

**Witness Name:** Alison Mae  
**Statement No:** WITN0462001  
**Dated:** 24/09/2021

## ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

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### WITNESS STATEMENT OF ELISON MAE

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I, Alison Mae, will say as follows:

#### Introduction

1. My full name is Alison Mae. My birth name was Alison Mae Taylor, however I changed my name by deed poll as an adult.
2. I was born:  1955. I am now sixty-six years old.
3. My iwi connections are to Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa and Rangitāne.
4. Ngāti Moe is my hapū.
5. Papawai, in Greytown, is my marae.
6. I am the eldest of eight siblings. One sibling was adopted out and the rest of us were all, at various times, taken into care by the Department of Social Welfare.
7. I was in state care for seventeen years. During that time I was abused emotionally, psychologically, physically and sexually.
8. I have never said that much about my abuse. I was uncertain how to provide this evidence. I have always been comfortable with saying that I had been 'abused' and it was never necessary for me to elaborate. I think people didn't really want to know the 'details' of what that word 'abuse' meant and I knew that. My admission without elaborating suited me, in that I did not have to expose myself and the listener felt like I had 'confided' in them which made them feel good.

9. However, I believe that New Zealand has a real problem with abuse of children and young people in State care. And the answer is to find a way to stop this abuse. Because I want an answer to be found, I am willing to tell my story.
10. I don't want to tell my story in an acceptable or palatable way. I want to tell it honestly because I really hope that by sharing my story I can in some small way make a difference to how children in care are treated.

### *Whakapapa*

11. My knowledge of my whakapapa has been a journey that began when I was 18 years old. I was about to start studying at Victoria University and I wanted to be financially independent of Social Welfare. I became aware that I could obtain financial assistance from the then Department of Māori Affairs and I was keen to take that course of action. However, this meant I had to prove my ancestry to Ngāti Kahungunu. Despite proving my ancestry, the Department of Māori Affairs informed me I should receive financial support from the Department of Social Welfare given I was a ward of the state. However, that process began my journey of learning about my whakapapa.
12. My great, great, great, great grandfather was a Chief of Ngāti Moe at Papawai. His name was Te Whatahoronui and Aromea was his first wife.
13. My great, great, great grandmother was their daughter Te Aitu-o-te-Rangi. When Te Aitu-o-te-Rangi was 14 years old, her father's tribe was invaded by Te Rauparaha and her father killed. Te Aitu-o-te-Rangi was taken back to Kāpiti Island by Te Rauparaha to become his slave bride.
14. Whilst captive, Te Aitu-o-te-Rangi met my great, great, great grandfather, John Milsome Jury a trader, whaler and later farmer from Wapping in London. John was one of the first arrivals in New Zealand when he was 16 years old on the whaling ship Thetis. With the help of John, Te Aitu-o-te-Rangi escaped from Kāpiti Island.
15. Te Aitu-o-te-Rangi and John were married on 26 October 1840.
16. My great, great grandparents were Hoani Turei Whatahoro Jury, the eldest son of John and Te Aitu-o-te-Rangi and his first wife Pane Ihaka Te Moe Whakarau.
17. Whatahoro was a prolific writer on Māori traditions, lore and customs. He was elected chairman of 'Te Kotahitanga' the first Māori Parliament in 1892. He was also a native assessor and interpreter to the Native Land Court.
18. Whatahoro adhered to the Mormon faith and had seven wives and fifteen children.
19. My great grandmother was the eldest child of Whatahoro, her name was Huhana Te Aitu-o-te-Rangi also known as Sue Mataroa. My great grandfather was Mataroa Karauria

Hamuera. My understanding is that my great grandparents had several children. One of those children was my grandmother Te Ohipera Tete Katarina also known as 'Bella' and as Kathleen Isobel. Te Ohipera had a younger brother who was whāngai and not raised in Greytown where he was born.

20. My grandmother married a Pitamoana Piwari and they had, I believe, seven children. It is my understanding that my grandfather is Te Ohiperas' younger brother, Henare Te Ua, who, as stated above, had been whāngai and that he returned to Greytown as an adult. It seems he was aware that Te Ohipera was his sister but that she did not know he was her brother.
21. My mother was born in November 1934. However, Pitamoana Piwari had died a year before my mothers' birth, so he could not have been her father. As stated my mothers' surname is registered as Piwari on her birth certificate. Following the birth of my mother, my grandmother gave birth to another four children, all boys, two who died in infancy.

### **My parents – Ōku mātua**

22. My fathers' name was Robert William Taylor. My mothers' birth name was Eleanor Piwari. They are both deceased.

### *Tōku whaea – my mother*

23. My mother was of English and Māori descent. As stated above, I believe she was the result of incest. I believe my mother was in care, but I do not know at what age she went into care or for how long. I also believe her childhood was very abusive. I have heard stories of her sleeping in the bath; of being found in a dog kennel. I know she suffered from tuberculous of the spine, was in a cast and spent time in hospital. I have also heard that she did not get a lot of schooling, whether this was because she was in hospital or not I am uncertain. I understand she had learning difficulties and struggled with learning.
24. I don't think my mother had a lot of knowledge about her past. I don't believe that she had very much support, if any, from her family.
25. I am aware that she began offending as an adult and after she was married. She served sentences in Christchurch Women's' Prison and Arohata Prison in Tawa, Wellington.
26. My mother had ongoing mental health issues and I believe she was diagnosed as schizophrenic. As a child I was exposed to her mental health issues just as I was to her temper. I believe my mother had a pathological temper and that she was a pathological liar, the latter noted in my files with reference to mum being a 'terrible liar', 'prone to untruths'.

*Tōku mātua – my father*

27. My father was for most of his life morbidly obese and struggled to walk. My fathers' speech was very unclear unless he was cursing and then the words were very clear. Up until his death in his sixties my father was not able to read or write. Not only was my father illiterate his thinking was almost childlike, yet he had the stubbornness of a grown man.
28. Unlike my mother, my father had no temper at all. If he got angry he would mumble and swear but never hit and very rarely displayed any temper.
29. My father did drink but because of a lack of money was not able to do it a lot and I have no recollection of him being a 'nasty' drunk.
30. What my father didn't do was provide any support to mum and often was not employed. If he did get a job he often quit for no apparent reason or just didn't turn up for work. I believe because of his size he found working too hard. Whatever the reason Dads' unemployment was a long-standing and chronic issue.
31. Although I have no recollection of Dad's family when I was younger I know when I was older he did spend time with two of his brothers in Shannon. I do believe that Dad did have some support from his family.
32. I am also aware that Dad's family did not like Mum and this stemmed from my mother telling Dad's family that Dad, myself and GRO-B-1 had all been killed in a car accident, which was not true.
33. That dislike was still present many years later when my father died. When I was organising Dad's funeral his family accepted that my mother would be present at the funeral but asked that she not attend the family gathering following the funeral.
34. When my father passed away I had to deal with my mother, who at this time had another partner, but was acting at the retirement home as if she was my father's wife which confused the staff. It was just another example of my mother's mental health issues and her need to be involved in 'drama'.
35. Both my parents lacked any skills in being adequate parents; neither of them could provide even the basic care for the children for any sustained period let alone be good parents.

**Circumstances going into care**

36. I was put into care because my parents could not provide the basic requirements of food, shelter and warmth for our family.
37. On 6 October 1957 my father, with his four-month pregnant wife, two-year-old daughter (me) and GRO-B-1 walked into the Wairoa Police Station. He told the Police that



he had no home, no job, no food, only the clothes we had on and no money. The Police gave my father six pounds to buy a train ticket to take him and his family to Upper Hutt where his father lived.

