

Witness Name: GRO-A Ms AJ

Statement No.: WITN0704001

Exhibits: [WITN0704002] - [WITN0704024]

Dated: 22.08.2021 2021

ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

WITNESS STATEMENT OF GRO-A Ms AJ
IN RESPECT OF THE MĀORI INVESTIGATION

I, GRO-A Ms AJ state: -

INTRODUCTION

1. My full name is GRO-A Ms AJ My name means GRO-A Ms AJ I was born on GRO-C 1994 in Ōtāhuhu.

2. My parents' names are GRO-B and GRO-B I grew up with my parents and several siblings including GRO-A Ms AK GRO-A Ms AH GRO-A Ms AG GRO-A Mr AI and GRO-B-1 I am the second youngest out of the group. I also have two much younger half-brothers.

3. My family is Māori on both sides and, as far as I know, both sides affiliate with Tainui iwi. Due to my parents' own disconnection with the culture, and due to my time in care, I know very little about my whakapapa, who my hapū is, or where my marae is. This is something that I struggle with. I am Māori, but I do not feel connected to my Māori identity.
4. I do not remember my grandparents very well, as two of them died before I had a chance to connect with them. I know when I was living with GRO-B-4 who I refer to later in this statement, I went to see GRO-A Ms AK and she took me to see both my mum's mum, and my dad's dad. I don't think CYFS ever facilitated contact in the years I had been in care before that, or in the years I remained in care afterwards. I lost the opportunity to connect with my grandparents and a lot of other whānau members, or to learn from them, as I spent so many years disconnected from my wider whānau when I was in care. CYFS never arranged for us to visit any of our grandparents, the entire 12 years I was in care.
5. I know that my dad was in the care system himself as a child and has his own issues, and cultural disconnect from that experience. As a result, dad was in and out of prison a lot when we were growing up.
6. I do not remember living at home with both mum and dad. I know that there was some violence, but I was too young to experience much of the violence myself.
7. I also know that there was drug and alcohol use in our home, and that gang members were often present. We were often poor, because my parents would use their money to get their fix. As a result, we were not always fed. My records show that me and my siblings would wander around to neighbours' homes to ask for food.

First CYFS uplift from home

8. When I was about two years old, I was uplifted from home. I do not have strong memories of this uplift, because of how young I was, but from conversations with

my siblings, I know that we were all taken from home for several months in 1996 and placed in foster care. I do not have any memories of these placements, but I have heard from others that they were okay.

9. My records show that the reason for the uplift was that my mum had separated from dad and was struggling to care for all us kids. For a while Mum had all of us, but eventually GRO-A Ms AK went to live with dad, and soon after GRO-A Mr AI went to live with dad too. Me, GRO-A Ms AH, GRO-A Ms AG and GRO-B-1 stayed with mum.

10. Our records show that CYFS and the police had received notifications from mum's neighbours in January 1996 that mum was drinking and would leave us alone at home with only GRO-A Ms AH to watch us. GRO-A Ms AH was seven years old, and she was caring for us three young ones, including me, who was two years old, and GRO-B-1 who was a baby. CYFS also had reports of physical violence from mum toward GRO-A Ms AH and reports that there was regularly no food in the home, and that the food that was in the home was mouldy and had maggots in it. The neighbours also reported that us kids and mum had moved to Hamilton in the first place as mum had been trying to escape a violent relationship with dad. **[WITN0704002]**

11. The records say that CYFS visited our home, where mum denied the allegations.

12. A few weeks later, in early February 1996, our neighbours again notified CYFS that there was inadequate food in the home, and also noted that our father was back on the scene, having driven down to Hamilton the previous night with both GRO-A Mr AI and GRO-A Ms AK. The neighbours reported that during the drive, our father had rolled the car with GRO-A Mr AI and GRO-A Ms AK in it. CYFS was told that my father was pacing the street and swearing at the neighbours. **[WITN0704003]**

13. Social workers visited our home, where they spoke to mum. Mum said she and dad were getting back together, although she also stated that she was scared to go back to Pukekohe with dad. **[WITN0704004]**

