

**Witness Name:** GRO-A Mr AA

**Statement No.:** WITN0219001

**Exhibits:** WITN0219002 - WITN029100

**Dated:** 9.03.21

## ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

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WITNESS STATEMENT OF GRO-A Mr AA

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I, GRO-A Mr AA will say as follows:

- 1 I was abused in state care while living in many social welfare different institutions. My experiences of all the institutions except Lake Alice are set out in my witness statement dated 14 February 2021, which was prepared by my lawyers, Cooper Legal. Here I give a very brief summary only of what happened to me at those places. Mainly this statement is about what happened to me in Lake Alice and what I saw happening there.

### **My early years**

- 2 I was born on GRO-A and am the eldest of two children. We lived in GRO-A Wellington. My father was a big drinker and would violently assault my mother and me from my earliest years. Also when I was young I would caddy for some local men in the neighbourhood as a means of earning extra pocket money. We lived near the golf club. One man sexually abused me in the

club house on two occasions and on another occasion when I had to caddy away from home with him for the weekend.

- 3 As a result of the abuse from my father and the sexual abuse from the man I golf caddied for at the **GRO-A** Golf Club, I lost the plot and began to act up. The police were involved in my life from when I was nine. No-one ever asked why I was the way I was or if I had been abused. When I was 12, I was taken into the custody to the DSW with the consent of my father. From then on I was moved around a lot of different places before ending up in Borstal.

#### *Epuni Boys Home*

- 4 I was locked in secure in Epuni as soon as I arrived. I was physically and sexually assaulted there. A staff member called John Ngatai, who is now dead, forced me to engage in oral sex with him about 7 to 9 times in total. I had 5 or 6 admissions to Epuni between 1973 and 1977 and he abused me on every admission. MSD have accepted this. There was a lot of sexual behaviour going on at Epuni. It was obvious some staff were having sexual relationships. I got assaulted by other boys and staff. I often tried to run away and make my way home. I was always caught and bought back there.

#### *Whatman Home (Salvation Army)*

- 5 I was in Whatman House for six to seven weeks. Staff were free with their hands, slapping and hitting around the head areas. A night time female staff member regularly fondled my genitals, and other boys, when she was on night duty. I ran away from there and was then put into a social welfare home.

#### **GRO-B** } *Family Home*

- 6 I was put into a family home in **GRO-B** I assume they thought it would not be so easy for me to run away. I did my intermediate school years there and began high school from there. The people running it were horrible people. I was hit with an open hand or strapped by the foster carer at least twice a week and

had welts on my body as a result. They were always strapping children. I recall there was a chef who did lovely baking. We used to pinch the baking, as kids do. Then the people running the home put rat poison dust on the baking tins. We didn't notice it but when our hands touched water it showed up as a dye. That is how they caught us. MSD have accepted these things as true in their settlement with me.

- 7 I ran away all the time from this family home and would find my way back to Wellington. A friend of my father's drove the buses and he would let me on for free. I would always be picked up from home and brought back again. I started school at **GRO-A** Intermediate and then went onto the College in **GRO-A** but shortly after I was taken from **GRO-A** to Kohitere boy's home.

#### *Kohitere*

- 8 There was a lot of violence at Kohitere. I was physically assaulted by staff, by kicking, punching and hitting me with an open hand. I suffered bruises, bloody noses and a cut face. I was also assaulted by other residents and had an initiation beating. I learned criminal behaviours at Kohitere. MSD have accepted all the above. I was sick of all the violence and ran away.

#### **How I came to be in Lake Alice 1975**

- 9 I was admitted to Lake Alice when I was 14 years old on **GRO-A** I was there for three months and released on **GRO-A** I went to Lake Alice after I had absconded from Kohitere and gone home to see my parents. They phoned social welfare and I was collected by two men in a late model car and driven to Lake Alice. No-one told me I was going there or why I was going there.
- 10 I made a statement about Lake Alice in 2001 for Grant Cameron's class action. It is in my Bundle and I confirm it is accurate. In this statement I repeat some I what I said there and summarise others. **[WITN0219002]** Lake Alice had to be the worst of all the places I was put in by the government. The kids who were there were just ordinary kids but what happened to us wasn't.

