

Witness Name: Hohepa Taiaroa

Statement No: WITN0698001

Dated:

31-1-22

ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

WITNESS STATEMENT OF HOHEPA TAIAROA

I, Hohepa Taiaroa, state:

I te taha o tōku Matua
Ko Tongariro te Maunga
Ko Taupo-nui-ā-Tia te Moana
Ko Te Arawa te Waka
Ko Tūwharetoa te Iwi
Ko Ngāti Rongomai te Hapū
Ko Ngāti Rongomai te Marae

I te taha o tōku Whaea
Ko Puketapu te Maunga
Ko Ngaruroa te Moana
Ko Takitimu te Waka
Ko Ngāti Kahungunu te Iwi
Ko Ngāti Hinemanu te Hapū
Ko Omāhu te Marae

Ko Pat Matiaha Taiaroa tōku Pāpā
Ko Dianne Te Timatanga Matiu tōku Māmā
Ko Hōhepa Taiaroa āhau

Introduction

1. My name is Hohepa Taiaroa and I am 61 years old. I am not a number.
2. I was born in a place called Whangaehu.
3. My father is from Tūwharetoa. My mother is from Ngāti Kahungungu ki Heretaunga.
4. I live in Wellington. I have fourteen children, two from my first relationship, three from my second relationship and nine from my third relationship. My two eldest sons, have passed away, as well as my thirteenth child.
5. My statement is about the violent abuse and racism I suffered in Kohitere, Epuni and Waikeria Borstal. During my time there, I started to build a wall around me to protect myself. Even when I left those institutions, the walls stayed with me and hardened. They affect me to this day.
6. The impacts of this violence and systemic abuse was then inflicted, by me, on my whānau. It carried through from relationship to relationship, generation to generation. It started as ripples and became waves. It stops here.
7. The loss of my reo, culture, and identity, and the ongoing intergenerational effects of that loss, still exists today.
8. I also share the story of some of my children who were uplifted, the struggle to keep them with whānau, and the effects of being forced to have one daughter placed with a non-Māori family.
9. Having this Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care helps us, as survivors, have a better understanding of ourselves, but also lets others know why that uncle, father, sister or mother was the way they were. They thought we were haututū but all we wanted to do was go home.

Background

10. My father brought me into the world in GRO-B 1960, at Whangaehu Beach Road. I was my parents' only child. Dad and Mum used to go away and work as a shearer-rousie combination. They would work the sheds around the Waverly, Whanganui area, over to Hastings and down towards Wairarapa to Eketāhuna. While they were away my uncles and aunties used to look after me. That's how it was when I was growing up.

11. Mum was an āwhina for the Rātana faith, so Māori language was around me. When I started moving around to my aunties and uncles, I'd hear them speaking te reo to their kids too and that's how I'd learn. I grew up in Rātana, so everything was reo, except for the music.
12. When I moved to Wellington there was no kura kaupapa in Wellington. Everyone was speaking English, including at school. At primary school they called me 'Joseph' because it was easier to say than Hohepa. From then on, I was called Joseph. My birth certificate shows my correct name, but my records from the Ministry of Justice show my name as Joseph Hohepa Taiaroa.

Circumstances leading into care

13. At some point between my birth and 1965, Mum and Dad split up. I didn't know but Mum had left. I suddenly ended up at my aunty's place just down the road from our old house, no Mum, just Dad. I used to cry, and every now and then I would sneak down to the papa kāinga where Mum and Dad used to stay and hide away there - pray, cry, and swear. Every time I felt like I needed to get away from everything I would run back to that house at Whangaehu.
14. It was frustrating for me when I found out that Mum and Dad had split up. Being an only child, then losing my mother and growing up with my father, uncles and aunties, was traumatic, especially because I didn't understand why. I didn't know what a separation was. The frustration of not understanding, and the shock of knowing that mum wasn't coming back, is when trauma and confusion came in. All these things were going through my head and I shut right down to the point where I wouldn't talk to anybody.
15. Even though I had family around me, I didn't know how to love. Nobody taught me. It was tangi, tangi all the time and not knowing what was going on. I didn't know why I had these emotions. I was only five. Back then, you grew up fast, or you sunk. You drowned.
16. In 1969, by the time I was around 9, I was living with another uncle and aunty in Rātana. Dad was doing the same mahi, only this time he was working in Whanganui at the freezing works. Then one day, Mum came, and asked me to go to Wellington with her.

