

ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

COLLECTIVE STATEMENT OF TĀMAKI MAKAURAU WHĀNAU TURI

Dated: September 2022

**BENNION
LAW**

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Introduction

1. We are a group of Whānau Turi, predominantly based in Tāmaki Makaurau, who wish to give our evidence as a collective. Our evidence is focused on our collective experiences as Whānau Turi and our wishes for the community for the future.
2. Whānau Turi are Tāngata Turi (Māori Deaf), our whanau and support people.
3. A group of about 18 Whānau Turi met with Royal Commission kaimahi and lawyers on 29 and 30 September 2022 at Papatūānuku Kōkiri marae, Tāmaki Makaurau. A wānanga was held to discuss our collective experiences of:
 - a. Our younger years as tamariki turi;
 - b. Institutionalisation in Deaf schooling;
 - c. Our identities as Tāngata Turi;
 - d. The lack of access to trilingual interpreters;
 - e. Issues with Deaf support services and organisations;
 - f. Ko Taku Reo and Rūaumoko Marae;
 - g. NZSL education; and
 - h. Looking to the future.
4. Our collective voices from this wānanga are set out in this statement. We have decided to share as a collective because, as Whānau Turi, we identify as a collective and share many experiences. Therefore, we have not identified individuals to the quotes used throughout this statement. This statement represents all of our views.

Our experiences as tamariki turi

5. Many of us became Deaf when we were young from illnesses. This was particularly hard for our whānau as there was no support for our whānau to learn signs and to

learn how to communicate with us. This was often our first experience of being isolated from our whānau Māori:

“I was born hearing. My parents would talk to me when I was little. Then out of the blue I became Deaf. I had meningitis. And my whānau still thought I was cute, but when they spoke to me I didn’t understand them at all. I had become Deaf overnight. So, I couldn’t understand.”

“At home, everyone was hearing, and my family couldn’t sign. So, I couldn’t communicate within my whānau.”

“None of my whānau signed, they all spoke. They connected with sign later on.”

6. Our diagnosis was often delayed, and we did not get access to Deaf support services and equipment that would have actually helped us:

“I was also born hearing and could speak well, hear well, then when I was about two I got really sick with sore ears and then I stopped talking. So they took me to the doctor and they said it was normal. But my parents knew there was something not right so as time went on, I got really sick and had to go to hospital.”

“Then at Kelston where I went later, they did an audiological assessment and told my mum I was Deaf. So, I had had no medical interventions before then whatsoever. Mum was really angry at this point. Then they gave me a hearing aid and I was given access to all these sounds I’d never heard before.”

“I remember my mum cooking a steak, I remember hearing the bubbling noise. That was the first time in my life, and I was ten years old. I suddenly was able to hear some sounds. I said mum the steak is singing. And she was really emotional that I was suddenly able to hear.”

7. Those of us who attended mainstream hearing schools were not supported at these schools and so these were also largely a negative experience:

“Growing up I went to a hearing school. I faced discrimination and oppression. Kids would bully me and say these awful things to me. I would get angry and I would lose it ... The teachers would just push me aside and focus on the hearing kids. They saw me as less than everyone else.”

“I couldn’t understand a thing that was going on. Teachers would get me to read things but I couldn’t.”

“My brothers were angry with other kids teasing me. They were protective of me and would go out there and defend me. It was a roller coaster.”

Institutionalisation

8. Mostly, our whānau were told that we had to be sent away to Deaf schools. This was extremely distressing for us as small children, often just three or four years old, and meant being further isolated from our whānau Māori:

“So, she took him to the dorms, and he wouldn’t stop crying.”

“I didn’t want to go in. I didn’t know who the other kids were. At that time they just dropped me off. Mum didn’t want to but felt she had to. This is where I felt a disconnection from my family.”

“I got really upset. Where was my mum and dad? It also confused me because I felt like I didn’t have a link to my whānau.”

“... it was all very regimented. It felt like being in an orphanage. Where was my real family? Where did I belong? I had nothing to do with my family let alone my Māori family.”

9. This physical isolation was confusing and confronting and many of us wrongly blamed our whānau and thought that they did not want us:

“Then at holiday time he didn’t wanna go home because he was so angry at his family for leaving him there.”

10. It was not until later in life that we understood that actually the doctors and educators had told our whānau that we had to be sent to these institutions. Our whānau were just following the advice they were given.
11. At Deaf school we were not allowed to sign and there was no access to te reo Māori. We were denied access to both of our indigenous languages.
12. Because of the communication barriers and physical isolation from our whānau we had no access to te ao Māori. We learnt nothing about who we were as Māori at Deaf schools:

“I just thought my mum was olive skin. I thought marae was a place to party or have a bit of fun. There were all these gaps growing up.”

