

Witness Name: Glenda Maihi

Statement No: WITN0577001

Dated: 03/08/2021

ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

WITNESS STATEMENT OF GLENDA MAIHI

I, Glenda Maihi, state;

1. My name is Glenda Maihi. This is the first time I have shared my story of being a ward of the state. The process of telling my story has been very emotional for me and it has brought back a lot of memories. I am having to work through those again to make sense of my life.
2. I share my experiences of being in foster care in the hope that the system will do better for other children. I do not want other children to endure what I did.
3. I guess the overwhelming sense I have of my childhood, is the feeling of being alone. During my entire childhood I did not know what love was. All I knew was abuse, hurt, and feeling angry. On top of the abuse, there was no affection, no hugs, no birthdays. No connection.
4. There was never a time I felt that anyone in the State cared for me. I have always felt like an outcast. I remember wondering when my family was going to come and get me. I learnt to look after myself because I could never rely on anyone for support. I learnt to solve my own problems because I felt let down. On reflection, social welfare made me feel like a pay packet.

My whanau and my early life.

5. I was born on GRO-C 1972 in Rotorua.
6. I have three brothers and a sister. I am the second youngest in my whanau.
7. I have seven children and my youngest child is five years old.
8. My earliest memory of abuse in my whanau is from when I was around two or three years old. My mother and I were living with my mother's side of the family, my mother's brother, GRO-B GRO-B had some weird ways, and I do not think that she was

right mentally. I remember GRO-B putting me in a freezer and my mother trying to stop her. I also remember GRO-B chucking me into the river. There was a lot of abuse, it was a rough time. My mother was not abusive, so to be on the receiving end of abuse from GRO-B was a shock.

9. My siblings back in Rotorua were all removed by social welfare and placed into care. My older sister was placed into care first because GRO-B was abusing her. My two older brothers were fostered by a family in Rotorua and then placed with my uncle. My younger brother was adopted out when he was a baby.
10. I lived with my father briefly, until my mother took me away to live in Christchurch.
11. Mum and I moved to Christchurch with her boyfriend. I would have been five years old at the time.
12. I remember starting school in Christchurch. I often went to school without lunches.
13. In Christchurch, Mum would have a lot of parties and random people would come over to our house. We would be at the parties with whoever she picked up at the pub.
14. I remember one night my mother had gone out and left me at home alone. We lived on a busy main road, GRO-C in Christchurch. I was outside by myself in the dark sitting on the kerb of the footpath. I must have fallen asleep waiting for Mum. Our neighbour who lived in the front house took me inside her house and fed me. The next morning Mum came back. A few days later, I was removed from Mum by social welfare and taken into care. I was six years old at the time.

My first foster home – the GRO-B₁ whanau

15. I did not understand what was happening to me when I was taken into care. I did not know where I was going, or for how long.

16. I was first placed with the GRO-B-1 whanau in Linwood, and I was with them for three years. The GRO-B-1 had three older children.
17. My social worker's name was Peter Nicolls. When he dropped me off to the GRO-B-1 house, he told me I had a week to decide if I wanted to live there. He said to me that if I did not like living there, I could go back to live with my mother. I remembered asking if I could go to my mother and his response was, "no, you can wait until next week." Well, next week never came. I did not see Mum for a long time, and I started to feel like no one cared about me and that my mother had forgotten about me. I wondered why I was living with people that I did not know.
18. I remember one of the daughters of the GRO-B-1 whanau saying to me that I was never going back to live with my mother. When I heard her say this to me, I felt scared and confused.
19. My memories of the GRO-B-1 are hard for me because this is where I remember learning about the feeling of fear. It was not long before the abuse started, and then it became frequent. I would get hidings for trivial things that they thought I had done. When I was there, I was made to feel like a slave and a punching bag. I learnt that if I tried to stick up for myself, I would get a hiding and a slap around the mouth from the parents. There were also occasions where I would be hit by the foster parents when I had done nothing and there was no reason.
20. For example, I recall one time I was abused I call this the "the book incident." We were sitting at the table eating breakfast, and I was reading a book. I started to read the book aloud to the foster parents. I kept getting one word wrong. It was the word 'basket', but I kept saying bucket. I was told to put my hand on the table. I was scared and nervous, so I kept repeating the wrong word. My foster father became angry and frustrated with me and kept hitting my hand with a knife. He hit my hand with the knife a couple of times until there was a cut in my skin and my hand started to bleed.

