

Witness Name: Alex Kaspin

Statement No.: WITN1071001

Exhibits: WITN1071002 - WITN1071009

Dated: 02/03/2022

ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

WITNESS STATEMENT OF ALEX KASPIN

I, Alex Kaspin, states as follows: -

Introduction

1. My full name is Alex Kaspin. I was born in Dunedin on the GRO-C 1989. I am of Ngāi Tahu descent from my mother's side.
2. My name at birth was GRO-B I changed this due to my time in care and the abuses that I link with that name.
3. My parents split up when I was still a baby. I know Social Welfare were involved with my family before I was born because of my dysfunctional mother and father.
4. I have ten brothers and sisters. Most of these are half brothers and sisters.
5. I was placed into care because my parents had split up and my mother was incapable of being a parent and she had mental health problems.
6. During my time in care, I had regular visits home to stay with my mother and I had different respite care placements. The time with my mother wasn't good and I don't have much memory of the respite care.

Rainbow community

7. I am non-binary gender identity. This probably first showed up from the time I was about 5 as I did not like wearing the girls' clothing that I was given, nor did I like boys clothing. I have always just wanted to wear jeans.
8. I publicly identified myself as non-binary about a year ago. I have a female partner who supports me. The only issue I had in care surrounding my gender was the expectation to dress as a female which caused me to shut down. I received some verbal abuse from caregivers saying that I should dress like a girl because I'm female and I should get used to it.
9. I never directly raised with my parents or caregivers that I felt different because I felt I had no one to trust. Instead, my actions would have been identified as behavioural problems in refusing to wear what they wanted me to wear.

Placements

10. My file indicates an excess of 25 placements. There is a psychological report in my file in June 1998 stating that I had had 21 placements up until that point **(Refer to WITN1071002 Dept of Psychology Report dated 04/6/1998)**.
11. I had several placements from 1990 through to 1993 that I don't remember much about because I was so young. A lot of these were for respite care away from my mother. I am not aware of any abuses occurring in those placements.
12. I know on my file there is an allegation that I made to my caregiver about a male putting his finger in my bum in 1993. I know this was one of my mother's friends, but I am unsure of who. I was evidentially interviewed in relation to that but according to my file I could not identify the perpetrator or even talk about it really.

Foster Care Placement with [GRO-B-1]

13. The first foster placement I remember was with [GRO-B-1]. I do not recall being told anything about going here, I was just taken there by Social Welfare. I was only four years old at the time.
14. I was the only one taken out of my siblings and placed into care at this time, however, [GRO-B] was later placed here with me.
15. I recall I didn't like it there and I have memories of being made to drink dish soap and water.
16. I remember the house was green and I drove past it once later in life. This resurfaced a lot of feelings for me, and I remember having the urge to burn it down. When I read my file, I was reminded of the sexual abuse I had suffered from [GRO-B-1]'s biological son [GRO-B-3].
17. My file indicates I was with [GRO-B-1]'s for about 8 months.

Sexual abuse

18. My file indicates I disclosed to my next foster carer [GRO-B] after I left the [GRO-B-1]'s that I had been sexually abused by [GRO-B-1]'s 15-year-old son [GRO-B-3].
19. My file has a medical report (**Refer to WITN1071003 – Medical Report dated 15/8/1994**) which details that I had described lying on top of [GRO-B-3] and playing mothers and fathers. I also said that I had seen [GRO-B-3]'s diddle and that it was cold when it was wet.
20. My file also had a specialist services report detailing descriptions of sexual abuse from [GRO-B-3] (**Refer to WITN1071004 – Specialist Services Report dated 15/7/1994**).

21. I said that [GRO-B-3] does rude things and that he would come into my bed and asked me to lie on top of him and push back and forwards.
22. I said that this happened lots of times while [GRO-B-1] was at work and sometimes my clothes were off. I said that I didn't like when this would happen.
23. I reported [GRO-B-3]'s sexual abuse to the Police as a result of work I was doing with my counsellor about two years ago. It was investigated and [GRO-B-3] was interviewed but apparently there was insufficient evidence to charge him.

Foster Care Placement with [GRO-B] 1994-1996.

24. I was placed with [GRO-B] from June 1994 – April 1996. This was in Corstorphine, and I remember her being nice. I think this is where I spoke to [GRO-B] about what [GRO-B-3] had been doing to me.
25. I was removed because [GRO-B] was having some mental health issues. I started Forbury Primary School while I was staying with [GRO-B]

Foster Care Placement with [GRO-B-4 GRO-B-5] 1996 – 2004

26. I was placed into full care with [GRO-B-4] and [GRO-B-5] on the 4th of April 1996 when I was 7. My file indicates I spent some periods of respite care here in the years prior to my full care placement. [GRO-B-2] was also here with me for some of the time.