Move to Wellington

17. I moved down to Wellington with Mum and found out that she had a new husband and I had four younger brothers. It was exciting to begin with, but then rejection started to set in. I started to become a bit of a haututū because I couldn't understand the fact that, suddenly, I had four brothers and a new father, when all I wanted was my mum. I couldn't fit into this family, but I wanted to be a part of it. So, I rebelled against my mother.
18. I'd argue with Mum and I'd run away. I would take milk money to survive. Mum would call Social Welfare saying her son was missing. Probably after the third call, the dynamics changed and the cops became involved.
19. Social Welfare got involved properly when I was around 10 years old. My case manager at Social Welfare was an old teacher of mine from Strathmore Park School, Mr Robinson. He picked me up and told me not to do this stuff, but I'd had enough. I was confused and angry.
20. That's how it started, truancy, delinquency and petty theft. I had a paper run so I'd run away from home a lot and live on the streets. I'd go into town and stay at the Roxy picture theatre which was open 24/7. When I got homesick, I would sneak back home and sleep under the house and listen to the family conversations upstairs, and that was frustrating for me too.
21. I wouldn't go in the house, because I knew Mum would ring Social Welfare to come and get me. She was old school, and was trying to protect her family, because the influence I was bringing into the house was one of rebellion and anger. By then my anger at Mum and everyone else was right up there. So, I'd go back to the streets and live off milk money.
22. When I was about 12, Mum and I went to see my social worker. We were on the second floor of Cubewell House. He said, "You've got to come with us." I believe they wanted to put me in a holding place until they could figure out what to do with me. I looked at him and Mum, jumped out an open window and ran away. That's when I decided I wasn't going to be accountable to *anyone*, including my parents.
23. I spent a lot of time on the streets after that, using milk money as my wage. I'd sleep on top of buildings or in dumpsters. I was essentially an escapee from Social Welfare custody which gave the police the right to hunt me down.

24. Sometime, after running away, Mum and Social Welfare had had enough of me. I ended up going through the court system, but I was given grace and ended up going to live with an uncle working on the farm in Omāhu in Hawke's Bay. I got my work ethic from working for my uncle, and from my parents who were both hard workers.
25. While living with my uncle, I was at Hastings Boys' High School for third and fourth form. When I was about 14, I wagged school with a mate and learned how to steal cars. We then started to take a car a week to get around. That's how I learned to drive. In 1974, I got caught and was sent to Kohitere.

My experience of abuse in state-based institutions

Kohitere – Arrival

26. I arrived at Kohitere and after a few days, when I had settled in, it began. They had this thing in Kohitere called the 'blanket show'. When I first got there, I walked into the common room and these guys go, "Come down here." We went down to the showers and they gave me a hiding.
27. I remember being stripped down and they were going to rape me. I wouldn't sit down for that, so I fought my way out. I was so badly beaten up that they just let me go. I learned later, that if you were staunch, they let you go.
28. What I noticed is that they picked on the big fullas, and they picked on the weak. If you were related and had whānau in there, they'd leave you alone. If the kingpin (discussed later) or leader of the main group, didn't like you or said otherwise, then there were other ways they would move you around by using the guards or getting you into trouble.
29. I was fit and that's why they targeted me. I couldn't fight, but basic instinct got me out of there. I ended up in the infirmary for three days after the 'blanket show' beating. The staff did nothing. Nothing was said afterwards and after the infirmary, I was sent to the wings.
30. I got such a fright from that experience to the point that I thought, "Fuck this, I'm outta here." It was a mix of anger, fear, survival and escape. As soon as I was well enough, I ran.