“All I knew was English from that time. I only read and spoke English until 1994.”

“I had a Māori family, but I had no idea what was happening from the Māori side of things.”

13. The impacts of this are intergenerational:

“Many Māori Deaf aren’t able to pass on their culture to their children because it was never taught to them in their schools, so they missed out.”

Tāngata Turi Identities

14. Because of the institutionalisation of tamariki Turi in Deaf schools, many of us grew up without access to, or an understanding of, our Māori identities:

“At some point he lost his Māori identity, after attending the Deaf boarding school. And lots of people had a similar experience.”

“There was a clash between the two worlds, how Deaf was I? How Māori was I? Then after a long period of time I realised I am Māori Deaf. I think as a border there’s a real disconnection when you get dropped off at school. It affects you in many ways.”

15. Many of us have had a long journey to understanding our identities as both Māori and Deaf. Patrick Wikiriwhi Thompson (Ngāti Paoa) in particular was really good at asking the question: are you Māori or are you Deaf? Patrick in his time guided a lot of this kōrero:

“There was some conflict about being Māori and Deaf. He felt like he didn’t know who he was. Is he Māori? Deaf? Or both? In that moment, he realised he was Māori Deaf and that was a thing.”

“I think this question still hangs in the air for a lot of Māori Deaf.”

“Then I met Patrick and said how can I find my Māori family and he said to go home and ask my family about it. It was a really slow emergence.”

“He always thought he was just Deaf. But in 1993 he woke up, he realised he was Māori too.”

“When I’m in the Deaf community or at school I’m Deaf. But it’s interesting for Pākehā, they say I’m Deaf Māori, but in the Māori world I’m Māori Deaf.”

“My attitude changed over time, and I slowly identified as Māori Deaf.”

“For me I grew up one foot in Māori world and one foot in the Deaf world – can I jump between worlds, or is there a place in between? This is an important discussion for us to have as a people.”

“When I came out of the womb, I wasn’t Deaf, I was diagnosed as Deaf later, but I was born Māori.”

16. We face multiple layers of discrimination being both Māori and Deaf:

“I think about myself as a Deaf person. I think about my whānau as Māori. I have two identities – Deaf and Māori. We face multiple barriers and I have [faced all of these barriers] as an individual.”

Lack of access to trilingual interpreters and te ao Māori

17. Without trilingual interpreters, we have no access to our culture. At tangihanga and visiting whānau, there is a lot of te reo Māori and the tikanga is often that te reo Māori has to be spoken:

“At the heart of this is access. How can we access our own world, our own language?”

“For the record we need more trilingual interpreters, we need to think about how we grow the workforce. Maybe we could set up an organisation committed to this? I’m just putting it out there as a potential idea.”

18. We are often not honoured in the same way because we do not have that fluency or access to trilingual interpreters to voice our reo:

“We felt as Māori Deaf that we were not honoured in the same way given it was a Tāngata Turi tangihanga.”

19. Trilingual interpreters are difficult to book through the booking services. There is no list of trilingual interpreters that we can choose from. Because of the lack of trilingual interpreters, you often need to book one well in advance. This isn’t always practical:

“I’ve had the experience of trying to call through for trilingual interpreters through the relay service – but the tangi might be that day and they have all these questions about where to go etc. You check in and they’re still not ready. Meanwhile we’re sitting there getting more and more irritated. It should be a professional service – my son can do a little bit of interpreting for me, he makes the odd mistake, but it makes me feel connected to the process – but we need more people we can call on to interpret in these situations.”

20. There are significant barriers to learning te reo and tikanga Māori because there are not enough trilingual interpreters:

“I enrolled in Te Wānanga o Aotearoa to take te reo classes but there weren’t any interpreters available ... I tried using the video interpreting service but in the end I gave up because I couldn’t get access to the programme. The system failed me, and the support systems failed me.”

“I had to sit next to a hearing person who would write the notes down and I’d access the programme that way. But what I need is someone trilingual.”

“For three years I’ve been at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa. I’ve had two Pākehā interpreters. When it comes to karakia and waiata it’s disappointing. There’s some Māori words they don’t know how to sign. They often say they don’t understand te reo. I’m committed to learning each piece of vocab and it affects me when the interpreters say they don’t know.”

“I see the others at lunch in cafes practicing their te reo and they asked me if they’d like to join but the interpreters said they didn’t want to.”

“Sometimes I take a photo of the words on the white board and research it after class because I have to teach myself.”

21. The first national Māori Deaf hui in 1993 at Ōrakei Marae identified these issues and we have lobbied to the government about the issue of trilingual interpreters for decades but nothing has changed:

“There was a list of things at the national Māori Deaf hui. Here we are 30 years later. Progress has been so slow. Look at me now – I’m old!”

