

Witness Name: **GRO-A-5**

Statement No.: [WITN0050001]

Exhibits: [WITN005000X – WITN005000X]

Dated: 05.10.2020

ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

WITNESS STATEMENT OF **GRO-A-5**

I, **GRO-A-5** state as follows: -

INTRODUCTION

1. My name is **GRO-A-5**. I am currently head of student support and counselling at **GRO-A** in **GRO-A**. I have been in this role for ten years. I am married to an Anglican **GRO-A**. We have a son named **GRO-B-1**. He was born in **GRO-A**.
2. My witness statement is given in my capacity as a **GRO-A** at St Margaret's College ("St Margaret's") from **GRO-A** to **GRO-A**. St Margaret's is an Anglican girl's school that caters for primary to high school age pupils. In my role, I was

responsible for **GRO-A** and **GRO-A**. In particular, I was a **GRO-A** and an advocate for a student that was sexually abused by a teacher at St Margaret's. I can speak to how St Margaret's handled the incident and the impact it had on me.

3. I am a **GRO-A** year-old **GRO-A** male.

MY EXPERIENCE OF ABUSE IN AN ANGLICAN SCHOOL

Context

4. **GRO-A** I started jobs at St Margaret's in **GRO-A**. **GRO-A**
GRO-A
5. At the time of our appointment, St Margaret's was in financial difficulties. There had been some internal issues and a significant number of students had left. As a result, a new Principal was appointed in **GRO-A** and was charged with turning the school around. When we arrived, the school was in a rebuilding phase where reputation was particularly important. **GRO-A**
GRO-A.
6. The student at the center of the incident I became involved in is **GRO-A-2**. **GRO-A-2** started at St Margaret's as a primary school student and carried on through until the end of high school.
7. In about **GRO-A** **GRO-B-3** was appointed as a **GRO-B** teacher at St Margaret's. He taught students in the senior school - from third form onwards.

8. **GRO-B-3** was about 5-6 years younger than me and had come to New Zealand from **GRO-B**. The Principal had asked me to support him in his transition to New Zealand and the school. We became friendly both in a professional and personal capacity. We hosted **GRO-B-3** and his partner at our house for Christmas. **GRO-B-3** and I were also both keen and competitive in the same sports. We therefore began to regularly train together.
9. **GRO-B-3** was considered by some to be one of the best teachers at school. He was charismatic, dynamic and got good results from his students. Accordingly, he was very popular among the students.
10. However, issues with **GRO-B-3** started to come to the fore. He always liked to be in control of situations. He also pushed boundaries in the way that he spoke and behaved, particularly with female students. For example, he was well known for spending a lot of one-on-one time with students both in an academic as well as sporting context.
11. At the time, spending one-on-one time in itself was not particularly unusual and was considered to be part of **GRO-B-3**'s style. On one occasion I had seen him alone in a room with **GRO-A-2** in what appeared an intimately close engagement. I questioned him about the appropriateness of this and reported it to **GRO-B-4**.
12. **GRO-A-2** was one of the first students that **GRO-B-3** met. She would have been 14 at the time. **GRO-A-2** was not a boarder at the school. She was physically small and a vulnerable child. Although she was both an able student and athlete, she was diminutive. I knew **GRO-A-2** reasonably well as a

student, through sport and through a confirmation process that GRO-B-2 and I had organised.

13. GRO-A-2 was chosen to show GRO-B-3 around the school. GRO-B-3 quite quickly started to spend a lot of time with GRO-A-2, including getting her into sport. When GRO-B-3 spoke about GRO-A-2 he regularly referred to her as "Loopy GRO-A-2".

How I became aware of the offending

14. I knew something was wrong when GRO-A-2 asked to come and see me as she had something serious to disclose. GRO-A-2 had left the school 3 years prior and was doing her honours or masters at University. It was the morning of our athletics sports day at St Margaret's, which was held offsite at the Queen Elizabeth II park in Christchurch. I remained behind to speak with GRO-A-2.
15. The relationship was abusive. GRO-A-2 explained the extensive grooming, ongoing sexual abuse and threats that she endured for many years. These threats were across the spectrum and included: physical threats (that his wife would hurt her); threats to her academic grades; and threats that he could ruin her future academic career. This was a case of extreme sustained high-end abuse. I took notes in the session and I believed what she was saying.
16. At this stage I also knew of a number of things that gave me cause for concern about GRO-B-3. The weekend before GRO-A-2 came to see me, I had spent time with GRO-B-3. He talked freely and disclosed his thoughts. GRO-B-3 told me that he had fallen in love with a student teacher he was mentoring and that he planned on leaving his wife to be with her. The student

teacher was unaware of his feelings and as far as I am aware did not reciprocate them. I told him he was “fucked in the head”. GRO-B-3 got angry that I said that.

