

**Response by Dr Clare Ward to Royal Commission witness statement of Sarah
(Sunny) Webster**
WITN0346001

1. I have been provided with two paragraphs from a witness statement of Sarah Webster, which I understand has been prepared for the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care. Ms Webster also used the surname 'Wiles'. I knew her as Sunny.
2. I am a medical practitioner, Fellow of the Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners (1998) and Fellow of the Division of Rural Hospital Medicine New Zealand (2009). I graduated MB ChB from the University of Auckland in 1984 and was subsequently awarded a Diploma in Obstetrics (1987) and a Diploma in Child Health (1994).
3. I have worked as a General Practitioner for Hauora Hokianga Health since 1990, based in Rawene.
4. I was Sunny's GP during the 1990s.
5. Paragraph [151] of Sunny's witness statement reports her impression that, because of her background, I did not treat her as a person or take any interest in her as a patient.
6. First, I want to say sorry to Sunny that I was not able to care for her in a way that she now feels was good for her.
7. While it has been a long time since Sunny moved away from Hokianga, I remember her well. There was never a time when I did not like Sunny. I knew her over quite a few years and I was aware that she had had to overcome major challenges in her life and that her background included significant difficulties. I both admired and respected Sunny's achievements in being able to overcome these to the point where she was able to make long term relationships, to have children, to raise those children and to be a member of her community. Although I knew she had previously been a patient of mental health services, from my point of view she was a normal, healthy, functioning person and I never thought of her as having mental health issues except to the extent they had been part of her past.
8. I am sorry Sunny's recollection is that I did not like her and that I did not take an interest in her as a patient. Again, from my own perspective, I did care about her, and I was interested in her both from a professional and from a personal point of view.
9. Paragraph [152] of Sunny's witness statement describes telling me about an occasion when colleague of mine behaved unkindly towards her. Sunny recalls that I tried to explain the conduct away and did not take any further action. She makes the point that she felt humiliated, that she told me about it, but nothing happened.
10. I do not have a memory of this interaction, but I believe she may well have raised this with me and that no formal action was taken as a result. As I cannot remember, I do not know whether I tried to affirm Sunny's feelings at the time, but I am sorry for any excuses I made for what would have been clearly a breach of confidentiality and also a very unprofessional, unkind and disrespectful way of treating any patient — in particular Sunny. It may well be that I did not realise she wanted to progress a

complaint. Hauora Hokianga has always had a complaints process and if I knew that she did want to make a formal complaint I would have suggested that she use this process.

11. My hope is that the Inquiry process is helpful for Sunny, that she now feels able to access medical care and that she is treated with kindness and respect when doing so.

I confirm the truth and accuracy of this statement. I make this statement with the knowledge that it is to be used in the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care. I am aware that it is an offence to intentionally provide false or misleading information to an inquiry.

Dated: 25 / 6 / 2022

Signed:

GRO-C

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Clare Ward