Abuse in Care
Royal Commission of Inquiry

Whanaketia – Through pain and trauma, from darkness to light

Easy Read summary – Part 1

Published: October 2024

Before you start

This Easy Read document is about a report written by the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care.

Some of the information and pictures in this document are very upsetting.

This document is about people being badly hurt by people who were meant to look after them.

The people who were hurt include:

- children / young people

- disabled people
- people who experience mental distress.

Before you read this document you might want to make sure you:

- are in a safe place
- have people who can support you.

If you do not feel safe call the police on **111.**

If you are upset after reading this document you can talk to your:

- whānau / family
- friends.

NEED TO TALK?
1737
free call or text any time

You can also talk to a counsellor at Need to Talk by:

- calling 1737
- texting 1737.

It does not cost any money to call / text 1737.

Survivor Experiences Service
For people who experienced abuse in care

You can also find support through the **Survivor Experiences Service**.

You can contact the Survivor Experiences Service by:

- **phone**: **0800 456 090**
- **text**: **8328**
- **email**:

contact@survivorexperiences.govt.nz

It does not cost any money to call the Survivors Experiences Service.

You can find information from the Survivor Experience Service about support at:

survivorexperiences.govt.nz/ support-services/

You can find information from the Survivor Experiences Services for disabled survivors at:

survivorexperiences.govt.nz/for-survivors/disabled-survivors/

What you will find in here

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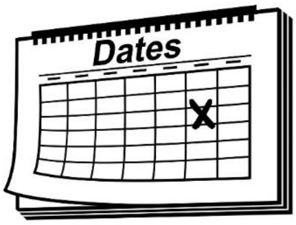

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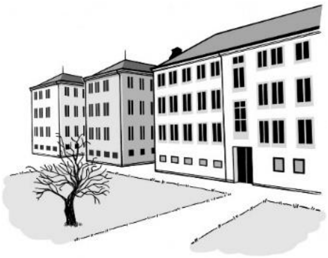
About the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care

The **Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care** looked into abuse that happened to people **in care**.

The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care is also called the **Commission**.



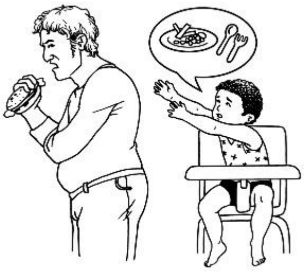
In this document being **in care** means that the Government or a **faith-based institution** took **responsibility** for your care.

Faith-based institutions are organisations that are connected to a religious group or belief.

For example a church is a faith-based organisation.

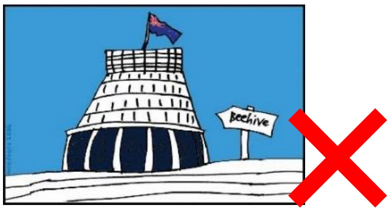
Having **responsibility** for your care means they are:

- in charge of your care
- can be blamed if:
    - something is done wrong
    - they do not do something they should.



Abuse can be:

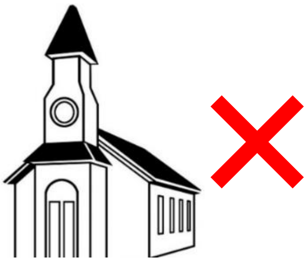
- **physical** – a person kicking or hitting you
- **sexual** – a person doing sexual things to you that you do not want them to such as:
    - touching your body or private parts
    - kissing you
    - making you have sex with them – this is called rape
- **emotional** – a person yelling or saying things to you that are not nice
- **neglect** – a person not giving you the things or care you need.



The Commission is **not** part of the Government.

The Government cannot tell the Commission:

- how to do its work
- what it should find out
- what it should say should happen next.



The Commission is not part of any faith-based organisations like churches.

The Commission calls people who have been through abuse in care **survivors.**

What is this document about?

This document is Part 1 of an Easy Read **summary** of a report called:

Whanaketia – Through pain and trauma, from darkness to light.

A **summary** is a shorter version of the report.

Abuse in Care
Royal Commission of Inquiry

This is the final report by the Commission.

The Commission was set up to look into abuse in care between 1950 and 1999.

Now it has done its work it has made this report.


Abuse in Care
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Easy Read
Whanaketia – Through pain and trauma, from darkness to light
Easy Read summary – Part 1
Published: August 2024

We have split this Easy Read translation into 2 parts.

This part is about what the Royal Commission found out.


Abuse in Care
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Easy Read
Whanaketia – Through Pain and Trauma, From Darkness to Light
Easy Read summary – Part 2
Published: July 2024

Part 2 looks at what needs to happen now.

