

**Witness Name:** Walton James Ngatai-Mathieson

**Statement No.:** WITN0441001

**Dated:** 11/05/2021

## ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

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### WITNESS STATEMENT OF WALTON JAMES NGATAI-MATHIESON

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I, Walton James Ngatai-Mathieson, say as follows:

#### **Background**

1. I am 61 years old and currently living in Levin. I am legally blind but can see faces and mouths moving from my one poorly sighted eye. I also have many health conditions that mean travelling to Auckland to speak at a public hearing is a big challenge for me. Despite this I want to speak to the Commissioners and to the New Zealand public about my experiences and I want to be listened to. What happened at Lake Alice must never be able to happen again.

#### Family

2. My mountain is Hikurangi, my river is Waiapu and my marae is Mangahanea, but I am from Ruatoria . I am very proud of where I am from.
3. I was born in Te Puia Springs, Ruatoria, Tokomaru Bay. My iwi is Ngāti Porou. I know about my whakapapa. My grandmother (Mum's mother in Ruatoria) called GRO-B taught me te reo Māori, and about my whakapapa.

4. My father is **GRO-B** from Tikitiki. My mother is **GRO-B**. I am the oldest of five children. From oldest to youngest: my brother **GRO-B** sister **GRO-B** (whangai), **GRO-B**, and **GRO-B**. My stepfather **GRO-B** is from Te Araroa. There are another five children, the **GRO-B**, who are my stepfather's kids, **GRO-B**, **GRO-B**, **GRO-B**, **GRO-B** and **GRO-B**. My father also has another five children with another partner.
5. I moved around a lot from one family member to another family member when I was young. In my early years I was brought up by my grandparents. My grandparents could not afford much, we were very poor.
6. I had a lot of whānau around to support me. I lived with different family members in Ruatoria, Gisborne, Auckland, Napier, Masterton, and Wellington.
7. I was brought up by various whānau members including Uncle **GRO-B** who was an **GRO-B**, and his wife **GRO-B-1** **GRO-B**, who was my mother's sister. This was when I was about seven or eight years old. I was also brought up by my sister **GRO-B** and brother **GRO-B**.
8. My other sister **GRO-B** was whangai (adopted) to my Grand Uncle **GRO-B** (Maunga Taupiri) because they had no kids of their own. **GRO-B** **GRO-B**, my youngest brother stayed with my grandparents. My father's mother **GRO-B** (in Gisborne) also helped raise **GRO-B** **GRO-B** and me until my 'real' Dad took us to Napier.

### Schooling

9. I was stung by bees around my eyes when I was five. This resulted in an infection that did not get better. I contracted infantile granulating trachoma. I suffered from a gross lack of vision in both my eyes and had to go to Napier

Hospital for an operation. Ever since then my ability to see has greatly impacted many areas of my life.

10. One area of my life that has been impacted by my lack of vision is my education. I went to Manutahi Primary School where I was put in what was called a “backwards class”. I did not need to be put in the “backwards class”. What I needed was help with my vision so I could learn. I had to hold any writing up very close to my face to see anything.
11. I enjoyed sport at school and used to play rugby. I was struggling to learn at school, but that was because of my limited vision.
12. When I was nine years old, the doctor recommended to my grandparents that I go to Homai College for the Blind in Auckland.
13. When I went to Homai College I could not read or write. I was beginning to go completely blind, so I went to learn braille. I quite liked Homai College. It was good being taught how to read braille. I was able to make friends and had girlfriends. My behaviour was difficult to manage, and I experienced epileptic seizures. I was sent home from Homai to my grandparents and was not taught braille anymore.

### Epilepsy

14. I developed epilepsy when I was a child. At age 12 it began to get bad. During a seizure I would often swallow my tongue. My grandmother (Māori) and grandfather (Scottish) were worried about my safety during these seizures. They found it hard to look after me when I came home from Homai College and did not know how to help me get through my seizures safely, so they sent me to Gisborne Hospital.

## Institutions

15. I spent 14 years of my life in state psychiatric institutions, from 1971 to 1985. All my teenage years and my early twenties were spent in State care in different psychiatric units. This included Lake Alice Child and Adolescent Unit, Hastings Psychiatric Unit, Cook Hospital Gisborne Psychiatric Unit, Tokanui Psychiatric Hospital and Porirua Psychiatric Hospital. I also spent time in Napier Hospital where I received operations on my eyes and treatments for my epilepsy.
16. I was admitted to Lake Alice Child and Adolescent Unit in 1972. My first admission into the Child and Adolescent Unit was for six weeks, but my second admission was for about 12 months.
17. When I was 18, I was admitted to Lake Alice Psychiatric Hospital Open-Side Ward, Villa 8, in 1979 and Villa 2 in 1984.

