

**Witness Name:** John Charles Watson

**Statement No:** WITN0028001

**Dated:** 15/01/21

## ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO ABUSE IN CARE

### FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF JOHN CHARLES WATSON

I, John Charles Watson, say as follows:

1. I am a registered clinical psychologist.
2. I hold a B.A. Degree with majors in Education and Psychology, an M.A. Degree with Honours, an Endorsement in Clinical Psychology and a Post Graduate Diploma in Clinical Psychology.
3. I am a life member of the New Zealand Psychological Society, a member of the New Zealand College of Clinical Psychologists, the Australian and New Zealand Association of Psychiatry, Psychology and Law and the International Society for the prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect.
4. I am an accredited Clinical Psychologist with the Accident Compensation Corporation of New Zealand and an accredited Expert Witness for the Family, Youth, District and High Courts of New Zealand.
5. During my career, I have conducted over 3000 Specialist Psychologist Examinations and assessments for the Department of Social Welfare (DSW), Youth, District and High Courts, ACC, the Department of Corrections Psychological Services, the NZ Police, Capital and Coast District Health Board Regional Forensic Service.

#### **Holdsworth**

6. From late 1972 until mid-1975 I worked as a housemaster at Holdsworth school in Whanganui which was run by the DSW.

7. The main Holdsworth staff consisted of a Principal at the top, a Deputy Principal and four housemasters. When I first started at the school, Marek Powierza was Principal and John Drake, otherwise known as Jack Drake, was the Deputy Principal. Marek went on to work at another DSW residence called Weymouth Girls' Home in 1973. When he left, Jack Drake became acting Principal and Duncan McDonald was the Deputy Principal. When Jack Drake and Duncan McDonald left, Mike Doolan became Principal towards the end of 1973.
8. Holdsworth was a school and residence for young boys aged 10-14. It housed up to 60 boys at a time. I believe the culture at Holdsworth was intended to be very caring. The housemaster role could be described as both a parenting and teaching role. Each housemaster had a caseload of about 10-12 boys who we would work with individually to manage behavioural problems or any other issues they were having. This involved counselling and therapy work with the boys.
9. The boys were often very vulnerable, seriously disturbed and in need of care and protection when they arrived at Holdsworth. The type of behaviour exhibited was extremely volatile. At one moment they might be incredibly quiet then all hell would break loose with kids chucking things at each other. You never knew when things would explode. The younger ones were especially unpredictable.
10. When the boys returned from home-visits over holidays, they would often be nervous and fragile. Many would start wetting the bed as a result. From my experience in clinical psychology, I know bed-wetting (otherwise called nocturnal enuresis) can be a response to feelings of rejection and abandonment. If the boys had a good time at home, they were often unhappy to be back, and bed-wetting would be the result. In response to nocturnal enuresis, the boys would be administered the medication 'Imipramine'. A medical practitioner would come into the school to administer this.
11. While working at Holdsworth I was studying Psychology at Massey University. I decided to establish a behavioural management programme for the boys at Holdsworth which included a reward system for good behaviour. This behavioural management programme was new for its time and I believe it was the first of its kind in the country.
12. I designed it, so each boy was given a card, like a bus ticket, which would get clipped by a housemaster if the boy behaved well. When a boy had a certain

number of clips on his card, he would get a reward. Rewards included treats such as ice creams or chocolate bars, swims in the swimming pool, or special outings. Duncan McDonald or Jack Drake would take the boys on trips, such as to town, the beach, or up the Whanganui River. Most of the boys responded well to this programme.

13. 'Time-out' was a form of punishment if the boys behaved badly. This would involve the boy sitting behind a drawn line for 15-20 minutes, or until the boy calmed down, while being watched by a housemaster. Often this would be in response to a fight breaking out and the separation of the boys being necessary. Jack Drake would refer to this punishment as the 'dog box.' This was his terminology, which I argued he should change because we were working with children. This was the closest thing we had to a 'secure' unit within Holdsworth.
14. Corporal punishment was very rarely used. I never administered any corporal punishment against the boys myself. Jack Drake did have a strap that he would use to slap boy's clothed bottoms.
15. I also eventually learned Jack Drake and Duncan McDonald started sending boys to the Lake Alice Child and Adolescent Unit as punishment for misbehaving at Holdsworth.

