

Witness Name: GRO-A Ms AF

Statement No: WITN0658001

Dated: 13/08/2021

## ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

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### WITNESS STATEMENT OF GRO-A Ms AF

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I, GRO-A Ms AF state:

**1. He uri ahau nō ngā hau e whā**

- 1.1. My ancestors are from all four corners of the world. I have Sami whakapapa through my biological father and Navajo, Aboriginal and Māori whakapapa through my biological mother.
- 1.2. Nō Ngāti Tāhinga me Whakatōhea ōku iwi Māori. I am from the Koivu clan on my Sami side, and of the Jillimanjara mob from the Northern territory.
- 1.3. My settler name is GRO-A Ms AF I call it my 'slave' name or colonial name' because it was given to me by my adoptive family who essentially bought me. To me, it was a sale and purchase of a baby. I don't know if money was actually exchanged, but for all intents and purposes it was a contractual arrangement between the State and my adoptive family.
- 1.4. My indigenous name is GRO-A Ms AF It has more meaning because it is the beginning of my identity and who I am today.
- 1.5. I was born GRO-C 1962.
- 1.6. I live with my wife in Auckland. I have two adult children and two mokos. We are Aunties to many nieces and nephews.
- 1.7. I am whānau hauā. This name was gifted to us by Donny Rangiahau from Tuhoē. He described whānau hauā as an umbrella term suitable for disabled Māori. This is because we are whanau first, but we are affected by the

environment which we live within. For me as an adoptee, this centres me in my whānau and hauā is the trauma around that adoption.

- 1.8. My statement is about my adoption and the fraudulent birth certificate that severed my connection to my whakapapa and whenua.

## **2. Born and sold**

- 2.1 My parents were very young when they had me. My father was 18 and my mother had just turned 16. She was only 15 when she fell pregnant with me. Due to her young age, she was sent away to Stratford Taranaki to have me.
- 2.2 I was born a month premature at Stratford Hospital. I imagine it was difficult for my mother. She was in a state of grief at this time because her younger brother had just passed away.
- 2.3 When I was born the doctors told my mother that I had a hole in my heart and that I would not survive. They convinced my parents that the best thing to do was to leave me at the hospital and one of the staff members would look after me. My mother breastfed me for three days and then she left.
- 2.4 The staff members did not look after me. Instead, a few weeks later, I was adopted by a Pākehā family in New Plymouth.

## **3. The taking of my whakapapa**

- 3.1. My adoption is an example of institutional violence. There was collusion on all levels.
- 3.2. It started with the hospital. The doctors who convinced my parents that I would die went and falsely listed my ethnicity as European on my birth certificate. They had seen my mother, there is no way that they could mistake her for Pākehā.
- 3.3. I think they did this because Māori babies were less desirable for adoption than non-Māori babies. My adoptive mother had specifically asked for a white baby. The social workers who placed me knew this.
- 3.4. They also knew that there was a different process to follow if you wanted to adopt a Māori child. The Ministry of Māori Affairs would have to be notified and

they would take over the process to place me in a home. The social workers were able to bypass this process by changing the ethnicity on my birth certificate to European.

- 3.5. In doing so, they stole my whakapapa and my whenua from me and my descendants.

#### **4. My adoptive Family**

- 4.1. The systemic racism prevalent at the time meant that there was no vetting of Pākehā families wanting to adopt children. However, Māori families wanting to adopt a child had to undergo rigorous background and safety checks.
- 4.2. The lack of vetting of Pākehā parents meant that I was placed at a significant risk through this adoption.
- 4.3. My adoptive parents were strict Irish Roman-Catholics. They had crosses in every room and had cousins as Priests and Nuns. The Church provided them with a religious endorsement which told the State they were fit to be parents, and that was enough to allow them to adopt me.
- 4.4. I was their first child. Three years after I was born, they had a biological daughter, who was my younger sister.
- 4.5. My adoptive mother was unwell. She was an alcoholic and had significant mental health problems which would see her hospitalised at times.
- 4.6. She was also very racist and hated Māori, even though I suspect that she was Māori herself. This is because her first cousin was a well-known Māori and they shared the same last name. My adoptive mother and aunty would tell me that I was nothing but a dirty savage and that I was lucky to be raised by a Catholic white family.
- 4.7. All of that together meant that she was incredibly abusive towards me; physically, emotionally, and spiritually. She knew how to hit and would use a belt buckle or wooden spoon on me. This was normalised at the time and as it was legal it meant you could beat a child within an inch of life.

