



Abuse in Care

Royal Commission of Inquiry



Our hands were tied



**A case study of audism abuse at
Van Asch College and
Kelston School for the Deaf**

Published: August 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 used in this document is 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
- disabled people.





Before you read it 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?



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.

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

[https://survivorexperiences.govt.nz/
support-services/](https://survivorexperiences.govt.nz/support-services/)

[https://survivorexperiences.govt.nz/
for-survivors/disabled-survivors/](https://survivorexperiences.govt.nz/for-survivors/disabled-survivors/)



You can contact them the Survivor Experiences Service by:



- **phone: 0800 456 090**

- **text: 8328**



- **email:**

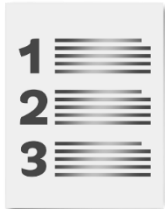
contact@survivorexperiences.govt.nz

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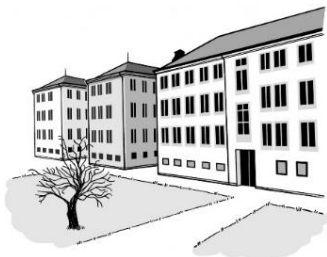
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About the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care



Abuse in Care
Royal Commission of Inquiry

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



In this document being **in care** means that the Government or a **faith-based institution** was in charge of your care.



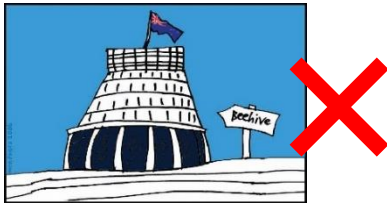
Faith-based institutions are run by religious groups like churches.



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.

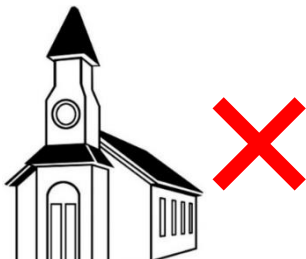
The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care is also called the **Commission**.



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



The Government cannot tell the Commission what to do.



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

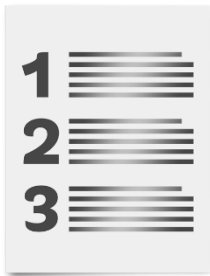


The Commission calls people who have been through abuse in care **survivors**.

What is this document about?



This Easy Read document is a **summary** of a **case study**.



A **summary** is:

- shorter than the main document
- tells you the main ideas.



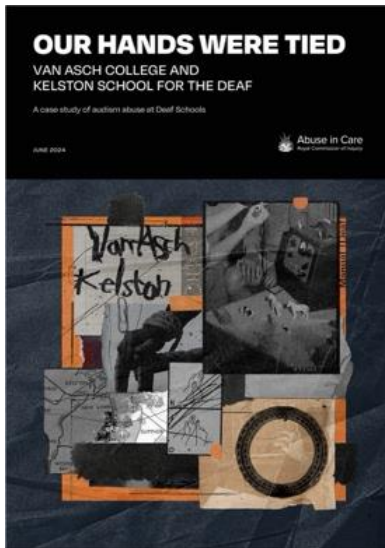
A **case study** is research that is done on 1:

- person
- group
- place.





The Commission asked for case studies to be done to talk about the abuse in care that happened to certain communities of survivors.



This case study report is called:

Our hands were tied Van Asch College and Kelston School for the Deaf: A case study of audism abuse at Deaf Schools.

This case study report is about abuse that happened at:



- Van Asch College
- Kelston school for the Deaf.



In this document we will call the schools **Van Asch and Kelston.**



Deaf

Van Asch and Kelston were the main schools Deaf children could go to at the time the Commission is looking at.



In this document there are **quotes** from:



- the Commission
- survivors.



Quotes:

- are words someone has said
- will be inside a yellow box like this.

The Commission has given a **trigger warning** to go with this document.



A **trigger warning** is a statement that says the information you are about to read has upsetting things in it.



