

Witness Name: Leota Fred Scanlon

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ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

WITNESS STATEMENT OF LEOTA FRED SCANLON

I, Leota Fred Scanlon, say as follows:

INTRODUCTION

1. My name is Leota Fred Scanlon. I was born on 1962. I currently live in Masterton.
2. I am full Samoan. I also whakapapa to the whānau in Whanganui by marriage.
3. I am sharing about my time as an inpatient at the Lake Alice Child and Adolescent Unit (**Lake Alice**), and in family homes, foster care and Borstal training. I am also sharing about the impacts of Lake Alice on my life.

MIGRATION STORY AND EARLY LIFE

4. Both my parents are part Samoan. They had Irish and German descendants who settled in Samoa.

5. In the early 1930s, my paternal grandfather and his two brothers left Samoa for New Zealand. My grandfather worked on the cargo ships in NZ, which shipped goods to and from the Pacific Islands, including Samoa. My grandfather travelled back and forth on these ships and stayed with family in Rānana with his brother. One his brothers settled in Napier and the other settled in Whanganui, where he met and married Nana [GRO-B-2] from the [GRO-B-1] whānau. I whakapapa to the [GRO-B-1] whānau because of that marriage and because the [GRO-B-1] whānau took us in as part of their family.
6. My Dad grew up in Samoa but came to NZ in 1945. Dad left Samoa because of disagreements in the village about the way people treated him at church. Dad settled at Rānana, next to the Whanganui River and later met my Mum in Whanganui. They married and raised all their children in the Whanganui township. I grew up with three older brothers and one younger sister. I was the youngest of the boys. I had other half-siblings, but I didn't grow up with them.
7. Dad was violent and abusive during my childhood. He was an alcoholic. Dad only spoke fluent Samoan and Māori, which Nanny [GRO-B-2] taught him. He couldn't speak, read or write in English because he struggled to learn it. At home, Dad mainly spoke Samoan to us, but me and my siblings communicated in English because we were speaking English outside of our home all the time.
8. I attended school in Whanganui; [GRO-C Carlton] School, Rutherford Intermediate, and Whanganui [GRO-C High School]. My family regularly attended church growing up. I got kicked out of Sunday school when I was young for being too hyperactive. Because I was hyperactive, I had to sit with Mum and Dad during the main service.
9. In 1974, my Mum passed away. I was 11 years old at the time. My older brothers all left home after this, leaving just me and my younger sister at home under the care of Dad.
10. Mum's death had a really big effect on me because I had no other family support. I visited my Dad's sister not long after Mum passed away and told her how much I missed my Mum. I was trying to seek solace with my Aunty but instead, she slammed the door in my face because she was angry at something I had said. This experience hurt me a lot. My Dad had another sister who lived in Whanganui,

but I couldn't see her because they were ashamed of my family. I didn't really understand it at the time, but I think Dad's family were ashamed that we were half cast.

11. Not long after Mum passed away, GRO-B. This made me so angry because I know I should've been there for her. I also continued to receive beatings from my Dad.
12. This is when all my problems started. I became an angry kid and I started fighting at school all the time.

ADMISSION TO LAKE ALICE

13. I clearly remember what happened on the day I got sent to Lake Alice. I don't recall the exact date of my admission but my file states that I was admitted on 2 April 1976. I was 13 years old at the time.
14. On that day, an old lady from the Department of Social Welfare (**DSW**) came to my school and met with my Principal. I believe that the Principal arranged this meeting with DSW because of the fights I was having at school. My Dad didn't attend this meeting in person, but my Principal called him on the phone. My Principal and the social worker spoke to Dad in English and essentially asked for his consent to send me to Lake Alice, which they got.
15. The social worker told Dad that I needed a psychiatric evaluation because of the fights I was having at school. The social worker told him that they wanted to send me to Lake Alice Hospital. I knew my Dad couldn't understand what they were saying because he couldn't speak English. The social worker then gave me the phone to talk to Dad and I said to him in Samoan that I didn't want to go that place, being Lake Alice. I told him in Samoan because I didn't want the Principal to understand what I was saying.
16. Dad agreed to send me to Lake Alice. I was then taken straight to Lake Alice from the school by the social worker. There was another person driving the car. During the car ride, the social worker told me that Lake Alice would be the best place for me to get help and that I would be looked after with the other children there. The social worker didn't even let me go home to get some of my clothes or say

goodbye to my sister. Instead, someone arranged for my clothes to be delivered to Lake Alice after I was admitted.

