

Witness Name: **GRO-A - Mr U**

Statement No.: WITN0291001

Exhibits: [WITN0291002] - [WITN0291023]

Dated: 12. 02. 2021 2021

## ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

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WITNESS STATEMENT OF **GRO-A - Mr U**  
IN RESPECT OF RESIDENCES INVESTIGATION

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I, **GRO-A - Mr U**, state: -

### INTRODUCTION

1. My full name is **GRO-A - Mr U** I was born on **GRO-A** 1981 in Auckland.
2. My parents' names were **GRO-B -1** and **GRO-B-2**. I was born and raised in Otara, South Auckland. My family is Māori and affiliates to Ngāti **GRO-A**.
3. I am the eldest of 5 siblings and have two younger brothers and two younger sisters.

4. My father has now died, and I am not very close with my family.
5. Growing up, my father was heavily involved in gangs and was a GRO-B member of the GRO-B Motorcycle Club.
6. Our home growing up was always full of gang members.
7. I felt like I was born into the gang lifestyle.
8. Some parts of my childhood were good, but others weren't. My father was violent and very heavy-handed. He spoke with his fists. **[WITN0291002]** There were times I would not go to school for over a week because he had beaten me so badly. I remember not being able to open my eyes properly for several days, and on a couple of occasions, being unable to walk after a beating.
9. My mother was also abusive, but in a different way. She was an alcoholic and had her own demons. She would talk down to me and was psychologically abusive. I often felt like she hated me.
10. From about 10 until 12 I lived with my grandparents in GRO-B as I had been getting into trouble in South Auckland. They showed me love, but after a couple of years my grandfather died, and I again began to get into trouble. My parents picked me up and took me back to Otara.
11. When I got back to Otara, I still hated it at home, and would run away and spend time away from home with my older cousins.
12. By this stage my older cousins had all become involved in gangs, and because I looked up to them and saw them as role models, I would follow their lead, and do as they said. At around 13 years old, this led me to start getting into trouble with the police.
13. I remember that around this time I was placed temporarily in a few foster homes or Family Homes. I was not abused in these homes, but I remember that I felt

scared being placed with strangers, and that I felt very uncomfortable and wanted to go home to my parents.

14. When I returned home, I continued to offend.
15. On 22 June 1994, my mother contacted CYPS requesting a Family Group Conference ("FGC") as she had heard that I had been seen in a stolen car.  
**[WITN0291003]**
16. I was arrested on 6 July 1994 for threatening behaviour. I was taken by the police to the cells where I was strip-searched in front of my friends, including a female friend. I was only 13 years old. My whānau made a complaint to the police for how they handled my arrest. **[WITN0291004]**
17. I continued to get into trouble for thefts and other offending in the months following my arrest.

#### Weymouth

18. On 2 June 1995, when I was 14 years old, I was admitted to Weymouth after further offending. On arrival I was placed straight into the Secure Unit.  
**[WITN0291005]**
19. Secure was like prison, and I was kept in a cell that was locked. My cell was very small and had only one window. There was a toilet in my cell. Everything in the cell was concrete, including a concrete bed base. I was given a mattress, blankets, and a pillow. Quite often I would be made to eat my meals in the cell.
20. I remember that in the cell you could not control your own light switch, and it would be turned on or off by staff outside your cell.
21. When I was in Secure, I would be allowed out for about half an hour a day into a larger concrete dayroom with a TV and ping pong table where I could mix with the other children who were in Secure. We did not get to go outside to exercise and I don't remember getting any schooling while I was in Secure. Aside from the half hour in the dayroom, I spent the rest of my time in my cell.

22. On my first admission to Weymouth, I stayed in Secure for 10 days until I was sent to Moerangi Treks.
23. After I left Moerangi Treks and was returned to Weymouth, I was again placed in Secure. **[WITN0291006]**
24. I spent much of the next 3 months in and out of Secure. **[WITN0291007]**
25. I was the youngest person at Weymouth in 1995.
26. When I moved to the open unit, I got bullied by other residents, and ended up getting into many fights with other kids, as I got sick of the bullying and tried to stand up for myself.
27. In a record dated a few days after I was first placed in the open unit at Weymouth, it notes that I had a fight and was being threatened by other boys. In another record it was noted that I felt unsafe with other residents on the unit. **[WITN0291008]**
28. I remember that I had three bad hidings from other boys while at Weymouth. I got black eyes and bruises from the beatings.
29. On one occasion, when me and other boys were allowed to sleep in the mezzanine, a boy put deep heat into my ear as I slept, and we ended up fighting when I woke up.
30. I felt like I could not tell staff about the bullying and fighting, because I knew I would just get more hidings from the other boys. I learned to just suck it up.
31. I remember a staff member trying to break up one of our fights, and in the process restraining me excessively. I was also restrained by staff on other occasions. **[WITN0291009]**
32. At Weymouth I witnessed sexual activity between the residents. In the showers, boys would be playing with themselves, and with each other. I did not participate.

