

Aims and Desired Policy Change

The Hands Off Our Tamariki Movement aims to “directly end the systemic removal of Māori pēpi from their whānau into Oranga Tamariki.” In return, this movement prioritises Māori-led solutions, proposing approaches such as whānau-centred decision-making, which seeks to let whānau, hapū, and iwi have a voice in the removal process. Further solutions include establishing a Mokopuna Māori Authority to oversee policies and decisions, voicing their perspective on a child’s circumstances and placement, and funding Kaupapa Māori organisations that focus their services on a Māori worldview rather than the government’s view on child placement.

With these solutions, the Hands Off Our Tamariki Movement directly opposes the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989, which still gives overall authority to Oranga Tamariki in decision-making. This campaign’s goal was to repeal parts of this legislation, which, in response to a march in 2019 along with a petition, led to Section 7AA being introduced. This section acknowledges Māori values such as whakapapa and tino rangatiratanga. Despite this success, the Hands Off Our Tamariki Movement still recognises flaws within the legislation. Their ongoing goal is specifically eliminating non-consensual “uplifts” of tamariki Māori and mandating iwi-led decision-making processes with the solutions stated above.

In 2019, the movement organised a nationwide protest march and delivered a petition to Parliament, calling for an end to non-consensual uplifts of Māori children and for greater recognition of whakapapa and tino rangatiratanga in child welfare decisions.. Beyond public demonstrations, the movement has continued its advocacy through community hui, public awareness campaigns, and media engagement, promoting whānau-centred decision-making and calling for the establishment of a Mokopuna Māori Authority to oversee policies affecting tamariki Māori. The group also pushes for increased funding for Kaupapa Māori organisations, ensuring that child protection decisions reflect Māori worldviews rather than government-imposed models. These combined actions reflect an ongoing commitment to restoring Māori authority over the care and wellbeing of their tamariki and ensuring iwi-led, culturally grounded solutions in child welfare policy.

Reasons for individuals’ and/or groups’ involvement**#1 Sarah Taiapa:**

Sarah Taiapa is a well-established Māori activist and advocate for wahine Māori, who has consistently criticised Oranga Tamariki and their methods. Emerging as a powerful voice within the Hands Off Our Tamariki Movement, Sarah is strongly against the removal of Māori pēpi by Oranga Tamariki. Most notably, she attended protests as early as 2019, where she passionately declared her dismay regarding the removal of Māori children by the state, exclaiming, “I cannot believe that children are still being taken by the state in 2019.” She went on to stress that “To preserve the Māori culture, tamariki must be kept with their whānau,” while further stating, “This here is raising the awareness and physically getting people together to face the problem face to face just to show that we are here, we care, this is a problem, as something does need to be done about it.”

These statements show Sarah’s strong stance on this issue and her reason for involvement, as her view comes from those affected directly by Oranga Tamariki and their controversial child removal methods. A significant example of this was recorded in early 2019, when Oranga Tamariki came under fire regarding the attempted removal of a newborn from its mother at Hawke’s Bay Hospital. The midwife in the care of this pēpi expressed her perspective, saying, “Oranga Tamariki’s policies are racist against Māori, and continue to hurt iwi, hapū, and whānau through the generations,” while further stating, “When we look at the statistics of children in state care today, they are third, fourth and fifth generation. They are children of state care, their parents were, and their grandparents were.”

This incident perfectly highlights Sarah’s view and reason for opposing Oranga Tamariki. She passionately declares her opinion, aiming to challenge what she believes is systemic racism that exists within state care institutions such as Oranga Tamariki.

#2 Ngā Maia

Founded in 1993, Ngā Maia was created by Māori midwives with the intent to act against Māori maternity inconsistencies present around the time of their establishment. Since then, Ngā Maia has become a strong voice within maternity care, fighting for Māori equality and rights. One prominent achievement includes their creation of Turanga Kaupapa, a cultural framework for midwifery that has been adopted and endorsed by the Midwifery Council and the New Zealand College of Midwives.

With their advocacy for Māori in the maternity space, their support for the Hands Off Our Tamariki Movement came as no surprise. The most significant reason for Ngā Maia's involvement in this campaign derives from the strong core values they hold as an organisation. Their most distinguished value is their acknowledgement and commitment to Mana Motuhake. Mana Motuhake is a value that seeks self-determination and autonomy over oneself. With the government's dismissal and ignorance towards Oranga Tamariki's policies and their lack of Māori worldview within the establishment as a whole, it is unsurprising the amount of dismay Ngā Maia holds towards both the government and Oranga Tamariki's rejection of mana motuhake.

