

**WHANAKETIA**

through pain and trauma,  
from darkness to light



**SURVIVOR EXPERIENCES**

for the survivors,  
by the survivors



### **Pānui whakatūpatō**

Ka nui tā mātou tiaki me te hāpai ake i te mana o ngā purapura ora i māia rawa atua nei ki te whāriki i ā rātou kōrero ki konei. Kei te mōhio mātopu ka oho pea te mauri ētahi wāhanga o ngā kōrero nei e pā ana ki te tūkino, te whakatūrora me te pāmamae, ā, tērā pea ka tākirihia ngā tauwharewarenga o te ngākau tangata i te kaha o te tumeke. Ahakoa kāore pea tēnei urupare e tau pai ki te wairua o te tangata, e pai ana te rongō i te pouri. Heoi, mehemea ka whakataumaha tēnei i ētahi o tō whānau, me whakapā atu ki tō tākuta, ki tō ratongo Hauora rānei. Whakatetia ngā kōrero a ētahi, kia tau te mauri, tiakina te wairua, ā, kia māmā te ngākau.



### **Distressing content warning**

We honour and uphold the dignity of survivors who have so bravely shared their stories here. We acknowledge that some content contains explicit descriptions of tūkino – abuse, harm and trauma – and may evoke strong negative, emotional responses for readers. Although this response may be unpleasant and difficult to tolerate, it is also appropriate to feel upset. However, if you or someone in your close circle needs support, please contact your healthcare provider or wellbeing provider. Respect others' truths, breathe deeply, take care of your spirit and be gentle with your heart.

**Some of these profiles have been edited for publication in this book. The full versions are available online and in other parts of Whanaketia.**

Presented to the Governor-General by the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in State Care and in the Care of Faith-based Institutions

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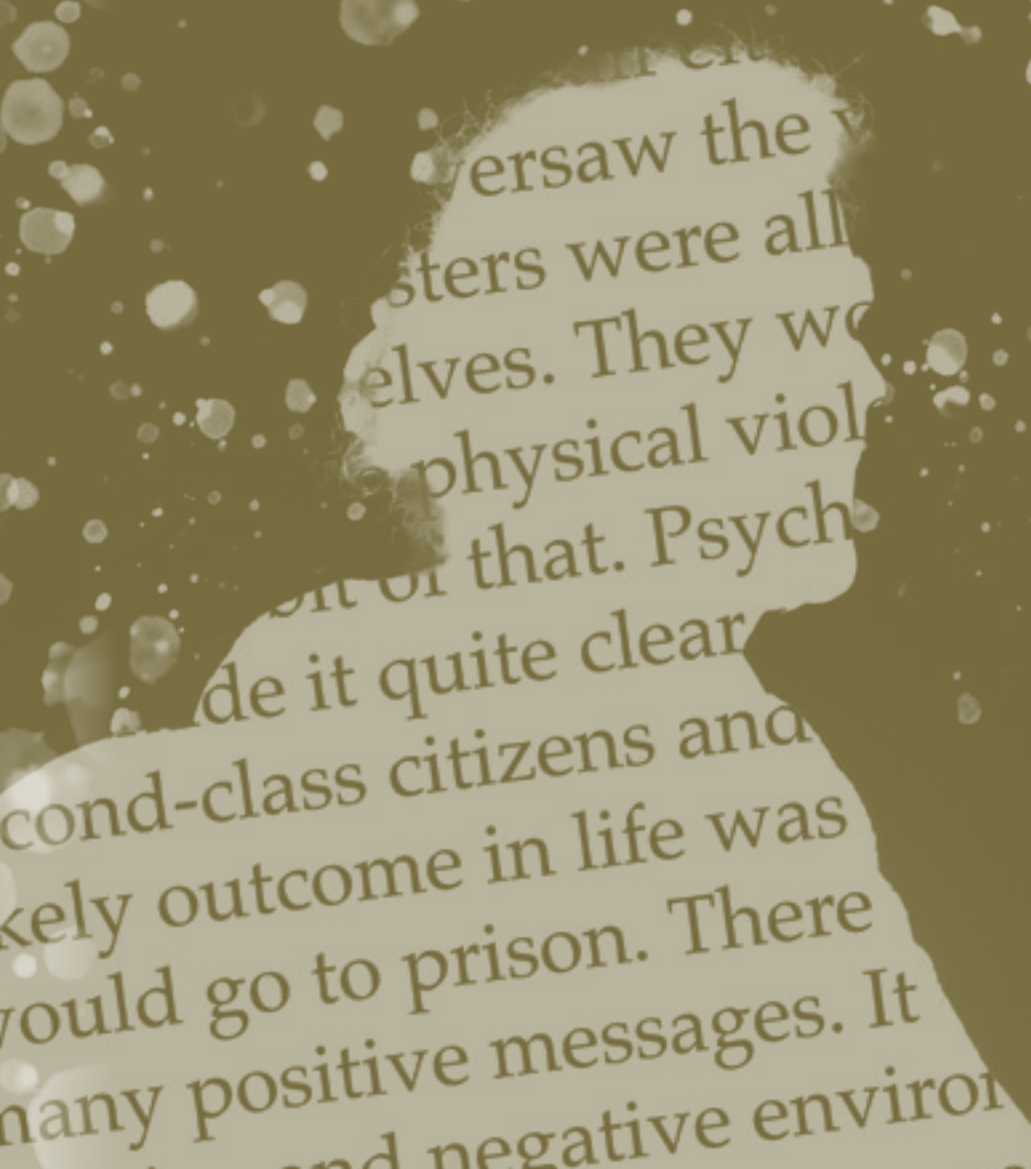
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## He karakia

Sed E tāmara mā, koutou te pūtake o ēnei kōwhiringa, kua horaina nei

E tohe tonu nei i te ara o te tika

E ngaki tonu ana i te māra tipu

Anei koutou te whakairihia ki te tihi o Maungārongo, kia tau te mauri.

Rukuhia te pū o te hinengaro

kia tāea ko te kukunitanga mai o te whakaaro nui.

Kia piere ko te ngākau mahora

kia tūwhera mai he wairua tau.

Koinei ngā pou whakairinga i te tāhuhu

o te Whare o Tū Te Mauriora.

Te āhuru mōwai o Te Pae o Rehua,

kaimuru i te hinapōuri,

kaitohu i te manawa hā ora,

kaihohou i te pai.

Nau mai e koutou kua uhia e ngā haukino

o te wā,

kua pēhia e ngā whakawai a ngā tipua nei,

a te Ringatūkinō rāua ko te Kanohihuna.

Koutou i whītiki i te tātua o te toa,

i kākahu i te korowai o te pono,

i whakamaui i te tīpare o tō mana motuhake,

toko ake ki te pūaotanga o te āpōpō e tatari

mai nei i tua o te pae,

nōu te ao e whakaata mai nei.

Kāti rā, ā te tākiritanga mai o te ata,

ā te huanga ake o te awatea,

kia tau he māramatanga,

kia ū ko te pai, kia mau ko te tika.

Koinei ko te tangi a te ngākau e Rongo,

tūturu ōwhiti whakamaui

kia tina, tina!

Hui e, tāiki e!

– *Waihoroi Paraone Hōterene*

## He karakia

To you upon whom this inquiry has been centered  
Resolute in your pursuit of justice  
Relentless in your belief for life  
You have only our highest regard and respect,  
may your peace of mind be assured.  
Look into the deepest recesses of your being  
and discover the seeds of new hope,  
where the temperate heart might find solace,  
and the blithe spirit might rise again.  
Let these be the pillars on which the House of Self,  
reconciliation can stand.  
Safe haven of Rehua,  
dispatcher of sorrow,  
restorer of the breath of life,  
purveyor of kindness.  
Those of you who have faced the ill winds of time and made to suffer,  
at the hands of abusers and the hidden  
faces of persecutors, draw near.  
You who found courage,  
cloaked yourselves with your truth,  
who crowned yourself with dignity,  
a new tomorrow awaits beyond the horizon,  
your future beckons.  
And so, as dawn rises, and a new day begins,  
let clarity and understanding reign,  
goodness surrounds you and  
justice prevails.  
Rongo god of peace, this the heart desires,  
we beseech you,  
let it be,  
it is done.

– *Waihoroi Paraone Hōterene*

# // We have hope, because we're being heard //

***Whanaketia* tells the experiences of people in care, their life-long pain and trauma.**

We thank and acknowledge all survivors who shared with the Inquiry their experiences. We are grateful to you for reliving traumatic experiences, making that sacrifice in the hope of achieving a better future for mokopuna.

This book is a tribute to all survivors and tells of your experience through a selection of survivors' profile. We heard you and we have tried to reflect your collective experience in *Whanaketia*.

We also mihi to those survivors who were not able to come forward, some because they had lost their trust and confidence in authorities due to being abused and neglected, some because they didn't want to talk about their experiences – we send you aroha and understanding.

We also acknowledge those survivors who have died, sometimes by suicide, and some while the Inquiry was underway. We pay tribute to them and acknowledge their whānau and friends.

Over the life of the Royal Commission, the Inquiry heard from 2,329 survivors about the abuse they experienced in care and how it affects them today. Survivors talked to us about the very real and tangible impacts, not just on them but on their children and grandchildren. Survivors' battles to get redress or even just to be believed, are lengthy, overly complex and simply not good enough, from both State and faith-based institutions.

The origins of the word 'survivor' means 'to outlive' – and the exact magnitude of abuse will never properly be known – many have turned their lives around and used what they experienced to give them power. We've heard from survivors who became social workers, found ways to help youth, put themselves through university, started their own businesses, and tackled the ramifications of their abuse by addressing intergenerational trauma.

In the pages that follow you'll read the often graphic and horrific experiences of just a handful of the thousands of survivors who spoke with us. People like Gwyneth Beard, who's now a social worker using the kaupapa of *Tūpono te mana kaha o te whānau*, which means to stand in the truth and strength of the family. Gwyneth says she wants to make sure that children who go into care don't go out more damaged than when they went in.

"I believe in care and protection, but it needs to be care and protection, not care and damage," she says. "I've dealt with the sexual abuse. I know who it belongs to and it doesn't belong to me – it belongs to the perpetrator. I was not a willing participant in what happened to me. So I fixed that myself."



Gwyneth says we also need to decolonise the way we think within our government departments, and we need to come back to tikanga Māori and the Treaty of Waitangi.

“We need to come back to whanaungatanga, manaakitanga and those concepts, to bring it all together and ask, how is this going to work for this whānau?”

Survivor Fa’amoana Luafatu went through boys’ homes, borstal, prison, foster care and family homes. He’s now a playwright, author and musician, and has shared his experiences of abuse through creative arts, particularly plays.

“My hope is that sharing my story through the creative arts will help young Pacific people in their own journeys. I want these kids to know they’re not by themselves, that there are other people who have been through this abuse, who understand what they are going through. I want them to see how they can use different mediums to express themselves.”

Working with rangatahi is also a focus for survivor Tupua Urlich, who now works with VOYCE Whakarongo Mai to advocate voice and connection for young people in care, empowering children’s voices to be heard and listened to, and enabling a pathway to their cultural identity.

“Our tamariki don’t belong to a Crown entity,” Tupua says. “Neither did I. Knowing who you are and where you come from, along with values defined by tikanga, are the right foundations for developing strong, healthy, independent, ready young people. It’s like day and night compared to the system we were raised in.”

The mahi of the Royal Commission and VOYCE is important to him as he’s the eldest left in his direct whānau line.

“You can’t say that this isn’t connected, because it absolutely is. The hardest part is living in a society that denies it is real. Just allow Māori to exercise being Māori, tino rangatiratanga. We don’t need the Crown to give us power – we have always had it, and they need to respect our power.

Most of all, Tupua says: “We have hope, and we have hope because we’re being heard.”

Joan Bellingham, who was put into psychiatric care at Princess Margaret Hospital for being gay, said she’s battled at length for redress to try to get people to believe that what she was saying had actually happened.

“I just keep going forward,” Joan says. “This is the end of a chapter for me, to finally be heard and believed. I’m very thankful.”

Survivors told us, overwhelmingly, they are speaking out so the harm is put right and so abuse in care stops, today.

The survivors and their words are a taonga. They are a treasure we must cherish, support and learn from.

We mihi to all our survivors who spoke with the Royal Commission, and pay tribute to those who couldn’t.

Kia kaha, kia mana ake. Stand strong in the internal power we all possess.



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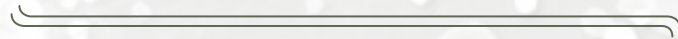
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# WHANAKETIA

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from darkness to light



## SURVIVOR EXPERIENCES

for the survivors,  
by the survivors

“

I remember  
peeking  
through the  
window crying  
for my parents

”





# Andrew Brown

**Age when entered care:** 9 years old

**Year of birth:** 1960

**Hometown:** Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington

**Time in care:** On and off from 1970 to around 1988

**Type of care facility:** Berhampore Family Home; boys' homes – Epuni Boys' Home, Hokio Beach School, Holdsworth Boys' Home, Ōwairaka Boys' Home; psychiatric hospital – Oakley Hospital.

**Ethnicity:** Māori, Moriori, English, Welsh

**Whānau background:** Andrew's mother is Māori and Moriori, from the Chatham Islands, and his father is of English/Welsh descent. He has five older brothers and two younger sisters.

**Currently:** Andrew is a single parent and is also raising a family member, who has been with him since birth.

## **I've been waiting for this chance to share my story and reclaim my voice.**

I was 9 years old when I was taken from home by a social worker. My file notes that I was the subject of a Court Order for not being under proper control. Social Welfare didn't even bother to explain why they took me away from my family. I'd been wagging school a bit and fighting – I'd stayed for nearly two years with my grandparents on the Chatham Islands and didn't seem to fit in at school back in Wellington. I also experienced racism at school. I didn't realise at the time that's what it was, I just knew that I had to fight back. That's why I was in the principal's office all the time.

My first placement was a Presbyterian Family Home in Berhampore, with lots of other kids all under 14. I remember being the only brown kid at the home. There was a lot of praying and I was forever cleaning shoes – I must have cleaned 40 to 50 pairs a day. I was sexually abused by the older girls. I was sad, lonely and miserable, and I just wanted to go home to my family. I tried to run away with some other boys, but the police stopped us and took us back.

After that I was taken to Epuni Boys Home in Lower Hutt. I was 10 years old. They put me in the secure unit – a concrete room with holes in the wall, windows that you couldn't close. The room was concrete with a plastic cover on the mattress and pillow. I didn't know what was going on. I remember peeking through the window crying for my parents.

You were only allowed out of your cell for one hour. So, you basically went from standing in one concrete room to another.

I think I was in secure for about 10 or 14 days. I remember hearing kids screaming, yelling and crying outside, but I couldn't actually see anybody. I don't recall any books and anything to read – all you could do all day was sit there and stare out into a field. I was abused by the staff, but I felt too afraid and unsafe to say anything to anyone about it. I thought I was going to die in there.

At Epuni, we were forced to clean volleyball courts with a toothbrush – they took two weeks to clean. We had to mix up a big drum full of caustic soda to clean them with. The staff would make us stand in it and the acid would eat the skin off your feet. We spent all week cleaning, folding clothes and working in the kitchen. On Saturdays we played sports whether you liked it or not. I was small for my age and often the youngest, so sports would be very brutal for me.

Some of the staff were sexually abusing boys. One of them came into my secure unit and tried to comfort me when I was crying. He sat me on his knee, tried to cuddle and feel me too. He and other staff used to go around and visit all the boys' rooms. They would come into the shower block and say they were checking to see if our balls had dropped.

I didn't go to school while I was at Epuni, school was only for when "you are good". I tried to run away a couple of times, so they stuck me in a cage, like I was cattle. After another attempt to run away, they stuck me in the pound and I was beaten to a pulp. The beatings I endured were severe and savage. After a while, I was sent home to my parents. Epuni taught me how to fight and when I went home my behaviour was the same. It was no good putting me into school, I had missed so much education and would fight anyone who came at me. Eventually I ended up back in Epuni.

When I was 10 or 11, I was transferred to Hokio – another State institution run by bullies and nasty people. The violence was severe, and a couple of times I nearly died. I was constantly fighting to keep myself safe from violence and sexual abuse by other boys.

After a few months I was transferred to Holdsworth. I remember the staff and social workers at Holdsworth by the abuse they inflicted. It is unlikely that there was a single person employed there who could claim they didn't know about the emotional, physical and sexual abuse.

I spent what I thought was about two years in total at Holdsworth. During that time, I was sent home. I had been there over a year before I got to go home. When you're 11 years old, not being able to see your family is lonely and isolating. At home, I went to the local intermediate school, but I was struggling and couldn't integrate, I couldn't read and write very well. I used to love learning and was considered intelligent by the teachers in my younger days, but I wasn't coping at school because the State deprived me of an education.

After my second stint in Holdsworth, my father was transferred from Wellington to Auckland because of his job and we moved up there. I'd got involved in stealing cars – I was pretty much stealing cars every weekend, and making good money too. It wasn't long before I ended up in Ōwairaka Boys' home. I was 14 years old.

Ōwairaka was a nasty place, and like other State-run institutions I had been in, there was a kingpin system – a pecking order based on size and how mean and nasty you could be. Housemasters not only encouraged this, they set it up and used violence and aggression to control you. At Ōwairaka, the staff organised a boxing ring with the biggest, meanest boy, built like a huge gorilla.

When I got out I told my parents about what had happened there. They went to the police, which is what you are supposed to do, but the police refused to believe them. We felt helpless, like we had no voice. I turned to drugs and alcohol to numb the pain I felt.

I ended up overdosing a couple of times and getting in trouble with the police for petty crime. I was 17 or 18 when the court ordered me to be sent to Oakley Hospital. I was there because I was using drugs and booze to numb my pain. It was another abusive place, with staff who hit, hurt and abused patients. They diagnosed me with schizophrenia, but I think the doctor was just saying whatever he needed to, to tick the box.

The staff would load you up with prescription drugs and say “just take them” when I asked what the drugs were for. I got addicted to the pills and would manufacture symptoms to get more. I became quite resourceful and could manipulate the doctors to prescribe whatever I needed.

Sexual abuse there was horrific – there were guys getting raped every single day by other patients. Staff knew what was going on and didn’t do a thing about it. Staff threatened us with shock treatment or they would make threats to send us off to Lake Alice.

I felt too unsafe to talk to the authorities about what I’d seen, I didn’t think they’d believe me, and there were no complaint processes.

I was incarcerated into Mt Eden when I was in my mid-twenties. All up, I did three stints inside, including at Pāremoremo because I had escaped from Mount Eden Prison. During my time in prison, I’d regularly meet up with the boys I had known in the boy’s home.

I continue to bear the scars of the physical and emotional torment inflicted on me by the State’s failure to keep me safe.

The institutions I was in were brutal, and I feel fortunate that I survived. What happened to me in care has affected me throughout my life and made me determined that no child of mine would ever end up in State care.

No child should be taken off their parents.

Children have the right to be cared for, to be loved, to be protected, to be valued. If someone had made the effort to treat me as a person, rather than as a little brown boy, there could have been a totally different outcome.

**Source:** Witness statement, Andrew Brown (13 July 2022).



“  
You had to  
sleep on your  
back with  
your arms  
crossed over  
your chest,  
so the devil  
couldn't come  
and take you  
away.

”



# Ann Thompson

**Hometown:** Ōtautahi Christchurch, now Whangarei

**Age when entered care:** Baby – 2 ½ months old

**Year of birth:** 1941

**Time in care:** 1941-1965

**Type of care facility:** Orphanages – St Joseph’s Girls’ Orphanage, Nazareth House.

**Ethnicity:** Pākehā

**Whānau background:** Ann was taken without her mother agreeing. Her mum fought for Ann but was made to give her up. Ann reconnected with her brother in 1993 when she was 52 years old, but has not reconnected with her mother and other siblings. She has four sisters and two brothers.

**Currently:** Ann has a daughter. Her husband died and their son died when he was 27 years old.

**My mother was raped when she was 15 years old, and I was the product of that assault. I was just 2 ½ months old when I was taken from my mother’s arms and sent to St Joseph’s Girls Orphanage, a Catholic orphanage in Christchurch. I only ever saw my mother once more in my lifetime. I was at St Joseph’s until the age of 10. In 1951 I was moved to Nazareth House, another orphanage where I lived full time until the age of 19. I lived on and off at Nazareth House until I was 24 years old.**

On my 15th birthday two ladies I didn’t know came to see me. They gave me my first ever birthday cake, a pair of shoes and a beautiful jersey. When they left, I asked Sister Blandina, a nun at the orphanage, who they were. She told me one was my fairy godmother. When I was 52 years old I reconnected with my brother, John, and he showed me a photo of our mother and her sister. I recognised them both as the two ladies who came to see me. The nuns knew about my mother and didn’t tell me that I had a family – they told me I was an orphan.

I owned one toy the entire time I was in care – a doll. I later found out my mother had bought it for me. One day a nun took the doll and ripped off its arms and legs in front of everybody. I knew right then that nobody cared about me, and nobody wanted me.

Over and over I was shown that I didn’t deserve to enjoy anything or experience happiness.

At St Joseph’s, the children who had no parents were lined up each Sunday morning outside the front door for adoption. The adults would look us over, and the feelings we had when no one picked us are something I will never be able to explain, but I felt it all over again when I accessed my records and found out I was put up for adoption four times. Once at St Joseph’s Orphanage and three times at Nazareth House.

I was 10 years old when I went to Nazareth House from St Joseph's. We were given a number, which we had to put on all our clothes. I was number 99.

The nuns physically and verbally abused all sense of self-worth out of me. They said I was born in the gutter and would go back there if they didn't punish me. They kept telling me the punishment was for my own good, so I didn't turn out to be like my mother.

I was cold, all the time, day and night, and I used to get so hungry I would eat the ice that formed on top of puddles, as well as grass. I left school at the age of 12 years old to work and earn my keep at the orphanage. I didn't have much schooling and couldn't read or write very well.

Our clothes were changed once a month. My underpants were hard and stiff in the crotch. I was sore and had a rash, which bled a lot. I could only wash them at night, but if I left them to dry, they would be stolen, so I would lie on top of them at night.

I would try to hide from the nuns, but Mother Euphrasia would drag me out by my hair, put me in a sack, tie the top of it and tell me that the pig man was going to come and take me away. It was so dark and I was terrified. She would hit me with a stick. She told me she had to punish me for what my mother had done.

I never knew when or where Mother Euphrasia was going to sneak up behind me. The nuns would come up behind me and pinch me on my arm with the tips of their fingernails, taking skin off. It was painful and bled.

You had to sleep on your back with your arms crossed over your chest, so the devil couldn't come and take you away. If you didn't, the nuns would beat you with a cane.

At night, the nuns would strip my clothes off, tie me to the bed face-down, and thrash me with a belt with the buckle. It cut into my skin until I bled and I couldn't sit down afterwards for weeks.

One of the nuns would lock me in the cellar, sometimes by myself, sometimes with others. We couldn't get out and we had nothing to eat or drink while we were down there. The cellar was cold, dark and it leaked. We had no blankets to keep warm, all we could do was curl up in a ball. It was infested with rats and we had to go to the toilet on the floor.

Sister Blandina frequently put my head down the toilet and flushed it. When I wet the bed, she would make me get down on my knees and put my hands behind my back, and she would rub my head in the wet sheets.

There were some older girls who would come to my bed, strip me, then one of them would sit on my face while the other one pushed my legs apart and touched my vagina. They would put things up me. They'd lock me in the broom cupboard afterwards. I couldn't make any noise or they'd sit on me harder. I was so scared.

The older girls would make me lick their genitals in the bathroom. I was too afraid to go to the toilet, because that's where they would be waiting for me, so I started wetting my pants.

From the classroom to the toilets was a stairway that led up to the attic. The older girls were always up there and it was a place I ran past if I was alone. One day I was by myself and they dragged me up there by my hair. They made me drink their urine, then they took their pants off and pushed me onto my knees while pulling me around by my hair to get me to lick them. I felt trapped – if I stayed in the classroom I would get slapped for wetting my pants, but the girls were waiting for me outside as well. I couldn't see any way out. I had no one to go to for help. Once, I went to the police. They gave me hot cocoa and took me back to the orphanage. They did this every time I went to them for help. I was just another girl with no one to turn to.

I cannot overstate how much my time in care has ruined my life. It has been over 50 years since I left Christchurch, but the fear I have is still so strong, and it will not weaken in this lifetime.

My physical ailments are the least of my problems. These include spinal arthritis, partial deafness, and respiratory issues, as well as difficulties carrying children due to an injured uterus. I have miscarried eight times. I get severe migraines, due to what I suspect was a fractured skull.

But it is the mental and emotional health issues that do not relent. I suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression and anxiety. A registered psychologist recorded me as having all 21 recognised symptoms of PTSD.

One of my deepest sadnesses is that I had no idea how to love and nurture my children, and they suffered, probably as I suffered with the nun.

The fear is still with me today. The nuns have taken so much away from me, besides my freedom. They took my innocence, laughter and love.

I took action against mistreatment at St Josephs and received a modest settlement.

The action I took against the Nazareth nuns led to me being listened to by Sister Clare and Mary from the Order with great care and that was a first. There was again a modest settlement. Part of it was a fund ("the Commitment") the nuns would establish to be available to the 28 claimants then present. This was to be replenished every year while we lived but it did not work out. It created disappointment and felt like the old humiliation. I understand the Order plan to cancel it, which breaches our settlement agreement.

I want awareness for what I went through. I want remorse. I want accountability, and I want thorough oversight of care institutions.

May God have mercy on their souls, for I will never forgive them.

**Source:** Witness Statement of Shirley Ann Thompson (10 February 2022) and Affidavit of Shirley Ann Thompson (2 October 2000).



“

I try not to think about what happened to me when I was in care, but I still have lots of nightmares about it

”



# Antony Dalton-Wilson

**Age when entered care:** 10 years old

**Year of birth:** 1967

**Hometown:** Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland

**Time in care:** 1977 to 1980

**Type of care facility:** Hospital – Ward 12 at Auckland Hospital, Māngere Hospital; residential school – Mount Wellington Residential School, Bucklands Beach Residential School (Waimokoia Residential School).

**Ethnicity:** Samoan, Gypsy and German

**Whānau background:** Antony grew up the eldest of four children, with two brothers and one sister. His mum is English and his dad is Samoan. Samoan culture was important in his family. Antony also feels a strong connection to tikanga Māori through his stepdad, who he also called 'Dad'. Antony's Gypsy and Samoan side were the pinnacle in his upbringing.

**Currently:** Antony married Jaitoon in 1997 and they had lots of happy times together. She passed away in 2019. He lives in Royal Oak, in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.

**When I was 7 years old, I was crushed by a truck at my dad's work. I don't really remember the accident, but I know that I slipped, and a stock truck was backing up and hit me. The truck crushed my head and parts of my body.**

My brain got really hurt and I couldn't walk, talk or write any more. I can't see anything out of my left eye and I'm 90 percent blind in my right eye.

After I left hospital, I got physical and speech therapy at the Wilson Home. When I went back to live with my mum and my dad, I started going to school again, but I didn't stay there very long because they couldn't help me after my accident.

Before my accident, I went to Balmoral Seventh-Day Adventist School. I liked going there because I really like learning. Religion was important in our family. We went to church every week and I also learnt about God at school.

When I was 9 years old, I moved to Mount Roskill Primary School for a trial in the physically handicapped class – I didn't like the name of that class. The work wasn't hard but I needed help with writing. I asked the teacher for help lots of times but she wouldn't come and help me.

I didn't stay at Mount Roskill for very long because I didn't like it and they couldn't support me. I moved back to the Seventh-Day Adventist school for a very short time but I had the same problems as before, so it didn't work out.

When I was 10 years old, I went to Ward 12 at Auckland Hospital and it was very scary. The nurses gave me more medication than I was on when I went in. I didn't like it – they were drugging me up. The male nurse said mean things to me.

I was sometimes locked in a time out room, even if I didn't do anything wrong. It was a room that had no beds or blankets, and it was freezing cold. I had to go there for about an hour if the staff thought I was being annoying or naughty. It happened more than once.

I was in Ward 12 for about five months and when I left, my mum and dad had split up. I stayed at home with my dad, my brothers and my sister.

I went to the adjustment class at Ruapōtaka Primary School. The teachers were alright, but I got very tired so I went home and slept in the afternoon. Mrs Clare was my favourite teacher.

I sometimes went to Māngere Hospital in the holidays but I'm not sure why. I hated it and was treated really badly there. The staff called me handicapped even though I asked them not to. I don't like that word – it undermines me.

When I first went there, they put me straight in time out and told me to wait. I was yelling for somebody to get me out. I didn't have any food or drink. The staff didn't come until night-time.

Then I was sent to foster care. The foster father was a bastard and his care was really bad. I was placed there for a long time and I didn't get to go outside and play with my friends. Nobody ever told me what was happening, so I was worried about what would be next.

After Ruapōtaka, when I was 11, I went to Mount Wellington Residential School and then Bucklands Beach Residential School (Waimokoia). My records say that I was a 'special admission' because I was different from the other kids.

One of the things I really remember is that the teachers were very mean. Lots of them would call me 'bung-eye' and some would put their cigarette butts out on me. I think they liked to harass me. They called me names, laughed at me and gave me the fingers.

The teachers knew about the bullying, but never did anything to stop it.

The teachers wouldn't let me sleep in the afternoon even though my mum told them I needed to. They sometimes even made me stay awake at night. Sometimes the teachers wouldn't let me have food. They said it was because I was naughty.

One of the teachers was a bloody bastard who physically hurt me. He took me to the doctor in the school van, pulling my collar to get me in and pushing me out of the van. During one trip, he was so rough with me when I was already hurt, I called him a "fat bloody bastard". He left me in the time out room with no food and no bedding all night.

The headmaster at Mount Wellington made me pull my pAntony down and he hit me with a belt. It would really hurt. He did this to me many times – sometimes it would be a few times in one week. He also told me that the staff didn't like me and I cried.

Another teacher physically hurt me too. He made me sit on a chair and tap my finger on the desk. He then pushed the back of my chair and I fell to the ground. Then he made me go in the time out room for the whole night. This happened about four times.

I was put in the time out room nearly every day. I remember there was one time out room at Mount Wellington and two at Bucklands Beach. All of the rooms were really scary because they were very dark. The room at Mount Wellington was the worst because there were no windows and I could hardly breathe.

I didn't feel good when I had to go in the time out room. I felt scared and I felt like I wasn't loved. Sometimes the teachers would tie my hands behind my back with rope before they threw me in there. Sometimes I had to stay the night in the time out room and one time I had to stay there for the whole weekend.

The teachers didn't tell me why they were putting me in the time out room but sometimes I was put in there if I wet the bed. It wasn't my fault that I wet the bed – I think it happened for a few reasons but one of them was because I was taking a lot of medicine. I also remember a time I had to go to time out because I accidentally broke one of the dinner plates.

Another time, when I hadn't done anything wrong, a group of teachers stood around asked what they should do to me. One of the teachers said to put me in time out, so they did. Then they just stood and laughed at me.

There was nothing to do in the time out room. I cried and yelled because I wanted somebody to let me out. There was no toilet and I banged on the door so that a teacher would come. They never did so I had to wee on the floor.

Sometimes instead of putting me in the time out room, the teachers held my hands tight behind my back and threw me hard on my bed in the dormitory. Sometimes I had been a bit naughty but sometimes they just did it.

When I wet the bed at night, the teachers sometimes wouldn't let me change the sheets. They made me sit in the corner of my room for the whole night. They didn't give me blankets or anything to sleep on. I was very upset and cold. Other times, if I wet the bed, the staff threw a whole bucket of cold water on me.

I left Bucklands Beach when I was 12 years old. Mum and my stepdad just came and picked me up one day – I was so happy to go home. That was the end of that. I am hurt about what happened there. I just don't understand why the teachers did those things to me.

I try not to think about what happened to me when I was in care, but I still have lots of nightmares about it. For a long time, I didn't talk about the abuse because I thought that I would get into trouble. I want to share my story because I want to help other children who have had brain injuries.

**Source:** Witness statement, Antony Dalton-Wilson (13 June 2021).



“

It seemed as though we were some kind of social experiment

”



# Beverly Wardle-Jackson

**Hometown:** Ōtautahi Christchurch

**Age when entered care:** 7 years old

**Year of birth:** 1952

**Time in care:** 1960 to 1970

**Type of care facility:** Salvation Army Home – Florence Booth Salvation Army Home; family home – Riccarton Family Home; girls’ homes – Fareham House, Miramar Girls’ Home, Strathmore Girls’ Receiving Home; psychiatric hospitals – Oakley Hospital, Porirua Hospital; Salvation Army home for unmarried mothers.

**Ethnicity:** Pākehā

**Whānau background:** Beverly is the fourth of 10 children.

**Currently:** Beverly has four children with her first husband. She has no connection with her oldest daughter but has good relationships with her other children. Beverly is married to her second husband Ian and lives in Christchurch.

**I was 12 years old when I was made a State ward. My father tried hard, but we lived in extreme poverty and didn’t have a lot of food. Despite this, the children kept coming.**

My family first came to the attention of Child Welfare when I was 6 years old. The school headmaster contacted Child Welfare because of concerns about our family, and not long after, other people who were concerned also contacted them. I’m not surprised by this – sometimes there was no food in the house at all, and I would have to go begging to the neighbours for milk for the babies.

When I was 10, my parents were prosecuted by the Education Board because my siblings and I weren’t going to school. Sometimes I’d be at home helping to care for the younger ones, or because I was sick. Sometimes I stayed home because I had no clean clothes or because there was a school trip on that we could not pay for.

I was sent to various girls’ homes, where I was physically abused and put in seclusion.

Like a lot of girls who went into care, I ended up in psychiatric hospital care – first Ward 27 at Wellington Hospital and then Porirua Hospital, where I stayed on and off from 1967 to 1973, and later Oakley Hospital. In between admissions, I went to other places – often back to various girls’ homes.

Each time, I was returned to Porirua Hospital when my behaviour was perceived to be ‘difficult’. I was just a lonely, isolated teenage girl. Every little thing about Porirua Hospital seemed to reinforce the feeling of being trapped and powerless. Every day, violent incidents would happen somewhere, usually ending with the nurses assaulting

patients and dragging them off to their rooms, kicking and punching them along the way. It was all wrong, so wrong, but there was no one to tell, no one to complain to.

The continual screaming, banging and swearing day and night was overwhelmingly depressing. I was on edge the whole time, wary of everyone, anxious that I might end up in the thick of it.

I was filled with deep despair. I felt more alone in the world than ever before. Deep down, I knew I wasn't mad. I also knew that Child Welfare had nowhere for me to live. As each year passed, it became less and less likely that I would ever have a home or someone who cared about me.

Even at my age, I could see the injustice of dumping us girls into mental institutions simply because there was nowhere else for us to go. It seemed as though we were some kind of social experiment.

I escaped once and was given electric shocks as punishment, although the 'medical' reason given was that I was suffering from depression.

There was very little for us to do other than spend each day with the other patients inside the day room. Many of the adult patients had been there for years. Some of these patients had vacant expressions and just sat hardly ever speaking. Others spoke continuously but only to the voices in their heads. Eventually I got used to living in the hospital and used to the people I was forced to live with. I no longer allowed myself to think about my future – I knew I had to accept this madhouse as my home.

When I was 16, I went on trial leave from the hospital. Trial leave is a fancy term for when they allow people like me to leave hospital to test my readiness for living in the community. While I was on leave, I met a man and fell pregnant. Nobody had explained to me how you became pregnant or how babies were born. Child Welfare arranged for me to be forcefully taken back to Porirua Hospital. I overheard the nurses talking about me being pregnant, and that I would probably stay there until after the baby was born, then Child Welfare would take the baby and adopt it out. I spent days and days crying in my room. I begged to be let out of the hospital, but my pleas were ignored.

A friend and I devised an escape plan and we managed to hitch-hike to Auckland but were found by police. I was held in the police cells overnight, remanded in custody for one month, and went to Mt Eden Prison and then Oakley Hospital. At Oakley I lived in a constant state of terror and anxiety – I was terrified by the screaming and fighting among the patients.

When I eventually appeared in court, the magistrate said to the prosecutor that he failed to see any reason why I, as a pregnant young woman, was being held in a mental institution, and he released me immediately.

I was scared and relieved – I knew I was ill-prepared, but at least my life was in my own hands, not in the hands of strangers. I still wasn't free from Child Welfare though – I was dropped off at a home for unmarried mothers, where I gave birth to my daughter four months later. I was 17.

Within minutes of her birth, the staff took my baby from me and refused to let me see her. Child Welfare wanted me to sign adoption documents and I refused. Child Welfare told me I would have to find work, or they would take my daughter away. I was determined that wouldn't happen, and I worked long days, leaving my baby with a caregiver. Then I accidentally bumped into her father, and we married.

I moved to Christchurch for a fresh start. Somehow, I got by from day to day, drawing on some unexplained strength within me. I reconnected with two of my sisters, but that all became too hard in the end; too much damage had been done.

Against all odds, I did make a new life for myself. The years were never easy, but somehow, I must have been blessed with a mental fortitude that made me want to get through.

I wrote a book, *In the Hands of Strangers*. I requested my files from Child Welfare, and as I read the notes that had been recorded about me, I wept. Shock, anger, and feelings of worthlessness welled up inside me. I could hardly believe the coverups, whispers and lies people had written to justify their treatment of me.

I am very aware that my story is just one of the many stories of the 'lost children' – the State wards of my generation. We were children who did not have mental illnesses when we entered mental institutions, but we all became mentally scarred by our time there. At the most basic level, most State wards were unwanted by their own families. Many of them, like me, remained unwanted as we entered our teenage years. I can only share my own story – but I know what happened to many of them. Some ended up in borstals and went to prison; others still wander lost and forlorn through life.

Some days I can't believe I survived. But I did. I don't deny the physical and emotional scars I still carry, but the very things I was missing throughout my childhood – love and a sense of belonging – eventually found me.

This is my story. I hope that by telling it, lessons will be learned.

**Source:** Witness statement, Beverly Wardle-Jackson (7 November 2019).





“  
The Secret  
Keeper  
”

# Catherine Daniels

**Year of birth:** 1967

**Type of care facility:** Rangitikei College in Marton

**Ethnicity:** Pākehā

**I started this journey about six years ago. I made one sculpture to portray what I couldn't say to my psychiatrist and psychologist, so I thought that I would try and sculpt an emotion. Emotions that I could never say out loud. That's where The Secret Keeper started. It took me about 18 months to get brave enough just to make a whole body. At first all I could make were arms and legs. I made her out of many different materials because I didn't want her to be easily broken. She'd already been broken enough. I wanted her to be very solid, so she would never ever break or crack again.**

She's the Secret Keeper because she's kept all the secrets that I was unable to say.

I am telling my story because I have realised that secrets make you sick. I always felt it was my fault. The shame and stigma keep me silent, alone and isolated. Now after speaking out I know I'm not alone anymore.

When I went to College I loved drawing, I'd spent my whole life drawing, and I wanted to be an architect.

The Tech Drawing class wasn't what I thought it was going to be. I loved the tech drawing but what should've been a supportive environment to get a student to reach their potential, dreams and aspirations, turned out to be more of a nightmare. With everything else that had happened and intertwined in my life, it was just another person doing another thing. It was like you get this neon sign saying, "Pick me, pick me".

The teacher that we had, used to push himself up against me and jam me into the tech drawing tables, He used to put his hand down my shirt and pin me up against the desk.

"We have no hands. Hands do bad things. Powerless, we breathe every breath as if it is our last. We can't protect ourselves or ask for help. It feels like a plaster cast is wrapped around our mouths. No one can hear our voices through the layers of cloth sodden with tears. So, I hated hands. When I was little, hands did bad things, so I still hate my hands to this day."

He used to obviously get off on it because he would be hard, and he would push himself into me and push himself into my back. I would feel him being erect and stuff, and it was every tech drawing class, it wasn't just once. He would corner me or he would call me out into the back office. It just wasn't the environment that it should've been for being in a public school. It was just a given thing. So many students knew it was happening, but nobody said anything. I was too petrified to say anything.

There were very few girls that did tech drawing. There was only ever one or two of us in the class. But it just was something that happened, and I didn't really realise but it happened to a lot of girls over a long period of time. I think most people our age had a teacher that was either known as creepy or handsy or touchy-feely and they just seem to stay in those positions.

Because of what he did to me I never got a chance to go to university or to get a degree. It impacts my life still to this day because I feel worthless, and I feel like I haven't got that piece of paper that says that I achieved something from school. I left school really early and became unwell and my mental health deteriorated.

"I became someone else the first time I was touched, trapped in a body that doesn't belong to me. I look upwards, asking for help. My eyes are trying to tell but no one sees. Tears fall as my innocence is taken. I have lost who I am and fear who I've become."

I'm unable to sleep with my husband because of the nightmares. If I travel, most of the time I have someone supporting me. I am a child in an adult's body. I look like an adult and I sound like an adult but I'm not an adult.

I've had more non-consensual sexual partners than I have had consensual partners in my life and I had nobody to tell because I was terrified that if I told, I would die. I had been sexually abused from a young age so, as far as I was concerned, it was just what was happening to me. It was just another thing to happen.

"My thoughts slow, voices fade into the background, sensations dull. Everything gets further and further away. Numbness drifts across my body. I gradually lose myself as my body disconnects. You get a numbness as you get touched, you change, you become somebody else. There's a numbness just goes across your body and you just lose all feelings, you lose – it's like you enter into a tunnel and you just slowly disappear as it's being done to you, and you just slowly disconnect."

I am unable to do so much. I've never tasted tea or coffee because of past abuse. I can't drink alcohol because if I smell alcohol I vomit.

"The pungent smell of his alcohol-fuelled breath penetrates my lungs. When he inhales and exhales, I feel every drop of the stale air. As I'm taken over, venom has been injected into my veins. Everything is slow motion, voices dim, pain subsides. As I dissociate, we drift to another place, a world high above us where we float, watching it as if it's not us. So, you go from here to here in a very short space of time. It can be seconds, and then you just feel like you're floating high above and watching from a distance."



It takes away so much of your social life that everyday people take for granted. My ability to do so much has been impeded. My mental health has been really impacted. I got put on medication which put on 40 kilos of weight. That has its own effects. I still see a psychologist every week, a psychiatrist every three months.

I'm 53 years old and I have three or four nightmares every night reliving that event that happened more than 40 years ago.

"I would lay terrified in bed and I would be terrified of the monsters, but my monsters were real. I would watch from above, high above, and I just – I couldn't stay in my body so I would dissociate, and I would climb up to a safe place."

"I lay terrified, curled in a tiny ball. I tried to make myself invisible from the monsters hiding in my bedroom, prowling shadows that are ready to pounce when the light is turned off. They snatch pieces of me and come back night after night to haunt me as horror-filled nightmares. They live in my past, present and future, feeding off my anxiety."

I relive that every night to the point where I'm sick, sometimes I even vomit. I get petrified of going to sleep and closing my eyes, to the point where if I'm with somebody that's supporting me, I look to them, and one of the last words that I often say, I've been told, which often I don't remember, is, "Please promise I'm not going to die tonight because I've told. I've told my secrets."

That's why so many people don't come forward, because they've been blackmailed, they've been sworn to secrecy, they're told they're going to die if they say anything. It's just horrendous, the long-term effects that this has on people. My journey I will take with me to the day I die.

People that live with sexual abuse – it's a really dark place and people often don't know how dark that place is unless you've been there. Three o'clock in the morning, I've spent many hours rocking in the foetal position, holding myself that tight that I've left bruises on my arms because that's the only person I had, was me inside to hold on to myself. I spent years and years like that, unable to tell anybody, unable to do anything. So, it's just shining a light on this new generation that we need to make changes for.

The ramifications are huge. What it does is ongoing.

It needs to change. It's broken. You have a whole generation of broken people like myself. There are thousands of us, and if things aren't changed it's just going to carry on and their children and their grandchildren are all going to be broken just like us.

**Source:** Witness statement of Catherine Daniels (7 June 2022).

“

Sometimes  
when I wake  
up, I don't  
know if  
I'm dead  
or alive

”



# Chris Finan

**Year of birth:** 1978

**Type of care facility:** Multiple foster homes; boys' homes – Hogben School in Ōtautahi Christchurch, Ngati Arohanui Trust in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland; psychiatric hospitals – Lake Alice in Manawatū-Whanganui, Kingseat Hospital in Karaka, Māngere Hospital in Te Tonga a Tāmaki Makaurau South Auckland; residential care – Wilson Home Trust in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, Weymouth Residential Centre in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.

**Ethnicity:** Māori and Yugoslavian

**Whānau background:** Chris was adopted as a baby. His sister is also adopted. His mother put him into care when he was a young child as she couldn't cope with his behaviour. He had some contact with his family while he was in care.

**Currently:** Chris has two children. He has a relationship with his parents but can't talk to them about what happened because they don't believe him.

**I didn't know my birth mother, and I was adopted when I was 6 months old. When I was about 2 years old, I started hitting family members and throwing things. I couldn't concentrate and had speech problems at kindergarten and primary school. At some point between 4 and 6 years old, I was diagnosed with ADHD.**

Mum couldn't cope with my challenging behaviour, so she put me into care. I was constantly moved around, and a social worker said they had considered 77 placements for me but couldn't find anything suitable. Mum didn't think she had any say in the matter.

When I was around 7 years old, I was admitted to Lake Alice. I was there for two years, and I felt like a number, not a patient. Each day I would just sleep, eat and shit. We had nothing to do. I didn't go to school or receive any therapy sessions – instead, I was zonked out on drugs. They'd also give me ECT for my behavioural issues, without anaesthetic. I remember being shackled to the bed and the pain of the shocks, feeling like thunder or fireworks. The staff would also restrain me for answering back. Once, I was put in a straitjacket for refusing to do something. I tried to run away and as punishment, they injected something into my leg that was painful and crippling.

I did complain but I wasn't believed. I'm disappointed with that.

Between placements or on school holidays, I went to the Ngati Arohanui Trust on Waiheke Island. It was a horrible place, and it wasn't right for me, but Social Welfare put me there anyway. The other kids were usually young criminals – some were rapists and murderers. It felt like we were doing probation work. The woman in charge was violent and hit me with pots and pans.



Sometimes, I would be placed in foster homes. In 1994, I was placed in one full of youth offenders. The foster father was violent and there'd be a lot of fighting between the kids.

In 1996 I was admitted to Kingseat Hospital. I was told I'd be there for a few weeks, but instead, I stayed for four years. It had people of different ages, some with severe psychiatric issues. It was noisy and scary, and I felt like we were caged hens. Every day I'd sit around doing nothing. I'd just be given drugs, and the dose was increased when my behaviour got worse. The medication was horrible – I couldn't go into the sun, it made me feel hot and cold, and I couldn't focus. I got more and more aggressive, and the staff would hold my arms behind my back and throw me on the ground.

Violence was just normal. The staff would beat up patients or tell patients to beat up other patients. I would be held up against the wall and threatened if I told someone what the staff were doing. Sometimes they'd grab me by the genitals to make me listen or do what they wanted. I also heard about staff having sex with patients, and patients having sex with patients.

I ran away at least four times and was punished by being put in secure and locked up for six weeks. I was also given ECT multiple times as punishment for being violent and disruptive.

I think I was admitted to Māngere Hospital after I was discharged from Kingseat. I was in with a lot of people with intellectual disabilities, and they could be quite violent. The staff were physically abusive – they'd kick, put you in headlocks, grab you by the hair or give you a hiding. I complained many times, but nothing was done.

After the hospital closed, I went to a community house. The staff there were physically abusive and often drunk or on drugs, and sometimes they used patients' medications. They'd take us to bars or massage parlours and steal client money.

While I was in care, there was never any encouragement to get me out of institutions and into the community. When I self-discharged at 20 years old, I didn't get any support.

The mental impact of my time in care meant I was unstable for 15 years and it took a while to come off the drugs. I used to smoke dope because I was getting flashbacks, but I don't drink or smoke now, as it was making things worse. I've grown out of my violent and aggressive behaviour, and I've done some anger management programmes. However, I still have nightmares, and sometimes when I wake up, I don't know if I'm dead or alive. Sometimes, I feel like I've run out of emotions. I also can't stay in one place and have moved around 30 times.

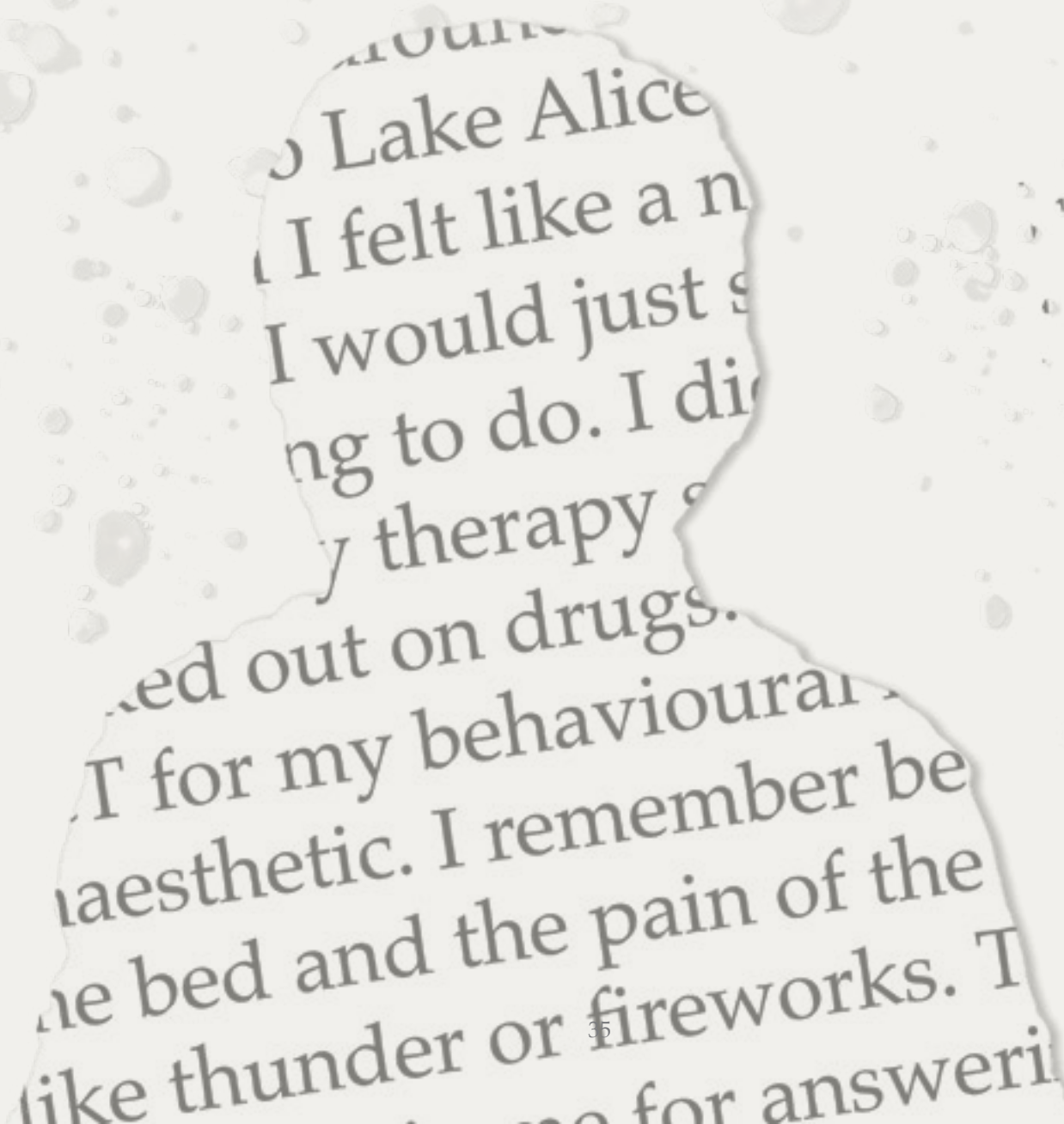
I've tried to talk to my parents about what happened to me, but they think I'm being dramatic, that it was all fine. I think they're just in denial.

If you've been in a mental health institution, you have to continuously prove yourself. I am discriminated against in my daily life because of my mental health history. Even WINZ treats me differently. They make assessments based on my history rather than who is standing in front of them.

I currently work as a doorman at a bar. I've had jobs on and off since I came out of care, but I haven't been able to hold down a full-time job for a long period of time. I wanted to work with children, but my history in psychiatric care means I can't. It's been a real barrier to getting jobs.

Now, I'm just trying to move on. There are too many reviews but not enough people looking at how much we have suffered and how difficult it is to get compensation.

Source: Witness statement of Chris Finan (9 August 2021).



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It's okay, you haven't got a baby anymore," a nurse said. I realized I had been given an abortion

”





# Christina Ramage

**Hometown:** Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland

**Age when entered care:** 15 years old

**Year of birth:** 1956

**Time in care:** 1971–1976

**Type of care facility:** Psychiatric hospitals – Ward 10, Auckland Hospital; Carrington Hospital.

**Ethnicity:** NZ European

**Whānau background:** Christina has a younger brother and a younger sister.

**Currently:** Christina lives in Auckland and says her counsellor is a lifeline for her.

**I was 15 years old and a friend and I went out to celebrate passing School Certificate. That night, I was raped by five young men. They were at a bus stop and threatened me, dragged me around the back, then raped me. I remember bits and pieces of what happened, but other parts are blank. I kept it to myself, but soon afterwards I started cutting myself because I was so stressed.**

I was also sexually abused by my father from when I was a pre-schooler until I was 13 years old. A lot of what I remember from this time is being in darkness. I was afraid most of the time because I didn't know what was going to happen. I became more and more stressed and ended up having seizures.

I was 15 years old when I was admitted to psychiatric care, first at Auckland Hospital. A doctor there gave me something he described as a "truth drug", then I went before a three-person panel and they decided I was a danger to myself and to the public. I was committed to Carrington Hospital as an involuntary patient. The doctor had said I would be told the results, including what I had said, but that never happened. It makes me angry, because it seems like they decided to commit me because of what I'd said, but they wouldn't tell me what I had said.

I was sent to Carrington Hospital in 1972, at 16 years old. I was taken to a dark and smelly room and told to get on the bed. They gave me electric shocks without anaesthetic. Then I was admitted to an unlocked ward for women, but later moved to a locked ward called Park House.

My sister told me the entrance to Carrington was nice and welcoming, with a picture of Jesus on the wall. But that wasn't the case with the wards – they were terrible, overcrowded and understaffed, and I was treated as a lesser human being. The bedrooms had bars on the windows. The reception and entrance were a facade.

I was given a lot of drugs but never told what they were or how I might react to them.

It was a known thing that the male nurses at Carrington were university students working for wages in the semester break, so a lot of them were totally untrained. In the female ward, women were there to be used for sex or assault. People seemed to think it was easy to look after a lot of 'loonies'. These untrained nurses had direct access to straitjackets and were allowed to use them on us without having to give any reason.

One day I was walking down a corridor when two young male nurses grabbed me, took me into an area behind doors where the straitjackets were kept, and put one on me hurriedly and roughly. I was confused and afraid; I didn't know what I'd done wrong, and I was terrified of whatever was going to happen.

They laughed and joked. "Nobody can see us here," one said. They pushed me onto the ground, and I thought, "This is it". I realised what was about to happen, and it terrified and panicked me. I struggled uselessly to get out of the straitjacket even though I knew I couldn't. I closed my eyes, I was overwhelmed and despairing.

As one raped me, the other would say, "Hurry up, hurry up". I was raped by both of them. I could feel my body above my waist, but not below at all. I screamed out even though I knew it was no good – my cries couldn't be heard through the thick and solid doors that hid the three of us.

After the rape, the two of them sat on the steps and laughed at me for what seemed like forever. "She's no good, scum, rotten to the core," one said. They took the straitjacket off and I straightened my nightgown. I didn't say anything – after all, who would believe a mental patient who had previously been abused and raped and was currently in a mental asylum? They'd probably say I was asking for it, or I was lying. I knew if I said something, I'd be locked up.

I was sexually abused by a psychiatrist while I was at Park House. A nurse took me to a very small room and the psychiatrist locked the door. He asked me a few questions. One of them was, "Do you like sex?". I thought he'd find something wrong with me if I said no, so I said yes. The nurse took me to the examination bed and left the room, and the psychiatrist took my underwear down and raped me.

A few months after the psychiatrist had raped me, a nurse took me to a room that was usually always locked. The room had lots of shiny things. They told me to get on the bed, and suddenly everything went dark. The next thing I knew, I was awake. "It's okay, you haven't got a baby anymore," a nurse said. I realised I had been given an abortion following the rape by the psychiatrist.

I think this is one of the most criminal aspects of my time at Carrington. It still haunts me today.

I was also sexually abused by other patients. Three young women assaulted me, two of them on either side fondling my breasts while the other one pushed a finger up my vagina.

I also saw other people being abused or neglected in the same way that I was, and it created an atmosphere of abuse and neglect that was thick. A female patient once got hold of some matches and went to her room during the day and set fire to herself on the mattress. I never saw her again. The incident really troubled me because she was in quite a helpless situation – she had been 'dumped at the door' at birth as she was disabled.

I became wary of what was going on around me, and I trusted no one. All-enclosing fear was everywhere and hung really heavily. The feeling was palpable all the time.

I was given 10 rounds of electric shocks, six shocks per round. I wasn't told how this would be done, what might happen to me afterwards as a result, or why I was being given the shocks. I wasn't given a sedative or anaesthetic on any of these occasions, and wasn't even told that this was a possibility. ECT was often given as a form of punishment.

I had to get onto the bed and the nurses would put a cloth in my mouth while they held me down. The doctor would say, 'are you ready' and flick the switch on the grey ECT box. After ECT, I was always sore in my private parts, and I realised I must have been raped or sexually assaulted.

You got one bath per week, as the sole female nurse came in only once a week. She would watch you having a bath. The baths were made of rough concrete and the water only covered the bottom half of your body as you laid down.

The wards had padded cells and you were thrown into them as punishment if you played up. I was thrown in there for making a noise scraping my chair as I got up in the dining room. The reasons for locking us up were many, and petty.

I was generally unable to express myself, so when I did, it was in the form of fighting. The male nurses would throw me into a room and take apart the three-piece bed, leaving only the mattress. They'd pull my pants down and roughly inject me with a knockout drug, and leave me in there for a long time. It was usually dark when I went in and daylight when I came out, except for the occasions when I was left in there for longer than a day.

Going into psychiatric care was the end of any education I received. I didn't get any schooling, although a few people did, if they were considered 'well enough'. Sometimes an occupational therapist would come in, but there was no entertainment and nothing to do.

I was 20 years old when I was discharged from Carrington. My hopes and dreams were shattered. I was angry, bitter, sad, and I felt alone. It was like being in a straitjacket all the time.

It is encouraging that, after 37 years in my case, a Royal Commission of Inquiry has finally taken steps to seek to uncover the harrowing stories of many individuals who were in care. It's long overdue.

I've spoken out for the people who are currently in psychiatric wards, and for those in the future. My experience shows that there is always hope.

**Source:** Witness statement, Christina Ramage (27 July 2021).



“  
the stripping  
of my cultural  
identity is the  
one thing that  
hurts the most  
”

# David Crichton

**Age when entered care:** 1 year old

**Year of birth:** 1967

**Hometown:** Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington

**Time in care:** 18 years

**Type of care facility:** Children's Homes – St Barnabas Home, Salvation Army Residential Nursery, Berhampore Children's Home, Our Lady's Home of Compassion, Epuni Boys' Home. Foster placements, including a foster placement where he was relocated to Papua New Guinea; Open Home Foundation.

**Ethnicity:** Samoan

**Whānau background:** David's mother was born in Dunedin, he is her youngest child. David was raised under the name Mohi and grew up believing he was Māori. On getting his file at 30 years old, he read he was in fact Samoan and learnt his father's name, noted in his file.

His dad was Samoan, but David didn't get to meet him before he passed when David was 15. No one connected David to his family during his time in care.

**Currently:** David maintains a strong connection to the Māori side of his upbringing as this formed a big part of his identity growing up, alongside being Samoan and is continuing to learn what this means. He has connected with his Samoan family and carries the surname of his father. He has a supportive and loving partner, children and moko, who have learnt a lot about understanding David's trauma.

**I went into care as a baby and spent my entire childhood and teenage years in care.**

**At birth I was named David James Mohi. Throughout my time in care, I was told I was Māori. I was referred to by others as Māori. I believed I was Māori.**

I am not.

It was only after I requested my care files when my partner and I were expecting our first child that I found out my biological father was a Samoan man named James (Jim) Crichton and that I am of Samoan heritage. By this time, I had claimed the Māori culture I thought was my own and carried Māori tattoos all over my body.

Presbyterian Support Central and the State knew from the very beginning that Jim Crichton was my dad, and that I was of Samoan heritage. It is there in my files, in black and white.

My records show that my mum had significant mental health issues. She was not well, and Presbyterian Support Central and the State knew this. They shouldn't have relied on information provided by her given her mental state.



My records state that a major source of conflict for my mum was that my father was Samoan, that she despised him for being Samoan and thought Samoans were inferior. She was reported to consider herself to be superior in every way to my father and felt that by living with a Samoan she had degraded herself.

A social worker made an entry shortly after I was born: "The baby's father is an Islander and this coupled with Mrs Mohi's low intelligence would probably make adoptive placement for the baby rather doubtful."

My birth certificate doesn't record Jim Crichton as my father – it says my father was unknown. But my mother knew who my father was. She kept his name off my birth certificate intentionally.

My father's sister, Auntie Rose, is mentioned in the early reports. But no one made attempts to contact her directly. The social workers believed all the negative things my mother told them about my dad and my family, despite references in the report to my mum being "disturbed" and information provided by her lacking credibility.

My mother gave me the surname Mohi. I think this was probably so that the Crichton family couldn't ever find me, I will never know.

The obligation on the State to establish, preserve and strengthen a relationship between me and my paternal family was further heightened because they knew my mother had such strong feelings against my Samoan father, family and heritage. They knew she was very unwell. There was no way she was going to support and encourage any relationship between me and my family, so when Presbyterian Support Central and the State became involved in my life and responsible for my care that duty fell squarely on them.

My dad died while I was in the care. My mother knew for ages that he had been sick. He died on a Monday. I understand that the previous Friday, the staff at my placement became aware that my dad was in hospital, he was likely to pass away and he had asked to see me. But the staff kept this information from me until Sunday. On Monday morning the staff contacted the hospital to organise a time for me to visit him, but they were told he had died a few hours earlier.

Later that week my mother and a social worker took me to my dad's funeral. I had no idea what was going on. At the funeral my mother told my dad's family that Jim was my father. She introduced me to people by saying things like, "This is Jim's boy". I vividly remember family members staring in disbelief, some didn't know how to take it, which made me feel very uncomfortable. I was only there for a very short time, less than half an hour. It was so confusing for me.

Despite the other abuse I suffered in care, the loss of my cultural identity is the part of my experience in care that hurts me the most. I spent all my childhood, youth and the beginning of my adult life believing that I was Māori. I was denied any knowledge of my Samoan family, culture and identity. I am covered in Māori tattoos because I believed that that was who I was. If I had truly known of my Samoan cultural heritage I would likely be covered in Samoan tatau.



It took many years, and I still struggle with it, to accept that I'm Samoan, because I wasn't raised as a Samoan, but all my family is. With my Māori family and friends, I'm very culturally comfortable, they are staunch people of Māori descent, and they would be the first to say that I'm Māori.

I feel like I was Māori before I was Samoan and when I'm around my friends I still feel like I'm Māori. Adjusting to the Samoan culture has been challenging. The way things are done is quite structured and there is a hierarchy of who can say and do different things. I am quite a vocal person, so I have had to adjust that to fit into the Samoan way of doing things.

When children are in care, they need to be made aware of their ethnicity, their true identity and of their extended family. When Presbyterian Support Central and the State became responsible for my care, they should have done all they could to locate my dad and my paternal family directly, but they did not. My Samoan family lived in the Wellington region, and it would not have been that hard to find them.

I missed out on having relationships with my extended family because of my mother's secretiveness and because Presbyterian Support Central and the State neglected their duties. I believe that the organisations responsible for my care had a duty to at least tell me who my family was, to tell me about my ethnicity, to make genuine efforts to look for my family. This responsibility increases, in cases like mine, where a child spends their whole upbringing in care.

After I gave evidence at one of the Inquiry's public hearings, Presbyterian Support Central's chief executive wrote to me to apologise for the abuse I suffered while in its care and to acknowledge my evidence. My family and I found this to be a genuine apology and we later met with senior staff face-to-face. We appreciated this.

My children very much identify with Samoan and Māori culture. They have been around their Samoan family their whole lives, and due to this have a strong connection to being Samoan. At times I feel guilty and angry about not being able to teach them about my family and the Samoan culture, but it has been great to learn things together and to build bonds with our Crichton whānau in the process.

It's been a joy to see my children's desire to be connected to who they are. Seeing my daughter building connections online with the extended Crichton family and hearing my 16-year-old son's speech in the Samoan language are great successes for us as an aiga.

There are no words that will ever come close to fully describing the impact this has had on me. I suffered all forms of abuse during my time in care, but the stripping of my cultural identity is the one thing that hurts the most and has had the most effect on me and my family. This is the main reason why I am sharing my story with the Inquiry in the hopes that no other child goes through what I have.

**Source:** Witness statement, David Crichton (9 July 2021).

“  
The staff  
were  
instigating  
the violence  
”



# Ms FT

**Age when entered care:** 15 years old

**Year of birth:** 1980

**Hometown:** Ōtara, South Auckland

**Time in care:** 1995

**Type of care facility:** Youth justice facilities – Weymouth, Eponi

**Ethnicity:** Ms FT has Cook Islands whakapapa and a strong affinity with Māori culture.

**Whānau background:** Ms FT has two brothers and two sisters. Ms FT and her brothers were raised by their grandparents. Her sisters were raised by her birth mother.

**Currently:** Ms FT has six children and five mokopuna. She is currently incarcerated in Auckland Women's Prison.

**Growing up in Ōtara, it felt like we were one big family. I used to stay at the neighbours' houses as everyone knew everyone. My biological mother came around now and then, but it was my nan and grandfather who raised me and my siblings.**

Though he had Cook Islands and German heritage, my grandfather was big on Māori culture. I looked up to him and took so much pride in what he taught me. He was a man of great mana and I always tried to please him.

Between the ages of around 4 and 7 years old, I was molested at home. It wasn't a family member – it was some prick who stayed with us who was an in-law.

I started fighting a lot. At primary school, most kids scratched or pulled hair. I punched the person I was fighting until they bled. I also whacked staff as well, usually when they were trying to restrain me. When they touched me, I felt this need to lash out. I was always distracted in school and couldn't really listen.

My grandparents always talked to me and tried to help me. My uncle, who was a well-known medical figure in the Pasifika community, told my grandparents that I was hyperactive. He said he could give me some medication, but my grandfather said no. Instead, my grandparents tried to tire me out.

There was a specific event when I was 15 that led to me going into care. After I stood with my brother when he was jumped by a number of men, he took his friend's side in an argument. I saw that as a betrayal. My grandfather had told me if any of his children betrayed another, they would be cut off from our family. I took his words too literally and felt like he needed to be physically cut off and needed to die. I used a kitchen knife and stabbed him once in the back. I missed his heart by about six inches.



When I arrived at Weymouth, I was forced to strip in front of male guards who were behind the glass. I don't think I had any type of psychiatric assessment or anything like that. I was put in secure, which was very isolating.

I was transferred to Epuni. I didn't understand what was going on – no social worker visited while I was at Weymouth. I thought I was at Weymouth for two weeks, I found out recently that it was actually a couple days. It felt like forever.

When I arrived at Epuni it was the same deal – I stripped down and was placed in secure for about a week. We were allowed “out” for one hour a day but only in the hallway – we didn't get fresh air or a chance to exercise.

I remember the principal and a guard who acted like her attack dog – he looked at us like we were scum and never treated us like human beings. The kingpin resident was always talking to them. The first time I was at the table tennis table, she threw the bat at me. She was trying to bully me to get off the table, trying to staunch me out. I threw the bat at her, then I grabbed the chair and whacked it at her. I then started punching her but I got pulled off. I think they made her do it to see how I would react. I definitely reacted – I got the chair and smashed it on her and then started hoeing into her.

The guard watched for a bit, but as soon as the principal came, he pulled me by my top and tried to choke me out. I punched him in the face, it made his nose bleed. He kicked me to the ground, and then he lifted me by my hair, put me in a headlock and carried me into secure.

After that, I played up all the time. They were trying to make me submissive and I am not that person.

I also got into fights with other youths. One boy, who was in Black Power, threw a knife at me when I was eating so I threw a hot jug of water over him. Gangs played a big role at Epuni. People were either Black Power or Mongrel Mob. Me and the cousins were Crips from Auckland but that meant nothing to them.

There was another staff member who was a sexual predator and worked night shift. He tried to come into my room, but I told him to fuck off. You could hear him rooting girls in other rooms though. They said he pretty much raped them at the beginning, but they realised they could get stuff out of it, like money into their canteen and other favours like that.

We couldn't really complain to anyone. I did try to raise the paedophile with another staff member who was pretty solid, but he didn't want to make a formal complaint because it would jeopardise his job.

The school work wasn't challenging at all. I played the dumb card because I didn't want to show that I was quite intelligent. The main thing I learnt was that I didn't want any of my children to experience what it was like to be in these types of institutions.

After six months, I went back to my mum's care. I had to see a psychiatrist as part of the conditions of my release. Her style made me angry – she was a stranger asking me all these things and I told the court I would rather just get thrown back in Epuni than answer them.

Now I know that I didn't have the tools to process what I had been through. I got no help or support getting back to normal life after Epuni. My only support was my mum, and our relationship was up and down.

Dealing drugs was the only way we could get money. It's sad because it felt hypocritical contributing to the problem just to make a better life for my whānau. I had five more kids to my partner, who I am still with today.

After a history of fraud, dishonesty and driving while disqualified, I was charged with grievous bodily harm in 2003. I went down as the instigator and my partner went down as the principal.

Wanting to live a legit life, we moved to Wellington for five and half years. A recruiting company said I had awesome qualifications but declined my application because of my fraud history. I couldn't get around these hurdles. In the end, I got a job doing cleaning and administration for my partner's boss.

I also decided to go to Victoria University to study. I wanted to be someone who came into prisons to help the women see a better life. When my moko was sick, I transferred to Auckland University. I was in Auckland for three months before I was charged in 2016 for the offence that I am now in prison for.

At Auckland Women's Prison, I had a positive attitude. I knew that the experience was what we made it and I wanted to help bring the best out of every wāhine – for them to know that our prison experience doesn't define who we are. Staff could see that I was influencing and empowering other women, so they moved me to another unit. They didn't want us to feel empowered in prison.

I have now been in Christchurch Women's Prison since 2021. It's hard being down in Christchurch with my whānau in Tāmaki. My kids haven't seen me for months. Two years, and even then, it was only by video calls.

I'm proud to say that none of my kids have ever been in care. Despite my experience, I kept them safe and I still have a strong bond with them. After the 2016 charge, CYFS tried to get involved, saying my whānau who are gang members were a bad influence. The reality is that many Māori and Pacific people have a whānau member who is in a gang. They assumed my whole family were gangsters, but the whānau who care for my kids are good people and hard workers. My children had a bulletproof network of whānau, but not everyone is so lucky.

The system needs to be based around tikanga Māori for all kids in Aotearoa, not just Māori. Other than a few waiata, I had no opportunity to learn tikanga when I was in care, but there is so much that tikanga can teach us as a country. In te ao Māori, it starts with our tamariki, and that's where the whole care system needs to start.

**Source:** Witness statement of Ms FT (21 June 2022).

“

We didn't  
go into care  
for being  
naughty, but  
we learned  
how to be  
naughty  
while we  
were in care

”



# Ms HA

**Age when entered care:** 10 years old

**Hometown:** Ōtepoti Dunedin

**Year of birth:** 1967

**Time in care:** 1977–1983

**Type of care facility:** Orphanage – St Joseph’s Orphanage in Ōtepoti Dunedin; foster care; girls’ home – Dunedin Girls’ Home, Kingslea Girls’ Training Centre in Ōtautahi Christchurch; borstal – Arohata Borstal.

**Ethnicity:** Māori (Ngāi Tūhoe)

**Whānau background:** Ms HA is the second oldest of five children; she has two brothers and two sisters. They all went into care and were separated.

**Currently:** Ms HA has been married twice. She reunited with her first husband, then he passed away. Ms HA has a whāngai daughter (she adopted her niece’s daughter) and has been to court to get guardianship. She is also a grandmother. She does not have much to do with her family, even though they live in Christchurch. They do not visit her, so she is isolated. She stays home every single day.

**Our home life wasn’t good. Dad was a really good father and I loved him a lot – it was my mum who was the problem. She used to hit him and once she chucked boiling water over his face and he had scars. I think my mum was jealous of the attention my dad gave me because he treated me really well. She hated that, and she beat me. My mum kicked him out and we were left at home with her after that. She would have parties, and the men who came over would sexually abuse us girls. Then Mum took off, and we were at home by ourselves for a while. I remember it to be about three months, but I understand from my records it was a few weeks. We had no power and no food. I was about 10, and my older brother was about 13, while my younger sisters were nine and seven, and our younger brother was a baby, just three months old. We’d steal vegetables out of people’s gardens and cook on the fireplace, and we also stole food from the shop to survive and pinched milk bottle money. Somebody noticed and Social Welfare took us into care.**

I was initially placed at St Joseph’s Orphanage in Dunedin. My memories are a bit hazy but I remember it was run by nuns and there were some good people there. They

wanted us kids to stay together. I'm not sure how long we stayed there for, but it was a quick stay of a couple of nights. We were all made State wards at this stage. Dad couldn't look after us because he didn't have anywhere to live with us.