Running away form Kohitere - including my brief time at Epuni

31. While I was at Kohitere, I rebelled. Every chance I got, I ran from Kohitere and I *kept* running. The secure unit at Kohitere was where boys, especially those that ran away, were sent to be punished. It was also known as the 'block'. I ran away about seven times in total and ended up in the 'block' every time.
32. One time I ran away and my mate GRO-B-1 and I took off down to Wellington. I got a job there making neck ties. As soon as I heard I'd got the job, I went and told Mum. When I told her, she called Social Welfare and the police, and they picked me up and took me to Epuni. That time, I was out for about a week and a half.
33. At Epuni, they would stand me in the courtyard in the rain, so that everyone could see. It was mainly to cause humiliation and shame.
34. Another time I ran away with GRO-B-1 and GRO-B-2 another guy from Kohitere. We were at this place in Ōhau, just outside Levin, hiding along a fence line. That night, GRO-B-2 tried to get into me. I don't exactly know what happened, but I think there was an argument and he was gone when we woke up. This made me feel frightened and angry again, like when I first got to Kohitere. I didn't understand what was going on. I was just a kid!
35. GRO-B-1 ended up in Wellington. The cops spotted me, so I got caught out at Ōhau river. I went to the Levin police station and was taken back to the block in Kohitere.

Suppression of reo and culture

36. There were Māori staff at Kohitere. There was the Māori matron, and one of the house parents, Mr GRO-C-1 but they were puppets. They were governed by the institution with its rules. We couldn't speak to them, Māori to Māori, and because of this we despised them. They never spoke to us in Māori either. They only ever spoke to us in English.
37. I remember when I was still a new boy, I went up to another one of the house parents, Mr GRO-C-2 who spent most of his time down on the block. I said, "Kia ora bro, how's things?" He reprimanded me for speaking te reo. I remember thinking, "We're Māori! Why aren't you acknowledging that?"

38. It was like the Māori staff were plastic, *and* they were the enemy. They stood between us and freedom. There were a lot of unsaid, unwritten things that we had to do to conform. I couldn't be Māori. I couldn't be me. I had to act like a Pākehā. To me that's racism. That's abuse. If we spoke te reo, the staff would give us mean looks or give us all the shit jobs. It was 'subtle pacification'.
39. We weren't allowed to speak Māori in school either. It was like we were sent to Kohitere to be re-educated, to the point where if they heard us kōrero Māori we were reprimanded for it. I'd call it 'white out', where we were made to feel like a white person. You had to speak like one and act like one. That's why we went to school. It wasn't about educating us on *our* culture. It was about educating us to be Pākehā.
40. The only Māori exposure we ever had was when a Māori tutor called Hemi Te Peeti would come in and teach us carving. That was just before I left Kohitere.
41. It wasn't until Mt Crawford and Waikune when we were doing kapa haka, that I became interested in te reo Māori again.

Secure - also known as the 'block'.

42. I had a record as a runner, so I always ended up in secure. I was a big boy who was physically fit, and I was angry with a very loud voice which projected quite far. This was how I was categorised.
43. I spent most of my time down the block because I didn't want to associate with anyone, so in some ways, the block was a haven. I got my solitude and silence from the block.
44. The screws were pretty good to me, after that first beating I got. I don't know if it was because they felt sorry for me.
45. On the block, everything was regimented. There was physical training and no one would touch me in there. I got fitter, stronger, and faster in there - for fighting and running.
46. I did about 12 months off and on in the block.

Physical abuse

47. Every day we had to stand at attention at our doors and the screws would come past and press into your forehead. You might have a shoe that wasn't shiny or one of your shirt tails untucked. They'd do it all the time and use intimidation.
48. We were getting hidings to the point where we thought it was normal. Because we were getting hidings from the screws, we thought it was okay to go and give everyone else a hiding too. We conformed to what they were doing.

Kingpin

49. There was a kingpin (KP) system at Kohitere.
50. The KP didn't have to be a big person, but he had to know how to handle himself in a fight. He was well organised. Basically, a group of friends got together, and the leader of those friends became the KP. He'd send his friends out to do his bidding, or to pick on someone. He was just the boss. Everybody, through the KP's friends, would spread the rumour so that everyone knew he was higher up than the warden at the centre.
51. The staff utilised the KP all the time. He'd get special privileges from some of them for doing their dirty jobs. One instance I know of was a young guy who got a hiding because he did something to the staff, and the staff took it out on that guy through the KP and his friends.
52. That sort of thing went on daily. The staff would use the KP and his friends to keep the boys in line. They'd get extra lunches, bacon and eggs for breakfast. I don't think it was monetary, although I don't know for certain.
53. I do know that drugs and cigarettes were involved. That was the KP's take. I think the drugs would come from visitors coming in, and the staff would turn a blind eye for favours or narking on somebody that the staff needed to know about.
54. The KP would never do things himself. He'd send someone else to do it. He had people that worked for him, but the staff would go to the KP, and he'd issue the orders out. If the KP didn't do it, they'd set him up and find someone else who would listen to them.

