxic weight of risk factors, increasing executive function and freeing up bandwidth, may provide a better alternative to out-of-home care for both tamariki and their parents and, for at least some whānau, help to break the cycle of intergenerational trauma.

There are enormous personal, whānau, community and societal benefits in supporting tamariki to stay in the care of their families. Based on the outcomes to date the evaluation finds, **if implemented with fidelity**, Mana Whānau provides a safe and highly successful alternative option to foster care. It is recommended the programme is further rolled out and scaled up.

Appendix One: Literature Scan

While the impact of child abuse and neglect on both child and adult wellbeing has been well documented, the placement of tamariki in out-of-home care is also associated with devastating outcomes for both children and their parents (Rapsey & Rolston, 2020). The response of Oranga Tamariki has been to remove tamariki considered to be at risk from their parents rather than work with the parents to safely support and care for their children.

Intensive Family Preservation (IFP) services are intended to prevent unnecessary out-of-home placements for tamariki. They are based on the premise that it is in the child's best interests to remain in the care of their family, wherever this is a safe option.

IFP services are intended for crisis situations where at least one child is at imminent risk of being removed from their family. Services focus on ending the crisis, improving family functioning and promoting the use of social support systems.

Intensive family preservation programmes have a number of different names, but generally have developed from the Homebuilders model employed in Washington in 1974. Important characteristics of the Homebuilders model include a quick response to the crisis (generally within 24 hours of the referral), small caseloads of social workers, high intensity of service especially in the first week, and time-limited duration rather than an ongoing service. It is an intensive intervention, with caseloads averaging only two families at a time, and is focused in the family home, where ultimately behaviours need to change.

IFPS is specifically an emergency response and is considered by many to be the best way of dealing with a crisis situation without removing the tamariki immediately. It is not intended to provide all of the ongoing support a family may need and does not mean the family will never again need support. IFP is a time-limited service that is usually provided for at least six weeks, although this length varies between programmes. There is some evidence to suggest that longer programmes are more effective, though this impact tends to diminish for families still receiving intensive services after a year. Some agencies have optional extensions or "booster shots" depending on the needs of the family. Countries such as Taiwan offer family preservation services for up to a year-and-a-half, but limited resources and pressure on social workers also make their intervention less intensive (Lin & Lee, 2016).

In acute emergency situations intensity is considered more important than length of service, and the first week usually has the highest number of contact hours with a family (Martens, 2009). This approach allows IFPS therapists to support very high-risk families, and aims to facilitate rapid change in families, who may need help with a variety of things including parenting skills, communications skills, self-control, problem-solving, depression, drug or alcohol use, and in meeting such basic needs as food or clothing. Hours of contact with family members are allocated according to the needs of the family and caseworkers are

available at any time of the day. Sessions are often scheduled for times when there are the greatest opportunities for learning and practising new skills, specifically at times in the family's day when issues are most likely to arise such as early morning, mealtimes, and bedtimes (Indiana Department of Child Services, 2006/2007). The intervention can include therapeutic services, such as training in new parenting skills or anger management, as well as concrete services, such as helping with cooking or cleaning and organising financial support (Ryan & Schuerman, 2004; Tully, 2008; Al et al., 2012). "Providing hard services, such as helping clean an apartment or driving a client to the grocery store, is a powerful way to engage clients. Clients are grateful for the help and are often the most willing to share information when they are involved in doing concrete tasks with their therapist" (Martens, 2009).

Contradictory results when evaluating Intensive Family Preservation Services

Initial evaluations of Intensive Family Preservation Services have provided very mixed results. The initial positive results showed family preservation programmes reduce the number of children entering out-of-home care and significantly reducing the risk of child maltreatment (Lewis, 2005). These positive results however were mainly found in studies that did not meet rigorous methodological criteria, such as not using control groups, and therefore no conclusions on effectiveness could be drawn (Lindsey et al., 2002; Al et al., 2012). These studies from the 1990s are also now given less weight as many of them included lower-risk families, which were not the intended recipients of IFP services.

Other studies conducted around a similar time however showed discouraging findings, with preservation programmes often having a neutral and sometimes negative effect compared with traditional social services (Hayward & Cameron, 2002; Ryan & Schuerman, 2004). Many of these studies were critical of the IFPS approach and either point to negative outcomes or to no statistically relevant improvement compared to other services.

These critiques however have also been questioned as to their reliability. The National Family Preservation Network (2006) found "much of the research on IFPS from this period was flawed with respect to both research design and implementation". Research that began in the early 2000s took a quasi-experimental approach and academics and practitioners have come to disregard some of the earlier findings.

When are Intensive Family Preservation Services most effective?

Academics and practitioners such as Raymond Kirk and Diane Griffith began conducting experiments that controlled risk factors that may have adversely affected findings in earlier studies (2004). By the mid 2000s a consensus was forming that the existing "experimental" literature did not conclusively demonstrate that IFPS work or don't work as much as it

demonstrates the enormous difficulty of conducting experimental studies in practice settings.