The Commission says:

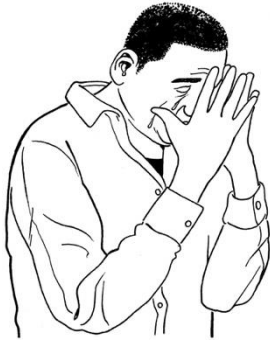
We honour and uphold the dignity of survivors who have so bravely shared their stories here.



We acknowledge that some content contains **explicit** descriptions of tūkino – abuse, harm and trauma – and may evoke strong negative, emotional responses for readers.



Here **explicit** means things are talked about in detail.



The Commission also says:

Although this response may be unpleasant and difficult to **tolerate**, it is also appropriate to feel upset.



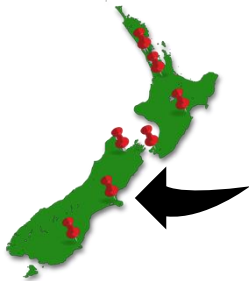
Tolerate means to put up with something even though it is bad.



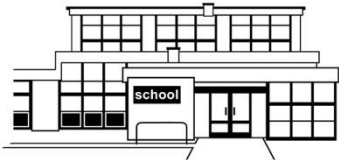
The Commission also says:

Respect others' truths, breathe deeply, take care of your spirit and be gentle with your heart.

About Van Asch and Kelston



Van Asch College was in Sumner which is part of Christchurch.



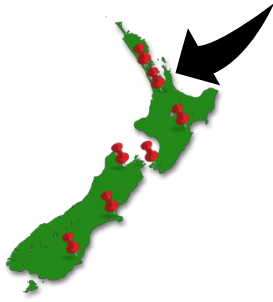
Deaf

It had several different names like:

- Sumner Institution for Deaf-Mutes
- Sumner School for the Deaf and Dumb
- Van Asch Deaf Education Centre.



It opened in 1880.



Kelston School for the Deaf was in Kelston which is part of Auckland.

It opened in 1958.



Both schools were **residential schools**.

Residential school means that some students lived at the school.



Van Asch and Kelston were **state schools**.



State school means the school:

- got money from the Government
- taught what the Government told it to.





The 2 schools joined together in 2020.

The new school is called Ko Taku Reo.



Ko Taku Reo supports Deaf students all around Aotearoa New Zealand.

About Deaf culture



A lot of Deaf people have their own **culture**.



Culture means the things a group shares like:

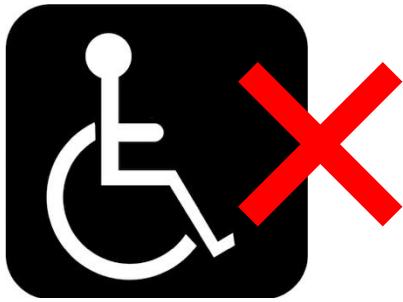
- language
- beliefs
- ways of doing things.



People who are part of Deaf culture have their own way of doing a lot of things.



Sign language is an important part of Deaf culture.



A lot of Deaf people do not think of themselves as disabled.

They only feel disabled by the **discrimination** they face.



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

- if they are Deaf
- if they are disabled
- if they are Māori.



A survivor called Ms Bielski told the Commission:

Deaf people are not disabled.

I might be **financially** disabled but I am not disabled in any other way.

Financially means to do with money.

What happened at Van Asch and Kelston



Deaf students at Van Asch and Kelston experienced **audism**.



Audism is a sort of discrimination against Deaf people.

Audism means thinking that:

- hearing / speaking out loud is the only way for people to say what they want to say
- Deaf people are not as good as hearing people
- Deaf people should learn to act more like hearing people.



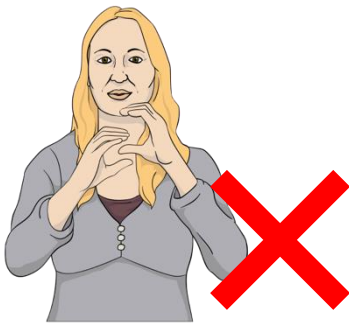


Van Asch and Kelston used **oralist education**.