You can find Part 2 at this **website**:

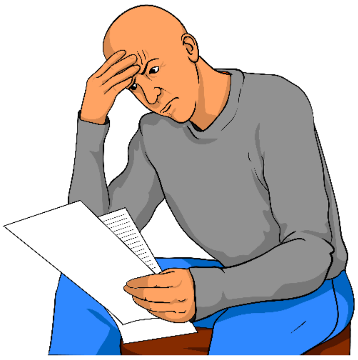
www.abuseincare.org.nz

Lots of survivors told the Commission about what happened to them when they were in care.

Information from what survivors said has been used to make this report.

This Easy Read document is long.

We have chosen not to make it shorter because of how important all the information in it is.



You might want to read it a bit at a time.

State / faith-based institutions were meant to care for people.

Instead people were abused in terrible ways.

People did not get their rights like:

- human rights
- the rights Māori have under **te Tiriti o Waitangi**.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi / The Treaty of Waitangi is an important agreement between Māori and the British Crown.

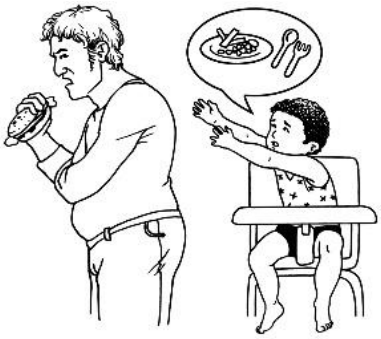
We think more than half a million people were in care in the time the Commission looked at which was between:

- 1950

  and

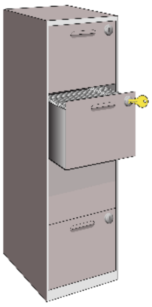
- 1999.

We think up to 2 hundred thousand of these people were abused.



This is more than 1 in every 3 people in care.

We will never know how many people were abused because information:

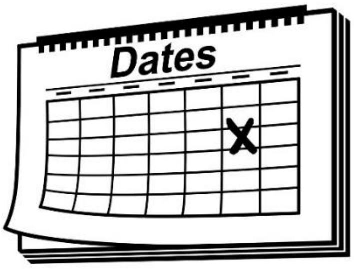


- was not written down
- was lost
- was destroyed.

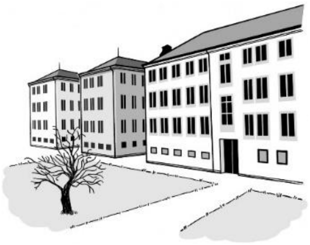
That this abuse happened is a **disgrace** for New Zealand.

A **disgrace** is something we should feel ashamed of.

About the abuse



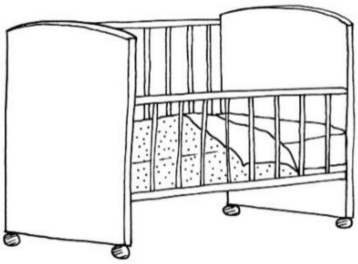
Abuse / neglect almost always started from the first day someone was in care.



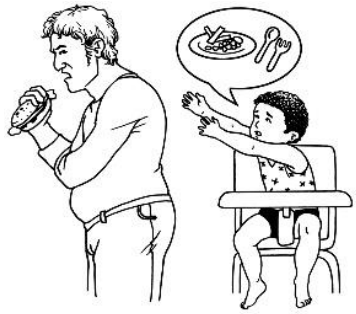
It often kept happening for their whole time in care which could be many years.

For some people this was all their life.

People in care were treated in ways that showed people did not care about them.



Babies were left in cots with no hugs or other ways of caring for them.



Many people in care did not get the things they needed like enough:

- food
- clothes to wear.

Some people were not allowed **privacy** when:

- washing themselves
- using the toilet.

Privacy is when you get the chance to be:

- on your own
- without anyone else watching.

Māori were often treated worse than other people in care.

Māori people in care were not allowed to learn:

- **mātauranga**
- tikanga / Māori ways of doing things
- te reo Māori / the Māori language.

Mātauranga is:

- Māori ways of knowing things
- information Māori have known for a very long time.

Sometimes violence was used to stop Māori learning these things.

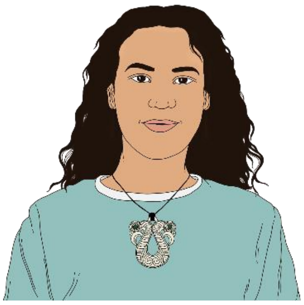
Some Māori in care were also abused for being:

- disabled
- Deaf
- **Takatāpui**.

This abuse often **compounded**.