This led to a shift where instead of asking if IFPS are effective or not people started asking the question of under what circumstances are they effective.

Overall the most robust studies tend to show only a small positive impact of IFPS from other wraparound services in terms of placement prevention. They do, however, show some positive impacts on family functioning (Al et al., 2012). This raises the question once again of what counts as ‘success’ and how programme outcomes should be measured. Some recent studies claim that when the service is targeted and being used in the right circumstances it is effective compared to other traditional services (Bagdasaryan, 2005), but how does one define and measure the success of this type of programme?

Prevention of out-of-home placement has long been the most often used measure of IFPS, but many maintain this should not be the sole outcome measure (Tully, 2008). This fits with a concern for child welfare and not wanting services to have a performance indicator that encourages the decision to leave families in situations that may not be safe. It is also a recognition that IFPS were originally a short-term crisis response and never intended to see an end to the family’s need for other social services and support. Some maintain that factors such as family functioning need to be considered, as this is what is necessary for the family to improve to prevent the crisis situation recurring. “In striving for keeping families together and creating a safer environment for children, improving family functioning may be seen as an essential intervention aim” (Al et al., 2012).

An ability to support multi-problem families and coordinate services could be an appropriate indicator given this is often required by the most vulnerable families. One of the findings of meta-analysis however is that intensive family preservation programmes may be suitable for many multi-problem families but these services do not appear to reduce the number of out-of-home placements in families experiencing child abuse and neglect (Al et al., 2012). Differing opinions as to how to best measure the success of these programmes helps explain the contradictory opinions on their success.

What types of families are likely to benefit from IFPS? How do we measure outcomes?

Meta-analytic studies conducted since the mid-2000s have attempted to answer more specific questions including:

- which families are likely to have the best outcomes from IFPS; and
- which are the defining characteristics of the Homebuilders original IFPS that are the most important.

In terms of what family characteristics are most likely to have a positive outcome, variables such as sex and age of the child, parent age, number of tamariki in the family, single-parenthood, and non-white ethnicity been found to have at least a small impact.

Factors associated with a lesser positive effect from services, and more out-of-home placement after intervention includes youth who identify as female, with a younger parental age, older child age, non-white ethnicity, single-parent families, and a larger number of tamariki in the family.

The age of the tamariki can be an important factor, with intensive family preservation programmes appearing to be more effective with younger tamariki. One possible reason given for this is that with older tamariki the intervention is coming too late in the piece, and when problems have remained undetected or unresolved for many years, usually escalating over time, they become harder to change. “There is a vast body of research showing that, although with rather small effects, the best chance of changing the lives of children is by means of early intervention (Deković et al., 2011).”

Some analysis has shown intensive family preservation programmes to have a greater success in preventing out-of-home placement with boys than with girls. This finding is in line with Dunn, Culhane, and Taussig's (2010) study to the extent that it is more difficult to prevent out-of-home placement in girls, because staying at home may pose more risks for girls than for boys.

Early studies, with a range of methodologies, noted there was a higher rate of single-parent families not completing the intervention. There is divergence on how much can be concluded from this, and Bagdasaryan notes that “one reason why single parent status alone decreases the likelihood of a successful outcome may be that single parents face additional stressors not included in [these studies]’.

Factors that have shown to not affect chances of success are also relevant, especially for characteristics that had previously been assumed to have an effect. These findings contradict prior research and include families with substance abuse issues and families that have a child previously placed in out-of-home care, neither of which has a statistically relevant impact on likelihood of future placements (Bagdasaryan, 2005). The same is seen with receiving public assistance, for, despite early assumptions, a methodologically sound study observed approximately 79% of families receiving public assistance had a successful outcome, compared with 81% of those not receiving public assistance having a successful outcome (Bagdasaryan, 2005).

The same cannot be said for families where the child experiences significant problems with mental health. “Families who had this problem and received services were no more likely to have a successful outcome than those who had the problem and did not receive services; but, they were less likely to have a successful outcome than those who did not have the

problem at all. This may speak to the quality of the services provided through FPS programmes or it may be that families with mental health problems are inappropriate for FPS (Bagdasaryan, 2005).”

Much space has been given to discussions around which characteristics of the Homebuilders original IFPS model are the most important in achieving successful outcomes. Unsurprisingly, internally conducted monitoring has generally shown high fidelity to the Homebuilders model to be essential. These studies and many of the published guidelines are quite specific and prescriptive in how they run interventions.

More recent evaluations of intensive family preservation programmes have shown divergence from the Homebuilders model can be effective. It seems to follow that while some characteristics are important, a certain amount of flexibility is needed to allow a contextually appropriate intervention and service provision. Wider comparisons of intensive services allow for more variation in length of services, and intensive services for longer periods do seem to be increasingly common. Only beyond a year do intensive services significantly decrease in their likelihood of success.

