

Witness Name: Gwyneth Beard

Statement No: WITN0159001

Exhibits: WITN0159002 – WITN0159016

Dated: 26/03/2021

ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

WITNESS STATEMENT OF GWYNETH VICKI BEARD

I, Gwyneth Vicki Beard, will say as follows:

Introduction

1. My full name is Gwyneth Vicki Beard. I was born on GRO-B 1961. I am of Ngati Porou and Welsh descent. I am known as Piwi to my friends and family.
2. I have seven beautiful children, five who are alive. I have 36 mokopunas. When I was 30 my son passed away due to cot death. One of my daughters passed away due to domestic violence. I am now raising her three children.
3. I come from an amazing big family of eight. My mum and dad have now passed.
4. I am a social worker and I work under the kaupapa of Tūpono te mana kaha o te whanau, which means to stand in the truth and strength of the family.
5. Until recently I was on the governance board of Te Whare Hauora, which is the Māori Women's refuge. I had to step down from this role due to other commitments.

Early life

6. Prior to going into care, I was a very damaged child. I had experience of being sexually abused and my instinct to survive kicked in from an early age. To survive I became quite rebellious and ran away from home a lot.

7. My father was a Welsh man, my mother is Ngati Porou. My Dad was my hero. My Mum had a really turbulent childhood which came out in her parenting on some of us kids.
8. I have three older sisters and one older brother. Then three younger brothers. All of my siblings are still alive and live in both New Zealand and Australia.
9. I grew up in Aranui, Christchurch. Dad worked at Dunlop and before we were born he was a merchant seaman. Mum worked at Piri Gold and a plastic products company.
10. Mum took things out on me, one of my older sisters and one of my older brothers. Her behaviour confused me a bit, because she knew how to be a good parent to some of my siblings. She used to beat the three of us really badly. I would say a dog had a better life than my older brother. My sister and I used to get really bad hidings too, for nothing. Things like walking around with a cup of tea and accidentally dripping a bit or breathing too loudly.
11. Mum used her fists to beat us. She would also use a jug cord or her cane. She used her crutches one time, a vacuum end, the poker, a big pot – whatever she could get her hands on.
12. Later in life I had to find out why she treated us the way she did. I learnt my Nana passed away when Mum was young, so she grew up in lots of different places. She was the slave of the whanau and was treated like the kid who had to do everything. I do not think she knew what love was and she never got help with anything.
13. Dad was away from the house a lot. He was out at sea a lot until I was born and then when I was young he did shift work and worked nights. He never knew what was going on with Mum, we hid it from him. We were too scared for him to know.
14. Apparently, my Mum could see a lot of her family in me.
15. My mokopunas have dyspraxia and dyslexia. When I look back, I think my struggles I had through school might have been due to dyspraxia and dyslexia. I think they were also due to being born through violence.
16. I love my Dad so much but he was a violent man to my Mum. When she was seven months pregnant with me, he came back from sea and beat her. He did not know she was pregnant. I was born prematurely at that time. Mum had no concerns about telling me Dad threw her in the chicken coop and as a result she prematurely went

into labour. It took me years to come to understand why she treated me the way she did. I had a real hate for my Mum when I was younger.

17. I can't remember my Dad being violent, but I heard about it from my younger days. I don't know if I blocked it out, maybe because I didn't want to see it. He was such a loving and caring man to me. I was so ready to blame my Mum for everything. My dad was my highlight of my childhood.
18. When I was born, my aunty told Dad to get into hospital because I was the spitting image of him. He was refusing to go before that. He spent every day of his life looking after me and trying to make up for when I was born. I deserved being spoilt like that, but I knew whenever he would leave the house, I would get beaten up big time.
19. It was a cycle of him leaving, me getting a beating, then being spoiled again when he came home. I didn't know why it was happening. I thought it was all my fault. I thought it was my fault because I was born. I thought I was a bad seed. I know that I am not now. It took me a lot of years to fix that.
20. The violence at home was why I became violent in my life. When I was younger, I was involved with bullying. I was bullied and I bullied some other children. This was when I was living on the street before I went into the homes. I remember and have a shame for it, I imagine if anyone had done that to my children how I would feel. But I understand I did it because of what was happening to me. I am proud we have broken that cycle in my whanau now.
21. There wasn't really alcohol in my house growing up. My parents went to the 6'o'clock shut. I do not relate to the partying lifestyle in 'Once Were Warriors' as a child, but I do relate to the beatings and sexual abuse.
22. I went to Wainoni Primary and Chisnalwood Intermediate. I went to Strathmore Girls' Home, Kingslea and Weymouth. I attended Chisnalwood Intermediate for a short time while I was at Strathmore. After I went to Weymouth I attended Aranui High for one week.
23. I would describe the education I received as crap.