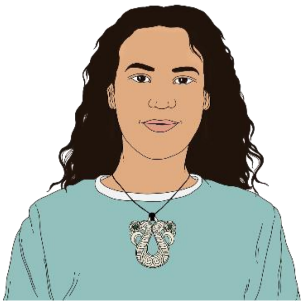
Compounded means they:

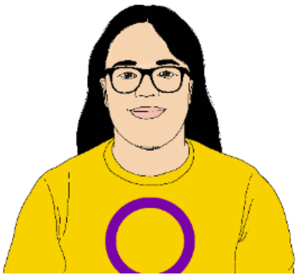
- added together
- made each other bigger / worse.

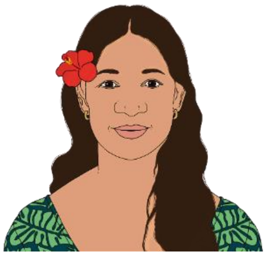


Takatāpui is a word for Māori who:

- have 1 of the **rainbow** identities
- have a similar identity but in a Māori way.





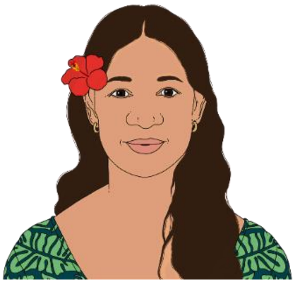


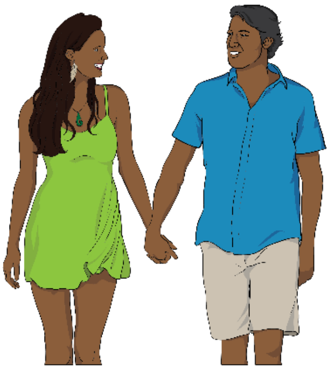
Rainbow means people who are:

- lesbian
- gay
- bisexual
- transgender
- takatāpui
- queer
- intersex
- asexual
- **MVPFAFF+**
- + is for other people who fit in similar groups.

MVPFAFF+ includes:

- Samoan people who are fa’afafine
- Tongan people who are:
  - leiti
  - fakaleiti
- Niuean people who are fakafifine
- Cook Islands people who are akava’ine
- Tuvaluan people who are pina
- Tahitian and Hawaiian people who are māhū
- Fijian people who are vakasalewalewa
- Papua New Guinean people who are palopa.





Pacific people also got:

- racial abuse
- cultural neglect.

This included not being able to:

- know about who they are in their **culture**
- learn about their culture
- speak their languages
- do things that are part of their culture
- know their kainga / family.

Culture is a way of:

- thinking that a group shares
- doing things as a group.

There are many different cultures in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Some examples of the different cultures are:

- Māori culture
- Pacific culture
- Deaf culture.

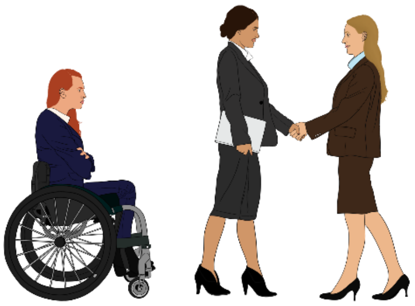
Many Pacific people in care were also Māori.

This means they experienced more than 1 kind of:

- racial abuse
- cultural neglect.

Deaf / disabled survivors experienced abuse based on:

- **ableism**
- **audism**.



Ableism is when disabled people are treated:

- badly for being disabled
- as less important than people who are not disabled.

Audism is when:

- Deaf people are treated badly for being Deaf
- the ways hearing people do things are thought to be better.

This often meant things like not being allowed to:

- use sign language
- be part of Deaf culture.

The bad treatment of disabled people in care includes survivors who experienced mental distress.

Mental distress is when people are having a very hard time with their mental health.

Disabled and Deaf survivors were not given **stimuli** to:

- grow
- develop / grow up as a person.

Stimuli are things that make people feel interested in things like:

- music / talking
- ideas
- things to look at.

Stimuli are important for:

- learning
- getting to know the world around us.

Many Deaf / disabled survivors were:

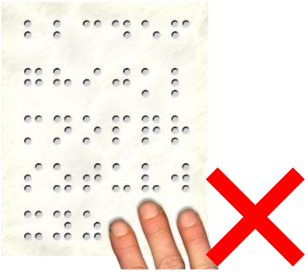
- kept away from society / other people
- not paid attention to
- not allowed a basic education.

Disabled adults were often treated as if they could not make their own:

- choices
- decisions.

Deaf survivors were stopped from:

- using sign language
- taking part in Deaf culture.



Blind survivors were stopped from using Braille.

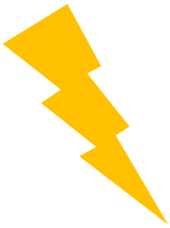
Abusive / uncaring language was used to:

- scare people
- make people feel bad.