### **Lake Alice Hospital Child and Adolescent Unit**

18. I was 12 when I was first put in Lake Alice. I was in hospital receiving treatment for my cornea, but I behaved badly and tried to run away to my grandmothers. That was when I was placed in Lake Alice Child and Adolescent Unit under the Mental Health Act.
19. I remember I was transferred in a small plane to Palmerston North and then driven to Lake Alice in a van. I was very scared at the time and did not understand what was happening, where I was going or why I was going there. I had no family with me. I was given no information about Lake Alice. I was just told I was going to Lake Alice.

20. When I arrived at Lake Alice, I remember being frightened. I did not know or understand where I was. I was frightened by all the sick people walking around. They looked like zombies.
21. Aunty [GRO-B-2] would visit me in Lake Alice and would always take me to her home for leave from Lake Alice because she did not like it there. Aunty [GRO-B-2] and [GRO-B] were my godparents, they lived in Masterton.
22. It was too far for my other whānau members to see me but my Aunty [GRO-B-1] my grandparents and Aunty [GRO-B-2] would speak to each other about getting me out of Lake Alice and Aunty [GRO-B-2] would attend the hui. That is how I got out of Lake Alice.

#### Daily life at the Child and Adolescent Unit

23. My daily routine involved getting up at 7am to shower. Staff would make sure you washed yourself in the shower.
24. You would then make your bed, put your clothes on and go downstairs.
25. We had porridge and toast in the morning and a cup of coffee or tea. For lunch we had sandwiches and fruit. Teatime would consist of mashed potatoes with a roast or boil-up. It was like a home tea. The food was alright.
26. The dormitory where I slept was kept locked at night. If you got out of bed at night-time you got in trouble and were locked up in a separate room.
27. Ward 14 was the girls' ward. Ward 11 was the boys' ward. I do not know what went on in Ward 14.

28. A lot of kids would run away from Lake Alice and the police would bring them back. I cannot remember the names of anyone who ran away. I ran away and I was brought back by the police to Lake Alice.
29. I would be taken away from Lake Alice for weekend leave. Weekend leave was quite good. Every month or two months Aunty [GRO-B-2] would come pick me up and take me out on leave. My aunty is still alive but very sick with dementia.

### **Kimberley Hospital and Lake Alice Hospital patient swap**

30. Another thing I remember about Lake Alice Child and Adolescent Unit, is the patient swap they had with Kimberley. They used to swap patients from Kimberley Hospital to Lake Alice Child and Adolescent Unit. The quiet kids from Lake Alice would go over to Kimberley Hospital and the kids from Kimberley who got up to mischief were dropped off at Lake Alice. If the kids from Kimberley behaved, then they would go back to Kimberley.
31. When I was there in 1972, I remember approximately six children who would have come from Kimberley Hospital in the van.
32. One of the children from Kimberley was just five years old. He used to have fits, epilepsy, and they would give him ECT. They brought him over from Kimberley to give him ECT at Lake Alice. His mum and dad were killed in a car crash. I cannot remember what happened to him. He was only at Lake Alice for about one or two months then he went to a boys' home. I do not know what boys' home he went to.
33. Another boy brought over from Kimberley was in a wheelchair and he had to sleep downstairs as the dormitory was upstairs.

### **Lake Alice Hospital staff**

34. I had no problems with patients at Lake Alice, only the staff.
35. We used to call one of the nurses Colonel Klink because he used to whack us across the head. He was quite bad. I do not remember his actual name. Colonel Klink, he had an accent, it sounded German. He is the one who gave out medication, the Charge Nurse.
36. I remember a nurse called Steve; he was a good guy to me. He was head nurse. Steve use to take me out on weekend trips with him. I really enjoyed those getaways.
37. Another memory I have of the staff at Lake Alice, is that when I had epileptic seizure, I would shake, and staff would come along and kick me in the guts.
38. I had a friend, I cannot remember his name, he used to have blackouts. I remember staff would get cold, icy water, and tip it on him.
39. I remember Dr Leeks, but I only ever saw Dr Leeks when I was on the ECT table. I never had an appointment or doctor's consultation with Doctor Leeks. He never talked to me about what was happening.

### **Electro-Convulsion Therapy (ECT)**

40. I remember a nurse saying, "your turn" and taking me upstairs. There were four staff upstairs and they held me down. A dummy was forced into my mouth, and I was told to be quiet. There were three buttons the doctor had to push. Every time a shock was administered it would increase in intensity. I would feel the first shock, then shock two was stronger, and then shock three even stronger, like that. I was awake and could feel all the shocks.