## **Admission**

- 11 When I arrived the two social workers took me to a very small office where a woman sent me over to the Villa. I didn't get assessed by anybody and never met Dr Leeks.

## *Accommodation*

- 12 To begin with I was put in Villa 11. After a few weeks I was transferred to Villa 12 because of my good behaviour. It was a bit better. We had to walk across the grounds and take all our meals in the main hospital with all the adult patients, except those locked up in Villa eight. The food was awful mass produced hospital food.
- 13 I was only there for two or three weeks and then put into Villa seven. The authorities had cleared the adults out of it and it became the villa for boys and adolescents. We had our own meals in the villa. I was there for the rest of my time. I describe the layout of Villa seven in para 25 of my class action statement. **[WITN0219002]**

## **Group therapy sessions**

- 14 Dr Leeks and an Indian doctor used to conduct therapy groups in the lounge of Villa 10 or 11 about once a week or more. That's how I first met Dr Leeks. It is also the only time I saw the Indian doctor. I think he was from Palmerston North. You had to talk about your feelings and stuff like that. If you didn't, you would be getting ECT on Fridays. A lot of guys who didn't talk would get ECT. I didn't while I was in Villa 10. I don't recall having any group therapy at Villa seven.

## **Getting paraldehyde injections for punishment**

- 15 I got paraldehyde injections twice for punishment while I was in Villa 11. The first time I got one, I was outside playing soccer and a boy kicked me. I turned

around and kicked him back. **GRO-B-100**, a nurse, grabbed me by the hair and marched me back to the villa. I tried to tell him the other boy kicked me first, but he said he only saw me kicking. He dragged me upstairs and into one of the rooms which converted into a cell.

- 16 He then made me drop my pants and he injected paraldehyde into my backside. It was an intensely painful feeling, and it was very sore. The pain lasted for hours and there was a horrible smell that began to develop on my breath. I think I was taken to the dorm room. I had incredible difficulty getting to sleep that night. I had been injected into both cheek butts so it wasn't possible to sit down or to relax properly. I had a terrible night sleep.
- 17 The second time I got paraldehyde I was just clowning around. Some staff member told me to settle down. I didn't, and he made me go back to Villa 11 with him. We went upstairs to one of the cell rooms. Another nurse was present. I don't remember who. I was told to lie down on the mattress on the floor. One of the nurses went downstairs and got a needle and gave it to me again in the butt, both sides. It was just as painful as the first time. It was horrible.

### **Getting Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT)**

- 18 Friday was the big ECT Day in Villa seven. I was petrified about ECT. I always thought that one day my number would be up and it would be my turn. I was right. I managed to avoid ECT at villas 11 and 12 but two of the boys from my dormitory got ECT there. I got it three four times while in Villa seven. Twice was when I was awake and twice was when I was asleep.
- 19 Once a week, on a Friday, the staff would collect those who were scheduled for ECT. Although it seems odd, they seem to wait until everyone was in the shower or the bath in the late afternoon. Dr Leeks would have arrived and would be in the dormitory. The nurses would come into the shower blocks and get people for ECT. We wouldn't usually know who was going to get picked or why a person was getting ECT.

- 20 The first time I got it I had just left the shower. I only had time to place a towel around myself. I didn't know why they're going to give me ECT. It was always done in the dormitory upstairs next to the shower block, the same dormitory I was in, but it was done on the first bed when you walked in on the left-hand side.
- 21 What happened was that I laid on the bed with four nurses and Dr Leeks looking on. Then the nurses wet my temples and I bit into a rubber mouthpiece. This was so I didn't bite my tongue off. The nurses held me down and Dr Leeks turned the machine on.

