

**ABUSE IN CARE ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY
FOSTER CARE INQUIRY HEARING**

Under The Inquiries Act 2013

In the matter of The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in State Care and in the Care of Faith-based Institutions

Royal Commission: Judge Coral Shaw (Chair)
Ali'imua Sandra Alofivae
Dr Anaru Erueti

Counsel: Mr Simon Mount QC, Ms Kerryn Beaton QC, Dr Allan Cooke
and Ms Aroha Fletcher for the Royal Commission
Ms Rachael Schmidt-McCleave, Ms Julia White and
Mr Max Clarke-Parker for the Crown

Venue: Level 2
Abuse in Care Royal Commission of Inquiry
414 Khyber Pass Road
AUCKLAND

Date: 13 June 2022

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

INDEX

OPENING SUBMISSIONS BY THE ROYAL COMMISSION	2
OPENING SUBMISSIONS BY THE CROWN	8
HEMI THOMAS McCALLUM	
Questioning by Dr Cooke	10
Questioning by Commissioners	19
MR EH	
Questioning by Dr Cooke	23
Questioning by Commissioners	42
ELISON MAE	
Questioning by Ms Fletcher	45
Questioning by Commissioners	65
DR SARAH CALVERT	
Questioning by Dr Cooke	69

Lunch adjournment from 1.07 pm to 2.19 pm

7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34

CHAIR: Tēnā ata mārie Ms Fletcher.

MS FLETCHER: Ata mārie, Madam Chair. Tēnā koutou e ngā Kaikōmihana, kei konei a Alison Mae me tāna tamahine, he kaiawhina ia mō tēnei whaea. Just before we get into the affirmation, just want to let you know that Alison's brought her daughter Sarah who's here for support.

CHAIR: Welcome Sarah.

MS FLETCHER: There's a few housekeeping matters we thought we'll bring to your attention before we begin.

CHAIR: Certainly.

MS FLETCHER: There might be a time we might have a few pauses just to let Sarah stand and have a move around just in case she needs it and if Alison needs a break at well and we'll just signal that to you. Is that okay?

CHAIR: Absolutely. All you have to do is tell us and we will do whatever you require. If it's just standing up that's fine, if you'd like to go out and take five minutes in another room, that's fine too. Entirely up to you, all right? Good.

MS FLETCHER: Madam Chair, would you be doing the affirmation?

CHAIR: I will be doing. Is that the end of housekeeping?

MS FLETCHER: Yes, thank you.

ELISON MAE (Affirmed)

QUESTIONING BY MS FLETCHER: Thank you for coming here today Alison and for reading your statement. This is quite a tough conversation to have, so we really appreciate the time that you're giving us and the kōrero you'll be sharing with us today. Just be mindful that there's someone who's trying to sign, so we'll try and keep pace with what we say. But as we said before, if you need any breaks, just let us know as well.

So, before we begin looking at your care journey, we thought it might be helpful to know a little bit more about you if that's okay. Alison you were born in 1955?

A. Yes.

- 1 **Q.** Through your mother you have Māori whakapapa; is that correct?
- 2 **A.** Yes, I'm Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa and I'm also Rangitāne, Ngāti Moe is my hapū and
3 Papawai in Greytown is my tūrangawaewae.
- 4 **Q.** Kia ora. And post your time in care, which is jumping a little bit ahead you actually were a
5 residential social worker at one point?
- 6 **A.** Yeah, for a brief time. In what was then Miramar Girls' Home, I had just finished my first
7 degree and thought that, okay, in fact I had been doing a research paper and the then
8 principal offered me a job. I thought okay, I'll take it, which was actually a little unusual
9 because I'd vowed and declared I'd never ever work for Department of Social Welfare, but
10 when faced with the reality of actually being given a job, I took it. But 14 months later
11 I then took stock and thought actually no, I need sometime out for myself, and I stopped
12 work.
- 13 **Q.** You must have had a bit of a gift in the area because later on you used to also be a solicitor
14 for what was known as Child, Youth and Family and is now Oranga Tamariki?
- 15 **A.** Yes, later in life I embarked on a law degree, and I entered the profession thinking that I
16 would make a difference but learned fairly quickly that it was very much a male dominated
17 profession. But I got stroked as much as I had positive comments made, I kind of knew
18 I made a mistake in my first year, but I also just kept plodding on and ending up working
19 for the organisation, it actually kind of made sense of everything I'd been through. So, I felt
20 that would hold me in good stead and I believed it did.
- 21 **Q.** So, you're quite familiar with what good practises should look like and what should occur if
22 the State decides to remove or return a child to their family?
- 23 **A.** Yes, and that's probably more from my own experience of being in care rather than being a
24 lawyer or even my social work experience, because I know it sounds a little fluffy, and I'm
25 not a fluffy person, but often I am guided by the little girl within me.
- 26 **Q.** What's also helped for this kōrero today is you also have access to our old CYFS file which
27 has aided your recollections of what happened to you when the State was responsible for
28 your care?
- 29 **A.** Absolutely, without those files I actually — my childhood's very chaotic, which I don't
30 think is that different from a lot of survivors, and my timeframes are often out of whack. So
31 having it on paper has been beneficial, but I would qualify that with it is somebody else's
32 interpretation of me.

1 **Q.** Just before we get more into it, Mr Registrar, there's a few photos of Elison when she was
2 around 12 to 18 months old and four years old. Can we just put them up on to the screen
3 please. You can see child Elison, there we go.

4 So, in your statement you describe how the hurt or the mamae that you suffered
5 mostly occurred when the State would return you to your whānau, or sorry, family and the
6 State's inaction when your safety was placed at risk at home. Just so we understand what
7 home life was like, do you mind if we ask you a few questions about your parents and what
8 life was like at home?

9 **A.** No, not at all.

10 **Q.** In your statement you note mum was English and Māori. Mum was not connected to her
11 whānau or knew any of her whakapapa?

12 **A.** No, and my mother in fact was a ward of the State herself and I never recollect any of her
13 family members. At a later stage there was some connection but at the time I was unaware
14 of the connection. But she would have not had any support at all and actually didn't know
15 much about her heritage either.

16 **Q.** And from what you can recall, mum spent some time in hospital when she was young and
17 didn't really have an opportunity to go to school and had her own difficulties with learning
18 and things?

19 **A.** Yes, I understand that she had Tuberculosis (TB) of the spine, so did spend quite a bit of
20 time in hospital and the nature of her birth meant that she had certain issues that she would
21 have to deal with, and as I say, she was a ward of the State at that time as well.

22 **Q.** When you say a ward of the State, was mum possibly in an abusive childhood situation as
23 well?

24 **A.** I have heard stories, like she was found in a dog kennel, there was another story that her
25 bed often was the bath, and my understanding, it is my understanding, is that much of this
26 was linked to how she came into this world and apparently it was not looked upon
27 favourably.

28 **Q.** Mum also spent time in custody and had some mental health issues. In your statement you
29 note that you were exposed to mum's mental health issues. Can you elaborate a little bit
30 more on that?

