

- 752 -

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DALLAS PICKERING - AFFIRMED

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EXAMINED BY MS THOMAS

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6 **MS THOMAS:** I call the witness Dallas Pickering.

7 **CHAIR:** Ms Pickering, good afternoon. Just as we start,

8 can I ask you of you in terms of the Inquiries Act

9 2013 - witness affirmed.

10 **MS THOMAS:**

11 Q. Can you please tell us your full name?

12 A. Dallas Marie Pickering.

13 Q. You are currently employed as a senior practitioner
14 social worker?

15 A. Yes, that's correct.

16 Q. And you reside in Auckland?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. You are a survivor of abuse in State care?

19 A. Yes, I am.

14.18 20 Q. Can you please tell us why you have come here to speak
21 today?

22 A. I believe that the story of children in care needs to be
23 heard and that the voice of children that have been
24 through State care over the period of time outlined needs
25 to be heard.

26 Q. We will start with going through your evidence right at
27 the beginning. When were you born, what year?

28 A. I was born in 1970. My Mum was 16 at the time that she
29 had me. She was living up here in Auckland and she was

14.19 30 encouraged to have me adopted out. She went down to
31 Rotorua and have me and I was adopted out down in
32 Rotorua.

33 Q. So, she left Auckland to have you down in Rotorua?

34 A. Yes. So, no family knew that I, I guess, existed. My

- 753 -

1 birth father didn't know that I was around at the time
2 and so she went down on her own and had me down there.

3 Q. So, her family didn't know that she was pregnant?

4 A. No, she had really limited family support with her
5 situation. My understanding now is that her mother had
6 passed away a few years earlier and she was the youngest
7 of three siblings and she was at home living with her
8 father at the time.

9 Q. You've mentioned your birth father didn't know at that
14.20 10 point that you existed.

11 A. Mm-Mmm.

12 Q. What have you since come to know about your birth
13 certificate and what was recorded on that with relation
14 to your birth father?

15 A. Yep. So, the previous speaker spoke about the adoption
16 certificate and on the adoption certificate I was named
17 SSSelena Hughson, that was the name my birth mother gave
18 me. And on there, it had information about my birth
19 father, that he was of brown eyes and light olive
14.21 20 complexion. There was no indication that he was Maori
21 but I have later found out that he is Maori. And so, I
22 guess, my whole identity, you know, was lost in that
23 process. So, when I was adopted, my name was changed
24 from Selena to what it is now, Dallas Pickering.

25 Q. You've told us you were adopted and placed with a family
26 in Rotorua?

27 A. Yep.

28 Q. And that adoption took place, the State social worker
29 placed you with that family?

14.22 30 A. Yes. From my understanding, and I've had a look at some
31 of the documents, there was a matching process, you know.
32 I was a Pakeha, I guess, looking child with blonde hair.
33 On the birth certificate, it said that my father was a
34 mechanic and my adopted father was a mechanic as well.

- 754 -

1 So, you know, the family that I was placed with was a
2 white European middle class family. So, I guess in the
3 State's eyes, they had matched me up with, I guess, the
4 perfect family. Yeah.

5 Q. And the family that you were placed with already had one
6 child who is a few years older than yourself?

7 A. Yep, so they had an older boy who was three years older
8 and they wanted a girl. Also, the neighbour had just
9 adopted a little girl and so, they thought it would, you
10 know, be great to have a little girl as well.

11 Looking at the documents, the references in the
12 documents showed that they'd only known this family for
13 6 months, the adopted family, and the family had shifted
14 up from Wellington. So, in looking at it now, there was
15 minimal assessment done on the adopted family.

16 Q. And so, the people that provided references to the Social
17 Welfare Department had actually only known your adopted
18 family for 6 months?

19 A. That's correct.

14.23 20 Q. From your reading of your file and the documents, was
21 there anything else noted in terms of the adoption
22 placement or any concerns raised by the Department before
23 you were placed with them?

24 A. There was a statement from one of the social workers
25 unsure whether that was a good placement. There was also
26 documentation about the house being cold and not fully
27 furnished. And, yeah, that's kind of all that was on the
28 file.

29 Q. So, as an adult, you have sought and obtained your
14.24 30 records in relation to your adoption and other records in
31 relation to your life?

32 A. Yes.

33 Q. At the time that you were adopted as you were a young
34 child, were you told that you were adopted?

- 755 -

1 A. I wasn't told until I was about 7 or 8 years of age. At
2 the time, and I guess I'll talk about it a bit later, the
3 social workers told the adopted parents to tell me that I
4 was adopted. They didn't want to tell me that I was
5 adopted. And so, there was a bit of pressure on them to
6 do that.

7 Q. In the documents that you have obtained, there are notes
8 of concern about your care and they start even at a time
9 when you were just 5 months old?

14.25 10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Where were those notes of concern from? Who made a note
12 of concern?

13 A. Those notes of concern didn't actually come out until
14 later on but there were notes along the way from Plunket,
15 from doctors, doctor specialist, from the kindergarten,
16 there was also concerns raised from neighbours and a
17 friend of the family as well who had visited the family
18 but none of this was linked together and it was all found
19 out later on that there were concerns.

14.26 20 Q. At what time did something get done about these concerns?
21 How old were you then?

22 A. I was nearly 5 years of age and I was hospitalised at the
23 time. I was in hospital for 6 weeks. I was
24 malnourished, I had broken bones and it was reported that
25 although I was nearly 5 years of age, I was actually the
26 size of a 12 month old baby. I have photos which I'd
27 like to give to the Commissioners that show the reality
28 of how I presented at hospital. I remember this being a
29 really scary dark time of being separated from my adopted
14.27 30 parents. They were the only parents that I knew, the
31 only parents that I knew, and yeah.

