

**Witness Name:** Waiana Suzanne Kotara

**Statement No:** WITN0606001

**Dated:** 17 February 2022

**ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE**

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**WITNESS STATEMENT OF WAIANA SUZANNE KOTARA**

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I, Waiana Suzanne Kotara, will say as follows:

### **Ko Wai Au?**

*“What the world did to me was cruel. What I did to myself was crueller still.”*

*Mark Twain*

*“Matariki marks the turning year along with Puanga indicating that there is more than one marker of time.”*

*Dr Rangi Matamua*

1. Ka mihi ki a koutou. My name is Waiana Suzanne Kotara, and this is my story... my marker ... in my own words.
2. It is important for me to tell this story in my own words because much of my life has involved other people interpreting and telling my story through their eyes – the police, therapists, ACC workers, staff at the care facilities I was placed in. They were often wrong and almost always judgemental. Me telling you my story from my perspective is part of me holding authority over my story.
3. I was born in Christchurch on GRO-C 1966 and I am 56 years old. I am of Ngāti Hako, Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāi Tahu and Scottish descent.
4. My parents' names are Hineata Raewyn Ruru Kotara (nee McNaughton) and GRO-B My mother was born and raised in Lyttelton, Christchurch and my father was born and raised in GRO-B Hauraki. My mother passed away in 2015 and my father currently lives in GRO-B Christchurch.
5. I come from a family of eleven. My brothers and sisters are Suzanne (deceased), myself, GRO-B GRO-B GRO-B GRO-B-1 GRO-B GRO-B and GRO-B-2 I also had two whāngai siblings Dean and Shar (both deceased). We all currently live in Te Waipounamu.

6. My evidence speaks to the abuse that I suffered while I was a ward of the state.

### **Desperate to escape**

7. I want to paint a picture for you of a 12-year-old girl.
8. At 12 years old, I was desperate to escape the attempted assaults from an older neighbour, conflicted about the route I took to school bypassing a gang house, often being in trouble for late attendance to school as a result and avoiding close friends because of a previous sexual assault by a friend's uncle. Scared of unwanted attention, I wanted to get away from prying eyes, hurtful taunts, the burden of my friend's guilt, the relentless attacks of a neighbouring boy and the sinking feeling that I had no control over what others would do to me. In my desperation I did the only thing I could. I ran away.
9. My only thought was the need for space, to figure out the conflict in my head. To cry unobstructed by prying eyes.

### **Strathmore Girls' Home**

10. My parents reported me as missing, however law enforcement identified me as a runaway. At 12 years old I was arrested and taken to Strathmore Girls' Home. I was put into a shocking bright pink concreted cell and told "it has a calming effect", and the door was locked behind me. There was nothing calming about being locked up like that. I am unsure how long I was kept in there because it felt like forever. I know it was at least 24 hours.
11. Eventually I was taken upstairs to the dormitory with the other girls. The layout of the room had two rows of beds stretched against the wall either side of the doorway, and I remember standing at the doorway and looking at the window directly ahead of me thinking 'freedom' was on the other side. The staff told me that the windows and the doors were secure, so

that we were 'safe'. If this was Strathmore trying to 'care for me' then I did not feel cared for. I did not feel safe.

12. I do not remember receiving any education or schooling while in Strathmore. I have no recollection of the number of girls there or of the number of staff. The only solid memories I have of my time in Strathmore were the cell/solitary confinement and the dormitory. My strongest memories of Strathmore are centred on the desperate need to escape and the frequent attempts I made to escape to make my way back home to my mum.
13. I didn't understand why I couldn't go home and was never told why either. By this stage I assume they had their own files on me and am guessing they kept me at Strathmore because of my 'home environment'. But it wasn't my home environment that caused me to run away.
14. I also have a vivid memory of the Ferry Road (old Strathmore Girls' Home) fires that took the lives of seven street kids. The two girls were both my nieces - Jenaya Kotara and Patricia Albert. It wasn't a home anymore, just a derelict house. The doors were bolted from the outside. For them, there was no escape.

## **My life before Strathmore Girls' Home**

### Whānau Life

15. My parents moved down to Christchurch during the period of urban migration for employment. My father worked in construction and my mother was a cleaner for the courts and the police station – a position of trust. My mother also was a carer of other children with mātua whāngai and was a support person on a voluntary basis with Women's Refuge under the guidance of Aunty GRO-B providing comfort and solace to women suffering from domestic violence. She was passionate about bridging the gap between young women in prison and society, supporting and providing homestays. She provided a bridge between two worlds of

indifference and made visits with her church group on a monthly rotation to Christchurch Women's Prison. This eventually led to working with P.A.R.S (prisoners aid) where she was able to provide a wide range of support and networking across the board.