- 4.8. My mother's family were all abusive to me. They treated me differently because they thought I was intellectually disabled but I think they also knew that I was Māori.
- 4.9. My uncle (my adoptive mother's brother) was one of the worst abusers in that family. He started abusing me when I was 3 years old. He would say to me "Its ok because you are not blood, you're just a dirty Māori". His abuse continued until I was entering puberty around 10 years old. As soon as I could speak out for myself, he backed off.
- 4.10. The only person in that family who wasn't like that was my Nana. Nana protected me until she passed when I was about 9 years old. I saw her when she passed. She was my strength, she came to me and told me that she would never leave me, she would always be by my side. She loved me. I didn't feel that from any of the others.
- 4.11. I think my adoptive dad did love me too. He was a wonderful man. He never raised his voice. He was firm but calm. He tried to give us a good life and was well respected and loved in our communities. He had various jobs over the years, he worked in the prisons and as a social worker. He taught me how important it was to treat people well, and at his funeral there were tons of people who attended because of the way he lived.
- 4.12. My adoptive mother needed help. If the state had have investigated, they would have noticed something was wrong. If the state had made any effort to check in on me post-adoption, they would have seen this and taken me away.

## **5. Catholic school education**

- 5.1. I attended Catholic school education and was enrolled at St Joseph's School in New Plymouth from the ages of 5 to 6 years old. I attended a State school in Auckland from the ages of 6 to 9 years old and then went to Sacred Heart Girls College in New Plymouth from 9 years old until I turned 15.
- 5.2. As children we were treated as evil little children by the Nuns, born of sin. The Nuns at both St Joseph's and Sacred Heart used to beat the hell out of us, even if you hadn't done anything wrong. I recall one time I picked up a paper

toy which had been dropped by a group of boys. One of the Nuns asked me how many I had made and I told her the truth, that I hadn't made any, but she smacked me until I said "one". That was their way, they would beat you until you confessed.

- 5.3. We had confession once a week with a male priest. There was no safety there. They protected everyone by having secret confession.
- 5.4. I was very timid and frightened child. The Nuns would use canes, their hands or whatever they could get their hands on to beat us. One Nun would throw wooden blackboard erasers at us.
- 5.5. I was so terrified of the Nuns so I would never ask for help. As a result, I didn't do very well at school and my education suffered. I became terrified of asking. I didn't concentrate, I was deemed too dumb. I was short sighted, but it took years to find out because they kept telling me I was dumb. The Nuns weren't trained teachers either. There was no learning there.
- 5.6. I could have gone down different journey if it wasn't for the way I was treated there. I could have been a doctor or trained under Mary Leo if I had been supported. They didn't reinforce positive messages to us. They were disempowering. I was told I was good for nothing more than being a mother.
- 5.7. Being ADHD and a girl, it was not diagnosed during that time. There was no support for children with disabilities. We were seen as the problem not our disabilities. Violence is endemic against disabled in this country and we have nothing to protect us because we are seen as a burden and a blight, so it was normal to beat us. They would tell me the only thing that was wrong was that I was dumb or naughty. There was no protection at all.
- 5.8. They were big strong women who were not saintly, lovely or nice. Except for one or two, they were cruel people.
- 5.9. This abuse was so normalised at the time that I didn't recognise it as abuse. No one talked about it.
- 5.10. I always wanted to be a part of the kapahaka group at school. Something called me to it, but I was too scared to join because I was told that I was not Māori. I was craving my culture and who I truly was but I didn't know it at the time.