38. We arrived at my paternal grandfathers' home the same day. There was no room for us in the house, so we had to live in an outside shed. This arrangement lasted less than a week as my parents, on 11 October 1957, went to the Lower Hutt Welfare Office asking that they take care of myself and [GRO-B-1], as we were no longer welcome to stay with grandparents.
39. [GRO-B-1] and I were taken on warrant and admitted, that day, to the then Miramar Receiving Home. We were medically examined; we were both covered in sores, were neglected. I was enuretic, which I find interesting given I was just two years old.

## Residences

### *First placement into care*

40. [GRO-B-1] and I remained in the Miramar Home for just over two months when we were removed from there on 5 December 1957 and placed with a childless couple in Maungaroa, just out of Wellington. I understand we were the first children the couple fostered.
41. I am aware of this placement from reading my files although I do not recall this placement or the placement at Miramar. From my files I sensed these foster parents wanted to provide more than just the basics and that they really cared about my brother and me. The foster mother displayed a desire to 'know' the children, I really sense that she regarded us as her children.
42. Social worker comments were very complimentary on the level of care [GRO-B-1] and I were receiving, and that [GRO-B-1] and I were doing very well; that we were happy, laughing a lot.
43. I am aware from the files that the family had wanted to adopt me and [GRO-B-1] but that Mum would not agree to this. This placement lasted just over six months when on 19 June 1958 [GRO-B-1] and I were returned to the care of our parents.
44. I believe that future costs to the Department was a factor in the decision to return me. A case note dated 11 June 1958 states "It would probably be better to help these people through the NF scheme and be more economical than boarding and outfitting the children as wards if the mother is able to look after children otherwise."
45. Following our removal, I am aware that these foster parents did adopt siblings of Māori descent. I am also aware that the older girl went on to run a Family Home for several years. A Family Home that had a reputation for the children not wanting to leave. I met this woman, who advised me that her father had died but that her mother was still alive

living in the South Island. It had been my intention to meet her mother, but life got in the way and it never happened. The woman also shared how her younger brother, and I believe a younger sister, would often assist in the running of the Family Home. She spoke fondly of her parents and upbringing.

46. Given this knowledge, knowing what I sensed when I read my files about that placement, I really wondered what my life would have been like if I had been adopted by them.

*Second placement into care*

47. [GRO-B-1] and I were returned to the care of my parents. Also in the home (but not in care) was [GRO-B-2] who had just been born. This return only lasted four months until 16 October 1958. The return went belly up.

48. On 14 October 1958 my mother contacted the Lower Hutt Welfare Office saying she wanted to hand the children back. That the family was in debt, that the electricity had been cut off, that of the three boarders only one was paying rent, and that there was no money as my father was unemployed again. There is case note reference to the home and children being dirty.

49. My knowledge of my parents means that 'boarders' would have been paedophiles, alcoholics, inappropriate people to have around children. For example, there was a young man on probation who was sharing a bedroom with [GRO-B-1] and I for a period. These would have been people that my mother would have brought into the home and that my father would and/or could not have done anything about.

50. Despite the Lower Hutt office being told of the dire situation that the family was in, the response of the office was to suggest that Mum with the children go to Masterton, that a social worker would visit Dad to discuss getting the boarders out and sorting out the debts. I do not understand why it was thought that this would resolve the issue. My feeling is that the local office preferred that this family was not in their area.

51. We were not removed until two days later when my mother presented at the Masterton office. Prior to turning up at the office Mum had phoned the Masterton office informing them that she and her children had arrived in Masterton and that she was staying with an alcoholic friend of hers. When Mum turned up at the office the case note states that Mum was "...in an agitated emotional state asking that all the children be taken into care...she had nowhere to take the children, had no money...did not know where her husband was. I" Another case note commented that Mum "...has deteriorated considerably and the children are now in need."

52. On 16 October 1958 I was placed in another foster placement. [GRO-B-1] was placed with me but not [GRO-B-2]. I was three [GRO-B]. Our foster mother was sixty-



five years old who had an adult daughter and adult son who lived with her. This home was in Carteron. Like my first two placements, in Miramar and Maungaroa, I don't recall this placement, but I recall a later placement with this foster mother. What I recall is the home. It was a large wooden home with a verandah that went around three sides of the home, there was a large front lawn with lots of grass and there were lots of buildings at the back of the house and I think there was a cow.

53. I recall the foster mother sharing with me when I was older, a story about when I and [GRO-B-1] were first placed with her and how mine and [GRO-B-1] language shocked the social worker. I went to sit on the verandah which must have been hot and I said, "Oh shit it's bloody hot." and [GRO-B-1] said when seeing a cow "Look a fucking gigi." - meaning a horse. Another story she told me was that I had on a singlet and that it was so small the only way they could get it off me was to cut it off.
54. I have said that [GRO-B-1] was with me but not sure where [GRO-B-2] was placed. I recall at various times having different siblings placed with me. Those siblings were [GRO-B-1], [GRO-B-3] and [GRO-B-4].

*Returning to the care of my parents*

55. My second placement into care lasted one year and 11 months. On 1 September 1960 [GRO-B-1] and I were returned to the care of our parents in Palmerston North. This return included [GRO-B-3].
56. Following our return there were numerous incidents over the next three years on my file that, in my view, warranted our removal. Just one month after our return, our mother went to the Palmerston North office stating she was separating from our father; he was not working; she had no money; no food for the children; and there were a number of boarders. Police were regular visitors to the home and neighbours commented that myself and [GRO-B-1] were often out on the street unaccompanied at 10pm, and that there were a lot of parties. Even when a social worker was provided with a disclosure by our mother and confirmed by myself and [GRO-B-1] (and the disclosure recorded) of sexual abuse the Social Welfare did nothing.
57. This return home lasted three years. This was a particularly traumatic time and there was a lot of abuse. Looking back, it was three years of constant house moves, different schools, chaos, turmoil, fear, uncertainty, always feeling sick, not liked, confused. There was nothing good about it.
58. In three years I lived in eleven homes, in five different towns and I attended five schools.
59. There were numerous concerns referred to in my files that included truanting from school. I question this as it was known my absence from school was due to my mum's actions. For