16. Our mother also used to do a lot of things with us. She would take us strawberry and raspberry picking. She taught us how to earn our money and how to be self-sufficient. She was very inventive in how she raised us. She also took us to Sunday School – that was instilled in us. I loved Sunday School as a child because of the social aspect and the sense of whānau that church provided for me.
17. I have always been connected to my culture ā-wairua. I am much like my father in that sense, but my mother was the driving force for my siblings and I to learn about our culture. Outside of my whānau, our exposure to Te Reo and our culture primarily came from kapa haka at school, and this was in an urban setting. We are the products of Te Kotahitanga, a Christchurch-based Māori culture club.
18. Both my parents come from big families, so we were always surrounded by whānau. As a child I think I always did things that I knew to be tika based on what I learned growing up around my whānau, and if I was ever wrong someone from my whānau would let me know.
19. My grandad was a farmer who often taught me practical lessons by getting me to complete tasks whenever I spent time with him. This is where my love for the whenua came from. He never explained why I had to do things or what it was for, but there was always a lesson that came from the tasks. He was a hard man, a hard worker and a man of his word, and he instilled all these values into our whānau by embodying them.
20. Weekend gatherings were frequent occurrences. I remember my whānau setting up the marquee, enjoying housie nights, preparing boil-ups for a pig on the spit. These gatherings were funded through whanau

contributions to the “house kete”. Whatever was left over was saved for the tangi and other whanau expenses.

21. My life wasn't all great. I was about 7 years old when my parents split up and it was challenging for my mother to care for us all on her own. She had a miscarriage with my sister Suzanne and my brother [GRO-B-2] is intellectually disabled.
22. My mother did not know how to best care for [GRO-B-2] and was struggling with his disability, so she reached out to her doctor to get some assistance. She received no support from the doctor other than some prescription drugs and continued to struggle to care for him. During these times, her desperation and frustration got the best of her, and she physically abused [GRO-B-2]. Once social welfare received notice that he was being physically abused, they responded by permanently removing [GRO-B-2] from our whānau.
23. The loss of my sister Suzanne, compounded with the removal of [GRO-B-2] from our whānau by the state, led to my mother suffering a mental breakdown. She was put in Sunnyside Hospital. While she was there the state continued to remove us all from her care and placed us all in different institutions.
24. I do not remember social workers or anyone else explaining to us what was happening or why we were being moved into these institutions. I cannot recall where my father or my wider whānau was or why we weren't placed with them while my mother was in hospital. We were only meant to be in care while my mother was hospitalised, but we were left in care long after my mother was released from hospital.
25. Looking back, I think that the system didn't see her struggle. They just saw what they wanted to see - “abuse” - and decided the only answer was to take her children. The state care system was unrelenting and unforgiving, and they used my mother's suffering against her.

Glenelg Health Camp and Cholmondeley Children's Home

26. I was placed in Glenelg Health Camp and Cholmondeley Children's Home.
27. The first place I remember was Glenelg. We were put in a car and told that we were going to a health camp for a little while, just while Mum was in hospital. So as a child, when I was placed in Glenelg I understood that my mother was not well, but I didn't understand why or what she was sick with.
28. I remember Glenelg Health Camp and Cholmondeley Children's Home both being very sterile and regimented. At Glenelg, I remember feeling scared to speak or do anything wrong and scared to speak out. At Cholmondeley we had strict instructions on how to make the bed and how to do other tasks around the dormitory. One of the punishments for misbehaviour was to line us up, have us hold our hands out, and we would be whacked with the wooden coat hanger. Both places made me feel lonely and unwanted, and I wanted to go home.
29. While at both places, I tried to run away to get back to my mother. I didn't understand why we were separated and just wanted to go home. My brother and I ran away from Glenelg. We didn't make it far before we were picked up by the staff and returned. While at Cholmondeley, I ran away on my own. I made it past Rāpaki - about a whole day's walk for a little kid - before I was picked up by the staff and taken back.
30. At Cholmondeley, I specifically recall one time sitting on the lap of a man who was dressed as Santa. He held me too close and too tightly against his groin and I remember feeling uncomfortable and scared. I didn't know it was 'abuse', I just knew that I felt uncomfortable. I tried to tell the staff at Cholmondeley about this, but they told me "you're just afraid of Father Christmas, that's so funny" and laughed it off.