32 Q. I'd ask Madam Registrar to provide you with - show the
33 witness those, just to confirm are those two pages the
34 photos that you've talked about?

- 756 -

1 A. Yes, they are.

2 **MS THOMAS:** Madam Registrar, I have copies for each of
3 the Commissioners. (Copies of photographs
4 distributed to Commissioners). I would ask for
5 those photos to be produced as Exhibit 14.
6 However, I am seeking a section 15 Order under the
7 Inquiries Act in relation to those photos, given
8 their personal nature.

9 **CHAIR:** Yes, they are photographs of a very personal
10 kind and they seem to be of a sort that call for an
11 Order under section 15(2) of the Inquiries Act
12 forbidding publication of them because they are
13 photographs of a personal nature. Does any counsel
14 wish to make any submission regarding that, in
15 particular if there is any objection to the Royal
16 Commission undertaking this course? There isn't,
17 I'll therefore make the Order. The Inquiry having
18 considered the matters it ought to take into
19 account under section 15(2) of the Inquiries Act,
14.29 20 makes an order forbidding publication of Exhibit 14
21 produced on today's date, the 5th of November 2019,
22 being photographs of a personal nature.

23 **MS THOMAS:**

24 Q. Dallas, can you tell us why it was that you did want the
25 Commissioners to see those personal photographs?

26 A. I guess, when often we talk about abuse, you know, people
27 in the public often just think about a child being hit
28 but actually, I don't think that people actually see the
29 reality of the care that has happened or not happened for
14.30 30 children in New Zealand. This does happen in New Zealand
31 and so, that's the reason why, that I think that people
32 need to see the full extent of some of the experiences
33 that the children of New Zealand have been through.

34 Q. And those photos that the Commissioners have were taken

- 757 -

1 when you were in hospital aged almost 5 years old?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. But you weighed the weight of what a 12 month baby would
4 weigh?

5 A. Yes. I was labelled, I guess, in that, that I looked
6 like a Biafran baby, that I was insidiously neglected
7 and -

8 Q. Those words were used by the doctor to the senior social
9 worker, stating that you had been insidiously neglected?

14.31 10 A. That's correct.

11 Q. You've said you were in hospital for 6 weeks. What
12 happened at the end of those 6 weeks?

13 A. I was placed back with my adoptive family. The reason
14 that I understand is that the Social Welfare filed a
15 complaint against my adoptive parents and the people, the
16 professionals involved all agreed that I should not go
17 back to the care of my adoptive parents but on the day of
18 the Court case, and I don't remember this, but it was
19 recorded that I was crying to go back to my adoptive
14.32 20 parents, and I guess they were the only parents I knew,
21 and I was screaming in the Court and had to be removed,
22 and so the Judge decided that instead of removing me,
23 that they would place me under a Supervision Order for
24 3 years and I was placed back in the care of my adoptive
25 parents and to have regular medical assessments and for
26 them to receive counselling. Counsellors at the time
27 were the social workers, so they were considered
28 counsellors, and also the psychologist also recommended
29 that I shouldn't be placed back into my adoptive parents'
14.33 30 care but I was.

31 Q. Within a few months of being placed back in your adoptive
32 parents' care, were there some further complaints made by
33 the school?

34 A. Yes, there were complaints made by the school, and this

- 758 -

1 was the first school that I had been to. And kind of
2 from the time of August to December that year, there were
3 complaints from the school about bruising that they'd
4 seen on my body, there was stick marks on my back from
5 being hit. I was treated differently from my adopted
6 brother, I was not allowed to wear shoes to school, had
7 really minimal lunches, wasn't allowed to attend - this
8 is the reports from the school - I wasn't allowed to
9 attend school trips but my brother was. So, it was very
14.34 10 clear that I was being treated differently from my
11 adopted brother.

12 Q. And as a result of a further complaint by the Social
13 Welfare Department ~~become~~being made, were you then
14 placed in a foster home?

15 A. Yes, I was then placed in a foster home in Taupo. What's
16 really interesting, is that I went to another school, so
17 this is my second school in 3 months. I don't remember
18 the home, I don't remember the family, I don't remember
19 the school. I know that within that time I was in two
14.34 20 foster care placements. And the first one, the
21 caregivers were new caregivers and they asked for me to
22 be removed because of my behaviour. Yeah.

23 Q. We'll get into that in some more detail shortly.

24 A. Sure.

25 Q. But you said within that time, so within an 18 month
26 period you were a 5 year old child and you were placed
27 into two different foster homes?

28 A. Yes, that's correct.

29 Q. And at the end of that 18 month period, you were then put
14.35 30 back in your adoptive family home?

31 A. Yes, I was placed back into my adoptive family home.

32 Q. In your brief, you've told us in there a few things about
33 what it was like to live in that adoptive family home.

34 Can you please take us through those headings that you've

- 759 -

1 got there?

2 A. Sure. So, the first one that I've got is I was
3 malnourished and it was evident that I was different to
4 the other family members. I wasn't allowed to eat with
5 the family. I'd have a certain amount of time to eat and
6 then if I wasn't fast enough, I'd lose my food. That I'd
7 have to go to my room for the rest of the night.
8 Sometimes food was thrown out to me if I wasn't fast
9 enough to get it. Yeah, I'd steal lunches at school and
14.36 10 I guess I was just, in that respect, trying to get my
11 needs met.

12 There were times where I survived by drinking hose
13 water. There would be times where I was left home alone
14 for long periods of time. There was fruit that I'd eat
15 and neighbours would pass me food sometimes under the
16 hedge as well.