Daily life

27. My day-to-day life at the [GRO-B-4 GRO-B-5]'s was a nightmare. We were underfed and ended up stealing food from the house, praying not to get caught.
28. I was treated differently than the other foster children that were there sometimes.
29. I was locked in my room every night by [GRO-B-4] and [GRO-B-5] until I was moved into the room next to [GRO-B-6], [GRO-B-4] and [GRO-B-5]'s son. I caused havoc when this happened

because GRO-B-6 was very perverted towards me. When I was about 14 or 15, I was moved into the sleep out which was good because it gave me some freedom.

30. While I was at the GRO-B-4 GRO-B-5's I was diagnosed with ADHD.
31. My file has a psychology report indicating that I had ADHD behaviours (**Refer to WITN1071002 – Psychology Report dated 04/06/1998**). I believe this was a misdiagnosis because of the effects I felt from the Ritalin medication I was given. These pills made me feel hyper as opposed to calming me down like they did for my brother.
32. On my file there is a letter to my social worker from Otago Youth Wellness Centre (**Refer to WITN1071005 – Letter from Otago Youth Wellness Centre dated 07/04/1999**). This letter details my teacher's observations of me arriving to school with bruises on my arms, me being padlocked in my room at night and me delivering pamphlets at 8pm at the age of 10. There is also a letter from my paediatrician detailing that I was sometimes locked in my room because I refused to stay there by myself (**Refer to WITN1071006 – Letter from Paediatrician dated 27/05/1999**).
33. My teacher was concerned by these incidents outlined above and had said that no behaviour that they had seen of mine would come remotely close to requiring me being locked in my room at night.
34. My teacher also said that they didn't think I needed to be on Ritalin and raised a rumour that they had been told about my foster mother being questionable in terms of caring for me.
35. My file also has a case note from 2004 which details that I was seen at the Emergency Department of Dunedin Public Hospital for a significant drug overdose, following a serious argument with GRO-B-4 (**Refer to WITN1071007 –**

Case Note dated 21/10/2004). The note details concern that GRO-B-4 did not seem supportive of me and that she didn't come straight in to see me in hospital after I had asked her to.

36. Just a month after this, further concerns are raised from my social worker about GRO-B-4 behaviour toward me (**Refer to WITN1071008 – Case Note dated 04/11/2004**). They say that GRO-B-4 started talking about my sexuality and an incident with a burst condom in front of them and continued even though I told her I was embarrassed and asked her to stop. It also says that she told me my parents did not want or love me.
37. I remember that I did have regular visits from social workers during my time with GRO-B-4 and GRO-B-5. I had multiple social workers and found that some of them were useless while others were good.
38. My first social worker swept everything under the table and believed everything my mother would tell him. I then had a social worker who really cared about the kids she was working with. However, at the end of the day the parents were still calling the shots.
39. One of my social workers was really good at coming and taking us out to do things with him. His only mistake was using reverse psychology with me and my brother. We told him that we had kicked in the side of GRO-B-4 and GRO-B-5 car in, and he said you may as well do the other side to make it even, so we did, evidently, we got into a lot of trouble for that.
40. While I had a couple of good relationships with my social workers, there was still never any one-on-one time. Social Welfare visits were always monitored and scripted by caregivers, we were told what to say and what not to say so I never got to tell them what was really going on.

Schooling

41. When I arrived at the GRO-B-4
GRO-B-5 s I was moved to Caversham Primary School. I then went to Macandrew Intermediate, followed by Salisbury School for Girls in Nelson and then Sarah Cohen School for children with specialist needs.
42. When I was moved to board at GRO-C this was a bit like a holiday because I wasn't being abused as much as I was at home. However, I wasn't treated well here either.
43. Some of the staff didn't like me because I had learnt not to take crap anymore and the other girls there would take my stuff.
44. If I ever complained or ever got in trouble the staff would place me in the time out room and I would be locked in there. They would physically restrain me to do this, and I would be left for hours with nothing but the four walls because it was just a bare room. I was in here up to 10 times a week.
45. Throughout all of my schooling I felt I never received a proper education. I never sat still because I was being moved around so much and therefore knew I would be moving again soon.
46. In Sarah Cohen I didn't have the opportunity to do much learning because the work was too easy for me. It was a Special School.
47. I did ask for more challenging work, but they only had enough resources to focus on special needs. There was no effort to put me into a mainstream school, but I also have some knowledge that other schools did not want to take me.