17. After talking with GRO-A-2 I got her permission to call the school principal. I told the Principal the general nature of the issue and that she needed to come back to the school (she was at the sports day). GRO-A-2 wanted to formally report the complaint to her.
18. One of the reasons that GRO-A-2 came to see me was her concern that there might be other girls at risk. There were. I do not know if a GRO-C with any other young women went to the level it did with GRO-A-2. However, I later found out that he wrote more than 50 intimate letters to another student, and over the years a number of past students have described to me their own experiences of his inappropriate engagement with them.
19. The Principal came back from the sports day to meet with GRO-A-2 and me. Initially she had assumed the incident involved a female teacher as there were only half a dozen men working at the school at the time. She kept a list of everyone on staff that she knew or thought was lesbian. So, she was conscious of the possibility of sexual abuse.
20. After GRO-A-2 had talked to her, the Principal said she was going to call the Chairman of the Board. They took over from there. I was left out of the bulk of the process.
21. GRO-B-3 denied GRO-A-2's account.
22. When GRO-B-3 was notified of the allegations he came to our house. I was not there at the time. When I arrived home, he

was standing in the lounge. He was furious with me about what had happened. He said [GRO-A-2] was making false allegations, that she was “loopy” and that as I was his friend he expected me to support him. He knew of my support for [GRO-A-2]

23. At one point he said to me “this is bad”. I agreed and said, “yes [GRO-B-3] it is as bad as it can get”. He responded and said “it is not as bad as it can get. Your boy – he is still out there happy”. He heard [GRO-B-2] and our young son. I was left in no doubt this was a clear threat regarding my son’s safety. We took this very seriously. I talked to the school and lawyers straight away about it.
24. [GRO-B-3] groomed [GRO-A-2] and fostered a relationship with me because as a [GRO-A] he knew it was likely that any reports of wrong-doing would eventually come to me. This is what eventually occurred as [GRO-A-2] did come to me.

REDRESS

25. The subsequent process and approach taken by the school in dealing with the offending was problematic for a number of reasons. This included the following:
- (a) The school never took the issue to the police.
 - (b) [GRO-A-2] was never offered a psychologist, lawyer, support person or advocate. She was not offered any support at any level apart from what I offered her.
 - (c) [GRO-B-3] was left in his teaching role and stayed for a period of time. From memory it was months -

although I can't say exactly. After the complaint had been made, [GRO-B-3] regularly came into my office to tell me about what I should be doing on his behalf.

- (d) There were certain comments made by the Board Chair during the aftermath that concerned me. She referred to [GRO-A-2] as a "woman scorned", saying that [GRO-A-2] was the age of consent and that it was just a "lover's tiff".
- (e) The school did not report the matter to the teacher registration board. They did a deal with [GRO-B-3] where he quit. It meant that the school could not report it as [GRO-B-3] was no longer employed. I therefore supported [GRO-A-2] to make the complaint to the Teacher's Council.
- (f) I later found out from the Principal that after the fact they contacted some previous schools that he had worked for in [GRO-B]. They discovered that there was a history of some sort of similar issues. They hadn't done due diligence to prevent his offending against young women in New Zealand.
- (g) I felt unsupported. I was still scared of [GRO-B-3] not just for myself but also for my son. I had asked the Principal for support for both [GRO-A-2] and ourselves in terms of our safety. The whole thing was an incredibly lonely experience.

26. We listened to the school who said that they would advise us what to do. I believed they would have it under control. I was informed the school was doing everything 'by the book'.
27. The school did get lawyers involved at some point, as they accessed all my notes and they did an evidential interview with GRO-A-2 I was not sure the purpose for this. I believe now it may have been for employment processes. I believed they took the complaint seriously, however, I felt the primary focus was protecting the school. There was a fear that if they did not get the process right GRO-B-3 would sue them. The school was also tenuously balanced in terms of finance and enrolments. They therefore did not want the issue to become public or it could affect their bottom line.
28. I was not aware of the school having a formal complaints process or central process nor did we get any professional development on how to deal with these types of issues.

The Teachers Council Hearing

29. The matter took a while to get to the Teacher's Council. It was months after the initial report. I was not told that the school had not reported it. Eventually GRO-A-2 had to do it herself. I supported her to do this.
30. The school did not support me to attend the hearing. I had to take leave to give evidence and support to GRO-A-2 I felt no support from the school throughout this process.

31. GRO-B-3 represented himself at the hearing. He cross-examined GRO-A-2 for 2 hours. He also cross-examined me for a long time. It was harrowing. No one objected to it.
32. I do not recall any support during the hearing. There may have been someone there. It was horrendous, and I was traumatised by it.
33. The evidence supporting GRO-A-2's account was compelling and overwhelming. GRO-B-3 was struck off - although by that point he had already resigned.
34. One of the members of the Council later approached me and said it was one of the worst cases they had seen. They informed me that after this case the law needed to be changed regarding perpetrators being able to cross-examine victims because of how bad it was.

THE IMPACT OF THE PROCESS ON ME AND OTHERS

35. As a result of the experience and process, I was put on medication for 10 years.
36. The process was traumatic and isolating and hugely impacted our life. I felt cut adrift.
37. We decided we had to move to Australia in GRO-A. We had got to a place where the case was resolved, at least in the sense that GRO-B-3 was deregistered and was no longer a risk to students. But we were also fearful because of GRO-B-3's threats. We genuinely feared for our safety.

38. **GRO-B-3** had yelled further abuse and threats at me in public places. I felt vulnerable and I was aware that he had told **GRO-A-2** that his **GRO-B** was in the Irish Republican Army and had warned her to check under her car.
39. We knew we had no choice but to leave Christchurch.
40. The impact of seeking to advocate for a sexual abuse survivor has had a traumatic impact on me. I lost community, our church and have been burned in the process. I have huge grief for what was lost. I cannot stand on what used to be my turangawaewae.
41. **GRO-A-2**'s account has always been consistent, honest, compelling and to have witnessed the process she has been through with the school and the Teachers Council has been tragic and traumatic.

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.

GRO-C

Signed _____

Dated 21/10/20