

STATEMENT OF ROBERT MARTIN

Introduction

1. My name is Robert Martin. First, I am a person with a powerful story to tell. Second, I am a person with a learning disability. Person first, disability second. Today, I am going to share my story with the Royal Commission of Inquiry. I hope that all New Zealand will listen.
2. It is time to challenge New Zealanders. The phrase “out of sight, out of mind” is no longer acceptable. I am going to talk to you about my life in institutions, foster homes and care services. I am in your sight today. I hope my story will remain within your mind.

The early years of my life

3. I was born in 1957. The doctor damaged my brain during birth with the use of the forceps. And people wonder why I don't have much time for doctors.

4. A Doctor told my mother I was mentally retarded. He told her there are places where other people know how to look after people like me. He told my mother to send me away and forget about me. So, at eighteen months old I was sent away to an institution called Kimberley.

5. I was put in an institution and I lost my family. I was locked away from the community. I wanted to be with my family. I wanted to grow up with my sister – I missed my family and cried for them. I wanted them to come and take me home. But they did not come. So in the end I gave up crying for them.

6. As a toddler at Kimberley I was fed and changed and taken care of, but I do not remember being picked up, or loved and cuddled, because there were so many of us, we were just a number.

7. I didn't experience what other kids did. I didn't go to birthday parties or feed the ducks or visit the zoo. We were locked away from the community. It was lonely. There were hundreds of people around me, but as a little boy I didn't know another human being. Not properly.

8. When I was seven, I was returned to my family. Things did not work out so well at home. I was told I had a mental handicap; I was dumb, thick as a plank of wood and would always need other people to do things for me. That hurt, because I really wanted to be like the other kids.

I was sent to school. It was hard. I would leave my classroom and knock on the window of my sister's classroom calling out to her to come and play with me. I would be picked on by other kids and my sister tried to protect me.

My parents were not given any support or counselling. Things just did not work out and I was made a ward of the State.

Foster homes

9. As a ward of the state I was placed in a foster home on a farm. I thought the other kids in the family would play with me but they didn't want to. At school I wanted to join in the games with the other kids, but they did not want me in their team. They thought I would be useless. I got into trouble at school for raiding the staff room biscuit tin. I only did that because I was hungry.

10. At my foster home I was worked like a slave. If I didn't do all the jobs on the farm, I would get the jug cord. At night I was wetting the bed. To punish me for this they made me kneel on the wood pile for hours. That was torture. I ran away, but the welfare just brought me back.

I ran away from that place again and again until the welfare eventually took me away.

11. I was put in another foster home, but then I stole a chocolate bar from a shop, so I was sent back to the institution, Kimberley.

Institutions

12. From my own experience I know that institutions places of neglect and abuse. They also mean people are denied their human rights and basically denied a proper life.

13. The right to education and the right to participate, the right to live free of violence, the right to life are all things at risk in an institution.

14. I personally had nothing and no one. I learnt that I was a nobody and my life didn't really matter.

15. Just because I was born with a disability. I was being punished just for being who I was.

Kimberley

16. I was nine years old when I was put back at Kimberley, but this time in a different ward called Monowai. It was not like the first time I was there. The conditions at Monowai were horrible. There were 40 kids in a dormitory.

17. When you are shut away from the world you are not treated as a real person with a life that actually matters.

18. We were not given our own clothes. We had to share a pool of clothes and grab what we could get. We never had our own underwear. They didn't let us just be a kid. We were colour coded in groups and had stars and labels and categories.

19. We all had the same bowl haircuts on the same day. We were not treated as individuals. In fact, people said we all looked the same!

20. We were neglected. One time I had boils, but it took a whole day for anyone to notice that I was sick.

21. There was no privacy. The day room opened into a toilet block, but there were no doors or partitions.

22. There was nothing to do. Some people stayed on the floor all day rocking back forth. Especially people with the highest needs. There were so many of them, they were just left on the ground. If someone had an accident and soiled themselves, they were just left in their dirty clothes.

23. You always had to eat your food fast. If you weren't fast enough your food went.

24. They would get us to do crafting. I never liked it. I would rather kick a ball around. I used to wander around the grounds alone, with a ball and a stick. I would kick a ball up onto the roof. I realised that if I kicked it onto the roof, someone else would get it down. But then I became known as a 'problem kid.'

25. At Kimberly I experienced abuse and I witnessed abuse. I saw staff upset people. One memory is of staff taking smokes off people. Smokes were given out for a reward and taken away as a punishment. If you had any possessions they would be taken off you. I treasured my great grandfathers watch, but it was taken from me.

