

Witness Name: GRO-A Ms NN

Statement No: WITN0544001

Dated: 12 August 2021

ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

WITNESS STATEMENT OF GRO-A Ms NN

I, GRO-A Ms NN state:

**Introduction**

Nō Te Tai Rawhiti ahau

Ko Ngati Porou te iwi

1. My legal name is GRO-A Ms NN I was born on GRO-A 1972.
2. My evidence is about the abuse I experienced while living with my family that led to the State being involved with my family and also about the abuse I experienced. I spent most of my childhood being shuttled around different places.
3. Today, I have a partner and family of my own. While I still suffer from the trauma of my experiences as a child, I am proud to say that none of my children have been involved with CYFS. Unfortunately, my extended family are still in the system, we now have generations who have suffered. It is for this reason that I am speaking out about my experiences.

*Whānau*

4. I am the third eldest of ten children but when I was growing up I thought I was the eldest. I found out about two older brothers when I was about 35.
5. My mother is European and my father is Māori. There are three different fathers to all ten of us children.
6. My father told me that when he was young he was forced to change his name to a Pākehā name when he went to school and he was beaten for speaking te reo. As I was his only daughter, he tried to teach me some te reo when I was a child. My father blames Pākehā for everything and to this day, he is an angry man. He still carries the pain from his own childhood.

7. When I was young, I learned that my mother's family were unhappy that she had gone and had children to a Māori man. Similarly, my grandparents on my father's side were unhappy that my father got a European woman pregnant. As children we were torn between two different cultures, and so we were subjected to two different upbringings where my father's Māori side wanted us to be Māori, and I would get thrashed by my mother if I dared to try to speak Māori or learn it.
8. We suffered a lot of conflict and a lot of hurt because there was no give on either side. We were just in the middle. My mother's family did not identify us as children; they called us mongrels. I recall the one time my mother's side visited us; they looked at us like animals.
9. There was also conflict between my father's family and my mother about who would raise me. My father's family wanted to take care of me because I was my father's only daughter, and I was named after my very staunch Māori grandmother. My grandmother's name was [GRO-B] (meaning [GRO-B]), and I was given the name [GRO-A] in honour of that. Even though my father's family desperately wanted me, my mother refused to relinquish me because then she would lose her benefit.
10. Growing up, we did not have a good relationship with either of our parents and we had very little support from them.

### Early Years

11. We were brought up rough. The best way I can describe our upbringing is that it was survive or die. I remember I would worry a lot about getting fed and worry about everything because I had to. We had to grow up fast.
12. My parents separated when I was about eight years old. We were living in a state house in Porirua. My mother was left with us children and my father would come and go. My mother turned to alcohol to cope with the breakup.
13. At this point we were living on [GRO-A] in [GRO-A]. My mother neglected us and treated us badly. She began having a lot of parties at our house and that is when the doors started opening for my mother's friends to take advantage of me. My mother was dealing with grief from my father leaving her, she was consumed by her alcoholism and she had no time for us children. There wasn't any protection for us children while so many different people were in and out of the house. We were completely neglected.
14. We lived in a cul-de-sac and so all the kids who lived on the street would come to our house when parties were on. Us children were put upstairs and forgotten about. At any one time there would be about 30 to 50 people downstairs in the house, drinking and partying. It was safest for us to stay upstairs and avoid the adults while they were drinking.
15. As I was the oldest of the siblings, I began to care for my younger siblings. At that stage I had four younger brothers to look after. I was shipped around to a lot of the different houses in the cul-de-sac to look after other people's kids, and sometimes I would take my siblings with me.



We were constantly moving from house to house. During this time, one of our next-door neighbours sexually assaulted me. She was a female. I did not know what it was at the time. All my siblings were sleeping downstairs while it was happening. She would have been about 18, so she was a lot older than me, and her life was not good either but she knew that what she did was wrong.

