

Witness Name: FRED RAWIRI

Statement No.: WITN0326001

Exhibits: WITN0326002 – WITN0326013

Dated: 16 April 2021

ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

WITNESS STATEMENT OF FRED RAWIRI

I, Fred Rawiri, will say as follows: –

- 1 My full name is Frederick Terence Rawiri, and I was born on **GRO-C** 1960. I am 60 years old. I currently live in Australia. I am a survivor of Lake Alice.
- 2 I was admitted to Lake Alice from 12 September 1973 until 18 December 1973. I spent a total of three months at Lake Alice.

My early life

- 3 I was born in Te Kuiti and raised in Melville, which is a suburb of Hamilton. My mother's name is **GRO-B** and my father's name is **GRO-B**. I come from a family of 15, although a couple of my siblings had passed before I was born. I am the fourth youngest. Growing up and around large families was common for us as a Māori whānau.

- 4 We lived in a four-bedroomed house. My older siblings had moved out, but there were still seven of us children living there. Mum would be working up in the gardens while dad was away on the railways. It was hard back in those days for us as a big whānau. Our life may have seemed impossible to others, but our parents coped. We would take Māori bread to school for lunch wrapped in newspaper and go to school barefoot in rain, hail, or shine. There were many Māori whānau that were like us back then.
- 5 We would walk to school every day with no fear of anything happening to us. All of my siblings attended Melville Primary, Melville Intermediate, and Melville High.
- 6 When GRO-B was at home, he drunk heavily. My files say that I had a “deprived and neglectful upbringing” and that my parents were irresponsible (Recommendation Report to be Admitted to Hokio, dated 24 February 1972 **[WITN0326002]**). I don’t agree with that comment. It was a hard upbringing, but I think they were doing their best. We were always clothed and always had food on the table.
- 7 I would get in trouble a bit when I was young. It was always only small things, like hanging around outside shops and taking milk money so me and my mates could buy food (New Zealand Police Department Youth Aid Report dated 10 October 1971 **[WITN0326003]**).
- 8 When I was ten, I appeared in court for burglary. From then, I was “known” to the police and Social Welfare. It actually felt like they were just following me and waiting for me to do something bad again. Once, they charged me with the burglary of a key that was valued at 60 cents. (Police Department Caption Sheet, dated 29 October 1971 **[WITN0326004]**). I had taken the master key for our school and used it to sneak into the school after hours.
- 9 All of this type of behaviour was just me acting out as a young boy. I don’t think I had any mental issues; I just needed some guidance and some help from people who wanted to actually help me, not just lock me away.

- 10 On 9 December 1971, I appeared before the court on my third burglary charge (Social Worker Report and Recommendation, dated 10 December 1971 **[WITN0326005]**). At the hearing, my aunty and uncle came down from Auckland to ask the court to place me into their care rather than sending me off to a boys' home. They were both employed and had two of my cousins living at home at the time. While this request was said to have been sent off "for investigation", my file notes say that the memo was never sent, as they could not place me with people who were known to Social Welfare and who "can't even look after their own children" **[WITN0326005]**. I can't help but think that the rest of my childhood would have turned out differently if I had been allowed to go and live with my family.
- 11 Instead, I was committed to the care of Social Welfare and placed in Hamilton's Boys' Home until they could find me a permanent placement **[WITN0326002]**. This home was close to my family home in Melville. I stayed at Hamilton Boys' Home for 13 months.
- 12 Mum visited me once in that time. Again, it makes me angry to see my files that say my family didn't come to see me. **[WITN0326002]**. What they don't say is that my mum was almost a solo mum and she had to look after a huge family. She did the best that she could with Dad being away all the time for mahi. I missed my parents and my siblings so much when I was sent away; I was only 10 years old, so you can understand what I was going through.
- 13 On 1 January 1973, on the recommendation of psychiatrists, I was admitted to Hokio **[WITN0326002]**. This place had a bit more freedom and had a pool table, beaches, swimming pool, and outings. However, that meant nothing to me because I was further away from my family and it just made my loneliness worse. I knew I wouldn't see my mum if I was that far away from home. As a result, I became withdrawn and isolated while I was at Hokio, and so I was told I had to get a psychiatric assessment done. My notes say I was examined by Dr Leeks at Hokio (Principal Progress Report from Hokio, dated 27 June 1973 **[WITN0326006]**), but I don't remember him ever going there and talking to me.

