

Witness Name: Keith Wiffin

Statement No: WITN0080030

Exhibits: WITN0080031 – WITN0080040

Dated: 19 April 2021

ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

THIRD WITNESS STATEMENT OF KEITH WIFFIN

I, Keith Wiffin, will say as follows:

Introduction

1. My full name is Keith Vernon Wiffin. I was born on GRO-B 1959 and I am currently 61 years old.
2. I have given evidence to the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in State Care and in the Care of Faith-based Institutions (the Commission) at two previous hearings and provided a written statement on each occasion.
3. Firstly, at the contextual hearing on 29 October 2019, regarding the abuse I suffered at Epuni Boys' Home (Epuni) and in family homes after I was taken into State care following the death of my father in 1970.
4. Secondly, at the State redress hearing on 12 February 2020, regarding my experiences of seeking redress for those abuses, the fundamental flaws in the

process that I experienced, and the way I believe things should be done in the future.

5. The purpose of this evidence is to provide further information about what went on at Epuni, frustrations that I had with the Crown Prosecution Service, the restorative justice conference that I did privately, the use of private investigators by the Crown Law Office and to give an overview of developments since my last statements.

Van excursions from Epuni

6. As I've mentioned in my previous evidence my first recollection of a van was travelling from the Court which made me a Ward of the State to Epuni.¹ My recollection of the van after that is that boys were taken out of the Epuni grounds on various excursions. The van would always be driven by the man that was convicted of sexually abusing me, Alan David Moncrief-Wright.
7. Alan would go out and pick up movies to be shown on a Saturday night. There was one occasion where I remember him driving the van into Wellington and taking some boys to see a movie. The movie was called *The Great Escape* and ironically three boys did exactly that during the intermission.
8. In relatively recent times what has come to my attention is that boys were driven in that van to a Catholic facility in the area where some boys were selected by Catholic officials to be sexually abused. It is my understanding that the person who drove the van to that location was Alan Moncrief-Wright.
9. That information has come to me in the first instance because of an investigation being conducted by the Catholic Church itself. And in the second instance from a boy who was a Ward of a State at around the same time that I was at Epuni. He remembers the van being driven to the church and recalls members of the clergy walking around the van to look at the boys inside and select who they would take.

¹ Statement of Keith Wiffin for the contextual hearing, p1 [4].

10. The common denominator was always Alan Moncrief-Wright, a very serious and prolific abuser of children. As part of that investigation it would seem there is some evidence to suggest that what Moncrief-Wright was doing was prostituting boys from Epuni to Catholic Church officials.

The Catholic Church's investigation

11. One person from the Catholic Church side of things that seems to know a bit about this is Virginia Noonan (Director of the National Office for Professional Standards). She gave evidence at the recent faith-based Redress – phase 2 hearing. Ms Noonan has been in touch with the ex-Ward of the State. This person also got in touch with me. Ms Noonan has been asking him questions about the trips to the Catholic facility. I was told that at the end of that discussion that she said to him, "That helps me corroborate my investigation". I have spoken to the advocate for the principal victim.
12. This information first came to me in confidence from the Catholic Church side of things and I have not spoken about it because of that. But because it has now come to me through another source independent of that, I now feel free to talk about it. I have been told by the former State Ward that his complaint about the van incident went to the top person in the Church. The proposal was that the claim be dismissed, however it was sent back by the senior Church figure saying no have another look, then it went back with the same recommendation that it be dismissed.
13. It seems that the major point of it being dismissed is around the inability to identify the building where the abuse was alleged to have happened. But it would also seem to me that the investigators, or at least the principal investigator, seem to think that the abuse may well have occurred as stated by the source.
14. What I'm also getting a sense of is that it could well be reinvestigated by the Catholic Church with the introduction of new information and that may well be ongoing.
15. There is still more to be done in relation to this subject. It is ongoing and I'm taking an active interest in it because it involves a contact who was also at Epuni with me.

In relation to what ongoing entails, this means talking to the people that were involved further.