- example, I had not gone to school on one occasion because mum made me run an errand at 7:30am a distance of four kilometer round trip. I was six years old. So instead of going to my school I ended up going to the school of the children I had been running the errand for.
60. There were other references in my files to incidents of being left at home alone, Police involvement in a serious assault on a baby/child; disclosure in regards to GRO-B<sub>-1</sub> and I being assaulted, hit around the head and body with a broom; living in a home that had been condemned. There were so many 'red' flags and yet Social Welfare allowed us children to remain in the care of my parents.
61. I recall when we lived GRO-C in Masterton. It was bloody awful. Lots of boarders, lots of uncles, lots of sexual abuse, lots of alcohol, witnessing lots of fights that included with the neighbours who I did not realise were the landlords.
62. I recall always being hungry and sneaking out the window at night to pinch money out of milk bottles, so I could buy food and/or lollies, something to eat.
63. Sometime in late 1961 and early 1962, whilst our mother was pregnant GRO-B without the knowledge of Social Welfare, Mum took me and GRO-B-1 to stay with her brother GRO-B in Hastings. We were there for three months and apparently enrolled at Mangateretere School in Hastings, although I don't recall going to school. My time in Hastings was particularly violent and GRO-B<sub>1</sub> and I experienced a lot of physical and sexual abuse including being forced to have sexual intercourse with each other.
64. I remember Mum coming to visit, I remember hiding in the back of the car and begging Mum to take me home, but she wouldn't.
65. When GRO-B<sub>-1</sub> and I returned from Hastings we were covered in bruises and boils, I had had my head shaved because of headlice.
66. My file documents that following our return Mum told the social worker that she was 'beside' herself because GRO-B<sub>-1</sub> and I were uncontrollable since our return; that we had been taught to be sexual and that we continued to indulge in that activity. GRO-B<sub>-1</sub> and I confirmed mum's statement to the social worker and the social workers' only comment and action was to remind us that we must go to school.
67. Mum also told the social worker that she was 'losing it' with me and that she had had to 'lock' herself in a room 'before she hurt me'. I know my mother and there is no way she would have stopped and locked herself in a room. She would have thrashed me.
68. This visit to Hastings was one of many examples of our parents moving without informing Social Welfare, as they were legally required to.



*Foster home placements*

69. We were eventually removed again in November 1963. The removal was only for about a month.
70. On 28 November 1963 I, GRO-B-1, GRO-B-3 and GRO-B-4 were all removed from our parents' care. I was eight years old. Records show that GRO-B-4 and I were placed with the elderly foster mother, who was now seventy-one years old; GRO-B-1 and GRO-B-3 went to another foster home.
71. At the same time mum was taken and admitted to Porirua Hospital. Mum returned from Porirua Hospital 21 December 1963 and on 23 December all of us children were returned to the care of our parents.
72. Then two months later we were again removed on 21 February 1964. I recall this removal, a comment from a social worker on my files reads "As was expected, we had difficulty in doing this". There were two social workers and the aid of the local constable and local Doctor needed.
73. I recall holding my mother around the neck, screaming and crying; I also remember trying to kick the Police who was pulling me off mum. There were kids crying, adults yelling.
74. Interesting how despite how much I had been abused I reacted in this manner. No matter how much a child is abused they cling to what 'should' have been as if it was. By this I mean that as a child I desperately needed to be loved, to be wanted and even though I wasn't I still had that need and the only people I could get if from were the very people not giving it to me.
75. GRO-B-3 and I were placed with elderly foster mother, GRO-B-1 and GRO-B-4 placed in Family Home.
76. Records show that the 1960 'H' status now terminated, and we were now permanently in the care of the Superintendent of Child Welfare.
77. I remained in this placement from age nine until I was fifteen. GRO-B-3 remained but a few years later was again placed with me in my final placement.
78. When I was fifteen years old I asked to be removed from my foster placement, I know this was all happening during my school certificate exam. I was always arguing with my foster mother, who was now seventy-seven years old. Before I was removed the social worker took me for a ride in her car to tell me how disrespectful and ungrateful I was.
79. I was then placed in a temporary foster home, for a month, with a young family in rural Carterton.

80. Then I was placed in my last foster placement, with an older farming couple who had four adult sons. The youngest son was in his final senior year at the same college I attended, Kuranui College in Greytown. The foster parents were related to the elderly foster mother. I remained in this foster placement until I began my first degree and moved to live in Wellington.

### **Inaction of the Department of Social Welfare**

81. Although the State intervened with my removal, and that of my siblings, the State did not either support or assist my parents nor protect me or my siblings.

82. Despite having the knowledge of my parents' inadequacies - my files are littered with comments such as, 'Eleanor is well known to the Masterton Office', both parents are 'below in intelligence' of 'low mentality', 'records show the parents unreliability and instability', 'mother is irresponsible, a terrible liar, lackadaisical', 'father is lazy, close to being mentally defective'.

83. The State continued to knowingly return me and my siblings to the abusive home environment from which they had removed us from.

84. Each time I was returned to the care of my parents it was subject to conditions as set out by the Department of Social Welfare. This was not a consultative process. The lack of consultation may be more indicative of the time however lack of consultation is a criticism that continues to be levied against Oranga Tamariki.

85. Given the repeated assessments of my parents as 'low intelligence', 'mentally defective' along with my knowledge that my father could not read or write, I was surprised to read that the decision to return us to the care of my parents was relayed by letter.

86. The conditions of the 1958 supervision order were:

They still remain under the legal control of the Department, and from time to time will be visited by the nearest Child Welfare Officer. If at any time during the period of supervision it is ascertained that either their conduct is unsatisfactory or the surrounding conditions of your home are not conducive to their future welfare, the question of their removal from your control will be immediately considered. If at any time you change your address you must advise the District Child Welfare Office, whose address is Lower Hutt. They must not live away from your home without the authority of the Child Welfare Officer. It is also a condition that children of school age be regular in attendance at school.

This period of supervision may extend over one year or two years, or even longer, if it is considered necessary in the child's interests to take such a course. When conditions are satisfactory the Department is only too pleased to relinquish

control at the earliest possible date. If supervision is continued, then the Department is legally in a position to assist at any time should this be necessary.

87. As set out above, in mid-October 1958, just three months after my return, mum contacted the Lower Hutt office asking that the children be taken. This would have been myself, GRO-B-1 and GRO-B-2
88. Why did no social work visits highlight the above issues? Rent arrears don't happen overnight. The power is not switched off for one bill payment not made. Who were these boarders, were they suitable around children? Why were there boarders? And why was it not known dad was again unemployed?
89. Not having a place to stay, not having any power, having unsafe boarders in the home, dad not working, having a dirty home and wearing dirty clothes were not conducive to the welfare of GRO-B-1 and I. Despite this clear breach of the 1958 supervision order, there is no evidence on the file of immediate consideration of removal.
90. The proposal was Mum take herself and the children to Masterton and stay with an alcoholic friend, while the social worker talks to dad to get debts sorted, get rid of the boarders and have the house cleaned up. Again, I wonder what was expected to be achieved from a 'lazy' mentally defective man who never held down a job. Social Welfare continued to look to inadequate parents for a solution yet Social Welfare did not fulfil their legal obligation to remove us so that we could be safe.
91. On 1 September 1960, one year and eleven months after the first failed attempt, Social Welfare decided for a second time to return GRO-B-1 and I to the care of our parents and our GRO-B-3
92. Again, my parents were informed of the decision and the required conditions by having the agreement posted out. This contract was slightly different to the earlier one.
93. Firstly, this agreement/contract was specific to each child whereas the first one covered both GRO-B-1 and I. Secondly, although I was school age, this agreement/contract did not include the condition that children of school age attend school. The return in 1958 was on a 'Friends License' which was similar to a supervision order and the 1960 return was referred to as "H" status.
94. The 1960 agreement/contract included the following conditions:
- Elison will still remain under my control and from time to time will be visited by a Child Welfare Officer. If at any time during the period of Supervision either Elison's conduct is unsatisfactory or the conditions of your home are not helpful to Elison, she may have to be removed from your care again. If at any time you change your address you must notify the District Child Welfare Officer whose address is P.O.



Box 1004 Palmerston North. Elison must not live away from your home without the authority of the District Child Welfare Officer. The period of Supervision may extend over one year or two years or even longer, if it is considered necessary in Elison's interests to take such a course but where conditions are satisfactory I shall be pleased to discharge from my control at the earliest possible date. Supervision is continued in certain cases because I am then legally in a position to assist at any time should this be necessary.

