

Witness Name: Anthony Edward Sutherland
Statement No: WITN0029001
Dated:

ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF ANTHONY EDWARD SUTHERLAND

I, Anthony Edward Sutherland, formerly of the New Zealand Police, will say as follows:

1. I was born GRO-C 1947, in Whanganui, New Zealand. I am now 72 years old and live in Melbourne, Australia.
2. I have been asked to make this statement regarding several incidents regarding Holdsworth School and Lake Alice Hospital in which I was involved whilst a member of the New Zealand Police. These events took place some 45 to 50 years ago, so this account consists of events, facts, and memories, that I have tried to recall to the best of my ability. All matters related are true and factual. If I am not clear as to a detail I have tried to make that clear.

My Service in N.Z. Police.

3. I was employed by the NZ Police Department from when I commenced my training as a cadet in January 1965 through to my resignation in mid-1979.
4. My training lasted some 18-19 months at the Trentham Police Training School. On graduation I was posted back to my home town of Whanganui. On my 19th birthday I was sworn in as a Police Constable. I undertook general duties working a standard 5-week roster and working under various Sergeants who in turn reported to the Senior Sergeant. The Senior Sergeant reported to the District Commander.
5. Around 1970/71 I applied for the position of Juvenile Crime Prevention Officer (JCPO). The role of JCPO was combined with Court Orderly. These are two different and distinct roles, and both were shared duties by the one officer. From time to time I continued to take part in other general duties as and when called upon. Eventually the role of Court Orderly was taken on by someone else and I

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was thereafter made the full time Youth Aid Officer (YAO) for the Whanganui Police Station. I think this full-time appointment happened about late 1973.

6. The Youth Aid Section (YAS) was a division of the Police formed to pick up the pieces of a historic division called Juvenile Crime Prevention. YAS began an initiative focused on looking at alternatives to prosecution for juveniles reported for minor offences.
7. The YAS together with the then Child Welfare Department and the Maori Affairs Department combined to consider all matters relating to juveniles (under 17 years) in a weekly conference and then to make a recommendation as to potential Police action against the offender. This recommendation was in writing and forwarded to the District Commander of the Whanganui Police District who made the final decision as to disposal of the matter, prosecution or otherwise. Initially when set up the conferences were weekly. I met with the Whanganui head of the Child Welfare, Mr Eric Medcalf, and the local senior officer in Maori Affairs in a weekly meeting held at the Child Welfare Office. I can no longer remember the name of the senior Māori Affairs officer. In later years the weekly conferences were with Mr Ray Wallace, the second in charge of the Child Welfare Department in Whanganui. During my day to day work I met with and was involved with all the field welfare officers from both the Child Welfare and Maori Affairs departments.
8. As another part of the YAS I was expected to talk to children in classrooms in the various schools from preschool (kindergarten) through to secondary schools. Towards the end of my time in YAS I was speaking to some 3000 plus children a year in school visits arranged by me and the schools involved.
9. I also spoke at least once a week to parent and other groups wherever I could find them for example at school parent teacher meetings and at the Lions Club.
10. I sought out other activities where I thought I could lift the profile of the Police within our community. I was known throughout the Whanganui City community for what I did, and in fact I was sought out by various groups to become involved with their activities. I did radio appearances and appeared in articles in the local paper.
11. I reported directly to the District Commander. Initially this was Superintendent Keith Vincent and then on his retirement, he was replaced by Superintendent Bryan Dean.

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Holdsworth Boys Home.

12. I got involved with the Holdsworth Boys Care Home, as a result of my desire to talk to children in classroom situations. Holdsworth was situated on St John's Hill, in Whanganui. I do not recall the date of the contact and subsequent involvement. In agreement with the Principal, whose name I cannot remember, it was agreed I would talk to their "inmates" in the classroom. From my memory these boys were 10 years or younger. This was a long-term project. When I made my first visit to a class room, I introduced the boys to a sheet of paper which had a border outline and a stick drawing of a policeman. I asked the children to draw a picture of themselves and nearly all the kids in the class turned the page over and drew the picture of themselves on the back. I asked why this was and they all replied as one "we don't want to be seen with a cop".
13. One boy, whose name I cannot recall, explained that when I was finished with the class I would probably give them another sheet of paper and ask them to draw themselves again and I would be able to show everyone how much closer the student figure was to the Police man.
14. While I was working with this group trying to break down barriers between "the young crims" and the "Police Department", for my own interest I was doing some research on the "King Pin phenomena". My understanding was that every institution, where there are "inmates", develops a "King Pin", who is the "head honcho" that every inmate either respects and obeys or pays a price. I wanted to see if such a system existed in the Holdsworth institution – the boys being so young. This research was not formal or recorded; it only commenced following conversations with other people.
15. I was surprised at the divergence from normality with the institutionalised thinking that existed towards the Holdsworth boys. Even at that level (10 years), those children were already seen as being beyond recovery. It was a prison mentality rather than a rehabilitation and recovery focus. It was as if the staff saw the kids as a lost cause. My observations were from my involvement overall with the institution, with the teachers, the principal, and the children.