“It’s not acceptable. We’ve had the same trilingual interpreters for years and years and it’s my right to visit the marae.”

“30 years later we are still where we were. We have not increased significantly the number of trilingual interpreters.”

“We see the numbers of Pākehā interpreters growing but what about us? Where’s the development, where’s the growth?”

“We’d like to see that equality with trilingual interpreters. It shouldn’t be Turi Māori that do all the work. The government should give us money to access this and resource this area.”

NZSL Education

22. A number of us are NZSL teachers. We set up NZSL classes on the marae after the first national Māori Deaf hui in 1993, but these were never funded:

“So, we started with signing Māori concepts, build that up, we were trying to develop something that was for us. We needed something based on te ao Māori.”

“...the barrier was funding – costs like petrol, koha to marae were expensive and became too hard. So, we asked government for help. Tutors were lobbying as well. But we still face barriers.”

23. There are no courses for te reo Māori speakers who wish to learn NZSL and there is only one course in the country where you can take the course to become a registered NZSL interpreter (this is provided by AUT in Auckland). To become a trilingual interpreter, you have to pursue this on your own, it is not a given or encouraged:

“Technically you would do the interpreter course at AUT and then do a te reo course after that.”

24. There are even more barriers to accessing NZSL education in the regions:

“But what about more provincial and rural areas – much of our country falls under that. If you go north of Whangārei there’s one person that knows sign language and teaches it but they are paying out of their own pocket, they’re paid for teaching but not travel or accommodation – those costs they are covering themselves.”

Deaf support services and organisations

25. There is a lack of cultural understanding in the Pākehā Deaf world. Deaf support services and organisations have largely failed to serve Tāngata Turi.

26. Tāngata Turi organisations and leadership has not been funded or supported:

“Think about Enabling Good Lives. They were looking for some support role for someone to work alongside Deaf people. I signed myself up and was really shocked because it was only focused on youth as a priority population. For me, my priority would be working with us [Māori Deaf] - but there wasn’t any such need working in that role.”

“Tāngata Turi have difficulties getting funding, there are a real lack of resources for us as a community.”

27. Tāngata Turi are always the minority on governance boards and in leadership roles. There is a lack of partnership and balance:

“My experience with school Board of Trustees and the NZSL Board is that it’s unfair. There is often just one or two Māori. It should be half and half. The representation should be more even.”

“We need representation within government, in organisations – often there are no Māori in these spaces. We need our voices in these spaces.”

28. In relation to the NZSL Board:

“We know Māori organisations asking funding from that board have been declined. A board making decisions about us that isn’t Māori.”

“The boards lack of understanding meant they turned down many of these applications for Māori.”

“Māori were always the last on the list, we only got the leftovers or the dregs of the money. That was a problem, so I quit.”

“I have been overwhelmed by how Pākehā the system is. The behaviour of the board – it is governed in a Pākehā way. We don’t feel that we fit. It feels like they’ve accommodated everyone else’s needs except for ours.”

29. Te Rōpū Kaitiaki has recently been established which operates as a Māori advisory group to the NZSL Board. While this is a step in the right direction, the NZSL Board still has the final say:

“We know the status of this board [Te Rōpū Kaitiaki] is less because they [the NZSL Board] have the final say. So really Māori can’t enact self-determination because we can’t sign off on the money itself. That’s how it’s been set up by the NZLS Board. We are being treated second class once again.”

“It’s almost like a hangover from colonisation that we’re still second class, sideliners, and we can’t make our decisions in the way that we should be able to through true partnership.”

30. We have little to no connection with the new Whaikaha – Ministry of Disabled People. This highlights how Deaf support services and organisations continue to be Pākehā driven and how there remains a lack of understanding in the disability sector about the Māori world. We don’t know much about the new Ministry and we don’t see ourselves in the new Ministry:

“That’s an interesting word, role. Whaikaha is a flash name to cover up nothing ... in terms of disability, the flash new ministry just points out disability. I’m confused what my role is. Whether I can or can’t. I guess they’ve given us a label and I don’t know which way I’m gonna go. People say we can’t talk, but we can talk with our hands. Disabled is a label, it’s a word.”

“It was meant to be Mana Whaikaha but they [the government] took the term they were gifted and altered it.”

Ko Taku Reo and Rūaumoko Marae

31. Pākehā staff and leadership still dominate Deaf education:

“There aren’t enough Māori staff there. Most of them are Pākehā. Even though a large percentage of the students are Māori. Some of them play

up, which I think is because of the mismatch of teachers [i.e. not Māori teachers].”

“We don’t feel valued by Ko Taku Reo as an institution.”

