

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

**Statement No:** WITN0610001

**Dated:** 17.01.2022

## ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

**WITNESS STATEMENT OF** GRO-A Mr EV

I, GRO-A Mr EV, will say as follows:

### 1. Introduction

#### Background

- 1.1 My full name is GRO-A Mr EV. I was born on GRO-B 1964 in Takapuna, Auckland. I am Pākehā and I am Deaf. My family are all hearing – I am the only one who is Deaf. When I was born, my mother gave me away.
- 1.2 From when I was very young, I was looked after by my foster parents in Te Atatū. Later, my parents moved to Cambridge. As soon as I was old enough, I was sent to Kelston School for the Deaf (**Kelston**) as a boarding student. I was a boarding student at Kelston from 1969 until 1982. I don't know if I was asked about going there. I was dropped off at Deaf school by my grandmother.
- 1.3 I would still go home to my parents in the school holidays. My parents and my siblings could only communicate with me in a very basic way. They did not know how to sign. My father had finger spelling signing, and my brother had a little bit of basic sign.
- 1.4 My evidence is about the abuse and neglect that I experienced when I was a student at Kelston.

### Life at Kelston

- 1.5 In general, Kelston was a good school, although I was not the perfect student and could be naughty at times - I was a normal kid. I remember arriving at Kelston on my first day. Mr Young was the principal at the time. He kept talking at me, but I had no idea what he was saying. I was just sent on my way. I slowly learnt to sign by communicating with other older kids – that was how I learned to communicate. We played touch rugby and soccer, and went shopping – all those parts of school were really good.
- 1.6 I was a boarding student the whole time that I was at Kelston. The boarding house had lots of dorm rooms with a kitchen and a big hall. The girls and the boys slept separately, and we were separated by age group. The youngest kids slept in 12-bed dorms, then you moved into the eight-bed dorms. The oldest students got to sleep in four-bed dorms.
- 1.7 Before Mr GRO-B-1 arrived, I enjoyed school. I liked my classes and my teachers. I remember we learnt math, reading and art. We would draw and write things and send them home to our families. I remember learning about astronomy.
- 1.8 Throughout my education, none of my teachers used much sign language. They mostly wrote on the board and spoke. They did not use the New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) that we use today. It was different then. There was a bit of old sign and oralism – but no Total Communication. I had left school by the time Total Communication was introduced.
- 1.9 Some of my teachers were really patient with us. Mr Bury and Mr Thomson would take their time to explain things to us. If we got something wrong or we did not understand, Mr Thomson always explained it so clearly. He was the best teacher. Mr Bury taught us life skills like cooking and woodwork – he was great. Mr Thompson used to do magic trick and he took us for science, math and astronomy. He explained everything clearly.
- 1.10 Both these teachers used more sign language than others. My father had been in contact with Mr Bury. My father taught me English words. I had such a bad education – Mr Bury and Mr Thompson were great but apart from that I had a bad education.

## 2. Abuse at Kelston

### Psychological abuse and educational neglect

- 2.1 Mr GRO-B-1 taught me for two years, from around 1978 to 1979, when I was about 13 to 14 years old. For 30 years he was harassing and abusing children at different schools. I don't know how old he was.
- 2.2 Mr GRO-B-1 used to be in the army. He had a hard face and he always wore an army jacket. When I asked him if he was in the army, he said "Yes I was, I'm a hard man". I always wonder if maybe he was traumatised himself. From observing his behaviour, it was obvious to me that Mr GRO-B-1 had anger management issues. He could not control his own behaviour.
- 2.3 Mr GRO-B-1 always had such a bad attitude. He was a know-it-all. He thought we were all dumb and he made us feel that we could never answer his questions correctly. If we got an answer wrong he would yell at us, "You're wrong!". He would go around all of the students, "You're wrong! You're wrong! You're wrong!". How could we possibly respond being spoken to like that?
- 2.4 Mr GRO-B-1 repeatedly told us that we were dumb. It really took our confidence away. I had never seen that sort of discrimination before. It was so surprising because the teachers I had before then were great.
- 2.5 In Mr GRO-B-1's class, we always tried to watch out for each other. We tried to prevent situations with Mr GRO-B-1 from escalating, but it was hard when Mr GRO-B-1 was always on at us. There were so many times that we would tell Mr GRO-B-1 that we were upset about what he was doing, or we would ask him why he hit us or kicked us, but Mr GRO-B-1 never gave us any sort of response.
- 2.6 All of us students tried to keep away from him as much as we could. He was always going around and damaging our lives. We all lost confidence from the bullying and abuse that we endured for those two years.

