

Witness Name: Billy Puka Tanu

Statement No.: WITN0539001

Exhibits: N/A

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ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

WITNESS STATEMENT OF BILLY PUKA TANU

I, Billy Puka Tanu, will say as follows: -

INTRODUCTION

1. My full name is Billy Puka Tanu. I am 50 years old. I was born on GRO-C 1970. I am of Tokelauan and Māori descent.
2. I am giving this statement to talk about my experiences in State care and in the care of the Salvation Army, and the impact of that on me and my family. I think it is important that people know my story so that this doesn't happen to anyone else.

FAMILY BACKGROUND AND EARLY LIFE

3. I am one of seven children. I am the third youngest sibling. We grew up in Porirua. We also have another half-brother, who is the eldest. He is my mother's eldest son.
4. In around the 1960s, my dad migrated to New Zealand from Tokelau. He came here for work and moved to Wellington, where he met my mum. My mum is

Māori, her whānau are from Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei and Ngāpuhi.

5. My dad worked on the railway lines which is why he came and settled in Wellington and my mum did nightshift as a cleaner. Both my parents worked long hours and we were left on our own a lot.

Culture, language and church

6. Growing up, we didn't learn much of our Te Reo and Tokelauan language and culture. Dad would tell us that we're not in the Islands anymore so didn't bother teaching us that stuff. I didn't have much to do with Mum's whānau either.
7. I attended church when I was younger. Mum took us to the Apostolic church. I think this was between the ages of about five and nine years old. Dad didn't go to church.

Mental illness

8. During this time, there was a lot of violence happening at home. My earliest childhood memory was looking up at my dad and seeing him beating my mum. I had no idea what was going on at the time. There was a lot of yelling too. I must have been five or six years old.
9. Later on in life, I understood that Mum had bipolar and schizophrenia. When she got really sick, she would take her clothes off and walk around naked outside. She was so unwell that she didn't realise what she was doing. I saw a lot of that.
10. Mum would be worse when she had a lack of sleep. She often didn't get enough sleep because she worked night shift, when Dad got home from work.
11. I don't think Dad realised she had mental illnesses or what it was. He didn't know how to cope with her behaviour, so he used to bash her a lot. I think that's the only way he knew how to deal with it. I saw my dad giving my mum hidings on a weekly basis. I think he hoped he could snap her out of it. Sometimes he had to physically restrain her from running around outside naked, or from harming herself, him or other people.

12. Mum says that her mental illness started when she was in prison and her baby son, my eldest half-brother, was taken off her and adopted out. The stress of it caused her to become sick. I can't remember why she was in prison. This was before I was born.
13. I don't remember us ever receiving any support in relation to Mum's mental health.

Physical violence / criminal activity

14. Dad was a violent man and he used to drink a lot. He would work days on the railways and then afterwards, work as a bouncer at the local tavern. He would often come home from work drunk and bleeding from having fights at the tavern. Then he would take it out on us. It was scary.
15. Dad's hidings were not five minutes, they were two to three hours, or sometimes all night. Sometimes he beat us until we couldn't move. We got hidings most days but especially on Sundays because we had to stay inside on Sundays – that's Toke styles. When I felt like he went too far, he would massage us with baby oil. Maybe that was his way of dealing with his guilt.
16. As the youngest boy, I was bullied the most out of my siblings. I was like the runt of the pack. My brothers beat on me and gave me hidings too. They also forced me into a lot of criminal activity. My older brother was a good thief so I learnt off him. They would play up, so it felt right for me to follow suit. We'd eventually tag team in criminal activity. I remember one time we tried to break into the takeaways because he was hungry and forced to go with him.

Financial struggle

17. I remember going to primary school with no shoes and no lunch. At lunch time, I'd sit outside while everyone else was eating their lunch from their lunchboxes. Teachers would sometimes feel sorry for me and buy me lunches. Or sometimes I'd steal some food from the cloak room where the bags were kept. If I got caught, the teacher would hold out his fist and tell me to run at his fist. Me and my brother ran into his fist heaps of times.

EPUNI BOYS' HOME

18. While Mum was in and out of hospital, Dad couldn't cope with us. Because of everything that was happening at home, I started playing up, missing school and running away from home.
19. I was really young when I first went to Epuni Boys' Home. My records say that I was 12 years old, but I think I was still in primary school when I first went, so I might have been around nine years old.
20. All I knew was that people in nice clothes and little white cars would have meetings with Mum and Dad. I didn't know what was going on but after that, I was taken away to Epuni.
21. My guess is that I did a lot of stealing when I was little and that's how it started. I was young, so I didn't understand what was going on. All I knew was that I was going away, I was crying and my parents were crying. Dad was outside, wiping tears from his face and sharpening his machete as I was taken away in the car.
22. When I got to Epuni, the staff checked me over and did their procedures. They made me strip down, have a shower, then they threw this white powder all over me so I was like a ghost. After that, I would get dressed into the boys' home clothes and walk out into the yard where everyone was. That was scary. I was so young and little, so I was an immediate target.
23. They put me in a room that had three wings, like a prison. I think they were called Totara, Rata and Kauri. There was one long corridor and all the rooms were down the side. Half way down the middle were the shower blocks where the showers and toilets were. All the rooms were open – they had no doors and were all facing each other. Each room had a bed, table, chair and cupboard. Every room was the same, just like a little prison cell.
24. Most of the boys were Māori, a lot from Napier and Hastings. There were also some Pacific Islanders.

