

27 September 2024

An open letter apologising for abuse in care

On behalf of Presbyterian Support Otago (PSO) we publicly apologise for the suffering and harm experienced by children who were in our care. As Chair and Chief Executive we pledge to lead PSO in responding to and learning from this tragic part of our history.

The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care confirmed the terrible experiences of some children in PSO's care, at our residential children's homes. Through meeting with people who have come forward, we have learned that some of those we trusted to care for children, inflicted harm on them. For these children, the experience of home was one of fear, hatred and loneliness that words can't describe. Through PSO's neglect we clearly failed some children at critical moments in their lives. We know that the impacts of these experiences can be lifelong and profound. This included making it harder for them to find and nurture loving adult relationships. We will have put some at risk of dependency on drugs and alcohol. We deplore every instance that caused harm to these children and we are deeply sorry that it happened.

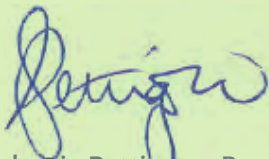
Further, we are aware that we have made the process of healing more difficult still, by denying those in our care important information held about their young lives, when records were destroyed in 2017-18. We know how important such records are, not just to those who spent parts of their childhood in our care but to their families. These records belonged to those who were in our care, some of whom experienced harm. We fully accept that they should not have been destroyed and we lament that those important links to the past have been lost.

Our Board continues to review our policies and processes to ensure safety, specifically in light of the Commission's report. We are committed to learning from the report and better understanding how we can continue to minimise the potential for abuse of vulnerable people in our care, living our values of integrity, respect, courage, manaaki and aroha.

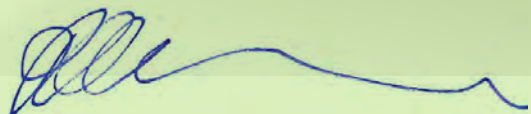
PSO has offered support and care in the community to hundreds of thousands of families and people for well over a century. We are and will continue to be steadfast in our commitment to serving the community we have been a part of for so long.

As we continue to respond we are grateful for the ongoing prayers and encouragement from our community and especially from some of the very people for whom we failed in our duty of care.

We have been deeply moved by the courage of those who have come forward and we encourage people who experienced harm to contact us. We undertake to respond with care and compassion in the hope that through listening and understanding we can work with you towards redress and with your insights, strive to ensure that the actions and decisions of the past never happen again.



Stephanie Pettigrew Board Chair



Robbie Moginie, Interim Chief Executive