41. Doctor Leeks and Doctor Pugmire were beside me when I got ECT.
42. A nurse would hold my head. You see lightning just like when you see lightning outside on a rainy day. You are really kicking, it is bad. They used to treat us like guinea pigs. Afterwards I would feel dizzy.
43. I would have unmodified ECT without anaesthetic and was awake feeling the shocks. My records show I was given unmodified ECT by Dr Leeks, 16 days after being admitted to the Unit. I was not given any information in advance of ECT being given to me.
44. I had ECT four or five times at Lake Alice. My grandparents did not know I was getting ECT.
45. We would play cards while we waited for ECT in the day room, then they would say, "Walton, upstairs".
46. My mate, [GRO-B], like me had ECT to help with his epilepsy. He died on the bed after having ECT as I never saw him again. [GRO-B] was from Foxton and was 14 going on 15 years old. This was recorded in the book, the head nurse's diary. Both Doctor Leeks and Doctor Pugmire were in the room with [GRO-B] when he died.
47. They locked us up in the room next door when [GRO-B] died, the day room, while the staff dealt with the situation. They brought the body out and would not let us see it, but we knew it was him.
48. I arrived at Lake Alice in 1972, [GRO-B] died about a month or two after I arrived.



49. We would get locked up all the time for talking about ECT in the Unit. ECT was often used as punishment at Lake Alice, but it was also given to me as a treatment for my epilepsy. This did nothing to treat my epilepsy.

### **Treatment**

50. I grew out of my epilepsy when I was 16, 17 years old. The ECT that I was given at Lake Alice did not help. My epilepsy only improved when I was given the proper medication.
51. In terms of medication I was given at Lake Alice, you name it I got it. I got all the medication. It made you sleepy and tired. The staff would come along and kick you to keep you awake.
52. Doctor Leeks would prescribe the medication. He was a bad man.

### **Group therapy**

53. We had a counsellor, but in a group. It was a counsellor from Palmerston North, I think. All counselling was in a group.

### **Paraldehyde**

54. There was one man who was a paranoid schizophrenic who use to try fight us. Every time he would fight us, we would hit back. We would then get injected with Paraldehyde and locked up.
55. Paraldehyde was injected in the butt and when you woke up you were sore. It was like you were paralysed down one side.

56. A lot of kids used to get Paraldehyde.

### **Isolation**

57. I got locked up for having a fight with Colonel Klink because he whacked me on the back. I turned and whacked him, punched him over. I got given Paraldehyde and put in isolation for a week.

58. There was only a mattress and blanket on the floor (no bed). The blanket was sewed up down the sides so you couldn't get out, like a strait jacket. You had a bucket for toilet purposes. We were allowed five minutes for exercise, that was all.

### **Sexual abuse**

59. I was sexually abused in the hall at Lake Alice. I was only 12 years old. I did not know what sexual abuse was at the time. I did not know anything about sex. I did not know what was happening.

60. I cannot say who it was because they put something around my mouth and something over my eyes. I could hear them, and it sounded like more than one person. It was a male. It did not sound like Doctor Leeks. This happened on more than one occasion, about four, five times. You were locked up if you said anything.

61. When I got raped at Lake Alice, I felt them touching my private parts and I knew nothing about it because I was too young to understand. In Porirua Hospital staff did the same thing to me. By then, I was old enough to understand what they were doing. At Lake Alice I was too young to understand this abuse.

62. I do not know of anyone else who got sexually abused while at Lake Alice Child and Adolescent Unit, but I know others were.
63. Talking to this Commission of Inquiry, is the first time I have talked about being sexually abused at Lake Alice and Porirua Hospital.

### **Lake Alice School**

64. When I was 12, I went to Lake Alice School. It was all right.
65. I was vision impaired when I was at Lake Alice, and this made it difficult for me to learn. I would use a magnifying glass to read books. There was no braille at Lake Alice School.
66. I missed out on a lot of things such as being taught how to read braille. Now I cannot read.

### **Tokanui Psychiatric Hospital**

67. Tokanui was the best hospital I went to. I suffered no kind of abuse, physical or sexual.

### **Porirua Psychiatric Hospital**

68. Porirua Hospital was a bad place, it was the worst. Lots of ECT with no anaesthetic and lots of Paraldehyde. Both ECT and Paraldehyde were given as punishment. If you went for walks out of town or down to Porirua, you got it.

69. I was around 17-19 when I was at Porirua Hospital. I was at Porirua Hospital for around a year.
70. I cannot remember any of the staff at Porirua.
71. I was raped at Porirua by a staff member, I do not know who it was, he sounded like a Samoan. Because I was older, I knew I had been raped. Not like when I was at Lake Alice as I was too young to know what rape and sexual abuse was.
72. I was given Paraldehyde when I was raped. When I woke up, I told the senior nurse and he goes, "no you are fine". I wanted to charge the person who raped me, but they would not do it. I got locked up for complaining about it and given Paraldehyde, they told me I was sick.
73. This is the first time I have told anyone about what happened to me at Porirua. No one listens to me.
74. I heard there were physical beatings, but I never saw it.