33. I tried to run away more than once while at Weymouth. A record shows that I successfully ran away on 14 July 1995. On my return I was placed back into Secure. **[WITN0291010]**
34. Each time I was placed in Secure, and after visits, I was usually strip-searched by staff. **[WITN0291011]**
35. The strip searches mostly happened in my cell, and I would be made to take off all my clothing, pass it over to staff, who would search it and then give it back to me piece by piece.
36. On one occasion, I was strip-searched in the hallway after staff smelt dope near the visitor room where I had been.
37. I was strip-searched more than 10 times while I was at Weymouth.
38. On one occasion, I was accused of trying to set a fire at Weymouth. I remember that I did not start the fire, but took the blame for it, at the request of older and bigger boys. **[WITN0291012]**
39. Due to my absconding and the allegation of arson, I lost my chance at early release.

#### Moerangi Treks

40. On 8 June 1995 after an FGC at Weymouth, it was agreed that I would attend Moerangi Treks on a supervision with activity order for three months. **[WITN0291013]**
41. On 11 June 1995, my records state that I was visibly upset when I was picked up to be taken to Moerangi Treks. **[WITN0291014]**
42. I was upset about having to go there because I had heard bad things about Moerangi Treks from other young people at Weymouth. They all told me that even though Weymouth was bad, you never wanted to end up at Moerangi Treks as kids got smashed out there.

43. As we were leaving Auckland, I managed to jump out of the car window and tried to run away. I was caught, and when they tried to take me out to Moerangi Treks again, they had my father come sit in the back seat of the car with me, to make sure I got there.
44. We drove for hours out into the bush.
45. I remember that we arrived at this isolated place, with a few Marae and a few sheds, out in the middle of nowhere.
46. I did not want to be there, and I was scared by the thought of being hours and hours away from home with strangers.
47. Everyone I met when I got out of the car was big and angry. I hated it straight away.
48. I met the main man who ran the place who was called GRO - B - 150. Everyone called him GRO - B - 150.
49. On the same day that I had arrived, I overheard two boys planning to run away. I decided to join them, and later that day I jumped into a truck that one of them had stolen, and we left the camp. We did not get far and hid overnight. The next day we were caught and taken back to the camp.
50. When we got back GRO - B - 150 made me and the two other boys who had run away sit on seats, surrounded by all the other boys. He then made the other boys take turns beating us. It felt like they were trying to kill us. I ended up on the ground curled into a ball as the other boys punched and kicked me.
51. I thought after the beating stopped, that this was the end of my punishment for running away. It was not.
52. The day after I ran away, I was put on a big wild horse and made to ride 5 hours through the bush. I thought I was being taken out to be killed.

53. At one point I fell off the horse and was beaten for it by a staff member who was huge and was nicknamed GRO - B -  
3 More than once he booted me up the bum for falling off my horse.
54. In the days after I tried running away. I would be made to play "crash" in the bush, which involved being chased and beaten by the other boys.
55. We would be made to stay out in the bush for days at a time, cutting down trees, and hauling them out of the bush.
56. When we were out in the bush, we would be made to sleep under a tarp, and were provided with no blankets, or pillows.
57. We would have to hunt for our food, and there was never enough. In the two weeks I was there I lost weight.
58. One time I was made to go hunting with a staff member, who was nicknamed GRO-B-4 but who I think was called GRO-  
B-4 I was not good at hunting and was noisy. At one point GRO-  
B-4 got angry with me and put his rifle to my head and told me he would shoot me if I did not "shut the fuck up".
59. I remember when GRO-B-  
4 was around he would often randomly punch me in the head and was verbally abusive toward me.
60. When we were back in the camp, there was a big shed which contained mattresses in it for sleeping and a little area with a large bathtub. I remember that everyone had to share the same water to wash themselves.
61. On two occasions, GRO-B-  
150 wife, who was called GRO-B-  
5, got naked and got into the tub with me and other boys.
62. She touched my privates.
63. She also tried to get me and the other boys to touch each other in front of her, while she touched herself.