Physical abuse happened a lot in all types of places people were in care.

In some cases staff did as much as they could to make things very painful.

They used different things to hurt people with.



They also gave people electric shocks.

Staff often encouraged children to be violent to each other.

Sexual abuse was common in state / faith-based care places.

Abusers tricked people into trusting them.

They also tricked other staff / people in charge into believing they could be trusted.

This meant that when survivors tried to tell people about the abuse they were not believed.

Many survivors were:

- sexually assaulted which means hurt in sexual ways
- raped which means forced to have sex with someone
- made to do sexual things.

Sexual abuse was used to:

- punish people
- scare people.

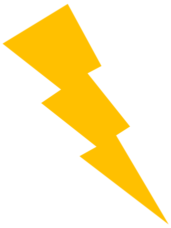
In some cases abusers let other people abuse the survivors in exchange for money.

In many care places there was:

- **medical abuse**
- medical neglect which is when people are not given the medical treatment they need.

Medical abuse means things like:

- people being given the wrong medical treatment
- people being given treatment without them agreeing.



This included electric shocks.

Drugs were used to:

- punish people
- control people.

Solitary confinement was commonly used to:

- control behaviour
- punish people.

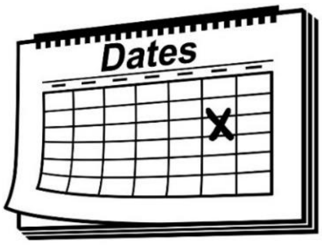
Solitary confinement is when someone is kept alone / away from other people.

In some places survivors were locked in places with no or not enough access to:

- toilets
- water.

Rooms where people were kept alone were often:

- cold
- dark
- dirty.



Survivors could be held there for a long time.

While they were in solitary confinement some people were abused by staff:

- physically
- sexually.

Some survivors were **financially abused** by their carers.

Financial abuse is abuse to do with money like making you:

- give the abuser money
- spend money in ways you do not want to.

Disabled people were made to work for:

- very little pay
- no pay.

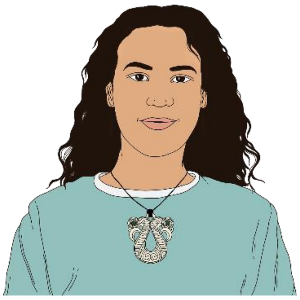
How did the abuse happen?

Some of the reasons people were more likely to be in care included:

- being Deaf

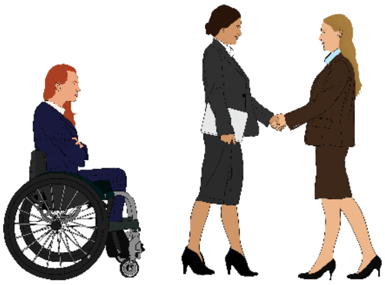
- being disabled

- their family not having enough money when they were a child
- having bad things happen to them as a child



- being Māori
- being Pacific

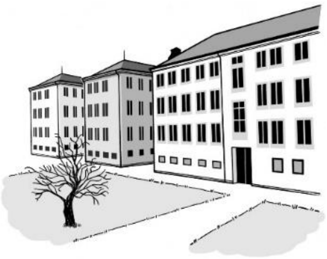
- being rainbow
- being MVPFAFF+
- being takatāpui.



Another reason people were more likely to be in care is experiencing **discrimination**.

Discrimination is when people are treated unfairly because of things like:

- how old they are
- if they are a man / woman / someone of another gender
- if they are disabled.



Many of these reasons also made it more likely for people to be abused when they were in care.

The people who did the abuse / neglect used the power they had over:

- children
- young people
- adults.

They knew how to use the problems in the care system so they could:

- do abuse
- not be caught or get into trouble.

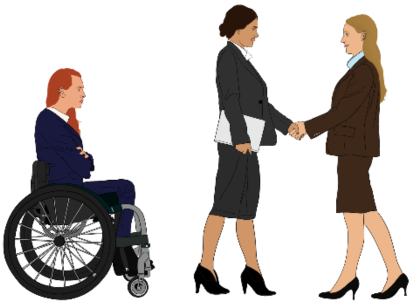
There was rarely anything done to abusers – the people who did abuse.

This meant they felt okay doing more or worse abuse.

Abusers were often people the community thought well of.

Many of the systems that were set up let abusers:

- do abuse
- get away with it.