17 In regards to the physical abuse, that was ongoing.
18 It just seemed that nothing I could do was right. I was
19 hit with the jug cord, beaten with a broom. I remember
14.37 20 being burnt with an iron. In regards to, you know,
21 having sores all the time and these not being attended
22 to. I became fearful and started bed wetting and soiled
23 myself. There was one occasion in particular where I had
24 soiled and the consequences of that, was that the things
25 that I did have were burnt by my adoptive mother.

26 Q. You've said you were isolated from the family?

27 A. Yeah, I was isolated. So, I wasn't able to play with my
28 adoptive mother, play at the neighbours. Her, I guess,
29 opinion was that I was naughty, that I didn't deserve to
14.38 30 be around other people. You know, I was isolated. I had
31 no-one to talk to, no-one to, yeah, converse with and I
32 could hear the neighbour's kids playing and having fun
33 and, you know, there was a time where, you know, they had
34 a pool and, you know, I had one swim in the pool and

- 760 -

1 because, you know, I had an accident and hit my nose,
2 that was it, that was the last time I could play in the
3 pool.

4 There was a swing out the back and, you know, at the
5 beginning I was allowed to play on the swing but then I
6 made grooves in the ground, so that was it, I was banned
7 from playing on the play equipment. Yeah but it always
8 was put back that it was my fault.

9 Q. You mentioned earlier that the school had commented that
14.39 10 you weren't wearing shoes at school.

11 A. Mm.

12 Q. Did you have shoes in your wardrobe that you could wear?

13 A. Yes, I did but I wasn't allowed to wear them.

14 Q. Why was that?

15 A. Um, I think because I lost them. You know, and so, you
16 know, but then I had others but it was just the
17 consequence, you know, harsh punishment, you know, on
18 every level. You know, I was, I guess, told that I was
19 dirty, I was disgusting and, you know, I had to hand wash
14.40 20 my own washing, you know, for long periods of time.

21 There was one report from a family friend that recorded
22 that I was in the washhouse kind of from 11.00 in the
23 morning to 3.00 in the afternoon and only allowed to come
24 out to have some lunch and then back in the washhouse
25 doing the washing. So, yeah, there was just so much that
26 went on within that home.

27 Q. And also in that home, is the heading in your brief in
28 relation to sexual abuse?

29 A. Yep. I was abused by a family member, sexually abused by
14.41 30 a family member. This family member would come into my
31 room often and when I did speak about it, I was given a
32 hiding.

33 Q. These matters that you've just talked to us about in
34 relation to living in your home, these took place over

- 761 -

1 roughly two and a half years?

2 A. Yes, it happened over around a two and a half years and
3 there were social workers visiting at the time. I don't
4 remember social workers asking me how I was doing. I do
5 remember the visiting social worker coming round and
6 hearing some of the conversations. And the conversations
7 were that, in particular with the adopted mother, that my
8 behaviour was because I was taken off them at the
9 beginning and that it was the Department's fault why my
10.42 10 behaviour was bad and that I was a constant liar and a
11 thief and that I bullied other children, which was true
12 in regards to the behaviours. Yeah but nothing was done
13 about or asking me what was going on for me, so I had no
14 voice, yep.

15 Q. Was it around about this time that there was another
16 complaint raised, so a neighbour complained to a social
17 worker about what they were observing?

18 A. Yeah, yes, there was a complaint on my files from the
19 neighbours about my treatment. And I think there were
10.43 20 complaints coming in from the school as well but it took
21 a while, you know. To me, that two and a half years was
22 hell.

23 Q. As a result of a complaint being discussed with the
24 social worker, did your parents then voluntarily place
25 you under the care of the State?

26 A. Yes, they did. I remember the agreement being signed and
27 that was so that they didn't have to go back to Court.
28 So, there's been no justice, no accountability, for
29 anything that happened.

10.43 30 Q. At that time, you were then placed in a family group
31 home?

32 A. Yes, I was, yep.

33 Q. Can you just tell us a little bit about what is a family
34 group home in comparison to a foster home?

- 762 -

1 A. A family group home is a big home with usually around
2 about 8 bedrooms and you had two children in each room.
3 It's supposed to only be a temporary placement and
4 children come and go. And children of all ages, you
5 know, Criminal Justice children, children that have been
6 through abuse, so we were all joined into this one home
7 with two house parents.

8 Q. At the time that you were put into this family group
9 home, you were around about 9 years old?

14.44 10 A. Yes, that's correct.

11 Q. Can you tell us what happened to you within a few days of
12 arriving at that home?

13 A. Within a few days, I was abused, sexually abused by a
14 13 year old boy and was found in a compromising situation
15 under a bed. To me, you know, because of what had
16 happened in my adopted home, I thought it was normal. We
17 were caught by the foster parent. The foster parent was
18 a respite carer on that weekend looking after us. And
19 the week after I met with the social workers and I
14.45 20 actually disclosed about the family member in my adoptive
21 parents' home abusing me as well at the time, and that's,
22 you know, well this just happens, I guess that was my
23 thinking, yeah.

24 Q. So, you told the foster parent who was in charge of you
25 at that home about what had just happened with this
26 13 year old?

27 A. Yes.

28 Q. And you had also told the foster parent and the social
29 worker about what had happened to you in your family
14.46 30 home?

31 A. Yes, I did.

32 Q. And as an adult, you've seen your entire file now and
33 you've seen a report that records those two disclosure?

34 A. Yes, there is, there's a report, yeah.

- 763 -

1 Q. What action, if any, was taken by the social workers
2 after you disclosed that abuse?

3 A. No action was taken. And, in fact, what happened is that
4 I think about 9 months I was actually placed back in the
5 adoptive family home again, even though that disclosure
6 had happened. The family because it was a voluntary
7 agreement, they could have me back at any time. And, at
8 the time, they were paying \$13 maintenance and didn't
9 want to pay it anymore. And the Department put me back
14.47 10 in that home where the abuse continued.

