



Family
for every child

Strengthening Kinship Care as Systemic Reform

Elevating Whānau, Shifting Power

Dr Braden Clark &
Dr Michelle Egan-Bitran



Ko Wai Au

- **Dr Braden Clark**
Relate Services
Lead Researcher
- **Dr Michelle Egan-Bitran**
Programme Advisor New Zealand and
Pacific, Family for Every Child
Co-Researcher and Project Manager



Family
for every child

What is Kinship Care?

When children cannot live with their biological parents for various reasons, they may go to live with 'kin'. This includes:

- Grandparents
- Adult siblings
- Other relatives
- Whānau, hapū, iwi
- Close family friends

In the Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori have customary practices of atawhai and whāngai.



"It's whānau just all supporting each other and stepping in when you have to so that it doesn't get any worse and trying to do our best for the children."

Our Research Approach

Kinship Carers

- 17 kinship carers from 15 households
- 60% of participants were Māori

Professionals Supporting Kinship Carers

- 4 professionals from a range of backgrounds and organisations
- 50% were Māori

Advisory Rōpū

- Our advisory rōpū guided us on this research journey
- 50% were Māori and included representation from Family for Every Child partner organisations, stakeholders, Pasifika, people living with a disability, and researchers



Family
for every child



Family
for every child

Kinship Care Supports Children's Wellbeing

**Kinship Care occurs everyday in
Aotearoa New Zealand and supports
the wellbeing of children**



The Kinship Care Journey

Support Before Kinship Care

- Practical and emotional support is provided by kinship carers before the child enters their care.
- Kinship carers support the wellbeing and safety of children whilst in their parents' care.

Deciding to Provide Care

- Kinship care was not necessarily a decision – it was a natural response out of love for the children.
- Kinship care is usually unexpected and unplanned.

Providing Kinship Care

- Relational changes and meeting the needs of the child can be challenging.
- Systems can create additional complexity and challenges for kinship family and whānau.

Navigating Supports

- Kinship family and whānau need supports, services, and systems which are tailored to their unique needs.
- Peer and social support, along with training is valuable for kinship carers.



Family
for every child

The Kinship Care Journey

"We surrounded her as much as we could, but even things like being able to keep her house clean, she wasn't able to do that ... There were a number of people around us keeping an eye on and trying to assist and just trying to support her to be a good mum, or to become one."

"It came down to seeing my mokopuna as being an extension of myself. And even though it was hard, I wouldn't want it any other way."

"I've heard and seen a lot of horror stories in the foster system. That would have been the last thing I wanted for them ... And I could see what was happening was not right. And I didn't want that for my grandchild."



Family
for every child



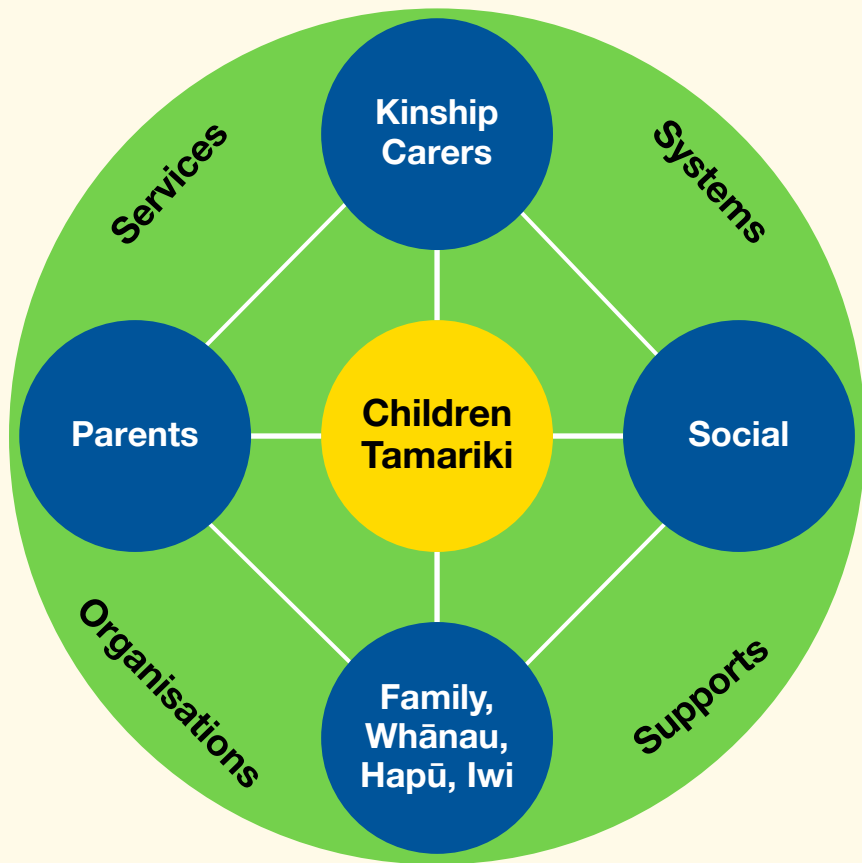
Family
for every child

Kinship Care can be Challenging

**Kinship Carers Navigate Relational
and Systemic Challenges**



Relationships & Support Systems



Family
for every child

Relationships & Support Systems

"It's hard being grandmother to your ... other grandchildren, you know. They miss out. Because when they come to my house, I'm not like the fun granny that I used to be with them."