The Hands Off Our Tamariki Movement endorses mana motuhake as they aim to prioritise Māori-led solutions, something Ngā Maia is familiar with and a noteworthy reason for their involvement in this campaign. An additional value held by Ngā Maia is their commitment to whanaungatanga and manaakitanga, which both directly align with the kaupapa of this movement. These ideologies highlight the value of strong, supportive whānau relationships and the community's duty to care for tamariki Māori. The Hands Off Our Tamariki Movement is directly targeting policies of the Oranga Tamariki Act that prohibit or fail to uphold these values - specifically Section 78 of this Act, which allows the courts to decide custody of a child without notifying all parties. This directly opposes Ngā Maia's values of whanaungatanga and manaakitanga, making all of the values they uphold an integral reason for their involvement in the Hands Off Our Tamariki Movement.

Social Action Methods and Reasons

One of the main social action methods taken as part of the campaign was an open letter and petition that was delivered to Parliament in 2019. The open letter outlined the "urgent need for transformative systemic change" and listed 15 key changes they wanted the government to make in relation to the issue. They supported this by citing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Articles 7, 21, and 22, and highlighted, "We have not been alone in such a position, which has been advocated by a range of organisations including the Māori Women's Welfare League, Whānau Ora collectives, the Māori Council, Te Wharepora Hou, a number of iwi and Māori organisations, groups of Māori counsellors, social workers and healers, and both the previous and current Commissioner for Children amongst others."

This open letter was shared through ActionStation and managed to gather 17,000 signatures. ActionStation helped to promote the letter through their own social media platforms, and on many occasions the hashtag #HandsOffOurTamariki was used. By creating an open letter that clearly outlined their position, positioning themselves alongside other reputable groups, and citing UN obligations, they were able to add weight to their cause and help ensure they were taken seriously by the government. Additionally, by using a platform such as ActionStation, which is widely known and able to spread messages quickly through its channels, they were able to amass a huge number of signatures, particularly as the issue was very prevalent in the media at the time due to the Hawke's Bay uplift. The 17,000 signatures were hugely important to the campaign as they clearly illustrated to the government that there was mass support behind their policy requests.

Importantly, the delivery took place on 30 July 2019, when several hundred people gathered at Parliament to submit their petition and open letter. Around 300 people attended the Wellington rally (there were also other rallies held in other urban centres, gaining further attention), and it was delivered to Green Party co-leader Marama Davidson. This action had two key parts: firstly, the number of people who attended the rally gathered media attention and further spread the message,

as the delivery was covered by RNZ, Stuff, and local news channels. Secondly, by ensuring it was handed over to Parliament, it helped to ensure that the message was clearly delivered to the policymakers they were aiming to influence. Alongside this, they published a press release where the campaigners “called for the resignation of both the CEO Grainne Moss and for the Minister Tracey Martin to step down and strongly advocate for Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern to step up and to take seriously the calls by Māori for Kaupapa Māori solutions and approaches that are led by Māori for Māori.” This added further public pressure on politicians to act more promptly and address the concerns that were raised.

Part 2 Examine in detail the real and potential consequences of the campaign.

In addition to the change to legislation through Section 7AA, the Hands Off Our Tamariki Movement had many social and economic impacts on Aotearoa. The most significant impact and real consequence of this campaign was the sharp reduction in child removals and disparities around state care. As a result of heavy advocacy through media, rallies, petitions, and other social actions initiated by this campaign, several child welfare systems in Aotearoa saw a substantial reduction in the number of babies removed at birth. Specifically, between the years 2019 to 2020 (the years the movement was most prominent), newborn removals declined by more than half compared to previous years. Additionally, the disparity between Māori and Pākehā child removals also lessened drastically. These decreases greatly demonstrate the weight a campaign can acquire and the impact that weight can have on society given the right resources and consistency in advocacy. The Hands Off Our Tamariki Movement remained consistently mobilised during the years that saw great improvements to newborn removals. Though this was not on the scale of full policy change, they inadvertently aided in reducing these removals through consistent presence alone.

A secondary and somewhat negative real consequence of the Hands Off Our Tamariki Movement is the avoidance and reinforced distrust in government-owned public health services. Due to this movement's exposure of systemic racism and historical trauma present in Oranga Tamariki, whānau Māori have voiced concerns and avoided seeking help from these services. These services are not limited to state care. Some Māori whānau have been documented avoiding essential healthcare such as seeing a doctor in fear that Oranga Tamariki will uplift their child. Despite the risks and flaws that arise from this exposure, this avoidance and stigmatised distrust of not only Oranga Tamariki but essential healthcare further highlights the systemic racism and generational trauma that stem from state care services like Oranga Tamariki. This could likely result in possible intervention from government entities to act on this issue. The Hands Off Our Tamariki Movement was able to bring dire systemic issues to the attention of not only the general public but possibly even governing ministers, while also exposing the deep-rooted fears some Māori experience when dealing with state care institutions like Oranga Tamariki.