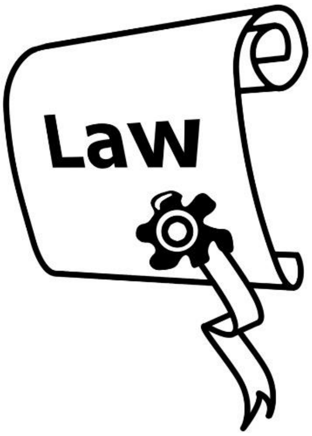
Society discriminates against people who are different in lots of ways including:

- racism
- ableism
- sexism – treating people unfairly because of their sex or gender
- homophobia – treating rainbow people unfairly.

The way society discriminates against some people meant people in care were thought of as:

- not important
- less than human.

Discrimination made it easy for the rest of Aotearoa New Zealand to ignore what was happening to people in care.



The law said people in Government had to do things to make sure people in care were looked after well.

They did not do these things.

The Government and leaders of faith-based institutions:

- knew about the abuse or should have known about the abuse
- were meant to:
  - keep people in care safe
  - deal with abusers.

They did not do what they were meant to.

People from **military** backgrounds were thought to be right to care for people.

Military means the armed forces like the:

- Army
- Navy.

These people brought with them the idea that they were there to control people with:

- punishment
- violence.

Some people who worked in care saw abuse happen so much it seemed normal.

Then they abused people as well.

Other people who worked in care:

- were too scared to do something
- felt there was nothing they could do

- lost their jobs when they tried to do something
- were told to stop talking about abuse.

There were some specific reasons faith-based institutions had abuse.

People thought religious leaders were the ones who:

- knew what was right / good
- could be trusted.

Religious beliefs were often used to:

- say abuse / neglect was okay
- stop survivors saying anything.

Religious groups often:

- had strong ideas about who was in charge of who
- had people make decisions in private.

Some religious groups said survivors had to do lots of things like forgive their abusers.

Abusers just had to repent for doing abuse which is like saying sorry to God.

Abuse was often just treated as a **sin**.

A **sin** is:

- something bad you do
- that you can fix by saying sorry to God.

Workers were not well:

- checked
- trained
- managed.

Some people making decisions about care had:

- little understanding
- not many connections with:
  - people in care
  - their communities.

When there were not enough staff it meant:

- more neglect happened
- abusers could do more abuse.

Only some places had ways of dealing with **complaints**.

A **complaint** is when you tell someone:

- what is wrong
- that something needs to change.

Often when people complained:

- they were not believed
- nothing was done.

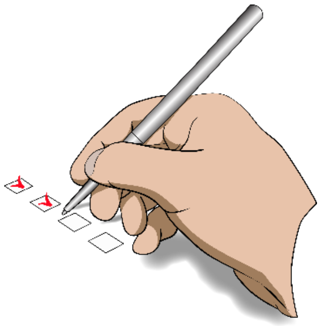
Only a few complaints were sent to authorities like the police.

Many abusers were just moved to other places.

They kept abusing people in the new places.

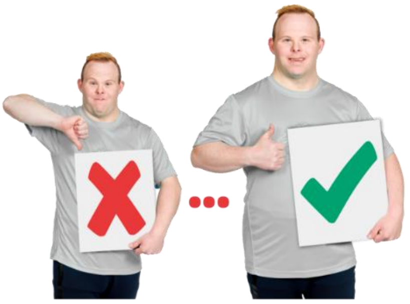
There was not enough **independent oversight** of care.

Independent oversight means other organisations watching how care is going.

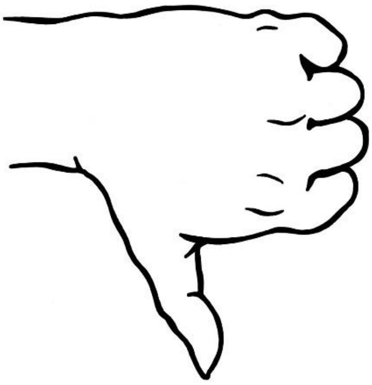


All the reasons abuse / neglect happened worked together.

This meant neglect / abuse kept happening for many years.



In more recent years there have been some changes to do things better.



But most of the problems that led to abuse / neglect are still there.

The Commission looked into things that happened from 1950 to 1999.

This is because in 2021 the Government changed the rules about the Commission.

The new rules said the Commission could not look at anything that happened from the year 2000 or later.

Survivors also told the Commission that lots of the problems from then are still problems today.

How has the abuse affected survivors?

Abuse / neglect in care affected survivors for the rest of their lives.

Some people died while they were in care.

Some survivors died by suicide later because of what had happened to them in care.

Suicide is when someone decides to kill themself.

People in care were:

- kept away from whānau / family
- told no-one loved them.

