



Social Return on Investment (SROI) of Social Workers in Schools



Summary Report
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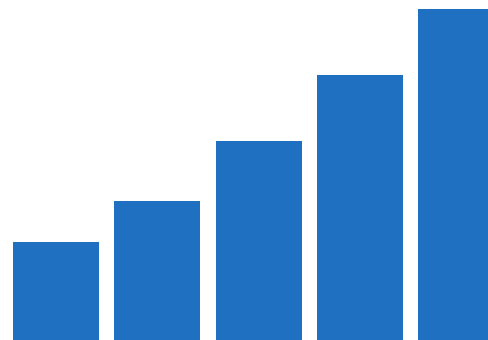
Conflict of Interest Declaration

The Social Workers in Schools Service is a Presbyterian Support Northern service and this evaluation report has been conducted by the Presbyterian Support Northern Service Evaluation Team.

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Message from the General Manager



I'd like to share this Social Return on Investment (SROI) report for the Social Workers in Schools (SWiS) service.

At its core, SWiS exists to support the wellbeing of tamariki and their whānau. Every day, our social workers walk alongside children, families, and schools to ensure that tamariki feel safe, supported, and connected — both in the classroom and beyond. We know that when children's basic needs are met and their emotional wellbeing is nurtured, they are more likely to attend school regularly, engage in learning, and reach their full potential.

This report helps to demonstrate the social value created through the SWiS service — not only through numbers and outcomes, but through the positive changes seen in the lives of tamariki and their whānau. Whether it's building trust with a family, addressing barriers to attendance, or creating a safe space for a child to be heard, SWiS plays a vital role in strengthening the foundations for lifelong wellbeing.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the participants who collaborated so that we could produce this report, evidencing our work and the impact that we make in the communities we serve. I also want to acknowledge Dr. Sheri Zeng, Senior Researcher, for guiding us on this journey, as well as the Service Evaluation Team (SET) at Presbyterian Support Northern for the support they provided.

To all of the social services staff — whether directly or indirectly involved — thank you for your mahi and your passion in making a difference to the many clients we work with.

Finally, this is for all of the clients we have worked with, are busy working with, or will be working with. You inspire us to continue this mahi and, most importantly, demonstrate the impact that we can have in your lives and in your communities.

EHARA TAKU TOA I TE TOA TAKITAHU, ENGARI HE TOA TAKITINI
SUCCESS IS NOT THE WORK OF AN INDIVIDUAL BUT THE WORK OF MANY

Grenville Hendricks
General Manager, Social Services
Presbyterian Support Northern



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About the SWiS Service

Presbyterian Support Northern (PSN) delivers the Social Workers in Schools (SWiS) service across primary and intermediate schools in northern New Zealand. Funded by Oranga Tamariki - Ministry for Children, SWiS supports vulnerable tamariki and their whānau through early intervention social work services, with a focus on improving safety, wellbeing, and educational outcomes. The service includes both one-on-one casework and group programmes, delivered by qualified social workers based on-site in schools. By working alongside tamariki, whānau, teachers, and other professionals, SWiS address social, emotional, behavioural, and family challenges that may impact children's wellbeing and social engagement.

PSN's SWiS service is delivered through Family Works Northern and reflects a holistic, culturally responsive, and whānau-centred approach. Social workers not only support tamariki but also work with parents or caregivers to improve parenting skills, strengthen family relationships, and build resilience. By empowering families, restoring trust, and connecting whānau to wider community services, PSN enables long-lasting improvements in child safety, emotional wellbeing, school attendance, and family functioning. With deep roots in local communities and strong school partnerships, PSN's SWiS service aims to create meaningful and sustainable change.





Defining Scope and Social Value

Scope

This evaluation considers the social value created for key stakeholders who engaged in SWiS service, during the period 1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025.

Key stakeholders are defined as individuals or groups that experience change or impact the service, whether positive or negative, as a result of the service being analysed (SROI Guidance, 2012). Based on this definition, the key stakeholders include:

- Tamariki: they are at the heart of the SWiS service.
- Parents or Caregivers: they play an important role in supporting tamariki outside of the school environment.
- Qualified Social Workers: they are delivering SWiS service.
- SWiS team leaders or area managers: they have a comprehensive understanding of the service, oversee its daily operations, and provide strategic guidance.

Indirect stakeholders include external agencies, school staff and principals, Oranga Tamariki (OT), and others. While they play an important role in the broader ecosystem of support, their involvement is considered indirect, as they are not the primary recipients or direct providers of the service.