Sexual abuse

48. GRO-B-6 was a lot older than me and every time he was left to babysit me, he would do sexual things to me. He made me jack him off and kiss him. He did these things every chance he got whenever GRO-B-4 and GRO-B-5 were not around which was multiple times a week.

49. One time he tried to rape me, but [GRO-B-2] walked in and stopped him.
50. [GRO-B-2] and I also experienced sexual abuse from one of [GRO-B-4] work colleagues called [GRO-B-7]. We would go to his house near Tainui school for respite care from [GRO-B-4] and [GRO-B-5], I think this was just a private arrangement between [GRO-B-4] and this guy.
51. He would constantly play strip poker and spin the bottle. He would make us jack him off and perform sexual favours including making [GRO-B-2] ejaculate him. He would also rub his private parts all over me. This happened every weekend that we were left in his care, I believe we were sent here for a couple of months.
52. I voiced what was going on to [GRO-B-4] and she instantly stopped me from going there but continued to let [GRO-B-2] go there.
53. [GRO-B-2] ended his own life a couple of years ago. I believe one of the reasons contributing to this was the sexual and physical abuse he suffered while in care.

Physical abuse

54. I experienced physical abuse from [GRO-B-5]. He smacked my hand with a knife to which I retaliated and hit him.
55. We also had a verbal argument and I told him that he was not my father and said that my father wouldn't let their son rape me. This enraged him and he choked me by my hoodie, but I retaliated here and whacked him.
56. I was kicked out of the [GRO-B-4
GRO-B-5] in 2004 following a physical fight with [GRO-B-4]. My file indicates I was sent back to [GRO-B-4
GRO-B-5]s in 2004 for period but I don't believe this occurred.
57. [GRO-B-2] had already left [GRO-B-4
GRO-B-5]s when I was about 11. I know he went to stay at [GRO-B-7].

Middleton Road Family Home

58. After leaving the [GRO-B-4
GRO-B-5]s I went to Middleton Road. At the start this was okay, but the other kids there began to bully me for being different. They quickly learnt not to do this when I fought back. I was only there for a couple of weeks according to my file. I also went to fathers for three weeks and I didn't like it there.

Foster Care Placement with [GRO-B-8] & [GRO-B-9] 2005 - 2006

Daily life

59. [GRO-B-8] and [GRO-B-9] place was in Waikari Dunedin.

60. When I came to [GRO-B-8]s I had left school by this point. I spent my days with friends and trying to avoid home as much as possible.

61. There were four other foster children in [GRO-B-8]s care during the time I was there, they were all treated better than me.

Sexual abuse

62. I was repeatedly abused by [GRO-B-9], [GRO-B-8]s husband, in the form of unwanted sexual attention. [GRO-B-9] would grope me, smack my bum, and try to pull my top up which he successfully managed to do once.

63. This abuse would happen every time I was in the kitchen or when no one was looking.

64. I tried to tell [GRO-B-8] about what [GRO-B-9] was doing. Her response was to defend [GRO-B-9] and say that he will stop and that he won't do it anymore. She said this because she was very protective of him and her situation. He didn't stop.

65. I was also abused by [GRO-B-8]s nephew [GRO-B-10] who was very violent toward me. On one instance he broke into my room, pinned me down and tried making out with me, I kicked him in the balls to get him off me.

66. A couple of nights after this he came into my room, dragged me down the stairs and smashed my head into the bottom of the stairs. Another foster boy heard the commotion and punched [GRO-B-10] to get him off me.

Leaving care

67. I left [GRO-B-8] care in 2006 when I was 17 years old. I was sick of the abuse by [GRO-B-9] and [GRO-B-8] response, so I told CYFS that I wanted out of the system. They didn't want this to happen, however, I gave them no choice. My file has an official record of my discharge from care on the 1st of November 2007 (**Refer to WITN1071009 – Discharge Order dated 01/11/2007**).

68. My file shows that I was placed in Youth Justice care at Te Puna Wai o Tuhinapo in 2007. I have no recollection of this at all and believe that if I was listed as being in care at this time, it was without my knowledge.

Life after leaving

69. Not long after leaving care I fell pregnant at age 18 or 19 years old. After Social Welfare became aware of my pregnancy they became heavily involved and I was placed back into the system. During this time, I was living between [GRO-B-8]'s home and renting my father's place.

70. I was told by social workers that due to the abuse and mistreatment I had suffered that I would be an unfit parent and that I would do these things to my child.