11 Q. Dallas, if you look at paragraph 12 of your statement
12 there, did you want to read that paragraph?

13 A. Yep. In it, I did not have anyone that I could talk to.
14 And nobody asked how I was and I had no trust towards
15 adults anyway because I wasn't believed. None of the
16 trauma that I went through was addressed. I was actually
17 labelled in the files as a disturbed child. That I was
18 naughty and that I had a chip on my shoulder. Wouldn't
19 you have one too? Yeah.

14.48 20 Q. Talking about being placed in foster homes and family
21 group homes, do you know how many times you were shifted
22 around various homes when you were a child or a teenager?

23 A. 12 times by the age of 15 I was shifted. And in regards
24 to primary schools, there was 11 moves of primary schools
25 in that time and, you know, shifted from foster homes to
26 family group homes, and then also back with my adoptive
27 parents four times.

28 Q. So, throughout that period, you were placed in foster
29 homes, family group homes and intermittently be placed
14.49 30 back with your adoptive family?

31 A. Yes.

32 Q. Do you have any memories of being placed in a foster home
33 that was a good environment?

34 A. Yes, probably the second one where I was placed in a home

- 764 -

1 in Murupara. You know, it was - they had their own, I
2 think three children of their own and it was on a farm
3 and, you know, there was some really good experiences
4 there, you know, going to I guess farm shows and having a
5 pet lamb and things like that. But unfortunately that
6 didn't last long because that was the next time I was
7 placed back with my adoptive family.

8 And then there was another foster home that actually
9 I was there for 18 months and that was when I was around
14.51 10 11-12. They were an amazing family and, as I said, I was
11 only there for about 18 months but what made it really, I
12 guess, a new experience for me, is that I was included in
13 the family. They included me in family outings or
14 holidays. I wasn't just, in other foster homes when the
15 family went on holiday I was placed in respite care
16 because the family wanted to have a break but with this
17 family I was taken on the holidays with them. You know,
18 birthdays and Christmas were a positive experience and I
19 think for me this particular Christmas when I was with
14.51 20 this family was probably the best Christmas that I had,
21 you know, in regards to understanding what Christmas is
22 all about. Because Christmas and birthdays in my
23 adoptive family I was left out of. And so, you know,
24 this was a really special time for me.

25 Q. I think you've said you even, in terms of photographs in
26 this family, was another thing?

27 A. Yeah. I mean, you know, when it came to family photos, I
28 was included in the family photos as well and not put
29 aside as the "foster child". You know, so, that was
14.52 30 really important to not feel like I was outside of the
31 family, yeah.

32 Q. So, that was a positive environment but what happened to
33 you in that family?

34 A. So, I mean, you know, I wasn't the best behaved child. I

- 765 -

1 had a lot of trauma and a lot of behaviours. The foster
2 parent was asking for support, for some counselling. I
3 remember going to one counselling session and because I
4 didn't engage in that counselling session, that was it,
5 that was the last counselling session that I went to.
6 And I guess we all know now that, you know even back
7 then, that takes a while to build up rapport and trust
8 with a counsellor, so that was I guess a prime
9 opportunity or a chance to get some counselling support.
10 That never happened.

11 So, it got to a point where I had an explosion and
12 so the foster parent asked for a month's break, and it
13 was, you know - and I think we both needed a break as
14 well. So, yeah, I was placed in a family group home.
15 And I guess because I also had been rejected, you know,
16 or pushed away so many times, I guess in my inner
17 thoughts I felt I was being rejected again, and so you
18 know I was saying that I didn't want to go back but deep
19 down I did.

20 The foster parent was saying that she wanted me back
21 but that was closed down and I was not returned to this
22 foster home. I ended up staying in the family group home
23 and I think the really horrible thing was, was that I was
24 told that I wasn't allowed any more contact at all with
25 that foster parent. So, you know, this relationship that
26 I'd built, you know, a fairly good relationship over that
27 period of time, had broken down and it wasn't encouraged
28 to have that resolved or have any issues resolved. I
29 even had to - because it was on the way to home, I had to
30 walk past her house every day and I wasn't allowed to,
31 you know, say hello. She was given the same direction
32 and told that I would not be coming back to her care.

33 Many years later, we've talked about it and, you
34 know, for her, you know, it broke her heart and I guess

- 766 -

1 for me as well, in regards to attachment. You know, it
2 was an opportunity for me to have a safe and secure home
3 and that was taken away by decisions made by the social
4 workers because they felt it was in my best interests not
5 to go back, and it's recorded in the files as well.

6 Q. At that time in your life, what was your feeling about
7 your situation, where things were heading for you?

8 A. I didn't know what was going to happen to me, you know.
9 Because it was a closed adoption, and I didn't understand
10 that back then, I couldn't go back to my birth family.
11 There was no opportunity for that, for my birth family.
12 And one of the things, I've met my birth father and he
13 said to me that he wasn't given a choice whether he could
14 be a parent or not. It took away my identity, you know.
15 And I don't know whether my birth family could have had
16 me back then but they were never given a chance or given
17 a choice to have that opportunity. And so, in regards to
18 my future, I don't know, I didn't know what it would be.
19 I actually felt, to be honest, like nobody's child.
14.57 20 That's how it felt, that I was nobody's child because I
21 couldn't go back to my adoptive family and the foster
22 homes weren't working out.

23 Q. So, where did you end up then at that point?

24 A. I ended up staying in the family homes until - I went to
25 actually one other foster home. In my thinking, before I
26 read the files, I thought I was there for 18 months but
27 when I look at the files it was only a month. So, that
28 was, I guess, my thinking around the timeframe around
29 that and what was happening in that home. That placement
14.58 30 only lasted a month but I ended up staying in the family
31 group homes, which was supposed to be a temporary
32 placement, until the age of 16.