Physical violence and bullying by other residents

25. When you first walk into the rooms after being admitted to Epuni, the boys are standing at their doors with a chair. You have to run through and get the bash from each one as you passed them. They called it the "scragg line". After a couple of minutes of running it straight, I got as far as two or three doors down before I was smashed to the ground and beaten. Staff were having a cup of tea, they didn't care.
26. I also got a welcome hiding or a welcome stomp. This happened on the first night I was there, in the early hours of the morning when I was asleep. The boys came into my room a couple at a time and beat the shit out of me for no reason. I was trying to hide under my blankets. The boys told me that if I said anything, I'd get another bash. After that, all the boys took off to their rooms and pretended to be asleep. These sorts of beatings happened all the time after that.
27. There would be a staff member working nightshift who was meant to be awake and walking the corridors during the night. But at some point during the night the staff would leave their area. Otherwise, they'd doze off. That's when the bashing would happen by the boys. Even though the lights were out, all the boys were up every night until 12 or 1 o'clock in the morning.
28. After that, I was bullied everyday by the older boys. I was one of the younger, smaller boys there. Us little ones were the easy targets so we were often picked on and bullied by the older boys.
29. The older boys were 15 and 16 years old. They would walk around being tough and I had to acknowledge them as tough, otherwise I would get a hiding.
30. There was a kingpin system. The kingpin was the toughest out of all the boys. Whatever he said, goes. We always knew who the kingpin was because when you first got there, the other boys would tell you to watch out for certain boys.
31. The kingpins had their own circles and would go around bullying the younger ones, like taking their pudding.

32. Sometimes I would complain to staff about the abuse by other boys but they would brush me off. They'd tell me to go and have a shower or harden up. They didn't want to hear about us crying and moaning. Our complaints to staff fell on deaf ears.
33. During the night before you leave Epuni, you get a goodbye hiding by the other boys. About 10 to 15 guys come into your dorm one at a time and do their thing. During my goodbye hiding, I tried to cover my face but they're punching and kicking. If you cry to staff, one way or another, the boys will get you again before you go.
34. Every time I went into Epuni, I got welcome and goodbye hidings, except for the very last time I went there when I was a bit older. Everybody got them, unless you were one of the older ones, because they were the ones doing it.

Physical and emotional abuse by staff

35. There was a staff member called Mr [GRO-B-1] who would often pick on us. He was in his [GRO-B]. He was white, [GRO-B]. He didn't like anybody. He had no favourites. But he picked on Pacific Islanders and Māori more than the white boys.
36. One time during breakfast, me and another guy, who was Māori, were arguing so Mr [GRO-B-1] told us to go to the gym. There were no cameras in the gym so you could get away with anything in there. As punishment for arguing, he made us duck walk around the whole gym, one on each end of the basketball court. It killed me. After that, he made us go up and down all these ladders that were up on the wall. Then he made us chase each other around until one of us caught the other. By the end of it, I was ready to have a heart attack. There was no need for any of it, all we did was argue.
37. After that, we went back to eat our breakfast. We sat down with all the other boys and they were asking if we were okay. Then Mr [GRO-B-1] came up to me and said something like, "Are you happy? Because you're going back to the gym after breakfast." That's when I broke down and cried. I remember all the milk and cereal in my mouth as I was crying and everyone else was laughing.

38. We didn't end up going back to the gym, I think he just wanted to see me cry. He got his wish – to humiliate us and embarrass us in front of the boys. I was humiliated heaps of times in front of the boys by Mr [GRO-B-1] I guess it made him feel powerful over me.
39. Mr [GRO-B-1] made us do PT (physical training) like this a couple of times.
40. Another time we were playing touch rugby with another staff member. I was the last one to get a try and the staff member came running up and tackled me in the head with his knee. He set me up to get smashed. It knocked me out.
41. There was another time where we were playing a game and I was on the shoulders of another boy. Without telling me, he threw me off and I landed on my back bone. I was really hurting and I was rubbing my back. The staff member made a comment like, "Did you wipe your arse properly?" and everyone else was laughing. That stuff sticks in your head.

Sexual abuse by other residents

42. Younger ones like me were forced into giving oral sex and other sexual things to the older boys. This happened most nights. Some boys also got it up the arse.
43. The boys would say things like, if you don't do what I say or if you say something to anyone "you're dead" or "I'll stab you with a fork from the kitchen".
44. There was a code of silence. If I narked, I'd get a bash from the older boys. The staff just turned a blind eye, they didn't want to hear shit. They had better things to do.