31 **A.** As I got older, I was aware that my mother was diagnosed as schizophrenic, but as a child
32 there were certain behaviours. I mean I didn't understand it, I just knew it was weird. Give
33 an example, one night, this was one I was at home, and it was very, very dark so it was
34 either very late at night or in the early hours of the morning, my mother was naked and

1 waking me up because she wanted to do the ironing and I sensed that she just wanted some
2 company. I was very young and I remember falling asleep in the bunch of clothes that she
3 had to iron, but there was a plus because my father walked through the door with a box of
4 oranges that I figured he obviously stole from somewhere but I didn't care because I got to
5 get an orange and so, yeah.

6 **Q.** Speaking of your dad, you describe dad as being a bit child-like and a bit stubborn. He
7 wasn't able to read or write as well; is that correct?

8 **A.** No, and he died in his late 60s and at the time of his death he could still neither read nor
9 write. The family story, my father was the first born and he was the only one that was
10 challenged. So, when I say he as child-like, his — he could neither read nor write, his
11 English, like when he spoke, he mumbled quite badly except for when he was swearing,
12 and those words were particularly clear. But he saw everything in a very child-like manner
13 but had the pig-headedness of a full-grown man.

14 I remember when my ex-husband first met him and at that stage there was a shuttle
15 going to outer space or something and so for my father that was proof that there was no
16 God because those people in the shuttle didn't see him and so that means there was no God
17 and my — I remember my ex-husband saying "is he for real?" I said "yes, he is, he's really
18 serious, he's not joking, that's just his understanding." But if you were to try and correct
19 him then he had the annoyance and frustration that a full-grown man would have.

20 **Q.** And just a little bit more in terms of dad and your family life, dad wasn't really able to walk
21 around that much?

22 **A.** No, my father — I always remember my father being a really, really big man, which to a
23 kid meant he was a big fat man. And I must admit that on the occasions there was contact
24 I did find it embarrassing because I'd walk behind him, because he — he didn't really walk,
25 he kind of waddled, and he found I think walking and movement quite difficult.

26 **Q.** And that kind of impacted his ability to maintain a job when you were growing up as well?

27 **A.** That in part played, but that was his chronic, chronic issue. Dad, for no apparent reason,
28 might get a job on the Monday and then decide on the Wednesday actually he wasn't going
29 to go anymore. And that was really a big issue because within the family the negative
30 attitude is quite clear when it comes to our mother, because she was the aggressor. But as
31 I've got older, I've understood that actually this woman had absolutely no support from this
32 man. As a child he was the safer option, he was like the gentle giant. But having been

1 married, yes, it's important if you've got a partner that would help. Dad just didn't get any of
2 that. And yeah, so I do understand that it would have been difficult for our mother.

3 **Q.** What might have compounded that dynamic at the family home is that when he did get
4 access to money, that was sometimes spent on drink?

5 **A.** Yeah.

6 **Q.** Rather than what you needed at home?

7 **A.** And my mother was very good at using taxis and just wasting the money anyway.

8 **Q.** Did dad have much support from his family?

9 **A.** Definitely more than our mother, but I don't think a great deal from his father. I never knew
10 his real mother, she died very young, like in her 40s, and originally when I first got taken
11 into care it was their home we went to, but it was pretty short-lived, yeah.

12 **Q.** We'll get to that in a moment.

13 **A.** Yeah.

14 **Q.** If you've just got your statement in front of you, if you can turn to page four. Just see if you
15 can see, have you got to page four?

16 **A.** Yeah.

17 **Q.** Paragraphs 35 and 36.

18 **A.** Did you want me to read those?

19 **Q.** Yes please.

20 **A.** Okay. Both my parents lacked any skills in being adequate parents. Neither of them could
21 provide even the basic care for the children for any sustained period let alone be good
22 parents. I was put into care because my parents could not provide the basic requirements of
23 food, shelter and warmth for our family.

24 **Q.** There were attempts made, by the looks in your statement, that your parents did try and
25 reach out for help. In your statement you describe how your dad tried to ask for help at the
26 Wairoa Police Station. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

27 **A.** Yeah, my understanding was that at the — so at this stage I would have just turned two and
28 the next sibling would have just been one. So, they turned up at Wairoa Police Station, dad
29 advised he had no money, no job, no food, no house and my understanding is they gave him
30 six pound and that was to get us to his family who, well, in Lower Hutt, although the train
31 went to Upper Hutt at that stage I think.

32 **Q.** So, no other support besides six pounds to get to your paternal grandfather's place?

33 **A.** Yes.

34 **Q.** And when you got to your paternal grandfather's place, what happened?

- 1 A. I was going to say there was no room in the inn. There was no room in the home
2 apparently. I don't think they particularly wanted us there, but they offered us the shed and
3 so we were in the shed I think for just over a week, because the hospitality had run out at
4 that stage. I mean I'm oblivious to this, I'm just a kid, but this is the information I've found
5 on my file.
- 6 Q. This is where your care journey starts, is beginning now?
- 7 A. Yes.
- 8 Q. So, on 11 October 1957 your parents then took you and [GRO-B-1] to the Lower Hutt
9 welfare office. Again, your parents asked for the State to then look after you and [GRO-B-1];
10 is that correct?
- 11 A. Yes, and also at this time our mother was about three to four months pregnant with the then
12 third child and she didn't keep good health with her pregnancies, so was I think
13 haemorrhaging at times and being hospitalised. So, at some point they did just say "we can't
14 do this anymore", and at that stage we were then committed to care, my [GRO-B-1] and
15 I made wards of the State, and our journey began then.
- 16 Q. That's where you both went into the Miramar home, is that correct?
- 17 A. Yes, and at that stage it was a receiving home. And I think we were there just for a couple
18 of months.
- 19 Q. Yeah. So roughly a couple of months, two months you're there, and then you get shifted
20 again to what we're calling the childless couple in Maungaroa; is that correct?
- 21 A. Yes, I have no recollection of these people at all. What I do know is from my files and what
22 I've read from those file notes. My understanding is and the sense that I got from reading
23 those files was that they really wanted me and [GRO-B-1], and it was more than we weren't
24 just welfare kids, that's the sense I get, that they really loved us and did want us, and I know
25 from my files that they in fact did want to adopt us. That didn't come to fruition, but I did
26 find out many years later very shortly afterwards they did adopt a sibling group, and I met
27 the eldest of those and that woman had ended up running the then Whanganui family home,
28 and that family home had a reputation for kids not wanting to leave. And we met and had a
29 coffee.
- 30 Now she was completely unaware that her parents had fostered two little — and they
31 were also Māori, two little Māori children prior to them adopting, I think it was herself, a
32 sister and a brother, so I believe there were three of them. At the time I met her the foster
33 father had died, but the foster mother was still alive in Christchurch. I planned on meeting

1 because I wanted to meet this person because — and I think part of it was, here was
2 I working for the organisation and here was another child that she'd raised also working.
3 So, there was something that they'd done, I believed, and I just thought it would be nice.
4 But then life got in the way, and I never did get to meet her.