- 14 On 5 April 1973 and 2 May 1973, Leeks wrote to the principal of my school noting that he had taken an E.E.G. that showed I was within normal limits for a child of my age. He recommended I go to Lake Alice, and he put me on the waiting list suggesting that I might have a schizoid personality disorder (Dr Leeks Letters to Hokio Principal, dated 5 April 1973 and 2 May 1973 [WITN0326007]). This was rubbish. I was young and I was lonely. Of course I was lonely. I hadn't seen my family for three years, and for them to say these were symptoms of a mental disorder was ridiculous.

Admission to Lake Alice

- 15 On 12 September 1973, I was admitted to Lake Alice and put in Villa 11 (Lake Alice Admission notes, dated 12 September 1973 [WITN0326008]). I was 13. I cannot remember this day at all. I do not remember anyone telling me why I was going to Lake Alice, and as far as I am aware, my family were never told I was going there, and my parents' consent was never asked for.
- 16 I was discharged on 18 December 1973 (Lake Alice Discharge Notes dated 18 December 1973 [WITN0326009]), after spending over three months at Lake Alice, and sent straight back to Hokio.

Electro-convulsive Therapy

- 17 I never knew anything about ECT or shock treatment before I went to Lake Alice. But I did afterwards.
- 18 It was usually a Wednesday or a Thursday when everybody would assemble in the lounge room of the villa. If your name was called, then you would be escorted upstairs. When my name was called, I would follow them upstairs to one of the bedrooms where there was a single bed. Then I would be asked to lie down.
- 19 Leeks would be standing at the head of the bed, and then he would put some electrodes onto my head that were like headphones. He would then ask me to put a mouth guard into my mouth, and then he would administer the ECT, turning the dial while the staff held me down. They had to physically hold me

down because I was kicking the whole time and trying to get free. I would be biting into the mouthguard while this was happening. The shocks would start off mild and then get stronger and stronger. It felt like an eternity.

- 20 One of the times, I was given ECT on my genitals. This shock wasn't as long as the shocks I would get on my temples but was much more painful. I remember that when it was over and I went back into the lounge area, I was so embarrassed. I remember crying in front of the other children who were just staring at me. I was not given any anaesthetic when I was shocked. Every time I got shocked, I defecated in my pants.
- 21 ECT was used regularly to punish the children at Lake Alice. The first time I got ECT was because a staff member told me to stop eating a packet of chips. That was it.
- 22 My nurse's notes say I received ECT for the first time on 30 September 1973 (Nurse's Notes from Lake Alice, various dates between September and December 1973 **WITN0326010**). On 27 October 1973, my notes say I had an interview with Leeks and then ECT followed. On 15 November, my nurse's notes say that ECT "was required" **[WITN0326010]**. There are no other comments about side effects or anything about how they administered the shock treatment.
- 23 Dr Leeks mentions in his notes that "other methods seemed called for" and I suspect he meant child abuse in the way described above (Dr Leeks Letter to Hokio Principal, dated 31 December 1973 **[WITN0326011]**). By November, both Leeks and the nurse's notes say that I was making good progress and was helpful around the villa **[WITN0326010]**. Of course I was – I didn't want to get shocked again.

Drugs

- 24 I was given paraldehyde while I was in Lake Alice. One of the nurses injected it in my backside. This was given to me as punishment for misbehaving. My notes say that I was given the drugs after a kicking incident that I was involved in **[WITN0326010]**.

25 The drugs they gave me made me think really slowly. I was spaced out after being given them, and sometimes I would get hallucinations. I was in another world. This feeling would last for hours.

Staff

26 Apart from Leeks, I don't really remember any particular staff member. They all just seemed to me like they were walking around like they were above the law.

Life after Lake Alice

27 After Lake Alice, I was returned to Hokio, where I stayed until November 1974. Then I moved home and went to Melville High School.