14. After this meeting with mum, our social workers got apprehensive about the situation with our dad being back on the scene, and the social worker who was investigating, discussed our case with their manager and the CYFS lawyers, and decided that we should be uplifted under a s 39 place of safety warrants, because of abuse and neglect from both of our parents.
15. Four social workers and three police officers came to our house and quietly removed us one by one, while dad was sleeping inside. They told mum that she could come with us, and offered to take us all to a Women's Refuge, which mum agreed to. **[WITN0704005]**
16. Our records show that the social workers had to drive around to find GRO-A Ms
AK, and that when they found her, they had to wrestle her into the car. When we arrived at the Women's Refuge, the social workers had to wrestle GRO-A Ms
AK out of the car again. Eventually, the social workers decided that they should let GRO-A Ms
AK go because they were causing distress and they would have to use too much force to keep her there.
17. During the same drive, GRO-A Ms
AH had to be restrained by a social worker, to stop her from following GRO-A Ms
AK.
18. Our dad, on waking up to find us all gone, called the police to report us missing. He also contacted CYFS. He was angry, particularly as both GRO-A Ms
AK and GRO-A
Mr AI had been taken into care too, when they had been living with him until the night before the uplift and were not the subject of the notification that had triggered the uplift. **[WITN0704006]**
19. Two days later, on 12 February 1996, CYFS used the same place of safety warrant to remove us from mum's care at the Refuge, after the refuge workers complained that mum couldn't control us. There were also reports that mum had told dad where we were and had told him to come and pick us up. **[WITN0704007]**

20. After being removed from mum as well, CYFS broke us into pairs and placed us in various foster homes. I know that throughout this time, dad was trying desperately to get all of us back, but CYFS told him that was not an option.

Foster homes one and two

21. I was initially placed in a home with my sister GRO-A Ms
AG but within a few days CYFS changed my placement so that I was with my baby sister GRO-B-1 instead. A later record stated that GRO-B-1 and I did not have contact with our other siblings for 10 weeks while we were at this home. **[WITN0704008]**

Huakina Development Trust

22. Sometime later, around May 1996, we were all placed with a Tainui service provider called the Huakina Development Trust (Huakina"). Huakina split us up so that four of us were with one caregiver in Mangere, and the other two were with a different caregiver. I don't remember being at the Trust at all.

23. In GRO-C 1996, the Family Court granted the Director-General of CYFS legal custody of all of us with a s 101 custody order. **[WITN0704009]**

24. My records show that during this time, CYFS was trying to find a whānau placement for us. Initially dad told CYFS and his whānau that if he couldn't have us with him, he didn't want us placed with whānau. However he soon changed his mind, and our records show that CYFS looked at placing us with various aunts and uncles. **[WITN0704010]**

25. This didn't happen for me, because in September 1996, a meeting was held between social workers and my mum. At the meeting mum admitted to being responsible for patu to us children and that she had a lot of whakamā about this. During the meeting it was agreed that mum could have supervised custody of myself and my baby sister. **[WITN0704011]**

26. The following week my mum was moved into a Barnardos home, and me and my baby sister went back to live with her.
27. My dad was back in prison at this point.
28. A year or so later, CYFS allowed GRO-A Ms AH and GRO-A Ms AG to move back in with us and mum. At some point Barnardos kicked us out because it decided mum was behaving inappropriately and was not able to adequately control us kids. **[WITN0704012]**
29. I still do not really remember any of this, because I was only four years old at the time, although I have some memories of mum having an abusive boyfriend during this period, and of her drinking.
30. My records show that in July 1998, new reports were made to CYFS that mum was going on drinking binges and that she was leaving us four girls for multiple days with a babysitter. The babysitter was unhappy about this, and reported that we had no food, as our mum spent all her money on alcohol.
31. In August 1998, me, GRO-B-1, GRO-A Ms AH and GRO-A Ms AG were all uplifted from our mum's care and placed at a Pukekohe Family Home for one night before CYFS returned us to our mum the following day.
32. On 4 September 1998 CYFS received another notification that we had been left home alone, and decided that we were not being adequately supervised by our mum. We were yet again uplifted. During the uplift CYFS recorded that we left crying and screaming for mum. **[WITN0704013]**
33. On 9 September 1998, me, GRO-A Ms AH, GRO-A Ms AG and GRO-B-1 were taken by social workers and placed with foster parents GRO-B-2 and GRO-B-3. A few months later, GRO-A Ms AK and GRO-A Mr AI were transferred from their placement at Huakina to join us with GRO-B-2 and GRO-B-3.

