

VOYCE – Whakarongo Mai - Frequently Asked Questions

What is VOYCE – Whakarongo Mai?

VOYCE – Whakarongo Mai is an independent connection and advocacy service being set up in partnership with care experienced children and young people, four philanthropic funders (The Tindall Foundation, Foundation North, Todd Foundation and Vodafone Foundation), Government through the Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki, and NGOs such as Ngāpuhi Iwi Social Services and Dingwall Trust.

The service is being set up as a Non-Government Organisation (charitable trust) and will be formally established on 1 April 2017.

What will VOYCE - Whakarongo Mai do?

VOYCE - Whakarongo Mai will connect children and young people in care to build a positive care identity, advocate with them and influence the development of services to ensure their individual and collective rights are upheld.

VOYCE - Whakarongo Mai has the following core features:

- The voice of the child or young person at the centre
- A whole of life approach (services for all children and young people aged 0 to 25)
- A central relationship with a ‘trusted person’ chosen by the child or young person
- A collaborative advocacy approach
- A care-experienced community of support.

The service will also be uniquely positioned to provide real time qualitative feedback, so that services can understand whether the intent of the care system is being realised in the lived experiences of children and young people in care.

Who is the service for?

VOYCE - Whakarongo Mai is a service for care experienced children and young people in New Zealand aged between 0 and 25-years-old.

Following the recent passage of the *Children, Young Persons, and Their Families (Advocacy, Workforce, and Age Settings) Amendment Bill*, the jurisdiction of the care and protection system has now been extended to include 17-year-olds. For more information about this and other legislative changes to the care system, please refer to the MSD website here - <http://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/investing-in-children/index.html>

What is the legislative framework?

The Children Young Persons and their Families (Advocacy, Workforce and Age Settings) Amendment Act (2016) supports the establishment of an independent advocacy service for children and young people in care by introducing a duty on the CE of the Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki to “ensure that services are available to children and young people...that provide them with an opportunity and support to express their views...” (section 7(2)(bb)).

The act also introduces a duty on anyone exercising significant decision-making powers under the CYPF Act to ensure that the child or young person:

- is encouraged and assisted to participate
- must be given reasonable opportunities to freely express their views on matters affecting them
- is provided with support to assist them to express their views and be understood

- must have their views taken into account.

The independent advocacy and connection service, when combined with these new provisions and proposals to further amend the CYPF Act through a second Bill, will establish a firm foundation to ensure that the voices and views of children and young people are more clearly expressed and have greater influence in the new operating model.

What does the name mean?

VOYCE - Whakarongo Mai means 'Voice of the Young and Care Experienced - Listen to me', and represents the need for children and young people to be heard and their voices kept at the centre of all decisions made about them.

The name embodies the intent of the service, which is to provide an independent voice *from* children and young people to the care system, rather than an adult voice *for* these children and young people.

How was the name chosen?

The name VOYCE - Whakarongo Mai was chosen following consultation and engagement with around 100 children and young people at a number of collaborative workshops and connection events throughout September and October 2016.

What does the logo represent?

The logo is comprised of multi-coloured sound waves to visually represent the individual and collective voices of children in care. The semi-circle shape symbolises connection and community.

What are connection events?

As the name suggests, connection events are activities which fulfil a core function of the service, to connect care experienced children and young people with each other, and promote a positive care identity through safe, fun, and memorable experiences.

Where will the service be based?

By its April 2017 launch, VOYCE - Whakarongo Mai will operate through a national centre in Auckland, supported by a social media platform and network of local partners and communities.

Over time, services will be increasingly led, governed and delivered directly by those with a care experience, with a permanent Auckland base and regional hubs established across New Zealand.

How will children and young people access the service?

VOYCE - Whakarongo Mai will deliver services through a combined approach of direct service delivery and strategic partnering, particularly with Iwi and other Māori groups and care experienced children and young people.

The service will establish direct contact with children and young people as soon as possible when they enter care. They will receive a welcome pack, information about the service and a means to contact the service. They will also be periodically reminded of their right to access the service, should they wish to do so.

At a local level, connection and advocacy teams will support and facilitate ongoing and naturally occurring connection. The service will also support a care experienced alumni of adults who have left care but wish to remain connected to each other and the wider care experienced community.

When will the digital platform be up and running?

The face-to-face engagement with children and young people at connection events will be augmented through social media and the development of a digital platform, alongside a toll-free phone number.

Design and development of VOYCE - Whakarongo Mai's digital platform is ongoing ahead of the April 2017 launch of the service.

When finalised, the platform could take the form of a website, an app, or a combination of different digital tools used to connect children and young people with each other, with advocates and with VOYCE - Whakarongo Mai.

How will the service respond to the needs of rangatahi Māori?

VOYCE - Whakarongo Mai is committed to supporting the connection of Māori children and young people in care to their whānau, hapū and Iwi.

Rangatahi Māori involved in the design of the service talked about the importance of connecting through experiences that linked them with their whakapapa and their culture, and that through such experiences they felt a sense of confidence, freedom and belonging.

Māori children and young people are significantly over represented in the care system, with around 60 per cent of those in care identified as Māori.

In order to effectively respond to the needs of Māori children and young people, the service will need to work closely with Iwi, urban Māori organisations and other Māori academics, clinicians and leaders to align the advocacy model to the needs of Māori children and young people.

