

Kahu Aroha report media release

The SWRB would like to acknowledge the report from the Ministerial Advisory Board into Oranga Tamariki, and to offer support for the recommendations on its social work workforce.

The SWRB appreciates that the child protection system is complex. We are aware that Oranga Tamariki deals with extremely difficult and emotionally charged situations, including child abuse and neglect, and intervenes when pēpi and tamariki are hurt, harmed, and neglected. This is why it's extremely important to have social workers in this space, and for their voice to be heard and their expertise valued.

It is clear from the Kahu Aroha report that social workers at Oranga Tamariki are under significant pressure, and the SWRB is pleased to see the recommendation that 'the social work voice within Oranga Tamariki needs strengthening as professional practice views, opinions, and experience are missing at many levels, including at its leadership group'. As the regulator of social work, we have a responsibility to enhance professionalism and that can only be achieved through social work having a strong voice and identity.

We note the recommendation that the Office of the Chief Social Worker should be restored as a central role within Oranga Tamariki with enhanced influence across the agency to address the de-professionalisation of its workforce away from social work.

We also welcome the report highlighting that, 'induction, training, continuing professional development, and supervision, including training and support for supervisors and practice leaders, should be prioritised'. We have had ongoing discussions with Oranga Tamariki's chief social worker around the need for all social workers to have continuing professional development, including supervision. We recognise that the quality of supervision is hugely important to enhancing the professionalism of social workers. We think there's an opportunity to work more closely with Oranga Tamariki on guidance and understanding around supervision.

Social workers need to be supported to deliver on their professional obligations just as other professionals are when providing their opinions. As the report states, they are expected to manage ambiguity, uncertainty, and to make judgements in challenging circumstances. The SWRB is keen to see systems at Oranga Tamariki improve to ensure all social workers are supported to work within the SWRB Code of Conduct and competence standards, and the expertise, skills, and knowledge they bring to their work are valued. This may go some way towards addressing some of the issues raised.

The SWRB, which was recently appointed the lead agency for social work workforce planning, looks forward to having discussions with Oranga Tamariki to be able to co-ordinate efforts in a cohesive way for sector-wide workforce planning.

We believe the social service sector has to work together to improve a system so that it puts whānau and communities at the core of what we do, in a way which enhances mana and ensures the safety of all.