Māori culture at home

24. Mum was Ngati Porou but she didn't want us to be Māori. My mother was a fluent, native te reo Māori speaker. My mother's hapu paid for her to go to university. However she was beaten at University when she would greet people by speaking te reo Māori. She did not speak Māori with us at all because of the university. She said there was no value in us speaking Māori anymore, that the white man ruled the world. She was very anti Māori, for a lot of reasons – not just because of the university.
25. My Dad jumped ship from the war and he ended up in Port Levy. He was whangai'd at the end of the war when he was 19 or 20.
26. Anything we did when we were younger to do with the Māori culture was through my Dad. My dad spoke fluent Māori with a Welsh accent, so we learnt from him and all spoke Māori with a Welsh accent. My Mum would have nothing to do with it.
27. I thought I was Ngai Tahu and from Port Levy because we were always over there. We did kapa haka amongst other things.
28. I never knew I was Māori in the sense of colour until I went to school and became institutionalised. Then I got an understanding of what Māori was, but in a bad way. It was a shameful thing to be.
29. Every time I had to fill in ethnicity, I would fill it in as Welsh. I was made to feel that way because of my mother, and the treatment I received in institutions and schools. I felt like my culture was something to be ashamed of. We were called black maggots in schools and the 'N word'. One teacher at intermediate treated me very badly. Boys were allowed to slap me across the face. If that happened and I retaliated, I was the one who got in trouble. One of the teachers cut my hair, and I was told to go home and have a wash. At the time I was living in a car. I remember that no one ever asked me why I was living in a car.

Sexual abuse

30. Between the ages of five and eight or nine, I was sexually abused by someone who knew my family. We would visit his house.
31. He used to do stuff to me whenever I was visiting his house. He was around 12 and I was very young. He would come and start playing with me and would have sex with me. It happened every night I was there.

32. I used to lie there at night and go into my own space because I knew it would happen. I can't remember when it started but I know it carried on for a long time, until I was eight or nine. It stopped when the family moved away.
33. I didn't feel like I could tell anyone. I would have got the blame, I know I would have. I knew if I told I wouldn't be able to visit the people anymore.
34. He has now passed away. When I was in my 40s, he asked me for forgiveness. I talked to him and forgave him. He was a victim of abuse himself.
35. From around the age of eight until I started to run away from home at 10 or 11, I was going to a friend's house up the road. Her father was molesting me. It sounds strange but at the time I preferred that abuse, to what was happening at home.
36. By then, sexual abuse was normal for me but I knew it was wrong. The sexual abuse by my friend's father was fondling and touching, and he wanted me to touch him. There was also rubbing and he would use his hand for stuff. This went on for a few years and stopped when I went into the girls' home.
37. He was also doing it to his daughter and some of her other friends. He later went to jail for what he was doing to my friend and to others.

Running away

38. I ran away from home a lot when I was younger. I ran away to get away from mother and the beatings that I would get.
39. When I was 10 or 11, I started to go to a friend's house who lived nearby. Their family had a car in the alley by the house and I used to sleep there a lot. I would stay for days on end. My friend would bring me food or I would sneak home and steal some. When I slept in the car, I still made sure I went to school. I guess looking back, that is why the teachers would tell me to go home and have a wash.
40. When I started running away from home, I would either stay at my friend's house when she asked, or I was sleeping in cars. Quite often the police would find me, pick me up to take me home.
41. The first time I ran away, I tried to ring my Dad but then hung up. I knew he would have had to go to work and would have been worried. A policeman picked me up and I told him I was running away because of the beatings at home. The police just

took me home, nobody listened. This kind of thing happened a lot and it got to the point when I realised no one was going to do anything.

42. I was going to school while I was running away. I wasn't breaking into any places or committing any crimes when I was younger. That happened later when the ability to survive kicked in while I was in the homes.
43. My Mum put me into social welfare care. She told me all my life she never wanted me, that I was the ugly duckling. She used to say she got rid of her burden.
44. My Dad went back to Wales for some time because his mother was sick. I was left at home with Mum and another older sister, who used to give us hidings all the time too.
45. I remember my sister giving me a hiding in the car and saying something like 'you don't have Dad to protect you anymore'.
46. I took off and I ran away after that. I remember thinking 'I'm not going back there' because I feared I would not survive.
47. A letter on my file dated 5 March 1975 records I was placed on supervision for a year during 1974. The letter further states my Dad was away for most of the time I was on supervision and that my parents felt other authorities should take over my discipline. [WITN0159002]
48. My file records I was made a ward of the state on 29 May 1975. [WITN0159003]

Strathmore Girls' Home

49. I remember the first time I ever went to Strathmore my Mum took me. I can remember it clear as day. I would have been around 12.
50. I think I was at Strathmore for around two years, or maybe longer. I was there before I was made a state ward. I am not sure of the exact timing and have not seen any evidence of exact admission dates on my file. There is a record on my file dated 7 August 1975 which notes it was not possible to obtain a school report for me due to the 'lengthy stay in the Girls' Home before a Guardianship Order was made'. [WITN0159004]
51. When Dad found out I was in a home when he came back from Wales, he fought to get me out. I was a ward of the state then. It is confusing for me; I don't know if what I heard was reality or not. I have blocked out a lot for some reason.