After that we all went to the Dunedin Girls' Home, which was also known as the Elliot Street Girls' Home. It was meant to be for girls, but there was nowhere else for us to go, so we stayed there until we got split up.

We were given a social worker, but we didn't get to see them that often. I told them I wanted to live with my dad, but he was busy working and was staying in a room at a pub, so he couldn't take us. If they'd said to my dad that they could help us get a house so he could have taken us kids, maybe we could have stayed with our father, we would have stayed together, and everything would have been different.

If you were naughty or ran away you were sent to secure, the locked part, which had a big thick door like a jail cell and a little plastic window that was very thick and not breakable. There was just a bed and a table. I ran away a lot to try to see my dad. That meant I spent a lot of time in secure. I was in secure more than I was in the main area.

At the home, I was sexually abused by Edward Anand, who was a social worker there. He would come down to secure and molest me. He raped me about six or so times in there. The cells were soundproofed, so nobody could hear me screaming. He told us nobody would believe us if we said anything. I did tell – I told another staff member that Mr Anand was raping me, but I don't think they really cared. He still worked there for a few years after that. There were other girls who told as well – we all knew because we'd talk to each other about it.

I was sexually abused in foster care too. I was 11 or 12 years old when I was placed in a foster home. I didn't see much of the mother – she would go to housie on a Saturday night, and the father would look after me. He'd sit me down in the living room and look at pornographic magazines while he sexually abused me – touching and raping. I told someone what he was doing, and they took me to the police station to make a complaint. He told police I was lying and that his parents were there on Saturday nights when his wife went to housie. So, nothing came of my complaint, and nothing was written in my Social Welfare file.

I'd been running away a lot, shoplifting, and stealing cars, and went to Youth Court because of it. After that, I was sent to Kingslea. I wasn't molested at Kingslea, but I knew other girls who were. I spent a lot of time in secure because I kept running away. I didn't even know where I was going – I didn't know Christchurch, I'd just run away with other people, in groups.

I was sent to Arohata Borstal because I was hanging around with the wrong people and I got involved with criminal activities. There were some hardcore women there, and a lot of them were quite scary. Corrective training was horrible, a boot camp style sort of existence. There was no schooling or preparation for life outside, and it wasn't possible to run away from Arohata. Later, I ended up in Christchurch Women's Prison, with an 18-month sentence for fraud.

Being placed in State care definitely impacted me. I never dealt with all the things that happened to me during my upbringing, so as a consequence, those things are still affecting me today.

I didn't have a childhood. My sisters and I didn't go to Elliot Street for being naughty, but we certainly learned how to be naughty in there. I'm not close with my siblings – that's a direct result of being split up when we went into care. We aren't in touch now.

I was deprived of having an adequate education while I was in State care. I'd say I'm at primary school level for reading and writing. My daughter asks me stuff and lots of it I don't know – so I can't help her with any of her homework. I really notice it when I have to fill out forms because I don't know how to fill them out, and there's often no one there to help you do it.

I was diagnosed with PTSD a long time ago, and I'm also really affected by anxiety – I hate going to pick my daughter up from school, and wearing a mask makes me really anxious. I also have health issues – I have arthritis in my spine and legs, lung disease and back problems. I've struggled with a drug addiction, and I've made multiple attempts to kill myself.

I've been in violent relationships. I think I thought that violence and abusive relationships were normal because I'd seen so much violence growing up. I also didn't trust people after what I'd been through. One of my partners raped me and held a gun to my head, and I left that relationship.

I go with women now. When I was younger, I realised I was a lesbian but didn't act on it. I think it was because of what was happening to me – all relationships were abusive. My first relationship with a woman was in Christchurch Women's Prison.

Edward Anand, who raped me while I was in care, is still alive. In 2016, he was sentenced to 13 years' jail time for rape and seven indecent assault charges against victims aged between 10 and 15. I gave evidence at the trial. It was horrible seeing him at court, and he didn't have any remorse for his crimes against young girls. He's tried to get the charges dropped.

It would be good if the government would take responsibility for what happened to us. I think people who were abused in care should get better help. I'd also love to get an education, even now in later life, to make up for the years I lost.

Now, I have my whāngai daughter – she's my niece's daughter – and I go to church when I feel good. I found religion about the time I got my daughter. I have a much better life today.

**Source:** Witness statement of Ms HA (22 September 2021).



“

I'm not asking for a handout, but a hand up out of this nightmare

”

# Mr KA

**Hometown:** Dargaville

**Age when entered care:** 12 years old

**Year of birth:** 1968

**Time in care:** 13 August 1979 to 31 August 1979

**Type of care facility:** Health camp – Maunu Children’s Health Camp.

**Ethnicity:** Māori

**Whānau background:** Mr KA was adopted and raised from birth by his grandparents. As the youngest of their 11 children he felt very loved and recalls being a happy child.

**Currently:** Mr KA has nine children and three mokopuna. He is currently homeless.

**I was only in health camp for three weeks, but the abuse I suffered had a huge negative impact on my life. I believe I would have a totally different life if I’d never been sent there.**

When I was about 11 or 12 years old my family GP told me my hearing was damaged from a hole in my ear drum and that health camp would be good for me.

I didn’t really understand what was going on. I had never heard of health camp and didn’t want to go. I didn’t know why I had to be sent away to a camp for a damaged ear drum – why couldn’t they just fix my ear and hearing? I just wanted to stay home with my grandparents. Eventually I was told I was just going on a camping trip but instead I was taken to Maunu Children’s Health Camp. I was never told how long I would be away for.

I was sexually abused by one of the older teenagers, who was the biggest and the leader. He stayed in the room across from my room. About three or four times I woke up in the night in pain because he had his hand down my pants squeezing my groin and trying to have anal sex with me.

I shared the room with four other boys who had been there for a while, who would beat me up.

I always had a weird feeling every morning when I woke up and went to breakfast. I always had sore feet because of no shoes, I was hungry and scared that I was going to be beaten and forced to do sex acts on the older boy.

The staff enjoyed my suffering and called me a “little black c\*\*t”. They told the older boys who abused me that I had told on them, and watched me get beaten up and my fingers slammed in the door for telling staff what had happened to me.



I told the managers repeatedly but they didn't care and did nothing when I complained. They were mean and abusive to me, calling me "black" and telling me to fuck off.

It was the first time I realised I couldn't trust anyone in authority. I still don't, why would I? I tried and tried to get them to help me, but no one ever did. I had no support and no one to trust.

I wasn't allowed to call my grandmother for the entire three weeks that I was there. I wasn't allowed any phone calls at all. I didn't understand why, but I knew I was in trouble, I just wanted to survive. I wanted to talk to my grandmother so she could get me out of the place.

My grandmother came to visit me on my birthday, concerned because she hadn't heard from me at all. She was shocked at my injuries and how the place looked – like a prison. I told her what had happened to me, and she believed me straight away. She argued with the boss and took me home.

I never got over the abuse I suffered over those three weeks. After the camp, I was no longer the cheeky outgoing boy – I had behaviour issues and was playing up. I couldn't tell anyone what had happened – I felt it was somehow my fault. I never received any counselling.

I had changed after that when I went home. I started getting into trouble and I wasn't going to school.

When I was 16 years old, my whānau decided to send me to Australia to live with my Aunty. While I was there, I got into trouble for a bag snatch. I was on remand at Long Bay maximum [security] prison. Because I was only 18 years old, the judge gave me two options – buy my own ticket and go back to New Zealand for five years or go to prison for five years and then get deported back to New Zealand. I decided to buy my own ticket and return to New Zealand. When I got back, I started beating up my cousins and stealing from my whānau. One time, when I stole my grandfather's truck, he had a heart attack.

I joined gangs and have lived on the streets. If I wasn't on the streets, I was in prison. Most of my life has been in prison, starting with the first prison, health camp.

My whānau came to hate me, they made me an outcast when I was only 19 years old. I caused a lot of problems because of my paranoia and anger from the abuse. I didn't know how to behave or how to control myself.

So many negative impacts have come from those three weeks in camp prison. I still have the fear of being molested. I suffered from ADHD, severe anxiety, paranoia, claustrophobia and depression.

I don't trust anyone, and I think everyone is mean, it makes me mad. I struggle every day with the fear that I will be attacked and molested. I can't ever trust the system because I don't trust most of the people in that sort of position of power. They are always racist towards me. I feel it's because of my colour, my Māori culture – it makes me dispensable.



My grandmother was the only member of my family who still talked to me, and she's gone now. I have no one. I received \$10,000 compensation through lawyer Sonja Cooper. It was a quick fix only and didn't really help. I was told it was the maximum amount I would get, and that I should accept it and move on. But I received no support on how to rebuild my life, they just gave me a band aid. No roof over my head, no solid foundation.

I'm in the same cycle, back on the streets and into the gang life again.

At the early age of 12 years old I was forced into this dark path and have remained here for the past 44 years. I am not asking for a handout, but a hand up out of this nightmare.

We keep heading down this one-way street with our kids, and there are no safe options. Years go by with more abuse happening and the Government does nothing. Staff need to keep their eyes and ears to the ground and if they suspect something, they need to act straight away. And they need to believe kids when they tell them something is going on.

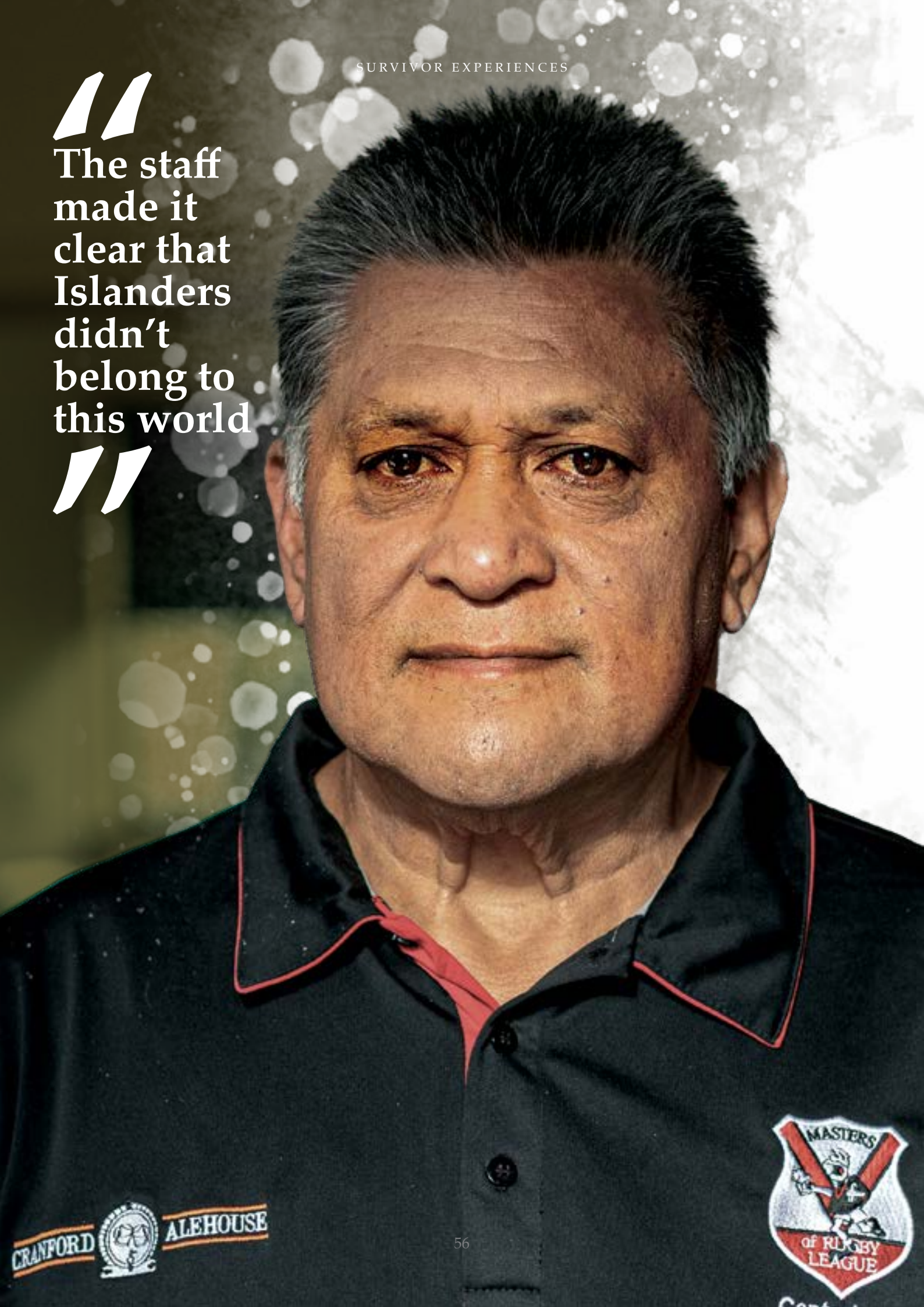
The kids need aroha. Give them aroha and kindness. Build them up in a happy place.

**Source:** Witness statement, Mr KA (7 February 2023).

“

The staff  
made it  
clear that  
Islanders  
didn't  
belong to  
this world

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# David Williams

(aka John Williams)

**Age when entered care:** 9 years old

**Year of birth:** 1958

**Hometown:** Ōtautahi Christchurch

**Time in care:** 1969–1974

**Type of care facility:** Boys' homes – Ōwairaka Boys' Home, Hokio Beach School, Kohitere Training Centre; borstals – Invercargill Borstal and Waipiata Borstal

**Ethnicity:** Samoan

**Whānau background:** David, two sisters and a brother grew up in Auckland with his grandparents, who became his guardians after his parents split up.

**Currently:** David has found sisters he never knew he had and is now part of a loving family. After many years, he finally has a sense of belonging.

## **I started running away from home when I was 9 or 10 years old. I just got sick of the bashings and sexual abuse.**

When I was 11 or 12 years old, I was kidnapped. The kidnapper sexually abused me and threatened to kill my brothers and sisters. There was a nationwide search, with pictures of me on TV, and I was found when the neighbour saw me in the window and called the police. I brought shame to the family because of what happened to me.

The kidnapping was never noted in my Social Welfare file. After the kidnapping, I started running away from home. I got into trouble because of what I had to do to survive on the street. Nobody ever asked me why I was running away or why I was in trouble.

I was sent to Ōwairaka when I was about 13 years old. No one asked me what ethnicity I was but they knew who was Māori and who was a Pacific Islander. They never acknowledged our culture or ethnicity in a positive sense. You had the white boys who were treated not too bad. Then you had the Māori who were treated like shit. But then if you were an Islander you were dog shit. They would step all over you.

Staff used to tell me nobody wanted me and that I was useless and I should kill myself. At school in the classroom, they made the white boys sit at the front, the Māori boys in the middle and the Islanders at the back. School was a waste of time because you couldn't hear anything from the back. If you asked the teacher to repeat anything he would come up to you and whack your knuckles with a ruler.



It was the sexual abuse that was the worst. I've shut it away for such a long time. A lot of things happened down in the secure unit but also outside of secure. I can still hear the screams and cries from other boys when they'd get taken into the shower block, where the abuse happened. I remember one time it was so painful because they thought it was funny to stick a bottle up my arse and watch me walk around.

My last time in secure at Ōwairaka, they kept me there for three weeks. I contracted a sexual disease but staff never got me to see the doctor because questions would have had to be asked about how it happened. I think that's why I've never been able to father children.

I was transferred to Hokio. They came during the night and took me out of my room, and put me in secure but didn't say why. In the morning, they put me in handcuffs and I was taken to Hokio.

There was a lot of abuse by the staff. Once when I was locked up in the cell, a staff member came in and sat on the mattress on the floor next to me. He talked to me as if he was my friend. It started by rubbing my leg and progressed from there. It wasn't just me getting that treatment, you could hear the other boys screaming.

Going to school at Hokio was a privilege, which was ironic given it was called Hokio Beach School. If you misbehaved or ran away, you would have to mop, clean, vacuum and wash windows instead of school. A report in my files says that I was "probably the best in the class" at oral and written expression, and that I was "articulate and well conversant with language". Another note said I had a good attitude to school work and that I had made "amazing progress" at school. But the abuse got to me and it became hard to focus on school. Later that year Hokio applied for a school exemption for me. I would have liked the opportunity to continue my schooling, but no one asked me.

At both Ōwairaka and Hokio they would drag you outside and give you cigarettes after abusing you. You had to smoke them as a reward, as if you agreed to the abuse and were being a good little boy. We were never smokers as kids, but if we didn't smoke when we went in, we were big smokers when we went out.

Most of the boys at Hokio were Māori or Islanders. If you had brown skin, you were going to get abused. When I was being raped, both at Ōwairaka and Hokio, I was told "this is all you're good for, you're a coconut, you are the lowest of the low, you are just a piece of shit". They'd refer to us as 'coconut' or 'bunga' or 'fresh off the boat'.

When I was released from Hokio, I was told I wasn't a ward of the State anymore. I was sent back to Auckland on a train, but my family didn't want me back. I had nowhere to go, no money and I ended up living on streets. I slept in Myers Park and stole to survive for quite a while.

I didn't feel like I could tell anyone about the abuse. You know what happens if you talk. Someone else in my family went through the same thing – we knew nobody would believe us. Social workers must have known about the abuse. When I wonder why they didn't ask questions, I think it was because they already knew the answers.

What's in my file is another form of abuse. Some of it is true, but not all of it. Reading that I was a bully, when it was the staff telling me to beat up other boys – I couldn't believe it.

The things that happened, you can't let go of it, it's there for life. We wouldn't be here if social workers had done their due diligence and did what they were meant to do. If I had been treated properly in care with no abuse, who knows what my life could be now.

I learned how to be a good criminal while I was in care. I have done three stints in prison. My last stint was in Dunedin Prison, 30 years ago. I woke up one morning and decided I'd had enough. When I got out, it was trial and error going straight, but a lot of the time I just stayed off the roads. I knew if the cops saw me they'd pull me over for something I hadn't done.

Us survivors, we have no one to fall back onto. The only way we can get up is to do it ourselves. We can't rely on anyone. That's the way it's been for a long time and why we feel the way we feel. I am a painter and I have also done a building course. I'm a health and safety officer. I am an MPI transfer facility officer. I've got my first aid and my forklift licence. Everything I have, I have worked for it off my own back. No one has given me money to help me.

I've had a good rugby league career and I've got good mates. People know me as a hard worker. I work 14 to 16-hour days. I've got a family who loves me and cares about me. But I've done that. No one has come and helped me.

I used to deny that I was an Islander because of what happened to me in the boys' homes. I lost my identity because I thought nobody likes Islanders. Everyone thought I was a Māori, and that was alright. I had learned to keep my mouth shut. They pounded that into me, that we were no good, we were dog shit. You lose your identity. It's not until the past four or five years I've started saying that I am a Pacific Islander.

I understood Samoan when I was younger. Now I only understand a little bit. In my social welfare file it says they had to carry on religion and culture, but they never made sure that happened. When you go into a home, you lose your culture and you lose your identity. You start to believe what they are saying about you. The staff made it clear that Islanders didn't belong to this world. A lot of survivors turn to gangs, because gangs have treated them like family. They lost their history and mana and identity, just as I have.

They took a lot from my life and no one has ever given it back to me.

**Source:** Witness statement of David Williams (aka John Williams) (15 March 2021).

“

It was a big shame I could never fulfil my potential because nobody gave a shit

”





# Debbie Morris-Jenkins

**Year of birth:** 1976

**Hometown:** Ōtautahi Christchurch

**Time in care:** 1981–1983

**Type of care facility:** Children’s home – Christchurch Methodist Children’s Home; foster homes – private faith foster homes.

**Whānau background:** Debbie is the third of five children, and three of them went into care. Her parents did not have a happy marriage, and her father spent time in Sunnyside Hospital.

**Currently:** Debbie has a supportive partner, and her children know about her childhood and have told her they are proud of what she’s come through and achieved. The consequences of the trauma she experienced continue to impact both Debbie and her whānau, and often create friction within the whānau including outbursts and arguments. After going through church redress, she received financial compensation from the Methodist Church.

**Mum and Dad had been in the Cooperites – Neville Cooper’s Christian community in Springbank. We escaped after they saw things going wrong in the community, but we didn’t have a lot of support. Dad would do house painting to try and get by, but Mum was disabled – she had hip replacements – and couldn’t care for five children. Basically, their marriage fell apart, they couldn’t cope and started drinking, so people at their church encouraged them to send us to the Methodist Children’s Home in Christchurch.**

My oldest sister and the baby stayed with Mum but the rest of us were put in the home. I didn’t have much to take, aside from a nightie and a wee panda bear. The bear was special, it was the only real possession I had.

My caregiver at the home was mean and horrible. One night I vomited on my panda bear, and she made me throw it away. If I wet the bed, she’d give me a smack and make me sleep in it. Given the slightest chance, she’d ridicule and punish us. Once, my brother and I didn’t want to eat some pumpkin, so we dropped it under the table. She made us eat it off the floor like dogs.

In the Cooperites, your hair was your crowning glory and Mum had always said, “Don’t ever cut your hair or I’ll never speak to you again”. But in the home, we had to line up outside in the freezing cold with bowls on our head to get a haircut. I bawled my eyes out, but they just smacked me.

We were targeted horrendously at school, even by the teachers, who would whack us with their rulers. And if we were punished at school, we'd also get punished at the home. I felt like I was punished the whole time.

In the school holidays we were told someone would pick us up and then we had to go with those people, not knowing who they were. When I was about 6 or 7 years old, a couple took me for two weeks. She wasn't around a lot, and he raped me daily. They lived in a grey brick house, with flats down the back. He would put a towel on the bed, give me a dolly and use it to show me what we were going to do. Then he'd just get on me and rape me. I was just a little girl and I'd be screaming in pain, wondering why the neighbours couldn't hear me as they were so close. Then he'd say, "Don't tell anyone, it's our secret".

I think I was there near the end of my stay at the children's home because I remember when Dad got me from the home, I thought, "Thank God I won't have to go back to that foster couple again".

The thought he might have done it to someone else has tormented me over the years.

When I was 13 or 14, I broke down and told Mum what had happened. I had never told anyone else, it was such a shameful thing. She took me to the police and I was so mortified, embarrassed and ashamed that I just clammed up and didn't speak much. They told Mum they wouldn't pursue it as there wasn't any evidence – it was my word against his.

I trusted the police and they didn't listen to what I was saying. They just assumed I was making things up and wasting police time. Years later I saw the police report and the reasons for not prosecuting my foster carer. It said the police doctor found that I'd lost my virginity but could've lost it riding a horse or falling off a bike. I ended up burning the report because it was so traumatising.

I was a rebellious teenager, but I started to rebel even more after that. I got expelled from school at one stage – surely adults should have wondered why? I mean, if you've had a normal life and everything's going okay, you don't do things like that.

A few months after I told the police, my mother's boyfriend drugged and raped me. We had to go back to the police station again, but he'd used a date rape drug that leaves your system quite quickly, so there was no evidence and he got away with it. After that, I started to rebel even more, hanging out with gangs and bad people. I ended up being gang raped by the Road Knights. But that was just my life – I thought there was no point in telling anyone because when I did, no one listened. I thought it was my fault because it happened so much, and I must have put myself in that situation. So I didn't go to the police, I just kept it to myself.

I think through all that hardship I must be a born fighter – otherwise I would've gone the other way and ended up in jail or worse. But what happened while I was under the care of the children's home, and afterwards, built up inside me for years. It affected my life. I've had anger issues, eating disorders and have attempted to kill myself. I thought my parents didn't have faith in me, and being bashed and raped was all I was good for. I have felt unworthy and not good enough, and that I will never amount to anything. It wasn't a very blessed, fulfilled life.

That children's home was like a haven for sexual predators. It's just not acceptable to give a child to any person that says, "I'll take a kid" and thinks, "you can pay me while I rape them for two weeks".

A Methodist representative looked at records from the children's home and there's actually a note saying that foster couple weren't suitable to care for children, yet I was still sent there. There was also a note saying I had specifically asked not to go back to them. I have wished someone else would come forward and say they were also raped by that man because it would validate me, would know in my heart it was true.

Not being believed extended into my whole life – I thought I was never going to be able to fulfil any dreams or succeed at anything. If things had been different, I could have become a police officer like I wanted to. It was a big shame I could never fulfil my potential because nobody gave a shit.

In late 2019, we heard the Methodist Church was looking for people to come forward for church redress. I never asked for money, so getting that was a bonus. The impact of the abuse meant my whole life and earning ability had been affected and I was never going to have a chance to make that money myself.

However, for me, the redress was about finally being heard, listened to and hearing them say they had failed me. It was about the recognition, the record and the apology.

All I wanted was to be heard.

**Source:** Witness statement, Deborah Morris-Jenkins (21 June 2022).



“

I reflect on  
it all and the  
effect that it  
had on me

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# Eugene Ryder

**Year born:** 1971

**Age when entered care:** 11 years old

**Hometown:** Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland

**Time in care:** Four years

**Type of care facility:** Boys' Homes – Wesleydale Boys' Home, Ōwairaka Boys' Home, Kohitere Boys' Home, Hamilton Boys' Home; foster homes; faith-based care – Hodderville Boys' Home (The Salvation Army).

**Ethnicity:** Māori (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Kahu, Ngāti Kurī, Ngāti Tuwharetoa Ki Kawera, Te Roura and Mangukaha)

**Whānau background:** Eugene's mum left when he was young. He and his siblings had a challenging childhood with their dad that affected his early feelings about being Māori.

**Currently:** Eugene is an E Tū Whānau-aligned social worker, legal student, kapa haka stalwart and dedicated husband and father.

**I grew up in a home where abuse was normal. We didn't think or see that as something out of the ordinary. Hidings were normal. I wanted to get away from that, so I started running away and living on the streets in Auckland. Because I was meant to be at school I often came to the attention of police. They would threaten to take me to Wesleydale Boys' Home or back home. I told them I wanted to go to Wesleydale.**

One of the staff at Wesleydale used to encourage us to run away. He said we could stay at his house. When we were there, he would rape us. It was the first time I was sexually abused. There was this other Samoan staff member, he was fucking evil. He liked disciplining people.

One day I was mowing the lawns, I don't know exactly what I did but he picked up a rake and broke it on my back. I tried to run to the nurse, but he stopped me. That rake became a symbol because he kept the end of it. When he was on shift, he would drag me into the showers and ram the handle of the rake up my arse. I ran away that morning, but the police caught within hours. When I got back, he was still there, even though his shift had finished. He was waiting for me.

I was telling the police officers not to let him near me, and I started attacking them with the hope they'd drag me away, but they didn't. They let him grab me by the hair and drag me back into the showers. I was screaming like fuck. I assume the other staff knew what he was doing because they would all disappear when it happened.

I remember going to the doctor after I got the rake shoved into me and he didn't care. He fondled me pretending he was looking for damage and he was playing with my balls. We knew not to go to the doctor because he was a threat. So, even if we were hurt, we wouldn't go to him. Every new boy had to go and see the doctor. He would grab our balls and say, "cough" and he'd keep saying, "cough". We'd be in there with him for ages.

Because of the abuse I was becoming more and more rebellious. When I was 12 years old, they sent me to Ōwairaka because they had a secure unit there. You had to be 13 years old to be at Ōwairaka. Because I was only 12, they kept me locked up in secure all the time and I could only come out for meals.

Ōwairaka became a goal because that's where the big boys were and they got issued a cigarette at every meal, whether you smoked or not. When shit happened in Ōwairaka I expected and got a hiding every time, even if I had been locked up at that time. Like a man hitting a man, not a child. It was punches and kicks. We weren't allowed to see anyone from the outside until we were healed. My old man used to try and visit but he was always told that I had been playing up so wasn't allowed visits.

I was sent to a few foster homes too. They weren't any better. The dads were beating their kids and raping their daughters. At one home, one night I heard him raping his daughter and so I ran away to see if I could make it to this huge riot that I knew was happening in Auckland. Because of that I got shipped to Kohitere in Levin.

At Kohitere there were 'social workers', they called themselves, that were evil. This one guy who was at the 'pound', would beat the shit out of us if we looked at him wrong or did something wrong. He was either in the Vietnam or Korean War and he showed us photos of the Viet Cong where they had chopped the Viet Cong's dick off and stuffed it into his mouth. He said that's what he'd do to us. So, every time he said something we'd jump, it didn't matter.

That pound was terrible. I remember one time he broke both arms of this fella during a beating. They told authorities that he broke his own arms to get out of doing forestry work.

There was another guy who was running the forestry workers at Kohitere. He would make us eat shit if we wanted a cigarette, like literally eat shit. Whoever had done a shit – that's what we had to eat. He'd crack up about it. Those of us that didn't eat it would get sent to the pound. The pound was where the other guy was so, it was eat shit or get the bash. Because I was used to getting the bash, I'd just go there and get it.

Kohitere wasn't all bad. They saw me as a bright spark and so I was the first one there to go to Waiopahu College, but the college wouldn't let me go there with the rest of the kids, so they had a special class for me at night, and I'd go to school at night.

Somewhere in that mix I went to The Salvation Army's Hodderville Boys' Home. I must have been 13 or 14 years old by then. That place was the worst. When I first got there, I was so scared, I pissed the bed. Someone noticed, they all started making fun of me. One of the captains dragged me out because I was screaming because I was getting a hiding.



At first, I thought he was there to help me, and I was thanking him. Then he told me that I caused it, and then I knew he was going to give me a hiding. He stripped me off and I had to bend over a table, naked. He'd take a run up behind me and whack my arse so hard my head would hit the table.

Kohitere was the last place I was in. I think I was 15 years old by then. I didn't want to leave because leaving meant going home and I didn't want to go home. You were only meant to be there for three months, but I pleaded for them to let me stay so they let me stay another three months, just to not go home.

I discovered gangs in Kohitere. I had uncles that were Stormtroopers and cousins that were Mob, but they weren't an influence on us. But, in Kohitere, you had to pick a gang. At first I was a Stormtrooper and when the numbers were unbalanced we became Mongrel Mob. The day I left we were Black Power.

Years later, I ended up coming across that social worker from the pound at a tangi. When we were going around for a hongī, I was so scared I was sweating. I was thinking to myself how badly I wanted to punch him. When I got to him, I said, "remember me?" He said, "yeah, yeah, yeah, I seen you on TV." I said, "No, in Kohitere."

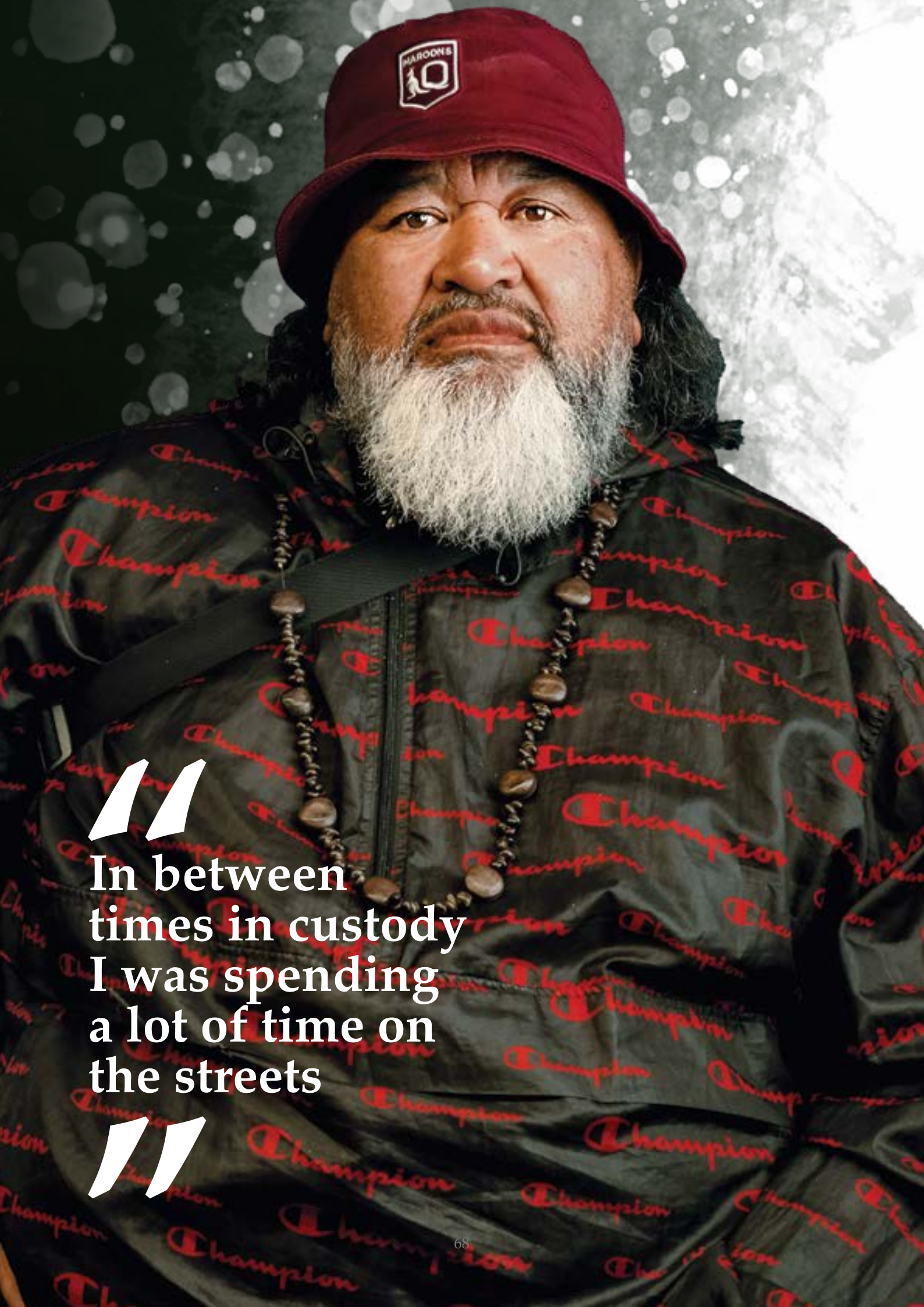
He went white. When I saw that I said, "Oh, no, I forgive you, bro" and just hongī him and carried on. I don't think I did forgive him, but I saw him as someone's koro and I don't want to be responsible of putting someone's koro in prison.

I try and think about the fun times, because I had a bit of fun in there. But that fun wasn't what society thought was fun. I reflect on it all and the effect that it had on me. When my daughter was born, I didn't want to be alone with her. I didn't want to change her nappies or bathe her because I was scared to become an abuser.

One day, when my daughter was 3 or 4 months old, my wife went to the shop and was away for a couple of hours. When my wife got back, she was angry with me because I hadn't changed my daughter's dirty nappy. That's the day she found out what happened to me. I told my wife I didn't want to be seen or thought of as an abuser. Because I thought sexual abuse was normal, it wasn't until I talked to my wife that she told me it wasn't.

That was the first time I had had a kōrero with anyone about it. I felt released. Then I became the only one that bathed my daughter.

**Source:** Private session transcript of Eugene Ryder (17 December 2022).



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In between  
times in custody  
I was spending  
a lot of time on  
the streets

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# Fa'afete Taito

**Age when entered care:** 14 years old

**Type of care facility:** Boys' home – Owairaka Boys' Home in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland;  
Youth Justice – Waikeria Borstal in near Te Awamutu

**Ethnicity:** Samoan New Zealander

**My parents moved to New Zealand from Samoa in the 1950s with the hope that they could earn money to provide a good life for their children, to enable us to have a good education, and to send money back home to Samoa. My father was very involved in the church and we spent every Sunday attending church and helping out afterwards. My Mum loved me very much and I was always close with her. My father, like many Samoan men of his generation, struggled with the broader cultural forces at play and the challenges of trying to raise his family in New Zealand society while maintaining Samoan values. My father experienced strict discipline at home himself when he was younger so he saw that as a normal way to parent us.**

When I was about 12 years old, I started running away from home when I could tell my dad was in a bad mood and I was in for a hiding.

This pattern of me being beaten by my father, running away, and then being beaten when I was returned continued. I was brought before the Children's Board at Hampton Court in Auckland city. I remember there would be two judges, social workers, priests and members of the Police 'J team' (juvenile delinquent team). I became well-known to them. At school, I became more violent getting into fights with other kids. Looking back, I suppose I thought violence was normal because of the regular hidings I was getting at home.

I got sent to Owairaka Boys' Home for the first time when I was 14 years old. I was reading the court file prepared for the social worker and it said that I had been adopted. Until then, I grew up believing that my parents were my biological parents.

When I first got taken to Owairaka, I had no idea what was happening. I was crying in the van and tried to ask the social worker why I was going to this place and not home and he said "it's coz you're a fucking State ward now so shut up!" One of the workers who took me into secure on my first day pointed out a Māori boy and said "that's the kingpin. If you don't behave here, you'll get a hiding from him."



At Owairaka I learned how to steal cars, how to pick locks, and I was introduced to cannabis for the first time. I wasn't sexually abused at Owairaka but I experienced a lot of physical violence. The workers there allowed kids to bully and assault other kids. I also think, for some of them, seeing fights appealed to their sense of humour and was a form of entertainment.

I was often pushed around and abused by staff and racially insulted. The first time I was in secure I didn't know that in the mornings they let you out for a short time to run around the yard. I was just unlocked and told to start running. When I got tired, I stopped, and they then yelled at me to keep running.

I got kicked out of high school for burglary when I was 14 years old. At that time, it was illegal to suspend or expel kids from school who were under 15 years old. In 1976 the Education Act was amended and I became the first child under the new legislation to receive an exemption order. I had a letter I kept with me for if I was stopped by authorities to show that I did not have to be at school.

I also had two stints at the borstal in Waikeria. That was a whole other level to what I had experienced at Owairaka. In Waikeria I met a lot of the kids that had been in Owairaka with me. The majority of them had joined the Mongrel Mob and Black Power and I was asked to join the Mongrel Mob by one of my mates that had been at Owairaka with me. I had heard a little bit about the King Cobras in Ponsonby, so I wasn't sure about joining the Mongrel Mob.

When I look back on that period of my life, I see the State gifted me the gang lifestyle. In between times in custody I was spending a lot of time on the streets with other kids who were in similar situations to me. We would find abandoned houses to stay in until the police J-team came after us. In winter, we would stay under Grafton Bridge with cardboard boxes under us to sleep on and we would pinch blankets from Auckland Hospital to stay warm.

When I was about 16 years old I starting hanging out with others in Ponsonby who were the beginnings of the King Cobras. In 1979 I was sent to do my first lag at Mt Eden Corrections Facility. I was 17 years old and a fully patched member of the King Cobras. I spent 12 years as a patched member. I left the gang in 1990 but continued on the criminal pathway I was by now well accustomed to. The criminal underworld and lifestyle had become part of who I was. I could not see any other life for me.

In the 1990s, I did a seven-year stint prison sentence. I got out in 2000 but was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment in 2001 for drug offending. I served those sentences at Paremoremo prison in Auckland. I got out of prison in 2006. I began to want to change but taking a different pathway seemed impossible to start with. In 2009 I started to change slowly but it took some time.

It took me awhile to come to the realisation that I would have to leave the criminal world altogether to fully make the change. In the end, I left and went straight for my partner. My partner has been by my side for 29 years and I wanted to make sure I was around to live my life with her and for my children. Between us we have 6 children and I wanted to be there for them.

It was incredibly hard coming off drugs with no money and no support. In 2010 my partner told me I needed to do something with my time. She encouraged me to study as she was worried if I had too much time on my hands I would end up going back to my old ways. I have now completed a Bachelor of Arts at the University of Auckland with a double major in Sociology and Māori.

With time, and through my studies, I have had the opportunity to reflect on my life and I made peace with my adoptive father and what happened in my early childhood years. There are three long term impacts that are important context to trying to understand the broader issues of abuse and neglect in care and the devastating impacts they can have for people:

*Identity* – by removing me from my family, I lost part of my identity. To be taken away from my mother at such a young age had a profound and lifelong impact on me. My mother was everything to me in terms of being Samoan, being Christian, being my family. Being Samoan and being Christian were most of what I knew previously. I came out of care being tough and being violent. That was my new identity.

*Pathway to crime and prison* – my family and I were not offered support at the time I was taken into care. Instead, I was removed and placed in an environment where I was moved closer towards a gang lifestyle. The number of gang members who began in boys' homes illustrates the strong link between early abuse and neglect and a life of crime.

*Losing the ability to love* – the world of State care and the gangs takes away your ability to love and care. My mother loved me but I lost the protective power of that love when I was removed and made a State ward.

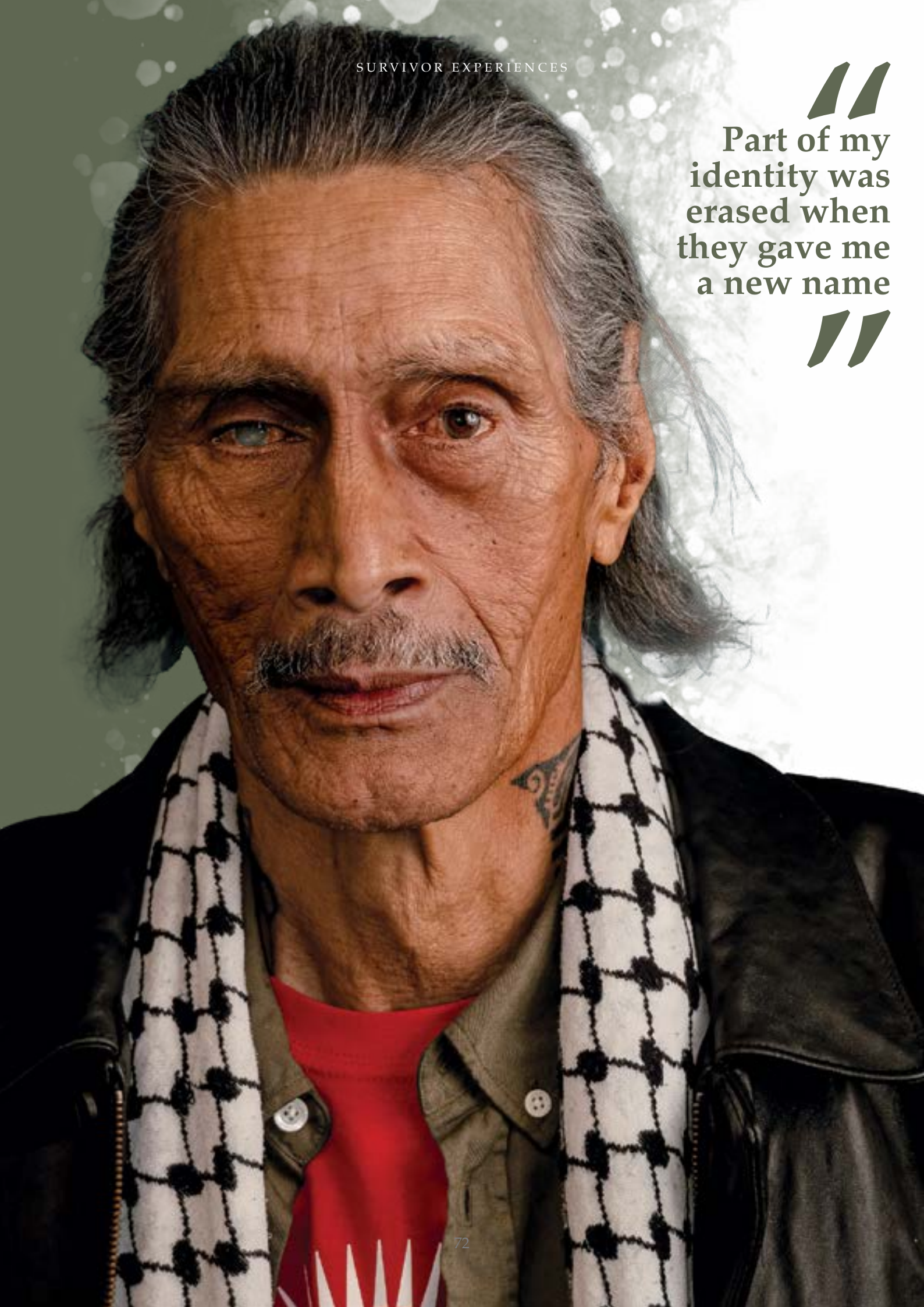
Racism was alive and well in New Zealand during this time. Authority figures: teachers, police, social workers and others were predominantly white New Zealanders and many openly looked down on Pacific Islanders. The Dawn Raids exposed the overt racism that many of us experienced on a daily basis. A lot of us New Zealand born Samoans felt lost in this new society. We were not accepted by our own culture and we were definitely not accepted by New Zealand Palagi culture.

Violence within the home can be seen as a symptom of struggling with the culture shock and dislocation experienced by many Pacific Island families. However, removing children from a violent home and placing them into an emotionally and physically violent institution cannot be said to be in anyone's best interests.

I am speaking out today in the hope that others will feel that they can come forward and share their stories. New Zealand needs to hear the truth about what happened during those years so that we can begin to heal and move forward.

Source: Witness statement of Fa'afete Taito (24 September 2019).

“  
Part of my  
identity was  
erased when  
they gave me  
a new name  
”





# Fa'amoana Luafutu

**Age when entered care:** 12 years old

**Year of birth:** 1952

**Hometown:** Ōtautahi Christchurch

**Time in care:** 1962–1967

**Type of care facility:** Boys' homes – Ōwairaka Boys' Home, Kohitere Boys' Training Centre; various other placements in foster care and family homes; borstal.

**Ethnicity:** Samoan

**Whānau background:** Fa'amoana was born in Samoa and came to Auckland with his family in 1960. His sisters and two of his cousins also went into care.

**Currently:** Fa'amoana is a playwright, author and musician. He has shared his story and experiences of abuse through creative arts, particularly his plays *The White Guitar* and *A Boy Called Piano*, which he performed with his son and grandsons.

**Ōwairaka was the place that changed my life. I experienced physical abuse at other placements, but all forms of abuse at Ōwairaka Boys' Home, and by the time I left, the gun was already loaded. The die had been cast because of what happened to me there.**

When I came from Samoa, I couldn't speak a word of English and that made schooling really hard for me and my siblings, particularly because we weren't allowed to speak English at home.

Fa'amoana was my grandfather's name, it's a beautiful name. But the teachers couldn't say it, so on my first day at school, I was given the name John. This is how I came to be known as John Luafutu throughout school and it carried on to my time in State care, prison and life after that.

Part of my identity was erased when they gave me a new name. It marked the turning point of dislocation, dispossession, disorientation, disillusion and lost self-esteem experienced by me as a small child.

I wasn't behaving at school. I couldn't understand English or what was going on. My cousins and I, and other people like me, just started playing truant and didn't go to school. That's how we first came to the attention of the State – it was deemed that we were out of control. It felt like we were all being tarred with the same 'trouble' brush. We got to thinking that if they were going to treat us like animals, we were going to act like that.

I was about 10 years old when I was placed under supervision, my first contact with the State. I was around 12 years old when I was first taken on warrant and spent periods at Ōwairaka. When I arrived there, I thought it was a really flash-looking place with well-kept grounds. As this freshie kid from the Islands, I'd never seen anything like it and thought it would be pretty good. But when I got in there, it was just a nightmare.

The older boys didn't like me because I was a 'coconut'. There was stomping, a kind of initiation. You just had to harden up and take it. You learned not to be a tell-tale, not to nark. I soon realised I had to be the tough guy — otherwise you were somebody's bitch, or you were cleaning somebody's crap.

On Sunday afternoons the boys would be taken into the lounge, where you would sit around in a ring and the staff would tell you to pick a partner. You would be given boxing gloves, go into the middle of the ring and just smash the shit out of each other. The boxing did not stop until somebody got a bloody nose or couldn't fight anymore.

We were told to do what the white guys said, and at that time I just accepted it. That's how it was, do as you're told, the white guys are clever and all of that. And I remembered my mum saying to me when I got taken into care, "Do exactly what they tell you to do".

I played up one time and was put into secure. I think I was there for 21 days on one stint. You had a little bucket in the room to go to the toilet. Every morning they would wake you up at 6am and tell you to go empty your bucket out.

Some of the Palagi men were really touchy-feely. When I was in secure, one guy would bring nudist pornography books for the boys to look at. He tried to feel me up in the shower and I swore at him and he said, "I wasn't trying to do anything to you, little black bugger". He tried again over the next few days. He would touch me and say things like, "You got a nice tight little black bum". He wasn't the only one doing things like that. I ended up acting out because these bad things were happening – it became my defence mechanism to nut out so I would get left alone.

I felt so helpless that I attempted suicide. After all the things that were happening and the way they were running the home, I just wanted to end my life. I have rarely told that part of my story before because it is something I have really tried to bury.

After that incident, I got taken back to the cell. The guards notified the superintendent and they kept me down there for another day. After that I was put out into the garden permanently and didn't have any more schooling. But I was way past education by then – I was totally lost. Anyone who wet the bed had to get up early and stand at the front of the door with their linen so everyone could see. It was humiliating.

I never got to go home. My mum came to visit me whenever she could but my dad didn't come to see me, because he was disappointed and ashamed. Dad barely spoke to me and wanted nothing to do with me.

They couldn't handle me anymore at Ōwairaka so I was sent to Kohitere. By the time I got there I was just like, "bring it on already". After Ōwairaka I didn't give a shit.

At Kohitere there was a hierarchy , and if you were a 'coconut' you had to watch your back, although by that time, I was able to defend myself. My mantra was, "When in doubt, nut out," and if I ever felt that I needed to protect myself that's what I would do. But that all had consequences, being punished over and over again for bad behaviour, it was just a cycle.

I was one of the first to go in the Kohitere secure unit. I was there for three months. They had ex-army guys there who trained us. They shaved our heads and it was like a detention centre. Our job was to smash concrete foundations all day with sledge hammers and we weren't allowed to talk to each other.

I was in Kohitere for about 20 months, but it felt like years. I have mixed feelings when I think about it – I made some good friends and those friendships carried on outside Kohitere. Most of the guys I met again later on, in borstals and prisons. I got into guitar and sports. But I also got to know a whole lot of negative things. I was confused and didn't know myself. That place had no function to meet the needs of a Samoan like me. My family couldn't afford to come and visit me – it was too far away. I don't remember a social worker coming to visit me.

After Ōwairaka I was changed. By the time I got to Kohitere, that anger was already built. I just didn't understand it. By way of surviving, I nursed a deep anger within me, and I ended up with a vicious temper. I'm sorry to say my wife can vouch for that, as can many others. I had nowhere else to put those feelings and became a violent person.

I got out of Kohitere in 1967 and went in and out of prison and lived a life of crime. I ended up running the jail, because you have to be at the top to survive. Like the homes, there is a hierarchy in jail. And if you make yourself vicious enough, the other vicious dogs will leave you alone. That's how it was.

In prison, I found this book by Samoan writer Albert Wendt, *Sons for the Return Home*. When reading that book, I suddenly remembered a dream I had of my mum and my dad and why they came to New Zealand in the first place – for a better life. And that just blew me away. And I decided to change then.

I told a psychotherapist and a priest what had happened to me. It saved me. Until I hit recovery, I didn't know why I had turned out the way I had. And those people, they actually took me right back to the beginning. And that's when I started to understand.

My parents had to pay maintenance for me when I was in care. We were already poor and struggling. They shouldn't have had to – when the State took me, they became responsible for what happened to me in care and the pathway my life took. We were put into a system that couldn't cater for us Pacific kids. The State shouldn't take you away if your life is going to be worse off.

**Source:** Witness statement of Fa'amoana Luafatu (5 July 2021).



“

Perpetrators  
are forgiven,  
and victims  
are required to  
forgive

”



# Faithful Disciple

**Age when entered care:** From birth

**Year of birth:** 1986

**Hometown:** Cust, Haupiri Valley, Mayfield

**Time in care:** 1986–2021

**Type of care facility:** Faith-based communities – Springbank, Gloriavale

**Ethnicity:** NZ European

**Whānau background:** Faithful is the sixth of 10 children. His father passed away at Gloriavale and his mother and eight of his siblings still live there.

**Currently:** Faithful and his wife live with their eight children in Canterbury, where he is employed as a farm manager. They homeschool their children and have settled into their new life.

## **I lived, learned, worshipped and worked in the Springbank and Gloriavale Christian communities until I was 35.**

I have personally been subject to, witnessed or learned from trusted sources about abuse and neglect in the community. I am also aware of things that happened there, although I did not personally see or witness them, for example, bestiality and child sexual abuse.

In the community, every aspect of your life is controlled. Leaders exercise complete power and demand submission and subjugation. Their power is ordained by God, which opens the opportunity for broad-ranging neglect and abuse.

My mother's family joined the community when she was 14, and she still lives there. My father joined when he was 18. He briefly left before I was born and was only allowed to return if he did not set a foot wrong. He spent his whole life trying to prove his loyalty and worked long hours.

The community is guided by core principles, and leaders have clear discretion to interpret or reinterpret these principles how they wish. Changes are presented as being from a divine source and above question, even when they make no sense. Life there does not build self-esteem or confidence. It is based on systemic and institutionalised bullying, where perpetrators are forgiven, and victims are required to forgive.

The principle of unity supports living in communal dwellings. At one point, we shared a space with 11 other large families, with only partial plywood partitions between us. There was no privacy. Living in such close quarters, children regularly see and hear their parents having sex and this is considered normal and healthy. Sex is also a common topic of conversation and frequently preached about, including stories of leaders' own sex lives.

The community values education because it produces compliant and productive workers. Leaders control the curriculum, which is 'one size fits all'. At preschool, teachers often used humiliation as a discipline tool. Beatings in primary and secondary school were sometimes public. When I was at high school, I learned nothing. And although children 'formally' leave school at 16, school-based learning stops at 15.

At school, I remember getting hidings and the principal's physical, spiritual and psychological abuse. At primary school, he made us write notes identifying classmates who had to led us to do bad things. He then wrote the name of each child identified on a chart he hung in the hall. If those named tried to defend themselves, this was evidence of their guilt. This reiterated the community's focus on surveillance, which means members do not seek support from each other in case they are reported on.

Hard work was a requirement. I can't remember my mother ever telling me I was good at anything or that she loved me – I was only ever congratulated for how hard and how long I worked.

At 5 years old, we worked outside cleaning dry moss for about an hour each school day. From 6 years old, boys started work on the dairy farms, in the gardens or the community's commercial arms and would get a hiding if they were not there by 1.30pm. We did this for three hours a day, six days a week. By 9 years old, I was also working Sunday mornings and afternoons at the dairy farm. By 10 years old, I was milking one morning from 4.30am. By 11 years old, this was two mornings and by 12 years old, it was three. I recall that I was working more than 30 hours a week, as well as attending school.

When I finished school at 15 years old, I went to work in the moss plant, then got moved to the dairy farm. The primary form of discipline was the sheer volume of physical effort expected. I started work at 4.30am six days a week and worked until everything was done, often 2am. During calving, I often worked 120 hours a week.

Leaders insisted on doing everything in-house, even when not safe, efficient or economical, and bought cheap tools and equipment. I now have significant hearing loss because I was denied and mocked when I requested earmuffs, despite working with loud tractors.

There were no days off and we were not paid for our work – it was compensation for the cost of housing and feeding us.

At 20 years old, I wanted to get married. My father sent me to Hopeful, who gave me a list of names and had me fast and pray for three days. When I told him who I had chosen, he said I was wrong and chose my now wife for me instead. We were married three and half weeks later, having spent no time alone together. In our first 14 years together, we hurt each other because our expectations did not align. But separation and divorce do not happen in the community, despite there being some very unhappy and even abusive marriages.

The sole source of growth in the community is procreation, and married couples face immediate pressure to have large families.

In the community, children's disobedience reflects on the family. Abuse was so normalised that I remember my father as the kindest, gentlest man whose physical discipline was the minimum he could get away with. However, he would use a leather belt to give us hidings and sometimes a wooden bed slat.



You need a strong will to leave the community because you face insurmountable barriers, such as no money, employment or accommodation. Any remaining family will be treated poorly, and any future communication with them will be difficult or non-existent. You also lose the salvation you spent your whole life working for.

When I was sent to other farms on sharemilking arrangements, I became aware of alternative opinions and began to think independently. My workmates and I would listen to audio sermons and discuss the Bible without a leader present, which is forbidden in the community.

In May 2018 I was badly burned in an accident. I was exhausted as I was working full time as the main plant operator, full time as a boiler attendant (with no training) and part time as a compost manager. I had third-degree burns and could not walk but was pressured to start work again within four weeks.

In 2020, a police investigation concluded sexual abuse among boys in the community was systemic, generational and cyclical. As a result, the community had to instigate the START programme, which consists of intervention, counselling and support around sexual violence. This programme made me realise events in my childhood were not normal, that there was other abuse, and trauma could affect you for life.

In 2021, I became involved in the first of the civil cases against the community trustees. I stood up with my friends outside the courthouse. There were television cameras there and I was seen. When I got back to the Community I was pulled into a Servants and Shepherds meeting where all of the men in the Community were invited to attend and to abuse me and my friends. After this, my health and wellbeing deteriorated rapidly. I knew the leaders would come after me.

I eventually became so run down that my wife booked me in to see a doctor. I borrowed a vehicle from a friend outside the community, and my wife and the children came away with me for the weekend. During that time, I saw the doctor, who said I was two steps away from death, and we spoke to former community members. Taking strength from this, my wife agreed we could leave. We went back under cover of darkness to clean out our room. The leaders saw our light and sent Loving's mother to talk to her, but she stayed firm.

We left the community in May 2021 and settled in Mayfield, where I work, and we homeschool our children. I am now trying to work out who I was before I was replaced with who they wanted me to be.

I have learned more about my wife since we left, and our relationship has improved. I am allowed to be nice to her now.

I have become a hands-on father and my children know they can achieve if they work for it.

I want to ensure no one else suffers and that the leaders are held accountable for the harm they have caused or have allowed to occur. I propose change, undertaken by people the community trusts, in consultation with the community. I also seek some sort of financial compensation for the opportunities I have lost as a direct result of not being paid during my working life at the community.

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I did not like to be around men, I didn't like any male attention

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# Frances Tagaloa

**Hometown:** Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland

**Age when entered care:** 5 years old

**Year of birth:** 1968

**Type of care facility:** Catholic schools – Sacred Heart Primary in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.

**Ethnicity:** Samoan and Irish

**Whānau background:** Frances is the eldest of five children and lived with her mum and dad.

**Mum and Dad met in their mid-twenties at St Pats Auckland City Youth Group. My household was very busy with my immediate family and lots of relations around. We went to mass every week, that was not questioned.**

Dad was a lawyer. He was also involved with the Polynesian Panthers, due to the Dawn Raids. We had the police coming to our door – I remember being there and seeing my dad yelling “I’m a New Zealand citizen, you can’t come in, you have no right to be here, you cannot enter”. It was scary at the time, waking up and hearing Dad going off at them. Dad spent a lot of time helping and advising people about their immigration rights. There was a lot of stress on him, he was seeing what was going on and doing his best to help people get their immigration papers.

Dad was also a chronic alcoholic, although he later gave up drinking when I was 14 years old. He wasn’t engaged as a father. As a result of his alcoholism, he ended up committing fraud and later went to prison. He went into detox due to his court case, and I remember at the time that he felt he would die from the effects of detox. In feeling that he might die, he made a recommitment to the Lord.

I remember he was in prison for about a year, which was very hard. People ostracised us, and the worst was church. We found out who our real friends were too during that time. When Dad got out of prison, he decided to help others with alcohol and drug addictions. He successfully managed a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre run by churches in Ngaere, Taranaki, then later started Pacific Motu Trust, one of the first organisations that ran drug, alcohol and job training programmes for Pasifika. He went on to receive an MNZM for his services to the Pacific Island community.

I went to Sacred Heart Primary from 5 years old to 11 years old. One particular Sister at Sacred Heart was known as being a disciplinarian. I remember her taking off her thick, high heeled shoe to hit students on the back of their legs or backside in front of school assemblies while we were all lined up to watch.

I had a Māori friend from next door who also attended Sacred Heart. One time, she invited me to come to meet Brother Bede (Fitton) after school one day. I understood this to be a fun thing to do after school. This was at the Marist Brothers Intermediate next door.



She brought me along and we drew on the blackboard, talked and spent time. This was in the company of Brother Bede (Fitton). Initially I thought it was fun to play and get to draw on blackboard and learn something different. After a while I would visit Brother Bede (Fitton) by myself and that is when the abuse would occur.

Brother Bede (Fitton) would be fondling me or would want me to take my pants off and stand me up on a table and get me to read books. I was not sure what else he was doing because I was reading the book. Another time I was on his knee he was fondling around my private parts. This occurred regularly between ages 5 and 7 years old. I never saw Brother Bede (Fitton) at any other time apart from these sessions.

The abuse stopped when I stopped going to the classroom after school. I just stopped going, just decided I didn't have to keep going.

I didn't tell anyone at the time about the visits or the abuse. My parents did not know I was going to see Brother Bede (Fitton). I didn't spend very long there during a visit, so I am not sure if they were aware I wasn't coming home directly after school.

I grew up to be a teenager with very low confidence, I was quiet and reserved and also very angry. I actually hated who I was, my family and where I had come from. I did not like to be around men, I didn't like any male attention. At 16 years old, I discovered a personal relationship with God because I wanted to experience God's unconditional love for me. But soon after this life-changing spiritual experience, I experienced flashbacks and nightmares and had an awareness that something happened at school. When it popped up, I would push it aside. At university, as my relationship with God was developing, some things occurred where I began to acknowledge the abuse. I told a friend at my Bible study group about the abuse I suffered. Shortly thereafter at a conference, I listened to a speaker talk about sexual abuse and realised it happened to me. The conference hosts encouraged us to come forward if this had happened. I wrote my name on a comment card, and this was told to the Christian organisation that I was a part of and they instigated me getting counselling.

The abuse I suffered has affected my entire life. I have found it difficult to trust others and to maintain good friendships. I have suffered from depression and sleeping problems at times, and I've wondered if my health problems with fibromyalgia, which crippled me for years, might have been triggered by the trauma. Due to my anger towards men, I had to work on that anger and a deep mistrust of men. It is surprising to me that I could have married my husband Timo and that he could work with that.

I eventually told my parents about the abuse in 2001–2002. There were many barriers that prevented me from telling my parents sooner. Shame was very relevant, as it was quite shameful that I had gone through that terrible trauma and experience, and that it was related to sex which is a taboo. Although I've had a blended culture, in our family we don't talk about sex. I was worried from a cultural perspective about telling my father of the sexual nature of the abuse.

I didn't know if I would be believed. At the forefront of my mind was my dad's experience working with rehabilitating offenders and that he always saw the good in them, I was concerned he may try to explain the abuse.

Faith, and my parents' strength of faith in the Catholic Church was a significant reason why I didn't tell them sooner. Catholicism, for my family, is a cultural way of life. If I told my parents what Brother Bede (Fitton) did, I would be calling into question my parents' faith. I didn't want to be a source of pain for them. I also didn't want them to feel like their parenting or parenting choices had caused this to happen to me. The respect one feels for their parents is very strong in my culture, so it would cause me emotional turmoil to think about how they might take it.

My mother was so angry when I told her about the abuse that she called up the church and spoke to someone that she knew quite well. They suggested I could talk to someone in the Church and document what happened. I attended a meeting with a woman from the Marist Brothers Protocol Committee with my husband. I remember the woman had a list of columns with names. She pointed out my name on the list and I saw it next to Brother Bede (Fitton)'s section. I believe this was a list of perpetrators and the victims who had made complaints. The list was arranged by perpetrator. The list was many pages and the section on Brother Bede (Fitton) was long and had many names.

I wasn't too impressed with the outcome, I don't recall an apology, I don't recall them trying to explain what happened. I got a letter, and I threw it out because I was so upset. Following my complaint, I was offered compensation. I did not want it. I said to give a donation to my Ministry if they wanted to. The Church said in 2002, Brother Henry Spinks, donated \$6,000 in mine and my husband's name to our Ministry. But I never received the donation. It was not done in my name or in my husband's name. I have never received redress for the abuse I suffered.

I was quite upset that there wasn't more that the church did. I wanted to know how this could have happened, how was there so very little supervision of Brother Bede (Fitton). They just did that one counselling session and that was it. I did not speak to or hear from anyone more senior. No one told me what happened to Brother Bede (Fitton) or if he was still working with children. It was never suggested that we might go to the police.

I have since been offered the opportunity to begin a dialogue with the Marist Brothers to discuss my questions. I have been told that I was one of four or five complaints about Brother Bede (Fitton), and that he is now deceased.

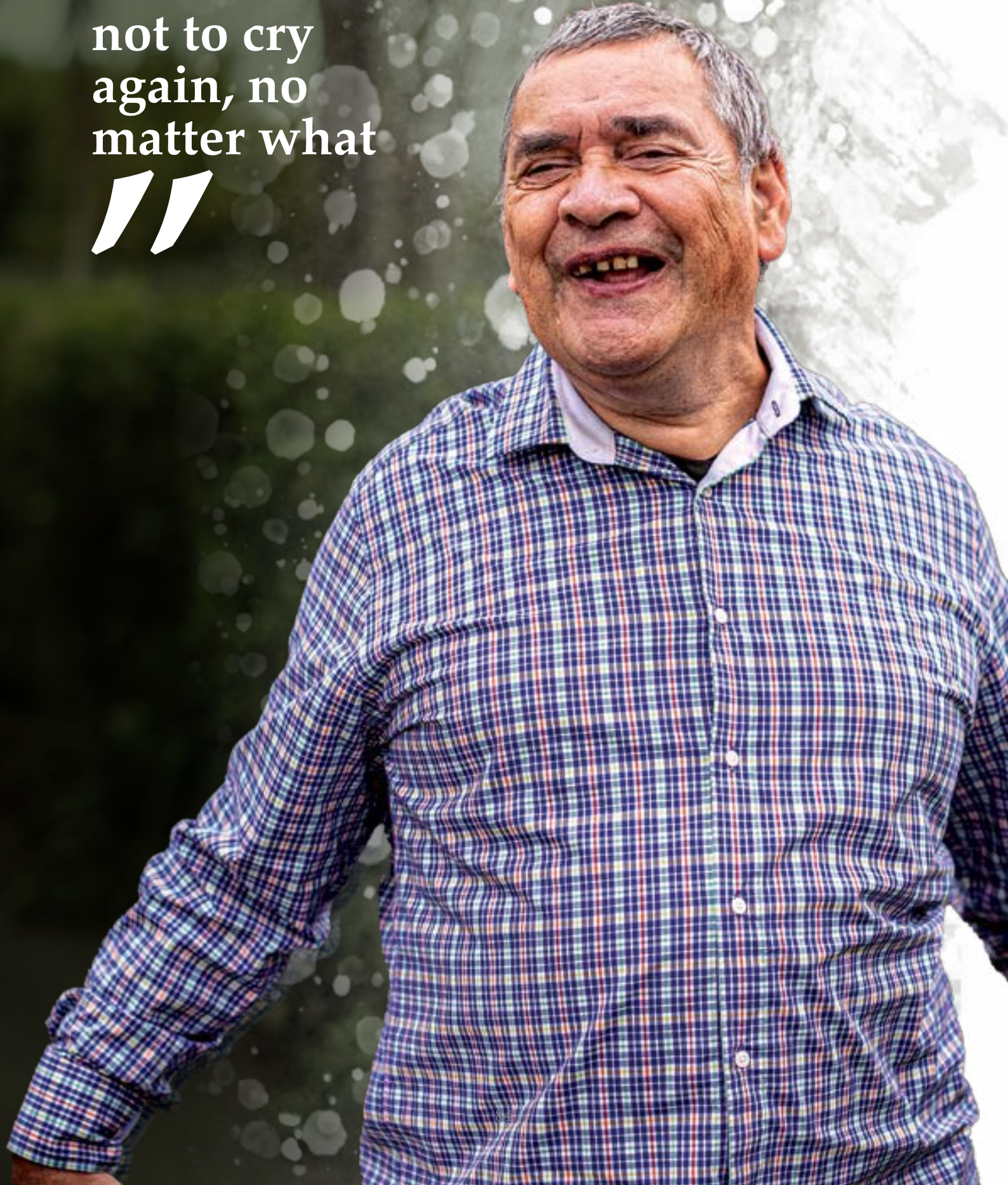
**Source:** Witness statement of Frances Tagaloa (2 October 2020).



“

I decided  
not to cry  
again, no  
matter what

”





# Gary Williams

**Year of birth:** 1960

**Hometown:** Tokomaru Bay

**Type of care facility:** Disability facility – Pukeora Hospital, Laura Fergusson Trust

**Ethnicity:** Māori (Ngāti Porou)

**Whānau background:** In Gary's early years, he was very happy living with his whānau. He had five siblings. Te reo Māori was spoken in his community and they spent a lot of time at the local marae.

**Currently:** Gary is married and lives with his wife in Ōtautahi Christchurch. They both work for their own company.

**I have cerebral palsy. This affects my muscles and my mobility. I am a part-time wheelchair user. I also have a speech impediment. When I was young, I wasn't treated like I was disabled. I participated fully in whānau life on the marae and at school.**

I started medical treatment when I was 2 or 3 years old, I went from Tokomaru Bay to Cook Hospital in Gisborne where I had physiotherapy. I also went to Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Rotorua. I was there for eight or nine weeks at a time. This happened for about five years, then I stayed home fulltime in my community.

I went to the local school Hatea-a-Rangi, which I enjoyed because I am an academic. When I was at Hatea-a-Rangi, I used to do my friends' homework for them, and they'd reciprocate by helping whenever I needed. I was like the boss, I told them what to do and they did it. When I was in Form One, my family were planning to send me to the University of Waikato to study accounting. I would make a contribution to the community and to my iwi.

When I was ending my intermediate school years, I began planning my high school years. The nearest high school was in Tolaga Bay, which is forty kilometres from Tokomaru Bay. All my peers were going there. The Education Board decided that that school would not be accessible for me, so I would need to be sent away to go to school. It was the 1970s and I believe the Education Board did not want to make school accessible for me because of the financial cost. This meant I would have to leave and go to school somewhere else.

I moved to Pukeora, Waipukurau, when I was 13 years old. Pukeora was a converted Tuberculosis sanatorium. It was a place that housed disabled people from all over New Zealand. There were about 80 people living there, and it was full most of the time.

It was a big change. I needed assistance to eat. The staff tried to make me wear a bib like everyone else who needed assistance to eat. I decided that if I had to choose between eating or wearing a bib, I'd stop eating. And I did. I stopped eating for a couple of days. I am so stubborn. The staff even called my mother to ask what they should do. Nowadays, I'd be labelled as having challenging behaviours. In the end, the staff gave in and I didn't have to wear a bib. It was the first of many instances where I'd resist injustice and/or stupidity.

It was this physical isolation that enabled the abuse that occurred at Pukeora. Pukeora was in a little town where everybody knew everyone. Abuse happens when no one is watching.

I experienced cultural abuse and neglect at Pukeora. I am from Ngati Porou and the Māori staff that worked there were Ngati Kahungunu. No one spoke te reo Māori, not even the older Māori men residents. There was no Māori kai. I was very lucky that I had my experiences that I did when I was young at home.

At Waipukurau Hospital, there was Matron Pene who used to work at Te Puia Hospital and she knew my mother, so she knew me. Things were good while she was there. She retired after I had been at Pukeora for a year. Then things got hard. I was clever, I didn't fit in the environment. I didn't really have anyone I could trust and talk to about things. As there was no one I trusted, I kept things to myself. I was a loner, I learnt how to not get trapped by the predator types that lived and worked there. I think it was easy for people to take things too far.

A lot of the staff were untrained. The biggest employer in the central Hawke's Bay at that time was the Peter Pan ice-cream factory. When the factory closed, the factory workers became workers at Pukeora. They didn't know how to care for disabled people. A lot of the staff should not have worked at Pukeora but they couldn't get anyone else to do the work. There was a staff hierarchy. I would try and avoid becoming over familiar with most of the staff because they worked together. So, there was not much point in complaining – nothing would get done. When the staff were unjust to me or anyone else, I stood up to it. I would say stuff like "I bet your mum would be embarrassed by you" or "real men don't beat defenceless people". Overall, though, no one bothered to complain as nothing would change.

I have excessive saliva and I dribble as a result. To fix this, they wanted to cut a gland through my ear to reduce or stop the saliva production. I went into Palmerston North Hospital on the 22 or 23 December 1975. This meant I couldn't go home for Christmas. It was the first time I had been in a medical hospital. I had no idea what to expect. It was the first time I had surgery. It was horrible, my ear was full of blood. Saliva is natural and necessary for living. The operation didn't work. I think that it was experimental surgery. I am not sure if my parents gave consent to the operation. Back then, doctors were treated like gods. It was unnecessary, and I was available for the experiment.

I was humiliated when I had to shower with others, I had no privacy. It was practical for staff to shower two or three of us at a time. Sometimes it was mixed genders. I hated it. I used to position myself so I couldn't see the person behind me. The area was so small.

I am quite lippy, and I was willing to stand up to authority figures. I won't back down. Staff tried to get retribution for my non-compliance. There were times when staff would put me on the toilet and leave me there. They knew I wouldn't move in case I embarrassed myself. I couldn't get their attention, the alarm cord that hangs from the ceiling was turned off. I would pull it, and no one would come. One time, they left me there for four hours. That kind of abuse didn't leave physical marks.

I was 13 years old and I cried the first time I was punched. I'd never been hit before. It was a combination of shock, pain and humiliation. I decided not to cry again, no matter what.

I was innocent and naïve. I knew nothing about sexuality, it wasn't in my consciousness. I was abused in the showers by a range of staff from older men to teenage girls. Pukeora was open slather for staff who sexually abused. Some of the staff were quite open about the abuse, like it was a badge of honour.