21. I would be blamed for anything that went wrong. If one of the other kids in the house accused me of upsetting them, the parents would give me a hiding.
22. The abuse also felt like emotional abuse to me. One day, one of the daughters told me she was my real sister and that she had been put into the home before my arrival. This made me feel happy because I thought I had a real sister. However, I realised later that she was lying. She and the other kids would say positive things to me, then turn around and say nasty things, and they would constantly put me down. The impact of their mental abuse made me withdraw and become reclusive. I felt unsafe and learnt not to trust them.
23. During my time with the GRO-B-1 I enjoyed going to school because I did not have to be at home. At school I was a different kid. I was more outgoing, loud, and boisterous because I was not allowed to be at home. However, I started to bully the other kids at school, and I think this is because I was bullied at home.
24. Even at school I carried fear because my foster parents would frequently threaten me and say things to me like: "you wait until you get home from school." I used to wonder what I had done. I felt fear when I knew it was time to go home after school.
25. I was also afraid that someone at school would discover that I was being abused. I learnt to tell lies to cover up the bruises. To protect myself, I would pretend everything was fine at the foster home. I knew if the truth came out, I would receive another hiding.
26. I remember receiving a hiding from the foster father and he hit me so hard it left a bruise on my leg. It was so painful. The next day at school we had swimming, and my school friends noticed my bruises and asked me what happened. I was afraid to tell them the truth, so I made up a lie. I covered up the abuse and said I fell off a fence at home. This is where I learnt to lie.

27. My social worker, Peter Nicolls would show up after things would have happened and it seemed that on the days he did come, it happened to be a good day and so I would carry on playing. By this time, I had learnt to cover up the lies. The lack of care that social welfare showed me made me realise I could not trust anyone from social welfare.
28. I do not know why the [GRO-B-1] wanted to foster kids. They showed me no love or kindness. I did not feel any joy or happiness with the [GRO-B-1]. I felt like no one was there for me and I learnt to be a loner. I feel like I lost my childhood. I learnt to grow up fast and became reclusive to protect myself.
29. When I was with the [GRO-B-1] whanau my mother went to jail for five years because she was an accomplice to or was there when someone had been murdered. Before she went into jail, Mum would pick me up and I would spend the weekends with her. I told her I did not want to go back to the [GRO-B-1] whanau, but the police would return me.
30. I only recall seeing my social worker Peter Nicholls four or five times. He would pick me up from school and take me to see my Mum in prison.
31. My mother was released from jail when I was 12 years old.

Second foster family – the [GRO-B-2]

32. I was ten years old when I was removed by social welfare from the [GRO-B-1] house and placed with the [GRO-B-2] family in Aranui.
33. The [GRO-B-2] had three of their own children. The foster father was Māori, and the foster mother was Pākehā.
34. Social welfare did not tell me why I was moved from the [GRO-B-1] home. I was just told I was going to live with the [GRO-B-2]. I had no choice or say whether I left or not. I remember thinking maybe they [GRO-B-1] had just had enough of me.

35. The few positive memories of living with the [GRO-B-2] was when I was able to attend Christian camp. I also stayed with the [GRO-B-2] extended family, and they made me feel welcome (unlike the [GRO-B-2]
36. However, the [GRO-B-2] home was worse than the [GRO-B-1] home.
37. When I arrived at the [GRO-B-2] home, I was still feeling fearful because of my experience with the [GRO-B-1] whanau, and I was quiet and withdrawn. I had only been there for a short time before the parents and children started physically and mentally abusing me.
38. I recall having to tie up one of the kid's shoelaces and he kicked me in the teeth. It was very painful.
39. On another occasion, I recall one night talking to one of the kids in bed and the foster father was angry. He slapped me hard across my face only because I was talking in bed. Being a young kid, you are going to chat. He was a big man, and I was a little kid, so it felt daunting. The next day, I went to school with a black eye and the other kids at school asked me what happened. I replied, "oh I was just playing and so-and- so hit me in the eye." I was constantly lying to cover up the bruises I received at home.
40. The foster father would hit me, and the foster mother would yell at me. Another incident I recall is the foster father threatening me with a shovel. He was trying to get me to own up to something I did not do. I also recall being hit with a jug cord.
41. I was treated differently from the other kids. I do not recall the foster father hitting his own kids. It was just me receiving the hidings. I was treated like the odd one out and constantly reminded I was a foster kid. They did not treat their own kids in this way.
42. I felt like the housemaid cleaning up after everyone. One of my jobs that they made me do was to fetch the coal in winter. I was a small child and heaving coal was heavy.

43. I remember another time the foster parents blamed me for something that I did not do, and they kept me in a room for two days and withheld food as a form of punishment until I said sorry for what I had done. I would go to the toilet because that was the only time I was allowed out and have a drink of water just to have something in my stomach. Finally, I gave in and said that I had done what they accused me of. I was starving and wanted to play with the other kids.
44. I did not receive any love or compassion during my time with the GRO-B-2 I do not remember ever being cuddled. They never encouraged me to do anything. I was just their punching bag and slave. The abuse felt constant, and I felt like I was picked on all the time by them. Looking back, I could not believe the GRO-B-2 could treat kids like that.
45. The impact of their abuse made me feel worthless and insecure. The foster homes I was placed with made me feel like they only wanted me around because of the money they received from social welfare.
46. I remember the day when I decided that I had had enough of their mental abuse. We were outside in a sleepout eating our dinner, and there was a dartboard. The three children told me to stand near the dartboard and started using my feet as a dartboard. One of the darts stabbed me in my foot. They all freaked out and I started crying as I watched them run out of the room. I was yelling at them saying I hated them and that I did not want to be there anymore.
47. I stayed in the sleepout and thought "fuck, I am going to get a hiding, I better just sit here for a bit", then I walked back to the house and foster father told me to sit at the table. I told them I did not want to be there and that I could not take it anymore. Not long after that incident, I was moved by social welfare to another foster home.

