



Apology: Acting Chief Executive Andrew Bridgman

Today I stand here as the Chief Executive of Oranga Tamariki, on behalf of numerous others that have held this seat before me and led Ministries for Children known by many other names.

I stand here on their behalf, to take responsibility and to unreservedly apologise to the survivors of those who were abused in the care of the state.

You were children who came into our care. You needed us to protect you. To look after you.

Instead, our people and our places harmed you.

You were subjected to physical, sexual and verbal abuse, neglect, assault, violence and humiliation. And what is worse is we would often turn around and place the blame back on you.

We are sorry for our failure to do right by you. For not protecting you, and for failing to keep you safe. Nothing that happened to you was your fault – it was ours.

You were children, just kids. You had a right to a childhood filled with smiles and love, connected to your culture, at home at your marae. A childhood where you looked forward to ice creams in the summer, bike rides around your neighbourhood with your friends, birthdays and Christmas.

This is not the childhood we provided for you. We took that from you and gave you a childhood full of fear.

Fear to be alone, to go to bed at night. Fear of authority because they were the ones that hurt you the most. Fear that no one would believe you, fear that no one was coming to help you. Fear for what could happen today, tomorrow, next week.

You were frightened, scared. And that was our fault.

We are sorry for failing to provide you with a childhood that you deserved, that every child in Aotearoa is entitled to.

You wanted a family, a whānau, a place to belong. I could not imagine a world where I would not do everything humanly possible to protect my kids from harm.

The state care system should have cared for you in the same way.

It didn't.

We put in you places and called them homes – but they were the furthest thing from what a home should be.

When you asked for help – we did not listen.

When you showed us the bruises – we looked away.

When you wanted a place to belong – we left you all alone.

We are sorry for failing to give you a safe place to grow up, for not treating you like you were one of our own kids. We are sorry for not listening, for looking away and leaving you all alone.

I will not stand here today and be dishonest by saying that harm no longer occurs in our system, we know we have work to do to make sure every child is safe and has the care they deserve.

But I will stand here and say this.

The care system today has changed. Most will argue that it has not changed enough. And we agree.

Moving forward, it is this report that will keep us relentlessly focused on the change you have called for. It will be your words that will remind us of the need to demand more, to demand better and not to settle for a system that silences the voices of children and young people who need us to listen.

Today, I want to talk about the change I think matters most.

The reason why survivors shared their stories.

To make the future safer for children.

If any child, or young person, tells us they are not safe. If they share with us stories of harm, of hurt, or fear – we will stand by their side, we will listen to them, like we should have listened you.

To every survivor, and every person who did not survive.

To the children who we failed,

To the adults those children have now become.

We are sorry.

End of information: Apology, Acting Chief Executive Andrew Bridgman

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