

**12 November 2024**

# Public apology to survivors of abuse in care

# Survivor contribution, Keith Wiffin

Kia ora tātou. I was going to start with something different. But I have to say, after listening to those chief executives, I absolutely need to tautoko my brother Gary Williams. Because we have heard those meaningless words for many, many years, which have not resulted in change, and we see the terrible rates of abuse still happening now.

I too would like to firstly acknowledge and honour the very many who have not survived. Many taking their own lives, many having their lives shortened by the serious health issues related to being abused in care. They did not survive the ill‑treatment that they never should have had. Their spirits are here with us today.

Today is a monumental day for the thousands of survivors, their families and whānau who have suffered abuse and neglect in care. It has taken far too long to come about, primarily because up to this point, the focus of both the state and faith-based authorities and institutions has been to invest in avoiding taking responsibility, denial and determined efforts to see that survivors do not get meaningful redress.

Today is also a hugely important day in our country’s history, as it continues to come to grips with the atrocities and scale of the tragedy, outlined by the Royal Commission, which has so impacted our nation – the enormity of the impact not yet fully understood. It has ripped families and communities apart, trapping many into a life of prison incarceration, leaving many uneducated and ill-equipped to cope in the outside world. It has tarnished out international reputation as an upholder of human rights, something our country likes to dine out on.

Today’s speech by the Prime Minister is an opportunity to bring about some healing, relief and comfort. To achieve this, he must connect with survivors as being genuine and sincere , for example by committing to timelines to deliver redress for all those who have suffered. Survivors have witnessed a Royal Commission of Inquiry play out for six years. It’s three years since the state was given recommendations for an independent redress scheme to be incorporated, but we sit here today with nothing.

The public of this country has invested heavily in this inquiry and like us they expect outcomes.

Prime Minister: Your speech at the tabling of the Royal Commission’s final report was applauded, and maybe, rightly so. You gave hope and raised expectations that redress would soon be delivered. It is time to deliver. For the words to have meaning you and your Government must act. Do the right thing.

Today I’m hoping to hear a vision for a better future, one that recognises that what has gone before has utterly failed, and, as a result, we still have terrible rates of abuse today. Rangatahi are just as affected as survivors of my generation. We need to do things fundamentally different to achieve those better outcomes and we need to address the root causes as to why our young go into care in the first place. A new way forward cannot be developed by official. There needs to be direct involvement and leadership from survivors

There will always be a need for safe haven for our most vulnerable. But, ultimately, it is the system itself that has failed us, and is the problem. It is far more beneficial and cost effective to invest in alternatives, such as resourcing families, whānau, hapū and communities to look after their own, poverty being a major determinant to so many going into care.

All survivors need to feel included in today’s apology. That means all those who have been in faith-based care and state. You must hold churches and faith-based organisations to account, and compel them to do what’s right, as the state has an obligation to all children under its roof. The reckless, negligent manner in which the institutions were misadministered has led to the scale of the catastrophe that we have.

I could sit here for 105 minutes and I still wouldn't have enough time to outline the crimes of the State against children.

Hopefully today is a significant catalyst for change, because otherwise it will have been a waste and more hollow words. Hopefully today, because of that, it will be a day for survivors to cherish and savour. Kia kaha, noho ora mai.

End of information: Public apology to survivors of abuse in care | Survivor contribution, Keith Wiffin

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