Staff and tutors

55. From my point of view, there were three factions. There was the KP with his boys, the house parents, and the gang-bosses (the tradesmen that came in and taught us).
56. The tradesmen would awahi us, but then they'd get growled by the house parents, so then they'd back off and do it on-the-sly. They were just trying to teach us new skills, in an environment that wasn't very nice.
57. Some used to say that the tutors on the forestry gang, the GRO-B brothers, were mean. If we played up, they would whack us with the inside part of the flax. I could see that they as Māori, who were ex-army, were trying to teach us Māori boys how to act in a ngahere environment and in a Pākehā environment. They were trying to teach us lessons on how to be less Maori.
58. One of the Māori house parents, Mr GRO-C-1 was good. He was like a father or uncle. He would awahi the boys because he knew what we had been through, but he also came under the law of the government, so this had to be done discreetly.
59. There were other people who came in to take boys away to church, or to have time out. Pastor Eddie, Victor and whānau of the Door of Faith Church, used to come to Kohitere and awahi us boys.
60. The ones that were worst out of all of them were the house parents. It was the house parents who were always picking on us and using the KP and his boys against us. They were the ones pushing the buttons, and that was Mr GRO-C-3 lot, all the house parents.
61. One of the house parents, Mr GRO-C-4 was bad. We hated him because, although he was Māori, he tried to get us to behave but he did it in a Pākehā way. It's like he was trying to make us less Māori. He was vicious and sneaky too and would utilise the KP to do his work. If Mr GRO-C-4 had a run-in with one of the boys, you could guarantee that by the end of the night that person, would have something done to him by the KP or his friends.
62. Mr GRO-C-3 the deputy principal or principal was not a very nice person. To him, you were a number, that's it. You did your time there, you got out, and that was it.

Education

63. The tradies came in five days a week to teach us. It was like school. 8am until 4pm. There was also school for the little ones. I would have been about 4th form or 5th form when I started working with the tradies.
64. Mr Lee was one of the house parents (from memory). He was a good guy. He was a rally driver, so he'd take guys out on the weekend, and that was his way of giving us time out from Kohitere.
65. There was another boss in the home that a couple of my mates went out with. He was taking portraits of them with just shorts on, no top. That was a bit weird. But at that time, the boys got a day out and got a feed and that's all we were worried about.
66. Sometimes the tradies would come and take one or two of the boys away for the weekend. I assume it was for time out or sometimes they'd help do their gardens or chop wood, weekend work.
67. After about two years, I was in the painting gang. We used to paint and varnish the pool tables and ping-pong tables. For a day out after all that work, we would go to Holdsworth Boys' home and Miramar Girls' home to drop off a pool table and ping-pong table. We were proud of our work. That was the start of my career as a painter.

Work release

68. Towards the end of my stay at Kohitere, I got work release for a job at a place that made telephone covers, and the blocks for the bases of fireplaces. That was my first job out in the open.

Visits

69. My Mum and one of my brothers visited me in Kohitere, but no social workers. It was hard for her to come as it was quite far away. She had no car and had my younger brothers, and later my sister to look after.
70. I never got a visit from a social worker or psychologist. No one ever came to talk to me and ask why I was so angry all the time.