Social Value

- In this report, the term ‘social value’ is utilised to describe the overall value of the changes experienced by people as a result of the SWiS service.
- This definition is based on guidance from Social Value International and the SROI framework, which focused on what matters most to the people affected.
- Although terms like ‘social impact’ and ‘social value’ can have different meanings in other contexts, here we use ‘social value’ as an inclusive term. It covers both the measurable changes caused by the service and how important those changes are to the people who experience them.



How Social Value was Measured

This report is based on the internationally recognised Social Return on Investment (SROI) framework and follows the eight principles of Social Value International. To ensure the analysis is rigorous, transparent, and stakeholder-informed, the researcher used a mixed-methods approach, combining high-quality internal data, stakeholder feedback, and evidence from research.

The Data Sources and Process

Internal SWiS Database

- At the core of the analysis is a well-maintained database that tracks all students engagements with SWiS. After one-on-one or group programmes, surveys are sent to students to gather feedback. If students are unable to respond, surveys are sent to their parents or caregivers. The database also includes social workers' observations and feedback on each student's progress and outcomes.

Targeted Online Surveys

- Sent to school staff, SWiS staff, and social workers.
- Designed to understand changes, verify outcomes and help estimate attribution percentages.

Semi-structured Interviews

- Conducted with SWiS staff to gain deeper insights into service delivery and the significant outcomes.

Ongoing Literature Review

- Used to support achieved outcomes, identify appropriate financial proxies, and benchmark deadweight rates.

Regular Meetings with SWiS Teams

- Throughout data collection and analysis, the researcher held regular meetings with the SWiS teams to discuss findings, clarify uncertainties, and ensure their voices were incorporated at every stage.

Valuing Outcomes

In line with best practice, the researcher assigned financial value to outcomes by:

- Selecting financial proxies from the NZ Treasury CBAX Tool, relevant research, and comparable programme valuations;
- Estimating attribution, based on stakeholder feedback on how much change could be credited to SWiS;
- Applying deadweight adjustments, using literature-based benchmarks to account for change that would have occurred without SWiS.

These adjustments ensure our valuation is conservative, evidence-based, and consistent with the SROI principle: "Do not overclaim."

SROI Principles Followed

The researcher applied the eight SROI principles (Social Value International, 2025):

- Involve stakeholders
- Understand what changes
- Value the things that matter
- Only include what is material
- Do not overclaim
- Be transparent
- Verify the result
- Be responsive

These principles ensured the analysis remained ethical, balanced, and grounded in the real experiences of students, families and staff.

Service Activities

SWiS social workers use a holistic approach, grounded in the belief that the best way to support tamariki and their whānau is by fostering strong connections to their culture and tikanga, which in turn supports their overall wellbeing and needs. They deliver a range of tailored supports and interventions to enhance safety and positive outcomes.

- **One-on-one support tailored to tamariki needs**

SWiS social workers provide individualised casework for tamariki facing challenges with emotional wellbeing, peer relationships, behaviours, attendance, and more. They also act as advocates, helping ensure tamariki's voices are heard in school and family matters.

- **Group-based programmes**

In addition to one-on-one support, SWiS social workers deliver structured group programmes that promote social skills, emotional regulation, and resilience. Some programmes focus on building tamariki's sense of identity and belonging - for example, helping tamariki explore their whakapapa, cultural values, and sense of where they come from.

- **Support for whānau**

SWiS social workers support parents by offering practical parenting strategies and helping strengthen family relationships. Just as importantly, they act as a bridge between the school, the student, and the whānau - facilitating communication, addressing concerns, and ensuring families feel connected and supported by the school.

- **Advocacy and collaboration**

SWiS social workers advocate for the needs of tamariki and their whānau both inside and outside the school. They work closely with teachers, school leaders, and other professionals (e.g., Oranga Tamariki, health services) to coordinate support and ensure tamariki are surrounded by a network of care.

- **Culturally responsive practice**

SWiS embrace culturally responsive approaches, particularly for Māori tamariki and their whānau. Social workers incorporate tikanga Māori and te ao Māori into their practice and build strong, respectful relationships with diverse communities.