### Life After Strathmore: Kingsley Girls' Home

31. I was about 12 or 13 when I was transferred from Strathmore to Kingsley Girls' Home. I was one the youngest girls there when I arrived, but by the time I left two to three years later I was one of the oldest.
32. When I arrived, I was placed in a secure unit (referred to as "in secure"). This is where I spent most of my time while I was at Kingsley because I was always getting into trouble for running away. Isolation was a norm that I became conditioned to.
33. The girls in the home had a hierarchy – you were either "in" or you were "out". I spent my time on the "out" defending myself and others from the "in" crowd. I was not bullied easily, and I had attitude. This made me a target for anyone maintaining a position of rank or for anyone trying to push their authority.
34. When I was released from my initial "secure" stay, GRO-B led the "welcoming committee", which was a group of girls who showed me what was what around Kingsley.
35. I tried to maintain a low-key position observing the surroundings familiarising myself with the landscape. Unfortunately, in the jungle tough is the language that was best understood and on many occasions there were fights. I became the violence.
36. After a few altercations with the "in" crowd I was eventually left alone. However, these incidents also earned me time in the secure unit and my endless pursuit of escape, which included from secure, earned me a reputation as a ringleader. I just wanted out. I wanted to be back home. There was no agenda, no great intention to do anything else other than to run. I never really thought about consequences, nor did I think about my actions affecting others. To run home was self-serving and in my mind, necessary.

37. Most of the girls at Kingsley were Māori but there were Pākehā and Asian girls there too. Most of the staff were Pākehā.
38. I can only remember one of the staff members being Māori. There was an undertone of racism from the staff at Kingsley. I do not think that it was intentional, but they made it clear that their ways of living were the right ways and the only ways to behave, even if this was very different to how I saw the world as a young Māori girl.
39. I remember going to Aranui High School for about 2–3 months in 3<sup>rd</sup> form, but the remainder of my schooling was done through correspondence while I was at Kingsley. It was quite difficult to focus on my schooling at Kingsley because most of the time I spent “in secure” and I was constantly on the run trying to get home.

#### Approach and Attitudes of the Staff

40. There were times that physical pressure was put on me, like being forcibly detained and manhandled. For example, they would twist our arms behind our backs, and I would be forcibly marched and dragged around a field by the scruff of my neck after I refused to do physical education. I also remember being pushed up, then down, a flight of concrete stairs by a male staff member.
41. His action today would be seen as brute force - as an extreme measure - but in all honesty I believe that most of them were good people who wanted to make a difference, using the tools and methods at hand and the scope from the system to physically enforce if necessary. I don't blame them. I blame the system that condoned their behaviour.
42. By this stage in my life my mum was gay. The staff at Kingsley did not appreciate my mum's newfound freedom and judged her according to her sexuality. I was told that my mother's lifestyle was inappropriate for young people. I was told that she was “a gang affiliate” and “a drug dealer”. My mum was branded unfit to have me and I was told that my home is unsafe,

and my return is not possible. I was told "the sooner I see the truth of my situation the sooner I would be able to go home".

43. I would be seen as rebelling if I argued and would be kept "in secure". I learnt to play the game and as soon as the opportunity arose I would escape the compound and run home again.
44. I brought the police to our home each time I ran back there. I realised the ramifications of my decision making and my desire to come home was compromising my mother and my little sister. By this stage mum had been told that, her taking me back in was considered "harbouring a runaway". Mum wanted to keep me but I was putting her in a compromised position. At the time my sister was 2-3 years old. GRO-B-1 could be taken, mum could be charged. In my teenage world I was (&\*&^6#@!). I was out of my depth. I was alone and life was that much harder to navigate. I started running to the streets rather than running home.
45. When on the streets I became a mark. I was not only raped and beaten on a regular basis by the Mongrel Mob, but also tormented.
46. The rapes were so severe I often questioned if I would make it out with my life. On one occasion after a gathering of different chapters congregated in Christchurch I was taken from outside the cathedral in the middle of the day shoved into the back of a car, held down by a steel boot, taken to Mongrel Mob headquarters and held there for three days.
47. I thought I was going to die that day. By the third day I wanted to. I believe today that a part of me did die there in that locked room. My saving grace was that one man had a conscience. He walked me over sleeping drugged up bodies lining the corridor (while they waited there turn for the third or fourth time), took off his swanndri, mumbled that we are whanaunga and to run. I froze twice down the hallway trying to get out, scared someone would stir. I froze again at the door, transfixed on a six foot fence in front of me. He said "run" again and I did.