Sexual abuse by staff

45. I think it was during my first week at Epuni that I was sent to medical by Mr [GRO-B-1] I later realised that Mr [GRO-B-1] was probably not a medical staff member because he was with us all the time at meals, play, shower time. He was a helper kind of staff member.
46. When I got to medical, Mr [GRO-B-1] told me to lock the door, take my clothes off and lie on the bed. I was only young then so I didn't know any better. I thought

it was part of what usually happens. He then covered my face with a tissue, grabbed my penis and started playing with me. He also put his finger up my arse. I couldn't do anything. I had no voice. I did a lot of crying in my room.

47. Mr [GRO-B-1] was a day shift worker. Because of what he did to me at the medical, I was shit scared every time he started a shift. I felt like he was always giving me looks like he was going to rape me. To keep myself safe, I didn't want to be anywhere alone in case he ever walked in.

Treatment by staff members

48. White boys were treated a lot more fairly than the black boys. The white boys had right of way. They were talked to differently by staff. We could tell by the way the staff spoke to and their tone of voice. They would call the black boys "niggers", talk to them like dogs, say that where we came from was where they kept all the losers and that we'd never amount to anything.
49. There was one staff member who was different to the other staff. Her name was Mrs [GRO-B-2]. She was an older lady and she felt like a nan to me, even though she was white. Most staff barked orders at us, but she was softly spoken. I felt a bond with her and would stay around her.
50. We became close because sometimes at night the dining room would be turned into an arts and craft centre. I would draw and she would sit next to me. I would always buddy up to her and she cared for me. If I ever showed any feelings, it was around her. I always liked when she was working. When her shift came to an end, I would have a tear in my eye and couldn't wait for her to come back to work. She knew what was going on in there but what could she do?

Secure unit

51. There was a secure unit where boys went when they played up. I was put in secure at least once. I think I was caught smoking. I remember it being really dark in there. The door had a little window and that was the only light in the room. There was a light, but they never turned it on. There was a mattress on the floor. You weren't allowed out, you were in there for 24 hours a day. They

would bring you your meal to eat in there. There was nothing to do in there except sleep. It was boring, but it was safer than being out with the other boys. I remember crying myself to sleep, missing home and thinking about Mum.

Education

52. Epuni had two or three classrooms. I didn't really learn anything there. I wasn't in the right frame of mind.
53. There was no cultural support at Epuni. The only culture club was to survive.

Family visits

54. I didn't see Mum much while I was at Epuni. She didn't visit and we weren't allowed to go home to see our families. I had no say in the matter. I don't know why my family didn't come and visit. I'm not sure if family were allowed to visit or if it was Epuni's protocol to reduce the contact with family and increase the fear in the kids. It was like a jail for kids.
55. In the hallways where we slept, they had these speakers and would play music every day from about six in the morning to midnight. Every time the song 'Total Eclipse of the Heart' came on I would cry because it reminded me of Mum. I often bawled my eyes out at night because I missed Mum and I missed home. It messed with my head. I remember those times when I hear that song today.
56. I was in and out of Epuni multiple times. My records show it was about four times but it was more like eight times. Each time I went there, it was only up to a few months each time. That's how it was at Epuni, you never stayed long. It was the same with my brothers when they went there. Each time I left Epuni, I either went back to my whānau or went into another home.
57. At one point I think I was getting too old for Epuni so I was transferred to Arbor House in Greytown.

ARBOR HOUSE (GREYTOWN)

58. I was transferred straight from Epuni, I didn't go home in between. My records say that I went to Arbor House in July 1983 when I was 12 years old. But I

remember having my 12th birthday at Arbor House. The reason I remember that was because there was a Greek cook there and she made me a big truck cake. I will never forget it. That was the first time I ever got to celebrate my birthday in all the time that I was in care.

59. Arbor House was totally different to Epuni. It wasn't like a boys' home. It wasn't full of young thugs and gangsters. It didn't have a secure unit. There was bullying by other boys, but not much physical violence. It was more laid back. It was like a big family home with rooms. It was quite nice and welcoming.
60. The boys were mainly Māori. There were some Pacific Islanders and white boys too.
61. When I first got there, it was only boys. Later on, some girls from local surrounding suburbs who were playing up got chucked in Arbor House too.
62. I remember there were about four dorms and maybe eight of us in each dorm. Boys and girls were in separate dorms, but all the dorms were in the same wing.
63. The manager was an old white fella and he was always in his office. We didn't see him much. The one that used to run the place was John Ngatai. He used to take us for rides in his Porsche in the weekends.
64. For physical activity, staff would drive us all the way to the train station, maybe 10 km away, and make us run back to the House. We could walk, run, whatever we liked, but if we were late to tea then we missed out.