64. One time, when I was cutting firewood, I was hit over the back of the head. I was knocked unconscious and when I woke up, I was in a little cabin with a tarp over me. The other kids were surprised I woke up. They thought I had died.
65. The other kids told me that I had been hit over the back of the head with a metal shovel by a man named [GRO-B-6]. I can't be sure it was him, as I was knocked out cold. [GRO-B-6] was not a staff member, but he was an adult who would come along to activities at Moerangi Treks.
66. I can remember that [GRO-B-6] beat me up on a different occasion. He was a boxer, and I got injured from the beating. I had cuts on my body and face, and a black eye.
67. I never received any medical care after any of the assaults.
68. After two weeks I managed to call my parents, and my dad drove out to Moerangi Treks and removed me.
69. I told my social worker about the abuse when I got back to Auckland. I was covered in injuries including bruising and a black eye at the time.
70. I don't know what happened after I told my social worker.
71. I found out much later that Moerangi Treks had been investigated because of my allegations, but I was not told about the investigation and did not know what the outcome of the investigation was.
72. There are a number of documents about my complaint and the subsequent investigation, but none of these documents are contained on my personal file.

*Documents contained on my personal file*

73. There are only 2 documents on my personal file regarding my time at Moerangi Treks. The first is a record stating that CYPs paid bed nights to Moerangi Treks from 11 June 1995 until 24 June 1995 and that I was in the custody of the



Director-General of Social Welfare throughout my placement at Moerangi Treks.  
[WITN0291015]

74. The second is a record dated 14 July 1995 from Detective Sergeant McGlone, who wrote to Youth Justice South Auckland stating that on 29 June 1995 Youth Justice had reported that I had been assaulted at Moerangi Treks to the police, but the police had chosen to take no further action about the complaint, in light of my absconding, and my mother's statement that she did not wish to make a complaint and did not think I would make a complaint. [WITN0291016]

*Documents about the Moerangi Treks investigation*

75. On 27 June 1995, 3 days after my father picked me up from Moerangi Treks, I made a written complaint to social worker Graeme Vincent. In the complaint I wrote in detail about the assaults I suffered at Moerangi Treks. My father and grandmother delivered the complaint to Mr Vincent. [WITN0291017]
76. On 29 July 1995 Mr Vincent visited me at Weymouth, writing afterwards that he thought that my complaint was "likely to have substance". Mr Vincent noted that I had a fading black eye, and a bruised and swollen nose that was still full of dried blood. Mr Vincent filed a complaint with the police for an independent investigation.
77. In the same report by Mr Vincent, he noted that Moerangi Treks was not CFA approved, and he had decided to visit Moerangi Treks to check on the other children that Auckland CYPS had placed out there. He went to Moerangi Treks on 3 July 1995.
78. Mr Vincent noted that on his arrival to Moerangi Treks, it was evident that he was not welcome there, and there was considerable anti-CYPS sentiment, and he wrote: "*not surprisingly, I was singled out for a particularly lengthy tirade from* GRO-B-150 *. One result was to stir up the young people's emotions again and not unexpectedly a number stormed out of our meeting, in two cases to saddle*

*horses and literally gallop off. The scene would have been funny if it hadn't been so tense."*

79. After several hours of talking, Mr Vincent recorded that it was obvious he could not return to Auckland with the eight young people. He was conscious there was a questionable power to forcefully remove them from Moerangi Treks as none of them had broken conditions of their section 307 (supervision with activity) orders. It was decided to only remove those young people who were prepared to willingly go and three Youth Justice people plus one Care and Protection person who had been at Moerangi Treks for 8 months were removed.
80. Mr Vincent wrote that it was impossible to properly interview any of the young people on the trip back to Auckland, but he gained sufficient information to satisfy himself that it was likely much of my complaint had substance and that Moerangi Treks operated by the rules of the "school of hard knocks".
81. Mr Vincent wrote: "*We know from our experience with the Fa'afouina Trust the effect on young people living under such a harsh regime*". He described the regime as a "dog eats dog type of existence". [WITN0291018]
82. On 5 July 1995 [GRO-C-1] from CYPS Palmerston North also visited Moerangi Treks. Mr [GRO-C-1] reported that [GRO-B-150] "*made no apologies for the harsh living environment of the programme as this was the essence of character building for the boys.*" [GRO-B-150] said that neither he nor the tutors condoned or used violence but acknowledged he was strong enough to break a boy's neck if he wanted to and described me as a problematic and troubled boy. Mr [GRO-C-1] wrote that [GRO-B-150] "*did not deny that the boy may have got a backhand around the ears but he denied that the boy had been assaulted. He said that fighting among the boys was not condoned, and that the bigger, more senior boys were expected to stop any scraps that developed.*"
83. Mr [GRO-C-1]'s conclusion was that the programme was good for the boys, but he noted that there were some comments by (presumably) [GRO-B-150] which did not sit comfortably with the CYFS managers who visited the site, in particular comments about killing other people's livestock, using fencing material left

behind by council workers and not being responsible for what the boys did to an informer once they left the programme. Mr [GRO-C-1] recorded: "This seemed like a directive that the boys were free to assault him once they left the programme".