## **6. Teenage trauma**

- 6.1. When I was 14 years old, I was raped by a man that I later found out was a best friend of the uncle who had abused me as a child. Knowing this added to the abuse that he inflicted on me.
- 6.2. The night that it happened, my adoptive mother slapped me and called me a slut. She was drunk when she did that.
- 6.3. I had an examination by a male doctor at the hospital, I didn't know what was happening. I was stressed so he prescribed me valium.
- 6.4. I made a sketch of the man and the Police caught him the next day. I had to go to court for it, but my parents weren't supporting me through it. I didn't want them there. I was terrified. The Police told me that I had to give evidence and that if I lied, I would be taken to prison. It was very stressful.
- 6.5. He was sentenced to seven years imprisonment but was let out after two years and fully reintegrated into society. He got support to be rehabilitated and I received no support.
- 6.6. I couldn't cope with all that was happening, so I ended up overdosing by taking three bottles of valium and I survived.

## **7. Barrett Street Hospital abuse and coping mechanisms**

- 7.1. After this I was sent by my parents to Barrett Street Hospital in New Plymouth. I was taken there by ambulance. I was 14 years old when they placed me there and I was there for two weeks.
- 7.2. There were a lot of teenagers in that hospital. It was set up like a dorm style bedding, but it was a mixed dorm, so you were at risk of being jumped on by one of them if you weren't careful.
- 7.3. The staff were abusers. There was no therapy. It was all about bullying the patient into silence or into compliance.
- 7.4. While I was there, I refused any medication. I didn't want to be drugged up. Then I stopped eating because it was the only thing that I could control, and I needed to have control over something.

- 7.5. The staff threatened to send me to Lake Alice if I didn't eat. I feel so lucky that I wasn't sent there. Eventually, about two days before my release they decided to try to force feed me. I think I had been deemed anorexic. They threw me into a room and they started punching my face with a metal spoon. I was stubborn, I had to fight for years so I was fighting. They smashed my face in and broke my two front teeth. I kept vomiting and blacking out, and they would just throw the same food back in my mouth.
- 7.6. When I left, the psychiatrist told my parents that there was nothing wrong with me and I was just a "spoilt brat". The reality was that I was a traumatised young girl who needed help and they thought I was just attention seeking. The key message I got was that there was no one there to help me but so many people there to punish me.
- 7.7. Once I got back home, I started to sneak out of my house and hang around with the street kids. That is where I would find comfort. Those kids understood trauma as they were mostly foster children who were abused themselves.
- 7.8. I started to drink so that I wouldn't feel anything. I tried all sorts of drugs, and I met a lot of men on the street. They were usually businessmen who wanted to be with young girls.
- 7.9. I would anaesthetise myself with drugs and alcohol and I was self-harming because I didn't love myself and I didn't think that anyone else did. This led to a lot of trips to hospital.
- 7.10. I didn't want to feel and I didn't want to be around pain. My family told me not to talk about it, and to be a good Catholic. This was a destructive period in my life.

## **8. Forced adoption of my baby – another generation taken**

- 8.1. When I was 18 years old, I was pregnant. My parents sent me to a Catholic Nun's home for unwed mothers. I believe this was named Rosanna (Good Shepherd Hostel for expectant mothers) in Lower Hutt. Catholic families would sponsor women to go here.