Sexual activity

65. It was here at Arbor House that I learnt about sex and those sorts of things. Not in the classroom though, there was no sex education.
66. There would be one nightshift staff member, usually an older woman, who was meant to be watching us while we were asleep. They were usually sleeping themselves. We could see them sleeping and hear them snoring.
67. The nightshift staff member would send us to bed and after an hour, she would go to sleep on her seat when she was meant to be walking around, monitoring

us, checking all the rooms. That's why we were allowed to get up to heaps of mischief, because she wasn't doing her work properly.

68. When the nightshift staff member fell asleep, we would go into the girls' rooms. There was a lot of sex between boys and girls. It usually happened in the rooms at night. It happened pretty much every night.
69. There was one girl I remember in particular. She was a white girl from Featherston. She was way older than us. She lived at Arbor House too. All the boys had turns at hooking up with her. She had sex with most of the boys. I was about 11 years old when I had sex with her.
70. There was also a lot of unmonitored sex between kids of the same sex.
71. Younger boys, like nine to 11 years old, were also forced to give older boys blow jobs. The older boys were about 14 to 16 years old. There were a few times where I was forced to do it.
72. When you're in the homes, you don't have any morals. You don't care about that stuff. You're not thinking of your family.
73. It was normal to go into the showers at 2 am and see lots of things, like oral sex and other things, happening there.
74. If you weren't doing any of the sexual stuff with the other boys or girls, they'd move onto the next person.
75. Now that time has passed, I realise that all this stuff messed with our heads. We're not meant to be doing that stuff at that age.
76. I don't think the staff ever knew any of this stuff was happening.

Education and substance abuse

77. When I moved to Arbor House, I was still attending Greytown School. It was a primary and an intermediate school. I was the only black guy in my class. There were only a couple of Māori in the whole school.

78. My teacher reminded me of the teacher in Pink Floyd – The Wall, he looked exactly like that. I don't remember his name. He was a scary looking white dude. He would look at me and give me the evilest looks, like I was the devil. I was shit scared to go to school.
79. I felt that he picked on me because I was the only black one. It felt like he pulled me out of the classroom every five minutes. If anything was wrong, it was blamed on me. He would often send me to the principal's office and I would get the cane or the strap.
80. The Principal reminded me of Hitler. He had an ugly look in his eye and he looked like he wanted to shoot me.
81. When I turned 13, I went to Makoura College in Masterton. I didn't pay any attention at school. At lunch time my friends and I would steal cigarettes and smoke them, get stoned and sniff Bostik. I was doing anything to get high. I got high to find my own space, to sit there in my own zone and feel good.

Family visits

82. We were allowed to go home in the weekends.
83. Mum visited me once or twice in the two or three years I was there. I remember the second time she visited she was unwell. That must have been on my birthday.

Section 11 agreement

84. My records show that while I was at Arbor House, my parents signed an agreement with the Director-General of Social Welfare on 30 September 1983, under section 11 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1974. I would have been 13 years old.
85. My records also show that about eight months after signing the section 11 agreement, my parents terminated the agreement and I went back home to live with them.

86. By the age of 14 years old, I was made a State ward. All of a sudden, a staff member took me to buy all these clothes.

HODDERVILLE BOYS' HOME (SALVATION ARMY)

87. I went to Hodderville Boys' Home when I was about 14 years old. This was a boys' home run by the Salvation Army. It was in rural Waikato, near Tokoroa. It was a bit more laid back than the other homes I'd been in. My records say I was here for about one and a half years.

Physical abuse

88. I didn't get a hiding on the first night because I was told about the kingpin straight away and I made sure I steered clear. But I got a hiding not long after.
89. One night the kingpin and his friends came in when I was sleeping. They held me down and tied my hands and legs to the bed with socks and pillow cases. I thought it was a joke until I saw the kingpin telling them how to tie me up properly, that's when I realised it was serious. They pulled my pants down to my knees and whacked my penis with a jandal. It felt like it went on for ages. Everyone just stood there laughing. They thought it was a big joke.
90. One time when we were playing bullrush another guy ran hard at me with his knees up. I went down to tackle too soon and his knees smashed into my shoulder. I was in bad pain. My shoulder felt like it was dislocated. I received no medical attention, no doctors, nothing. Staff told me to walk it off. Later in life I was hit by a bucket on a digger. Still, this incident was much more painful than that. I can still feel that injury in my shoulder.
91. Because the kingpin was brown, and there were a lot more brown people there than white, I didn't get picked on as much.
92. One time a new guy came in and he was bigger and uglier than me. He bullied a lot of people and was looked to as the new kingpin. The old kingpin was trying to make a statement or show his power by picking on us younger ones. I knew straight away that something wasn't right. I could feel the tension in the air when the new guy started. That was his way of showing that he's the man and he's

running the joint now. In those days, it was a competition as to who could be the toughest.