95. As with the 1958 agreement/contract there were many breaches, more than in 1958, because this time we remained in our parents' care for three years. Within this three year period there was so much abuse.
96. There was ample evidence, on record, of "the conditions not being helpful to me". I was five when I returned to my parents care in September 1960 and eight when I was removed in November 1963. In that time I lived in eleven homes in five different towns and I attended five primary schools.
97. We lived in a condemned home at GRO-C Street, Palmerston North where I was left at home alone. There are records of Police involvement, GRO-B<sub>1</sub> throwing a stone through a window, my father was involved in a fraudulent act, there was a serious assault on a child; Leaving Palmerston North without telling Social Welfare; Living in Hastings without the knowledge, therefore without the authority, of Social Welfare; Leaving Masterton without telling Social Welfare; Known that GRO-B<sub>1</sub> and I beaten, learned about being sexual. The above are some examples, not all.
98. I accept the role my parents played in my abuse and although I do not condone their actions, I understand why they did not protect us and why we were abused whilst in their care. What I don't understand is why the State did not protect me and why the State intentionally and knowingly returned me to the very situation that they had deemed was bad enough to warrant my removal.
99. The State will say my parents had improved themselves. It was clear from the evidence that they had not and that they were unlikely to do so. The State knew about my parents' inadequacies, it knew my parents lacked family support and knew the conditions of life at home were not suitable for us. The corollary of that was that I continued to be abused.

### **Abuse**

100. Recollection of my past, my childhood is disjointed, chaotic, sad, fearful and incredibly abusive. My memories carry emotions of shame, fear, confusion and unworthiness.

101. I have decided to recall various incidents and to categorise as best I can the abuse I experienced. I have decided to provide the details of some of my abuse. Much of my abuse I have 'blocked' which I know is a defence I have employed to protect myself - and good on me for doing that. Other times I recall smells, feelings, and intuitive knowledge.
102. And like many survivors much of the abuse was not recorded, or if as in one instance in my case disclosed but absolutely nothing is done or the disclosure is not believed. Having read my files there were so many red flags that should have alerted social workers, it isn't rocket science, but these warning signs were either ignored because of incompetence or worse intentionally ignored because 'I' didn't matter.
103. To defend lack of intervention on the basis of social work practice at that time is no excuse. Good social work practice, whether in the 1960s or 2021, is premised on a commitment to doing what is best for the child. It is premised on ensuring the child is safe, is protected, and is not being abused.
104. If I was to describe myself as a child it would be that I knew, just as I know I need oxygen to breathe, that I was nothing. This was the only way I could make sense of what happened to me all the time and by lots of different people. I was the constant, so it must have been me that caused it; it was because I had no purpose other than for people to hurt me.
105. I was always hungry. I was always scanning the footpath and gutter for food. A piece of discarded fruit, a bit of a sandwich, anything. I would pick it up, brush off the dirt and eat it and if [GRO-B-1] was with me [GRO-B] I would share with [GRO-B-1] and vice-versa. I would also scan the footpath and gutter for coins.
106. I discussed this with [GRO-B-1] some years ago and [GRO-B-1] admitted that he still scans for wallets and money.

#### *Emotional and physiological abuse*

107. My mother's mental health meant that I was often exposed to behaviours that I knew were 'weird' but it was just the way my mother was. I recall a time when my mother was naked but she wanted me to keep her company while she did the ironing so she woke me up. It was dark outside, just me and my mother were awake in the house. I recall falling asleep in the pile of clothes. Then my father came in the back door with a big box of oranges, I was allowed to have one. I was about seven years old.
108. Often witnessed physical fights between my mother and father. My mother threw cups, plates and one time I recall a big knife. My father protected himself with chairs or getting out of the room. I was always scared but knew not to interfere. I was very young and this continued until I was nine years old.



109. For many years, even as an adult, if I was near people arguing and if someone near me should raise their arm (even if not to hit anyone), I instinctively put my hand up above my head to protect myself. It was quite embarrassing.
110. Always told that I was just like my mother, which I knew was not a good thing. Generally told angrily. And when I did something wrong I was told "like daughter like mother".
111. A relative of my foster mother, when visiting often, told my foster mother with me present that "I was a bad one"; that my foster mother needed to "watch that one" and that "she won't amount to much". My foster mother never said anything, certainly did not contradict the woman. I used to think the woman was an 'ugly old cow' not that I ever said that to her.
112. I was constantly reminded that I was not to walk home from school through town because if a shop window was broken then I would be blamed as I was a welfare kid.
113. Whenever the social worker visited, with my foster mother in the room, I was asked if I was happy living in the home. This is a good example of poor social work practice. Of course, I am going to say yes. In fairness, I would have answered the same, as I did when appointed a new social worker and that social worker took me away in the car to have a chat. I knew that you kept your mouth shut and I didn't trust social workers. What I did like about the new social worker is that my foster mother did not like him, especially as he took me away to have a chat.
114. When visited by my parents, which thankfully was not often I was in a constant state of stress. Generally whichever parent was visiting they were allowed to take me out somewhere. My stomach was in a constant turmoil before, during and after the visit. I felt physically sick for a couple of days. I was walking a tightrope being careful not to say anything negative about my foster home and at the same time not saying anything negative about the visit or my parents. I knew what each person wanted to hear and had to do this without betraying either - never mind what I felt or wanted. There was no such thing as 'me'.
115. This whole 'me' thing was incredibly conflicting because on the one hand I knew there was no me but at the same time I did want to be someone. I did want to be seen but I knew I had no right to even want that let alone be seen.
116. Every time there was a visitor, all us five girls had to line up in chronological order of age. We were then introduced by our foster mother as "my foster children" sometimes "foster daughters". We then had to sing a song. We were a 'collective'.
117. Although chronologically I was the second to eldest I took the role of the eldest as my older foster sister along with her two sisters and GRO-B-3, were all in the Special class at school. As I got older this became a problem as I was not allowed to do homework



because to my foster mother it meant I thought I was smarter than the others, when in her words I wasn't.

118. Once I got to College I had to do my homework under the blankets with a torch. We all had to go to bed at the same time, which was 7:30pm. At fifteen I did rebel against this generally with my mouth by 'back chatting'. There was a period of time that I was able to stay up later, I will discuss shortly.
119. The college year began with all students getting the years required stationery. This was done by a student being given a stationery list and on the first day of school going to the assembly hall that had all stationery laid out on tables set up in a large square formation. Inside the square were staff and volunteer helpers and at the end the cashiers. Students entered the hall one side, going round the tables collecting the stationery they needed and then paid the cashier at the end.
120. The stationery list was a white sheet of paper with a typed list. Except the welfare students list was a bright yellow sheet. I would memorise my list so that it only had to come out at the end so that the cashier knew that I didn't have to pay for my stationery.
121. The above examples of abuse on their own would not probably account for much except maybe the not being able to do my homework. However, if considered cumulatively and particularly in the context of the other abuse which I will disclose then the above abuses served to cement for me that I was nothing; that I did not matter; that there was no me.
122. I know that this foster mother would never have intentionally hurt me. I know that she cared about me, I also know that she would not have known much or anything about what had happened to me or my siblings. What she would have known is the local gossip and what she saw. I do believe that how she cared for me and the other children in her care was indicative of the times.
123. For example, I was physically disciplined, by my foster mother, with a thin leather strap that was looped on a wooden handle. Again because of my 'back chat' I got the strap the most and the oldest girl did because she stole things. I don't ever recall the three youngest girls ever getting the strap. I did not get the strap a lot but when I did it was never above the knee, always on the back-calf muscle and only once. Once was enough; it stung like hell!!
124. The only time I regard my time in this foster home as abusive was when my foster mothers' son became mentally unwell. To me as a child and young teenager this man was huge. He was over six feet tall and of very solid build, but he was a very gentle man, quietly spoken and very kind to us girls. I never felt unsafe around him and, even as a child, I knew unsafe men.