- 8.2. I gave birth to my eldest child there and then I was forced to adopt him out 10 days later. I recall having a paper given to me after the birth and being told to sign it by my parents and the Nuns. I had no idea what it was, I had no advice provided to me. The next thing I know my son had disappeared. I returned to New Plymouth that day.
- 8.3. I didn't know that I could keep him. Later, they told me that I had adopted my son out and I was promised an open adoption, but this promise wasn't kept. The contact with my son was blocked and I missed being part of his life growing up.
- 8.4. I wrote a poem about my son, about the whole experience of birthing him and then suddenly having them come and take him away. They don't let you look at the baby or feed the baby. To be a single mother was still deemed bad in 1980. I was young and in shock, so I let him be taken, not that there was ever any question that I might be a good mum. Then he was gone, and I had to carry on as though he didn't exist.
- 8.5. When I got home, my adoptive parents told me never to talk about him ever again. I wasn't allowed to talk about the birth or adoption of my son. My adoptive parents were staunch in their faith and saving face was important to them. It would not look good for their unmarried teenage daughter to have a child. I had to keep it a secret and it was so heavy to keep all of that to myself.
- 8.6. My son's adoptive parents would send me photos of him right up until he was 7 years old, then they suddenly stopped contact. When he was 16 years old and my youngest son was 9 years old, I met with him and he was very angry. He didn't want to know his younger brother. He wanted answers. He hurts because he believes I gave him up but didn't give my youngest son up.
- 8.7. I never heard from him until several years later when he got in touch with me. He was living in Australia at the time. I got to meet his first wife and my eldest grandson when he was 18 months old (now 9 years old). He doesn't have a relationship with his eldest son because the mother won't let him, and he doesn't have the money to fight for custody. Later he remarried, and I have a second moko. We all get on well.



- 8.8. We have re-connected now but we must keep that a secret from his family because it will cause a lot of ugliness, so it is easier to hide it from them. His adoptive parents have told him that they don't want him to have anything to do with me.
- 8.9. My son is 41 years old now and he is damaged because of the adoption. He doesn't know who he is and has no connection with his Māori identity. He is a heavy drug user. I can't rescue him and my heart breaks for him. I have a family that has been completely decimated by adoption and this has impacted us intergenerationally.
- 8.10. I have to trust the Atua. My tūpuna speak to me all the time. When I last tried to hurt myself they told me quite clearly to stop! I am hoping they will give him the same guidance.

## **9. My files and a lost opportunity**

- 9.1. My father was a social worker and I had been asking to get my files for a long time. One day I was at work with him at the Department of Social Welfare and I snuck into the file room and looked through my file. I realised my adoptive family knew more about my biological family that they didn't tell me. I also saw a lot more than what was disclosed in the documents I have been able to obtain in later years.
- 9.2. My file said that I was an imbecile and an idiot. It hurt me to see that written about me in my files. I am neither of those things. Back in those days they assumed I was intellectually damaged because I was born premature.
- 9.3. I know that in some ways I was lucky that I went with a family because usually disabled babies were placed into institutions or into foster homes that could not care for them. However, their idea of having an imbecile for a daughter was the basis for them denying me opportunities.
- 9.4. As a young girl I had a scholarship to train under Dame Sister Mary Leo. My parents didn't send me because they didn't think I was capable. I would have loved to have done that. I love the Opera. There were lots of lost dreams and that was just one of them.

- 9.5. I wanted to be a Nun that worked with poor starving kids. The Nuns would say to me “oh you, you’d be no good at that you’re only good for getting married and having babies”.
- 9.6. They kept destroying my dreams. That is why I left school at 15 years old.

## **10. Later life – university**

- 10.1. I had lots of different jobs after I left school. I wanted to be a Karitane nurse, but they stopped that program when I was finally old enough to apply.
- 10.2. I worked in a women and children's home for a while. It was horrible. My job was to look after unwanted kids. Those kids were so badly beaten that they had terrible cauliflower ears. It was run like a prison, it was so wrong and it made me feel like a jailor.
- 10.3. Instead, I decided to study nursing and moved to the Waikato. When I moved there, things were chaotic. I was in the hospital a lot and I was really sick. Part of that was because my partner at the time was very abusive. I have brain damage from her abuse.
- 10.4. I started having to use a walking stick, and they wouldn't let me finish my training because of my signs of Multiple Sclerosis. They said that I couldn't practise nursing using a walking stick and they told me I had to leave.
- 10.5. In 1993, I went to Waikato to study psychology. I won an Inland Revenue Department scholarship so in my second year I studied a conjoint in law and psychology which I finished in 1999. I majored in law, psychology and women's studies. Even though the head of the nursing program told me I wouldn't be any good, I did quite well at law school.
- 10.6. I got good grades throughout my studies and earned a number of scholarships. This is even though while I was studying, I underwent three different surgeries, and I was incredibly ill including suffering from a brain injury in 1996.
- 10.7. After I completed my LLB/Bsoc degree I went on to complete my Master of Law gaining first class honours. Finally, I decided to complete my PhD in law.