### **Lake Alice Child and Adolescent Unit - referral process**

16. Holdsworth was situated near Lake Alice Hospital. I believe the relationship between Holdsworth and the Lake Alice Child and Adolescent Unit was started around 1973 by Dr Selwyn Leeks, who headed the unit, and Jack Drake. Jack Drake was acting principal and was in charge. I do not know how Dr Leeks and Jack Drake came to know each other.
17. Of all the Holdsworth staff members, Jack Drake referred most boys to Lake Alice. He would send them there for persistent absconding and aggressive behaviour around the school. At the time I was concerned at the reasons for the referrals to Lake Alice because I believed misbehaviour of this sort could be managed by the school. Regardless of how much the boys played up, I didn't think it was necessary to send them to a psychiatric hospital like Lake Alice. I told Jack Drake I was really annoyed he was were sending those boys to a psychiatric hospital as punishment for misbehaviour at Holdsworth. Jack Drake never acted on my concerns which

frustrated me. Holdsworth was meant to be a nurturing, positive environment for children. We, as staff members, were meant to be focused on what was best for each child. It was also an abuse of the behavioural management system I had introduced to the school. I wanted that system to be conducted in a humane way towards what were disturbed children.

18. During my time at Holdsworth, I remember about eight to 10 boys were referred to Lake Alice. I believe the rates of different ethnicities being sent, including Maori and Pākehā kids, was proportional to one another. The boys were taken from Holdsworth to Lake Alice initially in a car, until we got a van which was used for transport. Jack Drake or Duncan McDonald would usually transfer the boys. I tended to be shut out of the process.
19. I did manage to visit the Child and adolescent Unit two or three times while working at Holdsworth to check on some of the boys from my caseload who were there. They would be in the unit for around two or three weeks.
20. All Lake Alice referral forms for the boys would be completed by Jack Drake as acting Principal. I do not know if written consent forms were used for treatment at Lake Alice, but I do not believe the boys, or their parents were properly informed about the Lake Alice referrals, treatment or were able to give proper consent. I challenged Jack Drake on these processes as I had learned about informed consent during my studies at Massey University. The standard ethical procedure was if the patient was a child, informed consent of the parents was required before they could receive medical treatment. However, because the boys were state wards under the care of DSW, I believe Jack Drake and Dr Selwyn Leeks got around this requirement because the children had been removed from their parents.
21. It is important that consent is handled properly, clearly, and that the child is also informed. If it had been up to me at the time, parents of state wards receiving medical treatment would have been informed and consulted on the treatment. Although the kids had been removed from their parent's care and even though some parents may not have been kind towards their child, the mother or father should have been informed.
22. As just a housemaster I didn't have a lot of authority at Holdsworth. When I first learned of the referrals to Lake Alice I did think of raising concerns several times with DSW Head Office. However, such complaints had to be in writing and go

through Jack Drake as the acting Principal and he would intercept them. I was not able to write directly to the DSW Head Office.