26. Punishment was severe and out of proportion to the behaviour.

27. I learnt not to trust people, just try to and survive as best I could. I became defensive and on guard all the time just to keep away from violence and abuse.

28. If you were taken to Villa 5 at Kimberley, you knew you were in real trouble. The Staff there were just evil. I saw this completely 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.

29. The Staff would tease people. It was a mean thing for the staff to do. Some of the people would shout, "I'll get high, I'll get high", meaning they will get upset or do something like hurt themselves or someone else.

But the staff didn't stop and would carrying on teasing them and then watched the people lose control and flip out. Often this happened just before the staff went off duty.

30. It was at Kimberley that I was first sexually abused. That was by a male nurse. I was so young I did not know what was happening.

31. People who have power over other people are easily corrupted. Behind closed doors the human rights of others are often violated. This should not be allowed, but it was allowed.

Campbell Park

32. The first time I was sent to Campbell Park I was about 11.

When I got there, I was assaulted by the other boys. I 'got my beans' that is the initiation test. I was put in a pit where the trampoline was and they all branded me with tennis balls. There were fights there every day. After a while I started to fight back. I would throw stones.

33. I was then sent home again for a few years. It was not good. I didn't really know my family. People thought I was too dumb to go to secondary school. The doctor said I was upsetting my Mum, so he was going to send me to a mental hospital, called Lake Alice.

Lake Alice

34. I was about 13 years old. I was put into a villa near the front of Lake Alice with much older people. I hated it. They wanted me to do crafts. I found a golf club and some balls, so I hit the balls around the grounds, and then when that got boring, I started smashing them through the windows.

35. One day I went to the shop just outside the gates and I took some comics and ice creams. Then I got moved into Villa 8 where staff lock you up. I was locked up there for a few months.

Campbell Park

36. One day I was transported back to Campbell Park. This time I was put into a cottage for older boys. It was different from the last time. Some mean stuff went on there. I was sexually abused by the other boys there. I couldn't understand how people could be so cruel.

37. If you got into trouble there, you had to work it off, clean windows, or shift stones. If one person misbehaved, we all

suffered the consequences. Someone stole money off the matron and as our punishment we had to march around the grounds all day.

38. Another example of what we lose in an institution is something you may all take for granted: having a pet

39. Many children have a cat to cuddle and call their own. Children in institutions do not. I adopted cats and made them my friends but then I was moved and lost that friend.

40. My attachments meant nothing to others.

41. Children raised in institutions learn that good times don't last, and people and pets come and go.

42. The result of this is very negative. We struggle with how to relate to people, we are always different and somehow catching up.

43. Nowadays I have had pets of my own and I no longer fear I will lose my pets, my home or my friends.

44. These things you may take for granted, I do not.

Back into the world

45. When I was released from the Institutions at age fifteen, I had to learn to live and to survive all over again.

46. And this is very hard to do.

47. I realised I didn't know lots of things other New Zealanders did. It was like I wasn't even a citizen.

48. There was a massive gap between me and everyone else in my community.

49. I didn't know about the All Blacks – New Zealand's world famous national rugby team. But just like thousands of other boys, my greatest pleasure was kicking my rugby ball.

50. Little did I know that my passion was matched by millions all around the world.

51. I had never heard any of the radical music of the 60's. I didn't know about the Vietnam War or the assassinations of the Kennedys. These things everyone else knew about. It was like I was brought up on a different planet with different rules.

Services

52. Once I got out of the institutions I was in the care of services.

53. I did not like being treated like a child. I had been abused my whole life, so I took exception to being treated like a child. At IHC a lot of the people with learning disabilities called the female staff 'mum' and the male staff 'dad'. There was one staff member who told me to call her Mum. One day I told her 'No. You are not my mum.' She slapped me in the face. I told her to 'f off'. She kicked me, and then I kicked her back. I had been abused for years, and I had had a gutsful.

54. I ended up living and working on a farm, which was under the umbrella of the IHC. I witnessed abuse of others by staff members while I was there.

There were not enough staff. One of my best friends had a seizure and cut his head open. I saw him and helped him. I got a towel around him. I then had to climb through another boy's window to get down to the bottom unit to wake up the only staff member because the place was all locked up. My friend was never the same after that. There were just not enough staff.

55. Another time, there was a staff member and a guy with cerebral palsy who did not get on. That staff member was really cruel to that guy, so he started a fire. When the staff member got to him they hit and smacked him around the head so hard it really damaged him. It was shocking to witness this. Another staff member was there and just watched, he didn't do anything to stop the assault.