48. I ran down Armagh Street and happened to run passed my old neighbour walking in the other direction. She grabbed me and took me to hospital. I think I was admitted under her name – I definitely did not give them mine because I didn't want to go back to Kingsley. The hospital staff asked me if I wanted to see a social worker, and when they went to get someone I snuck out of the hospital.
49. I eventually ended up back in Kingsley and remember scrubbing my body bare in the shower. I felt angry. The staff seemed to know from my behaviour – the way I would scrub myself raw and would actively avoid men in the home – that something had happened. They ran a blood test and it came back "abnormal", but I was told not to be concerned. I later found out that I had contracted Hepatitis C because of these rapes.
50. Another time when I was 13 and on the run from Kingsley and on the streets, I was given a plane ticket to Wellington by someone I had known in my childhood. Wellington was as far away as I could imagine. I was safe, or so I thought.
51. My "rescuer", who was about 27, saw that I was damaged and vulnerable so took advantage of me. I didn't have a good gauge of who to trust at that point.
52. After being there a couple of weeks, he gave me a hiding and after that he kept me under lock and key, guarded by his two sisters who were too scared to disobey his demands. It would be two months before I made brief contact with my mum, enough time to give her my bank account details so she could give me money for a plane ticket, and to tell her I would be home soon.
53. When I managed to escape back to Christchurch, I stayed at home long enough to recuperate before I would have to leave again for fear the police would find me there and it would make trouble for my mum. So mum never had the time to mother me, to protect me, because I had to leave.

**Kicked out of Kingsley**

54. I got picked up by the police and returned to Kingsley.
55. Four to five weeks before my 16th birthday I was cut loose from state care – “thrown to the dogs” in my opinion.
56. Before then, I made an appointment with the matron of Kingsley, Mrs Judge, and told her that I was fearful something bad was going to happen to me. I told her that I was scared and asked her for help to go into the White House, a transitional house at Kingsley for young girls who had been in care. I knew that it was a house that made a difference in the lives of those who went through it, and I wanted the chance to have something better for myself.
57. My request was declined though as “unfortunately” she said I was “a recidivist runner, a ring leader and a trouble maker”. No one asked me why I was running away. I held back the tears and walked away feeling let down and frightened.
58. There was no place for me, and this was one of the first times where I really felt “black”. As a girl I felt like I was released to the wolves and made to fend for myself by an organisation and system that had removed me from my whānau for “care and protection”.
59. I knew it was a defining moment for me. I knew the Mongrel Mob were on the hunt and I knew if they saw me I was marked. I knew I could not take the trouble home. I was standing at a crossroad. I was scared and options were limited.
60. About two weeks later I made the decision to get into a stolen car, calling out to my friend to get in I told her the mob were on the hunt and we need to go ... running again.
61. We were chased down by the police and our car crossed the Waimakariri Bridge and we crashed. It was an accident. My friend Nickola Burns did

not survive the impact. The rest of us suffered severe injuries. I suffered bruising over the chest bone, a crushed pelvis and a head injury which required a craniotomy.

62. The jaws of life pulled my crushed body from the wreck. I suffered head trauma and I was in and out of consciousness for what seemed like an eternity. When I regained consciousness I did not recognise my mum and had no feeling down the right side of my body. I was told by the doctors that my injuries were psychosomatic - then why could I not walk?
63. While I was in hospital, the Mrs Judge (the matron) visited and approached my mother to apologise for turning me away from the Transitional House. I think it was only at the point that I was hurt that she recognised the inherent prejudice that she held when she turned me away.
64. The report read that I was a runaway, a ward of the state, and that there is nothing wrong with me. Three weeks later after a scan it was discovered that I had a cracked pelvis and my womb had been pierced. The report was then rectified.
65. I was provided with rehabilitation, a walker frame and a walking stick. I did water rehab for about six months. I had to use the walker for six months and the stick for another six months. I pushed hard to regain stability in my body, however I still suffer regular attacks to my nervous system today.
66. My mind took a lot longer to catch up and my memory was shot. I did not recognise my friends and I did not know my enemy. This was a terrifying timeframe for me. I often mistook a foe for a friend and the abuse I suffered at the hands of my perpetrators was relentless brutal and cruel. The injuries I had, both physical and mental, made me that much easier a target... a mark.
67. At 17 years old, a year after the initial car accident, I was charged with being a passenger in a stolen car. This time I was sent to corrective

training but not before being abused by the arresting officer who tells me "he can make it all go away". I tell him to charge me. It seems that no matter where I go someone wants to break me, but I was already broken. The distrust I had only grew.