52. When I first went arrived at Strathmore, I had never been to a place like it. I remember a staff member taking me to a cupboard like room. I was given romper like clothing to wear and some knickers. It was frightening and it was foreign. I was then taken to the cells.

Sexual abuse

53. There was an initiation after I was let out of the cells. Two older girls sexually abused me and raped me. It happened when I first arrived. They held me down, did stuff and laughed about it.

54. One of the girls who did it was the oldest one there. She was Pakeha. I didn't tell anyone. After that I started becoming a bit more defensive. When you are in that state you show yourself to be bigger than what you are.

Staff

55. The staff were mainly Pākehā, or European. There were no Māori staff.

56. The principal at Strathmore was called Mr GRO-B-1. He was horrible. He was physically and verbally abusive towards me. I look back now and think maybe he was horrible because of my behaviour, but I did not deserve how I was treated. I was a child. He really hated me and would punish me for nothing.

57. There was a Samoan lady there. Her name was Mrs Akui. She was the best of the best.

58. There was another female staff member there. I think she was called Mrs Smith or Jones.

59. One time, I had stubbed my toe taking toast into the dining room. My toe was bleeding. Mr GRO-B-1 dragged me down to the secure cells and he was beating the crap out of me with the vacuum end. Mrs Jones came in and stopped him. He shut the cell door and left me in there. This was all because I had stubbed my toe.

60. There was no one you could really go to at all. Whatever happened behind that closed door, you had to put up with. It was like you belonged to them.

Secure

61. I was in secure a lot at Strathmore. Usually for running away, or because I had a voice. I would run back home. I do not remember the main house there much. The secure unit was called the cells.
62. I was running away from what was happening to me, from the way I was being treated and made to feel like I was nothing.
63. I was so rebellious during that time at Strathmore, and I own that behaviour. But I do not own being put in a cell for that behaviour.
64. Children should not be locked up. You would not be locked up in your own house, so why should the government be allowed to lock you up in a cell for weeks on end? They don't even lock adults up for half the stuff I was being locked up for.
65. In the cell there was just a bed, nothing else, and a little window at the top. There was no toilet. I would climb on the bed and look out the window to yell out to the girls playing on the trampoline. I would do that every day and I always got caught.
66. All there was to do in the cells was sit there and wonder why you were there. I was never given any books or anything to do. I heard some people, who were in secure later than I, did get books. I was surprised when I heard that. I remember thinking 'what books? I never got any'.
67. There was no recreation while I was in the cells.
68. Looking back at it, I was this little girl who was locked up in a cell for long periods with no contact overnights. A little girl locked up in a cell.
69. I do get muddled up sometimes between Kingslea and Strathmore.

Medical examinations

70. Every time you left the building and went outside the institution, you had to have a medical examination. Whether you went on day leave or had run away, you had to get one on return.
71. The medical examinations were the worst thing about Strathmore.
72. There was a man called Dr [GRO-B-2] who did my examinations the first time I was at Strathmore. We used to call him 'Dr [GRO-B-2]'. There was also a senior female staff member present but I cannot remember her name.

73. We used to say Dr [GRO-B-2] was just a dirty old man. We also used to think the female staff member got off on holding us down. It sounds bad, but that is how we felt.
74. The first time I went in I had no idea what was going on. It was worse than sexual abuse. You could hear them saying things about you while you lay there, helpless.
75. I remember the female staff member would hold me down, and if you moved at all she would put straps over your legs where the stirrups were so you couldn't move. I always had the straps. Then the doctor inserts this big steel thing inside you.
76. The medical examinations were to check for sexual diseases. They took samples. You could feel it when they did the examination, it felt even worse than a smear test.
77. I can remember the comment they made was 'she's sexually active' or 'she's not a virgin'. That really bugged with my mind that these adults were blaming me for sexual abuse I had experienced. They did not think to ask why and find out what had happened to me.
78. No one should have to go through that experience. Especially after being sexually abused. It was absolutely horrific.
79. Every girl that went to Strathmore that I know had to do the medical examinations. They happened on a Tuesday and a Friday, when Dr [GRO-B-2] was coming in. We would say we had our periods so we didn't have to undergo those examinations. They would make us show evidence of our period. So when we did have our periods, we would hide the evidence, so when it came to the test day we had something to show.
80. I also experienced medical examinations when I returned to Strathmore at the end of my time in care, in 1977. There was a new doctor at Strathmore by then called Dr Fahey. I think I had two examinations done by him.
81. When I look back to the way Dr Fahey took swabs, I understand what was going on. He was touching parts of my body down there that he should not have been. Looking back, I know it was wrong. He would say things like 'I will just put some lubrication in'. You do not need to lubricate for that.
82. Dr [GRO-B-2] did this too.