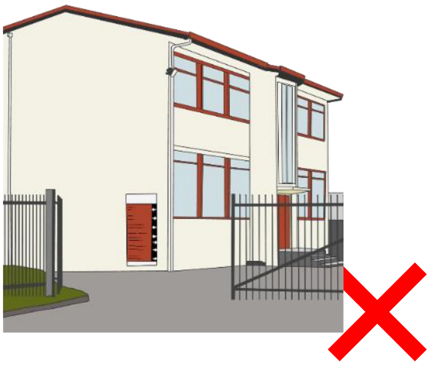
This changed how survivors:

- think of themselves
- think of others
- understand the world.

It has made it harder for them to:

- make good relationships
- find jobs

- keep jobs
- do all the things they could have done.



Many survivors did not get an education because they:

- were not sent to school
- were not given the support they needed to learn
- could not learn because they were being abused / neglected.

Not getting an education has meant they have:

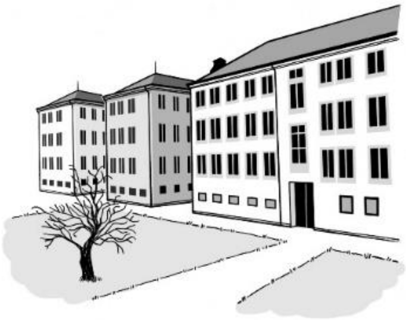
- found it hard to get jobs
- not been able to do the kinds of jobs they might have done if they had a good education.

There was so much violence in care that some survivors felt like it was normal.

Some survivors abused other people.

For many survivors their time in care led to them:

- doing crime
- ending up in prison.



Some survivors became trapped in care.

Some of them are still in institutions now.

Some survivors went from prison to **psychiatric** care.

Psychiatric means medicine to do with mental distress / your mind.

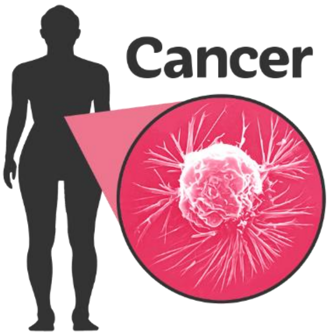
Many survivors have health conditions because of their time in care.

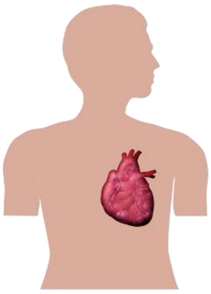
These may be because:

- they were hurt by abuse
- they did not get proper medical treatment

- they were given medical treatment that was wrong for them.

Some people died in care because of not being given medical care.





Trauma makes it more likely for people to have medical conditions like:

- cancer
- heart disease
- addiction which is when you find it hard to stop using things like drugs or alcohol
- mental health conditions like depression.

Trauma is the effects bad things like abuse have on people.

Trauma can last a very long time.

Survivors are **triggered** by things like:

- sounds
- tastes
- smells.

Triggered means they:

- are reminded of the abuse
- may feel like the abuse is still happening.

Many survivors:

- feel whākamā / shame
- do not feel good about themselves.

This has meant some survivors have:

- hurt themselves
- wanted to kill themselves
- tried to kill themselves
- died by suicide.

For some survivors sexual abuse changed their ideas of what sex is like.

They often have difficulty having good sexual relationships.

Many have decided not to have sex.

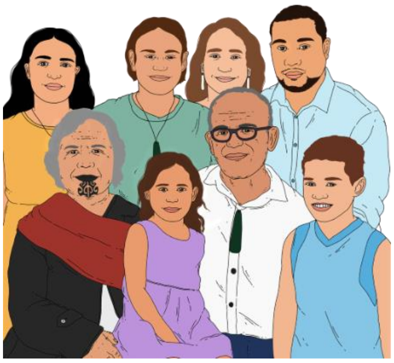
Some people in care were kept away from their **siblings**.

Siblings are people who have the same parent or parents as you like:

- brothers
- sisters.

This meant survivors worried a lot about their siblings.

It often meant they did not see each other again.



Abuse and neglect in care also affected whānau.

This included new generations like:

- children
- grandchildren.

Survivors talked about:

- not knowing how to parent
- finding it hard to form close relationships with their children.

Children of survivors told the Commission about growing up with a parent who experienced abuse / neglect in care.

They said it damaged their own childhoods.

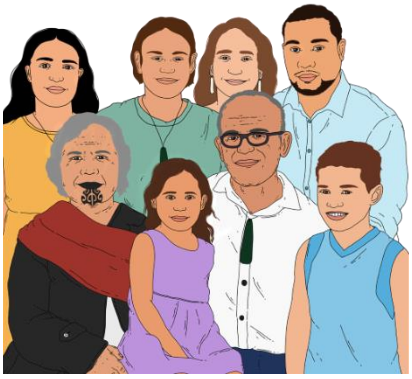
How does abuse affect groups of people?