68. When I make an attempt to have the matter investigated I am told that the evidence is lacking and it goes no further. I felt at the time that it was okay that I experienced the darker side of someone else's nature but not one person is brave enough to stand in that dark with me, reinforcing that my life does not matter.
69. At 18 years old I was charged with grievous bodily harm, which carries a sentence of five years. I hurt my friend in an altercation prior to which I had been sexually attacked by another women. The two other women involved, fuelled on a concoction of reihipnol, held me in a room and forced me to watch them. Whenever I tried to leave the room I would be beaten back to the window ledge. My attacker used an axe handle and a spanner to keep me from attempting escape. I could not believe that these women wanted to do this, wanted to harm me this way. I was beyond rational. I had passed a point of sanity and in desperation I made a final attempt to escape. As the axe handle came down across the back of my head I reached out grabbing at an object on the window sill and fought back attempting to get to the door.
70. Dr Brian Duvell described what happened to me as "forced control", "to be forced against ones will". The law calls it assault and ACC termed it "voyeurism". I was acquitted of all charges, however I fall deeper into despair and addiction. I do not own the right to my body nor do I have the right to defend it. I hit an emotional rock bottom, having fallen through the cracks of systemic abuse.
71. I began to experience "black outs", edging closer to oblivion. The black outs made me volatile. I became scared that in that state I really would act out on my fantasies of taking on the Mob and harming someone. The

sexual trauma I had experienced left my body riddled with hepatitis C, the abusers had invaded my interior and I would never be rid of them. This was a cruel reminder. I was branded a “block”, the stigma of which I still live with today, and the diseases I carried left me sterile. I had learnt not to assume I had a future. The experiences I faced only reinforced the probability that “this was what I am to expect”. I was becoming consumed by revenge and I believed that if I did not reach out I would soon pass no return.

72. This was not me I still held points of love - so my one choice left was to control my own fate - I had to take myself out. At 21 years old I began to see ending my existence as a solution, a way out of my waking nightmare. I was unable to hold down a job, to maintain a relationship or to function as a “normal” person. I was fuelled on by my need to consume as many chemicals as it would take to keep me numb - the only problem is this no longer worked. The attempt was unsuccessful. I was still here feeling even worse. I was not able to live and I was not able to die. I was the true expression of non-existent.
73. I would spend the next few years incarcerated on misdemeanours, and at 25 years old the presiding judge commented that “I am too old to be acting and behaving in this manner”. I agree.

### **Rehab**

74. The year was 1996 (January 27). It took me 6 years to get to this point, but I finally arrived at Queen Mary Hospital, a referral from Te Rito Arahi. Bill Phelps referred me to the Taha Māori Programme in Hamner, a twelve step programme integrating the concepts and principles of a Māori World View. I go in fist clenched. Fearful of where the next drink might lead me I concede that I have a problem and my life had spiralled out of control.
75. I met two women - Lilly Luafutu and Pokekaua Wehi. They both were instrumental in facilitating change for me along with Brenda Lowe Johnson and Bill Phelps. These people were challenging. They reminded

me that through all my trials there was purpose, that I had purpose, that as long as I practised the steps and traditions there was hope for a fallen star like me. They taught me that not all gifts come in pretty coloured wrapping and that as long as I was willing and present the miracle would happen. Incorporating the teachings of our tūpuna (Māori world view) and the twelve step programme of addiction, being in an environment where two world views complemented each other, that was the gift. The work – that was on me. It seemed the deeper I dove the more beneficial the outcome, I learnt to let go and to take responsibility for my actions – to release the past and own it and not to let the past own me.

76. Psychodrama was a component of the twelve-step programme. The process allowed me to explore the dynamics of childhood abuse and set the stage for further exploration, which I am now undertaking.