83. When Dr Fahey and Dr GRO-B-2 put the lubrication in they used their fingers. I remember because they always used two fingers. It wasn't until years later I learnt that was not a necessary part of the procedure.
84. Dr Fahey did other things that were different. He touched you in parts he did not need to. He would touch my clitoris during the examination. He would give you an examination like when you are having a baby to check you are dilated. I know everyone got the same examination from talking to other girls.
85. The same female staff member who was still there with Dr Fahey, she was meant to protect us. But she just let it happen. I think she needs to be responsible. I wish I could remember her name.
86. Dr Fahey became my doctor when I was pregnant with my child. Then when I heard about him being charged later, I realised he did that to me. I put all those things together and realised those medical examinations at Strathmore were very wrong.
87. It took me a long time to do smear tests because of those medical examinations. I couldn't until I found a doctor I trusted. I didn't trust female doctors because of that female staff member. From talking amongst the girls, I don't know anyone she didn't hold down.

Periods

88. One of the things that I could not understand when I was at Strathmore was why no one told me about when you become a woman. No one talked to me about what a period was. We were never taught anything at all about that kind of thing.
89. I got my first period when I was at Strathmore. I remember it was in the sheets when I woke up and I had no idea what was going on. I was forced in front of everyone to go and wash my sheets. I was treated like a dirty little girl.
90. While this was going on, I was thinking, 'but what's happening to me'. I thought it was because of the sexual abuse from my childhood. I never had sex education.
91. No one taught me what to do and I had a real shame about not having the ability to care for myself during that time. I felt shame around not knowing what to do and feeling really dirty because we were never taught female hygiene. No one said, "This is what you're meant to do. If you have an accident, this is what you are meant to do".

92. I should not have been put in that position. I was really embarrassed if I had an accident, and I should not have felt that way. Especially because us, as Maori women, our bodies are sacred and especially that part.
93. We were given sanitary pads at the home. There was a cupboard you went to and could help yourself. Mrs Akui – she was amazing. She was the person you could talk to if she was on duty.
94. After I got my period, I started to use the name Vikki. I decided to put Gwyneth in a box because she was a damaged little girl. I couldn't protect her anymore so I had to put her in a box where she would be safe.
95. So I became Vikki in the institutions. Vikki was the strong one. I am remembered in the homes as Vikki, and my file uses that name. I continued to be called Vikki until I lost my son, then Gwyneth became the strong one.

Other girls

96. There were lots of Māori and Pacific children at Strathmore.
97. I rebelled a lot and I own my own behaviour. I was quite domineering, violent and disruptive. I never beat anyone else up, but I would stand over other girls. A lot of it was about having the reputation. If I wanted a cigarette, I would get it. There were other girls there who were stronger than me.
98. A lot of those girls from Strathmore, even today, come and say thank you to me for looking after them there. I stopped them from being abused by other girls like I had been. As soon as those two girls left Strathmore it stopped. As far as I was aware, no more sexual abuse amongst the girls happened while I was there.
99. A couple of the girls I knew at Strathmore have become social workers. I didn't even know until later when one girl was qualifying and stood up and recognised me.

School

100. I went to school at Strathmore. I had a teacher called Mrs Jackamakky. She was amazing. She read us the Lord of the Rings.

Running away

101. I ran away from Strathmore a few times. I can remember there was me and two other girls. We met up with some guys the same age as us. We got into a car and ended up over on the West Coast.
102. One time, I ran away for about a month. It was during this time I learnt to survive on the streets. I got into a lot of trouble. I ended up in the cells for a couple of weeks after that.
103. When I was on the streets, I went home a couple of times. But when Mum was there, I would take off.

Racism

104. Staff picked on me for being Māori. I think we were all picked on if we were Māori. We were seen more as 'the trouble'.
105. I remember hearing the words 'typical Māori' quite often from staff members. We all used to say Mr GRO-B-1 was racist.
106. I never saw any staff members show anger or hit any of the Pākehā girls. I can remember feeling that they were more privileged. I felt like if I wasn't Māori I probably wouldn't have been getting talked to or treated the way I was.
107. Were the Māori girls more naughty or is it just that we felt we were naughtier because we were made to feel that way?
108. When I went for day visits or home on the weekend, I didn't tell Dad what was happening. When Dad used to come and visit staff would be sitting there.

Social workers

109. I didn't have a social worker come to see me. I met a lady years later; who introduced herself as my old social worker. I never saw a social worker come to my house. It was all done behind closed doors with my mother of all people.
110. There was one time when I went to Court. I remember it wasn't for a charge. I begged my Dad and told him I needed to get out of Strathmore. I begged him to rescue me.
111. I was so used to that environment, that it was normal to me. Now I realise that was not right. It was crap what was happening. No one had the right to judge me on the colour of my skin, or an inability to do the things I wasn't taught. They

especially did not have the right to put it in a report. Nobody asked me anything about what was going on and why I was running.

