

STATEMENT OF TANYA AND GEORGINA SAMMONS

DATED: 24 FEBRUARY 2020

Introduction

- [1] My name is Georgina Nola Liza Sammons. I am 43 and live in Whangarei, where I work in child care. This is the evidence of myself and my sister, Tanya June Sammons. Tanya is 44, and lives in Warkworth, where she works in merchandising and runs a screen printing business. Tanya has also signed this evidence and accepts its contents.
- [2] We were taken into state care as very young children, and raised by a foster family, where we all suffered physical, psychological and sexual abuse. This evidence is about our experiences in trying to make claims against MSD for their failure to protect us as kids.
- [3] Our evidence is also on behalf of our older sister, Alva, who was in care with us but has since taken her own life, leaving her two young kids behind. Alva is the main reason we wanted to make a claim in the first place at all. We want to get justice for Alva and for her kids, to make sure someone was held accountable for the abuse that we all suffered, and that eventually killed Alva and left her kids without a mother. We want to make sure her kids have something.

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Alva

- [5] Alva took her own life almost 20 years ago, when she was 26. Around a year earlier, she had a heart valve replacement to repair damage from undetected rheumatic fever she had when she was young, and she had been advised by doctors that if she didn't take her daily medication, it would kill her. Later she started talking about wanting to die and that she had had enough of living and threatened to stop taking her medication. Then she stopped taking her medication. Alva left behind a 2-year-old son and 5-year-old daughter.
- [6] Before she died, Alva wrote letters that talked about the pain of her childhood as a state ward, which she felt she couldn't escape, and how she had had to spend her life running, and never wanted to let her children be taken into state care.¹
- [7] Alva had suffered as we all did in our abusive home. She told us later that she was regularly sexually abused at the hands of at our foster brothers. She was always protective of us younger girls even though she was just one year older than Tanya, and just 2 years older than me. She said to me once that she let herself be sexually abused, because she thought if she put up with it, then maybe we wouldn't have to.

Not relevant to the Natural Justice Process

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Background: Our experience in state care

- [14] I was just 2 when I was taken into care, Tanya was 3, and Alva was 4. We don't remember our home before care, but understand that we were not well looked after by our biological parents. After we were removed from that home, we were placed in a home for a short period, and then placed with a foster family.
- [15] Our foster family was a GRO-C The parents had 4 older children from previous marriages. They also had one other foster child, the same age as Tanya, who they later adopted. We weren't ever adopted. We stayed with that foster family until we were discharged from care. Our upbringing with that family was really difficult and abusive.
- [16] One of the big things for us was that we were always moving - we moved something like 8 times in the first 3 years; and somewhere around 15 times over the 13 years in care, between different cities and towns, living in Auckland, Whangarei, Kaikohe, Kaitaia, Herekino, Ruawai, Dargaville, Hikurangi and Whananaki, and having to change schools all the time.
- [17] We were always given second hand clothes and usually didn't have the correct school uniform or didn't have enough clothes in winter. We often didn't have lunch to take, and we weren't allowed to go on school camps or trips and didn't get school supplies. For example, Tanya remembers having a friend's mum pay for her to go to school camp,

and buy her fabric so she could do sewing at school. It was only when we were quite a bit older that we found out that CYFS was paying our foster parents board and clothing allowances and other costs that were supposed to be spent on us. It seems that these costs went towards trips and other expenses for our foster mother, or other debts that she had.

- [18] Often one of us, especially Tanya, would be made to stay home from school to help with chores and help look after our foster sister's kids while our foster mother went away or looked after her shop.
- [19] Because of our absences from school and of moving so often, we weren't able to make friends or get settled at school, and we never had long term relationships with other people, including any social workers. Our education also really suffered. At the end of her 5th form year, Tanya was told she wasn't allowed to sit school certificate because her attendance had been too low. She really wanted to re-sit, but after re-enrolling and doing most of the first term, the family moved again and she was made to move with them and switch to a new school. She lasted three days in that school and then gave up and dropped out. I also dropped out of school before completing School Certificate.

Physical and psychological abuse

- [20] We were physically beaten by our foster father, sometimes quite badly. I remember a time when I was caught smoking being beaten so badly that I wet myself and had black eyes. A social worker visited a few days later, and I had to hide under the bed so the social worker wouldn't see my black eyes. I just remember hearing my foster mother telling the social worker I was away staying at a friends' house.
- [21] Our foster father could be violent in other ways too. Tanya had a cat for a while, that meant everything to her. When Tanya was around 13 or 14, the cat once made a mess in the garage after it had been locked in all day. Our foster father found the mess and was furious, so in front of Tanya, killed the cat by cracking its head on the concrete.
- [22] Beatings from our foster mother were less frequent but also occurred and were sometimes quite brutal. Tanya got a severe beating after telling our foster brother that

she was being sexually abused, which left her so bruised she couldn't easily get out of bed for 2 days afterwards. She was kept home from school while she recovered. Tanya shut down after that - she didn't complain about things and did what she was told.