125. However, because of his illness and because of what my foster mother made me do I feared for my life. Without anyone's knowledge I was going to bed with a bat hidden in my bed and the window left slightly ajar each night in case I needed to run.
126. I am not sure when this man started becoming unwell but I think I was fourteen years old. At first I did not know that he was unwell. All I knew was that my foster mother said I could stay up with her and her adult daughter. My first response was that I was excited that I got to stay up when the other girls had gone to bed but that excitement was short lived and I would have rather gone to bed.
127. When the man finished work he would go to the local pub, have a drink and then come home. He would come in the back door, put his large metal lunchbox on the kitchen bench, go to his bedroom, change his work overalls and then come out, get his tea out of the warmer and eat it. My first task was to check the mans' lunch box to make sure he had eaten his lunch and if he had not I had to advise the foster mother what was not eaten.
128. I had to do this quietly and quickly before he came back into the kitchen. My next task was to sit on the sofa in the lounge that gave me a full view of the kitchen table and the man eating his tea.
129. This task was particularly 'scary' as the man performed ritualistic behaviours that I knew were odd and I had to quietly relay this to his mother. After getting his tea he placed the plate of food on the table in front of him. He sat staring in front of himself for quite a while and then he put his knife into the butter, held the knife with the butter on it up in front of himself, and then moved the knife and butter back and forth across his face. He then stopped stared at the knife and butter for what seemed an eternity then put the butter on his meal and ate his tea.
130. When he finished tea he would come into the lounge and sit next to me on the sofa. I stayed up until he went to bed.
131. I recall one time when we were watching Coronation Street the man got upset because he thought they were talking about him on the programme. I intuitively knew that I had to be 'jolly' and to reassure him that they weren't talking about him. My foster mother and his adult sister said nothing, I knew it was my job.
132. Honestly, I was petrified but not once did I show it because I knew that I couldn't. It would not be safe for me. I don't recall how long this went on for however it came to a head one weekend. The man had a friend who was visiting. This friend was as small as the man was big. I also had to be present during the visit. Next minute the man attacked his friend, there was yelling and screaming from my foster mother and her adult daughter. I am not sure how we did it but the friend, my foster mothers' daughter and I managed to get the man

face down on the floor with us all sitting on his back. My foster mother is yelling to me to get help. I was so relieved to get out of there I ran to the next-door neighbour's screaming "X is killing Mr Y".

133. I have no memory of what happened after that, all I know is that the man was admitted to Porirua Hospital; that he had alcohol poisoning. None of this was told to me. I overheard conversations.
134. The foster mother and the adult sister denied that I was present when the man attacked his friend.
135. The man came back home. He was different when he came back, he had a sad silence about him. When he returned, I continued the monitoring role as referred above. Shortly after that he [ended his life] which again was not told to me but which I overheard. His death was not nice. [GRO-C] [GRO-C] I remember hearing that there had to be a closed coffin. That image deeply affected me as a 15 year old. I recall not being able to deal with it as I had no-one to talk to because I supposedly knew nothing about what had happened.

### *Physical abuse*

136. I recall many incidents of physical abuse during my childhood.
137. One of my earliest memories is of looking out a window, looking down and seeing [GRO-B-1] screaming and blood pouring down [GRO-B-1] face. My mother said I pushed [GRO-B-1] out of the window. I remember being really scared. I know my mother gave me a hiding but all I can remember is wooden floorboards and being pulled out from under a bed. I think I may have tried to hide under the bed to get away from mum. I know I was very young, maybe three years old, because this is on my file when we were living with our parents in Petone.
138. When I was about five years old my mother had made a lettuce salad and decorated the top of it with sliced boiled eggs. I was hungry and stole a couple of slices of egg; when my mother asked who took the eggs I blamed [GRO-B-1] and [GR 1] said it was me. Our mother stripped us both naked made us lie on the floor face down and proceeded to thrash us with the jug cord, having no regard for what end of the cord hit our bodies.
139. When I was six years old [GRO-B] mum took us to Hastings to stay with her brother. We were here for three months. In the home were older boys, I remember them being 'big' and I believe they would have been about thirteen to fifteen years old except one of them I think may have been much younger maybe about nine years old. This boy did try to help us but wasn't really big enough, is what I recall.



140. When the boys' parents were gone, which was in the morning (I think they were apple pickers) the boys would push me and [GRO-B-1] behind a door and then put their body weight against the door, squashing us.
141. Another thing they would do was make us climb a tree that had branches that hung over a driveway. The boys would climb the tree too and then push us out of the tree to see us hurt ourselves when we hit the ground.
142. The boys beat us with brooms and always tell us that if we told their mum and dad we would get a 'real hiding'.
143. I was at my mums' friends' home, or maybe they were relatives I am not sure. They were the [GRO-B], they had a daughter called [GRO-B-5] and I liked her. She was kind. To me, [GRO-B-5] was a big girl. I think she might have been about fourteen years old. I did not like her father, he scared me. We were in the kitchen and [GRO-B-5] had done something because her father grabbed her and hit her head against the wall several times. I was petrified but said nothing. My mother didn't say anything sitting at the table laughing and talking to [GRO-B-5] mum. This family lived with us for a while.
144. I recall many hidings from our mother. Looking back I now realise it was her rage. She used anything to hit us with, me and [GRO-B-1]. I could never tell what the triggers were although she never abused us when my father was around. I do not remember my father ever beating us. Sometimes he would threaten us but we would run away and by the time he caught us, we were all laughing. With all the sexual abuse, I knew it would be over and done with and that I would survive. But with my mother's physical abuse, I genuinely did not know if I would survive the hidings because her level of rage was so intense and her violence was often explosive and unexpected.

### *Sexual abuse*

145. I had lots of 'uncles', a lot who were boarders that mum got to live with us. I knew that if they told me I was 'pretty', or asked if 'I would like a lolly', or told me that my mum told them I was a good girl then that meant they put their hands inside my pants, rub themselves against me with their 'hard' thing.
146. I recall 'yucky' smells (the smell of their breath) and I recall pulling my face away. I recall grunting sounds.
147. I have a memory of walking down a path hand in hand with a young Māori woman. She was talking to me in a kind way, telling me that I would be okay and to just do as I am told, that everything will be alright. I have a sense that this was when [GRO-B-1] and I were taken to Hastings for three months. We got to this place and the girl opened the door and there was

a young Māori man sitting on the end of a bed. He wasn't an old man. I stood in front of the man and watched the girl close the door.

148. I remember he asked me to sing 'Michael row the Boat to Shore'. I knew he was going to have sex with me. Beyond what I have said I recall nothing else. I was six years old.

149. I know I was in Hastings. The boys who used to beat GRO-B<sub>1</sub> and I took us to a shed that had a double bed in it, the bed only had a mattress on it. The boys told me and GRO-B<sub>1</sub> to get on the bed and 'root' each other. They had brooms and hit us until we did what they said. I don't recall the actual event just being hit and crying. I was six years old and GRO-B<sub>1</sub>.

