



12 May 2023

Tēnā koe

On 5 April 2023, you emailed the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) requesting, under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), the following information:

1. *Can you please provide the number of recipients of the Steps to Freedom Grant for each quarter from 2018-2023?*
 - a. *Can you further provide a breakdown of these figures by ethnicity?*
2. *Can you also provide the total amount for Steps to Freedom grant for each quarter from 2018-2023?*
3. *Can you also provide an annual number of recipients of the Steps to Freedom Grant for the years 2002-2017?*
 - a. *Can you further provide a breakdown of these figures by ethnicity?*
4. *Can you also provide an annual total amount given under the Steps to Freedom Grant for the years 2002-2017?*
5. *Can you also provide the total amount of debt owed to MSD by people in prison per annual year from 2002-2023?*
6. *Can you also provide the number of prisoners that owe debt to MSD per annual year from 2002-2023?*
 - a. *Can you further break these down by ethnicity.*

On 21 April 2023, you confirmed to the Ministry that data from 2009 onwards would satisfy the intent of your request and point in time data for questions 5 and 6 was preferred over annual figures.

On 8 May 2023, the Ministry informed you that a decision had been made to grant your request in full, however, more time was required to prepare the information for release.

The Steps to Freedom (StF) grant is intended to help eligible prisoners pay for any initial costs they may have when they are trying to get re-established in the community, such as with housing, bond or rent in advance, beds and bedding, essential appliances (e.g., a kettle or toaster), power, gas or

connecting a home phone, food, clothing, and toiletry items (e.g., a toothbrush or toothpaste).

The grant can be received more than once if a person meets the criteria (e.g., they have spent more than 31 days in prison or they were remanded in custody) and is released from prison more than once.

More information on the StF grant can be found on our website, here: www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/steps-to-freedom-grant.html.

In March this year, the Ministry publicly released the cabinet paper *Welfare Overhaul Work Programme Update: Key priorities and next steps*. On page 23 of this cabinet paper, you will find key initiatives over the next 1 to 3 years include beginning work and exploring how to improve the effectiveness of the StF grant.

This cabinet paper and related documents are available at the following link: www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/information-releases/cabinet-papers/2023/welfare-overhaul-work-programme-update-key-priorities-and-next-steps.html.

This grant is just one way the Ministry can help. The Ministry have a voluntary prisoner reintegration programme, working with people to support their reintegration, including finding suitable employment. The Ministry may also consider other benefit and financial assistance.

The Ministry also works with organisations such as Corrections (as the lead agency), the Ministry of Health, housing providers, and community support services to help people who have been released from prison to find a job, accommodation, pay medical costs and buy food.

I will now respond to your questions in turn.

1. *Can you please provide the number of recipients of the Steps to Freedom Grant for each quarter from 2018-2023?*
 - a. *Can you further provide a breakdown of these figures by ethnicity?*
2. *Can you also provide the total amount for Steps to Freedom grant for each quarter from 2018-2023?*

Please refer to **Table One** in the **Appendix**, for the number of Steps to Freedom grants granted and amount paid from 1 January 2009 to 31 March 2023, broken down by quarter and ethnicity.

3. *Can you also provide an annual number of recipients of the Steps to Freedom Grant for the years 2002-2017?*
 - a. *Can you further provide a breakdown of these figures by ethnicity?*

4. *Can you also provide an annual total amount given under the Steps to Freedom Grant for the years 2002-2017?*

Please refer to **Table Two** in the **Appendix**, for the total number of Steps to Freedom grants granted and total amount paid annually as at 31 December 2009 to 31 December 2022, broken down by ethnicity.

5. *Can you also provide the total amount of debt owed to MSD by people in prison per annual year from 2002-2023?*
6. *Can you also provide the number of prisoners that owe debt to MSD per annual year from 2002-2023?*
- a. *Can you further break these down by ethnicity.*

Please refer to **Table Three** in the **Appendix**, for the number of clients in prison and the amount of debt owed as at 31 December 2009 to 31 December 2022, broken down by ethnicity.

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 and attachments on the Ministry'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, 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.

Ngā mihi nui

Bridget Saunders

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**Manager Issue Resolution
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