33 Q. So, they were supposed to be a temporary placement but
34 you were there for a number of years?

- 767 -

1 A. Yeah, I was there for probably another two and a
2 half/three years.

3 Q. At paragraph 20 of your statement, you talk about the
4 caregiver at this family group home?

5 A. Yep. There were two caregivers in the family group home
6 and the first one was, you know, firm but fair and I kind
7 of knew my place there in a good way. There was some
8 really good boundaries. But the next caregiver that came
9 into that family group home, she ruled by fear, she ruled
14.59 10 by violence. There was a segregation between the
11 children in care and her family. In fact, there was a
12 separate living area, you know, so the adults had their
13 living area and her and her family had their living area
14 and we had our living area. And, you know, it's supposed
15 to be a family group home, there wasn't a family, it
16 didn't feel like family. We knew that we weren't family.
17 We knew that that wasn't a home. And I guess for me,
18 there was only two of us that were long-term care and, as
19 you can imagine, there were children coming in and out,
14.59 20 so I could wake up in the morning, have a new child in
21 the room next to me. I didn't know how they were going
22 to respond. I never had safety around my possessions.
23 Things were taken, broken, stolen, so nothing was safe,
24 nothing was mine.

25 I didn't feel safe in this home. There was little
26 supervision in this home as well. Sexual abuse became
27 the norm from older children. And I didn't have any
28 boundaries. There were also times where the caregiver,
29 you know, if you had pissed the caregiver off, you'd have
15.00 30 the silent treatment for days. So, I couldn't get my
31 needs met. So, if I wanted something, I knew I couldn't
32 approach her because, you know, don't talk to me until
33 I'm over your whatever you've done. So, you know, I
34 couldn't get my basic needs met.

- 768 -

1 Q. You've said there was no supervision, you were not
2 supervised, what about supervision in terms of the
3 caregiver and the running of the home?

4 A. One of the things that I noticed when I looked at my
5 files, is there was hardly anything written in my files
6 in that time from social workers from that home and
7 particularly around that caregiver. And I kind of felt
8 like I was just in a state of sitting in care, you know.
9 Every 6 months I'd have a review meeting, and it was a
15.01 10 long time between those 6 months of not seeing social
11 workers or knowing what was going to happen, so there was
12 a lack of social work support as well around that time.
13 And there's no way that I would have told the social
14 worker what was happening because I didn't trust the
15 social workers.

16 I guess in regards to the supervision, you know, I
17 didn't have boundaries and I was told that I could smoke
18 as long as I bought my own cigarettes. I started using
19 drugs. You know, there would be times where I'd go
15.02 20 roaming and meet up with older men to have sex with them.
21 And so, yeah, I was at risk there in that situation as
22 well.

23 Q. If we turn to paragraph 23, you've talked in that
24 paragraph about this caregiver's brother, so the
25 caregiver you've just described, what happened in
26 relation to the caregiver's brother?

27 A. Yeah. At the time, it was over usually around
28 Christmas/New Year's or any holiday period, I'd either be
29 kind of shipped off to another family home because all
15.02 30 the other homes would close down or I'd stay. And in
31 this particular time, this was the family time that was
32 open. There was only me and another young lady in the
33 home at the time and the caregiver had gone out and on
34 new years day her brother came over and he was drunk. He

- 769 -

1 came into my bedroom. I remember it quite clearly
2 because I didn't realise it at the time but he had a bowl
3 of cannabis in his hand and that was put on the bed. He
4 asked me if he could have sex with me and he raped me.

5 I couldn't say no, even if I tried. I was too
6 scared. And there was no way that I would tell the
7 caregiver that happened. So, guess, yeah, this place was
8 supposed to be a place of safety but it was the complete
9 opposite.

15.04 10 Q. And then a year on from that event, on New Year's Eve the
11 following year, can you tell us what happened then?

12 A. So, this year, that year, I went to another family home
13 with respite caregivers and I was the only one left in
14 the home, the rest of the kids had gone back to their
15 families for the holidays. I was brought up to Auckland
16 to a family get together up here and on that evening the
17 caregiver got drunk and he abused me. I told his wife
18 because she came into the room and she just told me to
19 because I was sleeping on the couch and he was on - him
15.05 20 and his wife were on mattresses on the floor, and I was
21 told to go to a different side of the room, and so I did,
22 I went and slept on the floor that night away from them.

23 Q. So, at that time, nowhere felt safe for you?

24 A. No.

25 Q. I would like to talk to you about transitioning out of
26 care. How did that work and how old were you?

27 A. At the time, the transitioning out of care, the age was
28 16. Earlier that year, I was, I guess, either told to
29 leave school or be kicked out of school because I'd
15.06 30 actually assaulted three children or three people at
31 school, and so I chose to leave school and I got a job at
32 a sewing factory. I don't even know how I got that. Oh
33 yeah, it was through a youth programme, so I was
34 supported to go into a youth programme and then got a job

- 770 -

1 at a sewing factory.

2 And then I was given a room at the YMCA at the time
3 and I left care, I think it was practically on my 16th
4 birthday, with the blankets and the clothes that I had
5 and went to live in this residence.

6 Yeah, I soon lost my job soon afterwards because I
7 bullied someone at the job. And then a few months later
8 I became pregnant and had my son, a bit later.

9 Q. What supports, if any, did you have at that time in terms
15.07 10 of raising your son?

11 A. I had friends, yeah. I didn't have any family support,
12 so yeah. And I guess I had some options, you know, I
13 could have an abortion, which I didn't agree with. I
14 could have my child adopted out, and I guess with my own
15 experience it was like a definite no way. So, I chose to
16 have my child. The Department were considering taking my
17 child off me but I fought that and I said, no, I'm going
18 to do this and I'm going to do the best that I can with
19 my children, yeah, with my son. And then a few years
15.08 20 later I did have another child as well.