**My worth is not in what I do but in the way that I do it**

77. I know that looking back at my experiences cannot hurt me with the same verocity that it once did. It certainly still scorches, and on occasion burns. However, I am still holding the magic in the belief that the phoenix will indeed rise from the ashes, which brings me back to the beginning of my story.
78. It has been difficult to isolate specific events without spilling over to the next, to quantify the effects without sharing the sum total of my journey. I have also endeavoured to share my story with courage. This is my story, my marker. I hope that it may be both helpful and beneficial to the whole.
79. I do not want to assign blame to any one person – they had a job to do and the parameters and the scope does not rest on them alone. The system let me down. Some of those failings were:
- (a) The extreme measures of the police to detain me as a runaway after being reported as missing took a toll on me and my family.

- (b) The force used by police to detain hold and incarcerate me was forceful and unnecessary. Care and protection was “enforced” not given.
  - (c) I was denied care at a critical point in time – at Kingsley – and told it was my own fault, and that they had no duty of care towards me.
  - (d) I was subjected to physical harassment.
  - (e) I was labelled a repetitive offender, leaving me without a home and on the streets.
  - (f) Being a state ward left my mum feeling inadequate and powerless to defend me. When the system failed her she resorted to other means of protection.
  - (g) I was not viewed as a victim. Being treated like a hardened criminal and not a victim left me exposed and vulnerable.
  - (h) I did not choose to be victimised by those who should and could protect me. I did not choose that path, it was chosen for me.
  - (i) It was not right to confine me to a cell and to take away my right to exist.
  - (j) We were displaced because of government legislation.
  - (k) My rights were impeded through managed isolation
  - (l) To the undercurrent of racism we were defenceless
80. For too long I have worn the garments of guilt shame and blame. Like many of us the pain inflicted by others have been internalised and as Mark Twain said “what I did to myself was far worse still”. Today is not so much about running the gauntlet as it is about putting it down.

*Mai te kore, ki te pō, ki te ao mārama*

**Redress: Accident Compensation Corporation (“ACC”)**

81. On 23 April 1991, I made a claim with ACC for the sexual abuse and rape I suffered between the period of 1979 to 1983.
82. ACC assessed my entitlement based off eleven incidents of sexual abuse and/or rape. Of those eleven incidents of sexual abuse, six were accepted. Their reasons for declining the remaining claims included technical limitations (three of the incidents of abuse occurred prior to April 1974), “insufficient evidence” and one incident was deemed to be “voyeurism”, therefore not coverable.
83. From the five claims that were accepted, I was awarded \$10,000 from ACC under Section 79 of the Accident Compensation Act 1982, and the accompanying letter stated that this was the maximum award available.
84. On 19 December 1996, I applied for a review of the decision seeking payment of more than one amount of lump sum compensation for the incidents of abuse, because it was such an insult to be treated that way. They made me fight for recognition and redress of my pain. I was ripped off the whole way and I saw it as “blood money”.

**Impact of my time in care**

85. Social welfare placed me in institutions for my “care and protection” but there was nothing caring about being removed from my whānau. There was nothing caring about the staff telling me that my mother was bad because she was involved with gangs. As a child when I was running away, all I ever wanted was to go to be back with my mother, because as a child that was the only place where I knew love existed. There was no love, no care and no protection in the homes I was placed in.
86. I think as a child growing up in these homes and on the streets, I had no role model and no guidance. I had to figure things out for myself, and I struggled to differentiate between sex and violence. I had no sense of what was “normal”.

87. Alcohol was the sedative I took to escape my already tortured youth. Numbness was my escape from my reality.
88. Welfare blamed my mother for her parenting. The gangs blamed my mother when they took away my innocence. I struggled not to blame the one person who was powerless to stop my hurt ... my mum.
89. The dreams of song and dance of my 10-year-old self had long disappeared and were replaced by a growing distrust of authority and the burning reality that nobody could or would help me. The idea that nobody cared sank into my soul.
90. My trust in humanity faded and I had nowhere to go. My family home was no longer a viable option. The homes did not care for me. A cell was not an option. There was no safe place. Instead, I felt the one decision I still had was the streets. Stealing food and clothing, and eventually prostitution, were added to my survival kit. I had grown defiant and rebellion set in.
91. The 1970s-1980s was fraught with dawn raids, riot squads, protest marches and welfare fraud squads. Unfortunately, if you were deemed a troublemaker, poor or Māori, and showed any anti-social behaviours, the possibility or plausibility of becoming a ward of the state for most in this demographic was inevitable, and the expectation of being chased down by the police like hardened criminals was a certainty. This, for young runaways was compounded by the gangs who lurked at every intersection, with prospectors of the gangs eager to earn a reputation as a patched member.
92. Spurred on by the subtle undertones of racial tension, the perpetrators flourished in this environment. Vulnerable children were not seen and not heard, and our best interests were not top of political agenda. I lived in a war zone, and I was the property of the state.