I didn't tell my parents about the abuse I was experiencing. I made the conscious decision to stay at Pukeora and not create turmoil in their lives. After all, they'd been promised I was only there until the end of my secondary education. Even now, after what I have experienced, I won't even tell my wife what I have been through.

When I left Pukeora, I moved to Laura Fergusson Trust which is in Naenae, Lower Hutt. I lived there for 17 years. I lived there with about 20 others, but I did not have anything in common with most of the others. The manager there employed her family to be staff. They weren't trained.

After the 45 years I was in State care, I do not trust the system. The State has control and the power to make a difference. The State has powerful people making life and death decisions. Unfortunately, the people who make the most crucial decisions, politicians, are not subject-matter experts.

I don't trust the system because it has let people down, I need to see change. We live in a sophisticated nation. In my view, schools that teach disabled people to fit the narrative of what a disabled person is - helpless, needy, dependent, vulnerable - are not helpful. Children need to be supported in their local communities and stay local.

It is a societal issue to find better ways to care and support people. The conversation that needs to happen is what will it take to support our people. In my view, I think that non-indigenous systems have not worked even for non-indigenous people. We all need to step back from the brink and figure out a move in a different way. I often think about pre-colonial times and ways of living and behaviour where Māori influence was the norm.

If things are done differently that way of life will surface again.

**Source:** Witness statement of Gary Williams, (6 September 2022).



“

The examinations  
told me that  
adults had rights  
to my body.

”



# Gwyneth Beard

(also know as Piwi)

**Age when entered care:** 11 years old

**Year of birth:** 1961

**Hometown:** Ōtautahi Christchurch

**Time in care:** 1972 –1978

**Type of care facility:** Girls' homes – Strathmore Girls' Home in Ōtautahi Christchurch, Kingslea Girls' Home in Ōtautahi Christchurch, Weymouth Girls' Home in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.

**Ethnicity:** Māori (Ngāti Porou), Welsh descent

**Whānau background:** Gwyneth has three older sisters and one older brother, and three younger brothers.

**Currently:** Gwyneth has given birth to seven beautiful children, five who are alive, and 36 mokopuna. When she was 30, she lost her son to cot death. In 2011 one of her daughters passed away; Gwyneth is now raising three of her mokopuna. There is neuro diversity within the wider family and Gwyneth believes she may have an undiagnosed neuro diverse condition.

**I was a very damaged child, and to survive I became quite rebellious. Between the ages of five and about eight or nine, I was sexually abused by someone who knew my family. It carried on for a long time, and I didn't feel like I could tell anyone – I would have gotten the blame for it.**

My mum put me into social welfare care.

She took me to Strathmore Girls' Home. I'd never been to a place like it. A staff member took me to a cupboard-like room, and I was given rompers to wear and some knickers. It was frightening and foreign. After I was let out of the cells two older girls sexually abused me and raped me, as an initiation. They held me down and they laughed.

I experienced several forms of abuse at Strathmore. But the worst thing about Strathmore was the medical examinations. Every time you left the institution and came back, you had to have one, even if you were just on day leave.

The first time I went in, I had no idea what was going on. It was worse than sexual abuse. You could hear them saying things about you while you lay there, helpless. There was a male doctor and a female staff member, and she would hold me down. If you moved at all, she put straps on your legs where the stirrups were so you couldn't move. I always had the straps.

Then the doctor would insert a big steel thing inside you.

They said the medical examinations were to check for sexual diseases. I remember a comment they made that I wasn't a virgin, that I was sexually active. That really bugged me with my mind, that these adults were blaming me for the sexual abuse I'd experienced. Nobody thought to ask why, or to find out what had happened to me.

No one should have to go through that experience, especially after being sexually abused. It was absolutely horrific.

Every girl in Strathmore had to have the medical examinations. We would say we had our periods so we didn't have to undergo the examinations, and they'd make us show evidence of our period. So when we did have our periods, we'd hide the evidence, so that when it came to test day we had something to show.

A new doctor arrived in 1977, called Dr Morgan Fahey. I had two examinations done by him.

When I look back now, I understand what was going on – he was touching parts of my body that he shouldn't have touched. I know it was wrong. He'd say things like "I'll just put some lubrication in" – you don't need to lubricate for that.

The other doctor did the same.

When they put the lubrication in they used their fingers, always two fingers. It wasn't until years later that I learned it wasn't a necessary part of the procedure.

Dr Fahey did other things that were different. He touched you in places he didn't need to – he'd touch my clitoris during the exam, and he would give you an examination like when you're having a baby to check you're dilated. I know the other girls got the same examination.

Later on, when I heard about Dr Fahey being charged, I put everything together and realised the medical examinations at Strathmore were very wrong. You shouldn't do that to 12 year olds.

The staff at Strathmore were mainly Pākehā – there were no Māori staff, although there were a lot of Māori and Pacific children at Strathmore. Staff picked on me for being Māori - we were seen more as 'the trouble'. I remember hearing the words 'typical Māori' quite often from staff members. Were the Māori girls more naughty, or was it just that we felt we were naughtier because we were made to feel that way?

I turned my life around at Strathmore, and I was told I was doing well.

One day I thought I was going home, only I got in the car to discover they were taking me to Kingslea. I couldn't understand why I wasn't being rescued from the situation I was in.

I was at Kingslea for around three days before I ran away. I spent a lot of time in secure.

Children should not be locked up. You would not be locked up in your own house, so why should the Government be allowed to lock you up in a cell for weeks on end?

I ended up being the longest person held in secure at Kingslea at that time. I was an at-risk person, so the only place they could hold me was secure.

Dad went back to Wales for a while because his mother was sick. When he came back and found out I was in a home, he fought to get me out.



They were just waiting for me to be able to go to Weymouth.

By the time I got there, I could handle myself. I'd adapted to institutional life and I wasn't picked on by anyone. Weymouth was a better place for me than Kingslea and Strathmore, although the secure unit was horrible, worse than any other secures I'd been in – it was more like a police cell. It smelled of kerosene, and the toilet was in the cell, which wasn't nice.

There was an article about me and Weymouth in a magazine. It had a photo of me from behind and said I was the highest absconder in New Zealand or something. I wasn't a monster to be locked up.

I also still had to undergo medical examinations at Weymouth. They were done by a nurse, who was lovely, but I always pretended I had my period.

The first time I ever properly thought about suicide was when I was at Kingslea. I thought everything was my fault. I didn't understand what was going on with me and what I'd done wrong. I thought out what I was going to do, how I was going to do it. I don't know why I didn't do it, but I'm so glad somewhere in there, one of my tupuna made me strong enough not to go through with it.

After Weymouth, I was sent home, and things didn't work out well for me there. I was institutionalised, so I felt I couldn't live outside of the homes. I just didn't know how to focus or function. All I knew was dysfunction, and I just wanted revenge for my life, so I didn't last long at home. I went back to Strathmore on my own. I knocked on the door and said I had nowhere else to go.

When I left State care, I was given \$21 by the State, and I was on my own.

The abuse I suffered in care was so traumatising, it still affects me today.

I've struggled to go for smear tests because of the medical examinations I experienced in care. I've had cancer scares. I was traumatised by those experiences. The examinations told me that adults had rights to my body, no matter who they were, and that's wrong.

I'm now a social worker, and I work under the kaupapa of Tūpono te mana kaha o te whānau, which means to stand in the truth and strength of the family. I want to make sure that children who go into care don't come out more damaged than before they went in. I believe in care and protection, but it needs to be care and protection, not care and damage.

We live in a society that punishes the child for adults' behaviour, and we need to find a system that fixes that.

We also need to decolonise the way we think within our government departments, and we need to come back to Tikanga Māori and the Treaty of Waitangi. We need to come back to whanaungatanga, manaakitanga and those concepts, to bring it all together and ask, how is this going to work for this whānau?

Later in life I started to have this ability to talk to myself. I think it's my tīpuna. My tīpuna that stand beside me, giving me this ability to focus. The way I have done it, is I think what I would tell someone else, then I tell myself that. I get told I'm a wise old lady, but I get that strength from one of my two tīpuna. This wise old lady that stands beside me gives me all this wisdom.

**Source:** Witness statement, Gwyneth Beard (26 March 2023).



“

I believe that  
at least some  
of the staff  
were aware  
of the abuse  
and did  
nothing to  
stop it

”



# Mr LF

**Hometown:** Te Kuiti / Ōtautahi Christchurch

**Age when entered care:** 13 years old

**Year of birth:** 1970

**Time in care:** 1983–1987 (Kelston School for the Deaf); 1992–2003 (Sunnyside Hospital)

**Type of care facility:** School for the Deaf – Kelston School for the Deaf in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland; psychiatric hospital – Sunnyside Hospital in Ōtautahi Christchurch.

**Ethnicity:** Māori (Ngāti Maniapoto)

**Currently:** Mr LF's mother has been a critical support for him emotionally in his life and she continues to advocate for him.

**I am the only Deaf member of my immediate family and I suffer from Asperger's Syndrome. I went to Kelston as a boarding student in the 1980s, between 1983 and 1987. My siblings lost their brother and my parents lost a son. It fractured our family.**

At Kelston, there was a particular teacher there who all the students were afraid of. I was repeatedly physically and emotionally abused at Kelston by this teacher, to the point where there are too many instances to remember. I was smacked around the head and pushed hard in the chest in the classroom. I was punched in the stomach at a swimming pool and hit on the head with a wooden duster, which he also threw at me many times. I was often hit on my hands with a ruler or other objects. I saw him push my friend into the swimming pool.

We were intimidated and discouraged not to use Sign Language – this teacher would hit me when I used it to communicate with other students. I also witnessed him hitting other students who used Sign Language on several occasions, and I saw him break the arm of one of my friends. This really upset and distressed me.

I told my mum about the abuse. She told the Kelston staff about it, and spoke to either the deputy headmaster or the headmaster. But nothing was investigated or done to stop the teacher's behaviour, so it continued. On one occasion, the boarding matron called my mother and voiced concern about the treatment I was receiving at Kelston. I believe that at least some of the staff were aware of the abuse and did nothing to stop it from happening.

I felt powerless and it was difficult to communicate what was happening because I was so afraid. My mother tried to get answers but was always pushed aside. I didn't know who I could turn to.



Trying to get redress has been a lengthy, drawn-out process over many years, which has caused unbearable stress to me, my mother and my whānau. There was no government department or central person to support me, or families like mine, who wanted to bring claims. We knew nothing about how claims were being assessed and by whom, or what sort of compensation was available. There have been so many delays and no clarity around timeframes. The process was very unclear and uncertain.

I did not know that it would be many years, and a long struggle, to get any kind of recognition. It has only been because of the determination and advocacy of my mother that I got through the process at all. It has been retraumatising, not only because I have to relive my experiences of abuse, but also because of the uncertainty. It was never clear who I could or should speak to, or if people would listen to me or take me seriously, which made my feelings of anxiety and disillusionment even worse.

There was a lack of proper record keeping and that has been one of the most difficult parts of this process – it undermines a system of redress if no accurate records are kept, and it makes the whole process stressful. It also made it difficult to provide the evidence the Ministry of Education required to take my claim seriously. Neither the ministry nor Kelston were able to give me a copy of any relevant records about my time at Kelston. They could not even work out among themselves who held my original personal files. This made the redress process frustrating as I could not be precise about when things happened.

The ministry undertook its own investigation of my claims of my experience at Kelston. We received a letter from Crown Law that stated it found there was no documentary evidence of the teacher hitting students before 1990. It said the complaints were dealt with at the time. We were told that the teacher was disciplined, and investigated by NZ Police, but no prosecution was made because there was no evidence.

The Crown's letter accepted that I was smacked by the teacher but it also said that there was no evidence of the other allegations I made. There apparently was no evidence of my mother's previous complaint to the school, nor any evidence that the school did not follow appropriate process. The constant reliance on a 'lack of evidence' has been frustrating, to say the least. Relying on a poor system of record keeping and processes to deny the seriousness of my claims makes this whole thing more traumatic.

The process of investigation needs to be independent and not carried out by a ministry that is interested in protecting its conduct and reputation, and those of the teachers. The focus of the redress process should be on the survivors. It should be made as easy to engage with as possible, given it is already dealing with vulnerable, traumatised people. It takes a lot of courage to challenge the system and speak up about what happened.

Allegations about abuse are not made lightly because they come at such a huge personal cost.

This has never been about the money for us. Money doesn't even come into it. This is about getting recognition and being believed. To me, the whole process was defeating and demoralising.

What happened at Kelston meant I always felt powerless and unable to do anything. I was so traumatised by the teacher that I couldn't talk about the abuse for long periods of time or in extended interviews, and this made the process more difficult. I still push clothes against my door at night to stop the teacher from coming into my room and abusing me.

**Source:** Witness statement of Ms RJ on behalf of Mr LF (13 February 2020).

“

I would have been terrified to say anything, especially in front of my foster parents

”





# Ms M

**Age when entered care:** 7 years old

**Year of birth:** 1962

**Hometown:** Ōtautahi Christchurch

**Time in care:** 1969–1981

**Type of care facility:** Multiple foster care placements; Children's homes

**Ethnicity:** Pakehā

**Whānau background:** Ms M's parents separated when she was 2 years old. Her mother remarried the following year. One of her two older sisters had been removed by police while only 18 months old due to neglect.

**Currently:** Ms M has a good relationship with her surviving older sister. She is a bird lover and when throughout life things were overwhelming, she would watch the birds flying and wish she could escape with them.

## **My sister and I were told we were going for a six week 'holiday' with foster carers on the West Coast. Instead, we were raped, abused and terrorised there for the next five years.**

For the first seven years of my life, my sister was my mother. I remember playing together on Sumner Beach stealing food from old drunks because we were starving, and sitting in the gutter crying from hunger. I remember mum being really sick and me at four trying to do the ironing and I dropped the iron on my eye. It wasn't Mum who helped me; it was a neighbour I went to for help.

The next memory is of my mother being in bed, rambling about things that didn't make sense even to a 7-year-old. My sister rung an ambulance and Mum was taken away. After that, my sister, our stepbrother and I went to Huntsbury House. I loved it there – I had clean clothes and food. I went to school. I got to swim in the pool, and my sister was with me.

Mum died in hospital in February 1969 – I had just turned seven. I apparently attended her funeral but I don't remember. I have no visual memories of her at all. My stepfather – who I believed to be my father – was found dead in the house six weeks later. He'd shot himself.

Our stepbrother went to live with an aunt and we lost contact with him. My mother's father took us to the West Coast on a train, where we were to stay temporarily with a foster family.

Imagine being a little girl and trying to judge your carer's mood by how much milk he put in his whisky and then knowing what was coming. Watching your sister being thrown across the room and then going to sit on your carer's knee trying to keep him sweet so you wouldn't be next.

Imagine having to watch the man who was supposed to be looking after us threaten his wife with a loaded shotgun, tearing her clothes off in front of you and us not knowing if the gun was going to go off.

We often went to school with black eyes and bruises from the stock whip. No one ever asked us if we were ok. No one ever came to check on us.

I didn't find out until years later when we were adults that our foster carer used to drug my sister and lend her out to some of his mates. She was between 10 and 15 years old when we lived there.

There was only one other house in the district. We didn't feel there was anyone we could tell about what was happening to us every day.

In May 1974, my sister went to the police with the support of a girlfriend whose partner was a police officer. Our foster carer was charged with unlawful sexual activity. We were placed in a family home – we felt safe there for the first time in five years.

We had to give evidence and our case was heard in July 1974. The abuse I suffered was so traumatic, so complete – emotional, physical, sexual – that I had become almost incapable of thinking. I hardly remember giving evidence, but I know from the transcript that I gave evidence that our foster carer regularly had intercourse with me.

Although I was just 12 and the medical evidence was that we had been repeatedly vaginally penetrated, and that our foster carer had torn incriminating pages out of my sister's diary that showed I had been telling the truth, he was acquitted of sexually abusing us. After the trial, everyone thought we were liars. It was as if the judge had labelled us as liars, and it followed us everywhere.

Our carer had made threats to kill us, so we returned to Christchurch. We were separated – no one spoke to us about what we wanted or told us where we were going.

I went to live with a family on a farm not far from the city. I can hardly bear to remember myself standing there, wondering where I was, wondering where my sister was and if I'd ever see her again.

I was regularly abused by my foster father. Although I ran away from their home three times over a three-week period, no one ever really asked me why. One of the other children had reported seeing my foster father and I "doing things" on the sofa. According to my files I was interviewed about the allegations and denied them. I can't really remember anything about it, but I know after my last experience with disclosing abuse – the trauma of the trial and the acquittal, and being labelled as liars – I would have been terrified to say anything, especially in front of my foster parents.

Nothing was done. Even after independent witnesses with no reason to lie said they had seen him abusing me, no one did anything to protect me.

A friend and I ran away but were caught by police – after that I went to live with a reverend and his wife who I had met while living with my previous foster family.

When I was about 16, it was agreed the family would adopt me. I wanted so much to be part of a family and I thought this would be it at last. I believed being adopted would give me some rights and they wouldn't be able to send me back because I'd really belong to the family.

That's when the rapes began. My adoption was finally completed when I was 19. At the time he started having sex with me I was his foster daughter, then I was his legal daughter. I can remember not wanting the adoption to go through, but not knowing how to stop it. I had been abused by almost every man that was supposed to look after me – I thought I was the common denominator, so it must be my fault.

I have many challenges caused by the years of abuse I suffered. I've tried to escape living because I didn't feel entitled to breathe. I have nightmares most nights, and flashbacks – they got worse after the 2019 mosque attacks in Christchurch. I have major depression and chronic complex post-traumatic stress disorder, among other things. I have never been able to work full-time. I haven't married or been in a relationship for more than 30 years. I would have liked to have been married and had children.

The name of the man who adopted me still triggers me, even now. I think I am so scared of him because I didn't necessarily expect much from the other men who were supposed to be looking after me, but he was a minister, I thought I could trust him.

My sister died at age 51. We reconnected when I was in my early twenties. She was fun-loving, passionate, artistic, but had bouts of depression that manifested itself by suicide attempts and admissions to Sunnyside Hospital.

I worked in the area of child protection for 20 years and I'm the person that people turn to in crisis, yet often don't feel I count. I live alone because I feel unable to cohabit. So, in sharing this with you I'd like you to see a snapshot of two sisters who were let down by the system over and over again.

If people had truly wanted to help, it wouldn't have taken a lot to see we were being horrifically abused, over and over again, but people were blinkered.

We were not bad children. We were abused, neglected and left unprotected by the State. I've taken many years to claim that truth and I honour my sister for saving my life.

I would like to say to other survivors:

Nobody knows your pain. Nobody can truly appreciate how difficult it is to get out of bed in the morning when you haven't slept because you are having nightmares.

The courage it takes to put one foot in front of another each day and the courage it takes to begin to heal.

It's a lifetime of recovery of using doctors, counsellors, friends and family. Some people choose to end the pain having lived a life that was for them too painful to endure. It is important we honour them and their families.

Your childhood desecration isn't what you only have to live for, for the rest of your life, take hope in the Albatross.



“

I wasn't allowed near my foster parents' daughter. If I did go near her, she'd scream and I'd get a hiding with a belt buckle across the back of my legs.

”

# Ms MC

**Age when entered care:** 2 years old

**Year of birth:** 1964

**Type of care facility:** Foster care; residential school – Salisbury School in Whakatū Nelson; hostel – IHC hostel.

**Ethnicity:** Māori

**Whānau background:** Ms MC was made a State ward and spent her childhood in foster care. In 2019 she discovered that her biological mother and two half-sisters live in Australia. She thinks her Māori heritage is through her father but doesn't know who he is. She would like to find him.

**Currently:** Ms MC's husband passed away in 2001. She lives independently with support from CCS Disability Action and Healthcare New Zealand.

## My Life

*I live my life in a shell.  
There I live very well.  
I feel like I want to tell,  
But all I can do is yell.  
People say that I am a pain,  
And that I have got nothing to gain.  
They say I have not got a brain,  
Or if I have, it is made of grain.  
They always like to pick on me,  
Because they say it is free.  
They are only happy when they can see  
That I am sad, as sad as can be.  
My life has been nothing but sheer hell;  
Sometimes all I want to do is yell.  
Is there anyone I can tell?  
Maybe then, I would feel well.  
I feel that I am on a merry-go-round,  
Instead of solid ground.  
In my world, I cannot be found,  
So sh-h-h, do not make a sound.*

I have no memory of my early life, but I was placed with my foster mother and her first husband when I was 3 years old. There were about three families in one house, and my bedroom had no bed, no nothing. I'd be locked in and couldn't get out. When something happened, I got the blame and the hidings.

They would tie me to the clothesline, around my stomach and my feet with my hands behind my back. If they went out, they put me in the shed with a rope tied around my neck – I'd have to stand on my toes because the rope was too short. When they came home, they'd tie me to the clothesline again. They'd also put me in the pool naked with weights tied to my feet so I couldn't get out. The water came up to my mouth – I could just put my nose out to breathe.

Sometimes my foster father and his friends would use me as bait for pig hunting. I was tied between two horses and dragged along. When the pigs came, they scratched and bit – sometimes to the bone. My foster mother sewed me up, and if I screamed, she'd stick the needle into the muscle.

My foster parents threw lots of parties with doctors, lawyers and police from all over town. During the party they'd throw me face up on the bed and tie my legs and wrists to it. Just about every guy at the party would put their fingers or themselves in me. The wives would watch, cheering them on. They'd tell the teenagers to put things inside me – broom handles, sticks, tools, carrots and potatoes. The more I screamed, the harder they did it.

They wouldn't stop, even if I was bleeding. I was their sex toy, a prostitute, but I wasn't getting paid for it. It's the only way I can describe it.

I hardly ever went to school. When I did, the teacher would call me dumb and make me sit in the corner. The kids I lived with would tell their mates what happened at home, and they'd bully me. I'd try to tell the teachers about the bullying, but they'd tell me to go away and not tell lies.

My foster parents split up when I was 6 years old. At first, my foster mother brought me up on her own, with the help of her mum and dad.

My foster mother left me with her parents. When she came back, she asked if I wanted to live with her, her new husband and their daughter. I wasn't doing well at school, so I thought, "Yeah, new school, new start, Mum's going to be there".

That was the biggest mistake, ever.

My new room was the same as my old room – it didn't even have carpet. I was tied up again, with my hands behind my back around the pole and my legs tied together. They put a rope around my neck. When I was older, they used a chain.

I wasn't allowed near my foster parents' daughter. If I did go near her, she'd scream and I'd get a hiding, with a belt buckle across the back of my legs.

My new foster father was one of the big people in his job, and a Presbyterian Church elder. Whenever my foster mother wasn't around, he put himself in me. I think he kept it a secret from her. It was mainly him but once or twice one of his male friends would do it to me as well. On the weekends, he'd tell his wife he had to pick something up from work, tie me up and take me to his job. He'd do it to me in his office, on the desk.



A social worker visited every six months. They would always ring and give my foster parents time to prepare. I would be dressed properly, and the social worker never checked my bedroom. If they asked me questions, my foster parents would frown at me, so I'd say I was all right.

When I was 13 years old, I was sent to Salisbury boarding school because Social Welfare paid for it. The principal took me into her home and taught me how to use a knife and fork, and how to do my buttons. I loved her, like a mum. But at the end of each term, I had to go back to my foster family, and I hated it.

The day after I finished boarding school, my foster family put me in an IHC hostel and told me I wasn't good enough for society. I still had to go back to them on weekends though. My foster father continued to abuse me and warned me not to tell or I'd have to live with the consequences.

I worked in the IHC community, which was okay, I didn't mind doing the jobs and I was paid. But when I saw my foster family, I had to give them my money – they said it was theirs. When I got a full-time job as a finisher at a knitwear factory, my foster father would pick me up, do what he wanted to do with me in the bushes, then leave me on the side of the road.

The first time I got pregnant, I was only about 12 or 13 years old. I gave birth on their bed, on a big plastic sheet so I wouldn't make a mess. After it arrived, they took it away. I don't even know if it was a boy or girl – even if we came face to face, I wouldn't recognise them.

Over the years I had several babies – I think I've been pregnant 12 to 15 times. Once a baby came out, another one came in. It felt like there were no breaks in between, and each was harder than the last. I had miscarriages, and a couple of stillbirths. No one ever knew I was pregnant because I wore baggy clothes about four times my size, anything to hide it.

I don't know what happened to the babies. I think they either kept them or gave them away. I know some of the babies weren't born 'normal'. Those ones, I'd hate to think what they did to them, knowing what they did to me.

When I was 28 years old, the house mothers at my second IHC home asked if I had been touched by my foster father. I said no. They asked again, another 10 or 15 times, until I broke down and said yes. They took me to my foster parents, and I told my foster mother what her husband had been doing. She said I was lying and that he wouldn't rape me. The house mothers banned him from coming to see me and said what I did next was up to me, but I didn't want to tell anyone.

I was working when I met my hubby.

He had a lot of patience. I told him about what I'd been through, and he took me to the police station. They interviewed me, put me through the works, took me to doctors and had me looked at. They got the police to visit my foster parents, who denied doing anything. I told the police not to worry about it.

I still hate my life at times. I can't stop hearing my foster family, smelling them, feeling them.

If I can save one soul with my story, it's worth it. I want the Government to know what happened to me, so it will never happen to anyone else. Absolutely no one, no child, should have to go through what I've been through. If I can stop that from happening, then as far as I'm concerned, I've done my duty to society.

“

**Kelston  
was racist,  
oppressive  
and violent**

”

# Hēmi Hema

**Age when entered care:** 5 years old

**Hometown:** Ōtautahi Christchurch

**Year of birth:** 1970

**Time in care:** 1975–1987

**Type of care facility:** Schools for the Deaf – Van Asch College in Ōtautahi Christchurch, Kelston School for the Deaf in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.

**Ethnicity:** Māori (Whakatōhea, Ngāti Kahungunu)

**Whānau background:** Hēmi is the only child of both his biological parents; his father had other children. He grew up with one sister, who is the daughter of his mother's sister. She was whāngai into his whānau so they grew up as siblings.

**Currently:** Hēmi has been strongly involved with the Deaf community. He is president of Tū Tāngata Turi, a registered charitable entity for tāngata Turi Māori. In 2012 he received a Queens Service Medal for his services to the tāngata Turi Māori community.

**My mum had measles while she was pregnant with me and I was born Deaf. I went to Van Asch in 1975, at 5 years old, as a day student for a few months, then as a residential student. On weekends I stayed with my aunty.**

I didn't like being at boarding school. It was very isolating and I didn't like the staff. It was very strict, there were specific times when you had to eat dinner, and if you didn't like the kai you were sent straight to bed.

At Van Asch I recall being taught Total Communication and not New Zealand Sign Language. English was the big focus, but we developed our signing outside of the classroom with other Deaf kids in the playground. The other classes, like science and maths, were quite visual which was good. Total Communication didn't have that, so it was pretty pointless.

The teachers were all hearing Pākehā – there were no Deaf or Māori teachers. While I was there, about half the students were Māori but we didn't learn anything about te ao Māori.

My family moved to Ōpōtiki and I went to primary school there but I was the only Deaf person and it was hard to learn. I was sent to Kelston, but I desperately wanted to go home. I felt very disconnected from my whānau, in a new place where I didn't know anyone. A teacher saw me crying and they hit me with a wooden ruler. I was about 10 years old and this was my first experience of my new school.



I was at Kelston almost six years. The staff were all hearing Pākehā. There was a focus on oralism – they tried to teach us to lipread and vocalise, but I didn't understand. In speech therapy, the teachers would make me press on my throat to feel the vibrations. If I got it wrong, they'd say I wasn't pressing on the right place. It made no sense to me because I couldn't hear anything. There wasn't any learning.

We were taught to lipread but it was a waste of time. We were taught the alphabet, how to pronounce the letters, but it was really hard to understand the teachers. If I asked other students for help, I'd use sign, but teachers would tell us off. We were just trying to learn but they didn't understand Deaf culture – they thought we weren't paying attention.

The staff at Kelston were very abusive and they did whatever they wanted – the violence happened all the time. If we were caught using sign we'd be smacked with a belt or a ruler. If we cried from being smacked, we'd be sent to sit in the corner, and often we'd be smacked again. Once, a staff member hit me on the head, slamming it against the floor until my skin broke. I had a black eye and was bleeding a lot. I had to have butterfly stitches.

There was a lot of racism at Van Asch and Kelston. The Māori and Pacific kids were put down and stereotyped, and we were punished more. I've talked to other Māori who were there and it's all the same – their anger and hatred towards us.

It wasn't just the staff. The senior students would beat us up and sometimes sexually abuse the younger students. There were no staff around to stop this happening. When I had just arrived at Kelston, the older boys tried to intimidate me into doing sexual things with them. It was traumatic.

From when I was 13, a male staff member would have sex with me in my room at night, and he was abusing other boys as well.

I didn't tell the staff, I wasn't confident enough. This kind of abuse was very common at Kelston. There were others who abused me – I don't know where they learnt this behaviour from, but I think maybe it happened to them.

Once, I got quite aggressive in response to all the fighting and violence, and I got my hands on a knife. I was about 14 or 15 years old. The staff called the NZ Police and I was taken away to a boys' home, which felt like a prison. I was the only Deaf boy there and I couldn't communicate with anyone. I had to go to court, and I just wanted to go home – I was tired, the staff were abusive and I was worn out from all of it. I was let off with a warning.

When I returned to Kelston I was kept separate from other students for two days. My mum came to Kelston and met with the principal, who said I was a safety risk. Eventually I went back but I kept getting into trouble. The staff were oppressive, and I was permanently kicked out when I was about 16 or 17.

My dad took me to Deaf Club when I was about 19 years old. When I got there, people were signing, there were even Deaf sports. It was lovely. I joined the Deaf rugby team, and I got involved in the Deaf community in every way I could, finding my own mana.

When I was 26, I was doing a disabilities studies course at the polytechnic in Ōtautahi and I went back to Van Asch to observe for a 12-week period. I sat in on classes, and even though many years had passed, a lot of the same problems were still happening. I often swapped with the teacher and helped out – just being able to have relevant communication as Māori Deaf with the kids in class made them so much more responsive.

Hearing teachers who don't know how to sign don't understand this.

We need better protection of our tamariki Turi in schools. When I visit Van Asch, I am careful to keep my role professional. We need to make sure our tamariki are safe.

Source: Witness statement of Hēmi Hema (21 November 2022).



“

We were  
all broken,  
growing  
up without  
our dad and  
mum

”



# The Hopa whānau

The Hopa whānau are a large family of siblings from Taitoko Levin who all went into care. The siblings went into care after their mother left, while the youngest was taken into care when aged 12. The whānau recall a home environment of violence and alcoholism, and neighbours called Social Welfare with concerns.

The Hopa whānau were in a range of care including foster homes, health camps and psychiatric institutions. They are now scattered between Taitoko Levin, Te Papaioea Palmerston North and Sydney.

**Ethnicity:** Māori (Muaūpoko)

**Age when entered care:** Between 4 years old and 12 years old

## Maryjane Hopa

**Year of birth:** 1962

**We weren't the first whānau to be placed into State care, and we won't be the last. But we were, to my knowledge, one of the first big Māori whānau in the 1970s from Levin to be placed in care.**

We were only kids, and yet we had been given the label 'that family'.

We were taken to an office in Levin and were left inside a room. The door kept opening, and they'd take out one person at a time, and we'd grab for each other and scream and cry. I watched from a window and saw my family being dragged into cars by aunties. My sister Heather was crying and holding her hands out for me. That was the last time I'd see her for many years.

I was the last one left in the room. I was told nobody wanted me, that I was trouble. I got my files in 2021 and read that I was defiant, not co-operating, rebellious, acting out. Wouldn't you be that person if your family had been ripped away?

I should have been given the chance to live with my real family. That never happened. The department never asked me what I wanted – they told me. I wasn't given choices.

I'm the eldest sister and I took on the role of mum at age 12. I learned very quickly to protect and care for myself. If anyone came at me, especially in my house, I'd grab a knife.

When I was 14 years old, I tried to contact Sonny and Stephanie and I had to get permission from Social Welfare to see them. It was like we were strangers. We were brothers and sisters but almost strangers. We didn't know one another. It was weird, and it still is.

I shut the doors on the events that happened. For years, I put up walls and erased memories. Who takes ownership for what happened to me and my siblings? The way the State handled us as a whānau was about control. We had no rights and no dignity. Self-respect was stripped from us. It's a part of my life that will never be repaired.

Until recently, I hadn't shared my past with my siblings, as they have their own skeletons to address. It wasn't until our baby sister Stephanie brought us together to tell our story. We needed to tell our own individual stories so that we could start the healing process, but as a whānau we needed to do it together so that we could hear one another.

We went into it as a whānau and we're going to stick together as a whānau.

## Alec Hopa

Year of birth: 1963

**I'm the second eldest in our family. The abuse started before we went into care, as my father was heavily involved with alcohol. Being the second eldest I saw a lot of things – I saw violence, I saw hunger, I saw my mum getting beaten. But in saying that, I loved my dad. He was a totally different person without the alcohol. It wasn't until later in life that I got to understand his upbringing and what he went through too – it's a hereditary thing, especially with Māori families back in the day.**

I was about 7, maybe 8 years old, when Mum left. She grabbed the two youngest ones and just took off. The other kids were still at the house, and I had to take care of them. I got them dressed, fed and off to school, just carried on as normal. I did it for about six or seven weeks – I was stealing food, raiding trees – then one day I got into trouble, I couldn't do it anymore, and they came and took us away.

I went to foster homes, don't know how many, and Holdsworth. It was pretty hard, very strict. I'd been through numerous homes, and I just couldn't settle, couldn't focus. There were 90 boys, and some of them were big boys, they were like young men, and they were hard, very hard. They were mean. I was only a little guy at the time, but I learned pretty quick what to do, when to look, who to watch - it's only street smart.

After Holdsworth, I went to school when I was 13 and got into a bit of trouble, so I left when I was 14. I started working for a Chinese family, ploughing, then I went to work with my cousin. At 18, I went to Wellington and worked in the rail yards for five years. But I left there to go back home; my dad was sick. Even though my dad did some things, he had a heart of gold.

My story, I just wanted to get it out there, but I couldn't talk to my family about it. I don't want to put the burden on them. I don't want it on my daughter, on my moko. I want them to learn to live their life to the fullest.

# Christine Hopa

Year of birth: 1964

**When Social Welfare stepped in to take us, we had no warning of it, nothing. I was sent to live with one of the aunties, where I was raped by an extended family member. He also raped my sister.**

Then, I was sent to Marycrest, a Catholic girls' school, where the nuns sexually abused me. From there, I went to Margaret Street and then to Miramar Girls. Nothing was going right for me back then – it was just getting worse and worse. Nobody was listening to my cry for help. I wanted help: I wanted all this stuff to go away. I tried to tell Social Welfare what was happening, but they didn't want to listen. They didn't care – so long as they got rid of me to a girls' home, their problem went away, even if I was being sexually abused. Their problem went away, but my problem didn't. It just kept happening and it still remains with me.

My attitude got worse, and they shipped me to Kingslea. From one ugly place straight into the next one. At Kingslea, I pushed to go to my aunty's house, and eventually, I got there. There, I was loved – I wasn't abused.

I reckon we could have all had a better life. Me and my brothers and sisters, we've been robbed of our childhoods and we'll never get them back. They're gone forever.

My brother, Sonny, he'll never be ready to talk because there's just too much pain. But he's got Stephanie, he'll be right. We respect our brother because he's not ready. That's kei te pai with us. We've got his back.

What really hurt me was losing contact with my siblings. I only knew where some of them were, not all of them. Later, when I did cross paths with them, it was without the system knowing. Dad used to come and see us, and that was kept secret from the department, thank goodness, otherwise, they would have stopped him having access to us.

It broke our father when we were all taken from him. He always believed we'd come home, and the funny thing was, we eventually did, one by one. They painted my father like a monster, but he was no monster to us. He didn't sexually abuse us – it was the other lot who did all that damage to us.

# Heather Hopa

Year of birth: 1968

**I remember our neighbours feeding us quite a lot. I think this is how it all came about, our neighbours' concern. I remember the ugly things, you know? Like, reaching out for my sisters because we were all getting separated, and just screaming and crying.**



We all lost contact with each other – I didn't see my sister Denise at all. Even Stephanie and Sonny, who lived just down the road, I didn't see them as kids growing up.

Denise ended up in Lake Alice, and she's been everywhere – not through her own doing. She's just been passed around the system.

Dad got worse when we were all ripped away from him – one minute we were there and the next we were all gone. He pretty much told the system to get fucked. He didn't want to have anything to do with Social Welfare. He was broken – we were all broken, growing up without our dad and mum.

I ended up living with whānau from my dad's side for a few years. It wasn't a good time. At 9 years old I was getting raped. I tried to talk but I was just made to shut up because I was a nuisance or naughty or something. I got too much for my aunty and uncle, and they went to Social Welfare and I was shipped off.

For years, I thought it was my fault. I blamed myself for bloody years because I was just taken away, no explanation, you know.

I went to Miramar Girls' Home – the social worker said I was naughty. That was no better. Getting touched by the staff was shit. You just had no control because they had the authority. I ran away and for a while, I was living in a Chevy with my mates. The police found me at the wharf in a container, sniffing glue and stuff. I was doing anything I could not to go back to Miramar. I certainly didn't feel safe and secure in the girls' home.

It actually made the Evening Post newspaper, and my brother Alec saw it in the paper and showed Mum and said "I've found your daughter".

All the runaways go into lock-up. You can't get out of it, doesn't matter how hard you try. The only way is to behave and listen, to get out of there faster, then do the same thing – run away again.

I went to stay with my sister Maryjane, and we were both happy with that. We got on, and I felt really safe and happy. I didn't worry that someone was going to hurt me or touch me. She was just so loving and warm. Through all my years I was in care, that was my happiest time because I felt so safe.

Social Welfare didn't look after me – they didn't look after any of us really. How can you not be allowed to see your siblings? It's just as well I knew who they all were – their faces and names. And I'm not being silly. We didn't really get to know one another until we made our way back to Levin – so as adults, it took us bloody years. We lost our mana, we lost everything. It feels like everything Māori was stripped away from us.

# Stephanie Hopa

Year of birth: 1970

**Sonny and I were taken to the Ōtaki Health Camp. We couldn't understand why, because nobody ever told us anything, where we're going or why we're going there, and it was terrifying. We got there and we were separated, and we didn't see each other until church on Sunday.**

My little brother Sonny, he wasn't a communicator, still isn't. At school, they'd have to pull me out of my classroom to go see him because he wouldn't communicate with anyone. He'd whisper things to me and I'd have to talk to the teachers. That went on for years.

We were shipped off to whānau, and when I was about seven or eight my older cousin started to sexually abuse me. He threatened me, he told me if I ever told anyone, he'd kill my brother Sonny. I kept it secret for years.

The man who ran the local Social Welfare office labelled me a troublemaker. He said I was attention seeking, just like my older sisters. I didn't know what that meant until later, and I thought, "Okay, but what does that mean? Really, what does that mean?" My cousin left town and word got around about what he'd done but there was no inquiry. I was just told I was a shit-stirrer, an attention seeker, and if I didn't behave myself I was going to the girls' home.

I wasn't allowed to communicate with Sonny, even though we went to the same school. Social Welfare said we weren't allowed to associate with each other – how do you do that when you live in a tiny town like Foxton. But we used to see each other anyway – he'd jump out the window and come to see me. And at school, we spent all our time together.

When my older siblings started coming back to Levin, I started asking why couldn't I go and live with my dad. Maryjane, Christine and Alec had all come back, and Heather, and were living with Dad. I wasn't allowed to and nor was my brother Sonny, and I couldn't work that one out.

Having a weekend visit with Dad was such a mission. We had to get special permission from Social Welfare.

Even though he was a drunk and all the rest of it, he was 10 years sober before he died, and was never given the option to have us back, and I still don't understand that. I was 16 years old when he died and I was so fucking angry because I didn't get to spend time with him.

A few other family members passed away not long after, in the space of two months, and I went off the rails. I couldn't be fucked after that, I really couldn't. I was doing well academically, I was netball captain and debating captain, school council secretary. Sonny was captain of the First XV. We had so much potential and it just all went out the window. Sonny could have been an All Black, no shit. Social Welfare never addressed what was going on.

As soon as I got a chance to get back to my siblings, I did. Sonny came back and was living with Maryjane, and I followed not long after that. Sonny ended up in jail. All we ever wanted was to come home to be with our family. Sonny's very angry, traumatised by it all. He still won't communicate.

I worked on myself so hard to be the person that I am today. There was a time when I was such a waste of space. My kids are my greatest achievement, I'm so proud of them. I've done everything I can to keep them safe and give them a better life than what I had.

We're all so broken in our whānau. We're never going to properly heal from this stuff, but we just try to be the best people we can be with what's left.

## Denise Hopa

Year of birth: 1965

**Denise has been under a Compulsory Treatment Order and is currently in care in a mental health facility.**

I was admitted to Lake Alice. One day, they go, 'Denise, you're due for an injection' and they didn't say what it was. I got the shock big time. They put the wires in. They shocked me on my head, on my hip, on my leg. I was in a girls' home, Fearon House, and the owner pulled me into the room and beat me up with a thick stick. What did I do? I hadn't done anything wrong.

## Sister Stephanie on Denise:

**My sister Denise is stuck in a shit system that's still mistreating her – she's still being abused. She's been stuck in there for 40-something years, and we've been trying so hard to help her, but there's nowhere for her to go. We keep being told there's no funding, no other facilities.**

Denise is bipolar and schizophrenic with an intellectual disability. When we were all separated and tossed all over the place all those years back, she went to Lake Alice, where she had electric shock treatment. She's done a tour of all the mental institutes in this country, as well as the girls' homes and foster care.



We want her to come home or closer to us but there's no facilities. She's in a facility now, and when she gets unwell, they ship her back to Ward 21 at Palmerston North Hospital. But that's for acute cases, and she can only be there for so long, and then they ship her back. When is that going to change? She's now got physical issues as well because of the long-term medication and the institutionalisation.

I made enquiries and they said, "She's telling you stories". They say she's making it up. They're just dismissing it all, pushing it under the carpet. After everything I've been through, it pales in comparison to what she's still going through

## Summary

The Hopa whānau experience shows what could happen for whānau Māori who needed urgent support from the wider community and the State. Their experience has to be understood in the context of colonisation and land loss in the Taitoko Levin area and the ongoing effects of that tūkinō on local hapū.

The State and local whānau were incapable of providing the care the Hopa whānau desperately needed. Most important, they failed to ensure the brothers and sisters stayed together as a whānau and were raised in a loving and safe home. Instead, the children went down many different paths, including foster homes, residential care, faith-based institutions, and Lake Alice – there they were abused and neglected, and also disconnected from one another.

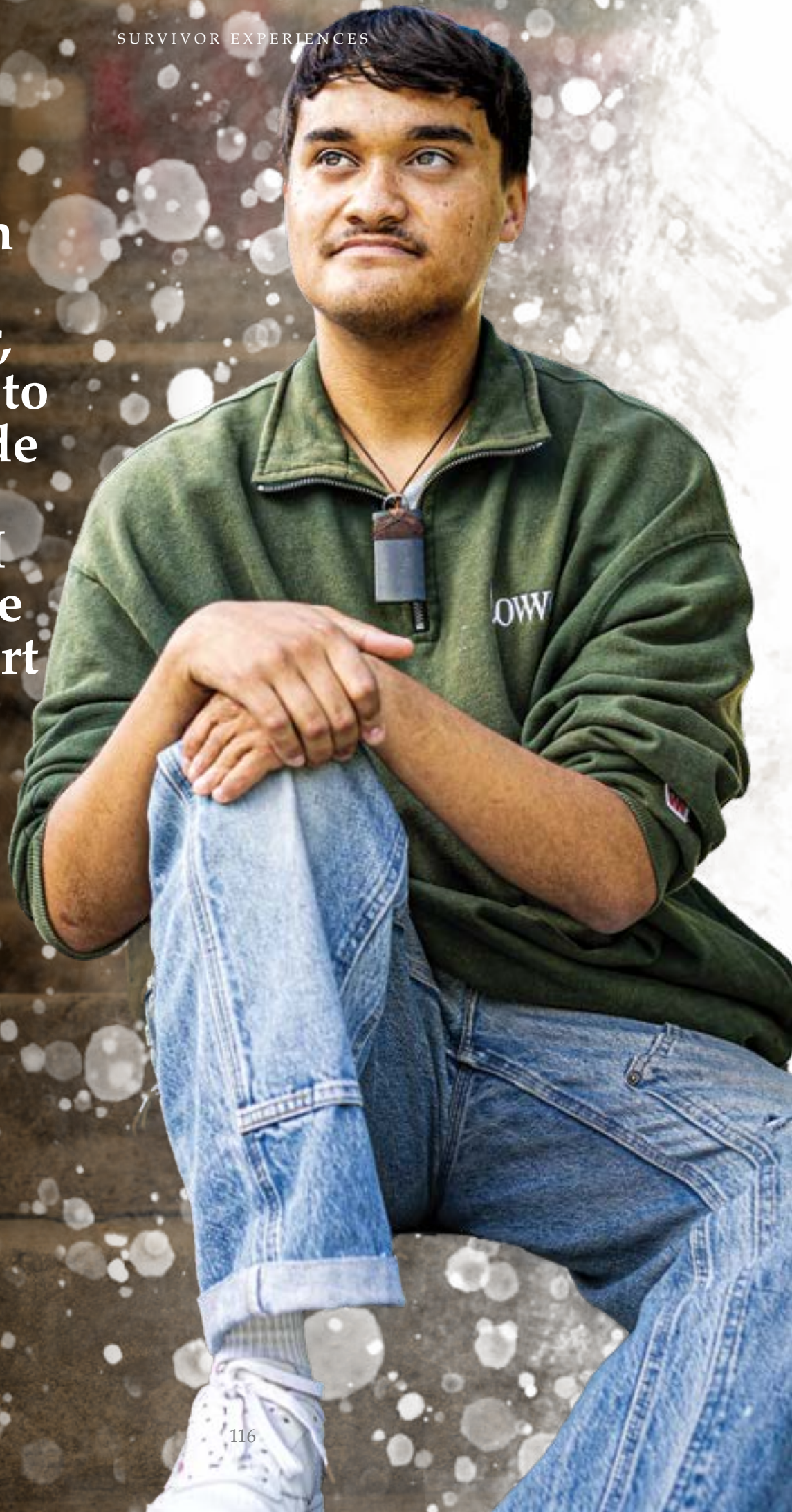
But this is also a story of triumph over adversity. The Hopa whānau have worked hard to heal themselves – they have come together to rebuild their relationships and enhance the mana of the whānau. And courageously, the whānau decided to talk to the Inquiry about their experience, with the objective of ensuring that no other whānau Māori would ever have to go through this.

**Source:** Private session transcripts of Alec Hopa (31 March 2022); Christine Hopa (7 July 2021); Denise Hopa (6 December 2022); Heather Hopa (7 July 2021); Maryjane Hopa (6 July 2021) and Stephanie Hopa (8 July 2021).

“

I lost the connection with my counsellor, which led to four suicide attempts – I felt like I didn't have any support

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# Ihorangi Reweti Peters

**Year of birth:** 2005

**Hometown:** Ōtautahi Christchurch

**Time in care:** Foster homes; family homes; residential school – Halswell Residential College; transition home; psychiatric hospital – Princess Margaret Hospital Inpatient Services.

**Ethnicity:** Māori (Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Ngāti Tahu-Ngāti Whaoa, Ngāti Kahungunu)

**Whānau background:** Ihorangi's father is Māori and his mother is Pākehā. He has two brothers and one sister – he is the youngest. His parents separated when he was 7 months old.

**Currently:** Ihorangi lives with his grandfather. Ihorangi is committed to his advocacy work for rangatahi and tamariki in care. He is on the Christchurch Youth Council and also won the 2021 Prime Minister's Oranga Tamariki Award for Te Iho Pūmanawa – Whakamana Tangata and the 2021 Young Change Maker Award at the Waitaha – Canterbury Youth Awards.

## **I was uplifted by Oranga Tamariki when I was 7 months old. My parents had separated, and there was violence and drinking and drugs at home.**

My sister and I went to live with my grandparents. My older brothers stayed there too for a while. My grandparents were awesome and provided me with a loving and nourishing home. But due to my parents' addictions, and not receiving the best start in life, I was left with disabilities and behavioural and mental health issues.

At 10 years old, I started to feel angry and would sometimes become violent towards my grandparents. I was removed from their care and sent to live with another family member. My social worker told me my grandparents didn't love me and didn't want me back.

I'd never met or even heard of this person before then and my social worker didn't tell me anything. I cried all the way there because I was scared. They lived by themselves on a rural property. I was with them for about 12 days before I ran away because they hit me. The first time, they were using PVC pipes to round up sheep. I left a gate open and they threw a pipe at me. A few days later, they smacked me around the side of my face. I decided to run away, and they threw one of the pipes at me again. I walked for 90 minutes to the police station and complained. The next day my social worker flew me back to Christchurch.

No one asked me where I wanted to go. I was just told I was going to be placed in a family home – they said just for one day but I was there for five months initially and went back several times over the next few years. Heaps of different boys came through. I shared a room with one boy who got undressed, rubbed his hand on his bum and wiped poo on my bed. He was bigger than me. He was taken away but returned a week later – it felt rough to see him again.



My grandparents visited and advocated for me, including around my mental health. But the caregivers said they treated me like a baby and banned them and other parents from entering the house. After this, I noticed their behaviour towards me changed and I was treated differently to the other boys. They had their favourites – at Christmas, the Pākehā boys got PlayStations and Xboxes but I got a couple of T-shirts. I didn't get the same amount of pocket money, either. The caregivers also refused to help me with my homework – they claimed the other boys didn't have any homework so I was just seeking attention. When I reached out for help with my mental health, they claimed it was “just bullshit” and that Oranga Tamariki wouldn't supply the correct support.

When I was 11 years old, I went to live at Halswell Residential College for about 18 months – I also went to school there. On weekends, I stayed with my grandparents and during the week I lived in the Māori Villa with five other boys. I loved it there because I got help with different problems like my anger. It was supportive and calm and there was no abuse. A Māori tutor taught me about my heritage – where I was from and about my iwi in Taupō, Ngāti Tūwharetoa. I also spent Friday afternoons horse riding at the Disabled School for Riding. I really enjoy riding horses, and the teacher thought I was good at it.

I had to leave Halswell because the funding ran out. I didn't want to leave, but you can't stay there for more than two years anyway. I went to stay with my grandparents for two weeks and then I was placed with two caregivers. They were Pākehā with no other children in their care. For the first few months, it was fine but they were heavy drinkers and they'd get angry when drunk. I was physically abused, punched and kicked. I had never been hit like that before. The man hit me more than the woman did – he'd get aggressive, telling me to “fuck off” and “get out of my house”. He was controlling. I talked to them about them hitting me and they said they didn't know what else to do with me. I also told my teacher. I didn't want to stay there after the abuse. They asked a social worker to take me away.

I was then placed in a transition home for a few months. The man who ran would smoke weed in the garage, and in front of the other kids in the house. This didn't sit right with me but I didn't tell anyone because I thought I might get into trouble.

In 2020, during lockdown, I stayed with my grandparents. After lockdown, I lost the connection with my counsellor, which led to four suicide attempts – I felt like I didn't have any support. After the fourth attempt, I was placed under the Mental Health Act and taken to Inpatient Services at Princess Margaret Hospital.

VOYCE Whakarongo Mai is an independent advocacy service for children in care. They advocated with Oranga Tamariki for me to get a new social worker because of my then social worker's behaviour towards me. By the time I went to hospital, I had a new social worker but my previous one turned up while I was there, stood over me and yelled at me. He dismissed my mental health and said I was “attention seeking” and “just trying to get what I want”. It was so loud and abusive that a charge nurse came in and told him to leave and not return.

I was in hospital for a week and a half and then I was moved to another family home. It was hard there because Youth Justice kids were mixed up with care and protection kids and the Youth Justice kids beat the other kids up. I felt anxious and weird while I was there. On my first day, I went over my crisis action plan with the caregivers, but they were dismissive and said I didn't need it.

I made more suicide attempts while I was there. After my fourth attempt, they said, “We need to talk to you. Your suicide attempts are fucking bullshit.” They asked me if I was doing it to get attention and said my anxiety was fake, there was nothing wrong with me and accused me of crying wolf. After this I ran away and refused to go back. But the police found me, placed me in a temporary family home for the weekend and then I was sent back to the earlier family home for two months, until I was placed with a foster family.

Since I was 10 years old, I’ve been in seven placements. This has meant my connection with my own family has weakened. I don’t talk to my brothers anymore – like my parents, both have been imprisoned. I know my feelings of anger, suicide and stress come from being abused while in State care. Through it all, I have learnt to deal with these feelings with the support of my grandparents and VOYCE Whakarongo Mai, whom I now work with.

In May 2021, I spoke at the Child Poverty Action Group Post-Budget Breakfast and made two calls of action. I asked the Government not to remove the Royal Commission’s requirement to look at modern day care policy settings. That call to action by me, and others, was answered.

I also asked for improved access for mental health and counselling and wellbeing support for rangatahi and tamariki. I am aware that 2,700 young people in care are described as having a mental illness and 80 percent of young people in State care have had at least one suicidal thought in their lifetime. I believe if Oranga Tamariki took this issue seriously then those figures wouldn’t be so high.

My speech meant I was invited to meet the Oranga Tamariki chief executive to discuss how mental health and wellbeing needs to be taken more seriously at all levels in that agency. My own experience shows that staff there do not take mental health seriously.

I have received support from local members of parliament to draft a Bill that makes properly resourced mental health and counselling support a statutory entitlement for every young person in care under the Oranga Tamariki Act. Part of my mahi at VOYCE Whakarongo Mai is to facilitate some group discussions and gather young people’s voices to add weight to the Bill.

I have many goals. I don’t want other rangatahi and tamariki to endure the abuse I did while under the care and protection of the State. I want parents of children in care to have access to free counselling and drug rehabilitation services so there is hope the family unit can become one again.

I believe Oranga Tamariki has a responsibility to help tamariki and rangatahi Māori visit their marae. This should be a priority.

I am trying to build my knowledge of my whakapapa (genealogy), but it’s challenging as Oranga Tamariki don’t want to give it to me because they say it is confidential.

I would like an apology from Oranga Tamariki and the minister responsible for that agency.

**Source:** Witness statement, Ihorangi Reweti Peters (18 January 2022).

“

Kimberley  
was just  
a place  
of people  
existing

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# Irene Priest

## Statement by Margaret Priest about her sister Irene

**Age when entered care:** 6 years old

**Year of birth:** 1956

**Time in care:** 1962–2004

**Type of care facility:** Disability facility – the Kimberley Centre in Taitoko Levin

**Ethnicity:** NZ European

**Whānau background:** Irene is Margaret's younger sister. Their parents were loving and caring, and they had a relatively happy early life.

**Currently:** Today, Irene lives a happy and fulfilled life. Margaret is Irene's Welfare Guardian, it is a joint Welfare Guardianship with her daughter (Irene's niece). Irene has a caregiver who looks after her closely and she sees Margaret regularly.

**My sister Irene Priest has a learning disability and has been in care since she was 6 years old. Irene can't speak for herself – she communicates through actions, for example, she'll growl if she is unhappy and will smile and clap her hands if she agrees or is happy.**

Irene couldn't walk so my mother taught her to climb. However, she would climb out of windows and my parents were worried so they strapped Irene to her bed at night. I shared a room with Irene and I remember her fighting against the straps. I would stroke her head to calm her down.

My mother found it difficult to look after Irene. My father was working and my mother had no assistance from the government or disability services to look after Irene. She was prescribed tranquilisers because she could not cope. My father tried his best to balance looking after Irene and my mother. He investigated if there were any care facilities that might help look after Irene and heard about the Kimberley Centre through our family doctor, who pulled some strings to get Irene to the top of the waiting list.

So Irene went away to the Kimberley Centre, which was promoted as a training school. It broke my parents' hearts to send Irene away, but they thought she would be better off. She went there in 1962 and was a resident until 2004.

When Irene was first admitted, my parents were told by the staff to leave her there for at least a month, without any contact. However, during that time they were told Irene had contracted hepatitis. No explanation was given for this. I remember going with my parents to pick Irene up. She had been placed in an isolation room, and she was alone on her bed, rocking backwards and forwards. There was nothing else in the room, except her bed. She didn't even have her teddy bear, which she had taken to the Kimberley Centre.

Irene came home most weekends and she never wanted to return. When my parents started driving her back, she would growl. That's her way of showing unhappiness. I don't think she was given any love at the Kimberley Centre – the staff didn't see her as a child who needed love and care. Most of the staff didn't care about the residents – they saw it as just a job. Kimberley was just a place of people existing.

Irene communicates through actions but the staff at the Kimberley Centre never made any effort to communicate with her. When I was older and more involved in her care, I asked the staff if they would investigate developing a specific sign language for Irene, which would allow her to point to pictures, but they didn't do that.

Irene would sometimes come home with injuries such as scarring, stitches or grazes, and no explanation was given. I now know from her file that she was physically assaulted several times by other residents. I counted 77 head injuries recorded in her file and that is with almost 30 years of records missing. She was also put into seclusion as a punishment, for a total of 18 days, sometimes for a few days in a row. To put somebody who is claustrophobic in seclusion where it wasn't even a safe environment, is reprehensible. Once she was in seclusion for eight hours. I can only imagine how distressing this would have been for her. Another time she came out with an injury from her time in there.

She didn't get any education or training at the Kimberley Centre. In fact, she regressed. She was learning things at home, like how to use a spoon or go to the toilet without a nappy, but she wasn't able to do these things when she left the Kimberley Centre.

Another consistent issue was the loss of Irene's personal items. The Kimberley Centre had a communal laundry and anything that was good just disappeared.

The worst thing that happened to Irene at the Kimberley Centre was the indiscriminate drugging. She was on a concoction of drugs that had all sorts of side effects – drowsiness, nausea, fatigue and co-ordination disturbance. She was given a drug or injection to stop her periods. Melleril was the worst – Irene was like a zombie on Melleril and my father, who was a pharmacist, advocated for a long time to ensure Irene was given the appropriate drugs. While there were alternatives to drugging Irene if she was hyperactive, I think because the Kimberley Centre was understaffed, drugs were an easy way to subdue residents. When she was weaned off drugs in the late 2000s she became very perky.

Irene got very thin in her 40s. She weighed around 33 kilograms and it was a shocking sight. Our family doctor ordered blood tests because he thought she might have AIDS – that's how awful she looked. My father wanted the Kimberley Centre to refer Irene to a specialist but this was met with resistance from the manager and the Kimberley Centre doctor, who said there was no point in a second opinion.

We found out around this time that she was being placed in a special chair where she was strapped in and force fed. Irene has trouble eating. My father explained that all it requires is patience, but the staff didn't listen. This had lasting effects on Irene – for many years, if anyone came to feed her, she cowered, and it could take up to two hours to feed her because she was so afraid.

Irene also had problems with her teeth and was scared of going to the dentist. Because of the difficulty, the staff at the Kimberley Centre decided it would be easier if all her teeth were removed. It felt like a final indignity.

The Kimberley Centre was a hellhole. Irene never deserved to be hurt or frightened – she deserved to have the best life that was available to her, but that has not happened.

**Source:** Witness statement of Margaret Priest on behalf of Irene Priest (January 2022).

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around like a  
parcel

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# Jesse Kett

**Hometown:** Tauranga

**Age when entered care:** 4 or 5 years old

**Year of birth:** 1989

**Time in care:** 1993–2003

**Type of care facility:** Foster homes; schools – Waimokoia Residential School in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland; health camps – Princess of Wales Children’s Health Camp in Rotorua and Kuaeranga Valley Christian Camp in Waihou Thames; borstal – Waikeria Youth Prison; child mental health inpatient facility.

**Ethnicity:** NZ European

**Whānau background:** Jesse’s mother moved from Australia to Aotearoa New Zealand when she was pregnant with him. He has a younger sister with the same mother, and they were close as children. His sister was only in one foster home with him, in Bethlehem. He did not meet his father in person (they met via video chat) until he was 25 years old and found out he has two half-sisters.

**Currently:** Jesse has a fiancé and a daughter. His daughter was born when he was in his early twenties, and he had custody of her for nine and a half years. Two years ago, when he went to jail, he lost custody of her, but he can see her whenever he wants. Jesse speaks to his father occasionally. His father is in Australia and Jesse can’t leave the country to meet him. Jesse gets along with his mother now, is working, getting married, and is being promoted to second in charge of a dairy farm.

**I have ADHD and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD). I was diagnosed as a young child because my behaviour was difficult for my mum to manage. This was probably due to my ADHD as well as Mum’s lack of routine and structure.**

I have a younger sister with the same mother – Mum met my youngest sister’s dad when I was 4 or 5 years old, and he was a father figure to me in a way. They were together for 11 years, but I was in and out of State care a lot, so I didn’t see him that often. I didn’t meet my real dad until I was 25 years old.

When I was 4 or 5 years old, Mum couldn’t handle me any longer. I think Nan, my maternal grandmother, wanted me to live with her but she couldn’t handle me either. Mum tried to get help and find out about options for respite care, but the agencies ended up placing me in a foster home.

It’s difficult to remember, but I think I lived in around 20 foster homes. I lived in so many I lost count – I was passed around like a parcel.



All the placements were non-whānau. Many were with Christian families, although our family is not religious. I was made to go to church, which I didn't like. I felt like they were trying to convert me. When I was about 6 years old, I had counselling with someone religious – they told Mum I was the next Charles Manson and performed an exorcism.

I wasn't beaten at the foster homes, and they weren't bad. I got to see my family sometimes. I struggled, though, because most foster homes had lots of rules and routines, and I wasn't used to that. I wasn't very well behaved either – I'd tell them I hated church, terrorise the other kids, smash windows and run away. I would sleep with a knife under my pillow. I was between 6 and 8 years old.

When I was about 6 years old, I was sent to a foster home with my little sister. She wet the bed and they beat her. I rang Mum, who came and picked us up. My sister's dad got custody of her, but I went to another foster home.

Mum says she battled for years to get us back. But I don't remember anyone ever explaining what was happening or asking where I thought I should live. I didn't feel I had much say in what happened to me.

I wanted to be with Mum, where there were no rules. My friends liked her because you could do anything at her house – she was a 'cool' mum. However, I wasn't properly medicated for years because Mum would take my Ritalin. She got me to save it up and stash it in a hole in a tree. She would then replace it with money.

I went to Waimokoia Residential School when I was 8 years old. I was there for about two years. It was the worst period of my life – hell on earth. I suffered horrific abuse and I still have physical and mental scars.

I've tried to block out a lot of what happened to me at Waimokoia but there are certain things that stay with me, like being sent to the little shed for discipline. The shed had no natural light, no bed, no blanket, no toilet. You were locked up alone and had to sleep on the hard concrete floor. The smell was overwhelming. This happened to me several times, once for three or four days in a row. I was given food and water, but only things like muesli bars.

In the little shed I was beaten and raped by staff. Sometimes my abuser would be alone, but sometimes other staff members would watch. I can remember their faces but not their names. It was usually the same two big men involved, and I heard rumours about the same men from other children.

My main abuser was my woodwork teacher. I vividly remember him raping me in the shed while another male staff member watched. Once, he cut my penis open lengthways with a razor. My penis bled for days, and I never got any medical treatment. I still have a massive scar. I told my mum and stepdad about it, and I showed Mum the injury. My stepdad smacked me around the ear and told me I was lying.

Most of the teachers were nasty, not just those that raped and beat me. If I played up in class, my English teacher would make me sit under my desk, then spit at me and kick me over and over. In another class, the teacher told a naughty boy to pull his pants down then she staple-gunned his penis to the chair in front of 20 students.



I can't remember how much I told Mum about what was happening. I felt broken, ashamed and that I somehow deserved it. I didn't think anyone would believe me because I was a bad kid and only bad kids went to Waimokoia. Mum did complain to Child, Youth and Family Services, and school management, but nothing was done. I think most of the staff and management were in on the abuse or aware of it because it would have been impossible to ignore the rumours. Mum remembers fighting constantly to get me out of there and back into her care.

During and after my time at Waimokoia I had bad night terrors and sleepwalked. Afterwards, I would often get angry and forget what I did. For instance, I would throw knives at Mum in rage but not remember doing it. Mum said it was like I was possessed.

I wasn't beaten or sexually abused anywhere other than Waimokoia, but I suffered other forms of emotional abuse. When I was 15 or 16 years old, I ran away from a foster home. By this point I had run away a lot and learned to steal to support myself. CYFS seemed to give up on me because I was never placed anywhere else again. I went to live with Mum, and I don't remember any follow up from social workers.

I first went to jail when I was 17 years old, for burglary and arson. I was in Waikeria prison for about nine months. To me it was like a holiday compared to Waimokoia. It was also better than most foster homes because everyone was treated and fed the same. I think I'm quite institutionalised because I don't mind being in jail.

I didn't have any alcohol and drug issues when I was young, but I got into P at 23 years old. I found it calmed me down better than Ritalin. I get bad anxiety and depression and I struggle to wind down for sleep without medication. When I was last in prison, my medication was changed so I feel a lot calmer and can sleep better.

Despite it all, I'm proud of what I've achieved. I've worked hard and now have formal qualifications in the dairy and farming industries. I think I've done really well, all things considered, but I could do even better if I could control my emotions.

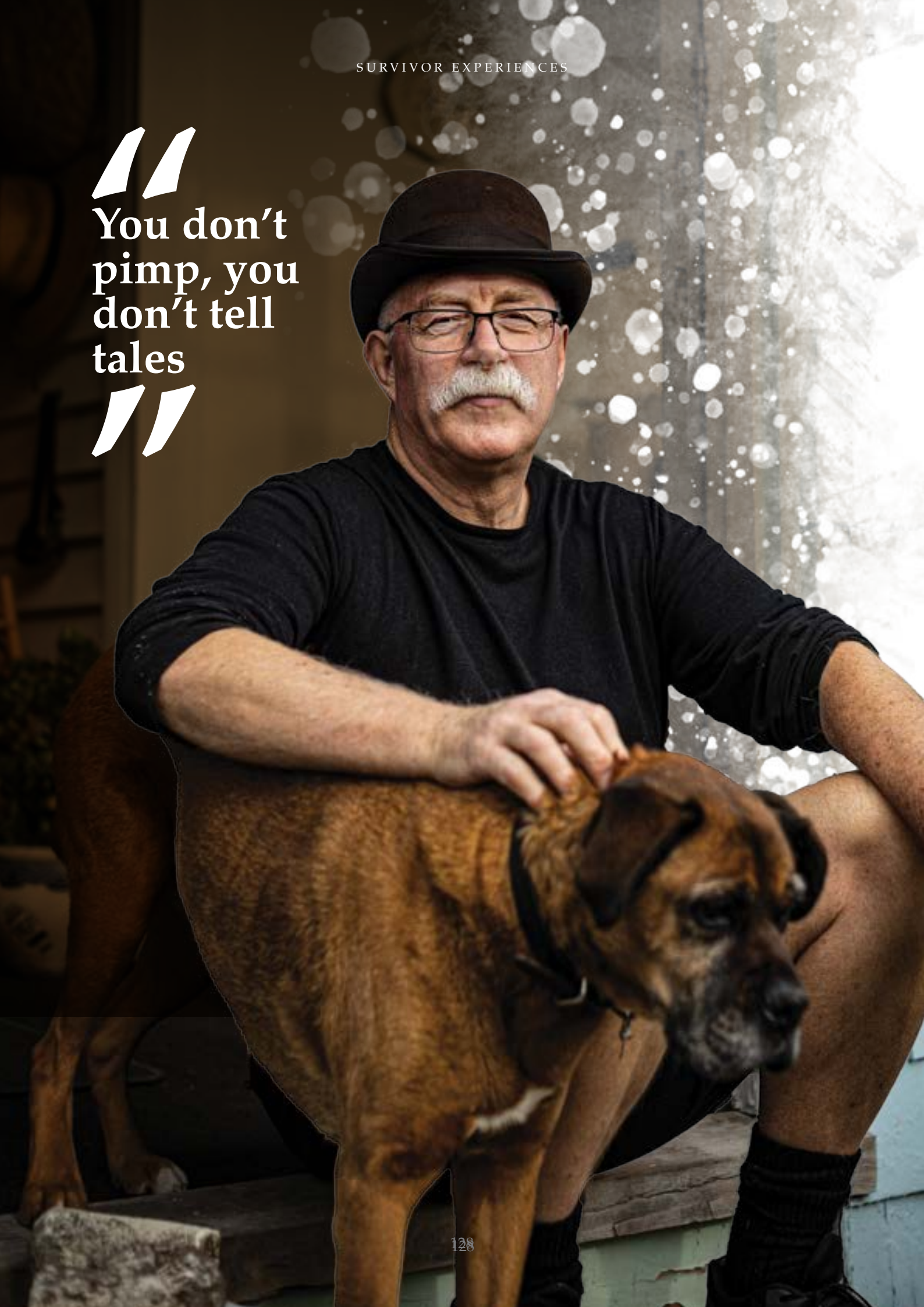
I don't feel anything most of the time, but then I get very angry, and I lose it. Mum has run me down my whole life to try and make me behave but it's had the opposite effect – it just makes me feel bad about myself. After a lot of counselling, I started talking, and I'm now starting to open up to Mum as well. I may need counselling for the rest of my life, and I think it should be available if I need it – the State should fund counselling and therapy for people like me.

I think professionals at Corrections, Ministry of Social Development, Education and other support agencies need better training on mental health and neurodiversity. People in power at schools and social agencies need really good background checks – extra care needs to be taken to ensure they have empathy, morals and compassion.

I could've had a normal life if my ODD, ADHD and other mental health issues were handled better by teachers and social workers. Instead, I was told I was naughty, I felt like I was naughty, and that became my life.

**Source:** Witness statement, Jesse Kett (23 February 2023).

“  
You don't  
pimp, you  
don't tell  
tales  
”



# Jim Goodwin

**Age when entered care:** 13 years old

**Year of birth:** 1956

**Hometown:** Fairlie

**Time in care:** 1970–1974

**Type of care facility:** Education - Christ's College in Ōtautahi Christchurch

**Ethnicity:** Pākehā

**Whānau background:** Jim's family were farming people. His dad was the farmer and his mum was the farm wife. Jim has four siblings, two brothers and two sisters. He is the oldest.

**I lived with my parents in Fairlie until I was 12 ½ years old and then I was sent to Christ's College in Christchurch as a boarder. The school was based on four boarding houses and four day-boy houses. I was in Richards house. There were just under 80 boys in the house, run by a house tutor who lived in the house, a house tutor who didn't, a house master and a matron. They were the four adults. We didn't see much of them. The house was really run by the house prefects who were 7th formers.**

It was pretty violent all the time. When you were a 3rd former you walked down the corridors and the 5th formers would knee you in the leg until you fell over. We had fagging at Christ's College. This was where junior boys were required to do chores for senior boys. As a prefect, I had a fag who made my bed and cleaned my shoes. The fagging system also meant that 3rd formers could be sent on errands, such as going to the tuck shop for a senior boy.

I pottered along more or less until I got to the 5th form. By then, you're a bit higher up the pecking order, you don't get pushed around so much. The school had this institution called 'hauling', where senior boys would take a junior boy off and beat him up basically, give him a hard time. I don't know where the name came from, but I think the current term used in popular culture for this is 'hazing'. Hauling was not an initiation; it was done as a punishment for perceived offences committed by the junior boy.

We get to the 5th form and one day in the summer, towards the end of the year, I went into the dining hall. There are 400 boys going into the dining hall and I bumped into a guy who was a year older than me. He was a 6th former then. I didn't think anything of it, went on and had my lunch. After lunch, he and his mates came up to me and said, "You've disrespected him we're going to haul you." I protested and said it was an accident and I didn't mean to. They said, "No, we're going to haul you, come up to our study". So, I went, because that's what you did.



I went up to their study, which is at the top of Richards house, and they said, "You've been disrespectful, we're going to teach you respect." They started to push me around. There were three of them. They were the main three and various of their mates came and went during the afternoon. They abused me and bullied me for an afternoon.

They produced these half gallon flagons of warm salty water and told me to drink it. It feels like it was yesterday, it feels like it was so recent. I thought, well, I'll drink the water and they'll be finished with me. So, I drank one flagon but then they produced more and they kept filling them up. I think they had about six. I was beginning to feel horrible, sick and bloated. They were angry and desperate, and I thought, as a 15-year-old, they're gonna kill me. Unless I do what they tell me, they'll kill me. They were angry. They were having a good time, so I did what they told me, and I was so sick. They made me vomit in a metal rubbish bin and after a while, blood started to come up from my nose. You tear your throat, so my throat was tearing from all the vomiting. Blood was coming up and that worried them, so they sent me off to empty my own vomit out of the rubbish tin and to wash it out and come back.

I thought I've got to go back. If I don't go back, they'll find me. I took it back and it still stank. They sent me back again. I cleaned it out again and did that three or four times. Then, when I went back with the rubbish bin, they said, "fuck it, have sex with it. It's your girlfriend, have sex with it". It's the rubbish bin. They said shove down, so I shoved down to where I was lying prone over the rubbish tin.

They told me to pull my pants down. I said I wasn't going to do that, so they pulled my pants down and said, "Here, go on, tell her that you love her. Say nice things to her. It's your girlfriend, get onto it." Then they shoved and punched me. I thought, well, I've got to do this. If I don't, I don't know what they'll do to me. So, for all I knew about sex, I moved my hips and one of them put a broom handle up my anus, which hurt. I screamed and I ejaculated. They stood me up and I was covered in vomit and blood and cum.