16. My school, [GRO-A], was very close to our house. It was a very small community and everyone at that school knew everybody. At this point in time, I coped with my trauma by playing up. One of the teachers started taking me aside to ask me if I was okay. When I reflect on those times with her, I think she was frustrated that nothing was happening. I think she felt powerless to do anything more.
17. I ended up telling my teachers a little bit about what had happened to me. I found out later that one of the teachers had gone to my mother and my mother played it down. I think that was when my teachers got social workers to come round to the house. I don't remember who the social workers were, I just remember them coming and asking me all these questions about what had happened. I remember that not long after that, my mother dragged me down to the doctor's surgery in [GRO-A] and I was put on a bed and a male doctor examined me. I remember my mother screaming at me because I would not lay still for the doctor. I would have been around 10 years old. I can recall the doctor and his office clearly.
18. Reflecting on that time, my siblings and I were subjected to a lot of racism. My mother was blonde and blue eyed and it was very obvious to me that the social workers, teachers, and police felt sorry for her being left with all these brown children to raise. You could see the pity on their faces. They never seemed to question her or challenge her; they just accepted what she said. I felt that they looked down on us because we were brown and they treated her differently because she was white and attractive and on her own. She could talk the talk and could change her voice to suit the situation.
19. From a young age, I learned that people would respect people like my mother before they listened to a young Māori girl like me. As a child, I learned to read the signs, the looks and the facial expressions.

*Moving to live with my father – 10 years old*

20. After the visit to the doctor, my mother sent me to live with my father in Petone. He was working at the Petone foreshore and he had a little one-bedroom flat. I would stay in the house alone while my Dad went to work, day in, day out. There were no other kids living out there, I was the only one. Some of Dad's work colleagues would often come back to Dad's flat and they would have a few drinks. Dad would get drunk, go to sleep, and some of the other workers would think that I was then 'fair game'.

*Returning to my mother – 10 years old*

21. I started playing up badly for my Dad and after a while he sent me back to my mother. This was the point in time when stuff really started getting out of control. The social workers weren't

doing anything, and I knew that because I was still being sent back to my Mum's where the partying and abuse were happening.

22. Looking back on that time, I really struggled with the fact that nobody was listening to me and nobody did anything when I did say something. Even though I talked about what was going on, each time I got picked up from running away I was always taken back to my mother. Things with my mother got really, really bad. She had all these different men coming through the house.
23. It felt as though people wouldn't believe that my mother could be doing anything wrong because of who she was and how she looked.
24. At the time I was still caring for my siblings. We were spending a lot of time living under the house. One night when things were bad, I picked up my siblings, opened up a bedroom window and I threw them out the window, and I climbed out the window myself and took them all down to this trapdoor and pushed them under the house. I made sure they were okay then snuck back into the kitchen, grabbed some bread, and we lived down there for four days.
25. Another traumatic event which stuck in my mind is one of my mother's boyfriends running around the house in the middle of the night with an axe in his hand, wanting to slice us all up. There were a whole lot of police officers in our house, and they were trying to capture him, the guy was off his head. The next morning the social workers arrived to speak to us but nothing happened and we were left there.
26. That was the pattern each time. There were years and years of these instances of abuse that happened where social workers came afterwards to the house. But the social workers did nothing.
27. My Aunt on my father's side tried to have me removed. She told me that she had rung the social workers and asked if she could take care of me. She said she wanted me to come and live with her, and my cousins. She would constantly be ringing Social Welfare and asking to take me into her care, but they wouldn't remove me or let her care for me. They wouldn't listen to her.
28. I know my Aunt fought for us for a very long time because she could see that things were terribly wrong on so many levels. It was obvious to anyone who was looking. I have thought a lot about why I couldn't go to my Aunt. My Uncle worked and my cousins were well looked after. She is Māori and it is hard not to wonder if that had something to do with it.
29. It would have saved years and years and years of abuse if somebody had have just said, "Let me speak with this aunt", the one aunt that was fighting black and blue to remove us and nobody gave her the time. My Aunt would sneak us food and she'd say to me, "I've rung them again, I've rung them again", but I think in the end she gave up telling me that because she was building my hopes up. Right up until recently when she passed away, she would tell me that she had tried but nobody acted on what she was saying. It seemed as though it was easier for them to just put us in a car and take us back to our mother.