*How ECT felt while awake*

- 22 The pain was slow at the start. ECT was a quick intense pain with everything flashing. I got a very tight cramp and that is why the nurses had to hold me down. Then it was a quick finish and I passed out completely. I can't really explain the pain, it was how you would expect to feel if you were getting electrocuted on the head.
- 23 When I woke up I was in bed and had pissed myself and lost control of my bowels. I felt like a cabbage or a zombie for three to five days after. I had no idea why I had been shocked on my head. For a few hours I couldn't remember anything. I assume I was fed afterwards, but I cannot remember whether or not I could keep it down. I was disoriented with a painful headache and a really confusing feeling. This happened a second time and I wasn't told why I got it that time either. I'm not sure anyone knew why they got it.
- 24 As well as Fridays ECT was also given during the week. This happened most weeks. The nurses would just grab someone – you could be sitting in the day room or outside or anywhere. They would take you upstairs for it. Dr Leeks would always give the ECT. I think it was the same ECT as they did on Fridays.
- 25 ECT while awake was dished out like lollies. You couldn't predict when you would get it. Dr Leeks was the one who administered ECT from what I saw.

Boys ran away all the time to get away from the ECT but it made no difference because they just bought them back and gave it to them anyway.

*ECT when asleep*

- 26 Everyone knew if you were going to get ECT while sleeping because the nurses would come and give you a pill on the morning to make you drowsy stop you would not be allowed to have breakfast either. After lunch they would come and give you another pill and then take you across to the female villa and you would get ECT. I remember this happened to me once.

By the time I had arrived at the female villa and laid down on the ECT bed I fell fast asleep. The next thing I knew I woke up in another room still in the girls Villa, totally uncoordinated. My mind was totally confused. There were staff there, but I can't say who they were.

- 27 I got a terrible memory after I had ECT. It ruined it. I have always had to write the simplest things down so as to remember them.

*Having to work around dead bodies/clean up after dead people*

- 28 I also had to work at things that were very traumatic to me. There was an old villa behind Villa 7 where elderly mental patients lived. When one of them died we had to go and clean up their beds and living space. I had to do this at least 3 times. This is not something that anyone would want to do. It was disgusting. It usually meant cleaning up their urine. While we were doing this their body would be lying in a coffin. If co-one came to claim the body, relatives would pick it up on a tractor and take it to the other side of Lake Alice. Staff told me their bodies were incinerated there. That really traumatised me. I believed I could smell burning human flesh all the time after I was told this. I had to do this on at least three occasions.

*Threats of being put in national psychiatric secure unit*

- 29 Sometimes the female nurses would take us for walks around the hospital grounds and we would pass the security block and the nurses would say "if you don't behave yourself that's where you end up. I was terrified at the thought of being sent there. It was an evil looking place, the only thing you could see was the garden and a tower. I definitely didn't want to go there.
- 30 I was also traumatised by the locked villa – Villa 8. Once a friend whose surname was [GRO-B] and another boy called [GRO-B] were taken there as punishment after they had been caught smoking twice. After they returned they told me that they had been put in cells with adults and they had both been raped in there. I met [GRO-B] again in Invercargill Borstal and we talked about how yukky Lake Alice had been.

#### *School*

- 31 We went to school at Lake Alice. School was in an old unused villa, the last one before the big field. School was upstairs in that villa. It was a bit of a joke really. We had an outside teacher who would come in, but our schedule was sporadic. This seemed to be no set routine for any lessons. It was not the same as an outside school. I couldn't really say whether or not the teachers were generally interested in our education. All I remember was doing was a bit of drawing, passing the time playing games and sport and stuff like that. I regret not having a proper education.

#### *Leisure activities*

- 32 There was a community hall, which we used to hang out in sometimes when we weren't at school. We could play games like table tennis. They would show movies sometimes. There was a tuck shop. The girls would come over from the villa and it was a time when we would socialise. The community hall was the only good thing about Lake Alice.

#### *Family Visits*



- 33 They were visiting days at the villa. I think they were either Saturday or Sunday. My Uncle [GRO-B], my mother's brother in law, would come with his wife and their [GRO-B] sons once a week to visit. I never told them what was going on in Lake Alice, I'm not sure why, I guess I didn't think they would believe me. When I was an adult, my mother told me that my uncle had said to her years later that he knew something was not right, but he didn't specifically say how he could tell.

### *Staff*

- 34 Most staff were not nice. I particularly remember two male nurses at the villa who were awful. There was also a man with glasses who ran the ward and he was a horrible person who operated under Dr Leeks and was all for punishment. I recall [GRO-B-100] He was ok to me apart from when he grabbed me for a paraldehyde injection.