Frustrations with the Crown Prosecution Service

16. I have previously given evidence that in terms of the criminal prosecution of Alan Moncrief-Wright, it is my view that the Police showed respect and handled it very professionally in terms of all three victims. In my State redress statement, I said, "My experience did not reflect well on the Crown Solicitor's office in my view. There is more I could say on that topic, but it is not directly relevant to the present statement".² I now wish to elaborate on that topic.
17. I do not think that the Crown prosecutor handled the case as professionally as the Police. That was primarily because after Moncrief-Wright had been convicted and during sentencing there were certain things that were supposed to happen that didn't and went unchallenged by the Crown prosecutor.
18. Prior to the sentencing the Police approached me with an offer from Moncrief-Wright to pay a reparation order of \$10,000 per complainant. Between that approach and the day of sentencing, I was aware that the offer had reduced from \$10,000 to \$7,000 per complainant. On the day of sentencing, that was the reparation order that was supposed to be made. That was agreed to and as part of that resolution (or bargain if you like) and something I wasn't personally entirely comfortable with but took into account the views of the other complainants, some of the serious charges were dropped.
19. In sentencing the defence talked down that agreed offer from \$7,000 to \$5,000 without any challenge from the Crown prosecutor. I was very unhappy about that and the Police at the time were not entirely happy about it either.

² Statement of Keith Wiffin for the State redress hearing, p12 [51].

20. The other thing that was supposed to be part of the sentence was a Court ordered restorative justice conference between myself and Alan Moncrief-Wright. It was clearly understood by me that the restorative justice conference was to be part of any sentence, certainly the Police were aware of that, so should the Crown prosecutor have been, as should Moncrief-Wright's lawyer.
21. That also didn't happen because the Crown prosecutor failed to advance it, which again made me very angry and once again, the Police weren't very happy about it either. Because of this failing, the Police assisted me to set up a restorative justice conference, done privately.
22. The other two victims didn't want to be involved in a restorative justice conference, but it was something that was important to me.

Proposed changes to the redress process

23. As I have mentioned in my previous evidence the most important thing for me in terms of redress, and it is easily the most important thing, is for an independent process to be set up to hear the civil claims, outside of the courts, outside of the very agencies that employ the perpetrators.³ They should never be the final arbitrator.
24. That is something that I strive for and hope that it will one day lead to a substantial reduction to those wanting to take civil claims through the courts.
25. Whilst I disagree with most of what the Solicitor-General said during the State redress hearing, the one thing I do agree with is that the courts are not the appropriate place to deal with these claims. The problem is that there is no fair, just, impartial claims process outside of the courts.

³ Statement of Keith Wiffin for the State redress hearing, p15 [64]-[65].

26. In terms of redress also, it is very important for me that victims, if they want to, have access to their records and restorative justice.

Private restorative justice conference

27. During the questions from the Commissioners at the end of the contextual hearing I told Commissioner Shaw about the record I have of the restorative justice conference with Alan Moncrief-Wright.⁴ At that point in time I did not feel comfortable disclosing the contents of that transcript, there are various reasons for this and they are all very personal. Aspects of the transcript remain deeply personal to me, but for this hearing I am prepared to share a significant portion of the document itself. These portions of the original have been shown to Commission staff.

28. To provide some context about the restorative justice conference, on 8 July 2011 Alan Moncrief-Wright was convicted of eight sexual offences in the Wellington District Court, including five against me.⁵

29. The offending had been ongoing during the nine months⁶ that I was at Epuni. I was 11 years old at the time⁷. The charges only represented some but not all of what had happened to me. I disclosed the general nature of the offending to the Police.

30. Just over four months after Alan Moncrief-Wright's sentencing, on 23 November 2011, I had a restorative justice conference with him. This was organised privately by the Police because, as I have already mentioned, the Crown prosecutor failed to advance the proposal.

⁴ Transcript of evidence of Keith Wiffin at the contextual hearing, 29 October 2019, p104-105.