GRO-B

150. When GRO-B<sub>1</sub> and I returned to Masterton and were visited by a social worker (noting Social Welfare) did not know that we had been living in Hastings for the past three months) my mother told the social worker that GRO-B<sub>1</sub> and I were covered in bruises, boils; that we had been deprived of food and that we had been taught how to "root". GRO-B<sub>1</sub> and I confirmed to that social worker what mum had said but the social worker did nothing. All she did was tell GRO-B<sub>1</sub> and I that we had to go to school every day and that before we went to school we had to wash ourselves.

151. I recall an uncle who lived down the road when we lived in GRO-C Street in Masterton. We had lived with this uncle for a short time, he was a friend of mum. I remember being in a big bed with him, his thing was hard, I remember it hurting and then next thing my parents are in the room. My father is crying, has picked me up out of the bed and is carrying me in his arms. I remember liking that my father was crying and holding me. He never told me off or gave me a hiding. I don't recall what happened other than him taking me home. My mum however stayed with the uncle. I was about seven years old.

152. Mum had two Mormons boarding with us when we were living in Carterton. They were having a bible lesson in the bedroom. They said to mum that I could sit in between them under the blankets so I kept warm whilst we all had the bible lesson. I don't recall sensing that these men were unsafe. Anyway bible lesson above the blankets fingers inside my undies under the blankets. I just waited for it to be over. I think there was even a prayer said.

153. I do not mean to be flippant but what I have just said was the reality - it was my reality. I was eight years old.

154. I recall another incident that occurred when I was with the elderly foster mother. No-one knew about this. We would go to a relative of the foster mother, the woman was very kind and very good to us girls. I loved going to visit her as she lived on a farm and I was allowed to ride the bike all over the farm. There were tracks so it made riding easy. I loved riding



the bike because I would go into a fantasy world pretending that I had very rich parents, who loved me very much and that we travelled all over the world.

155. I did not like the woman's husband. I KNEW he was not safe so made sure I was never around him on my own. On this visit I had biked to the pig shed so I stopped and got off my bike to go in to see the new litter of piglets. While I was looking at the piglets the husband came up behind me. He put his arms around me and pushed himself up against me. His thing was hard and he started rubbing while at the same time had put his hand inside my undies. I knew not to stop him or to say anything, I just had to wait for it to finish. He was getting 'grunty' but before he could finish I heard one of my foster sisters calling my name as she was coming into the pig sty. I knew I had to get her out so pulled away, gave the husband a quick smile and jovially said I need to go now. I knew that by smiling and being 'happy' my abusers knew that I was not going to say anything to get them in trouble. I took my sister by the hand and said I would dub her on the back of the bike. I was nine years old.
156. As stated my abuse was extensive. I don't believe my father was aware of what was happening. Even the time he found me in bed with the 'uncle' down the road I don't think he fully understood. I am not excusing my father, I am trying to explain how 'simple' minded my father was. My mother was a very sick woman who was incredibly damaged herself. In this way I can understand and to that extent forgive my parents for the parts they played in my abuse but what I don't understand and cannot explain is why the State did not protect me; why the State knowingly and intentionally returned me and my siblings to abusive environments. Did I or my siblings as children really not matter?

### **Education and work experience**

157. From the age of five years to eight years I had attended five primary schools, one (Masterton Central) I attended twice. These schools were, Palmerston North Central Masterton Central, Mangateretere Hastings, Masterton Central, and Carterton Primary.
158. My files show that my attendance was very poor and irregular until I was placed in my elderly foster mothers' care when I was eight years old.
159. A couple of teachers wrote comments that when I read them I felt proud, really good. One comment was "...if this child's attendance was better, I feel her progress would be excellent.... she is capable of good work...but progress is poor."
160. The other comment was "Think this girl is really intelligent but she is never at school long enough to know."
161. My enrolment at Carterton School was Mum driving me and GRO-B  
1 to the school leaving us outside the gate and told to enrol ourselves. We sat on a step outside the school. After



- the school bell rang a teacher came out and asked what we were doing there, I advised that me and [GRO-B-1] were to start school there. She took us in and we were enrolled.
162. I attended Kuranui College, in Greytown. Up until I was fifteen years old and had sat my school certificate I was living with the elderly foster mother. I then asked to be removed and was in my final placement by the time my school certificate results had been posted out, as I received the results in my new placement.
163. I clearly recall receiving my results as this was the first time I had ever been given mail addressed to me without it being opened first.
164. I completed my first degree, a Bachelor of Arts with majors in Psychology and Education from Victoria University, in 1976.
165. I then worked as a residential social worker for fourteen months in Miramar Girls Home, which had originally been the Receiving Home that I was placed in when I was first taken into care in 1957.
166. While working in Miramar I found [GRO-B-2] name scratched into one of the benches down in the secure unit. I was aware that [GRO-B] had spent some time in Miramar and then Kingsley in Christchurch.
167. Not really enjoying myself at Miramar I decided to work in a Supermarket. I had gone straight from College, completed my degree, straight into social work. It was time to take stock. While working for Woolworths in Johnsonville, where I met my husband, I had a serious car accident. I was hospitalized for three months and shortly after my release from hospital, in Palmerston North, I got married.
168. I then got a job as front receptionist in the Wellington Probation Service.
169. Because of my husband's work we moved to Levin where I worked as a Supervisor in an IHC workshop.
170. I had our two daughters in 1983 and 1986.
171. In the early 1990's the family moved to the small coastal/rural village of Pirinoa. My husband ran the store there, the girls attended the school and I worked as a cleaner and teachers' aid in my daughters' school. I was also a relief carer of a male adult cerebral palsy.
172. While living in Pirinoa I began my law degree, in my first year I drove to Featherston to catch the train to Wellington, stayed with my mother-in-law for two nights commuting in from Newlands to attend lectures and then returning to Pirinoa.

173. My marriage ended just prior to sitting my first year exams however surprisingly I passed. I, with my daughters moved to Wellington and I completed my law degree whilst raising my daughters as a sole parent.
174. Following the completion of my degree and being admitted to the Bar I worked as an operational solicitor with Child Youth and Family with subsequent name changes culminating in Oranga Tamariki.
175. I have worked in the Palmerston North Office on two separate occasions with legal responsibility to the Palmerston North, Levin, Masterton and Dannevirke offices and courts. I have also worked in the Wellington office with legal responsibility to the Porirua office and court; and the Whanganui and Taumaranui offices and courts.
176. After the Wellington Office I worked as the National Cover Solicitor for over six years. This role covered the whole country so at that time I had appeared in nearly every Family Court in the Country and appeared before every Family Court Judge. I had worked in nearly all Child Youth and Family/Oranga Tamariki offices across the country. The primary purpose of the role was to enable continuation of court matters for colleagues whilst they were on leave.
177. This role, although I was getting tired from all the travelling and living out of a suitcase for about nine months of the year, I absolutely loved it. However, following a sexual assault in a Wellington motel when covering for colleagues in the Wellington office, I went back to be an operational solicitor.
178. I mention this assault because my past saved me from this assault being possibly worse than what it was. For over forty-five minutes I talked to my assailant, a young eighteen-year-old Māori boy who clearly worked out at the gym, until he voluntarily left my motel room.
179. In July 2019 I took early retirement to assist my eldest daughter and son-in-law to care for my two grandchildren. I have been living with them in [GRO-C] since then. My other daughter and her husband with their two children live in New Plymouth. Each of my daughters has a daughter and son hence I have four grandchildren. Given my current living situation my daughter in New Plymouth gets first priority for the school holidays, so I generally have time with those grandchildren then. I video message those grandchildren most mornings.