93. All of this started fucking with my head. I started pissing the bed. Sometimes I slept under the bed and put pillows under my blanket to pretend that I was there. I cried at nights. I was insecure, scared, lonely and thinking of Mum. I always missed Mum. I also remember seeing other boys who had been there two years crying because they missed home.
94. When the kingpins left and the older boys finished, the other boys started looking to me as the new kingpin. Staff members started treating me as the kingpin and even gave me a heads up about a new boy who was coming in who was 6 foot 3.
95. Captain Herring ran the place. They had all these other captains too. One of these other captains loved to give us the cane. I think his name was Mr [GRO-B-3]. There would often be Māori kids going to his office. We would only go the office for one reason. I think he got off on bending us over and giving us the cane. He looked like he enjoyed it. We were caned every day.

Sexual abuse

96. Staff would tell us lights out at 9pm. They would be in the office until 9.30 – 10pm, then they would go home and we would be left on our own. There was no nightshift. We would walk around and do what we wanted.
97. There was some sexual abuse between boys, similar to what happened at Epuni, but it was much more discrete. Older guys would try different things on the other younger guys, like stick a pool cue up your arse and see how far it can go.

Differential treatment

98. The white boys were always treated better than the brown boys. We were not treated the same. It was lots of little things like if they did something good, they would get extra puddings. The white boys always got more aroha, attention and praise. The brown boys would never be rewarded or even acknowledged for anything we did right. The staff members referred to us as "niggers".

Substance abuse

99. We used a lot of substances there. I got into sniffing substances when I was younger and moving between the boys' homes. I used to wag school with my mates and older brother and we'd get into sniffing petrol. So by the time I got to Hodderville, this was my way of life and I didn't think any different.
100. At Hodderville we often sniffed petrol, glue and solvents. We were young and just wanted to get some sort of high.
101. We would also find Indian ink and tattoo each other in the showers.
102. We'd stay up all night. The whole place was open, out on the farm. Staff members had no idea and didn't care.
103. If anything happened at night, Mr [GRO-B-3] was the only one that could hear because his flat was connected to the boys' home. But we were all too quiet for him.
104. They had a demerits point system. When you got enough merit points, they let you go into the candy store and take a big bag of lollies home.

Education

105. There was no cultural training or education. Hodderville was purely Salvation Army white Palagi. I remember us having to hop in those grey buses and go to church on Sundays.
106. I was meant to be going to College but I think there was paper work saying I wasn't fit for school. I don't know why. Instead of going to school, I was put in an intellectually handicapped place called the Sheltered Workshop. I had learning difficulties but I've never been diagnosed with any disabilities.
107. The Sheltered Workshop did work for the community in that area. I would go there and work alongside males with disabilities making things like beer crates. The women there would make things like pegs. We were paid for our work.

108. One time when I was at the workshop another guy attacked me with a hammer for no reason at all. He just missed my face and got my shoulder. I told the boss what happened and she tried to see if I was alright. But I had to go back the next day. He was there the next day, acting like nothing happened.
109. These guys were mentally disturbed but here they were using these dangerous weapons. I was young, cautious, wary and shit scared for my life because they could attack me any time with a hammer. I was scared every day but I had no choice, I had to go there.

Family visits

110. We were not allowed home in the weekends, only in the holidays.
111. The State ward people only let Mum visit me once over the whole time I was here. I have no idea why. I had no say in the matter.
112. When Mum visited, it was weird but good. It was weird because I was with Mum, but at the same time, we were around everyone else. There was no separate room to be with her. When it was time for dinner, she was allowed to sit with me. But still, we were with everyone else.
113. I would have liked a separate place for me and Mum to relax and have our meals. I didn't feel like I could be myself and talk to her when everyone was around us.
114. I also wish we had more visits and that they were properly planned. I wasn't given any notice that Mum was coming. It was unannounced. The staff were just like, "Hey, your Mum's here".
115. I hated the part when she left. They only allowed day visits.
116. I remember that Mum also came up for a couple of meetings.
117. I can't remember how I ended up leaving Hodderville. I was about 15 years old. I left to go home to live with my family.

OTHER BOYS' HOMES

118. I also went to Ōwairaka Boys' Home and Hamilton Boys' Home. I don't remember much from these places because I was only there for short periods.
119. I just remember going in and out of boys' homes, saying bye to my family and not knowing why.
120. I also remember that sometimes when it was time for me to go home after being in care, I complained to staff that I was too scared to go back home to my dad and asked that they send me somewhere else. I had a deep fear of my dad. Sometimes I would rather stay in the boys' homes and be bullied than go back to Dad.