17. I believe that my Principal supported this decision because of all the fights I was having at the school. I believe that, if my Dad did understand, he agreed to the social worker's plan because he wanted to separate me from my sister, [GRO-B] [GRO-B]. There were no court orders for my admission to Lake Alice because my father was my legal guardian. The social worker only required his consent to put me in Lake Alice, which they got.
18. I had never heard of Lake Alice before this. No one asked me what I wanted.

LAKE ALICE: 2 APRIL TO 17 SEPTEMBER 1976

19. I spent over five months at Lake Alice.
20. When I first arrived, I was terrified, and I was crying. The social worker left me with Dr Leeks on arrival. Dr Leeks was the head psychiatrist at Lake Alice. I knew he ran the place because everyone did what he said. I didn't know this was his role at the time, but I did understand during my time at Lake Alice that he made all the decisions on who got electric shocks.
21. After seeing Dr Leeks, the first thing the nurses did to me was inject me with paraldehyde on my buttocks. After the injection, the nurses put me in bed. I couldn't walk for about two days because of the pain in my backside and legs from the injection. When I was able to walk again, I walked around Lake Alice and familiarised myself with the buildings and the people there.

Children at Lake Alice

22. There were about 30 children at Lake Alice when I arrived. I was placed in Villa 7 which was a boy's dormitory. The first level of the Villa contained the dining room and the drug room where we got our paraldehyde injections. Upstairs was where we slept. At the end of the corridors, there were four seclusion rooms. Across from our dorm was Villa 6 which was the girl's dorm. The youngest resident was about six years old. There were even numbers of male and female children. There were some Polynesian boys there too.

23. The six-year-old got electric shocks. I had a gay GRO-B at Lake Alice who received electric shocks because the nurses thought that the electric shocks would cure his sexual orientation.
24. There were a couple of children at Lake Alice who were part of the Intellectually Handicapped Children's (IHC) services. They were given electric shocks. One of them would often sit there and rock back and forth. These children should never have been given electric shocks or been at Lake Alice in the first place.
25. At that age, I didn't really know what racism was. I learned about racism later when I went to Borstal training. Looking back on my time at Lake Alice, it was clear that the Polynesian and Māori kids were treated worse than the Palagi kids because we were getting more injections and electric shocks than the Palagi kids. There were rules for them and different rules for us.

Daily life at Lake Alice

26. A normal day at Lake Alice would begin with breakfast. We would then go to Lake Alice School (**School**) for a couple of hours. The School was located on the same grounds. We were able to play sports and other leisure activities every now and then.
27. We were often around older patients from the main hospital, which contained adults who were criminally insane. There was an adult villa right next door to our Villa. That really freaked me out. I remember meeting a man from the National Security Unit, which was the really secure unit at the main hospital. He ended up being moved to the villa next door to us.
28. This adult patient would freak out if me and the other boys said the word "Porirua" to him. The nurses punished us with paraldehyde injections every time we said Porirua to him. It was always scary when he got upset and at the time, I never really understood why he was like that. When I got older, I became aware of what had happened at Porirua Hospital and understood why he freaked out when someone mentioned the word Porirua.
29. During my time at Lake Alice, I went on home leave to see Dad three times. Each time, I would beg him to let me stay at home and to take me out of Lake Alice. I

had to return to Lake Alice every time except for the last visit in September 1976. My Dad's girlfriend visited me twice at Lake Alice. Dad never came.

30. I spent every single day in Lake Alice terrified. I would've preferred getting a hiding from my Dad than to get treated the way I did in Lake Alice. I just felt like a guinea pig there as the staff spent their time figuring out what drug worked best to settle us down and shut us up.
31. I had hoped that the staff at Lake Alice would help me to grieve my Mum's death, which would've helped with my anger. They punished me instead.

Running away from Lake Alice

32. Around May 1976, me and some boys ran away from Lake Alice. We ran away because we were just sick of the medication, the paraldehyde injections, the threats of punishment from nurses and the electric shocks. Although we came from homes that were scary because of the violence, Lake Alice was a scarier place which is why we ran away.
33. The Police caught us just before we got to Turakina. Police notified staff from Lake Alice who met up with us and brought us back to Lake Alice. As soon as we got back to Lake Alice, they injected us with paraldehyde and put us in the seclusion rooms. I was in seclusion for a week.
34. I ran away two more times but both times, I was caught, taken back to Lake Alice, injected with paraldehyde and thrown into a seclusion room.