### **The extent of State Care for my siblings**

180. Recalling all of this and writing this statement has been incredibly hard for me to do.
181. I came into care on 11 October 1957, I was two years old. I was discharged from care on 31 May 1975. I was in care for seventeen years and seven months.

182

GRO-B-1 and I were in care together in the early years but after that we were not. GRO-B-1 was in care for sixteen years. GRO-B-1 and I re-established our relationship about ten years ago. Life has not been easy for GRO-B-1

183

My siblings and I were in state care for extended periods of time, ranging between ten and seventeen years. There were times when my placements in care would overlap with the placement of one or another of my siblings.

184

Being placed alongside my siblings was however, incidental. No effort was made to place or keep us together.

185

My siblings have had children that went into care, and now some of the children of my nieces and nephews have also been placed under the care of the State. The State has now had the care of children in my family for four generations.

GRO-B



GRO-B

### **Impact of abuse**

201. As a child I was discarded, like garbage. What I had to deal with as a little girl should never have happened, especially in a 'developed' nation like New Zealand. But it did happen over and over again. And I had to make sense of it. Alternatively, I could have accepted my lot, lost myself and my soul to all the dirt and human depravity that had been inflicted on me through no fault of my own, just simply because I had been born.

202. The most significant impact of my abuse is that the abuse was against a little girl aged three years old; against a little girl aged four years old; against a little girl aged five years old; against a little girl aged six years old; against a little girl aged seven years old; against a little girl aged eight years old; against a little girl aged nine years old; against a girl aged ten years old; against a girl aged eleven years old; against a girl aged twelve years old; against a young teenager aged thirteen years old; against a young teenager aged fourteen years old.
203. Those YEARS of abuse happened because the STATE did not protect me; because the STATE KNOWINGLY and INTENTIONALLY placed me with parents that the STATE knew were not protective and because the STATE placed me in an environment that was abusive.
204. Because of the abuse perpetrated against me I have had to make sense of it all.
205. As a little girl the only way my life made any sense was to know that it was my fault; that I deserved it because I was NOTHING because "I" did not exist. That knowledge is soul destroying but it saved my life. I am not sure if I am able to explain this but here goes.
206. By accepting that "I" didn't matter, I wouldn't fight back. That by being compliant, by being acutely sensitive to my surroundings and to the people around me and knowing that if I did as I was told I would be alright. I didn't die.
207. The only person that did scare me because I did not know if I would be okay after was mum. When she 'lost' it I just hoped I would survive.
208. On the other hand, 'men' were easier. I knew that no-matter what the men did to me, it would be over soon. From a young age I knew that what was happening was wrong. However, there were times when it felt 'nice' and this really confused me and I felt 'bad'. The other 'good' thing was that I would get food, drink or lollies.
209. I knew that people were more comfortable if they felt they were smarter than me and that often if I was 'dumb' people would be nice to me. As I got older this became an issue as I slipped into the role so easily that it was a difficult 'defence' to change.
210. There is one defence that I have not changed and that is using humour to 'deflect'.
211. When the abuse, particularly the sexual and physical, stopped, it was easier for me to try and understand my past. It has taken me years, I am now sixty-six and I am still 'understanding'. I always knew that 'intellect' was important to me and that I wanted people to know that I was smart. I always knew that it was much easier for me to 'think' about things rather than 'feel' things and it was certainly very easy for me to keep my mouth shut.
212. Slowly over the years I came to know that I was someone, that it was incredibly smart of that little girl to do and think about all the things she did because it 'saved' her. Once I

acknowledged myself as a really smart little girl, I could then accept and begin to deal with changing how I thought about myself. It was ok for me to know that I did matter, that I deserved good things, that I was a good person.

213. We all need 'balance'. By this I mean that what we feel and know inside ourselves needs to match with what is happening outside of ourselves. My thought processes as a child was the best solution to match my inside world with my outside world but as my outside world began to change so it became necessary for my inside world to also change. Not sure if I have expressed that well.
214. At times I still struggle with 'either not wanting to put people out or not 'upsetting' them however the flip side to that is that I know which battles to pick.
215. I am a strong advocate for others but pretty useless when advocating for myself. I am getting better.
216. I have difficulties in accepting help but this is something that I have improved on greatly particularly with the 'advancing' years.
217. My journey has been long and lonely, at times incredibly lonely.
218. As well as the impact of my abuse there is the impact of being in care. The obvious impact is that "family" means something different to those who were not removed from their family. I don't have the experience of being a part of a large family with shared birthdays; shared Christmases; family holidays; weddings of siblings; meeting new nieces and nephews. I never had that.
219. I often wondered throughout my work life whether or not I was working alongside nieces and nephews. I think about how my daughters have so many cousins that they have never met.
220. Because of being in care and because of being abused, my siblings and I have never had the chance to sit and talk with each other about what we each experienced. I am the eldest of five sisters and two brothers, but I don't know my brothers and sisters.
221. Another impact is that I had to wait until I was twenty-one before I ever had photos of me as a child. At that time a relative of my elderly foster mother gave me five black and white photos of myself and GRO-B  
1 when we were about four and three years old. Then in my forties someone gave me a photo of me with another child when I was about eighteen months old. I treasure these photos.
222. Another impact is that to understand my past, my childhood I have had to refer to written notes; to another's interpretation of my life from their perspective. My childhood is a cardboard box full of paper.



223. In terms of 'cultural' identity I don't know what impact my being in care had. I say this because neither of my parents had strong family support, particularly my mother.
224. However, my abuse, particularly the physical and sexual abuse has had an impact on my view of the importance of 'cultural identity' for a child in need of care and/or protection. That view is that being loved by someone trumps cultural identity. I accept that my experience 'skews' my view however that view should not be discounted and does not invalidate what was my reality. Most of the physical and sexual abuse, I experienced was perpetrated against me by Māori, and that included my mother.

### **Request for my files**

225. I have requested my files from the State three times. The first was in 1978 when I was twenty-three years old and I received four and half pages of typed comments. It was known why I requested my file because as per a handwritten note on the last page stated: "This background history was prepared at the request of Elison who was hopeful of filling in some gaps in her life."
226. A very small portion of the release was helpful but the majority was not. I received four pages like the following excerpt:

"Jan 1968 YMCA Camp at Riversdale

Jan 1969 YMCA Camp at Riversdale

Feb 1969 Started High School at Kuranui College

Sept 1969 Continuing to do well at Kuranui College. Marks have been around the average other than, French which was well above. Elison is doing well at gymnastics and Basketball. She is good at sport and takes a keen interest in it.

Jan 1970 YMCA Camp at Riversdale

Sept 1970 Holiday

Dec 1970 To Rotorua for holiday

Jan 1971 YMCA Camp at Riversdale"

227. I did not find this release helpful and I knew that my file was much larger than four typed pages. Did those releasing this information honestly believe this would help me and did they honestly believe they were providing me what I was legally entitled to?
228. My second request was made in 1993 when I was 38. This release was extensive and in fact I received more information than I probably should have. However this release really did help me in my search to understand my past, my childhood and it 'filled in gaps'.