21 Q. At this time in your life, at around this time, who else
22 entered your life at that stage?

23 A. When I was pregnant with my son, my birth mother
24 contacted the Department and she wanted to know me.
25 Well, she actually didn't want to know me but when she
26 heard of what I'd been through, she wanted to meet with
27 me. And I met her soon after I had my child. I just
28 really feel for my birth mother and what she went through
29 and, you know, I know that it's been a continued struggle
15.09 30 and we've struggled in our relationship, yeah.

31 Q. Can you tell us about your birth father and how you found
32 out that you were Maori?

33 A. I found when I met him. I met him when I was about 22
34 years of age and he let me know then that he was Maori.

- 771 -

1 His father was Maori. And I guess, in a sense, I kind of
2 knew in myself, it's just something you know, it's a
3 sense of who you are and I kind of felt that and knew
4 that as I was growing up. I'm not sure how I knew that,
5 you just know.

6 Yeah, he wasn't connected strongly to his Maori side
7 of the family but to me that was really important. You
8 know, we did spend some time together then, and then we
9 lost contact but over the last 10 years we've had a
10 really good relationship and things are going really well
11 there and I have contact with his family.

12 Q. In terms of parenting your own children, how is that?

13 A. I mean, I know that I did the best that I could with the
14 knowledge that I had but I also know that I made some
15 huge mistakes, and a lot of that is because of the lack
16 of role modelling that I had growing up. You know, I
17 brought both of my children up on my own. There was some
18 real challenges. You know, the past doesn't go away, you
19 know, it impacts on every relationship and it impacted on
20 my children's relationship. And, you know, in some sense
21 there's still some of those struggles today but my
22 children too are both doing really well, you know, and
23 they've got children of their own now and so, you know,
24 yeah, they're amazing, my children, and they're a real
25 blessing.

26 Q. Can you tell us about what changes you made in your life
27 and where you went to after having your children?

28 A. Yeah. I think there was some critical things that were
29 happening for me when I made some changes. I had my
30 daughter and, you know, I guess the past was catching up
31 with me, you know. I was using drugs quite a bit, I had
32 postnatal depression and I knew I had to make some
33 changes in my life, otherwise my children would end up in
34 the same system that I did. You know, one of the key

- 772 -

1 things is that I started going to a church and made some
2 changes. Later on, I studied and completed a Bachelor of
3 Social Work and also a Post Grad Diploma and I have been
4 working in the social work field now for the last
5 20 years supporting families.

6 Q. I'd like to ask you about the Confidential Listening and
7 Assistance Service. How did you find participating in
8 that?

9 A. I felt like I had a voice but I also felt, you know, and
10 I guess it's the wondering around this process too, you
11 know, there's so many voices and, you know, will the
12 survivors' voice be lost in all of this? I also went
13 through the Ministry of Social Development around my
14 adoption and this as well, so I've been through both
15 processes and I found both really difficult, just sharing
16 and the real shame about, you know, I never wanted to
17 tell anybody that I'd been through care. You know, one
18 of the questions that is a normal question that people
19 ask you is where are you from, who are your family, and I
20 really struggled to answer that. So, this gave me a bit
21 of a voice around that, to be able to address some of
22 that. But, yeah, but it's not easy, yeah.

23 Q. So, by having access to your files to be able to read
24 that, you gained a bit more understanding of what had
25 happened in your early childhood?

26 A. Yeah, it did and I guess getting the counselling and
27 support that I actually needed, you know, through that
28 process. You know, I actually sought that out for myself
29 before this process as well and I don't think I would
30 have been able to do that without that. And I guess
31 getting an understanding that actually you can't just
32 forgive and move on, that actually you do have to process
33 that and work through it and kind of, you know, because
34 this impacted on all relationships. So, you know, yeah,

- 773 -

1 you just have to go through that process. You can't just
2 leave it there and let it sit. Yeah, it's an ongoing
3 journey.

4 Q. As part of that, did you go through the claims process?

5 A. Yes, I did go through the claims process.

6 Q. How did you find that?

7 A. I actually found that - there was one thing that really
8 stood out to me that really distressed me. You know,
9 nobody has been held to account and I asked MSD at the
10 time, would these caregivers be held to account, you
11 know, considering that they're your employees? You know,
12 you've employed these caregivers. And they said that
13 nobody will be held to account. That shocked me, you
14 know, and I'm thinking of the many other children that
15 there's been no justice for. And these caregivers,
16 particularly the family home caregivers that were
17 employed by the Department, have not been held to account
18 and still to this day are not. So, that was really
19 difficult to hear that.

15.17 20 Yes, I was offered compensation and I was given an
21 apology and I was advised to accept the apology and take
22 the offer because that was all that would happen.

23 Q. How did you feel about that aspect of that process, the
24 advice that you received?

25 A. I felt that it wasn't valued, what I went through wasn't
26 valued for what it was. I guess that's how I look at
27 that. I guess for me too, the enormity of the
28 institution or the Department was a big thing. It was
29 like, you know, to fight the organisation or an
15.17 30 organisation that's a government department, you know,
31 you can't do it on your own and it's huge, you know, and
32 the enormity of that, yeah, it doesn't give you a choice
33 around that and there's no structure within New Zealand
34 to be able to deal with that.

- 774 -

1 Q. If we turn now to the paragraphs in your brief under the
2 heading "Future", what would you like to tell the
3 Commissioners about your hopes for the future in terms of
4 parenting, caregivers, social workers, those types of
5 things?