Potential Consequences

A prominent potential consequence of the Hands Off Our Tamariki Movement is the reinstatement of Section 7AA of the Oranga Tamariki Act. As explained earlier, in 2019, the Hands Off Our Tamariki Movement played a vital role in exposing Oranga Tamariki and their lack of consistent adherence to Section 7AA of the Act, a section that ensures the use of Māori values during their procedures. Through this exposure, they were able to raise public awareness and hold Oranga Tamariki accountable for rejecting this section, reinforcing its importance. In 2024, under the current coalition government, the New Zealand Act Party repealed this section, claiming it prioritises culture over individual needs. From this repeal, the Hands Off Our Tamariki Movement could possibly see a future resurgence, doubling down on the importance of this section. Considering their accomplishment in 2019 and their past displays of consistent mobilisation, action from this movement surrounding this issue is extremely probable and could lead to the reinstatement of Section 7AA of the Oranga Tamariki Act.

Deriving from this possible reinstatement, an additional potential consequence of this campaign is further advocacy for Māori-led solutions. One of the most significant objectives this campaign voiced

was the implementation of Māori-led solutions. One solution that could potentially be revived is the establishment of a Mokopuna Health Authority. In 2023, Te Pāti Māori brought this idea forward to limit disparities and solve the ongoing issue of systemic mistreatment of Māori pēpi. This solution would create an independent Māori youth service designed for Māori by Māori. It would also solve further problems as it would see the immediate end to both at-birth uplifts and uplifts without the consent of hapū, iwi, and whānau. This solution as a whole addresses many of the issues Māori face with Oranga Tamariki and greatly accomplishes the goals the Hands Off Our Tamariki Movement aims to achieve. Implementing manaakitanga and kotahitanga, along with Māori leadership at the helm of this solution, highlights the likelihood of this movement's advocacy for this approach.

Examine the effectiveness of the campaign in influencing policy change

The Hands Off Our Tamariki Movement was significantly influential to policy change and showed several examples of its effectiveness throughout the course of its mobilisation. One example I have referenced throughout my analysis was their substantial influence in the 2019 march and their eventual impact on Section 7AA of the Oranga Tamariki Act. They were able to not only gain massive traction publicly through petitioning and rallies but also remain consistent over the course of their advocacy, something else I have repeatedly emphasised in my examination of their campaign. Their petition alone was extremely strong, holding over 17,000 signatures and garnering a formal response. Later that year, Oranga Tamariki released a statement acknowledging their wrongdoings regarding at-birth child removals. This movement held a rally carrying this petition and marched to the steps of Parliament, demanding the immediate abolishment of at-birth uplift procedures along with stressing the targeted and systemic racism that stems from this procedure. Through the culmination of this campaign's efforts, the Hands Off Our Tamariki Movement was able to influence Section 7AA of the Oranga Tamariki Act. This section of the Act newly obligated Oranga Tamariki to recognise and consider whanaungatanga and whakapapa Māori. From this feat, the effectiveness of the campaign is displayed perfectly. From their consistency to their intricate and well-thought-out social actions, this campaign undoubtedly made a significant impact on society through brilliantly effective campaigning methods and as a result made an impact on policy change.

While this movement was rooted in many strengths that eventually led to policy change, a further modification I believe was missing during their mobilisation derives from their lack of structured political strategy. Despite my praise of their political impacts through consistency, I believe they lacked an organised and set-in-stone political strategy, which led to many of their goals being overlooked, particularly their desire for Mokopuna Māori AUTHoirty to be established. Assets such as a political wing, a group made up of political experts that would work through the intricacies of policy change, could have strengthened their approach. This group could consist of or be aided by legal experts and MPs driving down the message with a powerful political argument to aid in further policy change. Additional assets could include Māori academics such as members of the Waitangi Tribunal to have a more integral and first-person role in this campaign. Though this movement had the backing of well-respected groups such as ActionStation and Ngā Maia, alongside the political backing of groups such as Te Pāti Māori, I believe creating a designated cohort of people like the one proposed who specifically target the political aspect of this campaign would greatly enhance the overall results from policy change.

Upon further consideration, a method I believe this campaign was missing is a thoroughly crafted way of getting their concerns across. During my research, I found there was a lack of consistent and secure messaging throughout the campaign's runtime. Many of the statements I encountered represented different aspects of what the campaign was striving for, which made it harder for the public and policymakers to clearly understand their core objectives. The public outrage was present and powerful, but this passion was diminished by the absence of a unified message that tied all actions together.

The hashtag "#HandsOffOurTamariki" was the most well-crafted and memorable element of their messaging, and while it successfully captured attention and created visibility, it did not fully

communicate the specific solutions the movement was advocating for. This gap meant that while people understood the problem, they were less aware of the detailed policy changes being requested, such as the establishment of a Mokopuna Māori Authority or mandatory iwi-led decision-making. A strong, structured communication strategy could have amplified these solutions and ensured they were front and centre in public discourse.

The student used footnoting throughout and provided a full reference list. These were removed for brevity.