112. Towards the end of my time at Strathmore, I turned my life around. I was told I was doing well. I had started to do everything they needed from me and stopped running away. I became a leader and started helping in the kitchen, which was a big thing to do. I had been going home on the weekends. I even had my own room, which was a big plus.
113. I had been in the main area for about eight months. I was told I was going to be going home soon. Instead, I was sent to Kingslea because I was getting too old for Strathmore. I did not understand why.
114. A letter on my file dated 15 July 1975, stated the Principal of Strathmore recommended me for long term training at either Kingslea or Weymouth. The letter states 'her attitude appears to have become fixed and hardened over the years, and I see no possibility of any rehabilitative work being done with her in a short time'. [WITN0159005] The Principal of Strathmore at this time was Mr [GRO-B-1]. As I have stated before, he had it in for me.
115. Another report I read when I requested my file which says I needed to go to a more secure facility because I had been absconding. I hadn't been absconding during the end of my time at Strathmore. I know I was doing brilliantly and I was really proud of myself.

Kinglsea

116. My records show I was at Kingslea for two and a half months. [WITN0159006] I was admitted sometime during late September or early October 1975.
117. When I first got to Kingslea, I just wanted to go home. The day that I was taken there, I thought I was going home but they just said 'oh sorry you're going to Kingslea'. I was taken there by car.
118. I had been at Strathmore for a long time. And I had shown everybody that I could be obedient. I understand when you keep absconding and do bad things you need to be answerable, but why didn't anyone rescue me from the situation I was in before that happened?

Telling others about abuse

119. I think I was at Kingslea for three days before I ran away for the first time. I was caught by the police. I told the police officer who picked me up about my life and what had happened to me. He was nice. Then when I got back to Kinglsea, there was an amazing lady called Mrs Nuttall who sat down and listened to me.
120. Mrs Nuttall talked to my Dad as well. I don't know if the police officer told her to talk to me. I told her all about my life, from the moment I was sexually abused to running away from home and Mum beating me. She didn't do anything about what I told her; I know that.
121. There are no notes from Kingslea on my file about what I told Mrs Nuttall. Everything was all blacked out when I got it. My file also didn't show I was working in the laundry, or that I won awards for gymnastics. There was no positive stuff. Just absconding and all the charges against me.

Secure

122. A letter on my file dated 21 November 1975 records I absconded three times since my admission, which was nearly two months before. [WITN0159007] I had only spent 13 days in the main house since admission, with the rest of my time being in the secure unit.
123. There is a comment in this letter which I find disgusting. It is a false statement in my files which says, 'she is a very grubby little girl', amongst other things. It made me angry to read this. I do not know how someone could write this about me. It is not logical to make this comment when there was a daily schedule where we had to shower every day. There was also a roster for our bedding to be changed. These kinds of comments are through my records. I comment on this reporting later at paragraphs [216-217].
124. I remember the first time I ran away from Kingslea, I escaped while I was at school. Each time I was caught, I was put in secure.
125. I will take responsibility for running away. But I do not think I needed to be locked up. I think someone just needed to sit down with me and find out why I was running away.
126. Even my family couldn't believe I was being locked up. My Dad said he couldn't sleep at night knowing I was locked up in a cell. He stopped coming to visit me for a period because he didn't like visiting me there.

127. I ended up being the longest person held in secure at Kingslea at that time. I thought it was neat at the time. I was an at-risk person so the only place they could hold me was secure. They were waiting for me to be able to go to Weymouth.
128. I didn't really see many of the other girls while I was there since I was mainly in secure. A lot of the girls in Kingslea had also been at Strathmore. The first time I ran away was with one of the girls I knew from Strathmore.
129. The secure block at Kingslea, was a block on its own. I was allowed books in there and could get out to do recreation.

Mrs Nuttall

130. I can't remember many of the staff at Kingslea, just Mrs Nuttall. She was like the nana I never had. She had been at Kingslea for many, many years.
131. I think because I had Mrs Nuttall looking out for me and protecting me, nothing bad, like sexual or physical abuse, happened to me in there. She took me under her wing. I cannot remember much of it. One of my sisters came to visit me and wanted to take me home. Dad used to visit also.

Suicidal thoughts

132. The first time I ever properly thought about suicide was when I was at Kingslea. When I was at Strathmore I had thoughts as well, but they were not as bad as at Kingslea. I think it wasn't as bad there because I had friends to talk to and some of those girls are still my friends today.
133. Today I can't even remember what the cells looked like in Kingslea. I thought I just screwed everything up all the time. I thought everything was my fault. I didn't understand what was going on with me and what I had done wrong. I didn't know who I was and I just didn't want to be here. I was being punished all the time.
134. I thought out what I was going to do, how I was going to do it. I don't know why I didn't do it. I'm so glad somewhere in there one of my tupuna made me strong enough to not go through with it.
135. When I ended up in institutions, there was no one to talk to and no one I trusted. You were also so ashamed. I wanted to talk more about who was harming me, rather than about me trying to harm myself.

136. A report on my file for December 1975, which was during the end of my time at Kingslea and the start of my time at Weymouth describes my emotional state as 'although depressed at times, Vikki appears to be fairly stable'. [WITN0159008]

Medical examinations

137. I continued to have medical examinations at Kingslea. I remember I had one swab taken and they found something to do with me continuously bleeding all the time. This time I wasn't pretending I was bleeding.