30. The more that social workers came to the house, the angrier my mother would get. When the social workers left we would get another beating, and because I was the oldest, I'd bear the brunt of it. Nobody came back to check on us after a visit.
31. One of the worst hidings was when my brother was bent over a couch and mother whipped him with the jug cord. He was the youngest of us five and my other brothers were hiding in the room. I thought my mother was seriously going to kill my brother that day. I remember that I got in between my mother and my brother, which enraged her even more. I can't even describe the sound of my brother's screams that day. It was like a noise I had never heard before. I remember I picked him up off the couch afterwards and he was covered in welts – all over his body.
32. We lived next door to a community police base and I know that they would've heard him screaming. To this day, I think that the police and social workers were turning a blind eye to what was going on.
33. At some point my mother had gone out and I was traumatised by seeing what happened to my brother. I grabbed my brother and run. We had no plan, no food, no idea where to go. We somehow made it all the way to Tawa. We slept at a park in Tawa for a few days, hiding from everybody. I would have stayed there, but my brother started getting hungry. I remember that he was so freezing, I had to bury him under the pine needles at night to sleep.
34. We were cold and hungry so we came out of hiding and started walking again. We were quickly spotted and picked up by my cousins who took us back their house and the Police came and spoke to us. My brother was petrified, and I told the police officers not to take us back. I remember saying "Take us anywhere but there, just don't take us back because she will kill us".
35. When we arrived at my mother's, there were social workers there. The social workers took us into the house, they sat me down with my brother and they said that everything will be okay, and that was it. When they left, my mother unleashed all her fury on us. I got a really good beating that night. The social workers didn't come back after that.

*Porirua Psychiatric Hospital*

36. When I was around 12 or 13 years old, my mother started leaving the house for days on end. We had no food and I learned that cooking sugar and butter made toffee. We lived on toffee for days. My mother was gone for so long and I didn't know what to do with myself. One night I fed my brothers toffee, put them to sleep, and I climbed up into this top cupboard where I found all these pills. I pulled them all down, tipped them all on the bench and I took the lot. I don't believe I was trying to kill myself. I think it was a cry for help. I really did not know what I was doing or trying to do.
37. After taking the pills, I walked down the main highway that links up to GRO-A to GRO-A, and I collapsed. All I remember was the ambulance officer telling me to breathe. The next thing I remember is waking up in Wellington Hospital. There was a social worker on

either side of me and the doctor told me they had pumped my stomach. I had no idea what that meant. The social workers were asking me "why did you do that?" but the way that were saying it made me feel like I was being told off. There was no compassion in their tone and no explanation. I felt bad about what I had done.