LAST TIME IN CARE – EPUNI BOYS' HOME

121. The last time I was in care, I went to Epuni and I was about 16 years old. My records show that I had been running away from home and stealing.
122. Things were a bit different this time at Epuni. I was a bit older this time so I didn't get welcome and goodbye hidings.
123. I tried to smuggle in smokes but I realised that the rules had changed since the last time I was there and we were now allowed to smoke. We'd steal butts from the staff room and smoke them.
124. I don't remember much from this time at Epuni but I do remember on my first or second day there, Mum and Dad came in for a meeting. Staff said to Dad they weren't sure if my parents should be taking me home because I was scared. Dad had crocodile tears and his eyes were red with fire. I don't think they were tears of sadness, I think they were tears of anger. I'd seen that look many times. I specifically remember him saying, "I'm not a violent man".
125. My records show that between the ages of 16 and 17 years old, no social workers followed up or contacted me for 18 months. I had not been on anyone's case load. It was described as "a case of bad drift". Social services recommended that I be discharged from State care.

126. My records show that I was discharged as a State ward when I was 18 years old. At that time, I think I was living in Porirua and wasn't in any care institution.

SIBLINGS

127. [REDACTED] GRO-B

128. [REDACTED] GRO-B
[REDACTED] GRO-B Every time I came out of care, I would play up again and then go back in.

129. [REDACTED] GRO-B

130. I don't have much of a relationship with my siblings now.

LATER LIFE AND IMPACTS

Anger

131. When I came out of care, I had had enough of the system. I had been forced to do a lot of things that I didn't want to do. So when I came out, I was free and I wanted to retaliate. I didn't want to listen to white men and their rules any more. I got "FTP" tattooed on my hand which means "fuck the Police". After what I had been through, I didn't care about anything. I didn't give a shit about life.

132. I was angry at God. I would ask him: Why did you do this to me? Why did you bring all this pain and suffering to me? Why do you hate me so much? Where were you when I went through everything I went through? I put a lot of blame on God. For three or four years I hated him for the shit I went through and wondered why he let it happen to me.

Gangs

133. I started getting involved in gangs in my late teens. The kids on the street had dads that were in gangs. Gang members showed me a lot more love than my

own family, so I started drifting away from my family and towards gangs. My Dad and brothers didn't care about me. The only person who cared was Mum.

134. I remember one time Dad was bashing Mum and I told him I would kill him because I was sick of seeing him hurting her. Him and I were about to have a one out in the front yard and he came out in his lavalava and told me that if I wanted to be with the gangs, then fuck off.

Criminal activity

135. The one thing I cared about was money. At that time, money meant more to me than breathing. I stole a lot of money. I became a really good criminal. I didn't care if I got caught.
136. Every time I did a big hit, I would give money away to everyone I met, including my parents and sisters. I also bought my dad a car because we didn't have a car growing up. It felt good being able to help them out. I felt like Robin Hood.
137. I went to Youth Court a couple of times. No one ever asked me what happened to me growing up. Then I started going to adult courts. I was in and out of jail a few times. With my record I've never been allowed to leave the country.
138. I would like to share a poem I wrote when I was in prison. I can't get it out of my head:

*Us crims, we lead a life of hope
Hiding our feelings by smoking dope
Hiding away our feelings and thoughts
Dreading the day we go to Court
No one understands what we go through
But we all stick together through and through
We all stand so staunch on that day
Until we get sentenced and taken away
Oh how I wish this was a dream and not real life
Why, my brothers, must we fight, fight, fight*

Drugs and alcohol

139. I was trying to find things to get high on and I was drinking a lot. I tried a lot of drugs and that escalated until I was using class A drugs.
140. I was sick of the hurt, sorrow and sadness so I just wanted to get far away in my own world. I'd had enough of everything around me and everything I went through. I wanted to be in a place where there was no more hurt. Getting like a zombie made me not feel the pain and stress. It was different to what I experienced when in care.
141. Sometimes I would sit in the pines on a sunny day and blow my brains out. I just needed support or encouragement because I wasn't getting it from anybody. When I used drugs and alcohol, all the bad vibes would go away. It felt like a safe place for me. I think it got out of hand. Everyone around me would tell me I needed to go to rehab.
142. There were two incidents where I took off in Dad's car, drink driving and had two near misses. I was really lucky that no one was hurt. When I got home, Dad beat me. He slapped me in the face with an open palm. My face was purple and I couldn't see out of my eyes for about six weeks. That night Mum came home at 2 o'clock in the morning from her night shift and saw Dad over me. She dropped everything and held onto me, protecting me and taking the hits herself.
143. The drugs, alcohol and criminal activity carried on for years, until I met my ex-girlfriend and I settled down. She showed me better ways than stealing and encouraged me to get a job.

Paranoia and social interactions

144. There was a point where I was paranoid and scared for my life. I started wearing a trench coat and carrying around a machete or crow bar for my protection. When people looked at me, I got so paranoid. If I heard a V8 car going by, I'd hide in my bed or in the bushes because I thought people were coming for me.
145. I was so paranoid that I never talked. I had no emotions and I didn't know how to interact or socialise with people. I didn't know why no one talked to me. I felt

that I couldn't communicate with people. Then someone told me that people were looking at me like that because of how I was looking at them. I also started hallucinating. Because of what happened to me in care, it messed up my head.