138. My sister knew about it because when she visited, she asked if I had any results. I think it was the first time I ever heard that word endometriosis. Then years later I found out I had endometriosis. At the time, I was sure when I was younger, I had heard that word and was diagnosed.

Family visits

139. My Dad found it really hard when he visited. When you had a visitor, you were taken out of secure and had to meet out in a boxed field area, it was never in the secure unit. There was also a room for visits.

140. A decision was made to transfer me to Weymouth. I was told it was because I needed to be somewhere I couldn't run home.

141. My file contains a letter by the Principal of Kingslea dated 8 December 1975 which sets out a proposal for my transfer from Kingslea to Weymouth. [WITN0159009]

142. In the letter, it is noted I ran away from Kingslea three times since being admitted two and a half months ago. There are many assumptions made in the letter about my family.

143. I remember there being a meeting about the decision to move me to Weymouth. My Dad was present at the meeting and he did not agree to me going there.

Weymouth

144. My file records I was admitted to the secure unit at Weymouth from Kingslea on 11 December 1975. [WITN0159010] This date does not marry up with my recollection of when I went to Weymouth.

145. I was taken to Weymouth by the first Māori staff member who I knew from Strathmore. She was lovely and came to see me in Weymouth a few times.
146. By the time I got to Weymouth, I could handle myself. I had adapted to institutional life and I wasn't picked on by anyone.
147. Weymouth was a better place for me than Kingslea and Strathmore, apart from the secure unit was horrible. A record on my file records I was discharged from secure on 15 December 1975. [WITN0159011]
148. It was the first place that anyone actually sat down with me and talked about my hygiene and women's stuff. The first place I got taught to cook and to be independent. I got given the right to leadership roles and stuff like that. Just really basic stuff.
149. The worst thing about Weymouth was being so far from home. I was the only person from the South Island there. All my friends would go away for weekends or have visitors. It was too expensive for my Dad to visit. I had an elderly uncle who lived in the North Island, but it was too far for him to come to visit me.
150. It was already isolating being in institutions and away from my whanau, this time I was so far away. I had never been to the North Island. There was an article about me in a magazine called 'Thursday' which was about Weymouth. It had a photo of me from behind and said I was the highest absconder in New Zealand, or something.
151. It was not until another girl came up from Christchurch that I had someone to relate to.
152. There is a report on my file dated 4 February 1976 shows my progress after two months at Weymouth had been good. [WITN0159012]

Māori culture

153. Weymouth was the first institution where I was given a right to be Māori. I was asked my whakapapa, my pepeha and all that. It was the first time that I actually was acknowledged for being Māori as a culture and a connection to something positive.
154. I learnt to do kapa haka at Weymouth. It was really awesome. It was where I learnt a lot of my Māori values.

Secure

155. I went to secure twice at Weymouth, the first time when I arrived, the second time because I had run away.
156. The secure at Weymouth was horrible, it was worse than any other secures I had been in. It was more like a police cell.
157. The secure cell smelled of kerosene. The toilet was in your cell, which was not nice.

Medical examinations

158. Medical examinations were still happening to me at Weymouth. They were done by a nurse who was lovely. But I always pretended I had my period. When I think about it now, it's really sad what I felt I had to do to avoid those examinations. To hold onto dirty stuff when I had my period so I could avoid the doctor.

Opportunities

159. At Weymouth I was allowed to do kapa haka and play netball. I learnt to ride a horse and got to work in the kitchen, which was the best place to work.
160. I felt like I had opportunities and learnt some life skills. I was trusted to do things like stay behind by myself after a basketball game to referee the next team.

Other girls

161. There were a lot of Samoans at Weymouth. They were cool. There was more of a family culture there. The girls created a family amongst themselves.
162. There was a lot of lesbianism there as well. I was shocked by that because of the trauma I went through at Strathmore, so I was quite anti it then.
163. When I was away on a home visit, there was an incident that happened. The person who was my closest friend was one of the offenders. I remember getting back and a group of girls had been put in secure. They were then sent to borstal.
164. They had done something to the girl who came from Christchurch who I knew. I don't know the full story of what happened but they had done something really bad.

165. There were gangs at Weymouth – the Cobras and Polynesian Panthers. Weymouth also had Mongrel Mob and there were lots of girls there who had partners or fathers in the gangs.

166. At Kingslea there were no gangs, just the townies.

Staff

167. The staff at Weymouth were really good. Even the Principal was awesome. He was a Samoan guy. I have no bad memories of the staff there.

168. We had a school at Weymouth. I was a rebel there. I played up so they said I didn't have to go to school. They said I couldn't be educated because I would play up. Now I look back at it being because I didn't know how to read and write back then. I was embarrassed about it, so my behaviour was a fight or flight reaction.