38. I can remember a nurse pulling the curtain open and looking down at me with disgust. She was Pākehā. I felt so ashamed about what I had done. I didn't just disappoint others; I disappointed myself but yet I had no one for support. My mother came into the room at the hospital and glared at me like I had put her out.
39. The next thing I knew I was put in the back of an ambulance and taken to Porirua Hospital. There were other people in the ambulance who were older and scary. When we got there, I knew that I was at Porirua Hospital. As a kid, I knew that Porirua Hospital was for crazy people as we used to cut through there when we were going past and everyone knew that's what it was for.
40. I was the first one taken out of the ambulance and I had to wait on the side while the rest were taken inside. I remember the office with bars and a lady behind the desk. There was a wall with lots of keys and noise. A man with a clipboard took me to a room where I was locked up by myself. There was no light, just a little grill window that looked out into the carpark. There was a bed in the room and not much else. I remember the jingling of the keys of the man who took me to the room, he had a big chain of keys for all the different rooms. Nobody told me why I had been taken to Porirua hospital. I was absolutely terrified.
41. At some point, I was brought out of the room and dragged by my arm through the corridors. I remember we went through these big double doors into a room full of people. I could tell they were sick people. There were people in wheelchairs rocking and people vomiting, others were throwing food around. The man that had dragged me out of my room put me at the end of one of the tables and told me to eat, but I wouldn't eat. I was screaming and asking what I'd done wrong. He was getting frustrated. Nobody would tell me what was going on. I was taken back to my room and locked up again. I was given pills but I wasn't told what they were for. I stayed in the room and I don't know how long I was there for.
42. Later I remember my mother coming to visit me. The doctors sat me in a room with her against my will. She was playing the good little princess and she brought me a new nightie. I threw it at her and I was told off by the staff because they said I was being rude to her. I did not want to talk, I was terrified being in a place with people who were very unwell.
43. It was an incredibly sad time for me and it feels like that whole experience could have been avoided. I should never have been taken there.
44. I can't remember much about what else happened when I was there.
45. I don't remember how long I was there for but my father turned up. He was yelling at the doctors to get me and I was unlocked from my room and given to him with a paper bag of my clothes. I was released wearing a night gown. I recall the doctors talking to my father and after



that I was thrown in the back of my father's car and taken to his place in Levin. I had not seen my father for years and I was scared.

*Returning to my father's house*

46. By this time my father was living in Levin with a new partner. The social workers met us at my father's house in Levin. I asked the social workers why I had to stay there, and I told them I was worried about my dad's new partner who was quite violent. The social workers told me that there was nowhere else for me to go. I was left there. I believe I was signed over to my father which meant he then received the benefit money for me.
47. During my time at my father's house I was expected to behave. If I didn't, I was dealt to by my stepmother. Two houses down, lived my father's girlfriend's sister. I was introduced to one of her teenage sons (my stepmother's nephew). I became his toy thing. I would go over next door and he would rape me repeatedly, throughout the whole time that I was living with my father. I believe that everybody around me knew that I was getting raped but nobody ever said anything about it to me.
48. I remember going to the social welfare office to get a new uniform for intermediate school in Levin.
49. At some point my father moved to Palmerston North so I was shipped back to my mother while they moved so that I wouldn't be in the way. My mother hated me by this point. Once my father was settled in Palmerston North, I was shipped back to him. At this time, my stepmother's three daughters moved in to live with us things got worse for me.
50. I was put in a bedroom upstairs with the door handles taken off so I couldn't get out. My windows were nailed shut from the outside. I felt that my stepmother hated me, she would force me to bathe in cold water. When CYFS came around we would sit down on the couch and play happy little families. Nobody dug to find the truth. It felt like nobody cared.
51. I didn't enjoy going to school because I didn't know anybody. So instead of going to class I would go and sit in one of the parks. My stepmother found out that I wasn't attending school and as punishment she locked me out of the house for days. My stepmother would beat me, tell me that I wasn't my father's daughter and constantly lock me in my room. There was a hole put through the wall between my room and my stepsisters so that the stepsisters could keep an eye on me. My stepmother's nephew would come to visit and they would let him up to room and he would have his way with me.
52. I felt very alone during this time. I started to run away and walk the streets in Palmerston North at night. I was walking around Highbury one night and it was raining. I was picked up by a guy who said he would take me to get some warm clothes. I went with him and he took me back to his house. I was raped by him and his friend. I grabbed some clothes and jumped out the bedroom window. I ran to a pay phone and called my father. My stepmother answered the phone and I told her what happened and she said, "Well, you've made your bed, now you lie in it". I ended up finding my way back to my father's house and I was cleaned up.