- 10.8. I applied for a scholarship, even though I was 0.06 points below the GPA criteria. I asked them to factor in the impact of my brain injury and they did. I won the scholarship. This was my first taste of advocacy.
- 10.9. My PhD started off in law but then I realised no one had researched disabled Māori so I did it on the legal, social and cultural rights or needs of disabled Māori. I had been thinking around the Western way of thinking but during my doctorate, and then I began to understand the Western world less and embrace the indigenous world more because it made sense. It opened my eyes to what I do now.
- 10.10. My research focused on the relationship of disabled people in pre-colonial Māori communities. In doing so, I hoped to get guidance in how we can better include disabled people into our communities, iwi and hapū and to empower them in that space.

## **11. Finding my whānau**

- 11.1. In 1989 I gave birth to my second child. He was 7 and a half weeks premature and I had toxemia. This pregnancy and birth were difficult. I nearly died in the process. This made me really hungry to know the truth. I needed to know who my family was.
- 11.2. I decided to put an ad in the newspaper. I wrote all the information I knew about my birth, including my mother's first name and the name that they had given me.
- 11.3. Shortly afterwards, I received a letter from my Nana Mary. She had recognised me from this ad, and she contacted my mum and dad. Everyone was surprised because they had thought I was dead. They came over from Australia to visit me 3 months later.
- 11.4. I was sitting in the hotel room that they had paid for, and I saw this little round black woman come in with this tall Scandinavian man and a little brown boy. My smile was so big, I remember thinking "I knew it".

- 11.5. I had always felt that I was Māori, but I was confused because of my birth certificate. I was so happy to meet them and just know who I was. This was one of the most amazing moments of my life.
- 11.6. Two years later I went with my son to visit them in Perth. This trip was terrible. There was a big falling out, I was using drugs and I was stuck in the desert for so long I ended up in Perth hospital. My family came and dropped my son off to the hospital and then just left me there.
- 11.7. My adoptive mother got me an airfare back to New Zealand. I didn't hear from my biological family for 12 years after that. I was a mess psychologically. It was so bad that I really needed help.

## **12. Adoption as a trickle down of trauma**

- 12.1. Violence came through the institutions, when they falsified my birth certificate, when they placed me with a family that they didn't vet. They weren't looking out for my best interests and that started the damage to my whole whānau.
- 12.2. My biological parents had 5 children, including me. When my youngest sibling was 18 months old my parents left New Zealand and moved to Australia.
- 12.3. My sister was found home alone in her cot, her nappy was dirty, and she was crying. My parents had just left my siblings in the house. They were found by my aunty a little while later.
- 12.4. That's when the State intervened. My aunty took in my baby sister, she had always wanted a daughter, but this process took 11 years for her to get custody of my sister.
- 12.5. The rest of my siblings were placed into foster care. They experienced so much abuse in those places that they have left New Zealand. They can't be on their own whenua because of the trauma that is attached to this land.
- 12.6. My eldest sister placed her daughter up for adoption because she didn't know how to be a parent. She couldn't bring herself to raise a child. They don't have a relationship. My sister is an alcoholic now.