93. By the time I was 21 years old I developed a sense of hopelessness. I struggled to keep employment, to maintain positive relationships and to function in life as a “normal” person. I started to believe that the world did not want me, so I did not want to be of the world. These were the thoughts that were running through my mind, and I seriously considered ending my existence as a solution and escape from the abuse and pain.
94. My abusers were not all “patched”, some of them wore hats and badges too. Before I was abused I had no reason to fear people, or to fear men. But I learned to fear men after these experiences, and I developed a distrust in authority.
95. The remnants of past trauma still haunt me. The nightmares of locked rooms and hands still disturb my sleep. The constant need to take a deep breath when I wake. I constantly survey any room I am in to find an exit.
96. I do not handle big crowds and do not like the feeling of being trapped by people. I am in constant fight or flight mode and practice meditation to cope with the anxiety.
97. I can still feel I am in a war zone and I am prepared to run. If I feel that I am in a position of threat I act accordingly.
98. Trust is still an issue. Relying on others is a constant challenge, one which I have learnt to navigate. However, I have learnt to trust my own instincts, intuition, ability and knowledge base.
99. I have been beaten, battered and bruised, my body is scarred and broken and the radiation treatment has weakened my bone density – every break is intensified.
100. I am trying to rectify any wrongs, any harm I have done. I am not exempt from liability nor am I excused of responsibility of my decision-making because of my past. However, I do ask the question, at my most vulnerable, had the formula been different, what would the outcomes have looked like for me?

## Recommendations

101. My experiences of my time in care were compounded by the social attitudes of the time, for example the Dawn Raids and the Springbok Tour. Through my own experiences I have recognised that racism is not always in the form of overt actions and that covert racism is equally detrimental. I think that something needs to be done to educate people in Aotearoa about our colonial history to address racism.
102. I was often pushed away and brushed to the side by adults when I tried to speak to them about the abuse I was suffering. Tamariki need to be given safe and effective spaces to voice their concerns. This means that the avenues available to tamariki need to include safe processes, the people involved in these processes need to be trusted by the tamariki and tread carefully, and the tamariki need to feel like their voices are being heard and taken seriously. Crown agencies need to educate their staff in how to have these conversations and relationships with tamariki Māori.
103. People who are screened for social worker roles, or any other role that is required to oversee the care of tamariki must be screened properly. There needs to be measures in place to ensure there is transparency in how social workers operate and accountability for social workers' practices.
104. I think that the State has too many powers which allow intervention in the care of tamariki, and that this is not always what is in their best interests. There needs to be a shift in powers particularly with tamariki and whānau Māori. The State's role in the care of tamariki should primarily be in supporting and empowering whānau to care for their own tamariki. This means that the funding and resources should go towards Māori approaches to supporting and empowering whānau.
105. The State separated me and my siblings, they completely removed GRO-B-2 from our whānau and my parents were vilified and scrutinised by the State. This was not empowering or supportive, it was a destructive way to

address the challenges that we faced as a whānau and it was an approach that ultimately sought to divide us.

106. The wellbeing of our tamariki and rangatahi needs to be at the forefront of the decisions made by the Crown. To me, this means that they need to change their perception of people who are involved with the criminal justice system. They need to look beyond viewing our whānau as “criminals” and look at the surrounding circumstances. Instead of taking a punitive approach, the Crown needs to uplift and empower whānau to be able to care for their own tamariki, in order to uplift the mana of that tamaiti and that whānau.
107. Uplifting the mana of the whānau includes looking at this idea around “cradle to grave” which focuses on improving both ends of the spectrum, that is for our tamariki and our kaumatua. I think there are some practical steps that the Crown can take to achieve this, like making housing safer and more accessible, supporting whānau to be able to care for their own (especially where individuals with mental health and disabilities are concerned) and engaging and working with whānau to see what is needed.
108. I have previously presented my story, using a Māori world view to frame my kōrero. I end my statement with that kōrero.