34. From the time I was placed with GRO-B-2 and GRO-B-3 at four years old, I remained in State care, in various placements, until I was discharged 12 and a half years later, when I turned 17 years old.
35. In all the placements from then on, but particularly with the GRO-B-2 GRO-B-3 I felt neglected emotionally and psychologically. In none of those homes was I ever shown love, or given affection, or a cuddle when I needed it. There was no encouragement, or interest in me as a person. So little care was put into my childhood in those homes, that I never even had toys, or any stimulation. I think for me this emotional neglect was as bad as much of the physical abuse I suffered, and has had some really long-term impacts on me.

GRO-B-2 and GRO-B-3 (ages 4 to 8)

36. When we first moved in with the GRO-B-2 GRO-B-3 we lived at their town house in GRO-A where there were already heaps of people living, before the six of us arrived. Me and all my siblings were made to share one small room.
37. GRO-B-2 told CYFS sometime after we were placed there that GRO-B-3 was distant whānau to our dad. After that CYFS saw the placement as a whānau placement and looked at as being a long-term one. For myself, I do not know if we were actually whānau with the GRO-B-2 GRO-B-3 I had never met any of them before, and they definitely did not treat us like whānau.

Physical abuse

38. Our placement with the GRO-B-2 GRO-B-3 was terrible. I know my older siblings have their own, and probably worse experiences of their time there. These are mine.
39. GRO-B-2 was constantly violent, more so to my older siblings, but I still would have been hit every day during the four years I lived there. She would hit us with anything she had to hand like a brush, or the remote, or the vacuum pole. She also would grab and twist our ears.

40. I think she took it a little easier on me and my younger sister as we were only two and four years old when we got there. Despite the slightly softer hits, I still lived in constant fear of her.
41. I remember that [GRO-B-2] husband, [GRO-B-3] could also be violent. His violence was more severe, but I remember that at least toward me and my younger sister, it was only occasional, maybe twice a month. He would slap us or punch us, always to the head.
42. Some of the other memories I have of that placement include [GRO-B] [GRO-B-3] and [GRO-B-2] adult son. [GRO-B] would also make us kids line up and he would physically abuse us by booting us up the bum with his wooden leg.

Sexual abuse

43. A niece of [GRO-B-3] and [GRO-B-2] who was about 14 years old, sexually abused me. She put me on a bed and touched my genitals and asked me to touch hers and made us perform oral sex on each other. I was about 5 years old when this happened. The abuse from her has had a huge impact on me. I feel uncomfortable around women and find it hard to make female friends.
44. The [GRO-B-2] [GRO-B-3] son [GRO-B] could also be creepy, and I remember him calling me into his room and asking me inappropriate questions like "do you know what 'pussy' means?" He was about 30 years old, and I was somewhere between 4 years old to 7 years old. I remember that I knew what the word meant, but I did not want to say anything back to him, because I was scared of what might happen next.

Psychological abuse

45. [GRO-B] was weird and would psychologically abuse us. I remember him teasing my brother [GRO-A] [Mr AI] and forcing us to play the 'knife game' where he would make us stab the gaps between our fingers with a knife very quickly.

46. I remember another of the GRO-B-2
GRO-B-3 sons, GRO-B tormenting GRO-A
Mr Al by making him do press-ups while we ate dinner, and late into the night.
47. Another disturbing memory I have of that time is of male relatives of GRO-B-3 sitting around drinking. One man we called uncle, made me get in the car and drive him down the road because he was too drunk to drive himself. I was maybe 5 or 6 years old and terrified. He changed the gears while he made me use the pedals and steer.

Emotional abuse

48. GRO-B-2 would not allow us to speak about our family or ask questions about our parents. Despite my records saying that GRO-B-2 encouraged our dad to visit, I remember her not allowing us to see him when he would turn up for access. I remember her threatening me, saying "don't you go outside and meet him". He would sit outside calling for us while we were inside pretending not to hear him.
49. On the occasions that we were allowed to see him, GRO-B-2 would sit us down beforehand and threaten us with hidings if we complained about our treatment there.
50. She also gave us the same threats of hidings before visits from social workers.
51. GRO-B-2 seemed to like messing with our minds. She would make promises to take me and my siblings on outings for things like McDonalds. I remember that I would always believe her and would get excited and go and sit in the car waiting to leave. More than once I fell asleep in the car waiting. We would never actually go.