- [23] Our foster mother would also often threaten us with violence or use our foster brother to hurt us when she thought we needed bringing into line. Our foster brother would rub his fist into our scalps until our scalps were rubbed raw and sometimes weeping. When I was in Form 1, around 11 years old, I came home and decided to kill and pluck the chickens and put them in the freezer. I wasn't trying to be naughty – I had been asked to prepare a chicken before, and thought that I was being helpful. My foster brother was allowed to punish me. I remember being thrown into the pantry, and falling down all the shelves, and then being thrown across the dining room table. We knew to expect that we would be hurt if we stepped out of line.
- [24] There was also a lot of psychological abuse and manipulation in our household, especially from our foster mother. She would do things like hide money in our bag and then do a 'bag check' before we left for school. When the money was found we would get in trouble and be made to stay home from school if we didn't confess to taking it. She often humiliated us in front of our school friends. Tanya had a medical bladder problem, which she had had an operation for but had not fully resolved. At a birthday party when she was around 10, our foster mother made her put on a nappy in front of all her friends, calling her filthy. In my case, I also had urinary reflux when I was a kid, which meant I often had a bed wetting issue. I remember my foster mother hanging my undies on the mailbox so that everyone on the school bus could see that I had wet the bed.
- [25] The physical abuse was usually hidden from others outside the household. As we already mentioned above, we remember sometimes being made to hide from social workers, or stay home from school if we had visible marks of the beatings. It's also not something we would have talked about with social workers. Because we moved so much, we had many social workers throughout our childhood, and we don't remember seeing any of them very often. Usually they would only speak to us in front of our foster mother. Sometimes they visited us at home or at school and spoke to us on our own, but

never for more than a few words. Neither of us remember ever having any long conversation with any of them.

Sexual abuse

- [26] All three of us were also sexually abused in our foster home. We didn't talk about it with each other and so didn't know the extent to which we all had similar experiences until much later. In fact, we still haven't completely compared experiences, but Alva did confess some to us much later when we were adults.
- [27] I was first sexually abused by one of our older foster brothers when I was 6 years old. He forced me to give him a blow job. Because I was so young, I still can't recall which brother it was - all I remember was his blonde hair.
- [28] I was also regularly raped by our adopted brother from when I was in form 1 or 2 until I was 14. I told our foster mother about it once, but she didn't believe me. Our adopted brother told her I was having an epileptic fit and he was just helping me, and she believed him and thought I was dreaming. Later, I reported it to our social workers and to the police.
- [29] At that time, our brother had been ordered to stay at another care residence because he had been getting into trouble stealing and doing other things. However, he came home on weekends, and would assault or rape me. One Friday night, when I knew he was coming home for the weekend, I ran away to my friend's house. Tanya told my foster mother why I had run away. My foster mother found me and took me to the care worker at the home that my brother was at. The next day I was taken to the police where I made a statement and had a video interview. I told police what had been happening, and also talked about some specific occasions when friends had been around and had seen some of the abuse.
- [30] After I made my report, it seemed like nothing happened. My foster brother was still allowed to come home on weekends. I have seen on my file that it says there was a meeting with me, but I don't remember seeing the police officer ever again after making the statement, or getting any follow up from police.

Not relevant to the Natural Justice Process

[33] Tanya was also sexually abused by our oldest foster brother when she was around 6. She confided in the second brother about what had happened, but he told our foster mother, who then told Tanya she was lying and beat Tanya for talking about it. After that the second brother also began sexually abusing Tanya, and later the adopted brother who raped me also abused her. Tanya didn't tell anyone else after that first time: she had learnt what the consequence was for talking about it.

Not relevant to the Natural Justice Process

Not relevant to the Natural Justice Process

Not relevant to the Natural Justice Process

Seeking redress

Georgina's claim

Retrieving records

Not relevant to the Natural Justice Process

[46] What I did see in my records was that throughout our childhood, there were notes on our files from social workers, and some from other church members and teachers, showing concern about our wellbeing. This included concerns about us moving too much and having no stability, and about our shabby appearance and our foster parents' financial management. There are notes recording that our foster mother wanted to get paid our clothing allowance to pay off some of her debt. There were also records of both me and Alva reporting sexual abuse, and concern that we displayed behaviour consistent with abuse. One social worker acknowledged himself that the department hadn't done a good job of looking after me.

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[69] Most importantly, the letter from Crown Law didn't mention Alva at all, and there was nothing to acknowledge the abuse she suffered and the failure of the Ministry to protect her, which she carried with her her whole life.

[70] After I got that letter, I got in touch with our foster sister, one of our foster father's daughters, who had also experienced abuse from our foster mother. She was happy to support my claim because she had suffered the same treatment. She made a statement for my lawyers.¹⁶ In 1994, she and the younger foster brother (my foster mother's son) had also documented their concerns about my foster mother and older foster brother, as my foster sister was worried about her nephew who was living with them and was trying to get custody of him. She got a copy of their 1994 statements from the Court, and also provided those to my lawyer.¹⁷ Those statements included evidence of our older foster brother's violence, and of suspicions of his sexual abuse. The younger foster brother's statement included that he believed that the older one had sexually abused us girls, because he remembered one of us making a complaint to him about it when we were younger.

Not relevant to the Natural Justice Process

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[74] I can't understand what they were looking for. My foster sister's statement said that she remembered a time her father (our foster father) "laid into [her] with an alkaline pipe", another occasion when her father and step-mother had "dragged [her] out of the car and...laid into [her] one at a time open hand and closed fist." She talked about her step brother (our foster brother) punching her in the mouth and knocking teeth loose, and seeing her father punching Alva in the body until he got tired and picked up scissors to carry on with until she intervened.

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Signed:

GRO-C

Georgina Sammons

Date:

25/2/2020

Signed: _____

Tanya Sammons

Date: _____

Not relevant to the Natural Justice Process

Signed:

GRO-C

Georgina Sammons

Date: 25/2/2020

Signed:

GRO-C

Tanya Sammons

Date: 24/02/2020