**MANA MOTU HAKE****MANA** - your Authority                      **A** - Insight**MOTU** - the Land (Island)                      **TŪ** - Stand**HAKE** - A form of digging up                      **ATUA** - Creation

An Authority that derives from the land (Whenua)

Whānau...Hapū...Iwi

And is of the Land

Tino Rangatiratanga

What we do on the Land, what we do within our society, within our people.

Mana - is our authority.

Taonga - Understand these principles in terms of Tangata = A Treasured Possession

We have the mandate to insist on change, the Mana to effect that change and the Knowledge for change to be effective.

Mātauranga Māori is with Maori.

From the cradle to the grave, implementing Māori models of healing.

Re-establishing the connections (relationships) to all things is a must.

There is no more space for debate to continue.

The voice of today echoes the voices of Te Ao Tawhito. What is good for Māori is good for all.

If we are to learn from the past in regard to Historical Abuse and Systemic Abuse the veil needs to be lifted and an honest approach in terms of the correct path forward needs addressing. The pathways forward need to be conducive to a Māori World View and that right of passage needs affirming. Māori need to have a directive for and by Māori. The future of our taonga (tamariki) is paramount. Anything less is inadequate and should not be tolerated.

**HERETI** (coming together) is a must if we are to achieve cohesive change. The implementation needs to be with Māori in respect to Mātauranga Māori and our models of healing.

He Whakaputanga (The Declaration of Independence of New Zealand)

Signed by a number of chiefs in 1835, it proclaimed the sovereign independence of New Zealand prior to the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi 1840. We proclaim our rights by mandate. Our autonomy as a right of way.

**TE AO TAWHITO**

**TE AO HURIHURI**

**TE AO MARAMA**

Hau Ora is for all

My understanding of tauwiwi models of healing say, 'we are to ascend the Mountain'.

I apply the Poutama model so that it is more relative to Māori thinking. Holistic approaches - Whare Tapa Whā and Te Wheke give depth and insight from a Māori perspective of relationships both within and without - self and community.

My understanding of our Māori World of Healing says, that ascension starts at the top of the mountain. The knowledge (mātauranga) is held within Māoridom and its application is also within Māoridom. These applications of thought and process have enhanced our cultures across the motu.

Change as we know is inevitable. My question for you here is, "what does that change now look like?"

Will we rise to the challenge ahead together or will we remain separated in our fight for survival?

I stand before you in both my shadow and my light and claim the right to have my voice heard, a right like so many of us that has not been afforded. No child should be silenced and although the harsh practices of the past are now being

addressed the speech, rhetoric and mindsets, like whispers down the corridors, remain the same.

We do not want tokenism we want practical platforms of engagement. The ability to speak is one paradigm demonstration. Action is another.

PARTNERSHIP

PROTECTION

PARTICIPATION

These Principles are derived from the underlying tenets of the Treaty of Waitangi underpinning the relationship between Māori and Government.

We Māori teach our children to navigate the relationships around them. To trust, to share, to form friendships based on conscientious effort, mutuality and understanding. To foster a spirit of co-operation.

It is time now for Māori and the Crown to demonstrate to our tamariki what that co-operation looks like going forward.

The Wero I lay before us is to improve strengthen and protect our taonga. The time is now.

Thank you for this massive privilege and the opportunity to stand before you today not as one voice but as a chorus of voices.

To my Mum

When I did not understand this world and in my weakness, you forgave me. When I was not courageous you understood and it was you who held me and when I least warranted your love, you covered, sheltered and protected me with that love that a mother's heart knows.

I speak to you and say with adoration, I am standing.

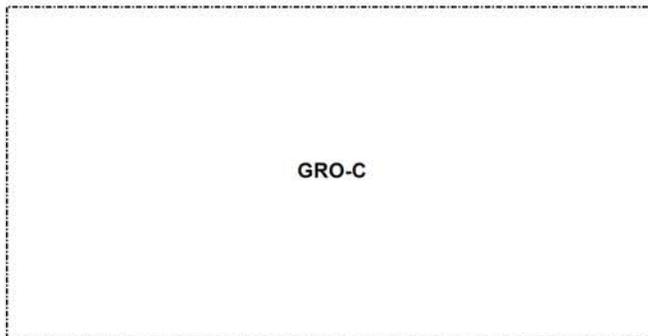
I hear you now.

I am not alone.

**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.

**Waiana Suzanne Kotara**



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