

23 of 1000 DOCUMENTS

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Instructor who abused deaf children is jailed for 12 years

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A former teacher who sexually abused deaf children in his care was jailed for 12 years yesterday.

Colin Macdonald, 61, of Wakefield, West Yorkshire, was found guilty of 10 charges of abusing children in Scotland between 1973 and 1983.

Macdonald, a respected instructor in outdoor activities, and who is also deaf, carried out his attacks when the children were on camping and skiing expeditions.

Passing sentence at the High Court in Edinburgh, Lord Malcolm said that Macdonald was responsible for a "planned and premeditated" breach of trust. He said: "You sexually abused and assaulted vulnerable deaf children who were entrusted to your care whilst on expeditions in isolated places far from their homes. Over several years you took advantage of ... your own power as their leader, all for your own gratification. You had no regard to the damage being done to them.

"It is clear from the report that you refuse to accept full responsibility for your disgraceful assaults and you even tried blaming some of your victims for your current position. All of this was a planned and premeditated breach of the trust which they and others placed in you."

The judge praised the victims who came forward, saying that it must have taken "great courage" to do so.

Three of the victims waived their right to anonymity to speak out after the sentence was passed. James Colhoun, 48, said: "I expected seven or eight years, but to hear twelve is fantastic." Mr Colhoun, of Glasgow, said that he believed there were dozens more victims yet to come forward. "The three of us and the other victims - there's 10, but I reckon there could be up to 100 victims - have suffered and we're still suffering. It will be in our minds forever."

George Drinnan, 45, said that the extent of Macdonald's crimes came to light after he told police of abuse that he had suffered. "I just felt that it's been gnawing away, nagging at me for all these years and I wanted to get it out," he said.

"I went forward, and from that more people came forward. But there should be a lot more."

Mr Drinnan, who lives in London, said that he felt "huge relief" that Macdonald had been sent to prison.

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Macdonald's skills in outdoor activities placed him in demand at youth camps, the court was told. He was a prominent figure and his expertise had been sought by other countries. He carried out attacks on children at locations across Scotland, and his youngest victim was 10.

Macdonald, who was earlier found guilty in a trial at the High Court in Kilmarnock, has been placed on the sex offenders register. The judge proposed to refer him to Scottish ministers as someone unsuitable to work with children.

"There is no doubt in my mind that given the nature and the gravity of your offences and the breach of trust towards vulnerable young people in your care, I must take a very serious view of the matter," Lord Malcolm said.

He acknowledged that Macdonald's deafness may make prison an "especially difficult environment" for him, but he said that sentences could not be tailored accordingly. "In any event, you had no concern for the special vulnerability of the children you assaulted and abused," he said.

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