

Cauldron of violence

Hokio Beach School and Kohitere Boys’ Training Centre: A case study of the State’s role in creating gangs and criminals

# Context

Commissioners directed that some case studies be developed for a variety of reasons, including to highlight the experiences of particular communities of survivors, across the inquiry period.

# Trigger Warning

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. Although this response may be unpleasant and difficult to tolerate, it is also appropriate to feel upset. However, if you or someone in your close circle needs support, please contact your GP or healthcare provider. Respect others’ truths, breathe deeply, take care of your spirit and be gentle with your heart.

# Executive summary

Hokio Beach School (Hokio School) and Kohitere Boys’ Training Centre (Kohitere Centre) were long-stay social welfare institutions in the Taitoko Levin area from the early 1900s up until the late 1980s. Boys came from throughout Aotearoa New Zealand and were often far from family and whānau. These children and young people were seen by the State as “too difficult … to remain in the community.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Yet it was the care system that was punitive and abusive.

Hokio School and Kohitere Centre were not places of care. The State removed children and young people from their families and sent them to institutions where abuse of power, violence and racism were normalised. Survivors were brutally punished and blamed for behaviours often caused by trauma, learning difficulties, disabilities and by the very abuse they endured.

The ‘no-narking’ culture and use of the kingpin system by staff to maintain control contributed to a culture of extreme violence. A lack of supervision, staff with military backgrounds, and inadequate vetting and recruitment processes all played a part in the abuse. Survivors were often seen as manipulative or lying and both survivors and staff were silenced and complaints of abuse covered up.

Some survivors described prison as better than Hokio School and Kohitere Centre.[[2]](#footnote-2) They were worse off when leaving than when they arrived. Some survivors told the Inquiry the only thing they learned was how to be better criminals.[[3]](#footnote-3) The abuse they experienced has led to spiritual, physical, psychological, relationship, and inter-generational impacts. Some survivors have spent most of their lives in jail or sought connection and support through gang membership with others who share similar experiences of abuse in care.

Abuse in Hokio School and Kohitere Centre was systemic. From the top down there was little oversight, or accountability. Not for the State, the institutions, the staff, nor for perpetrators. Survivors’ lives were profoundly altered by their time at Hokio School and Kohitere Centre. Samoan survivor David Williams (aka John Williams) told the Inquiry:

“The things that happened in those places, I don’t really know how us survivors can let go of it. You can’t, it's there for life until you go to your grave.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

End of information | **Cauldron of violence**

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1. Department of Education, Child Welfare Division, Field Officer’s Manual, part Q (1965, page 1). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Witness statements of Mr JV (4 May 2023, para 38); Mr RX (27 March 2023, para 4.6.8); Peter Brooker (6 December 2021, para 246) and Tony Lewis (21 August 2021, para 55). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Witness statements of Wiremu Waikari (27July 2021, para 239); David Williams (aka John Williams), (15 March 2021, para 178) and Daniel Rei (10 February 2021, para 91). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Witness statement of David Williams (aka John Williams), (15 March 2021, para 174). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)