32. Recruitment processes are also very Pākehā:

“There’s a staff interview panel, all of them are Pākehā. They said we don’t need a Māori rep. I shut the door firmly after that conversation. Many of these issues have been raised but nothing happens.”

33. A lot of work Whānau Turi do with tamariki turi is done on a voluntary basis:

“They expect Māori to do work on a voluntary basis. We are expected to stay after hours without being paid.”

34. There are issues with the new name Ko Taku Reo and the process of how this name was decided:

“When the name was created, which happened a while ago, they selected a group of mostly Pākehā to talk about the name ... In the very last minute they came to me and said I needed to be involved in creating a sign name. There were no other Māori Deaf. I was one person in the whole group. I didn’t even know who these people were. I didn’t know the history or context. It was late in the piece. They talked about the name and suddenly it was signed off – I felt like I didn’t have a voice in that process. It didn’t feel right that it was just me, there was no opportunity for engagement with the Māori Deaf community. Now lots of people complain about the name – they can’t pronounce it, Deaf values not reflected in the name. Deaf people have always been proudly Deaf but this name makes them feel invisible.”

“We have faced real barriers in terms of branding for the new name. New logos were created without our input. The whole branding strategy was done and dusted without consultation with Māori Deaf.”

35. Rūaumoko Marae is the only Māori Deaf marae in the world, but it is a part of Ko Taku Reo. This means that Ko Taku Reo have control over the marae but that is not right. The haukainga should be Whānau Turi:

“When it first started it was a Māori Deaf enterprise but things have changed.”

“The school has taken control. They impose all these rules without involving us.”

“They just side-lined Māori Deaf and removed us. I feel culturally they just don’t value us.”

“I think about Māori Deaf – Van Ash and Kelston didn’t have a marae until Rūaumoko was set up. But Māori turi have stopped going there so it’s kind of a waste.”

36. Recently, we have been denied access to our own marae:

“There has been a change in leadership and cultural practices such as sleepovers on the marae have been stopped. Which meant that Māori Deaf couldn’t access marae.”

“There are barriers to accessing our own marae, which is meant to be there as our space.”

Looking to the future

37. Whānau Turi need trilingual interpreters. We need to work with te reo Māori speakers and organisations like Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori, Kohanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa Māori:

“Have you heard of Te Taura Whiri? They have funding. They provide [reo Māori] interpreters. We need trilingual interpreters – maybe their interpreters could become trilingual interpreters. Maybe we need to work with them to pull in people who might be interested in becoming trilingual interpreters. It doesn’t matter if you’re Pākehā – maybe you still want to join that kaupapa. Because we need more - we still have the same old numbers.”

38. There needs to be wānanga and marae based NZSL interpreter courses for te reo Māori speakers as a safe place for Māori to learn NZSL. The courses could be delivered through an appropriate Māori rōpū such as Te Wānanga o Aotearoa.

“We are hoping there will be a diploma qualification available that is kaupapa Māori based.”

39. The government needs to make training trilingual interpreters a priority. We also need our own booking system that can access trilingual interpreters.

40. We need resourcing of our own Tāngata Turi organisations and leadership so we can achieve our own self-determination, we need to be able to advocate for ourselves:

“Maybe I can be a leader. However, if I was to lead, I’d be an eagle or a duck or a bird on the skyline, with my flock behind me. I may get tired, I may get worn out. I need my flock behind me to support me when I die out. So, we need to be strong as a group.”

“So, we need a strategic lead and kaiwhakahaere.”

41. We also need more Whānau Turi and Māori in Deaf education and a marae for Whānau Turi as haukainga:

“I want a good education for them, access to kohanga reo, seeing their language in front of them, I don’t want teachers who can’t communicate with them. They shouldn’t be stressed trying to learn. I want teachers who are innovative and think in different ways. Barriers still exist today. Where is their [tamariki turi] place? Where is their marae? There’s a lot of sadness in our community and we need to come back together.”

“Deaf education is an important issue for us. When our tamariki leave school, they need qualifications but they’re not getting them. They need NCEA credentials but they’re not getting them. That is a barrier for our children as well as cultural barriers. All of this is all connected – education on the marae and in the big world is connected. We need leaders coming out of our own community ready to lead. People keep getting pushed into

manual work, but we need people coming through our communities to fight the fight, who can be empowered through the service of good interpreting to do the mahi.”

Collective statement

This statement represents the views of the Whānau Turi in attendance at the Royal Commission hui held at Papatūānuku Kōkiri Marae in Māngere, Tāmaki Makaurau, on Thursday 29 and Friday 30 September 2022.

This statement was drafted by Bennion Law as members of the Commission’s Legal Assistance Panel. The purpose of this statement is to provide evidence to the Royal Commission in a format that can be made public.