Another guy, to whom I'm eternally grateful, who was a friend of theirs, came in and made them stop. He told me to get out of there and clean myself up. I went off and cleaned myself up as best I could. One of the other guys in my year, to whom I'm very grateful, told the Housemaster that I had been hauled and by whom. The Housemaster called me in and he was this huge big man. I wasn't going to tell him anything. I thought in those days if I told him what had happened, that those boys would kill me, that they would do something, so I wouldn't tell him anything. He could see I was distressed. I'd cleaned myself up by then. He called the boys in and told them they weren't to touch me and if they did, they would be thrown out of the school.

There was no more hauling of me after that. I remained afraid that I would be hauled again.

The abuse at Christ's College changed my life. I had flashbacks. I haven't had a flashback for a few years but I've had flashbacks most of my life. It was so intimate and even though it was just once, that was enough to change my life.

I hung on at Christ's College. I tried to join the army. My dad talked me out of it, maybe because it would have been out of the frying pan into the fire. He didn't say that though. I just thought I'd get on with it. It was something that had happened, but I wanted to get on with my life.

My father died at the age of 87 without ever knowing what happened to me. He knew that something had happened, but he didn't know what, so there was no family support there. They weren't there for me, so you just seal it up and go on.

Having sex would set the flashbacks off. I had a series of partners who had to put up with me writhing, screaming and crying. Going to a crowded pub or a busy place and someone coming up behind me touching my back would also set me off into another flash back. I had nightmares about being stuck back at Christ's College for many years.

I thought about going to the police. I did therapy through ACC and I talked to my therapist about it and decided not to. Partly, I thought it would be re-traumatising, partly I thought not much would happen and partly, I was worried about going up against the school. I didn't think about doing anything about my abusers for many years.

The perpetrators, helpers, aiders and abusers are still around, and I know where they are. I am not going to approach them by myself.

Now I would like to meet with my abusers. That's what I would like. I would like to meet with someone to mediate and actually see their response. I don't have any expectation about how they respond but I would like to meet them and speak to them. That is why I decided to speak to the police in the end.

I haven't heard of anybody else whose sexual abuse happened at Christ's College apart from one other guy. I wasn't aware of anybody else at the time, but I am aware that it could well have happened. Certainly, the hauling happened. The hauling was all sorts of stuff - bullying hitting, pushing, shoving, making people do stupid things.

Telling people - it's called pimping. You don't pimp, you don't tell tales. It's a big strong culture. I mean, that's what I would change. That's the first thing that I would change in places like that, that you must tell. People must tell. I would like to set up a system in schools where students can go to safe adults to tell them about abuse.

**Source:** Witness statement of Jim Goodwin (21 September 2020).



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I think it's  
incredibly  
sad that these  
things were  
done to me  
simply for  
being gay

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# Joan Bellingham

**Age when entered care:** 19 years old

**Year of birth:** 1952

**Hometown:** Ōtautahi Christchurch

**Time in care:** 1970–1982

**Type of care facility:** Psychiatric hospital – Princess Margaret Hospital

**Ethnicity:** NZ European

**Whānau background:** Joan comes from a close-knit family with a history in healthcare – both her mother and grandmother were nurses, and Joan also entered nursing training. Joan’s sister was also a nurse.

**Many things that are socially acceptable now were not in the 1970s. Sexuality wasn’t often talked about publicly. I myself have always been pretty open about my sexuality. I’ve been gay for as long as I can remember. I never saw it as something I needed to hide away.**

While I was training to become a nurse at a hospital in Christchurch, word got around that I was gay, and I was constantly picked on. The matron in particular took offence to my sexuality and constantly made snide comments about it. One day she stared straight at me and told me that homosexuality was wrong, that I wasn’t normal. She said I was depressed and messed up in the head. That was the first time I’d experienced prejudice so openly and directly. And she made it clear I wouldn’t succeed – even marking on my grade papers: “If you thought that you are going to be a nurse, you are wrong.” It made me feel so ashamed.

Things got more difficult as I went on, as I was seen as someone who didn’t conform. Things escalated when the matron accused me of stealing drugs off a trolley. Next thing I knew, I was being driven to a psychiatric ward. They said I needed treatment and I was taken off that same day – I had no choice in the matter. I didn’t even have spare clothes with me.

I was terrified and told them it was a mistake, but they just gave me drugs to quieten me down. They said I had ‘neurotic personality disorder’ – a completely false diagnosis. The doctors didn’t listen and I had no say in what happened to me. I didn’t realise it at the time but I would spend the next 12 or so years there and I’d never get to complete my nursing training.

The amount of medication they gave me was astounding, and I wasn’t told what it was or what it was for, or what the side effects might be – I just had to take it. I had no choice. At one point they gave me trial drugs for deep sleep therapy, which lasted

about a week. My notes show I was given up to 40 different medications – everything from anti-psychosis drugs to laxatives, muscle relaxants and sedatives.

They gave me electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) more than 200 times, sometimes even daily. The muscle relaxant before the ECT felt like razor blades going through my body. It went from the top of my head, down my neck and all the way down my back. They would give me a muscle relaxant to paralyse me, but I was fully awake while it was happening. I remember the silver machine and the assistants holding the electrodes, which they would place around my head. Then I'd go unconscious. After the shock therapy I would feel faint and dizzy, and usually I would vomit. I'd cry and beg them not to do it again, but they wouldn't listen. Time blurred. Sometimes I would go completely blind from ECT.

I believe that they did not use disposable electrodes during my ECT and that I contracted hepatitis C this way. I also ended up with burn scars on my scalp, which hairdressers comment on.

Once I was put into a room without a toilet and punished for peeing on the floor in desperation, and I was often given enemas of soap and water as a punishment.

I was in and out of Princess Margaret Hospital 24 separate times over the next 12 years. The hospital started to feel like it was part of me – I became institutionalised. I had no control over my own life. No matter how much I complained or questioned the doctors, I was ignored.

I felt so humiliated by what was done to me, and sometimes I hated myself and felt like I had no reason to live. The doctor would ask me inappropriate questions about being a lesbian, like “how many times a week do you have sex with your partner”, and “what is it like”. I was scared of him and didn't want to be alone with him.

There was never actually anything wrong with me – although I was labelled an alcoholic, a schizophrenic and a drug addict, none of these things were true and eventually I got them all wiped off my records.

The effects are long lasting. I've lost some of my memory, I have tinnitus and severe headaches, as well as dealing with the hepatitis C and scalp burns. I've self-harmed, so I've got scars on my wrists and it's a terrible reminder.

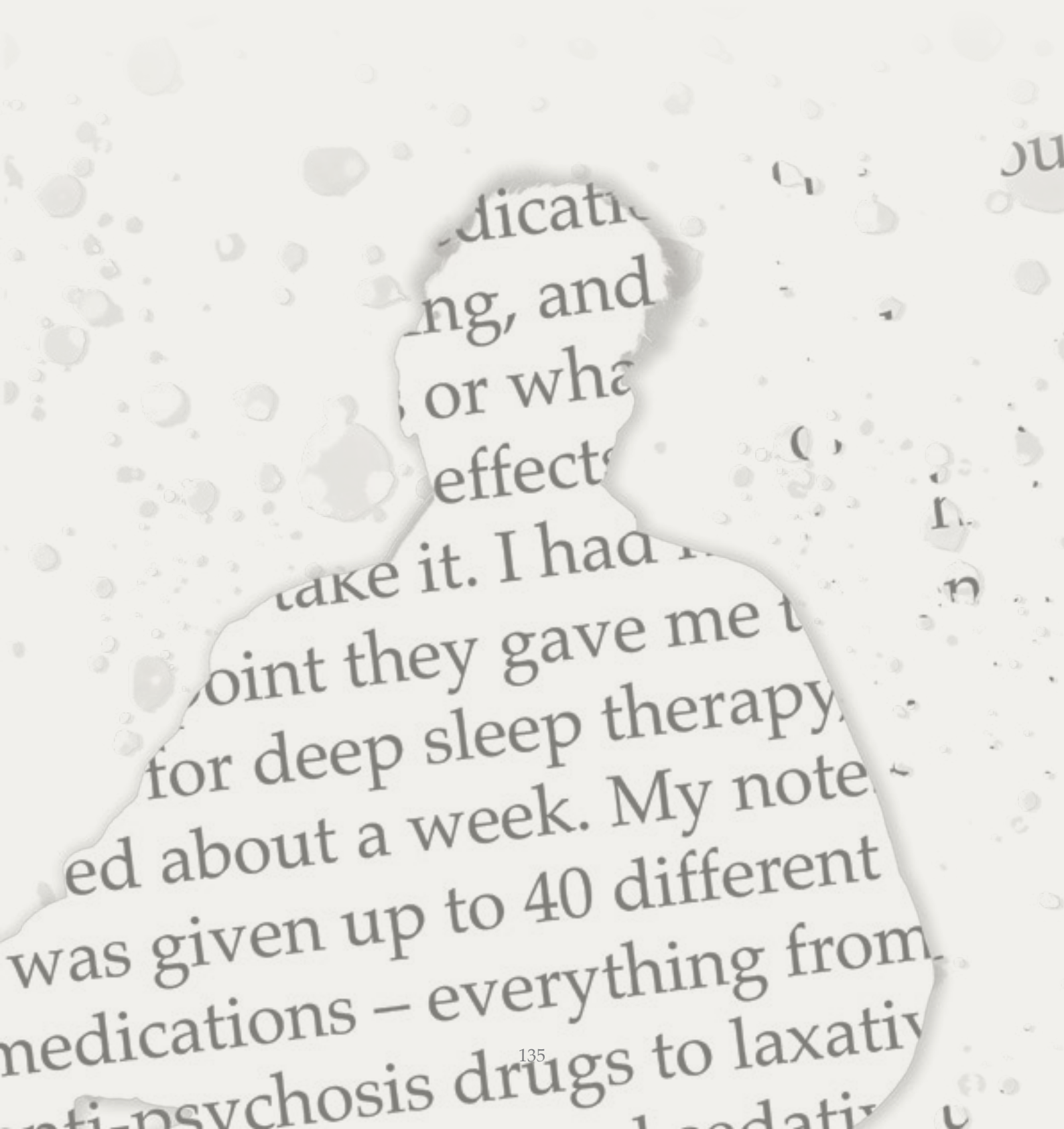
I've battled ACC and the Crown for compensation and recognition, including spending all of my inheritance money on expensive legal fees. It is so traumatic to have to talk about it over and over again, to try to get people to believe that what I was saying actually happened. It is incredibly disappointing that survivors have to rely on local MPs and doctors to speak up on their behalf.

My current GP, who has since retired, has been very clear that I have no symptoms of mental illness, no delusions, hallucinations or signs of being out of touch with reality. He says any diagnosis of schizophrenia can't be sustained, and in fact I've shown great resilience and strength.

I think it's incredibly sad that these things were done to me simply for being gay in a time when it wasn't acceptable. If I hadn't been put into psychiatric care I think my life would've taken a very different turn. I'm sad I didn't finish my nursing training, I

know I would've gone far as a nurse. It ruined my life, but I try not to be bitter about everything – I just keep going forward. This is the end of a chapter for me, to finally be heard and believed. I'm very thankful.

Source: Witness statement, Joan Bellingham (25 February 2020).

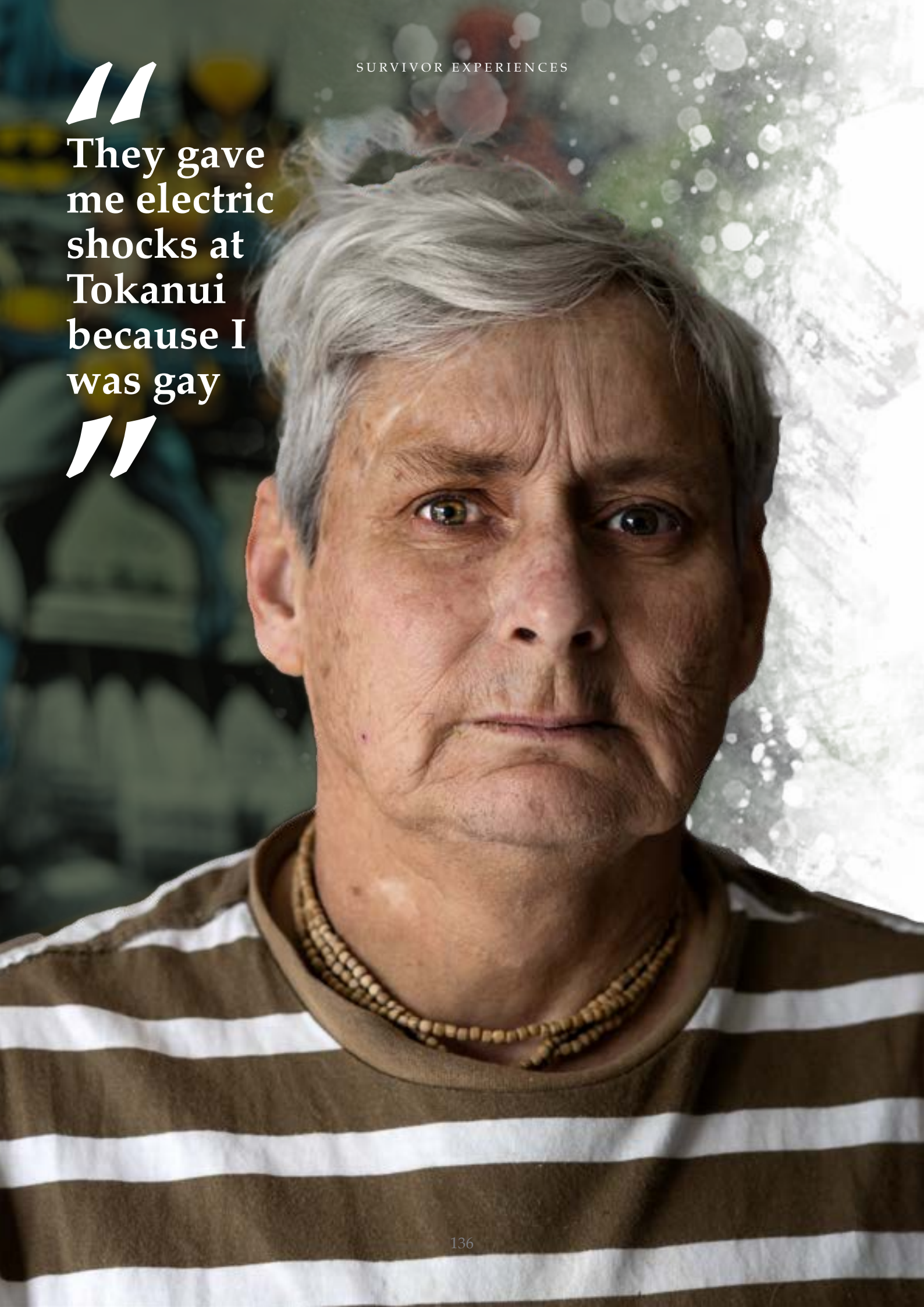




“

They gave  
me electric  
shocks at  
Tokanui  
because I  
was gay

”



# Joshy Fitzgerald

**Hometown:** Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland

**Age when entered care:** 14 years old

**Year of birth:** 1969

**Time in care:** 1983–1985

**Type of care facility:** Boys' home – Hamilton Boys' Home; psychiatric hospital – Tokanui; Social Welfare family home; foster homes.

**Ethnicity:** NZ European and Māori (Te Arawa)

**Whānau background:** One of eight kids. Dad left when Joshy was four, and his mum remarried when he was around 5 or 6 years old.

**I was a bit of a black sheep in my family growing up and was beaten constantly. There were times I couldn't walk because my legs would be black and blue from bruises. It wasn't a good childhood.**

I became a State ward and was initially placed in Hamilton Boys' Home aged 14 years old. Some staff treated me okay, some didn't. The staff who did the showers and night shifts were the creepy ones. There was sexual abuse at night, after we'd gone to bed when the staff would come to check on us. I'm sure everyone knew what was going on, but no one said anything.

They always preyed on the quiet ones like me. Never the rowdy ones who would make a scene.

I told a staff member about it once, and I think he believed me, but nothing ever happened. I thought, what's the point, so I didn't tell anyone else after that.

It wasn't long before they sent me to Tokanui Hospital. That happened after I tried to set fire to a doctor's surgery in Rotorua. I'd been sent back home and I didn't want to be there – I wanted to go back to the boys' home, because I didn't get beaten there. But nobody talked to me about what was happening or how long I was going to be there. Social workers never contacted me or came to see me.

I was a scared little kid. I felt like I didn't belong in there. I felt I was being punished for my behaviour, but I didn't know what I had done. I knew being in Tokanui wasn't going to be good for my mental health in the long run. I started running away, but I'd get picked up and taken back, and put into seclusion. Complaining to police about the abuse wasn't an option – I knew nobody was going to believe me anyway.

They gave me electric shocks at Tokanui because I was gay. I remember asking, “Where are you taking me?” The male nurse said, “We’ve got to get this gay out of you.” I said, “Well, it’s not something that I choose to be.”

That was it. Nobody ever talked to me about being diagnosed with anything. It was just when I mentioned I was gay that everything changed, and I got three sessions of electric shocks and then nothing was ever said.

The staff treated me differently because of my sexuality – they’d call me names. Some of the nurses would call me a faggot, like, “Go to bed, go have a shower, you faggot.” They were extremely homophobic.

I was sexually abused at Tokanui. It was constant – every night, a male staff member would come in, then a couple of hours later, another would come in. Sometimes I’d sleep under the bed, because I thought if they didn’t see me in bed when they opened the door, they might go away.

I was raped by another patient there, and I got really upset about it, so the staff drugged me up to calm me down and I was out of it for about three days. That was it – it was never mentioned again.

I think I was an easy target because I had no one to tell, and the staff wouldn’t listen. The staff at Tokanui didn’t like any trouble. If you started up, they’d bring you medicine or give you an injection. I started rebelling and got injections at night. I didn’t know what it was, but I’d sleep for hours and be really dozy when I woke up.

After Tokanui I went to a Social Welfare family home and was abused there by the husband. I understand he was later arrested for sexually abusing children. He’d threaten me each time he sexually abused me, telling me I’d be locked up, I’d be taken back to Tokanui.

I ended up in foster homes too, just a constant back-and-forth between the boys’ home, foster homes, my mum’s place. Once I was 16 years old, I went back to my mum’s and she had my suitcases packed and was standing out the front of the house. I was just dumped off at a social worker’s place in Rotorua. I never heard from Social Welfare again once I turned 16 years old.

I just wanted to be somewhere that was safe.

I went to Christchurch and studied to be a pastry chef, and I’m now qualified as a chef and pastry chef. I had a really good tutor who helped me find accommodation and I got work. I went to Australia for a while too.

But the abuse has affected my relationships and my trust. I can’t let anyone touch me or hug me. I have a real fear of being hurt, so I push people away. I don’t go out – I stay by myself all the time because my health is so bad now.

I believe that I contracted HIV when I was sexually abused at Tokanui, and I have full-blown AIDS now. I’m on borrowed time at the moment, anything can take me out. So, I’m just trying to cope with that. There’s a lot of stigma out there in relation to HIV and having to deal with that is a bit much sometimes.



At one point I was self-destroying – drinking and taking a lot of drugs. I had counselling, but it was hard to open up – nobody else had listened, so I wasn't going to talk to other people, because they wouldn't believe me.

My neurological stuff isn't good at the moment and I'm not sure if that's because of the AIDS or the electric shocks. I've lost strength in my hands to pick things up. I'm not sure what the long-term effects of the electric shocks are.

I've been disconnected from my culture. I don't go to my family marae, I just don't feel like I belong. Māori culture never got brought up at Tokanui or the Hamilton Boys' Home. I took a te reo course a few years ago – I wish I'd had more opportunity to learn it, that would at least give me a feeling of belonging, because I don't feel like I belong anywhere. I feel like my innocence has been taken away.

There needs to be more support where young people can have somebody they can trust to talk to. If you've got someone you can trust, you know you're not alone. As long as someone cares for our young people, that's the main thing.

**Source:** Witness statement, Joshy Fitzgerald (25 February 2022).

“

I had to stay  
there while  
the priest  
sexually  
assaulted the  
prefect

”

# Kamahl Tupetagi

**Age when entered care:** 3 years old

**Year of birth:** 1973

**Hometown:** Australia

**Time in care:** 1977–1994

**Type of care facility:** Family home – Nayland Family Home, St Andrews Family Home, Tahunanui Family Home; foster care; boys' home – Lookout Point Boys' Home; Māori boarding school – Hato Pāora College (Catholic).

**Ethnicity:** Niuean and Māori (Ngāpuhi)

**Whānau background:** Kamahl has seven siblings. One was adopted to maternal grandparents. Kamahl has a twin sister.

**Life with my mum and dad was quite abusive and difficult. I ended up going to hospital more than once, and I'm surprised I didn't come to the attention of the authorities. I was also sexually abused by people who came to our house for parties, and later sexually abused at a family home.**

My father left our family when I was young and went back to Niue. I last saw him when I was about 18 years old. I didn't have a lot of connection with the Niuean side of my family growing up, and I don't now. My mother is Māori. She had a disagreement with her family before I was born, and moved down south. We had some contact with her family but I didn't spend a lot of time on the marae, and I didn't have a lot of cultural knowledge or understanding as I was growing up.

Social Welfare got involved with my family after our school noted that my older siblings were truanting regularly. My family was placed under the preventive supervision of Social Welfare in 1977 when I was 3 years old, and I was made a State ward aged 9 years old. My mother voluntarily placed us kids into Social Welfare care for six months, with the intention that we'd be home again by Christmas. Mum's emotional health was a problem, as well as our poor financial situation and unsettled accommodation.

We were placed in the St Andrew's Family Home. I was treated well there and wasn't abused, but I had a lot of anxiety during that time. I didn't really know that I was in State care. Mum visited but we never went back to living with her again. When she did visit, it was quite emotional because of the long periods of separation.

Later I went to the Nayland Family Home. I shared a room with an older boy there who repeatedly sexually assaulted me. I reported it to my social worker, and I think I told him about the boy sexually abusing me, but I don't think anything came of it. If



you talked about these things, people didn't believe you. I was physically abused by another boy there too.

Foster placements didn't go well, so I was enrolled at Hato Pāora College in 1987 and was there until 1989. I didn't want to go. The social worker attributed the problems I'd had in foster care to a "difference in cultural values and perception", and he thought that sending me to Hato Pāora would give me an opportunity to explore my Māori culture and make Māori friends. But I had been brought up in a Pākehā environment. I asked to go to my relatives in the north, to one aunty in particular. She'd agreed I could stay there, but this was never explored by my social workers.

The decision to send me to Hato Pāora was the worst decision Social Welfare could have made for me. I was horrifically abused while I lived there, by both the students and the staff members.

Violence and bullying were endemic to Hato Pāora. Staff knew it was happening. They wouldn't intervene unless there was some serious blood spilt. You never knew when the punishment was going to be delivered or who gave the instruction.

Punishments were severe, from senior students and staff. Seniors would clear their mouths and nostrils with the ugliest snot and saliva they could muster, to have you wipe it up with your hand and eat it. My teeth were damaged after being forced at times to brush them with toilet cleaner.

We were punished if we made mistakes during culture practice. A metal ruler was used as a knuckle punishment. We had to hold our arms out with hands palms down, and the metal ruler was turned on its side and cracked onto our knuckles hard enough to cause hand injuries and create tears, which would only create more reasons to be punished.

Culture was so important at Hato Pāora. Because I knew nothing about it when I got to Hato Pāora, I became a target. If I did not speak Māori properly or do the haka properly, senior students would pick up the nearest desk or chair and hit me with it, or find a stick to punish me with. I'd be forced to stand for hours and have my legs slapped or my hands hit.

I've been disconnected from my Pacific and Māori culture for most of my life. I think being involved with my own culture would have given me a sense of myself and a sense of belonging. I didn't know any Niuean or Māori language growing up, which I think would have helped me as well. My cultural learning was done at Hato Pāora, at a time when I experienced an enormous amount of abuse.

I was regularly sexually abused by a priest at Hato Pāora – several times a week, sometimes several times a day. He realised I had no contact person or anyone I could tell, because I was never visited by a social worker. It was worse during the school holidays because I was often left behind.

A lot of older boys also sexually abused younger boys. I was sexually assaulted multiple times by a senior boy.

Once, I was summoned to the prefect's dorm and told to strip down to my underwear. We heard the priest coming and the boy told me to hide under the bed. I had to stay there while the priest sexually assaulted the prefect.

I became so mentally exhausted by the abuse that I faked having appendicitis. The priest drove me home from surgery. I was in the infirmary for two weeks and he abused me there too.

I know that some survivors of abuse have unclear memories of the things that happened. I have very clear memories of everything that happened. I also have physical responses to things, such as smells I associate with the priest.

So many of my Social Welfare records from my time at Hato Pāora indicate I was being abused. A social worker wrote a note saying I was “unlikely to develop the strength to be able to survive at a boarding school” as I might be “the subject of all types of physical abuse,” and “observing him, his beautiful piano playing, lack of sporting interests, and delicate gestures – it is easy to accept that he would have difficulties with bullies at boarding school”.

I was finally allowed to leave Hato Pāora after telling my social worker I was going to kill myself. I was sent down south because my mum was based down there, and Social Welfare had changed its policy and kids had to go back to their parents or extended family. That was awful because we’d been estranged from Mum for a very long time.

I started to go to counselling in 1989. I also spoke to my social worker at the time about the abuse at Hato Paora and I was interviewed by the police, but it does not look like the priest was charged in relation to my complaints at that time. It looked like my social worker believed I’d been sexually abused at Hato Pāora, so I don’t know why police didn’t pursue it.

I was sent to live with an aunty. I was in a very bad state, and very distressed. They took me to hospital and then I was sent to Lookout Point Boys’ Home. I was depressed and seeing a psychiatrist every week.

I spoke to a staff member there about the sexual abuse I experienced at Hato Pāora, and I signed a report about it. It’s not clear whether anything was done with it.

I had just bounced around the whole country, and I didn’t have any power to make decisions for myself.

Eventually a ‘family preservation agreement’ was signed, which gave me some money for flatting and expenses, and I was to apply for the Independent Youth Benefit. I had someone who was a real advocate for me, and she helped me lodge an ACC claim. But I was pretty much on my own.

There was a real lack of care in the way Social Welfare looked after me. I had to fight for a lot of things from them, like counselling, and there was a lack of interest in us – sometimes social workers wouldn’t even turn up for appointments. We weren’t consulted about placements. We were in Social Welfare care all our lives and no one actually did anything to save us.

I left New Zealand and went to Australia when I was about 17 years old. It wasn’t until I left New Zealand that I had an opportunity to change my life.

**Source:** Witness statement Kamahl Andrew Teau Fukuoka Tupetagi (September 2021).



“

It's like broken  
glass – you  
can put it back  
together, but  
it's still ugly

”



# Ms MK

**Hometown:** Rangitikei District

**Age when entered care:** 4 years old

**Year of birth:** 1958

**Time in care:** 1962–1973

**Type of care facility:** Foster care; schools for the Deaf – Van Asch College in Ōtautahi Christchurch, Deaf unit at Sumner School in Ōtautahi Christchurch; residential home – Randall Home

**Ethnicity:** NZ European

**Whānau background:** Ms MK has three siblings, and 13 half siblings on her father's side. She has two children and two grandchildren. Her three siblings also went into care.

**My hearing loss may be from being hit in the head as a child. I don't know for sure.**

**When I was 3 years old, Dad went to jail. Then my mum died when I was 4 years old, so my siblings and I went into care. I was sent to Van Asch at 6 years old and was there for nine and a half years.**

Once I arrived at Van Asch I went straight to bed, because I thought the school was a hospital. It took me a couple of days to realise where I was.

I was at Van Asch School for most of the time I lived at the boarding school, but I also went to the Deaf unit at Sumner School from 1967 to 1969. At Sumner School, I was in a Deaf unit with seven other children. The teacher would give me the strap because I didn't know how to do math. The strap would usually come around lunchtime, and I would put my hand in hot water before lunchtime so it wouldn't hurt as much. After I got used to it, he started giving me the strap on the other hand, and on the tops of my hands too. I never learned properly there because I was so scared of him.

At Van Asch, we weren't allowed Sign Language. If we got caught signing we had our hands smacked. Sometimes we had to put our hands behind our backs. They didn't teach Sign Language – the teachers didn't know how to sign, and they would write on the blackboard instead. When staff weren't looking we used to sign our own sign language – not taught by teachers or other people, but taught by kids. We developed our own way of communicating and learnt about our own culture.

From 1964 until 1973 I was in 35 different foster homes during the school holidays. I struggled to concentrate at school because I was often scared thinking about which foster family I would be going to next holidays. I didn't get any qualifications, because

I couldn't concentrate properly with all the anxiety, and I used to get nightmares. I felt unsettled and on edge. I was sexually abused in some of the foster homes, and sometimes physically abused too.

I hated being at boarding school. I didn't know what was going to happen next, because some staff were good but some were very horrible to me. Sometimes I would wet my pants because I was so scared of the staff. One of the worst was my teacher. She used to pick on me and was cruel to me for four years.

When I was about 13 years old a boy from the boarding school down the road came to the girls' dormitory where I was sleeping and tried to do things to me that I didn't want to do. I said no and pushed him away. He pulled the blanket back and pissed all over my sheets, then he ran off. The sheets were wet, but my pyjamas were dry. My teacher came and pulled my blanket back. I told her I had done a wee on the bed, because I couldn't tell her a boy had come along. She got the wet sheet and wiped it on my face. All the kids were looking at me and I just had to stand there.

Another time, the kids had to transfer all the beds from one dormitory to another, but I was really sick. I told my teacher I was going to vomit and couldn't move the beds. She pushed me and slapped my head. Then I vomited in the corridor. The teacher made me mop up my vomit, but I couldn't because I was too sick. She cleaned up the vomit then slapped the mop in my face.

I sometimes felt uncomfortable at Van Asch. When I was 6 years old the staff taught us to wash ourselves in the bath. I didn't wash myself properly, so my teacher put the soap in my private parts and it burnt. When I was 7 years old, the staff made me go in a cold water bath with the boys because I was a tomboy. It was embarrassing.

Sometimes I was locked up in a room by myself for being naughty.

The staff treated me worse than other kids because they knew I didn't have a family I could turn to or complain to if things went wrong. I was too scared to complain to anyone at Van Asch in case the abuse got worse, and I knew they wouldn't believe me anyway. I was the one in the trash and I just had to carry on.

Social Welfare would take me to the shops every three or four months to get new clothes, but the clothes weren't as good as the other kids' clothes and I would get teased.

I didn't know my birthday until I was 12 years old, and I didn't know my middle name for a long time either. The first birthday present I got was from a teacher – she gave me a gift with some lollies, books, pencils and other things. I wasn't used to it – we didn't celebrate birthdays or holidays at Van Asch. We didn't get Easter eggs, Christmas or birthday presents. We didn't have special things of our own, like toys or pictures of our families.

I left Van Asch in 1973 and stayed with foster families and went to a school with a Deaf unit. I met my best friend there. We had lots of laughs. It was nice having someone who understood me. In my last year of high school, I was with one family who were nice and generous and I was a little bit happy. After care, I found a place to board and got a job. I reconnected with my dad and met him when I was 22 years old. I love him because he's my dad, but he's on the wrong track.

I often get premonitions, and I got them when I was younger too, I think because I've had to learn things on my own. It's like a stray dog can look after itself better than a spoiled cat. My time in care taught me how to look after myself.

Being separated from my family had a huge impact on me. Foster families were never the same as my real family. I wasn't in touch with any of my siblings or my dad for most of my life. No one in the system thought it was important that we stay in contact. I only re-established contact with my siblings on my 60th birthday. We keep in contact, and I'm glad I'm in contact with them but I'm sad about all the years we lost.

I focus now on making sure my children and family don't go through what I went through. It might be nice if the government acknowledged what happened and apologised, but it is hard to get back those pieces. I carry the long-term impacts from my time in care. I feel sad inside and suffer from anxiety. I still have nightmares about the abuse and neglect. These things stay with you, and you can't just get rid of them. It's like broken glass. You can put it back together, but it's still ugly.

**Source:** Witness statement of Ms MK (28 June 2022).



“

If I couldn't  
speak properly,  
I got hit

”

# Ms NH

**Age when entered care:** 5 years old

**Year of birth:** 1965

**Hometown:** Perth, Australia

**Time in care:** 1970 – 1979

**Type of care facility:** School for the Deaf – Kelston School for the Deaf in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.

**Ethnicity:** NZ European

**Whānau background:** I live by myself, I have My Mum, 1 sister and 1 brother still alive. They Live in Their own house.

**Currently:** I dont work, I am on a Pension. My Hobbies are sewing and crochet.

**I was born Deaf and blind in my right eye. I'm the only Deaf member of my family, and growing up my family communicated orally and I couldn't understand everything. I went to Kelston at 5 years old. I was scared and felt unsure about being there. I didn't know I was Deaf or different to my family, and I was confused. I also didn't know my mum was going to be leaving.**

I started feeling depressed right from my first day. I was thirsty and drank water from a fountain, and I didn't know that I wasn't allowed to drink it. A staff member grabbed me by the throat and yelled at me and hit me.

We didn't learn anything – they didn't teach us anything and there was no learning, it was all about learning how to speak. We had to use the oral method to say our name and the teacher would make us hold our hands to our throat so we could feel the vibrations. We had to do this over and over again. We also had to sing, but we couldn't hear the music.

After breakfast we had to line up to get toothpaste. When it was my turn, the teacher who had hit me insisted I vocalise the word 'please'. I tried many times and she got angry that I couldn't get it right. She hit my head and pushed me against the wall, then told me to wait at the end of the line. I tried again and again, and she hit me as I got it wrong. I was sobbing uncontrollably. The other girls weren't being hit. They just stared at me.

A similar thing happened in the dining room – if we didn't verbalise 'please' properly, we had to go to the back of the line, and if I got it wrong I would be hit. Sometimes I'd repeat this three or four times, going to the back of the line because I couldn't hear or understand. Other students sometimes had to go to the back of the line, but I never saw

them being hit for getting it wrong. When I eventually got my food, I would be eating and still crying.

One time I was washing my hair in the sink. I checked first to make sure the teacher wasn't around. It was safe. Then I felt my face being shoved down into the sink, and someone was trying to drown me in the water. I couldn't breathe, and it went on for so long. I saw it was the teacher, pushing my head into the water. I hit her hard and ran away fast. I didn't know how to tell anyone about it.

The same day we had fish and chips for dinner. I hated fish so I was just eating the chips. The teacher saw I wasn't eating the fish, so she came over to me, picked up my fork with fish on it and forced me to eat it by squeezing my cheeks, making my mouth open. A similar thing happened at breakfast the next day – I wasn't eating porridge, and another staff member came up to me angrily, hit my hand with the spoon and forced me to eat the porridge. I forced it down and then vomited everywhere.

I was so depressed at Kelston. It got worse and worse the longer I was there. I felt my head get so tight and sore. I just wanted to go home and be with my mum.

I didn't tell my parents about what was going on because I couldn't communicate. The staff members at Kelston saw me being abused but said nothing. I didn't have any friends and I was very isolated.

The teacher abused me nearly every day. She would hit me, whack my head, and slam me into walls. I remember always being sore and having bruises. I was also picked on by other students and bullied.

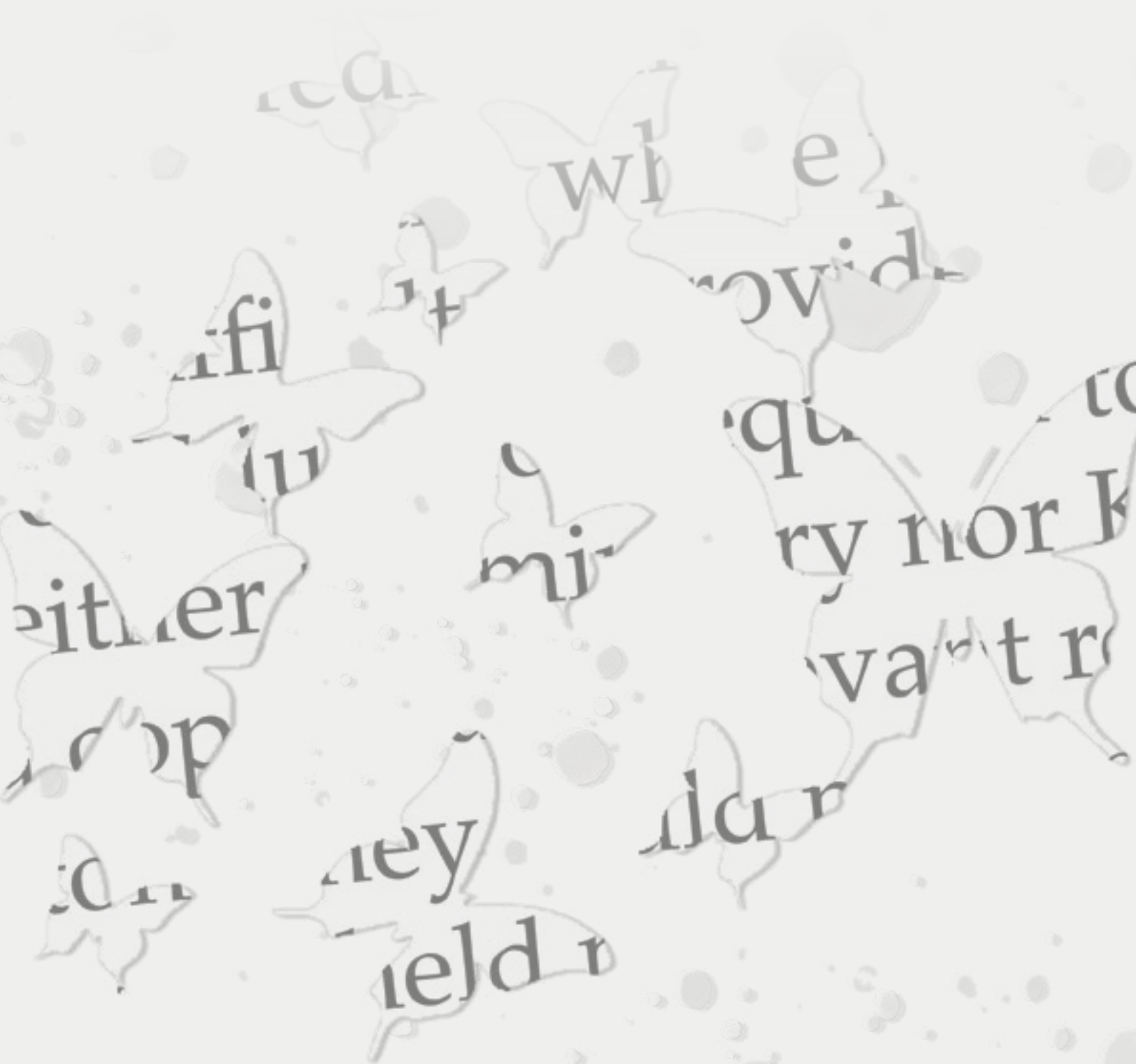
When I was 14 I moved overseas with my family, and I felt my depression slowly releasing away, and my wellbeing began to improve. Deaf people were shocked that I hadn't learned any sign language. I got a better education and learned sign language so I could communicate. My mother asked me if I wanted to move back to New Zealand and I said no. I don't want to go back, and I haven't been back since.

When I was 30 I started telling my mother all the things that had happened to me. My parents went to night classes to learn sign language so we could communicate properly.

I can never forget the abuse I received from people who were paid to be there for me and care for me. The trauma has stayed with me. I still have awful thoughts of how I was treated, and I'm still scared to see those mean teachers and staff members.

**Source:** Witness statement, Ms NH (28 October 2022).





“

Everyone has had to deal with the minister's abuse in their own ways

”

# Ms NI

**Hometown:** Ahuriri Napier

**Age when entered care:** 11 years old

**Year of birth:** 1963

**Time in care:** 1974 – 1976

**Type of care facility:** Faith-based institution: Church youth group – Presbyterian

**Ethnicity:** Māori and Pākehā

**Whānau background:** Ms NI has one sister and two brothers, one of whom is adopted. Ms NI's mother was adopted and was a State ward.

**Currently:** Ms NI is close with her three children.

**Mum and Dad were both involved in the church. Mum was an elder and Dad was one of the managers. Mum was more on the faith-based side of it, while Dad mostly did practical things like maintenance. We were closely involved with the people at church, both ministers and their families, and with others who went to church.**

My parents had a hypocritical lifestyle – on one hand, they were quite involved in the church and the school, but on the other hand, they lived a somewhat alternative lifestyle, and as a family we were members of the Sun Club. It didn't make sense to my developing mind.

I was in my last year at primary school when there was a new minister appointed at our Presbyterian parish. He was a bit different to other priests – he didn't wear a clerical collar, and he dressed as a clown for the school gala. The minister started a youth group, which our church hadn't had before, and we started going on youth group camps. The minister would pick the kids who went on the camps, so we felt like we were lucky if we were chosen to go.

I didn't have particularly close friends at school, and we didn't have nearby neighbours, so our family was a bit physically isolated. It made it hard for me to feel like I belonged and to make friends.

There was sexual abuse in the youth group and on the camps and outings. The abuse I experienced was inappropriate touching, inappropriate nudity, and encouragement of us to explore sexually with our peers. The minister touched my body all over, including under my clothes and around my breasts and vagina. He also made me touch his penis. He would take opportunities when we were isolated. The abuse happened at church, in my home, at youth group camps and outings, in the transport used for youth group and at church events. He'd isolate you but make you feel special that you were being chosen to be with him.



There was this undercurrent of inappropriate touching and open nudity on the camps and at youth group. We were encouraged to skinny dip and there would be 'accidental' touching underwater. The minister would change in front of us without any attempt at modesty and encouraged us to do the same, both in front of him and in front of each other. Promiscuity was encouraged but also a secret.

There was so little supervision by the church. Our parents trusted the minister to look after us because he was a minister, and also because he had kids and a wife.

My mother once witnessed him touching me in our home. We regularly had the ministers or their families at our home for meetings and other things. Mum came into the kitchen one day when he was touching me, but she didn't say anything in the moment. After he left, she challenged me, "Were you letting him touch you?" I said 'no' because I wasn't 'letting' him. I didn't have a choice in it. I thought if I said 'yes', then I'd be in trouble for 'letting' him touch me.

A local school principal somehow got wind of what was going on, and about six or eight of us ended up making statements at the police station. It should've been a headline story – there were so many people impacted by the minister's abuse that it should've been made public and been stopped. But nothing went any further than that trip to the police station. The touching continued to happen. It only stopped when the minister moved on to another church when I was in third or fourth form. By then, the damage was done.

My mother was interviewed by the police about it, and they showed her my statement. She told police she had asked me if he had been touching me in the kitchen at our house and I'd said "No, nothing was happening". She told the police that what was written in my statement was obviously a lie. A little girl never forgets the betrayal of her mother.

Mum was an elder at the church and part of those who appointed and monitored the minister. She would've been involved in him getting and keeping his job. She saw what he was doing to me in the kitchen, in my home where I should have been the safest. I don't know how she could have defended him and made me out to be a liar – she had seen it with her own eyes.

I've made some poor decisions and done some Bonnie and Clyde stuff I'm not proud of. I've been lucky to get through life without a criminal record. I've taken a lot of risks where things could have gone really wrong, not just for me but for my children also. There are skeletons in my closet I need to keep hidden.

If it weren't for the breakdown of my relationship with my family caused by what the minister did, I wouldn't be living with depression, anxiety, complex post-traumatic stress disorder and imposter syndrome, controlled only by medication. My career stability and educational outcomes at school could have meant that my life journey would have been quite different. Economically I've missed the boat, and I'll need to work into my 70s. I've used alcohol heavily over the years, and I've had periods of cannabis use as well as prescription medication. I attempted to take my own life a couple of times in my teen years.

The grooming and touching really influenced me as a teenager and later in life. I didn't value my body, and I'd be intimate with anyone who would pay me attention. For a time, I worked as a high-class sex worker, because I needed money.

Everyone has had to deal with the minister's abuse in their own ways.

After having my three kids, I decided I needed to knuckle down for them to have a better chance at life than I had. I went to polytech, got a diploma and got a job, and bought a house. I kept a close eye on my kids – they rarely went anywhere when I wasn't with them, and it was like me and them against the world. We're still close.

My relationship with my mother went pear-shaped in my teen years. I believe that me being sexually assaulted touched a nerve for her – it was hard for her to face it or deal with it, because until recently she believed she had been conceived because of a sexual assault. She was abandoned before she was 2 years old and made a ward of the State. She was in and out of foster care before being adopted at around 3 or 4 years old. Her birth mother went on to have several children to multiple fathers, and her birth father was in and out of prison and psychiatric units for his whole life – I think he was locked up to prevent him using his cultural practices. He died in prison the year I was born, and Mum never got to meet him. My son has done a lot of whakapapa research, and we are slowly reconnecting with our iwi, hapū and marae.

Mum not accepting that I was a victim has just made it impossible for me to connect with her. A lot of what I do to keep a relationship with her, I do resentfully. Over the years she stayed good friends with the minister and his wife, even after they left Napier. She once wanted to take my two girls to visit them when we were travelling past their place on the way to the South Island together. Another time she asked me to come to her house and prepare a dinner for some 'surprise' guests they had coming. I did this often, and the children and I stayed and had a meal as well, so it wasn't an unusual request. But I discovered it was the minister and his wife coming to dinner, so I took my kids and left before they got there. Some sick kind of surprise. Mum has never accepted that I was one of the minister's victims, and her not believing me is a real cloud over our relationship.

Over the years I have dreamt about confronting him directly, but I never did. By the time I realised I could, it was too late, and he had died. There are institutional structures that have protected the perpetrators of abuse and shattered the lives of their victims in the process. Churches need to acknowledge their part and do better, much better than just putting fancy words on their websites.

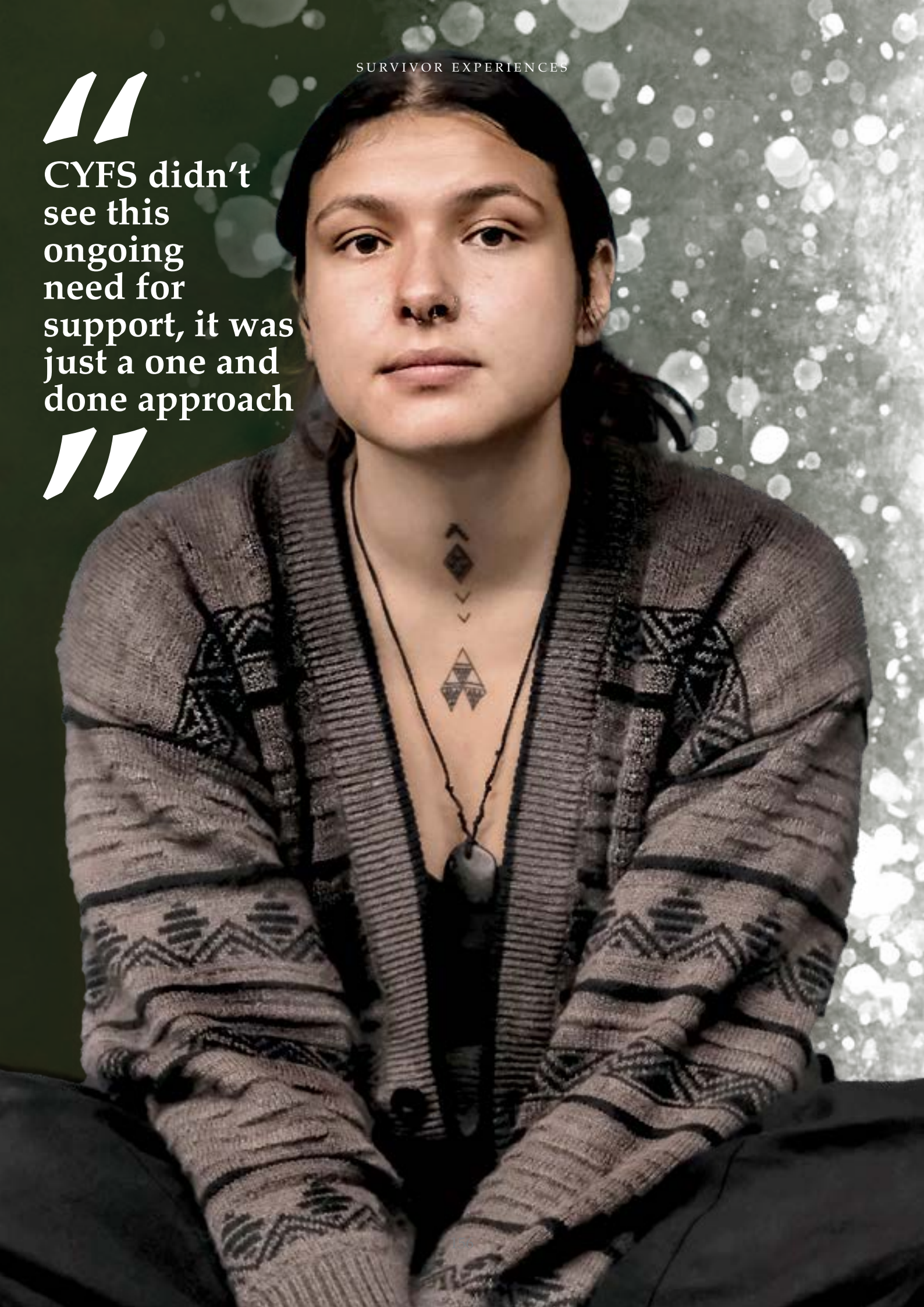
**Source:** Witness statement of Ms NI (28 April 2022).



“

CYFS didn't see this ongoing need for support, it was just a one and done approach

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# Karah Mackie

**Year of birth:** 1999

**Type of care facility:** Foster homes

**Ethnicity:** Māori (Ngāpuhi)

**Whānau background:** Karah is one of eight siblings who all grew up in care, but spent time living with their mother as well. Her siblings have different fathers to her. Her mother also grew up in care.

**Currently:** Karah had an up and down relationship with her mother, who has now passed away. She doesn't have a relationship with her father. Karah works in youth advocacy. Her relationship to Te Ao Māori is important to her.

**My mum had been in care in the 70s and was abused by her caregivers. In comparison, my experience was more neglect than abuse. From my mum's generation, her and all her siblings went into care. It's the same for my generation of siblings and first cousins, except one person that I know of.**

We all ended up in care because Mum had no support and she had a lot of mental illness so she couldn't be there for us. She started having babies in her 20s and CYFS was involved from the start. I don't think she or my dad were capable of understanding how to be a parent.

I went into care in 2000 when I was a 1 year old. I went into a couple of houses in Hawke's Bay and then a long-term one in Auckland. It's a bit patchy.

My main placement was with a family member on my mum's side. I guess she was the only family available at the time – it was pretty rough. She told us that our mum didn't want us, so we didn't have a relationship with Mum growing up. At first, me and one of my older sisters, and some of our cousins, all lived with her. But it would have been better to be with family that cared about us. It was very hierarchical there. I didn't feel like there was really any other option, like anywhere else to be.

I had a social worker. They'd do home visits, but but beforehand we'd get told: "You can't talk about this shit."

In the end, there were nine of us living with her. Four of them weren't through CYFS, it was just whāngai and their parents lived close by. One of the kids had a disability so she would look after them and the rest of the siblings just ended up over there too.

I don't feel like it was like severely abusive, to be fair. We were taught to fight each other, so there was always violence in the home. We were really unsupported and it was really shit.

We were told there was nowhere else to go, and if CYFS were to get involved again then we might all get separated. I'm so grateful for my her, because she did keep us together, but it's a really twisted dynamic.

School was my happy place. It was where I got away. I mentioned it at school once, and they tried to put me into counselling. Then I got hidings for that because you need your parents' or caregivers' permission to go into counselling. I think that was the only time I ever said anything about it.

She died when I was 13. Some of my family went over to Australia, and me and my younger siblings went down with my mum to Hawke's Bay. But because me and my mum didn't have a relationship I just ended up house-hopping and I was pretty much homeless until I was 16. CYFS knew about this, but they wouldn't get involved because I was nearing the age you could get out of care, and they didn't want to do anything.

I had a really tough time in my teenage years. I'd stay at partners' houses or friends' places or in empty houses – there were a lot around, because they weren't earthquake safe. There was one social worker who got a bit more involved when I was 15 years old, but they didn't do anything, they just came round more and checked in.

I was going to school when I could. I feel like a lot of people did try to offer something – teachers at school said I could live with them. One teacher took me up to Auckland with her for a couple of weeks to give me space from the stuff I was involved with, which was really cool, but I think I made it quite hard for people to get involved.

I don't think I knew how to cope with anything. I had really bad mental health and I was grieving over my grandma's death. She had been the only form of caretaker I knew. I got really involved with drugs and stuff. But I realised that everyone older than me in my family had been through the same kind of journey and felt like there was no hope, that that was where we were destined to go in life. I didn't want my siblings to see me like that and it sorted me out pretty quick.

I kept up a good academic record, so teachers gave me a chance. I started going back to school regularly when I was about 16 years old. I went on the independent circumstances benefit and then started flatting. It was good, it was safe and stable. That wasn't something I'd really had, which was a big thing.

I finished school, went to uni, but dropped out in my last semester because it was just another thing I was doing to show my siblings that it was an option.

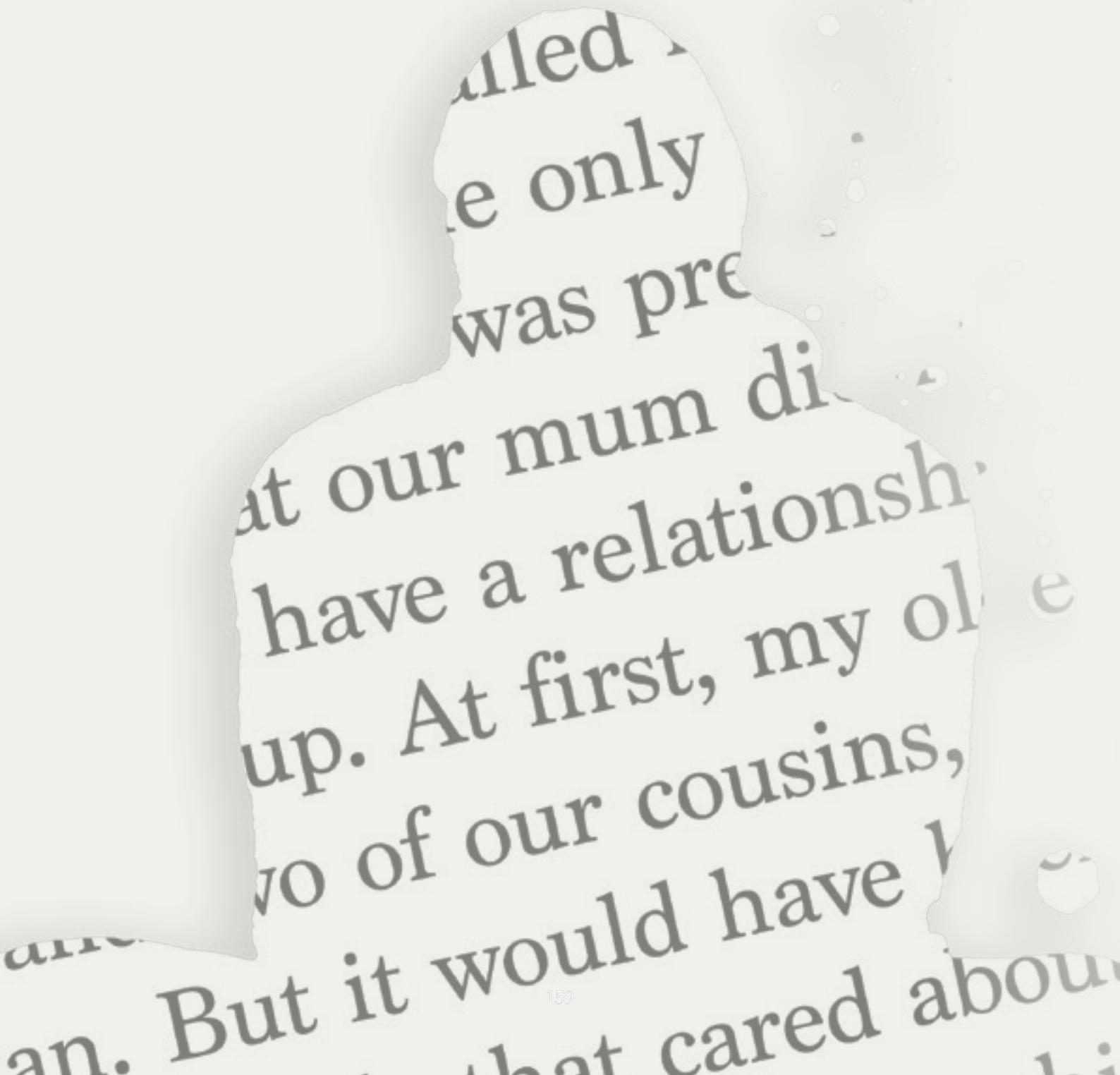
As a child I didn't understand the care system. It was portrayed to me as the best we were going to get. With CYFS, I think they wanted to keep children with family, but the family options that were there weren't good. But CYFS weren't willing to look outside of that, so ignored it when things got bad. I always felt like they were hesitant to involve themselves in our lives, even though we were already involved with them. CYFS didn't see this ongoing need for support, it was just a one and done approach. But they're supposed to be there for the welfare of children.

Oranga Tamariki should not be a thing. Renaming something, giving it a Māori name but then not being able to show up for our Māori families is not acceptable.

Instead of putting all of these funds and resources into Oranga Tamariki, put the same amount into community-based support systems so families have the support and resources available to them before there has to be an uplift or there an intervention. That would decrease a lot of the problems that children experience.

At this point, it's a disservice to our country to keep a system like this.

Source: Private session transcript of Karah Mackie (21 February 2023).





“

In many cases, the staff either perpetrated or oversaw the violence

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# Keith Wiffin

**Age when entered care:** 11 years old

**Year of birth:** 1959

**Type of care facility:** Boys' homes – Epuni Boys' Home, Family Home

**Ethnicity:** Pākehā

**Whānau background:** Keith lived with his mum and dad, two sisters and a younger brother. Keith's dad passed away suddenly when Keith was only 10 years old.

**I went into State care after my father died on his 39th birthday, leaving a mother trying to care for four children with very little income or support. I was 10 years old at the time. I had two sisters and a younger brother. My mother was not able to care for us after my father's death. That, plus my reaction to my dad's death, led to the decision to place me into care.**

There was a brief court appearance, and I was placed in State care. Next thing, I was in a van being driven to Epuni Boys' Home, Lower Hutt. For the next nine months I had very sporadic contact with my family. It was hard to have any contact, even to write letters, and contact was not encouraged.

My introduction to the culture at Epuni started in the van on the way out there. There were a lot of other children in the van. One boy in particular didn't like the look of me, and smashed a guitar over my head. I walked into the place picking bits of wood out of my head - that was my welcome.

The culture was violent and abusive. The boys had what they called a "kingpin" system. Fights and bullying were routine. I personally had broken bones and required medical treatment, including stitches.

It was a devastating experience to go into that, coming from a loving home and trying to deal with losing my father. The culture of violence was totally foreign to me. There had been nothing like that going on at home – we faced hardship, but there was never any abuse.

In many cases, the staff either perpetrated or oversaw the violence. The house masters were all very violent themselves. They wouldn't hesitate to use physical violence. I saw a fair bit of that. Psychologically they made it quite clear we were second-class citizens and the most likely outcome in life was that we would go to prison. There weren't many positive messages. It was an abusive and negative environment. Once you were in it, there were huge obstacles to success. We became products of an environment overseen by the staff.



The staff encouraged the kingpin system and used it as a means of control. The kingpin himself would be respected by the staff and used. If they thought somebody needed sorting out, they would turn to the kingpin to get that done.

I remember a camp in the Akatorua Valley. There were three cabins and there were fights going on in each cabin to determine who would be the kingpin. I was involved in a couple of those fights and my hand was broken. The whole process was overseen and encouraged by the staff who were there.

There were some serious child abusers working at Epuni when I was there. I will never forget being locked in a room in one of the wings and hearing the boy next door being raped by a staff member, knowing that that was happening and wondering when it would be my turn.

Alan David Moncreif-Wright was one of the staff members. He was a prolific offender, who had been caught abusing children in Hamilton but he was allowed to leave that institution and get a job at Epuni. Moncreif-Wright was a House Master – roughly the equivalent of a guard, a prison officer. He slept on site. The House Masters were all powerful. They had easy access to children. We had to obey them – if we didn't we were disciplined.

I remember the first time Mr Moncreif-Wright abused me, he found a reason to send me to my room. Once in the room he came in and he sexually abused me. There was no escape. I was trapped.

After nine months at Epuni, I was taken out of there and put into a Family Home in Titahi Bay, Porirua. I was there for about three years. A similar culture existed there, but not as bad. The first day I arrived I distinctly remember sitting in the lounge. Another boy wandered in and, without introducing himself, he just punched me fair in the face. I had just come from a pretty rugged environment and I retaliated, which got me into trouble. Later I said to the boy, "Why did you do that? I don't know you at all - I have never done anything to you." He said, "because the kingpin told me to do it". Some of the kids that were at the Family Home had been in Epuni Boys' Home, so it was violent.

The male guardian at the Family Home was violent towards the kids. He sexually abused the girls. It was another abusive environment which saw my behaviour and wellbeing deteriorate. I was given an ultimatum when I was expelled from Mana College that I could do three or four months in Epuni Boys' Home and then be given 'school dispensation' to allow me to go to work, or I could go to Invercargill Borstal. Those were my two options. I chose the first one.

The second time I went to Epuni, it was for about three to four months. Moncreif-Wright wasn't there the second time around and I distinctly remember my first day back asking if he was there. I will never forget the response: "No he's not, but turn your lights out at night, you'll have a better chance." I knew exactly what that meant.

The culture was the same and so were some of the staff. I remember I was standing on the line with the other kids and a fight had broken out. One of the staff was almost salivating over it and he just turned around to me and said, "Oh Keith, these kids aren't quite as tough as when you were here last time". These two kids were trying to kill each other and he did nothing to try and stop them.



When I left Epuni the second time around, I found myself throwing parcels in a sack for the Post Office at not quite 15 years old. I was still a ward of the State. I was not in good shape. I hated the world. I had a destructive attitude which saw me get into trouble, linking up with another kid or two from Epuni Boys' Home and getting a minor criminal record at a young age.

I had no education. I was abusing alcohol, drifting from job to job, from boarding house to boarding house, with no sense of what I should do with my life to try and improve things. Looking back on my time at Epuni, the only positive was leaving it.

Many decades later, I went to police and told them what Moncreif-Wright did to me. The reason I made a criminal complaint against Moncreif-Wright was because somebody else had complained. Police contacted me as a potential witness, and I told them what happened to me. It ended up with three of us being involved in a criminal case against Moncreif-Wright.

I remember the Judge saying to Moncreif-Wright, who was deciding whether to change his plea, "you've got exactly five minutes to show these people some compassion." He went out with his lawyer and came back and pleaded guilty. That told me something about the way the Judge saw the case.

In 2011 Moncreif-Wright was convicted of eight sexual offences in the Wellington District Court, including six against me. It turned out that in 1972 Moncreif-Wright had been convicted of three charges of indecent assault on boys aged under 16, and two charges of attempted assault. In 1988, the High Court sentenced him to four years' jail for serious sexual offences. I cannot give an exact number of people Moncreif-Wright offended against, but I am very confident that he was a prolific offender.

It is not possible in my mind that the other staff at Epuni were unaware of abuse by their fellow staff members. I never saw a staff member face any consequences for their actions on either of my two stints at Epuni. I believe they did not face any consequences because of an administration that either didn't know how to deal with it or didn't want to. Either way they were as complicit as the offender.

State care had a devastating effect on me in those formative years. The impact of that period has continued throughout my life. I always wanted to get justice and an explanation for what happened to me.

I have thought about what a better system might be. First of all, there needs to be culture change. There are a range of things and the important thing is that when a young person goes into care, they are treated with dignity. Their needs may be different from others - it is about that person's future. Investing at that level in those formative years is where you avoid having inter-generational prison populations, the continued growth of the gangs and all those negative outcomes.

Until it changes and the investment is made for young people, you are going to get the outcomes that happen here, which we all pay a price for. A massive impact on this country because we get it so wrong in those formative years.

**Source:** Witness Statement, Keith Wiffin (29 October 2019).

“ Separation robbed me of the ability to successfully relate to my extended family ”

# Kylee Maloney

**Hometown:** Te Papaioea Palmerston North

**Age when entered care:** Almost 5 years old

**Year of birth:** 1966

**Time in care:** 1971–1985

**Type of care facility:** School for children who are blind or have low vision – Homai College in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, run by the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind

**Ethnicity:** Celtic New Zealander

**Whānau background:** The youngest of three children, Kylee has a brother and a sister.

**Currently:** Kylee lives with her sister in Palmerston North and they are very close.

**I was born prematurely and spent the first two months of my life in an incubator, tube-fed and pretty much never touched unless professionally required. That’s had a lifelong impact. I became blind from being in the incubator –having too much oxygen scarred the retinas of my eyes.**

I was a fairly confident child, but I didn’t stay that way. It all changed when I went to Homai.

I don’t remember any conversations about why I was going there, and I don’t think I even really knew what Homai was. As an adult, I asked my parents about it. They said it was something expected of them from both medical professionals and society itself. They were just told that Homai was the best place for me, as a blind person. It was a specialist school and residential campus for kids who are blind or have low vision.

I was there for over 14 years, from just before my 5th birthday. I felt bewildered and was left to fit in. Nobody explained anything to me about what was happening. Initially I’d go back home on the weekends, then only in the school holidays. I’d tell my dad I didn’t want to go back, but the conversations were fruitless. I learned in the end not to be demonstrably unhappy about returning, as it made my parents unhappy. I was told that I couldn’t be unhappy at Homai as I was a nuisance and being there was the best place for me to be.

There was a lot of psychological and emotional abuse. I used to have my hands tied behind my back for touching my eyes, and I was only 5 or 6 years old at the time. Lots of the children touched their eyes, because we could see pin lights when pressure was put on them. I suppose the matrons thought it was socially inappropriate. After a while I figured out how to untie myself, and once I could do that, I didn’t get tied up as much.



If we got a package from home, it all got pooled and we'd have to share our things with the other children. Nobody explained why and I felt resentful about this. I also knew that some of the staff were dipping into our gifts, because we'd open our parcels and some of the things in there, they would disappear.

When I was very young I used to regularly develop fevers without the associated symptoms of cold or flu. I think they were psychosomatic, a way of dealing with what I was experiencing at Homai. The staff, though, thought I was putting it on. The matrons were trained nurses and should have known the symptoms for what they were, but I think they chose to see me as a nuisance for 'faking illness' instead of trying to discover the cause.

I had an incident in the pool when I panicked and was hauled up by somebody, and after that I was too afraid of water on my head to have my hair washed, so whenever it was time for hair washing, I fought and struggled. In the end, they wrapped me up in a sheet to force me to submit. It was like a straitjacket – effectively, that's what it was.

I struggled with food at Homai. There were things I didn't want to eat, some of which I was intolerant of, and staff exhibited a lot of power and control when it came to food. I wouldn't submit and eat what they wanted me to eat. Hostel staff would hold my nose and force my mouth to open and make me eat whatever it was. I refused, it would make me sick, and I would try to run away.

We had to eat everything we were given, but then we were punished if we put on too much weight. Our food would then get restricted – it was all very arbitrary. To rebel, I just wouldn't eat. So my eating became very erratic.

I was so positive and confident before Homai. I was removed from my home at such a young age, and there was no respite from what I was experiencing. The whole ethos at Homai was that if you were not meeting expectations, you were somehow less of a person. You were accorded less respect.

By separating me from my family, we were robbed of the opportunity to learn from and grow with one another. Separation robbed our families of the learning and growth experiences they would have had in learning to live with, and advocate for us. Separation robbed me of the ability to successfully relate to my extended family – and to have successful close relationships with anyone.

It had a big impact on my relationship with my mother, and we had a difficult relationship throughout the remainder of her life. We never bonded – we weren't given the opportunity. I always had the feeling that her emotions and feelings were more important than mine. Not being unhappy at Homai was as much, if not more, about her own guilt as it was about my needs.

I remember her once casually telling a friend, while I was sitting with them, that she had thought that if she had killed me when I was about three or four, everything would have been alright.

I already had relationship issues when I arrived, and Homai exacerbated them. I'm now sitting here, avoiding society unless it's on my terms. It has coloured everything I am and everything I do. I feel that being inside my head is the only safe place to be.

The general impact of my life's beginning and my Homai experience has been loneliness. The knowledge that I am, and always will be, an outsider, is both liberating and painful. Liberating in the sense that this process has given me permission to try to reverse the habit of a lifetime and stop trying so hard to fit in and be accepted, and painful because I long, like anyone else, to belong somewhere and be loved.

People like me who are congenitally blind are outsiders, anyway, as we are so much in the minority. Most people are partially blind or have lost their sight later in life. I'm in the minority of the minority.

The pressure to be independent that was so prevalent at Homai has stayed with me all my life. Even today, I feel like a loser because I live with my sister and not by myself, doing everything for myself.

Along with many other parents, my mother and father entrusted care of me during term time to the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind, in my case for more than 14 years. This organisation had a responsibility to ensure that all our needs – physical, spiritual, intellectual and mental – were met, so that we would grow up well-adjusted and prepared to live successfully in a hostile world. They failed to ensure this.

The medical profession encouraged our parents to hand over their 'problem' children to the care of others, informing them that 'experts' were better placed to care for them than they were. These people weren't experts – they were largely untrained and unqualified, and universally poorly paid.

Homai could have been a nursery where we tender seedlings were nurtured in the arts of relationships and family, as well as taught how to do all the physical things anyone needs to do on a daily basis, so that we could have been prepared to contribute to, love, and even make a difference in the wider world. Instead, it was a confusing, sometimes cruel, competitive and discouraging environment where, if we learned any intangible quality with which to move forward, it happened by accident.

With the new Ministry for Disabled People on the way, with its 'Enabling Good Lives' principles at the forefront, I would like it recognised that a 'good life' for me, as a survivor, is not to push me out into a hostile world and demand that I work. It is to keep me comfortably independent, secluded and safe. That, to me, is my 'good life' – the only one I'll survive. I wish it could be different.

For all that I've achieved and tried to achieve, I feel like a failure because I can't live in your world.

**Source:** Witness statement, Kylee Ann Maloney (31 March 2022).



“

She should  
have been  
able to trust  
her abusers

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# Lily

## Statement by Mrs NS about her daughter Lily

**Hometown:** Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland

**Age when entered care:** 3 years old

**Year of birth:** 1983

**Time in care:** 1986 to present

**Type of care facility:** Schools – Belmont Primary School, Sunnybrae Normal School, Wilson Home School; respite care – Wilson Centre Radical Respite Unit; service providers – Creative Abilities, SILC, IDEA Services, Totara Farm Trust, Taikura Trust

**Ethnicity:** NZ European

**Whānau background:** Lily has an older sister who is involved in her care. Her parents separated when Lily was a baby.

**Currently:** Lily lives in Auckland and is supported by her mother, Mrs NS, and Vision West.

**My daughter Lily has outlived her prognosis and is possibly the oldest person in New Zealand with Lennox Gastaut Syndrome – a severe childhood epilepsy syndrome characterised by multiple types of drug resistant seizures. She also has cognitive impairment and autistic traits.**

From the 1980s until today, Lily has suffered psychological and physical abuse from education, health and support providers she should have been able to trust. Numerous attempts to correct her behaviour and make her more compliant have resulted in both physical injury and ongoing psychological harm and trauma.

As a child, Lily was overmedicated until I advocated for a reduction. When we finally got down to small doses of two drugs, this little person woke up. She later began to walk with a specially made walking frame, and she was taught to play and sign colours.

During the 1990s, Lily attended several special units in mainstream schools, but I never felt like she was part of the school, or appropriately supported. She experienced the use of aversive practices, for example, when a teacher at Belmont Primary School (Auckland) flicked water in her face and put ginger in her mouth because she had been spitting.

At Sunnybrae Normal School, they blamed lack of discipline for Lily's behaviour and used two teacher aides to force her – aged 10 years old and weighing about 26 kilograms – into a purpose-built cupboard multiple times per day. This was despite her doctor explaining that she didn't understand cause and effect.

Between 1997 and 2001, Lily attended the Wilson Home School. She continued to be very unwell at times. This was often because she was in a non-convulsive status, where her brain was constantly seizing but she wasn't outwardly convulsing. At times like this, she would

become increasingly comatose and unresponsive. Sadly, it seemed her teacher preferred this situation to the more highly mobile Lily, and usually failed to report it to me.

From 1998, she also attended the Radical Respite Unit at Wilson Centre. I felt one nurse took a dislike to Lily and I understand she wrote numerous incident reports about her behaviour. Despite Lily's caregivers denying that many of these things had actually happened, in January 2001, I was told that they were going to potentially need to use more aversive punishments and restraints to manage Lily's behaviour. I decided to collect Lily and she never returned to the school or respite unit.

I provided full time care for Lily at home until she began attending the day programme at Creative Abilities. I was told she was having a great time doing aerobics and "other things". I ultimately found out that she wasn't really being supported at Creative Abilities.

After determining there weren't any providers in Auckland with the skills to provide the support Lily needed, SILC decided to set up a service specifically for her. There was a skilled team leader who was intent on supporting Lily to live the life she chose. All her staff were valued, supported and provided with excellent training.

For the first year, Lily came home so happy, and it was wonderful to see her enjoying her time there. Unfortunately, things began to go downhill after staff changes in the organisation, and towards the end of 2006, SILC announced they were pulling out of Auckland and would no longer be able to support Lily.