### **Lake Alice Child and Adolescent Unit - Complaints**

23. I started to get more worried about what has happening at Lake Alice so one day in 1973, I drove the school's Hillman Hunter car to the Lake Alice Child and Adolescent unit to check on some boys from my caseload. When I got to the unit, I sat down with the boys who I believe were Rangī Wickliffe, Tyrone Marks, GRO-B-1, GRO-B-1, GRO-B-2 and GRO-B-3. I asked them how things were going. They appeared to be really scared and told me they had been administered Electro-Convulsive Therapy (ECT) to their heads and electric shocks to their legs, without first receiving anaesthetic or muscle relaxant. They said they had been given these electric shocks as a form of punishment by Dr Leeks. The boys also said they were given paraldehyde injections by Dr Leeks. The boys said they got painful injections in their bottoms which meant they couldn't sit down.
24. I had some prior knowledge of Electro-Convulsive Therapy (ECT) and paraldehyde having witnessed it being used on patients many times while working at Tokanui hospital during my university holidays in 1964/65. I believe ECT is very good for depression. Farmers would regularly voluntarily admit themselves to Tokanui struggling with long-term or seasonal depression, often following their cows having dried off, and be administered ECT with anaesthetic and muscle relaxant. This was what I understood to be the proper way ECT should be administered. I knew paraldehyde to be a very powerful drug that could sting like hell when given to a patient.
25. I believed what the kids were telling me. I knew them well and when they were telling lies. They wouldn't have made up stories like that to tell me. It seemed to me that what the boys said Dr Leeks was doing to them was completely out of order. After I spoke with the boys, I approached Selwyn Leeks about the boys' allegations. He was defensive, denied that the ECT had been given as punishment, and said the boys were lying. His response was along the lines of "I know what I'm doing, I'm the psychiatrist here, you're just a psychologist in training."
26. I left the boys at Lake Alice that day and went back to Holdsworth to speak to Jack Drake about my concern for the boys' safety. I told him that because he was the

main person sending the boys to Lake Alice, he should have been monitoring their wellbeing while they were in the hospital. Jack Drake tried to stop me from removing the boys from Lake Alice and told me that Dr Selwyn Leeks was the only one who could make the decision to discharge patients.

27. I thought 'bugger that', so a couple of days later I collected the boys from Lake Alice myself.

### **Duncan McDonald & John Drake sexual abuse complaints**

28. Jack Drake and Duncan McDonald seemed to have a soft spot for Pākehā boys at Holdsworth and had difficulty getting along with boys of other ethnicities. The other housemasters and I didn't have any problems with boys of different ethnicities. Both Jack Drake and Duncan McDonald had two or three Pākehā boys they favoured whom were labelled their "pets" by the other kids. They were referred to as "Drake and Duck's pets".

29. A short time after the incident at Lake Alice, sexual abuse claims were made about Jack Drake and Duncan McDonald by some Holdsworth boys. GRO-B-3 was one of the boys making the allegations along with one or two other boys whose names I cannot recall. The boys said both men would sit with them on their beds to read bedtime stories and, on occasions, feel the boys up. I believe the same boys complained to other Holdsworth housemasters called Graham Lee and Noel Bowker.

30. Prior to receiving the boy's complaints, I was already concerned at the way Jack Drake and Duncan McDonald acted towards the boys. I saw them hugging some of the boys, and, on two occasions I noticed them sitting on the boys' beds at night just before lights out. I felt this went beyond boundaries so had a go at them. They said all they were doing was reading the boys' bedtime stories. I think they saw me as a 'stirrer' and I got the impression they felt they could do whatever they wanted.

31. After hearing the boy's allegations, I put them to both men. Neither gave me a response. I told them I was handing the matter over to the police to be investigated.

32. I then spoke with Noel Bowker and Graeme Lee about the sexual abuse allegations and the claims of mistreatment at Lake Alice. Both Noel and Graham told me they had similar concerns as they also heard the boys making similar allegations against

Jack Drake and Duncan McDonald. I said I intended to take over as Principal which they agreed with.

33. I called the Whanganui police to inform them of the sexual abuse allegations against Jack Drake and Duncan McDonald. I told the Police I wanted the men removed. I wasn't at the school when the Police arrived, but I believe they came and escorted both men off the Holdsworth grounds. I didn't have any further contact with Police about this matter and I am unaware of any follow-up or action by the police on this complaint. My main concern was to get both men away from the kids which was achieved.

### **Complaints to DSW head office**

34. I also contacted DSW Head Office and asked to speak with [GRO-C] one of the directors in charge of DSW residences. I knew [GRO-C] to be a very caring person, a quick thinker and good to deal with. I informed him that I was now acting Principal of Holdsworth and that Jack Drake and Duncan McDonald were off the property. I told [GRO-C] of the sexual abuse allegations against both men as well as the complaints of mistreatment at Lake Alice. [GRO-C] was surprised and told me he didn't think I had the authority to take over the school. I said I was acting in the best interests of the children and that was my paramount consideration. That was what the Children and Young Persons Act required of us as DSW employees. It didn't matter to me whose toes I stepped on. After I explained this, [GRO-C] praised me for moving so quickly. He shared my concern for the boys and told me he would drive to Holdsworth the following day.