GRO-A Shearing Quarters

53. One day a male social worker turned up to the house and said he was going to take me. I remember my father having an argument with my stepmother and the social worker because my father was concerned that he had to pay for me to leave. The social worker left but came back with my brother, GRO-B<sub>1</sub>. Social welfare had uplifted my brother from my mother and the social worker said he was going to take me too. I had nothing to bring with me when I left, all I had was a brown paper bag. But I was so relieved to get out of that house and to leave my prison room.
54. I was put in the back of the social worker's car and my brother, GRO-B-1 was there. I remember that we were both terrified, but we were grateful because we were together for once. I think I was around 13 at this time.
55. The social worker drove us for what seemed like a long way and we ended up at a shearing quarters in the back hills of GRO-A. There were three shearing gangs in the quarters. When we arrived, I was the only girl at the shearing quarters, and my brother and I were the only kids. When we woke up in the morning my brother and I were separated and loaded onto vans where we were taken to work. I was terrified. We worked the whole time we were there, it was an expectation that I would prepare meals, I had to cook and I had to clean for everyone. It was a very lonely time for us as we were left and forgotten.
56. Two younger boys, GRO-B and GRO-B arrived at the shearing quarters a couple of weeks later. I remember this because my brother was really happy to have some friends. I remember that they were troubled boys, they had a reputation for stealing cars. All of us kids were put to work. We never did any school work while we were at the shearing quarters, and I didn't have an understanding of who was in charge, or who was supposed to be taking care of me and my brother. I felt unwanted and uncared for and when I hurt myself there was no one who cared.
57. Every weekend it was the shearers party night. My brother and I were fuelled up on tequila at these parties. The shearers would get my brother drunk, then carry him to his room so that he was out of the way. It was an unsafe environment for a young girl to live in.
58. We were there for a long time with no visits from the social worker. We couldn't run away because the road was gravel. We were so isolated; we couldn't even see another house. It felt like I had been imprisoned out there.
59. After some time, the social worker came back and told my brother that we could get the train to visit my father. The shearers gave us some money and told us to catch the train to our father's house. Even though we were very young, my brother and I got on the train and went back to our father's. As soon as we arrived, my Dad drove us straight back to the shearing quarters because my stepmother didn't want us.
60. Eventually I was taken back to my mother. I was just getting shipped around, I was constantly taken from one fire to another.



*The East Coast*

61. One day I found out that my youngest brother was sent back to the East Coast. He was taken back there and left there.
62. At another point, my father took me back to my grandparents' homestead on the East Coast. I was enrolled in school there. We were living on my grandparents' farm in a rural part of the coast on the other side of [GRO-A] we were very cut off from anybody.
63. As I was my father's only daughter and I was named for my grandmother, I was looked after by my grandparents who taught me so many things. I really connected with being there, going to school with other Māori children and hearing te reo Māori being spoken. I was proud of my culture at that time and I was right into it with kapa haka. I really miss that. I miss being the person that I was entitled to be.
64. However, while I was there was a cousin of mine who lived there too and he looked after the fam. He was older than me and he sexually abused me for a long time while I was living there. He is now a convicted serial child abuser.
65. After living there for some time, my mother called Social Welfare and I was picked up again. I found it hard because back at my mother's house I couldn't be open about any of the Māori side because my mother hated it. Everything about my experience taught me that the "white way" was the right way.
66. I only spoke out about the abuse by my cousin a few years ago when he was in the paper. I saw that he had been arrested for sexually abusing six other little girls, and I read it in the paper and I walked into the police station the day after I read it and I asked to speak to someone. I spoke to a detective and I just said to him, "All I want to say is those girls are telling the truth. Please listen to them". And he asked me how I knew they were telling the truth and I told him that the same thing had happened to me.