Waikeria Borstal

71. I did my time at Kohitere. When I got out in 1975, I went back to stay with my mum for around a year, then I got into trouble again. That time, I was sent to Waikeria Borstal. I think the age range at Waikeria Borstal was 16 to 18 years old. After 18 years of age, you went to prison.
72. At Waikeria Borstal you could be put in mainstream (corrective training which at the time, was run by the army), blue stripes (medium security borstal) and white stripes (maximum security or the untouchables). Because of my history of being a runner, they stuck me straight into blue stripes. There, everyone knows you're a runner and you spend 23 hours a day in lock up and an hour out.
73. I later got moved to mainstream into the West Wing, but I never quite made it into the houses. I just stuck to the painting gang and stuck to what I knew.
74. Everything I needed to know about a prison was introduced to me at borstal, and I took it all in with my back against the wall. There was a fight every day and you had to be a good fighter to survive.
75. There was a KP system in Waikeria Borstal as well, but it was mostly the gangs who controlled that place. You could see the staff communicating with the gangs and then, suddenly, the dynamics would change as a result of those conversations.
76. Compared to the boys' homes, borstal was a lot faster and harder. The energy there taught you how to be that angry person they were looking at.
77. You learnt all the tricks about breaking into things without getting caught, including cars. You learnt how to gamble on the horses for chocolates and cigarettes. How to deal and play cards for money. I sharpened all my skills to survive. That was the beginning of my schooling on being a criminal, and the start of learning how to fight. But for the first three months there, I learnt how to scrub a concrete floor with a toothbrush.
78. At that point I learnt to shut up when they talked to me, because I would talk and then I'd think, I should have shut my mouth. I learnt that at borstal - how to shut it, when to shut it, when to open it. Everything I know today I learnt from that period. All I did was enhance it later when I went to prison.

79. As far as rehabilitation was concerned, I self-rehabilitated. There was nothing else done to help me. After that there was probation, but I received no help to transition from borstal into society.
80. My time in state institutions set me on my pathway to prison.

Waikeria Prison

81. I got into trouble again and ended up in Waikeria Prison when I was still 18. It was a medium security prison by then.
82. While sitting in a prison cell, I began to understand why my mother used to call the authorities on me. I could see that she had been trying to protect what was in front of her and to make ends meet. I was still a very angry person.

Impacts

The trauma and impact of losing my Māori identity – systemic racism

83. Mum, Dad, my aunties, uncles and cousins all spoke te reo when I was growing up. That's how I learnt. That all changed when I went into care.
84. As I talked about above, we weren't allowed to speak te reo Māori in Kohitere, Epuni or Waikeria Borstal. In Kohitere, I was reprimanded for saying "kia ora". I was told off and humiliated in front of everyone else. I was made an example of, so the others would know that if they spoke Māori they would be reprimanded too. In Kohitere, you would be mentally belittled then sent off to clean the toilets and other jobs like that.
85. So, I just didn't speak Māori at all. Now, I can still understand te reo Māori but I can't speak it. I've always wanted to speak on the paepae but I can't because I can't speak Māori. I'm trying to learn, but it's a real struggle for me to pick it up now.
86. The impact from this assimilation, and loss of language and culture, has followed me all through my life.
87. For years I thought I had to be Pākehā. I conformed and accepted the fact that things had to be done the Pākehā way. I was never allowed to just *be Māori*.
88. On the other hand, when you end up at places like the police stations and borstals, the first thing they do is categorise you as an 'Islander or a Māori'. If you were Māori, you were a target for the racial abuse.

89. My children were up there, in te ao Māori, and I couldn't answer them or do their homework with them. There was anger and frustration from not knowing how to communicate with my children because they were on a high level of Māori, but I had no clue at all. I just wouldn't talk to them. This still goes on today, but we're working through it.

Adoption, whāngai and forced adoption – my children to my second partner

90. My second partner and I had three children together. The eldest daughter Juanita, then a son [GRO-B-3] and then the youngest daughter, Coralee. I was between the ages of 23 – 25 years old at time.
91. Juanita was adopted when she was a baby. [GRO-B-3] was also adopted, by someone I knew while I was incarcerated. The youngest baby, Coralee, was uplifted from her mother, unbeknown to me, again when I was incarcerated. I assumed that it was because of the lifestyle of her mother, but that wasn't all her fault - it was also my fault for being angry and aggressive.
92. With Coralee, as soon as I was released from prison, I did everything Social Welfare asked to get her back. I asked for her for 3 months and got her back.
93. At this time I was also starting to form a new relationship with my third partner. When things were comfortable, I introduced Coralee to that partner's mother and whānau. This kuia fell in love with Coralee. She knew, as our kuia do, that Coralee was to be a whāngai. Although she lived with this kuia, she was still a part of our family, through whānau-sharing. We *all* brought Coralee up. Coralee was taken there so she wouldn't have to go through the system and because I still needed to sort myself out.
94. I knew the whānau [GRO-B-3] was adopted by, so I knew he would be well looked after. What I didn't know was the effect it had on him as a boy growing up: the loneliness, the anger, and the frustration of not knowing he had brothers and sisters then finding this out later. That anxiety still haunts him today. I understand his frustration as it reminds me of what happened to me as a child. He is starting to open up to me now.