146. If anyone wants to start beef with me, I get really scared at first and then I'll let go like a loose cannon. A couple of times I've been backed into a corner and eventually snapped.
147. I got smacked in the head so much when I was younger that when I got a hiding, it felt like a massage.
148. Today, when I see people are having a hard time or stressing out, I try to encourage them. I've been through a lot of shit so I feel for them.

Relationships and children

149. I had three children with my ex-girlfriend. I got clean before we had kids.
150. After we broke up, I met my ex-wife and we had a child together, my fourth child. We were married for 14 years.
151. My spirit as a kid was broken so young. When I had kids, I didn't want them to go through what I went through so I always tried to give them everything I never had. I always made sure they had lunches, were warm going to school, had good gears, everything better than I had. As for all the abuse I got from Dad, I made sure it didn't happen to my kids. It stopped there. None of my kids have ever been in care.
152. It was hard to teach my kids because everything I knew was self-taught. It was hard when they'd ask me to help them with their homework. I had to learn it myself first so that I could help them. It was a learning experience for me too.
153. I don't have any contact with my three eldest children at the moment. They live in Aussie.
154. When my marriage ended in 2017, my ex-wife moved away with my youngest child. I still see him sometimes.

155. Every relationship I've had in my life have been headaches.

Coping mechanisms

156. There were a few low points in my life. These were times where I was going through a custody battle, when I was worried about not seeing my kids, the break-up of my marriage, when I was in and out of court, when I was worried about being locked up, when I had nowhere to live and no one to turn to. There was a lot of stress on me at times. I was tired and I felt that everyone was against me.

157. Sometimes I turned to crack and meth to handle the stress. It made me feel better and made me relax. My brothers and sisters were against me because I was doing meth and looked at me like I was the devil.

158. Since I've been off the drugs, lots of memories from when I was in care have come back. I have had to try come to terms with everything I've been through.

159. I've had two heart attacks. The doctor said it was due to meth use.

160. Sometimes I self-harmed, particularly when I felt alone and that I had no support. Self-harming gave me a sense of release of pressure. I have scars on my face and body from this. At times in the past I have felt suicidal. Despite my scars, I feel that I'm over those thoughts now.

161. These pressures in life brought back all the memories from when I was in care.

Culture and language

162. The old man never taught us how to speak Tokelauan He should have taught us more about that side and to be proud of who we are.

163. Then when I was in care, there was never any care shown towards our cultural needs. There were no opportunities to learn Te Reo, practice tikanga or learn more about my Tokelauan culture.

164. I have received some of my files from Oranga Tamariki and see that sometimes I have been recorded as only Māori and not Tokelauan. I'm proud to be Toke.

It's important to get these records correct. My old man taught me that if you do a job, do it once and do it properly.

165. Now when I visit my Toke side and we have korero, I feel bummed out that I can't really understand what they're talking about. If I had an opportunity to learn it now, of course I would.

Church

166. I hadn't been to church since I was about nine years old. There was no pastoral support when I was in the homes. Back then, staff weren't very supportive, they were just there to do their jobs.
167. One day when I was in my twenties my aunty took me to church with her. That's how I started going back to church. I gave my life to the Lord. I felt a peace sensation come over my whole body. Everything felt right again. I stopped being angry at God.

Education and employment

168. Later in life, I realised that I have a brain and I can read if I give it a go. I taught myself how to read when I was in jail. I started by reading the Bible in a dim light. I was over 20 years old at that time. I started copying it down, getting familiar with long words. Next thing I knew how to write out the ten commandments without looking at it. All self-taught.
169. I was in my young twenties when I got my first job. I did cold calling and knocking on doors just looking for a job.
170. Even though I didn't get School C or UE, I'm still a good worker. I have had jobs working at KFC, bakeries, scrap metals, roading, underground drilling and truck driving. I worked in drainage and ran my own team. I also worked in construction for 10 years, starting in the yard and eventually working on the cranes. There I volunteered to learn how to read plans. I also learnt how to be a dogman all by myself by watching other dogmans and working closely with them, so I could learn off them.

171. I did the 13 week course at Whitireia to get my dogman certificate. When I started the course, I didn't really know how to read so I read the Road Code to practise. For the hard bits, I wrote them out and hung them around my kitchen. I told the others doing the course that if you do your homework, then you'll succeed.
172. I also did a road and infrastructure course run by Whitireia. I also got certificates for working at heights and working with dangerous goods (DGs). I got a ramset licence as well as licences for classes 2, 4, WTR (wheels, tracks and rollers) and forklift. I can operate a digger and can read plans.
173. Even with all my certificates and licences, I struggle to get jobs because they see my criminal history. The only time I get jobs is when they don't check my history.
174. In 2017, I was working in underground drilling. I gave all of that up to look after Mum full-time. Mum did the best for us. That's why I sacrificed my job to look after her. Those guys have millions of workers out there but I only got one mum.
175. I'm currently in emergency housing until I can get a place on my own.
176. I think my abuse in care is a big part of the reason why my life turned out the way it has and why I'm so fucked up in the head. I also blame myself for playing up in the first place.
177. People say I'm 'out the gate'. If you had been through what I have been through, you'd be 'out the gate' too.
178. I am no longer angry at God. I have a lot to thank God for. I wouldn't be the person that I am today without him. I've got God on my side now.