⁵ Statement of Keith Wiffin for the contextual hearing, p3 [18] and Statement of Keith Wiffin for the State redress hearing, p2 [8].

⁶ Statement of Keith Wiffin for the contextual hearing, p2 [8].

⁷ Statement of Keith Wiffin for the State redress hearing, p1 [5].

31. In relation to the meeting itself, it was a very long meeting, it started at 1:25pm and went until 4pm, with one break. There were five of us present: me, Alan Moncrief-Wright, Alan's partner, the principal facilitator, and a second facilitator. At that meeting the principal facilitator produced a 28-page document [WITN0080031] of what she said were the "key features" of the meeting. The principal facilitator said that the transcript could have been 50 or 60 pages long, so it is not an entire reflection of everything that played out. Therefore, some of what was discussed is from my memory, rather than being recorded in the document itself.
32. The reasons that I wanted to meet with Alan are recorded at the top of page 2 of the transcript [WITN0080031].
33. There are some important things in the transcript that I think need to be revealed. In particular there are admissions from Alan Moncrief-Wright that speak to the violent culture of Epuni that the staff played an effective role in fostering. It also illustrates how the mismanagement of the institution enabled staff to get away with abusing young boys.

Culture of violence at Epuni

34. In my previous evidence I have spoken about the violent and abusive culture at Epuni.⁸ I asked for Alan's opinion on this in the restorative justice conference. He admitted that there were two really bad staff members that inflicted violence on the boys [WITN0080032].
35. It should be noted that the "Māori fella" that I refer to in line 30 of page 5 hadn't actually passed away, I was mistaken.
36. What Alan and I discussed is a clear indication and a graphic example of the culture of violence that existed on a daily basis in that institution while I was there and, in

⁸ Statement of Keith Wiffin for the contextual hearing, p1 [5] and Statement of Keith Wiffin for the State redress hearing, p1 [6].

my opinion, while there were varying degrees of violence inflicted by staff, overwhelmingly the majority of them were violent.

37. Hearing Moncrief-Wright say that Sid was one of the worst staff members in terms of physical violence personally affected me because I had a close association with one Māori boy who was a victim of Sid's beatings. So, I feel a personal connection and something that I have really struggled to get my head around is the fact that Sid himself was of Māori descent, as were 70 percent of the kids in that institution. Their life was already hell in that place and he was making it worse for his own race.

Violent nature of Alan Moncrief-Wright

38. During the conference Alan tried to impress upon me that he wasn't a physically abusive person and he gave an example at line 10 of page 6 [WITN0080032], where he said that the only time he could remember being violent is when a boy refused to leave a room.
39. Alan was not being honest when he claimed that he wasn't violent often because there was another incident that he was involved in that I remember very clearly, where Alan used a brush to scrub a tattoo out of a young boy's hand [WITN0080032].
40. Alan made 30-odd of us boys line up outside in the courtyard to witness the tattoo removal, to hear that boy's screams and to instil in us fear of it happening to each and every one of us if we tattooed ourselves.
41. I remember there was at least one other housemaster present, probably two, but I cannot remember their names. They were there to ensure that we remained stood to attention with our hands behind our back while this was done by Moncrief-Wright and the screams were heard by all. I can still hear the screams of that boy now. I don't know the boy's name, I only know that he was Māori.

42. I also remember having a strong sense at the time that that's the closest I saw to the boys on mass wanting to attack the housemasters. Because it was an act of outright brutality.
43. At the State redress hearing I spoke about the 60 Minutes documentary that I was involved in back in 2009, which Alan Moncrief-Wright was also involved in.⁹ I was asked by the 60 Minutes crew what the worst thing that I saw at Epuni was, and I said it was the tattoo removal incident, where Alan used a wire brush to scrub that boy's hand. That was my impression on the basis of everything that I saw and heard that day.
44. When Alan was asked by the 60 Minutes crew about that incident they accused him of using a wire brush to scrub off that boy's tattoo and he denied that it ever happened. He was really annoyed by what the 60 Minutes crew asked him, not because of what they were accusing him of, but because they got the type of brush wrong. Alan brought that up in our restorative justice meeting **[WITN0080032]**.
45. For me Alan's comment on the type of brush he used highlighted the total dishonesty, insincere nature of the man and his brutality.