### **How I got out of Lake Alice**

- 35 My uncle, [GRO-B] asked for me to be removed from Lake Alice. I have never asked him to take me out but I assume he must've realised something was not right. My mother told me later that the administration didn't want to let me go but he threatened them that if they wouldn't release me he would go and see his MP and the newspapers. I was released on [GRO-A]
- 36 I note Dr Leeks wrote a positive note about me on 1 July 1975 being 'lively and insightful'. This was before I had any ECT. By 22 Jan 1976 Dr Leeks had described me as 'insightless' with 'impulse disorder' and 'his uncle showed a marked degree of impulse disorder also' and it was only after a 'particularly fiery session' that he was prevented from moving me then and there. [WITN0219003] He recommended against my return placement as I required too much staff time. I believe that I didn't require any more time with staff than anyone else but by then Dr Leeks was worried about my uncle's desire to go to the newspapers.

## Life after Lake Alice

36 From Lake Alice I was enrolled at GRO-A College. I didn't fit in and was all over the place. My life had been so different to the students there. Before long I was living on the streets and in trouble with the police. After that I was sent to Borstal in Invercargill.

37 I am now 60 and have spent 40 years of my adult life in prison, counting borstal. When not in prison I have done mostly labouring jobs. I worked in a fishing company in Nelson for a while. I also went to chef school. I worked on and off as a chef but nothing regular.

38 My last release from prison was in GRO-A 2020. The Crown prosecutor said that I wasn't a risk to the community. My last psychological report classifies me as institutionalised. This is true. It is easy for me to be in jail. I know the system and I do not have problems there.

39 However I really want to stay out of jail now and have a real quality life. I do know people on the outside who have started their own small businesses and are not in gangs.

## *Relationships*

40 I have two children: a boy and a girl. They barely knew me growing up because I was in jail so much. I understand why they are annoyed with me for not being there for them. We are not close but if I'm in Wellington I will give them a call and maybe have a catch up.

41 My youngest brother has a happy life with a wife and children and a home. He was my father's favourite and avoided a lot of what my father did to me. That brother and I have nothing to do with each other. He doesn't want to know me. My mother died a few years ago. She was guilty about my childhood and knew

why I had turned out in jail etc. She spoke to me about it. I told her that it wasn't her fault.

- 42 The last time I saw my father he was still in denial about what he did to me. I don't know if he's dead or alive.

### **Taking a claim**

- 43 I heard that a lawyer was taking a claim for Lake Alice survivors and I asked to be part of it. A lawyer came to the jail and interviewed me and then rang me a few times to get my statement completed. From memory I was offered \$57,000 to settle. I was disappointed and shocked at how little it was. I thought I had no choice but to take it. From memory I got \$26,000.00 in the hand. The rest went to Grant Cameron. I felt very very disappointed and that it was so unfair at how it turned out.

### *Justice Gallen telling us Dr Leeks would be prosecuted*

- 44 I recall after we settled with Grant Cameron that Justice Gallen had a meeting in Auckland at the Crowne Plaza hotel with about 10 to 15 survivors. I think he travelled the country and met class action survivors in the main centres. I was out of jail at that time. Grant Cameron was there and one or two others. I remember Justice Gallen telling us that Dr Leeks would be prosecuted. We felt good about that. It never happened. I am very angry about that.

### *Claim about abuse in other social welfare institutions and foster care*

- 45 I have recently just accepted a settlement offer of \$26,000.00 in relation to my treatment at the other homes when I was in the care of the state. I wanted more and was advised I might be able to argue for \$5,000 more but I got so sick of waiting. I first went to Sonja Cooper in 2007. I had to wait 13 years for that much. I think the Crown deliberately put road blocks up everywhere and tried to wear us down so we would give up trying to get compensation and justice. I don't think this amount justified what was done to me.

46 I went to the Newmarket redress hearing for some of the Crown witnesses' evidence. I was not impressed with the crown blatantly saying they could not recall various events. I don't think the Crown have made up for the really terrible way I and other children were treated in their care.