6 A. I could be here forever. I guess just working in the
7 field but, you know, what happened to me shouldn't happen
8 to children today, especially with what we know around,
9 you know, experiences of children, around trauma, around
10 attachment. You know, I know of, you know, cases now
11 where decisions are made out of people being reactive and
12 not responsive, and that transitions are being made for
13 children that are not in the child's best interests but
14 it's about the Department's timeframes or the social
15 workers' timeframes but actually not about the child.

16 I believe that ~~intergenerational~~ ~~ventional~~ abuse
17 needs to be addressed and looking at wraparound services
18 for families within the home and not having the removal
19 of children.

15.19 20 I know this is not my experience with adoption but, you
21 know, with children that are in homes where there's
22 generational abuse, that actually, you know, teaching
23 these children how to parent because they haven't had
24 that or they've been through their own trauma.

25 Accountability for caregivers. I think that's huge.

26 And in regards to that, training around trauma and
27 that the focus needs to be on the child and the trauma,
28 not the child's behaviour.

29 You know, many children, and I still hear it now, is
15.20 30 that children in care are labelled as naughty but
31 actually, it's the trauma that's speaking and it's not
32 the behaviour. I mean, it's the trauma coming through
33 the behaviour.

34 You know, that caregivers need mandatory training
before they take on children in care.

- 775 -

1 And, yeah, also working with the caregivers because
2 when something happens with the home, and from my own
3 experience, is that caregivers don't actually want the
4 children to be moved, they actually want the support in
5 order to keep that placement secure. And I think if that
6 would have happened, the outcome for me a bit later on
7 may have been better. And often we move children without
8 putting the right supports in place for the caregivers
9 and the children.

15.21 10 Social workers, you know, there was one social
11 worker that I remember that did build a relationship with
12 me but other than that, you know, how can you build a
13 relationship with a child when you visit them every 8
14 weeks? How can you build that rapport and how can that
15 child feel confident to be able to share what's going on
16 for them when you only visit every 8 weeks? These
17 children have enough problems trusting as to go.

18 And for many, I've seen it, when they've done the 8
19 weeks visit, it's a tick box, I've done the visit. Okay,
15.22 20 when's the next one? And I guess that comes down to
21 funding and, you know, resources and things like that.

22 Q. Would you like to, just before we conclude, would you
23 like to read paragraphs 38 and 39 of your brief to us and
24 then you wanted to finish with a quote that you've got
25 with you today?

26 A. Mm-Mmm. I guess, you know, the lifelong impact that this
27 abuse has had on me, you know, I'll carry for a lifetime,
28 it's continuous and it's something that I need to
29 continue to address. You know, I've got really good
15.23 30 support around me now but there's a lot of people that
31 haven't. But, you know, the stigma of being a foster
32 child or the stigma of abuse, you know, can't be shaken
33 off.

34 Yeah, and I've come just to share my story with the

- 776 -

1 Commission to help other children not to have a childhood
2 like mine. And I guess as a nation, our children, our
3 tamariki, are ctrying out for something to change because
4 the change isn't happening and children are still being
5 put in these situations that are unsafe and are not
6 getting the support, and then we're dealing with, you
7 know, adult trauma and then parenting, you know, the
8 adults that become parents and then it continues as a
9 generational. And there's layers of trauma around that
10 which I see in the work, where I'm working. And I guess
11 just encouraging us to be responsive, rather than
12 reactive, to situations of care.

13 I guess the quote I want to finish with, which I
14 think is by Dr Bruce Perry, is "you can take the child
15 out of the trauma but it takes generations to take the
16 trauma out of a child." And child trauma is complex and
17 it turns into adult trauma and then parental trauma.

18 So, I think that's kind of my end statement, yeah.

19 **MS THOMAS:** Thank you, Dallas, for your evidence today.

15.25 20 Chair, I have not had any notice of any questions
21 from counsel, to I'll hand over to you.

22 **CHAIR:** Thank you. I take it from that, counsel, that
23 there's no wish for any of you to ask - oh,
24 Mr Stone.

25 There's just a slight procedural problem, two counsel
26 have intimated they wish to ask a question but there's a
27 process which you usually go through. I think the way in
28 which it can perhaps be resolved is for my colleagues and
29 I now to take the afternoon adjournment and if you,
15.26 30 Mr Stone, and you, Ms Thomas, can speak about this with
31 your counterparts and we will approach the matter afresh
32 in 15 minutes' time.

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34 **Hearing adjourned from 3.26 p.m. until 3.45 p.m.**

- 777 -

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DALLAS PICKERING

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QUESTIONED BY MR STONE

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CHAIR: The Commissioners have been assured that the protocol in relation to questioning of witnesses has been followed. There are obvious matters of sensitivity that need attention. We are satisfied that it is appropriate for permission to be granted in the following terms: permission is granted to Mr Stone to ask questions of this witness regarding Maori identity. And permission is also granted to Mrs Guy Kidd to ask questions regarding the way in which a social worker can create a relationship with a child.

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As you are in the position, Mr Stone, I will invite you to go first.

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MR STONE:

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Q. (Talks in Te Reo Maori). In English that means I acknowledge everything you said today and the kaha and strength it would have taken to say it and I give you nothing but my support.

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Did you have the benefit of listening to the previous witness, Dr Else?

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A. Yes, I did, yes.

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Q. That's good because everything that she spoke about, you're the living embodiment of everything that she was speaking about. You pretty much tick all those boxes that she was referring to, the severance of the whakapapa, the fear of babies being the preferred babies and all that sort of stuff. And the last question I asked of the previous witness was, that there must be people out there who don't know who they are.

- 778 -

1 A. Mm-Mmm.

2 Q. And you touched on that but I ask the question of you
3 again, in light of everything that you've said, do you
4 know who you are?