The points system at Holdsworth and the Lake Alice Child and Adolescent Unit.

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16. I remember one case of a young boy I worked with. He was in the care of the Child Welfare Department. He was brought to my attention because of some low-level offending. When I visited him, the young boy reported both physical and verbal abuse from both his mother and stepfather. He had accused his stepfather of doing "weird things" in the house and referred to an incident where his mother had discovered a calendar spontaneously go up in flames. My investigations concluded that the boy had been responsible for this. After he went before the court, he was sent to Lake Alice Child and Adolescent Unit. This must have been done by the Magistrate. I cannot remember any date regarding this incident.
17. The only other involvement with the Lake Alice Child and Adolescent unit I can recall was a conversation I had one day in the early 1970s at Holdsworth with a staff member I think was the Assistant Principal at the time, John Drake. I am quite sure it was John Drake that I spoke to. His is the only name that I have in my memory that I associate with Holdsworth. We walked through the foyer area and on the wall was a list of the inmate's names and beside each one there was a number. We discussed some of the boys and I asked what the numbers meant. Mr Drake told me it was a points system which let the boys know when they were going to leave the institution. There was a certain number of points that each boy had to obtain before he could go home or be released. He explained that the points were controlled by the "house masters" and himself in particular. He said an inmate "mysteriously" got the right number of points when the management team decided he could go home. I believed the points system was an illusion. I understood the system and the positive way it could work – but I also realised how it could be used negatively with the message to the boys "behave/comply or you will lose points". I asked Mr Drake what happened if a boy had negative points on the board. He replied, "Oh then that inmate goes to Lake Alice for treatment and let me tell you he comes back with a much better attitude." I clarified did he mean Lake Alice Mental Hospital, and he agreed. I was shocked. He saw my reaction and stopped the conversation.
18. At the next weekly conference, I had with the Child Welfare Department I mentioned the conversation I had with Mr Drake regarding the Holdsworth points system. Ray Wallace, who chaired the meeting, shut me down and said the matter was one for Holdsworth and not part of his agenda. I sought to discuss the matter further; that is, the action of sending children to Lake Alice from

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Holdsworth. Mr Wallace would not discuss or allow it to be discussed at the meeting which shocked me. Mr Wallace understood what was happening at Holdsworth, I believe he had knowledge prior to my raising the matter, that is, with recalcitrant children and the involvement of Lake Alice. What also concerned me about the stance he took was that I knew Mr Wallace personally. For example, I went sailing for a fortnight with him in his yacht off the coast of Auckland for a two or three-week period. I believe that the Child Welfare Department in Whanganui was motivated to keep the district squeaky clean. At this time, I had no knowledge of the apparent shock treatment and I am not sure if Mr Wallace knew or not.

19. I also raised the Holdsworth Points system with Eric Medcalf and his response was to say it wasn't his area of responsibility.
20. Unhappy with this response, I then raised the Holdsworth situation with my two senior officers, Inspector John Turner and Superintendent Bryan Dean on separate occasions. I mentioned it to Inspector Turner over drinks at a pub and he told me we should let the welfare people look after welfare issues and we should focus on Police Work. Sometime later I was invited into Superintendent Dean's office at Whanganui Police to have a whiskey and discuss a number of matters. I raised my concerns with Holdsworth and said the whole culture at Holdsworth needed to be looked at. Mr Dean's response was the same as that I received from Inspector Turner, he told me it was not really a Police matter. The impression I was left with was not that anyone in Police wanted to cover-up what was happening with the Holdsworth's points system, rather my senior officers didn't consider it was an issue related to Police duties.
21. I had no dealings with Lake Alice Hospital staff regarding the Holdsworth points system. I did not know of the shock therapy treatment at Lake Alice nor that it was used for punishment. If I had known about the nature of Lake Alice treatment, I would have gone straight to Superintendent Bryan Dean to try and find out if the treatment was appropriate for adolescents and children in the care of the Child Welfare Department. Had I not been listened to, I would have escalated the matter to Police National Headquarters through the Inspector in charge of YAOs nationally.
22. I remain shocked that if a child could not succeed in the prison environment of Holdsworth, a housemaster had the ability to send them to a psychiatric

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institution as punishment. I was surprised at my own naivety upon leaving Holdsworth, especially my lack of awareness about how draconian it was.

23. Sometime after this, my elder brother Tom visited from Palmerston North. He was also a YAO. I informed him of what I had observed at Holdsworth. We then made a request to visit Holdsworth to attend a dinner and eat with the children, which was granted. When we did attend, the staff were sullen and negative. We also ate separately from the children. Tom is now deceased.

Summation

24. I am frustrated that my repeated attempts to raise concerns over the relationship between Holdsworth School and Lake Alice Hospital were shut down by people in authority. I have no problem relating the above incidents and I am truly shocked at the activities of the Lake Alice Child and Adolescent Unit.

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

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Dated: 20 · 10 · 20

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