REDRESS-COMPLAINTS PROCESS

179. The only counselling I have ever received for my experiences in care has been through the Royal Commission. I have not received any compensation, money or redress.
180. In 2017, my mate got a payout from his time at Epuni. He worked through Cooper Legal. So I approached Cooper Legal in 2017 and made a historic claims process against the Ministry of Social Development. If I get any money, that is a

bonus. It is still ongoing. Cooper Legal told me the process would take a couple of years.

181. I don't need a written apology. An apology can't turn back the clock and make it all better. It's too late for that.
182. Money will help but that won't make it better either. For me it's not all about money. I don't have much of it now, but I don't care. I've had a lot of money over my life.
183. I'd rather get my story out. All my life this stuff has been swept under the carpet. After all these years, it's my turn to talk. I've waited 30 years for this. I want to tell them face to face what they put me through. I want to talk to the heads of the Ministry of Social Development and the Salvation Army, not the labourers. I want to speak to the horse's head, not the horse's arse. I want them to acknowledge what they and their systems put me through, and to change their ways.

IDEAS FOR TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

184. Kids in care should get the attention they need before they go through the mischief process, before they're left out and missed. Most of us growing up thought that no one cared about us. We need to catch these young ones before they fall through that safety net.
185. People that work in State care are the ones that are trusted with kids so they need to look at who they hire to supervise these kids to make sure they are spot on. They need to go through screening tests and there need to be safety measures in place because no one is perfect. For example, when kids are going to medical, they should always have two people there. You can't have one male staff in there tutuing with kids who can't complain to anyone.
186. People working in care need to know the background to the people they're looking after, they need to have a hui about it. They can't just put someone with kids and that's it. Someone has to have their files of their history and relay it back to the staff that are going to be looking after those kids. Then they'll have a better understanding of the kids they are looking after.

187. Care providers need people who have been there before, who have some background experiences and who understand these kids and these systems. Courses and books are not enough.
188. They need more Māori and Pacific Island staff working in these places. They can relate better to Māori and Pacific kids because they are in the same waka.
189. Staff should treat kids how they would like to be treated. Like the staff member at Epuni who was like a nan to all of us. She had a kind voice and was sincere in how she spoke to us.
190. When kids have troubles or complaints in the homes, staff should pinpoint these kids and support them. They need to make a plan of attack and figure out what sort of resources would help that kid.
191. Staff have got to have one on ones with the kids. They need to reach out and build trust with them. Only then will they open up. They should take baby steps with kids to see what is happening with them.
192. Kids often have a favourite staff member. That staff member would be the best person to talk to the kid, rather than a stranger.
193. Food is also a good medicine. Laughter too.
194. Social workers should have an ear to the kids. Not just take them from one place and chuck them in another place. They should take their time and do their jobs properly. They should ask what's happening in the family and check they have the right support.
195. When the State became aware that there were problems at home, they should have checked in with Mum, Dad and the rest of the kids, and offered support. No one spoke to the kids. If we were supported to work through any concerns, that would have taken a lot of stress off us. But instead, they just took us.
196. Nobody ever asked me what was going on. Staff should have asked. At one of the places where I used to work, they had a big sign in their yard: "If in doubt,

ask". That applies to anything. Rather than sitting there wondering why these kids are playing up and causing mischief, staff need to do their own homework.

197. Staff should have a refresher each month about us kids that have chosen to put our stories forward through the Royal Commission, so they can read and understand it, so that we don't go down that path again.
198. I live by three things which I always say to myself: treat people the way I want to be treated; be yourself, don't be anybody else; there's always someone tougher around the corner.
199. Being able to talk about my experiences in care through this Inquiry has opened my mind and my heart from the black darkness. It has helped me a lot by taking a lot of weight off my shoulders. I had kept all this in since I was a kid. I have told very few people about this, not even Mum.
200. I want my experiences to be heard. I want others to see where I've been and where I am now. I want people to see that there is light at the end of the tunnel, and I'm living proof of that. If someone can read my story, relate to it and better themselves from it, then that is payment enough.
201. A copy of my written consent to use my statement is **annexed** to this statement.

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: 7-6-21

Annexure A
Consent to use my statement

I, **Billy Puka Tanu**, 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:

- 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;
- publication on the Inquiry website.

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 one of the two following boxes:

if you are seeking anonymity

or

if you are happy for your identity to be known

Signed: GRO-C

Date: 7-6-21