

Witness Name: Sarah (Sunny)

Webster Statement No.: WITN0346007

Dated: 13 May 2022

ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

SECOND WITNESS STATEMENT OF SARAH (SUNNY) WEBSTER

I, Sarah (Sunny) Webster, state as follows:

1. After my first witness statement was taken by this Royal Commission, I was sent a list of avenues for possible further compensation or support from different Government agencies. One of these was the Ministry of Health Historic Abuse Resolution Service. I had never made a claim through this service, so I decided to get in touch with them.
2. I had an initial phone conversation with Mr Phil Knipe. He said that the Ministry first needed to make sure I was eligible to make a claim. He told me he would be back in touch when that was determined.
3. Mr Knipe got back in touch with me a decent amount of time after that first conversation and let me know that I was eligible to make a claim.
4. I told him during this conversation that I had been a part of a class action in the past with Sonya Cooper at Cooper Legal. Rather than acknowledging what I have said, Mr Knipe decided not to comment on this particular information I have shared with him.
5. I sent the Ministry my first statement I made to the Commission as context and I sent through a signed document giving them permission to request my medical records.
6. I don't remember ever having to fill out any other forms. I never actually wrote down anywhere the nature of my complaint or anything like that.

7. I was told around this time that the maximum pay-out I was able to receive was \$9000. I was really disappointed by this amount. For 16 years I was misdiagnosed and for the next 30 years I have suffered post-traumatic stress. If I had been wrongfully imprisoned for 16 years I would be a millionaire by now. \$9000 is nothing. But on the other hand, because I'm so broke \$9000 would have helped me out, at least for a little while.
8. I wasn't updated throughout the investigation process. I would try get in touch with Phil Knipe for updates, but he wouldn't answer my calls and wouldn't call me back.
9. I tried to call again one day, and Phil Knipe picked up this time. He then told me that because I had been through that initial class action, I was in fact not eligible for any compensation.
10. The fact that I was initially told I was eligible, and then later told I was not, was hard. They had gotten my hopes up and I felt as though I was being tantalized.
11. The class-action settlement agreement stated that the \$18,000 pay-out covered all my time in psychiatric care. This didn't take into account the effects of the experiences on me since being in care such the PTSD. I don't feel like this pay-out was adequate for the abuse I endured.
12. During this conversation, I told him what I think about this system. Something along the lines of it feeling like the government system works for itself and not for the people it's supposed to help.
13. Phil Knipe said that he agreed with everything that I said, that he thinks the Ministry isn't doing enough, but that there was nothing more he could do. This made the situation even more frustrating. The fact that he agreed with me, but then would just sit there and do nothing. Lives are being affected here and he should have the power to do something more.
14. The conversation was left with Phil Knipe telling me he would contact Cooper Legal to see if there was any sort of loophole in the class-action settlement agreement. I've tried to get hold of him since then but he hasn't answered and I haven't heard back.

15. Throughout the whole process, when I was able to speak to the people handling my claim on the phone, I felt as though I was treated with dignity and respect. But the fact that they wouldn't call me when they said they would, wouldn't answer my calls and wouldn't return my calls made it seem like they didn't care about me. It's like a veneer – it's fake.
16. Both this process and the previous process with me have been a total nightmare. It has ultimately left me feeling like the government is working against me and not for me.
17. I've been chasing compensation for what happened for 30 years. 30 years of rejection really takes its toll on your self-esteem. Each refusal from any Government agency has just reinforced that message I was told all those years ago that I'm worthless and that I should be locked up, that I'll never be a useful member of society. As a result, I don't care about society or anyone in it, because society has never helped me.
18. This process has made my alienation from society more pronounced. Because if you don't have money, you can't be a proper functioning member of society. You're a reject. I recently got to know a woman that lives up the road from me. She used to bring me eggs. After a while she said something about my house, as though I owned it. I told that it's actually owned by Housing Corp, and you could see the look of disgust on her face.
19. People try get me to go to counselling, but really my biggest stress in life is the lack of finances. The money issue is why I don't have friends. When you can't afford to go out and do things, people treat you differently. It would be nice to have at least one time in my life where I could live with dignity and afford to do things, replace my household appliances when they break. I don't want flash-living, but at the moment I can't even afford basic-living.
20. I was eight when my life was first flipped upside. Then I was wrongfully misdiagnosed and institutionalised for 16 years. I've had PTSD ever since. I don't think I'm ever going to have a time where I can actually enjoy my life. I'm getting old now, towards the end of my life. There's not much time left for me.

21. I've recently got a dog. His name is Teddy. Before I got Teddy, I was in a bad place. My daughters helped me get Teddy and he has made a massive difference to my life. It's good having the company. He gives me such a greeting when I get home and constantly snuggles up with me and loves me. He doesn't judge me – he just knows that I love him and care for him.

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: 24/5/22 _____