84. Mr [GRO-C-1] recorded that he did not think that physical abuse was structured into the programme although it was not beyond belief that 'sometimes' physical force occurred among the boys or by some of the tutors. It was a tough "macho" environment, and the conclusion was that it was not necessary to remove the Palmerston North boys. [WITN0291019]
85. On 17 July 1995, Graeme Vincent wrote a response to the notes of [GRO-C-1] [GRO-C-1]. He then recorded:
- I appreciate that Palmerston North may not have had the experience of Fa'afouina, but I would have thought that as a "generic office" they would of at least recognised the level of risk posed by placements with a group who clearly have difficulty differentiating between harshness and abuse. I find it hard to believe they could hear first-hand [GRO-B-150] inviting his young charges to seek vengeance on a young offender [redacted] and yet still say "we did not think that physical abuse was structured into the programme.*
86. Mr Vincent wrote: "Youth Justice learnt from the bitter experience of Fa'afouina Trust that even when young people are being assaulted they will more often than not accept it as just part of the programme." He wrote that his experience of Moerangi Treks to date suggested it would be unwise to rely on [GRO-B-150] and his staff to recognise the problem at an early stage and respond to it appropriately. It was not practical for Youth Justice Auckland to closely monitor placements as far away as Whakatane. He recorded: "If the local CYFS or CFA are not regularly monitoring the placement on our behalf, then how safe is it?" He recorded that he was disappointed but not surprised by the position taken by others over Moerangi Treks. [WITN0291020]
87. After the police wrote to Mr Vincent, stating they were dropping my complaint, it does not appear that anything further was done, until more complaints about the programme emerged two years later in 1997.

88. When my father removed me from Moerangi Treks, I was immediately returned to Weymouth to complete my supervision with activity order. I remained there for 3 months.
89. On 13 October 1995 I was discharged from Weymouth. **[WITN0291021]**
90. I was readmitted to Weymouth, about two weeks after I was discharged, on a charge of aggravated robbery.
91. I was again released shortly afterwards, but my records show that no school would enrol me in the area, and I continued to get into trouble. **[WITN0291022]**
92. Over the next year I continued to get in trouble with the police, and was held overnight in the police cells, on multiple occasions.
93. When I was 16 years old, I was transferred to the District Court and sentenced to adult prison. **[WITN0291023]**

Effects:

94. I have been in and out of prison, ever since my first incarceration at age 16.
95. I have struggled with drug and alcohol addictions and began using meth when I was 16, shortly after I left Moerangi Treks and Weymouth. My drug abuse has had a massive impact on my family, and I have often been absent from their lives.
96. I have had major trust issues since my time at Moerangi Treks and Weymouth. I still suffer from nightmares and flashbacks and think about my time there often.
97. I have struggled with depression and have been diagnosed with PTSD.
98. I have been involved in gangs and violence and am lucky to still have my family around me.

99. I feel like I never received a proper education, and instead was just institutionalised. I have struggled to find work, and to hold down work when I have had it.

100. I am trying to change my life and attend several different programmes a week, including a men's support group, counselling, fathers for families, drug and alcohol counselling, and an anti-P support group.

**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: \_\_\_\_\_

12.02.2021.

**Annex B**

Consent to use my statement

I, GRO-A-Mr U, confirm that by submitting my signed witness statement to the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care, I consent to its use in the following ways:

- publication on the Inquiry website;
- reference and/or inclusion in any interim and/or final report;
- disclosure to those granted leave to appear, designated as core participants and where instructed, their legal representatives via the Inquiry's database or by any other means as directed by the Inquiry;
- presentation as evidence before the Inquiry, including at a public hearing;
- informing further investigation by the Inquiry.

I also confirm that I have been advised of the option to seek anonymity and that if granted my identity may nevertheless be disclosed to a person or organisation, including any instructed legal representatives, who is the subject of criticism in my witness statement in order that they are afforded a fair opportunity to respond to the criticism.

Please tick this box if you are seeking anonymity

Signed: GRO-C .....

Date: 12.02.2021 .....