

Tūtohi



Wild Bamboo

Tamariki at the heart

Stories, statistics, and solutions from a quantitative
evaluation of the Kōkihi ngā Rito programme





Executive Summary



Executive summary

A snapshot of insights and impact

New Zealand has the highest rate of family violence in the OECD, a dark shadow cast over individuals, whānau, and our communities. Its effects are far-reaching and devastating, impacting not just those directly harmed but also the wider fabric of our society. Every year, tens of thousands of wāhine seek safety and support through the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges (NCIWR), often accompanied by tamariki whose lives have also been disrupted. For these children, family violence is not a reflection of adult struggles—it is a direct assault on their safety, wellbeing, and sense of self.

NCIWR has long been a lifeline for both wāhine and their tamariki, providing critical services and support in more than 40 independent refuges dotted across the country. Recognising the unique and often invisible scars carried by the child victims of family violence, NCIWR has continually sought to innovate care models to meet their needs.

Developed with the guidance and input of tamariki, the Kōkihi ngā Rito programme is a novel, child-centred model of advocacy that respects children as individuals with their own voices, needs, and aspirations. Delivered by specialist Kaiārahi Tamariki, Kōkihi ngā Rito helps tamariki to process their experiences, rebuild trust, and regain confidence. By offering sustained, relational care, the programme provides an alternative to traditional models that prioritise maternal experiences.

The programme also serves as a blueprint for change, setting a new standard for advocacy within NCIWR. Through its tailored supports—emotional, practical, and relational—it aims to empower tamariki on their individual journeys of healing and growth. It has also illuminated new pathways for systemic transformation.

This report provides a quantitative evaluation of the Kōkihi ngā Rito programme, delivered since 2021 in six NCIWR refuges nationally. We aimed to balance rigorous analysis with respectful understanding of the lived realities faced by tamariki and their mothers, measuring the impact of Kōkihi ngā Rito, its ripple effects within a refuge, and the broader implications it may have for family violence services.

The interweaving of information, analysis, and the voices of tamariki highlights the transformative potential of Kōkihi ngā Rito. It exposes the urgent need for expanded, sustained investment in services that centre our youngest survivors—offering them not just safety, but the opportunity to heal, thrive, and reclaim their futures.



70%

of risk assessments report that
a child has been harmed
by family violence



This translates to more than

25,000

tamariki annually

This is the reality for these tamariki:

1 in 2 have been threatened

1 in 3 have been physically harmed

1 in 3 have been kept from their mother

1 in 2 have witnessed their mother
being physically abused

1 in 2 have witnessed their mother
being verbally abused

1 in 4 have witnessed their mother
being sexually abused

Kōkihi ngā Rito

A blueprint for change

Kōkihi ngā Rito transforms support for tamariki affected by family violence by providing dedicated, specialist child advocates (Kaiārahi Tamariki). Unlike many mainstream models where children's needs are secondary to their mothers', this programme centres tamariki voices and relationships, shifting from crisis-focused, short-term interventions to sustained, comprehensive support.

Kōkihi ngā Rito delivers significantly better outcomes in key wellbeing domains and elevates care standards across entire refuges, demonstrating how child-centred design can revolutionise support for our most vulnerable tamariki.

75%

of tamariki felt safer

69%

of tamariki felt more
self-confident, with
greater self-esteem

75%

of tamariki felt better
able to deal with their
feelings and behaviour

**Tamariki
flourish**



**Whānau
thrive**



**Mothers
heal**



**Services
improve**





When we invest in specialist support for the child victims of family violence, we don't just change statistics—**we change lives**



Next steps | Build insights into impact

Expand critical reach to vulnerable tamariki



Close the support gap for those most at risk



Quantify economic and social value



Leverage evidence-based mechanisms of impact



Advocate for system-wide transformation

Key findings

Five key findings in this report illuminate the measurable, life-changing impact of Kōkihi ngā Rito.

Tamariki wellbeing transformed

Tamariki supported by Kōkihi ngā Rito experienced remarkable improvements across all eight wellbeing domains measured by My Star™, with the most profound gains in *Being safe*, *Feelings and behaviour*, and *Confidence and self-esteem*. Most strikingly, their wellbeing improved significantly more than children supported by other NCIWR services, underscoring the programme's unique impact in enhancing wellbeing and creating safer futures for tamariki.

Mothers thrived alongside their tamariki

When tamariki are supported, their mothers also flourish. The wellbeing of mothers whose children were supported by NCIWR improved significantly in the specific domains of *Children* and *Work and learning*, reinforcing a deep interconnection between a child's safety and a mother's stability. These findings highlight the broad reach of child-centred support services—when we lift tamariki, we strengthen entire whānau.

More care meant better outcomes

Kōkihi ngā Rito did more than just provide support—it redefined service delivery. Tamariki in the programme spent twice as long in service, received 5-7 times more support hours (even corrected for referral duration), and had significantly longer and more detailed case notes compared to those in other services. The presence of a specialist Kaiārahi Tamariki also corresponded to a service delivery uplift across other services in a refuge, raising the standard of care for tamariki even beyond those enrolled in the programme.