5 **Q.** So that really could have been yours and [GRO-B-1]'s home for life?

6 **A.** It's interesting you say that, because I often wondered what my life would have been like if
7 that had happened.

8 **Q.** Unfortunately, though, you were only there for just over six months and then you were
9 returned to your family. Do you know why you returned to your family; can you recall?

10 **A.** No, but from my files I think that it was more of an issue of finances, because in the files
11 there was a case note that there was reference that it would be probably financially
12 beneficial if in fact these children could be returned if the mother was able to take care of
13 them as opposed to the cost of caregivers. And I remember thinking mmm, that's a good
14 reason.

15 **Q.** So, the cost —

16 **CHAIR:** You're saying the cost of the —

17 **A.** To have the children in place.

18 **Q.** It's too expensive to keep you in foster care so they sent you home?

19 **A.** Yes, that's the sense that I got from what I was reading.

20 **QUESTIONING BY MS FLETCHER CONTINUED:** So, you and [GRO-B-1] were then
21 returned to your family, that's where you then met your [GRO-B]?

22 **A.** Yes, it is.

23 **Q.** How old were you at the time now?

24 **A.** So I — well, so that was in Petone and I think what also assisted with the return home was
25 even though my father's father wasn't very supportive of him, he had a brother who I have
26 no recollection of and they lived opposite, and so they assured Department of Social
27 Welfare they could keep an eye on things.

28 **Q.** Okay, so as a part of that process your uncle assisted with the return?

29 **A.** Well, just keeping an eye on — because they lived opposite to begin with. So, I think
30 I might have been about three.

31 **Q.** Right.

32 **A.** Yeah.

33 **Q.** Because there were — for you to return home to your family there were certain conditions?

1 A. Oh, yes, so even though we returned, we were still legally under the care of the Department
2 of Social Welfare. I think that first return was something called a friend status, which I'm
3 not quite sure what that is, other than I think it's possibly similar to nowadays the 91
4 support order. But maybe more clout than the support order. So yes, placed back with the
5 parents but ultimately the State had the control.

6 Q. What might help for those present who might not be familiar, if you can turn to page 10 of
7 your statement, if you've got it before you. And it's at paragraph 86.

8 A. So, this is the contract that was between the Department of Social Welfare and my parents.
9 They, meaning GRO-B-1 and I, because remembering at this time the baby that's been
10 born is not committed, so it's just me and GRO-B-1.

11 "They still remain under the legal control of the Department and from time to time
12 will be visited by the nearest Child Welfare officer. If at any time during the period of
13 supervision it is ascertained that either their conduct is unsatisfactory, or the surrounding
14 conditions of your home are not conducive to their future welfare, the question of their
15 removal from your control will be immediately considered. If at any time you change your
16 address, you must advise the district Child Welfare office whose address is Lower Hutt.

17 They — me and GRO-B-1— must not live away from your home without the
18 authority of the Child Welfare officer. It is also a condition that children of school age be
19 regular in attendance at school. This period of supervision may extend over one or two
20 years or even longer. If it is considered necessary in the child's interest to take such a
21 course. When conditions are satisfactory, the Department is only too pleased to relinquish
22 the control at the earliest possible date. If supervision is continued, then the Department is
23 legally in a position to assist at any time should this be necessary."

24 Q. So just for those listening in to your kōrero and your story today, while you had been
25 returned to the family, the State was still responsible for you. You had not been discharged
26 from State care?

27 A. No.

28 Q. In your statement you describe how times were quite tough when you returned. The family
29 was still in debt, there was no power and no money. There was also a few more adults in
30 the home, what your mum was calling boarders. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

31 A. Boarders for me, they were uncles. From a very young age I understood men, and not in a
32 good way. I knew what certain phrases meant, I knew what a look meant, if I was told I was
33 a good girl I knew what was going to happen, if I was told that you're a pretty little thing,

1 I knew what was going to happen. And that happening was I would either be fingered, I
2 would be rubbed up against, I would be used to touch them. I learned about sex at a very
3 early age. Penetration came a little bit later.

4 And I guess that was also the start of my not understanding what was happening to
5 me and trying to make some sense of it and it was the beginning of that journey of
6 worthlessness, because that was the only way I could make sense of what was going on for
7 me. But I know that it was very young, and yeah, I actually didn't like boarders, because
8 they weren't nice people.

9 **Q.** So, it wasn't a safe environment for you at all?

10 **A.** No, not at all.

11 **Q.** Then three months later your family tried to reach out again for more support and on 14
12 October 1958 your mum contacted the Lower Hutt welfare office again and again tried to
13 hand you and your siblings over to the State to be looked after?

14 **A.** Basically, the return home went belly up really at the end of the day. And at this stage when
15 we did get removed, it was at this point that the baby that had been born now was also
16 committed. And that tended to be a pattern for later on. And having worked for the
17 organisation, that is often a pattern that we see repeated. So, children will come into care,
18 more are brought and then they're brought into care, and — yeah. Sorry, I didn't mean to
19 jump ahead.

20 **Q.** No, no that's all right, we're on track. Just for the benefit of those that might be watching,
21 Mr Registrar, can you please bring up document WITN0462002 please, just so we can see
22 it on the screens. So, this is an exhibit capturing your mum's attempts to actually get the
23 support and get you guys into State care. If you could slowly scroll through it so those can
24 read that.

25 While those who haven't seen that document look at that, Alison if you can just look
26 at the statement before you. If you can please turn to page six and you can see you've got
27 paragraphs 50 to 51 in front of you, can you see that?

28 **A.** Yes.

29 **Q.** Can you please read those paragraphs out?

30 **A.** Despite the Lower Hutt office being told of the dire situation that the family was in, the
31 response of the office was to suggest that mum with the children go to Masterton, that a
32 social worker would visit dad to discuss getting the boarders out and sorting out the debts.
33 I do not understand why it was thought that this would resolve the issue. My feeling is that
34 the local office preferred that this family was not in their area.

1 We were not removed until two days later when my mother presented at the
2 Masterton office. Prior to turning up at the office, mum had phoned the Masterton office
3 informing them that she and her friend had arrived in Masterton and that she was staying
4 with an alcoholic friend of hers. When mum turned up at the office the case notes state that
5 mum was in an agitated emotional state, asking that all the children be taken into care. She
6 had nowhere to take the children, had no money, did not know where her husband was.

7 Another case note commented that mum has deteriorated considerably, and the
8 children are now in need.

9 **Q.** So, on 16 October 1958 the State then intervened?

10 **A.** Yes.

11 **Q.** And placed you and your siblings into care?

12 **A.** Yeah.

13 **Q.** However, you were then separated from your GRO-B; is that correct?

14 **A.** Yes, GRO-B-1 and I went to a placement which would figure later, and that woman that we
15 were placed with was 65 at the time we went to her, and GRO-B went somewhere else.