Forced labour

52. One of the worst parts about the placement was the ongoing forced labour we were made to do. My siblings and I were made to work all day and night on the

GRO-B-2
GRO-B-3 property and in their home. Eventually, some of my older siblings were removed from school by the GRO-B-2
GRO-B-3 so that they could spend even more time working.

53. Often, we would get woken up at 3.00am to begin chores. I was too young to really help out, but GRO-B-2 would make me get up with my older siblings anyway and watch them as they worked. They would work all morning until school. I joined in once I was old enough to help. We would also work after school, and during weekends.
54. It felt like we were their slaves.
55. As I grew older, I remember us all spending entire days out in the field cutting out thistles. We worked out in the hot sun, and they did not give us any food or water. We were not allowed to come in for lunch, and they would not come out and check on us during the day.
56. We were always tired from working.
57. CYFS records from after we were uplifted from the GRO-B-2
GRO-B-3 note that one of the reasons for the uplift, were allegations about the amount of work we were expected to do on the farm. **[WITN0704014]**

Neglect

58. One of my other strong memories of this home, is of neglect. I do not think they really fed us properly. It was definitely not a priority to ensure that we ate. I remember having to sit at the table and eat mouldy sandwiches for dinner. I had to eat it all and show them that it was all gone.
59. Often there was not enough food at all, and we usually did not have food for school lunch.

Schooling

60. The only good thing I remember is that in the first few years of the placement I was sent to Kōhanga Reo and I loved it. I was quickly able to understand te reo and I think my time at Kōhanga was my favourite experience while being in care.
61. After some time, we moved from the [GRO-B-2
GRO-B-3] townhouse to their farmhouse, and it was too far away to continue Kōhanga. I had to start back at a Pākehā school, and I quickly forgot all the reo I had learned.
62. [GRO-B-3] and [GRO-B-2] spoke a little Māori, but not really around the home, only when we went to their marae for tangi.

Records of my time with the [GRO-B-2 GRO-B-3]

63. My records contain references to how overcrowded it was at the home, with [GRO-B-2] telling CYFS shortly after we had arrived that we had all developed school sores from the conditions. [GRO-B-2] also told CYFS that there was no privacy and no adequate space to do school homework and the confined space meant we children were fighting each other. [GRO-B-2] requested that CYFS fund a bigger home, or fund extensions to their existing home, threatening to terminate the placement as an alternative. **[WITN0704015]**
64. I remember strongly feeling like that [GRO-B-3] and [GRO-B-2] only had us because they could get money for us. They never treated us like family.
65. It is sad looking in my records and seeing that [GRO-B-2] told CYFS we were 'income' to her. **[WITN0704016]**
66. It is clear from the records that [GRO-B-2] was aware that CYFS would struggle to place 6 siblings together, should the placement break down, and used that knowledge as leverage against CYFS to get extra funding, loans, and money for renovations.

67. On 18 September 2000, our Lawyer for Child, Grant Litchfield noted that there had been concerns raised that [GRO-B-2] was hitting us. In response, our social worker said CYFS would prefer to “work with” [GRO-B-2] than organise a new placement for us. [WITN0704017]
68. In June 2001 [GRO-B-2] readily admitted to CYFS that she physically abused us, telling CYFS she “gives the children a good whack” stating “it is necessary to growl them, whack them, boot them, shove them”. The social workers recorded that [GRO-B-2] saw nothing wrong with this. [GRO-B-2] then advised CYFS that we were all doing well in her care, and that she was considering having us long-term and adopting us. During the same discussion [GRO-B-2] requested that the Department pay for their reroofing, as it was leaking into our room. [WITN0704018]
69. Despite [GRO-B-2] comments, CYFS left us living with her.
70. In October 2001 CYFS visited our school, where teaching staff stated that we were continuing to be physically abused at the [GRO-B-2
GRO-B-3]. The teacher told CYFS that we had no faith or trust in anyone, and that this was directly related to CYFS' lack of response to [GRO-B-2] admissions of assaulting us. The teacher informed CYFS that after the social workers had left in June, [GRO-B-2] had told us kids that she told the social workers she hit us, and that she was going to carry on hitting us.
71. CYFS again spoke with [GRO-B-2] who told CYFS that sometimes she would kick and hit us, and that she would yell at us. She said she whacked us with a stick, but that she did not give us hidings. She also said that we all had our chores to do. She told CYFS again that we had sores because of the way we lived. [GRO-B-2] again asked CYFS for a loan and financial assistance to start renovations and informed CYFS that she and [GRO-B-3] were saving the Department a lot of money.