The VOYCE - Whakarongo Mai Governance Board will also reflect the high proportion of Māori children in care.

How will the service respond to the needs of children and young people with disabilities?

Children and young people with disabilities (including physical, intellectual or sensory) will be supported to be fully involved in the life of the care experienced community, and VOYCE - Whakarongo Mai will build its capability to work in ways that are disability informed.

The service will work closely with providers and experts to ensure services are attuned to the high rate of disability (including unidentified disability) amongst children and young people in care.

A collaborative advocacy approach will enable the service to work with other advocates in the field of disability to ensure these children and young people's needs are effectively responded to.

What makes VOYCE - Whakarongo Mai different?

Whether at an individual or systemic level, the connection and advocacy approach will promote the voice of the child or young person.

A collaborative advocacy approach will be responsive to the child or young person's preferences and needs, could include more than one type of advocacy occurring concurrently, and could transition from one form to another at different points in a child or young person's care journey.

A community will be fostered and nurtured through connection events, a digital social network, and the central role played by children, young people and other care experienced individuals in the leadership and governance of the service. This community of care will actively foster relationships with others who can support care experienced individuals including Iwi / Māori, communities, organisations and individuals.

What led to the creation of the service?

In 2015, an Expert Panel was commissioned to report to Government on changes needed to the New Zealand care system, to ensure services placed the interests of children and young people at the centre.

The Expert Panel's report '*Investing in New Zealand's Children and Families*' assessed the current system as being adult-focussed and lacking advocacy and support mechanisms for children and young people in care.

The Panel found that children and young people in care said they crave nurturing and love, and feel the stigma of being in care. They feel powerless in the face of a system which is perceived to hold all the power and have no voice in important decisions being made about their future.

The report set out a blueprint for the future system and led to the formation of the new Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki. At the heart of the changes recommended was a view that services must be collaboratively designed with children, young people, whānau, communities and professionals.

The development of VOYCE - Whakarongo Mai, as an independent connection and advocacy service, is a central aspect of this fundamental shift to achieve better outcomes for children in care.

The service will also be a first-of-its-kind in New Zealand, as there is currently no advocacy service specifically for children and young people who are or have been in care.

What relationship will VOYCE - Whakarongo Mai have with the new Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki?

VOYCE - Whakarongo Mai will play a critical role in the New Zealand care system, influencing the development of services to ensure they meet the needs of children and young people in care and improve their whole-of-life wellbeing.

The service will have a key relationship with the new Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki, its Chief Executive, and particularly the new Tamariki Advocate Deputy Chief Executive Voices of Children, and General Manager Voices of Children roles, to ensure the voices of children and young people are heard in all the decisions made about them and their care.

The service will capture, synthesise and report themes and issues from children and young people using their language to inform the design, development, implementation and evaluation of policies and services.

Who has designed the service?

The development of the service has been overseen by an Establishment Steering Group comprising representation from young people, four philanthropic funders (the Todd Foundation, Vodafone Foundation, The Tindall Foundation and Foundation North), Government through the Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki, and non-government organisations such as Ngāpuhi Iwi Social Services and Dingwall Trust.

The design has followed a collaborative approach integrating three key 'voices'; the Voice of Intent (the Expert Panel's report and findings), the Voice of the Expert (literature review and interviews with experts and professionals in the area of care), and the Voice of Experience (voices of children and young people in care).

How is VOYCE - Whakarongo Mai funded?

The partnership between Government and the four philanthropic organisations in developing the service is based on a shared vision of a service that builds a community of children and young people in care through a bespoke model of advocacy and connection.

The focus of Government funding is on core service provision and supporting the new advocacy and connection service to establish itself and build its full range of capacity and capability, the contribution of Philanthropy is about impact investment, driving social change and embracing innovation. Progressively, the service will develop a diversified and sustainable funding framework.

What are VOYCE - Whakarongo Mai's principles?

Underlying principles of VOYCE - Whakarongo Mai include:

- *A care experience led community* - the service will grow the governance, leadership and service delivery of those with a care experience.
- *Connection* – the service will foster connection amongst care experienced children and young people.
- *A positive care identity* – children and young people in care will perceive themselves and be perceived as having a positive identity.
- *Right to choose* – children and young people will have the right to choose how they interact with the service.
- *Relationship-based advocacy* – advocacy will be based on a trusted relationship between a child or young person and their advocate.
- *Sustainability and permanence* – the service's permanence will be supported by a sustainable structure and funding arrangements.
- *Equity of access* – all New Zealand children and young people in care must be able to access the service.
- *Independence* – the service must be, and be seen to be, independent.
- *Partnering with Iwi / Māori* – approaches that are most effective for Māori children and young people in care will be developed in partnership with Iwi and other Māori groups such as urban marae and authorities
- *Effects change through influence* – the service must be an effective change agent on behalf of children and young people in care.
- *Agility and capability building* – the service will adapt to the changing needs of children and young people in care and will take a continuous approach to building its capacity and capability.

Is this the same service that has previously been called CareConnect?

CareConnect was used as a working name for the connection and advocacy service while it progressed through the initial stages of development, and has been reported in media previously.

The confirmed name for the service, as chosen by children and young people in care, is VOYCE - Whakarongo Mai.