169. My file contains a report dated 13 July 1976 by the Principal of Weymouth. The letter recommends I return to my parents on 30 July 1976, due to my positive progress. [WITN0159006]

Back to Strathmore

170. I went home when I was first discharged from Weymouth. Things did not work out for me there.

171. I attended Aranui High School for a week at this time.

172. I was institutionalised so I felt I couldn't live outside of the homes. I didn't know how to focus or function. All I knew was dysfunction, I just wanted revenge for my life. So I didn't last long at home. Mum dropped me back outside Strathmore and I knocked on the door and said I had nowhere to go.

173. I'm not sure what my status was when I went back to Strathmore. I'm not sure the whole period I went back to Strathmore was formally recorded on my file. I wasn't there under any formal Court order. I was much older than the other girls. I remember I looked after some baby twins who came in. I was more stable and I felt like it was home.

174. A record on my file states I was placed at Strathmore in September 1977 for some period. [WITN0159013] My records also confirm I went back to Strathmore on 24

December 1976 until 21 January 1977, after a court appearance on six different charges. [WITN0159014].

175. I had been to Court for an offence that happened while I was meant to be at home but living at Strathmore. I remember trying to explain to my lawyer I wasn't actually at Strathmore and that I was more of a self-referral.

176. Strathmore wasn't as bad this time round. Mr [GRO-B-1] was gone. I still had to undergo medical examinations while I was there from Dr Fahey. I cover this in paragraphs [80-87] above.

Discharge from care

177. I thought I was a state ward until I turned 21. My file contains a record which confirms I was discharged as a state ward in January 1978 [WITN0159015]. From reading my file, I understand I was discharged from social welfare at this point, but for the next two years I was on probation. When I turned 21, I was given \$21 by the state and I was on my own.

Later in life

178. After the homes, my Mum didn't want me so I was living with my sister and became her baby sitter for a while.

179. I soon got into my first relationship and ended up pregnant with my daughter at 18, going on 19. My partner, [GRO-B-3], was a gang member. We never married. He was in the Mongrel Mob. He is the father of my two oldest children. It was a violent relationship, he shattered my cheeks and I have scars on my face from that. He beat the shit out of me. I ran away when I was pregnant with my second child.

180. Even though my Mum was what she was to me, when I had my daughter she was in love with her. I realised I couldn't cope with my daughter and asked Mum to take her, which she did.

181. [GRO-B-3] kept finding me and he was very violent. I was scared for my life and for my parents. Gangs were violent then, there was lots of shooting and street fights. I managed to leave him. I ended up in hospital. He ended up getting deported back to [GRO-B]. He's a really strong Christian now.

182. I married my second partner, GRO-B-4. He was a father to my first son, GRO-B, who I had before I met him. We had three children, including GRO-B. My oldest daughter was also back with me then, GRO-B-4 and I were too young and naive to understand how to be in love. He left me for another woman.
183. After GRO-B-4, I met GRO-B-5. I was with him for 18 years. He was a very violent man. I had three children with him. He was an amazing father although he was violent towards me. I was addicted to violence at that point, because I thought that's what love was. Like my mother and father.
184. I went to the Women's Refuge and got a protection order against him. I told him to move on, but he would not. He just kept turning up. Eventually, I had to move to Australia to get away from him.
185. By this time, I was a social and community worker. I was helping other women in the same situation as me, behind closed doors.
186. I have always been involved in the community. I had done volunteer work and worked as a community worker running a soup kitchen and food bank. I coached league for over twenty years and became a selector for Southern League.
187. I decided to get my social worker qualifications, which I was unable to finish as a friend passed away. But as far as everyone is concerned, I am qualified as I have done this work for years. I have developed a youth for youth organisation which is very famous called Youth for Youth. I also developed programmes that are utilised by Māori organisations today. I had to leave this work when I escaped to Australia in 2005.
188. I came back to New Zealand because one of my daughters died. GRO-B-5 had moved on by then. He went through a programme to deal with things. He is a really good Dad and is my best friend now. He understood what he was doing wrong. I have ownership over the relationship as well. I was a strong woman, but I did not deserve beatings.
189. I have been with my current partner who I met in Australia, for 13 years.

Relationship with my mother

190. I became a Christian in my forties. I went to my Mum and told her I forgave her for how she had treated me. She looked at me like I was an idiot and said, 'what

are you talking about?'. I told her that I didn't care if she didn't remember but I wanted her to know she had my forgiveness. I needed to move on with my life.

191. We became best friends after that. For the last eight years of my mother's life I was her favourite child. I cared for her when she was dying. I still have some letters from her where she wrote to me about how much she cared for me. It was everything I wanted in life.

192. I got to the point where I was ready to forgive her by learning about my mother and what happened to her in her life. I had a son pass away at 10 months from a cot death, so I wanted to know why things were happening to me. Why my Mum hated me.

193. I looked at my mother's history and I found out about her life. I talked to my family and my Dad before he passed away. I talked to anyone who knew my Mum and knew her past. On the sly, I would sometimes ask someone to talk to my Mum for me, like my older sister.