16 **Q.** Just before we get to the next bit, Mr Registrar can you please bring up the photo again of
17 Elison please, just so we can see.

18 **A.** Can I just mention something about — I've asked for the photos because I think when I'm
19 sitting here I'm nearly 67 and I'm telling my story, but it's not actually the 67 year old
20 woman's story, this is the story of this little girl, and I think it's important for people to see
21 that, because often we see the person speaking and if they're articulate and can — you
22 forget, because I certainly forgot her for a long time and I am her. And also, it's my way of
23 honouring this little girl.

24 **Q.** Speaking of honouring that little girl, so if we look at the one that's more grey scale, that's
25 when you were about four years old?

26 **A.** Yes, I'm well fed at that stage.

27 **Q.** That's about the time that you were in Carterton, is that correct?

28 **A.** Yes, and that was the woman that was 65. Now she was a lot older, but she was an
29 excellent caregiver. It's interesting to note an issue nowadays is cultural. In my time it was
30 religion. And there was a lot made of the fact because she was Roman Catholic. Now she
31 also had an adult son and adult daughter that assisted her because they lived at home.

32 I wouldn't have known what a Protestant was but apparently that was an issue, but there

1 was, like there are today, an exceptional social worker who actually answered the welfare
2 and best interest of the children.

3 And that's a point that I — it's important to me because a lot is made of especially,
4 for example, Historic Claims Unit, they look at the policies and practises of the time. If
5 you're doing good social work practice, that existed in 1950, in 1980 and in 2022. It's not
6 rocket science. It is putting the child first.

7 Now this social worker was aware of the difference in the religion but said that this
8 woman had the expertise and the patience to work with these two little children and she is
9 what they needed. We will look at the religion when they're a little bit older, but in the
10 meantime, she approached the Methodist church, set up a meeting so that the caregiver was
11 more than happy for these children to attend Sunday School when they're older. I went back
12 to this caregiver later and I never once step foot in the Catholic Church, we always attended
13 the Methodist church, so she meant what she said, and, yeah, all I'm saying is that good
14 social work practice exists no matter when it was.

15 **Q.** But for running on that, though, you and [GRO-B-1] actually had quite a good time there
16 then, you had the love and support for almost two years?

17 **A.** I don't actually — I mean yes, I remember the home, it was a big old home and as I got on
18 later, we called it the old place because she moved later on. I don't remember anything bad.
19 I remember stories that she would share with us. And it was safe, nothing bad happened, it
20 was safe.

21 **Q.** Unfortunately, though, you and [GRO-B-1] were then eventually returned to home?

22 **A.** Yes.

23 **Q.** On 1 September 1960, you were about five at the time; is that correct?

24 **A.** No, I was in — that was set up purposely because I would be turning five on the 17th. So,
25 the idea behind it was that I — it gave me time to adjust being back with our parents and
26 then I would be starting school. Now this return, again it was [GRO-B-1] and I, but the
27 [GRO-B], the one that had just been born when we went back the first time didn't come
28 back, and our mother had had another child who by the time we got there was nine months
29 old.

30 And the placement that that third [GRO-B] went to actually had something to do with
31 a later [GRO-B] of mine. But that's where she was and on my case notes there's a lot of
32 reference to the fact of the first return not working out, that there were warnings that we

1 better make sure we get this right, there were warnings about the supposed reconciliation of
2 our parents etc, but it went ahead anyway.

3 **Q.** And there was a little bit of history repeating itself, because in your statement you note that
4 the State and your parents had to again enter into another contract with certain conditions
5 that had to be fulfilled if you returned to your family?

6 **A.** Yeah, very similar to what I'd read out before. The first one applied to the two of us,
7 whereas the later one, and that was called H status, we had our own individual contract.
8 What was interesting about the latter one was we were of school age, well, I was, GRO-B-1
9 did end up going to school a bit earlier because apparently, I fretted for him. But there was
10 nothing — in the first one there was that clause that attendance at school had to be regular,
11 that was missing in the second. Yeah.

12 **Q.** Just to clarify, the State was again supervising — was supposed to be supervising?

13 **A.** They had legal control, yes.

14 **Q.** And just to remind those present, when your parents were asked to enter into this
15 agreement, your father was still not able to read or write?

16 **A.** No.

17 **Q.** He still had to depend on your mum?

18 **A.** No, so his signature's very child-like. I don't know if they discussed with him, I doubt it, so
19 yeah, it just seemed odd.

20 **Q.** When you went back the second time, while the State was still responsible for you, you
21 were unfortunately placed in using the terms of that agreement conditions that were not
22 helpful to you. If you don't mind, we'll go over what happened to you over the next three
23 years when you're back in your family's care?

24 **A.** No, I don't mind.

25 **Q.** One of the conditions in the agreement is that they would notify Child Welfare wherever
26 there was movements or placements. In your statement you say that you've been moved to
27 five different towns and 11 different homes without the district Child Welfare office's
28 consent. Can you talk us through that?

29 **A.** Well, when we lived in Palmerston North we went to a particular address. Now I think
30 whilst in Palmerston North they were aware that we'd moved from place to place. I think
31 there were at least three different homes that we went to. And in fact, one of those homes,
32 now the head in those days was a superintendent and it was a requirement that workers had
33 to provide reviews every so often. And it became apparent that one of the homes had in fact

1 been condemned, and the Superintendent was somewhat concerned that actually he had
2 agreed to a return to a home that supposedly had been condemned for the past eight
3 months. But the social worker explained that away by saying that in fact the parents were
4 going to move to another home, but that didn't happen for a while.

5 We also — and this is why my recall often is chaotic, I understand there was a
6 period of time when we went missing and that was because the family I think had moved to
7 Morrinsville, but we were only there for a short period of time because my father had
8 secured employment, but typical to dad something happened and a week later we moved
9 on. Then when we went to Masterton, I think there were several placements there, like
10 when I — several homes, and then we went to Carterton, and I think we were in the same
11 home a lot. But we were just moving all the time, and it was a particularly abusive period.

12 **Q.** Yeah. Just before we get into those bit more abusive stuff, just with all the movements that
13 happened, you actually had quite a broken education during that time with all the different
14 schools you were having to go to?

15 **A.** Yes, yes.

16 **Q.** And there was one time where you were just left on the side of the road, you had to enrol
17 yourself?

18 **A.** Yes, that was Carterton school. Yes, I remember my mother dropped me and [GRO-B-1] off
19 and said, "start yourselves there". So, we just sat outside, [GRO-B-1] just did as I told [GRO-
20 B] to, and we just watched everybody going in and then finally a teacher came out and said,
21 "what are you kids doing here?" I said, "we're starting school here." I think I might have
22 been about seven or something, I'm not sure of the age. So that was our enrolment.

23 **Q.** Most times you were left, you and [GRO-B-1] were left to fend for yourself?

