

TIAKI

STEPS TO...FREEDOM?

Exploring the inadequacies of the WINZ special grant
for people leaving NZ prisons



TIAKI Rangahau Rōpū
2026

TIAKI (meaning 'to care') is a kaupapa Māori rangahau (research) project that focuses on the lived experiences of Māori adults who have been imprisoned (in prisons in New Zealand or overseas) & their whānau

For more info on **TIAKI**
use the QR code to
check out our podcast



PUBLISHED BY  **TIAKI RANGAHAU RŌPŪ**

TE WHANGANUI-A-TARA — 2026

ABOUT THE

STEPS TO FREEDOM

GRANT

Source: www.workandincome.govt.nz

(Work and Income)

If you've been released from prison, we may be able to help you get set up in the community with a 'Steps to Freedom' grant.

You may be able to get a 'Steps to Freedom' grant if:

- you've been in prison for 31 days or more and
- have now been released, or released on home detention.

If you've been released into a residential care facility, you may be able to get the grant for any costs that aren't paid for by the facility.

YOU CAN GET UP TO

\$350

It can help pay for any initial costs you have when you're trying to set yourself up

THE AMOUNT YOU GET

DEPENDS ON...

- How much money you have when you're released from prison (any money is taken off the amount of the grant)
- If you have a partner (their income & assets are taken into account too).

Source: www.workandincome.govt.nz

So,
you might
get NOTHING!

In 2024 the average grant was

\$325

* According to information released to us under the Official Information Act 1982 by the Ministry of Social Development

THE VALUE OF THE
STEPS TO FREEDOM
GRANT

has not changed
SINCE

1991

IN INTERVIEWS

WE HEARD

ABOUT
THE GRANT
&

ITS
SHORTCOMINGS

SETTING YOURSELF UP ON

\$350 IS ^{ALMOST} IMPOSSIBLE

Nah, there's never been any support coming out. Just \$350, nowhere to go, a whole lot of conditions that you probably can't meet. **THEY SET YOU UP TO FAIL.**

Once you're released you've only got \$350 and that's pretty much your step to freedom. And that \$350, that's meant to feed you, clothe you, and house you until you sort your benefit.

Source: TIAKI Kairangahau interviews

& THERE IS NOT ENOUGH PRACTICAL
SUPPORT

... when you get out, you got **NOWHERE** to go. You got your money - you might go stay at a backpackers or whatever **BUT** when that money runs out, I know you have to jump through heaps of hoops to get your benefit back on. That can be overwhelming...

When you get your money, you're left to your own, so you don't know what to do. And you don't want to go back to, um, the circles. Or you don't want to hang out with the people that you were with before you went in there.

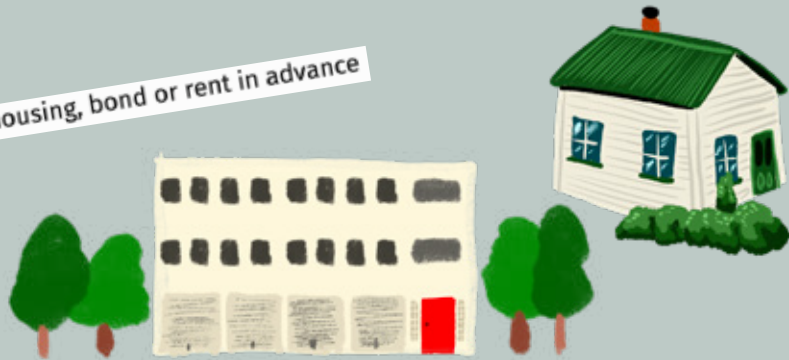
Source: TIAKI Kairangahau interviews

WHAT CAN YOU USE STEPS TO FREEDOM FOR?