35. The next morning [GRO-C] arrived at my home, across the paddock from Holdsworth and sat down with my wife Glenys and I to discuss what was going on. Glenys is now deceased.

36. I think [GRO-C] may have recorded our conversation with some type of Dictaphone. We discussed the allegations made by the boys and [GRO-C] said he would handle it. As a result, I never wrote up my own report of these events because I understood normal procedure was for a more senior person, such as [GRO-C], to prepare a report and file it with DSW's head office. I don't remember [GRO-C] and I speaking about this matter again. It was my expectation that kids would stop being

sent to Lake Alice and that the allegations against Jack Drake and Duncan MacDonald would be investigated.

37. After my conversation with GRO-C I don't recall there being a DSW investigation undertaken and I found the response of the DSW to my complaints of misconduct against staff to be slack.
38. I am however pretty sure my complaint resulted in Duncan McDonald being transferred shortly thereafter to a role at Weymouth Girls School. DSW did this knowing of the allegations against him from Holdsworth. I found this crazy and unacceptable. He and Jack Drake should have been sacked and prosecuted. I believe Duncan McDonald was later arrested for fraud related to misusing funds meant for the Weymouth residents.
39. Towards the end of 1973 Michael Doolan arrived to take over as Principal at Holdsworth School. Michael was a nice guy and I remember he changed the culture that existed at Holdsworth for the better. I remember speaking to him about the Lake Alice problem and the other allegations, he said he heard I had been 'making waves' at Holdsworth. I believe the concerns I raised contributed to Michael Doolan's decision to stop sending any more Holdsworth boys to Lake Alice at the end of 1973.
40. I eventually left Holdsworth to take up the position of Principal at the DSW Palmerston North Girls Home 1975. This move meant I was closer to Massey University where I was carrying out my studies.
41. I was not contacted in 1977 when allegations against Dr Selwyn Leeks were rife and the Commission of Inquiry into his treatment of a Lake Alice patient was taking place. I do remember hearing some of the news coverage of the investigation. I'm surprised that I wasn't contacted because I was still a DSW employee. I didn't consider coming forward because I had my hands full running Palmerston North Girls home and I already experienced more than enough controversy raising concerns about Lake Alice while at Holdsworth.
42. Shortly after the Lake Alice controversy quietened down, I spoke with Dr Leeks' ex-wife Priscilla Leeks who did social work with some of the residents at the Palmerston North Girls Home. She told me Dr Leeks had disappeared off to Melbourne.

43. I went on to have some further professional involvement with Lake Alice. For my Masters studies in Psychology at Massey University, around 500 hours of practical work was required. As part of that, I was worked every Friday at Lake Alice for two years from 1978-79. I was in the national security unit and the forensic unit. I wrote reports for the parole board hearings to be held at Lake Alice to determine whether the inmates should be released or not.

44. I stayed with DSW for 25 years, working both in residential institutions and psychological services.

### **Final thoughts**

45. The boys from Holdsworth trusted me and I have seen reminders of this trust since I left. When I first moved to Christchurch in 1982 I took on some work as a prison psychologist. I visited the east wing of the prison there, which was known for being the tough wing. When I arrived I recognised GRO-B-2, a boy who had been on my Holdsworth caseload. GRO-B-2 was in prison for murder and was associated with Black Power. When he saw me, he stood up and said to the other inmates "listen up, I know this bloke, he was my housemaster at Holdsworth school. You can trust him." This trust allowed me to do my job there effectively.

46. Since 1973 I have not been spoken to by police or any government officials about the complaints I have outlined in this statement. I can recall these events because what happened to the boys made me so angry. I only recently learned that despite my complaints to DSW about Lake Alice in 1973, Dr Selwyn Leeks continued in his role giving ECT to young people, including state wards until 1977. I am staggered and shocked to learn that he continued for that long. I don't understand how this wasn't stopped earlier. I certainly tried to bring it to an end.

### **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:

15/01/21

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