Taikura Trust, an NGO who were contracted as our Needs Assessment Service Coordination service by the Ministry of Health, organised for IDEA Services to take over. I withdrew Lily from IDEA Services in December 2007 after her longstanding team leader was moved to a different position while I was overseas, and replaced with agency staff who had no training or introduction to her.

In 2008, we set up the Circle of Friends' Trust to manage the discretionary funding we received from Taikura Trust. We rented a house and had a lovely group of friends supporting Lily.

Sometime later, there were issues with a staff member obviously using Lily's money for her own gain, and when some staff resigned at the end of 2010, we couldn't replace them with people who had the necessary skills. This meant I had to provide a lot of time and input into the management of her service and, by the beginning of February 2011, I was becoming ill and exhausted.

The psychiatrist from the Dual Disability Team suggested Lily go away for three to six months to a "calm, skilled environment where she could learn to be independent from me". Totara Farm Trust was recommended. Six months without seeing my daughter wasn't an option for us, but I gratefully accepted four weeks' respite at one of their houses in Takanini.

Two significant events occurred during those four weeks. First, Lily managed to leave the property in the middle of the night while two staff members were asleep in the house, despite the doors being locked. She wandered down the road before the staff noticed she was missing.

Second, when Lily was picked up, she had significant bruising on her upper thighs, chest and neck. A staff member employed by the Circle of Friends' Trust explained that a few days earlier it had been suggested to Lily's staff to use physical restraint for behaviour management. When it didn't work, they contacted the Totara Farm manager who sent two male staff members to take over.

The men took Lily to her bedroom and advised her staff to go the office. They were encouraged to stay there for about an hour. Over this time, they saw Lily leave the room continually and, on each occasion, be taken back by the men. They thought the men's treatment of her was "very rough and scary".

When we told the Dual Disability Team psychiatrist how appalled we were at what had happened, she became very defensive saying a number of her clients experienced bruising. We received a letter shortly after discharging Lily from the Dual Disability service.

Repeated texts, emails and phone calls requesting copies of the incident reports from Totara Farm failed to elicit any response. When a meeting was finally arranged by Taikura Trust seven weeks later, we were told their staff were well trained in restraint and the bruising had nothing to do with them.

I reported the incident to the police but was told they wouldn't be laying charges. An officer told me that Lily was an "unreliable witness" and couldn't give evidence.

I also reported it to the Ministry of Health and the Health and Disability Commissioner, but they declined to investigate any further as the police had already determined there was insufficient evidence to show who caused the injuries. I've always been very upset that they thought this traumatic event for Lily wasn't worth investigating further.

Since 2012, we have had seven failed providers.

After another period of supporting Lily ourselves, her seizures continued to worsen and, with very little support, I was exhausted. In 2018, I decided that Lily needed to be hospitalised.

My other daughter and a friend travelled to the hospital and were told that they had to have eight security guards sitting on Lily to restrain her, and that she hadn't received any of her medication since her arrival. They phoned me at 4am and told me I needed to come immediately, or they felt she would die.

The total lack of understanding or training to support someone in a very stressful situation who is cognitively impaired and non-verbal was appalling, and Lily was extremely traumatised by what happened. Between April and September, I stayed with her 24/7 so she wouldn't end up with more security guards restraining her.

Vision West became Lily's provider in 2020 and we became concerned early on when new staff were busy vacuuming and dusting but seemed anxious about interacting with her. We later found out that staff had responded to an advert for a home support worker. The manager seemed unable to understand the difference between supporting someone like Lily to live a meaningful life and doing a few hours housekeeping.

Since the beginning of 2022, Lily's service has had serious gaps in the roster. All current staff are exhausted and burnt out. I am too, after 40 years of caring and advocating for Lily.

When I seriously considered finding another provider, I could see that history would only repeat itself – so I have also asked Vision West to accept an investigation into why it appears to be so incredibly difficult to support Lily successfully.

All disabled people must be able to enjoy the same human rights as every other citizen of Aotearoa. Abuse of these most vulnerable citizens must not be allowed to continue.



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The institute  
felt dark and  
cold.

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# Lusi Faiiva

**Age when entered care:** 2 years old

**Type of care facility:** Disability facility – the Kimberley Centre in Taitoko Levin

**Ethnicity:** Samoan

**Currently:** Living in a State house, with support workers visiting daily. Lusi uses a communication device.

**I'm a proud Samoan woman. I am an artist, a dancer and a passionate freedom seeker.**

**I was diagnosed with cerebral palsy at 2 years old. There wasn't much support for disabled children and their families then, so the doctor arranged for me to go to the Kimberley Centre. He said it would be better for me.**

I can only remember a small amount from my years at the Kimberley Centre. The institute felt dark and cold. I shared a room with other children, and during the day we sat in the recreational room. There were people of all ages with different disabilities in the shared space but there were no activities going on – we hardly interacted with each other.

It was assumed that I didn't have the 'mental capacity' to communicate, and that I had an intellectual disability. I didn't know how to express myself and there were no tools or strategies offered to me to communicate with others around me, so that I could express what I wanted and needed. Nobody thought to ask me what was going on for me. I was under 5 years old but old enough to remember how trapped I felt in myself.

No one talked to me about my Samoan heritage at the Kimberley Centre. I felt like people didn't know or care about my Samoan culture. There was no respect or effort to recognise me for who I am.

At the Kimberley Centre, the nurses didn't look after me properly. The only time they came on to the ward was to give us our medicine. Once, I fell and broke my ankle because no one was watching me. If I had received better care then, my physical health would be better today. I never received any specialised support until after I left, even though my mum had been told that being there would be better for me.

I think the concept of institutions is broken. They aren't set up to care for disabled people, because they're built on a system that dehumanises us. Not much has changed for how current State care works. It's about medication, changing, showering and other very clinical procedures, and doesn't take into account the needs of human connection and affection.

There was a kind of school scheme at the Kimberley Centre, run by two staff members who were a couple. I think I was just 5 years old when I started. They visited the centre every day and they were the only ones who taught us kids. They recognised that I was switched on and started teaching me how to read and write and express myself, finally. It was strange to see words in the beginning, but I was a fast learner and as time went on I could understand what they were teaching me. I had a blackboard with chalk that I was able to hold and they taught me how to spell. It was the only time we could do other activities like games and drawing.

Those staff members were kind and gave their time to come and teach us and play with us. I remember them dearly. They kept in touch with my mum and when I was 7 years old, they convinced her to take me home. My mum had never visited me while I was in care, and when she arrived to take me home, I didn't know who she was, so I felt nervous. I didn't see the two staff members again for a long time after I left the Kimberley Centre but they remain significant people in my life – their regular interactions with me taught me that I was someone, I was Lusi and I deserved to be loved.

Returning to live with Mum was challenging – she was in an abusive relationship, and living with his family was confronting and scary. I went to school and liked it, because it gave me a sense of normality, I was interacting with other children and learning, and I could switch off from what was going on at home.

Eventually we had to escape from my mum's boyfriend. We went to Women's Refuge first, then to stay with my auntie and her family in Auckland. We lived in a four-bedroom house with 15 people in it, and everyone spoke Samoan. I went from not really understanding my Samoan identity nor hearing my language to being thrown into this rich but overwhelming space. The transition required a lot of adjustment from me.

We eventually moved to our own place, and I went to a school for children with cerebral palsy. They didn't really teach us though, because the school was focused on recreation and rehabilitation. None of the schools had a good understanding of my culture.

When things got hard, sometimes I wished I had stayed at the Kimberley Centre. But I know if I'd stayed longer, my life would have been worse. I wouldn't be the Lusi I am today.

I joined an acting group when I was 15 and that was my first step towards exploring myself and what I wanted to do. I joined a dance group for disabled and non-disabled people when I was 28, and I knew that was my passion – I feel free when I dance. And through dance, I've reconnected more strongly with my Samoan culture.

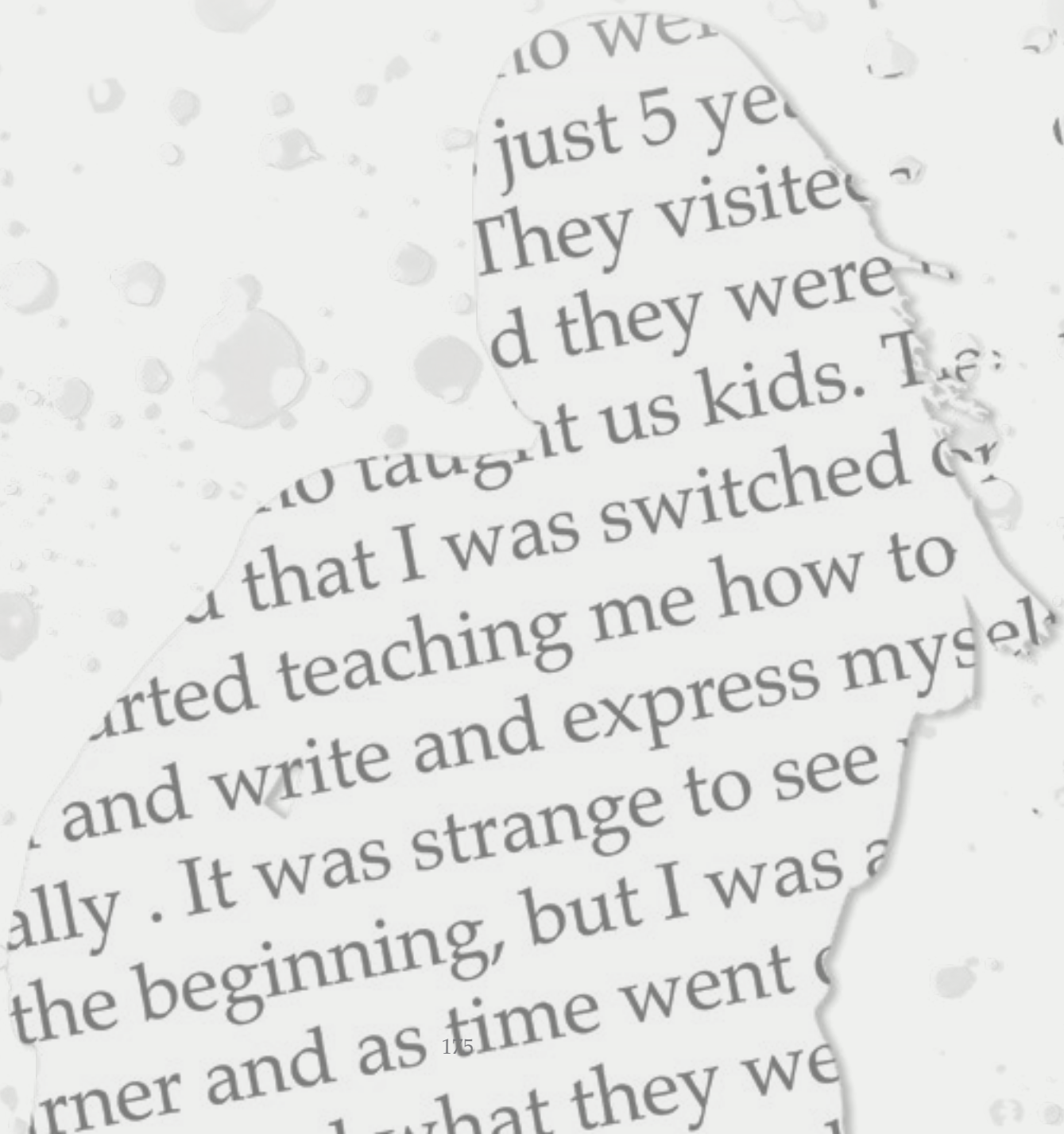
I now live by myself in a State house and have support workers who come in mornings and nights. I do get scared living on my own because sometimes support workers don't turn up and I get stuck. A lady who lived near my area passed away alone, and sometimes I get scared it might happen to me. I feel like I don't have control over this situation and this sense of fear and restriction takes me back to the memory of being in the Kimberley Centre.



Being in care was like a slap in my face. I was lost, and there was no freedom of choice. Care still fundamentally operates under a similar system, where I'm left without support for a long period of time. The reality is the system lacks the respect for freedom and even basic human needs.

If I met myself in the Kimberley Centre, I believe that little Lusi would be happy seeing someone like her wanting to play alongside her. That little Lusi at Kimberley wanted to know she was important, loved, and deserved affection. That she was from a rich and vibrant Samoan heritage and she had so many strengths.

Source: Witness statement of Lusi Faiva (15 June 2022).



“  
Some  
people call  
it ‘forced  
adoption’,  
I prefer  
to call it  
abduction  
”

# Maggie Wilkinson

**Age when entered care:** 19 years old

**Year of birth:** 1944

**Hometown:** Gisborne

**Time in care:** January to June 1964

**Type of care facility:** St Mary's Home for Unwed Mothers

**Ethnicity:** Pākehā

**Whānau background:** Maggie grew up in Whakatane.

**Currently:** After a period living in Australia, where she met her husband Graeme, Maggie now lives with her family in Gisborne. She was reunited with her daughter Vivienne 18 years after being forced to give her up for adoption.

**My child was taken away by a self-righteous matron. She was abducted from me at birth then given away to make strangers happy. No one bothered to look back at the grief of the 'sacrificing' mother.**

In 1964 I fell pregnant with my first child. I was 19 years old. The father of my baby refused to marry me and joined the army, where he volunteered to be posted to Vietnam.

I was in Whakatane living with my family. They were ashamed and didn't want to tell anyone that I was pregnant out of wedlock. They made me stay in my room and out of sight – I couldn't leave the house and had to stay hidden from the community.

They wouldn't take me to see our family general practitioner, because they wanted to hide my secret. Instead, they arranged for another local doctor to come to the house and discuss how I was to proceed with my pregnancy. This doctor advised my family to send me to St Mary's Home for Unwed Mothers in Ōtāhuhu, Auckland.

He described St Mary's as a safe haven, a sanctuary, and told them I would be cared for at the home. But it was neither a haven nor a sanctuary.

St Mary's public-facing areas were nice, such as the office and the maternity wing for married women, and they gave the impression that it was a good place. There was a birthing suite and public maternity hospital on the premises where we gave birth to our babies.

The rest of the home resembled a concentration camp. It was bare, with very little furniture, and we slept in dormitories. The home was always damp because of the constant wet mopping.

There was an orphanage, full of the 'unadoptable babies', who were mainly twins and Māori children or children of mixed race. It was a disgusting place, always cold, and we weren't allowed to play with the children, although they were crying out for attention.



The home was run by Matron Rhoda Gallagher. At first, she seemed to have my interests at heart and created the appearance in front of my parents that she would look after and care for me. However, it was soon clear that the matron's 'homey' front room did not mirror the hell hole out the back.

Matron was a vicious woman who would always shout at us and say the most awful things to us. She would tell us that we were fallen women and that she would make decent women out of us. She used words such as selfish, used, tarnished and illegitimate. She would tell us that we were selfish to want to keep our children, and she would refer to our babies as her babies. She would say things such as, "someone better than you wants your baby" and "there are lovely married couples just wanting to give baby a home".

We all had to take Matron's surname and we could not use our own given names. First names were changed and surnames disappeared. We wore communal clothes from a shared box of clothing – we were only allowed to wear our own clothes on a Sunday if a visitor was coming. When I look back on this, I see that the process of institutionalisation was instant, and we were dehumanised.

There would have been between 18 to 22 unwed women at St Mary's at any one time, including young pregnant girls in the home. They were told to say they were 16 years old if anyone asked them. We were made to attend chapel twice a day for our sins. I recall one time another one of the unwed mothers fainted in chapel and Matron told us to just leave her there on the floor.

We were treated as the proverbial dirty girls and were punished daily with a heavy work schedule. I worked hard in the kitchen, orphanage and laundry. I cleaned and wet mopped constantly, I bottled produce from the harvest festivals. The work was relentless and only with very basic equipment and tools, even when we were heavily pregnant. This was unpaid labour and the conditions were something out of a Charles Dickens novel.

As a single mother, I qualified for a sickness benefit from the government, which was paid directly to the home. I was allowed a small amount of pocket money per week from that, enough for a packet of barley sugars and some wool. We were effectively locked up in the house and not allowed to go anywhere. For most of us there, the 'home' was a prison for sad girls with no choices and no advocacy. It was a place of fear and punishment.

Food was scarce; we weren't given enough to eat because Matron wanted us to have small babies so there were no problems during delivery. I was not given any education about pregnancy or what our births would be like – Matron did not allow or give any opportunity for advice from anyone. Letters were vetted by Matron, coming into or leaving the home. This meant that we were isolated and controlled by her.

Social workers were meant to visit the home, but they were frightened off by Matron. I was told this by an ex-social worker, who is now deceased – he apologised to me and told me that they knew terrible things were going on at St Mary's, but they did nothing.

It became very apparent quite early on that we would be forced to have our babies adopted. I was horrified and distressed. There was a Pacific Island woman who worked in the kitchen at St Mary's and she looked after her daughter living on site. I loathed St Mary's but to keep my child I thought that I might be able to live and work there just like her. When I spoke to Matron about this idea she seemed supportive and agreed to my request.

However, she had no intent on following through. When my mother visited, Matron told her that I was not the type to cope with a child.

I got in trouble one day and was placed into an isolation room and given some sort of medication to bring on the birth. It was a difficult delivery and I was torn to bits inside. I was left in a physical mess with no post-natal treatment or support. A nurse let my baby stay in the room with me for a short time and I placed my hand on my daughter as she slept. This was a big deal as the nurse wasn't allowed to do this and would have been in trouble if Matron had caught her. While I was asleep my baby was abducted by Matron and concealed from me.

I was drugged without consent – I was given medication to stop lactation. My breasts were also bound tightly. My baby was given to an Anglican woman who was a member of the Auckland Diocese. I was called to say goodbye to my daughter when they took her, but I wasn't allowed to hold or touch her. Eight days later I was taken to a lawyer's office, where I was made to sign documents and swear on the Bible that I would never try to find my daughter.

I did not want to sign but felt that I had to. It is recognised that consent not freely given is not consent at all. Adoption corruption in New Zealand relied on invalid consents obtained under pressure, and on manipulation, threats, illegal practices, emotional blackmail and stand-over tactics.

I was discharged from St Mary's two weeks after the birth, bleeding, both physically and mentally. I was told by Matron that I would get back to my normal life and I would forget about my daughter. This has never been the case.

For all these years, I have been grappling with the ongoing grief and depression. My husband has stood by me, my sturdiest support. My children from my marriage lived with a mother who was deeply depressed and suicidal.

Those on the gravy train of adoption practiced a culture of total power over unwed mothers in order to supply the adoption industry.

They are guilty of the traumatic act of removing newborns from their mothers, guilty of ignoring pleas of the mother, guilty of rendering the mother incapable of taking any action in a world that ignored her, guilty of concealing baby and coercing mother to surrender her child. They have a responsibility to make reparations and apologise. The adoption legislation enabled those with the agenda of wielding power to exert their beliefs of moral judgement over those they considered had sinned.

It is time that the State- and faith-based regimes of abuse be acknowledged without the excuses and the dismissive attempt to annihilate our physical being and pain with "but that's just what happened then" or "it's not like that anymore".



“

Transgender  
people face stigma,  
exclusion and  
marginalisation

”



# Ms NT

**Hometown:** Aorangi Feilding

**Year of birth:** 1974

**Type of care facility:** Psychiatric hospital – Te Whare Ahuru Mental Health Ward in Te Awa Kairangi ki Tai Lower Hutt

**Ethnicity:** Pākeha

**Whānau background:** Ms NT has two younger siblings. Growing up, her family attended church regularly and she was an altar boy.

**Currently:** Ms NT has a partner and they have a good relationship. However, her biological family can't accept her for who she is. Ms NT has a child from a previous relationship.

## **When I was a child, there were times I thought I was a woman, but I didn't really know what transgender was.**

I don't remember much from my childhood, although I remember attending church twice a week. I made friends with another boy at primary school, and sometime between the ages of 8 and 11 years old, we went camping with another friend. My friend threatened me with violence and they made me give them blowjobs. The sexual activity, including rape, continued for a number of years and my friend used intimidation, financial control and physical assault to control me.

Because of this, I became sexualised at an early age and thought this kind of activity was normal.

I went to a Catholic boarding school when I was teenager. I think I may have been seen as an effeminate child – I was skinny and vulnerable and got bullied. I was beaten up by other boys many times, and I was often caned until I bled. Priests and teachers, and the school nurse knew about the abuse, but no action was taken. At 14 years old, I was caught sniffing glue so I ran away and got expelled.

I ended up at a local high school and the same 'friend' started sexually abusing me again. It was horrible and became quite violent – he was stronger and bigger than me. One day I just walked away – I hadn't known I could do that before then. I had never told anyone I was being raped and abused and it was only later I realised it wasn't normal behaviour.

I blocked out the trauma with solvent use and cannabis, which reduced the pain.

I was expelled in sixth form, due to my low attendance and drug use. After that, my parents asked me to move out. I had an older girlfriend by then, so I moved in with her and we had a child. After a couple of years, I moved, got a polytech qualification,

broke up with my girlfriend and started to view myself as bisexual. But although I was working and had started studying for a degree, things weren't going well for me and I attempted suicide. I was then diagnosed as having an adjustment disorder.

I finished my degree in 2000 and over the next few years, I travelled overseas, then moved to Wellington and started work there. About this time, I started to confirm in my mind that I was a woman.

I stopped using solvents when I was 28 years old but started using cannabis to cope with my anxiety. At work, I was sexually harassed, so I left. That, plus being diagnosed with a brain tumour, led to my breakdown. Following that, I told my partner about my childhood abuse. She was the first person I ever told. She listened, she understood, and she was supportive.

I still have the brain tumour, it's slow growing and I am on a 'watch and wait' programme and may require surgery. I have hearing loss in one ear because of it.

Having a breakdown really affected me financially. I made a claim with ACC regarding weekly compensation – this claim had nothing to do with my childhood abuse. Chasing my claim was extremely difficult and I went through five case managers. To start, they wanted a medical certificate from 2000 – by the time I finally got one, I had a new case manager and instead of using the medical certificate, I had to have a psychological review and they decided instead to cover me using the 1996 medical report that diagnosed me with an adjustment disorder.

For the next five years, I had psychosis and hallucinations – I couldn't leave home. Around 2006 or 2007, I tried to kill myself again and was admitted to hospital as a voluntary mental health patient. I returned home after six weeks but when I couldn't sleep, I took a double dose of medication. My partner thought I'd tried to attempt suicide again so she called the police. They asked her if I had a firearm and when she said she didn't know, the Armed Offenders Squad came. Embarrassed and naked, I ran away in shock and they stopped me with a taser and pepper spray. I was readmitted to the mental health ward under the Mental Health Act and after six weeks I was allowed to return home on the condition I take my medication.

By this time, I had started to transition from being a man to a woman with hormones and testosterone blockers. When I was readmitted, all of my hormone treatment was stopped and I found this distressing. This was a time when gender identity and transgender people were not so common and there was a stigma attached to people like me.

I remained under the Mental Health Act for two years. During that time, I started part-time work and made a gradual recovery. Once I came out from the compulsory treatment order in 2010, I went back into the gender reassignment programme. I started a new job, but after a few years I became unwell and got bullied. I ended up having psychotherapy for five years. It was challenging but, along with gently changing my medications, I began to improve.

In 2016 I had gender reassignment surgery in the United Kingdom and in 2019, I began training to be a nurse. After graduating, I started working in mental health.

In August 2020, ACC declined me the weekly compensation and considered if I could

have an independence allowance – I was assessed as being impaired to a level of 25 percent. I asked for the decision to be reviewed but it was upheld. In the review, ACC said I have no clear recollections of the abuse as a child – however, this isn't true. It also said I agreed with the 1996 date ACC had used for my claim, however I did not. Also, my claim had been for my breakdown, not my childhood abuse. I realise now I needed an independent advocate but I felt too much shame to try and get one. I couldn't afford a lawyer.

I would like things to change.

Transgender people face stigma, exclusion and marginalisation. I have experienced all of these things, especially from my biological family. They still can't accept me for who I am – that hurts most. I understand that at least 40 percent of transgender people attempt suicide at least once and most of them don't have the support of family or friends. I place myself in that category.

Although attitudes towards transgender people have gradually improved over the last 20 years, I still run into problems. I have been treated badly by medical practitioners, who have refused to use my chosen name or pronouns in their report and when speaking to me. I also found it hard to get my brain tumour diagnosed – when I first presented with deafness, my psychiatrist said it was psychological. Because of this, finding the tumour was delayed.

I would like ACC to be nice. Sensitive claims are hard to file and case managers change so often, it's hard to start from scratch with a new person who has to know the things I feel most whakamā (embarrassed) about in life. I would have preferred fewer people to know my story and to have only one point of contact for the whole process.

I would like better mental health support for adolescents, and I would like every child to have the opportunity to speak to someone confidentially, away from their home and parents.

If I had been given the chance to talk to a school nurse who was trained in mental health then I might have disclosed my abuse and received treatment for my issues. My life might have been quite different.

**Source:** Witness statement, Ms NT (20 January 2022).





“

**It's not right  
for able-bodied  
people to dictate  
the lives of people  
with disabilities**

”

# Shannon

**Hometown:** Ōtepoti Dunedin

**Age when entered care:** 7 years old

**Year of birth:** 1984

**Time in care:** 1991–current

**Type of care facility:** Foster home; residential homes.

**Ethnicity:** NZ European

**Whānau background:** Shannon has a younger sister and brother. He doesn't know his father, but had a stepfather for a while.

**Currently:** Shannon has autism, epilepsy and dyspraxia. He is non-speaking and uses a text-to-speech facilitated communication device. Shannon lives alone with support staff who care for him. He has a close relationship with his foster sister who is also his welfare guardian.

## **In third form I wrote a piece called 'Life in my own world':**

*"People sometimes call me dumb, or they say I am a moron. What they don't realise is that I am a clever cookie. A clever cookie in a silent world. Silent because I can't talk or communicate well. Silent because I am on my own in it. But silence isn't bad, just scary sometimes."*

I'm Shannon. I want people to know that living with Autism is great, and I wouldn't change a thing. We're just people who see the world through a different lens. That lens isn't wrong, and we aren't less.

I use a Lightwriter to communicate – it's a text-to-speech device that lets me communicate, though I need a facilitator to help me. I got it when I was 15 years old, and I could finally speak for the first time. I felt free to be me – it was exhilarating to have a voice.

I went into care when I was 7 years old. My mum loves me but she couldn't take care of me when I was young, so I went into a foster home and then to a farm and residential homes. I liked the foster home at first, but I had no proper way of communicating. Then bad things happened, and I left to go to the farm.

I loved the farm. We would go on trips and feed the animals. I was looked after very well. My foster sister learnt to do facilitated communication and made up new ways to communicate. She taught me how to be okay with feelings. I loved the other staff too.

When I was 15 years old I moved into a residential home. I had good staff and I liked most of my flatmates. I could do facilitated communication with some staff and that was really good.



I was at high school at the time. I did very well there, and some teachers could facilitate with me. I got sixth place for maths in my 6th form year group. I also really like writing and I'm bloody good at it. After high school I studied creative writing at Massey University.

I was assaulted by a flatmate while I was at the residential home but I had been taught to scratch and he couldn't hurt me. He got taken away. Then I moved to another home where there were fewer people and I liked it better. But then I had to go back to the first house – I didn't want to but I had to.

When I returned, management had changed. I wasn't allowed to see my foster sister for a long time, and I wasn't told why. Staff yelled at me and I was put on hard drugs that made me feel dopy and stupid. They didn't ask me if I wanted to be on those drugs. Some staff hurt me and I wasn't happy. They'd speak badly to me, and sometimes grab my shoulders and arms. They'd swear at me and treat me like a moron. This made me feel shit.

My Lightwriter had gone missing, but I could still communicate through a facilitation board. However, management took this off me. Some able-bodied people had decided they didn't believe in facilitated communication, despite the fact dozens of people had facilitated with me over the years. So all my communication was suddenly gone. I didn't have a say in any of it. They took my voice away from me.

I wasn't allowed to go out and do things. I wasn't able to be free and I couldn't tell anyone anything.

My foster sister got me out of there and it was the best move ever. I was so happy to live with her. I got to be myself. She did everything for me. I got a new Lightwriter and started doing stuff I liked. I was happy.

I now live in my own house and I love it. I love being independent – I feel in control of my life. I like watching television and reading. I like music too. I have a wonderful singing teacher. I also volunteer at the Fringe Festival in Dunedin. I deliver pamphlets and posters, and I do a great job. It's my favourite thing.

I love making choices for myself. But I want to make more. I still struggle sometimes because my support staff can't do facilitated communication and need my foster sister to help me tell them things. But it's still better than living in a home.

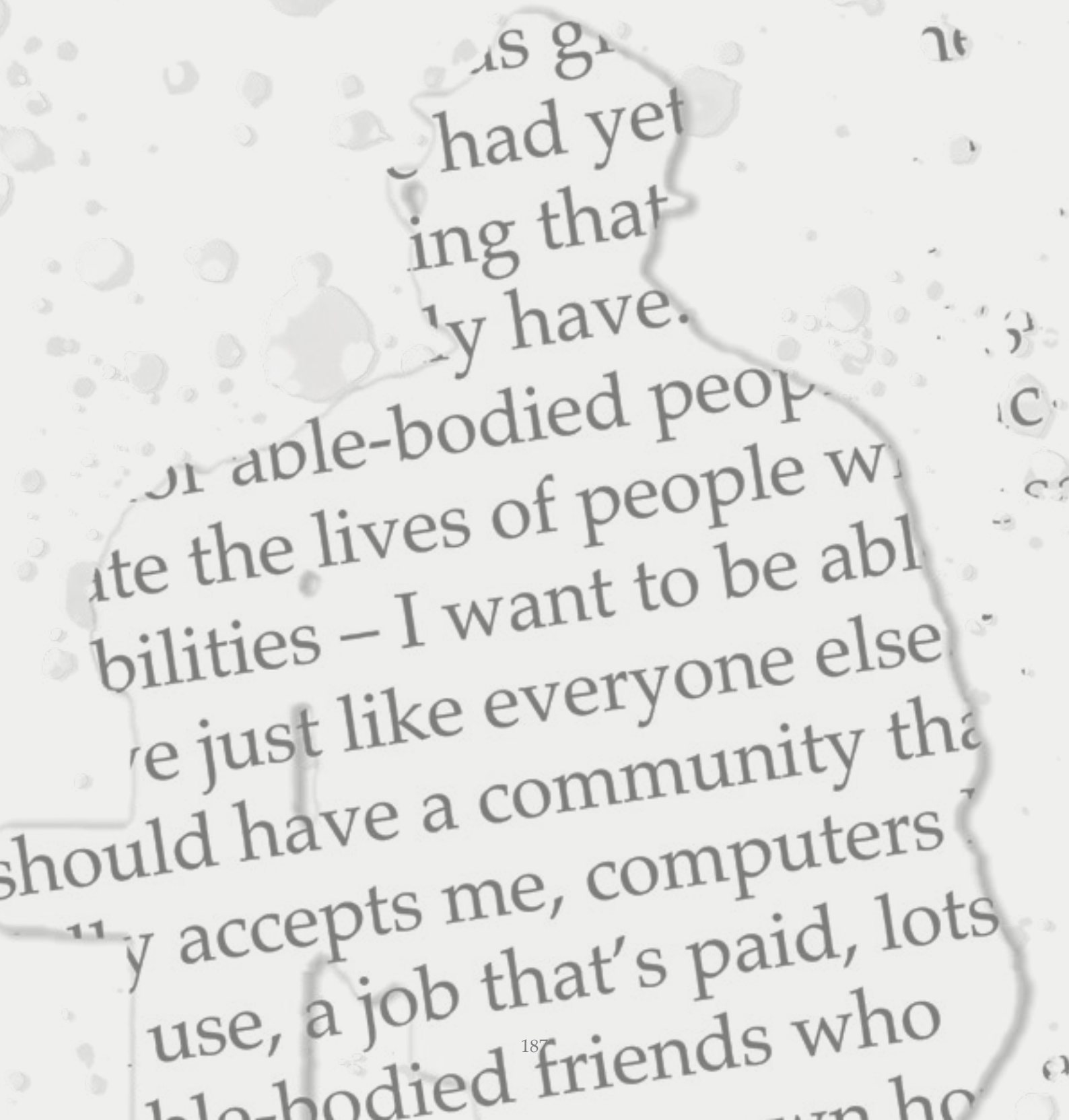
I recently got a new Lightwriter – they cost \$8,000 and I had lots of trouble getting the funding for a new one. There is also no funding for specialised computer equipment, which I need so I can go back to university.

My foster sister has given me the best life I've had yet, but it's not everything that I should rightfully have. It's not right for able-bodied people to dictate the lives of people with disabilities – I want to be able to live just like everyone else. I should have a community that fully accepts me, computers I can use, a job that's paid, lots of able-bodied friends who aren't paid, and my own home designed for my individual needs. I have to pay for a speech and language therapist out of pocket to train my support staff to learn how to communicate with me. This is expensive, and I am unable to do this full time.



People need to stop treating us like idiots and society needs to respect that different ways of being are equal to able-bodied ways. Our homes and lives need to be designed around and for us, because why should we have to fit into able-bodied boxes? Everyone has the right to be different.

Source: Witness statement of Shannon (19 June 2022).



“

No one ever  
gave a shit  
about me  
until I met  
the Mob

”



# Mr OB

**Hometown:** Ōtepoti Dunedin

**Age when entered care:** 14 years old

**Year of birth:** 1972

**Type of care facility:** Boys' home – Dunedin Boys' Home (Lookout Point Boys' Home); psychiatric hospital – Ward 17, Tauranga Hospital

**Ethnicity:** Pākehā

**Whānau background:** Mr OB has a younger brother and two older sisters. His early memories of family life are of violence and alcohol abuse. His parents separated when he was young and split the children up. His father quickly remarried someone who treated Mr OB and his sister badly.

**Currently:** Mr OB has been married twice and has daughters. He is a patched member of the Mongrel Mob and considers it to be family. He hasn't had much contact with his children, as their mothers have kept them away from him.

**When I was growing up, there was a lot of violence in our house. My siblings and I were all beaten up from a very young age. One of my relatives contacted Social Welfare to let them know about the abuse but nothing happened.**

When I was 5 years old, our parents got divorced and a social worker asked each of us which parent we wanted to go with. We never got to talk together about what we wanted. My older sister and I ended up going with my father. It was the last time I'd see my mother and other siblings for years. My dad didn't talk to my mum from then so he didn't want us to have any contact either.

My dad remarried quite quickly and when I was 7 years old his new wife and her four kids moved in with us. She was horrible and her kids were older and heavily addicted to sniffing solvents. She would tell our dad we'd been bad so he'd beat us up. I had to share a bedroom with her eldest son – he was about six or seven years older than me. When I was 8 years old, he started to sexually abuse me. I told my dad but got a hiding for 'lying'. It's hard to explain what that does to your head.

The abuse at home only got worse and at school, I was fighting and getting in trouble. When teachers told my parents, I'd get a massive hiding so it was a vicious cycle. I'd wag school so I could shut myself away. At 10 years old, I started sniffing solvents – I just wanted to get away from it all.

When I was 11 years old I ran away and ended up living on the streets. I was sleeping in bushes, always cold and hungry – but it was better than being at home. I got into stealing cars and eventually got busted by the police. Social Welfare took me back to my father. They didn't even care about where I'd been.



I ran away a few more times, and eventually Dad and his wife told me to get out. I was about 12 or 13 years old and went to live with Mum but found it hard to fit in.

When I was about 14 years old the police picked me up and took me to Lookout Point Boys' Home. I'm not sure why. That place was horrible. Rather than helping troubled kids, it just made us more fucked up. I saw a lot of kids get beaten up and kicked by the staff. We'd be denied food or confined to our room for days if we got in trouble, or sent to isolation – a bare room, with no bed or toilet.

I got out when I was about 16 years old and went back on the streets – it was better than going home. It was around this time that I first started hanging out with the Mongrel Mob in Dunedin. No one ever gave a shit about me until I met the Mob. They took me in and took care of me. Finding them was the best thing that ever happened to me. I finally had a place where I belonged.

In the early nineties, I became an ambulance officer for a few years. I loved it. But I was plagued by issues with alcohol and anger. I was also looked down upon because I was in the Mob. I left but keep on volunteering for 18 years.

After several years, I moved to Wellington and became a Level 4 social worker – the training was tough because a lot of my own hurt and grief came to the surface. At this time, I decided to report the sexual abuse I had experienced to the Lower Hutt Police. They said they would chase it up but nothing ever happened.

I was encouraged to report the sexual assault again, so I went to the Tauranga Police and the detective was good. The police found my stepbrother and said they had 10 charges against him. But those charges were whittled down to two. I was horrified. I felt failed by the system that had already failed me so many times.

I ended up having a massive breakdown in 2004, made several suicide attempts and ended up in Ward 17 of Tauranga Hospital, which is a mental health ward. I was there for five and a half months and it was awful. At one stage I got put into a very secure unit, which was very similar to Lookout Point. The room had no toilet or window and brought back terrible memories.

I was diagnosed with chronic depression and given ECT four times a week, even though I never gave consent. ECT was horrible and affected me heavily. They told me I might get short-term memory loss, but I still have major memory loss. When I got out, I couldn't even remember my wife and daughter's name – I had to get their names and birthdates tattooed on my arms so I could remember who they were.

My time in mental hospitals only made my mental issues worse and I became even more depressed. I found out my wife had been with another man while I was in the mental hospital, and she ended up leaving me and taking my daughter with her. Since then, I've been on the sickness benefit and in and out of hospital feeling depressed and suicidal. I've mostly been unemployed, and I've struggled for money and a place to live. I was in emergency housing for about eight months. Once I got a job they kicked me out – if you have a job then you can't be in emergency housing. How does that work?

People need support when they get out of a mental health unit. I've never been offered counselling. Not once has anyone sat down with me and simply listened. How can people begin to understand me without ever having heard where I come from and what I've been through? The system shuts a lot of people up, but someone should start listening. That can happen.

The only ones who have supported me is the Mongrel Mob. Without them I would've topped myself. I've faced a lot of discrimination because I'm a gang member. But I'm not a bad person, I've never been to prison. Many gang members have experienced abuse and trauma as kids. The majority have been in State care and got abused there. Their mental health isn't good either. Gang members ring me saying they are struggling and want help. We've been abandoned by the system and our families, so we make our own system and we are family. All I can do is listen, but counselling would help too.

Those of us who have been in State care, who are in need, we're simply not getting the follow up and help we require. A lot of what goes on isn't talked about, and that needs to change. The system needs to be held accountable. That needs to change and we need people like me to help make those changes.

We need input from the people who are going through it themselves.

**Source:** Witness Statement of Mr OB (2 August 2021).



“

After I  
was raped  
I became  
even angrier,  
bolshier,  
more vocal  
and tougher

”

Source: Witness statement,  
Neta Kerepeti (22 April 2021).





# Neta Kerepeti

**Hometown:** Whangārei

**Age when entered care:** 12 years old

**Year of birth:** 1961

**Time in care:** 1974–1978

**Type of care facility:** Foster care; girls' home – Bollard

**Ethnicity:** Māori – Te Rarawa, Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Wai, Ngāti Mutunga

**Whānau background:** Youngest of 10 children, mother died when she was six. Cared for by her father between the age of 8 and 11, and again between the ages of 15 and 16 years old.

**Currently:** Neta is married with a family – she is the proud nan of 16 mokopuna and nine mokopuna tuarua, all of whom are flourishing.

**When I was 12 years old I was removed from my home for truancy, then placed into care with evil people and within institutions where I was abused.**

My mother died when I was six, and it all started to go wrong from there.

I grew up in Ngunguru, a small settlement on the north-eastern coast from Whangārei. There was a real sense of community there, with all my whānau living in the area. Te ao Māori and te reo were a big part of my upbringing. It was the language the old people would speak to us in.

I was the youngest of 10. My mother was from Panguru in the Hokianga, and of Te Waiariki, Ngāti Manawa, Ngāti Korokoro, Ngāi Tūpoto whakapapa, and connections to other tribal groups. She was known as a tohunga rongoā, and a hunter gatherer; a resourceful, kindly, and well-loved woman.

My father connects me to the hapū of Te Waiariki, Ngāti Kororā and Ngāti Takapari, in the Horahora and Ngunguru rohe. My father was many great things, but he was also an alcoholic and an abuser. My earliest childhood memory of being abused was at his hands, between the ages of eight and 11 years old. Despite that, I continued to love him, and I've since been able to forgive him.

I started to realise the abuse I was suffering wasn't right and it was affecting me in different ways. By intermediate school I was acting out and truancy became one of the reasons I came to the attention of the authorities. My records from Whangārei Intermediate School in November 1974 say I was "increasingly aggressive, belligerent, obstructive, defiant...".

I was once picked up by a policeman in down-town Whangārei. Instead of taking me home, he took me to Tikipunga Falls where he parked up and attempted to rape me. He said no one would believe me if I talked about it because I was a naughty child and had a reputation for being wayward. I was only 12.

The day I became a ward of the State I was taken out of the Whangārei Court and placed into a room by myself. I had no idea what was going on. No one told me why I was being taken away from my whānau.

That day my father had been summoned to appear in court because of my truancy from school and for not having proper care and control over my behaviour. That seemed to be enough for the Court to make me a ward of the State. Both my father and I should have had an advocate at the Court to begin with. My father wouldn't have known what was going on and what the impact would be on his child and whānau.

I was placed into the hands of the Department of Social Welfare. From the start of the Court process, the police were there to deliver me, pick me up and take me away. The social worker was there to tick boxes and it was all process driven but there was no one there to explain to me what was going to happen.

First, I was placed into a family home in Whangārei with a Pākeha couple with about six or seven other kids, who were wards of the State also. The mother would treat some of us differently because we were Māori. The father was an abuser and so was their oldest son. I remember thinking 'why was I removed from my home for truancy and then placed into care with evil people who were abusive?'

I spent some time in another family home run by a lovely couple in Onerahi, as well as with private foster families. They were good people, but culturally we were miles apart. It wasn't an option for me to go where I wanted or to live with whānau.

As a 13 year old under the guardianship of the Director-General, Department of Social Welfare, I was incarcerated at Bollard Avenue Girls Home in Avondale; apparently for increasingly uncontrollable behaviour, truancy and absconding from school.

Most of the girls there were Māori, at least three quarters. There was no acknowledgement of Māori culture.

On entry to Bollard I had to be seen by a doctor who examined me to see if I had a venereal disease. There was no nurse, only a male doctor. He made me lay naked on the bed with my legs apart and feet in stirrups. I was never told why he was doing this; it just happened to me.

I also learned very quickly at Bollard that if you behaved yourself, you got certain privileges, including the privilege of cleaning a staff member's house. One day I was chosen, and he raped me at his home.

Sometime after I remember waking up one morning with bad stomach cramps. The sheets of my bed were covered in blood. I was miscarrying.

It was about four or five days later before the doctor saw me. By then the bleeding had ended.

I later spoke to a staff member and told her I thought I had just had a miscarriage. She didn't believe me, she said I was just having a heavy period. Following this experience,

I was seen by a doctor, different to the one who examined me to see if I had a venereal disease.

Through the Commission's inquiry process, it has been revealed from notes on my State file penned by the doctor who saw me after the miscarriage that it is highly likely I did indeed suffer a miscarriage, given the symptoms I described to the doctor at the time.

Bollard became too much for me. I had not seen my whānau, and after I was raped by the principal I became even angrier, bolshier, more vocal and tougher.

When I was 14 I ran away again, and this time I stayed away. I lived on the run for about two years; living on the streets, under bridges, in the bush, just living rough generally and surviving any way that I could.

At 16 I was wandering around Whangārei and decided not to hide anymore. I ended up going down to the wharves and on the ships. I made some friends there. I got involved with substance abuse, then I got pregnant. I had my first child when I was 16, in March 1978.

I was discharged from the care of Social Welfare later that year.

I had trust issues with people because of the abuse I suffered. Abuse, sexual abuse, taught me how to manipulate people, and that sex could be used to get what I want.

After studying social work at Victoria University, I worked for CYFS for many years. I now work as a general manager for my hapū, managing our ahu whenua trust located in Te Tai Tokerau.

I journeyed a pathway through counselling, taking advantage of that counselling and as many sessions as I could get.

It doesn't matter how many times anybody said, and might still say... "It wasn't your fault, it wasn't your fault", there is this little seed of doubt.

I don't want the State to intervene in my family's life. It's incumbent on me and other family members to ensure that we step up to the plate. To ensure that the safety of the child remains paramount, and yes, we may need some help to be the best family / whānau caregivers that we can be. I struggle to see how it can be fair that we / Māori, should not receive access to resources to meet those familial obligations and responsibilities, especially when we know because evidence exists confirming that complete strangers, mostly non-Māori, would have ready access to such resources as the 'chosen ones' to look after our Māori children.

I think if we want a system that is not racist and if we want a system that acknowledges tāngata whenua and all citizens, then we want a system that not only talks about the Treaty in principle but applies the principles of that Treaty. It's going to require a major shift in the system and an attitudinal and behavioural change in the people who are part of that system.

Any change needs to involve the entire system – the Courts, Corrections, the Police and social workers, education providers, as well as all other institutions that have contracts, obligations or responsibilities to ensure the safety of tamariki and mokopuna. And change can't be made in isolation from the people whose lives will be either improved or impacted by such change.



“

I was put in so many places, moved around so many homes, abused by so many different people

”

# Nooroa Robert

**Age when entered care:** 2 years old

**Hometown:** Rāhui Pōkeka Huntly

**Year of birth:** 1972

**Time in care:** 1974–1989

**Type of care facility:** Various family homes run by faith-based organisations; Anglican Trust; Stoddart House; Methodist boarding school – Wesley College; Ōwairaka Boys' Home.

**Ethnicity:** Cook Islands

**Whānau background:** Nooroa came to Aotearoa New Zealand with his mother aged 2 years old. A younger sister was born soon after. He has never known his father and his mother passed away. Nooroa lost contact with his sister after they were both taken into care.

**Currently:** Nooroa has no connection with his biological family or his culture.

**I experienced all forms of abuse during my time in care. At times I told staff, but nothing happened. It was documented and written somewhere but it was never followed up. No one believed me or they just didn't want to listen or didn't care.**

I didn't tell anyone else about the abuse until I was 40 years old. You just don't talk about that sort of stuff. But I'm 50 now and because of my age I am stepping up to do what I can, as if it were my last move.

When I was 2 years old, Mum and I left the Cook Islands and moved to New Zealand. She was pregnant. She didn't have any support and struggled to care for me and my sister on her own, and I was placed into the care of the Anglican Trust for Women and Children soon after we arrived. To this day, I don't know where my sister is, but I know she went into care. We should have been kept together.

I went into a family home, and I was there for about eight years. The couple who ran it were violent. He was a real prick, and she was scared of him, so she went along with everything even though she knew the abuse was wrong. At times she would support us, but she was abusive, too, sometimes. We were black and blue from the beatings and sometimes got broken bones from them, especially if we ran away.

I was moved around different homes, different locations. It was the same setup at each home. There were house parents and other kids there. We wouldn't really say much to one another or mingle. When you're in there, you're already broken down and smashed so you don't want to know what their stuff is about.

At one place, I was groomed and sexually abused by a female staff member. She showed me attention, made me feel loved, bought me flash stuff, took me to the movies and gave me gifts. It started off with grooming and moved to kissing. After that, things started to get a bit more hands on. She bathed me, and from there it progressed to other sexual acts. She did this for about two or three years.

I was placed at Ōwairaka for about six months, and I hated it. Staff members would get on the piss, then they would come back and beat us up. It was a cesspit of ugly. There were a few people who killed themselves there and I can remember kids just giving up on life. I'm glad that place got bulldozed.

I was also placed at Stoddart House. There, kids were taken to a room and beaten up, where nobody could see what was going on. I was physically assaulted by the older kids, but it was worse when it came from staff.

In 1983, I was sent to Wesley College, a Methodist boarding school, and was there until 1989 as a full-time boarder. There was so much physical violence and mental abuse at Wesley, from both students and teachers. It was like being back in the homes, but nothing prepared you for this. The violence and bullying mainly came from the prefects – they were supposed to be role models for us. There were flats where the seniors stayed and we were called up to there to be humiliated, bullied and beaten up. You just had to try and keep yourself out of those situations.

I was put in so many places, moved around so many homes, abused by so many different people. It's not just the Anglican Trust that is responsible for what happened to me – there are many, like my abuser, Wesley College and others.

Drinking was my way of coping with things. I first started to drink when I was maybe 11 years old, in one of the family homes. The older kids were doing it, so we did it as well. It became an addiction that I'm fighting to this day. When I made the top 18s for rugby league it was all about the drinking and the image. Then, when I was 21 years old, I passed as a qualified welder and I managed to get some decent money, but habits got in the way of progress. Alcohol was a big part of my coping strategy and I started hitting the liquor pretty hard. I got convicted for drink driving – it was my first encounter with the police and the courts, and it was not my last.

I make no excuses for what I did. What I will say is that my childhood and all of the abuse I went through goes a long way to explain how I became addicted to alcohol and the issues that developed. I drank to forget all the sexual and physical violence in the homes and boarding school.

I suffer from PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) and anxiety because of what happened to me. The anxiety doesn't rule my life like it used to but it's still there. It will always affect me. I'm still hurting. There's heaps of emotions of shame and anger, it's just wicked. I am currently going through a claims process with ACC for my PTSD. But that is taking ages and I'm not getting anywhere with it.



My redress process with the Anglican Trust took a long time. I gave up on it, I told them to go and stick it because it was all just going round and round in circles. After six years, the Anglican Trust threw \$60,000 at me and told me to shut up. That was it. I gave it all away, I blew it. It could have put me in a better place, you know, but it was dirt money. Don't take it any other way.

I want to ask the Anglican Trust why it didn't give me back to my family. I'd been told they didn't want me. But two years ago, I got my file and in the part that's not blacked out it says my family came to look for me many times. Then it says, "No follow up," and that was it. The Trust lied to my family and said they didn't know who I was. I want to ask, why didn't you give me back to my family? Why did you give me this life? I was all about exposing them. But they just give you 'shut up' money.

I don't see how throwing money at people who don't know how to handle money is the right way to do it. You need to regulate this because these are people that don't have skills with money. They spend half their life in jail, they don't know how to handle money if you just give them \$50,000–\$60,000, then say: "Sign on the dotted line and you can't say anything about any of the shit that happened to you. But, go and have some fun." Most of the people who got redress money are dead now or in rehab or back in jail.

You need an apology but an apology, 15, 16, 20 years down the track, doesn't really hold much, does it? A few years ago, I probably would have said 'no' to sharing with the Royal Commission, being a reserved man. But I am coming forward to share my experience to stand up and hold others to account. What's changed since I was a 2-year-old kid?

I'm glad the Commission is opening up Pandora's Box. I hope this goes somewhere. We need to listen to our kids and give them a voice when they're in care.

**Source:** Private session transcript of Nooroa Robert (22 April 2022). Witness statement of Nooroa Robert (13 August 2022).

“

We're  
not what  
happened  
to us. We're  
what we do  
with it.

”



# Paora Crawford Moyle

**Age when entered care:** 5 years old

**Year of birth:** 1963

**Time in care:** 1967–1981

**Type of care facility:** Multiple foster homes and family homes, including Presbyterian Church-run homes

**Ethnicity:** Māori – Ngāti Porou

*Tēna koe koutou katoa*

*Ko Te Whetumatarau te maunga*

*Ko Awatere te awa*

*Ko Horouta te waka*

*Ko Ngāti Porou te iwi*

*Ko Tūwhakairiora te tangata*

*Ko Hinerupe te marae*

*Ko Karawhata me Crawford te ingoa whānau*

*Ko Paora Moyle tōku ingoa*

*Tihei Mauri Ora!*

I am not just here by myself, I come from the love of thousands, I come from many tūpuna on both the tauwiwi side and the Māori side and that whakapapa extends now to my own mokopuna. It's not just about the blood content, it's about the herstory and history of what came before us.

Before I tell you my story, you need to understand that we're not what happened to us. We're what we do with it. We're what we become. I am the author of my own story. Survivors came to do this journey in the world to teach others about their own humanity and how to treat them accordingly.

My going into care was a mix of things – my parents' fighting, a very racist grandmother who liked things to be done the English way, racial profiling of my mum by the Department of Social Welfare and, in the end, the utter abandonment of us by our parents. I don't believe that I was abused by my parents, but I was very young when I left their care.

At 5 years old, you're a child with a broken heart missing your family, you have no voice, no power or protective person looking out for you. You are susceptible to being groomed because the loneliness and desolation makes you crave any sort of connection with a human being.



For me, the grooming began immediately on my entering the first home. I still remember hearing the shuffling sound of his slippers, making their way down the long corridor of polished linoleum. The covers held tight around me so that my knuckles are white, my breath stopped, the threats he used to keep me silent, “You will be separated from your younger brothers” or “Your parents will never be able to come and see you or come and get you.”

After a time, I got used to the things that happened and I stopped protesting. You learn how to behave, how to respond and perform, and how to leave your body until it’s all over. The man who groomed me was a respected elder in the church. I was never safe, nor did I feel safe, in or around the Presbyterian Church. I experienced sexual abuse at after-church functions, at Sunday school, at Bible study, church picnics and in parishioners’ homes.

I started to notice that there was some organisation to the outings with parishioners. Church leaders started visiting the home and often the same ones came back later to pick us up on take us on outings, as they called them. These people weren’t vetted but were able to access us because of their standing in the church as good Christian people. Many of the outings were fun and legitimate, but many were not. This accessing us became part of our lives, the norm, it’s what happened to you when you’re nobody’s child. The passing around seemed to happen more and more when you were deemed amenable, quiet or compliant. Possibly made easier if you were being slipped a dose of Valium or something else.

There was always someone or more than one person who found an excuse to take me with them on a picnic, a children’s show, or to the beach or some other place. I always knew what was going to happen.

I knew I wasn’t the only one it was happening to. Although as children we talked to one another, we never really talked in detail about what was happening to us, but we just knew from the silence. Despite the threats to keep me quiet, I remember trying to tell trusted people. I talked to our reverend about it, to our Sunday school teacher and to school teachers, but nobody wanted to believe that good Christian folk abused children. I tried to talk to social workers on the rare occasions they would check on me, but nobody wanted to hear. Instead they saw us as unwanted children from dysfunctional families who made up stories to get attention.

At school I was targeted by my teacher for my behaviour and because I was Māori. I had an undiagnosed neurodiverse condition – I now know I have high functioning Autism. I was constantly sent to the corporal punishment teacher, and was strapped with a large leather belt, or caned across the backside or back of my legs. I was 8 years old when I was first strapped, and this abuse continued for at least the next three years.

I know now that other children have come forward from the places I was in. I didn’t. I didn’t know that until recently, I always thought that I was just the only one. And I say to them, “How do you know that what I’m telling you is the truth?” And they look back and go, “Because others have come forward with the same story and the same people.” You can’t know what that’s like in the moment to have that validation. And your whole life passes through your mind like a film reel, it goes, it fuckin’ happened, I did exist. It’s quite indescribable, but it’s also really powerful.

My given name was Paula. My whānau called me Paora because that meant Paul and Paula, but I always preferred the name Paul. I was a tomboy and I loved looking like my brothers, you know, short hair, jeans, cotton shirts, boots – I still pretty much wear the same thing today. I couldn't stand being put in a dress. I hated Sunday because Sunday put me in touch with abusers but also because it was when I had to put a dress on, with patent leather shoes and a little handbag and white gloves.

I didn't have words for it or fully understand it, but when I look back now, it's a part of my story.

I like that little non-binary person that didn't have words. Because, that's when they were themselves and that's when they felt most at home – playing bull rush, kicking the soccer ball around in jeans, roughing it and also smiling at the girls. Although I didn't have words for it then I was starting to understand that my love or my preference to love was different from my mates.

The church failed to provide safe environments for us so that we might live life in all of its fullness as children in care were supposed to. It failed to protect us from physical or mental harm and neglect, including sexual abuse and exploitation.

The ones who didn't take good care of us, they ruined our little lives and stole our childhoods. I find it really hard being amongst other people because I walk around feeling like I have a neon sign plastered to my head saying 'fuck me', and I can't get away from it.

There are many more things I could tell you about the abuse, but that's not why I am telling my story.

The heart of my kōrero today is about who we are and what we do. Being non-binary is not because of my trauma, or because I have high functioning Autism. These are distinctly different parts of myself that add to the rich person that I am. We are not what happened to us. We are what we do with it and I have chosen to use everything that happened to me – the good, the bad and the ugly – to do the work that I do with those that are most important to me and that contributes to making a difference.

I work in family violence prevention. I work with our men, with children and with mamas, because I believe in the whole whānau approach. Rather than decimate families, let's work with them to strengthen them. My best work is with survivor whānau who have had three and four generations of child removal, of being decimated, disenfranchised from their whakapapa. I'll keep on doing that work till the day I die.

I have one surviving son who's about to have his third child with his partner. We are very close knit, we've survived a lot. He's a good daddy, I'm very proud of him and he really is the heart of everything that I do.

Survivors are not broken people, we are whole people, we have many facets to our being. When you look at us, all you see is somebody faulty, that's downtrodden, that needs to be saved or needs to be put on a conveyor belt and poked and prodded, or fixed and helped. We are not. Stop compartmentalising us, stop leaving us out of decisions or just giving us a token role where some of us can come together in an advisory group and provide some input. Let us be part of making significant change occur for children who are vulnerable. Let's really put children at the centre around their whānau.



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His body still  
carries the  
scars

”



# Paul Beale

## Statement by Gaye Rowe about her brother Paul

**Hometown:** Heretaunga Hastings

**Age when entered care:** 10 years old

**Year of birth:** 1951

**Time in care:** 1961–2012

**Type of care facility:** Hospital – Kimberley Hospital; residential home – Parklands

**Whānau background:** Paul has a sister, Gay, who is now his welfare guardian.

**Currently:** Paul lives at a residential whānau home, where he enjoys a range of activities and a good quality of life.

**My brother Paul was diagnosed with an intellectual disability at 2 ½ years old. I'm his sister and welfare guardian. He functions intellectually at a very basic level and his vocabulary and decision-making are quite limited. He has little awareness of physical danger.**

After attending the local IHC Fairhaven School, it was suggested that Paul attend Kimberley Hospital, where he would receive an education. At 10 years old, Paul was taken to Kimberley, where he spent more than 40 years. As a child, I would sometimes visit with my parents and, during school holidays, Paul would come home to Hastings.

When we visited Paul, he was in a ward with what seemed like about 50 others but could have been as few as 30. They were all males and they slept in dormitory-type accommodation.

At mealtimes, others around Paul would grab his food if it was not eaten quickly. The assistants stood around watching. Later, Paul was diagnosed as a 'choker' because he just swallowed his food so no one else could get it.

Each time he came home, he had a new scar somewhere on his body. We were told this was from 'fighting'. There were fights going on all the time at Kimberley and the attendants only stepped in when they were not going to get injured. His body still carries the scars from there.

Sometimes the residents were very roughly handled by the attendants. I pleaded for my parents to take Paul out of there. After getting married, I even offered to look after him in my own home. Sadly, my pleas fell on deaf ears.

As Paul got older, he was moved from one ward to another, supposedly to be with like folk. He was given drugs that made him like a zombie – he just sat and only spoke when spoken to. I suspect the drugs were given to the residents to keep them quiet.

One of the side effects of the medication was dribbling. In 2002 or 2003, I collected Paul to take him to my home in Onewhero for a week. He was drugged up so much, we had to change his t-shirt at least eight times a day to prevent him from being wet all the time. After that, I asked if the meds that were causing him to dribble and his neck muscles to atrophy could be replaced with something that was a bit kinder to his body.

My parents had been told that he needed them because he had seizures. However, Paul had witnessed another resident having seizures and then getting a lot of attention and care, so he began to lie on the ground and shake. Those around him thought he was suffering a seizure. I have only witnessed him having a true seizure once while at home on holiday, and he has not had a seizure since leaving Kimberley.

Paul moved to Parklands in May 2005 and stayed there until September 2012.

His welfare was entrusted to me by our late parents and I have always done my best to look out for his interests and to ensure he is treated with appropriate care. Parklands appeared to be everything we wanted, and Paul liked it too, which was very important to me.

Everything went well at Parklands for the first 18 months or so, but after that the cracks began to show. Paul had a terrible time.

We were told that Parklands was supposed to be getting most of his benefit to go towards his cost of living. I was very unhappy about this because, in my view, the money the proprietors were already getting for Paul, which was significant, was sufficient.

The proprietors didn't properly account to me for monthly expenditure, and it seemed quite expensive – so I started to ask questions. Paul was not adequately fed, and his account would be charged for food purchased on day trips. I became aware towards the end of Paul's time at Parklands that his diet was bland and monotonous.

Poor attention was paid to Paul's personal hygiene. He wet the bed virtually every night – the response was to remove his mattress, so that he had to sleep on a thin, plastic-covered foam squab, much like a hospital one. There were no springs or support for Paul, who had had a hip joint replacement.

When I asked what had happened to Paul's regular mattress, I was told he had wet it so much it stank, and staff had taken it down to the paddock and burned it. There was no consultation about this.

I found this particularly frustrating because I had provided Parklands with mattress protectors for this reason. As Paul doesn't have the capacity to look after his teeth properly, I also sent a battery-run toothbrush to Parklands, which wasn't used.

Paul was also assaulted at Parklands, both by staff and other residents. He started to have unexplained injuries, despite not having a history of clumsiness. Staff told me 'off the record' that Paul's injuries were the result of him being regularly assaulted by other residents.

In April 2006, Paul's medical records show that he presented at the local medical clinic with a fracture. The next month, he had severe bruising on his left upper arm. In October 2006, he fell over and hurt his shoulder. Another record of that incident stated

that Paul had ‘somehow’ managed to sustain the injury. Much later, I saw handwritten notes recording that Paul had been kicked and punched by other residents, but no incident reports had been prepared.

In March 2008, Paul was assaulted by another resident, resulting in a head injury. The ambulance officer confirmed that Paul had a bleeding head and ear, and scratching and bruising to his right arm. The next day, I took Paul to my doctor to get him checked over thoroughly. They observed that the arm injury was on top of another injury we had not been informed about.

About a month later, Paul complained to a staff member that his right leg was sore, and he seemed to be limping. Three days later, another staff member phoned to say that his foot was sore, red and swollen. His foot was x-rayed and displayed fractures. I was told by a nurse that this type of injury was likely to have come from somebody standing on Paul’s foot. When I told two staff members at Parklands, they said Paul had been assaulted by another resident while he was in his bedroom.

I was informed that, as a result of this, Paul was, in addition to being sedated, now locked in his room at night. This was a safety concern given the number of evening staff rostered on. I was also very unhappy about how Paul’s medication was managed. As Paul’s welfare guardian, I was supposed to approve any sedative medication. However, he was routinely sedated without my consent.

In April 2009, Paul was at the medical centre again. This time, the records stated that he fell in the bath and bashed his forehead. He presented twice at the medical centre in 2010. On the first occasion, his records stated that he slipped on a step and grazed his lower leg, which became infected. The second time, he was described as having an infection from a scratched arm.

In May 2010, another record described Paul as having an “unwitnessed fall”, which again resulted in a fracture. In October 2010, he was scratched on the head by another resident and, in 2011, an incident report stated that he had been bitten on the cheek by another resident. On one occasion, I took Paul to hospital. His shirt was lifted and he had a massive bruise on the side of his ribs, which nobody was able to explain.

In 2006, I contacted the police about a staff member who had assaulted Paul. This eventuated in a court case. The staff member was charged with assault and she was asked to leave Parklands.

In making a legal claim against the Ministry of Health for the abuse and neglect suffered by Paul, it also came to light that he had been sexually assaulted by two Parklands staff members.

I regularly voiced my concerns regarding the poor quality of residential care and requested the opportunity to explore alternative options for Paul. In April 2008, attempts finally began to be made to find an alternative placement for Paul. However, he remained at Parklands until late 2012.

Paul was moved and continues to reside at a residential whānau home. From there he attends activities, including going on twice weekly walks, movie visits, one-on-one walks and attending where lunches and picnics. His quality of life is significantly better than it was at Parklands.

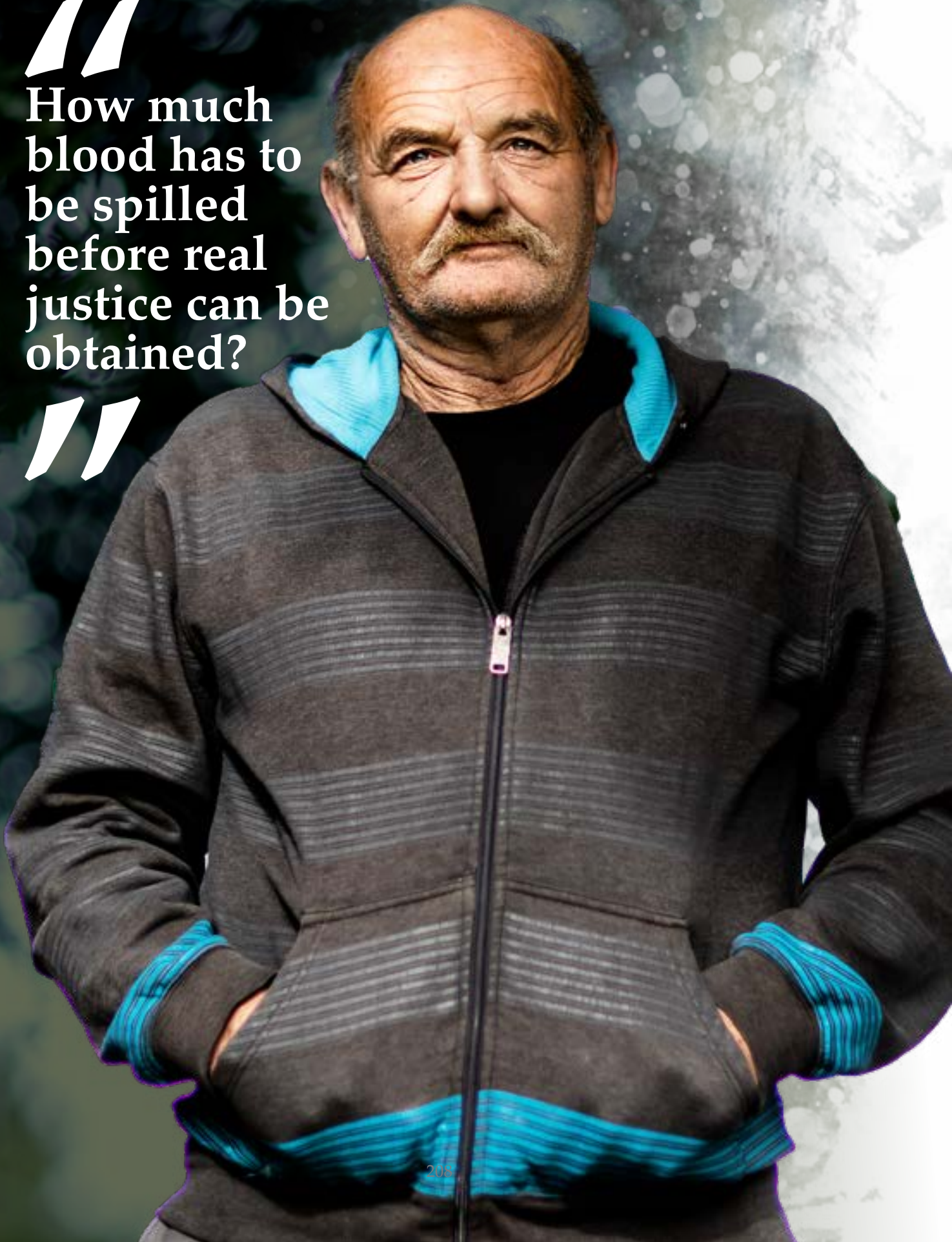
**Source:** Affidavit, Gay Rowe (12 February 2020).



“

How much  
blood has to  
be spilled  
before real  
justice can be  
obtained?

”



# Paul Zentveld

**Age when entered care:** 12 years old

**Year of birth:** 1960

**Hometown:** Rahutu, Taranaki

**Type of care facility:** Psychiatric – Lake Alice Hospital Child and Adolescent Unit in Rangitikei

**Whānau background:** Paul grew up with his mum and dad, two younger sisters and a little brother on a farm. They moved to Te Papaioea Palmerston North when he was 11 years old.

**Currently:** Paul has two children from separate relationships and a 5 year old grandchild. He is on his own now. He lost his sibling relationships after Lake Alice. No one believed what it had been like for him. It was better not to be around them. He has always found it very hard to be intimate in a relationship.

**One Sunday I started to get headaches and bleeding noses. I spent a week in hospital, and I got a series of tests including a lumber puncture, which hurt a lot and I had to lie on my back for two days. They found nothing wrong with me.**

Then they called in Victor Soeterik, a psychologist from a place called Manawaroa. I was sort of shocked when I was going there because I knew that Manawaroa was a place where ‘mentals’ went. I attended a discussion group but I thought it was just a waste of time. Every Thursday after school I had to go to Manawaroa for the group sessions for at least two months. I was 12 years old.

After I stopped going to the group discussions at Manawaroa I was getting into trouble. So, Mum got in contact with Manawaroa and tried to talk to Victor Soeterik, but he wasn't there. Instead, there was a psychiatrist whose name was Dr Selwyn Leeks and he said that I should try a wee while at Lake Alice Hospital. I was stunned because everybody in Palmerston North knew that Lake Alice was a place for ‘loonies and cracked-up people’ and I never thought I would ever go to a place like that. Dr Leeks had a few interviews with Mum and me, then he sent me to Lake Alice Hospital when I was 13 years old.

Within a week I was given Paraldehyde for making insolent remarks toward the staff and misbehaving. After two weeks there I started to give the wrong impression to the staff by playing up and for that I got ECT (electroconvulsive therapy) and boy I hated that. I recall taking off my shoes and belt and laying down on the bed. I recall a kidney-shaped dish containing headphones which were soaking in liquid. This was on the trolley next to the bed. At this stage, Dr Leeks walked into the room, introduced himself and said he was going to give me “some of this to teach me a lesson” and to let me know what it was like. They applied gel to my temples. A hand towel, which was rolled in a sausage-like shape, was placed in my mouth. The hand towel was to gag me

to ensure that I wouldn't bite my tongue. The experience of unmodified ECT was pure pain. After receiving ECT for the first time, my next recollection was waking up in bed with water running out of my mouth.

At Lake Alice if you do something wrong, didn't do your schoolwork or not talk in the groups – upstairs for shock treatment and that was the start.

The ECT sessions usually occurred on Friday's when Dr Leeks would come about 9 or 10am in his white Kombi van and have discussions with the staff, while we were sitting in the day room in a big circle waiting and being scared in case your name was called to go upstairs.

Sometimes two or three of us would get called and were taken to individual, single rooms where we were left on our own, looking at plywood white shutters over the windows with one-inch-thick circles for the fingers, to wait our turn and listen to the screaming of other boys getting ECT knowing we were next.

I would be held down by three of the nursing staff, one on each knee and one holding my shoulders down. I cannot recall exactly how many times I got ECT for what, but I got it at least 12 times for group therapy discussions to try to change my attitude and stubbornness. I got it for mischievous behaviour, not getting on with other people, having an argument with some of the other guys, not eating my meals, not talking in a group. I wouldn't talk so I'd go upstairs for ECT, then I'd talk and get myself in trouble, then I got more ECT.

I mostly got ECT on the head, but I also got it on my knees and scrotum. I remember that happening three times but there were plenty more times I can't remember.

During the ECT Dr Leeks would pause and say something smart, like, "We're going to change your way of thinking" or "You've been bad Paul, we've got to change your thoughts." Then he would turn the dial up. When the first round is delivered the pain is unbearable. You could see black zigzags going through your head. Same with the second and third rounds, black zigzags still in your head, excruciating pain. In the third round your teeth were sore from the pressure of biting down and then the fourth round, bliss because you were unconscious.

You'd wake up alone, naked and looking at the plywood shutters over the windows, feel like shit. Then the nurses would say, "Come on Paul, come on down and have tea." The staff would feel sorry for you and would try to cheer you up with biscuits and Milo.

I was also given ECT on my testicles for bed wetting. It was particularly painful.

I remember my father coming along once he had found out where I was. He came to see me. I was upstairs getting zapped. He was bawling his eyes out. "I want to see my son." He was told he would have to come back another day. He could hear me screaming. He wanted to do something but couldn't.



I was also given Paraldehyde for punishment. A nurse would give the injection by putting their arm around my middle like a waistlock and bending me over to administer the injection to my buttock. I can still recall the smell. We were used as a target. There would be three or four of us in the little medical room, pants down, facing the wall. One nurse would throw the Paraldehyde syringe like a dart, from about one metre away from us, into our buttocks.

While in Lake Alice I was also administered Imipramine, Stelazine, Benzhexol, Chlorpromazine, Modecate, Artane to name some of the medications.

I was put into seclusion many times. The rooms were about three metres square with a thin mattress and no blankets. I often spent the night in these rooms. They had these special plywood shutters with small holes in them on the windows so as you couldn't see out. The room was very dark when the lights were turned out.

Overall, I was admitted to Lake Alice five times before I was 16 years old. Then I became an adult and was put into the adult villa under Dr Bill Carr. He was my life saver. After three months I was off my medication. Dr Carr said, "We're throwing you out, you don't need to be here, there is nothing wrong with you, you shouldn't have even been in those other villas." On 3 November 1976 I was discharged for the final time.