Kingpin system

46. In my previous evidence I have talked about the kingpin system that was used as a means of control at Epuni, as well as a camp in the Akatarawa Valley where us boys were made to fight each other to determine who the kingpin was.¹⁰ This is in reference to the violent culture that existed at Epuni while I was there and it's a question I asked of Alan during the conference **[WITN0080032]**.

⁹ Transcript of evidence of Keith Wiffin at the contextual hearing, 29 October 2019, p92, Statement of Keith Wiffin for the State redress hearing, p9 [34] and Transcript of evidence of Keith Wiffin at the State redress hearing, 12 February 2020, p31.

¹⁰ Statement of Keith Wiffin for the contextual hearing, p2 [10]-[11] and Transcript of evidence of Keith Wiffin at the contextual hearing, 29 October 2019, p80.

47. In my mind there were two staff members who instead of breaking up fights and seeing that they didn't happen, would watch them play out and encourage it. One was Alan Moncrief-Wright and the other was Tony Weinberg.

Effects of abuse and the stigma attached to being a State Ward

48. Another matter that I discussed with Alan Moncrief-Wright was the effect the sexual abuse had on me and the stigma attached to being a State Ward [WITN0080033].

Alan Moncrief-Wright's lack of understanding of the harm he caused

49. One of my objectives for the restorative justice meeting was to talk to Alan Moncrief-Wright about his sexual offending against me in an effort to understand whether he had any feelings of remorse or a sense of wrongdoing. Alan said on more than one occasion in the transcript that he knew what he was doing was wrong, morally and legally, but he didn't think he was hurting anyone [WITN0080034].

50. What struck me the most about Alan's response was his lack of understanding about the effects of his abuse. I found that very hard to come to terms with.

51. Alan Moncrief-Wright didn't really give me a satisfactory reason as to why he didn't think he was hurting anyone that he was sexually abusing. He tried to justify his offending on the basis that he himself had suffered some form of abuse in his childhood.

Inadequacies in the management of Epuni and lack of staff training

52. An issue that really concerned me that Alan was able to confirm during the conference was the complete lack of staff training. I also discussed this issue during

the contextual hearing.¹¹ Alan was able to confirm that at that stage in time none of the staff at Epuni would have been qualified by today's standards [WITN0080034].

53. I got a strong sense from talking to Alan that he was able to get away with his offending in the most part because of the fundamental inadequacies of the management of the institution and their negligent oversight. He was particularly damning of the long-time manager of the Epuni, Maurice Howe. For me it was a pointer to serious systemic failures that allowed the scale of abuse to happen [WITN0080034].

Alan's motive for obtaining employment at Epuni

54. I asked Alan what his primary motive for getting a job at Epuni was [WITN0080034].

The two activities that he stated he had been involved in set off alarm bells in my mind, a paedophile in the Scout movement and coaching boys' sports teams.

55. I've already spoken about the connection between Epuni and the Catholic organisations within the vicinity. But I also know that Alan Moncrief-Wright was coaching a rugby team at a Catholic school or church in the area because I saw a photo of this.

The administration allowing the resignation of Alan Moncrief-Wright

56. During the contextual hearing I spoke about how Alan Moncrief-Wright was able to leave Epuni after being caught, allowing him to do a whole lot more offending. This was because the administration at the time allowed him to resign, so that it wouldn't appear on his employment record.¹² Alan confirmed this during the conference [WITN0080034].

¹¹ Transcript of evidence of Keith Wiffin at the contextual hearing, 29 October 2019, p98.

¹² Transcript of evidence of Keith Wiffin at the contextual hearing, 29 October 2019, p83.