Abuse affects people who were abused.

Abuse also affects wider groups of people like:

- Māori
- Deaf people
- disabled people.

Māori have been affected a lot by abuse in care.



Tamariki / children have been taken away from their:

- whānau / families
- hapū
- iwi.

This has meant they have been **deprived** of their:

- reo / language
- tikanga
- mātauranga Māori.

Deprived means they have:

- had it taken away from them
- not been allowed to have it.

People who would have been leaders for Māori have not been able to do that.

This means Māori have not been able to have the leaders they should have had.

Tino rangatiratanga is an important idea for Māori.

It means groups of people getting to:

- make their own decisions
- decide how they will run things.

Having tino rangatiratanga over their kāinga / home means Māori getting to make their own decisions about what happens in their homes.

Tino rangatiratanga over their kāinga is one of the most important roles for:

- whānau
- hapū
- iwi.

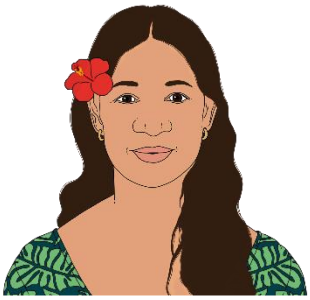
When Māori were put into care it stopped these groups of people having tino rangatiratanga over their kāinga.

It stopped them from being able to:

- care for their people
- make rules about the lives of their people
- pass on mātauranga Māori.

Putting people in care was **dehumanising** in a particular way for:

- Māori



- Pacific peoples.

Dehumanising means treating people as if they are not human.

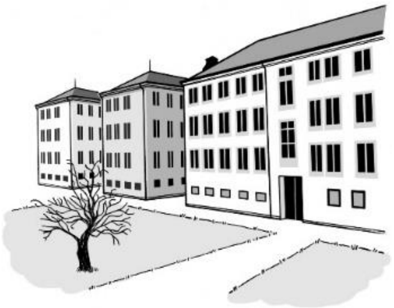
This is because **collective identity** is very important for:

- Māori

- Pacific people.

Collective identity is about how you see yourself as being part of a:

- culture
- group.



Being put in care stopped people having their collective identity.

For many people this was both:

- culturally abusive
- spiritually abusive.

Trauma from abuse has led to much larger problems like:

- health issues
- mental distress

- harm from using things like drugs

- lots of people in prison
- people hurting family members

- people not having jobs
- people not having places to live

- not getting a good education.

Many Pacific survivors lost their links to their:

- kainga / family
- culture
- language.

Survivors spoke about the **devastation** caused by being disconnected from their culture.

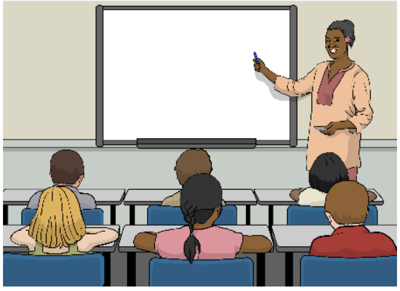
Devastation means important things have been destroyed.

When you feel devastated you may feel:

- that you have nothing
- that there is no way to make things better.

This caused harm to the **vā**.

The **vā** is a Pacific idea of something between us that joins everything together.



It also impacted on fakatupuolamoui which is a way Pacific people talk about being able to live a really good life.

There was also an impact on many

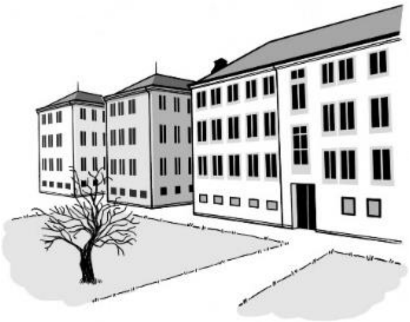
- Deaf survivors
- disabled survivors
- survivors with mental distress.

When they were in care they were often kept away from:

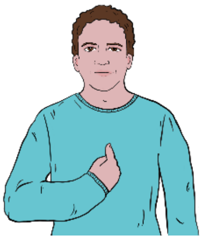
- their communities
- their whānau / family.

This has caused them:

- very bad pain
- harm to their lives.



Being put in care meant people found it hard to live outside institutions.



Deaf / disabled people were stopped from having:

- personhood which is the sense of being a person

- their culture

- the chance to learn the things they needed to live good lives in the community.

These people lost the chance to be leaders.

All communities lost the chance to have them as leaders.

Deaf people in care were not allowed to know:

- about Deaf culture / communities
- that they could be part of Deaf culture / communities.