I left for Australia to start again where I spent eight months. I got mixed up with the wrong people, which resulted in conflicts with the criminal justice system there and I was deported back to New Zealand. I flew to Nelson where I stayed with The Salvation Army emergency lodge. They taught me things I didn't know, such as personal hygiene. They also got me a job unloading fish at Sealords.

I was taking 16 Nurofen tablets per day to address migraines and blinding headaches. I attribute this to the ECT I got while at Lake Alice Hospital. I won't take drugs anymore and I won't ever seek psychiatric treatment again. I have learned to live with the pain. I also have explosions in my head, like a hand grenade going off. This can happen daytime or nighttime and happens when I am being asked or trying to remember things about Lake Alice. I suffer panic attacks occasionally. I control the bed wetting by not drinking anything in the evening and no coffee. My body aches all the time and I have cramping in my joints.

With over 40 years of stonewalling and whitewashing, and millions of dollars in defence the New Zealand Government needs to show some heart and tell the truth and do what the UN Committee Against Torture have urged and to uphold the law.

How much blood has to be spilled before real justice can be obtained? Certainly 40 years is too long, and people have died in the process, some directly relating to the abuse they received. Their blood is on the Government's hands. So, do the right thing and tell the truth.

**Source:** Witness statement of Paul Zentveld (17 March 2021).



“

The abuse  
I suffered  
makes me  
feel dead  
inside

”



# Peter Evaroa

**Age when entered care:** 4 years old

**Age now:** 60 years old

**Hometown:** Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington

**Type of care facility:** Boys' home – Epuni Boys' Home; children's homes – Christian home, Homeleigh Methodist Children's Home; foster families

**Ethnicity:** Raratongan and Pākehā

**Whānau background:** Peter has three older brothers, three half-sisters and seven stepsisters. His biological father was extremely violent, drank a lot and would sometimes desert their family. Peter feels Social Welfare kept his mother from him.

**Currently:** Peter's abuse has made it hard for him to maintain relationships, but he talks to his brothers. He has a long-term partner he talks to every day.

## **I spent six years being physically, sexually and psychologically abused in a Methodist Church children's home.**

Years later, when asked what I would want as compensation, I replied that nothing less than the value of a house would be enough. My answer wasn't just for me but for all victims. I feel the value of a child's life is higher than any price that could be paid as compensation. Yet a child's life is exactly what was taken from so many of us when Social Welfare placed us in such toxic environments.

My parents separated when I was very young, and my brothers and I went to a Christian home for a period, before going to live with our father and his new partner. However, Child Welfare started to receive a lot of complaints that we weren't being properly looked after. After my brothers and I ran away we were taken to Epuni Boys' Home for a few weeks and then became State wards.

I was 8 years old when Social Welfare placed us in Homeleigh Methodist Children's Home.

I'd had a hearing impairment since I was young. Shortly after I arrived at Homeleigh, I was fitted with hearing aids. I still couldn't hear clearly because sounds were amplified randomly – but I was punished for not listening. The constant noise also gave me headaches and the aids were really uncomfortable so I'd take them out.

The manager would often hit me around my head if I wasn't wearing my hearing aids. Once he hit me so hard when I had them in, that an aid broke and made my ear bleed. He then kicked me around my head because it was broken. I wasn't allowed to go to school for a couple of weeks until my ear healed.



My hearing has been made worse by all the assaults I suffered in care.

At school, my deafness affected my ability to learn. I was mostly forced to sit at the back of the class and I didn't get any additional support. I was also constantly bullied because I was Deaf and I was never taught sign language.

I wet my bed every night at Homeleigh. The manager, a different one, would grab me, drag me out of bed, then make me sit in a scalding hot bath. He would often beat me around the head and body while I was sitting in the bath. I remember him taking me to his apartment at least twice, I think after one of the night-time baths. I have no memory of what happened in his apartment, my mind seems to go blank, but I do remember leaving with a sore bottom on each occasion.

Every time he seriously hurt me, he gave me 50 cents to stop crying and not tell anyone. It was a lot of money for a child back then.

He shot me on three occasions – I'm not sure if it was with an air rifle, a slug gun or a .22. The first time, he shot my big toe then took me to the bathroom to clean the wound. He then put my penis in his mouth and attempted to perform oral sex on me, possibly to stop me crying. This was a total shock and I really struggle with the fact that part of me must have enjoyed it because I did stop crying. Again, he gave me 50 cents not to tell anyone.

The second time he shot me in the stomach. He cleaned the wound and gave me 50 cents to keep quiet. The third time, he shot me just below the knee. Again, he cleaned the wound and gave me 50 cents. I still have the scars.

Although I was a State ward, I hardly ever saw a social worker and when they did visit, a manager was always present. I did complain once about how I was treated but I guess they didn't believe me because nothing was done, except I got a hiding when they left. Even my school told my social worker I was having problems but no one ever asked me about it.

I left Homeleigh when I was 15 years old, just before it closed due to insufficient funding. I was separated from my brothers and placed with various foster families for a few years. At one placement I finally stopped wetting the bed because I wasn't afraid of my foster parents. This was a big deal for me, something I wasn't used to. When I was 18 years old, I was discharged from Social Welfare's guardianship. I felt relieved but lost because I didn't have my brothers or sisters with me.

At some point in the next decade, I confronted the man who sexually abused me. It took several tries to build up the courage. I couldn't confront him about the sexual abuse, or the shootings, but I did confront him about the beatings as I wanted closure. I wanted to get revenge. But he told me the beatings were just discipline. I felt like he thought he'd done nothing wrong and this made me very angry. I got no revenge and no closure.

In 2004, my father died and I started wetting the bed again. This brought back memories of Homeleigh so I laid a police complaint against the two managers, but as both men had died the police said there was nothing they could do. I wanted to take it further but couldn't afford to. A year later, I visited Homeleigh, hoping that might

make the memories go away. But when I got to the manager's apartment I couldn't move any further. I was just frozen to the floor.

In 2007, a law firm agreed to act for me on a legal aid basis. Due to funding issues, until 2013 they could only collect my records, talk to potential witnesses and work on a statement. In 2013, my lawyer and I met with the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) so I could talk about what happened at Homeleigh, and other life experiences. This meeting was so stressful I started drinking.

I don't like to talk about the abuse I suffered as child. It makes me feel dead inside.

In 2014, my lawyers filed a claim on my behalf against the Methodist Church. I was willing to take whatever it offered as long as the church apologised and acknowledged what had happened. In 2015, the church offered to settle for \$10,000 but stated it saw no merit in my claims and refused to give me a letter of apology. After considerable negotiation I agreed to settle for \$15,000. I remember telling myself the fact the Methodist Church was willing to pay me anything was an admission of liability and acknowledgement.

In 2016, I agreed to take part in MSD's Fast Track Process, which is a faster way to assess and resolve historic claims. MSD offered me \$20,000 along with a letter of apology from the Chief Executive. However, I had been told the apology would come from the Minister for Social Development so I tore the letter up. I wasn't sure if MSD accepted responsibility for what had happened to me or if it was just trying to get rid of me like the Methodist Church.

I feel like my life has been a failure and that it's my fault. I drink heavily to cope and am an excessive smoker. I have attempted suicide on two occasions. I was addicted to gambling, but now I only play for fake money. However, I spend up to 11 hours a day doing it, just to stop thinking about the abuse.

It's hard for me to maintain relationships and I am desensitised to emotion. I've thought about getting counselling but I don't really believe anyone is going to help me. It's down to me to help myself.

In 2022, when I worked with my lawyer on my statement for the Royal Commission, I asked them to contact the Methodist Church to revisit the outcome of my complaint. This resulted in a meeting with the Methodist Church general secretary. Following that, the church made me an additional offer of \$60,000 with an apology in writing, and in person.

Now I think the State should revisit what they offered me too – it put me in Homeleigh, ignored how I was treated there and kept my mother away from me.

The State owes survivors like me our lives.

**Source:** Witness statement, Peter Evaroa (10 October 2022).



“

Staff knew  
there was  
sexual  
abuse but  
wanted to  
cover it up

”





# Philip Laws

**Year of birth:** 1973

**Type of care facility:** Foster homes; boys' homes – Epuni Boys' Home in Te Awa Kairangi ki Tai Lower Hutt, Stanmore Road Boys' Home in Ōtautahi Christchurch, Hamilton Boys' Home in Kirikiriroa Hamilton, Hokio Beach School near Taitoko Levin, Kohitere Boys' Training Centre in Taitoko Levin; health camps – Glenelg Children's Health Camp in Ōtautahi Christchurch.

**Ethnicity:** NZ European

**Whānau background:** Philip has one brother. His parents separated when he was 6 years old and he and his brother lived with his father. He lived with his mother sometimes in between stays at boys' homes.

**Currently:** Philip has a daughter. He is on the supported living benefit because his post-traumatic stress disorder keeps him from working. He has a good relationship with his mother and his relationship with his father is better now, but difficult.

**I've had serious dyslexia my entire life – I believe I was one of the first to be diagnosed in 1983. This has made reading and writing difficult for me throughout my life. I struggled with school and I never received adequate support for my disability.**

My parents separated when I was 6 years old and I chose to live with my father. Because I was struggling with school so much, I became a handful. My brother and I were afraid of him and were acting out at school.

My father is, and always has been, highly religious. He had a hard time dealing with my brother and me as a single father. He wanted to work more and did not want to take care of us. Whenever my father got involved with another woman, we were pushed aside, ignored and left to our own devices.

Sometimes there was normalcy, but it depended on my father's emotional state. I would express myself at school – I would be angry just like my father was.

My father had a breakdown when I was around 9 years old and I went to Glenelg Children's Health Camp. I was sexually assaulted there. I ended up in State care – in Epuni, Stanmore and Hamilton boys' homes. There was lots of physical violence between the boys, and I ran away a lot. In the end I was placed at Hokio because I was considered to be too difficult to manage.

It didn't take me long to discover that violence was encouraged and promoted at Hokio. In secure at Hokio, we were required to have a freezing shower at 5.30am. There was a clear punishment system – if you ran away, you got put back in secure. They would force us to run around in a circle and exercise until we were absolutely exhausted. While exercising, other boys would chase us down with racist slurs, and staff watched.

One day, after I'd been there for about a month, three boys forced me to perform oral sex on each of them. I reported the abuse – I was sick of being sexually abused. I told a staff member who seemed to listen to me. He told me he knew they had sexually assaulted me and that they would be punished, but that I was not allowed to tell any of the other boys what had happened, or I would be punished.

Staff knew there was sexual abuse but wanted to cover it up. I don't know if there was any documentation taken about this sexual assault.

The only punishment those boys got was being put in secure. But when they got out of secure, they didn't try to assault me again. They harassed me but the anger inside me was growing, and I started to stand up to them.

One night, a boy accidentally spilled tea on me and burnt me. I was angry and a staff member got us to fight it out in the gym. I was a monster. I destroyed the other boy. I still feel so guilty about this and think of myself as the villain in that situation. I had been the victim so many times and then I victimised someone. Those places bred criminals.

I stayed at Hokio for approximately three to four months and did not run away in that time. I started thinking if I was going to survive, I was going to survive the right way. There were some good staff members and the education was a lot better than what I'd previously had. I got more help with my dyslexia, and got involved with sports.

I was sent to Kohitere over the school holidays. A boy dragged me into a room and made me perform oral sex on him, then he raped me. I ran away for two weeks before I was caught and taken back to Hokio. The staff asked me why I had run away. I told them who raped me but they put me in secure anyway. I got some counselling, but I didn't find it helpful. I've never seen any documentation about this.

After the rape, some staff started sticking up for me a bit. They'd let me visit my mother for a weekend. I didn't run away while on leave because I didn't want her to be blamed. I waited until I returned to Hokio before I ran away for a final time, and they never caught me again. I was discharged as a State ward when I was 15 years old.

The abuse I suffered, and the lack of education and support for my dyslexia, have ruined my life. The sexual, physical and emotional abuse I suffered in State care has destroyed most of my relationships. I've had substance abuse issues and been in prison. I self-medicated with drugs and alcohol to block out the trauma – to the point where I didn't care if I died. I've been quick to fly off the handle throughout my life so I decided I had to get help. I've been in regular counselling for about three-and-a-half years. It's made a huge difference.





“

It was bad to  
be brown

”

# Poi McIntyre

**Age when entered care:** 4 years old

**Year of birth:** 1969

**Hometown:** Timaru

**Type of care facility:** Family homes – Presbyterian Children’s Home in Timaru, Buchanan Street Family Home, Ōamaru Family Home, Woodland’s Family Home; boys’ homes – Dunedin Boys’ Home (Lookout Point Boys’ Home), Kohitere Boys’ Training Centre in Taitoko Levin; borstal – Invercargill Borstal.

**Ethnicity:** Māori – Ngāi Tahu

**Whānau background:** Poi is the youngest of six siblings – he has two brothers and three sisters. Although the family had frequent interactions with the State, he was the only child to go through the ‘system’.

**Currently:** Poi has two adult tamariki but does not have a meaningful relationship with either of them. He is in a committed relationship with his partner Vicki, whom he describes as his “rock”.

**I was 4 years old when I was put in a car with my siblings and cousins and told we were “going for a ride”. Reading my file, Social Welfare appears to have viewed my parents as abusive and neglectful, unable to meet our basic needs.**

However, my memories of my home life are wildly different. My file refers to me being left unsupervised, but there were always older siblings, cousins or whānau around. We looked out for each other. While my father used physical punishment as a form of discipline, it was never over the top. We were only ever punished for making mistakes – you knew exactly what you did wrong and why you were getting a smack. At the time, it was common parenting practice, not abuse. My file also references my parents’ alcohol use, but while I do recall my parents drinking, I don’t recall them drinking to excess or more than other children’s parents.

My memories are of aroha, safety and abundance. My parents had a good relationship. I had a meaningful connection with Māoritanga and was part of a large and connected whānau. Although my dad was at sea a lot, my aunty and cousins lived close by, and we shared meals and resources and were always together.

Only a handful of Māori families lived in Timaru in the 1970s. Looking back, it felt like we were always trying to squash the fact we were Māori and tried to appear as white as possible to anyone outside our whānau. It was bad to be brown.

The people making decisions were Pākehā and they viewed our home life through a Pākehā lens. It was a time when Māori culture was squashed by society and practices such as tangi were not understood by Social Welfare. My whānau was judged based on this lack of understanding.



We were well-known to and targeted by government agencies in the area. We were perfect scapegoats for social ills, and easy targets. I was often targeted by police and regularly took the rap for offending that I didn't do. I believe I was accused of stealing and physically punished often because of the colour of my skin, and when I or my whānau complained, no one listened.

The car ride I took at 4 years old marked the start of a horrific journey through the State care system that ended in men's prison, where I arrived broken and completely soulless. I don't remember being placed anywhere that acknowledged the fact I was Māori in a positive way. I was force-fed Pākehā ways of living, Pākehā values and Pākehā beliefs.

That first placement with my siblings and cousins was in the Presbyterian Children's Home in Timaru. We were only there for a couple of months. I remember the caregiver. She was mean and hit me with a belt, I think for wetting my bed. I felt lost and scared.

When I was 12 years old, Social Welfare placed me in a family home in Timaru. This time, my siblings and cousins were left in the care of my parents. I understand it was because I stole a bicycle and Social Welfare was granted guardianship of me.

I believe that I had other placements between the Children's Home and this placement when I was 12, however there are no records about me for some years. It appears that some of my file has been lost.

While I was in this family home the caregiver accused me of stealing her wallet. My file states I admitted to this, but I know I didn't take the wallet and I didn't admit to doing it either. I think I got the blame because I was the only Māori child in the family home. I ran away numerous times. I ran away because I hated it there and wanted to be back with my whānau. I ran away a lot.

I believe I was placed in the Ōamaru Family Home when I was 12 years old because I kept running away from the one in Timaru. The father in Ōamaru was physically abusive. When I was allowed to spend holidays with my whānau, I tried to tell them and other adults how bad the home was – there is a note in my file that I reported "bad experiences at Ōamaru family home". I understand my parents also laid a complaint about how I was treated. There are no further records of this, or any evidence Social Welfare bothered to look into it.

While I was in family homes I missed birthdays, tangi and other celebrations. I also missed the limited opportunities to spend time with my dad when he was home from sea. Once, when I was 13 years old, I ran away just to see Dad before he left for sea again.

In between placements in family homes, I was sent to Lookout Point Boys' Home in Dunedin. The first time I was about 12 years old. Despite my age, I was mixed in with the older boys and often beaten up. The male staff were bullies and liked to dominate – some verbally abused me almost daily. Some staff kicked or pushed me for no reason. I was propositioned for sex by an older boy. He went on to be admitted to Lake Alice and charged with sexual offending against children. I didn't tell anyone about this incident.



While I was there a staff member decided to get the tattoos on my arm and hand removed. I was taken to the onsite medical room and they were cut out by someone with a scalpel. I assumed this person was a doctor, but I am not sure. It hurt, and I was in pain after this. I remember getting a small numbing injection but not any follow up medical treatment or pain relief after. My records say that I had 27 stitches.

I don't know why I was taken to Lookout Point or why I was kept there so long. My file states the principal thought there was no reason to keep me there. Despite this, I continued to spend time at Lookout Point until I was placed in Kohitere in Levin at age 14 years old.

The eight months at Kohitere changed me in the worst way and negatively affected the rest of my life. Kohitere smelt, looked and felt terrifying. The violence between the boys was extreme, happened almost daily and was worse than any I saw later at youth or men's prison. We were constantly on edge. To survive I had to become a bully and use violence against others. This changed me. I lost empathy and became numb to witnessing and engaging in physical violence. To me, Kohitere was a training ground for jail.

The reports on my file from my time at Kohitere state I was coping well and using my time constructively. This is not my recollection. I left with a fierce hatred for the world and the system, and no empathy or self-worth. Kohitere stole my mana.

After Kohitere, my offending went through the roof. At 15 years old, I was sentenced to youth prison in Invercargill. While serving my sentence, I experienced violence, I used violence. I also experienced physical abuse from staff. Fighting was so common and normal, and I didn't know any different.

All up, I spent about 23 years in custody. Except for when we were all young, I was the only child out of my siblings to go through the 'system'. I was also the only sibling to end up in prison and in a gang.

I regularly wonder if things would have turned out differently if Social Welfare had stayed out of my life.

I have never understood why I was taken from my whānau and have felt anger about this for as long as I can remember. It has only been as an older adult and after I exited the system that I regained my mana after decades of having this figuratively and literally beaten out of me.

I was motivated to make my experience known as I don't want other tamariki to have the same experience I did. The physical and emotional abuse I experienced while under the care of the State has negatively affected every aspect of my life as an adult, and the time I spent in prison has also affected my relationship with my tamariki.

Staff members working in child protection need to have a cultural understanding of all cultures. I strongly believe I was removed from my parents' care, not because they were bad parents, but because they were Māori.

There needs to be watchers on the watchers – no one is overseeing the decisions made by agencies tasked to keep children safe. There needs to be an independent body holding them to account when they get it wrong.

“  
In my mind,  
I was just  
being a  
normal  
22-year-old  
”





# Rachael Umaga

**Age when entered care:** 28 years old

**Year of birth:** 1964

**Time in care:** 1992–2013

**Type of care facility:** Psychiatric care – Ward 5 Hutt Hospital in Te Awa Kairangi ki Tai Lower Hutt, Te Whare Ahuru Acute Inpatient Care Unit in Te Awa Kairangi ki Tai Lower Hutt.

**Ethnicity:** Samoan

**Whānau background:** Rachael is Mum to Soraya, Grace, Thomas and Peter; and Grandma to Jensen, Fox, Maleki, Elliot and Kylo.

**Currently:** Rachael passed away on 13 February 2024.

**My first experience with the mental health services was in 1986 when I was 22 years old. My parents thought that my behaviour was concerning and that I was mentally unwell. I had dyed my hair bright orange and was partying a lot. I was flitting with my friends at the time and believed I was just enjoying life. They thought this was behaviour that was not befitting of a young Samoan girl at the time.**

My mum worked as a nurse in the Hutt and Porirua and I thought she was well versed in picking up ‘behavioural issues’ from her nursing experience. My dad was primarily concerned about what the church people thought. He was stern but was also looking for answers about why I was behaving the way I did. In my mind, I was just being a normal 22-year-old.

My dad took me to see two mental health professionals at Ward 27 in Wellington Hospital for the ‘behavioural issues’. The professionals concluded that I did not have a mental health issue. I was not put on any medication nor was I admitted to a psychiatric unit on this occasion.

I continued to work in Wellington and then moved to Hamilton. My partner at the time was abusive and I was physically and emotionally abused during that relationship.

In 1992, I left a violent relationship and sought a protection order against him. I moved in with my friend and my ex-partner kept trying to visit me at her house. I remember I wasn’t able to sleep. I had to take time off work because I couldn’t cope anymore. That is when the ‘mania’ started.

My family and friend decided to take me to Ward 5 at Hutt Hospital. This was a traumatic experience for me. They literally picked me up and threw me into the back of the car. My friend’s husband was seated at my head, my brother was holding me at my feet and one of them was sitting on me until we got to the hospital.



I remember the psychiatric registrar asking me, "Why do you think you're here?". I said, "Because you guys don't see the real problem." I was referring to the fact that I was a victim of abuse, I needed help, but I was the one being admitted to the ward instead of my abusive ex-partner, who remained in the community.

Medical professionals described my behaviour as "hypo-mania" but for me, my behaviour was a culmination of the physical, mental and emotional abuse I received, and a lack of sleep. This admission was done informally. I discharged myself from the ward 15 days later but was then re-admitted three days after that on a formal basis.

I was put in a room with five other unwell women. There were no curtains to give us privacy. I was given a lot of medication and I was never told exactly what the medication was.

When I decided to leave, the psychiatric registrar threatened, "If you leave, I'd make sure you never leave again if you came back". I also remember one of the psychiatrists on the ward telling me that he could guarantee I would be back at the unit in a few days. A few days after I discharged myself, I was re-admitted to Ward 5 following an incident where my legs gave way and I couldn't walk. On admission, I was made to sign a contract. This meant that I was sectioned under the Mental Health Act and was only permitted to go on escorted leave with a family member or a nurse.

I was put into a seclusion room. I remember the nurses sedating me to bring my energy levels down and them having to restrain me to the bed. The seclusion rooms were like a cell, there was no water given and no toilet.

I stayed at the unit for a couple of months until I was discharged on 19 November 1992. During this time, I was in seclusion for a long period of time.

Over the years I was admitted into care 11 times.

Te Whare Ahuru was meant to be a place of calm. This to me was anything but calm.

I had to take so many pills, possibly as many as 13 pills at a time. As a result, my kidneys started to fail. Prior to my admission into psychiatric ward, I was not on any medication at all. I didn't even like to take Panadol. In 2009, I had to undergo dialysis treatment. My renal function continued to deteriorate and in 2011 I had a kidney transplant.

I felt like I was placed in seclusion for long periods of time. I just want to be clear that I don't ever want anyone in the future to experience seclusion. It is lonely and boring and makes you feel like you're an animal in a cage. We have no freedom. The staff just leave you in there, and there is nothing for you to do.

A lot of the time, I did not feel safe at Te Whare Ahuru and did not feel staff listened to my concerns. There was negativity from medical professionals and other patients. Staff were falling asleep on night shifts. Patients were also intrusive and abusive. I had limited contact with my whānau. It was not a healthy environment for me.

Throughout my admissions I was diagnosed with various conditions. However, the diagnosis did not make sense to me. During my first admission I was diagnosed with post-natal depression. This did not make sense to me because my daughter was 2 ½ years old. Then I was diagnosed with bipolar affective disorder. Later, I was

diagnosed with epilepsy, which tests confirmed was wrong. To me, I felt like I was 'labelled' with a particular medical condition that gave medical professionals a licence to pump me with more drugs. I believe they were just experimenting with their drugs on me.

When I was reviewing my medical file, I noticed other labels being used by staff throughout my admissions. These 'labels' included mania, hypomania, psychosis, bipolar disease, depressive phase of my illness, suicidal ideation, schizo-affective disorder, elevated mood, depression and sedated.

These labels were hurtful and degrading, and I could not help but wonder why they did not inform me about what they were writing at the time of writing. I was never told of these conditions and neither were they explained to me.

Medical staff often got my ethnicity wrong despite me telling them constantly that I am Samoan. To me, this showed that they were ignorant and careless, and it did not help the situation if they were not getting the basic things accurate. The staff assumed what ethnicity I belonged to and that did not sit well with me. It caused an unfavourable reaction from me because they often did not get the simple stuff right.

There was no creative outlet, just some walks around the hospital grounds. I believe that options such as Samoan fofo or Māori massages should be readily available because they worked well for me.

My time in psychiatric care has also impacted my lifestyle. I went from being a very active mum to be an isolated, shy and quite introverted person, fearful of being in social settings. Even doing the shopping became a problem for me. I had this fear that everyone knew I was on a psychiatric ward, so they judged me or labelled me before they got to know me.

The feeling of shame is very real. For people that have been in these units, they carry the stigma of shame. We feel shame. Shame stops us from making friends. The stigma makes us untrustworthy of people, always insecure and cautious of people all the time. I am often questioning people whether what they are proposing is in my best interests because of my experience. I used to be outgoing and an extrovert. I have been forced by the shame to behave differently and to be more introverted.

In the 1990s, a staff member asked me, if I was in charge of Ward 5, what would I change. I told them that I would not have it attached to a hospital. I told her it would be like a retreat. It would have a sea view or be in the country, where it would be therapeutic and where you could walk in nature (really walk in nature as opposed to fake grass). You would have massage therapists, you would have art, and you would have music. You would have all the things that people could be passionate about to help them become well. It would all be about wellbeing.

I guess the question for me is, who are going to be the reformers and who is going to make sure that there are big changes for the future of care? I believe that survivors are a good start to consult with.

**Source:** Witness statement of Rachael Umaga (18 May 2021).

“

I never got any help for the trauma I have suffered, and I would like those responsible to be held accountable

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# Mr NK

**Hometown:** Taitoko Levin

**Age when entered care:** 10 years old

**Year of birth:** 1981

**Type of care facility:** Health camps – Ōtaki Health Camp; police station cells – Palmerston North Police Station, Levin Police Station; family home; corrective training – boot camp (Tūrangi); boys' home – Bridge Lodge.

**Ethnicity:** Pākehā and Māori (Ngāti Raukawa)

**Whānau background:** Mr NK is the second of six children – he has three brothers and two sisters. None of his other siblings ever got into any kind of trouble. Growing up, he was very close to his cousin, who lived with them for a while.

**Currently:** Mr NK has a good relationship with his family and is in touch with his siblings. His mother recently passed away. He is closest to his younger brother, who supports him and helps him with his family. Mr NK has two children with different mothers, and he has a relationship with both. His daughter was raised by her mother and recently had a baby. From the age of 3 years old, his son was raised by Mr NK's parents, then his brother.

**My parents were very hard on me when I was young, and I think I often misbehaved. My cousin lived with us for a while – we were very close and did a lot of things together. I don't think my parents could control us.**

When I was about 8 years old, my younger brother and I were sent to Ōtaki Health Camp. I'm not sure why. I have never told anyone this before, but while I was there, I was sexually abused by a staff member. He whispered sexual stuff in my ear and tried to touch me. He told me if I said anything, he'd do it to my little brother, so I put up with it – I was very protective of my brother.

What happened there, I saw as a weakness in me.

After this, I fell into crime and got involved in theft and shoplifting. My cousin was often part of this. My parents couldn't control us and contacted Child, Youth and Family Services, who took us to the Palmerston North Police Station while they found us a foster family. We ended up staying in the cells for two weeks. It was frightening and the worst time in my life. Every night, drunks came into the station and screamed a lot. The station was next to a McDonalds, and that's what they fed us three times a day. I haven't eaten it since.

After two weeks, we went to a foster family for two months. We were badly treated, sometimes we were kicked, we didn't go to school, and if we didn't behave, or didn't listen, then we wouldn't get any food.

After that, I went back to my parents, but then I started messing up again. I wouldn't listen to my parents and was often angry. When I was 13 or 14 years old, I was put in the Levin Police Station cells for two days and was caught trying to hang myself with my belt. It was a genuine attempt to die.

I was sent away to boarding school, twice, but I ran away. When I was 14 years old, I spent about two months at a boot camp in Tūrangi. I was physically abused there – one of the officers would hold me down when I was doing press-ups, kick me in the chest and ribs, and throw cold water over me.

I have spent time in and out of jail with lots of small sentences for burglaries and thefts. My last big sentence was in 2006 when I got more than five years for aggravated assault – I was released in 2012. At the end of this prison sentence, I reflected on my situation and sought help. I was prescribed drugs for sleep, which I have taken ever since. I didn't get into any trouble again until 2022. At that time, I was prescribed something else for my anxiety – it helps.

I contacted the Royal Commission because of the serious consequences of my time in the police cells when I was 10 years old. I believe everything else that happened to me, and that I have done, came from that time, including the fear and trauma that made me attempt to take my own life a few years later. Now, every time I go to jail, they ask if I am suicidal – but I'm not since I've had my children.

I have spent my life in and out of jail. I have nightmares, I get very agitated around police, and I suffer from anxiety. I have no explanation for my current offending – I have always found prison acceptable, even though I know if I go to jail it affects my children.

The sexual abuse means I have trust issues, and this has completely coloured my life to a point where I don't trust anyone, and I've learnt to hate people.

For a long time, I blamed my parents for my problems. However, they didn't know about the abuse and violence that I suffered. I never disclosed any of that before.

I never got any help for the trauma I have suffered, and I would like those responsible to be held accountable.

**Source:** Witness statement, Mr NK (25 March 2023).







“

I'm just numb  
all the time

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# Mr NL

**Age when entered care:** 8 years old

**Time in care:** 1995–1997

**Hometown:** Te Papaioea Palmerston North

**Year of birth:** 1988

**Type of care facility:** Gisborne Health Camp

**Ethnicity:** Pākehā

**Whānau background:** Mr NL grew up in Napier. His parents separated when he was young and he has an older sister. Mr NL is dyslexic and suspects he had undiagnosed ADHD as a child.

**Currently:** Mr NL lives with his partner and has three sons; each has severe ADHD and one also has Oppositional Defiance Disorder.

**I've been to pretty much every school in Hawke's Bay, because I was an unruly child. I got labelled as a naughty kid, a difficult kid. Nobody seemed to really care why I acted the way I did – I was just naughty and that was it. Even if I didn't do anything wrong, I would still get the blame.**

Mum and Dad used to argue all the time, then they separated on Christmas Eve 1995. After that, there was an incident at school when another kid was giving me a hard time about my dad. Child, Youth and Family Services got involved and I was made to go to a health camp in Gisborne when I was about 7 or 8 years old.

It was a scary place. The dormitories were split, with older kids at the back of the dormitory and the younger kids up at the front of the dormitory. So many of the kids there were bullies, they just used to beat people up for no reason and get away with it.

If you didn't do as you were told, you were forced to stand at attention, feet together, hands by your side, not allowed to move while everybody else was asleep. If that didn't work, the supervisors would get the older kids onto you. I woke up at 5.30am one morning to find a group of three older boys with bars of soap in socks beating the shit out of me.

They had a time out room they used to put me in. It was small, carpeted and soundproofed. I was locked in there multiple times – no toilet, nothing. There was only one window, on the door – it had a slot on it, so then they could open it, look in, then close it. There was one light that was way, way up in the roof that I couldn't get to. When I was in there I didn't know if it was day or night, or even how long I'd been in there. I had to eat my dinner in there and I can't even really remember if I was given anything to drink. The only time I was allowed out was to have a shower at night.

One time I kicked and kicked and kicked on the door until somebody came and I was pleading with them to go to the toilet. They just said, “Too bad, you should have thought about that before”.

Once I ended up going toilet in my pants. They pulled me out and paraded me up and down in front of the other boys to show them: “This is what happens if you don’t do as you’re told.”

I just felt like a piece of shit. I was treated like I was scum, like I didn’t matter. I’d never allow anybody to do that to my kids. I’d fight tooth and nail to bloody stop that from happening. Rather than help me, it was easier to just send me away somewhere. I’ve seen it with my own kids, too, “You’re unteachable, you’re unruly, we can’t teach you, we don’t want you”.

Being in the health camp fucked me up pretty badly. It really taught me not to trust people. I don’t have any friends at all. I’m really funny about meeting people and being around people. I used to be a big advocate for standing up for what’s right and I’d argue the point if I knew I was in the right, but I won’t do that anymore, I just shut down and walk away. Since I was at health camp I feel almost like I’ve got no emotions. I don’t really get that happy or sad, I’m just numb all the time. If you don’t show emotion and you don’t feel anything, nobody can use it against you – you can’t be a target.

I’ve had problems with drugs and alcohol. I don’t drink anymore because I got sick, but drugs have been such a big burden my entire life. I need to stop so the drugs so there’s not that hold over me. Instead of spending money on drugs I can take the kids away for a holiday.

If my partner starts getting angry with me, she’ll get even more wound up because instead of talking to her I won’t talk – I’ll just sit there and look at the floor and go quiet. Because that’s always been my response since I was in the health camp. I just shut down whenever there’s conflict and try and get away from it.

That’s why I don’t deal with people and that’s why I went farming. That’s why I’m a tree surgeon, because I don’t have to deal with people. I can avoid conflict. I can’t hear someone talking to me when I’ve got a chainsaw going. Cows don’t argue. Cows are quite peaceful to be around, lovely animals, and if you treat them right they’ll do exactly what you want them to do, whereas to me, most people are just out for themselves and all they can get.

In life, I’ve never been able to get anywhere because I keep doing the same stuff over and over again. I’m telling my story because it’s time to deal with that and hopefully be able to move on.

**Source:** Private session transcript of Mr NL (16 June 2020).



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Pasifika was when  
they were calling  
me a coconut

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# Mr NM

**Hometown:** Whangārei

**Age when entered care:** 12 years old

**Year of birth:** 1957

**Time in care:** 1967–1973

**Type of care facility:** Foster care; boys' homes – Ōwairaka Boys' Home in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, Hokio Beach School near Taitoko Levin.

**Ethnicity:** Niuean

**Whānau background:** Mr NM is the fourth youngest of 10 children and the first born in Aotearoa New Zealand in his family – the others were born in Niue.

**Currently:** Mr NM has a daughter and two sons and is involved in a youth trust for Aotearoa New Zealand-born Niueans to help young people connect with their culture. His parents have passed away.

**My family moved to New Zealand from Niue when I was fairly young. I spoke Niuean at home and English at school. My parents were busy working, and I started hanging around with some street kids. I was arrested for vandalism at about 11 years old, and I was 12 when I was taken to Ōwairaka Boys' Home. I was in and out of there and Hokio Beach School for a few years.**

There was physical abuse and the 'kingpin' system, and a lot of racism. I was put in secure too. I told my parents what was going on but they didn't believe me. I also went to foster care with a Pālagi family, and that was a real culture shock – I was completely lost.

It was confusing to me because I kind of lost my identity as a Niuean. I was surrounded by Māori boys, and the staff treated us all the same. There was nothing cultural for Pasifika in care. The only time they knew I was Pasifika was when they were calling me a coconut. I just lost my identity, and I took up the next best thing and became a Māori. I learned te reo and did well at that, but I just did what I had to do to survive.

Ōwairaka was a hard and violent environment, but I think it wasn't so much the violence for me but the mental side of things – I'd had enough, and I started having suicidal tendencies. I just kind of gave up and lost everything.

I was separated from my parents. They didn't visit often. I saw them probably about three times while I was in care.



I got out of Ōwairaka, aged 16 and went back home, trying to find a connection with my parents, trying to find some love. But it wasn't the same, and I just gave up on my mum and dad and family and went out and did my own thing. It became a cycle – I went from boys' homes to prison to being in the gangs, and then I had kids and everything changed for me – my whole outlook of purpose. I decided to break the cycle. I broke away from the gang scene and went up north and became more assimilated into the Māori way of living.

I've slowly reclaimed my Niuean identity, but it took a long time. Even though I was New Zealand born, we've still got these barriers you have to go through to get to know your roots. Now, the thing is to try to get my family to connect with that identity. I've raised my kids more Māori than Niuean, but I wanted to bring them up with both cultures and to be proud of who they are.

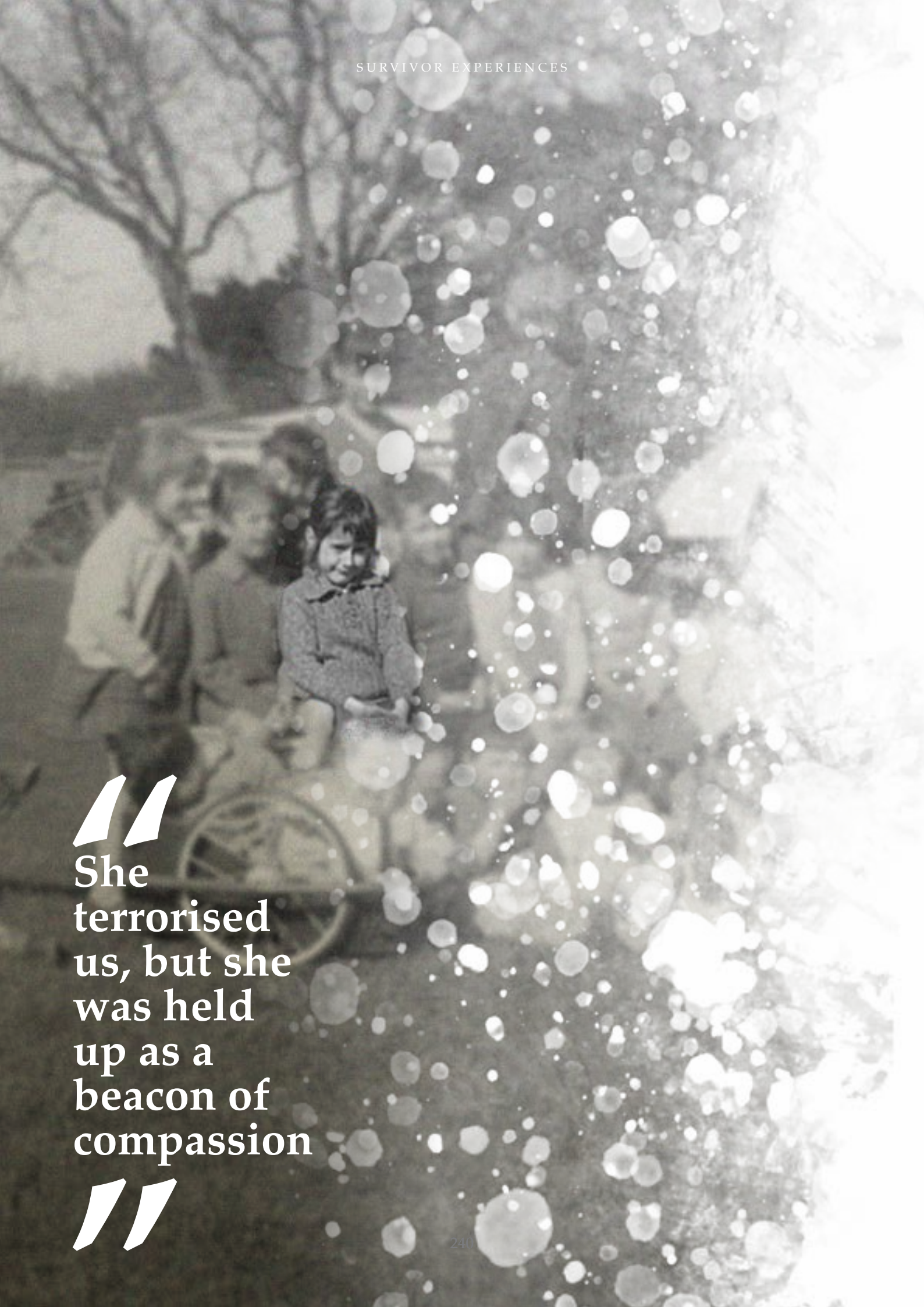
Having kids – my daughter and sons – that kind of steered me away and onto a better path, but I'm still trying to find that direction and guidance. A lot of times it comes back to what happened to me in care, and I know I need to be proactive and positive. What I've got to share, it can make a big impact on a lot of others. It's just about moving forward, and we all go forward together. I know it's still a long way to go.

**Source:** Private session transcript of Mr NM (January 2022).



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# Renée Habluetzel

**Hometown:** Ōtautahi Christchurch

**Age when entered care:** 6 months old

**Year of birth:** 1961

**Type of care facility:** Foster care; adopted into a family that ran a children's home

**Ethnicity:** Pākehā

**Whānau background:** Renée went into care at six months old and was adopted just before she turned 5 years old. She reconnected with her birth mother when she was 17 and describes the relationship as difficult. Her mother has passed away. Renée also discovered the identity of her father as an adult.

**Currently:** Renée has two children, a son and a daughter. She is still close with her foster brother Paul, after reconnecting about 12 years ago.

**I was adopted before I turned 5 years old by a woman who ran Little Acres Children's Home for disabled children in Christchurch, Mrs Miles. She was probably the most evil person I have ever met, and will ever meet in my whole life. She was so cruel to the most vulnerable people – not just me but hundreds of children.**

Mrs Miles told me she adopted me because my birth mother was crazy and didn't want me. She said all our mothers were prostitutes and bad people. I believed her at first – then I realised, how can they all be prostitutes? I think my mother was probably mentally unwell – she'd had a rough life herself and no family support. From what I've pieced together, Mrs Miles manipulated my birth mother into signing the adoption papers. Although I didn't have the best relationship with my birth mother, I never doubted that she tried to do her best for me.

I used to joke that Mrs Miles didn't need to go to the gym because she got a full body workout beating the crap out of us. I remember regular beatings for being 'naughty', although in retrospect, nobody really was. She would punch us, thump us, kick us to the ground and hit us in the head. She would make me put my hand out and smack me over the back of the hand with a wooden hearth broom and then send me to school. I couldn't write for hours. Once I got away with putting my left hand out so I could still write, but she figured that out and she was furious.

It always amazed me that we didn't have bruises. I think she was tactful about where she hit us so that it didn't show. She would whack all the kids across the head. Once, when I was 12, I got such a severe beating that I was off school for a whole week – I had bruises all up my legs and my back.

She had a particular dislike for anybody who wet the bed. She would pull me out of bed at 10pm to check if I'd done it yet. If I had, then she'd beat the crap out of me. Then I'd have to get back into my wet bed – she wouldn't change the sheets. The nature of beatings was such that I was absolutely terrorised. I think she enjoyed it. When she started on us, her husband would just take off and do something else – get out of the house. A few times she tried to get him to hit us and he would just walk away.

She would make me wear the singlet I had worn to bed to school the next day so that I would stink. I'd try to get the singlet off and stick it in my bag so no one could tell, but I'd still smell, and I got a really hard time from other kids.

When I was about nine or 10, she broke my tooth by smacking me against the bar frame of the bath. I still hate looking at that now. She was washing my hair and said I was wriggling too much, so she got me by my hair and just smashed me against the bath. After that my tooth was really sharp and I kept getting a cut lip and cut tongue because of it. If I complained about it, she would just hit me around the head.

After she beat us up, she would make us all hug and kiss her. I wouldn't do it, I didn't want to hug someone after they'd thumped me.

From a young age I didn't think I was a person, and I didn't think the rest of us were, either. We weren't treated like people – we were just things. She used to tell me that she saved me from the gutter, and that I was there because no one loved me, so I owed her.

One of my early memories is scrubbing a floor with about five of us in a line. The girls just worked all the time. My job was to do the dishes at night. I'd help all the kids go to bed, then Mrs Miles would have us knitting clothes for everybody before bed.

It was also my job to get Mrs Miles up in the mornings. I would bring her some toast with jam on it and a cup of tea. Then I would get her a hot cloth to wipe under her armpits, help her put her bra on, get her clothes out and help dress her. Then I'd have to empty her urine potty from under the bed.

Another child sexually abused me. He was about 10 years older than me. I know he started abusing me before I was five, when I got adopted, because I remember being in court for my adoption and knowing that I was already being regularly abused by him. I think Mrs Miles knew what was going on because she caught him red-handed touching other children at least twice, but she didn't care. At night he would go along and tap us in bed with a hockey stick, which was a signal to get out of bed and go into the bathroom, where he'd abuse us.

Social workers used to come at least once a month and Mrs Miles hated it. They were becoming younger and more educated, and she did what she could to keep them away – they were onto her and she knew it. She became more in favour of non-verbal kids.

Most parents wanted to visit their children at the home and Mrs Miles would tell them awful lies. She did a good job of convincing them never to visit, saying things like, “They get upset when you come to see them. That one, your son, screamed and screamed for days after you came to see him. It’s best you don’t come back.”

I remember six instances of children dying in care – four who died at the home and two who were dropped off to die. I remember thinking I could die, because it was kind of normal for kids to die, and there were a lot of very sick kids.

When I met my birth mother she told me Mrs Miles promised when she adopted me that I would get an education, have music lessons and do ballet, and I’d have my teeth straightened. My mother gave Mrs Miles a lot of money to do all of those things – my grandmother remembers it too. Mrs Miles’s children mocked me for not doing ballet and I never understood it. Her grandchildren would say “we’re off to do ballet” and laugh at me. If I got presents from my biological family they’d be taken off me and given to her grandchildren. I’d go to visit their house and see all my presents there.

When I met my birth mother it destroyed her to learn what had happened to me – she thought she’d done the right thing by leaving me there.

I escaped at 17 years old. I’d been told I was going to be put into psychiatric care, she was going to organise that next, and I got out before she could do that.

She shut down Little Acres within six months of me leaving. I saw a newspaper article and I rang Social Welfare to raise my concerns. They just ignored me. I feel so angry at the State.

A documentary about the children’s home and Mrs Miles’ “selfless” work was made in about 1973. It was filmed when I was about 13 years old. Mrs Miles named it *Four in the Morning*, because that was the time she was supposedly up looking after the kids. She wasn’t. I know she’s dead now, but I still worry.

Mrs Miles was also given a British Empire Medal for her services to the intellectually disabled in Christchurch, in 1969. She is forever held up as this beacon of compassion, and I would like to see that medal taken off her. What I want more than anything now is for the people who adopted me to acknowledge that they let me and my future descendants down. I’d like them to offer me and my kids some redress for what they did. I’d also like to be un-adopted. I would like no one on my birth certificate, except for perhaps my birth mother.

Disabled children are so vulnerable, and the fact I’m the only person to come forward from the place I grew up isn’t surprising, because Mrs Miles got people she could shut up.

**Source:** Witness statement, Renée Habluetzel (10 August 2022).

The Inquiry notes that Presbyterian Support South Island commissioned an independent investigation into the allegations made between 2005 and 2007 but they were unable to be corroborated. The matter was also referred to the NZ Police and no charges were laid.



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It's a bad  
kids place,  
doom  
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# Rovin Turnbull

**Name:** Callum and Victoria Turnbull

**Child in care:** Their son Rovin is autistic

**Age when entered care:** 9 years old

**Year of birth:** 2001

**Hometown:** Central Otago

**Time in care:** Four years

**Type of care facility:** School for pupils with intellectual impairments – Ruru Specialist School in Waihopai Invercargill

**Ethnicity:** European

**Whānau background:** Rovin has a brother.

**Currently:** Callum and Victoria describe Rovin as happy, sensitive and quirky. He enjoys bush walks and is learning to operate a little digger.

**Our son Rovin is profoundly affected by autism. He also has savant abilities – he’s highly intelligent and has an aptitude for learning. Rovin is self-taught and very clever. He communicates in a straightforward way but he’s not very talkative. He struggles with sensory issues, and in social situations.**

When he was nine, he began attending Ruru School in Invercargill, where he experienced physical and psychological abuse, including restraint and seclusion. He began to regress. His language and connection with us, and the world, disappeared. Looking back, we can see that Rovin’s dramatic deterioration was connected with the restraint and seclusion of him that was happening at Ruru, unbeknown to us.

When you have difficulty talking, you say ‘no’ the best way you can, and Rovin was trying to tell us. It became clear to us that he was unhappy. Getting him to school was a battle – he tried to exit the moving vehicle on occasions, and he’d hide under his bed in the morning, and put up a fight not to go to school.

At the time, we attributed his deteriorating behaviour at school and home, and his apparent fear and anxiety about school, due to having to be at school for the whole day, and this was how hard being at the school was for him.

His whole person changed. He began self-harming and talking about ending his life, expressing morbid thoughts. He would display aggression, strip off his clothes, cut off his hair and hit himself. It was a distressing time for our whole family.

There was an incident where he was put in a cloakroom by a teacher aide and left unsupervised after becoming upset. We recall he was taken to hospital in an ambulance with a large hematoma on his forehead.

We began noticing red flags everywhere. We spoke to the principal two or three times about bruising on Rovin's body and arms, which was put down to his interactions with other children. This included very dark bruises around his wrists.

One day, he got off the bus groaning in complete devastation. He had a hematoma on his head, his face was all puffy, and he had marks on his hands. That night, the bus driver called us to tell us a teacher aide had assaulted Rovin during the after-school pickup. The driver said kids told him the teachers would shut them in the broom cupboard.

When Rovin had started at Ruru School, he had yelled out about a "little room". At a meeting with the school, we asked to be shown the little room. There was a door at the back of a classroom, which opened into a tiny internal space, 1.3m x 1.8m and 3.3m high. It had a dark raw concrete floor, with ragged, frayed carpet stuck on the walls. There was no electric light, just light from a window at the top facing south into a hallway, so it was dark.

We were in shock and we both felt panic set in. Suddenly, the reasons for Rovin's behaviour became clear to us.

We complained to agencies – the police, the Ministry of Education, the Education Minister, the Office of the Ombudsman and even the Children's Commissioner. The Ministry appointed someone to investigate.

The investigator's report described the room as "dark and grimy" and that children put in the room would feel that it was for punishment. She said the atmosphere of the room was not pleasant and recommended that the room be closed.

The Ministry had existing guidelines from 1998, stating that "Time-out rooms should not be used. They are not necessary and can result in teachers and schools being accused of using inhumane and cruel punishments." However, these guidelines were not provided to police or Ministry investigators. Instead in 2015, off the back of our seclusion complaint, a Ministry working group was set up to develop draft 'seclusion guidelines'. The draft guidelines allowed for seclusion. The draft was provided to and used by police investigating our seclusion complaint against Ruru in 2016 – 17, even though the then-Minister of Education, Hekia Parata, directed the Ministry to end seclusion in schools in October 2016, calling seclusion "intolerable".

In October 2016, new restraint guidance was issued by the Ministry, which stated, "Seclusion is an extremely serious intervention. It is potentially traumatic and can harm a student's wellbeing. It is an inappropriate response to a child's behaviour and must be eliminated." It became law in 2017.

Our complaints went to the Ombudsman for review. In his report, the Ombudsman said, "For any child or young person, let alone someone with particular disability-related needs, sensitivities and vulnerabilities, I consider that it would have been an uninviting and unpleasant place in which to spend even a short amount of time involuntarily."



As a result of this, Rovin has missed almost all of his schooling. He spent four years at Ruru School, but four years of abuse is hardly good schooling.

As soon as we pulled him out of school, we were able to take him off all his medication and he's been off medication ever since. We can count on one hand the number of meltdowns he's had since. Once the abuse stopped, his behaviour stopped.

We've removed our son, so he is safe. But what about all the other students still there? What about the other children that were forced into the dark and grimy storeroom? Nobody spoke to the students – no agency talked to them. We were disheartened to hear from the Chief Executive of the Ministry in 2022 that they cannot know for certain that seclusion is not being used in schools, despite it being unlawful. The law change didn't prevent children from being put into seclusion, or create a proper complaints and investigations process.

This entire experience had had a lifelong impact on our entire family. We are much less trusting, especially of agencies and authorities, and it will continue to have a major effect on our lives. It has been heart-breaking and stressful, and brought us overwhelming anxiety at times. Rovin's experience is common, and as hard as it is to tell our story, people – and the system – can learn from our story. That is our hope.

**Source:** Witness statement, Callum and Victoria Turnbull (9 November 2022).

“

I have come  
to learn that  
there is a lot  
of power in  
sharing a  
story

”



# Rūpene Amato

**Age when entered care:** 11 years old

**Year of birth:** 1972

**Hometown:** Wairoa

**Type of care facility:** Education – St Joseph’s School, Wairoa

**Ethnicity:** Māori (Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngā Ariki Kaipūtahi, Ngāti Māroko) and Samoan

**Whānau background:** Rūpene lived with his Mum and Dad, three brothers and two sisters. Rūpene’s eldest brother passed away in the 1990s during a rugby game. His death really took a toll on the family and many are still struggling with his passing today.

**My father is full Samoan. My mother is Māori. Before Mum and Dad got married, Dad had to seek approval from Mum’s family. My Mum’s family weren’t supportive of their relationship because Dad was an Islander. In Wairoa at the time, it was out of the norm for a Māori person to marry an Islander, but it was normal for Māori to marry Palagi people.**

Mum’s family became more accepting of Dad over time. However, during my childhood, Dad continued to be teased and bullied by Mum’s family about being an Islander. Because of this, I think Dad chose to be more ‘Māori’.

Given we were the only Pacific Islanders in Wairoa at the time, me and my siblings identified as Māori because we knew the other kids would hassle us if we said we were Samoan. We were also closer to our Māori whānau growing up because our mother raised us Māori, and Dad chose to conform to the Māori way of life.

Growing up, there was a lot of alcohol use and domestic violence in our household. Dad was quite violent towards me and my siblings and our Mum. Because of the violence during our childhood, my siblings and I promised that we wouldn’t use violence against our children when we were older. I am happy that our generation has been able to fulfil this promise and give our moko a new way of doing things. Although Dad was violent towards us back then, he isn’t violent towards his moko.

My maternal grandfather was a Bishop of the Rātana Church. The Rātana faith was a big part of our whānau, marae and culture. My father is Catholic and was raised in the Catholic Church in Samoa. As a child, I attended events and church services at both the Rātana and Catholic churches in Wairoa.



My siblings and I started school at North Clyde School in Wairoa. After a few years, our parents moved us all to St Joseph's School, which was a Catholic primary school in Wairoa. We changed schools because Dad was a Catholic. Back then, you had to be a baptised Catholic to attend St Joseph's.

As a child, I always loved school and learning. I enjoyed it more than my siblings. In Wairoa, St Joseph's is known as a 'good academic school'. Because of this, my parents saw it as a blessing that we were Catholic and were able to attend the school.

Our former parish priest, Father Snowden, was an amazing man. He was a part of our community and would help whānau in need whether they were Catholic or not. We were always happy to help him – he was kind and gave us treats. In my young mind, I thought all priests would be like Father Snowden. However, that wasn't the case.

The abuse I suffered happened when I was in form one at St Joseph's School. I was around 11 or 12 years old at the time. A new priest was appointed to St Joseph's parish following the death of the former priest. I can't remember the new priest's exact name, but me and my friends at school would call him "Fitz the feeler".<sup>1</sup>

At that age, my knowledge of sex was what I had learnt from friends at school. We were given no explanation about what sex education or puberty was, and we weren't prepared or warned about the content of the lesson with Father Fitz.

The first time I was sexually abused was by Father Fitz in the priest's house. I remember the nun giving me a yellow slip and telling me to go see Father Fitz. I went by myself and gave him the piece of paper. He opened the note, read it and said, "Oh while you're here, let's have a conversation." He then took me to the lounge at the front of the house and started talking. I can't remember how the topic came up, but we suddenly started talking about sex.

Father Fitz then asked me to remove my shorts, which I did. At this point, I was in my underwear standing in front of the couch I was sitting on. He grabbed my penis and said, "This is your penis, you might know it as your cock." He was stroking and masturbating me through my underwear. I remember standing there with my pants down freaking out because I had no idea what was going on. Back then, I was also exploring my own sexual identity.

Father Fitz then touched my testicles and said something like, "These are your testicles, you might know them as your balls". While we talked about sex, Father Fitz groped and fondled me. All of the touching was through clothing. He talked about things like masturbation and ejaculation. These 'sex education lessons' would last about 20 minutes. Then I would be sent back to class.

By the time Father Fitz started at St Joseph's, the way confessions were done had changed. There was no longer a partition between the priest and the parishioner. The confessions at the school were face-to-face with Father Fitz, in an open room with a few chairs. During confession, Father Fitz would grope and fondle us. The door was always closed. Afterwards, he always insisted that we hug him before we could leave. Confessions became more frequent than the sex education lessons.

One lunchtime, I remember sitting in a circle with a group of friends. Me and my friends were talking about something unrelated when we saw a student walking towards the priest's house with a yellow note in his hand. We all said things like, "Oh I know where you're going" and started laughing. Because we were talking about what was happening, it made other students aware of what might happen to them when they were alone with Father Fitz. There was a girl in our group who was quite well-endowed for her age. She told us Father Fitz tried to touch her breasts. Everyone then started sharing stories about abuse from Father Fitz. We all agreed to go home and tell our parents. I didn't tell my parents that night, mostly because I wasn't sure how they'd take it. I was scared I would get a hiding mainly because I know that it was Dad's church. At the time, I knew that it would be my word against the church. I knew Dad would take the church's word over mine.

I later found out that when one of my friends told her mother about Father Fitz, her mother called some of the other parents and told them what Father Fitz had been doing. A group of parents went to the school the same day and complained about Father Fitz. Within a week of this complaint, Father Fitz was no longer at St Joseph's. We didn't even see him the next day. There was no explanation given as to why he left. Nobody from school or the church talked to us about it. Father Fitz was just there one day and gone the next.

To this day, I'm not sure whether my parents knew about what happened with Father Fitz, or if my friend's mother had called my Mum that night. If they did know, we never talked about it. Most Pacific families, especially Catholic, don't talk openly about sex or sexuality.

On reflection, I now know that Father Fitz was grooming us all. We lived in a poor town and were more vulnerable to this kind of abuse. We never discussed contacting police or anything like that once Father Fitz left.

One of the major impacts on my life was that I became distant from the church as a result of what happened to me. However, more recently, I have decided to visit the church to close the chapter on my abuse.

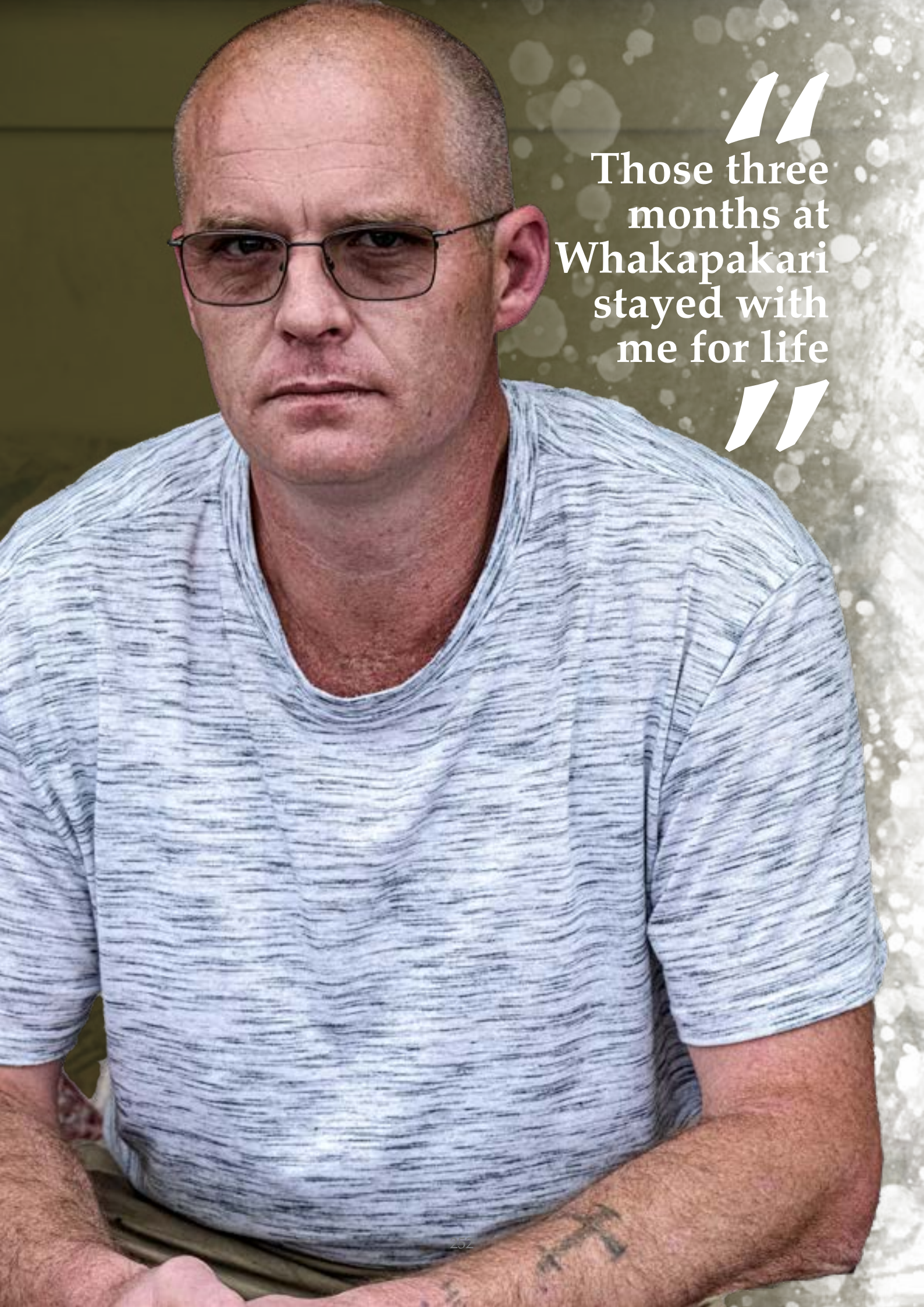
There should have been further consequences for Father Fitz. I believe that he should have been prosecuted for what he did. Following on from the abuse, the school should have had someone speak to us about what had happened, what was done about it and how to get support if we needed anything. However, the school didn't do any of this.

I have come to learn that there is a lot of power in sharing a story. Particularly for those who are survivors of sexual abuse who feel that they are alone. It would be great if it were normalised to have someone like myself or other survivors who work in these fields to go into schools to share their experience and inform children and young people of the supports that are available.

**Source:** Witness statement of Rūpene Amato (16 July 2021)

<sup>1</sup> The Inquiry notes Mr Amato cannot recall the identity of the priest who he says abused him. A subsequent investigation into the allegations by the Society of Mary has found that the priest is unlikely to be a Society of Mary priest.





“  
Those three  
months at  
Whakapakari  
stayed with  
me for life  
”



# Scott Carr

**Year of birth:** 1983

**Type of care facility:** Foster homes; Boys' home – Epuni Boys' Home in Te Awa Kairangi ki Tai Lower Hutt; Te Whakapakari Youth Programme on Aotea Great Barrier Island.

**Ethnicity:** NZ European

**Whānau background:** Scott has two older brothers and one older sister. During his childhood, his parents worked a lot.

**Currently:** Scott has ongoing health issues and had a heart attack when he was 40. Scott believes that his experiences in care and the resulting PTSD contributed to his heart attack. He struggled with alcohol addiction and has been sober for over five years.

**My parents believed good parenting meant working hard, all the time. I ended up in care after someone contacted CYFS to let them know that “something was not right” at home. I wasn’t physically abused, but I was not a priority. My dad never spoke to us.**

I got suspended from school when I was 13 years old. I was bored and lonely, which is when I started drinking and hanging out with an older crowd. I had also tried to commit suicide in the past, but I wasn't offered any help, despite me telling CYFS I was suicidal. I also ran away from home and appeared in court several times.

I was sent to Epuni and later to Whakapakari, aged 14.

When I arrived at Whakapakari, I was strip-searched to ensure I wasn't concealing anything. I was then placed in a tent group, who were assigned to chopping and carting firewood. We did this from early in the morning to late at night.

I asked my tent supervisor a question one day and he told me to keep my “ballhead” comments to myself. I said I didn't like being called a ballhead, and he beat me and threatened to kill me. He knocked me unconscious and left me lying there covered in blood. The other boys were ordered not to help me or check on me. I still have multiple scars across the back of my head. I was so distressed I seriously considered throwing myself off a cliff to get away from Whakapakari.

I took to sleeping with a fish filleting knife that I stole from the kitchen in case he attacked me again. He was a bully. He'd deflate the tyre of the wheelbarrow and when I couldn't push it properly, he'd throw firewood at me.

After I had been there for a few weeks, the camp supervisor found a letter I had written to my mother complaining about the violence the tent supervisor had inflicted on me. I was told to apologise to the tent supervisor repeatedly, until I cried. To stop me crying, he choked me until I couldn't breathe. The camp supervisor wrote down my mother's address and told me he would go there, and make her pay if I ever wrote negative things about Whakapakari again and "get" me or my family if I ever told anyone about the choking. I then had to rip up the letter and put it in the fire.

I was also assaulted, bullied and harassed by other residents while staff watched. I was exposed to serious violence – I would describe this as 'cage fighting', where staff organised residents to fight, for their own entertainment. While I didn't always participate, I had to watch.

If I misbehaved, I was forced to do things like carry sacks of stones up a hill as punishment. Despite my parents sending me a new pair of gumboots, I was made to carry these sacks in bare feet, because the supervisor gave my gumboots to another resident. The path up the hill was very rocky, and my feet got covered in cuts that became infected.

Another supervisor made me dig holes in the ancestral graveyard to bury skull and skeleton bones, and told me if I didn't behave, I'd end up there too. He also told all the residents to call me "white bread" because I was Pākehā.

I wasn't looked after properly at Whakapakari. We were sent to another island, known as Alcatraz, where I was very cold and not given any food. I was told to find oysters for food. I was often hungry because we were responsible for catching our own fish to eat, and if we didn't, we only had potatoes and porridge. My mother would send me food parcels, but the staff always took most of the food out, either to eat it themselves or give to other residents.

I was only allowed to shower once every four days, despite doing hard physical labour every day. The toilet was a longdrop that was so full, the faeces came right up to the toilet seat. I remember putting rocks in it to make sure the faeces did not touch me while I used the toilet.

One supervisor helped me send letters to my mother and she kept some. In one, I mention that my shoes and pants had been stolen and that I had been involved in two fights, "and one involved a knife".

I never saw my social worker after he dropped me off at Whakapakari. He rang once and talked to a supervisor who told him I was doing well and fitting in. If he'd called me, I would have told him about the violence and abuse.

When I got home from Whakapakari, I felt overwhelmed, and struggled to fit back into society. I was never visited by a social worker or provided with any sort of support from CYFS to assist me in slotting back into life after Whakapakari. I didn't cope.

I have intense flashbacks of the violence and it often keeps me awake at night. I feel robbed of any opportunity in my adult life, especially because I never got a proper education.

I have used alcohol extensively in the past to block out traumatic memories.

A few years ago, I was diagnosed with a degenerative brain disease. I have a lot of headaches and am on medication because of this. While it is difficult to pinpoint an exact cause, doctors have told me that most my health issues could be triggered by post-traumatic stress disorder from my time at Whakapakari.

Those three months at Whakapakari have stayed with me for life.

Source: Witness statement of Scott Carr (7 March 2021).



“  
I’ve struggled  
with major  
anxiety and  
depression  
”

# Shaye Parkinson

**Hometown:** Waitara

**Age when entered care:** 8 years old

**Year of birth:** 1986

**Time in care:** 1995–2000

**Type of care facility:** Residential school – McKenzie Residential School; foster homes in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland (Waipareira Trust), Hāwera and Waitara; youth justice residences – Palmerston North, Weymouth.

**Ethnicity:** Māori – Te Atiawa

**Whānau background:** Shaye has a brother and a sister.

**Currently:** Shaye lives with his partner and is still struggling with the impacts from his time in care alongside the difficulties of the claims process.

**I don't remember much of my childhood. There were difficulties at home because my father was physically abusive and a bit of an alcoholic who hit my mum. I was diagnosed with ADD at an early age.**

By the time I was about 7 years old, I began stealing and committing petty crimes. That's when CYFS got involved. When I was 8 years old, I was put on a plane and shipped off to McKenzie Residential School in Christchurch. I never really got told why, but I put it down to my behaviour. I remember crying at the airport, and my mum crying.

During my time at McKenzie, I was sexually abused by the staff member who was in control of the lolly room. He would frequently take children into his office and give them lollies. This would generally happen on a Friday night, which was movie night, or on the days children arrived back at McKenzie from the holidays. He was widely known among the children as "the dirty old man" or "the lolly man". I referred to him as "the scary man".

On three occasions he took me into his office for a chat, asking me about my time at home. He gave me lollies out of the box, and talked to me about people I knew, like my family. He groped my buttocks, and asked me to sit on his knee and rocked me back and forwards. Those assaults made me feel frightened and uncomfortable, but I didn't feel able to object while I was alone with him in his office.

I was also raped by another child. One evening, a boy in my dorm came into my bed and raped me, using violence to restrain me. He masturbated and licked my back



and anally penetrated me during the assault, which lasted about 15 minutes. No staff members were around when this happened – staff only checked the dorm rooms occasionally during the evenings. Afterwards, he threatened to kill me if I reported the incident to anyone.

He was probably a year or two older than me. He had a reputation for being aggressive and talking about sexually profane subjects. I recall he was also receiving some mental health supervision or special treatment – he got other help that we didn't. I was scared of him before the rape as he was bigger than me. Afterwards, I lived in terror that I might be raped again, often crying myself to sleep.

Then there was the physical abuse. I was always beaten up there, crying without crying, bleeding noses. I was physically abused by a number of boys, particularly one larger boy who beat me and intimidated me – sometimes to steal my belongings, like my basketball cards. I suffered bruising as a result of these beatings.

If you did something or said something naughty in school, they'd lock you in a room. I was often placed in a secure unit or time out room. I was made to stand still with my arms folded to calm down before I was allowed out. The 'blue line' was another form of punishment. It was a straight line in the hall – I had to go stand on that line for a couple of hours after school. I wasn't allowed off that line.

I was at McKenzie for over a year before I was discharged to go to Motonui Primary School in Waitara. When I got expelled from there, the teacher had all my meds stacked up. My controlled meds had to go to the teachers to be locked away, but he hadn't been giving them to me.

I endured CYFS homes all around New Zealand. In Auckland, at a Waipareira Trust foster home, I was introduced to prostitutes and I was smoking dope from the caregiver. That's why I spent most of my life running from CYFS homes – scared, running home.

I went to CYFS homes in Hāwera and Waitara. Waitara was alright because I knew the guy who ran it. I got involved in the Waitara Rowing Club, and the yachting. I was a coxswain in the rowing club and I got to sit in the front seat and steer the rowing boats.

At the weekend, in Hāwera, another caregiver would come and pick us up and take us to his farmhouse – I'd just sit there on the couch, drinking piss and smoking dope. This was when I was 10 or 11 years old – up until I was old enough to hit Family Court and then I was in residences all over New Zealand. I'd still just run scared – get beaten up every day and then just run, steal a car and drive home, or jump on the back of a bus. I was only young.

Palmerston North and Weymouth are the two residences I can remember, but most of them were just prisons. I got hidings at Palmerston North and I got beaten up at Weymouth too.

At Palmerston North, they had a staff member who got sacked for smoking dope and cigarettes, and watching porn in the gym. He set up the TV and took all the Pacific Island boys. We wondered why all these Islander boys and Māori were going and throwing sticks around in the hall, behind the curtains, but they got caught out.



I remember being taught some discipline. I learned how to wood carve there and I later learned my whakapapa, so that's what I liked about that place.

I made complaints about a staff member at Weymouth – he was a big, muscly Samoan wrestler guy. He put me in submission locks between his legs and pulled my neck back. He was pretty scary.

You get scared and you run. The emergency fire doors were magnets and they'd have to re-latch, so at 12 o'clock at night I put a pen spring in there and we were off. Bang, and the fire doors opened, and we were over the fence, running – ran into an electric fence. Ended up in some Samoan's shed.

I was back there a week later – we got caught in a high-rise apartment that was getting built in Auckland. We were in the Pink Batts trying to keep warm. Dumb stuff like that all stacks up in Youth Court and makes you look real bad and that's why I have a reputation. The police don't care about me. They'd happily shoot me dead and say that I had a gun pointed at them – that's how I feel.

My records said that at only 8 years old I was placed in a harsh, badly supervised environment where violence was common, and where I was vulnerable to sexual predation by staff and residents. My experience of abuse at McKenzie caused me to develop distrustful anti-social behaviours, anti-authority attitudes, and various mental health problems. These issues have profoundly altered the course of my life, making me unable to function in a normal society and priming me for a future of institutionalisation.

Indeed, following my placement at McKenzie, I was placed in various social welfare residences and institutions around New Zealand. During my adult life, I've been incarcerated multiple times. I've spent most of my life in prison – six months was the longest I'd ever been out of jail until now.

It's impacted my opportunities to get work. There are jobs out there and I'm applying for them, and turning up to the appointments. If you've got criminal convictions, you tell the truth – at least you told the truth.

Since my childhood I've struggled with major anxiety and depression. I had anger management issues for which I received counselling. I'm on meds for my ADD, anxiety and depression. I've been very suicidal at different stages in my life. I isolate myself from a lot of people, but there are times when I push myself to take my dog for a walk down the beach just to get outside and among the community – because, in my eyes, I'm a valuable member of society.

**Source:** Private session transcript, Shaye Parkinson (2 February 2021).

“  
I was being  
punished for  
who I was  
”



# Sir Robert Martin

**Age when entered care:** 18 months old, 9 years old

**Year of birth:** 1957

**Type of care facility:** Disability facility – the Kimberley Centre in Taitoko Levin, Campbell Park School in Waitaki Valley; psychiatric hospital – Lake Alice Child and Adolescent Unit in Rangitikei; foster homes

**Ethnicity:** NZ European

**Whānau background:** Sir Martin had a sister.

**Currently:** Sir Martin passed away on 30 April 2024 and is survived by his wife. He had enjoyed a life packed full of books, music and sports once leaving the Kimberley Centre.