Reach and Engagement

Total Tamariki Reached: **2,981**

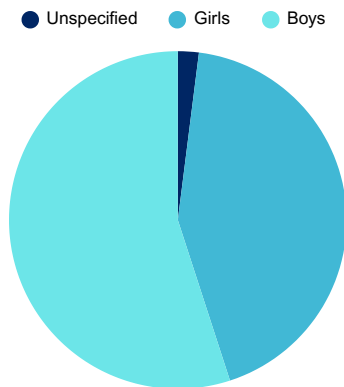
Including both individual support and group-based sessions

ONE-ON-ONE CASEWORK

GROUP-BASED PROGRAMMES

Tamariki supported individually: 922

Tamariki reached through groups: 2,059



Gender

Girls: 43%

Boys: 55%

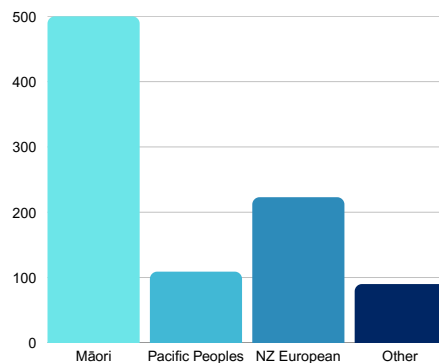
Ethnicity

Māori: 54%

NZ European: 24%

Pacific Peoples: 12%

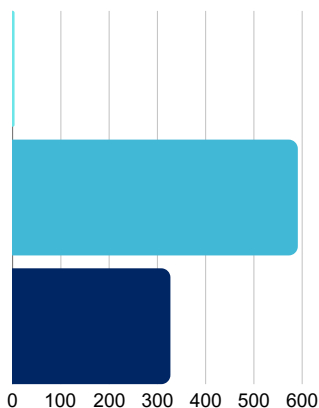
Other: 10%



Under 5 years

5-10 years

11-14 years



Age

Under 5 years: 0.4%

5-10 years: 64%

11-14 years: 35.6%

Number of programmes delivered

291

Total programme hours

5140

Schools were run with SWiS programmes

96

Average number of programmes per school:

3

Average hours per programme:

18



Outcomes for Tamariki

Nine key outcomes were experienced by tamariki through the SWiS service

<p>Learned emotional management skills and strategies</p> <p>411</p> <p>Tamariki gained skills and strategies</p>	<p>Improved emotional regulation</p> <p>280</p> <p>Tamariki reported improvements</p>	<p>Learned relationship-building and social skills</p> <p>490</p> <p>Tamariki built stronger skills</p>
<p>Better peer relationships</p> <p>260</p> <p>Tamariki improved friendship quality</p>	<p>Improved ability to identify and respond to risks</p> <p>669</p> <p>Tamariki identified and responded risks better</p>	<p>Greater school attendance and classroom participation</p> <p>161</p> <p>Tamariki increased school attendance and class engagement</p>
<p>Improved self-confidence and self-esteem</p> <p>164</p> <p>Tamariki grew in confidence</p>	<p>Greater sense of belonging and identity</p> <p>159</p> <p>Tamariki felt a stronger sense of belonging and identity</p>	<p>Improved emotional wellbeing</p> <p>626</p> <p>Tamariki experienced improved emotional wellbeing</p>

Outcomes for Parents and Social Workers

The SWiS service is designed not only to support tamariki, but also to strengthen the environments that surround them - their whānau, schools, and the professionals who support their wellbeing. The findings indicate that the service has delivered on this vision:

For Parents or Caregivers

- Better parent-child communication and relationships
260 parents or caregivers reported improved connection and communication with their children.
- Stronger connection with schools and external agencies
290 parents or caregivers felt more confident engaging with schools and accessing other support services.
- Learned parenting skills and strategies
66 parents or caregivers developed new ways to support their children's wellbeing and behaviour at home.

For Social Workers

- Improved professional skills
35 social workers described growth in confidence, caseload management, engagement strategies, and other areas of professional practice.



Valuing the Outcomes

The SWiS service generated measurable social value across tamariki, parents or caregivers, and social workers. All significant changes were adjusted for deadweight and attribution, and valued using conservative financial proxies from reliable sources.

Total Social Value Created: \$7,976,056


The total social value created includes all significant changes experienced by tamariki, parents or caregivers, and social workers. The table below shows the breakdown by social value created for key stakeholder groups.

Key Stakeholder Group	Social Value Created
Tamariki	\$7,191,517
Parents or Caregivers	\$744,376
Social Workers	\$40,163

SROI Ratio: \$3.5:1

Every \$1 invested in the SWiS service generated \$3.5 of social value

This SROI analysis focuses on the significant outcomes experienced by key stakeholders – in alignment with SROI principles. However, the PSN's SWiS service also created positive ripple effects beyond these groups. For example, schools benefited from improved classroom engagement, and agencies such as Oranga Tamariki may experience reduced demand for intensive interventions. While these indirect outcomes are not included in the SROI ratio calculation, they demonstrate the broader social value and system-level impact generated by the service.