### **My friend** GRO-B-2

- 2.7 There was one student in my class, GRO-B-2 who Mr GRO-B-1 really laid into. I would tell Mr GRO-B-1 to leave him alone. Mr GRO-B-1 would just tell me to shut up. He would tell us that GRO-B-2 was at fault, that he was dumb and that we were all dumb.

- 2.8 [GRO-B-2] became so depressed. We would try to comfort him and tell him to ignore Mr [GRO-B-1] [GRO-B-2] kept doing badly at math and Mr [GRO-B-1] kept bullying him for it. I remember at lunch time I would sit with [GRO-B-2] and try to help him catch up in math so that Mr [GRO-B-1] would leave him alone. [GRO-B-2] was such a good guy.
- 2.9 Around September 1978, we all went home for the school holidays. When we came back to school, one of the students had cut an article out of the newspaper. Apparently, [GRO-B-2] had been walking near some train tracks. The train driver saw the boy and pulled the horn, but the train couldn't stop [GRO-B-2] was hit and died. [GRO-C]  
[GRO-C]
- 2.10 All of the teachers went to the funeral but none of the students did because no one told us. We had two minutes silence but that was it. All of the teachers stood up and said something about how sorry they were. When it was Mr [GRO-B-1]'s turn, he said "[GRO-B-2] was my friend, not your friend. He was my friend. That's why I went to the funeral". What Mr [GRO-B-1] said made no sense and it just upset us.
- 2.11 We went back to the classroom. We were all sitting quietly, remembering [GRO-B-2]. Suddenly, Mr [GRO-B-1] lost it. He picked up a table and just threw it across the room.

### **Educational neglect**

- 2.12 Mr [GRO-B-1] did not teach us normal lessons. I do not remember him ever teaching us English reading. I do not think Mr [GRO-B-1] knew how to sign properly. He did not use sign language in class, except for maybe a few basic signs and gestures. He taught us army stuff, like Morse code. Morse code was not a normal part of our school programme. Mr [GRO-B-1] only made us do this because of his experience in the army.
- 2.13 If we got the Morse code wrong, Mr [GRO-B-1] would make us do it again and again until we got it right. It was not fair to try to make us learn Morse code. We were never going to be able to master it. It did not make sense to us.
- 2.14 When we were learning Morse code, Mr [GRO-B-1] would set up makeshift cardboard cubicles around us so that we could not see each other, and we could not see how Mr [GRO-B-1] was bullying anyone else.
- 2.15 One day, we were in the gym and we were supposed to be doing PE. However, instead of PE, Mr [GRO-B-1] just ordered us to mop the floors. We didn't even participate in PE. We just mopped the floors. Once another group of students came in, we were told to just get out.

- 2.16 Sometimes Mr GRO-B-1 would make us go to the shops to buy things for him. He would say thanks when we came back but then he would ask for something else and we would have to go back to the shops again. Mr Bury saw Mr GRO-B-1 doing this. He confronted GRO-B-1 and told the kids to go back to class. Mr Bury told us not to go back to the shops. We did not have to go to the shops for Mr GRO-B-1 again after that.

### **Physical abuse**

- 2.17 Mr GRO-B-1 had a black and orange striped cane. He always hit us over the hands with it. It really, really hurt. He would also slap us around the head and ears. It was such an ongoing thing. We were all constantly hit, slapped, kicked and caned. Mr GRO-B-1 created an environment of fear in the classroom.
- 2.18 There was another time when Mr GRO-B-1 threw a softball at my face. This was during a PE class – I think he threw the ball at my face on purpose because he was frustrated.
- 2.19 GRO-B-3 was one of the only students who would stand up to Mr GRO-B-1. He was Māori and he was quite tall and strong. He would tell Mr GRO-B-1 to stop hitting us. One time he got right in Mr GRO-B-1's face. They stood face to face for some time before GRO-B-3 sat down and the class just continued.
- 2.20 If kids arrived late on the bus, Mr GRO-B-1 would hit them on the head with a clipboard. This included kids as young as five. I remember another teacher confronted Mr GRO-B-1 and told him not to hit the students. He told him, "Don't you dare touch these kids. Don't touch them!".