Sexual offending by other staff members

57. During the conference I asked Alan if there were other staff members who were sexually offending at Epuni [WITN0080034]. He responded by saying that at least one of the women that worked there was sexually involved with boys. I had some evidence of a female staff member, called Miss Hart, having sex with young boys. I think that Alan recognised that it was Miss Hart but failed to specifically confirm this.

Alan Moncrief-Wright's offending in Hamilton

58. During previous evidence I have said that, "In my opinion, he [Alan Moncrief-Wright] was a prolific offender and in terms of Epuni, I believe he was caught offending in a similar institution in Hamilton, but he was allowed to leave the institution and get a job at Epuni".¹³ I would like to provide some further information about why I hold that belief. This first came to my attention when the information was supplied to me by two investigative journalists. Then I found out later that there had been a claim settled around Moncrief-Wright's offending at Hamilton. What was supplied to me by the journalists gave me a very strong sense that at the time the management people were aware of his offending and allowed him to quietly slip away. In relation to those journalists, I have a great deal of respect for both of them and I'd like to protect their identity. This information was then reinforced by a separate source who told me that the information had also come to the attention of Confidential Listening and Assistance Service.

¹³ Transcript of evidence of Keith Wiffin at the contextual hearing, 29 October 2019, p81. Also see: Statement of Keith Wiffin for the contextual hearing, p9 [55], Transcript of evidence of Keith Wiffin at the contextual hearing, 29 October 2019, p95, and Transcript of evidence of Keith Wiffin at the State redress hearing, 12 February 2020, p29 and p34.

Effect of Alan's offending on other victims

59. At one point during the meeting, in the context of wanting to impress upon Alan the lasting impact that he'd had on a boy that he had seriously offended against, I told Alan that a significant anecdote of cause and effect is that that victim, now a gang member, said that whenever he went into a fight he saw Alan's face. **[WITN0080035]**.

60. I think Alan's lack of response showed quite clearly to me his lack of understanding, remorse or empathy for his victims and what he had done, and the impact it had on those victims.

The Ministry of Social Development's failure to interview Alan Moncrief-Wright during their investigation

61. As I have said in previous evidence it was clear after speaking with Alan Moncrief-Wright at the restorative justice conference that no one from the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) or other relevant government agencies ever interviewed Alan to find out the full extent of what he did and to whom¹⁴ and the transcript of the conference confirms this **[WITN0080036]**.

Outcomes of the conference

62. Alan was asked if there was anything that he could offer me as an outcome of the conference, and as I've mentioned in previous evidence¹⁵, he offered to help by writing letters or contributing to papers **[WITN0080037]**. Unfortunately, I was never able to fully take Alan up on his offer, because, as I have disclosed in previous evidence, Alan Moncrief-Wright died in June 2014, after being charged with further

¹⁴ Statement of Keith Wiffin for the contextual hearing, p8 [48], Transcript of evidence of Keith Wiffin at the contextual hearing, 29 October 2019, p92, Statement of Keith Wiffin for the State redress hearing, p10 [36] and Transcript of evidence of Keith Wiffin at the State redress hearing, 12 February 2020, p28, p31-32 and p35.

¹⁵ Transcript of evidence of Keith Wiffin at the State redress hearing, 12 February 2020, p32.

sexual abuse offences against children.¹⁶ Just prior to this I put several questions to Alan, through the principal facilitator, and I understand that he agreed to answer them.

63. The last page of the transcript records the conference outcomes **[WITN0080038]**.

At (2) the transcript records that for the most part I had forgiven Alan. I have to comment that in saying that I was biting my tongue with the view to Alan participating further in the future as to answering more questions, because I didn't necessarily find him to be at all sincere.

64. The point made at (5) was written in the context of Alan being alive and I haven't spoken about the conference until now. Now that Alan Moncrief-Wright is dead I feel absolutely at liberty to be able to do that, whilst protecting the identity of his partner.

