

FUELLING DEBATE

Region's petrol price war

News A3

FLYING VISIT

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News A5

Back on screen

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TV Week

THE DOMINION POST

Harm in state care revealed

KATIE KENNY

About 12 per cent of Kiwi children experience harm in state care – more than previously thought – according to new research. While past approaches to measuring the safety of children and young people relied on findings of maltreatment, new research jointly produced by the Ministry for Vulnerable Children Oranga Tamariki and the Office of the Chief Social Worker applied a broader definition of harm, which the ministry described as a “zero-tolerance” approach. The report, published today, said 85 out of a representative sample of 698 children/youth in state care between July 1, 2015, and June 30, 2016, experienced harm. Given a total of 7360 entered the system over that time, it’s likely 929 of them experienced harm.

The research involved manually reviewing the case notes and analysing reports of harm, ranging from emotional distress to physical injury. While the sampling approach allowed for the overall extent of harm to be extrapolated, other findings such as those relating to demographics, the nature of harm, and placement types, were descriptive only. The authors examined several different placement types – including whānau placement, non-whānau placement, return/remain home placement, group home settings, child family support service placement, and independent living placement. Of those 85 children/young people who experienced harm, the largest proportion (31) were placed with whānau. The longstanding whānau-first policy, which prioritises kin-

“The research says there’s harm occurring, and there will be a number of factors contributing to that harm.”

Grainne Moss, pictured

carers when a child is removed from a home, made headlines earlier this year as it was omitted from the new Oranga Tamariki Act during an overhaul of Child, Youth and Family (CYF). After a backlash, however, it was reinserted. But when asked if the new research signalled issues with the policy, ministry boss Grainne Moss said it did not.

“The research says there’s harm occurring, and there will be a number of factors contributing to that harm,” she said. “What we then need to do is ask further questions around those contributors, and look at what actions we are taking to reduce them. “We have done an international and domestic literature review which would indicate the transformation journey Oranga Tamariki is on is the right one, and actually we are addressing some of the contributing factors ... “But all the report tells us is that harm is more prevalent than had been measured under previous definitions. We don’t have enough numbers to make any conclusions [around placement types] that are statistically significant.” She said the ministry would be setting up an expert group to discuss the findings and propose a sustainable and robust future measurement and reporting approach.

New Zealand was “leading the way” in its “zero-tolerance” approach to harm, she said. In the past, New Zealand and international jurisdictions were under-reporting harm owing to narrow definitions of the word. “The important thing for us is we have to know more to be able to do better. I think, for myself, and the leadership team, what this report does is strengthen our resolve to make sure we get this transformation journey right, and we do improve the quality of care of children in the system.” The ministry was established in April this year to replace CYF. According to reports prepared by CYF for the minister of social development, in 2013 and 2014, there were findings of substantiated abuse relating to 117 children in the custody of CYF.



Carterton cyclist Sean Woolgar remains in Wairarapa Hospital with a broken leg after allegedly being pursued on to a footpath and then hit by a car. PHOTO: JACK BARLOW/STUFF



The injured cyclist snapped a photo of the vehicle driven by his alleged assailant as he lay on the ground.

“I’ve never had road rage from drivers in Carterton before. I think of it as a peaceful place – I’ve never, ever experienced anything like this.”

Serves you right, hurt cyclist told

JACK BARLOW

A cyclist claims an angry motorist deliberately swerved on to a footpath to knock him off his bike. Then, as Sean Woolgar lay on the ground with a broken leg, he says the man walked up to him and said: “Serves you right.” Woolgar, of Carterton, was cycling home on Friday evening when he became aware of a car following closely behind. “It began honking at me,” he said from his hospital bed yesterday. “I turned around and said, you know, ‘What’s up?’” The car drew alongside and the young driver began swearing.

Woolgar, a video editor and camera operator, pulled on to the footpath and turned into a side street in the Wairarapa town to avoid the vehicle. But soon after riding back on to the road, he heard the squeal of tyres. He pedalled as hard as he could, and pulled back onto the footpath, thinking that, with trees and a grass verge between him and road, he would have some protection. He then claims the car swerved across the verge and hit him, sending him flying. “I was lying on my stomach and I heard the car turning around,” he said. “I looked over and saw my leg at a crazy angle. I went to pick it up and it just flopped over.” The car pulled up beside him. The driver wandered over and asked Woolgar if he was OK. “I said, ‘No dude, you’ve broken my leg’. He said, ‘It serves you right.’” Woolgar remains in Wairarapa Hospital, with his leg held together by a 37-centimetre-long plate. He will be on crutches for about 15 weeks. He said the whole incident came as a shock. “I’ve never had road rage from drivers in Carterton before. I think of it as a peaceful place – I’ve never, ever experienced anything like this.” He said he had forgiven the driver. “I was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. He was angry, and I just happened to be the person he took it out on.” Before the offender drove off, Woolgar took photos of the man’s car. Police have arrested a 22-year-old Carterton man, and said charges would be laid before the accused appeared in court later this week.



Sean Woolgar has had a 37cm-long plate inserted in his leg.

Weather TODAY Max: 22C Min: 13C Let's hope this morning's low cloud and fog clear to reveal much cheaper petrol prices – and a spectacular day. A16 Inside A6-7 Opinion A8 Capital Day A9-13 Business A15 Culture B1-2 World B3 Puzzles B5 Sharetables B5-8 Sport

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