*After Social Welfare*

67. When I was 15 I had run away from home again and I met [GRO-B] a little Pākehā boy from Levin. I got pregnant soon after and we stayed together. Social Welfare were still very involved with my four younger brothers. Over the next few years, there was still a lot to do with Social Welfare because my brothers were in and out of boys homes and different placements.
68. When [GRO-B] and I got together, neither of our families were happy about us being together but we stuck together. My Dad especially, because of his hatred towards white people due to his own experiences, was very unhappy when I met [GRO-B]. He tried to separate us and it took years for him to accept that [GRO-B] and I were staying together.
69. [GRO-B]'s Dad did not like me because I was brown but [GRO-B] and I fought back against that. With [GRO-B], it was the first time I had someone who believed in me.

## Impacts of Abuse

### *My family today*

70. GRO-B and I have five adult children and 13 grandchildren. All my life I have had to fight to protect my children from the trauma I went through in my childhood.
71. None of my children have ever been under the scope of CYFS. I fought damn hard to give them what I never had. I am one of the ones that can say I raised my kids different, I broke that cycle. My adult children do not know about the Porirua Hospital or about being dumped somewhere in the hills with shearing gangs. They do know I had a hard life, and that's okay.
72. I have had to fight for my children, and protect them from my extended family who wanted to take them from me. They saw it as a right. So I had to fight that part, I had to fight the Māori expectation that my eldest child would go and live with my father.
73. My partner GRO-B had a completely different upbringing to me, so this was all new to him as well, being exposed to my trauma. As we went through life, I started sharing a lot of my childhood with him. I don't share it with people because I don't want people to judge me. I don't want people to treat me any differently just because they've heard my story. Sharing with GRO-B has helped, but it doesn't answer the questions.
74. The whole experience with Social Welfare destroyed our family unit because they split us kids up. Even once I was living with GRO-B and having my own babies, I was often asked by the social workers to go to the boys' homes where my brothers were to talk to them. That is because the social workers knew I was the only one that my brothers would talk to. I still felt responsible for them in some ways. I was still young myself but the social workers expected me to engage with my brothers, to look after them, to visit them while in residences, and to take care of them when they were in trouble. It was a terrible thing for the Department to assume I wanted to continue this for my brothers when I was still so young myself.
75. Three of my brothers went down the gang pathway and I do not have a relationship with them anymore. They have all spent a lot of time in prison. They are carrying a lot of anger, do not care about anything and are dangerous.
76. When I had my first son, my brothers wanted to take my him and introduce him to the gangs. I had to fight my brothers because they wanted to recruit my children. I spent many years running from my family with my children, living in caravans so that they couldn't find us, because I wanted to keep my children safe.
77. I believe people join the gangs because they are looking for a figure to look up to and somewhere to belong. I saw that with my brothers who became affiliated with gangs. My brothers become mobsters and got lost in the cycle.



78. My brother GRO-B-2 journey was different because he was given to our grandparents and raised by them. I didn't see him for many years which was really sad but we are quite close now. He has a lot of health issues and I try to support him to get the care that he needs.
79. Being a Mum keeps me determined. As soon as I had my children, they became the focus of my life. That is not to say that me and my children do not escape the trauma of my childhood. We are still dealing with my troubled family unit, even though they aren't around. In my adulthood, I don't have a relationship with most of my brothers or my mother. My mother believes I made everything up, the bits that she does know, my father can't deal with the truth in relation to my cousin.
80. All that family support is gone for me. There are no pictures of me or my children in my mother's house. My mother felt that I had turned on her when I refused to keep bending over backwards for my brothers. I was sick of them keeping drugs in my mother's attic, hiding guns, and all of the things that come with being in gangs. I was disowned by my mother and so were my children.
81. We have tried to reconnect with family members in the past and it hasn't worked out. It is a source of real pain for me.