72. Following [GRO-B-2] second admission of abuse, CYFS decided to uplift all six of us. [WITN0704019] It took CYFS approximately three weeks to find a placement for all of us. Throughout those weeks, we remained living with [GRO-B-2] and [GRO-B-3]
73. The uplift occurred on 2 November 2001. Social workers came and grabbed us from school, and we were not even allowed back into the [GRO-B-2] [GRO-B-3] house to get our clothes. We left with just what we had on that day for school. My records state that several of us were crying during the uplift, and defending [GRO-B-2] physical abuse of us.
74. The social workers took us and placed with a woman called [GRO-B-4]
- [GRO-B-4]
75. Initially, all six of us were placed together at [GRO-B-4] home. Within a week, [GRO-A Ms AK] and [GRO-A Ms AH] ran away and went to live with dad. I think that less than a year after that, [GRO-A Mr AI] left and was placed somewhere else. [GRO-A Ms AG] was fostered out the following year. Only me and [GRO-B-1] remained there.
76. At the time, I did not understand why all my siblings were leaving. I felt hurt and abandoned.
77. I think me and [GRO-B-1] lived with [GRO-B-4] for about 5 years. Most of those years, it was just the two of us and [GRO-B-4] It became very lonely for me there.
78. During this placement I started spending holidays with mum again. I loved being able to spend time with her, although I remember she was still drinking. Our records show that me and [GRO-B-1] regularly asked our social workers to be allowed to go back and live with mum.
79. Mum had had our younger half-brothers by that time and had been allowed by CYFS to keep them. I am not sure why we weren't allowed to return to live with her too.

80. At some stage after we had been living there a while and had been seeing mum regularly with the help of CYFS workers transporting us to mums, the court granted GRO-B-4 additional guardianship orders of us. Our social worker told mum that she had to arrange her own contact with us now, directly through our caregiver GRO-B-4
81. When mum asked the social worker how she was supposed to get up to Auckland to see us, without a car, the social worker simply told her she "could call us, or cheaper still, write to us". No real care was shown throughout the years by CYFS to make sure we maintained contact with either of our parent. [WITN0704020]
82. I remember feeling that GRO-B-4 only offered us food and shelter. To me, it did not feel like there was any love or affection from her. She never showed interest in our school or social life, and she never came to meetings, or sports games.
83. She seemed uninterested in us, and I remember that when we annoyed her, she would refuse to speak to us for several days, and pointedly ignore us.
84. She never got up to make us breakfast or make sure we had lunches for school. We would have to raid what was in the cupboard, and often, me and GRO-B-1 ended up stealing other kids' food at school.
85. I do not think she was just in it for the money, but I think she just had a cold personality.
86. On some occasions she hit us, although this was not nearly as bad as out at the GRO-B-2 GRO-B-3
87. Similar to my experience at the GRO-B-2 GRO-B-3 the best bit of my placement with GRO-B-4 was when I was at school. I know I was doing well academically and had won awards for music. I wanted to pursue music and was very dedicated to my education.
88. Despite the placement being mostly okay, I missed my siblings so much. I knew that GRO-A Mr Al and GRO-A Ms AG were at Kokiri together. Eventually, me and GRO-B-1 told

CYFS about being hit by [GRO-B-4] just so that we would be moved to live with them. Despite our disclosures, and [GRO-B-4] own disclosure a few weeks later to CYFS that she need assistance with no hitting strategies for managing us, we stayed with [GRO-B-4] [WITN0704021]

89. Six months later, in June 2006, [GRO-B-4] admitted to CYFS that she had punched [GRO-B-1] in the head the previous year. [WITN0704022] CYFS decided that no further action was required. In a CYFS record from this time, it was noted that me and [GRO-B-1] agreed to stay with [GRO-B-4] as long as CYFS arranged for us to have regular contact with our brother and sisters.
90. By August 2006, me and [GRO-B-1] were again asking our social workers if we could move out of [GRO-B-4]