### ***Fighting with staff and students***

- 2.21 I remember Mr GRO-B-1 asked one student, GRO-B-4 to come over to him while all the rest of us were watching. He just laid into GRO-B-4. He gave him a hiding and we couldn't work out why. Mr GRO-B-1 punched and kneed him around the kidneys. When Mr GRO-B-1 was done, he told GRO-B-4 to go and sit down. Then he turned to us and said that only GRO-B-4 was his friend, and that we were not his friends. This was confusing as he had just given GRO-B-4 a hiding. GRO-B-4 was sore from the beating but nothing was said and nothing was done. I don't understand it to this day.
- 2.22 At lunchtime, GRO-B-4 asked us why that happened. He did not understand the reason. We did not know, but there were so many stories like this all the time.

- 2.23 [GRO-B-4] passed away in the early 2000s. When we were at [GRO-B-4]'s funeral, Mr [GRO-B-1] was there. I remember looking at him and I was so angry that he was there. Mr [GRO-B-1] left the funeral after a while. He did not talk to anyone. He did not even say sorry for what he had done.
- 2.24 After the funeral, we went to the pub and we talked about how Mr [GRO-B-1] had shown no respect to our mate. He should not have been there.
- 2.25 Around 1975 there was another staff member called Maurice Ratapu who had a fight with Mr [GRO-B-1]. A fight broke out after Mr [GRO-B-1] told him to clean up a table, which wasn't his job.

### **Art class**

- 2.26 I remember one particular instance when we were in art class. I think Mr [GRO-B-1] was telling us to pack up and go back to class. As I was leaving, Mr [GRO-B-1] grabbed me by the shoulder. He rammed his knee straight into my leg. It was so painful. I yelled at him, "Fuck you!". [A boarding staff member], Peter Hay, also saw what happened. Mr Hay and Mr [GRO-B-1] had an argument about it, but nothing else was done. Generally, Mr Hay would confront Mr [GRO-B-1] about abusing us. Mr Hay knew we were suffering. The students would have a sore head or leg. He told Mr [GRO-B-1] to stop and Mr [GRO-B-1] just ignored him.
- 2.27 [GRO-B-3] also confronted Mr [GRO-B-1] about the incident in art class. He told Mr [GRO-B-1] that he had cousins in Black Power that would bash him. One time, Black Power came and waved at Mr [GRO-B-1] from their car on the side of the road. I saw this. Mr [GRO-B-1] just ran off.

### **Gym**

- 2.28 Every Friday, we went to the gym. One time, we were climbing through an obstacle course in the gym when Mr [GRO-B-1] told a student, [GRO-B-5], to jump off something. As [GRO-B-5] jumped, Mr [GRO-B-1] pulled the thing away, so he fell straight to the floor. Mr [GRO-B-1] kicked him on the ground and told him to get up. [GRO-B-5] was a big guy and he got back up and he challenged Mr [GRO-B-1] who backed down. We congratulated [GRO-B-5] for his bravery.

- 2.29 There was another incident in the gym, with a student called GRO-B-6. While GRO-B-6 was climbing on something, Mr GRO-B-1 began shaking it so that she fell from the top. Mr GRO-B-1 did not even check if she was okay, he just walked off. Polly, the nurse, asked what happened. GRO-B-6 said she had a sore arm, so she was taken by ambulance to the hospital. They confirmed her arm was broken and gave her a bandage. There were four other teachers who were there, in the gym. When GRO-B-6 fell she walked out the door, and even though they were there, and they did nothing. They were cowards.
- 2.30 The next day, we asked GRO-B-6 if she was okay. We were all yelling at Mr GRO-B-1 and telling him that he broke GRO-B-6 arm. He just stormed off and said something along the lines of, "I don't care". He never apologised. He was never sorry. He didn't care.