Tamariki voices were heard, loud and clear

Case notes from Kōkihi ngā Rito captured tamariki perspectives with unprecedented depth, particularly around feelings, whānau, and violence. This reflects the programme's fidelity to an advocacy model that places tamariki at the heart—not as passive recipients of care, but as individuals whose experiences and voices shape the support they receive.

The scale of unmet need is stark but solvable

More than 70% of wāhine supported by NCIWR report that their tamariki have experienced or been exposed to family violence, which corresponds to a conservative estimate of over 25,000 tamariki each year. These children have been threatened with harm, physically abused, separated from their mother, forced to witness verbal, physical, and even sexual abuse—yet fewer than 1 in 5 are currently able to be supported by NCIWR, and less than 1% have access to Kōkihi ngā Rito. These children are not statistics—they are known, named, and they are in need.



Recommendations

Programmes like Kōkihi ngā Rito offer an opportunity to reset the future trajectories for our most vulnerable tamariki—a chance to rewrite stories of trauma into ones of resilience and hope. Intervening early with targeted, child-centred care could transform not just individual lives, but also the systems and communities that sustain them. Therefore, the following recommendations are proposed:

Expand critical reach to vulnerable tamariki

- **Deploy specialist Kaiārahi Tamariki** across additional refuges to create a safety net for more at-risk tamariki
- **Use risk assessment data to inform community engagement** by analysing service patterns and community needs to guide resource allocation and develop responsive outreach strategies that connect with tamariki who may benefit most from support
- **Extend vital support to rangatahi** by expanding programme eligibility beyond age 12, a critical service gap for adolescents

Close the support gap for those most at risk

- **Scale infrastructure and expertise** through targeted investment in specialised staff (maintaining the rigorous training standards of the programme) and enhanced service delivery systems to reach those tamariki who are experiencing harm without support
- **Strengthen strategic partnerships** with government agencies, funders, and community stakeholders to secure dedicated resources for child-focused family violence interventions

Quantify economic and social value

- **Conduct a comprehensive Social Return on Investment (SROI)** analysis that captures the full economic impact of Kōkihi ngā Rito
- **Centre tamariki perspectives in value assessment** through meaningful consultation to determine financial values for safety and wellbeing outcomes—an approach that will address the exclusion of children's voices from impact valuation frameworks

Leverage evidence-based mechanisms of impact

- **Investigate the observed connection** between tamariki support and maternal wellbeing improvements, particularly within the *Children and Work and Learning* domains
- **Identify the mechanism of transformative differences** in service delivery at a refuge when specialist Kaiārahi Tamariki are present, using mixed-methods research and kaimihi consultation
- **Develop replication strategies** that preserve the integrity of the core Kōkihi ngā Rito service model while extending successful impact mechanisms across the broader refuge network

Advocate for system-wide transformation

- **Develop specialised guidance** for professionals across family court, education, health, and social services to improve interactions with child victims of family violence
- **Champion children's right to representation** by ensuring every tamaiti has access to a trained, specialist child advocate, so that tamariki voices are meaningfully included in other decision-making processes that impact them, particularly in the family court system.

These recommendations are specifically linked to the Kōkihi ngā Rito service model. The positive outcomes documented in this evaluation reflect the specialist approach delivered by those extensively trained Kaiārahi Tamariki and we caution against extrapolating those results more broadly to other children's programmes. For any initiatives seeking to replicate these outcomes, we encourage fidelity to the comprehensive training, supervision, and support systems of Kōkihi ngā Rito.

Conclusions

The findings of this quantitative evaluation underscore the profound and measurable impact of the Kōkihi ngā Rito programme. Tamariki who participate in the programme experience significant improvements in wellbeing, surpassing gains seen in other services. But the impact extends even further—into the lives of their mothers, into the wider refuge environment, and into the very fabric of how care is delivered. These results are not merely luck—they reflect the intentional, evidence-based design of the programme and its deep commitment to child-centred, relational advocacy that puts tamariki at the heart of care.

The data tell a story of transformation. Kōkihi ngā Rito tamariki are seen, heard, and supported in ways that extend beyond traditional service models. They receive more time, more care, and more meaningful support than those in traditional service models. Their voices are captured with unprecedented depth in case notes, ensuring that their experiences shape the support they receive. The ripple effects of this model reach beyond the programme itself, elevating service delivery across entire refuges, lifting the standard of care even for tamariki outside the programme. This is systemic change in action.

Yet, these findings also expose a stark and urgent truth. Tens of thousands of tamariki are connected to wāhine supported by NCIWR each year, but fewer than 1% receive the depth of care offered by Kōkihi ngā Rito. Risk assessment data reveal a devastating reality: too many children are facing severe and enduring harm without access to the specialised support they need. This disparity is not just a gap—it is a crisis. It demands more than recognition; it demands action.

The evidence is clear and compelling: Kōkihi ngā Rito is not just delivering measurable outcomes, but meaningful change. Investing in tamariki is an investment in futures, in whānau, and in communities. Kōkihi ngā Rito makes a difference for tamariki today, but this targeted, early intervention for the child victims of family violence also builds a foundation for the safer, stronger communities of tomorrow. The challenge now is not in proving the model—it is expanding its reach and scaling the impact, ensuring that the rising tide of Kōkihi ngā Rito lifts every child it touches, including the many more who are still waiting.

**If we are not going to advocate
for tamariki, who will?**

- Kaiārahi Tamariki