Kokiri

91. On 31 August 2006 me and [GRO-B-1] were transferred to Kokiri to be with our siblings.
92. Kokiri was much worse than staying with [GRO-B-4]
93. It was run by a woman named [GRO-B] and her family members. [GRO-B] and her staff were very controlling of us, particularly around small issues like what we wore. It was frustrating because [GRO-B] had her own children and grandchildren onsite, and those kids were treated so much better by her and the staff, and were allowed to dress and do as they pleased.
94. There were about 20 CYFS kids there. We all slept together in the loft: boys on one side, girls on the other. There was no privacy.
95. When I first arrived, I was going to school onsite which was taught in te reo Māori. I hadn't had any te reo since Kohanga and struggled a bit. I might have been okay at learning in te reo if I had had a bit of time to learn, but shortly after I started, [GRO-B] found out that I was seeing a boy at the school, and I was made to

drop out as a result. This was extremely hard on me as I really liked school and had previously done well academically. I had ambitions and a plan of how I was going to achieve them, and school was my way of getting there. Kokiri stripped all of that from me when it stopped me from going to school, and stopped me continuing my music for the next two years.

96. My records from the time show that within three months of arriving at Kokiri, **GRO-B-1** and I were asking our social worker for further tuition to meet our talents that were not being met at Kokiri. **[WITN0704023]**
97. By 30 November 2006, four months after I started my placement at Kokiri, my social worker recorded that I was not happy in my current placement, and I wanted to change my name, and identity. I was threatening to run away. It was noted that I was not attending school, and my social worker was not sure why. It was also noted that in my previous placement I had been very good at singing, and had won several prizes for this, however at Kokiri I was unable to have an opportunity to continue this, despite being across the road from the music centre, as I needed 24 hours' supervision, and Kokiri did not have sufficient staff. **[WITN0704024]**
98. Again, in February 2007, and May 2007, my social workers recorded in my notes that I needed stimulation of my musical talent.
99. It is strange how controlling the staff were of us. At the time, I was 12 or 13 years old and perfectly capable of walking across the road for music lessons. I was also not under any sort of youth justice orders that might have justified 24-hour supervision. The staff treated us like we had done something wrong to be there, when it was actually just another group home and we were in need of care and protection, not discipline.
100. Another example of the extreme control they had on us, and their weird rules was that while I was there, I was supposed to be going to counselling. CYFS later recorded that I had been unable to attend the counselling sessions, because I was not allowed off the Kokiri premises.

101. After I was removed from school, I remember that I spent most of my time sitting around chatting with the other kids. Otherwise, I would be cleaning, or gardening. I was extremely bored.
102. We were made to clean or work in the garden for about 5 hours a day on 'work programs' maintaining the property. I remember that at one point, me and the other kids were made to dig a full-sized pool for GRO-B family.
103. We were supposed to get \$10 a week pocket money when we were at Kokiri. If we did not do enough cleaning or garden work, our pocket money would be withheld.
104. We were also supposed to get grants from CYFS for clothing every 6 months. Throughout my time at Kokiri, I never once received my clothing grant. This was confirmed in my records.
105. I feel like Kokiri used us to maintain their properties. We did not receive any care or feelings of being in a family. It was like we were a little gang of free labour.
106. Another thing that made me feel the lack of care in that place was when I was not provided medical attention for serious issues. On one occasion I injured my wrist at one stage breakdancing and spoke to GRO-B and staff about it. They told me all it needed was ice. They did not take me to doctor to have it checked out, despite my complaining. A few years later, after I left care, I had an Xray on that arm and found out that I had actually broken it.
107. On other occasions, I suffered with very bad painful tooth aches which lasted several days and nights. I remember I would be unable to sleep because of the pain. I remember they gave medication for the infection, but no pain relief. When they did eventually get me to a dentist, he just pulled the teeth out.
108. Also, with all of us sleeping in such a small space, hygiene was not that good, and I became infected with boils. We did not go to the doctor to get treatment.

Instead, we were given 'Island leaves' to cover the boils with. They changed the leaves every night and I remember that it was extremely painful. I wished I could just get medical treatment. The boils did not go away for a very long time. I still have scars from them today.