56. I became active in trying to make the people with the learning disabilities have a voice within IHC. When you were taken out to your workplaces or on trips, the side of the buses had IHC in big letters and a stickfigure of a person with a star on their forehead. People would see us on the bus, they would point and make faces at us. It made us feel sub-human. So, we decided to protest. We made signs and protested in the street. In the end the management removed those labels from the buses.

57. I do not want any disabled children to have the same childhood I did.

58. My hope is that there is an end to segregation, institutionalisation and discrimination.

59. 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.

60. My hope is that all the children of tomorrow grow up in caring, well supported families and that communities and societies shift to be inclusive of all people.

61. I believe every person can live in the community with the rights support – no ifs, no buts, no maybes.

62. When assisting people to move from institutions into the community we need to remember whose life is it. Don't just make decisions for people. Don't just assume you know best. Include the person in all decisions that affect their life.

Lifelong impact of abuse in care

63. I often wondered why I ended up in the places I did – just because I was born with a disability. I now live a proper life but I could have had this as a child.

64. The abuse I experienced and the abuse I saw has had a lifelong impact on me. Even today, I get scared of people if they are yelling or screaming. It makes me feel anxious.

65. In 2016, I was appointed to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It is an honour to have this role. I do find it challenging to meet so many people. I find it very difficult to trust people and it is hard work to socialise.

66. I have had counselling in the past and I still do.

Civil claim

67. I have never made a civil claim. I did participate in the Confidential Listening and Assistance Service.

68. I know other people have made claims. I know there was a class action for some people that lived in Lake Alice. Some years ago I was told about some lawyers I could go to but I didn't as I thought this would be too hard. I think it is difficult for people with disabilities to know how to make a claim.

69. If I was going to make a claim, there are two main things that I would claim for.

70. The medication. At one stage when I was in Kimberley, they gave me some medication that wasn't ever meant for me. Whatever it was it had a terrible effect on me. It made me lean on my side. The effects last for a very long time. I was sent home. 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.

71. The sexual abuse. From the staff member at Kimberley, and from all those boys at Campbell Park. It should never have been allowed to happen. At that time of my life, I was displaying so many signs of abuse, but nobody picked up on these signs, or if they were they were ignored.

Nobody helped me. Instead I was punished for the behaviour I was displaying. I would claim for those things. They should never have happened.

Hopes for the future

72. My life in institutions meant I personally had nothing and no one to call my own. I learnt that I was somehow a nobody – that my life didn't really matter. I also learnt that I was somehow actually being punished for who I was.

73. I was one of the lucky ones I got out.

74. I went on to build a good life for myself.

75. I now have a life packed full of books, music and sports.

And I have a person to call my own: My wife Lynda.

76. But I have had to really work to create a life for myself because I didn't know what a life was actually made up of.

77. I would like to see a citizen ceremony for all people who have been institutionalised in New Zealand. We were shut away from New Zealand society and culture. When people are shut away in an institution they don't feel like a citizen. This can even feel as bad as the abuse we experienced and witnessed.

78. When I got out of the Institutions, I felt like a non-citizen. I think a citizen ceremony is one thing the government could do for us.

79. I also believe families are the foundation of any community and society and play an important role. It is by being within a family that we learn about the world around us while being provided with safety and security.

80. Children are innocent and it is too risky to leave it to the state to look after children. They need to be part of a family, they need love, opportunities and individual care

81. We need to do more to make sure are children safe, loved, and cared for, wherever they live. It is everyone's duty to make sure this happens

82. Disabled children should be able to join in and be part of all the things happening in their community. They should go to their own local school so they can learn from their friends in their neighbourhood and be the best they can be and enjoy life like anyone else.

83. They should also be allowed to become adults and not treated as children forever.

84.They can be included in anything not excluded from everything.

85.Give families adequate support. Make families the only acceptable place for children to grow up. All children belong with families and that includes all disabled children.

86.I feel in lots of ways we have just swapped large institutions for smaller ones. Residential group homes have different bricks, but it is the thoughts, feelings and actions of others that make a place an institution. Everyone has a right to a life instead of wasting away in Institutions waiting to die.

87.That is not a life.

88.I strongly urge New Zealand to make the rights in the United Nation Convention on the Rights for Persons with

Disabilities real. All the rights are very important but I want to highlight Article 19 which talks about disabled people have the right to choose where they live and with whom.

89. I want disabled people to live the life they chose free from violence and abuse. Violence and abuse is not OK. We already have this campaign in New Zealand but we need to make sure it means all New Zealanders and that means disabled people too.

90. My dream is that all disabled people have their rights and are treated as a citizens of New Zealand.

Thank you