28 I tried really hard to not think about what had happened because, at the end of the day, no one was going to believe me. Even if I wanted to, how was I supposed to "make a complaint"? Who was I going to tell? As far as I was concerned, they were all the same people and a part of the same system that had ripped me away from my family and abused me. There was no way I was then going to trust them.

29 Despite me trying to forget, it was hard. I was struggling after being released from Lake Alice and Hokio. I would misbehave at school and appeared a few times in court on small charges like stealing \$30 or \$60 – nothing ever too serious but still getting into trouble (New Zealand Police Caption Sheet dated 2 February 1975 and Youth Aid Report dated 1 April 1975 [WITN0326012]).

30 This was the start of me turning to crime and to gangs for security and then being locked up in prison. I was in and out of prison for the next 20 years for offences like theft, burglary, and driving while disqualified.

Complaints and compensation

31 In 2017, I instructed Cooper Legal to help me make a claim for what happened to me at Lake Alice. In December of last year, I was offered \$59,356 from the government for what I went through at Lake Alice (Ministry of Health, Letter of Offer to Fred Rawiri, dated 2 December 2020 [WITN0326013]).

32 I have not yet accepted this offer and do not know what I want to do. It's not just about the money. We need to be able to tell our story and get some sort of closure for what happened to us. This won't happen if we are just paid off, silenced, and forgotten about.

Effects of Lake Alice and state care on my life

33 For those who went to Lake Alice and survived, life afterwards was rough. It was a road of loneliness, a road of feeling betrayal, and a road of continued inhumane treatment.

Emotional trauma

34 The effects Lake Alice has had on me have largely been emotional. That doesn't mean that they have been any easier to overcome. I have battled with depression my whole life and constantly feel overwhelmed by my emotions.

35 I've suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and social anxiety disorder; I have a fear of being watched and judged, which effects my everyday life.

36 I have flashbacks and nightmares of being in Lake Alice and seeing Leeks. You see, the fear of being put back in Lake Alice and the memories of what happened do not just go away because we have been let out. It is something we have to live with now.

37 I worry constantly that my children and my grandchildren will be put in a place like that and suffer like I did. This needs to stop.

38 Overall, what I went through at Lake Alice has affected the quality of my life and my ability to just enjoy every day and be happy.

Employment

39 Like I said above, I turned to gangs and to crime. This was the easiest way to make money because I couldn't hold down a nine-to-five job due to the emotional trauma I was constantly battling.

40 I had no money, and finding work in New Zealand, because of my gang affiliations, was hard. That is one of the main reasons I moved to Australia.

Stigma

41 I have always been embarrassed that I was in Lake Alice and, in particular, I've been afraid that people might find out and think I'm mentally ill. It doesn't matter that I'm not mentally ill, people just hear Lake Alice and think everyone who went there had mental problems. But I never did. But people don't know that, and they don't know my story. That whole stigma around Lake Alice is real, and it has followed me around my whole life.

My current situation

42 You could say that my life has been a roller coaster due to the trauma I received at Lake Alice. As I moved into the later years in life, and finally got out of the gang and crime life, it's still been a struggle.

43 I'd like to think that I am doing better though. I'm over 60 years old, and I am living abroad. I have lived in Australia for the past 25 years and have been working in the construction industry. However, I am on a CentreLink payment at the moment due to COVID.

44 I have finally settled down and have children of my own to take care of. They look up to me and believe in me for who I am, not who I was. They are my priority.

What I want from the Royal Commission

45 I would like:

- a. a formal apology;
- b. someone to publicly take responsibility for what happened;
- c. proper compensation;
- d. the survivors' voices to be heard so that we can get closure;

- e. for you to make Leeks come back to New Zealand and pay for what he did to us all.

Statement of Truth

- 46 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

Signed: _____

Dated: 16 April 2021

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**INDEX OF DOCUMENTS FOR STATEMENT OF FRED RAWIRI
DATED 16 APRIL 2021**

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WITN0326002	Recommendation Report to be Admitted to Hokio	24 February 1972	6, 11, 12, 13
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WITN0326009	Lake Alice Discharge Notes	18 December 1973	16
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WITN0326011	Dr Leeks Letter to Hokio Principal	31 December 1973	23
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