- 12.7. I don't know my family. I know who they are, but we have no real connection. My whole life I have wanted to have this connection to my whānau but we are all still suffering from the trauma we experienced.
- 12.8. Adoption severed our whānau connection and damaged the relationships within the whānau. My Mum died crying for me in Australia, but I couldn't afford to get over there. She was calling for me, she died not knowing if my sister could ever forgive her.
- 12.9. The only person I have a relationship with is my sister, she wasn't in foster care. My sister and I feel like we have never been apart. It's nice but I don't feel that with anyone else. I don't have that security of whānau like other people do.
- 12.10. My adoptive family have nothing to do with me. I get a lot of hate and abuse from that family. I only see my adoptive sister once a year and it is a struggle to maintain that relationship.

### **13. Starting the healing process and reclaiming my whakapapa**

- 13.1. From the age of 11, I was constantly suicidal. I was in a coma for about 10 days after my first attempt. I have died multiple times. I have had three comas. The last time that I died I saw my son and my tupuna telling me to stop it and it was time to move on. I recall seeing my sons face, he was white as a ghost. I have never been afraid of dying.
- 13.2. Drugs and alcohol were my place to forget. I learnt that I needed to shut down emotionally otherwise it would hurt. It wasn't until my baby was 2 years old that I realised I needed to do something, or I would be dead. I put myself into counselling and I did that for two and a half years. I had a lot of work to do.
- 13.3. My friend took me to Parihaka to help me connect with my Māoritanga. I have more of an affinity with Parihaka than my own whenua because of the disconnection. I have been taken home by my aunty and they totally embraced me as whanau and I know that I can go there any time.

- 13.4. My moko kauae is part of me reclaiming my whakapapa. It has helped me grow into who I am. It is a step towards healing for our whānau. I dreamt about this moko and it was exactly as I had dreamt.
- 13.5. I had concerns about it, but I know that it is my whakapapa that gives me the right to wear this. It is my birthright. It includes my Māori, Aboriginal, Sami and Navajo heritage. It also incorporates my disability and my sons.
- 13.6. A big barrier to my getting this was my adoptive sister. I was worried about how she would react. I have this because everything that mattered to me was taken away. I am not going to let them do that again.

#### **14. Redress is about mana**

- 14.1. It is not about money. The question is how can the Crown restore my mana?
- 14.2. The only way to restore that is to restore my whānau. Connection and relationships are what heals people. When you take away those connections you take away the wellbeing of that person. I have experienced this myself and I am witnessing it in my eldest son.
- 14.3. Where Māori were adopted, the Government needs to set up a program to reconnect those people with their whenua, their whānau, their hapū and their iwi. Especially in cases where the Crown has separated them is it their responsibility to support that whānau re-connection.
- 14.4. The forced adoption of my son drove him away from this country. My grandchildren live in Australia. If there is going to be a restoring of mana and whānau, then they should pay for it. Pay for me to meet my grandchildren, fund whānau re-connection efforts. There needs to be some thought into our future whānau and my mokos. I want my children to feel that connection to their whenua.
- 14.5. These institutions need to be shut down. This system does not work for us, this system that cause all this trauma will never heal us. Our people, our whanau, hapū and iwi need to be able to care for themselves. The system that Tūhoe has set up to take partial governance over their own social welfare system needs to be available to be adopted by all Iwi and funded by the government.