**I'm a person first, disability second.**

**When I was born, the doctor damaged my brain during birth with forceps. My mother was told to send me away and forget about me, so I went to the Kimberley Centre, aged 18 months. Just because I was born with a disability. I was being punished just for being who I was.**

I lost my family and was locked away from the community. I missed my family and cried for them, and wanted them to take me home. But they didn't come. So in the end I gave up crying for them.

It was lonely at the Kimberley Centre – there were hundreds of people around me, but as a little boy I didn't know another human being. Not properly. As a toddler, I was fed and taken care of, but there were so many of us, we were just a number. I didn't experience what other kids did. I didn't go to birthday parties or feed the ducks or visit the zoo.

Institutions are places of neglect and abuse, where people are denied their human rights and basically denied a proper life. The right to education and the right to participate, the right to live free of violence, the right to life – these things are all at risk in an institution.

I went back to my family when I was 7 years old but my parents weren't given any support or counselling and things just didn't work out so I was made a ward of the State. I was 9 years old when I went back to the Kimberley Centre. I was now in a different ward, where the conditions were horrible – there were 40 kids in a dormitory. We had to share a pool of clothes and grab what we could. We never had our own underwear. There was no privacy and there was nothing to do. We were colour coded



in groups and had labels and categories. We weren't treated as individuals, and we were neglected. Punishment was severe and out of proportion to the behaviour.

At the Kimberley Centre I experienced abuse and I witnessed abuse. It was there that I was first sexually abused by a male nurse. I was so young I didn't know what was happening. It should never have been allowed to happen. I learned not to trust people, just to try and survive as best I could. I became defensive and on guard all the time, just to keep away from violence and abuse.

If you were taken to Villa 5 at the Kimberley Centre, you knew you were in real trouble. The staff there were just evil. I saw this naked boy who had had an accident being hosed down by the staff using a fire hydrant hose. He would try to stand up and be knocked over again. I have seen many terrible things, but what I saw that day has stayed with me and still frightens me. It was a warning – if you misbehave, this will happen to you.

At one stage when I was in the Kimberley Centre, they gave me some medication that wasn't ever meant for me. Whatever it was, it had a terrible effect on me and made me lean on my side. The effects lasted for a very long time. I was sent home and my family thought I was playing up so I got in trouble, but it was the medication. I should never have had to endure that.

When you're shut away from the world, you're not treated as a real person with a life that actually matters. People who have power over other people are easily corrupted, and behind closed doors the human rights of others are often violated. This should not be allowed, but it was allowed.

At the Kimberley Centre, I personally had nothing and no one. I learnt that I was a nobody and my life didn't really matter. Children raised in institutions learn that good times don't last, and people come and go. The result of this is very negative. We struggle with how to relate to people, we are always different and somehow catching up.

When I was released from the institutions at age 15, I had to learn to live and to survive all over again. This is very hard to do. I didn't know lots of things other New Zealanders did. It was like I wasn't even a citizen. I didn't know about the All Blacks. I had never heard any of the radical music of the 60s. I didn't know about the Vietnam War. These things everyone else knew about – it was like I was brought up on a different planet with different rules.

I remember the Springbok tour of New Zealand in 1981. The protests about rights and freedom for people in South Africa. I remember thinking, what about the rights and freedoms of all the people in New Zealand locked away in institutions? I remember feeling like I hardly had any human rights. Nobody was marching for me, or for anyone else with a disability.

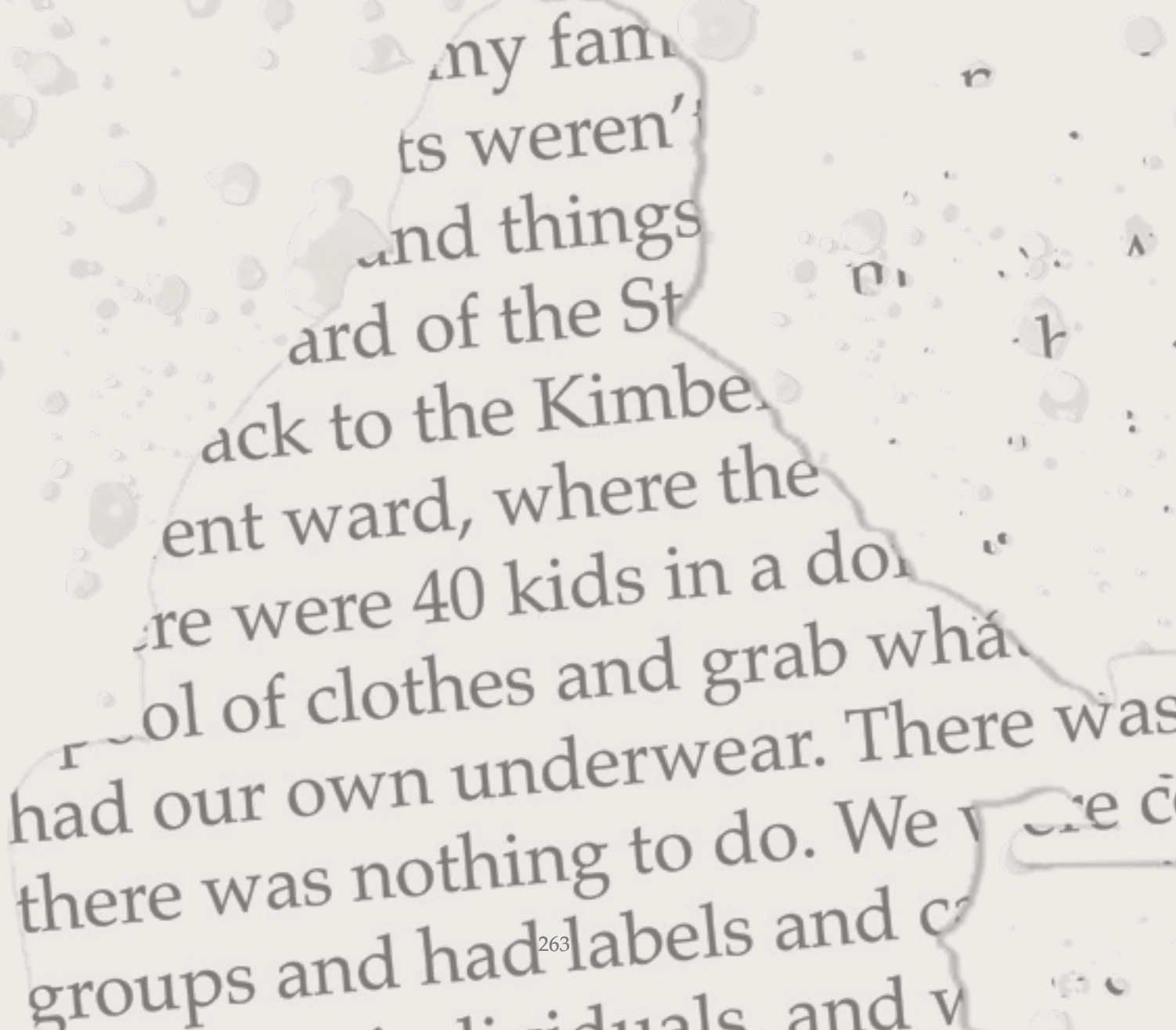
I since have fought for the rights of people with learning disabilities and closure of institutions in Aotearoa New Zealand and around the world. I was elected to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2016. I was the first person in the world with a learning disability to be elected to a United Nations Committee. I was knighted for services to people with learning disabilities in 2020.

I now live a proper life but I could have had this as a child. Children are innocent and it is too risky to leave it to the State to look after them. They need to be part of a family, they need love, opportunities and individual care.

I don't want disabled children to have the same childhood I did. My hope is that there is an end to segregation, institutionalisation and discrimination, and that all the children of tomorrow grow up in caring, well-supported families, and that schools, communities and societies shift to be inclusive of all people.

Everyone has a right to a life instead of wasting away in institutions waiting to die.

Source: Witness statement of Sir Robert Martin (17 October 2019).



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I didn't tell anybody, because I was scared

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# Skyler Quinn

**Hometown:** Ōtautahi Christchurch

**Age when entered care:** 8 years old

**Year of birth:** 2003

**Time in care:** 2011–2014

**Type of care facility:** Foster homes – various; residential family homes in Spencerville and Oxford

**Ethnicity:** European, Māori

**Whānau background:** Skyler has an older half-sister, who was taken into care before Skyler was born.

**Currently:** Skyler lives in Ōtautahi Christchurch.

**I'm aware that Child, Youth and Family (CYFS) was involved with my mother before I was born, and that my older half-sister was taken from my mother. My mum was sterilised when I was born, so she couldn't have any more children. Dad says that CYFS told her she had to have the operation or I would get taken away as well. He says it affected my mother's mental health, and their relationship as well.**

My parents separated when I was about 18 months old. I lived with my mother, then my parents lived together for a while – co-parenting in the same house. Later, my mother moved out and was living with a guy who had a criminal conviction for sex with a minor. I went into my father's care because of that, for about a year and a half.

When I was 6 years old, there was an incident while we were camping where I broke my arm. I just remember that I tried to get out of the car door, and my father grabbed me and I got hurt. It was recorded that I told the doctors that my father hurt me on purpose, but I never said that. After that, I had to live with my uncle and aunt in Swannanoa. I was there for about a year before I got sent away.

I was 8 years old when I went into foster care. The first six homes I went to were so close together, they're all muddled. At times, I was only at one place for one night, and then a week or two weeks. I started having panic attacks. I would wake up thinking really fast and I couldn't stop it. I told my social worker at the time and I know that she tried to get help, but nothing happened.

I remember really liking some of the carers. Mostly though, I ran away from the homes. At one place, there were two boys about a year or two younger than me. Some things happened there, like those childish games you play, like 'doctor, doctor' and all that. I can't explain what happened, because I felt like it was my fault, but I didn't know. I remember crawling out the window and running away with one of the boys.

I don't really remember much about the others that I ran away from. I was either running away because of where I was, because of the way I was treated or because of the place. I was having problems and I couldn't handle it. Sometimes I ran away with some of the other kids and we would get into trouble.

I went to 18 different foster homes in a short period of time, before I went back to my uncle's home for about a year when I was 9 years old. They're not all documented, but I believe I was placed in 30 different homes overall, not including the times I went back to places. I also went to almost as many different schools. No one ever told me why I was leaving any of my foster homes, except one.

I also lived in residential homes – I think there were two that I went to. When I was about 8 years old, I went to one in Spencerville. That was when I first started developing my personalities. All of a sudden, I would have this burst of anger that I had never had before. I have a scar from breaking a window with my hand one time.

There were three boys and four girls living there at that time, but all older than me – 13 to 16 years old. Once I woke up with a bloody nose as one of the older girls had punched me. That was also around the same time I first self-harmed. For whatever reason, I was removed from this home, then I was in and out of foster homes again.

I went back to the Spencerville home when I was 10 years old and I was assaulted again by some of the older girls. I was still the youngest – the others were all teenagers. I woke up to girls punching and kicking me, and I got dragged out of bed by my hair. I hid in the bathroom curled up in a ball. The worker in the home found me and the girls were locked outside to protect me. I had to make a statement about what happened, and I had an x-ray on my jaw. One of the bones is dislodged and is still uncomfortable.

The next year, I was also sexually assaulted multiple times at a residential family home out in the country, near Oxford. I stayed at this home on four occasions. The last two times, a boy who was staying in the home assaulted me. The first stay with him was not as bad, but it was more severe the next time. It happened almost every night I was there.

On one occasion, I woke up not being able to breathe. I was on my period and I told him to fuck off. He wouldn't listen. Then I blacked out. I woke up naked and bloody because of my period. It still carried on after that. I didn't tell anybody what was happening at the time because I was scared and I knew I would get blamed for it.

When my social worker first mentioned the idea of going to Australia, I said yes. My mum's sister and her husband lived there, and I wanted to be with family. I was 11 years old when I went to live with my aunt and uncle in Toowoomba. I stayed there for almost four years.

They were sweet and nice to begin with, but then by halfway through year six, stuff started going downhill. The verbal abuse in the house from my uncle was bad. There was also an incident with my uncle near the end of that year, where he pulled me from one room into another by my hair because I didn't clean my room properly.

At around the same time, a boy at school started forcing me to do certain things. It was constant and, because of everything that had happened to me, I just shut up about it. I didn't know how to say no or stop it happening.

Another incident with my uncle ended with me leaving. He got angry after collecting me from an event, and I was crying a little in the car, sniffing. He threw his phone at me and asked if I wanted something to cry about. He grabbed my hair and pushed me down to the seat, then straight up so my head hit the ceiling of the car.

After school the next day, I went to the house of the boy I was dating at the time and told his mother everything. They took me to the police and I filed a report. I ended up in the Australian foster care system and went to emergency housing in Ipswich.

My aunt and uncle went to court because of what happened. The outcome was that I had suffered emotional and physical harm as a result of neglect from them. After everything that happened with my uncle and the boy, I spiralled. I abused alcohol and drugs. I ended up pregnant twice and miscarried both times.

My first suicide attempt was in mid-2013, when I was 10 years old. I started to drink some bleach, but my sister turned up and saved my life. By the time I left Australia when I was 15 years old, I had been in hospital six times for suicide prevention, six times for self-harm prevention and twice because I nearly died because I cut myself so deep on my legs.

During those difficult times, I had a 'second mum' who helped me get back to New Zealand. I wanted to see my mum and they said that if I was free of self-harm for a month and no drugs in the system, then I could go. I returned to New Zealand in 2018.

I live with multiple personalities and severe depression. At times, my mental health is not good and I have been in Hillmorton Hospital. I have anxiety related tics, borderline personality disorder and bipolar disorder.

You should be able to feel safe as a child. My parents were in care as children and then it happened to me. It has lifelong effects and I can't see that I will ever be able to work.

I haven't had good help around me to support me with my trauma, mental health and disabilities. I think there should be more support and help for people that suffered abuse in care.

**Source:** Witness statement, Skyler Quinn (20 April 2023).



“

I was given forced internal examinations – they were humiliating and degrading... Every day I was told I was a liar, a trouble-maker, or that I was nuts

”



# Susan Kenny

**Hometown:** Ahuriri Napier

**Age when entered care:** 12 years old

**Year of birth:** 1954

**Time in care:** 1962–1971

**Type of care facility:** Girls' homes – Margaret Street Girls' Home, Miramar Girls' Home; psychiatric hospitals – Kingslea, Sunnyside, Porirua, Lake Alice; family home – Taradale; borstal – Arohata.

**Ethnicity:** Māori – Ngāti Apa

**Whānau background:** Susan has two younger brothers, and two older half-brothers on her mother's side. Susan was the only child who went into care.

**Currently:** Susan has five children and has been with her husband John for more than 20 years. Her children were taken off her by the State; one of them was adopted out. Her youngest daughter died in 2010 when she gave birth to twins, and Susan and John are raising her children.

**I ended up in care because I kept running away. I was running away because my half-brother was sexually abusing me. Everything had been alright until that started. I was 9 years old, and he would have been about 16 years old. He told me if I told anyone, he'd kill me.**

I grew up in Napier, living with my parents and my two older half-brothers on my mum's side, and my two younger brothers. My mother didn't really like me – I didn't have a close, loving relationship with her. I did have a good relationship with my father, who was a very peaceful man and didn't like conflict.

I ended up telling my mother about my half-brother sexually abusing me, and she took me to the doctor to check if I was still a virgin. I remember it clearly – she bought me an ice cream and told me we don't talk about these things with anyone else. The police were called and there was a big fight. My half-brother was removed from our home. My mother then had a breakdown.

Even though my half-brother had been removed from the home, I kept running away. I wasn't allowed to talk about the abuse at home, and I used to have a horrible guilty feeling that it was all my fault.

I ran away so many times, my social worker decided I had to go into care. I remember the police telling me I ran away 50 times in one month. I was playing on a playground and was dragged off by a social worker. First to a psychiatrist and then to the Taradale Family Home.

At the home I was sexually abused. The father of the home made me stand in the laundry naked, and he touched me, sexually. He said I had to stay there, naked, in the laundry so I couldn't run away. I found a pair of shorts and ran away. I told a social worker why I ran away, but he wasn't interested and didn't believe me. He thought I was a bad girl and a liar.

I was taken to Margaret Street Girls' Home in Horowhenua for a few weeks. I ran away as soon as I got there, and when they took me back, a staff member suggested to the other girls they should kick me and punch me.

Then I was sent to Miramar Girls' Home in Wellington, where I was physically and sexually abused.

At Miramar I was put in secure, where a male staff member punched me in the head and face. I think it was punishment for running away and being a nuisance. I was raped by one of the male staff members, a man with red hair.

They gave us internal examinations at Miramar, which were humiliating and degrading. Every time you ran away and came back you had to have one before you went back among the other girls. The examination was to check for venereal diseases. If you complied, it would be mainly done by female staff. If you didn't comply, then it would be done with both male and female staff present. The examinations became commonplace for me.

Later I was in Kingslea. I was subjected to anti-psychotic medication and forced Paraldehyde injections. I spent most of my time locked in secure, and drugged up – I think they drugged me so I couldn't run away. If I did anything wrong, they injected me in my backside – staff held me down and I'd feel like my neck was going to snap off. I was also given Tryptanol and Largactil, and I knew to take those because if I did, I wouldn't have to get an injection. The medication made me heavily sedated and very fat. I was drugged up most of the time.

I had little stints of school at Kingslea but most of the time I was locked up and I couldn't go. In my files it says I was below average intelligence.

The doctor I saw at Kingslea was a nutcase psychiatrist. He made me think I was nuts. He asked if I heard voices and I thought I'd be smart and say yes. That was not a wise thing to do.

I was sent to Sunnyside, given medication along the same lines as what I was given at Kingslea, and put in a ward of people who had committed murders. I saw violence every day. It was horrible and I hated it. I had trouble sleeping there. I remember having a thing stuck on my head – I think it was an ECG, but I don't remember exactly.

I don't even know why I was sent to Sunnyside.

I wrote letters to my social workers about what was happening to me in the institutions. I told them about the abuse, by letter and in person. I told them about the bashings and the internal examinations. Some, but not all of the letters I wrote were on my file when I requested it from MSD – none of the letters I wrote about the abuse had been put in my file.



When I was younger I thought my social worker supported me and was a friend of mine, because that's how he came across. Later on, when I read the things he wrote about me in my file, I realised he thought I was a liar.

I was sent to Arohata Borstal for two years and nine months, at just 15 years old. The first thing they asked when I got to borstal was if I wanted to keep taking my medication. I said no, and the staff put it in the rubbish.

I had no schooling while at borstal – I just worked on a farm, and didn't get any skills I needed for living. I was nearly 18 years old when I left, and when I got out I went on probation.

During my time at Arohata I went to Porirua Hospital for a brief visit.

Although I was a voluntary patient I was locked in my room at night. A staff member told me I was there for good. I managed to escape with another patient but the police caught us and I was taken to Lake Alice.

They put me on medication that made me very sleepy and unable to move. It was horrible, I just sat there like a zombie. I wasn't like the other patients there – they were really mentally ill and didn't know who they were. I had no psychiatrist visits and didn't see any other kids while I was there. I saw staff hitting and kicking patients for things like wetting the bed. They didn't deserve the treatment they were given.

I was too scared to say anything or do anything wrong, so I just shut up, and eventually I was sent back to Arohata. All the women I met there, their souls were just as broken as mine.

I would hate anyone else to walk my path in life. State care sent me into a spiral of despair that no young girl should ever have to experience. I came from a family where all my siblings ended up in top jobs, whereas I went on to attempt suicide, go to psychiatric hospitals and end up addicted to anti-anxiety pills. I've experienced panic attacks and I've had a number of abusive relationships in my life. I had no qualifications when I left care, and that impacted the sort of work I could find.

I feel like I've been judged because I was in care. People make assumptions about you.

I'm so distrustful of social welfare not just from my experience as a child but also later with my own children. The same social worker who put me in care also took great delight in taking my own children off me. She claimed I left my daughter in the house alone. I adopted my son out, thinking I was doing the right thing.

We need to believe children – what children are telling us is not a pack of lies. What children are saying should be believed and acted upon.

I want to share my experiences and tell the government and the people of New Zealand that this really did happen. I am amazed I have survived to tell my journey of abuse at the hands of my so-called carer, the State.

**Source:** Witness statement, Susan Kenny (15 July 2021).

“  
Hokio was  
a hellhole  
”

# Tani Tekoronga

**Hometown:** Whakatū Nelson

**Age when entered care:** 11 years old

**Year of birth:** 1974

**Time in care:** 1985–1992

**Type of care facility:** Foster homes; family homes – Opawa Group Home, Tāhunanui Family Home, Richmond Family Home; Boys’ homes – Stanmore Road Boys’ Home in Ōtautahi Christchurch, Hamilton Boys’ Home in Kirikiriroa Hamilton, Epuni Boys’ Home in Te Awa Kairangi ki Tai Lower Hutt, Hokio Beach School near Taitoko Levin; girls’ homes – Kingslea Girls’ Home in Ōtautahi Christchurch, Miramar Girls’ Home in Te Whanganui-ā-tara Wellington; youth justice facility – Rangipō Detention Centre near Tūrangi.

**Ethnicity:** Scottish, Irish, Cook Islands / Māori (Ngāi Tahu)

**Whānau background:** Tani has two older sisters and lots of older and younger half siblings. They didn’t live together but he went to school with some of them.

**Currently:** Tani has always been close to his mum and recently reconnected with his dad. He has a son from a previous relationship. After being in care, Tani went back to school and studied. He then travelled and lived in Scandinavia and Australia, working in forestry, farming, hospitality and the music industry.

**There was lots of violence at home and the cops knew but they didn’t do anything about it because they were family friends. The teachers at school knew we were getting beaten too but I think it was seen as the typical ‘darkie’ situation. At the time, I was the only darker-skinned pupil in the whole primary school.**

In 1985, the day before my 11th birthday, my mum left my dad. It was a dark day. My parents then went through a custody battle over me. It dragged out until eventually the judge wouldn’t award custody to either of them, and instead made me a ward of the State. By this time, I was already in State care. I was 11 years old.

That was the beginning of me being shipped all around the country. I remember just wanting to be with my mum. I got into a lot of trouble with NZ Police during this period and racked up a bit of a record.

I went to Hokio Beach School in 1987 when I was 13 years old and was there for just over a year. I’m not sure why I was sent to Hokio. It might have been because I was getting into trouble and playing up.

Hokio was a hellhole and the most traumatic placement I was in.



As soon as you got to Hokio, you had to 'run the line'. You had to run down a narrow hallway with boys on both sides, and they could do anything they wanted as you went down. It was carried out by the boys, but I wouldn't be surprised if the staff invented it. The physical abuse from staff was bad, and almost daily. A senior staff member would smash us if we did anything wrong, and staff would punch us in the guts or hit us across the back of our heads. We would be beaten for small things like moving too slowly, if your shoes weren't polished right, if you didn't clean quickly enough or if you answered back at all. I still have scars from that staff member's beatings.

One time, the senior staff member locked four of us into separate rooms and then went through each, one at a time, and beat us. I was the last one to be beaten. It was worse because I could hear him beating each person before he got to me. There was a strong gang and kingpin culture at Hokio. One day the kingpin got me into his room, pushed me down on the bed and sexually assaulted me. I was embarrassed, ashamed and scared. I didn't tell anyone about what was happening at Hokio because there was no one to tell, and there was a big 'no-narking' culture. I crawled into myself and stayed there.

Several boys tried running away from Hokio and a few of them died while on the run. I tried running away too – I was caught, beaten by staff and put into the secure unit with a Bible, the only book we were allowed. I spent a couple of weeks in secure and it was horrible. The second time I ran away, my records show that I stole a school van along with three others and drove it through two fences and into a staff car. Anyone who tried to run away would be punished, along with the rest of the population – this was part of the 'jail' or 'institutional' politics.

I was eventually discharged from Hokio when I was 14 years old. I had very little life skills, and I went to live with Mum. When I was 15 or 16 years old, I went into corrective training, and then I was in and out of jail until I was about 22 years old.

I still carry this stuff around with me. It's like carrying a rock in your chest. It affects everything I do. It's painful and it makes me feel like damaged goods. Under that, there's the anger and the disappointment. I was a smart kid – if I had a chance, I could have done a lot more. It pulls me down constantly. Looking back at my time in care, there were no positives. There was nothing there that you should be doing to a kid. The only good thing was when I was able to get out of it.

I did want to do well in life, I did want to be better and to be good at something. But because of what has happened in the first 20 years of my life, and having no stability, it has made me feel like I am useless, crap, that I will never be good enough and that I don't deserve good things.

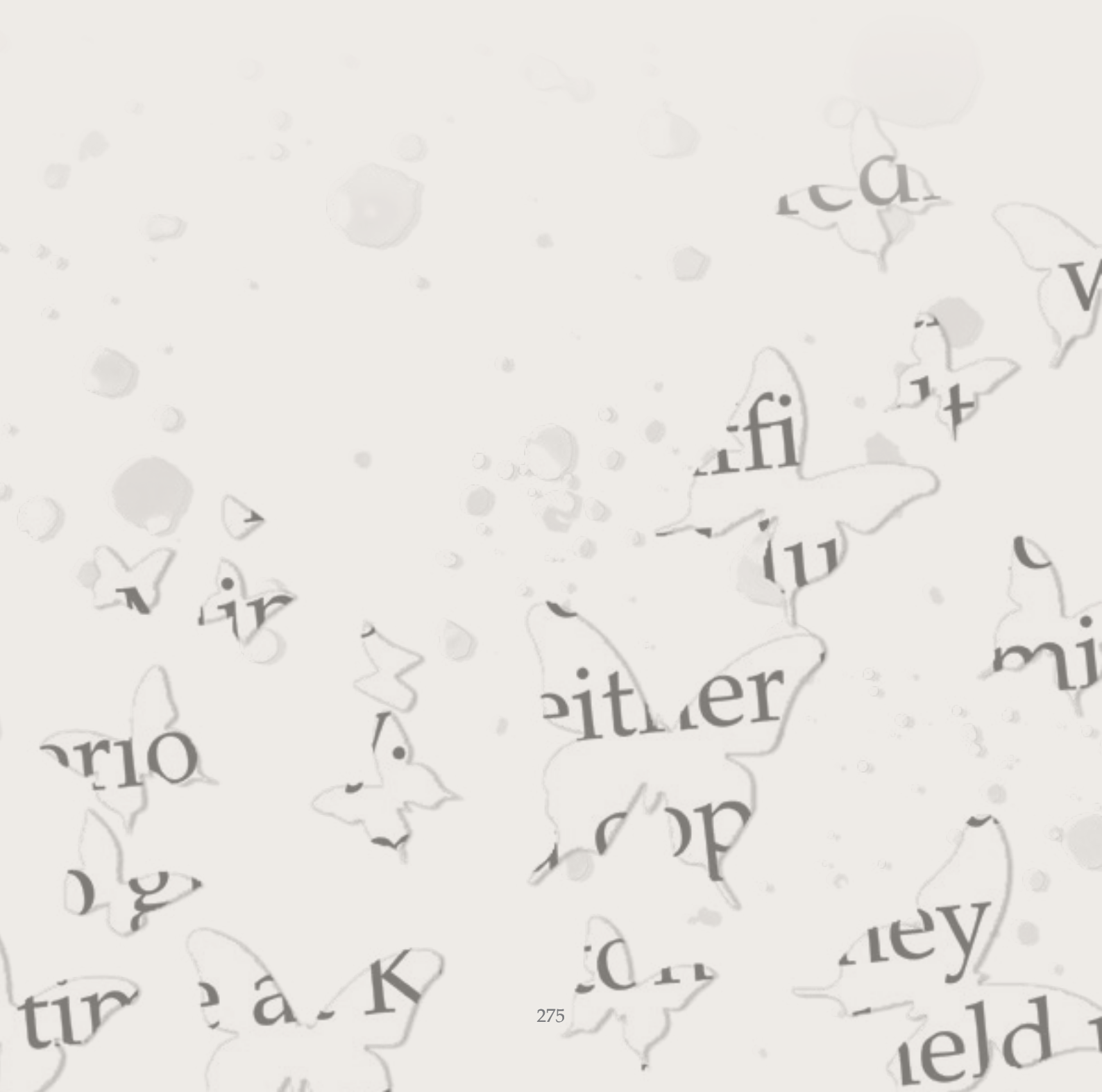
Kids need to feel loved. They need someone who believes in them and genuinely cares about them. But all I heard was, "you're a piece of shit", "you're useless" and "you're jailbait". I didn't feel loved, I didn't feel wanted, I didn't feel I could do anything.

Because of my upbringing and time in care, I have a distorted image of love. I came from shit, went into shit, came out and found a shit relationship, because that's what is familiar to me. I found it difficult to leave because shit is all I knew and maybe that's all I deserved – that's what my thinking was.

When I was at Hokio, I got involved in the culture group. A large number of boys in the group are either dead or in prison now. I have a photo from then. Every one of the boys in that photo has suffered, even the ones that made me suffer. I don't want retribution against any of them. I want the Government to know that they really screwed up some people's lives.

The system is broken – you can't treat a kid like that and expect them to come out alright.

Source: Witness statement of Tani Tekoronga (19 January 2022).





“

I was never  
schizophrenic,  
I was simply a  
lesbian

”



# Ms OF

**Hometown:** Waihopai Invercargill

**Age when entered care:** 17 years old

**Year of birth:** 1960

**Time in care:** 1977–1984

**Type of care facility:** Psychiatric hospital – Ward 12 Southland Hospital, Cherry Farm Psychiatric Hospital

**Ethnicity:** Māori – Ngāti Kahungunu

**Whānau background:** Growing up, Ms OF's home life could be violent, but she knew she was loved and supported. She is close to her brother and four sisters. Ms OF was the only child to go into care, and her parents were devastated to find out what happened to her at Cherry Farm. Her mother has since passed away, and her father still lives in Invercargill. They have a reasonable relationship.

**Currently:** Ms OF has a partner, who encouraged her to study. She also has a daughter in her thirties, and a grandson. She was friends with her daughter's father but not in a relationship with him. Her daughter has been diagnosed as being on the autism spectrum.

## **I was in Cherry Farm on and off for 10 years. I was told I was crazy, and treated like I was crazy, but I wasn't crazy when I went in there.**

Growing up, I had a family that loved me, but it wasn't the best environment. There was the normal sort of argy-bargy with my brother and sisters, and my parents fought a lot, but it was a violent home. There was no engagement with te ao Māori or with my culture. My father was frustrated with how Pākehā treated Māori.

Several factors combined to make me depressed and angry, including being sexually abused by a friend's father for about three years from 6 years old, struggling with my sexuality, and my best friend moving away when I was around 16 years old. As a result, I got into trouble a lot at school. I wasn't stupid but I was put in the 'cabbage' class. I think I was treated pretty unfairly throughout school simply because I am Māori.

I began attempting to take my own life and was admitted to hospital – and they just sent me over to Ward 12. I was admitted maybe three times that year. Before that, I had seen a school counsellor but not a psychiatrist. I had been involved with Ward 12 for probably a year before an incident that led to police involvement. I was then remanded to Cherry Farm for psychiatric assessment.

I was 16. Up until then I had probably been depressed, but not psychotic.

On my first day, a woman who'd had a lobotomy picked me up and threw me, for no reason. In the showers, women would smack me in the back of the head, and nothing was done. I was in with a bunch of very unwell women.

I saw a counsellor when I was admitted. I remember being told I was a lesbian because I had penis envy, and that I came out of my mother's body the wrong way and got damaged on the way out. I was diagnosed as schizophrenic. However, I was never schizophrenic, I was simply a lesbian.

They focused on the schizophrenia and what they described as my 'personality disorder'. This involved constant treatment. I would act up about a lot of it, but they would simply increase my medication or add something new.

I don't believe my parents consented to me receiving ECT treatments. I don't think they even knew about it until they came to visit. But they wouldn't have challenged it because doctors were gods. Everyone's view of doctors at the time was the same.

A normal course of ECT was three times a week for two weeks but I would go four or five times a week for weeks on end. We'd be herded into a room and one after another we'd go in and then be trolleyed out. I was given anaesthetic, which contained a muscle relaxant to ensure I was asleep, and electrodes were put on my head. After the shock I would be zombified.

We did a deep sleep programme in the narcosis unit where they filled us up with highly addictive barbiturates and didn't tell us much. I wasn't asked for my consent. It probably went on for six weeks, but it could have been several months. I was so out of it that I really can't remember a lot of what went on.

I do remember going to court when I was about 18 or 19. There was no social worker or support person, just nurses. I think I had to sign something after they decided what was going to happen to me. I believe I was put under a section of the Health Act where I had no say.

The punishments at Cherry Farm were horrendous, and I started cutting myself because of them. I hadn't been a slasher before that. We'd be put in seclusion, which meant being put in a room with windows and a cardboard potty for up to 12 days – they wouldn't tell you how long it would be for. You'd be naked with only a horse blanket, and they'd observe you. I hated isolation and I don't like locked doors because of it.

I was never sexually assaulted at Cherry Farm but there was some physical harm. Once I had a serious cut on my wrist, which the doctor stitched without anaesthetic, on purpose. The pain was excruciating but I didn't want that bastard doctor to see me cry. A student nurse was watching, and she cried.

When I first went to Cherry Farm, there were separate units for males and females. Once, as punishment, I was taken to the male ward. There were rapists, murderers and child molesters in there. Men would also do stuff to your clothes in the drying room and your clothes would be covered in whatever.

I was afraid of men even before I went to Cherry Farm. I didn't like being around them, except for my brother and father. I think the staff knew about my fear. Male staff would observe me when I was naked and supervise baths and showers. We couldn't do anything because if we misbehaved, we'd be dragged down to seclusion again.

I did make some friends in there and I was close with some of the nurses. One gave me a hug once, but a senior nurse saw it, so the nurse was shipped off to another unit. I thought it was weird they couldn't even show affection.

Mum and Dad came to visit every month and it was traumatising for them. It was clear I wasn't getting any better, and they couldn't understand it. Dad told me how one time I was dribbling and incoherent. I don't remember that, but he said it was simply heartbreaking. They were devastated when they found out what happened to me. Mum died thinking it was their fault. I've told Dad we can't go back and change it, but I do feel sorry they feel so guilty.

I got out because one of the doctors saved me. She took me under her wing, got me off the drugs and into a job. She said she understood this wasn't right and that a young woman shouldn't be like this.

When I left, I initially went home to my parents, then moved in with my sister and got a job. It was hard because I didn't know how to function properly and I had a lot of issues, particularly with alcohol. This became too much so I went to AA and got sober.

I had my daughter in 1989. I was friends with her father, but we weren't in a relationship. I wasn't taking any drugs while I was pregnant but was still getting injected with a very strong anti-psychotic drug every few months. I said I wouldn't take it anymore because of what it might do to my baby. They said it wouldn't do anything major, but they were wrong. She was in neonatal for over a week, twitching, with low body temperature and wouldn't feed. I did some research and found getting the injection in the first and second trimester can cause this.

My daughter has some issues and has been diagnosed on the autism spectrum. She isn't living the life I'd like her to, but she's okay.

I met my partner, and she encouraged me to go to a polytech open night, which led me to start studying. I now have two degrees and have worked in public health for 14 years, including for the DHB that locked me up, which is ironic.

Once, when I was in seclusion, I was extremely distressed and could only think of the life I wanted. This included having someone I love, children and grandchildren, travelling and being educated. The staff at Cherry Farm said I'd never have these things, but now I do. I did it all without their 'help'. Without their drugs.

I am very proud of who I have become, but I am extremely frustrated at how I was treated, like a piece of shit, like a nutter. There was no schizophrenia, it was just a waste of years. You simply wouldn't do that to a 16-year-old now.

I do have survivors' guilt. So many in there died, a lot of them by their own hands, and I didn't die. I still have nightmares about being there and trying to get out. I still get anxious, and some smells take me back.

Thank goodness those places have gone but the issue remains the same – no one listens. We must listen to those with mental health issues.

**Source:** Witness statement, Ms OF (21 November 2022).



“

I knew I had  
no one to  
turn to

”

# Mr PM

**Hometown:** Waihi Beach

**Year of birth:** 1974

**Type of care facility:** Foster homes; boys' homes – Hamilton Boys' Home in Kirikiriroa Hamilton, Weymouth Boys' Home in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland; Te Whakapakari Youth Programme on Aotea Great Barrier Island; police station cells.

**Ethnicity:** Pākehā

**Whānau background:** Mr PM lived with his mother until she died when he was 10 years old. He then lived with his father, stepmother and two stepsisters.

**Currently:** Mr PM is a truck driver, although he is currently unemployed. He has two children.

## **My mother died when I was about 10 years old and my world turned upside down.**

**I was good at school and sports but began to hang out with the wrong people and became involved in burglaries. I didn't have a mother and father and proper family. I had a stepmother and stepsisters that didn't want me.**

I was considered uncontrollable by age 12 and was taken into State care. The police brought me home several times. The youngest age that I recall being held in a police cell was at around 14 years of age. On one occasion, my parents told the police not to bring me home. I had become a nuisance to them and they wanted me to go somewhere else.

I was in and out of foster care and boys' homes, then I was sent to Whakapakari. I was 15 years old.

At first, I thought it was wonderful. I went snorkelling, diving and fishing, and they kind of nurtured us a little bit to start with. There were only a handful of white boys and we stuck together. There were lots of boys there, some the same age as me and some a lot older.

But things quickly changed. The first alarm bells for me were hearing children screaming at night.

The supervisor carried a gun and would wave it around when giving us direction. He'd beat us and get kids to beat each other. He slept in the tents with us, and I noticed him moving around the beds at night and doing things to the boys. I saw him doing it every night, although it never happened to me.



Once, he took me and two other boys into a tent. There were two older boys and he told us to take off our clothes and told the older boys to fuck us. I freaked out and ran, but he caught me and beat me. Back at the tent I heard some horrible noises. The younger boys had been beaten and raped. One of them was literally holding his arse, he was in severe pain. The other boy was speechless, holding his arse and he could barely walk.

Another time, some of us were taken up the hill and the older kids and supervisor tried to beat us up and rape us. It was the same older boys involved again. We got a huge beating. The supervisor told us to get our clothes off but because I had been in a similar sort of situation, I knew what was going to happen so I ran away into the shed back at camp.

It was then that I knew I had no one to turn to. I was shit scared.

On another occasion, the supervisor took us down to the creek to a flat grassy section and made us dig our own graves. He made us get in and lay face down. We weren't allowed to look, and he threatened to shoot us. He started shooting into the air and we were screaming, begging for our lives and freaking out. It was horrifying. If we tried to get out, he'd kick us back in. I thought this was going to be the end of my life, and I didn't know what we'd done to deserve that treatment.

There were many beatings while at Whakapakari, both by other boys and by the supervisor. Sometimes he would line us up and beat us. I recall a group named the 'Flying Squad,' who were a group of kids who used to beat people up. The supervisor used to orchestrate all the beatings and rapes. He created a sick culture at Whakapakari, like a fight and rape club. I still wonder where he learned to be the way he was.

The day before I left Whakapakari, the supervisor took me and another boy to his camper. If I'd known what was going to happen, I would never have gone in there. He followed us in with his gun and said, "Get on the fucking bed". He put the gun on the counter and raped us both. It was too much pain for me to take and I started squealing and freaking out and he smashed my head down into the fucking pillow. And I just shut down in shock. We had to stay there all night. What happened in that cabin was putrid.

Later, I went back to one of the boys' homes and I was put into secure and beaten again. But nothing was ever as bad as Whakapakari. I pretty much didn't fear anything after that place.

For many years, I felt lots of shame and couldn't tell anyone about what had happened to me. I just walked around trying to hide what had happened.

In 2019, I heard about the claims process for those who had been placed in care as children. When I contacted MSD, I asked about compensation. My case manager said I was up to no good and trying to scam them. I struggled to get anyone to answer my calls. The way I see it, they invaded my life and ruined it and when I asked for help they sent me away.



I had to stop driving trucks because of my post-traumatic stress disorder. I contacted ACC to try and get paid leave from work, but they won't help me. They think I'm a scammer too.

I have absolutely no faith in ACC and MSD. They don't know me, but they question me, trying to catch me out to be a liar. The system got me raped. The system got me where I am now. And when I do speak up, they all run for the woods.

Whakapakari taught me that bad things can come with smiles. Just because someone is smiling at you doesn't mean they're nice.

Source: Witness statement of Mr PM (23 March 2021).

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really had a  
relationship  
with my  
mother

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# Ms QP

**Hometown:** Grew up in Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington, lived in Porirua, lives in Stratford currently

**Age when entered care:** 11 years old

**Time in care:** 1971 – 1975

**Year of birth:** 1960

**Type of care facility:** Orphanage – St Joseph’s Orphanage in Te Awa Kairanga ki Uta Upper Hutt; schools – Wellington High School Special Unit; girls’ homes – Miramar Girls’ Home, Kingslea Girls’ Home in Ōtautahi Christchurch; psychiatric hospital – Porirua Hospital

**Ethnicity:** Cook Island Māori

**Whānau background:** Ms QP’s father died when she was two, and she didn’t have a good relationship with her mother. She is the third of four children – with an older brother and sister and younger brother. Her older brother died in his sleep, and her younger brother committed suicide. She has had no contact with her sister for 16 years. She has a large wider whānau but doesn’t have much contact with them.

**Currently:** Ms QP gave birth to seven children. Some spent time in the care system and one was raised by his father’s family. One daughter passed away in 2007 and Ms QP brought up her son. She is now a great-grandmother and has a good relationship with her remaining children.

**I have experienced a lifetime of abuse that can’t be erased or forgotten, from family members and various partners, as well as events at Miramar Girls’ Home. There are still flashbacks and memories that haunt me.**

I never really had a relationship with my mother.

Dysfunction was part of the problem in my family. I love my Cook Islands heritage, but my mum would never let me embrace it. She didn’t want to know her people. There seems to be a lot of shame in my mother’s family.

I remember lots of beatings. It is now thought my deafness came from those frequent beatings with the vacuum stick, and a shoe with a stiletto that went in my ear. I can vaguely remember hearing things when I was about 2 years old. After that, when I was getting hidings, I sort of felt things went quiet. No one in my family ever acknowledged I am Deaf. I was always thought of as stupid, and I was always called “stupid”.

I had no inkling I was Deaf, but I was aware that kids were making fun of me, and teachers at primary school were always annoyed with me. I also stuttered. I was always put at the back of the classroom because they thought I was a problem child. I wanted help with my schoolwork, but reports said I didn’t want to learn and wouldn’t



listen. When I think back, the school didn't do right by me or the other kids who were disabled. There was a lot of prejudice in those days.

At home, I remember the bangs and the hits, and being picked up by my arm and thrown into a room. I think the most embarrassing part was going to school on swimming day and hiding. One of the girls saw bruises going down my backside and my legs. She ran and got the teacher, but they didn't do anything. I think that was when you didn't get involved.

When I was 10 years old, I went to stay with my aunty because my mother was in hospital. I went to New Lynn School and got speech therapy for my stutter, but they still didn't pick up on my hearing loss.

In 1971 I went to St Joseph's Orphanage in Upper Hutt because Mum was still in hospital.

I went to St Joseph's School and the teacher there noticed my deafness. I had just turned 12 years old. The head nun told me I could get hearing aids, then I got special help for my learning. It was a good feeling, but it was short-lived. Happiness doesn't last long, I discovered.

When I turned 13 years old, I had to go home. I was safe for a wee while as my uncle and aunty were living with us but then they moved into a new house. I was alone again. I needed protection from my mother but that wasn't happening.

I ran away when I was 13 years old. I didn't know anything about the streets, I just knew I had to get out. Eventually my mum caught me. I told her I wouldn't go home, and we went to Social Welfare. I told them I'd run away again if they sent me home. That's when they placed me at Miramar Girls' Home. I thought I was going to be safe.

Some staff at the home were good, but some weren't. They ignored the bullying that went on. There were lots of violent girls and many had gang affiliations. I was mocked for my stutter and some of them would hold me up against the wall, four to one, and one of them punched me in the eye. I told the staff, but they didn't do anything.

There was no care and no compassion or understanding. No one tried to make us feel safe or wanted. I would call it neglect. The only time they'd pay attention was if someone stepped out of line.

I started at Wellington High School when I was 13 years old. After about six weeks at the girls' home, I was allowed to go back to school, where I'd been put in a special learning class with a lot of intellectually disabled kids. I thought I did know quite a bit and I wanted to learn more but felt I was still being taught at primary school level. When we came out of our class the more academic students used to give us shit, like: "Oh, here goes the dumb dumbs, the retards." That just really sets you back.

When I went to school, the girls at the home expected me to bring smokes back. I had to buy them with my own money, which was meant to be my lunch money. When I didn't bring the smokes, they would be bitches, walk past and slap me across the head.

One day six of us girls were told we were going to the hospital for a checkup. It was actually a checkup for venereal disease. I had no idea what was happening. I was put in stirrups, and it was really painful. I was still a virgin then. The doctor doing the procedure was a cruel bastard. I tensed up and he said: "Why are you crying, you must have liked it." Some of us were only 14 or 15 years old.

I was never told anything about sex. I was still in care when I was gang raped by four guys, and I got an STD then. One of the girls set me up. It was my weekend out, but instead of going home this girl encouraged me to go to her uncle's house – it was actually a gang pad. No one from the girls' home checked I got home safely. Mum was angry because I got home late that night. Of course, I didn't tell her what happened.

The social worker at the home didn't believe me when I told her. She said it didn't happen. She shut me down. And I just felt like, because of my disability, it's another tale coming out of my mouth. So, I just kept quiet.

There was one social worker I did like. He was the one my mum punched in the face, because he called her a child abuser.

After about three months at the girls' home, I was sent to Porirua Hospital. I was told they would put something on my head and use waves or something. I had to lie on the bed and hold onto the bars because it hurt. It was like lots of zaps in my head. No one told me why I was having it. I only went once but it seemed like I was there for ages.

I was so glad when I got out of the girls' home and went to Kingslea. It was a good place for me. At Kingslea they told you what was going on. I think that was one of the best homes I went to.

I'm now seeing a counsellor who has not only helped me with the sexual abuse, but also with my experience at the girls' home. I'm feeling a lot better for it – I feel like I'm free. Counselling has really cleared up a lot of bottled-up pain, hurt, betrayal, confusion and injustice. I'm feeling good that a lot of this has gotten out.

I was that child who wanted to be loved and nurtured but that love never came. I know I was trying to get out from where I was, to get away from violence and just trying to find a happy space. But I'm happy with my life now. My kids tell me I broke the cycle.

Thinking about my experience, we need to be really careful with the people some of these poor kids are going to. We need to protect our kids more.

**Source:** Private session transcript of Ms QP (June 2022).

“  
Nobody wanted  
a broken  
teenage girl  
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# Tania Kinita

**Hometown:** Rotorua

**Age when entered care:** 14 years old

**Year of birth:** 1971

**Time in care:** 1985–1988

**Type of care facility:** Family homes, foster care

**Ethnicity:** Māori – Ngāti Hineuru, Ngāi Tahu, Te Arawa, Ngāti Whakaue, Ngāti Tūwharetoa.

**Whānau background:** Tania has one half-brother and four sisters.

**Currently:** Tania has five tamariki and two mokopuna.

*Ko Titiokura te maunga*

*Ko Mohaka te awa*

*Ko Te Haroto te Marae*

*Ko Mataatua te waka*

*Ko Ngāti Hineuru te iwi*

*Ko Te Rangihiroa te tangata*

*Raua*

*Ko Kakaramea te maunga*

*Ko Waikato te awa*

*Ko Ohaaki te Marae*

*Ko Puaharangi Manunui*

*Ko Ngāti Tahu/Ngāti Whaoa te iwi*

*Ko Te Rama te tangata*

The theft of my culture and my right to te ao Māori is entrenched in my whakapapa, and this is the ancestral history load that I carry with me, or the muri kawenga that sets the scene for my experiences of abuse.

My maternal grandfather served in Turkey in WWII, and he suffered post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). My mother had a strict upbringing and is a survivor of sexual assault. My father served in the war in Vietnam and suffered undiagnosed PTSD, and there is also a history of sexual abuse in his generation. My mother and father parented out of this background of trauma, of mental health issues, of alcohol and drug abuse and intergenerational sexual abuse. When my mother was hapū, she wanted a

son because she already had two daughters before me. I had a twin, but my mother miscarried my twin while she was hapu and this is when the disconnection between me and my mother started. This disconnection was the foundation of our relationship.

I was 14 years old when I was made a State ward. I was told that my parents no longer had any rights to me and I belonged to the Crown. This made no sense to me. I am not a piece of land.

We grew up around violence. The violence we experienced and witnessed as kids was almost always connected to alcohol. My dad would sexually abuse me when they were drunk or when my mother was working. My father was very good at instilling a type of wairua of separation between myself and my sisters, and myself and my mum. We never spoke to each other about the abuse we were suffering until eventually I built up the courage to speak to my older sisters about the abuse and tried to create a plan for us to escape.

I ran away with my cousin, but Social Welfare caught up with us and asked me to disclose what had happened and why I had run away from home.

I told them that what I said was not to be repeated to my mother as it would rip her to pieces. I had memorised everything about the abuse from my father. The time of day, what he was wearing, where he placed the knife that locked the door, where my mother was. They breached my confidentiality and sent my mother the report of everything I had disclosed, without telling me. This completely broke my trust. Reading the report, my mother tried to kill herself and then decided I was a liar.

They took me to hospital to have an internal examination and I was absolutely petrified. A few days later they took me to court to emancipate me from my parents. I didn't understand what was happening.

My first placement was Kingsley Family Home, run by a Māori Mormon couple. Most of the children who were placed in Kingsley were put in there because they committed a crime. This was confusing for me because the only crime I committed was running away from home and disclosing the abuse by my father. There was a policy at the time that stated that Māori children needed to be placed in a home that had at least one Māori caregiver. So, when I think back, I think that my placement at Kingsley was intentional. The issue with this practice is that there was nothing at the time that required Social Welfare to look at options within the child's own whānau.

After Kingsley, I was placed with a foster family and they were loving. But my social workers heard that my foster mother had struck up a relationship with my parents, and my dad wasn't allowed access to me, so they moved me. They put me in a car with a black plastic bag filled with all my belongings and took me to my next home. You know you're a foster kid if all your belongings can fit in a black plastic bag.

I was never part of the decision to move me, and I had all these thoughts like: Why was nobody talking to me, why can't I choose where I live, why can't I live with my Auntie, why do I have to live with strangers? When the car pulled up at the next home, my thoughts were racing – I knew the family and I didn't feel safe here. My concerns didn't matter to my social worker, he dropped me off and was on his way.

My foster father was extremely violent and abusive. He knocked me out, pummelled my face black and blue, cracked my cheek bones, broke my nose, sprayed my blood

up the walls and kicked me senseless. My social worker came to a meeting and all he said to my foster father was, “that’s a bit extreme, isn’t it?” and sent me home with him again. I completely shut down at this point. No one listened to my voice, and nobody wanted a broken teenage girl.

My foster father constantly made comments with sexual undertones and invited older men to come to the house and spend time with me, bartering prices with these men to marry me. On one occasion a man came to our house and asked me to marry him. He was getting closer and closer in my personal space and I wanted to be left alone. I told him I was only a kid and I did not want to marry him. That night he got drunk and committed suicide. My foster father blamed me for him taking his own life and gave me a hiding.

When I turned 17, I left my foster home. I left there a shell of a human. I was dissociative, like a zombie. There was no transition plan for me, and I had no money, no understanding of how to make money or how to apply for a job. Social Welfare had located a relative who was willing to care for me, my Uncle Charlie. Uncle Charlie was heartbroken when he discovered that I had been in care all those years and that they didn’t try to locate or notify him about my situation earlier. It broke me to know that he was always waiting and ready to care for me.

I’m aware that my foster father works in an evangelical Christian church and is part of a men’s programme. I have no words for how let down I feel, not just for me but for everyone he continues to ‘help’.

Today I’m the proud mother of five tamariki, and four pēpi in heaven who I miscarried. I have two beautiful mokopuna too. When I went on to have my own tamariki, I realised I didn’t know what a healthy family looked like. I had to watch other people to see what these qualities were and teach myself.

Once I had my own children, I grew to despise my mother. I couldn’t understand how she didn’t defend us, as I would die for my tamariki. Today I have no relationship with my parents. Occasionally, I pop in to see my father and see how his health is progressing and whether he is prepared to say sorry yet. That day is yet to come.

Being made a ward of the State stripped me of all connection to my identity. This trauma has left me with a huge sense of loss. I am still fighting to decolonise myself today. The work I need to do to reconnect to my cultural identity falls on my shoulders alone.

I don’t know if the PTSD ever goes away. I’ll get a flashback because someone looks similar to somebody. I’m extremely sensitive to noise, and children screaming is a trigger for me. The doctor said I had bipolar and needed to be on medication. Couldn’t I just be sad? I’d never given myself permission to cry and grieve. Labelling me and forcing me to take anti-psychotic drugs was not tikanga.

Romiromi healing has been my therapy and balances my wairua and mauri, helping me to recover from the years of trauma I faced. I fight with every ounce of me that I have to heal. At 50 years old I can say that I love the life I have created for myself. I have an inner drive and strength to heal and restore my mana. I will not be another Māori statistic. I don’t know where this strength came from, but I don’t just want to survive – I want to thrive.

**Source:** Witness statements of Tania Kinita (2 August 2021, 17 September 2022).



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It felt as though  
no one was  
listening

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# Taraia Brown

**Age when entered care:** 5 years old

**Year of birth:** 1975

**Hometown:** Motueka

**Time in care:** 1981–1990

**Type of care facility:** Faith-based school – Shiloh Christian Academy (“the school”)

**Ethnicity:** Cook Island Māori

**Whānau background:** Taraia’s heritage includes a Māori mother and a Cook Island father. Taraia is the second oldest of four sisters. Her older sister and younger sister both attended Shiloh Christian Academy, but her youngest sister didn’t. Currently, Taraia lives in New Zealand with her English husband.

**It has taken me 40 years to have the courage to speak up and tell my story. I was sexually, physically and psychologically abused from 6 years old until I was 15 years whilst I was a student at the school.**

The sexual, physical and psychological abuse at school has caused immeasurable harm to me in so many areas of my life. I have worked hard over the years to heal from the trauma of the hands-on abuse. The physical violence and the regular deprivation of liberty has left me vigilant and on guard. Every day, I know that three of the teachers who abused me are still teaching in schools. The fact that these teachers are still teaching continues to disturb me 40 years later. This knowledge exacerbates my pain and adds a constant stress and grief to my life.

A male teacher at the school who was a role model to many students engaged in sexualised behaviour with young girls. He would expose his male genitals or move me up and down on his knee whilst pushing his penis into my bottom. I observed him doing this with other female students. On one occasion, whilst reading quietly in the school reading room he entered the room unexpectedly. I was trapped and had to physically fight him off me. During this incident, my school uniform was ripped in several places. I was terrified and the feelings of terror, combined with suffocation is still a vivid memory for me. This teacher exposed his genitals at school so frequently, it encouraged male students to do the same. It was uncomfortable and frightening.

Even though I was a very young child when the abuse began, I knew that sexual abuse and physical abuse was not right. I pleaded with my parents to change schools for many years. It felt as though no one was listening. I felt trapped and deprived of personal liberty.

I received physical beatings from five teachers at the school regularly. One of the female teachers at the school administered most of the beatings and she would scream at me that she was beating the devil out of me. At times, it felt as though she would go into a frenzy and the only way to survive was to hold onto your ankles and pray for it to be over.

All beatings were accompanied by a scripture from Proverbs in the Bible, “spare the rod and spoil the child”. I was physically beaten on my upper thighs, bottom, lower back and middle back on over 1,800 occasions, receiving an average of 4 or 5 blows per occasion. This amounts to a total of approximately 7,200 strikes on my body, which started when I was 6 years old.

On two occasions I was hospitalised for severe bruising and swelling due to the beatings at school. I also saw our GP, who discussed his concerns at the welts and bruises on my body with my mother. I still carry some of the scars of those beatings on my upper thighs.

I suffered from suicide ideation as a child. I cried constantly, wet the bed and suffered from fear and anxiety every day. My only solace was to self-harm, which released my pain and grief. I considered suicide frequently as a child as the only way out. As an adult I try not to think about this period of my life. It is raw and painful to look back.

I continued my schooling there until I was 15 years old. By then I had grown tall and strong. At my last scheduled beating, with the female teacher who had beaten me for nine years, I responded by threatening violence. I was suspended because of this. A week later, my parents made the decision to withdraw myself and my sisters from the school.

In my late teens, I suffered from bouts of rage and violent thoughts and found myself in constant conflict without understanding its cause. I sought opportunities to release the anger, grief and rage whilst intoxicated. My grief was palpable, and I was unable to control the rage. I would suffer from uncontrollable anger and violence directed at family, friends and strangers. I engaged in self-medicating behaviour much to my parent’s disappointment. I failed University in my first year and I withdrew from everyone to cope with my grief and depression, and an overall sense of failure.

It is difficult for me to trust people. I suffer from poor attachment and abandonment issues. I still struggle with trauma symptoms especially nightmares, cold sweats, and severe insomnia some 30 years later and after many years of therapy. I hoped the memories would fade as I got older, but I suffer from constant stomach complaints, a diagnosis of adenocarcinoma (stomach cancer) and other digestive system related issues as a consequence.

I am aware of internal triggers which could lead to violence due to my long-term exposure to physical and psychological abuse at the school. It has taken years of therapy to relearn new coping mechanisms and regulate my emotions and behaviour. The physical abuse I suffered at the school continues to require constant effort on my part to regulate my symptoms, emotions and behaviour. I am prone to anger and if triggered I need to self-manage my symptoms and engage in de-escalation and calming techniques. I will need to do this for the rest of my life. For this reason, I never fully relax, and I am vigilant about managing my thoughts and behaviour.



I have developed a strong and reliable moral compass due to these experiences. Working in the public sector I have gained a greater understanding of the importance of child safeguarding and duty of care responsibilities. My eyes were opened to the 'bystander role' the other teachers and church community played at that time when they provided an environment for the abuse to thrive. I wasn't the only student to raise this issue.

I was diagnosed with anxiety, stress and complex post-traumatic stress disorder as a consequence of my experiences at the school. I have received therapy for over 29 years. The economic and emotional labour to undo all of the negative messaging, self-loathing, shame, grief and depression as a result of abuse at the school has been intensive. I continue to work hard to overcome these entrenched messages to slowly replace the sadness and grief with positive experiences, joy, love and optimism.

I have held discussions with my father about the sexual, physical and psychological abuse experiences at the school, which helped me to process these experiences. He has explained to me that if he had his time again, he would not have sent my older sister, myself and my younger sister to this school. It's not an apology, but it's an acknowledgement of the damage that was done.

Children should grow up in a space where they are happy, safe and thriving. I didn't have that experience. I was robbed of a happy childhood and as an adult I am now re-claiming my childhood by being brave and speaking up. I owe this to my inner child.

**Source:** Private session transcript of Taraia Brown (17 August 2022).

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Terry was  
denied the  
ability to live  
with dignity

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# Terry Le Compte

## Statement by Judy McArdle about her brother Terry

**Age when entered care:** 16 years old

**Year of birth:** 1946

**Hometown:** Ōtautahi Christchurch

**Time in care:** 1963 – current

**Type of care facility:** Psychiatric hospital – Sunnyside Hospital in Ōtautahi Christchurch; residential care – Spreydon House, community group housing, Salvation Army Men’s Centre, veterans’ home

**Ethnicity:** Pākehā

**Whānau background:** Terry was one of five siblings, with two sisters and two brothers, and parents who cared about him. When he went into care, his family tried to visit him and ensure he was being looked after.

**Currently:** Terry’s father passed away and his mother lives in a rest home. Terry is currently under the care of his uncle, and he stays in a retirement home, which is ill-suited to his needs. His family feels powerless to help their son and brother – they struggle to find the right care for him due to him being labelled a paedophile, and his situation requires constant re-explanations to authorities. Terry struggles with being social and doesn’t like to be touched, so affection only happens on his terms. The family is seeking reassessment for Terry to see what funding is available so he can make the most of his life.

**When he was a child, my brother Terry, had rheumatic fever and polio. This left him with a very low IQ, and no understanding of his behaviour or consequences. This means he has the mental and psychological age of a child and is easily bullied and manipulated.**

When he was 16 years old, our parents were pressured into admitting Terry to Sunnyside because he was difficult to manage and used indecent language with children. Police threatened my mother, saying if she didn’t admit Terry, they’d take action against him. He was discharged three years later, in 1966, after our parents insisted he be returned to our family.

Later that year, Terry was arrested and accused of making suggestive comments to two children. He went back to Sunnyside and was committed under the Mental Health Act in 1967. He was deemed unfit to plead to these crimes and was never convicted.



However, he was treated as a sex offender at Sunnyside, and I think this removed any chance of him being rehabilitated and living with dignity.

Terry was forced to stay in a ward at Sunnyside until 1986. During that time, the staff restricted our family's visits, claiming we couldn't care for him. We tried to visit every week but were often stopped by staff who either didn't give us a reason or said Terry was in seclusion for disciplinary reasons. Terry would not have understood this – it's unlikely he would connect punishment with behaviour. We tried to understand what happened in seclusion, but staff told us it was none of our business. By limiting our time with him, they increased his social isolation and sense of helplessness and fear, which made his anxiety worse.

Terry described Sunnyside as “awful” and said there were “bad people there”. He said younger staff would rough up the patients, which involved pushing and shaking. The staff and patients would also laugh at him about how he walked, which was a result of the polio – this only added to his sense of shame and worthlessness.

From 1986 to 2003, Terry was placed in community group housing. I think he was moved just to get him out of Sunnyside. He was in Spreydon House for the first three years, even though it wasn't suitable for the type of care he needed. This is noted in his file, but he was kept there anyway.

None of the group homes were suitable – they were cold, wet, dirty and unhygienic. I would often try and clean the home for Terry and the other residents, but it wouldn't stay that way. In such conditions, there was no chance for Terry's mental state to improve. We were concerned by his living conditions, but we weren't listened to.

Terry was also bullied in group housing by the other residents. The homes didn't have adequate staff or support to manage residents' disputes or personalities and nothing was done to protect Terry as a vulnerable person.

Terry then spent 10 years in a Salvation Army centre for men. He was the only long-term resident. The centre wasn't designed or staffed to cope with the long-term care of an intellectually impaired man, and he was bullied constantly – this included physical assaults and theft of his property. Terry was incredibly unhappy, and his mental state deteriorated. Any independence he may have been able to enjoy was eroded by the inhumane conditions and his continued labelling as a sex offender.

Terry was treated as a lost cause and never as a vulnerable person whose life could be improved. He never received the care someone in his position should expect. At one point, we hired a nurse to shower him and support his care in the centre. But despite the lack of basic care there, Terry thinks it was better than the community housing.

Terry was transferred to a veteran's home when he was 67 years old. We have fewer concerns for Terry at this home, but it is a place for older people and therefore isn't a particularly stimulating place for someone with intellectual disabilities.

Terry has been labelled as a sex offender for decades despite never being charged. This has affected how he has been treated in care and by society. As a result of what would have been a minor crime if he'd been convicted, Terry was shut off and made a

pariah. He was denied any ability to integrate into the community, even though he was identified as being a nuisance, not a danger to society. The way he was treated added shame and created severe anxiety that has affected the rest of his life. He's never been treated as he should have been – as a patient with physical and mental health needs.

He was denied the ability to live with dignity.

Due to his time in care, Terry has chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, hepatitis, general anxiety and little or no bowel control. His doctors think his inability to control his bowels is due to the long-term use of antipsychotics, which can also result in hepatitis. I also believe this is why Terry struggled to communicate in any of his placements – once he stopped taking those medications, the quality and clarity of his speech increased and improved his relationship with staff.

Before Terry went to Sunnyside, he could read simple sentences and manage his own self-care and hygiene. He is now illiterate, cannot manage his own self-care and needs 24-hour supervision. In addition, his eyesight, dental care and hearing have also been significantly compromised, as has his ability to perform basic functions.

Our family's relationship with Terry has been damaged by his enforced isolation. We were consistently told we didn't know what was right for him and that we had no role to play in his care. This left him socially isolated and a victim of a system that didn't care for him or for us as a family unit. Despite not showing any signs of danger to children, Terry was not allowed to stay with me because of an imagined risk to my grandchildren.

Terry now has no hope of leaving care or living with much dignity. This outcome was avoidable and is a direct result of his unjust and enforced admission to Sunnyside.

It eroded any potential he had to be more.

**Source:** Witness statement of Judy McArdle (9 October 2020).



“  
We are the  
generation  
that needs  
to stop the  
damage  
”



# Toni Jarvis

**Age when entered care:** Adopted at 10 days old; entered a family home aged 7 years old

**Year of birth:** 1961

**Type of care facility:** Adoption; family home – Awatea Street Family Home, Trent Street Family Home; psychiatric hospital – Cherry Farm; boys' homes – Epuni Boys' Home, Hokio Beach School, Holdsworth School; borstal – Invercargill Borstal.

**Ethnicity:** Māori (Ngāti Toa, Ngāpuhi) and Pākehā

**Whānau background:** Toni's parents had a casual relationship, and Toni was adopted 10 days after his birth as his biological mother didn't have support to raise him. His adoption order was overturned in 2003 as it was illegal – it was arranged before he was born by a social worker and Toni's mother wasn't aware it was happening. His adoptive family had two children, one older than Toni and one younger.

**There was a lot of violence and abuse in my house when I was little. I used to wander the streets at a preschool age looking for toys and stimulation. I didn't get fed much so I'd steal food.**

A social worker visited me and found me beaten black and blue. I didn't think this violence was abnormal – I didn't know any different. I started to run away from home and Social Welfare got more involved. I went to a family home when I was about 7 or 8 years old, then after I turned 9 years old, I went to Cherry Farm. One of the doctors advised Social Welfare that they didn't have the facilities for a 9-year-old boy and that I would be placed in a locked facility with the adult patients, that the adults would corrupt me and the facility wasn't made for children. Social Welfare sent me there anyway. Social Welfare had the attitude of doing what they wanted, and not what was best, throughout my childhood.

I didn't know what Cherry Farm was, and I didn't have any understanding of why I was taken there. I was excited to go to a cherry farm – all I could think about was the tins of fruit salad, where there would only be one cherry. My siblings and I always fought for the cherry, and I was excited that I was now going to a farm of them.

Cherry Farm was a transit place for me until there was a spot at Hokio Beach School. I can't understand how the State could expect me to go to Cherry Farm and then later on manage to fit back into the community.

I entered the locked main area and it was like, welcome to the horror show, for a

9-year-old boy. The patients were very disturbed and mentally unwell, making noises, wailing, and making unusual movements. I thought, “what the hell is this” and I was still wondering where the cherries were. I went into a corner and got into the foetal position.

A door opened and an older man came in, shuffling towards me with his pyjamas around his ankles. He had a handful of shit and was eating it. He rubbed the poo on my face and head. I was screaming, but no one came. One of the other patients was masturbating and he ejaculated all over me in the corner. I was covered in shit and semen.

My bedroom was a cell with a slot for them to look in. I screamed, and they sedated me with Melleril. I had no mental health diagnosis, no assessment, and no understanding of why I was there.

Some of the patients were normal and could have a conversation. I was initially drawn to one of them as he played the guitar. He asked me to sit on his knee, and he bounced me around, then put his hands down my pants and his fingers up my anus. I threw billiard balls at him and was locked in a room for a few days for doing that. I screamed constantly to try to get out. I started to lose my sense of sanity. They regularly medicated me and I became quite docile.

I was constantly medicated after that, and the patients then had free reign to me. I was sexually abused at least six times when I went to the toilet. Groups of men would insert their fingers in my anus and grab my penis. I would urinate in my pyjamas so I didn't have to go to the toilet.

I was discharged from Cherry Farm after about six weeks, and went to Epuni Boys' Home then Hokio Beach School. The boys checked me out as the new boy, put me on a grey blanket and pulled me along the polished wooden floor. I thought this was fun until I got to the end of the hall. They swung me into the wall and pulled the blanket over my head, then started booting me. I went from being okay being there to complete fear.

I was regularly abused by a boy who was the kingpin, but it wasn't only him – some nights when the night watchman left my room, I could count the seconds before three or four boys would rape me. Initially I used to fight and squeeze my buttocks tight, then I just became a rag doll. As soon as the watchman did his check, I'd spit on my hand and wet my anus, and lie with my pants down – that way it hurt less.

I wasn't sexually assaulted by any of the staff, but I didn't feel like I could talk to anyone about the abuse. Lots of the other boys were also survivors of abuse and they were angry. The abuse was often just passed down the food chain. The culture at Hokio was to shut your mouth and not complain.

I believe I was in Hokio for just under a year, but my time there seemed like an eternity. I can't say how many times I was raped while I was there, but my guess is about 200 times.

I went to the Awatea Street Family Home next and it was a good experience, but after

about six months, the kingpin from Hokio arrived. He was only there for two days before the abuse started. He continued to abuse me there, about 30 times over the next five or six months. I didn't tell anyone – I was threatened and scared. I stole a bike and smashed it up, because I knew they'd take me away, and I wanted to get away from him.

I went to Holdsworth School next. The deputy principal would come around the dorm at night and kiss us on the lips – full and sloppy. He would then fondle us including putting his fingers in our anuses. I had been raped so many times I was conditioned to it, so it was the kiss that I found the most disgusting. Two other staff members were abusive when I was there, and some of the other boys. It was well ingrained in me by this stage to shut my mouth.

I ended up in Invercargill Borstal and later Paparua Prison in Christchurch. A lot of borstal and State care boys were also in prison. I changed a bit after I got out of prison, and I haven't been back to jail for 40 years since then. I still have a lot of issues and problems with violence, but I turned away from the life of crime that would have kept me behind bars.

I didn't know what a relationship was. I often ran away from relationships. I didn't know how to be intimate – I was used to being beaten and sodomised. Feelings of abandonment have never been far from the surface. I used alcohol as a coping strategy, but I stopped drinking to excess about 20 years ago.

I found out I was adopted when I was 19, and life started to make a lot more sense once I knew that. I've always questioned my identity. I struggle with it, because if I don't know who I am, then who are my children, my tamariki, my mokopuna.

My mental health was definitely impacted by my time in care. I struggled with depression but I didn't let it show. I was beaten until I'd stop crying, so I didn't cry for 30-odd years. I'd shut things out.

I believe we should receive an unreserved apology from the Crown for the abuse we suffered while in the care of the State, an admission of fault and a starting point for moving forward. Abuse can be prevented by getting rid of State institutions. The boys' homes were breeding grounds for abuse. It's gone on for too many generations. You can't care for children in institutional systems – kids need one-on-one love, encouragement and acceptance.

I've spent 44 years of my life looking for justice and answers. It's time for the State to be honest, stop the lies and deceit. I want the State to bring out all of the records, be honest, and put them on the table for all to see. This is a chance for real change, with the truth.

We are the generation that needs to stop the damage.

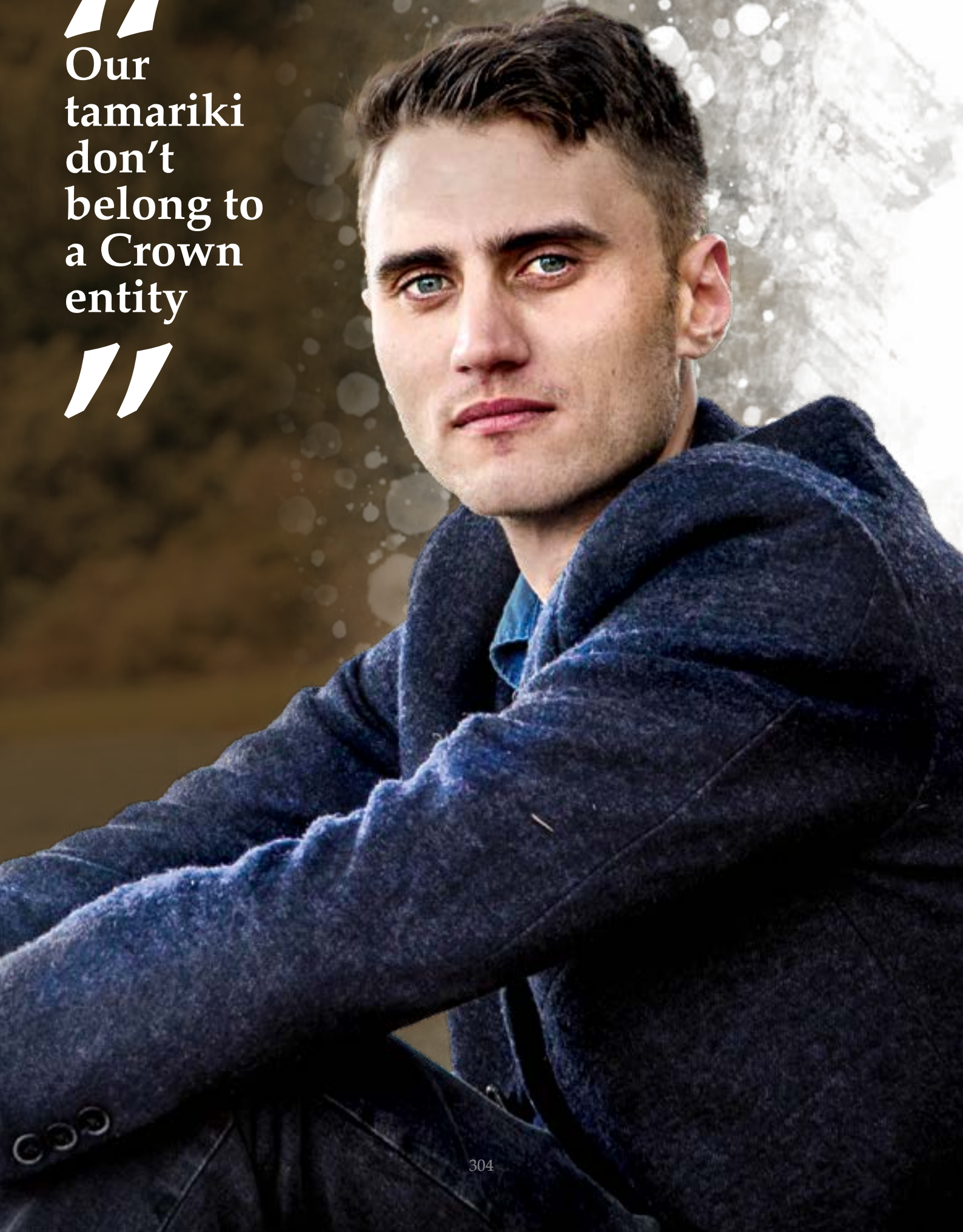
**Source:** Witness statement of Toni Jarvis (12 April 2021).