24 **A.** Oh look, I mean the file notes are littered with neighbours and people making complaints
25 because, you know, at five and four we were out on the street at 10 pm at night. There were
26 parties galore. There were — there was an incident involving an assault, a very serious
27 assault on one of the children, one of us, and the ages were five, four and 14 months and we
28 weren't removed, and it was like what more did you need? I mean, the Police were involved
29 on several occasions with the family, this is all known because it's on my file. But that
30 assault in particular, it was like that was serious, very serious and nothing was done.

31 **Q.** We'll jump ahead in terms of speaking about those assaults, sorry Elison. If you can help us
32 by turning to page 18 of your statement. And you'll see I think it's paragraph 144.

1 A. I recall many hidings from our mother. Looking back, I now realise it was her rage. She
2 used anything to hit me and my siblings. I could never tell what the triggers were. Although
3 she never abused us when my father was around. I do not remember my father ever beating
4 us. Sometimes he would threaten us, but we would run away and by the time he caught us
5 we were all laughing. With all the sexual abuse I knew it would be over and done with and
6 that I would survive. But with my mother's physical abuse, I genuinely did not know if I
7 would survive the hidings because her level of rage was so intense, and her violence was
8 often explosive and unexpected.

9 I recall—I recall, this is on the first return, so I'm only three, and [GRO-B-1] fell out
10 of the window. Now apparently, I pushed [GRO-B-1] out, and I do remember this,
11 I remember looking down and seeing all this blood on [GRO-B-1]'s face. I then remember
12 floor boards and being pulled out from under a bed, so I think I may have hidden under the
13 bed and my mother beat the hell out of me.

14 I remember another time she'd made a salad and I was too little to understand that if
15 you're going to pinch the boiled — sliced boiled egg you need to rearrange it so it can't be
16 told, so there were the gaps. She said, "who did that?" And me being the good big sister
17 I pointed to [GRO-B-1] and said [GRO-B-1] did it, and [GRO-B-1] pointed to me. So, she
18 completely undressed us, we were naked, we had to lie face down and she hit us with a jug
19 cord not caring what end it was. Her rage was frightening, really, really frightening, and
20 I didn't know when it would come, and I genuinely didn't know if I would survive.

21 So, although there was a lot of sexual abuse, I knew I wasn't going to die. But
22 I didn't know if I was going to die with my mother. My mother had mental health issues.
23 I mention that not to condone, but to put some perspective, that she had her own issues, and
24 she didn't have a supportive partner. It doesn't make it right what she did. Yeah.

25 **Q.** That's okay. It sounds like there was quite a lot of rage in the family home, and while you
26 might have been the subject of it, you were also witnessing a lot of violence when you were
27 at home too?

28 A. It was interesting because my mother — it would be my mother that got the boarders in, my
29 mother was the one that made up the stories and that's littered with on my file, you know,
30 that she's a liar. But dad just didn't get it. So if they had fights, she would throw — there
31 were things often thrown, knives would be going, plates would be going, and actually as an
32 adult I found, and it was a bit embarrassing, but if, for example, I was somewhere and there
33 was a discussion going on, I could sense when that discussion actually the anger was

1 starting to step in, and if somebody was right next to me, I'm talking about 18 and 19, and
2 somebody would go "oh for goodness sake" and I would do that, and it was because I —
3 I just did it almost as a reflex. And I never liked being around — I didn't like going to
4 parties where there were a lot of drink because I could sense when the drink was becoming
5 bad and so that was a carry over for me from my past.

6 **Q.** When you were talking just before you mentioned the boarders and adults that were coming
7 through your house and people staying. And in your statement, you recall one incident
8 where you saw a child being hit quite severely. That's really impacted you, could you speak
9 about that?

10 **A.** Yeah, that — I don't know if the family were related to us and I'm not sure if we were at
11 their home, because I do know for a period, they were with us. They had a 14-year old, had
12 several children, but I particularly liked this girl because I liked anyone who was kind to
13 me. So, if there was an adult that was kind to me or a teacher kind to me, I felt nice about
14 them.

15 But I didn't like the father, he was big, and he was violent. Anyway, we were in a
16 kitchen and this 14-year old girl, I don't know what she said or what she did, he got his
17 hand, this is her father, and he just smashed it up against the wall. I was petrified. But her
18 mother and my mother were still sitting at the table laughing and talking away, it was just
19 normal, and it was like awful, it wasn't nice.

20 **Q.** Unfortunately, you've actually been privy to quite a lot of violence before you. You speak
21 of when you were still in your parents' care with the State supervising you were six years
22 old when your mum took you and GRO-B-1 to live in Hastings for a little bit?

23 **A.** Yes, and again she was pregnant with another child, but never told Social Welfare about it
24 at all and that was pretty horrific, a lot of abuse went on there. I think we were there for
25 something like three months. In fact, I was enrolled at the school there.

26 **Q.** There were a group of boys there that used to bully you?

27 **A.** Yeah, to me they were big, but when I think about it, I think possibly they are 14, 15, but
28 there was a younger one and he tried to do what he could do, but they just did all sorts of
29 things. So, they would get me and GRO-B-1 behind a door and push against it and see how
30 long they could do it before we'd, you know, scream really bad. They had a tree that hung
31 over a driveway, because their parents were never there, but I think they were apple pickers
32 because they would go off in the morning and then come back later in the day.

1 Now, I apparently was enrolled at the school, but I don't even remember going to
2 school. But this tree, they would climb up, or they'd make us climb up and they'd be behind
3 us and then they'd push us out and we'd land on the ground, and it was just really horrific,
4 and the sexual abuse was pretty bad too. Did you want me to expand on that?

5 **Q.** It's up to you, you don't have to talk about that if you don't want to.

6 **A.** So, I think I'm six, seven, I can't remember, [GRO-B-1]'s [GRO-B]. Don't ask me why
7 they had a double bed, but there was a bed out in a shed, and all these boys had these
8 broomsticks or sticks, and they beat us until [GRO-B-1] and I rooted each other. I knew it
9 was wrong, I mean I actually knew early that what men were doing to me was not okay.
10 But that was my purpose, that's why I was born, was so that people could do what they
11 wanted, I was nothing. I was less than nothing. There was no such thing as me or I, it's
12 whatever anybody wanted.

13 One time our mother did turn up and I hid in her car, and I screamed and pleaded
14 for her to take us, and she wouldn't. She wouldn't take us away. When we did finally return
15 back to Masterton, we were covered in bruises, I had kutus, nits, my hair got washed with
16 petrol and it got shaved. And it seems that there was a visit and that's how they found out
17 that we hadn't been in Masterton, and my mother told the social worker that since we had
18 come back [GRO-B-1] and I, that we were uncontrollable in our behaviour and that we had
19 learned to be sexual and that that behaviour was continuing.

20 That social worker spoke to me and [GRO-B-1] about that. And the case notes said
21 that [GRO-B-1] with some pride told the social worker that [GRO-B-1] learned how to root,
22 and that social worker did nothing. No, actually she did. She told me that I needed to make
23 sure I went to school every day and that I had a good wash before I went. And that was it.
24 That same social worker did make a comment however, because one of our boarders, and
25 I remember this man, and I remember him because he had a particular liking for [GRO-B-3].