One characteristic that seems to be important in all models of intensive family preservation services is the focus on intensity. Having a social worker able to focus on an individual family and prioritise their needs is understood to be beneficial for these acute emergency situations. If a social worker is responsible for too many families at one time they will not be able to always be with the family at their times of greatest need, which is one of the strengths of IFPS, and other caseworkers will have to fill the gap more often. It is being in the family home and participating in some of the more repetitive tasks that allows families to form new habits, feel supported and develop a strong relationship between the caseworker and the family. Whether or not this is realised is reflective of how stretched services are in the region, as ideally social workers would only work with two to three families at one time, and these families would also ideally be at different stages of their intervention and not all in crisis.

Cooperation and willingness to change are essential elements to a successful intervention and have come up as a constant predictor of outcome. This seems to carry more weight than other family characteristics. It also may be more important than specific features of the intervention, such as duration and intensity. Some analysis even shows that while often an intensive approach at the beginning of a crisis is effective, in some cases a family’s willingness to engage with services increases as a relationship is established and thus gradually building the intensity in parallel with building trust and cooperation can be best.

One question raised by this finding is how to judge and measure willingness to change. Does being backed into a corner with threats of having one’s child removed count as willingness to change?

What is required to ensure that whānau are able to provide a safe environment for their tamariki?

The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, which uses science and research to develop more effective policies and services, has identified four foundations of health and wellbeing for children, namely:

1. Stable and responsive relationships. These provide young children with consistent nurturing and protection.
2. A safe and supportive physical and built environment which allows for an active lifestyle, exploration, and provides support to young families.
3. Secure and appropriate nutrition, from preconception onwards.
4. Cultural knowledge and involvement (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2010).

The Center highlights extensive research showing adverse experiences that occur early in childhood can have lifelong consequences. Neuroscience has shown that adverse experiences can derail a child's healthy development, and create learning, behavioural and health challenges. This is underpinned by Growing Up in New Zealand data (Morton et al., 2015) that shows the impact of whānau stress on child outcomes.

Stress, even severe stress, which is shortlived and experienced in the context of warm supportive relationships, is normal and important to healthy development. A toxic stress response occurs when a child experiences strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity to extremely stressful conditions (Center on the Developing Child, 2010).

Exposure to toxic levels of stress can rob parents and their tamariki of executive function or the ability to plan, strategise, organise and learn. Neuroscientists have found that the mental processes located in the prefrontal cortex, which support thought, memory, emotions and behaviour, are key to a child's ability to develop executive function and self-regulation skills, and underpin successful parenting (Center on the Developing Child, 2010).

As the Center on the Developing Child (2010) points out, some people beat the odds despite severe levels of stress, hardship and adversity. Some tamariki and parents are naturally more resilient than others. However, it appears that if resilience is to be built or enhanced in tamariki, it requires nurturing relationships and opportunities for skill-building. Building resilience in tamariki requires a supportive, stable, committed adult in their life who can provide personalised responsiveness and protection that buffers tamariki from risks and trauma. These adults help to build the key capacities in tamariki, such as the ability to plan, monitor and regulate their behaviour. These relationships are critically important to child wellbeing. They are based on give and take, or serve and return interactions, where the adult responds to the child, and the interactions are individualised to the child's personality, interests and capabilities. It stimulates their heart, mind and grows self-awareness.

“Whether the burdens come from the hardships of poverty, the challenges of parental substance abuse or serious mental illness, the stresses of war, the threats of recurrent violence or chronic neglect, or a combination of factors, the single more common finding is that children who end up doing well have had at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive parent, caregiver or other adult.”
(National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2015).

The researchers argue, however, that the burden of multiple risk factors, or toxic stress levels, is more than any whānau could or should be expected to overcome. Their findings suggest whilst positive experiences and initiatives can counterbalance significant adversity, they may not generate sufficiently positive outcomes for tamariki and families who experience toxic stress. Even the best initiatives can be overwhelmed by the weight of the risk factors some families face.

Moreover, it appears that the most vulnerable tamariki and their families may not be getting support from these initiatives. The Growing Up in New Zealand study (Morton et al., 2015) has found, for example, that the largest proportion of families accessing Whānau Ora were in the medium vulnerability risk group, and fewer than ten percent of families using Parents as First Teachers were from a high vulnerability risk group.

According to Featherstone et al. (2018) the focus of child protection is dominated by risk and risk aversion. This has meant that there has been limited attention paid to the social determinants of harms and how these might be ameliorated, despite few tamariki uplifted being in imminent risk of harm.

The literature suggests that developing an intensive programme that focuses on the social determinants of harm, addresses the trauma of whānau, reduces the toxic weight of risk factors, increases executive function and frees up bandwidth may provide a better alternative to out-of-home care for both tamariki and their parents but help to break the cycle of intergenerational trauma.

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