95. Juanita was adopted by an older, Pākehā couple, while I was incarcerated but about to be released. Social Welfare *made* me sign the adoption papers. I didn't want to, but I had no choice. I was forced to do it. I signed but stipulated that I wanted my baby to *learn* Māori and *be* Māori. As soon as I signed the papers, they were gone. Social Welfare never came back again to tell me how she was doing. They never had follow-ups or showed me photos of her at different stages, like I had asked them to. I didn't see her again until she was 12 or 13 years old.
96. The other kids grew up knowing they had a sister but they just hadn't seen her.
97. When she was adopted, her new parents changed her name from Juanita Makatea-Taiaroa, her birth name, to Carol Douglas, her adopted name. We only found this out when we met her again.
98. When we called, trying to find Juanita, it was a real shock for her as she never knew her whakapapa. I called out of the blue and told her I was her father. She is fair in colour and was bought up in a Pākehā environment. Through my eyes, she didn't really know she was Māori.
99. In her adopted whānau she was an only child, so to meet her new whānau - her brother and sister - was a bit of a shock for her. There was some awkwardness at first, but there was also the emotion of knowing that you have a brother and sister. I could understand how she was feeling because of the *mamae* I felt when I first met *my* brothers, from my Mum's other whānau.
100. Over time, their bonds strengthened to the point now where they keep in contact all the time, like they were always together.
101. My second eldest boy passed away this year from cancer. To hear Juanita *kōrero* Māori at his tangi and step up as the next eldest was so awesome.
102. Although I am very grateful that she went to a whānau who listened and understood, the impact of having my eldest daughter adopted out in this way, to a Pākehā whānau, was very traumatic. Particularly given I was incarcerated and didn't have a chance to *tono* for my baby or have any say, and that a family was already chosen by Social Welfare without both parents' consent. At that point in time, I was just worried about whether she'd be in good hands, and I was angry at Social Welfare for not letting us know what was going on.

Intergenerational impacts of anger and violence - I built a wall

103. When I was finishing borstal, around 1976, I was so angry and so full of hate that I would let it out on anybody that was in front of me. That included my own whānau. I was very angry.
104. I've lost three good families because of the violent way I was brought up in the system and the flow on effects on my whānau.
105. In 1985, when I started a relationship with my third partner, I had mamae from the last two partners. I carried the baggage of my first two relationships into this third relationship, and our boys and their mother bore the brunt of it. I didn't know why at the time.
106. Around 2001 I started counselling. Through counselling, I came to realise that I was carrying frustration from my previous partner not being there at a time when we needed to be together.
107. I became really aggressive and abusive towards them. I couldn't understand it. I was in and out of jobs, up and down. The abuse kept going. I thought I had beaten that taniwha and that everything was okay. As I was thinking this, I saw my family crumbling before me.
108. I could also see the same cycle happening in the same repetitive way with one son in particular. He ended up in prison for violent offending and, when he got out, he continued that abuse with his partner. That violence stepped down from me to him. I don't want it to filter down to my grandchildren.
109. From my point of view, it comes from the systemic abuse back in Kohitere and Waikeria Borstal. I shouldn't take all the blame for the silliness and doing the things that I did. The violence and abuse towards me carried on from me to my whānau. The impacts of the abuse I suffered are intergenerational.
110. I don't know why I got a hiding in the showers. I don't know why people were picking on me. For me, I just thought, if you're going to pick on me then I'm going to pick on you back. That's where the anger started. I started to get fit and push people away. You rebel against the law and when people start doing that to you, automatically you think, you're the law too, so I'll smack you as well.