ABUSE AT LAKE ALICE

Group therapy

35. Dr Leeks ran the group therapy meetings with all the children and the nurses once a week. The nurses would dress in mufti at these group meetings.
36. The meetings were like therapy sessions. We had to share how we felt and how we were progressing at the unit. If we complained about any of the nurses or if we said anything rude or cheeky about them, the nurses would single us out after the group meeting, threaten to use electric shocks on us and warn us not to do it again. I remember crying one time after I was singled out by a nurse and

threatened and warned. Because of this, nothing really happened at the group meetings. We were too scared to talk or express how we really felt.

37. Even though it was the nurses handing out the punishment, it was Dr Leeks who was responsible for running the meetings and making decisions on who got electric shocks.

Electric shocks

38. In my statement, I refer to electric convulsive therapy (**ECT**) as electric shocks. I do this because it was used for punishment and it was not therapy. All my electric shocks were unmodified, so the nurses didn't even try to minimise my pain. It was obvious that they were punishing me. The nurses never explained why I was getting electric shocks but if we misbehaved, the nurses threatened to use electric shocks on us. I remember people getting electric shocks for swearing.
39. I had electric shocks about three times. I don't remember Dr Leeks being present during my electric shocks, but it was usually done by the nurses. I remember one nurse who had a foreign accent.
40. I would be taken to the electric shock room up the villa stairs to where the machine was. I would be placed on the bed and the nurses would hold me down. They tied me down at the waist and at my feet. The nurses placed the electric shock stuff on my head and then I got electrocuted. Sometimes I was electrocuted until I was unconscious. When this happened, I would only remember waking up in my own bed. Sometimes after the electric shocks, the nurses would give us pills to knock us out.
41. One time, I wet my pants before I even got to the electric shock room and pissed again on the bed where the electric shocks were given. I remember the nurses moaning about having to change the bed I had wet. I would also wet myself after the electric shocks. The nurses would tell me to clean myself up and have a shower when I was awake. After I received electric shocks, I couldn't remember what happened that day or sometimes the day before, because we were so sedated from the medication the nurses gave us after the electric shocks.
42. The electric shocks would usually leave electrode marks on my head.

Paraldehyde injections and other medication

43. Paraldehyde really stuffed us up. It was really nasty stuff.
44. I got paraldehyde injections for things like running away and for talking to others in my dorm when we were supposed to be sleeping.
45. Paraldehyde was usually given to us in a room away from others or in the drug room near the front door. If we were taken to the drug room, we knew it was because we were going to get paraldehyde injections. Otherwise, if it was standard medication, they would walk around the dorms and hand it out.
46. Usually after the paraldehyde injection, it would be a couple of days before we could walk again due to the pain. Even though we were still in pain, the nurses would make us get up and out of bed to walk around the hospital grounds.

Seclusion

47. As mentioned before, there were four seclusion rooms in our dormitory. The room had one door and a shutter on it that the nurses used to look through. There was no way of getting out as the rooms were locked from the front. The nurses were like prison officers guarding the rooms. They had a big skeleton key that they used to open those four rooms.
48. I went into seclusion quite a few times. I was there once or twice a week. I was usually in seclusion for about three days but sometimes up to a week.
49. We would be taken to seclusion sometimes after receiving electric shocks, paraldehyde injections or running away. As mentioned, I ran away three times. The nurses locked the seclusion room door and closed the shutter. I often urinated in my pants while I was sleeping in the seclusion room. I wouldn't notice it when it happened because the nurses continued to sedate us in seclusion. I only realised that I had urinated myself when I could think clearly, and it was obvious that I had been there for days because I would be quite smelly. No one cleaned me.

50. One time, I was given a paraldehyde injection and thrown into seclusion. I shit the bed because I couldn't get up due to the pain of the injection. After this, the nurse made me take a shower and then put me back into seclusion.
51. I would also get physically abused by some of the nurses in seclusion because the rooms were isolated and out of the way. No one could see what was happening. The isolated abuse was a regular thing.

Sexual abuse by a staff member

52. I don't want to talk about this part of my abuse in much detail, but there was an older Lake Alice nurse, who used to take groups of boys to his house in Marton. I was part of that group. When we were at his home, he would single out some of us, touch us and molest us.