Oralist education means teaching Deaf people to:

- speak out loud
- **lip read.**



Oralist education also means stopping Deaf people using sign language.

Oralist education is part of audism.



Lip read means working out what someone is saying by watching how their lips move.



Oralist education is a sort of **educational neglect**.



Educational neglect means stopping someone learning the things they need to know.



Deaf

There were no Deaf teachers at Van Asch and Kelston.



Deaf parents were told not to teach their children sign language.



Students were punished if they used sign language.

Some of the punishments were very cruel.



Students whose parents used sign language did not know how to talk to their parents.



These students could not tell their parents about the abuse.

The schools did not start using sign language until 1979.



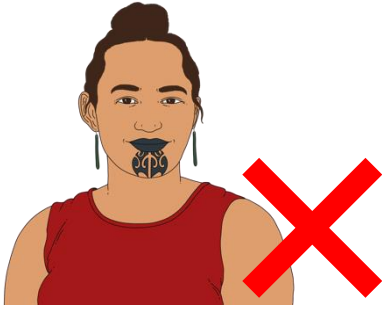
Some students became friends with each other.



They would use sign language in secret.



They did this even though they knew they would be punished if they were caught.

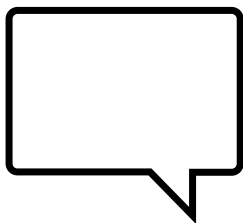


There were very few Māori teachers at the schools.



Māori students were often robbed of their:

- Deaf culture
- Māori culture.



The board chair of Ko Taku Reo Dr Denise Powell said:

For those of us who are hearing and pākehā, it's difficult to imagine the effects of this double **marginalisation** on turi / deaf Māori.



Marginalisation means treating a group of people like they do not matter.



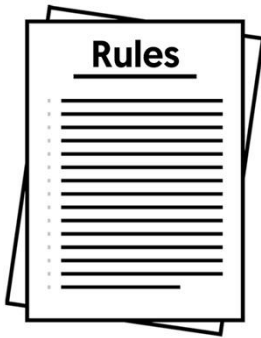
Some students were physically abused by staff at the schools.

The staff said the abuse was **corporal punishment**.



Corporal punishment means hurting someone because:

- they have broken a rule
- you want to change how they are behaving.



Even though the staff said it was corporal punishment it was still abuse.



Some students were sexually abused by:

- staff
- other students.



Students who lived at the schools had the biggest risk of being sexually abused.



The schools failed to keep students safe from abuse.



The Government also failed to keep students safe from abuse.



The **Department of Education** did not pay attention to what was happening at the schools.

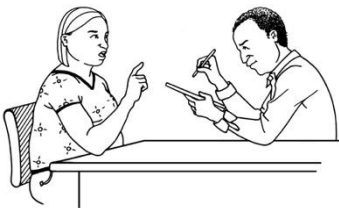


The **Department of Education** was the part of government in charge of schools.



Some people made **complaints** about the abuse to:

- the schools
- the Government.



Complaint means telling someone:

- what has happened
- that you want them to do something to make it right.





There were a lot of complaints about the schools.



No one did anything about the complaints.

What the abuse did to people



Sign language is the best way for most Deaf people to communicate.

It can be very hard for Deaf people to:



- lip read
- speak out loud.

Without sign language a lot of students were not able to:



- talk to people
- know what people were saying.



Some students were not able to talk with their whānau / family.

Students were often away from their whānau / family for a long time.



Some students stopped feeling like they belonged in their whānau / family.



Students were not able to get the education they needed.



This meant it was hard to:

- get jobs
- fit in with other people
- have a good life.



Most of the survivors the Commission heard from have not:

- asked for **redress**
- been given redress.



Redress means someone:

- agrees that something bad has happened
- does something to try to:
 - put things right
 - make up for any harm that has been done.





Redress can be things like:

- saying sorry
- giving money as a way of saying sorry
- giving other kinds of support like counselling.

Counselling is when you talk about things that are worrying you with a **counsellor**.

A **counsellor** is someone who is trained to give other people:

- support
- advice.



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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