### 3. Impacts of abuse

#### Talking about the abuse with Deaf friends

- 3.1 At the time, we all talked to each other about what was happening to us. We knew it was wrong. The problem was that no adults would listen to us. The teachers did not help us and most of us could not communicate well with our parents.
- 3.2 We would ask each other if anyone had told their parents but everyone always said that they had not. I could not tell my parents what was happening because we had communication issues. I think that hearing kids would have found it much easier to have these conversations with their parents. It was so much harder for us. Our English was not great. Our education was not great.
- 3.3 I knew that Mr GRO-B-1 was not only abusing the students in my class. There were other students experiencing the same thing as us. For example, there was a Māori woman called GRO-B-7 who was also a student when I was at Kelston, but we were not in the same classes. One day, she came up to me and she asked me if I had been bullied by Mr GRO-B-1. I told her I had.
- 3.4 GRO-B-7 told me that she experienced the same thing. I was bullied by Mr GRO-B-1 for two years, but she went through it for *four* years with him. She asked me if Mr GRO-B-1 used to slap me for silly little things. Mr GRO-B-1 would always slap and hit us. GRO-B-7 told me that one time she did such a small thing wrong, but Mr GRO-B-1 slapped her for it. I could not believe it. She was a woman! I had never heard of a girl being slapped before – that was wrong.

3.5 I remember we talked about how our parents were paying taxes to pay this man to come into class and abuse us. [GRO-B-7] was very upset. Me and [GRO-B-7] tried to support each other. [GRO-B-7] and I were astonished that Mr [GRO-B-1] was being paid to constantly slap us.

3.6 In my opinion, my class and [GRO-B-7]'s class were intentionally kept at a lower level. We were brainwashed not to tell anyone what was happening. Mr [GRO-B-1] did this by always telling us we were stupid, and by physically abusing us. He picked on all of us.

#### **Talking about the abuse with family and teachers**

3.7 I talked to Mr Bury and Mr Thomson about how Mr [GRO-B-1] was treating us and that we had all lost so much confidence. They helped explain things to us and told us not to worry. They helped to fill in the gaps that Mr [GRO-B-1] was not teaching us.

3.8 I do not think any of the other teachers liked Mr [GRO-B-1]. They tried to keep their distance. I am still upset that none of the teachers reported Mr [GRO-B-1] to the police at the time. They should have reported him and had him arrested for child abuse. They could have stopped him, but nothing was done.

3.9 My parents would ask me how school was, and I would just tell them it was okay. English is not my first language. That word "abuse" was foreign to us. I have only really learnt what abuse meant as the years have gone on.

3.10 When I was being taught by Mr [GRO-B-1], I knew what bullying meant but I did not know what abuse was. Over time, and I guess through osmosis, I have started to learn more words that describe what happened to me. It was my family members that helped me to fill in the educational gaps that I had. My family members helped me to understand that what happened to me was wrong.

3.11 I remember it was around the time we left school that I told my brother and father about the abuse but the only word I knew was "bullying". I showed them a photo of Mr [GRO-B-1] and wrote the word "bully". They had a bit of a conversation between them but I don't know what I said.

3.12 At the time, we were told to tell the principal, Mr Young, about what happened to us. Mr [GRO-B-1] completely twisted our story. His version was completely different from what we told Mr Young, but there was nothing we could do about it. Mr [GRO-B-1] kept teaching at Kelston.



### Impact on my education and my confidence

- 3.13 After Mr [GRO-B-1], I had two really good teachers. Mr Bury and Mr Thomson were both great. With learning came confidence. Mr Thomson helped me get my confidence back after those two awful years with Mr [GRO-B-1]. I started doing so much better in class, but the abuse and lack of education we suffered from Mr [GRO-B-1] still had an impact.
- 3.14 Mr Bury taught us great life skills in our education. He was a good man. He taught us how to drive (as well as my uncle), how to save, how to buy a house and save money. Lots of things like that. Mr Bury used to congratulate me on how good I was at driving. Every person in our class passed their driver's test. I was so proud of myself when I got my licence.