26 Now I don't believe it was sexual with him. He just liked [GRO-B-3], but he was an
27 alcoholic and above his wall in his bedroom was a poster that had a woman with just a bra
28 on and holding a can of beer. In the case note the social worker thought that was appalling.
29 This is the same person that's just been told about what's happened and she was appalled by
30 this poster. It's like this didn't make any sense. And again, it just fed into something that
31 had already started a long time ago that I was nothing.

32 **Q.** Because with that admission there's nothing in your file note saying that they investigated
33 the claims, or the statements made?

1 A. No.

2 Q. It was just a pass it off?

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. Wasn't believed about anything?

5 A. Well, there was nothing done, absolutely nothing done.

6 Q. So, after three years in your parents' care you were getting pretty horrific abuse?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. What you suffered?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. You and your siblings were then removed again in November 1963?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Can you tell us where you went next?

13 A. At that stage we were in Carterton and the abuse continued there. We had Mormons living
14 with us and they were abusive. But in November of '63, and I didn't realise this until I'd
15 read my files, we got removed and at that stage I, with one sibling, went and returned to
16 that old lady who now is 71. And two houses down from me two other siblings went, and I
17 don't know where some of the others went.

18 But the reason we were removed was because our mother was then committed to
19 then the Porirua mental hospital. She returned home on 23 December, and we were returned
20 back. And then it was either a month or two months later, that was the last uplift and that's
21 the uplift I recall, there was screaming, there was yelling, there were Police, there was the
22 local doctor, there were social workers, and I recall that because I had my arms around my
23 mother and I was screaming blue murder, which was really odd because this was the
24 woman that never gave me what I needed, she beat the living hell out of me, she offered me
25 to people, but I think it's — even though she didn't give me what I needed, I still wanted it
26 for her.

27 And that really hit home. My mother died in my early 60's and my father had died
28 some years before, and like with my father's death, it didn't really hit home. Like with my
29 father's death I ended up having to arrange matters. But it wasn't like — there was no
30 sadness, I was just going through the functions of doing what I needed to do. But about a
31 month later I was overwhelmed with sadness, and I couldn't work out and I was just crying,
32 and I realised that that little girl, because my mother had died, she could never now, just by
33 some means, be the mum I needed. And I'm in my 60's, and thought oh my gosh, it's
34 amazing how it's with you, it's just a part of who you are. You know, it was — I just

1 mention that because it is something that stays with you and you think you've got it sorted,
2 but actually it is with you for your life.

3 **Q.** We'll just take it a little bit back just on that topic though. When you're removed from your
4 family that time, it's more about an adult decision to give respite almost so that your mum
5 can go to hospital rather than what your safety concerns were, what was best for you at the
6 time?

7 **A.** Yeah, definitely, yes. I mean when I look at my file, it was like God, what did you need to
8 actually do something? Because there were — and that's just my story, I don't know about
9 **GRO-B** and **GRO-B** in terms of — I'm pretty damn sure it wasn't just me that was being
10 abused.

11 **Q.** So, you're now eight years old?

12 **A.** Yeah.

13 **Q.** Your place, was it nana, you call her nana?

14 **A.** Yes, we ended up calling her nana because she was older, and that was probably the
15 placement that I had the longest. I stayed with her until I was 15. I remember I was with her
16 when I sat my School C and by the time, I got the results I was at another foster home.
17 Chronologically, I took the role of — I was the second to eldest. There were three other
18 girls from another family and there was me and **GRO-B** that died a couple of years ago.
19 And they were all special class.

20 **Q.** So, in terms of this placement in foster from eight until 15 this is your last foster placement
21 that you had?

22 **A.** No, no, what happened was nana and I were arguing all the time, because I had a mouth on
23 me, and one day she said, "if you're not happy then just go, ring them up." And I thought
24 right, so I rung up Social Welfare and said, "can you come and get me." More because she
25 told me to and I thought no, if you don't think I'm going to do it I'll do it.

26 I had a social welfare officer come take me away in the car to tell me how
27 ungrateful I was, and I'd never been any problems. Anyway, I went to a temporary home in
28 rural Carterton for about a month or two months maybe, and then I went to — the foster
29 home that I remained in until I went off to university for my first degree and when I got
30 married. They'd had four sons and they actually approached me when I was to get married
31 and asked if I would mind if they paid for the wedding and could they announce it as the
32 wedding of their daughter. So that was — and my children know them, they're both passed
33 now, as farmer nana and farmer poppa. My natural parents were sometimes nana and

1 sometimes poppa, and my husband's parents were home nana and home poppa because they
2 lived locally. But yeah, they were amazing people, they did a lot for me.

3 **Q.** So, you had quite an amazing time in your last placement, but that first time with nana at
4 eight years old, there was a few things that happened while you were there?

5 **A.** Yeah, look, nana was a good person and in fact her grandson, I got him to read my witness
6 statement, because I wanted him to know what I was about to say. Because I don't believe
7 that nana did this intentionally, I don't think she knew how to deal with mental health
8 issues. I said that she had an adult son. I was never ever scared of this man, and I knew
9 men, but he was huge, he was well over six feet, and he was solid, but really, really gentle
10 man. But he got sick, and I don't know when it started.

11 Now, because I — even though I wasn't in a special class, I was kind of treated like I
12 was. So, I wasn't allowed to do things like homework and stuff because it meant that
13 I thought I was smarter, and I wasn't. And she did things like, you know, every time
14 somebody came to the door, we all had to be lined up, we were introduced as her foster
15 daughters or foster children and then we had to sing a song. And that was just her way. She
16 did use a strap, I got it the most because of my mouth, but it was never ever above the knee,
17 it was at the back, and it was only once. Mind you, you only needed it once because it
18 actually hurt like hell, it was just — I still see it today, just a tiny piece of leather looped.
19 And even then, it wasn't like a daily thing or anything like that, it was just, you know, that
20 was her way.

21 But with her adult son, he had become sick, I was unaware that he'd become sick
22 and I'm not sure when it started, but it was a bit of a benefit because I was now allowed to
23 stay up because I was in bed even at 15 at 7.30, and I had a role to do and that role was he
24 would go off to work, he worked for the Council, he would come home, he had a great big
25 tin lunch box, he would put it on the kitchen bench, he would then go up to his room, take
26 off his work clothes, have a bit of a wash up, come out eat tea.

27 When he came home, I had to run out from the lounge, check his lunch box, make
28 sure everything was eaten, relay that back to my foster mother. I then had to sit on a couch
29 that gave me direct view to the kitchen and then I had to relay what was happening. And
30 I knew something was wrong because this man would come in, wash his hands, get his
31 meal off a pot that had water in it to keep it warm, bring it and sit it down at the table. He
32 then would just stare into space for quite a period of time. He then picked up his knife, he
33 would put it into the butter, he would put it up like this, it would go backwards and

1 forwards for some period of time, then he'd look into space and then he would start his
2 meal.