Third foster home

48. I was 12 when I was placed by social welfare into my third foster home. My third foster mother's name was GRO-B-3. I lived in this home until I was 17 years old. I ended up calling GRO-B-3 'Mum' because I trusted her so much.
49. I was happy living with GRO-B-3 and she wanted to adopt me. It felt like the first family I had ever had.
50. My foster father was a sergeant in the army. We moved around when they separated, and it was a bit unsettling. I felt like a gypsy. There were two older foster kids living there as well and my relationships with them were good.
51. It was a much better experience living with GRO-B-3. I learnt about love, and she taught me how to look after myself. Even though I had shut down because of my previous experiences, I learnt to be open, to share, and finally to trust someone. GRO-B-3 also taught me to find my voice again; the voice I had when I was a child back when I lived with my mother.

Separating from the state

52. I was 16 years old when I separated from the state. I did not like the way the state was treating me even in my late teens.
53. One day I said to GRO-B-3 "I am sick of being treated like I am a book, a book that can be picked up and dropped whenever and wherever they like."
54. GRO-B-3 supported and encouraged me to break away from the state. She came with me to my interview, where I told the case manager that I did not like how I had been treated by social welfare and I asked to separate from the state. I did not want to be under their control. I was also scared they would remove me from GRO-B-3 house; I wanted to stay there.

55. Once they discharged me there was no support from the state. I stayed with GRO-B₃ for another year.
56. I left the system, but I still held feelings of mistrust for the system into my adult life.

Life after state care

57. When I was 18, I moved in with my mother, and not long after that I met my husband Richard.
58. With my husband I felt like I knew what love was and I had found someone who loved me. My husband had three children, who I connected with straight away. Our first son was born a year later, followed by our three younger children. We had six children altogether.
59. Richard helped me heal and I became stronger. He also helped me build a stronger relationship with my mother.
60. Richard and I were together for twelve years, until he got sick and passed from diabetes. I was 30 years old when he died, and I felt alone, like I had no one again. I realised it was just me and my kids and I needed to keep going.
61. Losing Richard triggered my past and I started to drink and do some dumb stuff. My grief for him really brought back the pain of my childhood. I can see now I was still hurt from my past, and it kept coming back to hit me in the face again.
62. I experienced a lot of grief and there were some dark moments. There were times when I would think I wanted to end things, I thought my kids would be fine.
63. Five years ago, my youngest daughter was born. She is like a gift. As a mother I felt like I needed to keep my children safe. I raised them to have a voice. I can see in my daughter the same outspoken attitude that was in me before I went into state care,

and it was all ripped away from me. Before I had to start locking myself up and being careful of what I would say and do.

How being in state care has impacted my life

64. I grew up a lost soul.
65. One of the worst effects of being in state care has been the loss of my identity, loss of my whanau, and loss of my whakapapa.
66. As I mentioned, my siblings were all placed in Rotorua with extended whanau. I was in Christchurch with Mum and placed with strangers.
67. I barely saw my siblings while I was a ward of the state, and after some time I could not remember their faces. I remember seeing them perhaps once or twice.
68. I remember visiting my sister once at her foster home, where I read a letter she wrote to my mother about how she did not really want to meet me. My sister resented me because she thought that Mum and I were living together in Christchurch, and she was jealous. She did not realise that I was in foster care while I was there. I also had feelings towards them too because they grew up around whanau and I didn't get that. When you are young, and people don't explain what is happening you are trying to figure out your world. Now we have had a chance to talk and we get on really well.
69. I met my brother around the same time. They brought him in for the day and then he left. When I met him, I could see how similar we were.
70. My siblings also suffered while being in state care. My brothers, who lived with my uncle, were associated with gangs, and eventually ended up going to jail.
71. Due to our separation from each other, our whanau relationships as adults have been fractured.

72. The effect of having no connection with my siblings made me feel alone. Growing up feeling like I had no one was very hard.
73. I wonder why social welfare did not ask my whanau if they wanted to take me into care, someone would have wanted me. My mum's brother told me he came to Christchurch to look for me, but Social Welfare could not find me.
74. There was no work by social welfare to retain my whakapapa or my cultural identity. I wanted to learn about my cultural identity, but I did not know where to go to.
75. When I reconnected with Mum, I learnt about Māoridom. I have been trying to heal and reconnect with my whakapapa and I want to learn more about who I am.
76. I practice wairua mirimiri in my community. I can empathise with people who are hurting because of my own experience, and I can feel their mamae, so I use mirimiri to help with healing.
77. In my healing, I have learnt to love myself probably more than ever before in all my life. I had to let the pain go.

Recommendations for change

78. The state needs to carry out proper checks and screen the foster families where our kids go.
79. Case managers need to build relationships with the children in care, so they have someone to talk to if something is going on in their placements. There needs to be regular check ins with the kids making sure they are safe in the home.
80. Social workers need to be consulting with the child and explaining why they need to move to another placement and seeking their views and inputs.
81. There needs to be training and proper support for case managers and caregivers.

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