111. Back then I had mixed emotions all the time. The frustration of not knowing and understanding why I was doing what I was doing, the anxiety of watching my partner or children cringe in front of me. These are the things I've grown up with and have no understanding of, still to this day.
112. I missed out on family birthdays, tangi, weddings or just associating with my whānau, because I was scared that I'd get angry and punch people. I didn't like restaurants because I didn't like crowds. We've only just started to go out and have dinner in the past couple of years.
113. It has taken me a long time to break this cycle of anger and violence and I know my children find it hard. Some may not make it because of the trauma they have suffered.
114. For years I kept quiet, using two-word answers, because I didn't know how to express my feelings. I learnt how to build up a wall that was so thick and so high that no one could touch me. It got to the point where, if anyone hurt me, I couldn't feel it and it just went straight through me. It was a big wall, a heavy wall, because of the rebellion and the rejection and the loneliness with no whānau and no support as a child.
115. I shut up. I never had a voice because my voice was these two things here, my fists. I couldn't even say a full sentence. It was just yes, no, and that was it. That's how much mamae and anger I had inside me.

Healing – Palmerston North Street Vans

116. It wasn't until the mid-80s that, with the help of whānau and friends, there was a crack in the wall. That crack opened a bit wider and then eventually that wall came down, when I realised I needed help, and I sought help.
117. In 2001, with the help of the Christian community, I started a three-month course at a place called Shiloh Retreat in Cheltenham, Fielding, through Drug Arm Palmerston North. They felt that three months wasn't enough to fix thirty years of trouble, so I stayed a further three months. Later, the organisation changed to Palmerston North Street Van (PNSV).
118. The PNSV coordinator was Councillor [GRO-B] from Manawatu. It was through one of his workers, working with my son doing hip-hop, that I learnt about [GRO-B], who could help people break the chains.

119. PNSV's mission statement is "helping people whatever the need, whenever possible". They also have Christian values. For me, that's when I realised the only thing that would stop me from being angry was God's love. After completing my course there, I started volunteering with PNSV.
120. I helped run the halfway house and delivering bread to those in need with the street van. On the weekends, we would venture out and provide milo, coffee and tea to whānau on the streets and help those who needed kai or transport.
121. As a result of the government bowling down Housing New Zealand houses, PNSV saw the need to house people who were starting to move onto the streets in Palmerston North. There was a building which we/PNSV renovated as an accommodation area, like a boarding house. It was called Shepherd's Rest. I managed Shepherd's Rest from 2001 to 2005. I still volunteer for PNSV today.
122. My whānau and I are starting to communicate now. I learnt to say more than one sentence. This has taken me from 2001 to 2017 to find my devices to help so I won't be that ugly person, and so my kids can see the *real* me. My kids have a better knowledge of why I am the way I am. We have started to listen to each other now and face these problems together.

Redress

123. I have never made a claim for the abuse I suffered in state care. I have never asked for any compensation because I never felt at that time that I was worthy.
124. Now, I want an apology from the government.
125. For my own reparation, I want a clean slate from the time I first went into Kohitere, up until now. My main concern is to have my name cleared.
126. I want my criminal records wiped because of the trauma and the acts that were taken upon me by those people, including those who were supposed to look after me, while I was in State Care. The reason I say this is because of my name, the Tairaroa name that my children hold. I want my name cleared so that my family don't have to go through that shame.

127. If there was any monetary reparation, I would take it plus interest from 1974 until now, or such time as they give it. I *need* that compensation now. Not just for me, but for my family to get out of the hole that they're in now. 20k isn't enough. A lifetime of mahi, of triple trauma for those that I've hurt and for those they have hurt too. Any money that goes to me would go towards helping those that I've hurt and those that are hurting others, like my sons and their children.
128. I want my life back. I want my name cleared. I want my criminal record removed. The ability to go and buy a car on credit without being knocked back, and to be able to go to see mokos in Australia without being sent home due to my criminal record.
129. I just want peace of mind for me and my family as well. I want this government to stand up and acknowledge that there are many like me who are struggling today. I am 62 years old but to me it's like the abuse happened yesterday.
130. If I need to change, the government needs to change too and acknowledge that what they did to me was wrong. And not just me, but those who came before and after me.
131. I've lost a lot of friends in the places I have been. Some took their own lives. They're past being tired, they're gone. I know others today in the same boat as me. We just want peace of mind. That's all I ask for, is that peace of mind.
132. Own it government! Your apology means more than any money. It tells me that you acknowledge that you had a part in this. It also tells me that you are willing to care.
133. I implore you, please give us peace of mind, give us the right to live as a family, as a whānau for our hapū and our iwi, as Māori.
134. This journey is a long one, I'm tired now. I just want to be left alone. I want the right to be who I am, not who you want me to be. I'm Māori. I want to just be a man again. Give me the tools so I can work, so that I can be free to do whatever I want to do. Not be restricted all the time because of being Māori. So I can stand up and be that *man*, that *father* I want to be.