3 He then would come in and he would sit next to me. And I remember one time we
4 were watching Coronation Street and he became agitated because they were talking about
5 him. My nana and her adult daughter said nothing, but I knew it was my job, so I had to be
6 jolly, I never ever let anyone know that I was scared shitless, I mean really scared, in fact
7 I went to bed with a bat in my bed and the window partly ajar because his room was right
8 next to mine and the foster sister that was with me.

9 And this went on for some time until one weekend he had a friend who was as small
10 as he was big, and he attacked the friend. I don't know how he did it, but me and that friend
11 and the adult daughter managed to get him down on the ground. There's yelling and
12 screaming, I'm probably about 15 at this time, 14, 15, and my nana's yelling go to the next-
13 door neighbours. I was relieved, I took off, I ran over, I said so and so's trying to kill so and
14 so, and what it was was that this adult son had alcohol poisoning.

15 The hard part for me was that my nana and the adult daughter denied that I was
16 even there, and I don't know why they denied it. So, I know it was alcohol poisoning
17 because I heard the conversations. I didn't know he'd been taken to Porirua, but I heard the
18 conversations.

19 The man returned from Porirua, he wasn't the same man, it was like he was a really
20 sad man and not long after, he ended his life. That means of ending his life was not nice at
21 all. The coffin was closed. But again, I didn't know any of this because I'd simply
22 overheard, and as a young teenager trying to deal with knowing what he did, I had no-one
23 to talk to because I didn't know anything supposedly, so that was pretty tough as well. And
24 that probably, if I look back, would be the only abusive action on nana's part, but as I say, I
25 don't think she intended it to be that way.

26 Like she really didn't like taking us to the doctor because that meant she wasn't
27 looking after us well. That's how she saw it. It wasn't that she didn't want us, because I used
28 to have a great deal of difficulties with my periods. So, her solution was I'd have to get
29 down on my hands and knees and scrub. After passing out a couple of times she realised,
30 you know, it wasn't that she was cruel, that was just her way, because she was older.

31 **Q.** That's what she knew.

32 **A.** Yeah.

33 **Q.** I'm just conscious we've only got —

1 A. Sorry.

2 **Q.** No, it's all right, don't apologise. We've got five minutes and you've got some kōrero that
3 the Commissioners need to hear. They do have your statement so if we don't get through
4 everything, they've still got it before them.

5 A. That's fine.

6 **Q.** One of the key messages coming out of your statement is this, with what you went through
7 and the abuses you suffered, you started to see yourself as being worthless, as being
8 nothing, and that played a major impact in your life. Can you talk a little bit about that?

9 A. That's what I was saying, that started when I was little in terms of the violence shown by
10 my mother. It is something that even now when I think about it, it hurts me, because
11 I couldn't understand why all these different people did things, I couldn't understand why
12 my mother was so abusive towards me. And while I'm in it, every single action just kept
13 reaffirming what had already started developing.

14 What became my saving grace was that when I did finally get removed and was
15 with nana, all this, the sexual abuse, the physical abuse stopped and so I was able to
16 maybe — I'd always used my head, and it didn't match up, because none of this depravity
17 was happening to me anymore. So maybe I wasn't as worthless as I thought I was. Because
18 tied up with feeling like I was nothing was I thought I didn't even have the right to want to
19 be something. That wasn't okay. But it's a journey that's been long for me.

20 And I still even now will have those days where my past has overwhelmed me. But
21 I know myself well enough, I just take time out, I let those feelings, I feel them, I know that
22 I'm going to come through the other side. Those times are getting fewer and fewer as I get
23 older. And for me, doing this now, I just don't want another little girl or a little boy to have
24 to deal with this.

25 And the State was right to look at my situation and go these people are not okay.
26 But I understand my mum and dad, they had their issues, the State became my parent, what
27 was their excuse? Because if they were parents, they would have their kids removed from
28 them. And I don't understand why nobody did anything. You know, were we that worthless
29 that it wasn't, you know, don't bother, I don't know. I don't know if it was because I was
30 Māori, I don't know if it was because I was — I don't know. But I took it on board, and
31 I shouldn't have, and it wasn't my fault.

32 **Q.** Thank you, thank you for your words today. And before I pass you on to the
33 Commissioners if they have any questions, just want to reiterate that you're not nothing,
34 you are something and you're helping a lot of people here by sharing your voice. It's really

1 important and your voice is important too, Elison, so we really appreciate you coming
2 today. Is there anything else you want to share before we pass you on to the
3 Commissioners?

4 A. I think probably the one thing — look it doesn't matter what your family is like or what's
5 happened in your past, it doesn't — it helps you to understand, but it doesn't define who you
6 are. This has been a long and lonely journey, but you can make it through to the other side
7 and you're the better person for it, because you survived.

8 So yes, I was a bit nervous about today because it was like finally after a couple of
9 years it's all happening, and it's a little bit off-putting being on the other side, you know,
10 normally I'm giving the instructions to the social workers and blah blah blah, but I'm glad
11 I've done it, and I spoke to somebody earlier and the relief and they're like yeah, I've done
12 it. And that's kind of what I feel because I do want us to try and get it right. We really have
13 to get this right. I don't want this just to be another attempt and we still go down the same
14 path.

15 I don't know what the answer is exactly. I don't think it's going to be easy, but I
16 think that everybody, and it's not just the State, and it's not just the experts, actually Joe
17 Bloggs has to take some responsibility, because our kids are the one sector of society that
18 they do have rights and they have entitlements, but they can't give effect to them. They're
19 totally reliant on the adults around them to fulfil for those children the obligations that
20 those parents owe to those children. They're not asked to be born; they're not asked to be
21 brought into this world. And they, you know, I just — that's important.

22 Q. Thank you Elison.

23 A. Thank you.

24 **CHAIR:** Thank you. I've got a question that might take you three days to answer it, but I'm going
25 to ask you to just keep it short. Your parents were not good parents and you've told us that.
26 They also were battling demons of their own, your mother in particular.

27 A. Yeah.

28 Q. Who plainly could have been sitting where you are today if she'd been alive as a ward of
29 the State herself etc, your father obviously had difficulties. They were chaotic. The State
30 knew that and kept sending you back. Were you aware of, first of all, apart from the odd
31 money to get them from one place to the other, did they ever wrap around your family, your
32 parents?

33 A. The State?

34 Q. Yeah.

1 A. No, no.

2 Q. Providing support that might have just held them together?

3 A. No, not at all, not at all.

4 Q. I thought you were going to say that, so then I'm going to ask you now as a professional,
5 and trying to be as objective as you can, which I know is hard, do you think it would have
6 been possible?

7 A. Yes, because having worked for the organisation, we've always had more children than
8 we've had caregivers, so there's actually some benefit to working with the family, because
9 if you're worried about costs, then isn't it better to — this is on the presumption that these
10 parents, you know, it is safe to return these children and that it is a viable solution. Because
11 there are examples and I think my parents would be possibly even with assistance there
12 would still be some issues there.