STAFF AT LAKE ALICE

53. I had a cousin called [GRO-B] who was a nurse at Lake Alice. We weren't aware of our family connection at the time. He was my Mum's first cousin's son. He beat me up one time. I had no idea why.
54. I befriended one of the cleaners while I was at Lake Alice. She knew my family and came from around Rātana Pā. I told her I was really scared at Lake Alice and asked her if I could jump in her car boot and be taken away, but she said no. I remember having just received electric shocks before I spoke to her. She was the only person I ever complained to about Lake Alice at the time.
55. I remember one nurse at Lake Alice who was really comforting. She ran Kapa Haka classes and waiata lessons at the School which I enjoyed. These lessons were run in one of the classrooms at the School during the weekend. It reminded me of home. I always dreaded going back to the dormitory afterwards because of the punishments.
56. I could tell that some of the nurses enjoyed giving us paraldehyde injections and electric shocks because of the satisfied expressions on their faces. I remember one nurse who always picked on me. His name was [GRO-B-3] who came from England. He administered some of the paraldehyde injections on me and appeared to have enjoyed it.

57. [GRO-B-4] and [GRO-B-5] were two of the nurses who also administered electric shocks and paraldehyde injections on me. They also appeared to have enjoyed doing it because of the satisfied expressions on their face as they administered this. All the other nurses just seemed to go through the motions and did what they were told to do by Dr Leeks.

LEAVING LAKE ALICE AND SUPERVISION BY THE DSW

58. On 17 September 1976, I left Lake Alice to go on home leave. I never went back. I was at Lake Alice for over five months.
59. When I left Lake Alice, I was a bit of a loner. I tried to go back to high school, but the school wouldn't take me back given my history.
60. I tried to enrol at a different high school, but they wouldn't take me either. All I wanted was a chance to be educated and to find work, but I was denied it.
61. I had no life skills coming out of Lake Alice, so I turned to crime to feed me and my sister. I would rob houses so that I could get food for us. I learnt to just look after myself and my sister as life at home wasn't great. The robberies and thefts caught the attention of Police which is how I became involved with the DSW again.

Family homes, foster care and Borstal training

62. Over the Christmas holidays in 1976, my Dad went on holiday to Auckland, leaving me at home alone. I didn't have enough food or money to get by, so I stole from a shop and the neighbour's house. I was caught by Police on 30 December 1976.
63. My file states that I was "remanded in [social welfare] custody" and "taken on warrant by Police". I remember being placed in the adult cells while the Police tried to find a social worker to see me. That evening, Police moved me to a temporary placement on [GRO-B] Avenue in Whanganui.
64. Someone then managed to contact my Dad. Dad told the social worker that I could stay with family friends until he returned home. I was then taken to that

family friends' home on 31 December 1976. I stayed there until Dad came home on 7 January 1977.

65. On 31 January 1977, the Magistrate granted an order placing me under the supervision of a social worker for 12 months. Mr Moffitt was the only social worker that I can remember who actually thought I had potential. All the other social workers just tried to pass me on to the next social worker. I felt like they were just going through the motions with me.
66. When a social worker tried to visit me at home, I ran away and ended in Auckland. I lived off a paper run in Auckland for about a year and slept in a cemetery in Mt Eden.
67. Eventually, the social workers caught up with me when I tried to steal something. Police sent me back to Whanganui. Around 5 April 1978, I was placed in a family home on [GRO-B] Road in Whanganui. The caregivers had a daughter in Lake Alice. The family treated me terribly, and eventually just told me to leave. This was a Palagi family. I spent around three weeks at this family home.
68. In May 1978, I was caught by Police and was "remanded in social welfare custody" until my court hearing the following week. While on remand, on 12 May 1978, I was placed in foster care with a lady on [GRO-B] Street in Whanganui. I was there for about a week.
69. On 31 July 1979, I was sentenced to 0-2 years of Borstal training. I was still 15 years old at the time and turned 16 while I was at Borstal. I don't know why they placed me there before I turned 16. To me, it felt like they just wanted to put me somewhere and throw away the key. Borstal was a real eye-opener. I had a tough time at Borstal, always fighting with boys and prison officers. I think I had a guardian angel which got me through that.
70. After Borstal, I returned home, which was in a terrible state. My Dad was drunk, [GRO-B]. As a result, I attempted to take my own life [GRO-C].