### **Lake Alice Open-Side Ward**

75. I was around 18, 19 years old and later 24 years old when I went back to Lake Alice. They were not doing shock treatment when I went back. They had a different doctor there. I cannot remember his name, he was Indian. The Open-Side Ward of Lake Alice was much better than the Child and Adolescent Unit.
76. When I was in the Open-Side of Lake Alice, we used to do activities, such as making boxes and gardening. These activities were to keep our minds occupied. We were called the "Box Gang" because making boxes is what we

did. I also used to clean the hall at Lake Alice and helped look after the elderly men.

77. There was no violence or sexual abuse or ECT when I went back to Lake Alice in 1979 and 1984. I was in the Open-Side Ward. The abuse only occurred when I was in the Child and Adolescent Unit at Lake Alice.
78. I was given a “blue pill” when I was older at Lake Alice. I understood this was to make sure I could not get anyone pregnant. I called it the “kill cocker”. This belief was confirmed by what other patients also told me.

### **Impacts from being in care**

79. I have had three strokes and have a brain tumour; I believe this came from my time spent at Lake Alice.
80. I was depressed when I was in State care. It has been hard on my life. Half the time I feel like I want to kill myself, I have tried before. I continue find it hard. I have been imprisoned twice in my life. Another form of State institutional life that I found very hard. I did try to kill myself when I was in prison. I was transferred to Lake Alice from prison because they did not want me in prison, and I could not handle it. I plead guilty because my lawyer told me to. I do not think I got enough support or advice. People do not believe you because you have been in psychiatric hospitals such as Lake Alice.

### **Redress and compensation**

81. I received compensation from the Government as a round two claimant for what I experienced at Lake Alice as a child in the Unit. This did not include any compensation for the sexual abuse I suffered as a child at Lake Alice and Porirua Hospital as this was not something my lawyer ever asked me about.

82. The process of trying to claim money for being abused was alright because I had a lawyer. However, the money I got was not enough.
83. My aunty [GRO-B-1] told me to see the local lawyer regarding compensation for Lake Alice. The claim I made for compensation did not refer to the sexual abuse I have experienced at Lake Alice. My lawyer never asked me about sexual abuse.
84. I never knew I could make a complaint to police about my time at Lake Alice in the Unit.
85. I was never asked about Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC), and I did not know this was something that I could seek? I did not and do not know what a sensitive claim is. Nobody ever offered or explained this to me.
86. I also never knew about civil claims for abuse I had suffered at other institutions such as my experiences at Porirua Hospital. My worst experiences of abuse were at Porirua Hospital and were never part of my claim. My lawyer did not ask me about Porirua Hospital.

### **Current living situation**

87. I do not like to tell people I was in Lake Alice because they will probably leave me.
88. I am trying to reconnect with my whānau and learn te reo Māori but my experiences in care continue to affect those relationships and my ability to learn. I do not like to talk about it with them or have them bring it up.

89. I do not have as much choice over my own life as I would like. I receive disability support funding, but I cannot choose who I live with. The **GRO-C** **GRO-C** calls me handicapped. I do not like being called this. I am scared of him. I spend a lot of time in my room. I now have a lock on my door so that he and other people cannot come into my room and take stuff.
90. My life has been impacted by my lack of vision, my health conditions and my lack of educational opportunity. I was not given the opportunity to fully learn braille.
91. Things that have helped me since being in the community are the tools that allow me to be more independent, such as my scooter. I am very proud to be able to drive my scooter around town to get myself around. Becoming a Christian and joining a Church has also helped me, I like socialising with my friends at church. My faith has helped me to give up drugs and alcohol. I was drinking too much, and I had to give up.
92. My Health Coach helps me. Sometimes people just do not listen to me. Some people ignore me when I speak to them. My Health Coach steps in to help me ask those people to see me and listen to me.

### **Concluding comments**

93. Lake Alice was a terrible place. I refused to go back there and am pleased it is closed. Although I know it is closed, I live in fear that I might have to go back.
94. Shock treatment, the use of Paraldehyde, the rape and sexual abuse of patients' needs to stop.
95. If there was something that could be changed it would be the bad rules. I want to make sure this does not happen again to other children. I want the

Commissioners to change the bad rules, the bad rules involved giving kids electric shocks as punishment. If people are fighting do not give them electric shocks as punishment.

96. Another thing they could do better would be to have better staff and security to protect patients from sexual abuse.
  
97. A significant amount of my life has been spent within State institutions. Despite the abuse and neglect I have experienced in State institutions and the barriers society has put in my way; I am strong, proudly independent and positive man. I want to be listened to. What happened at the Lake Alice Child and Adolescent Unit must never be able to happen again.



**Statement of Truth**

This statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and was made by me knowing that it may be used as evidence by the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care.

Signed:

**GRO-C**

Dated: 11/05/2021

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