109. At Kokiri they also had a system of 'loss of privileges' ("LOP"). If I was placed on LOP, it meant I would lose my pocket money. The staff would then make us come with the other kids to the shops and watch as the other kids bought and ate lollies etc with their pocket money. Another punishment when I was on LOP, was that they would take my guitar off me.
110. When we were on LOP we were also not allowed to speak to our own siblings. I was also not allowed to eat with them, or share with them any food that we had bought with our pocket money.
111. We could be on LOP for a week to two weeks.
112. A year after I arrived, in December 2007, GRO-A
Mr AI and GRO-A Ms
AG graduated from Kokiri.
113. While we were at Kokiri, my older sisters, who were out of care by this stage, tried to convince CYFS to let us come and stay with them for weekends, and eventually sought to have us come live with them. GRO-B actively tried to stop our weekend leave with our sisters and insisted that we only ever be allowed to stay with them for a day or two at a time.
114. Throughout the time that I was at Kokiri, I complained to my social worker about wanting to be in a family placement, and not a group home. I also said that I wanted to attend school.
115. In January 2008, GRO-B-1 and I went and stayed for a few days with GRO-A Ms AH and dad GRO-B-1 convinced me to sneak out with her one night, and as a result CYFS came to take us back to Kokiri. Our records show that CYFS had to threaten police intervention to get us in the car, as we did not want to go back to Kokiri.

116. In February 2008 [GRO-B-1] ran away from Kokiri, leaving me there alone. I complained to my social worker that I didn't like the attitude of staff at Kokiri and that I planned to run away too. I complained to CYFS that, despite acting responsibly and not running, still no one wanted me. I told my social worker I needed to be somewhere else where I could be back in school because I was bored.

117. A month or two before I left Kokiri, [GRO-B] approached CYFS, stating that she had found out that I was whānau, and requested to adopt me. Despite her request, CYFS honoured my request to leave.

118. I remember on the day I left, [GRO-B] made big fuss about how much she would miss me, and that it was sad that Kokiri had not had the opportunity to have a farewell celebration for me. I remember leaving thinking why hadn't this woman shown any interest or care in me the rest of the time I was there, and why was she pretending then.

119. As soon as I left Kokiri, [GRO-B] told CYFS I was not allowed to see my siblings [GRO-A Mr Al] and [GRO-B-1] who were still living there.

120. In March 2008 I was placed with [GRO-B] of [GRO-B] Trust.

[GRO-B]

121. [GRO-B] place was not a family placement like I wanted, but rather a woman who took in teenage girls, to ready them for independence. There were about 6 or 7 other girls in the home. At some point, [GRO-B-1] came and lived at the home with [GRO-B] too.

122. I shared a room with two other girls. The other girls all had issues because of their own traumas.

123. I remember finding [GRO-B] suffocating. She became extremely attached to me. She would tell me she loved me. I hated it. I hated her saying the word. I hated that this Pākehā lady who I didn't really know, would say that to me, when my own family couldn't. It felt like she was forcing it on me, and it made me feel disgusted.
124. Sometimes it felt like there was a sexual element to her affection, although it never progressed to any actual touching.
125. My records show that by I was complaining to my social worker that I felt [GRO-B] was pressuring me to call her mum and wanted to adopt me. I told the social worker that I wanted to leave and live with a family, preferably a Māori family.
126. I remember that [GRO-B] was so clingy toward me, and when I eventually moved out, she behaved like a child having a tantrum. She was yelling and screaming at me. I could not understand what was going on.
127. My records show that within a few months of the placement, my behaviour began escalating and I was absconding, truanting and self-harming.
128. I remember some of my feelings from this time. When I had arrived at [GRO-B] I was initially excited about the placement because I was allowed to go back to school. However, when I started, I immediately struggled due to having missed two years of schooling, and I was so far behind everyone else. I felt dumb, embarrassed, and incompetent. I was scared I would be shamed and laughed at. I hated those feelings, so I pretty quickly stopped going to school at all. I struggle now with that decision and am angry that more supports or a teacher aid or something wasn't offered, so that I didn't throw away that opportunity.
129. One of my strong memories of that placement was an occasion when me and [GRO-B-1] went with friends to hang in the park. We were drinking and [GRO-B] called the cops on us. A policeman came and tried to arrest my sister as she was out past her curfew. He was extremely aggressive and had [GRO-B-1] pinned on the ground. I tried to get him off her and another police officer hit me in the head with his torch, knocking me out cold.