Thoughts on Alan's attitude in the restorative justice conference

65. When Alan was asked whether he would participate in a restorative justice conference he responded by saying that he didn't have a choice **[WITN0080031]**. It seems to me as though Alan thought that he had to be at the conference because it had been Court ordered, but that's not the case because it was organised privately through the Police, so he was mistaken and did not have to be there.

66. I felt like Alan gave up as little as possible about his own behaviour in that conference. He alluded to the fact that there were suspicions about staff abusing boys and taking kids homes, but he knew they were doing that, and he knew who the other offenders were. Those were things that I was going to try to get out of him later, but I obviously never got the chance.

¹⁶ Statement of Keith Wiffin for the State redress hearing, p10 [37] and Transcript of evidence of Keith Wiffin at the State redress hearing, 12 February 2020, p32.

67. I believe that Alan admitted to things in a manner which suited his own agenda, which was to stay out of prison. So, for whatever he has been held to account for, it is nowhere near the scale of his actual offending.

Crown Law Office's expression of regret for the use of private investigators

68. At the State redress hearing I discussed the Crown's use of private investigators in their preparation for the *White* trial, in particular the fact that two detective-like people were watching me at my home. I raised this with a senior manager who denied that there had been surveillance of witnesses involved with the *White* trial, but it transpired that they spent \$100,000 doing just that.¹⁷

69. In addition to the evidence that I have previously given, I obtained a response to an information request that I made from the Crown Law Office, dated 28 February 2019, from Mark Bryant (Crown Counsel). This response confirms that private investigators were engaged by the Crown to assist with the preparation for the *White* trial. This was around the exact time that I felt that I was under surveillance. The letter expresses regret that the broad terms of its instructions to the private investigation firm fell short of the high standards necessary for the conduct of the *White* litigation [WITN0080039].

Other matters

Visit to Epuni

70. I have previously told the Commission that back in 2008, Garth Young, who was the National Manager of Historic Claims for MSD at the time, offered to help arrange for me to visit Epuni, which I had requested.¹⁸ For me it was really important to visit

¹⁷ Transcript of evidence of Keith Wiffin at the State redress hearing, 13 February 2020, p55-56.

¹⁸ Statement of Keith Wiffin for the State redress hearing, p6 [25] and Transcript of evidence of Keith Wiffin at the State redress hearing, 12 February 2020, p27-28.

the institution that I was in 50 years ago. It is now called Epuni Care and Protection Residence and has changed its form a bit. In my day it was boys only, now it is a mixed institution that caters for girls and boys between the ages of 10-17.

71. That visit still hasn't happened, but I'm confident that it's close to happening and that confidence comes from having a joint meeting with Oranga Tamariki and MSD. At that meeting from Oranga Tamariki was their National Manager for Care Services, Natalie Richardson. At the end of that meeting it was clear to me that they would welcome me at Epuni for a visit, albeit 13 years after they originally offered to help arrange this.
72. So that was a positive outcome and I hope also that that meeting has opened the door for further engagement around broader issues in relation to children in care today.

Current concerns

Concerns about the management of Epuni Care and Protection Residence

73. There are still some concerns I have about the management of the Epuni Care and Protection Residence in relatively recent times. A Wellington journalist ran a story on 23 November 2020, on the front page of the Dominion Post, about the abuse that was happening in that institution that was of a similar ilk to what was happening in my day, 50 years ago [WITN0080040].
74. So, where I sit at the moment is that I still have some concerns and there are still unacceptable levels of abuse happening in State care. But what gave me some optimism and even some heart in my meeting with those officials, whose names were Paea Dentice (Team Leader Claimant Support Historic Claims, MSD) and Natalie Richardson, was when they talked about the introduction of models of care, not just talking about them but actually doing them. They are moving to smaller models that have fewer numbers of kids, away from Epuni and to places with fewer children. So, whilst trying to remain positive and optimistic that things are improving and wanting to have a good relationship with those government agencies, I still

have concerns about what has gone on in recent times and I think they are things that Oranga Tamariki will have to take responsibility for at some stage.

Statement of Truth

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

Signed:  GRO-C

Dated: 19 April 2021