### **How I feel now and when looking at my files**

47 I deeply regret the way my life has turned out. If only someone had listened to me when I was 9 and supported me through the trauma of being sexual abused and living in a violent family. I might have turned out very differently for me. The constant conflict with my father was because, as the oldest, I tried to protect my mother from his violence. My younger brother would not understand that. I feel shame at having been in jail. But the state trained me for it from 9 years old.

48 I note that in DSW documents when I was 11 it was written that I had social and emotional problems and was not getting enough love and affection from my mother. I felt the world was against me and preferred to withdraw into myself. They were thinking of a boarding school placement. No-one questioned if there was another problem as well, such as my sexual abuse. Its not a thing I could have bought up.

49 Instead of them dealing with my emotional problems I got put into places where, among other things, I was sexually used for a staff member's pleasure, kicked, punched, strapped and bashed. All I ever did wrong was run away to go home. For that I finally got put into a psychiatric hospital when there was nothing wrong with me mentally and I was traumatised on so many occasions. Then given cruel painful 'treatment' as punishments.

50 When I was 16 I was just thrown out of the DSW system as *it had nothing further to offer me*. So they made me the way I was but then just abandoned me at 16. I should have had a mentor, given skills training and a proper place to live. The boarding house I was put in by the social workers was full of alcoholics and drug addicts. I never had training from anyone and couldn't get a job. I was

never supervised or assisted. MSD have apologised for this. How else was I going to live if I didn't steal.

- 51 I also note a comment that the 'best specialist guidance' had been given to me but it had not done me any good. They listed the boys homes I had been in and Lake Alice. There was never any helpful specialist guidance unless you count abuse, ECT for punishment, paraldehyde drugs for punishment. Physical abuse everywhere. I wonder why the people who wrote these notes didn't know what was going on in these places of 'specialist guidance'. Or maybe they did know but didn't care.
- 52 I want the system of locking kids up and institutionalising them when they have become troubled to be gone forever. Kids in lock up become adults in prisons. They know no better.
- 53 When I had just turned 15, on GRO-A the state had washed its hands off me – In a letter a Mrs Gush wrote that the Epuni Boys Home management recommended a 'secure, well structured environment, which could be best provided by the Justice Department'. By the age of 15 the government had given up on me and put me behind bars.
- 54 I have no material, family or emotional support going into old age. I have no savings as I have rarely worked and been in jail so much. My health is a poor state. I have only 4 teeth left and it is difficult to eat. I have a debt with Social Welfare for having to get bonds so I could move into places. I don't sleep – I haven't for years. I snap awake with the memories of incidents in my childhood while in state care. I am on heart medication for arrhythmia. I need hip replacements. I have PTSD and have intrusive memories all the time. I have anxiety about my uncertain future. I am trying my best not to go back to prison. There is so much pressure living on the outside, such as paying bills, being older and unable to get a job.
- 55 For years and years, when I had time out of jail I asked to see a probation psychologist. I was told I would never get it because I wasn't a violent offender

so I didn't qualify. GRO-C I got out of jail last GRO-B 2020, and that was the first time I was offered help. The psychologist saw me in prison on remand and when I got out. I had a few sessions. I need ongoing support to get rid of the anger I have from what happened to me as a child and PTSD and frustration.

### **What I want from the Royal Commission**

- 55 When I think of how my life has been destroyed by how my care was handled as a child by the government, I believe the government owes me compensation and a lot of support.
- 56 I also wasn't paid the full amount of compensation that Justice Gallen awarded me. The government should have picked up my legal fees. and should repay the legal fees with interest.
- 57 There have got to be lots of protections to stop children and adolescents being put into psychiatric institutions.
- 58 There has to be a robust employment process that weeds out people with power issues, paedophilia, anger problems, emotional problems from working with vulnerable children and adolescents.

### **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 State Care.

Name: GRO-A Mr AA

Signed:

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## INDEX OF DOCUMENTS: STATEMENT OF

GRO-A Mr AA

Exhibit Ref	Document Description	Date	Para
<b>WITN0219002</b>	Statement for Grant Cameron Class Action proceedings	9 Feb 2001	10,13
<b>WITN0219003</b>	Notes of Dr Leeks on <b>GRO-A Mr AA</b>	22 Jan 1976	36