

Stand Children's Services consulting staff on closing two residential villages

Stand Children's Services is proposing to close its Children's Villages at Otaki and Roxburgh.

The organisation would continue to operate its Intensive Family Wraparound services in the central and southern regions, but would stop providing the residential trauma focused treatment programme at the end of June 2018.

Stand Chief Executive Dr Fiona Inkpen says all children and families currently working with Stand would continue to receive the Intensive Family Wraparound Service.

"I want to reassure our children and families that Stand is not going anywhere. The villages are one aspect of the services we provide and while it would be very sad to close these two, our priority remains supporting children and families to be safe, healthy and functioning well."

Stand's Children's Villages provide a unique treatment service for children aged 5 to 12 who need support to recover from trauma.

Dr Inkpen says Stand hasn't had a funding increase since 2009 and has been meeting operating shortfalls from its own reserves. Financial pressures increased last year following salary increases for the organisation's staff.

"Pay rises were a priority for us to retain our specialist staff who support some of the country's most vulnerable children and families, but who've been among the lowest paid in the sector.

"Our people deserve recognition for their work, and we needed to recruit and keep quality staff who make a real difference to these children's lives."

"Stand has been able to top-up Government funding for many years with prudent financial management and the sale of unused land.

"Unfortunately our reserves are now used up and we have made the difficult decision to consult with staff and the PSA about closing two of our villages. Our hope is this will be a temporary measure and we will be working with Oranga Tamariki and the Ministry of Education to rebuild services in both regions," says Dr Inkpen.

For the 2017/18 financial year, Stand and Oranga Tamariki split the operating costs caused by the increase 50/50, however Stand would need \$3 million extra, an increase of 18 per cent, to cover the pay rises, compensate for 9 years of inflation, and added costs such as Kiwisaver, to keep the villages open.

Minister for Children Tracey Martin told Stand the Government recognised the value of the organisation and its work, but the funding required could not be secured at this time because of restrictions on the Government budget.

If the proposal to close proceeds, 63 jobs will be lost across both regions and 380 children a year will miss out on the Children's Village trauma treatment programme.

"We believe there is no alternative trauma focused treatment service for these children. Our future focus on rebuilding our service in these regions is to ensure they are able to receive the help they really need," says Dr Inkpen.

"If the proposal proceeds, we would be offering redundancy, or where there are vacancies, staff could apply to transfer. Oranga Tamariki have also offered to identify employment opportunities for staff to consider.

"We have spoken to our people over the last two days. They understand the situation, and are being courageous in working to keep supporting children. They now have time to consider the information and respond. I will then consider their feedback and responses before making a final decision.

"Stand has evidence showing its services significantly improve the safety and wellbeing of children and we are one of the most cost effective in the sector. There is a real and important need for this treatment. We are not going away."

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About Stand Children's Services Tu Maia Whanau

Stand is a proven and respected nationwide provider of a range of specialist services including intensive family wraparound, therapeutic social work, family therapy and childhood focused trauma treatment.

Stand works with children and families to break the cycle of harm so children and families are safe, can recover from past trauma, reconnect with each other, and create a positive future together.

There are currently seven Children's Villages across the country: Whangarei, Auckland, Rotorua, Gisborne, Otaki, Christchurch and Roxburgh.

Stand also provide Family Therapy Services in the Midland, Central and Christchurch Regions; Kidzacool respite services in school holidays to grandparents raising grandchildren and kin carers; and Social Worker in Schools Services in Christchurch, Northland and Gisborne.

A recent independent assessment of Stand's services, conducted by TDB Advisory, shows that Stand is working with the children most in need, and that its services are making a positive difference in the lives of vulnerable children. The report can be found at <https://www.tdb.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Stand-for-Children-Social-Investment-Review-Feb-17.pdf>

More information on Stand Children's Services can be found at www.standforchildren.org.nz