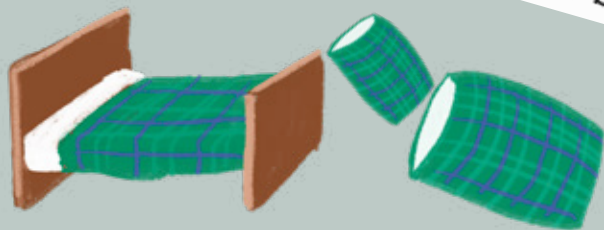
Source: www.workandincome.govt.nz

It can help pay for any initial costs you have when you're trying to set yourself up in the community, such as:

housing, bond or rent in advance



beds and bedding



power, gas or connecting a phone in your home



essential appliances, for example a kettle or toaster



food



clothing and toiletry items, for example a toothbrush or toothpaste.



BUT WHAT DOES ALL

THIS ACTUALLY COST?

The following calculations are based on
online searches conducted on 3 & 4
December 2025

TĀMAKI MAKĀURAU

4 DECEMBER 2025

Bond	\$680.00
Weekly rent *incl bed and utilities	\$170.00
Bedding	\$39.95
Groceries *one week	\$61.68
Toiletries	\$20.04
Basic clothing	\$86.87
Appliances	\$20.00

TOTAL: \$1,078.54

SHORTFALL
in Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland)
OF

\$728.54

* There are slight differences
in Cost by gender. We based this
on a person who buys period
products + women's clothing.

* We used WINZ guidance
on what the grant is
meant to cover + the
"Eating & Activity Guidelines
for NZ Adults"
where possible

SHORTFALL
in Whanganui-a-tara (Wellington)
OF
\$552.95

WHANGANUI-A-TARA

4 DECEMBER 2025

Bond	\$480.00
*three weeks rent	
Weekly rent *incl bed	\$160.00
Utilities	\$40.00
Bedding	\$39.95
Groceries	\$56.09
Toiletries	\$20.04
Basic clothing	\$86.87
Appliances	\$20.00

TOTAL: \$902.95

ŌTAUTAHĪ

4 DECEMBER 2025

Bond	\$600.00
*four weeks rent	
Weekly rent *requires two weeks to be paid at once; incl utilities	\$300.00
Bedding	\$542.95
Groceries *one week	\$51.41
Toiletries	\$20.04
Basic clothing	\$86.87
Appliances	\$20.00

TOTAL: \$1,621.27

SHORTFALL
in Ōtautahi (Christchurch)
OF

\$1,271.27

BUT

This isn't even
all the things you might
need money for
when returning to the
Community.

There are around an extra
\$170
worth of costs

NOT INCLUDED IN WINZ
GUIDANCE



TRANSPORT COSTS:

\$25 TĀMAKI MAKĀURAU
AUCKLAND

\$49 TE WHANGANUI-A-TARA
WELLINGTON

\$15 ŌTAU TAHI
CHRISTCHURCH

*WITH A COMMUNITY SERVICES CARD

COST TO VISIT A GENERAL PRACTICE:

\$19.50

(under the Very Low Cost Access Scheme)



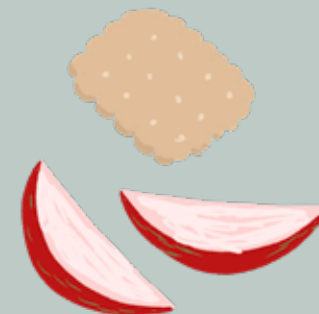
\$5

For each Subsidised Prescription



around
\$30
for additional kai

For tamariki/visitors



GLUTEN FREE DIET: $\approx$ \$22 extra

VEGETARIAN DIET: $\approx$ \$20 extra



Phone + Credit
\$47

Cleaning
Products
\$6 - \$8



SO the TRUE shortfall is

Between **\$723**
& **\$1441**

depending on where you live

MEANWHILE, THE COSTS OF HOLDING

SOMEONE IN CUSTODY HAS

...

Increased 
by

83%
in the past 9 years

from \$302 per person per day in
2016/17 to \$552 per day in 2024/25

*according to Department of
Corrections annual reports

The average cost per person
per day for the government
in 2024/25:

\$552
Per day

OR \$3,864 a week
for people on prison sentences

\$414
per day

OR \$2,898 a week for
people on remand

?

to hold people in police
custody for a night

WE REQUESTED INFO ON THE
COSTS OF HOLDING A PERSON
OVERNIGHT UNDER THE OIA.
NZ POLICE SAID...