130. No one called the ambulance to check I was okay.
131. Instead, we were taken to the police station, but no charges were laid. I think it was because the police knew they would get questioned over how a 14-year-old girl was knocked unconscious.
132. When I got back to [GRO-B] I started vomiting and showed signs of concussion. I asked her for help, but initially [GRO-B] refused to let me go to the doctors or hospital to get treatment. She just became angry at me.
133. Eventually she took me to the hospital. The whole way there she acted pissed off with me, at having to take me to hospital.
134. I remember this experience solidified my feeling that I was unimportant and that I did not matter. It also really damaged my trust in adults, as she was supposed to be looking out for me.
135. By 2010 I was attending a course, and wanting to go to Uni when I left care. I got into the Prime Minister's programme for a week in January 2011. In March 2011 my CYFS custody order was discharged.
136. Shortly after that I left [GRO-B] house and moved in with my boyfriend.

Impacts

137. The loss of education was a massive thing for me. I think I missed out on a lot of opportunities. I never actually went to Uni. I had missed too much school, and lost confidence in myself.
138. I think the main lesson care taught me was that I was unimportant. I still struggle with feelings of this today.

139. I have struggled with anxiety and my mental health since leaving care. I am currently accessing counselling for this. At 21 I was diagnosed with schizophrenia. My counsellor believes that my childhood trauma may have been a contributing factor to the development of my schizophrenia.
140. Because of my mental health, I have struggled to maintain a job.
141. Since the concussion from the police, I have had ongoing migraines and headaches since and have a sensitivity to light. It feels like my thought processes slowed afterwards.
142. I have never really cried about what happened to my childhood, but there is an anger about the way I was treated that has stayed with me.
143. I feel very disconnected from my culture. Because of my time in care, lots of my connections with my wider whānau were broken, leaving me with very few people that I can ask about it.
144. I feel there is a missing piece in regard to my culture. I want to know about my whakapapa, my marae, my culture, and my language.
145. I want to be reconnected. My culture is a part of me.
146. I think after leaving care I have felt lost in the world, with nowhere to belong. I received no support from CYFS once I was discharged, and I struggled out in the world. I had never had the stability or the care of parents who might have taught me how to be independent and to look after myself.
147. As an adult, I am still trying to learn how to stand up for myself. I don't really trust anyone. Sometimes I struggle to even trust my own sisters.
148. Me and my siblings were not very close after leaving care, but now we are working on it and are a lot closer.
149. We see a bit more of our parents these days, particularly since mum has moved closer.

Recommendations

150. From my experience, there were often extremely long periods between being visited by a social worker. Some placements I don't remember being visited at all. There needs to be more regular checking in on the kids who are in care.
151. In addition to the lack of visits, even when the social workers did come, I was just about never spoken to on my own by a social worker. I was robbed of the opportunity to tell someone what was going on, without my caregivers being around. I think it is important that all children in care get the opportunity to speak with a social worker they trust, on their own, regularly.
152. Kids should also be asked the right questions to help them talk about what is going on the homes. Social worker should be better trained in how to talk with kids, and how to spot body language that a child is hiding something, or is scared. Often kids can't just come out and say what is wrong. They need some help and good questioning.
153. Every kid in care should have to regularly see a psychiatrist or a counsellor so they have safe spaces to disclose and process what's going on for them.
154. I think consistency of schooling is important. Kids should be able to stay at one school, not constantly changing with each home, and continue with their schooling. Kids in care already come out of the system with less opportunities, education should not be another lost opportunity.
155. With being removed and all the changes in placement, no one ever bothered to teach us about our culture, or our iwi, or anything that could have helped us stay connected. We also were never given the opportunity to connect with our grandparents and aunts and uncles, who might have been able to share some of that with us. It is important to encourage those connections.
156. I think there should be better background checks on caregivers, although I know that it is hard to know who someone is, behind closed doors. I also think everyone who will be in that kid's life at the placement should be checked, including the

friends of the caregivers, and the caregivers' kids. There are so many random adults who have access to kids in care, who don't seem to be checked.

157. I think there should be better ongoing supports for children as they age out of care, as many of those children will have less supports in place, than children who were not in the foster system.
158. I think for those children like us who experienced abuse in care, and who are making claims against the State, there should be more supportive services, in addition to any monetary compensation, as many of us have long-term impacts, which have resulted in us struggling with employment or other social issues.
159. I think the compensation that is offered by the State is far too low to make up for what was done to us. We have a lifetime of struggle because of what happened, and a few thousand dollars does not really make up for that.
160. I think if we had been receiving support and help over the years since we had left care, to help us deal with the abuse, and our subsequent mental health issues, I think I wouldn't care so much about the quantum of compensation, as I might have been able to have already worked through more of the damage and be in a better place now.

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.

GRO-C

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