13 But if you are willing to work not just with the child but work with the family as
14 well, then I think you've got a better chance —

15 Q. Yeah.

16 A. — of one, keeping that family together, because that was the other thing, I hardly ever saw
17 my GRO-B.

18 Q. Yes, that's right.

19 A. And I kind of didn't really want to see my mother and father because that was another
20 whole big thing, but yeah, there is I think a sensible approach to looking at working with
21 the whole family. But for me the focus was children.

22 Q. Yeah, thank you for that.

23 **COMMISSIONER ALOFIVAE:** Alison, you've just been so generous and rich. My question's
24 actually been asked because, as you know, there's a lot of focus at the moment on the
25 prevention end and the question is how much, how far do you go? And just a number of
26 issues have been raised in your narrative around the safety and community and all of those
27 risk factors that have to be taken into consideration.

28 In your time in the Ministry and feel free not to answer.

29 A. Yeah.

30 Q. Did you get a sense that they were getting better at understanding that those risk factors and
31 the matrix and what actually would truly make the difference?

32 A. No. I used to often say to my social workers that my personal view was the biggest mistake
33 the organisation made is what it didn't do. So, if there was an investigation required, we

1 either didn't get on to it quick enough or we didn't do a good enough job. If there were
2 reviews required, we didn't do those appropriately. And that every time we didn't do
3 something that effectively we became a part of that abusive process.

4 Look, there are some really skilled and competent social workers and incredibly
5 dedicated, but there are also a lot that aren't. This is a huge, huge organisation we're going
6 to make mistakes. And that's a part I think where the rest of society comes into play. Just
7 because you create something to deal with care and protection, that's not the end of Joe
8 Bloggs' role. Because children should be first and foremost for everybody. And I think
9 that's the big thing.

10 My daughter when she came here, one of the taxi drivers asked her what she was
11 doing here, and she mentioned that her mother was involved with the Royal Commission
12 on abuse and the response was "oh yeah", and then just left. And I thought mmm, I really,
13 really hope, because enough is enough, and I know that the sentiment from here is very
14 strongly we've got to deal with this. But it's actually not just this lot, it's everybody, we all
15 have a part to play. And yeah, I'll leave it at that.

16 **Q.** Thank you. The paradigm shifts, thank you very much.

17 **COMMISSIONER ERUETI:** Kei te mihi atu ki a koe whaea, ki a kōrua. We often talk about
18 that very thing around the table about getting that societal community shift and the
19 responsibility that it's not someone's else's problem, we all have to care and love our
20 children and our communities.

21 I just wanted to ask a quick question, there was so much in your brief, I'm just going
22 to zero in on. One thing in particular you stressed was that your survival skills about
23 thinking yourself to be less than zero, less than nothing I think the words you used today
24 and putting on a game, you know, happy face.

25 **A.** Yeah.

26 **Q.** I wondered, using these skills while you're in care to shift the paradigm, as my colleague
27 says, how challenging that must be to shift be your own mindset and thinking away from
28 those ways of thinking, you know, when you're young.

29 **A.** And what did that was when the abuse stopped. So that evidence that I was like these bad
30 things were happening, so I had to make sense of it, but when that stopped, then it was like
31 well hold on, it's not happening anymore. Maybe I'm — maybe it's not me. Maybe I am
32 okay. But it had to stop. And isn't that what this is about, because we do want to stop the
33 abuse.

1 Actually, there is one other thing, like I understand and have always accepted my
2 culture, I don't know a lot about it, but actually what for me is more important is that a child
3 has a sense of belonging, feels that they are loved, and they are wanted. I have become
4 frustrated at times when culture has almost trumped that, especially in a situation if we, for
5 example, have a child in a home for life and for whatever reason, whether the family didn't
6 step up a year ago say, or whether an appropriate search wasn't undertaken, but they've
7 been in this placement for a period of time, it has been an excellent placement, they have
8 developed a sense that this is mum, this is dad, I'm part of this family, and then we find that
9 there's whānau, that we then pull them apart, because to be with — and that's like actually
10 do you know what, you're just doing what everyone else has done, and it's like, yeah, it's
11 like the old lady, you know, she knew she was Roman Catholic, she said I will let them,
12 you know, go to Protestant, not that I knew what it was.

13 **Q.** Yeah.

14 **A.** There are caregivers that will do what they need to do. But, yeah.

15 **Q.** We did see that in your evidence and the reference back to the Catholic caregiver and how
16 culture is the new form of religion. I think it's a really important question, isn't it?

17 **A.** Yeah.

18 **Q.** About that permanency and time and the love that they're getting there.

19 **A.** Yeah.

20 **Q.** And the tension there is between that and looking for kin to look after children as well.

21 **A.** Yeah.

22 **Q.** I think that's something, a theme that we will explore more throughout the week. Can I just
23 ask one last question?

24 **A.** Yeah.

25 **Q.** You talk about social work practice, and you may have your degree, but you suggest in
26 your evidence that just having a degree is not enough, that you need that practical hands-on
27 experience to implement the policy?

28 **A.** Yeah, look and I think it's the same with any profession. I mean you've got lawyers who
29 have degrees and you've got excellent lawyers and you've got crap lawyers, sorry, you
30 know. But in social work it's something that's really important because — well, actually it's
31 really important in law too because you're impacting on people's lives, but particularly in
32 social work. So yeah, I mean there are social workers that just, they're in the wrong
33 profession, you know, they just shouldn't be there, but I mean that's not for me to say. But...

1 **Q.** And that practical training do you think it would be really invaluable, you brought that to
2 the —

3 **A.** Yeah, well the other thing too is that statutory social workers are really at the hard end of
4 social work compared to Open Home Foundation or somebody else because of the
5 legislative controls etc, and they're — the knowledge that they require, because they also
6 have very huge powers, and they need to understand those powers. So, it's not easy being a
7 social worker, a statutory social worker at all.

8 Look, whatever solution we're going to come up with it's going to cost a lot of
9 money, because there needs to be sufficient resourcing of personnel, of programmes, of
10 providers whoever, and I think we have to accept that it is going to cost. But if we want to
11 fix this up, so that we have — I mean our reputation as a developed nation is terrible when
12 it comes to children. So, if we mean it, then we're just going to have to dig deep.

13 **Q.** Tēnā koe. On behalf of the Inquiry, it falls to me to thank you for your time here and your
14 whānau and your daughter. We're most appreciative. You've got lived experience, you've
15 been there, you've been through the horrors and you've come out the other side through
16 your endurance and your determination and you've come back to the area to work, to
17 commit to it and to make a change and you're here again today to give your advice and
18 insights to us to make a change with a combination of lived experience and your
19 professional expertise and so, ngā mihi, ngā mihi mahana ki a koe whaea, ngā
20 manaakitanga ki runga i a koe me tō whānau. Thank you so much.

21 **A.** Thank you very much.

22 **CHAIR:** We'll take a break. 15 minutes.

23 **Adjournment from 3.43 pm to 4.02 pm**