



Strengthening Kinship Care in Aotearoa Research Project

Family
for every child



Kia ora,

Let's strengthen kinship care in Aotearoa

Introduction

The right for children to grow up in a safe, loving whānau environment is critical to their development and well-being. However, many children/tamariki in Aotearoa New Zealand, especially Māori, have historically been placed in state care rather than with their kin, often resulting in trauma, cultural disconnection, and a lack of identity support.

Aotearoa New Zealand's child protection system has been marked by high rates of institutional abuse and a failure to meet the needs of children/tamariki. This is particularly true for Tamariki Māori, who are disproportionately represented in care. This is evident in the findings of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in State Care and in the Care of Faith-based Institutions, *Whanaketia – Through pain and trauma, from darkness to light*. Abuse in the care system is an ongoing issue. VOYCE Whakarongo Mai's Roopuu Kaitiaki Mo Nga Teina e Haere Ake Nei report *Korowai Aroha* details the experiences and key asks of 11 young individuals who endured abuse after 1999.

In addition to this, formal kinship carers often face systemic challenges such as inequitable access to financial, educational, and emotional support. Additionally, informal carers lack legal recognition and essential resources, which are needed to provide stable, nurturing environments and supports for children so they can thrive.

Currently, there is limited Aotearoa New Zealand research about kinship care (particularly informal kinship care). Family for Every Child seeks to work with key stakeholders to address this gap by exploring kinship care (formal and informal) in Aotearoa New Zealand. This includes, definitions of kinship care, kinship care dynamics, challenges, and the supports needs of kinship carers to improve care outcomes.

Why this research matters

Family for Every Child's vision is for a world in which children and families everywhere have access to the support they need to survive and thrive. When children are unable to live with their parents, they have the right to remain living with their family. The research will explore both formal and informal kinship care practices in Aotearoa, with a focus on reforming current systems to uphold children's rights and decolonise kinship practices.

It will provide a robust evidence base on the importance of kinship care within Aotearoa New Zealand. The findings will be able to be used to inform others and advocate for reforms that

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prioritise, support and enable whānau-based care, reflecting cultural values and contributing to child protection policies aligned with decolonising practice.

The project aligns with Family for Every Child's organisational goals:

- Enabling children to grow up in permanent, safe and caring families.
- Ensuring a range of high-quality, appropriate temporary alternative care choices for children.
- Taking steps to prevent children from having to live outside of any adult care, without the care of families or other carers, and in the interim, protecting these boys and girls.

What this research will achieve

The research will enable Family for Every Child (and partners) to:

- Build on Family for Every Child's Kinship Care Guidelines by contextualising them within Aotearoa.
- Advocate for care reform that upholds children's rights and provides meaningful support for kinship carers.
- Highlight the benefits of kinship care and identify barriers that hinder its effectiveness.
- Promote culturally grounded definitions and understandings of kinship care, particularly for tamariki Māori.
- Address inequities and support gaps to empower kinship carers and position Family for Every Child as a thought leader in this domain.

Research questions

The research will seek to answer the following research questions:

- What are the unique cultural definitions and understandings of kinship care in Aotearoa?
- What challenges do kinship carers face in providing stable, long-term care for tamariki and rangatahi?
- What supports are most effective in enabling kinship carers to nurture and sustain whānau-based care?
- How can care reform be guided by principles of children's rights and decolonisation to better serve the needs of Māori children and their whānau?

Research approach

We will work collaboratively together through regular meetings between the Family for Every Child project manager/co-researcher, research leadership rōpū (made up of key NGO partners, including mana whenua), and the independent lead researcher/primary investigator.

The research will be undertaken in three stages: Research Preparation, Data Collection, and Analysis and Report Preparation.

Stage 1: Research Preparation

Project Planning

Careful planning of the research project is necessary for success. Through collaboration with the research rōpū, the research objectives and questions will be refined.

Literature Scan

A scan of the literature will provide key insights to contextualise the research and identify relevant sources and studies on kinship care, children's rights, and decolonisation practices.

Ethics Application

Ethical approval for the research will be obtained from the [Aotearoa Research Ethics Committee](#). Ethical approval will strengthen the rigour of the research.

Stage 2: Data Collection

20 participant interviews will be completed with formal and informal kinship carers and organisations supporting them (including iwi).

Stage 3: Analysis and Report Preparation

Data Transcription and Analysis

Recorded interviews will be transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis. Findings will be organised to answer the research questions.

Report Writing

A draft research report, including introduction, methodology, findings, and conclusions will be written. The report will include recommendations to inform kinship care practices and policy advocacy.

The draft report will be shared with key stakeholders for their review. Feedback received will be incorporated into a final revised report.

Deliverables

At the end of this project, Family for Every Child will be provided with:

- A report highlighting kinship care dynamics, challenges, and the supports needed to improve care outcomes. This will build on Family for Every Child's Kinship Care Guidelines and contextualise these to Aotearoa New Zealand.
- Policy recommendations to support family-based care options as an alternative to state intervention, advocating for better systemic support and resources for kinship carers.

Who's leading this research?

Braden Clark

Family for Every Child have contracted Braden Clark from Relate Services to be the lead researcher/primary investigator of this research project.

Braden is a registered social worker and has extensive experience in the child protection and family violence sector. Braden is passionate about supporting tamariki and whānau wellbeing.

Braden has a Bachelor of Business Studies (Management), a Masters of Applied Social Work (First Class Honours), and has completed his Doctor of Social Work Degree.

Braden's research interests are in the areas of children and whānau wellbeing (including child protection and family violence). His master's research explored the qualities of kinship carers in Aotearoa New Zealand. His doctoral research looked at how child protection social workers can address the impacts of adversity.



Dr Michelle Egan-Bitran

Dr Michelle Egan-Bitran, Programme Advisor New Zealand and Pacific at Family for Every Child is the Project Manager and co-researcher for this project.

Michelle was born and raised in Otepoti/Dunedin and now lives in Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland with her three daughters. She is a researcher, social worker, and advocate with about 25 years' experience working within govt, NGOs and independent entities. This includes in leadership and senior roles as Principal Advisor and faith leadership team member at the Abuse in Care Royal Commission of Inquiry, as a staff member and researcher at the University of Auckland Social Work faculty, and as a Senior Advisor at the Office of the Children's Commissioner [Mana Mokopuna].

In her role with Family for Every Child she helps support civil society organisations to come together to implement joint actions across research, advocacy and practice exchange, with a current focus on initiatives related to improving the lives of children in our care system and preventing violence against children and young people.



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