*Intergenerational experience in care*

82. Sadly, just a year and a half ago, CYFS rung me and asked me if I would take in my niece and my nephew. They were being removed from my brother, and I said that I would take care of them.
83. This was the first contact I had with a social worker in a long time, and I started questioning the social worker about follow-ups and things like that because I was surprised they did not do more checks on me or my partner before agreeing that the kids could come to us. They did not check who else lived at the house, they did not do checks on GRO  
B they did not even check whether I had a bedroom for them.
84. I agreed to take my young niece and nephew but when I met the social workers to take them, they tried to give me a third child that I had not been told about. The third child was other my nephew who was 13 and while we were all talking, he pulled marijuana out of his pocket and then took off. I couldn't believe they had not checked him before getting in the car.
85. I took the two younger children and put them in the car to take them home. I asked the social workers if they had checked the kids for bruises and they said they hadn't. When I got them home, I bathed them. They both were covered in sores, marks and bruises. They had not been cared for at all. I was worried because I hadn't been told about any of that and the social workers hadn't checked. I didn't want anyone to suggest that those bruises had come while they were in our house.
86. I wasn't told if the children had allergies, whether they had been interfered with or anything else about them.

87. I looked after the kids, I started schooling them and they were doing well and were putting on weight. The kids did really well once they understood my boundaries. I had the kids for quite a long time before there was any phone call from CYFS to check on the kids.
88. It felt like they were not doing their job properly and that made me relive my past.
89. I had them for about 9 months but then I started getting threats from my brother about burning down my house. I told CYFS that it wasn't safe for the children to be there anymore.
90. CYFS took the kids and took them straight to my mother's place. I couldn't believe it because my mother's partner lost his children due to sexual abuse so I did not know why CYFS would put other children in her care while he was still around.
91. I felt bad about it and I carried the trauma of this recent experience for quite some time, but I could not afford for anything to happen to the children when they were in my care. I couldn't protect them if my brother turned up with a gun, and these were the threats that were coming through. It was the same as what happened with me as a kid, only this time it was replaying through my nieces and nephews, through the same organisation just with a new name.

*Loss of identity*

92. I do believe that my ethnicity and my culture prevented me from getting the help that I needed. Being Māori meant that we were viewed as less "helpable". As I have said, my mother was a blonde European woman and the social workers just believed everything she said. I believe racism was part of why we were let down.
93. It wasn't just the social workers, it was also the Police. It felt as though we were the little shits of society that were forgotten about. I sometimes wonder, were we not worthy enough because we were brown? I know that was the reason we were treated differently.
94. Growing up, before I could even put words to it, I knew that the Police and social workers looked at us differently and treated us differently. They had compassion for my mother but they looked at us like the little mongrel Māori kids that my poor mother was left with. That made me feel as though being Māori and being brown was worse than being Pākehā.
95. It made me hate being Māori, I absolutely hated having this Māori connection. Being brown meant trouble and meant being treated badly. I still think that being Māori is seen as different.
96. I do not associate with being Māori and I have issues with it to this day. I never got the chance to be Māori, that was taken away from me.
97. I feel bad for my children and grandchildren because I cannot give them that connection to their whakapapa. I can't give them what I don't have. I know that I whakapapa to Ngāti Porou on the East Coast but that is as far as it goes for me. It's not that I do not want to connect, it's that mentally I can't because of what happened to me as a child.



98. About 5 years ago I legally changed my name to GRO-A I changed my name because I needed to try and address the past, and for me I needed to see if changing my name would help me with that process, and it did. At the time of changing my name, I felt guilt in terms of getting rid of my roots but it was all part of a healing process for me.
99. Going back to the East Coast, to my whānau homestead is difficult for me. I have been back with GRO-B and our five kids because I do want my kids to know where they're from. When we went back, I was worried about how my kids would be received, especially the one that is fair and blonde. I felt like an outsider going back and I was so nervous. The family urupa is at the back of the homestead so I was just planning to say that we were going to see that if the visit went badly. We were welcomed in and we stayed one night but I couldn't stay longer than that as the property holds too many sad memories for me.