IMPACTS OF LAKE ALICE

71. I turned to alcohol and drugs at a very early age and developed a severe drinking problem. I drank alcohol to try and kill all the bad memories I had of Lake Alice.
72. My anger problems continued throughout my life because no one ever helped me. I went from being an angry kid, to an angry youth, and then to an angry adult.
73. My time in Lake Alice affected all my relationships with my ex-partners. I used to hit my first partner. I had no excuse for this. I was just angry because of the time I spent at Lake Alice. I was angry at those who hurt me.
74. My own parenting skills were affected. When my kids were born, I couldn't stay inside the hospital too long because the typical hospital smell reminded me of Lake Alice, which really stuck with me whenever I got electric shock treatment. When I got injured from fighting, the doctor came to my house to treat me because I couldn't bear going back to a hospital for treatment. I've had issues with my older sons and daughters who are now going through their own problems. I isolated myself from my family for a long time after my 16-year-old daughter passed away 12 years ago.
75. About 4 years ago, I went to prison and served six months for my third drink-driving offence. I was 56 years old and there was a 23-year gap between my last drink-driving charge and that conviction, but I was sent to jail for this offence. I couldn't believe it. I know many Palagi people who have worse drink-driving histories, but they got a slap on the hand.
76. Police officers would also tell people not to hang out with me. I know this because my mates told me. My friends said police officers referred to me as "bad news".
77. I have also struggled with depression and attempted to take my own life a few times. I have struggled with a lot of challenges throughout my life, but it all started when I was taken and placed in Lake Alice.
78. I've also had to get two full hip replacements, and struggle with arthritis. I believe my hip problems are linked to the paraldehyde injections I got at Lake Alice. To this day, I still have marks on my buttocks from the injections. I am currently recovering from my second hip replacement.

79. Throughout my life, I have always hated the fact that the nurse who sexually abused me, the other nurses, [GRO-B-4] and [GRO-B-5] who gave us paraldehyde and electric shocks, and Dr Leeks, got to live happy lives. They were never held accountable for the abuse. In comparison, all of us who went to Lake Alice have had to live with the impact of their actions. One of my friends from Lake Alice [GRO-C].
80. I only ever told a couple of people about what happened at Lake Alice. I've had to carry the burden of what happened for a long time. I kept quiet about it for so long because I used to believe that I had done something wrong, and that Lake Alice was my punishment for that. Now I know that I was never in the wrong – the people running Lake Alice were.
81. My Aunty (Dad's cousin) who used to live up the Whanganui River only found out about my experience in Lake Alice long after it had happened. To this day, she tells me that if she had known what was going on, she would've taken me out of Lake Alice and given my Dad a hiding for it. I have been deprived of an education because of my experience in Lake Alice. If my Aunty had taken over my care, I would've had a good education.
82. I eventually did a chef course in my 40's but I wish I had done it earlier. When I look back on my life, there are many good things I wish I had done earlier but didn't because of all the trauma and hurt I never dealt with.
83. Despite everything that has happened to me, I haven't let my bad start to life stop me from learning life skills and educating myself. I've been drug free for 23 years. However, I still can't be around too many people. I get anxious about going to Pak n Save because there are too many people there. I prefer to live on my own and to avoid large groups of people.
84. I've also had some counselling which at first was difficult for me, but it has helped me process my daughter's death. Whenever I do counselling, it always reminds me of the group therapy sessions we had at Lake Alice.

LAKE ALICE REDRESS

85. In 2002, I received about \$52,000 in compensation from the government. When I went through this process, I was told to keep quiet about the process. I also got a letter from Helen Clarke saying sorry.
86. All of the money in the world or any written apology is not going to change what happened to me, nor will it give me back my childhood. I wish I was still that little kid so that I don't have to endure the pain I am now. The mamae that I have will always be there, but I am happy that I am now starting to talk about what happened to me through counselling.
87. If there is a formal apology, it should come from the top, for example, by Jacinda Ardern. I say this because she seems to be the most genuine of all the current politicians. So, it must be a genuine apology.

LOOKING FORWARD

88. I still can't believe that people treated children the way I was treated. When I think about Lake Alice, I still get angry. Those who ran the place should be held accountable for what they did to us. It's important for people to know what happened at Lake Alice and the consequences it had on us for the rest of our lives.
89. Dr Leeks must be held accountable for the role he played at Lake Alice. I want him to be prosecuted for his role at Lake Alice. I remember seeing him on a documentary on TV when he was over in Australia. That brought back a lot of bad memories for me, so I turned to drinking alcohol again.
90. In terms of the care of children, we need to have caregivers that are loving. They need to praise children all the time. Caregivers need to remind children that they're always going to be there for them. Children need to feel important, and not be made to feel dumb, like I was at Lake Alice.
91. The most important thing for me would be to screen potential caregivers. I've heard stories of caregivers hitting children and misusing the money the Ministry has given them to help care for the child.

92. I believe that everything comes back to parenting. My Dad had no parenting skills. He didn't have any external support after my Mum passed away. However, this was no excuse for what he did to me: GRO-B

Statement of Truth

This statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and was made by me knowing that it may be used as evidence by the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care.

Signed:

GRO-C

Dated:

23 / 6 / 2021