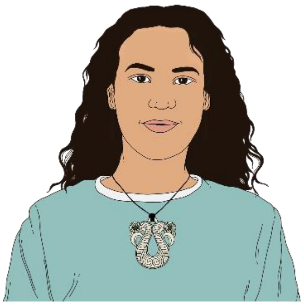
They were forced to talk / use speech to communicate.

They were physically abused for using sign language.

They were not able to learn much sign language.

This meant they were not:

- confident using sign language
- able to access their own culture
- able to talk to their own community leaders.



Other groups that were harmed are the communities of:

- takatāpui survivors
- rainbow survivors
- MVPFAFF+ survivors
- gender diverse survivors
- **transgender** survivors.

Transgender people are people who have a different gender to the one people thought they had when they were born.

For example people might think someone is a boy when they are a baby.

When they get older the person knows they are a girl / woman.

They / their communities experienced:

- abuse
- harm
- hate.

This led to:

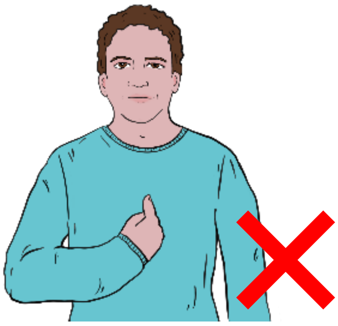
- mental distress

- PTSD which is an illness that comes from trauma

- people wanting to die from suicide

- people having poor health with their bodies

- relationships not being good.



The abuse meant people could not be themselves.

It also stopped communities doing as well as they could have.

Some survivors experienced trauma when they left their faith / religion because of abuse / neglect.

For some survivors leaving their church meant losing their

- family
- friends
- job.

Some survivors chose to leave their churches.

Others were made to leave.

Some people were not able to see their family again after they left.

The result of leaving churches was emotionally devastating.

There was a loss of

- identity
- community
- money.

Many survivors have worked hard to make things better for:

- their tamariki / children
- other younger people / people who are not yet born.

Some survivors have found ways to feel better by:

- supporting others

- being part of:
    - arts
    - sport
    - other community activities.

The cost of abuse

Abuse has caused huge harm to:

- people
- communities.

Abuse has also cost a lot of money.

The total cost of abuse in care between 1950 and 2019 is probably between:

- almost 1 hundred billion dollars

  and

- a bit over 2 hundred billion dollars.

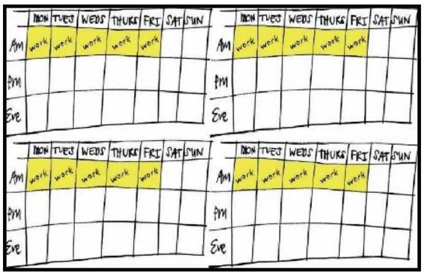
Less than 50 billion of this money was paid in taxes.

Most of it is money survivors have had to pay themselves.

Abuse costs survivors lots of money because they:

- need to pay for things like support or healthcare related to the abuse

- cannot earn as much money as other people because:
  - they did not get a good education
  - they cannot work as much because of the trauma.



Abuse / neglect in care has had a **financial** effect on:

- survivors
- families

- hapū
- iwi

- communities
- society / all of us.

Financial means to do with money.

The harm it has caused is still happening.

It has contributed to **social inequities**.

Social inequities are when things are unfair because:

- some groups of people have more money than others
- the people without much money find it harder to get important things like:
  - warm housing
  - a good education.

Not listening to survivors made things worse.

Survivors spent many years calling for justice.

Surivivors were:

- not listened to
- not believed
- made to stop speaking out.

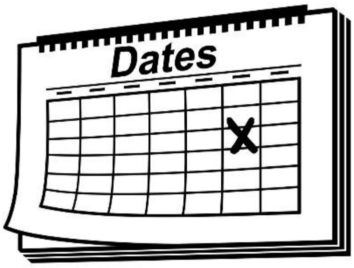
What happened to them was treated as being not important.

When survivors did get anything they were usually still not treated well.

Government leaders hid what was happening.

Government leaders then worked against survivors to:

- stop survivors costing the Government money
- stop themselves looking bad.



Working against survivors cost:

- time
- energy spent on that work
- money paid in taxes.

Religious leaders also tried to hide abuse by:

- moving abusers to other places
- saying the abuse was not their fault.

Survivors were right to say there should be a Commission.

The way survivors have been treated has been awful.

It needs to stop.

This information has been written by the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care.

It has been translated into Easy Read by the Make it Easy Kia Māmā Mai service of People First New Zealand Ngā Tāngata Tuatahi.

The ideas in this document are not the ideas of People First New Zealand Ngā Tāngata Tuatahi.

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