#### *Ongoing trauma*

100. I was diagnosed last year with fibromyalgia, which is a condition with your muscles. This can relate back to trauma in your childhood so I'm educating myself on that. Understanding this connection has given me an answer to why my body is in the condition that it's in now. To this day, I have been fighting the trauma that's been dormant. A lot of my trauma is associated with fibromyalgia. I believe this relates to my past hurt of not being wanted and never being helped.
101. I have really struggled with my mental health. I was diagnosed with PTSD a few years ago. I sought some counselling because certain triggers would set me off. People jingling keys would set me off because that would take me straight back to the hospital, because they used to have them strapped to their hands so when they walked the keys would jingle and that's all I would hear.
102. Some years ago I requested my hospital records, not expecting anything, and I got a parcel and from Porirua Hospital. I didn't read through the documents, I just looked at the first page. For me, receiving these records validated what I had lived through but I did not want to read the details. I then burnt the documents.
103. One of the biggest issues I faced was that the social workers did not follow-up at all. As kids, we were never heard. We were only seen to sit on the couch and look okay for the social workers for those visits. I was never given an opportunity to speak to the social workers or the police in private. I needed someone to get on my level and say to me; "Come on, I want to genuinely hear what's happening". There was no compassion, no support. I was treated like I was a waste of space and a burden.
104. I think the whole organisation failed us as a family unit. They had the tools to do their job and they did not do their job. They did not follow up and find us somewhere safe to go when someone clearly had their hand up. Day in, day out, my Aunt was harassing CYFS. There was no reason why we could not have gone to live with my Aunt. It would have saved so much trauma, so much hurt.

105. My Aunty was very staunch Māori and I do wonder how different our lives would have been if we had been able to go to her because we would have been exposed to our culture and language in a way that was not allowed at my mother's house. We would have been loved, cared for, nurtured, and saved.

### **Moving Forward – Making Change**

106. I get angry when people use the way they were brought up as an excuse. There is no point blaming others. That is in the past and I feel like there is nothing to be gained from being angry about the past. For myself, I knew I did not want my shit life to continue so I made changes for myself and my family.

107. It actually angers me when people blame how they were brought up for their actions, in my opinion that is using it as an excuse. I know we all experience things differently but owning the past can help with the future. It is still a struggle but I choose to live every day the best I can.

108. In terms of my culture, I feel as though that was stolen from me and there's nothing that can be done today to give that back. It feels too late.

109. I don't think I want anyone to say sorry to me because I don't think I could accept an apology. The damage that was done to me is just too deep.

110. What I do want is for things to change so that no other children have to go through what we did. The first thing is that the right people need to be in charge to make change. There must also be accountability.

111. I have been wanting to share my story my whole life. This is the first time that I have had somebody who would listen. To this day I am still troubled by the question, why didn't anyone listen to us or get involved in the fight to help us? I know if I see anything like that, I do something about it. Everyone who knows me knows that I am very protective of children and I will not tolerate any child being hit or slapped in front of me. People know that I am like that but they do not know the reason I am that way.

112. I need answers about what happened to me. I was neglected, forgotten about, repeatedly raped, sexually abused and assaulted since I was 7/8 years old by so many people. I can count up to 20 individuals. Being used and abused has left an imprint on me.

113. I can sense fear, I can sense bad things before they happen. My trauma has made me vigilant about things happening.

114. I feel more Pākehā than Māori because I don't know what being Māori is apart from being seen as dirty, second-hand, unwanted mongrel. I learned as a child that being brown meant you were mistreated, misled, unheard, and not believed.



115. I believe it is those of us who have lived through trauma that are equipped to help others to navigate through. Survivors are well equipped to work with those going through similar issues.
116. Departments involved in caring for children need to be more vigilant, more compassionate, more empathetic, more aware and more accountable for their actions (and their non-actions).
117. I am talking to the Royal Commission because this is a way I can try to protect other children, to try to make sure no other child has to go through what I did.

**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:

13/08/2021



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