Alignment with Oranga Tamariki' Goals

This report found that SWiS has achieved outcomes that directly align with the expectations and goals outlined by Oranga Tamariki (OT).

OT Goal: Safety, Social Capability, and Wellbeing

✓ Achieved through these significant outcomes:

- Tamariki improved their ability to identify and respond to risks.
- Tamariki learned relationship-building and social skills.
- Tamariki developed better peer relationships.
- Tamariki learned emotional management strategies.
- Tamariki gained a greater sense of identity and belonging.
- Tamariki improved emotional wellbeing.
- Tamariki improved self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Tamariki improved emotional regulation.

These outcomes reflected enhanced wellbeing, safety awareness, emotional resilience, social connection, and cultural identity.

OT Goal: Educational Engagement

✓ Achieved through this significant outcome:

- Tamariki improved school attendance and classroom participation.

This outcome reflects improved presence, participation, and learning capacity - directly aligning with OT's aim of supporting educational engagement.

OT Goal: Connection to Whānau and Community

✓ Achieved through these significant outcomes:

- Parents or caregivers reported better connection with schools and external services.
- Parents or caregivers gained confidence in parenting and communication with tamariki.
- SWiS social workers acted as bridges between families, schools, and community services.
- SWiS embedded culturally responsive practice, especially in Māori kura.

These outcomes reflect stronger links across home, school, and wider support networks, enabling whānau to feel supported and capable of accessing help.



Responsiveness

As guided by SROI Principle 8, this report goes beyond valuing outcomes - it considers how the findings can shape decision-making and improve service delivery.

Key Insights from Stakeholders

- The service is working well

Tamariki, parents or caregivers, and school staff reported positive outcomes from the SWiS service. Respondents described the SWiS service as supportive, impactful, and essential to tamariki wellbeing and whānau connection. No significant concerns or suggestions for improvement were raised by participants.

- Need for expansion

Social workers noted that many schools without SWiS have similar needs, and tamariki in those settings could equally benefit from the SWiS service.

Recommendations

- Expand SWiS to More Schools

Research from the Ministry of Social Development highlights significant unmet wellbeing needs among tamariki - especially Māori students - across Aotearoa. SWiS has been shown to improve tamariki wellbeing, strengthen family relationships, and reduce contact with police and child protection services. Evaluations conducted by Oranga Tamariki and the Education Review Office confirm that schools, whānau, and tamariki highly value the service and observe meaningful changes. Therefore, expanding SWiS to more schools is a well-supported and equity-driven recommendation.

- Use SROI data to Guide Decision Making

This SROI analysis found a strong return of \$3.5:1, indicating that the SWiS service creates significant social value relative to the investment made. This finding aligns with other similar evaluations, including those outcome evaluations conducted by Oranga Tamariki and the Social Investment Agency, which consistently show positive outcomes for tamariki, whānau, and schools. Therefore, this analysis can inform decision-making and has implications for future investment, highlighting the potential for broader system-wide impact if SWiS were scaled across more educational settings.

This SROI analysis demonstrates that SWiS is achieving not only service - level change, but also offers a scalable model for improving tamariki wellbeing, whānau resilience, and system coordination. Future policy can build on these insights to extend the reach and impact of the service.



Limitations and the Response

To ensure transparency and credibility, this section outlines key limitations in this SROI analysis, and the steps taken to address them. While the findings reflect a strong social return, it is important to acknowledge areas where data quality or coverage could be improved in future evaluations.

Limitation	Response/Mitigation Approach
The researcher did not directly come in contact with the children that received the service.	The researcher referenced literature, news reports, and evaluations related to the SWiS service or similar programmes, and engaged with the other stakeholders to determine all potential impacts and outcomes in children.
Attribution and deadweight are based on stakeholders' feedback, literature and internal benchmarks, not directly measured from counterfactual data.	The researcher combined feedback from SWiS social workers, school staff, and national/international benchmarks to inform conservative estimates.
The survey response rate from some stakeholders was moderate, and not all students could self-report.	The researcher collected proxy feedback from parents/caregivers and used the internal database, which includes social workers' observations.



References

A wider range of literature and government resources were used to support this SROI analysis. Only a selection of key references is listed below.

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Ki te kotahi te kākaho ka whati, ki te
kāpuia e kore e whati.

When we stand alone we are
vulnerable but together we are
unbreakable



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