“

Our  
tamariki  
don't  
belong to  
a Crown  
entity

”



# Tupua Urlich

**Age when entered care:** 5 years old

**Year of birth:** 1995

**Hometown:** Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland

**Time in care:** 2000–2011

**Type of care facility:** Foster care

**Ethnicity:** Croatian and Māori (Ngāti Kahungunu)

**Whānau background:** Tupua has seven siblings, including a younger sister who was born 11 months after him. He is the second generation on his father’s side to go into the care system – his father and father’s siblings all went into care.

**Currently:** Tupua works with VOYCE Whakarongo mai to advocate voice and connection for young people in care, empowering children’s voices to be heard and listened to, and enabling a pathway to their cultural identity.

**I was 5 years old when I was torn away from everything I had known. Out of love for us, my mother made a call to my extended whānau in the Hawke’s Bay and they had a hui about our care. I have a very vivid memory of the day the whānau came to collect us. That is my first memory of true trauma. I will never forget that day, seeing my mother collapse to the ground watching us leave. I’ll never forget the pain of not knowing what was going on and where we were going.**

I was separated from my mother and siblings for many years. Being separated from my sister after being separated from my mother was nothing short of punishment, and it continues to have a lasting effect.

Aged five, I went to live with a caregiver in Flaxmere, via CYFS. I suffered severe physical and mental abuse while I was living with him. One day he gave me a huge beating and I was lying on the ground with a bleeding nose, when he turned to me and said, “Oh by the way, your dad is dead” and slammed the door. I was six years old.

When I was older, I took him to court for the abuse, but he was acquitted of all charges except one, for kicking me. That taught me that I was on my own. It was clear even then that I was up against the system. The second you open your mouth, the State just seems to push you from pillar to post. After that I didn’t have any stable placements – I’d go to school one day, and next thing you know, I’m going home to a different town or place. I had no voice in that process. I wasn’t valued – it was more like, you go where we say you’re going, and it doesn’t matter whether you understand it or not.

The abuse, the hopelessness, and the loneliness were terrible. You top that off with absolutely no stability, no direction, and so many things suffered – my education, but most importantly, my mental health.

I missed school because of the abuse, and nobody checked on me to see if I was doing okay. I wondered where the people who cared about me were.

I've got so many examples of racism, and I haven't met Māori in the care system who haven't experienced racism. The fact that there are so many Māori in the care system is a good indication of racism.

I had to go to lots of psychology and counselling appointments and there wasn't much room for learning te reo. When you live in a racist system, it makes you view yourself differently. The only time I saw a reference to te ao Māori was the koru patterns in the glass frosting of the meeting rooms in a CYFS building. I deserved more than that.

CYFS placed me with a caregiver who insisted on calling me Michael. That was driven by her purely religious views, and her understanding of the word 'Tupua' as evil and demonic. At school I wouldn't respond to the name and was grilled by teachers for listening, but my name is Tupua, not Michael.

I'm not as close as I'd like to be with my family, and that's a result of the State alienating me from my whānau. We had no contact with each other for many years. You can't make up for those years lost.

We are alienated because the system did not value us as Māori tamariki as belonging to a collective whānau, hapū and iwi. They throw these words around that they don't understand, and it shows how they treat our young people. Being Māori and raised in a system that is determined to separate you from your culture and knowledge is modern-day colonisation. They want to detach us from our people and our culture, and fall into a system that feeds their privilege, it feeds their position in Aotearoa.

Our tamariki don't belong to a Crown entity. Neither did I. Knowing who you are and where you come from, along with values defined by tikanga, are the right foundations for developing strong, healthy, independent, ready young people. It's like day and night compared to the system we were raised in.

I am the second generation on my father's side that has gone into State care – my dad and his siblings all went into care. They're all gone now – I'm the oldest one left in my whānau, and I'm only 27 years old. The result of abuse and trauma, and what the State does to our people is present even in death. This mahi is important to me as I'm the eldest left in my direct whānau line. You can't say that this isn't connected, because it absolutely is. The hardest part is living in a society that denies it is real.

The Crown has created a system in which we fall through the gaps. They look like the helping hand up, but they're the ones pushing us down. All care and protection residences should be shut down. These environments are prison-like for children with high needs, and what part of prison is therapeutic?

Just allow Māori to exercise being Māori, tino rangatiratanga. We don't need the Crown to give us power – we have always had it, and they need to respect our power.



Now I work with VOYCE Whakarongo mai to advocate voice and connection for young people in care, empowering children's voices to be heard and listened to, and enabling a pathway to their cultural identity.

I was very fortunate that I had some strong mentors come into my life. That's what makes me passionate about this work. I had people who saw me for who I was, not the way I was acting or behaving, because you're broken and you struggle to fit in. But a person sees you and is committed enough to bring out those leadership qualities.

We have hope, and we have hope because we're being heard.

**Source:** Witness statement, Tupua Urlich (10 August 2021).

“  
They were  
all Pākehā  
picking on  
me because  
I am Māori,  
it was so  
frustrating  
”



# Whiti Ronaki

**Age when entered care:** 6 years old

**Year of birth:** 1954

**Hometown:** Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland

**Time in care:** 1959–1969

**Type of care facility:** Kelston School for the Deaf

**Ethnicity:** Māori (Te Arawa)

**Whānau background:** Whiti was an only child. He was raised by his birth mother's cousin and his adoptive father. He has eight sisters and nine brothers to the same parents in his birth family.

**Currently:** Whiti lives in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland and does a lot of volunteer work with the Māori Deaf community. He is close to his children and grandchildren.

**When I was 3 years old, I got the measles and lost my hearing.**

**Growing up, they called me mischief. I had difficulty understanding whānau – I didn't understand how they were communicating with me. It was a problem. They thought I was being cheeky and I used to get hit and yelled at, but I was Deaf. My father would physically attack me, which made me so scared. He used weapons, anything he could get his hands on.**

I arrived at Kelston in 1959, then aged 6 years old. I was a boarder, and I was scared at the beginning. There were heaps of Deaf kids, and they were all signing. I didn't know how to, so I sat in the corner watching and learning. Most of them were Pākehā.

At dinner, I didn't know how to use a knife and fork and a teacher hit the back of my hand with the blade of a knife. That night before bed, I learnt about toothbrushes – I had never used one before.

When I went to Kelston, sign language was banned. If you tried to sign you were strapped. You had to be oral and talk. We had to wear hearing aids. I didn't like it. In the break, we would hide in the playground to sign, and if we saw a teacher we would stop. We learned to sign by watching each other. We made up our own way of communicating.

Even the Government banned sign language. This made learning in the classroom hard. I didn't know what the teacher was saying, and I wasn't allowed to sign and ask for help. The teacher would growl at me – she said we had to listen. The whole class had to learn how to lip read, but the teachers didn't know how to lip read.



It took me a long time to learn how to say hello – they said my tongue was lazy, but I was trying my best. I had to put a feather in front of my mouth and spit on it to make it move and make the right sounds. It was very difficult.

There was no Māori culture or te reo Māori taught at school. It was the 1960s, so we didn't have to be taught our language and culture. I was confused about my identity – I didn't know I was Māori and Mum and Dad didn't explain anything to me.

The staff were Pākehā. The cook was Māori. She used to take us in the kitchen and give us big bowls of ice cream. We would give her big hugs. It was just what we needed.

Some staff didn't like Māori children and didn't treat us the same as the Pākehā children – the Pākehā kids got toothpaste, but the Māori kids got soap. They would smell your mouth to make sure you brushed with soap. I was frightened. I complained to the principal, but he didn't believe me. The complaint failed even though I told the truth, and it was abuse.

There was a staff member that I hated, and another man too. At bath time they would use the soap and wash you for a long time then put their hands up your bum. The boys in the bath would play with each other, too. I felt yuck. The other kids would tell their parents what was going on, and they'd go to the principal, but he didn't believe it.

Growing up with the abuse, I would fight with gangs, fight with whānau. It was wrong, no one taught me – not my parents, whānau, friends. I had to teach myself, and I was trouble.

I found out about my biological family when I was 18 years old. One day I asked my real dad why he gave me away. He was so angry. His words hurt me, but I had the right to ask. That's why I got into the gangs and fighting when I was young – I was frustrated with my life. I was attracted to the gangs because it was a place that I had power and mana that I didn't have before.

When I was in the gang, the police were hard on me. I used to go to the pub on payday and I'd be drinking a jug of beer when they came in. I couldn't communicate with them, so they would grab me and put me in the truck. I'd be confused. They'd get my cards out of my wallet to find out my name. I didn't understand the way they communicated or the words they used. They would make up stories, like saying I pissed in the garden. I'd be charged and have to go to court. They would write a report that I didn't understand, and there were no interpreters to communicate with me. It was all oral, and even though I tried to lip read, I couldn't follow what was going on.

They were all Pākehā, picking on me because I am Māori. It was so frustrating and I would get angry. I didn't know why they treated me like that.

I met another Deaf man and I told him I was in the gangs. He said, "What are you doing that for? Come to the Deaf club. You can talk, and we do fun things. We play sports, you should come." I went to Deaf club without my patch, and I met heaps of people I went to school with. It was great talking and seeing them again.

When I left the gang life at age 25, the Māori Deaf community pressured me to change. It made me relax from the police always getting at me. I realised I wanted to join the Māori Deaf community to help them and the young ones. Now, I take my patch and talk to Māori Deaf youth about my stories and my journey in gangs. I tell them to not get involved, to think and be careful.

My most recent job was at Kelston school as a voluntary kaumātua. I visited a 10-year-old girl at school who was always in trouble. She was shocked, as she had not met a Deaf Māori man before. She told me her teacher was Pākehā and didn't understand Māori ways. I told the teacher and said if the teacher couldn't teach the girl, to get a Māori staff member or someone else. They asked me to come back and volunteer one day a week.

Before I got the job, the children feared me because I was covered in tattoos. I went to WINZ and asked if I could get them removed. It cost me \$20. When I got the job, the children asked where my tattoos had gone. I said they were butterflies and they flew away. I had changed – I became positive.

Due to how and what I was taught at Kelston, I was alienated from both the Deaf and the Māori communities. I couldn't understand the Deaf community because I wasn't allowed to learn in sign language. I was alienated from the Māori community, because I wasn't taught any language or cultural practices that would help me understand and be able to live as a Māori man. I had to learn later in life.

There is a disconnect between Deaf and Hearing people. A long time ago my daughter wanted to be an interpreter, so she signed up for a course. The teacher was Hearing and I objected – I told him the class should be taught by the Deaf.

I think there is also a disconnection when Māori Deaf attend events on the marae. Māori sign language needs more interpreters, as not many are fluent in te reo Māori and sign language.

When I sign in Māori I include Māori concepts, and mix it with English. When I do the karakia, on the marae, I sign in te reo. It should be voiced in te reo by the interpreter – to me it doesn't sound right to voice my karakia in English. If you visit my marae, my whare, my pōwhiri, that is my culture. When people understand that switch in thinking, they get it.

**Source:** Witness statement of Whiti Ronaki (20 June 2022).

“

I learnt  
you settled  
matters with  
your fists

”





# Wiremu Waikari

**Hometown:** Te Oreore Masterton

**Age when entered care:** 11 years old

**Year of birth:** 1954

**Type of care facility:** Family homes – Workshop Road Family Home; foster homes; girls’ home – Miramar Girls’ Home in Te Whanganui-ā-Tara Wellington; boys’ homes – Epuni Boys’ Home in Te Awa Kairangi ki Tai Lower Hutt, Hokio Beach School near Taitoko Levin, Kohitere Boys’ Training Centre in Taitoko Levin; borstal – Invercargill Borstal in Waihopai Invercargill; prison – Pāremoremo.

**Ethnicity:** Māori (Ngāti Porou)

**Whānau background:** Wiremu was raised by his uncle in a whāngai arrangement until he was 7 years old. He then lived with his mother, brother and a cousin before going into care at 11 years old.

**Currently:** Wiremu is a social worker and has degrees in social science and counselling therapy. He and his partner work together in education and coaching people who are facing trauma. Wiremu is a grandfather.

**Being placed into care meant the trajectory of my life changed drastically. I’m lucky that I survived it.**

**When I was 1 year old my mother gave me to my maternal uncle through the practice of whāngai. I had a happy childhood on a farm, immersed in Māori culture. When I was young, I was hit in the eye with a dart – I was declared legally blind in 1984 while in prison. I believed my adoptive parents were my real parents until, at 7 years old, my uncle gave me back to my mother. I think it was because I was very sick with eczema and asthma.**

I first came to the attention of Social Welfare after appearing in the Children’s Court on charges of burglary and theft. My mother tried her best but I was confused and angry – she was like a stranger to me. I would run away back to my uncle’s. At age 11 years old, I was placed in a family home. Then I was at various places including Epuni Boys’ Home twice. When I was 13 years old I was transferred to Hokio Beach School.

On the third night at Hokio, me and two other boys got a ‘welcome’ beating. Afterwards I was bleeding from the nose and mouth. I knew it was coming, so I was glad it was over. I experienced and witnessed physical violence and intimidation from staff and other boys almost every day. Some of the bigger boys knocked me out a few times.

By the time I got to Hokio, 'no narking' was thoroughly ingrained into me and I knew not to complain to anybody about the beatings. This was just as well, because I witnessed many boys being beaten for narking. Often, the younger, newer boys would take a while to figure out the hierarchy of boys, with the kingpin at the top, and would be beaten for narking to staff.

Another staff member set up fights in the gym a lot. It was said he was teaching us to defend ourselves, but what he taught me is that you settle matters with your fists. If you look back through my criminal record, you'll see that's exactly what I did.

One housemaster, who was ex-military, regularly punished me by making me run, duck walk and leapfrog around a huge field. He screamed and yelled at me like a drill sergeant, and repeatedly thrashed my legs, back and shoulders with a stick. He emotionally abused me, saying I was a "useless fucking black bastard".

The female nurses also sexually abused the boys. One nurse lived on site and she got me and another guy to go over to her house a lot. We weren't having penetrative sex with her, but we were masturbating and playing with her. There was no way we thought that this behaviour was abusive at only 13 years old. I had no idea.

Hokio was where I first learnt about gangs. I also learnt a lot about crime. A few of the housemasters tried to teach us right from wrong, but many did not.

I was sent to the secure unit at Kohitere as punishment for converting a car. It was like a real jail – everyone was yelling and you got hit if you didn't move like they wanted you to. The cell was hosed down at about 5am each day. I was forced to perform excessive physical training, which involved push-ups, medicine balls and sit-ups. I was placed in the secure unit at Kohitere another time for breaking into a staff member's house and drinking their alcohol. On several occasions during this stay I was denied food.

I was officially admitted to Kohitere five months after that. I was in secure for about a month before I was let out into the main residence. Kohitere was different from anywhere because there weren't any boys there, most of them were young men. I was 14 years old at this stage, but I was quite hardened – I was fit and strong. I received my initiation beating the first night. It was the expected routine so I knew that was coming. I had a blanket thrown over me and was punched and kicked by other boys. I was repeatedly hit with a pillowcase filled with heavy objects.

On several occasions, staff were present when other boys assaulted me but they did nothing. I frequently witnessed boys being beaten and stomped on by other boys and staff. Staff members also forced boys to fight each other. I was beaten, kicked and punched by boys on the command of staff members. I was also verbally abused. It became standard, that was just the way that we were treated and spoken to.

I was aware of sexual abuse perpetrated on younger, smaller boys. This involved forcing boys to perform oral sex and forced anal penetration of some boys with a broom. I was told boys performed oral sex in exchange for cigarettes and chocolate.

I witnessed other boys at Kohitere harming themselves. There wasn't anywhere for them to get help. Suicide became something that was normalised for me – it happened so often that I just began to accept it when people would disappear.

I had minimal education while at Kohitere, but instead I was exposed to and learnt about criminal conduct and activities from other residents on a daily basis, without intervention from staff members who were often present when criminal conduct was discussed.

It was the links I made in Hokio and Kohitere that led me to joining the Mongrel Mob when I was 16 years old. I loved it because I already knew them – I felt more at home with Mob members than I did with my own family.

In the 1960s and 1970s, gangs in New Zealand really kicked off because the boys' homes were feeding them with disenfranchised young people who were not nurtured by Māori or the State. That is definitely where my time in State care pushed me, and hundreds of other unhappy Māori kids, who weren't sure of themselves in any world.

While in prison, I left the Mob and on my release trained to be a social worker. I like to provide a cultural element, that is the most important thing to me. As a social worker, I sit directly with my people on a day-to-day basis. I witness the ongoing issues that my people face within the current systems and I understand how the systems must be changed.

I have done a lot of bad things, I have hurt a lot of people, shed a lot of blood. I'm fortunate because I'm quite happy with where I have got to in life – I can use my experiences to help others. Now I've got all these mokos to look out for and I don't want them to run into the same problems. I want them to have a chance.

**Source:** Witness statement of Wiremu Waikari (27 July 2021).



“

I started to question the belief that the leaders saw themselves as anointed by God

”



# Zion Pilgrim

**Age when entered care:** From birth

**Hometown:** Springbank

**Year of birth:** 1978

**Time in care:** 1978–2020

**Type of care facility:** Faith-based communities – Springbank, Gloriavale

**Ethnicity:** NZ European

**Whānau background:** Zion is the son of Faithful Pilgrim, who was a Shepherd and school principal at Gloriavale. Zion has 12 siblings.

**Currently:** Zion is married and has 13 children. Zion and his family left Gloriavale in 2020 and he is actively involved with the Gloriavale Leavers' Support Trust. Five of his siblings have also left Gloriavale. One of Zion's sons was a plaintiff in an Employment Court case against Gloriavale leaders.

**My wife and I married when I was 21 years old. We were taught that any form of birth control is evil and sinful so we immediately started a family. Eventually, we were sharing a two-bedroom space with our 12 children – we were given a third room in early 2020, which helped a lot.**

We were also taught that every man and woman at Gloriavale must have greater loyalty to the leaders than to their spouse. This means if the husband wants to leave Gloriavale, the wife cannot.

I was a trustee of the Gloriavale Christian Community Trust. The trust owned various businesses, including a passenger plane service from Greymouth to Wellington. I worked as a pilot in this business from 2004 to 2008. Then from 2008 until 2020, I was the head guide at Wilderness Quest New Zealand, a division of Canaan Farming Deer Ltd, also owned by the trust. We catered for predominantly American tourists and turnover was NZD\$1.4 million per annum. Once a year, a colleague and I would travel to America to attend trade conferences to promote our business. This role created conflict with my personal life because some of Gloriavale's core principles relate to being 'separate' to the world.

I became a Servant at Gloriavale, which is like a church deacon. I acted as support management for the Shepherds, who were the senior managers. We dealt with financial, administration, spiritual and disciplinary matters. If someone was not 'toeing the line' we would interview them, and people were encouraged to report those who may have acted in a way that did not reflect the leaders' teachings. Discipline from the Servants and Shepherds was seen as an act of mercy and love because if you were held to account and repented, then your soul was saved.

When I was at Gloriavale the leaders were not really concerned about sexual abuse. Their thinking was that women were the ones that have control, and you can't blame men for wanting or having sexual desires. Nothing can happen if women do not encourage it. If something of a sexual matter does happen, it is the woman's fault because she must have caused it by encouraging it to happen. It is never seen as the male perpetrator's fault.

If someone made an allegation of sexual abuse against a male member of the community, the leaders did not let the rest of the community know, even if children are involved. For example, a youth leader had a sexual relationship with an underage girl. When she left the community and made a legal complaint against him, he was initially allowed to keep his position and the leaders chose not to make the rest of the community aware of the potential risk to the young girls he interacted with on a daily basis or to take any steps to make sure it didn't happen again. He was only later stood down following pressure by an external report. I believe that the people at Gloriavale are still unaware of his sexual offending.

Parents who are unhappy with such situations can choose to stand up to the leaders, but this is extremely difficult. It may also make their children the subject of increased scrutiny and pressure.

I am aware that a young girl made an allegation against a teacher, Just Standfast, and the leaders blamed the girl for her involvement. Just Standfast was found guilty but the leaders took his side. He was signed off as a fit and proper person to teach.

The leaders also knew a young man in the community was sexually offending against young boys but they did not report his offending to any outside authority. The leaders told the parents of one victim they needed to better supervise their children so these things do not happen. They also told parents of other young boys to closely monitor their children and ensure they did not go out at night. They gave no reason for this warning and parents did not know the risk they were being warned about.

Eventually, this led to a police investigation relating to 63 people in the Gloriavale community – multiple perpetrators were identified and charges have been laid but there has been no accountability for the issues that allowed for this intergenerational sexual offending. The leaders knew about the offending, but were more concerned that someone had called the police, therefore betraying the community.

Because I spent a lot of time outside Gloriavale, I had access to outside scriptures and preaching through the internet. I started to question the belief that the leaders saw themselves as anointed by God, and that when they read the scriptures there was no difference between God and themselves.

I wrote a letter to Howard Temple, the overseeing Shepherd. I wrote the letter because I felt very strongly that changes needed to be made. When I spoke to him he said, "We are not going to change. We have been living this life for 40 years. People have had concerns but we are not going to change."



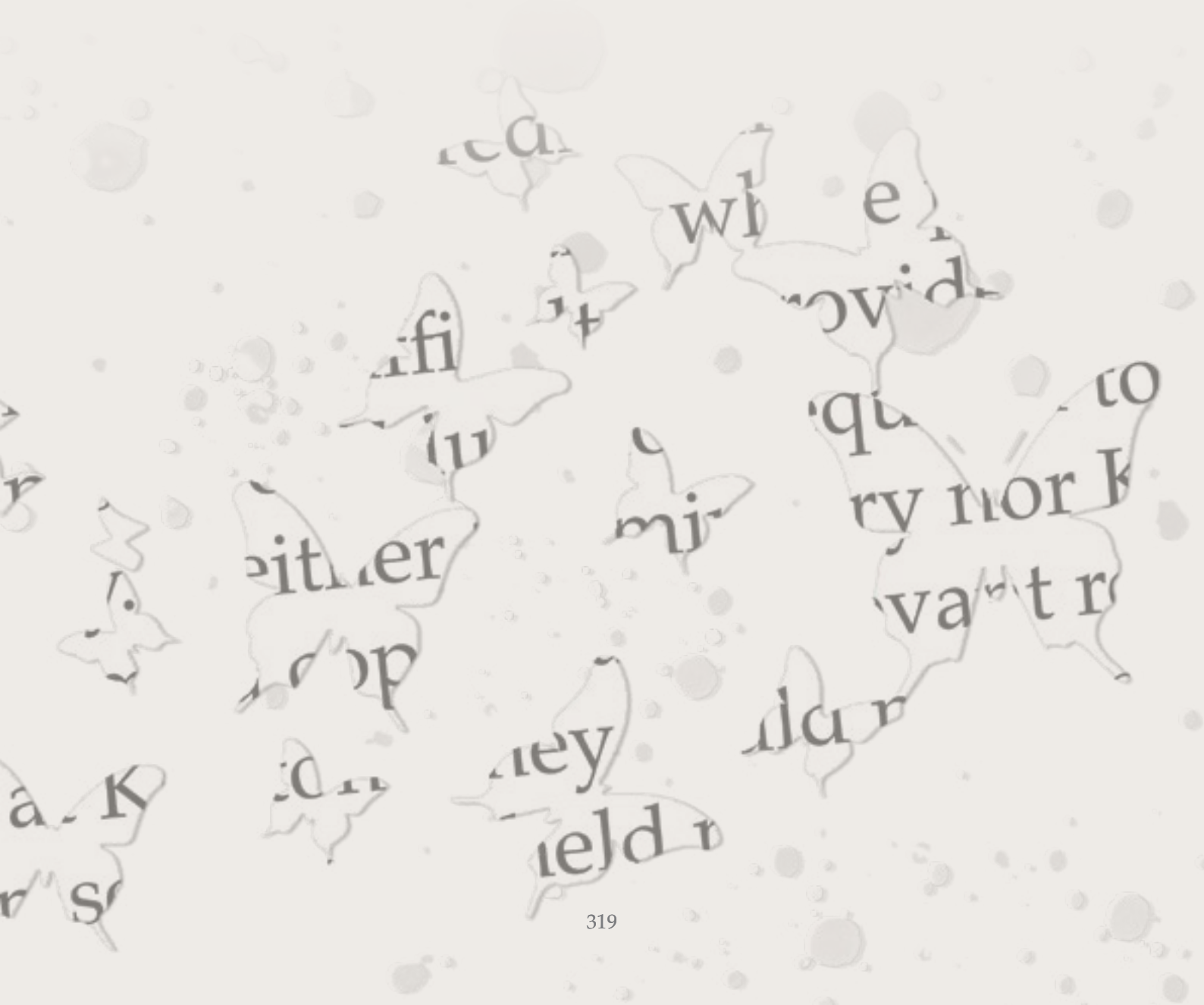
I was very disappointed with this response and sent a resignation letter to the trustees the following week. I was summoned to a disciplinary meeting and told in the opening statement that I would have to leave Gloriavale because I had talked with others in the community about my thoughts.

At a final meeting on 19 September, Howard Temple told me that my letter was judged to be completely wrong and it was rejected and unacceptable. My wife and eldest son were also required to be at the meeting and we were told that if we wanted to stay then we would have to reject all outside preaching, submit to the will of the leaders and give up our own thoughts and questions. We were also told we would have to reject our son if he would not reject outside preaching.

We knew this was wrong and we could not go against our conscience and give them complete and unfettered control of everything in our lives.

Our family left Gloriavale on 20 September 2020.

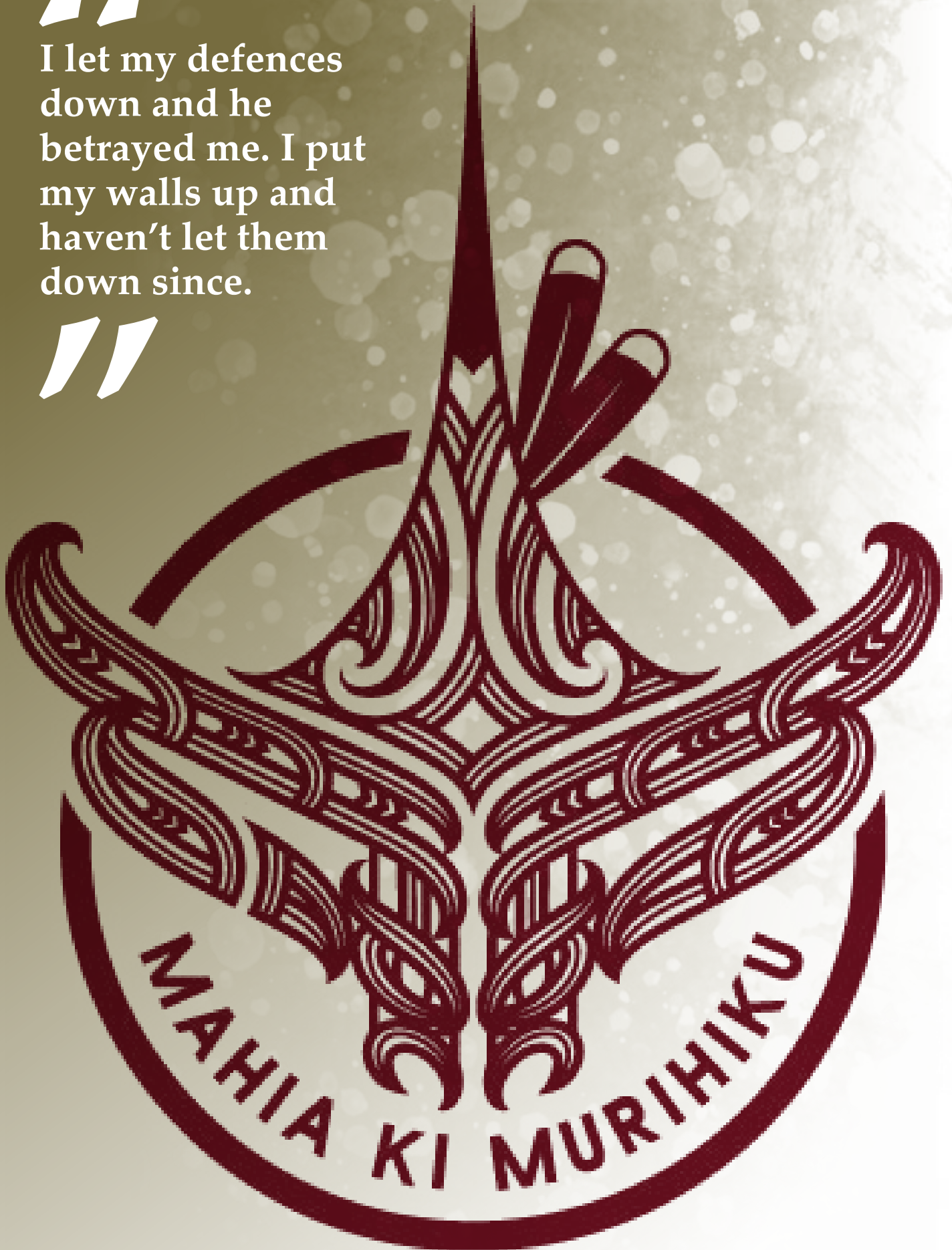
Source: Witness statement, Zion Pilgrim (10 August 2021).



“

I let my defences down and he betrayed me. I put my walls up and haven't let them down since.

”



# Mr RA

**Age when entered care:** 12 years old

**Year of birth:** 1988

**Hometown:** Kirikiriroa Hamilton

**Type of care facility:** Foster homes; family homes – Melville Family Home, Silverdale Family Home, Fairfield Family Home; specialist schools – Amber Centre Classroom; residential specialist schools – Waimokoia Residential School in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland; residential care – Weymouth in Te Tonga o Tāmaki Makaurau South Auckland; trust programmes – Piako Whānau Trust programme, Te Whakapakari Youth Programme on Aotea Great Barrier Island.

**Ethnicity:** Māori (Rongomaiwahine)

**Whānau background:** Mr RA has two younger siblings with the same parents, two half-sisters from his mother, and one half-brother and four half-sisters from his father. His parents separated when he was young but lived together in the same house a lot of the time.

**Currently:** Mr RA has spent time in prison. His children, whom he loves, were going to be taken into State care, but Mr RA opposed that, so they remained with whānau. Nevertheless, he feels he's passed on intergenerational trauma.

**When I was young, I was neglected at home and exposed to gang culture. My mother was verbally abusive and rough on me, and often violent to my dad. When I was 5 years old, there were concerns about violence and neglect at home and Child, Youth and Family Services (CYFS) got involved for a few months.**

When I was 9 years old, my principal referred me to Special Education Services (SES) because I was playing up at school and getting aggressive. I worked with a psychologist who believed my behaviour at school was learned from home. She told CYFS she was worried I was being beaten at home or not being looked after properly. CYFS did nothing.

I was sexually abused by a teacher aide when I was 9 or 10 years old. At first, I felt he was genuine and looked up to him. My mum trusted him too and let me go to his place for the weekend, where we played Nintendo and smoked fish. I slept on a mattress in his lounge. When I woke in the morning, he had his hand on my penis and was masturbating me. I automatically knew it was wrong and told him I wanted to go home.

I couldn't tell my mum what had happened, and I had to deal with that man over the next seven years as he went on to work in Youth Justice.

In late 1998 I went to the Amber Centre Classroom at SES. Staff and my psychologist



were worried about my wellbeing at home because I would beg not to go back there. My psychologist referred me to Waimokoia, and I went there for a year. But the staff there sometimes restrained me because I'd been aggressive or abusive, or fighting with other kids. They'd twist my arms and pull my wrist back so it touched the back of my head. I was assaulted there by a staff member and I would get into fights with other kids. I'd often end up in the Time Out room.

Over the next few years, I came to police notice for offending and not showing up for school. I was 12 years old and getting into serious crime. I was placed in CYFS custody and sent to the Melville Family Home. I took off within nine minutes of getting there.

Between the ages of 12 to 14 years old, when I ran away I would often stay at a halfway house run by two women in their late teens/early twenties. While I was there I'd do sexual favours for them. I supported myself by dealing cannabis and stealing. I was in CYFS custody a lot of that time – they knew I went back on the streets and to the halfway house but didn't do enough to keep me safe.

Once, after being sent back to the Melville Family Home, I told a social worker that some family friends were keen to look after me. I was formally placed with this family, and I'm still close to them now. My foster mother told CYFS the women at the halfway house had forced me to burgle houses to earn my keep, got me stoned and forced me to have sex with them. My social worker told her to keep me safe and tell me it wasn't my fault. But CYFS never spoke to me about it and I was never offered any counselling.

One weekend, I went to stay with my parents, and they wouldn't let me go back to my foster family. Being back with my parents meant I didn't go to school much and got into trouble with police a few times – I ended up being referred to Youth Justice. Over the next few months, I was placed in different family homes and ran away each time.

In mid-June 2002, when I was 13 years old, I ran away for a month. When I was found, I said I wouldn't run away again – but within two hours of being placed in a home, I took off.

Later that year, my social worker did a wellbeing assessment that noted I'd committed 80 offences since I was 11 years old, hadn't attended any education activity for some time, and most of my friends were engaged in criminal activity. I was 14 years old and my parents didn't know how to deal with me. A month later I was arrested again and taken to Weymouth.

At Weymouth, I was assaulted by staff members and excessively restrained. I was always fighting with the other kids and staff didn't do anything to stop it. I got sent to Secure a lot, where you'd be locked down for 23 hours a day. I was also strip-searched by male staff. I know a lot of these searches didn't follow proper procedure.

In mid-2003, when I was 14 years old, I went to Whakapakari Youth Trust on Great Barrier Island. One of my mates warned me not to go, and I wish I'd listened. We had to do adult slave labour there. There was also a lot of violence between the boys.

We'd get punished for fighting, smoking or not working as hard as everyone else. Punishment meant carting bags filled with rocks for a kilometre. It got to the point where I was getting 50 bags at a time.

Once I found a stash of cannabis and took some – but a staff member worked out I'd found it, tied me to a tree for two days and told me to think about what I'd done. When I was untied, I had to go and see another staff member, a big guy. He told me to lie about finding the cannabis. When I said I wouldn't, he punched me in the face and threatened me with more time on the island. Then he stood behind me and put his hand on my penis, over my pants. I pushed away from him, then he told me to stick his cock in my mouth. I said no, but he threatened to keep me on the island for another six months. I was so scared and just about to do it when I spewed on the floor, so he punched me in the side of the head.

When I left Whakapakari in September 2003, I went to my aunt's place in Hastings. It was cool living with her, although she was strict. She really tried with me but eventually she'd had enough and I was removed from her care.

I ended up back at my dad's place – but mostly I was on the streets.

I had a few charges going through the Youth Court around then, and I was getting into more trouble and getting arrested again. I ended up in Lower North Youth Justice Residential Centre. There were lots of fights at Lower North.

I was at Lower North until June 2005, when I was sent to Youth Justice North for a few months. In September, I ran away while being taken to court. I was missing for a few weeks before I got picked up by police. I was convicted of aggravated robbery and sentenced to two years' imprisonment – and CYFS officially closed my case in November 2005. I was 17 years old.

My time in care has fucked up my whole life. I never understood its impact until I met a counsellor who helped me identify why I act and think the way I do and how that goes back to childhood trauma.

The biggest thing for me is the impact it's had on my kids. I was in prison a lot of the time when they were growing up and, just like me, they've been taken into State care.

In 2022, my lawyers sent my claim to the education and social development ministries – it's not clear which part of the State is responsible for the abuse. My lawyers tried to get information from Oranga Tamariki to help sort it out but they refused to hand anything over because it was too hard to gather.

I've done some serious offending and spent a lot of time in prison, and I don't want evil to ruin me. Bringing my legal claim and seeking counselling is part of my quest for closure, because I need to focus on moving forward.

**Source:** Witness statement, Mr RA (15 August 2022).



“

I don't see men  
and women –  
I see keys  
and uniforms

”



# Mr SK

**Hometown:** Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington

**Age when entered care:** 9 years old

**Year of birth:** 1968

**Time in care:** 1978 – 1983

**Type of care facility:** Boys' homes – Epuni Boys' Home in Te Awa Kairangi ki Tai Lower Hutt, Hamilton Boys' Home, Hokio Beach School near Taitoko Levin, Kohitere Boys' Training Centre in Taitoko Levin; family homes – Carterton Family Home in the Wairarapa, Rexwood Street Family Home in Carterton, Waimarino Family Home; orphanage – Arbor House in Greytown; borstal – Waikeria Borstal near Te Awamutu.

**Ethnicity:** Māori (Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Maniapoto)

**Whānau background:** Mr SK is the third eldest of six children, who he generally does not have any contact with.

**Currently:** Mr SK is an inmate of Rimutaka Prison. The sister he was closest to has passed away.

## All I ever knew was abuse.

**My mum and dad both abused me. I remember my mother telling me that when I was a baby, she made me eat faeces once because I kept "shitting my nappies". I remember being belted with a jug cord or the buckle end of a belt, being chained to the leg of a dining room table and forced to eat from a dog dish while the rest of the family ate at the table and fed me their scraps, and my parents burning the skin in between my fingers with cigarettes as punishment.**

We got one meal a day – dinner. Sometimes, if I'd been naughty, I didn't get to eat at all – I was bashed and put in the shed. One day I broke into the cupboards in the kitchen and pulled out a jar of golden syrup so that my siblings and I could eat. I stole food from the neighbours – I wasn't a good thief; I was just trying to survive. I relied on my instinct and wit to feed myself and my siblings the best I could.

I started lighting fires when I was 8 years old. I was practising to burn our house down. I almost did, once, but a neighbour put it out. I got a hiding from both my parents, and they threw me into the shed. I still loved my parents, though – it's a paradox I will never understand.

A social welfare information sheet from February 1970 stated that my mother had been ill-treating us for some time. It's not clear who provided this information, but the document stated that our neighbours, on the whole, weren't anxious to do anything

about our ill-treatment, but my mother had threatened to kill one woman who had called the police about it. We had a visit from a social worker soon after.

I found out later that I was admitted to hospital as a baby under the age of two, and that might be how I came to the notice of a social worker at the hospital. By 1976, we had a social worker visiting us every week. They became involved with my family because of problems I was having at school, related to theft. My records show my parents asked for help from the Youth Aid Service because they were having problems with me. I was committing petty thefts and setting fires in an abandoned building.

In December 1976 I appeared in front of the Porirua Children's Board, though the reason isn't clear from my records. They referred me to Social Welfare for follow-up, and my family was placed on preventive supervision until July 1977.

My mother left us, and my father told us someone was coming to take us on holiday. I was nearly 10 years old when I was placed temporarily in Epuni Boys' Home.

At Epuni I was put into secure. I was stripped and put in the shower, then had some type of kerosene substance put in my hair. Then I was painted with some white stuff and handed a grey uniform. The cell had a mattress, a blanket and pillow, a basin and toilet, and the window up high had bars on it. I remember being pretty traumatised. I asked for my mum and dad and was told they were dead. I cried myself to sleep.

On one admission to Epuni they took my personal stuff off me and threw it in the rubbish bin in front of me, including a taonga tiki that had been my great-grandfather's. That was extremely traumatising for me as the tiki meant everything to me. I've never gotten over it.

Epuni had a culture of violence and the 'kingpin' system. I believe this treatment later turned me into the kingpin of my block in a maximum-security prison. It made me violent. I haven't hurt anyone in over 12 years, but I hold onto the fear that I will become another murderer statistic if I don't get the help I know I need.

By this time in my life, I had been locked in a closet, shed, kennel and cell by people who were meant to be looking after me.

I was sent to Hokio Beach School when I was 12 and I stayed there for nearly two years. It was a nightmare. There was an initiation process – boys came in at night and kicked the shit out of you. 'Stompings' happened at night because there were fewer workers on.

The staff there were physically abusive too. I would run away, then get caught and brought back and put into secure. Then I would go into the penalty phase. I had to get up at 6am and do physical training for an hour or so. Then again at 8am. If I collapsed, a staff member would punch me, or hit me with a set of keys, usually on the head or legs. While I was doing PT, they would tell me my parents were dead, or that they didn't want me. They were trying to break me.

I was sexually abused twice at Hokio, by another boy. Once, I tried to complain about this, and the staff member told me to fuck off. I ran away, was caught, and strapped. After running away another time, a staff member made me line up against the wall and bend over. Over 30 other boys were lined up and had to kick my arse. One kick was

bad enough – imagine being kicked more than 30 times. I lost control of my faculties and began smashing my head into the wall. I said to the staff member, “Stop or I will kill you”, and he locked me into a cell where I cried myself to sleep.

By the time I turned 14, I had at least 18 charges pending against me. A social worker’s report said my past made sad reading and my future prospects remained bleak. From there, I was sent to Kohitere Training Centre, where there was more physical and sexual abuse waiting for me. Kohitere was just a holding pen for prison – the place was uncontrollable at times. It lacked security, monitoring, supervision and any sort of therapy. I spent a total of 320 days in secure over a 563-day period at Kohitere.

I had my first taste of prison aged 14 at Waikeria. I preferred it there because of the small luxuries we got in prison, like my own soap and a bed with blankets. I was treated better by some of the prison officers than I’d ever seen or heard in a boys’ home.

I was discharged from being a State ward at 15 years old. I’ve been in jail ever since.

I do not see men and women, I only see keys and uniforms. I don’t trust anyone; people need to earn it first.

I was institutionalised, and with an institution comes culture. It is just a vicious cycle, and kids wind up in jail. The culture is cannibalistic; it takes you in its mouth, chews you up, swallows you, and shits you out.

I suffer from low self-esteem, depression and anxiety. I have problems sleeping and I suffer from flashbacks. These are triggered by names or circumstances that remind me of what happened to me.

I have many secrets, but my best-kept secret is this: for more than 20 years I have been crying out for help. The State has given me the label of ‘extremely dangerous’ and I have taken that label and hid behind it. That label has kept me safe and helped me to survive.

I know how to look after myself, and the little boy in me, better than anyone else. I had the right to be loved, cared for, protected and nurtured. I had the right to be clothed, educated, to be a child, and to play. Instead, I was exposed to cruelty, torture, murder, deceit, lies and every domestic and social ill under the sun. This little boy – the one that I keep safe – laughs at whoever thinks he is a dangerous man.

Hokio and Kohitere created gashes. It has been very taxing for me to tell my story, however after a lot of tears, heartache and pain I have finally fully recorded it all. I ask one thing: that my story is respected. It is my pain and it’s precious.

I hope there will be an outcome that brings transformational change for us who lived it, so the ‘institutional beasts’ that were the boys’ and girls’ homes of the past will never rise or be resurrected ever again.

**Source:** Witness statement, Mr SK (22 February 2021).



“

We thought we  
were going to die

”

# Mr SL

**Hometown:** Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland

**Age when entered care:** 9 years old

**Year of birth:** 1977

**Type of care facility:** Children's home – Manurewa Baptist Children's Home; family homes – Witehira Family Home; Windrush Family Home; girls' home – Bollard Girls' Home in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland; boys' homes – Weymouth Boys' Home in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, Helensville Boys' Home, Epuni Boys' Home in Te Awa Kairangi ki Tai Lower Hutt; corrective training – New Zealand Legionnaires Academy in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, Birch Camp; Te Whakapakari Youth Programme on Aotea Great Barrier Island.

**Ethnicity:** Māori (Tainui)

**Whānau background:** Mr SL's parents separated when he was young and he mostly lived with his mother and younger brother. His father was in a gang, and in and out of his life.

**Currently:** Mr SL is in prison. He has four children. He has worked as a cleaner and hospital orderly. His mum has always been there for him.

**I spent most of my childhood in and out of care. I was moved from violent home to violent home, and suffered serious psychological, physical and sexual abuse at the hands of people who were supposed to care for me.**

This has had an indescribable impact on my life.

When I was 7 or 8 years old, Mum got a new boyfriend who was extremely violent. I started running away and getting into trouble. I lived on the streets and did a bit of stealing, and police and Social Welfare got involved.

I ended up in State care when I was about 9 years old mainly because I was running away – but no one ever asked me why. Social Welfare said I was in need of care, protection and control, but just put me wherever they wanted to. It was so unstable. I had no idea where I would be placed, and I never felt safe or settled.

I was about 15 years old when my social worker sent me to Whakapakari.

The supervisors were idiots. Some were ex-gang members. They started abusing the boys and turned us against each other. They would use the older boys they trusted to beat us. Another supervisor came from a psychiatric hospital and smashed us in the woods.

I was made to dig trenches as a punishment because I was having a hard time getting along with other boys. We were punished during kapa haka time, too. If you made a mistake with the movements, everyone was made to do push-ups, and the supervisors would walk around and kick you in the face. We would get back up and have to practise the words. The supervisors singled out people and if they made a mistake, they got beaten.

Everyone says we were made to dig our own graves – we were digging trenches. There was a worker there and he had a gun. Once, when we weren't digging fast enough, he pointed the gun at us. We were terrified and thought we were going to die. One of my friends defecated on himself because he was so scared. I could see it coming down his pants.

The worst place was in the tents, where the older boys would come in and smash us. I tried to fight back but I was always outnumbered by bigger boys, and the supervisors were on big power trips.

The older boys would sexually assault the younger boys and call them names at the same time. One of my friends had wooden sticks put up his anus by other boys – that wasn't uncommon.

There was a 'no narking' culture among the boys and there was no way you could tell anyone about what happened to you or what you witnessed. If you did say anything, you got a beating, either from the staff or from the other boys.

A few of us were sent over to the other island, Alcatraz, as a punishment for trying to run away. It was awful. I was violated by one of the supervisors. They'd pull down our pants and sexually abuse us. Before this, we had been over to Alcatraz in groups. Sexual abuse occurred while we were there – they tried to put sticks up our rectums. It happened to me, and to the other boys. We always complained but no one cared about us.

There was no medical treatment at Whakapakari.

Most of the boys at Whakapakari seemed to have come from bad environments, bad homes. And a lot of those boys were young criminals. I learned a lot about crime and how to become a better criminal during my time.

Later, I was sent to corrective training at Birch Camp, Tongariro. That place felt like a holiday camp compared to Whakapakari. The staff weren't abusive to us, but by this point I was a very hard young man. Corrective training did not change my trajectory, and it didn't give me any skills to turn my life around.

I've been in so many prisons that I have a hard time remembering where I've served time and when. I consider myself a criminal through and through – I've never tried to be anything different. I'm learning coping skills now as an adult in prison and I'm really working on it. I need help to change the way I still think.



Because of my time in various placements, boys' homes and corrective training facilities, my education opportunities have been limited. We were always afraid, and they gave us nothing. It was about survival and trying to look for opportunities to escape. I was never taught how to deal with anything properly as an adult – I am learning coping skills now in prison.

I had many case workers throughout my childhood. I told many of them about the abuse I suffered as a child, but it was always treated as a 'wild story'. They said they investigated and nothing came of it. But I know they didn't investigate. I complained about the repeated physical and sexual abuse I suffered throughout my time in care, but no one believed me.

I know that part of who I am is because of the abuse and neglect I was subjected to in care. I should have received care, protection, education and basic skills, but this was far from the case.

We need to believe children when they tell us something is wrong. I was told my abuse was a fairy tale, but it was the truth. No one listened. This has to change.

**Source:** Witness statement of Mr SL (28 July 2022).

“

**My existence  
was at  
odds with  
everything  
around me**

”

Source: Witness statement, Mr UB,  
(3 April 2022); Expert statement,  
Mr UB, (11 September 2022).

# Mr UB

**Hometown:** Waihopai Invercargill

**Age when entered care:** 16 years old

**Year of birth:** 1981

**Time in care:** 1997

**Type of care facility:** Church

**Ethnicity:** Mr UB's father is from Canterbury and his mother is from the Pacific Islands

**Whānau background:** Mr UB grew up in a religious and conservative family and wider community.

**Currently:** Mr UB is married. He has a PhD and works as a leader and consultant.

**My childhood was terrifying. My mother lived with severe psychosis and she made threatening comments to me daily – for example, that people were watching and would kidnap me. She was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia after a major psychotic event when I was 6 years old. She was admitted to a psychiatric hospital for six months.**

When I was a pre-schooler, my mother sexually assaulted me when she bathed, dressed or toileted me. Once I could do those things for myself, she walked around naked in front of me, lifted her skirts at me and made sexualised comments. She also called me into her bedroom for morning prayers and initiated sexual contact with my father during the prayers.

Both parents verbally, physically and psychologically abused me. I was only allowed to speak when spoken to and my parents would both mimic my words. I was also refused medical care, including pain relief or other medications.

My father is from Canterbury. My mother first came to New Zealand in the late 1950s as a Pacific Islands government secondary school scholarship recipient and she returned in the early 1970s on the visitor permit scheme. Both parents were strongly of the opinion that my name and upbringing needed to be Palagi in order for me to be successful.

My parents attended separate churches. My mother was a devout Catholic, attending mass daily, while my father was a devout Anglican. He became a lay preacher in 1985 and an ordained priest in 2012. Both were involved in various church organisations and bible study groups.

I attended mass with my mother when I was home from school and alternated church services with my parents each week. As a teenager, I began attending a youth-oriented Pentecostal church.



I identify as fakaleiti, mainly because many in my extended family used to refer to me that way. In terms of sexual orientation, I identify as a gay male. But the concept of a Rainbow community eluded me until my early thirties.

In 1980s and 1990s Invercargill, binary genders were the totality of anyone's concept of gender. The deeply conservative city and community around my family meant that sexuality was never discussed. I didn't know how to connect with other LGBTIQ+ people until I found community groups in the 2010s.

I remember on the rare occasions I met my extended family, my uncles and aunts would talk about the fakaleiti and gay men in the family in an accepting and loving way. My mother would argue with them about that. I also clearly recall news items about the 'town hall' sessions protesting the Homosexual Law Reform Bill. I remember my parents being upset and angry about homosexuals.

At the age of 12, I began to repress my total identity. I purposefully monitored what I said around others, my references to myself, my posture and poise, my voice, my mannerisms and my dress sense. I had no one to confide in about my burgeoning identities, the abuse or the pressure I felt to repress my self-expression.

I decided to open up about my sexuality in 1997, at the age of 16. By this point, I was deeply frustrated. Inside I knew that my existence was at odds with everything around me. When I came out as gay, my mother was enraged. After 48 hours of her abuse, and with no intervention from my father, I decided to leave the family home.

For years I didn't have a frame of reference where I could consider a relationship between being Pasifika and gay. In the anga fakatonga as taught in my family, being gay and being Pasifika were not aligned to the point I was told to expect abuse and hell. I was unable to access any forms of community or social support due to prevailing attitudes in the community about both LGBTIQ+ people and Pacific peoples. I also experienced two instances of conversion practices – one initiated by the church and another by my school.

The church incident occurred because of gossip in the community about me coming out. One of the pastors led a prayer session in which church leaders laid hands on me and prayed for my ability to choose "the right path" in life.

Afterwards, I was referred to a mental health professional based at Southland Hospital. I attended a counselling session where we discussed the incompatibility between being gay and the beliefs of the church. It wasn't particularly condemnatory, but it was completely unsupportive.

The school incident happened after I came out. I had been due to attend a national speech-making competition as well as the national choral festival, but I was barred from representing the school at national competitions. The school counsellor asked to meet with me after some classmates expressed their opinions both for and against my presence at the school. The counsellor asked me about what impact my sexuality would have on my education and asked whether I would consider moving on from the school. The counsellor claimed that some teachers were consulting with the board of trustees as to whether I should be expelled.

At the time, I saw these events as these two entities outlining their rules of engagement. I had only heard of conversion practices via TV or newspapers and thought of them as

being electro-shock therapy, or intensive week-long residential courses of prayer and fasting.

As a result, I stopped attending that church and began to withdraw from church attendance overall. I considered leaving school 18 months early.

These organisations attempted to convert me away from my identity by isolating me and confronting my self-actualisation. This isolation decimated the Pacific idea of the person being connected to others as the life force that helps us understand our place and value in the world. This is a simple, yet foundational, consideration that is unique to Pacific people. Luckily these incidents occurred in Palagi environments – I’ve been fortunate to see conversation therapy as a ‘white’ phenomenon.

It taught me that Christianity is unwilling to entertain the idea that rainbow people are worthy recipients of God’s love. My family’s unwillingness to prioritise my story over their faith (as well as their long-standing abuse) led to the disintegration of the superficial relationship I previously had with them. I have no relationship with my remaining parent.

I’ve spoken with a small number of people who attended that church and school. It appears that more people knew what I was experiencing than I had realised. However, no one expressed remorse at my suffering or anger at what they knew. I have few connections to Invercargill now because people knew but didn’t care.

I didn’t acknowledge my gender identity as fakaleiti until I wrote my PhD in 2017. This was the first point in my life I had people I could discuss it with. When I was open about my identities, I started to feel a connection to my spirit, or life force.

My life journey has seen me underestimate my talents and accept poor behaviour in work and social environments. I’ve accepted countless incidents of racist intimidation and minimalisation across my career because I’ve had a core belief that I’m an unworthy person and I deserve poor treatment.

I never enjoyed leisure activities or travel as I was too busy working to ensure I had a stable financial base. My academic pathway was always pragmatic – I was looking for the next level up so that I could ensure I was a high-priced and valuable commodity.

The biggest impact is my lack of trust in anyone but myself. I don’t trust that my employer will provide a safe workplace. I don’t trust that my colleagues will treat me with respect. I don’t trust that my husband will not abandon me or start abusing me. I don’t trust that the Pasifika community could ever accept me. I don’t trust that I can go about in the world without some random event occurring to make me feel unworthy.

Community leaders, including religious leaders and politicians, must understand the implications of their words and actions. They must be held accountable for “standing up for the family” or “holding debate”. Institutions charged with care – like schools, community groups and churches – must proactively monitor the welfare and wellbeing of their participants.

No one in my world has ever expressed regret at the things that happened to me. Many in my family deny they happened at all. The people responsible have been held in high esteem – some died with loud tributes paid, others are in influential local positions.

Having someone acknowledge the harm caused to me is unimaginable but needed. I would like to see the people who treated me this way held accountable in some way.



Source: Witness statement,  
Mr VT (5 July 2021).

“  
I hate the  
system, and  
I don't trust  
anyone in it  
”



# Mr VT

**Hometown:** Born in Samoa; then Ōtautahi Christchurch

**Age when entered care:** 10 years old

**Year of birth:** 1986

**Time in care:** 1996–2003

**Type of care facility:** Foster homes; family homes; youth unit – Kingslea Care and Protection Unit in Ōtautahi Christchurch; youth programme – Eastland Youth Rescue Trust near Omaio; youth justice residence – Lower North in Te Papaioea Palmerston North.

**Ethnicity:** Samoan

**Whānau background:** Mr VT's grandparents adopted him when he was about 4 years old, and he did not find out he was adopted until he was 19 years old. Mr VT grew up assuming his birth mother was his sister. He has not had much contact with his birth father. He has a younger brother, who did not go into care.

**Currently:** Mr VT has two daughters from previous relationships and does not have any contact with one of them; the other daughter has had kids, so Mr VT is a grandfather.

**Growing up, I thought family violence was normal. It was just 'discipline' – it was the norm.**

**Someone at school noticed I was turning up with bruises and black eyes, and alerted Children, Young Persons and their Families Service (CYFS). I got hit by my dad if I was backchatting, being disrespectful, or not listening. It was discipline, but it was quite violent. In my CYFS notes there's a report that my mum had tied my legs together and beaten me. A paediatrician told CYFS I had bruising consistent with being assaulted with an electrical cord.**

CYFS received many reports of the abuse I was experiencing and the injuries I had, but nothing much was done to help me.

In 1996 CYFS made an application to put me into interim care. I was 10 years old. My family tried to hide me, but eventually I went to a foster family, then I was admitted to Kingslea and I was there on and off for several years.

Like any 10-year-old, I missed my parents and just wanted to be at home. I cried a lot, and I was angry that I had to be away from my family. I hated Kingslea so much that I tried to numb the hurt by drinking shampoo and window cleaner and got taken to hospital.

I was restrained a lot by the staff at Kingslea. At times, they'd use so much force it would make me think, "I'm sure they can't do that to a kid". They'd throw me to the ground and put a knee in the back of my neck or head. Sometimes they'd pin me down using their knees.

At Kingslea, I was bullied, assaulted and intimidated by other residents. I was depressed and wanted to harm myself. In my notes I was described as feeling lonely, unloved, worthless, sad and withdrawn. CYFS was still recording that under no circumstances should I go home, because it wasn't safe – but even after writing that, they sent me home to my parents.

In 1999 I was sent to Eastland, an outdoor pursuits programme for boys aged between 14 and 17 years old who were physically strong and under Youth Court orders. I was only 13 years old, and under care and protection orders, not a supervision with activity order. I should never have been sent there.

I was meant to be at Eastland for six months, but I ran away. The two and a half weeks I spent there were incredibly brutal.

The man who ran Eastland, Neville Walker, had been involved with a previous similar programme, which had been investigated by CYFS for abusing kids. Neville started Eastland on the same property almost straight away and got paid by CYFS to take boys on his programme.

As soon as the social worker dropped me off, I was made to sit on a log and have my hair shaved off. When I protested, I was hit me around the ears. I was threatened with violence if I ran away. The first few days were spent doing hard labour, while Neville ordered us around, yelling and swearing at us. He also said racist things to me, such as calling me a “coconut cunt” or telling me to move my “black ass”.

Almost all the other boys on the programme were violent towards me. They stole all my new clothes, beat me on a daily basis, and threatened me with more hidings. Once, they smashed an old-fashioned washing machine roller over my back.

Other times, the older boys tied me up or chained me and other boys to a pole outside at night-time. They'd yank on the chains from their tents. Sometimes, we had dog chains tied around our necks and the other boys would drag us around and urinate on us. They stubbed out cigarette butts on my face and made me lie down in the freezing river in my underpants. Once, while tied up, another boy cut a tattoo out of my arm with a pocket knife.

I told Neville about it, but he didn't do anything. Once, his kids shot me and another boy with BB guns, while he sat there watching and laughing.

I ran away with another boy and stole a rifle and some bullets. Neville caught the other boy first, then fired several shots from another rifle into the bush to try to draw me out. I came out of the bush with my hands up and surrendered. Neville made me kneel down, took the rifle off me and smashed the butt of it into my head, splitting my head open. I bled everywhere. He kicked me in the ribs and threatened to kill me if I tried anything else.

I tried to run away again and I was made to stay up all night scrubbing a tarpaulin floor with a toothbrush, wearing only my underpants. The punishment lasted three nights, and one of the nights I had to do it completely naked. I was really sleep deprived and several times I fell asleep, then woken up by being kicked in the face. During those nights, I was sexually abused by two different boys, and I had injuries to my anus as a result of one of those assaults.

I told Neville about the sexual assaults. He got angry and tied one of the boys to the back of a horse by his hands, then rode the horse around and dragged the boy behind him.

I ran away again, was picked up by a stranger and taken to hospital. A doctor called CYFS and informed them I had been physically assaulted. The police interviewed me and I said I'd been beaten by Neville with a rifle butt. The police later faxed through an eight-page statement to CYFS about my allegations at Eastland, but they only ever investigated the sexual assault allegations, and nothing about Neville. Even then, the sexual abuse allegations weren't investigated for more than a year. Not only did CYFS put me in a dangerous place, but they absolutely failed to address the things that happened to me.

I know now that because of what happened to me, CYFS stopped using Eastland and took all the boys off the programme. I should never have been sent there. It was incredibly violent and what happened there scarred me for life.

I had a medical examination, which showed a lot of scars on my body including a four-centimetre scar on my scalp from where I was smashed with the rifle butt. The doctor also noted scars on my anal region. But later, police said no charges could be laid, because there was no medical evidence to support my allegations.

I was put back in Kingslea again later in 1999 until April 2000. This long period of time in Kingslea was because I was waiting for CYFS to organise a placement with my family in Samoa. There were huge delays with this, mostly caused by my social worker. In September 1999, the same CYFS manager who said I should go to Eastland wrote that she was worried I would become "yet another Christchurch case that sits in residence". The proposed placement fell through and I stayed in Kingslea.

I wrote to the CEO of CYFS in 2000, saying: "I just want to know how long I am in this place. I am just confused. I do not know when I am getting out. I do want to make some changes in my life. I just want to go home."

In 2002 I was sent to Lower North Youth Justice Residence in Palmerston North. I was bullied and threatened by other residents, and in response I fought back. The staff saw me getting beaten up. The only thing I could do was defend myself. All I remember from being in the secure unit is getting locked down a lot. I was isolated and let out for an hour a day. Most of the day I just sat and stared out of the window. I didn't do any school work.

In 2003 when I was 16 years old, I was remanded to prison. I shifted from one State institution to another. CYFS closed their file on me a few weeks later.

I've been in and out of jail ever since. I've probably spent two years in the community since 2005. I am quite institutionalised – I don't know how to live in the real world, I feel safer in prison.

I hate the system, and I don't trust anyone in it. The system abandoned me and traumatised me.

I got an apology and a settlement, but it felt hollow. All the money in the world won't wash this away. They knew not to put me in places like Eastland but did it anyway. I feel like I was a happy kid who had to create a mask to survive, and I had so many different masks that it got confusing.

There's a photo of me in my CYFS file from when I was a teenager. I wasn't very big or scary. I was just a kid.



“

I was taken  
out of a  
good home  
and put  
into places  
where I lost  
my identity  
and suffered  
horrific abuse

”

# Mr VV

**Hometown:** Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland

**Age when entered care:** 12 years old

**Year of birth:** 1959

**Type of care facility:** Boys' homes – Ōwairaka Boys' Home in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, Hokio Beach School near Taitoko Levin, Holdsworth School in Whanganui, Kohitere Boys' Training Centre in Taitoko Levin

**Ethnicity:** Niuean, Māori (Ngāpuhi)

**Whānau background:** Mr VV's father was Niuean-Tahitian and his mum was Māori. He can trace his whakapapa to Rahiri, a famous tūpuna of Ngāpuhi. He has three younger siblings and two older siblings, who all grew up together in Pakuranga.

**Currently:** Mr VV is serving a sentence of preventive detention and has spent eight years in prison. He is the father of 13 children.

## **Child Welfare got involved with my family because I wasn't going to school. My records say that I first came to the attention of Child Welfare in February 1971 because of some offending.**

I was sent to Ōwairaka Boys' Home on a Child Welfare warrant. The police took me to Ōwairaka the first time. I was only there for a few weeks, but was taken straight to the secure unit, where I was locked in my cell for 23 hours a day. When I was allowed out of my cell, I had to do harsh physical training as punishment. I didn't go to school, and I didn't get any books or anything else to do. I only had a shower every few days and ate my meals in my cells. I strongly recall not being allowed to do anything during the day, not even look out the window, which only looked out onto a concrete wall anyway. I remember the ceiling of my cell was made out of Perspex plastic, which meant I had no natural light. I didn't get a lot of food in secure, because it was sometimes withheld as punishment. Sometimes we were only given corn on the cob to eat, and I was so hungry that I would eat the cob as well.

There is only one record which suggests my social worker looked for alternative care for me. There's a note in my file that talks about Māori foster families not wanting a part-Niuean boy, and Niuean foster parents saying they did not want to care for a part-Māori boy. I was not aware of this. I don't think my social worker ever looked for a foster placement for me. I didn't even know I had a social worker. The social worker also said my extended family didn't want to care for me. But nobody in my family ever mentioned being asked by a social worker to help care for me. I had a lot of paternal cousins close by, as well as my mum's sisters, who also lived close by. The two sides of the family often got together and there were no problems. There were lots of options for my social worker but those were never explored.

Later on, I was transferred from Ōwairaka to Hokio Beach School, just out of Levin. I got an initiation beating from the other boys. I was punched, kicked and stomped on until I started crying. For my first few months at Hokio, I got beaten up almost every day by older boys.

I experienced horrific abuse at Hokio. There was a staff member at Hokio, a Māori man who was pretty fit and had large, bulging eyes. The first time he abused me, he came into my room at night while I was sleeping. He sat on my bed and fondled me in an aggressive way, while asking me if I was going to run away. Then he jumped on me, and dry humped me. He forcibly kissed me and put his tongue in my mouth. I tried to scream, so he stopped. I told a staff member about it, he said to me, "Well, did he hurt you?" When I said, "No", he said not to worry about it.

My abuser would watch me have a shower, which I found really difficult, then offer me a cigarette and tell me to come down to the shower block to smoke it. When we'd get there, he'd rape me. This happened multiple times. After the first time, I would try to fight him off. He would beat me up to stop me fighting back and hold me down by my neck with a hand over my mouth. He made me perform oral sex on him once as well. To keep me quiet, he would hit me around the back of my head with an open palm and kick me in the backside. I would get a sore head and bruising, and bleed from the rapes.

I never talked about what happened with anyone, but I remember the boys had a kind of code language they talked in. Everyone knew he was doing something bad to boys.

Later I was transferred to Holdsworth School, where there was physical violence among the boys and sexual abuse from staff. One staff member came into my room very late at night and woke me up. He rolled me onto my side and forced me to perform oral sex on him. I cried and begged but he wouldn't let my head go. I really struggled at Holdsworth because of the abuse, and I ran away at least once and spent a night in police custody.

I was in and out of different places for a while after that. In 1973 I was admitted to Kohitere Training Centre. By this time, I was really institutionalised. I was the one dishing out the violence, because I had learned what to do at all the other institutions. That was all I knew. I was put in the secure unit at Kohitere a few times – my records confirm that I spent three weeks in secure in September 1973, because of my "poor performance and disruptive behaviour". The notes also say that I hadn't been very productive as a member of the work group, and suggested that I could return to the Islands, "where his present way of life could be acceptable". It's pretty hurtful to read things like that in my records. It sounds very racist to me.

I went back to live with my parents and was sent to live with some family in Niue. I spent almost two years there. When I got back home, I got a job with my dad and did a stint at borstal.

I joined the Black Power when I was about 17 years old. A lot of us had been in the boys' homes and the gang gave me a sense of belonging and identity. I'm still affiliated now, but I would call myself an 'elder statesman' rather than an active member.





## He waiata aroha mō ngā purapura ora

Kāore te aroha i ahau mō koutou e te iwi I mahue kau noa i te tika  
I whakarerea e te ture i raurangi rā Tāmia rawatia ana te whakamanioro  
he huna whakamamae nō te tūkinō  
he auhi nō te puku i pēhia kia ngū  
Ko te kaikinikini i te tau o taku ate tē rite ai ki te kōharitari o tōu  
Arā pea koe rā kei te kopa i Mirumiru-te-pō  
Pō tiwhatiwha pōuri kenekene  
Tē ai he huringa ake i ō mahara  
Nei tāku, 'kei tōia atu te tatau ka tomokia ai'  
Tēnā kē ia kia huri ake tāua ki te kimi oranga  
E mate Pūmahara? Kāhorehore! Kāhorehore!  
E ara e hoa mā, māngai nuitia te kupu pono i te puku o Kareāroto  
Kia iri ki runga rawa ki te rangi tihore he rangi waruhia ka awatea  
E puta ai te ihu i te ao pakarea ki te ao pakakina  
Hei ara mōu kei taku pōkai kōtuku ki te oranga  
E hua ai te pito mata i roto rā kei aku purapura ora  
Tiritiria ki toi whenua, onokia ka morimoria ai  
Ka pihi ki One-haumako, ki One-whakatupu  
Kei reira e hika mā te manako kia ea i te utu  
Kia whakaahuritia tō mana tangata tō mana tuku iho nā ō rau kahika  
Koia ka whanake koia ka manahua koia ka ngawhā  
He houkura mārie mōwai rokiroki āio nā koutou ko Rongo  
Koia ka puta ki te whaiao ki te ao mārama  
Whitiwhiti ora e!

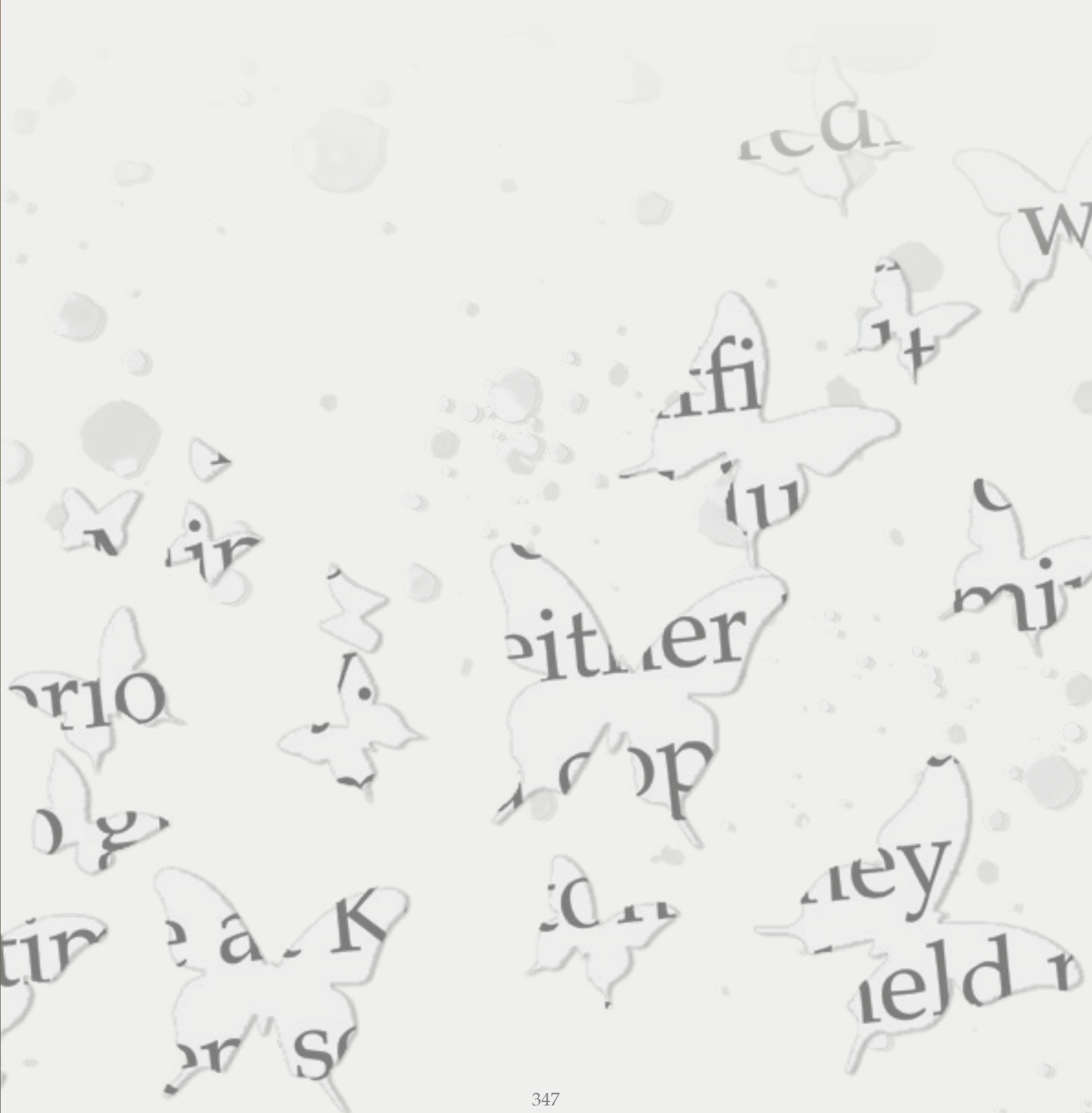
## A Love Song for the Living Seeds

The love within me for you, the people, remains unchanged  
Left alone, abandoned by justice and order  
Subjected to the silent suffering of mistreatment  
A heaviness in the core, silenced into stillness  
The gnawing of my heart cannot compare to the anguish of yours  
Perhaps you are hidden in the depths of the night, Mirumiru-te-pō  
A night dark and dense  
Where there may be no turning in your memories  
But here's my thought: 'Do not push open the door to enter.'  
Instead, let us turn to seek life and well-being  
Is memory dead? No, certainly not!  
Arise, friends, let the truth resound loudly from the heart of Kareāroto  
To ascend to the clear skies, a sky washed clean at dawn  
Emerging from the troubled world to a world of promise  
A path for you, my flock of herons, to life  
So, the precious core may blossom within you, my living seeds  
Scattered across the land, cherished and growing in abundance  
Rising in One-haumako, in One-whakatupu  
There, my friends, lies the hope to fulfil the cost  
To restore your human dignity, your inherited mana from your ancestors  
Thus, it will thrive, flourish, and burst forth  
A peaceful feather, a treasured calm, a serene peace from Rongo  
Emerging into the world of light, into the world of understanding  
A crossing of life indeed!

– Paraone Gloyne









**Abuse in Care**  
Royal Commission of Inquiry