Details of the cost associated with an individual's time spent in Police custody is not recorded in a way in which it is retrievable to answer your question. A new dataset would have to be created to provide you with this data. Therefore, this part of your request is refused under section 18(g) of the OIA as the information requested is not held.

IN OTHER WORDS...

IT IS MUCH MORE
EXPENSIVE
TO HOLD SOMEONE
IN CUSTODY THAN

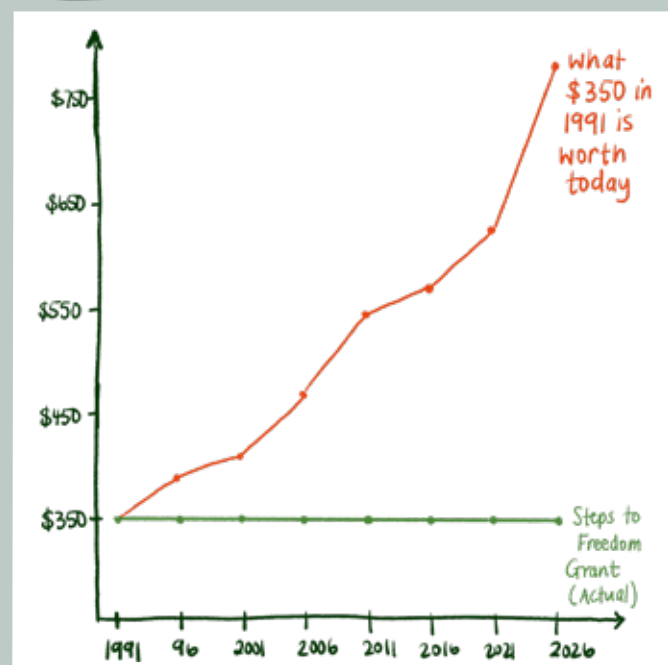


TO **INCREASE** THE STEPS
TO FREEDOM GRANT TO
A LEVEL THAT COVERS
THE TRUE COSTS OF
RETURNING TO THE
community

The purchasing power of

Steps to Freedom has dropped since
1991

GRAPH 1: INFLATION CALCULATION



If it had
kept pace with
inflation the Steps
to freedom grant
would be

\$781.06

Calculated for quarter 1, 2026



In 2019 the

WELFARE EXPERT ADVISORY GROUP

Recommended

THAT THE SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE
LEAVING PRISON BE ENHANCED &
IMPROVED, INCLUDING BY

INCREASING THE STEPS TO
FREEDOM GRANT

OUR RECOMMENDATION

IS THAT >>> STEPS TO
FREEDOM
MUST BE
INCREASED

By how much?

1. ANY AMOUNT UNDER
\$3,864 per week
REPRESENTS A POTENTIAL
SAVING TO THE GOVERNMENT
2. OUR RESEARCH SUGGESTS
THE STEPS TO FREEDOM
GRANT SHOULD BE
BETWEEN
\$1,170 & **\$1,800**

For more
recommendations
from the TIAKI rangahau
check out our
POLICY PAPER



REFERENCES + LINKS



This QR code will take you to a dropbox folder on information requested of the Ministry of Social Development under the Official Information Act 1982 about the Steps to Freedom Grant.

The Folder also has information released by the NZ police which is referred to in this Zine.



Welfare Expert Advisory Group (2019). *Whakamana Tangata: Restoring Dignity to Social Security in New Zealand*. Kia Pike Ake Welfare Expert Advisory Group. Wellington.

This publication is archived on the National Library of New Zealand website:
www.natlib.govt.nz/

Information about the Steps to Freedom Grant is available on the Ministry of Social Development website:

www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/steps-to-freedom-grant.html

AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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With Thanks to
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The TIAKI Rangahau Rōpū also wish to thank John Kingi for gifting us the beautiful tohu that we use on the back page of all of our zine publications. Ngā mihi nui John!



TIAKI Rangahau Rōpū

2026