What should have been done differently?

135. I should have had a social worker that knew what they were talking about. No one ever visited me and asked me how I was or what was wrong.

136. Why did they miss me out? Why didn't they come and talk to me? When I was in trouble they always showed up, but when I needed them, no one came. I must have been the one who fell through the cracks.
137. If they had looked *inside* me, instead of at the *outside* of me, they would have seen the confused and frustrated child that I was.
138. The people who work in the homes, the prisons, the system, should *not* have treated me like a number.
139. My whānau, my children and grandchildren are still in a healing phase. I believe that not only me, as a victim of systemic abuse, but my children and their mothers should have counselling and support as well, so we can go through this together. If it's done just for me then it won't work, because the trauma I have already caused to my children and my partners is still instilled in them and will be instilled in their children as well. There needs to be a way where we all have input into this situation, then we can break the cycle together. If it is done individually, it will fail.
140. I believe awahi, not counselling, from a Māori-orientated service provider for Māori would help. I am Māori and I find comfort in speaking to someone who is Māori. I am sure that my whānau would too.
141. I think these services should be iwi-led and hapū-based. That way, not only do we have whakawhanaungatanga but we also have kaitiakitanga through the hapū who will awahi us. The iwi will then support the whānau and the hapū.
142. I would go back to my own iwi, because I don't know them and it would help me get to know them, and them, me. If you want to heal, you take what's in front of you and run with it.
143. I believe that iwi and hapū *must* be involved. We need to bring Māori professionals from all over the motu so we can work as one.

Recommendations for children in care

144. Get Māori to work with Māori and Pākehā to work with Pākehā. Don't switch. With Māori, by Māori, for Māori.
145. In order to educate Māori, you have to educate the whānau too.

146. There are too many service providers out there who don't run under the same rules. There should just be one or two providers with the backing of a Treaty-minded government.
147. There needs to be a Māori boss, using Māori initiatives, working alongside Pākehā workers and the government, to help them. That will work better. This is how Te Tiriti o Waitangi says it should be a partnership.
148. Trauma is dealt with by love, not rules; anger with awahi, not words. Support should be there when called upon, with a focus on the person dealing with trauma, not at a certain time frame set by the providers. Follow ups need to be carried out and must be consistent and not delayed.

Concluding remarks

149. My name is Hohepa Taiaroa and I am 62 years old. I am not a number.

Piko piko - Hohepa Taiaroa

I wrote piko piko in 2018. It was a poem first and then I translated it into Māori as part of learning my reo. I wanted it to be more significant and meaningful to help those in the generations to come.

Ka kite au i a koe e piko piko,
 E huna piri i te tomairangi e
 Aue he piko piko ngoikore,
 I karapoti ai i tō whānau hoki e
 I whanau tangohia mai i a ratou
 I mua, he mamae ra i taku oranga a
 He puhoi te tipu aue e lhowa
 Whakarongo mai ki taku karanga,
 E arahi mai kia kore au e hinga
 Te toro atu ki te katoa e
 kia kite te Taniwha nei aue,
 Ehara ko koe, ehara ko au....e....i!

Piko piko I see you, hiding there amongst the dew,
 oh so fragile piko piko, surrounded by your whanau too.
 Taken from them long ago, scarred for life and slow to grow.
 Oh lhoa hear my call, guide me so that I won't fall.
 Reaching out for all to see, this Taniwha is not you or me.

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.

Signed

GRO-C

Dated: 31 - 1 - 22

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