



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT**

TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

07 OCT 2020

Dear

On 28 August 2020, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982, the following information:

- *All available information regarding dates that the Wairarapa Community Link was closed to the public between 23 - 25 March 2020 (Alert Level 3), 26 March - 27 April 2020 (Alert Level 4), and 28 April - 13 May 2020 (Level 3)?*
- *Also, can you please provide information regarding if and how clients were able to apply for Special Needs Grants through Wairarapa Community Link over those same dates?*

On 24 September 2020, the Ministry extended the time in which it would respond to your request.

All Ministry service centres including the Wairarapa Community Link were closed to the public during Alert Levels 3 and 4 to keep people safe and prevent the spread of COVID-19. All communication relating to the closure of the Wairarapa Community Link was not specific to the Wairarapa as the Ministry sent the same messaging to all of its service centres to ensure a consistent approach across the country.

On Sunday 22 March 2020, the Group General Manager for Client Service Support sent an email to all Regional Directors of the Ministry, outlining the following:

- All service centres will be operating the new site entry measures as mentioned below:
- We (the Ministry) are moving all sites to phone-based appointments only. While we are transitioning, you can provide a F2F (face-to-face) service to clients with existing appointments if it is not possible to do them over the phone.
- All sites will be ceasing all proactive appointments, including meetings, seminars etc.
- All case managers and other staff with the appropriate skills will be deployed to manage payment of financial assistance to clients i.e. benefits, supplementary assistance, hardship and wage subsidies.

This summary of the email dated 22 March 2020, is provided in accordance with section 16(e) of the Act.

Although service centres were closed to the public during the lockdown period, the Ministry continued to deliver essential income support and housing services. The Ministry also provided support for employers such as the COVID-19 Wage Subsidy.

In order to ensure that clients and staff didn't need to have face-to-face contact, all clients were able to apply for or discuss assistance (including Special Needs Grants) over the phone by contacting our 0800 numbers, or online through their MyMSD account. Appointments were also conducted by phone rather than in person.

For your reference, data relating to Special Needs Grants can be found in the Ministry's fact sheet at the following link: www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/benefit/2020/benefit-fact-sheets/quarterly-benefit-fact-sheets-w-i-supplementary-tables-june-2020.xlsx. Data pertaining to the Wairarapa Community Link is included as part of the Central Region.

Please note that due to the change in processes and high demand for the Ministry's services during the lockdown period, clients may have been assisted by staff other than those from their local service centre (for example, Contact Centre staff or case managers from other sites).

More information about changes to the way the Ministry works during the COVID-19 pandemic can be found at the following link: www.workandincome.govt.nz/covid-19/changes-to-how-we-work.html#null.

More information about what clients can access through their MyMSD account can also be found at the following link: www.workandincome.govt.nz/online-services/mymsd/index.html#null.

The principles and purposes of the Official Information Act 1982 under which you made your request are:

- to create greater openness and transparency about the plans, work and activities of the Government,
- to increase the ability of the public to participate in the making and administration of our laws and policies and
- to lead to greater accountability in the conduct of public affairs.

This Ministry fully supports those principles and purposes. The Ministry therefore intends to make the information contained in this letter and any attached documents available to the wider public. The Ministry will do this by publishing this letter on the Ministry of Social Development's website. Your personal details will be deleted, and the Ministry will not publish any information that would identify you as the person who requested the information.

If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz.

If you are not satisfied with this response regarding the Wairarapa Community Link, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bridget Saunders', with a large, stylized initial 'B'.

Bridget Saunders

Manager

Issue Resolution, Service Delivery