71. I had to attend multiple Family Group Conferences, as well as a parenting course and do an IQ test at Waikari Hospital.

72. Despite always showing up to the parenting course, Social Welfare changed the narrative to say that I had missed days.

73. I believe that they also coerced Waikari into changing my IQ test results as they were changed from an average level to an incompetent level.

74. They also threatened my psychologist in attempts to turn him against me. He was supportive of me and refused to do this, instead he advised me that it was best that I no longer come and see him.
75. My son was born in Dunedin on GRO-C 2009. I organised an open adoption for him where he has remained. I chose an open adoption after I was told there would be no chance that I would ever be able to keep him.
76. Up until the point that I noticed Social Welfare was trying to tamper with my efforts, I had done everything that was asked of me. At this point, I realised nothing more could be done.
77. I have also had a daughter who was born in Dunedin and is now 9 years old. I organised an open adoption for her with my son's adoptive parents who were pleased to also adopt her.
78. I have some relationship with my son and see him once a year. I have a strong relationship with my daughter who calls me mum who I also see once a year.
79. My children are understanding that I was never given the chance to keep them.
80. I moved out of Dunedin a couple of years ago following due to abuse from my father.
81. GRO-B-2 ended his own life a couple of years ago and I was feeling pretty messed up. I was also still feeling the impacts from having gone through what I did with my children.
82. Since moving to Timaru, I have got my license and a car. I am working with ACC to get reimbursement for loss of earnings. I am also talking to them about the abuse I suffered while in care. I started my claim with ACC about a year ago, through my counsellor. I am happy with how the ACC process has gone.

83. I now have a relationship with my sister since being able to speak up about my experience in care. I had always been the outsider of the biological family, now she is very regretful of how she treated me.

Impacts

84. My time in care and the abuse I have suffered has ruined my life.

85. I don't trust anyone and am very cautious about who I speak to or go near.

86. I am a selective mute, and this started while I was in care. It has returned when the abuse started to resurface about three years ago and is still there on and off depending on the situation.

87. I suffer from PTSD and flashbacks.

88. I have personalities that will come out to protect me when need me, I call these my friends. I am learning to control the violent one who comes out if anyone hurts someone who is unable to defend themselves.

89. I don't like to be physically touched especially by men. When I am touched, I will shudder and sometimes smack the person. The only instance where I will hug someone is if they are a child, this is about as far as it goes.

90. For a period, I wanted to commit suicide, and this started at age 11 when I began to self-harm. I have tried to end my own life you name it I've done it. I have stopped self-harming in the last couple of years when

GRO-B-2

ended his own life.

91. Due to the abuse I was suffering, I had trouble with school and didn't gain a proper education. I now don't have any levels which is an obstacle when looking for work. This then also impacts my financial situation.

92. I don't feel that my time in care impacted me culturally. I don't have any connection to my Māori side, I do recognise it now but only when asked about my ethnicity.
93. My foster parents did try to get me involved in kapa haka, but I wasn't interested. During my time in care, I did receive verbal abuse from other children, they would call me things like an inbred mutt.
94. I don't think my connection to Māori culture would have been any stronger if I had of stayed with my mum.
95. I have been diagnosed with Idiopathic intracranial hypertension. I am unsure if this was caused from abuse while I was in care.

My Care File

96. I received my file but there were lots of areas blacked out and big chunks missing, I think that because it is my file things shouldn't be blacked out and chunks shouldn't be removed.

Redress

97. The best way to say sorry is to show it through action and change.

Recommendations for the future

98. My main thing is that you should not judge a book by its cover. Social Welfare should not be so quick to judge parents for things that have happened to them in their past. These things were not their fault and just because it has happened to them it does not mean that they will then do those things to their children.
99. I think thorough checks should be done of everyone in the household including other children, before placing a child in this house.

100. Homes should be monitored more, and children need to be taken away from the foster parents on visits so that they have the chance to speak one on one to the social worker, I never had any alone time to tell anyone what was happening to me and GRO-B-2.
101. When money is allocated for the foster child, then the social worker should take the children shopping themselves. This is because all too often the allocated money was spent by the foster parents on their biological children. They would get new clothes and we would get second-hand clothes.
102. There needs to be an admission when there is a wrong done.
103. If a child who has been through the system requests their file, then they should have the right to their whole file without things being blacked out.
104. Parents should not be made to do all these things by Social Welfare with the hopes that in doing so they may get to keep their children when Social Welfare has already made the decision that this will not be the case.

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: 02/03/2022