My Tīpuna

194. Later in life I started to have this ability to talk to myself. I think it's my tīpuna. My tīpuna that stand beside me giving me this ability to focus. I think that's why I was uncontrolled when I was younger. Gwyneth disappeared into a box and I named myself Vikki after I got my period because I couldn't deal with Gwyneth.

195. When I was in my 40s I became Gwyneth again because I went back and spoke to that little girl and said sorry for not being strong enough to go to someone and say, "I need help". I said to her that it's okay, it wasn't her fault, that I love her and to look at who she has turned into.

196. The way I have done it, is I think what I would tell someone else, then I tell myself that. I get told I'm a wise old lady. I get that strength from one of my two tīpuna. This wise old lady that stands beside me gives me all this wisdom.

Impact

Trauma

197. I was subjected to abuse while in care that was so traumatising, it still affects me today.

198. I have dealt with the sexual abuse. I know who it belongs to and it doesn't belong to me. It belongs to the perpetrator. I was not a willing participant in what happened to me. So I fixed that myself.

199. I don't understand how I can fix the trauma from when I was a child in care, who had no control over my situation. The trauma from the way I was treated by people who were meant to have the authority to protect me.

Relationships

200. I have had some really bad things happen to me in relationships. I chose bad people because that's what I thought I was entitled to. I blamed myself for everything.

Learning to survive

201. I think when you go through institutions in life, you have to learn to fight. If you don't, you get picked on and lose your lollies or toys. I took cigarettes off other girls but not toys. I feel really bad about it.

202. It was about survival. Because I had experienced abuse, like being hit around the head with a pot, I had the attitude that it all been done to me before.

203. While I was on the run, particularly from Strathmore, my time on the streets taught me I couldn't be vulnerable, otherwise I would be picked on and targeted. I learnt to survive by being tough and showing who I was.

204. It's the same in prisons, although I have never been to prison. I think the only reason I didn't end up in prison is because I had one person in my life who always stood by me. That was my Dad.

Medical examinations

205. I have struggled to go for smear tests because of the medical examinations I experienced in care. I've had cancer scares. I was so traumatised by those experiences.

206. Those examinations told me that adults had rights to my body, no matter who they were. That is wrong. It is so wrong to get that idea in your head as a child, because then as a woman, your value for yourself is lost.

Redress

207. I have not been through the historic claims process. I do not think there is anything that can be given to me. It would just bring back the trauma anyway. I don't need compensation.
208. Two years ago I got my file from Social Welfare. When I read it I kept thinking, 'What? What? Where did they get that information?'. It was a slap in the face because I was a girl they were blaming for everything.
209. My file mentions things like I was uncouth and unhygienic, that my hair was matted and clothes were always dirty. No one tried to understand why and to see what was happening to explain why I was disruptive and moody. Usually it would be because something bad had happened to me the night before.

Looking forward

210. The reason I am doing this, is I want to make sure that children who go into care do not come out more damaged than before they went in. I believe in care and protection. But it needs to be care and protection, not care and damage.
211. Children are not born bad. We need to investigate to find out the answer to why a child is behaving a certain way before they are institutionalised or uplifted from whanau and put elsewhere. We need to fix the children, not break the children.
212. Social workers who work within the government need to look at the wellbeing of our tamariki. There are some amazing Oranga Tamariki workers, I work alongside them and some of them are amazing.
213. The wellbeing of the child should be considered before any impact is put in place. I have seen uplifts of children and it's been so traumatic. The Mum and Dad argue all the time and the neighbours have heard and made a call, so the child is uplifted.
214. There is more trauma having a child uplifted from their home, than seeing Mum and Dad argue. It is not right that Mum and Dad argue. But get something in place where we can help Mum and Dad, don't punish the child.
215. We live in a society that punishes the child for adults' behaviour. So we need to find a system that fixes that.

216. Reporting needs to be done correctly. There needs to be better questioning of why children are behaving the way they do. I would never take any report on a child and hold it as fact.
217. I am a good example of this. My reports said I came to school unkempt, dirty and with messy hair [WITN0159016]. That was because I was living in a car. I was not respecting myself because I was being sexually abused. If they had investigated my situation they would have found out what was happening. Then they could say, 'well ok, let's ring Auntie up and see if she can have her for a while'.
218. I am also very about decolonisation and all of that. We need to decolonise the way we think within our government departments and we need to come back to Tikanga Māori. We need to come back to the Treaty of Waitangi, we need to come back to whanaungatanga, manaakitanga and all of those concepts. We need to bring it all together and say, 'how is this going to work for this whānau?'.
219. It is also very important for me to make sure the practice of carrying out medical examinations is not happening today. No one should have to go through that. If a child has already been through what I went through, they should not then be institutionalised into a place where those kinds of practices are carried out.
220. As a social worker, I want to know why someone like Dr [GRO-B-2] would want to physically examine 12 years old girls.
221. If someone wants to be a social worker they need to get the proper training and be able to recognise the signs, signs of sexual abuse for example.

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: 26-3-01