5 A. In light of what you said, I guess it has to go back a
6 couple of generations for me because my father's father
7 was adopted. So, if you go back earlier, his mother was
8 European and his father was Maori. And when he was born
9 he was adopted to a Pakeha family as well. And that's
10.48 10 where we have been able to link back to our iwi to know,
11 you know, all that we know is that he was born in Te Poi
12 and that, you know, he was removed from his mother and
13 placed with a Pakeha family as well.

14 So, we still, in regards to that, still don't have
15 strong links back to our whakapapa, to our marae, to our
16 hapu, to our iwi, and that's something that - it's a real
17 blockage because we can't, you know, we're struggling to
18 find those links.

19 Q. One of my other questions I was going to ask you is
15.49 20 whether the prejudice in terms of severing your whakapapa
21 link was intergenerational. And I was going to ask that
22 with reference to your children and mokopuna but it
23 appears that you've suffered that as well because you're
24 a second generation that's been disconnected to your
25 whakapapa. Was it your grandfather that was also adopted
26 out?

27 A. Yes, yep. It wasn't my father, it was my grandfather,
28 but yes, it impacted on my father's generation as well
29 because I found out later on that he actually had some
15.49 30 time in foster care as well, so we're going back now
31 three, four, generations of this that impact. And I
32 think that, you know, in relation to the previous
33 speaker, you know, I agree that if I had been identified
34 as Maori back then, that maybe I would not have been put

1 back into this adopted family so many times. And I also
2 kind of reflect on that and think would decisions have
3 been made differently because of that?

4 Q. And in your evidence, you spoke about being ashamed of
5 being a foster child. Do you feel a level of whakama or
6 shame in terms of not knowing your identity?

7 A. Absolutely. You know, I don't get to know some of the
8 stories, the history, the values and beliefs that could
9 have come through those generations. I have, you know, a
10.51 10 good relationship with my Dad but I'm still, you know, in
11 a sense, that relationship is still forming. And so, I'm
12 still on the outer and yet, I think if I had grown up
13 within the family, that would have been different.
14 Because that history, that story, those unspoken things,
15 you know, that becomes who you are and that was
16 disjointed for me in many ways through being a child in
17 care and a foster child.

18 **MR STONE:** Thank you.

19 **CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Stone.
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DALLAS PICKERING
QUESTIONED BY MS GUY KIDD

Q. My name is Fiona Guy Kidd and I represent the General Synod~~agogue~~ Whanui of the Anglican Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia. One of the focuses of this Commission is how to prevent abuse in care in the future. And you are a senior social worker, do you work with children regularly?

A. Yes, I do and, yeah, I guess, I don't want to disclose in this forum where I work but, yes, I do.

Q. And you've told us that, from your own experiences as a child, you said you couldn't trust the social workers and that there was only one social worker with whom you were able to build a relationship.

From your experiences in your current work, can you tell us how does a social worker build a relationship with a child? What's necessary to do that?

A. I guess, it is about that connection, finding a point of connection with that child, finding out who they are, where they're from, coming down to their level, spending time with them, you know, is really, really important. You can't build a relationship if you don't see them, you know, every 8 weeks you can't build that relationship with them. And that's not just done through talking. You know, there's other avenues that this could be done, through play, through interaction, through activities. And also, actually helping them with their connection with whanau as well. You know, that's going to help them, you know, open up and actually valuing their family, even though there's stuff that happened in their whanau, valuing their family and those family

1 relationships as well.

2 Q. Related to that, you spoke of your own brief experience
3 of counselling. As I understood you to say, you didn't
4 convey your true feelings. What are your thoughts about
5 how we can find out children's real feelings and thoughts
6 about what's happened to them?

7 A. Allowing time for those relationships, trusting
8 relationships to form. You know, it's not, you know, I
9 often hear social workers putting a timeframe, we'll give
10 you six sessions or we'll give you 12 sessions. You
11 know, not putting a timeframe on the counselling, you
12 know. Allowing that time. Yeah, that's probably what I
13 can -

14 Q. And part of that, I imagine, is children at different
15 ages, different stages, take their own time?

16 A. Absolutely. And it's also their own processing, how they
17 understand. You know, a lot of children that have been
18 through trauma, you know, have issues around their own
19 learning difficulties, so we've got to bring it down to
15.55 20 the level that they can manage, and that can't happen
21 overnight.

22 **MS GUY KIDD:** Thank you.

23 **CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Guy Kidd.

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DALLAS PICKERING

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QUESTIONED BY COMMISSIONERS

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6 **CHAIR:** I will now ask my colleagues if there are any
7 questions they may each have of Ms Pickering. May
8 I start with you, Commissioner Gibson?

9 **COMMISSIONER GIBSON:** No further questions. Thank you
10 for your great testimony.

15.55

11 **COMMISSIONER ALOFIVAE:** Thank you, Ms Pickering. I just
12 want to express my deepest gratitude for the
13 courage that you've really shown in sharing your
14 story with us this afternoon, thank you so much.

15 **COMMISSIONER SHAW:** Again, my thanks but no questions,
16 thank you very much. Just one thing, just to say,
17 congratulations on making a real life out of a very
18 unreal life. I think that's really that we all
19 admire very deeply.

15.56

20 **COMMISSIONER ERUETI:** I just want to say thank you
21 having the courage and fortitude to come to speak
22 with us. I found your evidence very compelling and
23 I have taken on board your aspirations and
24 recommendations to the Inquiry and I hope we can do
25 it justice. Kia ora.

26 A. Kia ora.

27 **CHAIR:** Ms Pickering, there is an old saying, sometimes
28 less is more. I adopt that and echo what's been
29 said by my colleagues. Thank you for your valuable
30 evidence.

15.57

31 A. Thank you.

32 **CHAIR:** Madam Registrar, can you proceed to bring
33 today's sitting to an end?

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(Closing karakia and waiata)

Hearing adjourned at 4.00 p.m.