- 14.6. The systems and institutions that were involved need to be disestablished. There was a violent structure to my adoption. They were complicit in stripping me of my whakapapa and this violence was felt throughout my life. When I was adopted, it severed my connection to my whānau and whenua. My children and my mokos have lost their connections and their rights to their whenua because of this fraudulent adoption.
- 14.7. I want my birth certificate to be rectified. It needs to be re-issued with my parents' names and my true ethnicities. This is the most hurtful part of what happened to me. The lies. They falsified my birth certificate and changed my mother's ethnicity and mine to Pākehā so I could be adopted by a family that didn't want a Māori baby. There is no way they could have recognised my birth mother as Pākehā. She was a beautiful woman who was clearly of colour.
- 14.8. The fact that they changed this on the birth certificate pisses me off. The Crown needs to ensure that this never happens again.
- 14.9. The moment my adoption happened was the minute I lost my legal Treaty rights as a Māori. This is the one thing that broke my heart. Under the law, I have no rights succeed to my mother's Māori land interests because I was legally adopted out of the whānau. Technically under Te Ture whenua Māori Act and the Adoption Act 1955 I do not belong as an indigenous person in this country and that's what I find the hardest. I helped my Mum to succeed to my Nana's land, and I helped my siblings to create a trust, but I have no right to any of that because of my legal adoption.
- 14.10. Changes need to be made to adoption and Māori land legislation to ensure that those who are legally adopted out of a whānau but nevertheless still retain their whakapapa Māori can legally maintain their connection to their whenua and can ensure this for their descendants also.
- 14.11. I can forgive all the rest including the violence but cannot forgive the State for taking away my rights as a Māori woman to have legal interests in my land and to be denied a whāngai adoption right where I could have been raised under a different environment. The State took those choices away because closed adoptions would not allow my parents to have a say.

- 14.12. There needs to be an apology from the Governor General. It was Queen Victoria's system that was imposed on us through colonisation which caused all of this harm. Therefore, it is only right that the Crown acknowledges this and help to heal.
- 14.13. The Crown also needs to allow for Rongoā Māori to be provided as part of our health services and ACC to help us to heal.

## **15. Criticism of government in relation to disabled peoples**

- 15.1. The current social welfare system denies disabled adults the right to care for their own whānau. When our mokos were being removed from their parents and split up we wanted to care for one of our mokos. They decided that I was an unsuitable foster parent because I was disabled.
- 15.2. I have cared for many children in my lifetime, I raised a pretty good son and have many nieces and nephews. Having a disability does not automatically mean that you cannot care for children.
- 15.3. On the other side of that, I have seen the lack of care for disabled children by Social Welfare. One family I know of had their children removed because of the violence in that home. They left the baby in that home because they didn't know who to place a disabled baby with. This places disabled children at higher risk and it is unsafe.
- 15.4. The authority that they used to make those decisions is wrong.
- 15.5. There needs to be an independent regulatory body which oversees all policy and law relating to disabilities. This needs to be led by disabled people, they need to be given their own voice. Providers are always given the voice to speak on behalf of disabled people, that's enough, we can speak for ourselves.

## **16. He kakano ahau**

- 16.1. The poem that I wrote about my son and my experience of adoption is below:

**\* Adoption**



A child stolen  
a woman broken  
a child taken  
a woman lost...

photo unseen  
a stolen second  
a stolen moment  
give them back?

they are gone  
forever...

**my whanau**

I glance at her as I sit cross legged  
this woman I know yet have never met  
I glance at him as I straighten my dress  
this man of mine, this stranger dad  
my siblings around me  
straightened and fussed  
our closeness is never to be  
our memories are stuck  
in the vortex of time and  
pain so unyielding

Yet I belong to these people  
for we are blood, we are family

given away at birth by them  
They now reclaim what they lost  
Feeling alone and already rejected  
I hold back for fear of the pain  
For fear there will be no gain

This family of mine use the right words  
They call me daughter and sister  
I respond in kind although not in heart  
yet what does it all mean  
as I kiss my mother goodbye  
only to know my other mum is left to cry  
over the fear of losing me not knowing  
I was never hers to claim  
I was never theirs to claim  
Ko wai ahau? I cannot say  
kaue who knows? So many years  
So many tears  
Yet I love you all  
for having me, for raising me  
more importantly, for loving me  
I belong to no one yet here we are  
we have met, we say we love and we connect  
I still have to say though that through all of this  
that *Adoption is cruel*

16.2. Despite my circumstances and my journey, my whakapapa dictates who I am, and no one can ever take that away from me.

16.3. *E kore au e ngaro, he kakano i ruia mai i Rangiāta.*

*I will never be lost, for I am a seed sown in Rangiātea.*

**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:

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