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New Zealanders with intellectual disabilities faced systemic abuse in state care

New Zealanders with intellectual disabilities faced systemic abuse in state care

July 27, 2017

The release of a new report into state abuse shows the mistreatment was systemic, enduring and an everyday reality for New Zealanders with intellectual disabilities who lived in institutions and special schools.

“Institutions are places of abuse carries the stories of some very brave people whose stories of suffering are remarkably similar. Their testimonies speak of a lifetime of abuse and distress, and a life devoid of love and family. Their abuse was physical, psychological and sexual,” said Disability Rights Commissioner Paul Gibson.

“This report highlights systemic failures and a system that enabled abuse to continue unchecked for years.”

This year the Human Rights Commission called on Government to initiate an independent inquiry into the abuse of people held in state care. In the past, only a few people with learning disabilities have been able to access opportunities to share stories of their abuse so the Commission invited the Donald Beasley Institute to find out more about the abuse of people with learning and other disabilities in state care. Researchers used an integrative review methodology to capture the stories of 17 individuals who spent most of their lives in institutions across the country.

“The stories are both horrifying and heartbreaking: John and David were constantly fearful; Avis was tied to a bed; Mavis was made to feel a slave; Alison in prolonged seclusion drunk her own urine,” said Mr Gibson.

“Thousands of children and vulnerable adults were taken from their families and put into institutions over many years: these are the stories of New Zealand’s stolen generations. Only last year we heard that children with autism were being secluded in dark school cupboards.”

“The Human Rights Commission’s role includes to protect the rights of all New Zealanders and I would like to give assurances to disabled people and their families that we have learnt the lessons of the past and that systemic abuse is not ongoing and will never happen again: But without a thorough inquiry I cannot give that assurance.”

“This report and the lives it represents highlights the need for a formal inquiry so we can learn from our past and our present to guide our future. Only once we have shone a light on the abuse fellow New Zealanders have suffered can we say sorry with any kind of mana.”

“Institutions are places of abuse”: The experiences of disabled children and adults in State care | Brigit Mirfin-Veitch, PhD Jenny Conder, PhD



July 2017

Click here to download the pdf version of the report

(https://archive.hrc.co.nz/files/3415/0103/3949/Institutions_are_places_of_abuse-_The_experiences_of_disabled_children_and_adults_in_State_care_.pdf)

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“Institutions are places of abuse” The experiences of disabled children and adults in State care

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