"I find it very isolating because it's hard to find people that can relate to my situation ... Even the concept of going and having a coffee with my old work colleagues, I couldn't even do that because I didn't have the ability."

"When I get invited to my extended family, like my brothers and sisters and that, sometimes you just don't go because it's too bloody hard."

"I don't know what other help that you can get. Because I didn't know nothing about what I could get."



Family
for every child

The Impacts on Children

Relational

**Trauma &
Emotional**

**Health &
Disability**

Education

Identity



Family
for every child



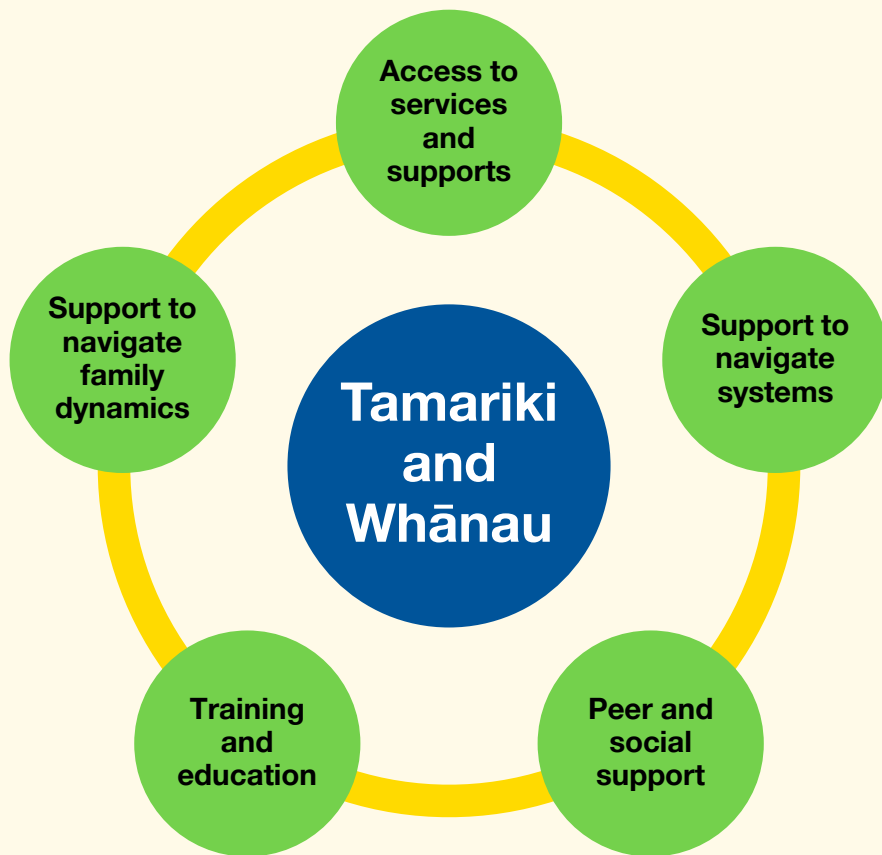
Family
for every child

Kinship Families and Whānau Need Support

Kinship Care Requires Tailored Wraparound Support



Support Needs



Family
for every child

Support Needs

"The right people in the right places, that cultural support and options. Because sometimes a system just gives you one option, that's it. But it's like it's a one size fits all."

"We used to go to this therapy ... My granddaughter wouldn't talk to them. They said, 'oh we can't see her, she's not interacting'. And I said, 'well isn't that part of your job to get her to interact?' But no, they just give up. It's too hard."

"It's not just about giving you some money and letting you look after these children. It's all about their emotional needs, because they're not your run of the mill kids, you know, no matter what anybody says."

"Finding a service or support service that is Māori-led, if it's Māori and it's whāngai and that understands what whāngai might look like or maybe their lived experience."



Family
for every child

Supporting Kinship Care

Key principles of support:

- Understand the unique and complex dynamics of kinship care.
- Be child-centred, whānau-led and culturally responsive.
- Link to and advocate for services and supports.
- Recognise the needs of children and whānau change over time.
- Support whānau to build an enduring support network who can provide practical supports.



Closing Reflections & Next Steps

**This is not just a service gap — It is a structural injustice.
We must re-imagine care through the lens of whakapapa and
manaakitanga.**

Next steps:

***Strengthening Kinship Care in
Aotearoa New Zealand***
research report launch on the
7th of October during
Global Kinship Care Week.

**Strengthening Kinship Care:
Upholding the rights of children
and their families/whānau
13th October.** Check out the
Children's Rights Alliance Aotearoa
New Zealand website at:
www.childrensrightsalliance.org.nz

**Or email Michelle for further details at:
michelle.egan-bitran@familyforeverychild.org**



Family
for every child

Any questions?



Family
for every child