### Life after Kelston

- 3.15 When we went to high school, we left Mr [GRO-B-1] behind. However, we kept hearing stories that Mr [GRO-B-1] was still abusing children at the primary school. Mr [GRO-B-1] only taught at the primary school, not the high school.
- 3.16 When I left school, we all started talking about the experiences of abuse that we went through. I heard so many more stories about Mr [GRO-B-1]. There had been no action after we left school. Nothing has happened.
- 3.17 I am incredibly frustrated and angry about the abuse I suffered at [GRO-C]. I was a young person, who needed to be supported and protected. Instead, I was yelled at and assaulted.
- 3.18 I tried to move on after I left Mr [GRO-B-1], but I am still emotionally traumatised from what happened to me. None of us can let it go. I will never forget it. I have mental trauma now. I am very wary of other people, because of the abuse I suffered from Mr [GRO-B-1]. This has caused me to be isolated from and suspicious of other people.
- 3.19 I am angry that other staff knew what was going on, but did not do something about the way Mr [GRO-B-1] was treating me and the other children. When Mr [GRO-B-1] finally resigned, he was even given an award to celebrate him. It was bullshit – the staff were blind. They congratulated them. What a laugh. This made us re-visit the abuse that we had suffered.
- 3.20 I do not understand why the abuse occurred to me. I am still so shocked and bewildered by it. From class, to class, to class, this abuse continued for years.

#### 4. Redress

##### Cooper Legal claim

- 4.1 In 2012, I started working with a lawyer, Sonja Cooper, to make a claim to the Ministry of Education. I spoke to Sonja Cooper after I went to the police. There were a group of us sharing our stories.
- 4.2 The legal process was difficult to follow. I kept asking my lawyer and the Ministry of Education, when is Mr [GRO-B-1] going to be held accountable? When is action going to be taken? When is justice going to be served? How many more files does the Government have to read to understand how much abuse occurred?
- 4.3 In 2018, I received \$5,000 from the Ministry of Education. That was it. I did not think this was enough.

##### Police complaint

- 4.4 In 2008, I went to the Henderson Police and I reported Mr [GRO-B-1]. I spoke to a police officer, Constable Deborah Leahy. I went to the police with a group of about five or six other Deaf students. We had an interpreter with us when we spoke to the police and we all spoke to Constable Leahy at the same time.
- 4.5 I remember that [GRO-B-8] told the police how Mr [GRO-B-1] came in and watched the girls while they were getting changed in the girls' changing room. [GRO-B-8] only had a towel on. All of the girls were telling Mr [GRO-B-1] to get out of the room, to protect their modesty. He was intruding on their space. It should have been a female teacher telling them to hurry up. It was shocking. They were women – he shouldn't have done that. He would also come into the boys changing room and hit us to hurry up.
- 4.6 I think Constable Leahy took a statement from us, but the police have not taken any initiative. There have been such long delays. The whole police process felt like a waste of time. I do not remember ever hearing anything back from Constable Leahy.

##### Disclosure to the Confidential Listening and Assistance Service

- 4.7 I spoke to Judge Henwood from the Confidential Listening and Assistance Service (CLAS) in 2010. I understand that CLAS is linked to the Royal Commission. The session was recorded but nothing has changed. Nothing happened afterwards.

## 5. Looking forward

- 5.1 Based on what I experienced, I do not think anyone who is ex-army should be allowed to be a teacher at all. It should be banned. Teachers need to be qualified and they should not have an army background.
- 5.2 I want the rest of the Deaf community to come forward and speak as well. If you put Mr GRO-B-1's face on TV 1, on the news, I am sure that so many Deaf people would be able to point at his face and say, this is him, this is the man who abused me.
- 5.3 When we were children, so many of us were unable to communicate with our parents. We could not get the words out. There would be so many adults today who would recognise Mr GRO-B-1 and remember being abused.
- 5.4 So much time has passed now. I just want Mr GRO-B-1 to be arrested. Mr GRO-B-1 is quite old now and he could pass away soon without ever being accountable for what he has done. The delay has been really problematic. This is a really serious situation.
- 5.5 The Government needs to stop wasting time. We have all been holding onto this trauma for so long. I just want to be able to let it go and be able to move on, but I cannot do this while Mr GRO-B-1 continues to be free.
- 5.6 This is the fourth time that I have told my story. I told the Police, I told the Ministry of Education, I told CLAS and now I have told the Royal Commission. I want something to finally happen as a result of what I have said. I am still talking about the same problem. Still, nothing has been done. I hope that if we keep sharing what happened, then the case against Mr GRO-B-1 will keep growing.
- 5.7 I want to see equity for Deaf people. I want the Police to treat Deaf people equally. I want power for Deaf people.

### 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: 17.01.22 2022

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