229. In 2018, I made another request. That request resulted in my receiving page after page of redacted information, there were hundreds of pages completely redacted, no print on the page. In that release, which was so heavily redacted, for one of the bundles there were 306 pages and only 77 pages were not redacted. Of those 77 pages that I was able to read, 31 were in relation to the non-payment of maintenance by my father and two were transit sheets. This means there were only 44 pages about me that were not redacted.
230. This infuriated me because seeing blacked page after page was like witnessing a continuous stamping out of my existence.
231. This release also made me question the integrity of Oranga Tamariki's release of information in my third request.
232. In relation to the case note in 1958 when it was apparent that the return home of myself and GRO-B-1 had failed, there was a record of Mum going to Masterton with us children to stay with a friend, there was a statement about that friend. In the 2018 release of information that statement was as follows: - "Mrs. GRO-B (blacked out)".
233. I recalled immediately from the second release what had been blacked out. It was the word alcoholic. I recalled it because the first time I read it I was angry that Social Welfare did not care that mum was taking us to an alcoholic friend to stay at. There was no comment to Mum that staying with an alcoholic was not appropriate. I recall also thinking that the Lower Hutt office were probably glad to be rid of us and that Masterton could deal with us. Another redaction in the 2018 release related to the second return in 1960. The case note has the first paragraph redacted. What was not redacted was later paragraphs that refer to the power recently being turned off, but then turned back on for the children's sake. Then there is further redaction.
234. What was redacted at the start is that mum went into the office to 'drop a bombshell' that she was going for a separation from dad. That dad was back to old habits of drinking and women. Comment about a Detective forever on her doorstep. Allegation about a false cheque and a car not owned by dad being sold. Dad was away for three weeks during which time she had no money and had trouble feeding the children.
235. Final redaction is Mum advising that Dad accused her of going out with other men and that he cursed and swore at everyone.
236. What the redactions told me is that the organisation was 'covering up' parts of the file. Firstly, in regards to the first return to the care of our parents, the fact that Social Welfare knowingly allowed mum and us children to stay with an alcoholic and secondly that less than a month after my and GRO-B-1 second return to the care of our parents, the

home environment was already breaking down; that despite this knowledge Social Welfare continued to allow us children to stay.

### **Current concerns**

237. There are excellent social workers who are committed to children and young persons, they are skilled and highly competent, they are dedicated, routinely going the extra mile. And there are social workers who are none of the above.
238. I worked as an operational solicitor for 20 years in many Oranga Tamariki offices across this country. This has given me the unique experience of working inside the very organisation, and its predecessors, that 'failed' me my siblings and thousands of other survivors.
239. Before I start I will respond to the question of 'given my history and my view that I was failed by the system, why did I work for that system?'
240. Firstly, it made sense that my past experiences would help me, that those experiences would inform me in carrying out my role.
241. Secondly, I had hoped that I could make a difference.
242. Thirdly I wanted to let young people know that it was possible to be successful; that success had many faces; that where you came from, the family you came from, the crap that had happened in your life through no fault of your own did not define you.
243. I am aware that since my time working at Oranga Tamariki that there have been a lot of legislative changes, changes to how the organisation and community agencies work together, and changes to the mindset of policies and practice. But I am still of the view that core issues still exist there, including lack of funding, social work resourcing and training.
244. Statutory social workers are at the hard end of social work. They have huge powers, but they also have corresponding huge obligations. Therefore, although they have completed their social work degrees, further training is required regarding the legislation and how that legislation impacts on their work.
245. I am not sure whether this can be incorporated into their social work training or whether it is best left to Oranga Tamariki to continue to provide that training through operational solicitors from Oranga Tamariki or whether there should be lawyers with a specific role to train social workers.
246. I believe that caseload numbers need to ensure that a social worker has the time to do quality social work. To achieve this will require more social workers therefore more money.
247. Good social work practice should, while having welfare and best interests of the child as the first and paramount consideration, also have a focus on working with the family, not



- just the child/young person coming into care. There has always been a lack of caregivers and there always will be, hence focusing on the family unit and providing the support it needs to enable a child/young person to remain safely in that unit makes good economic and practical sense. Therefore, funding is needed to provide the family unit with the support it needs.
248. This will also impact on the number of social workers needed and caseloads. So adequate funding is required.
249. If there is to be a focus on finding family/whānau that share the same cultural identity of the child, then Oranga Tamariki needs the appropriate level of resourcing to ensure that there are sufficient staff numbers to undertake these searches. This requires adequate funding.
250. Also, there will need to be reliance on local iwi to ensure that appropriately skilled persons do this job.
251. With respect to home for life my personal view is that all children have a right to a safe, loving home. They have the right to feel that they belong. In my view this is one of the most important rights of a child. If that right is not achieved through a family that shares the same cultural identity as the child, whether that is because no family is available or because there was an inadequate search for an appropriate family, then a child should not be removed from 'home for life' because a year later a family with the same cultural identity is located.
252. I am concerned about the disproportionate number of Māori families that Oranga Tamariki is involved in. Putting explanations of 'the impact of colonisation on Māori' to one side, at its most basic it is clear that unless you believe that Māori are born with a predisposition to abusing their children, then the problem is not being Māori, the problem is the prevailing colonial system.
253. This may seem a simplistic approach but in my view the problem and answer is simple. The problem is the abuse of our children and the answer is to stop abusing our children.
254. Care and protection, healing and restoring positive family dynamics are human issues, social issues. Abuse is a human issue, it is caused by humans against humans. Regardless of culture the problem is the same and likewise the answer is the same. My view is that culture can inform ways of how to address the problem but what is crucial is having highly skilled and competent people who have studied and trained to address abuse in all its forms and this will include social workers.

255. Also crucial is taking responsibility and being accountable for what as a parent you have done or not done. This applies to all regardless of ethnicity, cultural identity. This point leads me to my final concern.
256. It has always frustrated me that in our current legislation there is an expressly stated expectation that children and young persons be accountable and accept responsibility for their behaviour and yet there is no corresponding legislative expectation that adults whether they be parents, caregivers be accountable and accept responsibility for their behaviour that has resulted in the removal of their children from their care.
257. If we expect our children and young people to take responsibility and be accountable, then the adults who have the obligations to ensure that the rights of their children and young people are fulfilled should also take responsibility and be held accountable for not fulfilling the obligations they owe their children. Likewise, Oranga Tamariki and other organisations that have a legal obligation to children and young people should take responsibility and be held accountable if that organisation's legal obligation is either not fulfilled or undertaken in such a way that results in the abuse of children and young people.

#### *How to prevent future abuse*

258. Firstly, we have to accept that as a country, as a society New Zealand is not good at protecting and caring for its children and young people. Our stats on abuse for a developed country are an embarrassment.
259. Secondly, our mindset has to be 'enough is enough' and that we have to 'get it right this time'. We must be committed to children more than we are committed to other issues such as economic growth, armed forces, education, the housing issue whatever because it is the children who, as future adults, will find the answers to all the above.
260. I am concerned that already in this inquiry there was a recent request for changes to terms of reference which ultimately limited the scope of the current inquiry because of money. I understand that the inquiry plans to continue to look into issues after 1999 but the concern, for me, is that cost has already reared its ugly head as a justification to not do the job correctly. This leads to my final point.
261. Thirdly we have to accept that this is a huge problem therefore requires a huge answer; a response that is going to need money, lots of it if there is to be the resourcing needed to address this problem.

**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:

25 / 09 / 2021



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